**Dedication**

In memory of Liu Bang, the leader of the bandit rebellion who slew the snake near Mount Mangdan and who became Gaozu, the 1st Emperor of the Han Dynasty in 202 BCE and to the Liu clan of Zhongshan, Guangdong with love.

**Characters**

**Protagonists (Alphabetical List)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | An Daoquan | Divine Doctor | 64 |
| 2. | Bai Sheng | Daylight Rat | 17 |
| 3. | Bao Xu | God of Death | 66 |
| 4. | Cai Qing | The Flower | 61 |
| 5. | Cai Fu | Iron Arm | 61 |
| 6. | Cao Zheng | Demon Carver | 16 |
| 7. | Chai Jin | Small Whirlwind | 8 |
| 8. | Chen Da | Leaping Tiger | 1 |
| 9. | Dai Zong | Divine Traveller | 35 |
| 10. | Deng Fei | Fiery Eyed Beast | 43 |
| 11. | Ding Desun | Arrow Struck Tiger | 69 |
| 12. | Dong Ping | Two Spears General | 68 |
| 13. | Du Qian | Sky Feeler | 10 |
| 14. | Du Xing | Demon Face | 46 |
| 15. | Duan Jingzhu | Golden Haired Dog | 59 |
| 16. | Fan Rui | Demon King of Disorder | 58 |
| 17. | Gongsun Sheng | Cloud Dragon | 14 |
| 18. | Gong Wang | Flowery Necked Tiger | 69 |
| 19. | Gu Dasao | Tigress | 48 |
| 20. | Guan Sheng | Great Halberd | 62 |
| 21. | Guo Sheng | Rival of Rengui* | 34 |
| 22. | Han Tao | Ever Victorious General | 54 |
| 23. | Hao Siwen | Jing Mu An | 62 |
| 24. | Hou Jian | Nimble Monkey | 40 |
| 25. | Hu San Niang | Ten Feet of Green | 46 |
| 26. | Hua Rong | Little Li Guang | 21 |
| 27. | Huang Xin | Supressor of Three Mountains | 32 |
| 28. | Huangfu Duan | Purple Bearded Uncle | 69 |
| 29. | Huyan Zhuo | Two Bludgeons General | 53 |
| 30. | Jiang Jing | Marvelous Mathematician | 40 |
| 31. | Jiao Ting | Disliked One | 66 |
| 32. | Jian Dajian | Jade Armed Craftsman | 38 |
| 33. | Kong Liang | Fiery Star | 31 |
| 34. | Kong Ming | Restless Star (comet) | 31 |
| 35. | Lei Heng | Winged Tiger | 12 |
| 36. | Li Gun | Flying Great Sage King Monkey | 58 |
| 37. | Li Jun | Muddy Water Dragon | 35 |
| 38. | Li Kui | Black Whirlwind; Iron Ox | 37 |
| 39. | Li Li | Hell's Judge | 35 |
| 40. | Li Ying | Striking Hawk | 46 |
| 41. | Li Yun | Black Eyed Tiger | 43 |
| 42. | Li Zhong | Tiger Fighting General | 4 |
| 43. | Lin Chong | Leopard's Head | 6 |
| 44. | Ling Zhen | Roaring Thunder | 54 |
| 45. | Liu Tang | Red Haired Demon | 13 |
| 46. | Lu Fang | Little Marquis of Wen | 34 |
| 47. | Lu Da | Tattooed Monk | 2 |
| 48. | Lu Junyi | Jade Qilin | 60 |
| 49. | Ma Lin | Iron Flute Immortal | 40 |
| 50. | Meng Kang | Jade Flagstaff | 43 |
| 51. | Mu Chun | Slightly Restrained | 36 |
| 52. | Mu Hong | Unrestrained | 36 |
| 53. | Ou Peng | Golden Winged Hawk | 40 |
| 54. | Pei Xuan | Iron Faced Clerk | 43 |
| 55. | Peng Qi | Heavenly Eyes General | 54 |
| 56. | Qin Ming | Thunderer | 33 |
| 57. | Ruan, the Second | Heavely King Who Stands His Ground | 14 |
| 58. | Ruan, the Fifth | Short Lived Second Brother | 14 |
| 59. | Ruan, the Seventh | Living King Yama | 14 |
| 60. | Shan Tinggui | Water God General | 66 |
| 61. | Shi En | Golden Eyed Tiger Cub | 27 |
| 62. | Shi Jin | Nine Tattooed Dragons | 1 |
| 63. | Shi Qian | Flea on the Drum | 45 |
| 64. | Shi Xiu | Life Risker | 43 |
| 65. | Shi Yong | Stone General | 34 |
| 66. | Song Jiang | Welcome Rain | 17 |
| 67. | Song Qing | Iron Fan | 17 |
| 68. | Song Wan | Diamond in the Clouds | 10 |
| 69. | Sun Er Niang | Night Witch | 16 |
| 70. | Sun Li | Sickly General | 48 |
| 71. | Sun Xin | Young General | 48 |
| 72. | Suo Chao | Urgent Vanguard | 12 |
| 73. | Tang Long | Cash Marked Leopard* | 53 |
| 74. | Tao Zongwang | Nine Tailed Tortoise | 40 |
| 75. | Tong Meng | River Churning Clam | 36 |
| 76. | Tong Wei | Cave Dragon | 36 |
| 77. | Wang Dingliu | Lightning Goddess | 64 |
| 78. | Wang Ying | Stunted Tiger | 31 |
| 79. | Wei Dingguo | Fire God General | 66 |
| 80. | Wu Song | Tiger Slayer | 22 |
| 81. | Wu Yong | Clever Star | 13 |
| 82. | Xiang Chong | Eight Arms Nezha† | 58 |
| 83. | Xiao Rang | Sacred Handed Calligrapher | 38 |
| 84. | Xie Bao | Double Tailed Scorpion | 48 |
| 85. | Xie Zhen | Double Headed Snake | 48 |
| 86. | Xu Ning | Spear Expert | 55 |
| 87. | Xuan Zan | Disgraced Son-in-law | 62 |
| 88. | Xue Yong | Sick Tiger | 36 |
| 89. | Yang Chun | White Speckled Snake | 1 |
| 90. | Yang Lin | Glorious Leopard | 43 |
| 91. | Yan Qing | The Prodigy | 60 |
| 92. | Yan Shun | Elegant Tiger | 31 |
| 93. | Yang Xiong | Sick Guan Suo | 43 |
| 94. | Yang Zhi | Blue Faced Brute | 11 |
| 95. | Yu Baosi | Dangerous Road Spirit | 67 |
| 96. | Yue He | Iron Flute | 48 |
| 97. | Zhang Qing | Arrow without Feathers | 69 |
| 98. | Zhang Qing | Market Gardener | 16 |
| 99. | Zhang Heng | the Boatman | 36 |
| 100. | Zhang Shun | White Fish | 36 |
| 101. | Zheng Tianshou | White Faced Squire | 31 |
| 102. | Zhou Tong | Little Tyrant | 4 |
| 103. | Zhu Fu | Laughing Tiger | 43 |
| 104. | Zhu Gui | Dry Land Crocodile | 10 |
| 105. | Zhu Tong | Lord of the Beautiful Whiskers | 12 |
| 106. | Zhu Wu | Intuitve Strategist | 1 |
| 107. | Zou Run | Horned Dragon | 48 |
| 108. | Zou Yuan | Forest Dragon | 48 |

**Other Heroes outside the 108**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Chao Gai | Heavenly King | 013 |
| 2. | Cui Daocheng | Iron Buddha | 005 |
| 3. | Deng Long | Golden Eyed Tiger | 016 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | Fu An | Stinking Dickhead | 006 |
| 5. | Gao Qiu | Marshal of the Imperial Guard | 001 |
| 6. | Gao, Master | Heavenly King of Pleasure | 006 |
| 7. | Hu Cheng | Flying Tiger | 046 |
| 8. | Huang Wenye | Huang The Buddha | 040 |
| 9. | Huang Wenbing | Stinging Wasp | 40 |
| 10. | Jiang Zhong | Door God | 028 |
| 11. | Li Cheng | King of Heaven | 011 |
| 12. | Li Ji | Rabbit Hunter | 001 |
| 13. | Li the Fourth | Green Grass Snake | 006 |
| 14. | Liang | Grand Secretary | 011 |
| 15. | Luan Tingyu | Iron Staff | 046 |
| 16. | Niu Er | Hairless Tiger | 011 |
| 17. | Qiao (Boy) | Elder Brother Yun | 023 |
| 18. | Qiu Xiaoyi | Flying Ogre (Taoist) | 005 |
| 19. | Sun Ding | The Buddha | 007 |
| 20. | Wang Jin | | 001 |
| 21. | Wang Lun | White Clothes Scholar | 010 |
| 22. | Wang, Madame | Devil Acting as Watchman | 023 |
| 23. | Wen Da | Great Sword | 011 |
| 24. | Wu the Elder | Three Inches of Mulberry Bark | 023 |
| 25. | Ximen Qing | | 023 |
| 26. | Zhang the Third | Old Rat Who Crosses the Road | 006 |
| 27. | Zhi Zhen | Abbot | 003 |
| 28. | Zheng Guanxi | Bully of the Western Pass | 002 |

**In the Vision**

An Ch'en, winner of first place in the *chin-shih* examinations but displaced in favour of Ts'ai Yün because he is the younger brother of the proscribed figure, An Tun; becomes a protégé of Ts'ai Ching and is patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, later rising to the rank of secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works; rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
An Ch'en's second wife.
An, Consort. See Liu, Consort.
An Tun (1042–1104), elder brother of An Ch'en, a high official whose name has been proscribed for his role in the partisan political conflicts of the late eleventh century.
An-t'ung, pageboy of Aunt Yang.
An-t'ung, pageboy of Miao T'ien-hsiu who is rescued by a fisherman and does his utmost to see justice done for the murder of his master.
An-t'ung, pageboy of Wang Hsüan.
Apricot Hermitage, Layman of. See Wang Hsüan.
Autumn Chrysanthemum. See Ch'iu-chü.
Barefaced Adept, Taoist master from the Fire Dragon Monastery in the Obdurate Grotto of the Vacuous Mountains from whom Yang Kuang-yen acquires the art of lying.
Bean curd-selling crone who identifies the home of Commander Yüan in Potter's Alley to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Beanpole, The." See Hui-ch'ing.
Black-robed lictor on the staff of Ho Hsin.
Black-robed lictor who announces the arrival of Chang Pang-ch'ang and Ts'ai Yu to congratulate Chu Mien.
Black Whirlwind. See Li K'uei.
Brocade Tiger. See Yen Shun.
Busybody who directs Ch'iao Yün-ko to Dame Wang's teashop when he is looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Cassia. See Li Kuei-chieh.
Chai Ch'ien, majordomo of Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital.
Chai Ch'ien's wife.
Chai Ching-erh, Sutra Chai, proprietor of a sutra printing shop in Ch'ing-ho.
Chai, Sutra. See Chai Ching-erh.
Ch'ai Chin, Little Whirlwind, Little Lord Meng-ch'ang, direct descendant of Ch'in Jung (921–59), emperor Shih-tsung (r. 954–59) of the Later Chou dynasty (951–60).
Ch'ai Huang-ch'eng, paternal uncle of Ch'ai Chin.
Ch'an Master Snow Cave. See P'u-ching.
Chang An, caretaker of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ancestral graveyard outside Ch'ing-ho.
Chang, Auntie, go-between who helps arrange Ch'en Ching-chi's marriage to Ko Ts'ui-p'ing.
Chang Ch'eng, a neighbourhood head in Ch'ing-ho.
Chang Ch'ing, a criminal innkeeper with whom Wu Sung seeks refuge after the murder of P'an Chin-lien.
Chang Ch'ing's wife.
Chang Ch'uan-erh, a garrulous chair-bearer in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Wei Ts'ung-erh.
Chang the Fourth. See Chang Ju-i.
Chang the Fourth. See Chang Lung.
Chang Hao-wen, Chang the Importunate, Chang the Second, proprietor of a paper shop in Ch'ing-ho, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo.
Chang Hsi-ch'un, a ballad singer maintained at one time as a mistress by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Chang Hsi-ts'un, an acquaintance of Hsi-men Ch'ing's who invites him to his home for a birthday party.
Chang Hsiao-hsien, Hsiao Chang-hsien, Trifler Chang, "ball clubber" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.
Chang the Importunate. See Chang Hao-wen.
Chang Ju-i, Chang the Fourth, wife of Hsiung Wang, employed in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household as a wet nurse for Kuan-ko and later for Hsiao-ko, sexual partner of Hsi-men Ch'ing after the death of Li P'ing-erh, finally married to Lai-hsing.
Chang Ju-i's mother.
Chang Ko (1068–1113), promoted to the post of vice-minister of the Ministry of Works for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Chang Kuan, brother-in-law of Ch'en Hung and maternal uncle of Ch'en Ching-chi, militia commander of Ch'ing-ho.
Chang Kuan's sister. See Ch'en Hung's wife, née Chang.
Chang Kuan's wife.
Chang Lung, Chang the Fourth, maternal uncle of Meng Yü-lou's first husband Yang Tsung-hsi who unsuccessfully proposes that she remarry Shang Hsiao-t'ang and quarrels with Aunt Yang when she decides to marry Hsi-men Ch'ing instead.
Chang Lung, judicial commissioner of the Liang-Huai region.
Chang Lung's elder sister (Chang the Fourth's elder sister), mother of Yang Tsung-hsi and Yang Tsung-pao.
Chang Lung's wife (Chang the Fourth's wife).
Chang Mao-te, Chang the Second, nephew of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant who first seduces P'an Chin-lien; a major rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in the social world of Ch'ing-ho who, immediately after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, bribes Cheng Chü-chung to intervene with Chu Mien and have him appointed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's former position as judicial commissioner so he can take over where Hsi-men Ch'ing left off.
Chang Mao-te's son, marries Eunuch Director Hsü's niece.
Chang Mei, professional actor of Hai-yen style drama.
Chang, Military Director-in-chief, official in Meng-chou.
Chang, Mr., a well-to-do merchant in Ch'ing-ho who first seduces P'an Chin-lien.
Chang, Mrs., wife of Mr. Chang, née Yü.
Chang, Old Mother, go-between who tries to sell two inexperienced country girls, Sheng-chin and Huo-pao, to P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Chang, Old Mother, proprietress of an inn next door to Auntie Hsüeh's residence.
Chang Pang-ch'ang (1081–1127), minister of rites, promoted to the position of grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, puppet emperor of the short-lived state of Ch'u for thirty-two days in 1127.
Chang the Second. See Chang Hao-wen.
Chang the Second. See Chang Mao-te.
Chang Sheng, Street-skulking Rat, "knockabout" who, along with Lu Hua, shakes down Dr. Chiang Chu-shan at the behest of Hsi-men Ch'ing; later a servant in the household of Chou Hsiu, brother-in-law of Liu the Second; murders Ch'en Ching-chi when he overhears him plotting against him and is beaten to death by Chou Hsiu at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Chang Sheng's reincarnation. See Kao family of the Ta-hsing Guard.
Chang Sheng's wife, née Liu, sister of Liu the Second.
Chang Shih-lien, Ch'en Hung's brother-in-law, related to Yang Chien by marriage, an official in the Eastern Capital.
Chang Shih-lien's wife, née Ch'en, Ch'en Hung's elder sister.
Chang Shu-yeh (1065–1127), prefect of Chi-chou in Shantung, later pacification commissioner of Shantung, responsible for the defeat of Sung Chiang and his acceptance of a government amnesty.
Chang Sung, Little. See Shu-t'ung.
Chang Ta (d. 1126), official who dies in the defense of T'ai-yüan against the invading Chin army.
Chang, Trifler. See Chang Hsiao-hsien.
Ch'ang, Cadger. See Ch'ang Shih-chieh.
Ch'ang the Second. See Ch'ang Shih-chieh.
Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Cadger Ch'ang, Ch'ang the Second, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.
Ch'ang Shih-chieh's wife.
Ch'ang Shih-chieh's wife's younger brother.
Ch'ang Yü, Commandant, officer rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Chao, Auntie, go-between who sells Chin-erh to Wang Liu-erh.
Chao Chiao-erh, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Chao, Dr. See Chao Lung-kang.
Chao Hung-tao, domestic clerk on the staff of Yang Chien.
Chao I (fl. early 12th century), Duke of Chia, twenty-sixth son of Emperor Hui-tsung by Consort Liu.
Chao K'ai (d. c. 1129), Prince of Yün, third son of emperor Hui-tsung by Consort Wang.
Chao, Lama, head priest of the Pao-ch'ing Lamasery outside the west gate of Ch'ing-ho.
Chao Lung-kang, Dr. Chao, Chao the Quack, incompetent specialist in female disorders called in to diagnose Li P'ing-erh's fatal illness.
Chao Lung-kang's grandfather.
Chao Lung-kang's father.
Chao No, investigation commissioner for Shantung.
Chao the Quack. See Chao Lung-kang.
Chao, Tailor, artisan patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Chao-ti, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.
Chao T'ing (fl. early 12th century), prefect of Hang-chou, promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Judicial Review.
Chao, Widow, wealthy landowner from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing buys a country estate adjacent to his ancestral graveyard.
Chao Yu-lan, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.

Ch'e, Hogwash. See Ch'e Tan.
Ch'e Tan, Hogwash Ch'e, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.
Ch'e Tan's father, proprietor of a wineshop in Ch'ing-ho.
Ch'en An, servant in Ch'en Ching-chi's household.
Ch'en, Battalion Commander, resident on Main Street in Ch'ing-ho from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing declines to buy a coffin after the death of Li P'ing-erh.
Ch'en Cheng-hui (fl. early 12th century), son of Ch'en Kuan, surveillance vice-commissioner of education for Shantung.
Ch'en Ching-chi, secondary male protagonist of the novel, son of Ch'en Hung, husband of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, son-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing who carries on a running pseudo-incestuous affair with P'an Chin-lien that is consummated after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; falls out with Wu Yüeh-niang and is evicted from the household; drives Hsi-men Ta-chieh to suicide; attempts unsuccessfully to shake down Meng Yü-lou in Yen-chou; squanders his patrimony and is reduced to beggary; accepts charity from his father's friend the philanthropist Wang Hsüan, who induces him to become a monk with the Taoist appellation Tsung-mei, the junior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing; is admitted to the household of Chou Hsiu as a pretended cousin of P'ang Ch'un-mei who carries on an affair with him under her husband's nose; also has affairs with Feng Chin-pao and Han Ai-chieh, marries Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, and is murdered by Chang Sheng when he is overheard plotting against him.
Ch'en Ching-chi's grandfather, a salt merchant.
Ch'en Ching-chi's reincarnation. See Wang family of the Eastern Capital.
Ch'en, Dr., resident of Ch'ing-ho.
Ch'en, Dr.'s son, conceived as a result of a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh.
Ch'en, Dr.'s wife, conceives a son in middle age after taking a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh.
Ch'en Hung, wealthy dealer in pine resin, father of Ch'en Ching-chi, related by marriage to Yang Chien.
Ch'en Hung's elder sister, wife of Chang Shih-lien.
Ch'en Hung's wife, née Chang, sister of Chang Kuan, mother of Ch'en Ching-chi.
Ch'en Kuan (1057–1122), a prominent remonstrance official, father of Ch'en Cheng-hui.
Ch'en Liang-huai, national university student, son of Vice-Commissioner Ch'en, friend of Ting the Second.
Ch'en, Master, legal scribe who assists Wu Sung in drafting a formal complaint against Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ch'en, Miss, daughter of the deceased Vice-Commissioner Ch'en whose assignation with Juan the Third results in his death.
Ch'en, Miss's maidservant.
Ch'en, Mistress. See Hsi-men Ta-chieh.
Ch'en the Second, proprietor of an inn at Ch'ing-chiang P'u at which Ch'en Ching-chi puts up on his way to Yen-chou.
Ch'en Ssu-chen, right provincial administration commissioner of Shantung.
Ch'en the Third, "cribber" in the licensed quarter of Lin-ch'ing.
Ch'en the Third, criminal boatman who, along with his partner Weng the Eighth, murders Miao T'ien-hsiu.
Ch'en Ting, servant in Ch'en Hung's household.
Ch'en Ting's wife.
Ch'en Tsung-mei. See Ch'en Ching-chi.
Ch'en Tsung-shan, ward-inspecting commandant of the Eastern Capital.
Ch'en Tung (1086–1127), national university student who submits a memorial to the throne impeaching the Six Traitors.
Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner, deceased father of Miss Ch'en.
Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner, father of Ch'en Liang-huai.
Ch'en, Vice-Commissioner's wife, née Chang, mother of Miss Ch'en.
Ch'en Wen-chao, prefect of Tung-p'ing.
Cheng Ai-hsiang, Cheng Kuan-yin, Goddess of Mercy Cheng, singing girl from the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hua Tzu-hsü, elder sister of Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Cheng Ai-yüeh, singing girl from the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai and Hsi-men Ch'ing, younger sister of Cheng Ai-hsiang.
Cheng, Auntie, madam of the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho.
Cheng, Battalion Commander's family in the Eastern Capital into which Hua Tzu-hsü is reincarnated as a son.
Cheng Chi, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
Cheng Chiao-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, niece of Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Cheng Chin-pao. See Feng Chin-pao.
Cheng Ch'un, professional actor in Ch'ing-ho, younger brother of Cheng Feng, Cheng Ai-hsiang, and Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Cheng Chü-chung (1059–1123), military affairs commissioner, cousin of Consort Cheng, granted the title of grand guardian for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, accepts a bribe of a thousand taels of silver from Chang Mao-te to intervene with Chu Mien and have him appointed to the position of judicial commissioner left vacant by the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Cheng, Consort, (1081–1132), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, niece of Madame Ch'iao.
Cheng Feng, professional actor in Ch'ing-ho, elder brother of Cheng Ai Hsiang, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Cheng Ch'un.
Cheng the Fifth, Auntie, madam of the Cheng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing.
Cheng the Fifth, Auntie's husband.
Cheng, Goddess of Mercy. See Cheng Ai-hsiang.
Cheng Kuan-yin. See Cheng Ai-hsiang.
Cheng, Third Sister, niece of Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng, marries Wu K'ai's son Wu Shun-ch'en.
Cheng T'ien-shou, Palefaced Gentleman, third outlaw leader of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain.
Cheng Wang. See Lai-wang.
Ch'eng-erh, younger daughter of Lai-hsing by Hui-hsiu.
Chi K'an, right administration vice commissioner of Shantung.
Chi-nan, old man from, who directs Wu Yüeh-niang to the Ling-pi Stockade in her dream.
Ch'i family brothel in Ch'ing-ho, madam of.
Ch'i Hsiang-erh, singing girl from the Ch'i family brothel in Ch'ing-ho.
Ch'i-t'ung, pageboy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
Chia, Duke of. See Chao I.
Chia Hsiang (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Chia Hsiang's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Chia Jen-ch'ing, False Feelings, neighbour of Hsi-men Ch'ing who intercedes unsuccessfully on Lai-wang's behalf.
Chia Lien, name to which Li Pang-yen alters Hsi-men Ch'ing's name on a bill of impeachment in return for a handsome bribe.
Chiang Chu-shan, Chiang Wen-hui, doctor who Li P'ing-erh marries on the rebound only to drive away ignominiously as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing becomes available again.
Chiang Chu-shan's deceased first wife.
Chiang, Gate God. See Chiang Men-shen.
Chiang, Little, servant of Ch'en Ching-chi.
Chiang Men-shen, Gate God Chiang, elder brother of Chiang Yü-lan, gangster whose struggle with Shih En for control of the Happy Forest Tavern in Meng-chou results in his murder by Wu Sung.
Chiang Ts'ung, Sauce and Scallions, former husband of Sung Hui-lien, a cook in Ch'ing-ho who is stabbed to death in a brawl with a fellow cook over the division of their pay.
Chiang Ts'ung's assailant, convicted of a capital crime and executed as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's intervention.
Chiang Wen-hui. See Chiang Chu-shan.
Chiang Yü-lan, younger sister of Chiang Men-shen, concubine of Military Director-in-chief Chang of Meng-chou who assists her husband and brother in framing Wu Sung.
Ch'iao, distaff relative of the imperial family whose garden abuts on the back wall of Li P'ing-erh's house on Lion Street, assumes hereditary title of commander when Ch'iao the Fifth dies without issue.
Ch'iao Chang-chieh, infant daughter of Ch'iao Hung betrothed to Hsi-men Kuan-ko while both of them are still babes in arms.
Ch'iao, Consort (fl. early 12th century), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, related to Ch'iao the Fifth.
Ch'iao the Fifth, deceased distaff relative of the imperial family through Consort Ch'iao whose hereditary title of commander passes to another branch of the family when he dies without issue.
Ch'iao the Fifth's widow. See Ch'iao, Madame.
Ch'iao Hung, uncle of Ts'ui Pen, wealthy neighbour and business partner of Hsi-men Ch'ing whose daughter, Ch'iao Chang-chieh, is betrothed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's son Kuan-ko while they are still babes in arms.
Ch'iao Hung's concubine, mother of Ch'iao Chang-chieh.
Ch'iao Hung's elder sister, Ts'ui Pen's mother.
Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng.
Ch'iao, Madame, Ch'iao the Fifth's widow, née Cheng, aunt of Ch'iao Hung's wife, née Cheng, and of Consort Cheng.
Ch'iao T'ung, servant in Ch'iao Hung's household.
Ch'iao T'ung's wife.
Ch'iao Yün-ko, Little Yün, young fruit peddler in Ch'ing-ho who helps Wu Chih catch Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien in adultery.
Ch'iao Yün-ko's father, retired soldier dependent on his son.
Ch'ien Ch'eng, vice-magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district.
Ch'ien Ch'ing-ch'uan, traveling merchant entertained by Han Tao-kuo in Yang-chou.
Ch'ien Lao, clerk of the office of punishment in Ch'ing-ho.
Ch'ien Lung-yeh, secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of collecting transit duties on shipping at the Lin-ch'ing customs house.
Ch'ien, Phlegm-fire. See Ch'ien T'an-huo.
Ch'ien T'an-huo, Phlegm-fire Ch'ien, Taoist healer called in to treat Hsi-men Kuan-ko.
Chih-yün, Abbot, head priest of Hsiang-kuo Temple in K'ai-feng visited by Hsi-men Ch'ing on his trip to the Eastern Capital.
Chin, Abbot, Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Eastern Peak on Mount T'ai.
Chin Ch'ien-erh, former maidservant in the household of Huang the Fourth's son purchased by P'ang Ch'un-mei as a servant for Ko Ts'ui-p'ing when she marries Ch'en Ching-chi.
Chin-erh, maidservant of Wang Liu-erh.
Chin-erh, singing girl in Longleg Lu's brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho.
Chin-erh, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Chin-erh's father, military patrolman whose horse is fatally injured in a fall and, for lack of replacement money, is forced to sell his daughter into domestic service.
Chin-kuei, employed in Chou Hsiu's household as a wet nurse for Chou Chin-ko.
Chin-lien. See P'an Chin-lien.
Chin-lien. See Sung Hui-lien.
Chin Ta-chieh, wife of Auntie Hsüeh's son Hsüeh Chi.
Chin-ts'ai, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.
Chin Tsung-ming, senior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.
Ch'in-tsung, Emperor of the Sung dynasty (r. 1125–27), son of Emperor Hui-tsung who abdicated in his favour in 1125, taken into captivity together with his father by the Chin dynasty invaders in 1127.
Ch'in-t'ung, junior pageboy in the household of Hua Tzu-hsü and Li P'ing-erh, originally named T'ien-fu but renamed when she marries into the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ch'in-t'ung, pageboy of Meng Yü-lou who is seduced by P'an Chin-lien and driven out of the household when the affair is discovered.
Ch'in Yü-chih, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai.
Ching-chi. See Ch'en Ching-chi.
Ching Chung, commander of the left battalion of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, later promoted to the post of military director-in-chief of Chi-chou, and finally to commander-general of the southeast and concurrently grain transport commander.
Ching Chung's daughter for whom he seeks a marriage alliance with Hsi-men Kuan-ko but is refused by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ching Chung's mother.
Ching Chung's wife.
Ch'iu-chü, Autumn Chrysanthemum, much abused junior maidservant of P'an Chin-lien.
Cho the Second. See Cho Tiu-erh.

Cho Tiu-erh, Cho the second, Toss-off Cho, unlicensed prostitute in Ch'ing-ho maintained as a mistress by Hsi-men Ch'ing and subsequently brought into his household as his Third Lady only to sicken and die soon thereafter.
Cho, Toss-off. See Cho Tiu-erh.
Chou, Censor, neighbour of Wu Yüeh-niang's when she was growing up, father of Miss Chou.
Chou Chin-ko, son of Chou Hsiu by P'ang Ch'un-mei the real father of which may have been Ch'en Ching-chi.
Chou Chung, senior servant in the household of Chou Hsiu, father of Chou Jen and Chou I.
Chou, Eunuch Director, resident of Ch'ing-ho whose invitation to a party Hsi-men Ch'ing declines not long before his death.
Chou Hsiao-erh, patron of Li Kuei-ch'ing and probably of Li Kuei-chieh also.
Chou Hsiu, commandant of the Regional Military Command, later appointed to other high military posts, colleague of Hsi-men Ch'ing after whose death he buys P'ang Ch'un-mei as a concubine and later promotes her to the position of principle wife when she bears him a son; commander-general of the Shantung region who leads the forces of Ch'ing-yen against the Chin invaders and dies at Kao-yang Pass of an arrow wound inflicted by the Chin commander Wan-yen Tsung-wang.
Chou Hsiu's first wife, blind in one eye, who dies not long after P'ang Ch'un-mei enters his household as a concubine.
Chou Hsiu's reincarnation, see Shen Shou-shan.
Chou Hsüan, cousin of Chou Hsiu's who looks after his affairs while he is at the front.
Chou I, servant in Chou Hsiu's household, son of Chou Chung and younger brother of Chou Jen, clandestine lover of P'ang Ch'un-mei who dies in the act of intercourse with him.
Chou I's paternal aunt with whom he seeks refuge after the death of P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Chou I's reincarnation. See Kao Liu-chu.
Chou Jen, servant in Chou Hsiu's household, son of Chou Chung and elder brother of Chou I.
Chou, Little, itinerant barber and masseur in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Chou, Miss, daughter of Censor Chou, neighbour of Wu Yüeh-niang's when she was growing up who broke her hymen by falling from a standing position onto the seat of a swing.
Chou, Ms., widowed second wife of Sung Te's father-in-law who commits adultery with him after her husband's death, for which Hsi-men Ch'ing sentences them both to death by strangulation.
Chou, Ms.'s maidservant.
Chou, Ms.'s mother.
Chou the Second, friend of Juan the Third.
Chou Shun, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing female lead parts.
Chou Ts'ai, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Chou Yü-chieh, daughter of Chou Hsiu by his concubine Sun Erh-niang.
Chu Ai-ai, Love, singing girl from Greenhorn Chu's brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, daughter of Greenhorn Chu.
Chu, Battalion Commander, resident of Ch'ing-ho, father of Miss Chu.
Chu, Battalion Commander's deceased wife, mother of Miss Chu.
Chu, Censor, resident of Ch'ing-ho, neighbour of Ch'iao Hung.
Chu, Censor's wife.
Chu family of the Eastern Capital, family into which Sung Hui-lien is reincarnated as a daughter.
Chu, Greenhorn, proprietor of a brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho situated next door to the Verdant Spring Bordello of Auntie Li the Third.
Chu Jih-nien, Sticky Chu, Pockmarked Chu, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter.
Chu Mien (1075–1126), defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, an elite unit of the Imperial Bodyguard that performed secret police functions; relative of Li Ta-t'ien, the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho; chief mover behind the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, for which service to the throne he is promoted to a series of high posts; one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
Chu Mien's majordomo.
Chu Mien's son, granted the post of battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Chu, Miss, daughter of Battalion Commander Chu.
Chu, Pockmarked. See Chu Jih-nien.
Chu, Sticky. See Chu Jih-nien.
Ch'u-yün, daughter of a battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard purchased by Miao Ch'ing to send as a gift to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ch'u-yün's father, battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard.
Ch'un-hsiang, maidservant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.
Ch'un-hua, concubine of Ying Po-chüeh and mother of his younger son.
Ch'un-hung, pageboy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
Ch'un-mei. See P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Chung-ch'iu, junior maidservant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household serving at various times Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Wu Yüeh-niang.
Chung Kuei, policeman from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital into whose family Hsi-men Ta-chieh is reincarnated as a daughter.
Ch'ung-hsi, maidservant purchased by Ch'en Ching-chi to serve Feng Chin-pao.
Ch'ung Shih-tao (1051–1126), general-in-chief of the Sung armies defending against the Chin invaders.
Ch'ü, Midwife, maternal aunt of Lai-wang in whose house on Polished Rice Lane outside the east gate of Ch'ing-ho Lai-wang and Sun Hsüeh-o seek refuge after absconding from the Hsi-men household.
Ch'ü T'ang, son of Midwife Ch'ü, cousin of Lai-wang.
Coal in the Snow. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.
Died-of-fright, Miss, wife of Yang Kuang-yen.
False Feelings. See Chia Jen-ch'ing.
Fan family of Hsü-chou, peasant family into which Wu Chih is reincarnated as a son.
Fan Hsün, battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard.
Fan, Hundred Customers. See Fan Pai-chia-nu.
Fan Kang, next-door neighbour of Ch'en Ching-chi in Ch'ing-ho.
Fan, Old Man, neighbour of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Fan Pai-chia-nu, Hundred Customers Fan, singing girl from the Fan Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.
Fang Chen (fl. early 12th century), erudite of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices who reports that a brick in the Imperial Ancestral Temple is oozing blood.
Fang La (d. 1121), rebel who set up an independent regime in the Southeast that was suppressed by government troops in 1121.
Feng Chin-pao, Cheng Chin-pao, singing girl from the Feng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing purchased as a concubine by Ch'en Ching-chi, later resold to the brothel of Auntie Cheng the Fifth who changes her name to Cheng Chin-pao.
Feng Chin-pao's mother, madam of the Feng Family Brothel in Lin-ch'ing.
Feng, Consort (fl. mid 11th-early 12th centuries), Consort Tuan, consort of Emperor Jen-tsung (r. 1022–63) who resided in the palace for five reigns.
Feng Family Brothel's servant.
Feng Huai, son of Feng the Second, son-in-law of Pai the Fifth, dies of injuries sustained in an affray with Sun Wen-hsiang.
Feng, Old Mother, waiting woman in Li P'ing-erh's family since she was a child, continues in her service when she is a concubine of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh, wife of Hua Tzu-hsü, wife of Chiang Chu-shan, and after she marries Hsi-men Ch'ing, supplementing her income by working as a go-between on the side.
Feng the Second, employee of Sun Ch'ing, father of Feng Huai.
Feng T'ing-hu, left assistant administration commissioner of Shantung.
Fifth Lady. See P'an Chin-lien.
First Lady. See Wu Yüeh-niang.
Fisherman who rescues An-t'ung and helps him to locate the boatmen who had murdered his master.
Flying Demon. See Hou Lin.
Fourth Lady. See Sun Hsüeh-o.
Fu-jung, maidservant of Lady Lin.
Fu, Manager. See Fu Ming.
Fu Ming, Fu the Second, Manager Fu, manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's pharmaceutical shop, pawnshop, and other businesses.
Fu Ming's wife.
Fu the Second. See Fu Ming.
Fu T'ien-tse, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Golden Lotus. See P'an Chin-lien.
Good Deed. See Yin Chih.
Hai-t'ang, concubine of Chou Hsiu much abused by P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Han Ai-chieh, daughter of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh, niece of Han the Second, concubine of Chai Ch'ien, mistress of Ch'en Ching-chi to whom she remains faithful after his death, ending her life as a Buddhist nun.
Han, Auntie, wife of Mohammedan Han, mother of Han Hsiao-yü.
Han, Baldy, father of Han Tao-kuo and Han the Second.
Han, Brother-in-law. See Han Ming-ch'uan.
Han Chin-ch'uan, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, elder sister of Han Yü-ch'uan, younger sister of Han Pi.
Han Hsiao-ch'ou, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, niece of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan.
Han Hsiao-yü, son of Mohammedan Han and Auntie Han.
Han Lü (fl. early 12th century), vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel, brother-in-law of Ts'ai Ching's youngest son, Ts'ai T'ao, grants Hsi-men Ch'ing favourable treatment for his speculations in the salt trade.
Han, Master, formerly a court painter attached to the Hsüan-ho Academy, called upon by Hsi-men Ch'ing to paint two posthumous portraits of Li P'ing-erh.
Han Ming-ch'uan, Brother-in-law Han, husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister who lives outside the city gate of Ch'ing-ho; friend of Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i.
Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng, Mrs. Han, elder sister of Meng Yü-lou.
Han, Mohammedan, husband of Auntie Han, father of Han Hsiao-yü, renter of a room on the street front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property next door to that of Pen Ti-ch'uan and his wife, employed on the staff of the eunuch director in charge of the local Imperial Stables.
Han, Mrs. See Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng.
Han Pang-ch'i, prefect of Hsü-chou.
Han Pi, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho, elder brother of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan.
Han, Posturer. See Han Tao-kuo.
Han the Second, Trickster Han, younger brother of Han Tao-kuo, "knockabout" and gambler in Ch'ing-ho who carries on an intermittent affair with his sister-in-law, Wang Liu-erh, whom he marries after the death of Han Tao-kuo.
Han Tao-kuo, Posturer Han, husband of Wang Liu-erh, son of Baldy Han, elder brother of Han the Second, father of Han Ai-chieh, manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk store on Lion Street who absconds with a thousand taels of his property on hearing of his death, content to live off the sexual earnings of his wife and daughter.
Han Tao-kuo's paternal uncle, elder brother of Baldy Han.
Han, Trickster. See Han the Second.
Han Tso, boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Han Tsung-jen, domestic clerk on the staff of Yang Chien.
Han Wen-kuang, investigation commissioner for Shantung.
Han Yü-ch'uan, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho, younger sister of Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Pi.
Hao Hsien, Idler Hao, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.
Hao, Idler. See Hao Hsien.
Ho Ch'i-kao, left administration vice-commissioner of Shantung.
Ho Chin, assistant judicial commissioner of the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, promoted to the post of commander of Hsin-p'ing Stockade and later to the post of judicial commissioner in the Huai-an office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, thereby creating the vacancy filled by Hsi-men Ch'ing in return for the lavishness of his birthday presents to Ts'ai Ching.
Ho Chin-ch'an, singing girl from the Ho Family Bordello on Fourth Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
Ho Ch'in, son of Ho the Ninth who succeeds to his position as head coroner's assistant of Ch'ing-ho.
Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, Dr. Ho, son of Old Man Ho, physician in Ch'ing-ho.
Ho, Dr. See Ho Ch'un-ch'üan.
Ho, Eunuch Director. See Ho Hsin.

Ho Hsin (fl. early 12th century), Eunuch Director Ho, attendant in the Yen-ning Palace, residence of Consort Feng, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Ho Yung-shou, entertains Hsi-men Ch'ing on his visit to the Eastern Capital.
Ho-hua, maidservant of Chou Hsiu's concubine Sun Erh-niang.
Ho Liang-feng, younger brother of Magnate Ho.
Ho, Magnate, wealthy silk merchant from Hu-chou, elder brother of Ho Liang-feng, tries to buy P'an Chin-lien after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, patronizes Wang Liu-erh in Lin-ch'ing and takes her and Han Tao-kuo back to Hu-chou where they inherit his property.
Ho, Magnate's daughter.
Ho the Ninth, elder brother of Ho the Tenth, head coroner's assistant of Ch'ing-ho who accepts a bribe from Hsi-men Ch'ing to cover up the murder of Wu Chih.
Ho, Old Man, father of Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, aged physician in Ch'ing-ho.
Ho Pu-wei, clerk on the staff of the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who assists his son Li Kung-pi in his courtship of Meng Yü-lou.
Ho the Tenth, younger brother of Ho the Ninth, let off the hook by Hsi-men Ch'ing when he is accused of fencing stolen goods.
Ho Yung-fu, nephew of Ho Hsin, younger brother of Ho Yung-shou.
Ho Yung-shou, nephew of Ho Hsin, elder brother of Ho Yung-fu, appointed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's former post as assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission as a reward for Ho Hsin's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, niece of Lan Ts'ung-hsi.
Hou Lin, Flying Demon, beggar boss in Ch'ing-ho who helps out Ch'en Ching-chi when he is reduced to beggary in return for his sexual favours.
Hou Meng (1054–1121), grand coordinator of Shantung, promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Hsi-erh, pageboy in the household of Chou Hsiu.
Hsi-men An. See Tai-an.
Hsi-men Ching-liang, Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandfather.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, principal male protagonist of the novel, father of Hsi-men Ta-chieh by his deceased first wife, née Ch'en, father of Hsi-men Kuan-ko by Li P'ing-erh, father of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko by Wu Yüeh-niang, decadent scion of a merchant family of some wealth from which he inherits a wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen of Ch'ing-ho, climbs in social status by means of a succession of corrupt sexual, economic, and political conquests only to die of sexual excess at the age of thirty-three.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter. See Hsi-men Ta-chieh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's first wife, née Ch'en, deceased mother of Hsi-men Ta-chieh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's father. See Hsi-men Ta.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandfather. See Hsi-men Ching-liang.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's grandmother, née Li.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's mother, née Hsia.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's reincarnation. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko and Shen Yüeh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's sons. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko and Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, posthumous son of Hsi-men Ch'ing by Wu Yüeh-niang, born at the very moment of his death, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Yün Li-shou's daughter, claimed by the Buddhist monk P'u-ching to be the reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and spirited away by him at the end of the novel to become a celibate monk with the religious name Ming-wu.
Hsi-men Kuan-ko, son of Hsi-men Ch'ing by Li P'ing-erh, given the religious name Wu Ying-yüan by the Taoist priest Wu Tsung-che, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Ch'iao Chang-chieh, murdered by P'an Chin-lien out of jealousy of Li P'ing-erh.
Hsi-men Kuan-ko's reincarnation. See Wang family of Cheng-chou.
Hsi-men Ta, deceased father of Hsi-men Ch'ing whose business took him to many parts of China.
Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Mistress Ch'en, Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter by his deceased first wife, née Ch'en, wife of Ch'en Ching-chi, so neglected and abused by her husband that she commits suicide.
Hsi-men Ta-chieh's reincarnation. See Chung Kuei.
Hsi-t'ung, pageboy in the household of Wang Hsüan.
Hsiao-ko. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Hsia Ch'eng-en, son of Hsia Yen-ling, achieves status of military selectee by hiring a stand-in to take the qualifying examination for him.
Hsia-hua, junior maidservant of Li Chiao-erh who is caught trying to steal a gold bracelet.
Hsia Kung-chi, docket officer on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.
Hsia Shou, servant in the household of Hsia Yen-ling.
Hsia Yen-ling, judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, colleague, superior, and rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in his official career.
Hsia Yen-ling's son. See Hsia Ch'eng-en.
Hsia Yen-ling's wife.
Hsiang the Elder, deceased distaff relative of the imperial family through Empress Hsiang, consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85), elder brother of Hsiang the fifth.
Hsiang, Empress, (1046–1101), consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85).
Hsiang the Fifth, distaff relative of the imperial family through Empress Hsiang, consort of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85), younger brother of Hsiang the Elder, sells part of his country estate outside Ch'ing-ho to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsiao Chang-hsien. See Chang Hsiao-hsien.
Hsiao Ch'eng, resident of Oxhide Street and neighbourhood head of the fourth neighbourhood of the first subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho.
Hsiao-ko. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Hsiao-luan, junior maidservant of Meng Yü-lou.
Hsiao-yü, Little Jade, junior maidservant of Wu Yüeh-niang, married to Tai-an after Wu Yüeh-niang discovers them in flagrante delicto.
Hsiao-yüeh, Abbot, head priest of the Water Moon Monastery outside the south gate of Ch'ing-ho.
Hsieh En, assistant judicial commissioner of the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.
Hsieh, Fatty. See Hsieh the Third.
Hsieh Hsi-ta, Tagalong Hsieh, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.
Hsieh Hsi-ta's father, deceased hereditary battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard.
Hsieh Hsi-ta's mother.
Hsieh Hsi-ta's wife, née Liu.
Hsieh Ju-huang, What a Whopper, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo who punctures his balloon when he inflates his own importance.
Hsieh, Tagalong. See Hsieh Hsi-ta.
Hsieh the Third, Fatty Hsieh, manager of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Hsin Hsing-tsung (fl. early 12th century), commander-general of the Honan region who leads the forces of Chang-te against the Chin invaders.
Hsiu-ch'un, junior maidservant of Li P'ing-erh and later of Li Chiao-erh, finally becoming a novice nun under the tutelage of Nun Wang.
Hsiung Wang, husband of Chang Ju-i, soldier forced by his lack of means to sell his wife to Hsi-men Ch'ing as a wet nurse for Kuan-ko.
Hsiung Wang's son by Chang Ju-i.
Hsü, Assistant Administration Commissioner, of Yen-chou in Shantung.
Hsü-chou, old woman from, in whose house Han Ai-chieh encounters Han the Second.
Hsü, Eunuch Director, wealthy eunuch speculator and moneylender, resident of Halfside Street in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho, landlord of Crooked-head Sun and Aunt Yang, patron of Li Ming, original owner of Hsia Yen-ling's residential compound, major rival of Hsi-men Ch'ing in the social world of Ch'ing-ho whose niece marries Chang Mao-te's son.
Hsü, Eunuch Director's niece, marries Chang Mao-te's son.
Hsü Feng, prefect of Yen-chou in Chekiang who exposes Meng Yü-lou's and Li Kung-pi's attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi.
Hsü Feng's trusted henchman who disguises himself as a convict in order to elicit information from Ch'en Ching-chi.
Hsü Feng-hsiang, supervisor of the State Farm Battalion of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, one of the officials who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.
Hsü the Fourth, shopkeeper outside the city wall of Ch'ing-ho who borrows money from Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsü Hsiang, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Hsü, Master, yin-yang master of Ch'ing-ho.
Hsü Nan-ch'i, military officer in Ch'ing-ho promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade.
Hsü, Prefect, prefect of Ch'ing-chou, patron of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mout T'ai.
Hsü, Prefect's daughter.
Hsü, Prefect's son.
Hsü, Prefect's wife.
Hsü Pu-yü, Reneger Hsü, moneylender in Ch'ing-ho from whom Wang Ts'ai tries to borrow three hundred taels of silver in order to purchase a position in the Military School.
Hsü, Reneger. See Hsü Pu-yü.
Hsü Shun, professional actor of Hai-yen style drama.
Hsü Sung, prefect of Tung-ch'ang in Shantung.
Hsü Sung's concubine.
Hsü Sung's concubine's father.
Hsü, Tailor, artisan with a shop across the street from Han Tao-kuo residence on Lion Street in Ch'ing-ho.
Hsü the Third, seller of date cakes in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.
Hsü Tsung-shun, junior disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.
Hsüeh, Auntie, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who also peddles costume jewelry, mother of Hsüeh Chi, sells P'ang Ch'un-mei into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, represents Hsi-men Ch'ing in the betrothal of his daughter Hsi-men Ta-chieh to Ch'en Ching-chi, proposes his match with Meng Yü-lou, arranges resale of P'ang Ch'un-mei to Chou Hsiu after she is forced to leave the Hsi-men household by Wu Yüeh-niang, arranges match between Ch'en Ching-chi and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing after Hsi-men Ta-chieh's suicide.
Hsüeh, Auntie's husband.
Hsüeh Chi, son of Auntie Hsüeh, husband of Chin ta-chieh.
Hsüeh Chi's son by Chin Ta-chieh.
Hsüeh, Eunuch Director, supervisor of the imperial estates in the Ch'ing-ho region, despite his castration given to fondling and pinching the singing girls with whom he comes in contact.
Hsüeh Hsien-chung, official rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Hsüeh, Nun, widow of a peddler of steamed wheat cakes living across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery in Ch'ing-ho who takes the ton-sure after the death of her husband and becomes abbess of the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, defrocked for her complicity in the death of Juan the Third, later rector of the Lotus Blossom Nunnery in the southern quarter of Ch'ing-ho who provides first Wu Yüeh-niang and then P'an Chin-lien with fertility potions, frequently invited to recite Buddhist "precious scrolls" to Wu Yüeh-niang and her guests.
Hsüeh, Nun's deceased husband, peddler of steamed wheat cakes living across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery in Ch'ing-ho.
Hsüeh-o. See Sun Hsüeh-o.
Hsüeh Ts'un-erh, unlicensed prostitute in Longfoot Wu's brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.
Hu, Dr., Old Man Hu, Hu the Quack, physician who lives in Eunuch Director Liu's house on East Street in Ch'ing-ho in the rear courtyard of which Hsi-men Ch'ing hides in order to evade Wu Sung, treats Hua Tzu-hsü, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ch'ing without success, prescribes abortifacient for P'an Chin-lien when she becomes pregnant by Ch'en Ching-chi.
Hu, Dr.'s maidservant.
Hu the Fourth, impeached as a relative or adherent of Yang Chien.
Hu Hsiu, employee of Han Tao-kuo who spies on Hsi-men Ch'ing's love-making with Wang Liu-erh, accompanies his employer on his buying expeditions to the south, and tells him what he thinks about his private life in a drunken tirade in Yang-chou.
Hu, Old Man. See Hu, Dr.
Hu the Quack. See Hu, Dr.
Hu Shih-wen (fl. early 12th century), related to Ts'ai Ching by marriage, corrupt prefect of Tung-p'ing in Shantung who participates with Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling in getting Miao Ch'ing off the hook for murdering his master Miao T'ien-hsiu.
Hu Ts'ao, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing young male lead roles.
Hua the Elder. See Hua Tzu-yu.
Hua, Eunuch Director, uncle of Hua Tzu-yu, Hua Tzu-hsü, Hua Tzu-kuang, and Hua Tzu-hua and adoptive father of Hua Tzu-hsü, member of the Imperial Bodyguard and director of the Firewood Office in the Imperial Palace, later promoted to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan from which post he retires on account of illness to take up residence in his native place, Ch'ing-ho; despite his castration engaged in pseudo-incestuous hanky-panky with his daughter-in-law, Li P'ing-erh.
Hua the Fourth. See Hua Tzu-hua.
Hua Ho-lu, assistant magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.
Hua, Mistress. See Li P'ing-erh.
Hua, Mrs. See Li P'ing-erh.

Hua, Nobody. See Hua Tzu-hsü.
Hua the Second. See Hua Tzu-hsü.
Hua the Third. See Hua Tzu-kuang.
Hua-t'ung, pageboy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household sodomized by Wen Pi-ku.
Hua Tzu-hsü, Hua the Second, Nobody Hua, nephew and adopted son of Eunuch Director Hua, husband of Li P'ing-erh, next-door neighbour of Hsi-men Ch'ing and member of the brotherhood of ten, patron of Wu Yin-erh and Cheng Ai-hsiang; cuckolded by Li P'ing-erh, who turns over much of his property to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he loses the rest in a lawsuit and dies of chagrin.
Hua Tzu-hsü's reincarnation. See Cheng. Battalion Commander's family in the Eastern Capital.
Hua Tzu-hua, Hua the Fourth, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.
Hua Tzu-hua's wife.
Hua Tzu-kuang, Hua the Third, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.
Hua Tzu-kuang's wife.
Hua Tzu-yu, Hua the Elder, nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, brother of Hua Tzu-hsü.
Hua Tzu-yu's wife.
Huai River region, merchant from, who employs Wang Ch'ao.
Huai River region, merchant from, who patronizes Li Kuei-ch'ing.
Huang An, military commander involved with T'an Chen in defense of the northern frontier against the Chin army.
Huang, Buddhist Superior, monk of the Pao-en Temple in Ch'ing-ho.
Huang Chia, prefect of Teng-chou in Shantung.
Huang Ching-ch'en (d. 1126), defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Wang Ts'ai's wife, née Huang, lavishly entertained by Hsi-men Ch'ing at the request of Sung Ch'iao-nien.
Huang Ching-ch'en's adopted son, granted the post of battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Huang the Fourth, merchant contractor in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Li Chih, ends up in prison for misappropriation of funds.
Huang the Fourth's son.
Huang the Fourth's wife, née Sun, daughter of Sun Ch'ing.
Huang-lung Temple, abbot of, entertains Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou en route to Ch'ing-ho from the Eastern Capital.
Huang, Master, fortune teller residing outside the Chen-wu Temple in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
Huang Mei, assistant prefect of K'ai-feng, maternal cousin of Miao T'ien-hsiu who invites him to visit him in the capital and appeals to Tseng Hsiao-hsü on his behalf after his murder.
Huang Ning, pageboy in the household of Huang the Fourth.
Huang Pao-kuang (fl. early 12th century), secretary of the Ministry of Works in charge of the Imperial Brickyard in Ch'ing-ho, provincial graduate of the same year as Shang Hsiao-t'ang.
Huang, Perfect Man. See Huang Yüan-pai.
Huang Yü, foreman on the staff of Wang Fu.
Huang Yüan-pai, Perfect Man Huang, Taoist priest sent by the court to officiate at a seven-day rite of cosmic renewal on Mount T'ai, also officiates at a rite of purification for the salvation of the soul of Li P'ing-erh.
Hui-ch'ing, "The Beanpole," wife of Lai-chao, mother of Little Iron Rod.
Hui-hsiang, wife of Lai-pao, née Liu, mother of Seng-pao.
Hui-hsiang's elder sister.
Hui-hsiang's mother.
Hui-hsiang's younger brother. See Liu Ts'ang.
Hui-hsiu, wife of Lai-hsing, mother of Nien-erh and Ch'eng-erh.
Hui-lien. See Sung Hui-lien.
Hui-tsung, Emperor of the Sung dynasty (r. 1100–25), father of Emperor Ch'in-tsung in whose favour he abdicates in 1125, taken into captivity together with his son by the Chin invaders in 1127.
Hui-yüan, wife of Lai-chüeh.
Hung, Auntie, madam of the Hung Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.
Hung the Fourth, singing girl from the Hung Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.
Hung-hua Temple in Ch'ing-ho, monk from, whom Hsi-men Ch'ing frames and executes in place of Ho the Tenth.
Huo-pao, eleven-year-old country girl offered to P'ang Ch'un-mei as a maidservant but rejected for wetting her bed.
Huo-pao's parents.
Huo Ta-li, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho who accepts Ch'en Ching-chi's bribe and lets him off the hook when accused of driving his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to suicide.
I Mien-tz'u, Ostensibly Benign, neighbour of Hsi-men Ch'ing who intercedes unsuccessfully on Lai-wang's behalf.
Imperial stables in Ch'ing-ho, eunuch director of, employer of Mohammedan Han.
Indian monk. See Monk, Indian.
Iron Fingernail. See Yang Kuang-yen.
Iron Rod. See Little Iron Rod.
Itinerant acrobat called in by Chou Hsiu to distract P'ang Ch'un-mei from her grief over the death of P'an Chin-lien.
Jade Flute. See Yü-hsiao.
Jade Lotus. See Pai Yü-lien.
Jen, Abbot, Taoist priest of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing to whom Wang Hsüan recommends Ch'en Ching-chi as a disciple; dies of shock when threatened with arrest in connection with the latter's whoremongering.
Jen, Abbot's acolyte.
Jen, Dr. See Jen Hou-ch'i.
Jen Hou-ch'i, Dr. Jen, physician in Ch'ing-ho who treats Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing without success, friend of Han Ming-ch'uan.
Jen T'ing-kuei, assistant magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.
Ju-i. See Chang Ju-i.
Juan the Third, dies of excitement in the act of making love to Miss Ch'en in the Ksitigarbha Nunnery during an assignation arranged by Nun Hsüeh.
Juan the Third's parents.
Jui-yün. See Pen Chang-chieh.
Jung Chiao-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Wang Ts'ai.
Jung Hai, employee of Hsi-men Ch'ing who accompanies Ts'ui Pen on a buying trip to Hu-chou.
Kan Jun, resident of Stonebridge Alley in Ch'ing-ho, partner and manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk dry goods store.
Kan Jun's wife.
Kan Lai-hsing. See Lai-hsing.
K'ang, Prince of. See Kao-tsung, Emperor.
Kao An, secondary majordomo of Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital through whom Lai-pao gains access to Ts'ai Yu.
Kao Ch'iu (d. 1126), defender-in-chief of the Imperial Bodyguard, granted the title of grand guardian for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park; one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
Kao family from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital, family into which Chou I is reincarnated as a son named Kao Liu-chu.
Kao family of the Ta-hsing Guard, family into which Chang Sheng is reincarnated as a son.
Kao Lien, cousin of Kao Ch'iu, prefect of T'ai-an, brother-in-law of Yin T'ien-hsi.
Kao Lien's wife, née Yin, elder sister of Yin T'ien-hsi.
Kao Liu-chu, son of the Kao family from outside the city wall of the Eastern Capital, reincarnation of Chou I.
Kao-tsung, emperor of the Southern Sung dynasty (r. 1127–62), ninth son of Emperor Hui-tsung, Prince of K'ang; declares himself emperor in 1127 when the Chin invaders take emperors Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung into captivity; abdicates in favour of Emperor Hsiao-tsung in 1162.
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, wife of Ch'en Ching-chi in a marriage arranged by P'ang Ch'un-mei with whom he continues to carry on an intermittent affair; returns to her parents' family after Ch'en Ching-chi's death and the invasion by the Chin armies.
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's father, wealthy silk dry goods dealer in Ch'ing-ho.
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's mother.
Kou Tzu-hsiao, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing male lead roles.
Ku, Silversmith, jeweler in Ch'ing-ho patronized by Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing, employer of Lai-wang after he returns to Ch'ing-ho from exile in Hsü-chou.
Kuan, Busybody. See Kuan Shih-k'uan.
Kuan-ko. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko.
Kuan Shih-k'uan, Busybody Kuan, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.
Kuan-yin Nunnery, abbess of, superior of Nun Wang, frequent visitor in the Hsi-men household.
Kuang-yang, Commandery Prince of. See T'ung Kuan.
Kuei-chieh. See Li Kuei-chieh.
Kuei-ch'ing. See Li Kuei-ch'ing.
Kung Kuai (1057-1111), left provincial administration commissioner of Shantung.
K'ung, Auntie, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Ch'iao Hung's family in arranging the betrothal of Ch'iao Chang-chieh to Hsi-men Kuan-ko.
K'ung family of the Eastern Capital, family into which P'ang Ch'un-mei is reincarnated as a daughter.
Kuo Shou-ch'ing, senior disciple of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.
Kuo Shou-li, junior disciple of Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.
Kuo Yao-shih (d. after 1126), turncoat who accepts office under the Sung dynasty but goes over to the Chin side at a critical point and is instrumental in their conquest of North China.
La-mei, maidservant employed in the Wu Family Brothel in Ch'ing-ho.
Lai-an, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
Lai-chao, Liu Chao, head servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, husband of Hui-ch'ing, father of Little Iron Rod, helps Lai-wang to abscond with Sun Hsüeh-o.
Lai-chao's son. See Little Iron Rod.
Lai-chao's wife. See Hui-ch'ing.
Lai-chüeh, Lai-yu, husband of Hui-yüan, originally servant in the household of a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang, loses his position on exposure of his wife's affair with her employer, recommended as a servant to Hsi-men Ch'ing by his friend Ying Pao, the son of Ying Po-chüeh.
Lai-chüeh's deceased parents.
Lai-chüeh's wife. See Hui-yüan.
Lai-hsing, Kan Lai-hsing, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, originally recruited by Hsi-men Ch'ing's father while traveling on business in Kan-chou, husband of Hui-hsiu, father of Nien-erh and Ch'eng-erh, helps to frame Lai-wang for attempted murder, married to Chang Ju-i after the death of Hui-hsiu.
Lai-pao, T'ang Pao, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household often relied upon for important missions to the capital, husband of Hui-hsiang, father of Seng-pao, appointed to the post of commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün in return for his part in delivering birthday presents from Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ts'ai Ching, embezzles Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death and makes unsuccessful sexual advances to Wu Yüeh-niang, ends up in prison for misappropriation of funds.
Lai-pao's son. See Seng-pao.
Lai-pao's wife. See Hui-hsiang.
Lai-ting, pageboy in the household of Hua Tzu-yu.
Lai-ting, pageboy in the household of Huang the Fourth.
Lai-ting, pageboy in the household of Wu K'ai.
Lai-wang, Cheng Wang, native of Hsü-chou, servant in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, husband of Sung Hui-lien, framed for attempted murder and driven out of the household in order to get him out of the way, carries on a clandestine affair with Sun Hsüeh-o before his exile and absconds with her when he returns to Ch'ing-ho after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death.
Lai-wang's first wife, dies of consumption.
Lai-wang's second wife. See Sung Hui-lien.
Lai-yu. See Lai-chüeh.
Lan-hsiang, senior maidservant of Meng Yü-lou.
Lan-hua, junior maidservant of P'ang Ch'un-mei after she becomes the wife of Chou Hsiu.
Lan-hua, elderly maidservant in the household of Wu K'ai.
Lan Ts'ung-hsi (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, uncle of Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan.

Lan Ts'ung-hsi's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Lan Ts'ung-hsi's niece. See Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan.
Lang, Buddhist Superior, monk of the Pao-en Temple in Ch'ing-ho.
Lei Ch'i-yüan, assistant commissioner of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit.
Li An, retainer in the household of Chou Hsiu who saves P'ang Ch'un-mei's life when she is threatened by Chang Sheng and resists her blandishments when she tries to seduce him.
Li An's father, deceased elder brother of Li Kuei.
Li An's mother, persuades Li An to avoid entanglement with P'ang Ch'un-mei by seeking refuge with his uncle Li Kuei in Ch'ing-chou.
Li, Barestick. See Li Kung-pi.
Li Ch'ang-ch'i, father of Li Kung-pi, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho and later assistant prefect of Yen-chou in Chekiang.
Li Ch'ang-ch'i's wife, mother of Li Kung-pi.
Li Chiao-erh, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Second Lady, originally a singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello in Ch'ing-ho, aunt of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, enemy of P'an Chin-lien, tight-fisted manager of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household finances, engages in hanky-panky with Wu the Second, begins pilfering Hsi-men Ch'ing's property while his corpse is still warm, ends up as Chang Mao-te's Second Lady.
Li Chih, Li the Third, father of Li Huo, merchant contractor in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Huang the Fourth, ends up dying in prison for misappropriation of funds.
Li Chin, servant in the household of Li Chih.
Li Chung-yu, servant on the domestic staff of Ts'ai Ching.
Li, Eunuch Director. See Li Yen.
Li family of the Eastern Capital, family into which P'an Chin-lien is reincarnated as a daughter.
Li Huo, son of Li Chih.
Li Kang (1083–1140), minister of war under Emperor Ch'in-tsung who directs the defense against the Chin invaders.
Li Kuei, Shantung Yaksha, uncle of Li An, military instructor from Ch'ing-chou patronized by Li Kung-pi.
Li Kuei-chieh, Cassia, daughter of Auntie Li the Third, niece of Li Chiao-erh and Li Ming, younger sister of Li Kuei-ch'ing, singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, deflowered by Hsi-men Ch'ing, who maintains her as his mistress for twenty taels a month, adopted daughter of Wu Yüeh-niang, betrays Hsi-men Ch'ing with Ting the Second, Wang Ts'ai, and others.
Li Kuei-chieh's fifth maternal aunt.
Li Kuei-ch'ing, daughter of Auntie Li the Third, niece of Li Chiao-erh and Li Ming, elder sister of Li Kuei-chieh, singing girl from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the Licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
Li K'uei, Black Whirlwind, bloodthirsty outlaw from Sung Chiang's band who massacres the household of Liang Shih-chieh and kills Yin T'ien-hsi.
Li Kung-pi, Bare Stick Li, only son of Li Ch'ang-ch'i, student at the Superior College of the National University, falls in love with Meng Yü-lou at first sight and arranges to marry her as his second wife, severely beaten by his father for his part in the abortive attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi, forced to return with his bride to his native place to resume his studies.
Li Kung-pi's deceased first wife.
Li Kung-pi's servant.
Li, Leaky. See Li Wai-ch'uan.
Li Ming, younger brother of Li Chiao-erh, uncle of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh; actor and musician from the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho; employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing to teach Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang to sing and play musical instruments; driven out of the house by Ch'un-mei for having the temerity to squeeze her hand during a lesson but allowed to return on many subsequent occasions; assists Li Chiao-erh, Li Kuei-ch'ing, and Li Kuei-chieh in despoiling Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death.
Li Pang-yen (d. 1130), minister of the right, grand academician of the Hall for Aid in Governance, and concurrently minister of rites, alters Hsi-men Ch'ing's name to Chia Lien on a bill of impeachment in return for a bribe of five hundred taels of silver, promoted to the ranks of pillar of state and grand preceptor of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
Li P'ing-erh, Vase, Mrs. Hua, Mistress Hua, one of the three principal female protagonists of the novel, concubine of Liang Shih-chieh, wife of Hua Tzu-hsü, commits adultery with her husband's neighbour and sworn brother Hsi-men Ch'ing, wife of Dr. Chiang Chu-shan, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Sixth Lady, mother of Hsi-men Kuan-ko, dies of chronic hemorrhaging brought on by grief over the death of her son and Hsi-men Ch'ing's insistence on trying out his newly acquired aphrodisiac on her while she is in her menstrual period, commemorated in overly elaborate funeral observances that are prime examples of conspicuous consumption, haunts Hsi-men Ch'ing's dreams.
Li P'ing-erh's former incarnation. See Wang family of Pin-chou.
Li P'ing-erh's deceased parents.
Li P'ing-erh's reincarnation. See Yüan, Commander.
Li Ta-t'ien, district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, relative of Chu Mien, appoints Wu Sung as police captain and later sends him to the Eastern Capital to stash his ill-gotten gains with his powerful relative, accepts Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes to abuse the law in the cases of Wu Sung, Lai-wang, Sung Hui-lien, Miao T'ien-hsiu, and others.
Li the Third, seller of won-ton in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.
Li the Third. See Li Chih.
Li the Third, Auntie, madam of the Verdant Spring Bordello on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, mother of Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, partially paralyzed, prototypical procuress who milks her customers for all she can get.
Li, Vice-Minister, employer of Licentiate Shui.
Li Wai-ch'uan, Leaky Li, influence peddling lictor on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who is mistakenly killed by Wu Sung in his abortive attempt to wreak vengeance on Hsi-men Ch'ing for the murder of his elder brother Wu Chih.
Li Yen (d. 1126), Eunuch Director Li, entertains Miao Ch'ing in his residence behind the Forbidden City in the Eastern Capital, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
Li Yen's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Liang, Privy Councilor. See Liang Shih-chieh.
Liang Shih-chieh, Privy Councilor Liang, regent of the Northern Capital at Ta-ming Prefecture in Hopei, son-in-law of Ts'ai Ching, first husband of Li P'ing-erh, forced to flee for his life when his entire household is slaughtered by Li K'uei.
Liang Shih-chieh's wife, née Ts'ai, daughter of Ts'ai Ching, extremely jealous woman who beats numbers of maidservants and concubines of her husband to death and buries them in the rear flower garden, forced to flee for her life when her entire household is slaughtered by Li K'uei.
Liang To, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Liang Ying-lung, commandant of security for the Eastern Capital.
Lin Ch'eng-hsün, judicial commissioner in the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.
Lin Hsiao-hung, younger sister of Lin Ts'ai-hung, singing girl in Yang-chou patronized by Lai-pao.
Lin, Lady, widow of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, mother of Wang Ts'ai, former mistress of P'an Chin-lien who learns to play musical instruments and to sing as a servant in her household, carries on an adulterous affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing under the transparent pretext of asking him to superintend the morals of her profligate son.
Lin Ling-su (d. c. 1125), Perfect Man Lin, Taoist priest who gains an ascendancy over Emperor Hui-tsung for a time and is showered with high-sounding titles, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Lin, Perfect Man. See Lin Ling-su.
Lin Shu (d. c. 1126), minister of works rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Lin Ts'ai-hung, elder sister of Lin Hsiao-hung, singing girl in Yang-chou.
Ling, Master, fortune teller in Ch'ing-ho who interprets Meng Yü-lou's horoscope when she is about to marry Li Kung-pi.
Ling Yün-i, prefect of Yen-chou in Shantung.
Little Iron Rod, son of Lai-chao and his wife Hui-ch'ing.
Little Jade. See Hsiao-yü.
Little Whirlwind. See Ch'ai Chin.
Liu, Assistant Regional Commander, officer of the Hsi-hsia army who gives a horse to Chai Ch'ien, who in turn presents it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Liu Chao. See Lai-chao.
Liu Chü-chai, Dr., physician from Fen-chou in Shansi, friend of Ho Yung-shou who recommends him to Hsi-men Ch'ing when he is in extremis but whose treatment exacerbates his condition.
Liu, Company Commander, younger brother of Eunuch Director Liu, indicted for illicit use of imperial lumber in constructing a villa on a newly purchased estate at Wu-li Tien outside Ch'ing-ho, let off the hook by Hsi-men Ch'ing in response to a bribe proffered by Eunuch Director Liu.
Liu, Consort (1088–1121), Consort An, a favourite consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, mother of Chao I.
Liu, Dame, Stargazer Liu's wife, medical practitioner and shamaness frequently called upon by the women of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
Liu, Eunuch Director, elder brother of Company Commander Liu, manager of the Imperial Brickyard in Ch'ing-ho, resides on an estate outside the south gate of the city, intervenes with Hsi-men Ch'ing to get his younger brother off the hook when indicted for misappropriation of imperial lumber but supplies Hsi-men Ch'ing with bricks from the Imperial Brickyard for construction of his country estate.
Liu, Eunuch Director, landlord of Dr. Hu's house on East Street in Ch'ing-ho.
Liu, Eunuch Director, resides near Wine Vinegar Gate on the North Side of Ch'ing-ho, patron of Li Ming.
Liu Hui-hsiang. See Hui-hsiang.
Liu Kao, commander of An-p'ing Stockade, friend of Shih En who gives Wu Sung a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation to him when he is sent there in military exile.
Liu, Mr., official serving in Huai-an who passed the *chin-shih* examinations the same year as Sung Ch'iao-nien.
Liu Pao, servant employed as a cook in Hsi-men Ch'ing's silk dry goods store.
Liu, School Official, native of Hang-chou, educational official in Ch'ing-ho who borrows money from Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Liu the Second, Turf-protecting Tiger, brother-in-law of Chang Sheng, proprietor of My Own Tavern west of the bridge in Lin-ch'ing, pimp and racketeer, boss of unlicensed prostitution in Lin-ch'ing, beaten to death by Chou Hsiu at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei after Chang Sheng's murder of Ch'en Ching-chi.
Liu the Second, Little, seller of ready-cooked food in front of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.
Liu Sheng, foreman on the domestic staff of Yang Chien.
Liu, Stargazer, husband of Dame Liu, blind fortune teller and necromancer who interprets P'an Chin-lien's horoscope, teaches her a method for working black magic on Hsi-men Ch'ing, and treats Hsi-men Kuan-ko ineffectually.
Liu the Third, servant of Company Commander Liu.
Liu Ts'ang, younger brother of Hui-hsiang, brother-in-law of Lai-pao with whom he cooperates in surreptitiously making off with eight hundred taels worth of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property after his death and using it to open a general store.
Liu Yen-ch'ing (1068–1127), commander-general of the Shensi region who leads the forces of Yen-sui against the Chin invaders.
Lo, Mohammedan, one of the "ball clubbers" patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Lo Ts'un-erh, singing girl of Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsiang the Fifth.
Lo Wan-hsiang, prefect of Tung-p'ing.
Love. See Chu Ai-ai.
Lu Ch'ang-t'ui, Longleg Lu, madam of the brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho where Chin-erh and Sai-erh work.
Lu Ch'ang-t'ui's husband.
Lu, Duke of. See Ts'ai Ching.
Lu Hu, clerical subofficial on the staff of Yang Chien.
Lu Hua, Snake-in-the-grass, "knockabout" who, along with Chang Sheng, shakes down Dr. Chiang Chu-shan at the behest of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Lu, Longleg. See Lu Ch'ang-t'ui.
Lu Ping-i, Lu the Second, crony of Ch'en Ching-chi who suggests how he can recover his property from Yang Kuang-yen and goes into partnership with him as the manager of the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Lu the Second. See Lu Ping-i.
Lung-hsi, Duke of. See Wang Wei.
Lü Sai-erh, singing girl in Ch'ing-ho.
Ma Chen, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Ma, Mrs., next-door neighbour of Ying Po-chüeh.
Man-t'ang, maidservant in the household of Li Kung-pi.
Mao-te, Princess (fl. early 12th century), fifth daughter of Emperor Hui-tsung, married to Ts'ai Ching's fourth son, Ts'ai T'iao.
Meng Ch'ang-ling (fl. early 12th century), eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Meng Ch'ang-ling's adopted son, granted the post of battalion vice-commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard by *yin* privilege as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Meng-ch'ang, Little Lord. See Ch'ai Chin.
Meng the Elder, elder brother of Meng Yü-lou.
Meng the Elder's wife, Meng Yü-lou's sister-in-law.
Meng Jui, Meng the Second, younger brother of Meng Yü-lou, a traveling merchant constantly on the road.
Meng Jui's wife, Meng Yü-lou's sister-in-law.
Meng the Second. See Meng Jui.
Meng the Third. See Meng Yü-lou.
Meng Yü-lou, Tower of Jade, Meng the Third, one of the female protagonists of the novel, widow of the textile merchant Yang Tsung-hsi, Hsi-men Ch'ing's Third Lady, confidante of P'an Chin-lien, marries Li Kung-pi after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, forced to return with her husband to his native place in Hopei after their abortive attempt to frame Ch'en Ching-chi, bears a son to Li Kung-pi at the age of forty and lives to the age of sixty-seven.
Meng Yü-lou's elder brother. See Meng the Elder.
Meng Yü-lou's elder sister. See Han Ming-ch'uan's wife, née Meng.

Meng Yü-lou's son by Li Kung-pi.
Meng Yü-lou's younger brother. See Meng Jui.
Miao Ch'ing, servant of Miao T'ien-hsiu who conspires with the boatmen Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth to murder his master on a trip to the Eastern Capital, bribes Hsi-men Ch'ing to get him off the hook, and returns to Yang-chou where he assumes his former master's position in society and maintains relations with his benefactor Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Miao-ch'ü, teenage disciple of Nun Hsüeh.
Miao-feng, teenage disciple of Nun Hsüeh.
Miao Hsiu, servant in the household of Miao Ch'ing.
Miao Shih, servant in the household of Miao Ch'ing.
Miao T'ien-hsiu, a wealthy merchant of Yang-chou who is murdered by his servant Miao Ch'ing on a trip to the Eastern Capital.
Miao T'ien-hsiu's concubine. See Tiao the Seventh.
Miao T'ien-hsiu's daughter.
Miao T'ien-hsiu's wife, née Li.
Ming-wu. See Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Mirror polisher, elderly itinerant artisan in Ch'ing-ho who polishes mirrors for P'an Chin-lien, Meng Yü-lou, and P'ang Ch'un-mei and elicits their sympathy with a sob story.
Mirror polisher's deceased first wife.
Mirror polisher's second wife.
Mirror polisher's son.
Monk, Indian, foreign monk presented as the personification of a penis whom Hsi-men Ch'ing encounters in the Temple of Eternal Felicity and from whom he obtains the aphrodisiac an overdose of which eventually kills him.
Moon Lady. See Wu Yüeh-niang.
Ni, Familiar. See Ni P'eng.
Ni, Licentiate. See Ni P'eng.
Ni P'eng, Familiar Ni, Licentiate Ni, tutor employed in the household of Hsia Yen-ling as a tutor for his son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, who recommends his fellow licentiate Wen Pi-ku to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Nieh Liang-hu, schoolmate of Shang Hsiao-t'ang employed in his household as a tutor for his son who writes two congratulatory scrolls for Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Nieh, Tiptoe. See Nieh Yüeh.
Nieh Yüeh, Tiptoe Nieh, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.
Nieh Yüeh's wife.
Nien-erh, elder daughter of Lai-hsing by Hui-hsiu.
Nien-mo-ho. See Wan-yen Tsung-han.
Niu, Ms., singing girl in the Great Tavern on Lion Street who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal assault on Li Wai-ch'uan.
Old woman who tells the fortunes of Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh with the aid of a turtle.
Opportune Rain. See Sung Chiang.
Ostensibly Benign. See I Mien-tz'u.
Pai, Baldy. See Pai T'u-tzu.
Pai the Fifth, Moneybags Pai, father-in-law of Feng Huai, notorious local tyrant and fence for stolen goods in the area west of the Grand Canal.
Pai the Fourth, silversmith in Ch'ing-ho, acquaintance of Han Tao-kuo.
Pai Lai-ch'iang, Scrounger Pai, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten.
Pai Lai-ch'iang's wife.
Pai, Mohammedan. See Pai T'u-tzu.
Pai, Moneybags. See Pai the Fifth.
Pai, Scrounger. See Pai Lai-ch'iang.
Pai Shih-chung (d. 1127), right vice-minister of rites rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Pai T'u-tzu, Baldy Pai, Mohammedan Pai, "ball-clubber" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.
Pai Yü-lien, Jade Lotus, maidservant purchased by Mrs. Chang at the same time as P'an Chin-lien who dies shortly thereafter.
Palace foreman who plays the role of master of ceremonies at the imperial audience in the Hall for the Veneration of Governance.
Palefaced Gentleman. See Cheng T'ien-shou.
Pan-erh, unlicensed prostitute in Longfoot Wu's brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.
P'an Chi, one of the officials from the Ch'ing-ho Guard who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.
P'an Chin-lien, Golden Lotus, P'an the Sixth, principal female protagonist of the novel, daughter of Tailor P'an from outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho who dies when she is only six years old; studies in a girls' school run by Licentiate Yü for three years where she learns to read and write; sold by her mother at the age of eight into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang and Lady Lin where she is taught to play musical instruments and to sing; resold in her mid-teens, after the death of her master, into the household of Mr. Chang who deflowers her and then gives her as a bride to his tenant, Wu Sung's elder brother, the dwarf Wu Chih; paramour of Hsi-men Ch'ing who collaborates with her in poisoning her husband and subsequently makes her his Fifth Lady; seduces her husband's pageboy Ch'in-t'ung for which he is driven out of the household; carries on a running affair with her son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi that is consummated after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; responsible, directly or indirectly, for the suicide of Sung Hui-lien, the death of Hsi-men Kuan-ko, and the demise of Hsi-men Ch'ing; aborts her son by Ch'en Ching-chi; is sold out of the household by Wu Yüeh-niang, purchased by Wu Sung, and disemboweled by the latter in revenge for the death of his elder brother Wu Chih.
P'an Chin-lien's cat, Coal in the Snow, Snow Lion, Snow Bandit, longhaired white cat with a black streak on its forehead that P'an Chin-lien trains to attack Hsi-men Kuan-ko with fatal consequences.
P'an Chin-lien's father. See P'an, Tailor.
P'an Chin-lien's maternal aunt, younger sister of old Mrs. P'an.
P'an Chin-lien's maternal aunt's daughter, adopted by old Mrs. P'an to look after her in her old age.
P'an Chin-lien's mother. See P'an, old Mrs.
P'an Chin-lien's reincarnation. See Li Family of the Eastern Capital.
P'an, Demon-catcher. See P'an, Taoist Master.
P'an family prostitution ring operating out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, madam of.
P'an the fifth, white slaver, masquerading as a cotton merchant from Shantung, who operates a prostitution ring out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, buys Sun Hsüeh-o from Auntie Hsüeh, and forces her to become a singing girl.
P'an the Fifth's deceased first wife.
P'an the Fifth's mother.
P'an, old Mrs., widow of Tailor P'an, mother of P'an Chin-lien, sends her daughter to Licentiate Yü's girls' school for three years, sells her into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang and Lady Lin at the age of eight, resells her in her mid-teens into the household of Mr. Chang, frequent visitor in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household where she is maltreated by P'an Chin-lien who is ashamed of her low social status, adopts her younger sister's daughter to look after her in her old age, dies not long after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
P'an the Sixth. See P'an Chin-lien.
P'an, Tailor, father of P'an Chin-lien, artisan from outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho who dies when P'an Chin-lien is only six years old.
P'an, Taoist Master, Demon-catcher P'an, Taoist exorcist from the Temple of the Five Peaks outside Ch'ing-ho who performs various rituals on Li P'ing-erh's behalf but concludes that nothing can save her.
P'an, Taoist Master's acolyte.
P'ang Ch'un-mei, Spring Plum Blossom, one of the three principal female protagonists of the novel, originally purchased by Hsi-men Ch'ing from Auntie Hsüeh for sixteen taels of silver as a maidservant for Wu Yüeh-niang, reassigned as senior maidservant to P'an Chin-lien when she enters the household, becomes her chief ally and confidante; from the time that her mistress allows her to share the sexual favours of Hsi-men Ch'ing she remains loyal to her right up to and even after her death; after the demise of Hsi-men Ch'ing aids and abets P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'en Ching-chi, the discovery of which leads to her dismissal from the household; purchased as a concubine by Chou Hsiu, she bears him a son and is promoted to the status of principal wife, thereby rising higher in social status than any of the ladies she had formerly served as maidservant; comes to Wu Yüeh-niang's assistance when she is threatened by Wu Tien-en and condescends to pay a visit to her former mistress and to witness at first hand the signs of her relative decline; carries on an intermittent affair with Ch'en Ching-chi under her husband's nose and, after Chou Hsiu's death, dies in the act of sexual intercourse with his servant Chou I.
P'ang Ch'un-mei's deceased father who dies while Ch'un-mei is still a child.
P'ang Ch'un-mei's deceased mother who dies a year after Ch'un-mei's birth.
P'ang Ch'un-mei's reincarnation. See K'ung family of the Eastern Capital.
P'ang Ch'un-mei's son. See Chou Chin-ko.
P'ang Hsüan, clerical subofficial on the staff of Yang Chien.
Pao, Dr., pediatric physician in Ch'ing-ho called in to treat Hsi-men Kuan-ko who declares the case to be hopeless.
Pao-en Temple in the Eastern Capital, monk from, tries unsuccessfully to warn Miao T'ien-hsiu against leaving home before his fatal trip to the Eastern Capital.
Pao, Ms., singing girl in the Great Tavern on Lion Street who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal assault on Li Wai-ch'uan.
Pen Chang-chieh, Jui-yün, daughter of Pen Ti-ch'uan and Yeh the Fifth, concubine of Hsia Yen-ling.
Pen the Fourth. See Pen Ti-ch'uan.
Pen, Scurry-about. See Pen Ti-ch'uan.
Pen Ti-ch'uan, Scurry-about Pen, Pen the Fourth, husband of Yeh the Fifth, father of Pen Chang-chieh, manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various capacities, member of the brotherhood of ten in which he replaces Hua Tzu-hsü after his death.
Pen Ti-ch'uan's daughter. See Pen Chang-chieh.
Pen Ti-ch'uan's wife. See Yeh the Fifth.
Pin-yang, Commandery Prince of. See Wang Ching-ch'ung.
P'ing-an, pageboy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, absconds with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, is caught, and allows himself to be coerced by the police chief Wu Tien-en into giving false testimony that Wu Yüeh-niang has been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an.
P'ing-erh. See Li P'ing-erh.
Prison guard on Chou Hsiu's staff.
Pu Chih-tao, No-account Pu, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten whose place is taken after his death by Hua Tzu-hsü.
Pu, No-account. See Pu Chih-tao.
P'u-ching, Ch'an Master Snow Cave, mysterious Buddhist monk who provides Wu Yüeh-niang with a refuge in Snow Stream Cave on Mount T'ai when she is escaping attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi; at the end of the novel he conjures up a phantasmagoria in which all of the major protagonists describe themselves as being reborn in approximately the same social strata they had occupied in their previous incarnations; convinces Wu Yüeh-niang that her son Hsiao-ko is a reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and spirits him away into a life of Buddhist celibacy as his disciple.
Sai-erh, singing girl in Longleg Lu's brothel on Butterfly Lane in Ch'ing-ho.
Sauce and Scallions. See Chiang Ts'ung.
Second Lady. See Li Chiao-erh.
Seng-pao, son of Lai-pao and Hui-hsiang, betrothed to Wang Liu-erh's niece, the daughter of Butcher Wang and Sow Wang.
Servant from the household of Chou Hsiu who is sent to fetch P'ang Ch'un-mei with a lantern.
Servant in the inn at the foot of Mount T'ai where Wu Yüeh-niang and Wu K'ai spend the night on their pilgrimage.
Servant from the Verdant Spring Bordello who runs errands for Li Kuei-chieh.
Sha San, Yokel Sha, one of the "cribbers" and "ball clubbers" in Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.
Sha, Yokel. See Sha San.
Shamaness brought to the Hsi-men household by Dame Liu to burn paper money and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of the sick Hsi-men Kuan-ko.
Shang Hsiao-t'ang, Provincial Graduate Shang, son of Shang Liu-t'ang, widower in Ch'ing-ho whom Chang Lung proposes unsuccessfully as a match for Meng Yü-lou, provincial graduate of the same year as Huang Pao-kuang, assisted by Hsi-men Ch'ing when he sets out for the Eastern Capital to compete in the *chin-shih* examinations.
Shang Hsiao-t'ang's second wife.
Shang Hsiao-t'ang's son.
Shang Liu-t'ang, Prefectural Judge Shang, father of Shang Hsiao-t'ang, formerly served as district magistrate of Huang Pao-kuang's district and prefectural judge of Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan, resident of Main Street in Ch'ing-ho from whom both Li P'ing-erh's and Hsi-men Ch'ing's coffins are purchased.
Shang Liu-t'ang's deceased wife, mother of Shang Hsiao-t'ang.
Shang, Prefectural Judge. See Shang Liu-t'ang.
Shang, Provincial Graduate. See Shang Hsiao-t'ang.
Shantung Yaksha. See Li Kuei.
Shao Ch'ien, boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Shen, Brother-in-law, Mr. Shen, husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister.
Shen Ching, resident of the Eastern Capital, father of Shen Shou-shan.
Shen, Mr. See Shen, Brother-in-law.
Shen, Second Sister, blind professional singer in Ch'ing-ho recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Wang Liu-erh but driven out of his household by P'ang Ch'un-mei when she refuses to sing for her.
Shen Shou-shan, second son of Shen Ching, reincarnation of Chou Hsiu.

Shen Ting, servant in the household of Brother-in-law Shen.
Shen T'ung, wealthy resident of the Eastern Capital, father of Shen Yüeh.
Shen Yüeh, second son of Shen T'ung, reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Sheng-chin, ten-year-old country girl offered to P'ang Ch'un-mei as a maidservant but rejected for befouling her bed.
Sheng-chin's parents.
Shih Cho-kuei, Plastromancer Shih, shaman in Ch'ing-ho who prognosticates about the sick Hsi-men Kuan-ko through interpreting the cracks produced by applying heat to notches on the surface of the plastron of a tortoise shell.
Shih En, son of the warden of the prison camp at Meng-chou who befriends the exiled Wu Sung, obtains his assistance in his struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern, and gives him a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation to Liu Kao when he is transferred to the An-p'ing Stockade.
Shih, Plastromancer. See Shih Cho-kuei.
Shih Po-ts'ai, corrupt Taoist head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai.
Short-legged Tiger. See Wang Ying.
Shu-t'ung, Little Chang Sung, native of Su-chou, pageboy catamite and transvestite presented to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Li Ta-t'ien, placed in charge of Hsi-men Ch'ing's studio where he handles his correspondence and caters to his polymorphous sexual tastes, becomes intimate with Yü-hsiao and when discovered in flagrante delicto by P'an Chin-lien purloins enough of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property to make good his escape to his native place.
Shui, Licentiate, scholar of problematic morals unsuccessfully recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing as a social secretary by Ying Po-chüeh; after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death he is engaged by the remaining members of the brotherhood of ten to compose a funeral eulogy for Hsi-men Ch'ing in which he compares him to the male genitalia.
Shui, Licentiate's father, friend of Ying Po-chüeh's father.
Shui, Licentiate's grandfather, friend of Ying Po-chüeh's grandfather.
Shui, Licentiate's two sons, die of smallpox.
Shui, Licentiate's wife, elopes to the Eastern Capital with her lover.
Sick beggar whom Ch'en Ching-chi keeps alive with the warmth of his body when he is working as a night watchman.
Silver. See Wu Yin-erh.
Singing boys, two boy singers sent under escort all the way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's home in Ch'ing-ho by his host, Miao Ch'ing, after he expresses admiration for their singing at a banquet in the residence of Li Yen in the Eastern Capital.
Six Traitors, Ts'ai Ching, T'ung Kuan, Li Pang-yen, Chu Mien, Kao Ch'iu, and Li Yen.
Sixth Lady. See Li P'ing-erh.
Snake-in-the-grass. See Lu Hua.
Snow Bandit. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.
Snow Cave, Ch'an Master. See P'u-ching.
Snow Lion. See P'an Chin-lien's cat.
Snow Moth. See Sun Hsüeh-o.
Southerner who deflowers Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Spring Plum Blossom. See P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Ssu Feng-i, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Stand-hard. See Tao-chien.
Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho, cook from.
Storehouseman in charge of the local storehouse in Yen-chou Prefecture in Chekiang.
Street-skulking Rat. See Chang Sheng.
Sun, Blabbermouth. See Sun T'ien-hua.
Sun Chi, next-door neighbour of Ch'en Ching-chi.
Sun Ch'ing, father-in-law of Huang the Fourth, father of Sun Wen-hsiang, employer of Feng the Second, merchant in Ch'ing-ho engaged in the cotton trade.
Sun Ch'ing's daughter. See Huang the Fourth's wife, née Sun.
Sun Ch'ing's son. See Sun Wen-hsiang.
Sun, Crooked-head, deceased husband of Aunt Yang.
Sun Erh-niang, concubine of Chou Hsiu, mother of Chou Yü-chieh.
Sun Erh-niang's maidservant.
Sun Erh-niang's maidservant's father.
Sun Hsüeh-o, Snow Moth, originally maidservant of Hsi-men Ch'ing's deceased first wife, née Ch'en, who enters his household as part of her dowry; Hsi-men Ch'ing's Fourth Lady but a second-class citizen among his womenfolk whose responsibility is the kitchen; enemy of P'an Chin-lien and P'ang Ch'un-mei; carries on a clandestine affair with Lai-wang with whom she absconds when he returns to Ch'ing-ho after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; apprehended by the authorities and sold into Chou Hsiu's household at the behest of P'ang Ch'un-mei who abuses her, beats her, and sells her into prostitution in order to get her out of the way when she wishes to pass off Ch'en Ching-chi as her cousin; renamed as the singing girl, Yü-erh, working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing, she becomes the kept mistress of Chang Sheng until his death when she commits suicide.
Sun Hsüeh-o's reincarnation. See Yao family from outside the Eastern Capital.
Sun Jung, commandant of justice for the two townships of the Eastern Capital.
Sun Kua-tsui. See Sun T'ien-hua.
Sun T'ien-hua, Sun Kua-tsui, Blabbermouth Sun, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter.
Sun T'ien-hua's wife.
Sun Wen-hsiang, son of Sun Ch'ing, brother-in-law of Huang the Fourth, involved in an affray with Feng Huai who dies of his injuries half a month later.
Sung Chiang (fl. 1117–21), Opportune Rain, chivalrous bandit chieftan, leader of a band of thirty-six outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh whose slogan is to "Carry out the Way on Heaven's behalf," slayer of Yen P'o-hsi, rescues Wu Yüeh-niang when she is captured by the bandits of Ch'ing-feng Stronghold and Wang Ying wants to make her his wife, eventually surrenders to Chang Shu-yeh and accepts the offer of a government amnesty.
Sung Ch'iao-nien (1047–1113), father-in-law of Ts'ai Yu, father of Sung Sheng-ch'ung, protégé of Ts'ai Ching, appointed regional investigating censor of Shantung to replace Tseng Hsiao-hsü, entertained by Hsi-men Ch'ing who presents him periodically with lavish bribes in return for which he gets Miao Ch'ing off the hook and does him numerous other illicit favours, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Sung Hui-lien, Chin-lien, daughter of Sung Jen, formerly maidservant in the household of Assistant Prefect Ts'ai who takes sexual advantage of her; sacked for colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery; marries the cook Chiang Ts'ung who is stabbed to death in a brawl; second wife of Lai-wang; carries on a clandestine affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing that soon becomes public knowledge; after Lai-wang is framed for attempted murder and driven out of the household she suffers from remorse and commits suicide.
Sung Hui-lien's reincarnation. See Chu family of the Eastern Capital.
Sung Hui-lien's maternal aunt.
Sung Jen, father of Sung Hui-lien, coffin seller in Ch'ing-ho who accuses Hsi-men Ch'ing of driving his daughter to suicide but is given such a beating by the corrupt magistrate Li Ta-t'ien that he dies of his wounds.
Sung Sheng-ch'ung (fl. early 12th century), son of Sung Ch'iao-nien, elder brother of Ts'ai Yu's wife, née Sung, regional investigating censor of Shensi suborned into traducing Tseng Hsiao-hsü by Ts'ai Ching.
Sung Te, commits adultery with Ms. Chou, the widowed second wife of his father-in-law, for which Hsi-men Ch'ing sentences them both to death by strangulation.
Sung Te's father-in-law, deceased husband of Ms. Chou.
Sung Te's mother-in-law, deceased mother of Sung Te's wife.
Sung Te's wife.
Sung T'ui, eunuch rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Ta T'ien-tao, prefect of Tung-ch'ang.
Tai-an, Hsi-men An, favourite pageboy of Hsi-men Ch'ing and his sedulous understudy in the arts of roguery and dissimulation; manages to stay on the right side of everyone with the exception of Wu Yüeh-niang who periodically berates him for his duplicity; married to Hsiao-yü after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing when Wu Yüeh-niang discovers them in flagrante delicto; remains with Wu Yüeh-niang and supports her in her old age in return for which he is given the name Hsi-men An and inherits what is left of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property and social position.
T'ai-tsung, emperor of the Chin dynasty (r. 1123–35).
T'an Chen (fl. early 12th century), eunuch military commander with the concurrent rank of censor-in-chief, appointed to replace T'ung Kuan in command of the defense of the northern frontier against the Chin army.
T'ang Pao. See Lai-pao.
Tao-chien, Stand-hard, abbot of the Temple of Eternal Felicity at Wu-li Yüan outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho.
T'ao, Crud-crawler, an elderly resident of Ch'ing-ho who is renowned for having sexually molested all three of his daughters-in-law.
T'ao-hua, maidservant in the Star of Joy Bordello in Ch'ing-ho.
T'ao, Old Mother, licensed go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Li Kung-pi in his courtship of Meng Yü-lou.
Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho, lector of.
Teng, Midwife, called in by Ying Po-chüeh when his concubine, Ch'un-hua, bears him a son.
Third Lady. See Cho Tiu-erh and Meng Yü-lou.
Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin. See Wu Chih.
Ti Ssu-pin, Turbid Ti, vice-magistrate of Yang-ku district who locates the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu after his murder by Miao Ch'ing.
Ti, Turbid. See Ti Ssu-pin.
Tiao the Seventh, concubine of Miao T'ien-hsiu, formerly a singing girl from a brothel on the Yang-chou docks, carries on an affair with her husband's servant, Miao Ch'ing, the discovery of which leads to the beating of Miao Ch'ing and the murder of Miao T'ien-hsiu in revenge.
T'ien Chiu-kao, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
T'ien-fu. See Ch'in-t'ung.
T'ien-hsi, senior pageboy in the household of Hua Tzu-hsü and Li P'ing-erh who absconds with five taels of silver when his master takes to his sickbed and vanishes without a trace.
T'ien Hu, bandit chieftan active in the Hopei area.
Ting, Director, Wu K'ai's predecessor as director of the State Farm Battalion in Ch'ing-ho, cashiered for corruption by Hou Meng.
Ting, Mr., father of Ting the Second, silk merchant from Hang-chou.
Ting the Second, Ting Shuang-ch'iao, son of Mr. Ting, friend of Ch'en Liang-huai, a silk merchant from Hang-chou who patronizes Li Kuei-chieh while on a visit to Ch'ing-ho and hides under the bed when Hsi-men Ch'ing discovers their liaison and smashes up the Verdant Spring Bordello.
Ting Shuang-ch'iao. See Ting the Second.
Ting the Southerner, wine merchant in Ch'ing-ho from whom Hsi-men Ch'ing buys forty jugs of Ho-ch'ing wine on credit.
Tou Chien (d. 1127), superintendant of the Capital Training Divisions and capital security commissioner.
Tower of Jade. See Meng Yü-lou.
Ts'ai, Assistant Prefect, resident of Ch'ing-ho from whose household Sung Hui-lien is expelled for colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery.
Ts'ai, Assistant Prefect's wife.
Ts'ai Ching (1046–1126), father of Ts'ai Yu, Ts'ai T'iao, Ts'ai T'ao, and Ts'ai Hsiu, father-in-law of Liang Shih-chieh, left grand councilor, grand academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, grand preceptor, minister of personnel, Duke of Lu, most powerful minister at the court of Emperor Hui-tsung, impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung, patron and adoptive father of Ts'ai Yün and Hsi-men Ch'ing, first of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
Ts'ai Ching's mansion in the Eastern Capital, gatekeepers of.
Ts'ai Ching's mansion in the Eastern Capital, pageboy in.
Ts'ai Ching's wife.
Ts'ai family of Yen-chou in Shantung, family of which Hsi-men Hsiao-ko is alleged to have been a son in his previous incarnation.
Ts'ai Hsing (fl. early 12th century), son of Ts'ai Yu, appointed director of the Palace Administration as a reward for his father's part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Ts'ai Hsiu, ninth son of Ts'ai Ching, prefect of Chiu-chiang.
Ts'ai, Midwife, presides over the deliveries of Li P'ing-erh's son, Hsi-men Kuan-ko, and Wu Yüeh-niang's son, Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Ts'ai T'ao (d. after 1147), fifth son of Ts'ai Ching.
Ts'ai T'iao (d. after 1137), fourth son of Ts'ai Ching, consort of Princess Mao-te.
Ts'ai Yu (1077–1126), eldest son of Ts'ai Ching, son-in-law of Sung Ch'iao-nien, brother-in-law of Sung Sheng-ch'ung, father of Ts'ai Hsing, academician of the Hall of Auspicious Harmony, minister of rites, superintendent of the Temple of Supreme Unity, rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, executed by order of Emperor Ch'in-tsung after the fall of Ts'ai Ching and his faction.
Ts'ai Yu's son. See Ts'ai Hsing.
Ts'ai Yu's wife, née Sung, daughter of Sung Ch'iao-nien, younger sister of Sung Sheng-ch'ung.
Ts'ai Yün, awarded first place in the *chin-shih* examinations in place of An Ch'en when the latter is displaced for being the younger brother of the proscribed An Tun, becomes a protégé and adopted son of Ts'ai Ching, appointed proofreader in the Palace Library, is patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing; after being impeached by Ts'ao Ho he is appointed salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region where his illicit favours to Hsi-men Ch'ing abet his profitable speculations in the salt trade.
Ts'ai Yün's mother.
Tsang Pu-hsi, docket officer on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho.
Ts'ao Ho, censor who impeaches Ts'ai Yün and thirteen others from the Historiography Institute who had passed the *chin-shih* examinations in the same year.

Tseng Hsiao-hsü (1049–1127), son of Tseng Pu, regional investigating censor of Shantung, reopens the case of Miao T'ien-hsiu's murder at the request of Huang Mei and arrives at the truth only to have his memorial suppressed when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling bribe Ts'ai Ching to intervene; submits a memorial to the throne criticizing the policies of Ts'ai Ching that so enrages the prime minister that he suborns his daughter-in-law's brother, Sung Sheng-ch'ung, into framing him on trumped up charges as a result of which he is deprived of his office and banished to the furthest southern extremity of the country.
Tseng Pu (1036–1107), father of Tseng Hsiao-hsü.
Tso Shun, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Ts'ui-erh, maidservant of Sun Hsüeh-o.
Ts'ui-hua, junior maidservant of P'ang Ch'un-mei after she becomes the wife of Chou Hsiu.
Ts'ui Pen, nephew of Ch'iao Hung, husband of Big Sister Tuan, employee, manager, and partner in several of Hsi-men Ch'ing's enterprises.
Ts'ui Pen's mother, Ch'iao Hung's elder sister.
Ts'ui, Privy Councilor. See Ts'ui Shou-yü.
Ts'ui Shou-yü, Privy Councilor Ts'ui, relative of Hsia Yen-ling with whom he stays on his visit to the Eastern Capital.
Tsung-mei. See Ch'en Ching-chi.
Tsung-ming. See Chin Tsung-ming.
Tsung Tse (1059–1128), general-in-chief of the Southern Sung armies who retakes parts of Shantung and Hopei from the Chin invaders on behalf of Emperor Kao-tsung.
Tu the Third, maternal cousin of Ying Po-chüeh.
Tu the Third's pageboy.
Tu the Third's wife.
Tu Tzu-ch'un, privy councilor under a previous reign living in retirement in the northern quarter of Ch'ing-ho, engaged by Hsi-men Ch'ing to indite the inscription on Li P'ing-erh's funeral banderole.
Tuan, Big Sister, wife of Ts'ui Pen.
Tuan, Big Sister's father.
Tuan, Consort. See Feng, Consort.
Tuan, Half-baked. See Tuan Mien.
Tuan Mien, Half-baked Tuan, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Tuan, Old Mother, waiting woman in Lady Lin's household whose residence in the rear of the compound is used as a rendezvous by her lovers.
Tung the Cat. See Tung Chin-erh.
Tung Chiao-erh, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who spends the night with Ts'ai Yün at Hsi-men Ch'ing's behest.
Tung Chin-erh, Tung the Cat, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho, patronized by Chang Mao-te.
Tung Sheng, clerical subofficial on the staff of Wang Fu.
Tung Yü-hsien, singing girl from the Tung Family Brothel on Second Street in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
T'ung Kuan (1054–1126), eunuch military officer beaten up by Wu Sung in a drunken brawl, uncle of T'ung T'ien-yin, military affairs commissioner, defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, Commandery Prince of Kuang-yang, one of the Six Traitors impeached by Ch'en Tung.
T'ung Kuan's nephew. See T'ung T'ien-yin.
T'ung, Prefectural Judge, prefectural judge of Tung-p'ing who conducts the preliminary hearing in the case of the affray between Feng Huai and Sun Wen-hsiang.
T'ung T'ien-yin, nephew of T'ung Kuan, commander of the guard, director of the Office of Herds in the Inner and Outer Imperial Demesnes of the Court of the Imperial Stud.
Turf-protecting Tiger. See Liu the Second.
Tutor employed in the household of Miao Ch'ing.
Tz'u-hui Temple, abbot of, recovers the corpse of the murdered Miao T'ien-hsiu and buries it on the bank of the river west of Ch'ing-ho where it is discovered by Ti Ssu-pin.
Vase. See Li P'ing-erh.
Waiter in My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Wan-yen Tsung-han (1079–1136), Nien-mo-ho, nephew of Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1115–23) the founder of the Chin dynasty, commander of the Chin army that occupies K'ai-feng and takes Retired Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity.
Wan-yen Tsung-wang (d. 1127). Wo-li-pu, second son of Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1115–23) the founder of the Chin dynasty, associate commander of the Chin army that occupies K'ai-feng and takes Retired Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity, kills Chou Hsiu with an arrow through the throat.
Wang, Attendant, official on the staff of the Prince of Yün to whom Han Tao-kuo appeals through Hsi-men Ch'ing and Jen Hou-ch'i to be allowed to commute his hereditary corvée labor obligation to payments in money or goods.
Wang butcher, elder brother of Wang Liu-erh, husband of Sow Wang whose daughter is betrothed to Seng-pao.
Wang Ch'ao, son of Dame Wang, apprenticed to a merchant from the Huai River region from whom he steals a hundred taels entrusted to him for the purchase of stock, returns to Ch'ing-ho, and uses it as capital to buy two donkeys and set up a flour mill, becomes a casual lover of P'an Chin-lien while she is in Dame Wang's house awaiting purchase as a concubine.
Wang Chen, second son of Wang Hsüan, government student in the prefectural school.
Wang Ch'ien, eldest son of Wang Hsüan, hereditary battalion commander of the local Horse Pasturage Battalion of the Court of the Imperial Stud.
Wang Chin-ch'ing. See Wang Shen.
Wang Ching, younger brother of Wang Liu-erh, pageboy employed in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing as a replacement for Shu-t'ung after he absconds, sodomized by Hsi-men Ch'ing during his visit to the Eastern Capital, expelled from the household by Wu Yüeh-niang after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Wang Ching-ch'ung (d. 949), military commissioner of T'ai-yüan, Commandery Prince of Pin-yang, ancestor of Wang I-hsüan.
Wang Ch'ing, bandit chieftan active in the Huai-hsi area.
Wang Chu, elder brother of Wang Hsiang, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Wang, Consort (d. 1117), a consort of Emperor Hui-tsung, mother of Chao K'ai, the Prince of Yün, related to Wang the Second.
Wang, Dame, mother of Wang Ch'ao, proprietress of a teahouse next door to Wu Chih's house on Amythest Street on the west side of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who is also active as a go-between and procuress; go-between who proposes the match between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang; inventor of the elaborate scheme by which Hsi-men Ch'ing seduces P'an Chin-lien; suggests the poisoning of her next-door neighbour Wu Chih and helps P'an Chin-lien carry it out; intervenes on behalf of Ho the Tenth when he is accused of fencing stolen goods with the result that Hsi-men Ch'ing gets him off the hook and executes an innocent monk in his stead; after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Wu Yüeh-niang discovers P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'en Ching-chi, she expells her from the household and consigns her to Dame Wang, who entertains bids from Magnate Ho, Chang Mao-te, Ch'en Ching-chi, and Chou Hsiu before finally selling her to Wu Sung for a hundred taels of silver plus a five-tael brokerage fee; that same night she is decapitated by Wu Sung after he has disemboweled P'an Chin-lien.
Wang, Dame's deceased husband, father of Wang Ch'ao, dies when she is thirty-five.
Wang, Dame's son. See Wang Ch'ao.
Wang, distaff relative of the imperial family. See Wang the Second.
Wang family of Cheng-chou, family into which Hsi-men Kuan-ko is reincarnated as a son.
Wang family of the Eastern Capital, family into which Ch'en Ching-chi is reincarnated as a son.
Wang family of Pin-chou, family in which Li P'ing-erh is alleged to have been formerly incarnated as a son.
Wang the First, Auntie, madam of the Wang Family Brothel in Yang-chou.
Wang Fu (1079–1126), minister of war impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung.
Wang Fu's wife and children.
Wang Hai-feng. See Wang Ssu-feng.
Wang Han, servant in the household of Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.
Wang Hsiang, younger brother of Wang Chu, professional boy actor in Ch'ing-ho.
Wang Hsien, employee of Hsi-men Ch'ing who accompanies Lai-pao on a buying trip to Nan-ching.
Wang Hsüan, Layman of Apricot Hermitage, father of Wang Ch'ien and Wang Chen, friend of Ch'en Hung, retired philanthropist who provides aid to Ch'en Ching-chi three times after he is reduced to beggary and who recommends him to Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing.
Wang Hsüan's manager, in charge of a pawnshop on the street front of his residence.
Wang Huan (fl. early 12th century), commander-general of the Hopei region who leads the forces of Wei-po against the Chin invaders.
Wang I-hsüan, Imperial Commissioner Wang, descendant of Wang Ching-ch'ung, deceased husband of Lady Lin, father of Wang Ts'ai.
Wang I-hsüan's wife. See Lady Lin.
Wang I-hsüan's son. See Wang Ts'ai.
Wang, Imperial Commissioner. See Wang I-hsüan.
Wang K'uan, head of the mutual security unit for Ch'en Ching-chi's residence in Ch'ing-ho.
Wang Lien, henchman on the domestic staff of Wang Fu.
Wang Liu-erh, Wang the Sixth, one of the female protagonists of the novel, younger sister of Butcher Wang, elder sister of Wang Ching, wife of Han Tao-kuo, mother of Han Ai-chieh; paramour of her brother-in-law, Han the Second, whom she marries after her husband's death, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, to whose death from sexual exhaustion she is a major contributor, and of Magnate Ho, whose property in Hu-chou she inherits.
Wang Liu-erh's niece, daughter of Butcher Wang and Sow Wang, betrothed to Seng-pao, the son of Lai-pao and Hui-hsiang.
Wang Luan, proprietor of the Great Tavern on Lion Street in Ch'ing-ho who witnesses Wu Sung's fatal attack on Li Wai-ch'uan.
Wang, Nun, Buddhist nun from the Kuan-yin Nunnery in Ch'ing-ho which is patronized by Wu Yüeh-niang, frequently invited to recite Buddhist "precious scrolls" to Wu Yüeh-niang and her guests, recommends Nun Hsüeh to Wu Yüeh-niang who takes her fertility potion and conceives Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, later quarrels with Nun Hsüeh over the division of alms from Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yüeh-niang.
Wang, old Mrs., neighbour of Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan who appears in Wu Yüeh-niang's nightmare.
Wang, Old Sister, singing girl working out of My Own Tavern in Lin-ch'ing.
Wang Ping (d. 1126), commander-general of the Kuan-tung region who leads the forces of Fen-chiang against the Chin invaders.
Wang Po-ju, proprietor of an inn on the docks in Yang-chou recommended to Han Tao-kuo, Lai-pao, and Ts'ui Pen by Hsi-men Ch'ing as a good place to stay.
Wang Po-ju's father, friend of Hsi-men Ch'ing's father, Hsi-men Ta.
Wang Po-yen (1069–1141), right assistant administration commissioner of Shantung.
Wang the Second, distaff relative of the imperial family through Consort Wang, landlord of Wu Chih's residence on the west side of Amythest Street in Ch'ing-ho, purchaser of Eunuch Director Hua's mansion on Main Street in An-ch'ing ward of Ch'ing-ho, maintains a private troupe of twenty actors that he sometimes lends to Hsi-men Ch'ing to entertain his guests.
Wang Shen (c. 1048–c. 1103), Wang Chin-ch'ing, commandant-escort and director of the Court of the Imperial Clan, consort of the second daughter of Emperor Ying-tsung (r. 1063–67).
Wang Shih-ch'i, prefect of Ch'ing-chou in Shantung.
Wang the Sixth. See Wang Liu-erh.
Wang, Sow, wife of Butcher Wang whose daughter is betrothed to Seng-pao.
Wang Ssu-feng, Wang Hai-feng, salt merchant from Yang-chou who is set free from prison in Ts'ang-chou by Hou Meng, the grand coordinator of Shantung, as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's intervention with Ts'ai Ching.
Wang the Third. See Wang Ts'ai.
Wang Ts'ai (1078–1118), Wang the Third, feckless and dissolute third son of Wang I-hsüan and Lady Lin, married to the niece of Huang Ching-ch'en, tries unsuccessfully to borrow three hundred taels of silver from Hsü Pu-yü to purchase a position in the Military School, pawns his wife's possessions to pursue various singing girls in the licensed quarter including those patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, tricked into becoming the adopted son of Hsi-men Ch'ing during his intrigue with Lady Lin, continues his affair with Li Kuei-chieh after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Wang Ts'ai's wife, née Huang, niece of Huang Ching-ch'en.
Wang Tsu-tao (d. 1108), minister of personnel.
Wang Tung-ch'iao, traveling merchant entertained by Han Tao-kuo in Yang-chou.
Wang, Usher, official in the Court of State Ceremonial who offers the sixteen-year-old wife of his runaway retainer for sale as a maidservant through Old Mother Feng.
Wang, Usher's runaway retainer.
Wang, Usher's runaway retainer's wife.
Wang Wei, supreme commander of the Capital Training Divisions, Duke of Lung-hsi, granted the title of grand mentor for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Wang Ying, Short-legged Tiger, second outlaw leader of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain who wants to make Wu Yüeh-niang his wife when she is captured by his band but is prevented from doing so by Sung Chiang.
Wang Yu, commander of a training division rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Wang Yü, subofficial functionary on the domestic staff of Ts'ai Ching deputed by Chai Ch'ien to carry a message of condolence to Hsi-men Ch'ing and a personal letter from Han Ai-chieh to Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh.
Wang Yü-chih, singing girl from the Wang Family Brothel in Yang-chou patronized by Han Tao-kuo.
Wei Ch'eng-hsün, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Wei Ts'ung-erh, a taciturn chair-bearer in Ch'ing-ho, partner of Chang Ch'uan-erh.
Wen, Auntie, mother of Wen T'ang, go-between in Ch'ing-ho who represents Ch'en Ching-chi's family at the time of his betrothal to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, resident of Wang Family Alley on the South Side of town, active in promoting pilgrimages to Mount T'ai, patronized by Lady Lin for whom she acts as a procuress in her adulterous affairs including that with Hsi-men Ch'ing, involved with Auntie Hsüeh in arranging the betrothal between Chang Mao-te's son and Eunuch Director Hsü's niece.
Wen Ch'en, one of the officials from the Ch'ing-ho Guard who comes to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to offer a sacrifice to the soul of Li P'ing-erh after her death.
Wen Hsi, military director-in-chief of Yen-chou in Shantung.
Wen, Licentiate. See Wen Pi-ku.
Wen, Pedant. See Wen Pi-ku.
Wen Pi-ku, Warm-buttocks Wen, Pedant Wen, Licentiate Wen, pederast recommended to Hsi-men Ch'ing by his fellow licentiate Ni P'eng to be his social secretary, housed across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence in the property formerly belonging to Ch'iao Hung, divulges Hsi-men Ch'ing's private correspondence to Ni P'eng who shares it with Hsia Yen-ling, sodomizes Hua-t'ung against his will and is expelled from the Hsi-men household when his indiscretions are exposed.

Wen Pi-ku's mother-in-law.
Wen Pi-ku's wife.
Wen T'ang, son of Auntie Wen.
Wen T'ang's wife.
Wen, Warm-buttocks. See Wen Pi-ku.
Weng the Eighth, criminal boatman who, along with his partner Ch'en the Third, murders Miao T'ien-hsiu.
What a Whopper. See Hsieh Ju-huang.
Wo-li-pu. See Wan-yen Tsung-wang.
Wu, Abbot. See Wu Tsung-che.
Wu, Battalion Commander, father of Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Wu Yüeh-niang, hereditary battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard.
Wu, Captain. See Wu Sung.
Wu Ch'ang-chiao, Longfoot Wu, madam of the brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter of Ch'ing-ho patronized by P'ing-an after he absconds from the Hsi-men household with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop.
Wu Ch'ang-chiao's husband.
Wu Chih, Wu the Elder, Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, elder brother of Wu Sung, father of Ying-erh by his deceased first wife, husband of P'an Chin-lien, simple-minded dwarf, native of Yang-ku district in Shantung who moves to the district town of Ch'ing-ho because of a famine and makes his living by peddling steamed wheat cakes on the street, cuckolded by P'an Chin-lien with his landlord, Mr. Chang, and then with Hsi-men Ch'ing, catches P'an Chin-lien and Hsi-men Ch'ing in flagrante delicto in Dame Wang's teahouse but suffers a near-fatal injury when Hsi-men Ch'ing kicks him in the solar plexus, poisoned by P'an Chin-lien with arsenic supplied by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Wu Chih's daughter. See Ying-erh.
Wu Chih's deceased first wife, mother of Ying-erh.
Wu Chih's second wife. See P'an Chin-lien.
Wu the Elder. See Wu Chih.
Wu the Fourth, Auntie, madam of the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
Wu, Heartless. See Wu Tien-en.
Wu Hsün, secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Wu Hui, younger brother of Wu Yin-erh, actor and musician from the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho.
Wu, Immortal. See Wu Shih.
Wu K'ai, eldest son of Battalion Commander Wu, elder brother of Wu the Second, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Wu Yüeh-niang, father of Wu Shun-ch'en, brother-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing, inherits the position of battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard upon the death of his father, deputed to repair the local Charity Granary, promoted to the rank of assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard in charge of the local State Farm Battalion as a result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's influence with Sung Ch'iao-nien, accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang on her pilgrimage to Mount T'ai after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing and is instrumental in rescuing her from attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi.
Wu K'ai's son. See Wu Shun-ch'en.
Wu K'ai's wife, Sister-in-law Wu, mother of Wu Shun-ch'en, sister-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing and a frequent guest in his household.
Wu, Longfoot. See Wu Ch'ang-chiao.
Wu the Second, second son of Battalion Commander Wu, younger brother of Wu K'ai, second elder brother of Wu Yüeh-niang, brother-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing and manager of his silk store on Lion Street; engages in hanky-panky with Li Chiao-erh for which he is denied access to the household by Wu Yüeh-niang when it is discovered after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing although he continues to manage the silk store and later, along with Tai-an, the wholesale pharmaceutical business; accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and Hsi-men Hsiao-ko when they flee the invading Chin armies to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan; ten days after the climactic encounter with P'u-ching in the Temple of Eternal Felicity and Wu Yüeh-niang's relinquishment of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko to a life of Buddhist celibacy he accompanies Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, and Hsiao-yü back to their now truncated household in Ch'ing-ho.
Wu the Second. See Wu Sung.
Wu the Second's wife, wife of Wu Yüeh-niang's second elder brother.
Wu Shih, Immortal Wu, Taoist physiognomist introduced to Hsi-men Ch'ing by Chou Hsiu who accurately foretells his fortune and those of his wife and concubines as well as Hsi-men Ta-chieh and P'ang Ch'un-mei; when Hsi-men Ch'ing is on his deathbed he is called in again and reports that there is no hope for him.
Wu Shih's servant boy.
Wu Shun-ch'en, son of Wu K'ai, husband of Third Sister Cheng.
Wu, Sister-in-law. See Wu K'ai's wife.
Wu Sung, Wu the Second, Captain Wu, younger brother of Wu Chih, brother-in-law of P'an Chin-lien; impulsive and implacable exponent of the code of honour; becomes a fugitive from the law for beating up T'ung Kuan in a drunken brawl; slays a tiger in single-handed combat while on his way to visit his brother and is made police captain in Ch'ing-ho for this feat; rejects attempted seduction by P'an Chin-lien and tells her off in no uncertain terms; delivers Li Ta-t'ien's illicit gains from his magistracy to the safe keeping of Chu Mien in the Eastern Capital; returns to Ch'ing-ho and mistakenly kills Li Wai-ch'uan while seeking to avenge the murder of his brother; is sentenced to military exile in Meng-chou where he is befriended by Shih En and helps him in his struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern; is framed by Military Director-in-chief Chang with the help of his concubine, Chiang Yü-lan, the younger sister of Chiang Men-shen, in revenge for which he murders his two guards and the entire households of Military Director-in-chief Chang and Chiang Men-shen; sets out for An-p'ing Stockade with a hundred taels of silver and a letter of recommendation from Shih En but is enabled by a general amnesty to return to Ch'ing-ho where he buys P'an Chin-lien from Dame Wang for a hundred taels of silver and disembowels her to avenge the death of his brother; once more a fugitive he disguises himself as a Buddhist ascetic with the help of the criminal innkeepers Chang Ch'ing and his wife and goes to join Sung Chiang's band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh.
Wu-t'ai, Mount, monk from, who solicits alms from Wu Yüeh-niang for the repair of his temple.
Wu Tien-en, Heartless Wu, originally a Yin-yang master on the staff of the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho who has been removed from his post for cause; makes his living by hanging around in front of the yamen and acting as a guarantor for loans to local officials and functionaries; crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing; member of the brotherhood of ten; manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various of his enterprises; misrepresents himself as Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law and is appointed to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station in return for his part in delivering birthday presents from Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ts'ai Ching; receives an interest-free loan of one hundred taels from Hsi-men Ch'ing to help cover the expenses of assuming office; promoted to the position of police chief of a suburb of Ch'ing-ho after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing he apprehends the runaway P'ing-an and coerces him into giving false testimony that Wu Yüeh-niang has been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an but when Wu Yüeh-niang appeals to P'ang Ch'un-mei he is dragged before Chou Hsiu's higher court and thoroughly humiliated.
Wu Tsung-che, Abbot Wu, head priest of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho, presides over the elaborate Taoist ceremony at which Hsi-men Kuan-ko is made an infant Taoist priest with the religious name Wu Ying-yüan, later officiates at funeral observances for Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Wu Yin-erh, Silver, elder sister of Wu Hui, singing girl from the Wu Family Bordello on the back alley of the licensed quarter in Ch'ing-ho, sweetheart of Hua Tzu-hsü, adopted daughter of Li P'ing-erh.
Wu Ying-yüan. See Hsi-men Kuan-ko.
Wu Yüeh-niang, Moon Lady, one of the female protagonists of the novel, daughter of Battalion Commander Wu, younger sister of Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, and an elder sister; second wife and First Lady of Hsi-men Ch'ing who marries her after the death of his first wife, née Ch'en, in a match proposed by Dame Wang; stepmother of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, mother of Hsi-men Hsiao-ko; a pious, credulous, and conventional Buddhist laywoman who constantly invites Nun Wang and Nun Hsüeh to the household to recite "precious scrolls" on the themes of salvation, retribution, and reincarnation, who has good intentions but is generally ineffectual at household management and is not a good judge of character; colludes with Hsi-men Ch'ing in taking secret possession of Li P'ing-erh's ill-gotten property but quarrels with him over admitting her to the household; suffers a miscarriage but later takes Nun Hsüeh's fertility potion and conceives Hsi-men Hsiao-ko who is born at the very moment of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; thoughtlessly betroths both Kuan-ko and Hsiao-ko to inappropriate partners while they are still babes in arms; makes a pilgrimage to Mount T'ai after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death and narrowly escapes an attempted rape by Yin T'ien-hsi and capture by the bandits on Ch'ing-feng Mountain; expels P'an Chin-lien, P'ang Ch'un-mei, and Ch'en Ching-chi from the household when she belatedly discovers their perfidy but is unable to cope effectively with the declining fortunes of the family; forced to seek the assistance of P'ang Ch'un-mei when she is threatened by Wu Tien-en she has no alternative but to accept the condescension of her former maidservant; while fleeing from the invading Chin armies to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou in Chi-nan she encounters P'u-ching and spends the night in the Temple of Eternal Felicity where she dreams that Yün Li-shou threatens her with rape if she refuses to marry him; still traumatized by this nightmare, she allows P'u-ching to persuade her that Hsiao-ko is the reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing and relinquishes her teenage son to a life of Buddhist celibacy without so much as asking his opinion; on returning safely to Ch'ing-ho she adopts Tai-an as her husband's heir, renaming him Hsi-men An, and lives in reduced circumstances, presiding over a truncated household, until dying a natural death at the age of sixty-nine.
Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, wife of Brother-in-law Shen.
Yang, Aunt, widow of Crooked-head Sun, paternal aunt of Yang Tsung-hsi and Yang Tsung-pao, forceful advocate of Meng Yü-lou's remarriage to Hsi-men Ch'ing after the latter offers her a hundred taels of silver for her support, quarrels with Chang Lung when he tries to prevent this match.
Yang Chien (d. 1121), Commander Yang, eunuch military officer related to Ch'en Hung by marriage, commander in chief of the Imperial Guard in the Eastern Capital, bribed by Hsi-men Ch'ing to intervene on his behalf against Wu Sung and in favour of Hua Tzu-hsü, impeached by Yü-wen Hsü-chung, reported in a letter from Chai Ch'ien to Hsi-men Ch'ing to have died in prison in 1117.
Yang, Commander. See Yang Chien.
Yang the Elder. See Yang Kuang-yen.
Yang Erh-feng, second son of Yang Pu-lai and his wife, née Pai, younger brother of Yang Kuang-yen, a gambler and tough guy who scares off Ch'en Ching-chi when he tries to recover the half shipload of property that Yang Kuang-yen had stolen from him.
Yang Kuang-yen, Yang the Elder, Iron Fingernail, native of Nobottom ward in Carryoff village of Makebelieve district in Nonesuch subprefecture, son of Yang Pu-lai and his wife, née Pai, disciple of the Barefaced Adept from whom he acquires the art of lying, husband of Miss Died-of-fright, con man employed by Ch'en Ching-chi who absconds with half a shipload of his property while he is in Yen-chou trying to shake down Meng Yü-lou and invests it in the Hsieh Family Tavern in Lin-ch'ing only to lose everything when Ch'en Ching-chi sues him with the backing of Chou Hsiu and takes over ownership of the tavern.
Yang Kuang-yen's father. See Yang Pu-lai.
Yang Kuang-yen's mother, née Pai.
Yang Kuang-yen's pageboy.
Yang Kuang-yen's wife. See Died-of-fright, Miss.
Yang, Poor-parent. See Yang Pu-lai.
Yang, Prefect. See Yang Shih.
Yang Pu-lai, Poor-parent Yang, father of Yang Kuang-yen and Yang Erh-feng, brother-in-law of Yao the Second.
Yang Sheng, factotum on the domestic staff of Yang Chien.
Yang Shih (1053–1135), Prefect Yang, prefect of K'ai-feng, protégé of Ts'ai Ching, agrees under pressure from Ts'ai Ching and Yang Chien to treat Hua Tzu-hsü leniently when he is sued over the division of Eunuch Director Hua's property by his brothers Hua Tzu-yu, Hua Tzu-kuang, and Hua Tzu-hua.
Yang T'ing-p'ei, battalion commander rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Yang Tsung-hsi, deceased first husband of Meng Yü-lou, elder brother of Yang Tsung-pao, nephew on his father's side of Aunt Yang and on his mother's side of Chang Lung, textile merchant residing on Stinkwater Lane outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho.
Yang Tsung-hsi's maternal uncle. See Chang Lung.
Yang Tsung-hsi's mother. See Chang Lung's elder sister.
Yang Tsung-hsi's paternal aunt. See Yang, Aunt.
Yang Tsung-pao, younger brother of Yang Tsung-hsi, nephew on his father's side of Aunt Yang and on his mother's side of Chang Lung, brother-in-law of Meng Yü-lou.
Yang Wei-chung (1067–1132), commander-general of the Shansi region who leads the forces of Tse-lu against the Chin invaders.
Yao family from outside the Eastern Capital, poor family into which Sun Hsüeh-o is reincarnated as a daughter.
Yao the Second, brother-in-law of Yang Pu-lai, neighbour of Wu Chih to whom Wu Sung entrusts his orphaned niece Ying-erh when he is condemned to military exile in Meng-chou; gives Ying-erh back to Wu Sung when he returns to Ch'ing-ho five years later only to repossess her after the inquest on P'an Chin-lien's murder when Wu Sung once more becomes a fugitive; later arranges for her marriage.
Yeh the Ascetic, one-eyed illiterate Buddhist ascetic employed as a cook by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh of the Water Moon Monastery outside the South Gate of Ch'ing-ho, physiognomizes Ch'en Ching-chi when he is reduced to penury and working nearby as a day laborer.
Yeh Ch'ien, prefect of Lai-chou in Shantung.
Yeh the Fifth, wife of Pen Ti-ch'uan, mother of Pen Chang-chieh, originally a wet nurse who elopes with her fellow employee Pen Ti-ch'uan, carries on an intermittent affair with Tai-an while at the same time complaisantly accepting the sexual favours of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Yen the Fourth, neighbour of Han Tao-kuo who informs him of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death when their boats pass each other on the Grand Canal at Lin-ch'ing.
Yen P'o-hsi, singing girl slain by Sung Chiang.
Yen Shun, Brocade Tiger, outlaw chieftan of the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold on Ch'ing-feng Mountain who is persuaded by Sung Chiang to let the captured Wu Yüeh-niang go rather than allowing Wang Ying to make her his wife.
Yin Chih, Good Deed, chief clerk in charge of the files in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission who recognizes that Lai-wang has been framed by Hsi-men Ch'ing and manages to get his sentence reduced and to have him treated more leniently.
Yin Ching, vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel.
Yin Ta-liang, regional investigating censor of Liang-che, rewarded for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Yin T'ien-hsi, Year Star Yin, younger brother of Kao Lien's wife, née Yin, dissolute wastrel who takes advantage of his official connections to lord it over the Mount T'ai area with a gang of followers at his disposal, colludes with Shih Po-ts'ai, the corrupt head priest of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds on the summit of Mount T'ai, in attempting to rape Wu Yüeh-niang when she visits the temple on a pilgrimage after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing; later killed at Sung Chiang's behest by the outlaw, Li K'uei.
Yin, Year Star. See Yin T'ien-hsi.
Ying, Beggar. See Ying Po-chüeh.
Ying-ch'un, disciple of Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the East Gate of Ch'ing-ho.
Ying-ch'un, senior maidservant of Li P'ing-erh who after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing agrees to be sent to the household of Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital and is raped by Lai-pao on the way.
Ying the Elder, eldest son of the deceased silk merchant Master Ying, elder brother of Ying Po-chüeh, continues to operate his father's silk business in Ch'ing-ho.
Ying the Elder's wife.
Ying-erh, daughter of Wu Chih by his deceased first wife, niece of Wu Sung, much abused stepdaughter of P'an Chin-lien who turns her over to Dame Wang when she marries Hsi-men Ch'ing; repossessed by Wu Sung when he returns from the Eastern Capital after the death of her father; consigned to the care of his neighbour Yao the Second when he is condemned to military exile in Meng-chou after his first abortive attempt to avenge the murder of her father; taken back by Wu Sung on his return to Ch'ing-ho five years later and forced to witness his disembowelment of P'an Chin-lien and decapitation of Dame Wang; repossessed by Yao the Second after the inquest and provided by him with a husband.
Ying, Master, father of Ying the Elder and Ying Po-chüeh, deceased silk merchant of Ch'ing-ho.
Ying Pao, eldest son of Ying Po-chüeh, recommends his friend Lai-yu to Hsi-men Ch'ing who employs him as a servant and changes his name to Lai-chüeh.
Ying Po-chüeh, Ying the Second, Sponger Ying, Beggar Ying, son of the deceased silk merchant Master Ying, younger brother of Ying the Elder, father of Ying Pao and two daughters by his wife, née Tu, and a younger son by his concubine Ch'un-hua; having squandered his patrimony and fallen on hard times he has been reduced to squiring wealthy young rakes about the licensed quarters and living by his wits; boon companion and favourite crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten; a clever and amusing sycophant and opportunist he has the art to openly impose on Hsi-men Ch'ing and make him like it while he is alive and the gall to double-cross him without compunction as soon as he is dead.
Ying Po-chüeh's concubine. See Ch'un-hua.
Ying Po-chüeh's elder daughter, married with the financial assistance of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ying Po-chüeh's grandfather, friend of Licentiate Shui's grandfather.
Ying Po-chüeh's second daughter, after the death of her father she is proposed by Auntie Hsüeh as a match for Ch'en Ching-chi but turned down by P'ang Ch'un-mei for lack of a dowry.

Ying Po-chüeh's son by his concubine Ch'un-hua.
Ying Po-chüeh's wife, née Tu, mother of Ying Pao and two daughters.
Ying the Second. See Ying Po-chüeh.
Ying, Sponger. See Ying Po-chüeh.
Yu, Loafer. See Yu Shou.
Yu Shou, Loafer Yu, a dissolute young scamp upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system.
Yung-ting, pageboy in the household of Wang Ts'ai.
Yü, Big Sister, blind professional singer in Ch'ing-ho frequently invited into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household to entertain his womenfolk and their guests.
Yü Ch'un, Stupid Yü, one of the "cribbers" in the licensed quarter of Ch'ing-ho who plays the tout to Wang Ts'ai on his visits to the licensed quarter and upon whom Hsi-men Ch'ing turns the tables by abusing the judicial system at the behest of Lady Lin.
Yü-erh. See Sun Hsüeh-o.
Yü-hsiao, Jade Flute, senior maidservant of Wu Yüeh-niang, carries on an affair with Shu-t'ung the discovery of which by P'an Chin-lien leads him to abscond and return to his native Su-chou; after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing agrees to be sent to the household of Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital and is raped by Lai-pao on the way.
Yü, Licentiate, master of a girls' school in his home in Ch'ing-ho where P'an Chin-lien studies for three years as a child.
Yü-lou. See Meng Yü-lou.
Yü Shen (d. 1132), minister of war who suppresses Tseng Hsiao-hsü's memorial impeaching Hsia Yen-ling and Hsi-men Ch'ing for malfeasance in the case of Miao Ch'ing, rewarded with the title grand guardian of the heir apparent for his part in facilitating the notorious Flower and Rock Convoys and the construction of the Mount Ken Imperial Park.
Yü, Stupid. See Yü Ch'un.
Yü-t'ang, employed in Chou Hsiu's household as a wet nurse for Chou Chin-ko.
Yü-tsan, concubine of Li Kung-pi, originally maidservant of his deceased first wife, who enters his household as part of her dowry, reacts jealously to his marriage with Meng Yü-lou and is beaten by him and sold out of the household.
Yü-wen, Censor. See Yü-wen Hsü-chung.
Yü-wen Hsü-chung (1079–1146), Censor Yü-wen, supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for War who submits a memorial to the throne impeaching Ts'ai Ching, Wang Fu, and Yang Chien.
Yüan, Commander, resident of Potter's Alley in the Eastern Capital into whose family Li P'ing-erh is reincarnated as a daughter.
Yüan-hsiao, senior maidservant of Li Chiao-erh who is transferred to the service of Hsi-men Ta-chieh at the request of Ch'en Ching-chi after her former mistress leaves the household, accompanies her new mistress through her many vicissitudes while also putting up with the capricious treatment of Ch'en Ching-chi in whose service she dies after he is reduced to penury.
Yüan Yen, professional actor from Su-chou who specializes in playing subsidiary female roles.
Yüeh Ho-an, vice-magistrate of Ch'ing-ho.
Yüeh-kuei, concubine of Chou Hsiu much abused by P'ang Ch'un-mei.
Yüeh-niang. See Wu Yüeh-niang.
Yüeh the Third, next-door neighbour of Han Tao-kuo on Lion Street who fences Miao Ch'ing's stolen goods and suggests that he approach Hsi-men Ch'ing through Wang Liu-erh to get him off the hook for the murder of Miao T'ien-hsiu.
Yüeh the Third's wife, close friend of Wang Liu-erh who acts as an intermediary in Miao Ch'ing's approach to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Yün, Assistant Regional Commander, elder brother of Yün Li-shou, hereditary military officer who dies at his post on the frontier.
Yün-ko. See Ch'iao Yün-ko.
Yün Li-shou, Welsher Yün, Yün the Second, younger brother of Assistant Regional Commander Yün, crony of Hsi-men Ch'ing, member of the brotherhood of ten, manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing in various of his enterprises, upon the death of his elder brother succeeds to his rank and the substantive post of vice-commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard, later appointed stockade commander of Ling-pi Stockade at Chinan where Wu Yüeh-niang seeks refuge with him from the invading Chin armies but dreams that he attempts to rape her.
Yün Li-shou's daughter, betrothed while still a babe in arms to Hsi-men Hsiao-ko.
Yün Li-shou's wife, née Su, proposes a marriage alliance to Wu Yüeh-niang while they are both pregnant and formally betroths her daughter to Hsi-men Hsiao-ko after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Yün, Little. See Ch'iao Yün-ko.
Yün, Prince of. See Chao K'ai.
Yün the Second. See Yün Li-shou.
Yün, Welsher. See Yün Li-shou.

**Juan Chi** (210-63)

*There is a vile place, reached through side roads,*
Where there are heaps of deer and pigs:
It is not made beautiful by the fair and clean,
But is the resort of the filthy and impure....
[Here] the Three Chin concocted their alliances
And Cheng and Wei[8] spread their disorder....
That is why violence ran loose within families
And poisoned hate sprang up between husband and wife.
These people still had boundless desires to do bad:
How could it be long before they gave vent to them? ...
With its back to the mountains, facing the waters,
The region was filthy, full of egotism,
So that in the small quarters and border towns
No one would deny the bad things said of it....
Arrogant menials from small towns
Lived here.
The waterways lead, by the quickest route,
To Lake Tung-t'ing and to the state of Ch'u,
And they carry [southern] influences [to Tung-p'ing],
Directly to it, and to its entire domain.
Thus they inherited [southern] customs
And were without rules, without models:
Not barbarians, they still followed no laws,
And came to do harm.
... in their cooperative ventures, each vaunts his own power;
They turn away from reason and towards debauchery.
Extolling the passions and chasing after profit,
The only thing they respect is excess.

**The Outline of the History of Song**

Song Jiang, a bandit from Huainan, plundered several prefectures east of the capital but Zhang Shuye, the prefect of Haizhou, defeated and subdued him.
The historian concludes: Pardoning is the greatest grace of the emperor; punishing is the greatest law of a gentleman. Song Jiang plundered the counties east of the capital, a crime deserving death. The book uses "surrender" instead of "execution," indicating he was pardoned at the time. For a thief is not born a thief. His father and brothers failed to educate him, hunger and cold drove him, and his talent and strength were insufficient to be displayed. Thus, he aimlessly entered the wilderness, gathered a band of thieves, first robbing, then raising an army—all these factors played a role. But who truly caused the failure to educate him, the hunger and cold, and the inability to display his talent and strength? "All the people are guilty but the guilt lies with me." Is this not true of Cheng Tang's words? Who is not someone who would not steal even if rewarded? If the ruler has already implicated them, and then punished them, and a benevolent person is in power, and the people can do as they please, how can this be considered acting on behalf of Heaven to govern the people? Therefore, to depose them without punishing them is a great favour from the Son of Heaven and a good law for dealing with thieves. If it were a virtuous person, then they would certainly not be able to fully punish their crimes and record them as thieves. A virtuous person is not unaware of the beginning of thievery, nor is he born a thief, and even after being pardoned, the joy and renewal afterward will prevent him from stealing again. A virtuous person believes that the Son of Heaven's duty is to nourish all people; to nourish all people means to cherish their lives, even the smallest creatures are related to God's heart in giving life. The duty of a virtuous person is to educate all people; to educate all people means to love them with a heart full of love, and even for a day or two, to be as cautious as if walking on frost and ice. Therefore, after a theft, those who truly refrain from stealing can be pardoned by the Emperor, who can remove them from the wrath of boiling water and place them on a comfortable bed. This is what is meant by opening the gates of virtuous conduct wide above the nine heavens. However, even after a theft, there may not be no more thieves. A virtuous person must first identify their wickedness and punish them with the mighty Yu tripod. This is what is meant by the three-foot pen that truly embodies the wrath of thunder. For a pardon granted in a single day is the Emperor's grace; what remains unchanged for a hundred generations is the virtuous person's law. Although Song Jiang surrendered, it was recorded as a theft. This is the strict record of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, intended to demonstrate caution, prevent future occurrences, rectify people's hearts, and assist the king's rule. Later generations, failing to understand this, have lavished praise on these unofficial historians, crowning them with the name of loyalty and righteousness, and then endlessly admiring them. Alas! Who was this man? Did he not harbour rebellious intentions?
When Zhang Shuye defeated Song Jiang and forced him to surrender, the *History of Song* extensively recorded it, saying, "Who was the one who governed Haizhou?" It was I. Why Zhang Shuye? Because I was truly capable of governing Haizhou. Why? Because a virtuous person eats the food of the ruler, receives the ruler's orders, is allocated the ruler's land, and governs the ruler's people; thus, he is called the governor of a certain prefecture. "Governing" means being in charge of its affairs. If the elderly are not at ease, you know their well-being; if the young are not yet cared for, you know their upbringing; if the hungry are not fed, you know to plant trees and raise livestock; if the cold are not clothed, you know to cultivate silkworms and mulberry trees; if the labourers are not yet rested, you know to give them rest; if the sick are not yet healed, you know to heal them; if the foolish are not yet taught, you know to teach them; if the virtuous are not yet promoted, you know to promote them. Only in this way can one be said to have fulfilled his duties. For three years he reported on his duties, and his ruler rewarded him with feasts, presented him with poems and songs, treated him with exceptional favour, and invited him to the imperial palace. Indeed, the prefect was a true pillar of the emperor's court, not merely a figurehead. Since the officials' integrity was compromised, many have become power holders. The people have abandoned their fields, yet the officials are unaware; the people are idle, yet the officials are unaware; the people are starving, yet the officials are unaware; the people are increasingly resorting to robbery, yet the officials are unaware. As such, it is inevitable that bandits will rise up like swarms. And when asked about the city walls, the officials know nothing; when asked about the weapons and armor, the officials know nothing; when asked about the provisions, the officials know nothing; when asked about the horses, the officials know nothing. Alas! Having learned nothing, he deceives his ruler, saying, "I know about such and such a prefecture." What do you know about such and such a prefecture? The History of Song states that Zhang Shuye defeated and subdued Song Jiang but only gave high praise to the one who was appointed Prefect of Haizhou, indicating that he was highly regarded.
The historian's words in this regard are a lenient assessment. If an official is to govern a certain prefecture, what is truly unknown to him? He knows how to navigate complex situations; he knows how to curry favour with powerful figures; he knows how to exacerbate tax collection; he knows how to impose fines and redemptions; he knows how to apprehend wealthy households through connections; he knows how to cultivate relationships with cunning clerks. What he truly does not know, he is utterly ignorant; yet what he does know, he knows perfectly well. Alas! Alas! To be utterly ignorant is not only unfit to be an official; but to be utterly ignorant is tantamount to being a thief! If only we had someone like Zhang Shuye, with the remaining strength from defeating Song Jiang, to strike down all those who had fallen!

**Abridged History of the Song Dynasty**

Song Jiang rose to become a bandit, leading thirty-six men to roam the Hebei region, plundering ten prefectures, with government troops daring not to challenge his might. Hou Meng, the prefect of Haozhou, submitted a memorial, stating that Jiang possessed extraordinary talent and that it would be better to pardon him and send him to subdue Fang La to redeem himself. The emperor appointed Meng as prefect of Dongping but he died before taking office. Zhang Shuye was then appointed prefect of Haizhou. As Jiang approached Haizhou, Shuye sent spies to ascertain his direction. Jiang went directly to the coast, hijacking more than ten large ships and filling them with salt. Shuye recruited a thousand brave men, setting up an ambush near the city, while sending out light troops to lure the enemy into a battle at sea. Strong soldiers were hidden near the shore, waiting for the enemy to engage, then setting fire to the ships. Hearing this, the bandits lost their will to fight. The ambush troops seized the opportunity, capturing Jiang's deputy, and Jiang surrendered.
The historian concludes: This shows that nothing in the world is impossible but there are simply no people willing to do it. When Song Jiang rose up in Hebei with thirty-six men, plundering ten prefectures, none of the local officials dared to harm him. At that time, would anyone still say that he was like a hungry beast easily subdued or a wildfire easily extinguished? Then, by the grace of the court, Zhang Shuye arrived. Zhang Shuye was merely the governor of ten prefectures; he was not the one who received the most food from the emperor or the most favour from the state. Furthermore, Song Jiang was not only powerful in the ten prefectures but also cowardly in Haizhou. Yet, before, they allowed him to plunder and kill without anyone daring to do anything; afterwards, he was captured in a single day, swept away like a whirlwind. This is nothing more than this: the officials of the ten prefectures each had their own wives and children, their own wealth and possessions, their own salaries and positions, and their own lives. With so many concerns and no clear plan, they were caught off guard by the sudden attack of the bandits. Zhang Shuye, however, had no wives and children to cherish, no wealth to worry about, no position to seek, and no life to fear. Whether to act or not was his duty as a subject; whether to help or not was entirely up to the emperor's will. And yet, those thirty-six men like Song Jiang had already surrendered themselves to his command. Alas! History records that Shuye recruited a thousand men to die for him; how could anyone know that Shuye was indeed the foremost warrior to fight to the death! The commentary says, "He is willing to risk his life in the face of danger." It also says, "He is fearful in the face of adversity, and good at planning and achieving success." It also says, "If I fight, I will win." It also says, "He can be entrusted with the fate of a hundred li." Zhang Shuye possessed these qualities; was he not a worthy minister of the state?
Hou Meng's attempt to pardon Song Jiang and send him to punish Fang La was fraught with eight errors. Firstly, the mighty Song Dynasty, unable to subdue a single bandit, resorted to a plan involving a pardon. While the euphemisms of "pardon" and "redemption" were elegant, they were in reality a plea for appeasement, undermining the dignity of the court—this was the first error. Secondly, murderers are executed, and rebels are exterminated—this was the law. Thirdly, the looting had spread to ten prefectures, the atrocities committed were considerable, yet to lightly discuss pardon undermined the laws of the state—this was the second error. Fourthly, Fang La's arrival was devastating, yet there was no sign of the imperial army's fury; instead, the emperor looked to the thirty-six outlaws to be wiped out—this demonstrated the lack of capable men at the time—this was the third error. Fifthly, luring one bandit to attack another, hoping for a two-way fight where one would be injured, was a scheme that none of the bandits could conceal and laugh at—this only emboldened the rebels to unite and further embolden them—this was the fourth error. Martial arts are something that heroes and valiant men of the world obtain by sacrificing their heads and limbs. Now, it is suddenly used as a breeding ground for thieves, causing strong men to lose their dignity. This is the fifth point. The Book of Changes says, "When the four suburbs are surrounded by fortifications, it is a disgrace to the high officials." Now, no one is willing to step forward to relieve the ruler's worries but instead, the emperor merely wants to use imperial edicts as a means to quell the chaos. This is the sixth point.
Those who are guilty can be pardoned, while the innocent are tempted; from this point on, there is no way to govern the world—this is the seventh point. If one claims his talent is exceptional, then why wasn't he employed before the theft, and why was he recommended after the theft? Who was the prime minister at that time? Such a complete reversal—this is the eighth point. Alas! A wise man considers one word wise, another unwise; like Hou Meng, he was fortunate enough to die. If Tuo Zhen had known Dongping, who would have known he wouldn't have greatly ruined public affairs and become a laughingstock! He Luo, lacking understanding, still followed this doctrine, resulting in the wicked commentary of the *Continuation of Water Margin*.
Original Publisher's Preface
Sima Qian said, "The 'Difficulty of Persuasion' and 'Solitary Indignation' were written by sages and worthies out of indignation." From this, we can see that the ancient sages and worthies would not have written if they had not been indignant. To write without indignation is like shivering without being cold or groaning without being sick. Even if one writes, what is the point?

*Water Margin* was written out of indignation. Since the Song Dynasty's decline, with its corrupt practices, the virtuous were relegated to lower positions while the wicked were elevated, eventually leading to barbarians being superior and the Central Plains relegated to inferior status. For a time, even the emperors and ministers were like sparrows in their halls, paying tribute and submitting to the Song, willingly kneeling before the dogs and sheep! Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, though living under the Yuan Dynasty, remained loyal to the Song. Though born in the Yuan era, they were truly indignant about the Song's fate. Therefore, indignant at the two emperors' northern capture, they claimed to have decisively defeated the Liao to vent their anger; indignant at the Song's cowardly peace after its southward migration, they claimed to have annihilated Fang La to vent their anger. Who, then, vented their anger? It was none other than the bandits who had gathered at Water Margin the other day! It is impossible not to call them loyal and righteous; therefore, Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong wrote *Water Margin* and named it "Loyalty and Righteousness."

Why is "loyalty and righteousness" attributed to the Water Margin? The reason is understandable. Why are all the members of the Water Margin loyal and righteous? The cause is also understandable. It is natural that those of lesser virtue serve those of greater virtue, and those of lesser wisdom serve those of greater wisdom. But if those of lesser wisdom are used to command others, and those of greater wisdom are used to command others, would they willingly serve without shame? This is like using a small force to bind someone, and having a large force bind someone—would they willingly submit without complaint? This would inevitably lead to the gathering of all the great and virtuous men in the world into the Water Margin. Therefore, it is acceptable to say that the members of the Water Margin are all great and virtuous men, loyal and righteous.

Yet none were as loyal and righteous as Song Jiang. Looking at the 108 heroes, they shared the same merits and demerits, the same life and death; their loyalty and righteousness were comparable to Song Jiang's. Song Jiang alone, though living in the Water Margin, had his heart set on the imperial court, single-mindedly seeking amnesty and dedicating himself to serving his country. Ultimately, he faced great calamity, achieved great merit, and even committed suicide by poison, willing to die alongside them. His fierce loyalty and righteousness truly won over the hearts of the 108 heroes. Therefore, he was able to form a brotherhood at Liangshan and become their leader. In the final campaign against Fang La, more than half of the 108 heroes perished.

Then Zhishen passed away peacefully at Liuhe Temple, Yan Qing wept as he bid farewell to his lord, and the two boys devised a plan at Hunjiang. Song Jiang was not unaware of this but he thought it was merely a clever and discerning scheme by a petty man to ensure his own safety, something that a man loyal to his lord and righteous to his friends would never stoop to. This is what Song Jiang is all about, and this is why he is called "loyal and righteous."

Is this *Biography* unnecessary? Is this *Biography* not worth reading? Therefore, those who govern a country cannot afford not to read it. Upon reading this *Biography*, one will realize that "loyalty and righteousness" are not found in the Water Margin but are all found at the emperor's side. Wise prime ministers cannot afford not to read it. Upon reading this *Biography*, one will realize that "loyalty and righteousness" are not found in the Water Margin but are all found in the court. The Ministry of War, holding the reins of military and national affairs, and the governors-general, entrusted with the affairs of the state, also cannot afford not to read it. If one reads this *Biography* even for a single day, one will realize that "loyalty and righteousness" are not found in the Water Margin but are all found among trusted and reliable officials. Otherwise, if they are not found in the court, not at the emperor's side, not among trusted and reliable officials, where are they found? In the Water Margin. This is the purpose of this *Biography*. If those who enjoy reading it use it as a basis for discussion, and those who use it for military strategy, they will only use it to showcase their own strengths. Where then can one find the so-called loyalty and righteousness?

Written by Li Zhi, Zhuowu of Wenling

Written by Sun Pu of Hulin on a midsummer day in the year of Gengxu, beside the 3 Lives Stone.

"Preface to the Loyal and Righteous Water Margin"; "ancient sages" in *Burning Books* is "ancient saints"; "sparrows in the hall" in *Burning Books* is "sparrows in the hall"; the two instances of "肯" are "肓" in *Burning Books*: "而使大力缚于人" is "而使大力者缚于人"; "不在干城心腹" is "不在干城心心"; "资其谈柄" is "资其谈柄". The Wuqionghui edition of the Three Great Bandits edition contains this preface, titled "Preface to Reading the Loyal and Righteous Water Margin". The biggest difference in this preface is that "驯致夷狄处上" is changed to "驯致边陲处上"; "甘心屈膝于犬羊" is changed to "甘心屈膝于时势". The remaining text also has minor differences: "古之圣贤" is "古之贤圣" in this version; "不病而呻吟" is "不病而呻唫" in this version; "不病而呻唫也" is followed by the phrase "可耻什么甚焉" in this version; "冠讠倒施" is "冠履倒施" in this version; "处堂燕雀" is "处堂燕鹊" in this version; "实愤宋事也" is "实愤宋事也" in this version; "而使大力者缚于人" is "而使大力者缚于人" in this version; "为壹百单八人之主" is the lord of one hundred and eight men. "This version reads 'for the 108 men'; 'And Zhishen passed away in meditation'; 'And Zhishen passed away in meditation'; 'Read this biography once' in two places; 'Read this biography once a day' in this version; 'Not a trusted confidant'; 'Not a trusted confidant'; 'What this biography describes'; 'What is done in loyalty and righteousness'; 'It provides a basis for discussion'; 'Each sees their strengths'; 'Each sees their strengths'; 'How can one see what is called loyalty and righteousness'?"" The preface to the "Three Bandits" edition published by Hayashi Kyubei is titled "Preface to Reading the Loyal and Righteous Water Margin." The text of this preface is basically the same as the "Three Bandits" edition but the parts altered in the "Three Bandits" edition are not altered in this edition. Other differences include: the phrase "Who dares to vent their anger?" in the "Three Bandits" edition is "Who dares to vent their anger? No way!"; the phrase "It provides material for discussion" in the "Three Bandits" edition is "It provides material for discussion"; the phrase "What is done in loyalty and righteousness" in the "Three Bandits" edition is "What is done in this story"; the phrase "Is this not what is called loyalty and righteousness?" in the "Three Bandits" edition is "How can I see what is called loyalty and righteousness?". The 120-chapter complete edition held by Peking University Library also has this preface, titled "Preface to Reading the Loyal and Righteous Water Margin." The biggest difference in this preface is that it changes "to quell Fang La to vent their anger" to "to suppress the three bandits to vent their anger." The rest of the text is basically the same as the Lin Jiubingwei edition but there are also some minor differences. The Lin edition reads "From this perspective," while this edition reads "From this perspective." The Lin edition reads "May I ask if it is to vent one's anger? How could it be?" while this edition reads "May I ask who is venting their anger?"

My devotion to Mr. Zhuowu is one of outward conformity and inner devotion; I am nothing but his. I will not speak what he has not spoken, nor read what he has not read. Some may call it madness, others eccentricity but I forget myself, knowing only that Mr. Zhuowu exists. His passing has only increased his fame, broadened his teachings, and spread his books. Even fragments and single words left to the world are treasured like precious herbs, seemingly poised to sweep across the universe—how magnificent! His immortality is assured. Yet, while seventeen may marvel at his writings and thirteen at his character, upon examining one's own heart, none of them have ever considered Mr. Zhuowu.

Since my travels to Wu, I visited Prefect Chen Wuyi and met Yuan Wuyai. Before I could even finish my greetings, he immediately inquired about the master, his sincerity as a student overflowing from his brow, as if he himself possessed the spirit of Zhuo Wu. Subsequently, I visited him several times, and in every conversation, he would mention Master Zhuo. He earnestly sought Master Zhuo's posthumous words and annotated posthumous works. Was Wuyai mad? Or was he eccentric? I searched my belongings and found with me two books: Master Zhuo's annotated edition of *The Water Margin* and *The Collected Works of Yang Shengan*. I took them and gave them to him. Wuyai was overjoyed, as if he had found a priceless treasure, and wished to share them with the world. I asked, "Which of the two books comes first?" Wuya replied, "Water Margin is about loyalty and righteousness, and loyalty and righteousness are about Water Margin. Whether you know me or condemn me, Zhuo Lao's Spring and Autumn Annals are close to this. It comes first, Water Margin! It comes first, Water Margin!" I laughed and said, "Yes, yes! Only Zhuo Lao could have expressed the spirit of Water Margin, and only Wuya could have expressed the spirit of Zhuo Lao. I have served Mr. Zhuo Wu the longest but Wuya has understood Mr. Zhuo Wu the most deeply. I am ashamed of Wuya! But Wuya is not me, so who can express Wuya's spirit? I have not failed Mr. Zhuo Wu, and Wuya has not failed my visit." Then we looked at each other and laughed, brewed tea and sipped it together, taking Mr. Zhuo Wu's narration of Water Margin and reading it aloud in unison. The Xujiang River roared, as if responding. I forgot Wuya, and Wuya forgot me; all we knew was Mr. Zhuo Wu.

Yang Dingjian, a man from Fengli in Chu, wrote this on a boat on the Xujiang River.

"Commentary on the Complete Story of Loyalty and Righteousness in the Water Margin"

I. The transmission originated from Zuo Zhuan, yet some critics still consider it a misrepresentation; how much more so from unofficial accounts! However, since the intention is to offer advice and punishment, even if it is a misrepresentation, it is not a crime. Modern novelists produce a multitude of works, many of which deviate from the classics and cannot be used as teachings. Some use the subject to expound on morality, aiming to punish theft, adultery, and falsehood, and to serve as a warning; others merely pick up bits and pieces instead of the whole book, or embellish and deviate from common knowledge; while they may appeal to those seeking novelty, they actually harm the decline of refined taste. How much better is this book that is correct? Ancient sages compared it to Ban Gu and Sima Qian; I believe it surpasses Qiu Ming, and it almost bears the legacy of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Therefore, it is fitting to call it a transmission.

I. Liangshan Marsh belonged to Yanzhou Prefecture in Shandong Province. The local gazetteer refers to it as Luo, stating it was eight hundred li long, a name given by the local authorities. However, the ancients, wanting to level this marsh, found it difficult to store water that was no small feat. The historical records do not mention Liangshan or Song Jiang, because it was neither a bandit's territory nor a bandit's man; therefore, it is simply named "Shuihu" (Water Marsh). "Hu" means water's edge, a somewhat empty term. It is likely that under the rule of the emperor and his subjects, Jiang would not dare to occupy this marsh. Perhaps it was a desire to live by the sea? The naming by Luo Guanzhong is indeed subtle!

I. Loyalty and righteousness are the virtues of serving one's lord and being a friend. Those who are disloyal and unrighteous, though dead, will have their words, however eloquent, forgotten. These 108 men are a gathering of loyalty and righteousness in the mountains and forests; these 120 chapters are a record of loyalty and righteousness in writing. If we find them in official histories, we can look to unofficial accounts; if we find them in official documents, we can look to the common people. This is intended to influence virtuous people, while preventing petty people from using it for their own selfish purposes. Therefore, Li Shi added the words "loyalty and righteousness," and there is a reason for this.

First, commentary on books aims to convey the author's intent and enlighten the reader. A successful commentary is like adding the finishing touch, revealing the author's spirit; a poor one is like smearing paint on the cheek, defiling the original work. It cannot be treated lightly. This work meticulously points out the main theme of a book, the insightful observations of a chapter, and the essence of a single sentence, making it clear that this is a work of unofficial history, relevant to society and beneficial to literature, quite different from traditional commercial publications. Like accurately following a musical score or hitting the mark with a needle on a bronze figure, the pen has both a tongue and eyes, making the reader see and hear—this is the most valuable aspect of commentary.

First, this book has already vividly depicted the situation, thus constituting a sketch from life. To add further embellishment with painting would be superfluous. Nevertheless, how many people can truly see literature in the zither and Yao in the wall? Therefore, the paintings of Yuntai and Lingyan, and the depictions of the displaced people in seclusion, can evoke emotion and sorrow in the viewer, making them feel as if they are facing the scene themselves. Thus, such depictions are indispensable. Now, I have taken a new approach, not following the old style. Some details are highlighted outside the main text, while others are incorporated into the chapters. I only select the best, not valuing quantity.

Firstly, the ancient version contained Luo Guanzhong's "Words of Wisdom," which supposedly included events such as the "Lady Lamp Flower," but these are no longer available. Later generations either selectively omitted these events due to the constraints imposed by the Four Great Bandits, or removed them because they were considered too cumbersome (120 chapters). All these omissions are lost. Guo Wu's revised version that is the original version, cleverly moved the story of Yama (the Beast Goddess) that is excellent. His removal of Wang and Tian from the bandit group and the addition of the Liao Kingdom is a clever way of resolving conflicts. Those who are unaware of true mastery are quite different; for example, the chapter on Wang Jin's opening is not included in this version. This is what distinguishes it from other novels and makes it a saint among novels!

First, the old version eliminated the tedium of poetry and lyrics, addressing both the simplification of events and the confusion of the viewer, making it quite direct and clear. However, some instances where this style was used to describe human nature, thus disrupting the flow of the text, could not be entirely eliminated. Therefore, this version has been revised and expanded: some parts are adapted from the original and added, while others contradict the ancient meaning and add what was not present. The aim is to use both admonition and punishment, along with playful banter, to move the reader and enlighten their mind, leaving them with a profound sense of appreciation.

I. Regarding the pronunciation of characters, the old edition was quite skillful but there were still many errors and inconsistencies. For example, the first quoted word contained four errors. Comparing this edition with the old edition will reveal the rest. As for the errors of writing "耐" as "奈" and "躁" as "燥," these are clearly typos. If "戴" is confused as "带," "煞" as "殺," and "閂" as "束," and if "冲" and "衝" are indistinguishable, and "逕" and "竟" are unclear, then the meanings become contradictory. Such errors are too numerous to list, and all have been corrected. While the pronunciation is appended to the characters for easier reading, the discontinuity in pronunciation is unpleasant for laypeople. Therefore, it is listed at the end for easy reference. Those with distant pronunciations are listed separately, and those with different pronunciations are listed separately. If half a character is readable and its common meaning is understandable, it may be omitted.

First, every author must have a basis for their work. This book is based on facts and events, so there is no need to consult other books for verification. Moreover, the names and numbers of people in the *Song Jian* and *Xuanhe Yishi* are verifiable, and the *Qixiu Leigao* also records names and describes the thirty-six Heavenly Spirits and seventy-two Earthly Fiends of Guanzhong. Now, I have listed the hometowns and origins of 108 people in these two documents for easy reference and to aid in discussion.

First, the chronicler provides a summary, and the compiler adds profound insights. Li Kui, for example, has already been mentioned in the biography as "The Biography of Shou Zhang." Others such as Lu Da, Lin Chong, Wu Song, Shi Xiu, Zhang Shun, Li Jun, and Yan Qing could each have their own biographies to illustrate their beginnings and ends. The book's elegant language, even its dialectal banter, is captivating. It is highlighted here because this book is a treasure trove of gems. Su Shi said, "The method of reading is to focus on one thing at a time." If even novels possess such beauty, how much more so official histories?

## PUBLISHERS' PREFACES

### 1

Originally, the creation of written records was a means for the sages of old to unite the people's hearts and establish the way of governance. Its origins lie in knotted ropes, and its development culminated in the Six Classics. Those who wielded the bamboo slips and pen were all those in positions of authority and possessing the virtue of sages. In the position of a sage, one has authority; possessing the virtue of a sage, one knows the reasons. Having authority and knowing the reasons, one is both able to create and compelled to create. Therefore, the *I Ching* guides people towards good; the *Book of Rites* prevents them from doing evil; the *Book of Documents* encompasses the changes of the heavens; and the *Book of Poetry* harmonizes the understanding of human nature. Thus, the *I Ching* is a book of action; the *Book of Rites* is a book of restraint; the *Book of Documents* is a book to be feared; and the *Book of Poetry* is a book to be enjoyed. Therefore, it is said that the *I Ching* is round and the *Book of Rites* is square, the *Book of Documents* is enduring and the *Book of Poetry* is grand. It is also said that the *I Ching* does not reward, yet the people are encouraged; the *Book of Rites* does not anger, yet the people avoid it; the *Book of Documents* is the altar outside the temple; and the *Book of Poetry* is the hall before the morning court. If one could have the *I Ching* but not the *Book of Documents*, then it would no longer be the *Book of Documents*. If one could have the *I Ching* and the *Book of Documents* but not the *Book of Poetry*, then it would no longer be the *Book of Poetry*. If one could have the *I Ching*, the *Book of Documents*, and the *Book of Poetry* but not the *Book of Rites*, then it would no longer be the *Book of Rites*.Those who possess the virtue of a sage understand the reasons behind things; understanding the reasons, they know that the *I Ching*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Poetry*, and *Book of Rites* each have their own reasons, and none can be discarded. Those who possess the virtue of a sage and hold a position of authority have the power; having this power, they can then create the *I Ching*, and later, desiring to create the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Poetry*, and the *Book of Rites*, all of which they can accomplish with effort, and no one can criticize their actions. Those who do not hold a position of authority lack the power; lacking the power, they cannot avoid creating—this is the case of Confucius. Confucius did not hold a position of authority but possessed the virtue of a sage; possessing the virtue of a sage, he understood the reasons; understanding the reasons, he could not refrain from creating—this is the case of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.Confucius would surely say, "Those who understand me, are they only those who study the *Spring and Autumn Annals*? Those who condemn me, are they only those who study the *Spring and Autumn Annals*?" Why is this so? Those who understand me only through the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are those who, in order to understand the principles of Heaven, study the *Book of Changes*; in order to connect events to the day, study the *Book of Documents*; in order to compile the *Book of Poetry*, study the *Book of Rites*, study the *Book of Poetry*, and in order to promote good and prohibit evil: all these are what is meant by having the virtue and knowing the reasons, knowing the reasons and being unable to stop writing, and being unable to stop writing, thus combining the strengths of the four classics into one book, thus he has never actually written one. This lack of originality is Confucius's intention. Those who condemn me only through the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are those who, in ancient times, only the emperor examined texts. Since Confucius, a commoner, wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, later generations of cunning and eloquent people have all produced their own versions. As the writings continued for a long time, all sorts of wild and varied opinions arose; rulers read them and became confused above, while the people read them and became bewildered below. This inevitably led to chaos and destruction, even affecting the Six Classics. Confucius was not unaware of this, yet he still continued writing; this is why Confucius lamented his own guilt. Someone might ask: Was Confucius truly guilty? The answer is: Confucius was not guilty. Confucius knew the reason but because he considered himself a commoner and dared not readily create anything, he compiled the classics from historical records, without establishing separate texts but simply writing "Spring, the First Month of the King" at the beginning. If one says: The old ones are the books of the feudal lords, the new ones are the books of the Son of Heaven. By taking the books of the feudal lords and manually transforming them into the books of the Son of Heaven, Confucius did not grant the feudal lords the right to compile books. Confucius refused to grant the right to write books to the feudal lords, so how could he possibly grant it to the common people? Therefore, writing books is the business of sages. Anyone who writes books but is not a sage should be executed, and his books should be burned. Writing books is the domain of sages and emperors. Anyone who writes a book but is not an emperor should be executed, and the book should be burned. Why? Because a book written by someone other than a sage undermines the Way; a book written by someone other than an emperor undermines order. Undermining the Way and order is tantamount to blasphemy. Blasphemy, then, must be burned! And those who engage in blasphemy, then, must be executed! Therefore, the Qin dynasty's burning of books was not only the will of the First Emperor but also the will of Confucius. The fact that Confucius did not burn books while the First Emperor did shows that Confucius not only lacked the right to write books but also lacked the right to burn them. If the First Emperor burned books and even the sacred scriptures, then he had the right but lacked the virtue; lacking virtue, he did not understand the reason; not understanding the reason, he burned them all. Therefore, burning the Bible was the fault of the First Emperor; burning books was his achievement. Soon after the rise of the Han Dynasty, there was a great search for lost books. Many officials at court presented books as tribute. Consequently, scholars from all over the country claimed to possess books, and the number of books obtained in a short time exceeded that before the burning. From ancient times to the present, people know that burning books is a terrible calamity but how could they know that seeking books is an even worse calamity? Burning books means there are no books in the world; because there are no books in the world, the books of the sages survive. Seeking books means there are books in the world; because there are books in the world, the books of the sages perish. Burning books is to prohibit people from writing books. Seeking books is to allow people to write books. As for allowing people to write books, what will they not do? Those who understand the teachings of the sages have books; those who rebel against the teachings of the sages also have books. Those who proclaim the emperor's decrees have books; those who violate the emperor's decrees also have books. If the governance of the Three Dynasties were truly applied, those who understand the teachings of the sages and proclaim the emperor's decrees would still not be permitted. Why? Because they would be abhorred for destroying the Way and order, and the common people would not be at peace. How could one go so far as to betray the teachings of the sages, defy the decrees of the emperor, and openly write one's own book? Originally, it was only those above who had a liking for it that were even more fervently indulged by those below. Fathers, sons, brothers, and clans gathered to write, and after a long period of work, their talents overflowed. While it's true that imperial edicts require eloquent words, what's wrong with indulging oneself? But how can one tolerate the depiction of demons and monsters, and the slander of sages and worthies, when the pen is already flowing freely? Therefore, while those who rebelled were executed, biographies of "wandering heroes" were created; while those who humiliated others were celebrated in "commercial works." The intention was to explore the extremes of the bizarre and unconventional, to the point of heart-wrenching pain, to reach the heavens above and the netherworld below, to be utterly satisfied and unstoppable. Initially, such works were kept privately among the lower classes, merely circulated among them, fearing only that their superiors would forbid them. But as time went on, the superiors gradually noticed them, and upon seeing them, they couldn't help but be pleased, and not only did they not forbid them. Books that defy doctrine and decree are now so widely accepted that the emperor not only no longer forbids them but even rejoices in them. How can the people of the world possibly fear them anymore? Their authors are alarmed and inform each other; their readers are alarmed and inform each other. After this alarming announcement, everyone follows suit, and there is no one who does not write them, no one who does not read them. As a result, the sages' remaining classics are reduced to only one or two chapters; the books of various schools cannot be carried even if an ox's axle breaks, nor can they be stored in entire palaces. The emperor's edicts are merely covered with earth; the books of various schools are only titled with silk and labeled with gold and jade. This has gradually led to the present day, and the resulting calamity is beyond description. People who do not know how to steal will become thieves after reading various books; people who do not know how to be licentious will become licentious after reading various books; people who do not know how to deceive will become deceitful after reading various books; people who do not know how to cause chaos will become chaotic after reading various books. My previous statement that those who write books not by sages corrupt the Way, and those who write books not by emperors corrupt governance, is merely concerned that their interpretations of classical texts will confuse the people; and that their methods of governance will be presented to the people in a way that is too clear. If the people are confused, they will find it difficult to believe; if they are presented with too much clarity, they will find it difficult to govern. Therefore, I have concluded that these books corrupt the Way and governance that is tantamount to unfounded speculation. Such people should be executed, and their books should be burned. It is not that they truly deviate greatly from the sacred scriptures or are extremely harmful to the rule of the king, yet they are still like this. As for the books of today, how could they be what the First Emperor anticipated when he created characters, or what he anticipated when he burned them? Indeed, execution alone is insufficient to cover their crimes, and burning alone is insufficient to erase their traces. The root of the problem lies in the Han people's edict to retrieve the lost books that truly opened the floodgates. Therefore, it is said that the calamity of burning books is severe but the calamity of seeking books is even more severe. The calamity of burning books lies in the simultaneous burning of the Bible. With the Bible burned, the people do not turn to good; this is the crime of the First Emperor that can never be forgiven for eternity. The calamity of seeking books lies in the simultaneous circulation of private books. With the circulation of private books, the people become utterly wicked; this is the crime of the Han people that can never be forgiven for eternity. However, since the Bible was burned, it eventually became widely known in later generations; in this case, the First Emperor's crime can still be forgiven. But if private books were circulated, and the disaster caused by them spread beyond redemption, then the crime of the Han people will never be forgiven. Alas! When a virtuous person reaches this point, listening is futile, and prohibition is impossible; what then can be used to govern him? It is said: I have heard that sages wrote books with virtue, and ancient people wrote books with talent. Knowing that sages wrote books with virtue, one understands that the Six Classics are all the dregs of the sages' teachings; readers should value their spiritual understanding and not merely nitpick over words and phrases to claim to be engaged in classical studies. Knowing that ancient people wrote books with talent, one understands that all schools of thought expound their essence; readers should quickly discard them and not pick up scraps to claim subtle insights. As for those who can spiritually understand the books of the sages, I know that only now will I dare not write a commentary on the *I Ching*, a commentary on the *Book of Documents*, a commentary on the *Book of Poetry*, a commentary on the *Book of Rites*, or a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Why? I am truly ashamed of my lack of virtue and fearful of the inadequacy of my writing, both of which greatly offend the sages' hearts. As for those who truly dare to abandon the works of various schools, I know that only now will they refuse to write an expanded version of *Zhuangzi*, a sequel to *Sao*, a post-historical work, a pseudo-poem, or a new version of anecdotal writings. Why? I am truly ashamed of my inadequacy, yet I merely engage in a torrent of criticism; this truly makes me a slave to the ancients. If the water cannot be cooled, it is better not to add fuel to the fire; if avoiding the shadow only increases the shadow, it is better to teach one not to chase after it. When a wicked person writes a book and presents it with the virtues of a sage and the talents of an ancient person, it is because those who study under a sage find it difficult to speak, and those who observe the works

of a talented person find it difficult to write. This is also the way of stopping the pursuit of knowledge. However, the virtue of a sage is truly beyond the reach of ordinary people; and since it is beyond the reach of ordinary people, it is something I, a mere youth, dare not attain today. The talents of the ancients, however, may be comparable to those of ordinary people; and since they are comparable to those of ordinary people, it is something I, a mere youth, cannot presume to reach. The talents of the ancients are not passed down through generations, nor can they be matched by one another. Zhuangzi had his talents, Qu Yuan had his talents, Sima Qian had his talents, Du Fu had his talents, and so on, down to Shi Nai'an and Dong Jieyuan. Talent, in this context, refers to material ability. The ability to pierce the clouds and obscure the sun originates from the breaking of the pit and the separation of the pod; in the process of breaking the pit and separating the pod, one possesses the power to pierce the clouds and obscure the sun; in the process of piercing the clouds and obscuring the sun, one does not deviate from the power of breaking the pit and separating the pod—this is what is meant by material ability. The word " 才" (cái) also refers to "to tailor" or "to design". One may have a complete brocade in hand but not a complete brocade before the eyes; one may not have a complete garment before the eyes but a complete garment in the mind; one can know the sleeves by seeing the collar; one can know the shawl by seeing the lapel. The collar is not the sleeve, and the lapel is not the shawl, yet they complement each other, front and back, seemingly separate, yet perfectly combined. This is the meaning of " 裁" (cái). People today only know that talent enables one to conceive ideas but they don't know that the ancients used talent after conceiving ideas; they only know that talent enables one to establish a framework but they don't know that the ancients used talent after establishing a framework; they only know that talent enables one to polish sentences but they don't know that the ancients used talent after polishing sentences; they only know that talent enables one to write words but they don't know that the ancients used talent after writing words. This is even a debate with caution. Those who say that talent enables one to conceive ideas, establish a framework, polish sentences, and write words are people who outwardly never boast of their masterpieces, nor inwardly have ever endured hardship. They casually put pen to paper, thinking themselves right but they don't know that their so-called talent is not the talent of the ancients. It is precisely something they cannot do with their hands yet are ashamed of in their hearts. To speak of talent that extends beyond the initial conception, to the arrangement, refinement, and placement of words—this is a person whose brush has left and right strokes, whose ink has right and wrong strokes; if the left brush is unsatisfactory, switch to the right; if the right brush is unsatisfactory, switch to the left; if the right ink doesn't appear, switch to the wrong ink; if the wrong ink doesn't appear, switch to the right ink; wherever the mind goes, the hand follows; wherever the mind doesn't go, the hand also goes; wherever the mind doesn't go, the hand also doesn't go. When the mind and hand both reach the pinnacle of literary achievement, that is the sacred realm of writing. When the mind and hand both reach the pinnacle of writing, that is the divine realm of writing. When the mind and hand both don't reach the pinnacle of writing, that is the transcendent realm of writing. If an article lacks both heart and hand, it is merely a blank page devoid of words, sentences, structure, and thought. Only those who can command the attention of countless generations to read my writing possess a profound and clear understanding, a well-defined structure, resounding sentences, and vibrant words. This is because, when the pen touches the paper, the writing flows naturally, not a sudden and abrupt event. Therefore, according to the world's definition of talent, one who writes easily is a talented person; according to the ancients' definition of talent, one who writes with difficulty is a talented person. The saying "writing easily" implies swift and spirited writing; the saying "writing with difficulty" implies a life-or-death struggle, a lifeless face. Therefore, the works of Zhuangzi, Qu Yuan, Sima Qian, Du Fu, as well as Shi Nai'an and Dong Qichang, all exemplify the saying that one's heart and breath were exhausted, and one's face was like that of a dead man, before one's talent flowed freely and was finally able to complete a book. The brilliance of Zhuangzi, Qu Yuan, Sima Qian, and Du Fu is such that it needs no further discussion. As for Shi Nai'an's work, it too must have reached the point of exhaustion, with his heart and breath exhausted and his face like that of a dead man, before his talent flowed freely and was finally able to complete a book. Only then can we know that the ancients were not careless in their writing. Yet, people of the world still refuse to assess their own abilities and give up writing prematurely. Therefore, such people are truly not worthy of execution, and their works are truly not worthy of burning. As a commoner, I have no power to forbid anyone from writing books. Yet, I suddenly take a book from a swineherd, break it down into sections, and manage to prevent any unwritten books from being written, and render all existing books obsolete. This is a feat that even the sage marvels at, a feat of purifying the world, more miraculous than the fire of Qin. Hence, in the first chapter, I outline the general rise and fall of ancient and modern classics. Though I dare not call myself a hero of literature, I am but a small part of the effort that sealed the gates.

**2**

Those who observe things judge by their names; those who discuss people discern their intentions. Shi Nai'an, in his novel *Water Margin*, wrote about Song Jiang, deeming him utterly despicable and utterly repulsive, completely unlike any other Chinese writer. Yet, later generations, driven by some insatiable troublemaker, mistakenly attributed this to "loyalty and righteousness." Alas! Is loyalty and righteousness truly found in *Water Margin*? Loyalty is the highest virtue in serving superiors; righteousness is the great principle in governing subordinates. Loyalty in serving superiors, righteousness in governing subordinates—this is the quality of a prime minister. Loyalty is the great way to treat others; righteousness is the good way to conduct oneself. Loyalty in dealing with others, righteousness in dealing with oneself—this is the way of a sage. As for the "Water Margin" mentioned by Nai'an, it means that there is water on the shore of the king's land, and what is outside the water is called "Margin," which means to keep away from it. Keeping away from it means that it is a vicious thing in the world, something that the world should attack; it is a hateful thing in the world, something that the world should abandon. If loyalty and righteousness existed in "Water Margin," would loyalty and righteousness be vicious and hateful things in the world? Moreover, if there is loyalty and righteousness in "Water Margin," does the state lack loyalty and righteousness? A ruler is still a ruler, and a minister is still a minister; how can there be no loyalty and righteousness in the state? Although this is a criticism of the minister's words, it is difficult to explain to my ruler. A father is still a father, and a son is still a son; how can there be no loyalty and righteousness in the family? Although this is a criticism of the son's words, it is difficult to explain to my father. Therefore, those who write "Water Margin" with loyalty and righteousness must have a heart that opposes their ruler and father, and this cannot be ignored. And what about Song Jiang and his 108 companions? Why did they end up in *Water Margin*? In their youth, they were all like jackals and tigers; in their prime, they were all capable of murder and robbery; later, they were all victims of cruel punishments; and in their final days, they were all thieves who raised poles and chopped down trees. If a true ruler were to rise up and execute them, even a thousand or ten thousand would be happy. How could they have escaped the axe and chopping block of the Song Dynasty? Those 108 who managed to escape the Song Dynasty, who knows how many hundreds of thousands or even millions of others might try to repeat their fate in later generations? Nai'an was worried about this, so he wrote the biography *Water Margin*, intending that while the 108 might escape execution upon their own death, they could not escape exile afterward—this was the will of a virtuous man. And yet, to presumptuously bestow loyalty and righteousness upon them—should this be a warning or an exhortation? Jackals and tigers are described with the eyes of auspicious beasts and majestic phoenixes; murderers and thieves are praised as Boyi and Yan Yuan; those with mutilated features are honoured with the purity of the upper class; those who raise poles and cut down trees are lauded as loyal and obedient. Since their names and realities contradict each other, and their right and wrong are distorted to such an extreme, then almost no one in the world or future generations should regard them as lofty figures but only Song Jiang and his 108 companions, whom they aspire to emulate! Therefore, judging from Nai'an's *Water Margin*, it is like the historian's *Taowu*, fully recording the external cunning and the internal evil, so as to punish the already dead hearts of those who came before, and to prevent future generations from having such hearts. Judging from today's version of "The Water Margin," it is no different from Song Jiang's scheme of recruiting others and Wu Yong's claims. "No evil goes to the court, no beauty goes to the outlaws"—this is something that thieves would be proud to read, and even non-thieves would become thieves upon reading it. Alas! Names are the outward manifestation of things; wills are the outward manifestation of people. If names are unclear, I doubt the book; if wills are not upright, I doubt the person. To omit "Loyalty and Righteousness" while retaining "Water Margin" is a small matter in preserving Nai'an's book but a great matter in preserving Nai'an's will. Although I am a minor official, I have the worries of my time. If future generations of respectful and prudent gentlemen can understand my will, perhaps they will not change my words!

**3**

Shi Nai'an's *Water Margin* consists of seventy volumes in the main text, plus one volume of the prologue, and the original preface is also in one volume, totaling seventy-two volumes. Now I will explain the bow to you. Preface: When I was ten years old, I entered the village school and, as was customary, read books such as the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, the Analects, and Mencius but I was completely confused. I often whispered to my classmates: What is the purpose of studying these books? I also saw adults reciting them all night long, and they seemed to enjoy it very much but I didn't know what they found enjoyment in. I also wondered how many books there were in the world, and what they all said, and whether they were all the same. I could never understand these things. Next year I will be eleven years old, and I will often be slightly ill. When I am sick, I must ask for leave from school. Since I am not fond of playing, and the adults forbid me from playing, I will only use books for communication. The first book I read was the *Lotus Sutra*. Next, I read Qu Yuan's *Li Sao*. Next, I read Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. Next, I read a popular version of *Water Margin*. These were all discoveries made during my illness at the age of eleven. *Li Sao* has many unfamiliar characters, and although I like it, I don't understand it very well, only memorizing one or two lines to recite. I understand more about the *Lotus Sutra* and *Records of the Grand Historian* but my courage is not strong enough, and I will never be able to read them. As for the book I keep in my arms day and night, I can say that I have no problem with *Water Margin*.I often see fathers and elder brothers in this world who forbid their children from reading any books, nor do they ever introduce them to any adults or teachers. This is a grave mistake. When a son is ten years old, his mind begins to develop. If he is not allowed to read all kinds of books and has other interests, and is not allowed to be among adults and teachers, it is tantamount to driving him to associate with servants. When you were five years old, I allowed you to sit in a corner. Now that you are ten, I am giving you this book not because I spoil you but because this is the proper way to teach you. I still remember reading *Water Margin* at the age of eleven, after which I developed an insatiable thirst for knowledge. I have never actually seen a book and yet understood it perfectly; that is the only truth. But reflecting on it now, this is certainly not wrong. Of all the writings in the world, none surpasses *Water Margin*; of all the gentlemen who investigate things, none surpasses Mr. Shi Nai'an. If a scholar can truly purify his mind and investigate things, and thus develop brilliant writing, wouldn't he be a pillar of the literary world? However, simply being able to read *Water Margin* well is already more than enough to qualify him as a person. The novel *Water Margin* narrates the lives of 108 characters, each with their own temperament, character, appearance, and voice. If one were to draw several faces with one hand, one would inevitably depict brothers; if one were to blow several sounds with one mouth, one would inevitably produce two spitting sounds. Shi Nai'an, with his single-minded focus, managed to create 108 characters, each exquisitely rendered. This is because he spent ten years meticulously studying things, achieving a single moment of profound understanding. Thus, he could depict hundreds of thousands of people with a single stroke of the brush that was not difficult for him. There is a method to investigating things that you should know. The method of investigating things takes loyalty and forgiveness as its gate. What is loyalty? All things in the world arise from causes and conditions; therefore, loyalty need not be learned, for it is naturally present in the world, and there is no law that is not loyal. Fire is loyal, eyes are loyal, therefore my perception is loyal; bells are loyal, ears are loyal, therefore my hearing is always loyal. Since I am loyal, then people are loyal, thieves are loyal, dogs and rats are loyal. Even thieves, dogs, and rats are not without loyalty; this is what is meant by forgiveness. Only then can things be investigated, only then can human nature be fully realized, and only then can we assist in the creation and nurturing of things, and participate in the workings of Heaven and Earth. People of this world, as I know them, first and foremost do not understand the law of dependent origination. Without understanding dependent origination, they do not understand loyalty. Without loyalty, how can they understand forgiveness? It is like fathers who have two children yet cannot understand themselves. They say to their wives: "Eyebrows are eyebrows, eyes are eyes, noses are noses, mouths are mouths, yet the elder child is not the younger, and the younger child is not the elder. Why is this?" They do not realize that they and their wives have created this situation together. The husband does not understand his children, so he asks his wife. The reason is that through the causes and conditions of husband and wife, their children are born. There is no greater loyalty in the world than that between husband and wife; there is no greater loyalty in the world than that towards one's children. If one understands this principle and sees the faces of all people in the world, and observes the affairs of husband and wife, how can one not understand the myriad differences in their relationships? Loyalty and forgiveness are the measures that measure all things. The laws of cause and effect are the tools that cut the world. Shi Nai'an holds such measures in his left hand and such tools in his right, yet he only describes the temperament, character, appearance, and voice of 108 characters—this is merely a small test. If his writing has its own rules for words, sentences, chapters, and sections, what difference is there? I enjoy reading *Water Margin*, and at the age of twelve, I obtained an ancient copy from the Guanhua Hall collection. I copied it day and night, correcting my own errors, and after four, five, six, seven, or eight months, the task was completed, and this is the copy I have now. This is not my method of reading *Water Margin*; *Water Margin* itself is the method of reading all books. I once heard someone say that Zhuangzi's writing is unrestrained, while the *Records of the Grand Historian* is magnificent. At first, I agreed but now I suddenly laugh. People of all times and present are talking to the blind; they are truly ignorant, merely causing children's stomach aches! How could Zhuangzi's writing be unrestrained? How could the *Records of the Grand Historian* be magnificent? They probably don't understand what Zhuangzi is saying but only see his sudden mentions of fish transformations and ox butchering, unable to find the root cause, and thus consider it unrestrained; they only see that the *Records of the Grand Historian* mainly records the struggle between Liu Bei and Xiang Yu, and other events mostly involve revenge killings and acts of loyalty, and thus consider it magnificent. If one truly reads it using the method I use to read *Water Margin*, then one can say that both Zhuangzi's and the *Records of the Grand Historian* are precise and rigorous. Not only that but all the books in the world that are truly intended to be preserved in famous mountains and passed down to future generations are meticulously written. What is meant by meticulousness and rigor? It means that each character has its own rules, each sentence its own rules, each chapter its own rules, and each section its own rules. If one were to mix Zhuangzi's writing with the *Records of the Grand Historian*, it would not resemble the *Records of the Grand Historian*; conversely, if one were to mix Zhuangzi's writing with the *Records of the Grand Historian*, it would not resemble Zhuangzi. This is because Zhuangzi intended to expound on the Way of the Sages, while the *Records of the Grand Historian* merely expressed his resentment. Their intentions differed, and they could not work together; this is a natural consequence and not surprising. However, if we set aside the arguments within and focus solely on the underlying sentiment, then only Zhuangzi could have written the *Records of the Grand Historian*, and only Zichang (Zhuangzi) could have written the *Zhuangzi*. How do I know this? I know it from reading the *Water Margin*.Even the most minor art of writing has its merits, and our Party, though outstanding, still needs refinement. Throughout history, the greatest sages and worthies have all used their writing to glorify themselves. Take the *Analects*, for example—is it not the subtle words of Confucius, a pure and concise collection of texts? Yet, those skilled in discussing the Way discuss the Way, and those skilled in discussing literature discuss literature. I have observed their composition, and how exquisitely wonderful it is! In the chapter "Learning," the phrase "Isn't it so?" is uttered three times; in the chapter "Sighing over the Gu," the character "Gu" appears four times, while the rest contain only one "not" and two "how." "When substance prevails over form, it is rustic; when form prevails over substance, it is pedantic"—these are the interplays in their writing; "Those who know it are not as good as those who love it, and those who love it are not as good as those who delight in it"—these are the principles passed down. The movement and stillness of mountains and rivers, joy and longevity, are like the opposite growth of trees; "Zilu asked about what he had heard, and that's how he acted" is like the frequent beating of the morning drum. Other works cannot be listed exhaustively but they are all generally excellent. The Zhuangzi and the Records of the Grand Historian are each considered unparalleled for millennia, and people throughout history have marveled at their origins. But in my own view, how could they possess such versatility? They merely use a few chapters to expand upon and extend the ideas, drawing parallels to other works. The novel *Water Margin* recounts the lives of 108 people, all of whom are outlaws, and their deeds are nothing more than robbery and murder. They are morally corrupt and lack integrity, truly beyond redemption. However, I wish to disregard their outward appearances and instead focus on their underlying principles. This book, with its seventy chapters and hundreds of thousands of words, is quite lengthy. Yet, to grasp its essence is like examining a passage or two from the *Analects*—clear and bright, serene and insightful, serene and refreshing. Is it not comparable to the works of *Zhuangzi* and *Records of the Grand Historian*? Otherwise, how could it be so? If one insists on scrutinizing their outward appearances, then half of the fifteen sections of the *Airs of the States* are filled with licentious and vulgar content; nineteen out of ten of the records in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* are about murder. Have we not heard of those who abhorred the gods' treachery and thus abandoned the Yu Tripod, or those who hated the *Taowu* and thus executed Yi Xiang? This principle is perfectly clear and easily understood. Alas! At the age of ten, a person's senses begin to develop, like the sun rising in the east, shining brightly. Even if I wanted to forbid you from seeing such a book, how could I? Now I know I cannot forbid it, and I have instead taken out my old annotations and readily handed them to you. I have always believed that the writing of *Water Margin* is exquisite and rigorous, and that reading it is the key to reading all books. If you truly master this method, and after you finish your studies next year, you can use it to read all the books in the world, and it will be as easy as splitting bamboo. Only then will you truly appreciate that Shi Nai'an's *Water Margin* is the essence of literature. Otherwise, you will only be like a child skimming the surface. This would not only be a disservice to Shi Nai'an but also a great disservice to me. Think about this; how can I not feel overwhelmed?

February 15th, the 14th year of Emperor Chongzhen's reign

**Foreword**

A Chinese man should not marry after 30 years of age; should not enter the government service after the age of 40; should have no more children after the age of 50; and should not travel after the age of 60. This is because the proper time for those things has passed. At sunrise, the country is bright, fresh, and you dress, wash, and eat your breakfast but before long, it is noon. Then you realize how quickly time passes. I am always surprised when people talk about other people's ages, because what is a lifetime but a small part of a much greater period? Why talk about insects when the whole world is before you? How can you count time by years? All that is clear is that time passes, and all the time there is a continual change going on. Some change has taken place ever since I began to write this. This continual change and decay fills me with sadness. What excites pleasure in me is the meeting and conversing with old friends. But it is very galling when my friends do not visit me because there is a biting wind, or the roads are muddy through the rain, or perhaps because they are sick. Then I feel isolated. Although I myself do not drink, yet I provide spirits for my friends, as my family has a few fields in which we grow millet. In front of my house runs a great river, and there I can sit with my friends in the shadow of the lovely trees. I have four old women to do the cooking and household affairs, and 10 small boys also who act as messengers. And when they have nothing to do they fill up their spare time in making brooms and mats. If all my friends came there would be 16 but because of the weather, there are seldom more than six or seven here. When they come, they drink and chat, just as they please but our pleasure is in the conversation and not in the liquor. We do not discuss politics because we are so isolated here that our news is simply composed of rumours and it would only be a waste of time to talk with untrustworthy information. We also never talk about other people's faults because in this world, nobody is wrong, and we should beware of backbiting. We wish to injure no one and therefore our conversation is of no consequence to anyone. We discuss human nature about which people know so little because they are too busy to study it. My friends are all broad-minded, and well educated but we do not keep a record of our conversations. The reason for this is

1. We are too lazy and do not aspire to fame
2. Talking gives us pleasure but to writing would give trouble
3. None of us would be able to read it again after our deaths, so why worry
4. If we wrote something this year, we should probably find it all wrong the next year.

I have written these seventy chapters of the *Water Margin* just for my own pleasure after my friends had left, or when they had not turned up owing to the weather. I have had no preconceived plan but have jotted these items down just as they occurred to me, sometimes when sitting outside near the bamboo fence, or at early dawn when lying on my couch in pensive mood. But someone may ask, "As you did not write down your friends' conversations, why have you written this book?" To which I reply because: I have

1. only done this to fill up my spare time and give pleasure to myself
2. written it so that the uneducated can read it as well as the educated
3. Used this style of composition because it is such a trifle.
4. It is just a hotchpotch and cannot make me famous or even discredit me

Alas! Life is so short that I'll not even know what the reader thinks about it but still I'll be satisfied if a few of my friends will read it and be interested. Also, I don't know what I may think of it in my future life after death because then I may not be able to even read it. So why think anything further about it?

Shi Nai'an/Jin Shengtan

**How to Read *the 5th Book of Genius***

01. When reading a book the first thing to be taken into account is the state of mind of the author when he wrote it. For example, the Shih- chi [Records of the Historian] was the product of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's [b. 145 B.C.] bellyful of stored-up resentment.1 Therefore he poured [his emotions] into the writing of the collective biographies of the knights- errant and the money-makers.2 Even in the other biographies, whenever he comes to accounts of great generosity or assassination, he cannot stop his exclamations of admiration. The whole Shih-chi can be summed up by the phrase "people all have their moments of crisis,"3 and this is the main concern of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's lifetime of writing. The Shui-hu chuan, on the other hand, is a different matter. Its author, Shih Nai-an,4 had no bellyful of stored-up resentment he needed to let out.5 Well-fed, warm, and without anything else to do, carefree at heart, he spread out paper and picked up a brush, selected a topic [t'i-mu JS @], and then wrote out his fine thoughts and polished phrases [chin-hsin hsiu-k'ou $S<L>$I P]. Therefore his judgments do not go against those of the sages.6 People of later times7 were unaware of this and went so far as to add the characters for "loyal" [chung ,¾] and "righteous" [i j|] to the title and considered its writing to be similar to Ssu-ma Ch'ien's writing of the Shih-chi to express his resentment [fa-fen chu-shu !$111¾ H]. This is precisely what ought not to be done.

02. The Shui-hu chuan contains substantial sections of serious writing but the author hates Sung Chiang with a passion and portrays him so that, on seeing him, readers will scorn him as much as if he were a piece of meat that neither dog nor swine would come near. However, this is something others have not noticed up to now.

03. The reason the Shui-hu chuan singles out Sung Chiang for detesta tion is because it intends to destroy the chief rebel. The rest [of the rebel band] are forgiven.

04. Someone may ask: "When Shih Nai-an was looking for a topic [t'i-mu Ü @ ] on which to write out his fine thoughts and polished phrases, there were all the topics in the world available to him. Why did he go and choose this one?" The answer is: "He was tempted by the fact that just as there are thirty-six major heroes,9 there are thirty-six different personalities [hsing-ko t£f6]. Out of these a fine story could be concocted [chieh-chuan]."

05. The topic [t'i-mu S @] is the most important thing when writing a book. As long as the topic is a good one, the book will be well done.

06. Someone may ask: "How about the topics [t'i-mu S @] of books such as the Hsi-yu chi [The Journey to the West] and the San-kuo yen-i [The Romance of the Three Kingdoms]?" The answer is: "Neither of them is any good. In the standard history of the Three Kingdoms period [220-80] there are too many characters and events and too much conversation. The author's pen cannot move or turn at will. It is just like an official sending a message through his attendant. The latter can only use his voice to transmit what he has been told. Indeed, how dare he add or subtract a word? The Hsi-yu chi, on the other hand, is too fantastic. The author just made it up paragraph by para graph. It is like setting off fireworks on New Year's Eve—they explode one group after another with no connecting link [kuan-ch'uan] between. When we read it, we can stop at any place."

07. All the literary devices used in the Shui-hu chuan are taken from the Shih-chi, yet the former surpasses the latter in many places. As for the very best aspects of the Shih-chi, they can all be found in the Shui-hu chuan.

08. When you read a book, you should widen and deepen your range of vision. For example, if you take them in at a single glance, the 71 chapters of the Shui-hu chuan that cover more than two thousand pages, really constitute a single composition. The various events and devices in those pages are used as methods to begin [ch'i J§], continue [ch'eng 7^], change direction [chuan ft], and sum up [hop] the composition. However, if read over too drawn out a period of time, these devices cannot be detected by the reader.

09. The Shui-hu chuan was not written carelessly. We need only note that Sung Chiang's name does not appear until chapter 1710 to realize that the author must have thought the matter over more than a hundred times. If the book had been written carelessly, then Sung Chiang would certainly have been treated from the beginning in chapter 1 but then the text would be nothing but a straightforward accounting, with no play in it.

10. I have said that the Shui-hu chuan is superior to the Shih-chi but nobody believes me. Really, I wasn't talking nonsense. The truth is that in the Shih-chi words are used to carry events [i-wen yun-shih], while in the Shui-hu chuan events are produced from the words [yin-wen sheng-shih HJ χ it (J]. When you use words to carry events, you first have events that have taken place in such-and-such a way, and then you must figure out a piece of narrative for them. To use words to produce events, on the other hand, is quite different. All you have to do is follow where your pen leads. To cut down what is tall and make tall what is short is all up to you.
11. The author of the Shui-hu chuan was a man of surpassing intelligence. As for his book, it is going to portray 108 bandits, yet it begins with the portrait of a filial son as a frontispiece [men-mien]. This is the first proof of the author's surpassing intelligence. Of the 36 bandits who are incarnations of heavenly stars and the 72 bandits who are incarnations of earthly stars, it is 3 earthly stars who are the first to become bandits. Clearly, this shows that they are acting against the will of Heaven. This is the second proof. The chief of the bandits is Sung Chiang, yet the author purposely does not let him take this position right away. Instead, he creates Ch'ao Kai to "cover" [kai li] him. This is proof number three. Both the heavenly and earthly stars are relegated to a secondary position and are not allowed to appear at the very beginning. This is proof number four. The book ends with the words "peace under Heaven." This is the fifth proof of the author's surpassing intelligence.
12. The words "stone tablet" [shih-chieh 5£ig] appear three times and each occurrence marks a major section of the Shui-hu chuan.
13. The Shui-hu chuan does not talk about ghosts, spirits, or other strange and exotic matters. This is where its power surpasses other books. In the Hsi-yu chi, whenever the author is at a loss as to what to do, the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of the Southern Seas comes to the rescue.
14. The Shui-hu chuan does not contain literary language particles like chih 5L,hu^,che^i, and yeh ^b,.18 Each individual character is made to speak in his own individual way. This is truly marvellous skill!
15. For every character who appears in the Shui-hu chuan a clear-cut biography [lieh-chuan] is provided. As for the events contained within them, each section further forms an independent unit in itself. Sometimes two or three chapters will form such a unit. Sometimes it takes just five or six sentences.
16. Other books you read through once and stop but one never tires of reading the Shui-hu chuan because it succeeds completely in describing the different personalities [hsing-ko t£f#] of all 108 people.
17. When the Shui-hu chuan describes the personalities of 108 persons, there are truly 108 different personalities. In other books, the people they describe all look the same, be they as many as a thousand or as few as two.
18. In the Shui-hu chuan each chapter has its principle of organization [chang-fa $?£], so does each sentence [chii-fa ^¾¾] and each word [tzu-fa]. As soon as a young person can read a little, he should be taught to read the book carefully over and over again. If he can appreciate all the fine points in the Shui-hu chuan, reading other books will be as easy as splitting bamboo.
19. The account of the rescue of Sung Chiang from the execution ground in Chiang-chou is already extremely unusual,20 but later on there is the account of the rescue of Lu Chiin-i from the execution ground in Taming fu which is even more unusual.21 The account of Pan Chin-lien's adultery with Hsi-men Ch'ing is already extremely unusual,22 but later on there is the account of P'an Ch'iao-yiin's adultery with P'ei Ju-hai which is even more unusual.23 The account of Wu Sung's fight with the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge is already extremely unusual,24 but later on there is the account of the killing of the tigers at the I River by Li K'uei which is even more unusual.25 Truly, the author's genius is unfathomable.
20. The rescue of someone from an execution ground, adultery, and fighting with tigers are all extremely difficult topics [t'i-mu H @]. One almost feels that there is no way to begin. Yet the author was not only undaunted, he even insisted on giving two accounts of each.
21. The Hsuan-ho i-shih !3¾¾^ [Anecdotes from the Hsiian-ho Reign Period] records the names of all thirty-six major heroes. We can see then that these thirty-six people did exist. We must be aware however, that many events within the seventy chapters were made up out of thin air [p'ing-k'ung tsao-huang] by the author. Yet, after read ing the seventy chapters we have become acquainted with the thirty-six characters. Just mention any one of them, and we feel we have known him well for a long time. Such is the power of the author's pen!
22. Of the 108 heroes, Wu Sung must be rated as belonging to the upper-high [shang-shang _h_h] category of character.27 Shih Ch'ien and Sung Chiang, being the same sort of person, must both be rated as belonging to the lower-low [hsia-hsia TT] category of character.
23. Lu Chih-shen is of course a character of the upper-high [shang- shang _h_h] category. He is shown to have an honest heart and an imposing physique. As for roughness, he is indeed a little rough. As for meticulosity, he is also quite meticulous. Yet, for some reason I feel that there are many places where he is not the equal of Wu Sung. IfLu Chih- shen is already a pinnacle among men, then Wu Sung must simply be a heavenly god, standing high above the others.
24. Just in the description of rough men alone, the Shui-hu chuan uses many methods of description. For example, the roughness of Lu Chih-shen is that of a man of hasty temperament, that of Shih Chin the impulsiveness of youth, that of Li K'uei wildness; the roughness of Wu Sung is that of an untrammelled hero; the roughness of Juan the Seventh comes from his pent-up sorrow and anger; and the roughness of Chiao T'ing is simply his bad temper.
25. Li K'uei is a character of the upper-high [shang-shang _h_h] cate gory. He is shown as a creature of great simplicity without a speck of guile in his body. It would seem that in his eyes none of the other 107 leaders in the mountain lair are worthy of his approval. Mencius's saying, "Wealth and honour cannot lead him to immoderation, poverty and obscurity cannot change his purpose, external authority cannot force him to kneel down."29 applies to him exactly.
26. It seems that in writing a composition, one must first have in mind a reason [yiian-ku Hc #t] for writing. If there is a reason behind it, no matter what one writes about, it will turn out to be excellent writing. If there is no reason behind it, there is no way to write. Even if one can produce something, it will be as dry and unpleasant as chewing wax.
27. Just take the portrayal of Li K'uei. Isn't it true that every episode about him is absolutely marvelous writing? Yet few notice that all these episodes come right after events dealing with Sung Chiang, and this is why they are so unspeakably marvelous. Because the author vehemently hates Sung Chiang's deceitfulness, after each episode about him there always follows another one about Li K'uei's guilelessness to form an unflattering contrast [hsing-chi )& Ψ]. Although the author's purpose was to reveal the wickedness of Sung Chiang, he has unexpectedly brought out the wonderfulness of Li K'uei. This is like stabbing with a spear—your main purpose is to kill someone, and yet in the process you display the technique of your school of spear fighting.
28. Recently, there was someone who did not grasp the author's intention in pairing Sung Chiang and Li K'uei. He selected out all the passages about Li K'uei into a separate volume called Shou-chang wen-chi MIU^M [The Collected Writings of the Magistrate of Shou-chang]. He indeed can be said to be one who eats human excrement—not a very good dog.
29. In the portrayal of Li K'uei, every feature is incomparable. The author truly possesses a most natural [hua-kung ^c X] and lifelike [hsiao- wu fi| %/] style. Leaving aside the rest, just consider the fact that Li K'uei has an elder brother Li Ta and thus must be the second eldest in his family. However, all his life he insists on calling himself Li the First. Not until an emergency arises and he must change his name does he finally call himself Li the Second.31 You might say he is quick-witted but stop and think how foreign such matters really are to him.
30. Even a truly great and heroic man can sometimes be induced by money to agree to something. Only Li K'uei cannot be bought by any amount of silver. You must wait until he is willing to do the thing of his own accord. He is truly in a class by himself.
31. Lin Ch'ung is, of course, a character belonging to the upper- high [shang-shang] category but he is made to appear too ruthless. He can anticipate, he can endure, he can control himself firmly, he can do things thoroughly; all this makes one afraid of him. Such a person will certainly be able to make his way in the world but he will also harm his physical constitution a great deal.
32. Wu Yung must be considered an upper-high [shang-shang _h_h] character. He is as tricky as Sung Chiang but he has a more upright heart than Sung does.
33. Sung Chiang relies solely on trickery to get people to do his bidding but Wu Yung's direction of the band's efforts is out in the open and aboveboard. He is appropriate as a military commander.
34. The difference between Wu Yung and Sung Chiang is that the former is willing openly to call himself the "Star of Wisdom" [chih-to hsing] while the latter always speaks of himself as sincere and unrefined.
35. Sung Chiang thinks that he has Wu Yung in the palm of his hand when actually it is Wu Yung who has Sung Chiang under his thumb. Both know this within their hearts, and yet on the outside both pretend not to know anything of it. Truly fascinating writing!
36. Hua Jung naturally belongs to the upper-high [shang-shang] category. He is portrayed as being so cultured and refined!
37. Juan the 7th belongs to the upper-high [shang-shang] category. He is shown to be of an altogether different complexion from the rest. Of the 108 characters, he must be considered the most straightforward. He thinks straightforwardly and speaks straightforwardly. Meeting up with him, all pollution melts away.
38. Both Yang Chih and Kuan Sheng are of the upper-high [shang- shang _h_h] category of character. Yang Chih is portrayed as the scion of an old family, while Kuan Sheng is presented as the veritable incarnation of Kuan Yu.
39. Ch'in Ming and So Ch'ao are both characters of the middle-high [shang-chung] category.
40. Shih Chin can only be ranked in the middle-high [shang- chung _h φ] category because the second part of his story is not well done.
41. The author expended a lot of effort on Hu-yen Cho but he is only a character of the middle-high [shang-chung Ji φ] category.
42. Lu Chiin-i and Ch'ai Chin are only characters of the middle- high [shang-chung _h Φ ] category. In the story of Lu Chiin-i, the author has done his best to create the image of an heroic man of social standing. In the end, however, Lu Chiin-i is not without a certain awkwardness. It's like painting a camel—although it is an imposing creature, when we look at it we feel that it is not very handsome. Ch'ai Chin doesn't have anything to recommend him except his hospitality.
43. Between Chu T'ung and Lei Heng. Chu T'ung comes off better but both are just in the middle-high [shang-chung _t.f$>] category of characters.
44. Between Yang Hsiung and Shih Hsiu, Shih Hsiu comes off better. While Shih Hsiu is in the upper-middle [chung-shang φ Ji] cate gory of characters, Yang Hsiung can only be placed in the lower-middle [chung-hsia] category.
45. Kung-sun Sheng is just an upper-middle [chung-shang φ Ji] char acter, functioning only as a reserve player.
46. Li Ying is just a character of the upper-middle [chung-shang φ J;] category. This ranking, however, is based on considerations of status and precedence, not on how he is actually portrayed.
47. Juan the Second, Juan the Fifth, Chang Heng, and Chang Shun are all upper-middle [chung-shang φ Ji] characters, as are Yen Ch'ing, Liu T'ang, Hsu Ning, and Tung P'ing.
48. Tai Tsung is a lower-middle [chung-hsia ΦT] character. Except for his ability to travel at superhuman speed, he doesn't have anything else to recommend him.
49. I hate those young people who, when they read, ignore the art of writing itself. As long as they can remember a few incidents from the book, they consider themselves to have read it. Since even the Chan-kuo ts'e IkH ñÏ [Intrigues of the Warring States]34 and the Shih-chi are passed over as nothing but collections of incidents, how much more so is this the fate of the Shui-hu chuan?
50. The Shui-hu chuan contains a lot of literary devices that cannot be found in other books. In what follows, I will point out just a few of them.
51. Advance insertion [tao-ch'afa #JjfjjE]. This means that things or people that will be important in a later part of the book are inconspicu ously inserted into the narrative ahead of the place where they take on real importance. Examples of this are the first mention of the Father and Son Inn next door to the smithy in the village at the foot of Mt. Wu- t'ai,36 [the first mention of] the vegetable garden of the Great Hsiang- kuo Monastery adjacent to the Temple of the Eastern Peak,37 P'an Chin- hen's mention of going with Dame Wang to see the tiger,38 and Li K'uei's recruitment of T'ang Lung into the band when he was out buying dates.
52. Simultaneous narration [chia-hsiifa 3*ξ|£ïE]· This means that two people in great haste want to speak at the same time. It cannot be that after one has finished speaking, the other then begins. The author must write the speeches with one stroke of the pen [so that they seem to be simultaneous]. For example, in the Wa-kuan Monastery Ts'ui Tao-ch'eng says, "Calm down, Brother Monk, and let me ..." and Lu Chih-shen says, "Out with it! Out with it! Speak!"
53. Snake in the grass or [discontinuous] chalk line ["ts'ao-she hui-hsien fa" ^¾¾¾¾¾]-41 Examples of this are the frequent mention of the word "club" [shao-pang B$#] when Wu Sung crosses Ching-yang Ridge,42 and the continual appearance of the word "curtain" [lien-tzu Mir] in the passages set [in Pan Chin-lien and Wu Ta's home] on Amethyst Street.43 Read in haste, there seems to be nothing there but a closer look reveals a connecting thread [hsien-so !¾¾] which, if pulled, draws the whole sequence together.
54. Detailed and extended narration [ta lo-mofa ^cHi !1¾]. Examples of this are Wu Yung's persuasion of the three Juan brothers,44 Yang Chih's contest in arms in the Northern Capital [Ta-ming fu],45 Dame Wang's persuasion of Hsi-men Ch'ing.46 Wu Sung's fight with the tiger,47 the besieging of Sung Chiang in Huan-tao Village,48 and the second attack on the Chu Family Village.
55. Needles wrapped in cotton and thorns hidden in the mud ["mien- chen ni-tz'u fa" !¾!!ifS'iJft]. One example is Sung Chiang's refusal to take off his cangue when asked to do so by Hua Jung.50 Another example is that each time Ch'ao Kai wants to leave the mountain lair, Sung Chiang exhorts him not to but the last time he doesn't do this. From somewhere beyond the actual words comes a sharp knife which sticks into its target.
56. Whitening the background to bring out the foreground ["pei- mien p'u-fen fa" #tBMI&ft]· For example, in order to set off Sung Chiang's deceitfulness, the author unobtrusively portrays Li K'uei's straightforwardness; and to set off Shih Hsiu's sharpness, he unobtru sively portrays Yang Hsiung's dullness.
57. Displaying the bait [nung-yinfa #3!¾]. This means that when there is an important section of writing it is best not to start in abruptly; rather, a passage of minor interest should be used to lead into it. For example, before Yang Chih fights So Ch'ao he first fights Chou Chin. Before Dame Wang lays out the ten-step plan for seducing P'an Chin- lien, she first enumerates the five prerequisites for the successful seducer. The Chuang Tzu U^p says, "The wind begins at the tips of the green duckweed and becomes strong at the mouth of the big cave."54 The Li- chi it IB [Book of Rites] states, "When the people of Lu want to make sacrifice to Mt. T'ai, they must first make sacrifice to the P'ei Woods."
58. The otter's tail [t'a-weifa SiJiS]. At the end of an important section things should not come to a sudden stop; rather, after-ripples [yti- po ^¾] from the main story are used to bring about a gradual tapering off [yen-yang 2¾¾]. For example, after Imperial Delegate Liang returns from the tournament held outside the eastern city wall, the magistrate of Yüη-ch'eng hsien, Shih Wen-pin, presides in his yamen.56 After Wu Sung kills the tiger, he meets two hunters [dressed in tiger skins] on his way down the ridge.57 Again, after the massacre in the Hall of the Mandarin Ducks, there is the mention of the moonlight over the moat around the city wall.
59. Direct repetition of topic [cheng-fan fa IEiES]- For example, after the account of Wu Sung's fight with the tiger, there are accounts of Li K'uei's killing of four tigers and of the quarrel between the two Hsieh brothers and the Mao family over a tiger.59 After the story of Pan Chin- lien's adultery with Hsi-men Ch'ing, there is that of P'an Ch'iao-yun with P'ei Ju-hai.60 After the rescue of Sung Chiang from the execution ground at Chiang-chou, there is that of Lu Chiin-i in Ta-ming fu. After the account of Ho T'ao's attempt to capture the robbers, there is that of Huang An's trying to capture the same robbers.62 After the story of Lin Ch'ung's exile, there is that of Lu Chun-i's exile.63 Also, after the release of Ch'ao Kai by Chu T'ung and Lei Heng, there is the release of Sung Chiang by the same pair.64 This means that the author, for his amusement, deliberately repeats [fan 2E] the topic [t'i-mu g @] and yet has the ability not to borrow any detail or stroke from the previous treatment. Truly, he is bursting with methods and techniques.
60. Incomplete repetition of topic [liieh-fanfa 8¾¾¾]. Examples are Lin Ch'ung's purchase of a sword followed by Yang Chih's selling of a sword,65 the parts played by the urchins T'ang Niu-erh and Yun-ko, the beating of Butcher Cheng in his butcher shop and the beating of "Door God" Chiang in K'uai-huo Forest.67 and Lu Chih-shen's trying out his monk's staff at Wa-kuan Monastery and Wu Sung's trying out his monk's dagger on top of Centipede Ridge.
61. Extreme avoidance of narrative frugality [chi pu-sheng fa ffi?f< iSS]· For example, in order to make Sung Chiang commit a crime, the author first arranges to put the gold into his document bag. Prior to this, he sets up Yen P'o-hsi's affair with Chang Wen-yiian, and even before that he mentions Sung Chiang's taking of Yen P'o-hsi as his concubine and his donation of a coffin to the Yen family. However, all of these things are not part of the main story.
62. Extreme narrative frugality [chi shengfa 8¾¾]. For example, after Wu Sung is given a hero's welcome in Yang-ku hsien, he runs into Wu Ta, who just happens to have moved into the same town.70 Another example is Sung Chiang's eating fish soup at the Lute Pavilion and suffering an upset stomach for several days on end.
63. Introducing new twists into the narrative just as you are about to bring it to a close ["yii-ho ku-tsung fa]. For example, after the rescue boats under Li Chun, the two Chang brothers, the two T'ung brothers, and the two Mu brothers have already arrived at the White Dragon Temple, Li K'uei wants to fight his way back into the city.73 After both Chao Neng and Chao Te have left the Temple of the Dark Goddess of the Nine Heavens in Huan-tao Village, soldiers trip on the root of a tree and call out.74 The reader is thus given an extra fright at the end of the narrative sequence.
64. Clouds cutting the mountains in half ["heng-yiin tuan shan fa" íí β iff UJ ft]· For example, after the second attack on the Chu Family Village, there is suddenly inserted the story of Hsieh Chen and Hsieh Pao's quarrel with Squire Mao over the carcass of a tiger and their subsequent jailbreak. Another example is that during the siege of Taming fu there is suddenly inserted the episode of the robbery and murder committed by "River Hopping Devil" Chang Wang and "Slippery Loach" Sun the Fifth.76 This is because when an episode is too long, it may seem tiresome [to the reader]. Therefore the author inserts a passage into the middle of the episode so as to separate it into two parts.
65. Joining a broken zither string with glue ["luan-chiao hsii-hsien fa]. For example, on his way to Liang-shan-po to inform Sung Chiang of Lu Chiin-i's arrest, Yen Ch'ing comes upon Yang Hsiung and Shih Hsiu. The two parties do not know each other. Moreover, since they are travelling on out-of-the-way roads between Liang- shan-po and Ta-ming fu, how could they happen to be on the same road? The author casually brings about the first coincidence by using Yen Ch'ing's shooting of the magpie with his lucky arrow to divine the fate of his master to lead him to Yang Hsiung and Shih Hsiu. Then Yen Ch'ing fells Shih Hsiu with one blow of the fist and Yen Ch'ing's name is revealed in the ensuing tussle. All this is meticulously planned.
66. Formerly when young people read the Shui-hu chuan, they learned many irrelevant matters from it. Although the punctuation and com mentary [tien-yueh WiKj] of my edition is only rough and incomplete, after the young people read it, they will have learned many literary devices. They will not only know that there are numerous literary devices in the Shui-hu chuan, they will also be able to detect even the literary devices in the Chan-kuo ts'e and the Shih-chi. Formerly, when young people read the Chan-kuo ts'e and the Shih-chi, they would only pay attention to the irrelevant matters. This is really laughable.
67. The Shui-hu chuan is, after all, only a work of fiction. Young people are anxious to read it. Once they have read it, unexpectedly it will cause them to learn a number of literary methods.
68. Once young people have learned these literary methods, they will want to read without stopping such works as the Chan-kuo ts'e and the Shih-chi. The benefit of the Shui-hu chuan to young people is great.
69. Formerly, the Shui-hu chuan was read even by peddlers and yamen runners. Although not a word has been added or subtracted in this version, it is not destined for petty people. Only those with refined thoughts and feelings can appreciate it.

**How to Read the Plum in the Golden Vase**

01. The author has invented [p'i-k'ung chuan-ch'u] the three characters [whose names make up the title], P'an Chin 4¾ -lien, Li P'ing Si-erh, and Ch'un-met fa. Notice how he brings them together into one place and then disperses them again. In the first half [ch'ien pan- pu M ^fP] of his work the focus is on P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh but in the second half [hou pan-pu 'i£¥3] it is on Ch'un-mei. In the first half Hsi-men Ch'ing manages, by hook and by crook, to obtain for himself the gold [Chin ife-lien] and the vase [P'ing St-erh] that had belonged to other men; but in the second half the plum blossom [Ch'un-mei Ig] which was his to begin with falls easily into the hands of another man.
02. The action begins in the Yü-huang miao [Temple of the Jade Emperor]I and ends in the Yung-fu ssu [Temple of Eternal Felicity], and both these temples are introduced in the first chapter.3 These two are places of pivotal importance [kuan-chien ch'u] in the book.
03. First Wu Shen-hsien [Wu the Immortal] surveys Hsi-men Ch'ing's household at its height,4 then Huang Chen-jen [His Holiness Huang] sustains it somewhat in its decline,5 and finally Master P'u-ching purges the sins of the main characters.6 The way in which these episodes are correlated [chao-ying MM] is highly significant.
04. Wu Shen-hsien's mirrorlike forecast of the fates of the members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household7 is a kind of summation [chieh-shu !¾¾] but Ch'en Ching-chi is conspicuously absent. P'an Chin-lien is not pre sent when her fellow ladies lightheartedly have their fortunes told by means of the tortoise,8 but she makes good the deficiency by what she says when she comes on the scene immediately afterward,9 so she is not really left out. It is only Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'un-mei who are not included here but Li P'ing-erh's two appearances in Hsi-men Ch'ing's dreams!0 supply the missing data for him. It is not until Ch'en Ching-chi is physiognomized by Yeh T'ou-t'o [Yeh the Ascetic].11 however, that his final fortune is foretold.
05. Before introducing P'an Chin-lien,12 the author introduces Li P'ing-erh.13 Only after Hsi-men Ch'ing takes P'an Chin-lien into his household14 does the author introduce Ch'un-mei.15 However, before Hsi-men Ch'ing takes P'an Chin-lien into his household, he first marries Meng Yii-lou.16 Again, before Hsi-men Ch'ing takes Li P'ing-erh into his household,17 the author introduces Ch'en Ching-chi.18 The skill with which these elements of the plot are dovetailed [ch'uan-ch'a % g] cannot be described in words. But the way in which the author goes on to weave in [chia-hsieh ^M] the stories of Sung Hui-lien, Wang Liu-erh, Pen the Fourth's wife, Ju-i, and the rest only demonstrates once again that he has mastered the creative skills of Heaven [t'ien-kung ^ X] itself.
06. Those who really know how to read the Chin P'ing Mei appreciate the second half [hsia pan-pu F^8|5], yet it is also only those who really know how to read it who prefer the first half [shang pan-puh]· You can only understand this after having fully savored scenes, of which there are too many to enumerate, such as those where the play about Han Hsiang-tzu's quest for his uncle, Han Yii, is performed!9 and where the song "Alas! Life Is like a Dream" is called for20 during the celebrations that mark the birth of Kuan-ko and Hsi-men Ch'ing's appointment to office.

07. The Chin P'ing Mei exhibits certain regular structural devices ["pan-ting ta chang-fa" $2¾!^¾¾?¾]. For example, whenever P'an Chin- lien gets angry about something, the author arranges to have Meng Yii-lou at her side. This is done without any variation each time and is a seasoned stylistic technique [chang-fa lao-ch'u #5¾¾]¾]. Another example is the way that every time Hsi-men Ch'ing is about to go out drinking at someone else's place, some guest or official turns up for a visit and he has to delay his departure in order to entertain him. This is a major structural device [chang-ja 5¾] used in the chapters after the birth of Kuan-ko and Hsi-men Ch'ing's appointment to office.
08. Each of the hundred chapters of the Chin P'ing Mei is constructed by means of the structural device of juxtaposing two episodes [liang-tui chang-ja], so that there are two hundred episodes in all. How ever, there are some chapters in which the transition [kuo-chieh j$t[5] between the two episodes is effected by means of a single expression, while there are others in which the two episodes are mortised [kuo-hsia] by a hidden tenon [sun]. For example, Chao Yiian-t'an's tiger performs this function in chapter 1. There are some chapters in which the two episodes are further sub divided, the author narrating the first half of the first episode, shifting to the first half of the second, then going back to finish off the first, and only then going on to complete the second episode. There are some chapters in which the two episodes are completely intermingled [san-wu ts'o-tsung, and there are some in which the treatment of other matters is inserted into the narration of the two main episodes. In short, the two episodes form the framework [t'iao-kan] of each chapter. If you savor carefully the way in which they are handled from one chapter to another, you will know what I mean.
09. It is true that two episodes are juxtaposed [tso-tui fFff] in every chapter of the Chin P'ing Mei but there are also cases of episodes in different chapters that parallel each other at a distance [yao-tui 'MM]- Examples of this include the parallel episodes [tut ff] of P'an Chin-lien playing the p'i-p'a22 and Li P'ing-erh playing elephant chess23 and the paired episodes [tui ft] of the hiding of the wine pot24 and the theft of the gold bracelet.25 I could go on but there are too many to enumerate fully.
10. In the first half [ch'ien-pan ItJ^] of the book, the motif of "cold" [leng ] is repeated so effectively that one can hardly bear to read on whereas in the second half [hou-pan] the motif of "heat" recurs but is not readily apparent to the reader. In the first half the motif of "cold" occurs where the greatest "heat" is being described. If you savor these passages you will know what I mean. The way that the motif of "heat" occurs in the second half can be seen in the description of Meng Yii-lou's visit to Hsi-men Ch'ing's grave where the author provides an elaborate description of the beauties of spring on the Ch'ing-Ming Festival.
11. In this book there are examples of the most dubious and un important characters who nevertheless play significant roles, such as Han Ai-chieh. Innumerable women appear in the work but why does the author choose to end it with the example of Han Ai-chieh's integrity? He has a profound reason for doing so. Han Ai-chieh's mother, Wang Liu-erh, becomes a prostitute, and Han Ai-chieh herself, after her return from the Eastern Capital, also engages in this profession,28 but as soon as she becomes interested in Ch'en Ching-chi, she remains faithful to him until death.29 If we compare this with the way in which Li P'ing-erh and Ch'un-mei treat their husbands, Hua Tzu-hsii and Chou Hsiu, it cer tainly puts them to shame. If we compare P'an Chin-lien's conduct after meeting Hsi-men Ch'ing with that of Han Ai-chieh after meeting Ch'en Ching-chi, we see that she is unfaithful first with Ch'in-t'ung,30 later on with Ch'en Ching-chi,31 and finally even with Wang Ch'ao,32 so that she is not even the equal of a repentant prostitute. Thus the author concludes [chieh] his book with Han Ai-chieh in order to put to shame the other female characters and to emphasize the contrast between a repentant prostitute who can preserve her integrity and those who not only fail to correct their faults while living in luxury but, abandoning all integrity and shame, go unrepentant to their deaths.
12. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei we must pay attention to the significant features of the spatial setting [ta chien-chia ch'u ^:^1¾¾]. These include the location of P'an Ch'in-lien and Ch'un-mei in one place and Li P'ing-erh in another and the placing of all three of them in the single larger setting of the front garden. The fact that P'an Chin-lien and Ch'un-mei are placed together accentuates the isolation of Li P'ing-erh. The fact that P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh live close to each other in the garden allows their jealousy to flourish, while the fact that Wu Yiieh-niang lives far removed from them gives Ch'en Ching-chi his chance to get at P'an Chin-lien.
13. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei we must pay attention to the points at which one element in the narrative is used to lead into another [ju-sunch'u AloiS]- For example, the theme of slaying a tiger is introduced [ch'a-ju SA] amid the joking in the Yu-huang miao.33 The fact that Hua Tzu-hsu is Hsi-men Ch'ing's next-door neighbour is introduced when he is proposed for membership in the brotherhood.34 In chapter 8, when P'an Chin-lien is suffering from the heat, during her tirade at Tai- an the information that Hsi-men Ch'ing has taken Meng Yu-lou into his household is introduced.35 Li Kuei-chieh is brought out [ch'a ch'u jgtB] when Hsi-men Ch'ing asks Ying Po-chueh where he has been the last few days.36 Ch'en Ching-chi's establishment of intimacy with P'an Chin- hen is introduced on the occasion of the completion of the summer- house.37 Wang Liu-erh's submission to Hsi-men Ch'ing's demands is introduced as a result of Chai Ch'ien's request for a concubine.38 Li P'ing-erh's pregnancy is introduced in the course of her bout with Hsi- men Ch'ing in the Fei-ts'ui hsiian [Kingfisher Pavilion].39 The origin of Li P'ing-erh's illness is introduced with the trial of the Indian monk's medicine.40 The monk P'u-ching is introduced into the story as a result of the events in the Pi-hsia kung [Temple of the Goddess of the Iridescent Clouds].41 Li Kung-pi is introduced on the occasion of the visit to Hsi- men Ch'ing's grave,42 and the first indication that there is anything going on between Tai-an and Hsiao-yu is introduced when he is sent home for the fur coats.43 Such examples of the author's ability to accom plish his aims without leaving a trace are innumerable. This is due to the skill with which he employs indirect [ch'u-pi ¢^] and unexpected [ni-pi j^^] techniques to tell his story. He is not willing to start a new narrative thread [t'ou-hsti M^] from scratch or to use direct [chih-pi S^] or straightforward [shun-pi HH H] techniques to tell his story. There is no end to the separate narrative threads in this book, and if each of them were started from scratch, one could not even count them. When I take up my brush I also try to use indirect and unexpected techniques but, unlike the author, I am unable to be indirect [ch'u ft] without leaving traces or to be unexpected [fit 5¾] without tipping my hand. This is what makes his book so marvellous.
14. There are many episodes in the Chin P'ing Mei in which the clandestine activities of some of the characters are disclosed [p'o-chan] to others. For example, Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual intercourse with Pan Chin-lien during the funeral service for her husband is overheard by the monks outside the window;44 P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'in- t'ung is discovered by Sun Hsueh-o, and the even more incriminating perfume sachet that P'an Chin-lien has given him is also found on Ch'in-t'ung's person; P'an Chin-lien discovers Hsi-men Ch'ing's secret assig nations with Li P'ing-erh over the garden wall46 and stumbles upon Sung Hui-lien's affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing;47 Li P'ing-erh's remarks in the Fei-ts'ui hsiian are overheard by P'an Chin-lien,48 but her own antics in the grape arbour are witnessed by T'ieh-kun; no sooner does Hsi- men Ch'ing accept the bribe of stolen goods from Miao Ch'ing than he incurs the wrath of the regional inspector;50 no sooner does Wu Yiieh- niang implore the aid of the magistrate in her suit against Ch'en Ching- chi51 than P'ing-an gives false testimony against her in the court of Wu Tien-en; immediately after P'an Chin-lien's affair with Ch'en Ching-chi is first consummated, Hsi-men Ch'ing actually touches the evidence without realizing it,53 and when Hsi-men Ch'ing burns moxa on Wang Liu-erh's pudendum, Hu Hsiu is an unseen witness to the scene.54 Exam ples of this kind are too many to enumerate. In general, the author uses this risky technique [hsien-pi] in order to show the predicaments to which human emotions can lead. But even more remarkable is the way in which he enables the characters whose clandestine activities are dis closed to cover their tracks with plausible alibis so that he does not have to waste his energy on tedious explanations. This is why his technique is so miraculous [hua-pi].
15. There are instances in the Chin P'ing Mei in which the author seems to have deliberately created episodes or characters that appear from nowhere and disappear for no apparent reason [wu-wei]. Shu- t'ung is an example. Who knows how much planning went into the author's creation of this single character? It goes without saying that he serves the purpose of depicting Hsi-men Ch'ing's depravity and poly morphous promiscuity but it is not so apparent that the author has created Shu-t'ung in order to prepare the ground for the departure of another character from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. What is the expla nation for this? Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yiieh-niang start out estranged but end up on intimate terms. Pan Chin-lien and Wu Yiieh-niang start out on intimate terms but end up estranged. Although the rift between them develops over the expulsion of Lai Chao and the banishment of Lai Wang, it need never have been as serious as it becomes when P'an Chin-lien throws her tantrum.57 This tantrum is precipitated by Yu- hsiao's willingness to repeat every word of Wu Yueh-niang's private conversation to P'an Chin-hen. Why should Yu-hsiao tell her everything? Because she has accepted her three conditions. Why does she accept these three conditions? Because P'an Chin-lien discovers her affair with Shu-t'ung.60 The author does not want to have to account for the affair between Yu-hsiao and Shu-t'ung from scratch at this point in the narative, so he describes the hiding of the wine pot and the ill will it engenders at an earlier point. But the reason why the author goes to such pains [yao-yao hsieh lai] is because he needs P'an Chin-lien to have her tantrum. Why is this? The [tantrum] episode is needed to account for the fact that when P'an Chin-lien has to depart from the household, Wu Yiieh-niang abandons her to her fate without the slightest regret and P'an Chin-lien's downfall is complete.62 How can anyone say that there is a single example of irrelevant [wu-wei] writing in the Chin P'ing Mei?
16. In the Chin P'ing Mei the author devotes serious attention to the description [cheng-ching hsieh] of 6 women, and of these he really concentrates on only 4, that is, Wu Yiieh-niang, Meng Yii-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh. But he describes Wu Yiieh-niang only because of the requirements of the plot [ta-kang JzM] and uses different techniques to depict Meng Yii-lou because she is a person of superior gifts who resents her unjust neglect. Thus he describes Wu Yiieh-niang only because he has to and is unwilling to describe Meng Yii-lou the way he does his other characters. Neither one of them is given full treatment [cheng hsieh JEM]- The full treatment is reserved for Li P'ing-erh and Pan Chin-lien. But again, he describes Li P'ing-erh by what he does not say about her that is to say, he describes her while keeping his focus [hsieh-ch'i] elsewhere. This is because the focus of his description is always on P'an Chin-lien. Because he always concentrates [tan-hsieh WM] on P'an Chin-lien, it is no wonder that she emerges as the most vicious of all his characters. Such, indeed, is the awesome power of the writer's brush.
17. There are 2 characters in the Chin P'ing Mei to whom the author devotes special attention and whose final fates are also noteworthy: Ch'un-mei and Tai-an. While she is still only one of the maidservants, the author indicates in numerous passages that Ch'un-mei possesses a sense of self-esteem and ambition that sets her apart from the others. While he is still only one among the many menservants, Tai-an is described by the author in passage after passage as being adept at pleasing people in everything he does. Why does the author insist on having Ch'un-mei become a lady of rank and Tai-an a man of wealth and position64 at the end of the book? In order that his novel on the theme of "heat and cold" (yen-liang l¾¾) should illustrate the reversal of fortunes [fan-an]. Notice how the other characters can only see that the Ch'un-mei before them is merely a maidservant—they have no idea that later she will become a lady of rank. Notice how they only see that the Tai-an before them is merely a manservant—they have no idea that later he will become a man of wealth and position. When their status changes, not only do others look upon Ch'un-mei and Tai-an in a new light and pay court to them, even Wu Yiieh-niang has to look on them differently, treating Ch'un-mei as her social superior and placing herself under Tai-an's protection after the decline of the Hsi-men family. Of what utility then is judging people according to transitory social status [yen-liang]? The author's acupuncture [chen-pien] uses satiric barbs instead of regular needles. In order to make the later reversal of their fortunes plausible, the author must first demonstrate the special qualities of Ch'un-mei and Tai-an.
18. What need does the author have for the characters Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsiieh-o? He uses Li Chiao-erh to imply that even before Hsi- men Ch'ing meets P'an Chin-lien or Li P'ing-erh he is already a dissolute wastrel who is capable of any crime. In his treatment of P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, he describes certain of Hsi-men Ch'ing's crimes in full [shih-hsieh MM], whereas in his treatment of Li Chiao-erh he describes others of Hsi-men Ch'ing's crimes by implication [hsu-hsieh f&M]- If the crimes that are actually described are as bad as they are, those that are not portrayed leave us free to wonder how many other indescribable crimes he has committed in the past. How deep is the author's hatred of Hsi- men Ch'ing! As for Sun Hsueh-o, why should the author devote the space he does to this person of humble origins whose status is only that of a maid servant who has been seduced by her master? This is an example of the author's Bodhisattva-like compassion. How could the retribution [pao St] due a character as vicious as Hsi-men Ch'ing be complete without his wife's becoming a prostitute?67 But since the author has already decided to handle Wu Yiieh-niang in a different way, he certainly could never bring himself to reduce her to this. Meng Yü-lou is an innocent victim of Hsi-men Ch'ing's depravity, so the author could scarcely endure to expose her to any additional suffering for the sake of punishing Hsi-men Ch'ing. Li Chiao-erh is a prostitute to begin with. Li P'ing-erh is destined to play a role in Hsi-men Ch'ing's retribution while he is still alive. As for Pan Chin-lien, not only does she have a nemesis of her own but even if she were to become a prostitute, it would not harm Hsi-men Ch'ing and might even be beneficial to P'an Chin-lien, who would probably be nothing loath. How could this be called retribution? Thus the author describes Sun Hsueh-o as being reduced to prostitu tion68 in order to accentuate the retribution visited upon Hsi-men Ch'ing and at the same time unobtrusively to bring to a conclusion [an- chieh Bf |8] the case of Sung Hui-lien.69 As for the subsequent incidents involving Chang Sheng and Ch'en Ching-chi, they are merely dictated by the exigencies of the plot [ch'ing yin wen sheng fa] and represent an expedient tidying up [sui-shou shou-shih] of loose ends. Otherwise how could Sun Hsiieh-o's life as a prostitute be brought to a conclusion [chieh-kuo]?
19. Li Chiao-erh represents the role of money [ts'ai in the realm of sex . This is apparent from the fact that she takes charge of the household accounts71 and that she lines her pockets before leaving the household. Wang Liu-erh represents the role of sex in the realm of money. When she meets with Hsi-men Ch'ing she is always talking about business deals,73 getting maidservants and houses,74 fixing up things for Miao Ch'ing,75 and so forth, all of which profitable subjects are broached by way of sex
20. The author needs Sung Hui-lien in his book in order to bring out as completely as possible the viciousness of P'an Chin-lien. This early trial of her powers against Sung Hui-lien foreshadows what she does later on out of jealousy of Li P'ing-erh. How can we see this? When Sung Hui-lien succeeds in attracting her master's attentions, it is P'an Chin-lien who first becomes aware of it,76 just as it is she who first catches sight of Ying-ch'un pretending to call the cat as a signal for Hsi-men Ch'ing's assignation with Li P'ing-erh.77 How does P'an Chin- lien's willingness to send Ch'un-mei with a brazier to warm the grotto for Hsi-men Ch'ing and Sung Hui-lien78 differ from her urging Hsi- men Ch'ing to take Li P'ing-erh into his household and offering to share her quarters with her for the time being?79 How do her apparent willing- ness to forgive Sung Hui-lien when she kneels and throws herself upon her mercy and all the other tricks by which she keeps the upper hand over her80 differ from her pretending to be drunk when Li P'ing-erh first enters the household and saying to her, "Now we walk together on the same path"?81 How does her double-tongued troublemaking between Sun Hsüeh-o and Sung Hui-lien82 differ from her telling tales about Li P'ing-erh to Wu Yüeh-niang?83 To make a long story short, Lai Wang's narrow escape from death84 and the needless suicide of Sung Hui-lien are both P'an Chin-lien's doing. The author times this subplot to coincide with Li P'ing-erh's entry into the household for the express purpose of providing her with a warning but she does not realize her danger and actually befriends P'an Chin-hen. How fitting that disaster should not be long in overtaking her and that she should suffer the fate of which she has been so clearly forewarned [hou-ch'e chungfu]. This episode that I interpret as an early trial of her powers, greatly accentuates P'an Chin-lien's viciousness but the author has also created here a cautionary example [yang-tzu] for those who do not know how to keep danger at a distance. If you read this episode inattentively you may think that it describes nothing more than Hsi-men Ch'ing's having another affair with the wife of one of his servants. But Hsi-men Ch'ing is a man who kills husbands in order to take their wives and money, protects servants who have killed their master,87 and puts the law of the land up for sale, so the author scarcely needs to create [chuan ft] this episode merely to add another item to the roster of his crimes. The reader, however, is often deceived by the author.
21. Why does the author in the later part of his narrative depict the relationship between the wet nurse Ju-i and Hsi-men Ch'ing? This is also clearly directed against P'an Chin-lien, for it demonstrates that her successful elimination of Sung Hui-lien and Li P'ing-erh has been an exercise in futility. How can we see this? When Sung Hui-lien dies, P'an Chin-hen is delighted but then Kuan-ko is born and Li P'ing-erh wins Hsi-men Ch'ing's favour.89 When Kuan-ko dies90 and Li P'ing-erh follows him to the grave,91 P'an Chin-hen is again delighted; but before she knows it, the fragrance of Ju-i's cosmetics attracts Hsi-men Ch'ing's attention by the very side of his dead favourite's spirit tablet.92 Every time P'an Chin-lien eliminates a rival another comes to take her place. No matter how good she may be at maintaining her lover's favour and gaining the upper hand, what can she do in the face of a situation like this but acknowledge the futility of her efforts and retire from the field? Thus the author's portrayal of Ju-i is really a means of getting at P'an Chin-lien and of expressing the indignation he feels on behalf of Sung Hui-lien and Li P'ing-erh.
22. But why does the author devote space to the various singing girls such as Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yueh? They serve the purpose of demonstrating the insatiability, frivolity, and vulgarity of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh are purposeful duplications [t'e-fan] of P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, respectively, demonstrating that by taste and affinity the latter pair are indistinguish able from prostitutes and that though they may never have actually engaged in that trade, their wantonness and depravity are such that they not only show the same proclivities as prostitutes but will go even further than they do. The author portrays Cheng Ai-yueh in yet another way—as fragrant, smooth, and soft—in order to bring out the un relieved boorishness of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is depicted by contrast [fan-ch'en] as being incapable of fully appreciating even the refinements of a high-class whore.
23. Why has the author created Wang Liu-erh, Pen the Fourth's wife, and Lady Lin? These three characters are depicted in different ways and serve different purposes. The depiction of Wang Liu-erh is solely in tended to illustrate the theme that money [ts'ai] commands sex [se]. If you observe the lengths to which she goes to ingratiate herself with Hsi-men Ch'ing when he is alive and the alacrity with which she absconds with his property as soon as he is dead,94 you will see that in the relationship between them, Hsi-men Ch'ing is using money to seek sex and Wang Liu-erh is using sex to seek money. Hsi-men Ch'ing's death follows upon a visit to Wang Liu-erh.95 so that in the end he finds both sex and money to be empty [k'ung 0]. When Wang Liu-erh subse quently meets Ho Kuan-jen, she ends up using sex to seek money just as before.96 Indeed, though sex can move people, it is no match for money which can be used anywhere for any purpose and is loved by everyone. Thus the author does not conclude \chieh |g] the story of Wang Liu-erh, who symbolizes the lust for money, until his last chapter. The author has created Pen the Fourth's wife as a means of revealing Tai-an's character. He shows that Hsi-men Ch'ing, who seeks only to indulge his own insatiable desires, is unaware of the fact that the example he sets will be followed by his subordinates, who have already learned from him how underlings can take advantage of their masters. Thus, Tai-an's seduction of Hsiao-yii that eventuates in his marriage to her,97 is foreshadowed [fu-hsien {£&!] in his relations with Pen the Fourth's wife.98 You may say that Pen the Fourth's wife is used as a foil to depict [p'ei-hsieh $$M] Wang Liu-erh but this is a subsidiary function. As for Lady Lin, she serves as a vehicle for expressing the incalculable resentment the author feels in his heart for P'an Chin-lien. Not only does he have her murdered and mutilated," but he is not satisfied until he has damned even the household in which she got her start in life and the persons who taught her to be what she is. How can we see this? P'an Chin-hen is sold as a child into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang where she is taught to sing and dance.100 To argue that she is utterly devious and shameless from birth is not consonant with the doctrines that conscience is innate and that human nature is basically good. I am sure that she was not necessarily as dissolute as this at the age of three or four. During the time when she was a member of Imperial Commissioner Wang's establishment, if the male members of the house hold had shown respect for propriety and righteousness and the female members of the household had honoured chastity and integrity so that obscene words and deeds were neither to be heard nor seen, then, even if she had been dissolute to begin with, she would have been transformed into a chaste girl. How is it that this imposing imperial commissioner neither pacifies distant peoples in the name of the Son of Heaven nor proclaims the imperial majesty and virtue but, instead, when the ten- year-old daughter of a tailor enters his household, devotes his leisure time to teaching her how to paint her face with cosmetics and encour ages her to put on airs. If he carries on like this with a lowly serving maid, the way he conducts himself with his legitimate wife can be imagined. How fitting that his son, Wang San-kuan, should be a good- for-nothing profligate and his own wife, Lady Lin, a dissolute adulteress. Who is there to blame but himself? But what the imperial commissioner teaches P'an Chin-lien results in incalculable harm to many people, from Wu Ta in the beginning to Hsi-men Ch'ing at the end. It is certainly fitting that the imperial commissioner's retribution [huan-pao 31¾] should come in the form of Lady Lin's adultery with Hsi-men Ch'ing. This is why I say the author has a profound hatred for P'an Chin-lien, a hatred that extends even to the household in which she got her start in life, and this is why he devotes attention to Lady Lin. But Chang Ta-hu also contributes to P'an Chin-lien's corruption, so why does the author neglect him? The answer is that it is his nephew, Chang Erh-kuan, who takes over Hsi-men Ch'ing's official post after the latter's death, and it is he whom Ying Po-chiieh persuades to take Li Chiao-erh into his household.103 Clearly, he is another Hsi-men Ch'ing who will suffer a similar indescribable retribution for his own sins. In this novel, undescribed but implied incidents ("pu cho pi-mo ch'u") occur without number. In the case of Chang Erh-kuan, the author has hidden another large book between the lines of his text [wu-pi ch'u]. This is an example of material implied but not directly written out on the page ["pi pu tao erh i tao"].
24. As for the depiction of Wu Yueh-niang in the Chin P'ing Mei, people all say that Hsi-men Ch'ing is lucky to have such a wife. They do not understand that the author describes Wu Yueh-niang's crimes in such a subtle way [yin-pi] that people do not realize what he is up to. How can we see this? A husband is the person whom a wife looks up to and depends upon for the remainder of her life. If her husband spent large sums of money on concubines in order to secure a male heir and Wu Yueh-niang raised no objections, this would truly be an ideal mar riage and she would be an exemplary wife. But Hsi-men Ch'ing murders husbands in order to steal their wives that is the conduct of a gangster. Now, when a husband engages in the conduct of a gangster and his wife does not tearfully remonstrate with him but instead neither expresses approval nor disapproval, treats him as a stranger whose welfare is no concern of hers, and regards her compliance as a virtue, can such an attitude withstand scrutiny? As for her relationship with Ch'en Ching- chi, the author goes out of his way to emphasize Wu Yueh-niang's responsibility for bringing the fox into the chicken coop.104 an act of indescribable folly. When she finally gets wind of her son-in-law's adul tery with Pan Chin-lien, she can think of nothing better to do than to keep the doors locked in the daytime.105 Afterward, when she drives Ch'en Ching-chi out of the household,106 sends his wife back to him, and agrees to sell Ch'un-mei to Chou Hsiu,108 she is merely adjusting her rudder to the wind without any convictions of her own. Moreover, her fondness for hearing Buddhist nuns recite pious texts and her in discriminate burning of incense are not proper activities for a wife to engage in. It follows from all this that the words "did not pay much attention to his studies"109 are the source of the complete ruination of both Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yueh-niang. How can we see this? If Hsi- men Ch'ing had adhered to the rules of propriety himself, he would have been able to mould his wife accordingly. But instead, merely because he pays no attention to his studies, Wu Yueh-niang, who has the capac ity for goodness, also ends up lacking any understanding of the dictates of propriety. Her everyday activities show no evidence of the protocol a wife should observe in her relations with her husband but only a lot of superficial gestures in that direction. Wu Yueh-niang is described as a woman with good intentions who is ignorant of propriety. But good intentions alone are not enough, for ignorance of propriety can lead to incalculable harm. IfWu Yueh-niang is ultimately responsible for Ch'en Ching-chi's evil deeds, how much worse might things have been if she were not even well intentioned? However, although it is Wu Yueh- niang who makes Ch'en Ching-chi's crimes possible, it is Hsi-men Ch'ing who must bear responsibility for having failed to set a proper example for his wife.
25. In the art of writing there is a mode of description characterized by the incremental repetition ["chia i-pei hsieh-fa" in] [of a motif]. This book excels at this type of incremental description [chia-pei hsieh]. For example, after describing Hsi-men Ch'ing's "heat" [je] the author goes on to describe that of the two censors, Ts'ai and Sung,110 then that of Grand Marshal Huang,111 then that of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, and finally the "heat" of the imperial court itself. This is the incremental repetition [chia i-pei in —fS] of [the motif of ] "heat." After describing Hsi-men Ch'ing's "cold" [leng ^] the author goes on to describe Ch'en Ching-chi in the Beggars' Rest.114 Grand Preceptor Ts'ai's exile,115 and finally the captivity of the emperors Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung.116 This is incremental repetition of [the motif of] "cold." In brief, the incremental repetition of [the motif of ] "heat" is used especially to show the way that "heat" of the sort Hsi-men Ch'ing attains is no rare thing but Hsi-men Ch'ing knows nothing but to rely on his wealth to commit crimes. The incremental repetition of [the motif of] "cold" is used precisely to show that "cold" of the sort Hsi- men Ch'ing experiences knows no limit but this is a point that Hsi-men Ch'ing himself fails to see.
26. The author insists upon describing Wu Yueh-niang as a pious Buddhist. Does the reader understand the reason for this? In his opening remarks the author enjoins us to purify our six senses.118 so we can anticipate that he will certainly conclude [chieh fp] his work by showing that the two words money [ts'ai M] and sex [se fe] are empty [k'ung 5]. But only a monk will do to exemplify the conclusion [chieh |pj that everything is empty. Hsi-men Ch'ing is not the sort of person to repent before his dying day, and after his death who is there to play this role? Even if Wu Yueh-niang, after her husband's death, were to dis regard the family property and take the tonsure, what would that have to do with the author's use of Hsi-men Ch'ing to exemplify Buddhist doctrine? Thus the only thing is to have Hsi-men Ch'ing himself take the vows. But how is one to get around the fact that he is already dead? The author, after some hesitation,119 arranges to have Hsiao-ko born at the very hour of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death,120 so that in the end he may repent and achieve deliverance.121 The author's mind is that of a Confu cian sage but he has taken the compassionate vow of a Bodhisattva in the hope that there should be no one in the world who conceals his faults to the end or fails to correct them. He hopes that even those who die unrepentant may be able to correct their faults in the life to come. What magnanimity and compassion the author shows for Hsi-men Ch'ing and how great are his efforts to admonish future generations! The author has this denouement [ta chieh-shu ^15¾] in mind from the outset but he does not want baldly to introduce Master P'u-ching all of a sudden at the end to spirit Hsiao-ko away without tying this into the rest of the narrative [wu-t'ou wu-hsii MMM^]- First, to do that would be to use a hackneyed narrative cliche [hsim-ch'ang k'o-chiu ^?¾¾¾].122 Second, the ending would then seem unconnected [t'o-lo 8¾¾] with the body of the text and would appear contrived [hen-chi 3¾¾]. Therefore he must depict the motif of Wu Yueh-niang's Buddhist piety off and on throughout his narrative so that it appears and disappears like a snake in the grass or a [discontinuous] chalk line [ts'ao-she hui-hsien ^¢6 #<§!]. He especially describes Wu Yiieh-niang's pilgrimage to the Pi-hsia kung in order to lead up to the scene in the Hstieh-chien rung [Snow Stream Cave], where he gives the reader a glimpse of P'u-ching.124 It is not until ten years later in the narrative that he brings them together again in the Yung-fu ssu, where all the major characters in the novel reappear in a phantasmagoria only to fade finally from sight, one after the other. Thus the biography [chuan ^] of each of the characters, all of whom are fated to suffer separation in this life and the next, is brought to a conclu sion [chieh |p]. This is the grand finale [ta chieh-shu] in which the myriad threads [ch'ien-chen wan-hsien T" ft Hit] of the author's narrative are all resolved and allowed to recede into the great void from whence they came. Thus, in depicting Wu Yiieh-niang's Buddhist piety the author is certainly not merely describing in a general way the everyday practices of a lay believer for the benefit of pious village women. The marvelous quality of this book lies in the skill with which the arteries that connect widely separated elements of the plot [ch'ien-li fu-mai] are concealed. The author never resorts to facile writing [i-an chih pi] or the use of elements for which connections [sun] have not been prepared. That is why the Ch'in P'ing Mei surpasses all other books.
27. It is also necessary to keep in mind that the author, in the course of his depiction of Wu Yiieh-niang's Buddhist piety, also unobtrusively [yin |§] describes the numerous secret plots and devious schemes of the three Buddhist nuns, such as inducing Wu Yiieh-niang to burn incense at night [as a means of effecting a reconciliation with Hsi-men Ch'ing] and procuring for her a drug to insure conception.127 There is nothing they will not stoop to. Thus, the author's description of Wu Yiieh- niang's Buddhist piety is also a means of depicting the darker side of her character. The reader should be aware of this.

28. Meng Yü-lou is the only major character in the book whom the author allows to come to a decent end.128 Why is this? She functions as a contrastive foil to Li P'ing-erh and P'an Chin-lien. After suffering the misfortune of the early death of her first husband, although she is unable to remain faithful to his memory, at least she lives in quiet seclusion and leaves it to a go-between to find her a match. When she enters Hsi-men Ch'ing's household although she may be open to criticism for her unseemly haste, this is a common occurrence among widows. She suffers grievously from her husband's neglect but bears it patiently and is willing to make the best of her fate. This is where her superiority to all the other women in the novel shows up. Ch'un-mei consistently gives herself airs, while Meng Yü-lou is consistently circumspect. Thus, it turns out that Ch'un-mei falls victim to her desires!30 whereas Meng Yu-lou, after undergoing a period of hardship, achieves long-lasting happiness.

29. The episode in which Ch'en Ching-chi goes to Yen-chou (in an abortive attempt to blackmail Meng Yü-lou) seems superfluous (she- tsu ¢£,¾) at first glance but in fact the author uses it for three purposes ("i-pi erh san-yung"). First, it provides the cause for Ch'en Ching-chi's sudden descent in the world to the point that he is forced to resort to the Beggars' Rest.132 Second, it prepares the way (fu-hsien f£ H) for the suicide of Ch'en Ching-chi's wife, the daughter of Hsi-men Ch'ing.133 Third, it demonstrates that Meng Yü-lou in her marriage to Li Kung-pi has really allied herself with an understanding mate whose lifelong companionship will make up for the three or four years of unhappiness she has endured in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing. How can we see this? The reason why Meng Yu-lou is unmoved by Ch'en Ching-chi's blandishments is that she is in love with her husband, and Li Kung-pi, in turn, would rather die than give up his wife. Can a love that one would rather die than forsake be anything but true love? It is clear that Meng Yü-lou will not have to complain of her husband's infidelities in her old age. If we take a look at Meng Yu-lou's attractive personality, it is clear that she is really a beauty of the first rank but Hsi-men Ch'ing remains infatuated by his prior conquest, P'an Chin-lien. Thus, the author's description of Meng Yii-lou is clearly intended to emphasize the fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing is a vulgar plebian who is only bent on slaking his lust but has no appreciation for true beauty.

30. When Meng Yu-lou enters Hsi-men Ch'ing's household she does so with full observance of the proprieties.134 If we compare this with the furtive way in which Hsi-men Ch'ing carries off P'an Chin-hen and his adulterous liaison with Li P'ing-erh, the difference is greater than that between Heaven and earth. These modes of matrimony also differ in what they portend of good and ill. Meng Yü-lou's marriage to Li Kung-pi is also arranged for and carried out with full observance of the proprieties.137 If we compare this to the way in which Li Chiao-erh departs the household after the haggling of the old bawd,138 Sun Hsüeh-o elopes by night with Lai Wang,139 and P'an Chin-lien is led away by Dame Wang without a farewell tear,140 the difference between the auspicious and the inauspicious is clear. Thus, the author has made a point pf depicting this true beauty in order to prove how incapable Hsi- men Ch'ing is of appreciating any refinement.

31. P'an Chin-Hen and Li P'ing-erh no sooner enter Hsi-men Ch'ing's household than they are subjected to humiliation,141 Meng Yii-lou is the only person in the household who is never criticized from beginning to end. Truly, the author had a point in doing this.

32. Hsi-men Ch'ing is an undiscerning scoundrel, Wu Yüeh-niang is an artful hypocrite, Meng Yii-lou is endearing. P'an Chin-lien is in- human, Li P'ing-erh is infatuated, Ch'un-mei is unruly, Ch'en Ching- chi is a frivolous nonentity, Li Chiao-erh is lifeless, Sun Hsiieh-o is stupid, Sung Hui-lien does not know her place, and Ju-i is a mere surrogate. As for the rest, Wang Liu-erh, Lady Lin, Li Kuei-chieh, and the like can scarcely be considered human. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and company are utterly unconscionable, and Grand Preceptor Ts'ai and the censors, Ts'ai and Sung, might just as well never have been born.

33. Shih-tzu chieh [Lion Street] is the setting in which Wu Sung finally murders P'an Chin-lien to avenge his brother's death.142 It is there that Hsi-men Ch'ing almost loses his life!43 and that Hua Tzu-hsü also comes to grief not long afterward.144 Hsi-men Ch'ing frequents it [in order to carry on his affair with Li P'ing-erh] and later on Wang Liu-erh moves there on Hsi-men Ch'ing's account.146 P'an Chin-lien twice visits it to enjoy the Lantern Festival.147 The author uses this street to depict to perfection the way in which petty people, in their self- importance, indulge their evil desires while remaining oblivious to their ominous surroundings.

34. The Chin P'ing Mei is a veritable Shih-chi [Records of the Histo rian; by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, b. 145 B.C.] but the Shih-chi, though it contains both individual biographies [tu-chuan ®fl] and collective biographies \ho-chuan -n (#), treats each biography separately. The hundred chapters of the Chin P'ing Mei, on the other hand, constitute a single biography [chuan fif] in which hundreds of characters are treated. Though the pre sentation is discontinuous [tuan-tuan hsu-hsu WWWIWi\, each character has a biography of his own. Thus, it is obvious that the author of the Chin P'ing Mei could have written a Shih-chi. Since he has already ac complished a more difficult task, what difficulty would he have found in accomplishing an easier one?

35. I have often noticed that those who write commentaries [p'i #t] to any particular book often insist upon criticizing other books as a means of raising the status of the one they are concerned with. They do not realize that literature is in the public domain. The fact that one work of literature is marvelous does not prevent other works from being mar velous too. Ifl happen to appraise the marvelous qualities of a particular work, the marvelous qualities of other works do not eclipse the marvels of the one with which I am primarily concerned. If I were to write a work myself, I could not claim that once my work appeared, the other works in the world had ceased to be marvelous. Nor could I claim that there were not in the world any works more marvelous than mine. Why should one, then, when writing a commentary on any work, treat it as if it were one's own and feel the necessity to prove that no work in the world is its equal? This only reveals a selfish and narrow mind that would certainly be incapable of producing good writing. If one is in capable of writing well oneself, how can one comment on the good writing of others? When I say that it would have been easier to compose the Shih-chi than the Chin P'ing Mei, I refer to the fact that its component parts are presented separately [fen-tso 5"]¾] whereas those of the Chin P'ing Mei are integrated [ho-tso # I¾]. If Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself were to be reborn, I am sure that he would not say that I was being partial to the Chin P'ing Mei. I am not claiming that the Shih-chi is any less marvelous than the Chin P'ing Mei; yet the Chin P'ing Mei has succeeded in captur ing the marvelous qualities of the Shih-chi. The successes and failures of works of art can only be understood by the discerning. I confine myself to appreciating the marvelous qualities of the works with which I am particularly concerned. Why should I worry about whether the authors are ancient or modern, engage in debates on their behalf, or apologize for them?

36. The writers of novels never divulge their names, either because they have some axe to grind (yti-i in their works or because they contain covert references to real people. Since the authors have decided to abide by the principle of only speaking well of others without dwelling on their faults ("yin-e yang-shan chih pi" and conceal the real names of the people on whom their characters are modeled and since they choose not to divulge their own real names, why are men of later times so anxious to search for clues to the underlying reality and call every person by his right name? How petty such desires are! Moreover, hearsay in such matters is generally apocryphal and not to be taken seriously. To sum the matter up in a word: if the author had not had intense feelings he would never have written the book. If the persons whom he wished to describe duly make their appearance in his book but the author, who had such intense feelings about them, could not bring himself to name them explicitly, it would be the height of inanity for us, who have no such intense feelings ourselves, to insist on identifying them. Therefore I shall ignore the theory that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in- tended to represent Yen Shih-fan [1513—1565], whose style was Tung-lou (Eastern Tower) and whose childhood name was Ch'ing-erh. As for the person who wrote this book, I shall simply refer to him as the author. Since he did not choose to attach his name to the book, why should I try to second-guess him? Recently I saw a work called Ti-ch'i ts'ai-tzu shu [The Seventh Work by and for Geniuses: an edition of the P'i-p'a chi with commentary by Mao Lun and his son, Mao Tsung-kang which is full of speculation about Wang the Fourth. Although every commentator is entitled to his own views, I wonder if the time spent on these inconclusive speculations might not be better devoted to appreciation of the literary techniques embodied in the work. I merely record this here in order to make my position clear to my contemporaries.

37. The Shih-chi contains chronological tables and the Chin P'ing Mei is also full of specific dates. At the very outset it is stated that Hsi-men Ch'ing is twenty-seven sui. When Wu Shen-hsien physiognomizes him he is said to be twenty-nine sui.151 On his deathbed he is said to be thirty-three sui. But Kuan-ko is stated to have been born in the fourth year of the Cheng-ho reign period [1114], during the cyclical year ping- shen [1116], and to have died in the fifth year of the Cheng-ho reign period [1115], during the cyclical year ting-yu [1117]. Now if Hsi- men Ch'ing's son was born when he was twenty-nine sui during the cyclical year ping-shen [1116], he should have been thirty-three sui during the cyclical year keng-tzu [1120]. But Hsi-men Ch'ing is said to have died during the cyclical year wu-hsti [1118]. The death of Li P'ing-erh should also have taken place in the fifth year of the Cheng-ho reign period [1115] but is stated to have occurred in the seventh year of that period [1117].156 These are all places where the author has deliberately introduced incongruities [ts'en-tz'u chih ch'u # H: ,i JsS ] into the chronol ogy. Why has he done so? Because this book is different from other novels. The events of these three or four years appear to be accounted for day by day, hour by hour. We are told whether it is spring or autumn, cold or hot, that such-and-such a day is someone's birthday, that such- and-such a person is invited for a visit on such-and-such a day of such- and-such a month, that such-and-such a day is the day of a particular festival. AU elapsed time seems to be scrupulously accounted for. But if the author had arranged the chronology of these three to five years so that there would be no discrepancies whatever, his work would really have constituted no more than a daily record of the events in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, as some benighted critics have alleged. Thus the author has deliberately introduced discrepancies into the chronology. The multitudinous events of these three to five years of prosperity are brought vividly to life, day-by-day, and festival by festival. They are not mechanically [ssu-pan ?ES] strung together. Although they are arranged in order and you can tick them off one by one, they still have the power to dazzle the reader into feeling as though he has lived through each and everyday. This is marvelous writing. When skill reaches this level the miraculous plane [hua -ft] is reached. I dare not treat such a timeless literary masterpiece as just a work of ordinary fiction.

38. The hundred chapters of this work constitute a single chapter. Only if you expand your view until you can read it as a single chapter will you be able to appreciate its overall structure [ch'i-chin ch'u].

39. These hundred chapters were not written in a day but they were conceived on particular days at particular times. If you try to imagine how the author conceived of this wealth of individually structured episodes you will come to realize how much planning, interweaving [ch'uan-ch'a I?¾], and tailoring [ts'ai-chien Scli] was required.

40. If you read the Chin P'ing Mei as a description of actual events you will be deceived by it. You must read it as a work of literature in order not to be deceived by it.

41. If you read the Chin P'ing Mei as a work of literature by the author you will stiU be deceived by it. You must read it as though it were your own work in order not to be deceived by it.

42. Though you should certainly read it as though it were your own work it is even better to read it as a work that is still in its early planning stages. Only if you start out with the assumption that you will have to work out every detail for yourself in order to avoid being deceived wiU you avoid being deceived.

43. The prerequisites for a successful literary creation can be summed up in the two words emotion and reason [ch'ing-li]. The key to this long work of a hundred chapters is also only these two words, emotion and reason. If you can determine the particular mixture of emotion and reason in a character's heart you have captured the character. Though this character's speech may be mixed in with those of many others, whenever he opens his mouth, what he says will express his particular balance of emotion and reason. It is not that his emotion and reason are revealed only when he opens his mouth but that only after the author has determined his balance of emotion and reason is he able to open his mouth. Thus the process involved in depicting any number of characters is the same as that involved in depicting any one, and it is possible in this way to produce a work with the plenitude of this great hundred-chapter novel.

44. In the Chin P'ing Mei the description of seemingly unrelated events is often inserted [chia-hsu at points of high tension in the development of the plot. Thus, the episode in which Hsi-men Ch'ing marries Meng Yii-lou!58 is introduced fch'a into the narrative just before P'an Chin-lien is taken into his household.159 The marriage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, is inserted into the episode about his marriage to Meng Yii-lou.160 Wu Tien-en's loan from Hsi- men Ch'ing is inserted right after the birth of Kuan-ko.161 Ch'ang Shih-chieh comes to request a loan just at the point when Kuan-ko is about to die.162 The episode in which Yii-hsiao accepts P'an Chin-lien's three conditions comes at the time of Li P'ing-erh's death.163 The invitation to Grand Marshal Huang occurs in the middle of the arrangements for Li P'ing-erh's funeral.164 All of these are examples of deliberate retardation at points of high tension in the narrative ("pai-mang-chung ku tso hsiao- hsien chih pi" How could anyone but an author richly endowed with talent be capable of such effects? There are also cases like that in which Wu Sung demands to know Hsi-men Ch'ing's whereabouts from Manager Fu. During this point of such high tension, the information that the manager receives a salary of two taels of silver a month is slipped in.165 These are examples of the incidental use of a light touch [ch'ing-pi to bring out an essential truth [shen-li and do not belong under the heading of the technique [chang-fa discussed above.

45. One of the marvelous things about the Chin P'ing Mei is the expert use of the device of duplication [ fan-pi without being repeti- tive [fan For example, the author depicts an Ying Po-chiieh and then goes on to depict a Hsieh Hsi-ta but throughout the work Ying Po- chiieh remains Ying Po-chueh and Hsieh Hsi-ta remains Hsieh Hsi-ta. Each of them retains a distinct identity and mode of conversation so that there is never the slightest confusion between them. He depicts a P'an Chin-Hen and then goes on to depict a Li P'ing-erh. This could be described as repetitive, yet from first to last, whether they are to gether or apart, there is never the slightest confusion between them in their words or acts. He depicts a Wang Liu-erh and then insists upon going on to depict the wife of Pen the Fourth. He depicts a Li Kuei-chieh and then insists upon going on to depict a Wu Yin-erh and a Cheng Ai- yiieh. He depicts a Dame Wang and then insists upon going on to depict an Auntie Hsiieh, a Dame Feng, an Auntie Wen, and a Dame T'ao. He depicts a Nun Hsiieh and then insists upon going on to depict a Nun Wang and a Nun Liu. All of these are examples of the marvelous way in which the author purposely duplicates characters [t'e-t'e fan-shou ^f ¥f$\L Ψ] and yet succeeds in individualizing each character so that they all remain distinct.

46. In the Chin P'ing Mei Hsi-men Ch'ing is never drawn with cul tivated strokes [wen-pi UljiE], Wu Yiieh-niang is never drawn with ob vious strokes [hsien-pi gf |t], Meng Yü-lou is always drawn with attrac tive strokes [ch'iao-pi iiKt], P'an Chin-lien is never drawn with dull strokes [tun-pi I¾¾!:], Li P'ing-erh is never drawn with profound strokes [shen-pi 5¾¾], Ch'un-mei is always drawn with disdainful strokes [ao-pi fit I'], Ch'en Ching-chi is never drawn with appealing strokes [yiin-pi], Hsi-men Ta-chieh is never drawn with refined strokes [hsiu-pi 5I¾], Ying Po-chueh is never drawn with dull-witted strokes [tai-pi :¾¾], and Tai-an is never drawn with stupid strokes [ch'un-pi MM]- Thus, each of the characters is successfully individualised.

47. At the beginning [ch'i-t'ou |E||() of the Chin P'ing Mei the author introduces a man and a woman into his narrative only to let them go and then proceeds to do the same thing with another man and woman at the end [chieh-mo I¾¾]. Pu Chih-tao and Cho Tiu-erh are the characters he lets go at the beginning and Ch'u-yiinI66 and Li An are the characters he lets go at the end. Pu Chih-tao is let go at the beginning in order to create a vacancy in the brotherhood and thus leave room for his place to be filled by Hua Tzu-hsii. The author is unwilling simply to introduce Hua Tzu-hsii into his narrative directly [chih-ch'u fitti], nor does he wish to give his game away by describing only nine of the ten sworn brothers, thus leaving a vacancy which he will have to bring in Hua Tzu-hsii to fill. Therefore he introduces Pu Chih-tao only so that he can remove him at his conve nience and thereby create a vacancy in the brotherhood that will provide an opening for the introduction of Hua Tzu-hsii.167 Moreover, the introduction of Hua Tzu-hsii into the narrative provides a convenient occasion for the introduction of Li P'ing-erh at the same time.168 Other wise, if he had initially introduced Hua Tzu-hsii as one of the sworn brothers, it would have necessitated additional explanation when the time came to introduce Li P'ing-erh. Thus, although Pu Chih-tao is created for the purpose of providing a vacancy for Hua Tzu-hsii to fill, he also serves to provide an opening [hsieh-tzu W* Ψ] for the introduction of Li P'ing-erh. Since his only function is to provide an opening of this kind, what point would there be in making up a significant name for him? But since a name of some kind is required, why not simply call him Pu Chih- tao [puns with "do not know" ^FftIS]? Thus his name becomes Pu Chih-tao. As for Cho Tiu-erh, she too is let go in order to create a vacancy in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household for Meng Yii-lou to fill. Before marrying Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken Cho Tiu-erh into his house hold but after she has been replaced by Meng Yii-lou, Hsi-men Ch'ing forgets about her completely.169 How different this is from Hsi-men Ch'ing's response to the death of Li P'ing-erh. Day after day he keeps vigil by her coffin or has paper money burnt on her behalf. Her servant girls and the wet nurse keep vigil in her empty chambers!70 and she twice appears to Hsi-men Ch'ing in his dreams.171 Cho Tiu-erh, by contrast, is allowed to drop completely out!72 of Hsi-men Ch'ing's mind. This is why she is called Tiu-erh [puns with "one who gets dropped" SIS]. Thus the author lets these two characters go at the beginning of his work in order to make room for the introduction of other characters. What of the other characters the author introduces at the end of his work only to let go? Ch'u-yiin [Clouds of Ch'u] is introduced as a device to convey indirectly [ying-tzu jp {▪ ) the idea that the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing will disperse as readily as luminescent clouds at sun set.173 Though beauty may be inexhaustible, man's life is finite; when death comes to your door, though you should possess beauties such as Hsi Shih and Wang Ch'iang,174 what will they avail you? Thus the author introduces Ch'u-yiin only in order to reinforce the truths ex pressed in the prologue of his book. Li An is introduced for the same reason as Han Ai-chieh and like her is accorded the author's most favourable treatment [man-hsii chih pi]. He introduces this filial son, a man of rectitude and honour, to serve as a rock in midstream that is unmoved by the torrent [chung-liu ti-chu 43¾¾¾:)- Why is this? Of the hundreds of characters in this book, from the Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching at the top of the social scale to Hou Lin-erh and his ilk at the bottom, there is hardly a decent person to be found. Those who are not the sort who welcome their own defilement or voluntarily prostitute themselves are the kind who attach themselves to the powerful or toady to the rich. If there were no Li An, the sole example of a filial son, would this not be tantamount to the extinction of men of conscience? Observe how the author tells the tale of the mutual reliance of Li An and his mother to show him as a filial son who maintains his chastity as though it were jade and will let no injury befall the body that he has inherited from his parents.176 in contrast to the likes of Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi who are really inferior to pigs and dogs. Thus, in the last part [mo-chieh] of his narrative the author lets these two characters go but cannot do the same for the rest of his cast. In fact, he makes a special point of letting these [aforementioned] characters go in order to stimulate critical self-examination on the part of his readers.

48. If the author had chosen to describe Hua Tzu-hsu as one of the brotherhood often at the beginning of the book, why could he not have simply introduced Li P'ing-erh at the same time? Before the author took up his brush, his conception of Li P'ing-erh had already taken shape. Since his conception of Li P'ing-erh had already taken shape, her secret assignation and willing adultery with Hsi-men Ch'ing, her marriage to Chiang Chu-shan, and her subsequent marriage to Hsi-men Ch'ing had all been worked out in the author's mind before he thought about the problem of what name to give her husband. Since her husband is not required to do anything more than supply the function implied by that term, though his presence may be necessary, he scarcely seems to have any real existence; and so the author gives him the name Tzu-hsii (empty or unreal]. A vase [p'ing] exists to hold flowers [hua], so the author gives him the surname Hua. It occurred to the author, as he was beginning his task, that he should provide a formal biographical sketch [cheng-chuan IE fill of Hsi-men Ch'ing. If he did not introduce Li P'ing-erh in the course of his biog raphy [chuan flf ] of Hsi-men Ch'ing, how was he to work her case [kung- an £ sg J into the story? If he had chosen to deal with her separately, he could not have had Hsi-men Ch'ing say in the opening scene that his next-door neighbour is named Hua So-and-so and his wife's name is such and such.181 Her separate introduction at a different point would have been an intrusion for which there would have been no connecting threads to what went before ["wu t'ou-hsii chih pi" j&'MWi^iM] and thus would have been unacceptable. Suppose he had waited until after Pan Chin-lien had been taken into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household!82 to introduce Li P'ing-erh into his narrative? Other novels tend to narrate one incident after another, providing the necessary connecting threads [t'ou-hsii liH] for each incident at the time but the Chin P'ing Mei relies purely on the technique of Ssu-ma Ch'ien ["T'ai-shih-kung pi-fa"]. Now, among the writings of Ssu-ma Ch'ien that were designed to focus on a particular person how could any piece be considered worthy of him if it did not prefigure at the very beginning the pivot [shu-niu flsi 'iH ] on which events would turn, so that it would function like the collar of a coat or the calyx of a flower? Nowadays when people write a play they always introduce the roster of major characters in the first few scenes. How much the more might one expect this to be true of the Chin P'ing Mei that is one of the most extraordinary books in the world? Thus, the author could not begin a new section from scratch [ling- ch'u t'ou-hsii] to introduce Li P'ing-erh but instead took advan tage of the introduction of Hua Tzu-hsii into the brotherhood of ten to touch on Li P'ing-erh. Now, if Ying Po-chiieh and the other members of the group had not already been introduced as the boon compan ions of Hsi-men Ch'ing, what reason would there have been for an oath of brotherhood? If the author had introduced Hua Tzu-hsu as one of the original ten members of the brotherhood, then they would have been in constant contact with each other. In that case, in chapter i, when Hsi- men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chiieh meet, Hua Tzu-hsu would be familiar to both of them, and there would be no reason for Hsi-men Ch'ing to mention his wife, let alone the fact that they are next-door neighbours or that his wife is a fine person. Thus the author has chosen not to make Hua Tzu-hsu a member of the original brotherhood so that he can use this occasion to bring him into it and give Hsi-men Ch'ing a reason for mentioning the fact that they are next-door neighbours. By these means Li P'ing-erh is introduced, the fact of their being next-door neighbours is made clear, and the whole situation of Hua Tzu-hsu's household is vividly implied without being explicitly described in words [pu-yen chih piao]. This in turn has led the author to think of the death of Pu Chih-tao!85 as providing a reason for Hsi-men Ch'ing to think of asking Hua Tzu-hsii to join the brotherhood. The author achieves his effects with such supernatural skill ["shen- kung kuei-fu chih pi"] that the twists and turns [ch'ii-che] of the plot beguile the reader without permitting him to see where the golden needle has done its work ["chin-chen chih i tu"]. That is why I say that his mode of composition is purely that of Ssu-ma Ch'ien [Lung-men wen-tzu]. Whenever I concentrate my atten tion on this kind of writing, following its every twist and turn and exploring its structure [ch'i-chin], I feel just as though I were discovering the extraordinary sights of the five sacred mountains and the three islands of the immortals. I can never tire of pleasures such as these.

49. In the Chin P'ing Mei even the jokes and songs are all pertinent to the occasion and contribute to the desired effect. They may reveal some thing of the meaning of the chapter in which they occur, fill in [tsu ^] something from a previous chapter, or divulge [t'ou 3f ] something about the chapters to come. I will devote a separate comment [chu] to each of them as they occur.

50. There is no feature of the art of writing that is not illustrated in the Chin P'ing Mei. It would be impossible to describe them all ade quately at one time, so I will point them out in my comments at the beginning of the chapters in which they occur.

51. In the Chin P'ing Mei lewd language is used more often by Pan Chin-lien and Wang Liu-erh than by anyone else, with Li P'ing-erh running a poor third. Among the others, Wu Yueh-niang and Meng Yii-lou are each shown using it only once, and Ch'un-mei's practice in this respect is only hinted [tien-jan] at. Why is this? The only time Wu Yueh-niang is shown using lewd language is on the night before she sweeps snow to make tea. This scene is intended to show both Wu Yueh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing in an unfavourable light. The only time Meng Yii-lou is shown using lewd language is on the night when her bitterness culminates in an upset stomach. This scene is intended to indicate the injustice that Meng Yii-lou has to suffer and to show Hsi- men Ch'ing in an unfavourable light. It is not really the author's intent in these scenes to depict Wu Yueh-niang or Meng Yii-lou as lascivious. As for Ch'un-mei, the author wishes to save her for the task of illustrating the reversal of fortunes [yen-Hang fan-an], so he has to preserve her dignity and can only hint [ying-hsieh] at her sexual behaviour. The author has put into the mouths of P'an Chin-lien and Wang Liu-erh totally shameless and utterly unspeakable things, so intolerable that even Li Kuei-chieh and Cheng Ai-yiieh could never have brought themselves to say them. By so doing the author expresses his profound condemnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is really less than human, for when he is exposed to such bestiality he actually expresses a preference for it. It follows that when Wang Liu-erh and P'an Chin-lien both get a crack at him on the same day, it is the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing.188 This is the real point that the author wishes to make. As for Li P'ing-erh, she is capable of forbearance, yet she brings troubles on herself; she doesn't meddle in other peoples' affairs, yet she causes Hua Tzu-hsii to die of chagrin, invites her own seduction, and remarries without a qualm. Thus she is not really very different from P'an Chin-lien, and there is no reason why the author should not also exhibit her in an unfavourable Ught. But Li P'ing-erh is weak whereas P'an Chin-lien is ruthless, so the author has depicted her lewdness somewhat more favourably than P'an Chin-lien's. Moreover, Li P'ing-erh signs her own death warrant when she permits Hsi-men Ch'ing to try out his aphrodisiac on her while she is in her menstrual period.189 Thus the author emphasizes the point that when women are given to concupiscence, if they do not hurt others they will hurt themselves. Alas! It is a fearful thing indeed. As for the likes of Sung Hui-lien and Ju-i, they do not possess anything in the way of moral character that might inhibit the author from portraying them in an offensive light. As I have already pointed out (see item twenty-three above), the author is motivated to create Lady Lin of the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang by his desire to visit retribution [pao-ying #JS] upon the household in which Pan Chin- lien got her start in life, so there is no reason for him not to depict her in an offensive light.

52. The Chin P'ing Mei should not be read in a desultory fashion. If you read it that way you will only read the obscene passages. Only if you take several days and read it all the way through will you perceive the connecting nerves and arteries [kuan-t'ung ch'i-mai JtSSSR] that act like a single thread upon which the author has strung together his succession of rising and falling actions [ch'i-fu].

53. Anyone who says the Chin P'ing Mei is an obscene book has only taken the trouble to read the obscene passages. I read this book exactly as though it were a work by Ssu-ma Ch'ien [Shih-kung wen-tzu].

54. If the author of the Chin P'ing Mei were to have written another book about loyal ministers and filial sons, he would have been certain to produce an original work on these subjects that depicted its characters with uncanny fidelity to life [mo-shen hsiao-ying ¢¢¢^¾], capturing their very spirit [chui-hun ch'u-p'o]. How do I know this? I know it from his success in representing [mo-hsieh] adulterous men and lascivious women.

55. Nowadays, if a Buddhist monk reads the Chin P'ing Mei openly he is sure to be criticized, so he can only read it on the sly. People do not understand that only a true monk is fit to read the Chin P'ing Mei.

56. Nowadays, if a scholar reads the Chin P'ing Mei his parents and teachers are sure to forbid it, and they themselves do not dare to read it openly. People do not understand that only a true scholar is able to read the Chin P'ing Mei properly. Anyone who reads it on the sly is really reading an obscene book.

57. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei must have been an avatar of Sudhana!90 in order to be able to escape so dexterously from all his narrative problems and always find a happy solution. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine how he could have done it.

58. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei must have had the capacity to become a Bodhisattva in order to be able to achieve such extraordinary literary effects ["lin-chiao feng-tsui wen-tzu"}.

59. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei must have experienced danger, difficulty, poverty, and sorrow and must have been thoroughly acquainted with the ways of the world in order to be able to depict the inner spirit of his characters with such verisimilitude [mo-shen].

60. However, if the author had felt it necessary to have personally experienced everything he describes in order to produce this book, the Chin P'ing Mei could never have been written. Why is this? The various licentious women in the book engage in illicit relations with men in a variety of different ways. If the author had to have personally experienced all of these things in order to understand them, how could he have done it? Thus, it is apparent that there is nothing a genius [ti'ai-tzu ^f-] can not apprehend if he concentrates his mind upon it.
61. Once his concentration has enabled him to apprehend what he needs to know about a character, the author must be able to become that character himself [hsien-shen S#] before he can speak for him. Thus, he has actually become the various licentious women whom he describes, and he is able to expound his lesson through them.
62. The author succeeds in portraying each of the characters in his book with utter fidelity to human nature [jen-ch'ing A'fra ]· He transforms himself [hua-shen ft#] into a multitude of guises, representing all sorts of people in order to expound his lesson through them.
63. While portraying each of his characters with utter fidelity to human nature [jen-ch'ing AIFR)5 the author is also faithful in his portrayal of the way of Heaven [t'ien-tao ^Jl]. From ancient times it is in ways such as these that Heaven has punished the wicked, rewarded the good, and overthrown the powerful and unscrupulous. When we read this book, it seems as though there must have been a person with brush in hand inside the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing, across from the district yamen in Ch'ing-ho hsien, recording everything that happened, great and small, first and last, down to the very plates and bowls. It seems so real that we can hardly believe that the author took brush in hand, spread out a sheet of paper before him, and made it all up. That is why I say that the author's portrayal is faithful to the way of Heaven.
64. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points that are only sketched in outline [pai-miao ή JH]. The novice who can appreciate the points that are only sketched in outline will learn to write with unusual economy and skill.
65. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points where a particular narrative line is sloughed off [t'o-hsieh ch'u]· The novice who appreciates the points where a particular nar rative line is sloughed off will learn to be original in his handling of transitions [kuo-chieh wen-tzu].
66. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points where the author gets out of his difficulties [pi-nan ch'u]. The novice who appreciates the way in which he finds easy ways to get out of his difficulties ["pi-nan chiu-i ch'u" S H St Jj Jg] will learn to prefer the light touch [ch'ing-pi gui] to the heavy [chung-pi M.V-] and will learn how to make his writing deft and ingenious.
67. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points where the author handles a proliferation of events with apparent ease ["shou-hsien shih-mang ch'u"]- The novice who learns how to do this will be able to handle complicated passages [fan-yen wen-tzu].
68. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points where plot elements are intertwined [ch'uan-ch'a ch'u IPíífβ]· The novice who learns how to do this will be able to write ornate and dazzling passages.
69. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei one should pay attention to the points in the text where narrative sections come together [chieh-hsueh] where new sections begin [fa-mai], and where the episodes are linked or correlated [chao-ying MiM] with each other. The novice who learns how to do this will be able to appreciate the Tso-chuan t£ M [The Tso Commentary], the Kuo-yii Hfg [Conversations of the States], the Chuang Tzu ffi^·, the Li-sao MM [Encountering Sorrow], the histories, and the philosophers.
70. In reading the Chin P'ing Mei, one should pay attention to the points where the author takes special pains. Only if one understands why the author takes special pains at the points where he does, is one fit to read the Chin P'ing Mei or to say that he knows how to read literature.
71. When I was a child learning to read and write in school I once saw the teacher punish one of my fellow students while saying to him, "I've told you to study the text word by word, not swallow it whole." I was still very young at the time and on overhearing these words took them very much to heart. Thereafter, when reading a text I would hnger over each character as though it were a syllable from an aria in a K'un-ch'u % ft opera, drawing out its pronunciation and repeating it over and over again. I would not stop until I had made each word my own. I particu larly remember doing this with the phrase "to love antiquity and be dili gent in investigating it."191 No more than three days after I had begun to do this the teacher set us, as a topic for an examination essay, the hne "the superior man maintains his dignity and does not wrangle."192 I felt as I wrote that the task did not seem too hard. When my essay was completed the teacher was greatly surprised and thought I must have copied from someone else, for he had no other way to account for my rapid progress. I was unable to explain it myself. After this the teacher made a point of keeping an eye on me. When he saw that I sat with my head bent over the table, following the text with one hand as I read it out loud, one character at a time, he exclaimed in delight, "So you weren't deceiving me after all," and turning to the rest of the class admonished them to follow my example. Although I do not claim to have mastered anything yet, I am con vinced that in reading a book one should not try to digest it in large chunks at a time. This is true not only of works in the literary language but even of novels like the Chin P'ing Mei. If one trys to take in large chunks of it at a time it will seem as tasteless as chewing wax. The only thing one will be aware of is page after page of women's talk, and one will be unable to see it for the marvelous work of literature that it is. If one is not concerned with it as a marvelous work of literature but only anxious to read about the marvelous things it contains, one deserves only contempt.
72. Before reading the Chin P'ing Mei, one should sit in contempla tion for three months. Otherwise his vision may be so clouded that he will miss the point.
73. Lack of talent is due to carelessness, and carelessness is due to inattention. These two traits tend to reinforce each other. Not only will such a person be unable to write well himself but he will not even be able to recognize good writing when he sees it. Such a person should never be permitted to read the Chin P'ing Mei.
74. If a person who writes indifferently to begin with does not write better after reading the Chin P'ing Mei, he should burn his writing implements and take up the plow for his enjoyment. There is no longer any need for him to trouble himself with trying to write.
75. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei is certainly a genius [ts'ai-tzu ^fT] but his learning is that of a Bodhisattva, not that of a Confucian sage, for his message is that everything is empty [k'ung g?]. If he had taken the further step to nonemptiness he would have written a different book.
76. The Chin P'ing Mei concludes [chieh] with emptiness [k'ung] but if we look carefully we will see that it is not complete emptiness. This is apparent from the fact that the author brings his work to a conclusion [chieh |p] with the transfiguration of Hsiao-ko ^ If [filial son] that signifies the fact that filiality [hsiao] has the power to transform all evils.
77. The Chin P'ing Mei is characterized by an air of resentful indig nation but then its author is certainly a reincarnation of Ssu-ma Ch'ien [who was wrongfully castrated].
78. The Chin P'ing Mei is a book that is intended to correct people's faults, as can be seen from the fact that it concludes [chieh fg] with the example of Han Ai-chieh. The pun in her name expresses the idea of "seeking at 3t [moxa] that is three years old in order to cure an illness that has lasted seven years."194 [That is to say, though there may be a cure for your illness, you won't be able to find it when you need it unless you have prepared it in advance.]
79. The Chin P'ing Mei is the work of a person who has achieved great enlightenment. That is why he describes all the failings of Buddhist monks and nuns. Only by so doing could he reveal himself to be a real Bodhisattva or truly enlightened.
80. If the author of the Chin P'ing Mei had not chosen to write about the mundane affairs of the vulgar world he could certainly have written works as elegant and romantic as the Hsi-hsiang chi jSffIffi [Romance of the Western Chamber] and its like.
81. People who are unable to write themselves ought never to be permitted to read the Chin P'ing Mei or it may affect them just the way vulgar people say it will. For people who are writers themselves, reading the Chin P'ing Mei is just like reading the Shih-chi.
82. The Chin P'ing Mei is a work that women should never be per mitted to see. Nowadays there are many men who read passages out loud to their wives or concubines while taking their pleasure with them inside the bed curtains. They do not realize that, even among men, there are few who recognize the force of exhortation and admonition or respond appropriately to what they read. How many women are there who are capable of responding appropriately to what they read? What would be the consequences if they were to imitate, however slightly, the things they read about? Its literary style and technique [wen-fa :¾¾, pi-fa ^¾] are not such as could or should be studied by women. If they are well educated enough to do so they should be encouraged to read the Tso-chuan, the Kuo-yii, the Shih-ching fifgi [Classic of Poetry], and other classics and histories. But if the Chin P'ing Mei is a book that ought not to be read, why should I write a commentary [p'i #fc] on it and thus do an injury to the world? Such a question does not take into account the fact that I really believe the Chin P'ing Mei to be a literary masterpiece that cannot be allowed to go unread but that, at the same time, it is a book that is unfit for the eyes of women. It is the fear that some may fail to heed this admonition and then hold the Chin P'ing Mei to blame for the conse quences that has led me to raise this issue here, for I am unwilling to acknowledge that it is the book itself that is at fault. Now among those men who have some knowledge of how to read a book, who does not read the Chin P'ing MeP. Those who read it and find it enjoyable are a source of anxiety to the Chin P'ing Mei; anxiety lest they not know why it should be enjoyed and only enjoy it for its licentiousness. Where this is the case, the Chin P'ing Mei may do the reader an injury. But, in fact, it is not the Chin P'ing Mei that injures him but he who injures himself. Those who read it and find it objection able are a source of sorrow to the Chin P'ing Mei, sorrow over the fact that although it actually contains nothing objectionable, they insist on objecting to its descriptions of licentiousness. Where this is the case, the reader is doing the Chin P'ing Mei an injury. But, in fact, it is not the reader who does the injury nor the Chin P'ing Mei itself but Hsi-men Ch'ing who does it. What does it mean to say that the Chin P'ing Mei does the reader an injury? People who are not good readers are careless and superficial. If you give them the classics and histories to read, they will not be able to get all the way through them. By contrast, they may enjoy reading the Chin P'ing Mei but will dislike reading the second half [hsia-pan F ^ ] of the book. In such a case, the Chin P'ing Mei may be thought to do the reader an injury. What does it mean to say that the reader injures himself? Now, if one person explains the meaning of theft to another, so that he will know what to guard himself against but the other person takes advantage of the information to acquire the art of thievery, it is not the fault of the original informant. The one who heard the explanation of theft was already a thief by nature. In like manner, the Chin P'ing Mei ought not to be held responsible for the responses of its superficial readers. What does it mean to say that the reader does the Chin P'ing Mei an injury? The author of the Chin P'ing Mei employed all the power, wisdom, and intelligence at his disposal to depict his adulterous men and lascivious women, corrupt officials and wicked servants, pimps and whores. He drained himself mentally and physically in order to create this literary masterpiece. Now, if benighted readers should succeed in con vincing the rest of society that this literary masterpiece should be re garded as an obscene book and kept out of sight, then the labours of the author who drained himself mentally and physically to create this masterpiece not only for his own benefit but also for that of the gifted writers of all time, would be undone by vulgar men and would prove to have been expended in vain. This is what is meant by saying that the reader does the Chin P'ing Mei an injury. What does it mean to say that it is Hsi-men Ch'ing who does the Chin P'ing Mei an injury? If the reader would not read the book as an account of Hsi-men Ch'ing's affairs but employ his own literary imagi nation in the attempt to discover retroactively the secrets of the author's marvelous effects, it would be more valuable to him than reading the Shih-chi in its entirety. But, unfortunately, no sooner does he begin to read than he becomes absorbed in what Hsi-men Ch'ing is doing and becomes oblivious to the pains expended on the composition by the author. That is why I say that Hsi-men Ch'ing does the Chin P'ing Mei an injury. Nevertheless, readers continue, as before, to misread it as the Chin P'ing Mei of Hsi-men Ch'ing, rather than appreciating it as the work of its author. I have seen someone's comment on the Chin P'ing Mei which states that it is a voluminous daily record of the events in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.195 This is so benighted as to be laughable. On what day of what month in what year did he see the author employed in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing, engaged in writing a daily record of the events there? But there is even someone who, when he reaches the point where Ch'en Ching-chi seduces P'an Chin-lien and gets Ch'un-mei into the bargain,196 waxes indignant on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf over the fact that Ch'en Ching-chi should have been able to steal these two pearls. This pedant does not realize that he has misread the situation again. P'an Chin-hen did not originally belong to Hsi-men Ch'ing, neither did the author create Ch'un-mei so that she might be a permanent possession of his. This episode is deftly drawn with the author's subtle brush as part of his marvelous design. What need is there for this pedant to vent his blind indignation from the sidelines? Thus, the readers of the Chin P'ing Mei are many but those who do not read it well are also many. Although I would not be so presump tuous as to say that I have succeeded in getting to the bottom of the author's mind, I have felt compelled to write this commentary [p'i Jtt], despite my own inadequacies, by the desire to defend him against all the undeserved calumnies that have been heaped upon him. I would also like to be able to open the drowsy eyes of aspiring writers to the author's achievement while at the same time making some small contribution to the rules of literary composition ["wen-chia chih fa-lii" Sl^ift^]. Who can say that this is not worthwhile?
83. The Chin P'ing Mei consists of two halves [pan-chieh ^¾]. The first half [shangpan-chieh _h^|fe] is "hot" [je *] and the second half [hsia pan-chieh T^lfe] is "cold" [leng J^] but in the first half there is "cold" in the "heat" and in the second half there is "heat" in the "cold."
84. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei, in the course of describing the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing, also describes quite a few other house holds, such as those of Wu Ta, Hua Tzu-hsii, Ch'iao Hung, Ch'en Hung, Wu K'ai [Wu Yiieh-niang's elder brother], Chang Ta-hu, Impe rial Commissioner Wang, Ying Po-chiieh, Chou Hsiu, and Hsia Yen- ling. This list does not include the household of Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital, or those of Hsi-men Ch'ing's employees, or the relatives by marriage with whom Hsi-men Ch'ing is not on intimate terms. These households alone would account for most of the important officials and prominent families in Ch'ing-ho hsien. Thus, through the description of one man the author has described an entire district. Alas! "Such a chief criminal is greatly to be abhorred."197 I have not even taken into account the households that suffer complete ruination or gross abuse at Hsi-men Ch'ing's hands. How detestable! How detestable!
85. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei depicts Hsi-men Ch'ing as being without a single relative. He has no parents alive in the generation above his, no children or grandchildren in the generation below his, and no siblings in his own generation. Luckily for him, Wu Yueh-niang does not insist upon her prerogatives as his legitimate second wife. If she had persisted in giving him the silent treatment on P'an Chin-lien's account,198 what pleasure could Hsi-men Ch'ing have found in life? Yet even with this reprieve he does not correct his faults or engage in self- cultivation but abandons himself to evil without compunction. It is no wonder that he should go to his death unrepentant.
86. All the relatives of Hsi-men Ch'ing described in the book are false relatives. Kinsman Ch'iao [Ch'iao Hung] is a false kinsman. Kinsman Chai [Chai Ch'ien] is an even falser kinsman. Whose paternal aunt is Aunt Yang? She is a false paternal aunt. Ying Po-chiieh is a false brother. Hsieh Hsi-ta is a false friend. As for the Hua brothers [siblings of Hua Tzu-hsii], they are even more laughable. This is really carrying falseness to the point where it becomes hard to comprehend. Ch'en Ching-chi twice wears mourning,199 but he is a false filial son. As for the brothers- in-law Shen [husband of Wu Yiieh-niang's eldest sister] and Han [hus band of Meng Yii-lou's eldest sister], we hear nothing of their wives, so they are also false brothers-in-law. The only relatives Hsi-men Ch'ing has are Wu the First [Wu K'ai] and Wu the Second [Wu Yiieh-niang's second brother], and the latter is a very shadowy figure. Wu the First is not a bad sort, and that is why in the end he helps Wu Yiieh-niang out on a number of occasions.200 Hsi-men Ch'ing does not have a single relative from his own family. The retribution [pao-ying #(fi] meted out by Heaven is cruel enough but the author's hatred for him is also virulent. How is it that the people of this day who have a full comple ment of relatives treat them so coldly and only wish they could find a way of getting rid of them? What sort of attitude is that?
87. Why does the author of the Chin P'ing Mei feel it necessary to describe Hsi-men Ch'ing as being alone in the world without a single relative? Only by so doing can be bring out the laughableness of his "heat" [je *] at the beginning and the completeness of his "cold" [leng ^] at the end, a cold that can never become warm again.
88. Although the author's allegorical purpose [yii-yen ^Hli] is served by making the fate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's family in Ch'ing-ho hsien so utterly "cold" [leng (¾] that not a single person is left to perpetuate it, it is also his hatred for such people that causes him to make sure that there can never be so much as the hope of a rekindled ember. Indeed, a writer, too, can be ruthless!
89. In the Chin P'ing Mei there is a Li An who is a filial son,202 a Wang Hsiian who is a charitable man,203 an An-t'ung who is a faithful servant,204 a Huang Mei who is a generous friend,205 a Tseng Hsiao-hsii who is a loyal official,206 and a Wu Sung who is both a hero and a devoted brother.207 Who can say that in this novel's world of lust and desire the will of Heaven and the virtue of the people have been com pletely obliterated?
90. Although there are numerous good characters in the Chin P'ing Mei, all of them are men. There is not a single good woman. If we count them off, the only one who remains faithful to a single mate is Wu Yiieh-niang. But she does not understand that the role of a wife is to govern her household with propriety and that she herself is responsible for much of the trouble that occurs. Han Ai-chieh's final fidelity to the memory of Ch'en Ching-chi is certainly commendable but the relation ship to which she shows such fidelity is not itself a proper one, and her earlier life is anything but blameless.208 As for Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, her mother takes her away,209 and since the author does not tell us what becomes of her, we cannot be sure how she turns out. Egregious, indeed, is the yin H nature of women. Although it can scarcely be said that there are no examples of chastity among them, yet they find it all too easy to abandon it. Everything depends on the sort of family instruction each woman receives. Only one who recognizes this can take on the fearful responsibility of setting a proper example for his womenfolk. This is a matter in which the head of a family cannot be too careful.
91. In the Chin P'ing Mei, there are two Taoist masters [Wu Shen- hsien210 and Huang Chen-jen211] and a living Buddha [P'u-ching] and yet they are unable to undo the damage done by a single profane monk. Who is this profane monk? The one who gives Hsi-men Ch'ing the aphrodisiac.
92. Since it is Hsi-men Ch'ing who provides the poison that kills Wu Ta,214 someone is bound to appear with the poison that proves to be Hsi-men Ch'ing's undoing.215 How can an immortal [Wu Shen-hsien], a Taoist master [Huang Chen-jen], or a living Buddha [P'u-ching] be of any avail against the will of Heaven?
93. The Chin P'ing Mei should not be read inattentively. If the reader allows his attention to wander he will go astray.
94. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should keep a spittoon handy in order to have something to bang on.
95. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should keep a sword ready to hand so that he can hack about him to relieve his indignation.
96. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should hang a bright mirror [ching it] in front of himself so that he can see himself fully revealed.
97. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should keep a good wine by his side so that he can drink lustily in order to dispel the reek of worldliness.
98. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should burn fine incense on his desk in order to express his gratitude to the author for creating this literary masterpiece, in all its intricacy [ch'ii-ch'ii che-che ft ft iff Jf ], for his enjoyment.
99. The reader of the Chin P'ing Mei should keep fragrant tea on his table as an offering of thanks to the author for his pains.
100. The Chin P'ing Mei is a clear example of what the Zen school calls exercising one's powers after having attained perfect mastery. In my commentary [p'i #t] on the Chin P'ing Mei I call attention to the places where the author's perfect mastery is evident.
101. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei did not know that he had achieved any such thing as perfect mastery. In my commentary [p'i #t] I also call attention to the places where he did not know what perfect mastery he had achieved.
102. The Chin P'ing Mei begins [ch'i |E] and concludes [chieh £g] with "emptiness" [k'ung 5].216 In my commentary [p'i $t] I do no more than call attention to this fact. I would certainly not presume to use the word "emptiness" to denigrate the Confucian sages.
103. The author of the Chin P'ing Mei is faithful in every particular to human nature [jen-ch'ing Atra] and the principles of Heaven [t'ien-li ^I]. This shows that he has truly attained complete enlightenment, and in this he is not empty [k'ung].
104. The Chin P'ing Mei is a work of enormous scale and yet it required the most meticulous thought to produce.
105. The Chin P'ing Mei is a cautionary work [ch'eng-jen ti shu f8EA 0¾¾] that may be said to be admonitory in intent. Nevertheless, it has also been described as a book that immerses its reader in the ways of the world [ju-shih ⅄ Ur]. But one could also say that it is a book that enables its reader to escape from the ways of the world [ch'u-shih].
106. The three characters of the title Chin P'ing Mei [literally, "plum blossoms in a golden vase"] constitute a metaphor for the author's ac complishment. Although this book embodies so many of the beauties of spring, every blossom and every petal of which cost the author the creative powers of spring [ch'un-kung] itself to evoke, these beauties should be placed in a golden vase where they can diffuse their fragrance in a cultivated environment and adorn the desks of men of literary talent for all time. They must never be allowed to become the playthings of the rustic or the vulgar. Indeed, plum blossoms in a golden vase depend for their effect on the ability of human effort to enhance the handiwork of Heaven [t'ien-kung ^ I]. In like manner, the literary quality of this book is such that it seems, in passage after passage, to have stolen the creative powers of nature [hua-kung] itself.
107. This book was written as a continuation [chi fg] of the Sha-kou chi [The Slaying of the Dog; a famous play on the theme of brotherly lovej.217 In place after place it alludes [ying-hsieh SPII] to the relationship between brothers. Even Ho the Ninth has a younger brother, Ho the Tenth;218 Yang the First has a younger brother, Yang the Second; Chou Hsiu has a younger brother, Chou Hsuan;220 and Han Tao-kuo has a younger brother, Han the Second.221 As might be expected, it is only Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi who do not have any brothers.
108. The story begins [ch'i] with Meng Yu-lou playing the guitar [t'an-yuan, puns with t'an-yuan, to sigh with resentment] and concludes [chieh] with Han Ai-chieh carrying her guitar [pao-yuan, puns with pao-yuan to harbour resentment]. This is because the author had a bellyful of outraged tears but no place to shed them. Therefore, he created the Chin P'ing Mei as an outlet for his tears.

## PREFACE

*The Plum in the Golden Vase* is an obscene book. In praising it as highly as he did, Yüan Hung-tao was merely giving indirect expression to his own discontent, not bestowing his approbation on the *Plum in the Golden Vase*. Nevertheless, the author did have intentions of his own that were admonitory rather than hortatory. For example, many women play a role in the story but the fact that the author chose to emphasize only the names of Pan Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Ch'un-mei by including them in his title is an instance of the type of historiography exemplified by the *Tao-wu* of the State of Ch'u. Thus, Chin-lien dies for her adultery, P'ing-erh dies for her burden of sins, and Ch'un-mei dies for her licentiousness, each of them coming to a more horrendous end than any of the other women. The author has availed himself of Hsi-men Ch'ing to depict the great villains of the world. He has availed himself of Ying Po-chüeh to depict the petty clowns [3] of the world. He has availed himself of all these wanton women to depict the female clowns and villains of the world. So effective is his delineation that we cannot but break into a sweat as we read. Thus, his intentions are admonitory rather than hortatory. I have remarked, "He who reads the *Chin P'ing Mei* and responds with a feeling of compassion's a Bodhisattva; apprehension's a superior man; enjoyment's a petty person; and emulation's no better than a beast."

My friend Ch'u Hsiao-hsiu once accompanied a young man to a banquet at which live entertainment was provided. When the point came in the play at which the Hegemonic-King feasted at night the young man drooled with admiration, saying, "How can the life of a real man be anything but this?"

"The fact's," responded Hsiao-hsiu, "that it's only by way of contrast with the denouement at Wu-chiang that the dramatist's inserted this scene." Those present who overheard this remark sighed at the prescience of his comment. Only those who grasp the significance of this statement should be permitted to read the *Chin P'ing Mei*. Otherwise, Yuan Hung-Tao may be accused of having been a flagrant instigator of venery. The people of this world must be exhorted not to follow in the footsteps of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

*Casually indited en route to Su-chou by the Pearl-juggler of Eastern Wu in the last month of winter (28 December to 25 January), 1617–18*

## THE *TZ'U-HUA*

I venture to observe that in writing the story of the plum in the golden vase the Scoffing Scholar of Lanling has focused his attention on the manners of the age, about which he has something significant to say. Of the 7 feelings natural to humankind (joy, anger, sadness/melancholy, fear, love, disliking, and liking), melancholy is the most intractable. For such men of superior wisdom as may occasionally appear in the natural course of evolution, the fogs and ice that melancholy engenders disperse and splinter of their own accord, so there is no need to speak of such as these. Even those of lesser endowment know how to dispel melancholy with the aid of reason so that it may be prevented from encumbering them. Among the many who fall short of this however, have been unable to achieve enlightenment in their hearts, and do not have access to the riches of the classic tradition to alleviate their melancholy, those who escape its infection are few. It is in consideration of this fact that my friend, the Scoffing Scholar has poured the accumulated wisdom of a lifetime into the composition of this work, consisting of 100 chapters in all. Its striking rhetoric that minced and roasted for every mouth appeals to every taste is designed to illuminate the cardinal human relationships, discourage sexual promiscuity, distinguish between the pure and the impure, edify both the good and the un-good, and expound the secrets of flourishing and decay, failure and success through the inexorable working of karmic cause and effect in such a way that they lie utterly revealed before the

reader's eyes. From its beginning to its end the strands of the plot are as intricately articulated as the conduits of the circulatory system and are like myriad skeins of silk that flutter in the wind without ever becoming entangled. So enticingly are these effects accomplished that the reader may perhaps be beguiled into forgetting his melancholy with a smile. It is scarcely to be denied that in this work, the language encroaches on the vulgar and the atmosphere is redolent of rouge and powder. But I would assert that such allegations miss the point. The first poem in the book of poems) has been characterised by Confucius as expressing "Pleasure that does not extend to wantonness and sorrow that does not lead to injury. Wealth and distinction are things that man desires" but few are able to attain them without resort to wantonness. Sorrow and resentment are sentiments that man dislikes but few are able to experience them without injury to themselves. I have surveyed such productions of fabulists of earlier times as Lu Ching-hui's New wick-trimming tales, Yüan Chen's *Ying-ying*; Chao Pi's Emulative frowns collection, Luo Guanzhong's Outlaws of the Marsh, Ch'in Chün's A pleasing tale of passion, Lu Mei-hu's Elegant vignettes of spring yearning, and Chou Li's Pure conversations by candlelight) as well as such later works as the story of Lord As You Like It and the tale of Chang Yü-hu. Their diction is so demanding that readers are often unable to enjoy them and discard them before reaching the end. As for this story, although it may be couched in the everyday language of the marketplace or the idle chatter of the boudoir, even a three-foot-tall lad can derive as much pleasure from it as he would if he were enabled to suck the nectar of Heaven or pluck the tusk of leviathan, [19]so easy is it for him to understand. Although it may not be the equal of the works of former days, its purport and its rhetoric are outstanding enough to make it worthy of consideration. In addition, with regard to the moral reformation of the age, the reproof of vice and encouragement of virtue, the purification of the mind and cleansing of the heart, [20]it cannot fail to make a small contribution.[21] As for those events that take place in the bedchamber, everyone feels attracted to them, on the one hand, and repulsed by them, on the other. Of those who are not sages or worthies like Yao and Shun, [22]there are few who escape entanglement. It is on this account that even the best of those who have attained wealth and distinction allow their hearts to be swayed and their intentions to be deflected. Behold: how secluded are the high halls and spacious structures,[23] the cloudy windows and misty chambers;[24] how magnificent are the golden screens and embroidered bedding; how enticing are the clouds of hair tumbling in disarray,[25] the creamy texture of swelling breasts; how assiduous are the cavorting of the cock phoenix and his mates; how extravagant are the brocade garments and the rare repasts; [26] how devoted are the women of beauty and men of talent[27] as they descant upon the breeze and apostrophize the moon; how abandoned are the fragrant tongues as the jadelike drops of saliva commingle; how reckless are the pair of jade wrists, tugging and re-tugging at the ropes, and the pair of golden lotuses, tossing and retossing on the swing. [29]Surely this is happiness. Yet, when joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow.[30] Occasions for separation will occur, bringing haggard countenances in their wake, for this is inevitable. The need to "Pluck a sprig of plum blossoms to entrust to a courier,"[31] or resort to a square of silk to be conveyed by a fish, [32]cannot then be avoided.

A stranger came from far away
And gave me a pair of carp.
I summoned my son to cook the carp
In which there was a letter on a square of silk.

Calamitous missteps and disruptive dislocations[33] will become inescapable. Sacrifice of life to blade and sword can no longer be prevented. For in the world of light there is the imperial law, in the world of darkness there are ghosts and spirits, [34] that cannot be evaded.[35] And as for the propositions that if you defile the wife and children of another your own wife and children will be defiled,[36] or that calamity is the result of accumulated misdeeds and good fortune the reward of virtue,[37] they may all be subsumed under the rubric of the workings of the cycle of retribution. Thus, "Heaven has its spring, summer, autumn, and winter," [38] just as "Man has his sorrows and joys, partings and reunions." [39] There is no reason to be surprised that this is so. As for those who act in accord with Heaven's seasons, in the long term their descendants will continue to prosper, and in the short term they will serenely enjoy their allotted days. As for those who act in defiance of Heaven's seasons, they will sacrifice life and reputation, for calamity will strike before they can turn on their heels. [40] Since no man in this world can escape the periodic revolutions of the times, [41] those who remain unscathed by cruel fate and untainted by disgrace are fortunate indeed. That is why I have observed that the Scoffing Scholar in writing this story has something significant to say.

Written by the Master of Delight in his studio in Bright Worthy Village

## COLOPHON

*The story of the Plum in the Golden Vase* is a fable created by a prominent figure of the Chia-ching reign period[1] whose satirical shafts were directed at contemporary targets. But is not the explicitness with which he exposes the uglier aspects of human life also consistent with the purpose of our former teacher, Confucius, in not deleting the airs of Cheng and Wei from the *Book of Poems*? The way that, in incident after incident, he has taken pains to sow the seeds of karmic cause and effect shows that the author was also a man of great compassion. Those who help to disseminate this book in the future will earn immeasurable merit. The ignorant go so far as to regard this as an obscene book. In so doing not only do they fail to comprehend the author's purpose but they also unjustly repudiate the intentions of those who would disseminate it. It is the purpose of this colophon to make this clear.

*Written by Nien-kung*

## 4 STANZAS TO THE POEM *BURNING INCENSE*

*1*
Gardens of Paradise, Isles of the Blest,
The storied towers of Golden Valley,
Are scarcely equal to a thatched cottage for pure seclusion.
Where wildflowers embroider the ground,
Is that not also elegant?
Appropriate to spring,
Appropriate to summer,
Appropriate to autumn.
*Wine is mature, ready for straining,*
Guests arrive, fit for retaining.
Here is no glory, here no disgrace, here no sorrow.
Step back and relax.
What reason for that?
Only, when tired to sleep,
When thirsty to drink,
When drunk to sing.
*2*
A short angled wall,
Low roughhewn windows,
A tiny pond, no bigger than a pimple.
Amid serried peaks,
By green waters,
There is a little wind,
There is a little moonlight,
There is a little coolness.
*Life's ordinary needs fulfilled,*
By bamboo table, on rattan couch,
Look to what lies before the eyes, the water's hue, and the mountain's light.
If guests appear and there's no wine,
What's wrong with plain conversation?
Just, carefully brew the tea,
Gently warm the cup,
Fastidiously pour the water.
*3*
Situated amid water and bamboo,
I love my cottage.
Rocks lie clear beneath the stream like randomly placed steps.
The design of my retreat is personal,
Along lines delicately wrought.
It is secluded,
It is elegant,
It is comfortable.
*At ease, without restraint,*
What is this like?
Leaning on the railing, I gaze into the water and watch the fish.
From breeze and blossoms, snow and moonlight,
I have wrested the freedom,
To burn some incense,
Make some comments,
Read some books.
*4*
Sweep away the dust,
Conserve the moss,
Before the door, let the red leaves cover the steps.
The scene might be depicted in a painting,
But that it still continues to surprise,
With only a few boles of pine,
Few stalks of bamboo,
Few sprigs of plum.
*Flowers and trees are so cultivated,*
That they come into bloom one after another.
As for the events of the morrow, leave them to Heaven.
Let wealth and distinction,
Come when they will.
I'll simply go where I please,
Abide by my lot,
Unbutton my collar.

## STANZAS ON THE 4 VICES TO THE POEM *PARTRIDGE SKY*

*DRUNKENNESS*
Wine depletes the spiritual resources and destroys the home;
It causes speech to become incoherent, makes conduct riotous.
Estrangement from family, loss of friends, derive there-from;
Deeds of injustice and ingratitude are all its doing.
*One ought not to imbibe,*
From the flowing cup.
If you are able to obey this injunction, you cannot go wrong.
The foundering of all your undertakings may be traced to this.
From now on, when you entertain guests, serve them tea.
*LUST*
Do not become enamored of glossy black hair and beautiful complexions;
Cease to hanker after crimson powder and halcyon-feathered ornaments.
What ravages man's body and shortens his life are those bewitching figures;
Beauties capable of toppling kingdoms and cities are more alluring still.
*Be not beguiled,*
Husband your cinnabar fields (regions of vital heat).
Those who are able to diminish their desires live longer years.
From this time on, abandon all thought of casual amours;
Within paper curtains decorated with plum blossoms sleep by yourself.
*AVARICE*

Money and silk, gold and pearls, may pile up in your coffers;
But, unless they are gotten legitimately, forgo their greedy acquisition.
Family and friends, honesty and integrity, are often forfeited for gain;
Even the feelings that bind father and son are sometimes sacrificed for profit.
*Pull back your hand,*
Restrain yourself,
Lest body and mind be fraught with care, both day and night.
Your descendants, of course, will have the fortunes that befit them;
On their behalf, you can spare yourself anticipatory worry.
*ANGER*
Do not resort to violence or endeavour to show off your prowess;
By brandishing fists, rolling up sleeves, or displaying your spirit.
Once you let the flames of your temper escape your control;
You will subsequently stew with anxiety at the calamitous results.
*Don't go overboard,*
Avoid catastrophe;
Be advised, the best policy is to be tolerant in all things.
When it is appropriate to let things go, you should let them go;
When you can make allowances for people, you should make allowances.

When wealth has taken wing, the streets seem desolate.
The strains of flute and stringed zither are heard no more.
The brave long sword has lost its terror; its splendour is tarnished.
The precious lute is broken, faded its golden star.
The marble stairs are deserted; only the autumn dew visits them now.
The moon shines lonely where once dancing feet and merry songs were.
The dancers are departed: the singers have gone elsewhere.
They return no more.
Today they are but ashes in the Western Tombs.
Beautiful is this maiden; her tender form gives promise of sweet womanhood,
But a two-edged sword lurks between her thighs, whereby destruction comes to foolish men.
No head falls to that sword: its work is done in secret,
Yet it drains the very marrow from men's bones.

This poem was written by one Lü Yan [Lü Dongbin], an immortal whose name in religion was Master Chunyang. He lived in the dynasty of Tang and spent his days in the pursuit of virtue and the mortification of the flesh. So he attained to paradise, leaving this mortal world, and there was given to him a seat in the Purple Palace. The gift of immortality was bestowed upon him, and he was made the Governor of the Eight Caverns that are above, whence he brings succour to them in trouble and adversity. It seems, unfortunately, too true that they who live in this world can never wholly free themselves from their bondage to the Seven Feelings and the Six Desires. There is no escape from the fatal circle of Wine and Women, Wealth and Rage. Sooner or later the end comes to every man, and he must give up his hold upon all of these, for, after death, they will avail him nothing. Experience would seem to show that of these four evils, women and wealth most surely bring disaster. Let us for a moment consider the case of one who falls upon evil times, so that he finds himself in sore need, suffering misfortunes whereof he never dreamed. At night he searches diligently for a grain of rice, and finds the morrow must be foodless. In the morning he rises and looks around the kitchen but cannot discover even the makings of a fire. His family is hungry and cold; his wife and children are starving, and he knows not where to turn for food. Where shall he find the money to buy wine? Worse even than this, his relatives and friends turn aside their eyes, and show him nothing but coldness and contempt. There may have been a time when the poor wretch had ambitions; now they must perish, for he is in no position to enter into rivalry with others. Then there is the man who squanders his wealth to purchase the delights of love. It matters not how great that wealth may be, in one adventure he may cast away ten thousand golden pieces. Should he crave for wine, he will find it precious indeed, precious as molten jade, for to the outpouring of amber cups there is no end. Should it be rank he seeks, his wealth may conjure up spirits; a gesture may bring servants running to serve him, and a nod may summon his attendants. Men will flock to his presence and press forward to curry favour with him. They will hasten to abase themselves before his majesty, even to lick his sores and set their tongues where tongue should not be set. Only so long as he maintains his power will this continue: when once his influence is gone, they will shrug their shoulders and wait on him no more. No trial is harder to bear than this change from hot to cold. Are not both the upstart and they who fawn upon him sufferers from the plague of wealth? Then there is the danger that is to be had from women. Look around the world, I pray you. Liuxia Hui, though a fair lady seated herself upon his knee, remained unmoved. Where in these days shall we find conduct such as his? And he of Lu, who when a maid would have come to him, made fast his door and would not let her enter; where shall we find one like him? Or to Guan Yunchang who, with a lighted candle, kept chaste watch until the dawn? How many such heroes can history make known to us? What shall we say of those who, though they have four wives already, daily go forth to spend their substance on unlawful loves, unceasingly craving amorous delights? For the moment we will leave them, for there is that kind of lustful beast who cannot see a woman of even ordinary comeliness, without devising a hundred or a thousand plots to seduce her. He ensnares the woman, craving the pleasure of a moment, and for this neglects the affection of his friends, and takes no heed for the governance of his own household. To attain this paltry end, he pours forth countless wealth and casts immeasurable treasure to the dogs. His wantonness exceeds all bounds, and then come disputes, bloodshed, and all manner of evil. He is doomed. His wife and children are forever ruined and his business brought to the dust. Such a man was Shi Jilun who, for love of his mistress Lu Zhu, died wretchedly in prison, though, at one time, the masses of his wealth were high enough to touch the skies. Another was Bawang [Xiang Yu] of Chu, whose heroism might have uprooted mountains. Because of his madness for Yu Ji [Concubine Yu], his head hung in Gaixia. The gate of Love may be the gate of Life but just as surely is it the gate of Death. Time and time again, our common sense reminds us of this fact; and yet our hearts still carry us away. So do men fall victims to the plague of love. It is easy to talk thus of women and of wealth, yet there is none who is forever free of these plagues. If, in the entire world, there be one who appreciates the truth, he will tell us that all our piles of gold and silver, all the jade we treasure, can never follow us beyond the grave. They are but refuse, no more worth than dust and slime. Our wealth may be so great that nothing can contain it, our rice so plentiful that it may rot because we cannot consume it: to our dead bodies it will be of no avail; all will become corruption and decay. Our lofty palaces and spacious halls will bring no joy to us when we are in the grave. Our silken gowns and our embroidered skirts, our robes of fur and wraps of sable, what are they but worthless rags, for all the pride our bones will take in them? Those charming dainty maidens who serve our lusts so well, whose skill in self-adornment is so exquisite: when once the veil is torn aside, what shall we find in them but falseness? Are they not like a general who, when the signal is given for battle, can only manifest his valour by the noise he makes? Those scarlet lips, those white and glistening teeth, that flashing of eyes and dallying with the sleeve: if true understanding were vouchsafed us, we should know them for the loathsome grimaces of the powers of Hell within the palace of the Prince of Hades. The silken hose, the tiny feet are like the pick and shovel that dig our graves. Soft dalliance upon the pillow, the sport of love upon the bed, are but the forerunners of an eternity wherein, within the Fifth Abode of Hades, we shall be boiled in boiling oil. Well does the *Diamond Sutra* speak of this foolish life "as dream and as illusion; as lightning and as dew." For though at the end of life all things are vain, during life men cannot bear the loss even of a trifle. We may be so strong that, unaided, we can lift a cauldron or tow a ship but, when the end draws near, our bones will lose their strength and our sinews their power. Though our wealth may give us mountains of bronze and valleys of gold, they will melt like snow when the last moment comes. Though our beauty outshine the moon, and the flowers dare not raise their heads to look on us, the day will come when we shall be nothing but corruption, and men will hold their noses as they pass us by. Though we have the cunning of Lu Jia and Sui He, it will avail us nothing when our lips are cold, and no word may issue from our mouths. Let us then purify our senses, and put upon us the garment of repentance, that so, contemplating the emptiness and illusion of this world, we may free ourselves from the gate of birth and death, and, falling not into the straits of adversity, advance towards perfection. Thus, only may we enjoy leisure and good living and still escape the fires of Hell. I am brought to these reflections upon the true significance of wine and women, wealth and rage, remembering a family that, once flourishing, sank at length into a state of deepest misery. Then neither worldly wisdom nor ingenuity could save it, and not a single relative or friend would put forth a hand to help. For a few brief years the master of this household enjoyed his wealth, and then he died, leaving behind a reputation that none would envy. There were many in that household who always sought to flatter, to do well for themselves, to join in amorous pleasures, to stir up strife, and to turn their influence to their own profit. At first it seemed that all was well with them, yet it was not long before their corpses lay in the shadow, and their blood stained the deserted chamber.

Prologue
*Reputation will not stay,*
*While the years still haste away:*
*Literary fame's a vain endeavour;*
Paring ice and snipping snow,
*Hoping from words' idle flow*
*To forge a blade of magic temper.*
We judge the kings of ages past,
*Assess their empire's right to last;*
*We see the Seven in turn rampage*
*Through restless years of a warring age:*
*Man's rise and fall, light as the willows',*
*Life but an empty boat on the billows.*
So many have gone who once gained fame,
*So many more who sought acclaim,*
*And many too who found and forsook it.*
Into the Yangtze the moon dips swiftly,
*The wilderness sprouts fields and causeways.*
But who'd go looking for fish in an oak?
*The fleeing ape leaps in the dark,*
*At sight of the bow, the bird turns back.*
*So just drink the cup, and lend an ear*
To the new melody sounding here.
Ending the gloom of that unruly age,
*The clouds disperse to unveil a flawless sky;*
*Fresh dews from Heaven, Nature's thirst assuage,*
*And ancient culture's placed again on high.*
*Silk robes are seen in all the streets and lanes,*
*In every quarter flutes and zithers sound;*
*Unbroken peace throughout the land now reigns,*
And boundless ease, where spring's delights abound.

These verses are said to have been written by a famous scholar in Song times, when Emperor Shen Zong reigned. The scholar's name was Shao Yaofu,[2] and he was also known as the Taoist master Serene Virtue. The preceding period of the Five Dynasties, from the end of the Tang Dynasty, had been, alas, a time of ceaseless troubles. Suppose in the morning Liang held sway, by evening it was the house of Jin. Rightly was it written:

Emperors Zhu, Li, Shi, Liu and Guo
*Founded Liang, Tang, Jin, Han and Zhou;*
*Fifteen emperors in a row*
Bring fifty years of civil war.

Then the wheel of destiny turned and Emperor Tai Zu,[3] the Martial, was born at Jiamaying. When this heroic progenitor came into the world, a red light filled the sky, together with a mysterious fragrance, that still hung on the air the following morning. It was the God of Thunder himself who had come down to be born among men! The new emperor was filled with martial valour, endowed with far-seeing wisdom, and had no equal even in olden times. He wielded a staff as tall as himself, and reduced four hundred military and civil districts to submission. He swept the land clear and restored order to the central plains. The dynasty became known as Illustrious Song; the capital was established at Bianliang. This opened a succession of nine reigns and 8 emperors, lasting 4 centuries. It was for these reasons that Master Shao Yaofu wrote:

"The clouds disperse to unveil a flawless sky."

For it was indeed as if the people had at last been allowed the view of a clear sky once more. At that time there was on Mount Flower, the sacred peak in the West, a holy man named Chen Tuan, a saintly Taoist who could cast the future by observing the winds and rains. One day when he rode down from the mountain on his donkey, heading for the road to Huayin, he overheard some travellers saying, "The latest news from the Eastern Capital is that Chai Shizong has ceded the throne to Marshal Zhao." This news rejoiced Chen Tuan's heart. He raised both hands to his temples and laughed so heartily he fell off his donkey. When they asked him, "Why?"

He answered: "This will assure the stability of the universe. All will accord with heaven's will on high, earthly law below, and human happiness betwixt the two."

The abdication occurred in the year 960. The new emperor who came to the throne reigned for 17 years during which there was universal peace. He was succeeded by his brother, Tai Zong who reigned 22 years before relinquishing the throne to Zhen Zong who in turn would cede it to Ren Zong. Now Ren Zong was in fact an incarnation of the Barefoot Immortal, from the upper world. The moment he was born into this world of ours, he began to cry night and day without cease. An imperial edict was published, calling for help to provide a remedy. Heaven was moved to send down the Evening Star, in the guise of an old man who stepped up and grabbed the imperial edict, declaring that he could cure the Prince's crying. An official of the court admitted him to an audience with Zhen Zong. The Emperor was pleased to grant him entry to the inner courts so that he might examine the prince. The old man marched straight in, picked up the prince and whispered eight words to him, whereupon the child ceased his crying. Then without even divulging his name, the old man vanished in a sudden gust of wind. And what were they, these 8 words the old man whispered to the infant? "Peace star and martial star guide your reign." For the Jade Emperor had in fact assigned 2 stars from the Purple Constellation to watch over this ruler: for civil affairs, Bao Zheng, member of the Longtu Academy and Governor of Kaifeng; for military affairs, General Di Qing who led an army against Western Xia. These two wise ministers came forward to assist the new emperor whose 42-year rule was divided into nine imperial periods. For the 1st 9 years that coincided with the period of the reign named Tian Sheng, beginning with his accession in 1022, there was perfect peace in the land, with abundance of the five cereals and great content among the people, so much so that objects lost on the road by day were returned to their owners and no one needed to lock their doors at night. This was known as *the first abundance*. The following 9 years were also a time of prosperity, known as *the second abundance*. And for the 9 years after that, up to the 2rd year of the Jia You period, there were also rich harvests — the 3rd abundance. These 3 9-year stretches, 27 years in all, were popularly known as *the triple abundance*. The people lived in great contentment. But just when happiness is at its height, trouble is born. In the third year of Jia You, in spring, the plague struck. From the south of the Yangtze River to the 2 capitals, not a single human habitation escaped contagion. A flood of petitions, from every province and district, inundated the court. In and around the Eastern Capital a good half of the population died, civil and military. Bao Zheng, the lord chamberlain and Governor of Kaifeng district, undertook personally the preparation and distribution of medicaments for the benefit of the people in an attempt to save their lives. But it was to no avail; the plague intensified. All the civil and military dignitaries then held council. There they were, gathered together in the Court of the Water-clock, awaiting the dawn court when they planned to petition the emperor. Their intention was to ask him to offer prayers for delivery from the plague. And it was in consequence of this that 36 celestial powers came down to earth and 72 terrestrial powers came to dwell with men and the empire of the Song was shaken to the roots, Zhao's kingdom by storms assailed. For as the poem says:

Nurtured in plenty by a bounteous age
*The people bathe in Nature's friendly charms;*
*Till peacetime arts are forced to quit the stage,*

*And music cedes its place to war's alarms;*
*While to the Marshes many a hero turns,*
*And in the mountain fortress strong men wait;*
*For of the world's ever-changing ups and downs*
The master plan is drawn by Heaven and Fate.

There is a lyric to the tune *Pleasing Eyes*[6] that goes:

The hero grips his *Hook of Wu,*
Eager to cut off ten thousand heads.
How is it that a heart forged out of iron and stone,
Can yet be melted by a flower?
Just take a look at Hsiang Yü and Liu Pang:[3]
Both cases are equally distressing.
They had only to meet with Yü-chi[4] and Lady Ch'i,[5]
For all their valor to come to naught.[6]

The subject of this lyric is the words *passion* and *beauty,* 2 concepts that are related to each other as substance is to function. Thus, when beauty bedazzles the eye, passion is born in the heart. Passion and beauty evoke each other; the heart and the eye are interdependent. This is a fact that, from ancient times until the present day, gentlemen of moral cultivation ought never to forget. As 2 men of the Chin dynasty once said, "It is people just like ourselves who are most affected by passion"; [7] and "Beauty is like the lodestone which exerts its unseen pull on the needle even when obstacles intervene. If this be true even for nonsentient objects, how much the more must it be so for man, who must spend his days striving to survive in the realm of passion and beauty?"[8]

"The hero grips his *Hook of Wu.*" Hook of Wu is the name of an ancient sword. In those days there were swords with names such as Kan-chiang, Mo-yeh, T'ai-o, Hook of Wu, Fish Gut, and Death's-head. [9] The lyric speaks of heroes with temperaments of iron and stone and the sort of heroic prowess that vaults across the heavens like a rainbow, who yet did not escape the fate of allowing their ambitions to be blunted by women. It then goes on to refer to the Hegemon-King of Western Ch'u, whose name was Hsiang Chi, or Hsiang Yü. Because the First Emperor of the Ch'in dynasty [10] was so lacking in virtue that he garrisoned the Five Ranges to the south, built the Great Wall to the north, filled in the sea to the east, constructed the O-pang Palace[11] in the west, swallowed up the 6 States, buried the scholars alive, and burned the books,[12] Hsiang Yü rose up in rebellion against him and was joined by the King of Han, whose name was Liu Chi, or Liu Pang. Liu Pang rolled up like a mat the territory in which the capital of the First Emperor had been located and thus put an end to the Ch'in dynasty. Later he and Hsiang Yü agreed to make the Hung Canal[13] a boundary line between their territories and divided the empire between them. Now, in the course of their conflict, Hsiang Yü was able, with the help of plans provided by Fan Tseng,[14] to defeat the King of Han in seventy-two military engagements. But he was so infatuated with his favourite, Yü-chi, who possessed the kind of beauty that can topple kingdoms, that he took her with him on his campaigns so they could be together day and night. The result of this was that he was finally defeated by Liu Pang's general, Han Hsin,[15] and had to flee by night as far as Yin-ling, where the enemy troops caught up with him. Although Hsiang Yü was defeated, he might have sought help from the area east of the Yangtze River but he could not bear to part with Yü-chi. Hearing the armies that surrounded him on all sides singing the songs of his homeland, the region of Ch'u, he realized that his situation was hopeless and expressed his sorrow in song:

My strength can uproot mountains,
My valour knows no peer;
But the times are against me,
And my steed will run no more.
My steed will run no more,
So what can I do?
Oh, Yü-chi, Yü-chi,
What is to be done?[16]

When he finished singing his face was streaked with tears. "Your highness must be sacrificing important military considerations on my account," Yü-chi said to him.

"Not really," the Hegemon-King replied. "It's just that we can't bear to give each other up. Moreover, you're such a beauty that Liu Pang, who is a ruler addicted to wine and women, is sure to take you for himself if he should see you."

"I'd rather die in an honest cause than compromise myself in order to save my life," Yü-chi wept. Then asking Hsiang Yü for his sword, she slit her throat and died. The Hegemon-King was so moved by her act that, when the time came, he followed suit by cutting his own throat. A historian has composed a poem to commemorate this event:

Gone was the strength that could uproot mountains, the dream of hegemony destroyed;
Laying aside his sword, he merely sang that his steed would run no more.
As bright moonlight flooded the encampment beneath the liquescent sky;
How could he bear to turn back his head and bid Yü-chi farewell?[17]

Now the King of Han, Liu Pang, was originally no more than a neighbourhood head in Ssu-shui. Yet, with his three-foot sword in hand, he slew the white snake [18] and rose in righteous revolt in the mountainous area between the districts of Mang and Tang. Three years later he destroyed the Ch'in dynasty, and in the fifth year of his reign destroyed the Ch'u, thereby winning the empire for himself and establishing the Han dynasty.[19] But he became infatuated with a woman whose maiden name was Ch'i. Lady Ch'i gave birth to a son whose title was Prince Ju-i of Chao. [20] Because Empress Lü[21] was jealous of her and wished her no good, Lady Ch'i was extremely uneasy. One day when Emperor Kao-tsu[22] was ill and lay with his head in her lap, Lady Ch'i began to weep, saying, "After you have fulfilled your ten thousand years, on whom shall my son and I be able to rely?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," the emperor said. "When I hold court tomorrow I'll depose the heir apparent and set up your son in his stead. How would that be?"

Lady Ch'i dried her tears and thanked him for his favour. When Empress Lü heard about this she summoned her husband's chief adviser, Chang Liang,[23] for a secret consultation. Chang Liang recommended that the Four Graybeards of Mount Shang be induced to come out of retirement and lend their support to the heir apparent. One day the Four Greybeards appeared in court with the heir apparent. When Emperor Kao-tsu saw these four men with their snow-white hair and beards and imposing caps and gowns, he asked them who they were. They identified themselves as Master Tung-yüan, Ch'i-li Chi, Master Hsia-huang, and Master Lu-li. Greatly astonished, the emperor asked, "Why did you not choose to come when We offered you employment in the past, only to appear today in the company of our son?"

"The heir apparent is destined to be the preserver of what Your Majesty has established," the 4 Greybeards replied.

Upon hearing this Emperor Kao-tsu felt dejected and upset. As the 4 Greybeards were on their way out of the palace he summoned Lady Ch'i into his presence, pointed them out to her, and said, "I'd have liked to replace the heir apparent but these four men have lent him their support. Now that his wings are full-grown his position will prove difficult to shake." Lady Ch'i wept inconsolably and the emperor extemporised a song to explain the situation:

The great swan soars aloft,
A thousand li in one flight.
Once his pinions are complete,
He can range the Four Seas.
He can range the Four Seas,
So what can we do?
Of what avail are stringed arrows,
Against a target that lies beyond their reach?[24]

The emperor finished his song and, in the end, did not make the Prince of Chao his heir apparent. After the death of Emperor Kao-tsu, to rid herself of her apprehensions, Empress Lü had Prince Ju-i of Chao put to death with poisoned wine and so mutilated Lady Ch'i as to turn her into a "human pig." [25]Poets have remarked, on reaching this point in their evaluations of these two rulers, that Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü were certainly heroes of their day and yet did not escape the fate of suffering their ambitions to be blunted by these 2 women. Although the position of wife is superior to that of concubine, the calamity that befell Lady Ch'i was even crueler than that which befell Yü-chi. Thus it is that the way of a wife or concubine who wishes to serve her husband faithfully and yet keep her head and neck intact within her own windows is hard. With regard to these two rulers, is it not true that they had only to meet with Yü-chi and Lady Ch'i, for all their valour to come to naught? There is a poem that testifies to this:

The favourites of Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü are much to be pitied;
These heroes proved powerless to protect their beauties.
Yet even the site of Lady Ch'i's burial remains unknown;
She was less fortunate than Yü-chi who has a tomb.[26]

Now why do you suppose your narrator is so preoccupied with explicating the two words *passion* and *beauty*?[27] It is because "Gentlemen who presume on their talents are lacking in virtue, and women who flaunt their beauty are dissolute. If only they were able to maintain the fullness of their gifts while taking care to avoid the overflow of excess, they could be upright men and virtuous women."[28] What need would they have then to fear the calamity of unnatural death? This has always been so, in ancient as in modern times; it is as true for the exalted as for the humble. Now this is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions. In it, a licentious woman commits adultery with a decadent man-about-town:

Every evening devoted to the pursuit of pleasure;
Every morning an occasion for deluded dalliance.
But in the end she does not escape the fate of:
A corpse prostrate beneath the blade,
A bloodstained carcass in the Yellow Springs;[29]
Never again to don silk or satin,
No longer able to apply rouge or powder.

If we pause to reflect on these events, from whence do they arise?[30] And moreover, what does the death of such a woman matter anyway?

He who coveted her sent to perdition his imposing six-foot body;
He who loved her squandered wealth enough to splash against the sky.[31]
The prefecture of Tung-p'ing was dumbfounded;
The district of Ch'ing-ho was greatly disturbed.

If, in fact, you don't know to whose family this woman belonged, whose wife she was, by whom she was subsequently usurped, or at whose hands she died, truly: the telling of this tale is enough to knock the peak of Mount Hua askew; its revelation is sufficient to make the Yellow River flow backward.[32]

During the years of the Cheng-ho reign period[33] of Emperor Hui-tsung[34] of the Sung dynasty,[35] the emperor bestowed his trust and favour upon the 4 wicked ministers, Kao Ch'iu,[36] Yang Chien,[37] T'ung Kuan, [38]and Ts'ai Ching[39] with the result that the empire was thrown into great disorder. The people were unable to pursue their vocations and the populace was in dire straits. On all sides bandits arose in swarms and baleful stars descended to earth to be incarnated in human form. [40] The glittering facade presented by the empire of the Great Sung dynasty was disrupted and in 4 different places, great bandit chieftains arose. Who were these 4 great bandit chieftains? In Shantung there was Sung Chiang,[41] in Huai-hsi there was Wang Ch'ing. In Hopei, there was T'ien Hu.[42]In Chiang-Nan there was Fang La.[43] All of them disrupted sub-prefectures and pillaged districts, setting fires and killing people; assuming royal titles for themselves. Among them Sung Chiang alone carried out the Way on Heaven's behalf,[44] and devoted himself to the righting of injustice; endeavouring to slay all the venal officials, corrupt functionaries, evil magnates, and delinquent commoners in the empire.

## 001

### Zhang the Divine Teacher/Heavenly Master Prays for Cessation to Dispel Plagues; the Foolish Marshal Hong makes a Blunder & Releases Demons by Mistake

*After Five Dynasties' turmoil and strife,*
*The clouds dispersed and revealed the sky,*
*Refreshing rain brought old trees new life,*
*Culture and learning once again were high.*
*Ordinary folk in the lanes wore silk,*
*Music drifted from mansions and towers,*
*Under the heavens, all was serene,*
*Men dozed off at noon midst happy birds and flowers.*

This 8-lined poem was written during the reign of Emperor Shen Zong of the Song Dynasty[2] by a scholar named Shao Yaofu, also known as Master Kang Jie. From the end of the Tang[3] and all through the Five Dynasties, times had been troubled. One short-lived dynasty had ruled after another. How true was the verse:

Emperors Zhu, Li, Shi, Liu and Guo
*Founded Liang, Tang, Jin, Han and Zhou;*
*Fifteen emperors fifty years in a row,*
*Bringing hardship, tumult and woe.*

In time, the way of Heaven took a new turn. At Jiamaying, Tai Zu, the Emperor of Military Virtue, was born. A red glow suffused the sky when this sage came into the world, and fragrance still filled the air the following morning. He was in fact the God of Thunder descended to earth. Brave and magnanimous, he was superior to any emperor who had ever lived. With a staff as tall as himself he smote so hard that four hundred prefectures and districts acknowledged his sovereignty. He swept the land clean and pacified the Central Plains. Naming his empire the Great Song, he established his court at Bianliang. Tai Zu was the first of eighteen Song emperors and founder of a dynasty lasting 4 centuries. That is why Master Shao Yaofu said in his praise, " *The clouds dispersed and revealed the sky.*"

For the people it was indeed like seeing the sun again. At that time on Huashan, the West Sacred Mountain, lived a Taoist hermit named Chen Tuan. A virtuous man, he could foretell the future by the weather. One day as he was riding his donkey down the mountain towards the county town of Huayin he heard a traveller on the path say, "Emperor Chai Shi Zong[5] has surrendered his throne to Marshal Zhao[6] in the Eastern Capital."

Chen clapped his hands to his brow and laughed so delightedly that he fell off his donkey. Asked the reason for his joy, he said: "The empire will be firmly settled from now on. For this is in accord with the will of Heaven above, the laws of Earth below, and the hearts of men between."

Marshal Zhao accepted the abdication in 960 and established his regime. He ruled for 17 years, and there was peace throughout the land. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Tai Zong, who ruled for 22 years. After Tai Zong came Zhen Zong who was succeeded by Ren Zong. Emperor Ren Zong was actually a re-incarnation of the Barefoot Immortal. When he came down and was born on earth he cried day and night without cease. The imperial court posted a proclamation, inviting any man who could cure him to come forward. Heaven was touched and sent the Great Star of White Gold in the guise of an old man. Announcing he could cure the prince's weeping, the old man took down the proclamation. The officer in charge conducted him to the palace, where the emperor directed that he be allowed to see Ren Zong in the inner apartments. The old man went in, picked up the baby, and whispered eight words into his ear. At once, the prince stopped crying. The old man disappeared in a puff of air without even revealing his name. What were the eight words? They were these: *"Civil and military affairs, both have their stars."*

The fact was that the Jade Emperor of Heaven had dispatched two stars from the Propitious Constellation to serve the future emperor. The civil affairs star became Bao Zheng, prefect of Kaifeng and a senior member of the Dragon Diagram Academy. The military affairs star became Di Qing, the great general who led an expedition against the Kingdom of Western Xia. With the help of these two ministers, Ren Zong ruled as emperor for forty-two years, in the course of which he gave special names to nine periods of his reign. During the first nine years, or the Tian Sheng period, all went well. Grain harvests were large; the people were happy at their work; no one kept articles lost by others on the road; doors were left unlocked at night. That was the period of the "First Abundance."

From the beginning of the Ming Dao period to the third year of Huang You another nine years of prosperity followed. That was the period of "Second Abundance."

From the fourth year of Huang You to the second year of Jia You, nine years more, the fields continued to flourish. That was the period of the "Third Abundance."

These three nine-year periods, twenty-seven years in all, were known as the Era of Three Abundances. During that time the people enjoyed great happiness. Who could have foreseen that extreme joy would give birth to sorrow?

In the third year of the Jia You period, a plague struck the land. From the south to the two capitals, not a single hamlet escaped the contagion. The imperial court was snowed under with petitions for relief from every district and prefecture. More than half the soldiers and residents in and around the Eastern Capital died. Bao Zheng, counsellor and prefect of Kaifeng, published the officially approved prescriptions and spent his own money on medicines in an attempt to save the people. But to no avail. The plague grew worse. All the high civil and military officials conferred. They gathered in the Hall of the Water Clock and waited for daybreak, when court would be held, so that they could appeal to the emperor.

That day, the third day of the third month of the third year of the Jia You period, at the third interval of the fifth watch Emperor Ren Zong mounted his throne in the imperial palace. After the officials had made their obeisance, the chief of ceremonies cried: "If anyone has a petition, let him come forward. If there are none, this court will adjourn."

Zhao Zhe, the Premier, and Wen Yanbo, his deputy, advanced and said: "The plague is raging unabated in the capital. Victims among the soldiers and the people are many. We hope Your Majesty, in a forgiving and benevolent spirit, will reduce prison sentences and cut taxes, and pray to Heaven that the people be relived of this affliction."

The emperor at once ordered the Hanlin Academy to draw an edict proclaiming a general amnesty for all prisoners and cancelling all taxes. He also directed that every temple and monastery in the capital offer prayers for a termination of the disaster.

But the plague only became worse. The emperor was very disturbed and summoned his officials for a conference. A prominent minister stepped forth and asked to be heard ahead of turn. The emperor saw that it was Fan Zhongyan, his Deputy Premier.

Fan kowtowed, then rose and said: "The plague is decimating our soldiers and citizenry. No one is safe. In my humble opinion, if this pestilence is to be ended Your Majesty should summon the Divine Teacher of the Taoists, who comes from a papal line dating back to Han times. Let him travel day and night and rush here to the capital and conduct a great prayer service in the imperial park. In this way the people will be saved."

Emperor Ren Zong approved Fan's proposal. He directed the scholars of the Hanlin Academy to draw up an edict that he signed personally, and issued a bunch of royal incense sticks. He ordered that Marshal Hong Xin go as his emissary to the Dragon and Tiger Mountain in Xinzhou Prefecture of Jiangxi Province and fetch Zhang the Divine Teacher. While incense burned in the imperial hall, the emperor himself placed the edict in Marshal Hong's hands and told him to set out immediately.

Hong accepted the royal edict and took leave of the emperor. With the edict in a bag on his back and the incense sticks in a golden box, he mounted his horse and left the Eastern Capital, leading a column of several score men. They headed directly for Guixi, a county town in Xinzhou Prefecture.

After a number of days they arrived. Officials, high and low, greeted Marshal Hong. They sent word to the abbot and other Taoists in the Temple of Supreme Purity on the Dragon and Tiger Mountain to get ready to receive the imperial edict.

The next day the officials accompanied Marshal Hong to the foot of the mountain. A procession of Taoists, beating drums and bells, playing saintly music, bearing incense and candles, banners and canopies, came down to receive the imperial envoy. They escorted him to the temple, where he dismounted. All of the Taoists, from the abbot to the lowliest novice, gathered round and led him to the Hall of Three Purities. They asked him to place the royal edict on an altar.

"Where is the Divine Teacher?" Marshal Hong inquired of the abbot.

"You must understand, Marshal," replied the abbot, "our Teacher is known as 'Pure Serenity.' He is of a very exalted nature and cannot be bothered with such mundane matters as welcoming and seeing off visitors. He has built a thatched hut on the top of the mountain, and there he meditates and cultivates his spirit."

"But I have an imperial edict. How can I find him?"

"Leave the edict here in this hall. None of us will dare to unroll it. Please come into the abbey for some tea. We can talk things over there."

Marshal Hong did as the abbot suggested. When he had seated himself amid his hosts in the abbey, tea and meatless dishes of many varieties were served. After the meal, the marshal said to the abbot: "You say the Divine Teacher is in a thatched hut on the mountain top. Why not ask him to come down and receive the royal edict?"

"He's up there, all right, keeping himself aloof from the world. But our Divine Teacher has an unusual knowledge of the Way. He can ride the clouds and mists. Nobody knows exactly where he is. We ordinary Taoists are rarely able to see him. How can we ask him to come down?"

"I must meet him. A plague is raging in the capital and the emperor has sent me with an imperial edict and royal incense to invite him to conduct a great prayer service that will dispel the pestilence and save the people. What can I do?"

"You must first prove your piety. Eat no meat, bathe and change into simple cotton garments. With the edict on your back, carry burning incense and travel on foot alone to the summit. There, kowtow, and cry your invitation aloud. Then perhaps you'll be able to meet the Divine Teacher. But if you're not sincere your trip will be in vain. You'll never see him."

"I've eaten nothing but vegetables since I left the capital. Doesn't that show I'm sincere? I shall do as you say. I'll start up the mountain the first thing in the morning."

Everyone retired for the night. At the fifth watch the following morning the Taoists prepared scented water and a vegetarian meal for the marshal. After bathing in the scented water he dressed in new cotton garments and straw sandals, ate the meatless breakfast, wrapped the imperial edict in a piece of yellow silk and tied it on his back. In a silver censer he carried the smoking incense. Many Taoists escorted him to the mountain behind the temple and pointed out the path.

"You must never retreat, if you are to save the people, Marshal," said the abbot. "Just push on piously."

Bidding the Taoists farewell and calling on the Highest Deity for aid, Marshal Hong started up the mountain, alone. He climbed the twisting overgrown path for two or three *li*," crossing a number of peaks. Soon his feet ached and his legs grew weary. He felt he couldn't move another step. Though he didn't say it aloud, he grumbled to himself: "An important government official like me. When I'm in the capital I lie on double mattresses and dine on banquet dishes. Even then I don't have much energy. What am I doing here in straw sandals, climbing this mountain path? Who knows where that Divine Teacher is anyhow? Why should I have to endure these torments?"

He was panting hard, his shoulders heaving, before he had gone another fifty paces. A strong wind blew through the hollow. When it had passed, a roar thundered from behind the pines and out leaped a huge tiger, with bulging eyes, a white forehead and striped fur.

*"Aiya!"* cried the marshal, toppling over backwards in terror.

The tiger, its eyes fixed upon him, circled left and right. Then it roared again and bounded off down the rear slope. Marshal Hong lay beneath a tree, his teeth chattering, his heart clanging like fifteen buckets in a single well. Paralyzed as if suffering a stroke, his legs limper than a defeated cock's, he could only moan.

Not until the tiger had been gone the time it takes to drink a cup of tea was the marshal able to crawl to his feet. He picked up the censer, re-lit the royal incense and continued up the mountain in search of the Divine Teacher.

The marshal climbed another forty or fifty paces. He sighed. "If the emperor hadn't set a time limit on my mission, I wouldn't have had to suffer such a fright."

Before he finished speaking a strong wind blasted him with foul air. Marshal Hong heard a loud hissing. A big snake, thick as a bucket and dappled with snow-white spots, wriggled out of a grove of bamboo and vines on the mountainside.

"I'm dead man!" exclaimed the marshal. He fell on his back beside a spiral-shaped rock, dropping his censer.

The great snake moved rapidly towards the rock, then twisted itself into coils, its eyes shooting golden sparks. It opened its large mouth, flickering its tongue, and breathed poisonous fumes in the marshal's face.

So horrified was Marshal Hong that his three souls drifted and his seven spirits departed. The serpent looked at him, then slithered down the mountain and was quickly lost to sight. Only then was the marshal able to haul himself erect.

"Lucky," he muttered. "That snake nearly scared me to death!" There were goose pimples all over his body. He cursed the abbot: "What rudeness, playing tricks on me and frightening me so. If I don't find the Divine Teacher on the summit I'll settle with that abbot when I get down!"

Again, he picked up the silver incense burner, straightened his clothes, settled the edict on his back, and adjusted his hat. About to go on, he heard the notes of a flute coming softly from behind the pines. Gradually, the melody drew nearer. A yellow ox plodded over the rise. A boy novice, seated on its back, was smiling as he played a metal flute.

"Where are you from?" called the marshal. "Do you know who I am?"

The boy merely continued playing. Marshal Hong shouted the question several times. The boy laughed and pointed at him with his flute.

"You've come looking for the Divine Teacher, haven't you?" he said.

The marshal was astounded. "You're just a cowherd. How do you know?"

Smiling, the boy replied: "When I was serving the Divine Teacher in his thatched hut this morning he said: 'The emperor has sent a Marshal Hong here with royal incense and an imperial edict for me to go to the Eastern Capital and conduct a great prayer service that will drive away the plague. I'll mount a crane, ride the clouds, and go there today. He must have left by now. He's not in the hut. There's no point in your climbing any higher. The mountain is full of venomous snakes and savage beasts. They're liable to kill you."

"Are you telling me the truth?" the marshal demanded.

The novice only laughed but didn't reply. He resumed playing his flute and rode off around the bend. "How could that child know so much?" the marshal wondered. "The Divine Teacher must have told him. That's it." He hesitated. "I've had those terrible frights and nearly lost my life. Maybe I'd better go back."

Carrying the censer, he returned hastily down the same path he had come. The Taoists received him and invited him to be seated in the abbey. "Did you meet the Divine Teacher?" the abbot asked.

"I'm a high official of the imperial court. How could you send me up a mountain path and make me suffer such torments? I was nearly killed. First, halfway up, a big tiger with bulging eyes and a white forehead jumped out and scared the wits out of me. Then, before I had passed another gap, a great snake with snow-white spots wriggled from a thicket of bamboo and vines, wrapped itself in coils, and blocked my path. If I weren't lucky, I'd never get back to the capital alive. It's all the fault of you Taoists. Making sport of me!"

"Would we humble Taoists dare show disrespect to a high minister?" said the abbot. "The Divine Teacher was testing your piety. Although there are snakes and tigers on our mountain, they don't hurt people."

"By then I could hardly walk. Just as I was about to continue up the slope, a novice, sitting on a yellow ox and playing a metal flute, came riding over the rise. I asked him: 'Where are you from? Do you know me?' He answered: 'I know all about you.' He said the Divine Teacher told him he would mount a crane and ride the clouds to the Eastern Capital this morning. That's why I've returned."

"Too bad," cried the abbot. "Marshal, you missed your chance. That boy was the Divine Teacher."

"A rustic-looking fellow like that?"

"The Divine Teacher of this generation is very unusual. Although young in years, he has a remarkable command of the Way. He's not an ordinary mortal. He can appear in any guise he wishes. People call him the Master of the Way."

"I saw him and didn't recognize him! What a shame."

"Never mind, Marshal. Since the Divine Teacher said he was going, by the time you return to the capital, the great prayer service will be successfully finished."

On hearing this, the marshal felt better. The abbot ordered that a banquet be prepared for him. At the abbot's suggestion, the imperial edict was placed in a casket for royal documents, to be retained permanently in the temple; the royal incense was burned in the Hall of Three Purities. A big feast of meatless dishes was spread in the abbey. The diners ate and drank until dark. Then all retired.

After breakfast the next morning, the abbot, priests and abbey superintendents invited the marshal out for a sight-seeing stroll. He accepted with pleasure. Led by two novices they left the abbey, followed by a large entourage. They walked around the temple grounds, enjoying the beautiful scenery.

In the Hall of Three Purities the marshal was shown objects precious beyond words. He visited also the Nine Heavens Hall, the Propitious Star Hall, and the North Pole Hall, beside a covered walk on the left side of the grounds. Along another such walk on the right he inspected the Great Monad Hall, the Three Officials Hall and the Hall for Dispelling Evil.

He was then escorted to the grounds in the rear of the right walk. There he observed a building with walls as red as peppers, and vermilion-coloured lattice-work on its two front windows. A lock as thick as a man's arm clamped together its double doors. A dozen strips of paper, pasted across the crack where the doors met, were stamped with innumerable red seals. Beneath the front eaves was a red plaque inscribed with letters of gold, reading: "Suppression of Demons Hall."

"What is this place?" asked the marshal.

"A hall where an earlier Divine Teacher imprisoned some demons," replied the abbot.

"Why are there so many seals on the doors?"

"A Divine Teacher known as the Royal Master of the Way locked the demons in there in Tang times. Each subsequent Divine Teacher added his own seal, prohibiting any successor from opening the doors. If those demons escaped, it would be awful. Nine generations of Divine Teachers have ruled since then, and they all vowed to keep the hall closed. The lock has been filled with melted bronze. Who knows what's in there? I've been in charge of this temple for thirty years but I only know what I've been told."

Marshal Hong was surprised. "I certainly would like to see a demon," he thought. To the abbot he said: "Open the doors. I want to see what a demon looks like."

"I cannot, Marshal," the abbot replied. "The early generation Divine Teacher has forbidden it. No one today would dare."

The marshal laughed. "Nonsense. The story is an invention to delude people. You've deliberately prepared this place so that you can say you've got demons imprisoned as proof of the power of your Taoist magic. I've read many books but none of them says anything about how to lock up demons. Spirits inhabit only the Nether Regions. I don't believe you've got any demons in there. Open up and let me have a look."

"This hall mustn't be opened," the abbot pleaded. "It would mean disaster." Marshal Hong grew angry. He pointed his finger at the Taoists and roared: "If you don't do as I say I'll report to the court that you prevented me from delivering the imperial edict and refused to let me see the Divine Teacher. I'll tell how you rigged up this hall and invented the story that you've got demons inside in order to fool the public. I'll have your religious orders cancelled and have you all tattooed with the mark of the criminal and exiled to a wild and distant region!"

The abbot feared the influence of Marshal Hong. He had no choice but to order some blacksmith priests to remove the scales and break the lock. Then the doors were pushed open and everyone entered the hall. It was pitch dark. The marshal called for a dozen torches. When these were brought he saw that the hall was empty except for a stone tablet in the centre. About six feet high, it was based on a stone tortoise which was sunk halfway into the damp earthen floor. Hong moved the torches closer to the tablet. The front was inscribed with dragon and phoenix scripts and mystic signs and symbols which no one could understand. Then he looked at the back. There, written large, were four words: "Open when Hong comes."

The marshal was delighted. "You tried to stop me," he said to the abbot. "Yet my name was written here hundreds of years ago. 'Open when Hong comes.' It's perfectly plain. What's wrong if I have a look? I believe the demons are right here beneath this stone. Get a few more men with mattocks and shovels and dig it out."

The abbot was horrified. "We can't do that, Marshal. Something terrible may happen. It's not safe!"

"What do you know, anyway?" the marshal shouted angrily. "It says clearly on the tablet it can be removed when I come. How dare you stop me? Get me those men."

Four or five times the abbot pleaded: "No good will come of it." But the marshal wouldn't listen. The workmen were summoned. After long and strenuous effort they pushed over the tablet and pried the stone tortoise out of the ground.

Then they started shovelling. At four feet they came upon a big stone slab some ten feet square. Marshal Hong directed them to dig it out. "You mustn't," begged the abbot but the marshal ignored him. When the men had removed the slab, a pit one hundred thousand feet deep was revealed. A great ripping sound was heard, and a black cloud shot out of the pit. It tore through half a corner of the roof and zoomed into the sky, where it split into more than a hundred golden rays which shimmered in every direction.

Everyone shouted in fright and threw down their tools. They dashed out of the hall, bowling people over left and right. Marshal Hong goggled and gaped helplessly. His face was the colour of earth. He hurried out to the porch, where the abbot was lamenting.

"Who are those demons who escaped?" Hong asked.

"Oh, Marshal, you didn't know," groaned the abbot. "In this hall the Master of the Way left a written warning. It said: 'Thirty-six stars of Heavenly spirits and seventy-two stars of Earthly Fiends, a total of one hundred and eight demons, are imprisoned here, held down by a stone tablet inscribed with their names, written in a mystic script that resembles dragons and phoenixes. If they are released on earth they will cause no end of trouble.' Now you've let them out. What are we going to do?"

The marshal trembled and broke into a cold sweat. He hastily collected his luggage, marched down the mountain with his men and headed for the capital. The abbot and the Taoists saw them off, and then returned to the temple where they repaired the roof and re-erected the stone tablet.

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During the return trip, afraid that the emperor would reproach him, the marshal instructed his men to say nothing about the escape of the demons. The march was uneventful. Travelling day and night, they soon reached Bianliang, the Eastern Capital. On entering the city, they were told: "The Divine Teacher held a great prayer service in the Imperial Park for seven days and seven nights and distributed many charms. Now the sick are cured and the plague is completely gone. The Divine Teacher has taken leave of the emperor and returned to the Dragon and Tiger Mountain, astride a crane and riding the clouds."

At early court the following morning, Marshal Hong reported to the emperor. "The Divine Teacher mounted a crane and rode the clouds, so he arrived first," said Hong. "We'd to march every stage of the road. That's why we didn't get here till now." The emperor approved of his report. He rewarded the marshal and ordered him to resume his post. Emperor Ren Zong ruled for 42 years and died without leaving a son. The throne passed to the son of Prince Yun Rang of Puan. A grandson of Tai Zong, he is known by his posthumous title of Ying Zong. After 4 years of rule, he abdicated in favour of his son, Shen Zong who reigned for 18 years and then gave the throne to his son Zhe Zong. During this entire period, there was peace throughout the land and no disturbances. But not so fast. If it was true that nothing happened, what'd we have to tell in this novel? Readers, don't be alarmed for in what follows 36 stars of Heavenly Spirits come to earth and 72 stars of Earthly Fiends appear among men. Valiant hide in strongholds, heroes gather in the marshes.

In the days when the Great Song Emperor Ren Zong reigned. It was in the 3rd drumbeat of the 5th watch — dawn, in other words — of the 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month of the 3rd year of Jia You, and His Majesty had just proceeded to the Purple Imperial Palace to receive the obeisance of all the mandarins of the court. Here's how it was:

Auspicious clouds engulf the Phoenix Hall,
*A precious air invests the Dragon Tower;*
*Mist-veiled palace willows flirt with flags,*
*And dew-starred royal blossoms welcome swords.*
*'Mid smoke of incense, jade pins and scarlet shoes*
*Invade the vermilion courts;*
*To heavenly harmonies, rich gowns and flowery robes*
*Escort the royal sedan.*
*Respectful screens of jade deploy*
*When the sacred chaise attains the golden palace;*
*Peacock feather fans unfold,*
*As the precious carriage halts by the white jade steps.*

*3 times the crack of a distant whip resounds;*
In serried ranks, the imperial court attends.

Then the master of ceremonies shouted: "If there are matters to report stand forth and declare them; if not, take leave and depart."

Accordingly the Prime Minister, Zhao Zhe, and the Chief Counsellor, Wen Yanbo stepped forward and said: "Your Imperial Majesty, a fearful plague is raging in the capital at the present time. There have been many losses among your subjects, both civil and military. We beseech Your Majesty, of your graciousness, to vouchsafe pardon to transgressors, to relax punishments and reduce taxes, and to offer up prayers and sacrifices for the avoidance of heaven-sent disasters and the delivery of all your people."

The Son of Heaven, on hearing this petition, instructed the Imperial Academy to prepare forthwith an edict proclaiming the remission of prison sentences throughout the empire and the total abolition of general taxes and levies, and at the same time ordering all Buddhist temples and Taoist monasteries in the capital to perform the appropriate rites for the prevention of natural disasters. To everyone's confusion, the troubles merely intensified. When the Emperor was informed of this, he was greatly perturbed and summoned his ministers to council. From amongst the group of counsellors, one stepped forward to request a hearing. It was Fan Zhongyan, the Deputy Chief Minister, who, after prostrating himself, rose and said: "A great ill afflicts the land; the whole population, civil and military, suffers extremely; day and night the people struggle in vain to secure their lives. I therefore venture to offer this humble proposal: to save us from this affliction, let a message be sent, if it please Your Majesty, to the Heavenly Master, bidding him travel with all speed to the court and offer here in the Forbidden City the three thousand six hundred libations to the heavenly constellations, requesting the Lord of Heaven to lift this burden of suffering from your people." The Emperor gave his consent, and told the Imperial Academy to draft a proclamation immediately. This the Emperor then graciously copied in his own hand, deigning also to add some sticks of incense. Marshal Hong Xin, the palace superintendent, was appointed imperial envoy, with instructions to proceed to the Dragon-Tiger Mountain[1] in Xinzhou district, in the Province of Jiangxi, and invite the Heavenly Master, Zhang the Pure, to hasten to the capital to perform the propitiatory rites. Incense was burnt in the Golden Palace, while the Emperor personally placed the imperial order in the Marshal's hands, urging him to set out at the earliest opportunity. In accordance with the royal wish Hong Xin took leave of the Son of Heaven, took up the imperial edict and casket containing the incense, collected a number of men, mounted a relay horse, and followed by his escort left the Eastern Capital, taking the most direct route to Guixi, a county town in Xinzhou district. Here's how it was:

The far hills are folds of blue,
*The distant waters a clear green;*
*Rare flowers deck the woods with rich embroidery,*
*Fresh willows strew the floor with golden thread.*
*Soft are the winds and warm the sun.*
*Past country inns and mountain villages*
*The way first lies.*
*Now the road is straight and the land flat:*
*They lodge at night in hostels on the route.*
*Gorgeous robes swirl over the red dust.*
Thoroughbreds gallop across the purple steppe.

And so Marshal Hong Xin and his retinue set out with the sacred edict; and they came, not losing a day, to Guixi, where all the officials turned out to meet them, outside the city walls. A messenger was sent ahead to tell the Superior and the monks at the Temple of Holy Purity on Dragon-Tiger Mountain to prepare to receive the imperial edict. Next day the officials escorted Hong Xin to the foot of the Dragon-Tiger Mountain. Here a crowd of Taoists from the Temple of Holy Purity came trooping down the hillside, striking gongs and beating drums; they came with incense, flowers, lamps and candles, carrying a precious reliquary adorned with silken streamers and playing music of the Immortals, to receive the solemn edict.

The imperial envoy did not dismount till he was right in front of the temple. And what a place it was, that Temple of Holy Purity! Here's what met their eyes:

*Grey-green the pines, gnarled and twisted; bright bluish green the cypress, leafy and luxuriant. Over the door, an imperial inscription, copied in characters of gold; framing the doorway, the sacred signs and symbols. On the verge of the sanctuary, a willow dimly droops its celebrated flowers; next to the purificational crucible, ancient pine and imperial juniper block out the sun. On the wall to the left the Celestial Guards accompany the Sovereign Lord; on the right-hand wall, Jade Maidens and Golden Boys attend the Purple Emperor. With flying hair and brandished sword, the Perfect Warrior, Master of the North, bestrides the turtle and the snake; in his down-trodden shoes and square hat the Old Man of the South straddles dragon and tiger. Aligned in front, the twenty-eight Lords of the Heavenly Mansions; at the back, the thirty-two Heavenly Princes. Below the steps, running water murmurs gently; behind the garden wall friendly slopes give shelter. There are red-headed cranes and green-haired turtles, offerings of fruit laid on the branches of trees for the green apes, fragrant white deer squatting in the sedge. A golden bell is struck in the Hall of the Three Pure Ones and the Taoists process, chanting their litanies; jade clappers are sounded in front of the Chapel of the Four Holy Ones and the votaries pay homage to the Dipper. On the incense-burning platform coloured clouds irradiate the deep-blue tiles. On the precious altar of supplication, the sun's red is reflected by crimson agate. An auspicious cloud hovers at the gates: the Heavenly Master, as it might be, bidding farewell to Lao-Tze.*

At once all the Taoists, from the saintly Superior down to the meanest acolyte, pressed forward to meet the Marshal and escort him to the Hall of the Three Pure Ones. They requested him to present the imperial proclamation to the gods then and there in the hall.

"But where is the Heavenly Master?" the Marshal inquired.

It was the Superior who came forward and answered. "Your Excellency should please be informed that the Heavenly Master of this generation, whose title is 'Heavenly Master of the Tranquil Vacuity,' has achieved great sanctity, and weary of the world's incessant coming and going, has retired to the top of the Dragon-Tiger Mountain, where he has built himself a thatched cabin and devotes himself to developing virtue and cultivating his spirit. For this reason he is not in residence here."

The Marshal said: "I have to give him the Son of Heaven's message, how can I see him?"

The Superior replied: "If it please Your Excellency, let the imperial edict be placed temporarily in this hall; we humble Taoists will not dare to meddle with it. Then do me the honour of accompanying me to my quarters to take tea, while we consider how to proceed."

Accordingly the edict was placed, with all due care, in the Hall of the Three Pure Ones, and the entire company removed to the Superior's private quarters. The Marshal seated himself in the centre of the room, and several lay brothers brought in tea. A lavish vegetarian meal was also served. When this was ended, the Marshal said: "If the Heavenly Master is in his cabin on the peak, might not someone be sent to request him to come down and meet me here, so that I may deliver the Emperor's message?"

"The Heavenly Master of this generation may be on the mountain," the Superior replied, "but he has achieved such a degree of perfection that he can ride the mists and mount the clouds, and his footsteps are not fixed. We poor Taoists can rarely catch a glimpse of him; how then can we send someone to ask him to descend?"

"In that case, how am I ever to see him?" the Marshal exclaimed. "This very moment a plague is ravaging the capital, and the Emperor entrusted his edict to me, and the imperial incense, with instructions to bring it personally to the Dragon-Tiger Mountain and request the Heavenly Master to perform the three thousand six hundred libations to avert disaster and save the people. So what am I to do?"

"If the Son of Heaven wishes to save the people," the Superior proposed, "the only way is this: You must free your heart, Your Excellency, from all insincerity, fast and bathe yourself and don simple attire, dismiss your suite, and take the imperial tablets on your own back. Then, lighting the imperial incense, you must ascend the mountain on foot to pay your respects and make your request to the Heavenly Master. In this way perhaps you may be granted an interview. But if your heart is not pure, the journey will be in vain, for then it is unlikely you will have sight of the Heavenly Master."

The Marshal replied: "On my journey from the capital I have eaten frugally that surely is proof enough of my sincerity. But if that is how it is, I will do as you say. I will climb the mountain tomorrow at break of day."

Everyone went to bed early that night. Next morning before dawn the Taoists rose and prepared scented bath-water for the Marshal to bathe himself. He put on a clean robe of plain cotton and a pair of hemp sandals, ate a light vegetarian meal, and took up the imperial edict that he wrapped in yellow silk and tied on between his shoulder-blades. He carried also a silver censer in which he carefully burnt the imperial incense. A group of Taoists accompanied him to the foot of the mountain at the back of the temple, to show him the way.

"If Your Excellency wishes to save the people," the Superior reminded him, "you must put aside all retrospective thoughts and proceed with a pure intention."

The Marshal bade the monks farewell, and reciting the name of the Lord of Heaven began the steep ascent. About half way, he paused to look up: the peak seemed to invade heaven's vault, what a mountain it was! Hear what he saw:

*Its roots are twined in the crannies of the earth, its summit brushes the zenith. From afar it seems to pierce and wound the clouds; near to, it swallows the bright moon's soul. Such broken heights and depths — truly this can be called a mountain! Such a way through overhanging rocks — a veritable tunnel! The only road a track winding over lonely ridges to the flattened summit set about with what a fantastic assembly of spurs! There are caverns where tigers and wild-cats lurk, secret grottoes that are home to the winds and clouds. What a cave, the one where the holy man lives concealed! A whole region this, with its own frontiers. If the woodcutter can get through, you can say there's a path, if a horse and cart can pass, call it a highway; the sound of rushing water signals a gorge, the old ford introduces you to a brook, water dripping from the rock reveals a spring. The cliff on the left is a blank wall, the cliff on the right reflects the sun. On the outside, nothing but cloud; inside you're in the mist. The path climbs pinnacles that are sharpened to a point, ascends prodigious cliffs, perilously skirts the void, traverses flattened terraces. A thousand peaks vie in splendour, a million torrents rush headlong. Waterfalls trail their slanting sheets in the air, creepers dangle topsy-turvy. The tiger roars and the wind rises in the valley mouth; the gibbon howls and moonlight floods the slopes. The picture is painted in different greens, like a jade mosaic; the whole scene is clothed in tatters of mist like finest silk.*

Thus the Marshal ascended for a while, following the twists and turns of the path, sometimes having to hold onto vines and creepers to pull himself up. After passing several crests and covering almost a mile, his feet were aching and his legs seemed to have turned to jelly and were refusing to carry him further. Too tired to speak and all his resolve failing, he began to complain to himself: "I am a man of some standing at the court; in the capital I sleep on mats of double thickness and they serve me from many dishes, and I am exempt from all that is wearisome; when have I ever worn hemp sandals, or been obliged to climb such a mountain path as this? The Devil knows where this Heavenly Master has got to! Why am I subjected to this torture?"

He went on, notwithstanding, and had not taken a dozen or so paces more when, as he straightened his back to draw breath, he felt a sudden gust of wind rush out from a hollow in the mountainside. When this gust passed, a thunderous roar burst from behind a pine tree, and out sprang a savage-eyed, white-browed tiger with a brilliantly-patterned coat. The Marshal was terrified. "Ai-ya!" he cried, recoiling aghast. Here's what his horrified eyes beheld:

The coat a mat of shining gold,
*Eighteen claws like silver hooks,*
*Eyes like lightning, tail a whip,*
*Mouth a bloodpit, teeth like knives.*
*The back arches with hideous strength,*
*The tail lashes with a sound like thunder;*
*Hares on the mountainside bolt for cover,*
Deer in the valley make themselves scarce.

Fixing its eyes on Hong Xin, the great beast wove to the left and circled to the right, gave a mighty roar, then bounded off down the slope and disappeared. Hong Xin had fallen at the foot of a tree, all his thirty-six teeth chattering against each other and his heart knocking like fifteen buckets in a well, clashing as they pass up and down; his whole body was numb with shock and his legs limp as the defeated contestant's in a cock-fight. Continuous lamentations issued from his mouth.

When the tiger disappeared, it took him the time in which one would drink a cup of tea to haul himself to his feet. He collected the incense and the censer that had fallen to the ground, and relit it. Then he set off again up the mountain, determined once more to search out the Heavenly Master.

After another thirty or forty paces, he sighed a few times and said bitterly to himself: "I come here in obedience to the Emperor's wishes but what frights I must pass through!" Before he had even completed the sentence he felt another gust of wind, this time laden with noxious fumes, blowing directly towards him as before. He stared at the thick undergrowth from which a slithering sound was issuing. Out shot an immense snake, big as a barrel and spotted with white. Terrified again, the Marshal threw down the censer and gasping, "Now I'm really finished!", fell back against a rugged boulder. He watched the creature, out of the corner of his eye. Imagine it:

As it lifts its head, the earth convulses;
*Lightning strikes if it blinks its eye.*
*When the great beast stirs*
*The valleys split and the hilltops tumble;*
*It breathes out clouds and spits forth mists.*
*Its scales are a kaleidoscope of jade,*
Its tail a slanting pile of silver.

The great snake slithered towards the boulder and fixing its eye on Hong Xin coiled itself in front of him. A dazzling golden light poured from its eyes, and opening wide an enormous mouth it protruded its tongue and breathed its noxious vapours right in Hong Xin's face. The Marshal almost fainted in terror; his three spirits scattered and his seven senses dispersed. After regarding the Marshal for a moment, the snake slid away down the mountain and was seen no more.

"Merciful Heavens! I almost died of fright!" the Marshal exclaimed when he had picked himself up again. He examined himself and found he had come out in goose-flesh with bumps the size of buns. He cursed the Taoists: "What insufferable lack of manners! To make sport of a court official, treating me to all these shocks! If I don't find the Heavenly Master when I get to the top, I shall have a thing or two to say to that lot when I get down again!" He picked up the silver censer, rearranged the imperial edict on his back and, after adjusting his clothing and his cap, was ready to continue the ascent. He was just about to take the first step when he heard from behind a group of pine trees the sweet sound of a flute softly played. It was gradually approaching. He watched closely while from a hollow on the mountainside there came a young Taoist acolyte, riding backwards on a cow and playing an iron flute. See him here:

*His hair was coiled into twin peaks, and he was apparelled all in blue; about his waist was a belt of plaited straw and hemp shoes with rope soles were on his feet. His eyes were piercing and his smile dazzling as he glided along, stirring no dust. The rich profusion of his hair and his rosy cheeks gave him a brilliant appearance but nothing coarse or common was there in his bearing.*

It was just like it says in Lü Dongbin's? Famous cowherd songs:

The grassy plain extends for several miles;
*The sound of a flute carries on the evening wind.*
*After nightfall, he reaches home and eats.*
Still in his raincoat of bark, he slumbers in the moonlight.

So there was this lad, smiling to himself and blowing on an iron flute as he rode along on his cow, crossing the mountainside in front of Hong Xin. "Where have you come from?" Hong Xin called out, and "Do you know who I am?"

The boy paid no attention but simply went on playing his flute. The Marshal had repeated his question a number of times, before the boy suddenly laughed out loud and, pointing his flute at Hong Xin, said: "You come here to see the Heavenly Master, am I right?"

Hong Xin was taken aback. "You're just a cowherd, how do you know this?"

The boy answered: "When I was serving the Master this morning in his thatched cabin, I heard him say: 'Today the Emperor has sent an envoy to me here on the mountain bearing His Majesty's edict, with the imperial incense; my presence is requested in the Eastern Capital to offer the three thousand six hundred libations and pray for the world's delivery from the plague. I shall go today, mounted on a crane and riding the clouds.' I believe the Master must have left already, he is not in his hut. You should climb no higher. There are many poisonous reptiles and dangerous beasts on the mountain, I fear your life will be in danger. You had better go back."

"You're not deceiving me, are you?" the Marshal asked.

Instead of replying, the boy burst out laughing. He began to play his flute again, and moved off across the mountainside.

"How does the boy know so much?" the Marshal was thinking. "He must be following the Heavenly Master's instructions, so it must be true." He thought about renewing the ascent but then he thought of the terrifying experiences he had just undergone and how they might have cost him his life, and it seemed better to go back down.

He took up the censer once more, searched out his former route and hurriedly descended. All the Taoists came out to meet him and entreated him to rest in the Superior's private quarters.

"Did you see the Heavenly Master?" the Superior inquired.

"I am an important officer of the imperial court," the Marshal said. "Why did you tell me to climb the mountain and suffer all these appalling dangers that nearly cost me my life? First, when I was halfway up a huge tiger with ferocious eyes and a white forehead sprang out; the shock almost finished me. Then, after I had passed another ravine, an enormous white-spotted snake shot out of the undergrowth and coiled itself in front of me, barring the way. If I hadn't some credit stored up with fate, I could never return to the capital alive. I believe you Taoists wanted to play a trick on me."

"How could we show such disrespect to an important officer of the court?" said the Superior. "It must be that the Heavenly Master was testing your resolve. Although there are snakes and tigers on the mountain, they do no harm to men."

"When I was about to start climbing again," the Marshal continued, "before I had even moved, an acolyte came out from among some pine trees, riding on a cow and playing an iron flute. As he was crossing the mountain in front of me, I asked him where he came from and whether he knew me. He replied 'I know everything.' He said the Heavenly Master had given instructions and left early in the morning for the capital, mounted on a crane and riding the clouds. That is why I have returned."

"Unfortunately, Your Excellency," the Superior said, "you failed to observe an important point. That cowherd was the Heavenly Master himself."

"If it was the Heavenly Master," the Marshal said, "why should he take such a humble form?"

"The Heavenly Master of this generation," said the Superior, "is absolutely out of the ordinary. Though only young, he has reached an extraordinary degree of perfection. He is far above ordinary standards: he is a master of metamorphosis and adept in many arts. People call him the Teacher who has found the Way."

"Then I had no eyes to recognize the true Master," the Marshal said. "I have let him pass me by!"

"Set your mind at rest, Your Excellency," the Superior said. "Since the Master said he was going, the whole business will have been concluded before you get back to the capital."

The Marshal took comfort at this. The Superior meanwhile ordered a banquet in the Marshal's honour, and requested that the imperial edict in its official box be left in the Hall of Higher Purity and that the imperial incense be burnt in the Hall of the Three Pure Ones. A great vegetarian feast was served that day. The eating and drinking lasted till evening and then they slept till dawn.

The next day, after the morning collation, the Superior and monks, with the guestmaster and others, proposed a tour of the monastery. The Marshal was pleased. With several of his suite he left the Superior's quarters, and guided by two acolytes, they visited every part of the monastery. In the course of this tour Hong Xin was able to enjoy many grand sights. The Hall of the Three Pure Ones was rich beyond words; under the left-hand gallery were the Hall of the Nine Heavens, the Hall of the Purple Mysteries, the Hall of the Northern Star; under the right-hand gallery the Hall of the Supreme Unity, the Hall of the Three Powers, the Hall of Exorcism of Perversities. Having admired each of these, they proceeded to an area behind the right-hand gallery. Here the Marshal saw another complete temple. Its surrounding wall was red, the colour of pounded peppers; in front there was a great vermilion door with two leaves. These doors were secured by a bolt the size of a man's arm, and their surface was criss-crossed by a dozen overlapping paper seals on which were affixed all manner of red stamps; above the door was a red lacquer tablet with an inscription in gold characters which read: "Hall of the Vanquished Demons." "What place is this?" the Marshal asked, pointing to the door.

"That is the hall where the Heavenly Masters of preceding generations have confined the Demon Princes," the Superior replied.

"Why is there such a quantity of seals on the door?" the Marshal wanted to know.

"It was our venerable ancestor, the Tang Master of the Mystic Cavern, who sealed the Demon Princes in here," the Superior said. "The masters of ensuing generations each added a seal, so that none of our descendants or descendants' descendants would be so rash as to open the door. Should the Demon Princes escape, the most terrible disasters would ensue. All the Heavenly Masters of the eight or nine generations that have passed till now have renewed the pledge not to open it. The locks are cast from molten bronze. It is impossible to imagine what is within. I myself, who came to this temple thirty years ago, know all this only from hearsay."

It sounded a strange business to the Marshal, and he thought: "I wouldn't mind having a look at these Demon Princes." He said to the Superior: "Open up the door, I'm going to see what these Demon Princes look like."

"Your Excellency!" the Superior cried. "Whatever you do, don't open that door! The masters of preceding generations left the strictest instructions: 'No one henceforth shall dare to open this door!'."

"Poppycock!" the Marshal said. "All you people do is invent mysteries and monsters to dupe the people; it's just a trick to set up a place like this and pretend you've got the Demon Princes locked up in there, in order to show off your magic powers. I've read many books but I don't know where it says how you can lock up demons! The spirits stay in their own world, I refuse to believe there are any Demon Princes in there. Open it up for me at once. I'm going to take a look at these Demon Princes!"

The Superior pleaded with him, repeating over and over: "This hall must not be opened. If it is, woes will follow which the whole of humanity will rue."

Then the Marshal, in a fury, pointed his finger at the monks and said: "If you don't open that door for me, on my return to the court I shall report that you Taoists are guilty, in the first instance, of hindering the proclamation of the imperial edict, failing to respect His Majesty's commands, and preventing me from speaking with the Heavenly Master; and that, secondly, you have built these halls without official authorization, made false claims about holding the Princes of Demons under lock and key here, and sought to subvert the minds of the people. I shall get your certificates withdrawn, and have you branded and sent to languish on a distant frontier!"

Since they were very much afraid of the Marshal's power, the Superior and monks summoned brothers skilled in metalwork, who tore off the seals and smashed the great lock with hammers. Everyone pushed at the door, and it opened. Inside it was pitch black. Just imagine it!

Murk, mist, and inky gloom,
*Smelling of damp and hellish black;*
*Sealed from the sun a hundred years,*
*A thousand years without the moon:*
*Here you can't tell north from south,*
*Here there is no east and west.*
*Swirling vapours freeze your bones,*
*The dark sends shivers down your spine.*
*Here no human trace is seen,*
*Demon spirits only haunt.*
*Open both your eyes, you're blind!*
*Stretch out your hands and nothing find!*
*Like at month's end with the moon newborn*
When dark is deepest close to dawn.

They all poured into the hall. It was so dark they could see nothing. The Marshal ordered his people to fetch a dozen torches and illuminate the interior, when it was seen that the hall was entirely empty except for a stone tablet in the centre, about six or seven feet high. The base of this tablet rested on a carved tortoise half buried in the ground. When light was shone on it, the front of the tablet turned out to be covered in dragon script and phoenix characters, magic signs and ciphers which no one could understand. On the back of it, however, they found four proper words, engraved in bold characters: "For Hong to open." Now was this not a sign first of all that the conjunction of the stars was right for the birth of something? And secondly that the Song Dynasty was to see the appearance of men of honour? And thirdly that Hong Xin's presence was preordained, that it was all drawn up in heaven? Hong Xin was jubilant when he saw these four words.

"You all wanted to stop me," he said to the Superior, "but why do you think my name is here, written so many hundreds of years ago? 'For Hong to open' — it obviously means I am meant to open it and look inside, how can it be wrong to do so? No doubt these Demon Princes are under the stone! Just go and get me some workers with mattocks and crow-bars, and we'll start digging."

The Superior remonstrated with him in dismay: "We can't do that, Your Excellency. There could be dire consequences, fatal to humankind. It would be a disaster!"

This enraged the Marshal. "What do you Taoists know about it?" he bellowed. "What's written on the tablet is perfectly clear, it's for me to open it. How can you object? Call the workers immediately and open it up."

Again and again the Superior warned: "No good will come of this," while the Marshal continued to turn a deaf ear. Workers and monks were summoned. They threw down the tablet and then together they struggled to excavate the stone tortoise. After working half the day, they succeeded in lifting it. Digging deeper still, some three or four feet down, they came upon a slab of green stone, about ten feet square. The Marshal ordered the digging to continue, while the Superior went on protesting. "Don't move it!" The Marshal took no notice. Finally, working all together they managed to lift the stone. Under it they discovered a vast bottomless pit, from the depths of which arose a deafening howl. It was no joke, that sound. Listen:

Heaven splits, earth totters, peaks tremble, mountains fall.
*The tidal wave on the river Qian Tang*
*Rushes for the gates of the sea.*
*On Mounts Tai and Hua*
*A mighty force splits the peaks*
*Like the monster, Gong Gong, moved by ancient wrath*
*Battering the pillars of the sky,*
*Or the famed assassin's awesome strength*
*Smashing the First Emperor's chariot.*
*The wind snaps a thousand bamboos:*
Among a million soldiers the drums beat all night long.[3]

When that piercing shriek passed, behold a black cloud came billowing out of the hole and carried away part of the corner of the temple roof. The black cloud rose till it was half-way up the vault of heaven, then burst in an explosion of gold rays that shot off in all directions and disappeared. There was general panic. Shouting and screaming, they fled from the hall, throwing away their mattocks and crowbars as they went. Many were knocked down and trampled. The Marshal stood aghast, not knowing where to turn. Ashen-faced, he took shelter in the gallery. The Superior joined him, ceaselessly bewailing the calamity.

*

"What kind of spirits are they, that passed?" the Marshal stammered. The holy man needed but few words to explain everything, as you shall hear. You will also hear how a certain emperor could not sleep at night and by day forgot to eat. And how tigers and leopards gathered in the Place of Many Meanderings, and dragons came to rest in Duckweed Marsh.

Behold the reclusive scholar, where so many elegant and refined men of letters dwell. Unconcerned with empty fame and meagre fortune, they sculpt ice and trim snow, laughing and chatting as if they were adrift on a tangled river. They critique former kings and subsequent emperors, distinguishing truth from falsehood as they vie for control of the Central Plains, the seven warring states stirring up the Spring and Autumn Annals. Rise and fall are as fragile as willow branches, life as fleeting as a drifting boat. Countless have achieved fame, countless have sought it, and even more have fled from it. In an instant, a new moon shines over the long river, the vast sea transforms into ancient fields. Surprised that fish cling to trees, like a poor monkey choosing its own wood, yet fearing it might be a broken bow or bent wood. Better to overturn the cup in one's palm and listen to a new melody.

Amid chaos of Dynasties 5,
Peaceful days at last revive;
Mountains and rivers are of yore,
Benevolence of a century and more.
Orioles sang in forest trees,
Entrancing music filled the air;
The people dressed in gorgeous silks,
Contentment reigned everywhere.

This poetry was written in the reign of Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty by a famous scholar named Shao Yaofu. At the close of the Tang Dynasty, and during the succeeding Five Dynasties there was continual civil warfare. In the morning, one General would be supreme but by evening, another General would be in power. Generals Zhu Quanzhong, Li Cunxu, Shi Jingtang, Liu Zhiyuan, and Guo Wei established respectively the Five Dynasties of the Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou (907–60CE). There were fifteen Emperors within fifty years. These frequent changes followed one after another until Zhao Kuangyin founded the Song Dynasty, and ascended the throne as Emperor Taizu. When this great man was born the sky was all red, and in the bedroom there was a fragrant smell. This was because the God of Thunder descended among the mortals.

Taizu was a brave hero, and very intelligent. No Emperor from ancient times to the present can be compared to him. He was a well-made man, and conquered four hundred prefectures and regions. He swept the floor of the whole empire, and left it clean. He established his capital at Bianliang in modern Kaifeng, and laid the foundations for the succeeding eighteen Emperors of the Song Dynasty which lasted for three hundred years. Because of this illustrious feat of arms the scholar states that "the clouds were dispersed, and heaven seen again."

At that time there was a very virtuous and learned man named Chen Tuan living on the Western Sacred Mountain, Mount Hua, and he could foreknow the weather. One day as he was riding on his donkey down the mountain he heard a rumour that Chai Shizong [41] had withdrawn in favour of Marshal Zhao Kuangyin who had ascended the throne. When he heard this he laughed so much that he rolled off the donkey. When his informer asked for an explanation he replied, "The Empire will now be settled, and heaven, earth, and mankind will all be in harmony."

The Emperor Taizu ascended the throne 960 CE, and for the following seventeen years there was general peace. He was succeeded by his descendant Emperors Taizong, Zhenzong, and Renzong. Now Renzong was the incarnation of the Barefoot Immortal, [42] and when he was born he cried continuously, day and night. His father, Emperor Zhenzong issued an edict offering a reward to anyone who could cure the crying infant. When this became known in Heaven, the Great White Gold Star was sent down to earth, and metamorphosed into an old man. He tore down the Imperial edict, and said that he could effect a cure. An official took him to the court, where the Emperor gave him permission to see the sick baby. Upon entering the palace he picked up the royal infant in his arms, and whispered eight words into his ear. Immediately the royal infant stopped crying and the old man vanished in a gust of wind. The words he whispered were:

For civil affairs, there is a civil star,
For military affairs a military star.

As a matter of fact the Jade Emperor of Heaven, the great Taoist god had already sent two stars to assist this newborn infant in those affairs when he became Emperor. The Civil Star was incarnated in Bao Zheng who later became a scholar of the Longtu Academy, and also Prefect of Kaifeng. The Military Star was incarnated in Di Qing who became commander-in-chief of the expedition to the Western Xia Kingdom in modern Gansu. These two worthy ministers assisted the Emperor Renzong for forty-two years. During the first twenty-seven years the crops were abundant, and there was general peace and prosperity. Robbery was rare, and the people could always leave their doors open even at night. In fact the people enjoyed abundant happiness in those years. But who could know that great happiness would be culminated in sorrow? In the 28th year a grave pestilence afflicted the Empire, and a flood of petitions inundated the capital like a heavy snowstorm.

In the Eastern Capital half of the people died. The Grand Secretary Bao Zheng offered a special medicine free but with no effect. The pestilence spread, and increased its virility. The officials discussed the situation in the Council Chamber and when the Emperor gave audience they all entered the Grand Audience Hall where they all kowtowed together. The appointed minister asked what business there was to bring before the Emperor, and the Prime Minister Zhao Zhe, and the official Wen Yanbo stepped forward. The former spoke, "Just now there is a serious pestilence in this Capital, and a great many people have died. I request that in your benevolence an edict be issued pardoning all criminals, reducing all sentences for future crimes, and lessening all taxes. We also beg Your Majesty to offer prayers to Heaven to save the lives of your people."

The Emperor at once agreed to this, and added to the edict that in all temples there should be special prayers to Heaven to stop this great calamity. Although this was done the pestilence still increased its ravages. When the Emperor was informed of this he summoned all ministers to discuss the matter, and during the meeting of the Grand Council Fan Zhongyan spoke, "This great calamity is inflicting the people who are on the verge of despair. I suggest that we send for the Taoist, Heavenly Teacher Zhang at Mount Longhu, Jiangxi province, to offer special prayers here for the cessation of the pestilence."

The Emperor Renzong agreed, and ordered a Hanlin scholar to write the edict. He signed it with the vermilion brush, and handed it to Marshal Hong Xin to deliver it as the Imperial Envoy. Hong Xin fastened the edict on his back, held the Imperial incense in his hand, took about ten assistants, travelled by relays of horses, and soon reached Guixi County in Jiangxi province. He was met and welcomed outside the various towns he passed through by the local officials. A messenger had been sent in advance to advise Heavenly Teacher Zhang of the approaching envoy.

Upon reaching Mount Longhu he was received by a big crowd of Taoist priests, with much beating of drums and gongs, much burning of incense, fluttering banners, and music. The temple abbot conducted the envoy into the Hall of Three Purities where the Imperial edict was respectfully received. When the envoy, Marshal Hong Xin, asked for Heavenly Teacher Zhang the superintendent replied, "The Heavenly Teacher is known as "Xu Jing" who has a pure and lofty nature. He is averse to soliciting favour, and has retired to a straw hut on the summit of the mountain where he cultivates his spirit."

"Then how can I see him about this important matter?" asked Hong Xin.

"We can leave the Imperial edict here unopened while we discuss that matter in another room," replied the superintendent.

This was done, and the envoy took the seat of honour while attendants brought in tea and vegetarian food for all. After the meal the superintendent explained that the Heavenly Teacher had acquired the Tao and since he travelled on clouds, they never knew where he might be. [43] They very seldom saw him at the temple so they thought it hardly worth while to advise him of the approach of the Imperial Envoy.

Hong Xin explained what the edict was about, and asked how he could meet the Heavenly Teacher.

The superintendent replied, "As the Emperor wishes to save the people you must carry out his orders. You must therefore purify yourself by fasting, dress in plain rough clothes, then go by yourself with the Imperial edict on your back, step by step up the mountain, and then you may have the chance of seeing the Heavenly Teacher. But if your heart is not truly sincere, that may spoil your chance of meeting him."

"Since I left the capital," said Hong Xin, "I have been a strict vegetarian so how could my intentions be other than absolutely sincere? Such being the case I will follow your advice and go up the mountain tomorrow."

The following morning about 4 A.M. the priests prepared the fragrant water and invited the envoy to bathe. After bathing he put on new rough clothes and straw sandals; wrapped the Imperial edict in yellow silk and fastened it on his back; took a silver bowl with burning incense in his hands. He took leave of the priests and set off saying prayers as he walked. After some time the path became steeper, and he had to take hold of bushes and trees to pull himself up. He had traversed several summits, and began to feel extremely fatigued. It was now very hard walking, and he became hesitant as to whether to go forward or not. He thought of the pleasant, easy times he used to have in the Capital with rich varied food and comfortable beds. There he never wore rough clothes, and straw sandals, and was never tired like this. Why did they send him to experience such bitterness of soul? How could he find the Heavenly Teacher?

He struggled on for about fifty paces more but was now panting for breath. A strong gust of wind blew down the ravine, and roared through the pines. Just then he saw a tiger rush out from the trees, and was so afraid and startled that he fell down. The tiger examined the envoy, walked round him but after roaring returned to the forest. Hong Xin lay there, his teeth grinding and his heart beating like "a chain of buckets raising water from a well." His sensation became numb, and he seemed paralyzed. His legs could not move, and seemed like a defeated cock after a fight. He began to whine about his fate.

But after a short time his spirits gradually revived, and he continued his walk. He was, however, still short of breath, and began again to complain of the hardness of the way. He muttered, "The Emperor gave me a very hard task," but before he had finished this a very noxious wind burst forth. He stared round, and saw an enormous speckled snake rattling among some bamboos. He was startled and throwing away his bowl, fell down near a large stone, exclaiming, "I shall certainly die this time!" The snake glided towards him, and coiled up at his side. It showed a yellow light in its eyes, opened wide its mouth, and blew a poisonous vapor in his face. This so frightened him that he fainted but the snake soon left him.

When he regained consciousness he saw that his body was as chilly as having been thrown into an icy river. He soliloquized, "I was almost frightened to death! I never suspected that priest of deceiving me. What a shock I had! If I don't find the Heavenly Teacher, I shall have something to say to that priest when I get back." He, however, picked up his incense bowl, put on his headdress, straightened his garments, and prepared to try again. He had taken only a few steps when he heard the sound of a flute which was being played somewhere among the trees. Looking round he saw an acolyte riding on a yellow ox playing a flute, with a smiling countenance.

Hong spoke to him, "Where do you come from? Do you recognize me?"

The boy did not reply but continued playing the flute.

Hong asked the same questions several times, and at last the boy laughed and pointing his flute at him replied, "Have you come here to see the Heavenly Teacher?"

"As you are only a cowherd how is it that you know my affairs?"

"Early this morning I waited upon the Heavenly Teacher, and he told me that you had been commissioned by the Emperor to bring an edict here inviting him to go to the Capital to offer prayers to Heaven to stop the pestilence. He said that he was going to mount his stork, and fly off to the Capital at once. So I think he may have gone, and may not be at the temple. You need not go up the mountain as there are many poisonous snakes and fierce beasts on this mountain that might endanger your life."
"You cannot lie to me," said Hong but the acolyte did not reply to this, and went on his way playing his flute.
The envoy thought, "How can the boy know as much as he says, it may be that the Heavenly Teacher has told him to say this so as to test my perseverance. But as I have already met so many frightful things perhaps it would be better if I now get back." So he retraced his steps.
Upon reaching the temple at the foot of the mountain he was asked by the priests whether he had seen the Heavenly Teacher. He told them what frightful experiences he had had, and said he suspected them of merely trifling with an Imperial Envoy.
"How dare we poor Taoists treat you disrespectfully?" replied the abbot. "These trials might have been arranged by the Heavenly Teacher to test your perseverance. The snakes and tigers on this mountain do not injure people."
"As I was going to struggle up the mountain, I saw a cowherd coming out of a pine forest on a yellow cow, playing a flute who told me that the Heavenly Teacher had flown away on a crane this morning to the Eastern Capital, and so I returned."
"What a pity that you missed such a fine opportunity! That cowherd was the Heavenly Teacher himself!"
"In that case why did he appear in such a strange way?"
"Because he is not an ordinary man. He is only young but his supernatural power is unbounded. He is not a common person. His power is omnipotent. The people all praise him as the Master of the Tao."
"I am so ignorant that I have failed to deliver the edict."
"Never mind! As the Heavenly Teacher meant to go, I think the prayers may have been over and the pestilence already vanished when you get back to the Eastern Capital."
The Imperial edict was replaced in the cover, and put in the Hall of Three Purities. A feast was then prepared for the envoy.
After breakfast the following morning the abbot suggested that they should stroll round the monastery for a sight-seeing. They did so, and spent some time going round all the temple buildings. One of these attracted Marshal Hong Xin's attention. It was surrounded by a red mud wall; the entrance had a large red door with two leaves which were fastened by a very big lock. There were about ten strips of paper sealing the door, and these were all stamped with red seals; above the door was a board with four gilt characters, "The Subdued Demons Hall." The envoy asked what the Hall was used for, and was informed that a previous Heavenly Teacher had subdued many demons, and imprisoned them there.
"But why are there so many seals on the door?"
"During the Tang dynasty the Heavenly Teacher Dong Xuan subdued the king of the demons, and locked him up inside this Hall. The succeeding generations have each added another seal so that is may never be opened. If those devils ever got out there would be a great calamity. Now about nine generations have passed, and no one ever attempted to tamper with this arrangement. Molten copper has been poured into the lock so that it is impossible to unlock the door. I have lived here for thirty years, and this is all that I have heard of but nobody knows what is inside.
Marshal Hong Xin felt very curious at this, and had a desire to investigate so he said to the superintendent, "Please open the door, and I will see what this king of the demons is like."
"We dare not do that. Our former masters enjoined us not to open it and we cannot presume to disobey the order."
The Imperial Envoy laughed, and said, "Nonsense! You only falsely declare there is something strange, in order to deceive the innocent people. You purposedly arrange such places and tell people that demons are locked up inside so as to show off your spiritual powers. I have read hundreds of volumes of books, and yet have never read of the king of the demons being imprisoned here. There is no way by which man can know about the supernatural. I do not believe that the king of the demons is inside here. Quickly open the door, and I want see what this demon is."
The abbot still declined to do this, as he was afraid that somebody would be injured.
Marshal Hong became angry, and pointing at the Taoists, said, "As you will not open the door I shall first report that you refused to obey the Imperial orders, and not allow me to see the Heavenly Teacher. Also I will say that you are falsely declaring that the king of the demons is imprisoned here, in order to deceive decent people. Your license will be canceled, and you will all be banished to some distant places."
The priests were all afraid of his great influence, and therefore they summoned servants to tear off the seals, and break the big lock. This was done, and when the door was opened they all went inside but could not see anything because it was pitch dark there. So Marshal Hong ordered the servants to light about ten torches, and with these he made a close examination. There was not a single thing except a stone tablet in the centre of the hall. It was about six feet in height, and was resting on a stone tortoise which was almost half in the soil. On the tablet were characters of the very ancient style, and they could not make out any of them. But upon examining the other side of the tablet they found four characters which read, "Open when Hong comes." The Imperial Envoy Marshal Hong Xin was much pleased at this, and turning to the Taoists said, "You tried to obstruct me but many hundred years ago they wrote my name here, and predicted that I would come here, and open the door. The fiends, I see, are imprisoned under this tortoise. Dig out the stone tortoise for me!"
The Taoists were terrified at the order, and said that it was not safe to do such a thing.
Marshal Hong was angry at this continuous obstruction, and abused them as ignorant. He insisted upon the excavation being begun immediately. As on the stone tablet it was stated that he would open the place so although the Taoists still objected they at last gave way, and told the workmen to dig. The men removed the soil and the tortoise. After digging about three feet down they unearthed a square slab of stone. Marshal Hong told them to lift it out, and in spite of objections from the Taoists, the stone was raised, and carried out of the hole.
It was evident that the slab was the cover of a very deep well. Now that the cover was removed a loud strange noise was heard far down in the cavity, and instantly a black cloud shot out from below, breaking a corner of the roof of the hall, and escaped through the aperture. The cloud ascended very high in the sky, and then burst forth into more than a hundred rays of light and disappeared in all directions.
All the spectators were astounded and rushed away from the hall. Even Marshal Hong was thunderstruck, and his countenance changed to a pale yellow colour. He went out to the veranda where he met the abbot who lamented the result. Upon his asking what the demon was which had escaped the superintendent replied, "You do not understand. The fact is that our former Master Dong Xuan imprisoned here the thirty-six heavenly spirits, and seventy-two baneful stars which make a total of 108 fiends. The names of these fiends are inscribed on the stone in ancient writing. As they have now all been released they will bring calamity to the people. What are you going to do in the matter?"
Upon hearing this Marshal Hong was covered with cold perspiration and trembled with fear. Without saying a word he went to pack his baggage and calling together his retinue he quickly departed down the mountain on his way back to the Capital.
On the way Marshal Hong told his suite that they must not mention to anybody what had happened as he was afraid that if the Emperor heard of it he would be punished. They travelled both night and day, and soon reached the Capital, Bianliang, in modern Kaifeng. There he found that the Taoist Heavenly Teacher had arrived, and had held seven days' service against the pestilence and had written magical spells for the sick people and as the pestilence had abated the Heavenly Teacher had flown back on his stork to the mountain.
The following morning Marshal Hong attended the early audience, and addressed the Emperor, "The Heavenly Teacher travelled by crane, and as I could only travel by horse relays he had been here and returned before I could arrive."
The Emperor did not reply but rewarded him for his work. After this, the Emperor reigned for 42 years and upon his death, as he had no children the son of an illustrious Prince succeeded to the throne with the title Yingzong. This Emperor reigned for 4 years, and was followed by his son who reigned as Emperor Shenzong for 18 years. Then after this, Emperor Zhezong reigned and during his reign, there was peace in the empire. But if there had been nothing but peace.

## 002

## Drill Instructor Wang Secretly to Yanan Prefecture Escapes; 9 Dragons Shi Jin Wreaks Havoc in the Shi Family Village & gets his Defences into Shape

During the reign of Emperor Zhe Zong, who ruled a long time after Ren Zong, in Bianliang the Eastern Capital, in Kaifeng Prefecture previously called Xuanwu District, there lived a young scamp named Gao. A second son, he was quite useless. He cared only for jousting with spear and staff, and was an excellent football player. People in the capital were fond of making quips. They dubbed him Gao Qiu, or "Gao the Ball." Later, when he prospered, he changed "Qiu" to another character with the same sound but with a less inelegant meaning.
In addition to his skill with weapons, Gao Qiu could play musical instruments and sing and dance. He also learned a bit about poetry and versifying. But when it came to virtue and proper behavior, he didn't know a thing. He spent his time gadding about the city and its environs. Thanks to him, the son of Master Wang, an iron-shop owner, dissipated a considerable sum of money in theatres, gambling dens, and brothels.
For this reason the father made a written complaint against Gao to Kaifeng Prefecture. The prefect gave Gao 20 strokes, banished him from the city, and forbade the people of the Eastern Capital from either feeding him or giving him shelter. Gao Qiu's solution was to proffer his services to one Liu Shiquan, known as Liu the Eldest, who ran a gambling house in Linhuai Prefecture, west of the Huaihe River. Liu surrounded himself with idlers and riffraff from all over.
Gao Qiu remained with Liu for three years. Then Emperor Zhe Zong prayed to Heaven south of the city, and this caused the winds and rains to become very propitious. The emperor was moved to benevolence, and he declared a general amnesty. Gao Qiu was able to return to the capital. Liu the Eldest wrote a letter of introduction to Dong Jiangshi, a relative of his who ran a medicinal herb shop near the Bridge of Golden Girders, gave Gao some travelling money, and told him Dong would take care of him.
Gao said goodbye, shouldered his pack and returned to the city, where he delivered the letter to Dong. The druggist took one look at Gao, then read the letter.
"How can I put this man up in my home?" he mused. "It would be different if he were straight and honest. The children could learn from him. But he's just a loafer, an untrustworthy fellow who's been exiled for breaking the law, and not the kind likely to reform. If I keep him here he's liable to teach the children bad ways. Yet if I don't I'll be offending Liu the Eldest."
He had no choice but to receive Gao into his home with pretended delight. Dong feasted him everyday for ten days, then he got an idea. He presented Gao with a suit of clothes and handed him a letter of introduction.
"The light of my household is too feeble," he said. "It would only be holding you back to keep you here. I'm turning you over to Su Junior, the Court Scholar. With him you'll be able to make a start. How does that sound?"
Gao thanked him gratefully. Dong had a servant take the letter and escort Gao to the Court Scholar's residence. There, a gateman reported Gao's arrival. The Scholar came out and greeted him. He saw from the letter of introduction that Gao was a scamp.
"I can't take this man in," thought the Scholar. "As a favour to Dong I'll send him to Wang Jinqing, the Young Prince Consort, to serve as a retainer. The Young Prince likes that sort of fellow."
He wrote Dong a reply and let Gao stay the night. The next day he wrote another letter and dispatched it with a steward who took Gao Qiu to the residence of the Young Prince.
Wang had married a younger sister of Emperor Zhe Zong before he took the throne and while Emperor Shen Zong still reigned. The Young Prince was partial to adventurous men, and he staffed his retinue with them. He liked Gao the moment he saw him with the Scholar's letter-bearing servant. He wrote an immediate reply, accepting him as a retainer. From then on Gao remained with the prince, coming and going like one of the family.
As the old saying has it: "Distant friends grow ever distant, friends at hand grow closer still." To celebrate his birthday, the Young Prince ordered that a feast be laid, and invited Prince Duan, his wife's younger brother. Duan had been the eleventh child of Emperor Shen Zong and was a brother of the reigning emperor Zhe Zong. In charge of the imperial equipage, the Ninth Royal Prince, as he was called, was an intelligent, handsome young man, and a skilled dilettante in all forms of amusement. His accomplishments included the lute, chess, calligraphy, painting and football. He was also a good musician, singer and dancer.
That day, Wang the Young Prince spread a banquet of the finest delicacies of land and sea. He seated Duan the Ninth Royal Prince in the central chair or honour and sat down opposite. After several cups of wine and two courses, Prince Duan went out to relieve himself. He stopped by in the library on his return, where the Young Prince joined him. Duan was attracted by a pair of paper-weight lions carved of mutton-fat jade. They were extremely well made, in exquisite detail.
Prince Duan picked them up and couldn't set them down. "Beautiful," he murmured.
"The same artisan also made a jade rack carved like a dragon for writing brushes," said the Young Prince. "I don't have it handy but I'll find it tomorrow and sent it to you together with these paper-weights."
"That's awfully kind of you. I'm sure the dragon is carved even more finely than the lions."
"I'll send it to the palace tomorrow. You'll be able to see for yourself."
Prince Duan thanked him and they went back to the banquet table where they dined until dusk. Both were drunk when they parted. Prince Duan bade the prince consort farewell and returned to his palace.
The next day the Young Prince found the writing-brush rack carved like a dragon. He placed it in a small gold box together with the pair of jade paper-weight lions, wrapped the box in golden silk, wrote a covering letter, and told Gao to deliver the gifts. Gao proceeded directly to Prince Duan's palace. The gate-keeper reported his arrival to the steward, who came out.
"From which official residence are you?"
Gao Qiu bowed. "Prince Consort Wang has directed me to deliver these jade objects to the Royal Prince."
"His Highness is in the middle court playing football with some young eunuchs. You may go in."
"Could I trouble you to show me the way?"
The steward led Gao to the gate of the inner court. Four or five young eunuchs were kicking a ball with Prince Duan. He was wearing a soft Tang style silk hat and a purple robe embroidered with an imperial dragon. The robe was tucked up in front under the prince's official waist sash. Flying phoenixes embroidered in gold thread decorated his boots.
Gao dared not interrupt. He stood behind some servants and waited. Fortune favoured him. The ball sailed past Prince Duan, who couldn't stop it, and rolled through the crowd to Gao Qiu. In a momentary seizure of boldness, he kicked it back to the prince with a "mandarin duck and drake twist."
Duan was delighted. "Who are you?" he asked.
Gao fell on his knees, "A retainer of Prince Consort Wang. At my master's orders I bring Your Highness two jade gifts. I have a letter that goes with them."
The royal prince smiled. "Brother-in-law is always considerate."
Gao Qiu produced the letter. Prince Duan opened the box and looked at the jade pieces, the turned them over to his major-domo.
"So you know how to kick a ball," he said to Gao. "What's your name?"
Gao crossed his arms before his chest respectfully and dropped again to his knees. "Your servant is called Gao Qiu. I've spent a little time with a ball on the field."
"Good," said the prince. "Come and join the game."
"A man of my rank! I wouldn't dare play with your Highness."
"Why not? This is the Clouds-High League, known as the All-Round Circle. It's open to anyone."
Gao Qiu continued to refuse. But when the royal prince insisted, he kowtowed, begged forgiveness for his presumption, and trotted onto the field. He made a few passes with the ball and the prince shouted approval. Gao Qiu was inspired to show everything he had. His movements, his style, were a pleasure to behold. He stayed so close to the ball it seemed glued to his feet.
Prince Duan was enchanted. He wouldn't let Gao leave, and kept him overnight in the palace. The next day he ordered a feast and sent an invitation to the Young Prince.
When Gao failed to return the night before, the Young Prince began to wonder whether he could be trusted. Now, his gate-keeper announced: "A messenger from the Ninth Royal Prince is here with an invitation for Your Excellency to attend a banquet in the place." The Young Prince went out and received the messenger and read the invitation. The he got on his horse and rode to the palace. Dismounting, he proceeded directly to Prince Duan.
The Ninth Royal Prince thanked him for the two jade gifts. Together, they entered the dining-room.
"That Gao Qiu of yours plays a good game of football," said Prince Duan. "I'd like to have him as a retainer. How about it?"
"If he's of any use to Your Highness, let him serve in the palace, by all means."
Prince Duan raised his wine cup and thanked the Young Prince. The two chatted and dined until evening. Then the Young Prince returned to his residence. Of him we'll say no more.
Let us talk rather of Gao Qiu. After he went into the service of Prince Duan he lived and dined in the palace and accompanied the prince everyday, never taking so much as a step from his side. Before two months had elapsed, Emperor Zhe Zong died without leaving an heir. All the high civil and military officials conferred and made Prince Duan the emperor. He was known as Emperor Hui Zong and bore the title of High Priest of Jade Purity and Taoist Sovereign of Provident Truth.
Hui Zong assumed the throne and all went well. One day he said to Gao Qiu: "I'd like to raise you in rank but you'll have to perform some meritorious deed on the border first. I'll have the Council of Military Affairs put you down as available for imperial appointment." Less than half a year later, he was able to make Gao Qiu a marshal commanding the Imperial Guards.
Gao Qiu selected an auspicious day and hour to assume office. All the officers of the Mighty Imperial Guards, both infantry and cavalry, who would be serving under him came to pay their respects. Each showed his identification document and registered. Gao Qiu examined the roster name by name. Only Wang Jin, a drill instructor in the Mighty Imperial Guards, had failed to appear. Half a month previous he had reported ill. Because he had not yet recovered, he hadn't returned to duty.
Marshal Gao was furious. "Nonsense," he shouted. "Sheer insubordination! He sent in his identification document, didn't he? The oaf is just pretending to be sick. Bring him here at once!" Gao dispatched an officer to Wang Jin's house to arrest him.
Now this Wang Jin had no wife or children, only an aged mother in her sixties. The officer said to him: "Marshal Gao has taken office today. When he checked the roster, you weren't there. The chief of staff explained that you were sick at home, and that your excuse was properly registered. But Marshal Gao is very impatient. He wouldn't believe it. He insists that you're faking and wants you arrested. Please come along with me, Drill Instructor. Otherwise. I'll be in trouble."
Wang Jin had no choice but to go to headquarters, sick as he was, and report to the marshal. He kowtowed four times, hailing Gao respectfully, then rose and stood to one side.
"Are you the churl whose father was Wang Sheng, a drill instructor in the district garrison?" Kao demanded.
"I am that humble person," replied Wang Jin.
"Rogue," cried Gao. "Your father was only a medicine pedlar who twirled a staff to attract to crowd. What do you know about military arts? The previous commander must have been blind to appoint you drill instructor. How dare you snub me and fail to report for roll call? Whose backing have you got that you can feign illness and loll around at home?"
"Your humble servant would never dare! I really haven't fully recovered."
"Criminal! If you're sick, how could you come?"
"When the marshal summons me, I must obey."
Gao was enraged. "Guards," he roared, "seize this fellow and give him a good beating."
Many of the junior officers were friends of Wang Jin. Together with the chief of staff they pleaded: "Today is the lucky day the marshal is assuming office. Please let the drill instructor off."

"As a favour to these officers I'll excuse you today, criminal," shouted Gao. "I'll settle with you tomorrow."
Wang Jin thanked him. Only then did he raise his head and get a good look at Gao Qiu. As he left the gate of the headquarters' compound, Wang Jin sighed.
"My life is in danger. So that's our fine Marshal Gao. Loafer and football player, Gao the Second! When he was learning to joust with staves, my father gave him such a drubbing he couldn't get out of bed for three months. He's hated us ever since. Now that he's come up in the world and been appointed commander of the Imperial Guards he's sure to want revenge. Who would have thought that I'd be under him? As the old saying goes: 'Fear not the authorities—except those that have authority over you.' How can I stand up against him? What am I going to do?"
He returned home very depressed and told his mother about it. The two held their heads and wept.
"My son," said the mother, " 'Of all the thirty-six ways to get out of trouble, the best way is—leave.' Only I'm afraid you have no place to go."
"You're right, mother," said Wang Jin. "I've thought it over, and that's how I feel too. The border garrison of Yanan Prefecture is governed by Old General Zhong. Many of his officers who've visited the capital have admired my skill with arms. Why shouldn't I cast my lot in with them? Yanan's a place where men are needed. I'd be safe there."
After talking it over, mother and son agreed.
"We must go secretly, my son," said the mother. "But what about those two corporals at the door—the orderlies who were sent by headquarters? If they find out, we won't be able to get away."
"Don't worry, mother," said Wang Jin. "I know how to get rid of them."
At dusk, he called Corporal Zhang in and said: "First have your dinner. Then I want you to go out and do something for me."
"Where do you want your humble servant to go, Drill Instructor?"
"Because I was ill a few days ago, I vowed I would burn incense in the Temple of the Sacred Mountain outside Sour Date Gate if I got better. I want to do that first thing tomorrow morning. Tonight you tell the priest in charge of sacrifices to open the temple gate a little earlier tomorrow. I'll be the first worshipper. I want you to buy me three kinds of sacrificial meat. You can spend the night in the temple and wait for me there."
Corporal Zhang promised to do as he was bid. He had his dinner, got things ready, and left for the temple.
That night mother and son packed their bedding and clothing, their silks and silver, and placed them in containers to be carried on a shoulder-pole. They also filled two saddle-bags with fodder for the horse.
At the fifth watch before dawn Wang Jin summoned Corporal Li and said: "Take these silver coins to the temple. You and Corporal Zhang buy and cook the three kinds of sacrificial meat, and wait for me. I'll join you just as soon as I've bought some sacrificial paper ingots and candles."
Corporal Li took the silver and departed for the temple. Wang Jin got the horse ready, loaded on the saddle-bags, tied them firmly in place, led the animal outside the rear gate and helped his mother mount. All the heavier household belongings they left behind. Wang Jin locked the front and rear gates, raised the carrying-pole to his shoulder and walked behind the horse.
It was the fifth watch.[1] Taking advantage of the darkness before dawn, they left the city by the West Gate and set out along the road towards the prefecture of Yanan.
To get back to the two orderlies. They bought the sacrificial meats, had them cooked, and waited in the temple until late morning. But Wang Jin failed to appear. Corporal Li became worried. He returned to the house and found the gates locked. He couldn't get in, either front or back. Li inquired among the neighbours for several hours but no one had seen the drill instructor. It was getting late. Corporal Zhang in the temple grew suspicious and also hurried to Wang Jin's home. The two soldiers searched until dusk. But even after dark neither Wang Jin nor his mother returned.
The following day the two corporals inquired about Wang Jin in the homes of his relatives but could not discover any trace of him. Afraid of being implicated, they reported to the Imperial Guards headquarters: "Drill Instructor Wang Jin and his mother have fled. Their destination is unknown."
Gao Qiu cried angrily: "So the criminal has escaped. We'll see how far he can get!" He notified every prefecture and district to arrest Wang Jin on sight as a deserter. Since the two corporals had reported the matter voluntarily, they were not charged. Of them we shall say no more.

Let us speak rather of Drill Instructor Wang Jin and his mother. They ate and drank only when hunger and thirst compelled them, stopping at night and travelling on again at dawn. One day towards evening, after more than a month on the road, Wang Jin, who was carrying a laden shoulder-pole behind the horse his mother was riding, said: "Heaven has been merciful. We've escaped the danger that was spread like a net over earth and sky. We're not far from Yanan Prefecture, Even if Marshal Gao sent men to arrest me, they couldn't catch us now."
Mother and son, rejoicing, passed an inn without noticing it. There was no village in sight now. Although it was late, they didn't know where they could spend the night. Just then, they observed a lamp gleaming in a distant grove.
"There's the answer," said Wang Jin. "We'll go there. We can apologize for disturbing them, ask for a place to spend the night, and go on again in the morning."
Entering the grove, they found a large manor enclosed by an earthen wall. Around the outside of the wall were two or three hundred big willows. Wang Jin knocked on the gate a long time. Finally, a vassal came out. The drill instructor set down his load and greeted him.
"What do you want?" the man asked.
"To tell you the truth," said Wang Jin, "my mother and I tried to cover too much ground and we passed an inn. There doesn't seem to be any inns or villages around here. We hope you can put us up for the night. We'll leave tomorrow morning. We'd be glad to pay whatever is customary for lodgings. Please let us impose on your kindness."
"Wait a bit," said the vassal. "I'll ask the squire. If he agrees, you can come in."
"Sorry to trouble you, brother."
Before long the man returned and said: "My master bids you both to enter."
Wang Jin helped his mother dismount. Carrying his shoulder-pole and leading the horse, he followed the vassal to a threshing-ground. There he set down his burden and tied the horse to a willow tree. Mother and son went to a hall roofed with thatch. The squire was waiting for them.
He was a man over sixty. His hair and beard were white. He wore a hood and a straight-cut loose-fitting gown, tied at the waist by a black silk sash. His feet were shod in tanned leather boots.
Wang Jin kowtowed respectfully.
"That's not necessary," the old man said hastily. "You're travellers who've been exposed to the elements. Please be seated."
Mother and son completed their ceremonial greetings and sat down.
"Where are you from?" asked the squire. "Why have you come here so late in the day?"
"Your humble servant is called Zhang," said Wang Jin. "We live in the capital. Because we've used up our money and cannot carry on our business, we're going to Yanan Prefecture to join some relatives. On the road today we were too eager to press on, and passed an inn without noticing it. If you'll permit us to spend the night here we'll leave in the morning and pay whatever is customary for accommodations."
"Certainly. Who carries his lodgings with him when he travels? I don't suppose you and your mother have eaten?" The squire told his vassal to bring food.
Soon a table was set up in the hall and the vassal came in with a tray bearing four vegetable dishes and one of beef. He set these on the table and heated some wine which he served first.
"Our fare is crude here in the country," said the squire. "I hope you'll forgive us."
Wang Jin rose and thanked him. "We're putting you to too much trouble. We don't know how to repay you."
"No need to talk like that," said the squire. "Let us drink."
In response to his urging Wang Jin and his mother downed six or seven cups of wine. Then the food was served and they ate. After the bowls and dishes had been cleared away the squire rose and led them to a guest-room.
"Could I trouble you to see to it that the horse my mother rode is stabled and fed?" said Wang Jin. "Of course we'll pay."
"That's easy," the squire replied. "We have horses and mules here. I'll tell a vassal to put your horse in our stable and feed it with the other animals."
Wang Jin thanked him, raised his shoulder-pole and carried his belongings into the guest-room. A vassal lit a lamp and brought in hot water so that the travellers could wash their feet. The squire returned to his own quarters. Wang Jin and his mother thanked the servant, closed the door and retired.
They slept all night. By dawn the following day they still hadn't emerged from their room, and the squire approached their door. He heard Wang Jin's mother groaning.
"It's already dawn, guest," called the old man. "You'd better rise."
Wang Jin hurried outside and greeted his host. "I've been up for some time," he said. "We put you to a lot of trouble last night. It really wasn't right."
"Who was groaning just now?"
"To tell you the truth, my mother is exhausted from riding. Last night her heart began paining her again."
"In that case why not stay on here a few more days? Don't worry. I know a good prescription for pains of the heart. I'll send a servant to the county town and get some medicine for your mother. Tell her to set her mind at ease and just rest."
Wang Jin thanked him.
But enough of petty details. Wang Jin and his mother remained at the manor, and the old lady took the medicine. After six or seven days she felt that her illness was cured. Wang Jin packed their belongings and prepared to continue their journey. On his way to the stable to look at his horse he observed in a clearing a young man stripped to the waist with blue dragons tattooed all over his body. His face was as round as a silver platter. About nineteen, he was practising with a staff.
Wang Jin watched for a while, then said without thinking: "Not a bad style but it has weaknesses. It wouldn't stop anyone who was really good."
The young man overheard him. "Who are you to laugh at my skill?" he demanded angrily. "I've had eight of the best teachers. Don't think I can't knock you down! Do you dare have a go with me?"
As he was speaking, the squire came along. "None of your insolence," shouted the old man.
"What right has this fellow to laugh at my technique?" the boy asked.
"Do you know how to wield a staff, guest?" queried the squire.
"A little," replied Wang Jin. "May I presume to ask, sir, what this young man's relationship is to you?"
"He is my son."
"Since he is the young master, if he wishes to learn, your humble servant can give him a few pointers. Is that agreeable?"
"Excellent," said the squire. And he directed the young man: "Kowtow to your teacher."
But the boy would have none of it. "Don't be taken in by this varlet's talk, pa," he said hotly. "I'll kowtow to him as my teacher only if he can beat me at staves!"
"If the young master won't take it seriously," said Wang Jin, "we can have a bout, just for fun."
Standing in the centre of the clearing the boy whirled his staff over his head like a windmill. "Come on, then," he exclaimed. "Come at me, if you have the nerve!"
Wang Jin smiled but he made no move.
"Since you're willing to teach the boy, guest," said the squire, "why not joust with him?"
"I'm afraid I'll hurt the young master," Wang Jin laughed. "It wouldn't look nice."
"That's all right. If you break his hand or foot he'll have brought it on himself."
"Forgive me, then." Wang Jin selected a staff from a weapons rack, walked into the clearing and struck a stance.
The young man looked him over, then raised his staff and charged. Wang Jin quickly withdrew, trailing his weapon. The boy flourished his staff and gave chase. Suddenly Wang Jin turned and lifted his weapon as if to hack down. His opponent raised his own staff to parry. But Wang Jin swiftly retracted his weapon, then thrust it against his adversary's chest. The boy fell flat on his back, his staff flying off to the side.
Wang Jin cast his weapon away and hurried to help the young man. "I'm terribly sorry," he said.
The boy crawled to his feet. He brought over a stool, seated Wang Jin upon it and kowtowed respectfully. "I've studied with many instructors," he said, "but they've taught me practically nothing. Teacher, all I can do is beg for your guidance."
"My mother and I have imposed on your household for several days with no way to show our gratitude. It's only right that I should do my best."
The squire was very pleased. He told his son to dress, and all went to a rear hall and sat down. The old man ordered a vassal to slaughter a sheep and prepare wine and food and fruit. Then he invited Wang Jin and his mother to join him in a feast.
When the four were seated at the table the old man poured out the wine. Rising, he toasted Wang Jin. "With your remarkable skill, you must be a drill instructor," he said. "My son 'has eyes but failed to recognize Mount Taishan.' "
Wang Jin laughed. " 'To a true man, one tells the truth.' Your servant's name isn't Zhang, it's Wang Jin. I'm a drill instructor in the Eastern Capital's Mighty Imperial Guards. I play with spears and staves everyday. Gao Qiu, who has just been appointed commander of the Imperial Guards, was once beaten by my father. He's been longing for revenge and wants to take it out on me. Being under his command, I can't stand up against him. So I've run off with my mother. We're heading for Yanan Prefecture to join the border garrison commanded by Old General Zhong. We never expected that we would come here and be so well treated by you, sir, and your son. You've cured my mother's illness and entertained us for days. We've really imposed too much. If your son wants to learn, your servant will gladly teach him with all his heart. What he's learned so far are a lot of flashy manoeuvres. They look good but they're of no use in combat. I'll teach him from the beginning."
"My son," said the squire, "admit your defeat. Kowtow to your teacher once again." The young man did so.
"Let me tell you, honoured teacher," the old man continued. "My clan has always lived here in Huayin County. There before us is Mount Shaohua. The village is called Shi Family Village. All of the three or four hundred families in it are named Shi. My son, since childhood, has had no interest in farming. He cares only for play with weapons. His mother tried in vain to talk him out of it. She finally died of worry. I had to let him have his way. I don't know how much money I've spent on weapons teachers. I also paid a skilled tattooist to decorate his arms and chest with dragons—nine in all. For that reason he's known throughout the county as Nine Dragons Shi Jin. It's good that you've come, Instructor, and can complete his training. I'll reward you handsomely."
Wang Jin was delighted. "Rest assured, old squire," he said. "If that is your wish, your servant will teach him well."
They drank and feasted. From that day on, Wang Jin and his mother remained in the manor. Wang Jin instructed the young man everyday, teaching him the use of the eighteen weapons: lance, mallet, long bow, crossbow, jingal, jointed bludgeon, truncheon, sword, chain, hooks, hatchet, axe, trident, halberd, shield, staff, spear and rake. Squire Shi went to the county town of Huayin to serve as a ward chief. Of that we'll say no more.
The days slipped by. Soon half a year had passed. Shi Jin became adapt at the eighteen weapons. Wang Jin put his heart into teaching, explaining the fine points of each. When the young man had mastered the weapons, Wang Jin thought to himself: "Although it's very pleasant here, I'm not getting anywhere." He wanted to continue on to Yanan but Shi Jin wouldn't hear of him leaving.
"Stay, teacher," the young man pleaded. "I'll support you and your mother the rest of your lives. Won't that do?"
"Thank you for your good intentions, young brother," said Wang Jin. "It's fine here. But I'm afraid Marshal Gao will send men after me, and you'll become implicated. That wouldn't be right. We'd both be in trouble. I'm determined to go on to Yanan and join the garrison under Old General Zhong. It's a border post and they need men. I can make a fresh start there."
Since they couldn't persuade Wang Jin to stay, Shi Jin and his father gave him a farewell banquet. They presented him with two bolts of satin and a hundred ounces of silver, brought in on a platter.
The next day Wang Jin tied his luggage to his shoulder-pole and got the horse ready. He and his mother took their leave of the old squire, then Wang Jin helped his mother into the saddle and they set out for Yanan. Shi Jin had a vassal carry the shoulder-pole. He himself, hating to part, escorted his guests for ten //:
Finally Shi Jin bowed to his teacher and said good-bye with tears in his eyes. He returned with the vassal to the manor. Wang Jin shouldered the carrying-pole and followed behind the horse. Mother and son proceeded westward along the road.
We'll talk not of Wang Jin, who went to join the garrison but rather of Shi Jin. Everyday, he steeled himself vigorously. Young, unmarried, he often got up in the middle of the night to drill with weapons. During the day he practised archery and rode horseback behind the manor.
Before half a year had gone by, his father fell ill and could not leave his bed. Shi Jin brought doctors from near and far but none of them could save him. To the sorrow of all, the old man died. Shi Jin prepared a coffin and outer casket, in which his father was laid, richly dressed, and he hired Buddhist monks to conduct seven services, one every seven days, to pray for the departed squire. He also paid Taoist priests to chant prayers ensuring the passage of his father's soul straight to heaven. There were more than ten of these services. He then selected an auspicious day for the funeral. All of the three or four hundred families in the village attended, dressed in mourning. Squire Shi was buried in the ancestral cemetery on a hillside west of the village.
Now there was no one to look after Shi Jin's household affairs. The young man cared nothing for farming. His only interest was in finding people with whom he could match skill at arms.
Three or four months passed. It was the middle of the sixth lunar month, and very hot. Shi Jin sat on a folding-chair beneath a willow on the edge of the threshing-ground outside the manor, seeking a breath of cool air. He had nothing to do. A breeze wafted in from the pine grove opposite. "How refreshing," thought Shi Jin.
Suddenly he saw a man poke his head out of the grove and peer around. "Who's that over there," Shi Jin shouted, "looking at our manor?" He leaped to his feet and ran to the trees. There, behind a pine, he discovered Li Ji, the rabbit hunter.
"Why are you watching the manor?" Shi Jin demanded. "Are you spying on me?"
Li Ji came forward and greeted him respectfully. "Your humble servant was looking for Shorty Qiu. I wanted him to have a bowl of wine with me. When I saw the Young Master sitting there, enjoying the breeze, I didn't dare intrude."
"Let me ask you. You used to come often and sell us game. I never underpaid you. Why have you stopped? Do you think I have no money?"
"Would I dare think that? There just hasn't been any game lately. That's why I haven't come."
"Piffle! A mountain as big and wide as Shaohua? Do you expect me to believe there are no deer, no rabbits?"

"So you haven't heard, Young Master? Bandits have built a fort on the mountain. They've six or seven hundred men and over a hundred good horses. Their leader is called Miraculous Strategist Zhu Wu. The second in command is called Gorge-Leaping Tiger Chen Da. The third is called White-Spotted Snake Yang Chun. These three raid and pillage at will. The Huayin County authorities can do nothing about them. They've offered a reward of three thousand strings of cash for their capture. But who dares to try? Your servant is afraid to go hunting on the mountain. That's why I can't offer you any game."
"I've heard there were bandits up there," said Shi Jin. "I didn't know the scoundrels were so active. They're bound to make trouble for me. But I still would like some game if you can catch any."
Li Ji bowed and departed.
Shi Jin returned to the manor. "Those rogues are going at it in a big way," he thought. "They'll probably attack our village. In that case ..."
He ordered his vassals to slaughter two fat water buffaloes and bring out some good home-made wine. First he burned paper replicas of gold and silver ingots as an offering to Heaven and prayed for good luck. Then he invited the three or four hundred local peasants to the hall in the manor. After all were seated according to age, he had the vassals pour them wine.
"I hear that three robber chieftains have formed a gang of six or seven hundred bandits on Mount Shaohua who raid and pillage," he said. "Since they're operating in a big way, sooner or later they're going to attack our village. I've invited you here for a conference. When those rascals come, every family must be ready. If our manor sounds the alarm, all of you come running with your weapons. We'll do the same if any of you are attacked. We'll help each other and defend our village. If the chieftains come, I'll deal with them personally."
"You make the decisions, Young Master," said the peasants. "We depend on you. When the alarm sounds none of us will stay away." At evening they drank a final cup in thanks and returned to their homes to prepare their weapons.
Shi Jin strengthened the gates and walls of the manor and put everything in order. He issued suits of armor, and had swords and horses kept in readiness. Of this we'll say no more.

We'll speak instead of the three bandit chieftains on Mount Shaohua. They sat down, one day, and conferred. Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist, their leader, was from Dingyuan. His weapons were two swords. Although not an especially good fighter, he was skilled in battle tactics and was a clever strategist. The second in command, Chen Da was from the city of Yecheng. He wielded a steel-tipped spear. Yang Chun, number three, was from Xieliang County in Puzhou. He used a halberd.
"I hear that Huayin County is offering a reward of three thousand strings of cash and is mustering men to arrest us," said Zhu Wu. "We'll give them a bloody battle when they come. The trouble is we're short of money and grain. We'd better go out and rob some. We'll need a grain reserve to see us through if troops besiege us."
"That's right," said Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger. "Let's demand grain from Huayin County, and see what they do about it."
"Don't go to Huayin," Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake advised. "Pucheng would be better. It's a sure thing."
"There aren't many people in Pucheng," said Chen Da, "and they don't have much money or grain. I'm for raiding Huayin. The people are prosperous there. They've money and grain aplenty."
"You don't understand, brother," said Yang Chun. "To get to Huayin, we have to pass Shi Family Village. That Nine Dragons Shi Jin is very tough. It's not wise to stir him up. He'd never let us by."
"Weak talk, brother," said Chen Da. "If we can't get past a mere village, how are we going to stand up against government troops?"
"You shouldn't underestimate Shi Jin, brother," Yang Chun replied. "He's really fierce."
"I too have heard that he's very brave," said Zhu Wu. "They say his skill with weapons is first rate. Let's not go, brothers."
"Shut your craven mouths," Chen Da cried. "Praising other people's courage pulls down your own. After all he's only human. Does he have three heads and six arms? I don't believe it!" And he shouted to his cohorts: "Get my horse. I'm going to attack Shi Family Village, then I'm going to take Huayin."
Zhu Wu and Yang Chun tried to dissuade him but he wouldn't listen. He donned armor and mounted his horse, picked a hundred and fifty men and, drums beating and gongs crashing, started down the mountain towards Shi Family Village.
Shi Jin, who was in front of the manor checking his men's arms and equipment, was informed of this by one of his vassals. He promptly had the alarm beat out on a bamboo segment. From all sides men of the four hundred village families came running to the manor, carrying their weapons. They found Shi Jin wearing a ridged turban, a vermilion coat of mail, iron breastplate and backpiece, an embroidered black robe, green boots and a leather belt. He had a bow and a quiver of arrows, and he grasped a three-pointed double-edged sword with four holes and eight rings.
A vassal led forward his fiery red horse. Shi Jin mounted. He raised his sword. Preceded by forty strong vassals and followed by ninety villagers and peasants, Shi Jin set forth. Shouting and cheering, the rest of the villagers brought up the rear and followed them to the road north of the village.
Chen Da led his men swiftly down the mountain and told them to spread out. Shi Jin saw that he was wearing a red concave hat, a golden suit of mail, a red robe and thick-soled boots. Around his waist was a long plaited girdle. He rode a high white horse and carried level a steel-tipped lance eighteen feet long. The men on both sides set up a fierce cry.
From their mounts, the two leaders looked at each other. Chen Da bowed in his saddle.
"You murder and burn, rob and plunder, your terrible crimes are all punishable by death," Shi Jin shouted. "Haven't you heard of me? Where do you get the gall to come and tweak the tiger's whiskers?"
"We're short of grain in our mountain fortress," Chen Da replied. "We hope to borrow some in Huayin. The road brings us by your honourable manor but of course we wouldn't dare touch a blade of grass here. Let us pass. We'll thank you properly on our return."
"Nonsense. I'm a ward chief. I've been meaning to go out after you bandits but now you've come to me. If I let you go and the magistrate hears about it, I'll be implicated."
" 'Within the four seas, all men are brothers.' We'll trouble you to let us by."
"Enough of idle chatter. Even if I were willing, there's another who won't agree. You'll have to ask him."
"And who is that, good valiant?"
"This sword in my hand!"
Chen Da grew angry. "Don't push me too far. You'll force me to retaliate!"
Shi Jin, also angry, flourished his sword, spurred his horse and charged. Chen Da struck his own mount and galloped forward with levelled lance. The two men clashed and fought. After several rounds, Shi Jin feinted, pretending to leave his chest exposed, and Chen Da lunged. The young squire dodged the streaking lance. Their bodies met. Shi Jin threw an agile arm around Chen Da's waist, seized him by his plaited girdle and, with a quick twist, lifted him from his decorated saddle and flung him to the ground. The bandit leader's horse dashed away like the wind. Shi Jin shouted for his men to tie Chen Da up. The rest of the bandits were driven off.
Shi Jin returned to the manor and had Chen Da bound to a pillar in the courtyard. He decided that when he captured the other two bandit chieftains as well he would turn all three over to the authorities and claim the reward. He dispensed wine to his men and told them they could go. They drank, praising his courage.
Back in the mountain fortress, Zhu Wu and Yang Chun were wondering why there was still no news. They sent out a scout. Soon the other bandits returned, leading a riderless horse. As they climbed, they shouted to the chieftains: "Bitterness and woe! Chen Da wouldn't listen to you two older brothers, and now he's as good as dead."
Zhu Wu asked what had gone wrong. The bandits told him about the battle, adding: "That Shi Jin is a mighty warrior."
"Chen Da wouldn't listen to me," said Zhu Wu, "and sure enough he's met with disaster."
"Let's go down in full force and fight it out," suggested Yang Chun.
"Impossible," said Zhu Wu. "If Chen Da couldn't beat him, how can you? I have an idea. It's risky but it may save Chen Da. If it doesn't you and I are finished, too."
"What is it?"
Zhu Wu whispered the plan in his ear.
"Excellent," said Yang Chun. "Let's go, then. We've no time to lose."
Shi Jin, in the manor, was still in a temper when a vassal rushed in and reported: "Zhu Wu and Yang Chun are on their way from the mountain fortress."
"Those scoundrels. I'll turn them both in. Bring my horse, quickly."
The alarm was sounded and the villagers gathered. He mounted and was riding through the manor gate when he saw Zhu Wu and Yang Chun approaching on foot. They knelt and gazed at him with tears streaming down their cheeks. Shi Jin reined his animal and shouted: "What are you kneeling there for?"
Weeping, Zhu Wu replied: "We three small men were harried so by the officials that we were forced to go into the hills and become outlaws. We swore that 'although not born on the same day we would on the same day die.' Perhaps ours cannot be compared to the brotherhood between Guan Gong, Zhang Fei and Liu Bei of antiquity but our hearts are equally sincere. Today our younger brother Chen Da went against our advice. He offended Your Excellency and has been locked up in your honourable manor. Since we have no way to save him, we've come to die with him. Please turn the three of us over to the officials and collect the reward. We won't even frown. We gladly ask you to send us to our deaths."
Shi Jin thought to himself: "What loyalty! If I turn them in and claim the reward every stout-hearted fellow in the land will scorn me. 'A tiger doesn't pounce on supine prey,' as the old saying goes." To the kneeling bandit chiefs he said: "Come with me."
The two, without fear, followed him to the rear hall. Again they knelt and asked him to tie them up. Shi Jin repeatedly urged them to rise but they wouldn't hear of it. "The astute spare the astute, and the brave know the brave."
Sure enough, the young squire said: "Since you two are so loyal, I'd be no true man if I handed you over to the authorities. Suppose I gave Chen Da back to you, how would that be?"
"You'd only become implicated," said Zhu Wu. "That would never do. We'd much rather you turned us in and claimed the reward."
"Impossible," retorted Shi Jin. "Will you share my food and drink?"
"Death doesn't scare us," said Zhu Wu. "Why should your meat and wine?"
The young squire was very pleased. He untied Chen Da and spread a feast for the three bandit chiefs in the rear hall. Zhu Wu, Yang Chun and Chen Da thanked him for his kindness. After several drinks, they all looked more cheerful. When the wine was finished, the three chieftains again thanked Shi Jin and went back to their mountain. Shi Jin saw them off as far as the manor gate.
After returning to the fortress, Zhu Wu sat down with the other two. "If it weren't for our plan, would any of us be alive now?" he said. "Not only did we save Chen Da but Shi Jin, with rare gallantry, released us all: In a few days we must send him some gifts to show our gratitude."
Let's skip the petty details. Ten or so days later, the three bandit chiefs, on a moonless night, dispatched two of their men with thirty gold bars. The men knocked at the manor gate and a vassal reported their arrival. Shi Jin quickly donned his clothes and went out to meet them.
"Do you have a message for me?"
"Our three chieftains offer their respects. We are instructed to deliver this paltry gift in thanks to Your Excellency for sparing their lives. Please don't reject it but keep it with a smile." They handed Shi Jin the gold.
At first he was going to refuse but then he thought: "Since they were good enough to send it, I ought to accept." He directed his vassal to give the messengers wine. They drank until after midnight. Then Shi Jin tipped them with silver and told them to return.
Less than half a month later the bandit chiefs again conferred, and once more sent messengers at night to the manor, this time with a string of large precious pearls they had obtained in a robbery. Shi Jin accepted it. Of this we'll say no more.
After another half month Shi Jin thought to himself: "Those three show so much respect, I really ought to send them some gifts in return." The next day he instructed a vassal to buy three bolts of red brocade in the county town and have a tailor make three gowns for the bandit chiefs. He also had three fat sheep slaughtered and cooked. These and the clothes he had two men deliver in a large box.
Shi Jin's steward was a man named Wang the Fourth. This fellow's tongue was so nimble he could converse with officials. The other servants called him "Bodang's [2] Equal." Wang was one of the two messengers. When they arrived with the box at the foot of the mountain, bandit sentries questioned them, then led them to the fortress. The bandit chiefs were delighted with the brocaded silk gowns and the delicious mutton and wine. They tipped the messengers ten ounces of silver and poured them more than a dozen bowls of wine. Shi Jin's men then returned to the manor.
"The mountain chiefs are very grateful," they told the young squire.
Thereafter Shi Jin had considerable dealings with the bandit leaders. Wang the Fourth went to the mountain lair a number of times with gifts. On several occasions the chiefs sent gold and silver to Shi Jin.
The days sped by. Soon it was the eighth lunar month, the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival. Shi Jin decided to ask the three bandit chieftains to enjoy the full moon and drink wine at the manor on the night of the fifteenth. He sent Wang the Fourth to the stronghold with a written invitation. The three leaders accepted with pleasure. They wrote out a reply, tipped Wang five ounces of silver and gave him more than ten bowls of wine.
On the way home Wang ran into two bandits who frequently came to the manor with gifts. They embraced him and dragged him off to a grog shop in a mountain hamlet by the side of the road, where he downed another ten bowls. Finally they parted and Wang resumed his homeward journey. A strong wind buffeted him and brought all the wine to his head. Wang staggered along for about ten //until he came to a grove. He plunged in and threw himself down on a grassy sward.
It so happened that Li Ji the hunter was out after rabbits on the mountainside. He knew Wang and, seeing him lying there, went to help him up but the steward was much too heavy. The hunter's sharp eye noticed the bulge of silver in Wang's belt sash.
"The knave is drunk," he thought. "Where did he get so much money? Why don't I help myself?" Li Ji took off the sash and shook it. The pieces of silver and the brigands' reply fell to the ground. He picked up the letter and opened it. He was barely literate, and could recognize only the names Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun. The flowery language of the rest he was unable to read.
"It's not easy for a poor hunter like me to come up in the world," he said to himself. "Yet the fortune-teller said this year I would get rich. This must be my chance! In Huayin Town I saw a proclamation offering a reward of three thousand strings of cash for the capture of those three bandits. No wonder the other day, when I was looking for Shorty Qiu, that rogue of a Shi Jin was afraid I was spying on him. He's been in league with those brigands right along!"
Li Ji took the pieces of silver and the letter and headed for Huayin to report to the authorities.
When Wang the Fourth awakened it was already the second watch. He was startled to find himself bathed in pale moonlight. He leaped to his feet and looked around. On all sides were pine trees. He felt his waist.
His sash and letter were gone. Wang searched everywhere. He found only the empty sash, lying on the grass.
Wang the Fourth groaned. "It doesn't matter about the silver," he thought. "But it's terrible to lose that letter. Who could have taken it?" He frowned. "If I say I've lost it, the master will be furious. He'll throw me out. I'd better say there wasn't any written reply. He'll never know the difference."
The steward flew back to the manor. It was well into the fifth watch when he arrived.
"What took you so long?" Shi Jin demanded.
"Out of courtesy to you, master, the three chiefs wouldn't let me go. They plied me with drink till after midnight. That's why I'm late."
"Did they send any reply?"
"They were going to write one but I said: 'Since you're definitely coming, why bother with a written reply? Your servant has been drinking. What if I lost it on the way home? That wouldn't be any joke.' "
"No wonder everybody calls you 'Bodang's Equal,' " Shi Jin commended him smilingly. "You're really clever."
"Your servant didn't dare delay. I hurried back without stopping once."
"Well then, send someone to the county town for tidbits to go with the wine we'll serve our guests."
Soon it was Mid-Autumn Festival Day. The weather was bright and clear. Shi Jin instructed his servants to slaughter a big sheep and kill over a hundred chickens and geese and prepare a feast.
Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun directed their minions to guard the stronghold. Towards evening they came down the mountain with an escort of five men. They each carried a halberd and a sword. All were walking, having left their horses in the fortress. They headed straight for the manor.
Shi Jin received them and they exchanged courtesies. The young squire invited them to the rear garden, where a banquet had been spread. He asked them to take the seats of honour. He sat down opposite, and told his vassals to bolt the front and rear gates of the manor. As host and guests drank, attendants kept refilling their cups and carving the sheep. By the time several cups were drained, a full moon was rising in the east.
They drank and enjoyed the Mid-Autumn Festival, and chatted about old things and new. Suddenly, they heard a clamour outside the manor and saw the glow of torches. Shi Jin, startled, rose quickly.
"Please remain seated, friends. I'll go and see what the matter is," he said. Shouting to his vassals: "Don't open the gate."
He climbed a ladder to the top of the wall and looked over. The sheriff of Huayin County, 2 constables and 300 or 400 soldiers had surrounded the manor. Shi Jin and the bandit leaders groaned. In the light of the torches, the young squire could see a veritable forest of pronged spears, halberds, 5-tined forks and barbed spears. The constables were shouting: "Don't let the robbers escape!" If this detachment had not come to arrest Shi Jin and the 3 chiefs, would Shi have killed several men and joined with a dozen or more gallants? As a result, warriors gathered deep amid the reeds, and in the shade of lotus-leaves rode craft of war.

Then the Superior said to Marshal Hong — the story goes on — "Your Excellency still does not understand. This is the very hall referred to in the sacred injunctions handed down by the Master of the Mystic Cavern. His warning was as follows: 'In this hall are incarcerated the thirty-six celestial powers and the seventy-two terrestrial powers; altogether one hundred and eight demon princes are located here, subjugated by the magic formulas engraved in dragon script and phoenix characters upon this stone. If ever they are released into the world, the realm of man must suffer perforce the gravest disturbances.' Now Your Excellency has let them go. What can we do?" Listen to this poem about it:

When of a sudden doors dark and ancient gape,
*Powers of sky and earth from prison escape.*
*Evils awake that until now were sleeping.*
*And he who came to save gives cause for weeping.*
*Now cosmic powers in turmoil swirl like mist*
*And clashing spears on all sides know no pause.*
*While Gao Qiu's villainy is rightly hissed,*
Hong Xin must rank as calamity's prime cause.

When Hong Xin heard the words of the Superior, he broke out in a cold sweat and began to shake uncontrollably. Hurriedly he gathered together his things, summoned his followers and departed from the mountain to return to the capital. The Superior and monks saw him off, as courtesy demands, and then went back to the temple to repair the damaged building and re-erect the tablet. We say no more of them. As for Marshal Hong, on the return journey he gave strict orders to his followers to say no word to anyone about the release of the demons. He feared that if the Emperor heard of it he would be blamed. They made an uneventful journey, riding night and day to reach the capital. On their arrival in Bianliang they heard people say: "The Heavenly Master was seven days and nights in the Forbidden City of the Eastern Capital performing holy rites, distributing amulets and praying for disaster to be averted. Now the plague is eradicated and peace and prosperity have returned to the land. The Heavenly Master left the court, mounted on a crane and riding the clouds, and has returned to the Dragon-Tiger Mountain."

The following day Hong Xin attended court in the morning and made his report to the Emperor. "The Heavenly Master, mounted on a crane and riding the clouds, reached the capital before your servant and his retinue," he explained, "who travelling by stages arrived later."

The Emperor accepted this report and rewarded Hong Xin, who returned to his old duties. We shall say no more of him.

Emperor Ren Zong remained on the throne for forty-two years, until his death. There being no heir, the throne then passed to the son of Yunrang, Prince of Pu'an who was a grandson of Emperor Tai Zong. Under the name Ying Zong he reigned for four years. He was succeeded by his son, Shen Zong whose reign lasted 18 years and was followed by that of Zhe Zong. This was a time of universal peace. There was no trouble of any kind anywhere.

Now there was in those days in the Xuanwu district of the Eastern Capital, Bianliang, or Kaifeng as it is now called, a certain profligate son of a ruined family named Gao. He was the second son, and since his youth he had neglected family affairs and devoted himself entirely to the manipulation of sword or staff, and to football, at which he was very skilled. The people of the capital therefore referred to him not in the customary way as Second Brother Gao but as Gao Qiu or Gao-the-Ball. Later, when he began to get on in the world, he transformed this nickname into Gao-le-Bel. [1] He could play various instruments, wind and string, danced well, and had a good voice. He was an adept at martial arts, with spear or staff, and wrestling. He had some idea of rhyming and calligraphy, and could turn out a song or an ode. But of generosity, virtue, the rites, wisdom, trustworthiness, reliability, loyalty, or excellence he knew absolutely nothing. He spent his days within and without the walls of the capital, pandering to the rich and famous. He had abetted the son of a wealthy man, Mr. Wang, in squandering a fortune: the two of them used to haunt the pleasure gardens, where they were forever in and out of those Houses of the Wind, the Flowers, the Snow or the Moonlight. After this the father took out a writ against Gao, and the district court sentenced him to twenty lashes and banishment, forbidding any inhabitant of the capital to give him food or shelter. Thus beleaguered, Gao-the-Ball betook himself to Linhuaizhou, west of the River Huai, where he found refuge with the owner of a gaming parlour, one Gentleman Liu, or Liu Shiquan, to give him his proper name. The latter had devoted his life to harbouring and supporting riff-raff, and it was his pleasure to shelter miscreants from the four corners of the empire. Gao-the-Ball came to rest in Gentleman Liu's abode and lived there three years.

Later, Emperor Zhe Zong, having gone to offer sacrifices in the southern suburbs and procured propitious winds and timely rains, graciously proclaimed an amnesty throughout the empire. Accordingly in Linhuaizhou Gao-the-Ball received a remission of his sentence and began to plan his return to the capital. Liu Shiquan happened to have a relation in the capital, a certain Dong, who had a medicinal herbs shop under the Golden-Beam Bridge. Liu wrote him a letter which he gave to Gao, together with supplies and money for travel expenses, so that the latter on his return to the capital could lodge with the herbalist.

Gao-the-Ball bade farewell to Liu Shiquan, shouldered his bags, and departed from Linhuaizhou. He made his way to the Eastern Capital, where he went straight to the herbalist's shop under the Golden-Beam Bridge and presented his letter. After observing Gao-the-Ball and reading the letter from Liu Shiquan, Dong said to himself: "How can I take this Gao into my home? If he were an honest man it might be all right to let him have the run of the house. The children could learn something from him. But he's an idler and a vagabond, and simply not to be trusted. What's more, he's a convicted criminal. Such as he don't change their ways. If I let him live with us it will disturb the children and set a bad example to them. On the other hand, if I don't receive him it will be an offence to Liu Shiquan." So for the time being he saw no alternative but to feign a warm welcome. He took Gao in and invited him to dine and drink each day. After ten days or so, Dong worked out a tactic. He bought a new set of clothes and he wrote a letter. These two things he offered to Gao, saying: "My humble establishment fails to do you justice; I fear you will be held back. I in turn, therefore, would like to recommend you, to the young academician, Mr. Su. Sooner or later you are sure to make your name. How does this proposal strike you?"

Gao-the-Ball thanked him profusely. Dong detailed someone to deliver the letter and show Gao the way to the academician's. The doorman announced him. The moment the academician saw Gao and read the letter he recognized him for the dissolute good-for-nothing he was, and said to himself: "How can I take this one into my house? The best solution is to do him a favour, and recommend him to Wang Jinqing, the Emperor's son-in-law, as a personal aide. People have a name for Wang, they call him 'Marshal Wang, the Princeling,' and this is just the type of person he likes." He wrote a reply to Dong, the herbalist, and invited Gao to stay the night. The next day he composed a deferential letter and dispatched it with a servant, who was to take Gao to the Princeling's house.

This Princeling Wang was in fact the husband of Emperor Zhe Zong's younger sister and was the son-in-law of the late Emperor Shen Zong. He liked men of the world: such were the people to whom he gave employment. When academician Su's messenger brought him the letter and presented Gao, Princeling Wang was greatly taken with him, and immediately penned a reply to the academician, informing him that he would take Gao into his household as a personal aide. Gao's fortunes had turned, for from now on he came and went in Marshal Wang's house like one of the family. And, as the old saying goes, "Separate lives make separate thoughts; close living makes for close relations."

One day — it was his birthday — the Princeling ordered his household to prepare a banquet, at which the guest of honour was to be his brother-in-law, Prince Duan. This Prince Duan was the eleventh son of the late Emperor Shen Zong, younger brother to the Emperor Zhe Zong. He had been appointed superintendent of the Eastern Stables, and had the title of Ninth Royal Prince. This was a man of some intelligence and he cut a dashing figure. Of the various pastimes of the rich, the idle, and the dissolute there was none he did not know, none he was not skilled in, and none he did not love. Master of the lute, chess, calligraphy and painting, it goes without saying that he was as good at kicking a ball and throwing bowls as at playing the flute, strumming a guitar, singing or dancing.

The feast that was prepared at Marshal Wang's house that day was furnished with the choicest fare from sea or land. It was an occasion when:

*Incense burns in precious vessels, flowers are arranged in golden vases; brilliant musicians compete to produce the most striking harmonies, and everywhere the masterpieces of famous artisans are on show. There are crystal decanters overflowing with ambrosia, amber cups brimming with transparent distillations; there are tortoiseshell plates piled with luscious peaches and rare fruits, glass bowls heaped with bears' paws and camel's hooves; there is meat of delicate fish parted in silver strands, and perfumed tea brewed from the herb's choicest tips. The dancing girl in the red skirt matches her steps to the ivory clappers and the trilling flute; the blue-sleeved singer pours out her rich notes in harmony with the orchestra and the pipes. 2 rows of beauties are drawn up before the steps, and the orchestra sits close below the dais.*

When Prince Duan arrived for the banquet, Marshal Wang ushered him to the place of honour, and himself sat down opposite. After a good many cups, and after 2 complete menus had been served, Prince Duan got up to wash his hands. Happening to enter the library to rest for a while, he noticed on the table a pair of paperweights made of mutton-fat jade and carved in the form of lions. They were of especially fine workmanship, and the detail was exquisite. Prince Duan picked the lions up and after holding them in his hands and gazing at them a long while, exclaimed, "Magnificent!" Marshal Wang, seeing Prince Duan so taken with them, said: "There is also a jade brush-holder, in the shape of a dragon, from the hand of the same craftsman. I don't have it here at the moment but I will get it tomorrow and send the complete set to you."

Prince Duan was delighted. "That is truly generous," he said. "I am most grateful. I imagine the brush-holder must be even more beautiful."

"Tomorrow I will send for it and have it delivered to your palace," Wang said, "and then you can judge."

Prince Duan thanked him again, and the two of them returned to the banquet, where they feasted on till dusk. They were quite drunk when the party broke up and Prince Duan returned to his palace.

The next morning Wang sent for the jade dragon brush-holder, and together with the two jade lion paperweights had it put in a little gold box that was wrapped in yellow silk. He also wrote a respectful letter, and told Gao-le-Bel — as he now called himself — to deliver it.

In obedience to Marshal Wang's wishes, Gao-le-Bel took up the precious jade knick-knacks, slipped the letter into his breastpocket, and took himself off to Prince Duan's palace. Here the doorman announced him to the chamberlain, who in a little while appeared and asked: "Whose household are you from?"

Gao-le-Bel bowed and said: "I am from Marshal Wang's household. I am sent especially to present these jade ornaments to the Prince."

"His Highness is in the main central court," the Chamberlain said, "playing ball with some of the young palace attendants. You'd better go there and see him yourself."

"Be so good as to conduct me," Gao-le-Bel said. The Chamberlain escorted him to the gates of the court where Gao saw the Prince, wearing a turban of soft gauze in the Tang style, and a long purple tunic embroidered with dragons, fastened at the waist by a double silk belt, signifying military and civil rank; the tunic was hitched up and tucked into the belt in front. On his feet he wore gold slippers embroidered with a flying phoenix. Several young palace attendants were kicking the ball with him.

Not wishing to interrupt, Gao-le-Bel remained standing behind some servants awaiting his opportunity. It must have been Gao-le-Bel's destiny to make his fortune, for luck was with him that day: the ball sailed through the air, while Prince Duan tried in vain to reach it, and came down among the group of servants, where it rolled right to Gao's feet. Gao saw the ball coming, and plucking up his courage, gave it the special kick known as "a duck and drake" or a "double bend," which delivered it straight back to the Prince.

Prince Duan was enormously impressed. "Who are you, then?" he asked.

Gao-le-Bel took a step forward and knelt. "Your Highness, I am in the service of Marshal Wang," he said. "I come, on my master's instructions, to bring you two jade ornaments that he begs you to accept. There is also a letter that I venture humbly to present to you."

The Prince smiled and said: "How gracious of my brother-in-law."

Gao-le-Bel took out the letter and presented it. Prince Duan opened the box, and looked at the jade objects, then gave them to a servant to take away. He paid no further attention to the knick-knacks or where they went but said to Gao: "So you can play football! What's your name?"

Gao bowed again and said: "My name is Gao-le-Bel. I play just a little."

"Good!" said the Prince. "You can come and play with us now."

"But Your Highness, I am no one," Gao protested, prostrating himself. "How can I play with Your Highness?"

"This is the Clouds Company, a club for players," the Prince said. "We call ourselves 'Kickers United.' What possible harm can there be in your playing with us?"

"How could I presume?" Gao said, prostrating himself again.

He refused five or six times but the Prince was adamant, so Gao had no alternative but to knock his head on the ground in acknowledgement of the honour, remove his leggings and enter the field. To begin with he simply performed a few kicks that the Prince applauded. Finally, in deference to the Prince, he was obliged to display the full range of his skill and talent. He played so brilliantly that the ball seemed literally glued to his body, and Prince Duan was so pleased with him he would not hear of Gao's returning home but insisted he stay the night.

The next day the Prince organized a banquet for Marshal Wang and invited him to the palace. Marshal Wang, by the way, had been full of suspicions, when Gao did not return the night before but now his doorman appeared and announced: "The Ninth Royal Prince's servant has arrived with a message for Your Grace: he wants to invite you to a banquet at his palace." After receiving the messenger and reading the invitation, Marshal Wang immediately mounted his horse and rode over to the palace. Arriving there he dismounted and entered. Prince Duan expressed great pleasure at his coming, and thanked him for the jade objects.

During dinner, Prince Duan said: "That Gao-le-Bel is truly an extraordinary ball player, what would you say if I asked you to let me keep him in my service?"

"If you find this person useful to you, then by all means let him stay here in the palace to serve you," the Marshal replied.

Prince Duan was delighted and expressed his gratitude in a toast. After that the two friends chatted for a while, and when the dinner party broke up that evening, Marshal Wang returned to his residence. We say no more of him.

As for Prince Duan, having taken Gao-le-Bel into his service he kept him in the palace, where he was lodged and fed. Gao, for his part, after being so fortunate as to be noticed by Prince Duan, followed his master all the time, never departing from his footsteps.

Less than two months later, Emperor Zhe Zong departed this world. There was no direct heir, and the civil and military authorities, after holding a council, declared Prince Duan emperor. He reigned as Emperor Hui Zong, and was also a Taoist grand master — founder of the Clear Jade School and master of the Way of the Subtle Mystery. His reign was unremarkable. One day, however, he said to Gao-le-Bel: "It is our desire to advance you. But for a promotion to be possible, you really need some frontier service behind you. First we will have you listed at the War Ministry. Then you will be transferred to our personal guard."

Less than six months later the Emperor promoted Gao-le-Bel to the rank of Grand Marshal of the Palace. It was like this:

Clouds Company pays degree no heed;
*"Kickers United" knows not higher and lower;*
*Gao booted himself upwards with an agile kick,*
And landed in the corridors of power.

After receiving this rank, Gao-le-Bel chose a suitable day and an auspicious morning, and went to assume his duties at the Palace. All the members of staff and officers of the guard under his orders, the staff officers, the Imperial Guard, the Emperor's personal guard, infantry and cavalry, came to pay him their respects, each holding out a card showing his name and duties. When Grand Marshal Gao had ticked the names off on his list only one was missing: Wang Jin, instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards, who already a fortnight earlier had reported sick, and had not returned to his post because he was not yet recovered from his illness. Marshal Gao flew into a great rage. "Bollocks!" he shouted. "I've got his card here. If the bastard refuses to put in an appearance, it's because he's a shirker! He's malingering! Fetch him here at once!"

They went at once to Wang Jin's home to get him. Wang Jin was not married and lived with his old mother, who was over sixty. "Today Marshal Gao came to the office for the first time," the commander of the local police explained to Wang Jin. "He couldn't tick your name on his list. The quartermaster explained you were staying home because you were sick and there was a certificate to prove it. But Marshal Gao's a difficult man. He refused to accept this. He said you must be fetched, because you were at home faking an illness. So, Instructor Wang, please come with us. If you don't, we will all get into trouble."

Hearing this, Wang Jin had to disregard his illness and go with them. When he came into the presence of Marshal Gao, he kowtowed four times, and, still inclining respectfully, sang out "Beg to report, Sir!"; then he went and stood to one side.

"Listen, you! Are you the son of Wang Sheng, former instructor of the guards of the capital?"

"Yes sir," Wang Jin replied.

"Well, you scum, your father was a mountebank who gave staff-play exhibitions with a painted stick and sold patent medicines in the market, what do you know of the military arts? My predecessor must have had no eyes, if he asked you to be an instructor! How dare you insult me by not turning up to my roll-call! What makes you think you can stay home pretending to be ill, as if you were on holiday?"

"I would not do that, sir. Truly I had not recovered from my illness."

"You felon! If you're ill, how did you get here now?"

"If Your Excellency commands my presence, naturally I must come."

The Marshal's fury was unabated. "Take the bastard away and thrash him for me," he yelled to the guards. The guards, however, were all on good terms with Wang Jin, and they joined with the quartermaster in saying: "Today is the day of the Marshal's first taking office. On such an auspicious day, is it not possible for Your Excellency to pardon him this once?"

"All right, you gaolbird, for the sake of these officers I shall let you off for the time being. But you'd better watch out tomorrow!"

When Wang Jin had prostrated himself in gratitude, he stood up and raising his eyes for the first time saw that it was Gao-le-Bel. As he left the *yamen*, he sighed deeply and said to himself: "I'll be lucky to get out of this now with my life. I was wondering who this 'Marshal Gao' could be, and it turns out that it's none other than that infamous wastrel, Second Brother Gao, the ball-player. He has harboured this hatred ever since he was learning the art of the staff and my father flattened him with a blow he was three or four months recovering from. Now he's struck lucky, and got this position of Grand Marshal to the court, so he wants his revenge. I never foresaw I might have to serve under him. As the proverb says: 'Fear not the law but the one who wields the law.' How can I oppose him? What can I do, in my situation?"

It was in a desperate frame of mind that he returned home. He told his mother everything, and the two of them wept together. Then his mother said: "My son, if there are thirty-six possibilities, the best one is always flight. The trouble is, I fear there's nowhere to go."

"You are right, Mother," Wang Jin said. "It's what I had decided myself. And I've thought of a way. Field-Marshal Zhong, the Old Field-Marshal, is in command of the frontier garrison in Yanan. Under his command there are a good many officers from the capital who used to enjoy my martial art demonstrations. Why not seek refuge with them? I'm sure I can find some employment there which will enable us to live comfortably." This was a case of:

If the master knows how to use the servant,
*The servant will be of use;*
*When the master's unjust, though, the service*
*Accrues to somebody else.*
*It's ever the case that this place's gain*
*Arises from that place's loss;*
*Whom some will drive out, others call in:*
Then shame on the wasteful boss!

When the two of them had discussed it together, the mother said: "My son, if we are going to leave secretly, we must beware of those two guards outside the door. They were sent by the Marshal to watch you; if they begin to suspect our intention, I'm afraid we shall be prevented."

"Don't worry Mother, that's no problem," Wang Jin said. "I've a way to deal with them."

That same evening, before dark, Wang Jin called in one of the guards, Zhang by name, and told him: "When you've had your dinner, I want you to go somewhere and do something for me."

"What do you want me to do, sir?" Zhang asked.

"A few days ago, when I was ill, I made a vow to offer incense at the Temple of the Sacred Mountain outside the Gate of Wild Jujubes. I intend to go there tomorrow and burn some sticks of incense. I want you to go tonight and find the monk who looks after the temple and tell him to open the door a bit earlier tomorrow, so that I can burn the incense and then make the three offerings to the Lords Liu and Li.[2] You can sleep there at the temple, until I come."

Zhang followed these instructions; first he had his dinner and then he said goodnight and went off to the temple.

That evening mother and son packed their bags, taking clothes, a few valuables and some silver that they made into bundles that could be carried. They also filled two saddle-bags with provisions that their horse would bear. In the fifth watch, just before dawn, Wang Jin roused the other guard, whose name was Li, and told him: "Take this silver and go to the Temple of the Sacred Mountain; there I want you and Zhang to buy me all that is needed for the three offerings of meat; you can cook it while you're waiting for me. I shall join you when I've bought candles and some paper-money."

Li took the silver and went off to the temple. Wang Jin then went and saddled the horse. He brought it out of the stable and loaded it with the saddle-bags, checked the harness, and led it out by the back door, where he helped his mother to mount. All the heavier household goods they left behind. He locked the front and back doors and shouldered the carrying-pole, and they set off, with Wang Jin walking behind the horse. Taking advantage of the pre-dawn darkness, they quietly slipped out of the Gate of Western Splendour and took the road to Yanan.

The two guards bought the meat for the offerings and cooked it, and waited in the temple till halfway through the morning. No one came. Li got impatient and went back to the house to see what was going on but he drew a complete blank: the door was shut, and he searched half a day without finding anyone. By evening Zhang, who had remained at the Temple of the Sacred Mountain, also grew suspicious and rushed back to the house, where he joined Li in his searches until darkness fell. Obviously Wang Jin was not returning that night, and there was no sign of the mother either. Next morning the two guards inquired at Wang Jin's relatives' house but didn't find him. Fearing that they would be implicated, they had no alternative but to report the matter to the Marshal's office: "Instructor Wang has abandoned his home and fled with his mother, no one knows where they have gone."

When he heard this, Marshal Gao flew into a great passion. "The crook has fled, has he?" he shouted. "Well find out where the bastard has gone." He issued a writ to every province and district, ordering the arrest of the deserter Wang Jin. The two guards were exonerated because they had reported the matter. We say no more of them.

Instructor Wang and his mother, after leaving the capital, had to keep going, eating and drinking only to appease hunger and thirst, not resting till night and departing at dawn. They were on the road more than a month. One day, as it was getting dark and Wang Jin, with his bundles on a carrying-pole, was following the horse on which his mother sat, he said to his mother: "Heaven is merciful! We have escaped the snares and pitfalls that were set for us. It is no great distance now to Yanan. Marshal Gao can send his men after me if he likes, he won't catch me now."

They were both so pleased with this thought that they travelled on without noticing they had missed the inn where they might have lodged that night. They continued all evening without coming to a single village; where could they put up? Just as they were almost despairing, they saw in the distance a lamp glimmering among the trees. "Well," said Wang Jin, "suppose we go there and explain politely that we want shelter for one night, and will leave tomorrow morning?"

When they reached the wood, what they found was a big old manor, surrounded by a mud wall. Outside the wall were some two or three hundred willow trees. Here's what they saw:

*The highway runs in front; stream and hill protect the rear. A mist of greenery wraps it round, and there are deep pools of shade on every side. Turn the corner and you'll find cows and sheep everywhere, while flocks of ducks and geese wander over the threshing-floor. The meadows and orchards provide ample pasture and are filled with over a thousand workers; countless women and children throng the imposing farm buildings. There's more than enough feed for chickens and dogs. There's a fine library, and plenty of promising sons and heirs.*

Wang Jin went up to the door and knocked several times. When a servant appeared, Wang Jin put down his carrying-pole and exchanged greetings with him. "What brings you to our house?" the man asked.

"To tell the truth," Wang Jin said, "I and my mother have travelled too long and too late and find ourselves without lodging for the night. Here we are, with no village in front and no inn behind; we would like to prevail on your hospitality for one night; we promise to be gone early tomorrow morning. Naturally we will pay for our lodging. I hope you can help us."

"Just wait here, then," the servant said. "I'll go and ask the master. Provided he agrees you'll be welcome to stay."

"Thank you," Wang Jin said. "Don't hurry on our account."

The servant disappeared inside for a good while, before returning and saying: "The squire asks you to come in."

Wang Jin helped his mother to dismount. Then he picked up his carrying-pole and took the horse by the bridle, and they followed the servant inside. Wang Jin put down his burden on the threshing-floor and tied the horse to a tree. He and his mother were taken to a thatched room where the master received them.

The master of the house was a man of some sixty years or more, and his hair was completely white. He wore a hood, for warmth and protection from the dust, and a loose robe cut with the opening on the right, with a sash of black silk, and leather boots. Wang Jin immediately prostrated himself but the squire stopped him: "Please, no ceremony. You are travellers, you have suffered the trials of the road; you must sit down."

These polite rituals completed, mother and son seated them-selves. "Where are you from?" the squire asked them. "How is it that you arrive like this, after dark?"

"My name is Zhang," Wang Jin replied. "I am from the capital. Lately I have exhausted my resources and I have no means of support, so I am going to Yanan, to seek help from some relatives. Today without thinking we pushed on too far, and passed the inn where we might have stayed. We seek your hospitality, just for one night — we shall be gone tomorrow. Of course we would pay you."

"There's no need for that," the squire said. "In these times, who can carry his house with him? Now, I'll wager you and your mother have not eaten. Let me tell the servants to prepare some food."

In a little while a table had been set up in the hall, and servants brought a tray with four different kinds of vegetables and a dish of beef. They put these things down and went to warm wine and pour it.

"In a poor village like this we have little to offer," the squire said. "Please forgive us."

Wang Jin stood up to express his thanks. "We are only sorry to give you the trouble," he said. "I don't know what we can do to show our gratitude."

"Think no more of it," the squire answered. "And drink some wine, I beg you!" He made them drink six or seven cups while the food was served. When they had eaten, the dishes were cleared away and the old man stood up and showed them to the guest-room where they were to sleep.

Wang Jin said: "My mother is travelling on horseback, and if it is not troubling you too much, I would like the horse to be put in the stable and fed. I will pay for that with the rest."

"It is no trouble," the squire said. "We have mules and horses here ourselves. I'll tell one of my people to bring your horse in and feed him."

Wang Jin thanked him and took his bundles into the guest-room. A servant lit the lamp and brought warm water for them to wash their feet. The old man returned to his quarters, and the travellers both thanked the servant, closed the door and settled down to sleep.

Next morning, there being no sign of the visitors well after the day had dawned, the old man and his servants went to listen outside their door; they heard Wang Jin's old mother groaning. The squire called out: "Guests, it's morning, time to get up!" Wang Jin appeared immediately and greeted the old man. "I have long been up," he said. "I fear we gave you too much trouble yesterday, we are at fault."

"But who is it groaning like this?" the old man asked.

"I shall not conceal it from you," Wang Jin replied. "My mother is worn out after so many days in the saddle. Last night she began to suffer heart pains."

"In that case," the old man said, "be at ease. Let your mother stay and rest in my house a few days more. I know a remedy for heart pains, I will send a servant to town to get medicine for her to take. Tell her to rest and not to worry."

Wang Jin thanked him, and to cut a long story short, Wang Jin and his mother stayed at the manor and she took the medicine, until in a little less than a week she seemed almost recovered, and Wang Jin packed their bags, ready for departure.

That day as he was going to the stable to attend to the horse, Wang Jin noticed in a courtyard a young man practising with a staff. He was stripped to the waist, and his body was tattooed all over with blue dragons; he had a round face like a silver plate, and was about eighteen or nineteen years old. Wang Jin watched him for a good while, and then without thinking said, "You use the stick well; only there are some gaps in your technique, you couldn't defeat a real fighter." The youth was furious when he heard this. "Who are you?" he said. "And how dare you mock my art? I have had seven or eight famous teachers, and I certainly don't suppose you can do better. I dare you to try."

Almost before he'd finished speaking the old squire appeared. "Watch your manners," he shouted to the young man.

"I don't like the way this fellow made fun of my fighting," the young man said.

"Do you happen to know anything about fighting with the staff?" the old man asked his guest.

"I know quite a bit," Wang Jin replied. "May I ask who this young man is?"

"He is my son," the squire answered.

"Since he is the young master of the manor," Wang Jin said, "I could correct his technique, if he likes. What do you think?"

"That would be splendid," the squire said. He commanded his son to come and prostrate himself before the teacher. But the young man refused. He was even angrier now. "Don't listen to this fellow's nonsense, Father," he said. "Until he can defeat me with the staff, I certainly won't pay him respect as a teacher."

"If it pleases the young master," Wang Jin said, "we could essay a few passes."

The youth took up a position in the middle of the courtyard and began to whirl his staff around, crying to Wang Jin: "Come on, come on, the one who's scared is no true fighter."

Wang Jin only smiled, and made no move.

"Sir," said the old squire, "if you're willing to teach this young idiot, you might as well trade a few blows."

Wang Jin still only smiled. "If the young man should take a hard knock, it would seem discourteous of me," he said.

"It is no matter. Suppose you should break one of his arms or legs, he would have only himself to thank."

"Then forgive my impoliteness," Wang Jin said. He went to the arms rack and took a staff, after which he placed himself in the middle of the yard and took up a position. The young man watched him a moment, then raised his staff and attacked. Wang Jin parried and broke off the attack. The youth whirled his staff and charged again. Wang Jin turned and raised his staff in the air as if to strike downwards. The youth, thinking the blow was coming from above used his staff to block it. But Wang Jin did not strike downwards. Instead he thrust at his opponent's chest and with one and the same blow caused the staff to fly out of his hands and knocked him over backwards.

Immediately Wang Jin threw down his staff and rushed forward to help the young man up, saying, "Forgive me, forgive me."

The youth scrambled to his feet, and after fetching a stool for Wang Jin to sit down, prostrated himself. "Everything I've studied with all those other masters was useless," he said. "I'm absolutely no good. Teacher, there's no other way. Please, you must teach me."

"My mother and I have been giving trouble here in the house for several days now," Wang Jin said. "We didn't know how we could show our gratitude. It will be a pleasure to do this for you."

The old squire was delighted. He told his son to get dressed and they all went to sit in the inner room. A sheep was killed, wine and dishes and fruit were prepared, and Wang Jin and his mother were requested to enjoy the banquet. When all four were seated, the old man raised his glass and invited them to drink saying: "This master has such skill, I am sure he must be an instructor. My son, you can't see the nose on the end of your face!"

Wang Jin smiled and said: "Good men don't cheat each other, wise men tell the truth. My name is not Zhang. I am actually Wang Jin, instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards, and fighting with the staff is something I have practised all my days. But there is a certain Marshal Gao, to whom my father once gave a beating, who has just become Grand Marshal of the Palace. He bears this old grudge and wants to destroy me. It is my misfortune to be under his command. I have no means to fight him, so the only solution is to escape with my mother to Yanan and seek refuge with Field-Marshal Zhong the Elder, to whom I shall offer my service. I had no idea that I would arrive here and find myself treated so kindly by you and your son. Moreover, my mother owes her recovery to you, and we have been here giving you trouble for days. Since your son wishes to study I will do everything in my power to help. What your son has studied is only what we call 'painted stick'; that is to say, it is only for show, and no use in real fighting. We shall need to start all over again, from the beginning."

The old squire, hearing all this, said: "My son, now we know why you were beaten. Come and prostrate yourself again." The young man did so willingly. It was a case of:

If the teacher's fame is not made plain,
*Heartfelt respect is hard to gain.*
*Not till the master shows his art*
Will the young hothead give his heart.

The father now said: "Instructor, let me tell you about myself. My family have always lived in this district of Huayin. Opposite is Little Mount Hua. This village has become the Shi village. There are three or four hundred families here, all with the name Shi. Since childhood my son showed no interest in farming and only wanted to study the practice of arms. His mother was always against it and died of grief but I have always allowed him to follow his bent. I've spent heaven knows how much on teachers for him. I even got the most skilled craftsman to do this tattoo: on his back, arms and chest there are nine dragons, all told — locally everyone calls him 'The Tattooed Dragon.' Since you are here, Instructor, it will be a fine thing if you can complete his training. You can be sure that I will show my gratitude."

"Don't worry, Squire," said Wang Jin. "If that's what you want, I shall not leave until I have taught your son thoroughly."

After this they ate and drank abundantly and Wang Jin and his mother stayed on in the manor. Each day Shi Jin asked Instructor Wang to teach him something of the management of the eighteen weapons, and one by one learnt them all from the beginning.

These are the eighteen weapons:

*Pike, hammer, bow, crossbow and voulge; flail, broadsword, two-handed sword, mace and bolas; hatchet, guisarme, lance, and halberd; buckler, quarterstaff, trident and rake.*

So each day as we are told, Shi Jin looked after Instructor Wang and his mother at the manor, and learnt the weapons. Squire Shi went to Huayin to perform his duties as Justice of the Peace but our story is not concerned with that. Imperceptibly the days slipped by, and soon half a year had passed:

Outside the window the sunlight is gone in a flash,
*The shadows of flowers steal past the feasting guests.*
*There's barely time for a cup before the farewell song.*
While under the palace steps, the passing hours are rung.

About six months later, then, Shi Jin had covered all the eighteen weapons, learning them all again till he knew them completely. As a result of Wang Jin's dedicated teaching, his technique in each was excellent. Seeing how well he knew it all, Wang Jin said to himself: "We are very well off here but it can't go on forever," and the day soon came when he decided he must move on to Yanan. Shi Jin was most unwilling to see him go. "If you could just stay here, Teacher," he said, "I would look after you and your mother for the rest of your days. That would be fine!"

"Young man," Wang Jin said, "I really appreciate your kindness. We are truly happy here. But I am afraid Marshal Gao may send to arrest us and then you would be implicated. That would not be right. Either way there are disadvantages. But it is my firm intention to go and offer my services to Field-Marshal Zhong in Yanan. It's a frontier zone and I can find employment there which will enable me to live in peace."

Since Shi Jin and his father could not persuade Wang Jin to stay, the best they could do was to organize a farewell dinner for him. As a mark of respect to the teacher, they also presented him with two pieces of silk and a hundred taels of silver. The next day Wang Jin packed their bags and saddled the horse, and he and his mother bade Squire Shi farewell. Wang Jin helped his mother to mount and they set off for Yanan. Shi Jin ordered one of the manor servants to carry the pole and himself accompanied them for more than three miles of the way. His heart was heavy. At the final parting, he prostrated himself, and then returned in tears to the manor. Wang Jin took up the carrying-pole as before and walking behind his mother's horse continued in the direction of Guanxi, the region beyond the western pass.

The story, however, is not concerned with Wang, as he goes off to enlist in the frontier army but with Shi Jin, who after returning home, dedicated himself thoroughly to training. As he was young and strong and had no old people or children to worry about, he thought nothing of getting up in the middle of the night, in the third watch, to practise martial arts, and in the daytime he was always at the back of the manor practising archery or riding.

Less than six months later Shi Jin's father, the old squire, became seriously ill, and took to his bed. Shi Jin sent for doctors, far and wide, to cure him but he did not recover; on the contrary, sad to relate, he passed away. Shi Jin arranged the coffin and the burial, called Buddhist monks to perform ceremonies and read prayers, fasted and observed the rites of the seven times seven days, for the repose of his father's soul. He also called some Taoist priests who performed the rituals for the dead and prayers to ensure that the soul of the dead man would go straight to heaven. They set up at least ten altars and conducted services for the deceased and for his liberation from purgatory. Then an auspicious day and time having been chosen, the coffin was taken to the tomb and interred. The entire village, three or four hundred families with the name Shi, came to escort the coffin and pay their last respects. Squire Shi was buried in the ancestral tomb on the slopes to the west of the village.

From now on there was no one to look after the affairs of the manor. Shi Jin wasn't interested in farming. All he wanted was to find people with whom to practise, measuring his skill with staff and sword.

* * *

Three or four months had passed since the old squire died. It was now the middle of June and the days were suffocatingly hot. One day, Shi Jin, having nothing better to do, took a folding chair and set it in the shade of a willow tree beside the threshing-floor, to enjoy the cool. A breeze was blowing from the direction of a group of pines opposite. "How cool the breeze is," Shi Jin said to himself.

While he was enjoying this sensation, he was surprised to notice someone craning his neck and peering around furtively. "That's odd," Shi Jin thought. "Who's this, snooping about on my land?" He jumped up and got behind the tree to observe. He recognized the man as Li Ji, generally known as "Rabbit-Catcher Li." "Hey, you, Li Ji!" he shouted. "What are you snooping around for? Are you spying out the land for someone?"

Li Ji bowed respectfully and said: "Sir, I just came to look for Young Shorty Qiu, to invite him for a cup or two but I saw Your Honour there, enjoying the breeze, and I didn't want to disturb you."

"Tell me something," Shi Jin said. "Once you used to come here with game to sell to me. I always paid you a fair price, didn't I? So why is it you don't bring me any now? Do you think I haven't got the money, is that it?"

"Oh, no Squire, how could I? There just isn't any game nowadays, that's why I didn't come."

"Balderdash! The whole of Little Mount Hua, a great wilderness like that, and you tell me you can't find a deer or a rabbit or two?"

"Then you haven't heard, sir? These days a bunch of thugs have set up shop there, built themselves a regular stronghold. They've got something like five or six hundred men up there, and a hundred horses. The leader's Zhu Wu, they call him 'The Strategist.' The second one's Chen Da, 'The River-Jumping Tiger.' And the third is Yang Chun, 'The White-Spotted Snake.' The three of them spend their time fighting and looting, and there's no one in Huayin can stop them. A reward of three thousand cash has been announced for their capture. But who'd be fool enough to stir up that lot? That's why people like me don't go hunting on Little Mount Hua any more. How can I have anything to sell you?"

"I've heard about some robbers," Shi Jin said, "but I didn't realize the blighters were such a nuisance. They're going to make trouble for us. All right, Li Ji but next time you come across some game, don't forget me, will you?"

Li Ji saluted and went away.

When Shi Jin went back inside, he said to himself: "These scum are a menace. They'll certainly come here some day, to stir things up. Well, since that's the way it is..."

What he did was order his people to kill two fine fat water- buffalo. There was plenty of good wine in the house, made on the estate. He had them first burn an appropriate amount of paper money and then bade them invite the three or four hundred families in the village. Everyone sat down in the big thatched hall, ranged according to rank and age, and when the wine was served and the first toast drunk, Shi Jin addressed the assembly as follows:

"It has come to my attention that three robbers have established themselves on Little Mount Hua, with something in the order of five or six hundred followers, and that they are attacking and pillaging houses and homes. Since this rabble are getting away with it undisturbed, sooner or later we can expect them to pay us a visit here in our village. That means trouble. And it's why I've called you all here today, to decide what to do about it. If they come, we'd better all be prepared. We here in the house will sound an alarm, and then every one of you must come and lend a hand, with stick or with sword. If any one of you has trouble it will be the same procedure. Provided we all help each other, the village will be secure. Rest assured, if these brigands come, I shall know what to do."

"Yes," they all said, "we shall rely on you, sir, and follow your instructions. If the alarm sounds, everyone will come, never fear."

That evening, after thanking Shi Jin for the wine, the villagers went home and got their weapons out. From now on, Shi Jin busied himself repairing gates and restoring walls, putting things in order about the house and estate, hanging up alarm rattles in various places, mending his armour, polishing his sabre and inspecting his horse, making sure everything needed to repel the bandits was to hand. Enough of this.

Let us turn now to the three brigand chiefs, holding counsel in their retreat on Little Mount Hua. Chief of them was Zhu Wu, "The Strategist," native of Dingyuan and an expert in the use of the two swords. Although not an absolute master, he was a skilled tactician and an excellent leader. Here's a little poem to tell you of his qualities:

Palm leaves cut for his attire,
*Deer-skin stitched to make a hat:*
*The face ablaze with eyes of fire,*
*The chin adorned with curls of hair.*
*He takes his tactics from Zhuge;*[3]

*He's got more tricks than old Fan Li;*
*On Little Mount Hua, who is the first?*
Zhu Wu, the subtle strategist.

The second of these heroes was Chen Da, from Yecheng, also known as "The River-Jumping Tiger." His favourite weapon was a staff of flashing steel. Here's a poem for him:

He's strong and he's bold and his name has spread far,
*He scatters down blows from his staff in a rain,*
*He's the man from Yezhong, he's the scourge of Huayin,*
River-Jumper they call him, the tiger Chen Da.

The third was Yang Chun, from Xieliang in Puzhou, also known as "The White-Spotted Snake." He favoured the fauchard. Here's his poem:

Long is his reach and wiry his arm,
*His prowess is patent and fit for acclaim;*
*The blade of his weapon spills sparks in the sun.*
*This hero is worthy indeed to make one,*
*Of the trio who lord it on Little Mount Hua.*
*Among all the brothers of rivers and lakes,*[4]
He goes by the name of White-Spotted Snake.

Well, Zhu Wu now said to the others: "I heard recently that in Huayin district they've put a price of three thousand on our heads, and said we must be captured. I'm afraid that if they come for us, it's going to be a big fight. Now one problem is that we're not very well provisioned. What do you say to making a little raid? We can lay in supplies — stock up with food and provisions; then if the government troops come we'll be ready to last out any attack."

"Good idea," said Chen Da, the River-Jumping Tiger. "Why not go right away to Huayin and ask them to be so good as to lend us some provisions? Let's see what they say to that."

"No," said Yang Chun, the White-Spotted Snake, "not to Huayin. Pucheng would be far less risky."

"Pucheng is only a small place," Chen Da objected. "Not so much food and resources. Much better attack Huayin. It's crammed with wealth, there's piles of money and supplies."

"But Elder Brother, don't you see?" Yang Chun said. "If we go to attack Huayin, we'll have to pass through the Shi estate. That Shi Jin, the Tattooed Dragon as they call him, is a real tiger, we don't want to provoke him. And he's never going to give us permission to cross his land."

"That's feeble, Little Brother! If you're afraid of passing through one tiny village, how are you going to stand up to the government forces?"

"Elder Brother, we mustn't underestimate him. That's a really brave man."

Zhu Wu, the Strategist, agreed. "I have heard so too, they say he's quite fearless and truly able. Friends, let us not take that road."

But Chen Da began to shout, "Shut your traps, both of you! If you keep singing someone else's praises, all you do is destroy your own confidence. He's only a man, isn't he? I don't reckon he's got three heads and six arms!"

Thereupon he called to his followers: "Quick, saddle my horse. We're going to attack Shi Jin's place at once, and afterwards we'll take Huayin."

Zhu Wu and Yang Chun tried over and over again to dissuade him. But was it likely that Chen Da would ever listen? He strapped on his armour forthwith, leapt on his horse, picked a hundred and fifty men, and then, in a tumult of gongs and drums, descended the mountain towards the Shi village.

Now Shi Jin happened to be right outside his house, inspecting his arms and his horse, when one of his people ran up with the news. Shi Jin heard him out, then went back into the house and sounded the alarm. At this signal, in front and behind, east and west, three or four hundred Shi family dependents ran to fetch their spears or staves and gathered, all three or four hundred of them, in front of the house. There they found Shi Jin, with a flat turban on his head and cased in vermilion armour, wearing a blue brocade and dark green boots, a huntsman's leather belt about his waist, and iron talismans protecting his chest and back. He was armed with a bow and a sheaf of arrows, and in his hand was a three-pointed double-edged guisarme with four holes and eight rings. A retainer was leading his flame-red steed. Shi Jin mounted, brandished his weapon, and thirty or forty solidly-built retainers took station in front of him, while eighty or ninety awkward villagers, together with all the other Shi dependents, formed up behind. With a good deal of shouting they marched to the road which entered the village from the north.

Meanwhile Chen Da, the brigand from Little Mount Hua, was charging down the mountain with his troops. On reaching the valley they deployed. Shi Jin saw Chen Da, his head adorned with a concave red turban, encased in a corselet of polished iron with gold inlay, wearing a red plaided doublet, boots with turned-up toes, and about his waist a seven-foot cord hung with bags. He rode a white charger which held its head proudly, and he carried at a slant an eighteen-foot steel lance. The troops on both sides raised a shout as the two leaders suddenly came face to face.

From his tall mount, Chen Da inspected Shi Jin, then bowed in polite greeting. But Shi Jin began to shout: "You bunch of murderers and incendiaries, looters and pillagers! Felons like you deserve nothing but death! You've heard who I am, haven't you? Yet you've the nerve to come here. You're really asking for trouble!"

Chen Da, who had not dismounted, said: "Our mountain retreat is a little short of provisions. All we want is to go to Huayin in search of supplies. If you'll grant us passage through your land, I promise you we won't touch a single blade of grass. And if you let us pass, of course we'll show our gratitude when we return."

"Balls!" replied Shi Jin. "I'm in authority here, and I was just coming to get you, you bunch of brigands! Do you imagine you can come here today, asking to pass through my village, and I won't arrest you, I'll just give you leave to go? If the district magistrate heard that, I'm the one who'd be on the carpet!"

Chen Da merely said: "All are brothers, within the four seas! I request passage."

"You're wasting your breath," said Shi Jin. "Even if I consented, there's one who wouldn't. Ask him — you can pass if you get his permission."

"Be so kind, sir, as to tell me who that is."

"This good halberd in my hand. If this lets you, you can go."

Then Chen Da shouted in a great rage: "You push a man too far! I've had enough of your bragging!"

Shi Jin, equally furious, began to whirl his blade about, settled himself firmly in the saddle, and charged at Chen Da. The latter struck his horse, took a firm grip of his lance, and galloped towards Shi Jin. The two horses clashed. Then it was:

*To and fro and back and forth: to and fro, two deep-sea dragons fighting for the pearl; back and forth, a tiger roaming the valley for his prey. Enraged, the Tattooed Dragon hurls his guisarme straight at the target; in a fury the River-Jumper aims his lance right at the centre. Skill vies with skill, courage emulates courage.*

The two fought for several hours. Finally Shi Jin sold some damaged goods! He allowed Chen Da to aim a blow directly at the pit of his stomach, and with a sudden bend of the waist caused Chen Da to fall against him. Thus the Tattooed Dragon, whose arms were long and agile as a monkey's, whose waist was supple as a wolf's, was easily able to grasp Chen Da and pull him neatly from the saddle. He seized him by the belt and with a twist sent him sprawling on the ground. The victim's horse bolted, swift as the wind. Shi Jin called his men to tie Chen Da up, and when everyone turned on the brigand troops they ran away. Shi Jin returned to the house, where he tied the River-Jumping Tiger to a pillar of the great hall, purposing by this means to trap the other two chiefs, and hand them all over to the authorities for the reward. He ordered wine for all his men, and then dismissed them. Everyone was full of praise for Shi Jin: "No wonder the master has such a reputation for bravery," they said.

Let us leave this crowd to their rejoicing and their wine, and return to the mountain hideout, where Zhu Wu and Yang Chun were sorely perplexed, being quite unable to guess what had happened. When scouts were sent to hunt for news, they met their companions streaming back up the mountain, leading a riderless horse and crying: "Bad news. Big Brother Chen wouldn't listen to his elders, and it's cost him his life!"

When Zhu Wu asked what this meant, they described the encounter, and added: "How could anyone stand up to a hero like Shi Jin?"

"He wouldn't listen to me," Zhu Wu said. "And this is the result!"

"Then shall we all go," Yang Chun asked, "and offer Shi Jin a fight to the death?"

"That wouldn't help," said Zhu Wu. "If Chen Da was defeated, what hope have you got? No, I have an emergency plan. If we can't save Chen Da with it, then there's nothing left for all of us."

"An emergency plan? What does that mean?"

"The only possible way is this..." Zhu Wu bent and whispered in his ear.

"Brilliant," said Yang Chun. "Let's go, there's no time to lose."

And now we return to Shi Jin. He was hardly back in his house, his fury still unabated, when one of the villagers came flying in and announced: "Zhu Wu and Yang Chun are coming down the mountain!"

"These scum will all die together," Shi Jin roared. "I'll catch these other two and hand them over to the authorities as well. Quick, bring me my horse."

He ordered the alarm to be sounded at once, and the people quickly re-assembled. Shi Jin leapt onto his horse, and just as he was going out of the gate, he saw the two bandits approaching the house. They were on foot! They both threw themselves on their knees before him, tears streaming down their faces.

Shi Jin dismounted and shouted to them: "You two, kneeling there, what have you got to say for yourselves?"

Zhu Wu replied with great emotion, "We three, wretched beings that we are, fled to the mountains and became bandits because we could no longer stand the persecution we suffered from the authorities. From the beginning we made a vow: 'We couldn't ask to be born on the same day but at least we will die on the same day.' We may not have the qualities of Guan Yu, Zhang Fei and Liu Bei,[5] but our feelings are like theirs. Today Younger Brother Chen refused to listen to our advice and fool-ishly insulted Your Honour's tiger spirit. Now he is a prisoner in your manor, after suffering defeat at your noble hand. We know there's no way to save him, so here we are, ready to die also. We trust in your nobility to hand us over to justice together, and we will utter no complaint. Indeed, if you permit us all to die by your hand, we will count it a favour."

Hearing this, Shi Jin reflected: "Such brotherly feeling! If I hand them over and claim the reward, everyone will laugh at me and question my honour. As the old saying has it: 'The tiger doesn't eat carrion'." So he said: "Come inside with me please, both of you."

Zhu Wu and Yang Chun obeyed. Fearlessly they followed him to the door of the inner hall, where they knelt again and asked him to tie them up.

Many times Shi Jin asked them to get up but would they listen? As the saying is, "The wise man understands wisdom, the brave recognize the brave."

"Since you feel so deeply for each other," he said at length, "how would I look if I handed you over? It will be better to release Chen Da and return him to you, don't you think so?"

"Shun all involvement with us, sir," Zhu Wu said. "Brave though you are, it could make things very difficult for you. You had much better turn us in and get the reward."

"I can't do it," Shi Jin said. "Will you accept an invitation to drink and dine with me?"

"If we weren't afraid to die, how could food and wine frighten us?" Zhu Wu declared.

Here's a poem for all this:

Born apart, they swear they'll die together;
*'Tis oft the mark but not so often hit.*
*Look not for courage in the courtier's finery,*
See these poor outlaws demonstrate true grit.

Delighted with this outcome, the Tattooed Dragon released Chen Da, and they went to sit in the inner hall where he regaled all three with wine and meat. The three guests prostrated them-selves in acknowledgement of their host's generosity. Then, after several cups, spring colours began to light all faces. When the wine was gone, the three thanked Shi Jin once more and returned to the mountain. Shi Jin accompanied them as far as the gate, before going back in.

We follow the three brigands back to their mountain hideout. Here they sat down, and the Strategist began: "If it hadn't been for the emergency plan, how would we still be here among the living? But although the rescue worked, there aren't many people like Shi Jin, whose sense of honour prompted him to release us. We must prepare a few gifts during the next few days, to show our gratitude for his sparing our lives."

But enough of these tedious details. A short while later, Zhu Wu and his friends had amassed thirty or so taels of gold, in the form of ingots, the kind known as garlic stalks. These they told two of their men to carry after dark, profiting by the moonlight, to Shi Jin's.

Early that night there was a knock on Shi Jin's door, and a servant came to find him. Shi Jin dressed hurriedly, and went to the door. "What do you want with me?" he asked the bandits.

The ruffians said: "The three chiefs humbly salute you; they have sent us to offer you this poor present, sir, to thank you for sparing their lives. They hope you will not refuse it, or laugh at its inadequacy."

They took out the gold and gave it to Shi Jin, who at first wanted to refuse but then reflected: "Since they sent the gift in good faith, it is really only polite to accept it."

He ordered wine to be brought for the messengers, and entertained them half the night. They were also given some silver in small change, in recompense for their pains. After this they returned to the mountain.

Another two weeks or more passed. Zhu Wu and his companions had got hold of some fine pearls and decided after some discussion to make a gift of them to Shi Jin. Nocturnal messengers were sent again, and he accepted the gift. We say no more of this.

Two weeks or so later, Shi Jin said to himself, "The kindness those three have shown me is really quite out of the ordinary. I'd better prepare some gifts too, to repay them."

The next day he sent some of his people to find a tailor and himself went to town to buy three pieces of red patterned silk, from which he had three double tunics made; he also selected three fat sheep that were cooked and placed in large wooden boxes. He looked for two peasants to carry all this.

At the manor there was a certain chief peasant known as Fourth Brother Wang, a man who was expert at dealing with the authorities. Wang had a glib tongue and a ready wit, so that the whole village called him "a second Wang Bodang."[6] It was to him and to a sturdy peasant from the village that Shi Jin gave the job of carrying the gifts up the mountain.

After questioning them closely, the sentries admitted them to the mountain retreat. The three chiefs received the clothes, the sheep and the wine gladly, and rewarded the messengers with ten taels of silver. They all drank a dozen or so cups, and then the messengers went down the mountain again and back to the house. When they reported to Shi Jin they announced: "The chiefs of the mountain send you many thanks."

After this, Shi Jin's relations with the three chiefs were cordial in the extreme, and Wang was up and down the mountain all the time, bearing gifts. For their part, the three chiefs were always sending their people down with gifts for Shi Jin.

Time passed and suddenly it was the eighth month, and the Mid-Autumn Festival was at hand. Shi Jin felt a desire to talk with the three brigands and decided to invite them to the house on the eve of the fifteenth day, to drink a few cups while admiring the moon. First he sent his man, Wang, to Little Mount Hua with a letter of invitation, to ask them to join him in a banquet. Wang took the letter to the mountain retreat immediately and handed it over. When he saw what it was, Zhu Wu was delighted. The three chiefs accepted and penned a reply. Wang was given four taels of silver and treated to at least ten cups of wine.

As he descended again, Wang fell in with the ruffians who were accustomed to carry gifts in the opposite direction. After embracing him, they weren't going to just let him go, oh no! They dragged him off to a village inn beside the mountain road, where he downed another ten cups of wine or so. After this he left them, and continued on his way back to the house. But as he went, a little mountain breeze got up, and it seemed to send all the wine rushing to his head, so that he began to stagger and stumble as he pursued his way. He had not gone more than a mile or two before he sighted a shady thicket, and plunged into it. Seeing a patch of soft green sedge, he collapsed there, dead to the world.

Now at this moment Li Ji, the trapper, was roaming the mountain in search of rabbits. He recognized Fourth Brother Wang from the Shi estate and went towards him with the idea of helping him up. But could he shift him? However, he noticed some silver that had slipped out of Wang's belt.

"The bastard's drunk," Li Ji said to himself. "Where did he get all this? Why don't I just relieve him of some of it?"

It was really a case of grasping the opportunity fate presents, of chances that arise by themselves. He undid the belt and shook it. Onto the ground fell not only the silver but also the letter. Li Ji picked it up. He knew how to read a few words, so he opened it out and saw on the top "From Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun, of Little Mount Hua." This was followed by a good deal of literary or official stuff which was beyond him but those three names he knew all right. "I'm never going to make anything out of my hunting," Li Ji thought to himself. "But the fortune-teller said I'm going to have a big windfall this year, and here it is. There's a reward of three thousand in Huayin for the capture of those three brigands. To think that only the other day that bastard Shi Jin, when I went to his house to look for Shorty Qiu, bawled me out for spying! And all the time he's the one who's in league with the robbers!"

He took the silver and the letter and hurried off to Huayin to make his report.

As for Wang, he slept right through till the second watch. When he woke to find the soft light of the moon falling on him, he had a big shock. He leapt to his feet. All around him was nothing but pines. He felt for his belt but it was gone, and the letter too. Searching all about, he found only the empty belt lying in the grass. Wang could only curse his fate. "The silver doesn't matter," he said to himself, "but what am I going to do about the letter? How can I know who's taken it?"

Suddenly his brow cleared, as an idea began to take shape. "If I go back and say the letter was taken, the master's going to let me have it, that's for sure. Probably he'll throw me out as well. So the best thing is to say there wasn't any letter. He'll never find out."

Having made this plan, he sped back to the house, arriving in the fifth watch. When Shi Jin saw him, he said, "What kept you so long?"

"Your name was my gain, sir," Wang replied. "Those three on the mountain wouldn't let me go. They kept me there half the night filling me up with wine, that's why I'm late."

"Isn't there a reply?" Shi Jin asked.

"They were going to write a letter but your servant said, 'Your Honours are coming to the party, so where's the need? Besides, I've had a lot of wine, and it would be no joke if something happened to me on the way back'."

Shi Jin was very pleased with this. "No wonder people call you a second Bodang," he said. "You really use your brain."

"Of course I wouldn't dream of wasting time," Wang said, "it was straight back home and no dawdling on the way."

"In that case," Shi Jin said, "tell someone to go to town now and get something to eat with the wine."

The eve of the Mid-Autumn Festival soon came. It was a fine, clear day. Shi Jin ordered his people to kill a big fat sheep and over a hundred chickens and geese, and to make everything ready for the banquet.

Colour faded slowly from the sky and it looked like being a good Mid-Autumn:

*Night approaches, twilight is fading already; a moon like a silver piece hangs in the sky. It looks like a painted thing, this disk of ice; good men all enjoy it. The shadows on its surface are round and full, the cassia and the white hare are in harmony. They roll back screens and curtains. They raise their gold cups in toasts over and over again. Everyone smiles as peace and plenty are pledged. Every year this festival returns. All the revellers are drunk as lords, no one can refuse a toast all night. The Milky Way rains down freshness.*

The three brigands gave orders for a careful watch to be set. They took only three or four men as escort. Providing themselves with a small dagger each, and a sabre in the belt, they set off down the mountain on foot, leaving their horses behind. Presently they arrived at the Shi village. Shi Jin welcomed them ceremoniously, and asked them to come through into the garden at the back, where the banquet was laid. He made them sit in the place of honour, and himself sat down opposite. Then he ordered his retainers to bar the gates, front and back, and the drinking began, with the household servants and retainers raising their cups in turn, while the sheep was carved and toasts proposed. Countless cups were drunk, until in the east the bright face of the moon appeared. Here's the beauty of it in a poem:

The pale flower parts from the sea cliffs
*Clouds scatter from Heaven's road;*
*Sunset fades a thousand leagues to silver,*
*Moonshine makes a thousand hills like water.*
*Shadows slant across the moor,*
*Startling the lone raven.*
*Brightness floods the lake's surface,*
*revealing the paired geese.*
*The ice-disk puts a thousand leagues on show,*
The white hare swallows four hundred lands.

Now as Shi Jin was thus employed drinking with his guests in the garden and enjoying the Mid-Autumn Festival moon, discoursing of things past and present, there suddenly arose a clamour outside the walls, and a flickering of torches. Shi Jin was startled. He jumped to his feet, saying to his guests: "My friends, I beg you to remain seated, while I go and see what is happening." Shouting to his people, "Don't open the gates!" he got a ladder and climbed up to look over the wall. What should he see but the sheriff of Huayin, on horseback, with two officers and three or four hundred militia-men surrounding the house!

It was a bad moment for Shi Jin and his three friends! Outside the light of the torches shone on steel forks, sabres, five-pointed halberds and spiked pikes, as thick as trees in a forest, while the two officers shouted, "Don't let the bandits escape!"

If these intruders hadn't come to seize Shi Jin and the brigand chiefs, how would it ever have come about that Shi Jin killed a couple of men and got to know a dozen heroes? Without the influence of baleful fate, would one ever have seen:

Many soldiers hiding in the thick of the reeds;
Concealed among the lotus, the boats of the attackers?

DURING the reign of the Emperor Zhezong of the Song Dynasty there lived at the Eastern Capital Bianliang, in Kaifeng Prefecture, a loose profligate, named Gao. [44] He could handle well either spear or cudgel, and was an extremely good player at football. He was the second son of a Gao family but instead of calling him Gao the Second,[45] people gave him the nickname of Gao Qiu meaning Gao "the Ball." Later on, however, he adopted another character, also pronounced Qiu.

He could play well on wood or string instruments but was no good at poetry or literature. If there was a discussion of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, or virtue he was unable to take part. He wasted his time in the company of the son of a wealthy man, and everyday these two spent their time in pleasure resorts. His conduct became so bad that at last the wealthy man lodged a complaint before the Prefect who had him arrested, punished with twenty blows of the bamboo, and then banished from the capital.

Gao Qiu went to Huaixi in Linhuai Prefecture where he found refuge in a gambling den that afforded shelter to all the lazy rascals from all places. Three years after this, however, the Emperor granted an amnesty so as to show his benevolence. Upon hearing of this, Gao Qiu decided to return to the capital, and got an introduction to a man named Dong Jiangshi who kept a drug store at the Jinliang Bridge. Upon reading the letter, this man remembered the bad reputation of Gao Qiu, and was afraid that if he lived at his house he might have an evil influence on his children. So after about ten days Dong spoke to Gao Qiu, "Here we can offer you little help. I will however recommend you to a certain Su the Younger, a scholar, who may assist you in cutting a fine career. What do you think of that?"

Gao Qiu was much pleased at this and thanked Dong Jiangshi. Dong wrote a note and sent this with Gao Qiu to the residence of the high official. The doorkeeper announced the arrival, and the scholar Su came out to see Gao Qiu. He also remembered that Gao Qiu was a profligate and decided to get rid of him by recommending him to the Emperor's son-in-law, the Prince Consort Wang Jinqing as a steward.

The following day Su sent Gao Qiu with a servant to Prince Consort Wang Jinqing. This Prince Wang was the husband of the younger sister of the Emperor Zhezong, and son-in-law of the Emperor Shenzong. He took pleasure in meeting flaboyant, stylish men, and when he received the introduction he was glad, and he made Gao Qiu his personal attendant.

An ancient saying is: "Remoteness begets neglect; nearness brings about intimacy." It happened that on his birthday Prince Wang suddenly gave orders to prepare a feast, and specially invited his maternal uncle Prince Duan who was the eleventh son of the late Emperor Shenzong, and the younger brother of the Emperor Zhezong. He controlled the affairs of the Emperor's eastern palaces where he was known as the Ninth Prince. He was intelligent and handsome—but his taste was not so—he preferring profligacy. However, he was a good performer on the lute, he could play chess, paint pictures, and was an excellent footballer. On the day mentioned Prince Duan took the seat of honour at the feast prepared. When the wine was brought in they drank several cups, and after the second course Prince Duan took leave for the toilet. He then retired to the library for a rest and there he happened to see on the reading table a pair of lions made of white jade used as paperweights. They were of elegant workmanship, and he admired them very much. Prince Wang saw that Prince Duan was fond of them so he said, "There is also a jade brush rack with a dragon design made by the same hand but it is not here now. I will get it tomorrow and send both of them to you." Prince Duan was much pleased and said, "I am much obliged for your generosity. I think the brush rack must be very fine." The two men then returned to the banquet and feasted until the evening—when they were very intoxicated they separated, and Prince Duan returned to the palace.

The following day Prince Wang packed the two jade-lion paperweights and the jade brush rack in a golden box, wrote a letter, and sent Gao Qiu off with them. Upon reaching Prince Duan's palace the doorkeeper reported his arrival to the courtyard attendant who inquired his business and then said, "My master is playing football with the eunuchs in the courtyard. You may go in by yourself." The courtyard attendant accompanied him to the gate, and there Gao Qiu saw Prince Duan wearing as a cap, a soft gauze towel of the Tang Dynasty style, and arrayed in a purple gown embroidered with a dragon and a waistbelt with two tassels. The gown was folded up and tucked in the belt. His boots were inlaid with golden thread in the design of a phoenix. There were three or five eunuchs playing football with him.

Gao Qiu dared not to intrude—so he took up his position behind the servants. Now good luck had come to Gao Qiu. The ball rebounded from the ground and Prince Duan failed to kick it—it bounced into the crowd of spectators and landed at the side of Gao Qiu. He saw the ball and instantly had courage. He used the mandarin-duck twist (one leg behind the other) and kicked the ball back to Prince Duan. Prince Duan saw this and being pleased with the exhibition, asked who he was.

Gao Qiu knelt down and said, "I am a confidential servant of Prince Consort Wang and by his orders, I have brought two jade curios to present to Your Highness," so saying, he offered the letter with both hands.

Prince Duan hearing this, laughed and said that Prince Wang was very obliging. He opened the box and after examining the curios handed them to an attendant. He then asked Gao Qiu, "Can you play football? Who are you?" Gao Qiu clasping his hands and kneeling down said, "I am called Gao Qiu. I was punishable for kicking that football." Prince Duan said, "Good! come into the playground and again try." Gao Qiu saluted with folded arms, and said, "What kind of man I am to dare play with Your Highness?" Prince Duan replied, "This is the Society of Gathering of Clouds," also known as the "World's Horizon" (meaning, there is plenty of room for you). It does not matter if you play." Gao Qiu again saluted; saying, "I cannot do it." He begged leave to depart time and again but as Prince Duan insisted upon his playing, Gao Qiu had no escape—so he kowtowed, and confessed his inability, he then untied the garters round his knees and moved towards the centre of the ground. Gao Qiu kicked a few times, and Prince Duan applauded. Gao Qiu had to use all his skill to please the Prince. He played the ball as though it stuck to his body like glue or paste. He never missed it. Prince Duan was highly amused and was unwilling to let Gao Qiu return, so he kept him there for the night. Next day Prince Duan ordered a banquet and sent a special invitation to Prince Consort Wang. The latter had become anxious at the absence of Gao Qiu but upon receipt of this invitation he mounted a horse and went to Prince Duan's palace. Upon entering the banquet hall Duan expressed his gratitude for the curios and then said, "This man Gao Qiu kicks equally well with both feet. I should like to have him for my personal attendant—what do you say?" Prince Wang answered, "If you have any use for him, you may keep him." Prince Duan was pleased and offering a cup of wine thanked him. The two men chatted until evening.

From that time Prince Duan had Gao Qiu as a special servant and the latter did his work well. Everyday he accompanied Prince Duan and was always close at his hand. In less than two months the Emperor Zhezong died without an heir. A large number of civil and military officials petitioned Prince Duan to become Emperor. He ascended the throne with the reign title of Huizong, and known with the Taoist titles of High Priest of Jade Purity and the Emperor of Subtle Truth.

Upon ascending the throne he did nothing remarkable. One day he said to Gao Qiu, "I want to make you an official. But I cannot promote you unless you have shown your merit. Now I will first tell the Grand Council to record your name as an imperial attendant." Within six months Gao Qiu was raised to Marshal of the Imperial Guard.

Before proceeding to his new post he selected a fortunate hour and a lucky day to begin his duties. All the lower officers of various military ranks—both cavalry and infantry—visited him to pay their respects—present their credentials with details of their records. Gao Qiu, the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, examined these reports one by one and noticed one was missing, that is of Wang Jin, the Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guard. About two weeks before Wang Jin had been sick and had not been able to attend business at his *yamen*.[46] Gao Qiu was very angry at this and shouted, "What nonsense! His credentials are here but he himself has not come. This is disobedience, yet he pretends to be sick at home. Men, have him brought here at once." He forthwith sent men to arrest Wang Jin.

Now this Wang Jin had no wife and lived with his mother who was over sixty years of age. The sergeant spoke to Wang Jin, "Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard has assumed his post but has not yet seen you. The Adjutant reported that you were sick at home but Marshal Gao Qiu did not believe this and has sent me to arrest you—you had better go and see him. If you do not go, I shall be implicated." Wang Jin hearing this saw no alternative but to go, in spite of his sickness.

Upon entering the door of the headquarters he saw the Marshal at the other end of the hall and kowtowed four times, then bowing he called "*nuo*" (a sound to attract attention almost equivalent to saying "waiting your order"), then lifting his head he stood at one side.

Marshal Gao Qiu asked, "Are you not the son of Wang Sheng who used to be a Drill Instructor of the whole army?" Wang Jin admitted this.

Marshal Gao Qiu then shouted at him, "So it is you—your father used to sell medicine and exercise the fencing stick to attract a crowd on the street. What military skill have you? But don't be supercilious because I can court-martial you—you must not dare to presume on your rank and differ from my point of view. On whose influence are you depending? What excuse have you for resting at home?" Wang Jin answered, "I speak the truth. I am certainly sick and have not yet recovered." Marshal Gao Qiu used abusive language and said, "You banished thief! If you were sick how could you come here?" Then Wang Jin said, "You summoned me here so I had to come." Marshal Gao Qiu was very angry and shouted an order to the attendants to seize Wang Jin and beat him severely. Among the junior officers there were many who were friendly with Wang Jin, they therefore joined to plead to Marshal Gao Qiu, "Today is your inauguration day it is a lucky day, please forgive this man, this time."

Marshal Gao Qiu spoke in a loud voice, "You banished thief! These junior officers want me to forgive you. I will speak to you again tomorrow." Wang Jin confessed his guilt. Holding up his head he recognized that he was Gao Qiu. He left the headquarters and heaving a sigh said, "Just now my life is insecure; this Gao Qiu was previously at the capital known as Gao the Second—head of a gang of lazy men. At that time he was learning to use the cudgels, and my father hit him, and for three or four months he could not get up from a sick bed. Now he has fortunately become Marshal of the Imperial Guard, and is eager for revenge. I did not know that he was my superior officer. From ancient times it has been said: "Fear not the authorities, except those that have authority over you." There is no help for me. He returned home in a very melancholy mood.

He told his mother about the affair, and they held together and cried: "My son, of thirty-six ways of doing a thing going is the only one that is the best. I am afraid there is no safe place for us." Wang Jin said, "What you say, mother, is true. Your son has also thought of this plan. There is at Yanan Prefecture a General who guards the frontier and controls many military officers, who used to come to the capital to see me fence. Why should we not now fly to him for refuge? At that place I could get employment and settle down to a quiet life."

Mother and son discussed this matter and after deciding, she said, "My son, I must go with you secretly: but I am afraid of the sentries who are stationed outside the door by the headquarters, and we certainly will not be able to get away if they hear of our plans." Wang Jin said, "Never mind, don't worry, mother, I will arrange matters satisfactorily with them." Before the sun set Wang Jin called the sentry Zhang to come inside. He gave him an order—"After you have had your supper I want you to go to a place to do something for me." The sentry inquired where he was to go. Wang Jin said, "Because of my sickness I once took a vow to offer sacrifice at the Yue Temple outside the Suanzao Gate—I wish to be there tomorrow morning and be the first person to burn incense—I want you to go this evening and inform the head priest of this matter. Tell him to have the doors open early tomorrow morning and wait until I come to burn the first incense. There I shall present three sacrifical meats to the gods Liu, Li, and Wang. You must stay at the temple till I come."

Zhang, the sentry replied, "I have already had my supper and will now go to the temple to arrange matters."

That night the mother and son packed their baggage—making two loads for carrying on a pole. They filled two bags with fodder to be tied on the horse, and waited until nearly dawn. Then Wang Jin awakened Li, the other sentry, and giving him silver told him to go to the temple and buy the three meats for the sacrifices, as he himself would buy some yellow candles and would arrive later. Li, the sentry, took the money and departed. Wang Jin saddled the horse and led it out of the stable, fastening the fodder on with ropes and making all tight, he assisted his mother to mount. The furniture, etc., was abandoned. Locking the door he shouldered his load and followed the horse. It was the fifth watch about 4 A.M. and was still dark—so availing themselves of this, they left by the Xihua Gate—and travelled quickly toward Yanan Prefecture, Shaanxi province.

The two sentries at the temple bought the meats for the sacrifices, cooked them, and then waited until about II A.M. without seeing Wang Jin. Sentry Li became anxious and returned to the house to look for Wang Jin. He found that the doors were locked, and he could not enter. After half a day he saw nobody come. Sentry Zhang stayed at the temple until evening and then returned to the house. They both watched the house during the night without seeing Wang Jin or his mother. The following day they inquired of Wang's relatives but no one could be found. They did not wish to be implicated, and therefore reported the matter to the headquarters.

Marshal Gao Qiu upon hearing the report was very angry and wrote a dispatch instructing the officials in every prefecture and district to arrest Wang Jin. The two sentries were free from all blame.

Wang Jin and his mother travelled a good distance from the capital taking their meals on the way as chance permitted. They had been on the way over a month, when one evening Wang Jin remarked to his mother who was riding the horse in front, "May Heaven have pity on us and we are now beyond the reach of legal punishment, as although Marshal Gao Qiu has ordered my arrest, Yanan Prefecture is not far away." They both felt contented but they were not aware that they had passed the only available inn. As it grew dusk, however, they saw the glimmer of a light in a forest a good distance away. Wang Jin decided to investigate as to whether they could stay there for the night. He went into the forest, and saw a farmyard which was surrounded by a mud wall, with about three hundred willow trees outside. He knocked at the gate, and when a servant came he saluted with folded hands. He explained the situation, and asked for a night's lodging for his mother and himself for which they would pay.

The servant went inside to report the matter, and upon his return said the farmer wished to see them. Wang Jin requested his mother to dismount and tied the horse to a tree. He put his load on the threshing floor, and then they followed the servant into the house.

The farmer was over sixty years of age, and his hair was all white. He was wearing a warm cap to protect his head from the dust; a loose fitting gown with a black sash round the waist, and dressed leather boots. Wang Jin saluted but the farmer said, "Friend, don't stand on ceremony. You are travellers in distress. Please be seated."

Wang Jin and his mother, observing the rules of propriety, sat down, and in answer to the farmer's questions Wang Jin explained, "My name is Zhang, and I lived in the capital. Business was bad so I sold all my things, and am now on my way to Yanan Prefecture where I hope to stay with my relatives. Today we have travelled a good distance but have unfortunately missed the inn. We now wish to stay for the night at your honourable house."

The farmer said, "Never mind! No men of this world carry houses about with them. Have you dined?" He then ordered a servant to bring food. The servants soon arranged a table, and carried in trays with four dishes of vegetables, and dishes of beef. They placed these on the table, and then poured out wine. After exchanging complimentary phrases they sat down, and after several cups of wine, rice was brought in. When they had finished the meal, the farmer conducted them to the guest chamber. Wang Jin said, "My mother has ridden the horse a long way, and I suppose that it will be well fed."

"That does not matter," said the farmer. "Here we have many animals, horses and mules, and I have already instructed the servants to look after your horse and feed it well."

Wang Jin thanked him, and then brought his bundles into the chamber. The servants lit a lamp and brought in a tub of hot water for the guests to wash their feet. When the farmer and servants had withdrawn Wang Jin and his mother retired to rest. They slept till well after daybreak the next day. The farmer came to the door of their room to make inquiries, and heard Wang Jin's mother groaning so he asked what was the matter. Wang Jin told him, "I certainly will not deceive you. My mother was very tired last night, and she became sick."

"This being the case, you must not worry," said the farmer. "Tell your mother that she can rest here for a few days. I have a prescription for her sickness, and will send a servant into the town for the medicine. Tell her that she will soon be well again." Wang Jin expressed his thanks. His mother took the medicine and in about five days she was quite well again.

On that day Wang Jin wished to leave and went to the stables to look at the horse. In the yard he saw a young man with naked body, tattooed all over with nine dragons and with sleeves turned up. His face was as white as a silver plate. He was about eighteen years old and was exercising with a cudgel. Wang Jin watched him for some time and then soliloquized, "You use your cudgels very well but I think it could be improved, as there are better men than you."

The young man was angry upon hearing this and said in a loud voice, "Who are you? How dare you sneer at my display—I have been trained by about eight well-known teachers, and I do not think you are their equal. Would you care to fence with me?" While he was speaking the farmer came on the scene and said, "Young man, you are ill-mannered." He replied, "He should not have laughed at my display."

"Can our guest use the cudgel?" asked the farmer. "I know a little about it. May I ask who is this young man?" The farmer replied. "He is my son." "As he is a young man of this house I will give him a few lessons if he likes." "That's very good," said the farmer. He then summoned his son to come and pay respects to the guest but he was unwilling to do this and instead he became very angry—He said, "Father, do not listen to his stupid talk—If he beats me with the cudgel, then I will pay respects to him as a teacher."

"If you do not believe that I can do this, let us have a contest with the cudgels." The young man walked to the middle of the yard and picking up a cudgel whirled it round. He addressed Wang Jin, "Come on! If afraid, you will be a coward." Wang Jin only laughed, and was unwilling to move. "If you are willing to instruct my son, what objection have you to using the cudgel?" said the farmer. Wang Jin laughed, "I am afraid that I may hurt your son, and that will not do." "That does not matter. Even if you break his arm or leg, that will be his own fault," said the farmer. Wang Jin said, "Forgive me if I make a mistake." He then went to the arms rack, and taking a cudgel, went to the centre of the yard and stood on guard. The young man seeing this, seized his cudgel and went to strike at him. Wang Jin retreated, trailing his cudgel on the ground. The farmer's son flourished his weapon and pursued him. Wang Jin suddenly turned round and delivered a downward blow. Seeing the blow descending, the farmer's son met it with an upward thrust. Wang Jin stayed his blow, drew his cudgel away, and then with a sudden thrust, struck the young man on the breast and with a twist, knocked the young man's cudgel out of his hand. He fell down on his back, and Wang Jin immediately advanced to lift him, saying; "Do not blame me! Do not get offended!" The farmer's son scrambled up, brought a stool and requested Wang Jin to be seated. He saluted Wang Jin, saying: "I have wasted my time with other teachers; but they prove to be unworthy half a cash. [47] Now I have to ask you to be my teacher."

"My mother and I have given much trouble to your house for many days," said Wang Jin. I have no favours to give you but I can compensate by teaching you." The farmer was much pleased and told the servants to kill a sheep—prepare a feast with wine and fruit. He also invited Wang Jin's mother to attend the banquet. All four sat down and drank wine together. The farmer stood up with a cup of wine and addressing Wang Jin, said, "Teacher, you are so skillful; you must be an instructor. My son, you have eyes but have failed to see this eminent person." Wang Jin laughed, "I will not deceive you. I am not Zhang; I am Wang Jin, Drill Inspector of the Imperial Guard at Kaifeng. Just now a new commander has arrived—Marshal Gao Qiu—and because my father once knocked him down with a cudgel he still harbours resentment, against me. As I am his subordinate I cannot dispute with him, so I take my mother to Yanan Prefecture. It was by chance that I came here and met you. You have treated me well—cured my mother, entertained us, so I felt uneasy of your generosity. If your son is willing to learn I can teach him. At present, his fencing is only showy and spectacular but in a real contest it would be of no use. I will instruct him properly from the beginning."

The farmer insisted upon his son paying respects to his new teacher, and said, "You are a first-class instructor. My ancestors lived in this district of Huayin County, close to Mount Shaohua. This is the Shi family village, and contains about four hundred families of the surname Shi. My son takes interest in playing with lances and cudgels instead of doing farm work. When his mother remonstrated with him, he paid no heed and she became angry and died. I am unable to control him and do not know how much money he has spent. He engaged a man to teach him and also employed a workman to tattoo nine dragons on his body, so that the people about here call him "Shi Jin with nine dragons." Drill Instructor, you have come here today and completed his training very well. I will amply reward you."

Wang Jin began his lessons from that day and Shi Jin asked to be taught the eighteen subjects of athletics in detail. In a little over half a year he had mastered the use of the: (1) lance; (2) long-handled mallet; (3) bow; (4) crossbow; (5) jingal; (6) iron whip; (7) iron truncheon; (8) double-edged sword; (9) chain; (10) hooks; (11) axe; (12) battle-axe; (13) 3-pronged spear; (14) halberd; (15) shield; (16) cudgel; (17) spear; and (18) rake.

He learned these one by one and became proficient. Wang Jin thought that he could not stay there any longer although the conditions were suitable. One day he told them that he wished to leave. Shi Jin replied, "Master, you must not think of leaving; I will keep both you and your mother here till your dying days; will that not be better?" "Worthy sir, I have received many favours from you but I am afraid that Marshal Gao Qiu's men may arrive and you will be implicated. I must go to Yanan Prefecture, where men are needed: there I can rest and settle." Shi Jin spoke to his father and it was agreed that Wang Jin must stay until they had prepared a farewell feast. They presented him two rolls of silk and one hundred taels of silver.[48] When he left, Shi Jin told one of his men to carry Wang Jin's baggage and accompany him for ten *li*;[49] where they parted with tears.

Drill Instructor Wang again shouldered up his load and mother and son travelled along the road to the western pass.

We will now leave Wang Jin and return with Shi Jin to his home. There he continued his drill. In the middle of the night he would practice for two hours, and during the day, ride his horse outside the village. In less than six months Shi Jin's father died. He prepared a coffin and engaged Buddhist monks to conduct the usual memorial services for seven days. He also asked a Taoist priest to erect an altar; repeat the funeral services; pray for the safe passage of the soul to heaven; attend at the altar for ten days and select a lucky and fortunate time for the funeral and burial.

About four hundred members of the Shi clan came to the funeral in white mourning clothes and they buried the dead in the ancestral graveyard in the hills to the west of the village. After this there was no one at home to manage the property as Shi Jin only wanted to practice fencing.

Three or four months after the death of the farmer on a hot day in the sixth month Shi Jin was idling away his time. He placed a bedstead outside on the threshing floor, in the shadow of a willow tree, and took rest. A breeze came from the fir trees just opposite. He was enjoying the cool breeze, when all at once he saw a man stealthily spying. He shouted, "What are you doing, and who is there looking round this place?" As he said he rose and went to behind a tree to get a better view. He recognized that that man was Li Ji, the rabbit hunter. Shi Jin called, "Li Ji, what are you looking for in my village? Have you come as a spy?"

Li Ji stepped forward and said "Yes, sir, I want to find a man named Qiu Yilang to drink wine with him but seeing you taking a siesta I dared not intrude."

"Did you not previously come here selling game—and did I not pay you liberally? So why have you not been here lately with your game. You might think that I had no money." Li Ji replied, "That's not the case. Just now there is no game and therefore I did not come."

"Stupid talk," said Shi Jin. "Shaohua is a mountain of vast expanse and I do not believe that neither deer nor hare can be found there." Li Ji answered, "You do not know that there is a band of robbers on the mountain, where they have erected a stronghold. They have collected about seven hundred armed men and over a hundred horses. The chief is a man named Zhu Wu, nicknamed "Intuitve Strategist," and the second in command is Chen Da, nicknamed "Leaping Tiger," the third in command is Yang Chun, nicknamed "White-speckled Snake." These three leaders take to robbing houses; they have been officially denounced in Huayin County, and a reward of three thousand strings of cash has been offered for their capture. But who dare go to arrest them? Even we hunters dare not go to the mountain to shoot game, so how could I come here to sell it."

"I have heard of those robbers," said Shi Jin, "but did not know that they have made so much trouble. This being the case the people certainly dislike them. Li Ji, if you have any game in the future bring it here."

Shi Jin thought this matter over. "These men will certainly come here to plunder." He then told the farm labourers to select two fat buffaloes and kill them; and bring the best brew of the village. He sent invitations to all the Shi clan and upon arrival they seated themselves in order of seniority. Wine was served and Shi Jin then spoke to the audience, saying, "I have heard there are three robbers on Mount Shaohua, who have altogether about seven hundred followers, and they rob the people with violence. Sooner or later they will come and pillage our village. I now invite you here to discuss this matter—so that we may be prepared when they come. I will have a rattle sounded at my house when they arrive; and upon hearing this you must bring your arms to defend the village. If your families are attacked we will defend you." All of them are agreed to what Shi Jin said. They then returned home and prepared their weapons. Shi Jin repaired the defences of the village.

At Mount Shaohua, the three bandit chiefs were now holding a conference. The leader, Zhu Wu, the "Intuitve Strategist," was a Dingyuan County man and could fight with a sword in each hand. He was clever in arranging plans for an attack. The second chief Chen Da was a Yecheng County man, and was skillful in the use of a steel lance while the third Yang Chun was a Xieliang County man and used a long sword.

When they were discussing, Zhu Wu said, "I have heard that there is a reward offered for anyone who can capture us, and I am really afraid that when the soldiers come we shall have a severe strugge with them; but we are short of food so we must take some for use here. We must collect a large stock of food on the mountain ready for the time when the soldiers attack us."

Chen Da the "Leaping Tiger" agreed. "Let us go to Huayin County, and ask the people there to lend us some grain and we can see what they say."

Yang Chun the "White-speckled Snake" remarked, "There is no need to go there; it would be better to go to Pucheng County. The chances are ten thousand to one, we shall not fail there." Chen Da said, "There are very few people in Pucheng and very little money or grain there. It will be better to attack Huayin County. The folk there are wealthy and have abundance of grain."

Yang Chun replied, "Elder brother, you do not know that if we attack Huayin County we must pass the village of the Shi clan where that dangerous fellow Shi Jin with nine dragons lives, and we must not provoke him. He will not let us pass."

Chen Da said, "Younger brother, what a coward you are, you are even afraid to pass a village, so what can you do when you are opposed by soldiers?"

"Elder brother, you should not despise Shi Jin. He is hard to deal with."

"I have already heard that he is very brave and is extremely capable," said Zhu Wu. "Younger brother, do not go."

Chen Da would not change his mind, and said, "You two, shut up! Do not increase the other man's determination and reduce our own courage. He is only one man and has not three heads or six arms." He then called to his armed followers, "Get my horse ready! I will attack the Shi clan village, and afterwards seize Huayin County."

Zhu Wu remonstrated with him but Chen Da did not listen. He put on his armor and mounted his horse: he then mustered about one hundred fifty armed brigands down the mountain and went with gongs and drums sounding.

The brigands' approach was duly reported to Shi Jin, who instantly had the rattles sounded and quickly all the men assembled in arms. Shi Jin wore a towel round his head and was equipped with red mail over an embroidered black wadded coat. On his feet were embroidered green boots and round his waist a leather belt. In front and behind were round metal plates. He carried a bow with quiver full of arrows. In his hand he held a double-edged sword with three sharp spikes at the end and four holes with eight rings attached. He was mounted on a roan horse. Before him were forty of his retainers while behind were ninety of the farm labourers. With a combined shout they all moved toward the north of the village. The brigands halted. Shi Jin saw that Chen Da was in front of his men, wearing a red cap with a concave top, and with iron-armor covered with gilt, wadded red clothing, thick army boots and a plaited waistbelt. He rode a white horse and carried a three-pronged halberd which was about ten feet long. As the two leaders met, the men raised a loud shout. Chen Da paid his respect to Shi Jin by rising in his stirrups.

Shi Jin spoke in a loud voice, "You kill people, set places on fire, rob with violence; your crimes fill the heavens, and you are all deserving of death. You ought to have ears; how dare you come to pouch the tiger's litter!"

Chen Da replied from his horse, "We are short of grain at our mountain fortress and are going to borrow some grain at Huayin County. We have taken a short cut by passing your honourable village—but we will not disturb even a blade of grass here. Let us pass and on our return we will thank you." "Nonsense," replied Shi Jin, "I am the head of this village and I must arrest you. If I don't do so, I shall be implicated and the magistrate will blame me." "Within the four seas all men are brothers, so let us use your road," said Chen Da.

"What meaningless talk!" said Shi Jin. "Even if I am willing but there is one who is not, so you must have his consent before you pass."

"You are a hero. Tell me whom I must ask?" replied Chen Da.

"You can ask the sword in my hand and if it is willing then you can pass," said Shi Jin.

Chen Da spoke angrily, "You are trying to deceive me but you should not be presumptuous." Shi Jin was also angry, and brandishing his sword, he rode forward to fight.

Chen Da whipped his horse, thrust forward his three-pronged halberd, and advanced to meet Shi Jin. They fought for some time. Then Shi Jin thought of a plan, and purposely allowed Chen Da to thrust in his halberd, he parried the blow by moving to one side, as Chen Da lunged forward. With a dexterous turn of the arm he caught Chen Da and pulled him out of his saddle, then he took hold of his plaited waistbelt and threw him to the ground. The horse galloped away like a gust of wind. Shi Jin told his servants to bind Chen Da, and the band of robbers scattered. Shi Jin returned to his house and bound Chen Da to a pillar in the hall to wait until he captured the other robber chiefs so as to send them together to the magistrate's *yamen* to be dealt with. He gave wine to all the villagers and then dismissed them. Everyone applauded him and said, "You, sir, are a hero."

We will not say anything more about the feast at the Shi clan village but let us consider the anxiety of Zhu Wu and Yang Chun in their mountain stronghold. They had sent many soldiers to make inquiries, and on the way they met the men returning with the riderless horse. The defeated men said, "Bad luck! Our elder brother's life is in danger."

Upon reaching the stronghold they gave details of the fight, saying, "Shi Jin was a great hero."

"Shall we risk our lives in rescuing him?" asked Yang Chun.

"We cannot do that," replied Zhu Wu. "The disaster is of his own making. How can we defeat Shi Jin? I have a desperate plan but if we fail to rescue Chen Da, that will be the end of all of us." Zhu Wu whispered his plan. Yang Chun said, "Good! Let us go without delay."

Now in the village Shi Jin's anger had not abated when a labourer rushed in and reported that the other robber chiefs had come. Shi Jin said, "I will send them both to the magistrate. Bring me my horse."

The rattle was sounded and the same crowd of armed men assembled. He was just on the point of leaving when he saw the two robber chiefs walking to the gate. They both knelt down and cried. Shi Jin dismounted and shouted, "What have you to say?" Zhu Wu crying, answered, "We shall be arrested and tried, and cannot live as bandits on the mountains. Once we took a vow that we would die on the same day. Although we have not the heroism of Guan Gong, Zhang Fei, and Liu Bei, yet we have the same objects in mind. [50] Today our brother Chen Da did not listen to our advice but he unintentionally offended your dignity. You, hero, have already arrested him at your noble village. As we have no alternative we come only to beseech you to put us to death together. We hope that you, hero, will send us three men to the magistrate, and ask for a reward. We swear that we shall not feel sorrow at that; we are entirely in your hands and wish to die."

Shi Jin heard this, and thought that they were brave. If he sent them to the magistrate and requested a reward, then all heroes would be ashamed of him for not being a brave man. The ancients said, "The tiger does not eat the flesh of a tiger." So he said to these men, "Come inside." They were not afraid and followed Shi Jin into the hall, where they knelt and asked him to bind them. Shi Jin told them several times to rise but they declined to do so. He thought, "Intelligent people like intelligence in others, and so good folk recognize the good in others." He said, "As your bravery is so great, I cannot send you to the magistrate. How will it be if I release Chen Da?"

"We do not wish to implicate you," said Zhu Wu. "It will be better for you to ask for the reward." "How can I do that?" said Shi Jin. "Are you willing to eat my food and drink wine?"

"We are not even afraid of death so how can we be afraid of meat and drink?"

Shi Jin was much pleased at this, and released Chen Da. He invited all three to dine with him, and they expressed their thanks for his great benevolence. After drinking several cups of wine they departed. As a token of thankfulness the three brigand chiefs got together thirty taels of gold in ingots that was sent in a dark moonless night by two of their men, to Shi Jin. When the bandits arrived at the farm Shi Jin came to the gate to inquire what they wanted, and they presented the gold and asked him to accept the same. At first Shi Jin refused to accept the gift but he saw that the intention was good so he accepted the gold, and then ordered a servant to give the men refreshments. When they departed he gave them some small pieces of silver for themselves. A fortnight afterwards the bandit leaders took a big jewel which they had looted sometime before, and sent it to Shi Jin who accepted it. He saw that they were grateful for his mercy so he had three gowns made with red embroidered silk and sent these with some wine and three fat roasted sheep to the brigands, and his steward Wang the Fourth was put in charge of this matter. Shi Jin and the brigands became very friendly, and were frequently giving each other presents.

On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Shi Jin sent Wang the Fourth with an invitation for a banquet and the bandit chiefs wrote a reply, accepting the invitation. [51] After a few cups of wine Wang the Fourth left but on his way down the mountain he met some brigands who took him to an inn where he drank more wine. When he left, he was slightly drunk, and staggered along. After going about three //e came to a forest which he entered and lay down in the long grass to sleep. The hunter, Li Ji came to that spot to look for hares, and recognizing Wang the Fourth he attempted to raise him up but he could not do so. In doing this some silver fell out from Wang the Fourth's girdle which made Li Ji meditate, "This man is drunk but where did the money come from? Why should I not take some?" It was now the opportunity for the baneful forces to come together, so unexpected events ensued naturally. He unloosened Wang the Fourth's girdle, and upon shaking it, the sealed reply from the bandits fell out. He opened that, and recognized the names of the brigand chiefs. "Here is my luck. A fortune teller told me that I should have great fortune and here it is. A reward is offered for their arrest, and perhaps I can get something for this letter also." So he took the silver, and the letter, and went to report the matter to the officials at Huayin County.

When Wang the Fourth awoke that evening, the moon was shining through the trees. He found his girdle in the grass but the silver and the letter were missing. He felt greatly annoyed and thought the matter over. He thought if he said that he had lost the letter Shi Jin would probably dismiss him, so at last he decided to say that the invitation had been accepted but there was no written reply. He told this to Shi Jin who asked why he had been so long in returning, and he explained that the bandits had pressed him to stay, drinking wine for half the night.

On the day appointed Shi Jin had a banquet prepared, and the three bandit leaders duly arrived with about five armed men. They took their seats. But when they had drunk much wine there was a loud noise and much torchlight outside the gate. Shi Jin was startled, and jumping up told the brigands to keep their seats while he went to see what had happened. He told the servants not to open the gate, and putting a ladder against the wall he looked over. He saw that the county police inspector was on a horse, two constables and about four hundred soldiers surrounded the farm. He returned and told the bandits that the soldiers had come evidently to arrest them.

Men concealed in the deep of reeds,
Prepared their boats among the lotus leaves.
Soldiers sent to capture them,
Did only make them intimate.

The brigands made their escape.

## 003
## Master/Squire Shi Leaves Huayin County at Night; Major Lu Da Assaults & Pummels the Lord Butcher Zheng of the West & have a Fight

"What'll I do?" Shi Jin exclaimed.

Zhu Wu and the other 2 bandit chieftains knelt before him and said, "Your hands are clean, brother. Don't get involved because of us. It's better to tie us up and claim the reward than have your own good name besmirched."

"Impossible," retorted Shi Jin. "If I did such a thing it would look as if I inveigled you here so that I could get the money. Everyone would laugh at me. We'll live or die together. Stand up and don't worry. There's no need to sacrifice yourselves on my account. Let me see what this is all about."

He mounted the ladder and called: "What do you mean by coming here in the middle of the night and raiding my manor?"

"Don't pretend, Young Master," the constables replied. "Li Ji who made the accusation is right here with us."

"Li Ji," Shi Jin shouted, "how could you slander an honest man?"

"I didn't know, at first," the hunter responded. "I picked up a letter Wang the Fourth was carrying in the woods and took it to the county seat to have it read. This is the result."

Shi Jin summoned Wang. "You said there was no reply. Where did that letter come from?"

"I was drunk. I forgot about it."

"Wretch," shouted Shi Jin. "You've got us in a pretty fix."

Afraid of Shi Jin's fighting prowess, the constables didn't dare force their way into the manor. "Better give them an answer," the bandit leaders advised. Shi Jin understood.

"Don't start anything, you constables," he called from the top of the ladder. "Move back from my walls. I'm going to tie the bandits up and turn them over to the officials for the reward."

The constables had no desire to clash with Shi Jin. "We don't want any trouble," they said. "Bring them out and we'll go with you to the magistrate, together."

Shi Jin came down from the ladder and went to the front of the hall. He had Wang the Fourth taken to the rear garden and killed him with one blow of the sword. Next he ordered his vassals to pack all his portable valuables and light thirty or forty torches. He and the bandit chiefs put on their armor and took halberds and swords from the weapons rack. Then they set fire to the thatched buildings in the back of the manor house. Meanwhile, the vassals also packed their own belongings.

When the soldiers outside saw the flames, they rushed around to the rear. Shi Jin set the central hall to the torch, threw open the front gate and charged out with a mighty yell. Followed by Zhu Wu, Yang Chun and Chen Da and their guards, Shi Jin and his men plunged into the fray. The young squire was a formidable warrior. Who could withstand him?

As wild flames enkindled the sky, Shi Jin and his men cut a path through the soldiers. He soon found himself face to face with the two constables and Li Ji. Shi Jin flew into a rage. "When enemies meet, their eyes blaze." The constables could see that things were going badly. They turned and ran. Li Ji also tried to escape but Shi Jin was quickly upon him. With one sweep of his blade, he cleaved Li Ji in twain. Chen Da and Yang Chun dispatched the constables with one thrust of their halberds each. The county sheriff, terrified, galloped off as fast as his horse would take him. Of course the soldiers dared not advance. They ran for their lives in all directions.

Killing as they went, Shi Jin and his cohorts proceeded directly to the bandits' stronghold on Mount Shaohua. Only then did they sit down and catch their breaths. Zhu Wu and other leaders ordered their men to slaughter steers and horses and prepare a celebration feast. Of this we'll say no more. Shi Jin remained for several days. He thought to himself: "To save three people, I burned down my manor. Although I managed to keep a few small valuables, my larger property is gone completely." He felt uneasy. How could he stay in a place like this? He said to the brigand chief. "Instructor Wang, my arms teacher, is attached to a border garrison west of the Pass. I've been intending to seek him out but because my father died I was unable to leave. Now that the manor is ruined, there's nothing to keep me here."

"Don't go, brother," the bandit leaders urged. "Stay on a while, and we'll talk it over again. If you don't want to join us, when things have quieted down a bit we'll rebuild your manor and you can become a respectable citizen again."

"Your intentions are good but I don't wish to remain. If I can find my teacher and get some sort of job I can distinguish myself in, I'll be happy the rest of my life."

"Why not stay on and be our chief? Wouldn't that make you happy?" queried Zhu Wu. "Of course our mountain stronghold is too small for a man like you."

"My reputation is spotless. How can I sully the body my parents have given me? There's no use your trying to persuade me to become a bandit."

A few days later, Shi Jin decided to depart. The exhortations of the three chieftains were in vain. He left his servants and most of his money in the fortress and took only some small pieces of silver which he wrapped in a bundle.

A broad-brimmed felt hat topped by a red tassel covered the soft black bandanna which bound his head. Around his neck was a kerchief of bright yellow. He wore a white silk military gown tied at the waist by a plum-coloured sash five fingers wide. His legs were wrapped with alternate strips of blue and white. On his feet were looped hemp sandals, good for mountain climbing. A sword hung from his waist.

Shi Jin tied his bundle to his back, took up his halberd and bid farewell to the three chieftains. They and the other bandits saw him to the foot of the mountain. Weeping, they parted from Shi Jin and returned to their stronghold.

Shi Jin followed the road leading to Yanan Prefecture. He ate and drank when hungry and thirsty, he stopped only at night and set out again the next day at dawn. He travelled in this manner, alone, for more than half a month until he arrived in Weizhou.

"This is also a border garrison," he said to himself. "Maybe my teacher, Instructor Wang, is here."

He entered the town. It was a bustling place, with several streets and market-places. On a street corner he saw a small tea-house. He went in and sat down.

A waiter approached him. "What kind of tea would you like, sir?"

"I'll have a cup of steeped."

The waiter brought his order and placed it on the table before him. "Where is the town's garrison command?" asked Shi Jin.

"It's that place just up ahead."

"Do you know whether they have a drill instructor from the Eastern Capital, a man called Wang Jin?"

"The garrison has many drill instructors. There are three or four named Wang. But I don't know whether any of them is Wang Jin."

While the waiter was talking, a big fellow who looked like an army officer strode in. His head was bound in a bandanna with figured swastikas, buckled in the back with twisted gold rings from Taiyuan. A raven-black plaited sash bound his parrot-green warrior's gown at the waist. On his feet were yellow boots embossed with four welts of brown leather in hawk talon design. He had large ears, a straight nose and a broad mouth. A full beard framed his round face. He was six feet tall and had a girth of ten spans.
When the new-comer had taken a seat, the waiter said to Shi Jin: "That's the major. You can ask him about Wang Jin. He knows all the drill instructors."
Shi Jin rose quickly and bowed. "May I invite you to some tea, sir? Please join me."
The officer saw that Shi Jin was a big stalwart fellow who seemed a man of valor. He walked over and returned his greeting. Then the two sat down together.
"May I be so bold as to ask your name, sir?" Shi Jin queried.
"I'm called Lu Da. I'm a major in this garrison. And who are you, brother?"
"My name is Shi Jin. I'm from Huayin County in Huazhou Prefecture. My teacher, Wang Jin, used to be a drill instructor in the Mighty Imperial Guards in the Eastern Capital. Could you tell me, sir, whether he's here in this garrison?"
"Say, aren't you Young Master Shi from Shi Family Village, the fellow they call Nine Dragons?"
Shi Jin bowed. "I am that humble person."
Lu Da returned his courtesy. " 'Meeting a man of fame is better than just hearing his name.' Is your teacher the Wang Jin who got in wrong with Marshal Gao in the Eastern Capital?"
"The same."
"I've heard of him but he's not here. They say he's with Old General Zhong in the Yanan garrison. Weizhou is a small post. Young General Zhong is our commander. Brother Wang is not with us. So you're Young Master Shi. I've heard a lot of good things about you. Come out and have a few drinks with me."
He took Shi Jin by the hand. As they were leaving the teahouse, Lu Da called over his shoulder: "Charge the tea to me."
"It doesn't matter, Major," replied the waiter. "Just go along."
Lu Da and Shi Jin strolled down the street arm in arm. Before they had gone fifty paces they saw many people gathered around an open plot of ground.
"Let's take a look," Shi Jin suggested.
They pushed through the crowd. There in the centre was a man holding a dozen or so staves. Various packets of salves and ointments, with prices marked, were arrayed on a platter on the ground. The man was a medicine pedlar who attracted customers by putting on a show with weapons.
Shi Jin recognized him. It was his first arms instructor, Li Zhong, nicknamed the Tiger-Fighting General.
"Teacher," called Shi Jin. "I haven't seen you in ages."
"What are you doing here, young brother?" Li Zhong cried.
"Since you're Young Master Shi's teacher," said Lu Da, "come and have a few cups with us."
"Gladly, just as soon as I've sold some of these medicines and earned some money."
"Who's got time to wait? Come on, if you're coming."
"Mince is a hand-to-mouth existence, Major. Go ahead. I'll catch up with you later ... Young brother, you go on first with the major."
Lu Da was very irritated. He roughly shoved the spectators aside. "Haul your assholes out of here or I'll beat you to a pulp," he bellowed.
The crowd, recognizing him, hastily scattered. Li Zhong was angry but he dared not protest. Lu Da was obviously much too fierce. "How impatient you are," Li said with a placating smile. He gathered up his arms and medicines, gave them to a friend for safe-keeping, and set off with Shi Jin and the major.
They turned this way and that through the streets until they came to a famous tavern run by a family named Pan at the foot of a bridge. From a pole sticking out over the tavern door a pennant fluttered in the breeze indicating that liquor was sold on the premises. They went upstairs and selected a clean room. Lu Da took the host's seat, Lin Zhong sat opposite, while Shi Jin seated himself at the side.
The waiter, who knew Lu Da, greeted them respectfully. "How much wine do you want, Major?" he asked.
"We'll start with four measures."
The waiter laid out dishes to go with the wine. "What would you like to eat, sir?"
"Questions, questions," Lu Da exploded. "Bring whatever you've got, add up the bill and I'll pay! Must you gab so?"
That waiter went downstairs. Soon he returned and heated the wine. He covered the table with platters of meat and other food.
Each of the three men downed several cups. They talked of this and that, comparing methods in feats at arms. Just as their conversation was at its liveliest, they heard the sound of sobbing in the next room. The irascible Lu Da immediately became enraged. He snatched plates and dishes and smashed them on the floor.
The waiter, alarmed, rushed up the stairs. He found Lu Da fuming.
"If there's anything you want, sir, just give the order and I'll bring it," he said, with a bow.
"Who wants anything? I think you know who I am. Yet you have the brass to allow people to bawl in the next room and disturb us while we dine. I haven't underpaid you, have I?"
"Don't be angry, sir. I would never permit anyone to disturb you. The people weeping are a man and his daughter who sing in the taverns. They didn't know you and your friends were drinking here. They can't help lamenting their bitter fate."
"There's something peculiar going on. Bring them here to me."
In a few minutes the waiter returned with a girl of about eighteen, followed by a man in his late fifties. Both carried wooden clappers. Though not very pretty, the girl was rather appealing. Wiping her eyes, she made three curtsies. The old man also greeted the diners.
"Where are you from?" asked Lu Da. "Why do you weep?"
"I will tell you our story, sir," the girl replied. "We are from the Eastern Capital. My parents and I came to visit a relative but when we arrived, we learned he had left Weizhou for the Southern Capital (Shangqiu in Henan Province). My mother fell ill in the inn and died. My father and I were having a hard time. Master Zheng, who is called the Lord of the West, saw me and wanted me for a concubine. He sent people to wheedle and threaten, and finally signed a contract promising my father three thousand strings of cash for me.
"The contract was real but the promise was false. In less than three months his wife, a hard woman, drove me out of the house. What's more, Master Zheng ordered the innkeeper to demand that we 'return' his three thousand strings of cash. We never received a penny of his money. How could we repay him? My father is weak. He couldn't argue with a rich and powerful man like Zheng. We didn't know what to do. My father taught me many ballads when I was a child and we began making rounds of the taverns, singing. We give Zheng most of what little we earned each day, saving a little for our travelling expenses so that we can go home.
"But the last few days the taverns haven't had much business, so we couldn't pay. We're afraid Zheng will come asking for it and abuse us. Ours is a hard lot, and we've no place to seek redress. That's why we've been weeping. We hadn't meant to disturb you, sir. Please forgive us."
"What's your family name?" asked Lu Da. "Which inn are you staying at? Where does Master Zheng, that Lord of the West, live?"
The old man replied: "Our name is Jin. I am the second among my brothers. My daughter is called Jade Lotus. Master Zheng is the butcher who sells meat at the foot of Zhuangyuan Bridge. My daughter and I live in the Lu Family Inn just up ahead inside the town's East Gate."
"Bah," said Lu Da contemptuously. "So Master Zheng is only Zheng the pig-sticker, the dirty rogue who runs a butcher shop under the patronage of Young General Zhong, our garrison commander. And he cheats and bullies too, does he?"
He turned to Li Zhong and Shi Jin. "You two wait here while I beat the varlet to death. I'll be right back."
They grabbed him. "Calm yourself, brother," they pleaded. "Let's talk this over again later." They finally managed to restrain him.
"Come here, old man," Lu Da said to the father. "I'll give you some money. Tomorrow you can go back to the Eastern Capital. How about it?"
"If you can help us return home you'll be giving us a new lease on life," said father and daughter. "But we're afraid the innkeeper won't let us go. Master Zheng has ordered him to collect our payments."
"Don't worry about that," said Lu Da. "I'll take care of the innkeeper." He pulled out five ounces of silver and placed them on the table. To Shi Jin he said: "This is all I've brought today. If you have any silver, lend it to me. I'll give it back tomorrow."
"It doesn't matter, brother. No need to repay." Shi Jin extracted a silver bar weighing ten ounces from his bundle and put it down beside Lu Da's money.
The major looked at Li Zhong. "You lend me some too."
Li Zhong produced two ounces of silver.
Lu Da was annoyed at the smallness of the offering. "Big-hearted, aren't you?" he snorted. He handed the fifteen ounces of silver to the old man. "This will cover your travelling expenses for you and your daughter. Go to the inn and pack your things," he directed. "Tomorrow at dawn I'll come and see you off. Just let that innkeeper try and stop you!"
Old Jin and his daughter thanked him and departed. Lu Da returned the two ounces to Li Zhong.
After the three men finished two more measures of wine they went down the stairs. "I'll pay you tomorrow, host," called Lu Da.
"Just go along," the owner of the tavern said. "You can drink here on credit any time, sir. Our only fear is you won't come."
The three left the Pan Family Tavern. On the street they separated. Shi Jin and Li Zhong went to their respective inns.
Lu Da returned to his quarters near the garrison and angrily went to bed without any supper. His landlord didn't dare ask what was wrong.
Old Jin returned to his inn with the fifteen ounces of silver. He settled his daughter down, went to a place far outside the town and hired a cart. Then he returned to the inn, packed their belongings and paid their rent, fuel and rice bills. After that they could only wait for the morrow.
The night passed without incident. Father and daughter rose at dawn, lit a fire and cooked breakfast. When they finished eating, they collected their utensils. The sky was just turning light. Lu Da strode into the inn.
"Boy," he called, "which room is Old Jin's?"
"Uncle Jin," the attendant shouted, "Major Lu Da is here to see you." The old man opened his door. "Ah, Major, please come in and sit a while."
"Sit, nothing," retorted Lu Da. "If you're going, go. What are you waiting for?"
Old Jin summoned his daughter and raised his carrying-pole to his shoulder. He thanked Lu Da and started for the inn gate. The attendant stopped him.
"Where are you going, Uncle Jin?"
"Does he owe you any rent?" Lu Da demanded.
"He paid up last night. But Master Zheng has ordered me to collect the money he laid out for Jin's daughter."
"I'll return the butcher's money in person. Let the old man go."
The attendant refused. Lu Da slapped him across the face with such force that blood gushed from his mouth. The punch that followed knocked out two of his front teeth. Crawling to his feet, the attendant scuttled to the interior of the inn and hid himself.
Of course, the innkeeper dared not intervene. Jin and his daughter quickly departed from the inn, then left the town to get the cart the old man had hired the day before.
Lu Da, afraid the attendant might still try to stop them, sat himself down on a stool in the inn and remained there for four hours. Only when he was confident that the old man was far away did he leave the inn. He went directly to the Zhuangyuan Bridge. There Zheng had a two-room butcher shop with two chopping blocks. Four or five sides of pork were hanging on display. Zheng sat behind a counter by the door, keeping an eye on his ten or so assistants as they cut and sold meat. Lu Da came to the door. "Butcher Zheng," he shouted.
Zheng recognized him. He came out rapidly from behind the counter and greeted him with respect. "Major, a pleasure." He directed an assistant to bring a bench. "Please be seated, sir."
Lu Da sat down. "The garrison commander has ordered me to buy ten catties of lean meat, chopped fine, to be used for filling. There mustn't be a speck of fat in it."
"Right," said Zheng. He turned to his assistants. "Pick out a good cut and chop up ten catties."
"I don't want those dirty oafs touching it," said Lu Da. "You do it yourself."
"Certainly," said Zheng. "Glad to." He selected a cut of ten catties of lean meat and started mincing.
The attendant from the inn, his head bound in a white handkerchief, arrived to tell Zheng about Old Jin. But when he saw Lu Da seated at the door, he was afraid to come any closer. He stood under the eaves of a house, observing the proceedings cautiously from a distance.
After chopping for an hour, Zheng wrapped the minced meat in a lotus leaf. "Shall I have it delivered, sir?" he asked.
"Delivered, nothing. What's your hurry? Now cut up ten catties of fat meat. There mustn't be a speck of lean in it. This is also for filling."
"The lean can be put in dumplings but what good is the fat?"
Lu Da glared. "When the commander gives an order, who dares question him?"
"As long as you can use it I'll chop it for you." Zheng selected a cut of ten catties of fat meat and began mincing. By the time he wrapped it in a lotus leaf the morning had gone and it was the hour for lunch.
The inn attendant dared not approach. Even other customers were afraid to draw near.
"Shall I have this delivered to the garrison command for you, sir?" asked Zheng.
"Now I want ten catties of gristle, chopped fine, also to be used for filling, and I don't want to see any meat in it."
Zheng laughed awkwardly. "Are you making fun of me?"
Lu Da leaped up, one package of chopped meat in each hand, and scowled at the butcher. "That's exactly what I'm doing—making fun of you." He flung the contents of the packages full in Zheng's face.
The shower of meat stung the butcher into a rage. From the soles of his feet, fury surged into his forehead. An irrepressible flame blazed in his heart. He grabbed a paring knife from the butcher's block and jumped down from the shop steps. Lu Da was waiting for him in the middle of the street.
None of the dozen or so clerks from the neighbouring shops dared to mediate. Passers-by stood frozen in their tracks on both sides of the street. The attendant from the inn was struck dumb.
The knife in his right hand, Zheng reached for Lu Da with his left. Lu Da seized the outstretched hand, closed in and sent the butcher sprawling with a swift kick in the groin. Another step forward and he put his foot on Zheng's chest. Raising a fist like a vinegar keg, Lu Da thundered: "I was roving inspector of five western military districts under Old General Zhong. People might very well call me Lord of the West. But you're just a meat slicing butcher, a low cur. Where do you come off giving yourself such a title? And who gave you the right to force and cheat Jin's daughter Jade Lotus?"
He landed a punch on Zheng's nose that flattened it to one side and brought the blood flowing like the sauces in a condiments shop—salty, sour and spicy. Zheng struggled vainly to rise. The knife fell from his hand. "A good blow," he cried.
"Mother-raping thief," said the major. "How dare you talk back?" He punched the butcher on the eyebrow, splitting the lid so that the eyeball protruded. Red, black and purple gore flowed like swatches of cloth in a draper's shop.
The spectators were all afraid of Lu Da. None of them ventured to intervene.
Vanquished, Zheng begged to be spared.
"You scurvy knave," the major exclaimed scornfully. "If you had shown any guts I might have let you off. But since you're so lily-livered, I won't." He struck the butcher a heavy blow on the temple. Zheng's head rang like the clanging of gongs, bells and cymbals in a big memorial service. The butcher lay stretched on the ground. Breath was coming out of his mouth but none was going in. He didn't move.
Lu Da pretended to be incensed. "Playing dead, eh? I'll hit you a few more!" He had observed that Zheng's face was changing colour. "I only wanted to give the varlet a beating," he said to himself. "Who would have thought that three blows would kill him? They're sure to hold me for trial, and I've nobody to bring me food in prison. I'd better get out of here."
He rose and strode away, pausing briefly to look back, shake his finger at Zheng's corpse and shout: "Go on playing dead. I'll settle with you later."
Neither the butcher's assistants nor the clerks in the neighbouring shops had the courage to stop him.
Lu Da returned to his quarters and hastily packed. He took only some travelling clothes and a bit of silver. His old garments and heavier things he left behind. Carrying a staff as a weapon, he sped out of the South Gate like a wisp of smoke.
Although Zheng's family and the inn attendant worked on the butcher a long time, they couldn't bring him back to life. He was quite dead. His wife and neighbours went to the prefecture and filed a charge of murder. Court was called into session, and the prefect took his place and read the document of accusation.
"That Lu Da is a major of the garrison," thought the prefect. Instead of issuing an order for his arrest forthwith, he mounted his sedan-chair and went to the headquarters of the garrison commander. He stepped down from his chair and had the soldier at the gate announce him. He was ushered into the main hall where he was received by the commander. The two men exchanged courtesies.
"What brings you here?" asked the commander.
"I've come to inform Your Excellency that Major Lu Da has, without cause, beaten to death on the street a butcher named Zheng. I wouldn't presume to arrest him without reporting to Your Excellency first."
The commander was startled. "That Lu Da is a skilled military man," he thought, "but he's rough and crude. Today he's committed a murder. How can I cover up for him? I must let him be taken and questioned." To the prefect he said: "Lu Da originally was an officer of my father, the Old General. I had no proper aide, and he was sent here as a major. Since he's committed a capital offence you may arrest and interrogate him according to law. If you get a confession and the crime is proved, you must inform my father before passing sentence. Otherwise it might be very embarrassing if, at some future date, my father should ask for him back."
"I'll get to the bottom of this and send a formal report to the Old General before any sentence is passed," the prefect promised.

He said farewell to the commander, left the garrison headquarters, got into his sedan-chair and returned to the prefecture. There he resumed court and issued an order to the police inspector on duty for Lu Da's arrest. The officer, with twenty men, set out immediately for Lu Da's lodging.
"He left only a little while ago with a few bundles and a staff," the landlord told them. "I assumed the major was going on official business, so I didn't dare ask."
The police inspector directed that Lu Da's room be opened and searched. All that could be found was some old clothes and bedding. Taking the landlord with them, the officer and his men searched the town from south to north. There was no trace of Lu Da. The police inspector returned to the prefect with the landlord and two neighbours in custody, and reported.
"Major Lu Da has fled to escape punishment, no one knows where. I've arrested these neighbours and his landlord."
The prefect ordered that they be held and that Zheng's family and close neighbours be summoned. Along with forensic experts, local officials and the ward chief, he made a careful examination of the victim. The butcher's family encoffined the body and stored it temporarily in a monastery.
Appropriate documents were filed, and the prefect ordered his police to apprehend Lu Da within a specified time, on pain of being beaten. The complainant was allowed to go home, after filing a surety bond. The close neighbours who had witnessed the crime were beaten for failing to rescue Zheng. Lu Da's landlord and neighbours were not charged. An urgent proclamation, offering a thousand strings of cash for Lu Da's capture and giving his age, birthplace and description, was posted everywhere. All concerned were then released and told to await further notice. Zheng's family went into mourning. Of this we'll say no more.

*

To return to Lu Da: after leaving Weizhou, he hurried pell-mell east and west, passing through several prefectural towns. With him it was a case of:

*Any food when you're hungry,*
*When you're cold rags save life;*
*Any road when you're frightened,*
*When you're poor any wife.*

He dashed about in a panic, with no idea where to go. After many days of wandering, he arrived in Yanmen, a county seat in the prefecture of Daizhou. It was a bustling town with many people and thriving markets. Carts and horses filled the streets that were lined by shops conducting trade and commerce of every type. Although only a county seat, it was more prosperous than a prefectural capital. On a street corner, he saw a crowd gathered in front of a proclamation. Someone was reading it aloud. Illiterate himself, he pushed forward to listen. This is what he heard:

By order of the military commander of Taiyuan, this county hereby publishes the following notice from Weizhou: Wanted—the killer of Butcher Zheng. Name—Lu Da, former major in the Weizhou garrison command. Any man who conceals him or gives him food and shelter shall be deemed equally guilty. Whoever arrests and brings him forward, or offers information leading to his arrest, shall receive a reward of one thousand strings of cash…

As Lu Da stood listening, someone threw his arms around him from behind and cried, "What're you doing here, brother Zhang?" He pulled Lu Da away from the street corner. If this man hadn't seen him and dragged him away, Lu Da would never have shaved off his hair and beard, changed the name that identified him as a murderer, and wrecked the idols in the temple. And as a result: His Buddhist staff smashed open a dangerous road; his monk's knife slaughtered unjust men.

Then, so the story tells, Shi Jin exclaimed, "What's to be done?" while Zhu Wu and the other brigand chiefs knelt and said: "Elder Brother, your reputation is unsullied. You must not be implicated on our account. You should take a rope and bind all three of us, and then go to seek the reward. That will spare us the shame of having brought about your ruin."
"How could I do that?" Shi Jin cried. "It would look as if I enticed you here for the sake of the money. I'd be a laughing-stock. No, if it's time for me to die I'll die with you; if I'm to live, we'll all live. Come, get up. Take courage, don't despair, because I've a better idea. But first wait while I try to find out the reason for all this."
Shi Jin climbed the ladder and shouted to the officers: "You two, what the devil are you doing trespassing on my property in the middle of the night?"
The two officers replied: "Indeed, sir, you put a bold face on it! Can't you see we have Li Ji here, your accuser?"
Shi Jin roared: "Li Ji, how dare you slander people!"
Li Ji replied, "I didn't know anything, I just picked up a letter Fourth Brother Wang dropped in the woods and showed it to the magistrate, that's how it happened."
"Wang!" Shi Jin roared. "You said there was no reply. What's all this about a letter?"
"Your Honour, it must have been the drink," Wang said. "I must have forgotten the letter."
Shi Jin let out a great cry: "You moron! Now what's to be done?"
Outside the officers and their men were waiting, too afraid of Shi Jin to break in and seize their quarry. The three brigand chiefs made Shi a sign that signified "pretend to accept their demands." Shi Jin understood, and shouted down to the officers, "All right, then but don't imagine you'll get in here by force. Pull your men back a little. I intend to tie the brigands up myself, and deliver them to the magistrate for the reward."
Those two officers had a healthy respect for Shi Jin. They answered, meekly: "That's all right with us, we'll wait for you to tie them up and bring them out, then we'll go for the reward together."
Shi Jin descended from his ladder. He went to the hall and called for Wang. He dragged Wang into the inner court, where he dispatched him with a single cut. Then he called on some of the servants to collect up everything worthwhile that could be carried, and pack it neatly. He ordered thirty or forty torches to be lit along one wall. He and the brigands now armed themselves from head to foot, each taking from the rack a dagger that he passed through his belt, and a sabre that he brandished in his hand; then, after tucking the flaps of their robes into their belts, they went to set light to the barns at the back of the house. The retainers likewise tied their bundles. The besiegers, seeing flames within, rushed to the back of the house to find out what was going on. But Shi Jin had already returned to the hall. This he also set alight. Then, flinging open the main gates, he charged out, sabre in hand, uttering the most blood-curdling war cries.
With Shi Jin at their head, Zhu Wu and Yang Chun in the middle, and Chen Da bringing up the rear, followed by a crowd of servants and dependants, they forced their way forward, feinting to the west and striking to the east. Shi Jin was a real tiger, how could anyone bar his way?
As the flames spread everywhere in his rear, he cut out a path with his sabre. His devastating onslaught soon brought him face to face with the two officers and Li Ji. The sight of them enraged him. As the saying goes, "When enemies come face to face, savagely their eyes gleam!" The two officers, perceiving the situation was out of hand, turned to leave. Li Ji was all for leaving too but Shi Jin was already upon him. He raised his sabre and at one blow cut off Li Ji's head. As for the two decamping officers, Chen Da and Yang Chun were onto them straight away, dealing each a sabre cut which settled his account for good. The horrified sheriff set spurs to his horse and galloped off. As for the militia, how would they have found the courage to attack? They fled in all directions, heaven knows where to!
Shi Jin and his party pressed forward, killing as they went. The governor's troops had no stomach for the engagement and simply melted away. Shi Jin, Zhu Wu, Chen Da, and Yang Chun, with the retainers and the rest, pushed on without pausing for breath till they reached the stronghold on Little Mount Hua. Once he and his friends were inside, Zhu Wu ordered cattle to be killed at once, and horses sacrificed, for a grand celebration. We say no more of this.
A few days passed, and Shi Jin began to think, "Just because I once decided to save three lives, I have had to burn my house and estate. Although I rescued a few valuables, the stuff that can be carried, everything more substantial is gone."
He wondered what to do: he couldn't stay there. Eventually he announced to Zhu Wu and the others, "Instructor Wang, my old teacher, has a post at Guanxi in a frontier garrison. I always meant to go and find him but my father's death prevented me. Now that my house and estate are gone, I shall set off at once in search of my master."
The three brigand chiefs replied: "Elder Brother, do not go. Stay here in the stronghold a few days and we'll consider later what to do. If you don't want to be an outlaw, just wait, when things have quietened down we'll rebuild the manor for you, and you can go back to being a gentleman."
Shi Jin said, "Despite your generous sentiments, my mind is made up, I can't stay. If I can find where my master is, that's where I'll settle and build a new life and live out my days in peace."
"If you'd stay and be our leader here," Zhu Wu said, "it would rejoice our hearts! But I fear this place is just too small to house you."
"I am a gentleman," Shi Jin said. "How could I so dishonour this life my parents left me? Become an outlaw? Don't speak to me of this again!"
Shi Jin stayed a few more days but then he decided it was time to go. Zhu Wu and his companions could not persuade him otherwise. All the retainers Shi Jin had brought with him remained in the stronghold. He took just some small things and a sum of silver and tied them in a bundle; everything else he entrusted to the lords of the mountain retreat.
Then, wearing a broad-brimmed white hat in the Fanyang style, decorated with a little red tassel, and under it a soft turban with pleated corners, of a muddy green colour, with a bright yellow gauze scarf, clad in a white silk shirt and warrior's doublet, about his waist a braided money-belt of plum-coloured silk, broad as a man's hand, blue and white striped gaiters and open-laced mountain sandals of hemp on his feet, and in his belt a sword with round guard and curved blade in the shape of a wild-goose's feather, Shi Jin threw his bundle on his back, gripped his sabre, and prepared to leave Zhu Wu and the others.
A crowd of brigands accompanied Shi Jin down the mountain. After bidding him a sad farewell, Zhu Wu and his friends returned to the stronghold.
Thus Shi Jin departed, sabre in hand, from Little Mount Hua, and took the Guanxi road, in the direction of Yanan. Then it was:

A country of rugged mountain peaks,
*A land of silent lonely villages;*
*Night-lodging with the clouds and mist*
*In desolate woods,*
*At daybreak mounting the perilous way*
*With the morning moon;*
*Hastening one's steps at nightfall*
*To the barking of many dogs,*
*Pressing on early in the fierce cold*
To the sound of crowing cocks.

Shi Jin travelled alone for two weeks, eating only when hungry, drinking only when thirsty, stopping at nightfall and off again at daybreak, until he reached Weizhou.
"This is a frontier-zone," he said to himself. "Why shouldn't the master, Instructor Wang, be here?"
He entered the town. He noted that it contained, like any proper town, six streets and three markets. Right on the corner of one of the streets, he saw a tiny teahouse. He went in, found a place and sat down.
"How would you like your tea?" the owner asked.
"An infusion," Shi Jin replied.
The owner made the tea and placed it before him.
"Where is the local frontier garrison?" Shi Jin asked.
"Right across the road," the teahouse owner replied.
"Can you tell me if there's an instructor from the Eastern Capital called Wang Jin in the garrison?"
"There are many instructors in the garrison here and three or four of them are called Wang. Whether or not one of them is called Wang Jin I can't say."
Hardly had he finished speaking when a tall, well-built man strode into the teahouse. He had very much the look of an army officer, Shi Jin decided. He wore a sesamum-coloured gauze turban, folded in the shape of a swastika and fastened at the back of the head by two braids with gold rings, in the Taiyuan fashion; his parrot-green surcoat was bound at the waist by a double cord, civil and military, the colour of a crow's wing; high leather boots with double stitching, made from the leather known as "eagle's wings," completed this outfit. His face was round and heavy, with big ears, a straight nose, and square jaw, the cheeks adorned with side-whiskers. He was well over six feet tall and broad to match!
Such was the personage who entered the teahouse and seated himself.
The teahouse owner said to Shi Jin: "If you want to find Instructor Wang, the Commandant there is the man to ask, he knows everyone."
Shi Jin quickly rose to his feet and bowed: "Will you do me the favour sir, of joining me for some tea?"
The newcomer, observing that Shi Jin was of strong build and manly aspect, came over and returned a courteous greeting. They both sat down.
"May I venture, sir, to ask your name?" Shi Jin said.
The other replied, somewhat affectedly, "I am the commandant of the garrison here, Lu is the name, Lu Da. And who might you be?"
Shi Jin replied, "I am from Huayin district, in Huazhou county, my name is Shi, Shi Jin. Please excuse me if I ask you a question. I was tutored in the military arts by an instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards in the Eastern Capital, whose name is Wang Jin. I am wondering if he might be here in this garrison?"
"I say, are you by any chance the gentleman from Shi village known as 'The Tattooed Dragon' or something of the sort?"
Shi Jin bowed and said: "At your service."
"Face and name are not the same, reality surpasses fame," Major Lu said, bowing courteously. "You say you're looking for Instructor Wang. Would that be the Wang who got on the wrong side of Grand Marshal Gao in the Eastern Capital?"
Shi Jin replied, "The very same."
"One has heard the name, certainly. But the gentleman's not here with us. He's said to be in the service of His Excellency Field-Marshal Zhong at the Yanan fort. Here at Weizhou we are under the command of Field-Marshal Zhong the Younger, the man you want is not here. But since you're Squire Shi, about whom one has heard so many good things, you must come out and drink a cup or two with me."
Major Lu took Shi Jin by the arm, and as they left the teahouse together he turned and shouted, "Put the tea down to my account!"
The owner replied, "It's nothing, sir, think no more of it."
Arm in arm the two men left the teahouse. About forty paces along the road they found a crowd of idlers standing in a circle round an empty space.
"Let's have a look, Elder Brother," Shi Jin said.
Forcing a passage through the crowd, they found in the midst of it a man wielding ten sticks. A dozen or so salves and patent medicines were displayed on the ground beside him, spread out on a tray and labelled for sale. The man was obviously one of the "rivers and lakes" fraternity, a boatman and pedlar of patent medicines. Shi Jin knew him at once; it was his earliest instructor in the martial arts, Li Zhong, also known as "The Tiger-Killer."
"Master!" Shi Jin shouted through the hubbub. "It's a long time since we last met!"
"What brings you here, my disciple?" Li Zhong replied.
"If you're Squire Shi's teacher," Major Lu interrupted, "you'd better join us for a cup or two."
"I shall be happy to, if you'll wait till your humble servant has sold a few potions and collected some money," Li Zhong said.
"Who wants to wait for you," Major Lu said. "If you're coming, come now."
"I've got to make my living," Li Zhong objected. "The Commandant can go first, I'll follow later." He said to Shi Jin, "You go now with the Commandant." But Lu Da was incensed. He kept pushing and shoving the onlookers, cursing them all the time: "What are you gaping at, you bunch of morons? Fart off or you'll get a taste of my fists!"
The crowd knew Lu Da and they dispersed at once.
Li Zhong, seeing the violence of Lu Da's behaviour, stifled the indignation it naturally aroused in him, and said with a forced laugh, "Such impetuosity!" Then he bent and gathered up his effects, his salves and potions, and put away his sticks, and the three of them went off together. After several twists and turns, they came to a famous establishment known as Pan's, next to the bridge by the town hall; it was advertised by a pole before the door bearing a banner which fluttered in the breeze and had the look of a really good wineshop, like in the poem:

Seen through the mist the inn flag flutters,
*The peace of morning fills the air;*
*Here is a boost for the strong man's courage,*
*Here is relief for the woman's care.*
*Beyond where the willow trails its branches,*
*Beside an apricot the flag-pole slants.*
*When ambition fails, what signal pleasure*
To enter this realm of the tipsy trance!

Entering Pan's wineshop the three men went upstairs and found a clean alcove where they sat down, Major Lu in the place of honour, Li Zhong opposite him, and Shi Jin in the last place.
The proprietor came to greet them respectfully. He recognized Lu Da: "How much wine should I serve you, Commandant?"

"Four pints to begin with. And you can give us some small dishes to go with it."
"What about main dishes?"
"Why so many questions?" Lu Da exclaimed. "Just bring everything you've got, we'll pay for it all in one go. This bugger won't give us any peace, damn it!"
The innkeeper went down to warm the wine. He returned to serve them, bringing also all the food he had that he spread on the table. The three emptied quite a few cups, talking amicably of this and that, and discussing swordsmanship. They were getting along famously, when suddenly the sound of bitter sobbing arose from the adjoining room. This so enraged Lu Da that he swept all the dishes and plates onto the floor. Hearing the noise, the landlord rushed in to see what was going on. When he saw Lu Da fretting and fuming, he raised his joined hands in supplication: "Is there something you wish for, sir? Please, just say the word and it shall be provided."
"You ask if I want something?" Lu Da bellowed. "You know who I am, don't you? Yet you have the cheek to tell some one to snivel and moan in the next room, just to ruin our mood while we're drinking! Are you trying to tell me I haven't paid you properly for the wine on other occasions?"
"I beg you to moderate your anger, sir," the innkeeper said. "I wouldn't dream of encouraging anyone to disturb you while you are drinking. That weeping is two cabaret singers, a father and daughter. They had no idea the Commandant was drinking here, they are crying because of their own misfortunes."
"Sounds a rum tale," Lu Da said. "Call 'em in so I can see them."
The innkeeper did as bidden, and in a moment the two entered: first a young woman of eighteen or nineteen, and after her a fifty- or sixty-year-old man. They presented themselves to Lu Da. Both carried bamboo clappers in their hands. The young woman was not an outright beauty, yet there was that in her looks which could move the observer. Picture her:
*In the loose coils of her hair a fine jade pin reposed; she was slender and elegant, and she wore a red silk skirt. A plain old-fashioned blouse encased her snow-white breast, and soft stockings of pale yellow lined her tiny shoes. Tight-knitted were the moth-pale brows, the eyes brimming with crystal tears and the head lowered — sweet beauty fragile as jade snow. Grief did not flood over her, she held it in bitter store.*
The young woman wiped away her tears and came forward to wish them ten thousand happinesses.
"Where are you from?" Lu Da asked. "And why all these tears?"
The girl replied: "You do not know our story, sir; pardon me then if I recount it. My family is from the Eastern Capital. I came here to Weizhou with my father and mother seeking a home with some relatives, unaware that they had moved to Nanjing. My mother fell sick at the inn and died. We two remained here all alone. I had the misfortune to attract the notice of a rich man of the district, Mr. Zheng, whom they also call 'Master of Guanxi'; he arranged a forced marriage and made me his concubine. Who could have known that, after signing a contract for three thousand strings of cash, he would insist on our side of the bargain and not keep his? For he still demanded my person! And then, before three months were out, his first wife, in a fury, beat me and threw me out of the house, saying she couldn't stand me. She also charged our landlord with recovering the three thousand strings of cash mentioned in the contract. My father is weak and helpless, he had no way to fight that man, rich and powerful as he is. From the very beginning we had not had a penny from him, now where would we get this money to give him? There was only one way: from my infancy, Father had taught me a few simple airs. We would have to come here to this inn and go round the tables. Thus we can earn a pittance but the greater part of what we get each day goes to Mr. Zheng, leaving the two of us next to nothing to live on. And for the last few days there have been so few customers we cannot meet the payment, and I fear he intends to heap further shame upon us. Dwelling on the wretchedness of our condition, with no one in the world to turn to, we began to weep. We didn't dream we might be disturbing Your Worship. We beg you to forgive us and withhold the hand of punishment."
"What's your name and where do you lodge?" Lu Da asked. "And where does he live, this Mr. Zheng, so-called Master of Guanxi?"
The old man answered: "Jin is my name, Your Honour, and I am the second in my family. My daughter's name is Lotus. Mr. Zheng is the butcher who has a shop near the Academy Bridge. 'Master of Guanxi' is just a nickname. My daughter and I lodge at Lu's Hostel, opposite the East Gate."
"Ha!" snorted Lu Da, on hearing this. "I was wondering who this Master of Guanxi could be, and it turns out he's nothing but Butcher Zheng, killer of pigs, a stinking tradesman who set up his shop through the graces of Field-Marshal Zhong the Younger. And now he thinks he can bully people in this fashion!"
Turning to Li Zhong and Shi Jin, he said: "You two wait here. I'll just go and deal with the bastard, and then I'll be back."
But Li Zhong and Shi Jin held him and said, "Elder Brother, calm down first. Tomorrow will do to settle the matter." They exhorted him thus repeatedly.
Lu Da said to Jin, "Come here, old fellow. Suppose one were to give you your travelling expenses, so tomorrow you can return to the Eastern Capital, how about that?"
Father and daughter both exclaimed, "To go back home! It would be like a new life, a rebirth! But how will the landlord ever let us go? Mr. Zheng has told him he's got to get the money."
Lu Da interrupted: "That's no problem. I'll take care of that." He felt in his pocket and brought out five taels of silver that he placed on the table. Turning to Shi Jin, he said; "I don't happen to have much with me. If you have any silver, lend me some. I'll pay you back tomorrow."
"There's no need, for a trifle like this," Shi Jin said, reaching into his purse and taking out ten taels of silver that he placed on the table.
Looking now at Li Zhong, Lu Da said: "You lend me some too."
Li Zhong fished around and brought out two taels.
Lu Da didn't hide his contempt. "You're not much use, are you," he said. He picked up just the fifteen taels and gave them to the old man, saying, "Take this for your expenses and pack your belongings, I'll come at dawn tomorrow to help you leave. We'll see if that innkeeper dares to detain you."
Jin and his daughter gave profuse thanks, then left.
Lu Da tossed Li Zhong his two taels of silver. The three men had another three pints of wine before leaving. As they went down the stairs, Lu Da shouted: "Landlord, I shall pay you for the wine tomorrow."
The proprietor replied smoothly, "No matter, Commandant. Please drink as much as you like. My only concern is not to lose the Commandant's patronage."
Leaving Pan's, they went out into the street, and there they parted. Shi Jin and Li Zhong returning to their respective hostels. We shall stay with Lu Da, who went to his lodgings near the headquarters of the frontier garrison. He returned to his room without eating any supper and went to bed still consumed with rage. His landlord didn't even dare ask him what was the matter.
Let us see how Jin and his daughter fared.
With the fifteen taels of silver, they first went to their inn. Old Jin settled his daughter there, while he went to a place quite far removed outside the city walls, to order a small cart. Returning thence, he packed his bags, and paid the landlord the rent, including the cost of food and firewood. Then they waited for morning to come. The night passed uneventfully.
Rising early, before dawn, they lit a fire and cooked some food; after eating, they collected their bags. Just as day was breaking, Major Lu strode into the inn, shouting at the top of his voice, "Potboy, where is Old Jin's room?"
"Mr. Jin," the waiter called, "Commandant Lu is here looking for you."
Old Jin opened the door and said, "Please come in, Commandant, and take a seat."
"What's the good of sitting down? You'd better go, if you're going. What are you waiting for?"
Old Jin fetched his daughter, shouldered the bags, thanked the Commandant, and was about to walk out when the waiter stood in his way: "Where are you going, Mr. Jin?"
"Hasn't he paid you for the room?" Lu Da interrupted.
"That was all settled yesterday," the waiter said. "It's just a question of the money owed to Mr. Zheng, for releasing his daughter. I was told I had to watch him because of that."
"Butcher Zheng's money I shall be returning to him myself," Lu Da said. "Let the old man go home."
But the waiter just wouldn't.
Thereupon anger took possession of Lu Da. He planted his separated five fingers in the flunkey's face, dealing him a blow which left him spitting blood. He followed this up with another that knocked out two of his front teeth. The fellow struggled to his feet and fled into the depths of the inn. Don't suppose that after this the landlord was going to stand in the way!
Jin and his daughter left the premises as fast as their feet would carry them, and hurried to the place outside the walls where the cart had been ordered the previous day.
Lu Da considered the situation. He was afraid that the waiter might follow and stop them, so he returned to the inn, found himself a stool, and stayed put for a couple of hours. Not until Jin and his daughter must be far away did he get up and betake himself to the Academy Bridge.
Now Zheng the butcher had just opened the two shutters of his shop. He had set up the two counters, and hung up a number of pieces of pork. He was at present seated behind the counter, watching ten or so assistants chopping and selling meat. Lu Da walked right up to the counter and bawled, "Butcher Zheng!" When Zheng saw it was Major Lu, he bustled out from behind the counter, bowed and said, "My excuses, Commandant!" He ordered his assistants to bring a stool at once, and said, "Please take a seat, Commandant!"
Lu Da sat down and said: "Orders of the Marshal, we require ten pounds of lean meat, chopped up fine, and I don't want to see an ounce of fat in it."
"Very good, sir," said the butcher. "Find a good piece," he told his assistants, "and cut up ten pounds."
"I don't want that lot to put their dirty hands on it," Lu Da said. "Cut it yourself."
"Anything you say," said the butcher. "I'll cut it myself, of course." He went to the meat counter, took down ten pounds of lean, and carefully minced it.
At this moment the waiter from the inn appeared, with his head wrapped in a towel. He had come to tell Zheng the business about Old Jin but when he saw Lu Da sitting beside the counter he dared not approach. He waited some way off under a porch and watched. The butcher spent a whole hour cutting up the meat. He wrapped it in lotus leaves and asked, "Shall I have it sent, Commandant?"
"What are you talking about? You haven't finished yet. I need another ten pounds of fat only, there mustn't be a speck of lean in it; also cut it up fine."
"I suppose they want the lean to make dumplings. But what's the point of mincing the fat?"
Lu Da glared at him and said: "The Marshal's orders, delivered to me personally, who dares to question them?"
"If it's really wanted, then of course I will do it," the butcher said. He selected ten pounds of clear fat, carefully cut it up, and wrapped it in lotus leaves. It had taken him the whole morning, and now it was already lunch-time. The waiter from the inn still didn't dare approach of course, and even ordinary customers wouldn't venture into the shop.
"Now, sir," said the butcher, "shall I have someone deliver it for you to the Garrison headquarters?"
"I still want ten pounds of gristle, also cut up fine and without a trace of meat in it," Lu Da said.
The butcher started to laugh. "I believe this is some kind of joke you're playing on me," he said. At this point, Lu Da jumped to his feet, picked up the two packets of finely chopped meat, and glaring at the butcher with bulging eyes, said: "Some kind of joke, exactly!" And with that he hurled the two packets of meat in the butcher's face. There was a veritable rain of meat.
Zheng, the butcher, swelled with a great rage, the choler seemed to mount from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. This fury swept irresistibly through him like a forest fire. Seizing the sharp boning knife on the meat counter, he gathered himself and sprang at Lu Da. But the latter, with a single bound, was already in the street. None of the neighbours or the dozen or so shop assistants dared to intervene. Passers-by became rooted to the spot, and the waiter from the inn also watched, in fear and trembling.
With the knife in his right hand, Zheng tried to grapple Lu Da with the left. But Lu Da was able to block Zheng's left hand, and moved in to deliver a single kick to the solar plexus which sent Zheng crashing to the ground. He followed up, planting a foot on Zheng's chest and again raising that fist with the dimensions of a vinegar barrel. Looking Zheng in the eye, he said, "When I came here to serve under old General Zhong, I was made frontier commander of the five circuits of Guanxi, so it's not unreasonable to call me 'Master of Guanxi.' You're just a butcher, a hacker of pig's flesh, no better than a dog, and you call yourself 'Master of Guanxi'! Why did you force Jin's daughter, Lotus?" He struck him another blow, right on the nose, so that the blood came flooding out and the nose was knocked sideways. For the butcher it was as if he'd opened a sauce and vinegar shop: salty, sour and hot all mixed up together! The butcher could not go on. "You win," he groaned, letting the knife drop to one side.
"You dare answer back, you whoremonger?" Lu Da yelled, raising his fist again and crashing it down on the corner of the butcher's eye. This one blow was enough to burst the eyeball and scatter the pupil. It was as if the butcher had opened a brocade shop, scarlet and black and crimson stuff all spilling out! The spectators were terrified of Lu Da, who dared to interfere? The butcher's only idea was to cry for mercy.
Lu Da snorted in disgust. "What a broken, beggarly thing you are! If you'd fought to the end I'd have spared you but if you cry for mercy like that I won't." Another blow fell on the butcher's temple. It was as if the butcher was enjoying a full Taoist ritual for the dead: gongs and bells and cymbals all sounded together in his ears!
Lu Da examined the butcher. He lay there on the ground, the breath but none going in. He didn't stir. Lu Da made as if to strike him again. "Don't pretend you're dead, you animal, or I'll give you another!" But the butcher's colour was gradually changing.
"I only wanted to give the blighter a good drubbing, I didn't think three blows would kill him. I'm going to have to answer for this; they'll put me away where there's no one to serve me meals. I'd best get out of here right away."
He got moving at once but before leaving he turned to shout at the corpse, "If you're shamming, I'll be back to deal with you properly!"
Cursing to himself, he strode off. Which of the neighbours or the butcher's assistants dared stand in the way? He returned home hastily, made a bundle of some clothes, light valuables and silver, abandoning everything else, picked up a staff of eyebrow height, and left town by the South Gate without delay.
Meanwhile Zheng's family and friends, after trying in vain to revive him for half the day, were raising an outcry. With all the neighbours, old and young, they hurried to Government House to bring charges. The Civil Governor went into session and heard their complaint. After considering it, he said: "Lu Da is garrison Commandant, it is not within my authority to lay hands on the murderer." He then got into his sedan chair and went straight to garrison headquarters, where he stated his business to the duty officer. When the General heard that the Governor wanted to see him, he invited him in and after the usual exchange of greetings, asked why he had come.
"I have something important to tell Your Excellency," the Governor reported. "Your garrison commandant, Lu Da, in an unprovoked assault, has killed Zheng, the butcher down in the market. Without Your Excellency's consent, it is not within my authority to apprehend the murderer."
This news startled the General. "Lu Da is a brave soldier," he thought to himself, "but he's a rough diamond. Now he's responsible for a death. How can I hush this up? He'll have to be questioned."
To the Governor, he said: "This Lu Da was on the establishment of my father, the Old Field-Marshal. Because I was short of personnel here, he was transferred as commandant. Since he has committed a murder, you can detain him and question him according to the law. But if you get a full confession and sentence is passed, we'd better inform my father before carrying it out, because Lu Da might be wanted some time in my father's frontier command, and then it would look bad."
"Then I will ascertain all the circumstances," the Governor said, "and submit a full report to the Old Field-Marshal. Having done which, I will proceed according to his instructions."
The Governor took leave of the General, and returning by sedan chair to Government House went straight to his office, where he summoned the bailiffs and delivered to them a signed order for the apprehension of the criminal, Lu Da.
Superintendent Wang, carrying the warrant, took an escort of twenty men to Lu Da's place of abode. Here they found only the landlord, who told them, "The gentleman returned just now and collected a bundle of things and his short staff and left. I thought he must be going on a mission, so I didn't dare ask anything."
Superintendent Wang ordered the door of Lu Da's room to be broken down. All they found inside was some old clothes and bedding. Taking the landlord with him, Wang searched east and west. North and south of the government offices he looked but found no trace of the fugitive. Ordering two neighbours and the landlord to accompany him, he returned to the office to report.
"Major Lu has fled, to escape punishment. Being unable to ascertain his whereabouts, I have brought his landlord in and some neighbours."
The Governor ordered them to be locked up at once. He also had all Zheng's family, neighbours and assistants detained, appointed coroners, told the local police and ward chiefs to keep a lookout in the district, and ordered a third inquest. Meanwhile Zheng's family sent the coffin to the temple. A dossier was compiled and a time limit set after which failure to capture the murderer would incur penalties. The plaintiffs were released on bail; the neighbours and assistants received no more than a beating for failing to come to the victim's assistance; the landlord and his neighbours got a reprimand. Since Lu Da was on the run, a general proclamation was sent to every quarter announcing a reward of one thousand strings of cash for his capture, and details of his age, his appearance and his ancestry were posted everywhere. Everyone else was released provisionally.
Zheng's family started their mourning ceremony, and we shall leave them to it, in order to take up Lu Da's story again. After fleeing from Weizhou he wandered all over the place, in fear and trepidation:

Separated from the flock, the lone goose
*Glides through the sky by the light of the moon;*
*The fish escaped from the net*
*Leaps and tumbles through the waves.*
*He goes without seeing, no eyes for the road,*
*Full of his thoughts, shouldering others aside;*
On restless feet, unquiet as a horse before battle.

Thus Lu Da traversed several regions and districts, "When you run for your life the road's your lot, wherever you land that's your home," or — how does the old jingle go?

Famine doesn't chose its food,
*Cold weather doesn't care about fashion,*
*Panic doesn't pick a road,*
Penury has no time for passion.

He wandered aimlessly like this for more than half a month, until he came to the district of Daizhou.
When he entered the town, he found it was a bustling sort of place, crowded with people and with carriages rushing two abreast. The hundred and twenty different livelihoods and trades were all represented, all kinds of materials and goods were available, and the whole was so well laid out that this small provincial town was by no means inferior to a district capital.
As Lu Da proceeded on his way, he happened to observe a knot of people gathered at a crossroads examining a wall-poster. Here's how it was:
*They stand shoulder to shoulder, and press on each other's backs. Heads clash as they crane their necks to see. Wisdom and Folly here are mingled, the good man mixing with the base. Third Brother Zhang, the fat oaf, stands and nods — he can't read. Fourth Brother Li's a midget, all he can do is shuffle his feet. Old Greybeard there leans his chin upon his stick; the young swot copies down sentences. The document's indited in classic style, each word redolent of the law.*

Observing this crowd at the crossroads, Lu Da wormed his way into the middle of it to find out what was going on. He couldn't read the notice but he heard what people were reading out: "Yanmen Government Office, in the district of Daizhou, on the authority of the military commissariat at Taiyuan, and in accordance with a warrant issued in Weizhou, orders the arrest of Lu Da, formerly commandant of the garrison of the above post, for the murder of Zheng the butcher. Anyone sheltering him in their house, giving him a bed, and board will be accounted an accomplice and merit the same punishment. Whoever captures him or offers information leading to his arrest will receive in reward a thousand strings of cash."

Lu Da had heard thus far, when a voice right behind him said: "Elder Brother Zhang! What are you doing here?" and at the same time he was grasped round the waist and dragged away from the crossroads. Now if someone had not seen him and dragged him away like this, how would it ever have come about that Lu Da shaved his head, removed his beard and moustache, and changed his name? How would a murderer such as he have become the terror of the Buddhas and the *Lohans*? How would he have wielded the staff of Zen to clear a dangerous road, or used a monk's sword to rid the world of troublemakers?

The bandit chiefs knelt down, saying. "Elder brother, you're guiltless and we do not wish to involve you. You can take a rope and bind us, and ask for the reward."

"That will not do," said Shi Jin. "I invited you to come here, and if I seize you for the reward everybody will jeer at me. If this is your time for death, I will die with you; if to live, then I will live with you. Please get up, be at your ease, and let us think of another plan. Wait until I have asked the soldiers why they come here."

Shi Jin climbed the ladder and called out "Why do you men come here in the third watch of the night?" The inspector replied, "Sir, you need not say that you are not guilty as we have the accuser Li Ji here." Shi Jin shouted, "Li Ji! Why do you falsely accuse an innocent person?"

"I really do not know," replied Li Ji. "In a forest I got a letter from Wang the Fourth, and the same day I read it before the *yamen*, and this is the result."

Shi Jin addressed Wang the Fourth, "You said there was no reply, so how is this?" "I forgot the letter because I was drunk," answered Wang the Fourth. Shi Jin shouted, "You brute."

The inspector outside was afraid of Shi Jin, and dared not enter the farm to arrest the men. The three bandit chiefs pointed their fingers and said to Shi Jin. "Speak only to those outside." Shi Jin understood and said, "You two constables need not use force. I will give them over and you can escort them to the *yamen* where you can ask for the reward." The two constables replied, "We have no business here. We are waiting for you to come out, and go with us to get the reward." Shi Jin descended the ladder, and catching Wang the Fourth took him into the garden and killed him with a sword. He then ordered the servants to pack up all the valuables, and light about forty torches: he and the three bandit chiefs armed themselves—one sword in the hand and a smaller one in their waist. They set fire to the huts at the back of the farmstead and the soldiers immediately rushed there. Shi Jin set fire to the building in the centre of the enclosure. He opened the gates and called to his men to kill any one they met. He was in the front, Zhu Wu and Yang Chun were in the middle, and Chen Da was at the rear. They went out, killing men on both sides. Shi Jin was like a tiger, and nobody could stop him. They hacked their way through the cordon of soldiers. Afterwards they came across the two constables and Li Ji. When enemies meet they recognize each other clearly. The inspector seeing that Shi Jin was angry ran away. Li Ji also turned to ran but Shi Jin caught him, and with a slash, he cut him in half with his sword. The bandit chiefs pursued the constables and dispatched them. The troops scattered in every direction. Shi Jin led his men straight to Mount Shaohua where there was a feast to celebrate the occasion.

After staying a few days Shi Jin considered the position. He had saved the lives of three men, and some valuables; but his homestead and his property had all been destroyed. Evidently, he could not stay there, so he told the bandit chiefs that he wished to go to find his old drill instructor Wang Jin. The bandits urged him to stay and promised to erect new buildings for him but Shi Jin would not agree to this. Then Zhu Wu said they would make him their chief and quite happy.

"I am an innocent man—so how could I defile this body bequeathed to me by my parents? You need not persuade me to become a bandit."

After a few days Shi Jin still wanted to go but the bandit chiefs were equally determined to keep him. Nothing could stop Shi Jin, and he prepared to depart. He put on a broad brimmed hat with a big red tassel, under it a black cloth with the corners hanging down—and a bright yellow ribbon outside: he also wore a military overcoat arranged on two sides: around his waist was a girdle of plaited bands of red plum colour: black and white puttees wound tightly round his legs; his shoes were made of hemp specially suitable for hilly roads. He carried a "swan feather" sword with a round copper knob on the shaft, and a bundle on his back. He took leave of the three bandit chiefs, and descended the mountain accompanied by a large number of the bandits. The bandit chiefs shed tears when he left them. Shi Jin took the direct road to Yanan Prefecture; he took his meals when convenient and travelled during the day and slept at night. Traveling alone, he reached Weizhou in a little over a fortnight. He thought that as this place was a military station he would inquire about his teacher, Drill Instructor Wang Jin. Upon entering the town, he saw there were many roads and much business. He found a tea shop on the roadside where he stopped and ordered tea. He asked the waiter where the military *yamen* was. While they were talking, a big man came in with big strides. This man wore military dress; on his head was a piece of silk with a character *Wan*, and attached at the back were two golden rings inscribed, "Taiyuan Prefecture."[52] He wore a large military coat of parrot green colour with a military belt in black. His boots were made of yellow leather with four seams. He had a round face, big ears, a prominent nose, a big mouth and a bushy beard. He was quite eight feet high and a girth of fifty inches. As he sat down, the waiter said that Shi Jin might ask this officer about the drill instructor. Shi Jin stood up and said, "Will you please drink tea with me?" The man also saluted; and when they both sat down Shi Jin asked for his name.

"I am Major Lu Da. May I ask your name?" "I am from Huayin County, and my name is Shi Jin. I wish to ask whether you know a Drill Instructor called Wang Jin." Lu Da said, "Brother, are you not the 'tattooed dragons' Shi Jin of the Shi village?" Shi Jin admitted this, and the officer again saluted and said he had heard of him but to meet him was much better than hearing. He then said that Drill Instructor Wang Jin held office under Old Zhong, the frontier General at Yanan Prefecture. As he was the Shi Jin of whom he had heard so much he invited him to have a drink with him. The two men left the tea-house hand in hand, and after turning several corners they went into a well-known wine shop of the Pan family. Finding a cozy room upstairs they sat down; Major Lu Da ordered four pots of wine with dishes of eatables and fruit; and they chatted about the various forms of using the lance. While they were talking, they heard someone sobbing and crying in an adjoining room. This disturbed Major Lu Da, who took a cup and saucer and threw them on the floor. The waiter heard the noise and saw that the Major was angry. The Major inquired who it was that was crying and disturbing them. The waiter said, "There is a singsong girl with her father, and they are crying because there is no guest to engage them, and they do not know you are here." "But why do they make this noise?" said the Major, "Tell them to come here." The waiter left, and in a short time a woman entered, of about nineteen years of age, and behind her there was an old man of sixty years with castanets in his hand. The woman was not beautiful yet there was something attractive about her. Wiping away her tears she came forward, and gave a woman's salutation (one hand placed on top of the other). The major asked why they cried, and she replied, "I am from Kaifeng, and I came to this place with my parents to find some relatives; but upon arrival we found they had removed to Nanjing. My mother was taken ill in an inn and died. My father and myself stayed here in distress. There is a wealthy man here nicknamed "The Bully of the Western Pass." When he saw me he sent a matchmaker to demand me to be his concubine. A bond was drawn up that he would give me three thousand strings of cash for my body that I accepted as I thought he would keep his word. In less than three months his legal wife treated me very badly and turned me out of doors. Besides, they demanded me to return the three thousand strings of cash which I had never received but which they said I had received when I pawned my body. My father was timid and dared not dispute with the Bully, who was so influential. But as he has not paid me a single cash how can we return him the money? Now as when I was a small girl my father taught me to use the castanets, so we came to this wine shop to entertain the customers. Everyday the money we got was paid more than half to the Bully and we had only a little for ourselves. For the last two days there were very few guests and we have passed the time limit he allowed us. When we thought of our trouble, we were distressed. We had no thought of intruding upon your attention and hope you will overlook our offence."

Major Lu Da asked for their names and where this Bully lived. The old man replied, "My name is Jin, and the baby name of my daughter is 'Cuilian.' The Bully keeps a butcher's shop near the Zhuangyuan Bridge. We two live at the Lu Family Inn near the East Gate."

Upon hearing this Major Lu Da expressed his disgust, "Bah! I know that fellow, he was previously a butcher and is a filthy rascal. Sometime ago he asked my help in getting the garrison commander here to permit him to open his shop and this is how he cheats people—I will go and kill him." Shi Jin exhorted him repeatedly to wait till the morrow. But there was no alteration.

Major Lu Da said, "Old man, come here! If we give you your traveling expenses, will you return to Kaifeng tomorrow?"

The father and daughter replied, "If we could return to our native village, we should look upon you as our parent for this new life. But will the proprietor of our inn let us go? If we go, the Bully will certainly demand the money from the inn proprietor." Major Lu Da said that was not important as he had a plan. He took five taels of silver from his pocket and put them on the table and then asked Shi Jin if he could lend him some money till the following day. Shi Jin did not want repayment and placed an ingot of ten taels of silver on the table. Major Lu Da gave this money to the old man Jin and told him to make his arrangements at the inn, and he would come early the following morning to send them off. They gave their thanks and departed. Old Jin went outside the town and hired a cart for the following day; they paid the inn for the lodging; they packed their baggage, and waited for daybreak. About four o'clock he lit a fire and cooked some food for breakfast. Shortly after daybreak Major Lu Da arrived and told them to go quickly. As they moved toward the door the waiter stopped them and explained to the Major that the money for the pawning of the body was still unpaid, and the Bully had ordered him to watch them. Major Lu Da said that he himself would pay that to the butcher: but as the waiter was unwilling to let them go, the Major slapped his face so that blood flowed from his mouth: he knocked his two teeth out with his fist. The waiter rushed out of the inn, and the old man Jin with his daughter quickly left. Major Lu Da thought the waiter might intercept them, so he sat down on a stool and waited there for two hours. When he thought Jin had gone some distance he got up and walked to the Zhuangyuan Bridge.

The butcher had a double frontage shop, two butchers' blocks, and about five sides of pork hanging. The butcher was behind the counter watching his ten assistants selling the meat. When Major Lu Da arrived, he stood outside the door, and called to the butcher, who came and saluted with folded hands. He said, "Excuse me" and then told an assistant to bring a stool for the Major, who sat down, saying, "I have an order from the garrison commander for thirteen *jin*[53] of lean minced pork; he does not want the least fat in it." The butcher told his assistants to get it ready but the Major objected. "Do not let those dirty men handle the meat. You cut it yourself." "Very well," said the butcher, "I will cut it myself." He then got to the block, selected ten *jin* of lean pork, and cut it into small pieces. The waiter of the inn just then arrived with a towel wrapped round his head; when he saw Major Lu Da, he dare not come nearer, so he stood under the eaves of a house some distance away. It took the butcher quite half an hour to cut the meat, he then wrapped it in lotus leaves, and asked if he should send it.

"Send what?" asked Major Lu Da. "Wait! I want another thirteen *jin* and it must all be fat. There must not be any lean flesh with it. It must also be minced."

"But it is now all lean pork," said the butcher; "I am afraid that the commander wants to make pork pies. What use is there for minced fat?" Major Lu Da stared at the butcher, and said, "The commander gave me the order, so who dare ask questions?"

"No matter what purpose it is intended for, I will cut it up." He then selected ten *jin* of the finest fat pork, minced it, and placed it in a lotus leaf. He had been cutting the pork almost all the morning and it was now near the dinner hour. The butcher said, "Shall I tell someone to go with you to carry this to the magistrate?" Major Lu Da replied, "I also want ten *jin* of gristle to be chopped fine, there must be no flesh attached to it."

The butcher laughed and said, "It appears as though you had specially come to waste my time."

Major Lu Da upon hearing this, got up and staring at the butcher said, "I certainly came to waste your time." He then picked up the two parcels of pork and threw them into the butcher's face—the minced pork falling like a shower of rain. The butcher was very angry and his passion pervaded his body from his feet to the crown of his head. His heart became a burning mass of passions which could not be extinguished. He seized a sharp pointed knife and jumped out of the shop. Major Lu Da had got into the street before him. There was a crowd of neighbours but nobody dared intervene. The passers-by and the waiter from the inn were frightened out of their wits. The butcher had the knife in his right hand, and with his left he tried to seize Lu Da: but the Major caught his left arm and kicked him in the groin; so that he fell in the street. The Major took a step forward, and placed his foot on the butcher's breast: he raised his fist (which was as large as a monk's alms bowl) and said, "Now you are a butcher, and are like a dog. Why did you swindle the Jin's girl, Cuilian?" He struck a blow on the butcher's nose which was broken and twisted to one side, the blood was gushing forth like the breaking of a sauce bottle. The butcher could not rise and throwing aside his knife said, "Enough."

Major Lu Da abused him, saying, "You thieving bastard! How dare you reply!" Then lifting his fist he struck the butcher in the corner of his eye such a blow that the eyeball fell out with a display of red, black, and purple colours on his cheeks. The butcher asked to be pardoned but Major Lu Da shouted, "You are a bad lot. If you were sincere I would forgive you; but I cannot do so." He thereupon hit him on the temple and it seemed to the butcher as though a whole temple of priests were chanting their prayers, ringing bells, and clapping cymbals. The Major saw that the butcher was exhaling without any intake, so he falsely spoke to him, "You are pretending to die." But he saw that his skin was gradually becoming pale. And he could hardly believe that three blows of his fist could have killed the man. He knew that he would be prosecuted, so he decided to go away. As he left, he saw the butcher was dead. As he went along, he turned round and abused the butcher: but the onlookers dared not interfere. Returning to his lodging the Major packed a few things and silver and taking a cudgel he quickly left the town by the South Gate.

The people tried to revive the body for half a day without success—for alas, he was quite dead. The members of the family went to the *yamen* and, when the magistrate came, made their accusation. The magistrate thought that as Major Lu Da was a military officer he had better report to the garrison commander; so at once he got in a sedan chair and went to the headquarters. When they met, the magistrate saluted, then he stated that Major Lu Da had killed a man but he dared not arrest him without the General's consent. The General was startled at the news, and after some thought he asked the magistrate to arrest and try him according to the law. As Major Lu Da was still on the staff of the Old General Zhong of the frontier the sentence should be submitted to the latter for confirmation. The magistrate agreed to do this, and upon returning to his *yamen* he took his seat on the bench, and issued a warrant for the arrest of Major Lu Da. The inspector who received the warrant proceeded to the lodgings of the Major but he found no clue there. Moreover as he did not know where he had gone he arrested the landlord and two of the neighbours. The magistrate sent these men temporarily to the detention house, and ordered the coroner to make a careful postmortem examination of the corpse, then have the body placed in a coffin, and deposited it in the courtyard of a temple awaiting further developments. He then issued a proclamation giving details of the murder, a full description of the major, with a reward of a thousand strings of cash for his arrest. This was printed and posted in public places in every district.

Lu Da travelled hastily without any definite object in view. When hungry, he took any food that was ready; when cold, any clothing available; hurrying, he did not choose road; and being poor he would have taken any woman as his wife. In just more than a fortnight he reached Yanmen County in the Daizhou Prefecture, and entering the town on a market day he found that the streets were crowded and noisy. Horses and carts were passing along side by side. There were all kinds of traders selling and buying goods from all parts. Although it was only a county town yet it was better than many a prefectural capital for business. Arriving at the crossroads he saw a crowd looking at a proclamation. He forced his way through the crowd, and as he could not read he listened to one man who was reading it aloud. It was the proclamation about himself, warning the people not to harbour him, and offering a reward for his arrest. When he had listened to this he heard a voice behind him say, "Elder brother Zhang, what are you doing here?" He was then pulled away from the crossroads. Lu Da had his head shaved, and his moustache cut, changed his name, and destroyed a Buddhist disciple.

His staff cleared the roads from danger,
His sword killed the vicious people.

## 004

### The New Monk, Lu Da Zhishen puts Mount Wutai in an Uproar & sets a Bad Example; Squire Zhao Yuanwai Repairs & Rebuilds Wenshu Monastery Manjusri Temple

Lu Da turned to see who was hustling him away. It was none other than Old Jin from the Weizhou tavern, the man he had rescued. The old fellow didn't stop pulling till they reached an isolated spot. Then he said: "You're too rash, benefactor. That notice offers a thousand strings of cash for your capture. How could you stand there looking at it? If I hadn't spotted you, you might have been nabbed by the police. Your age, description and place of origin are all there."

"To tell you the truth, when I went to the foot of the Zhuangyuan Bridge that day to see Zheng the butcher about your affair, I killed the churl with three blows of the fist and had to flee. I've been knocking about for forty or fifty days now and just happened to wander into this town. I thought you were returning to the Eastern Capital. What are you doing here?"

"After you saved me, benefactor, I found a cart. Originally, I intended to go back to the Eastern Capital but I was afraid that rogue would catch up and you wouldn't be around to rescue us. So I changed my mind and headed north. On the road I met an old neighbour from the capital who was coming here on business. He took me and my daughter along. He was good enough to find her a match. She's now the mistress of a wealthy man, Squire Zhao. The squire has provided her with a house. Thanks to you, benefactor, we now have plenty to eat and wear. My daughter has often spoken to the squire of your kindness. He is also fond of jousting. He's said many times he'd like to meet you but that was never possible before. You must come and stay with us a few days. We can talk about what you should do next."

Lu Da and Old Jin walked less than half a //when they came to the door of a house. The old man pushed aside the bamboo curtain and called: "Daughter, our benefactor is here."

The girl emerged, neatly made up and attractively dressed. She begged Lu Da to be seated in the centre of the room. Then, as if offering votive candles, she kowtowed before him six times. "If you hadn't rescued us, benefactor," she said, "we'd never possess what we have today." She invited him upstairs to the parlour.

"Don't bother," said Lu Da. "I must be going."

"Now that you're here, benefactor, of course we can't let you leave," said the old man. He took Lu Da's staff and bundles and ushered him up the stairs. To his daughter he said: "Keep our benefactor company. I'll arrange about dinner."

"Don't go to a lot of trouble," said Lu Da. "Anything will do."

"Even if I gave my life I could never repay your benevolence," said Old Jin. "A little simple food—it's not worth mentioning."

The daughter sat with Lu Da while the old man went downstairs and directed the boy they had recently hired to tell the servant girl to get the kitchen fire started. Then Old Jin and the boy went out and bought fresh fish, a tender chicken, a goose, pickled fish and fresh fruit. He took these home, opened a jug of wine, prepared a few dishes, and carried them upstairs. There wine cups were placed on a table, and three sets of chopsticks. When the food and fruit were served, the servant girl came in with a silver wine kettle and heated the wine.

Father and daughter each filled Lu Da's cup in turn. Then Old Jin dropped to his knees and kowtowed.

"Please, dear elder, don't do that," said Lu Da. "You embarrass me terribly."

"When we first came here, not long ago," said the old man, "I wrote your name on a strip of red paper and pasted it on a wooden tablet. We burn a stick of incense before it every morning and evening, and my daughter and I kowtow before it. Now that you're here, why shouldn't we kowtow to you in person?"

"I'm touched by your devotion," said Lu Da.

The three drank till almost nightfall. Suddenly they heard a commotion outside. Lu Da opened the window and looked. Some twenty to thirty men, all armed with staves, were gathered in front of the house. "Bring him down," they were shouting. A gentleman on a horse cried: "Don't let the rascal get away!"

Lu Da realized that he was in danger. He snatched up a stool and started down the stairs. Old Jin, waving his hands, rushed down ahead of him, exclaiming: "Nobody move!" He ran over to the man on horseback and said a few words. The mounted gentleman laughed. He ordered his band to disperse.

When the men had gone, the gentleman got off his horse and entered the house. Old Jin asked Lu Da to come down. The gentleman bowed as Lu Da descended the stairs.

" 'Meeting a man of fame is better than just hearing his name.' Please accept my homage, righteous Major."

"Who is this gentleman?" Lu Da asked Old Jin. "We don't know each other. Why should he be so respectful?"

"This is Squire Zhao, my daughter's lord. Someone told him that a young man I had brought to his house was upstairs, drinking. So he got some of his vassals and came to fight. When I explained, he sent them away."

"So that was it," said Lu Da. "You could hardly blame him."

Squire Zhao invited Lu Da to the upper chamber. Old Jin reset the table, and once more prepared food and drink. Zhao ushered the major to the seat of honour. Lu Da refused.

"How could I presume?"

"A small mark of my respect. I have heard much of the major's heroism. What great good fortune that I could meet you today."

"Though I'm just a crude fellow who's committed a capital offence, the squire doesn't scorn my lowliness and is willing to make my acquaintance. If there's any way I can be of service, you have only to speak."

Squire Zhao was very pleased. He asked all about the fight with Zheng the butcher. They talked of this and that, discussed jousting with arms, and drank far into the night. Then every one retired.

The following morning Zhao said: "I'm afraid this place isn't very safe. Why not come and stay at my manor a while?"

"Where is it?" asked Lu Da.

"A little over ten //from here, near a village called Seven Treasures."

"All right."

The squire sent a vassal to the manor to get a horse for Lu Da. The man returned with the beast before noon. Squire Zhao told the vassals to bring Lu Da's luggage and asked the major to mount. Lu Da said goodbye to Old Jin and his daughter, and set out with the squire.

The two rode side by side, chatting idly, until they came to Seven Treasures. Not long after, they reached the manor and dismounted. Squire Zhao led Lu Da by the hand into a hall, where they seated themselves as host and guest. The squire ordered that a sheep be slaughtered and wine be served.

That night, Lu Da slept in a guest-room. The next day he was again wined and dined.

"You're much too good to me, Squire," said the major. "How can I repay you?"

" 'Within the four seas, all men are brothers,' " quoted the squire. "Why mention repayment?"
But enough of minor matters. Lu Da stayed at the manor for six or seven days. He and the squire were chatting in the study one day when Old Jin hastily entered. He looked to see that no one else was around, then said to Lu Da: "You mustn't think me overly cautious, benefactor. But ever since the night the squire and his vassals raised such a row in the street because you were drinking upstairs, people have been suspicious. Word has spread that you were there. Yesterday three or four policemen were questioning the neighbours. I'm worried that they'll come here and arrest you. It would be awful if anything should happen to you, benefactor."
"In that case," said Lu Da, "I'd better be on my way."
"Things might turn out badly if I kept you here, Major," the squire admitted. "Yet if I don't I'll lose a lot of face. I have another idea. It's foolproof and will give you complete protection. But maybe you won't be willing."
"I'm a man with a death penalty waiting for him. I'll do anything to find refuge."
"That's fine. Where the Wenshu Buddha used to meditate on Mount Wutai, some thirty-odd *li* from here, a monastery was erected. They have nearly seven hundred monks. The abbot is my friend. My ancestors were patrons of the monastery and contributed to its upkeep. I have promised to sponsor a novice, and have bought a blank certificate but have not yet found a suitable man, If you agree to join the Buddhist order, Major, I'll pay all expenses. Would you be willing to shave off your hair and become a monk?"
Lu Da thought to himself. "Who could I go to for protection if I were to leave here today? I'd better accept his offer." Aloud he said: "I'll become a monk if you sponsor me, Squire. I rely entirely on your kindness."
And so it was decided. That night, clothing, expense money and silks were prepared. Everyone rose early the next morning. Lu Da and the squire set out for Mount Wutai, accompanied by vassals carrying the gifts and luggage. They reached the foot of the mountain before mid-morning. Squire Zhao and Lu Da went up in sedan-chairs, sending a vassal on ahead to announce them.
At the monastery gate, they found the deacon and supervisor waiting to welcome them. They got out of their sedan-chairs and rested in a small pavilion while the abbot was notified. He soon emerged with his assistant and the elder. Squire Zhao and Lu Da hurried forward and bowed. The abbot placed the palms of his hands together before his chest in Buddhist greeting.
"It's good of you to travel this long distance, patron," he said.
"There is a small matter I'd like to trouble you about," said the squire.
"Please come into the abbey and have some tea."
Lu Da followed Squire Zhao to the hall. The abbot invited the squire to take the seat for guests. Lu Da sat down on a couch facing the abbot. The squire leaned over and whispered to him: "You're here to become a monk. How can you sit opposite the abbot?"
"I didn't know," said Lu Da. He rose and stood beside Squire Zhao.
The elder, the prior, the abbot's assistant, the supervisor, the deacon, the reception monk, and the scribe arranged themselves in two rows, according to rank, on the east and west sides of the hall.
Zhao's vassals left the sedan-chairs in a suitable place and carried into the hall several boxes which they laid before the abbot.
"Why have you brought gifts again?" asked the abbot. "You've already made so many donations."
"Only a few small things," replied Squire Zhao. "They don't merit any thanks."
Some lay brothers and novices took them away.
Squire Zhao stood up. "I have something to ask of you, Great Abbot. It has long been my desire to sponsor a new member for this monastery. Although I have had the certificate ready for some time, until today I have not been able to do so. This cousin here is named Lu. He formerly was a military officer but because of many difficulties he wants to have done with mundane affairs and become a monk. I earnestly hope Your Eminence will exercise mercy and compassion and, as a favour to me, accept this man into your order. I will pay all expenses. I shall be very happy if you consent."
"Gladly," said the abbot. "This will add lustre to our monastery. Please have some tea."
A novice served tea. After all had drunk, he removed the cups. The abbot consulted with the elder and the prior on the ceremony for receiving Lu Da into the order, then instructed the supervisor and deacon to prepare a vegetarian meal.
"That man hasn't the makings of a monk," the elder said to the other monks, privately. "See what fierce eyes he has!"
"Get them out of here a while," they requested the Receiver of Guests. "We want to talk to the abbot."
The reception monk invited Squire Zhao and Lu Da to rest in the visitors' hostel. They departed, and the elder and the others approached the abbot.
"That new applicant is a savage-looking brute," they said. "If we accept him, he's sure to cause trouble."
"He's cousin of Squire Zhao, our patron. How can we refuse? Hold your doubts while I look into the matter." The abbot lit a stick of incense and sat cross-legged on a couch. Muttering an incantation, he went into a trance. By the time the incense was consumed, he returned.
"You can go ahead with the ordination," said the abbot. "This man represents a star in Heaven. His heart is honest. Even though his appearance is savage and his life has been troubled, he will eventually become purified and attain sainthood. None of you is his equal. Mark my words. Let no one dissent."
"The abbot is only covering up his faults," the elder said to the others. "But we'll have to do as he says. We can only advise. If he won't listen, that's up to him."
Squire Zhao and the others were invited to dine in the abbey. When they had finished, the supervisor presented a list of what Lu Da would need as a monk—special shoes, clothing, hat, cape and kneeling cushion. The squire gave some silver and asked that the monastery buy the necessary materials and make them up.
A day or two later all was ready. The abbot selected a propitious day and hour, and ordered that the bells be rung and the drums beaten. Everyone assembled in the preaching hall. Draped in their capes, nearly six hundred monks placed the palms of their hands together in an obeisance to the abbot sitting on his dais, then separated into two groups. Squire Zhao, bearing gifts of silver ingots and fine cloth and carrying a stick of incense, approached the dais and bowed.
The purpose of the ceremony was announced. A novice led Lu Da to the abbot's dais. The prior told him to remove his hat, divided his hair into nine parts and knotted them. The barber shaved them all off. He reached with his razor for Lu Da's beard.
"Leave me that, at least," the major exclaimed.
The monks couldn't repress their laughter.
"Hear me," the abbot said sternly from his dais. "Leave not a single blade of grass, let the six roots of desire be torn out. All must be shaven clean away, lest they manifest themselves again," he intoned. "Shave it all off!" he exclaimed loudly.
The barber quickly finished the job. Presenting the certificate to the abbot, the elder requested him to select a name by which Lu Da should be known in the Buddhist order.
"A spark from the soul is worth more than a thousand pieces of gold," the abbot chanted. "Our Buddhist Way is great and wide. Let him be called Zhishen—Sagacious."
The scribe filled out the certificate and handed it to Lu Zhishen. At the abbot's direction he was given his monk's garments and told to put them on. Then he was led to the dais. The abbot placed his hand on Lu's head and instructed him in the rules of conduct.
"Take refuge in Buddha, the Law and the Monastic Order. These are the three refuges. Do not kill, steal, fornicate, drink or lie. These are the five precepts."
Lu Da didn't know he was supposed to answer "I shall" to each of the first three and "I shall not" to each of the last five.
"I'll remember," he said.
Everyone laughed.
Squire Zhao invited all present into the assembly hall where he burned incense and offered a vegetarian feast to the Buddhist gods. He gave gifts to every member of the monastery staff, high or low. The deacon introduced Zhishen to various members of the monastery, then conducted him to the rear building where the monks meditated. Nothing further happened that night.
The next day, Squire Zhao decided to leave. He said goodbye to the abbot, who tried in vain to keep him. After breakfast, all the monks went with him as far as the monastery gate. Squire Zhao placed his palms together and said, "Abbot, teachers, be compassionate. My young cousin Lu is a crude, direct fellow. If he forgets his manners or says anything offensive or breaks any rules, please forgive him, as a favour to me."
"Don't worry, Squire," said the abbot. "I shall teach him gradually to recite the prayers and scriptures, perform services, and practise meditation."
"In the days to come I will show my gratitude," promised the squire. He called Lu over to a pine tree and spoke to him in a low voice: "Your life must be different from now on, brother. Be restrained in all things, under no circumstances be proud. Otherwise, it will be hard for us to see each other again. Take good care of yourself. I'll send you warm clothing from time to time."
"No need to tell me, brother," said Lu. "I'll behave."
The squire took his leave of the abbot and the monks, got into his sedan-chair and set off down the mountain for home. His vassals followed, carrying the other, now empty, sedan-chair and boxes. The abbot and the monks returned to the monastery.
When Lu got back to the meditation room, he threw himself down on his bed and went to sleep. The monks meditating on either side shook him into wakefulness.
"You can't do that," they said. "Now that you're a monk, you're supposed to learn how to sit and meditate."
"If I want to sleep, what's it to you?" Lu demanded.
"Evil!" exclaimed the monks.
"What's this talk about eels? It's turtles I like to eat."
"Oh, bitter!"
"There's nothing bitter about them Turtle belly is fat and sweet. They make very good eating."
The monks gave up. They let him sleep.
The next day they wanted to complain to the abbot. But the elder advised against it. He said: "The abbot is only covering up his faults when he says he will attain sainthood and that none of us is his equal. But there's nothing we can do about it. Just don't bother with him."
The monks went back. Since no one reprimanded him, Zhishen sprawled out on his bed every night and slept snoring thunderously. When he had to relieve himself he made a terrible racket getting up. He pissed and crapped behind one of the halls. His filth was all over the place.
The abbot's assistant reported the matter. "That Lu has no manners. He's not in the least like a man who's left the material world. How can we keep a fellow like that in the monastery?"
"Nonsense," retorted the abbot. "Don't forget our donor's request. Zhishen will change later on."
No one dared argue.
And so, Lu Zhishen remained in the monastery on Mount Wutai. Before he knew it, four or five months had passed. It was early winter and Lu's mind that had been quiescent for a long time, began to stir. One clear day he put on his black cloth cassock, fastened his raven-dark girdle, changed into monk's shoes, and strode from the monastery.
Halfway down the mountain he halted to rest in a pavilion. He sat down on a low "goose neck" bench and said to himself with a curse: "In the old days I had good meat and drink everyday. But now that I'm a monk I'm shrivelling up from starvation. Squire Zhao hasn't sent me anything to eat for a long time. My mouth is absolutely tasteless. If only I could get some wine."
He saw in the distance a man carrying two covered buckets on a shoulder-pole. A ladle in his hand, the man trudged up the slope reciting this poem:

*Before Mount 9 Li an old battlefield lies,*
*There cowherds find ancient spears and knives,*
*As a breeze stirs the waters of the Wu River broad,*
*We recall Lady Yu's farewell to her lord.*

Lu watched him approach. The man entered the pavilion and put down his load. "Hey, fellow, what have you got in those buckets?" Lu asked.
"Good wine."
"How much a bucket?"
"Are you serious, monk, or are you just kidding?"
"Why should I kid you?"
"This wine is for the monastery's cooks, janitors, sedan-chair carriers, caretakers, and field labourers—no one else. The abbot has warned me that if I sell to a monk he'll take back the money and house the monastery loaned me for my winery. I don't dare sell you any of this."
"You really won't?"
"Not if you kill me!"
"I won't kill you but I will buy some of your wine."
The man didn't like the look of things. He picked up his carrying-pole and started to walk away. Lu dashed out of the pavilion after him, seized the pole with both hands, and kicked the fellow in the groin. The man clapped both hands to his injured parts and dropped to a squatting position. He couldn't straighten up for some time.
Lu Zhishen carried both buckets to the pavilion. He picked the ladle off the ground, removed the covers, and began drinking. Before long, one of the buckets was empty.
"Come around to the monastery tomorrow and I'll pay you," he said.
The man had just recovered from his pain. If the abbot found out, it would mean an end to his livelihood. How could he seek payment from Lu at the monastery? Swallowing his anger, he separated the remaining wine into two half-buckets. Then he shouldered the load, took the ladle and flew down the mountain.
Lu sat in the pavilion a long time. The wine had gone to his head. He left the pavilion, sat down beneath a pine tree and again rested for quite a spell. The wine was taking increasing effect. He pulled his arms out of his cassock and tied the empty sleeves around his waist. His tattooed back bare, he strode up the mountain, swinging his arms.
The monastery gate-keepers had been watching him from afar. They came forward when he approached and barred his way with their split bamboo staves.
"You're supposed to be a disciple of Buddha," they barked. "How dare you come here in this besotted condition? You must be blind. Haven't you seen the notice? Any monk who breaks the rules and drinks gets forty blows of the split bamboo and is expelled from the monastery. Any gate-keeper who lets a drunken man enter gets ten blows. Go back down the mountain, quickly, if you want to save yourself a beating."
In the first place, Lu was a new monk, in the second, his temper hadn't changed. Glaring, he shouted: "Mother-screwing thieves! So you want to beat me? I'll smash you!"
The situation looked bad. One of the gate-keepers sped back inside and reported to the supervisor, while the other tried to keep Zhishen out with his staff. Lu flipped it aside and gave him a staggering slap in the face. As the man struggled to recover, Lu followed with a punch that knocked him groaning to the ground.
"I'll let you off this time, varlet," said Zhishen. He walked unsteadily into the monastery.
The supervisor had summoned the caretakers, cooks, janitors and sedan-chair carriers—nearly thirty men. Now, armed with staves, they poured out of the western cloister and rushed to meet Lu. The ex-major strode towards them with a thunderous roar. They didn't know he had been an army officer. He sprang at them so fiercely they fled in confusion into the sutra hall and closed the latticed door. Zhishen charged up the steps. With one punch and one kick he smashed the door open. The trapped men raised their staves and came out fighting.
The abbot, who had been notified by the supervisor, hurried to the scene with four or five attendants.
"Zhishen," he shouted, "I forbid you to misbehave."
Lu was drunk but he recognized the abbot. He cast aside his staff, advanced and greeted him.
"I had a couple of bowls of wine but I did nothing to provoke these fellows," said Zhishen. "They came with a gang and attacked me."
"If you have any respect for me," said the abbot, "you'll go to your quarters at once and sleep it off. We'll talk about this tomorrow."
"It's only my respect for you that stops me from lambasting those scabby donkeys!"
The abbot told his assistant to help Lu to the monks' hall. He collapsed on his bed and slept, snoring loudly.
A crowd of monks surrounded the abbot. "We told you so," they said. "Now you see what's happened? How can we keep a wildcat like that in our monastery? He upsets our pure way of life."
"It's true he's a bit unruly," the abbot admitted, "but he'll become a saint later on. At present, we can do nothing. We must forgive him, for the sake of our donor, Squire Zhao. I'll give him good lecture tomorrow, and that will be the end of it."
The monks laughed coldly. "Our abbot isn't very bright," they said among themselves. All retired to their respective abodes.
The next morning the abbot sent his assistant to the monks' quarters to summon Lu Zhishen. He was still asleep. The assistant waited while he got up and put on his cassock. Suddenly, Lu dashed out, barefoot. The surprised assistant followed. He found Lu pissing behind the temple. The assistant couldn't help laughing. He waited till Lu had finished, then said: "The abbot wants to see you."
Lu went with him to the cleric's room.
"Although you originally were a military man," said the abbot, "I ordained you because of Squire Zhao's sponsorship. I instructed you: Do not kill, steal, fornicate, drink or lie. These are the five precepts by which all monks are bound. First of all, no monk is allowed to drink. But yesterday evening you came back drunk and beat up the gate-keepers, broke the vermilion latticed door of the surra hall and drove out the cooks and janitors, shouting and yelling all the while. How could you behave so disgracefully?"
Lu knelt before him. "I'll never do such things again."

"You're a monk now," the abbot continued. "How could you violate our rule against drinking and upset our pure way of life? If it weren't for the sake of your sponsor Squire Zhao I'd expel you from the monastery. Don't you ever act like that again."
Lu placed his palms together. "I wouldn't dare," he asserted fervently.
The abbot ordered breakfast for him and, with many kindly words, exhorted him to reform. He gave Lu a cassock of fine cloth and a pair of monk's shoes, and told him to return to his quarters.
Topers should never drink their fill. "Wine can spur action, or ruin everything," as the old saying goes. If drinking makes the timid brave, what does it do to the bold and impetuous?
For three or four months after his drunken riot Lu didn't venture to leave the monastery. Then one day the weather suddenly turned warm. It was the second lunar month. Lu came out of his quarters, strolled through the monastery gate and stood gazing in admiration at the beauty of Mount Wutai. From the foot of the mountain the breeze brought the sound of the clanging of metal. Zhishen returned to his quarters, got some silver and put it inside his cassock near his chest. Then he ambled down the slope.
He passed through an archway inscribed with the words: "Wutai, a Blessed Place." Before him he saw a market town of six or seven hundred families. Meat, vegetables, wine and flour were on sale.
"What am I waiting for?" Lu said to himself. "If I had known there was a place like this, instead of snatching that fellow's bucket I would have come down and bought my own wine. I've been holding back so long that it hurts. Let's see what sort of food they have on sale here."
Again he heard the clang of metal.
Next to a building with the sign "Father and Son Inn" was an ironsmith's shop. The sound was coming from there. Lu walked over. There men were beating iron.
"Got any good steel, master smith?" he asked the eldest of them.
The man was a little frightened at the sight of Lu's face, with newly sprouted bristles sticking out wildly all over. He ceased his hammering and said: "Please have a seat, Reverend. What kind of work do you want done?"
"I need a Buddhist staff and a monk's knife. Do you have any first-rate metal?"
"I do indeed. How heavy a staff and knife do you want? We'll make them according to your requirements."
"The staff should be a hundred catties."
"Much too heavy," the smith laughed. "I could make it for you but you'd never be able to wield it. Even Guan Gong's halberd wasn't more than eighty-one catties!"
"I'm every bit as good as Guan Gong," Zhishen burst out impatiently. "He was only a man, too."
"I mean well, Reverend. Even forty-five catties would be very heavy."
"You say Guan Gong's halberd was eighty-one catties? Make me a staff of that weight, then."
"Too thick, Reverend. It would look ugly, and be clumsy to use. Take my advice, let me make you a sixty-two catties Buddhist staff of burnished metal. Of course, if it's too heavy, don't blame me. For the knife, as I said, we don't need any specifications. I'll use the best steel."
"How much for the two?"
"We don't bargain. You can have them at rock-bottom—five ounces of silver for both."
"It's a deal. If you do a good job, I'll give you more."
The smith accepted the silver. "We'll start right away."
"I have some small change here. Come out and have a bowl of wine with me."
"Excuse me, Reverend. I must get on with my work. I can't keep you company."
Lu Zhishen left the ironsmith's. Before he had gone thirty paces, he saw a wine shop banner sticking out from the eaves of a house. He raised the hanging door screen, entered the shop, sat down, and pounded on the table.
"Bring wine," he shouted.
The proprietor came up to him. "Forgive me, Reverend. My shop and investment money all are borrowed from the monastery. The abbot has a rule for us tavern keepers. If any of us sells wine to a monk, he takes back the money and drives us out of our premises. Don't hold it against me.
"All I want is a little wine. I won't say I bought it here."
"Impossible. Please try some place else. I'm sorry."
Lu rose to his feet. "If another place serves me, I'll have something to say to you later!"
He left the wine shop and walked on. Soon he saw another wine flag suspended over a doorway. He went in, sat down and called: "Wine, host. Be quick."
"How can you be so ignorant, Reverend?" the tavern keeper demanded. "You must know the abbot's rules. Do you want to ruin me?"
Zhishen insisted on being served but the tavern keeper was adamant. Lu had no choice but to leave. He went to four or five more wine shops. All refused to serve him.
"If I don't think of something, I'll never get any wine," he said to himself. At the far end of the market-place he saw amid blossoming apricot trees a small house from which a bundle of broom straw was hanging. He came closer and found it was a little wine shop. Lu went in and sat down by the window.
"Host," he called, "bring wine for a wandering monk."
The rustic owner came over and scrutinized him. "Where are you from, Reverend?"
"I'm a travelling monk who's just passing through. I want some wine."
"If you're from the Mount Wutai monastery, I'm not allowed to sell you any."
"I'm not. Now bring on the wine."
Lu's appearance and manner of speaking struck the rustic owner as odd. "How much do you want?"
"Never mind about that. Just keep bringing it by the bowlful."
Lu consumed ten big bowls of wine. "Have you any meat?" he asked. "I want a platter."
"I had some beef earlier in the day," said the proprietor, "but it's all sold out."
Zhishen caught a whiff of the fragrance of cooking meat. He went into the yard and found a dog boiling in an earthenware pot by the compound wall.
"You've got dog meat," he said. "Why won't you sell me any?"
"I thought as a monk you wouldn't eat it, so I didn't ask."
"I've plenty of money here." Lu pulled out some silver and handed it over. "Bring me half."
The proprietor cut off half the dog carcass and placed it on the table with a small dish of garlic sauce. Lu tore into it delightedly with both hands. At the same time he consumed another ten bowls of wine. He found the wine very agreeable and kept calling for more. The shop owner was dumbfounded.
"That's enough, monk," he urged.
Lu glared at him. "I'm paying for what I drink. Who's asking you to interfere?"
"How much more do you want?"
"Bring me another bucketful."
The host had no choice but to comply. Before long, Zhishen had downed this, too. A dog's leg that he hadn't finished he put inside his cassock.
"Hold on to the extra silver," he said as he was leaving. "I'll be back for more tomorrow."
The frightened proprietor could only helplessly gape. He watched as Lu headed towards Mount Wutai.
Halfway up the slope, Lu sat down in the pavilion and rested. The wine began to take effect. Leaping up, he cried: "I haven't had a good workout in a long time, I'm getting stiff and creaky in the joints. What I need is a little exercise."
Lu came out of the pavilion. He gripped the end of each sleeve in the opposite hand and swung his arms vigorously up and down, left and right, with increasing force. One arm accidentally struck against a post of the pavilion. There was loud crack as the post snapped. Half the pavilion collapsed.
Two gate-keepers heard the noise and climbed to a high vantage point for a look. They saw Lu staggering up the slope.
"Woe," they exclaimed. "That brute is soused again!"
They closed the gate and barred it. Peering through a crack, they watched Lu advance. When he found the gate locked, he drummed on it with his fists. But the gate-keepers didn't dare let him in.
Lu pounded a while, in vain. Suddenly he noticed a Buddhist guardian idol on the left side of the gate.
"Hey, you big worthless fellow," Lu shouted. "Instead of helping me knock on the gate, you raise your fist and try to scare me! I'm not afraid of you!"
He jumped on the pedestal and ripped up the railing as easily as pulling scallions. Grabbing a broken post, he flailed it against the idol's leg, bringing down a shower of gilt and plaster.
"Woe," cried the gate-keepers. They ran to inform the abbot.
Lu paused, then turned and observed the guardian idol on the right.
"How dare you open your big mouth and laugh at me?" he yelled. He leaped on the pedestal and struck the idol's leg two hard blows. The figure toppled to the ground with a thunderous crash.
Lu laughed uproariously, holding the broken post in his hand.
When the gate-keepers notified the abbot he merely said: "Don't provoke him. Go back to your gate."
At that moment, the elder, the supervisor, the deacon, and other responsible monks entered the hall. "That wildcat is very drunk," they said. "He's wrecked the mid-slope pavilion and the guardian idols at the gate. How can we put up with this?"
"Since ancient times it's been known that 'Even a king shuns a drunkard.' All the more necessary for me to avoid them," replied the abbot. "If he's broken idols, we'll ask his sponsor Squire Zhao to make us new ones. Zhao can repair the pavilion too. Let Zhishen do as he wishes."
"Those guardian idols are the lords of the gate," the monks protested. "You can't change them around just like that."
"Never mind the gate idols," retorted the abbot. "Even if they were the idols of the leading Buddhas themselves that were destroyed, there'd be nothing we could do about it. Stay out of his way. Didn't you see how savage he was the other day?"
"What a muddle-headed abbot," the monks muttered as they left the hall. "Don't open that gate," they instructed the gate-keepers. "Just stand inside and listen."
"If you mother-screwing scabby donkeys don't let me in," bellowed Zhishen, "I'll set fire to this stinking monastery and burn it down!"
"Remove the bar and let the beast in," the monks hastily called to the gate-keepers. "If we don't, he's really liable to do it!"
The gate-keepers tiptoed up to the gate, pulled the bolt, then flew back and hid themselves. The other monks scattered.
Lu pushed hard against the gate with both hands. Unexpectedly, it gave way, and he stumbled in and fell flat on his face. He crawled to his feet, rubbed his head, and hurried to his quarters.
He pushed aside the door curtain and plunged into the meditation room. The monks, who were sitting cross-legged on their pallets, looked up, startled. They immediately lowered their heads. On reaching his own pallet, Zhishen noisily vomited. The stench was frightful. "Virtue be praised," cried the monks, holding their noses.
Lu clambered onto his pallet and opened his cassock and girdle, ripping them in the process. The dog's leg dropped to the floor. "Good," said Zhishen. "I was just getting hungry." He picked it up and began to eat.
The monks hid their faces behind their sleeves. Those nearest him stayed as far out of his way as possible. Lu tore off a piece of dog meat and offered it to the monk on his left.
"Try it," he recommended.
The man pressed his sleeve ends tightly against his lips.
"Don't you want any?" asked Lu. He shoved the meat at the man on his right. The fellow tried to slip off his pallet and escape but Zhishen seized him by the ear and crammed the meat into his mouth.
Four or five monks on the opposite side of the room jumped up and hurried over. They pleaded with Lu to desist. He flung aside his dog's haunch and drummed his knuckles on their shaven pates. The whole meditation room was thrown into an uproar. Monks got their cassocks and bowls from the closets and quickly left. There was a general exodus. The elder couldn't stop them.
Cheerfully, Zhishen fought his way out. Most of the monks fled to the cloisters. This time the supervisor and deacon didn't notify the abbot but summoned all the monks on duty, including every caretaker, cook, janitor and sedan-chair carrier they could muster—nearly two hundred men in all. These bound their heads with bandannas, armed themselves with clubs and staves, and marched on the monks' hall.
Lu let out a roar when he saw them. Not having any weapon he ran into the meditation room, knocked over the altar table in the front of the idol of Buddha, tore off two of the table legs, and charged out again.
He came at the attackers so fiercely that they hastily retreated to the cloisters. Zhishen advanced, flourishing his table legs. His adversaries closed in on him from both sides. Lu was furious. He feinted east and struck west, he feinted south and thumped north. Only those furthest away escaped his cudgels.
Right to the door of the preaching hall the battle raged. Then the voice of the abbot rang out: "Zhishen, stop that fighting! You, too, you monks!"
The attackers had suffered, several dozen injured. They were glad to fall back when the abbot appeared. Lu threw down his table legs. "Abbot, help me," he cried. By now he was eight-tenths sober.

"Zhishen, you're giving me too much trouble," said the cleric. "The last time you got drunk and raised a rumpus I wrote your sponsor Squire Zhao about it and he sent a letter of apology. Now you've disgraced yourself again, upset our pure way of life, wrecked the pavilion and damaged two idols. All this we can overlook. But you drove the monks from the meditation room, and that's a major crime. Wenshu Buddha meditated where out monastery stands today. For centuries these hallowed grounds have known only tranquillity and the fragrance of incense. It's no place for a dirty fellow like you. The next few days, you stay with me in the abbot's hall. I'll arrange for you to be transferred elsewhere."
The former major went with the abbot to his residence. The cleric told the supervisor to send the monks back to their meditations. Those who had been injured were to go and rest. Zhishen spent the night in the abbot's hall.
The next morning the abbot consulted with the elder. They decided to give Lu some money and send him on. But first it was necessary to notify Squire Zhao. The abbot wrote a letter and dispatched it to his manor with two messengers, who were instructed to wait for his reply.
Zhao was quite upset by the abbot's missive. In his answer he hailed the cleric respectfully and said: "I will pay for the repair of the broken gate guardians and the pavilion, Lu must go wherever the abbot sends him."
The abbot then directed his assistant to prepare a black cloth cassock, a pair of monk's shoes, and ten ounces of silver, and to summon Lu.
"Zhishen," said the abbot, "the last time you got drunk and made a disturbance in the monks' hall, you didn't know any better. This time you got drunk again, broke the guardian idols, wrecked the pavilion, and caused a riot in the hall of meditation. That's a serious crime. You've also injured many of our monks. Our monastery is a peaceful place. Your conduct is very bad. As a courtesy to Squire Zhao, I'm giving you a letter of introduction to another place where you can stay. It's impossible for us to keep you here. Last night I had a vision and composed a four-phrase prophecy to guide your destiny."
"Where do you want me to go, teacher?" asked Lu. "Please tell me the prophecy." The abbot pointed at Lu Zhishen and spoke. He told him where to go, with this result: Laughing and wielding his staff, Lu fought scores of heroes. Angrily stabbing with his sword, he struck down un-filial sons and treacherous officials.

Now when Lu Da turned round to see who was pulling him, he found it was none other than Old Jin, the person whom he had rescued in the Weizhou wineshop. The old man dragged Lu Da into a quiet lane and said: "My benefactor, you take such risks — standing there in front of that poster, when it says as clear as can be that they're offering a thousand strings of cash for your capture! Why did you go and look? If I hadn't happened to see you, the police would have got you, for sure. The poster gives a full description: your age, your appearance, and your place of birth."
Lu Da said: "Well, let me tell you what happened. Really, it was all on your account. I went to the Academy Bridge that day, and found that scoundrel of a butcher, gave him three blows and he died, so I'm on the run. I've been moving about for a month and a half. I had no particular plan in coming here. But what are you doing here? Why didn't you go back to the Eastern Capital?"
"My saviour and my master," the old man said, "the day you rescued me I went to find a cart, because I did indeed intend to return to the Eastern Capital. But then it occurred to me that villain might follow us and this time we'd be without the great benefit of your protection. So I didn't go to the Eastern Capital, I travelled north instead, and chanced upon an old neighbour from the capital who was proceeding to this place on business. He took us with him, my daughter and myself. It was our great good fortune that he kindly introduced my daughter to a suitor, Mr. Zhao, a man of substance, who has made her his minor wife, and now pays for her food and clothes. But it all stems from your generosity. My daughter speaks to him often of your kindness, with tears in her eyes. Mr. Zhao, moreover, loves all kinds of martial arts and often says how much he wishes he could meet you, and asks if there isn't some way of bringing it about. So I beg you now to come home with me and stay for a few days, while you consider what to do next."
So Lu Da went with Old Jin. A few hundred yards on, they came to the door, and Old Jin, drawing back the curtain, cried: "Daughter, our benefactor is here!" The girl came out, richly dressed and adorned, invited Lu Da to enter and sit down, and prostrated herself before him six times, bending and rising like someone setting out candles. "If you had not come to our rescue," she said, "how could we be here today?"
When Lu Da looked at the girl, he found there was a new air about her, she seemed different:

A gold pin slantwise set enhances raven tresses,
*Green sleeves of artful cut conceal the snow-white arms;*
*A mouth round as a cherry, with lips of tender pink,*

*White hands half revealed, like bamboo shoots in spring:*
*Below the green silk skirt a glimpse of tiny feet.*
*The red embroidered coat eclipses costly jewels,*
*The face is a bouquet of fresh April flowers,*
*The brows a graceful sweep, like willow boughs in spring.*
*The delicate colour tinting those perfumed cheeks*
*Recalls how moonlight floods a marble terrace;*
*A mass of hair overflows the turquoise band*
Like clouds that part to show resplendent peaks.

After prostrating herself before Lu Da the girl said: "I beg you, our benefactor, do come upstairs."
"No need to trouble yourselves," Lu Da said. "I have to move on."
But Old Jin said, "Now that you are here, how can you expect us to let you go like that?" and taking Lu Da's staff and bundle, he ushered him upstairs to rest. To his daughter he said, "Sit here with our benefactor while I go to order food."
"Don't order too much," Lu Da said. "Something simple will be quite all right."
The old man said, "We could hardly pay you back if we gave our lives, there's no cause to argue over a few plain little dishes."
So while the daughter kept Lu Da company upstairs, the old man went down and called a boy he had recently taken into his service. After telling the maid to get the fire burning nicely, he took the boy shopping with him. They returned with fresh fish, tender chicken, salted goose, fat prawns and fruit of the season. A bottle of wine was broached and the dishes were prepared and arranged on trays, then carried upstairs. Three cups were set out on the kind of low table they call a spring table, together with three pairs of chopsticks and the various dishes and fruit, whilst the servant warmed the wine in a silver jug.
Then father and daughter each raised their cups in turn. But when Old Jin bowed right down to the ground before Lu Da, the latter felt embarrassed and said: "If you persist, sir, in these excessive courtesies you will shorten my life."
Old Jin said, "My benefactor, hear me. When we first arrived here, I wrote your name on red paper, and morning and evening my daughter and I burnt a stick of incense and prayed. Now that we have you here in person, how can we fail to honour you?"
"Such gratitude is something rare indeed," said Lu Da.
The three of them continued to enjoy themselves, slowly sipping their wine, till evening, when unexpectedly a great com- motion arose below. Lu Da opened the window to look, and saw thirty or forty men down there, all armed with white staves and crying: "Seize him and bring him down!" And in their midst a figure on horseback was shouting: "Don't let the villain get away!"
Lu Da, assuming the worst, grasped a stool and was about to hurl himself downstairs and put up a good fight. But Old Jin stopped him quickly with a gesture. "Stay where you are," he said, and rushed downstairs himself. He went straight to the man on horseback and spoke a few words to him quietly. The rider suddenly began to smile, and gave an order, whereupon the men dispersed.
The rider dismounted and entered the house. Old Jin asked Lu Da to come down. The newcomer prostrated himself before Lu Da, and said, "Face and name are not the same, reality surpasses fame! What a pleasure to honour such a worthy commander!"
"Who is this?" Lu Da asked the old man. "I can't remember seeing him before, why does he flatter me?"
The old man said, "Why, it's my daughter's protector, Mr. Zhao. Just now he was imagining I had let some shady character get upstairs and start a drunken orgy, and he brought a posse of retainers along to deal with the intruder. As soon as I told him how it was, he sent them away."
"In that case, then," said Lu Da, "one cannot blame him."
Mr. Zhao invited Lu Da upstairs again, and Old Jin prepared more food and wine. Zhao wanted Lu Da to take the place of honour but the latter refused, saying it was too much. "It is but a small token of my respect," Zhao said. "I have heard so much of your brave deeds, and now heaven has been kind enough to allow this meeting — I count it a thousand blessings."
"I am just a rough soldier," Lu Da said, "and a criminal, to boot, with the sentence of death hanging over me. But if you don't feel it's beneath you, sir, to associate with such as me, then I'm at your service: just say the word."
Zhao was delighted. He had to know the full story of the killing of Butcher Zheng, and they talked of many things besides. They sat up till midnight, comparing notes on combat strategy, and drinking, and then betook themselves to bed. When the next day dawned, Zhao said, "I fear you are not safe here, may I invite you to come and stay at my place for a while?"
"Where is your house?" Lu Da asked.
"About three miles from here," was the reply, "at a village called Sevenstones."
"Perhaps it would be good to send some one to the village first to have them saddle two horses and bring them," Lu Da suggested.
The horses arrived before noon. Zhao asked Lu Da to mount, and told the servants to carry Lu's baggage. Lu Da bade Old Jin and his daughter farewell, and rode off with Mr. Zhao. Discoursing of many things, they proceeded to Sevenstones. Soon they were at Zhao's door. They dismounted and Zhao, taking Lu Da's arm, led him into the hall, receiving him as honoured guest. He gave orders for a sheep to be killed and wine got ready. A guest room was prepared for the night's rest, and once again wine and food were served.
"You do me too much honour," Lu Da said, "how am I ever to repay you?"
"Within the four seas all men are brothers," Zhao replied. "Why talk of repayment?"
But enough of this. Lu Da had been staying in Zhao's manor for five or six days when suddenly one day, as Zhao and Lu Da were chatting in the library, Old Jin burst into the house. He ran straight to the library to find them. Making sure there was no one to hear, he said to Lu Da: "Benefactor, I don't wish to alarm you but ever since that day when I invited you in to drink wine upstairs, and Mr. Zhao was misinformed about it, remember, and came with a crowd of his men, and there was a commotion in the street before they dispersed, well, ever since then people have been quite suspicious and there's been talk. Yesterday three policemen came round asking the neighbours a lot of questions. I am afraid they may come here to the village to get you. Suppose someone's a little careless, what then?"
"In that case," said Lu Da, "I'd better leave at once."
Mr. Zhao said: "If you stay here, I think there's a real danger we'll face 'high mountains and deep waters,' as they say; but on the other hand, if I let you leave, it doesn't seem honourable. I do have a plan which would guarantee your safety and put you quite beyond the reach of all difficulties and dangers but I'm afraid you may not like to hear about it."
"I am a man under sentence of death," Lu Da said. "The best I can hope for is to secure my life, how could I not be willing to listen?"
"That's good, then," said Mr. Zhao. "Some ten miles from here, there is a mountain, called Mount Wu Tai, Five-Terrace Mountain. On the mountain there is a temple known as the Manjusri Temple, because it is dedicated to the Bodhisattva Manjusri. [1] There are five or six hundred monks at this temple. The Abbot, the Venerable True Knowledge, is an old friend. My family in the past made donations and rank as donors of the temple. I once made a promise to sponsor a monk, and I've even bought the requisite certificate but I have never been able to find someone really suitable, in order to fulfil this wish of mine. Now, if you were willing, I would undertake to pay all the expenses. The question is, would you really be prepared to shave your head and become a monk?"
"If I leave," Lu Da reflected, "where am I ever going to find shelter? Isn't it better to take this road?" Aloud he said, "Since you have offered to take care of everything, I am perfectly willing to become a monk, and shall accept whatever you arrange."
Having thus settled the matter, that same evening they prepared the necessary clothing and some money for expenses, some gifts of silk and other things. Next morning they rose early and with some of the retainers carrying the baggage, Mr. Zhao and Lu Da set off in the direction of Mount Wu Tai.
It was still early in the morning when they arrived at the foot of the mountain. Naturally Mount Wu Tai was an impressive sight:
*Clouds swathe the summit, the sun circles its waist; its jagged outline seems to touch heaven's vault, its rugged rocks to split the constellations. Beneath the cliff, flowers and trees dance in the spring breeze, breathing out fresh scents; at the cave-mouth creepers hung with permanent raindrops drape their delicate strands. Waterfalls unfurl among flying clouds; the silver course of a stream is soaked in cold moonlight. In front of the rock-face stands a dark green pine; an iron bell tolls, swung by the dragon's tail. The mountain's base imposes on three thousand parishes; it has lifted its peak to the clouds for centuries.*
Mr. Zhao and Lu Da got into sedan chairs and began the ascent. Servants were sent ahead to announce their coming. When they arrived before the monastery, the bursar and the novice-master were already there to greet them. Dismounting from the chairs, the two visitors went to sit in a little pavilion outside the main gate. Within the monastery, the Venerable True Knowledge had been informed of their arrival and now, accompanied by the prior and acolytes, appeared at the main gate to receive them. Zhao and Lu Da stepped forward and inclined themselves. The Abbot raised his joined hands in holy greeting, and said: "Our donor has made a hard journey."
"I have come expressly to discuss a certain little matter," Zhao said.
"Then I must invite you to come to my quarters and take tea with me," the Abbot said.
With Zhao leading, and Lu Da behind him, they entered the Manjusri Temple. What a sight it was!
*The temple gate contends with purple peaks; the great Hall of the Buddha greets the blue sky. There are grottoes adjoining the bell-tower and the library faces a precipitous ridge. A clear spring wells up among the kitchens. These monks seem to dwell in the midst of the clouds; Sagittarius and Aries are the abbot's neighbours. Offerings of fruit are always set out for the white-faced apes; the wooden fish[2] is struck with a stone of curious shape. Stippled deer come daily to graze among the flowers; offerings are made to the golden Buddha in the Hall of Jewels. The seven-tiered pagoda meets the red dawn; holy men for a thousand years have sought out this great temple.*
The Abbot led Zhao and Lu Da into his quarters and invited the former to sit in the place of honour. Lu Da placed himself only a little way off, on a meditation chair. Zhao whispered to him: "You've come here to enter the monastery, how can you sit in the presence of the Abbot?"
Lu Da got up quickly and went to stand behind Zhao, muttering "I know nothing of these things."
In front of them were ranged the prior, the deacon, acolytes, the bursar, the novice-master, the hosteller, the secretary, standing in two ranks east and west.
Zhao's servants, having set down the sedan chairs, brought in a box that they showed to the assembly.
"There was no need to bring gifts," the Abbot said, "there is so much in our monastery already that we owe to your kindness."
"Just a few trifling things," Zhao said. "Nothing worth making a fuss about."
A monk and a novice collected the gifts and bore them away.
Zhao now began: "I have a request I would like to make Your Holiness, if you will permit me. There is a project I have long cherished: to enter a monk in this monastery. I have already taken out the permit and the certificate but I have not used them yet. Now here is this cousin of mine, Lu Da, a former officer of the frontier guard, who seeing that this world of dust is nothing but hardship and bitterness, has expressed a wish to leave it and enter a monastery. It is my hope, my greatest hope, that you might be willing to take him into your community, as a favour to me greater than I deserve, to shave his head and make him a monk. I would undertake to provide for all his necessities. If Your Holiness is pleased to accept, I shall be inexpressibly happy."
The Abbot answered thus: "This desire of yours does great honour to our house. It can certainly be satisfied, certainly. But please, let us drink our tea."
Novices brought the tea and when it was drunk, cleared away the cups and saucers.
The Abbot then ordered the prior and the deacon to make arrangements for the shaving of the postulant's head in the approved fashion and told the novice-master and the bursar to order a banquet.
But the prior and others of the community began to mutter about it. "This person does not seem suited for a monk," they said. "Look what wild eyes he has!"
"Brother hosteller," the monks said, "you go and ask the guests to sit down, and we will approach Father Abbot."
So the hosteller asked Zhao and Lu Da to sit in the reception hall, while the prior and the monks said to the Abbot: "This person who has just said he wants to become a monk has a very unsavoury appearance and a most violent expression. We believe that if we shave his head and admit him it is likely to be detrimental to the good name of our temple."
"But he is the cousin of Mr. Zhao, our faithful donor," the Abbot said, "to whom we cannot be discourteous. Put away your anxieties, and let me seek guidance." The Abbot lit a stick of incense and sat on the meditation chair, with his legs crossed. Murmuring an incantation he entered into meditation. When the incense had burnt down, he returned to normal consciousness and said: "Shave him immediately. This person, to whom a heavenly star corresponds, has a sincere and upright heart. Although he is sometimes violent and his life is full of confusion, he will eventually achieve great purity of soul, and his spiritual achievement will be quite out of the ordinary. None of you will equal him. Remember my words, and place no obstacle in his way."
"If Father Abbot is determined to protect him," the prior said to the others, "we'll have to obey, that's all. It would have been wrong to say nothing but we've had our say and he won't listen, so we must just forget it."
The Abbot now ordered the vegetarian banquet to be served, and invited Mr. Zhao and the others to dine in his quarters. When they had finished, the bursar drew up a list. Mr. Zhao took out a purse and sent someone to buy all the materials, whilst they prepared a pair of monk's sandals, monk's clothing, hat, robe and the objects associated with the rite, at the temple. In a day or two all was ready.
The Abbot selected an auspicious day and a fortunate hour, and ordered bells to be rung and drums beaten, while the entire congregation of monks assembled in the Hall of the Law in orderly fashion, five or six hundred of them, all in their robes, respectfully inclining with joined palms before the Abbot's throne in two separate ranks. Zhao took a bag of silver, the set of clothes and some incense and laid them before the throne, prostrating himself. After the prescribed declarations and responses, an acolyte led Lu Da up to the Throne of the Law. The deacon made Lu Da remove his hat and divided his hair into nine strands which he bound separately. The monk charged with cutting the hair then shaved his whole skull. As he was about to start on the moustaches, Lu Da said: "I'd be rather happy if you could leave just these few hairs." The monks burst out laughing. The Abbot, from his throne, said: "Hear the verse, all of you." He intoned: "Let no blade of grass be left, that the six senses be cleansed to the roots; by the removal of all hair, shall unruliness be dispelled." Then he abruptly ordered the shaving to be completed. With one sweep of the razor the monk removed every remaining hair.
The novice-master now presented the postulant in front of the Throne of the Law and requested the Abbot to grant him a religious name. The Abbot took the certificate, without a name as yet, and proclaimed this verse: "One spark of the spirit outweighs a thousand pieces of gold, all-embracing is the Way of the Lord Buddha, I hereby confer on you the name of Zhishen, Profound Wisdom." So saying he handed over the certificate to the temple secretary, who wrote in the name and presented the certificate to Lu Zhishen, as he was to be called from now on. The Abbot also presented the clothes and robe, and told the new monk to put them on. After this the novice-master led the new monk up to the Throne of the Law again and the Abbot placed his hands upon him, saying: "First, take refuge in the Buddha, second, follow the Law, third, respect the Community; these are the three precepts. The five interdictions are: first, kill no living thing, second, do not steal, third, do not fornicate, fourth, do not drink alcohol, fifth, do not lie!" Lu Zhishen was not aware that the proper response to each injunction was, respectively "I will" and "I will not." He simply said, "I'll bear it in mind." The monks burst out laughing again.
After the induction, Zhao invited the monks to sit in the refectory, or Hall of Clouds, as they call it, where incense was lit and a vegetarian meal was offered to all. Every monk received a commemorative gift. The temple director presented Lu Zhishen to each of the monks, elders as well as peers, and then con- ducted him to the Hall of Meditation, behind the main meeting hall.
Nothing worthy of remark occurred that night. The following day Zhao decided to return home, and it was in vain that the Abbot tried to detain him when he went to take his leave. After a vegetarian breakfast, the monks accompanied Zhao to the gates, where the latter joined his palms and said: "Worthy Father Abbot, and all you good fathers, I beg you to show mercy in all things. My younger brother, Zhishen, is a simple and forth- right person; if he should fail to observe your rules, or speak unadvisedly, I sincerely hope that for my sake rather than punish him you will find it in your hearts to forgive and forget."
"Have no fear," the Abbot said. "I shall myself be responsible for his learning by easy stages how to recite the sutras and prayers, follow the rule and practise meditation."
"You will not find me ungrateful," Zhao said. He then summoned Lu Da from among the crowd of monks and spoke to him quietly under a pine tree. "Dear Brother," he said, "from now on you cannot well behave as you used to. You will have to do only what is expected and heed the rules, you must be on your guard. Otherwise it will be too embarrassing for us to meet again. Take good care of yourself. I shall send someone with clothes for you when you need them."
"Say no more, Brother," Lu Zhishen replied. "I shall be obedient in everything."
Then Mr. Zhao bade farewell to the Abbot and all the monks, climbed into his sedan chair, and followed by his retainers, who were now bearing an empty sedan and the empty coffer, headed down the mountain for home. The Abbot, with the monks behind him, returned to the temple.
As for Lu Zhishen, as soon as he sat down on the meditation couch in the meditation hall, his head sank and he fell fast asleep. But the two contemplatives who had been appointed his spiritual mentors, gave him a shake and said: "That's not allowed here! If you're going to be a monk, you've got to learn to meditate!"
"I went to sleep," Lu Zhishen replied. "What business is it of yours?"
"This is a fine kettle of fish!" one of the monks said in disgust.
"Fish, turtle, I'll eat anything," said Lu Zhishen innocently. "But where is this fish?"
"This is going to be a tough one!" the monk exclaimed.
"A nice fat turtle is very tasty," Lu Zhishen said. "It's an excellent dish! What makes you say it's tough?"
His mentors gave up and left him to sleep. Next day they wanted to go to the Abbot and complain about Lu Zhishen's disrespectful attitude but the prior dissuaded them: "Father Abbot says he will one day achieve great sanctity. Father Abbot says he's exceptional, none of us will equal him. Father Abbot says we have to overlook his shortcomings. So you see, there's nothing you can do about it. We're not to compare his behaviour with other people's, that's all." The two monks went away.
No one said anything to Lu Zhishen after this, so everyday when evening came he collapsed spread-eagled on the meditation couch and slept. At night his snoring was like thunder, and when he got up to answer a call of nature, he made the most fearful racket. It was behind the meditation hall that he went to pee or relieve his bowels, and the ground all around was covered with his shit. One day some acolytes went to the Abbot to protest: "Zhishen has no manners at all; he doesn't behave like a monk. We oughtn't to let someone like that stay in the monastery."
"Nonsense," the Abbot replied. "What would our donor, Mr. Zhao think? He'll change, eventually." After that no one dared speak out.
So Lu Zhishen remained at the monastery on Mount Wu Tai, and imperceptibly four or five months passed. It was the beginning of winter, and after being quiet so long, he was restless. The day was fine and clear, so he put on his black monk's robe, tied his crow-blue belt, changed his sandals and strode out of the temple gate. He walked at random till he came to a little pavilion, halfway down the mountain, where he sat down on a long bench that he found there, and began to consider things. "What a fucking awful life!" he said to himself. "There used to be good meat and good wine, I could have it everyday. But now they've made me a monk, and I'm so hungry I'll soon be nothing but a skeleton. And for the last few days, Mr. Zhao has sent no one with things for me to eat. This bloody horrible taste in my mouth! If only I could get hold of some wine that'd at least be something!"
He was just thinking of wine when he saw, far off in the distance, a man with 2 pails on a carrying-pole coming up the mountain towards him, singing as he came. The pails had lids on them and the man was carrying a wine-warmer. He was singing to himself:

Nine Leagues Mountain,
*Site of the ancient battle,*

*Where rusty swords and spears*
*Are found by the grazing cattle;*
*The River Wu trembles,*
*Under the watching sky,*
*Like the fair lady Yu,*
As she bade her lord goodbye.

Well, when Zhishen saw that fellow bringing the pails up the mountain, he sat in the pavilion and watched, until the man came right to the pavilion and rested his carrying-pole there. Then Zhishen said: "Hey, you! What have you got in those pails?"

"Good wine," the man replied.

"How much is it a pail?"

"Are you pulling my leg, Your Reverence?"

"Why should I pull your leg?"

"I take this wine up to the temple but I only sell it to the servants and sedan chair porters, ordinary folk who work there. Their abbot has warned us all about it: if we sell any to the monks, we'll be held responsible. We'll lose our capital and be thrown out of our houses. We get our capital from the monastery, see, and our houses are owned by the monastery too. Do you think I'd take the risk of selling wine to you?"

"I can't buy some?"

"Over my dead body!"

"I don't want to kill you. I just want to buy wine from you."

Not liking the look of things, the man picked up his carrying-pole and left. Lu Zhishen rushed out after him, seized the pole, and gave him a kick in the balls — one was enough. The man clutched himself with both hands and remained huddled on the ground for a long while, quite unable to rise. Lu Zhishen dragged the pails into the pavilion, set the warmer down on the ground, took off the lids, and began ladling out wine and drinking it just like that, unwarmed. In no time at all he had emptied one complete pail. Then he said to the villager: "Come to the temple tomorrow, my friend, and we'll settle up." The man had not yet recovered from the pain. Also he was afraid the abbot might get to know and take away his means of subsistence, so he repressed his feelings and swallowed his rage. He certainly didn't intend to come asking for the money. He divided the remaining wine between the two pails, picked up the warmer, and almost flew down the mountain, as if he had wings.

Lu Zhishen, meanwhile, remained in the pavilion half the day; the wine had gone to his head. Then he left the pavilion and went to sit among the roots of a pine tree for a while. But then his head span even more. He freed his arms and chest from the black monk's robe and knotted the sleeves about his waist. With his tattooed back and chest in full view, and swinging his arms, he marched up the mountain:

*Head-heavy on floating feet, red-eyed and purple-faced, pitching and rolling, swaying and tilting this way and that, he stumbles up the mountain, like a crane driven by the wind. He weaves and twists his way towards the monastery like a swimming snake. He points skywards and curses the Marshal of Heaven; he stamps the earth as if he plans to crush the Lord of Hell. Half-naked and barefoot he goes, the drunken sot; a brazen bonze, breathing fire and destruction.*

Zhishen was now approaching the monastery gate. The two monks who kept the gate had seen him from afar, and now they appeared at the gate with supple canes of split bamboo in their hands, barring his way. "You are a follower of the Lord Buddha," they shouted, "what do you mean by coming back roaring drunk? You've got eyes, haven't you? You must have seen the warning that's posted in the shops, it's plain enough: any monk who breaks the rule and drinks alcohol will receive forty strokes of the cane and be thrown out of the monastery. If the door-keepers turn a blind eye and let him in, they also receive ten. So you'd better get back down the mountain, at least you'll spare yourself the beating."

Now partly because Zhishen was but newly a monk, and partly because his old character had not yet been transformed, he stared them straight in the eye and roared: "You mother-fucking scum! So you want to fight me, do you? Come on then, it'll be a pleasure!"

The door-keepers understood the affair was turning ugly. One of them shot off to inform the director, the other brandished his bamboo cane and prepared to repel Lu Zhishen. The latter parried the cane and separating his fingers, dealt the door-keeper a single blow that sent him flying head over heels. As he was trying to rise Zhishen gave him another which left him lying by the gate in a heap, crying for mercy. Mumbling "I'll let you off, you arsehole," Zhishen staggered off into the monastery.

When the prior heard the door-keepers' report, he called out servants, workers, porters and chair-bearers, about thirty of them. They came running along the western gallery to receive Lu Zhishen, armed with white staves. When he saw them coming he let out a roar like a thunderclap and bounded towards them, taking huge strides. None of them knew that Zhishen was a former soldier but now they saw his ferociousness they hurriedly took refuge in the Hall of the Sutras, closing both doors.

Zhishen leapt up the steps, and with one blow of his fist and a single kick, broke down the doors. Twenty or thirty were caught inside. Zhishen took a stick and drove them out.

Meanwhile the novice-master had informed the Abbot, who now with several acolytes appeared in the corridor, and shouted: "Zhishen, where is your respect?"

Although he was drunk, Zhishen recognized the Abbot's voice and throwing away his stick came forward to do obeisance. Pointing in the direction of the gallery, he said: "Zhishen took a couple of cups of wine but did nothing to provoke them. They got some others and they all came to attack me."

"For my sake," the Abbot said, "go and sleep now. We'll talk about it in the morning."

"It's only out of consideration for you, Father Abbot," Zhishen said. "Otherwise I'd beat this bunch of donkeys to death."

The Abbot told some acolytes to help Zhishen to the meditation couch. There he collapsed and fell asleep, snoring noisily. A good many of the senior monks then surrounded the Abbot, and said: "We warned you before, Father Abbot. And now what about all this? How can we keep a wild animal like that in our monastery? He is such a dreadful blot on the purity of our rule."

"Although undoubtedly something a little unseemly occurred today," the Abbot said, "the spiritual achievement will come in the end. In any case — we owe it to our benefactor, Mr. Zhao — we must overlook this one little transgression. I will deliver a reprimand tomorrow, that's all that's required."

The monks said to each other, contemptuously, "What an abbot! He has no sense at all!" and dispersed to their quarters.

Next morning at breakfast the Abbot sent acolytes to the meditation hall to summon Zhishen. They found him still sleeping, and had to rouse him. It gave them a big shock when immediately he threw on his cassock and rushed barefoot out of the room. But when they chased after him, and found him behind the Hall relieving himself, they couldn't stop laughing. As soon as he had finished washing his hands, they said: "Father Abbot wants to talk to you." Zhishen went with them to the Abbot's quarters.

"I know you were once an army officer, Zhishen," the Abbot said. "But our benefactor, Mr. Zhao, arranged for your ordination, and when I placed my hands on you I read you the five injunctions, not to kill, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to drink alcohol and not to lie. This is the rule by which we monks must live. Above all a monk must not drink, so how is it you were totally inebriated last night? You attacked the door-keepers, you damaged the red lacquered doors of the Hall of the Sutras, you beat the servants and porters and chased them away, shouting in a most unseemly manner. What explanation can you give for this behaviour?"

Zhishen knelt and said: "I won't do it again."

"You are a monk now," the Abbot said. "How can you break the rule against alcohol, and sully the purity of our order? If it wasn't for Mr. Zhao, I ought to expel you. Never do it again."

Zhishen rose and placing his palms together, said: "I won't, I won't."

The Abbot didn't send him away immediately but ordered breakfast for him, and continued to exhort him with good words. Before ordering him back to his quarters, he presented him with a cassock of fine cloth, and a pair of monk's sandals.

In olden days a good man wrote something excellent on the subject of wine. Here it is:

Everything that goes amiss, is always the fault of wine,
*But if you would know the truth, hear these words of mine.*
*A man is made of earth, water, fire, and air,*
*Take yeast, grain, and water, good wine to prepare.*
*Unless the wine is broached, it sleeps in the bottle all day,*
*Until a man drinks it, it hasn't a word to say.*
*Some say you'll find it in childhood, the cause of drunkenness,*
*But whoever heard of a madness that comes from consuming rice?*
*Why is it after three cups a man loses all inhibition?*
*Why, at wine's behest, will he defend any position?*
*There's many whose nature is such they can't take a single drop,*
*There's many who at one sitting can lap ten gallons up.*
*One man can be stone cold sober yet rage like a fiend from hell,*
*Another's drunk as a lord but his reason's clear as a bell.*
*One who loved his liquor still left a revered name,*
*One through intoxication encompassed his country's shame.*
*There is an ancient saying that truly enlightens the thinker:*
Drunkenness is not in the wine but in the wine's drinker.

So there you are! If you drink wine, you'd better learn moderation! As the saying is, "Wine can make and wine can mar." The coward drinks it and his nature is reversed, he's suddenly a brave man. What will happen to a hero then?

After the day of the drunken brawl, Lu Zhishen did not dare leave the monastery gates for all of three or four months. But then suddenly one day, when the weather had become warm — it was that weather you often get in April — he left his quarters and strolled through the monastery gate, to wander about outside, admiring the beauty of Mount Wu Tai. From far down the mountain a faint sound of hammering, ding-ding, dong-dong, was wafted on the breeze. Zhishen returned to his quarters and got some silver that he thrust inside his robe. Then step by step he descended the mountain, till he passed the gate which marked the limit of the temple grounds. Just beyond it, to his surprise, he discovered a settlement of some five or six hundred souls. There were butchers, greengrocers, and even wineshops and noodle-shops. "What a fool I am!" he said to himself. "If I'd known about this place, I needn't have taken that pail of wine, I could have come down here and bought some for myself. And all this time I've been suffering such agonies of deprivation! Let's go and have a look to see what we can buy to eat and drink."

The noise he had heard was caused by a blacksmith who was hammering iron there. On the house next-door was a sign saying, "Inn of the Father and the Son." Stopping in front of the blacksmith's, Zhishen found there were three men at work. "Ho, there, master," he called. "Have you got any good steel?"

At first when the blacksmith saw Zhishen, an unattractive and disturbing sight, with the short hairs erupting all over his shaven cheeks, he was somewhat afraid of him. He laid aside his work, and said: "Take a seat, Your Reverence. What kind of implement did you have in mind?"

"I want a monk's staff and sword," Zhishen said. "But do you have any top-quality steel?"

"I happen to have some excellent steel here," the blacksmith said. "But what weight would Your Reverence want the staff and the sword to be? I will make them according to your instructions."

"I'd like a one-hundred-catty staff," Zhishen said.

The blacksmith laughed. "That's a bit on the heavy side, Your Reverence," he said. "I probably couldn't make it, and anyway, how would you ever be able to manage it? Even King Guan's mace was only eighty-one."

"Do you think I'm not the equal of King Guan?" Zhishen said. "He was only a man, after all!"

"According to what they usually say, it would be better to make one of forty or fifty catties, that would be quite heavy enough."

"I'll have what you said before, like King Guan's mace, eighty-one catties," Zhishen said.

"Too thick and clumsy, Your Reverence, and difficult to use. May I suggest a sixty-two-catty staff made of finely polished steel? But please don't blame me if you find it too heavy to manage. I think I already know enough about the sword, no need for further instructions on that. I shall use only the best steel, of course."

"How much for the two?" Zhishen asked.

"I'm not going to haggle," the man said. "I'll take just five taels of silver."

"Five taels of silver it is then," Zhishen said. "And if you make them well there'll be a little bit extra for you."

The blacksmith accepted two taels on account, and said: "I'll make them at once."

Zhishen said: "I have some loose change here. I invite you to drink a cup of wine with me."

"You go ahead, Your Reverence," the man said, "but I have important work to do, so count me out."

No more than thirty paces from the blacksmith's Zhishen found a wineshop sign hanging under the eaves of a house. Pushing aside the curtain, he entered, sat down, banged on the table and called: "Bring me wine."

The shopkeeper said: "I'm sorry, Your Reverence, my house belongs to the monastery, and so does my capital. The Abbot has given orders: if we sell wine to any monk from the temple, they'll recall their loan and kick us out of our house. So you'll have to excuse me."

"You can sell me a little bit of wine," Zhishen said. "I'm not going to tell anyone I got it from you."

"No, I can't," the man said. "You'll have to get it somewhere else, Your Reverence. I'm sorry but that's that."

Reluctantly Zhishen got up, threatening: "I'll go somewhere else then but later I'll come back and I'll have a few things to say to you."

He left the wineshop, and walking just a few paces found another, with its sign on a pole outside the door. He walked straight in, sat down and shouted: "Ho, there! Bring me some wine, quickly."

"Not a hope, Your Reverence," the man said. "The Abbot has forbidden it, you must know that. Our living depends on it."

Zhishen refused to budge, and repeated his request four or five times but nothing would persuade them to sell him any wine. In the end he had to admit defeat, and he got up and left. He went to four or five more houses, with no greater success. Finally he hit on a plan. Unless he used his brain, how was he ever going to get hold of any wine? Far off among some flowering almond trees, on the very edge of the village, there was a house with a straw sign outside. When he got nearer, he saw that it was a small inn, more or less isolated from the other houses:

*On the edge of the village the inn has stood many a year, set at an angle among mulberry trees and hemp beside the old road. White plank benches are set out for the customers to sit, and there is a hedge of bamboos and a fence of plaited thorns. The yellow rice wine has been pressed in a broken jar and a blue cloth serves as a curtain across the door. It's really a place to make you laugh, with its walls of mud and cow-dung. But famous wine!*

Zhishen entered and seated himself beside the window. "Ho there," he shouted. "A wandering monk wants to buy a cup of wine!" The countryman looked him up and down, and said: "Where are you from Father?"

"I'm a pilgrim," Zhishen said, "I've just arrived in these parts and I'd like some wine."

"Father," the other said, "if you're one of the community on Mount Wu Tai, I can't sell you any."

"I'm not," said Zhishen. "So bring me the wine, quickly."

Awed by Lu Zhishen's appearance and something unusual in his tone, the countryman said: "How much do you want?"

"Don't bother about how much. Just serve the wine in big bowls, that will do."

After drinking some ten bowls, Zhishen asked: "What meat have you got? Bring me a plate."

"Earlier on I had some beef," the countryman said, "but I've sold it all."

But Zhishen had detected a smell of meat cooking. He went to explore the courtyard. Close to the wall he found a pot in which a dog was being boiled. "I see you've got dog meat here. Why don't you want to sell me any?" he protested.

"I thought as a monk you wouldn't eat dog meat. So I didn't ask you."

"I've got silver to pay for it," Zhishen said. "Here!" He gave some to the countryman and said: "Bring me half that dog!"

The countryman took the silver and quickly went to get half the boiled dog meat, together with some garlic paste that he set down in front of Zhishen. The latter began eagerly tearing the dog meat with his hands, dipping it in the garlic paste before eating it. He swilled it down with another ten cups of wine. The grease was dribbling down his chin but he didn't care, he was only interested in stuffing himself, nothing would stop him. The innkeeper who had been watching open-mouthed, cried: "Father, that's enough, isn't it?" Zhishen fixed him with a stern eye and said: "I'm paying for what I eat, so what's it to do with you then?"

"Do you mean you want me to bring you more?" the man asked.

"Bring me another quart of wine."

The man had to go and ladle out more wine. Zhishen drank this at one sitting. There was one dog's leg left over that he stuffed inside his robe. Just before reaching the door, he said: "Keep the change, I'll be back again to eat tomorrow." The horrified countryman stood at the door, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, and watched helplessly as Zhishen set off in the direction of the Mount Wu Tai monastery.

When Zhishen reached the pavilion halfway up the mountain, he sat down for a little. The wine had gone to his head but he felt full of energy. "It's a long time since I gave my fists and legs any work," he said to himself. "I feel stiff all over, I'd better practise a few movements." He descended from the pavilion, rolled up his sleeves, and began lunging left and right, high and low. This brought his strength back. The impact of his shoulder against one of the pillars of the pavilion set up a rumbling and then a crash as the pillar broke and one side of the pavilion collapsed. The noise was heard by the temple door-keepers, half the mountainside

away, and looking down they saw Zhishen stumbling and weaving up the mountain. "Look out!" they cried. "The animal is intoxicated again. We must shut the gates and bolt them thoroughly." Watching through a crack, they saw Zhishen stagger up to the gates and finding them shut, start drumming on them with his fists. But they had no intention of opening up!

After knocking for some while, Zhishen turned round and caught sight of the massive door-god[3] on the left-hand side. "Why don't you help me knock, you big bugger!" he roared. "It's no good waving your fist at me, I'm not scared of you." Leaping onto the platform where the statue stood, he took hold of the rail and at one go, like someone pulling chives, wrenched it out. Picking up one of the broken palings he proceeded to thump and bash the feet of the door-god till plaster and paint began to fly. "Merciful heaven!" the door-keepers exclaimed when they saw this, "we must tell Father Abbot!" After a while Zhishen turned round and saw the door-god on the right-hand side. "Why are you opening your big fat mouth like that?" he shouted. "Are you laughing at me?" Leaping onto the right-hand platform, he gave the other door-god two blows on the legs and with a sound like thunder it came crashing down from its plinth. Zhishen stood there with the broken paling in his hand, and roared with laughter.

When the two door-keepers reported what was happening, the Abbot said: "Don't provoke him! Keep well away from him!" At this point the prior, the deacon, the bursar, and other senior monks arrived in the abbot's quarters and said: "That wild beast has got himself into a shocking state of drunkenness again. He's smashed the pavilion on the mountainside and the door-gods at the main gate. What are we going to do?"

"There's a saying that the Son of Heaven himself keeps out of the way of drunks," the Abbot replied. "All the more reason for me to. If he has damaged the door-gods, we will ask his sponsor, Mr. Zhao, to come and replace them; he can pay for the broken pavilion also. It's his responsibility."

"But those door-gods are supposed to protect our monastery," the monks objected. "We can't just change them!"

"Forget about the door-gods," the Abbot said. "Even if he had destroyed the Buddha of the Three Ages in the Great Hall, there would still be no better policy than to keep away from him. Don't you remember what he was like the time before?"

"What an abbot," the monks said among themselves. "What a blockhead!" To the door-keepers they shouted: "Don't open. Just stay there and listen!"

Outside Zhishen continued to make a tremendous row: "You motherfucking bunch of bald asses! If you don't open this door to me I'll set fire to it and burn the frigging temple down!"

Hearing these threats, the monks had no alternative but to order the door-keepers to draw the bolts and let the wild beast in. If they hadn't, he might really have done something terrible. With the utmost care the door-keepers quietly slid back the bolts, and then took off, as if they had wings, flying to hide in their rooms. All the other monks also made themselves scarce.

When Lu Zhishen, summoning all his strength, thrust at the door with both hands, he flew through so suddenly that he tripped and fell. He crawled to his feet, rubbing his head, and then rushed off to the monks' quarters. When he reached the meditation hall, the contemplatives were sitting in meditation. They had a fright when they saw Zhishen push aside the screen and enter but they quickly lowered their heads again. Zhishen just made it over to the couch. But then there was a dreadful gargling sound and he began to vomit on the floor. The stench was unbearable. "Heaven help us!" the monks muttered, covering their mouths and noses with their hands. After vomiting for a while, Zhishen crawled onto the couch, loosened his belt, and pulled off his robe and other garments pell-mell. As he did so, the dog's leg fell out. "Good!" he mumbled. "After vomiting, one ought to put something back!" He began to tear off pieces of meat and eat.

When the monks saw this, they used their sleeves to hide their faces, and the two contemplatives who were supposed to be Zhishen's mentors, sought to get as far away from him as possible. But Zhishen had noticed. He tore off a piece of dog meat and offered it to the first of them saying: "Go on, try it!" The scandalized monk used both his sleeves to shut out the sight. "You don't want it?" Zhishen said, and he thrust it into the mouth of the other monk, who had no chance of escape, because Zhishen grabbed him by the ear as he was getting off the couch and stuffed the dog meat in his mouth. Four or five contemplatives who were sitting on the other side of the couch jumped up to intervene but Zhishen threw away the rest of the dog meat, raised his fist and devoted himself wholeheartedly to rapping away on their shaven skulls.

The whole hall was now in an uproar, as monks ran to the cupboards to grab their robes and begging-bowls and escape. The commotion was about to cause a general walk-out, and there seemed to be nothing the prior could do to prevent it.

As Zhishen persisted in his rampaging, most of the pilgrims had taken refuge in the galleries. The bursar and the novice-master meanwhile, without telling the Abbot, had summoned an army of lay brothers, reinforced with temple servants, porters, cleaners and sedan-chair carriers, more than a hundred strong, wielding sticks and staves and forks, with towels wound round their heads for protection, who now charged in a body into the monks' dormitory. When Zhishen saw them, he let out a great roar and counter-attacked, forcing his way without even a weapon in his hands right down the dormitory. He overturned the altar in front of the image of the Buddha, and wrenched out two table-legs. Then he attacked again.

When Zhishen charged at them waving his two table-legs, the rest of the monks, seeing the fury of his attack, threw away their weapons and fled into the galleries. But as Zhishen advanced, gripping his two table-legs, monks threatened him from the other side, in a pincer movement. A great rage entered into him. Pointing east and charging west, feinting to the south and attacking to the north, he cleared all but the two ends of the room. Suddenly, just as he had almost reached the Hall of the Law, the Abbot's voice rang out: "Zhishen, cease this disgraceful behaviour! All of you stop what you are doing at once!" The monks on each side, among whom there were more than ten wounded, withdrew the moment they heard the Abbot. Lu Zhishen, when he saw his enemies retreating, threw away his table-legs and called out: "Father Abbot, come and help me."

By this time about seventy or eighty per cent of the wine's effect had worn off.

"Zhishen," the Abbot said, "you will be the cause of my death! Last time you got drunk and stirred up trouble, I informed your relative, Mr. Zhao. He wrote a letter apologizing to the whole community. Now you have again become intoxicated and behaved disgracefully, offending against the purity of our rule, demolishing a pavilion and damaging the door-gods. All this we might perhaps overlook. But you have also upset the monks and driven them out of the meditation hall. This is a serious crime. This temple of the Bodhisattva Manjusri has been for hundreds and thousands of years a place of tranquil contemplation and respectful worship, how can it harbour such an offensive presence? You will therefore come with me to my quarters for the next few days, until I can arrange somewhere to send you."

Zhishen went with the Abbot. The Abbot told some monks to persuade the pilgrims to stay and return to the meditation hall, and went to meditate himself. The wounded monks retired to rest. Zhishen spent the night in the abbot's quarters.

The next day the Abbot deliberated with the prior. "Let us collect some taels of silver for him and send him somewhere else," they decided. But first Mr. Zhao had to be informed. The Abbot prepared a letter that two lay brothers delivered to Mr. Zhao's house. They recounted the affair and waited for the reply. After reading the letter, Mr. Zhao was very upset. In his reply, after respectful greetings to the Abbot, he said: "As far as the damaged statues and pavilion are concerned, I will make sure that you receive the money for repairs immediately. As for Lu Zhishen, he must simply go wherever Your Holiness sees fit to send him."

On receiving this the Abbot sent an acolyte to fetch a robe of plain black cloth, a pair of monk's sandals and ten taels of silver. Then he called Zhishen. "Zhishen, the first time you got drunk and upset the whole monastery, I accounted it a casual slip. But when you get drunk again, damage the door-gods, pull down the pavilion, and sow confusion in the meditation hall, it is no laughing matter. You have even wounded some of the pilgrims. Our monastery is a place for peace and quiet; these actions of yours are absolutely inadmissible. Out of consideration for Mr. Zhao, however, I am going to give you a letter that will enable you to find sanctuary. It is of course impossible for me to keep you here. But last night I meditated upon your case and I am going to give you a four-line verse which will serve you all your life."

"Please tell me where I can find this sanctuary, Father," Zhishen said. "And please let me hear the four-line verse." The Abbot told Lu Zhishen these things and that is why

*Laughing as he wields his bonze's staff,*
*He dares confront the bravest of the brave.*
*Unsheathing his Buddhist blade in fearsome wrath,*
He rids the world of many a treacherous knave.

WHEN Lu Da turned round he saw that it was Old Jin of the wine shop at Weizhou who was pulling him. They went to a quiet spot where the old man said, "Benefactor! You are too brave! That proclamation orders your arrest, and yet you go to look at it. If I had not seen you, you might have been recognized by a minor official."

"I will tell you the truth," said Lu Da, "because of your affair I killed the Bully, and I have been wandering about for fifty days, and did not plan to come here. Why did you not return to Kaifeng as it was arranged?"

"My superior benefactor!" said Old Jin. "On the day you saved me I hired a cart, and left with the intention of returning to Kaifeng but on the way I met an old neighbour of ours who was coming here to do business as a merchant, and he brought us here. Fortunately, he arranged a marriage for my daughter with a wealthy man, Zhao Yuanwai,[54] who kept her as a concubine. My daughter is always telling him of your benevolence, and he says that he would like to meet you. Let us go and see them now."

They went about half a *li* to the house of Zhao where Old Jin lifted the curtain in front of the door, and called out, "Daughter, our benefactor has arrived."

She came outside and invited Lu Da to enter and sit down. She then gave him six salutations, and asked them to go upstairs. He wished to leave but Old Jin took his staff and bundle, and said to his daughter, "Please take our benefactor upstairs, and I will go to arrange the food." He then went with a servant, and bought some fresh fish, a tender chicken, a goose cured in wine, and some pickled fish. Upon returning he had these cooked and taken upstairs. The girl servant brought the hot wine in a silver pot and father and daughter took it in turn to fill up Lu Da's cup. Old Jin knelt and made his obeisance. "Why do you pay me such respect?" exclaimed Major Lu Da, "you lessen my prospects in life." "Benefactor, please listen, I have been here a short time but I wrote your name on a piece of red paper, and every morning I burn a stick of incense and made obeisance to it. Now that you are here in person why should I not do the same to you?"

In the evening they heard a noise below. Major Lu then opened the window, and looked down; he saw about thirty men armed with wooden sticks and cudgels, who were calling out, "Bring down the man from upstairs." Among them was an official on horseback who was shouting, "I do not want this thief to escape." Upon hearing this Lu Da took a stool and was going to dash down to fight. Old Jin called, "You need not fight about this." He then descended and went to the official, and spoke to him a few words. The official laughed and dismissed the men. He dismounted and went indoors. Old Jin requested Major Lu Da to come down. The official was Zhao Yuanwai who knelt, kowtowed, saying, "To learn of your name is not so good as to see your face; to see your face is better than knowing your name. Famous Major, please receive my obeisances."

Lu Da asked Old Jin, "Who is this person? We are not acquainted, why does he make obeisance?" "This is my daughter's husband," replied Old Jin. "He suspected that I had brought an outsider here to drink wine, therefore he brought his servants to beat him. When I told him the truth he sent his men away."

Major Lu and the others went upstairs and sat down. Zhao Yuanwai said, "I wish to express my respect to you at this time. I have heard a great deal of your heroism and today Heaven has granted me this meeting."

"I am very stupid and am deserving death," said the Major. "If you do not mind my poverty and misfortune, we shall become close friends, and if you have anything to do I shall be willing to serve you."

Zhao Yuanwai was much pleased and inquired about the murder. They chatted, and compared notes about fencing with lances. They drank wine to midnight, and then went to rest.

The next day Zhao Yuanwai remarked: "I do not consider this place is safe, so I decided to take you to my native village which is three *li* from town." He sent a man to the village to bring a horse which Lu Da mounted, and the farm servant was asked to carry the baggage. They took leave of Old Jin and his daughter, and as they rode abreast, they chatted. The next day Lu Da said, at a feast, "You are treating me well, and I am not able to return your kindness." Zhao Yuanwai replied, "Within the four seas all men are brothers, so why mention 'returning the kindness'?"

Lu Da stayed there for a week. One day Old Jin hurriedly arrived and told Lu Da, "Benefactor, I have a suspicion, because of that affair the other day the neighbours talked about it, and yesterday four policemen came making inquiries. I am afraid that they will come here and arrest you."

Lu Da said that he had better go, and Zhao Yuanwai replied, "I have another plan, I will find a peaceful retreat for you if you would agree to go." Lu Da asked where that place was, and Zhao Yuanwai said, "About ten *li* from here is a mountain called Mount Wutai, and on it is a monastery called Wenshu Monastery. This was the earthly abode of the Bodhisatva Wenshu, and now there are about seven hundred monks in the monastery. The Abbot's name is Zhi Zhen, and he is a close friend of mine. An ancestor of mine endowed the monastery. I once took the vow that I would subsidize a monk there. I have purchased the certificate, monk's gown, and alms bowl. I have no trusty person who would fulfill my wish but if you would care to do so, I will arrange matters for you. Are you willing to have your hair cut off and become a monk?"

Lu Da thought the matter over, "Now I must leave here; but where can I go? I had better do as you suggest." So he said, "I accept your offer and will become a monk. I have confidence in you." During the night they arranged matters, and prepared the clothes, traveling expenses, rolls of silk, and other gifts for the temple. They rose early the next morning and called servants to carry the articles. They started at seven o'clock and reached the foot of the mountain at eleven. There they engaged two sedan chairs to take them up the mountain, and the servant was sent in advance to announce their arrival. They were met at the monastery by the manager and superintendent of that monastery, and were conducted to a pavilion outside the temple gate where the Abbot came with his attendants to welcome them.

After a little while the Abbot took them to his private room for tea. Abbot Zhi Zhen requested Zhao Yuanwai to take the seat of honour. Lu Da took a monk's seat and sat down in a lower position. Zhao leant over and whispered in Lu Da's ear, "You have come here to become a monk. How can you sit down opposite to the Abbot?"

"I do not understand their customs," said Lu Da. He then rose and took his position at the side of the Squire. In front of them stood the chief monk, the *Wei Na*, the abbot's assistant, the superintendent of the temple and his assistant, the guest's host, and the scribe, in order of rank. The servants brought in the box containing the gifts and placed it in front of the Abbot, who said, "Why have you brought presents again? We have plenty of your donations in this monastery." The servants and the acolytes removed the gifts, and then Zhao Yuanwai stood up and said, "Previously I wished to subsidize a monk here. I had the certificate but up to now I have not found the proper man. My cousin, Lu Da, was a military officer at Weizhou but he saw the misery of the present generation and has rejected the common lot. He begs the Abbot to have mercy and receive him as a monk. I would prepare all the articles for him. I have great hopes that the Abbot will satisfy his desire."

The Abbot upon hearing this replied, "This will bring glory to our monastery. It can be easily arranged." He then told the acolyte to serve tea that was done. After tea the Abbot discussed with the *Wei Na* the question of cutting off Lu Da's hair and making him a monk. He ordered the superintendent to supply the plain food for his fasting. He told all the other monks to be present to discuss the matter with their brothers. They did this, and the general opinion was that Lu Da had not the appearance of a monk, and moreover his eyes looked cruel. They asked the guest's host to request Lu Da to sit at another place, so that they could talk this matter over with the Abbot. The host invited Zhao Yuanwai and Lu Da to go with him to the guest chamber. The monks addressed the Abbot, saying, "This man who wishes to become a monk has a repulsive and cruel appearance, and we cannot shave him. We are afraid afterwards our monastery will be disgraced."

The Abbot answered, "He is a cousin of our donor Zhao Yuanwai so how dare we offend him? You should not suspect him; you can wait here and let me have a look at his features." He then burn a stick of incense, placing it in the vase for that purpose. He sat down, cross-legged, in a monk's meditation and began to chant. When the stick of incense was finished, he returned to the other room, and said to the monks, "You may now shave his head. He is a representation of a heavenly star, and he is quite upright. At present he is cruel but his future is favourable, and he will become pure. In the process of transmigration he has become uncommon, and is better than any of you. You must remember what I say and accept it."

The chief monk answered, "As you connive at his faults so we have no alternative but to obey. If we reprove him, then we are not obeying you." The Abbot ordered the common food to be prepared, and invited Zhao Yuanwai and Lu Da to dine with him. After the meal the superintendent opened the donations book, and Zhao Yuanwai gave some money, telling him to buy things necessary for a monk. In two days they were ready, and the Abbot selected a lucky time and day, and at that time the bells and drums were beaten, and the monks assembled in the Great Hall. There were altogether about six hundred, wearing their surplices, and they knelt down in an attitude of prayer, in two rows, before the Abbot's throne. Zhao Yuanwai brought silver paper money, and kowtowed before the Abbot. He stated the case clearly, and then the acolytes led in Lu Da. The *Wei Na* told Lu Da to remove his hat, let his hair down in nine plaits, and then fold it on the top of his head. The barber shaved the head all round including the mustache and beard. Lu Da asked, "Would it not be better if you leave me just a little?" Upon hearing this the assembled monks could not help laughing. The Abbot from his throne addressed them, "Let all listen to this

'Shave him clean of every hair,
Leave not e'en a root,
Cleanly shave the young monk's head,
So no strife may shoot.'"

The Abbot exclaimed loudly, "Shave it all off!" The barber took his knife, and shaved what was left. The abbot's assistant holding aloft the certificate brought it before the throne, and requested the Abbot to bestow a new name. The Abbot taking the certificate said,

"Priceless is the holy light,
Silver buys it not;
Buddha's laws are very broad,
Thy name is 'Wise and Deep.'"

The certificate was then handed to the recorder who completed the entries, and then gave it to Lu Da. The Abbot ordered that the priestly robes and the surplice be issued to the novitiate. The superintendent then conducted Lu Da to the throne, and the Abbot placed his hands on the new monk's head, saying: "First, you must conform to the laws of Buddhism; second, you must observe the rules of the order; third, you must be friendly to the monks. These are the three rules to obey but there are also five prohibitions as follows: You must not take life, steal, fornicate, covet wine, or speak falsely." Lu Da expressed his assent, and said he would not forget them. Upon hearing this statement, the monks laughed.

After the ceremony Zhao Yuanwai invited all the monks to accompany him to the Cloud Hall where he burnt incense, and then dined with them. He gave presents to all the officials of the monastery. Lu Da was conducted by the superintendent, and the monks all kowtowed to him.

The following day Zhao Yuanwai wished to return home, and after breakfast a large number of monks accompanied him to the main entrance where after saluting he addressed them, "Let all display mercy. Your younger brother 'Wise and Deep' (Zhishen) is very stupid and he speaks foolishly. He does not understand etiquette, and may unintentionally break your rules. I request you to forgive his faults on my account."

"Never mind," replied the Abbot. "I myself will teach him to read and chant the classics, and discuss the truth with him in the prayer hall."

Zhao promised to recompense the kind treatment. He beckoned Lu Da to a fir tree where he said, "Worthy brother, from today your life will improve but at all times you must not forget your weakness, and not be so confident of yourself. If there is any further trouble it will be difficult for us to see each other. So take care. By and by I will send a man with clothing for you." Lu Da promised to follow his advice, and then Zhao Yuanwai took leave of the Abbot and the crowd of monks. And down the mountain he departed. Lu Da went to the monks' dormitory, and lay down to sleep. On either side of him was a monk, and they both pushed him; saying, "Get up! This won't do! As you have left home, why do you not sleep in a sitting position?"

"I am going to sleep, and what is that to do with you?" answered Lu Da. A monk exclaimed, "What a calamity!"

Lu Da shouted, "Even a tortoise I shall eat; what calamity will there be?"

The monk replied, "Of course there will be a calamity." Lu Da said, "A tortoise has a big belly but the fat is sweet and nice to eat, so why should there be a calamity."

The monks took no more notice of him and let him sleep. The next day they wanted to report to the Abbot that Lu Da had been unreasonable: but the abbot's assistant advised them not to interfere as the Abbot would only protect him.

Lu Da saw that nobody spoke to him and therefore every evening he went to rest; he lay aslant across the bed. During the night he snored like thunder, and made great noises. He pissed and shit behind one of the halls. An attendant reported to the Abbot that Lu Da had bad manners and did not observe the customs of a monk. The Abbot shouted, "Nonsense! You must not forget the donor. I expect there will be an improvement later." After this no one dared speak about Lu Da.

Lu Da lived at the Mount Wutai monastery for about five months without noticing the time pass but upon winter coming he thought of leaving. At that time the weather was fine, so he wore a long black gown with a black belt, changed his monk's shoes, and walked down the hill. About halfway he sat down in an arbour and meditated, "What a glutton I am! Previously I liked good wine and meat, and never restrained my appetite. Now I have been trained as a monk, and I am hungry and thirsty. Zhao Yuanwai has not sent me any food for several days, and I feel ravenous. I should like some good wine." Just then he saw in the distance a young man carrying two buckets on a pole, and singing as he ascended the mountain path. The buckets were covered with lids. He had in his hand a bowl and sang:

On the battlefield of Mount Jiuli,
A herdboy got a sword and spear
From the days of long ago;
A fair wind ruffles the waters near
Where the River Wu sings the heroes' song
Of Xiang Yu's wife and her farewell woe.

Upon reaching the arbour the man put down his load, and Lu Da asked what the buckets held and he was told it was wine. "What is the price for one bucket?" asked Lu Da. "Reverend, are you joking?" asked the man. "Why should I joke with you?" said Lu Da. The man answered, "I am taking this wine up the mountain to sell it to the cooks, messengers, sedan-chair carriers, and other servants at the monastery. The Abbot has given an order that if we sell any wine to a monk he will punish us, take our money, and expel us from the monastery. The Abbot gave me the capital to buy the wine and I live in the monastery, so how dare I sell wine to you?"
"But why cannot you sell?" asked Lu Da.
"Kill me and still I will not sell," replied the man.
"I won't kill you," said Lu Da. "I am only asking you to sell the wine."
The man saw that trouble was brewing so he picked up his load and walked away. Lu Da quickly left the arbour, took hold of the carrying pole, and kicked the man in the groin. The fellow clasped his hand over the injured part, crouched upon the ground, and did not rise for a long time. Lu Da seized the two buckets of wine and took them into the arbour. He opened the buckets and ladling out the cold wine, drank it. In a little time he had drunk a bucketful of wine. Lu Da spoke, "You come to the monastery tomorrow and demand the money."
The man was now free from pain but was afraid that the Abbot would hear of the matter and punish him. He was angry but he suppressed his passion. He dared not ask for the money. He divided the remaining wine in the two buckets, shouldered his load, and flew down the mountain.
Lu Da sat in the arbour for half the day, and the wine mounted to his head. He took off his gown, and tied it round his waist by the sleeves, exposing his tattooed back. In this manner he went back up the hill, swinging his arms. As he neared the monastery, the gatekeepers saw him, and placed two bamboo boards across the entrance, and called out to him, "You are a disciple of Buddha, and yet you come here drunk. You are not blind; you have seen the order posted at the Treasury that monks are forbidden to drink wine, and if they disobey this they will receive forty blows with the bamboo, and be expelled from the monastery. If we allow you to enter in this state, we shall be punished with ten blows. Go away at once, and we will not say anything."
Although Lu Da was now a monk, yet he had not changed his temper. He stared at them and cursed, "You thieving bastards! If you hit me, I will fight you."
Seeing the danger of trouble, one of the gatekeepers ran to report the matter to the superintendent. Lu Da knocked the bamboo boards to one side, slapped the gatekeeper's face, and stumbled forward. The gatekeeper attempted to stop him but Lu Da knocked him down. This was certainly disgraceful but he stumbled forward into the courtyard. The superintendent had collected together about thirty servants, and armed them with white sticks. Upon meeting them, Lu Da roared like a clash of thunder, and advanced with big strides. The servants seeing his fierce appearance hurriedly retreated to the storeroom and closed the two folding doors. Lu Da struck the doors, and kicked until he forced the doors open. The men were cornered, and Lu Da seizing a stick drove them out. The superintendent had reported the trouble to the Abbot who taking his five attendants arrived on the scene and called out, "Lu Da, you are making a mistake!"
Although Lu Da was drunk, yet he recognized the Abbot. He threw away the stick, and saluted. "I have had only two cups of wine. These men came and hit me."
"Pay attention!" replied the Abbot. "Go and sleep at once, and tell me about it tomorrow."
"I would kill you bald-headed donkeys but for the Abbot," said Lu Da.
The Abbot ordered his attendants to assist Lu Da to a bed in the dormitory, and upon reaching it he fell down, and was soon fast asleep and snoring. A crowd of monks now surrounded the Abbot, saying, "We remonstrated with you before, and now this has happened. We object to this wild cat remaining here, as he will only upset our pure ways of life."
The Abbot replied, "Though there is trouble now, there will be a different state of affairs afterwards. I have no alternative but you will forgive him when you appreciate the influence of his donor. Tomorrow I will tell him that I cannot tolerate such bad conduct, and that will end the matter."
"What an injudicious Abbot!" jeered the monks. They all separated to their rest.
The next day after breakfast, the Abbot sent his attendants to summon Lu Da. He was not awake. They waited until he arose, and put on his long gown. Suddenly he dashed out to the surprise of the attendants. Following, they found Lu Da pissing behind the temple. When he had finished he went with them to the Abbot. "Lu Da," said the Abbot, "you were previously a military man and were introduced here by Zhao Yuanwai, I have given you some instructions. You must not take life, nor steal, nor fornicate, nor drink wine, nor lie. These are the usual five prohibitions for monks: but the most important is that you should not drink wine. Why did you return drunk last night; strike the gatekeepers, break open the doors of the storeroom, drive out the servants, and generally misbehave yourself? Why did you do this?"
Lu Da knelt, and replied, "I dare not do it again."
The Abbot asked, "Why did you break our rule about drinking wine, and so broke our laws of purity. I should have expelled you from the monastery if it had not been for the good character of your benefactor Zhao Yuanwai. Hereafter you must not break our rules." Lu Da arose, and clasping his hands said, "I certainly will not dare do that."
The Abbot then took him inside and ordered breakfast for them both. During the meal he gave him good advice, a monk's robe of fine cloth, and a pair of shoes, before dismissing him. "When there is wine drinking, one must not go to excess. There is a common saying, 'Matters can be settled or ruined by wine.' Cowards drink wine; they can have false courage, and muddle their affairs. But what does it do to the bold and impetuous?" After the drunken brawl Lu Da dared not venture out of the monastery for three months. One day in the second lunar month, the weather was very hot, and he strolled out of the monks' quarters standing outside the monastery gate, gazing and appreciating the beautiful view. Suddenly he heard the sound of knocks down the mountain carried upwards by the wind. He returned for some silver which he hid in his breast, and then slowly walked down the hill. At the bottom he saw a crowd of people attending a fair. There were butchers, greengrocers, wine and bread shops. He thought if he had known of this place earlier he would not have drunk the wine of the bucket but have gone there for it. These few days he had felt depressed, so he decided to ascertain what eatables were procurable. He heard again the sound of knocking and he knew that it was iron being worked. He saw on the wall between two shops the characters for "The Father and Son Inn." One of the two was a blacksmith's shop in which three men were working, and Lu Da asked them if they had good steel. The blacksmiths saw that Lu Da had a short growth of beard which gave him a disagreeable appearance, and made them half afraid of him at first sight. They ceased work and said, "Reverend, please be seated. What kind of work have you for us?"
"I want you to make an iron staff and a broad sword," said Lu Da. "I did not know you have such good steel here."
A blacksmith answered, "We have good steel here; you had better give us the order, for we do not yet know how heavy you want them."
"I need a staff weighing one hundred *jin*," said Lu Da.
The blacksmith laughed, saying, "Very heavy, master. I am afraid we cannot do it: but even if we could, perhaps you could not use it. The great halberd used by Guan Gong was only eighty-one *jin*."
"I am not as good as Guan Gong but he was only a man," said Lu Da.
"According to my idea, a staff of say sixty-two *jin* will be heavy enough."
"Now according to your account of Guan Gong's great halberd, make me one of eighty-one *jin*," said Lu Da.
"Reverend, it will be very big. It will not look well, and will be inconvenient to use. I think it would be better to make one of sixty-two *jin*, and have it brightly polished. But if you cannot use it, do not blame me. As you have decided upon it, we need not go into details: we will use the best iron and make it here."
"How much do you want for making them?" asked Lu Da.
"Not more than five taels of silver," replied the blacksmith.
"I will accept your word, so here is the money," said Lu Da. "If it is well made I will give you extra money." The blacksmith received the money, and said, "It shall be done at once."
Lu Da walked a short distance from the shop and saw the signboard of a wine shop. He lifted the curtain at the door, entered, and sat down. He tapped on the table, calling for wine.
"Excuse me, Reverend," said the innkeeper, "this wine shop belongs to the monastery that furnished the capital. The Abbot controls our affairs and does not like us to sell wine to men from his monastery but should we do so, he would expel us, so do not consider it impolite if we cannot supply you."
"Never mind that." replied Lu Da, "you can sell me some wine and I will not say a word about it."
"I cannot do that," answered the innkeeper. "Please go to another place and don't think us rude."
Lu Da rose, saying, "I will go and will not talk further with you." Going out a few paces, he saw a flag over the door of a wine shop. He entered, sat down and called for wine. "Reverend, you evidently do not understand that the Abbot controls our affairs, and so by coming here you endanger our livelihood."
Lu Da was determined to have wine but he knew that they would not sell any. He tried some more shops with the same result. In the distance he saw a broom hanging in front of a house which was situated in a cluster of the apricot trees. Upon approaching he found it was a small inn just outside the village. He went in and sat down near the window, calling, "Innkeeper, I am a stranger here and I want a cup of wine."
The proprietor looked at him carefully, "Reverend, where do you come from?"
"I am a traveling monk, and I happened to pass here." "If you are from the monastery at Mount Wutai, I cannot sell you any wine."
"I do not come from there. Bring me some wine quickly."
The proprietor saw that Lu Da had the manner and speech of another district, so asked how much wine he wanted. "Bring me a large cup of warm wine," said Lu Da. "What meat can I have with it?"
"This morning I had some beef but it is now all finished."
Lu Da could smell the meat which was being cooked, so going outside he saw along the wall an earthen boiler, containing dog's flesh. He said, "Why don't you sell me this?"
"I was afraid that a monk may not eat the dog's flesh."
"I have some silver," said Lu Da, offering it to the proprietor, "let me have half of the dog."
The proprietor prepared the dish with some powdered garlic, and placed it before Lu Da who tore the flesh apart with his fingers and dipping it in the garlic, ate it. Although he drank ten cups of wine, he still wanted more. The innkeeper was afraid and remarked he had had enough. Lu Da stared at him, "I will pay you, so why interfere?" The man asked how much he wanted and Lu Da said, "A bucketful." This was supplied and Lu Da drank it rapidly. There was still a leg of the dog which he picked up and put in his breast. As he left the inn, he said that he would come again the next day. The proprietor was speechless on hearing this, and saw that he was going in the direction of Mount Wutai.
Lu Da walked halfway up the mountain and rested in an arbour till the effect of the wine passed away. At last, getting up, he said to himself, "For a long time I have had no drill in hand combat and feel my body is not in good form—I will have a little practice here. Taking his long sleeves, he rolled up the ends and thrust in all directions. He was swinging his arm, when he struck against a pillar of the arbour with such force as to break it, and it fell with a great crash. The doorkeeper of the monastery heard this noise, and looking below saw that Lu Da was staggering up the path. He said, "Much trouble! This brute is extremely drunk again." He closed the gate, and taking the bar fastened it. Then gazed through a crack in the door, and watched Lu Da approaching. When Lu Da reached the door he struck it with his fist but the gatekeeper dared not open it. Lu Da turned and saw on the left side of the door, a guardian idol, covered with gilt, to which he shouted, "You big prick, why do you not knock the door for me, instead of frightening me with that attitude: but I am not afraid of you." He then mounted the steps—took hold of the railings in front of the idol, and pulled them up, as if plucking onions. He took one of the broken rails and struck the idol: the painted clay fell to the ground. The gatekeeper seeing this ran to report it to the Abbot. Lu Da then turned, and saw another gilded idol, at which he shouted, "You are opening your mouth wide, and laugh at me." He ascended the steps on that side and struck the foot of the idol twice with the railing. There was a tremendous noise as the idol fell to the ground at which Lu Da laughed loudly.

When the Abbot heard of the matter, he said, "We must not make him angry: you had better go away." A crowd of monks had collected, and they said, "That wild cat is extremely drunk. He has broken the arbour and the idols at the entrance. What shall we do?"
"Since ancient times the Emperor has always avoided drunken men, so why should I not do the same," said the Abbot. "As to the images and the arbour he destroyed, the patron will repair them."
The monks left the Abbot's quarters saying, "How stupid is our Abbot. The doorkeepers do not open the door but listen."
Outside, Lu Da was shouting, "You thieving stinking bald-headed donkeys! If you do not let me enter the monastery I will set fire to the building."
The monks upon hearing this told the gatekeepers to draw the bar and let the brute in. They did this quietly and stealthily, and then hurried into the buildings to hide themselves. The monks also got out of the way.
Lu Da using both hands pushed against the doors with great force and fell to the ground as they opened. Scrambling up, he rubbed his head, and then rushed into the meditation hall. There were many visiting monks seated in contemplation, and they were alarmed at his sudden, noisy entrance. Lu Da went to the side of the hall and vomited. The monks were disgusted with the stench and covered their noses with their hands. Lu Da got on a bed, took off his silk belt, and tore apart the fastenings of his clothes, and the dog's leg fell out. "How nice," he said picking it up, "I am very hungry just now." So saying, he ate it. Upon seeing this the monks covered their faces with their sleeves, and those on both sides of him withdrew. Lu Da seeing this movement, offered a piece of the dog's leg to a monk who covered his face with his sleeves. Lu Da asked why he did not eat it, and then pushed the flesh at the lips of another monk. About five monks on neighbouring beds leapt forward to intervene but Lu Da throwing the meat away hit the monk with his fist several times. This raised a loud shout from the monks who went to the cupboards to get their clothes and alms bowls with the idea of leaving. This created a general confusion which the monk in charge could not control. The superintendent summoned all the servants, including groundsmen, cooks' assistants, messengers, sedan-chair carriers, altogether about two hundred men, who seized sticks, rice shovels, staffs and cudgels, and placing towels round their heads, entered the hall in a body. Upon seeing them Lu Da howled, and, having no weapon, hurried to the centre of the hall, pushed over the table for offerings in front of Buddha, and having broken off two of the legs he advanced. When the menial monks saw his fierce expression, they retreated to the veranda but as Lu Da only flourished the table legs they soon returned to the attack. Lu Da was very angry and struck on both sides. He had moved towards the hall where the scriptures were expounded, and there he met the Abbot who called out, "Lu Da, you are unreasonable! You monks must not lay a hand on him." The monks retreated and Lu Da threw away the legs of the table, asking the Abbot, "Will you tell me what I must do?" At that moment Lu Da was nearly sober.
"Lu Da, you have implicated me seriously," said the Abbot. "You were drunk previously and created a lot of trouble. Now you are again drunk, knocked down an arbour and broken two idols. You have also made trouble with the monks, so that they have all to go away. This sin of yours is not a small one. This, my Wenshu Monastery, on Mount Wutai, has been kept holy and sacred for more than a thousand years, so how can I keep a filthy thing like you here? But you can live in my quarters for a few days more until I find a place for you to go to."
Lu Da accompanied the Abbot to his quarters. The Abbot sent word for the visiting monks to return and continue their contemplations. The monks that were injured had their wounds attended to.
Next day, the Abbot wrote a letter to Zhao Yuanwai sending it with two messengers who waited for his reply. When Zhao Yuanwai read the letter, he was very sad. He wrote a reply and said that he would pay for the repairs; as for Lu Da, he would leave him to the Abbot to be banished.
When the Abbot received the letter, he instructed his attendants to bring a gown of black cloth, a pair of shoes, ten taels of silver, and fetch Lu Da. Upon his arrival the Abbot reproved him about his offences; telling him he had decided to expel him from the monastery. He continued, "During the night I thought of your affairs, and have prepared for you four sentences from our sayings which you can use until your dying day."

Laughing monk with staff so rare,
And ordained sword so beautiful;
Fought with heroes everywhere,
And punished traitorous ministers.

**005**

**The Big Chief Little King comes to his wedding-night & Raises & Goes Inside the Gold-Spangled Bed Curtains, Drunk; By having a Fight, Peach Blossom Village in Thrown into Confusion & Pandemonium raised by Lu Da Zhishen the Boisterous Tattooed Monk**

"Zhishen," said the abbot, "you definitely can't stay here. In the Eastern Capital a Buddhist brother of mine, called the Lucid Teacher, is the abbot of the Great Xiangguo Monastery. Take this letter to him and ask him to find you a job. Last night I had a vision and composed a four-line prophetic verse to guide your destiny. You must remember these words."
Kneeling before him, Lu said: "I'd like to hear the prophecy."
The abbot intoned: "Take action in the forest, prosper in the mountains, flourish amid the waters but halt at the river."
Zhishen kowtowed to the abbot nine times, shouldered his knapsack, tied bundles round his waist, and placed the letter in a pocket. He bid farewell to the abbot and the monks, left Mount Wutai, put up in the inn next door to the ironsmith and waited for his staff and sword. The monks were glad to be rid of him. The abbot told the lay brothers to clean up the wreckage of the guardian idols and the pavilion. A few days later Squire Zhao brought some money personally and had the idols and pavilion repaired. Of this we'll say no more.
Zhishen waited several days at the inn. When his two weapons were finished, he made a sheath for the knife and had the staff painted. He gave some extra silver to the smith, shouldered his knapsack, hung the knife at his waist, took up the staff, bid farewell to the innkeeper and the ironsmith, and set forth.
"What a tough-looking monk," people on meeting him thought.
He took the road for the Eastern Capital and travelled for more than half a month. Lu didn't stop at any monasteries. He always spent the night at inns and ate in taverns during the day.
As he was walking along one afternoon he became so absorbed in the beauty of the hills and streams that he failed to notice the lateness of the hour. Suddenly he realized he'd never reach the next inn before dark, and he had no travelling companion. Where could he spend the night?
He hastened on another twenty or thirty // While crossing a wooden bridge he observed in the distance, shimmering beneath scarlet sunset clouds, a manor house in a grove of trees. Behind it rose massive tumbling mountains.
"I'd better put up for the night in the manor," Lu said to himself.
As he drew near, he saw scores of peasants busily moving things from one place to another. At the entrance to the manor he rested his staff and hailed a few vassals.
"What brings you to our manor this evening, monk?" they asked.
"I couldn't reach an inn before dark," he replied. "I hope your manor will put me up for the night. I'll be moving on tomorrow morning."
"We're busy tonight. You can't stay."
"It's only for one night. Tomorrow, I'll leave."
"Hurry along, monk. Don't hang around here if you want to live."
"That's strange talk. Why such a fuss about spending one night? What's so dangerous?"
"Get going. Otherwise you're liable to be seized and bound."
Zhishen lost his temper. "Can't you oafs be civil? I haven't said a word against you, and you threaten to tie me up!"
Some of the peasants swore at him, others tried to calm him. Lu raised his staff to sail into them when an old man emerged from the manor. About sixty, he walked with a staff higher than his head.

"What are you rowing about?" he shouted at his vassals as he approached.
"That wretched monk wants to hit us," they replied.
"I'm on my way to the Eastern Capital from Mount Wutai," said Lu. "I couldn't reach an inn and I asked to stay the night in the manor. But these surly louts want to tie me up."
"Since you're a reverend from Mount Wutai," said the old man, "come with me."
Zhishen followed him into the main building where they took their seats as host and guest. "Our peasants didn't know you were from the place of the living Buddha, Reverend," said the old man. "Don't hold it against them. They thought you were an ordinary monk. I myself have always respected Buddha, his teachings, and his disciples. Although we're busy tonight, we shall be glad to put you up."
Lu rested his staff, stood up and bowed respectfully. "Thank you, patron. May I ask your honourable name?"
"Our family name is Liu. Because this place is called Peach Blossom Village, the peasants refer to me as Grandpa Liu of Peach Blossom Village. May I ask the reverend's name, and what he is called in the Buddhist order?"
"My surname is Lu. Our abbot gave me the Buddhist title of Zhishen."
"Please have dinner with us, Reverend. Are you a meat abstainer by any chance?"
"I'm not opposed to wine or meat. The wine can be clear or cloudy. Beef or dog meat, I eat them all."
"Since you have no special scruples, I'll have my vassals serve you meat and wine."
A table was set up, and chopsticks laid out. Vassals brought Zhishen a platter of beef and three or four kinds of vegetables. He put aside the bundles which had been tied around his waist and sat himself at the festive board. A vassal warmed the wine and filled Zhishen's cup. The monk didn't need to be coaxed. In a trice he finished off both the pot of wine and the platter of meat. Grandpa Liu, sitting opposite, stared at him in amazement. Rice was brought. Zhishen consumed this as well.
Finally, the table was removed. "Please make yourself comfortable in the wing next door, Reverend," said the old man. "If you hear any noise during the night, don't come out whatever you do."
"Would you mind telling me what's going on here tonight?"
"It's not the sort of thing to discuss with a person who's disowned the material world."
"Why are you looking so unhappy, grandpa? Has my coming here put you to too much bother? Tomorrow, reckon up what I owe you and I'll pay.
"Hear me, Reverend. We give food and shelter to monks often. What difference does one more make? The trouble is my daughter is getting married tonight, and bringing a son-in-law into the family."
Zhishen laughed. "Men and women all must marry. It's an important event in every person's life and perfectly normal. What is there to be upset about?"
"You don't understand, Reverend. We don't want this marriage."
"Silly old man," Lu smiled. "If you aren't willing, why did you agree?"
"I have no other children, and my daughter's only nineteen. Not far from here is a height called Peach Blossom Mountain. Two chieftains built a stronghold on it recently with six or seven hundred men. They pillage and rob but the police of Qingzhou haven't been able to stop them. A few days ago they came to our manor to collect tribute, and one of the chieftains saw my daughter. He gave me twenty ounces of gold and a bolt of red satin as an engagement pledge, and chose tonight for the wedding. He said they would be married here in the manor. I had no way of opposing him. I had to consent. That's why I'm upset. It's not that I don't welcome you, Reverend."
"So that's how it is. Suppose I reasoned with him and convinced him not to marry your daughter, how would that be?"
"He's a rogue who kills without batting an eye. How can you make him change his mind?"
"When I was on Mount Wutai I learned the Buddhist Laws of Logic from the abbot. Now I can talk a man around even if he's hard as iron. Tell your daughter to hide. I'll reason with the groom in her chamber and get him to call the marriage off."
"It sounds all right but be sure you don't tweak the tiger's whiskers."
"I want to live too, don't I? Just leave everything to me."
"That's fine. How lucky my family is to have a Buddha like you come down from Heaven!"
The vassals were startled to hear of this arrangement.
"Would you like some more to eat?" this old man asked.
"I don't want any more food," said Lu, "but if you still have some wine you might give me a little."
"We've plenty," Grandpa Liu assured him. He told a vassal to bring a cooked goose and a large wine bowl. Zhishen drank twenty or thirty bowls of wine and finished the goose. A vassal was directed to put his bundles in a guest-room.
Lu took up his staff and knife. "Has your daughter hidden herself, grandpa?" he asked his host.
"I've sent her to a neighbour's."
"Let's go to the bridal chamber, then."
The old man led him to the door of a room. "It's in there."
"Now you can all go about your business."
Grandpa Liu and his vassals went out to prepare the wedding feast. Zhishen pushed aside all the tables and chairs in the room. He put his knife at the head of the bed and leaned his staff against the bedside. Lowering the gold-spangled bed curtains, he stripped to the buff, jumped into the bed and sat there.
It was growing dark. Grandpa Liu ordered his vassals to light lamps in the front and rear of the house. A long table with incense, lamps and candles was set up on the threshing ground. The old man called for large patters of meat and a big pot of warmed wine.
Around the first watch the sound of drums and gongs was heard on the mountainside. Grandpa Liu, worried about his ruse, and the vassals, sweating with apprehension, went out of the manor gate to look.
In the distance forty or fifty torches, turning the night as bright as day, revealed a troop of men, on horse and afoot, speeding towards the manor. Grandpa Liu shouted for his vassals to open the gate wide, and went forward to meet them. The crowding, jostling throng bore gleaming weapons bedecked with ribbons. Wildflowers adorned the hair of the lesser bandits. Four or five red gauze lanterns at the head of the procession illuminated the mounted brigand chieftain. On his head was a peaked hat, indented in front, of pale red, with a lifelike silk flower tucked under it beside his ear. His powerful frame was draped in a green silk robe embroidered with gold thread, bordered with wool, and bound at the waist by a gold-spangled red sash. He wore high-heeled leather boots and rode a big white horse with a curly mane.
At the manor gate the chieftain dismounted. His men crowded round and congratulated him. "In a shiny new hat, tonight you'll be a bridegroom. In well-fitting clothes, tonight you'll be a son-in-law."
Grandpa Liu hurried forward with a cup of good wine on a tray, and knelt before the bandit chief. The vassals did the same. The chieftain raised the old man to his feet.
"You are my father-in-law. You shouldn't kneel to me."
"Don't say that," Grandpa Liu replied. "I'm only one of the subjects in the great chief's domain."
The chieftain, who was already eight-tenths drunk, laughed heartily. "You won't lose out by taking me as a son-in-law. I'm the right match for your daughter."
The old man presented him with the ceremonial cup of wine for the dismounting guest, then led him to the lamp-lit table on the threshing ground. "You shouldn't have arranged such an elaborate welcome, father-in-law," the brigand protested courteously.
He drank three more cups and proceeded to the reception hall. He instructed his men to tie the horses to some willows. Several of the bandits began beating drums and gongs outside the hall.
The chieftain seated himself. "Father-in-law, where is my wife?" he asked the old man.
"She doesn't dare come out. She's too shy."
The brigand laughed. "Bring more wine. I must offer you a return toast." But when he took his cup in hand he said: "I want to see my bride first. I'll drink with you later."
Grandpa Liu was anxious to have the monk reason with him. "I'll show you to her room," he replied. Holding a lighted candle, he escorted the chieftain around a screen to the door of the bridal chamber. "This is it," he said. "Please go in." He departed with his candle. Not at all sure their plan would succeed, he wanted to get out of the way, fast.
The chieftain pushed open the door. Inside it was pitch dark. "That father-in-law of mine is a frugal manager," he muttered. "He doesn't even light a lamp and leaves my bride sitting in the dark. I must have my men bring him a keg of oil from our mountain stronghold tomorrow."
Lu Zhishen, seated behind the bed curtains, muffled his laughter. He didn't utter a sound. The brigand felt his way to the centre of the room.
"Wife," he exclaimed, "come out and greet me. Don't be shy. Tomorrow I'll install you as mistress of the fortress." Calling to his "wife," he groped forward until he touched the gold-spangled bed curtains. He opened them and thrust his hand inside. It brushed against Lu's belly. The monk promptly seized the chieftain by the head, hat and all, and pushed him down, struggling, on the bed. Zhishen clenched his right hand into a fist.
"Mother-raping thief," shouted the monk, and struck him a blow on the neck and ear.
"How can you hit your master?" cried the bandit chief.
"I'm teaching you to recognize your mistress," retorted Zhishen. He hauled him off the bed and pummelled and kicked him.
"Help!" howled the bandit.
Outside, Grandpa Liu was paralyzed with shock, for the cry came at the very moment he was sure Zhishen was reasoning with the chieftain. The old man took up a lamp and hurried into the room, followed by a swarm of bandits. They saw a big stout monk, without a stitch of clothes on, seated astride their chieftain beside the bed and thumping him vigorously.
"Save our chief," shouted the bandit in the lead. The others rushed at Zhishen, cudgels and lances in hand.
The monk pushed the chieftain aside, snatched his staff from the bedside, and charged. He attacked so fiercely that the bandits cried out and fled. The old man could only exclaim in dismay.
In the excitement, the chieftain crawled out of the room, ran to the front gate, and groped his way to an unsaddled horse. He broke a branch from a willow, leaped on the animal's back and flailed with his improvised whip. The beast didn't move.
"Woe is me," thought the bandit leader. "This horse is tormenting me too!" Then he looked, and saw that in his haste he had forgotten to untie the rein from the tree. Quickly, he ripped it loose, and dashed away, riding bare-back, at a gallop.
"Just wait, you old donkey," he swore at the old man as he left the manor gate. "Don't think you're going to fly out of this!" He struck the animal another couple of blows with the switch. It scampered pell-mell up the mountain.
Grandpa Liu grasped Zhishen by the arm. "You've brought disaster down on my whole family, Reverend!" he groaned.
"Excuse my bad manners," replied the monk. "Bring my clothes and cassock, then we can talk."
A vassal went back to the room and fetched the garments, and Zhishen dressed.
"I was hoping that you would reason with him, persuade him to change his mind," said the old man. "I never dreamed you were going to beat him up. He's sure to tell all about this when he gets back to the fortress. Now the bandits will come down in force and slaughter me and my family!"
"Don't worry, grandpa. To tell you the truth, I used to be a major in the border garrison of Old General Zhong in Yanan Prefecture. Because I killed a man, I had to become a monk. Two thousand mounted men wouldn't scare me, to say nothing of a few piddling bandit chiefs. Try and lift this staff, you fellows," he said to the listening vassals, "if you don't believe me."
Of course, none of them could do it. Zhishen picked up the staff and twirled it as if it were a lamp wick.
"You mustn't leave us, Reverend," pleaded Grandpa Liu. "My family needs your protection!"
"That goes without saying. I wouldn't leave if my life depended on it."
"Bring wine for the reverend," the old man called. To Lu he said: "But don't drink yourself into a stupor."
"When I'm one-tenth drunk I can use only one-tenth of my skill but when I'm ten-tenths drunk I'm at the top of my form."
"In that case, all right. I've plenty of wine and meat here. Have as much as you want."
We'll speak now of the head bandit. Seated in his stronghold on Peach Blossom Mountain, he was about to send a man down to see how his second in command was getting on with his wedding when a number of brigands, breathing hard and looking very distraught, rushed in, crying: "Woe, woe!"
"What's wrong?" he demanded quickly. "Why are you in such a pain?"
"Our number two chief has been beaten up!"
The startled leader began to question them. Voices outside exclaimed: "Number Two has come back!"
The head bandit looked. His lieutenant had lost his red hat, his green robe was ripped and tattered. Number Two dismounted and collapsed in front of the hall.
"Save me, brother, save me," he pleaded.
"What happened?"
"I went down to the manor and entered the bridal chamber. That wretched old donkey had sent his daughter away and hid a big fat monk in her bed. Not suspecting a thing, I opened the bed curtains and felt around. The lout dragged me down and punched and kicked me till I was black and blue. When our men came to my rescue, he left me, grabbed his staff and went after them. Otherwise, I'd never have escaped with my life. You must avenge me, brother!"
"So that's how it was. You go inside and rest. I'll catch that scabby thief and bring him here," said the head brigand. He called to his men: "Get my horse ready at once. All of you come with me."
He mounted and took his lance in hand. With as many men as he could muster, he rode down the slope. Everyone was shouting and yelling.
To get back to Lu Zhishen. He was drinking in the manor when a vassal announced: "The head bandit is coming down the mountain with a big gang!"
"Don't worry," said Lu. "As I knock them over, you fellows tie them up and take them to the magistrate and collect the rewards. Bring me my sword."
Zhishen removed his cassock, tied up the skirts of his robe, and hung the sword on his belt. Staff in hand, he strode out to the threshing ground. In the light of many torches he saw the head bandit carrying a long lance, riding swiftly towards the manor.
"Where is that scabby donkey?" shouted the brigand chief. "Come out and settle this once and for all!"
"Dirty unflogged scoundrel," swore Lu. "I'll teach you to know me!" Whirling his staff, he charged.
The chieftain parried his blow. "Hold off a minute, monk," he cried. "Your voice is very familiar. What's your name?"
"I'm Lu Da, former major in the garrison of Old General Zhong, and nobody else. Now that I'm a monk, I'm called Lu Zhishen."
The brigand laughed delightedly and rolled from his horse, tossing his weapon aside. He clasped his hands together and saluted.
"I hope you've been well since we parted. So it was you who gave my lieutenant that drubbing!"
At first the monk thought it was a trick. He leaped back a few paces and rested his staff. But when he got a good look at the man in the torchlight he saw it was none other than Tiger-Fighting General Li Zhong, who put on a show with weapons in the streets to sell his medicines.
Li Zhong took Zhishen by the arm. "What made you become a monk, brother?"
"I'll tell you about it inside."
Grandpa Liu, watching, was dismayed. "So the monk is one of them, too," he thought.
Lu went back into the manor house, put on his cassock, then led Li Zhong to the hall to talk over old times. The monk sat down in the middle of the hall and called to Grandpa Liu. But the old man didn't dare come forward.
"Don't be afraid of him, grandpa," said Lu. "He's my brother."
This alarmed the old man even more, and he continued to hang back. Li Zhong took the second-ranking seat. The old man then took the third.
"I will tell you my story, sirs," said the monk. "After killing the 'Lord of the West' in Weizhou with three punches, I fled to Yanmen County in Daizhou Prefecture. There I met Old Jin whom I had saved and sent off to the Eastern Capital. He had gone to Yanmen instead with a man he knew. His daughter was living with a rich landlord, Squire Zhao, who was very respectful to me the day we met. But the police were hot on my trail, so the squire paid out money and sent me to the abbot on Mount Wutai where I shaved off my hair and became a monk. Because I got drunk twice and rioted in the meditation room, the abbot has given me a letter to the head of the Great Xiangguo Monastery in the Eastern Capital, asking him to give me a job. Last night it was too late to find an inn, so I put up in this manor. I never thought I'd run into you, brother. Who is that fellow I beat up? And what are you doing here?"
"The day after I left you and Shi Jin at the tavern in Weizhou I heard that you had killed Butcher Zheng. I went to talk it over with Shi Jin but he was gone. Then I heard that the police were after you, so I quickly left, too. I was passing the foot of the mountain here when that fellow you thrashed came down with a gang and attacked me. He's called Zhou Tong, the Little King, and has a stronghold on Peach Blossom Mountain. I defeated him, and he asked me to stay as lord of the fortress, and gave me the first throne. I've been an outlaw from that day on."
"Since you're the leader, call off the marriage to Grandpa Liu's daughter. She's his only child, and he's been hoping she would look after him for the rest of his days. You can't take her and leave him alone."
Grandpa Liu was very pleased. He had food and wine placed before his two guests. Each of the lesser bandits was served two steamed rolls, two slices of meat, and a big bowl of wine. All ate their fill. Grandpa Liu also returned the engagement gifts of gold and satin.
"Take them, brother," Zhishen urged Li Zhong. "I'm putting this whole matter in your hands."

"That can be arranged," said Li Zhong. "Please stay at our little stronghold a while, brother. Grandpa Liu, you must come too."
The old man had his vassals prepare a sedan-chair for Lu Zhishen. They carried him off with his staff, knife and luggage. Li Zhong rode on horseback. Grandpa Liu went in a smaller sedan-chair. By then the morning was very light.
On reaching the fortress, Lu and the old man got out of their sedan-chairs and Li Zhong dismounted from his horse. The bandit chief left them to the assembly hall and all three took their seats.
Li Zhong summoned Zhou Tong to come forward. When Zhou Tong saw the monk he thought angrily: "Not only don't you avenge me, brother but you invite him here and give him a seat of honour!"
"Do you know who this monk is, brother?" asked Li Zhong.
"If I knew who he was, maybe I wouldn't have been beaten!"
Li Zhong laughed. "Remember I told you about a man who killed the 'Lord of the West' with three blows of his fist? Well, that's this monk!"
Zhou Tong clutched his head, "*Aiya!*" he cried. He stepped forward and kowtowed. Zhishen returned his greeting. "Please don't hold our clash against me," said the monk. The three took their seats but the old man remained standing before them.
"Hear me, Brother Zhou," said Lu. "There are some things you don't know about this match with Grandpa Liu's daughter. She's his only child. He needs her to look after him and carry on the family line. If you take her away in marriage, he'll have no one. In his heart I'm sure he's against that. Give her up as a favour to me and choose another good girl. Here are the gold and satin engagement gifts. What do you say?"
"Since it's you who ask it, brother, I won't enter their gate again."
"A real man never goes back on his word," Zhishen reminded him.
Zhou Tong broke an arrow as a pledge. Grandpa Liu bowed his tanks, returned the gold and satin, and went back down the mountain to his manor.
Li Zhong and Zhou Tong had oxen killed and horses slaughtered and gave a feast. They entertained Zhishen for several days, showing him the scenic spots in the front and rear of the mountain. Peach Blossom Mountain was quite remarkable. Wild and foreboding in appearance, it had steep cliffs on all sides overgrown with tangled grass, and could only be climbed by a single path.
"A good place to defend," said Zhishen.
Within a few days he realized that Li Zhong and Zhou Tong were not very generous, in fact they were rather stingy. He decided to leave. The two did their best to persuade him but he refused to remain.
"I'm already a monk," he explained. "I can't become a bandit."
"If you insist on leaving, brother," said the bandit chieftains, "we two will go down the mountain tomorrow. As much as we pick up, we'll give you for your travelling expenses."
The next day pigs and sheep were slaughtered in the stronghold and a farewell feast was laid. When all was in readiness, many gold and silver wine goblets were placed on the table.
Just as the diners were about to sit down and start drinking, a bandit came in and reported: "There are two large carts and about a dozen travellers passing at the foot of the mountain."
Li Zhong and Zhou Tong at once mustered their men, leaving only two to wait on Zhishen and serve him wine. "Brother," said the brigand leaders, "please have a few cups without us. We're going down to collect some riches. We'll join your farewell banquet later." They left instructions with the bandits remaining with Zhishen and went down the mountain at the head of their men.
"What tight-wads," thought Zhishen. "They don't give me any of this mass of gold and silver they've laid out here but wait until they rob something and present me with that! It doesn't cost them anything. Only travellers on the public road have to suffer. I'm going to throw a scare into those oafs!"
He told the two bandits attending him to pour some wine, and he drank two cups. Suddenly, he jumped to his feet, knocked them down with one blow of the fist each, bound them with his sash, and gagged them with knots of hemp rope. He emptied his rucksack of everything except absolute essentials, then swept the gold and silver vessels from the table, trample them flat, and stuffed them in. He placed the abbot's letter in the bag containing his monk's certificate that he wore on his chest. Zhishen hung the knife at his waist, took up his staff and left the stronghold with the sack on his head.
At the rear of the mountain he looked down the slope. It was steep and there was no path. "But if I leave by the front path," he thought, "I'm sure to run into those varlets. I'd better roll down here where the grass is thick."
He tied the sack and knife together, dropped them over the side, and tossed the staff down after them. Then he rolled down the slope, tumbling all the way to the foot of the mountain without injury. Zhishen jumped to his feet, found his sack, tied on his knife and picked up his staff. He selected a path and struck out in the direction of the Eastern Capital.
To get back to Li Zhong and Zhou Tong. On the side of the mountain they met the dozen or so travellers. All were armed. The brigand chiefs levelled their lances and their men moved forward. "If you have any sense," yelled the bandits, "shell out and buy yourselves a free passage!"
One of the travellers, brandishing a halberd, rushed Li Zhong. They fought more than ten rounds, back and forth, neither vanquishing the other. Zhou Tong, angered, ran up with a shout, the rest of the bandits following. The travellers couldn't withstand so many. They turned and fled. Some were too slow, and seven or eight were slain. The bandits seized the carts and valuables and slowly returned up the mountain, singing triumphantly.
When they reached the stronghold they found their two mates bound to a pillar. The gold and silver goblets which had been on the table were gone. Zhou Tong untied the two bandits and asked: "Where is Lu Zhishen?"
"He knocked us down and bound us," they replied. "Then he wrapped the vessels and took them all away!"
"That scabby thief is no good," said Zhou Tong. "He's played us dirty! Which way did he go?"
They searched until they found his prints leading to the rear of the mountain. They saw the flattened grass on the slope.
"He's an experienced crook, the scabby donkey," said Zhou Tong. "Rolling down a steep incline like this!"
"Let's catch and question him," Li Zhong proposed. "We'll put the rascal to shame!"
"Forget it," said Zhou Tong. "There's no use locking the door after the thief is gone. Where would we look? Even if we talked to him we wouldn't get our things back. You and I are no match for him in a quarrel, and it would only make things awkward if we ran into him again later on. It's better to drop the whole business. In the future, if we meet, we can pretend nothing has happened. Let's open the packages on the carts. We'll divide the gold and silver and silks into three portions. You and I will each take one. The rest can be split among the men."
"He's stolen a lot of things that belong to you," said Li Zhong. "Since I was the one who brought him here, you take my share too."
"Brother," said Zhou Tong, "we're in this together, live or die. There's no need for petty reckonings between you and me."
Reader, remember this well: From their lair on Peach Blossom Mountain, Li Zhong and Zhou Tong plundered and robbed. As to Lu Zhishen, when he left the bandit fort he travelled from morning till afternoon, covering fifty or sixty *li*. He was hungry but there were no taverns on the road. "I set out early with no thought but to travel fast," he said to himself. "I haven't had a thing to eat. Where can I find some food?"
He gazed all around. He heard, in the distance, the sound of bells. "Good," he thought. "If it's not a Buddhist monastery, it's a Taoist temple. Those bells are hanging from the eaves and the breeze is making them tinkle. That's the place for me." If Zhishen hadn't gone there, more than ten lives wouldn't have been lost in the night and a famous ancient landmark on a sacred mountain wouldn't have been consumed in flames. But the result was red fire spewed from golden halls, black smoke curled in jade-green temples. To which holy structures did Zhishen go?

What the Abbot said was this: "Zhishen, for you to stay here is out of the question. But I have a Brother in the Way who is at the Xiangguo Temple in the Eastern Capital. He is the Zen Master Pure Knowledge. I shall give you this letter for him. Go there and ask him to find you a position in the monastery's administration. Last night I meditated on your case, and I am going to give you this four-line verse that will serve you all your life. You must have these words always in mind."
Lu Zhishen knelt and said, "I want to hear it, this four-line verse." Then the Abbot recited:

When you find a forest, you will rise.
*When you find a mountain, you will prosper.*
*When you find water, you will grow.*
When you find a river, you will cease.

Zhishen listened, and then prostrated himself nine times before the Abbot; he picked up his bundle, tied his purse and a bag of provisions about his waist, put the letter in a safe place, and bidding farewell to the Abbot and the other monks, left Mount Wu Tai. He went straight to the inn beside the forge, to lodge there while he waited for his monk's staff and sword to be finished. Not one of the monks at the temple but was delighted at finally being rid of Lu Zhishen. The Abbot ordered workers and lay brothers to collect the broken pieces of the door-gods and the pavilion. Not long after, Mr. Zhao himself brought gifts and money to Mount Wu Tai, and the door-gods were restored and the pavilion on the mountainside repaired. We say no more of that but offer you instead this poem:

From one temple departing, he lands in another temple;
*He meets an old friend, who's obliged to part with gold.*
*Before his awesome might the wicked tremble;*
*The holy verse delights his mystic heart.*
*For long he's known to all as the Flowery Monk;*[1]
*But Profound Wisdom is his true and rightful name.*
*When worldly desires are fled, then comes the harvest,*
Only, for now, none understands his game.

So Lu Zhishen stayed on at the inn for a few days until the articles he had ordered at the blacksmith's were ready. Then he had a sheath made, that he could slip the sword into, and had the staff lacquered. After tipping the blacksmith, he slung the sword over his shoulder, picked up the staff, bade farewell to innkeeper and blacksmith, and took to the road. Those he passed on the way noted a coarse-looking sort of monk:
*He wears his patched black robe with the sleeves draped over his shoulders, and the blue sash slantwise, tied at both ends. The sword sleeps in its scabbard, three feet of menace; the staff rests on his shoulder, a long steel monster. His crane's legs are carefully strapped and bound; the begging-bowl is securely tied to his spider's paunch. Around the mouth, a sprouting of hairs like steel wires; the chest bared to reveal a wintry pelt. The face shows the signs of feeding on meat and fish: this is no devotee of the scriptures; no mumbler of pious invocations, this.*
Well, as we were saying, Lu Zhishen had left the Manjusri Temple on Mount Wu Tai, and was headed for the Eastern Capital. He travelled for half a month. When he needed rest he didn't look for any temple, oh no! It was to inns he went, for his comfort and solace; and at wineshops he would eat scandalously in broad daylight!
One day, as he went along, the beauty of the scenery so engrossed him that he failed to notice how late it was getting:

In the hills the shadows deepen.
*The locust's shade is swallowed up.*
*On the town's edge, lush groves of poplars*
*Welcome back the birds to sleep.*
*Through bright orchards of peach and apricot*
*Homeward plod the cows and sheep.*
*As the sun goes down, a blue mist rises,*
*Water reflects the day's last gleam:*
*The fisherman's boat traverses the stream,*
A boy in the fields rides the calf home.

Thus he went, for the whole afternoon, lost in the beauty of his surroundings and finding no inn to put up at. Nor was there any other traveller to give him company. Where would he find shelter for the night?
After following a path through the fields for almost ten miles and crossing a wooden bridge, he perceived in the distance, under the warm glow of the setting sun and just visible amid a little clump of trees, a manor house. Behind this manor the mountains crowded, range upon range of them. "I'd better go and ask them to let me stay the night," Zhishen thought to himself. When he arrived at the gate he found a dozen servants busily rushing this way and that, carrying things. Leaning on his staff in front of the house, Zhishen hailed them.
"What brings you here at this time of day, Your Reverence?" they asked him.
"I can't find an inn," he replied. "I'd like to stay — just for one night. I'll be off tomorrow."
"You can't stay," they said. "There's something happening here tonight."
"I can sleep anywhere," Zhishen insisted. "I'll be leaving tomorrow."
"You'd better be on your way, Reverend," said one of them, "if you value your life!"
"Extraordinary! I request lodging for one night, what's so difficult about that? And what's all this about valuing my life?"
"Get out right now, otherwise you're going to find yourself tied up!"
Lu Zhishen began to get angry. "You morons!" he said. "You must be raving. I haven't said a thing, and you want to tie me up!"
Some of the villagers tried to use persuasion, while others continued to threaten. But Zhishen raised his staff, and he was just about to put it to good use, when an old man appeared. He must have been more than sixty years of age, this old man, and he held a stick that was taller than himself. "What's the matter with you all?" he shouted as he came through the door.
"It's this monk, drat him, he's trying to attack us!" the retainers said.
"I am a monk from the Mount Wu Tai community," Zhishen said. "I am on my way to the Eastern Capital, on business, and I cannot find an inn for the night. I requested a night's lodging here at your manor but these ill-mannered wretches threatened to tie me up."
"If you are from Mount Wu Tai," the old man said, "do come in, please."
Zhishen followed him into the hall, where master and guest sat down ceremoniously. "Please forgive them, Father," the old man said. "They did not know you were from a house of the Living Buddha; they took you for just an ordinary monk. I personally have always venerated the Three Jewels, [2] and although we do have something going on in this house tonight, I beg you to stay and rest here."
Zhishen laid down his staff and stood up to return respectful thanks, saying: "Your Honour is most gracious. Might I be allowed to ask your name and the name of this manor?"
"My name is Liu," the old man said, "and this place is called Peachblossom Village. The people call me Squire Liu of Peachblossom Hall. May I ask Your Reverence's name and religious name, if you have taken one?"
"I am a disciple of Abbot True Knowledge," Zhishen said, "I took the religious name of Profound Wisdom, and since my own name is Lu, I am Lu Zhishen."
"I trust you will take supper, Father," the old man said. "I am not aware whether you are a strict vegetarian or not?"
"I do not exclude meat and fish," Zhishen said. "And if you happen to have any wine —cloudy or clear, I am not particular. I can eat beef, dog meat, whatever is convenient."
"Since you are not a strict abstainer then I will ask my people to get wine and meat," the old man said. And in no time, a table had been set up and a plate of beef, with three or four vegetable dishes and a pair of chopsticks, were laid for Zhishen. He removed his belt and bag and sat down. The servant brought a jug of wine and a glass and poured for him. Zhishen was not bashful or over-polite, and the jug of wine — all of it — and the meat were gone in a flash. His host, who had seated himself opposite to watch him eat, could not get over his amazement. Rice was brought, and when that too was gone the table was removed.
"I must apologize, Father," the Squire said, "for asking you to sleep at the back and not in the house. If you hear noises during the night, don't come out to investigate, I beg you."
"Forgive me for asking but what's going on here?" Zhishen said.
"It's not something for the ears of a holy man like yourself," said the Squire.
"But you seem disturbed about something," Zhishen said. "I hope it isn't because I'm giving you too much trouble. Tomorrow I shall most certainly pay you for my lodging."
"I can assure you, Father," the old man said. "In this house we always give alms and provide for many monks, how could one more be a problem? It's just that tonight my daughter is getting married. That's the reason why we're all so upset."
Zhishen burst out laughing. "When a man grows up he must find a wife, when a girl comes of age she needs a husband," he said. "It's the way of the world, it accords with the five principles. Why should it upset you?"
"But you see, this match is not of our choosing."
Zhishen remained unimpressed: "That's ridiculous, Squire. If the two partners are not in accord, there's no sense in taking on a superfluous son-in-law."
"I've only the one daughter, she's just nineteen," the old man began to explain. "Now, you see, there's a mountain in this neighbourhood, Mount Peachblossom it's called, and not long ago two robbers — 'Big Chiefs,' they call themselves — established themselves there, setting up camp with five or six hundred men. They've been causing havoc to houses and property. At present the Qingzhou militia are out on a sortie and haven't got time to do anything about them. When they came to my house to ask for money they saw my daughter. One of them threw down twenty taels of gold and a piece of red brocade and said it was a betrothal gift. He fixed on today as an auspicious date, and he's coming back tonight to take up residence in my house. I can't possibly fight him, so I've just got to put up with him. That's why I'm worried, not because of anything to do with you, Father."
"In that case," Zhishen said, "suppose I can find a way to make him change his mind, and give up the idea of marrying your daughter?"
"But he's the sort that would murder you without batting an eyelid. How are you going to make him change his mind?"

"When I was with Abbot True Knowledge on Mount Wu Tai, I learnt the art of reasoning. Even if this robber's made of iron or stone I'd be able to convince him. For tonight, send your daughter somewhere else. I'll stay in your daughter's room and I'll reason with him till he changes his mind."
"That's marvellous," the Squire cried. "Only don't go plucking the tiger's whiskers!"
"I know how to take care of myself. Just leave it all to me."
"That's wonderful then! What a blessing on my house that a living Buddha has come down to be with us!"
The rest of the household heard all this in amazement.
When the Squire asked Zhishen if he had had enough to eat, the latter replied that he was full but that he wouldn't mind a little more wine if there was any. "Of course, of course," the Squire said, and ordered the servants to prepare some slices of roast goose and bring more wine, serving it in a big bowl. Zhishen drank to his heart's content, finishing off more than twenty bowls and disposing of all the roast goose. Then, telling the servants to carry his bundle to the bedroom for him, he took up his staff and sword. "Is your daughter hidden yet?" he asked the Squire.
"I've already sent her to a neighbour's," the old man replied.
"Then lead me to the bridal chamber," Zhishen said.
The old man showed him the way. "Here it is," he announced.
"You'd better go and hide too," Zhishen said.
While the Squire and his people went off and prepared the banquet, Zhishen piled tables and chairs and everything else in one corner of the room, placed his sword by the pillow, propped his staff by the bedside, lowered the gold-embroidered curtain, removed all his clothes and sprang naked onto the bed to sit there and wait.
When the Squire saw it was beginning to get dark he ordered the servants to light lamps and candles everywhere, and set up a big table with incense, flowers and lights on the threshing-floor. Big plates of meat were also laid out and huge jugs of warm wine.
Around seven o'clock gongs and drums were heard from the direction of the mountain. Squire Liu was busy thinking of the secret plan but the rest felt their palms clammy with fear. They went to the gate of the manor and looked out. Far off fifty torches blazed like the light of day, as a troop of horsemen galloped towards them:
From the blue shadow of the mist-cloaked hills

*Like a host of headless riders they pour out.*
*From lost green forest fringes the mob spills,*
*Like a pack of hungry ghosts in angry riot.*
*For ferocious looks there's nothing to choose between them;*
*Each from beneath a blood-red turban squints;*
*Their coats are red as maple leaves in autumn,*
*Red-tasseled spears surround the barbaric prince,*
*Crossed cudgels hedge about the heartless chieftain.*
*This night scene's like a Rakshasa's family outing:*
*The great beast rides in state down from the mountain,*
With all his hideous host around him shouting.

Ordering his people to open wide the manor gates, Squire Liu went forward to receive the company. The troop surged about him, their weapons glinting, streamers of red and green waving. The ordinary soldiers had stuck wild flowers in their turbans. Four or five lanterns of red silk went in front, throwing their light on the chieftain on his horse:
*He wore a conical red hat, pinched in front and hollow on top, with an artificial flower at the temple, most realistic! His mighty frame was clad in a close-fitting green tunic picked out with gold and his solid waist was girt with a red sash with gold embroidery. He was shod in high-heeled leather boots and rode a tall white charger with a long mane.*
Arriving in front of the manor, the Big Chief dismounted. His escort sang out in unison:

You're getting spliced tonight,
*You've a brand-new hat.*
*Your tunic's nice and tight.*
What'll she say to that?

Squire Liu hurriedly took the jug in his own hands, poured out a cup of his best wine, and knelt to offer it. All the servants also knelt down. The Big Chief raised the Squire with his own hands and said: "You are my father-in-law, you don't have to kneel to me!"
"No, that's not right," the Squire replied. "I am only your humble subject."
The Big Chief, already three parts drunk, burst into cackles. "That's right," he said, "I'm coming to be your son-in-law, so you're not doing at all badly. Your daughter's got quite a catch, hasn't she?"
After the Squire had offered the stirrup-cup, they went on to the threshing-floor. When he saw all the lights, the incense and the flowers, the robber king said to the Squire: "Why, what a reception, O Venerable Parent!" He drank another three cups. When he reached the main hall, he remembered to tell his men to tie his horse to a willow tree. Others of his troop advanced to the doors of the hall and entertained the company with the music of fifes and drums. The Big Chief seated himself and said: "Now then, Father-in-law, where is my wife?"
"She's a little shy," the old man said. "She wouldn't come out."
"Give me some more wine then," the Big Chief said, with a leer. "I shall drink your health." He took a cup but then thought better of it: "Why don't I pay a call on my wife first? There'll be time for drinking afterwards."
Now the old man was just waiting for this, praying that the monk could make the robber change his mind. "I'll show you the way myself," he said quickly, and taking a candlestick he led the Big Chief on, till passing behind a screen they stood before the bridal chamber. "Here it is," he said. "Please go in, Your Highness." And he quickly left, taking the candlestick with him. Uncertain whether the outcome would be happy or disastrous he wanted to establish an escape route.
The Big Chief pushed open the door. It was pitch-black inside. "What a father-in-law!" he grumbled. "He's too stingy to light even a candle in the room. He lets my wife sit here in the dark. Tomorrow I'll have to get my men to bring down a big bucket of oil from the fortress to present to him."
Lu Zhishen heard all this, where he was sitting inside the curtain, and had to stifle his laughter. As the Big Chief groped his way into the room, he said: "Wife, why don't you come out to receive me? You mustn't be shy — from tomorrow you'll be the wife of a Robber King!" Thus addressing his wife, and at the same time cautiously feeling his way, he advanced till his fingers touched the gold-embroidered curtain. He stopped and stretched an exploratory hand inside till it encountered Zhishen's stomach, whereupon the latter gripped a corner of his turban and threw him onto the bed. When he tried to struggle, Zhishen made a fist with his right hand and, muttering "You dirty fornicator!" smashed it into his ear and neck. The Big Chief yelled blue murder: "Why are you beating your husband?" he cried.
"To teach you to know your wife," Zhishen roared, heaving the brigand onto the edge of the bed and raining down punches and kicks till he screamed for help.
Old Liu was thunderstruck when he heard cries for help coming from inside the room, because he had really believed that the monk would somehow convince the robber by his powers of reasoning. He snatched up his lantern, and followed by members of the robber band rushed into the bedroom. What they saw was this huge, burly monk, stark naked, sitting on the bed astride the Big Chief and pummeling him vigorously. The leader of the band shouted, "To the rescue, all of you!" and they all charged forward waving sword or staff to rescue their Big Chief. Zhishen abandoned his victim and, picking up his staff from beside the bed, jumped down and began to fight his way to the door. Before the fury of his attack the robbers scattered with cries of terror. Squire Liu simply stood there bewailing his fate.
Amid the confusion, the Big Chief managed to crawl out of the bedroom door. Following this he rushed to the front door, felt around till he found his horse that was unsaddled, broke off a branch from the willow, vaulted onto the horse's back and started belaboring it with the branch. The horse did not move. "Curse it!" the Big Chief cried. "This horse has got it in for me too." But then he realized that in his panic he had forgotten to untie the halter which held it to the willow tree. He slashed it through and galloped off, without reins or saddle. As he passed through the gate he shouted: "All right, Squire Liu, you old donkey. Don't imagine you'll get away with this!" He whipped his horse, and with a clatter of hooves disappeared in the direction of the mountain.
Squire Liu meanwhile was upbraiding Zhishen. "Look what a mess you've got us all into," he said.
"Excuse me," Zhishen said. "Please can someone bring me my clothes and my robe. Let me dress first and then we'll talk."
A servant went to the room to get the clothes and Zhishen dressed.
"I thought you were only going to reason with him to make him change his mind," the Squire said. "I had no idea you were going to use your fists on him like that. Now he's sure to go back and tell them in the mountain retreat and a whole army of brigands will come down and kill us all!"
"Don't worry about it, Squire," said Zhishen. "Shall I tell you who I really am? I was formerly commandant in the garrison of His Excellency Field-Marshal Zhong the Elder at Yanan. Because I'd killed a man I had to leave the world and become a monk. I'm not afraid of those two buggers, even if they come with an army of thousands. If anyone here doesn't believe me, let him try to pick up my monk's staff."
Well, no one in the household could pass that test! Accordingly, Zhishen himself took up the staff and started to whirl it about as if it were nothing but a straw for lighting the lamp.
"Whatever you do, don't go away, Your Reverence," the Squire said. "If you don't stay we're all lost."
"What are you talking about?" said Lu Zhishen. "Of course I'm not bloody going away."
"Bring wine for His Reverence," the Squire said. "Only please don't get yourself too drunk, Father."
"Give me a tenth measure of wine, and I've only got one-tenth of my true ability; with a full measure my strength is complete."
"Well, that's all right then," said the Squire. "The one thing we've plenty of is wine and meat, please take all you wish."
Now as for the Big Chief in the stronghold on Mount Peachblossom, he was just thinking of sending someone down the mountain to find out how the nuptials of his second-in- command were going, when a bunch of robbers appeared, out of breath and in total disarray. "Disaster, it's a disaster!" they were crying.
"You shower! What the hell's been going on?" the chief bellowed.
"Our number two has been beaten up," they said.
The astonished chief was just about to ask for details, when the cry went up: "The Second Chief is here!" And there he was, the red scarf no longer on his head, and his green tunic in tatters. He rolled off his horse and collapsed in front of the main hall, croaking "Save me, brother, save me."
"What's happened to you?" the chief asked.
"I went down to the manor, I entered the bedroom, and that bloody old donkey had hidden his daughter away and told an enormous monk to conceal himself in her bed. Suspecting nothing, I opened the curtain and felt inside. The lousy bugger grabbed me and beat me black and blue with his fists and his feet! When they came in to rescue me, he let me go, grabbed a staff, and fought his way out of the room. Only then was I able to escape from the room with my life. Brother, you've got to avenge me!"
"All right, you go to the room and rest, while I go down now and fetch the bloody villain up here for you," said the big chief, shouting for his horse to be saddled and the troops to assemble. He mounted and grasped his pike, and they set off down the mountain, the men uttering ferocious cries.
Lu Zhishen was enjoying his wine when the servants announced: "The brigand chief from the mountain is on his way with an army!"
"Now all of you, don't worry," said Lu Zhishen. "As I knock them down, all you've got to do is tie them up. Then they can be taken to the authorities for the reward. Bring me my sword."
He took off his monk's robe, tucked up his underclothing and tied it, gripped his sword and picked up his staff, and then off he strode to the threshing-floor. From here the Big Chief could be seen, on horseback among a forest of torches, approaching the manor.
The Big Chief levelled his weapon and shouted: "Where is he, where is that bald ass? Let him come out at once, and then we'll see what's what!"
Lu Zhishen was angered by this greeting. "You filthy loud-mouthed cur, you're going to learn who I am!" he riposted. Whirling his staff he charged his opponent. But the robber stayed his arm and shouted: "Wait a while, monk. There's something familiar about your voice. Tell me who you are."
"Lu Da, camp commandant under Old Field-Marshal Zhong, that's who I am!" Zhishen replied. "But since I left the world and became a monk, I'm called Lu Zhishen."
The brigand chief threw back his head and laughed. Then he slipped off his horse, cast away his pike, and threw himself on the ground before Zhishen. "Good health has been yours, I hope, since we last parted," he said. "Now I know who you are, it's no surprise to me that my second-in-command got a taste of your fists."
Zhishen, suspecting a trap, recoiled several paces. Then lowering his staff he stared at the other. By the light of the torches he saw who it was: none other than that famous member of the rivers and lakes fraternity, instructor of arms and pedlar of patent medicines, the Tiger-Killer Li Zhong.
By the way, when heroes greet each other, it is the customnot to talk of their prostrating themselves, since that doesn't sound very heroic. It's more usual to say, "pay respect," which has happier connotations.
So when Li Zhong had finished paying his respects, he gave Zhishen his hand and said: "How did you come to be a monk?"
"Let's go inside to talk," Zhishen said.
This made Squire Liu very unhappy. "This monk is one of their ilk," he muttered to himself.
Returning inside, Zhishen donned his robe again and accompanied Li Zhong to the main hall where they settled down to talk about the past. Zhishen sat down in the place of honour and called on Squire Liu to join them. But the Squire was reluctant. "There's nothing to fear, Squire," Zhishen said. "He's my friend." Hearing that the two were friends unsettled the Squire still more but he dared not refuse to sit with them. Li Zhong was sitting in the second place, so the Squire took the third.
"Well, then, hear this, both of you," Zhishen said. "After I left Weizhou, where I had killed the butcher, I escaped to Yanmen in Daizhou. There I again met the old fellow I had saved, Old Jin. He didn't go back to the Eastern Capital but went with an acquaintance and was living in Yanmen. His daughter had met a local bigwig called Zhao, who treated me with great honour when we happened to meet. But suddenly I found the authorities were on my trail. So Mr. Zhao provided me with the wherewithal and took me to Abbot True Knowledge's monastery on Mount Wu Tai, where my head was shaved and I became a monk. There were two occasions when I was said to have disturbed the meditation hall, after I happened to get a little merry, and the Abbot gave me a letter and told me to go to the Xiangguo Temple in the Eastern Capital to find the Zen teacher Pure Knowledge and ask him to give me a position in the monastery. I reached this manor as it was getting late and asked for lodging, having no idea of course that I would run into you here. Now tell me, who was that fellow I beat up just now? And what are you doing in these parts?"
"After I left you and Shi Jin in the Weizhou restaurant," Li Zhong explained, "I heard next day about your killing the butcher. I wanted to find Shi Jin to discuss it with him but he had disappeared too. I heard the police had detention orders out, so I cleared off in a hurry. I was passing Mount Peachblossom, when I encountered the fellow you just beat up. He had recently set up a stronghold here, and he said he was Zhou Tong, the Big Chief. He and his men came down that day to fight me. I beat him, and he asked me to remain here as commander-in-chief — he gave up his place to me. That's how I became an outlaw."
"Well, now, since you're here," Zhishen said, "I think this business of the marriage with Squire Liu's daughter should be dropped. The Squire has only this one daughter to take care of him in his old age. You oughtn't to take her away and leave him with no one to look after him."
These words delighted the Squire, who ordered a banquet to be prepared for the two of them, while the men all received two small loaves, two pieces of meat, and a bowl of wine to fill them up. Meanwhile the old man went to fetch the gold and the piece of brocade that he had received as betrothal gifts. Lu Zhishen said to Li Zhong: "You give it back to Zhou Tong; we'll leave the matter in your hands."
"That's no problem," Li Zhong replied. "But I was hoping you would come and spend a little time with us on the mountain. The Squire too of course."
The Squire told his people to prepare a sedan chair to carry Zhishen, who took with him his staff, his sword and his luggage. Li Zhong mounted his horse, and Squire Liu got into a smaller chair. The day had fully dawned when they set off up the mountain. Before entering the retreat, Zhishen and the Squire got down from their chairs, and Li Zhong dismounted in order to invite the monk in formally. All three went to sit in the Hall of Assembly and Li Zhong summoned his companion, Zhou Tong. When Zhou Tong saw the monk he was furious. "I asked you to avenge me," he complained, "and instead you invite him to visit and let him sit in the place of honour!"
"Do you know who this monk is?" Li Zhong said.
"If I knew him, do you suppose I'd have got beaten up by him like that?"
"This is the man I've so often told you of, the one who killed Butcher Zheng with three blows of his fist."
Zhou Tong, who was rubbing his head ruefully, gave an exclamation of surprise. Then he abased himself in token of respect.
Lu Zhishen courteously said, "Please forgive the violence of my recent behaviour." The three of them sat down, while the Squire remained standing in front of them. "Friend Zhou, listen to what I have to say," Zhishen began. "Regarding this business of marriage with Squire Liu's daughter, perhaps you didn't know that he only has this one daughter, prop of his old age and guardian of the rites, that is to say, responsible for the prayers and the burning of paper and incense over his mortal remains. If you take her, you leave him without support. Besides, he seems little pleased with the project. If you will take my advice, you should abandon it, and choose a suitable girl elsewhere. Here are the wedding gifts, the gold and the piece of brocade. What do you say?"
"I accept your proposal," Zhou Tong replied, "and will not venture to cross his threshold again."
"Spoken like a man of honour," said Zhishen. "But there can be no going back on this decision."
After Zhou Tong had broken an arrow and made a vow, Squire Liu thanked them all, handed over the gold and the brocade, and departed.
Li Zhong and Zhou Tong now had cattle killed and horses sacrificed, and feasted Zhishen for several days. They took him all round the mountain-top to show him the views. Mount Peachblossom was a remarkable spot. It was abrupt and rugged and surrounded by high cliffs; there was only a single road for access, with the wildest vegetation on every side.
"This is truly an impregnable site," Zhishen exclaimed.
But after staying several days with them, Zhishen came to the conclusion that Li Zhong and Zhou Tong were small-minded people, quite devoid of generosity and petty in all their dealings, and he could hardly wait to get away. They both urged him to stay but to no avail. "Now that I've left the world," he insisted, "how can I become an outlaw?"
"Since you won't join us as an outlaw," they said, "we'll go down tomorrow and whatever we get we'll give you to supply your needs on the journey."

Next day sheep and pigs were slaughtered in the mountain retreat for a grand farewell banquet, and the table was elaborately laid with a great display of gold and silver goblets. Just as the eating and drinking were about to start, one of the robbers appeared and announced: "Two carriages and a dozen or so men are passing the mountain." Hearing this, Li Zhong and Zhou Tong collected the company, only leaving a couple to serve Zhishen and pour for him. "Just stay here and enjoy a few cups," they said, "while we go down and get some booty, for your parting gift." Having given their instructions, they led their troops off down the mountain.

Zhishen meanwhile was saying to himself, "These two are real skinflints. Here's all this gold and silver on show but they don't want to give me any, they have to go down and steal someone else's to give to me. They seem to think gifts are what the highway brings, they will give only at others' expense. I'm going to teach those two scoundrels a lesson." First he called the remaining robbers to pour wine for him. He drank two cups, then he leapt to his feet and felled both the robbers with two punches. He undid his belt and bound them both together, and gagged them with hempen rope. Next he opened his bundle and threw out everything that was not indispensable; he took the gold and silver goblets from the table, stamped on them till they were flat, and stowed them in the bundle. He put away the letter from Abbot True Knowledge, took up his sword and staff, shouldered his bundle and left the mountain retreat.

He headed for the back of the mountain. But he found sheer precipices on every side. "But if I go down by the front way," he reasoned, "I am certain to encounter those two scoundrels. So the best way is to roll down this cliff, where it's covered in grass and shrubs." First he tied his sword and his bundle together and threw them to the bottom. Then he hurled his staff down after them. Finally he curled himself into a ball and rolled, gu-lu-lu, gu-lu-lu, all the way down to the foot of the mountain, without suffering the slightest hurt. As the poem says:

So precipitous is the spot
*No single route is safe;*
*To proceed from here he's got*
*To work things out for himself.*
*He curls himself into a ball*
*And rolls down all the way,*
*As a melon ready to fall*
Drops from the stem one day.

After rolling down the cliff, Zhishen jumped to his feet, found his bundle, sword and staff, and set off again.

As for Li Zhong and Zhou Tong, they went down the mountain and found as expected a dozen men, all armed. Brandishing their pikes they rushed forward, their men contributing war-like cries. "Ho there, wayfarers!" they shouted. "If you're wise, you'd better stop and pay the toll." But one of the travellers responded by stepping forward, sword in hand, to confront Li Zhong in single combat. Backwards and forwards, this way and that, the fight raged, with ten or more assaults and no clear indication of who was winning. Finally Zhou Tong lost patience. He shouted a signal and the whole robber band charged together. The little group of travellers, unable to withstand the onslaught, turned and fled. Some were not quick enough, and eight or nine were slaughtered. After removing everything of value from the carriages, the robber band made its way slowly back up the mountain, singing a victory song.

But when they reached the mountain retreat, one glance was enough to show them their two companions trussed and bound to a pillar and the gold and silver goblets which had been on the table all gone. Zhou Tong untied the men and asked for a full explanation. "Where was Lu Zhishen?"

"He knocked us down," they said, "and tied us up; and he's made off with all the drinking vessels."

Zhou Tong was furious. "That lousy villain has no conscience. I should have known from the way he beat me up. But where can he have got to?"

Searching everywhere for signs of him, they arrived at the other side of the mountain, where they found a swathe of crushed undergrowth, looking as if it had been flattened by a roller. Zhou Tong exclaimed: "The old crook, the tricks he knows! A sheer precipice like this and he rolls down it!"

"We must catch him and confront him," Li Zhong said. "We'll teach him to know shame."

"No, forget it," Zhou Tong said. "That's trying to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted. How can we catch him? Even if we did, we couldn't get anything back. And if he turns nasty you and I won't be able to get the better of him, and later we wouldn't know how to face him again. The best thing is to let it be, then we can still be friends with him afterwards. Let's go and open the bags we got from the carriages. We'll divide the gold, silver and silk into three parts, one for each of us and one for the rest."

"It's all my fault for inviting him into the retreat," Li Zhong said. "I'm afraid you lost a lot through it, so my share should go to you."

"Forget it, brother, we live or die together," Zhou Tong said.

Well, now reader, just keep it in mind that those two, Li Zhong and Zhou Tong, remained there on Mount Peachblossom, plundering the surrounding lands.

As for Lu Zhishen, after leaving the mountain he marched from morning till night, covering nearly twenty miles, till his stomach began to complain. Nowhere on the road was there a sign of anywhere to break his journey. "On the go since early morning without even a bite to eat," he complained to himself, "and now where am I going to spend the night?" He looked left and right and finally, far far off, he heard the faintest tinkling of bells. "Thank goodness!" he said to himself. "It's either a Buddhist temple or a Taoist one; that's the wind shaking the bells under the eaves, I'll be able to find some hospitality there."

If Lu Zhishen hadn't gone there, how would he have come to send a dozen spirits into the next world, or razed to the ground the remains of a renowned and holy temple? Truly, as it is said:

On the gold roof of the hall the red flames spread;
The black smoke rises before the temple of jade.

THE Abbot spoke, "Zhishen, you certainly cannot stay here but I have a brother in religion called Zhi Qing Jingshen, who is the Abbot of Great Xiangguo Monastery in Kaifeng, and you can go there for refuge, and work for the monks. I have here a letter of introduction for you. Last night I thought over your case, and decided to give you four sentences from our sacred sayings, and until your dying day you must not forget them."

Lu Da (Zhishen) knelt down, and said, "I am willing to listen to these sayings."

The Abbot continued and said: "When you (1) see a forest your lot will be improved; (2) see a mountain you will become rich; (3) enter a prefecture you will move on; and (4) see a river (*Jiang*, also a surname) you will stop."

Lu Da upon hearing these four "sayings" kowtowed three times three. He then put on his back a bundle, two girdles round his waist, hid away the letter, bid farewell to the Abbot and the crowd of monks. He departed from Mount Wutai and went to the inn in the village near the blacksmith's shop, where he stayed for a few days until the monk's staff and broadsword were finished. He also got a scabbard for the sword, and had the staff varnished. He took a number of pieces of silver and paid the blacksmith. He left, and the passers-by gazed after him as he was really a very strange sight. He followed the road towards the Eastern Capital (Kaifeng). In more than half a month he had not slept in a single monastery; but had rested and eaten his food at inns, and bought his wine in wine shops. One day he was enjoying the scenery of a mountain stream and did not notice it was evening, and that he had not found a place to sleep. The road was quite deserted. After he had gone thirty *li* more, he passed over a plank bridge, where he saw in the distance a red light emerging from a group of trees. It was a farmhouse in a wood with surrounding wild mountains rising one above the other. He went to the farmhouse and saw outside a dozen men who were very busy moving things about. He placed his staff against the wall and spoke to the men to attract their attention.

The villagers said, "Monk, why do you arrive so late at our farm?"

"As I cannot find an inn near here," replied Lu Da, "I should like to stay at your farm tonight, and will leave here early tomorrow morning."

"We have some business here tonight so that you cannot stay."

"However inconvenient it is, let me stay tonight," said Lu Da.

"Monk, you had better go at once, and do not risk your life here."

"This is strange," replied Lu Da. "If I only stay for one night how shall I risk my life?" "Go away!" said the villagers. "If you do not go we shall tie you up."

Lu Da became angry. "You villagers are unreasonable. I have not said anything wrong, yet you want to tie me up."

Some of the villagers abused him, while others acted as mediators. Lu Da took his staff and threatened to beat them; just then he saw an old man. He was over sixty years of age and was walking with a staff that reached above his head. He called, "What is all this noise about?"

The villagers answered, "This detestable monk desires to beat us." Lu Da spoke, "I am from Mount Wutai, and am on my way to the Eastern Capital on some business. This evening I have not found an inn, and should like to make use of your noble house for one night. Your servants were unreasonable, and wanted to tie me up."

"As you are a monk from Mount Wutai please come inside," the old man said. They went into the guest chamber and sat down. The old man said, "You must not think us impolite because our servants did not know that you are from a place where there is a living Buddha, and they took you as an ordinary person. I previously believed in Buddhism. Although we have some affair this evening, yet you may stay here tonight."

Lu Da placed his staff against a chair, and rising, signified his appreciation, and then asked his host's name.

"My name is Liu, and the villagers call me 'Grandpa Liu.' This place is called Taohua Village. May I ask your name and also your religious name?"

"My superior—the Abbot Zhi Zhen, gave me the name Zhi Shen but my surname is Lu."

"Reverend, will you take a little supper with me? but I do not know whether you are willing to eat meat with me," said Grandpa Liu.

"I can eat meat and drink wine. Whether the wine is yellow or clear, or from Shaoxing, I am not particular; and I can eat either meat or dog's flesh."

Very soon the servants prepared a table with a plate of beef and four different vegetables. Lu Da (Zhi Shen) took off his belt and waist girdle, and sat down. He did not stand on ceremony, nor did he decline anything. Grandpa Liu, who sat opposite, stared at him but only ate rice. When the servants cleared the table Grandpa Liu told them that as things were upset, Lu Da would sleep in a small side room. He then informed Lu Da that if there was a noise outside in the night, he should not notice it. Lu Da inquired what was the affair to occur that night, and he was told that it was something that a monk could not take part in.

"But why is your appearance so sorrowful?" asked Lu Da, "I hope that my coming has not been inconvenient. I will give you money for my lodging tomorrow."

"Reverend, please listen to me," said Grandpa Liu, "I always give food to monks, and bestow charity on them, so I cannot accept money from you. Tonight I have invited someone to come and marry my daughter, therefore I am quite busy."

Lu Da laughed loudly. "When men and women are fully grown they must marry; this is the proper thing for men and it is in accordance with the five constant virtues. So why should there be trouble?"

"You, Reverend, do not understand this marriage," said Grandpa Liu, "but the fact is that my daughter is not willing to marry."

Lu Da laughingly replied, "Sir, you are a silly fellow. If she does not agree why have you invited the man to marry her?"

"I have only one daughter, and she is nineteen years old," Grandpa Liu remarked. "Near here, there is a mountain called Mount Taohua. Recently two bandit chiefs have erected a stronghold there, and have collected about seven hundred men, and they rob the cottages near here. The officers in charge of the troops at Qingzhou have tried to arrest them without success. The bandits then came here, and demanded money. When one of the chiefs saw my daughter, he presented her twenty taels of gold, and a roll of red embroidered silk as a token of his desire for an engagement. He has selected this night to come and marry the girl. I cannot dispute the matter with him but I must agree to his demand. And that is why I am annoyed."

Lu Da upon hearing this said, "So that is the case. But if I have the means of causing him to change his mind about taking away your daughter, how will that do?"

"He is king of demons, and kills men without moving an eyelash, so how can you get him to change his mind?"

"I studied under the Abbot at Mount Wutai and therefore I can speak reasonably. Even if he were a man of iron or stone I could alter his decision. Tell your daughter to hide in some other place this evening, and I will stay in her room."

"That will be fine but do not pull the tiger's whiskers," said Grandpa Liu.

"Is not that my business?" asked Lu Da. "Leave it to me and I'll do the correct thing."

"Certainly it will be all right," said Grandpa Liu, "we are very lucky in meeting such a living Buddha as you."

He then asked Lu Da if he would like something more to eat but the latter replied, "only wine." Grandpa Liu ordered the servants to bring a big bowl of wine as well as a cooked goose, both of which were eaten by the monk, who told the servants to place his bundle in the room. Then putting his sword in his belt and picking up his monk's staff, he asked if the girl was in hiding. Grandpa Liu had sent his daughter to a neighbour's house, and led Lu Da to the bride's apartment. The servants withdrew to prepare the banquet. Lu Da placed the tables and chairs that were in the room to one side; put his sword at the head, and his staff at the side of the bed; let down the bed curtains covered with gilt letters, took off his clothes and lay down.

Grandpa Liu saw that it was getting dark so he told the servants to light the lanterns which were outside. He had a table placed on the threshing floor on which were flowers, incense sticks, and lanterns. He also instructed them to get a dish of meat ready, and heat a large kettle of wine. About ten o'clock they heard the sound of gongs and drums being beaten on the hill. Grandpa Liu thought of a vile scheme, and the servants were almost in a state of panic. They all went outside the gate of the farm but upon seeing in the distance a great illumination from five hundred torches, they fled into the farmhouse. Grandpa Liu had the gate opened and proceeded to welcome the guests. He saw two bodies of men, one in front of the other. They were armed with all kinds of military weapons, glittering in the light, and were decorated with red and green silk. The bandits had stuck wild flowers in their caps, and carried four or five red gauze lanterns that lit the road for their leader who was riding a horse. On his head he had a flat topped cap of red colour, and near his temple was a large imitation flower made of silk, he wore a long green gown with tiger design embroidered in gold, round his waist a red sash fastened with a golden buckle, standing away from this a few inches a stiff girdle was suspended; leather boots with designs of clouds on them. He was riding a big white horse and dismounted at the gate of the farmhouse. The bandits offered congratulations by singing:

"Tonight his cap is very bright
For he is a bridegroom;
Clothed with handsome dress is he
And all his cheek's abloom."

Grandpa Liu poured out a cupful of wine and kneeling on the ground, offered it to the bandit leader, who, however, raised him, saying: "You are my father-in-law so why do you kneel before me?"

"As you are the chief of this district, and my family is under your control, you should not object like this," replied Grandpa Liu.

The bandit chief was almost drunk and laughingly replied. "As I am to be your son-in-law I will treat you fairly; as your daughter is to be my wife things will soon be all right." Upon reaching the threshing floor, the bandit chief saw the preparations, and asked, "Father-in-law, why do you receive me in this way?" He drank three cups of wine at that spot. He told his men to tie up his horse to a poplar, and went toward the guest room. His men began to play on the musical instruments and beat the drums. Upon entering the guest room the bandit chief sat down, asking for his wife. Grandpa Liu replied, "My daughter is so timid that she dare not come here." The robber chief laughed, and taking a cup of wine said, "I should like my wife to come here and drink some wine with me."

Grandpa Liu thought this a suitable opportunity for the monk to act as mediator, so he requested the guest to come with him. He took a candle, and going to the bridal chamber pointed, saying, "This is the room. Please enter." Grandpa Liu took the candle and departed, as he did not expect trouble. The bandit chief pushed the door open, and saw that the interior was dark. He said, "My wife's father is really so economical that he has not even a lamp lighted in the room, and let my wife to sit in the dark. Tomorrow I will tell one of my men to bring a bucket of good oil to my mountain stronghold, so that my wife can light the lamp there."

Lu Da lying inside the bed curtains heard all this but he suppressed his inclination to laugh and made no sound.

The bandit chief felt his way into the dark room, calling out, "Wife, why do you not come to receive me? You need not be so timid because tomorrow you will be the leading woman in my stronghold." Feeling his way in the darkness, and calling "wife, wife," he at last touched the embroidered bed curtains, and lifted them. Then reaching with his hand he felt the belly of Lu Da. The latter at once took hold of the bandit chief's head and pressed him down on the bed. The chief struggled to get up but Lu Da abused him. "You are certainly a bastard" and lifting his fist struck a blow. "Why do you hit your husband?" he asked. Lu Da shouted, "I am teaching you how to recognize your old woman." He pulled him to the floor at the side of the bed, belabored him with his fist, and kicked him, while the bandit called out, "Save me, save me." Upon hearing this Grandpa Liu was almost startled out of his wits, and hastily picking up a lamp, led the bandits into the room. There they saw a big fat monk, stark naked, on top of the bandit chief, beating him. The bandits had their spears and cudgels, and Lu Da, upon seeing these, let go the chief and got his monk's staff from the bed. The men seeing his fierce bearing, all retreated, followed by Lu Da. Seizing the opportunity the bandit leader crawled to the door of the room, and walked into the yard. He soon found his unsaddled horse in the dark, broke off a twig from the tree, and jumped on the horse. He hit the horse with the twig but it did not move. The robber leader said to himself, "What a nuisance! Even the horse despises me!" He then realized that he had omitted to loosen the reins which were still fastened to the tree. He quickly snatched them, and the horse galloped away with him. As he passed through the gate, he cursed Grandpa Liu; saying, "You, old ass, need not hurry. Wherever you fly, I shall catch you." He lashed the horse which carried him up the mountain.

Grandpa Liu caught hold of Lu Da, saying, "Reverend, you have brought trouble to my home."

"You cannot say that I have done something improper," replied Lu Da. "Bring me my clothes, and when dressed I will talk with you." This was done, and Grandpa Liu said, "I hoped you would be reasonable, and get him to change his mind. I did not expect you to assault him; he will now gather a large body of his men and come to kill us."

"Grandpa, do not get excited, and I will tell you something," replied Lu Da. "I am a Major, in the army of Grand Secretary Liang at Yanan Prefecture. I became a monk because I killed a man. You need not speak of these bandits, for I should not be afraid of two thousands of them on foot or mounted. If you do not believe me then pick up my monk's staff and look at it." A servant tried to lift the staff but he could not move it. Lu Da, however, picked it up in his hand, and whirled it round as though it were only a lamp wick made of rush.

"Reverend, you must stay here and protect us," said Liu.

"That is needless talk because I will not go away."

The farmer told his servants to bring more wine but to be careful not to make the guest drunk.

"If I drink only a little wine, I can do only a small piece of business but if I drink a lot, then I can do more," said Lu Da.

On Mount Taohua, the principal head of the bandits was thinking of sending one of his men to inquire about his second-in-command's marriage. When the armed bandits returned with a defeated appearance he asked why they were in such disorder, and they told him that their second-in-command had been defeated. At this he was surprised but while he was listening to details, his assistant arrived. He noticed that he was not wearing the usual red cloth round his head, and that his green dress was in tatters. As he dismounted in front of the main building he called, "Elder brother, please save me," and when he was asked for an explanation, he continued, "I went down the mountain to the village where Grandpa Liu lives, and found that the detestable old donkey had hidden the woman, and had got a big monk to be on the bed in her place. I was quite unprepared for attack, and when I groped my way to the bed, and touched him, he hit me with his fists, kicked me, and severely maltreated me. When my men entered the room he chased them out, and while this was happening I managed to get away. Elder brother, I want revenge."

The principal bandit leader answered, "So, this is it! You rest indoors, while I go and seize this bald-headed thief." He then commanded his men to get his horse ready. He mounted, and led his men down the mountain, who shouted as they went along. Lu Da was drinking wine, when a servant reported that the bandits were again approaching. "Keep cool!" said Lu Da, "I will knock them down, and you can tie them up and take them to the *yamen*. Let somebody bring my sword." He then took off his long gown, tucked his short underclothing in his belt; put on his broad sword; he picked up the iron monk's staff, and strode to the gate

where he saw the bandit leader seated on a horse and holding a spear, surrounded by many torches. He heard him shout, "Where is that bald-headed donkey? Tell him to come at once as we must fight out the matter." Lu Da was angry and abused him, "You dirty rascal! You shall certainly recognize me." He then lifted his iron monk's staff and whirled it round.
The leader of the bandits called, "The sound of your voice is familiar to me. What is your name?"
Lu Da answered, "I am none other than Major Lu Da, in the employment of Grand Secretary Liang. Just now, however, I am a monk called Lu Zhishen."
The leader of the bandits laughed, and dismounted, and threw away his spear, knelt down, and making salutations said, "Is my elder brother quite well? I am aware that my younger brother felt the weight of your hand."
As Lu Da suspected that was a trick he retreated several steps, and examined the man closely by the light of the torches. He then recognized him as a drill instructor who had often sold medicine on the streets, and was named Li Zhong, with a nickname "The Tiger Fighting General." In those days the thieves did not consider it advisable to say "kneel down" in their band, so they used another expression, "Scissors and Brush"; as a kind of code. Li Zhong now arose and said, "Elder brother, why are you a monk?"
"I will talk that over with you indoors," replied Lu Da.
When Grandpa Liu heard this he was afraid of more trouble, as he thought that they both were thieves. When Lu Da was inside, put on his clothes, sat at a table, and called for Grandpa Liu, the latter did not care to come. So Lu Da said, "Grandpa, you need not fear. He is my younger brother." When Grandpa Liu heard this he was more confused: still he came forward, and sat on Lu Da's left. Lu Da gave a résumé of how he had killed the Bully and afterwards entered a monastery where he became drunk on two occasions, had been expelled, and sent to Kaifeng.
Li Zhong explained that when he heard Lu Da had killed the butcher at Weizhou, he tried to find him. Hearing the police wished to arrest him, he also went away. He happened to pass near this mountain and was attacked by the bandits in charge of Zhou Tong, nicknamed "Little Tyrant": but he repulsed them, so they invited him to join them as their leader.
"As things are like this you need not say anything about the bridal fiasco," said Lu Da, "because if Zhou Tong had taken the girl, her father would have become a vagrant."
Grandpa Liu was much pleased at this and ordered the servants to bring wine and food, and entertained his two guests well. He also ordered that each of the bandits was to have two small loaves of bread, two slices of meat, and a big cup of wine. Lu Da told Li Zhong to take the gold and silk, prepared by Grandpa Liu and give them back to "Little Tyrant." Li Zhong asked both of them to come to the stronghold on the mountain and stay for a few days: this was agreed to. Sedan chairs were prepared for Lu Da and Liu, while Li Zhong rode his horse. It was daybreak, and upon arrival at the stronghold they entered the hall to discuss matters. Zhou Tong was sent for but when he saw the monk he was angry, and said, "So my elder brother has not carried out my revenge but asked the monk to come, and invited him to sit in the premier place."
Li Zhong laughed, "This monk is the one who killed the Bully with three blows of his fist, about which I have told you many times."
Zhou Tong rubbed his head and exclaimed, "*Oh my!*" He then knelt and saluted Lu Da, who returned the compliment, saying, "Pray excuse my intrusion." They all sat down and Lu Da explained the position to Zhou Tong, advising him to break his engagement, and find a better girl. The wedding presents were handed to him. Zhou Tong agreed to this, and promised to let the matter drop, saying, "This is a vow taken with the breaking of an arrow."
Grandpa Liu was satisfied and returned home while the bandits prepared a feast for Lu Da. During the following days they took their guest all over the mountain to see the splendid wild scenery. The mountain was covered with grass and trees, and was difficult of access, there being only one road. After a few days, however, Lu Da saw that Li Zhong and Zhou Tong were mean, and had no nobility in their natures. When he told them he wanted to leave, they pressed him to remain but he reminded them he being a monk could not join them.
The bandit chiefs said, "As you have definitely decided to go, please wait until tomorrow, when we will go down the mountain, and plunder somebody for some money that we will give you for your traveling expenses."
The next day they made a big banquet at which the wine cups were of gold and silver but just as they sat down one of their men came to report that below were two carts with about ten travellers. Upon hearing this the bandit chiefs summoned their followers and said to Lu Da, "Elder brother, you will have to drink our wine by yourself but we will leave two men to wait upon you. We must go and get the money for you." So saying they left with their men.
Lu Da thought, "These two men are certainly very mean as they have plenty of gold and silver here to give me but instead they want to plunder other people for money and give it to me. Is not this being generous at other people's expense? So I will frighten these two men who are attending on me." He then told the men to bring him some warm wine, and after drinking some he got up and knocked them down with his fists. He then took their girdles, and tied their arms and legs. He gagged them with balls of hempen thread; he opened his bundles and threw away everything that was not needed; and then taking the gold and silver cups he made them flat by stamping on them, and packed them in his bundles. He hid the letter from Abbot Chen in his breast pocket; put on his sword; picked up his monk staff, and left the stronghold. He had a good look round, and saw that the mountain behind the stronghold was very wild. If, however, he went down the mountain by the ordinary road he was sure to meet the brigands, so he decided to descend the mountain by rolling down through the grass. He tied his broad sword, and the monk staff to the bundle, and threw them down the steep slope. He then rolled himself down to the foot of the mountain without sustaining any injury. He soon found his bundle, and started on his way. The bandit chiefs attacked the travellers, who resisted for a long time but seeing that they were outnumbered they at last retreated abandoning their baggage. Upon returning to their stronghold with the loot, the chiefs discovered that Lu Da had gone, and had taken away the gold and silver cups, and at first they thought of pursuing him but after a little discussion they agreed to let the matter drop. That day Lu Da walked a distance of about 20 *li* without coming across an inn so that by evening he was very hungry. Just then, he happened to hear the tinkling of a bell that he knew was the sound of a bell hanging at the eaves of a Buddhist temple, and it was moved by the wind. So he decided to investigate this. We will now relate what this temple was.

A score of souls,
Were lost in half a day;
Temples of long standing,
In ambers were now laid.

## 006

### The Tattooed 9 Dragons Shi Jin Robs in Red Pine Forest as a Highwayman on his own; Profound Wisdom Lu Da Zhishen Burns Waguan Monastery Temple Down

After crossing a number of ridges, Zhishen saw a path up the mountain through a large forest of pines. He followed it for less than half a *li* and arrived at a run-down monastery. It was from here that the tinkling of the bells came. Above an arch a faded vermilion sign read in letters of gold: "Waguan Monastery." Lu proceeded another forty or fifty paces, crossed a stone bridge, and entered the compound. He went directly to the guest-quarters. Its front gate was gone and its surrounding walls had crumbled.
"A big monastery like this," thought Zhishen. "How could it have deteriorated so?"
He went to the abbot's hall. It was filthy with swallow droppings. A cobwebbed lock secured its door. Lu pounded the ground with the end of his staff. "A passing monk wants some food," he cried.
Zhishen shouted for a long time but no one responded.
He walked around to the kitchen. There wasn't any cauldron. The earthen stove had collapsed. Lu untied his rucksack and placed it down before the idol of the kitchen god. Carrying his staff, he went on with his search. In the rear of the kitchen he found a small room in which a few old monks were sitting, their faces sallow and sunken.
"You monks are very rude," said Lu. "I shouted and shouted but none of you answered."
One of the monks waved his hand. "Keep your voice down."
"I'm a monk who's just passing through and I want something to eat," said Lu. "What's wrong with that?"
"We haven't eaten ourselves in three days. How can we find any food for you?"
"I'm from Mount Wutai. Even half a bowl of gruel would be all right."
"We should feed you, since you're from the place of the living Buddha. But what can we do? All the other monks are gone and we don't have a single grain. We have really been hungry for the past three days."
"Liars! I don't believe there's no grain in a big place like this."
"It's true that our monastery was once prosperous. Wandering monks came from all over. Then one of them brought a Taoist priest and they took control. They ruined everything. There's nothing those two won't do. They drove all our monks away. Only we, who are too old to move, remained. That's why we have nothing to eat."
"Liars! What do a single monk and a single priest amount to? Couldn't you have lodged a complaint with the government?"
"Reverend, you don't understand. We're a long way from any government office. Besides, even soldiers couldn't stop them. They're very fierce. Murder and arson mean nothing to them. They're living in a building behind the abbot's hall."
"What are their names?"
"The monk is called Cui. His Buddhist title is Daocheng—Accomplished. His nickname is Cast Iron Buddha. The Taoist priest is named Qiu. His father called him Second Son. His nickname is Flying Messenger from Hell. Neither of them act like men who've renounced the material world. They're just robbers in the greenwood. They only use their priesthood as a cloak."
As Zhishen was questioning the old monks he got a whiff of something fragrant. He took up his staff and went stealthily to the rear. There, on an earthen stove, steam was seeping through the reed cover of a pot. Zhishen raised the lid. Millet was simmering inside.
"You old monks are very rude," he cried. "You say you haven't eaten for three days but here you're heating a pot of gruel! Monks are supposed to speak the truth!"
Lu's discovery dismayed the old men. They hurriedly took away all the bowls, plates, dishes, ladles and buckets. Zhishen was hungry to distraction. He saw the gruel and he wanted to eat but the monks had removed all the utensils. Next to the stove he noticed a chipped old painted table, covered with dust. "Necessity is the mother of invention." Lu rested his staff, grabbed some straw from beside the stove, wiped the dust off, picked up the pot with both hands, and poured the gruel on the table.
The old monks rushed to snatch the porridge. Zhishen shoved and tripped them. Some fell, some ran away. Lu scooped gruel from the table and ate. He had just started when one of the old monks said: "We haven't eaten in three days. Only today we managed to beg this bit of millet and were making it into a little gruel, and now you're eating it!"
Lu had consumed no more than six or seven mouthfuls but on hearing this, he stopped.
Outside, someone was singing mockingly. Lu washed his hands, took up his staff and went to take a look. On the other side of a crumbling wall he saw a Taoist priest, his head bound by a black bandanna, wearing a cloth robe tied at the waist by a girdle of many colours, and shod in hemp sandals. On his shoulder was a carrying-pole from one end of which hung a bamboo basket containing a few fish and some meat wrapped in a lotus leaf. A jug of wine, its mouth also covered by a lotus leaf, dangled from the other end. The priest was bawling this song:

*In the east are you, in the west am I,*
*For you no husband, no wife for me.*
*Without any wife I can still get by,*
*Without a man how lonely you must be.*

The old monks hurried over, waving their hands, and whispered to Zhishen: "That's the priest Flying Messenger from Hell, or Second Son Qiu!"
Zhishen grasped his staff and followed him. The man, unaware that he was being trailed, went through a door in the wall behind the abbot's compound. Lu did the same. Under a green locust tree he saw a table laid with platters of food, three wine cups and three pairs of chopsticks. A fat monk sat in the middle chair. His brows were like streaks of smeared paint, his face was as black as ink. He bulged with muscles. Beneath his chest a swarthy belly protruded. A young woman sat beside him. The Taoist set down the bamboo basket and seated himself also.
Lu walked up to them. Startled, the monk jumped to his fee. "Please have a seat, brother," he cried. "Drink a cup with us."
"What do you two mean by ruining the monastery?" Zhishen demanded, tightening his grasp on his staff.
"Please be seated, brother," the monk replied. "Allow me to speak."
"Let's hear it. Out with it," Lu cut in, glaring.
"The monastery used to be a fine place. Its fields were broad, its monks were many. But those few old monks living in the cloisters like to eat and drink and carouse and spend money on women. The abbot couldn't restrain them. They complained against him and had him expelled. As a result, the monastery has fallen into decay, the monks have all left, the fields have been sold. I and this priest came here recently to take over. We hope to set the monastery in order and repair the halls."
"Who is this woman?' asked Zhishen. "Why is she here drinking?"
"Please hear me, brother," said the monk. "This woman is the daughter of Wang Youjin in the village below. He made contributions to the monastery often. But he's fallen on hard times and has had to sell all of their family property. His daughter has no other relatives, and her husband is ill. She's come here to borrow a little grain. Since her father used to be one of the monastery's donors, we've invited her to have some wine. That's all there is to it, brother. Don't listen to what those old animals say."
Lu was impressed by the monk's polite speech. "Those old monks have been playing tricks on me," he muttered. He returned to the kitchen, staff in hand. The monks had just finished their gruel and had been watching from a distance.
Zhishen pointed at them and said angrily: "So it was you who ruined the monastery. You lied to me!"
"Don't believe that monk, brother," the old men responded in chorus. "He's keeping a woman there right now. He saw you had a knife and a staff. He was unarmed, so he didn't dare quarrel. If you don't believe us, go back again and see how he treats you this time. Judge for yourself, brother. They're drinking wine and eating meat, while we hardly have any gruel. We were even worried that you wanted to eat it."
"That's true," said Lu. Holding his staff by the lower end, he went to the rear of the abbot's compound. The door in the corner of the wall was shut. Zhishen angrily broke it open with one kick and strode through. Cast Iron Buddha, or Cui Daocheng, halberd in hand, rushed forward to attack under the locust tree. With a roar, Lu sprang into the fray, brandishing his staff.
They fought fourteen or fifteen rounds. Cui, no match for Zhishen, could only parry and dodge. Weakening rapidly, he waited for a chance to run. The Taoist priest, seeing this, strode towards Lu with another halberd from the rear. Lu heard his approaching footsteps but dared not turn his head. Then he saw the priest's shadow, and knew the man was almost upon him.
"Now," shouted Lu.
Cui, panic-stricken, thought this signalled a blow from the ex-major's staff. He leaped out of the combat circle. Zhishen whirled, so that he was facing both his foes in a triangle. He fought the pair for more than ten rounds. But he was hungry and travel-weary, and couldn't cope with their combined strength. He executed a feint and ran, dragging his staff. His adversaries, waving their halberds, chased him to the outside of the monastery. They fought another ten rounds, and Lu ran again. They pursued him as far as the stone bridge. There, they sat down on the balustrade and rested.
Zhishen continued a long way. When he had caught his breath, he said to himself: "I left my rucksack by the kitchen god. I thought only of escaping and forgot to take it. Now I have no money for the road and I'm hungry. This is a pretty fix. I can't go back because those two rascals are too much for me. It's two against one. I'd only be throwing my life away."
He dawdled along another few *li* until he came to a large forest. All the trees were red pine. "A wicked-looking wood," he thought.
Suddenly, he saw a man poke his head out of the shadows. The fellow peered at him, spat, then slipped back among the trees.
"That bird is a robber, or I miss my guess, and he's here waiting for business," thought Lu. "When he saw I was a monk he knew there was no profit in me, so he spat and went away. It's just his bad luck that he's run into me. I've a bellyful of wrath and no place to get rid of it. I'll strip the lout of his clothes and sell them for wine money."
Staff in hand, he hurried towards the forest, crying: "You rogue in the wood, come out, quick!"
When the man heard this, he laughed and said: "I'm down on my luck and in need of money and he comes to pick a quarrel." He grasped his halberd and bounded out from among the trees. "Scabby donkey," he shouted. "It's you who've come looking for death! I haven't sought you out."
"I'll show you who I am," said Lu. Brandishing his staff, he charged. The other fellow rushed forward with his halberd.
When they were near each other the man said, "Hey, monk! I seem to know your voice, what's your name?"
"I'll tell you after we've fought three hundred rounds," Zhishen retorted.
Angered, the man attacked, halberd against staff. They fought a dozen or so rounds. "That monk's a grand warrior," the man said to himself admiringly. After another five rounds he shouted: "Rest a bit. I've something to say!"
Both contestants jumped from the combat circle.
"Really, what is your name?" the man queried. "I'm sure I know your voice." Zhishen told him. The man tossed aside his halberd and bowed. "Don't you recognize Shi Jin?" he asked.
"So it's you, Young Master Shi," Zhishen laughed. The two exchanged salutes and went into the forest and sat down. "Where have you been since we parted in Weizhou?" asked the monk.
"The day after I left you at the tavern I heard that you had killed Butcher Zheng and run away. The police discovered I had helped you in sending off Old Jin and his daughter, the singer, so I decided I'd better leave Weizhou too. I went to Yanzhou, looking for my teacher Wang Jin but I couldn't find him. I returned to the Northern Capital (Daming, Hebei Province) and lived there a while. But my money ran out, so I came to this place to pick up some more. I never thought we'd meet here. What made you become a monk, brother?"
Lu told his whole story from the beginning.
"If you're hungry, brother," said Shi Jin, "I have dried meat and some buns." He gave them to Zhishen. "You say you left your rucksack in the monastery," Shi Jin continued. "Let's go back and get it. If they won't give it up, we'll finish the rascals off."
"Right," said Lu.
After he and Shi Jin had eaten their fill, they took their weapons and returned to Waguan Monastery. As they neared the entrance, they saw Cui Daocheng and Second Son Qiu sitting on the bridge.
"Come on, you wretches," shouted Lu. "Let's fight to a finish!"
The fat monk laughed. "I've already licked you once. Haven't you had enough?"
Enraged, Zhishen ran towards the bridge, twirling his staff.

Cast Iron Buddha was annoyed. He charged down the bridge with his halberd.
Zhishen knew that he now had Shi Jin to back him up, and this gave him more courage. What's more, he had eaten heartily and was in high spirits. He fought the fat monk eight or nine rounds. Gradually, Daocheng weakened until he began looking for a means to escape. Qiu, the Taoist priest, saw that Cui was losing. He hurried forward with his halberd to assist.
Shi Jin bounded out of the forest and shouted: "Don't any of you try to get away!" He pushed back his broad-brimmed hat and attacked the priest, halberd in hand.
Both pairs battled furiously. The fight between Lu and Cui was reaching its climax. Lu saw an opening. "Ho," he exclaimed. With one clout of his staff he knocked Cast Iron Buddha off the bridge.
The priest saw the monk fall and lost heart. He feinted with his weapon and ran.
"Where do you think you're going?" exclaimed Shi Jin. He caught up and plunged his halberd into the priest's back. The man fell to one side. Shi Jin placed a foot on him and stabbed repeatedly.
Lu sped down from the bridge. With a single blow of his staff he broke Cui's back.
Poor ruffians, their lives vanished like a dream.
Zhishen and Shi Jin tied the bodies of their victims together and threw them into a ravine. Then they re-entered the monastery and took Lu's rucksack from the kitchen. The old monks, having seen Lu routed and afraid Daocheng and Second Son Qiu would kill them, had all hung themselves. When Zhishen and Shi Jin went through the door in the wall behind the abbot's hall, they found the kept woman had jumped into a well and committed suicide.
They searched eight or nine small buildings but found no one else.
On a bed they saw a few bundles of clothing. Shi Jin opened them. Hidden inside were gold and silver objects. They selected some and wrapped them up. In the kitchen they found fish and wine and meat. They lit the stove, cooked the food and dined.
Then each shouldered his pack. They tied reeds together into torches and ignited them in the stove. When the flames on the torches were leaping, they set fire to the small buildings in the rear. When these had burned almost to the door, they lit more torches and touched off the main hall from behind. Just then the wind rose, and crackling flames were soon spiralling into the sky. Zhishen and Shi Jin watched for a while. The whole monastery was burning briskly. "It's very beautiful here," they said to each other ironically, "but it's hardly a place to make our home!"
They set out and travelled all night. When the sky was turning light they saw a number of buildings in the distance, evidently a small town. Before long, they entered. They noticed a little tavern beside a single-plank bridge.
Lu and Shi Jin went inside and drank. They had the waiter buy them some fresh meat and rice, and they cooked these themselves. While dining they told each other of their experiences during their separate travels.
"Where will you go now?" Lu asked, when they had finished their meal.
"The only thing I can do is return to Mount Shaohua and join Zhu Wu and the other two leaders," replied Shi Jin. "After some time there, I can decide what to do next."
"Very well, brother," said Lu. He took some gold and silver drinking vessels from his bag and gave them to Shi Jin.
The two then tied on their rucksacks, took up their weapons, paid the bill and left the tavern and the town. When they had walked six or seven //they came to a fork in the road.
"We part here, brother," said Lu. "I'm going to the Eastern Capital. Don't see me off any further. You're going to Huazhou. You take that road. We'll meet again some day. If you know of anyone coming in my direction, you can have him bring me a message."
Shi Jin bowed and bid Zhishen farewell. Each went his separate way.
We'll talk now of Lu Zhishen. After eight or nine days on the road he sighted the Eastern Capital. Lu entered the city. He found it a noisy, bustling place. In the centre of town he apologetically asked a passer-by: "Could you tell me where the Great Xiangguo Monastery is?"
"There, ahead, by the bridge."
Zhishen, carrying his staff, went on to the monastery. He looked it over, east and west, then proceeded to the guesthouse. A servant went in to announce him. Soon the reception monk came out. He was somewhat startled by Lu's fierce appearance, the iron staff in his hand, the sword at his waist and the pack upon his back.
"Where are you from, brother?" he asked.
"I'm form Mount Wutai," said Zhishen. "I have a letter from my abbot, requesting Lucid Teacher, the venerable abbot of this monastery, to give me a position as a working monk."
"In that case, please come with me."
Zhishen followed him to the abbot's hall, opened his bundle and took out the letter.
"How is it you don't know the ceremony, brother?" the reception monk asked. "The abbot will be here in a minute. Remove your knife, bring out your robe and mat, and light the incense of faith so that you can do homage to the abbot."
"Why didn't you say so before?" demanded Zhishen. He took off his knife, and pulled a stick of incense and a mat and his robe out of his rucksack. But he didn't know what to do with them. The reception monk placed Lu's robe over his shoulders and told him to put the mat on the floor.
A moment later the abbot, Lucid Teacher, appeared. The reception monk stepped forward and said: "This monk comes from Mount Wutai with a letter to you from his abbot."
"It's been a long time since my brother on Mount Wutai has written," said Lucid Teacher.
"Quick, brother," whispered the reception monk. "Pay your respects to our abbot."
Lu didn't know where to put his stick of incense. The reception monk couldn't help laughing. He placed it in an incense burner. Zhishen kowtowed three times. The reception monk stopped him and presented his letter to the abbot.
Lucid Teacher opened the letter and read it. The letter set forth in detail why Zhishen had become a monk and the reason he had been sent down from Mount Wutai to the monastery in the Eastern Capital. "We pray you will exercise benevolence and give him a working post," the missive concluded. "Please do not refuse. This monk will have great attainments later on."
When he finished reading, the abbot said: "You've come a long way. Rest in the monk's quarters. They will give you something to eat."
Zhishen thanked him. He collected his mat, bundle, staff and sword, and followed a novice out.
The abbot summoned both sections of his clergy. When they had all assembled in his hall he said: "My brother abbot on Mount Wutai really has no discretion. This monk he's sent used to be an officer in a border garrison. He shaved off his hair only because he killed a man. Twice he caused riots in the monks' quarters of the Wutai monastery. He made no end of trouble. My brother abbot couldn't cope with him, so he's shoved him off on me. Shall I reject him? My brother's plea is so insistent that I can't very well refuse. But if I keep him here, he's liable to play havoc with our rules and put us in a terrible state."
"Even though he's one of our brothers," said the reception monk, "he doesn't look at all like a man who's renounced the world. How can we keep him?"
"I've thought of something," said the deacon. "Outside Sour Date Gate we have a vegetable garden behind the compound for retired working monks, don't we? The soldiers of the garrison and those twenty-old knaves living nearby are always despoiling it. They even graze sheep and horses there. It's quite a mess. The old monk in charge doesn't dare interfere. Why not let this fellow take over? At least he wouldn't be afraid of them."
"That's good idea," said the abbot. He instructed his assistant: "When that brother in the guest-room of the monks' hall has finished eating, bring him here."
The assistant went out. He soon returned with Zhishen.
"My brother abbot has recommended that you join us," said Lucid Teacher. "Our monastery has a large vegetable garden outside Sour Date Gate, next door to the Temple of the Sacred Mountain. I will put you in charge. Everyday the men tending the garden must deliver to us ten loads of vegetables. The rest will belong to you."
"I was sent by my abbot to become a member of the abbey here," said Lu. "Even if you don't make me a supervisor or deacon, how can you put me in charge of a vegetable garden?"
"You don't understand, brother," the elder interjected. "You've only just arrived. You haven't shown any special merit. How can you be appointed deacon? Overseeing the garden is also an important job."
"I'm not looking after any vegetable garden," cried Zhishen. "I won't be anything but a supervisor or deacon!"
"Let me explain," said the reception monk. "We have various kinds of members. I, for instance, am the reception monk. My job is to receive guests and visiting monks. Posts like prior, personal assistant to the abbot, scribe and elder, are special jobs. They're not easy to get. The supervisor, deacon, director and manager are custodians of the monastery's property. You've just come. How can you be given such a high post? We also have jobs like master of the surras, master of the halls, master of the rooms, master of alms begging, and master of the bath house. These positions are held by middle-ranking members.
"And then we have the keepers—keeper of the kitchen, of the tea, of the vegetable garden, of the toilets. These are all overseers' jobs, comparatively low in rank. If you keep the garden well for a year, brother, you'll be raised to keeper of the pagoda. If you do that well for a year, you'll be made master of the bath house. Only after still another year's good work might you be appointed supervisor."
"So that's how it is," said Lu. "As long as there's a chance for advancement, I'll start work tomorrow."
Lucid Teacher let him remain for the day in the abbot's hall. A notice of appointment was written and posted in the compound for retired working monks, effective the following day.
The next morning Lucid Teacher sat on his dais and issued the formal appointment of Lu Zhishen to the post of keeper of the vegetable garden. Zhishen accepted the document, bid the abbot farewell, shouldered his pack, hung his knife at his waist, and took up his staff. With two monks as escorts, he went directly to the compound to assume his duties.
In the neighbourhood of the monastery's vegetable fields were twenty or thirty rogues and gamblers. They made their living by selling the vegetables they stole from the monastery's fields. That day when a few of them went to raid the fields, they saw a notice posted on the gate of the overseer's compound. It read:

The monastery has appointed the monk Lu Zhishen overseer of these vegetable fields. Starting tomorrow, he shall be in charge. Those having no business here are strictly forbidden to enter.

The rascals called a conference of the entire gang. "The monastery has sent a monk called Lu Zhishen to take charge of the vegetable fields," they said. "He's new to the job. This is a good chance to pick a quarrel and beat him up. Teach the lout to respect us."
"I have an idea," one of them said. "He doesn't know us; how can we pick a quarrel? Let's lure him to the edge of the ordure pit instead, as if to congratulate him, then grab his legs and toss him in head over heels. It will be a nice little joke."
"Good. Good," approved the scoundrels
After making their plans, they went to seek the monk. As to Lu Zhishen, on arriving at the overseer's compound, he put his pack and luggage in the house, leaned his staff against the wall and hung up his knife. The lay brothers who worked in the fields all came to greet him and he was handed the keys. The two monks who had escorted him there and the monk he was succeeding as overseer bid him farewell and returned to the monastery. Zhishen then made a tour of the vegetable fields. He saw coming towards him 20 or 30 scamps bearing a platter of pastries and ceremonial wine. "We neighbours have heard that you've been put in charge, master monk," they said, grinning broadly, "and we've come to congratulate you." Not knowing it was a plot, Zhishen walked forward until he reached the edge of the ordure pit. The rascals advanced together, one of them intending to seize his left leg, another his right, and toss him in. The result was: A foot kicked out and a fierce mountain tiger was startled; a fist struck out and a dragon of the sea met a sorry plight. A peaceful garden was instantly changed into a minor battlefield.

Lu Zhishen, after climbing more than one hill, came to a great forest of pines and a mountain path. After following this path for two or three hundred yards, he looked up and saw an abandoned temple compound and heard the sound of bells stirred by the wind. Over the main gate was a faded vermilion plaque with four characters in gold that read, "Temple of the Ceramic Tiles." Some forty or fifty paces further on, he came to a stone bridge, and beyond it the monastery, clearly very ancient. Entering by the main gate, he looked around him. Though it had once been a large establishment, it was now in a very sorry state:
*The bell-tower is down, the temple roofs have fallen in. The monastery gate is overgrown with green ferns and the Scripture Hall is covered with jade moss. Madder shoots have sprung up between Sakyamuni's knees. just like when he spent the night on the Snowy Mountain. Kuan Yin is bound with brambles. like when she defended the Fragrant Hills. Birds build their nests throughout the sacred ruins. The Lord Buddha has been knocked awry and in his mouth spiders spin their webs. Headless Lohan with chipped torsos and broken-armed door-gods show no signs of magic power. Rabbits have burrowed in the kitchens and the high dais bears the fox's print.*
So Zhishen entered the monastery and went first to the guest quarters. Here the main door was missing, and the surrounding walls had collapsed. "A great monastery like this," he thought to himself, "why is it in such a state of neglect?" He found the abbot's quarters but the ground about was covered in bird-lime, and although there was a big lock on the door it was draped in cobwebs.
Zhishen struck the ground with his staff and called out "Here is a wandering monk, seeking refuge for the night!" He called repeatedly but no answer came. He then searched out the monastery kitchens: there were no pots and pans and the top of the stove had fallen in. Zhishen lowered his bundle and placed it in front of the shrine to the kitchen god. Then, staff in hand, he began a thorough exploration. At the back of the kitchen he found a little room. Inside it, several old monks were sitting on the floor. Their faces were yellow and their bodies emaciated.
"Really!" Zhishen exclaimed, "Have you gone out of your minds, you monks? I called and called but no one answered."
By way of reply they wagged their fingers at him and said: "There's no need to shout."
"I'm a travelling monk," Zhishen said, "I'm asking the favour of something to eat, is that unreasonable?"
One of the old monks said: "We haven't tasted food for three days, how can we find anything to give you?"
"I'm a monk from Mount Wu Tai," Zhishen said. "Never mind if you can only spare me half a bowl of thin gruel."
"A monk from the regions of the Living Buddha! We should certainly offer you food but unfortunately our community has dispersed and we haven't so much as a grain of rice. We've been without food for three days now."
"Rubbish!" said Zhishen. "I can't believe there are no provisions in a big place like this."
"This is indeed a house of some repute. It used to attract visitors from far and wide — that's what brought along one of those monks errant, as they're called. He, and a Taoist he had with him, they took the place over. They've ruined everything we had, they've no conscience at all. All the other monks have been driven away, and now there's just us few remaining, because we're too old to go anywhere. And we're without food."
"I still say it's nonsense," said Zhishen. "How can just one monk and one Taoist do all this? Why don't you report them to the government?"
"You don't understand, brother, the magistrate's a long way off. Besides, even the government troops wouldn't be able to stop them. Those two are monsters, they think nothing of killing and burning. Unfortunately they've taken up residence here, at the back of the abbot's quarters."
"What are their names?"
"The Buddhist is called Cui. His religious name is Daocheng, or Perfected Way but everyone calls him the Iron Buddha. The Taoist is Qiu, the youngest in his family, and people call him the Flying Yaksha. But they're not a bit like monks. They're more like robbers; the religious trappings are more of a disguise, like."
While Zhishen was making these inquiries, an exciting odour was wafted to his nostrils. Staff in hand, he padded to the back to investigate. What met his eyes was a little earthenware stove with a woven cover, a fragrant steam spiralling up from it. He lifted the cover and there was a pot of gruel bubbling away. "Well!" he exclaimed. "You shameless old men, you said you hadn't had food for three days, and here you are cooking gruel! How can monks tell such lies?"
When they saw that Zhishen had discovered their gruel, the old men lamented bitterly and decamped with every bowl, dish, spoon, ladle or receptacle in the place. Now, here was a problem. Zhishen was starving and there was the gruel but he had no means of eating it. All there was beside the stove was a broken lacquer table, its surface covered in ashes and dust. Well, necessity is the mother of invention, as they say. Zhishen laid aside his staff, collected some straw from beside the stove, and wiped the table clean. Then he picked up the pot in both hands and tipped the contents out onto the table. The old monks rushed back to try and rescue their gruel but Zhishen manhandled and kicked them: the luckier ones ran off and the less lucky were knocked down. Then Zhishen began to eat, scooping up the gruel with both hands. After he'd had only a few mouthfuls, the old monk returned to protest: "We really haven't eaten for three days; we had just managed to beg a bit of millet to make this gruel, and you've stolen it." Zhishen had only eaten five or six mouthfuls but this speech affected him, and he left them the rest.
At this point he heard someone humming outside. He washed his hands, picked up his staff, and went out to see who it was. Through a gap in the wall he saw a Taoist wearing a black cloth on his head, with a white cotton tunic, a brightly coloured belt and hemp shoes, and a carrying-pole across his shoulders. On one end of this was a bamboo basket with a fish's tail protruding from it, and also containing some meat wrapped in a lotus leaf; on the other was a jug of wine, also wrapped in lotus leaves. The song went like this: "You to the east and I to the west, you've no man and I've no girl. Things aren't so bad without a wife. A girl with no husband, what a life!" As the old monks fled past Zhishen, they gesticulated and whispered, "That's him, that's the Flying Yaksha!"
Zhishen followed the Taoist, staff in hand, as the latter, still unaware of Zhishen's presence, slipped behind the wall of the abbot's quarters. Zhishen was close on his heels. There, under an ash tree was a table, laid with dishes, three cups and three sets of chopsticks, and in the midst of this scene, sat a fat monk, with eyebrows like lacquer brushes, a face the colour of ink, and a huge muscular torso culminating in a bulging black stomach. In the side gallery a young woman was drinking wine. The Taoist put down his basket and sat down. When Zhishen materialized before them it gave the monk a considerable shock and brought him rapidly to his feet. Then he said: "Please, dear brother in religion, sit down and join us in a cup."
Zhishen, taking a firmer grip on his staff, said: "Why have you laid this temple in ruins?"
"Dear brother, sit down and let me tell you about it."
"Tell then," said Zhishen, fixing him with a fierce stare.
"This poor house of ours was once a wonderful place, with broad domains and a large community. But those old monks — you must have seen them in the gallery — began to drink and cause many scandals, squandering the temple funds on women. The abbot was quite unable to control them, in fact they succeeded in forcing him to leave. This is the reason the monastery fell into ruins. Later most of the monks left and the land was sold off. I, humble monk that I am, came to live here but recently, with this good Taoist. Our intention is to repair the gate and restore the sacred halls."
"And this young woman drinking wine here?" Zhishen asked.
"Dear brother, allow me to explain. She is the daughter of Wang Youjin, from the neighbouring village. Her late father was a benefactor of the temple but the family lost all its money, and now she is in great distress. She has lost all her own family and her husband is sick. She came here to borrow rice, and in memory of her father's generosity to our house, I thought fit to offer her a cup of wine, that's all there is to it. I trust you will not believe any scandal put about by those old scoundrels outside."
This all sounded quite respectable to Zhishen, so he said: "Those lousy old men made a fool of me," and, staff in hand, took himself back to the kitchen. The old monks were still there, after finishing off their gruel. Zhishen scowled and pointed an accusing finger: "It seems you are the ones who ruined the monastery," he said. "What do you mean by telling me all those lies?"
"Don't believe a word of it!" the old men chorused. "Don't you see he's got a woman in there? He suddenly saw you with your sword and your staff, and he hadn't got a weapon, so he didn't want to quarrel with you. If you don't believe us, just go back in there and see how he treats you now! Anyway, work it out for yourself: they've got wine and meat, and we've not even got gruel, or if we did have some, we were afraid you were going to eat it all."
"There's something in what you say," said Zhishen. So back he went to the abbot's quarters, staff in hand as always. But this time he found the door shut. He kicked it open angrily and erupted into the room. The Iron Buddha rushed forward immediately, waving a sword, and took his stand against Zhishen under the tree. Zhishen gave a roar and whirling his staff sprang to the attack.

After fourteen or fifteen assaults, it was clear that the Iron Buddha could not subdue Zhishen, so he contented himself with parrying and blocking, feinting and dodging, waiting for an opportunity to break off. Seeing his friend in difficulties, the Taoist now took up a sword and hurried up to attack Zhishen from behind. Thoroughly occupied with the fight, Zhishen heard the steps behind his back but did not dare turn round to look. But the man's shadow forewarned him of a treacherous attack, so he gave a sudden shout which startled the Iron Buddha who, assuming a crushing blow was on the way, leapt out of range. This gave Zhishen the chance to turn, so that now the three of them formed a triangle, with the big monk and the Taoist both striking at Zhishen, who bore the brunt of a dozen more attacks.

Now, one, Zhishen was hungry, two, he had travelled a good many miles, and three he could hardly match the unsapped strength of two adversaries. So he feinted, and then retreated, his staff still at the ready. They pursued, and came up with him again outside the temple, where Zhishen had to bear a further dozen or so assaults, before he could give them the slip. They followed but only as far as the stone bridge, where they sat down on the parapet and left him to flee unmolested.

Zhishen covered quite a lot of ground before he stopped to regain his breath. "I left my bundle in front of the altar to the kitchen god," he reminded himself. "I was too busy saving my skin to think of getting it. Now here I am without luggage and starving to death, what am I going to do? I ought to go back for it but I'd have to fight those two again, and two of them are too much for me on my own, it would be a stupid way to throw away my life." So he went forward, haltingly. When he had gone a mile or two, he came to a thick wood of red pines.

With curled limbs twisting every way
*A thousand barefoot dragons lie;*
*Weird shadows clustering all around,*
*A million red-scaled monsters stand.*
*You'd say a judge's beard from far,*
*Near to it's more like ghostly hair.*
*Who sprinkled the forest with fresh blood?*
Or is it soaked in cinnabar?

Lu Zhishen said to himself, "This is a pretty wild-looking wood." And just then he noticed in the shadow of the trees a man, who after sticking his head out and observing him furtively, spat, and disappeared. "This precious specimen looks to me like a highwayman," Zhishen said to himself, "And he's waiting here to do business. He must have seen I was a monk, and no good for his purposes, that's why he spat and went back into hiding. Well, it's his bloody luck that he happened to bump into me — and me with my belly full of nothing at all but anger — and just in need of something to take it out on, to boot. I'll have his clothes off him, that should at least buy me some wine." Brandishing his staff he rushed into the wood and shouted: "All right, you, show your face, fast!"

The other, hiding in the thicket, heard and smiled to himself: "Bad luck for him, he's walked straight into it!" Then he sprang into the open, sword in hand, and shouted: "Come on, you bald ass! You must want to die! It wasn't me that came looking for you."

"I'll teach you to know me," Zhishen replied, and advanced, whirling his staff, while the other, twisting the sword in his hand, prepared to engage him. But as he awaited the monk's approach, it struck him that the voice was familiar, and he said: "Hey, monk! I seem to know your voice, what's your name?"

"I'll tell you that when we've traded three hundred blows," Zhishen answered grimly.

The stranger was incensed, and staff and sword began to clash. After they had each sustained a dozen assaults, the man was secretly applauding his adversary's skill. "This monk's a wonder!" he muttered. Another five assaults and he cried: "A rest! I have something to say." They both drew back from the circle of combat, and the man said: "What is your real name? I am sure I know your voice." When Zhishen told him, the other threw down his sword, and bowed his head in respectful greeting. "Don't you recognize Shi Jin?" he said.

"Of course! It's Squire Shi!" exclaimed Zhishen.

Now they both exchanged respectful greetings, and together entered the wood to sit down. "Tell me, Squire, what happened to you after we parted in Weizhou?" Zhishen asked.

"After we said goodbye at the winehouse, I heard next day about your killing the butcher, so I took off. The police knew about our helping Old Jin to escape, so I thought it best to leave Weizhou. I continued the search for my master, Wang Jin, and went as far as Yanzhou but to no avail. I then returned to the Northern Capital, and remained there some while. When I ran out of funds I came here, in search of money. I was certainly not expecting to run into you. Why have you become a monk?"

Zhishen told him all, right from the beginning.

"But you're hungry, my friend," Shi Jin said, "and I've got some dried meat and pancake here." He took out the food and made Zhishen eat. "Since you say your bundle is at the monastery," Shi Jin said, "I'll go with you to get it. If those blighters don't want to give it up, we'll finish them off."

"Right!" said Zhishen. When he and Shi Jin had eaten their fill, they took up their weapons and set off for the Temple of the Ceramic Tiles.

When they reached the monastery, the two villains were still sitting on the bridge. Zhishen shouted a challenge: "Come on, then, you bastards, we're going to fight again; this time prepare to pay with your lives!"

The monk replied scornfully: "Aren't you satisfied with the thrashing I gave you before, have you come back for more?"

The furious Zhishen whirled his iron staff and advanced. The Iron Buddha, similarly aroused, gripped his sword and stepped down from the bridge.

Now, one, Zhishen felt a new man, knowing he had Shi Jin behind him, and two, he had eaten his fill that had restored all his natural strength and vigour. So after eight or nine assaults, the Iron Buddha began to fade and was looking for a chance to withdraw; seeing his companion weaken, the Flying Yaksha took up his sword, planning to intervene. But at this juncture Shi Jin stepped out of the wood and shouted "Not so fast, you two!" Removing his hat and raising his sword, he engaged the Flying Yaksha. Two pairs of combatants now cut and slashed at each other. As the fight between Zhishen and the Iron Buddha reached its climax, the former gave a sudden cry of "Got you!", and with one quick blow of his staff sent his opponent crashing down from the bridge. When he saw the monk fall, the Taoist had no more stomach for the fight. He feinted and then turned to flee. Shouting "Where do you think you're going?", Shi Jin caught the Taoist fair and square with a thrust in the back. He fell to one side. Shi Jin leapt on top of him and brought his sword down, splat! Zhishen meanwhile had rushed down below the bridge where a single blow on the back finished off the Iron Buddha. This was the end of those two miserable wretches. Their lives were empty as a fleeting dream. Truly it was a case of "Past deeds return to plague the doer."

Zhishen and Shi Jin took up the two corpses, tied them together, and threw them into a ravine. Then they went into the monastery. The old monks, when they saw Zhishen lose to the Iron Buddha, had assumed they would all be murdered, and hanged themselves. Zhishen and Shi Jin went to look at the room behind the abbot's quarters. Here they found that the young woman the villains abducted had killed herself by jumping into the well. They searched all the other rooms and found no living thing. All they found was Zhishen's bundle that had not been opened and which Zhishen gladly shouldered, and then, on a bed, three or four other bundles. On opening these, Shi Jin found they were mostly clothes but wrapped up in them were some pieces of silver. He made a single bundle out of what was worth having, and took it up. In the kitchen they found wine and meat, of which they ate their fill. Then they made two torches and set them in front of the stove. They scattered the embers from the stove till the torches caught. The flames mounted rapidly and soon all the little rooms at the back were ablaze. The fire spread to the front and they made more torches and set fire to the eaves of the great hall of the Buddha. A fresh breeze arose just now, making the flames crackle and leap till they were near to set the heavens alight. The two stood and admired their handiwork for a moment: the whole temple was ablaze. But as the saying is, " 'Tis fine to stay at Liang Hall but in the end its comforts pall." So they said to themselves, "We'd better get going."

The two friends set off immediately and walked all night. Just as day was beginning to dawn some figures came into view, off in the distance, and then they saw there was a village. Thither they directed their steps, and came to a tiny inn, beside a bridge made of a single plank. Here's how it was:

*A rough cloth hangs in the half-open doorway. Jars of thin acid wine stand beside the earthen bed. Figures of the Immortals are inked on the dusty walls. The country lad who pours the wine is certainly not Sima Xiangru in his days of poverty, nor is the coarse girl who tends the stove at all like Zhuo Wenjun, his faithful wife. The calligraphy on the walls is done by local scholars when in their cups, and the pile of rough raincoats belongs to the rude fishermen who drink there.*[1]

They entered the inn, bought some wine, ordered meat from the landlord and asked him to let them have some rice. Thus they broke their fast. And as they drank, they regaled each other with tales of the road.

"And where are you heading now?" Zhishen asked Shi Jin, when they had eaten and drunk their fill.

"The only way for me now is to go back to Little Mount Hua to rejoin Zhu Wu and the other two, and enter their band. After a while I'll reconsider."

"That makes sense," said Zhishen. He opened his bundle and took out some silver that he presented to Shi Jin. Then the two tied their bundles, took up their weapons and settled the account. After leaving the inn and the village, they walked another mile or two till they came to a place where three ways parted. "Dear Brother, here we must separate," Zhishen said. "I am heading for the Eastern Capital, so you must leave me. If Huazhou is your destination, that way lies your road. We will meet again another day. But perhaps if you can find a reliable messenger we may have news of each other."

They said their farewells, and then each pursued his separate way.

After eight or nine days on the road, Zhishen reached the Eastern Capital:

*A thousand gates, a million doors: everywhere the glamour of ostentatious wealth. In busy streets and markets every style and fashion is on show. At the sign of the Phoenix, treasures of every conceivable kind are displayed. In the Dragon Room there's a dazzling set of glass objects. Famous courtesans saunter among the willows of Garden Road and the Music Room is packed with the latest singers. Noisy carousing fills the houses of rich men, while the offspring of the nobility summon prostitutes to their palaces.*

Zhishen saw the hustle and bustle of the capital, the shouting and commotion. He entered the inner city. Cautiously he asked a passer-by the way to the Xiangguo Temple. "Right ahead, by the Zhou Bridge," was the answer. On he went, swinging his staff, and soon he reached his objective. He entered the main gate and gazed around. It was a fine temple!

*The temple gate rears up impressively, the Hall of the Buddhas radiates peace and repose. Overhead the imperial charter is clearly displayed on a tablet. On either side of the door stand two most fearsome door-gods. The five main halls are provided with jade-coloured dragon-scale roofs; the four monks' dormitories have intricate inlays of bricks made smooth by rubbing. Bell-towers are many as trees in a wood, the Scripture Halls have a dignified and reverend air. The flagstaff soars into the clouds, the elegant pagoda pierces the heavens. The wooden fish is hung up tidily, the clapper-board is suspended on high. Before the Buddha lamps and candles burn, smoke from the incense in the braziers spirals upwards. The temple of Kuan Yin is next to the shrine of the Founder, the sacred buildings are connected by corridors and a waterway leads to the garden of the Lohan. The Holy Custodian of the Law haunts these halls; here the demon-quelling Buddha is ever at hand.*

Zhishen looked about him, and then directed his steps to the guest quarters. A monk saw him and went to notify the father hosteller. The latter appeared a moment later. Seeing Zhishen's fierce appearance, with his iron staff and his heavy sword, and a heavy pack on his back, the hosteller felt apprehensive.

"Where are you from, worthy brother?" he asked.

Zhishen carefully put down his belongings and his staff and went through the formality of a polite greeting that the hosteller returned.

Then Zhishen said: "I am from Mount Wu Tai. The Abbot, the Reverend True Knowledge, has given me this letter and told me to come to here and ask the Reverend Abbot to take me in and give me a position in the monastery's administration.

"If you're bearing a letter from Abbot True Knowledge you'd better come with me to the abbot's quarters," the hosteller said. Zhishen followed him to the abbot's quarters, where he opened his bundle and took out the letter. He remained holding it in his hand.

"Worthy brother," the hosteller said, "how is it you don't know any rules of etiquette? You're about to have an audience with the Abbot! You must take off your sword! And you ought to have your robe, your mat, your sticks of incense all ready, to honour the Abbot."

"Why didn't you say so before?" said Zhishen, dutifully removing his sword and fishing about in his bundle for the incense, a candle, the robe and the mat. But he couldn't for the life of him work out how to arrange all these things. Finally the hosteller helped him on with the robe and told him to place the mat first.

A moment later the Abbot entered.

"This monk is from Mount Wu Tai and has a letter from Abbot True Knowledge," the hosteller announced.

"Ah, it is long since I was gratified with a letter from his holiness," Abbot Pure Knowledge said.

"Come, come, brother," the hosteller reminded Zhishen, "you have to show your respect to the Abbot."

Zhishen was still holding the incense, so he stuck it in a bowl, and prostrated himself three times before the Abbot, then presented the letter. The Abbot took the letter and opened it. The letter recounted Zhishen's past and the reasons for his leaving the world to become a monk, as well as his unfortunate behaviour in the meditation hall that necessitated his departure from Mount Wu Tai. It ended like this:

*I most sincerely hope that of your charity and goodness you will receive him and find him a position in your monastery. Do not reject him, I beg of you, for one thing is most certain: this monk will finally bear wondrous fru*it.

When he had finished the letter, the Abbot said: "Monk from afar please go to the hall to rest and take a little nourishment."

Zhishen thanked him and when he had picked up his robe and mat and put them away in his bundle and collected his staff and sword, an acolyte led him out.

The Abbot now summoned the entire community and addressed them as follows: "Hear all of you how unreasonable is our brother in religion Abbot True Knowledge. This monk he sends us was originally an army officer. He only shaved his head and became a monk because he had killed a man. Twice he disturbed the peace of their meditation hall with rowdy behaviour. He thus rendered himself unacceptable in that place. They can't keep him, so we must have him? Suppose we don't want him? But my brother here entreats me a thousand times not to refuse him. Suppose we receive him and he again slights the holy rules, what then?"

The hosteller said: "We have all had a look at the man, Father Abbot, and from his appearance he does not seem to be at all pious, how can we possibly take him?"

The prior spoke: "I have been thinking, Father Abbot. There is that little plot of land, behind the building we use for retreats, outside the Gate of Wild Jujubes. It is constantly being invaded by soldiers of the imperial guard and by vagabonds from outside the walls who let their goats and horses in and cause much damage. There's an old monk who's supposed to look after it but he doesn't dare do anything. Why not send Lu Zhishen there, as overseer? He might even do some good."

"We'll do as the prior suggests," the Abbot said. He sent an acolyte to the monastery guest-house, with instructions to return with the new monk as soon as he had finished his meal. In almost no time the acolyte came back to the abbot's quarters with Zhishen. Abbot Pure Knowledge said: "Since you come here with a recommendation from my brother Abbot True Knowledge, and a request that you be taken in here, temporarily, and given some position, know that this monastery possesses a large kitchen garden, just outside the Gate of the Wild Jujubes under the walls of the Temple of the Holy Mountain. I am sending you there as manager and overseer. You will see that the gardeners bring us ten loads of vegetables each day, and the rest will be yours to do what you like with."

Zhishen was indignant. "My master, Abbot True Knowledge, sent me to your temple to seek a position of some kind. Do you mean to say that instead of asking me to be prior or bursar you want me to go and look after a lot of vegetables?"

The chaplain responded. "You've misunderstood, brother," he said. "You've only just arrived, you're only just accepted, you've had no time to prove your worth. How can you expect to be made prior straight away? Anyway, superintendent of the garden is an important post."

"I'm not looking after any kitchen garden," Zhishen said. "I'll only accept the post of prior or bursar."

"Now listen here," said the hosteller. "Each of us junior monks with special offices has his own responsibility. Mine for instance, as hosteller, is to see to the comfort of any pilgrims or monks who happen to turn up. The others who serve as deacon, choir-master, librarian, registrar and so on, all have important jobs which are no sinecure. And the prior, bursar, secretary and director, they have the key positions, because they have to administer the property and funds of the monastery. Now, you've only just come, how can you expect to get one of these top jobs? There's also the master of the sutras, who looks after the scriptural texts, the master of halls, responsible for the halls, the cell master, responsible for the cells, the alms master who organizes the begging, and the ablutions master, who looks after the bathrooms — those are all posts of the middle rank; and then there's the pagoda attendant, the kitchen master, the tea master, the toilet-keeper and the garden superintendent — these are all overseer's posts, lower in rank. After a year, if you've managed the garden well, then you may be promoted to pagoda attendant, and if you perform that duty well for a year, then you may be promoted to ablutions master, and then perhaps after another year to bursar."

"All right then," said Zhishen. "If that's the way it is, and seeing there's promotion, I'll start tomorrow."

Now that Zhishen had agreed to go, the Abbot allowed him to spend the night there in the abbot's quarters. The same evening his future duties were set down, an official notice of the appointment was written and someone was sent to the garden to post it on the wall of the overseer's lodge. Following which, the company retired.

Early next morning the Abbot ascended his throne and wrote out an official letter of appointment entrusting the garden to Zhishen's supervision. Zhishen approached the throne and received the letter. Then he took his leave of the Abbot, picked up his bundle, sword and staff, and guided by two of the monks set off for his new place of residence beyond the Gate of Wild Jujubes.

The wayfarer finally reaches town
*At the end of a lonesome, weary way.*
*The ruined monastery he's just burnt down;*
*He'll one day command a tumultuous fray.*
*At the Xiangguo Temple his case is addressed;*
*He's sent to manage a vegetable plot.*
*But the seeker has never a point of rest,*
Movement and change are ever his lot.

Now there was in the neighbourhood of this garden a bunch of wastrels, a gang of idle thriftless miscreants whose habit it was to forage there, pilfering the vegetables for their subsistence. On one such expedition they saw the public notice posted on the overseer's lodge. It read: "The Xiangguo Temple announces the appointment of Father Lu Zhishen as resident manager of this vegetable plot. From tomorrow when Father Lu takes up his duties no trespassers will be permitted to enter and despoil this land." Those who saw this notice reported it to the others and a discussion ensued. "The temple is sending a monk, a Father Lu something-or-other, to look after the garden. We'd better take advantage of the fact he's new, and think up a few tricks, rough him up a bit, so he'll know he'd better do what we want."

"I've got an idea," one of them said. "He doesn't know us, so he won't be expecting any trouble. We'll wait till he comes, then lure him onto the edge of the cesspit, pretending we want to pay him our respects. Then we'll kick the bugger into the cesspit, arse-over-tip." Everyone applauded this scheme. The plan having been agreed on, all they had to do was await the monk's arrival.

When he arrived Lu Zhishen went straight to the overseer's lodge, disposed of his bundle, propped his staff against the wall and hung up his sword. The lay brothers who worked in the garden came to pay their respects and all the keys were handed over to the new incumbent. The two brothers, together with the old monk who had previously been in charge, returned to the temple. Zhishen then went out to take a good look round his new domain. The first thing he saw was a crowd of ruffians approaching with offerings of fruit and wine. With a good deal of sniggering, they said: "Welcome to your new appointment, Reverend. We are your neighbours and we've come to congratulate you."

Zhishen did not know of their plot, of course. When he was near the edge of the cesspit, the band of ruffians tried to rush him: one tried to grab his right leg and another tried to grab his left leg, they were planning to trip him up. But, as they say,

He lifts his foot, and the mountain tiger quails;
His fist descends, and the mighty dragon pales.

Or to put it another way,

A plot that wholesome fruits should yield,

Becomes a contentious battlefield.

Lu had crossed several mountain ridges before he entered a pine forest, and still following a path for about half of one *li* he at last came to a ruined monastery on the eaves of which bells were tinkling in the breeze. Above the main entrance was an honourary tablet in a horizontal position with four characters "Waguan Monastery" in a dilapidated condition. He crossed a stone bridge, and entering the monastery went to the monk's living rooms. There he found there were no doors, windows, or walls left standing, and wondered how the place had been destroyed. Near the abbot's living quarters the ground was covered with bird's excreta, and there a door was locked and covered with spider's webs. He stuck his staff into the ground and called out, "Are there any monks here? I want some food." Although he said this several times there was no reply. So be went to the kitchen but found that there was no boiler and that the cooking range had been destroyed. There he placed his bundle in the seat usually occupied by the supervisor at meal times, and then went to look round the place. Behind the kitchen he found a small room in which several emaciated old monks were sitting on the ground. He shouted, "You monks have no manners. I called out several times without getting a single reply from you."

They waved their hands, and said, "Do not talk so loudly."

"I am a traveling monk, and only demand a meal from you so what harm is there in that?"

An old monk replied, "For three days we have had no food so how can we give you some?"

"I am from Mount Wutai, and even if you have only stale congee I beg you to let me have half a bowl of it."

The old monk replied, "As you come from a place where there is a living Buddha we certainly ought to give you some food but as a matter of fact we have not got even a grain of rice in this monastery, and most of the monks have already left. For three days we have not had a bite of food."

"Nonsense! I don't believe that," said Lu Da.

The old monk continued, "This monastery was certainly not a small one, and we collected subscriptions over a large area. But some time ago a traveling monk came here with a Taoist and they seized all the property for themselves. They did everything that is bad, and that was why almost all the monks left. We are so old that we could not go with them, and we live here in a state of starvation."

"Nonsense! If these two men did such things why did you not complain to the government?"

"Reverend, you do not understand. The *yamen* is a long way off but even if the magistrate came here he would not put matters right, because these two men are exceedingly fierce, and would kill somebody or set the place on fire. They live in the abbot's quarters at the back of this building."

"What are the names of those two men?" asked Lu Da.

"The monk is called Cui; his religious name is Daocheng, and his nickname is 'Iron Buddha.' The Taoist priest is called Qiu Xiaoyi, and his nickname is 'Flying Ogre.' But they are just robbers, and not like clerics. Outwardly they look like clerics but their innermost thoughts are vile."

While Lu Da was listening to this he became aware of a fragrant smell, and turning round he saw a cooking pot with a cover of matting through which steam was issuing. He lifted the cover, and saw that the pot was full of maize and water. He said, "You old monks said that you had had no food for three days, and yet here is a pot full of maize congee. Why did you lie to me?"

When they saw that he had found the congee they removed the bowls, saucers, chopsticks, and ladles so that he should not eat any. But he was so hungry that he decided to take drastic steps. Taking a broken table near the stove he wiped off the dust with a whisp of grass; then taking the pot with both hands he emptied the contents on the table. Upon seeing this all the monks came forward with bowls to help themselves but Lu Da pushed them away. He took the congee with both hands, and ate it.

The old monks said, "For three days we have had no food, and we obtained this maize outside by begging but now you eat it."

Lu Da had taken about seven mouthfuls, and so he desisted taking any more. Just then he heard someone outside singing a ribald song, so he washed his hands, picked up his monk staff, and hurried off to see who was singing. Looking through a partitioned wall that had been partly broken down, he saw a Taoist who was wearing a black turban,[56] a shirt, a sash of many colours round his waist, hempen shoes, and was carrying a load suspended from a pole over his shoulder. In one bamboo basket was a fish with its tail showing over the side, and above it was a lotus leaf, with some meat on the top. In the other basket he carried a bottle of wine also covered by a lotus leaf. He was singing:

"You there, I here: each leads a single life,
You have no husband, I have no wife:
I have no wife: how lonely I must be,
You have no husband: don't you pity me."

All the old monks had followed Lu Da, and they now pointed to the Taoist and whispered, "That is the priest called Flying Ogre."

Lu Da took his staff, following the Taoist who entered the abbot's living quarters without knowing he was being followed. Inside, Lu Da saw an ash tree in the courtyard with a table under it, on which were plates of vegetables, three wine cups, and three pairs of chopsticks. At the table sat a fat monk, whose eyebrows looked as though they had been brushed and waxed stiff. He was very muscular and his face sallow. His clothing was not fastened, and disclosed his belly. At his side sat a young woman. The Taoist put down the baskets and took a seat. Lu Da walked to the table, and the monk, being startled at seeing him, rose, and said, "I request you, my brother, to sit down and have a cup of wine with us."

"Why have you two destroyed this monastery?" asked Lu Da.

"Brother, please be seated and listen to me."

Lu Da stared at him and said, "Say on, say on!"

The priest continued, "Previously this monastery had much land and many monks. Those old monks who are now in the veranda used to drink wine, and use the monastery money for women. The abbot issued an order prohibiting these practices, and as the monks disobeyed the order, he resigned. They ruined the monastery then, and sold the land so that many of the monks left. The Taoist and I have recently arrived, and we intend to repair the monastery."

"Who is this woman, and why is she drinking wine here?"

"Brother, allow me to tell you that she is the daughter of Wang Youjin, who lives in a village nearby. Her father was a donor of our monastery but now he is ruined, and the family is in extreme poverty. Her husband was inflicted with a disease, and as there was no other person at home she came here to borrow rice. I knew her and therefore gave her a drink of wine. There was no other intention. You, brother, must not listen to all those 'old animals' have to say."

Lu Da believed what he heard; so replied, "How that old monk has deceived me!" So saying, he picked up his staff and returned to the kitchen. The old monks had eaten all the maize congee but were still there. He pointed at them and said: "It was you who previously destroyed this monastery, and you have told me a lot of lies."

An old monk replied, "Brother, you must not listen to their talk, as they keep a woman inside there. They saw you had your sword and the heavy monk's staff, and as they were not armed, did not care to fight with you. If you do not believe me, then go back, and see how they treat you the second time. Brother, think a little. They have both wine and meat, whereas we cannot get even congee, and we were afraid that you would eat the little we had."

"What you say seems reasonable," said Lu Da. He took his staff and returned to the abbot's quarters but found the door closed. He was angry, and kicked open the door. He hurried inside, and saw that "Iron Buddha" was now armed with a halberd, and was advancing towards the ash tree, with the intention of fighting Lu Da, who gave a loud whoop, and whirling aloft his monk's staff, engaged "Iron Buddha" in conflict. They fought fifteen bouts but the "Iron Buddha" could not overcome Lu Da, and then the former took up a defensive attitude, parrying the blows and thrusts, slowly retreating. The Taoist saw that "Iron Buddha" was getting the worst of the fight, picked up a halberd, and came behind Lu Da, with the intention of stabbing him. Lu Da heard footsteps but dared not turn round. He also saw the shadow of a man, and suspected treachery. He called out " *Zhao*" (I will hit you), and upon hearing this Night Witch jumped out of the way of Lu Da's staff. Lu Da turned partly round so that he was facing them both in the form of a triangle. The two men combined to fight with Lu Da for ten bouts. He was hungry, and was also tired through walking so far, and knew that he could not defeat these two men with their spare energy. So he retreated, trailing his staff on the ground. The two men pursued him as far as the monastery gate, where they again fought. Lu Da withdrew to a stone bridge where the two men gave up the pursuit and sat down on the parapet. Lu Da went some distance, and then remembered he had left his bundle in the monastery. Moreover, he had no money, and wondered what he must do. He could not go back, as he knew if he faced the two men, it would mean disaster. He walked a little further but was in doubt whether to go on or not. After going a few *li* he saw a forest of pine trees which had a forbidding aspect.

In the shadow of the trees he saw a man looking round stealthily, and upon seeing Lu Da he uttered an exclamation, spat, and slipped back into the forest. Lu Da thought the man was a robber, who perhaps thought it would be useless to hold up a monk. But Lu Da decided to vent his rage on that man and take away the man's clothes which he could perhaps pawn for wine and food. He called, "You, footpad, come out at once."

The man in the forest laughed when he heard this, and replied, "I have bad luck, and you come here to pick a quarrel with me!" He then took his halberd, and coming into the open, called out, "You bald-headed donkey! You are evidently seeking for an opportunity to die."

"You will soon know me," called Lu Da, who advanced, nourishing his staff, while the other man also came forward, holding his halberd. When they were near each other the man said, "Your voice is familiar to me. What is your name?"

"When I have given you a good beating, I will tell you my name but not now," said Lu Da.

The man was angry, and advancing fought Lu Da but after a little contact he began to appreciate the skill of his opponent, whom he had regarded at first as only a stupid monk. So after a few more bouts of fighting, he said, "Let us rest. I have something to say to you." They both sprang apart at the same time, and the man said, "What is your name? Your voice seems familiar."

Lu Da told his name, and upon hearing it the man threw down his sword, and kneeling, saluted with folded hands; asking, "Do you not recognize Shi Jin?"

Lu Da laughed and replied, "Can you really be Master Shi?" He then knelt down and saluted. This done, they both went into the forest and sat down, telling their experiences since they last met. Shi Jin had some cold meat and cakes that he offered to Lu Da who was hungry. He said, "As your bundle is in the monastery I will go there with you and take it. If they decline to give it to us we will kill them." Lu Da agreed to this, and when they had finished their food, set off for the monastery. On their arrival they found the Flying Ogre and Iron Buddha sitting on the parapet of the bridge. Lu Da called, "Come here, you two men! This time I shall kill you."

Iron Buddha laughed, "I have just defeated you—why do you come here again?"

Lu Da whirled his monk's staff in the air and Iron Buddha seized his halberd, and went to meet him. Lu Da felt braver because Shi Jin was now with him, and moreover was no longer hungry. He fought for nine bouts until Iron Buddha became weak and thought of retreating. Seeing this Flying Ogre went to his assistance but Shi Jin ran from the shade of a tree, and attacked him. There were now four men fighting, two on each side. After a short time Lu Da became aware that he was getting the better of his opponents, and shouted "Strike," and made a final effort, striking Iron Buddha with his staff, knocking him off the bridge into the water below. When Flying Ogre saw this he retreated: but Shi Jin running after him struck him a blow in the back. Flying Ogre fell down and Shi Jin placing his foot on the body stabbed him repeatedly. Lu Da went under the bridge and killed Iron Buddha. We cannot but pity these two ruffians, who were sent to their last sleep in this way, and whose deeds passed like a bad dream.

Lu Da and Shi Jin went into the monastery and got Lu Da's bundle. They found the old monks had all strangled themselves in order to avoid what they thought would be certain death. When the woman saw Lu Da and Shi Jin, she, too, was afraid and committed suicide by jumping down the well. They went through the now vacant rooms, and found some bundles of clothing lying on a bed which they opened and found silver inside. In the kitchen they found fish, meat, and wine that gave them a good meal. Before their departure they set fire to the monastery. It happened a strong wind was blowing, so that very soon the whole place was in flames. They walked all night, and at dawn saw a large market town in the distance. Just before reaching it, they stopped at an inn, ordering the waiter to buy meat and rice, and have it cooked for them. Over their wine they discussed their future plans, and Shi Jin said he was going to Mount Shaohua to join the bandits there. They left the inn, and after traveling about seven *li* they came to a place where three roads met, and Lu Da decided they must separate, as he was going on to the Eastern Capital.

Lu Da arrived at the Eastern Capital in nine days. The streets were very crowded and noisy. Upon reaching the centre of the town he politely asked a passer-by where the Great Xiangguo Monastery was, and was directed. Upon entering the monastery he went towards the small room where guests are received. A servant reported his arrival, and without delay the monk came out to welcome the guest but when he saw the fierce appearance of Lu Da with his monk's staff and broad sword he was almost afraid of him. He asked where he had come from, and Lu Da replied that he had come from Mount Wutai, and had a letter for the Abbot. He took the letter from his bundle, and followed the monk when the latter reminded him that as he was going to see the Abbot he should not carry a sword but should carry a mat, and some sticks of incense, and should kowtow when he met the Abbot. So Lu Da put aside his sword, and after some time got the other things in proper order. The monk also told him how to wear his monk gown, and how to spread the mat. Just then the Abbot appeared on the scene, and the monk introduced Lu Da to him.

Abbot Qing said, "I have not heard from Mount Wutai for a long time."

The monk reminded Lu Da that he should salute the Abbot at once but the latter did not know where to put down the incense sticks he was holding, and this made the monk laugh. He took the incense from Lu Da, and placed it in an incense urn. Lu Da then saluted three times but the monk told him that he should first have presented the letter. The letter was opened by the Abbot who read how Lu Da had been expelled from Mount Wutai, and why he was recommended for employment, and that it was hoped that eventually he would become a reformed character. After reading the letter the Abbot stated that Lu Da could rest in the monks' quarters.

The Abbot Qing summoned to his living quarters all the staff of the monastery, and addressed them, "I want you all to know that Abbot Zhi Zhen of Mount Wutai is not a good judge of what is good or bad. He has sent us a monk who was previously a military officer and entered our calling because he had killed a man. He made disgraceful rows in the monastery so they have sent him here. But if he stays here he may break our rules so what shall we do?"

The monastery manager spoke, "I have a proposal to make. Just outside of the Suanzao Gate there is our branch temple with a vegetable garden attached. Near the temple is a barracks for soldiers, and everyday the soldiers come with hooligans to steal our vegetables. They also bring horses and sheep to feed there. The monk who resides there cannot stop these depredations, so how would it be if we sent this man to live there? He would perhaps control the position."

The Abbot accepted the suggestion, and sent an attendant to bring Lu Da to see him. Upon the latter's arrival the Abbot addressed him, "As you have been recommended by Abbot Zhen, I will enter your name on our register. Just outside the Suanzao Gate we have a branch temple with a vegetable garden, and I want you to take charge of that. Everyday you must see that the gardeners send ten loads of vegetables to this monastery, and you can have whatever is left over."

"Abbot Zhen told me that I could do some business here but instead of being a manager or superintendent you tell me to manage a vegetable garden," said Lu Da.

"Brother, you do not understand," said the monk who leads in worship, "you will be entered on our roll but as you have had no experience, how can you manage a monastery? The management of this vegetable garden, however, is quite an important job."

"I will not do such work, and must have a position as manager."

"You just listen to what I have to say," said the guest's host. "There must be a chief of the staff who manages our affairs. For instance, I attend to the guests who come here but more important work is done by the *Wei Na* (who attends to the monks' discipline); the *Shi Zhe* (abbot's assistant); the *Shu Ji* (scribe); the *Shou Zuo* (who conducts the prayers), and all their work is difficult. Then there are the business manager, and his assistant who look after the monastery property. As you have just arrived here, how could you occupy a leading position? Then there is the monk who looks after the storeroom where the holy scriptures are kept, he is called the storekeeper; the monk who keeps the monastery clean is called the hallkeeper; the monk who looks after the upper chamber is called the chamberlain; there are also the subscriptions collector; and the bathhouse keeper. These all manage affairs of the second class. Then there are the pagoda keeper; chief cook; chief tea maker; chief of the lavatories; and chief of the vegetable garden, all managing affairs of the lower class. If you attend to a vegetable garden well for say one year you will be promoted to look after the pagoda, and if you do that work well you will become the bathhouse keeper, and eventually become the superintendent of the temple."

"As there is a prospect of promotion I will go there tomorrow," said Lu Da.

This being decided Abbot Qing invited him to rest in his private room for the night. The next day the Abbot signed a notice to this effect, and sent a man to post it at the branch temple. Lu Da then took leave of the Abbot, and proceeded to his new duties with two monks who acted as guides. We have already mentioned that close to the garden there lived some worthless vagabonds who passed their time gambling, and stole vegetables. When they entered the garden that day they read the notice about the new arrangement, and they agreed among themselves that they must take an early opportunity to pick a quarrel with Lu Da as he would submit to them when he had been beaten. One man had a plan, "We must entice him to the cesspit to receive our congratulations, and while we are knelt down we must seize his legs, and throw him into the manure pit. That will be a nice bit of fun." The others thought it was a splendid idea, and they awaited Lu Da's arrival to put it into execution. When Lu Da arrived, the gardeners all came and saluted him, and the keys were handed over to him. The two monks who had accompanied him, and the monk also whom he had relieved, bid him goodbye and returned to the principal monastery. Lu Da then went into the garden to look round, and there he saw about thirty of the vagabonds who had a basket filled with fruit and wine. When they saw him, they smiled and said, "We heard that you have come to live here, and therefore we have come to offer you our congratulations as we are your neighbours." Lu Da had no suspicion of a trick, and therefore walked up to them near the manure pit.

A priestly foot was raised on high;
Fierce tigers slunk away;
He raised his fist up to the sky;
Scaly dragons were dismayed.

These rascals tried to molest Lu Da.

## 007

### The Tattooed Flowery Monk Lu Da Uproots a Willow Tree; Leopard's Head Lin Chong Enters White Tiger Inner Sanctum Hall by Mistake & discovered where he ought not to be

Among the 20 to 30 knaves who lived outside Sour Date Gate, 2 were leaders. One was 'Rat Crossing the Street' Zhang the Third. The other was 'Snake in the Grass' Li the Fourth. These two were in the lead as the gang advanced. Zhishen naturally walked forward to meet them.

The gang halted at the edge of the ordure pit and chorused: "We've come to congratulate you on your new post."

"Since you're neighbours," said Zhishen, "come into the compound and sit a while."

Zhang and Li dropped to their knees respectfully. They hoped that the monk would approach to raise them courteously to their feet. Then they could go into action.

Noticing this, Zhishen grew suspicious. "This gang is a queer-looking lot, and they're not willing to come forward. Can they be planning to dump me?" he wondered. "The louts think they can pluck the tiger's whiskers. Well, I'll go to them, and show them how I use my hands and feet."

Zhishen strode up to the gang. Still kneeling, Zhang and Li cried: "We younger brothers have come especially to pay our respects," and each reached to grab one of the monk's legs.

But before they could even lay a finger on him, Zhishen lashed out with his right foot and kicked Li into the ordure pit. Zhang rose to flee but a quick thrust of the monk's left leg and the two rascals were floundering in the foul mess together.

Startled, the rest of the gang gaped, then turned to run.

"Whoever moves goes into the pit," bellowed Zhishen.

The scoundrels froze, not daring to take a step.

Zhang and Li now raised their heads out of the ordure. The pit seemed bottomless, and they were covered with excrement. Maggots clung to their hair. Standing in the filth they wailed: "Reverend, forgive us!"

"Help those two dogs out, you oafs," Zhishen shouted to the gang, "and I'll forgive you all."
The rogues quickly hauled their leaders from the pit and helped them over to a gourd arbour. The two stank to high heaven.
Zhishen roared with laughter. "Fools! Go and wash off in the pond. Then I want to talk to all of you."
After the two gang leaders had cleansed themselves, some of their men removed their own clothing to give them a change of garments.
"Come into the compound," Zhishen ordered. "We're going to have a talk."
He sat down in the midst, pointed his finger at them and scoffed, "You ragamuffins! Did you think you could fool me? How could pricks like you ever hope to make sport of me?"
Zhang, Li and the whole gang dropped to their knees. "Our families have lived here for generations," they said, "supporting themselves by gambling and begging and robbing these vegetable fields. The monastery paid people several times to drive us away but no one could handle us. Where are you from, Reverend? Such a terrific fellow! We've never seen you at the monastery before. From now on, we'll be happy to serve you."
"I'm from Yanan Prefecture, west of the Pass. I used to be a major, under his excellency the garrison commander Old General Zhong. But because I killed many men, I took refuge in a monastery and became a monk. Before coming here, I was on Mount Wutai. My family name is Lu. On entering the Buddhist order I was given the name Zhishen. Even if surrounded by an army of thousands, I could hack my way out. What do you twenty or thirty amount to!"
The knaves loudly and respectfully voiced their agreement with these sentiments. They thanked the monk for his mercifulness and withdrew. Zhishen went into the house, put his things in order, then went to bed.
The next day, after talking the matter over, the rogues scraped some money together and bought ten bottles of wine. Leading a live pig, they called on Zhishen and invited him to join them in a feast. A table was laid in the overseer's compound. Zhishen sat at the head of the table, with the twenty to thirty rascals lining both sides. Everyone drank.
"Why are you spending so much money?" the monk asked.
"We're lucky," they replied. "Now that you are here you can be our master."
Zhishen was very pleased. Wine flowed freely and the party grew lively. There was singing and talking and applause and laughter. Just as the merriment was at its height, crows were heard cawing outside the gate.
Some of the men piously clacked their teeth and they intoned together: "Red lips rise to the sky, white tongue enters the earth."
"What are you making such a blasted racket about?" demanded Zhishen.
The vagabonds replied: "When crows caw, it means there's going to be a quarrel."
"Rot!" said the monk.
One of the lay brothers who tilled the monastery's fields laughed and said, "In the willow tree beside the wall there's a new crow's nest. The birds caw from dawn to dusk."
"Let's get a ladder and destroy the nest," said some.
"I'll do it," volunteered several of the others.
Feeling his wine, Zhishen went out with the crowd to take a look. Sure enough, there was a crow's nest in the willow tree.
"Get a ladder and tear the nest down," said the men. "Then our ears can have a little peace and quiet."
"I'll climb up and do the job," said Lu, "and I don't need any ladder."
Zhishen looked the situation over, walked up to the tree and removed his cassock. He bent and grasped the lower part of the trunk with his right hand, while his left hand seized it higher up, then gave a tremendous wrench—and pulled the tree from the ground, roots and all!
The knaves dropped to their knees, crying: "The master is no ordinary mortal! He's truly one of the *Lohans!* If he didn't have ten million catties of strength, how could he have uprooted that tree?"
"It was nothing at all," Lu said. "One of these days I'll show you how to handle weapons."
That night the vagabonds departed. But they came again the next day, and everyday thereafter, bringing meat and wine to feast Zhishen, for they positively worshipped him. They begged the monk to demonstrate his skill with weapons.
After several days of this, Zhishen thought to himself: "These fellows have been treating me day after day. I ought to give them a banquet in return." He sent a few lay brothers into the city to buy several platters of fruit and five or six buckets of wine, and he killed a pig and slaughtered a sheep. It was then the end of the third lunar month.
"The weather's getting warm," said Zhishen. He had mats spread beneath the green ash tree and invited the rascals to sit around and feast outdoors.
Wine was served in large bowls and meat in big chunks. When everyone had eaten his fill, the fruit was brought out and more wine. Soon the feasters were thoroughly sated.
"The past few days you've demonstrated your strength, master," said the rogues, "but you still haven't shown us your skill with weapons. It would be fine if you could give us a performance."
"All right," said Zhishen. He went into the house and brought out his solid iron Buddhist staff, five feet long from end to end and weighing sixty-two catties.
His audience was amazed. "Only a man with the strength of a water buffalo in his arms could handle such a weapon," they cried.
Zhishen took up the staff and flourished it effortlessly, making it whistle through the air. The vagabonds cheered and applauded.
Just as the monk was warming up, a gentleman appeared at a gap in the compound wall. "Truly remarkable," he commended. Zhishen stopped his exercise and turned to see who had spoken.
The gentleman wore a black muslin cap with its two corners gathered together; a pair of interlinked circlets of white jade held the knot of hair at the back of his head. He was dressed in a green officer's robe of flowered silk, bound at the waist by a girdle made of double strips of beaver and fastened by a silver clasp shaped like a tortoise back. His feet were shod in square-toed black boots. In his hand he carried a folding Chengdu fan. About thirty-five years old, he had a head like a panther, round eyes, a chin sharp as a swallow's beak, whiskers like a tiger and was very tall.
"Indeed remarkable," he said. "What excellent skill."
"If he approves, it certainly must be good," said the vagabonds.
"Who is that officer?" queried Zhishen.
"A drill instructor of the Mighty Imperial Guards. His name is Lin Chong."
"Invite him in. I'd like to meet him."
Hearing this, the drill instructor leaped in through the gap in the wall. The two men greeted each other and sat down beneath the ash tree.
"Where are you from, brother monk?" asked Lin. "What is your name?"
"I'm Lu Da, from west of the Pass. Because I killed many men, I had to become a monk. In my youth, I spent some time in the Eastern Capital. I know your honourable father, Major Lin."
Lin Chong was very pleased, and adopted Zhishen as his sworn brother on the spot.
"What brings you here today, Drill Instructor?" asked Zhishen.
"My wife and I just arrived at the Temple of the Sacred Mountain next door to burn incense. Hearing the cheers of your audience, I looked over and was intrigued by your performance. I told my wife and her maidservant, Jin Er, to burn the incense without me, that I would wait for them by the gap in the wall. I didn't think I would actually have the honour to meet you, brother."
"When I first came here I didn't know anybody," said Zhishen. "Then I became acquainted with these brothers and we gather together everyday. Today, you have thought well enough of me to make me your sworn brother. That makes me very happy." He ordered the lay brothers to bring more wine.
Just as they were finishing their third round, the maidservant Jin Er, agitated and red in the face, rushed up to the gap in the wall and cried: "Hurry, master! Our lady is having trouble with a man in the temple!"
"Where?" Lin Chong demanded hastily.
"As we were coming down the stairs of the Five Peaks Pavilion, a low fellow suddenly blocked her way. He won't let her pass."
Lin Chong quickly took his leave of Zhishen. "I'll see you again, brother. Forgive me!" He leaped through the gap in the wall and raced with Jin Er back to the temple.
When he reached the Five Peaks Pavilion he saw several idlers carrying crossbows, blowpipes and limed sticks gathered below the stair railing. They were watching a young man who was standing on the stairway with his back to them, blocking the path of Lin Chong's wife.
"Let's go upstairs," the young man was urging her. "I want to talk to you."
Blushing, the lady said, "What right do you have to make sport of a respectable woman in times of peace and order!"
Lin pushed forward, seized the young man by the shoulder and spun him around. "I'll teach you to insult a good man's wife," he shouted, raising his fist. Then he recognized Young Master Gao, adopted son of Marshal Gao Qiu, commander of the Imperial Guards.
When Gao Qiu first rose to high office he had no son to help him run his numerous affairs. And so he adopted the son of his uncle, Gao the Third. Since the boy was not only his cousin but now also his foster son, Marshal Gao loved him to excess.
The young scoundrel made full use of his foster father's influence in the Eastern Capital. His favourite pastime was despoiling other men's wives. Fearful of his powerful connections, none of the husbands dared speak out against him. He became known as the "King of Lechers."
When Lin Chong saw that he was Young Master Gao, the strength left his arms.
"This has nothing to do with you, Lin Chong," said Gao. "Who asked you to interfere!" He didn't realize that the lady was Lin Chong's wife. Had he known, the thing would never have happened. Seeing Lin Chong's hesitancy, he spoke boldly.
The commotion drew a crowd of idlers. "Don't be angry, Drill Instructor," one said. "The young master didn't recognize her. It was all a mistake."
Lin Chong's rage hadn't fully abated, and he glared at the rake with burning eyes. Some of the crowd soothed Lin Chong while others persuaded Gao to leave the temple grounds, get on his horse and depart.
Lin Chong was turning to go with his wife and Jin Er, the maidservant, when Zhishen, iron staff in hand, came charging into the temple compound with huge strides, leading his twenty to thirty vagabonds.
"Where are you going, brother?" asked Lin Chong.
"I've come to help you fight," said Zhishen.
"The man turned out to be the son of our Marshal Gao. He hadn't recognized my wife and behaved discourteously. I was going to give the lout a good drubbing but then I thought it would make the marshal lose too much face," Lin Chong explained. "You know the old saying, 'Fear not the authorities—except those that have authority over you.' After all, I'm on his payroll. I decided to let the young rascal off this time."
"You may be afraid of the marshal but he doesn't scare me a bit," shouted Zhishen. "If I ever run into that young whelp of his I'll give him three hundred licks of my iron staff."
Lin Chong saw that Zhishen was drunk and he said: "You're quite right, of course, brother. It was only because everybody urged me that I let him go."
"The next time you have any trouble, just call me and I'll take care of it!"
The knaves supported the tipsy Zhishen under the arms. "Let's go back, Reverend," they said. "You can deal with young Gao later."
Iron staff in hand, Zhishen said politely to Lin Chong's lady: "Your pardon, sister-in-law. Please don't laugh at me." And to Lin Chong he said: "Until tomorrow, brother." Then he and the vagabonds departed.
Lin Chong, his wife and Jin Er returned home. The drill instructor was angry and depressed.
As for Young Master Gao, when he had drifted into the temple leading his band of idle cronies and met Lin Chong's wife, he had become sorely enamored. After Lin Chong drove him off, he returned unhappily to the marshal's residence.
A few days later, his ne'er-do-well friends called. But they found him so fretful and irritable that they went away.
One of these idlers was an attendant named Fu An, better known as Dried Pecker Head. He suspected what was troubling Young Master Gao, and later went alone to the residence. The young rake was sitting abstracted in the study.
Fu An drew near and said: "You've been rather pale lately, Young Master. You seldom smile. Something must be bothering you."
"How do you know?"
"I'm just guessing."
"Can you guess what it is?"
"Lin Chong's wife. How's that for a guess?"
The Young Master laughed. "Not bad. The problem is I don't know how to get her."
"Nothing to it. You're afraid to provoke Lin Chong because he's a big powerful fellow. But you needn't worry. He's under the marshal's command and is being well provided for. Would he dare to offend? The least that could happen to him is exile, the worst is death. Now I've got a little scheme that will put his wife right into you hands."
"I've met many beautiful women. Why should I love only her? My heart is bewitched, I'm not happy. If you have a scheme that will work, I'll reward you generously."
"One of your trusted men, Captain Lu Qian, is Lin Chong's best friend. Tomorrow, prepare a feast in a quiet nook upstairs in Lu Qian's house. Have Lu invite Lin out for some drinking. Let Lu take him to a secluded room on the upper floor of the Fan Pavilion Tavern. I'll go to Lin's wife and say: 'Your husband has been drinking in Lu Qian's house and has been stricken by a sudden illness. He's collapsed. You'd better hurry and look after him.' Then I'll bring her over to Lu's place, where you'll be waiting. Women are as changeable as water. When she sees what a handsome romantic sort you are, Young Master, and you deluge her with sweet words, she won't be able to resist. What do you think of my plan?"
"Excellent," Gao applauded. "Have Captain Lu Qian summoned here tonight."
It so happened that Lu Qian lived only one street away from the Gao residence. He agreed to the scheme immediately. He felt he had no alternative. As long as it would please the Young Master, he was willing to forget his friendship with the drill instructor.
To get back to Lin Chong. For several days he had been brooding at home. One morning he heard someone shouting at his front door: "Is the drill instructor in?"
Lin Chong went to the door, and there was Lu Qian.
"What brings you here, Brother Lu?" Lin asked quickly.
"I'm concerned about you. Why haven't I seen you on the streets these past few days, brother?"
"My mind is troubled. I don't feel like going out."
"Come and have a few cups with me and forget about your trouble."
"First sit a while and have some tea."
After the two finished their tea, they rose.
"Sister-in-law," Lu Qian called to Lin Chong's wife who was in the next room, "I'm taking Brother Lin over to my place for a few cups of wine."
The lady hurried to the door curtain and pushed it aside. "Don't let him drink too much, brother," she admonished. "Send him home early."
The two men strolled down the street. "Let's not go to my house, brother," Lu Qian said. "We can have our drinks in the Fan Pavilion."
They went to the tavern. They selected a small room and ordered two bottles of good wine and some tidbits to go with it. For a time they chatted idly. Lin Chong sighed.
"What's wrong, brother?" asked Lu Qian.
"You don't know what's happened. I have talents but no intelligent superior to recognize them. I serve under little men from whom I have to take a lot of dirty nonsense."
"There are several drill instructors in the Imperial Guards but none can compare with you. The marshal regards you very highly. Who would dare to molest you?"
Lin Chong told Lu Qian about his encounter with Young Master Gao a few days before.
"The Young Master didn't realize she was your wife," Lu Qian said soothingly. "It's not serious. Forget it. Let's drink."
Lin Chong downed eight or nine cups. Soon he had to relieve himself. He got up and said, "I have to wash my hands." He went down the stairs, left the tavern, and attended to his business in a small lane to the east. As he was coming out, he met Jin Er.
"I've been looking all over for you, master," said the maidservant. "So you're here!"
"What's up?" asked Lin Chong hastily.
"You had only been gone a little while when a man come rushing over to our house and said to the mistress, 'I'm a neighbour of Captain Lu. While drinking with him, the drill instructor suddenly gasped for breath and fell to the floor. You'd better go and look after him.' Our lady begged Dame Wang next door to take care of our house, then she and I hurried with the man to a place one street past the marshal's residence. When we got upstairs we saw a table laden with food and drink but there was no sign of you, master.
"As we turned to leave, that young fellow who pestered the mistress at the temple the other day came out and leered: 'Stay a while, lady. Your true husband is here!' I flew down the stairs. Our mistress was screaming for help. I couldn't find you anywhere. Finally I met Doctor Zhang, the medicine vendor, and he told me: 'I just saw the drill instructor and another man going into the tavern.' so I hurried over here. Master, go quickly!"

Shocked, Lin Chong without waiting for Jin Er, ran at triple speed to Lu Qian's house and raced up the stairs. The door was locked. He could hear his lady exclaiming: "In times of peace and order how dare you hold a good man's wife prisoner!" Young Master Gao was entreating: "Have pity on me, mistress. Even a woman of iron and stone shouldn't be so cold-hearted!"
"Wife, open the door," thundered Lin Chong.
Hearing her husband's voice, Mistress Lin rushed to comply. The terrified Young Master Gao pushed open a window, climbed out and fled along the top of a wall. He was gone before Lin Chong entered the room.
"Did that dog violate you?" asked the drill instructor.
"No," replied his wife.
In a fury, Lin Chong smashed Lu Qian's furniture to bits, then led his wife down the stairs. As they came out of the house, frightened neighbours on both sides of the street hastily shut their doors tight. Jin Er was waiting for them outside. The three of them went home together.
Lin Chong armed himself with a sharp knife and sped directly to the tavern in search of Lu Qian. But his treacherous friend was gone. Lin Chong went to Lu Qian's house and waited outside the door all night. But Lu Qian did not return. Finally the drill instructor went home.
"He didn't harm me. Don't do anything foolish," his wife urged.
"Who would have thought that Lu Qian is such a scoundrel," fumed Lin Chong. "Calling me 'brother' while plotting against me all the time. Even if I can't catch that Young Master I won't let Lu Qian off!"
His wife pleaded desperately with him to remain at home.
Meanwhile, Lu Qian hid in the marshal's residence, afraid to return to his own house. For three successive days, the drill instructor waited for him outside the residence gate but the traitor didn't dare show himself. Lin Chong's appearance was so menacing, no one had the courage to question him.
On the fourth day since they parted, Zhishen came to Lin Chong's home. "Where have you been keeping yourself these past few days, Drill Instructor?" the monk asked.
"I've been too busy to call on you, brother," replied Lin Chong apologetically. "Since you've honoured me with a visit to my humble home, I ought to offer you a few cups of wine. But we don't have anything decent to drink in the house. Why not go out for a stroll together and have a cup or two in the market place?"
"Excellent," said Zhishen.
They went out and drank together all day and arranged to meet again on the morrow. Thereafter, Lin drank with Zhishen everyday. In time, he gradually set the other matter aside.
As to Young Master Gao, after he received that fright in Lu Qian's house and had to flee over the wall, he became ill and took to his bed. He didn't dare say anything to the marshal about what had happened. Lu Qian and Fu An called on the Young Master at the residence. They found him pale and in low spirits.
"Why are you so unhappy, Young Master?" asked Lu Qian.
"I won't try to fool you two," Gao replied. "Now that I've failed in both attempts to get Lin's wife, and had that awful scare in addition, I feel worse than ever. If I pass out of this world in three months or half a year, you needn't be surprised."
"Be of good cheer," the sycophants urged. "Unless she suddenly hangs herself, we guarantee to get you that woman, come what may." At that moment the old chamberlain entered to see how the Young Master was faring. Lu Qian and Fu An withdrew and held a private consultation.
"There's only one way..." they agreed. After the chamberlain had concluded his call and emerged, they invited him to a quiet corner.
"There's only one way the Young Master can get well," they said. "We must let the marshal know and have him order the death of Lin Chong. Then the Young Master will be able to get Lin's wife and he'll recover. Otherwise, he's sure to die."
"That's easy," replied the old chamberlain. "I'll inform the marshal this evening."
"We already have a plan," said the two. "We only await word from you."
That night, the old chamberlain saw the marshal. "I've discovered what's wrong with the Young Master," he said. "It's Lin Chong's wife."
"When did he ever see the woman?" asked Gao Qiu.
"On the twenty-eighth of last month, at the Temple of the Sacred Mountain. Today is a little over a month," said the old chamberlain, and he told the marshal what Lu Qian had in mind.
"H'mm, Lin Chong's wife, eh? The question is how to put Lin Chong out of the way," mused the marshal. "Let me think. I can't let my son lose his life just for the sake of Lin Chong."
"Lu Qian and Fu an have a plan."
"So? Bring them in here and we'll talk it over." The old chamberlain summoned Lu Qian and Fu An into the marshal's hall. They hailed Gao respectfully.
"Do you two have a plan that can cure my son's ailment? If so, I'll raise you both in rank."
Lu Qian stepped forward. "Gracious lord, it can be done only thus and thus and thus ..."
"Very well," said the marshal. "You may take action tomorrow." Of this we need say no more.
To get back to Lin Chong. He drank everyday with Lu Zhishen and finally forgot about the matter.
One day, as the two friends were nearing a lane, they saw a big fellow standing on a corner, a cap with gathered ends on his bead and dressed in an old military robe. He was holding a fine sword in his hand, with a tuft of grass tied to it indicating that it was for sale.
"No one recognizes its value," he was muttering. "What a pity for my precious sword!"
Lin Chong paid no attention and continued walking and chatting with Zhishen. The man trailed behind them, saying: "A splendid sword. It's shame no one appreciates it!"
Lin Chong and Zhishen were still engrossed in their conversation. The man followed them.
"A big city like the Eastern Capital and not a single person knows the worth of military weapons," he cried.
At this, Lin Chong looked around. The fellow whipped the sword out of its sheath. It gleamed dazzlingly in the sun.
Lin Chong was fated for trouble. He said abruptly: "Let me see it."
The fellow handed him the sword. Lin Chong took the weapon and he and Zhishen examined it.
Astonished, the drill instructor exclaimed: "An excellent blade! How much do you want for it?"
"The price is three thousand strings of cash but I'll take two."
"It's well worth two thousand but you won't find anyone who'll give that much. If you're willing to accept one thousand, I'll buy it from you."
"I need money quickly. If you really want the sword I'll knock off five hundred and let you have it for fifteen hundred."
"A thousand is the best I can do."
The fellow sighed. "It's selling gold at the price of iron. All right, all right but not one copper less."
"Come home with me and I'll give you the money," said Lin Chong. He turned to Zhishen, "Wait for me in the teahouse, brother. I'll join you soon."
"No," said the monk, "I must go back. I'll see you tomorrow."
After taking leave of Zhishen, Lin Chong brought the sword-seller to his home, counted out the purchase price in silver and gave it to him.
"Where did you get this blade?" the drill instructor asked.
"It was handed down to me from my ancestors. Because my family became impoverished I had no choice. I had to sell it."
"What's the name of your family?"
"If I were to tell you, I'd die of shame."
Lin Chong asked no more. The fellow took the money and departed.
Lin Chong turned the sword this way and that. "Truly a beautiful weapon. Marshal Gao is supposed to have a fine sword but he won't show it to anyone. Though I've asked to see it several times, he's never been willing to bring it out. Today I've bought a fine sword too. One of these days I'll compare blades with him."
The drill instructor didn't let the sword out of his hand all evening. Late that night he finally hung it on the wall but he was up before daybreak and took the blade down again to admire it.
Some time before noon two lieutenants came to his gate and cried: "Drill Instructor Lin, an order from the marshal. He's heard that you've bought a fine sword and wants you to bring it to compare with his. The marshal is waiting for you in the residence."
"Who is the big-mouthed gossip that reported the news so fast?" wondered Lin Chong.
The lieutenants waited while Lin Chong got dressed. He took his sword and accompanied them.
On the way he said: "I haven't seen you at the residence before."
"We've only recently been transferred," they replied.
Soon they arrived at the residence. In the reception room, Lin Chong halted.
"The marshal is waiting in the rear hall," said the lieutenants.
Lin Chong went with them around a screen wall into the rear hall. But there was still no sign of the marshal, and Lin Chong halted once more.
"The marshal is awaiting the drill instructor in the rearmost court. He directed us to bring you there," said the lieutenants.
Lin followed them through two or three more gateways until they came to a courtyard lined on all sides by green railings.
The lieutenants led him to the entrance of a large hall and said: "Please wait out here, Drill Instructor, while we report to the marshal. We won't be long."
Lin Chong stood before the eaves of a porch while the two lieutenants went inside. A time long enough to drink a cup of tea passed but they did not return. Growing suspicious, the drill instructor pushed aside a hanging awning, poked his head in and looked. There, above the door, was a placard with four words written in green: "White Tiger Inner Sanctum."
"This is where the highest military affairs are discussed," thought Lin Chong, startled. "How dare I go in there!"
He turned hastily. Behind him he heard the tread of boots, the steps ringing sharply. Another man had entered the courtyard. The drill instructor recognized him. It was none other than Marshal Gao. Lin Chong proffered his sword with both hands, and greeted him respectfully.
"Lin Chong," the marshal barked. "I didn't summon you. How dare you force your way into the White Tiger Inner Sanctum! Don't you know the law? And carrying a weapon! You must have come to kill me! People told me that you were seen waiting outside the Residence two or three day ago with a knife in your hand. Your intentions are surely evil!"
Bowing, Lin Chong replied, "Benevolent lord, two of your lieutenants brought me here saying you wanted to compare your sword with mine."
"Where are they?" cried the marshal.
"They just went into the hall, sir."
"Lies! Lies! No lieutenants would dare enter my official halls. Ho, guards! Seize this lout!"
Before the order had left the marshal's mouth, from the buildings flanking the sides of the courtyard over thirty stalwarts came rushing out and knocked Lin Chong to the ground. "As a drill instructor of the Imperial Guards, you must know the law," the marshal raged. "Why also would you enter the Inner Sanctum with a sharp sword in your hand if not to murder me?" He ordered his men to take Lin Chong away. Could Lin Chong survive? And because of this there was a great tumult on the Central Plains and a wild disturbance on the waters. Peasants had to wear army designations on their backs. Military pennants fluttered on fishing boats.
Now among that bunch of wastrels and miscreants outside the Gate of Wild Jujubes two acted as leaders. They were known as Zhang the Rat and Li the Snake. When these two leaders came forward, Zhishen also advanced, till he was standing not far from the edge of the cesspit. At this point, the ragged band stopped just where they were, beside the cesspit, and called out in unison, "We come to congratulate you, Your Reverence."
"If you are neighbours," Zhishen said, "you'd better come inside and sit down."
But Zhang the Rat and Li the Snake, having prostrated themselves, refused to rise unless he came to help them up. That was supposed to give them their opportunity. Zhishen began to get suspicious. "There's something fishy about this lot," he said to himself. "They don't want to come any closer, can they be up to something? Maybe they'd like to pluck the tiger's whiskers! Never mind, I'll go to meet them. It may do them good to get acquainted with my fist and my boot." So he marched boldly up to them, whereupon the Rat and the Snake, saying, "Allow us to pay our humble respects to you, Master," reached forward, one of them aiming to grab his left foot while the other went for his right foot. Zhishen did not give them the opportunity. He raised his right foot and booted the Snake into the muck. The Rat tried to dodge but Zhishen caught him with his left foot. Both miscreants were now floundering in the cesspit while the rest of the mob behind them stood gaping in amazement. When those others tried to run off, Zhishen shouted: "Anyone tries to leave, it'll be into the shit with him; if it's two, that'll be two in the shit." After that no one stirred.
Meanwhile the Rat and the Snake were struggling to get their heads above the surface. That cesspit seemed bottomless. They were totally covered in ordure and their hair was crawling with maggots. "Please," they shouted from the cesspit, "let us out!"
"All right, you lot," Zhishen shouted to the others, "get those buggers out, double quick. I've decided to let you all off."
The mob rescued the Rat and the Snake and dumped them on a cucumber frame. They stank so much you couldn't get near them. Zhishen was laughing his head off. "You filthy brutes!" he said. "Take yourselves off to the pond and wash thoroughly, then come back here. I've got a few words to say to you all."
When they had washed, the others took off some of their own clothes to give them. Then Zhishen said, "Come inside and sit down, all of you." He sat down at the head of the table and said: "Now, don't any of you think of deceiving me. Who and what are you? What do you mean by trying to make a fool of me?"
Everyone knelt down and said: "We've always lived here. We make our living by gambling and begging. This garden is actually our rice-bowl. The temple has tried giving money to get rid of us but it doesn't work. Where are you from, Your Reverence? You're incredible! We've never seen you before at the temple. From now on we shall be only too happy to serve you!"
"I served as commandant of the Yanan garrison in Guanxi, under Field-Marshal Zhong the Elder," Zhishen said. "I decided to become a monk because I'd killed a lot of people. I came here from Mount Wu Tai. My family name is Lu, and my religious name Zhishen. Twenty or thirty villains like you don't mean anything to me. If an army of thousands came at me, I could fight my way out."
There was a murmur of assent from the raggle-taggle mob. Then they gratefully prostrated themselves and departed. Zhishen retired to his room within the lodge, tidied his things, and lay down to sleep.
The next day the delinquents held counsel. A collection was taken, with which ten bottles of wine were acquired and a pig, the plan being to invite Zhishen. The banquet was laid out in the office and Zhishen was invited to take the place of honour, while the rest seated themselves in two rows on each side of him. The toasts began.
"But why all this expense?" Zhishen asked.
"We count ourselves lucky in having you come here as boss," they said.
Zhishen thoroughly enjoyed it all. Everyone got tipsy, and there was singing and talk and clapping and laughter. And then, in the midst of the hubbub, caw, caw, a crow began to call. Superstitiously they all touched wood and began chanting, "Dirty mouths go to heaven, evil tongues go to hell."
"What the hell's all that about?" Zhishen asked.
"When the crow calls, look out for discord," they said.
"Where did you get that idea?" Zhishen said.
One of the monastery gardeners said, with a grin: "A crow has just started nesting in that willow tree in the corner of the wall, and it calls from dawn to dusk."
"We need a ladder to knock the nest down," they said. "That'll put a stop to it."
"We'll go and get one," said some others.
Lu Zhishen, elated by the wine, went out with them to look. There, sure enough, was the crow's nest on the willow tree. "Get the ladder, knock it down, then we'll get some peace," people were shouting. But Li the Snake said, "I'll climb and get it, we don't need a ladder."
Zhishen considered for a moment, then he approached the tree. He took off his robe, bent and grasped the trunk low down with his right hand, placing his left hand higher up. With a sudden jerk he wrenched the tree up by the roots.
When they saw this, the delinquents prostrated themselves and said: "Master, you're not just a man, you're a god, a real *Lohan*. How could you do that, unless you have the strength to lift ten tons?"
"What's all the bloody fuss about?" Zhishen said. "Next time I'll give you a martial arts demonstration and show you some sword-play."
The mob dispersed for the time being. But from then on they sank to their knees every time they saw Zhishen, brought him meat and wine each day, and stayed to watch him training in martial arts or pugilism.
After a while, Zhishen said to himself, "I've been enjoying their wine and food everyday, now I'd better lay on something for them in return."
He sent the lay brothers into town to buy some plates of fruit and half a dozen buckets of wine, and had a pig and a sheep slaughtered. It was April, and the weather was just getting hot. "It's pretty warm," Zhishen said to himself, and he told the brothers to lay the mats under an ash-tree in the garden. Then the mob were invited to come and take their seats. The wine was served in big bowls, the meat was cut in thick slices, and when everyone was full fruit was brought out and a great deal more wine.
Finally, they all said: "Master, these last few days we've seen your strength but we haven't yet had a chance to admire your skill with weapons. We wish you'd give us an exhibition!"

"Right!" said Zhishen. He went back into the house and brought out his monk's staff of solid steel, five feet from end to end and weighing sixty-two catties. Everyone was amazed. "If he hadn't the strength of a water-buffalo in his arms, he couldn't wield that thing!" they said. Zhishen proceeded to make it whistle through the air, standing firm as a rock and giving a faultless performance, to the general applause of his audience.

Zhishen was just getting really into his stride when an army officer stopped outside the compound and exclaimed: "Capital!" The sound caused Zhishen to pause and look up. He saw the officer standing beside a gap in the wall, dressed as follows:

*Upon his head a blue silk scarf, with the corners folded into ears; at the back of his head two white jade and pearl rings to hold the hair in place. A light green officer's uniform of patterned silk, tied at the waist by a belt with a double silver clasp in the shape of a tortoise, and fashionable black boots. And in his hand, a Xichuan fan of folded paper.*

This officer had round eyes in a leopard's head, and was equipped with a tiger's moustache and pointed chin. He was about six feet tall and thirty-five years of age. "This monk," he now declared, "is someone quite out of the ordinary. His staff-play is first-class."

"If the Instructor likes it, it must be good," the mob said.

"Who is that officer?" Zhishen asked.

"That's Instructor Lin, master-of-arms and instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards. His full name is Lin Chong."

"Then ask him to come in. I'd like to meet him."

Instructor Lin vaulted over the wall, and the two of them greeted each other under the tree. They sat down together. Lin Chong asked, "Where are you from, my friend? And what is your religious name?"

"I am Lu Da from Guanxi. I killed a lot of men so I became a monk. In my youth I visited the Eastern Capital, and I once met Major Lin, your father, there."

Lin Chong was delighted. He immediately adopted Zhishen as his sworn brother.

"But what brings you here today, Instructor?" Zhishen asked.

"I've just arrived here with my wife to burn incense at the Temple of the Holy Mountain next door," the other replied. "When I heard the sound of your drill, I was so intrigued that I told my wife to go on in with the maid, Jin Er, and burn the incense, while I waited for them here. But I didn't know it would be my good fortune to meet you here, brother."

"I only arrived here recently myself," Zhishen said. "I don't know anyone, except these fellows who come to keep me company each day. But now you are kind enough to give me your friendship and call yourself my sworn brother, that's wonderful!" Saying which, he told the lay brothers to fetch more wine for them.

They had just finished three cups when Jin Er, the maid, appeared at the gap in the wall, extremely agitated and quite red in the face: "Master," she shouted, "don't sit there so calmly. The mistress is having an argument with a man in the temple."

Lin Chong had a shock. "Where?" he cried.

"We ran into this fiend just below the Pavilion of the Five Sacred Peaks. He's standing in the way and won't let the mistress pass."

"Excuse me Brother, excuse me," Lin Chong said, distractedly, "I shall come back."

Lin Chong left hurriedly, leaping through the gap and rushing off to the temple with Jin Er. When he arrived at the Pavilion of the Five Sacred Peaks, he found a group of men equipped with crossbows, blowpipes and bird-catching sticks standing beside the balustrade; on the stairs a young gentleman, standing with his back to them, was preventing Lin Chong's wife from passing.

"Do come upstairs with me, I want to talk to you," he was heard to say, while the lady, her face crimson with mortification, protested, "What right have you, in time of peace, to treat a lady this way?"

Lin Chong bounded forward, seized the young man by the shoulders and spun him round. "Do you know the penalty for importuning a married woman?" he roared. But as he raised his fist to strike the offender, he saw who it was: young Gao, the adopted son of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Gao. Yes, when Gao-le-Bel had made his fortune he had no son of his own to aid him in his affairs, so he had adopted a nephew, the son of another Gao who was his relative. Marshal Gao treated this young man like his own son and loved him dearly, and the young scoundrel took advantage of his power and position in the Eastern Capital to debauch people's wives and daughters. Everyone in the capital was too scared to denounce him. He had been dubbed "Lord Libertine."

Well, the moment Lin Chong saw the libertine's face and recognized him as the Marshal's adopted son, his strength left him.

"Lin Chong, this is none of your business!" young Gao said. "Who told you to interfere?" In fact, young Gao did not know that it was Lin Chong's wife; had he known, this business would never have occurred. But seeing that Lin Chong did nothing, he grew bolder. Meanwhile Gao's associates, scenting trouble, drew near and tried to smooth the matter over: "Forget it, Instructor, His Excellency didn't recognize your wife, it was a mistake."

Lin Chong's anger was far from assuaged and he continued to glare at young Gao. But everyone persisted in urging him to let the matter drop, and finally young Gao was persuaded to leave the temple, mount and ride off.

Lin Chong began to take his wife and Jin Er away. They were traversing a gallery when Lu Zhishen appeared. Brandishing his steel staff, with the raggle-taggle mob at his heels, he bounded into the temple. "Where are you going, Brother?" Lin Chong called when he saw him.

"I'm coming to give you a hand," the monk replied.

"It turned out to be the son of the Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Gao," Lin Chong said. "He didn't see it was my wife, that's why he forgot himself. I was on the point of thrashing the scoundrel but I know the Marshal would never be able to swallow it, and as the saying is, 'Fear not the law but the one who wields the law.' It wouldn't do me any good, when I'm serving under the Marshal, so for the moment I've let him off."

"You've reason to fear the Marshal but I'm not scared of him," said Zhishen. "If I run into that little shit, he'll get three hundred of the best from my steel staff!"

Lin Chong realized the monk had been drinking, so he said: "You're absolutely right. But they all advised me to forget it and for the moment I've agreed to do so."

"Well, if you have any more trouble, come and get me," Zhishen said.

The mob, seeing Zhishen was drunk, now started to haul him away, saying: "Come on, Master, we'd better be leaving, you can settle all that tomorrow."

"Sister, excuse me," Zhishen said to the lady. "Please don't laugh at me." Gripping his staff and turning to Lin Chong, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow, Brother." After these farewells he left, along with the mob.

Lin Chong with his wife and the maid set off home. But his heart was heavy.

Now as for young Gao, that day when he and his dissipated friends encountered Lin Chong's wife, and had been sent packing, he quite lost his heart, and he went back in very low spirits to mope in Government House.

After two or three days his good-for-nothing friends came looking for him. They found him very much down, not a spark of gaiety in him, and they went away. But there was one of these spongers who could read young Gao's mind; he was called Fu An and nicknamed Shrivelled Cockscomb. He went to the Residence on his own to look for young Gao, whom he found him sitting despondently in the library. He drew near and said: "You look pale, Your Excellency, your appearance is melancholy, something seems to be weighing heavily upon you."

"How did you know?" young Gao asked.

"I was just guessing," Fu An replied.

"Then can you guess what is troubling me?"

"Your mind is running upon the charms of a pair of trees,' like the two that make up the character 'Lin.' Am I right?"

Young Gao grinned. "You're right," he said. "But I just don't know what I can do to get her."

"It's no problem," said Fu An. "You think because Lin Chong is a brave man you daren't offend him. But really there's no danger. He's under your father's command. It's a good post, too, how could he think of incurring the Marshal's displeasure? At best he could get himself branded and exiled, and he might even pay with his life. I've got a plan which will enable you to enjoy her."

Hearing this, young Gao said: "I've seen so many women, I just don't know why I want her so much. It's an obsession, I've no happiness without her. If you have some scheme which will allow me to secure her favours, I shall reward you amply."

"One of your aides is Lieutenant Lu Qian, who is a bosom pal of Lin Chong's. Tomorrow you will conceal yourself upstairs at Lieutenant Lu's in a private room, well supplied with wine and food. You'll tell Lu to go and invite Lin Chong for a drink. Tell him to go to one of the upstairs rooms at Fan's winehouse. Meanwhile, I will go to Lin's house and say to his wife: 'Your husband, the Instructor, was drinking with Lieutenant Lu and he's had an attack. He's lying on the floor unconscious. You must come quickly, to assist him!' Once we can get her upstairs, well, you know what women are like, changeable as the weather: when she sees you — a dashing person like yourself — all it'll need is a few flattering words and she'll be yours, how can she help herself? Well, what do you think of my plan?"

"Brilliant!" young Gao exclaimed. "Have Lieutenant Lu sent here right away this evening, and I'll give him his instructions."

Lieutenant Lu Qian happened to live in the next street to the Marshal's. The plan having been explained to him, Lu did as he was told, how could he do otherwise? His only thought was to keep young Gao happy; the ties of friendship were as nothing to that.

Now as for Lin Chong, his mood remained black for days and he had no desire to go out. Then one morning he heard someone outside the door calling: "Is the master at home?" When Lin Chong came out to see who it was, he found Lieutenant Lu. Hurriedly he asked, "What brings you here, friend Lu?"

"I came to see you," the Lieutenant replied, "and to find out why you never go out these days."

"I am unhappy, I don't feel like going out," Lin Chong answered.

"Then I shall take you to drink a few cups, to cure your depression."

"Sit down and drink some tea first."

After drinking tea, they both stood up, and Lieutenant Lu said to Lin's wife: "With your permission, we're going over to my place to drink a few cups of wine."

Lin Chong's wife flew to the door and said: "Don't drink too much, and don't stay out late."

The two men went out and strolled along the street for a while. Then Lu said: "Let's not go to my place. Let's go and have a drink at Fan's." So to Fan's they went, and established them- selves in a secluded upstairs room, telling the waiter to bring out two bottles of his very best wine, and some dried fruit to go with it. As they were quietly chatting, Lin Chong let out a deep sigh.

"What's the matter, brother?" Lu Qian asked.

"My dear friend, you don't know ... what avails courage or talent, when you're not appreciated? I am at the mercy of a petty tyrant, and have to put up with the most vile treatment."

"Although there are several instructors now with the imperial guards, none of them can compare with you," Lieutenant Lu said. "The Marshal knows it and treats you well. Who would want to insult you?"

Lin Chong recounted the previous business with young Gao.

"Young Gao can't have known it was your wife. Stop thinking about it, and drink up."

After eight or nine cups, Lin Chong needed to relieve himself. He stood up, saying "I'm going to wash my hands." He went downstairs and out of the winehouse, and turned into a little alley on the east to perform his business. He was just leaving the lane when who should he meet but the maid, Jin Er, screaming: "Master, here you are, I've been searching everywhere for you."

"What's the matter?" Lin Chong asked.

"Not half an hour after you left with Lieutenant Lu, a man rushed in and said to my mistress: 'I am a neighbour of Lieutenant Lu's. Your husband was drinking with the Lieutenant when he suddenly began to choke and collapsed, he is calling for his wife, he wants her at once.' When the mistress heard this she quickly told Mrs. Wang from next door to look after the house and then we went with the man and he took us to a house in a lane in front of the Marshal's Residence. We went upstairs and saw there was wine and food laid on a table but you were nowhere to be seen. We rushed downstairs again, and there we ran into that same gentleman who pestered my mistress at the Temple of the Holy Mountain the other day. He asked my mistress to sit down and said 'Your true husband is here.' I ran downstairs, and my mistress began screaming for help. I looked for you everywhere but I couldn't find you. Then I met old Zhang, the drug seller and he told me he had been at Fan's and he had seen you go in with someone else and order wine. So I came here as fast as I could. You've got to hurry."

Lin Chong was so shocked by this that he raced off three steps at a time, not waiting for Jin Er. Arriving at Lu's house, he shot up the stairs but found the door shut. He could hear his wife shouting: "I'm a respectable married woman, by what right do you detain me here, in times of peace?" And he could hear young Gao saying: "Lady have pity on me, my life is in your hands! Were you made of iron or stone, you must surely requite me." From the top of the stairs Lin Chong shouted: "Open the door, my love!" Hearing her husband's voice, the lady rushed to open the door. What a fright for young Gao! Wrenching open the window and leaping out, he fled over the wall. By the time Lin Chong got there he was gone. "Has anything happened yet?" Lin Chong asked his wife. "Not yet," she answered. Lin Chong proceeded to smash up Lu's house. Then he took his wife downstairs. They came out of the front door. They noticed that the neighbours on either side had all locked their doors. Jin Er now arrived and the three of them made their way home. Lin Chong went to get a dagger and rushed back to Fan's to find Lu Qian but there was no sign of him. He returned to Lu's house, where he waited at the door all evening but Lu did not return. Finally he went home.

His wife tried to calm him down. "He did not touch me," she insisted. "Please don't do anything rash."

"What I can't do is forgive that swine, Lu Qian," her husband said. "He calls me friend and brother, and then treats me like that! Even if I can't do anything about young Gao, at least I'll get that Lu, I'll have his hide!"

His wife pleaded with him. She was determined not to let him go out. In any case, Lieutenant Lu remained in hiding at the Marshal's, and didn't dare return home. Lin Chong waited outside three whole days but he did not appear. The Marshal's people observed the expression on Lin Chong's face and no one dared ask him his purpose.

On the fourth day around dinner time Lu Zhishen came to Lin Chong's house in search of him. "We haven't seen you for days, Instructor. Where have you been?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, I was too busy to call on you, brother," Lin Chong said. "Since you've honoured me by coming here to my house, it's only right I should offer you a few cups. I'm afraid however that I'm not well prepared, so what do you say to coming out with me now for a stroll and we can have a drink on the way?"

"Excellent idea," Zhishen replied. So off they went, the two of them and spent the rest of the day drinking. They also agreed to meet again the next day. From then on Lin Chong went out drinking with Zhishen everyday and gradually began to forget his troubles. It was a case of:

The man has a trusted friend to confide in;
*Talk and song can put gloom to flight.*
*But the woman has only her room to hide in;*
Troubles untalked-of are harder to fight.

As for young Gao, since that day when he had such a fright at Lieutenant Lu's house and had to escape over the wall, he had not dared say anything to the Marshal. He had fallen ill, as a result, and taken to his bed. When Lieutenant Lu and Fu An came to see him, they found him looking far from well and very low in spirits.

"Why so melancholy?" Lu asked him.

"I'll tell you," Gao said. "It's all because of that wife of Lin Chong's. Twice now I've missed having her, and got a severe shock into the bargain. It's made my problem even worse. I don't see how I can have more than three months to live, six at the most!"

"Take heart," they said. "Leave it to us. We'll get the woman for you, one way or another — unless of course she hangs herself first."

At this moment, the old chamberlain arrived to inquire about young Gao's health. Here's how he found him:

He has no rash, he has no spot,
*His body's cold, his body's hot.*
*He has no ache, he has no pain,*
*His belly's full and empty again.*
*Forgetting to eat and shunning sleep*
*This secret to himself he'd keep.*
*He daren't tell whence his sickness came,*
*For if 'twere known he'd blush for shame.*
*His wits are scattered, spirit fled,*
He only wishes he were dead.

Whilst the old chamberlain was asking Gao about his health, Lu Qian and Fu An were whispering together. "That's the way to do it," they concluded, and when the chamberlain was leaving, they took him aside and said: "If we want the young master to get better, it's necessary to tell the Marshal. We've got to get rid of Lin Chong so we can bring his wife and the young master together, it's the only way to cure his illness. If we don't do this, he's a dead man."

"That's no problem," said the chamberlain. "I'll put the Marshal in the picture tonight."

"We've got something worked out already," the other two said. "We're just waiting for the word."

When he saw the Marshal that evening the chamberlain said: "The cause of the young master's illness is known: it is Lin Chong's wife."

"But when did he first see this woman?" Gao-le-Bel asked.

"On the twenty-eighth of last month, at the Temple of the Holy Mountain, that's over a month ago," the chamberlain said. He gave the Marshal a detailed report of all that Lu Qian had told him.

"So it's like that, is it?" said Gao-le-Bel. "Lin Chong's wife ... but then what do we do about Lin Chong? If I try to preserve Lin Chong, I endanger the life of my son. What's to be done?"

"Lieutenant Lu Qian and Fu An have a plan," the chamberlain said.

"In that case, you'd better send them both here to discuss the matter with me."

Accordingly the chamberlain summoned the two, who entered the hall and saluted. The Marshal said: "This business of my son's, have you a remedy for it? If you can really find a cure for the boy, I shall promote you both."

Lu Qian stepped forward and humbly submitted that if this were done and that were done, the affair could be successfully concluded. At the end of his report, the Marshal expressed his approval: "Excellently conceived! Set this all in motion tomorrow."

We say no more of this but return to Lin Chong, who, since he had been drinking each day with Lu Zhishen, had managed to forget his troubles. Now, as the two companions were passing Parade-ground Road, they encountered a big fellow with a specially folded turban and an old army coat, who was standing on the street corner, holding a sword to which he had tied a bunch of straw to show it was for sale. He was muttering to himself, "No one can recognize its worth, this poor sword of mine." Lin Chong paid him no attention; he was deep in conversation with Zhishen and they passed onwards. But the big fellow followed them, still muttering: "Such a fine sword, what a shame there's no one around to appreciate it!" Lin Chong still paid no heed; he and Zhishen, still conversing, turned into a side-street, with the big fellow behind them, saying: "Such a great city, and there's not one true connoisseur of arms!" Now at last Lin Chong heard him, and turned to look. At this precise moment the big fellow whipped the sword out of its scabbard, and the blade flashed dazzlingly in the sun. Well, it was Lin Chong's fate! "Let me look at it," he said on an impulse. The big fellow handed it over, and Lin Chong took it in his hands. He and Zhishen examined it together.

It glitters irresistibly, it gives the heart a thrill
*Far off it has the sparkle of winter's glistening chill;*
*Near to you see the elegance of objects wrought by man,*
*Of that which the craftsman's fashioned as finely as he can.*
*The blade so richly damasked a ghost's attack must fail,*
*The design so densely worked that demons all turn tail.*
*There isn't any other that with this one can compare,*
Not even the masterpieces of the artisans of yore.

Lin Chong was amazed: "It's a fine weapon," he exclaimed. "How much do you want for it?"
"Its proper price is three thousand cash but I'd let it go for two thousand," the other said.
"It may be worth two thousand but there's no one who really appreciates it. If you'll take a thousand, I'll buy it."
"I really need the money. If you want it, I'll knock off five hundred and let you have it for one thousand five hundred."
"One thousand is my best offer."
The big fellow sighed and said, "It's selling gold as iron but all right, I accept — not a penny less, though!"
"If you'll come to my house then, I'll give you the money," Lin Chong said. He turned to Zhishen and said: "Brother, wait for me in the teahouse, I'll be with you presently."
"I am going home now," Zhishen said. "We can meet tomorrow."
After bidding Zhishen farewell, Lin Chong took the sword's owner to his house to give him the money. "How did you come by this sword?" he asked him.
"It's an heirloom," he replied. "But my family is ruined, I've no alternative but to sell it."
"What's the name of your family?" Lin Chong asked.
"I'd rather die than tell you," the other answered and Lin Chong did not press him further.
When the man had taken the money and departed, Lin Chong examined the sword, turning it this way and that. He was impressed. "It's really a marvellous piece of work," he thought to himself. "Marshal Gao has one like it in his residence but he never shows it to anyone. I've asked to see it many times but never been allowed to. Now that I've bought this beauty, perhaps I'll manage to get him to compare his with it." He didn't let the sword out of his hands all afternoon. He hung it on the wall that night, and in the morning he went to look at it again before dawn.
Before midday two of the Marshal's aides appeared at his door and said: "Instructor Lin! The Marshal's orders: this sword you've just bought, you're to bring it over to the Residence so he can look at it, he's waiting for you now."
"Heavens, what busybodies people are," Lin Chong thought. "It's already been reported." At their insistence he dressed, picked up the sword and went with them. "I don't remember seeing you before at the Marshal's," he said to them. "We've only just entered his service," they replied.
Soon they reached the Residence and entered the reception hall. Here Lin Chong stopped. "No, the Marshal is sitting inside in the inner hall," the other two said. Passing the entrance screen, they entered the inner hall. But the Marshal was not to be seen here either, so Lin Chong halted again. "He's waiting for you inside," they said. "He told us to take you in." They passed through three more doors and reached an area surrounded by a green balustrade. Planting him in front of a hall, they said: "Wait here, Instructor, while we go and report that you've arrived." They disappeared inside, and Lin Chong waited there under the eaves, holding his sword.
They were gone long enough for one to drink a cup of tea, and Lin Chong began to grow suspicious. He went to take a look behind the entrance screen. Over the portal were four characters, inscribed in green: White Tiger Council Chamber. He understood at once. "This is the inner sanctum where major military decisions are taken, what am I doing here?" he exclaimed in horror. He was about to withdraw hastily, when he heard the sound of boots, echoing briskly. Someone was coming. Lin Chong looked up, and who should he see but his commanding officer, Marshal Gao! Lin Chong took a pace forward and proffering his sword made a profound obeisance.
"Lin Chong!" the Marshal growled. "You dare to enter the White Tiger Council Chamber without orders? Are you ignorant of the regulations? And why are you carrying a sword? Have you come to assassinate me? I've been told you were seen loitering near the Residence with a dagger a few days back. Your intentions cannot be good!"
Lin Chong bowed his head and said respectfully: "Your Excellency, it was your two aides who told me to come here, so that you could inspect my new sword."
"What aides?" the Marshal said.
"The two who just went inside," Lin Chong said.
"You're lying that of my aides would dare enter my private apartments? Ho, there, guards! Arrest this criminal!"
Immediately a score of men rushed out of a side-room and threw Lin Chong to the ground. It was like when the black eagle seizes the hapless swallow or the ravening tiger tears the innocent lamb. "You, an instructor of the guards, and you don't know the regulations?" the Marshal bellowed. "You penetrated the council chamber with a sword in your hand, what's that supposed to mean? You planned to kill your commanding officer, eh?" Then he ordered the guards to take the culprit away. No one would have given much for Lin Chong's chances of survival at that moment.
But for this, we would not have seen "Many a tumult throughout the land, all in uproar between the four seas." This was the cause of

Insignia borne on peasants' backs,
Standards raised on fishing junks.

NOW these vagabonds had 2 leaders; Zhang the Third, nicknamed "The Crossing Road Rat" and the other Li the Fourth nicknamed "Green Grass Snake," and they tried to induce Lu Da towards the cesspit but he noticed that the crowd of men did not move at all. Lu Da invited them all to come into the temple but as the two leaders had already knelt down they did not want to get up, and waited for him to come forward to assist them to get up when they would seize his legs. As they neither moved nor got up, Lu Da at once suspected some trickery, and thought they were surely waiting to "pull the tiger's whiskers." So he decided to go forward, and make them feel the weight of his fist and foot. As he strode up to them the leaders said, "We offer you our congratulations," so saying, they advanced on their knees, and tried to grab hold of Lu Da's legs. But the latter was too quick for them, and he kicked Green Grass Snake into the cesspit, and then did the same to Old Rat. This made the crowd of rascals speechless, and they all wanted to sneak off. Lu Da shouted that if any man attempted to go away he would be treated in the same way. No one dared move. In the cesspit the leaders were peeping to see what was happening. The cesspit was so deep that they could not touch the bottom. There was a terrible stench, and their heads were covered with maggots. They called out, "Reverend, please forgive us."
"You rascals there," shouted Lu Da, "come and help these men to get out. I forgive the whole lot of you."
The two leaders were assisted out of the pit, and then they went and stood near a gourd stand some distance away as the stench was so strong.
Lu Da laughed, "You foolish fellows! You had better go to the pool and after a wash there I will talk with you."
The leaders did this, and their followers handed them a change of clothing to put on.
Lu Da ordered them all to come into the temple, and there sitting in the centre of the hall he pointed at the assembled men and said, "You gang of vagabonds need not try to deceive me. Now why did you come here to trifle with me?"
They all knelt down, and the leaders replied, "We live by gambling, and therefore have to depend on your garden for our food. The temple bribed us several times to leave the vegetables alone but there is no result. Reverend, where do you come from? You are so strong that we must submit to you. We are willing to do whatever you wish."
"I was a Major in the army," replied Lu Da, "and because I killed many men I became a monk. My name is Lu Da. You thirty men are of no account to me for even if a thousand soldiers came here I would defeat them."
The rascals expressed their appreciation of his clemency in letting them off so lightly; they then departed. The next day the rascals got together some money, ten jars of wine, and a roasted pig, and brought them to present to Lu Da. In the temple they took their seats in two rows with Lu Da in the centre, and they all drank wine.
Lu Da asked why they had wasted so much money, and they replied, "We are happy because you are with us today, and we ask you to become our chief."
Lu Da was pleased at this offer. When they had been drinking for some time, some were singing, others talking, applauding, or laughing. While in this state they heard a great noise outside, caused by some crows cawing. Some men showed their teeth to indicate dislike of this interruption and used a saying, "If there is trouble let it go to either heaven or hell."
"What trouble are you fellows talking about?" asked Lu Da.
The men said, "We are afraid there will be trouble because of the cawing of those crows."
"Where do you get that idea from?" asked Lu Da.
A servant laughed and replied, "The crows build their nests in a willow tree just outside the garden, and every evening they clamour there."
Some said they would get a ladder, and destroy the nests. Lu Da was now merry with wine, and they all went outside to look at the nests. The Green Grass Snake said he would climb up the tree but Lu Da took off his gown, and seizing the tree with both hands he made a mighty heave and uprooted the willow tree. The vagabonds were astounded, and kneeling down they worshiped him. They said, "Reverend, you are not a mortal man but must be a living Buddha. If you had not the strength to lift ten million *jin* in weight you could not have done this."
"That is only a small affair. Wait till tomorrow, when you can see me do some military exercises with my sword."
It was evening before they all departed. The next day they were quite submissive in spirit due to what they had seen. They brought wine and meat for Lu Da, and watched him at his exercises. After they had done this for some time Lu Da decided to give them a banquet, and ordered his gardeners to go into the town and buy various kinds of fruit and wine, kill a pig and a sheep. At that time the weather was warm it being the end of the fourth lunar month, so Lu Da had mats spread under the ash tree, and there the vagabonds sat down. They were served with big bowls of wine, and large pieces of meat, and were told to eat as much as they wanted. During the feast they said, "Reverend, for several days we have seen you exercising but we have not noticed you using your staff, and we should like to see you do that now."
Lu Da agreed, and going indoors, brought out his monk staff, seventy inches in length, and weighed sixty-two *jin*. When they saw this huge weapon they were startled, and said, "If a man had not the strength of a buffalo in both arms he could not use that." But Lu Da whirled it round with great ease, making it whistle in the air. On seeing this the men applauded.
Lu Da was quite in high spirit and did this display in good form. He noticed an official watching him through a break in the garden wall, so he ceased his exercises. The official wore blue gauze silk, folded in a knot on his head; round his head was a string of pearls to which were attached two white jade tablets at the back of his head; his military gown was of thin green silk decorated with a flower design; his belt was embroidered like the marks on the back of a tortoise; suspended from it were two otters' tails, and it had a silver buckle; his black shoes were of court fashion with tips turned up; in his hand he held a fan made of Sichuan paper. His face was like a leopard's, with big round eyes and a heavy beard. He was nine feet tall and seemed to be thirty-five years of age. He called out, "This is an extraordinary master, and uses his weapon well."
The vagabonds answered, "As this Drill Instructor approves, Lu Da must be very good."
"Who is that army officer?" asked Lu Da.
"He is the Drill Inspector of the Imperial Guards, and is named Lin Chong."
"Why don't you ask him to come inside?" asked Lu Da. But just then the onlooker jumped over the broken wall, and met Lu Da under the ash tree, where they sat down.
After the usual courtesies as to names, Lu Da said that he had met Lin Chong's father at the Eastern Capital. Lin Chong was much pleased, and insisted upon making Lu Da his sworn elder brother. He then informed Lu Da that he had come with his wife to worship at the Yue Temple nearby. As he saw Lu Da exercising, so he told his maidservant, Jin Er, to go with his wife to the temple, and he would wait there for them. Lu Da ordered his servants to bring wine for the guest, and when the latter had partaken three cups, he saw the servant with a red face hurrying towards the broken wall and calling, "Master! come at once! Your wife has trouble with a man in the temple."
Lin Chong quickly inquired where they were, and Jin Er replied, "She was just at the bottom of the Wu Yue Pavilion in the temple when a cheeky fellow stopped her, and would not let her go."
Lin Chong hurriedly said to Lu Da, "Please excuse me, sir; I will come back very soon." He ran towards the broken wall and jumping over, hastened to the Yue Temple followed by the maid. Upon reaching the Wu Yue Pavillion, he saw several men with bows, blowpipes, and sticks covered with lime for catching birds, standing inside the railings. On the staircase to the upper chamber was a young man, preventing his wife to proceed, and saying to her, "Come with me upstairs as I have something to say to you."
Lin Chong's wife blushingly replied, "How dare you speak to me in this way, in broad daylight?"
Lin Chong hurried forward, caught hold of the man, and pulled him away, saying; "You should be severely punished for molesting a respectable woman like this." He was on the point of hitting him, when he recognized him as Master Gao, the adopted son of the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, Gao Qiu.
Now sometime before Gao Qiu having no child of his own, had adopted his cousin, and was very fond of him but Master Gao used the influence of this official for the sole purpose of debauching the people's wives. The people at the court were afraid of his power, and dared not oppose him; nevertheless, they nicknamed him "Heavenly King of Pleasure."
When Lin Chong saw who it was, he became cautious. Master Gao saw that he was restraining himself, and not knowing that the woman was Lin Chong's wife, asked, "Why do you interfere in my affair? You are going too far!"
Men standing round saw the danger of a row, and came forward saying, "Drill Instructor, please excuse him for if he had known that she was your wife he would not have intruded."
But Lin Chong's anger had not entirely subsided, and he glared at Master Gao, who left the temple and rode off.
Just then Lu Da arrived, armed with his monk staff, and accompanied by the vagabonds, and said he had come to fight for Lin Chong.
Lin Chong explained what had occurred, and said that he had let Master Gao off this time as he did not wish to annoy Gao Qiu. He referred to the old saying, "Fear not the authorities, except those that have authority over you."
"You are afraid of the Marshal of the Imperial Guard," said Lu Da, "but I am not. If I had met that young rascal I would have given him three hundred blows with my staff."
Lin Chong saw that Lu Da was drunk so he said, "What you say is all right. These men persuaded me to let him off."
"If you have any further trouble please tell me, and I will help you," said Lu Da. They then all departed but Lin Chong was rather troubled in his mind.
Master Gao was infatuated with the wife of Lin Chong but had submitted to Lin Chong's interference, and led his followers away but as he returned to his official residence he was in low spirits. During the next few days his followers kept out of his way as they found him upset, and quite unable to attend to business. But one man, an idler named Fu An, nicknamed "Stinking Dickhead," understood his master, and waited upon him. One day as Master Gao was sitting idly in the library he entered and remarked, "You are not looking well these last few days, and there must be something worrying you."
"And don't you know the reason?"
"I think I can guess what it is," replied Fu An. "You are thinking of the wife of Lin Chong. Am I right?"
Master Gao laughed, "You have guessed correctly but I have no means of getting her."
"There is no difficulty. You are afraid of Lin Chong because he is a hero, and therefore you dare not belittle him. But never mind that, because he is in your employ, and he would not dare to offend your father, the Marshal of the Imperial Guard. If he made a slight mistake he could be banished, or if a serious error he would be ruined for life. I have a plan by which he could be implicated."
Master Gao after hearing this said, "I have met many nice young women and girls but I particularly love this one, and since I saw her, my mind has not been at peace. How could you implicate him? If applicable I will handsomely reward you."
"I have an intimate friend Lu Qian who is very friendly with Lin Chong. Tomorrow you can hide yourself in Lu Qian's house. He would arrange a feast, and invite Lin Chong to it. He however is to be told to lead Lin Chung to the Fan Inn for wine. Then I will go to Lin Chong's home, and tell his wife that her husband, while drinking wine at Lu Qian's house suddenly became ill and fell down unconscious. I will tell her that she had better go at once as it might be serious, and I will bring her to Lu Qian's house. There when she sees you so well dressed, and listens to your flattery, she will become amenable to your suggestions as she is of an unstable disposition. What do you think of my plan?"
Master Gao was pleased, and said, "This evening I will send for Lu Qian."
Now Lu Qian's house was in the same alley as the house of the Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard. The next day the plan was explained to Lu Qian who agreed to act his part. Although he was a friend of Lin Chong yet he would do this treacherous thing in order to ingratiate himself with the more influential Master Gao.
Lin Chong had been depressed in spirits for some time, and had not gone out of doors. But one day about ten o'clock in the morning he heard a man at the street door call out, "Is the Drill Instructor in?" Upon going to the door he saw Lu Qian and asked what he wanted.
"I have specially come to see you as I have not seen you for a long time."
"I have been much depressed," said Lin Chong, "and therefore have not been outside."
"Come with me," said Lu Qian, "and a few cups of wine will drive your cares away."
Lin Chong invited him to come inside, and after a few cups of tea he told his wife that he was going with Lu Qian for some wine. She asked him not to drink too much, and to get back as soon as possible. The two men then left the house, and after strolling about for a little time Lu Qian suggested that instead of going to his home they would go to the Fan Inn for the wine. This was agreed to, and at the inn they sat in a small apartment where the waiter brought wine and fruit. While they were chatting Lin Chong sighed, and Lu Qian asked why he did that.

"You do not understand," said Lin Chong, "that although I have ability I have not yet found an employer who appreciates my skill. I have to submit to the injustices and vile tempers of mean fellows."
"Although there are several drill instructors yet there is not one equal to you in ability. The Marshal of the Imperial Guard treats you well so whose vile temper have you to submit to?"
Lin Chong then told of the affair he had with Master Gao some time ago, while Lu Qian pressed him to drink more wine. Lin Chong drank about nine cups of wine, left the room, and then the inn, for the lavatory. He was returning to the inn when he met his maidservant Jin Er who said that she had been looking for him. Upon Lin Chong asking why, she explained, "You had been gone with Lu Qian less than half an hour when a man rushed into your house, and spoke to your wife, 'I am a neighbour of Lu Qian, and your husband is drinking with him. I saw your husband fall down senseless. You had better go there at once.' Your wife asked our neighbour Madame Wang to look after the house, and then set off with me. We went to the alley where Marshal Gao Qiu lives, and opposite his gate we entered a house and went upstairs where there was a table set with food and wine but you were not there. I was just about to go below when I saw the young man who had annoyed your wife at the Yue Temple the other day. He spoke to her, 'Please sit down. Your husband will be here shortly.' I hurried below, and there heard your wife upstairs shouting, 'Help! Help!' Therefore I ran to look for you, and happened to meet a man who told me that he had seen you entering the Fan Inn so I came here at once. Please, sir, hurry up!"
Lin Chong was astonished, and immediately rushed off to Lu Qian's house. Upon arriving there, and going up the staircase he found that the door of the room was fastened but heard his wife inside say, "In this day of universal tranquillity why do you detain me, an innocent woman, here?" To this Master Gao replied, "Madame, please take pity of me! Even a woman of iron or stone would change her mind."
Lin Chong shouted, "Wife, open the door." And she did so, while Master Gao being afraid, opened a window, jumped out, and ran away.
Lin Chong ascertained that his wife had not been ravished, and then smashed everything in the room. He took her downstairs, and on the streets noticed that the doors of the neighbouring houses were closed. The maidservant just then joining them, they all three went home. There Lin Chong taking a dagger concealed it in his sleeve, and went to the Fan Inn to look for Lu Qian but did not find him there. He then went to Lu Qian's house, and waited outside the door until evening without seeing that man. Upon returning home Lin Chong was exhorted by his wife, "As I did not fall into that man's trap you must be reasonable."
"It is very intolerable to think that that brute Lu Qian who used to address me as his brother should have deceived me. Now I am only afraid that I shall not meet that Master Gao, and get my revenge."
His wife strongly appealed to him not to go out.
Lu Qian hid in the private quarters of the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, as he dared not go home. Lin Chong waited for three days without seeing Lu Qian. On the fourth day Lu Da called on Lin Chong, and remarked that he had not seen him for several days. Lin Chong explained, "I have been somewhat busy these few days so that I have not been able to see you but as you have favoured me by visiting my little hut you should drink three cups of wine with me. Unfortunately I have no wine here so how will it be if we go for a stroll and call at some inn?"
Lu Da agreed and they went out. They were drinking wine for the whole day, and then agreed to meet again the following day. They even did this everyday until at last the affair of Master Gao was almost obliterated from Lin Chong's mind.
After escaping from Lu Qian's house, Master Gao did not dare to mention the matter to his adopted father, and remained at home sick. Lu Qian and Fu An came to see him, and noticed that he still seemed to be depressed. Upon their asking why he was not well, he replied, "I will not deceive you in any way. It is because I have twice failed to get hold of that woman, and have been scared by her husband. My lovesickness is more acute than ever. I think I shall be like this for a long time, and that even my life is in danger."
The two men said, "Master, do not worry! We will take this matter in hand, and will be responsible for bringing you and her together. She can only escape by committing suicide."
While they were talking the steward came in to see how his master's sickness was progressing. When he had made the usual inquiries Lu Qian and Fu An asked him to go with them for a private conversation. Upon reaching a quiet spot they said to him, "If you want Master Gao to recover you must report the affair to his father, Marshal Gao Qiu, and put an end to Lin Chong's life. Then we can get hold of the woman and take her to Master Gao who will recover. If you do not do this your master will certainly die."
"That is an easy thing," replied the steward, "and I will inform Marshal Gao Qiu this very evening."
"We have already the plan," said the two men, "but we will wait until you tell us what's Marshal Gao Qiu's idea."
The steward went to see the Marshal of the Imperial Guard that evening, and told him, "Your adopted son is melancholy because he cannot have the wife of Drill Instructor Lin Chong. He met her at the Yue Temple, more than a month ago, and ever since he has become lovesick." He then explained Lu Qian's plan for curing Master Gao.
Gao Qiu thought the matter over but could not see how he could damage the prospects of Lin Chong, and said so. He agreed however to hear what plan Lu Qian had, and sent for him. Upon their arrival they called out "*nuo*!" in the usual way, and Gao Qiu asked what plan they had to cure his son. Lu Qian explained the plot, and the Marshal approved of it, and ordered them to carry it out the next day.
Lin Chong had been drinking with Lu Da everyday so that he had quite forgotten about the affair of Master Gao. It happened, however, on one day as they were walking near Yue Wu Fang lane they saw a big man with a splendid sword on which was a tuft of grass to indicate that it was for sale. He called out, "I have not yet met a man who knows the value of this sword." But Lin Chong and Lu Da paid no attention, and strolled along. The man followed them calling out, "A good sword! What a pity that nobody knows its value!" The two friends still paid no attention so the man called out as they entered an alley, "This capital is a very big place, and yet there is no one who knows about military weapons."
Lin Chong could not help but hear this, and turned round. The man drew the sword out of its scabbard, and displayed its dazzling brightness. Lin Chong was not aware that this sword would doom his fate as he asked to look at it. The man handed it over for inspection, and Lin Chong exclaimed, "What a fine sword! How much do you want for it?"
The man said it was worth three thousand strings of cash but he would take two thousand.
"It is worth two thousand," said Lin Chong, "but nobody here knows its value. If you will take one thousand I will buy it."
"I am hard up for ready money," said the man, "and as you want it I will make a reduction of five hundred."
But Lin Chong would offer only one thousand so the man heaved a sigh; saying, "Now gold is for sale at the price of scrap iron. But enough! But don't give me a single cash less."
Lin Chong said he would pay him at his home, and so departed with Lu Da, promising to see him again the following day. He duly paid for the sword, and then asked where he got it from.
"It is a family heirloom, and I sell it because we are very hard up," replied the man.
"Who was your ancestor?"
"If I told you I should be ashamed."
Lin Chong did not press the point, and the man departed. He examined the sword, turning it this way and that, and saying to himself, "This is certainly an excellent sword. Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard, has a sword like this but he does not let anybody see it. I have asked him several times to let me see it but have been refused. By and by I will take this sword and compare it with his." He continued examining the sword till it was evening. At night he hung it on the wall but got up long before daybreak to have another look at it.
The following day he heard two minor officials at the door calling out, "Drill Instructor Lin Chong, Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard has heard that you have bought a sword, and he orders you to bring it for his inspection. He is specially waiting for you in his *yamen*." Upon hearing this Lin Chong wondered who could have reported the purchase to the Marshal. The two men waited until he was dressed, then he took the sword and went with them.
On the way he said, "I have not seen you at the headquarters."
"We have been appointed quite recently," they replied.
Upon reaching the headquarters they entered while Lin Chong remained in the courtyard. The two men then came back and said that the Marshal was in the hall at the back. Upon going there they passed round the screen before the door of the hall and then saw that the Marshal was not inside. Lin Chong stopped there but the men said that the Marshal had instructed them to take him inside. So he went with them through three doors, until they came to a building surrounded by green railings. There they asked him to wait while they were going to announce his arrival. They went inside and Lin Chong stood under the eaves of the hall for so long a time that it would take to drink a cup of tea but the men still had not returned. Such a delay and silence made him suspicious. He lifted up the door curtain and peeping inside saw an honourary tablet with four black characters, "White Tiger's Private Hall." He understood immediately that this was the hall where councils of war were held, and that he was trespassing. He quickly turned round to go away but just then he heard the sound of footsteps behind him, and looking back saw the Marshal himself. He stepped forward, and called out, "*nuo*" (awaiting your attention).
Marshal Gao Qiu shouted, "Lin Chong! How dare you enter the White Tiger's Private Hall, seeing that I have not summoned you? Moreover you have a sword in your hand, and evidently intended to kill me. I have heard that you have been hanging about these headquarters for several days with a sword so you evidently have bad intentions."
Lin Chong bowed his head, and said, "Your Benevolent Excellency! I was favoured by a visit of two junior officers who told me to bring my sword here to compare it with yours."
Marshal Gao Qiu shouted, "Where are those junior officers?"
"Your Benevolent Excellency, they went inside this hall."
"Nonsense! No junior officer dare enter my rooms! Seize this person!"
Before he had finished saying this, about thirty men rushed out of the building on both sides, and arrested him. Marshal Gao Qiu pretended to be angry, and said, "You are a Drill Instructor, and yet you do not know the law. Why do you enter the White Tiger's Private Hall with a sword in your hand, and try to kill me?" This event was to lead to much trouble in the empire.

Marks inscribed on farmer's backs;
Fishing boats studded with flags.

## 008

### Drill Instructor Lin Chong's Tattooed/Branded, Exiled to Cangzhou, & prospects seem far from good; Lu Da Zhishen to the rescue in the Forest, has a Big Row, & makes a Shambles of Wild Bull Wood

As we were saying, Marshal Gao shouted for his guards to take Lin Chong out and execute him. Lin Chong loudly exclaimed that he was innocent.
"Why did you enter the Inner Sanctum with a sword in your hand?" demanded the marshal. "Of course you wanted to kill me!"
"Would I dare go in if the marshal hadn't summoned me?" countered Lin Chong. "I saw those two lieutenants enter the hall! They tricked me into coming here!"
"Nonsense! What lieutenants are you talking about? This scoundrel refuses to admit his guilt," said the marshal. And he directed his guards: "Take him to Kaifeng Prefecture. Ask Prefect Teng to examine him and investigate the case. Get the truth out of him, then have him executed. Label the sword as an official exhibit and take it along."
Bearing the marshal's order, the guards escorted Lin Chong to Kaifeng Prefecture. It happened that the prefect was still holding court, and Marshal Gao's emissary brought Lin Chong to the prefect's hall and knelt at the foot of the dais. The prefect's secretary relayed the emissary's message from Gao Qiu and placed the labelled sword down in front of Lin Chong.
"Lin Chong," said the prefect, "you're a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards. You must know the law. How could you enter the Inner Sanctum holding a sword? That's an offence punishable by death."
"Benevolent lord, you reflect the truth like a mirror. Lin Chong has been grievously wronged! Although I'm only a crude and stupid military man, I'm not exactly ignorant of the law. How would I presume to enter the Inner Sanctum? The reason I went there was this: On the twenty-eighth of last month I took my wife to the Temple of the Sacred Mountain to burn incense. There I caught Marshal Gao's son trying to seduce her. I berated him and drove him away. Next, he had Captain Lu Qian trick me into going out to drink and got Fu An to lure my wife to Captain Lu's home, where he tried to ravish her. This too I discovered and wrecked Lu Qian's furniture. Though Young Master Gao failed to despoil her, I have witnesses to both attempts.
"Yesterday, I bought this sword. Today, Marshal Gao sent two lieutenants to summon me. They said he wanted me to bring my sword to compare it with his. And so I went with them to the Inner Sanctum. After they went inside, Marshal Gao suddenly entered the courtyard. It's all a plot to destroy me. Please help me, Your Honour!"
After hearing Lin Chong's story, the prefect ordered that a receipt-of-prisoner be issued, a wooden cangue locked around the drill instructor's neck, and that he be held in custody. Lin Chong's family sent food to him in jail and gave tips to the keepers. His father-in-law, Drill Instructor Zhang, also called at the prison. He spent quite a bit, bribing high and low.
It happened that in the prefecture there was a scribe named Sun Ding. Because he was extremely just and kindly and always willing to help people, he was known as Sun the Buddha. Learning the facts of the case, he diplomatically informed the prefect what he had discovered.
"Lin Chong has been wronged," he said. "You must help him."
"But Marshal Gao has confirmed that he committed a crime. He insists that I convict Lin Chong for entering the Inner Sanctum, sword in hand, with the intention of murdering him. What can I do?"
"Is Kaifeng Prefecture ruled by the imperial court or the family of Marshal Gao?"
"Don't talk nonsense!"
"Everyone knows Gao Qiu uses his position tyrannically. There's nothing he won't do. Whoever offends him, even in the slightest, he sends to Kaifeng Prefecture. If he wants a man killed, we kill him. If he wants him hacked, we hack him. We've become a mere subdivision of his family."
"How can I make things easy for Lin Chong? What sort of sentence should I pass?"
"From Lin Chong's story, it's plain that he's innocent, although we haven't been able to find those two lieutenants. Why not have him confess to entering the Inner Sanctum improperly wearing a sword at his waist, sentence him to twenty strokes of the bamboo, tattoo him and exile him to some distant military district?"
After considering this, Prefect Teng went to see Marshal Gao and urged him to agree to such a confession from Lin Chong. Knowing that reason was against him, and since the prefect seemed reluctant to cooperate, the marshal was forced to consent.
The very same day, the prefect called court into session. He had Lin Chong summoned, the cangue removed and twenty blows of the bamboo administered. The prefect directed the tattooer to place the mark of a criminal on Lin Chong's cheek. Then he calculated the distance and decided upon Cangzhou as Lin's place of exile. In full court, a hinged wooden cangue of seven and a half catties was placed around the drill instructor's neck and nailed fast, and prefectural seals were affixed. The prefect issued a deportation order and designated two guards to escort the prisoner to his destination. Their names were Dong Chao and Xue Ba.
The guards left the prefectural compound with Lin Chong. Outside the gate, many of Lin Chong's neighbours and his father-in-law, Drill Instructor Zhang, were waiting. All repaired to a tavern and took seats.
"Thanks to the assistance of Scribe Sun, my beating was not heavy and I'm still able to walk," said Lin Chong.
Drill Instructor Zhang told the waiter to serve the two guards with wine and fruit. They drank several cups, and the old man presented them each with some silver.
Clasping hands respectfully, Lin Chong addressed his father-in-law. "Bad times have befallen me, exalted father-in-law. I clashed with Young Master Gao and the court has condemned me wrongfully. Now I have something to say: In the three years since you generously gave me your daughter in marriage she has never done anything to displease me. Although she's borne no children, not once have we quarrelled or even grown red in the face. Today I've suffered this misfortune. I'm being exiled to Cangzhou and there's no telling whether I'll live or die. My lady will be left at home. I'm worried about her. I'm afraid Young Master Gao will try to force his suit.
"She's still young. I shouldn't tie her down. This is my own idea, it's entirely voluntary. In the presence of our honourable neighbours I want to write out an annulment of our marriage, consenting to her making a new match and promising not to contest it. Only in this way will I feel at ease, assured that Young Master Gao won't be able to harm her."
"What words are these, good son-in-law," cried the old drill instructor. "You've been unlucky and this misfortune has happened. It's not of your own doing. Today you're going to Cangzhou for temporary refuge but sooner or later Heaven will pity you and let you return, and husband and wife will be together again. I've got a bit of money. I'll have my daughter and Jin Er move in with me. Come what may, I can support them for four or five years. I won't allow my daughter out on the streets. Young Master Gao won't be able to see her even if he wants to. Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. You go on to Cangzhou. From time to time I'll send you letters and clothing. Don't get any foolish ideas. Just go in peace."
"Thank you, father-in-law, for your good intentions. But I wouldn't feel right, tying her down. Have pity, father-in-law, let me have my way. Then, even if I die, I can close my eyes peacefully."
But Drill Instructor Zhang wouldn't hear of it. The neighbours also were opposed.
"Unless I am allowed to do this, even if I succeed in coming back I swear I'll never see her again," said Lin Chong.
"Write out the annulment if that's how you feel," said the old man. "In any event, I won't let my daughter marry another." Lin Chong then sent for a scribe and purchased a sheet of paper. The scribe wrote as Lin Chong dictated:
*Because he was convicted of a serious crime, Lin Chong, drill instructor of the Imperial Guards, Eastern Capital, has been sentenced to exile in Cangzhou. What will happen to him is difficult to foretell. His wife (maiden name Zhang) is still young, and he therefore wishes to annul their marriage. He grants her permission to contract a new marriage and guarantees that he will never contest it. The annulment is truly voluntary and not issued under compulsion. In the event of any doubt, this document shall serve as proof.*
*Year ... Month ... Day ...*
When the document was completed, Lin Chong took the writing brush and signed his name below the date, then added his thumb print. Just as he was about to hand the annulment to his father-in-law, his wife, weeping and crying aloud, came hurrying to the tavern, followed by the maidservant, Jin Er, who was carrying a bundle of clothing. Lin Chong rose and went forward to meet her.
"Wife," he said, "I have something to tell you. I've already spoken to father-in-law. Because I've fallen on bad times, I've had this misfortune. Today, I start for Cangzhou. It's hard to say whether I'll live or die. I don't want to hold you back in the flower of your youth, so I've had this document written. Please don't wait for me. If you meet a good man, marry again. Don't delay your happiness on my account."
"Husband," she wept. "I've never wronged you in the slightest. How can you discard me?"
"I mean well, wife," said Lin Chong. "Otherwise, we'll only impede each other. You'll be harmed."
"Don't worry, my daughter," said Drill Instructor Zhang. "Even though son-in-law recommends it, I'll never allow you to remarry. He can depart easy in his mind. If he doesn't return, I'll provide for you for the rest of your life, so that you can remain faithful to him."
The young woman uttered heart-rending sobs, tears streaming down her cheeks. When she saw the annulment document she collapsed swooning to the floor. Lin Chong and his father-in-law hurried to raise her. It was some time before she revived. She wept uncontrollably as Lin Chong presented the document to her father. Women neighbours did their best to comfort her. Supporting the bereft woman under the arms, they escorted her home.
"Go, and try to come back soon," Drill Instructor Zhang told Lin Chong. "Tomorrow, I shall move your wife over to my house. I'll take care of her until you return. You can depart without any worries. Be sure to write to us from time to time, if you find people who can deliver your letters."
Lin Chong rose and thanked his father-in-law and his neighbours, placed his bundle on his back, and went off with the guards. Drill Instructor Zhang and the neighbours departed for home. Of them we shall say no more.

We'll speak of the two guards and Lin Chong. Dong Chao and Xue Ba locked their prisoner in a guard house, and returned to their homes to pack some things for their journey. As Dong Chao was tying a bundle together, a waiter from the tavern at the head of the lane came in.
"Sir, a gentleman wishes to speak with you in our tavern."
"Who is he?"
"I don't know. He only told me to invite you over."
Dong Chao went with the waiter to a room in the tavern. He found a man wearing a hat decorated with Buddhist swastikas and dressed in a black silk tunic. On his feet were black boots and plain stockings. When Dong Chao entered, the man quickly rose and clasped hands in greeting.
"Please be seated," he said.
"I have not had the privilege of meeting Your Honour before," said Dong Chao. "How can I serve you?"
"Please sit down. You'll know shortly."
Dong Chao took a chair on the opposite side of the table. The waiter brought wine cups and food and fruit and laid them out.
"Where does Xue the guard live?" the man asked.
"In that lane ahead," replied Dong Chao.
The man called the waiter and asked him for Xue's exact address. "Invite him here to meet me," he instructed.
In less time than it takes to drink a cup of tea, the waiter returned with Xue Ba.
"This gentleman has invited us for a talk," Dong Chao explained.
"May I ask your name, sir?" queried Xue Ba.
"You'll know very soon," replied the man. "First let us drink."
The three took their seats and the waiter served wine. After they had consumed several cups, the man drew from his sleeve ten ounces of gold and placed them on the table.
"Five ounces for each of you," he said. "There is a small matter I want to trouble you about."
"But we don't know Your Honour. Why should you give us gold?" they asked.
"Aren't you going to Cangzhou?"
"We're taking Lin Chong there under orders of the Kaifeng Prefect," said Dong Chao.
"It's precisely for that reason that I must bother you two. I am Marshal Gao's trusted Captain Lu Qian."
Dong Chao and Xue Ba immediately greeted him with profound respect. "How can insignificant men like us presume to sit at the same table with Your Honour," they cried.
"As you know, Lin Chong has incurred the marshal's displeasure. The marshal has ordered me to present you with these ten ounces of gold. He hopes you will finish off Lin Chong in some secluded place along the road—it needn't be too far—and bring back a certification of his death from the local authorities. If Kaifeng Prefecture causes any difficulty, the marshal will take care of it personally. You needn't worry about that."
"I'm afraid it's not possible," said Dong Chao. "The official order of Kaifeng Prefecture directs that we deliver Lin Chong alive, not that we kill him. He's not an old man: How could we explain his death? We'd surely get into trouble. I'm afraid it can't be done."
"Dong, old fellow," said Xue Ba, "listen to me. If Marshal Gao ordered us to die, we would have to obey, to say nothing of a case like this, when he sends this gentleman with gold. Say no more. I'll share it with you and that's that. If we do this little favour, we'll be looked after in the future. On the road to Cangzhou there's a big pine forest, a wild evil place. Come what may, we'll finish him off there."
Xue Ba took the gold and said, "You can rely on us, Your Honour. At the latest on the fifth stage of the journey, at the earliest the second, the thing will be done."
Very pleased, Lu Qian exclaimed: "Xue Ba is truly straightforward and to the point. When the deed is accomplished, bring back the golden print on Lin Chong's face as proof. I will then reward you both with another ten ounces of gold. I shall be waiting for good news. Be sure not to delay."
In Song times, prisoners who were to be exiled were always tattooed on the face. To make it sound better, the mark was called "the golden print."
The three finished their wine, Lu Qian paid the bill, then all left the tavern and went their separate ways.
Dong Chao and Xue Ba, after dividing the gold, returned to their homes and finished packing. Then they took their official staves, called for Lin Chong at the guard house, and set out from the city. They travelled more than thirty //before calling a halt. In Song days, guards escorting a prisoner did not have to pay for lodging in public inns. Xue and Dong brought Lin Chong to an inn, and they stayed the night.
At dawn the next morning, the guards lit a fire and made breakfast, and the three continued their journey to Cangzhou. It was the height of summer and the weather was scorching. Lin Chong had not suffered much when he was beaten. But now a few days had passed, and the fiery heat irritated his wounds. He walked painfully, with dragging steps.
"Stupid clod," Xue Ba said. "It's over two thousand //from here to Cangzhou. Who knows when we'll get there, at the rate you're going!"
"I was buffeted a bit in the marshal's compound, and then, the other day, I was beaten with bamboos. My wounds are paining me in this awful heat," Lin Chong explained. "Please, sirs, don't be impatient."
"Just take your time," said Dong Chao. "Never mind his grumbling."
Xue Ba kept complaining and cursing all along the road. "It's our misfortune to have run into a wretched demon like you," he berated Lin Chong.
As the day was drawing to a close, the three again put up at a village inn. Entering the door, the guards rested their staves and removed their packs. Lin Chong also dropped his luggage bundle. Before the guards could say anything, he took out some pieces of silver and told the attendant to bring wine, meat and rice, and set the table. Lin then invited the guards to dine with him.
Dong Chao and Xue Ba ordered still more wine, and they gave Lin Chong so much that he became drunk and lay down on the floor, with the cangue still round his neck. Xue Ba then boiled a large pot of water. When it was bubbling hot he poured it into a basin.
"Wash your feet, Drill Instructor," he said. "You'll sleep better."
Lin Chong struggled to a sitting position but he couldn't lean forward because of the cangue.
"I'll wash them for you," Xue Ba offered.
"How could I impose upon you?" Lin Chong hastily replied.
"Men travelling together shouldn't be ceremonious over such details," said Xue Ba.
Lin Chong didn't realize it was a plot. He stretched out his legs. Xue Ba seized them and plunged them into the boiling water.
*"Aiya!"* exclaimed Lin Chong, hurriedly pulling his feet out. They had turned red and swollen. "I mustn't trouble you!" he cried.
"Plenty of prisoners have looked after guards but how often do you see a guard serving a prisoner?" said Xue Ba. "With the best of intentions I wash his feet but he has the nerve to complain—the water's too cold, the water's too hot ... If this isn't returning evil for good I don't know what is!"
He grumbled and swore half the night.
Not daring to reply, Lin Chong could only fall over and lie on his side.
The two guards poured out the boiling water, filled the basin afresh, then went to wash their feet outside.
They slept until the fourth watch, rising while the rest of the inn was still in bed. Xue Ba heated some water to wash with, and cooked breakfast. Lin Chong, dizzy, was unable to eat and barely able to walk. Xue Ba threatened him with his staff. Dong Chao untied from his belt a pair of new straw sandals with loops and bindings of woven hemp. He told Lin Chong to put them on. Lin Chong's scalded feet were covered with blisters. He wanted his old soft sandals but they were nowhere to be found. He had to put the new ones on.
The waiter added up the bill and the guards led Lin Chong from the inn. It was by now the fifth watch.
Before Lin Chong had gone more than two or three //; the blisters on his feet, broken by the new straw sandals, bled freely. He could hardly drag himself along and he groaned ceaselessly.
"Walk! Faster!" shouted Xue Ba. "Keep moving or I'll help you with this staff."
"Have pity on me, good officer," Lin Chong pleaded. "Would I dare slow down deliberately and delay our journey? It's because my feet are killing me. I can't walk."
"You can lean on me," said Dong Chao. He supported Lin Chong. But since the drill instructor walked with difficulty, they covered only four or five //;
It became obvious that Lin Chong really couldn't go much farther. They saw ahead of them a wild evil wood shrouded in mist. Known as Wild Boar Forest, it was the first dangerous place on the road from Kaifeng to Cangzhou. During the Song Dynasty, those who had grudges against prisoners being sent into exile often bribed their escorts to murder them there. Who can say how many good men lost their lives in that wood?
Now, the two guards led Lin Chong straight into the forest.
"In the whole fifth watch we haven't even walked ten //; "said Dong Chao. "We'll never reach Cangzhou at this rate."
"I'm tired," said Xue Ba. "Let's rest here."
The three men walked deeper into the forest, then removed their packs and placed them at the foot of a tree. Lin Chong groaned. With his back against a tree trunk he slid to the ground.
"Having to wait for you every time we take a step has worn me out too," said Dong Chao. "I want to sleep a while, then we'll go on."
They rested their staves and lay down beside a tree. But no sooner had they closed their eyes than they leaped up with an exclamation.
"What's wrong, good officers?" asked Lin Chong.
"We were just about to sleep when we remembered that there are no doors and locks here. We're afraid you'll run off. We're worried, so we can't sleep in peace."
"I'm a respectable man. Since I've already been convicted, I'd never run away."
"Who can believe that?" scoffed Dong Chao. "The only way we can really feel secure is to tie you up."
"If that's what you good officers want, how can I refuse?"
Xue Ba took a rope from his waist and bound Lin Chong hand and foot and tied him, together with the cangue, tightly to the tree. Then he and Dong Chao sprang up, whirled around, seized their staves and advanced on Lin Chong.
"Killing you isn't our idea," they said. "The other day Captain Lu Qian informed us of the order of Marshal Gao. We're to finish you off here and return immediately with the golden print. Even if we travelled a few more days, it would still be your death march. Doing the job here, we can get back that much earlier. Don't blame us two brothers. We're only carrying out orders. We have no choice. You must know: A year from this day will be the first anniversary of your death! We've been given a time limit. We must return quickly with our report."
When Lin Chong heard this, his tears fell like rain. "Officers," he cried, "there's never been any enmity between us. Spare me, and I'll never forget you in this world or the next!"
"Empty talk," said Dong Chao. "You can't be saved!" Xue Ba raised his official staff and swung it fiercely at Lin Chong's head. What a pity that a hero's life should vanish like a dream! There are no inns on the long road to the Nether Regions. In whose home can a wandering spirit rest in the deep of night?

Well, when the Marshal called for his escort to arrest Lin Chong, and have him executed, Lin Chong loudly protested his innocence.
"Then what were you doing in the council chamber?" the Marshal interjected. "You were carrying a sword. What can that mean except that you went there with intent to assassinate me?"
"But sir, I would never have entered, had I not been summoned. It was your two aides, the two officers who went into the hall. They tricked me into entering."
"You're lying!" the Marshal roared. "There are no such officers on my establishment. The bastard's trying to wriggle out of it!" He gave orders for the guards to carry the prisoner to the Kaifeng court and request Governor Teng to interrogate him and, having ascertained the truth, execute him. The sword was also sent, under seal, as evidence.
In accordance with the Marshal's orders, the guards escorted Lin Chong to the Kaifeng Magistracy where the court happened to be still in session.
*The courtroom is resplendent with red silks and purple sashes. Vermilion inscriptions hang overhead, while all around there are screens of mottled bamboo. Government officials are seen handing out justice and a stone tablet bears an admonition from the Emperor carved in four lines of the imperial characters. Meanwhile court officers carry out their duties meticulously. Lacquered tablets carry two words: "Keep silence!" There are security officers to handle the confidential documents and clerks to keep records. Tough-looking guards with rattan canes line the steps leading up to the bench and impressive officers holding truncheons wait to left and right. When civil cases are heard the judgement is clear and even-handed: when disorderly conduct is the crime, the sentences handed out match like the reflection in a gold mirror. The magistrate, a high-ranking government official, is like father and mother to the people. The accused approaches the bench like one walking on ice, or like a man walking towards a mirror. For its indescribable solemnity, this court resembles the tribunal of Heaven itself.*
The Marshal's men escorted Lin Chong into the courtroom, where he was made to kneel at the foot of the rostrum while the Marshal's instructions were repeated to Governor Teng. Then the sword, sent by the Marshal under seal, was produced and shown to Lin Chong. "Lin Chong!" the Governor said, "you are an instructor of the guards, how could you be ignorant of the regulations? How could you go to the council chamber with an offensive weapon in your hand? It is a capital offence."
"Your Honour," Lin Chong began, "I am unjustly accused, the victim of a plot! I may be only a rough and ready soldier but of course I know the regulations. I wouldn't have dreamed of entering the council chamber without authorization. What happened was that on the twenty-eighth of last month, when I went with my wife to burn incense at the Temple of the Holy Mountain, I caught the Marshal's son molesting my wife. He fled when I expressed my outrage. Later he had Lieutenant Lu invite me to drink wine, while my wife was lured by Fu An to a private upstairs room in Lieutenant Lu's house, where she was again molested. I rescued her, and vented my feelings on Lieutenant Lu's property. There have been two attempts on my wife's honour, as witnesses could testify. Yesterday I bought this sword, and this morning the Marshal sent two officers to my house to fetch me. They told me to take the sword to Government House because the Marshal wanted to examine it. That is why I went with the two men to the council chamber. They disappeared into an inner apartment, and then the Marshal suddenly entered from outside. It was a deliberate plot to ruin me. I beg you to help me!"
The Governor heard Lin Chong's story. He returned a reply to the Marshal and had Lin Chong thrown into prison, duly loaded with manacles and cangue. Lin Chong's family sent him food and paid out money. His father-in-law, Instructor Zhang, bribed all the officials he could, spending a small fortune in cash and rolls of silk.
Now at that time there was an archivist named Sun Ding who was very outspoken and entirely honest, and made it his business to help people, for which reason he was known as "Sun the Compassionate." He saw exactly how things were, he understood all the ins and outs of this case. He advised the Governor: "Lin Chong is clearly the victim of an injustice, we ought to help him."
"But he's accused of a serious crime," the Governor objected. "The Marshal says he must be interrogated, to find out why he penetrated the council chamber with a sword in his hand, intending to kill his superior; how can we help him?"
"So this court of the Southern district of Kaifeng is not under the Emperor's jurisdiction then, it's run by the Marshal," said Sun Ding.
"What are you talking about?" said the Governor.
"Everyone knows Marshal Gao abuses his power and oppresses the people, not to mention the way he carries on in his own house. For the slightest misdemeanour he'll send people to the court; if he says kill them, we kill them, if he says cut them into little pieces, we cut them into little pieces. Are we nothing but a tool in his service?"
"According to you, then, what should we do about Lin Chong? How can we get round this sentence we're expected to hand out?"
"By Lin Chong's own account he's totally innocent. The only problem is we can't lay hands on those two officers. What we must do is get him to confess that he entered the council chamber by mistake, illegally wearing a sword. Sentence him to twenty strokes of the cane, brand him and banish him to a frontier post."
Now that he understood the affair, the Governor went in person to the Marshal's and impressed on him the need to accept such a confession from Lin Chong. Marshal Gao, knowing full well the weakness of his case, was obliged to accept the Governor's judgement.
The court resumed the same day. Lin Chong was summoned; the cangue was removed and he was subjected to twenty strokes of the cane. The tattooer was called to place a mark on each side of Lin Chong's face. Distances were calculated, and Cangzhou was decided on as the place of exile. At the court's instance a hinged cangue weighing seven and a half catties was forthwith clamped round Lin Chong's neck and officially sealed. An official order was issued and two guards appointed to escort the prisoner to the place of exile.
The two guards were called Dong Chao and Xue Ba. When, carrying the official order, they left the Kaifeng courthouse with Lin Chong, all his neighbours together with his father-in-law, arms instructor Zhang, were waiting at the gate. They all accompanied Lin Chong and his two guards to a tavern under the Zhou Bridge.
"I have to thank Mr. Sun, the archivist, for the fact that the caning was not too severe and I am still able to walk," Lin Chong told them.
Instructor Zhang told the innkeeper to prepare wine and fruit to entertain the two guards. After a few cups, Instructor Zhang was seen to fetch out silver and pass it to the guards. Then Lin Chong took his father-in-law's hand and said: "Respected father-in-law, it is my misfortune to have fallen foul of the Marshal's son and thus incurred this injustice. Now I crave your indulgence to permit me to speak what is on my mind: You have granted me your love, more than I merit and, three years since, you gave me your daughter in marriage. I have not the slightest fault to find with her. True, we have not been blessed with children yet but I can say that we have never flushed in anger or raised our voices to each other. But now misfortune has fallen upon me, I am branded and banished to Cangzhou and my future is clouded with uncertainty. My wife will remain here, and I must be forever uneasy, fearing that the Marshal's son will take advantage of my predicament to force his attentions upon her. Moreover, she is now in the very flowering of her youth, and it is not fair that her future should be compromised because of me. I therefore propose — and this purely on my own initiative, entirely without outside prompting or interference — to draw up a document, with these good neighbours as witnesses, stating in unambiguous terms that I divorce her, leaving her entirely free to remarry, without let or hindrance from me. After this I shall depart with an easy mind, confident that it is no longer in Gao's power to ruin her."
Instructor Zhang was horrified. "My dear son-in-law," he said. "What an idea! You've had some bad luck, you've got involved in an unfortunate business but none of it through your own fault. For the present you must go to Cangzhou, where at least you'll find a refuge and be out of harm's way but sooner or later heaven will take pity on you. When you're allowed to return my daughter will be waiting for you, it'll all be as before. I'm not so badly off, I will take my daughter and Jin Er to live with me, ... I'll look after them for three or four years. I won't let them out of the house, so even if young Gao comes looking for them he won't have a chance to see them. Don't worry, put your trust in me. Whilst you're serving your time in Cangzhou I will send you letters and clothes. So enough of these foolish ideas, I want you to go with a quiet mind."

Lin Chong said: "I am truly grateful to you, father-in-law but it cannot set my mind at rest. The situation is prejudicial to us both. Have pity on me and accept my request, so that if need be I can die at peace."
Of course Instructor Zhang did not want to say yes, and all the neighbours likewise said it was impossible. But Lin Chong still insisted: "If you won't listen to me, then let me say to you that if I ever manage to get free I swear that I will not come back to find my wife."
Then Instructor Zhang said, "If that's the way it's got to be, write out your document. But I will not marry my daughter to anyone else." He told the innkeeper to summon a scribe and buy paper, and the scribe then wrote down what Lin Chong dictated:
*I, Lin Chong, instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards, having been convicted and banished to Cangzhou and whereas my future is full of uncertainty, and my wife is still young, hereby divorce her, so that she may marry whom she will, without let or hindrance from me. I certify that this is my own decision, arrived at without outside prompting of any kind. I write this in order for it to be known, that no conflict may arise later through lack of documentation.*
Having supervised the production of this document, Lin Chong took a pen and signed his name beneath the date and year and added his thumb print. He was just about to hand the completed document to his father-in-law, when his wife burst into the room, with great weeping and wailing, followed by Jin Er with a bundle of clothes. At last she had managed to find her husband, here in this inn.
Lin Chong started up to greet her and said, "Wife, I have something to say to you. I have already told your father. Because of ill fortune I have been unjustly accused and must leave for Cangzhou at once, where who knows what will become of me? It saddens me to think of you wasting away in the flower of your youth, so I have had these few words copied down. I implore you not to wait for me; if a good man presents himself, marry him. I would not have your life wasted, my dear, on my account."
At this the lady burst into tears. "When have I given you the least cause for complaint?" she sobbed. "How can you abandon me?"
"Believe me, it is for the best. I fear the future can hold nothing but misfortune for us and you will suffer."
Instructor Zhang now spoke: "Take heart, my daughter. No matter what your husband proposes, I will not have you remarry. Accept this arrangement so that he can depart in peace but if he does not return I shall provide for you always and thus you can remain faithful to him."
The lady continued to sob pitifully, and when she saw the certificate of divorce she gave a cry and fell to the ground in a lifeless swoon.
What now of wedded bliss, the long years of mutual harmony and trust?
*What of the joys of marriage, the lost days of service to the God of Spring?*
*What a blight on beauty now, failing like the peonies in the West garden that turn their heads to the wall!*
*The sweet lips now are closed, silent as Kuan Yin of the Southern Sea entering meditation!*
Last night's cruel East wind has wrecked the plum blossom down by the river.
Husband and father raised her up but it was a long while before she came to herself. Then her weeping continued without pause. Lin Chong handed the certificate of divorce to his father-in-law. Some good women among the neighbours rendered assistance to his wife and carried her home. Instructor Zhang then exhorted Lin Chong as follows: "You must go forward confidently now to whatever awaits you, and think of nothing else till your return. I shall take your wife home with me tomorrow and keep her safe for you until you can be reunited. So be at ease and have no care. But do, I beg you, send us news, if you can find a reliable messenger."
Lin Chong now rose and thanked his father-in-law and bade him farewell, and the neighbours also. Then he shouldered his bundle and left with his escort. Instructor Zhang and the neighbours went home, and we shall say no more of them.
We turn now to the two guards, who had escorted Lin Chong to the cell for banished criminals. Having secured the prisoner, Dong Chao and Xue Ba went to their separate homes to pack for the journey. As Dong Chao was tying his bundle, the innkeeper from the tavern on the corner of his street appeared and said:
"Officer Dong, there's a gentleman sitting in my establishment who says he wants to see you."
"Who is it?" Dong asked.
"I don't know him but he's asking for Officer Dong." During the Song Dynasty it was the custom to call policemen "officer."
Dong hurried off to the tavern with the publican. Sitting in one of the small rooms he found a man with a hat decorated with a Buddhist swastika, a black silk tunic, black boots and plain stockings. "Sit down, officer," he said, the moment he saw Dong Chao.
"I haven't had the honour," said Dong Chao. "But since you've sent for me, I imagine you have some commission for me?"
"Sit down and you'll soon hear about it," said the other.
Dong Chao sat down opposite, while the innkeeper brought wine, and a quantity of vegetables and fruit to go with it that covered the whole table.
"Where does Officer Xue live?" the stranger asked.
"Just across the road from here," Dong Chao answered.
The stranger summoned the innkeeper, made Dong Chao repeat the exact address and said: "Go and ask him to come here." The publican was gone the time for a cup of tea; returning, he ushered Xue Ba into the room. "This gentleman wants to speak to us," Dong explained.
"May I be so bold as to ask your name, sir?" said Xue Ba.
"You'll know soon enough. First drink some wine."
Whilst they sat there, the innkeeper filled the cups. After several rounds, the stranger threw ten taels of gold on the table and said: "There's five taels for each of you, if you'll do me a little service."
"We don't know you at all," they said, "why are you giving us gold?"
"Are you not headed for Cangzhou?" said the stranger.
"That's correct, sir, we are under orders from the Governor to escort the convict Lin Chong there," said Dong.
"In that case I've got a job for you. You may as well know that I'm Lieutenant Lu, a personal friend of the Marshal's."
"Then it's not right for us to be sitting in Your Honour's presence like this," the two murmured, overwhelmed by the honour.
"You both know that Lin Chong is the Marshal's enemy," said the Lieutenant. "I have orders from the Marshal. I am to give you these ten taels of gold. In return you are to undertake something. There is no need to go very far. Simply choose the first quiet secluded spot you come to, and when you have finished Lin Chong off, remember to get a proper death certificate from the local authorities. Then you can return. If any tongues happen to wag in the district, the Marshal himself will deal with it. There will be no problem."
"But I don't see how it can be done," Dong said. "Our orders are to deliver him there alive. We're not authorized to kill him. And the man's quite young; how could we explain his death? If someone wanted to make trouble for us, it could turn nasty."
But Xue Ba said: "Dong, old man, listen to me. If the Marshal told us to kill ourselves, you and me, we'd have to obey. Then all the more reason to listen when he sends this gentleman along to give us gold. You'd much better keep your mouth shut. The money's for both of us. The way I see it, we do them this little favour and we'll not have cause to regret it afterwards. On our way there's a big pine forest. It's a wild, fearsome sort of place. It won't be a big problem, just to do him in." So saying, Xue took the gold and said: "Don't worry, sir. After five stages at most, two if possible, we'll do what's needed!"
Lieutenant Lu was pleased. "Between you two, it's Officer Xue who's the smart one," he said. "When you get to the point, make sure you cut off the two golden seals on Lin Chong's cheeks and bring them back with you as proof that you've done the job. You'll receive another ten taels of gold from me as reward. I look forward to hearing the good news from you. Make sure there are no mistakes." In Song times, by the way, all exiled convicts were tattooed on the cheeks, and these marks were euphemistically known as "golden seals."
The three downed a few more cups, then the Lieutenant paid the bill and they left the winehouse and went their ways.
Dong and Xue contentedly divided the gold and returned home with it to collect their things. They each took the special staff denoting their office and returned to the cells to get Lin Chong. Then they took to the road.
Ten miles or so out from the city they called a halt. In Song times guards escorting a prisoner did not pay for their lodging on the road, so on this occasion they all spent the night together at an inn. Next day they were up at dawn; they lit a fire and made breakfast, then set off again on the Cangzhou road.
It was real midsummer weather, hot as a furnace. At first the flogging had not greatly affected Lin Chong but after two or three days' journey, together with the great heat, the wounds reopened. There was also the fact that he had not been flogged before. Soon it was all he could do to drag one foot after another. "You moron, it's more than six hundred miles to Cangzhou, when are we ever going to get there at this rate?" Xue Ba grumbled.
"I had quite a time of it at the Marshal's residence, and then just the day before yesterday I had that flogging and the wounds have reopened," Lin Chong said. "And on top of it, this blazing heat! Don't you think you could go a little slower?"
"Just keep on at your own pace," Dong Chao said. "Don't worry about him!"
Xue continued to mutter to himself, grumbling and grousing all the way. "Just our rotten luck to be stuck with a lazy devil like you!" he said.
By now it was getting late:
*The sun's red disk has sunk, the moon's mirror hangs on high. In the distance the smoke of cooking fires, in the foreground cottage doors half open. While the monk makes his way towards the old temple, rooks flock home to the misty wood. As the fisherman draws near to the dark shore, wind shrills in the trees like the cicada's song. Cows and sheep crowd together on the sheltered slopes; donkeys and horses plod down the well-trodden highway.*
That evening they lodged at a village inn. As soon as they entered, Dong and Xue put down their staves and unburdened themselves of their packs. Lin Chong also removed his pack and without waiting for the two policemen to open their mouths, took out some change and told a boy to go and buy wine and food, procure some rice and prepare a repast. This done, he invited the two guards to share it.
The guards provided more wine themselves, and got Lin Chong completely drunk, so that in the end, despite the cangue round his neck, he simply collapsed on the floor.
Xue went and warmed a big pot of water. When it was boiling, he poured it into a foot-bath, and said to Lin Chong: "Here you are, Instructor: bathe your feet, and then you'll sleep better." Lin Chong struggled to sit up but the cangue got in the way and he couldn't bend, so Xue said: "I'll wash them for you."
"I couldn't allow you to do that," Lin Chong said.
"No need to be shy about it, when you're on the road," Xue said.
Lin Chong innocently stretched out his legs, and Xue grabbed them and thrust them into the boiling water. Lin Chong let out a scream and jerked his legs back. His feet were covered in angry red blisters. "Forget it, I'd rather not trouble you," he said.
"Usually it's the prisoner serves the officer," Xue said. "Who heard of the officer serving the prisoner? Here's me, offering out of the kindness of my heart to wash his feet for him, and what do I get but complaints? Either it's too cold or it's too hot. There's the thanks you get for trying to help!" He went on grumbling half the night but Lin Chong knew better than to reply. He simply withdrew to one side. The guards threw away the water, refilled the basin and went to wash their feet outside. Then they went to bed. They were awake before dawn, when no one else was stirring in the inn. Xue rose and went to warm water for washing. Then he lit a fire and made breakfast. When Lin Chong awoke he was dizzy, scarcely able to eat or stand. Xue got his staff of office and threatened him with it. Dong was carrying a pair of straw sandals tied round his waist, with hemp eyes and laces; these he offered to Lin Chong. Lin Chong's feet were covered in big round blisters and he would have preferred his old sandals that were soft but they were nowhere to be found. Reluctantly, he put on the new ones. The waiter made out the bill for the wine and then the two guards led their charge away. It was nearly dawn.
But before they had gone a mile, the new sandals caused all Lin Chong's blisters to burst and his feet began to stream with blood. It was really becoming impossible for him to walk, and he groaned ceaselessly. Xue began to curse him: "If you can't walk faster than this, I'll have to see if my staff will help you."
"Have a little sympathy," Lin Chong said. "I'm not trying to be difficult. But my feet are so painful I can scarcely walk."
"You can lean on me," Dong said. But even when he helped Lin Chong along, they only managed another mile and a half. When it was obvious they could go no further, they saw ahead of them, swathed in mist, a wood of wild and ominous aspect:

'Tis dressed in withered creepers sad as rain,
*All roofed with foliage dark as lowering cloud:*
*A dismal bourne where sun is never seen,*
Where spirits haunt, with lamentations loud.

This was Wild Boar Wood. It was the first dangerous spot on the road from the Eastern Capital to Cangzhou. It was to this place that prisoners were always brought during the Song Dynasty, when those with a grudge against them had bribed the guards. Goodness knows how many good men ended their days here. Now the two guards and their charge plunged into this wood. Then Dong Chao said: "We have been walking since dawn, and we haven't covered five miles yet. When are we ever going to get to Cangzhou like this?"
"But I'm tired too," Xue Ba said. "We'll rest in this wood."
Once they were well into the wood, they removed their packs and flung them down at the foot of a tree. Lin Chong leaned his back against a tree and slid to the ground with a groan.
"It's stop and go all the time with you. That's the most tiring way," said the guards. "Well, we'd better sleep a bit, before we go on." They put down their staves and lay down beside a tree. But just as they were closing their eyes, they leapt up with a cry.
"What's the matter?" Lin Chong asked.
"We want to sleep," they said. "But there's nowhere here to lock you up. How can we relax, how can we sleep secure?"
"I'm a man of honour," Lin Chong said. "I've received my sentence, of course I wouldn't run away."
"You expect us to believe that?" said Xue. "No, the only way our minds will be at rest is if we tie you up."
"All right, tie me up, if you must. What can I say?"
Xue took a length of rope he had round his waist and bound Lin Chong hand and foot, passing the rope through the cangue to secure him to a tree. Then he and Dong leapt back and picking up their staves whirled about to face Lin Chong, saying: "It's not our idea to take your life, it's that Lieutenant Lu who came to see us the other night, he said he had orders from the Marshal: we're to bring you here and do you in and report back with the golden seals. We could have gone on a few more days but you'd still be a dead man, so it might as well be here and now … if we get it over with we can go back all the quicker. Please don't hold it against us. Remember, we're doing a job, we can't just do as we please. Besides, you ought to think it's all for the best: this day next year will be your anniversary. As for us, we've been given a time-limit and we've got to report back before it runs out."
Hearing this, Lin Chong could not hold back his tears. "My friends," he said, "I have shown you no ill-will, and to this day there is no quarrel between us. If you can help me, be sure that I shall not forget it, in this world or the next."
"Stop drivelling," said Dong. "There's no way for us to save you." Xue now raised his staff, preparing to bring it down and split Lin Chong's skull. He was just on the point of finishing our unfortunate and defenceless hero off:

There's no inn along the road to Hell;
The spirit un-housed, tonight where'll it dwell?

When the bodyguard of the Marshal Gao Qiu seized Lin Chong, and were going to behead him on the spot, Lin Chong called out that he was being wronged.
Marshal Gao said, "What business had you to come to this Private Hall with a sharp sword in your hand? Did you not come to kill me?"
Lin Chong beseechingly said, "If you had not ordered me to come here, how could I have dared to enter? The two junior officers who just went inside the hall brought me here."
Marshal Gao said, "Nonsense! What junior officers are there at my headquarters? Why don't you accept my word!" He then told his bodyguard to take the prisoner to the Kaifeng Prefectural *yamen*, and he would instruct the Prefect there to examine the case very minutely, and after a clear investigation he could execute the prisoner.[57] He told them to wrap up the sword, and seal it.
The bodyguard obeyed the orders, and took Lin Chong under arrest to Kaifeng Prefectural *yamen*, and fortunately upon arriving there they found that the Prefect was still sitting in the court hearing cases. Marshal Gao's officers took Lin Chong into the court, and they knelt down at the steps in front of the bench. The Prefect's officer got the particulars of the case, and then reported the matter to Prefect Teng. He then took the sword which was still sealed up, and placed it in front of the prisoner.
The Prefect said, "Lin Chong, you are a Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guard so how is it that you did not know the rules of the army, and entered the Private Hall with a sword in your hand? That is a crime to be punished by death."
Lin Chong said, "Most benevolent and wise official, I am falsely accused, and seriously wronged. Although I am a stupid army officer I understand a few of the rules. How dared I enter the Private Hall? The fact of the matter is, that on the twenty-eighth day of last month I went with my wife to the Yue Temple to sacrifice, and there we met the adopted son of Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard, who attempted to trifle with my wife, and I interfered and separated them. Afterwards Lu Qian cheated me by asking me to go to drink wine with him, while he employed Fu An to deceive my wife, and told her to go to Lu Qian's home where they had arranged to trifle with her. As soon as I heard of this I went there at once, and smashed up all the furniture. Thus although they had twice tried to ravish my wife, they had not succeeded, and I have a witness to bear that out. The following day I bought this sword, and today the Marshal of the Imperial Guard sent two junior officers to my home to tell me to take the sword to his *yamen*. So I went with those two men to the Private Hall. They went inside the Hall, and I thought that the Marshal was inside there. Those men had contrived this plot to injure me, and I hope that you, the benevolent official, will give me justice."
The Prefect listened to Lin Chong's statement, and then gave instructions for a dispatch to be prepared for the Marshal of the Imperial Guard. He gave instructions for the cangue and handcuffs to be placed on Lin Chong who was to be taken to the prison. Lin Chong's family supplied him with food and money while he was in prison. Lin Chong's father-in-law bribed many court officials to try to arrange matters for him. Fortunately in the court was a secretary named Sun Ding, who was a very honest and exceedingly good man, and was always trying to help people in distress. Because of his character everybody called him "Sun, the Buddha." He understood the case, and spoke to the Prefect several times about it. He said, "I think this case has been brought up simply to injure Lin Chong, and it would be better for you to show mercy to him."
The Prefect said, "He has committed a grave offence and the Marshal of the Imperial Guard has instructed me to question him as to (1) why he had a sword in his hand; (2) why he entered the Private Hall; (3) why he intended to kill the Marshal. How can I help him?"
Sun Ding spoke sarcastically, "This *yamen* does not receive its authority from the Imperial Court but evidently from the Marshal of the Imperial Guard."
"Nonsense!" said the Prefect.
Sun Ding said, "Does not everybody know that the Marshal Gao Qiu, uses his great influence to oppress people? and, moreover, those under him do the same thing? And if a man unintentionally breaks the least fraction of the law, Gao sends him here under arrest. If he wants him killed he is killed, if he wants him hacked to pieces that is done. So does it not appear that this *yamen* belongs to him?"
The Prefect said, "Assuming that what you say is correct how could this case of Lin Chong be settled in any other way?"
Sun Ding said, "According to Lin Chong's evidence he is quite innocent but the difficulty is that we cannot arrest the two junior officers. Now you had better tell him to admit that he ought not to have unintentionally entered the Private Hall with his sword in his belt. And having branded him you can banish him to a distant military outpost."
Prefect Teng thought the plan a good one, and decided to go to see Marshal Gao Qiu, and repeat to him the evidence of Lin Chong. Marshal Gao was aware of the weakness of his case, and had to agree to the sentence of the Prefect. Straightway he returned to the judgment hall and gave an order for the cangue to be taken off Lin Chong, and that he was to receive twenty blows on his back. He then told the workman who branded prisoners to brand Lin Chong on his cheek. He was to be banished to the prison at Cangzhou.

A cangue was at once made weighing ten pounds with round corners, and strips of metal nailed to it, and with a paper pasted on to seal the two halves together. A document giving particulars of the case was then handed to two constables who were to escort the prisoner to Cangzhou. The two men were named Dong Chao and Xue Ba, and as soon as they got the official documents they left the *yamen*.

At the gate of the *yamen* a large number of neighbours with Drill Instructor Zhang (Lin Chong's father-in-law) were assembled and they conducted Lin Chong and the two constables to a wine shop near the Zhou Bridge where they all sat down.

Lin Chong said, "Fortunately I have been helped by the secretary Sun, and although I was beaten with a bamboo yet I can walk without pain."

Drill Instructor Zhang told the waiters to bring wine and fruit, and treat the two constables well. After they had drunk a few cups of wine Drill Instructor Zhang took out some silver, and presented it to the constables.

Lin Chong raising his handcuffed hands to his father-in-law said, "Please listen to what I say. This year I have had misfortunes, and since I offended Master Gao I have been wrongly prosecuted. Today I wish to speak to you, and request your attention. I am indebted to you for your kindness. Three years ago you gave me your daughter, and since that time we have had no quarrels. Although she has not had any children, yet we have not had the least bit of dispute about it. But now this calamity has resulted in me being banished to Cangzhou, and now even my life is uncertain. My wife remains at home but I shall always be thinking of her. I am very much afraid that Master Gao will press his suit very strongly. As my wife is quite young I do not want to stand in her way of being happy. It is my own will, not influenced by any outside pressure at all. Now in the presence of all my neighbours I will write a bill of divorcement so that she may marry another husband as she will and there will be no dispute. In this way I shall be contented, and she will avoid any injury from Master Gao."

Drill Instructor Zhang said, "My worthy son-in-law! What are you talking about? You have been unlucky, and have encountered a calamity which was arranged by your enemy. You are going to Cangzhou today to avoid the coming trouble. When heaven have pity on you, and allow you to come back, you will be reunited to your wife. At my home there is plenty of money, and your wife, and her maid Jin Er, can both live at my home and whether they are there for three or five years I will look after them. So Master Gao shall not get the opportunity to see your wife. I will be responsible for this, and you need not worry about it. While you are in the prison at Cangzhou I will write you letters, and send you clothes frequently. You can go with a contented mind, and must not be anxious."

Lin Chong replied, "I am extremely grateful for your kindness. But I cannot rid myself of concern about my wife in the present state and any delay would only be a sorrow to each of us. I hope you will accept my wishes, and then I shall die with a peaceful mind."

Drill Instructor Zhang was unwilling to agree to do this. All the neighbours who were there also said that it could not be done.

Lin Chong said, "If you will not do as I wish I swear on my oath that when I return from prison I shall not live with my wife."

Drill Instructor Zhang said, "As it is that way then even if you write down such a wish I shall certainly not take your wife, and marry her to another man. He then told the waiter to buy a sheet of paper and then find a man who could write a letter. Upon the arrival ot the letter writer Lin Chong dictated the following:

"I, Drill Instructor Lin Chong of the Imperial Guards of Eastern Capital, am banished to Cangzhou because I have committed a serious crime, and as it is uncertain whether I shall die there or not I write this letter to express my willingness to give my young wife (family name Zhang) full liberty to marry a second husband, so that there shall be no dispute about it afterwards. This is certainly my wish, and there shall be no obstacle in the way of this being done. I have therefore written this document so that hereafter it may be proof of my desire."

Lin Chong saw that the date had been inserted, and then affixed his seal, and impressed his fingerprint on the document. When this had been completed he went to hand the document to Drill Instructor Zhang but the former's wife just then arrived, bewailing loudly. With her was the maidservant Jin Er who was carrying a bundle of clothes. Lin Chong rose to receive her, and said, "Wife, I have something to tell you which I have already imparted to your father. I have had to submit to a serious injustice. I have to go to Cangzhou, and whether I shall survive is uncertain. I am very much afraid that this will spoil the days of your youth and therefore I have signed this document expressing my fervent hope that you will not wait for my return but if there is a suitable man you will marry him, and not allow me to stand in the way of such a virtuous wife."

His wife wept upon hearing this and said, "Husband, I have not the slightest stain on my character, so why do you dismiss me in this way?"

"Wife, I have the best of intentions but I am afraid that they cannot be realized, and I do not want to deceive you."

Drill Instructor Zhang said, "My daughter, be contented. Although my son-in-law wants to arrange your affairs in this way I will promise you that I shall not press you to remarry. If we do this business in the way suggested he will depart with a contented mind, and if he does not return then I will provide for you at my home for the remainder of your life so that you can maintain your chastity."

His daughter listened to this and continued to sob but when she saw the sealed document she fell down in a faint. Lin Chong and Zhang raised her up, and after a long time she regained consciousness but still continued to weep.

Lin Chong took the document, and handed it to Zhang. The wives of the neighbours had now arrived, and they gave advice to Lin Chong's wife, and supported her back to her home.

Drill Instructor Zhang bade farewell to Lin Chong; saying, "Now be carefree and proceed on your journey, and try to come back as soon as possible. Tomorrow I will take your wife to my home, and provide for her, and she can wait there until you are reunited. You go now, and do not worry about her. And if there is anybody coming here, never fail to send a letter by that person."

Lin Chong rose and expressed his thanks. He then saluted Zhang and all the neighbours, shouldered his bundle, and departed in the company of the two constables. Inspector Zhang and the neighbours went back to their homes, and we will not say anything more about them.

The two constables took Lin Chong to the jail and there left him for the night. They then went to their homes, to get their baggage. While one of them named Dong Chao was packing up his bundle, a waiter from a wine shop in the same alley came, and said to him, "There is an official in our wine shop who wishes to speak to you."

Dong Chao asked who he was, and the waiter replied that he did not know him. The man, he said, had simply asked him to invite him.

Dong Chao went with the waiter to the inn, and there he saw a man sitting in a small room with the character "*Wan*" on his turban, wearing a short black crape coat, and a pair of black shoes with white socks. When he saw Dong Chao he immediately saluted with folded hands, and asked the constable to be seated.

Dong Chao said, "I have never had the pleasure of knowing you, and do not know what business you have for me."

"Sit down, and you will soon know about that."

Dong Chao sat down opposite the official, and the waiter laid upon the table cups and wine, vegetables and fruits.

The official asked, "Where does Xue Ba, the other constable, live?"

Dong Chao said, "He lives in the alley over there."

The official then told the waiter to go and bring Xue Ba. The waiter went off, and very soon Xue Ba arrived.

Dong Chao said, "This official has something to say to us."

Xue Ba said, "I dare not ask for his name."

The official said, "You will soon find that out. Please drink some wine."

The three men sat down, and very soon the waiter brought them some warm wine. After they had drunk a few cups of wine the official took ten taels of silver out of his sleeve, and placed them on the table. He said, "I have a little troublesome business for you two men to do, and you can have five taels each."

The men said, "We have not seen you before, so why do you offer us money?"

"Are you not going to Cangzhou?" asked the official.

Dong Chao said, "We have received an order from the *yamen* to escort a prisoner, Lin Chong, to Cangzhou."

"That being the case, I shall have to trouble you. I am Lu Qian, the confidential steward in the family of Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard."

Dong Chao and Xue Ba made many salutations and said, "We should not be sitting at the same table with you."

Lu Qian said, "Are you two men aware that Lin Chong has offended the Marshal of the Imperial Guard? You must now observe the order of the Marshal. He told me to give you these ten taels of silver, and say that you are not to take Lin Chong very far away. When you reach some quiet deserted spot you must kill Lin Chong, and then get an official near there to give you a report about his death. If any questions are raised when you get to Kaifeng you will be free from blame as the Marshal will deal with the matter himself."

Dong Chao said, "I am afraid that we cannot do that. Our order from the Prefect of Kaifeng says that we must escort the prisoner, and says nothing about killing him. Moreover, I am not very old, so how can we do such a vile thing? We are also afraid that we should be blamed if anybody got to know of the affair."

Xue Ba said, "Old Dong, you just listen to me. You must not forget that even though Marshal Gao Qiu, condemns us both to death we have to obey him. Moreover he has sent this official to give us this money. Let us talk no more about it but just divide the money. When we have done the deed Marshal Gao will be grateful to us, and will find us something to do. There is a wild deserted forest—let us dispatch him there." Xue Ba took his part of the silver and then said, "We shall do this after we have travelled not less than fifty *li* or not more than one hundred *li*."

Lu Qian was much pleased at this and said, "That will be very well. Don't forget that after you have murdered Lin Chong you must tear off the skin of his face, bearing the brand mark, and bring it back as an evidence that you have killed him." He also promised to give them an extra ten taels of silver when they returned. He would wait anxiously for their report, and he also urged them to get the matter done without delay.

During the Song Dynasty it was the practice to brand criminals on their faces when they were sentenced to banishment. But as the branding was disgustful to the people, it was called, "Fixing Golden Seals."

The three men finished their wine, and then separated. Lu Qian paid for the wine.

Dong Chao and Xue Ba divided the bribe between them, and took the money to their homes. There each man made up a bundle of necessary things for his journey, and carried this on a stick over his shoulder. They got Lin Chong out of the jail, and escorted him out of the city. That day they travelled about ten *li* before they stopped for the night.

During the Song Dynasty it was a rule that all inns were to give shelter to an escort in charge of criminals without charging for the room but would receive payment for food or wine taken.

The next day the three men rose early, and after breakfast they started out again on the road to Cangzhou. It was the sixth lunar month, and the weather was very hot. Previously Lin Chong had felt no pain from the blows he had got at Kaifeng but under the heat of the day he now felt pains, and limped along slowly.

Xue Ba said, "You do not seem to realize that we have to go about seven hundred *li* to Cangzhou, and that it will take a very long time to get there if you walk like this."

Lin Chong said, "While I was at Kaifeng I did not feel uncomfortable but, owing to the hot weather I now feel pains resulting from being beaten with the bamboo the day before yesterday. I beg you to walk a little slower."

Dong Chao said, "You can walk slower, and take no notice of what we say."

Xue Ba resented this kind of talk, and muttered to himself as he walked along. "We two are unlucky as we meet such a demon as this prisoner."

It was getting late in the evening when they got to an inn. When they got inside they all three took off their bundles. Lin Chong did not wait for the two constables to speak but taking some silver out of his bundle he gave it to waiter, and told him to bring some meat, rice, and wine for dinner. He then asked the two constables to dine with him.

The two constables purchased some more wine, and they gave Lin Chong so much that he became drunk, and lay down on the floor with the cangue still round his neck.

Xue Ba then went, and boiled some water, and when it was extremely hot he poured it into a tub. He then roused Lin Chong, and said to him, "Just wash your feet, and afterwards you will sleep better."

Lin Chong struggled to get up but the cangue prevented him from doing this.

"I will wash your feet for you," said Xue Ba.

Lin Chong would not agree to this but Xue Ba insisted that as they were traveling together they need not be too particular.

Lin Chong did not suspect anything, and therefore put forward his feet that Xue Ba seized and thrust them into the boiling water. Lin Chong yelled with the pain, and quickly withdrew his feet but they had already been scalded, and covered with red blisters. He said that it was awfully painful.

Xue Ba said, "Before this I have seen prisoners waiting upon us but now we have apparently to wait upon a prisoner. We had the best of intentions in telling you to wash your feet but you are so fastidious and would complain that the water was too cold if it was only a little cold and too hot if only a little hot. So we get no thanks for our labour."

Xue Ba continued muttering about this for a long time, and as Lin Chong dared not reply to his remarks he lay down on one side and tried to sleep. The two constables threw the boiling water away, and getting fresh water washed their own feet, and then went to bed. Early the next morning long before any of the people of the inn were out of bed Xue Ba got up, and after washing himself he lit the fire, and cooked some rice. But Lin Chong could neither get up, nor eat his breakfast. Xue Ba seized his stick, and told Lin Chong to get up. Dong Chao seeing the difficulty unloosened a pair of new straw sandals from his belt, and told Lin Chong to put them on.

But Lin Chong seeing the huge blisters on his feet would have preferred to wear his old shoes as being more comfortable but as he could not find them he put on the new straw sandals.

They then paid for the wine they had had, and escorted Lin Chong out of the inn about five A.M. After walking about a li the blisters on Lin Chong's feet, caused by the new straw sandals burst, and the blood oozed out. Walking was extremely painful, and he could not suppress his groans.

Xue Ba abused him, saying; "If you can walk, then walk quickly, and if you don't walk quickly I shall have to use this stick to make you get on."

Lin Chong said, "Have pity on me. I dare not go slow and so delay our journey. But the fact is that my feet are very painful, and I cannot walk quickly."

Dong Chao said, "I will support you a little, and that will make it easier for you to walk." He assisted him in this way for about two *li*. They then saw in the distance the gloomy, dense forest, called "Yezhu Forest." On the road between the Eastern Capital and Cangzhou, this was well known as the most dangerous place. In the Song Dynasty it often occurred that when somebody owed a grudge to a person the latter was accused, and banished, and then the escort was bribed so as to put him to death when passing through this forest. It is unknown how many innocent people were killed in this way.

On this day when the escort with Lin Chong entered the forest Dong Chao said, "We have been traveling for two hours but have not covered three *li*. If we keep on like this how can we get to Cangzhou?"

Xue Ba said, "Well, I cannot walk any further, and must have a rest in this forest."

The three men then left the road, and went into the forest where they threw down their bundles. Lin Chong cried out with the pain and fell down.

Dong Chao said to Xue Ba, "I am quite tired so we must rest a while here, and have a sleep before going on."

They then put down their sticks, and lay down at the foot of a tree. After closing their eyes for a short time they got up, and shouted at Lin Chong.

Lin Chong asked, "What is the matter with you?"

"There is no place here where we can lock you up, so we do not care to sleep as you might escape."

Lin Chong replied, "I am a brave man. As I have already been condemned I will never run away."

Xue Ba said, "We do not believe that. In order to feel safe we must tie you up."

"If you want to tie me up, of course I must agree."

Xue Ba thereupon took a rope, and tied Lin Chong to a tree—hands, feet, and the cangue. As soon as he had done this he turned round, picked up his stick and looking at Lin Chong said, "We do not wish to kill you but the fact is that the day before yesterday Lu Qian told us that Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard had given an order that we must kill you at this place. We must also quickly bring to him your brand mark as proof that we have done the deed. So it does not matter how many days we should travel you would eventually be killed. So today we have come here to finish the matter, and to get back as soon as possible. You must not bear resentment against us two as we are only obeying orders. If you think the matter over you will see that it is not our arrangement. A year from today will be the anniversary of your death. We have decided upon today for the deed, and we must return at once to report the matter."

Upon hearing this, Lin Chong burst into tears, and said, "Gentlemen, I have had no grudge against you. So if you two will save my life on this occasion I shall never forget your gracious action."

"We cannot do that, and it is a waste of time to talk about it." So saying the two men took their sticks to hit Lin Chong on the head. How pitiful to see a hero bound up and killed in this way!

On the way to Hell no inn is found
Lin Chong's soul will now be roaming round.

## 009

### Chai Jin comes home, keeps Open House for All Bold Men, offers Hospitality, and finds a guest; Lin Chong Hits with His Cudgel & Defeats Drill Instructor Hong in a Bout with Staves by putting Chong's mastery to the test

Xue Ba raised his staff with both hands to bring it down on Lin Chong's head. But quicker than words can tell, from behind the pine tree came a thunderous roar as a solid iron rod shot forward, intercepted the staff and sent it flying into the sky. Then out leaped a big fat monk.

"I've been listening quite a while," he yelled. Dressed in a black cassock, he was wearing a knife and carried a Buddhist staff which he brandished at the two guards.

Lin Chong, who had just opened his eyes, recognized Lu Zhishen, and he hastily cried: "Brother! Stay your hand. I have something to say!"

Zhishen lowered his iron staff. The guards gaped at him, too frightened to move.

"It's not their doing," said Lin Chong. "Marshal Gao, through Captain Lu Qian, gave them orders to destroy me. How could they refuse? It would be wrong to kill them!"

Unsheathing his knife, Zhishen cut the drill instructor's bonds and helped him to his feet.

"Brother," he said, "I've been worried about you ever since that day we parted, when you bought the sword. After you were convicted, I had no way to rescue you. I heard that you were being exiled to Cangzhou, and I sought you outside Kaifeng Prefecture but in vain. Someone said that you had been locked in a guard house. Then I learned that a waiter had gone to the two guards, saying: 'A gentleman wishes to speak to you in the tavern;' and I became suspicious. I was afraid these oafs would try to harm you along the road, so I followed.

"When these knaves brought you to the inn, I put up there too. I heard them plotting in whispers. When they tricked you and scalded your feet in the boiling water, I wanted to kill them on the spot. But there were too many guests at the inn and I was afraid I couldn't carry it off. I knew the rogues were up to something dirty. I was very worried.

"You set out before dawn at the fifth watch. I hurried ahead to the forest and waited to kill the two wretches here. They intended to harm you, so I ought to destroy them."

"Since you've saved me, brother, there's no need to kill them," urged Lin Chong.

"Scurvy knaves," bellowed Zhishen. "If it weren't for my brother here, I'd pound you both into mincemeat! Only because he asks it, I'll spare your lives." He put his knife away and shouted: "Support my brother, and be quick about it! Come with me!" Taking his staff he set off.

How dared they refuse? "Save us, Instructor Lin," the guards pleaded. They again shouldered their packs and took up their staves. Supporting Lin Chong and carrying his bundle, they followed the monk out of the forest.

After walking three or four //; they saw a little tavern at the entrance to a village. All four went in and sat down. They ordered five or six catties of meat, two jugs of wine and some griddle cakes. The waiter laid the table and served the wine.
"May we presume to inquire," the guards said to Zhishen, "in what monastery you reside, Reverend?"
Zhishen chuckled. "Why do you ask, scoundrels? So that you can tell Marshal Gao how to harm me? Others may fear him, I don't! If I meet that wretch I'll give him three hundred licks of my iron staff!"
The guards dared say no more.
The four finished the meat and wine, got their luggage in order, paid the bill and left the village.
"Where are you planning to go, brother?" asked Lin Chong.
" 'To kill a man you must draw blood, to rescue a man you must see him to safety.' I still don't feel at ease about you, brother. I'm going to escort you all the way to Cangzhou."
The two guards secretly groaned: "Woe! That ruins our scheme! What will we say when we get back?" But they could only continue the journey, docilely obeying the monk's orders.
From then on, they marched when Zhishen wanted to march, and rested when he wanted to rest. How dared they oppose him? In a good mood, he merely cursed them, in a bad, he beat them. Neither of the guards dared say a word for fear of arousing the monk's ire.
After marching two more stages, they hired a cart. Lin Chong rested on it, while the other three walked behind. The guards had guilty consciences and were anxious to preserve their lives, so they tagged along cautiously.
On the road, Zhishen frequently bought wine and meat for Lin Chong, and the guards were permitted to join him. When the party came to an inn, they would retire early and rise late. Of course, the guards lit the fires and did the cooking. Who dared to disobey the monk?
They conferred worriedly in private. "We've become the prisoners and the monk the escort. When we get back, Marshal Gao will surely punish us."
"I've heard that a newly arrived monk has been put in charge of the Great Xiangguo Monastery's vegetable fields," said Xue Ba. "He's called Lu Zhishen. This must be the man. Let's tell the truth when we get back. We'll say that we wanted to finish Lin Chong off in Wild Boar Forest but that the monk rescued him and went with us all the way to Cangzhou. That was why we couldn't do the job. We'll return the ten ounces of gold to Captain Lu Qian. Let him settle accounts with the monk himself! All you and I want is to be clear of the whole thing."
"My feelings exactly," said Dong Chao.
Of their discussion we shall say no more.
To make a long story short, they marched for seventeen or eighteen days, with the monk never relaxing his watch over the two guards. Soon they were only about seventy //from Cangzhou. It was a well-travelled road the rest of the way, with no desolate stretches. After inquiring to make sure of this, Zhishen led the party into a pine grove to rest.
"Brother," he said to Lin Chong, "From here to Cangzhou is not far. There are plenty of people on the road and no deserted places. I've already checked on it. I'll part with you here. Some day we'll meet again."
"Go back, brother. Let my father-in-law know I'm all right," said Lin Chong. "If I live, I'll repay you for your gracious protection in full."
Zhishen took out a score or more ounces of silver and gave them to Lin Chong, then handed two or three ounces to the guards.
"Scurvy knaves! Originally I was going to cut your heads off along the road. Out of courtesy to my brother I've spared your paltry lives. The journey is nearly over. Don't get any evil ideas!"
"Would we dare? It was all Marshal Gao's doing," they replied, and accepted the silver.
As they turned to leave, Zhishen glared and shouted: "Wretches! Are your heads harder than this pine tree?"
"We humble servants have heads only of the flesh and skin our parents gave us, wrapped around a few bones."
Zhishen raised his iron staff and struck the tree a mighty blow, cutting a gash two inches deep. The pine folded over neatly and fell.
"Scurvy knaves," roared the monk. "If you get any wrong ideas, I'll clout your heads like I did this pine!"
Dragging his iron staff and swinging his other arm, Zhishen walked off, calling: "Take care of yourself, brother."
The two guards stuck out their tongues in astonishment. It was some time before they remembered to retract them.
"Let's go, good officers," said Lin Chong.
"Terrific," exclaimed the guards. "With one blow he snaps a tree in half!"
"That's nothing," said Lin Chong. "Back in the monastery, he pulled a willow tree up by the roots!"
The two guards wagged their heads. This confirmed their guess about the monk's identity.
Leaving the grove, the three continued walking until noon. Down the highway they observed a tavern. They entered, and Lin Chong invited the guards to sit at the head of the table. Dong and Xue relaxed for the first time that day.
The tavern contained several tables, and the four or five waiters were busy rushing from one to another serving food and drink. Lin Chong and the guards sat for nearly an hour but no one came to take their order.
Finally, Lin Chong pounded on the table and shouted impatiently: "Ho, tavern keeper, how dare you abuse a customer? You see that I'm a prisoner, so you ignore me! I can pay for what we eat. What's the meaning of this?"
"You don't understand," said the tavern keeper. "My intentions were good."
"You don't sell me wine or meat. What's good-intentioned about that?"
"You don't understand. In our village there's a wealthy man called Chai Jin, known in these parts as Lord Chai. In the fraternity of bold men, all address him as Small Whirlwind. He's descendant of the Later Zhou Dynasty royal family. When the last Later Zhou emperor surrendered his throne, the first Song emperor bestowed on Chai's ancestors a 'Wrought Iron Pledge.' Since then, no one has dared to molest his family.
"Chai Jin makes a practice of welcoming all bold men. He's always supporting forty or fifty of them in his home. He's left instructions with us at the tavern: 'Tell any prisoner on route to exile to come to my manor. I will help him with money.' If I sold you meat and drink today and you ate until you were red in the face, he would say that you have money and don't need his help. My intentions were good."
Lin Chong turned to the guards. "When I was giving drill instruction to the soldiers in the Eastern Capital, I often heard military men speak of Lord Chai. So this is where he comes from. Why don't we pay him a call?"
Xue Ba and Dong Chao thought it over, then said: "Since we're already here, what have we got to lose?"
They collected their luggage and asked the tavern keeper: "Where is Lord Chai's manor? We want to visit him."
"Go straight ahead for about three //until you cross a big stone bridge. One or two turns, and you'll see a large estate. That's it."
Lin Chong and the guards thanked the tavern keeper and set out. After marching about three //; sure enough, they came to a big stone bridge. They crossed to the other side where they found a smooth broad road. In the distance, amid many green willows, they could see the outlines of a manor. A wide moat, flowing around the four sides, was fringed on both banks by large weeping willows. Through the trees, the white outer wall of the manor was faintly visible.
After a few more turns down the road, they neared the entrance. Four or five vassals were sitting on a plank bridge, enjoying the cool breeze. Lin Chong and the guards approached and bowed to the vassals. The drill instructor asked: "Could I trouble you to report to Lord Chai that a prisoner named Lin, on his way to exile from the capital, requests to see him?"
"You're out of luck," said the vassals. "If His Lordship were at home, you'd receive wine and food and money. But he left this morning to go hunting."
"When will he return?"
"Hard to say. Probably he's resting at the eastern manor but maybe not. We can't tell you for sure."
"That's my misfortune. I won't be able to meet him. Let's go back," said Lin Chong to the guards.
The three men took leave of the vassals and returned along the same road on which they had come. Lin Chong felt very depressed.
They walked more than half a //; Far off they saw a column of horsemen dash out of a grove and come galloping in the direction of the estate. On a snow-white steed with a curly mane rode a noble-looking gentleman. He had the brows of a dragon and the eyes of a phoenix, gleaming white teeth and ruble red lips. Drooping mustaches framed his mouth, below which was a slim goatee. About thirty-five years of age, he wore a black flowered silk hat with curled-up corners, and was dressed in a figured purple gown with designs embroidered on the chest. Around his waist was a handsome girdle inlaid with precious jade. On his feet were black boots with green stripes and filigreed gold thread. He carried a bow and a quiver of arrows.
The long line of riders raced towards the manor.
"Can that be Lord Chai?" Lin Chong wondered. But he didn't dare to ask.
The young nobleman turned his white horse out of the column and trotted up to Lin Chong.
"Who is this gentleman wearing a cangue?" the nobleman asked.
Lin quickly bowed and replied: "Your humble servant is called Lin Chong, formerly a drill instructor in the Eastern Capital's Imperial Guards. Because I offended Marshal Gao, he invented an excuse to send me to Kaifeng Prefecture and have me sentenced to exile in Cangzhou. We were told at the village tavern that the gallant hero who lives here, Lord Chai, keeps open house for men of talent. But my luck was poor and I was unable to find him."
Leaping from his saddle, the gentleman rushed forward, saying: "Forgive Chai Jin for not having received you fittingly." He fell to his knees on the grass and clasped his hands in salute.
Lin Chong hastily returned the courtesy. The gentleman took him by the hand and led him towards the manor. The vassals saw them coming and pushed wide the gates. Chai Jin led Lin Chong directly to the ceremonial hall, where the two men again exchanged obeisances.
"I have long known of your fame," said Chai Jin, "Who would have thought that today you would come to our humble place. To be able to gaze on your respected countenance is one of the happiest events of my life."
"Your Lordship's name is honoured everywhere. It is revered by all. I never thought that because I was convicted and was passing here on my way to exile I would have the joy of meeting you."
At Chai Jin's insistence, Lin Chong took the chair of honour at the table. Xue Ba and Dong Chao also were seated. The men who had accompanied Chai Jin on the hunt led their horses into the rear compound and retired. Of them we shall say no more.
Chai Jin ordered his vassals to bring wine. Before long they served a platter of meat and one of griddle cakes and a pot of warmed wine. Then came another platter heaped with rice. On top of the rice were ten strings of cash.
"These rustics don't recognize a man of quality," said Chai Jin. "How can they value the drill instructor so lightly? Ho! Take these things back. Bring fine fruit and wine. Slaughter a sheep. Be quick."
"Please, no more, Your Lordship," protested Lin Chong, rising politely. "This is quite enough."
"You mustn't say that. It's a rare privilege to have you here. We can't be remiss in courtesy."
The vassals soon came rushing in with fruit and wine. Chai Jin stood up and handed out three full goblets. Lin Chong thanked him and drained his cup. The two guards also drank.
"Excuse me a moment, Drill Instructor," said Chai Jin.
He took off his bow bag and quiver of arrows, went over to the guards and asked them to down a drink with him. Then he seated himself in the host's chair. Lin Chong occupied the chair of the guest of honour. The two guards sat beside him. All chatted idly for a time of bold adventures and feats of arms.
Before they knew it, the sun had sunk in the west. Wine, food, fruit and delicacies from the sea were set upon the table. Toasting each guest personally, Chai Jin drank three rounds. Then he resumed his seat and called: "Bring the soup."
After the soup was consumed, and six or seven more goblets of wine, a vassal entered and announced: "The teacher has come."
"Good. Invite him to sit with us and meet our guests," said Chai Jin. "Bring another setting."
The new arrival entered and Lin Chong rose to greet him. Cap tilted to one side, chest protruding, the man swaggered into the hall. "He must be His Lordship's arms teacher," thought Lin Chong. Hastily bowing, the drill instructor intoned: "Lin Chong tenders his respects."
Completely ignoring him, the man did not return his salutation. Lin Chong dared not raise his head.
Chai Jin said to the man, whom he called Drill Instructor Hong: "This is Drill Instructor Lin who teaches the art of spears and staves in the Eastern Capital's Imperial Guards. You two should know each other."
Lin Chong immediately dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
Drill Instructor Hong said brusquely: "Don't kowtow. Get up." He himself didn't even bow.
Chai Jin was annoyed. Lin Chong kowtowed twice, then rose and begged Hong to be seated. Without even a pretence of courtesy, the fellow promptly took the guest of honour's chair. Chai Jin was quite displeased. Lin Chong slipped into the next seat. The two guards sat down beside him.
"Why is Your Lordship so courteous to an exiled man?" Drill Instructor Hong asked.
"This gentleman is not an ordinary person. He's a drill instructor in the Mighty Imperial Guards. How can you regard him lightly, Teacher?"
"Because Your Lordship is fond of feats of arms, these exiled men are always coming to enjoy your bounty. Anyone who says: 'I'm a drill instructor in spears and staves,' can call at the manor and get food and drink and money and rice! Your Lordship is too gullible."
Lin Chong said nothing but Chai Jin retorted: "It's difficult to tell from appearances. You shouldn't underestimate him."
Stung by this last remark, Hong leaped to his feet. "I don't believe him. If he dares to take me on in a bout with staves, then I'll admit he's a genuine drill instructor!"
Chai Jin laughed. "Not a bad idea. Drill Instructor Lin, what do you say?"
"Your humble servant couldn't presume to such a thing," said Lin Chong.
Hong thought to himself: "He doesn't know how to fight, that's sure. He's afraid." And so he insisted that Lin Chong accept his challenge.
Chai Jin not only wanted to see an exhibition of Lin's skill, he wanted him to beat Hong and shut the oaf's mouth. "Bring wine," he called. "We'll drink first. The match can wait till the moon is high."
By the time they had consumed another six or seven rounds, the moon had risen and was shining in with such brilliance that the hall was as bright as day. Chai Jin stood up and said: "Drill Instructors, please give us a bout."
Lin Chong saw that Hong was teaching Chai Jin to drill with the cudgels, so he thought that Chai Jin would not like it if he knocked his teacher down.
Observing Lin Chong's hesitation, Chai Jin said: "Instructor Hong has not been here long either. No one has taken him on. Please don't refuse, Master Lin. I am most eager to see the skill of you two instructors." Chai Jin said this to indicate that Lin need have no fears of offending him, and that he should not hold back.
Lin Chong at last felt reassured.
"Come on, come on," cried Hong, rising. "I'll give you a bout with staves!"
Everyone surged out of the hall into the courtyard. Vassals brought a bundle of wooden staves and laid them on the ground. Hong removed his outer robe and tied up his skirts. Selecting a staff, he struck a fighting pose.
"Come on, come on," he urged.
"Instructor Lin," said Chai Jin, "please start the bout."
"Don't laugh at my clumsiness, Your Lordship," Lin Chong begged. He chose a staff and said to Hong: "Master, please teach me."
Hong glared as if wanting to swallow him down in one gulp. Lin Chong advanced holding the staff extended in both hands. Hong rapped his staff sharply on the ground and rushed at Lin.
After the two drill instructors had fought four or five rounds in the bright moonlight, Lin Chong leaped out of the combat circle. "Halt the bout," he cried.
"Why won't you show us your skill, Instructor?" queried Chai Jin.
"I've lost," said Lin.
"But you haven't fought to a conclusion. How can you say you've lost?"
"If I have to fight with this cangue around my neck, I may just as well consider myself defeated."
"How thoughtless of me," Chai Jin laughed. "That can be remedied easily enough."
He directed his vassals to fetch ten ounces of silver. When the money was brought he said to the two guards: "May I trouble you to take Lin Chong's cangue off temporarily? If there's any question raised about this when you arrive at the Cangzhou Prison, I will bear all responsibility. Divide these ten ounces between you."
Chai Jin looked so lofty and dignified that the guards didn't dare refuse. They wanted to stay in Chai's good graces and wanted the silver as well. Since there was no danger of Lin Chong running away, Xue Ba removed the wooden collar from his neck.
"Now the two masters can continue their match," said Chai Jin joyfully.
Because Lin's tactics had been cautious, Hong regarded him with scorn. Raising his staff, he prepared to resume combat.
"Just a moment," Chai Jin exclaimed. He ordered his vassals to bring an ingot of silver weighing twenty-five ounces. In no time at all, the ingot was produced.
"A match between you two instructors is no ordinary contest," said Chai Jin. "Whoever wins gets this silver as a prize." He was hoping in this way to encourage Lin Chong to display his skill. Deliberately, he tossed the ingot on the ground.
Hong was very annoyed that Lin Chong had come, and he coveted the big piece of silver. What's more, he was worried that a defeat would lower his prestige. Vigorously, he struck a fighting pose, then executed an opening flourish called "lifting the torch to sear the heavens."
"His Lordship wants me to defeat him," thought Lin Chong. First holding his staff level, he performed a move called "separating the grass to find the snake."
"Come on, come on," yelled Hong.

He swung his staff downwards. Lin dodged back. Hong pressed forward another pace. Raising his staff, he again chopped down. Lin Chong saw that he was off balance and brought his staff sweeping upwards from the ground. Hong had no time to recover. He tried to twist out of the way but Lin's staff cracked him hard on the shin bones. Hong dropped his staff and fell heavily.
Delighted, Chai Jin called for wine and presented Lin Chong with a congratulatory goblet. The watchers all laughed. Hong struggled but was unable to rise to his feet. Grinning vassals helped him up. Hong, shamefaced, limped away and left the manor.
Chai took Lin Chong by the hand and led him into the rear hall and feasted him with wine. He directed vassals to present Lin with the prize. Lin tried to refuse but his host insisted, and finally he was compelled to accept.
Chai Jin kept Lin Chong at the manor for several days, entertaining him daily with excellent wines and delicious food. After another six or seven days, since the guards were pressing Lin to leave, Chai gave him a farewell banquet. He also wrote two letters which he handed to the drill instructor.
"The prefect of Cangzhou is a good friend of mine," he said, "I'm also on intimate terms with both the warden and head keeper of the garrison prison. Give these letters to them and they'll be sure to treat you well."
He presented Lin Chong with another ingot of twenty-five ounces of silver, and bestowed five ounces on the two guards. They feasted all night.
Early the next morning, after breakfast, Chai Jin directed a few vassals to go with them and carry their luggage. The cangue was again fastened around Lin Chong's neck. Chai Jin accompanied the party to the manor gate.
"I will send someone with winter clothing for you in a few days," he said to Lin Chong in parting.
"I don't know how to express my gratitude to Your Lordship," said Lin Chong. The guards also thanked Chai Jin, then the three departed for Cangzhou. They arrived about noon and sent the luggage bearers back. The guards went directly to the prefecture and presented their order of exile to an official, who immediately brought Lin Chong before the prefect. Accepting custody of the drill instructor, the prefect issued a receipt and wrote out an order committing Lin Chong to prison. The guards bade Lin farewell and departed for the Eastern Capital. Of them we shall say no more.
We'll tell of Lin Chong after he was escorted to the prison. He was placed in a room by himself and directed to await registration. The other prisoners came to see him.
"The warden and the head keeper here are very bad," they said. "They only want to extort money. If you can bribe them, they treat you well. If you have no money, they throw you in the dungeon where you pray for life and long for death, both in vain! If their palms are greased, you can avoid the hundred blows they give all new prisoners to beat discipline into them. You need only say you're ill and the matter will be postponed indefinitely. Otherwise, it's a hundred strokes that will leave you more dead than alive."
"It's good of you brothers to advise me. If I were to give money, how much would be enough?"
"To do it properly, five ounces of silver for the warden and five for the head keeper would be just about right."
As they were talking, the head keeper came over and asked: "Which one of you is the new arrival?"
Lin Chong stepped forward. "I am that humble person." When the head keeper saw that the drill instructor failed to produce any money, his face darkened.
Shaking his finger at Lin, he shouted: "You wretched exile! How dare you not bow and hail me respectfully when I enter? I've heard all about your carryings-on in Kaifeng! Where do you get the gall to behave so insolently in my presence? I can read from the lines on your face that you're destined for nothing but hunger! You'll never rise in the world! What you need is plenty of beatings, you stubborn jail-bird! For better or worse, you're in my hands now, you felonious wretch! I'll pulverize your bones and pound your flesh to jelly soon enough!"
The keeper cursed vigorously while Lin Chong stood with bowed head. At this storm of invective, the other prisoners fled.
Lin Chong waited until the head keeper had blown off most of his steam, then took out five ounces of silver and handed them to him with a smile. "A trifling gift, brother. Please don't despise it."
"Is this for me and the warden both?"
"Just for you, brother. In addition, here's another ten ounces for the warden. I must trouble you to deliver them to him."
The head keeper grinned broadly. "Drill Instructor Lin, I've heard of your good name before. You're truly a splendid fellow. Marshal Gao has framed you, no doubt about it. Although, for the time being, you have to suffer this inconvenience, I'm sure you'll eventually make your mark. A man with your reputation and talents never waits around idly for long! One of these days you'll be a big official."
Lin Chong laughed. "I'm entirely dependent on your kindness."
"You can rest assured," said the head keeper.
Giving him Chai Jin's letters, Lin Chong said: "May I trouble you to deliver these?"
"Letters from Lord Chai? Then you've nothing to worry about. They're worth an ingot of gold each! I'll deliver them now. In a little while, the warden will send for you to be registered. When he orders the hundred blows, say that you were ill during your journey and that you still haven't recovered. I'll speak up for you. We must make it look genuine."
"Many thanks."
The head keeper took the silver and the letters and departed, leaving Lin Chong alone in the room. The drill instructor sighed. " 'With money you can reach even the gods.' A bitter truth indeed."
To the warden, the head keeper gave only the five ounces which Lin Chong had originally presented to him. "Lin Chong is an excellent man," he confided. "Here is a letter of introduction from Lord Chai. It seems that Marshal Gao had him exiled on a trumped-up charge. There's nothing much to the whole thing ..."
"Since Lord Chai has sent us this letter," said the warden, "we must look after him." He directed that Lin Chong be summoned.
To get back to Lin Chong. He was brooding alone in his room when a turnkey shouted: "The warden orders that new prisoner Lin Chong report to the warden's hall to be registered."
Lin Chong went directly to the hall.
"You are a new prisoner," said the warden. "The first emperor of Song has bequeathed to us the ancient regulation: 'One hundred blows must be administered to every prisoner newly sent into exile.' Guards! Get him ready!"
"Your humble servant caught a bad cold during his journey here, and still hasn't recovered," said Lin Chong. "I request that the beating be postponed."
"He's not at all well," said the head keeper. "Please have pity on him."
"Since the symptoms of his illness are still evident, perhaps we can put this off for the time being," said the warden. "We can beat him when he regains his health."
"Today, the time is up of that prisoner who has been taking care of the garrison prison temple. Why not let Lin Chong replace him," suggested the head keeper.
The warden promptly wrote out an order and the head keeper accompanied Lin Chong back to his room, where he collected his belongings, then led him to the temple.
"I'm being very considerate to you, Drill Instructor Lin, getting you this job," said the head keeper. "It's the easiest work in the garrison prison. All you have to do is burn incense and sweep the floor once in the morning and once again in the evening. You'll soon see that we don't let up on other prisoners from morning till night. As for those without money, we throw them into the dungeon where they pray for life and long for death, both in vain."
"Thanks for your protection," said Lin Chong. He gave the head keeper another few ounces of silver. "There's one more matter I must trouble you about, brother. Could you have this cangue taken from my neck?"
"Just leave it to me," said the head keeper as he tucked the money away.
He hurried to the warden and relayed the plea. The cangue was removed. From then on, Lin Chong slept and ate in the temple. Everyday, he did nothing except burn incense and sweep the floor. Before he knew it, forty or fifty days had gone by. The warden and the head keeper, having been bribed, were always very cordial. He was left free to come and go as he pleased, with no restrictions. Lord Chai sent a man with winter clothing and other gifts. All the prisoners became recipients of Lin Chong's charity. To make a long story short, one day around noon as winter was drawing near, Lin Chong was strolling outside the garrison gates. Suddenly, he heard someone behind him call: "Drill Instructor Lin, what are you doing here?" Lin Chong turned around and looked. And because of seeing the man who hailed him: Fire and flames nearly put an end to his life. In the wind and snow he narrowly escaped suffering mortal wounds.

And now, just as Xue Ba lifted his staff in both hands and was about to split open Lin Chong's skull — it's slow in the telling but happens in a flash — just as Xue Ba's stick was poised to come down, I say, there was a sound like thunder from behind a pine tree and out shot a Buddhist staff of steel which, clashing with the guard's stick, sent it flying into the clouds. And behind the staff, out leapt an enormous monk! "I was right here in the wood and I've been listening to you for a long time," he roared.
The two guards stared at the monk. He wore a robe of rough black cotton, and was furnished with a sword. He also brandished a staff, to which he was about to give employment by applying it to the two guards. Lin Chong opened his eyes and in a flash recognized Lu Zhishen. "Master," he said hurriedly, "stay your hand. Hear what I have to say first."
Zhishen forthwith arrested his stroke. The two guards stood there dumbfounded, unable to stir hand or foot. "Don't blame them," Lin Chong said. "It's all because of the Marshal, who sent Lieutenant Lu to give them their orders; he told them to murder me, so how could they disobey? It would be an injustice to kill them."
Zhishen drew his sword and cut Lin Chong's bonds. Then, helping him up, he said: "Brother, I was worried about you, after I left you that day when you bought the sword. But when you were sentenced, there seemed to be no way to save you. Then I heard you had been exiled to Cangzhou. I went to the court-house, to try and catch you on the way out but I missed you. Some one said you were in the lock-up. Then I heard the waiter telling these two there was a gentleman at the wineshop who wanted to talk to them, and that made me suspicious. Better keep you in view, I thought to myself. I was afraid these villains might do something to you on the journey, so I decided to follow. I watched the buggers take you into that inn, so I lodged there too. That night I heard them scheming and conniving. I saw them scald your foot in the bath. I would have killed the swine right away but there were too many people staying at the inn and I was afraid I might be stopped. But knowing they were up to no good, I was even more determined not to let you out of my sight. When you left before dawn this morning, I hurried on ahead to this wood, where I reckoned to settle with these two bastards. Since they were planning to do you in here, it seems appropriate to kill them."
"Now that you've saved me," Lin Chong said, "please spare them."
"Do you hear that, you two?" Zhishen roared. "If it wasn't for my friend here, I'd make you into mincemeat. It's purely out of consideration for him that I let you off with your lives!" Sheathing his sword, he yelled, "Give my brother a hand and follow me." He led the way, swinging his staff. The two guards had no mind to answer back. Their only thought was to implore Lin Chong to protect them. They shouldered their packs again, picked up their staves, and helped Lin Chong up. They even carried his pack for him.
Emerging from the wood, they travelled another mile or so till they came to a very small inn at the entrance to a village:
*It was a cosy place, agreeably situated between the high road and the village brook, sheltered by willows and an orchard of peach trees, and brightened by patches of mallow and pomegranate. Beyond the gates stretched fields of barley and hemp, and in front there was a lily pond. The pennant fluttered gaily in the breeze and an unpretentious awning gave protection from the sun. By the wall cool earthenware jars held the village's new fermentation, while on the counter an unstoppered china bottle gave off the sweet scent of wine. A white-haired village elder was washing his plough and a fresh-faced country girl smilingly tended the stove.*
Entering, they seated themselves and told the waiter to bring five or six catties of meat, two jugs of wine and some pancakes. The waiter set the things on the table and served the wine. "May we presume to ask what temple you are from, Your Reverence?" the two guards asked Zhishen.
"Why are you two buggers so inquisitive?" he said. "Don't tell me you're thinking to make trouble for me with Gao-the-Ball? Well other people may be scared of him but I'm not. If ever I run into that bastard, he'll get three hundred of the best from my monk's staff." After this the two guards naturally didn't open their mouths again.
After eating and drinking, they collected their things, settled the bill and left the inn. Lin Chong asked Zhishen: "Master, where are you going now?"
"If you're going to kill a man, better be prepared for blood; if you rescue someone, better see it through to the end," Zhishen said. "I'm still worried about you, I shall see you safely to Cangzhou."
"Bloody hell!" the two guards said under their breath when they heard this, "that really puts the lid on it. What are we going to say when we get back? Still, there's nothing for it, we'll just have to go ahead and do what he says." Well, as the poem says:

Shun all wicked plots, that bring evil out in the daytime,
*Hold fast to manly virtue and despise the lure of gold,*
*Fear not the longest journey, the endless weary grind:*
Suffering's nothing more than an idea in the mind.

From now on Zhishen dictated their progress: they went forward or rested according to his command, there was no arguing with him. At best the two guards got the rough edge of his tongue, at worst, blows. They kept their mouths shut, terrified of awakening the monk's ire. After two days' travel, a cart was procured and Lin Chong rode in state, while the other three followed behind. No matter what evil designs they might have, the guards knew they had to be circumspect if they hoped to stay alive. Along the way Zhishen bought wine and meat with which to regale Lin Chong, and the guards had their share. When they found an inn they rested early and set out late. Even if it was always the guards who cooked, they didn't protest! But they continued their confabulations: "This monk has turned *us* into the prisoners now, we're bound to be in trouble with Marshal Gao when we get back." Xue Ba said, "I've heard stories about a new custodian at that vegetable garden belonging to the Xiangguo Temple. He's called Lu Zhishen, this must be him. When we get back we'll tell the truth, we'll say that when we were about to finish the prisoner off in Wild Boar Wood, we were prevented by this monk, who insisted on accompanying us all the way to Cangzhou and that's why we couldn't do it. We'll offer to return the ten taels of gold, and let Lieutenant Lu look for the monk and deal with him himself. You and I, we just want to keep out of all this."
"You're dead right we do," Dong Chao said.
We say no more of their discussions.
To cut a long story short, they travelled seventeen or eighteen more days, during which Zhishen never let them out of his sight. Finally they were only another twenty miles or so from Cangzhou. The remaining way was populated and passed through no solitary regions. Having verified this fact, Zhishen called a halt in a little pinewood. "Brother," he said to Lin Chong, "we're not far from Cangzhou now. The road ahead is well populated, there are no lonely spots, I've already checked up on that. The time has come for us to part but we'll meet again another day."
"When you return, Master," Lin Chong said, "please tell my father-in-law I am safe. I owe you my life, and if I live I will repay you."
Zhishen took out some twenty taels of silver which he gave to Lin Chong, and a further two or three taels for the guards, whom he addressed as follows: "Listen here, you two. I had intended to cut your heads off but for the sake of my friend here I spared your lives. You haven't got much further to go now. Just make sure you don't get up to anything."
"We wouldn't dream of it," they said. "It was only because we were under orders from the Marshal." They took the silver. As they were about to leave, Zhishen fixed his eye on them again and said: "Are your heads as hard as this pine tree?"
They replied: "Our heads are such as our parents gave us, just skin and flesh and a little bit of bone."
Zhishen whirled his staff and struck the pine tree, cutting right into the trunk a good two inches and causing it to come crashing down. "Take good note," he roared. "Any evil scheming and I'll treat your heads the same as that pine tree!" Then, swinging one arm and trailing his staff he took himself off but not before calling out to Lin Chong "Take good care, brother!"
For a long time Dong and Xue stood gazing after him open-mouthed. Finally Lin Chong said, "Come, let's get going."
"What a monk!" the two guards said. "With one blow he can fell a tree."
"That's nothing," Lin Chong said. "In the garden of the Xiangguo Temple he pulled up a whole willow tree by the roots."
The two guards nodded to themselves; this confirmed their suspicions.
Emerging from the pine forest, the three marched till noon, when they descried an inn beside the road.
When they entered, Lin Chong made Dong and Xue take the place of honour. At last the two guards found themselves able to relax!
There were several tables and the three or four waiters were busily rushing backwards and forwards serving wine. Lin Chong and his guards sat for an age but no one came to take their order. Finally Lin Chong lost patience. He struck the table and cried: "Landlord! Have you no manners here? You seem to think just because I'm a convict you can ignore me. I shall certainly pay for what I take, so you've no excuse!"
The landlord said: "You don't understand; it's for your own good."
"What are you talking about? You refuse to sell me wine and food for my own good?"
"There's this rich landowner, see, in the village here. He's called Chai, Chai Jin. Most people call him the Governor. Or 'The Little Whirlwind', that's what the rivers and lakes lot call him. He's a descendant of the royal family of Later Zhou. Back in the time when Emperor Tai Zu came to the throne at Chenqiao, his ancestors earned themselves a cast-iron pledge. That's why no one ever dares interfere with him. What he likes to do is entertain passing heroes, that's to say, he provides for thirty or forty of them in his house. He's always saying to us: 'If any convicts stop here, tell them to call in at the manor and I'll look after them.' Suppose I'd sold you the wine and food now, he'd have seen you all flushed with eating and drinking and thought you had plenty of funds of your own, so then he wouldn't help you. So there you are, I'm only doing what's best for you."
When he heard this, Lin Chong said to the guards, "When I was an instructor in the Eastern Capital, I often heard the men talking about someone they called the Governor. So this is where he hangs out. Why don't we go and pay him a visit?"
Dong and Xue considered this for a moment. So far as they could see it couldn't do any harm. They collected their things and said to the innkeeper: "Tell us where this Mr. Chai lives, we'll go and see him."
"Just keep straight on for about a mile. You'll come to a big stone bridge, and then it's just a few more bends before you see a big manor house. That's it."
They thanked the innkeeper and set off. Sure enough, after a mile or so they came to the stone bridge. After crossing it and proceeding along a flat stretch of road, they saw the manor house, set among green willows. It was surrounded on all sides by a moat overhung with weeping willows on both banks. A whitewashed wall gleamed through the foliage. One more bend in the road brought them right to the gate. What a fine place it was!
*Its front gate greets the Yellow Way, the hill behind receives the Green Dragon. A multitude of flowering peach trees encroach on the river, a forest of shrubs brightens the Golden Valley park. In the Hall of the Heroes, rare flowers bloom unfading throughout the four seasons; before the Hall of a Thousand Plants gardeners compete during all the eight festivals to produce the most striking spring landscape. Above, an imperial charter with gold characters hangs, for this house has a cast-iron pledge. The nine-tiered hall, with its red rafters and green tiles, stands richly modelled in light and shade. The painted roof-tree and carved beams are worthy of some fabulous home in ancient myth. This is not the house of some parvenu, promoted through parentage with the present emperor but the princely heritage of a bygone age.*
When they reached the manor they found a bridge of wide planks, where four or five retainers were sitting enjoying the fresh air. They approached and politely greeted the locals. Lin Chong said, "Can I trouble you to inform your master that a convict from the capital is here, travelling to his place of exile? Lin is my name, and I would like to speak with him."
"I'm afraid you're unlucky," the servants said. "If the master was at home there'd be food and drink for you, and money and supplies as well but this morning he went out hunting."
"Do you know when he will be back?" Lin Chong asked.
"It's impossible to say, he might go to sleep at the eastern residence, or then again, he might not. We just can't tell."

"In that case I'm unlucky, as you say. Since we can't see him, we'd better be going." They bade the villagers farewell and resumed their former way, their spirits considerably cast down. But they had not gone more than a few hundred yards when they saw far off, issuing from a wood and galloping in the direction of the manor, a troop of horsemen:

*It is a goodly company, handsome and brave to a man. A dozen or so thoroughbreds prance and curvet, several banners flutter above them. A confusion of green hats rises like upturned water-lily leaves, while pink complexions and scarlet lips resemble a profusion of hibiscus flowers. The finely crafted light bows for shooting birds are in their flying-fish covers, and lion-head quivers hold bunches of arrows flighted with eagle's feathers dyed blue. Some of the group are restraining whippets trained to pursue the deer and others hold aloft falcons for hunting rabbits. Cords are cast away as a handsome flock of doves soars into the sky; as the hawks are unhooded, the falconers try to guard their fingers. Sword blades and spear tips glitter coldly beside the saddles. The painted kettle-drums produce rhythmic thunder as they ride. Wild birds, that else would take wing, are tethered to the pommels and beasts that normally roam wild in the mountains are slung across saddles. It's all in the spirit of the Lord of Ancient Jin riding to the red fort, or the Lord of Han arriving in Changyang.*

The riders galloped towards the manor. In the midst of the troop was an official-looking type who rode a snow-white charger with a docked mane. This gentleman was possessed of dragon brows and phoenix eyes, bright red lips and dazzling teeth, drooping moustache and pointed beard, and was about thirty-five years of age. On his head he wore a black gauze cap with turned-up corners, embroidered with flowers, and he was dressed in a purple gown with an embroidered design on the chest, and a belt with a jade clasp and pendants of precious stones; on his feet were long black boots with green stripes and gold filigree. He carried a bow and a quiver-full of arrows. He led his troop to the gates of the manor.

When Lin Chong saw this, he said to himself: "I wonder if that's Mr. Chai." But he felt awkward about approaching and asking, so he remained where he was, hesitating. At this point the young gentleman turned his horse and approached. "Who is this person with the cangue?" he asked.

Lin Chong hurriedly bowed and said: "I am an instructor of the guards in the Eastern Capital. My name is Lin Chong. Because I offended Marshal Gao I was unjustly accused and brought before the judge of Kaifeng, sentenced and banished to Cangzhou. I heard at an inn a little further back that there is an honourable man here, a Mr. Chai, who welcomes gentlemen — men of spirit. I therefore came here looking for him. But I was not in luck. I have not been able to see him."

The young gentleman slipped from the saddle and rushed forward, saying, "Forgive Chai Jin for not having received you fittingly," and prostrated himself right there on the grass. Lin Chong hurriedly returned the courtesy. This done the young man took Lin Chong by the hand and led him towards the manor. When the retainers saw them coming, they opened wide the gates. Chai Jin then invited Lin Chong into the main hall. After the formal reception ceremony, Chai Jin said: "I have heard so much about you, Instructor but I did not foresee that you would enter my humble home today. Now you have made my life happy."

Lin Chong replied: "Your fame and renown, sir, have spread throughout the land. Who would have thought that today, convicted and here on my way into exile, it would be my good fortune to meet you; it is the greatest happiness of my life."

At Chai Jin's insistence, Lin Chong sat in the place reserved for honoured guests, and the two guards sat down nearby. The others of Chai Jin's troop led the horses away to the stables at the back. We say no more of this.

Chai Jin now called for wine to be brought. Soon servants appeared carrying a platter of meat, a plate of pancakes, and a jug of warm wine. To this was added a dish bearing a mound of rice, on which reposed ten strings of cash. As soon as all this had been set before them, Chai Jin said: "You ignorant peasants! Can't you see who is here? What do you mean by bringing such ordinary fare for the Instructor? Take it back to the kitchen at once. Then serve us with wine and fruit while you go and kill a sheep and cook it. Quickly, go and see to it."

Lin Chong jumped to his feet and said: "Please, don't order anything more. What there is here is more than enough."

"Please don't argue, Instructor. Now that we have you here we can't possibly be lacking in hospitality."

The servants complied. First they rushed back with fruit and wine. Chai Jin stood and toasted his guest with three cups. Lin Chong thanked him, and when they had drunk the two guards drank too. Then Chai Jin said, "Let us move to the inner room, Instructor." He unburdened himself of his bow and quiver, and invited the guards to join them and drink with them.

Chai Jin sat at the head of the table, Lin Chong took the place of honour, and the two guards sat down after him. Conversation grew lively, and there ensued many tales of adventure among the rivers and lakes. Unnoticed, the sun's red disk sank in the west. The banquet was ready, with fruit and seafood all laid out on the table before the company. Chai Jin raised his cup and toasted his guest three times. Then he sat down again and gave the order: "Bring in the soup and let the feast begin."

They had finished a bowl of soup and four or five cups of wine when a servant came and announced: "The Instructor is here," to which Chai Jin responded with: "Then you'd better ask him to come and join us. Bring another table at once."

Lin Chong stood up to look when this instructor entered. He wore a cotton turban at a slant and proudly puffed out his chest as he marched in. "Since the servants called him the Instructor," Lin Chong decided, "he must be the personal sword instructor of the master of the house, so I'd better honour him." He hastily inclined from the waist and sang out: "Lin Chong, at your service." But the other paid no attention and did not even return the greeting, so Lin Chong was left there unable to straighten up. Chai Jin pointed to Lin Chong, and said to the newcomer, who was Instructor Hong, "I want you to meet this gentleman, who is military arms instructor Lin Chong of the imperial guard in the Eastern Capital." When he heard this, Lin Chong straightened up to look Hong in the eye, and then prostrated himself. Hong said, "Cut the ceremony, get up!" Not with so much as a nod did he return the courtesy. Chai Jin was highly displeased. Lin Chong prostrated himself twice, then stood up and waited for Hong to take a seat. The latter, without an instant's hesitation, sat down in the place of honour. Chai Jin was still more put out. But Lin Chong meekly took the lower seat, and the two guards seated themselves after him.

Hong now asked: "Why must you receive a convict with such ceremony?"

"This is no ordinary convict," Chai Jin said. "This is an instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards, how can you treat him with such disrespect?"

"Mr. Chai," said Hong, "you are so besotted with martial arts that every little convict who comes this way is allowed to come and sponge on you; they only have to say they're arms instructors and you receive them here at the manor and let them guzzle your meat and drink, and money and rice. How can you take them so seriously?"

Lin Chong heard but he said nothing. Chai Jin spoke. "You shouldn't judge by appearances. Don't underestimate him."

Hong was greatly incensed by this. He sprang to his feet, saying: "I believe he's an impostor. Let's see if he dares to take me on with the staff, we'll soon see whether he's a real instructor or not."

The idea excited Chai Jin. "All right, then. Instructor Lin, what do you say?"

"I'm not worthy," Lin Chong said.

This convinced Hong he was right. "This fellow doesn't know anything, he's scared," he said to himself. And so he continued to challenge Lin Chong to a duel.

Now, in the first place Chai Jin wanted to see Lin Chong demonstrate his skill. And secondly, he wanted him to win, in order to take the braggart down a peg. But he said, "Let us drink first. We'll wait till the moon is up."

By the time they had drunk six or seven cups the moon had risen, bathing the hall in light as if it were day. Then Chai Jin rose and said, "Now let the two instructors exchange a few passes." But Lin Chong said to himself, "This Hong must be Chai Jin's teacher, and suppose I should knock him down, it would seem discourteous." Seeing Lin Chong's hesitation, Chai Jin said: "Instructor Hong has not been here very long, and as yet he has not found a worthy adversary. Please do not deny him this opportunity. I have a great desire to see you both demonstrate your skill." He said this because he was afraid that out of deference to him Lin Chong would conceal his true ability. Lin Chong, seeing that Chai Jin really meant what he said, put aside his scruples. Meanwhile Hong had risen to his feet and was shouting: "Come on, come on! Let's see what you can do!" They removed to a bare space behind the hall. The servants brought a bunch of staves that they placed upon the ground. Hong removed his robe and tied up his sleeves. Then he chose a staff and took up a position, crying: "Have at you!"

Chai Jin said: "Instructor Lin, I request you to show us a few passes."

Lin Chong said: "I hope you won't laugh at me." Then he bent down and picked up a staff, saying to Hong: "I shall be happy to learn from you." Hong glared at Lin Chong, as if convinced he was going to make just one mouthful of him. Lin Chong advanced, his stick held ready in the Shandong defence. Hong struck his staff upon the ground and charged. Under the bright light of the moon the two instructors traded blow for blow. What a sight it was!

*The Shandong defence and the Hebei pincers. The Shandong defence is a loach lurking in its burrow, spitting out sand as camouflage. The Hebei pincers is a great python slithering from its lair. The Shandong defence is like uprooting a locust tree. The Hebei pincers is like tearing down a withered creeper. They were two dragons contending in the deep sea for the pearl. They were two tigers before their den fighting for the food.*

So they fought in the moonlight, until after some four or five passes, Lin Chong leapt out of the circle of combat and cried: "I request a pause."

Chai Jin said: "Why are you holding back, Instructor?"

"I am unable to do more," Lin Chong said.

"But you've only just begun, how can that be?"

"This cangue is a handicap," said Lin Chong, "it limits my power."

"Of course. I ought to have thought of it. But that can be remedied," Chai Jin said easily. He told his servants to go and get ten taels of silver. These were quickly brought. Chai Jin then addressed the prisoner's two guards: "I have a request to make. Would you be so good as to remove Instructor Lin's cangue? If any questions are asked later when you get to the prison fortress, I will take full responsibility. I would like you to accept these ten taels of pure silver."

Dong and Xue were aware that Chai Jin was an important personage, and dared not refuse. Their dearest wish was to please him. And besides there was the silver, and the fact that they were confident Lin Chong would not run off. So they removed the restricting cangue at once. "Now sirs," cried Chai Jin with satisfaction, "you can engage in a few more bouts."

Hong had made up his mind that Lin Chong's staff-work was unadventurous and he didn't think much of it, so he raised his stick, eager to proceed with the contest.

"Wait!" Chai Jin cried. He sent some of his servants off to get a twenty-five-tael silver ingot that they returned with in no time. "This is a contest between two instructors," Chai Jin said, "it's something special. This silver ingot here shall be the prize, it will go to the winner." Chai Jin's intention was to stimulate Lin Chong to give of his best. He cast the ingot down on the ground.

Now Lin Chong's presence was odious to Hong, and on top of this he was keen to win the silver. To maintain the initiative, he whirled his staff and quickly, before he should lose his impetus, steadied it and took up the "putting heaven to the torch" position. Lin Chong thought to himself, "Secretly Mr. Chai wants me to win," so he angled his staff and initiated the movement called, "combing the grass for snakes." With a shout of "Have at you, have at you!" Hong thrust with the point of his staff. But Lin Chong had already backed off a pace. Hong pursued, raising his staff and bringing it smartly down again. Lin Chong saw that Hong's stance was awkward, and struck a sweeping blow close to the ground that Hong had no time to parry. When he tried to dodge, his opponent's staff caught him a cracking blow on the shins. Dropping his staff, he fell to the ground.

Chai Jin could not hide his delight. He called for wine, amidst a general buzz of excitement from the audience. Hong was quite unable to get up and it fell to the lot of the grinning retainers to go and help him to his feet. He left immediately with a face like thunder. Chai Jin took Lin Chong by the hand and led him to the inner hall where more wine was drunk. He told the servants to fetch the silver ingot and present it to Lin Chong. The latter refused but despite his protests he had to accept in the end.

This was indeed a case of:

It's hard to endure such bullying,
*The haughty find few friends:*
*Behold him, sore and profitless,*
Whose pride now lies in ruins.

Lin Chong stayed at Chai Jin's for several days and everyday there was great feasting and carousing. But on the fifth or sixth day, the two guards wanted to be off. So Chai Jin organized a farewell dinner and wrote two letters which he gave to Lin Chong, saying: "The Governor of Cangzhou is one of my friends, and I am also on excellent terms with the Warden of the prison and the chief gaoler. Give them these letters and you can be sure they will treat you well." He also gave Lin Chong another twenty-five-tael ingot of silver and five taels each to the guards. They spent the evening drinking, and then, next day, after they had breakfasted at dawn, Chai Jin told his people to carry the bags, while Lin Chong, wearing the cangue once more, bade farewell and set out. When Chai Jin saw them off at the manor gate, he said: "In a few days I'll send some of my people to you with winter clothes."

"How can I ever repay you?" Lin Chong said gratefully. The two guards also expressed their thanks.

So the three of them set off for Cangzhou, whose walls they sighted around midday. It turned out to be quite a small place, just the necessary six streets and three markets. They went straight to the court to deliver the documents, and Lin Chong was presented straight away to the magistrate. The latter, having interviewed him, dictated a letter announcing receipt of the prisoner and consigned him to the prison of the fortress. The two guards took the letter and left to return to the Eastern Capital. Of them we say no more.

As for Lin Chong, here is what he saw when he reached the prison:

*The gates are tall and the walls thick, the area enclosed is vast and there is a deep moat. Beside the Temple of the Heavenly Prince two lines of willows hang down their green smoke; before the guardhouse stands a clump of pines like a streak of eyeshadow. Those who enter here are men of iron, hard as nails; none pass these doors but desperadoes bathed in blood.*

Lin Chong, now a prisoner in the fortress of Cangzhou, was placed in a cell on his own until his case could be examined. During this time a group of prisoners came to see him and said: "The Warden and the head gaoler in this place are really vicious, they'll try to squeeze whatever they can out of you. If you've got something to sweeten them up with, they'll treat you okay. But if you've no money, they'll throw you into a dungeon, where you won't know if you're alive or dead. You're supposed to get a hundred lashes when you first come, to take the fight out of you but if you give them presents, they'll let you off it. They just say you're sick and the flogging is put off indefinitely. But if you don't give them anything, you'll be flogged till you're more dead than alive."

"Thank you for the good advice, friends," said Lin Chong. "But if I want to buy favour, how much should I give?"

"If you really want to be treated well, give the Warden five taels of silver and another five to the head gaoler. Then you should do fine."

They had hardly finished speaking when the head gaoler appeared. "Which one's the new convict?" he growled.

Hearing this, Lin Chong stepped forward and said, "I am."

When he saw no money in Lin Chong's hands, the gaoler's expression changed. "Who do you think you are?" he shouted, pointing his finger at Lin Chong. "Why don't you kowtow when you see me? Why don't you salute? You villain, after all the crimes you've committed in the capital, you still dare to put on airs in front of me, do you? Well I can see from the lines on your face you're destined to starve to death. You'll never make it! Think yourself the type that can't be finished off by beatings or torture, do you? Too bad, because you've fallen into my hands, you bunch of offal, and I'm going to teach you how we cut a body up into little tiny pieces. Just wait till I show you what's what!" He continued his litany of abuse till Lin Chong was almost in despair. He dared not even lift his head to reply. Hearing the shouting the other prisoners all made themselves scarce.

Lin Chong waited till the storm seemed to have blown itself out, then went and got five taels of silver that he presented to the gaoler, saying pleasantly: "My friend, I hope you will accept this simple gift, and not despise it."

The gaoler looked and said: "Do you want me to give this to the Warden, or is some of it for me?"

"It's all for you," said Lin Chong. "There's another ten taels that I'd like to trouble you to deliver to the Warden."

Suddenly the gaoler was all smiles, and he said: "Instructor Lin, I've heard many good things about you. I can see you're a good man. I believe you had a little problem with Marshal Gao. I know things are a bit tough for the time being but don't worry, you're bound to flourish, eventually. From your reputation and your looks, it's obvious you're no common man. I've no doubt you'll be someone big one day."

"Well, I shall rely on your help," Lin Chong said with a smile.

"Of course, never doubt it," said the gaoler.

Lin Chong then took out Chai Jin's letters of introduction and said: "Please do me the favour of delivering these letters."

"Oh!" the gaoler exclaimed, "if you've got letters from Mr. Chai, say no more. Each of these letters is worth a gold ingot with me. I will deliver them at once, and in a little while the Warden will want to see you. If he orders the disciplinary hundred lashes, all you've got to do is say you were ill on the journey and haven't recovered yet, I'll speak up for you, we can easily pull the wool over their eyes."

"I am most grateful for all your help."

Taking the silver and the letters, the gaoler left the cell. Lin Chong sighed and said to himself: "They say that with money you can win even the gods over. Well, they're not wrong. But the things I have to suffer!"

Meanwhile the gaoler, of course, kept back five taels of the Warden's silver and only took him the other half and the letters: "This Lin Chong is a good man," he reported, "he has letters of introduction from Mr. Chai. Here they are. It seems Marshal Gao had it in for him, that's why he's been banished here. I don't think he's done anything much."

"If he has letters from Mr. Chai, of course we must treat him well," the Warden said, and sent for him at once.

Now Lin Chong was sitting gloomily in his cell, when a sergeant appeared and said: "Warden's orders: new prisoner, Lin Chong, report to the office." Accordingly, Lin Chong presented himself at the Warden's office. The Warden said: "You're a new prisoner. According to the tradition instituted by Emperor Tai Zu, every new convict is to receive one hundred strokes of the cane as a reminder of his position. Guards! carry out the order for me."

"I beg to report, sir, that I am suffering from influenza, contracted on the journey here," Lin Chong said. "I humbly request a postponement until I am fully recovered."

"There's no doubt that this man is sick," the sergeant said. "I support his request for lenience."

"Ah yes," said the Warden. "I can see the man is not well. We will postpone the beating. He can be given it when he is cured." Next the gaoler made a proposal: "The guardian of the Temple of the Heavenly Prince has completed his sentence. We could send Instructor Lin to replace him." The order was made out there and then, and the gaoler escorted Lin Chong to his cell to collect his things and then to the Temple of the Heavenly Prince where he was to take over.

"Instructor Lin, I am really looking out for you," said the gaoler. "This job of looking after the Temple of the Heavenly Prince is the cushiest billet in the prison. All you have to do is burn incense every morning and evening and sweep the floor. You just compare that with the other prisoners: they have to sweat from morning to night, there's never any rest for them. And the ones who don't cooperate, we stick them down in the dungeons. Down there they don't even know whether they're alive or dead."

"I am truly grateful for your help," said Lin Chong, and he took out another two or three taels of silver for the gaoler. "I wonder if I could ask you a small favour. It would really make life easier if the cangue could be removed."

"Leave it to me," said the gaoler.

After petitioning the Warden, he returned and took off the cangue. From now on Lin Chong lived in the Temple of the Heavenly Prince, and his sole duty was to light incense everyday and sweep the floor. Time slipped by imperceptibly and soon he had been there over a month. Now that he had paid off the Warden and the head gaoler they became more and more complaisant, giving him a free rein, placing no restrictions upon him. Moreover, Mr. Chai sent someone with winter clothing and other gifts. And all the other prisoners also benefited indirectly from Lin Chong's presence. But enough of this. Time passed and the rigours of winter were at hand. One day around noon Lin Chong happened to leave the fortress for a stroll. As he was walking, he heard someone shout behind him: "Instructor Lin! What brings you here?" Lin Chong turned round to see who it was. It was a meeting that was to have fateful consequences for Lin Chong. Because of it:

Lin Chong came near to perishing in the blaze,
In the howling storm, he all but ended his days.

XUE BA took up his stick in both hands, and was on the point of striking Lin Chong with it when all at once there came a tremendous noise in the fir trees, and a big fat monk jumped out and shouted, "I have been in the forest for some time and have heard all that you have said." So saying he knocked the stick out of Xue Ba's hands with his monk staff. He then whirled his staff, and was going to hit the constable with it when Lin Chong, recognizing Lu Da, called out, "Brother, leave them alone. I have something to say."
Lu Da upon hearing this stayed his hand. The two constables were almost paralyzed with fear.
Lin Chong said, "They are not responsible for this as the Marshal of the Imperial Guard gave instructions through Lu Qian that they were to kill me. They were only carrying out the order. So if you kill them it will only create another grievance."
Lu Da unsheathed his sword, cut the ropes binding Lin Chong to the tree, and raising him said, "Younger brother, I have been thinking of your trouble ever since we parted on the day you bought that sword. Since you were arrested, I have been planning to save you. I heard that you had been banished to Cangzhou but although I waited outside Kaifeng I did not see you depart. Afterwards I heard that you had been sent to the prison in Kaifeng, and also heard that an official had had a private conversation with the two constables in an inn. Because of this procedure I was very suspicious, and anxious about your safety. So when you left I secretly followed you. I saw these two rascals take you into the inn, and I therefore stayed there myself. In that night I heard these two men discussing their evil schemes, and saw them thrust your feet in the boiling water. At that time I thought of killing them but there were many people in the inn who might have tried to stop me. But as they had bad intentions I was more anxious about you. I left the inn before you in the morning, and hid in the forest with the intention of killing these rascals as they passed that way. As they came here with the object of killing you it will be better if I kill them."
"Elder brother," said Lin Chong, "as you have saved my life, you should not kill these two men."
Lu Da spoke in a loud voice, "If my younger brother had not interfered, I would have cut you two rascals into mincemeat. But at his request I forgive you." After sheathing his sword, he continued, "Now you assist my younger brother, and follow me." The two men dared not utter a word in reply but helping Lin Chong they followed Lu Da. They also carried Lin Chong's bundle. After going about a *li* they came to a village where there was an inn. The four men entered the inn and sat down ordering from the waiter eight pounds of meat, two big tankards of wine, and flour cakes. The waiter soon spread the table, and placed the tankards of wine in a dish containing hot water so as to keep them warm.
The two men then said, "Reverend, we dare not ask you at what monastery you live?"
Lu Da laughed and said, "You rascals! If I tell you what will you do? I suppose you would just go and report it to Marshal Gao of the Imperial Guard. Some men fear him but I do not. If I met him I should give him three hundred blows with my staff."
After that the two men dared not open their mouths. After they had finished their meal and paid the innkeeper they left the village, and on the road Lin Chong asked, "Elder brother, where are you going to?"
Lu Da said, "A murderer must see some blood, and so a rescuer must see that his man is quite safe. I am not yet quite easy in my mind about you so I will go with you as far as Cangzhou."
The two constables upon hearing this muttered to themselves, "Here is more trouble! Our business is entirely spoiled! What can we say when we get back? But we cannot do anything except follow them."
After that they were so afraid that Lu Da might kill them that they immediately agreed to whatever he wanted to do. If things were all right he cursed them, or if anything was wrong he hit them without the least protest from them. After about two days they got a cart for Lin Chong to sit in. The two constables were still so afraid and suspicious that they decided to follow Lu Da in order to preserve their own lives. On the way Lu Da paid for the food and wine for the party. Everyday they stopped at inns quite early in the afternoon, and departed late the following morning. The two constables cooked the rice for the party, and also did whatever they were told to do. They discussed matters privately, and Dong Chao said, "We are under the close supervision of this monk, and when we go back Marshal Gao will blame us for our failure in carrying out his order."
Xue Ba said, "I heard that a monk called Lu Da had recently been placed in charge of the vegetable garden at the branch temple of the Great Xiangguo Monastery, and I think this monk must be that person. So when we get back we must tell the truth, that we really tried to kill Lin Chong in the Yezhu Forest but this monk stopped us from doing so, and then took us with him on the road to Cangzhou. In this way we shall escape punishment. We must return the ten taels of silver we received, and then Lu Qian will himself go and search for this monk. We shall thus be free from blame."
Dong Chao said, "What you say is quite right."
But Lu Da never let them get out of his sight, and after traveling for about eighteen days like this they were within twenty-three *li* of Cangzhou. Lu Da inquired and found out that there was no desolate spot about there as there were houses all along the road, and then decided to have a rest in a forest of fir trees nearby.
Lu Da spoke to Lin Chong, "Younger brother, we are now close to Cangzhou. I have made inquiries, and find that there are many houses on the way, and no unfrequented places. So I will leave you now, and see you again some other day."
Lin Chong said, "Elder brother, when you return, you can report my safety to my father-in-law. If I live I will certainly reward you liberally for your benevolent protection."
Lu Da took twenty taels of silver, and gave them to Lin Chong. He also gave three taels of silver to the two constables, and said, "If I had been by myself I would have decapitated both of you before now but as my younger brother has pleaded for you I will let you off this time. Now your destination is not far away so you must not harbour your original vile plan."
The constables said, "We will not do so. It was Marshal Gao Qiu, who deputed us to kill him."
They received the silver, and just before they separated on their different ways, Lu Da spoke to the constables, "Are your heads as hard as the fir trees?"
The men replied, "Our heads are as they were at birth."
Lu Da swung his staff and hit a tree with it leaving a gash two inches deep—and causing the top part to fall down. He then shouted, "If you two rascals have vile intentions I will treat your heads in the same way as that tree." He then turned to Lin Chong, and said to him: "Younger brother, you had better be on your guard against these two men. I must now leave you."
The two constables were so frightened that their tongues hung out for a long time.
Lin Chong said at last, "Well, we had better go."
The constables said, "What brute strength that monk has! He broke a tree with just one blow of his staff."
Lin Chong said, "That is only a small affair. At the Great Xiangguo Monastery he tore a tree up by its roots."
The two men shook their heads upon learning that this monk was the very Lu Da they had supposed.
The three men then left the forest, and about noon they came to an inn which they entered, and Lin Chong requested the constables to take the seat of honour. After seven hours the two constables began to feel that they recovered their spirits. There were many men in the inn drinking wine, and five waiters attending to their wants. The waiters were very busy bringing first one thing and then another, Lin Chong and the two constables sat waiting for an hour, without a waiter coming to attend to them. Lin Chong's patience was exhausted, so he rapped the table and called out, "I suppose the proprietor of this inn despises us because I am a criminal, and therefore he does not attend to us. But as I can pay for the wine, your conduct is most unreasonable."
The proprietor replied, "You evidently do not understand why we do this."
"As you do not supply us with food and wine what else is there to understand?"
The innkeeper said, "You evidently do not know that in this village we have a very wealthy man named Chai Jin who is also known as Squire Chai; he has been nicknamed by the robbers as Small Whirlwind. He is the descendant of Chai Shizong, of the Later Zhou Dynasty, who at Chen Qiao abdicated in favour of the Emperor Taizu, founder of the Song Dynasty and the latter bestowed on him a charter made in iron that all men must respect him and his offspring for all future time. In his home there are generally about fifty brave men who have come from all parts of the empire at his invitation. He has given us a general order that should any banished criminals pass this way they can go to his home, and he will assist them with money. If I supply you with wine and food your face would be red, and when he sees you in that condition he would assume that you are not short of money and would not assist you."
Lin Chong upon hearing this turned to the two constables, and said, "While I was in the army at Kaifeng I often heard about this Squire Chai but I never knew that he lives here. So why should we not go, and ask him to help us?"
The two constables saw no objection to this so they asked the proprietor of the inn where Squire Chai lived. The proprietor told them that they must follow the road in front of the inn for about a *li* till they came to a large stone bridge, and there turning off the road they would come to the village where Squire Chai lived.
Lin Chong thanked the proprietor of the inn, and leaving the inn they found the bridge. From there stretched a fine road leading to a clump of willow in which was situated the village they were looking for. The village was surrounded by a white wall and also a very broad moat on the banks of which were many big weeping willows. Upon reaching the moat they found there were about five men sitting on the bridge enjoying the cool air. The three men saluted, and then Lin Chong said, "Excuse me troubling you but will you please inform your master that a criminal, named Lin, who is being escorted to the prison wishes to see him."
The rustics replied, "You are unfortunate, as if our master had been at home he would have given you wine, food, and money. But today he went out hunting, and has not returned yet."
Lin Chong asked, "When will he come back?"
The rustics replied, "We are not sure about that as he may have stopped at the eastern estate for a rest."
Lin Chong said, "It is evident that I cannot see him, and that is unfortunate; so we will go." The three men were very much disappointed but they had not gone more than a quarter of a *li* when they saw a long way off a large body of horsemen emerge from a dense forest, and gallop towards the estate. In front of the horsemen was the leader who was riding a white horse. He had long eyebrows, long slit eyes, pearly white teeth, crimson lips, with a minute beard hanging from his lower lip, and a flowing mustache. He was about thirty-five years of age, and on his head he wore a black hat. He wore a brown silk gown embroidered with flowers in circular designs, and round his waist was an elegant silk girdle with a large circular jade buckle. His boots were of black silk embroidered with a design in gold and green. On his back hung a bow, and at his side was a quiver full of arrows.
When Lin Chong saw him he thought that this might be Squire Chai but still he was not quite sure about it. When the horse got near, the rider asked, "Who is this man wearing a cangue?"
Lin Chong quickly bowed, and said, "I am Lin Chong, Drill Instructor in the Imperial Guards at Kaifeng. I was in ill favour with Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard, who sent me to be tried, branded, and banished to Cangzhou. At the inn I heard that here is a fine man named Chai who likes to meet all celebrated scholars, and therefore I came specially to ask for his help. But unfortunately he was not at home."
The man jumped off his horse, and walking rapidly towards Lin Chong said, "Chai has lost the opportunity of welcoming you." He then saluted.
Lin Chong immediately returned the compliment. Chai then took Lin Chong by the hand, and led him towards the house. When the rustics saw them coming they opened the gate. Chai conducted Lin Chong to the guest chamber where he observed the usual courtesies.
Squire Chai Jin then said, "I heard of your fame some time ago, so that your opportune arrival at this insignificant spot fills me with entire satisfaction."
Lin Chong replied, "This insignificant person has heard of your fame in all quarters, and everybody respects you. Because I have been banished as a criminal I did not expect to meet you but I have been extremely fortunate." After having been much pressed Lin Chong sat down in the guest's seat, and the two constables sat down near him. We need not say anything here about the other horsemen who had taken their horses to the stables at the back of the house.
Squire Chai Jin ordered the servants to bring wine, and they brought it in with meat, cakes, and a peck of unboiled rice on the top of which were ten strings of cash. When he saw this Chai Jin in an apologetic tone said that the servants were not aware that he was entertaining a Drill Instructor, and that was why they had brought such small quantities of things. He then told the servants to take them away, and bring the best of fruit, and wine, and kill a sheep at once.
Lin Chong rose, and expressed his thanks, and requested Chai Jin not to go to such trouble as what they had brought was quite ample.
Chai Jin objected to this, as the visit of a Drill Instructor was such a rare event that he could not treat it lightly.
The servants carried out his instructions, and soon brought in the better wine, and fruit, and Chai Jin then poured out three cups of wine for Lin Chong. After Lin Chong had drunk the wine, and expressed his thanks, Chai Jin asked to be excused as he wished to retire and take off his bow, and his quiver full of arrows. He asked the two constables to drink wine with Lin Chong while he was away. Upon returning he sat down as the host and Lin Chong again sat in the guest's seat, with the two constables behind him.
They discussed matters relating to heroes and were not aware that evening was drawing nigh. On the table were spread all kinds of food, fruit, and delicacies of the sea. Chai Jin poured out the wine three times, and then sat down, and told the servants to bring in the soup. They had just eaten the soup, and drunk about seven cups of wine each, when a village rustic entered, and said the Drill Instructor had arrived.
Chai Jin told the servant to go and request him to come, and sit down at the table with them. When the Drill Instructor entered, Lin Chong saw that he was not wearing his cap straight, and was strutting like a bully. He thought that the man must be the athletic teacher for Chai Jin so he rose, bowed, and after calling attention by saying "*mu*," he said, "Lin Chong salutes with all respect."
The man took no notice of Lin Chong, and did not return his salute.
Lin Chong dared not raise his head.
Chai Jin pointing to Lin Chong said to the Drill Instructor Hong, "This gentleman is Lin Chong, Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guards at the Eastern Capital, and I want you to make his acquaintance."
Upon hearing this Lin Chong again saluted Drill Instructor Hong, and the latter did not wish to bow so he only said, "You need not salute me. Get up."
When Chai Jin saw and heard this he was annoyed.
Lin Chong however saluted again twice, and then got up and requested Hong to be seated. Without returning this compliment Hong simply sat down in the chief guest seat. This further annoyed Chai Jin. Lin Chong had to take his seat in the lower position and the two constables also sat down.
Drill Instructor Hong asked Chai, "Why do you treat a banished soldier with such great respect?"
Chai Jin said, "This gentleman is Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guards so how can you despise him?"
"Sir," said Hong, "I know that you like to exercise with a cudgel, and that is why when these army men arrive they always say they can also exercise with the cudgel. They all say that they are Drill Instructors and so cheat you into giving them wine, rice, food, and money. Why do you always believe that they are speaking the truth?"
Lin Chong upon hearing this suppressed his desire to speak. Chai Jin said, "It is not anybody who can recognize ability by appearances and so we cannot treat him lightly."
Drill Instructor Hong did not like Chai Jin suggesting that he could not recognize ability by appearance so he jumped up, and said, "I have no faith in him! If he will have a bout with me with the cudgels then I shall be able to say whether he is a genuine Drill Instructor."
Chai Jin laughed and said that that was a fine idea. He then asked Lin Chong whether he agreed to the proposal. But Lin Chong declined the offer. After thinking the matter over Drill Instructor Hong came to the conclusion that Lin Chong was afraid, and also was perhaps unable to fence. So he decided to provoke Lin Chong to fence with him.
Chai Jin wanted to see Lin Chong display his ability and also to see him beat Hong and so close the latter's mouth. So he said to the servants, "Bring the wine, and we will wait till the moon rises." After they had drunk about seven cups of wine the moon rose and it was then as bright as daylight in the hall where they were drinking.
Chai Jin got up, and said, "Now you two Drill Instructors just have a trial with the cudgels."
Lin Chong saw that Hong was teaching Chai Jin to drill with the cudgels so he thought that Chai Jin would not like it if he knocked his drill teacher down.
Chai Jin saw that Lin Chong was in a quandary so he said, "Drill Instructor Hong has not been coming to my house for very long. No one has fought with him here, so you must not refuse to do so. I want to see which of you two is the best man." Chai Jin said this because he thought that perhaps Lin Chong would not do his best out of consideration for his feelings in the matter.
Lin Chong felt more satisfied when he heard Chai Jin explain the position in this way. Hong got up, and called out, "Come on! Come on! Come on! I will have a bout with you."
So all three adjourned to an open space outside, and the servants brought a bundle of cudgels and placed them on the ground.
Drill Instructor Hong took off his clothes, and tucked up his short underskirt in his belt. He then dragged a cudgel out of the bundle, and raised it above his head. He again called out, "Come on! Come on! Come on!"
Chai Jin said, "Now, Lin, let me see what you can do."
Lin Chong asked Chai Jin not to laugh at him. He then picked up a cudgel, and said, "Master, please give me a lesson."
At this Hong was so angry that he would have liked to swallow Lin Chong at one gulp.
Lin Chong raised his cudgel above his head and brought it down with a blow in "Shandong style." At the same time Hong brought his cudgel down in a horizontal sweeping motion. The two men fought about five bouts in the moonlight, and then Lin Chong suddenly jumped clear of the cudgel, and called out for a rest.
Chai Jin asked why he was not using all his ability.
Lin Chong said, "I have lost."
Chai Jin said, "I have not seen any display of skill so how can you be defeated?"
Lin Chong said, "But I am wearing this cangue so I must lose."
Chai Jin said, "Ah! I had quite overlooked that." He laughed loudly and said, "That is soon remedied." He then told the servants to bring ten taels of silver. He also told the two constables to take off the cangue, and he would be entirely responsible for it should there be any inquiry at the prison the following day. He then gave the two constables the ten taels of silver.
The two constables saw that Chai Jin had such a splendid appearance that they did not care to oppose his will. They were also not afraid of Lin Chong running away so they took off the cangue.
Chai Jin was pleased and said, "Now you two Drill Instructors can try again."
Drill Instructor Hong thought that Lin Chong was weak in his use of the cudgel so he despised him. He raised his cudgel, and waited for an opportunity of using it.
Chai Jin called out, "Wait for a moment." He then instructed the servants to bring an ingot of silver which they did immediately and set it before him. It weighed twenty-five taels. He then said, "You two Drill Instructors can now continue your practice. I have here an ingot of silver which I will give to the winner." He purposely put the ingot of silver on the ground so that Lin Chong seeing it would exert all his skill in fencing.
Drill Instructor Hong was very jealous that Lin Chong had come there. He wanted the money but was afraid that he might be defeated and lose his reputation. But he raised his cudgel above his head in readiness to strike downwards.
Lin Chong thought that Chai Jin wanted him to win. He took his cudgel, and held it horizontally in readiness to repel a downward stroke of his opponent.
Drill Instructor Hong again shouted out, "Come on! Come on! Come on!" and so saying, he brought down his cudgel. But Lin Chong avoided the blow by taking a step back. Hong raised his cudgel again, and taking a step forward again struck at Lin Chong. Again he missed, and Lin Chong now saw that Hong was not placing his feet in the best position, so he quickly raised his cudgel, and making a sweeping horizontal motion struck Hong on his ankle just as the latter tried to move away. Hong fell down, and his cudgel also lay on the ground.
Chai Jin was much pleased to see this, and told the servants to bring the wine. The onlookers all laughed when they saw Drill Instructor Hong fall down. As Hong did not get up, they came forward and raised him up. Hong was so extremely ashamed of himself that he just walked away.
Chai Jin took Lin Chong by the hand, and lead him into the hall to drink wine. He then told the servants to bring the ingot of silver, and give it to Lin Chong but the latter declined to receive it. But after being much pressed he agreed to take it.
After that Lin Chong stayed with Chai Jin for several days, and was well treated with wine and food. But after seven days the constables were urging Lin Chong to depart so Chai Jin prepared a feast for their final leave taking, and wrote a letter. He said, "The Prefect at Cangzhou is a friend of mine, and I am on intimate terms with the superintendent of the jail there. So you can present this letter to them, and they will treat you well." He then gave Lin Chong another ingot of silver. He also gave each of the constables five taels of silver.

The following day soon after breakfast Chai Jin ordered men to carry the three men's baggage. Lin Chong put the cangue on again and bid goodbye to Squire Chai Jin. The latter accompanied them as far as the gate of the village, and there said to Lin Chong, "After a few days I will send a man with some winter clothing for you."
Lin Chong expressed his thanks, and said, "How can I ever repay you?"
The three men then departed, and reached Cangzhou about noon the same day. The porters who had carried the baggage were sent back. The official dispatch was presented and the official took Lin Chong to the magistrate. The latter then sealed an order confining Lin Chong to the prison, and also a reply to Kaifeng which was handed to the two constables to take back.
At the jail Lin Chong was placed by himself in a cell where he awaited inspection. A great number of the prisoners came to his room to talk with him. They said, "The head jailer at this place is an awful fellow, and demands money and things from the prisoners. If you give him your money and things he will treat you well. But if you do not give him money he will confine you in a hole in the ground and he will be absolutely indifferent whether you live or die. If you give him money he will not beat you with the bamboo, and if you say you are ill the punishment will be postponed. If you do not give him money he will beat you until you are almost dead."
Lin Chong said, "Brothers, thanks for your information. But if he asks for money how much should I give him."
The prisoners said, "It will be best if you give both the head jailer and the prison superintendent five taels of silver each."
Just as they were saying this the head jailer came and said, "Where is that soldier who has been banished?"
Lin Chong replied, "I am the man."
As the head jailer did not see Lin Chong get his money ready he changed his countenance, and cursed him saying, "You banished thief! Why don't you kneel when you see me instead of replying in that way. Do you know what trouble you have brought about at the Eastern Capital? Now you are still so proud to me. I see that you are a banished thief with all your face wrinkled with starvation, and that you will never have good luck during the remainder of your life. You are a stupid prisoner whom beating and torture could not kill! But your bones will soon be in my hands, and then I will grind them to powder, and chop up your body. It won't be long before you get your deserts!"
This abuse made Lin Chong so frightened that he did not even raise his head or reply. The prisoners listened to it all, and then went away. Lin Chong waited until he had finished saying this and then took out five taels of silver, and smiling said, "Elder brother, and head jailer, I offer you this trifling present."
The head jailer said, "Is this to be divided between me and the superintendent?"
Lin Chong said, "That is for you, and I will also trouble you to give the superintendent this ten taels of silver."
The head jailer laughed and said, "Drill Instructor Lin, I have heard of your good name. You are really a fine fellow. I think that Marshal Gao Qiu, wishes to injure you. But although you are in trouble now, you will certainly have luck after this. Having heard of your great name and now judging by your appearance I am sure that you are not an average person, and soon you must become an official."
Lin Chong laughed, "Well, I will look forward for your assistance." The head jailer said, "But you need not worry." Lin Chong then took out the two letters he had received from Chai Jin, and said, "Elder brother, may I trouble you to send these two letters for me."
The head jailer said, "As you have letters from Chai Jin you need not be anxious. A letter like this is worth an ingot of gold. I will take it for you with pleasure. And when the superintendent comes, and orders a hundred blows with the bamboo for you, you must say that you were sick on the way here, and have not quite recovered yet. I shall be there, and offer excuses, and so deceive the people who are not in on the secret."
Lin Chong said, "Many thanks for your advice."
This head jailer took the silver and the letters, and left the cell.
Lin Chong heaved a sigh and said, "Money can move even the gods. That is a true saying, as without money there is always a difficulty."
The head jailer took the silver, and gave five taels to the superintendent. He also presented the letter and said, "This man, Lin Chong, is a fine fellow, and has brought this letter from His Excellency Chai Jin who speaks highly of him. He was falsely accused by Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard, who had him banished to this place. It was only a slight offence."
The superintendent said, "As he has brought this letter from Squire Chai Jin we must look after him well. Bring him here to see me."
Lin Chong was sitting in silence in his cell, when the head jailer returned and told him that the superintendent wanted to see him, and check his name off. He was taken to the hall where the superintendent spoke to him, "The Emperor Taizu issued a law that anybody who was banished to this place should receive one hundred blows with the bamboo. You have just arrived so I must administer that punishment." He then told his guard to put the prisoner on the ground.
Lin Chong said, "On the way I caught a severe cold, and have not quite recovered yet. I request that the punishment be postponed."
The head jailer said, "This man certainly is sick, and I suggest that you take pity of him."
The superintendent said, "As he is sick we will not beat him now but wait until he is better."
The head jailer said, "The man who attends to the Heavenly Kings Temple has been there quite a long time and I suggest that Lin Chong should supersede him."
The superintendent wrote an order accordingly, and Lin Chong was taken to his cell to get his baggage, and then taken to the shrine where he took over his duties.
The head jailer said that he had done his best for Lin Chong. "This job is the lightest in the prison, and all that you have to do is to sweep the floor, and burn incense. You must see that none of the other prisoners are spared from early morning till late at night. People who have no references and assistance as you have are confined to the prison, and whether they want to live or die makes no difference."
Lin Chong said that he was much obliged for the help. He then gave the head jailer three more taels of silver, and asked him to take off his cangue. The head jailer said he would attend to that, and put the matter before the superintendent. Upon his return he took off the cangue. So Lin Chong stayed by himself at the Heavenly Kings Temple and everyday swept the floor and burnt incense. The first fifty days soon passed over without him noticing the time. The superintendent and the head jailer became quite friendly to Lin Chong, and allowed him great liberty.
Chai Jin sent winter clothing and also money for Lin Chong. The other prisoners also received money from Lin Chong.
One day about 10 A.M. Lin Chong was strolling outside the prison when he heard someone behind him call out, "What are you doing here, Drill Instructor Lin?" Turning round he saw a man.

Lin Chong nearly lost his life.
First in fire, and then in snow.

## 010

### Lin Chong Seeks Refuge Shelters from the Snowstorm in the Mountain Spirit Temple & alleviates his plight; Captain Lu Qian Sets Fire to the Fodder Depot stores alight

Lin Chong was strolling along, when someone behind him called his name. He turned around and saw the tavern waiter Li Xiao-er. When they first became acquainted in the Eastern Capital, Lin had helped him financially several times. Later, Xiao-er stole money from the tavern keeper and was arrested. He was going to be sent to the prefect but Lin Chong spoke up in his behalf, and he did not have to stand trial. Lin also paid back the money for him and he was released. Although Xiao-er could no longer find work in the capital, thanks to the travelling expenses which Lin gave him, he was able to seek employment elsewhere. Today, unexpectedly, they met again in Cangzhou.
"What are you doing here, Brother Xiao-er?" asked Lin Chong.
Xiao-er kowtowed and replied, "After you saved me, benefactor, and gave me travelling money, I looked everywhere for a job but in vain. Finally, I wandered into Cangzhou. Here, a tavern keeper named Wang took me on as his assistant. Because I was a hard worker and could make tasty dishes and sauces, the customers praised me and business improved. The tavern keeper had a daughter, and he gave her to me in marriage and adopted me into his household. Now, both he and my mother-in-law are dead. Only my wife and I are left. We run a tavern in front of the garrison. I was just passing by on my way to collect some bills. What are you doing here, benefactor?"
Lin pointed to the mark on his face. "Because I crossed the will of Marshal Gao, he conspired against me and had me convicted and exiled to this place. At present, I look after the garrison prison temple. I don't know what they'll do with me in the future. I never expected to meet you here."
Xiao-er brought Lin Chong to his home, invited him to be seated, and called his wife in to greet him. Both husband and wife said happily. "We have no close relatives. Your coming here today, benefactor, is like a gift from heaven!"
"I'm an exile," said Lin. "Won't associating with me sully your name?"
"How can you talk like that?" said Xiao-er. "Everyone knows your excellent reputation. Be sure to bring all your washing and mending to my wife."
He entertained Lin Chong with food and drink and that night saw him back to the garrison temple. The following morning, he came again to invite Lin to his home.
From then on, Xiao-er and Lin called on each other frequently. Xiao-er often sent tea or soup to Lin in the garrison. Moved by the couple's respect and devotion, Lin gave them money from time to time to use in their business.
To skip the idle chatter, time passed quickly. Winter came. All of Lin Chong's padded winter garments were stitched and mended by Xiao-er's wife. One day, while Xiao-er was cooking in the entry, a man slipped in and sat down inside at one of the tables. Then another fellow furtively entered. The first man was an army officer, by the looks of him. The second seemed more like an attendant. He also hurried in and sat down.
Xiao-er went up to them. "Wine?" he queried.
The officer handed Xiao-er an ounce of silver. "Take this on account. Bring us three or four jugs of good wine. When our guests come, serve some food and tidbits. You choose the dishes. You needn't ask me."
"You've invited guests, sir?"
"I must trouble you to go to the garrison prison and invite the warden and the head keeper here for a chat. If they question you, just say: 'A gentleman requests that you come and discuss certain matters. He is looking forward to your arrival.' "
Xiao-er assented and left. At the garrison, he first relayed the request to the head keeper then, together, they extended the invitation to the warden, after which all three went to the tavern. The gentleman, the warden and the head keeper exchanged greetings.
"We haven't met before," said the warden. "May we ask your name, sir?"
"I have a letter of introduction here that I will give you shortly," replied the man. "But first let's have some wine."
Xiao-er quickly opened the jugs and served the food. The gentleman called for a ceremonial tray of wine goblets. After filling and handing them out, he invited his guests to be seated. Xiao-er dashed back and forth like a shuttle, serving without cease. The gentleman's attendant took care of the warming of the wine. A dozen rounds were drunk, more tidbits to go with the wine were ordered.
"My attendant will warm the wine," the gentleman said to Xiao-er. "You needn't come unless we call you. We want to talk privately."
Xiao-er said: "Very well, sir," and left the room. Outside the door, he conferred with his wife.
"There's something fishy about those two."
"What do you mean?"
"They've both got Eastern Capital accents and neither of them knows the warden. When I went in with those tidbits just now, I heard the head keeper murmur something about 'Marshal Gao.' Wasn't he the one who harmed Instructor Lin? I'll stay here at the door and keep an eye on them. You go and listen on the other side of the partition wall."
"Why not bring Instructor Lin here from the garrison and see if he recognizes them?"
"You don't know what a terrible temper he has. He's liable to commit murder and burn the place down. If I called him and that gentleman turned out to be the Captain Lu he mentioned the other day, Lin would never let him escape alive. If anything happened here, you and I would be involved. You'd better go and listen. We'll decide what to do later."
"Very well," said the wife. She went and listened for a time. Then she returned and said: "They're whispering with their heads together and I couldn't hear much. But I saw that fellow who looks like an officer take something wrapped in a white cloth from his attendant and give it to the warden and head keeper. Maybe there's money in it. I heard the head keeper say: 'Leave everything to us. We'll finish him off, come what may.' "
Just then, from the inner room a voice shouted: "Bring the soup." Xiao-er hastened to comply. As he entered, he saw that the warden had a letter in his hand. Xiao-er served the soup, then brought some more dishes of food.
The feast continued for another hour. After the bill was paid, the warden and head keeper departed first. The other two, heads stealthily lowered, then also left.
Shortly afterwards, Lin Chong entered the tavern. "Brother Xiao-er," he said, "I hope you're prospering."
"Please sit down, benefactor," Xiao-er begged hastily. "I was just about to look for you. I must tell you something very important."
"What is it?" asked Lin Chong.
Xiao-er led him to the inner room, invited him to be seated, and told him all about his recent customers. "I don't know who these fellows are," he said in conclusion, "but I don't trust them. I'm afraid they want to harm you, benefactor."
"What do they look like?" asked Lin.
"One is of average build, fair, clean shaven, about thirty or so. The other fellow isn't very tall either. He has a ruddy complexion."
Startled, Lin Chong cried, "That man of thirty must be Captain Lu Qian! The filthy thief, how dare he come here to harm me! If I get hold of him I'll smash him to a jelly!"
"The main thing is to be on your guard," said Xiao-er. " 'Take care not to choke when you eat, or trip when you walk,' as the old saying goes."
Lin Chong left Xiao-er's home in a towering rage. On the street, he bought a sharp dagger. Carrying it on his person, he made a search of all the streets and lanes. Xiao-er and his wife were in a cold sweat.
At daybreak the following morning, Lin rose, washed his face and rinsed his mouth, then took up the dagger and again prowled through all the streets and lanes both in the city and on the outskirts. He patrolled all day, even searching the prison and the garrison but nothing was stirring.
Returning to Xiao-er's place, he said: "Nothing happened today either."
"Benefactor," said Xiao-er, "let's hope it stays that way! But remain on your guard."
Lin went back to the garrison prison temple, where he spent the night. He walked the streets for four or five days, without success. His temper gradually began to cool.
On the sixth day, the warden summoned Lin Chong into his hall and said: "You've been here for some time now. For the sake of Lord Chai's prestige, we must improve your lot. Fifteen //outside the city's East Gate is a large army fodder depot. Every month you can collect fees from the people delivering the fodder. An old army man is in charge. I've decided to give you the job and have him replace you in the garrison prison temple. Out at the depot you'll be able to earn a little spending money. Go there with the head keeper and take over."
"I'll do that, sir," said Lin.
He first left the garrison and went directly to Xiao-er's house. Lin told the couple the news.
"Today, the warden is sending me to take charge of the army fodder depot. What do you think?"
"It's a better place than the garrison prison temple," replied Xiao-er. "You can earn some regular fees out there. Usually, no one gets that post without paying a bribe."
"Not only haven't they harmed me but they've given me this good job instead. I don't know what to make of it."
"Why be suspicious, benefactor? As long as nothing happens, that's fine. The only trouble is you'll be living quite far from us. After a while, I'll come and see you, when I have time." Xiao-er pressed Lin Chong to join him in several rounds of drinks.
To make a long story short, the two separated and Lin Chong returned to the garrison prison temple. He packed his belongings, put his dagger in his belt, took up a spear and set out with the head keeper for the fodder depot.
It was a bitterly cold winter day. The sky was overcast, and they walked in the teeth of a rising wind amid thickly swirling snowflakes. Since there was no place along the road to buy drinks, Lin and the keeper soon reached the depot.
Surrounded by an earthen wall, the depot had a gate with two doors. They pushed them open and entered the compound. They saw a thatched building of seven or eight sections that was serving as a storehouse for fodder. All around were piles of hay. In the centre stood a small thatched shack. Inside, they found the old soldier huddled over a fire.
"This is Lin Chong," the head keeper said to him. "The warden has sent him to replace you. You are to go back to take care of the garrison prison temple. You can hand over your duties."
The old soldier gave Lin Chong the keys and said: "The stuff in the store-house is under official seal. And those haystacks there are all numbered."
He took Lin around and counted the stacks, then brought him back to the shack and gathered his belongings. As he was leaving, he said: "I'll give you my brazier, my pot, my bowls and my dishes."
"I have such things in the temple too," said Lin. "You can have mine."
The old soldier pointed to a gourd bottle hanging on the wall. He said: "If you want to buy wine, there's a little market-place two or three //east down the road." Then he and the head keeper departed for the prison.
As to Lin Chong, he placed his bundle and bedding on the bed and sat down to replenish the fire in the earthen brazier. There was some charcoal in a corner of the room, and Lin used a few sticks of them. He looked around the shack. It was very dilapidated and shook with every gust of wind.
"How can I pass the winter here?" thought Lin. "When the storm stops I must bring a mason out from the city to repair this place."
Although he hugged the fire, he still felt cold. "The old soldier said there was a little market-place two //from here," he recalled. "Why don't I go and buy some wine?"
He took some money from his bundle, tied the gourd bottle to the end of his spear, covered the brazier, put on his broad-brimmed felt hat, took the keys and shut the door of the shack behind him. Coming through the compound gate, he closed and locket it. Then, carrying the keys, he headed east. The snow-covered ground was a mass of tiny white jade flakes. Lin Chong trudged forward with the north wind on his back. It was snowing very hard.

He had gone less than half a //when he observed an ancient temple. Lin Chong pressed his palms together before his forehead and bowed. "May the gods protect me. I must come here one of these days and burn some paper money in sacrifice."
Lin continued on his way. Ahead, he saw a cluster of houses. He halted, and peered through the storm. The buildings were enclosed by a fence. A clump of broom straw hanging outside one of them indicated that this was a tavern. Lin went inside.
"Where are you from, sir?" the host asked.
"Do you recognize this gourd bottle?" Lin Chong countered.
The man looked at it and said: "It belongs to the old soldier at the fodder depot."
"That's right," said Lin.
"So you're the new custodian," said the host. "Please be seated, brother. It's a bitterly cold day. Let me treat you to a few goblets, by way of welcome."
He served a platter of sliced beef, heated a pot of wine and invited Lin to help himself. Lin bought some more beef, drank a few cups, then had the gourd filled with wine. He wrapped up the two orders of beef, left a few pieces of silver, tied the gourd bottle to the end of his spear and placed the beef inside his shirt.
"Thanks for your trouble," said Lin. He went out through the fence gate and started back against the wind. Now that night had come, the snow was falling harder than ever.
Plodding through the snow in the teeth of the north wind, Lin Chong hurried back to the fodder depot. When he unlocked the doors and entered the compound, he uttered a cry of dismay. Actually, the gods who see everything and protect the good and virtuous were saving Lin Chong's life with that snowstorm. The thatched shack had collapsed under the weight of the snow.
"What am I going to do?" Lin wondered.
He put his spear and gourd down in the snow. Worried that the embers in the brazier might set the place on fire, he pulled open a section of the wall of the fallen shack, pushed himself halfway in and felt around. But the embers had been extinguished by the melted snow. Lin groped around on the bed till he found his quilt and pulled it out, emerging again into the dark night.
"I've no place to build a fire," he pondered. "How am I going to manage?" Then he remembered the ancient temple, half a //down the road. "I can spend the night there," he thought. "When daylight comes, I'll decide what to do."
He rolled up his quilt, shouldered his spear with the wine gourd dangling from one end, closed the compound gate once more, locked it, and proceeded to the temple. Entering, he shut the door and propped against it a big stone which he had noticed lying to one side. He walked further into the temple and saw on a platform an idol of a mountain spirit with golden armor, flanked by a Nether Region judge and a small demon, one on each side. In a corner was a pile of paper. Lin Chong inspected the whole temple but could find neither occupants nor anyone in charge.
Lin placed his spear and gourd bottle on the pile of paper and untied his quilt. He removed his broad-brimmed felt hat, shook the snow from his clothes and peeled off his white tunic which was half soaked, then put it together with his hat on the altar table. He covered himself to the waist with the quilt and drank from the gourd bottle from time to time, helping the cold wine down with slices of the beef he had been carrying.
Suddenly, he heard a loud crackling outside. He leaped to his feet and peered through a vent in the wall. The fodder depot was in flames and burning fiercely. Lin grabbed his spear. He was about to open the door and dash to the fire when he heard men's voices. Lin leaned against the door and listened. The footsteps of three men came directly to the temple.
The men pushed the temple door but the big stone held it fast and they couldn't open it. They stood under the eaves watching the fire.
"Not a bad plan, eh?" one of them said.
"We're much indebted to the warden and to you, Head Keeper," someone replied. "When I return to the capital and report to the marshal, he undoubtedly will make you both big officials. Now Drill Instructor Zhang has no excuse to refuse."
"We've taken care of Lin Chong properly this time," said a third. "Young Master Gao is sure to recover."
"We tried to arrange the match three or four times," said a voice. "We told that lout Zhang: 'Your son-in-law is dead,' but he wouldn't give in. Young Master Gao's ailment kept getting worse. And so the marshal sent us specially to beg you two gentlemen to help. Today, we've succeeded at last."
"I climbed over the wall and set a score of haystacks afire. I'd like to see him get away!"
"The depot is almost completely destroyed."
"Even if he escapes with his life, burning down a military fodder depot is crime punishable by death."
"Let's go back to the city."
"Wait a little longer. If we bring a couple of his bones with us to the capital, the marshal and the Young Master will praise us for doing the job thoroughly."
Lin Chong recognized them by their voices. One was the head keeper, another was Captain Lu Qian, the third was Fu An.
"Heaven took pity on me," thought Lin. "If that thatched shack hadn't collapsed, I'd have been roasted to death by these villains!"
Softly, he pulled the stone away from the door. Clutching his spear, Lin Chong pushed the door open. "Where do you think you're going, knaves!" he roared.
The three, who had just been leaving, froze, too shocked to move.
Lin raise his arm and speared the head keeper to the ground.
"Spare me!" cried Captain Lu, weak with terror.
Fu An had run only a score of paces when Lin Chong caught up. With one thrust, Lin plunged the spear into his back, and he also fell.
Lin turned. He saw Captain Lu starting to flee. Before Lu had gone three paces, Lin Chong shouted: "Halt, treacherous thief!" He grabbed Lu by the front of his tunic and threw him flat on his back in the snow.
Lin jabbed his spear into the ground, put one foot on Lu's chest, whipped out his dagger and held it against the captain's face.
"Filthy wretch," he grated. "I never wronged you. How can you have injured me so? Truly, 'Killing can be forgiven but never deception!' "
"This wasn't my idea," Lu pleaded. "The marshal ordered me to do it! I didn't dare refuse!"
"Treacherous knave," cried Lin. "We were friends since childhood, yet today you come to destroy me! How can you excuse yourself? Have a taste of this knife!"
He ripped open Lu's clothes, stabbed the blade into his heart and twisted. Blood spurted everywhere. Lin tore out his heart and liver.
He saw the head keeper struggling to his feet to run. Lin seized him in a flash. "Now I know what an evil scoundrel you are," he shouted. "Take that!" He cut off the keeper's head and tied it to the end of his spear.
Next, he went back to Fu An and Lu Qian and cut off their heads too. He put away his knife, tied the three heads together by the hair, carried them into the temple and placed them on the altar in front of the mountain spirit idol. Then he put on his white tunic, tied his waist sash, clapped the broad-brimmed felt hat on his head and finished off the cold wine in the gourd bottle.
Lin tossed his quilt and the bottle aside, took up his spear, left the temple and started east. He had gone only four or five //when he saw people from a neighbouring village hastening with water buckets and pikes to put out the blaze.
"Hurry and save the place," Lin Chong called to them. "I'm going to report the fire to the officials!"
Spear in hand, he walked on rapidly.
The snow fell more heavily. For two watches Lin Chong walked eastward. He shivered in the relentless cold. He was now far from the fodder depot. Across the snowy spaces in a sparse grove of trees he saw a small house with a thatched roof, weighed down by a thick mantle of snow. Firelight gleamed through cracks in the wall. Lin approached the house and pushed open the door. An old vassal and four or five young ones sat huddled around an open hearth where sticks of wood were burning brightly. Lin walked over to them.
"Greetings. I'm on a mission for the garrison prison. The snow has soaked my clothes. I'd like to dry them by your fire, if I may."
"Go ahead," said the old vassal. "We don't mind."
Lin toasted his damp clothes until they were somewhat drier. He noticed warming by the embers a large jug from which the fragrance of wine was rising.
"I have some small silver on me," he said. "Could you let me have a little of that wine?"
"We take turns every night guarding the grain bins," the old vassal said. "It's already the fourth watch, and very cold. We don't have enough wine for ourselves. How can we give you any? Forget it."
"Only two or three bowls to ward off the chill."
"Persistent, aren't you? I said no!"
The aroma of the wine sharpened Lin's thirst. "It can't be helped," he insisted. "You'll have to give me some."
The vassals all turned on him. "We're nice enough to let you dry your clothes by our fire and you want our wine," they said. "Get out of here! If you don't we'll tie you up!"
Lin grew angry. "Surly louts," he cried. With the end of his spear he flicked a burning stick in the old vassal's face and, again with his spear, stirred the flames so high that they singed the old man's whiskers. Everyone jumped up in alarm. Lin belabored them with his spear. The old vassal hurriedly departed. The others were paralyzed with fright. Lin drove them out with blows of the spear shaft.
"They've all gone," he said. "Now I can enjoy this wine!"
There were two coconut ladles on the clay platform bed. With one of these he began scooping up and drinking the brew. Soon only half remained. Lin took his spear and walked unsteadily through the door. He staggered along for nearly a //: A gust of wind knocked him down beside a ravine. In vain he tried to struggle to his feet. Once a drunkard falls, he can't get up. Lin Chong lay stupefied in the snow. The vassals, leading over twenty others armed with spears and clubs, came rushing back to the thatched house. Lin was gone. They followed his trail until they found him collapsed in the snow, his spear lying to one side. "So here you are," they cried. They seized and bound him. By the fifth watch, they had brought him to another place. And because he went to this place, thousands of boats fore and aft sailed into battle on the lakes; 100 and more heroes arrayed themselves in ranks left and right in the stronghold in the marsh. Truly, to hear of the slaughter and tragedy freezes the heart and chills the bones!

As Lin Chong was taking a stroll that day he suddenly heard someone call his name. Turning to look, he saw it was Young Li, a waiter whom he had once helped out when he was in the Eastern Capital. Young Li had been apprehended for foolishly stealing some money from the landlord of the inn where he worked; he would have been sentenced and punished, had not Lin Chong interceded for him, and got him off. Lin Chong also paid back the money on his behalf and obtained his release. Young Li could not then stay in the capital, so Lin Chong gave him some money for his travel expenses and he went to seek refuge elsewhere. Now he suddenly turned up here.
"What are you doing here, Young Li?" Lin Chong asked.
After prostrating himself, Li told his story: "After you saved me, sir, and treated me so nice, I went all round the place but no one wanted to give me a job. Eventually, I don't know how, I found myself here in Cangzhou, and got myself taken on as waiter at an inn that belonged to a Mr. Wang. Seeing as how I worked hard, served the dishes nicely and could run up some tasty sauces, the customers were all happy, and business was pretty good. This landlord had a daughter, and he decided to marry her to me. A little while back both my in-laws died, so now there's only me and the wife. We've opened a little teahouse just opposite the fortress. I was just on my way to collect some money I'm owed, when I saw you, sir. What brings you here?"
Lin Chong pointed to the tattoo on his face and said: "I got into some trouble with Marshal Gao. I was sentenced and banished here. For the time being I've been made guardian of the Temple of the Heavenly Prince but I can't say what the future will bring. What a surprise to meet you here!"
Young Li invited Lin Chong home and made him sit down while he called his wife to come and pay her respects. The couple were delighted: "We're all alone here now, just the two of us," they said. "To have you here, well, it's like a gift from heaven."
"But I'm a convict," Lin Chong said. "I don't want to give you a bad name."
Young Li scoffed at this: "Everyone knows who you are. Don't talk like that! You must bring us all your washing and mending."
Li entertained Lin Chong most hospitably that day, and it was evening when he escorted him back to the Temple of the Heavenly Prince. The next day he came again with gifts, and from then on Lin Chong was a frequent visitor at Li's teashop, while Li often sent soup up to the fortress for Lin Chong. And in return for all the honour they did him, Lin Chong made them gifts of silver so that they could add to their capital.
But enough of these details, let us return to our main concern. Time passed rapidly, and soon winter was at hand. Li's wife had aired and mended all Lin Chong's padded winter clothing. Then one day, as Li was preparing some dishes at the entrance to his shop, a stranger sidled in and sat down. Soon after, a second man slipped in. Li watched carefully. The first man was dressed like an officer; the second, who looked like a messenger, also seated himself. Li entered and asked: "Can I bring you some wine?" Immediately the man took out a tael of silver and gave it to him, saying: "Put that on your counter, and then get out three or four measures of your best; when my guests arrive just serve the usual fruit and small dishes, and don't ask any questions."
"Where are your guests, then?" Li asked.
"I shall trouble you to go to the fortress and tell the prison Warden and the head gaoler I'd like a word with them. If they ask, just tell them there's a gentleman who wants to see them to discuss some business. He requests their presence."
Accordingly Young Li went to the fortress, where he spoke to the gaoler first, and then proceeded to the Warden's residence to tell the Warden. When they entered the wineshop the officer and the other two greeted each other politely. "I don't think I have the honour, sir," the Warden said. "May I ask your name?"
The stranger replied: "I have a letter for you, in a moment you shall know all. But first, some wine!"
Li hurriedly served the wine, and brought the dishes to go with it. The officer ordered a large cup, initiated the drinking, and then asked his guests to be seated. There was only Li to serve them and they kept him pretty busy. The man who accompanied the officer asked for boiling water so he could warm the wine himself. After ten cups or so, they ordered more food to be brought and placed on the table. Then the officer said to Li: "My servant will warm the wine. Don't come unless I call you. We have important matters to discuss."
Li made himself scarce. But just outside the door, he called his wife and said: "These two men look suspicious to me."
"What do you mean, suspicious?" said his wife.
"They talk like people from the capital. They didn't know the Warden before. Then when I was taking in the dishes, I heard that gaoler mention the name of Grand Marshal Gao. Do you suppose they could have come here for the purpose of doing Instructor Lin some mischief? I've got to wait here by the door in case they call me. But you go and put your ear to the partition to see if you can hear anything."
"Do you think you ought to go up to the fortress and tell Instructor Lin? Maybe he knows them," said his wife.
"Don't be silly," Li said. "Instructor Lin's a very excitable man. It wouldn't take much to set him off, killing and burning. Suppose I get him to come and see, and it turns out to be that Lu Qian or whatever he's called, that he was telling us about the other day, do you think he'd let it rest there? And if anything happened, the two of us would be involved. Just go and listen. We'll decide what to do afterwards."
"Right," said his wife. She went and listened for two hours. When she returned, she said: "They're all talking in whispers. I couldn't really hear anything."
But at this moment they were able to observe the military-looking gentleman reach across and take from his servant something wrapped in a handkerchief that he presented to the Warden and the head gaoler. It looked as if it might be gold. They heard the head gaoler say, "Leave it to us. Come what may, we'll dispose of him." Then there was a shout from within: "More hot water!" Li hurried in to get the pot, and saw the Warden was holding a letter. After changing the water, he took them some more dishes. They went on eating and drinking for another hour or so, then they paid and left, the Warden and the gaoler going first, and then the other two, who kept their heads lowered.
Not long after this, Lin Chong appeared at the teahouse and said: "How's business, Young Li?"
Young Li said hurriedly: "Come in and sit down, sir. I was just coming to look for you. I've something urgent to tell you."
There's a poem about this:

The plotters' evil plans shake heaven's gates,
*Their whispered words throughout the Empire post.*
*How can it be? Do these blank walls have ears?*
The secret's now known to every wandering ghost!

"Well, what is this urgent news?" Lin Chong asked. Li asked him to come and sit inside and then said: "We've just had some suspicious-looking characters from the capital come in. They invited the Warden and the head gaoler here, and they were drinking together for hours. We heard the gaoler say something about 'Grand Marshal Gao,' so I was worried. My wife listened too, for ages but even by straining her ears she couldn't catch what they were saying. But in the end we heard the gaoler say, 'Leave it all to us; come what may, we'll dispose of him.' Those two handed over a bag of gold to the Warden and the gaoler; then they all drank some more and then they all left. I don't know who they were but I was pretty disturbed, I can tell you. I'm afraid they may intend you some harm, sir."
"What did they look like?" Lin Chong asked.
"One was smallish, thick-set, very white, no beard or moustache, about thirty years old. The one with him was also quite small, with a purplish complexion."
Lin Chong let out a cry. "That thirty-year-old one is Lu Qian. The dirty bastard, so he's got the nerve to follow me here! Just let me get my hands on him, I'll grind his bones to paste!"
"Just keep your eyes skinned, sir, that's all you need do," said Li. "Don't you know the proverb, watch out for choking when you eat, tripping's the problem when you walk?"
But Lin Chong left Li's in a fury. First he went out and bought a very sharp dagger which he secreted on his person. Then he mounted a search, combing every street and alley. Li and his wife were in a cold sweat. But when evening came, nothing had happened. Next day Lin Chong was up at dawn, and after washing and rinsing his mouth, took his dagger and set off again to spend the day searching every side-street and back-alley of Cangzhou, within and without the walls. But he found nothing, neither there nor in the prison fortress itself. Later when he dropped in on Li, he told him, "I drew a blank again today."
"Let's hope it stays that way, sir. Just be alert, that's all."
Lin Chong returned to the Temple of the Heavenly Prince for the night. He continued searching for four or five days but then having found nothing he began to calm down.

On the sixth day, the Warden sent for Lin Chong and said: "You've been here quite a while, and despite our regard for Mr. Chai, we still haven't done anything about promoting you. Now there's a big army depot, five miles from the east gate. Every month there are deliveries of grain there, and there's a commission to be had from it. At present an old soldier is in charge but I'm sending you there now, and the old soldier will replace you at the Temple of the Heavenly Prince. You'll be able to make some money for yourself down there. The head gaoler will escort you to your new post."
"Very good, sir," said Lin Chong. Before leaving the fortress, he called on Li and his wife. "Today the Warden told me I am to take over the army depot," he told them. "What do you think it means?"
"That job's as good as the one you have at the Temple of the Heavenly Prince," Li said. "Whenever grain or provisions are delivered, you ought to get a kickback. Generally you'd have to pay quite a lot to get that job."
"They don't threaten me, they even find me a good job, whatever is going on?"
"I think you should relax, sir," said Li. "So long as there's no trouble, all seems to be well. The only thing is, you'll be a long way away. But after a while I'll come and see you, when I've a free moment." He got some wine and invited Lin Chong.
To be brief, the two bade each other goodbye and Lin Chong returned to the Temple of the Heavenly Prince to collect his things. He did not forget the dagger, and he also took a spear. Then with the gaoler he left the fortress and set off for the army depot. It was in the depths of winter. Red clouds filled the sky, a bitter wind was blowing and soon snow began to fall, the flakes eddying down till the earth was blanketed:
*An icy murk holds the world in thrall. Heaven's white missives fall ever thicker and faster. In a moment everywhere's a pathless waste; in no time at all a thousand peaks can have vanished without trace. World of silver, world of white jade, where the traveller may think to be gazing on Mount Kunlun. If it goes on snowing till midnight, even those high passes will be rendered a level plain.*
Together Lin Chong and the gaoler went forward. There was nowhere even to buy wine. Soon they reached the depot. It was surrounded by a yellow mud wall, with a big two-leaved gate. They pushed this open and found inside seven or eight storerooms or granaries with thatched roofs, while all around were stacks of hay for horses. In the midst of all this were two thatched huts. Inside one of these they found the old soldier, crouching over a brazier. The gaoler addressed him: "The Warden has sent Lin Chong here to replace you. You're to take over as guard at the Temple of the Heavenly Prince. You can hand over to him right now."
The old man took his keys and showed Lin Chong around: "Everything here in the granary has the official seal on it. These stacks of hay, now, they're all numbered," he explained. After checking all the numbers, he took Lin Chong back inside the hut. He collected his bags, and then said: "I'll let you have everything else, the stove, the pots, the bowls and dishes."
"I left the same kind of stuff in the Temple of the Heavenly Prince," said Lin Chong. "You're welcome to use it."
Before leaving, the old man pointed to a gourd which was hanging on the wall. "If you want to buy wine, there's a little place down the road, just go out of the hut and walk a mile or so east." Then he went with the gaoler back to the fortress.
As for Lin Chong, he threw his bundle and his bedding down on the bed, and sat down to make up the fire. There was a pile of charcoal in a corner of the hut and he took some pieces to replenish the brazier. He raised his eyes to survey his quarters. The hut was in a pitiful state of neglect, and with the wind howling outside it was all swaying and creaking. "How am I going to spend the whole winter here?" he asked himself. "As soon as it stops snowing I'll go to town and get a mason to come and repair it." He huddled closer to the fire but he was still freezing. Then he remembered something. "According to the old soldier there's a hamlet just a mile from here. Why don't I go and get myself some wine?" He got some change from his bundle, tied the gourd to the end of his spear, covered the fire, put on his felt hat, and went out, not forgetting to take the keys. He bolted the door of the hut. The main gate he also bolted, locking both halves. Taking the keys with him he set off at a steady pace towards the east. The snow scrunched under his feet like precious stones. As far as possible, he kept his back to the north wind as he went, for the storm was at its height. He had barely gone a quarter of a mile when he saw an ancient temple ahead. He lowered his head respectfully and murmured: "Guardian spirits protect me! In a few days I will come and burn some paper money here." A little further on he caught sight of a group of people and stopped to look. There was a bamboo hedge, and over the top of it you could see the straw bundle, sign of an inn. Lin Chong went straight in.
"Where have you come from, sir?" the innkeeper asked.
"Do you recognize this gourd?" Lin Chong said.
"It belongs to that old soldier who's caretaker over at the depot," the man answered.
"It used to," said Lin Chong.
"If you're the caretaker there now, you'd better sit down," the man said. "It's freezing weather. You need a cup or two and then you won't feel the wind so bad." He went and cut a plate of boiled beef, and warmed some wine that he offered to Lin Chong. The latter ate and drank, and then ordered more beef and more wine for himself. Then he had the gourd filled, picked up two pieces of beef, and deposited a handful of silver on the table. He tied the gourd to his spear again, and thrust the meat inside the front of his robe. "Thanks for your trouble," he said, and out he went. Once beyond the hedge, he had to face the same bitter wind for the return journey. With night approaching, the snow was falling even more thickly. In the old days there was a scholar who made a song about that dreadful snow:

Fierce wind sweeps the wilderness,
*It's snowing like crazy:*
*Cotton tufts, candy floss, some pieces*
*Big as a basket.*
*Its weight has almost flattened*
*That hovel among the bamboos.*
*But in the rich man's mansion, why, it's nothing:*
*Red-hot braziers in animal shapes,*
*Soft cotton clothes and padded coats.*
*See him holding plum blossom,*
*Singing patriotic songs.*
*Not a thought for the poor,*
*He lives at peace with the world,*
*The man whose skin is thick,*
Humming his odes.

Lin Chong trudged on through the snow in the teeth of the north wind, pressing forward till he arrived at the door of the depot. When he had unlocked it and entered, he let out a cry of dismay — though actually, who can doubt that Heaven is just and watches over the righteous, for it was that very snowstorm which saved his life! The two huts had collapsed under the weight of the snow. "What am I going to do?" he wondered to himself. He stuck his spear, with the gourd attached to it, into the snow. Fearing there might still be some embers burning in the brazier, he pushed aside the broken wall, and stuck his head and shoulders inside to feel around. The coals in the brazier had all been extinguished by the melting snow. He felt about on top of the bed but only managed to pull out his quilt. When he had succeeded in extricating himself, it was already completely dark. "I've nowhere even to make a fire," he thought. "What can I do?"
Then he remembered the old temple, just a few hundred yards down the road. That would provide some shelter. "I'll go there for tonight," he thought. "Then tomorrow I can think of something." He rolled up his quilt, took the spear with the gourd, closed the door again and locked it, and headed for the temple.
Entering the temple, he closed the door. Beside it there was a large stone. This he rolled across and leaned against the door. Then he looked about him. On the dais there was a statue of the Spirit of the Mountain, in golden armour, flanked by the Judge of Hell and a small demon. Beside these was a pile of paper offerings. A thorough inspection revealed no monks and no custodian. He stuck his spear and the gourd into the ground among the pile of paper and unfolded his quilt. He removed his felt hat and shook the snow from his clothing. He took off his outer tunic of white cotton which he found to be partly soaked. He put this together with his hat on the altar. He wrapped the lower half of his body in the quilt, and taking up the gourd began to drink the cold wine, accompanying it with the beef which he took from inside his robe.
While he was eating, a sudden cacophony of popping and banging started up outside. He leapt up and went to look out through a crack in the wall. A fire had broken out over in the granaries that were crackling and blazing fiercely:

Snow chokes a fire, hay feeds the flames;
*Fanned by a breeze, surprise! from snow spring burning brands.*
*Can snow, when the fiery dragon leaps and prances,*
*Still thickly swirl? When the white stuff flies*
*How can the flames blaze higher and higher?*
*The sun, you'd say, has brought his glistening steeds*
*To pasture here, or else the scarlet bird*
*Banished from the southern sky has built its nest.*
*How can disaster rise from nothing thus?*
*It's such a sight to make the bravest man*
Forget his name, the evillest turn tail.

When Lin Chong, taking his spear, was about to open the door and rush out to fight the fire, he heard voices outside. He remained hidden behind the door and listened. From the footsteps, three men were approaching the temple. The door was pushed but the stone held it. They pushed and pushed but to no avail. The three then stood under the temple eaves and watched the fire. One of them said: "Wasn't it a good plan?" Someone answered: "You and the warden, head gaoler, have shown true diligence! When we return to the capital I shall speak to the Marshal, and I guarantee that you gentlemen will all be given important posts! This really does away with Instructor Zhang's reasons for refusing!"
"Yes, this time we've settled Lin Chong's hash," said one of the others. "The Marshal's son is definitely going to recover now!"
"That Instructor Zhang, damn him!" said the other voice, "three or four times I've gone to tell him his son-in-law is dead, and he refused to believe it, that's why young Gao has just been going from bad to worse. But when the Marshal sent us here to enlist your help in this matter, I never dreamed we'd bring it to such a rapid conclusion."
"I just climbed the wall and lit a dozen or so fires all over the place among the granaries, he hadn't a hope of getting out."
"The whole place will be burnt down."
"Even if he did escape, burning down the military stores is a capital offence."
"We'd better get back to the town."
"Let's just have one more look. If we can pick up one or two bones to take back to the capital, the Marshal and his son will say we've really done a good job."
Lin Chong recognized the voices: one was the gaoler, one was Lieutenant Lu Qian, and the third was Fu An. "Heaven indeed was merciful," he thought. "If the roof had not fallen in, I would undoubtedly have been roasted alive by these scoundrels." Very carefully he pushed the stone aside. He grasped his spear, and pushing the temple door with his left hand, leapt out, shouting: "You're not going to get away with this, you swine!" The three men would have fled but terror gripped them and they found themselves quite unable to move. Lin Chong raised his arm and thrust, transfixing first of all the gaoler. Lieutenant Lu was bleating, "For mercy's sake!" but fear paralysed him too. Fu An tried to run for it but he had not gone ten paces when Lin Chong caught him with a single thrust through the heart and he fell to the ground. Lin Chong turned back to Lu Qian, who had taken perhaps three or four steps. "Where do you think you're going, traitor?" Lin Chong shouted, hitting him in the chest. He fell in the snow, and with a second thrust Lin Chong pinned him to the ground. Planting his foot on the man's chest, he took out his dagger and waved it in front of Lu Qian's face, shouting: "I never did you the slightest harm, you murderer. Why did you seek my destruction? Don't you know the saying, 'murder can be forgiven but treachery never'."
"You can't blame me," Lu Qian gasped. "I was under the Marshal's orders, I didn't dare disobey."
"You scum!" Lin Chong bellowed. "You and I grew up together, and now you come seeking my life. How can you tell me not to blame you? Here, take this!" Tearing the clothing from Lu's breast, he sliced it open with his dagger. Then, as the blood gushed everywhere, he thrust in his hand and tore out the heart and liver. He turned in time to see that the gaoler had crawled to his feet and was trying to get away. Lin Chong pounced on him, shouting, "Now you've shown what you really are, take this!" and struck off his head that he stuck on the end of his spear. Then he went back and cut off the heads of Fu An and Lu Qian as well. He put away his dagger and after knotting the hair of the three heads together went into the temple and placed them on the altar before the image of the Mountain Spirit. Then he put on his tunic, did up his sash, donned his felt hat, and finished off the cold wine in the gourd. He discarded his quilt and the gourd and taking up his spear left the temple and headed east. He had not gone much more than a mile when he met a crowd of villagers coming with buckets and pikes to fight the fire. Lin Chong said to them, "Quick, go and deal with it, I'm going to inform the authorities." And he hurried off, spear in hand.

All is according to Heaven's decree;
*Their treachery doesn't succeed, you see.*
*Without the storm and the village liquor,*
*No doubt but he'd have been burnt to a cinder.*
*In the dark they followed the evil command,*
*But divine help that night was at hand.*
*With death so close, still coming off best,*
Surely the hero's life is blessed!

With the snow falling more and more thickly Lin Chong marched eastwards half the night. Lightly dressed as he was, he had little protection against the freezing cold. Eventually he surveyed the snow-covered landscape and judged he had put a good distance between himself and the depot. Ahead of him, amidst a cluster of sparse trees in the distance, he spied a few thatched cottages, their roofs laden with snow. Light shone through the cracks in their dilapidated walls. Lin Chong approached one of these houses and pushed open the door. An old farmer was sitting inside, with four or five younger men around him hugging the fire which was blazing merrily in the hearth. Lin Chong walked right in and said: "Greetings, everybody. I'm from the prison fortress. My clothing is wet through with the snow. Would you allow me to dry it at your fire? I should be most grateful."
"You're welcome to," they said. "It's no problem."
Lin Chong dried his wet clothing by the fire. When it was nearly dry, he noticed a bottle warming beside the hearth, giving off an enticing aroma of wine.
"I've some money here," he said. "Would you consider selling me some wine?"
The old villager said: "Every night we take turns to guard the grain bins. It's only the fourth watch and it's a really cold night. We've only got this little drop, how can there be enough for you as well? Not a hope!"
"But just two or three little bowls would do me, just to keep the cold out," Lin Chong insisted.
"You just stop bothering us," the old man said.
The smell of the wine had really aroused Lin Chong's thirst. "It's no good," he said. "You'll have to give me some."
Everyone now said, "Look, we did you a favour and let you dry your clothes by the fire. And now you want to take our wine? Get out of here. If you don't, we'll have to strap you up."
Lin Chong was angered. "These are uncivil rogues," he said to himself, and with the end of his spear he stirred the burning embers of the fire till they flew up in the old man's face. He went on poking about with his spear till he managed to singe the old man's beard. All the peasants leapt to their feet. Lin Chong began to belabor them with the shaft of his spear. The old man fled first; the others seemed too shocked to move, and it was only after Lin Chong had tickled them with his spear that they too took to their heels.
"Well," said Lin Chong to himself, "they've all gone. That leaves me to enjoy the wine." On the earthen platform that functioned as a couch he found two coconut ladles. He poured the wine into one of these and drank, till half the wine was gone. Then he picked up his spear and walked out of the door. He staggered and stumbled along with a most uneven gait. Before he had gone half a mile, a gust of wind bowled him over, and he rolled into a gully from which he had no power to raise himself. When a drunk falls down he generally fails to get up. Lin Chong was drunk, so there he remained, lying helpless in the snow.
Now the peasants had gone to fetch reinforcements, and with twenty or so others, armed with spears, they rushed back to the cottage. Finding Lin Chong gone, they followed his footprints till they came upon him lying in the gully, his spear abandoned on one side. Together they seized and bound him and shortly before dawn took him to a certain place. And what place was that? Well, thereby hangs a tale. And with it goes the reason why in Duckweed Marsh the armoured sampans and vessels of war are to gather in their thousands, and warriors and heroes are drawn up in serried ranks in the stronghold of the rivers and lakes, and

The odour of death strikes cold to the heart;
The breath of slaughter chills the bones.

One day Lin Chong was taking a stroll when he heard someone behind him calling out, and upon turning round he recognized the man as Li Xiao-er, who used to be a waiter in an inn at the Eastern Capital. While there Lin Chong treated him well. Afterwards this waiter stole money belonging to the proprietor of the inn for which he was arrested. But Lin Chong intervened, and begged that the boy not be sent to the *yamen*, and gave money to make up the loss. As the waiter could not stay in the Eastern Capital Lin Chong gave him money to go to some other place. It was quite accidental that he met Lin Chong on that day.
"Li Xiao-er, what are you doing here?"
Li Xiao-er saluted and replied, "After you had assisted me I travelled in many directions without meeting with any assistance and happened to come to Cangzhou where I met a man named Wang, who was proprietor of an inn here, and he employed me as a waiter. I was very good at preparing food, and made such delicious dishes that the visitors appreciated them and this led to a successful business. I married the daughter of the proprietor, and when the latter and his wife died I was in sole charge, and opened a restaurant just opposite the barracks. I happen to meet you as I return from collecting some bills, and wish to inquire what you are doing here."
Lin Chong pointed to his face, and said, "I incurred the enmity of Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard, who plotted against me, and had me tried, branded, and then banished to this place. I have been appointed to look after the Heavenly Kings Temple but I cannot say what I may do next. I did not expect to meet you here."
Li Xiao-er asked Lin Chong to come and sit down in his home. Upon arrival there the former introduced his wife who saluted, and expressed her pleasure in meeting her husband's benefactor.

Li Xiao-er said, "We have no relatives here so that for our benefactor to visit us today is just like a gift from heaven."
"I am a criminal," said Lin Chong, "and I am afraid that my visit may disgrace you in the eyes of your neighbours."
"Don't talk like that because everybody is aware of your fame. We shall be very pleased to wash and mend your clothes."
They all had dinner and wine together, and in the evening Lin Chong went back to the temple. After that he went very often to Li Xiao-er's home, and the latter often sent soup and tea to the temple for him. He however always paid them with money, because these two treated him so well.
The time quickly passed in this way until it was winter. Li Xiao-er's wife always washed and repaired Lin Chong's cotton gowns and jackets.
One day as Li Xiao-er was preparing a meal, two men entered his restaurant, and sat down. One of them was wearing a military uniform, and was accompanied by a soldier. Li Xiao-er asked them whether they wanted any wine, and the officer took out an tael of silver and said, "Put this money in your till, and bring us three or four bottles of wine. When our guests arrive I do not want you to ask questions but just bring us fruit, vegetables, and wine."
Li Xiao-er asked, "Who will be your guests?"
The officer replied, "I must trouble you to go to the jail, and request the superintendent and the head jailer to come here to discuss a matter with me." Li Xiao-er agreed to do this, and went straightway to the jail, and very soon returned with the two men.
Upon meeting, the superintendent of the jail said that he was not aware of having met the officer before, and asked for his name.
The officer replied that he had a letter which would explain matters but suggested that they should first have a drink.
Li Xiao-er opened the bottles of wine, and placed vegetables, fruit, and wine on the table. The officer poured out the wine, and offered it to the guests, and they then all sat down. Li Xiao-er bustled about as busy as a shuttle in a loom. The soldier who was with the officer asked Li to bring some hot water, so that he could warm the wine himself. But after they had drunk about ten cups of wine they again summoned Li Xiao-er to bring some more wine. The officer also told him that they would keep the wine warm themselves, and that he need not come again unless summoned, as they had some private business to discuss. Li Xiao-er therefore went to the door, and talked with his wife. He told her that the two men who had just arrived were not quite straightforward.
His wife asked what had given him that impression.
Li Xiao-er said, "According their pronunciation these men are evidently from the Eastern Capital but the superintendent has not met them before. And when I served them with wine I heard the officer mention the name of Marshal Gao Qiu. I therefore think that their business has something to do with Lin Chong. So I will stand at the door here, and watch them while you go behind the partition where they sit and listen to their conversation."
His wife said, "You had better go to the jail, and tell Lin Chong to come here, and see whether he knows the officer."
Li Xiao-er said, "You do not know that Lin Chong is very quick-tempered, and he might want to kill the man, or burn the place down. And if it is that officer Lu Qian whom he told us about a few days ago how could he keep quiet? If there was any row we should be implicated. So you go and listen, and afterwards we will decide what to do."
His wife agreed to this, and went off to listen. After a while she returned and said, "Those four men are exchanging confidential whispers so that I cannot make out what they are talking about. But the officer took a bundle and handed it to the superintendent. That might be some silver or gold. The superintendent then said, 'I will be responsible for this affair, and see that he is killed.'"
Just then the men called out for more soup. Li Xiao-er hurried forward and supplied fresh soup and rice. While doing this he saw that the superintendent had a letter in his hand. When the bills had been settled the superintendent and the head jailer departed, and the officer and his soldier soon followed suit.
Very soon afterwards Lin Chong entered the restaurant, and asked Li Xiao-er how business had been during the last few days. Li Xiao-er asked him to sit down as he had a very important matter to speak to him about. He said, "Just now an officer has arrived from the Eastern Capital who does not appear to be straight, and he invited the jail superintendent and head jailer to have wine with him here. While they were here I heard the officer mention the name of Marshal Gao and that made me suspicious, and I told my wife to listen behind the partition. But they whispered in each others' ears so much that my wife could not hear what they said. But she did hear the superintendent of the jail say that he would be responsible and would see that the man was killed. The officer also handed a bundle of silver or gold to the jail superintendent and head jailer, and after drinking some more wine they departed. Do you know who the officer is? I suspect and am also afraid that this will result in some trouble for you."
Lin Chong asked what the officer's appearance was like.
"He is a man of short build, has a fair complexion, no mustache, and looks about thirty years of age. The soldier with him is also short of stature but has a swarthy complexion."
Lin Chong upon hearing this was startled. "That officer is certainly Lu Qian, and that mean rascal has come here to injure me. But should I meet him I will beat his bones and flesh into pulp."
"But you must be on your guard against him. Have you not heard that ancient saying, 'When eating beware of belching; when walking beware of falling'?"
Lin Chong was very angry, went to the street and bought a dagger which he hid on his person, and searched for that officer in all the streets and alleys.
Both Li Xiao-er and his wife were quite alarmed but that evening nothing happened. But the next morning Lin Chong rose very early, and after washing and cleaning his teeth, took his dagger, and again searched for Lu Qian in all the lanes and alleyways both inside and outside of Cangzhou city. All was quiet inside the jail.
Lin Chong spoke to Li Xiao-er, "Nothing has happened today."
Li Xiao-er said, "My benefactor, we hope that things will remain like this but you must still be extremely careful."
Lin Chong returned to the Heavenly Kings Temple for the night. During the next five days he continued his search for Lu Qian without success, and his keenness for revenge gradually disappeared.
On the sixth day the superintendent summoned Lin Chong to come to the place where the roll of prisoners was generally called, and said to him, "You have been here a long time but we have not promoted you in spite of the influence of Squire Chai Jin. About five //outside the Eastern Gate there is a forage depot for the army. Every month we receive hay and fodder. There is an old soldier there who manages the depot, and you can exchange duties with him, and perhaps make some extra money for yourself. You can go with the head jailer, and take over the new duty."
Lin Chong replied that he would go. He then left the prison, and went to Li Xiao-er's place. Where he asked them what they thought of the new arrangement.
Li Xiao-er said that the new job was much better than looking after the temple, as he could make money. And previously anybody who got that position had to bribe the superintendent.
"But instead of injuring me he is giving me a better job. I cannot understand this move."
Li Xiao-er said, "Well, you need not be suspicious, because if there is no trouble it will be very fine. That place is a long way from here but when I have time I will go and see you." He got some wine, and offered it to Lin Chong. When they separated Lin Chong went back to the Heavenly Kings Temple, packed up his bundle, and took his dagger and a long spear. He then took leave of the superintendent, and departed with the head jailer, for the forage depot. The weather was extremely cold with a clouded sky. A cold wind was blowing from the north and snow was falling heavily. On the way there was no inn where they could stop for a drink of wine, and they soon reached the depot. There was a mud wall running round the inclosure, and a large gate with two leaves. Pushing the gate open they saw inside about eight sheds for beans, etc., many stacks of hay on all sides, and two rooms for the caretaker. When they came to the caretaker's rooms they found the old soldier warming his hands at the fire.
The head jailer said, "The superintendent has sent this man Lin Chong to take over your duties, and you are to perform his duties at the Heavenly Kings Temple. So you can hand over the place immediately."
The old soldier took the keys, and said to Lin Chong, "The officials have sealed up the doors of the sheds containing the fodder but you had better count the number of stacks of hay." After doing this they returned to the living quarters. The old soldier then got his baggage together, and when leaving he said, "I will lend you the stove, the rice boiler, the cups and saucers."
Lin Chong said he had such things at the Heavenly Kings Temple, and if he liked he could use them.
The old soldier pointed to a gourd on the wall, and said, "Should you want to buy some wine you can take that to a small village or market about a //from here in an easterly direction." He then departed with the head jailer.
Lin Chong put the baggage away, and spread his quilts on the bed. At the back of the room was some firewood and charcoal so he put some on the stove which was standing close to his bed. Upon lying down and looking at the ceiling he noticed that there were many holes through which the wind was blowing strongly.
He soliloquized, "I cannot stay here all winter with the roof like that, so when it is fine I will go into the town, and get a bricklayer to come and repair the roof." After a little time he felt cold so he remembered what the old soldier had told him, and decided to go to the village and buy some wine. He took some silver from his bag, picked up his spear and the gourd for the wine and put a cover on the fire. He put on his felt cap, and locked the doors. Then carrying the keys with him he went along the road towards the east. The snow lay deep on the ground like masses of beautiful white jade, and as there was a strong north wind blowing he walked sideways with his back half to the wind. The snow was falling fast, and he had not gone more than a quarter of a //when he saw an old temple at the side of the road. He entered and bowing his head to the image he said, "Protect me, O ye gods, and later I will burn paper money for you." He then resumed his journey, and soon came to a number of houses. He saw a bamboo fence with a signboard of a wine shop sticking outside. He entered the wine shop, and the proprietor spoke to him. "Where are you from?"
"Do you recognize this gourd?"
The proprietor said that it belonged to the old soldier at the fodder depot.
Lin Chong admitted it. "Since you are the keeper of the fodder compound please take a seat," said the proprietor. "And as the weather is very cold, you had better have three cups of wine on my account as you are a newcomer." He brought forward a kettle of hot wine, and also cut up a plateful of beef, and requested him to dine.
Lin Chong took out some silver and with it bought his gourd full of wine, and placed the beef away in his breast, and expressed his thanks for their kind treatment. He then left the inn, and faced the strong, cold wind. He saw that the snow was falling more heavily than before. He trudged through the snow, heading into the cold north wind, and hurried to the fodder depot where he unlocked the door, and entered his miserable quarters.
The gods in heaven protect good and just men, and they no doubt saved the life of Lin Chong by this heavy fall of snow that by its weight had broken down the grass hut where he was going to sleep. When he saw this he wondered what he must do. He was afraid that the stove might ignite the debris so putting his lance and gourd down on the snow he parted the grass and looked underneath. Creeping inside he found that the fire had been extinguished by the snow. He then felt around for the bed, and dragged away the cotton quilt. Withdrawing his body from the wreckage he looked around and as it was quite dark and he had no place to make a fire he wondered what he must do. He remembered however that there was the old temple a few hundred yards down the road where he could shelter. So he decided to go and sleep there for the night, and arrange matters the following day. He rolled up the quilt, and carrying the gourd of wine on the lance over his shoulder he locked the gate again, and left for the temple. Upon entering the temple he closed the door, and placed a large stone against it. Looking round he saw an image of the "Mountain Spirit" covered with gilt armor, attended by a judge of the afterlife, and a small demon on each side. On one side was a large pile of loose paper, and there was evidently nobody in charge. Placing his spear and the gourd of wine on the heap of paper, he unrolled his quilt, and shaked the snow off his clothes. His felt cap and outer gown were very wet so he took them off, and placed them on the altar. He then lay down with the quilt covering half his body, and drank the wine, and ate the meat which he had brought with him.
While lying there he heard a sound of crackling outside so he jumped up and peeping through a hole in the window he saw that the fodder depot was all in flames. He went to get his spear with the object of going to put out the fire when he heard some men outside talking. Hiding behind the door he found that there were three men who were coming to the temple. They pushed at the door but could not open it on account of the large stone he had placed there. So they stood under the eaves of the temple watching the fire, and one man spoke. "Is not this a good plan?"
Another man remarked, "Both of you, the superintendent and the head jailer certainly arranged the matter very well, and when I get back to the Eastern Capital, and report it to the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, you two will certainly be promoted. Then Drill Instructor Zhang will have no ground for further objection to the marriage."
Another man said, "Lin Chong has certainly been caught in our trap this time. Master Gao will soon be cured of his sickness now!"
Another man said, "A man was sent four or five times to plead with Drill Instructor Zhang, and said that his son-in-law Lin Chong was dead. But Zhang would not agree to let his daughter remarry. As Master Gao only got worse Marshal Gao Qiu ordered us to do this business, and we did not expect to get it finished so soon."
Another man said, "I went inside the fence and lit about ten stacks of hay on every side, so that he could not get out."
Another man said, "It is nearly all burnt down now."
Lin Chong listening heard another man say: "Even if Lin Chong escapes he will have to answer a serious charge of allowing a big depot full of army fodder to be burnt."
The other man said, "Let us go back to the town."
A man said, "It will be better if we wait until the fire is out, and then we can go and get one or two of his bones, and then when we report the matter to Marshal Gao Qiu and also Master Gao, they will see that we did the work thoroughly."
Lin Chong knew by listening that one of the men was the head jailer, and the others were Lu Qian and Fu An. He thought, "Heaven has had pity on Lin Chong! If that straw hut had not fallen down I would certainly have been burnt to death." He then quietly removed the stone from the door, and holding his spear in one hand he opened the door with his left hand, and shouted out, "Where are you thieves going?"
The three men wanted to get away at once but they were so startled that they could not move. Lin Chong stabbed the head jailer with his spear. Lu Qian called out, "Spare my life!" but he was so frightened out of his wits that he could not move either hand or foot. Fu An ran about ten steps but Lin Chong caught him up and stabbed him in the back. He turned round, and saw that Lu Qian had walked away a few steps. He shouted at him, "You villain! Where are you going?" He seized Lu Qian, and threw him on the ground. He then stuck his spear in the ground, and planted his foot on Lu Qian's breast. He then drew his sword, and lay it across Lu Qian's face. He shouted, "You villain! Previously I had no hatred of you so why did you try to injure me?" An old saying says, "Murder may be excused sometimes but generally no excuse can be allowed."
Lu Qian said, "This was not my affair. I am only carrying out the order of the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, and dared not disobey."
Lin Chong abused him, "You villain! I have been a friend of yours since we were children, and yet you come now to kill me, although you say it is not your business. I will give you a taste of my sword." He opened Lu Qian's dress, and made a big wound in his breast—the blood rushing out in all directions. He then plucked out his heart. Turning his head he noticed that the head jailer had got up, and was getting away. Lin Chong pushed him down, and shouted, "You are a vile fellow! I will also give you a taste of my sword!" He then cut off his head and stuck it to the end of his spear. He then cut off the heads of Lu Qian and Fu An, and tying the hair in one knot took all three heads into the temple, and placed them on the altar. He then put on his gown, and cap, and drank the wine from the gourd. Then picking up his spear he left the temple going east. After walking about a //he came to a village where the men were getting hooks and buckets of water to go and put out the fire. Lin Chong said to them, "You had better hurry up if you are going to put out the fire. I am going to report the matter to the officials." He then proceeded on his way. The snow was still falling heavily. After walking for about an hour his body was very cold. Looking round he saw that the flames of the fodder depot were now a long way off. Where he had stopped was a dense forest and among the trees were a number of straw huts covered with heavy snow. Through the cracks gleams of light were streaming. He walked towards the huts, and pushing open the door of one, he saw inside an old farmer, and about five farm labourers sitting in a circle round a glaring fire warming their hands. He entered and standing facing the old farmer, he said, "Gentlemen, I salute you. I am employed at the fodder depot belonging to the prison, and as my clothes are wet through I request that you allow me to dry them at your fire."
"You can dry them if you like," said the farmer.
As Lin Chong was drying his clothes he saw at the side of the fire a jar that was being warmed, and from which came the aroma of wine. So he told them that he had some silver, and wished to buy some of their wine.
The farmer said, "We take turns during the night in guarding the rice bin, and we each take a drink of the wine as it is so cold. It is now about 4 A.M., and as there won't be enough for us how can we let you have some? There is no chance of you getting any."
"Just sell me only two or three cups of wine to keep out the cold."
The farmer said, "Don't be so greedy!"
But Lin Chong could not withstand the aroma of the wine so he said, "There is no other way. I must have some."
All the men replied, "We have been kind enough to let you dry your clothes, and now you want to drink our wine. Get off at once, and if you don't go we shall have to tie you up."
Upon hearing this, Lin Chong became angry, and said that they were very unreasonable. He then took his spear, and putting it under a piece of wood in the fire he flicked the wood into the face of the old farmer burning his mustache. He then scattered the remains of the fire. The farm labourers jumped up, and the farmer ran outside. Lin Chong thrust about him with his spear, and the labourers ran away but not before they had been beaten with the spear.
Lin Chong soliloquized, "So they have all gone! Now, you sir can make merry with the wine." Above the bed were two ladles so taking one he poured out half of the wine, and drank it off. Then picking up his spear he left the hut. But he had drunk too much, and staggered about in all directions. After walking a short distance he came to a ravine where the bitterly cold wind brought him down. It is generally the case that drunken men once fallen cannot get up again, and Lin Chong lay in the snow in his drunken sleep.
The farm labourers had the assistance of more than twenty men but upon reaching the straw hut they could not find Lin Chong. So they followed his footprints in the snow, and so came to the place where he was lying in the snow with his spear at his side. They tied him up with ropes, and then carried him away to another place. Afterwards, it happened that many thousands of armed boats were arranged in close order in a pool of water surrounded by high reeds, and in the middle of the pool was a fortress occupied by over 100 valiant heroes.

Malice harboured deadly dim;
Chilled to the marrow in the bones.

## 011

### Zhu Gui Shoots a Whistling Signal Arrow from the Lakeside Pavilion Arbour as a sign; Lin Chong Arrives & Climbs Mount Liang Marsh in the Snowy Night During a Heavy Snowstorm

The night Panther Head Lin Chong fell drunk in the snow and was unable to rise, the vassals bound him with ropes and brought him to a manor. Another vassal came out and said: "Our lord is still asleep. Let's hang him up below the entry tower." At dawn, Lin awakened, quite sober. He looked around him. It certainly was a large manor.
"Who has dared to suspend me here?" He shouted.
Vassals grabbed sticks and came out of the gate-house. "You've got the nerve to complain!"
The old vassal whose whiskers had been singed said: "Don't bother talking to him. Just drub him! We can question him when our lord gets up."
Swarming around Lin Chong, the vassals flailed him with their sticks. He couldn't escape. "Beat away!" he cried. "I'll make you regret this!"
Another vassal approached and said: "The lord is coming."
Lin hazily saw an official-looking man, hands clasped behind his back, emerge from a building and descend from the porch.
"Who are you beating there?" the man called.
"We caught this rice thief last night," the vassals replied.

The man walked over and recognized Lin Chong. He quickly ordered the vassals to desist and untied Lin's bonds.
"What are you doing tied up here, Drill Instructor?" he asked.
On hearing this, the vassals all withdrew.
Standing before Lin Chong was none other than Chai Jin. "Save me, Excellency!" Lin beseeched.
"Why have these villagers been humiliating you?"
"It's a long story."
The two went inside and sat down. Lin recounted his adventures in detail, starting with the burning of the fodder depot.
"What bad luck you've had, brother," said Chai Jin. "But our meeting today is Heaven-sent. You needn't worry. This place is my eastern manor. Stay a while, then we'll decide what to do."
He ordered a vassal to bring fresh clothes and, when Lin had changed completely, invited him into a heated room and wined and dined him. Lin remained in the eastern manor for another six or seven days. Of that we'll say no more.

Let us speak rather of Cangzhou, where the warden of the garrison prison presented an accusation against Lin Chong for the murder of the head keeper, Captain Lu Qian and Fu An, and for burning down the army fodder depot. The prefect was astonished. He immediately issued an order for Lin Chong's arrest, and sent police to post pictures of him in every village and town, inn and shop, plus notices offering three thousand strings of cash for his apprehension. The hotness of the pursuit caused a stir among the local people.
Lin, in the eastern manor, was on pins and needles when he heard about it. He said to Chai Jin: "You'd better not keep me here, Excellency. They're making a house to house search. If they find me in the manor, you'll be implicated, and that's no good. Let me impose on your chivalry and generosity and borrow a little travelling money. I'll find another refuge. If I live I'll repay you with my complete devotion."
"Since you insist on leaving, brother, I have a place to suggest. I'll give you a letter of introduction. How will that be?"
"That's very kind of you. Where is this place?"
"It's called Liangshan Marsh, in Jizhou Prefecture, Shandong Province. The area is about eight hundred *li* in circumference, and includes the Water-Girt Fortress and the Liao-er Lowlands. Three bold men have set up a stronghold there. The first is Wang Lun the White-Clad Scholar. The second is Skyscraper Du Qian. The third is Song Wan, Guardian of the Clouds. They've formed a band of seven or eight hundred and rob and pillage. Many who have committed capital crimes find shelter among them. I'm on very good terms with the three leaders. We frequently exchange letters. Suppose I write an introduction recommending that you join them?"
"Fine if that's what you think best. I'm very grateful."
"The trouble is Cangzhou is plastered with notices for your arrest, and two army officers are checking travellers at the city gate, and that's the way you have to go." Chai Jin lowered his head in thought. Then he looked up. "I have an idea. We'll escort you."
"I'll never forget you kindness," said Lin Chong.
Chai Jin sent a vassal ahead through the city gate with Lin's luggage. Then he gathered a troop of twenty or thirty horsemen, armed with bows and arrows, carrying falcons and accompanied by hunting dogs, and all gaily set forth, with Lin Chong also mounted, in their midst. The army officers at the city gate had been to Chai Jin's manor before having been appointed to this post and knew him well.
When the band of hunters arrived, they rose from their seats atop the gate-tower and called: "Out for sport, Excellency?"
Chai Jin politely dismounted. "What are you two doing here?"
"The prefect has posted notices for the arrest of the criminal Lin Chong. We've been ordered to question every traveller who passes through this gate."
"I have Lin Chong right here in my troop," Chai Jin said with a laugh. "Don't you recognize him?"
The army officers chuckled. "Your Excellency is very familiar with the law. You'd never willingly slip him out. Please mount."
"You trust me that much?" Chai Jin smiled. "If we get any game, I'll present you with some on the way back." He bid the officers farewell, got on his horse, and the troop trotted through the gate.
They rode about fifteen *li* to where the vassal was waiting. Chai Jin told Lin Chong to dismount, remove his hunter's garb and put on his own clothes that the vassal had brought. Lin tied his sword to his waist, put on his red-tasseled felt hat, shouldered his pack, took his halberd in hand, bid Chai Jin a respectful farewell, and marched off down the road.
Chai Jin and his men mounted their horses and went hunting. Not until evening did they finally come back through the gate. They gave the officers some game and returned to the manor. Of this we'll say no more.
Lin Chong walked for over ten days. At dusk, heavy clouds gathered in the winter sky and the wind began to blow. Thick snowflakes drifted down as far as the eye could see. Lin pressed on. It was turning very cold.
Towards evening he saw in the distance beside a lake a wine shop almost completely submerged in the snow. Lin hurried towards it, raised the reed curtain and entered. He beat the snow from his clothes and looked around. There were plenty of seats. He selected a place and sat down. He leaned his halberd against the wall, removed his pack, hung up his felt hat and sword. A waiter came over.
"How much wine, sir?"
"Two measures, for a start."
The waiter drew two measures from a cask and placed the wine on the table.
"Anything to go with the wine?" Lin asked.
"We've got raw and cooked beef, fat goose and crisp fried chicken."
"Cut me two catties of cooked beef."
The waiter soon returned with a platter of beef, several vegetable dishes and a large bowl into which he poured the wine. Lin finished three or four bowls. He noticed a man walk to the door and look at the snow, his hands clasped behind his back.
"Who is that fellow, drinking?" the man asked the waiter.
The man was wearing a warm hat with a long peak, a sable-lined jacket and deerskin boots. Tall, stalwart, with cheekbones like fists, he was adorned with a mustache and goatee. He continued watching the snow.
Lin Chong summoned the waiter to pour more wine. "Have a bowl with me," he suggested. The waiter did so.
"How far is it from here to Liangshan Marsh?" queried Lin.
"Only a few *li but* you must go by water. There's no way to get there by land. You have to take a boat."
"Find one for me, then."
"Where would I find a boat in this snowstorm and at this time of night?"
"I'll pay you well. Find me a boat and ferry me across."
"There isn't any place to ask."
"A fine state of affairs!" Lin thought to himself. He drank a few more bowls of wine. "Once I was a drill instructor in the capital," he brooded. "I strolled and drank at will in every street and mart. Who would have thought that thief Gao Qiu would have reduced me to this condition, the mark of a criminal on my face, exiled here! I can't go home, no place is safe. How lonely I am!"
He told the waiter to bring him a brush-pen and ink. Drunk and depressed, he wrote these lines on the whitewashed wall:

*Chivalrous is Lin Chong,*
*The most loyal of men,*
*Renowned among the gallant,*
*He'll lead heroes of the land.*
*By tragedy set adrift,*
*He's suffered many setbacks;*
*But when he has his way,*
*Mount Tai will bow before him!*

Lin threw down the pen and drank. The man in the sable jacket walked up and grabbed him around the waist, exclaiming: "You've got your nerve! In Cangzhou you committed a capital crime, and here you are! Three thousand strings of cash are offered for your capture. What do you say to that?"
"Who do you think I am?"
"Aren't you Lin Chong?"
"My name is Zhang."
The man laughed. "Rot. You wrote your name on the wall, and the golden print is on your face. You can't lie your way out of it!"
"Are you really planning to turn me in?"
Again the man laughed. "What for? Come, we'll talk in private." He led Lin to a room in the rear overlooking the water and told the waiter to light the lamp. Lin and he bowed to each other and sat down on opposite sides of the table.
"I heard you asking for a boat to go to Liangshan Marsh, brother," said the man. "That's an outlaws' mountain stronghold. Why do you want to go there?"
"To be frank, the police are hot on my heels, and I've no place to hide. I've come to join the band on the mountain."
"In that case you need an introduction."
"I have one from a friend in Henghai County, Cangzhou Prefecture."
"You don't mean the Small Whirlwind Chai Jin?"
"How did you know?"
"He's on very good terms with the leaders of the mountain stronghold. They write to each other often." The man explained that when Wang Lun was on the run, he and Du Qian had been given shelter by Chai Jin. They lived in his manor for some time, and he gave them silver for travelling expenses when they left. They were very grateful.
"You are one of them and I didn't know," Lin exclaimed. "I 'had eyes and didn't recognize Mount Taishan!' Please tell me your name." He bowed politely.
The man returned the bow. "This humble person is the lookout for Chieftain Wang. I am called Zhu Gui. I come originally from Yishui County in Yizhou Prefecture. Among the fraternity I'm known as the Dry-Land Crocodile. In the guise of running this wine shop my job is to observe the movements of merchants and travellers. I let the stronghold know if they are carrying anything of value. When you asked about Liangshan Marsh I thought I'd better find out more about you. Then you wrote you name on the wall, and I remembered people from the capital telling of your gallantry. I never thought we'd meet here today. Since Lord Chai has written an introduction, Chieftain Wang is sure to welcome a man of your splendid reputation."
Zhu Gui feasted Lin with a meal of fish and meat and wine and delicacies. They ate and drank in the waterside room till half the night was gone.
"How can I find a boat to ferry me across?" Lin Chong asked.
"There are boats here, brother," said Zhu Gui. "Don't worry about that. First get some rest. Then, please rise at the fifth watch and come here. I'll go with you ."
Both men retired to their respective rooms. Zhu Gui woke Lin at the fifth watch. They washed and rinsed their mouths, downed four or five cups of wine and ate some meat. The sky was still not yet light.
Zhu Gui opened a window of the waterside room. He fitted a whistling arrow to a magpie-decorated bow and let fly towards a creek in a thicket of reeds on the other side of a cove.
"Why have you done that?" asked Lin.
"That was a signal arrow to the mountain stronghold. A boat will come soon now."
Not long after, from the reeds opposite a fast boat appeared, sculled by three or four men. It stopped beneath the waterside room. Lin collected his weapons and luggage and Zhu Gui conducted him to the craft. The boatmen propelled the vessel across the lake to the Shore of Golden Sands. There Lin Chong and Zhu Gui disembarked. One of the men went with them and carried Lin's things. The others took the boat back to the creek.
Zhu and Lin began climbing. Huge trees flanked the trail. Halfway up the mountain was a pavilion. A turn beyond that and they saw a large fortified pass. Before it were racks of spears and swords and bows and lances. On all sides were logs and boulders for rolling down the hill against invaders. Brigands went on ahead to announce them, then Lin and Zhu entered the pass.
They walked between two rows of pennants and battle insignia, and crossed two narrow defiles before coming to the gate of the stronghold itself. On every side were high mountains, with magnificent passes lying in between, together forming a powerful enclosure. In the centre was a mirror-smooth plain, about four thousand feet in circumference. The main gate of the stronghold faced the pass. Other buildings stood in wings to left and right.
Zhu Gui led Lin Chong to Righteous Fraternity Hall. A bold fellow sat in an armchair in the middle. This was the White-Clad Scholar Wang Lun. The man in the armchair to his left was Skyscraper Du Qian. In an armchair to his right sat Song Wan, Guardian of the Clouds. The two travellers came forward and hailed the brigands respectfully, with Lin Chong standing by Zhu Gui's side.
"This is Lin Chong the Panther Head," said Zhu Gui, "drill instructor in the capital's Mighty Imperial Guards. Because Marshal Gao decided to ruin Him, he was marked as a criminal and exiled to Cangzhou. There, the army fodder depot he was put in charge of was burned down and, in a struggle, he killed three men. He took refuge with Lord Chai, and they formed strong respect for each other. His Excellency has written a letter of introduction for him to join our company."
Lin Chong presented his letter. Wang Lun opened and read it, and asked Lin to be seated in a fourth armchair, and Zhu Gui in a fifth. He ordered a man to bring wine, and all drank three rounds.
"Lord Chai is well, I hope?"
"He hunts and relaxes in the outskirts of the town everyday."
Wang Lun fell silent. "I'm a scholar who failed in the civil service examinations," he thought. "In a fury I came here with Du Qian and turned bandit. Later, Song Wan joined us, and we formed this big company. I'm not particularly able, and Du Qian and Song Wan have only ordinary skill at arms. This fellow was a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards. He must be an excellent military man. If we accept him and he sees what duds we are, he'll probably want to take over, and we won't be able to stop him. I'd better just be a little rude, make some excuse and send him back down the mountain. That will avoid any trouble. It's not very courteous to Chai Jin, in view of all his kindness but that can't be helped."
He ordered more wine and food and laid a feast for Lin Chong. Together, all ate and drank. When they had finished, on Wang Lun's instructions one of the men brought a platter bearing fifty ounces of white silver and two bolts of fine silk and placed them before Lin. Wang Lun rose.
"Lord Chai has sent a letter recommending that you, Drill Instructor, join our humble band. But unfortunately we have little grain, our buildings are in poor condition, our forces are small. It wouldn't be right if we impeded your career. We offer these paltry gifts in the hope that you won't scorn them. Forgive us and seek a place in some big stronghold."
"Permit me to reply, three chieftains," said Lin Chong. "I have come from afar to place myself under your famed command. I seek, relying on the prestige of Lord Chai, to join your company. Though I have no talents, I hope you will accept me. I have no other desire than to pledge you my life. Nothing would make me happier. I want no silver or gifts. Please understand me."
"Our place is small. How could we give you a suitable position? Please excuse us."
Zhu Gui intervened. "Forgive me for speaking up, elder brothers," he said. "Although our stronghold is short of grain, we can obtain more from villages and towns near and far. There is plenty of wood in the mountains and by the streams, enough to build a thousand new houses if need be. This man has brought an introduction from Lord Chai. How can we tell him to go? This stronghold owes Chai a great deal. It would be very embarrassing if he heard that we refused. What's more, Lin Chong is a man of much skill. He would be a big asset to us."
Du Qian agreed. "What does it matter if we add one more?" he said. "Chai will be offended if we don't keep him. He'll think us ungrateful. We owe him so much. How can we send away a man he introduces?"
Song Wan also put in a word to Wang Lun. "For His Excellency's sake, we must let Lin Chong join as one of our stronghold's leaders. Otherwise, the whole fraternity of gallant men will despise us for our lack of chivalry."
"But don't you realize, brothers," Wang Lun argued, "although he's committed a capital crime in Cangzhou, we don't know much about him. What if he's come to spy on us?"
"I want to join you because I'm a condemned man," said Lin. "Why should you suspect me?"
"Very well, then," said Wang Lun. "Since you really wish to become one of us, you'll have to present a membership certificate."

"I can read and write pretty well. If you'll give me paper and pen I'll write one out."
Zhu Gui laughed. "You don't understand, Drill Instructor. We demand a membership certificate from any bold man who wants to join our band. That means you have to go down the mountain, kill a man, and bring us his head to prove yourself. That's what we call a 'membership certificate.' "
"That won't be hard. I'll go down and wait. I'm only afraid that no one will come along."
"I give you three days," said Wang Lun. "If you bring the membership certificate in that time, we'll accept you. If you don't, you'll have to excuse us."
Lin Chong agreed to the chieftain's terms.
After the meeting Zhu Gui went down the mountain and returned to his wine shop. Lin Chong took his weapons and luggage and followed one of the bandits to the guest house, where he spent the night.
He rose early the next morning. After breakfast he tied on his sword, picked up his halberd and had one of the bandits lead him down the mountain. They crossed the lake in a boat and chose a secluded place beside a path to wait for travellers. All day they waited but by dusk not a single traveller had come their way. Lin gloomily again crossed the water with the bandit and returned to the stronghold.
"Have you got your membership certificate?" Wang Lun asked.
"No, "said Lin. "No one came today."
"If you don't bring one tomorrow your chances of staying here are slim."
Lin Chong didn't reply. He went unhappily to his room, had something to eat, and retired for the night.
The next day he got up as the sky was turning light, breakfasted with the bandit, took his weapons and proceeded down the trail.
"Let's try the path on the south side of the mountain today," the bandit suggested.
They crossed the lake and waited in the forest. No one appeared until noon, when a band of over three hundred began marching by. Lin didn't dare move. He just watched them go. Hours passed and the shadows lengthened but there were no more travellers.
"What miserable luck," Lin said to the bandit. "Two whole days and we haven't seen a single man travelling alone. What am I going to do?"
"Don't worry, brother," the bandit consoled him. "Tomorrow's another day. I'll take you to wait by the eastern trail."
Again they crossed back to the stronghold.
"Your membership certificate?" asked Wang Lun.
Lin Chong could only sigh. The bandit chieftain laughed.
"So you failed again. I gave you three days. Two of them have already gone. If you don't get one tomorrow, there's no need for us to meet again. Just stroll down the mountain and find another place to stay."
Lin returned to his room, very depressed. "Who would have thought that scoundrel Gao Qiu would have hurt me so badly," he sighed. "I've ended up here in my wanderings, unfavoured by both Heaven and Earth. What a wretched fate!"
So passed the night. He rose the following morning at daybreak, had a bite to eat, tied up his pack and put it in a corner of the room. Then he attached his sword, took his halberd, and went down the mountain with his bandit companion and ferried across to the road on the eastern side.
"If I don't get a membership certificate today, I'll have to seek another place of refuge," said Lin.
The two concealed themselves in a grove beside the eastern path. No one had come by the time the sun was directly overhead. The last remnants of snow clouds had been swept away and the sky was a brilliant blue.
"It seems I'm out of luck again," said Lin. "I might as well go back while it's still early, pick up my luggage and start looking for another place."
"Over there!" the bandit said softly, pointing. "Someone's coming!"
"At last!" Lin exclaimed.
He saw a man walking towards them in the distance along the foot of the mountain. When he came close, Lin leaped out with a flourish of his halberd. *"Aiya!"* exclaimed the man. He cast down his laden carrying-pole, turned and fled. Lin gave chase but the fellow was much too fast. He quickly vanished behind a rise.
"Did you ever see such luck!" Lin fumed. "Three days I wait, and when one finally comes, I let him get away!"
"Although you didn't kill anyone, that stuff he's left here ought to earn you some more time," said the bandit.
"Take it up the mountain. I'll wait here a bit longer."
Not long after the bandit had departed with the carrying-pole and its load, Lin saw a big fellow coming round the bend. "Heaven is merciful," he murmured. The man carried a halberd, and he was in a raging fury. "Filthy rogues," he bellowed. "Where have you taken my luggage? Wait until I catch you varlets! I'll teach you to tweak the tiger's whiskers!" In great bounds, he came flying down the trail. Lin Chong strode forward to meet him. Because this man battled Lin Chong, a wind-stirring white-browed tiger was added to Liangshan Marsh, and several golden-eyed chasm-leaping wild beasts joined the water-girt stronghold.

Now when Lin Chong collapsed in a drunken stupor in the snow, and was unable to get to his feet again, he was caught by the villagers, who bound him and carried him off to a manor house. Then a retainer appeared and said, "The master's not awake yet. You'd better go and string that fellow up in the gate-house."
By the time it was beginning to get light, Lin Chong had sobered up. He looked about him and saw that he was in a fine house. "Who had the effrontery to hang me up like this?" he yelled. One of the retainers heard this outcry and came out, peeled staff in hand: "Who told you to open your trap?" he shouted. The old man whose beard had been singed said: "Don't ask, just beat him. We'll question him properly when the master wakes up."
So a group of them set about Lin Chong. Resistance was impossible, all he could do was cry. "Stop it! Hear what I have to say first."
At this point a servant appeared and said: "The master's coming." Lin Chong saw an official-looking figure approaching with hands clasped behind his back. When he reached the gallery, this gentleman said: "Who is that you're beating?"
"It's a thief we caught last night stealing rice," they said.
Soon the gentleman was close enough to recognize Lin Chong, whereupon he immediately ordered the servants to stand back while he undid the bonds himself. "Instructor, why have they hung you up here?" he said. Seeing this, the retainers made themselves scarce.
When Lin Chong realized that it was none other than Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind, he said: "Your Honour, help me please!"
"How did you get here, Instructor, and why have my people done you this injury?"
"It's quite a story!" Lin Chong replied.
The two of them went to sit inside, and Lin Chong recounted in full the business of the depot burning down.
"Things really seem to be set against you, my friend," Chai Jin said. "But now your luck has turned. This is my eastern manor. You can stay here a while, and we'll discuss what to do later."
He told servants to bring a new set of clothes and made Lin Chong change all his outer garments. Then he took him to a warm room and treated him to a banquet. Lin Chong stayed about a week at Chai Jin's. Of this no more.
Meanwhile in Cangzhou the prison Warden reported that Lin Chong had murdered the head gaoler, and also Lieutenant Lu Qian and Fu An, and set fire to the army stores. The Governor of Cangzhou was horrified. He immediately issued a warrant for Lin Chong's arrest. Bailiffs and police were ordered out to search every town and village, every wayside inn and local shop, and Lin Chong's picture was posted up all over the place. A reward of three thousand strings of cash was announced for the capture of the criminal Lin Chong. The hunt was pursued with such vigour that people were talking about it everywhere.
News of this commotion reached the ears of Lin Chong in Mr. Chai's eastern manor. He waited anxiously for Chai Jin to return, and then said: "Had you, sir, not so generously allowed me to stay here, they would have captured me for sure, because they are searching every house. My fear is that if they should come here to search the manor, you would be implicated that is the last thing I should wish. Now if I could presume further on your nobility and generosity to request a loan for my travel expenses, I will go to seek asylum elsewhere. For the rest of my life, assuming I survive, I shall count myself indebted to you."
"If you are determined to leave, brother, I can suggest somewhere for you to go," Chai Jin said. "I shall prepare a letter for you to take with you." This is how it was:

The hero each way meets obstruction,
*Barred is his path to fame;*
*But thanks to Chai Jin's introduction,*
In the Marshes he'll make his name.

"With this help of yours I am confident I shall find a safe place," Lin Chong said. "May I ask where it is I should go?"
"In Jizhou district of Shandong," said Chai Jin, "there is a great marshland known as the Marshes of Mount Liang. It is at least a hundred leagues around, and included within it are the Place of Many Meanderings and Duckweed Marsh. Three bold men have recently established themselves there. Their leader is called Wang Lun, the Failed Scholar, the second is Du Qian, the Skyscraper, and the third is Song Wan, the Door-god in the Clouds. They've assembled an army of seven or eight hundred men and are engaging in banditry. Many important criminals have gone to them and have found refuge, that's to say, they've been admitted to the company. I have close relations with all three leaders, we frequently correspond. Now, I will write a letter for you. What do you say? Are you prepared to join them?"
"What can I say but thank you for taking such trouble on my behalf?"
"The only problem is that the authorities have put up 'Wanted' notices everywhere in Cangzhou. Two officers have been posted at the city gates to check travellers, and that's the way we have to go." Chai Jin remained plunged in thought for a moment. Then he said, "I have it. I know how we'll get you through."
"I shall be forever in your debt," Lin Chong said.
The same day Chai Jin sent one of his people with Lin Chong's bundle to go through the checkpoint and wait for them some way beyond. He then had some twenty or thirty horses saddled, and with bows and arrows, pennants and spears, carrying falcons and followed by a pack of hounds, off they rode in a small troop. Lin Chong was concealed in their midst. Together they rode up to the checkpoint. The two army officers in charge there recognized Mr. Chai. They both knew Chai Jin well because prior to taking up these duties they had visited his house. They rose to greet him and said: "So you're off for some sport, Mr. Chai!"
Chai Jin dismounted and said: "What are you two doing here?"
"The Governor of Cangzhou has put up a 'Wanted' notice and pictures for the arrest of the convict Lin Chong. We have been ordered to set up a checkpoint here and question all travellers before letting them through."
Chai Jin began to joke with them. "Lin Chong?" he exclaimed. "Why, there he is among this party of mine, can't you see him?"
They laughed. "You understand the law, Mr. Chai, we know you wouldn't aid a criminal to escape," said one of them. He motioned Chai Jin to mount again. "Please, we don't want to detain you, sir."
"Thank you," Chai Jin said. "In that case when we return in a little while I must remember to bring some game for you."
The troop departed, riding through the gate and continuing for five miles or so till they came to the place where the servant who had been sent on ahead was waiting. Chai Jin bade Lin Chong dismount and change out of his hunting clothes, putting on his own clothes which had been brought by the servant. Lin Chong buckled on his sword, donned his red-tasselled felt hat, shouldered his bundle, grasped his halberd, bade Chai Jin farewell and set off down the road. As for Chai Jin and his party, they turned to their hunting, and when they returned at night via the same gate they presented the officers with some game. After this they went home. We say no more of them.
Meanwhile Lin Chong had travelled ten days or so since parting from Chai Jin. It was the end of winter: the sky was shrouded in black clouds and a bitter north wind was blowing. Soon the air was full of whirling snowflakes. Before he had covered another six or seven miles, the whole land was white. There is a composition on this subject by the old Jin poet, Wanyan Liang: it describes a big snowfall and the desolate air of the countryside:
*Heaven moved to anger upturns a silver sea and scatters strings of pearls; everywhere strange flowers floating down, until the valleys are level with the peaks. The white tiger raves and the glistening unicorn rampages, pulling apart the ropes of pearls. The jade dragon in a drunken frenzy sheds his scales till the whole sky's a-swirl. Think now of the poor traveller stuck in distant passes, of banners floundering in a sea of white. Everything's the colour of spears and lances, the light is like flashing swords and javelins, a desolate air pervades the camp. Now heroes bold as tigers and pards, and their intrepid followers, must make their battle plans. They stake all on a final throw: then there's nothing but the sky's vault, vast and empty.*
Anyway, Lin Chong pressed on over the snow-covered ground. The weather was getting colder and colder, and night was drawing near, when he spied an inn nestling between a stream and a lake, its roof weighted with snow:
*The cottage is a dazzling white, the reeds a glossy green; a dozen old trees with knotted branches stand beside it. The three or four windows are closely shuttered. The sparse thorn hedge looks as if it's had its face painted; the yellow mud wall seems coated in white lead. Like a thousand pussy-willow flowers, snowflakes drift about the door, like a myriad goose-feathers they dance around the inn sign.*
The moment he set eyes on it, Lin Chong hastened towards the inn. He thrust aside the curtain and, politely stooping, entered. When he looked about him he saw there were plenty of seats. Having chosen a place, he rested his halberd against the wall and unburdened himself of his pack, took off his hat and unbuckled his sword.
"How much wine would you like, sir?" asked the waiter, approaching.
"Bring me two measures, to start with," Lin Chong replied.
The waiter measured out the wine and set it on the table.
"Have you something to eat with it?" Lin Chong asked.
"There's beef, raw or roast, some nice fat goose, or fried chicken," the waiter said.
"Carve me two catties of roast beef, then."
The waiter was back in a moment with a big plate of beef and several dishes of vegetables which he arranged on the table, together with a big bowl that he filled with wine. When Lin Chong had drunk three or four bowls, a man appeared and walked to the door, where he stood with his hands behind his back staring out at the snow.
"Who's that you've got drinking over there?" the newcomer was heard to ask the waiter. Lin Chong inspected him. He was warmly dressed in a soft peaked cap, a sable coat, and deerskin boots. He was a big man, with a broad face, cheekbones that stuck out like fists and a pale moustache and beard. There he stood, watching the snow.
When Lin Chong called the waiter over to pour for him again, he said: "Will you join me in a bowl, waiter?"
The waiter drank a bowl and Lin Chong said: "How far are we from the Marshes of Mount Liang?"
"If you want to go to Mount Liang, it's no great distance but you've got to go by water, there's no road. So to get there you need a boat to carry you across."
"Can you find a boat for me?" Lin Chong asked.
"In this snow, and nearly night as well, where am I going to find a boat?"
"I'd pay you extra," Lin Chong said, "if you can find me a boat to ferry me across."
"There's nowhere to get one," the waiter said.
Lin Chong considered his situation. "What am I going to do?" he thought. After drinking several more bowls of wine he was seized by melancholy. "When I was an instructor in the capital, I had all the streets and markets to wander in everyday, drinking and enjoying myself. Who would have thought that now I would be brought to such a state by that scoundrel Marshal Gao? That I'd be tattooed as a criminal, sentenced and banished, leaving me with a home that I can't go to, a country I can't enter. So now I have to bear this loneliness." Such were the thoughts that ran through his mind, until, overcome by his feelings, he asked the waiter to bring him inkstone and brush; inspired by the wine he wrote an eight-line poem on the whitewashed wall:

Lin Chong is he who makes this plaint.
*Once honoured throughout the world he went.*
*All brave men then knew his name,*
*For in the capital he'd won great fame.*
*Now from the court he wanders far*
*And ill luck has eclipsed his star.*
*But fate will at last his state revise;*
And higher than Mount Tai he'll rise.

Throwing down the brush, he drank again. As he did so, the man in the fur coat came over and seized him by the waist, saying: "Well, you're a bold one and no mistake! Here you sit, when everyone knows you committed a major crime in Cangzhou. The police have put a reward of three thousand strings of cash on your head and what do you propose to do?"
"Who do you imagine I am?" Lin Chong said.
"Why, Leopard's Head Lin Chong, of course!"
"My name's Zhang," said Lin Chong.
The other grinned and said: "Come off it. There's your name on the wall over there, and your face is tattooed with the golden seal, what's the use of pretending?"
"So you really want to take me?"
"Take you? Why should I want to do that? Come inside with me. I'd like to have a word with you inside."

The man released his grip and Lin Chong followed him to the back where there was a little pavilion over the water. The other ordered the waiter to light lamps. The two men exchanged courtesies, and sat down facing each other.
"I heard you just now asking the way to Mount Liang," the stranger said, "and inquiring about a boat. That's a bandit's strong-hold, why do you want to go there?"
"I'll tell you the truth," Lin Chong said. "The police are hot on my heels, there's nowhere else I'm safe, I want to be admitted to their company. That's why."
"That's as may be," said the other, "but I'm afraid, my friend, that you can't join them without a recommendation."
"A certain friend in Cangzhou has given me just such a recommendation," said Lin Chong.
"It wouldn't be Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind, would it?" said the other.
"How did you know?" said Lin Chong.
"Mr. Chai is a close friend of the leaders'. Letters often pass between them. Once upon a time, when Wang Lun was unsuccessful in the civil service examination, he and Du Qian went and sought refuge with Chai Jin, and spent quite a long time in his house. When they were leaving he gave them a sum for their travel expenses. For this reason they feel they're indebted to him."
Hearing all this detailed information, Lin Chong prostrated himself and said: "I must be blind. I couldn't see what was staring me in the face. Please tell me your name."
The other hurriedly returned the courtesy and said: "I'm what you might call the eyes and ears of Wang Lun. My name is Zhu, Zhu Gui, and I come from Yishui in Yizhou. Among the rivers and lakes fraternity I'm known as 'The Dry Land Crocodile.' I was sent by them up there on the mountain to open an inn here. The inn's a front. My job is to keep watch for any travellers and merchants who pass by. If there's any who are wealthy, I go and report it to them. But solitary travellers, those who've got nothing worth bothering with, I let them pass on. If they've got something, say just a trifling affair, I drug their wine but if it's more serious we finish them off, and then the lean meat goes to make pemmican and the fat's melted down for lamp oil. But you, my friend, when you kept asking the way to Mount Liang, I thought it best not to start anything. Then I saw you write your name on the wall. I'd heard about you, from someone who came here from the capital, only of course I never expected to meet you here like this. Since you've a letter of recommendation from Chai Jin, and your name is known far and wide, chief Wang is bound to value your services."
He then ordered meat and fish, wine and some special dishes to feast Lin Chong. The two of them sat drinking half the night in the pavilion over the water.
"Then how can I get a boat to take me across?" Lin Chong asked.
"Don't worry," Zhu Gui said. "I've got my own boat. But you rest here tonight. Tomorrow we'll get up early, before dawn, and go together."
They both went to rest. Just before dawn Zhu Gui woke Lin Chong. They washed and rinsed their mouths, and then took a few cups of wine and some food. It was still dark when Zhu Gui opened the window of the pavilion, took up a bow painted with magpies, fitted a whistling arrow to the string and fixing his sights on a patch of reeds and bulrushes on the opposite bank, shot it off.
"What does that mean?" Lin Chong asked.
"It's the signal agreed with them up there," said the other. "Wait a bit and a boat will come."
Soon three or four men were seen to emerge from the reed-beds opposite sculling a boat which rapidly drew near. When it reached the pavilion, Lin Chong picked up his weapons and his bundle and Zhu Gui helped him into the boat. The scullers set to work again and drove the boat across the lake till they reached the landing at Golden Sands. Lin Chong looked about him. Now he was truly in the Marshes of Mount Liang with its hundred-league circumference, and a lonely place it was indeed!
*On one side the mountains spread like a great wave, on another the water extends to the horizon. A mass of reedbeds could hide vast companies of sabres and lances, a forest of stunted trees could conceal armies of swords and spears. Beside the canals are found deer's antlers, and even whole skeletons. All the bowls and spoons in the stronghold are carved out of the bone. The skin is stripped off corpses to cover the battle-drums. Human hair is plaited to make reins and bridles. To impede the progress of government troops there are countless dead-end channels. To protect the bandits there are mountain ranges and forests. Pebbles are piled in huge mounds, spears and darts stacked up like a forest. A deadly air pervades the gilt pavilion, and a mortal chill invests the Assembly Hall of the Heroes.*
When they reached the Golden Sands Landing, Zhu Gui and Lin Chong leapt ashore. One of the men carried Lin Chong's things and the two set off up the mountain, while the other men took the boat back to a creek to hide it. This bank was thickly forested. Halfway up the mountain there was a pavilion. Beyond this, they came to a narrow defile, at the mouth of which weapons of every description were laid out, with piles of logs all around and ballista stones for catapulting. The bandit accompanying them went ahead to report their arrival. In the pass itself they found the banners and insignia of the troops. They had to negotiate two more such defiles before they came to the actual gates of the mountain stronghold. This stronghold was thus secure from all sides, surrounded as it was by high mountains, the only access through three narrow defiles. In the centre was an area flat as a mirror, measuring over a hundred yards. The main gate faced the mountain. It was flanked by other lesser buildings.
Zhu Gui took Lin Chong to the main assembly hall where they found Wang Lun, the Failed Scholar, sitting on the throne, with Du Qian, the Skyscraper on his left and Song Wan on his right. The new arrivals stepped forward and saluted. Lin Chong stood a little to one side while Zhu Gui introduced him: "This is Instructor Lin Chong, instructor of the eight hundred thousand imperial guards in the capital, otherwise known as Leopard's Head. Through Marshal Gao's machinations he was branded and exiled to Cangzhou. There, when the army depot burnt down, he unfortunately killed three people and later took refuge in Mr. Chai's house. Mr. Chai holds him in high esteem and has written a letter recommending him to us."
Lin Chong produced the letter and handed it to Wang Lun, who after perusing it invited Lin Chong to take the fourth place, while Zhu Gui took the fifth. Wine was then ordered and they drank three times. Wang Lun asked how things went with Chai Jin.
"He enjoys life," Lin Chong answered. "He rides out into the country each day to hunt."
After a few more questions, Wang Lun paused to reflect. "I never made it in the civil service examinations," he said to himself. "I had such awful bloody luck I was persuaded I'd do better to join with Du Qian and set up camp here. Later Song Wan came along and we put together this company. I'm not what you'd call a military genius, and Du Qian and Song Wan also have their limits. Now, all of a sudden, this character appears, and it turns out he's an ex-instructor of the imperial guard, obviously an experienced soldier. What happens once he catches on to our methods? Obviously he's going to want to take over. How will we ever be able to cope with him? Rude or not, it's surely best to find some pretext for kicking him out. If we can send him back down the mountain, it'll save us much trouble in the future. The only problem is that it'll look a bit discourteous to Chai Jin, after all the kindness he has shown us in the past. Never mind though, we'd best ignore that for the moment." It was a case of:

His constant plan's to keep good men at bay,
*If a hero comes, he's not allowed to stay.*
*Envy's what rules this chieftain's heart, 'tis plain,*
And Lin Chong only seeks to serve in vain.

Wang Lun now ordered his men to bring more wine and food and organized a banquet in Lin Chong's honour. The company feasted and drank. Then Wang Lun ordered fifty taels of silver to be brought on a dish and two rolls of silk. Rising to his feet, he said: "Instructor, Mr. Chai recommends you and asks us to admit you to our company. It is really most unfortunate that our supplies here are so inadequate, our buildings in such disrepair, and our forces so far below their proper strength. I fear that it would, in the long run, be against your interests and I should not like to feel responsible. Here are some meagre gifts which I beg you not to reject. I sincerely hope that you will find a worthier refuge elsewhere and not hold this against us."
Lin Chong then rose and said: "Allow me to reply thus to the three chiefs of this stronghold: I have travelled a long way and, as they say, 'searched for the master far and wide.' Relying on Mr. Chai's reputation I made bold to present myself here. Although I have no talent, I beg you to accept me. I shall be eternally grateful and I can truly say that nothing could make me happier. It was not for silver that I came to you. I beg you to let me stay."
Wang Lun said: "But our place is too small. How can we receive you adequately? Please excuse us."
At this point Zhu Gui intervened. "Forgive me, brothers," he said disapprovingly, "but I must speak my mind. Maybe your provisions here are not so ample but there are villages and towns where you can go to get more. In these mountains and marshes timber is plentiful, there's enough to build any number of houses, that's not a problem. This gentleman is recommended by Mr. Chai, how can you send him away? What's more, Mr. Chai has gone out of his way to be helpful to us. If later he should hear that we refuse to accept this gentleman, it would look very bad. The Instructor is a man of true worth. I'm sure he will give us proof of it."
Du Qian added his weight to this: "Just one more won't upset things. If we don't let him stay, Mr. Chai will be offended when he hears about it. He'll consider us ungrateful. Mr. Chai has done us so many favours in the past. Now he sends someone to us are we to reject him, are we to throw him out?"
Song Wan was of the same opinion: "For Mr. Chai's sake we really ought to admit him as another leader here. Otherwise it will make us look mean-spirited. The brethren of the rivers and lakes will despise us."
"But none of you have thought carefully enough," Wang Lun said. "Even if he has committed some serious crime in Cangzhou, we don't know what his real intentions are. Suppose he's come here to spy on us? What then?"
"I face the death penalty," Lin Chong said, "that's why I've come here. How can my motives be cause for suspicion?"
"In that case," Wang Lun said, "if you sincerely want to join us, we'll need the pledge."
"All right," said Lin Chong. "I can write. Just bring me a brush and ink and I'll write it out."
"No, Instructor, you misunderstand," said Zhu Gui with a laugh. "When you join a company of outlaws, the pledge means going down the mountain, killing someone and bringing back his head. It shows you mean business. That's what we call 'providing the pledge'."
"That's all right too," said Lin Chong. "I don't mind going down the mountain and waiting. Only I'm afraid no one may come."
"We'll give you a time-limit of three days," Wang Lun said. "If within three days you provide us with the pledge, we'll take you. If you don't, we'll have to ask you to excuse us."
Lin Chong accepted but he was in low spirits when he retired to rest. Here's how it was:

Such a depression is hard to fix;
*He hates Wang Lun and his low-down tricks.*
*Down the mountain, he'll have to go:*
What head he'll bring back, he doesn't know.

After the party broke up, Zhu Gui said goodbye and went back to look after his inn. Lin Chong collected his things and one of the brigands showed him to the guest-room where he was to spend the night. Next morning he was up early and after breakfasting took up his sword and his halberd. He summoned one of the brigands who guided him down the mountain and ferried him across the water. Then he posted himself beside a small isolated trail waiting for some traveller to appear. From dawn to dusk, he waited the whole day but not a single traveller passed that way. With a heavy heart Lin Chong accompanied the brigand across the water and back to the mountain retreat.
"Where is the pledge?" Wang Lun asked him.
"No one passed today, so I couldn't get it," Lin Chong explained.
"If you don't get it tomorrow, it looks as if you won't be able to stay here," said Wang Lun.
Lin Chong said nothing but he was not pleased. He retired to his room and had them bring him some food, then slept. Next day he was up early again, breakfasted with the brigands and then took his weapons and descended the mountain.
"Today let's try the track on the south side of the mountain," his guide suggested. They found a wood and lay in wait there but no one passed by. Then about noon a large party of travellers appeared, more than three hundred of them. Lin Chong could not undertake anything against so many and had to let them pass. He continued to wait but night began to fall and still there was no sign of any other traveller. "What rotten luck I have," he said to his companion. "I've waited here two days, and no traveller has passed by on his own. What am I going to do?"
"Don't give up," the man said. "You've still got another day. Tomorrow we'll try the trail to the east."
Lin Chong went back that evening as before, and Wang Lun remarked, "Looks like you haven't got it today either. I gave you three days. This is the second. If you still haven't got it tomorrow, you needn't bother about saying goodbye, I shall expect you just to take yourself off."
Lin Chong retired to his room with a heavy heart. He raised his eyes to heaven that night and sighed deeply: "I never thought I'd be brought to such a pass by that bastard Gao-the-Ball. And now heaven and earth seem against me and fate opposes me in everything," he said to himself.
Next day he rose at first light, and ordered some breakfast. Then he tied his bundle and left it in the room. Grasping his sword and his halberd he descended the mountain and crossed the water once more with his guide and headed for the mountain road to the east. "If I don't manage to get that pledge today," he thought to himself, "I'll just have to go and seek refuge somewhere else."
Arriving at a wood on the road that passed under the mountain, the two hid themselves and settled down to wait. The sun reached its zenith but still there was no sign of anyone. The rough weather of previous days was gone and the sky was fine and clear. Gripping his halberd, Lin Chong said to his companion: "There's obviously nothing doing here. Wouldn't it be better now, while there's still plenty of daylight left, to go and try somewhere else?"
But just as he spoke the bandit pointed and said: "Wait! Isn't that someone coming?"
Lin Chong gave an oath. There was indeed a man, far away still, making his way down the mountain towards them. Lin Chong waited till he was quite close, then he leapt out with his halberd at the ready. But when the man saw him, he gave a cry of dismay, threw down what he was carrying, turned and fled. Lin Chong gave chase but there was no chance of catching him. The man shot off up the mountain and disappeared.
"Look what luck I have!" Lin Chong groaned. "It's the third day, and now when someone comes, he gets away."
The bandit said: "Even if you haven't managed to kill someone, this baggage of his is full of valuables; maybe that will do instead."
"You take it up to the stronghold then," Lin Chong said. "I shall go on waiting."
No sooner had the bandit departed with the booty, than a tall man came into view, heading down the mountain. Lin Chong said: "Heaven has not forgotten me after all!"
The stranger brandished his halberd and roared in a voice like thunder: "You scum, you gallows-fodder, what have you done with my baggage? I'm going to get you for this, you villains. I'll teach you to pull the tiger's whiskers!" With this he bounded towards Lin Chong. Lin Chong advanced to meet this ferocious charge.
Had not this stranger come to do battle with Lin Chong, how would we have seen:

A brood of white-browed tigers arise in the Marshes of Mount Liang,
In the lake-land stronghold those golden-eyed river-jumpers at play?

While the "Leopard's Head" Lin Chong was drunk he lay down in the snow, and being unable to rise was seized and bound by the farm labourers, and carried to a courtyard. A farm labourer came out of the yard and said to them, "Our master has not got up yet so you had better hang this man up by his hands under the tower at the gate. By daybreak, Lin Chong had recovered from his drunkenness. Looking round he realized that he was in the yard of a big farm. He shouted out, "Who has dared to hang me up in this way?"
A farm labourer hearing him shouting came from inside the gateway, with a stick and spoke in a loud voice to him, "So your spirit is still unbroken?"
The farmer whose mustache had been singed also came on the scene and said, "Don't ask him; just beat him! When our master gets up he will cross-examine him minutely." The farm labourer beat him accordingly. Lin Chong had to submit to this beating but he said, "Never mind this! I have something to say to you."
Just then another farm labourer came on the scene, and said that the master was coming. Lin Chong saw him strolling with his hands behind his back, and upon arriving at the veranda he heard him say, "Whom are you beating?"
The farm labourers replied, "Last night we arrested this man who was stealing our rice!"
The gentleman approaching recognized Lin Chong. He immediately told the labourers to go away, and releasing him asked, "Drill Instructor, how is it that you were hung up here"
The farm labourers all retired.
Lin Chong recognized Chai Jin the "Small Whirlwind," and immediately said, "Sir, please save me!"
Chai Jin said, "Drill Instructor, why have you allowed these villagers to disgrace you, and bring you here?"
Lin Chong said, "That is hard to explain in a few words."
The two men went inside and sat down. Lin Chong then related in detail what had happened at the forage depot.
After listening to this Chai Jin said, "Elder brother, you have been unfortunate. But today Heaven has taken pity and made all straight again, so that you need not worry any more. This is my eastern estate. You can rest here for a few days, and then we will discuss your affairs again." He then told a labourer to bring a new suit of clothes for Lin Chong, and also to set out wine and food in the room which had a fire in it, as he would ask Lin Chong to dine with him. Lin Chong stayed at that place for about a week but we need not say anything more about that.
The superintendent of the prison at Cangzhou reported to his superior officer that Lin Chong had killed the head jailer, Lu Qian, and Fu An, and had set fire to the army fodder depot. Upon hearing of this the magistrate was upset, and immediately issued an order to every district and village that all lower officials were to do their best to arrest Lin Chong. Full particulars were to be given and a full description of Lin Chong was to be placarded in every village and inn on the roads, and a reward of three thousand strings of cash was to be given to any person who gave information leading to his arrest. They were also to make a strict inquiry and search for Lin Chong in every house in their districts.
When Lin Chong heard of these measures being taken he was so afraid that he felt as though he was sitting on a carpet full of needles. He waited until Squire Chai Jin returned to that estate, and then spoke to him. "I know that you do not want me to go but I really must depart as these officials are making careful inquiries, and a strict search for me from house to house. Should they come to your house you will, most certainly be implicated. As I am aware of your liberal-mindedness I beg you to lend me some money to cover my traveling expenses, and I will go and hide in some other place. Should I not die I will certainly recompense you, and serve you in any capacity." Chai Jin said, "As you, elder brother, wish to go I will write a letter, and you can take it to a place I know of. How will that do?"
"As you Squire," said Lin Chong, "will assist me in that way I will go and live in that place. But I do not know where you want me to go."
"It is a village surrounded by water, called Liangshan Marsh with a fortress in the centre called Wanzi Fortress and also Liao-er Hollow. The village has a circumference of over eight hundred //: Just now there are three fine fellows living there. The chief is Wang Lun nicknamed 'White Clothes Scholar'; the second man is Du Qian nicknamed 'Sky Feeler,' and the third man is Song Wan nicknamed 'Guardian in the Clouds.' Those men have about eight hundred brigands who plunder the people. Most of them are men who are wanted by the officials for some serious crime or other, and they have fled to that place as a refuge. The three leaders just mentioned are fine men, and as I am intimate with them, they frequently send me letters. I will write a letter for you to take there, and you can join their band. How will that do?"
"If it is as you say," said Lin Chong, "it will do very well."
Squire Chai Jin said, "The officials have posted two military officers at the pass to cross-examine all persons who leave or enter Cangzhou, and have posted up the notice about you there where you will have to go." Chai Jin bowed his head in thought, and then continued, "But I have a plan to enable you to pass them."

Lin Chong said, "If you assist me in this matter I shall never forget your benevolence."
The squire instructed a servant to take Lin Chong's bundle beyond the barrier erected on the road, and wait there for him. He then summoned about thirty horsemen arrayed in their hunting dress; carrying bows, arrows, flags, and spears; with falcons on their arms, and hunting dogs in leash. He placed Lin Chong in the middle of the company. They all mounted, and left together for the barrier. Upon arrival there the military officers recognized Chai Jin and his men. These officers had been to Chai Jin's estate before they were commissioned. They now got up from their seats and asked, "Sir, are you going to have some sport again?"
Chai Jin dismounted and asked them, "What are you doing here?"
They replied, "The Prefect of Cangzhou has issued an order, that the criminal Lin Chong must be arrested, and we have been specially appointed to watch this place. We have to closely question all travellers and merchants who pass this way before letting them pass."
Chai Jin laughed and said, "I am smuggling Lin Chong through among this company of men, so why don't you recognize him?"
The officers laughed. "Your Excellency knows the law so well that you would not do any smuggling. Please, sir, mount your horse again."
Chai Jin again laughed and said, "That being the case I will get along, and should I kill some game I will make you a present of it." So bidding them adieu Chai Jin and also his followers mounted their horses, and rode off. After riding about five //they came to the place where the farm labourer was waiting for them with Lin Chong's bundle. Chai Jin told Lin Chong to dismount; take off the hunting dress and put on his own clothes that the farm labourer had brought along. This he did, then buckled on his sword, put on his felt cap with the red tassel, shouldered his bundle, and holding his halberd in his hand, he saluted Chai Jin, and departed.
The hunters then mounted their horses, and after the day's sport they presented some of the game to the officers, and then returned to their village.
Upon leaving Chai Jin, Lin Chong travelled for about ten days. It was almost the end of the winter, and there were heavy clouds in the sky. A cold north wind was blowing that scattered snowflakes over the countryside. He plodded along through the snow without stopping anywhere. One very cold day when it was just getting dark, he saw in the distance an inn almost buried in the deep snow. It was close to a lake and on the bank of a stream. Upon arriving there he lifted the reed curtain hanging over the door, and hurriedly entered. Looking round he saw that there were many tables and stools. He took his seat, leant his halberd against a table, hung up his sword, set down his bundle and took off his felt cap. A waiter came forward and asked him how much wine he wanted. Lin Chong ordered two jars of wine. The waiter brought and placed them on the table. Lin Chong then inquired what food he could have. The waiter said they had beef both cooked and raw; a fat goose; and a tender chicken. Lin Chong ordered three *jin* of beef for a beginning. The waiter very soon brought this in on a big tray with several kinds of vegetables. While Lin Chong was drinking about four bowls of wine he noticed a man walking about with his hands behind his back, and occasionally going to the door to look at the falling snow. Presently the man asked the waiter who the other man was who was drinking wine. Lin Chong saw that he wore a fur cap with a deep rim; a rich gown lined with sable; his boots were made of deer skin, and were neatly made; he was tall, and had a commanding appearance; he had prominent cheek bones, a mustache, and a small beard.
Lin Chong called for some more wine, and upon it being served he asked the waiter to have a bowl of wine with him. After the waiter had drunk his wine Lin Chong asked him how far it was to Liangshan Marsh. The waiter said that although it was only about a //away there was only one way and that was by water. Lin Chong asked him if he could get a boat for him. The waiter said that as there was so much snow, and also it was getting dark he could not find a boat that day.
"If you can find me a boat at once I will give you plenty of money," said Lin Chong.
The waiter said that there was no place there where he could find a boat.
Lin Chong wondered what he must do under these circumstances. But after drinking a few cups of wine he became more perplexed. Previously when he was Drill Instructor at the Eastern Capital he had drunk wine and had a good time but who would have thought that Gao Qiu would injure and brand him, and then force him into his present predicament. "I am," he thought, "a castaway; although I have a family I cannot go home; a country and yet cannot visit it. It is enough to break one's heart." Being so much chagrined he asked the waiter to bring a pen and ink, and wrote a poem on the white wall:

Justice he loved; loyalty his glory,
For these his fame was sung;
And everywhere they knew the hero,
The man of deeds, Lin Chong.
But now he sails on a sea of trouble,
Drifts like a reed—and where?
But powerful east of Mountain Tai,
With luck, he'll rule there.

This written he put down the pen, and had another drink. As he was drinking, the man with the fur-lined gown came forward and embraced him saying, "What a brave man! You committed a great crime at Cangzhou, and yet you come here! The officials have offered a reward of three thousand strings of cash for your arrest so what is your object now?"
"Do you know me then?" asked Lin Chong.
"Are you not Lin Chong, the 'Leopard's Head'?"
Lin Chong said, "My name is Zhang."
The man laughed at this, and said, "You need not talk so absurdly. You have just written your name on the wall, and also your face is branded so that it is quite clear who you are."
"So are you really going to arrest me?" asked Lin Chong.
The man again laughed and said, "Why should I arrest you?" He then requested Lin Chong to come with him to an arbour at the back of the inn, where he told the waiter to take a lamp and some wine. Upon arrival there he gave him respectful salutation, and then they sat down face to face.
The man said, "I just heard you inquiring about the road to Liangshan Marsh, and about engaging a boat. That is a stronghold of some robbers, so why are you going there?"
"I will tell you all about it," said Lin Chong. "The police are doing their utmost to capture me, and as I have no safe place to go to, I am going to join the band of the fine fellows at that mountain stronghold."
"As matters are like this," said the man, "there will certainly be a man who will recommend you to the robbers."
Lin Chong said, "A friend of mine at Cangzhou in the Henghai County has given me an introduction."
"Perhaps he is Chai Jin, the 'Small Whirlwind'?"
"How do you know that?"
"Chai Jin is on friendly terms with the chief of the bandits at the mountain stronghold, and correspondence has been continually passing between them," said the man. "Previously when Wang Lun failed to pass an examination he went with Du Qian to Chai Jin's house, and lived there for several days. When they left Chai Jin gave them money to cover their traveling expenses, and so they are beholden to him."
Upon hearing this Lin Chong saluted, and said, "Although I have eyes I do not recognize your eminence. I request your name."
The man again saluted before replying, "I am an agent of the robber chief Wang. My name is Zhu Gui but the robbers call me 'Dry Land Crocodile.' My native place is Yishui County in Yizhou Prefecture. I had an order from the mountain stronghold to open a wine shop here so that I could spy and listen to the conversation of the merchants and others who pass this way. If I hear of any valuables I go and report them to the headquarters on the mountain. If the traveller has no valuable I let him go. But if he has money I either hypnotize him or kill him outright, then cut up the flesh and salt it, and boil the fat into oil for use in the lamps. I heard you inquiring the road to Liangshan Marsh so I did not treat you in that way. Also I saw you write your name on the wall, and I had heard of you as a great hero from the men who had passed this way from the Eastern Capital but I had not expected to meet you. An introduction from Squire Chai Jin combined with your wide-spread reputation will insure you having a responsible position under our chief Wang." He then prepared some fish, meat, and other food, and entertained Lin Chong. Both of them sat in the arbour at the side of the lake drinking and eating until midnight.
Lin Chong asked whether they could get a boat to take them across. Zhu Gui assured him that he could get a boat, and he need not worry. They could stay there until daybreak, and then depart. So they both went to their rooms for a sleep.
At daybreak Zhu Gui called Lin Chong, and after washing they had their breakfast consisting of wine and meat. It was not yet very bright. Zhu Gui opened the windows of the arbour, and taking a bow decorated with magpies, he shot an arrow that had a whistle attached, across the water to a spot where the reeds were flat with the ground.
Lin Chong asked what was the purpose of shooting the arrow.
"That is a signal to the stronghold," said Zhu Gui. "A boat will be sent very soon."
In a short time they saw about five bandits in a boat emerge from the reeds on the other side, and they quickly rowed the boat across to the arbour. Lin Chong picked up his baggage and weapons, and was conducted on to the boat by Zhu Gui. The bandits rowed the boat across to the other side, and brought it to the Jinsha Bank. Upon touching the bank Zhu Gui conducted Lin Chong ashore. The robbers carried Lin Chong's baggage and weapons, and the party started off to ascend a hill that was there. On both sides of the road Lin Chong noticed that there were large trees of enormous girth, and halfway up the hill they passed an arbour which was lavishly gilded. Upon turning a corner they came to a barrier where there were arranged many spears, broad swords, two edged swords, halberds, bows, crossbows, short spears, and all around were round logs, and bowlders for rolling down the hill against an ascending foe. The bandits went inside to report their arrival. The two men, Zhu Gui and Lin Chong, entered the stronghold, and advanced between two rows of armed bandits who had their flag flying. After passing through two more barriers they came to the gate of the stronghold. Lin Chong saw that there was a drilling ground as flat as a looking-glass and with a circumference of about 1,958 yards and surrounding the spot on all sides were lofty, majestic cliffs. On two sides were small buildings, and in front was the principal entrance. Zhu Gui conducted Lin Chong to the Assembly Hall where in the principal seat was Wang Lun, at his right hand sat Du Qian the "Sky Feeler," and on his left sat Song Wan.
Zhu Gui and Lin Chong both stepped forward, saluted and called out "*nuo*" to attract attention, and the latter took up his position slightly at one side and behind Zhu Gui, who introduced him, "This is Drill Instructor Lin Chong of the Imperial Guards from the Eastern Capital, commonly known as 'Leopard's Head.' Because of the enmity of Marshal Gao Qiu, he was branded and banished to Cangzhou, and while there the army fodder depot in his charge was burnt down. Because he had killed three men he fled to Squire Chai Jin, with whom he is on very friendly terms. The latter has written a letter of introduction for you."
Lin Chong took the letter out of his breast pocket, and handed it to Wang Lun who requested him to be seated on the fourth chair, and Zhu Gui to be seated on the fifth chair. Wang Lun then ordered wine to be brought, and after they had drunk three cups each he asked about the health of Squire Chai Jin.
Lin Chong replied that Chai went hunting everyday.
After asking the question Wang Lun thought of the time when he was only a poor scholar, and being without luck, he had come there with Du Qian to join the bandits. Afterwards they had been joined by Song Wan, with many men and horses. He had no special ability, and Du Qian and Song Wan had only common military skill. This man had been a Drill Instructor and he must have great military skill. If they admitted him he would soon see their weakness, and take advantage of it, and in case of a fight how could they overcome him? Should they decline to receive him he would be angry. But if they offered excuse, then he would go away and they would avoid any trouble. But that would look as though they had forgotten the kind treatment they had from Squire Chai Jin. However under the present circumstances they could not allow him to stay here. He therefore told his followers to prepare a feast, and invited Lin Chong to take part in it. All the five men dined together, and when they had finished Wang Lun told the servants to bring a tray with fifty taels of silver, and two rolls of coarse silk cloth. Upon their arrival he stood up and said: "Squire Chai has written us a letter introducing you, and recommending that you should join our band but unfortunately we are short of rations, and the rooms are in disorder; our followers are very few; and I am afraid that your prospect would be spoiled by staying here. We hope you will not laugh at our small presents or be offended but we hope that you will be able to find a bigger stronghold than this where you can stay."
Lin Chong replied, "I request you to listen to what I have to say now. I heard of your great reputation over three hundred //away, and I have come a long distance to find a refuge under your roof. Relying on the influence of Squire Chai I fled to your stronghold to join your band. Although I have no ability I hope that you will allow me to stay here as without flattering I can say that I am willing to die in case of danger. I did not come here for money, and therefore I hope the chief will take my request into favourable consideration."
"This is only a small place, and we cannot afford to keep you here," said Wang Lun. "Don't think we have any other reason."
Zhu Gui remonstrated with Wang Lun, "Elder brother, please allow me to speak on this matter. If our supply of food is small we can borrow some from the neighbouring villages and distant market towns; as for dwelling, there is enough timber on this mountain and the surrounding land to build a thousand houses. This man has come here with an introduction from Squire Chai so how can we ask him to go to another place? Moreover Squire Chai previously treated us well, so if we do not receive this man here it will look bad. This man has great skill, and will use it to our advantage."
Du Qian said, "I do not think that it is right to say that the admittance of this one man will be too much for our stronghold? But I say that if we do not receive this man, Squire Chai will be offended and will think that we are very ungrateful. As he helped us so much in the past how can we turn this man away?"
Song Wan offered his advice, "In view of the great influence of Squire Chai I suggest that we keep Lin Chong here, and make him one of our leaders. On the other hand, if we do not employ him all the other outlaws like ourselves will laugh at our lack of gratitude."
"You are overlooking something," said Wang Lun. "Although this man committed a great crime at Cangzhou but you do not know yet what his real intention was in coming here. If he has bad intentions what will you do?"
Lin Chong said, "I fled to this place to join your band because I had committed a crime. Why do you suspect me?"
"It that case, if you really want to join us, you should present a 'membership application,' said Wang Lun.
"I know something about writing 'characters,'" said Lin Chong, "please let me have ink and paper to write it out."
"Drill Instructor," said Zhu Gui, "you do not understand. When anybody joins our band, he must present an application. That means that he must go down the mountain and kill a man. Then when he returns and presents a man's head, the chief will be satisfied. That is what we call 'presenting an application.'"
Lin Chong said, "That won't be difficult, and I will go at once, and get it done. But I am afraid it will be some time before anyone comes along."
Wang Lun said, "Very well, I will allow you three days, and if you present your application in that time you can join us but if you fail to do so then do not blame me if I don't admit you."
Lin Chong agreed to these conditions. He then went with the bandits to his quarters, and slept there that night. During the night Zhu Gui departed and went down the mountain to his inn.
The following morning Lin Chong got up early, and after breakfast, buckled on his short sword, and took his halberd in his hand. He then summoned one of the bandits to show him the way down the mountain, and crossing the lake by boat, he hid himself at a lonely spot on the road waiting for someone to pass. He waited there from early morning till late at night without a single individual passing that way. He was very disappointed at this but summoning the bandit they both returned to the mountain stronghold.
Upon reaching the stronghold Wang Lun asked where the "membership application" was.
Lin Chong replied that not a single person had passed him that day so that he had not been able to get a head.
Wang Lun said that if he did not get a head the next day it would be awkward.
Lin Chong did not reply to this as he was so depressed. He went and had his meals and then went to bed.
The following morning he again summoned the bandit to go with him down the mountain.
The bandit suggested that they should go to the southern road that day. They did this, and hid in the forest on that road. About noon a large party of about three hundred people passed but as they all kept close together Lin Chong dared not attack anyone of them. He still kept looking out but not another person passed that way.
Lin Chong spoke to his bandit companion, "How unlucky I am! Here I have been watching for two days, and no single person has passed me."
"Elder brother, never mind," said the bandit. "There is still one more day left, and tomorrow I will go with you to the eastern road."
When they got back at the stronghold Wang Lun asked where the head was. Lin Chong dared not reply but simply heaved a sigh.
"I suppose you have not got one today," said Wang Lun laughingly, "I gave you three days but two have already passed without any result. If you don't get one tomorrow you need not try to see me but instead you must leave the mountain at once."
Lin Chong withdrew to his quarters in a very melancholy frame of mind. Gazing towards heaven he sighed as he thought how that thief Gao Qiu had ill-treated him, and how both gods and men had not given him the least assistance. Really he had had very bad luck.
The following day after breakfast he packed up his things in a bundle, and left them in his room. Then picking up his weapons he departed with his bandit companion and went down the mountain and across the lake to the eastern road. He said to the bandit, "If I do not get a head today I then have to go and find another place where I can get a peaceful living." They hid in a forest there until noon without anyone passing. The snow had ceased falling, and it was a very bright clear day. Lin Chong picking up his weapons spoke to his companion, "I see that I am again unfortunate. I think I had better get my bundle, and set out for another place before it gets dark."
His companion pointed with his finger and said, 'Fine! But is not that a man coming?"
Lin Chong looked in the direction pointed out, and said that he felt ashamed. In the distance he saw a man coming along by the foot of the mountain. He waited until the man got near and then taking his halberd he struck it against the ground, and jumped out of the shade of the forest. The man upon seeing Lin Chong exclaimed "*Ai Ya*," threw down his load, and ran away. Lin Chong ran after him but could not catch up to him. The man disappeared round the shoulder of the hill. Lin Chong spoke to his bandit companion who had followed him, "You see what bad luck I have! After waiting for three days the man who turns up runs away."
The bandit replied, "Although you cannot kill the man you can seize the bundle of valuables he has left behind instead."
"You can carry the baggage up the mountain but I will wait here for a little time more."
A short time after the bandit had departed with the booty Lin Chong saw a tall man again coming along the road. Lin Chong said to himself, "Now Heaven is assisting me."
The man was armed with a long bladed halberd, and upon getting near and seeing Lin Chong he shouted in a very loud voice, "You thief! I shall murder every bandit I can get hold of. Where is my baggage? I am going to arrest you as you have 'pulled the tiger's whiskers.'" So saying he sprang forward, and Lin Chong noticing his extremely fierce expression, advanced to encounter him. The fighting of this man with Lin Chong resulted, as we shall see, in an addition to Liangshan Marsh.

At Liangshan Marsh tigers bold and fierce,
At Water Margin beasts with glaring eyes.

**012**

**Lin Chong Becomes a Bandit at Liangshan Marsh & joins the outlaws take him on board; Yang Zhi Sells His Sword in the Eastern Capital at Kaifeng**

Lin Chong saw that the man wore a broad-brimmed felt hat from Fanyang with a red tassel on top, a white silk tunic bound at the waist by a broad band of vertical stitches, leggings of alternate strips of black and white, deerskin socks, and short hairy cowhide boots. A sword at his waist, a halberd in his hand, he was tall and had a large blue birthmark on his face and sparse reddish whiskers. The felt hat was pushed far back on his shoulders, his chest was exposed, a knotted bandanna covered his head.
Halberd in hand he shouted: "You dirty robber! Where have you taken my luggage and valuables?"
Lin Chong irately refused to answer. Eyes glaring, mustache bristling, he rushed forward, grasping his halberd, to give battle. The snow clouds were gone, the sky had cleared. Thin ice coated the edges of the stream. On the bank the two attacked each other with murderous fury. They fought for thirty rounds, with neither being the gainer, then hacked away for another dozen.
Just as the struggle was reaching its climax, high on the mountain a voice rang out: "Stop fighting, brave fellows!"
Lin Chong leaped from the combat circle, and he and his opponent stayed their hands. Down the mountain came the White-Clad Scholar Wang Lun, accompanied by Du Qian, Song Wan and many of the bandits. At the foot of the slope they got into boats and crossed the lake.
"Beautiful technique, both of you," Wang Lun commended. "This is our brother Lin Chong, known as Panther Head. And you, sir, with the blue face? Would you tell us your name?"
"I'm called Yang Zhi. I am descended from three generations of generals, the grandson of Duke Yang Linggong. Yet here I am, wandering around Guanxi. When I was younger, I passed the military examination, and was appointed an aide in the palace. When Longevity Hill was being built, the Taoist Emperor sent ten of us aides to Lake Taihu to collect grotesque rock formations and coloured stones and bring them back to the capital to decorate the hill.
"I never knew my luck was so bad. On the return trip, when we were crossing the Yellow River, my boat capsized and the rocks I was transporting were sunk. I didn't dare report back to the capital, and I ran away. Recently, I heard that I was pardoned, and I was on my way to the Eastern Capital with money and valuables. I intended to spend some in the Council of Military Affairs to see whether I could arrange another position for myself. The peasant I hired was carrying them on a shoulder-pole when your men snatched them away. I hope you'll return them to me."
"Aren't you also called the Blue-Faced Brute?" asked Wang Lun.
"That is correct."
"So that's who you are! We'd be very pleased if you came to our stronghold for a few cups of wine. We'll return your belongings there. What do you say?"
"Since you know me, why not just return my luggage? That'll be just as good as inviting me to drink."
"I was in the Eastern Capital a few years ago, sitting for an examination, and I heard of your fame. Today, I've been fortunate enough to meet you. How can I let you leave empty-handed? Please rest a while in our stronghold. That's all I ask."
Yang Zhi went with Wang Lun and the others across the lake and climbed to the fortress on the top of the mountain. Zhu Gui was also summoned to come up the mountain and meet him, and all gathered in Righteous Fraternity Hall. On the left, in four armchairs, sat Wang Lun, Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui. There were two armchairs on the right, the first for Yang Zhi, the second for Lin Chong. When all were seated, Wang Lun ordered a feast of mutton and wine in Yang Zhi's honour. Of that we need say no more.
To dispense with idle chatter, when the assembled diners had drunk several cups, Wang Lun said to himself: "If we keep only Lin Chong here, it won't be to our advantage. Why not put on a show of kindness and keep Yang Zhi as well? Then we can play one off against the other."
He pointed at Lin and said to Yang: "This brother was a drill instructor in the Mighty Imperial Guards in the Eastern Capital. He's known as Panther Head Lin Chong. Marshal Gao can't abide good people. He framed Lin Chong, had him tattooed with the mark of a criminal and exiled him to Cangzhou. There, Lin ran into trouble again. He, too, has just come here. I don't want to detain you if you're set on going to the capital to try and get yourself a new position. I myself found I had no choice but to give up civil affairs and become an outlaw here in the hills. You have committed a crime. Although you're been pardoned, you'll never attain your former rank, especially since that rogue Gao Qiu now holds military authority. Do you think he'll forgive you? You'd do better to stay on in our small stronghold, sharing our loot and wine and meat, and be an outlaw like the rest of us. How does that strike you?"
"It's very considerate of you leaders. But I have a relative in the Eastern Capital who was implicated in my case, and I haven't thanked him yet for his help. I still think I'd better go. I hope you'll return my luggage. If you won't, I'll just have to leave without it."
Wang Lun laughed. "Of course we won't force you, if you don't want to remain. Please set your mind at ease. Spend the night. You can go tomorrow morning."
Yang Zhi was very pleased. They drank late into the second watch, then all retired. The next morning, farewell toasts were drunk to Yang Zhi. After breakfast the chieftains directed a bandit to carry Yang's belongings. They went with him down the mountain as far as the beginning of the trail and bid him farewell. The bandit ferried him across the lake and took him to the road. Yang departed and the outlaws returned to the stronghold.
Only then did Wang Lun agree to let Lin Chong occupy the fourth armchair, and Zhu Gui the fifth. From then on, these five bold fellows of Liangshan Marsh pillaged and plundered together. Of that we'll say no more.

Yang Zhi set out down the road. He found a peasant to carry his luggage, and told the bandit to go back. After a number of days, Yang Zhi arrived in the Eastern Capital. He took quarters in an inn, paid off the peasant, removed his weapons, and ordered food and drink. A few days later, he sent someone to the Council of Military Affairs with money and gifts to try, by dispensing largesse high and low, to get himself reinstated as palace aide. It cost him a lot but finally he was granted an interviews with Marshal Gao.
Gao read all the documents concerning his case. "Ten of you aides were sent to transport grotesque rock. Nine delivered their cargo. Only you, you clod, lost yours," the marshal said angrily. "You didn't even report back. Instead you ran away. We couldn't get our hands on you for a long time. Now you want a job again? You may have been pardoned but you still have a criminal record. We can't use you!" He scrawled a refusal on Yang's application, and had him expelled from the Imperial Guards headquarters.
Dejectedly, Yang returned to the inn. "Wang Lun was right," he thought. "It's just that I didn't want to sully the family name. I hoped for a chance to distinguish myself with spear and sword in a border post, to win honours for my wife and opportunities for my sons, and reflect glory on my ancestors. I never expected to get such a rebuff! Poisonous cruel Marshal Gao!"
Yang was quite depressed. A few more days at the inn and his money was gone. "What am I going to do?" Yang fretted. "I'll have to sell the ancestral sword which has never left my side. There is no other way out. I should be able to get a couple of thousand for it. That will keep me in expense money till I find a place for myself."
The same day he tied a few strands of grass to the sword, showing that it was for sale, and took it to the market-place. But though he stood all morning on Horse Fair Avenue, no one asked about the sword. Around noon he went to the busy Tianhanzhou Bridge area to try his luck there.
He hadn't been waiting long when people on both sides of the square suddenly began running away and hiding in lanes near the river. "Hide, quickly!" they yelled, as they fled in panic. "The tiger is coming!"
"Nonsense," said Yang. "What would a tiger be doing in the middle of a prosperous city?" He remained where he was. Then he saw a hulking swarthy fellow staggering half-drunk in his direction. He recognized the notorious rowdy Niu Er, known throughout the city as the Hairless Tiger. A trouble-making, rioting bully, he had been arrested several times but Kaifeng Prefecture seemed unable to control him. Whenever he appeared, everybody got out of his way.
Now he lumbered up to Yang and took the sword from his hand. "How much do you want for this?"
"Three thousand strings of cash for a precious ancestral blade."
"All that money for this shitty thing! For thirty coppers I can buy a knife that will slice meat and cut bean-curd. What's so good about your sword? What's precious about it?"
"This isn't one of those iron blades they sell in the shops. This is a rare weapon."
"How so?"
"First," it can cut copper and pierce iron without curling the edge. Second, it can slice a tuft of hair blown against it. Third, it can kill a man and come away clean."
"Would you really dare cut copper coins?"
"Bring them out and I'll show you."
Niu Er went to a pepper shop near the bridge and returned with twenty three-cent pieces. He piled these on the bridge railing and said to Yang: "If you can cut through these, man, I'll give you three thousand strings of cash."
Though people were afraid to come close, many of them watched from a distance.
"Nothing to it," said Yang. He rolled up his sleeves, grasped the sword fi and took aim. With one downward chop he cleaved the pile of coins neatly in two. The watchers set up a cheer.
"Quit that bloody racket!" growled Niu Er. "What did you say the second thing was?" he asked Yang.
"Take a tuft of hair and just blow it against the blade. It will cut right through it."
"I don't believe you!" The bully pulled a few hairs from his head and handed them to Yang. "Go on, blow, I want to see."
Yang held the hairs in his left hand and blew them with one hard puff against the sword edge. Two halves of the tuft floated to the ground. A loud cheer broke from the crowd. More and more people were gathering.
"What was the third thing?" Niu Er asked.
"Kill a man without staining the blade."
"How can you do that?"
"When you hack a man with this sword there's not a drop of blood on it. That's how sharp it is."
"I don't believe it! Kill a man and show me."
"Here, in the imperial city? Who would dare? I'll kill a dog for you instead."
"You said a man, not a dog!"
"If you don't want the sword, forget it. Quit pestering me."
"Let me see it!"
"Haven't you anything better to do? Don't provoke me."
"Kill me, if you dare!"
"You're never wronged me, we're not enemies. I've proven my claim twice. Why should I kill you?"
Niu Er grasped Yang Zhi's arm. "You must sell me that sword!"
"If you want to buy it, where's your money?"
"I don't have any!"
"What are you holding me for, then?"
"I want that sword!"
"You can't have it!"
"Stab me, if you're so brave!"
Yang angrily pushed him away. Niu Er fell to the ground. He clambered to his feet and butted Yang in the chest.
"Neighbours, you're my witness," Yang shouted. "I'm selling my sword because I need money. This knave is trying to snatch it away, and now he's struck me!"
But the watchers were all afraid of Niu Er. No one dared come forward to make peace.
"So I struck you," cried Niu Er. "Suppose I beat you to death? What of it!" He swung his right fist in a wild punch. Yang dodged and chopped a furious blow at Niu Er's forehead. The scoundrel collapsed. Yang closed in and finished him with two thrusts in the chest. Blood gushed copiously, and Niu Er lay dead.
"I've killed the wretch," Yang exclaimed. "I don't want to implicate you but the man is dead. Please come with me to the authorities and be my witness."
The neighbours quickly rallied round and accompanied Yang to the Kaifeng prefectural office. They all presented themselves and knelt where the prefect was holding court. Yang laid the sword before him.
"I was formerly an aide in the palace but because I lost a cargo of grotesque and coloured stones, I was dismissed. Now, I have no money, and I took my sword on the street to sell it. The rascal Niu Er grabbed for it and started to punch me. I killed him in a moment of rage. These neighbours all saw what happened."
Many spoke on his behalf.
"Since he has come forward voluntarily," said the prefect, "let him be spared the preliminary beating." He ordered that a long cangue be fitted around Yang Zhi's neck, and that two inspectors and a forensic expert take Yang and his witnesses back to the Tianhanzhou Bridge for an examination at the scene of the crime.
The prefect drew the appropriate documents.
After the witnesses submitted formal statements in writing they were released under guarantees to produce themselves whenever the court summoned. Yang Zhi was locked up in the jail for condemned prisoners.
The guards and keepers were sympathetic when they heard that he had killed Niu Er the Hairless Tiger. They didn't demand money from him and treated him well. People who lived near the bridge said he had rid them of a scourge. All chipped in and raised some silver. They had Yang Zhi's meals sent in and dispensed money gifts among his jailers high and low.
The prosecutor considered him a good man who had removed a nuisance from the streets of the capital and had confessed of his own volition. No one had petitioned for justice for Niu Er. And so the charges against Yang were made much milder. He was interrogated a number of times, and finally convicted of "involuntary manslaughter during a fight."
He served a term of sixty days. Then, on the recommendation of the prosecutor, he was brought before the prefect, who ordered that the cangue be removed, and that Yang be given twenty strokes and tattooed with the "golden print" of the criminal, and be exiled to the garrison in Daming, the Northern Capital. The sword was impounded by the court.
Documents were drawn and two escorts appointed. Who should they be but Zhang Long and Zhao Hu. A seven-and-a-half-catty cangue was fastened around Yang Zhi's neck, final instructions given to the escorts, and the three set out.
When they neared the Tianhanzhou Bridge several of the larger shopkeepers, who had raised a special fund, invited them to a tavern for food and wine, and gave the escorts some silver. "Yang Zhi is a good man who's rid the people of a menace," they said. "Please take good care of him on the road to the Northern Capital."
"We know that without you telling us," said the guards. "Don't worry."
Yang thanked his hosts, who gave him the rest of the silver for his travelling expenses, and all went their separate ways.
The former palace aide returned to the inn where he had been living, paid his food and rent bill, collected his clothing and luggage, and treated his escorts to food and wine. He had a doctor apply salve to the wounds from his beating, then took to the road with his guards.
They travelled towards the Northern Capital, a single marker every five *li*; a double marker every ten. In the big county and prefectural towns, Yang bought food and drink for Zhang Long and Zhao Hu. They spent the nights in hostels, walking again at the break of day. Before long they reached the Northern Capital, and put up at an inn.
The governor of Daming, the Northern Capital, had jurisdiction over both military and civilian affairs. He was very powerful. His name was Liang Zhongshu, and he was the son-in-law of Cai Jing, the Premier in the Eastern Capital. That day was the ninth of the second lunar month, and Liang was holding court. The two escorts entered with Yang Zhi and presented the documents from Kaifeng Prefecture. Liang read them. He had met Yang in the Eastern Capital. Now he questioned him closely, and Yang related how Marshal Gao had refused to reinstate him, how he tried to sell his sword when his money was gone, and his killing of Niu Er. Liang ordered his attendants to remove the cangue, and said he would keep Yang Zhi in his service. He issued a receipt for the prisoner and sent the two escorts back to the Eastern Capital. Of them we'll say no more.
Yang attended Governor Liang in his mansion from morning till night. Liang was impressed with his diligence. He wanted to make him a lieutenant and give him a regular monthly wage. But he thought the other army men would be against it. So he ordered that a military tourney be held among all junior and senior officers at the training field outside the East Gate.
That night Liang summoned Yang to him and said: "I'm thinking of making you a lieutenant with a fixed salary. How good are you with weapons?"
"I attained my original position by passing arms tests. In the palace I was a military aide. I'm familiar with all eighteen forms of the fighting arts. The news that Your Excellency is willing to raise me dispels the dark clouds and lets the sunlight through. If I can make the slightest advance, I shall serve you with the devotion of a horse that is saddled and bridled!"
Liang was delighted. He presented Yang with a set of armor. That night nothing more transpired.
The next morning there was a gentle breeze and the sun was warm. It was the middle of the second lunar month. After breakfast, Liang took Yang with him and they mounted. Escorted by troops front and rear, they proceeded through the East Gate. On the training field, officers and men and many officials were arrayed to greet the governor's arrival. Liang got off his horse at the reviewing pavilion, and took his seat on a silver filagreed chair. Military officers stood to the left and right of him in two rows. Fierce-looking commanders watched from front and rear, and on all sides. On a central platform were two famous generals; Li Cheng, known as the King of the Skies, and Wen Da, known as the Mighty Sword. Either could single-handed defeat ten thousand of the foe, and they commanded great hosts of men and horses. Now both came forward and hailed Liang respectfully.
A yellow flag rose over the generals' platform, and on either side fifty golden drums boomed in thunderous cadence. Three fanfares on the trumpets were followed by three flourishes on the thunder drums. An absolute silence fell on the training field. Over the generals' stand rose a plain white flag. Five companies quickly massed before it in formation. Then above the generals' platform a red signal flag fluttered in the wind. Again the thundering drums rolled, and the five companies broke into two battle formations, weapons at the ready.
The white flag waved. Two lines of cavalry trotted neatly to the fore and reined in their horses.
Liang sent down an order for Lieutenant Zhou Jin to present himself. Lieutenant Zhou, in the right formation, spurred his horse and cantered to the pavilion. He jumped from his mount, stabbed his lance into the ground, and hailed the governor in a ringing voice.
"Let the lieutenant display his military skill," Liang directed.
Zhou grasped his lance and vaulted back into the saddle. He put his horse through its paces in front of the reviewing stand, wheeling left and right while performing several figures with his lance. The watchers shouted their approval.
"Call Yang Zhi, the military stalwart who was transferred here from the Eastern Capital," said Liang.
Yang circled to the front of the pavilion and hailed the governor.

"I know that you formerly were a military aide in the palace in the Eastern Capital, and were exiled here for committing a crime," said Liang. "Today robbers and bandits rampage freely. Our country needs strong men. Dare you joust with Zhou Jin? If you can defeat him, I'll give you his position."
"Since Your Excellency is so benevolent, I cannot refuse."
Liang directed that Yang be given a battle charger, and that the armorer supply him with weapons. Then he ordered Yang Zhi to don his armor, mount and vie with Zhou Jin.
Yang went to the rear of the pavilion and put on the armor he had been given the night before, buckled it tight, set a helmet on his head, took bow and arrows, sword and lance, mounted his horse and cantered out.
Liang called: "Let Yang Zhi and Zhou Jin first vie with lances."
"How dare he cross lances with me," Zhou Jin said angrily. "An exiled criminal!" Little did he know how his words infuriated Yang, who came to do him battle. In this tourney, Yang Zhi won top honours and became tamed throughout the army. But who was the person this contest caused to appear?

Lin Chong looked and saw that the stranger wore a felt hat in the Fanyang style with a red tassel on top, and a white cotton surcoat bound at the waist with a silk belt, black and white leggings, deerskin socks and buffalo-hide boots, still with the hairs on. A sword hung from his waist and he carried a halberd. He was immensely tall. His face was adorned with a great blue birthmark, and he had thin reddish whiskers. He had pushed the hat back till it rested on his shoulders, and bared his breast. His head was covered by a soft knotted scarf.
This giant now brandished his halberd and shouted furiously: "What have you done with my baggage and my valuables, you dirty thief?"
Lin Chong was in no mood for niceties. He made no answer but glared ferociously, and his tiger's moustache bristled with indignation. He raised his halberd and advanced to confront the giant. The snowstorm had abated by this time and the clouds had thinned and scattered. There was a thin strip of ice along the river bank, and it was here that the two of them set about each other with murderous intent. The fight raged to and fro but even after thirty or so assaults, there was nothing to choose between them.
Another ten assaults, and just as a climax must surely be approaching, a voice rang out on the mountain: "Hold, put up your weapons!"
Immediately Lin Chong leapt back out of the circle of combat. Both men stayed their hands and looked towards the mountain. Wang Lun, Du Qian and Song Wan were descending, accompanied by a number of troops. When they had crossed the water, Wang Lun said: "You're both good, your technique's bloody marvellous, in fact. Now this is our friend, Leopard's Head Lin Chong. So you there, with the blue face, who are you? Do us the favour of telling us your name."
The giant replied: "I am descended from three generations of warriors, and I'm a grandson of Duke Yang Ling. My name's Yang Zhi. I've been here in Guanxi for quite a while now but when I was younger I passed the military examinations and served as a commander of the palace guard. When Emperor Hui Zong was building the Marvellous Mountain,[1] he sent ten of us commanders to Lake Tai to supervise the convoys of precious plants and stones on their journey to the capital. It was my misfortune that after I had escorted my convoy safely to the Yellow River, a sudden storm arose and capsized the boat, resulting in the loss of the entire cargo of plants and stones. This made it impossible for me to return to my duties in the capital. I was forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Recently an amnesty was announced, so I collected a quantity of silver and valuables and I was just on my way back to the capital, to report to the military tribunal and see if I can set my affairs in order. I employed a peasant to carry my baggage, and now you have seized it. I'd like to know if you're prepared to return it."
"You're not by any chance the gentleman they call the Blue-Faced Beast are you?" Wang Lun asked.
"Indeed I am," the giant replied.
"If you're Commander Yang, then we must invite you to our mountain fortress to share a few cups of wine with us. That will provide the opportunity for returning your things."
"Since you know me, friends, why not just return the baggage? I'd like that better than any invitation!"
"But Commander, I've heard so much about you — you see, I once had the privilege of going to the capital for the civil service examinations. Now I've had the fortune to meet you, how can I let you go without a celebration? I beg you to come to the mountain retreat, if only for a little while; you can't deny me this."
The upshot of it all was that Yang Zhi went with Wang Lun and the rest, crossing the water and ascending the mountain. They also sent for Zhu Gui to join them. They gathered in the Hall of the Heroes, where Wang Lun and his companions took the four chairs on the left, while Yang Zhi sat on the right, with Lin Chong next to him. A sheep was killed, wine was produced and a feast was laid on in Yang Zhi's honour. We needn't dwell on this. The main thing was that while several cups were downed Wang Lun had been pursuing his own thoughts: "If we let Lin Chong stay it's a dead certainty we're going to have problems. Why not put on the appearance of friendliness and ask Yang Zhi to stay too? The two of them will balance each other out." Accordingly he introduced Lin to Yang Zhi as follows: "This gentleman is Leopard's Head Lin Chong, former instructor of the palace guard in the capital. Because that bastard Marshal Gao can't bear the sight of a good man, he was sentenced and banished to Cangzhou, and now he's got into some more trouble there that is why he's just come to us. You say, Commander, that you want to go back to serving in the capital. Don't think I'm trying to involve you — as you see, I had to exchange the pen for the sword and now I'm an outlaw — but you, too, didn't you commit a serious crime? Even if there's an amnesty, I very much doubt if you'll get your old job back, especially when there's a rogue like Gao-the-Ball in charge of military affairs. I can't see him pardoning you. Wouldn't you do better to stay and throw in your lot with us? We share the loot, there's no shortage of food and drink, we're a loyal band. What say you, Commander?"
Yang Zhi replied: "I thank you all sincerely for your offer. But I have a relative in the capital who stuck his neck out for me. I haven't had a chance to thank him yet. So I still want to go, and I hope you will agree to return my baggage to me. If not, I'll just go as I am, empty-handed."
"Of course if you don't want to stay how could we force you to join us?" said Wang Lun pleasantly. "For tonight, though, you must please stay and rest here. You can leave first thing in the morning."
Yang Zhi was greatly relieved. They went on drinking and the night was well advanced before they parted and went to bed.
The next day they were all up early, to wish Yang Zhi a speedy journey and drink a cup of wine with him. After breakfasting, they appointed one of their men to act as bearer to Yang Zhi and set off to accompany him themselves as far as the highway that they reached after crossing the water. Here they bade Yang Zhi farewell and returned to the mountain stronghold. Wang Lun now assigned Lin Chong the fourth place, and Zhu Gui the fifth and henceforth the five of them pursued their life of banditry from their mountain base. We shall leave them to it.
Once on the highway, Yang Zhi soon found a peasant to carry his baggage and dismissed the bandit. After travelling a number of days, he reached the capital. The first thing he did there was find an inn to put up at. The peasant was paid and sent away. Yang Zhi went to his room and disposed of his baggage, putting aside his halberd and sword and handing the waiter some loose change to go and fetch food and wine. Some days later, he sent someone to test the waters at the military tribunal, and bring his case to people's attention. To this end he employed all the cash and valuables he had brought with him, distributing gifts to high and low, all in the hope of getting back his old position at the palace. He had exhausted considerable sums before finally his petition was received and he was granted an interview with Grand Marshal Gao. When he appeared before the Marshal, Gao-le-Bel had been looking through his dossier. "There were ten of you," he bawled, "sent to escort the convoys of precious plants and rocks. Nine of them returned safely to the capital and handed over the goods. But you, damn your eyes, you lost your convoy and what's more, you didn't even come to report the matter. We've been after you for a long time without being able to lay hands on you. And now you turn up here asking to have your old job back. Well, there may be an amnesty but it's not going to do you any good." With that he took a brush and crossed the petition through and through, after which he had Yang Zhi unceremoniously thrown out.
Yang Zhi returned despondently to the inn. "Wang Lun's advice was obviously quite right," he thought to himself. "But I bear an honourable name, and I didn't want to disgrace what I inherited from my parents. It was my hope to do great things, to win glory with sword and halberd and store up wealth and name for my descendants, as well as honouring my ancestors. I didn't expect a blow like this. Marshal Gao, you poisonous reptile! How you persecute me!" Thus ran his thoughts.
He remained some days more at the inn, till his funds were entirely gone. It was a case of:
The precious convoy went astray,
*Malice seems to have won the day.*
*Better than to seek power at court*
Is live in the wilds where men aren't bought.
"Well, what do I do now?" he wondered. "I've nothing left of value but this fine blade, a family heirloom which has never left my side till now. It seems there's nothing else for it: I shall have to sell my sword in the market. I should get a thousand cash or more that will allow me to leave and seek my fortune elsewhere."
That same day he took the sword and wrapped it in straw, to show it was for sale, and went to the market to sell it. He went to Horse-market Street, and stood there four hours but no buyers came. At noon he moved to the Bridge of the Milky Way which was very busy. He had not been there long when he noticed people on all sides were running to hide in the little lanes and alleys. There was great confusion but he heard people shouting: "Quick, let's get out of here. The Wild Animal is coming!"
"That's strange!" Yang Zhi thought. "This is the centre of a fine city, how can there be a wild animal here?" But as he stood there watching, he saw in the distance a huge swarthy ruffian of awesome appearance, staggering drunkenly towards him. Yang Zhi did not like the look of him at all:
*The lines of his face are shifting as a ghost's but his body has an entirely human solidity. It's as if a gnarled tree with tangled branches has been turned into a body with arms and legs. Or as if a rotten old stump has transformed itself into an ogre. The whole body is covered in rough skin like a shark's. The whole head and face are matted with tightly curling spirals of hair. He sticks his chest out mulishly and his forehead is furrowed by three obstinate lines.*
This character was in fact well-known in the capital. He was a drunken good-for-nothing whom everyone called "The Ox." He used to rampage through the streets at will, running amok, creating havoc, and even the police and the courts were unable to keep him in check. That's why everyone used to hide when they saw him coming.
Well, this "Ox" charged up to Yang Zhi and grabbed the sword. "How much do you want for this, then?" he asked.
"This fine blade is a family heirloom," Yang Zhi said. "I'm asking three thousand for it."
"What, that much for a bloody sword? I can get a knife in the market for thirty, and it'll do to cut meat or bean-curd. What's so special about yours? Why d'you call it a 'fine blade'?"
"This is not just your ordinary soft-steel blade, you can't buy it in a shop. It's tempered steel."
"What does that mean, tempered steel?" the Ox asked.
"One, you can cut through copper or iron with it and you won't turn the edge. Two, blow a hair onto it and it'll cut the hair in two. Three, it will kill a man without a trace of blood."
"You'd really cut copper and iron with it?" said the Ox.
"Bring me some and I'll show you."
The Ox went off and found a perfume and spices shop under the bridge, where he procured twenty triple coins that he piled up on the parapet of the bridge. "There you are," he said to Yang Zhi. "If you can cut clean through that, I'll give you the three thousand cash." There was quite a crowd of spectators by now, though they didn't dare to approach; they preferred to watch from afar.
"No problem at all," said Yang Zhi, and rolling up his sleeves he grasped the sword, took aim, and cut the pile of copper neatly in two with a single blow. A gasp went up from the crowd.
"What the hell are they oohing and ahing about?" growled the Ox. "What was that second thing you said?"
"If you blow a hair onto it, it will cut it in two. Just take a few hairs and blow them against the blade. It will cut them neatly."
"Don't believe you," said the Ox. He pulled out some of his own hair and handed it to Yang Zhi saying: "You do the blowing and I'll watch."
Yang Zhi took the hairs in his left hand and placed them on the blade and blew hard. The hairs were cut in two and the halves floated down to the ground. The crowd gasped again. More and more people were gathering.
"All right, what was the third thing?" the Ox asked.
"It will kill a man without a trace of blood."
"How can you kill a man without blood?"
"If you kill a man with one blow of this sword you won't see a drop of blood because it's so sharp."
"Don't believe you," said the Ox. "Go on, kill a man so I can see."
"How can I kill someone in the middle of the imperial city? If you don't believe me, find a dog and I'll kill it for you."
"You said it will kill a man, you didn't say anything about a dog," the Ox objected.
"If you don't want to buy it don't buy it. You're beginning to annoy me."
"Give it here."
"Watch your step! What have I done to provoke you?"
"You'd dare to kill me?"
"I've no quarrel with you, past or present. If you don't want it, someone else will. Why would I want to kill you, without any reason?"
The Ox gripped Yang Zhi's arm tightly and said: "But I want to buy your sword."
"If you want to buy it, let's see the colour of your money."
"I haven't got any money."
"In that case, you'd better take your hands off me."
"I want your sword."
"You're not going to have it."
"If you're so brave, let's see what you can do to me."
Yang Zhi lost his patience. He struck out and sent the Ox flying. The Ox staggered to his feet and tried to rush Yang Zhi.
"Be my witness, neighbours," Yang Zhi cried out. "I came here to sell this sword, because I've no money for my travel expenses, and this good-for-nothing tried to steal the sword and assaulted me."
But the bystanders were too scared of the Ox and no one dared to speak up.
"Assaulted you, did I?" said the Ox. "Then I might as well finish you off." And with this he drew back his right arm and aimed a mighty blow. Yang Zhi leapt aside, quick as lightning, drew his sword and slashed in fury at the Ox's forehead. The Ox crashed to the ground. Yang Zhi leapt on him and thrust the sword twice more into his breast. Blood flooded over the ground and the Ox expired on the spot.
"I've killed the stupid bastard," Yang Zhi shouted. "Friends, I don't mean to implicate you but since he's dead, you'd better all come with me to report it to the police."
The bystanders crowded round Yang Zhi and escorted him to the Kaifeng Magistracy. The court happened to be in session, and Yang Zhi, still holding the sword and surrounded by inhabitants of the district, was shown into the Governor's presence. He knelt down, holding out the sword in front of him, and made his declaration: "I am a former commander of the palace guard, because I had the misfortune to lose a convoy of precious plants and stones I was relieved of my duties, I am bankrupt and I wanted to sell this sword. I was suddenly attacked by a worthless scoundrel known as the Ox who punched me and wanted to take my sword by force. I lost my patience and killed him. These good neighbours can vouch for the truth of this."
The witnesses all spoke up and testified in Yang Zhi's favour.
"Since you have voluntarily given yourself up," the Governor said, "you will be spared the preliminary beating."
A cangue was imposed, and two policemen escorted Yang Zhi, together with an investigating officer and the crowd of witnesses, to the place of the crime to verify the facts. A report was drawn up, the witnesses, after making their statements, were released on bail, the court acted on the evidence immediately and Yang Zhi was thrown into the death cell.
Now when Yang Zhi landed in that gaol, all the warders, the turnkeys and other officers, hearing that he had killed that public enemy, the Ox, regarded him as a hero. They made no demands for money but rather, showed him the utmost consideration. The people from the neighbourhood of the Bridge of the Milky Way, seeing that Yang Zhi had rid the streets of a public menace, got up a collection for him and amassed quite an amount of silver. They took him food, and tipped every officer in the gaol, from the highest to the lowest. The investigating magistrate also considered Yang Zhi a capital fellow, because he had rid the city streets of a scourge, and since no plea was forthcoming from the Ox's family, he couched the accusation in the most favourable terms possible: after a perfunctory interrogation it was established that there had been a scuffle, a disturbance, resulting in blows, and an accidental death.
After the obligatory sixty days, the court's findings were presented to the Governor. Yang Zhi was summoned, the cangue was removed, he was given twenty strokes, the tattooer was called in to affix the two golden seals, and Yang Zhi was banished to the Northern Capital, Daming, where he was to serve in the garrison. His valuable sword was impounded.
When the order had been written out, two officers were appointed as his escort. They turned out to be Zhang the Dragon, and Zhao the Tiger. A seven-and-a-half-catty cangue was imposed and sealed, and the two officers were instructed to watch him carefully during the journey. The people from the Bridge of the Milky Way who had made their collection waited for him and invited him, together with his guards, to an inn. They handed out silver and exhorted the guards as follows: "Remember that Yang Zhi is a good man, who rid the people of a menace; now you're on the way to the Northern Capital, we trust you will look after him." Zhang and Zhao said: "We are well aware that he is a good man, there's no need to tell us all this but anyway, don't worry, we'll take good care of him." Yang Zhi thanked everyone. The remaining silver was set aside for Yang Zhi's travel expenses. The crowd went their ways.
Then, we are told, Yang Zhi and the guards went back to Yang Zhi's hotel, where he paid for his bed and board, and collected the clothes and baggage he had left there. He ordered food and wine for the two officers and sent for a surgeon to make up a salve that could be applied to the wounds he received from the beating. After this they took to the road, heading north towards Daming and maintaining a steady pace. Whenever they came to a town of any size Yang Zhi bought wine and meat and invited the two guards to join him. They stayed at an inn every night, and set out again at dawn, along the national highway. In a few days they reached the Northern Capital. Entering the city, they sought out an inn to put up at.
Now in those days the Governor of Daming District, or the Northern Capital, had considerable powers: wearing his military hat he commanded the garrison, and with his civilian hat on he governed the civilian population. He was Liang Zhongshu, also known to his family as Shijie. He was a son-in-law of the imperial adviser Cai Jing.
It was now the ninth day of the second month, and the Governor was sitting in the audience hall when the two guards escorted Yang Zhi into his presence. They delivered the letter from the Kaifeng magistrate. Governor Liang read it. He happened to have met Yang Zhi previously in the Eastern Capital, and of course wanted to know exactly what had happened. So Yang Zhi told him how Marshal Gao had refused to reinstate him, how he had exhausted his funds and tried to sell his sword in the street, and how this had led to his killing the Ox. All this he recounted in due order. Governor Liang greatly relished the account. He ordered the cangue removed and retained Yang Zhi for his personal service. A receipt for the prisoner was signed and delivered to the guards who returned to the Eastern Capital. Of them we say no more.

Yang Zhi from now on served the Governor with diligence and alacrity. His industriousness and attention to detail impressed the Governor so much that the latter determined to promote him. The Governor's idea was to give him a commission in the army as ensign, with the corresponding emoluments but he was afraid this might meet resistance from his subordinates. He therefore instructed his military council to instruct all officers of whatsoever rank to assemble the following day on the training ground outside the Eastern Gate for military manoeuvres and jousts. That same evening he called Yang Zhi and told him: "I intend to make you an ensign in my army, on full pay but I'd like you first to tell me about your military qualifications."

"I passed the military examinations," Yang Zhi said, "and reached the rank of commander of the palace guard. I have studied the eighteen martial arts since I was a child. If you give me this opportunity, it will really be like sunshine after a storm. Give me just one inch of opportunity and I will serve you like an obedient horse."

The Governor was pleased with this answer, and made him the gift of a suit of armour.

Nothing more of importance happened that evening. The next day turned out warm and sunny — it was just the middle of the second month. After breakfasting, Governor Liang rode with Yang Zhi, surrounded by his bodyguard, to the Eastern Gate. At the training ground they found all the troops and a considerable number of officials already waiting. The Governor dismounted and ascended the tribune and took his seat on a silver chair in the centre. To right and left of him his officials and military commanders were lined up in order of rank, from general down to standard-bearer. He was guarded front and rear by an imposing group of officers. Also on the platform were two senior generals: these were Li Cheng, known as the Heavenly Prince, and Wen Da, known as "Swordsman Wen," each capable of facing ten thousand enemies. They now pressed forward at the head of a bevy of cavalrymen and sang out a resounding salute to the Governor, thrice repeated.

But already a yellow flag was floating over the tribune. Some thirty or forty gilded drums, deployed on all sides, began to beat in unison, and trumpets and bugles rang out three times. There was a triple roll from the kettle-drums, and then the whole assembly fell silent.

A white flag was now run up over the tribune and five troops of soldiers formed in front of it, with perfect dressing. At a wave of the red signal flag on the platform the drums rolled again and five hundred men divided into two opposing bodies, their officers presenting arms. Another signal from the white flag and the two troops of cavalry wheeled towards the stand, and came to a sudden halt as each man reined in his horse.

The Governor gave an order for the ensign, Zhou Jin, to report to him. Zhou Jin galloped forward from the right-hand troop and halted before the tribune. He dismounted, stuck his weapon in the ground, and thundered out a salute.

Governor Liang said: "Let the ensign give us a demonstration of his skill and prowess in the martial arts."

Zhou Jin promptly sprang onto his horse, weapon in hand, and proceeded to wheel and manoeuvre in front of the stand, with virtuoso flourishes of his weapon. The spectators applauded.

Then the Governor gave another order: "Call the exiled commander from the capital, Yang Zhi!"

Yang Zhi halted in front of the tribune and saluted.

"Yang Zhi," the Governor said, "I know that you are a former commander of the palace guard and that you were banished here for a crime. At present many bandits and robbers are preying on the land and the country has great need of brave men. Are you prepared to test your military skill against that of Zhou Jin? If you can defeat him, I will promote you to his position."

Yang Zhi replied: "Whatever you order, I will obey."

Governor Liang commanded that Yang Zhi be provided with a cavalry horse, and that the quartermaster should equip him with all the necessary arms. Yang Zhi was to prepare himself and then do battle with Zhou Jin on horseback. Yang Zhi retired behind the tribune to don the armour he had been given. When he had tied on the breastplate, put on a hood, and taken up bow, arrows, sword and a long lance, he mounted and rode forth. The Governor said, "Let Yang Zhi and Zhou Jin first test their skill with lances."

Zhou Jin was fuming. "Am I to joust with a convict, does this jailbird dare to measure lances with me?"

Who would have expected that Yang Zhi's misfortunes would have brought him thus into conflict with Zhou Jin? However, without this trial things would have been different and how should we have seen Yang Zhi's name echoed among the ranks of the brave, top honours for the whole army awarded to him alone?

LIN CHONG noticed that the man was wearing a felt hat, with a red tassel on top; a white silk fighting gown; a loose sash; a pair of trousers with the bottom wrapped round with blue and white bands of cloth (like puttees). His socks were of deerskin, and his boots were of undressed cowhide. He had a halberd in his hand, and a sword in his belt. He was over six feet high, and his face was covered with blue spots. His mustache and scanty side whiskers were of brown colour; his felt cap was hanging down his back by the strings; his loose clothes were displaying his broad breast; and wrapped around his head was a small turban. Pointing his halberd at Lin Chong he spoke in a loud voice, "You thief! Where is my baggage?"

As Lin Chong was not in a good temper he did not reply but glared at his adversary, and turned up the corners of his mustache. He grasped his halberd, and advanced to fight with the man. Just at that time the weather was clear and bright, with no clouds in the sky.

These men in their bloodthirsty struggle trampled down the snow on the bank of a small stream at that spot.

They had about thirty bouts, without either side winning or losing. They went on and had about ten more combats when they heard on the hillside a loud voice saying, "These two fine fellows, you need not fight any more."

Upon hearing this Lin Chong leapt to one side out of the ring as an indication that he had stopped fighting. The two men looking up the hillside saw there Wang Lun, the "White Clothes Scholar," Du Qian, Song Wan, and many other bandits. They descended the hill, and crossed the lake by boats. Upon their arrival Wang Lun said, "You two, good fellows, are expert with the halberd. Quite marvelous! This is my younger brother, Lin Chong, 'Leopard's Head.' Who are you, the blue marked face? What is your name?"

The man replied, "I am the grandson of Marquis Yang Linggong, and my father and his grandfather were generals. My name is Yang Zhi, and I am now wandering about 'west of the pass.' While young I passed a test for my military skill and had a small position in the Imperial Guard. The Emperor decided to build a palace on Mount Wansui, and deputed ten of us lieutenants to get the marble from a quarry near the Taihu Lake, near Suzhou, and convey it to the Eastern Capital. I did not expect bad luck but in conveying the marble along the Yellow River a strong wind overturned the boat and the valuable cargo was all lost. I was afraid to go back to my post, and ran away to hide myself in some other place. Since then, however, I have been pardoned. So I got together some money and presents for the officials of the Grand Council at the capital, to try to regain my position. In passing this place I hired a farm labourer to carry my baggage, and did not expect that I should lose it like this. Are you now going to give it back?"

"Is not your nickname 'Blue Faced Brute,'" inquired Wang Lun.

"That is so."

"As that is the case," said Wang Lun, "please come to our stronghold, and after a few cups of wine I will return your baggage."

"You are a fine fellow," said Yang Zhi, "and as you know me I think it will be better if you give me my baggage, and never mind about the wine."

"When I sat for the examinations at the Eastern Capital a number of years ago," said Wang Lun, "I then heard of your fame. It is very opportune for us to meet here today, so how can I let you depart without entertaining you? Please come to our mountain stronghold just for a little chat. I really have no other intention."

Yang Zhi agreed to this, and thereupon they all crossed the lake, and ascended the hill to the stronghold. Zhu Gui at the inn was summoned to the stronghold for an interview. They all gathered together in the Assembly Hall. On the left were four seats for Wang Lun, Du Qian, Song Wan, and Zhu Gui, and on the other side were seats for Yang Zhi and Lin Chong. When they were all seated Wang Lun ordered a sheep to be killed, some wine to be prepared, and made arrangements for a banquet to entertain the guests.

While they were dining Wang Lun thought the situation over, and saw that if they kept only Lin Chong, he would discover their weakness. But on the other hand if they got Yang Zhi to stay he would be able to keep Lin Chong in order. So pointing to Lin Chong he said to Yang Zhi, "This our younger brother is Lin Chong, nicknamed 'Leopard's Head,' who previously was Drill Instructor in the Imperial Guards but the Marshal Gao Qiu, did not like him, and banished him to Cangzhou. There was some further trouble at that place so that he has just arrived here. You are a lieutenant and are on your way to the capital to get a position. I do not intend to ask you to join us but will simply point out that previously I sat for the civil service examination but afterwards became a brigand. Although you have been pardoned you will still be regarded as an offender, and therefore you will have a difficulty in getting back your previous post. Moreover, Gao Qiu is still in office so it is unlikely that he will be willing to give you a position. So would it not be better for you to stay here, and becoming a hero, share with us the silver, gold, wine, and meats? Do you not think this is a better plan?"

"I am much obliged to you for your kind invitation," said Yang Zhi, "but I have a relative at the capital, who was blamed for my offence, and I have never been able to thank him for his part in the affair. Today I must really go on my way to see him, so I hope that you will let me have my baggage at once. If you do not give it to me then I must depart empty-handed."

Wang Lun laughed at this, and said, "You say you will not stay, so how can I use force and compel you to join our band? I must ask you to rest here for the night at least, and depart tomorrow."

Yang Zhi was much pleased with this settlement, and after drinking wine together until about ten o'clock they each went to their separate rooms to sleep.

The following day they were up very early, and after breakfast the bandit chief detailed a man to carry the baggage, and accompany Yang Zhi down the mountain. All the leaders went down the mountain; across the lake, and put Yang Zhi on the road again where they bade him adieu, and then returned to their stronghold.

Wang Lun told Lin Chong that he would take thereafter the fourth seat, and Zhu Gui, the fifth.

Now we will not go into the question of the fighting and looting of these five leaders and their bandits on Liangshan Marsh.

Yang Zhi soon found a man to carry his baggage, and then dismissed the bandit soldier who went back to the stronghold on the hill. Within a few days he reached the Eastern Capital. Finding an inn he stopped there. He duly paid the countryman for carrying his baggage, and dismissed him. Taking off his sword and putting his baggage in a room, he gave the waiter a little money to go and buy some wine and meat for him.

After a few days he requested a man to go to the Grand Council, and make some arrangement for his case to be reconsidered. He also took the silver and gold articles, and sent them to the higher and lower officials with a request that he should be reinstated with his rank of lieutenant. When he had expended all his presents an order came instructing him to call and see the Marshal Gao Qiu . Upon Yang Zhi's arriving at the headquarters, Gao Qiu looked at his official record and was very angry. He spoke in a loud voice, "I see from this record that ten lieutenants were deputed to bring marble but nine executed the work, and you were the only one who lost a cargo. You did not even come and report the loss but instead ran away to avoid being arrested! Although you were pardoned of this serious offence, yet I cannot give you a commission in the army again." He then made his mark on the record and gave an order that Yang Zhi be driven away.

That hero left the headquarters in a very melancholy frame of mind. Upon arriving at his inn he thought matters over, and saw that Wang Lun was quite right in the advice he had given him. But as his family had a clean record, he could not join their band and disgrace his parents.

He hoped that he might by meritorious service at some distant frontier again establish a good reputation for himself, and even add to the luster of his ancestors, and make it better for his descendants. He did not, however, expect this rebuff. "Marshal Gao! How malicious you are! How cruel!" He was in a state of mental agony for some time.

He stayed at the inn for a few days until all his money was spent. Then he wondered what he must do. His ancestors had bequeathed him the best of swords which he had always carried with him. But now that he was in difficulty he had to go on the street and try to sell this sword for several hundred strings of cash. That would enable him to get away to some other place. So he tied some grass to the sword to indicate that it was for sale, and went out. He went to the Horse Market Street, and stood there for a long time, without any inquiry being made. In the afternoon he removed to the Tianhanzhou Bridge where there was more traffic. When he had been standing there a short time he noticed that the men on both sides of the bridge ran off to hide in the alleyways near the bridge. While Yang Zhi was looking on at this confusion he heard some men say, "Hide quickly! The 'Big Tiger' is coming!"

Yang Zhi said, "How strange! This is the capital, and yet there is a 'Big Tiger' here!" Looking along the street he noticed in the distance a big black man coming who was evidently half drunk as he staggered along. Yang Zhi then remembered that he had previously heard that in the capital there was a bully called Niu Er whose nickname was "Hairless Tiger." He had the reputation of always making rows and fighting on the streets. He had been before many magistrates but even the Prefect had not been able to make him submissive, and therefore when he came on the street everybody ran away to hide until he had passed. On this occasion he hurried up to Yang Zhi and took the sword out of the latter's hand. He asked, "How much do you want for this sword?"

Yang Zhi informed him that it was an excellent sword and an heirloom but he was willing to sell it for three thousand strings of cash.

"What sword is this that you want so much money for?" asked Niu Er. "I can buy a good sword for thirty cash which will cut up meat and bean curd. What is there about this sword that will justify you in calling it an excellent sword?"

"This sword," said Yang Zhi, "is not for use in an inn cutting up meat but is an excellent sword."

"But why do you call it an excellent sword?" asked Niu Er again.

Yang Zhi said, "This sword will cut through copper or iron without the edge being blunted, and again if you blow a hair against the edge the hair will be cut in half, and yet again if you kill a man there will be no blood left on the blade."

Niu Er asked, "But dare you cut copper with it?"

Yang Zhi said, "If you bring some cash here then you can see whether it will cut or not."

Niu Er went to a peppermint shop at the side of the bridge and demanded twenty copper coins valued at three cash each. He put these on the stone railing of the bridge and said to Yang Zhi: "If you can cut those in half I will give you three thousand strings of cash for the sword."

The people did not dare to come and see what was taking place but they stood around in the distance looking on.

Yang Zhi said, "That will easily be done." He took the sword and taking a careful steady aim he cut the coppers in half with one stroke. The crowd seeing what he had done applauded.

Niu Er said, "What are you people applauding for?" He then turned to Yang Zhi and asked him what was the second thing that the sword could do.

Yang Zhi said that if be got several hairs, and put them on the edge of the sword, and then blew, the hairs would be entirely cut in half.

Niu Er did not believe this but he pulled some hair from his own head, handed them to Yang Zhi and said, "You blow, and I will watch."

Yang Zhi taking the hair in his left hand, put it against the edge of the sword and with his blowing very hard the hair fell to the ground cut in half. The crowd had increased in size and applauded this.

Niu Er asked, "What was the third thing this sword can do?"

Yang Zhi said, "If a man is killed there is no sign of blood on the blade."

Niu Er asked, "How can that be?"

Yang Zhi said, "It cuts so quickly that the blood has no time to get on the blade."

Niu Er said, "I don't believe that. But you just kill a man, and I will see whether that will happen."

Yang Zhi said, "This is the Imperial city so how dare I kill a man here? But as you do not believe what I say, then get a dog and I will kill it, and you will then see what happens."

"Your claim was to kill a man, and you did not say anything about a dog."

Yang Zhi said, "I suppose you don't really want to buy. But why are you wasting my time by such remarks?"

"Let me have a look at the sword," said Niu Er.

Yang Zhi replied, "You are still talking without coming to the point. I did not ask you to come here to buy the sword, and I am not a person with whom you can pick a quarrel."

"Very well," said Niu Er, "perhaps you had better kill me!"

"I had no quarrel with you before," said Yang Zhi, "and now our bargaining has been fruitless, so why should I kill you?"

Niu Er took hold of Yang Zhi and said, "I most certainly want to buy your sword."

"If you want to buy then bring the money," said Yang Zhi

"I have no money," said Niu Er.

"As you are without money why do you hold me like this?"

"Because I want your sword."

"Then I won't give it to you."

"As you are a brave man you may give me a cut with the sword," said Niu Er in a provocative voice.

Yang Zhi became angry at this, and pushed Niu Er down on the ground. Niu Er got up and butted his head against Yang Zhi's breast.

Yang Zhi then addressed the surrounding crowd, "Neighbours, you have witnessed what has happened. I have no money, and want to sell this sword. This bully is determined to have it and has assaulted me, and wants to fight."

The neighbours were all afraid of Niu Er, and therefore nobody stepped forward to mediate in the quarrel.

Niu Er shouted, "You say that I have assaulted you, so if I do hit you it won't matter, I suppose." So saying he lifted up his right hand to strike Yang Zhi. But Yang Zhi drew back, seized his sword, and thrust the point of it into the neck of Niu Er who fell down. Yang Zhi stepped forward, and thrust his sword twice into the breast of Niu Er. The blood gushed out, and the latter was soon dead.

Yang Zhi spoke to the crowd of people, "I have killed this rascal, and I do not want any of you to be blamed for it. As he is quite dead now I want you to come with me to the *yamen*, and report voluntarily as to how it was done."

The bystanders came forward, and accompanied Yang Zhi to the *yamen* to give evidence. Upon arrival they found that the Prefect was in the court so they all crowded in and knelt down. Yang Zhi placed the sword before the Prefect, and said, "I was previously a lieutenant in the Imperial Guard but was dismissed owing to having lost a cargo of marble. As I had no money I took my sword to the street with the object of selling it. While I was there a blackguard named Niu Er came and tried to take the sword from me by force and also assaulted me. Because of this I got angry, and killed him. All these men saw what happened."

The bystanders confirmed this statement with many details.

The Prefect said that as Yang Zhi had come forward and confessed the crime he would not inflict the usual punishment of beating with the bamboo. He then instructed the coroner with two assistants to go and hold a post-mortem examination of the body. A cangue was put on Yang Zhi who, with all the bystanders, departed with the coroner to the Tianhanzhou Bridge. Upon their arrival a careful examination of the body took place, and after having recorded the inquisition they returned to the *yamen* where the evidence of the bystanders was recorded, and duly attested by them. They were then released by bail and Yang Zhi was sent to prison.

In the prison the superintendent, jailers, and turnkeys did not ask Yang Zhi to give them money this time but instead they took pity on him, and treated him well, because they heard that he had killed for the people the "Hairless Tiger," Niu Er. Moreover the neighbours near the Tianhanzhou Bridge collected money; some of which they gave to Yang Zhi, and with another part they purchased food and sent it to him, and another part was given to the prison officials with a request that they should treat Yang Zhi well. The magistrate who considered the case saw that Yang Zhi was a good man, and had rid the capital of a great bully. As no relatives or mourners had come forward from Niu Er's family, the judge decided to give a very light sentence. At several cross-examinations Yang Zhi besides confessing the crime, made it clear that he had done it unintentionally, and in a fit of temper. After keeping Yang Zhi in prison for sixty days without anything further turning up, the judge reported to the Prefect that the prisoner Yang Zhi had been given twenty blows with the bamboo, the cangue had been removed, he had been branded on both sides of his face and he recommended that he be banished to the Northern Capital, Daming Prefecture. The sword was ordered to be confiscated.

The Prefect thereupon issued an order that two aides, named Zhang Long and Zhao Hu, were to escort Yang Zhi, and that the prisoner was to have only a light cangue weighing ten pounds.
The wealthy people in the neighbourhood of the Tianhanzhou Bridge collected money to present to Yang Zhi, and then waited there for him and his escort to pass. Upon their arrival they were asked to adjourn to an inn for some food and wine. There they presented some silver to the escort, and said, "We think that Yang Zhi is a good man, and has rescued us from much danger and trouble, and we therefore hope that you will look after him well on the road to Daming."
Chang Long and Zhao Hu said, "We are already aware that he is a good man so you need not give us any orders and may rest assured that we will treat him well."
After the people had also given Yang Zhi plenty of money to cover his traveling expenses they all departed.
Yang Zhi then got his escort to take him to the inn where he had previously stayed, and there he invited them to take food and wine with him. He paid the money owing for the room he had occupied, got together his clothes and also bought some plasters which he applied to the sores left on him as a result of the bamboo he had been beaten with. All three then started off on the road towards Daming Prefecture. On the road there was a single stone every five *li*, and two stones every ten *li*. At every town and city Yang Zhi bought meat and wine which he asked his escort also to partake of. They walked during the day, and slept at inns for the night. In a short time they duly reached Daming. Upon arriving there they found an inn at which they stayed. At that time the commander-in-chief had his headquarters at the Northern Capital (Daming) where he had great power, and authority as he not only controlled the army but in addition governed the people.
The commander in chief was Grand Secretary Liang, the son-in-law of the Prime Minister Cai Jing.
It was the nineth day of the second lunar month when the escort arrived with Yang Zhi, and they delivered the report to that commander-in-chief who was at the headquarters at that time. Now it happened that Grand Secretary Liang had known Yang Zhi at the time he was stationed in the Eastern Capital. Upon reading the report he at once asked how it had happened that he had left the army.
Yang Zhi explained how he had been dismissed from the army by Marshal Gao, and how he had spent all his money in bribing officers to get him reinstated. How he had tried to sell his sword on the street, and during a fit of temper had killed Niu Er. He told him every detail of his affairs.
When Grand Secretary Liang heard it all he was much pleased. He gave orders for the cangue to be removed, and that Yang Zhi was to be employed at headquarters. The reply for the Eastern Capital was sent off by the escort.
At Liang's headquarters Yang Zhi was very diligent and attentive at his duties. The commander-in-chief noticed this, and decided to give him a commission in the army with a salary attached to it. But as he was afraid of some opposition to this from the other officers he issued a general order that all ranks should proceed to the drill ground outside the East Gate (two *li* from the city) where there would be a general parade and inspection of the troops.
On the evening of the same day when he issued this order Grand Secretary Liang sent for Yang Zhi to come and see him. Upon his arrival he spoke to him: "I have thought of giving you a commission in the army with a suitable salary. But I do not know what training or skill you have in military matters."
"I previously passed a military examination, and obtained a commission. I, in fact, learned the eighteen military arts when I was quite young. I am much obliged to you for your mentioning this, and this seems to me as the emerging of the sun from among the clouds. Should I be promoted I shall be only too glad if I had the opportunity of doing some services to you."
Grand Secretary Liang was much pleased upon hearing this, and presented him with an officer's uniform and armor.
The following day was the middle of the second month, and the weather was warm with a little breeze. After breakfast Grand Secretary Liang and Yang Zhi mounted their horses, and with a bodyguard both in front and behind proceeded outside the East Gate. Upon their arrival at the parade ground, the large number of troops and officers stood to attention. They proceeded to the inspection platform where they dismounted, and Grand Secretary Liang took his seat in a chair ornamented with silver. On either side of him stood the officers: staff officers, drill masters, generals, commanders, adjutant-generals, captains, and lieutenants. Before and behind were numerous minor officers. Near his chair stood his two chief Generals Li Cheng nicknamed "Li, the King of Heaven," and Wen Da nicknamed "Wen, the Great Sword." These two were the most skilled in the military arts. They led their foot and cavalry troops before the platform for inspection, and they all saluted Liang by calling out "*nuo*" three times. A yellow flag was floating over the platform, and on both sides were about fifty drums and trumpets which kept up a rhythm of sounds three times each alternately. Everything else was very quiet. A large white flag was then unfurled on the platform, and all the troops stood to attention upon seeing this. A red signaling flag was next unfurled, and the drums and trumpets burst forth to draw attention to it, and immediately five hundred soldiers wheeled round into two sections, holding their swords in their hands.
A small white signaling flag was next waved, and all the officers on horseback assembled in front of the platform, and there reined their steeds in. Grand Secretary Liang summoned Lieutenant Zhou Jin, and that officer galloped forward, dismounted in front of the platform, stuck his spear in the ground, stood to attention, and at the same moment replied in a loud voice "*nuo*."
Grand Secretary Liang then told him to go through his fencing drill. Upon hearing this order Lieutenant Zhou Jin took his spear, mounted, and went through a display of cavalry horsemanship and sword drill in front of the platform, and was applauded by the troops.
Grand Secretary Liang then summoned Yang Zhi, and upon that officer's arrival he spoke to him: "Yang Zhi, I know that previously you were an officer at the Eastern Capital but have been banished here because of some fault. Just now the bandits are giving a lot of trouble, and the government must employ men to suppress them. Now are you willing to have a bout with Zhou Jin so that I can see your skill and whether you are suitable for a commission? If you defeat Zhou Jin you can have his rank and duties."
"As you, my benefactor, ask me to do this I must do it," said Yang Zhi.
Grand Secretary Liang then gave orders for a mail suit of armor, suitable arms, and a horse to be placed at Yang Zhi's disposal, while he was fencing with Zhou Jin. Yang Zhi went to the rear of the platform, and put on the armor and helmet which had been presented to him the night previously. He took a bow, an arrow, and with a sword at his side, and a spear in his hand, he mounted a horse and rode forth. Grand Secretary Liang then gave orders that Yang Zhi and Zhou Jin must fence first with spears only. Upon hearing this Zhou Jin was angry, and said, "This banished criminal! He dares to fence with me!" Who could know that Yang Zhi was also extremely angry at having to fence with Zhou Jin.

At the tourney, Yang Zhi was famous,
Soon in army none so dangerous.

## 013

**The Blue-Faced Brute Suo Chao the Hasty Battles in the Northern Capital by taking part in the Military Sports & shows his battle skills; the Urgent Vanguard Vies for Honours & Strives for Merit on the Training Field at the Parade Ground & Yang Zhi gives the people of Damming some thrills**

Zhou Jin and Yang Zhi sat their chargers beneath the pennants, ready to enter the field and joust with lances.
"Wait!" shouted General Wen Da. He crossed to the pavilion and addressed himself to Governor Liang. "Although we don't know which of these two is more skilled, Your Honour," he said, "the point of a lance is merciless, meant only for destroying robbers and brigands. These are men of our own army, and they may be hurt. A slight wound can cripple, a heavy wound can kill. It would have a bad effect on our forces. I suggest that the lance tips be removed and the ends bound in felt and dabbed in lime. Let each of the mounted men wear black tunics when they fight. The man with the most white spots loses."
"An excellent idea," said Liang. He issued an appropriate order. The two contestants went to the rear of the pavilion, where the points of their lances were taken off. The ends were wrapped so thickly that they became knobs of felt. Each then donned a black tunic, dabbed his lance-head in a bucket of lime, mounted, and rode out onto the field.
Lance erect, Zhou Jin kicked his horse and cantered towards Yang Zhi. The former military aide slapped his mount and advanced to give battle, twirling his weapon. Back and forth they clashed, to and fro, wheeling, circling, man against man, horse against horse. They fought forty or fifty rounds. Zhou Jin was dappled white, as if spattered with bean-curd in nearly fifty places. Yang had only one white spot, over his left shoulder blade.
Liang was delighted. He shouted for Zhou Jin to mount the pavilion. "My predecessor made you a lieutenant," he said. "But after seeing the way you fight I don't consider you fit to lead troops into battle—and as a lieutenant, no less! Let Yang Zhi take this man's place!"
General Li Cheng entered the pavilion. "Zhou Jin isn't very good with lances," he admitted, "but he's a fine mounted archer. It wouldn't be right to demote him. You'd only affect morale. Why not let him and Yang Zhi contend with bows and arrows?"
The governor nodded. "Well said." He issued the order.
Zhou and Yang stabbed their lances into the ground and were given bows and arrows. Yang took his bow from its sheath, strung it, jumped on his horse, cantered up to the pavilion, and reined in. He rose in his stirrups and bowed.
"Excellency, an arrow in flight knows no mercy. It can cause a grievous wound. Please issue your instructions."
"When warriors fight, who thinks of wounds? Even if death results, there will be no consequences."
Yang returned to the battle arena. On Li Cheng's directions each contestant was issued a shield which he attached to his arm.
"You shoot three arrows at me, first," Yang proposed. "Then I'll shoot three at you."
Zhou Jin wanted nothing more than to put an arrow through him. But Yang, an experienced army officer, was sure he could deal with his tricks, and was not perturbed.
A blue flag waved over the generals' platform. Yang slapped his horse and cantered south. Zhou raced after him. He tied his reins to the pommel, grasped the bow in his left hand and fitted an arrow with his right. Zhou stretched the bow to its utmost and let fly at Yang's back. The instant he heard the twang, Yang ducked down well over his stirrups, and the arrow sailed harmlessly past.
Flurried, Zhou hastily drew a second arrow from the quiver, fitted it to the bow, aimed, and sent it winging towards the back of his rival. This time Yang didn't dodge but merely tapped the speeding arrow with the end of his bow and knocked it clattering to the sward.
Zhou was frantic. By then Yang had reached the end of the field. He spun his mount around and came galloping back in the direction of the pavilion. Zhou checked his horse quickly, turned and gave chase. Eight racing hoofs, like smashing plates and crashing gongs, churned up the green turf with the fury of a typhoon.
Zhou set a third arrow to his bowstring. With all his might he pulled the weapon to the full, his eyes glaring at the centre of Yang's back, and again let fly.
Yang turned at the sound and snatched the arrow in mid-air. Then he trotted up to the pavilion and tossed Zhou's arrow to the ground.
Governor Liang was entranced. He ordered Yang to shoot three arrows at Zhou. Again the blue flag waved. Zhou cast his bow and arrows aside, grasped the shield firmly in his hand and rode south. Yang straightened up in the saddle, clapped his mount with his heels and drummed after.
First, he sprang an empty bowstring. Hearing the sound behind him, Zhou twisted around and raised his shield. But there was nothing.
"That rogue is good with lances but he can't shoot," thought Zhou. "I'll wait till he makes his second false shot and demand that he forfeit the match. I'll be proclaimed the winner."
Zhou's mount by then had reached the far southern end of the field. It turned and started back towards the pavilion. Yang's horse followed, while Yang drew an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the bow.
"If I hit him in the middle of the back. I'll kill him," he mused. "He's not my enemy. I'll tag him in a spot that's not fatal."
His left arm extended as if holding up Mount Taishan, his right arm bent as if cradling a baby, Yang stretched the bow and string into a full moon. Quicker than it takes to say, the arrow streaked like a comet into Zhou's left shoulder. He tumbled to the ground. His horse galloped behind the pavilion. Officers and men hurried forward to help him.
Liang was very pleased. He ordered that a warrant immediately be issued giving Yang Zhi the position held by Zhou Lin. Overjoyed, Yang dismounted and presented himself in the pavilion to express his thanks and receive his appointment. But a man on the left side of the stairs suddenly came up and intervened.
"Not so fast!" he exclaimed. "You'll have to joust with me, first!"
Yang looked at him. He was a towering fellow with a round face, large ears, a big, thick-lipped mouth, bristling side-whiskers and an imposing bearing.
The man strode up to the governor and hailed him respectfully. "Zhou Jin has been ill and hasn't fully recovered his spirits. That's why he lost to Yang Zhi," he explained. "Though I'm not very talented I'd like to pit my skill against Yang's. If he can gain the slightest advantage of me, never mind about Zhou Jin's position, I'll yield him mine, with never a word of complaint till the end of my days!"
Liang saw that it was none other than Suo Chao, a captain in the guards regiment of Daming Prefecture. Suo's temper was as explosive as a pinch of salt in the flames, and he was eager to win glory for his country, always plunging first into the fray. And so he was known as the Urgent Vanguard.
Li Cheng came down from the generals' platform and presented himself before the pavilion. "Yang Zhi was a military aide in the palace, Excellency," he said. "Naturally, he is skilled with weapons. We should have known Zhou Jin is no match for him. Now, with Captain Suo there can be a real contest."
Liang thought to himself: "I want to raise Yang Zhi in rank but my officers are against it. If he can defeat Suo Chao they'll have nothing more to say. It will silence them for good."
He summoned Yang before him. "Will you joust with Suo Chao?"
"I could not refuse, since that is Your Excellency's wish."
"Good. Change your gear behind the pavilion. Tie your armor on well." He instructed the armorer to provide suitable weapons, and added: "Let him use my battle charger." To Yang Zhi said: "Be careful. This is no ordinary match."
Yang thanked him, and went to change his equipment.
Li Cheng gave his instructions to Suo Chao. "You're in a special position," he said. "Zhou Jin was your protege. He lost. If that should happen to you, it would be a reflection on the entire Daming officer corps. I'm lending you an experienced battle charger and a set of armor. Be careful. Let nothing tarnish your valor."
Suo Chao thanked him, and went to get ready.
Liang rose and walked out to the stairs. Attendants brought his silver filagreed armchair and placed it before the moon terrace railing. Liang sat down. Officers stood respectfully in lines to his left and right. They directed that the three-tiered parasol of tea-coloured silk topped by a golden gourd be opened behind him.
At a signal from the generals' platform a red flag waved, golden drums on either side thundered, and cannon boomed from each of the two formations upon the field. Suo Chao galloped out and waited behind the pennant-bedecked gate. Yang Zhi also emerged from one of the formations and rode swiftly to the rear of the gate, where he reined in.
Now, a yellow flag fluttered over the generals' stand, and the drums again thundered. Both formations raised a mighty shout. Then a hush fell on the field as gongs sounded and a pure white flag was broken out. None of the watchers breathed a sound. They stood in absolute silence.
Above the generals' stand a blue flag rose. For the third time the war-drums sounded. The pennanted gate of the left formation swung open. Bells tinkled, and Captain Suo Chao entered the arena and checked his horse. Weapons in hand, he was a heroic figure! On his head was a lion helmet of pure steel, with a long red tassel dangling behind. He wore a coat of iron mail, bound at the waist by a gold-plated girdle with an animal's face. Plates of bronze protected his chest and back. Overall was a pink cape with circular designs, fastened at the neck by cords of green wool. His feet were shod in open lattice-strip leather boots. A bow hanging from his left shoulder, a quiver of arrows hanging from his right, he held a golden axe at the level in his right hand as he sat astride General Li's battle-tested pure white charger.
Then the gate of the right formation opened. Bells rang, and Yang Zhi, lance in hand, rode forth. In the combat area he checked his mount and levelled his lance. A bold warrior! The helmet of steel on his head gleamed like frost in the sunlight, trailing behind it a blue tassel. Yang wore chain mail of petal and leaf pattern. A woolen sash held the garment in place. Animal-face plates, front and back, gave added protection. Over his shoulders a white floral-designed cape was draped. Purple wool cords tied it at his neck. On his feet were thick-soled brown leather boots. A leather-handled bow and a quiver of arrows with wedge-shaped heads hung from his shoulders. In his hand was a steel-inlaid lance of pure iron. He rode Governor Liang's flame-coloured charger, a horse as swift as the wind.
The officers on both sides murmured their admiration. Although their skill had yet to be displayed, the two presented a striking picture. A flag officer, riding due south and bearing a gold-spangled banner with the word "Order," cantered up and said: "An order from His Excellency. He wants you each to do his best. Any slackness will be punished. The winner will be handsomely rewarded."
The two combatants galloped to the centre of the field and turned to face each other, weapons raised. Suo Chao charged Yang Zhi furiously, swinging his axe. Yang, equally militant, twisting his lance, pressed forward to meet him. They clashed in the centre of the field before the generals' stand. Each exerted his utmost skill. Back and forth, to and fro, four arms flailing, eight hoofs flying, the battle raged for more than fifty rounds with no sign of a winner.
Liang watched from the moon terrace in a daze. The officers on either side of him cheered without cease. On the grounds soldiers marvelled to one another. "We've been in the army for years and have been in many battles but never have we seen warriors like these!"
Li Cheng and Wen Da, on the generals' stand, kept yelling: "Well done!"
Wen Da was worried that one of them would be wounded. He instructed the flag officer to ride out with his "Order" banner and separate them. Gongs suddenly sounded on the generals' stand. But Yang and Suo were both eager to win glory. Neither would desist.
The flag officer galloped up, shouting: "Stop, good warriors! His Excellency wants to issue an order!"
Only then did the two contestants lower their weapons and subside on their mounts. They cantered back to their original starting points and halted by their respective pennanted gates, facing Governor Liang, awaiting his command.
Li Cheng and Wen Da came down from the generals' stand and proceeded to the moon terrace. "Excellency," they said to Liang, "such skill as those two display should be made full use of!"
Very pleased, Liang directed that the combatants be summoned. The flag officer transmitted the order and Yang and Suo rode up to the pavilion and dismounted. A soldier relieved them of their weapons. They entered the pavilion and bowed.
Liang presented each with a silver ingot and a set of fine clothes, and bestowed on them the rank of major. He directed that commission documents be drawn, as of that day.
Suo and Yang bowed and expressed their thanks. They left the pavilion, bearing their gifts, removed their combat equipment and changed their clothes. They then returned to the pavilion and thanked the assembled officers. Liang ordered the two to pay respects to each other and join the majors.
The massed soldiers withdrew, banners waving, preceded by the golden drums, beating out the victory roll. Liang, in the company of his senior and junior officers, remained in the pavilion for a feast.
When the sun was sinking in the west, the dining ended. Liang mounted his horse and started back to his residence escorted by his officers. In the van, side by side, rode the two new majors, their heads garlanded with red flowers.
The street was lined with joyous crowds, young and old, as the entourage entered the city's East Gate. "What are you so merry about?" Liang demanded, from his horse. "Are you presuming to laugh at me?"
Several old men knelt and replied: "We were born and raised in Daming, the Northern Capital but in all our years we never saw such jousting! We were out at the field, watching those two bold fellows. Who wouldn't be happy to see such skill!"
Liang was very pleased. He returned to his residence. His officers went their respective ways. Suo Chao's friends gave a drinking party to celebrate his appointment. Yang Zhi, a new-comer, didn't know anybody, and retired, alone, to his quarters. From then on, he served Liang diligently. Of that we need say no more.
We'll dispense with idle chatter and come to the point. Liang became very fond of Yang Zhi after the tourney at the training field outside the East Gate, and they were together everyday. Yang received an additional monthly stipend. Gradually, he developed friends. Suo Chao respected him for his ability and strength.
Time fleeted by. It was the end of spring and the approach of summer, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, a festival day. Liang and his wife, Lady Cai, were celebrating it at a family dinner in the rear salon. After several toasts and two courses, Lady Cai asked a question.
"Today Your Excellency is a commander-in-chief and holds an important post in the government. Where does this honour and high rank come from?"
"Since childhood I have always studied. I've learned history and the classics," Liang replied. "But I'm a man of feeling—of course I know how much I owe your noble father in the Eastern Capital. I can never thank him enough for his help."
"That being so, how could you forget his birthday?"
"I remember it perfectly. It's the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. I've already sent out stewards with one hundred thousand strings of cash to buy ornaments of gold and precious stones to present as birthday gifts. They've been gone a month and have bought up nine-tenths of what I want. When everything is ready, I'll have the gifts delivered.
"Only one thing is troubling me. Last year, the trinkets and gold ornaments and jewels which I dispatched as gifts were snatched by robbers on the road. All those valuables gone, and we still haven't caught the bandits! Who should I choose to deliver them this time?"
"You have plenty of officers at your disposal. Just pick a man you can trust."
"We have another forty or fifty days yet. There'll be time enough for that when I've got all our gifts ready. Don't worry, madam. I'll know what to do." Their feasting continued from midday till the second watch. Then all withdrew.

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A new magistrate was appointed to Yuncheng, a county seat in Jizhou Prefecture in the province of Shandong. His family name was Shi, his given name was Wenbin. Officers sat to the left and right one day when he was holding court, and he called before him the sheriff and his two constables. One known as the "infantry constable," the other the "cavalry constable." The first commanded twenty pikemen and twenty foot soldiers. Under the second were twenty mounted archers and twenty foot soldiers.

Zhu Tong, the cavalry constable, was very tall, with a long luxuriant beard. His face was brown as a chestnut, his eyes bright as stars, like Guan Gong of old. Known throughout the county as Beautiful Beard, he came from a wealthy family. He was a chivalrous, generous man and had many friends among the gallant fraternity. He was also well skilled in the use of weapons.

The infantry constable was called Lei Heng. A tall man with a ruddy complexion and a fan beard fringing his face, he was extremely strong and agile. In a running jump he could clear a chasm twenty to thirty feet wide, and was known as Winged Tiger. Originally a blacksmith, he later opened a grain mill, a slaughter-house for cattle, and a gambling den. Although chivalrous, he was also rather narrow-hearted. But he, too, was proficient in arms.

Their main job was catching robbers. When the magistrate summoned them, they hailed him respectfully and awaited his orders.

"Since taking office," he said, "I have learned that bandits in Liangshan Marsh—which is in the watery region under our jurisdiction as part of Jizhou Prefecture—have been pillaging the land and fighting our soldiers. They rampage in every hamlet and village, and are quite a large force. I've called you two because I want you, without fear of hardship, to take some men and go out, one group through the West Gate and one through the East, and patrol. Arrest all the robbers and bring them in but don't disturb the villagers. On a hilltop past the village of East Bank is a big red-leafed tree. It's the only one around. Each of you must bring back a few of those leaves to prove you have patrolled that far. If you don't, I'll know you are lying and will punish you severely."

The constables returned to their stations, mustered their men, and set forth.

Lei Heng marched through the East Gate with twenty foot soldiers. They searched several villages and the surrounding countryside, and finally came to the hill beyond East Bank. They picked some of the red leaves and started back for the village. Before they had gone more than two or three //; they noticed that the door of the Lingguan Temple that they we're passing, was open.

"The temple has no custodian but the door isn't shut," said Lei Heng. "Could there be some bad person inside? We'd better take a look."

He and his men lit torches and went in. There, lying on the altar table was a big fellow, stark naked and fast asleep. The weather was hot, and he had peeled off his tattered garments and rolled them up to serve as a pillow beneath his head. He was snoring peacefully.

"Remarkable!" said Lei Heng. "Our magistrate must be psychic! Here's a robber in East Bank, sure enough!" He shouted an order.

The twenty soldiers all piled on. Although the big fellow fought strenuously, they soon had his hands trussed behind him. They pulled him out of the temple and marched him to the manor of the ward chief.

And because they took him there, three or four heroes met in East Bank Village, and treasures worth a hundred thousand strings of cash were sought in Yuncheng County. Truly, heavenly spirits from the sky gathered and earthly fiends among men convened. Where did Lei Heng escort that fellow they had nabbed?

So then, when Zhou Jin and Yang Zhi had reined in their horses beneath the banners and the tourney was just about to commence, General Wen Da suddenly cried out: "Wait!" He made his way to the front of the tribune and addressed Governor Liang: "Your Excellency, these two men are about to make trial of their skill at arms. Although we do not know which one of them will carry the day, we do know that lances and swords are unfeeling things, whose best entertainment is killing robbers and dispatching bandits. This contest is an internal affair, touching only our own army, yet it may lead to injury or wounds. What that means is disablement at best; at worst it means loss of life. Neither is in the interests of the army. May it please Your Excellency to order that the spearheads be wrapped in cloth and dipped in lime. Then let the two horsemen wear black clothing. When they thrust with their lances, the one who receives the most white spots shall be deemed the loser."

"An excellent proposal," said the Governor, and gave orders for it to be carried out.

The two contestants accordingly rode to the back of the tribune, where they removed the blades of their lances and wrapped the ends in cloth, to form rounded bulbs. They donned black tunics and dipped the ends of the lances in a bucket of lime. Then they mounted again and rode out in front of the troops.

Zhou Jin now spurred his horse, lowered his lance, and charged at Yang Zhi. The latter slapped his horse and steadied his weapon and made for his opponent. Before the assembled army the two of them thrust and parried again and again, circling and wheeling as if sculpted from a single block; and while the riders hacked away, the horses also strove against each other. After some forty or fifty assaults, Zhou Jin looked as if he had been splashed with soya paste; he was striped and spotted with white in forty or fifty places. As for Yang Zhi, all he had was a single spot of white on his left shoulder.

Delighted with the result, Governor Liang ordered Zhou Jin to report to the tribune. He surveyed the marks and said: "My predecessor promoted you to ensign. But from the evidence of your skill in combat, you would fare ill on any expedition against the barbarians. You evidently lack the quality demanded by your rank." He then ordered Yang Zhi to take over this man's appointment.

But General Li Cheng stepped before him and said: "Your Excellency, Zhou Jin is unfamiliar with jousting; archery and riding are his strong points. If he is dismissed from his post without good reason, it could be damaging to the army's morale. Would it not be right for the two to compete in archery?"

"Very well," said the Governor, and ordered that it be done.

On receiving the order, both men abandoned their lances and fetched out bow and arrows. Yang Zhi took the long bow from its case, and strung it carefully. Holding the bow in one hand he leapt onto his horse and galloped to the front of the tribune, where he halted, very upright in the saddle, bowed and said: "Your Excellency, when arrows fly, it's a serious business and someone may get hurt. I request your instructions."

Governor Liang said: "When soldiers compete, they should not take wounds into account. Think not of death but only of doing your best."

Having learnt the Governor's wishes, Yang Zhi returned to his position in front of the army. General Li Cheng ordered the two contestants to be given each a shield, to hang from his shoulders. Then Yang Zhi said: "You shoot first, three arrows; then I will shoot three." When he heard this, Zhou Jin could hardly wait to put an arrow through his rival, settling the score with a single shot. But Yang Zhi was a skilled and experienced soldier and he guessed what Zhou Jin would do, it didn't bother him a bit. Here's something about the archery contest:

One stalks the high hills and shoots a tiger,
*One in a strong wind can split a willow twig.*
*When the bow's full bent, hares and foxes die;*
*The osprey's brought to earth when arrows fly.*
*If their art's compared, there's judgement on the spot;*
*They show their skill and the crowd applauds each shot.*
*One gives his horse its head, he won't be caught;*
*The other ducks, and each shot comes to naught.*
*Win or lose, it'll be over in a trice;*
Life or death but one throw of the dice.

The green flag was now flourished on the tribune and Yang Zhi slapped his horse and galloped off towards the south. Zhou Jin spurred in pursuit. He looped the reins round the pommel of his saddle, took the bow in his left hand, fitted an arrow to it with his right, slowly took aim at Yang Zhi's back, and loosed the shaft. Yang Zhi heard the snap of the bowstring behind him and with lightning speed protected himself by squatting in the stirrups. The arrow found only empty air. When he saw that his first shot had missed, Zhou Jin was worried. He hastily took a second arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the bowstring. Yang Zhi was still close, so he aimed at his back again and fired. Yang Zhi heard the second arrow coming but he did not repeat the same trick. As the arrow sped towards him he took his bow and with a slight flick caused the arrow to strike it and dribble to the ground. When he saw the second shot had missed, Zhou Jin was still more anxious. By this time Yang Zhi had nearly reached the end of the field. He wheeled his horse suddenly and began galloping back towards the tribune. Seeing this, Zhou Jin reined in his horse, and then set off again in pursuit. Eight hooves hammered the turf, with a sound like upturned cups and falling gongs; the contestants swept onward like a tempestuous wind.

Zhou Jin now took his third arrow, fitted it to the bowstring and slowly bent the bow, employing all the strength in his body. His eyes were glued to Yang Zhi's back as he let fly this final shaft. Again Yang Zhi heard the string snap. He twisted in the saddle, stretched out his arm and caught the arrow in mid-flight. Reining in his horse right in front of the tribune, he flung Zhou Jin's arrow upon the ground.

Governor Liang was delighted. He commanded Yang Zhi to shoot his three arrows now, and the green flag was flourished on the platform. Zhou Jin threw away his bow, grasped his shield, and spurred his horse towards the south. Yang Zhi merely sat up straight in the saddle and gave his horse a kick; off it shot in pursuit. The first time Yang Zhi drew his bow there was no arrow in it. When Zhou Jin heard the snap of the string he twisted to one side and raised his shield to catch the arrow. But it met nothing. "The fellow can only joust, he's no archer," Zhou Jin thought to himself. "As soon as he's missed with the second arrow, I'll give a shout to stop him, and they'll declare me the winner." His horse had now reached the end of the field, and he turned and galloped back towards the tribune. Yang Zhi's horse also turned. Yang Zhi took an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to the bow. But he was thinking, "If I aim at his heart, that'll be the end of him. There's no quarrel between us. I'd better aim at some spot which isn't vital." His left hand was as steady as if it had to support Mount Tai, his right hand as gentle as if it were holding a baby; he bent the bow till it was round as the full moon and the arrow sped towards its target like a shooting star — it's slow in the telling but happens in a flash: the very first shot transfixed Zhou Jin's left shoulder. Taken completely by surprise, Zhou Jin span round in the saddle and fell from his horse. The riderless horse galloped on past the tribune and disappeared behind it. The watching soldiers rushed forward to help Zhou Jin.

Governor Liang was delighted. He ordered the army quarter-master to bring writing materials and signed an order confirming Yang Zhi's appointment in place of Zhou Jin. The triumphant Yang Zhi dismounted and marched up to the tribune to thank the Governor.

Suddenly there was a shout from below the steps on the left hand side. "Don't be in such a hurry, I want to fight you first."

The speaker was a tall man, over six feet, and had a round face with big ears, a wide mouth and thick lips. His cheeks were adorned with a handsome growth of hair, his bearing was dignified, his manner imposing. After shouting out a salute to the Governor, he said: "Zhou Jin has been sick and is not fully recovered, that is why he lost to Yang Zhi. I request permission to try my humble skills in warlike competition with Yang Zhi. Should he obtain but the slightest advantage over me, let me be the one he replaces, and not Zhou Jin. I will bear no grudge."

Governor Liang immediately recognized the speaker as Suo Chao, standard-bearer of the Daming garrison. Because of his quick temper and tendency to blow up, his readiness to quarrel for honour's sake and to be always first into battle, this officer was known as Suo Chao the Hasty or "The Front-Runner." When Li Cheng heard what Suo Chao had to say he too presented himself in front of the tribune and said: "Your Excellency, if this Yang Zhi was once a commander of the palace guard, he has to be a good soldier, and Zhou Jin is naturally no match for him. Let him measure his skill now with Captain Suo, and then we will really see what he is worth."

The Governor thought about this: "All I want is to promote Yang Zhi," he told himself, "but obviously the army isn't going to accept it easily. If he succeeds in defeating Suo Chao, they can't object, they won't have a leg to stand on." He called Yang Zhi over and said: "What do you say to a contest with Suo Chao?"

"If it is your wish, of course I will obey," Yang Zhi replied.

"All right then, go to the back of the tribune and change your equipment. Prepare yourself carefully." The Governor ordered the stores master to provide Yang Zhi with the necessary arms, and then said: "Bring out my own war-horse for Yang Zhi to ride." To Yang Zhi he said, "Be very careful, don't underestimate him."

Yang Zhi thanked the Governor and went to arm himself.

Meanwhile Li Cheng had a word in private with Suo Chao. "I know you are without equal. But Zhou Jin, who learnt from you, has already been beaten. If you are careless, you'll have the whole garrison of Daming laughing at you. I have an experienced war-horse and a breast-plate which I will let you have. Just be careful and don't let your resolve weaken."

After thanking him, Suo Chao also went to arm himself.

Governor Liang stood up and moved to the front of the tribune. Immediately bearers moved his silver chair forward till it was close to the balustrade. He sat down again, with his aides spread out on either side in two ranks. A bearer was called to open behind the Governor's back a three-branched umbrella of tea-coloured muslin with a gourd-shaped silver boss. An order rang out on the platform and the red flag was run up, while on either side the gilt drums began to beat in unison. From the ranks of the two armies on the practice ground cannon spoke. At the sound of the cannon, Suo Chao galloped through the ranks and halted under the flags at the gate. Yang Zhi also galloped out and halted to the rear of the gate. A yellow flag was displayed on the tribune, and the drums rolled again. An expectant gasp went up from the watching armies, then all was silent; the onlookers scarce dared to breathe. Again the drums and gongs, as a pure white flag was raised. Now the armies stood in total silence, not a movement, not a whisper.

Finally, on the platform, the blue flag was waved while drums and gongs sounded a third time. Then beneath the flag-decked gate the ranks of the army on the left opened and to the tinkling of bells and gongs Suo Chao rode forth. When he was between the two armies, he made his horse pirouette. Brandishing his weapons, he looked the very picture of a hero. On his head he wore a steel helmet on which a lion was depicted, with a red tassel hanging down the back of his neck; he had a coat of iron mail, a gold belt decorated with animal heads, breast and back-plates of burnished bronze; a red surcoat with roundels of flower embroidery and a collar of green velvet went on top, and on his feet were riding boots with crossed leather laces. A bow was slung over his left shoulder, a quiver of arrows on the right. He carried a gilt battle-axe at the slant. He was riding General Li's snow-white charger, tried and tested in battle. What a horse it was!

*Its colour was like Venus, the blazing planet, or like the white-browed tiger of the Southern Mountains. Its coat was glossy like the white jade unicorn of the Northern Seas. It could charge through lines of troops, and jump rivers, it liked nothing better than the sound of war-drums, it had the temperament of a hero. It could bear a great weight, travel vast distances, and still it could rear and prance, it must have been the dragon's messenger. Wu Xiang's bay horse was no match for it: it surpassed even the jade white steed of the Lord of Qin.*

Then the ranks opened on the right, under the flag-decked gate, and to the sound of bells and gongs Yang Zhi rode out, carrying his lance at the ready. He reined his horse in front of the army, and rested his lance. What a brave and martial sight! The helmet he wore was of polished steel and glittered like sunlight on frost. A blue tassel dangled from it. His armour was made of plates shaped like elm leaves and inscribed with cherry. His belt was of red velvet and bordered the armour; breast-plate and back-plate were decorated with animal heads. He had a surcoat of white linen embroidered with flowers and a floating purple sash. His boots were of yellow leather, with a double sole. His bow had a leather sheath and there was a plentiful supply of wedge-shaped arrows. In his hand a lance made from a single piece of steel. The horse Yang Zhi rode was Governor Liang's chestnut steed, a tireless beast and swift as the wind. And what a horse that was!

*Its mane was a rippling flame, its tail bright-hued as the dawn. Its whole body seemed painted with a generous palette. The pricked ears resembled two red leaves. Cantering beside the red fort at daybreak its hooves exploded like four winter stars; galloping along the bund at dusk they were like coals shot from the fire. There's no point in comparing it with any other, not even the Northern Lord's fabled courser or Shou Ting's red streaker.*

A gasp went up from the ranks on either side. Though none knew what the outcome would be, the preliminary spectacle was magnificent.

Then the flag officer on the southern side of the field rode out with a banner bearing the word "order" embroidered in gold. "His Excellency bids you both to give of your best," he commanded. "Weakness or failure will be punished severely. The winner will receive great honour."

Acknowledging the order, both riders spurred their horses to the centre of the field.

Now as the two horses sped towards each other, the two warriors raised their weapons at exactly the same moment. Suo Chao furiously whirled his mighty battle-axe as he galloped towards the encounter. Yang Zhi, in a display of mighty prowess, brandished his stupendous lance and rushed to meet him. There, in the centre of the field, directly in front of the tribune, the two engaged, each employing every ounce of strength and skill. Back and forth and back and forth the contest rages, four arms striking this way and that, while the eight hooves of the horses hammer the turf.

After more than 50. assaults, still there was no victor. On the dais, the Governor watched spellbound, while the troops on either side applauded ceaselessly. Soldiers looked at each other and said: "We have served many years and seen many campaigns but we've never seen such a combat as this, between two such daring opponents!" Generals Li and Wen, up on the tribune, never ceased in their shouts of "Bravo!"

Finally General Wen was struck by a fear that one of the contestants might wound the other. He hurriedly summoned the flag officer and told him to display the "order" flag. Gongs immediately rang out on the tribune. But Yang Zhi and Suo Chao had ranged far afield, and each was determined to win. They had no thought of turning their horses. In the end the signal officer had to chase after them and shout: "Put up your arms, both of you, it's the Governor's order."

Now at last they rested their weapons and reined in their horses, then galloped back to their corners under the banners, where they remained with their eyes turned towards the Governor, awaiting his pleasure.

Generals Li and Wen now came down from the command platform and stood directly in front of the Governor to say: "Your Excellency, both men are equal in strength, we need them both."

Governor Liang was pleased with this and summoned Yang Zhi and Suo Chao to him. The flag officer conveyed the order and the two men rode over towards the tribune and dismounted. A corporal received their weapons and they went to stand before the Governor with bowed heads, awaiting his orders. Governor Liang called for two ingots of silver and two sets of clothes that he presented in recognition of their prowess. Then he ordered the provost-marshal to promote them both to the rank of major with immediate effect, making out the commissions at once and incorporating the officers in the Governor's personal staff. They each thanked him and prostrated themselves, and then retired with their gifts. Yang Zhi put down his lance and his bow, and took off his helmet and armour, and changed his clothes. Suo Chao also went to take off his armour and don a padded robe. Then they returned to the tribune to thank all the military personnel. The Governor made them also greet each other courteously, following which they went to occupy the places corresponding to their rank. Drums now beat in the ranks as if in celebration of a victory, after which the troops dispersed, the drummers leading the way. A great feast was held on the practice ground, with the participation of Governor Liang, the army, and officials of all ranks.

As the sun went down in a blaze of red in the west, the feasting came to an end. Then the Governor mounted his horse and the officials escorted him back to his residence. The cavalcade was headed by the two newly appointed officers, with the rest riding behind them. They were garlanded with red flowers. When they rode through the Eastern Gate the populace turned out to watch, old greybeards and tiny children included.

"What are you all grinning at?" the Governor asked, surveying the crowd from his horse.

A group of old men in the crowd knelt and said: "We were born and raised here in the Northern Capital but never have we seen such feats of arms as we witnessed today. After the contest that we watched today on the training ground, how could our hearts not be glad?"

The Governor was delighted with this answer. He returned to his residence and the accompanying officials dispersed.

Suo Chao went to celebrate with a group of comrades in arms, while Yang Zhi, who was a newcomer, without friends in the capital, went to rest at the Governor's. It goes without saying that he performed his new duties with zeal and vigour.

But all this is not to the point, so let us pass on to what is really important. After the contest on the training ground outside the Eastern Gate, Governor Liang became very attached to Yang Zhi, and wanted him by his side from dawn to dusk. And now that Yang Zhi was on full pay, everyone began to know him. Even Suo Chao recognized that his ability was outstanding, and accorded him the greatest respect.

Imperceptibly the days slipped by, spring turned to summer and the Dragon Boat Festival arrived, the fifth day of the fifth month. The Governor and his wife, Madam Cai were celebrating the festival privately at home:

*There are plants in tubs to provide delightful greenery, and scarlet pomegranates in pots. The curtain is of crystal, the bamboo blinds are rolled up and an opulent screen displays a painting of peacocks. There's calamus wine in carved jade beakers: the lady fills the glowing cups. There are heaps of corn and piles of silver: the lady proffers the green jade plate. Cooked dishes of every kind are provided and fresh fruit of the season. While bamboo fans waft cooling air, sweet harmonies and gentle chords are played. Shaking their perfumed sleeves, a bevy of dancers show off their steps.*

After several cups of wine and two sets of dishes, Madam Cai suddenly said: "Since that first advancement, my dear, you have become a major figure and obtained top postings from the government. Have you forgotten to what you owe all this success?"

"Well, I was a studious boy, and I worked hard at the classics. But of course, I'm not made of wood, I know how much I owe to your father. His patronage has given me all I enjoy, and my gratitude is boundless."

"Then, if you acknowledge your debt to my father, how is it that you have forgotten his birthday?"

"It's on the fifteenth of the sixth month, how could I forget that? I've already got people out collecting a treasure worth a hundred thousand cash. I am going to send it for the Preceptor's birthday. My people have been working on it for a month now and it's very nearly complete. In just a few days it will all be organized, and I'll be sending it. There's only one problem. Last year when I bought all those ornaments and valuables and sent them off to the capital, they hadn't got halfway before they were stolen by robbers. All that expense went for nothing. And the robbers still have not been caught. So now this year who can I send with the convoy?"

"You seem to have plenty of military men in your entourage," said Madam Cai. "You just have to pick someone you can really trust."

"Well, there's still another forty or fifty days. We'd better wait till the gift is fully assembled. It'll be time enough then to choose who to send with it. Anyway, don't you worry your head about it. I've got it all in hand."

This intimate banquet lasted from midday till after nine o'clock! But enough of that.

Now we must turn to the district of Yuncheng in the province of Jizhou in Shandong. A new Magistrate had just been appointed here. His name was Shi Wenbin. One day, when the court was in session and he was sitting with his officials and police drawn up on either side of him, he called for the commissioner in charge of bandit suppression, and two police sergeants in the same branch. These two sergeants, who were under the orders of the commissioner, were known as the infantry sergeant and the cavalry sergeant. The cavalry sergeant was in command of twenty mounted archers and twenty foot soldiers; the infantry sergeant had twenty pikemen and twenty foot soldiers. The cavalry sergeant was Zhu Tong. He was a giant of a man, with a resplendent beard. His face was as red as a date and his gaze was piercing; he could have been a model for the God of War. Throughout the region he was known as "The Beard." He had been a wealthy man but being honest and open-handed he had struck up friendships with many of the rivers and lakes fraternity and had become an expert in martial arts. The infantry sergeant was Lei Heng, who was of medium stature, with a bronzed face and a fan-shaped beard. He was exceptionally strong and could leap a gap of several yards, so everyone called him "The Flying Tiger." He had once been the local blacksmith. After that he had started a mill, then a butcher's shop, and then a gaming house. Though a man of honour, he had a certain streak of meanness. But he was also a martial arts expert.

Zhu Tong and Lei Heng were both specialized in the capture of bandits. When the Magistrate called for them that day, they saluted and waited for their instructions. "Since I took office," the Magistrate said, "it has been brought to my attention that in the marshy area of Mount Liang, within the jurisdiction of Jizhou, there is a band of robbers who commit disturbances and robberies and obstruct the forces of law and order. I fear in fact that every village and district is likely to suffer from the depredations of these bandits, because they have considerable armies at their disposal. This is why I have called you. I want you to go out on patrol. You are not to waste time thinking up objections, you must leave at once, taking with you a suitable body of men. You are to go separately, one leaving by the west gate and one by the east. If you find robbers, arrest them and bring them in. But do not cause trouble among the villagers. I have heard that near East Riverside that is in the mountains, there is a group of trees with red leaves which are not to be found anywhere else. I want you to pick some of these leaves and bring them back to show me, as proof that you have patrolled that far. If you don't bring back the red leaves I shall assume you have not taken my orders seriously and you will be severely punished."

Having received their instructions, the two sergeants went to collect their men and set out separately on patrol.

We shall not follow Zhu Tong, as he leads his patrol out by the west gate but accompany Lei Heng, as he leads twenty men out of the east gate that same evening, and proceeds to search the villages round about and all the surrounding countryside. Returning, they came to the district of East Riverside, where they broke off to pick the red leaves before entering the village. Not more than a mile further on they passed the Temple of the Heavenly Official, where it was observed that the door of the main hall was not properly shut. "No sign of any guardian and the door not shut," said Lei Heng, "maybe some malefactor is lurking inside. We'd better take a look."

Holding torches, the men went inside to look. There, asleep on the altar, stark naked, was a large man. The weather was hot and he had simply taken off all his tattered clothes and rolled them into a bundle to make a pillow for his head. So there he was, snoring away on the altar.

When Lei Heng saw this he said: "It's amazing. Our Governor must be clairvoyant. There really and truly are robbers here in East Riverside, just like he said!" He gave a shout, and before the individual could put up any resistance, twenty men had thrown themselves upon him, bound him, and dragged him to the door of the temple. The intention was to march him off to the manor house in the village.

Supposing they had taken him somewhere else, things would have turned out quite differently, and it would not have been the case that:

In East Riverside the heroes meeting one day
Make plans to seize a treasure on its way.

Truly this was to be a fateful meeting, a fruitful conjunction.

Yang Zhi and Zhou Jin were mounted on their horses but while waiting at the foot of the flagpole for the signal to start the staff officer Wen Da shouted out, "Wait a bit!" He then went to Grand Secretary Liang on the platform and said to him, "Sir, we do not yet know what skill these two men have in military sports but their arms are dangerous weapons suitable for killing thieves and exterminating bandits. I am afraid that today somebody may be seriously wounded—a slight blow might cripple a man for life whereas a serious blow might kill a man, and that would not be for the good of the army. So I beg to suggest that the spikes should be removed from the spears, and replaced by the felt. Then they should both wear black dress. The felt knobs on the spears should then be rubbed in lime dust so that they would leave a mark on the clothing for each hit, and the man who has the most white marks will be the loser."

"That is a sensible proposal," said the Grand Secretary Liang. Orders were given accordingly.

Upon receiving the order the two horsemen retired behind the platform, where the spikes were removed from their spears and replaced by the knobs of felt. They rubbed these knobs well with lime dust, and put on some black clothing. When this had been done they remounted, and rode round to the drill ground.

Zhou Jin urged his horse forward to fight with Yang Zhi, and the latter did the same. They both dashed past each other, returned again, backwards and forwards many times, thrusting and parrying as they passed. After about fifty of these passages at arms Zhou Jin had so many white spots on his clothes that he looked as though somebody had thrown bean curd at him whereas Yang Zhi had only one single white spot under his left shoulder.

Grand Secretary Liang was much pleased at this, and summoning Zhou Jin he spoke to him: "My predecessor gave you a commission as Lieutenant but I think your military skill is of poor quality as you have been beaten in this way. So how can you fight anywhere and continue to receive a Lieutenant's salary?" He then summoned Yang Zhi, and gave him the position of Zhou Jin.

Just then General Li Cheng arrived on the platform and reported to Grand Secretary Liang that Zhou Jin's use of the spear was very poor but as a mounted archer he was excellent. For that reason he must not be dismissed from his position, as the troops would be dissatisfied if that was done. Perhaps it would be better if Zhou Jin and Yang Zhi now contested as archers.

Grand Secretary Liang thought that a good idea, and gave instructions accordingly.

Upon receiving this order Zhou Jin and Yang Zhi both stuck their spears in the ground, and armed themselves with bows and arrows. Yang Zhi took the bow out of its case, adjusted the string, then raising it aloft he mounted his horse, and rode to the front of the platform where he saluted the Grand Secretary Liang by rising in his stirrups and said, "I am afraid, sir, that one of us may be wounded by an arrow, and I ask for your instructions in the matter."

Grand Secretary Liang said, "in military sports one should not display anxiety about wounds. If someone is killed by an arrow we shall not hold a court-martial."

Yang Zhi returned to the parade ground, and General Li Cheng then gave an order that each combatant should bear a rattan shield to protect his body from the arrows being shot.

Both combatants took a shield and hung it on his shoulder. Yang Zhi then told his opponent that he could have three shots at him, and he would follow with three shots.

Zhou Jin upon hearing this only wished that he could shoot an arrow that would go right through Yang Zhi's body.

On the other hand Yang Chin saw that Zhou Jin had no skill, and was not afraid of him.

Just then the purple signaling flag was waved from the platform, and Yang Zhi urged his horse forward, and rode towards the south side. Zhou Jin followed him, and dropped the reins on the saddle. With the bow in his left hand, he took an arrow in his right hand aimed at Yang Zhi's back and pulling the bow to its full extent and let fly the arrow.

Yang Zhi heard the twang of the bow string, and immediately swung his body down resting entirety on one stirrup. The arrow flew past without touching him. Upon seeing that the arrow had missed its mark Zhou Jin was very much upset. He immediately took a second arrow out of his quiver, fitted it to his bow, took a steady aim at Yang Zhi's back, and again let fly the arrow.

Yang Zhi heard the arrow flying through the air, and taking his bow, turned round, and parried the arrow by a stroke of his bow. The arrow turned several somersaults ere it reached the ground.

This made Zhou Jin more annoyed than ever. As Yang Zhi had now reached the extreme limit of the parade ground he wheeled his horse round, and galloped back to the platform. Zhou Jin also galloped back to the same spot, and there the two horses pranced about impatiently. Zhou Jin now took his third arrow from his quiver, fixed it carefully to the bowstring, and exerting his full strength, drew the bow to its full extent and shot the arrow again at Yang Zhi's back. But Yang Zhi again heard the twang of the bowstring, and turning round in his saddle he caught the arrow with his hand as it flew past him. Then urging his horse forward he galloped to the front of the inspection platform and there threw the arrow on the ground.

Upon seeing this feat of skill Grand Secretary Liang was much pleased, and gave an order that Yang Zhi must now shoot three arrows at Zhou Jin. The purple flag was again waved to signal that the sport was to continue.

Zhou Jin threw down his bow, and taking his shield in his hand he urged his horse forward, and rode towards the southern part of the parade ground. Yang Zhi stooping forward in his saddle, urged his horse in the same direction. He then drew the string of his bow, without placing an arrow there, and let the bowstring, go. Zhou Jin hearing the twang of the bowstring, turned round, and held his shield to protect his body but no arrow came. He thought that Yang Zhi might be good with a spear but evidently he could not even shoot an arrow. He continued his course, and decided that if the second attempt was also a failure he would shout out, and claim a win. As he had now reached the limit of the parade ground he wheeled round, and returned to the platform again. Upon seeing this Yang Zhi also wheeled his horse round, and returned to the same spot. By that time Yang Zhi had taken an arrow out of his quiver, and fitted it to his bowstring. He thought that if he shot the arrow at Zhou Jin's back he would probably kill him. As he had no enmity towards Zhou Jin he decided to shoot an arrow and hit him in some non-vital spot. In his left hand he held the bow as firmly as a mountain while in his right hand he held the arrow as lightly as though he carried a baby. So pulling his bowstring to its full extent until the bow was like a full moon in shape, he shot the arrow which flew with the speed of a falling star, and struck Zhou Jin's shoulder. This occurred much quicker than it takes us to describe it. Zhou Jin fell off his horse and the animal being free galloped off to the back of the inspection platform. A number of soldiers came forward to help Zhou Jin to get up.

Grand Secretary Liang was again much pleased at seeing this, and summoning his adjutant he dictated an order that Yang Zhi take the rank and position of Zhou Jin. Yang Zhi heard this but did not allow his feelings to be visible in his face. He dismounted and approaching the inspection platform saluted, and offered thanks for his promotion.

Just then however a man ascended the steps leading to the inspection platform on the left side, and called out, "You need not offer thanks for your promotion. I will have a couple of bouts with you."

Yang Zhi saw that the man was over seven feet in height; had a round face with large ears; a broad and square shaped mouth; with bushy side whiskers; a general austere, dignified, and handsome appearance. Coming before the Grand Secretary he called out, "Sir, Zhou Jin has evidently not quite recovered from a sickness, and not being in the best of health, has been defeated by Yang Zhi. Though I have no particular ability, yet I am quite willing to compete with Yang Zhi. If Yang Zhi defeats me even only slightly then I shall be quite willing to let him take my rank and position instead of Zhou Jin's. Even if he kills me it won't matter."

Grand Secretary Liang recognized the man as Captain Suo Chao of the headquarters at the Northern Capital, Daming. He had a fiery disposition, and would invariably fought for the honour of the state, and even killed men so that everybody called him "The Urgent Vanguard."

General Li Cheng upon hearing the man make this statement left the inspection platform, and going round to the front of it addressed the Grand Secretary, "Sir, Yang Zhi was previously an officer in the Imperial Guard and therefore it is only to be expected that his skill in military sports would be better than that of Zhou Jin. I think it would be a good idea if Yang Zhi now contested with Captain Suo, and then we should see exactly who is the better man."

Grand Secretary Liang thought the matter over. He certainly wished to give Yang Zhi an officer's commission but as so many were opposed to that, he would wait until Yang Zhi had defeated Suo Chao, so that nobody could then raise any objection even if Suo Chao was killed. So he summoned Yang Zhi and asked him, "Would you care to compete against Suo Chao in the military sports?"

Yang Zhi replied, "Sir, if you give me an order I must obey it."

Liang said, "In that case you had better go behind this platform, and put on your full armor. Also tell the armorer to accompany you and give you whatever you require in the way of accouterment. You can also take my warhorse, and ride it. Now, be careful, and do not treat your opponent too lightly."

Yang Zhi expressed his thanks, and retired to put on his armor, etc.

General Li Cheng went and spoke to Suo Chao, "You, of course, cannot be compared to anyone else. Zhou Jin was a pupil of yours but he has just been defeated by Yang Zhi. If you be also only slightly defeated by Yang Zhi he will make nothing of all the officers at Daming. I will lend you my superb war horse, and also a suit of armor. I hope that you will take care, as I do not want a man with your valor to be defeated."

Suo Chao thanked him, and then went off to dress.

Grand Secretary Liang got up, and walked to the front of the inspection platform near the railings, and there the attendants brought his chair. He also told the umbrella bearers to open there the large official umbrella made of brown gauze, with a silver button on top, and with three fringes round to make it cool on hot days, and they were to hold it aloft behind his chair. On both sides of him the officers took their positions in two ranks. He then instructed the officer in charge to wave the red flag as a signal that the sports were to proceed. The gongs and drums on both sides were beaten, so that they gave a low rolling sound like thunder. In the centre of the parade ground two cannons were fired off. Upon this signal Suo Chao galloped to the parade ground, and took up his position at the foot of the flagstaff near the cannons, surrounded by the soldiers on parade. Yang Zhi also galloped forward, and took his position behind the flag on the opposite side.

On the inspection platform the yellow flag was waved, and upon this all the drums again rolled, and the troops cheered. After that there was absolute silence. A gong was now sounded, and a white flag was hoisted up on a pole on the inspection platform. The officers stood to attention, and there was not a single word spoken after this. A purple flag was now waved on the platform, and the drums rolled again for the third and last time upon which Suo Chao left his position, and rode in front of the platform where he took his arms, and certainly gave the audience the impression that he was a valiant warrior. On his head he wore a steel helmet with a lion design on it, and a large red tassel hanging down at the back. His body was covered by armor in the form of iron leaves linked together; round his waist was a silk belt with a buckle with a tiger's head design in gold; on his breast and also on his back was a bronze protecting mirror; his outer garment was of red silk with a design of florid circles all over it; on each side there hung a green silk sash; his big riding boots had strips of leather on them in a slanting direction; a bow was at his left side, and a quiver with arrows on his right; in his hand was a large battle-axe; and he was riding the trained war horse, as white as snow, belonging to General Li Cheng.

From the other side Yang Zhi galloped to the front of the platform, where he reined in his horse, with a spear in his hand, and with a very bold appearance. He was wearing a fine steel helmet which glittered in the sun, and had a green tassel hanging down at the back; his armor was made up of iron in the form of plum blossoms and leaves of the elm tree all linked together; his silk sash was of red colour; on his breast and back were two protecting metal mirrors; his outer coat was of white silk; and holding it in position was a belt of purple silken texture—his small boots were of undyed leather; at his side was a bow, and also a quiver full of arrows; in his hands he carried a heavy steel spear, and he was riding the Grand Secretary's red war horse which was capable of galloping about three hundred *li* against the wind.

The troops and officers on both sides approved of both combatants in whispers, and although they did not yet exhibit their military skill, yet their grand majestic appearance had already made a bold impression.

On the south side of the parade ground an officer now waved a flag with the character "*Ling*" (command or order) in gold, and riding up on his horse called out, "His Excellency orders both of you to exercise great care. Whoever of you is defeated will have to suffer the punishment, and the one who wins will be handsomely rewarded."

The two combatants after receiving this order pressed their horses to the centre of the parade ground, where they passed each other backwards and forwards several times, holding their arms ready in their hands, and watching for a chance of dealing a serious blow. Suo Chao lost his temper and brandishing his battle-axe challenged Yang Zhi to fight. But Yang Zhi was not afraid of this, and holding his spear in both hands he also charged towards Suo Chao. They met in front of the inspection platform, and there they both used their utmost skill. Backwards and forwards they went; lunging, slashing, and parrying and each time they met there was a general whirl of their arms and the legs of their horses. After more than fifty bouts neither of them had either won or lost.

Grand Secretary Liang was lost in admiration as he watched this marvelous display. The officers kept up a general round of applause. Among the troops on parade there were general remarks passed to one another such as, "We have been in the army for many years, and taken part in several battles but we have never seen such a deadly conflict between such fine men." On the inspection platform the two Generals Li Cheng and Wen Da kept up an incessant comment, "Well done! Well done!" In fact Wen Da was so afraid that one of the two combatants would be seriously wounded that he gave the signaler an order to take the flag with the golden character "*Ling*" on it, and place it between the combatants as a signal that fighting was to cease. At the same time a gong on the inspection platform was sounded as a signal for the two men to stop fighting but they were both so keen on winning that they would not rein in their horses or leave the spot. As the gong had no effect the signaling officer rushed towards the combatants, and shouted out, "You two must take a rest now! This is His Excellency's order!"

Yang Zhi and Suo Chao upon hearing this both reined in their horses, and returned each to his respective flag to await further orders. The Generals Li Cheng and Wen Da came forward to the front of the platform, and addressed the Grand Secretary, "Sir, we think that the military skill of both these men is of high order, and their merit is worthy of reward."

Upon hearing this Grand Secretary Liang was much pleased, and immediately summoned Yang Zhi and Suo Chao. The signaling officer transmitted the order, and both combatants came to the front of the inspection platform, where they dismounted. Two soldiers received their weapons, and the two heroes then ascended the platform where they stood in a respectful attitude.

Grand Secretary Liang gave instructions that each was to receive an ingot of silver and two suits of clothing as presents, and then instructed his adjutant that both men were to receive the rank of Major, and that an order must be issued accordingly—their commission was to take effect from that day.

The two heroes expressed thanks to the Grand Secretary, received the gifts, and leaving the platform they divested themselves of their swords, bows, armor, and put on their ordinary clothes. They then returned to the platform, and saluted the assembled officers. They saluted each other according to the instructions of Liang who then informed them that they both had the rank of Major.

The troops marched off to the accompaniment of their drums.

Grand Secretary Liang invited all the officers to dine with him. They feasted together until dusk when Grand Secretary Liang and all the other officers departed on horseback, the two Majors riding in front with red silk flowers in their caps. Upon entering the East Gate the people stood on both sides of the road, and welcomed the cavalcade.

Grand Secretary Liang on his horse asked, "Why are you people so pleased at seeing this?"

The old men in the crowd responded, "We were born and bred at Daming and never before have we seen such splendid fellows as these two. Today we have seen them on the parade ground, and know that they are equally matched. So why should we not be glad?"

Grand Secretary Liang was very pleased at hearing this. Upon arrival at the headquarters all the officers dispersed.

The comrades of Suo Chao invited him to a banquet in celebration of his feat; but as Yang Zhi had only recently arrived he had no acquaintances who would invite him to a feast; he went to his quarters to sleep. Yang Zhi after this attended to his duties very diligently all day long but we need not say anything more about that.

We will now come to the point. After the affair at the military sports Grand Secretary Liang was fonder than ever of Yang Zhi, and they were always together.

As Yang Zhi had a monthly allowance, many persons wished to be friendly with him. Now Suo Chao had great respect for Yang Zhi because he knew that he had great military skill.

The time flew very quickly, and it was almost summer. Grand Secretary Liang and his wife Madame Liang were celebrating the Dragon Boat festival with a feast in the private apartments. When they had drunk several cups of wine, and partaken of two courses of food, Madame Liang said, "Sir, you are now commander-in-chief and control the army but where did this great success and rank come from?"

Grand Secretary Liang replied, "I have been a student of the classics and history ever since I was a boy. I am not blockhead, and how can I be unaware of your father's generosity? He assisted me a great deal, and I am very grateful to him."

His wife replied, "Sir, you are aware of my father's benevolence but why have you forgotten his birthday?"
Liang said, "I am well aware that your father's birthday is on the 15th day of the sixth month. A month ago I sent a man with one hundred thousand strings of cash to buy gold, pearls, and other valuables which I will send to your father as a birthday gift. That will shortly be all arranged, and then I will dispatch the presents. About that only one thing keeps me in hesitation. Last year I also bought many precious stones and jewellery and dispatched them to your father at the Eastern Capital but when about halfway there the escort was attacked by some brigands who took away the whole presents, and up to the present time the brigands have not been captured. Who is the best man to escort the presents this year?"
Madame Liang replied, "In your employ you have plenty of soldiers from whom you can select a reliable man."
Grand Secretary Liang said, "During the next month I will look round carefully and select a really reliable man whom I will intrust with that job. You need not worry any more about it, as I have a plan."
They feasted together up to about ten o'clock that evening but we need not pursue that matter any further.
At that time a new magistrate named Shi Wenbin had just been appointed to Yuncheng County at Jizhou Prefecture in Shandong province. Upon taking up his duties he at once summoned two inspectors and officers whose special work was suppression of banditry. One Inspector was in charge of mounted police consisting of twenty men armed with bows and arrows, and twenty local men. The other Inspector had twenty foot soldiers armed with spear, and also twenty local men.
The Inspector in charge of the mounted police was named Zhu Tong; he was over six feet in height; had a thick beard nearly two feet long; his face was fiery red; and he had piercing eyes. In appearance he resembled Guan Gong, the God of War very much, and he was well known everywhere as the "Beautiful Whiskers." Previously he was a very wealthy man, and being generous he had become friendly with all the leaders of bandits from whom he had acquired great ability in using arms.
The Inspector in charge of the other platoon was named Lei Heng; he was about five and a half feet tall; had a swarthy complexion; a broad fan-like beard; and great muscular strength. He could jump a distance of twenty feet, and was known everywhere as the "Winged Tiger." Previously he had been a blacksmith; then had changed his occupation and became a proprietor of rice grinding mills; a butcher; or even a gambler. He was sometimes a great defender of righteousness but he was not of a generous disposition. He was also versed in military skill.
These two inspectors were experts in suppressing brigandage. Now the magistrate summoned them to his *yamen*, and handing them his written order he said, "Since I took up my duties here I have learned a great deal of a large number of bandits at Liangshan Marsh, a village in this prefecture, who have not only robbed and looted but have even resisted capture by our troops. I am also afraid that there are other bandits in the various villages. So I want you two to face this difficult matter with our police force—one platoon to go out through the West Gate, and the other through the East Gate. If you find any bandits then arrest them and report the matter at once. In doing this, however, you must not disturb the people. I am aware that at Dongxi village there is a tree, on the top of a hill, with red leaves and there is no other tree like that at anywhere else. I want you to pluck some of those leaves, and upon your presenting them to me I shall know that you have been at that place. If you return without the red leaves I shall not accept any excuse but shall punish you severely."
The two inspectors took the order, and left the court. They called the rolls of their platoons, and then filed off according to the order.
We need not follow the platoon under inspector Zhu Tong which left by the West Gate. But the platoon of twenty soldiers under Inspector Lei Heng left by the East Gate, and duly reached the hill at Dongxi village where they plucked some of the red leaves, and then returned to the village. Leaving the village they came to the Lingguan Temple in about a *li*. Inspector Lei Heng noticed that the gate of the temple was open, and he wondered why this was since he knew there were no priests living there at the time. As he suspected some irregularity he decided to look inside. As it was almost dark they lit torches, and then entered the temple. There they found a big man sleeping on the altar table with naked body. He had made a pillow of a lot of torn clothing, and was snoring loudly.
"How strange! How strange!" Inspector Lei Heng said. "Our magistrate evidently knew that there have been some bandits at the Dongxi village." He then shouted in a loud voice, and awoke the man who attempted to get up but was seized by the soldiers and bound with ropes. They then all left the temple, and took their prisoner to the village chief.

4 brave men of Eastern Stream
Captured jewels with bold scheme;
As earthly spirits, they did their feat,
As heavenly gods, they came to meet.

## 014
## Red-Haired Demon Lies & has a Drunken Sleep in Lingguan Temple; Boss Chao Gai the Heavenly King decides to adopt & Acknowledges a *Nephew* in East Bank Village & Administers Justice there

When Lei Heng entered Lingguan Temple he saw a big fellow sleeping on the altar. The soldiers rushed forward, tied him up, and dragged him outside. It was only about the fifth watch—the sun had not yet risen.
Lei Heng said: "Let's take the lout to the manor of Ward Chief Chao. We can get some breakfast there, then we'll turn him over to the county magistrate for questioning."
The company proceeded rapidly to the manor.
The ward chief of East Bank Village was surnamed Chao, his given name was Gai. Born of a well-to-do family native to these parts for many generations, Chao had always fought injustice and helped the needy. He liked nothing better than befriending gallant men, and put them up in his manor whenever they came to him, no matter what the circumstances. When they were ready to go, he gave them silver for travelling expenses. Extremely fond of play with weapons, Chao was very strong. He had never married and practised body-building exercises from morning till night.
Outside the East Gate of Yuncheng, the county seat, were two villages which the county administered. Separated by a large stream, one was called East Bank, the other West Bank. Formerly evil spirits had haunted West Bank. They lured people into the stream in broad daylight, lying in wait beneath the waters. No one could cope with them. One day a monk came by, and the villagers told him all about it. The monk pointed to a place, and instructed them to build a pagoda there of black stone; this would repress evil on the bank of the stream. The result was the spirits left the village of West Bank and moved over to East Bank.
When Chao Gai learned of this he was furious. He waded the stream, picked up the black stone pagoda, carried it across single-handed and deposited it on the East Bank. From then on he was famed as Chao Gai, the Tower-Shifting Heavenly King. He became the undisputed ruler of the village, and gallant men everywhere knew his name.
That morning Lei Heng and his soldiers took the big fellow to the manor and knocked on the gate. When the vassals learned who was calling, they reported to the ward chief. Chao Gai was still in bed but hearing that Constable Lei had come, he ordered that the gate be opened immediately. The vassals complied. The soldiers suspended the big fellow from a rafter in the gate house, then Lei Heng took ten or so of their leaders to a hall and sat down.
Chao Gai, who had left his bed to greet them, asked: "What business brings you here, Constable?"
"On orders of his honour the magistrate, Zhu Tong and I have led two patrols into the countryside to look for bandits," said Lei Heng. "Now we're tired and want to rest a while, so we've come to your manor. I hope we're not disturbing you."
"Not at all," replied Chao Gai. He told his vassals to prepare food and drink, and first to bring some tea. "Did you catch any thieves in our village?" he queried.
"Just now we discovered a big fellow sleeping in that Lingguan Temple out front. I could see he was no gentleman. He evidently got drunk and fell asleep there. So we tied him up, I was going to take him to the county magistrate straight away but in the first place it's too early, and in the second place I wanted to inform you, Ward Chief. In case the magistrate asks you about it in the future, you'll be able to answer. I have the prisoner hung up in your gate house."
Chao Gai made a mental note of this. "Thank you for telling me, Constable," he replied. A short time later, his vassals brought in wine and platters of food. Chao Gai said: "Talking out here is not very convenient. Let's sit inside." Ordering a vassal to light a lamp, he conducted Lei Heng to the porch of a rear building.
After they had both taken their places at a table—Chao Gai in the host's seat, Lei Heng in the guest's—a few vassals carried in platters of tidbits, while another poured the wine. Chao Gai ordered that wine also be given to the soldiers. The vassals led the soldiers to a covered walk and treated them as guests, serving large platters of meat and big bowls of wine. He urged them to eat their fill.
As he courteously plied the constable with food and drink, Chao Gai thought to himself: "What thief could he have caught in our village? I must have a look." He downed six or seven goblets of wine with Lei Heng, then summoned one of his stewards and said: "Keep the constable company. I'm going out to relieve myself. I'll be back shortly."
While the steward drank with Lei Heng, Chao Gai got a lantern and went directly to the main gate. None of the soldiers was around. All were inside, drinking. Chao Gai asked one of his vassals, who was guarding the gate: "That robber the constable caught—where have they got him tied?"
"He's locked in the gate house," said the vassal.
Chao Gai pushed open the door and looked. The fellow was suspended high above the floor. His body was a mass of swarthy flesh, his dangling legs were black and hairy, his feet were bare. Chao Gai shone his lantern on the man's face. It was ruddy and broad. On the side of his temple was a scarlet birthmark from which reddish-brown hair sprouted.
"Where are you from, young fellow?" Chao Gai asked him. "I haven't seen you in our village before."
"Your servant is a stranger from a distant district. I came to offer my services to a man but they've arrested me as a thief. I must get justice."
"Who did you want to join in this village?"
"A gallant man."
"His name?"
"He's called Ward Chief Chao."
"Why did you want to see him?"
"Chao Gai is famed everywhere as a champion of righteousness. There's a rare chance for riches I'd like to tell him about."
"Seek no further. I am Ward Chief Chao. If you want me to save you, pretend to recognize me as your mother's brother. In a little while when I come here to see off Constable Lei and his men call me 'uncle.' I will address you as 'nephew.' Just say that you were only four or five years old when you left here. That's why you didn't recognize me when you came again, looking for me."
"If you can rescue me, I'll be deeply grateful," said the young man. "Please help me, champion!"
Carrying his lantern, Chao Gai left the gate house. He again barred the door, then hurried back to the building in the rear.
"Forgive me for neglecting you," he said to Lei Heng.
"I'm putting you to too much trouble," the constable replied. "It's really not right."
They drank several cups of wine together. Soon light began shining in through the window.
"It's brightening in the east," said Lei Heng. "Your servant must take his leave. I have to sign in at the county office."
"You have your official duties, Constable. I dare not detain you. If business brings you to our humble village again, be sure to call on me."
"I certainly will pay my respects, Ward Chief. Please don't bother to see me off."
"At least let me escort you to the manor gate."
Chao Gai and Lei Heng emerged from the building. The soldiers, who had dined well, now took up their pikes and staves and proceeded to the gate house. There they let down the young man they had suspended and led him out through the door, his hands tied behind his back.
"He's a big fellow!" Chao Gai remarked.
"That rogue is the thief we caught in Lingguan Temple," said Lei Heng. Even before he had finished speaking, the young man shouted:
"Uncle, save me!"
Chao Gai pretended to peer at him. Then he cried: "Why, isn't that rascal Wang the Third?"
"Yes, it's me, uncle. Save me!"
Everyone was astonished. "Who is he?" Lei Heng asked Chao Gai. "How does he know you, Ward Chief?"
"He's my sister's son, Wang the Third! Why was the scamp resting in the temple? He lived here till he was four or five, then my sister and her husband moved to the Southern Capital. I didn't see him for ten years. He came again when he was about fifteen, accompanying a merchant from the city on a trip to buy dates. That was the last I saw of him. I've heard many people say the scoundrel is no good. What's he doing here? I'd never have recognized him if it weren't for that scarlet birthmark on the side of his temple!
"Little Third," he shouted at the young man, "why didn't you come to me directly? Why did you go into the village and steal?"
"But uncle, I didn't steal anything," the young fellow protested.
"If you're not a thief, why have they brought you here?" Chao Gai demanded. Snatching a staff from one of the soldiers, he belabored the young man about the head.
"Don't beat him," Lei Heng and the others urged. "Let's hear what he has to say."
"Uncle, don't be angry," said the young fellow. "Let me speak. Since the last time I came at the age of fifteen, ten years have gone by, isn't that so? Last night on the road I had one cup of wine too many. I didn't dare call on you drunk, so I went to the temple to sleep it off, first. How did I know they were going to nab me without a word? I'm not a thief."
Chao Gai again rushed at him with the staff. "Animal," he cried. "Instead of coming to me directly, you guzzled yourself full of yellow wine on the road. Couldn't you get all you want in my home? You've disgraced me!"
"Calm yourself, Ward Chief. Your nephew isn't a thief," Lei Heng said soothingly. "I got suspicious, finding a big fellow like him asleep in the temple. After all, I'd never seen him before. So I arrested him and brought him here. I would never have done it had I known he was your nephew."
Lei Heng ordered his soldiers to untie the young man and turn him over to the ward chief. They at once did so. "Please don't take it amiss," the constable pleaded. "Had I known he was your nephew, this wouldn't have happened. I hope you're not offended. We must go back, now."
"Just a moment, Constable," said Chao Gai. "Please come into my small manor. I've something to say."
Lei Heng returned with the ward chief to the hall. Chao Gai handed him ten ounces of silver. "Just a paltry gift, Constable," Chao Gai said. "Please don't scorn it for being so small."
"But you shouldn't be doing this."
"If you don't accept, I'll know you're displeased with me."
"Since you're so generous, Ward Chief, I can't refuse. Some day I'll show my gratitude."
Chao Gai instructed the young man to thank Lei Heng. Then he distributed pieces of silver among the soldiers and saw the company to the manor gate. Lei Heng bade the ward chief farewell and departed with his men.
Chao Gai took the young man to the rear building and gave him clothes and a hat. He asked his name and place of origin.
"Your servant's family name is Liu, my given name is Tang. My ancestral home is in East Luzhou Prefecture. Because of this scarlet birthmark on the side of my temple, since childhood I've been known as the Red-Haired Demon. I've made this trip especially to inform you of a rare chance for riches, brother Ward Chief. Last night I fell asleep, drunk, in the temple, and those oafs nabbed me and tied me up. Fortunately, today, I've met you at last. Please be seated, brother, and accept my four kowtows."
When the young man had completed his obeisances, Chao Gai said: "You say you have a rare chance to tell me about. What is it?"
"Ever since childhood, your servant has drifted about. I've been to many places and made friends with many gallant men. Though I've often heard them speak of you, brother, I never thought I'd have occasion to seek you out. I've also met men from east of the mountains and north of the river who've served under you, brother. That's why I'm willing to tell you this. If there are no outsiders around, I'd like to put the whole thing before you frankly."
"You can speak freely. Only my most trusted men are here."
"It's said that Governor Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital, has bought jewels and art objects worth a hundred thousand strings of cash to send to his father-in-law Cai the Premier in the Eastern Capital as birthday gifts. Last year he also sent birthday gifts of the same value. But they were seized by unknown persons along the way. To this day the robbers haven't been caught.
"This year Governor Liang has bought another hundred thousand strings worth of jewels and art objects. The route by which they'll be sent has already been chosen. They must be delivered before Cai's birthday on the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. In my humble opinion these things were purchased with unclean money. There will be nothing wrong in taking them. We've only to work out a plan for capturing them along the way. Heaven knows it will be no crime!
"I've often heard that you're a real man, brother, and that you have a remarkable skill with weapons. Although I'm not very talented, I know a little about them myself. Not only can I deal with four or five men at a time but if I had my lance I wouldn't be afraid even if two thousand men on horseback came at me together! If you don't despise me, brother, I'm more than willing to lend a hand. What do you think of the idea?"
"Excellent! We must plan carefully. But you've just come, and you've been rather battered about. Why not rest a while in the guest-house? Let me give the matter some thought. We'll talk more about it later."
Chao Gai ordered a vassal to lead Liu Tang to the guest-house. The vassal did so, then went off.
"I certainly was having a hard time," Liu Tang thought to himself. "It's lucky Chao Gai was able to get me out of that scrape. That lout Lei Heng grabbed me for a thief and suspended me all night from a rafter! The villain can't have travelled very far. Why not take a weapon and go after him? I can knock those rascals down, bring Chao Gai back his silver, and work off some of my anger at the same time. A great idea!" Liu Tang came out of the house, snatched a halberd from the rack and left the manor. As he strode south, the sky was already light. Soon he could see the constable and his soldiers marching slowly ahead. Hurrying after them, Liu Tang cried: "Constable, stand where you are!"
Startled, Lei Heng turned to see Liu Tang advancing towards him rapidly, halberd in hand. Lei hastily took a halberd from one of his soldiers.
"What do you want, varlet?" he shouted.
"If you know what's good for you, you'll give me those ten ounces of silver! Then maybe I'll forgive you!"

"Your uncle presented me with that money. What is it to you? If it weren't for his sake, I'd end your knavish life! What gall to demand my silver!"
"I'm no thief but you suspended me from a rafter all night and swindled my uncle out of ten ounces of silver to boot! Return it to me, if you've got any sense, and I'll let you off. If you don't, I'll spill your blood on the spot!"
Furious, Lei Heng pointed his finger at Liu Tang and swore: "Worthless lying thief! You're a disgrace to your family! Impertinent dog!"
"Dirty extortioner of the people! You dare to curse me?"
"You're a bandit to the marrow of your bones! You're sure to implicate Chao Gai! You're a bandit, heart and liver! Don't think you can pull that sort of thing on me!"
"I'm going to settle with you once and for all!" Brandishing his halberd, the enraged Liu Tang charged towards Lei Heng.
The constable raised his own halberd with a laugh and strode forward to meet him. They clashed in the middle of the road and fought over fifty rounds, with neither vanquishing the other.
When the soldiers saw that Lei Heng couldn't defeat Liu Tang, they began closing in on the young man. But just then the fence gate of a nearby house opened and a man holding a length of chain in his hand emerged, crying: "You two bold men there—desist! I've been watching a long time. Rest a moment. I've something to say." He swung the chain between the contestants. Both lowered their halberds, jumped out of the combat circle, and waited.
The man had the appearance of a scholar. He wore a cylindrical-shaped hat that came down almost to his eyebrows, and a wide flaxen gown with a black border that was gathered at the waist by a tea-coloured sash. His feet were clad in white socks and silk shoes. His handsome and refined face was adorned with a long beard. This was Wu Yong the Wizard. He was also known as the Pedant. His Taoist appellation was Master Increasing Light. Since the earliest times his family had resided in this neighbourhood.
Chain in hand, Wu Yong pointed at Liu Tang and said: "Stay where you are, young man. Why are you fighting with the constable?"
Liu Tang glared at him. "None of your business, scholar!"
"I'll tell you why, Teacher," said Lei Heng. "Last night we caught this rogue sleeping naked in the Lingguan Temple and brought him toward Chief Chao's manor. When we discovered that he was the ward chief's nephew, we released him for his uncle's sake. The ward chief invited us to have some wine and presented me with a gift. Unknown to his uncle, this scoundrel chased after us and demanded that I return the gift to him. How do you like that for nerve?"
"I've known Chao Gai ever since we were children," Wu Yong thought to himself. "He's often discussed his private affairs with me, and I'm familiar with all of his relatives. But I've never heard of this nephew. Besides, he's the wrong age. There's something fishy here. I've got to stop this fight, first. Then I can question him.
"Don't be so stubborn, big fellow," he said to the young man. "Your uncle and I are close friends. I know that he's on good terms with this constable. If you take back the little gift he's given him, it will make your uncle look bad. Have some respect for me. I'll talk this over with your uncle later."
"Scholar, you don't know the facts," said Liu Tang. "My uncle didn't give it willingly. The rogue squeezed that silver out of him! If he doesn't return it to me, I swear I'm not going back!"
"I'll return it only if the ward chief himself asks for it," said Lei Heng. "I won't give it to you!"
"You slandered me and said I was a thief! You extorted my uncle's silver. How dare you refuse to return it!"
"It's not your silver! I won't return it! I won't! I won't!"
"You'll have to ask this halberd in my hand whether you'll return it or not!"
"You two have already fought for a long time without either of you winning," said Wu Yong. "How much longer do you intend to fight?"
"If he doesn't return that silver, I'll fight him until only one of us is left alive!" cried Liu Tang.
"If I were afraid of you, I could have had one of my soldiers help me," Lei Heng shouted angrily. "But I'm too much of a man for that! I'm going to knock you head over heels all by myself!"
Liu Tang thumped his chest furiously. "Let's see you do it!" He came at him.
The constable also advanced, brandishing his arms and stamping his feet. Both men were spoiling to resume the fight. Wu Yong thrust himself between them but his admonitions were in vain. Liu Tang waved his halberd, just waiting for a chance to attack. Lei Heng, cursing the young fellow for ten thousand kinds of a thief, also held his halberd at the ready.
It was then that the soldiers exclaimed: "Here comes the ward chief."
Liu Tang turned and looked. He saw Chao Gai, his unfastened tunic draped over his shoulders, running down the road. "Behave yourself, you young whelp!" shouted Chao Gai.
Wu Yong laughed. "Thank Heaven the ward chief has come. He's the only one who can stop them."
Chao Gai rushed up, panting, "Why are you two fighting?"
"Your nephew chased after me, halberd in hand, and demanded my silver," replied Lei Heng. "I told him I'd only give it back to you, as it was none of his business. He fought me fifty rounds, then this teacher came and stopped us."
"That young animal!" said Chao Gai. "I didn't know anything about it. For my sake, Constable, please continue on your way. I'll call on you another day and make my apologies."
"I knew the young rascal was talking rot," said Lei Heng. "I didn't take him seriously. I'm sorry you've had to come all this distance." He bade the ward chief farewell and departed. We'll say no more of him.
Then Wu Yong confided to Chao Gai: "It's lucky you arrived when you did, or something serious might have happened. That nephew of yours is remarkable. A splendid fighter! I was watching from inside the fence. The famed halberd artist Lei Heng couldn't touch him. He was on the defensive all the time. If they had gone another few rounds, he surely would have lost his life. That's why I hurried out to stop them. Where is your nephew from? I've never seen him at your manor."
"I was just about to send a messenger to invite you over to my humble home for a talk when I noticed that Liu Tang was gone and a halberd missing from the rack," said Chao Gai. "A little cowherd told me he had seen a big fellow, carrying a halberd, running south. I hastily followed. Fortunately, you had already stopped the fight. Please come to my humble manor. There's a matter on which I need your advice."
Wu Yong first returned to his quarters and hung up the chain in his study. He said to his landlord: "When my students come, say that their teacher is busy today. Tell them they can take the day off." He closed his door and locked it, then proceeded with Chao Gai and Liu Tang to the ward chief's manor.
Chao Gai led them directly to an inner room in the rear building, where they took appropriate seats as host and guests.
"Ward Chief, who is this person?" Wu Yong asked.
"A bold fellow in the fraternity of gallant men, Liu Tang, from a family in East Luzhou Prefecture. He came especially to inform me of a rare chance for riches. Last night he fell asleep, drunk, in the Lingguan Temple, and Lei Heng nabbed him and brought him here. I pretended he was my nephew, and was able to save him. He told me that Governor Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital, has bought jewels and art objects worth a hundred thousand strings of cash to send to his father-in-law—Cai the Premier in the Eastern Capital. They will soon be passing this way. He thought since they were purchased with unclean money, there will be nothing wrong in taking them.
"His proposal happens to coincide with a dream I had last night. I dreamed the seven stars of the Big Dipper had settled on the ridge of my roof. Another small star just above the handle turned into a streak of light. I thought to myself: To have stars shining right on your own house—that must be an auspicious sign! I intended to invite you over this morning, Teacher, and ask you what I should do."
Wu Yong smiled. "I thought there was something odd about the sudden appearance of brother Liu, and was able to guess seven- or eight-tenths of what was up. His proposal is excellent but there's only one thing—with too many people involved, we can't succeed; with too few, we're bound to fail. Though you have many vassals here, not one of them is suitable. But can just the three of us accomplish our aim? Even though you, Ward Chief, and you, brother Liu, are remarkable people, the answer is no. What we need is seven or eight gallant men. More than that would be no use."
"Could that be the meaning of the number of stars in my dream?" asked Chao Gai.
"Brother's dream was no ordinary one," replied Wu Yong. "Can it be that north of here there are people who can help us?" Frowning he pondered for several moments. Then he understood. "There are, there are!" he exclaimed.
"If you know some courageous men you can trust, Teacher," said Chao Gai, "invite them to join us and put this thing through."
Wu Yong placed two fingers together and calmly spoke a few words. And as a result, in East Bank righteous men became bold robbers, in Stone Tablet Village fishing boats became vessels of war. Truly, their commander could speak of all things in heaven and on earth, and turn up the rivers and roil the seas. What men did Wu Yong the Wizard recommend?

Remember how Lei Heng had found that big fellow sleeping on the altar in the Temple of the Heavenly Official? and Lei Heng's men had pounced on him and trussed him up?
It was early still, before dawn, as they left the temple.
"We'll take this fellow with us to Boss Chao's, and see if we can get something to eat, before we take him back for interrogation," Lei Heng said. So off they all went to Boss Chao's.
This Boss Chao of East Riverside was a gentleman called Chao Gai, who was from a rich family of that neighbourhood, and was famous for his generosity and love of justice. It was his pleasure to seek the company of brave men, and whoever came to him for help, under whatever circumstances, was invited to stay and on leaving was provided by Chao Gai with silver to help him on his way. Chao Gai was a lover of fencing with sword or staff, and was of a strong, athletic build. He had never married so was able to devote the best part of his time to training and developing his physique.
Now in the administrative district of Yuncheng, beyond the east gate, there were two villages, East Riverside and West Riverside, separated only by a broad stream. West Riverside had once been plagued by spirits which used to bewitch people so that they fell in the river, in broad daylight — they simply couldn't save themselves. Then one day a monk passed that way. Having learnt the story with all its details from the villagers, he indicated a spot where he advised them to place a small shrine, fashioned out of blue stone. With this shrine in place on the river bank, the spirits of West Riverside all transferred themselves to East Riverside. When Chao Gai learnt of this, he was so angry he crossed the river and with his own hands carried that blue shrine back to East Riverside. For this reason people nicknamed him "The Pagoda-Lifter." Chao Gai's word was law in this village, and his name was well-known among the fraternity of the rivers and lakes.
That morning Lei Heng and his men, leading their prisoner, arrived at Chao Gai's and knocked on the door. The servants, having asked what they wanted, went to tell Chao Gai. Chao Gai was not up yet but when he heard it was Sergeant Lei, he quickly told them to open the door. The first thing the soldiers did when they were let in was to hang their captive up in the gatehouse. Lei Heng and a dozen or so of his men went to sit in the thatched hall. Chao Gai, when he had risen, received them and asked: "What business is it brings you to these parts, Sergeant?"
"I've been sent by the Governor, sir," said Lei Heng. "Zhu Tong and me, we've been told to go with our men and search the whole area for robbers. We've had an exhausting march, and we're in need of a rest, so we took the liberty of coming to see you. I hope we're not inconveniencing you."
"Of course not," said Chao Gai. He called his servants to organize some food and wine, starting with a soup. "And have you come across any robbers in my district?" he asked.
"As it happens," said Lei Heng, "when we were passing the Temple of the Heavenly Official we found a suspicious character sleeping inside. I could see he was not a reliable type. No doubt he got drunk, and that's why he fell asleep there. So we tied him up, and naturally we're going to cart him off to the magistracy but, well, firstly it's a bit early in the day, and secondly I thought it only right Your Honour should know, just in case our respected Magistrate should ask you something about it later on, so you'll know what to tell him, you see. For the time being we've hung the fellow up in your gatehouse."
Chao Gai took good note. "I am grateful to you, Sergeant, for informing me of this," he said.
The next moment the servants appeared with choice food and drink, and Chao Gai announced: "It's not very convenient here for talking, we'd better go inside and sit down." He told the servants to light lamps and candles in the room, and ushered the sergeant in. Wine was poured. Chao Gai took the host's place and Lei Heng the honoured guest's. The servants brought various dishes of fruit and vegetables to accompany the wine. While the wine was being served, Chao Gai remembered to order wine for Lei Heng's men, whom the servants showed into a reception room below the gallery where they were regaled with quantities of food and drink.
While Chao Gai urged Lei Heng to drink, he was thinking to himself "Who can this thief be who has managed to get himself caught in my village? I think I'd better go and have a look myself." So after five or six cups he called one of his assistants and said: "Stay here and keep the sergeant company a minute, while I go and wash my hands."
The assistant did as instructed and Chao Gai went to get a lantern and then made his way to the gatehouse to investigate. Lei Heng's men had all gone to drink wine and there was no one outside. Chao Gai asked the gatekeeper: "Where is he, this thief the sergeant brought along?"
"He's locked up inside," the man replied.
Chao Gai pushed open the door and saw the man strung up in there at a considerable height, a swarthy individual with a massive frame terminating in black hairy legs and bare feet. When Chao Gai shone the lantern on his face, it appeared broad and purplish with a red birthmark at the temple, sprouting brown hair.
Chao Gai hailed him: "You there, where are you from? I've never seen you before in my village."
"I'm a stranger, I'm not from these parts. I came here to look for a certain person but they mistook me for a thief and arrested me. I've a perfectly good explanation."
"Who is it you were looking for here?"
"A brave and just man."
"Does this brave and just man have a name?"
"He's called Boss Chao."
"And what business do you have with him?"
"He's famous for his courage and generosity. I've a scheme for getting rich I want to tell him about. That's why I'm here."
"All right. I am Boss Chao. If you want me to help you, you'd better pretend to recognize me as your maternal uncle. In a moment I'll be seeing Lei Heng off. You call me uncle and I'll recognize you as my nephew. I'll say you left here when you were just four or five years old and you haven't been back till now, that's why I didn't know you at first."
"If you get me out of this, I'll be forever grateful. Do, please, help me."
Chao Gai took up the lantern and left, closing the door care-fully behind him. He hurried back to the room where had left Lei Heng. "I fear I have been neglecting you," he said.
"No, no." Lei Heng said. "I have inconvenienced you, it is my fault."
After they had drunk a few more cups, the first gleams of day appeared in the window and Lei Heng said: "Day is dawning, I have to leave you and report for work at the office."
"I know you have work to do and I must not detain you," Chao Gai said. "But if duty brings you to our neighbourhood again, you must not fail to pay me a visit."
"If it is your wish, I shall certainly come to pay my respects. But please don't trouble to see me off now."
"Of course I will, at least as far as the gate."
They went out together. Lei Heng's men, who had eaten and drunk their fill, now took up their weapons and went to the gatehouse, where they released the prisoner and brought him out with his hands tied behind his back.
"That's a big fellow," said Chao Gai when he saw him.
"It's the robber we caught sleeping in the temple," Lei Heng began. But before he could finish, the prisoner began to shout: "Uncle, rescue me!"
Chao Gai looked at him hard, feigning surprise. "Why, can it be young Wang?" he said.
"Yes, yes, it's me. Rescue me, Uncle!"
All were amazed. "But who is he?" Lei Heng asked. "And how is it he knows you, Your Honour?"
"It's my nephew, young Wang. Whatever was he doing sleeping in the temple? He's my sister's boy, he lived here when he was small but then he left when he was about four years old because my sister and her family went to live in Nanjing. They must have stayed there, oh, a good ten years. He came back once with a merchant from the capital who was here on business, when he was about fifteen but since then I haven't seen him. Well, from what I've heard he hasn't turned out well at all, what's he been up to here? I didn't even recognize him at first. But for that red birthmark he has on the temple, I would never have known him."
Raising his voice, Chao Gai said: "Hey, you, young Wang, why didn't you come to see me? What do you mean by coming here to rob the people in my village?"
"Uncle," the prisoner replied indignantly, "I'm not a thief."
"If you're not a thief, how come you're under arrest?" So saying, he seized a truncheon from one of the soldiers and made as if to smash the young man's face in. Immediately Lei Heng and his men cried out: "Don't hit him, hear what he has to say."
"Uncle, don't be angry, let me explain. It's ten years since that last time I was here, remember, when I was fourteen or fifteen? Last night, when I was travelling, I had a bit too much to drink. I didn't dare come to see you in that condition, I thought I'd go and sleep it off in the temple first. I never dreamt they'd pick me up like that, without even asking what I was doing. Of course I'm not a thief."
Chao Gai lifted his arm again, as if about to strike. "You animal," he shouted. "You didn't come to see me. Instead you had to go and fill yourself up with yellow wine on the road! Couldn't you have waited till you got here? You'll make me die of shame!"
Lei Heng tried to calm him down: "Don't be angry with him, sir, your nephew is not a thief. It's just that, when we saw such a big fellow sleeping there in the temple, it seemed a bit suspicious. We'd never seen him before, and we didn't know who he really was. That's why we apprehended him and brought him here. Of course we'd never have done so if we'd known it was your nephew." He ordered his men to untie the prisoner at once and hand him over to Chao Gai. When they'd done this, Lei Heng said: "Please forgive me. Had I known it was your nephew we'd never have done this. It's really unpardonable. I think we should leave now."
"No, Sergeant, don't go yet. Please come inside a moment, I've something to say to you."
Lei Heng released the prisoner, and they all went back into the hall and Chao Gai got ten taels of stamped silver which he gave to Lei Heng, saying: "Please, Sergeant, do not despise this poor gift, I hope you won't be offended."
"But that's not necessary at all," Lei Heng said.
"If you don't take it, I shall feel insulted," said Chao Gai.
"Well, if you insist. I will accept it for the time being but I shall have to repay your generosity at the first opportunity."
Chao Gai told the young man to prostrate himself in gratitude to Lei Heng. Then he found some silver for all of Lei Heng's men. He escorted them to the gate, where Lei Heng took his leave.
Chao Gai now led the stranger to a room at the back where he found some clothes for him to change into and something to cover his head. Then he asked him who he was and where he hailed from.

"My name is Liu Tang, and I'm from Donglu. Because of this red birthmark I've got on my temple, they all call me 'The Red-Haired Devil.' I came here specially to give you something of great value. But yesterday when I got here it was late and I was drunk, so I went to sleep in the temple. How could I know those bastards would grab me and tie me up? Well, as they say, if people are destined to meet, a thousand miles is nothing, if not, you can be right on top of each other but it makes no difference. Anyway, now I've been lucky enough to find you. Just wait a minute, while I prostrate myself four times."
When this business was finished, Chao Gai asked: "You said you had something of great value to give me. Where is it?"
"Since I was little, I've always been a wanderer among the rivers and lakes. I've travelled many roads, and I always keep an eye out for brave men. So many times I've heard your name but I didn't dare think that one day I would meet you. In Shandong and Hebei I was told of so many smugglers who found refuge with you. That's what encouraged me to come here to speak to you. If you think no one can hear us who oughtn't to, I'll spill the beans."
"These are all people I trust," said Chao Gai. "You can speak freely."
"I have discovered that Governor Liang in the Northern Capital, Daming, has got together a treasure, pearls and precious stones and ornaments and suchlike, worth a hundred thousand, as a birthday present for his father-in-law, the Grand Preceptor Cai, at the Emperor's court. Another treasure just like it was sent last year but it was stolen on the way, no one knows by whom — they still haven't been caught. Sooner or later the convoy with this year's treasure is going to set off, in order to arrive for the birthday on the fifteenth of the sixth month. As I see it, this wealth is illegally acquired, so what's wrong with taking it? Why don't we work out a plan to steal it on the way? It won't be a crime in the eyes of heaven. I know your reputation as a man of honour and as a fighter. I'm nothing special but I know a bit about fighting too. I can deal with five or six men single-handed, I wouldn't be afraid even if a troop of cavalry came at me, so long as I had my lance. Anyway, if you'll accept it, that's the gift I'd like to make to you. What do you say?"
"It's brilliant! We'll have to work it all out. However, you've had a bit of a rough time getting here, you'd better go and rest for a while in the guest quarters, while I think it over. We'll discuss things later."
A servant took Liu Tang over to the guest quarters as instructed and left him there. "I had certainly got myself into some hot water there," Liu Tang thought to himself. "Lucky Chao Gai turned up and was able to get me out of it. That bloody lout Lei Heng, making out I was a thief and hanging me up all night! Incidentally, he can't have got far, why don't I get a stick and go after him? I'll knock those buggers down, get the silver and return it to Chao Gai! And I can work off some of my feelings at the same time, what a great idea!"
No sooner said than done. He went to the arms rack and equipped himself with a sabre. Then he rushed out of the gate and strode off southwards. It was broad daylight by now:
*The Plough has begun to slant and light begins to spread from the sky's eastern edge while the blazing star declines towards the sea. The golden rooster has called three times, summoning ladies to their toilet. The neighing of horses urges merchants to commence their competitive activities. Several wisps of pink cloud trail across the blue heavens, as the sun's red disk rises above the mulberry tree.*
The Red-Haired Devil had gone a couple of miles when he made out Lei Heng, marching along slowly at the head of his troop. Hurrying towards them he shouted: "Hey, you, Sergeant! Stop!"
It gave Lei Heng quite a shock. When he turned and saw Liu Tang rushing in his direction, waving his sabre, he hurriedly took a sabre from one of his men and shouted back: "What the bloody hell do you want?"
"Give me back that silver you've got, you cheat, and I'll let you off!"
"Your uncle gave it to me, what business is it of yours? If it wasn't for your uncle I'd finish you off! Asking for the silver back, you've got a nerve!"
"I'm no thief but you hung me up all night, and then extorted ten taels of silver from my uncle. You'll give it back, if you've any sense! I'll show you mercy if you do. If not, your blood will flow!"
Lei Heng lost patience. He pointed his finger at Liu Tang and roared: "You disgrace to your house and name! You idle good-for-nothing! How dare you speak to me like that!"
"You enemy of the people, you mangy cur! How dare you insult me!"
"Sod your eyes and sod your bones, what do you mean by trying to bring Chao Gai into it! Sod your heart and your soul, you can't carry on like that in front of me!"
"I shall settle your hash," shouted the enraged Liu Tang and rushed at Lei Heng, waving his sabre, whereupon Lei Heng gave a contemptuous laugh and taking a firm grip on his weapon, advanced to meet him. The two of them clashed right there on the road; over fifty assaults were delivered, in which neither proved the victor.
Lei Heng's men seeing that their commander was unable to get the upper hand, were on the point of joining in against Liu Tang, when suddenly the gate of a neighbouring compound opened and a man appeared wielding a pair of brass chains. "Would you two gentlemen stop fighting?" he shouted. "You've been at it a long time, I was watching. Take a break now, please, I wish to talk to you." And with that he shot out his chains to separate the two adversaries. They both put up their weapons, sprang back out of the circle of combat and stood stock-still.
The speaker was got up as a scholar. He had a tubular hat which fitted close down above the eyebrows, a loose canvas robe with black eyelets, held in at the waist by a tea-coloured belt, and dapper shoes and socks. As to his person, his eyebrows were strongly marked and his gaze penetrating, while a fine beard adorned his chin. This was none other than Wu Yong, the Beacon of Learning, also known as the Professor, and the Spreader of Enlightenment. His family had been in the district for generations. There's a composition of Linjiang Xian's that says some good things about him:
*He's read a thousand classics and devoted his life to cultivating his powers. He's mastered many an artful strategy. He has the mind of a great leader, the heart of a heroic warrior. He could fool Zhuge Liang and get the better of Chen Ping.*[1] *He has tricks and schemes enough to scare demons. That's why they call him "The Professor"; that's what earned him his title, "The Beacon of Learning."*
As he manipulated his chains, Wu Yong pointed at Liu Tang and said: "Cease now, you! What cause have you to fight with the sergeant?"
Liu Tang stared back and said: "That's no business of yours!"
"Professor, I'll explain," Lei Heng said. "We found this fellow last night, sleeping stark naked in the temple. We arrested him and took him along to the manor. But then it turned out that he's Mr. Chao's nephew. So for his uncle's sake we released him. Then Mr. Chao invited us to stay and drink and he made me a small gift. This scoundrel, unknown to his uncle, followed me here and asked for it back. It's an impertinence, don't you agree?"
Wu Yong thought: "I have known Chao Gai since childhood. If he has any kind of problem he talks it over with me. I know all his family and friends but this nephew I've never seen before. Besides, the age is all wrong. No, they must be up to something. What I must do is try and put a stop to this fight, and then go and ask Chao Gai." To Liu Tang he said: "Don't be obstinate, young man. Your uncle is a good friend of mine, and I know he is on good terms with this officer. If your uncle decides to make someone a gift, and you proceed to quarrel about it, you'll only embarrass your uncle. And you should show me some respect, too. I'll have a word with your uncle later."
"Excuse me, sir but you know nothing about it," Liu Tang said. "This wasn't just a free gift from my uncle, he was swindled. I swear I won't leave till this cheat gives back the money."
"I'll only give it back to Mr. Chao himself, assuming he comes and asks me for it," said Lei Heng. "I certainly won't give it to you!"
"You go around making false accusations and blackmailing people. Do you still refuse to give it back?"
"It's not your money. I won't give it to you, and that's that!"
"You won't? Well, just see what this sabre of mine has to say!"
"You've been fighting for hours," Wu Yong interjected, "and there's been no outcome. How long do you intend to go on for?"
"If he won't give the money back, it's got to be a fight to the death," Liu Tang said.
Lei Heng exploded: "Do you think I'm afraid of you? I'd call in my men to deal with you, only it might look as if I feared you. I shall have to cut you down myself!"
Liu Tang responded furiously, readying his weapon and shouting: "Who's afraid? Who's afraid?" Then he began to move in. At the same time, Lei Heng advanced, with whirling arms and stamping feet. Both men were bent on renewing the fight. Wu Yong stood on one side begging them to desist but to no avail. Liu Tang pointed his sabre, aiming to get in under his opponent's guard, while the latter poured out insults in a ceaseless flow and also took up a position of readiness. But just at this moment, the shout went up: "His Honour is here!"
Liu Tang turned to look. Chao Gai could be seen, hurrying up the road, still not fully dressed, with his robe unbuttoned in front. "You there, you unmannerly brute, stop this at once!" he was shouting.
Wu Yong laughed with relief. "Thank goodness Mr. Chao himself has come, that's the only thing that will put a stop to this fight."
Chao Gai arrived still panting. "What's he doing here, what's this all about?" he asked.
"Your nephew followed me here and wanted to take back the money you gave me by force of arms," Lei Heng said. "I said I wouldn't give it to him, I'd only give it back to you, and I told him it was none of his business. But he attacked me. We had fifty or so assaults before the Professor here intervened."
"The animal!" Chao Gai said. "I knew nothing at all about this. Please, Sergeant, forgive me and continue on your way, I will come to see you another day to present my excuses."
"I know the fellow is crazy," Lei Heng said, "and of course it is no fault of yours, sir. I am only sorry you had to be troubled." With this he took his leave, and we shall say no more of him.
Wu Yong now said to Chao Gai, "If you hadn't come, it might have been nasty. This nephew of yours is something quite out of the ordinary! He certainly knows how to fight. I was watching from my compound. Lei Heng has quite a reputation with the sabre but he could make no impression on him, the best he could do was block and parry. If they'd gone on a bit longer, Lei Heng would not have come out of it alive. That's why I thought I'd better step in. Where has he appeared from, this nephew of yours? I've never seen him before at the manor."
"I was going to ask you to be so kind as to come to my house so I could have a word with you," Chao Gai said. "I was just about to send someone when I noticed my nephew was not around and a sabre was missing from the arms rack. Then one of the cowherds said he had seen this big fellow armed with a sabre heading south in a hurry. I set out as fast as I could in pursuit. Luckily you had already restrained him. Please, let us both go to my house now, we need to do some thinking."
Wu Yong went first to his study and hung up his brass chains beside the bookcase. Then he instructed his landlord: "When the students come, tell them I have things to do today, they can have a day's holiday." There's a poem about this:
Skilled in books and arms alike,
*His whirling chains can vanquish a pike;*
*He loves to talk of chivalry,*
*But he won't sit at home unprofitably.*
*Open the cage and the bird flies out;*
*The frogs, released, go hopping about.*
*And so when the teacher leaves in haste*
Nothing's more to the students' taste.
Wu Yong closed the study door and locked it. Then the three of them went back to Chao Gai's.
Chao Gai invited them into an inner chamber, and they seated themselves according to the rules of precedence.
"All right, who is he?" Wu Yong asked.
"He's a gentleman of the rivers and lakes," said Chao Gai, "and his name is Liu Tang. His family are from Donglu. He came to find me because he's onto something of great value. He got drunk last night and went to sleep in the temple. He was arrested by Lei Heng and brought to the manor. I got him released by claiming him as my nephew. What he tells me is this: Governor Liang, Governor of Daming, the Northern Capital, has amassed a quantity of valuables worth a hundred thousand cash that he is sending to the Eastern Capital as a birthday present for his father-in-law — Madam Cai's father. At some time or another, the convoy will pass through here, and since it's a question of ill-gotten gains, why should it not be seized? Now what he told me corresponds exactly to a dream I had. Last night I dreamed the seven stars of the Plough stood right over my house and together with them there was another little star which vanished in a flash of bright light. I imagine that if the stars shine on my house it must signify something good. I had planned to come and ask you about it. What's your opinion?"
"I knew something was up the moment I saw young Liu here," exclaimed Wu Yong happily. "And I had guessed about seventy-five per cent of what it was about. It sounds an excellent scheme. There's just one thing: we don't want too many people in on it, yet it's impossible with too few. The servants here are no good, we can't use any of them. At the moment, then, there's only you, Liu Tang and myself, just the three of us to carry through this affair. Agreed that you and Liu Tang have exceptional qualities but it's still not enough. No, what we need for this is seven or eight good men and true, that would do the trick. But not more."
"Didn't I say that was just the number of stars in my dream?" exclaimed Chao Gai.
"Undoubtedly that was a most significant dream," said Wu Yong. "It surely suggests that there are others in the neighbourhood who will assist us." He thought for a long time, frowning with concentration. "I've got it!" he cried finally.
"If you know anyone reliable, then please go and ask them, so we can accomplish our design," said Chao Gai.
Without hurrying, Wu Yong raised one hand with the finger and thumb joined and proceeded to explain.
And as a result, in East Riverside good men became bandits, while in Stonetable fishing boats turned into warships. Truly it can be said that:

Gifted with speech that can the heavens beguile,
He makes the rivers seethe and the seas boil.

As we have said, when Lei Heng reached the Lingguan Temple he saw a big man sleeping on the altar table, whom the soldiers bound with ropes. Lei Heng said, "I will take this fellow to the village chief Chao, and ask for a meal there, and then will take him on to the county magistrate to be examined."
So the party came to the chief's village. The chief of the village was named Chao Gai, whose ancestors had been wealthy men. He was generous and hospitable, and was particularly fond of making friends with heroes from all parts of the empire. He offered hospitality to whomsoever came to his village, no matter of what character the strangers were, and if they wanted to leave they were given money and assistance. Chao Gai was very fond of exercising with the spear and cudgel, so that his body was very strong. He had no wife, and he spent all his time in developing his muscles. On the east side of Yuncheng County were two villages—Dongxi and Xixi and they were separated by a stream. Formerly at the Xixi village there were demons who decoyed men into the stream, and once there, there was no help for them. But one day a monk happened to pass that way, and the people of the village told him all about the demons. He selected a place, and told them to erect there a pagoda of gray stone, and it would protect them from the demons in the stream. When this had been done the demons went to the Dongxi Village, and Chao Gai was very angry about this. So he picked up the pagoda and carried it across the river. Because of this the people called him, Chao Gai, the "Heavenly King" who can carry a pagoda on the palm of his hand. He had great influence over those villages and was well known among the bandits.
On the day referred to Lei Heng, with his militia and their prisoner, arrived at the village and knocked at the gate. The gatekeepers heard this, and reported the matter to the village chief. At the time Chao Gai was still in bed but when he heard that Inspector Lei Heng had arrived he gave orders for the gate to be opened immediately. The gatekeepers did this, and the soldiers took the prisoner to the guardroom near the gate and tied him up there. Lei Heng took about ten of his best men, to the guest hall where they sat down.
When Chao Gai entered he received them with the usual inquiries, and then asked on what public business they had come there.
Lei Heng replied, "The magistrate gave orders to myself and Zhu Tong to take soldiers to the villages and arrest any bandits we found. We have travelled a good distance, and feeling tired we came to your village for a rest. I am afraid that we have disturbed the sweet dreams of the chief."
Chao Gai said that that did not matter. He then ordered the servants to prepare food and wine. He then asked whether Lei Heng had succeeded in arresting any brigand in that village.
Lei Heng replied, "I found a man at the Lingguan Temple, and as he appeared to be in a drunken sleep, and not of good character, I arrested him. I brought him here so that you might know all about the affair, as I was afraid that it would be inconvenient for you not to know of the matter when the county magistrate tries the case. He is now tied up in the guardroom near the gate."
Chao Gai bore this remark in mind and thanked him for reporting the matter. In a short time the servants brought in the food and wine. Chao Gai said, "This room is not a good place to discuss matters in, and therefore we had better go into a hall at the back of this." He then ordered the servants to light the lamps in another room, and requested the inspector to go and have a drink there.
On arrival there Chao Gai took his seat in the position of a host, while Lei Heng sat down as a guest. The servants brought in the fruit, wine, vegetables, and other food, and then stood at the side serving the wine. Chao Gai sent the servants with some wine for the soldiers. The servants did this, and also asked the soldiers to go to another room outside where the servant attended to their wants, bringing them a large tray of meat and a large bowl of wine.
While Chao Gai was pressing Lei Heng to take some wine he was thinking who the man could be who had been arrested, and how he could go to see who it was. When they had drunk about seven cups of wine Chao Gai summoned a steward, and told him to stay with the guest while he went to the toilet. Chao Gai then got a lamp, and going outside saw that there was no one about as all the soldiers had gone to drink wine. He went to the gatekeeper, and asked where the thief brought there by Inspector Lei Heng was tied up.
The gatekeeper said that the thief was imprisoned in the guardroom near the gate. Chao Gai went to the guardroom, and upon pushing open the door saw inside a man hanging from a great height. He saw that his flesh was dark, and also that his feet were bare, and were covered with black hair. Holding up his lamp he saw that his face was very broad and also discoloured. Near his temple was a red birthmark with black and yellow hair growing from it.
Chao Gai asked him, "Where do you come from? I have not seen you at this village before."
The man replied, "I came from a distant place to look for a man here, and was arrested as a thief but I can give a full explanation."
Chao Gai asked, "Whom did you come to find in this village?"
The man said, "I came here to find a hero."
"What was the name of the hero?"
The man replied that he had come to find a village chief called Chao.
"What business had you with him that you were trying to find him?"
The man replied, "He is famous everywhere as a hero. Just now I have a matter that may result in riches or influence, and that is what I want to talk with him about."
Chao Gai said, "You need not say anything more, I am the village chief, Chao Gai. The way I can help you, is that you recognize me when Inspector Lei Heng leaves here, as your maternal uncle and I will also recognize you as my nephew. You can say that you left here when you were only about five years old, and in returning to find me you forgot the place where I lived."
The man replied, "If in this matter you assist me I shall never forget your kindness. I request you to help me."
Chao Gai picked up the lantern, and leaving the guardroom, closed the door after him. Going to the room where Lei Heng was seated, he said to him, "I must apologize for leaving you alone so long."
Lei Heng politely replied, "I have not been right in giving you so much trouble."
They drank together several cups of wine before they saw the rays of early dawn entering through the window. Lei Heng then remarked that it was already dawn and that he must go as he had to report in the magistrate's *yamen* by dawn.

Chao Gai said, "As you are on official business I cannot of course detain you. But should you at any time have any business near this village I hope that you will pay me a visit."
Lei Heng said, "I will certainly pay you a visit but I request that you will not now accompany me."
Chao Gai said, "Very good, I will only go a short distance to the gate of this farm."
They both went outside. The soldiers had finished their wine and food, and now taking their spears and cudgels they went to the guardroom and released the prisoner, tied his hands behind his back, and then took him outside the gate. When Chao Gai saw the prisoner, he said, "What a big man!"
Lei Heng said, "This is the man who was arrested as a thief at the Lingguan Temple." He had hardly finished speaking when the prisoner called out, "Uncle! Save me."
Chao Gai pretended to look at him carefully, and shouted, "Hello! Can this be Wang the Third?"
The man replied, "I am. Uncle, save me!"
All the men were surprised. Lei Heng asked Chao Gai: "Who is this man? How is it that he recognizes you?"
Chao Gai said, "Oh! That is my nephew called Wang the Third. But how was it that he took rest in a temple? He is my sister's son, and previously lived here. When he was about five years old he went with his parents to Nanjing, and ten years later he paid us a visit here. A man from Nanjing came with him to buy some things but since that time I have not seen Wang the Third. From other men I heard that he had become a useless individual. But why has he come here now? At first I did not know him but now I recognize him because of the birthmark on his temple." Then turning to the prisoner he asked "Young Third! Why did you not come to see me in a straightforward way instead of arriving as a thief?"
The man replied, "Uncle, I am not a thief."
Chao Gai asked, "If you are not a thief, what were you arrested for?" Saying this he took a cudgel from a soldier and struck the man on his head and face.

Lei Heng urged Chao Gai not to beat the man but to wait and hear what he had to say.
The man said, "Uncle! Do not be angry but listen to me. When I came here I was only fifteen years old, and is that not ten years ago? Yesterday I drank much wine on the way, so that I was not in a condition to visit you. When these soldiers came to arrest me they did not ask me any questions. I am certainly not a thief."
Chao Gai again raised the cudgel to beat him, and reviled him; saying, "You beast! Instead of coming straightforwardly to visit me you indulged your vile appetite for the "yellow soup" (wine). If you had come to me would I not have given you wine to drink? What a disgrace!"
Lei Heng said, "Chief! Do not get angry. Your nephew may not be a thief. We saw him sleeping in a strange way in a temple, and as we did not know him we were suspicious, and arrested him. If we had known that he was your nephew we would not have arrested him." He then ordered his soldiers to untie the ropes, and deliver the prisoner to the chief. The soldiers did so, and released the prisoner. Lei Heng then spoke to Chao Gai, "You must not blame me. If I had known before that he is your nephew I would not have committed such a serious mistake. We must now go back to the town."
Chao Gai said, "Inspector, do not go yet. Please come inside as I have something to say to you."
They both then went into the guest's chamber where Chao Gai gave Lei Heng ten taels of silver, and then said, "Inspector, this is only a small present but I trust that you will accept it."
"There is no need for such things."
"If you do not accept it you must feel unsatisfied with it."
Lei Heng said, "As you are so generous, I will accept it but I will recompense you later on."
Chao Gai told the prisoner to salute Lei Heng; then he gave some money to the soldiers, and accompanied Lei Heng to the gate. Lei Heng saluted Chao Gai, and departed with his men.
Chao Gai took the prisoner into a room, and gave him clothes and a cap. He then asked him for his name, and where he came from.
The man said, "My name is Liu Tang, and I am a native of East Luzhou Prefecture. But people call me the "Red-Haired Demon" because of my birthmark. I came here to tell you about a matter of great importance. Yesterday evening I stayed in the temple and got drunk. I did not expect to be arrested by these men, and to be brought here as a prisoner. But fortunately today I am here. Elder brother, please be seated, and agree to receive my salute four times."
This being done Chao Gai said, "You now tell me where is the thing that will give me wealth and influence."
Liu Tang said, "Since I was a boy I have rambled about everywhere, and have been particularly fond of making friends with heroes. I always heard of your fame but never had a chance to come and see you. I also knew some merchants who did illegal buying and selling in both Shandong and Hebei provinces. I also heard that many of them sought refuge with you, and therefore I decided to mention this important matter to you and if there is no stranger here, I can now tell you everything."
Chao Gai said, "All the people here are my confidants so there is no need for any further delay in your speaking to me."
Liu Tang said, "I have heard that Grand Secretary Liang, the commander-in-chief at Daming, the Northern Capital, has bought gold articles, pearls, and other valuables to the value of one hundred thousand strings of cash that he will send to the Eastern Capital for presentation as a birthday gift to his father-in-law, Prime Minister Cai. Last year he also sent similar presents but they were stolen by bandits, and so far the culprits have not been arrested. It has not been fixed on what date this year's presents will be dispatched but they should reach their destination before the birthday which is the 15th day of the sixth month.
"I think this is ill-gotten money so why should we not take it? We had better think of some plan of seizing these presents on the road. Even if Heaven knows of the matter our act will not be regarded as a crime. I have heard of your fame, and think that your military training will insure success to the scheme. I have no skill but I know something of fighting. It is needless to mention only three or five men, because if there were two thousand mounted soldiers I would not be afraid of them even if I had only one spear. But if you think that my skill is not of much use, I shall be willing to assist you if you will take me. What do you think of the matter?"
Chao Gai said, "Bravo? We must discuss the matter. But I am afraid that you have experienced much suffering on your way here so better go to the guest chamber where you can rest, and tomorrow we will discuss the matter."
Chao Gai then ordered the servant to conduct Liu Tang to the guest chamber.
In the guest chamber Liu Tang meditated. "Why did I come here and so experience all this misery? If it had not been for the intervention of Chao Gai I should not have been released. I do not like Lei Heng who falsely accused me of being a thief, and caused me to be hung here for the night. As he cannot have gone very far I will get a stick, and pursue him. When I catch up to them I will knock them all down and get back the silver. This will avenge my wrong. This is an excellent plan!" He then went outside, and got a halberd out of the rack. Leaving by the gate he went along the southern road with big strides. The day was quite bright, and very soon he saw in the distance Lei Heng and his men, and soon caught up to them. Upon reaching them Liu Tang shouted out, "Hey, Inspector, you need not try to get away."
Lei Heng was surprised at hearing this, and turning round he saw Liu Tang armed with a halberd. He quickly took a halberd from one of his men, and shouted, "What are you following us for?"
Liu Tang said, "You understand the matter. You must give me those ten taels of silver, and then I won't attack you."
Lei Heng said, "The money was given to me by your uncle so what have you got to do with it? I would have certainly killed you but for your uncle. And yet you ask me for the money."
"I am not a thief, and yet you hanged me for one night," said Liu Tang. "You deceived my uncle of the ten taels of silver. You know this is the case, and you had better give me the money, then I will regard your past deeds with leniency. But if you do not give me the money I will spill some of your blood."
Lei Heng was very angry, and pointing at Liu Tang he cursed him saying, "You lying thief, who brings disgrace and ruin to your family. You have no decency but how dare you talk like this?"
Liu Tang replied, "You deceiver of the people with your vile skill. How dare you curse me?"
Lei Heng continued his cursing. "You are a wanton thief from your head to the soles of your feet! You are certainly implicating Chao Gai. You have a thief's disposition but this kind or thing I will not allow."
Liu Tang was also angry, and he shouted out, "I came here to give you a good hiding." He seized his halberd, and advanced towards Lei Heng. Lei Heng only laughed at him, and also advanced with his halberd. They met at the side of the road where they fought for a long time, without either getting an advantage. When the soldiers saw that Lei Heng had not defeated Liu Tang, they were on the point of coming to his assistance when a gate in a bamboo fence was opened, and a man came out carrying in his hand two copper wires. The man said, "You two are fine men, and must not fight any more. I have been watching you fight for a long time. You take a rest, and listen to what I have to say." So saying he placed the wires between the two men. The latter withdrew, and stood a little distance away from each other. They looked at the man, and saw that he was dressed as a scholar. He was wearing a cap low down on his brow; a large loose-fitting gown of hempen cloth with a black border; an official belt of the colour of tea; silk shoes, and clean socks. His eyebrows and eyes had an elegant appearance; his mustache was long and his face white. His name was Wu Yong, and his nickname was "Clever Star"; his fancy name was "The Inquisitive or Critical Student"; his Taoist name was "Much Brighter." His grandfather was a native of that place.
Taking the copper wires in his hand he pointed at Liu Tang and said, "You stop a bit! Why are you fighting with that inspector?"
Liu Tang looked closely at Wu Yong and said, "It has nothing to do with you, *xiucai* scholar."[59]
Lei Heng said, "You, sir, do not know. That fellow slept in a temple without wearing any clothes last night. I arrested him, and took him to the village of the village chief, Chao Gai. There we found that he was a nephew of Chao Gai, and I then released him because of what his uncle said. Chao Gai invited me to drink wine with him, and then presented me with some silver. This fellow evidently did not know about that, and came here to get the money back. Do you think that he is brave?"
Wu Yong meditated, "From my youth Chao Gai has been my friend and whenever he had any business he always discussed it with me first. I knew all his relatives but I have not met this nephew before. Moreover, this man seems too old to be Chao Gai's nephew, and that looks strange. So I will stop the fight and afterwards ask him about the matter." Wu Yong then spoke to the man, "You must not be insistent. Your uncle is a good friend of mine, and is also on friendly terms with this inspector. He has made a present to this inspector, and your demanding the return of it will cause your uncle to lose face. I will be responsible for this matter, and will speak to your uncle about it."
"Scholar, you do not understand," said Liu Tang. "My uncle did not willingly give the inspector this silver, and the latter deceived my uncle. If he does not give me the money I shall not go back."
"If chief Chao Gai, will come here himself I will hand him the money," said Lei Heng, "but I will not give it to you."
"You falsely accused me of being a thief," said Liu Tang, "and got money by false pretense, so why should you not return the money?"
Lei Heng replied, "Because it is not your money! I will not give it to you."
"As you will not give me the money," said Liu Tang, "then you had better ask the halberd in my hand whether it will agree to that procedure."
"You two men have been fighting for a long time," said Wu Yong, "without either of you losing or winning. So how long will it take you to finish the fighting?"
"As he will not give me the money," said Liu Tang, "I will risk my life, and one of us will die."
Lei Heng was very angry and said, "I am not afraid of you and I would not even order my soldiers to come and help me to fight with you. In any case I will certainly knock you down with my halberd."
Liu Tang was also angry upon hearing this, and slapping his chest he shouted, "I am not afraid of you! I am not afraid!" and at the same time advanced. Lei Heng also advanced, and both men were soon close together. But Wu Yong stepped between to stop the fight. Liu Tang tried to edge his way round Wu Yong, while Lei Heng continued to curse him as a thief. The soldiers however just then called out, "The chief is coming." Liu Tang turned round to look, and saw Chao Gai with his dress in loose disorder. Upon arriving there Chao Gai called out, "You beast! Do not act in such an impolite way."
Wu Yong laughed at this and said, "Sure enough the chief has arrived, and he is the only man who can settle this dispute."
When Chao Gai had regained his breath, he said, "Why are you two men fighting?"
"Your nephew took a halberd, and demanded that I should give him the money," said Lei Heng; "I told him that I would give you the money as it was not his business. He fought with me a long time. This scholar then intervened, and stopped the fight."
"What a beast!" said Chao Gai. "I did not know that he was doing this. Inspector, will you please go now, and by and by I will come to your home, and apologize."
Lei Heng said, "I knew that this man was making trouble, and I did not want to have anything to do with him. We have caused you much inconvenience in coming so far." He then took his departure.
Wu Yong said, "Sir, if you had not come here there would have been a big fight. This nephew of yours is a most extraordinary fellow. His military skill is quite good. I was inside the bamboo fence watching them fight. The Inspector Lei Heng used the halberd with great skill but could not win and had to defend himself from the thrusts and blows of his opponent. And I was afraid that Lei Heng might get killed, and so I intervened. But where does your nephew come from? I have never seen him before in the village."
Chao Gai said, "You had better come to my house where I can explain matters to you. I was just going to send a servant with a message for you, when I noticed that Liu Tang had gone, and that there was a halberd missing from the rack. A cowherd said that he had seen a big man taking a halberd from the rack and then going straight to the south road. I, therefore, immediately set out after him but before I arrived you had stopped the fighting. I beg that you will now come to my house where we can discuss matters."
Wu Yong took the copper wires, and placed them in the library of the house within the bamboo fence. He then spoke to the master of the house, "When my pupil comes please tell him that I have a little business to attend to, and he can have a holiday today." He then took the key and locked the door of the library.
He joined Chao Gai and Liu Tang, and they all went to the Dongxi village. Chao Gai invited them to enter a room at the back where they all sat down.
Wu Yong asked, "Chief, who is this man?"
"He is a good man named Liu Tang," said Chao Gai, "and he is a East Luzhou man. He has information about a promising enterprise and came here to tell me about it. Last night he was drunken, and slept in the Lingguan Temple where he was arrested by Lei Heng, and so brought to my village. I pretended to recognize him as a nephew of mine, and so he was released. He says that at Daming, the commander-in-chief, Grand Secretary Liang, has purchased one hundred thousand strings of cash worth of gold articles, pearls, and other valuables which he is sending to his father-in-law, Prime Minister Cai at the Eastern Capital. These valuables will pass this way. This wealth has been ill-gotten so do you think we might get it? His arrival seems to be the fulfillment of a dream. Last night I dreamt that the Northern Dipper of seven stars descended to my house. With it was a crowd of smaller stars which vanished leaving a track of light behind.
"I think this augurs some good fortune for my family. So now I would like to have your opinion of this affair."
Wu Yong laughed and said, "I thought that Liu Tang's arrival was very strange, and I suspected that there was something in it. Now it is a thing which neither too many nor too few men can do. At your homestead there are many visitors but not one of them may be used. But you, chief, the brother Liu, and myself cannot settle this matter ourselves, and in spite of your strength we must get some assistance. But we do not need more than seven or eight heroes with us."
Chao Gai said, "In my dream there were certainly only seven stars."
Wu Yong said, "This dream is very important. May it not mean that someone here will come to your assistance?" He then thought for a few minutes when a plan occurred to him and he called out, "I have got the man! I have him!"
Chao Gai said, "As you have found a reliable man we had better invite him to come here at once."
Wu Yong then slowly explained his plan, using his two forefingers to emphasize his remarks that would result in many heroes leaving Dongxi Village, and becoming brigands.

Justice seekers turn to highwaymen,
Warships are made of fishing boats;
Fine speeches running from versatile lips,
Lead bravoes at will by the nose.

Men were collected by Wu Yong, the *Clever Star*.

## 015

## Inquisitive Scholar Wu Yong Persuades & Induces the 3 Ruan Brothers to Join & gets their ears; Gongsun Sheng Becomes 7th of the Righteous 7 Stars of the Dipper

"I have in mind three men," said Wu Yong, "gallant, unusually skilled with weapons, men who'd dare to go through fire and water who'd stand together to live or die. We must get them if our venture is to succeed."
"What do these three do?" asked Chao Gai. "What are their names, and where do they live?"
"They are brothers, and they live in the village of Stone Tablet near Liangshan Marsh in Jizhou Prefecture. They are fishermen, though they've also done a bit of smuggling in the marsh. Their family name is Ruan. Second Brother is known as Ferocious Giant. Fifth Brother is called Recklessly Rash. Seventh Brother is nicknamed the Devil Incarnate. I once lived in their village a number of years and I got to know them. Although they haven't had any education, they're very loyal to their friends, and are good bold fellows, so we became quite close. I haven't seen them in over two years. If we can get those three, our big project is a sure thing."
"I've heard of the three Ruan brothers but we've never met. Stone Tablet is only about a hundred //from here. Why not send someone to invite them for a talk?"
"They'd never come. I'd better go myself and use this slick tongue of mine to persuade them to join us."
"An excellent idea! When will you go?"
"There's no time to waste. If I leave tonight at the third watch I'll get there tomorrow before noon."
"Fine."
Chao Gai instructed a vassal to bring food and wine.
"I've been from the Northern Capital to the Eastern Capital but I don't know which route the birthday convoy will follow," said Wu Yong. "Could we trouble brother Liu to go to the Northern Capital soon and find out exactly when it will set forth and along what roads it will travel?"
"I'll leave tonight," said Liu Tang.
"Not so fast," said Wu Yong. "The birthday is on the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. Today is only the beginning of the fifth. We've still got forty or fifty days. Wait till I come back from the Ruans.' Then brother Liu can go."
"Very well," said Chao Gai. "Brother Liu can stay here in my manor."
But enough of idle chatter. They drank for some time. At the third watch Wu Yong rose, washed, rinsed his mouth, had an early breakfast, concealed some silver on his person and put on his straw sandals. Chao Gai and Liu Tang saw him to the manor gate. Wu Yong travelled all night and arrived in Stone Tablet well before noon.
Since he knew the place, he didn't have to ask but went directly to the home of Second Brother. The mooring lines of a few small fishing boats were tied to a post near the water's edge. A torn net was drying on a spindly fence. Between the bank and the hill slope stood ten or so thatched cottages.
Wu Yong approached and called: "Is Second Brother at home?"

Second Brother Ruan at once came out, a torn towel cloth binding his head, and wearing old clothes. He was barefoot. When he saw Wu Yong he hastily hailed him respectfully.
"Teacher," he cried. "What good wind blows you here?"
"There is a small matter I've come specially to see Second Brother about."
"What is it? Tell me."
"It's been two years since I left this village. I am now a tutor in the home of a man of wealth. He is going to give a banquet and wants about a dozen golden carp of fourteen or fifteen catties each. I need your help."
Second Brother laughed. "Let's have a few cups of wine together first."
"That's why I've come!"
"There are a few taverns on the other side of the lake. I'll row you across."
"Good. I'd like to speak to Fifth Brother, too. Do you know whether he's home?"
"Let's go see."
They went down to the shore and untied one of the small boats from the post. Second Brother helped Wu Yong in, then took an oar that was lying beneath a tree and commenced sculling.
As they were moving out onto the lake, Second Brother suddenly waved his hand and called: "Ho, Seventh, have you seen Fifth?"
Only then did Wu Yong observe the small boat gliding out of the reeds. Seventh Brother was shaded from the sun by a black straw hat with a wide brim. He wore a checkered cloth vest and an apron of homespun. Still sculling, the younger man replied: "What do you want him for?"
"Seventh Brother," Wu Yong shouted, "I've come to talk with you three."
"Why, It's you, Teacher! Forgive me for not recognizing you. We haven't seen you in ages!"
"Come have a few drinks with Second Brother and me."
"I've been longing to drink with you, Teacher. It's just that I haven't had the chance."
One closely following the other, the two craft glided across the lake. Soon they arrived at a high bank surrounded by water, on which stood seven or eight thatched cottages.
"Mother," called Second Brother. "Is Fifth Brother at home?"
"Who knows where he is," the woman replied. "He doesn't fish but just gambles everyday till he hasn't a penny to his name. Now he's begged the hairpins from my head to bet them in his games."
Second Brother laughed and rowed away. Seventh Brother shouted from the boat behind: "I don't know why he always loses. His luck must be bad. And he's not the only one who doesn't win. I've been cleaned out, too."
Wu Yong thought: "That fits in with my plans perfectly."
The boats headed for Stone Tablet's market centre. After an hour or so, they came within sight of a single plank bridge. Beside it, a man carrying two strings of copper cash was untying a boat.
"It's Fifth Brother," Second Brother exclaimed.
A tattered bandanna tilted rakishly on his head, a pomegranate flower tucked behind his ear, Fifth Brother wore an old tunic open to reveal the blue panther tattooed on his chest. His plain trousers were tied at the waist by a checkered towel.
Wu Yong hailed him: "Fifth Brother, did you win?"
"Well, if it isn't Teacher! It's a good two years since we met. I've been watching your boats from the bridge."
"We went to your house first," Second Brother explained. "Mother said you'd gone into town to gamble. So we came here. Let's take Teacher to that tavern overlooking the water."
Fifth Brother untied his boat and jumped in. He grabbed his oar and, with one sweep, propelled it in line behind the other two.
Not long after, they arrived at a pavilion beside a cove of lotus flowers. They moored their craft and helped Wu Yong up the bank to the tavern. In a room facing the lake, they selected a red-lacquered table with red-lacquered benches.
"Please forgive the crudeness of us three brothers, Teacher," said Second Brother, "and sit at the head of the table."
"Oh, I couldn't do that," said Wu Yong.
"Then you sit there, brother, and let Teacher have the guest's seat," cried Seventh. "Fifth and I will sit down first."
"Seventh Brother is still impetuous," said Wu Yong.
The four took their places at the table, and ordered a bucket of wine. A waiter brought four large bowls, four pairs of chopsticks, and four vegetable dishes plus the wine bucket, and set them out on the table.
"Any meat to go with the wine?" asked Seventh.
"Beef from a freshly slaughtered ox," said the waiter. "Tender as sponge cake!"
"We'll have ten catties, cut in large slices," said Second.
"Don't laugh at our simple fare, Teacher," said Fifth. "We're not dining you properly."
"It's I who must beg forgiveness, for putting you to so much trouble."
"Please say no more about it," Second said. He told the waiter to pour the wine. By then two big platters of sliced meat had been placed on the table, and the Ruan brothers urged Wu Yong to try it.
He consumed several slices. When he could eat no more, his hosts tore into the remainder like ravening wolves and tigers, and demolished large quantities.
"What brings you here, Teacher?" Fifth finally asked.
"Teacher is now a tutor in a wealthy family," said Second. "He needs a dozen golden carp weighing about fifteen catties each, and he's made this trip specially to ask our help."
"Ordinarily, we could get you forty or fifty of that weight without any trouble, to say nothing of a dozen," said Seventh, "but today even ten-catty carp are hard to come by."
"You've travelled a long way, Teacher," said Fifth. "We might manage a dozen or so five- or six-catty carp."
"I've brought some silver. The price doesn't matter," said Wu Yong. "But I can't use small fish. They must be the fourteen- or fifteen-catty size."
"There's no place we can get them, Teacher," said Seventh. "We can't even guarantee the five- or six-catty kind Fifth has promised. It may take us several days. I've a bucket of small live fish in my boat. Let's eat some of those while we're here."
He went down to the boat and got the fish. They weighed a total of some six or seven catties. Seventh took them to the kitchen and cooked them himself. He brought them in three platters and placed them on the table.
"Try some of this, Teacher."
The four of them ate for a time. Gradually, the sky darkened.
"I can't talk openly in this tavern," thought Wu Yong. "I'll have to spend the night with one of them. We'll see what happens then."
"It's getting late," said Second. "Stay at my house tonight, Teacher. We can discuss this some more tomorrow."
"Coming here hasn't been easy for me," said Wu Yong, "but now, fortunately, we all are together. I can see you're not going to let me pay for this meal but I'll be spending the night at Second Brother's, and I've brought a little silver. Could I trouble you to buy a jug of wine and some meat in this tavern, and a brace of chickens in the village? Tonight, we'll get drunk together. How about it?"
"We can't let you pay, Teacher!" said Second. "We brothers will take care of it. Don't think we can't manage."
"This has to be my treat," said Wu Yong. "If you don't let me pay, I'm leaving."
"All right, Teacher, if you insist, we'll eat with you gladly," said Seventh. "We'll see about next time."
"Brother Seventh is straight and to the point," Wu Yong commended. He gave him an ounce of silver and told him to borrow a big jug from the tavern keeper and fill it with wine, and to buy also twenty catties of fresh and cooked beef and a couple of fat chickens.
"Take what I owe you out of that, too," said Second.
"Fine, fine," said the tavern keeper.
The four men left the tavern, went down to the boats, stored the meat and wine in the cabins, untied the mooring ropes and rowed to Second's house. In front of the door they stepped onto the bank and wound the ropes around the post, then took the meat and wine to the rear and sat down. Second called for a lamp. He was the only one of the three brothers who had a wife. Neither Fifth nor Seventh were married.
Host and guests sat in a rear pavilion overlooking the water. Seventh slaughtered the chickens and told his sister-in-law and the little boy she and Second had adopted to cook them. By the first watch, the wine and food were all on the table.
At Wu Yong's urging, he and the brothers drank several rounds. Again he raised the question of buying fish. "How is it you don't have the size I want in a big area like this?"
"To tell you the truth, Teacher, only Liangshan Marsh has fish that size," replied Second. "Our Stone Tablet Lake is small and narrow. It can't produce big carp."
"But it's not far from here to the marsh, and the two lakes are connected. Why not go there?"
Second breathed out heavily. "Don't ask!"
"Why do you sigh, brother?" Wu Yong queried.
"You don't know what's happened, Teacher," Fifth put in. "Our whole livelihood depends on Liangshan Marsh but we don't dare go."
"Surely the magistrate can't stop you from fishing in a place that size?"
"Magistrate! If he were the King of Hell himself he couldn't stop us!"
"Then why are you afraid to go?"
"You haven't heard? We'll explain."
"I haven't heard a thing."
"It's painful to relate," interjected Seventh, "but a gang of robbers has taken over the marsh, and they don't allow any fishing."
"I had no idea there were robbers there," said Wu Yong. "We haven't heard anything about it at my place."
"Their head is a man who failed in his civil service examinations," said Second. "His name is Wang Lun, and he's called the White-Clad Scholar. Second in command is Skyscraper Du Qian. Third is Guardian of the Clouds Song Wan. Below them is Zhu Gui, the Dry-Land Crocodile, who runs a tavern at the Lijia Entry as a blind for gathering information. He doesn't matter much. But now they've got a new lieutenant, a bold fellow who was a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards in the Eastern Capital—Panther Head Lin Chong. He's first rate with weapons. These men lead a band of six or seven hundred robbers who loot homes and waylay travellers. We haven't gone to the marsh to fish for over a year. They've sewed it up tight, and cut off our main source of income. It hurts us to even talk about it!"
"This is news to me," said Wu Yong. "Why don't the authorities come and capture them?"
"All the authorities know how to do is to disturb and hurt the people," said Fifth. "The first thing they do when they come into the countryside is to eat all the villagers' pigs and sheep and chickens and ducks. You have to pay them to get them to leave. A fat lot of use those knaves would be against the brigands! And as for the police, they wouldn't dare come. They'd shit in their pants if the authorities ordered them to arrest the robbers. They'd be scared to even look at one!"
"We can't catch any big fish, this way," said Second, "but at least we avoid paying taxes and doing forced labour."
"So," said Wu Yong. "Quite a happy life for those outlaws!"
"They fear neither Heaven nor Earth, nor the authorities, either," said Fifth. "Money, fine clothes, wine and meat—they share and share alike. Why shouldn't they be happy? We three brothers are wasting our talents. If only we could be like them!"
Wu Young was inwardly very pleased. "That fits in perfectly with my plans," he mused.
"Man lives only his given span, grass must die in autumn," said Seventh. "We spend our lives catching fish. If we could be like them for just one day, we would be content!"
"Who wants to be like them?" scoffed Wu Yong. "All they do is commit crimes punishable with fifty to seventy strokes of the bamboo. They're frittering away their valor. If they're caught and imprisoned, they've only themselves to blame."
"The authorities can't do anything about it. They're stupid blockheads," said Second. "Thousands of men who've committed towering crimes are wandering around free as air! We brothers are unhappy with our lot. We'd leave here gladly if we could find someone to lead us."
"We've often thought," said Fifth, "we're not less capable than others. But who recognizes our worth?"
"If there was someone who did, would you really be willing to go?" queried Wu Yong.
"We'd go through fire and water," Seventh assured him. "If we could be happy for a single day, we'd die smiling!"
"These three definitely have something in mind," thought Wu Yong. "I'll gradually draw them out."
He pressed the brothers to quaff another few rounds of wine.
"Would you have the courage to go into the marsh and capture those robbers?" he queried.
"Even if we could, who would we ask for the reward?" said Seventh. "Besides, gallant men everywhere would scorn us."
"I have a little idea," said Wu Yong. "If you're fed up with not being able to fish, why not join the outlaw gang?"
"We talked about that several times, Teacher," said Second. "But we've heard that the men under Wang Lun the White-Clad Scholar all say he's narrow and stingy. He doesn't make proper use of people. He gave Lin Chong, that Eastern Capital drill instructor, a hard time when he first arrived. Wang Lun is very fussy about who he takes on. Since that's the way things are, we've lost interest."
"It would be different if he was as big-hearted and as fond of us as you, Teacher," said Seventh.
"In that case we would have gone there long ago. If Wang Lun were like you, we wouldn't be here today," said Fifth. "We'd die for him without a qualm."
"I don't deserve such praise. In Shandong and Hebei today there are plenty of bold gallants you could join."
"No doubt there are," said Second. "But we brothers have never met them."
"What about Ward Chief Chao? Do you know him? He's right here in Yuncheng County, in East Bank."
"You mean Chao Gai, the Tower-Shifting Heavenly King?" said Fifth.
"That's the man."
"We know of him, of course," said Seventh. "But though we live only a hundred *li* away, we haven't been fortunate enough to meet him."
"How is that? Such a righteous, generous man."
"We've never had any reason to go to East Bank," said Second.
"These last few years I've been teaching in a village school near his manor," said Wu Yong. "I hear he's expecting a very valuable shipment. I've come specially to ask whether you'd be willing to join me in snatching it on the way."
"No," said Fifth. "Since he's a noble and charitable person, we wouldn't damage his affairs. The whole fraternity of gallant men would laugh at us."
"I didn't realize you brothers were so firmly principled. Your spirit is noble! I'll tell you the real story, if you're willing to help. I am now living in Chao's manor. Your fame has reached him, and he's sent me here to talk with you."
"We three are completely honest," said Second. "If the ward chief has sent you about some important private business where we can be of use, we pledge our help with our lives! On the dregs of this wine we swear it! May disaster strike us, may we die of horrible disease, if we speak false!"
Fifth and Seventh clapped their hands to the backs of their necks. "We sell this column of hot blood to the man who appreciates its worth," they exclaimed.
"I assure you I don't want to induce you to do anything bad," said Wu Yong. "This is something big! Cai, the Premier in the Eastern Capital, will celebrate his birthday on the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. His son-in-law, Liang, the Governor of Daming, the Northern Capital, has spent a hundred thousand strings of cash on birthday gifts of gold and jewels. A brave fellow called Liu Tang just brought us the news. I've been asked to invite you to a conference, to plan how, with a few gallant men, we can waylay the convoy in some mountain hollow, take their misbegotten treasure! and enjoy ourselves for the rest of our lives. I had to pretend I wanted to buy fish so as to find a chance to invite you for a talk. Does the idea appeal to you?"
"Marvellous!" exclaimed Fifth. He turned to Seventh. "What did I tell you!"
Seventh leaped to his feet. "Just what I've been hoping for all my life! This scratches me where I itch! When do we start?"

"We'll leave for Ward Chief Chao's manor tomorrow at the fifth watch."
The three brothers were delighted.
The night passed. Early the next morning, the men rose and had breakfast. They gave a few words of instructions to their families and set out from Stone Tablet with Wu Yong for East Bank. They walked all day, and finally came in sight of Chao Manor. The ward chief and Liu Tang were waiting outside beneath a green locust tree. When Wu Yong led the three brothers forward, Chao and Liu greeted them warmly.
"The eminent Ruan brothers," cried the ward chief, "I see you're entirely deserving of your fame! Let's talk inside."
The six men entered the manor, went to a rear hall, and took their seats as host and guests. Wu Yong reported. Chao was extremely pleased. He instructed his vassals to slaughter a pig and a sheep and prepare sacrificial paper ingots.
Chao presented so noble a mien, he spoke so freely, that the three brothers were moved to say: "Our greatest pleasure is meeting gallant men, and here you were, all along! To think we might not have had the chance of meeting you if Wu Yong hadn't brought us here!" They were clearly overjoyed.
All ate and chatted half the night. At dawn the next day they rose and went to the rear hall. Laid out before it were gold paper coins and paper horses, incense and candles, the pig and sheep which had been cooked the previous night, and paper replicas of silver ingots. The others were happy to see that Chao was so sincere.
Together they made this solemn vow. "Governor Liang in the Northern Capital harms the people. With the money he has extorted from them he has bought gifts to send to Cai, the Premier in the Eastern Capital, on his birthday. This is evilly obtained wealth. If any of us six has any selfish intent, let Heaven and Earth obliterate him! May the gods be our witness!"
After taking their oath, they burned the paper money.
They ended the ceremony and drank. A vassal entered.
"There is a Taoist priest at the gate who wants to see the ward chief about a grain contribution."
"How can you be so tactless?" Chao berated him. "Can't you see I'm drinking here with guests? Give him four or five measures of rice and be done with it. Why bother me?"
"I've already offered him rice but he won't take it. He wants to see you."
"He probably thinks it's not enough. Give him two or three pecks. Tell him the ward chief is drinking with guests and has no time."
The vassal departed. A few minutes later her returned.
"I've offered the priest three pecks of rice but he refuses to leave. He says he's an honest Taoist, that he hasn't come for any handouts but to see you."
"You don't know how to talk to him. Tell him I have no time for him today, to come another time and I'll invite him to tea."
"I did that but the priest said: 'I haven't come for money or grain but because I've heard the ward chief is a man of chivalry. I'm very eager to meet him.' "
"What a nuisance you are! Why can't you take care of this! If he's still not satisfied with the amount of grain, give him three or four pecks more. Don't keep asking me about it. I'd see him if I weren't entertaining. Why not? But now, get rid of him, and don't trouble me again."
The vassal hadn't been gone very long, when an uproar was heard outside the manor gate. Another vassal rushed in and reported: "That priest is in a rage. He's knocked down ten of our fellows!"
Startled, Chao Gai hastily rose to his feet. "Excuse me a moment, brothers," he said. "I'd better see about this." He left the hall and went out to the gate.
There, under the green locust tree, a handsome, powerful but strange-looking priest was fighting off his attackers. "You don't know a good man when you see him!" he was shouting.
"Cool down, sir priest," Chao called. "You came asking for Ward Chief Chao, apparently wanting a contribution. They gave you rice. Why get into such a temper?"
The priest laughed. "I'm not interested in grain or money. A hundred thousand strings of cash means nothing to me. I'm seeking the ward chief because I've something to tell him. These churls wouldn't listen to reason, and began swearing at me. That's why I blew up."
"Do you know the ward chief?"
"I've heard of him. But we've never met."
"I am that humble person. What did you want to tell me, sir priest?"
"I beg your pardon, Ward Chief. Please accept my greetings."
"You're most courteous. Won't you come into the manor and have some tea?"
"Thank you very much."
The two entered the manor. When Wu Yong and the others saw the priest approaching, they quietly slipped out of sight.
Chao Gai led the priest to the rear hall. After sipping tea for a while, the priest said: "This isn't a good place to talk. Is there somewhere else we could go?"
The ward chief took him to a small room, and again they seated themselves as host and guest. "May I ask your name, sir, and where you are from?" queried Chao.
"My family name is Gongsun, my given name Sheng. In the Taoist order I am called Yi Qing—Single Purity. I was born in Jizhou Prefecture. Since childhood I have loved playing with weapons, and have become quite skilled in many of them, so people call me Gentleman Gongsun Sheng. I have also studied Taoist lore. Because I can summon the wind and bring the rain, ride the mists and drive the clouds, in the fraternity of gallant men I'm nicknamed Dragon in the Clouds. I have long known of the eminent Ward Chief Chao of East Bank, Yuncheng County but I've never had the good fortune of meeting you. In honour of making your acquaintance, and by way of introducing myself, I would like to present you with a hundred thousand strings of cash worth of gold and jewels. I wonder whether the Ward Chief would accept?"
Chao laughed. "You mean the shipment of birthday gifts from the Northern Capital?"
The priest was astonished. "How did you know?"
"I just guessed. I gather we're talking about the same thing?"
"A real treasure! This is too good an opportunity to miss. 'If you fail to take when you've got the chance, don't bemoan it later,' as the old saying goes. How does the idea strike you, Ward Chief?"
At that moment a man dashed into the room and grabbed Gongsun by the front of his robe. "A fine thing!" the man shouted. "You defy the laws of the emperor and the gods. How dare you hatch such schemes? I've been listening for a long time!" Gongsun's face turned the colour of clay. Truly, before his plan was formed, someone outside the window heard everything, and could have brought disaster down upon him. Who, after all, was the man who seized Gongsun?

Wu Yong, so the story tells, continued as follows: "Here is what I have been thinking: I know of three good men, brave and true, exceptionally talented in martial arts, the sort who'd go through fire or water for you, share life or death. If we can get them, we can certainly bring this affair to a satisfactory conclusion."
"Who are they? What are their names and where do they live?" said Chao Gai.
"They are three brothers and they live in Stonetable, a village near Mount Liang in Jizhou. Their official occupation is fishing but they also indulge in a little 'unofficial' business in the marshes. Their name is Ruan. There's Ruan the Second, also known as the Battle-God, Ruan the Fifth, known as Devil-may-care, and Ruan the Seventh, whom people call Yama,[1] and they're real brothers. I lived in the district for a while some years ago, that's how I know them; and I can say that, although they haven't much formal education, they're absolutely to be relied on as friends. Yes, they're splendid people and I used to spend a lot of time with them, though it's about two years now since last I saw them. If we can get those three, the matter is as good as settled."
"I have heard of these three Ruan brothers," said Chao Gai, "but I've never met them. Stonetable is less than thirty miles from here; why don't we send someone to ask them to come and discuss matters?"
"They won't come if we send just anyone. I'd better go myself. I shall use all my powers of persuasion to get them to join us."
"Good idea," said Chao Gai, delighted with this. "When can you go?"
"We shouldn't delay. I'll start tonight. I should be there by tomorrow morning."
"Excellent!" said Chao Gai, and he ordered the servants to arrange a banquet.
"I know the journey from the Northern Capital to the Eastern Capital," said Wu Yong. "The only thing is, we don't know which road the convoy is going to take. We'll have to trouble our young friend here — I'm sorry about the inconvenience — to go back tonight and make inquiries along the North Road to see if he can find out what day they are starting and which route they plan to use."
"I'll do it right away," Liu Tang said.
"No, wait a minute," said Wu Yong. "The birthday is the fifteenth of the sixth month. We're only at the beginning of the fifth month. There's still more than forty days left. Wait till I've been to talk to the Ruan brothers. There's no need to go till then."
"All right," said Chao Gai. "In the meantime young Liu will stay here with me."
Enough of this.
That day they ate and drank at their leisure, and the following night Wu Yong rose around midnight, washed and rinsed his mouth, breakfasted, got some money which he concealed about his person, and put on straw sandals. The other two saw him to the manor gate. Under cover of darkness, he set off for Stonetable. By noon the following day, he had arrived at his destination:
*Richly forested hills stretching away into the blue distance: thick groves of mulberry, food for the silkworms. On all sides moving water surrounds the isolated village. Thin clumps of bamboo line the pathways. Thatched cottages stand on the edge of a gorge and there is a wood with old trees. On the outskirts a sign hangs high over the inn. Fishing boats are moored under the willows.*
Since he knew the place, Wu Yong had no need to ask directions. On arriving in the village he went straight to the home of Ruan the Second. Stopping in front of the gate, he saw a number of small fishing boats moored to a dead tree, a broken fishing net spread out to dry in the sun, and ten or so thatched buildings nestling between the hillside and the water. He called out: "Is Ruan the Second at home?" Immediately Ruan the Second appeared, wearing a ragged cloth on his head, dressed in old clothes and without shoes:
*Face round as a purse, jutting brows, a sensitive mouth; he's quick and expert in self-defence. His chest is covered with yellowish hair, his shoulders are like two transverse beams. His arms can exert a hundred kilos' pressure. His eyes give out a strong cold beam. This is no simple fisherman, you'd say but rather a Mars among men.*
When he saw it was Wu Yong, Ruan the Second immediately shouted out a salute. "Professor! It's good to see you! What wind blows you here?"
"I have a little matter which I want to discuss with you," Wu Yong answered.
"What is it? You can speak openly."
"It's about two years, isn't it, since I left here? Well, now I'm engaged to a wealthy family as tutor and they are organizing a banquet. They need ten carp of fourteen or fifteen catties. That's the reason they've sent me here to see you."
Ruan the Second smiled in reply, and said, "We'll have a few cups together first, then we'll talk business."
"That's the other reason why I came, to have a drink with you."
"There are several inns on the other side of the lake. We'll row across."
"Good. I'd like to see Ruan the Fifth as well, do you think he's at home?"
"We can go and see."
They walked down to the lakeside and Ruan the Second untied one of the boats moored to the dead tree. He helped Wu Yong into the boat. Then he took an oar which was leaning against the roots of the tree and shoved off. Soon they were out in the middle of the lake. As he rowed, Ruan the Second suddenly gave a shout: "Hey, Seventh! Have you seen Fifth?" Wu Yong saw the reeds part and a small boat appeared. Here's what the man in it looked like:
*His spotty face is marked with all manner of strange lumps and warts. His eyes are striking. His cheeks are covered by short whiskers of a yellowish tinge, his body is blackish as if made from iron, or you might even think it was cast in bronze. He seems like an earthly embodiment of the five planets. This is why men call him "Yama."*
It was Ruan the Seventh in the boat. He was wearing a broad-brimmed black hat as protection from the sun and a check shirt held in at the waist by a cloth belt. As he rowed towards them, he shouted: "What do you want him for?"
"Hallo there, Seventh!" Wu Yong shouted back. "I've come to see you. I want to have a word with you all."
"Oh, Professor! I beg your pardon. What a long time it is since we saw you last!"
"Let's go and drink some wine together," Wu Yong replied.
"That's just what I was going to suggest. Why don't you come and see us more often?"
The two boats glided together over the lake, till quite soon they came to a place in the middle of the water where there were seven or eight thatched huts above a tall jetty. Ruan the Second called out: "Auntie, is Ruan the Fifth there?"
"Is it likely?" came the answer. "He doesn't even fish now, all day long he's off gambling. He goes on till he hasn't a penny left. And then he goes and takes my comb and loses that as well."
Ruan the Second gave a laugh and started to row again. Ruan the Seventh, in the boat behind, said: "I don't know why it is but Elder Brother loses all the time. He has real bad luck. And it's not only him. I always get fleeced too!"
"This plays right into my hands," Wu Yong thought to himself.
The two boats now set off for Stonetable. They rowed for a long time, till they saw a man holding two strings of copper cash, standing beside a bridge made from a single plank. He came down to meet the boats:
*His hands are strong as iron bars, his eyes are like bells. Although there is some humour in his expression, his brow is stern. When calamity strikes he can overcome disasters. From a blow of his fist the lion quails, his kick is deadly as the cobra's bite. If it's someone to create havoc you need, he's the one. That's why men call him "Devil-may-care."*
"There's Fifth Brother," said Ruan the Second. Ruan the Fifth wore a ragged cloth set awry on his head, a pomegranate flower stuck above his ear, an old tunic full of holes, through which you could see the blue tattoo on his chest representing a leopard, rolled up trousers and a check apron on top.
"Hey there!" Wu Yong shouted. "Ruan the Fifth! Have you won anything?"
"Why it's the Professor!" Ruan the Fifth exclaimed. "We haven't seen you for two years or more. I was watching you people for a long time, up there on the bridge."
"The Professor and I went to your house to look for you," said Ruan the Second. "Your old woman said you'd gone into town to gamble, so we came here. We're all going to the pavilion by the water to drink a few cups."
Ruan the Fifth quickly returned to the bridge and untied a small boat. He jumped in, seized the oars, and they all started rowing.
In a while the little flotilla reached a water-lily-filled creek at the foot of a pavilion. They helped Wu Yong out onto the bank. They entered the inn and chose a red-lacquered table close to the water. "Professor, you must take the place of honour," said Ruan the Second. "And please forgive our rough and ready manners."
"No, no, of course I won't sit there," said Wu Yong.
"Brother, you take the host's place and let the Professor be the honoured guest," said Ruan the Seventh. "Fifth Brother and I will sit down first."
"Ruan the Seventh isn't one to waste time!" said Wu Yong.
They all sat down and a jug of wine was ordered from the landlord. The waiter laid out four cups, four sets of chopsticks and four plates of assorted vegetables, and poured the wine.
"What have you got to eat?" asked Ruan the Second.
"There's some fresh buffalo," said the waiter. "The meat's as fat and tender as fruit cake."
"Bring us ten catties in good thick slices," Ruan the Second said.
"Professor, this is no way good enough for you but please don't despise our hospitality," said Ruan the Fifth.
"On the contrary, I'm giving you far too much trouble."
Ruan the Second said, "Absolutely not," and told the waiter to hurry up and pour the wine. Soon there were two plates of sliced buffalo meat on the table before them and the brothers pressed Wu Yong to eat. He took a few slices but that was enough for him. Immediately the three brothers fell on the food like wolves and tigers.
After a while, Ruan the Fifth spoke again: "May I inquire what your business is here, Professor?"
Ruan the Second said quickly: "The Professor is working as tutor in a rich man's family, at the moment. He's come to order ten carp that he wants to be fourteen or fifteen catties. That's what he's come to us for."
"Normally we'd have been able to get thirty of forty like that," said Ruan the Seventh, "not just ten. So even if you'd asked for more, we could have delivered the goods. But nowadays it's difficult to find even one of ten catties!"
"The Professor's come a long way," said Ruan the Fifth. "We must promise to find him ten carp of five or six catties."
"I've got plenty of money to pay for them," said Wu Yong. "I'll give you the price you ask. Only small ones just won't do. They've got to be fourteen or fifteen catties."
"Professor, there's nowhere we can get them. Even fish of five or six catties like Fifth Brother was talking about are hard to come by, and it might take days to get them. But, anyway, there's a bucket of whitebait in my boat. I'll get those and we'll eat them now." He went and got the fish, five or six catties in all, and took them to the kitchen to cook them himself. They made a good three plates that he brought and placed on the table. "I'm sorry it's not better but do please try some, Professor," he said.
So the four of them ate again, and continued eating for some time. Soon the daylight began to fade. Wu Yong thought to himself: "It's not very convenient to talk in this inn. They'll want me to stay the night, so I'll wait till then before I bring the matter up."

"It's getting dark now," said Ruan the Second. "Please stay the night with me, Professor, and we can come to an agreement tomorrow."
"It wasn't at all easy for me to get here," said Wu Yong, "and I'm very glad I was able to find you. I know you're not going to allow me to pay for this feast but if I'm to stay with Ruan the Second tonight, and seeing that I've some money with me, let me ask you to purchase a jug of wine here and some meat, and to procure a pair of chickens in the village, and we'll celebrate together this evening. What do you say?"
"We can't let you spend your money, Professor!" said Ruan the Second. "We shall arrange it ourselves but please don't be offended if we can't offer you very much."
"But I came here with the specific intention of inviting you," said Wu Yong. "If you don't accept, I shall have to leave."
"Since you put it like that, Professor, we'll accept dinner from you but after that, we'll see," said Ruan the Seventh.
"Ruan the Seventh comes straight to the point again," said Wu Yong, taking out some silver and handing it to him. The landlord, asked to provide a good supply of wine, produced a big pitcher and they also bought twenty catties of fresh roast beef and a pair of fat chickens.
"I'll pay for the wine together with the rest," Ruan the Second told the landlord. "That'll be perfectly all right," said the latter.
When they left the inn and got into their boats they stowed the provisions in the hold. They cast off and started rowing, heading straight for Ruan the Second's house. Arriving there, they jumped out onto the bank and tied the boats to the same dead tree as before. They carried the provisions up into an inner room and seated themselves. The lamps were lit.
Ruan the Second happened to be the only one of the three brothers who had started a family, Ruan the Fifth and Seventh being unmarried. So while they all sat there in a little pavilion over the water at the back of Ruan the Second's, Ruan the Seventh killed the chickens and asked his sister-in-law and their young lad to prepare them in the kitchen. Some time after seven o'clock the food and drink was on the table. Wu Yong gave them a few toasts and then raised the subject of fish again. "This is such a big lake you've got here, I just don't understand why there aren't any big fish."
"To tell you the truth, Professor, the big fish can only be found in the lake at Mount Liang, nowhere else. This Stonetable lake isn't big enough, it can't support really big fish."
"But we're not so far from Mount Liang, and the lakes are connected, why don't you go and try fishing there?"
Ruan the Second sighed. "Forget it!" he said.
"Why do you sigh like that?"
"Professor," said Ruan the Fifth, "you don't know what's been happening. The Mount Liang lake used to be our rice-bowl but now we daren't go there any more!"
"Surely you'd get away with fishing in a lake of that size, even if it is officially prohibited," said Wu Yong.
"Officially prohibited? Who cares about that?" said Ruan the Fifth. "The Prince of Hell wouldn't stop us fishing there if we had a mind to!"
"Well, if you're not worried about the authorities, what stops you from going there?"
"Obviously you don't know about it, so we'd better tell you," said Ruan the Fifth.
"I don't understand at all."
Ruan the Seventh started to explain: "The Mount Liang area is a disaster for us! Nowadays a band of robbers have taken it over, and they won't let anyone fish there."
"I didn't know about this. I wonder why I hadn't heard about there being robbers there now."
"The leader of that lot is a failed graduate called Wang Lun, or the Failed Scholar," said Ruan the Second. "The second-in- command is Du Qian, known as the Skyscraper, and the third is Song Wan, or the Door-god in the Clouds. Down at the bottom of the mountain there's another called Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile, who keeps an inn on the road to Leeside and whose job is to keep watch but he doesn't give us any trouble. And just recently they've been joined by a real hero, an ex-instructor of the palace guard in the Eastern Capital, a certain Leopard's Head Lin Chong, who's a tremendously good fighter. These bandits have put together an army of six or seven hundred and rampage around destroying houses and robbing cottages, way-laying and pillaging travellers. We haven't been there to fish for a year now. That lake is cut off, and we've lost a principal source of our livelihood. As you see, it's quite a story."
"I had no idea things had come to such a pass," Wu Yong said. "But why don't the authorities send out a force to capture them?"
"Well, the fact is that every time the troops stir themselves the people suffer still more. If there's the slightest rumour that the brigands have descended on a village, they come and take away honest people's pigs, sheep, chickens and geese to feed them- selves. And you have to pay them off to get rid of them! So what can we possibly do against the brigands? Those who are responsible for suppressing them, well you won't find them showing their faces round the villages. When their superiors order them out to arrest someone, they're so scared they shit themselves! The idea of meeting the enemy face to face certainly doesn't appeal to them!"
"Well, we don't catch any big fish, it's true," said Ruan the Second, "but at least we manage to avoid being taxed or conscripted."
"It sounds as if those rascals have a fine old time of it," said Wu Yong.
"They've nothing to fear from heaven or earth," said Ruan the Fifth, "least of all the police. They count their wealth in pounds and ounces, dress in the finest silks and satins, drink from a full pitcher and eat huge roasts, of course they have a fine time. But us three, we're only good for one thing. How can we imitate them?"
Secretly Wu Yong was thinking, "This really fits in with my plans."
Ruan the Seventh exclaimed: "Like they say, a blade of grass only lasts one season, a man has just one lifetime; we can still get by with fishing, true enough but if only we could get to live like them!"
"What do you want to be like them for? Don't forget that occupation of theirs is not just petty crime that can be paid for by fifty or sixty strokes of the cane. You could be throwing away your precious lives! And if you were taken, you'd have only yourselves to thank."
"At present the relevant authorities are absolutely useless," said Ruan the Second. "They're a bunch of imbeciles. People who commit major crimes, hundreds and thousands of times, get off scot-free. People like us are given no peace. If there was someone who wanted to take us along, we'd go with him like a shot!"
"I've often thought," began Ruan the Fifth, "that we three have talents that aren't inferior to other people's, only no one appreciates them!"
"If someone did know how to appreciate you, what would you do?" asked Wu Yong.
"If that were the case," said Ruan the Seventh, "we'd go through water, we'd go through fire with him! If some great enterprise were available to us, within our grasp for just one day, then we'd die happy!"
In his heart, Wu Yong rejoiced: "The idea has taken. Now I must gradually work them round."

Know now that evil takes a tortuous path;
*Heaven sends a baleful planet down to earth.*
*And see how in times to come the Ruans three*
Will share the convoy's ill-gained wealth as fee.

He urged them to drink two more cups, and then said: "Would you dare go to Mount Liang and capture the bandits?"
"Suppose we did," said Ruan the Seventh, "how could we go and ask for the reward? We'd be a laughing-stock among all the heroes of the rivers and lakes."
"Maybe I'm wrong," said Wu Yong, "but if you really can't bear to go on as fishermen, wouldn't it then be best to go and join the robbers?"
"Professor, if you only knew how many times we've considered that idea already!" said Ruan the Second. "But we've heard from his subordinates that Wang Lun is a mean and narrow-minded type. He's suspicious of others. When Lin Chong first went there it put him in a terrible state. The lousy bugger just doesn't take to newcomers. So seeing as that's the way it is, we didn't feel like trying."
Ruan the Seventh said: "If that lot were as generous as you, Professor, if they could only be friendly, then it would be fine."
"That's right," said Ruan the Fifth, "if they would show us the same kind of generous regard as you do, Professor, we'd have joined them long ago, we wouldn't have waited till today. And we'd willingly give our lives for them!"
"Oh, come, there's no need to talk of me," said Wu Yong. "These days there are such numbers of brave, generous-hearted gentlemen everywhere, in Shandong and in Hebei."
"Perhaps there are," said Ruan the Second, "but we haven't met them!"
"Mr. Chao, for instance, of East Riverside in Yuncheng, haven't you ever met him?"
"Would that be Chao Gai, whom they call the Pagoda-Lifter?" said Ruan the Fifth.
"The very same."
"Although it's only thirty miles from here, we only know him by reputation, unfortunately our paths have never crossed." said Ruan the Seventh.
"I'm amazed that you've never met him, he's such an upright and generous person." said Wu Yong.
"We've never had the chance to," said Ruan the Second, "because we never had any business in that area."
"I have worked for some years as village teacher near Chao Gai's estate. I heard recently that he is hoping to get his hands on an important treasure. That's what I came here to discuss with you. What do you say to the idea of laying an ambush and taking it from him ourselves?"
"Certainly not," said Ruan the Fifth. "When he's such an upright and generous man, if we put a spoke in his wheel we'd be universally condemned among the rivers and lakes."
Wu Yong said: "I was afraid you might not be so firm of purpose. But I see you are indeed full of thought for others and love of righteousness. So now I will be completely honest with you. If you think you would be willing to lend a hand, I will explain everything. I am living these days in Chao Gai's district, and when I told him your names he specifically charged me to come here and invite you for discussions."
"We really and truly are just as you see us," said Ruan the Second, "we would not try to deceive you. Can it really be that Mr. Chao has the intention of enlisting us in some important business of his, some personal venture? I can see you've gone to a lot of trouble on our behalf. If this business is on, I swear by the wine left in this jug we are ready to lay down our lives to help, may an ill fate befall us if we don't, may we be struck by plagues and death if we fail you!"
Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh both struck the backs of their necks with their hands and said: "Our hearts are eager to serve but we will only surrender them to a buyer who appreciates the goods!"
Wu Yong replied: "Listen, then, all of you, and don't think that I'm trying to trick you into something. This enterprise is something really big! On the fifteenth of the sixth month it's going to be the birthday of the imperial preceptor Cai. His daughter is married to Governor Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital, who is arranging to send his father-in-law a birthday gift of jewels and rare objects worth a hundred thousand. A gentleman named Liu Tang came specially to inform us of this. What we want now is for you to come and discuss with us the idea of getting together a group of bold spirits to lay an ambush in the mountains for this ill-gotten wealth. There's enough to make each of us happy for the rest of his days. I've been sent, under pretence of buying fish, to help us formulate a successful plan. What do you say?"
Ruan the Fifth said calmly, "Okay!", then he exclaimed: "There you are, Seventh Brother, what did I say?"
Ruan the Seventh jumped up and said: "It's just what I've always longed for! It's the answer to all my prayers! This is something which scratches where the itch is! When do we start?"
"Straight away if you like," said Wu Yong. "We'll rise at dawn tomorrow and go straight to Chao Gai's." The three Ruan brothers were in raptures. But as the poem says:

Why should the scholar want for more?
*And surely fishing's a life without care?*
*But all because of those ill-gotten riches,*
So many good men will flee to the Marshes.

The night passed. They rose early, breakfasted, and after giving instructions for the management of their homes, the three brothers together with Wu Yong left Stonetable and strode forth on the road to East Riverside. At the end of a day's journey they came in sight of Chao Gai's manor. There were Chao Gai and Liu Tang, waiting under a green sophora tree. Wu Yong brought the three Ruan brothers right to where the others were waiting, under the tree, and greetings were exchanged.
"Brothers Ruan, it's easy to see why your name has spread far and wide," Chao Gai exclaimed. "Please come inside and let us talk."
They all went to the inner hall and seated themselves according to the rules. Wu Yong repeated all that had passed between him and the brothers, to Chao Gai's great satisfaction. Chao Gai told his servants to kill pigs and sheep and prepare paper offerings. The Ruan brothers were greatly impressed with Chao Gai's commanding personality and his direct language. "We like to meet men of spirit," they said, contentedly, "and we've certainly found the right place, thanks to the Professor, without whom we'd have missed this opportunity." That night was spent in feasting and talk, and the next day at dawn they went to the hall at the back to arrange paper offerings, incense and candles, and to lay out pork and mutton from the night before. They were enor-mously pleased by Chao Gai's resolve and frankness, and each of them joined in vowing: "Governor Liang of Daming oppresses the people, extorting money and goods, in order to send a birthday present to his father-in-law, Preceptor Cai, at court. The wealth is obtained by unjustifiable means. If any one of us six should harbour any selfish design may heaven and earth swallow him up. Let our hearts be dedicated to heaven." Having sworn the oath, they all burnt paper offerings.
While the six of them were relaxing and drinking wine in the inner hall a servant came and announced: "There's a priest at the door, sir, who wishes to talk to you concerning alms."
"Don't be a fool," Chao Gai said. "You can see I've got guests. Just give him four or five litres of rice, what's the point in bothering me?"
"I gave him the rice, sir but he doesn't want it, he says he wants to talk to you."
"He obviously doesn't think it's enough. Give him two or three pounds more and say 'The master has guests today and hasn't got time to see you'."
The servant left, and was gone some time. But eventually he came back and said: "It's that priest. I've given him more rice but he still won't go away. He says he's the Master of the Pure Way and he hasn't come for money or rice but because he wants an interview with you, sir."
"Well answer him, you idiot. Tell him I really haven't got time today. Tell him to come back another day and I'll give him tea."
"That's what I told him but he said: 'I'm not after money or rice. I heard that your master is a good man, and it's him I want to see."
"You're no help at all, you moron! If it wasn't enough, all you've got to do is give him a pound or two more. Don't keep coming back to me. If I didn't have guests I'd go and deal with it myself, it's nothing to make such a fuss about. Just get rid of him and stop pestering me!"
When the servant had been gone for something like an hour, a great uproar arose at the manor gates, and another servant rushed into the room and said: "The priest is angry. He's knocked out a dozen people!"
Disturbed by this news, Chao Gai stood up hurriedly and said to his guests: "Please stay where you are. I'd better go and have a look myself."
At the front gate he found the Taoist, an immensely tall figure, with an imposing countenance and something strange about his manner, busily engaged in beating up the servants under the green sophora tree:
*His hair is bound into a top-knot that then separates into two loose hanging strands. He wears a short brown robe, gathered at the waist with a multi-coloured silk sash. An old bronze sword grained like pine is slung over his back. His white feet are adorned with hemp sandals with many eyelets. In his cotton bag he carries a tortoiseshell fan. His eyebrows are slanting and his eyes almond-shaped. His mouth is surrounded by whiskers.*
This gentleman was dealing out blows under the sophora tree, saying as he did so, "You people don't know who you're dealing with!" Chao Gai called out, "Calm yourself, Father! You came to see Chao Gai, presumably about alms but he's already given you rice, why are you making such a commotion?"
The priest smiled contemptuously. "I didn't come for food or money," he said. "Anyway, a hundred thousand cash would mean nothing to me. I came to see Chao Gai, I've something to tell him. But these mannerless yokels do nothing but insult me. It makes me mad!"
"Do you happen to know Chao Gai?" Chao Gai asked.
"I know of him," the other answered. "I haven't actually met him."
"Well, I am Chao Gai. What is it you want to tell me?"
"Excuse me for not recognizing you, and accept my humble greeting."
"You do me too much honour, Father. Allow me to offer you some tea in the manor."
"Many thanks."
They went inside. When Wu Yong saw the priest coming, he and Liu Tang and the three Ruan brothers made themselves scarce.
When Chao Gai offered the priest tea in an inner room the latter said: "This is not a good place for talking, isn't there anywhere else we could go?" So Chao Gai took him to a tiny pavilion, where they seated themselves formally, and Chao Gai asked, "May I presume to ask your name, Father? And where you are from?"
"I have a double-barrelled name," the priest replied. "I am Gongsun, and my original first name is just Sheng. But my religious name is Master of the Pure Way. I come from Jizhou. When I was young, in my village, I learnt to fight with the staff, and became a martial arts adept, so people sometimes call me 'Gongsun Sheng, the Master.' Then I studied Taoism, and learnt to call up wind and rain, and to ride the mists and clouds, so to all the rivers and lakes fraternity I am known as 'The Dragon-in-the-clouds.' I have long known of the famous Chao Gai of East Riverside, in Yuncheng but I hadn't as yet had the opportunity to make your acquaintance. Now, what I have to offer as a present by way of introduction is a treasure trove worth a hundred thousand in cash. Will you accept it?"
Chao Gai began to laugh. "This present you speak of, it wouldn't be that birthday convoy now under preparation in the north, would it?"
The priest was quite taken aback. "How did you know?" he said.
"I was just guessing. So I'm right, am I?"
"That treasure is something that shouldn't be missed. You know the old saying: 'If you don't take it when it's there, you'll regret it when it's gone.' Well, what do you say?"
But as they were speaking a man rushed into the room, clasped Gongsun Sheng to his breast and exclaimed: "Wonderful! The prince's law is clear but the ways of heaven are dark. Now, how do you dare to talk like this? I was listening and I heard it all!"
Gongsun Sheng turned deathly pale. Truly it seemed a case of:

An eavesdropper heard the half-formed plan;

Disaster struck ere the business began.

WU YONG, the "Inquisitive Scholar," said, "I think that there are three men who have such a brave disposition, and such fine military training that they would not be afraid of 'jumping into hot water, or walking through fire.' If we do not have them with us our matter will not succeed."

Chao Gai asked who the men were, and where they lived.

Wu Yong said, "They are three brothers who live at Shijie village, near Liangshan Marsh, in Jizhou. They are fishermen but previously were smugglers at Liangshan Marsh. Their name is Ruan, and the second one has the nickname 'Heavenly King Who Stands His Ground'; [60] the other is 'Ruan the Fifth' who has a nickname, 'Short Lived Second Brother' (the name of a demon); the third is 'Ruan the Seventh,' who is nicknamed 'Living King Yama.' [61] I lived at their village for several years some time ago. They were not scholars but were very generous and hospitable. They were fine fellows, and therefore I made their acquaintance. I have not seen them during the last two years but if we get them this big job can be well finished."

"I have heard of these three brothers," said Chao Gai but so far I have not met them. The village of Shijie is not quite thirty-six *li* from here, so how would it be if we send a man there to ask them to come here to discuss the matter with us?"

Wu Yong said, "If you send a man they will not come. I must go there myself, and you can depend on my 'three-inch pliable tongue' in inducing them to join our band."

Chao Gai was much pleased at this and said, "We accept your good advice but when can you go?"

"This matter must not be delayed, and therefore I will start tonight at midnight. I shall reach there before noon tomorrow."

Chao Gai said, "That is very fine." He then ordered the servants to bring in food and wine.

Wu Yong said, "I know the roads between the Northern and Eastern Capitals but I do not know by which way these birthday gifts will be dispatched. If it won't be inconvenient I suggest that our brother Liu Tang should go this night to the road for Northern Capital, and makes inquiries as to when the presents will be sent and by what route."

Liu Tang said, "I will go this evening."

Wu Yong said, "Wait a bit. The birthday of the Prime Minister is on the fifteenth day of the sixth month but now is only the beginning of the fifth month so that there are still about forty days before the birthday. You had better wait until the three brothers arrive here, and then brother Liu Tang can depart."

Chao Gai said, "All right. Brother Liu Tang will stay here."

We need not weary you with details of how they dined for a long while. At midnight Wu Yong washed; ate his breakfast; got some silver and put it in his pockets; and put on sandals. Then Chao Gai and Liu Tang accompanied Wu Yong to the gate, and the latter departed on his journey to the village of Shijie. He reached his destination before noon the next day. He knew the place, and therefore had no need to ask his way. Upon arriving there he went straight to the home of the brothers Ruan.

At the door of the house he saw many fishing boats moored to posts; the fishing nets were hanging on the rough bamboo fence to dry; between the water and the hill there were more than ten grass huts.

Wu Yong shouted out, "Is the second brother home?" A person came out of a hut in his bare feet, wearing a torn cap, and some old clothes. When he saw Wu Yong he saluted and said, "Why has the tutor come? What wind has blown you here?"

"I have been absent for nearly two years. Just now I am teaching at the house of a wealthy man who wants to give a big feast so I came to see whether you could supply about ten carp each weighing at fifteen *jin*."

Ruan the Second laughed and said, "Come and have a drink then we can discuss this matter."

"In coming here," said Wu Yong, "I had the idea that I could get a drink."

"There are several wine shops on the other side of the lake, so we will go there by boat."

"Very good," said Wu Yong. "But I should like to have a talk with your younger brother as well, if he is at home."

"We will go together and find him."

They then went to the side of the lake, untied one of the boats, and got on board. Taking a pole resting at the foot of a tree, they punted the boat through the reeds into the centre of the lake. Ruan the Second had been punting for some time when he raised his hand and shouted, "Seventh Brother, have you seen my younger brother?"

A boat issued from the reeds with Ruan the Seventh in it, wearing a black straw hat, a sleeveless coat made of cloth with a chessboard pattern; and a short skirt made of undyed yarn. As he rowed he shouted, "What do you want your younger brother for?"

Wu Yong shouted, "I came specially to have a talk with you three brothers."

Ruan the Seventh said, "Please forgive me for it is a long time since I saw you."

Wu Yong said, "I will go with you two brothers for a drink of wine."

Ruan the Seventh said, "I will go and have a drink with you because I have not seen you for a long time."

The two boats were then rowed into the centre of the lake where there was a small mound with about eight straw huts on it. Upon arriving there Ruan the Second called out, "Mother, is Fifth Brother there?"

His mother replied, "That I cannot say. He has not been fishing but has been gambling for several days instead, and has lost everything. He asked me to let him have my hairpins so that he could go and gamble again."

Ruan the Second laughed at this, and rowed his boat away. His brother in the boat behind said, "You do not know what he has done. He has lost at gambling, and evidently has had bad luck. You should not say that he has not won, because I have also gambled and lost everything."

Wu Yong thought this would suit his plans.

The two boats at last came to the side of the lake where there was the village of Shijie, and there close to a single plank bridge they saw a man who was carrying two strings of cash and was coming down to untie the rope that fastened his boat. Ruan the Second said that that was his brother. Wu Yong saw that Ruan the Fifth was wearing a battered cap, with a pomegranate flower under it; he was wearing an old shirt which was unbuttoned and displayed the figure of a leopard tattooed on his breast. In his belt he had placed his handkerchief made of cloth with a chessboard pattern.

Wu Yong called out, "Ruan the Fifth, have you won?"

Ruan the Fifth said, "Hello! Here you are, tutor but I have not seen you for nearly two years. I have been watching you from this bridge for a long time."

Ruan the Second said: "I went with our teacher to our home, and our mother said that you had gone to the village to gamble there, so we came along here to look for you. Come with us to the inn where we can have a drink together." Ruan the Fifth immediately got into his boat, untied the rope, and rowed his boat after the other two. The three boats were rowed across the lake to a booth where they were duly tied up in a lotus pond. The brothers assisted the tutor to the bank, and then took him into an inn built upon piles in the water, where there were a set of red varnished chairs and a table.

Ruan the Second said, "You must not be offended at our coarseness but we request you our tutor to take the seat of honour." Wu Yong declined the offer, and Ruan the Seventh said, "Elder brother, do you mind taking the seat as a host, and we will ask our tutor to take the seat as a guest. We two younger brothers will take our seats first."

Wu Yong said, "Seventh brother, you are indeed quick tempered." The four men then all sat down, and the waiter was told to bring the wine. The waiter arranged four wine cups on the table, four pairs of chopsticks, four plates of vegetables, and a flagon of wine on the table.

Ruan the Seventh asked the waiter what nice dish they had got. The waiter replied that they had lovely beef from a fat ox that had just been killed.

Ruan the Second told him to bring in about ten *jin* of beef.

Ruan the Fifth said, "Teacher, you must not laugh at us, because we have not much to offer you."

Wu Yong said, "On the other hand I must ask you to excuse me for giving much trouble to you."

Ruan the Second said, "Don't mention that!" He then told the waiter to be quick and bring the meat which was done at once. The brothers then pressed Wu Yong to drink several cups of wine, and meanwhile they ate their food like wolves and tigers.

After eating a while Ruan the Fifth asked, "What is the business that has brought you here?"

Ruan the Second said that Wu Yong was now teaching in a rich family and had come here to buy about ten large carp which have to weigh at fifteen *jin* each."

Ruan the Seventh said, "Generally we catch about fifty fish and ordinarily we could let you have more, not to say a dozen but just now we have not got even fifteen *jin* weight of fish."

"As you have come from a distance," said Ruan the Fifth, "we must catch for you about ten fish, and each of them to be weighed at six *jin*."

"I have brought money with me," said Wu Yong, "so you can tell me what the price is but I must have fish weighing about fifteen *jin* each."

"Teacher," said Ruan the Seventh, "there are no fish of that size anywhere. My fifth brother says we ought to catch about ten fish of six *jin* each but I am afraid we cannot even do that just now. So you must wait a few days, when we may have them. In my boat I have a tub of small living fish which we can get for a meal."

Ruan the Seventh then went to the boat, and brought back the tub of fish weighing about six *jin* altogether. He took them to the stove, cooked them, placed them in three trays and served them up. He invited Wu Yong to partake of the food without any ceremony. They all "fell to" and by the time they had finished eating the fish it was growing dark.

Wu Yong thought that that inn was not a suitable place to talk matters over, that night he must sleep at their homes, and there discuss matters.

"It is now getting dark," said Ruan the Second, "and we shall be pleased if you would come and sleep at our house. Tomorrow we can arrange matters."

"I have come from a long distance," said Wu Yong, "and it is very fortunate that I have met you all in this way. I see that I am not to be allowed to pay for this meal. I will stay at your house tonight but as I have some money I will buy a jar of wine and some meat, and perhaps in the village we can get a pair of chickens. So let us have a feast tonight, and get a drink."

"But we do not want you to spend money," said Ruan the Second, "and we will arrange that matter ourselves so you need not worry."

"I have come to invite you three gentlemen," said Wu Yong, "and if you do not allow me to pay the cost I must leave."

"In that case," said Ruan the Seventh, "we will allow you, our teacher, to have your own way."

"Our seventh brother, you are really very straightforward," said Wu Yong. He then took a tael of silver, and gave it to Ruan the Seventh. He asked the innkeeper to lend them a large jar, and fill it with wine, and make up twenty *jin* of beef, and a pair of chickens.

"I will pay you now for the wine we have just had," said Ruan the Second.

The innkeeper agreed to this proposal.

The four friends took the wine and meat and stowed it in the boat, then cast off the rope, and rowed to the house of Ruan the Second. Upon arriving there they tied the boat to a post, took the wine and meat into a room at the back of the house, and told the servants to light the lamps. Of the three brothers only Ruan the Second was married.

They all took their seats. Ruan the Seventh killed the chickens, and giving it to the wife of Ruan the Second told her to get the cook to prepare it for them. At about 8 P.M. all the food and wine was ready and was placed on the table. Wu Yong then invited the brothers to drink wine with him, and in order to introduce again the question of the fish he asked, "How is it that there are no large fish here, seeing that you have such a large lake?"

Ruan the Second replied, "We will not deceive you. The fact is that all the big fish are only found near Liangshan Marsh and as our lake is very small there are no big fish here."

"This lake is not far from Liangshan Marsh, and is connected by a stream. Why do you not go there to fish?"

Ruan the Second sighed and said, "Don't mention that!"

"But why do you sigh?" asked Wu Yong.

Ruan the Fifth interposed saying, "Teacher, you do not understand. Formerly even our clothes and food come from Liangshan Marsh but now we dare not go there."

"But surely the magistrate in this large county has not prohibited you from catching fresh fish?" said Wu Yong.

Ruan the Fifth said, "No official dares come here, and prohibits us from catching fresh fish, and even King Yama dares not do that."

"But if there is no prohibition," said Wu Yong, "why don't you go there?"

"Sir, you do not know all the circumstances of the case," said Ruan the Fifth, "but I will explain matters."

"As you have not told me so far," said Wu Yong, "of course I do not understand."

Ruan the Seventh interposed, "It is not easy to talk about this Liangshan Marsh. Recently a band of brigands have seized the island in the lake so we cannot catch fish there."

Wu Yong said, "I did not know that there are robbers there, and have never heard of such a state of affairs."

"The chief of the bandits," said Ruan the Second, "is a man who has failed to pass the examination as a *recommended man* (MA), and he is called Wang Lun, 'White Clothes Scholar'; and the second-in-command is Du Qian, 'Sky Feeler,' and the third in command is Song Wan, the 'Diamond in the Clouds,' there is also Zhu Gui, 'Dry Land Crocodile,' who has an inn at the Liji District entrance, where he acts as a spy and gathers information. Recently a man named Lin Chong, 'Leopard's Head,' has joined them from the Eastern Capital, and he is noted for his military skill. There are about seven hundred men in this gang of bandits, and they loot and rob in every direction. We have not been there fishing for quite a year. They are the terror of this district; and have deprived us of our food and clothing but this is not the whole of what they have done."

"I did not know that matters are like this," said Wu Yong. "Why does the magistrate not arrest them?"

"Whenever the officials act in those affairs," said Ruan the Fifth, "the people suffer for it. As soon as they come into the village they first seize the people's pigs, sheep, fowls, and geese, and eat them, and then demand money to cover the traveling expenses of their soldiers. Just now the officials do not know what to do, so how dare they come here? If the officials come here to arrest the bandits they would be so frightened that they would be rendered useless, and would not even dare to look for the bandits."

"Yet as we do not catch fish now," said Ruan the Second, "we can avoid their extortion."

"This being the case," said Wu Yong, "these thieves are indeed leading a happy life!"

"They fear neither Heaven, nor Earth, nor the officials," said Ruan the Fifth, "they weigh and divide among themselves the silver, gold, and silks they have looted. They have big jars of wine to drink, and large quantities of meat to eat so why should they not be happy? In vain we three brothers have skill; how can we compare with them?"

Upon hearing this, Wu Yong was much pleased and thought it would fit in well with his plans.

Ruan the Seventh said, "Man lives just a generation, and grass exists just for a year. We follow the livelihood of fishermen but if we learnt their ways of earning a living our life would not be so bad even a day."

"Why, should we follow these bandits!" said Wu Yong, "Is not their criminal way of living deserving of severe punishment, so what would be the advantage for you to throw aside your present respectability by joining them? If you were arrested by the soldiers it would be your own crime that would be tried."

"But the soldiers," said Ruan the Second, "do not know anything, and are a stupid lot. Although the bandits commit great crimes yet they are not punished. We are very much distressed on account of our poverty. If somebody would only assist us in this matter we would go and become bandits ourselves."

"I always come to the same conclusion," said Ruan the Fifth. "Our abilities are quite as good as other men's but nobody seems to be aware of it."

"If somebody knew of your ability," said Wu Yong, "would you then be willing to go?"

"If somebody knew of our ability," said Ruan the Seventh, "and asked us to go through water or fire we would not hesitate a moment in doing so. If we were only employed for a day and were killed, we should still die contented."

Wu Yong was highly delighted at this, and thought that the three brothers had ideas, and he could gradually induce them to fall in with his plans. He pressed them to drink more wine, and after they had drunk two cups he asked, "Are you three willing to go to Liangshan Marsh and arrest these bandits?"

"If we did that," said Ruan the Seventh, "where could we get the reward? If there was no reward the bandits would laugh at us."

"I am rather inexperienced," said Wu Yong, "but would it not be a good plan for you to go to that place and throw in your lot with the bandits seeing that you do not like to catch fish?"

"Teacher," said Ruan the Second, "you do not know we have even discussed that plan but we have heard that Wang Lun, 'White Clothes Scholar,' is regarded by his followers as a very narrow-minded man, and does not care to get many other men. Sometime ago Lin Chong from the Eastern Capital joined them at Liangshan Marsh and suffered much at his hand. Wang Lun would not forgive others and such being the case, we are disinclined to approach him."

"If they would treat us as generously you do," said Ruan the Seventh, "that would be nice."

"If Wang Lun were as friendly to us as you," said Ruan the Fifth, "we should have gone there a long time ago, and would not wait until now. We should even have been willing to die for him."

"I am not worth mentioning," said Wu Yong. "In both Shandong and Hebei provinces there are many brave heroes."

"There may be many brave heroes," said Ruan the Second, "but so far we have not met them."

"Do you know a man in this vicinity named Chao Gai, who is the chief of the Dongxi village, in Yuncheng County?" asked Wu Yong.

"Is he not the man known as the 'Heavenly King' or 'Pagoda Carrier'?" asked Ruan the Fifth.

"That is the man," said Wu Yong.

"Although he lives at a distance of only thirty-five *li* from here yet our fate has not allowed us to meet him even though we have heard of his fame," said Ruan the Seventh.

"As he is a man who distributes wealth in a good cause how is it that you have not tried to meet him?" asked Wu Yong.

"We have had no business at that place," said Ruan the Second, "and therefore we have not been able to meet him."

"For several years," said Wu Yong, "I have been teaching at a village close to his home. I have heard that just now he has a matter in hand which will bring in much wealth and that is really what I came here to discuss with you. How would it be if we intercepted this treasure, and took it ourselves?"

"We cannot do that," said Ruan the Fifth. "He is a man who distributes wealth in a good cause; we cannot intercept his treasure. Besides that, should the brave heroic bandits hear of it they would laugh at us."

"Before you said this," said Wu Yong, "I thought that you were not firm in purpose but now I see that you are really chivalrous and would treat your friends well. As you really are willing to assist me I will tell you the truth about this matter. Just now I am living at Chao Gai's home. The chief Chao Gai has heard of your fame, and specially instructed me to come here and discuss a matter with you."
"We three brothers," said Ruan the Second, "are quite straight, and have no fraction of falsity about us. I think Chao Gai must have an extremely secret and illegal affair in hand which requires our assistance and that is why he sent you here. If it is true that there is such business then let us take our oath with this remaining cup of wine that if we do not assist you with our utmost ability then let calamity fall upon us, disastrous disease attack us, and let us die an unnatural death."
Ruan the Fifth and also Ruan the Seventh patted their necks with their hands and the former said, "This warm blood we will offer to the one that appreciates us."
"You three brothers are here," said Wu Yong. "It is not I, who have any bad intention in inducing you. This matter is extremely important. The birthday of Prime Minister Cai at the court, is on the fifteenth day of the sixth month. His son-in-law is Grand Secretary Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital. Very soon the latter will dispatch presents of gold articles, pearls, and other valuables worth one hundred thousand strings of cash to his father-in-law on the birthday. A splendid fellow named Liu Tang has just come and reported this matter. They want you to go there and discuss with them the question of collecting men together who will go to some lonely pass in the mountains and there seize these ill-gotten gains so that everybody will enjoy a rich and happy life. Therefore they told me to come here under pretext of buying fish but really to request you to go there to discuss this affair. What do you think of the matter?"
"Ho! Ho!" said Ruan the Second, "Brother, did I not tell you that it would come?"
Ruan the Seventh jumped up and said, "We have hoped for this a long time, and today we get our desires fulfilled. Your words scratch us at the place that itches. But when shall we go?"
"As you are willing to go," said Wu Yong, "I propose that we start tomorrow morning about 5 A.M., and go to the village of Chao, the 'Heavenly King.'"
The three brothers were much pleased at this. They all went to bed. Early next morning they ate their breakfast, and after leaving instructions at their home, they departed on the road to Dongxi Village. In the afternoon they came in sight of the farmhouse of Chao Gai. In the distance they saw Chao Gai and Liu Tang waiting for them under a green ash tree. When they reached the tree Chao Gai expressed his pleasure at seeing them and said, "I previously heard of your fame but now I find that it is quite true. I request you to come inside my home to discuss matters." All the six then went into a room at the back of the farm where they took their seats according to their status.
Wu Yong explained all that had happened, and Chao Gai was much pleased and instructed his servants to kill and roast a pig and a sheep, and prepare some paper offerings for worship. The three brothers saw that Chao Gai's personal appearance was fair and noble and his conversation was free and easy, so they said, "We are fond of making friends with fine fellows but we never supposed that we can find them here. We should not have had the pleasure of meeting you today if it had not been for Wu Yong who brought us here." The brothers were exceedingly pleased. They ate their evening meal, and talked with their host until midnight.
The next morning when they got up they went again to the chamber at the back where the paper joss money, paper horses, incense, flowers, candles and lamps, the roasted pig and sheep; and other worshiping materials were ready. They were pleased to see that Chao Gai was so sincere. So they all took an oath saying, "Grand Secretary Liang at the Northern Capital has injured the people, and has used his ill-gotten gains to buy presents and send them to his father-in-law, Prime Minister Cai at the Eastern Capital as birthday presents. They certainly represent wealth unjustly obtained. If in our band of six men there be one who has a selfish purpose Heaven and Earth will exterminate him. May the gods take note of our vows." They then burnt the paper money, and had a feast. While eating and drinking a farm servant entered and said, "There is a man at the door begging for some rice."
Chao Gai said, "You do not know your own business. As I am drinking wine here with my guests you should have given him about a quart of rice, and not come here to ask me about it."
The servant said that he had offered him rice that he refused, as he wanted to speak to the chief himself.
Chao Gai said, "He must have not been satisfied. You go and offer him about three pecks of rice. Also tell him that the chief is entertaining some guests, and has no time to see him."
The servant went away but after some time returned and said, "I gave that man three pecks of rice but he still refuses to go away. He tells me that he is a Taoist and does not want either rice or money but begs to be allowed to see you."
"Cannot you give him a suitable reply?" said Chao Gai. "Tell him that I really have no time to see him today, and ask him to call again in a few days when I will talk with him."
"I have told him that already," said the servant, "but he says that he has not come to beg for rice or money; but has heard that you are a just man and that is why he requests an interview."
Chao Gai said, "You are giving me lots of trouble. You do not even help me to deal with this matter. If he is still unsatisfied with the rice you can give him about five pecks of rice, and yet you need not come here again to speak. Tell him that if there were no guests here I would have gone and spoken to him. You now go and send him away, and don't come here again to mention this matter."
The servant withdrew but after about an hour they heard a row outside of the front gate. Another servant rushed into the room and said, "That man has become angry, and has assaulted about ten of your servants."
Chao Gai was startled upon hearing this, and hurriedly rising said, "Will you gentlemen please remain seated. I will go and investigate this matter myself." Upon leaving the guest chamber, he went to the gate and there he saw a tall man about eight feet high, who had a very dignified but strange appearance. He was outside the gate near the ash tree, and as he struck the servants he said, "You do not recognize a good man."
"Do not be angry," said Chao Gai. "You came here to see Chao Gai, the chief, for perhaps some contributions. They have already given you rice so why do you feel so much provoked?"
The man laughed loudly and said, "I, a poor priest, did not come here for either wine, food, money, or rice. In my eye, one hundred thousand strings of cash seem to be quite an ordinary thing. I just came here to have a little talk with the chief. I cannot bear these villagers who had no decency, and abused me, and that was why I lost my temper."
"Do you know the chief?" asked Chao Gai.
"I have heard of his great reputation," said the man, "but so far I have not met him."
"I am the chief," said Chao Gai. "What do you want to speak to me about?"
The man looked closely at Chao Gai, and said, "Chief, do not blame me for this, and kindly allow a poor Taoist to kneel down to you."
"Do not be too polite," said Chao Gai, "come inside and have a drink of tea."
"Many thanks," said the man. They went into the house, and when Wu Yong and the three brothers saw him enter they withdrew from the room.
When Chao Gai and the man had drunk tea for a little time the latter said, "This is not a good place for us to discuss matters. Is there a better place where we can go?"
Chao Gai took him to a small room where they both sat down.
Chao Gai said, "May I venture to inquire as to your name and the place you come from?"
The man replied, "My family name is Gongsun, and my single personal name is Sheng. My Taoist religious name is Yi Qing (First in Purity). I am a Jizhou man. When I was young I practiced much with the cudgel and spear. I was very good at all kinds of military drill so that people called me Gongsun Sheng, the 'Big Brother.' I then studied the arts of Taoism so that I could command the wind and rain, ride on the mists and clouds. Everybody calls me 'Cloud Dragon.' I heard of your great reputation but had not the opportunity to meet you and pay my respects. Now there are gold articles, pearls, and other valuables worth a hundred thousand strings of cash, and I wish to give them to you as a present for introducing myself to you. I do not know if you will accept them or not."
Chao Gai laughed and asked, "Are not these birthday presents from the north?"
The man was startled at this and asked how he knew about them.
"I just guessed that," said Chao Gai. "Does it agree with your ideas?"
"This great riches," said Gongsun Sheng, "we must not let pass amiss. The ancients had a saying, 'If you do not take what you ought to take, you must not regret it afterwards.' Chief, what do you think about it?"
Just then, while they were talking, a man rushed into the room, and taking hold of Gongsun Sheng, he said, "Well! In the visible world there is the Emperor's law, in the invisible there is the gods', and now you discuss the matters like this. I have been listening to you for a long time." This interruption frightened Gongsun Sheng so much that his face became pale.

Plans in project will leak through walls,
Lonely walls may hide calamity.

## 016
## Yang Zhi Escorts a Convoy of Precious Silver & Gold, insisting on his own style; Wu Yong Schemes a Ruse & Captures the Birthday Gifts by guile

The man who seized Gongsun Sheng was Wu Yong the Wizard. Chao Gai laughed. "Don't tease him, Teacher. Permit me to introduce you." The two exchanged bows.
"I have long known the fame of Gongsun Sheng among gallant men," said Wu Yong. "I didn't expect to have the pleasure of meeting you today."
"This savant is called Wu Yong the Wizard," said Chao Gai.
"In the chivalrous fraternity many have spoken of your illustrious name," said Gongsun. "Who would have thought I'd have the good fortune to meet you here in the ward chief's manor! Of course, thanks to his generosity and chivalry, bold men from all over call at his door."
"There are a few others inside I'd like you to meet," said Chao Gai. "Please come with me to the rear room." The three went in and the ward chief presented Liu Tang and the three Ruan brothers to Gongsun Sheng.
"This encounter cannot be an accident," they said. "Please, brother Chao, sit at the head of the table."
"I'm just a poor host with no delicacies to offer you fine guests," Chao Gai protested. "How dare I presume?"
"Please, brother," said Wu Yong, "be guided by me. You're the eldest among us. You must take that seat."
Only then did Chao Gai consent to sit in the first place. Wu Yong was seated second, Gongsun third, Liu Tang fourth, Ruan the Second fifth, Ruan the Fifth sixth, and Ruan the Seventh seventh. They drank together to celebrate their meeting, then the table was re-laid, and more wine and tidbits were served, and once more they drank.
"The ward chief has dreamt that the seven stars of the Big Dipper settled on the ridge of his roof, and now we seven, with the same righteous purpose in mind, encounter each other here today," said Wu Yong.
"Surely that is an omen from Heaven. We can take the precious convoy easily. I suggest that brother Liu Tang find out which route the convoy will follow. It's too late today but would he please set out early tomorrow?"
"No need for that," said Gongsun. "I already know. It's coming by way of the big road over Yellow Earth Ridge."
"Ten *li* east of there is the village of Anlo," said Chao Gai. "In Anlo lives an idler named Bai Sheng, better known as the Daylight Rat. He once sought me out, and I helped him with a little money."
"The Big Dipper gives off a white light. It must mean that man," said Wu Yong. "We can use him."
"But we're quite far from Yellow Earth Ridge. Where should we lie in wait?" asked Liu Tang.
"At Bai Sheng's place," said Wu Yong. "We'll be safe there. And we'll have other uses for him as well."
"Will we employ soft tactics or hard?" queried Chao Gai.
Wu Yong laughed. "I've already thought of a method. It all depends on how the convoy reacts. We'll meet force with force and guile with guile. I have a plan but I don't know whether you will approve." He outlined his proposal.
Chao Gai stamped his foot delightedly. "Marvellous! No wonder they call you the Wizard. You're better than Zhuge Liang.* An excellent plan!"
"Let's not talk about it again," said Wu Yong. " 'The walls have ears and people pass outside windows,' as the old saying goes. We must keep this strictly among ourselves."
"Please go back, you three," Chao Gai said to the Ruan brothers, "and return again when the time comes. Master Wu Yong, go on with your school teaching, as usual. Gongsun and Liu Tang can live here for the time being."
They drank until dark, then retired to rest in the various guest-rooms.
The next morning at the fifth watch they rose and had breakfast. Chao Gai presented the three Ruan brothers with thirty ounces of snow-white silver. "A small token of my regard," he said. "Please don't refuse." At first the three brothers wouldn't consider it but Wu Yong said: "Friendly gestures should not be rejected," and so they finally accepted.
All saw them off to the outside of the manor. Wu Yong gave them instructions in a low voice. "Be sure to be on time," he enjoined them.
The Ruan brothers took their leave and returned to Stone Tablet Village. Chao Gai kept Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang on in the manor. Wu Yong often came over to discuss their affairs.

But enough of idle talk. Let's get back to Governor Liang in Daming, the Northern Capital. After buying birthday gifts valued at a hundred thousand strings of cash, he chose a date to start them on their way.
The following day, as he was sitting in the rear hall, his wife, Madame Cai, asked him: "When will the birthday gifts go off, Your Excellency?"
"Tomorrow or the day after. I've bought everything I want. There's only one thing that's troubling me."
"What is it?"
"Last year I purchased a hundred thousand strings of cash worth of jewels and art objects and sent them to the Eastern Capital but because I didn't pick the right men they were seized by bandits on the road. To this day the robbers haven't been caught. At present I don't know of anyone really competent in my retinue. That is what's troubling me."
Madame Cai pointed to a man standing at the foot of the steps. "Haven't you often said that this fellow is quite remarkable? Why not entrust him with the mission? He can see it through."
The man she indicated was Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Brute. Liang was pleased. He summoned Yang Zhi into the hall.
"I had forgotten you," Liang said. "If you can safely deliver the birthday gifts for me, I'll have you raised in rank."
Yang Zhi clasped his hands together respectfully. "Since that is what Your Excellency wishes, I must of course comply. How shall the convoy be composed, and when shall it set forth?"
"I'm ordering the prefectural government to supply ten extralarge carts, and will send the service personnel from the city guard to escort them. Each cart will carry a yellow banner reading: 'Convoy of Birthday Gifts to the Premier.' In addition, I will have one strong soldier follow each of the carts. You can leave within the next three days."
"It's not that I'm unwilling but I really can't do it. Please give the mission to some brave and skilful person."
"It's my desire to raise you in rank. Along with the birthday gift documents, I intend to include a letter to the Premier, strongly recommending you. You'll return with his nomination for an official post. Why do you refuse to go?"
"Your servant has heard that the gifts were robbed last year, Excellency, and that the bandits still have not been caught. There are many brigands on the road these days. From here to the Eastern Capital there is no water route; you have to go entirely by land. Purple Gold Mountain, Two-Dragon Mountain, Peach Blossom Mountain, Umbrella Mountain, Yellow Earth Ridge, White Sand Valley, Wild Cloud Ford, and Red Pine Forest—all must be crossed, and all are infested with bandits. No merchant dares travel through them alone. If the bandits know we're carrying a precious cargo, of course they'll want to seize it. We'll just be throwing our lives away. That is why I can't go."
"In that case I'll simply provide you with a larger military escort."
"Even if you gave me ten thousand men, it wouldn't solve anything, Your Excellency. Those craven oafs would run as soon as they heard the bandits coming."
"Do you mean to say that the birthday gifts can't be delivered?"
"If you'll grant your servant one request, I will undertake the mission."
"Since I'm willing to entrust you with it, why not? State your wish."
"As I see it, Your Excellency, we shouldn't use any carts. Pack the gifts into containers to be carried, disguised as merchandise, on shoulder-poles. Let the ten strong soldiers serve as porters. I'll need only one more person, also dressed as a merchant, to go as my assistant. We'll travel quietly day and night until we reach the Eastern Capital and deliver the goods. That way we'll be able to do it."
"It shall be as you wish. I'll write a letter strongly recommending you for an official appointment."
"My profoundest thanks, Excellency, for your gracious kindness." That same day Yang Zhi made up the loads and picked his soldiers. The following day he was again summoned to the rear hall. Governor Liang came out and asked: "Yang Zhi, when will you be ready to leave?"
"We would like to start tomorrow morning, Your Excellency. I'm just waiting for the official documents."
"My wife has some gifts for her women relatives. I want you to take them along too. I'm afraid you won't know your way around the Premier's chancellery, so I'm sending with you Chief Steward Xie and two captains of the guards."
"I won't be able to go then, Excellency."
"Why not? The gifts are all packed in containers."
"I was made responsible for ten loads of gifts, and the soldiers were put in my charge. If I told them to march early, they'd march early. If I said late, then late it would be. They'd spend the night where I directed, and rest when I ordered it. Everything would be up to me. But now you also want to send the chief steward and two captains. The steward is one of madame's men, the husband of her old wet-nurse when she was an infant in the Premier's chancellery. If he disagreed with me on the road how could I argue? Yet the blame would be mine if the mission failed."
"That's easy. I'll tell him and the captains to do whatever you say."
"In that case, your servant is willing to accept the mission. May I be severely punished if I fail."

The governor was delighted. "I haven't decided to promote you in vain. You're a very sensible fellow." Summoning Chief Steward Xie and the two captains to the hall he gave them official orders: "Major Yang Zhi has accepted a mission to deliver birthday gifts—eleven loads of jewels and art objects—to the Premier's chancellery in the Eastern Capital. He is fully responsible. You three are to accompany him. During the journey he alone will decide whether to start early or late, where to spend the night, and when to rest. None of you is to cross him. You already know what madame wants done. Be cautious and prudent, leave soon and return quickly, don't let anything go wrong."

The old chief steward promised to obey the governor's injunctions.

Before dawn the next morning the loads were lined up outside the main hall. The chief steward and the captains brought another batch of valuables—making a total of eleven loads. Eleven strong soldiers of the guard were selected and disguised as porters. Yang Zhi was wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a black silk tunic. His feet were shod in hemp sandals tied with laces of cord. At his waist was a sword, and he carried a halberd in his hand.

The old steward was also dressed as a merchant. The two captains were disguised as lackeys. Each carried a halberd and a rattan switch. Governor Liang handed over the official documents. After all had eaten their fill, they formally took their leave in front of the hall. Liang watched the soldiers raise the carrying-poles to their shoulders and set forth. Together with Yang Zhi, the old steward and the two captains, a total of fifteen men left the governor's compound. Marching out of the Northern Capital's city gate, they proceeded down the highway in the direction of the Eastern Capital.

It was then the middle of the fifth lunar month. Although the skies were clear, walking was difficult in the broiling sun. Determined to deliver the gifts in time for the Premier's birthday on the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month, Yang Zhi pushed the march on briskly. During the first week after the convoy left the Northern Capital, they set out everyday before dawn to take advantage of the morning cool, and rested in the heat of noon.

By the sixth or seventh day, dwellings were few and far between, travellers had thinned out, and the road began climbing into the mountains. Yang Zhi now started the marches well after sunrise and didn't stop until late in the afternoon. The eleven guards were all carrying heavy loads and the weather was hot. Walking was a severe effort. Whenever they saw a grove they wanted to rest but Yang Zhi drove them on. If they halted, the least he did was curse them, and often he flogged them with his switch, forcing them to continue.

The two captains, although they bore on their backs only light luggage, gasped for breath and kept falling to the rear. Yang Zhi berated them harshly.

"How can you two be so ignorant? I'm responsible for this mission. Instead of helping me beat the porters, all you do is drag behind. This road is no place to dally!"

"It's not that we want to go slowly," said the captains. "We just can't move any faster in this heat. A few days ago we always set out early when it was cool but now we march only during the hottest hours of the day. Can't you tell the difference between fair conditions and foul?"

"You're talking farts, not words! A few days ago we were in a good part of the country, now we're in a very ticklish place. We must march in broad daylight. Who dares to set out while it's still dark?"

The captains said no more. But they thought to themselves: "That rogue swears at people whenever he likes!"

His halberd in one hand, his switch in the other, Yang Zhi urged on the convoy. The two captains sat beneath a tree and waited for the chief steward to catch up.

"That murderous Yang Zhi is only a major in his excellency's guard," they complained to the old man. "What right has he to act so mighty?"

"The governor ordered us not to cross him. That's why I haven't said anything. These past few days I too have found him hard to bear. But we must be patient."

"His excellency was only trying to make him feel good. You're the chief steward. Why don't you take over?"

"We must be patient with him," the old steward repeated.

That day they again marched until late afternoon. Then they stopped at an inn. Sweat was raining from the eleven porters. Groaning and sighing, they addressed the steward: "Unfortunately we're soldiers of the guard, and have to go where we're ordered. For the past two days we've been carrying these heavy loads in the burning sun, instead of starting early when it's cool. For anything at all, we're given a taste of the switch! We're flesh and blood too. Why should we be treated so cruelly?"

"Don't complain," the steward urged them. "When we get to the Eastern Capital, I'll reward you personally."

"Of course we wouldn't have said anything, Chief Steward," they replied, "if we had someone like you looking after us."

Another night passed. The following morning everyone rose before daylight, hoping to march early while it was still cool. But Yang Zhi jumped up and roared: "Where do you think you're going? Back to bed! I'll call you when it's time to leave!"

"We don't set out early," muttered the guards, "and in the heat of the day when we can't walk, he beats us!"

Swearing, Yang Zhi yelled: "What do you clods understand!" He threatened them with his rattan switch. The soldiers had no choice but to swallow their complaints and return to bed.

After the sun had risen and everyone finished a leisurely breakfast, the convoy resumed its march. Yang Zhi pushed on at a rapid pace, with no pauses for rest in the shade. The eleven guards grumbled constantly, and the two captains made no end of peevish observations to the chief steward. Although the old man did not reply, in his heart he was very irritated with the leader of the expedition.

To make a long story short, after marching for fifteen days there wasn't a man in the convoy who didn't hate Yang Zhi. On the fourth day of the sixth month they again rose late and slowly cooked breakfast. Then they set out. Even before noon the sun was a fiery red ball on high. There wasn't a cloud in sight. It was really hot. Now they were travelling along winding mountain trails. Towering peaks looked down on them from all sides. After marching about twenty //the porters were longing to relax in the shade of a willow grove. Yang Zhi lashed them with his switch.

"Move on," he shouted. "I'll teach you to rest before it's time!"

The guards looked up. There wasn't even half a cloud in the sky. The heat was simply unbearable. Yang Zhi hurried the convoy along a path fringing the mountain. It was about noon then, and the stones were so hot they burned the porters' feet. Walking was extremely painful.

"A scorching day like this," groaned the guards. "You're killing us!"

"Hurry up," Yang Zhi urged. "First cross that ridge ahead, then we'll see."

The column of fifteen men hastened on until they mounted the earthen ridge. Then the porters lowered their carrying-poles and threw themselves down beneath the pine trees.

"A fine place you've picked for cooling off," Yang Zhi ranted. "Get up, quick! We've got to push on!"

"Even if you cut us into eight pieces, we can't move another step!" retorted the soldiers.

Yang Zhi seized his switch and lashed them over the head and shoulders. But by the time he beat one to his feet another lay down again. He could do nothing with them. It was at this time that the old steward and the two captains climbed panting to the top of the ridge and sat down beneath a pine, gasping for breath. The old man saw Yang Zhi belaboring the porters.

"It's really much too hot to march, Major," he said. "Forgive them."

"You don't understand, Chief Steward. This is Yellow Earth Ridge, a favourite haunt of bandits. Even in peaceful times they robbed here in broad daylight, to say nothing of what they do in times like these! Stopping here is very dangerous."

"That's what you always say," countered the two captains. "You just use those stories to scare people!"

"Let the porters rest a bit," the steward urged. "We'll start again afternoon, what do you say?"

"Impossible. Where's your judgment? For seven or eight //around the ridge there isn't a single house. Who dares rest in the shade in a place like this?" Yang Zhi retorted.

"You go on with the porters first, then," said the steward. "I've got to sit a while."

Yang Zhi picked up his rattan switch and roared at the soldiers: "Any man who doesn't march gets twenty blows of this!"

They all noisily protested. "Major," one of them cried, "while you walk empty-handed we're carrying well over a hundred catties apiece! You act as if we weren't even human! If the governor himself were in charge of this convoy, he'd at least let us say a word or two. You have no feeling at all! The only thing you know is to storm and rage!"

"Wretched animal! A beating is all his kind understands!" Yang Zhi rained blows on the man with his rattan switch.

"Stop, Major!" shouted the steward. "Listen to me. In my days in the Premier's chancellery I met thousands of officers, and every one of them treated me with deference! I don't mean to be rude but it seems to me that an officer under sentence of death whom His Excellency has pitied and made a major of the guard—a post no bigger than a mustard seed—shouldn't be so pompous! Even if I were only a village elder, to say nothing of the governor's chief steward, you ought to heed my advice! Always beating the porters—what sort of conduct is that?"

"You're city dweller, Steward, born and raised in official residences. What do you know of the hardships of the road?"

"I've been as far as Sichuan, Guangdong and Guangxi but I've never seen anyone who behaved like you!"

"You can't compare today with times of peace!"

"You deserve to have your tongue cut out if you say such things! What's unpeaceful about today?"

Yang Zhi was going to reply when he saw a shadowy figure poke his head out of a grove opposite and peer at them. "What did I tell you?" he shouted. "Isn't that a bad fellow over there?" Ringing aside his switch, he seized his halberd and charged into the grove, shouting: "Insolent villain! How dare you spy on our convoy?"

In the grove he found a line of seven wheel-barrows and six men, buff naked, resting in the shade. One of them, a fellow with a scarlet birthmark on the side of his temple, grabbed a halberd when he saw Yang Zhi advancing. The seven men cried in alarm: *"Aiya!"* and leaped to their feet.

"Who are you?" Yang Zhi yelled.

"Who are *you?*" the seven countered.

"Aren't you robbers?"

"That's what we should be asking *you!* We're only small merchants. We haven't any money to give you!"

"So you're merchants. And I suppose I'm rich!"

"Who are you, really?"

"Tell me first where you're from."

"We seven are from Haozhou. We're bringing dates to sell in the Eastern Capital. At first we hesitated to pass this way because many people say that bandits often rob merchants on Yellow Earth Ridge. But then we said to ourselves: 'All we've got are some dates and nothing of any value.' So we decided to cross. Since the weather is so hot, we thought we'd rest in this grove till the cool of evening. When we heard you fellows coming up the rise we were afraid you might be bandits, so we sent this brother for a look."

"So that's how it is—only ordinary merchants! I thought he was a robber when I saw him watching us, so I hurried in here to investigate."

"Please have some dates, sir," said the seven.

"No, thanks," replied Yang Zhi. Halberd in hand, he returned to the convoy.

"Since there are bandits around, we'd better leave," said the chief steward, who was seated beneath a tree.

"I thought they were bandits but they're only date merchants," Yang Zhi explained.

"According to you," the old steward remarked, "these fellows were all desperadoes!"

"No need to quarrel," said Yang Zhi. "I only want everything to go well. You men can rest. We'll march on after it cools down a bit."

The guards smiled. Yang Zhi stabbed the point of his halberd into the ground, then he too sat down beneath a tree to rest and cool off.

In less time than it takes to eat half a bowl of rice, another man appeared in the distance. Carrying two buckets on the ends of a shoulder-pole, he sang as he mounted the ridge:

*Beneath a red sun that burns like fire,*
*Half scorched in the fields is the grain.*
*Poor peasant hearts with worry are scalded,*
*While the rich themselves idly fan!*

Still singing, he walked to the edge of the pine grove, rested his buckets and sat down in the shade of a tree.

"What have you got in those buckets?" the soldiers asked him.

"White wine."

"Where are you going with it?"

"To the village, to sell."

"How much a bucket?"

"Five strings of cash—not a copper less."

The soldiers talked it over. "We're hot and thirsty. Why not buy some? It will ease the heat in our bodies." They began chipping in.

"What are you fellows up to?" Yang Zhi shouted, when he noticed what they were doing.

"We're going to buy a little wine."

Yang Zhi flailed them with the shaft of his halberd. "What gall! How dare you buy wine without asking me?"

"Always raising a stinking fuss over nothing! It's our money! What is it to you if we buy wine? You beat us for that, too!"

"What do you stupid clodhoppers know anyhow? All you can think of is guzzling! But not a thought do you give to all the tricks that are pulled on the road! Do you know how many good men have been toppled by drugs?"

The wine vendor looked at Yang Zhi and laughed coldly. "You don't know much yourself, master merchant. I wasn't going to sell you any in the first place. What a dirty thing to say about a man's wine!"

As they were quarrelling, the date merchants emerged from the grove, halberds in hand. "What's the trouble?" they asked.

"I was carrying this wine across the ridge to sell in the village and stopped to cool off when these fellows asked if they could buy some," the vendor said. "I didn't let them have any. Then this gentleman claimed my wine was drugged. Is he trying to be funny, or what?"

*"Pei!"* snorted the seven. "We thought robbers had come, at least! So that's what all the row was about. Suppose he did say it—so what? We were just thinking of having some wine ourselves. If they're suspicious, sell a bucket to us. We'll drink it."

"No, no! Nothing doing!" said the vendor.

"We didn't say anything against you, you dull clod," cried the seven. "We'll give you the same price you'd get in the village. If you sell to us, what's the difference? You'll be doing a good deed, like handing out tea on a hot day, and quenching our thirst at the same time!"

"I don't mind selling you a bucket but they said my wine is bad. Besides, I don't have any dipper."

"You take things too seriously. What do you care what they said? We have our own dippers."

Two of the date merchants brought out two coconut ladles from one of the wheel-barrows, while a third scooped up a big handful of dates. Then the seven gathered around the bucket and removed its cover. Ladling out the wine in turn, they drank, while munching the dates. Before long the bucket was empty.

"We haven't asked you the price yet," said the seven.

"I never bargain," the vendor asserted. "Exactly five strings of cash per bucket—ten strings for the load."

"Five strings you say, then five strings it shall be. But give us one free scoop out of the other bucket."

"Can't be done. My prices are fixed."

While one of the date merchants paid him the money, another opened the cover of the second bucket, ladled up some wine and started to drink it. The vendor hurried towards him but the man ran into the pine grove with the half consumed dipper of wine. As the vendor hastened after him, another merchant emerged from the grove with another ladle. He dipped this into the bucket and raised it to his lips. The vendor rushed over, seized the ladle, and dumped its contents back into the bucket. Replacing the cover, he flung the ladle to the ground.

"You look like a proper man—why don't you act like one?" he fumed. "Is that any way to behave?"

When the soldiers saw this, their throats felt even drier. All were longing for a drink. "Put in a word for us, old grandpa," one of them begged the chief steward. "Those date merchants drank a bucket of his wine. Why shouldn't we buy the other and wet our throats? We're hot and thirsty, and have nothing else to drink. There's no place to get water on this ridge. Do us a favour, old grandpa!"

The old steward heard them out. He felt like having a drink himself. So he conferred with Yang Zhi.

"Those date merchants have already finished a bucket of that vendor's wine. Only one bucket is left. Why not let them buy some wine and ward off heat stroke? There really isn't any place on this ridge to get water."

Yang Zhi thought to himself: "I watched those birds finish off his first bucket, and drink half a ladleful from the second. The wine must be all right. I've been beating out porters for hours. Maybe I ought to let them buy a few drinks."

Aloud, he said: "Since the chief steward suggests it, you rogues can have some wine. Then we'll march on."

The soldiers chipped in and raised the price of a bucket. But the vendor refused them. "I'm not selling, I'm not selling!" he said angrily. "This wine is drugged!"
"Don't be like that, brother," the soldiers said with placating smiles. "Is it worth making such a fuss?"
"I'm not selling," said the vendor, "so don't hang around!"
The date merchants intervened. "Stupid oaf!" they berated him. "What if that fellow said the wrong thing? You're much too serious. You've even tried to take it out on us. Anyhow, it has nothing to do with these porters. Sell them some wine and be done with it!"
"And give him a chance to cast suspicion on me for no reason at all?" the vendor demanded.
The date merchants pushed him aside and handed the bucket to the soldiers, who removed the cover. Having no ladles, they apologetically asked the merchants if they could borrow theirs.
"Have some dates, also, to go with your wine," said the merchants.
"You're very kind."
"No need to be polite. We're all travellers together. What do a hundred or so dates matter?"
The soldiers thanked them. The first two ladles of wine they presented to Yang Zhi and the chief steward. Yang Zhi refused but the old man drank his. The next two ladlefuls were consumed by the two captains. Then the soldiers swarmed around the bucket and imbibed heartily.
Yang Zhi wavered. The soldiers showed no ill effects. Besides, the weather was hot and his throat was parched. Scooping up half a ladle of wine, he drank it while munching on a few dates.
"Those date merchants drank a couple of ladlefuls out of this bucket, so you had less wine," the vendor said to the soldiers. "You can pay me half a string of cash less."
The soldiers gave him his money. The vendor took it, then, carrying his shoulder-pole and empty buckets, he swung off down the ridge, again singing a folk song.
Standing on the edge of the pine grove, the seven date merchants pointed at the fifteen men of the convoy and said: "Down you go! Down you go!" The fifteen, weak in the knees and heavy in the head, stared at each other as, one by one, they sank to the ground. Then the seven merchants pushed the seven wheel-barrows out of the grove and dumped the dates. Placing the eleven loads of jewels and art objects into the barrows, they covered them over.
"Sorry to trouble you," they called, and trundled off down the ridge.
Yang Zhi, too weak to move, could only groan inwardly. The fifteen couldn't get up. They had only been able to goggle helplessly while the seven had loaded the barrows with the precious cargo. They were paralyzed, bereft of speech.

*

Now I ask you—who were those seven men? None other than Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Liu Tang and the three Ruan brothers. And the wine vendor was Bai Sheng, nicknamed Daylight Rat. And how was the wine drugged? When the buckets were carried up the ridge, they contained pure wine. After the seven finished the first bucket, Liu Tang removed the cover from the second and deliberately drank half a ladleful so as to dull the others' suspicions. Next, inside the grove, Wu Yong poured the drug into the other ladle. Then he came out and spilled it into the wine while taking a "free scoop." As he pretended to drink, Bai Sheng grabbed the ladle and dumped the wine back in the bucket.
That was the ruse. Planned entirely by Wu Yong, it can be called "Capturing the Birthday Gifts by a Ruse."

*

Yang Zhi had not drunk much, and he recovered first. Crawling to his feet, he could hardly stand. He looked at the other fourteen. Saliva was running from the corners of their mouths. None of them could move. "You've made me lose the birthday gifts," Yang Zhi muttered in angry despair. "How can I ever face Governor Liang again? These convoy documents are worthless now!" He tore them up. "I've become a man without a home or country. Where can I go? Better that I should die right here on this ridge!" Clutching his tunic, he staggered to the edge of the ridge and prepared to jump. Truly, rains in the third month wash the fallen blossoms away, the last of willow tendrils the autumn frosts destroy. Yang Zhi sought death on Yellow Earth Ridge. What became of his life?

When Gongsun Sheng was telling Chao Gai about the birthday convoy in the library, and how it was ill-gotten gain and there was no reason at all why they shouldn't steal it, some one rushed in and seized hold of the Taoist, saying, "You're pretty foolhardy, aren't you. I've just heard every word you said!" This person of course was Wu Yong. Chao Gai laughed and said: "Stop playing the fool, Professor, and let me introduce you!"
After the two had formally bowed to each other, Wu Yong said: "I have often heard the brethren of the rivers and lakes speak of 'The Dragon-in-the-clouds' but I never managed to meet you until now."
Chao Gai said: "This most talented gentleman is Dr. Wu Yong, the Beacon of Learning."
"I too have often heard your illustrious name from the brethren of the rivers and lakes," Gongsun Sheng said to Wu Yong, "but I never guessed it would be my fate to meet you here at Boss Chao's. No doubt it's Mr. Chao's great generosity and virtue that brings all men to his door."
"There are some other friends within," said Chao Gai, "please come inside now and allow me to introduce you." So they all went in and joined Liu Tang and the three Ruan brothers.

Wealth's a lasting cause of strife;
*This meeting of seven stars henceforth*
*Will have effects that last for life,*
And summon up official wrath.

Everyone agreed that it could be no accident that had brought them together. They requested Chao Gai to take the place of honour.
"But I'm a poor host, I've so little to offer you, how can I do that?" Chao Gai protested.
"You are the senior," Wu Yong said, "so please do as I say and take it."
So Chao Gai had to consent. Wu Yong took the next place, followed by Gongsun Sheng, Liu Tang and the Ruans in that order. Then they drank to their meeting, and afterwards drank a second round, with some accompanying dishes. Then Wu Yong said: "Mr. Chao dreamed of the seven stars of the Plough descending on the roof of this house and now here we are, the seven of us, meeting to make plans, who can doubt that it was a vision sent him by heaven? This prize is really ours for the taking. Remember what we said the other day: that friend Liu should go and make inquiries, to find out what route the convoy is going to take. It's too late for today but he'd better go first thing in the morning, if he will."
"But there's no need," said Gongsun Sheng. "I've already heard, and I know the whole route. It's coming by way of Yellow Mud Ridge."
"Only about three miles to the east of Yellow Mud Ridge there's a place called Peacehaven," said Chao Gai. "There's a certain vagabond there, Bai Sheng by name, alias 'The Daytime Rat.' He's been to me for help on several occasions, and I've lent him money."
Wu Yong said: "He must surely be that other bright star accompanying the Plough. I think we can use him."
"Yellow Mud Ridge is quite a way from here," said Liu Tang. "Where are we going to shelter while we wait?"
"We'll make that Bai Sheng's house our headquarters," said Wu Yong. "And we'll find other uses for Bai Sheng as well."
"Tell me," said Chao Gai, "are we going to have to use force or can we do it by guile?"
"I've got it all worked out," said Wu Yong gleefully. "We'll set a trap. It'll depend what happens when they come: if they want to play it rough, that's the way it'll be, if they're sensible, so will we be. I've got my plan but tell me if you think it will do. We shall do this … and we shall do this … "
When he had finished, Chao Gai showed his delight. He stamped his foot and said, "Masterly! It's not for nothing they call you 'Beacon of Learning.' I think you surpass Zhuge Liang. A stroke of genius!"
"There's another saying," said Wu Yong, "that walls have ears, and who knows someone isn't hiding outside the window. Let's keep this to ourselves."
"The Ruan brothers had better go home for now," Chao Gai said, "and return again nearer the time. Dr. Wu Yong can go back to teaching his students, and Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang can stay here with me."
They sat up quite late drinking that night, and then each went to rest in a guest-room. The next day they rose and breakfasted at dawn, and then Chao Gai got thirty taels of stamped silver and presented them to the Ruan brothers, saying: "Here is a little something to go on with, for friendship's sake." Of course the Ruan brothers refused but Wu Yong said, "What is given in the spirit of friendship cannot be rejected," so finally they had to accept it. The others escorted them to the manor gates, and Wu Yong whispered in their ears: "Remember, we will do so … and we will do so … When the time comes, there must be no mistakes." Then the brothers departed. Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang stayed on at Chao Gai's, while Wu Yong visited often to discuss the plan.
Lest this become tedious, let us leave it and turn to the Northern Capital, where Governor Liang has prepared the hundred thousand cash birthday gift and only needs to choose the right day for it to be dispatched in convoy. One morning as he was sitting in his council chamber, Madam Cai came in to him. "Husband," she said, "when is that birthday gift going to be sent?"
"The items have all been acquired," he answered. "It could leave tomorrow or the day after. There's only one thing that I still can't decide."
"And what is that?"
"Last year I also spent a hundred thousand on pearls and jewels and other valuables that I dispatched to the Eastern Capital but owing to the negligence of my people it was all seized *en route* by robbers, who still haven't been apprehended. Now looking over my staff I cannot find one capable man whom I can send with the convoy. That's my problem."
Madam Cai pointed to where all his staff stood in attendance: "I thought you always said that man was absolutely brilliant? Why don't you give him the job of taking the convoy to the capital? Then you'll feel confident of its getting there."
Governor Liang looked to see who she meant. It was Yang Zhi. Excitedly, he summoned Yang Zhi and said: "I had forgotten all about you. I have decided to promote you, if you will take charge of this convoy for me."
Yang Zhi clasped his hands together, bowed and said: "Sir, your wish is my command. But what are the arrangements, and when is it to leave?"
"There will be ten carts, provided by the administration of Daming and ten guards from my personal bodyguard to watch the carts. Each cart will carry a yellow flag bearing the words 'Gift convoy for the Grand Preceptor's birthday.' A guard will walk behind each cart. The convoy will start in three days' time."
"Please do not think I am unappreciative of the honour but I cannot accept this charge. I beg you to look for some brave and reliable man who will take it on."
"But I told you, I wish to promote you. A letter will be sent with the convoy, strongly recommending you to the Grand Preceptor, and when you return it will be with an imperial commission. I don't see what your objection is, why do you refuse?"
"With your leave, sir, my point is this: I have heard that last year a convoy was seized by robbers who were never caught. At the present time the country is swarming with robbers. Between here and the Eastern Capital there is no route by water, it is all overland, and lies through the Gold and Purple Hills, Twin-Dragon Mountain, Mount Peachblossom, Umbrella Pike, Yellow Mud Ridge, White Sand Pass, Wild Cloud Ford and the Red-Pine Woods. These are all places where brigands resort. Even ordinary merchants dare not travel this route alone. When the robbers hear that there's gold and silver and jewels coming, how can they leave it alone? I'd just be throwing my life away. No, I can't take the job."
"If that's the problem, we'll simply add more guards to the escort."
"If you sent a hundred thousand guards, it wouldn't help. As soon as the bastards heard the bandits coming, they'd decamp."
"Are you saying that it's impossible to send the convoy?"
Yang Zhi respectfully declared: "If the whole thing was under my control, I'd be prepared to undertake it."
"If I give you the job, of course it would be under your control. What's your idea?"
"If you want to know what I think, I'd say you shouldn't have any guard at all, and you shouldn't use carts. The gift should be divided into carrying loads, to look like the bundles of goods ordinary merchants carry, and ten tough guards should be picked and disguised as common porters. The escort should consist of just one other, to accompany me, also disguised as a merchant. We should travel quietly, by night, till we deliver the goods to the Eastern Capital. That way it would work."
"That's a brilliant plan. I shall write a very strong recommendation for you, and you will undoubtedly return with a commission from the Emperor."
"I am truly grateful, sir, for your consideration."
Yang Zhi was ordered the same day to make up the carrying loads and pick the guard. Next day the Governor summoned him and asked: "Yang Zhi, when can you start?"
"We shall be ready to start tomorrow morning, if you give the order."
"My wife also has some gifts which she is sending to some relatives in her father's residence. She wants you to take them too. But in case you don't know where to deliver them, she is sending along the husband of her old nurse, old Colonel Xie, together with two lieutenants."
"Sir," said Yang Zhi, "then I cannot go."
"But everything is ready, why do you say you cannot go?"
"The original ten loads are all my responsibility, and the party will be under my orders. If I say we must start early, we start early; if I say we should start late, we start late. We stop when I say so, we rest when I say so, everything will be under my control. But if you now want this Colonel to go with me and the lieutenants, he'll be working for your wife, and he's also the husband of the nurse in the Grand Preceptor's house, if any dispute should arise between us on the journey, how can I argue with him? If anything should go wrong, how can I explain it?"
"That's no problem, I will put them all under your command."
"If you arrange it like that, then I accept the responsibility. If there are problems, the blame is mine, just as much as the honour."
"How right I was to promote you," said the Governor, delightedly. "You really think of everything!" So saying, he summoned before him Colonel Xie and the two lieutenants and told them: "Major Yang Zhi has agreed to take command of the entire birthday convoy, consisting of eleven loads of treasure, until such time as they are delivered to the Grand Preceptor in the capital. The entire mission is therefore his responsibility. You are to accompany him but in matters of what time you start, how long you travel, where you stay and when you rest, you must obey his instructions. You must on no account argue with him."
The old Colonel and his aides agreed to all these terms. They left with Yang Zhi. Next day everyone was up at dawn to fetch the loads from the government offices. The loads were laid out on the ground, and the old Colonel and the lieutenants brought along another small load of valuables and silk, making eleven in all. Eleven strong soldiers were picked and disguised as porters. Yang Zhi had a straw sun-hat and was dressed in a green cotton tunic belted at the waist, and wore light hemp shoes for walking. He carried a sword in his belt and a halberd. The old Colonel was also got up as a merchant, and the two lieutenants were dressed to look like his servants. Each carried a pike and a number of rattan canes. Governor Liang handed over the papers and after an ample breakfast the party bade the Governor farewell in front of Government House and set off, leaving through the Daming city gate and taking the road to the Eastern Capital. They were fifteen in all, eleven soldiers carrying the loads, Yang Zhi and old Colonel Xie, and the two lieutenants.
It was halfway through the fifth month, and the weather, though beautifully clear, was excessively hot and made travelling arduous. Prince Wu Qi has a poem about this sort of weather:

Jade screens and crimson railings all about,
*Shoals of fishes playing among the weeds,*
*All the floor o'erspread with sumptuous mats,*
*The pillows of red agate. And such heat*
*As makes the six Dragons fear to go abroad,*
*And the seas scald the shores of Paradise Isle.*
*The listless sons of princes even begrudge*
*The effort required for waving of a fan;*
Through the red dust the weary travellers trudge.

This refers to the blazing heat of summer, and the sons of princes are sitting in a cool pavilion over the water, amusing themselves by floating melons and pears.
But if Yang Zhi's party was to arrive in time for the birthday, in the middle of the sixth month, they must not loiter. For the first few days the routine was to rise at dawn and travel in the cool of the early morning; when it got hot in the middle of the day they rested. But after a week or so, when the way had gradually become less populated and travellers were few, when every stage was mountainous, Yang Zhi changed to starting in the late morning, and then stopping in mid-afternoon. The eleven guards found the going very tough: their loads were all equally heavy, and the heat was exhausting. The moment they saw a wood, they wanted to go and rest in the shade. But Yang Zhi chased them on. If they stopped they received horrific curses or even worse, a beating, forcing them to keep going. The two lieutenants, though they were only travelling with small backpacks, were panting for breath. Yang Zhi told them off too: "You're a useless pair! I have all the responsibility for this expedition but instead of lending me support, you dawdle along behind. That's exactly what we've got to avoid on this road."
"We don't mean to lag behind," they said. "But it's really too hot for travelling, we can't help it. Before we only travelled in the early morning, in the cool of the day. Why do you now insist on travelling at the very hottest time? It's very bad planning."
"I don't give a fart for what you think," Yang Zhi replied. "That was the good part before but now we've reached a wild region. We've got to keep going during the day, because how can risk being on the move before dawn or at night?"
That shut them up. But they still nursed their grievance: "The only thing this character knows how to do is bawl people out," they said to themselves. And when Yang Zhi took himself off with his halberd and his cane to chivvy the porters, they sat down in the shade of a willow to wait for the old Colonel. When he caught them up, they said: "This Yang Zhi's a bloody tyrant. He's only a major in the Governor's guard but look what airs he gives himself!" But the old Colonel said: "The Governor personally insisted that we were not to argue with him, that's why I've been keeping quiet. I quite agree he's been insufferable the last few days. But for the time being we'll just have to grin and bear it."
"The Governor was too soft with him," they said. "It's time you took a stand."
"No, we have to humour him."
That day they stopped in the afternoon again and found an inn to put up at. The eleven guards were soaked with sweat and gasping for breath. They approached the old Colonel: "It was a bad day for us when we decided to become soldiers," they said. "We know we are on an important mission but this heat, it's like a furnace, and these loads are so heavy! The last few days we haven't even had the benefit of the morning cool, and then, just for the slightest thing, he lays into us with that cane of his. We're human beings, it's not right that we should have to suffer like this!"
"It's no good complaining. When we get to the Eastern Capital, I'll make it up to you." the old Colonel said.

"If you were in command, Colonel, we wouldn't have cause to complain," they said.
A day later, they all rose before daylight and were about to set off while it was still cool. But Yang Zhi rushed out and shouted: "Where do you think you're going? Go back to sleep, it's not time yet!"
"If we don't go now while it's still early, we won't be able to move later when the sun's hot, and you'll beat us!"
"What do you know about it!" Yang Zhi picked up his cane and threatened them with it. They had to swallow their indignation and go back to sleep again. They breakfasted slowly that day, and did not leave till late in the morning; they were then chased along unmercifully and had no chance to rest in the shade anywhere. They muttered angrily to themselves as they went. The two lieutenants held forth vociferously to the old Colonel and the latter, though he said nothing, was inwardly seething.
Thus they continued — to cut the story short — for a fortnight, and there was not one of the fourteen men who did not hate Yang Zhi. One day they set off from their inn after a late and leisurely breakfast. It was the fourth day of the sixth month; the best of the morning was already gone and a great blazing sun filled the sky, without the slightest sign of a cloud. The heat was absolutely unbearable. There's an old poem about this kind of thing:

The Fire-god whips his dragons from the South,
*His flaming banners fill the fiery sky;*
*The sun seems stuck at midday up above,*
*The earth's the red-hot centre of a stove.*
*Gone is all trace of green from the Mountains Five;*[1]
*And emptied the whole basin of the seas.*
*Oh, for a soothing touch of the autumn breeze,*
To save us from being barbecued alive!

The route they had to traverse that day was a narrow trail winding over a desolate mountain range — whichever way you looked there were mountain peaks. The eleven guards plodded on under Yang Zhi's watchful eye. After some six or seven miles, the men wanted to seek rest and relief from the heat in the shade of a willow but Yang Zhi drove them on with blows of his cane, shouting: "Get going! I'll teach you to stop without permission!" They looked up at the sky. Not a cloud could they see anywhere. Such appalling heat!
*The heat roasts them, baking dust coats their faces. The earth is fired to a surface like earthenware, the sky is become an umbrella of fire. Nothing but a still and silent wilderness. Trees are burnt up, streams have boiled dry, thousands of mountains have been heated till stones split and explode in clouds of ash. Birds drop exhausted from the sky to hide in the thickest part of the forest. Water creatures, their scales flaking, burrow in the deepest mud-holes. A tiger of stone even would gasp for breath, a man of iron be drenched in sweat.*
But Yang Zhi went on urging them up that desolate mountain trail. The sun was nearly at its highest and the stones of the way burnt their feet. They felt they could go no further. "On a day like this," they cried, "it's enough to roast us alive!" But Yang Zhi merely shouted: "Faster! Get beyond the next ridge and then we'll see."
*The crest is thickly wooded but the lower slopes are clad in yellow mire. The mountain's outline is jagged as the back of an old dragon, nothing is to be heard here but the sound of wind and rain echoing from its awesome cliffs. The undergrowth is thick and matted enough to hide an ambush and there are huge boulders behind which tigers and leopards might be crouching. Don't speak of the dangers of the Xichuan road. This is every bit the equal of Mount Taixing.*
They pushed on towards the ridge which loomed above them, straining every muscle. The whole party arrived panting at the top, whereupon the eleven porters threw off their loads and flung themselves down in the shade of some pine trees. "Bloody Hell!" said Yang Zhi. "What a place to choose to relax in! Get up! Quick!" But they only replied: "Cut us to pieces, if you like but we're not moving another step." He beat them about the head and shoulders with his cane till some of them rose to their feet but others merely collapsed and wouldn't stir and he could do nothing about it. At this point the old Colonel and the two lieutenants arrived panting at the top of the ridge and also flung themselves down under the pine trees. When he saw Yang Zhi belaboring the guards, the Colonel said: "Major, it's really too hot to move, you can't blame them."
"Sir, don't you understand?" said Yang Zhi. "This is a favourite spot for robbers. It's known as Yellow Mud Ridge. Even in peaceful times they think nothing of waylaying people here in broad daylight. Who dares rest here in today's circumstances?"
The two lieutenants intervened: "You keep saying that. You're just trying to frighten us!"
"Let the men have a spot of rest," the old Colonel said. "We can go on in a little while when the sun's lower, how would that be?"
"You still haven't understood," Yang Zhi said. "How can that possibly make sense? To get down from this ridge we've got two or three miles of deserted road. This is simply not the place to take a rest."
"Well, I'm going to sit here for a while," the Colonel said. "You go on ahead with the others."
Yang Zhi waved his cane in the air and said, "Anyone who doesn't move is going to get twenty strokes from this!"
This produced a general outcry. "These loads we're carrying are a hundred catties," one of the men protested. "We're not travelling light, like you. It's not human, the way you treat us! If the Governor himself were in charge he'd listen to us. But you've no regard for people's sufferings. All you know how to do is bully us."
Yang Zhi continued to revile them. "You animals! You'll drive me mad! Beating's the only language you understand!" And he applied the cane with renewed vigour.
The old Colonel cried out: "Major Yang! Stop this! Listen to me! When I was employed at the palace of the Grand Preceptor I saw thousands of officers and they all respected me. I'm not trying to make trouble but I have to say that you are just an ordinary soldier. You were lucky enough to escape death and then the Governor felt sorry for you and decided to promote you. But you're still just a pipsqueak. Your rank doesn't give you the right to throw your weight around like this! Forget that I'm a colonel on the Governor's staff — even if I were just a village elder, you still ought to take my advice. Always wanting to beat the porters — what sort of behaviour is that?"
"Colonel, you're from the city, you grew up in a palace, what do you know about the dangers of the open road?"
"Well, I've been to Sichuan, I've been to Guangdong and Guangxi but I've never seen anyone like you!"
"But things are not the same nowadays, it's not to be compared with peaceful times."
"That's treason! Who says the times are not peaceful?"
As Yang Zhi was about to reply something caught his eye under the pine trees in the little wood opposite: a man poked his head out and gazed around. "What did I tell you?" he said. "Surely that's someone who's up to no good." He threw down the cane, picked up his halberd and hurried off towards the pine wood, shouting: "You, there! Why are you eying my merchandise?"
When he reached the wood, he was surprised to see seven wheelbarrows drawn up in a straight line. Six men had taken off their clothes and were resting there in the cool. Another, who had a big red birthmark on the temple, was standing guard with a halberd. When they saw Yang Zhi coming, they all cried out: "Aiya!" and leapt to their feet.
"Who are you?" Yang Zhi said. The strangers also said, "Who are you?" Yang Zhi asked, "Are you robbers, then?", and they replied, "That's putting it back to front, we're just small traders, and we haven't any money to give you!"
"So you're just small traders, are you? I suppose you think I'm rich?"
"Well, who are you anyway?" they asked.
"Tell me where you're from," Yang Zhi countered.
"We're brothers and we're from Haozhou. We're going to the Eastern Capital to sell our dates. We have to pass this way but lots of people have told us that here on Yellow Mud Ridge travelling merchants often get robbed. We've been saying to ourselves that all we've got is some dates, we haven't got anything of value. So we weren't worried about crossing the ridge. We climbed to the top but it was so hot we decided to have a bit of a rest in the wood here and wait till evening when it's cooler. When we heard people coming up behind us we were afraid it might be robbers, so we told our brother here to go out and have a look."
"Oh," said Yang Zhi. "We are merchants too, and when I saw you spying on us I thought you were robbers. That's why I came to have a look at you."
"Allow us to offer you some dates, then, before you go," they said.
"No, no," said Yang Zhi, and gripping his halberd he returned to where the porters were.
The old Colonel was still sitting there but he said: "If there are robbers, let's go."
"I only said they might be robbers," said Yang Zhi. "In fact they're date-sellers."
The old Colonel nodded towards the guards and said, "If all you said was true, that lot would be dead men by now!"
"There's no point in quarrelling," said Yang Zhi. "I just hope nothing goes wrong. Have your rest now, and we'll go on when it's cooler." The guards looked very relieved. Yang Zhi stuck his halberd in the ground and also went to rest under the trees.
Just a little while later, in less time than it takes to eat a bowl of rice, a man appeared in the distance. He was carrying two buckets on a pole and singing as he came up the mountain towards them:

The sun's a fiery furnace,
*The plants are all burnt brown.*
*The peasant sweats in harness.*
The noble waves his fan.

The man reached the crest of the ridge, still singing, and headed for the wood, where he rested his load and sat down to enjoy the cool. The guards were watching him. "What have you got in those buckets?" one of them asked.
"Clear wine," he replied.
"And where are you off to?"
"I'm going out to sell it."
"How much a bucket?"
"Five strings of cash — nothing less."
The guards were thinking, "We're hot and we're thirsty, why don't we buy some? It would help us to bear the heat." They began making a collection.
Yang Zhi had observed them. "Now what are you doing?" he shouted.
"We're going to buy a bowl of wine for ourselves."
Yang Zhi reversed his halberd and began to beat them with the butt. "Haven't you heard anything I said? Now you have to go and buy wine for yourselves, do you? You must want to die!"
"You've no reason to swear at us like that," they said. "We're putting in our own money for the wine, so what business is it of yours? Why do you keep on beating us?"
"You bloody peasants, you've just got no idea! All you think of is getting drunk! You know nothing at all about the dangers of the road. How many good men have been destroyed by drugged wine!"
The wine-carrier gave Yang Zhi a nasty look and said: "You, Mr. Merchant, what the hell are you talking about? Anyway, I wouldn't sell to you, since you're so rude!"
While this dispute was in progress, the date-sellers appeared from the pine wood, carrying their halberds. "What's the row about?" they asked.
"I just got to the top of the ridge with this wine which I'm going to sell in the next village," the wine-seller said. "I was hot so I stopped here for a rest. They wanted to buy some wine from me but I didn't give them any. Then this boss of theirs goes and says my wine is drugged. How do you like that! He's got no right to go around casting aspersions like that!"
"Bah!" said the date-sellers. "So that's what all the noise was about, we thought robbers had come at least. What does it matter what he says? We were just thinking some wine would be good. If he doesn't trust it, sell some to us."
"No, I won't," the wine-carrier said.
"You're a bloody fool," they said. "We didn't insult you. Supposing you take the wine to the village and sell it there, you'll get the same money, won't you? So if you sell some to us what's the difference? You'll be doing a good deed, as well, you'll enable us to quench our thirst."
"All right, I'd sell a bucket to you but they said my wine was bad and besides, I haven't got a dipper."
"Don't take it so seriously. What does it matter what they said? And we've got our own dipper." Two of them went over to the wheelbarrows and brought out two coconut dippers. Another scooped up a big handful of dates. They ranged themselves around the bucket and someone took off the cover. Taking turns with the dippers they ladled out the wine and drank, and munched the dates. In no time at all they'd finished the whole bucket. Then one of them said: "We haven't even asked you the price."
"I never bargain," the wine-carrier said. "It's five strings of cash the bucket, ten for two."
"Then five strings it is but give us one free scoop from the other one."
"No go, the price is fixed."
While one of the date-sellers was paying him, another removed the cover from the other bucket, plunged the ladle in, withdrew it quickly and began to drink. The wine-carrier made a grab at him but he ran off towards the wood, still holding a half-full ladle of wine. When the wine-seller gave chase another date-seller emerged from the wood with a ladle, ran to the bucket, dipped and started drinking. The wine-carrier dashed back. He grabbed the ladle and poured its contents back into the bucket that he then covered. He threw the ladle on the ground, muttering: "You merchants have no morals. To look at you, anyone would say you were honest, respectable people but you go and behave like this!"
Now the guards had been watching all this, and they were seized with an overwhelming desire to drink. One of them addressed the old Colonel: "Sir, won't you put in a word for us? Those date-sellers bought one of his buckets, we would dearly love to buy the other one, to wet our throats a little. We're terribly thirsty, it's unbearable! There's absolutely nowhere we can get any water up here. Please sir, help us!"
Listening to them the old Colonel began to feel thirsty himself. He said to Yang Zhi: "The date-sellers have already finished the bucket they bought from him, and there's only one more. You might as well let the men buy it, to relieve their thirst. There's nowhere up here they can get water."
Yang Zhi considered. "I watched that lot finish off the first bucket and they also had half a ladle from the other," he thought to himself. "I suppose the wine must be all right. I've been giving them a hard time. I might as well let them have some wine." He said: "For the Colonel's sake, you can have the wine. But then we must start."
The guards collected the five strings of cash and approached the wine-carrier. But he refused to sell them any. "No," he said, "this wine is drugged, didn't you hear?" They laughed conciliatingly and said, "Friend, don't go on harping on that." But he merely repeated, "I'm not selling!" The date-sellers now intervened: "Don't be so bloody-minded! Okay, that officer was a bit rude but why take it so seriously? You even tried to take it out on us! Those porters aren't to blame. You might just as well let them have some wine."
"He had no right to accuse me like that for no reason at all."
Finally the date-sellers pushed him aside and handed the bucket of wine over to the guards. The latter took the lid off but they hadn't got a ladle. Somewhat apologetically they asked the date-sellers to lend them theirs. "Of course," said the latter, "and here are a few dates to go with the wine."
"That's very kind of you," the soldiers said.
"No need to thank us. We're all in the same boat, what's a few dates between friends?"
The first two ladles of wine were offered to the old Colonel and Yang Zhi. Yang Zhi refused but the Colonel drank his. Then the two lieutenants drank. Finally the soldiers waded in, and it was not long before the bucket was dry.
Yang Zhi watched them drink and saw there was no effect but at first he continued to resist. However, it was a very hot day and his throat was parched. He took the ladle and swallowed half. He also ate some dates.
"Those date-sellers drank a measure of wine out of this bucket," the wine-carrier said, when they collected the money to pay him. "That leaves you a bit short, so I'll charge you half a string of cash less." He took the money, picked up the empty buckets and marched off down the mountain as he had come, singing his mountain song.
Now suddenly the seven date-sellers standing on the verge of the wood pointed towards the party of fifteen and shouted: "They're going, they're going!"
See them there, all fifteen of them, heads falling and legs floating, staring at each other unseeingly till gently they keel over. Next thing, the seven push their wheelbarrows out of the wood. They sweep all the dates off onto the ground and reload with eleven bundles of treasure. They cover the barrows carefully and pausing an instant to say: "So sorry!" wheel them off down the mountain.
Well, after all, it was a case of:

It's valued in blood, this ill-gotten wealth
*Wrung from the people, heedless of their health.*
*No wonder it caught the robbers' eye;*
This crime's not hard to justify.

What could Yang Zhi do but bemoan his fate? His body was too weak, there was no fight left in him. They all witnessed the treasure being spirited away but, unable to move or speak, there was absolutely nothing they could do about it.
And now I ask you, who were those seven? Who else would they be but Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Liu Tang and the three Ruan brothers? And the wine-carrier, he was Bai Sheng, the Daytime Rat. How did they administer the drug? Well, when they first came up the mountain both buckets were good wine. When they had drunk the first one, Liu Tang uncovered the second and drank half a ladle, making sure everyone saw him. This was the trap they set. Afterwards Wu Yong went and got the drug from the wood and poured it into a ladle and pretended to steal more wine. When he dipped the ladle in the wine he mixed the drug with it. Then he pretended to take out half a ladle and drink it. The Daytime Rat seized the ladle from him and poured it all back. This was the ruse they employed, devised by Wu Yong, and it became famous as "Seizing the birthday convoy by craft."
Yang Zhi had only drunk a little of the wine and soon came round. He struggled to get up but he was still very shaky on his feet. The others lay there dribbling, quite unable to move. "Thanks to you," he thought bitterly, "the birthday convoy is lost. How can I ever return and face Governor Liang? My commission is useless now." So saying he tore the letter of appointment up. "Now I'm a man without home or country. Where can I go? Wouldn't it be better just to find somewhere to die here on the mountain?" He hitched up his robe and started unsteadily towards the edge, aiming to dash himself down from Yellow Mud Ridge. As they say:

Fallen flowers will vanish in spring rain;
And autumn frosts erase the willow's green.

While Gongsun Sheng was stating that it was not improper to seize the birthday presents from the Northern Capital as they had been bought with ill-gotten gains, a man rushed into the room, took hold of him and said, "I know what you are discussing. But how bold you are to talk about it!" The man was Wu Yong. Chao Gai laughed and said, "Teacher, stop this fooling, and let me introduce you to this man."

When the man had been introduced, Wu Yong said, "I have heard of the fame of Gongsun Sheng, the 'Cloud Dragon,' but I never expected to meet him here in this way."

Chao Gai introduced Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng then said, "Everywhere men speak highly of Wu Yong. But I did not expect to meet you at the village of this chief at the present time. It is simply because the chief distributes wealth in a good cause that all the heroes in the country come to him."

Chao Gai said there were some friends in the hall at the back whom he would also like to introduce.

They then all went into the hall where Liu Tang and the three brothers Ruan were duly introduced.

They all asked the chief to take the seat of honour, as their meeting there that day was not a casual affair.

"I am only a poor host," said Chao Gai, "so how dare I take the seat of honour?"

"Chief and elder brother," said Wu Yong, "you are much older than us, so I hope that you will comply with our requests, and take the seat of honour."

So Chao Gai sat down, Wu Yong took the second seat, Gongsun Sheng, the third seat, Liu Tang, the fourth seat, Ruan the Second, the fifth seat, Ruan the Fifth, the sixth seat, Ruan the Seventh, the seventh seat, and they all ate and drank the food and wine which was placed on the table.

Wu Yong said, "Chief, you had a dream, and saw the seven stars of the Dipper descending from the sky, and settling on the ridge of the roof. Today we seven men have assembled here to transact some business, and does it not mean that our meeting fulfills the forecasts of Heaven? I am sure that we shall succeed easily in this business. But previously we agreed that Brother Liu should make inquiries as to which way the presents are being sent so I suggest that he will start early tomorrow morning."

"There is no need for him to go," said Gongsun Sheng, "because I already know that the presents are being sent via Huangni Ridge."

"That place is not far from the village of Anlo which is about three *li* apart in an easterly direction. At that village there is a man of leisure named Bai Sheng, nicknamed 'Daylight Rat,' who previously came here when I helped him with some money."

"Does not this man answer the white light that was forecast in the dream?" said Wu Yong. "I think we ought to make use of him."

"This place is rather a long way from Huangni Ridge," said Liu Tang, "but is there a place there where we can rest?"

"We can stop at Bai Sheng's house," said Wu Yong, "and also make use of him."

"Mister Wu, shall we use force or not to get these presents?" asked Chao Gai.

Wu Yong laughed as he replied, "I have already prepared a trap for them. We need only to see how they arrive. If they are armed we must use force, and if they are on their guard we must use strategy. I have a plan but I do not know whether you will approve of it." He then explained his plan. When Chao Gai understood the plan he was so filled with glee that he stamped with his feet, and said, "A splendid idea! No wonder they call you 'Clever Star.' You are really better than Zhuge Liang![63] A splendid plot!"

"You must not mention it," said Wu Yong. "There is a saying, 'Walls have ears, and outside the window is there not a man?' This plan must be kept between you and me only."

"You three brothers of the Ruan family can now return to your home," said Chao Gai, "and you can come again when the time arrives. Tutor Wu can also go back, and resume your teaching. Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang can stay at this farmhouse."

On that day they all dined together, and afterwards retired to their separate rooms. The next morning they were all getting up about five o'clock, and after eating their breakfast Chao Gai took thirty taels of silver and giving it to the three brothers Ruan, he said, "This little silver is only a slight expression of what I think of you, and I hope that you will accept it."

But the three brothers Ruan refused to take the silver, and Wu Yong said, "As we are friends you should not raise any objection." The three brothers then agreed to accept the silver. The brothers were escorted outside the gate of the farmhouse where Wu Yong whispered to them as to what was going to be done, and that when the suitable opportunity arose there would be no delay. The brothers then departed for their home at Shijie Village. Chao Gai, Gongsun Sheng, and Liu Tang stayed behind at the farm where they had frequent conferences with Wu Yong.

Now we shall relate how Grand Secretary Liang at the Northern Capital, having purchased the birthday gifts for one hundred thousand strings of cash, selected a day on which to dispatch them. It happened that one day as he was sitting in the private apartments his wife Madame Liang asked him, "On what day are you thinking of dispatching the birthday presents?"

Liang replied, "The presents are now all ready, and they will be dispatched either tomorrow or the day after. But there is one thing that I cannot decide."

"What is that?" asked his wife.

"This year I am unable to find a servant whom I can intrust with these valuables, and that is the difficulty."

Madame Liang pointed to a man standing at the bottom of the steps to the hall, and said, "You have always said that that man was very strong so why don't you give him the order for this work? I think that he will not make a mistake."

Grand Secretary Liang saw that the man she was pointing to was Yang Zhi, "Blue Faced Brute." Although he had not made up his mind what to do, he summoned Yang Zhi and said to him, "I have almost forgotten you. If you will escort some valuable birthday presents for me without mishap I will see that you will be duly promoted."

Yang Zhi saluted with his folded hands, and said, "If Your Excellency tell me to go I must obey you. But I do not know yet what arrangements have been made, and when you want me to start."

Liang said, "I want to dispatch ten carts from Daming Prefecture, in charge of ten soldiers from my headquarters. On each cart there, will be a yellow flag, with the inscription, 'Birthday Presents for the Prime Minister,' I will also send a soldier for each cart to guard it. These will be dispatched within the next three days."

Yang Zhi said, "I am not trying to excuse myself but really I cannot go. I suggest that you should send the best of your able heroes."

"I have been thinking of promoting you," said Liang. "With the presents I will dispatch a letter for the Prime Minister recommending you for promotion, and when you have received the Imperial appointment you can return here. What is your objection to going?"

"I have heard," said Yang Zhi, "that last year the presents were seized by brigands who have not been arrested so far. This year there are more brigands about than last year. We shall have to go by road to the Eastern Capital as there is no water route. The road is via Mount Zijin, Mount Lianglong, Mount Taohua, Mount Sangai, Huangni Ridge, Baisha Wharf, Yeyun Ferry, and Chisong Forest. But at all those places there are bandits so that even a merchant with no valuables dare not travel there by himself. If the bandits get to know of the presents being sent they will certainly try to seize them. I do not want to lose my life just now so I am afraid that I cannot go."

"In that case," said Liang, "I will let you have more soldiers to accompany you."

"'Even if you let me have ten thousand soldiers," said Yang Zhi, "they will be of no use, because as soon as they hear of the coming of bandits they will all run away."

"Then do you think that I had better not to send the presents?" asked Liang.

"I will go if you will promise me one thing," replied Yang Zhi.

"Since I ask you to do this business," said Liang, "I of course have confidence in you. What promise do you want?"

"I want you to leave the matter in my hands, and I shall not use carts but will pack the presents in ten loads as traveller's baggage to be carried on poles over the shoulders. The ten soldiers shall be dressed as porters to carry the loads, and another man in traveller's costume without a load can accompany me. We should travel stealthily during the night until we reached the Eastern Capital."

"What you say is fine," said Liang. "I will write a dispatch recommending you for promotion, and when you have received your new rank you can return here."

"Thanks very much for your favour," said Yang Zhi.

The same day Yang Zhi packed the presents, and selected soldiers to go with him. The following day he was told to wait in the hall, and when Grand Secretary Liang came there he said to him.

"Yang Zhi, when do you propose to start?"

Yang Zhi replied that he thought of starting early the following morning, and asked for his orders.

Liang said that his wife had also some presents which she was sending to Cai's family, and these would also be intrusted to Yang Zhi. "As she is afraid that you do not know the person to whom the present must be delivered she will send with you the husband of one of her nurses, Chief Steward Xie, and also two servants."

Yang Zhi said, "Sir, I am afraid that I cannot go."

"The presents are now all packed ready for dispatch," said Liang, "so why do you now refuse to go?"

Yang Zhi saluted and said, "I will be responsible for the presents carried by the soldiers, and they will obey my orders as to when we must travel, whether early or late, and when we must stop or rest. But what can I do if these three extra men who have been deputed by your wife will not obey my orders on the road? If in this way any mishap happens to the convoy what explanation can I offer?"

"That is easily arranged," said Liang. "I will give them definite orders that they must follow your instructions."

"In that case," said Yang Zhi, "I will undertake the job, and if the things are lost I am willing to bear severe punishment." Grand Secretary Liang said, "I am not mistaken in employing you, you are indeed an experienced man." He forthwith summoned Xie and the two servants from his private apartments, and gave them orders saying. "Major Yang Zhi is willing to take charge of the convoy of the birthday presents made up in eleven loads, and will see that they are duly delivered to the Prime Minister at the Eastern Capital. He is responsible for everything. You three men will go with him, and on the road you must carefully follow his orders at all times as to when you are to stop or rest, and you must not dispute his authority. You will of course carry out the commissions my wife told you to execute for her. You must also be careful and not lose anything, and also get the business finished as soon as possible."

The three men agreed to do this, and the same day Yang Zhi took charge of the presents. The following morning about five o'clock Yang Zhi had the eleven loads of presents placed in front of the hall, and gave them to the eleven robust soldiers who were dressed like coolies. Yang Zhi was wearing a cool summer hat, a black crape gown, hempen shoes, with puttees wound round his legs, a sword in his belt, a halberd carried in his hand. Xie was dressed like a traveller, and his two servants accompanied him. Each man wore a halberd, and carried a cane. Grand Secretary Liang gave Yang Zhi the dispatches he had prepared. The men who had eaten their meals, saluted Liang in the hall before their departure, and he then watched them start on their journey. Including Yang Zhi, Xie, and the two servants there were altogether fifteen men in the convoy who left the Northern Capital and started on the road towards Eastern Capital.

That time was the middle of the fifth lunar month, and the weather was very hot so that traveling was unpleasant.

Yang Zhi was determined to reach the Eastern Capital by the fifteenth day of the following month, so he made forced marches on the road. During the first seven days from the Northern Capital they started about five o'clock each morning when it was quite cool, and rested at midday. After the first week, they passed through a scarcely populated district and met few people on the way. The road was hilly, and therefore Yang Zhi decided to start everyday about 8 A.M. The eleven soldiers acting as porters found their loads quite heavy in that district, and whenever they saw a wood they wanted to stop there and rest. If the men stopped for a short time Yang Zhi cursed them as lazy hounds but if they stayed a long time he even went so far as to strike them in order to get them to move. The two servants carried only their own baggage but still they panted for breath and walked very slowly. Yang Zhi spoke to them strongly saying, "You do not seem to understand this business! I am responsible for the whole thing! You do not beat these men for me, yet you walk slowly behind them. This is not a place for passing the time idly."

The two servants replied, "We do not wish to walk slowly but the weather is so hot that it is impossible to walk quickly, and that is why we get behind them. Previously we started early when it was cool but now the travel in so hot weather makes us walk slowly. Your orders are hardly fair."

Yang Zhi replied, "You're just farting, not speaking! Previously we travelled through fairly quiet places but now we are passing a dangerous locality. If it is hard to walk during the day who would dare walk here during the night?"

The servants did not reply to this but they thought in their minds, "This fellow ought not to go to the extent of using abusive language."

Yang Zhi took his halberd in one hand, and a cane in the other, and went to urge the men on. The two servants however sat down in the shade of a willow tree, and waited there until Xie caught up to them when they spoke to him. "This fellow Yang Zhi, although he is only a Major yet tries to pass himself off as a more important person. He puts on too much side."

Xie replied, "Grand Secretary Liang told us definitely that we must obey Yang Zhi, and that is why I have not said anything although these last few days I have noticed that he has been very severe, and we have had to endure it."

The two servants said, "What Liang said was simply to give Yang Zhi a little face but now you ought to decide matters yourself."

Xie replied, "Let us put up with him for the time being."

That evening about five o'clock they found an inn where they could stop. The eleven porters were dripping with perspiration, and panting for breath. They said to Xie, "We were very unfortunate to ever become soldiers. We are of course aware that we have been sent to do this work. But the heat has been so oppressive and our loads are exceptionally heavy. These last few days we have not even been walking in the cool of the morning. It has been very fatiguing, and Yang Zhi has beaten us with his cane. Our flesh and blood is the same as his, so why should we have this bitterness?"

"You must not be discontented," said Xie. "When we reach Eastern Capital I myself will give you a reward."

"If he treat us as you do," said a soldier, "we should have no cause for complaint."

They passed the night there, and before daybreak they all got up as they wanted to avail of the morning cool to start. Yang Zhi hastily got up and shouted out, "Where are you going? Go to sleep again, and wait until I give you the order."

The men said, "If we do not start when it is early, it will be so hot during the day that you will beat us with your cane."

"What do you know about it?" asked Yang Zhi. He seized his cane and was trying to strike them.

The men restrained their anger, and lay down to sleep. That day they got up about 8 A.M., slowly cooked their breakfast, and then started off. Again on the road Yang Zhi used his cane, and would not allow the porters to rest where there was a cool place. The men muttered their discontent to themselves as they plodded along. The two servants frequently spoke to Xie about the matter. Xie listened to what they said, and in his heart he harboured disgust with Yang Zhi.

We need not describe in detail the journey but after traveling like this for about a fortnight there was not a single man of the fourteen who did not hate Yang Zhi.

On the fourth day of the sixth month they got up as usual at 8 A.M. and prepared their breakfast in a leisurely manner. That morning there was not the smallest speck of cloud in the sky, the sun was glaringly bright, and it was exceedingly hot. There was only a very narrow footpath to follow, and it led through a lonely shaggy area among the mountains. After they had travelled about seven *li* the porters felt tired and wished to rest a while in the shade of some willow trees. But Yang Zhi came up with his cane, and shouted at them, "Hurry up! I will give you a rest by and by!" The porters looked at the sky but could not see a cloud anywhere, and as the day was so hot they could not stand in the heat any longer. But Yang Zhi continued to press them forward along the deserted footpath. It was almost noon, and the stones on the road were as hot as to burn their feet. They said, "It is very hot, and we shall be burnt to death."

Yang Zhi shouted, "Hurry up! When you get over this mountain ridge we will then discuss matters."

The men continued on their way, and when they reached the summit of the hill they rushed to the shade of a pine forest to sleep.

Yang Zhi said, "What kind of a place is this to rest in. Get up at once!"

The men replied, "Even if you threatened to cut each of us up with your sword into seven pieces we could not go any further just now."

Yang Zhi belabored the men with his cane, and got a few to stand up but the others all lay down to sleep. Yang Zhi saw that it was impossible to do anything more. The two servants and Xie just then also reached the top of the pass, panting for breath, and they also lay down under the pine trees.

Xie spoke to Yang Zhi, "Major, it is too hot to walk any further just now. Do not beat the men any more."

"You do not understand," said Yang Zhi. "This is a place well-known for bandits and is called the Huangni Ridge. Even in time of peace they often committed their robberies in broad daylight. Now the times are so full of troubles, how can we stop here?"

The two servants upon hearing this said, "We have heard you say that several times before, and you only frighten us with that."

"Would it not be better," said Xie, "if you let these men rest now, and they can proceed on their way after noon has passed?"

"You also do not understand," said Yang Zhi. "How can we do that? In the next three *li* going down from this pass there are no houses. This is an awful place so how dare we stop here?"

"I will rest here a while before I go on," said Xie. "You tell the men to go forward, and not wait for me."

"If any one does not go forward," said Yang Zhi, "I will give him twenty blows with my cane."

The men cried out and expressed their disapproval of this. One of them said, "Major, each of us is carrying a load of about one hundred and forty pounds, whereas you carry nothing. You are not treating us as human beings. If Grand Secretary Liang was in your place he would willingly listen to what we say. You do not know the pain we have to bear. You are only trying to enforce your own order."

"You brutes are enough to make me die from anger," said Yang Zhi, "I must beat you." So saying he struck them on their heads with his cane.

"Major, stop," shouted Xie. "Listen to me! When my wife was acting as wetnurse in the home of the Prime Minister I saw many officers in the army, and they always did what I asked them without a murmur. I do not wish to offend you but previously you were only a banished soldier and only through the kindness of the Grand Secretary did you get your present position as a Major. At present your rank is about the size of a mustard seed, how can you carry matters with such a high hand? Even if I am a village elder you should listen to my one advice, to not say that I am a steward in the household of the Grand Secretary. Now you insist on beating them, what is this treatment?"

"Steward Xie," said Yang Zhi, "you are brought up in town and have passed your time in the house of the Prime Minister, you naturally know nothing of the enormous difficulties of traveling by road."

The steward replied, "I have travelled in both Sichuan, Guangdong, and Guangxi provinces but I never saw a man who put on such airs as you do."

"The country at present is not so peaceful as that in your time," said Yang Zhi.

"As you talk like this," said steward Xie, "your tongue ought be cut out. Where is the place that is not peaceful just now?"

Yang Zhi was just on the point of answering the steward when looking into the pine forest he saw the shadow of a man who was evidently spying on them. He then said, "What are you saying? Just here comes the bad man." He then threw down his cane, picked up his halberd, and striding into the forest he shouted out, "What a brigand you are! How dare you look at our things like that?" Going forward he saw among the trees seven Jiangzhou style handcarts and arranged in a line. There were also six men with them who had stripped off all their clothes and were resting in the shade. One of the men had a big red birthmark on his temple, and he had a halberd in his hand. When the men saw Yang Zhi approaching them they all exclaimed, "*Ai Ya!*" and got up.
"Who are you?" shouted Yang Zhi.
"Who are you?" asked the men.
"Are you not all bandits?" asked Yang Zhi.
"You talk nonsense," said the men. "We are only petty traders, so where can we have the money to give you?"
"You are only petty traders," said Yang Zhi, "where can I have the money to give you?"
"Then tell us who you are," asked the seven men.
"You first tell me where you come from," said Yang Zhi.
The seven men replied, "We seven brothers are from Haozhou. We are on our way to the Eastern Capital to sell our dates there, and happen to pass this way. We have heard many people say that at this Huangni Ridge there are bandits who may attack us and seize our goods. But as we have only dates, and no other valuable goods, we came this way in spite of the warning. When we got to the top of this ridge we found the heat was so hot that we decided to have a little rest in the shade of these trees, and proceed further when it is a little cooler. While we were resting we heard you coming along and as we were afraid that you might be bandits, we sent a man to see who you were."
"Then it appears," said Yang Zhi, "that you are travellers just like us. When I saw this man spying I was afraid that he was a bandit, and so I came forward to investigate matters."
The seven men then asked Yang Zhi to partake of some of their dates but Yang Zhi declined the offer, and with his halberd in his hand went back to his own men.
The steward Xie, who was resting under the trees, said, "As there are bandits here we had better get along."
"At first," said Yang Zhi, "I also thought that they were bandits but I have found out that they are only traders with some dates."
"If it had been as you said previously all our men would have been killed," said Xie, looking towards the men.
"We need not quarrel any more. The only thing that I am anxious about is our safety," said Yang Zhi. "You can now have a rest, and when it is cooler we will go on."
All the men laughed upon hearing this. Yang Zhi stuck his halberd in the ground, and then went and sat under a tree for a rest.
In a very short time they saw a man approaching carrying a couple of buckets from a pole over his shoulder. As he reached the summit of the ridge he sang:

The sun pours down its glowing heat.
Parching the growing corn;
The farmer's heart melts in the glow,
The rich fan to and fro,
While I sweat here forlorn.

The man put down his buckets, and also sat down under a tree to rest. The soldiers asked him what he had got in the buckets, and he told them it was white wine. They then asked where he was going to, and the man replied that he was going to sell it in the village. The soldiers inquired the price of a bucket, and were informed that the lowest price was five strings of cash.
The soldiers talked the matter over among themselves saying that as they were all hot and thirsty why should they not buy the wine and have a drink. They then got out their money to see how much they had altogether.
Yang Zhi seeing this shouted out, "What are you doing?"
The men replied that they were going to buy some wine for a drink. Yang Zhi took hold of his halberd by the blade, and beat them with the shaft saying, "You have not even asked me whether you can do this or not. How dare you buy wine without my permission. How brave you are!"
The soldiers replied, "Without any justification you try to stir up troubles. We are going to buy some wine by our own money so what have you got to do with that? And yet you beat us."
Yang Zhi said, "You clodhoppers! What do you know? You want to drink wine, and yet you do not understand the great difficulties of the road. Many heroes have drunk drugged wine, and become unconscious."
The man who had carried the wine grinned at Yang Zhi, and said, "You evidently do not know much. I will certainly not sell any of the wine to you yet you talk so unreasonably." While they were so wrangling the seven men came towards him with halberds in their hands. They asked him, "What is the row about?"
The man with the wine said, "I am carrying this wine to a village to sell it, and being hot I sat down to rest here. These men asked me to sell them some wine but before I could do so this traveller said that the wine might be drugged. Wasn't that funny?"
"Pooh!" said one of the seven men. "We thought that some bad man had come but it appears now that your talk was hardly worthwhile. There is no need for a quarrel. We are very thirsty, and although he is suspicious, we will buy a bucket of wine ourselves."
The wine seller said that he would not sell.
"You stupid fellow," said one of the seven men, "you evidently do not understand that we have not condemned your wine. If you take it to the village you will only get the same price that we shall pay so why not sell it to us? We think that if you had only tea or water you would give it to us to assuage our thirst."
"I would not mind selling you a bucket of wine," said the wine seller, "if he had not said that it might be bad. But you have no ladles or cups to drink the wine with."
You are too particular," said one of the seven men, "what he said was not very important. We have a coconut shell which we can use as a ladle." Two men went to their carts, and one brought back two coconut shells, and the other as many dates as he could carry in his hands. The seven men then stood round the bucket, and taking off the cover they helped themselves to the wine, and ate the dates. In a short time they had finished the bucket of wine. One of the men pointed out that they had not asked what the cost of the wine was.
The wine seller said, "I have not mentioned the price but each bucket costs five strings of cash."
"We will pay you five strings of cash," said one of the seven men, "but you might now give us a ladle of wine free."
"I cannot give you wine free, the price is fixed," said the wine seller.
One man gave him the money but another man took off the cover of the other bucket, and took a ladle full of wine. The wine seller objected to the latter's conduct but the man drank half of the wine, and went towards the pine forest. The wine seller followed him, and then saw another man come out of the forest with a ladle that he dipped into the wine. The wine seller hurried back and seizing the ladle emptied the contents into the bucket. He threw the ladle down on the ground, and put the cover on the bucket again. He said, "You have not the manners but are dressed as gentleman and yet make so much trouble?"
The soldiers had seen all this happening, and as they also would have liked a drink of the wine they became dissatisfied. One of them said to steward Xie, "Sir, will you speak for us? Those merchants selling dates have bought a bucket of wine and drunk it. We must buy the other bucket of wine, and moisten our throats a little. We are very thirsty, and there is no other way. At this place there is not a drop of water anywhere so we hope you will do this good action."
Steward Xie wanted a drink himself and upon the soldier's request he spoke to Yang Zhi, "These dates traders have bought and drunk a bucket of wine, so would it not be as well to let our men buy some wine to assuage their thirst? Here there is no water."
Yang Zhi thought the matter over, "I have noticed from a distance that the men who have bought a bucket of wine have taken also one ladle from the other bucket, and drank it, and it appears to be all right. As I have been beating my soldiers I will now allow them to buy the wine just as they please." He said, "Steward, as you have requested me you may now tell our men to buy wine and drink it. Then they must start without further delay."
The soldiers upon hearing this soon collected five strings of cash to buy the wine with. But the wine seller declined to sell it, as he had said that it was drugged.
The soldiers coaxed him and said, "Brother, is it worthwhile saying that?"
"I won't sell," said the wine seller. "You need not say anything more."
The man who was selling dates interposed and said, "You foolish fellow! That man (Yang Zhi) was wrong but you are so particular and refused to sell to us before but I think you had better let them have a drink because they have not spoken against you." "How can it be that suspicion is aroused without cause?" asked the wine seller.
The trader of dates gently pushed the wine seller to one side, and then gave the soldiers the remaining bucket of wine.
The soldiers took the lid off the bucket but as they had no ladle, they asked the trader to lend them the coconut ladle. The trader lent them the ladle, and also gave them some dates to eat with the wine.
The porters expressed their thanks.
"You need not thank me," said the trader, "nor mention the hundred dates I have given you, as we are both travellers."
The soldier porters again expressed their thanks, and then offered a ladle of wine to the Steward Xie, and also another one to Yang Zhi.
But Yang Zhi would not drink the wine so the two servants drank it. The soldier porters then all drank, and it was not long before the bucket was quite empty.
Yang Zhi saw that his men had no ill effects from drinking the wine, so as the day was so hot, and besides that he was very thirsty, he himself took and drank half a ladle of the wine, and also took some of the dates.
The wine seller said, "There was a ladle of wine stolen from that bucket, so I will make a discount for it of half a string of cash."
The soldiers paid him accordingly, and as soon as he had received the money the wine seller shouldered his two empty buckets, and left the place singing his song. The seven traders of dates sitting under the pine trees pointed their fingers at the soldiers and said, "They are now falling down." The soldiers, in fact, felt "their heads heavy and their feet fight," and after looking at each other slyly had lain down.
The seven traders left the shade of the pine trees, and unloaded their carts of the dates, and then reloaded them with the valuable presents, and covered the loads. They then went straight down the Huangni Ridge making a loud noise on their way.
Yang Zhi saw this happen but although he struggled to get up he could not do so as his body was so weak. He fully realized the bitterness of his position. Also the fifteen men stared at these proceedings but they were equally helpless.
Now I want to ask you who those seven men were. They were none other than Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Liu Tang, and the brothers Ruan. The wine seller who had just gone before was Bai Sheng, the "Daylight Rat."
When and how had they drugged the wine? At the time the wine arrived at the Huangni Ridge it was quite good wine. The wine that the seven traders drank was also good, and Liu Tang opened the bucket and took half a ladle to drink just to show the soldiers that this wine was also good. Afterwards Wu Yong put some drug in a ladle, and bringing it from the pine forest he put it into the wine bucket pretending that he wanted to get a drink free but Bai Sheng (the wine seller) prevented him from doing so by knocking the ladle on the ground. All these plots had been conceived by Wu Yong, and are now known as seizing the birthday presents by craft.
Yang Zhi had not drunk much of the wine so that he soon recovered, and crawled, as he could not yet stand up. Approaching his men he saw that spittle was dripping from the corners of their mouths, and they could not get up. Yang with a sorrowful heart said to himself: "I need not quarrel with you seven men who stole the birthday presents but will you tell me how I can return and face the Grand Secretary Liang? As I cannot return these dispatches I had better destroy them. Now I have a home whereto I cannot go; I have a country whereto I cannot return. But where must I go to? Had I not better find a place here where I can commit suicide?" Raising his gown, he staggered along until he came to a steep place where he would jump down.

April showers made the blossoms fall;
Autumn frosts have killed the willow leaves.



**The Tattooed Monk Lu Da Assaults & has a Fight at Twin-Dragon Mountain Alone & the mountain chief experiences disaster; the Blue-Faced Brute Yang Zhi Tries to Seize, & with him, Takes Precious Pearl Monastery & in the fortress, Yang Zhi becomes joint master**

How could Yang Zhi return and face Governor Liang after having lost the birthday gifts on Yellow Earth Ridge? He wanted to leap from the ridge and kill himself. But he came to his senses and halted just in time.
"My parents who bore me gave me this fine appearance and handsome physique," he thought. "From childhood I learned all the eighteen arts of armed combat. This is no way to die. I can at least wait until I am captured, then decide."
He gazed at his fourteen companions. They could only stare at him, unable to move. Yang Zhi swore. "It's all because you wretches wouldn't listen to me that this has happened. Now I'm involved!" He picked up his halberd that lay by the stump of a tree, buckled on his sword, and looked all around. There was nothing else that belonged to him. He sighed, and went down the ridge.
Not until the second watch did the fourteen revive. One by one, they crawled to their feet, uttering strings of lamentations.
"You didn't take Yang Zhi's good advice," said the old steward. "You've ruined me!"
"What's done is done, old sir," the others replied. "We'd better come to an understanding."
"Do you have any suggestions?"
"The fault is ours. But as the old saying goes: 'When fire licks your clothes you beat it out, when there's a hornet in your tunic open it quick.' If Yang Zhi were here, we'd have nothing to say. But since he's gone, no one knows where, why not put the blame on him? We can go back and say to Governor Liang: 'He abused and beat and cursed us all along the road, he drove us till we were too exhausted to stir another step. Yang Zhi was in cahoots with the robbers. They drugged us, bound us hand and foot, and made off with the treasure.' "
"That's an idea. We'll report the theft to the local district authorities the first thing tomorrow, and leave the two captains of the guards behind to help in the capture of the robbers. The rest of us will travel day and night till we reach the Northern Capital. We'll tell the governor what we agreed upon, and he will inform the Premier in writing and direct Jizhou Prefecture to apprehend the brigands, and that will be that." Early the next day the steward and his company advised the Jizhou officials of the robbery.

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Yang Zhi halberd in hand, gloomily left Yellow Earth Ridge. He travelled southward half the night, then rested in a grove. "I've got no money and there's no one around here I know," he brooded. "What am I going to do?"
By then the sky was just turning light, and he set out again to take advantage of the cool. After covering another twenty *li*, he stopped in front of a tavern. "If I don't have some wine," he said to himself, "I'll never be able to carry on."
He went in and sat down. The tables and benches were made of mulberry wood. Yang Zhi leaned his halberd against the wall. A woman, who was beside a stove, came over and spoke to him.
"Can I cook something for you, sir?"
"First let me have two measures of wine. Then cook me some rice. If you have meat, I'll have some of that, too. Add it up later and I'll pay the whole thing together."
The woman called a young fellow to pour the wine. She cooked the rice, fried some meat, and set them before Yang Zhi. When he finished eating, he rose, took his halberd and headed for the door. "You haven't paid yet," the woman said.
"I'll pay you when come back. Just credit me for now."
The young fellow who had poured the wine rushed after him and grabbed his arm. With one blow Yang Zhi knocked him to the ground. The woman began to wail. Yang continued on his way. He heard another voice shouting at him from behind. "Where do you think you're going, rogue!"
He turned and saw running towards him a big bare-chested fellow, dragging a staff.
"So he's after me," thought Yang. "Well, that's his bad luck!"
Yang halted. Still further behind was the young waiter armed with a pitchfork and two or three vassals carrying cudgels, all racing towards him at flying speed.
"If I can finish off this first one, the rest won't dare come any nearer," he thought. Gripping his halberd, he charged forward to give combat.
The man, twirling his staff, met him head on. They fought twenty or thirty rounds. Of course the man was no match for Yang Zhi. He could only parry and dodge. The young fellow and the vassals were about to join in the fray when the staff-wielder jumped from the combat circle.
"Nobody move," he shouted. "You, big fellow with the halberd, what's your name?"
Yang Zhi smote his chest. "It is and always has been Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Brute! I haven't changed my name!"
"Not Yang Zhi, military aide in the palace of the Eastern Capital?"
"How do you know I'm Military Aide Yang?"
The man cast down his staff and fell on his knees. "I have eyes but didn't recognize Mount Taishan!"
Yang raised him to his feet. "And who are you, sir?"
"I'm from the prefecture of Kaifeng, originally, and I was a pupil of Drill Instructor Lin Chong in the Imperial Guards. My name is Cao Zheng. My family have been butchers for generations. I know how to slaughter, draw sinews, cut bones, remove entrails and skin carcasses. For this reason I'm known as the Demon Carver. A rich man in my district gave me five thousand strings of cash and sent me here to Shandong to do some business for him. I lost his entire capital. After that, I couldn't go back, and I married a local country girl and moved in with her family. She's the one you saw at the stove. The boy with the pitchfork is her younger brother. When we fought just now I recognized your moves. They were the same as my teacher, Drill Instructor Lin. I knew I couldn't beat you."
"So you were one of Lin's pupils. Your teacher was ruined by Marshal Gao, and had to take to the hills. He's in Liangshan Marsh, today."

"I've heard that, also. I didn't know whether it was true or not. Please come to my home, Military Aide, and rest a while."
Yang Zhi returned with Cao Zheng to the tavern. The host requested Yang to be seated. He told his wife and the young man to bow to their guest, and to bring him food and wine.
While they were drinking, Cao Zheng asked: "What brings you here, Military Aide?"
Yang related in detail how he lost the birthday gifts he was convoying for Governor Liang.
"In that case, why not remain with me for a time?" Cao Zheng proposed. "Then we can discuss what to do."
"That's very kind of you," said Yang. "But the police are liable to catch up with me. I'd better not stay too long."
"Where can you go?"
"I was thinking of going to Liangshan Marsh and joining your teacher Drill Instructor Lin. I passed there once, and ran into him as he was coming down the mountain. The two of us fought. Wang Lun saw that we were evenly matched, and invited us both to the mountain stronghold. That's how I got to know your teacher, Lin Chong. Wang Lun pleaded with me to stay but I didn't want to become an outlaw. I'm not going to look very gallant if I join him now, when I have the tattoo of the criminal on my face. That's why I've been hesitating. I can't make up my mind."
"You've got something there. I've heard what a narrow-hearted knave that Wang Lun is. He doesn't know how to treat talented people. They say when Lin Chong first went up the mountain he had to take a lot of abuse from him. If my place won't do, not far from here, on Two-Dragon Mountain in Qingzhou Prefecture, is a monastery known as the Precious Pearl. It's nestled in the mountains and has only one path leading to it. The monk in charge has given up religious life and let his hair grow. All the other monks have done the same. It's said that he's formed a gang of four or five hundred robbers. His name is Deng Long, and he's known as the Golden-Eyed Tiger. If you're determined to become an outlaw, you might do well to join him."
"Since there is such a place, why shouldn't I take it over and make it my refuge?"
Yang Zhi spent the night at Cao Zheng's house. The next morning he borrowed some travelling money, picked up his halberd, bid farewell to his host, and set out for Two-Dragon Mountain.
He travelled all day. Towards evening, he came in sight of a high mountain. "I'll sleep in this grove tonight," he said to himself, "and climb up tomorrow."
When he entered the grove he received a shock. Seated in the cool of a pine was a big fat monk, stripped to the buff. His back was elaborately tattooed.
The monk, on seeing Yang Zhi, grabbed a staff that was beneath the tree and leaped to his feet. "Hey, prick," he shouted. "Where are you from?"
"He has a west of the Pass accent," thought Yang Zhi. "We're from the same part of the country. I'll ask him." Aloud, he called: "Tell me where you're from, monk."
Instead of replying, the monk came charging forward, twirling his staff.
"That surly bald pate!" Yang swore under his breath. "I'll let out some of my anger on his hide!"
He rushed at his foe, halberd in hand. They battled up and down the grove, man to man, until they had fought forty or fifty rounds, with neither the victor. The monk executed a feint and jumped from the combat circle.
"Rest!" he roared. Both men stayed their hands.
"Where was there ever such a monk?" Yang said to himself admiringly. "He's really good. His skill is terrific! I can just barely outfight him."
"You blue-faced fellow," yelled the monk. "Who are you?"
"I am Yang Zhi, a military aide from the Eastern Capital."
"The one who was selling his sword and killed that loafer Niu Er?"
"Don't you see the tattoo on my face?"
The monk laughed. "Who would have thought we'd meet here!"
"May I presume to ask your name, sir monk? How did you know about my selling my sword?"
"I used to be a major in the Yenan garrison under Old General Zhong. Then I killed the Lord of the West with three blows of my fist and had to shave my head and become a monk on Mount Wutai. Because of the decorations on my back, everyone calls me the Tattooed Monk Lu Zhishen."
Yang Zhi smiled. "So we're both natives of the same place. I've heard a lot about you in the fraternity of gallant men. But I thought you were at the Great Xiangguo Monastery. What are you doing here?"
"It's a long story. When I was in charge of the monastery's vegetable garden, Marshal Gao wanted to have Lin Chong killed. I wouldn't stand for such injustice. I went with Lin all the way to Cangzhou, and saved his life. The two escorts went back and reported to that lout Gao that Lu Zhishen of the Great Xiangguo Monastery had rescued Lin just as they were about to murder him in Wild Boar Forest and had gone with them right up to Cangzhou, and that was why they couldn't finish him off. The mother-raper was furious. He made the abbot dismiss me and was sending men to arrest me. But I was tipped off by a gang of rascals and was able to foil the rogue. I burned down the vegetable garden buildings and took to the road but nowhere could I find a refuge.
"In Mengzhou Prefecture I stopped at a tavern in Crossroads Rise and was nearly done in by the tavern keeper's wife. She drugged my wine and I collapsed in a stupor. Luckily, her husband came home early. He was amazed at my appearance, my staff and my sword, and quickly gave me a drink that revived me. After I told him my name he kept me at his house for several days and made me his sworn brother. He and his wife are famous in the gallant fraternity. He is known as Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener. She is Sun Erniang the Witch. Both are considerate and bold.
"After four or five days at their place I heard that I would be safe in the Precious Pearl Monastery on Two-Dragon Mountain, and I went there, intending to join Deng Long's band. But the wretch wouldn't have me. I fought him, and he saw he was no match for me, so he fled up the mountain, closing and bolting the three big gates at its foot. There is no other way up. No matter how I cursed the prick he wouldn't come down and fight. I was stymied and enraged, and then you, brother, came along!"
Yang Zhi was very pleased. The two bowed to each other there in the grove and sat together the entire night. Yang told in detail how he tried to sell his sword and killed Niu Er, and how he lost the birthday gifts. He related also what Cao Zheng had said.
"Here we are but Deng Long has closed the gates. How can we get him to come down?" mused Yang. "Let's go to Cao Zheng's house and talk it over."
The two left the grove together and returned to the tavern. Yang Zhi introduced Lu Zhishen. Cao Zheng hastily poured out wine, and they discussed how to take Two-Dragon Mountain.
"If he's really shut the gates," said the tavern keeper, "an army of ten thousand couldn't get up there, to say nothing of just you two. The stronghold can only be conquered by guile, not by force."
"That prick," said Zhishen.
"Since it's such a good place," said Yang Zhi, "why don't you and I go all-out and take it?"
"We must have a plan for getting up there, first," said Lu, "or we won't be able to come to grips with him."
"I have an idea but I don't know whether you two will approve," said Cao Zheng.
"Let's hear it," said Yang.
"You, Military Aide, will have to change your clothes, and dress like a local peasant. I will take the staff and sword of the reverend, here. My wife's younger brother and few stalwarts will go with us to the foot of the mountain, and there we'll bind the reverend. I'll attend to that personally, using nothing but slip-knots. Then I'll shout up and say: 'We're from the neighbouring tavern. This monk drank so much he got tipsy but he refused to pay. He kept muttering that he was going to muster his men and attack your stronghold. We took advantage of his drunkenness to tie him up and present him to your chieftain.'
"Those clods will certainly let us up the mountain. When we get into the stronghold and are brought before Deng Long, the reverend can slip his bonds and I will hand him his staff. Once you two good fellows get to work, Deng Long will be finished. With him out of the way, his underlings won't dare resist. What do you think of my idea?"
"Shrewd, shrewd," said Lu and Yang.
That night all ate and drank and prepared dry rations for the coming expedition. They rose at the fifth watch the following morning and ate their fill. Lu stored his pack and luggage in Cao's house. Then the three men, plus the wife's younger brother and six or seven peasants set out for Two-Dragon Mountain. They reached the grove afternoon and changed their clothes. Lu Zhishen was bound tightly by two of the peasants but the knots were false. Yang put on a straw sun hat and a tattered cloth shirt. He retained his halberd but held it shaft forward. Cao Zheng carried the monk's staff. The others, who walked closely front and rear, were armed with cudgels.
They halted outside the first gate. It was bristling with bows and lime flagons and ballista stones. When the guards at the gate saw the trussed-up monk, they sent a messenger flying to the summit to report.
Not long after, two junior officers came down to the gate and demanded: "Who are you people? What do you want here? Where did you get that monk?"
"We're from that village below. I run a small tavern," Cao Zheng replied. "This fat monk came and drank himself silly, and then refused to pay. He kept saying: 'I'm going to get a thousand men from Liangshan Marsh and blast that Two-Dragon Mountain, and wipe out this village of yours too!' I plied him with good wine until he was dead drunk, and then tied the rogue up and brought him here to hand over to your chieftain as a token of our filial respect. It will save our village from disaster."
The junior officers were delighted. "Excellent," they said. "Just wait here a little." They returned to the stronghold and reported that the monk had been captured.
Deng Long was overjoyed. "Bring him up," he cried. "I'll eat the scoundrel's heart and liver with my wine to slake a bit of my hatred!"
The brigands were ordered to open the gates and send up the prisoner. Yang Zhi and Cao Zheng, escorting the bound Lu Zhishen, climbed the trail. With its three gates at three perilous passes, the stronghold was a formidable place. Wrapped in the embrace of tall peaks was the monastery. Only a single path wound between the majestic heights. The three gates were guarded by throwing-logs and ballista stones, powerful bows and sharp arrows, and a dense proliferation of bamboo spears.
After passing through the three gates, they came to the Precious Pearl Monastery. A three-doored temple stood on a mirror-smooth clearing, all enclosed in a strong wooden palisade. Seven outlaws stood at the entry arch before the building. They swore when they saw Lu Zhishen.
"You hurt our chieftain, you scabby donkey! Now, you've been taken and he's going to cut you slowly to bits!"
Lu didn't utter a sound as they brought him into the temple. The idol had been removed from its pedestal and replaced by an armchair covered by a tiger skin. Spear-carrying guards stood on either side.
A few minutes later Deng Long entered, supported by two bandits, and seated himself on his throne. Cao Zheng and Yang Zhi pushed Lu Zhishen forward to the foot of the pedestal.
"Wretch!" cried Deng Long. "The other day you knocked me down! My groin is still swollen and black and blue. Today it's my turn!"
Lu glared at him. "Prick! Don't try to get away!"
The two peasants yanked the rope and the slip-knots vanished. Lu took his staff from Cao Zheng and whirled it like a flurry of clouds. Yang Zhi, casting aside his sun hat, turned his halberd point forward and grasped its shaft. Cao Zheng brandished a cudgel. Together, the group charged.
Deng Long struggled to escape but Lu's staff swiftly split his skull and pulverized the throne. Yang Zhi ran his halberd through four or five of the bandits.
"Surrender, all of you!" yelled Cao Zheng. "If you don't we'll kill every last one of you!"
The five or six hundred brigands before and behind the monastery and the handful of junior officers were frightened stiff. They all submitted. Men were directed to carry Deng Long's body to the rear of the mountain and bum it. An inventory was taken of the food supplies, the building were set in order, and an inspection was made of the items stored in the back of the monastery. Then meat and wine were called for. Lu and Yang became the stronghold's leaders, and they feasted in celebration. The bandits, who all swore fealty, remained under the direct control of the junior officers.
Cao Zheng bid farewell to the two bold fellows and returned home with the peasants. Of them we'll say no more.

We'll talk rather of the old steward and the soldiers who had convoyed the birthday gifts. They travelled daily from dawn to dusk until they reached the Northern Capital. They reported directly to Governor Liang at his mansion. Kneeling before him, they confessed their criminal blunder.
"You've had a hard time on the road. I'm thankful to you," said Liang. And he asked: "Where is Major Yang Zhi?"
"He's unspeakable!" they cried. "An audacious, ungrateful thief! Five or six days after we left here, we arrived at Yellow Earth Ridge. It was very hot, and we rested in the cool of a grove. Who would have believed that Yang Zhi was in league with seven robbers, disguised as date merchants! He had arranged to meet them, and they were waiting there in the grove with seven laden carts. He also had a fellow carrying wine come and rest on the ridge. We bought wine from him but it was drugged, and we fell down in a stupor. Then they tied us up, and Yang and the seven robbers loaded the birthday gifts onto the carts, together with their luggage, and trundled them all away! We reported the crime to Jizhou Prefecture and left the two captains to help the authorities apprehend the culprits. The rest of us hurried day and night to report back to Your Excellency."
Liang was shocked. "That thieving exile! A convicted felon who thanks to my efforts was raised to respectability! How could he be such an ingrate! If I ever get hold of him I'll smash him to bits!"
He had his scribe write a document which he immediately dispatched to Jizhou. He also sent an urgent letter to his father-in-law, the Premier in the Eastern Capital, relating what had transpired.
We'll not speak of the messenger to Jizhou but rather of the emissary to the Eastern Capital. He was received by the Premier and presented the letter. Cai read it, aghast.
"What brash devils those robbers are!" he exclaimed. "Last year they stole the birthday gifts my son-in-law sent me, and they haven't been caught to this day. Now they've robbed me again. Something must be done or we'll never be able to maintain order!"
He issued a directive and dispatched an officer of his court to deliver it, at all possible speed, to the prefect of Jizhou, calling for the immediate arrest of the culprits, and demanding of formal reply.
For some days the prefect had been despondently mulling over the order he had received from Governor Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital. Now, the gate-keeper came in and announced: "An officer from Premier Cai of the Eastern Capital is here with an urgent directive for Your Excellency."
The prefect was startled. "It must be about the birthday gifts," he thought. He hastily summoned court and received the officer. "I've already been notified by Governor Liang's stewards," he said, "and have sent my police to apprehend the criminals. But we haven't discovered a trace. A few days ago, the governor made another query, and I again sent my police out with strict orders to investigate and arrest but so far they haven't caught them. I'll reply personally to the Premier the moment we hear anything."
"I'm very close to the Premier," the officer said. "He sent me here specially to make sure we get them. Just before I left, he told me that I was to stay here until you've apprehended every one of them—the seven date merchants, the wine seller, and the fugitive officer Yang Zhi. He set a time limit of ten days within which to arrest and deliver them to the Eastern Capital. If you fail to do so, I'm afraid you'll be sent into exile on the remote Shamen Island! It will also be difficult for me to return to the Premier's presence, in fact my life will be in jeopardy. If Your Excellency doesn't believe me, please read this order."
The prefect was greatly alarmed after reading the document. He immediately summoned his police officials. A man came forward and hailed him respectfully.
"Who are you?" asked the prefect.
"Ho Tao, police inspector of third district."
"Are you in charge of that robbery of the birthday gifts on Yellow Earth Ridge?"
"Yes, Your Excellency. I've been working on the case day and night. I sent our quickest and most sharp-eyed men to the ridge to search. But although I've had them beaten several times, they still haven't found a trace. We're doing our best, Excellency but it looks hopeless."
"Rot! 'If the superiors don't press, the underlings loaf.' I started my career by passing the palace examinations. Becoming a prefect wasn't easy! And now the Premier in the Eastern Capital has sent an officer with an order giving me ten days to catch the robbers, on pain of dismissal and exile to Shamen Island. You're a police inspector but you're not trying, and the disaster falls on my head! I'm going to exile you to a miserable border garrison, so far that even the wild geese can't reach it!"
The prefect sent for the tattooer and had him write on Ho Tao's cheek: "Exiled to ___ prefecture," leaving the name of the destination blank.
"If you don't catch those crooks," he warned, "you can expect no mercy!"
Ho Tao left the prefect's court and returned to his station. He immediately called most of his police to a private room for a conference. They all sat looking at one another, as silent as geese with arrow-pierced bills, as mute as gill-hooked fish.
"This is the room that I pay you in," said Ho Tao. "You're not generally so quiet. Is it because we're having a hard time solving this case? I'm the one who should be pitied. Don't you see what's written on my face?"
"We're not blocks of wood," said the policemen. "We know you're being pressured from above. It's just that those date merchants must be brigands from some stronghold deep in the mountains in another prefecture. Once they snatched the booty, they surely holed up to celebrate and revel. How can we catch them? Even if we knew where they were, we could only gaze at them from a distance."
Ho Tao had been five-tenths depressed to start with. Now, these words added another five-tenths. He left the station, mounted his horse, rode home, and tied the beast to the trough in the rear of the house. Then he sat and brooded.
"Why are you so dejected?" his wife asked.
"You don't know what's happened," said Ho Tao. "The other day His Excellency issued an order to capture the robbers who stole the eleven loads of birthday gifts Governor Liang was sending his father-in-law Premier Cai. It happened on Yellow Earth Ridge. We don't know who the culprits are and I still haven't caught them. Today, I went to ask for more time, and found that the Premier had sent an officer to wait here for the criminals and bring them back to the Eastern Capital. The prefect asked me about the case and I said: 'There isn't any news, and we haven't caught them yet.' He had an exile tattoo put on my face, leaving only the destination blank. There's no telling how much longer I have to live!"
"What are we going to do?" cried his wife. "This is awful!"
As they were talking, Ho Tao's younger brother, Ho Qing, came to see him.
"What do you want?" Ho Tao demanded. "Why aren't you out gambling? What are you doing here?"
The wife, a clever woman, quickly signalled the young man not to reply, and said: "Won't you come into the kitchen? There's something I want to talk to you about."
Ho Qing went with her into the kitchen and sat down. She served him meat and vegetables, and heated several cups of wine.
"Brother is too overbearing," he complained. "I may have faults but I'm still his brother! Why is he so high and mighty? He's my brother, isn't he? Would it disgrace him to have a couple of drinks with me?"
"You've no idea how upset he is."
"He's always had plenty of money and goods. What's happened to them? And I haven't been around to bother him. Why should he be upset?"
"You don't know. The other day on Yellow Earth Ridge a gang of date merchants robbed the birthday gifts Governor Liang of the Northern Capital was sending to Premier Cai. The prefect of Jizhou has just received an order from Cai to arrest the robbers within ten days and deliver them to the capital. If he doesn't, he'll be exiled to a distant garrison. Didn't you see what the prefect had tattooed on your brother's face? If he doesn't catch them soon, he's going to suffer. How can he think of drinking with you? That's why I prepared some food and wine for you in here. He's been very depressed. You mustn't blame him."
"I've heard some rumours that robbers have taken the birthday gifts. Where did it happen?"

"They say it was on Yellow Earth Ridge."
"And what kind of people were the robbers?"
"Brother, you're not drunk. I just told you—seven date merchants."
Ho Qing laughed. "So that's how it was. Since it's known that date merchants did the job, what's there to brood over? Why not just send a few capable men to arrest them?"
"That's easy to say. They can't be found."
"There's nothing to worry about, sister-in-law," Ho Qing smiled. "Brother always welcomes a lot of fair weather friends but he has no use for his own kin. He's looking for robbers, and his cronies say they can't find them. If he'd drunk a few cups of wine with me from time to time, I might be able to tell him how to go about it."
"Do you really have any clues?"
Ho Qing laughed. "Wait till brother's situation is desperate, then I may have a plan to save him."
He rose to leave. His sister-in-law persuaded him to stay for another few cups of wine.
Meanwhile she hurried into the next room and told her husband. Ho Tao quickly invited his brother to join him.
"Since you know where the robbers have gone," he said with an apologetic smile, "why don't you rescue me?"
"I don't know anything. I was only joking with sister-in-law. How can I rescue you?"
"Good brother, don't be offended by my manner. Think of how good I am to you generally, not of how bad I am on occasion. Save my life!"
"But you have so many sharp-eyed, fast-moving police. There are nearly three hundred men under your command. Aren't they doing their utmost? What can a mere younger brother do?"
"Never mind about them. You've got something up your sleeve. Don't wait for others to be the heroes. Tell me where the robbers have gone and I'll reward you. Let me relax."
"How do I know where they've gone?"
"Don't torment me. Remember we were born of the same mother!"
"No need to panic. When the situation gets really critical, I'll go out and nab the petty culprits myself."
"Ho Qing," said his sister-in-law, "you must rescue him, come what may. It's your duty as a brother. The Premier has issued an order for the arrest of the gang. It's very serious. How can you talk about 'petty culprits'!"
"You know I come only for money for gambling, sister-in-law," Ho Qing said ironically. "Many's the time brother has berated me. Even when he struck or cursed me, I never talked back. And when he feasted, it was always with others. But today I seem to be of some use after all!"
Ho Tao realized there was reason in what Ho Qing said. He hurriedly got a silver ingot weighing ten ounces and placed it on the table. "Take this, brother," he urged. "After we catch the robbers, I guarantee you won't lack for gold or silver, silks or satins."
Ho Qing laughed. "This is certainly a case of 'not burning incense in ordinary times but embracing the idol's foot in a crisis.' It would be sheer extortion if I accepted your silver now. Take it back. Don't try to bribe me. If you act like this I won't say a word. I'll tell you only because you two have apologized. I'm not impressed by your money."
"My silver is all rewards for cases I've solved," explained Ho Tao. "Naturally, I've always four or five hundred strings of cash on hand. Don't refuse the silver, brother, and tell me—where have those robbers gone?"
Ho Qing slapped his thigh. "I've got them right here in my pocket!"
Ho Tao was astonished. "What do you mean?"
"Never you mind. Just take my word for it. I don't want your silver. You don't have to bribe me. I ask only that you treat me decently." Then Ho Qing calmly related what he knew. And as a result, a gallant hero emerged in Yuncheng County, and in Liangshan Marsh there gathered a Heaven-shaking assemblage of courageous men. Who were the persons of whom Ho Qing spoke?

We left Yang Zhi on Yellow Mud Ridge after the capture of the birthday convoy, certain that he could not possibly return and report to Governor Liang and intent on finding somewhere to die right there on the mountain. But when he approached the edge and was about to throw himself off, he suddenly came to his senses and drew back. "I have parents who brought me into this world," he thought, "and from whom I inherited a respectable appearance and a certain dignity. From a tender age I studied, with some success, the eighteen martial arts. Is it all to end like this? Rather than kill myself here on this mountain, would it not be better to wait till I am taken and then consider what to do?" He turned to look at the others. They gazed back at him with sightless eyes, unable to move hand or foot. He pointed a finger at them, saying: "It's all because you fools wouldn't listen to my instructions that it had to end like this, that's what got me into this mess!" He pulled his halberd out of the tree root and stuck the sword through his belt, and after taking a good look around that revealed nothing new, sighed and set off down the mountain.
The others did not come to until evening. One after another they staggered to their feet. They poured out strings of curses, in their disgust. The old Colonel complained: "You lot refused to listen to Major Yang's good advice and now I'm scuppered!"
The soldiers said: "Sir, what's done is done. We've got to think what to do next."
"Have you anything to propose?" the Colonel asked.
"It's our fault, yes. But think of the old saying: When the flames get close, it's every man for himself; when a wasp gets under your shirt, the best thing is to undress. Of course, if Major Yang was still here, we'd have to accept the blame. But since he's disappeared, there's nothing to stop us going back and reporting to Governor Liang: we can put all the blame on the major, can't we? All we've got to do is say it like this: that all the time on the journey he was beating us and cursing us, driving us on till we couldn't move another step, and then he made a pact with the robbers and they drugged us and tied us up so they could steal the treasure."
"You're absolutely right," said the old Colonel. "We'll wait till morning, then go to the local police station and report. We'll leave my aides there to help in the inquiries and we'll return with all speed to the Northern Capital and inform the authorities and ask them to produce a written report informing the Grand Preceptor and making the Jizhou government responsible for apprehending the criminals."
Next day the Colonel and his party reached Jizhou and made their report of what had happened. We say no more of this.
Yang Zhi, meanwhile, had left Yellow Mud Ridge behind. For a long time he headed south, halberd in hand, his heart filled with despair. He continued walking long into the night, before he realized it was late and took shelter in a wood. "Here I am with no provisions," he thought to himself, "and no friends in these parts. What am I going to do?"
Gradually the sky lightened and he must needs set off again, to avail himself of the cool hours. He traversed another six miles or more:

His face bears the mark of a warrior,
*Yet the treasure was got for free.*
*Now he's a weary traveller,*
And flogging should be his fee.

Such was his misery that when he found himself in front of an inn door, he said: "If I don't get some wine, I just won't be able to go on." He entered and seated himself — the table and benches were made of mulberry wood. He laid his halberd down beside him. A woman standing by the stove said, "I expect you'd like something to eat, sir."
"First bring me two measures of wine," he replied. "Then find me some rice and cook a bit of meat for me. I'll give you the money in a moment." The woman ordered a young lad to come and pour the wine, then she cooked the rice and fried some meat, all of which she put in front of Yang Zhi. As soon as he had finished it, he stood up, grasped his halberd and strode out. "You haven't given me the money for your food and wine yet," the woman shouted after him. "I'll give it to you when I come back," he said. "For the moment I'll have to owe you." He proceeded on his way. The lad who had poured the wine chased after him and made a grab at him but Yang Zhi knocked him down with one blow of his fist. The woman began to shout that she had been cheated but Yang Zhi paid no attention. At this moment, however, he heard steps behind him and someone shouted: "Where do you think you're going, you thieving bastard?"
Turning, Yang Zhi saw that he was being hotly pursued by a rather dishevelled character with a stick. "Well, it's his bad luck if he wants to pick a fight with me," Yang Zhi thought. He halted and waited. Behind his pursuer he could make out the waiter from the inn, armed with a pitchfork, and two or three villagers, all carrying sticks. They were rapidly closing on him. "If it wasn't for this first one," Yang Zhi thought, "the others wouldn't dare chase me." He brandished his halberd and prepared to take on the leading assailant. The latter rushed towards him whirling his stick. They fought twenty or thirty bouts but the other could make no impression on Yang Zhi and had to resort to blocking and parrying, dodging and side-stepping. The waiter arrived, and the villagers, and they stood by awaiting an opportunity to intervene.
Suddenly the stranger leapt out of the circle of combat and yelled, "Let's call a truce. You're a great fighter. Would you be willing to tell me your name?"
Thereupon Yang Zhi struck his chest and said: "I don't stoop to using a false name or travelling under an alias. I am Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast!"
The stranger said: "Does that mean you're the Yang Zhi who was a commander of the palace guard in the Eastern Capital?"
"How did you know?" Yang Zhi asked, surprised.
The stranger threw away his weapon and prostrated himself, saying: "Pardon me, for being unable to see what was staring me in the face!"
Yang Zhi helped him up. "But who are you?" he asked.
"I was once a pupil of Lin Chong, instructor of the palace guard. My name's Cao Zheng. I come from a line of butchers. I can slaughter an animal very prettily: skinning and cleaning, separating the meat and scraping the bones. That's why people sometimes call me the 'Devil with the Darting Knife.' A rich man in my home town gave me five thousand cash to set me up in business here in Shandong but unfortunately I lost my capital. I couldn't go back so I married into this peasant's household. The woman who tends the stove is my spouse. The fellow with the pitchfork is my brother-in-law. When I had that exchange with you, Commander, I recognized your style of fighting — it's exactly like that of my instructor, Lin Chong — so I knew I had no chance against you!"
"So you're Lin Chong's pupil, are you?" Yang Zhi said. "Lin Chong was persecuted by Marshal Gao and became an outlaw. He's now in the Marshes of Mount Liang."
"I had heard something of the sort myself but I didn't know if it was true or not. Anyway, please come and rest in my house, Commander."
Yang Zhi returned with Cao Zheng to the inn. Cao Zheng invited him to sit down and told his wife and brother-in-law to come and pay their respects, and to bring wine and food. While they were drinking, Cao Zheng inquired: "What brought you to these parts, Commander?"
Yang Zhi told him the whole story, from the time when as Imperial Commander he lost the convoy of stones and plants to the recent business with the birthday convoy.
"In that case," said Cao Zheng, "why don't you stay with me for a while? That'll give you time to think what you're going to do next."
"That's exceedingly kind of you," said Yang Zhi. "But I'm worried about the police. They may come looking for me, so I'd better not stay long."
"If that's the case, where do you plan to go?"
"I'd like to go and look for your instructor, Lin Chong, in the Marshes of Mount Liang. I passed that way before and I ran into him at the foot of the mountain and we crossed swords. Wang Lun was so impressed by our fighting he invited us both to the mountain retreat. That's how I got to know your instructor. At that time Wang Lun was very insistent that I should stay but I didn't want to be an outlaw. On the other hand if I go there for refuge now, with these marks of shame on my face, it won't look good either. That's what makes me hesitate. It's a dilemma."
"I think you're right. I have heard that Wang Lun is a mean and narrow-minded type, and that he is afraid of rivals. They say that when my instructor, Lin Chong, was obliged to join the outlaws, he had to put up with a lot from Wang Lun. You might do better in this region. Not far from here in a place called Qingzhou there's a mountain called Twin Dragon Peak where there's a temple called Temple of the Precious Pearl. This temple has the most splendid situation, buried deep in the mountain with only one road for access. Recently the superior renounced his vows and let his hair grow and the other monks have all followed suit. They're said to have got up a force of four or five hundred men and they go around looting and wrecking. That monk is called the Golden-Eyed Tiger Deng Long. If you've decided to become an outlaw, you might go and join that lot, you'd be safe there."
"Indeed, if there's a place like that, why not go and seek sanctuary there?" Yang Zhi said. He stayed the night at Cao Zheng's and then, after borrowing his travel expenses, took up his halberd, said goodbye and strode off in the direction of Twin Dragon Peak.
A day later, at nightfall, he came to an immensely high mountain. "I'd better spend the night in this wood," he said to himself, "and leave the climb for tomorrow." But when he entered the wood he got a shock. An enormous monk, completely naked, his back covered in elaborate tattoos, was leaning against the roots of a pine enjoying the cool. When he saw Yang Zhi, the monk seized his staff that he had propped against a tree root, leapt to his feet and roared "Well, now, my fine friend, where have you sprung from?"
"This monk must be from Guanxi," Yang Zhi said to himself when he heard the accent. "We're fellow countrymen. Let's question him." Aloud he said, "Where are you from, monk?"
The monk did not reply but instead began to whirl his staff, as if minded to attack.
"This priest is most uncouth," Yang Zhi said to himself. "Well, he'll give me a chance to work off my spleen." Raising his halberd, he advanced towards the monk.
So the two of them fought it out, there in the wood, advancing, retreating, striking this way and that, and after forty or fifty passes neither had the upper hand. Finally the monk feinted and leapt back out of the circle of combat, shouting: "Hold!"
Both men stood stock-still, while Yang Zhi, hiding his amazement, was thinking: "Where can he come from, this monk? He's a tremendous fighter. He's got so much technique I can barely manage him."
"Well now, you with the blue face, who and what are you?" the monk roared.
"I am Yang Zhi, former palace guard commander in the Eastern Capital."
"Are you the fellow that was trying to sell a sword in the Eastern Capital, and ended up killing that scoundrel, the Ox?"
"Don't you see the marks on my face?" Yang Zhi replied.
"So that's it! ... but how surprising to meet you here," said the monk.
"Might I be permitted to ask who you are, Father, and how you come to know about my selling the sword?"
"You want to know who I am? I'm Major Lu, formerly garrison commandant of Yanan under the command of Old Marshal Zhong, that's who. Because I gave butcher Zheng three blows of my fist which happened to kill him, I had to shave my head and become a monk at the temple on Mount Wu Tai. On account of these tattoos on my back people sometimes call me the Flowery Monk."
"I knew you were a fellow-countryman," said Yang Zhi delightedly. "I've so often heard your praises sung by the brethren of the rivers and lakes. But I heard that you used to hang out at the great Xiangguo Temple. What brings you to these parts?"
"It's a long story. I was looking after the vegetable garden at the Xiangguo Temple. It was there I ran into Leopard's Head Lin Chong, a man whom Marshal Gao did his best to ruin. I saw he was in a lot of danger so I escorted him to Cangzhou and saved him from certain death. I didn't bargain for the fact that those two guards when they got back would say to Gao-the-Ball, 'We were about to finish Lin Chong off in Wild Boar Wood but he was rescued by Lu Zhishen of the Xiangguo Temple. The monk escorted him all the way to Cangzhou so we couldn't do anything to him.' On account of this that son of a bitch, Marshal Gao, couldn't wait to get even and he told the abbot to ban me from the temple. He even sent people to arrest me but I was forewarned by a bunch of layabouts, so I didn't fall into his hands. Before escaping I took the trouble to set fire to the overseer's lodge and the outhouses in the vegetable garden. Then I went to ground with the rivers and lakes fraternity. After that, they might search for me east and west but they'd never find me. When I reached the Hill of the Cross in Mengzhou I came within an inch of losing my life at the hands of an innkeeper's wife, who drugged my wine. Fortunately her husband returned just in time. He had a shock when he saw me and noticed my monk's staff and sword. He quickly gave me the antidote and brought me round, questioned me and made me stay with him for several days, so we became sworn brothers. Those two, husband and wife, are well known and respected among the rivers and lakes fraternity. He is Zhang Qing, the Gardener, and she is Sister Sun, the Ogress. They are upright people. After I'd been there three or four days, I heard of this Twin Dragon Peak as a place where one could find sanctuary so I came here to join Deng Long's band. But the blighter said he wouldn't have me. We started to fight it out. He couldn't get the better of me, so what he did was make fast the three gates barring the way up the mountain. There's no other way in. So there we were, cursing each other but the so-and-so wouldn't come out and fight again, and so here's yours truly completely stymied." He ended this speech by again expressing his surprise at meeting Yang Zhi there.
Here was an encounter after Yang Zhi's own heart. Right there in the wood the two of them performed a formal greeting and then sat down on the ground to pass the night. Yang Zhi recounted all his adventures, from selling the sword and killing the Ox to the business with the birthday convoy. He told how Cao Zheng had recommended him to come here. Then he said: "Since he's closed the gates and we are stuck here, we ought to think of a way to get him to come down. Why don't we go back to Cao Zheng's and work out a plan?"
Together they left the forest and went to Cao Zheng's inn. When Yang Zhi had introduced the monk and Cao Zheng had eagerly served them with wine, they all settled down to discuss the assault on Twin Dragon Peak. "If the gates at the bottom are secured," Cao Zheng said, "you'll never get in — not just you two, even ten thousand troops couldn't do it. So you'll have to use cunning, not force."
"Fuck the bastard!" Zhishen exclaimed. "When I first went to see him he would only talk to me outside the gates. When he refused to take me in we fought, and I floored him with a kick to the stomach. But before I could finish it off his people rescued him — there was a big crowd of them — and carried him up the mountain, shutting those bloody gates behind them, with me outside able to do nothing except shout insults! He wouldn't come out and fight again."
"If it's such a good stronghold, wouldn't it be worth making a combined assault?" said Yang Zhi.
"The problem is there's only the one way in," said Zhishen. "Oh, how I'd like to get my hands on that bastard!"
"I've got an idea," said Cao Zheng. "But I don't know if you'll approve or not."
"We're all ears, naturally," said Yang Zhi.
"Well, then, Commander, you'll need to change your dress. You can be got up like one of the local villagers. I myself will take His Reverence's staff and sword. We'll get my brother-in-law and some others to go to the foot of the mountain and tie up His Reverence with a rope — I'll make some slip-knots. Then we'll go to that lot on the mountain and say: 'We're villagers from the inn. This monk came to our inn and got drunk and refused to pay. He just kept saying he was going to go and get people to attack your stronghold. So we took the opportunity while he was drunk to tie him up. We've got him here and want to hand him over to you.' I'm sure they'll let us in. Once we're inside and get to see Deng Long, we can loosen the slip-knots and take the rope off and I'll give His Reverence back his staff and sword. Then you'll both attack him and he won't have a chance to escape. Once you've done him in his people won't offer any resistance. What do you think of my plan?"
"Brilliant!" the other two cried out in unison. As the poem says:

A tiger cub can never be a dragon.

*Twin Dragon Peak should have a dragon master.*
*This like-minded pair had but to meet:*
The battle plan is ready and complete.

That evening they ate and drank, and prepared some rations for the journey. Next day they got up at dawn and had a good breakfast. Zhishen's baggage and all his other things were stored at Cao Zheng's.

Then the three of them, together with Cao Zheng's brother- in-law and several villagers, set off for Twin Dragon Peak. They reached the wood before midday, and changed their clothes there. Zhishen was bound, using slip-knots, and two villagers were instructed to take a strong grip on the ends of the rope. Yang Zhi put on a straw sun-hat and a tattered shirt, and carried his halberd. Cao Zheng carried the monk's staff. The remainder, armed with sticks, formed an escort. Arriving at the foot of the mountain, they found the first de- fences, bristling with crossbows, lime bottles, and various missiles. When the guards saw the monk was tied up, they hastened to report the news to their chief. After quite a while, two of Deng Long's henchmen appeared and asked: "Who are you and what do you want? Where did you get hold of that monk?"

"We're from the village," Cao Zheng said. "I keep an inn there. This big fat monk here came to the inn and got very drunk and refused to pay. He kept muttering about going to the Marshes of Mount Liang and bringing back thousands of men to smash up the stronghold on Twin Dragon Peak. He said you'd be wiped out, together with all the neighbouring villages. So we gave him a lot more wine till he was completely smashed and then we tied him up and brought him here to hand him over to your chief. We want to show our loyalty and make sure there isn't any trouble for the village."

The two henchmen were elated. "All right," they said, "just wait here a moment." Off they went to report back to Deng Long that the big monk had been captured. Deng Long was equally pleased. "Bring him up," he cried. "I'll have the villain's heart and liver to go with my wine. That's the thing that will ease the pain I feel."

In obedience to the order, the men went down and opened the gate and ordered the monk to be brought up. Yang Zhi and Cao Zheng escorted Lu Zhishen up towards the stronghold. On the way they had a chance to see all three defensive barriers. The site was really precipitous. On both sides towering peaks of awe-inspiring majesty protected the temple, and there was only the one road leading up through the pass with its three gates. Each barrier was piled with wooden or stone projectiles, catapults and ballistae, and surrounded by sharp stakes of bamboo care- fully concealed. When they had threaded this defensive complex and stood before the Temple of the Precious Pearl, they saw a gatehouse with three towers and a terrace smooth as a mirror, surrounded by a defensive palisade. At the main gate of the temple stood seven or eight guards, who immediately began to curse Zhishen.

"You bald ass," they shouted, "you wounded our Chief! Now you're going to pay for it! We're going to chop you into little pieces!"

Zhishen remained silent. They brought him to the Hall of the Buddha, where all the Buddha images had been removed and replaced by a throne covered with a tiger-skin. Troops with lances in their hands were ranged on either side.

A moment later two soldiers helped Deng Long to the throne. Yang Zhi and Cao Zheng were still holding Zhishen tightly at the foot of the steps. Deng Long glared at the monk and shouted: "Why, you poxy bald ass! The other day you tripped me up and bruised my stomach — the swelling still hasn't gone down. But it's my turn now!"

Lu Zhishen simply stared back, with big round eyes, and roared: "Got you, you scum!" At this, the two villagers gave a quick tug of the rope to free the knots and the rope fell away. Lu Zhishen received his staff from Cao Zheng, and began to perform the flying cloud ploy with it. Yang Zhi threw off his straw hat and readied his halberd, while Cao Zheng brandished his stick menacingly and the villagers advanced in a coordinated and resolute manner. Deng Long desperately tried to dodge but Zhishen's staff caught him on the top of his head, splitting his skull in half and even shattering the throne he sat on. Four or five of his followers were quickly knocked down by Yang Zhi. "Surrender, or you'll all be put to the sword!" Cao Zheng shouted. There were five or six hundred troops both in front of the temple and behind it and one or two minor chiefs but all were paralysed with fear and they meekly came forward and surrendered. They were ordered to take the corpses of Deng Long and the others to a place on the other side of the mountain and burn them. Next the victors inspected the stores and checked the buildings, and then they went to see how much booty had been amassed at the back of the temple. This done, a feast was organized. Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi had become lords of the mountain stronghold and a banquet was held in their honour. All the men swore allegiance to them and the minor chiefs were confirmed in their positions. Finally Cao Zheng said farewell to his two friends and went off home with the other villagers. Of them no more. There's a poem now for Lu Zhishen:

The ancient temple in its green retreat:
*A nest of robbers behind a pious mask.*
*And Heaven's choice to rule this sacred seat:*
The Flowery Monk — well suited for the task!

And another one for Yang Zhi:

Able assistant to Lu Zhishen,
*He rules this green chapel of outlawed men;*
*Dragons and tigers flee from his art;*
The face is ferocious but gentle the heart.

Now as to those other members of the birthday convoy, the old Colonel and the guards, they had returned to the Northern Capital, setting off at dawn and not halting before noon. Arriving at the government building, they had all, as one man, thrown them- selves down on the ground in front of the audience chamber and reported their failure. But at first all Governor Liang said was: "You have had a hard time of it; you ordinary soldiers are not to blame." Then he asked what had happened to Major Yang. "We don't like to say this," the guards answered. "But that Major Yang is a bold and shameless robber. About a week after leaving here we reached Yellow Mud Ridge. It was a fearfully hot day and we sat down to rest in a wood. Suddenly Yang Zhi was joined by seven robbers dressed up as merchants selling dates. Yang Zhi had fixed a rendezvous with them and told them to meet him with seven wheelbarrows in this wood on Yellow Mud Ridge. He also got a wine-carrier to come and halt for a rest on the mountain. We were unlucky enough to drink some of his wine that was drugged. Then they tied us all up, and Yang Zhi and the seven robbers loaded the birthday gift and all our other things onto the wheelbarrows and left. We reported it to the Jizhou authorities and left those two lieutenants with them to assist in the inquiries and help catch the robbers. We returned with all speed to inform Your Excellency."

Governor Liang was beside himself. "That faithless bastard," he bellowed. "He was a convicted criminal but I took it on myself to raise him up and give him a position. How could anyone be so ungrateful! Wait till I get my hands on him, I'll have him chopped into little pieces!" Then he called a secretary and dictated an order, to be delivered with all possible speed to Jizhou. He also wrote a personal report for the Grand Preceptor in the Eastern Capital, also for urgent delivery, informing him of what had happened.

Let us leave the Jizhou messenger and follow the courier sent to the Eastern Capital. The Grand Preceptor was extremely shocked when he received the news. "These robbers are of an unparalleled audacity," he said. "Only last year the items sent by my son-in-law were stolen and the culprits have still not been apprehended. Now the same thing has occurred again. What are we going to do?" Then he too dictated an order that he handed to a member of his entourage with instructions to ride post-haste to Jizhou and deliver it to the governor, who was to secure the immediate arrest of the bandits and himself report back to the capital.

Now by this time the Governor of Jizhou had received the message from Governor Liang of the Northern Capital and was racking his brains for a suitable response. In this extremity, an usher came and announced: "An official from the household of the Grand Preceptor in the Eastern Capital is waiting to see you on urgent business."

This put the Governor in an even greater flurry. "I bet it's something to do with the birthday convoy," he said to himself, and hurriedly went into session and received the official. "I have already received a report from two of Governor Liang's lieutenants," he said hurriedly, "and investigations are under way but so far no trace of the criminals has been found. The other day I received a letter from Governor Liang and the inspector in charge of suppression of banditry has been put in charge of the case with orders to produce results within a set period on pain of flogging but so far he has not made any arrests. If any progress is made in this matter, I shall be going personally to the capital to report it."

"I am in the confidence of the Grand Preceptor," said the envoy. "I have received specific orders from His Excellency to come here and insist on the arrest of the culprits. Just before I left the Grand Preceptor personally gave me my instructions: he wants me to stay right here in the government building and wait until such time as you have those date-sellers, the wine-carrier and the deserter Yang Zhi under lock and key. There is a time limit of ten days, by the end of which time it is essential that the culprits be transferred to the Eastern Capital. If by the end of the ten days' grace this has not been performed, you, Your Excellency, will be ordered to pro-ceed to the Island of Shamen. For me, too, it will almost certainly be impossible to return to see the Grand Preceptor and my fate will be, to say the least of it, uncertain. If you do not believe me, please take a look at the Grand Preceptor's written instructions."

The Governor did so, and what he saw did not reassure him. He immediately summoned all those responsible for the suppression of banditry. At this point one of those standing in attendance saluted and advanced to stand in front of the screen.

"Who are you?" the Governor asked.

"I am Ho' Tao, Your Honour, I'm in charge of anti-bandit operations in the three capitals."

"Is the recent theft of the birthday convoy on Yellow Mud Ridge your responsibility?"

"Let me tell you, Your Excellency, ever since I was given the case I have been working on it night and day. I have sent our most brilliant investigators to Yellow Mud Ridge to carry out a thorough search and make arrests. But up till now, even with threats and beatings, they have not been able to find the smallest clue. Please don't think that I have been dragging my feet. There simply is nothing I can do."

"Balls! What is it they say? When the cat's away the mice will play! Well, since I qualified in the exams and was appointed to this post, it's never for one moment been easy. Now someone's come here from the Grand Preceptor in the Eastern Capital and given me my instructions. I have ten days to arrest all the bandits and send them to the capital. When the time limit expires, I shall not only be removed from office, I shall be sent to languish on Shamen. You're supposed to be investigating this case but thanks to your remissness, calamities are about to fall on my head. Well, let me tell you, before it comes to that, you're going to be removed to somewhere so remote that even the wild geese don't fly." Thereupon he called for the tattooer, and had him inscribe on Ho Tao's face the words: "Banished to the district of ...," leaving the actual name blank. He concluded with this solemn warning: "Ho Tao, if you fail to catch the villains, you can expect the severest of sentences and no remission."

This scribbling on the cheeks is rather tough
*It's always the little guy who's treated rough.*
*The villain hatches plots without obstruction,*
The honest man must move with circumspection.

Now that he knew what the score was, Inspector Ho went straight from the audience hall to a reserved room and assembled his team of investigators there, then led them all off to a conference room to go through the case behind closed doors. The constables were staring at each other in horror, each with the look of a goose transfixed by an arrow, or a fish on a hook. They could think of nothing to say.

"In the general run of things you're all of you pretty lively when you come here to get paid," Inspector Ho said, "but now there's a real problem to solve I don't get a sound out of you. You might at least show me some sympathy. Haven't you noticed this mark on my face?"

"Sir, we do have feelings," they answered. "We're not blocks of wood, so how could we fail to notice it? It's just that those bogus merchants must have come from outside, they must be bandits from some wild mountainous region. So, then, when they'd seized the booty they made off back to their mountain hideout, where no doubt they're living it up this very minute. How can we be expected to catch them? Even if we knew where they were, we probably wouldn't be able to do much more than just report it."

If the Inspector was vexed before, now he was doubly vexed. He left the office and rode straight home. On arrival he tied up his horse in the stable and went to meditate on his misfortune in solitude.

"Why such a long face today?" his wife asked. And indeed:

Heavy his brow as if hung with chains,
*His belly filled with sorrows and pains;*
*The netted fish will not get far;*
Who'll help the turtle from the jar?

"I suppose I'd better tell you about it. The other day the Governor assigned me to the Yellow Mud Ridge case: a bunch of robbers stole the convoy of treasure Governor Liang of Daming was sending as a birthday gift to his father-in-law, Grand Preceptor Cai. Eleven loads of it. Nothing is known about the people who stole it. Since I was put on the case I have made no progress. Today when I went to ask for an extension of the deadline I learnt that there'd been a message from the Grand Preceptor's office saying that he wants the robbers arrested and sent to the capital immediately. When the Governor asked me about the case, I had to say that I hadn't made any arrests because there weren't any clues. So the Governor had them put this tattoo on my face. The place of exile hasn't been named yet. I shall learn my fate later!"

"Oh dear, what will we do? What can we do?"

At this moment Ho Tao's younger brother, Ho Qing, came to see him. "What do you want?" Ho Tao asked. "Why aren't you out gambling, as usual? Why have you come here?"

Ho Tao's wife, who was no fool, made an urgent signal to Ho Qing and said: "Come to the kitchen, I want to tell you something." Ho Qing followed his sister-in-law into the kitchen and sat down. She prepared some wine and food, poured him several cups, and urged him to eat. "Ho Tao is really unfair to me," his brother said. "I may not be much good at anything but after all we are brothers. Whatever his feelings for me, he is my elder brother. It really wouldn't hurt him to invite me sometimes to drink a cup of wine with him!"

"You don't understand. Your brother has a lot to worry about."

"My brother always has plenty of money and good things. Where does it all go to? I never ask him for anything. And anyway, what's he got to worry about?"

"I don't suppose you know about it. It's all because of this Yellow Mud Ridge case, those seven robbers disguised as date-sellers who stole Governor Liang's birthday convoy for the Grand Preceptor. The Governor of Jizhou has just received word from the Grand Preceptor that he's got only ten days to capture the culprits and send them to the capital, or else he'll be branded and banished to a frontier region. Didn't you notice the tattoo on your brother's face, saying that he's to be banished but not saying where to? If the robbers aren't caught your brother's really for it! So how can you expect him to be in the mood to drink wine with you? That's why I've taken it on myself to give you this wine and food. Your brother's very unhappy these days, you mustn't hold it against him."

"I'd heard a lot of gossip," Ho Qing said, "about some robbers who seized the birthday convoy. Where did all this happen?"

"On Yellow Mud Ridge, so they say."

"And what were they like, the ones who did it?"

"Are you drunk or something? I just told you, it was seven date-sellers who committed the robbery."

Ho Qing began to laugh triumphantly. "So that's how it is," he said. "Well, if it was some date-sellers, there's nothing to be so miserable about. It's just a matter of sending someone to arrest them, provided it's done carefully."

"It's all very well to say that but where are they going to be found?"

Ho Qing grinned again. "Sister-in-law, stop worrying. My brother's always offering hospitality to a bunch of spongers who come here to eat and drink with him. The one person he generally pays no attention to is his younger brother. Now he's in difficulties and says he can't find these robbers. Well, if he'd take the trouble to offer me a few cups of wine sometimes, he wouldn't find it such a problem to lay his hands on these robbers of his!"

"You mean you've got a clue?"

Ho Qing grinned broadly. "If big brother is really desperate, I think I might be able to find a way to help him!"

He stood up and made as if to leave but his sister-in-law pressed him to take another cup or two. Ho Tao's wife was sure there must be something in it. She told her husband. Ho Tao summoned his brother and said with all the friendliness he could muster: "Brother, if you really know the whereabouts of these robbers, why don't you help me?"

"Me? I don't know anything. I was just joking. How should I be able to help my big brother?" "My dearest brother, don't be so touchy. Just remember how good I usually am to you. Forget my occasional bad temper. Right now I really need your help."

"Haven't you got all those sharp-eyed quick-witted officers under your command, and hundreds of constables? Why can't they make a little effort on your behalf? How can a younger brother rescue an elder brother?"

"Forget about them. From the way you talk I know you've got something up your sleeve. You wouldn't want to keep it back for the benefit of someone else, would you? Just give me a clue. Of course, I'll make it up to you. I believe my fate rests in your hands."

"What kind of clue? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Stop trying to annoy me. Just remember that we're the same flesh and blood."

"All right, all right. But wait till the situation is really desperate, then I'll come myself and lend a hand in capturing this bunch of petty thieves."

"Brother-in-law," the lady said. "You really ought to do something to help your brother, if you've got any brotherly feelings. He's received orders from the Grand Preceptor, who wants these felons handed over immediately. Theirs was a capital offence. How can you talk of petty thieves?"

"You ought to know, sister-in-law, that I'm only interested in gambling. How many times have we heard my brother say so? But however much he shouts at me, I've never dared complain. When he's got food and drink it's always other people he enjoys it with. It's only today that he finds he needs me!"

Ho Tao could still sense from his brother's words that he knew something. He quickly went and got ten taels of silver and placed them on the table. He said: "Here you are, then, brother. Here's something to start with. Later, if we catch the robbers, I'll give you gold and silver and silk, I promise you."

"Well, brother," Ho Qing said, "it's obviously true what they say, 'people kiss the Buddha's feet when seas are rough but in fine weather no one lights incense.' But it would be like blackmail if I took your money now. Put it away, quickly, you don't have to bribe me! If you behave like that I won't tell you a thing! However, since you've both apologized to me, I will tell you. Only don't try to impress me by bringing out your money."

"But it's the official reward," his brother said. "Just a few hundred cash, don't refuse it. But please do tell me where I can find out about those robbers."

Ho Qing slapped his thigh. "I've got the robbers right here, in my pouch."

"How can you say you've got them in your pouch?" said the startled elder brother.

"Don't ask how. They're here, isn't that good enough for you? And put your money away. Stop trying to bribe me. All you need is to show me a little kindness." Ho Qing spoke lightly but his words were to have grave consequences:

In Yuncheng province, a leader will arise;
In the Marshes of Mount Liang, bold spirits conspire.

Just as Yang Zhi was preparing to commit suicide by jumping down a steep place on the Huangni Ridge he stood still and thought. "When my parents gave birth to me I was very good-looking, and when I was a youth I knew all the eighteen forms of military exercises. I cannot ruin my future career by committing suicide as it will be better to wait until the bandits have been arrested and then I can explain matters." He then returned, and saw that his party of fourteen men were still staring at him but yet could not get up. He pointed at them with his ringer and cursed; saying, "You knaves would not listen to what I had said, and that was the cause of what followed, and you put me into this trouble." He then picked up his halberd that was lying at the foot of a tree, and put a sword at his belt. He looked all round but could see nothing else. He heaved a sigh, and went down the ridge.

About ten o'clock in the evening the fourteen men were able to scramble to their feet, and then they expressed their sorrow. The steward Xie said to them, "You would not listen to Major Yang Zhi's order, and therefore today I am in danger of my life."
"Sir," said one of the men, "now that it is all finished let us discuss a plan."
"What is your idea?" asked the steward Xie.
"We are certainly to blame," said the man. "The ancients had a saying, 'When the fire is scorching our bodies we try to put it out, or when a wasp gets in our bosom we quickly unfasten our clothes.' If Major Yang Zhi were here now we could not say anything but as he has now gone away why should we not return to Grand Secretary Liang, and lay all the blame for this on Yang Zhi? We could say that on the way Yang Zhi insulted us by continual curses and beat us so bitterly that we could hardly walk. He was in league with some bandits, and gave us some drugged wine so that we became unconscious; when he bound our hands and feet he went off with the golden articles and jewels."
The steward replied, "What you say is all right. At daybreak we will go to the local magistrate and report the matter as you say. We can leave the two servants at the *yamen* to guide the officials here and assist in arresting the bandits. The following night we can start for the Northern Capital where we can report the matter, and get a dispatch sent to the Prime Minister so that he can give orders for the arrest of the bandits." The following morning steward Xie led the men to the local magistrate at Jizhou Prefecture to report the matter but we need not go into the detail.
As he left the Huangni Ridge Yang Zhi was in a very melancholy spirit. He travelled during half the night in a southerly direction, and then lay down in a forest to rest. He asked himself, "I have no money to cover the traveling expenses and I cannot meet anyone on this road whom I know so what shall I do?" As soon as it was dawn he however took the advantage of the cool breeze and started. He felt quite miserable, after walking about seven *li*. Upon coming to an inn he thought, "If I don't get some wine here I shall soon be unable to proceed any further." Entering the inn he sat down on a stool which was made of, as same as the table, the wood of the mulberry tree. He placed his halberd leaning against the stool by his side. In the kitchen he saw a woman who asked him, "Do you want to dine, sir?"
"Bring me a small horn cup of wine," said Yang Zhi. "Also boil a little rice for me, and serve it with some meat. When I have dined I will pay you." The woman called a youth who poured out the wine and took it to Yang Zhi. She duly prepared the rice and meat and it was also brought in. When he had finished his meal he picked up his halberd, and was walking towards the door when the woman called out, "You have not yet paid me for the food and drink."
"Place it to my account, and I will pay you when I come back," said Yang Zhi. So saying he walked off.
The youth who had served the wine ran after him, and took hold of his clothes but Yang Zhi knocked the youth down by a blow of his fist. The woman seeing this cried out for help. Yang Zhi paid no attention to this, and went on his way. He heard a man behind him calling out, "Where are you going to?" Turning his head he saw that the man was only half dressed, and was running after him trailing a cudgel. He thought the man was unwise in attacking him as he could easily kill him. He stood still, awaiting the attack, and saw that the youth had got a pitchfork, and was also running towards him. There were also three farm labourers armed with cudgels who were also hastening forward. Yang Zhi thought, "If I knock this first man down the others probably will not dare to come any further." So he held his halberd in front of him ready to strike the man. The man came up whirling his cudgel, and then both men fought for about twenty bouts; but the man did not overcome Yang Zhi. He was only able to parry and dodge Yang Zhi's blows. The youth and the farm labourers were on the point of rushing upon Yang Zhi when that half-dressed man suddenly sprang back clear of Yang Zhi's halberd, and said, "No more fighting! What is the name of this man with the halberd?"
"Whether I am traveling or staying at home I do not change my name," said Yang Zhi, "I am Yang Zhi, the 'Blue Faced Brute.'"
"Are you not the Yang Zhi who looked after the Emperor's pavilion at Eastern Capital?" asked the man.
"How do you know that I am that officer?" said Yang Zhi.
The man threw his cudgel away, saluted with folded hands, and said, "I did not recognize Mount Tai."
Yang Zhi raised him up, and asked, "Who are you?"
The man said, "I previously lived at Kaifeng. I was a pupil of Drill Inspector Lin Chong of the Imperial Guard. I am Cao Zheng, and my father and also my grandfather were butchers. I was very skilled in drawing the sinews, breaking the bones, and scraping the skins. And because of this people gave me the nickname 'Demon Carver.' A wealthy man at Kaifeng gave me five thousand strings of cash to trade with in Shandong but I was unfortunate and lost all the money so that I dare not go back. Instead I married the daughter of a farmer near here, and live in their home. The woman whom you saw in the kitchen is my wife, and the man with the pitchfork is my brother-in-law. I saw that your skill with the halberd was almost equal to that of my instructor Lin Chong, and that I had no chance of defeating you."
"You say you were the pupil of Drill Instructor Lin Chong," said Yang Zhi. "You will therefore know that Marshal Gao Qiu, the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, insulted the wife of Lin Chong, and that was why the latter became a brigand. He is now at Liangshan Marsh."
"I have heard people say so," said Cao Zheng, "but I have no means of knowing whether it is true or not. Will you please come to my home and rest a while there?"
The two men then went back to the inn, and Cao Zheng asked Yang Zhi to be seated. He also asked his wife and his brother-in-law to salute Yang Zhi. They then dined together. During the meal Cao Zheng asked Yang Zhi what business had brought him to that place. Yang Zhi told him all about the matter of losing the convoy of marble, and how he had now also lost all the birthday gifts of the Grand Secretary Liang.
"In that case," said Cao Zheng, "I trust that you will stay at my house, and we can talk matters over."
"It is very kind of you to make such an offer," said Yang Zhi. "But I cannot stay here as I am afraid that the police will come to search and arrest me."
"Then where are you thinking of seeking refuge?" asked Cao Zheng.
"I am thinking of going to Liangshan Marsh to find Drill Instructor Lin Chong," said Yang Zhi. "Sometime before when I was passing near Liangshan Marsh I had a fight with him but Wang Lun saw that we were both experts at arms, and took us both up the hill to his stronghold where Lin Chong and I became friends. Wang Lun tried very hard to get me to stay at Liangshan Marsh but I had no desire to become a bandit. Now, if I go to seek refuge there for fear of being branded as a criminal it would be too unmanly, so I have not yet decided whether to do that or not."
"What you say is quite true," said Cao Zheng. "I have also heard that Wang Lun is jealous of other men and that when Drill Instructor Lin Chong went there he suffered much at his hand. But would it not be better to go to the Baozhu Monastery on the Lianglong Mountain in Qingzhou which is not far from here. The place is a natural stronghold, and there is only one road to it. Just now the Abbot, and also a number of monks have given up their vows, and have allowed their hair to grow again. They say he has now about four or five hundred men who loot in the surrounding villages. His name is Deng Long, and his nickname is 'Golden Eyed Tiger.' If you are thinking of becoming a bandit you had better go and join that gang, and enjoy your life."
"As there is such a place," said Yang Zhi, "why should I not go there, and capture it for the benefit of myself."
So he stayed with Cao Zheng for the night, and next morning set out for the Lianglong Mountain. Towards the evening of the following day he saw a high mountain in the distance so he decided to rest for the night in the forest, and proceed on his way the next day. Upon entering the forest to find a safe place to sleep he was surprised to see there at the foot of a pine tree a very fat monk who had stripped off all his clothes to enjoy the cool. He saw some tattoo marks on his bare back. When the monk saw Yang Zhi he jumped up, seized his monk's staff, and shouted out, "You prick! Where are you from?"
Yang Zhi recognized his voice, and thought that the monk came from the same village as himself. So he said, "Where are you from?" But instead of replying, the monk raised his staff to strike Yang Zhi.
"This bald-headed donkey is not polite," said Yang Zhi; "I will revenge my wrong on him." So saying he ran forward with his halberd towards the monk. The two men fought maneuvering backwards and forwards but after about fifty bouts neither of them had gained any advantage. The monk saw a fault on his opponent's part so he jumped aside clear of his halberd, and shouted out, "Let us have a rest."
Yang Zhi appreciated the monk's skill very much, and asked himself, "Where does this monk come from? He is certainly very skillful with his staff, and we are just well matched."
"Who are you," asked the monk, "with such a blue face?"
"I am Yang Zhi who looked after the Emperor's hall at the Eastern Capital," replied Yang Zhi.
"Are you the man who tried to sell a sword at the Eastern Capital, and killed a man named Niu Er?" asked the monk.
"Do you not see the brand on my face?" asked Yang Zhi.
"So now we meet here for the first time," said the monk laughingly.
"May I venture to ask who you are," said Yang Zhi, "and how did you know that I once wanted to sell a sword?"
"I am no other," said the monk, "than Major Lu Da, of the headquarters of Old General Zhong at Yanan Prefecture. Because I killed a man nicknamed 'The Bully of the Western Pass' I sought refuge at Mount Wutai where I became a monk. I have a tattoo on my back, and therefore people call me 'The Tattooed Monk.'"
Yang Zhi laughed and said, "We are evidently from the same village. I have heard of your fame everywhere. I did hear also that you were a monk at the Great Xiangguo Monastery so what are you doing here?"
Lu Da said, "That would entail a long explanation. While I was in charge of the vegetable garden of the Great Xiangguo Monastery I met Lin Chong, 'Leopard's Head,' whose life was in danger through the hatred of the Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guards. I saw his danger on the way to Cangzhou so I rescued him. The two constables who were escorting Lin Chong, returned and reported to Gao Qiu that I had rescued Lin Chong from them in the Yezhu Forest, and then escorted him to Cangzhou so that they had no opportunity of killing him as Gao Qiu ordered. That bastard was so angry that he wanted to kill me. He informed the Abbot at the monastery that he must not allow me to stay there. He also sent men to arrest me but some ruffians came and informed me of that fact, so I could escape being arrested. So to give them a wrong impression I burned down the hut where I lived at the vegetable garden, and then ran away but in whatever direction I went I never felt safe. I arrived at last at Shizipo in Mengzhou where I was almost killed by a woman of an inn who gave me some drugged wine so that I became unconscious. But her husband just then arriving was very much surprised at seeing my heavy monk's staff and knife, and he therefore gave me another drug which quickly brought me to my senses again. After he had ascertained my name he asked me to stay there a few days, and adopted me as his brother. The man and his wife were well known to the bandits as "'Market Gardener" Zhang Qing' and his wife, Sun Er Niang, nicknamed 'Night Witch.' They are very generous. After staying there for four days I heard that the Baozhu Monastery on the Lianglong Mountain was a safe place to establish oneself so I decided to go there and join the bandits under Deng Long. But that man was unwilling to let me join them on the mountain, and attacked me before I got there but as he failed to defeat me he retreated to the stronghold, and barred the three doors against me. As there was only one way up the mountain, and they would not come out again to fight with me in spite of my cursing them, and as I had no other prospect, I came to this forest, and did not expect to meet you here."
Yang Zhi was much pleased at hearing this, and after saluting each other the two men sat down on the ground. Then Yang Zhi gave his new friend all the details of selling of the sword which resulted in the death of Niu Er; also how he had lost all the birthday presents from Grand Secretary Liang; and how Cao Zheng had advised him to come to that place. He then asked, "As the bandits at the Lianglong Mountain have barred the gates in the defile how would it be if we had a ruse to bring them here? Let us go to Cao Zheng's home and discuss the matter there."
They immediately left the forest, and soon reached Cao Zheng's inn. Yang Zhi duly introduced Lu Da and Cao Zheng quickly brought them wine and food. They then discussed the position at the Lianglong Mountain, and Cao Zheng said, "As they have definitely barred the gates, not only you two but even ten thousand cavalry could not get to the top of the mountain. As it would be useless to use force to get them to open the gates we must think of some other plan."
Lu Da said, "That prick! When I went there he met me outside the gate, and as he did not allow me to stay there we fought, and I gave Deng Long a kick in the crotch and knocked him down. But a great many of his men rescued him, and retreated up the stronghold barring those beastly gates. I cursed them but they would not come outside again to resume the fighting."
"Since it is a delectable place," said Yang Zhi, "how can we afford not to attack by strategy?"
"We cannot get there," said Lu Da, "and that makes his position intact."
"I have a plan," said Cao Zheng, "but I do not know whether you two gentlemen would approve of it."
"Let us hear your plan," said Yang Zhi.
"You cannot do in those clothes," said Cao Zheng, "and you will have to dress in the same clothes as our farm labourers. I will take the monk staff and broadsword and go with my brother-in-law and a number of other men to the mountain. We take Lu Da with us as a prisoner, bound with ropes but tied in such a way that I can release him with a single pull on the rope. Upon arriving there I shout out: "I am an innkeeper at a village near here. This monk came to my inn, and drank so much wine that he became drunk. He would not pay me but instead said that he was going to take some men to fight you in your mountain stronghold. Upon hearing this I had him bound while he was still drunk, and have brought him here to present to the bandit chief. Upon hearing this Deng Long will at once allow us to go up the mountain. Upon arriving at the stronghold, and meeting Deng Long I will pull the rope, and release Lu Da and hand him his monk's staff. Then you two can rush forward, and Deng Long will not be able to run away. If we succeed in killing Deng Long his followers will submit to us without any further trouble. What do you think of that scheme?"
Lu Da and Yang Zhi both said that the scheme was excellent.
That evening all the men dined, and prepared the food to take with them the next day. The following morning they were up at five o'clock, and ate a hearty breakfast. Lu Da's things were packed up, and stored away. Lu Da, Yang Zhi, Cao Zheng and his brother-in-law, and about seven farm labourers departed on the road to the Lianglong Mountain.
In the afternoon they stopped in a forest, and stripped the clothes off Lu Da, then bound him with ropes, and handed him over to two labourers to lead him. Yang Zhi wore a straw hat, a cloth shirt, and carried a halberd in his hand. Cao Zheng carried the monk's staff. The other men had cudgels, and they formed an escort round Lu Da both in front and behind. Upon coming in view of the gates at the foot of the defile they noticed crossbows, bows, bottles of lime powder, and supplies of stone balls were stacked ready for defence. As soon as the brigands on guard at the gate saw that the monk had arrived as a prisoner they flew up the mountain to report the matter. In a short time two junior minions came to the gate, and asked, "Where do you come from, and what do you come here for? Why have you brought that monk here?"
Cao Zheng replied, "We come from a small village in the vicinity of this mountain, and I have an inn at that place. This fat monk often came to my inn to drink wine. One time he got drunk, and would not pay for the wine. He said that he would go to Liangshan Marsh, and get many hundreds of men to come here with him to attack your stronghold. He would also lay waste all the villages about here. So we made him still more drunk by giving him plenty of wine, and then tied him up with ropes to bring him here as a prisoner for your chief. We think this would prove our submission to you, and so save us from calamity in the future."
When the two junior minions heard this they were extremely happy, and said, "Good! But just wait a minute here." They then went up the mountain, and reported to Deng Long that the fat monk had been captured, and brought there as a prisoner.
Deng Long was also pleased at this and told them to bring the monk there. So he could have his heart and eat it with wine, and his feeling of resentment would thus be appeased. The brigands hearing these orders opened the gates, and told the men outside to enter. Yang Zhi and Cao Zheng closely guarding Lu Da advanced up the mountain, and as they passed up the narrow defile, and through the barriers they realized how impregnable the place was. The monastery itself was encircled by high mountains, and the peaks were unscalable. The narrow road led to the final barriers in front of the monastery. There were three stout barriers, and neatly arranged logs of wood for rolling down on the road, huge stones for discharging upon the enemy, crossbows, ordinary bows, and darts made of bamboo. After passing the three barriers they came to the Baozhu Monastery which had three large doors. In front was an open space as flat and smooth as a mirror, and around it were railings.
Standing near the gate in front of the monastery were seven or eight brigands who, upon seeing that Lu Da was bound, pointed at him with their fingers and cursed him, "You bald-headed donkey assaulted our chief and have now been arrested. You shall soon be chopped into small pieces."
Lu Da did not reply to this. Upon entering the monastery they saw that there was no idol of Buddha but in the centre of the hall there was a large chair covered with a tiger's skin. Many bandits there had spears and cudgels and stood in ranks on both sides. In a little time Deng Long entered assisted by two bandits, and took his seat on the chair. Cao Zheng and Yang Zhi were close to Lu Da, and led him to the steps below the chair.
"You bald-headed donkey!" said Deng Long, "a few days ago you kicked me in the crotch, and it is still swollen and black and blue. Today you see me face to face."
Lu Da opened his eyes wide and staring shouted, "You prick! You need not go!"
Two labourers seized the rope, and pulling it released Lu Da who taking the monk's staff from Cao Zheng whirled it round. Yang Zhi threw off his straw hat, and seized his halberd. Cao Zheng whirled his cudgel and his labourers all came forward with their cudgels. Deng Long was endeavoring to escape when Lu Da struck him with his staff, and split his skull into two parts, and the same blow shattered the chair. Yang Zhi had attacked about five of the bandits with his sword when Cao Zheng called out, "All of you must surrender. Otherwise we shall wipe you all out." The five hundred bandits outside the monastery were so surprised at what had happened that they immediately surrendered.
They then ordered the bandits to take the body of Deng Long and burn it on the mountain at the back of the monastery. Yang Zhi and Lu Da then went to the granary and took stock of the grain there, put other rooms in order, and took particulars of the things that were stored behind the temple. They then took food and wine for them to eat in the temple. As Lu Da and Yang Zhi were now masters of the stronghold they had a big feast with plenty of wine. All the bandits were submitted to the changed position of affairs and still controlled by their officers. Cao Zheng bid adieu to Yang Zhi and Lu Da and returned to his homestead but we need not say anything more about him.
The men who had formed the escort for the birthday presents and also Xie, the steward, went on their way to the Northern Capital, and upon arrival there they went to the *yamen* of Grand Secretary Liang, and there prostrating themselves asked to be excused for their crime.
Grand Secretary Liang said, "I appreciate fully the difficulties you must have had on the road. But where is Yang Zhi?"
"That we dare not say," said the men. "That man is a bold ungrateful thief. When we had gone about seven days from here, we reached the Huangni Ridge where we rested in the shade of some pine trees as it was a very hot day. We did not know that Yang Zhi had an understanding with a band of seven thieves. They pretended to be traders of dates, and were pushing seven small Jiangzhou–made handcarts. They had apparently arranged to meet us at that place, and were waiting for us there. Yang Zhi had also arranged for a man to carry some wine to arrive there at the same time. Without thinking we bought the wine but it had been drugged so that we were soon insensible and were all bound up with ropes. Yang Zhi joined with the seven bandits in loading the birthday presents on the small carts, and then went off with them. We reported the matter to the magistrate at Jizhou Prefecture where we left two of our servants to assist in arresting the bandits. We have travelled both day and night to reach here, and report this to Your Honour."
Upon hearing this Liang was very much surprised and cursed; saying, "That banished thief! He was a convicted criminal. I promoted him, gave him a position, and now I find that he has forgotten all my generosity. If I can only catch him I will kill him, and cut him up into ten thousand small pieces." He then dictated a dispatch to his secretary, and sent a man with it to Jizhou Prefecture with instructions to travel day and night until delivered. He also wrote a personal letter to Prime Minister Cai at the Eastern Capital, explaining what had happened.
We need not say anything about the dispatch sent to Jizhou Prefecture but we will now follow the personal letter for the Prime Minister. When Prime Minister Cai received the letter, and read it he was very much surprised and said, "These bandits are quite fearless. Last year they seized presents from my son-in-law, and so far they have not been arrested. This year the same thing has happened again, so what will be the end of it?" He wrote a dispatch, and told an officer in his *yamen* to take it himself with all speed to the Prefect of Jizhou who must immediately have the bandits arrested, and report to him at once.
After receipt of the order from Grand Secretary Liang at the Northern Capital the Prefect at Jizhou attended to the matter everyday without succeeding in arresting the bandits, and was becoming very anxious. One day the doorkeeper reported that an officer from Prime Minister Cai at Eastern Capital had arrived with a very urgent dispatch, and was waiting outside the hall to see the Prefect.
The Prefect was surprised at this but thought that it must have something to do with the matter of the birthday presents also. He went into the hall and when he met the officer he said, "I have already received an accusation against the bandits from the servants of the Grand Secretary Liang, and have sent men to arrest the bandits but so far we have not been able to find any trace of them. I also received a personal dispatch from Liang instructing me to give the police and the Inspector only a few days in which to arrest the brigands, and if they did not secceed in that time they were to be beaten. If we get only information as to the whereabouts of these brigands I will go myself and report the matter to your master."
"I am the intimate servant of the Prime Minister," said the officer. "He told me his intentions, and sent me specially to see that all the bandits were arrested. Just before I left the Eastern Capital the Prime Minister spoke to me and said that he wanted me to stay in your *yamen* until this matter was settled. He wants you to arrest the seven traders of dates, the wine seller, and also Yang Zhi who disappeared. They must all be arrested within ten days, and be sent to the Eastern Capital. If you do not succeed in arresting the men within that time I am afraid that he will banish you to Shamen Island. It will be very dangerous even for me to return and report a failure to the Prime Minister. If you doubt my word then please peruse the dispatch from the Prime Minister which I have brought."
The Prefect read the dispatch, and was much surprised. He at once summoned a number of police. Just then a man standing on the steps outside the door attracted attention by calling out "*nud*" and the Prefect turning to him said, "Who are you?"
The man replied, "I am He Tao, Police Inspector in the Third Police Area."
The Prefect asked, "Are you the man in charge of the affairs regarding the stealing of the birthday presents at the Huangni Ridge?"

He Tao replied, "Your Excellency, I had charge of the party that went to attend to that matter, and I have not had a wink of sleep since I started, and have kept the men under constant supervision. Although I beat the men with my stick continually we have not found a single trace of the bandits so far. There has been no neglect on my part, and yet I can find no plan to settle the matter."
The Prefect spoke in a loud voice, "Nonsense! As the ancients said, 'You have not been sharp enough, and your men have been too slow.' I passed my Imperial Examinations, and rose to my present position after many difficulties. Today an officer has arrived from the Prime Minister at the Eastern Capital with a dispatch which states that all the bandits must be arrested within ten days, and sent to the Eastern Capital. Should I fail to execute this order I shall be dismissed from office, and banished to Shamen Island. Although you are an Inspector yet apparently you are of no use, and will bring a great calamity to me. I shall, however, first send you to a very distant military post, so far away that even the wild geese cannot fly there." He then summoned a man, and told him to brand on the Inspector's face the three characters: "Banished to... Prefecture" leaving a blank space for the destination to be branded in afterwards. This done the Prefect said, "He Tao! If you do not arrest those bandits I will never forgive you."
He Tao after hearing this withdrew to his office where he summoned a large number of policemen to have a secret discussion of this matter.
He Tao said, "In your positions you get your wages whether you have anything to do or not but although you have not arrested the bandits you have not said anything about it. But you will surely have pity for me with these characters branded on my face."
The men replied, "Sir, we are not as senseless as wood or grass and we do know about your difficulty. We think that the bandits must have come from a remote and wild place in the hills in another district. When they seized the valuable presents they must have returned to their mountain stronghold in good spirits so how can we find them? Even if we know where they have gone to we shall still be quite helpless."
When He Tao heard them say this his sorrow for himself was doubled. Without saying anything he left the room, mounted a horse and started off for home. Upon arrival at home he led the horse to a trough at the back of the house, and tied it up there. He was by himself, and felt very melancholy.
Upon entering the house his wife asked him, "Husband, how is it your face is like that?"
"A few days ago," said He Tao, "the Prefect gave me an order to arrest some bandits who had stolen, at the Huangni Ridge, the valuable birthday presents that had been sent by Grand Secretary Liang to Prime Minister Cai. I took the order but so far I have failed to arrest the bandits. Today I was going to ask for a renewal of the time limit for the arrest of those men, and I did not know that an officer had arrived from the Eastern Capital with an order that the bandits must be sent there without delay. The Prefect asked me what news I had about the bandits, and I replied that I could get no news of them, and so far they had not been arrested. Thereupon the Prefect gave orders and had these three characters branded upon my face leaving a space for the place of my banishment to be filled in later on. I did not know what my fate will be."
His wife asked, "Well, and how will you put this matter right?"
Just then his younger brother He Qing entered, and He Tao said to him, "What are you doing here? Why have you not gone gambling?"
Madame He Tao signaled to He Qing with her hand and said to him, "Brother-in-law, just come into the kitchen, as I have something to say to you." They both then went into the kitchen where He Qing sat down.
The woman spread on the table some meat, vegetables, and wine, warmed a cup of wine, and then asked He Qing to dine.
He Qing said, "My elder brother was very insulting to me. I am his younger brother, although I am not very able."
The woman said, "You do not understand but your brother is exceedingly upset just now."
"But my brother has a good income everyday," said He Qing, "so where has the money gone to? I have not troubled him with visits so why is he so upset today?"
The woman said, "Some traders of dates at the Huangni Ridge stole the birthday presents sent by Grand Secretary Liang at the Northern Capital to Prime Minister Cai at the Eastern Capital. An order came from the Eastern Capital that if the bandits were not arrested within ten days the officer should be branded and banished to a distant military post. Did you not notice the three characters branded on your elder brother's face? Sooner or later he would suffer more if those men were not arrested, and is therefore disinclined to drink with you. So I have prepared some food and wine for yourself. While he is in this melancholy mood you must excuse him."
"I have heard at several places," said He Qing, "that some bandits captured the birthday presents. But where did it happen?"
"I heard that it occurred at the Huangni Ridge."
"But who could have done it?"
The woman replied, "Brother, you are not yet drunk. I have already told you that the men who captured the valuables were seven traders of dates."
He Qing burst into a roar of laughter, and said, "So that is it. But if he knows that there were date traders why is he so melancholy? Why does he not send some clever men to arrest them?"
"What you say is all right," said the woman, "but he cannot find out where they have gone to."
He Qing laughed again and said, "Sister-in-law, you need not be anxious. But you know that my elder brother was always asking men to come and dine with him whom he called his 'younger brothers' but he never invited me, his real younger brother, to join them. If he had previously invited me to dine with him we could this day have discussed the matter of these bandits."
"Brother-in-law, do you know where the bandits are?"
"I might have some plan of saving him from it," said He Qing, "when my brother is in a critical position." He then got up with the idea of leaving the room but his sister-in-law detained him to drink two more cups of wine. When she heard these statements made she thought they were somewhat strange, so she immediately went to her husband, and told him what she had heard. Her husband told her to bring He Qing in, and when He Tao saw him he smiled and said to him, "Younger brother, if you know where the bandits have gone to why do you not help me?"
"I do not know that," said He Qing. "I only spoke to your wife in a joking manner. But how can I help you?"
"Good brother," said He Tao, "do not look upon this matter with indifference. Just think of my goodness instead of my fault, and so save my life."
"Elder brother," said He Qing, "have you not some very smart men among the two or three hundred you employ, and why cannot they help you in this matter? I am only a single individual so how can I help you?"
"You need not talk about those men," said He Tao. "I think that you know something of the haunts of the bandits so I hope that you will not tell any other man about it and so help him to capture the bandits. If you give me the information I will see that you are duly rewarded. You will in this way also relieve my mind."
"Elder brother," said He Qing, "I really do not know where they have gone to."
"You may pay no attention to me," said He Tao, "but we are real brothers and you must tell me what you know for the sake of our parents."
"Do not be in such a hurry," said He Qing. "When matters are more urgent I will try and help you to arrest those small bandits."
"Brother," said the woman, "you should display your brotherly love by helping your elder brother. The Prime Minister has issued an order for the immediate arrest of all these men. It is a very big affair, and yet you speak of 'small bandits.'"
"Sister-in-law," said He Qing, "you are aware how many times my elder brother has beaten and cursed me for gambling so that I am afraid of him, and do not dare to dispute with him. Previously he had wine and food, and had a good time with other men but now he realizes that his younger brother is of some use."
He Tao saw that his brother knew something more so he quickly took ten taels of silver and placed them on the table and then told his brother to take them. "If we capture the brigands I myself will give you a reward of gold, silver, and silk."
He Qing laughed and said, "There is a saying, 'When there is urgent business we clasp the feet of Buddha but when nothing happens we do not even burn incense.' But if I now take the silver it would seem that I have been trying to extort it from you. So take the money away as I do not like you to bribe me. If you say anything else about giving me money I will not say anything. As you both have spoken kindly, I will tell you about the bandits."
"The money is the reward offered by the *yamen*," said He Tao, "so why should you not take it? Younger brother, do not refuse it." I ask you again, 'Do you know where those bandits have gone to?'"
Patting his leg, He Qing said, "I have all those bandits in my pocket."
He Tao was surprised, and asked, "Younger brother, how can you talk about putting all those bandits in your pocket?"
"That's my business," said He Qing. "I've already got them all inside. Now take away that money and do not try to bribe me again. I want us to be the best of friends." He then told them in detail all that he knew.

At Yuncheng County heroes distribute wealth,
At Liangshan Marsh assemble many veterans.

## 018

**Song Jiang Gongming Secretly Helps & Enables Ward Chief Chao Flee by riding to give his friend a warning; Beautiful Beard Handsome Whiskers Zhu Tong Devises a Scheme to Secure the Flying Tiger & Cleverly Fools the Winged Tiger & confuses everyone till morning**

Inspector Ho continued to urge his younger brother to tell what he knew. From a document case at his waist Ho Qing extracted a notebook.
"All the robbers are written down right here!"
"How can that be?"
"To tell the truth, a few days ago I lost again at gambling. I was clean, without a copper. A gambling pal of mine took me to a village called Anle, fifteen //outside the North Gate, and I put up at the Wang Family Inn, where I was able to raise a bit of change for the gaming tables. The authorities have issued an order that all inns must keep a register, with proper seals, and that an entry must be made for every guest, stating his name, place of origin, destination, and line of business, and that it must be shown to the local ward chief on demand, once a month. The attendant at the Wang Family Inn is illiterate, and he begged me to keep the register for him for a couple of weeks.
"On the third day of the sixth month, seven date merchants arrived pushing seven carts. I recognized one of them as Ward Chief Chao of East Bank in Yuncheng County, because I once stayed at his manor with a gambling friend. I took up my brush-pen and asked: 'What is your name, please?' Before he could speak, a fair-faced man with a mustache and goatee quickly answered for him: 'We're all of us named Li. We're from Haozhou Prefecture, and are on our way with dates for the Eastern Capital.'
"Though I was sceptical, I wrote it down. The next day, they left. My host offered to take me gambling in a place in the village. On the way, at a fork in the road, we met a fellow carrying buckets on a shoulder-pole. I didn't know him but the innkeeper hailed him: 'Where are you going, Master Bai?' 'To a rich man's house in the village. I'm bringing him this load of vinegar,' the man replied. The innkeeper said to me: 'This is Bai Sheng, known as the Daylight Rat. He's also fond of gambling.' I made a mental note of it. Later, when I heard gossip that date merchants had drugged some travellers on Yellow Earth Ridge and stole the birthday gifts, I guessed at once that Ward Chief Chao was involved. Arrest Bai and question him, and you'll get the whole story. Here is my copy of the register."
Ho Tao was delighted. He led his brother in to see the prefect.
"Any developments on that case?" asked the official.
"Some," replied Ho Tao.
The prefect called them into his rear chambers and questioned them carefully. Ho Qing responded in detail. The prefect directed eight policemen to go with the brothers that same night to Anle Village. They compelled the innkeeper to take them to Bai Sheng, and reached the wine seller's house at the third watch. The innkeeper, at their insistence, called Bai Sheng to open the door and strike a light. Bai's wife led them in. They heard Bai Sheng groaning on the bed. The wife said he had a fever but had not been able to sweat. They hauled him from the bed and tied him up. His face was blotched red and white.
"That's a fine thing you did on Yellow Earth Ridge!" they yelled.
Bai Sheng denied everything. They bound his wife but she also refused to talk. The policemen searched the house. They noticed that the earthen floor beneath the bed was uneven, and started to dig. At a depth of three feet, one of them uttered a cry. Bai Sheng's face turned the colour of clay. From the hole in the ground, the diggers extracted a bag of gold and silver.
The police concealed Bai Sheng's head and face in a hood, and took him and his wife and the loot back to Jizhou. It was the fifth watch and the sky was already light when they reached the prefectural office. They brought him before the prefect, tied the ropes around him more securely, and asked him who the brains was behind the robbery. Bai Sheng denied any connection, and refused to name his confederates. They beat him three or four times, till his skin split and blood was pouring from his wounds.
"We already know that the chief culprit is Ward Chief Chao of East Bank, Yuncheng County," shouted the prefect. "There's no use denying it. Name the other six and I'll stop the beating."
Bai Sheng tried to hold out. But soon he couldn't take it any longer. "The leader is Ward Chief Chao," he admitted. "He came with six men and inveigled me into carrying the wine! But I really don't know who the other six are!"
"That's no problem," said the prefect. "All we have to do is take Ward Chief Chao, and we'll find the rest quickly enough."
A twenty-catty cangue for condemned criminals was locked around Bai Sheng's neck. His wife, also fettered, was sent to the women's prison. The prefect then issued an order directing Ho Tao to proceed at once with twenty crack policemen to Yuncheng County and request the magistrate to aid in arresting Ward Chief Chao and his six un-named fellow conspirators. Inspector Ho was told to take along the two captains who had accompanied the birthday gift convoy to identify the culprits. But, warned the prefect, he was to proceed quietly and not let news of the raid leak out.
The inspector and his men travelled all night to Yuncheng. First Ho Tao secretly put up his party at an inn. Then, with two of his policemen and the prefect's order, he presented himself at the gate of the magistrate's compound.
By then it was late morning. and court was in recess. All was still. Ho Tao went into a tea-house across the street and sat down to wait. As he was sipping some steeped tea he had ordered he asked the waiter: "Why is it so quiet outside the magistracy?"
"The morning session is over. The attendants and litigants have all gone off to eat. They haven't come back yet."
"Do you happen to know which clerk is on duty today?"
"Here he comes, now," said the waiter, pointing.
Ho Tao looked. Emerging from the magistracy was a man whose family name was Song. His formal given name was Jiang, his popular given name was Kongming. A third son, he was born in the county's Song Family Village. Because he was short and swarthy, everyone called him Dark Song Jiang. And since he was filial to his parents, and was a chivalrous man, generous to friends, he was also known as the Filial and Gallant Dark Third Master. Above him, his father was still alive, though his mother had died early. Below him was a younger brother Song Qing, known as the Iron Fan who, with their father, the Venerable Song, ran the farm in the village and lived on the fruits of their fields.
Song Jiang was a clerk of the county magistrate's court in Yuncheng. He wrote legibly and well, and was familiar with administrative procedures. Especially fond of playing with weapons, he was adept at many forms of fighting. He made friends only in the gallant fraternity but he helped anyone, high or low, who sought his aid, providing his guest with food and lodging in the family manor, tirelessly keeping him company, and giving him travelling expenses when he wanted to leave. Song Jiang scattered gold about like dust! He never refused a request for money. He was always making things easy for people, solving their difficulties, settling differences, saving lives. He provided the indigent with funds for coffins and medicines, gave charity to the poor, assisted in emergencies, helped in cases of hardship.
And so he was famed throughout the provinces of Shandong and Hebei, and was known to all as the Timely Rain, for like the rain from the heavens he brought succor to every living thing.
As Song Jiang walked from the magistracy with an attendant, Inspector Ho crossed the street to meet him.
"Won't you join me for some tea, sir Clerk?"
Song Jiang could tell from his appearance that Ho Tao was in the police.
"Where are you from, brother?" he queried courteously.
"If I may have the pleasure of your company in the tea-house we can talk there."
"As you wish, sir."
The two men entered the tea-house and sat down. Song Jiang told the attendant to wait outside. Then he turned to the inspector.
"May I presume to ask brother's name?"
"I am Ho Tao, a mere police inspector of Jizhou Prefecture. May I dare ask your name, sir Clerk?"
"Forgive me for not having recognized you, Inspector. I'm a small official called Song Jiang."
Ho Tao fell to his knees and kowtowed. "I have long known your fame but never had the honour of meeting you."
"You overwhelm me. Please sit at the head of the table."
"An insignificant person like me—I wouldn't dream of it!
"As a member of our superior organization and a guest from afar, you must, Inspector."
They argued politely for a few moments. Then Song Jiang took the host's seat and Ho Tao the guest's.
"Waiter," called the clerk, "two cups of tea." The refreshments soon came and both men drank.
"What instructions from above do you bring to our humble county, Inspector?" asked Song Jiang.
"I'll speak frankly. It concerns several important people here."
"It couldn't be about a robbery?"
"I've brought a sealed order. I trust you will help me carry it out."
"How could I do otherwise with an emissary from our superiors? Which robbery does it involve?"
"You're the keeper of the official records, sir Clerk. There's no harm in telling you. On Yellow Earth Ridge that is under our prefect's jurisdiction, a band of eight robbers drugged fifteen men who were bringing birthday gifts from Governor Liang of Daming, the Northern Capital, to Premier Cai and made off with eleven loads of gold and jewels of an estimated value of a hundred thousand strings of cash. We've caught Bai Sheng, the accomplice. He says the other seven, the actual robbers, are all in this county. The Premier has sent an aide to our prefecture with orders to remain until we've caught them. We hope you'll give us every assistance."

"Of course we'll apprehend the criminals and turn them over. We'd do that on your orders, Inspector, to say nothing of orders from the Premier himself. Who are the seven named by Bai Sheng?"
"The leader is Ward Chief Chao of East Bank. To tell you the truth, we don't know the names of the other six. We beg your utmost diligence."
Song Jiang was shocked. He said to himself: "Chao Gai is one of my dearest friends! This crime he's committed is a capital offence! I must save him. If they capture him he's sure to die!"
Concealing his anxiety, Song Jiang said: "That dirty scoundrel. Everyone in the county hates him. So now he's come to this. We'll make him pay!"
"Please help us apprehend him."
"There won't be any difficulty. 'Easy as catching turtles in a jug. Just stretch out your hand,' as the old saying goes. But you'll have to present your order to the magistrate when the court is in session. He will read it and send men to make the arrest. I'm only a clerk. I couldn't assume responsibility for an important matter like this. What if word leaked out!"
"You're quite right. Please lead me in."
"The magistrate has been busy all morning and he's taking a short rest. If you'll wait a bit, court will be resumed soon. I'll call you."
"I hope you'll help us accomplish our mission, come what may."
"Naturally. That goes without saying. I must go home to attend to a few things. I'll be right back. Please sit and rest a while."
"Go ahead, sir Clerk. I'll wait here for you."
Song Jiang rose and left the booth. "If that gentleman wants any more tea, put it on my account," he said to the waiter. He hurried from the teahouse and told his attendant to remain outside the door. "When the magistrate resumes court, go into the tea-house and tell the officer I'll be back soon," he instructed. "Ask him to please wait a bit."
At his house, Song Jiang saddled his horse and led it out the rear gate. Quirt in hand, he mounted and walked the beast slowly from the county town. Once outside the East Gate, he struck the horse sharply twice with his quirt, and the animal scooted like a rabbit towards East Bank. In less than half a watch Song arrived at Chao Gai's manor. When a vassal saw who it was, he went in and reported.
Chao Gai was drinking wine with Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang beneath a grape arbour in the rear garden. The three Ruan brothers had received their share of the loot and returned to Stone Tablet Village. The vassal announced that Clerk Song was at the front gate.
"How many people with him?" asked Chao Gai.
"He's alone, and his horse is in a lather," replied the vassal. "He wants to see you at once."
"Something must be up." Chao Gai hastened out.
Song Jiang hailed the ward chief respectfully, grasped him by the hand and walked to a small building nearby.
"Why have you come in such a hurry, sir Clerk?"
"You know my devotion, brother. I'd lay down my life for you. They've broken the Yellow Earth Ridge case! Bai Sheng has been taken to the prison in Jizhou. He's confessed about you seven. The prefect has sent an Inspector Ho and several men, with orders both from himself and Premier Cai that all seven be apprehended, and naming you as the leader. Thank Heaven the matter fell into my hands! I put the inspector off by saying the magistrate was sleeping, and told him to wait for me in the teahouse opposite the court. Then I came galloping out here to warn you. 'Of all the thirty-six possible solutions, the best one is—leave.' Get out, quickly! Don't delay! I'm going back now to take the inspector and his documents into court. The magistrate will send men this very night. You mustn't delay. If anything goes wrong, I'll be helpless. Don't blame me if I can't save you!"
"Brother," said the startled Chao Gai. "I'll never be able to thank you enough."
"Save your breath. Just concentrate on getting away. Don't linger. I must go back."
"There are seven of us. The three Ruan brothers—Second, Fifth and Seventh—have returned to Stone Tablet Village with their share. The other three are here. You must meet them." Chao Gai led Song Jiang to the rear garden and introduced him.
"Wu Yong. Gaongsun Sheng, from Jizhou. Liu Tang, from Dounglu."
Song Jiang exchanged a few brief courtesies and turned to leave. "Look after yourself, brother," he urged the ward chief. "Get away quickly. I'm going now." He mounted his horse at the front gate, flailed his quirt, and flew back to the county town.
"Do you know who that was?" Chao Gai asked his three companions.
"What was he in such a hurry about?" countered Wu Yong. "Who is he?"
"This will surprise you but if he hadn't come all of us would be dead.
"Does that mean there's been a leak and our story's got out?" cried the three.
"That brother came to warn us, at the greatest risk to himself. Bai Sheng has been arrested. He's in Jizhou Prison, and he's named the seven of us! The prefect has sent an Inspector Ho and some men, together with a special order from the Premier, to request Yuncheng County to apprehend us immediately. Fortunately, my friend kept the inspector waiting in a tea-house while he rushed out here. When he gets back the magistrate will issue his orders and send men this very night to arrest us. What shall we do?"
"If he hadn't informed us, we'd all be in the net," said Wu Yong. "Who is our benefactor?"
"A clerk in the magistrate's court, Song Jiang, Defender of Chivalry."
"I've heard of him but we've never met, though we live not far apart."
The other two asked: "Isn't he the one known among chivalrous men as Song Jiang the Timely Rain?"
Chao Gai nodded. "That's the man. He and I are very close, we're sworn brothers. Teacher Wu hasn't met him but I can assure you he's worthy of his reputation. Since I became his blood brother I feel that my life hasn't been lived in vain!" To Wu Yong he said: "Our situation is critical. How can we solve it?"
"There's nothing to discuss. 'Of all the thirty-six possible solutions, the best one is—leave.' "
"That's what Clerk Song said. But where should we go?"
"I'm considering that. I'd say we should get together six or seven shoulder-pole loads of possessions and join the three Ruan brothers in Stone Tablet. First send a man on ahead quietly to let them know we're coming."
"But they're fishermen. How can they accommodate so many of us?"
"You're not thinking carefully, brother. Stone Tablet Village is only a few steps away from Liangshan Marsh. The citadel on the mountain top is thriving. When the officials and police go looking for robbers, they don't dare even glance in its direction. If the search for us gets too hot, we can always join the band."
"A very good idea. But what if they don't want us?"
"We've plenty of gold and silver. If we present them with some they'll accept us all right."
"Since we're all agreed, we'd better get started. Teacher Wu, you and Liu Tang take several vassals and a few loads and go first to the Ruan family and arrange everything. Have them meet us. We'll be coming by land. I and Gongsun will join you as soon as we've settled things here."
Wu Yong and Liu Tang made up the purloined birthday gifts of gold and jewels into half a dozen loads, and directed six vassals to eat a meal. Then, the teacher tucked his bronze chain into his sleeve, Liu Tang took up his halberd, and the group set out for Stone Tablet, shouldering the loads.
The ward chief and the Taoist priest began closing down the manor. They gave money to those vassals who didn't want to go along, and advised them to find other masters. Those who wished to go gathered their possessions and prepared their luggage. Of that we'll say no more.

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We'll speak rather of Song Jiang, who galloped back to town and hurried to the tea-house. Inspector Ho was standing outside the door, looking for him.
"Sorry to keep you waiting so long," said the clerk. "A relative from my village kept me tied up talking about family affairs."
"May I trouble you to take me in?"
"Please come this way."
The two men entered the magistracy, where Shi Wenbin was holding court. Song Jiang with the sealed papers in his hand, led Ho Tao to the magistrate's table, and instructed the attendants to put up a "Do Not Disturb" sign.
"Documents from Jizhou Prefecture," he told the magistrate, "brought by Inspector Ho because of the urgency of the robbers' case."
Shi opened the envelope and read the documents. He was shaken. "The Premier has dispatched an aide to wait in the prefecture!" he exclaimed to Song Jiang. "We must send men and catch the criminals!"
"If they go during the day, word is liable to get out. Night would be the best time. Once we take Chao Gai, we'll be able to bag the other six."
"Chao Gai is the ward chief of East Bank and has a very good reputation. I don't understand how he could have become involved in such a business!"
The magistrate summoned his sheriff and two constables. One was called Zhu Tong, and the other Lei Heng. Both were unusual men.
After receiving instructions from the magistrate in the rear chambers, they and the sheriff got on their horses, rode to the garrison and there picked over a hundred men, including ordinary soldiers and walking and mounted archers. When night fell, they all set out with Inspector Ho and the two captains who had originally accompanied the birthday gifts. Every man carried ropes and weapons. The sheriff rode his horse, as did the two constables. They wore swords, bows and arrows, and each held a halberd. Front and rear were platoons of mounted and walking archers. They left the town through the East Gate and proceeded rapidly towards East Bank and the home of Ward Chief Chao.
It was the first watch by the time they reached the village, and they assembled in the Guanyin Temple courtyard.
"Chao Gai's manor is just ahead," said Zhu Tong. "There are roads leading from both its front and rear gates. If we attack from the front, he'll leave by the rear. If we attack from the rear, he'll escape through the front. We must bear in mind that Chao Gai is a remarkable man. We don't know who those other six are but they're certainly not kindly gentlemen, and they're all desperate. If they decide to fight their way out, with their vassals helping, we'll never be able to stop them. Our only hope is to shout from one direction and attack from another, get them running around in confusion, then make our move.
"I propose that we divide our forces into two groups, with me taking one half and Constable Lei taking the other. I will go quietly with my men, on foot, to the rear gate, and lay an ambush. When you hear us whistle, Constable Lei, you and your group smash in through the front gate. Arrest every man you can lay your hands on."
"That sounds all right," said Lei. "Only, wouldn't it be better if you and the sheriff struck from the front gate while I cut off the rear?"
"You don't understand, brother. There are three possible escape routes from the manor. I've observed them often. I know every path. Even without torches, I could follow them in the dark. You're not familiar with all the places Chao Gai could twist in and out of. If he gets away it'll be no joke."
"You're right, Constable Zhu," said the sheriff. "Take half the men."
"I'll only need about thirty," said Zhu Tong. He picked ten archers and twenty soldiers and departed.
The sheriff again climbed into his saddle, and Lei Heng placed a protective cordon of mounted archers around him. The soldiers were ranged in front. In the light of thirty or so torches, with tined-spears and halberds and hooks, they advanced rapidly in a body towards the manor.
When only half a //away, suddenly they saw fire rising from the central building, spreading a thick pall of back smoke and spewing red flames into the sky. Another ten paces and they saw thirty or forty more blazes springing up everywhere around the front and rear gates.
Lei Heng waved his halberd, the soldiers behind him shouted, and they broke through the front gate in a body. Inside, the fires had turned the manor bright as day but the attackers didn't see a single person. Then, from the rear of the manor they heard yells and shouts, and cries of "Grab them!"
Actually, it had been Zhu Tong's intention from the start to let Chao Gai escape through the rear, and so he told Lei Heng to attack from the front. Lei Heng had the same idea. He too wanted to cover the rear gate and let Chao Gai flee. He had no choice when Zhu Tong insisted that he make a frontal assault but he only put on a show, creating a lot of noise and running about with the aim of hastening the ward chief's get-away.
By the time Zhu Tong arrived at the rear gate Chao Gai had not yet finished putting his affairs in order. Vassals hastened to report: "The soldiers have come! We must hurry!" Chao Gai ordered them to set fire to the manor. He and Gongsun the Taoist priest, at the head of a dozen or so vassals, brandishing their halberds, dashed through the rear gate. "Try to stop us and die, get out of our way and live!" they shouted.
"Halt, Ward Chief," Zhu Tong called from the shadows. "I've been waiting here for you a long time!"
Chao Gai paid no attention. He and Gongsun continued slashing furiously with their halberds. Pretending to dodge, Zhu Tong left a hole in the besiegers' line. The ward chief sent Gongsun and the vassals plunging through, and then followed, protecting their rear.
Zhu Tong pulled his foot archers from the manor's rear gate.
"There are robbers ahead, catch them!" he yelled. Lei Heng, hearing his shouts, came out of the front gate and also ordered his mounted and foot archers to give chase in various directions. He himself rushed about in the light of the fires, pretending to seek the fugitives.
Zhu Tong got away from his men and ran after Chao Gai, halberd in hand.
"Why are you chasing me, Constable Zhu?" the ward chief called over his shoulder. "I've done no wrong."
Zhu Tong saw there was no one behind him, and he dared to speak freely. "You don't know what I've done for you, Ward Chief. I was afraid Lei Heng would get muddled and not treat you right. So I fooled him into raiding your front gate, while I waited at the rear to ensure your escape. Didn't you see that big breach I just made for you? Liangshan Marsh is your only safe refuge. Don't try any other place."
"I'm deeply grateful to you for rescuing us. Some day I'll repay you."
Behind them came the sound of Lei Heng shouting: "Don't let them get away!"
"There's nothing to be alarmed about," Zhu Tong said to the ward chief. "Keep going. I'll draw them off." He called back. "Three robbers are heading for the east path! After them, Constable Lei!"
Lei Heng and his men hurried east, followed by the soldiers. Zhu Tong continued talking with Chao Gai while feigning to pursue him. The fact is he was protecting the ward chief and seeing him on his way. Chao Gai finally vanished into the night. Zhu Tong pretended to trip. He fell heavily to the ground. The soldiers caught up and raised him to his feet.
"I couldn't see the path in the darkness. I ran off into the fields by mistake," said Zhu Tong. "I slipped and fell. My right ankle is sprained."
"The main culprit got away," said the sheriff. "A pretty kettle of fish!"
"It isn't that I didn't try but there isn't much I can do in the dark of the moon," said Zhu Tong. "Most of these soldiers are useless. They're afraid to go after the robbers."
The sheriff ordered the soldiers to continue the chase. But the soldiers thought: "Those two constables weren't any use themselves. If they couldn't get close, what good can we do?" They made a desultory show of pursuit, then came back and reported: "In this darkness we can't find which path they've taken."
Lei Heng also returned after running a while. "Zhu Tong and Chao Gai are close friends," he said to himself. "He's probably let him escape. I have no reason to harm him. I also wanted to let him go. Well, now he's gone before I could prove my good intentions."
"We hadn't a chance of catching them," he said to the sheriff. "Those robbers are fantastic!"
It was already the fourth watch by the time the sheriff and the two constables reached the front of the manor. Inspector Ho observed the soldiers straggling in. After hunting all night they hadn't nabbed a single robber.
He groaned. "What am I going to tell the Jizhou prefect?"
All the sheriff could do was to seize a few of the ward chief's neighbours and take them back to Yuncheng County.
The magistrate hadn't slept all night, waiting for a report. What he heard was: "The criminals have escaped. We've brought in some of the neighbours." The magistrate had them summoned, and he questioned them.
"Although we're neighbours of Ward Chief Chao," they said, "the nearest of us are separated by a few hamlets from the manor, the furthest are two or three //across the fields. He often had visitors, bearing spears and staves but we never thought he'd do this sort of thing!"
The magistrate pressed them for information, determined to unearth a clue.
"If you want to get at the truth," said one of the closer neighbours, "why not ask his vassals?"
"Didn't they all go with him?"
"Some didn't want to go. They're still here."
The magistrate immediately dispatched men to East Bank to apprehend the vassals, sending the neighbour along to identify them. In less than two watches they returned with two vassals. At first when questioned the vassals denied everything. But when they were beaten beyond endurance, they confessed.
"There were six of them who conferred with the ward chief," they said. "The only one we knew was a teacher in our township named Wu Yong. Another man is called Gongsun Sheng. He's a Taoist priest. Another is a big dark fellow named Liu. There were also three others we didn't know. Wu brought them. We heard him say. 'They're three brothers, fishermen, named Ruan, from Stone Tablet Village.' That's the whole story."
The confession was recorded, and the magistrate turned the two vassals over to Inspector Ho and wrote a detailed report to the prefect. Song Jiang made himself surety for the neighbours, and they were allowed to go home and await further instructions.
Ho Tao and his men travelled all night and returned to Jizhou with the two vassals. The prefect was holding court. Ho Tao presented himself before him with his company and related how Chao Gai had burned down the manor and escaped. He repeated the confession of the vassals.
"So that's how it was! Summon Bai Sheng again," said the magistrate. "Do the three Ruan brothers really live where these men said?" he asked him.
Bai Sheng saw that denial was useless. "Yes," he said. "They all live in Stone Tablet. Second Brother is called Ferocious Giant, Fifth Brother is called Reckless Rash, and Seventh Brother is called the Devil Incarnate."
"What are the names of the other three?"
"Wu Yong the Wizard, Dragon in the Clouds Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon."

"Now we're getting somewhere! Return Bai Sheng to his prison and lock him up," said the magistrate. He ordered Inspector Ho to Stone Tablet Village. "Once we take the three Ruans the case is half solved." As a result, stars of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends gathered amid stormy clouds. In the marsh-girt fortress congregated a mighty battle host.

Then Inspector Ho said to his brother, Ho Qing: "This silver is the official reward, it's not a bribe. And there's a further reward to come. Now, brother, just tell me, please, what do you mean by saying the robbers are in your pouch?"
Ho Qing felt in the pouch he carried at his waist and drew out a little folder or notebook that he waved in their faces, saying: "They're all in here."
"How can they be in there?"
"All right, I'll explain. Some while ago I lost heavily at the tables, I was broke, hadn't a cent. Another player took me to a place called Peacehaven, outside the north gate, about five miles away; there's an inn, run by the Wangs, and I was able to come by a spot of cash there to gamble with. The authorities have decreed that inns should keep registers and that the names of all guests should be noted down, on those split sheets where you put the stamp across the two halves. When travellers arrive and ask for a room you're supposed to ask them their point of departure, destination, name and business. This all has to be copied into the book. The books are inspected once a month and the innkeeper must take them to the registrar's to be stamped. Since the waiter there can't write, he got me to copy out a fortnight's names for him. One day, actually it was the third day of the sixth month, seven 'date-sellers' appeared, pushing wheelbarrows, and asked for rooms. I happened to recognize one of the leaders of this group as Boss Chao of East Riverside in Yuncheng. How did I know it was him? I once went to his house with another gambler who wanted his help, that's how. When I was filling in the register I politely asked them their names. One of them, a very pale fellow, with a little three-pointed beard, suddenly pushed forward and said: 'We're all called Li, and we're from Haozhou. We're bringing a consignment of dates to sell in the Eastern Capital.' Well, I wrote it down but I thought it sounded a bit fishy. Next day they left. Later, when I was going with the innkeeper to gamble in the village, we met a fellow with a carrying-pole and buckets at one of the crossroads. I didn't know him but the innkeeper shouted out: 'Where are you going, friend Bai?' He answered: 'I've got this load of vinegar, I'm going to a rich man's house to sell it to him.' The innkeeper told me that this fellow was Bai Sheng, alias the Daytime Rat, and that he was also a gambler. It stuck in my mind. Later I heard all the gossip about the events on Yellow Mud Ridge — the date-sellers, the drugged wine, the robbery — and I thought, who else could it be but Boss Chao? So now all you've got to do is arrest Bai Sheng and question him and you'll know it all. This is the copy of the register."
Inspector Ho was overjoyed. He took his brother off straight away to the government offices to see the Governor. "Has there been some new development?" the Governor asked.
"Yes, I think I've got some good news," the Inspector replied.
The Governor called them into an inner chamber and questioned them closely. Ho Qing answered precisely on every point. Eight constables were detailed to go immediately with Ho Qing and Ho Tao to Peacehaven. There, the innkeeper was roped in as an informant and led them without delay to Bai Sheng's house. It was round about midnight and the innkeeper had to pretend he wanted something to eat. They heard Bai Sheng shouting from his bed. His wife told them that he was suffering from typhoid and was waiting for the sweat to break. Certainly he was both pale and flushed, when they dragged him out of his bed. They tied him up and shouted in his face: "I suppose you're proud of what you did on Yellow Mud Ridge!" Naturally, he denied it. They tied the woman up as well but she wouldn't talk either. The constables subjected the house to a thorough search. Under the bed they found the ground was not quite even, so they started to dig. A cry went up before they had even gone three feet. Bai Sheng's face turned deathly pale as they dragged out a cache of gold and silver. They covered Bai Sheng's head with a cloth and, together with his wife and the valuables on a carrying pole, conveyed him forthwith to Jizhou. Just as dawn was breaking he was brought into the audience chamber, bound hand and foot. When asked who had masterminded the plot, he denied everything; he preferred to die rather than name Chao Gai and the others. He was beaten repeatedly, till his skin was lacerated and the blood ran. "Miserable thief!" the Governor cried, "Our investigators have already ascertained that it was Chao Gai of East Riverside. What's the point in denying it? Just tell us who the other six were and we won't beat you any more." Bai Sheng held out a little longer but then, under extreme duress, he confessed: "Chao Gai was the ringleader. He and six others came and persuaded me to act as the wine-seller. But I don't know who the others are, honest."
"That's no problem," the Governor said. "We only have to arrest Chao Gai and we'll soon have the rest in our hands." Bai Sheng was fitted with the twenty-catty cangue of a man condemned to death. His wife was committed to the gaol for female prisoners. Then a warrant was made out, and the Inspector was ordered to take twenty picked constables to Yuncheng and show the local magistrate the order for the immediate arrest of Chao Gai and the six other robbers, whose identity was as yet unknown. He was to take along the two lieutenants from the original birthday convoy as witnesses.
The Inspector and his party set out, with as little to-do as possible, to prevent the news of it getting out. They reached Yuncheng at night, where the police and the two lieutenants put up at the local inn. The Inspector, with just two or three men, went to the Magistracy to show his warrant.
It was now well into the morning, and the Magistrate had just adjourned the early session. The area round the court-house was quiet and deserted. The Inspector found a teahouse opposite and sat down there to drink tea while he waited. He drank his tea and then asked the waiter: "Why are the government offices so quiet today?"
"The Magistrate dismissed the court early and all the officials have gone to eat. They're not back yet."
"Do you happen to know who is the duty registrar today?"
"That's him, just coming out now," said the waiter, pointing.
The Inspector looked and saw an official leaving the courtroom.
Now the name of this official was Song Jiang. He was also nicknamed Song Jiang the Just. He was originally the third in his family and his home was the Song village in Yuncheng. Because he was extremely dark and not very tall, people sometimes called him Song Jiang the Black, or Blackie. But because he was famed for his loyalty to his family and the openness and generosity of his dealings with the world, people also called him Blackie the Loyal and True. His father was still living but his mother was deceased. He had a younger brother called Song Qing, nicknamed Iron Fan, who was with their father, Squire Song, in the village, where they engaged in farming and made a living from the cultivation of a few fields and plots of land.
Song Jiang himself served as registrar in Yuncheng. He was skilled at inditing charges and highly experienced in his job but he also loved to practise martial arts, and had studied many different modes and styles. What he liked best in the world was to make friends with heroes of the rivers and lakes. No one was turned away who came to him for help, be they great or small; all were afforded refuge at his house in the country, where Song Jiang would keep them company all day long — he never tired. When they left he would be careful to make sure their purses were lined. He scattered his wealth like water and if anyone asked him for money he never said no. He deemed it a pleasure to offer people relief and arrange their affairs. He bought coffins and medicine for those who could not afford them, succoured the poor and aided the needy. Anyone in trouble could rely on him for support. This behaviour had made him famous throughout Shandong and Hebei and people called him "The Opportune Rain," comparing him to the rain which heaven bestows just when it is needed, to the benefit of all earthly things.
When Song Jiang appeared with a servant in front of the court-house, the Inspector rushed out to catch him in the street and said: "Will you allow me to offer you a cup of tea, sir?"
Seeing from his dress that this was a government official, Song Jiang replied at once with equal courtesy: "What can I do for you, sir?"
"Would you do me the honour of taking a cup of tea with me in this teahouse, and spare me a moment's attention?"
"I shall be delighted."
They went in and sat down. The servant was asked to wait outside. "Might I ask your name?" Song Jiang said.
"I am Inspector Ho Tao, head of operations for the suppression of banditry in the administration of Jizhou. May I in return ask your name?"
"Excuse me for not knowing you, Inspector. I am Song Jiang."
The Inspector immediately prostrated himself, saying: "I have long heard about you but I had not the opportunity till now of paying you my respects."
"You do me too much honour. Please, Inspector, take the chief place."
"How could I presume?"
"Inspector, you serve a higher authority. Besides, you are a guest here."
Thus they disputed courteously for a while, until Song Jiang sat down in the host's place and the Inspector in the guest's. Song Jiang told the waiter to bring tea and soon it was there on the table. They both drank. "Inspector, what brings you to our district? Are you here on official business?" Song Jiang asked.
"I'll be honest with you," the Inspector answered. "There are some people here I urgently need to talk to."
"Is it something to do with the suppression of banditry, then?"
"I have a sealed order here, and I would like to ask your assistance."
"Inspector, you are serving a higher authority, how could I fail to do all in my power to assist? But can you tell me more about the case?"
"Since you are an official of the court, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. My jurisdiction includes Yellow Mud Ridge, where a band of desperadoes, eight in all, drugged the fifteen-man escort of the Northern Capital Governor's birthday convoy to Grand Preceptor Cai in the Eastern Capital and stole the eleven loads of priceless treasure, valued at something in the region of a hundred thousand cash. We've got one of the gang now, an individual named Bai Sheng, who says the other seven are all from your district. This is such a serious affair that the Grand Preceptor has sent one of his own people to the Governor's office, and he's going to wait there till it's cleared up. I hope you will give us your full support."
"Even without the Grand Preceptor's intervention, the fact that you, Inspector, have come yourself to present the relevant order would oblige us to do everything in our power to secure the arrests. But what in fact are the names of the seven people implicated by Bai Sheng?"
"Well, I have to tell you that the ringleader is Chao Gai of East Riverside, in your district. We don't know the names of the other six but I trust you'll do everything possible to help us find them."
Song Jiang was greatly disturbed by this news. Secretly he was thinking to himself: "Chao Gai is an old friend. If he has now committed a major crime and I don't help him, and he gets caught, my reputation will be ruined!" To cover his confusion, he said: "Chao Gai is an obstinate bastard, an utter disgrace, in fact, and there's no one in the district who hasn't cause to complain of him. This time he's gone too far and we'll have to teach him a lesson."
"Then I can count on your cooperation in this affair?"
"Absolutely. It won't be difficult. As they say, to catch a turtle in a jar, just put your hand in and there you are! There's just one thing, though. That signed order you have there must be delivered personally to the district officer. When he has seen it he will take the necessary steps and order the arrest of the criminals. But it is certainly not for me to open it. This is a matter of major importance, and it must not be made public prematurely."
"Your assessment is absolutely correct," the Inspector said. "May I ask you to announce me now?"
"The Magistrate had a very full session this morning and tired himself out, so he's taking a rest just now. You wait here, Inspector, and in a little while, when the court resumes, I'll come and fetch you."
"I sincerely hope that with your help the case can be resolved."
"Of course it will, you need say no more. But now I have to go home for a moment to attend to some trifling domestic affairs, so please make yourself comfortable here."
"Please go ahead. I will wait here for you."
Song Jiang stood up and went out. He said to the waiter, "If that officer would like more tea, I'll pay you for it later." Leaving the teahouse he flew home but not before telling his servant to call a clerk from the court and have him wait outside the door of the teahouse. If the court resumed he was go into the teahouse and reassure the Inspector, telling him that the Registrar had everything under control and he was just to wait a little longer. He raced to the stable, saddled his horse and led him out through the back gate. He fitted the bridle and leapt into the saddle but then he rode slowly through the centre of town. Once beyond the East Gate, however, he kicked his horse into a gallop and careered off in the direction of East Riverside. In less than an hour he was outside Chao Gai's manor. The servants went to announce him.

Judgement's required on this illicit booty.
*The law is there, to apply it is his duty.*
*But since officials commit the greater rape,*
Friendship demands he help the thieves escape.

Chao Gai, at this moment, was with Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang drinking wine under a vine trellis in the garden behind the house. The Ruan brothers had already received their share of the booty and returned to Stonetable. When the servants announced that Song Jiang was at the door, Chao Gai asked: "How many people are with him?"
"He's alone," they replied. "He arrived at the gallop and said he must see you urgently."
"Something must have happened!" Chao Gai thought. He hurried out to receive Song Jiang. The latter greeted him and then took him by the arm. They drew aside, into a small chamber, where Chao Gai asked: "Registrar, what brings you here in such haste?"
"There's something you need to know. We are sworn brothers, remember, and I would give my life to help you. The Yellow Mud Ridge affair is discovered! Bai Sheng is in the Jizhou county gaol and has informed on the seven of you. The Governor of Jizhou has sent an agent named Ho with a party of men and there's even been an order from the Grand Preceptor's office demanding your arrest. You are named as leader. Fortunately, this news fell into my hands first! I pretended the Magistrate was sleeping and got the Inspector to wait for me in a teahouse opposite the court, so I could ride over here to warn you. Of thirty-six strategies, flight is always the best. But you'd better get a move on, there's nothing to be gained by waiting! I have to go back and take him in to present his warrant, and then the Magistrate will send to arrest you at once. So you must not delay. Heaven knows what will happen if you don't take this seriously. At any rate, you can't blame me for not warning you."
"Dear brother, how can I ever thank you?" said the startled Chao Gai.
"Forget the courtesies! Prepare to leave and don't waste any more time! I'm going back now."
"Three of the seven are the Ruans. They've taken their share and gone home. The other three are at the back. I'd like to introduce them to you."
Song Jiang followed him to the garden at the back. "Here they are," said Chao Gai, pointing out each in turn. "Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng from Jizhou, and Liu Tang from Donglu." After a few brief words of courtesy, Song Jiang turned and left but not without first urging his friend to make all possible haste. He leapt onto his horse, kicked it into a gallop, and raced back to the government offices.
Chao Gai began to explain to his three friends what had happened: "Do you know why that gentleman came to see us?"
"No, why was he in such a hurry? And who in fact is he?" Wu Yong asked.
"You're in for a shock! If it wasn't for him, our lives might be nearing their end."
"Has word got out? Have we been discovered?"
"Well, we have to thank our friend for treating the matter as urgent and coming to warn us. Bai Sheng is already locked up in Jizhou county gaol and has informed on us. An anti-banditry agent, one Inspector Ho, has been sent with a squad, and there's an order from the Grand Preceptor, requiring the Yuncheng Magistrate to arrest us immediately. Luckily my friend managed to hold the officer in a teahouse and was able to rush out here to warn us. Now he's had to go back to the office and in a moment they'll be sending people to seize us. What ought we to do?"
"If it hadn't been for his warning, we'd all be caught in the net," Wu Yong said. "What is the name of this man to whom we owe so much?"
"He's the court registrar, Song Jiang."
"You mean the one who's known among the rivers and lakes as Song Jiang the Just, the Opportune Rain"?
Chao Gai nodded. "Precisely. We're close friends, sworn brothers." To the others he explained: "Dr. Wu had never met him before. He is universally famous, and deservedly so. I will cer-tainly never regret becoming his sworn brother!" Remembering their situation, Chao Gai turned to Wu Yong again: "But we're in a tight spot. How do we get out of it?"
"There's nothing to discuss. Of thirty-six strategies, flight is always the best."
"That's the same advice Song Jiang gave," said Chao Gai. "The thing is, where do we go?"
"I've been thinking," said Wu Yong. "Let's get our share of the treasure and all go to stay with the Ruans in Stonetable. But we'd better send someone on ahead right away to warn them."
"The Ruans are simple fishermen," said Chao Gai. "How will they be able to put all of us up?"
"You've missed the point!" said Wu Yong. "Stonetable is just a stone's throw from the Marshes of Mount Liang. The mountain stronghold there is flourishing. Neither the army nor the police dare meet that lot face to face. If the pursuit gets too hot, we can always join them!"
"That's a great idea! The only problem is, they might not have us!"
"We've got money, haven't we?" said Wu Yong. "All we do is give them a share and they'll enroll us in the band."
It was like this:

When times are evil, thieves are many;
*Our heroes don't know which way to turn.*
*Because "The Scholar" rules the fort,*
Robbers, like officials, have got to be bought.

"Then if it's decided, we should waste no more time. Dr. Wu, you and Liu Tang take some men and go on ahead to the Ruans' to arrange everything, and then come out to meet us on the road. Gongsun Sheng and I will do what's necessary here and then join you."
Wu Yong and Liu Tang made five or six bundles out of the treasure stolen from the birthday convoy and having found five or six villagers to carry them, whom they plied with wine and food first, set off for Stonetable, Wu Yong with his bronze chains hidden in his sleeves, Liu Tang with his cutlass to protect them. There were about ten in the party. Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng meanwhile made final arrangements at the manor. Those servants who did not want to go with them were given money and sent to find work elsewhere. Those who wanted to go, collected up everything in the manor worth keeping and packed it. We say no more of this.

Wealth is a poisonous snake, I'd say;
*To a house's ruin 'twill open the way.*
*If the hero himself is by riches confounded;*

What of officials, whose greed is unbounded?

Meanwhile, Song Jiang had rushed back home and then gone straight to the teahouse, where he found the Inspector looking out for him at the door. "A thousand apologies for keeping you waiting," he said, "but one of my relatives in the village came round to see me over a certain domestic problem, and it took longer than I expected."

"May I trouble you to introduce me now?" the Inspector said.

"Please, just follow me." Together they went to the Magistracy, where the Magistrate, Shi Wenbin, had just gone into session. Song Jiang took the signed order and conducted the Inspector first to the Registrar's office. He told the attendants to move the notice forbidding entry and marched forward to report: "Inspector Ho is here, under orders from the Governor of Jizhou, on urgent business relating to the suppression of banditry. He has been specially sent to catch the thieves and is carrying this sealed document."

The Magistrate received the document, opened it and read it on the spot. What he read horrified him, and he exclaimed: "The Grand Preceptor has sent a member of his personal staff in connection with this, and he's expecting an immediate response. We must send a force to arrest these brigands."

"If we send troops by day," said Song Jiang, "I am afraid the robbers may get wind of it. It would be better to send them at night. Once we've got Chao Gai, the other six should be easy enough to find."

"That Chao Gai of East Riverside is supposed to be a good chap. How can he be involved in a business like this?" said the Magistrate. Nevertheless he summoned the chief of the militia and two officers — one of them was called Zhu Tong and the other Lei Heng, and they were both quite out of the ordinary. These two sergeants presented themselves and received their orders from the district officer. Together with the Chief of Militia they mounted and rode over to the local garrison, where they picked out a hundred infantrymen, cavalry and archers. Then they joined Inspector Ho and the two lieutenants from the stolen convoy, who were needed to identify the culprits. When evening came they equipped themselves with rope and weapons. The Chief of Militia mounted his horse and the two lieutenants did likewise. Each carried a sabre in his belt, a bow and a cutlass. In the midst of their troops they left by the east gate and hastened towards Chao Gai's manor.

When they reached East Riverside, it was already after seven. They first assembled at a little hermitage dedicated to Kuan Yin. Sergeant Zhu said: "That's Chao Gai's manor, right ahead of us. It's in between two roads, see, one in front and one behind. If we all attack at once from the front, he'll escape by the back. If we go to the back he'll get out from the front. I know Chao Gai, and he's not a pushover. Besides, we don't know anything about the other six. All we can be sure of is that they are not fine gentlemen, they're desperate villains. If they counter-attack, supported by a number of villagers, we may have trouble containing them. The best way is to make a diversion on one side in order to attack on the other. We must wait till they start to panic and then pounce. Wouldn't it be best if Sergeant Lei and I separate and attack from different sides? We'll each take half of the troops. We'll all approach on foot, and my force will lay an ambush outside the back gate. The signal will be a whistle, and when it's given you will attack the front gate and try to force an entry. If you see one of them, you'll take him, if you see two, you'll have a pair!"

"Good!" said Sergeant Lei. "You and the Commander attack from the front, Sergeant Zhu, and I'll go and cut off the rear."

"Listen, mate, you've got the wrong end of the stick! Chao Gai's house has three exits. I've been there, I've had plenty of opportunities to observe it. I know all the ways in and out. I wouldn't even need a torch. But if you don't know the layout, he might easily slip through that would be most embarrassing."

The Chief of Militia said: "Quite right, Sergeant Zhu. You take half the men, then."

"Oh, thirty will be more than enough," said Zhu Tong.

So Sergeant Zhu took ten archers and twenty infantrymen and started first. The Chief of Militia mounted again, and Sergeant Lei deployed the cavalry, foot soldiers and archers all around him, for his protection. The infantry preceded the cavalry, and were provided with twenty or thirty torches which brilliantly illuminated the scene: men armed with forks, halberds and sickles, all marching on Chao Gai's manor.

So there they were then, facing Chao Gai's manor, just a few hundred yards from it, when suddenly it burst into flames. The fire that apparently originated in the main hall, soon engulfed the scene in black smoke and filled the sky with red sparks. And before they had gone another ten paces, fire broke out on all sides so that some thirty or forty separate fires could be counted. The flames spread rapidly. When Sergeant Lei, leading the attack with drawn sabre, and the troops behind him cheering, reached the main gate, they broke it down and poured inside. The torches illuminated the scene as if it were broad daylight. Yet there was absolutely no one to be seen. Suddenly a cry went up at the back of the house, followed by an uproar in which shouts of "Stop them in front!" could be made out.

What actually was happening was that Sergeant Zhu intended to let Chao Gai escape, and it was to this end that he had tricked Sergeant Lei into attacking from the front. But Sergeant Lei also wanted to help Chao Gai that is why he had originally wanted to attack from the rear, only Sergeant Zhu had prevented it and he had to take the front. So all this commotion was quite deliberate: the uproar on all sides was intended to encourage Chao Gai to get out at once.

When Sergeant Zhu first arrived at the back of the house, Chao Gai had not yet finished what he had to do. Some servants saw the troops and reported to Chao Gai: "The government troops have come, we must hurry." Chao Gai ordered them to start fires on every side. Then he and Gongsun Sheng mustered the dozen or so servants who were going with them, and making as much noise as possible, burst out of the back gate with drawn swords. As they charged, they shouted: "Stand back or you die! Clear the way if you want to live!"

From the darkness Sergeant Zhu's voice could be heard, shouting: "Stop, Mr. Chao, you won't get away. Zhu Tong is waiting for you!" Chao Gai naturally paid no attention! His only thought was to fight his way out with the others and escape. Sergeant Zhu made various fake manoeuvres which actually left the way open for Chao Gai's escape. On Chao Gai's orders, Gongsun Sheng took the lead, while Chao Gai himself brought up the rear. Sergeant Zhu now ordered an attack on the back gate of the manor by his foot soldiers and archers, and started the cry of: "Stop them in front!" Sergeant Lei, on hearing this, turned round and retreated through the front gate. He ordered his troops to pursue the robbers, while he himself could be seen in the light of the conflagration gazing east and west in the manner of one searching for the enemy. Sergeant Zhu, leaving his troops far behind, raced after Chao Gai, sword in hand. "Sergeant Zhu, why are you pursuing me?" Chao Gai shouted over his shoulder. "I've never done you any harm!" Sergeant Zhu, after first looking to see there was no one close enough to hear him, said: "Didn't you see what I did for you? I didn't trust that blockhead Lei Heng. I got him to attack the front gate so I could let you get away at the back. Didn't you see how I left the way clear for you? But if you want to be safe now, you'd better go to the Marshes of Mount Liang."

"I am deeply in your debt," Chao Gai said. "Some day I shall repay you!" While this was going on, Lei Heng's voice was heard behind them, shouting: "Don't let them get away!" Sergeant Zhu said to Chao Gai: "Don't worry, just keep going. I'll get rid of him." He turned and shouted: "Three of them are escaping along that path to the east. Move it, Sergeant Lei!" Lei Heng gave an order and turned off along the path to the east, with all his men following. Sergeant Zhu continued to talk to Chao Gai as he pretended to pursue him. Actually, it was more as if he was acting as an escort! Gradually however in the darkness Chao Gai disappeared from view. Sergeant Zhu pretended to stumble and collapsed on the ground. When his men caught up with him and helped him to his feet, he said: "I couldn't see the path in the dark. I went off it into a field and slipped and twisted my left ankle."

The Chief of Militia said: "Oh dear! The leader has got away. What are we going to do?"

"No one can say I didn't try," Sergeant Zhu said. "But on a night like this, without a moon, it's just impossible. And none of these soldiers are any good. They were all shirking!"

The Chief of Militia ordered the men to resume the chase. The latter however were thinking to themselves: "The two officers failed, couldn't even get near them — so what can they expect from us?" They made a pretence of pursuing the robbers for a little, and then returned and said: "It's too dark — we can't tell which way to go." Sergeant Lei also continued the pursuit for a while but turned back, saying to himself: "Sergeant Zhu and Chao Gai are good friends. I wouldn't mind betting he wanted him to escape. What's the point in making myself unpopular? Anyway, I wanted him to get away too. He's probably miles away by now. It's just a pity I couldn't let him know I was helping." When he returned, he said: "Not a hope! Those bandits obviously know a thing or two!"

When the Chief of Militia and the two sergeants returned to the manor, it was already long past midnight. Inspector Ho, who had watched them running in all directions, and now saw them, after chasing all night, return empty-handed, could only wring his hands and say: "How can I go back to Jizhou and tell the Governor this?" And all the Chief of Militia could think of was to arrest a few neighbours and send them down to the magistracy.

All this time the Magistrate had been anxiously awaiting the outcome, quite unable to sleep. Now they came to report to him "All the robbers have escaped. We only managed to get a few villagers." He had the villagers brought before him and interrogated them. They all said: "Yes, we are neighbours of Chao Gai. Some of us live about a mile from his domain, others have land which verges on his. But there are always people practising martial arts at his place. How could we know they were engaging in this kind of activity?"

The Magistrate continued to question them for a while, in the hope of finding some clue. One of their number, a close neighbour of Chao Gai's, said: "If you want to know what went on there, the only way is to ask one of his people."

"But they say his household retainers all went with him," the Magistrate objected.

"There were some who didn't want to go. They stayed behind."

Hearing this, the Magistrate hastily dispatched a party to East Riverside, accompanied by the informant for purposes of identification, to bring the retainers in. In less than four hours they returned with two of the villagers. Under interrogation the latter began by denying all knowledge but the beating was too much for them and eventually they confessed: "To begin with there were six. All we know is that one of them was the teacher in our district, Dr. Wu; another was called Gongsun Sheng — that one is a Taoist priest; and there was a big dark fellow by the name of Liu. There were three others but we didn't know them. They came with Dr. Wu. Someone said they were called Ruan and lived in Stonetable, fishermen, he said — three brothers. That's the honest truth."

The Magistrate had their testimony copied down and then handed them over to Inspector Ho. He wrote a detailed report for the provincial Governor. Song Jiang secured the release of the other villagers who had been arrested and sent them home, with the condition that they remain available as witnesses.

Inspector Ho and his party now returned with all speed to Jizhou, taking with them the two villagers. The Governor had just gone into session when they arrived. The Inspector took the villagers in and recounted how Chao Gai had burnt down his house and fled, and then he presented the confessions taken from the two villagers. "In that case," said the Governor when he had heard it all, "bring back Bai Sheng!" Bai Sheng was asked where the three Ruan brothers lived. He knew it was no good trying to hide anything now, so he gave their full names and description and said they lived on the banks of Stonetable Lake. He did the same when asked about the other three.

"Now we've got something to go on," said the Governor, "you can take Bai Sheng back to his cell. Let him remain in custody." He then ordered the Inspector to go to Stonetable: "Bring back those Ruan brothers," he said. "That will give us the key to this case."

But for this next journey of the Inspector's, things would have turned out differently.

Powers of heaven and demon powers converge;
A mighty force in the Marshes will emerge.

The Inspector, He Tao, spoke to his younger brother, He Qing, "These ingots of silver are the reward offered by the *yamen*, and when we capture the brigands there will be much greater reward. I would not attempt to cheat you. But why did you say that you had put the brigands in your trouser's pocket?"

He Qing put his hand in his breast pocket, and drew forth a folding notepaper with cover, and pointing to it said, "All those brigands are here."

He Tao asked, "But how have their names got written there?"

"I won't deceive you," said He Qing. "The day before yesterday I lost every cash at gambling, and a fellow gambler took me to the Anlo village, about five *li* outside the North Gate, to an inn owned by a man named Wang, where there were many men assembled who were gambling with small stakes. The magistrate had issued an order that at every inn they must keep a register of the guests who stayed there, and should record their names, where they came from, where they were going to, and what was their business. The register must be sent every month through the chief to the local magistrate for inspection. The waiter at the inn did not know how to write so he asked me to stay there for half a month and keep that register for him."

"It happened that on the third day of the sixth month, seven traders pushing Jiangzhou-made handcarts stopped at the inn to rest. I recognized the leader of them as Chao Gai, the chief of the Dongxi village, in Yuncheng County. Now how did I know that it was him? Because some time before I went to that village with a fellow gambler who sought refuge there. When I took the register and asked for their names a man stepped forward who had a mustache and a small beard, with a white face. He said, "We are all called Li, and have come from Haozhou, with dates, and are going to sell them at the Eastern Capital." I wrote this down although I doubted the statement made. They departed the next day. The proprietor of the inn took me into the village to gamble, and upon passing the corner of a street I saw a man carrying two buckets on a pole over his shoulder. I did not know him but the proprietor of the inn called out to him, 'Mister Bai, where are you going?' The man replied, 'I am taking some vinegar to sell to the wealthy people of the village.'

"The inn proprietor told me that the man was Bai Sheng, and had a nickname 'Daylight Rat.' He was a gambler. At that time I took notice of the matter but afterwards I heard everybody talking that seven traders of dates had captured some birthday presents at the Huangni Ridge by means of some drugged wine. I at once jumped to the conclusion that Chao Gai had done this. So we may arrest Bai Sheng and find out what he knows about the matter. This notebook is my copy of the register."

He Tao was much pleased at this, and took his brother to the Prefecture *yamen* where the Prefect asked him, "Have you any information about that matter?"

He Tao replied that he now had a slight clue. The Prefect asked them to go with him to the inner apartments to discuss the matter. There He Qing gave him all the details he knew.

The Prefect then ordered eight policemen to accompany He Tao and He Qing to the inn at Anlo village where they got the proprietor to conduct them to the house of Bai Sheng where they arrived by midnight. The proprietor of the inn induced them to open the door but when they struck a light they heard Bai Sheng making a noise on the bed. Upon asking Bai Sheng's wife she said that her husband had a fever. The men seized hold of Bai Sheng and bound him with cords. They saw that his face was very red. They shouted out, "You have done a fine business at the Huangni Ridge!" But Bai Sheng did not confess this. Even when they bound his wife with cords she also remained silent. The men searched the whole house, and they noticed that the ground under the bed was uneven. So they dug there, and about three feet down they found a quantity of gold and silver that discovery excited them. Bai Sheng's face had now turned pale. They then blindfolded him, and his wife, and with the police carrying the booty they set off for Jizhou where they arrived about 5 A.M. They went into the *yamen* with the prisoners. The Prefect asked who had planned the bandits' raid but Bai Sheng would not say, and even if in danger of death he would not confess and implicate Chao Gai and the other six men. He was then beaten with bamboo about four times until his flesh was broken and his blood was flowing.

The Prefect shouted, "The police have found out that the head of the bandits is Chao Gai, the chief at the Dongxi Village in Yuncheng County, so it is useless for you to screen them. If you will say who the other six men are we will not beat you any more."

Bai Sheng hesitated a little but as he could not endure any more beating with the bamboo he at last confessed, "The chief of the bandits is Chao Gai. He himself came with six other men to get me to carry some wine for them but I do not know who the other six men are."

"That will not matter," said the Prefect. "Go now and arrest Chao Gai, the chief, and we can soon find out where the other six men are." He then ordered that Bai Sheng should be fitted with a large cangue weighing at twenty *jin*, and that the woman should be chained and confined to the women's jail. He then ordered a dispatch to be prepared and handed to He Tao who was to take with him twenty of the best policemen to arrest Chao Gai and the others. The magistrate at Yuncheng County must also send the two servants of Grand Secretary Liang to try and identify the six men. He Tao, the chief inspector, and his men must be careful as he was afraid that the news of their departure might reach Chao Gai first.

They travelled to Yuncheng County during the starlit night, and upon arriving there, He Tao put his men in an inn with orders to wait there until he came back. He then took two men with him to the *yamen*. He reached the *yamen* about 11 A.M. but the magistrate had retired from the early court, and everything was very quiet. He Tao therefore went to a tea-house where he got some tea, and rested a while. After he had drunk a cup of tea he asked the waiter, "How is it that everything is so quiet here today?"

"The magistrate had an early court," said the waiter, "and all the litigants went away also to get some food and have not returned yet."

"Who is on duty today?" asked He Tao.

The waiter pointed to a man and said, "That clerk is on duty today."

He Tao saw that the clerk was leaving the *yamen*.

The clerk was called Song Jiang, and his style was Gongming. He was the third brother in his family, and his forefathers had always resided at the Song Family Village, in Yuncheng County district. Because he had a dark complexion people called him "Black Song Jiang," and because he had a great reputation for filial piety and for distributing wealth in a good cause he was nicknamed, "Filial and Just Black the Third." His father was living but his mother had died some time before. He had a younger brother Song Qing, who had been nicknamed "Iron Fan," and stayed at home with his father cultivating the fields and supporting the family. Song Jiang earned a living as a clerk in the Yuncheng County *yamen*. He was a calligraphist and was quite familiar with all the routine of office work. He liked exercising with the lance and cudgel, and was quite good at all kinds of military exercises. He took a great interest in the doings of all bandits and they often came to him for help. No matter what kind of bandit there was, he would help him and keep him at the farmhouse. He kept company with them the whole day, and felt quite satisfied with their friendship. If they wanted to leave at any time he assisted them with money as though it was dirt. He never refused to give money when people asked for it. He was always charitable. He settled disputes and always assisted people in difficulties. He was always buying coffins for the poor, and medicine for sick people.

He always assisted those in distress, and raised those who had been crushed down in life. The result was that his fame was known in all Shandong and Hebei provinces, where he was also known as "Welcome Rain" because his influence was like the falling of rain on parched soil.

Song Jiang was accompanied by an attendant, and as they were leaving the *yamen*, He Tao, the Inspector, came out and saluted them, saying "Sir, I request you to come and have tea with me."

Song Jiang saw that the man was dressed in uniform, and quickly saluting, said, "Brother, where do you come from?"

He Tao replied that they could talk matters over when they were seated inside drinking tea. Song Jiang agreed to this and they thereupon entered the tea-house, and the attendant was told to wait outside.

"I take leave to inquire your name," said Song Jiang.

He Tao replied, "I am Inspector He Tao, and I come from Jizhou Prefecture. I also beg to inquire your name."

"You must not blame me for not recognizing you," said Song Jiang. He then gave his name and position in the *yamen*.

He Tao knelt down, and saluted. "I have heard of your fame but I had no opportunity of meeting you before."

"I am afraid," said Song Jiang, "but will you please take the seat of honour?"

"I dare not occupy such a position," said He Tao.

"You come from a higher *yamen* than this one, and you are also a guest from a distant place," said Song Jiang. After both men pressing each other to take the seat of honour they finally sat down—Song Jiang as host, and He Tao as guest in the seat of honour. Song Jiang then ordered the waiter to bring the tea, and it was soon served. After they had drunk some tea he asked, "What business has brought you here?"

"I won't deceive you. I have come here to arrest some very important persons in this district."

"Is it connected with the bandits business?" asked Song Jiang.

"I have a sealed dispatch here, and I hope that you will help me to get the business done."

"As you are appointed by superiors I must of course help you," said Song Jiang. "But what bandit affairs is it about?"

"It is a matter that you will have to deal with so I will tell you all about it: A party of eight bandits at the Huangni Ridge drugged some wine, and sold it to an escort of fifteen soldiers who were conveying some birthday gifts from Grand Secretary Liang at the Northern Capital for Prime Minister Cai. They seized the eleven loads of presents that were worth about one hundred thousand strings of cash. We have arrested one of the brigands named Bai Sheng, and he confessed that the other seven bandits were in this district.

"There is an officer from the Prime Minister waiting at our head *yamen* for the completion of this business, so I hope that you will give it immediate attention."

"We must of course arrange for the arrest of the bandits," said Song Jiang, "even though you yourself have brought a dispatch here, not to say about the instruction from the Prime Minister. But I should like to know who are the seven persons that Bai Sheng named."

"I will tell you. The head of the bandits is Chao Gai, the chief of the Dongxi Village in this district. But so far we have not found out the names of the other six men, so I must ask for your assistance."

Song Jiang was surprised at hearing this, and thought, "This Chao Gai is my bosom friend. Now he has committed this serious crime. But if I do not save him he will certainly be arrested." He was very anxious about the matter but replied, "That Chao Gai is evidently a rascal. Everybody in this district say that he is not a good man. Now that he has committed this crime it will be better for him to suffer for it."

"I hope that you will take the matter in hand," said He Tao.

"That will be easy. 'A tortoise in a wine jar is easy to catch.' But you must present the dispatch at the *yamen* yourself so that after it has been read men can be deputed to arrest the bandits. I dare not presume to open the letter myself. It concerns a very important matter, and it would not do to let the contents leak out, and be known to other men."
"As you understand the matter so well will you accompany me into the *yamen*?"
"The magistrate has had an early court," said Song Jiang "and being tired he is now taking a rest. You had better wait until the magistrate holds a later court when I will come and inform you."
"I hope that you will help me," said He Tao.
"It is my duty, you need not talk like that. I will now go to my home where I have a few matters to attend to, and you can rest here until I come back."
"All right," said He Tao. "You attend to your affairs, and I will stay here till you come back."
Song Jiang rose, and going into another room told the waiter that He Tao was to be supplied with tea which he would pay for. Upon leaving the tea-house he went with all speed. He however first told his attendant to go into the yamen, and get another man to stand at the door of the tea-house. Should the magistrate hold a second court the man must immediately tell He Tao and say, "The clerk, Song Jiang, is busy just now but he requests you to wait a little longer." He then went to the troughs where the horses were, saddled one, concealed a whip in his sleeve, and led a horse to the back door where he quickly mounted. After leaving the east gate, Song Jiang used his whip, and the horse galloped along towards the Dongxi Village. In less than an hour he drew up at the door of Chao Gai's house. A servant had seen him coming, and had already announced his approach.
At that time Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and Liu Tang were drinking wine under the vines in the garden. The brothers Ruan had returned to their home at Shijie Village when they had got the money. When Chao Gai heard that the clerk Song Jiang had arrived he asked, "How many men are with him?"
The servant said, "He has come by himself on a horse galloping at full speed, and wants to see you immediately."
"There must be some urgent business," said Chao Gai. He went at once, and upon meeting and saluting Song Jiang they took each other by the hand, and walked into a small room at one side.
"Why do you come here in such haste?" asked Chao Gai.
"Elder brother," said Song Jiang, "we are bosom friends, and therefore I came to save your life at great risk to myself. The affair at the Huangni Ridge has been disclosed. Bai Sheng was arrested and is now in prison at Jizhou Prefecture. He has confessed about the other seven men. An Inspector from Jizhou has arrived with a dispatch, and another order from the Prime Minister, for your immediate arrest, and you are mentioned as the head of the gang of bandits. Fortunately the matter is in my hands. I have told Inspector He Tao, that the magistrate is asleep just now, and told him to wait for me in a tea-house just opposite the entrance to the *yamen*. Therefore I came flying here on horseback to report the matter to you. Out of thirty-six plans you must select the best and get away at once. What is there to keep you here instead of going away at once? I must go back now and take the Inspector to the *yamen*, where he will deliver his orders, and as soon as the magistrate sees them you may be sure that he will immediately dispatch men to effect your arrest. So you had better not delay your escape. If there is any failure in your departure you must not blame me."
Chao Gai was surprised at hearing this. He said, "Worthy brother, how can I ever repay you?"
"You need not say much," said Song Jiang. "Get ready at once, and let nothing stand in your way. I must return at once."
Chao Gai said, "Of the seven, the three brothers Ruan have received their share of the booty, and have gone back to their home at Shijie Village. At the back of this room are however three others, and you might come and see them."
Song Jiang went to the back garden, and Chao Gai pointing to the three men there said, "These three men are Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and Liu Tang."
Song Jiang slightly bowed to them, and then turned round and said to Chao Gai, "Now take care of yourself, and get away at once. I must go now." He went to the door, mounted his horse, and using his whip, galloped off to the town.
"Do you know the man whom I just introduced to you?" asked Chao Gai to the three men.
"Who is he? And why did he depart so hastily?" asked Wu Yong.
"You do not know but had he not come here our lives would be cut short very soon."
The three men were startled at this statement. One of them asked, "But has our affair been disclosed?"
Chao Gai said, "It is very lucky for us that he has taken a bloody risk in coming here to report to me. Bai Sheng has been arrested, thrown into prison, and has confessed about us. An Inspector named He Tao has arrived with orders from the Prime Minister for the magistrate here for our arrest. He got Inspector He Tao to wait for him in a tea-house, and in the interval he has galloped here to tell me. He has returned, and when the dispatches are delivered the magistrate will immediately send men to arrest us. What shall we do?"
"Had he not told us," said Wu Yong, "we would be caught like fish in a net. But what is the name of our benefactor?"
"He is a clerk in the district *yamen*," said Chao Gai. He is called Song Jiang, nicknamed 'The Protector.'"
"I have heard of him," said Wu Yong, "but have not met him. Although we live so close together I have never had any chance for meeting him."
Gongsun Sheng and Liu Tang both asked, "Is he not the man whom people call the 'Welcome Rain,' Song Gongming?"
Chao Gai nodded his head in assent and said, "That is the man. We are on the best of terms, and we are sworn brothers. Wu, have you really not met him? His fame is well assured within the four seas. It is not useless to have this man for my sworn brother. But we are certainly in serious danger, what shall we do?"
"My brother, you need not discuss the matter," said Wu Yong. "Of the thirty-six plans the best is to get away at once."
"That was Song Jiang's idea," said Chao Gai. "But where shall we go?"
"I have already formed an idea," said Wu Yong. "We must pack up the booty into five or seven loads for carrying on our shoulders, and then depart for the Shijie Village, and go to the family of the brothers Ruan. But we must immediately send a man in advance to advise them of the matter."
"But how can so many men stay with the brothers Ruan, who are only fishermen?" asked Chao Gai.
"Elder brother," said Wu Yong, "you are not very shrewd. That place is quite close to Liangshan Marsh. That stronghold is very prosperous just now, and the soldiers dare not even go to look at the place. If we are closely pressed by the soldiers we can go there and join the band at once."
"What you say is fine," said Chao Gai, "but I am afraid that they may not admit us."
"As we have plenty of gold and silver," said Wu Yong, "we can send some to them, and then they will admit us."
"As we have agreed to do this," said Chao Gai, "then we had better not delay our departure. Teacher Wu, you had better go with Liu Tang and get servants to carry the booty for you, and when you have safely deposited it with the brothers Ruan you can come back along the road to meet us. I, with Gongsun Sheng will go as soon as everything is well arranged." Wu Yong and Liu Tang went to get about six servants, and as soon as the latter had had their food, they carried the bundles containing the booty and departed. Wu Yong hid a copper wire up his sleeve, whereas Liu Tang carried a halberd in his hand. Altogether there were about ten men in their party.
Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng stayed behind to arrange other matters. Those servants who did not want to go with them were paid off, and told to go to some other place. All the others who were willing to go with Chao Gai packed up many things, and then also departed.
Song Jiang galloped his horse to the town, and upon arriving at the tea-house he found He Tao at the door looking out for him. He said, "Inspector, you have waited a long time. There was a relative at my home who kept discussing many matters, and that has delayed me a little."
"Clerk Song Jiang, I must ask you to introduce me at once," said He Tao.
Song Jiang did so, and they entered the *yamen*, and went into the court where the magistrate Shi Wenbing was transacting business. Upon reaching the official desk Song Jiang told the aide of the magistrate to hang up outside of the court the boards with the two characters " *Hui Bi*" (withdraw, do not disturb), upon seeing which all people would refrain from entering the court. Song Jiang then presented the dispatches from Jizhou Prefecture, and explained in a low tone that He Tao had just brought them under urgent instruction. When the magistrate read the dispatches he was startled and said to Song Jiang, "There is an officer from the Prime Minister who is waiting for our immediate reply. We must send men at once to arrest the bandits."
"I am afraid," said Song Jiang, "that if we dispatch men in the broad daylight the matter will become divulged, and therefore I think that we had better send men in the night to arrest the bandits."
"That chief Chao Gai at the Dongxi Village is well known as a respectable person," said Magistrate Shi, "so why should he take part in such a disgraceful affair?" He then told his attendant to summon Inspectors Zhu Tong and Lei Heng. Upon their arrival he gave them orders, and they got together more than one hundred men, and set off with the magistrate's deputy to arrest the seven men. They were all fully armed with bows and arrows, halberds, swords, and ropes for binding the prisoners, and they reached the Dongxi Village about eight o'clock the same evening. They all stopped at the Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy Temple.
Zhu Tong said, "Ahead is the farmhouse of Chao Gai. There are two roads leading to the house—one at the back and one in front. If we all went to the front gate they might escape by the back door. So we will divide—half will go to the back entrance and the other half to the front entrance. I know that Chao Gai is well trained in military skills but I suppose the other six men may not be decent men. And all the farm servants may help them so how shall we overcome the whole lot? The only plan is that the soldiers on the east side will make a loud noise to frighten them and put them in confusion while those on the west side will fight and arrest them. I will go with half the soldiers and hide near the back entrance and there await your signaling with the whistle. The others will go to the front entrance, and arrest everyone they meet."
Lei Heng said, "That is all right but I think it would be better if you went to the front gate with the deputy magistrate and I will go to the gate at the back."
"You do not understand the position," said Zhu Tong. "There are three roads to this village, and I have noticed them many times before. If I go to the gate at the back I know which road to guard without using torches. You do not know the road by which he will try to escape. If he knows our object he will escape. This is not a matter to be trifled with."
The deputy magistrate said that Inspector Zhu Tong had spoken quite clearly, and that he must take half the soldiers with him.
Zhu Tong said that thirty men would be enough for him. So he took ten archers and twenty foot soldiers.
The deputy magistrate mounted his horse, and Lei Heng put his men some before and some behind so as to protect the magistrate's representative. In front were the foot soldiers with about thirty torches lit, others with swords, hooks, and halberds and they rushed to Chao Gai's farm. Before they were about a few hundred yards to the front entrance of Chao Gai's house, they saw flames leaping from the buildings, and dense clouds of smoke everywhere. They had not proceeded more than ten steps further when they saw fire break out at about forty places in all parts of the buildings. The soldiers shouted and Lei Heng with the vanguard took his halberd, and forced open the front gate. Inside the flames illuminated the yards as clear as daylight but there not even a single man was seen inside. Just then they heard the great shout raised by the soldiers at the back entrance. Now Zhu Tong really had the intention of letting Chao Gai escape, and that was why he had arranged for Lei Heng to go to the front gate. But Lei Heng himself had the same desire, and that was why he wanted to go to the entrance at the back. But owing to Zhu Tong's arguments he had given way and went to the front gate. There he purposely made a great noise, so that this would act as a warning to Chao Gai to escape at once.
When Zhu Tong and his men reached the back entrance, Chao Gai had not finished packing up the movable articles, and when his servants told him of the arrival of the soldiers and urged him to escape at once, Chao Gai told the servants to set the building on fire everywhere, and then with Gongsun Sheng he took about ten other servants and arming themselves with halberds they went to the gate at the back shouting as they went. Chao Gai shouted, "Those who oppose me shall die; those who avoid me shall live."
Inspector Zhu Tong was hiding in a dark place, and upon hearing this called out. "Chief, get away quickly! I have been waiting here a long time."
Chao Gai did not hear this, and was quite prepared to fight to the death. Inspector Zhu Tong, however, was making a way through his men for Chao Gai to escape. Gongsun Sheng was in front of the small band of servants whereas Chao Gai was bringing up the rear. Zhu Tong instructed his archers to go and force open the gate. He shouted out, "Go to the front gate and arrest the thieves." Inspector Lei Heng hearing this went outside the front gate, and told his archers on foot and on horseback to pursue and arrest the thieves. Lei Heng was standing in the light of the fire and was anxiously looking in all directions as though trying to find men. Zhu Tong left his soldiers, and ran after Chao Gai who was now outside the gate. As Chao Gai ran he looked round and shouted to Zhu Tong, "Inspector Zhu! What do you want to arrest me for? I have done no wrong."
Inspector Zhu Tong looked behind, and seeing none of his men he replied, "Chief, you did not understand my object. I was afraid that Inspector Lei Heng would not fall in with my plans so I got him to go to the front gate with some men while I came to this back door so that I could let you escape. Did you see that I made a way through my men for you to pass through? You should go at once to Liangshan Marsh, not any other place for safety."
"I am deeply grateful to you for your kindness," said Chao Gai, "and some day I will certainly recompense you."
Just then Zhu Tong heard Lei Heng calling behind him, "Do not allow him away."
"Chief," said Zhu Tong, "do not get upset but just go straight on your way, and I will try to get Lei Heng to go another way." He then turned his head round, and said to Lei Heng, "There are three men who are getting away by the eastern road. You had better run after them at once."
Lei Heng immediately took many of his soldiers, and led them to the eastern road.
Zhu Tong followed Chao Gai talking with him as they proceeded, and helping him in every manner to escape. When they had got beyond the range of the light from the burning farmstead Zhu Tong missed Chao Gai and in the dark he purposely fell down as though he had stumbled against something, when a number of his soldiers came up and assisted him to rise. Zhu Tong said to them, "In the dark I lost my way, and getting into this wild field I slipped and fell down. I have sprained my leg."
"The thieves have got away," said the deputy magistrate, "so what shall we do?"
"That was not due to our not trying to catch them," said Zhu Tong, "but because it is such a dark night. Among these soldiers there are very few capable men for such a job, as they are afraid of advancing."
The deputy magistrate sent the soldiers away to arrest the thieves but the soldiers thought that the two Inspectors had not been very brave in getting into close touch with the bandits, and therefore they (the soldiers) were not of much use. So they ran off, pretending to do as ordered but they soon came back and said that it was so dark that they could not see the roads.
Just then Lei Heng also returned, and he was saying to himself, "Zhu Tong and Chao Gai were evidently close friends and Zhu Tong has assisted him to escape, while I could not show my friendship." Upon reaching Zhu Tong and the deputy magistrate he said, "Who could catch up to them. The thieves are so smart!"
The two Inspectors and the deputy magistrate returned to the farmyard. It was then about 3 A.M. He Tao had remained inside the yard, and now saw the soldiers returning in batches of fours or fives without having captured a single man although they had been in pursuit nearly the whole night long. He said in a bitter tone, "How can I face the Prefect at Jizhou?"
The deputy magistrate could do nothing but arrest a number of the neighbours, and take them to the magistrate at Yuncheng County.
The magistrate had not slept that night but was waiting to hear the result of the expedition. When he was informed that the bandits had all escaped but that a number of the neighbours had been arrested, he went into the court, and there cross-examined the men who were under arrest.
The neighbours said, "Though we are the neighbours of Chao Gai, yet the remote of us live almost a //away from his farm while the nearer are several houses apart. Usually many men visited Chao Gai who were always practicing with the spear and cudgel but how could we know that they were engaged in this kind of business?"
The magistrate, however, examined them individually trying to find out whether they knew where the bandits had gone to. At last he found a man who had lived quite close to Chao Gai. This man said, "If you want to know about the affairs of Chao Gai you should cross-examine his farm servants."
The magistrate replied, "But I am informed that all the servants have escaped."
The man replied, "There were some servants who did not wish to leave, and they remained behind at the farm."
With the speed of fire the magistrate dispatched men to arrest the farm servants, and in about an hour they returned with two farm servants under arrest.
The magistrate cross-examined them, and at first they declared that they knew nothing but after a severe beating they confessed and said, "There were six men at the farm who were always discussing some matter. One of them was a teacher at a village close by, and was called Wu Yong; another was Gongsun Sheng, a Taoist priest, and still another was a dark-skinned man called Liu. There were three others whom we did not know but they were brought there by Wu Yong. We, however, heard that they were all called Ruan and came from the Shijie Village. They were all three brothers, and were fishermen."
The magistrate had all this evidence written down by his secretary, and he then wrote a dispatch to accompany it to Jizhou Prefecture. He handed these documents, and also the two farm servants, to He Tao and told him to deliver them to the Prefect. Song Jiang arranged for some person to come forward, and stand as guarantor for the neighbours who were to return to their homes.
He Tao escorted the two farm servants with all speed to Jizhou Prefecture, and upon arriving there he found that the Prefect was sitting in court transacting business. He entered the court, and reported the Prefect how Chao Gai and the bandits had all escaped, and the farm buildings had been burnt down. He also brought forward the two prisoners, and repeated their confession.
The Prefect after hearing all this gave an order for Bai Sheng to be again brought forward. Upon his arrival he asked him, "Where do those three Ruans live?"
Bai Sheng saw that he could not get out of the difficult position in any way so he said:
"One of the Ruans is known as the 'Heavenly King Who Stands His Ground,' he is Ruan the Second; another is called 'Short Lived Second Brother' and he is Ruan the Fifth; the other is called 'Living King Yama' and he is Ruan the Seventh. They all live at the Shijie Village."
The Prefect asked, "Who are the other three?"
Bai Sheng replied, "One's Wu Yong, another's Gongsun Sheng, and the other's Liu Tang." The Prefect sent Bai Sheng back to the prison. He then ordered Inspector He Tao to proceed at once to Shijie Village to arrest the three brothers Ruan, and so get some further clue.

Crowds of devils act in concert;
Armed horsemen now are gathered.

## 019

**Up in the fortress, Lin Chong Fights Fiercely & Stirs Internal Strife in their Water-Girt Stronghold & rocks the boat; Chao Gai Seizes & Wins a Battle Down in Marshes of Mount Liang & an army's put to rout**

On receiving the magistrate's order, Inspector Ho left the court and went with his men to a conference room.
"That Stone Tablet Village is on the edge of Liangshan Marsh. It has water and reeds and creeks all around," said the police officers. "Without a large force of men and boats, you can forget about going in there to make an arrest."
"True," mused Ho Tao. He returned to the court and spoke to the prefect. "Stone Tablet is full of waterways. It's next to Liangshan Marsh. All around are deep coves and channels, reeds and grass," Ho said. "There have always been robbers in Stone Tablet. Now they've added this gang of toughs. We'll need a strong force if we're going to take them."
"All right," said the prefect. "I'll give you a competent deputy and five hundred soldiers."
Ho Tao went back to the conference room and called out his police escort. He told them to prepare a list of five hundred men and make ready all necessary arms and equipment.
The next day the deputy came to Ho Tao with the prefect's written order. Together, they assembled the five hundred soldiers. With these, plus the policemen, they set out for Stone Tablet.

Meanwhile, Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng, after burning down the manor, arrived at Stone Tablet Village with a dozen or so vassals. They were met by the three Ruan brothers, all of them armed, and taken to the home of Fifth. Ruan the Second had already sent his mother, wife and child to a place of concealment in the marsh. The seven men discussed joining the outlaws on Mount Liangshan.
"In Lijia Entry a man by the name of Zhu Gui runs a tavern. He's known as the Dry-Land Crocodile and is very hospitable to brave fellows from all over," said Wu Yong. "Anyone who wants to join the gang has to talk to him first. We ought to get boats, load on our belongings, send him some gifts, and ask him to introduce us."
Just then, a few fishermen arrived and reported: "Soldiers, on horse and on foot, are closing in, fast, on our village!"
Chao Gai rose quickly to his feet. "If those knaves catch up with us we'll never get away."
"Don't worry," said Second. "I'll handle them! I'll drown the majority and stab the rest!"
"Keep calm," said Gongsun Shen. "Let me show you what this humble priest can do."
"Brother," Chao said to Liu Tang, "you and the teacher take our families and possessions in boats to the left side of Lijia Entry and wait there. We'll see what's up and join you later."
Second chose two boats. He loaded his mother, wife, child and belongings on one. Wu Yong and Liu Tang boarded the other. Seven or eight fishermen rowed off with both craft to wait at Lijia Entry. Second then told Fifth and Seventh how to deal with the enemy. They were each to go in a small boat and ... The two brothers departed.
Ho Tao, the deputy and the soldiers gradually neared the village. They seized whatever boats they saw along the bank and manned them with soldiers who knew how to swim. The cavalry kept pace on shore, land and water forces moving forward abreast. They set up a shout when they reached Second's house and charged into the yard. But except for a few items of heavy furniture the place had long since been cleaned out.
"Bring me a few of his fishermen neighbours," said Ho Tao.
The men were produced. They said: "His brothers Fifth and Seventh both live in the marsh. You can only get there by boat."
Ho Tao discussed this with the deputy and said: "The marsh is full of creeks and inlets and twisting paths, and ponds and pools of unknown depth. If we break up into small search parties those rascals are liable to catch us in some trap. My idea is to leave the horses in the village with a guard, and all of us proceed in boats."
This was done. Well over a hundred craft had been seized. Some were punted, some were sculled. Now the whole armada advanced in the direction of the fishermen's hamlet where Ruan the Fifth lived. After sailing five or six //they heard someone bawling a raucous song from a thicket of reeds. The pursuers stopped rowing and listened. The words rang clearly across the water:

*In the reeds all my life I fish,*
*Rice and hemp I no planting do;*
*Rapacious officials I kill them all,*
*To the emperor I'm loyal and true.*

Ho Tao and his men were startled. Then, far off, they saw the singer. He was sculling a small boat. One of the men recognized him. "That's Ruan the Fifth!"
Inspector Ho waved his arm in signal, and the entire flotilla, all armed to the teeth, pressed forward after their quarry.
Fifth laughed scornfully. "How brave you corrupt officials are when it comes to oppressing the common people! What do you want with me? Be careful. Don't tweak the tiger's whiskers!"
Archers behind Ho fitted arrows to their strings, pulled the bows to the full, and let fly. Fifth picked up his sculling oar and dived into the water. When the soldiers reached his boat, he was nowhere to be seen.
Before the armada passed another two inlets, they heard a shrill whistle from the reeds. The boats quickly spread out. Ahead they saw a small craft approaching, with two men. The one standing in the bow wore a black straw hat and a green coir cape. In his hand was a spear shaped like a brush pen. He sang this song:

*In Stone Tablet Village I was born,*
*I've always liked to kill,*
*Ho Tao and the deputy's heads I'll lift*
*And present them to the emperor as my gift.*

Again Ho Tao and his men were startled. Some of them recognized the singer.
"That's Ruan the Seventh!"
"All together, in full strength," shouted Ho Tao. "Grab that man. Don't let him get away!"
Seventh laughed. "Stinking wretches!" He pointed with his spear and his craft glided into an inlet.
Shouting at the top of their lungs, the soldiers gave chase. The craft of Seventh and the man wielding the sweep oar seemed to fly across the water. They whistled, and turned the boat into a smaller inlet. The pursuing fleet saw that the waterway was becoming narrower.
"Halt," Ho Tao ordered. "Moor the boats by the bank."
He went ashore and gazed around. On all sides were watery wastes and reeds. There was no sign of any path. Ho Tao hesitated. He couldn't make up his mind. He asked directions from a soldier who came from those parts.
"Although I live around here," the man said, "there are many places I don't know."
Inspector Ho sent out two small craft with three policemen in each to scout deeper into the reeds. Two watches passed and they failed to return.
"Those idiots don't do anything right," Ho fumed. He dispatched another five policemen in another two boats. More than a watch went by but these men didn't come back either.
"They're all experienced and clever. How can they act so stupid?" Ho wondered. "Why don't they send one boat back to report? And these soldiers I've brought are just as bad. They don't know up from down!"
It was already late in the day. "I won't solve anything sitting here," thought Ho Tao. "I'd better go have a look myself."
He selected a fast craft and went aboard with several of his best veteran policemen, each heavily armed. Plied by half a dozen oars, with Ho Tao seated in the bow peering at the expanse of reeds, the boat moved off.
The sun by then was sinking in the west. After proceeding five or six //up the inlet, Ho Tao saw a man approaching along one of the banks with a hoe in his hand.
"Hey, fellow. Who are you?" Ho called. "What is this place?"
"I'm a farmer from the village. This is Chop-Head Creek. It doesn't go anywhere."
"Have you seen two boats pass this way?"
"You mean the ones after Ruan the Fifth?"
"How do you know they were chasing him?"
"They're in the dark grove ahead, fighting."
"How far is the grove from here?"
"Only a few steps and you'll be able to see it."
Ho Tao shouted for his men to beach the craft and hurry to the fray. He sent two men up the bank with their tined spears. Suddenly, the "farmer" raised his hoe and with two blows knocked the policemen tumbling into the creek. The astonished Ho tried to scramble up the bank. But the boat began to rock, and a man surged out of the water, yanked Ho's legs and dumped him overboard with a splash. As the other policemen in the boat rose to flee, the "farmer" leaped aboard the craft and smashed their skulls with his hoe, spattering brain matter.
The swimmer dragged Ho Tao by the legs up the bank and bound him with his sash. It was Ruan the Seventh. Second was the man who wielded the hoe. They both reviled Inspector Ho.
"We three Ruan brothers have always liked killing and burning! Compared to us you're nothing! You've got your nerve, coming with a gang of soldiers to arrest us!"
"I couldn't help myself, good fellows. I was only carrying out orders. I would never come after such brave men. Pity my eighty-year-old mother and let me live! I'm her sole support!"
"Truss him up like a dumpling and put him into the cabin."
The Ruan brothers threw the bodies in the water, then whistled. From the reeds four or five fishermen in boats emerged and went aboard the vessel. Seventh and Second each took one of the small craft.
Meanwhile, the soldiers on the boat with the deputy were grumbling. "A police officer like Inspector Ho ought to know better than go out and do his own scouting! All this time and he still hasn't returned!"
By then it was the first watch, and stars filled the sky. The men in the boats were enjoying the coolness. Suddenly, a strange wind blew up behind them, so fierce that it snapped the mooring ropes. The soldiers covered their faces and cried out in alarm.
Helpless, they heard a sharp whistle behind them. They stared into the wind to see a fiery glow in the reeds along the opposite shore.
"We're finished!" they exclaimed.
There were over a hundred government vessels, big and small. These were so buffeted by the gale that they collided with each other, out of control. The fiery glow was now almost upon them. A flotilla of small boats, bound together in pairs, and heaped with reeds and brushwood which were crackling brightly with flames, was sweeping quickly downward in the wind. The government craft were all snarled together and the creek was narrow. They couldn't get out of the way.
The first of the fire vessels pushed in among a dozen or so large boats, and they began to burn. Men, swimming under-water, were propelling the fire vessels forward. The soldiers and their officers leaped for the bank, only to discover that they were surrounded by reeds and marsh, without a strip of solid ground. Then the reeds along the shore also burst into flame, cutting them off completely.
The wind was strong, the blaze was fierce. Soldiers and officers hastily immersed themselves in the soft mud. A small swift craft emerged from the fiery glow, one man sculling in the stern, a Taoist priest seated in the bow, holding a gleaming sword.
"Not a single one will escape!" he shouted.
The men in the mud huddled together in panic. At that moment from the reeds along the east bank came two men leading four or five fishermen, all armed with glittering swords and spears. Another two men, also followed by four or five fishermen, advanced from the reeds along the west bank, and these carried shining fish gaffs. The four bold fellows and their cohorts attacked the hapless foe from both sides. Before long scores of soldiers and officers lay dead in the soggy mire.
Chao Gai and Ruan the Fifth had come from the east bank. Second and Seventh had come from the west. The Taoist priest on the boat who summoned the wind was Gongsun Sheng. These five brave fellows, with the aid of a dozen or so fishermen, slew in the reeds a great host of officers and men. The only one left was Inspector Ho, trussed up like a dumpling in the cabin. Second carried him to the bank and pointed at him angrily.
"You wretched beast! You extort and squeeze the people of Jizhou! Originally I was going to make mincemeat out of you but now I want you to go back and tell that crooked prefect that the three heroes of Stone Tablet—the Ruan brothers, and the ruler of East Bank—Chao Gai, are not to be trifled with! We don't go to your town asking for grain, don't you come to our village seeking to die! If he's got eyes in his head he'll see that even if Premier Cai—never mind a pipsqueak of a prefect—sent men to take us, even if the Premier came in person, we'd put daylight into him with twenty or thirty stabs! We're letting you go. Don't come back. And tell your prick of a superior to stay away if he wants to live! There are no highways in this place. My brother will set you on the road."
Seventh took Ho in a small fast craft to where a road began. "Go straight on from here and you'll reach the highway. All of your men have been killed. If we let you off scot-free, your crook of a prefect would bray his donkey laugh at us. I must ask you to leave your ears here as proof against that!"
He whipped out a knife and cut off Ho's ears. Blood flowed copiously. Seventh wiped his knife, untied the sash that bound his prisoner, and flung him on the bank. Ho, glad to be alive, sought a road that would take him back to Jizhou.

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Chao Gai, Gongsun Sheng, the three Ruan brothers and the dozen or more fishermen left the Stone Tablet marshes in six or seven boats and went directly to Lijia Entry, where they found the craft of Wu Yong and Liu Tang, and rejoined them. The teacher wanted to know all about how they repelled the soldiers, and Chao Gai told him in detail. Wu Yong and the others were delighted.
They set their vessels in order and went together to the tavern of Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile. When all had arrived, they said they wanted to join the mountain stronghold. Zhu Gui hastily welcomed them. Wu Yong told him their story. The tavern keeper was very pleased, and greeted them, one by one. He invited them in, begged them to be seated, and ordered the waiter to bring wine.
Then he took a leather-bound bow, fitted a whistling arrow, and shot it into a cove of reeds, opposite. Soon a small boat came out, rowed by one of the brigands. Zhu Gui quickly wrote a letter of introduction, stating the number of men who wished to join, and their names, and gave it to the bandit, instructing him to deliver it to the stronghold. After this he slaughtered sheep to feast his guests.
The next morning Zhu Gui ordered a large boat, and invited the bold fellows on board. Together with the boats which had brought Chao Gai and the others, it set forth for the mountain fortress. After sailing a long time, they came to an inlet. They could hear drums beating and gongs crashing along the shore. Four sentry craft glided out, manned by seven or eight bandits. These recognized Zhu Gui, greeted him respectfully, and returned to their hiding place.
At the Shore of Golden Sands the party disembarked, leaving their families and fishermen to wait by the boats. Several score bandits came down the mountain and led them to the fortress gate. Wang Lun and the other leaders came out to greet them. Chao Gai and his party bowed politely. The bandit chieftain returned the courtesy.
"I am called Wang Lun. The fame of Chao Gai the Heavenly King has long thundered in my ears. It is a pleasure to welcome you to our humble stronghold."
"I am a crude, unlettered fellow seeking refuge, hoping only to be a simple foot soldier under your command. Please do not refuse me."
"You mustn't talk like that. Please come to our small fortress, and we will confer."
All went up the mountain and entered Righteous Fraternity Hall, where Wang Lun insisted that his guests sit on the raised platform. Chao Gai and his six companions stood in a row on the right, while Wang Lun and the other bandit leaders stood in a row on the left. After an exchange of courtesies, they took their seats as hosts and guests. Wang Lun instructed his junior officers, at the foot of the platform, to hail the visitors. When this was done, musicians in an ante-chamber commenced to play. The chieftain ordered a lieutenant to go down the mountain and look after his guests' retinue. These were quartered in a hostel below the gate.
Within the fortress two oxen were slaughtered, and ten sheep and five pigs, and everyone feasted, to the accompaniment of drums and horns. And as they drank, Chao Gai told the outlaw leaders the entire story.
Wang Lun listened uneasily, deep in thought, and made only brief noncommittal replies. They dined until evening, then the brigand chiefs escorted their visitors to the hostel below the stronghold gate, and left them to be waited on by the vassals who had come with them.
Chao Gai was very pleased. "We've committed such serious capital crimes. Where else could we find refuge?" he said to the other six. "If it weren't for the kindness of Chieftain Wang Lun we'd be in a real dilemma. We should always be grateful."
Wu Yong laughed coldly.
"Why are you sceptical, Teacher?" asked Chao Gai. "Tell us what you know."
"You're brave but too honest, brother. Don't think for a moment Wang Lun will let us stay. You didn't see what was in his heart. You noted only his facial expression and manner."
"What's wrong with that?"
"When we first began dining, he was quite friendly. But after you told him how we killed all those officers and soldiers and the deputy, and released Ho Tao, and how bold the Ruan brothers were, his expression changed. Although he answered you courteously, his heart wasn't in it. If he actually wanted to keep us, he would have already assigned us proper seats.
"Du Qian and Song Wan are a couple of boors. What do they know about how to treat a guest? Lin Chong, on the other hand, was a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards, a big city man, very polished. But right now he can't help himself. He holds only fourth place here. I noticed that he looked dissatisfied when he saw how Wang Lun was answering you. He never took his eyes off him. There was clearly something on his mind. I think he'd like to help us but he's in a difficult position. I'm going to throw out a few suggestions, and see whether I can't set them against each other."
"We rely completely on your shrewdness, Teacher," said Chao Gai.
The seven men retired for the night.
The next morning it was announced that Drill Instructor Lin was calling.
"He's come to see us," Wu Yong said to Chao Gai. "Just what we wanted!"
The seven men hurried out to greet their visitor and invited him into the parlour.
"We imposed too much on your generosity last night," said Wu Yong. "We must apologize."
"It is I who must apologize. Though I longed to show my respect, I was not in a position to do so. Please forgive me."
"We have no talent but we are not blocks of wood. We were most sensible of your kind intentions. We're extremely grateful."
Chao Gai begged Lin Chong to take the seat of highest rank. Lin Chong wouldn't hear of it. He pushed Chao into the chair and seated himself opposite. Wu Yong and the other five sat in a row on the side.
"We have long known of the drill instructor's fame," said Chao Gai. "We did not think we would have this opportunity to meet."
"When I was in the Eastern Capital I never failed in courtesy to my friends," said Lin Chong. "I now have had the honour to make your acquaintance but have been unable to behave as I wished. I come especially to express my regret."

"We sincerely thank you," said Chao Gai.
"Quite some time ago I heard of the drill instructor's chivalry in the Eastern Capital," said Wu Yong. "How did you fall out with Gao Qiu, and why did he ruin you? When the army fodder depot was burned in Cangzhou, that also was his doing, wasn't it? And who introduced you to this mountain stronghold?"
"If I told you of the wickedness of that scoundrel Gao Qiu it would make your hair stand on end. And I cannot get revenge! I found refuge here on the recommendation of Lord Chai."
"Not Chai Jin, known in the gallant fraternity as the Small Whirlwind?"
"The very one."
"I have heard much about his righteousness and generosity, how warmly he treats brave men," said Chao Gai. "It is said that he is a descendant of the royal Zhou family. How wonderful it would be to meet him!"
"Lord Chai is famed throughout the land," said Wu Yong. "Surely it was because of your extraordinary skill with weapons, Drill Instructor, that he recommended you here. I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that Wang Lun should have relinquished top leadership to you. This is common opinion and in keeping with Lord Chai's letter."
"Teacher rates me much too highly. I committed a capital crime and found shelter with Lord Chai. He was quite willing to keep me but I didn't want him to become involved. I came to this mountain of my own volition. Little did I know that it's a dead end! I don't mind having a lower rank but Wang Lun is hard to get along with. He's not sure of himself, and is often untruthful."
"He seems friendly enough," said Wu Yong. "What makes him so narrow-hearted?"
"Having you gallant heroes join us would be of great mutual benefit, like embroidering flowers on brocade, like rain on dry sprouts. But Wang Lun's very jealous of the talented and able, he's afraid you'll overwhelm him. When you told, last night, how you slaughtered the soldiers and officers, he was upset. He's plainly reluctant to let your stay. That's why he asked you to rest in this outside hostel."
"Since that's how he feels," said Wu Yong, "there's no point in waiting for him to say so. We'll go somewhere else."
"Please don't take it amiss but I have an idea," said Lin Chong. "I was afraid you bold fellows might be thinking of leaving, so I came early to confer. Why not wait and see how Wang Lun behaves today. If the lout speaks reasonably, not like yesterday, then everything can be discussed. But if he breathes so much as half an improper sentence, just leave the rest to me."
"Your kind consideration is more than we deserve," said Chao Gai.
"Why should you quarrel with your old brothers for the sake of your new?" asked Wu Yong. "If he'll have us, we'll stay. If not, we'll go."
"No, Teacher!" cried Lin Chong. "As the ancients say: 'The astute and the gallant each cherish their own kind.' That filthy churl! What use is he to anybody? Gallant fellows, you can rely on me." He rose and took his leave. "We shall be meeting soon," he said.
They saw him to the gate, and Lin Chong went back up the mountain.
Not long after, a bandit arrived from the stronghold and said: "Today, our chieftains are inviting you to dine in the waterside pavilion in the fort on the south side."
"Tell them we will be there shortly," said Chao Gai. The bandit departed.
"What shall we do, Teacher?" Chao Gai asked Wu Yong.
The teacher smiled. "Don't worry, brother. The stronghold is going to have a change of masters. Lin Chong seems determined to have it out with Wang Lun. If he shows any signs of hesitation, my tongue is sharp enough to prick him into open strife. You all carry concealed weapons. If I stroke my beard, get in and help him."
Chao Gai and the others silently and gladly agreed.
By mid-morning messengers had come four more times to repeat the invitation. Finally, neatly dressed, with weapons hidden on their persons, the seven set out for the feast. Song Wan arrived personally, on horseback, to lead the way, and seven sedan-chairs were provided for the guests. All proceeded directly to the waterside pavilion on the mountain's southern slope, and the seven came down from their conveyances. Wang Lun, Du Qian, Lin Chong and Zhu Gui were waiting to meet them and invite them into the pavilion. Hosts and guests took their seats, to the left and right respectively, on a dais.
Lesser brigands kept on refilling their goblets. When several rounds of wine had been drunk and two courses of food served, Chao Gai proposed to Wang Lun that the seven join the fraternity. But the bandit chieftain casually changed the subject. Wu Yong watched Lin Chong. The drill instructor was glaring at Wang Lun. They drank until afternoon. "Bring them in," Wang Lun said. Three of the bandits went out and soon returned. One of them was carrying five large silver ingots on a platter. Wang Lun rose, goblet in hand, and addressed himself to Chao Gai.
"We are honoured that you heroes have assembled with us here. Unfortunately, our stronghold is only a swampy marsh, not fit for gallants of such stature. We offer these few modest gifts and hope you won't laugh at them. When you have settled in some large suitable fortress, I will personally send men to serve under your command."
"For a long time we have known that this great stronghold welcomed able fighters," Chao Gai replied, "and so we made a beeline here to join. If you won't have us, we shall leave. As to the silver you so graciously offer, we cannot accept it. Not that we are rich but we do have a bit of travel money. Please take back your splendid gift. We must be on our way."
"Why refuse it? We would be very glad to have you. It's only that we're short of grain and housing. Staying in a place like this would be holding you heroes back. It's not in keeping with your dignity. That's why we are not asking you to remain."
Before the words were out of Wang Lun's mouth, Lin Chong, scowling fiercely, shouted: "When I first came here you tried to put me off by saying you were short of grain and housing! Now you tell brother Chao and his gallant company the same story! What's the big idea?"
"Calm yourself, sir leader," Wu Yong begged. "We shouldn't have come. We've only stirred up bad feeling among you. Chieftain Wang Lun is not driving us away, he's sending us off with travelling expenses. Please don't be angry, any of you. We'll go, and that will be the end of it."
"Wang Lun has a knife behind his smile!" said Lin Chong. "He's man of pure words but dirty deeds! I'm not going to let him get away with it!"
"Animal!" barked Wang Lun. "You're not drunk. How dare you speak of me like that? Have you no respect for your superiors?"
"You're an impoverished scholar who failed in the government examinations, a man of threadbare learning," Lin Chong scoffed. "What right have you to be stronghold leader?"
"Our coming here has caused this quarrel," Wu Yong said to Chao Gai. "We must get some boats and depart today." The seven men rose as if to leave the pavilion.
"Stay at least till the end of the banquet," Wang Lun proposed.
With a kick Lin Chong sent the table crashing to one side. He jumped to his feet and pulled a glittering knife from beneath his robe. Wu Yong stroked his beard. Chao Gai and Liu Tang hurried over as if to restrain Wang Lun.
"You mustn't quarrel," they exclaimed.
Wu Yong pretended to be soothing Lin Chong. "Please don't be rash," he urged.
Gongsun Sheng cried to both sides: "Don't destroy your harmony on our account!"
Ruan the Second wrapped his arms around Du Qian, while Fifth enveloped Song Wan, and Seventh did the same to Zhu Qui.
The assembled lesser bandits watched in frightened stupefaction. Lin Chong cursed Wang Lun.
"You're a poor village scholar! If it weren't for Du Qian, you wouldn't even be here! Lord Chai supported you, gave you travelling expenses, befriended you but when he sent me with a letter of introduction, you did everything to put me off! Now these bold heroes come, and you want to send them down the mountain! Does Mount Liangshan belong to you? You're a thief, jealous of men of talent! What good is there in keeping you alive? You haven't any particular ability. Who are you to lead this stronghold?"
Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui tried to press forward to help Wang Lun but they were held so tightly by the Ruan brothers that they couldn't move. The bandit chieftain turned to go. Chao Gai and Liu Tang blocked his path. Wang Lun realized his danger.
"Where are my boon companions?" he cried.
Several bandits who had always been very close to him wanted to come to his rescue but they were cowed by Lin Chong's fierce manner.
Again Lin cursed the bandit chief, then stabbed him through the heart. Wang Lun collapsed in a heap. Chao Gai and the others each produced a knife. Lin Chong cut off Wang Lun's head and raised it aloft. Terrified, Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui fell to their knees.
"Let us serve as grooms who hold your whip and stirrup," they begged.
Chao Gai, with polite haste, helped them to their feet. Wu Yong pulled the chair of the highest chieftain from the pool of blood and pushed Lin Chong down into it.
"If anyone disagrees, he will go the way of Wang Lun," he shouted. "From now on Drill Instructor Lin is the leader of Mount Liangshan."
"No, Teacher," said Lin Chong. "I killed the scoundrel out of loyalty to you gallant heroes. I seek no position for myself. I will be the laughing stock of the whole chivalrous fraternity if I take this seat today. I'd rather die, first! But I have another suggestion. I wonder whether you'll listen to me?"
"Speak," said the others. "Who would dare disagree? Let's hear it."
Lin Chong's words were brief. But as a result, in Unity Pavilion many men with but one heart gathered, before Righteous Fraternity Hall scores of righteous fighters assembled. The man who executed Heaven's will—that loyal, generous gallant, would soon arrive.

When Inspector Ho left the audience hall with the Governor's warrant in his hand, he went immediately to the conference room for a meeting with his subordinates. The constables all said: "If you're talking about Stonetable Lake, it's right next to the Marshes of Mount Liang. That's a wild region, full of marshy reeds and tracts of water. Without a big detachment of troops, including boats and cavalry, no one could think of going there to arrest robbers!"
"Good point!" said the Inspector, and back he went to the Governor. "This Stonetable Lake," he pointed out, "is next-door to the Marshes of Mount Liang. It's a whole area of shallow creeks and branching channels, overgrown with reeds and sedge. It's always been a place where people get robbed. All the more so now this band of desperadoes have taken refuge there. Unless you send a really big force, how can we go there and expect to arrest anyone?"
"All right, then," said the Governor. "I'll order a special investigator and five hundred picked troops to accompany you on the mission."
With this new order in his hand the Inspector returned to the conference room. His subordinates were summoned, and over five hundred troops were chosen and told to prepare their arms and equipment. Next day the special investigator turned up with a letter from the Governor. He and the Inspector mustered the troops and together with the Inspector's own men set off for Stonetable.
Meanwhile Chao Gai and the Taoist, Gongsun Sheng, having set fire to the manor, headed for Stonetable with a dozen or so villagers. On the way they met the Ruan brothers, who had come out fully armed to escort them back. All seven then installed themselves at Ruan the Fifth's. By this time Ruan the Second had moved his whole family, old and young alike, to a safe island in the lake. They now discussed their plan to join the rebels on Mount Liang. Wu Yong said: "The point is, there's this inn at the crossroads on the road to Leeside, run by Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile, whose job is to receive good men from all over the country. If you want to join the outlaws, you first have to contact him. Let us now procure boats and load them with the necessary provisions. We'll include a few introductory gifts for Zhu Gui."
Just as they were discussing all this, some fishermen arrived and said: "Government troops are coming!" Chao Gai responded by jumping to his feet and saying: "If the devils are coming here, we'll stay and wait for them!" Ruan the Second said, "Why not? I'll take care of them myself. Most of them will find death in the water; the rest I'll put to the sword." And Gongsun Sheng said, "All right but just wait and see what a humble Taoist can do!" Chao Gai began to give orders: "Liu Tang, you and the Professor here will take all the valuables, and the children and old people, and load them into boats; you will ferry them across to the Leeside road and wait near the crossroads. We shall remain here to watch developments, and then join you later."
Ruan the Second chose two rowing boats in which they installed the women, old people and children, together with the household goods. Wu Yong and Liu Tang went as escort, one to each boat, while seven or eight retainers rowed them to the crossroads on the Leeside road where they were to wait. Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh were sent off in boats with secret instructions to ... well, anyway, these instructions envisaged their making contact with the enemy, each in a separate boat.
Meanwhile Inspector Ho and the special investigator, with all their troops, were approaching Stonetable. They commandeered any boats they found moored along the bank. Soldiers who could swim were then transferred to the boats and continued the advance by water, while the cavalry proceeded overland. Boats and cavalry were to converge on Ruan the Second's house in a simultaneous attack by land and water.
On sighting the house, the troops set up a cheer and charged. They burst inside. But the house was completely empty. Nothing remained except a few household articles too heavy to be worth moving.
"We'd better arrest a few fishermen from the neighbourhood," said the Inspector. Under questioning the fishermen divulged that the two younger brothers — Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh — lived on the lake, and you couldn't reach them without a boat. Inspector Ho and his colleague discussed what to do next. They knew that the lake was full of little backwaters and channels and that finding one's way there was a complicated business. Moreover, the water was muddy and treacherous; you could never tell how deep it was. If they divided up into small groups and searched separately, they risked falling into a trap. So they decided to get the villagers to look after their horses and all go together by water.
In due course they embarked with their troops in the boats that by now numbered more than a hundred and ten, including both punts and rowing-boats. Together they rowed towards Ruan the Fifth's house. They had covered less than two nautical miles, when they heard someone singing, hidden among the reeds. All the boats stopped to listen:

In Duckweed Marsh a fisherman am I,
*I neither sow nor reap;*
*At my hand the wicked officials die,*
Yet faith to my Emperor I keep.

As they heard this song, they felt their hair stand on end. Then, far ahead of them, they saw a man sculling a boat with a single oar. He came towards them, singing. There were some who knew him: "It's Ruan the Fifth!" they exclaimed. The Inspector gave a signal and everyone rowed with all their might. The boats shot forward and the troops inside readied their weapons, waiting for the encounter. At this point Ruan the Fifth shouted scornfully: "You cursed officials, you oppressors of the people! You've got a nerve! What makes you think you can show your faces here? You're really trying to pull the tiger's whiskers!"
There were archers in the boat behind the Inspector. They now fitted arrows to their bows, bent them powerfully, and let fly together. Ruan the Fifth saw the arrows speeding towards him and seizing a paddle somersaulted into the water and disappeared. When the attackers reached the spot there was no one!
They rowed on, venturing down two more channels but before they got to the end of the second they heard a whistle from among the reeds. They stopped the boats again. In front two men were sculling a boat towards them. The man in the bow had a blue hat and a green raincoat. In his hand was a short spear. He was singing:

In Stonetable Village I was born and bred,
*Killing's my entertainment;*
*When I meet an official I cut off his head,*
That's how my days are spent.

Again the Inspector and his party felt shivers run down their spines. Those who recognized the singer exclaimed: "It's Ruan the Seventh!"
"Row for all you're worth!" the Inspector ordered. "We've got to catch the villain, we can't let him get away!" At this Ruan the Seventh gave a scornful laugh and shouted "Filthy vultures!" Then with a quick twist of his spear he turned the boat that shot off up a narrow channel and disappeared. With a general shout they raced in pursuit. But Ruan the Seventh and his fellow-sculler seemed to fly! As they went they let out piercing whistles. Evidently their idea was to shake off pursuit among the narrow channels. The attackers were led this way and that and the channels seemed to get narrower all the time, till finally the Inspector said: "Stop! Moor the boats and stay close to the bank." When they climbed out onto the bank to look around, they could see nothing but mile upon mile of desolate reedbanks. There was no path to be seen anywhere. The Inspector began to feel anxious. Not knowing what to course to follow, he asked the advice of some locals.
"Even though we live here," they replied, "there are many parts we don't know." So the Inspector dispatched two boats with two or three constables in the bows to search out the way. More than four hours passed but they did not return. "The fools are incompetent," the Inspector pronounced. He sent out another five policemen also in two boats. When these boats had been gone over two hours and there was still no sign of them, the Inspector said: "These were all experienced and effective officers, how can they be so hopeless? How is it that not a single boat has reported back? Why is it that, with all these men we brought along, not one of them is any good?"
The sky showed that it was getting late. The Inspector had to take a decision: "We can't see any end to this marsh, so what's going to happen? There's nothing for it but to go and reconnoitre myself." He chose a fast boat and several experienced and reliable officers, all fully armed. They equipped themselves with good birchwood paddles and the Inspector seated himself in the bow. Then they advanced into the midst of the reedbeds.
The sun had not yet sunk below the horizon as they paddled forward. After they had gone about two miles they saw a man walking along the bank carrying a hoe. The Inspector gave a shout: "Hey, you there! Who are you, and can you tell us where this channel goes to?"
"I be from the village," the man replied. "And this here be called Deadman's Ditch, an' she don't go nowhere."
"Did you see two boats go past?"
"You mean them as were chasing Ruan the Fifth?"
"How do you know they were chasing Ruan the Fifth?"
"Why, because they be fighting up there in Black Crow Wood."
"How far is that?"
"'Tis right there in front of you, you do see it from here."
Hearing this, the Inspector ordered the men to row ahead. Then he put two men, armed with pitchforks, out onto the bank. Immediately the man with the hoe materialized and in a trice he had felled each of them with a single swipe of the hoe, and tumbled him into the water. The horrified Inspector leapt to his feet, intending to jump out but the boat suddenly shot out from the bank and an underwater swimmer broke the surface, grabbed the Inspector by the legs and toppled him into the lake with a resounding splash. Those left in the boat were thinking to flee but the man with the hoe jumped aboard and smashed their heads in one after another, spattering the deck with their brains. By now the Inspector had been dragged out onto the bank by the underwater swimmer, who undid his belt and used it to tie him up. This swimmer was in fact Ruan the Seventh, and the one with the hoe was Ruan the Second. The brothers now gave the Inspector a hard stare and said: "Now you know us! There's nothing we like better than killing and looting! What a fool you must be! Whatever made you think you could come here with your troops and capture us!"
"Friends, I was only following orders," the Inspector pleaded. "It wasn't my idea. I would never have presumed to try and capture the likes of you. Please be merciful. You should know that I have an eighty-year-old mother with no one else to look after her. If only for her sake, I beg you to spare my life."

Their reply was to truss him up like a dumpling wrapped in a lotus leaf and throw him in the bottom of the boat. They got rid of the dead bodies by tipping them into the water. Then they each gave a whistle, and four or five fishermen's boats emerged from the reeds and came to pick the brothers up, each getting into a different boat.

Meanwhile the special investigator, who had remained with the rest of the troops in the other boats, was thinking: "Inspector Ho thought his men were incompetent, so he went to find the way himself but he's been gone an awful long time!" It was in fact already somewhat past seven o'clock and all the stars were out in the sky. Those in the boats were just thinking it was pleasantly cool, when suddenly a wild squall blew up.

*It hurls sand and starts stones rolling, wildly churns the water and sets the heavens in motion. It slowly masses the pitch-black clouds and flings out stinging rain. It fills the sky with leaves of the lilies which clog the channels and scatters the white banners of rushes over the surface of the lake. It tears up trees on the peaks of the Kunlun Mountain and awakens the Dragon Lord of the Eastern Sea himself!*

The wind was blowing from directly behind them, and they cowered in the boats, covering their faces and cursing their lot, as the boats broke their moorings, leaving them to drift helplessly. At this very moment they heard whistles behind them. Turning back against the full force of the wind to look, they saw a whole section of the reedbank burst into flames.

"We're done for!" they exclaimed.

There were about a hundred and ten boats, large and small that the gale was causing to slam into each other at random and now the flames appeared to be advancing towards them. This was caused by a series of small boats, tied two by two and filled with dry reeds and grass which burnt with a fierce crackling sound, that were being steadily driven onto them by the wind. The hundred-boat flotilla formed a massive log-jam which, in that labyrinth of narrow creeks and channels, could find no outlet. There were about ten bigger boats among them, and these were the first to be caught and set ablaze by the fire-rafts. In fact there were also swimmers under the water who were helping to direct the fire-rafts. The soldiers on the larger boats which were now on fire sought to save themselves by jumping out onto the bank but they found only marsh and swamp, no solid ground at all. And all around the reeds were beginning to burn with the same fierce crackling sound. These troops sent to suppress the bandits now found themselves surrounded and cut off!

The wind blew and the flames burned fiercer. The soldiers could only escape by plunging into the soft mud, where they could barely stand. Then from amidst the flames a fast boat appeared, with one paddler in the stern and a Taoist sitting in the bows wielding a gleaming sword. He was shouting: "Don't let a single one of them get away!" The troops crowded together in confusion, stuck in the soft mud. Then on the eastern bank two men appeared leading a group of fishermen armed with gleaming swords; and two others on the west bank, barbed fishing spears glinting in their hands. On either bank, east and west, four heroes in charge of these groups now led the charge, stabbing to left and right. In a short space many soldiers lay dead in the soft mud.

The two on the east bank were Chao Gai and Ruan the Fifth. The two on the west bank were Ruan the Second and Ruan the Seventh. Gongsun Sheng was the Taoist in the boat. There in the marshes, the five of them, with the aid of a dozen or so fishermen, had slaughtered the entire body of troops. Now only Inspector Ho remained, tied up like a dumpling in a lotus leaf, lying in the bottom of the boat. Ruan the Second heaved him out onto the bank. "You're one of those filthy Jizhou swine who oppress the people!" he shouted at him. "I was going to cut you into ten thousand pieces but I want you to go back and tell that bloody governor of yours that you've met the Ruan brothers, and the famous Chao Gai of East Riverside. Tell him it is not a good idea to provoke them! Tell him that I haven't been to demand provisions in the city yet, so he should leave us alone in the village, if he values his life! Anyone who comes here again to beard us, even supposing he were not just a miserable little local governor but an emissary of the Grand Preceptor, and who thinks to capture us — no, supposing the Grand Preceptor himself comes here looking for us — I shall personally render him transparent by making twenty or thirty holes in him! We're going to let you go, and don't come back again. And tell that bloody official of yours not to gamble with his life! Now, since there aren't any roads here, I shall get my brother to take you to the highroad."

Ruan the Seventh loaded the Inspector onto a small fast boat and took him to the road. "Just go straight ahead," he told him, "and you'll find the way. But since all the others are dead, it doesn't seem fair to let you off just like this, and let your ass of a governor have the last laugh. So I shall ask you to leave your two ears behind as a pledge!" With that he produced a sharp knife and cut off the Inspector's ears, leaving him bathed in blood. He put the knife away, undid the belt which bound the prisoner, and pushed him out onto the bank. There's a poem about this:

The government troops have given up hope
*In the battle of Deadman's Ditch.*
*The Inspector's the only one to escape*
*And even for him there's a hitch.*
*He'll have to leave them his ears, they say,*
*He's lucky not to be dead.*
*Now instead of his ass's ears,*
He'll go home with an ass's head!

So the Inspector, lucky at least to have escaped with his life, set off to find the road back to Jizhou.

Now Chao Gai, Gongsun Sheng, the Ruan brothers and a dozen or so fishermen left Stonetable Lake in six or seven small boats and went over to the Leeside road, where they joined up with Wu Yong and Liu Tang again. Wu Yong asked about the operation against the government troops and everyone was delighted with the story that Chao Gai told in detail. Then all the boats together made their way to the inn of Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile. When he saw so many people, all wanting to join the outlaws, Zhu Gui became quite excited. Wu Yong explained their situation with complete frankness. Zhu Gui listened with interest and was introduced to them all, one by one. He invited them to sit in the main hall and hurriedly ordered the waiters to prepare a banquet for their entertainment. He then took out his special bow, fitted a whistling arrow to it, and shot it towards the reedy creek. The troops in charge of the boat came rowing out. Zhu Gui quickly wrote a note, listing the names of all the heroes who wanted to join, and gave it to the soldiers, telling them to deliver it to the stronghold. He also killed a sheep for his guests. Thus they passed the evening. Next day they rose early and Zhu Gui called for a big boat which he invited them all to get into, and they set off for the mountain fortress, towing the boats they had come in. Soon they came to the mouth of a channel where drums and gongs were playing. Four patrol boats shot out, manned by seven or eight soldiers. They greeted Zhu Gui, and then returned in the direction they had come.

The party now arrived at Golden Sands Landing. Here the children and the old people, and the fishermen, were to wait with the boats, while a group of soldiers who had come down from the stronghold took the others up through the pass. Wang Lun at the head of his other chiefs came to the pass to meet them. Chao Gai and his friends immediately saluted and Wang Lun ceremoniously greeted them with: "I, Wang Lun, have heard many good things of the great Chao Gai. His name resounds like thunder in the land. I am most happy that he honours our fortress with his presence this day."

Chao Gai replied: "I, Chao Gai, am a rough, unlearned sort of fellow. My desire now is only to conceal my ignorance; my dearest wish is to become a simple soldier under your command. If you do not reject me, I shall be overjoyed."

"No, no, you're far too modest," said Wang Lun. "But please come inside and we can talk things over."

The newcomers followed Wang Lun into the stronghold. When they reached the great Assembly Hall of the Heroes, Wang Lun insisted that they should sit in the places of honour but they refused. Chao Gai went and stood with the others in a straight line on the right, while Wang Lun and his subordinate chiefs ranged themselves in a straight line on the left. Each person was now introduced individually, and then places were assigned according to the rules of etiquette. Wang Lun ordered the lesser chiefs, standing below the dais, to pay their respects, and off to one side some musicians began to play. The lesser chiefs were sent off to see to the entertainment of the rest of Chao Gai's party at the foot of the mountain, where there was a guest house.

In the stronghold two buffaloes were slaughtered, ten sheep and five pigs, and a feast ensued, accompanied by much blowing of fifes and thumping of drums. During the feasting, Chao Gai revealed to Wang Lun and his friends all that he had in mind, holding nothing back. Wang Lun, as he listened, remained silent for a long time, appearing fearful and hesitant. He fell into deep thought, and gave only absent-minded answers.

In the evening, when the party finally broke up, Chao Gai's party were escorted down through the pass to sleep in the guest- house, and people were assigned to serve them. Chao Gai was happy. He said to Wu Yong and the others: "We are criminals, guilty of a capital offence. Where else could we go to find shelter? We would be homeless but for Wang Lun's undeserved kindness. Our debt to him is great."

But Wu Yong only laughed sarcastically.

"Why do you laugh, Professor?" Chao Gai asked. "Is there something I don't know about?"

"You are too trusting," Wu Yong said. "Do you really believe Wang Lun is going to let us stay? You weren't watching him properly. You only saw the false appearance."

"Why do you call it false appearance?"

"Didn't you notice? At first, when you talked during the feast this morning he seemed friendly enough. But later, when you told him how we had killed so many soldiers and let no one off but Inspector Ho, and when you talked about the exploits of the Ruan brothers, his expression changed. It seemed as if his words were quite different from his thoughts. If he was really thinking of letting us stay, he would surely have fixed our positions in the hierarchy this morning. The other two, Du Qian and Song Wan, they are just bumpkins, they don't know anything about manners. Lin Chong, however, is different, he's a former instructor of the imperial guard, a man from the city, experienced and capable, who at the moment has to content himself with fourth position. I watched him carefully: he was observing Wang Lun's way of replying to you, and you could see he wasn't at all happy about it. He kept looking at Wang Lun and he was clearly furious. I think he is well-disposed towards us but he can't show it openly. I think it would only take a few words from me to bring things to the boil in this fortress."

"Well, I trust your judgement, Professor," said Chao Gai.

They all went to bed for that evening.

Next morning at dawn a man came in and announced: "Instructor Lin would like to speak with you."

Wu Yong said to Chao Gai: "He's come to find us. That's just what I wanted."

They rose and dressed hurriedly in order to receive Lin Chong. After inviting him in, Wu Yong stepped forward to say: "We must thank you for all the honour and consideration you showed towards us last night."

"I fear you were not received worthily," Lin Chong replied. "Had I been able to follow my own heart, I should have honoured you as you deserve. But I was not in a position to do so. I hope you will forgive me."

"We are simple people," said Wu Yong, "yet we are not made of wood. How could we not notice the marks of your concern? We are truly grateful."

Chao Gai tried many times to prevail upon Lin Chong to take the place of honour but the latter refused as many times, and it was only after he had pushed Chao Gai into it that he would sit down in the next place himself. Wu Yong and the others then seated themselves. Chao Gai said: "Instructor, I have heard so much about you but I never expected to meet you here in person."

Lin Chong said: "Before, when I was in the Eastern Capital, I never failed in courtesy towards my friends. But today, when I had the opportunity of satisfying a lifelong ambition in making your acquaintance, I found myself prevented from expressing openly the happiness this brings me. For this reason I came to apologize."

"We truly appreciate your delicacy," Chao Gai said.

Wu Yong then changed the subject. "I have heard a very great deal, Instructor, about your marvellous exploits in the capital but I am not fully acquainted with the causes of your falling out with Gao-le-Bel and all the ills he heaped on you. I also heard about the burning of the army stores at Cangzhou, and that it was all contrived by him. But on whose recommendation was it that you decided to join the outlaws?"

"Gao-the-Ball? My blood boils at the mere mention of that scoundrel's name and the thought of all the harm he has done me! To think that I have not yet been able to pay him back! But as to my seeking refuge here, it was Mr. Chai's idea."

"Would that be Chai Jin, the gentleman who's known among the rivers and lakes as the Little Whirlwind?"

"That is he."

"I have heard that Chai Jin is a most worthy and charitable man, one who delights in helping all men of spirit," said Chao Gai. "They say he is a descendant of an Emperor of the Later Zhou. What wouldn't I give to make his acquaintance!"

Wu Yong said: "This Chai Jin is universally known and admired. The fact that he recommended you, Instructor, is proof of your prodigious talents in the martial arts. Nor is it any exaggeration to say that it would have been only right for Wang Lun to have ceded the chief position to you. That is common knowledge. And besides, it would have been in keeping with Chai Jin's letter."

"I thank you for the sentiments. But I had committed a serious crime, remember, that is why I sought the help of Mr. Chai. He would have been willing to let me stay with him but I didn't want to get him into trouble, so I decided to join the outlaws. I didn't realize it was going to land me in this mess. It's not a question of status, it's simply that Wang Lun is weak and vacillating, that's what makes it so hard to work with him."

Wu Yong said: "Chief Wang receives people courteously, however, and seems to want to be friendly. Can he really be so mean of spirit?"

Lin Chong replied: "We should, today, be thanking our stars that such a group of heroes as yourselves have come here to offer us aid and support. We ought to regard it as the height of good fortune, it should be as rain to thirsty young seedlings. But the only emotion that jealous and resentful spirit feels is panic lest your power should eclipse his own. Last night when he heard your story about the massacre of government troops, he was uneasy in the extreme, and he made up his mind not to allow you to stay. That is why he asked you all to come down here to sleep in the guest-house."

Wu Yong said: "If that is how chief Wang feels, we had better not stay and serve him; we should take ourselves off."

"Please," said Lin Chong, "do not behave like strangers. I fore-saw all this. It was precisely because I feared you might with- draw that I came here to give you advance warning. Let us see how he treats you today. If the scoundrel treats you reasonably, not like yesterday, then let no more be said of this. But supposing this morning he steps out of line, be it just by a centimetre, then he shall answer for it to Lin Chong!"

"Really we do not deserve that you should go to such lengths for us. But we are truly grateful," Chao Gai said.

Wu Yong said: "Why should you fall out with old friends for the sake of new? If we can be accepted, all well and good. If we cannot, then we had much better withdraw at once."

"Certainly not, Dr. Wu. Remember the old saying, 'The wise know the wise, the brave man nods to the brave.' There's no point in trying to conciliate this creature, this filthy animal! But I assure you, there's nothing to worry about!"

With this, Lin Chong rose and took his leave, saying: "We shall meet again shortly." They escorted him out and watched him return up the mountain. The situation was like this: Why should they not have leave to stay
*When they'd rather stay than leave?*
*And nobody there could rightly say:*
*"There's no room for you, I believe!"*
*Because he who could give them leave to stay*
*Would rather see them leave,*
*Fearing that they will end his sway—*
Without even a by your leave.

Around nine o'clock a soldier appeared with an invitation. "The lords of the mountain retreat request the pleasure of the visitors' company at a grand banquet in the water pavilion on the southern slopes," he announced.

Chao Gai replied that they would be there shortly, and the messenger left. "What do you think this means, Professor?" Chao Gai asked Wu Yong.

"It's all right," Wu Yong replied, excitedly. "Here's your chance to take over the mountain retreat. Today Lin Chong undoubtedly intends to quarrel with Wang Lun. And should he hold back, then I am quite sure that with this tongue of mine — small but not idle, I may say — I can spur him on. We must all carry hidden weapons. Watch me closely, and when I give the signal, by tugging my moustache like this, we will all do our part." The others could barely contain their excitement.

Around eleven, messengers were again sent and the invitation was issued three or four more times. Chao Gai and the others chose weapons and secreted them on their persons. Now fully prepared, they set off for the banquet. They were met on the way by Song Wan, who was riding down to invite them himself, and a group of soldiers carrying seven sedans. They climbed into the sedans and were carried thus to the water pavilion on the southern slopes. On arrival they descended from the chairs and were welcomed by Wang Lun, Du Qian, Lin Chong and Zhu Gui, and invited inside the pavilion. Here's what the pavilion was like:

*Entirely surrounded by water, with the curtains rolled right up giving a clear view of the flowers and the red rail which enclose it: the air sweetly scented by thousands of water lilies spread over the green water. Everywhere the eye is met by the blue-green of lotus leaves extending over the lake. Beyond the painted eaves the shade of leafy willows; outside the closed windows the wind sighs gently in the pines. The beauty of rivers and mountains fills the pavilion where this noble band of heroes is now assembled.*

The company seated themselves ceremoniously: Wang Lun and his four colleagues on the left, Chao Gai and the six others on the right. Under the dais soldiers filled and passed the cups. Several rounds were drunk and food was served twice, while Chao Gai and Wang Lun held a lengthy conversation. Every time Chao Gai brought up his idea of joining the stronghold, however, Wang Lun quickly changed the subject. Wu Yong looked at Lin Chong, and saw that he was glaring fixedly at Wang Lun.

The feasting continued till afternoon. Then Wang Lun called out to some soldiers: "Bring it out!" Three or four men left the room and a moment later one came back carrying a big dish on which five big silver ingots were piled. Wang Lun stood up and raising his cup said to Chao Gai: "I am most grateful to you all for having come here to join us. But I fear this poor refuge of ours is but a barren swamp, how can it be home to so many true dragons? So I have ventured to collect these few gifts that I earnestly hope you will not despise, and I request you to look elsewhere for some worthier spot to tether your horses."

Chao Gai replied to this speech: "I had heard much about this great fortress, and how men of honour and importance were received here. It is for that reason that I came here, specially, to enlist in your band. If you find it impossible to take us, we will withdraw of our own accord. I thank you for your offer of payment but I cannot accept it. I do not wish to boast of my wealth but I have to inform you that our resources are entirely adequate, so I would ask you to put away your generous gift immediately. I bid you farewell."

"Why do you reject the gift?" Wang Lun said. "It is not that we do not want to have you but just that our provisions are meagre and our housing poor. I fear that your reputation would suffer from it and you would lose face. That's the only reason I do not want you to stay."

Before he had even finished speaking, Lin Chong, who had looked on with raised eyebrows, glaring ferociously, burst out: "It happened before, when I came to the mountain — you turned me away with the same pretext of inadequate provisions and poor housing! Now when our friend Chao Gai and his company come here you trot out the same old excuses. It simply doesn't hold water!"

"Please don't get so excited!" said Wu Yong. "It's all our fault for coming here, we've upset the good relations between you all. Just now Chief Wang politely asked us to leave, and offered us financial compensation. He didn't say he was throwing us out. So please, calm yourself. We will leave of our own accord."

"His smile hides a knife, the kind words conceal a treacherous heart. I have to speak, I can stomach no more!"

"Do you hear him, the filthy beast?" Wang Lun cried. "He's not even drunk, what excuse has he for speaking to me so offen- sively? Where is discipline?"

"You useless, broken-down scholar," Lin Chong scolded. "There's not an ounce of culture in you, who says you're fit to be lord of this stronghold?"

At this point, Wu Yong said to Chao Gai: "Because of us, the leader has lost face. As soon as the boats are brought, we must depart."

As Chao Gai and the other seven rose and made as if to leave the pavilion, Wang Lun stopped them, saying: "Don't go. Wait till the banquet is over." But Lin Chong kicked the table aside with one foot and leapt to his feet, pulling out from under his robe a dagger that blazed as if it was on fire. At this point, Wu Yong pulled on his moustache and Chao Gai and Liu Tang went over and made a pretence of restraining Wang Lun, saying "Please do not quarrel!" Wu Yong meanwhile pretended to hold Lin Chong back, saying "You must do nothing rash!" and Gongsun Sheng addressed both sides impartially, saying: "Do not let relations be spoiled on our account." The three Ruan brothers went over and stood by Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui, while the rank and file looked on, open-mouthed.Lin Chong grasped hold of Wang Lun and yelled in his face: "You're just a penniless village scholar, without Du Qian how could you ever have got where you are? Mr. Chai gave

you the money, paid your expenses and befriended you, yet when he recommended me to you, what did you do but reject me? And not just once, either! Now this whole bevy of good men come to enlist and you want to send them away too. Do you think Mount Liang belongs to you alone? You envious cur, you can't bear to see anyone better than you! What else are you fit for but the block? There's not an ounce of greatness about you, you've no right to be chief here!"

Perhaps Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui had thoughts of stepping forward but closely watched as they were, how could they stir? Wang Lun thought to flee at this time but Chao Gai and Liu Tang prevented it. Seeing the turn things had taken, Wang Lun cried out "Where are my bodyguards?" He did indeed have some trusted guards, and they might have come to his aid but when they saw the ferociousness of Lin Chong's expression they thought better of it. So Lin Chong continued to hold onto Wang Lun, and went on cursing him for another moment, until he struck. The blade ripped into Wang Lun's breast and he collapsed on the floor of the pavilion. When they saw Wang Lun was dead, Chao Gai and his companions drew their weapons. Lin Chong quickly severed Wang Lun's head and held it up. Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui, terrified, knelt and said: "We wish to serve you." Chao Gai and the others hurriedly helped them to their feet. Wu Yong dragged Wang Lun's throne over into the pool of blood and pressed Lin Chong into it, crying out: "If there be any not in accord, let them take good note of Wang Lun! I hereby declare Instructor Lin chief of this mountain fortress!" Lin Chong set up a vehement protest: "No, Professor, no! I acted out of regard for all of you and in the interests of right. It was for that reason I killed that unconscionable villain. Not because I had designs on his position. If you insist on giving the leadership to me, I will be mocked by men of spirit the world over. If you force me to this, I would prefer to die! But there is something I would like to say — will everyone allow me to say it?"

"You are the leader, if you have words to speak of course you must speak them," everyone murmured, "and we of course will listen."

Those words of Lin Chong's, though but few, were to have most important consequences:

In the Gold Pavilion stout hearts assemble;
Here's a company of heroes to make the wicked tremble!

It's a case of:

Heaven's agents now are close at hand;
Enemies of wrong will form a virtuous band.

The Inspector He Tao left the court with the signed order and went into a private chamber to discuss matters with a number of his men. They unanimously said, "As you want us to go to the Shijie Village, we must not forget that that place is quite close to Liangshan Marsh. The lake is very extensive, and there are numerous anchorages for boats among the reeds and rushes. Unless we have a large number of soldiers, boats, and horses, who dare go there to try and arrest the thieves?"

"What you say is correct," said He Tao. He left and entering the hall again spoke to the Prefect, "The village of Shijie is quite close to Liangshan Marsh, and on the lake there are numerous anchorages and narrow tracks in all directions in the reeds and rushes. There have always been thieves in that spot, and recently their numbers have increased. If you do not give me a very large number of soldiers and horses how dare we attempt to arrest the bandits there?"

"As things are like that," said the Prefect, "I will send an officer with five hundred soldiers to go with you to arrest the bandits."

The Inspector He Tao, after receiving these orders, went back to the private room and summoning all the soldiers he carefully selected five hundred of the best men, and then ordered them to go and equip themselves for the expedition. The next morning the military officer with his five hundred soldiers, and He Tao with his men left for the Shijie Village.

After Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng had set fire to the farm buildings they left with about ten of the farm labourers for the Shijie Village. About halfway there they met the three brothers Ruan, who were armed, and had come to conduct them to their village. Ruan the Second had already sent his family, both young and old, to a place of safety on the lake and now the 7 men discussed whether they should all go to the brigands' stronghold at Liangshan Marsh.

"Just now," said Wu Yong, "at the Li Family Village there is a man named Zhu Gui, 'Dry Land Crocodile,' who keeps an inn there, and offers shelter to brave men. Those who want to join the bandits must first go to him. We had better load all our possessions on a boat, and go there. We can make a present to him, and request him to arrange for us to join the bandits."

While they were discussing the matter several fishermen entered and reported that a large body of soldiers had arrived at the village.

Chao Gai stood up and said, "As they have come we must stay here."

"Never mind," said Ruan the Second, "I will go and meet them. I will cause more than half of them to be drowned, and the rest killed."

"Do not get excited," said Gongsun Sheng. "This is my affair, so you just watch how I deal with them."

Chao Gai said, "Let brother Liu Tang and Wu Yong load all our possessions and also the young and old people on a boat, and then row to the Li Family Village, and wait for us there. We will stay behind to see what the soldiers will do, and then we will follow."

Ruan the Second loaded two large boats accordingly, and Wu Yong went in one, and Liu Tang in the other. About eight men sculled the boats to the Li Family Village. Chao Gai then told Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh to get some small boats, and fight with the enemy in a certain way.

Inspector He Tao and the military officer upon arriving at the Shijie Village seized all the boats that were moored there. The soldiers who knew how to handle boats were then placed in the boats, and the others were mounted on horseback on the bank. They then all moved towards the village. Upon reaching Ruan the Second's home they raised a loud shout and rushed into the house. But it had already been vacated, and there were only few heavy furnitures left behind.

He Tao instructed his men to arrest some of the fishermen who were neighbours. When the neighbours were brought before him they said, "The two brothers, Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh, are living at another anchorage, and we cannot get there without boats." He then said to the officer, "This lake has numerous tracks and nooks through the reeds, and where there is open water we do not know how deep the water is. If we divide our forces I am afraid that we may fall into some villainous trap. I think we had better leave our horses here with a few men to guard this village and send all the other soldiers on the boats."

This was agreed to and He Tao and the officer then embarked with the bulk of their men. They had seized more than one hundred boats, some for rowing and others for sculling. They all started off for Ruan the Second's house on the lake. They had not gone five //when they heard a man in the reeds and rushes singing, and all the boats were stopped. The man was singing:

For long I've caught fish at Liao Er,
Neither corn nor hemp do I plow;
I'll kill the corrupt officials,
I'm loyal to Emperor Zhao.

He Tao was surprised at hearing this, and just then he saw the singer in the distance sculling a small boat.

A soldier recognized the man and called out, "That is Ruan the Fifth."

He Tao beckoned with his hand for his men to move forward, and all the boats advanced.

When Ruan the Fifth saw this movement he laughed and cursed them saying, "You are corrupt thieves who oppress the people! How dare you attack me! You come here to pull the tiger's whiskers!"

The soldiers took their bows, and let fly a large number of arrows.

Ruan the Fifth seeing this seized a tool used in fishing, made a somersault, and dived into the water. The soldiers rushed to the spot but could not find anyone there. They punted their boats towards two tracks in the reeds, and heard someone in the reeds whistle. The boats spread out, as they saw another boat approaching them sculled by two men. A man was standing in the boat, wearing a bamboo conical hat, and a grass raincoat, and was holding a spear in his hand. He was singing:

I was born at the village of Shijie,
And I long to slake my thirst for blood;
Let me only behead the deputy and He Tao,
And present their heads to the Emperor Zhao.

Both He Tao and his men were startled upon hearing this. A man called out, "This man is Ruan the Seventh."

"Let all of you advance and seize this thief," shouted He Tao. "He must not escape."

Ruan the Seventh laughed upon hearing this and said, "You crook!" He then pressed his spear and the boat turned round towards a nook in the reeds.

The soldiers seeing this, yelled out and chased him. But Ruan the Seventh and his two oarsmen sculled briskly so that the small boat seemed to fly. He also whistled with his fingers as the boat wound its way through the devious turnings.

The soldiers quickly followed down the narrow channels but He Tao called out ordering them to stop and anchor close to a bank there. He Tao got on the bank and looking round saw nothing but a vast expanse of reeds and rushes without any trace of a footpath on the bank. He was suspicious, so he asked the fisherman they had arrested whether he knew the place. The fisherman replied, "Although I live here yet I do not know all these numerous tracks through the reeds."

He Tao sent some three of his men in a small boat to go forward, and examine the tracks. As they had not returned after four hours He Tao said, "Those men are not good scouts." He then sent five more of his men in two small boats to reconnoiter the tracks. But after another hour had passed those men also had not returned. He Tao said, "Those men were well experienced so how is it that they have not returned to report to me? I never thought there is not a single man of the soldiers who can get out of a scrape by himself." As it was now getting dusk he thought that it would not do to stop in that spot but he decided to first investigate matters himself. He selected a quick boat and six of his reliable men who were armed, to pull the oars and then seating himself at the bow of the boat went towards one of the numerous tracks in the reeds. They went about two //; and now as the sun was setting in the west he saw a man on the bank carrying a hoe. He asked him, "Who are you? What place is this?"

The man replied, "I live at this village. It is called the Decapitation Creek. There are no thoroughfares here."

"Have you seen two boats pass this way?" asked He Tao.

"Are they the boats that were sent to arrest Ruan the Fifth?" asked the man.

"How do you know that they come to arrest Ruan the Fifth?" asked He Tao.

"They are fighting in the forest over there," said the man.

"How far is it from here?" asked He Tao.

"It is just over there—not far away," replied the man.

He Tao gave orders for the boat to stop at the bank, and then told two of his best men to arm themselves and come ashore. But the man took his hoe and struck the two soldiers with it, knocking them down into the water. Upon seeing this He Tao was startled, and was thinking of going on the bank himself. Just at that moment the boat was moved away from the bank, and a man suddenly emerging from the water seized his legs and pulled him off the boat into the water. The men on the boat seeing this were thinking of retreating but the man on the bank used his hoe and brained them all one by one. The man in the water dragged He Tao to the bank, stripped him of his belt and bound him with it. Then He Tao saw that the man who had jerked him into the water was Ruan the Seventh and that the other man on the bank was Ruan the Second.

The brothers cursed He Tao, "We three brothers always like to kill men, and set houses on fire. What a cur you are! How dare you bring your men here to arrest us!"

"Heroes!" said He Tao, "I was sent here by my superiors— It was not my own will. How dare I come here to arrest you? But pray have pity on me and spare my life because at home I have a mother who is eighty years of age, and depends entirely upon me for her support."

One of the brothers said, "Bind him tightly like a 'zongzi' rice dumpling and put him in the hulk of the boat." They then threw the bodies of the soldiers, who had been killed, into the water. The brothers then whistled with their fingers and immediately about five men emerged from the reeds and rushes and came on the boat. They then all departed.

The officer who had been left in charge of the soldiers on the boats thought, "He Tao thought that his men did not know how to carry out his order so he went himself to explore the tracks but so far he has not returned." It was then about 9 P.M. and the sky was studded with stars. The soldiers were all taking a cooling on the boats as it had been a hot day. Suddenly a strong wind sprung up and struck the boats in the stern. The men covered their faces with their hands and bemoaned their luck. The wind snapped the mooring ropes, and the boats were soon in disorder. Just then the soldiers heard a whistle, and looking in its direction they saw at the side of the reeds an outbreak of fire. The men cried out, "We cannot escape from that." There were about one hundred boats, both small and big, and these were now all bumping against each other. The fire approached quickly. They now saw that there was a fleet of small boats fastened together in pairs, and loaded with reeds and grass which was all ablaze and the wind was blowing this mass of flames towards them. Their boats were all mixed up in a disorderly mass, and the channel was so narrow that they could not escape. There were about ten of the big boats all together in one spot, and these pairs of small boats with the fire got between them. In the water beside these small boats were men who guided the boats to their destination. The soldiers on the big boats leaped on shore to escape. But there was no dry ground there, and the fire soon caught the reeds so that there was no way to escape in any direction. They stood in the mud. The wind was strong, and the flames were dangerous. In the fire they now saw a small boat sculled by a man, and with a man seated in it who held a two-edged sword and shouted, "Do not allow even a single one to escape." The soldiers standing in the mud shivered with fear. Instantly they saw on one side came two men leading about five fishermen armed with spears and swords, and on another also advanced two men who were leading four fishermen who were also armed. These men now commenced to attack the soldiers, and in a very short time all the soldiers were killed.

The four leaders were Chao Gai and the three brothers Ruan. The man seated on the boat was Gongsun Sheng who had prayed to Heaven for a wind and had obtained it. These five men had led ten fishermen in the attack on the soldiers, and had succeeded in killing them all in the reeds, or in the water. There was only one man left and that was Inspector He Tao who was lying in the bottom of a boat, tightly bound like a dumpling. Ruan the Second picked him up, and put him on the bank. He then cursed him saying, "You stupid reptile! You have deceived and injured the people of Jizhou. At first I thought of cutting your corpse into ten thousand pieces. But now I want you to return to Jizhou Prefecture, and tell that thief, the Prefect, that the three brothers Ruan, or even Chao Gai are not to be slighted with. We do not go to your town to borrow grains but if he comes to our village it will result in his death.

"We are not afraid of a piddly Prefect, who has an order from the Prime Minister to arrest us, because if Cai himself comes here we shall only cut about thirty holes in his body. If we release you, you must not attempt to come here again. You must tell that prick the Prefect that he had better not have another dream like this one. There are no roads here but I will get my younger brother to show you a way."

Ruan the Seventh got a small light boat, and placing He Tao on board took him to a place where a road started, and then said to him, "You can get away by this road. All the men who came with you have been killed so is it not nice for us to let you go in this way? When the Prefect sees you that asinine thief will laugh at our weakness. I now beg that you will let me have your two ears as a keepsake."

Ruan the Seventh took his sword and cut off both ears of Inspector He Tao. He then cut his bonds, and left him on the bank.

Chao Gai, Gongsun Sheng, the three brothers Ruan, and the ten fishermen embarked on seven small boats and left the anchorage of the Shijie Village, and went to the Li Family Village. There they found the boats that had brought Wu Yong and Liu Tang. Wu Yong asked how the affair with the soldiers had terminated, and Chao Gai told him all the details. Wu Yong and all the men were very much pleased on hearing the news. They then placed their boats together in one place, and went to the inn to find Zhu Gui, the "Dry Land Crocodile." When Zhu Gui saw so many people arriving and assuming that they wanted to join the bandits he went out to meet them. When Wu Yong had told him the news Zhu Gui was much pleased, and saluted each person individually. He then invited them to come into the main hall where he told the servants to bring wine and wait upon the guests. He then took his bow and shot an arrow, that had a whistle attached to it, into the reeds. As soon as the whistling arrow reached its destination a boat carrying a number of bandits came forth, and was sculled towards the inn. He then wrote a letter giving the names and number of the heroes who wished to join the bandits, and handing this to the boatmen, told them to take it at once to the stronghold. A sheep was then slaughtered, and cooked for the assembled men.

They passed the night there, and early the following morning Zhu Gui ordered a big boat, and invited his guests to embark. They also took the boats that had brought Chao Gai and his party, and set off for the bandits' stronghold. In a short time they neared the landing place, when they heard drums and gongs beating. Four small boats came out to meet them, and after the boatmen had saluted by exclaiming "*nuo*," they retreated.

Upon reaching the landing place called the Jinsha Bank, all the fishermen and other men were told to remain in that place. About ten bandits were there to conduct the leaders to the stronghold. At the barrier Wang Lun with the other chiefs was awaiting them, and they all saluted Chao Gai and his fellow leaders.

Wang Lun said, "I have heard the great fame of Chao Gai, the 'Heavenly King,' like the sound of thunder in my ears. Today I am greatly honoured by you entering our humble 'straw stockade.'"

"I am quite uneducated," said Chao Gai, "and am very rough. Today I want to hide my incapability and am willing to be a subordinate follower of yours, and I hope you won't reject my application."

"Don't talk like that," said Wang Lun. "Please come into our stronghold where we can discuss matters."

They all went up the mountain. Upon arriving at the assembly hall Wang Lun invited them to enter. Chao Gai and his six companions stood in a row on the right-hand side, while Wang Lun and his subordinate leaders stood on the left side. They then each individually pressed each other to be seated. Wang Lun instructed the lower officers standing near the door to salute the guests also, and he then gave orders for the men outside to beat the drums and play the music. He then told some of his men, to go down the mountain and conduct the other followers of Chao Gai to the stronghold and entertain them in the guest chamber where they could stay for the night. He also ordered that two oxen, ten sheep, and five pigs were to be killed and a big feast provided. While they were drinking the wine Chao Gai told them all about his affair from beginning to the end. While listening to this Wang Lun was much upset and very perplexed. He made no remark or comment but muttered to himself.

The feast lasted until the evening when Chao Gai and his men were shown by the chiefs to a guest hall where the former could stay.

Chao Gai was much pleased with the arrangements, and spoke to Wu Yong and the other five men, "We have committed a serious crime and should Wang Lun not treat us so well, we could find no safe place to stay. So we cannot forget to repay his kindness."

Wu Yong gave a sneering laugh.

"Why do you sneer in that way?" asked Chao Gai. "If you know anything you had better tell me."

"You have an honest disposition," said Wu Yong. "But do you believe that Wang Lun is really willing to receive us here? You cannot read his heart but you should carefully notice his conduct."

"What do you see in his actions?" asked Chao Gai.

"Did you not notice," said Wu Yong, "that in the early stage of the feast he spoke with you in a friendly manner but afterwards when you had stated how we had killed many soldiers, policemen, and how we released He Tao, and what splendid heroes the brothers Ruan are, Wang Lun then changed his countenance, and his answers to you were not sincere. If he had really intended to keep us here, he could have decided upon your position in the band early this morning. The two leaders Du Qian and Song Wan are rather rough characters, so how can they understand how to treat guests? Only the other leader Lin Chong was previously a Drill Instructor at the Eastern Capital, he understands everything. Just now he has no alternative but to remain as the fourth-in-command. At the beginning when Wang Lun was discussing matters with you I noticed that Lin Chong did not seem very comfortable, and was always looking at Wang Lun. I saw that Lin Chong might do something for us. I shall speak a few words which might produce a conflict between them."

"I have to depend entirely on your admirable scheming," said Chao Gai.

The seven men slept soundly that night. Early next morning they were informed that Lin Chong wanted to see them.

"That man," said Wu Yong, "is come to have a talk with us; he has fallen in my trap."
The seven men went to the door to invite Lin Chong to enter, and Wu Yong being in front said to him, "We are deeply indebted to you for the grand reception we had last night."
"I am afraid that I did not pay you sufficient respect," said Lin Chong. "Although I should like to have treated you much better yet I am not in a position to do so."
"Although our talents are negligible," said Wu Yong, "yet we can appreciate your intentions. We are extremely obliged to you."
Chao Gai pressed Lin Chong three times to take the seat of honour but Lin Chong declined the honour. At last Chao Gai gave way and agreed to take the premier seat, and Lin Chong took the second seat. The other six men took their seats in a row.
"I have heard of your fame," said Chao Gai, "but I did not expect to meet you today." "When I was in the Eastern Capital," said Lin Chong, "I never treated my friends lightly. But now as I cannot treat you as I would like to, so I came here to beg your pardon."
Chao Gai expressed his thanks for the great favour bestowed upon him.
"I heard previously," said Wu Yong, "that you were noted at the Eastern Capital as a great hero. But I never heard how you fell out with Marshal Gao Qiu, and how it happened that you incurred his displeasure. Afterwards I heard of the military fodder depot at Cangzhou being burnt down, and that it was part of Gao Qiu's plot to aggravate your misfortune but I have not heard who it was that introduced you to these bandits."
"The mention of Gao Qiu," said Lin Chong, "makes my hair stand on end. Yet I am not able to have my revenge. It was Squire Chai who introduced me to this place."
"Is not that Squire Chai," said Wu Yong, "the man whom we know as Chai Jin, the 'Small Whirlwind'?"
Lin Chong said that that was the person.
"I have heard," said Chao Gai, "that Squire Chai distributes wealth in a good cause. He is known to entertain heroes from all quarters. It is said that he is the descendant of the former Zhou royal house. It would be very nice if I could meet him some time."
"According to what people say," said Wu Yong, "the fame of Squire Chai is known everywhere, and it is heard of by all men. I think that if your military skill had been only ordinary he would not have recommended you to the bandits here. Without exaggeration I think that it would have been proper for Wang Lun to have made you the head chief here. Everybody in fact agrees with that, and moreover it would have been in accordance with Squire Chai's recommendation."
"I am flattered by your great praise," said Lin Chong. "It is not Wang Lun who would not have me remain at his home. I have really committed a great crime, and I was really afraid of implicating Squire Chai. I myself was willing to come here instead of staying at his home. But I never expected that I am today held on a dilemma. It is not that I am dissatisfied with my position but Wang Lun has no fixed idea, and his word cannot be depended upon and that makes it very difficult to work with him."
"In dealing with men," said Wu Yong, "he appears to be very amiable but who knows that at his heart he is so narrow-minded."
"Just now," said Lin Chong, "it is very fortunate that many heroes have come to our mountain stronghold to help and assist us in many ways. Your presence is like dressing an embroidery with flowers or like a welcome shower on a parched rice field. But Wang Lun is jealous and envious of capable men, and is afraid that the influence of the heroes will result in his overthrow. Last evening when you told him about your having killed many soldiers I could see that he was uncomfortable, and that was why he did not want you to stay but asked you to pass the night outside the barrier."
"As Wang Lun has that kind of disposition," said Wu Yong, "we need not wait until he asks us to go but must ourselves seek refuge in some other place."
"You heroes," said Lin Chong, "must not look at things in that way, because I have another plan. I was afraid that you had the idea of leaving here, and that was why I came early to discuss matters with you. You had better wait and see how he treats you today. If he is reasonable and quite different from yesterday, then we need not discuss matters any further. But if there is only half a sentence which is doubtful then everything that follows will rest upon my shoulders."
"As you display such kindness," said Chao Gai, "we shall be grateful to you forever."
"In that case," said Wu Yong, "you will break up the old brotherly association for our sake. If we are allowed to remain then we will stay but if we must go then let us depart."
"You are mistaken," said Lin Chong. "There is an ancient proverb: 'One ape will pity another ape, and a good man will have compassion for his fellow men.' I think he must be the offspring of a couple of rotters, as he is a vile brute, and we cannot therefore regard him as a brother. But you heroes need not be troubled about him." Lin Chong then rose to make his departure, and said that he would see them again very soon. He then left after being duly saluted by all the men present.
Shortly afterwards one of the bandits came, with an invitation from the chief Wang Lun for them to dine with him at an arbour on the south side of the mountain. Chao Gai told him to tell Wang Lun that they would soon be there, and he then asked Wu Yong, "What do you think of this meeting with Wang Lun?"
Wu Yong laughed and said, "Sir, you need not worry, as you will soon be in command of this stronghold. I think that today Lin Chong will fight Wang Lun, and if he hesitates then you will find that my three-inch tongue will not be useless, and I can make him risk his life. We must be prepared, and conceal weapons on our bodies. When you see me stroking my mustache you can use your united strength."
Chao Gai and the others were quite pleased at hearing this. After 9 A.M. four times a man came to request them to go to the feast. They all carried weapons but their dress gave no indication of them. Song Wan came to conduct them to the feast, and he was riding a horse. He brought seven sedan chairs carried by bandits, and the party went there and were ushered to the feast. Upon arrival at the arbour they were met by Wang Lun, Du Qian, Lin Chong, and Zhu Gui who conducted them inside where they all took their seats. Wang Lun and his four leaders sat on the left while Chao Gai and his six companions sat on the right. Many bandits served them with wine. After drinking wine and partaking of about two courses of food, Chao Gai attempted to start a conversation with Wang Lun about their joining the band but every time Wang Lun diverted the conversation to some other subject. Wu Yong was watching Lin Chong who sat with his arm over the back of his chair and kept his eyes on Wang Lun's body. Thus the feast went on till after midday when Wang Lun turning round ordered his bandits to bring in a thing, and shortly afterwards a bandit entered carrying in both hands a large tray on which were five ingots of silver. Wang Lun rising with a cup of wine in his hand addressed Chao Gai, "We are greatly honoured by you heroes wishing to join our band but unfortunately our stronghold in the midst of these waters is so small that it cannot accommodate many dragons. As a manifestation of my feelings I wish to present you these gifts, and I hope that you will accept them with a smile. Also should you find a larger stronghold where you can stay, I shall have much pleasure in surrendering myself to you there."
Chao Gai said, "We heard that you were always inviting virtuous men to enter your band, and that was why we came here. But if it is not convenient for you we will of course retire to some other place. We are extremely honoured by your offering us these ingots of silver but we cannot accept them. I do not care to boast of the wealth that we have but we really have enough for our present requirements. I request you to take these presents back, and we will then take our leave."
"But why won't you take the presents?" asked Wang Lun. "It is not that we do not wish you heroes to stay here but because our food supplies and housing accommodation are so scanty that we are afraid that you would soon be dissatisfied with them."
While he was saying this Lin Chong raised his eyebrows and his eyes expressed anger. Leaning back in his chair he shouted out, "When I first came here you falsely said that your food supplies and housing accommodation were scanty, and now that Chao Gai and his heroes have arrived you make the same pretext. How unreasonable you are!"
"Do not get angry," said Wu Yong. "The fault is on our side as our arrival has evidently upset the amiable relations in your mountain stronghold. Wang Lun, your chief, has today diplomatically suggested that we should go, and has even provided us with our traveling expenses. He did not try to drive us away. So I request you to appease your anger as we are quite willing to depart."
"There is a hidden dagger behind his smiling face," said Lin Chong. "His words are nice but his actions are dirty enough. Indeed today I cannot bear with him."
Addressing Chao Gai, Wang Lun said, "Just look at this brute! He is not drunk, and yet he hurts my feelings by this kind of rebellious language."
"You are evidently a poor scholar who has failed in the official examinations," said Lin Chong. "You have no learning so how can you be the leader at this stronghold?"
"Brother Chao Gai," said Wu Yong, "our seeking refuge at this mountain has resulted in causing the chief to 'lose face.' We had better get a boat and depart immediately."
Chao Gai and his six companions rose from their seats in order to leave the arbour. But Wang Lun urged them to finish their meal before going. Lin Chong, however, kicked the table over, and taking a sword from his clothes he flashed it about. Wu Yong stroked his mustache, and seeing this Chao Kai and Liu Tang gathered round Wang Lun, and pretended to urge him not to have any fighting.
Wu Yong plucked at Lin Chong's dress, and said, "Do not be rash!"
Gongsun Sheng addressing both parties said, "Do not break your friendly relations on our account."
Ruan the Second was pressing Du Qian to remain passive; Ruan the Fifth was pretending to persuade Song Wan; Ruan the Seventh to persuade Zhu Gui; while the bandit soldiers were too afraid to speak a word but looked on with surprise.
Lin Chong seized hold of Wang Lun and cursed him saying, "You village bumpkin! You are very lucky in having Du Qian to help here. Squire Chai helped you and gave you plenty of money. But when he recommended me to you, you were not willing to allow me to stay here. Again today you wanted to send these heroes away. This mountain surely is yours! But how jealous you are of capable men! As you are such a useless customer I must kill you. You are so narrow-minded and incapable that you certainly cannot be the chief of this stronghold."
Du Qian, Song Wan, and Zhu Gui all wanted to intervene but were surrounded by the three pretending peacemakers. Wang Lun would have escaped at this time had not Chao Gai and Liu Tang prevented him from doing so. He saw that the position was bad and called out, "Where are my intimate followers?" There were several of his intimates at one side but although they had a desire to help him yet dared not come forward when they saw Lin Chong's fierce aspect. Now Lin Chong caught hold of Wang Lun, and after further cursing he stabbed him in the breast. Seeing this Chao Gai and his men drew their broad swords. Lin Chong cut off Wang Lun's head, and held it aloft in his hand. Seeing this Du Qian, Song Wan, and Zhu Gui were much afraid, and kneeling down they said to Lin Chong, "We are quite willing to 'hold your stirrup and reins' and be your servants." Chao Gai and his followers immediately raised them up on to their feet again. Wu Yong took the chair that was standing in a pool of blood, and placing it at one side said to the assembly, "If you do not submit you will suffer the same fate as Wang Lun. Today we recognize Lin Chong as the chief headman of this stronghold."
Lin Chong shouted, "You are making a mistake. Today I desired justice to reign, and that is why I killed this bad thief. I certainly do not want to occupy the position as your chief. Wu Yong has asked me to occupy this seat but should I do so I should be a laughing stock of all the heroes in the empire. Should you press me any further in this matter I would rather die than submit. But will you listen to just one sentence I wish to say to you?"
The men replied, "We shall of course listen to what you, our chief, have to say." Lin Chong did not say much but the result was that many men of one heart were admitted to the Broken Gold Pavilion (even gold can be broken when 2 hearts are united), and many meetings of righteous brothers would be held at the Hall of Righteous Brotherhood.

The administrator of heaven's justice is coming.
The wealth distributor in good cause is approaching.

## 020
## The Men of Marshes of Mount Liang retreat elect Chao Gai as their Chief; Liu Tang Leaves Yuncheng Town on a Moonlit Night & Goes to Yuncheng County

Still clutching the dagger with which he killed Wang Lun, Lin Chong pointed at all assembled and said: "Although I'm an exile from the Imperial Guards I am able to be with these heroes here today. I turned against Wang Lun because his heart was narrow, because he was jealous of their talents and refused to accept them, not because I wanted his position. I could never have brains and courage enough to destroy the evil ministers surrounding the emperor and repulse their armies. Brother Chao is a gallant, charitable man. He is intelligent and brave. He's famed and admired everywhere. In the spirit of chivalry I propose that he become the leader of this stronghold. What do you say?"
"Very suitable," cried the men.
"No," said Chao Gai. "Since ancient times 'the strong guest must not exceed his host.' Strong I may be but I've only recently arrived from distant parts. I cannot assume high command."
Lin Cong pushed him into the leader's chair. "This is the time. Don't refuse." To the other brigands he shouted: "If anyone disagrees, let him remember what happened to Wang Lun!"
Courteously he insisted that Chao Gai retain his seat. He called to the bandits to come to the pavilion and pay homage. He ordered that Wang Lun's body be removed, and that a feast be prepared inside the fortress. He instructed that all the junior officers stationed on the front and rear of the mountain be summoned to the stronghold for a meeting.
Lin Chong and the others helped Chao Gai into a sedan-chair, then all got on their horses and proceeded to Righteous Fraternity Hall, where they dismounted and entered. Chao Gai was seated on the chair of first rank, in the middle. An incense burner was lit in the centre of the hall. Lin Chong came forward.
"I'm only a crude fellow who knows a bit about arms. I have no learning or talent, no wisdom or technique. Today we are fortunate enough to be here with you gallant men and our just principles are clear. We cannot be casual about authority, as we were before. Teacher Wu Yong shall be our military adviser, in charge of our fighting forces. He must take the second seat."
Wu Young replied: "I'm a simple village school teacher, with neither the leaning nor the ability to manage affairs. Though I've read something of the military classics by Sun and Wu, I haven't shown even half a grain of talent. How can I accept?"
"The time is at hand," Lin Chong said. "No need for modesty." Wu Yong took the second chair and Lin Chong said: "Master Gongsun, please take the third seat."
"That cannot be," Chao Gai protested. "If you keep giving way like this, I'll withdraw completely."
"You mustn't say that, brother. Master Gongsun is known throughout the gallant fraternity. He's an excellent commander, and even the spirits cannot fathom his tactics. He can summon the wind and the rain. There's no one like him!"
"Though I know a bit of magic," said the Taoist priest, "I haven't any real learning to benefit the world. How dare I become a leader? That place belongs to you."
"We all heard your cleverness today in defeating the enemy," said Lin Chong. "A tripod vessel must have three legs. With only two it cannot stand. No need to be polite."
Gongsun took the third seat. Lin Chong wanted to yield further but Chao Gai, Wu Yong and Gongsun wouldn't hear of it. "Because you talked of a tripod needing three legs, we had no choice but to accept the three top positions," they explained. "But we'll all withdraw if you relinquish any further." They firmly seated him in the fourth chair.
"Song and Du should now be seated," said Chao Gai. But Du Qian and Song Wan absolutely refused. They begged Liu Tang, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh to take the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth places respectively. Du Qian then accepted the ninth chair, Song Wan the tenth and Zhu Gui the eleventh.
From then on, the positions of the eleven heroes were fixed in Liangshan Marsh. The nearly eight hundred men guarding the mountain front and rear all came and paid their respects, then stood on either side. Chao Gai addressed them.
"Today, Drill Instructor Lin has made me leader of this stronghold and Teacher Wu the military advisor. Master Gongsun also controls military authority. Drill Instructor Lin and the others have over-all charge of the fortress. You lieutenants retain your original commands. Observe your daily duties and guard the palisades and the beaches. Let no mishaps occur. We must all be united in mind and virtue."
He directed that the houses on both sides of the hall be put in order for the two families which had come with them, and ordered that the purloined birthday gifts—the gold and silver and jewels—as well as the valuables he had taken with him from the manor, be brought forth. From these he distributed largesse to the lieutenants and the rank and file brigands.
Oxen and horses were slaughtered as a sacrifice to the gods of Heaven and Earth, and in celebration of the reorganization. The leaders ate and drank far into the night. They feasted in this manner for several days. Then Chao Gai, Wu Yong and the other chieftains checked the granaries, had the fortifications repaired and more weapons made—lances, halberds, bows, arrows, armor and helmets—readied boats large and small, trained their soldiers and boatmen to board vessels and fight, and prepared in general to meet any enemy attack. Of this we'll say no more. One day, seeing how generously Chao Gai provided for the families of the men living in the stronghold, Lin Chong thought of his wife in the Eastern Capital. Was she still alive? He confided his concern to Chao Gai.
"I've been meaning to send for her ever since I came here. But Wang Lun was shifty and hard to get along with, so I kept putting it off. I wish I knew what's become of her."
"Send someone to fetch her, brother. Write a letter, We'll have a man deliver it and bring her here as soon as possible. Then you won't have to worry."
Lin Chong wrote a letter and gave it to a pair of trusted brigands. Less than two months later, they returned to the fortress.
"We went straight to the neighbourhood of Marshal Gao's residence in the Eastern Capital," they declared, "and found your father-in-law's home. We were told that Marshal Gao had been pressing your wife to marry his son. Rather than do that, she hung herself. She's been dead for half a year. Broken with grief, your father-in-law half a month ago fell ill and died. Only Jin Er, the maidservant, is left. She has married and her husband has moved in with her. We checked with your neighbours, and they told us the same story. As soon as we got the facts, we came back to report."
Lin Chong wept. From then on, he cast out all thoughts of home and loved ones. Chao Gai, observing this, sighed. The stronghold settled down to a daily routine of training the men and preparing to repulse attacks by government troops.

During a conference of leaders one day in Righteous Fraternity Hall a bandit hurried up the mountain and announced: "Troops from Jizhou Prefecture, about two thousand of them, sailing this way in four or five hundred boats, large and small! They've stopped temporarily in the lake at Stone Tablet."
"They'll soon be here," Chao Gai said to Wu Yong in alarm. "How shall we deal with them?"
The teacher laughed. "There's nothing to worry about. I have a plan. 'Earth can stop the flow of water, generals can cope with enemy troops,' as the old saying goes." Quietly, he told the three Ruan brothers what to do, then gave instructions to Lin Chong and Liu Tang, and to Du Qian and Song Wan.
Well over a thousand soldiers were assembled in locally commandeered boats on the lake at Stone Tablet, dispatched there by the prefect of Jizhou. They were headed by District Garrison Commander Huang An and a high police officer. Dividing into two squadrons, they proceeded separately across the lake.
Huang An's flotilla, with flags waving and soldiers yelling, advanced swiftly towards the Shore of Golden Sands. As they drew near, mournful notes floated across the water.
"Isn't that a horn?" asked Huang An.
He signalled his boats to halt, and peered into the distance. Three craft came towards them, each rowed by four men, all dressed alike. One man was standing on the prow, a red bandanna on his head and wearing a red silk tunic, a barbed spear in his hand.
One of the soldiers recognized them. "Those are the Ruan brothers," he said to Huang An. "Second, Fifth and Seventh."
"After them," cried Huang An. "We'll take all three!"
From two sides, between forty and fifty craft gave chase, the soldiers shouting fiercely. Shrill whistles came from the three boats that turned and fled. Huang An shook his spear.
"Kill those robbers," he exclaimed. "I'll reward you handsomely!"
The soldiers sent a shower of arrows after the racing craft. The three Ruan brothers whipped fox pelts out of the cabins and warded the arrows off. The government vessels followed in hot pursuit. They had gone only two or three //into an inlet when a small boat sped up from the rear.
"Stop chasing them," a man on the little craft cried. "The bandits have killed all our troops in the other squadron and thrown them into the water, and they've captured our boats!"
"How did you fall into their hands?" Huang An demanded.

"As we were sailing, we saw two boats, far off. There were five men on each. We chased after them. When we had gone about four //; seven or eight small vessels suddenly came at us from the surrounding creeks. Their arrows descended on us like a swarm of locusts. We, turned around quickly. But when we reached an outlet, we found that twenty or thirty men on both banks had stretched a rope across the water. As we drifted towards it, they showered us with stones and blinding lime. We jumped into the water and fled for our lives. A few of us got away. When we reached the place where our horses had been, they were gone, taken by the brigands. The guards were lying dead in the water. Luckily, we found this boat in the reeds, and rushed after you to report."
Huang An groaned. He waved a white flag, signalling his other craft to abandon the chase and return. Just as they swung about, three vessels, followed by another dozen, were seen coming in their direction from behind, each with four or five men on board. These waved red flags and whistled sharply, sailing swiftly towards the government craft. Before Huang An could spread his flotilla out in battle formation, cannon thundered from the reeds that suddenly were alive with red flags. Huang An's confusion bordered on panic.
A voice sang out from the rapidly approaching boats: "Huang An can go—if he leaves his head behind!"
Huang ordered his men to row with all their might and get beyond the reeds. From inlets on both sides of the lake forty or fifty small vessels shot out and deluged the government soldiers with arrows. Huang An tried desperately to get through this forest of feathered shafts. He had only three or four small boats left.
He leaped over into a fast little skiff. He could see his men all jumping into the water. Some were being hauled away on their boats. The vast majority had been slaughtered. Just as Huang An was setting the skiff in motion, Liu Tang, on the prow of a craft near the reeds, reached out and caught it with a grappling hook. He bounded on board and grasped Huang An around the middle.
"Struggle is useless," shouted Liu Tang.
The soldiers who tried to swim were killed with arrows. Those who were afraid to take the plunge were captured on their boats.
Liu Tang dragged Huang An to the bank. From the mountain in the distance Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng approached on horseback, carrying swords and leading a reinforcement of fifty or sixty men, about half of them mounted. Altogether, nearly two hundred of the enemy were taken prisoner. The numerous captured boats were removed to the waterside fortifications at the southern foot of the mountain.
The brigand leaders and their lieutenants proceeded to the stronghold. Chao Gai got off his horse, went into Righteous Fraternity Hall and took his seat. The others removed their armor and weapons and sat down around him. Huang An was tied to a pillar. Gold and silver and silks were distributed among the rank and file as rewards. A count was made of the battle trophies. More than six hundred horses had been seized. That was Lin Chong's work. Du Qian and Song Wan had won the victory on the eastern lake, the three Ruan brothers on the western. Liu Tang had captured the enemy commander Huang An.
The chieftains were very pleased. Oxen and horses were slaughtered and a feast was laid. Home-made fine wine was served, and fresh lotus root and fish from the lake, to say nothing of peaches, apricots, plums, loquats, dates, persimmons and chestnuts from the mountain orchards, as well as chicken, pork, goose and duck, raised domestically in the stronghold.
Congratulations were exchanged all around. For men newly arrived at the fortress to have achieved so complete a victory was no small accomplishment!
As they were drinking, a bandit entered and said: "A messenger from chief Zhu Gui, below the mountain."
Chao Gai had him brought in, and asked what was up.
"Zhu Gui has heard that a party of several score merchants will be passing this way by land, tonight," said the messenger.
"Just when we were running short of gold and silks," said Chao Gai. "Who will lead this raid?"
"How about us?" said the three Ruans.
"Right, good brothers. Be cautious, go quickly and return soon."
The Ruan brothers left the hall. They changed their clothes, tied on their swords, took their halberds, pitchforks and barbed spears, and selected a hundred men. They bade farewell to the leaders in the meeting hall, and went down the mountain. At the Shore of Golden Sands they boarded boats and went across to Zhu Gui's tavern.
Chao Gai was afraid the Ruan brothers couldn't handle it alone. He sent Liu Tang with an additional hundred men to join them.
"Take only the merchants' money and valuables," he admonished Liu Tang as he was leaving. "Their lives must be spared."
Liu Tang departed. When, by the third watch, the raiders hadn't returned, Chao Gai dispatched Du Qian and Song Wan with still another fifty men.
Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng and Lin Chong drank till dawn. A messenger entered and said: "Thanks to Zhu Gui we've captured twenty carts of money and valuables and nearly fifty mules, donkeys and horses!"
"Was anyone killed?" asked Chao Gai.
"When the merchants saw us coming at them so strongly, they abandoned their carts, animal and baggage and fled. Not one of them was harmed."
Chao Gai was delighted. "We've just come to the stronghold. We mustn't hurt people." He gave the messenger a silver ingot and went down the mountain to the Shore of Golden Sands in a party with wine and fruit. The leaders of the raid were unloading carts and sending the boats back for the captured horses, donkeys and mules.
It was a joyful reunion. After ceremonial cups were drunk, Zhu Gui was summoned to a banquet in the stronghold. Chao Gai and the others returned to Righteous Fraternity Hall and sat around in a circle. Brigands opened bale after bale of captured booty, putting all the silken clothing in a pile on one side, the ordinary merchandise in a pile on the other, and gold and silver and other valuables in the centre.
The chieftains were very pleased at the large haul. They directed the junior officer in charge of the warehouses to store away half of each pile off for future use. The remainder was divided into two parts. One part was split among the eleven chieftains. The rank and file shared equally in the second part.
A distinguishing mark was tattooed on the face of each captured soldier. The stronger prisoners were made grooms and gatherers of fuel, the weaker were put to looking after the carts and cutting fodder. Huang An was locked up in a building in the rear of the fortress.
"When we first came here seeking refuge," said Chao Gai, "we hoped only to become junior officers under Wang Lun. Then Drill Instructor Lin Chong graciously relinquished the leadership to me. Now we have had two unexpected happy events in a row: First, we defeated the government soldiers, captured many men, horses and boats, and took Huang An. Second, we have seized a great deal of gold, silver and other valuables. We owe all this to your talents, brothers."
"Without the auspiciousness of elder brother we would have obtained nothing," the other leaders protested courteously.
"We seven newcomers must thank Clerk Song Jiang and Constable Zhu Tong for being alive today," Chao Gai reminded Wu Yong. " 'The man who does not repay kindness is not human,' as the ancients said. To whom do we owe our present happiness and prosperity? We must send some of our gold and silver to Yuncheng Town. That is a matter of first importance. And Bai Sheng is still in the prison in Jizhou. We've got to save him."
"Don't worry," said Wu Yong. "I have a plan. Although Clerk Song is a noble person and doesn't seek our thanks, we must do our part. As soon as things are a bit more settled here, we'll certainly have one of our brothers go to him. As to Bai Sheng, we'll send someone not known in Jizhou and have him spend a bit of money among the jailers, high and low, to induce them to relax their strictures. That will make it easier for us to get Bai Sheng out. What we should do now is discuss storing grain, building boats, manufacturing tools of war, strengthening our fortifications, building more living quarters, putting our clothing and armor in order, making spears and swords and bows and arrows, and preparing to meet any government attack."
"That's so," said Chao Gai. "We'll follow your advice." Wu Yong provided a division of duties among the leaders. Of that we'll say no more.

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Nor need we dwell on how Liangshan Marsh prospered from the time Chao Gai came to the fortress. We'll talk rather of the soldiers who escaped and returned to Jizhou. They told the prefect that the brigands had captured Huang An and wiped out his troops, that the men of the stronghold were very brave, that no one could get near enough to arrest them. The area was a maze of waterways and paths, they reported. Winning a battle there was impossible.
The prefect could only lament to the Premier's special emissary: "Ho Tao went in there first with a large force and was the only one to come back alive—without his ears! He's been resting at home ever since, and still hasn't recovered. All his five hundred men are gone. Then I sent District Garrison Commander Huang An and a senior prefectural police officer with many troops to arrest the bandits, and they too have vanished. Huang An is a prisoner in the fortress, and I don't know how many officers and men have been slaughtered. We can't beat those brigands! What am I going to do?" His insides were being torn by conflicting thoughts but he had no solution.
Just then a lieutenant entered and announced: "A new prefect is approaching the East Gate reception pavilion. I have rushed here to report."
The prefect got on his horse and hurried to the reception pavilion outside the East Gate. From the cloud of dust still hanging there, it was apparent the new official had already arrived and dismounted. The prefect went into the pavilion and met his successor. The latter handed him documents under the imprint of the Council of Administration ordering his replacement by the new prefect. After reading them, the prefect and his successor went to the prefecture where the prefect turned over the seals of office and all monies and grain formerly in his charge. He then laid a welcoming feast for the new official, and told him about his troubles with the bandits in Liangshan Marsh, and how they had just destroyed a large government expedition.
The face of the new prefect turned the colour of clay. "So it was for this Premier Cai raised me in rank," he said to himself. "What a place he's given me, and what an office! No strong soldiers, no able commanders. How am I supposed to apprehend those bandits? Suppose the rowdies come here demanding grain? What am I going to do?"
The next day, the former prefect packed his belongings and departed for the Eastern Capital, to await his punishment. Of him we'll say no more.
After taking office, the new prefect sent for the new garrison commander and they discussed a campaign against the mountain stronghold. They would replenish their troops, buy more horses, store fodder and grain, recruit men who were clever and bold. The prefect wrote to the Council of Administration, requesting that neighbouring prefectures be directed to give all possible aid. At the same time he issued an order to the counties under him to join in the hunt and keep a close watch on their borders. No more of that need be said.

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When the prefectural order was received in Yuncheng, the magistrate directed his clerk Song Jiang to relay the instructions to the county's subordinate townships. Song read the document and was shocked.
"I never dreamed Chao Gai and the others would go so far," he said to himself. "They've robbed the birthday gifts, killed policemen, injured Inspector Ho Tao, annihilated many soldiers and horses, and are holding Huang An in their fortress! For such crimes whole families and relatives to the ninth degree of consanguinity can be executed. They may have been forced into it but the facts stand. Legally, they have no excuse. If anything should go wrong, they'll be in a terrible fix."
He brooded for a time, then told his assistant Zhang Wenyuan to draw up instructions and make the prefectural order known to the various townships and villages.
Song Jiang left the office. Before he had gone thirty paces, a voice hailed him from behind: "Clerk Song!"
He turned around. There was Grandma Wang, the matchmaker, with another woman. "You're in luck," she said to her companion. "This is our charitable clerk."
"What did you want to see me about?" asked Song.
Grandma Wang blocked his way. She pointed at the other woman. "Her family is from the Eastern Capital, they're not local people. Just three of them—her husband Old Yan, her daughter Poxi, and herself. Old Yan used to be a singer, and he taught Poxi many ballads. She's only eighteen, quite pretty, too. They came here to Shandong to join the household of an official they knew but they couldn't find him. They drifted around and ended up in Yuncheng. But people here don't care much for music and entertainment, and they haven't been able to make a living. They have a flat in a quiet lane behind the magistracy. Yesterday, Old Yan fell ill of the epidemic and died but his wife has no money to bury him. She doesn't know what to do, and she's asked me to find a man to keep Poxi. 'Where can I find anybody who would be so good at a time like this?' I said. I didn't know where to borrow money for her, either. It looked hopeless. Then I saw you, and I hurried after you with Madame Yan. Have pity on her. Help her buy a coffin."
"So that's it," said Song Jiang. "You two come with me. I'll borrow a pen and ink at that tavern at the end of the lane and write a note to the coffin shop in the east part of town." And he asked: "Have you living expenses?"
"We can't even afford a coffin," said Madame Yan. "Where would we find living expenses?"
"Then I'll give you ten ounces of silver."
"You are my parents reborn! I'd gladly serve as a donkey or a horse to repay you!"
"No need to talk like that." Song Jiang gave the widow a silver ingot and departed.
She took the note to the coffin shop, selected a casket, returned home and arranged for the funeral. When it was over, she still had five or six ounces of silver left that she and her daughter kept for their living expenses. Of that we'll say no more.
One day, Madame Yan came to thank Song Jiang, and she observed that he had no woman in the house. Later, she asked her neighbour, Grandma Wang, about it.
"Doesn't he have a wife?"
"I know his home is in Song Family Village but I've never heard any mention of a wife. He works here as county clerk and has only temporary quarters. He's always handing out money for coffins and medicines, and helping people in distress. I doubt if he's married."
"My daughter is a good-looking girl. She can sing and knows all sorts of amusing games. When she was little and we lived in the Eastern Capital she used to wander around the brothels. All the managers thought she was adorable. One or two famous courtesans several times offered to buy her. But I wouldn't agree, because there was only my husband and myself at home and no son to support us in our old age. I never thought Poxi would suffer as a result. When I went to thank Clerk Song the other day I noticed he had no wife around. I wish you'd tell him for me—if he wants a woman. I'll be glad to give him Poxi. He was very charitable to me, with your help. I have no other way to thank him but this much I can do."
The next day, Grandma Wang went to Song Jiang and broached the subject. At first he refused. But he was no match for the marriage broker's eloquence, and finally he consented. He took a house in the western part of town, bought some furnishings, and installed Poxi and her mother. In less than half a month, Poxi was draped in silks and her hair was studded with precious ornaments. Not long after, even Madame Yan had a certain amount of finery. Poxi was living in luxury.
In the beginning, Song Jiang slept with her every night. But gradually, he came to the house less frequently. Why? Well, Song Jiang was a chivalrous man whose main interest was skill with weapons. Sex had only a moderate appeal. Poxi was a frivolous girl of eighteen or so, in the bloom of youth. She was quite dissatisfied with Song Jiang.
One day he brought his assistant Zhang Wenyuan over to have some wine. Zhang was a handsome young fellow, with dark brows, fine eyes, white teeth and ruby lips. Fond of the houses of pleasures, he was something of gadabout, and had learned all the romantic mannerisms. Besides which he was an accomplished musician and could play all the stringed instruments and woodwinds.
Poxi, an entertainer who loved to drink and frolic, was attracted to Zhang the moment she laid eyes on him. She kept giving him emotion-laden glances. Zhang, an enthusiastic drinker and ladies' man, of course understood the girl's suggestive signals. Afterwards, he called when Song Jiang was not at home, pretending to be looking for him. Poxi asked him to stay to tea. They talked of this and that, and suddenly they were lovers.
Who could have expected that from then on the two would burn so hotly that Poxi was left without a particle of affection for Song. She spoke harshly to him whenever he called and never sought to dally with him. Song was a soldierly man who cared little for women. So his visits dwindled to once every ten days or half month.
The lovers stuck together like glue. Zhang came every night and left with the dawn. All the neighbours knew about it, and word finally reached Song's ears. He only half believed the report.
"Anyhow," he thought, "she's not a real wife formally chosen by my father and mother. If she's lost interest in me, what do I care? I'll just stop going." More than a month went by and he did not call. Madame Yan sent an invitation but he wouldn't go. He claimed he was too busy.
To speak of another matter, on leaving the magistracy one day towards evening, Song Jiang went into the shop across the street and sat down to have some tea. A big fellow, dripping sweat and breathing hard as he walked, was gazing at the magistrate's office. He was wearing a broad-brimmed white felt hat and a silken gown of dark green, with leggings and knee-guards and sandals of hemp, a sword at his waist and a large pack on his back.
The man was clearly hesitant about something. Song Jiang got up and followed. The man had gone about thirty paces when he turned around and stared at Song Jiang. He showed no signs of recognition but to Song he looked familiar.
"Now where have I seen that fellow before?" he mused. For the moment he couldn't recall.
A gleam of recognition came into the man's eye. He stopped and looked at the clerk but didn't have the courage to speak.
"What's the matter with the fellow? Why is he staring at me like that?" thought Song Jiang. He too couldn't bring himself to ask.
The man went into a barber shop. "Can you tell me the name of that official outside, brother?" he queried.
"That's Clerk Song Jiang," the barber replied.
Halberd formally in hand, the man approached Song Jiang and hailed him respectfully. "Don't you remember me, sir Clerk?"
"You look very familiar."
"Let's walk a bit, and talk."
Song Jiang led him into a quiet lane.
"That tavern might be better," the man suggested.
The two entered the tavern and went upstairs and sat down in a secluded room. The man rested his halberd, removed his pack and placed it under the table. Then he dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
Song Jiang hastily returned the courtesy. "May I ask your name, sir?" he said.
"Benefactor," the man replied, "how could you have forgotten your younger brother?"
"Who are you? You really do look familiar but I don't remember."
"I'm Liu Tang, known as the Red-Haired Demon. I had the honour of meeting you in Ward Chief Chao's manor. You saved our lives."
Song Jiang was startled. "Brother," he cried, "you're very rash. It's lucky no policeman has seen you, or you might be in serious danger!"
"Even if it meant my life, I had to thank you!"
"How are Ward Chief Chao and the others? Who sent you here?"

"Brother Chao is very grateful to you for saving his life. He feels he must express his thanks. He's now the highest leader of our stronghold on Mount Liangshan. Wu Yong is military adviser of our army. Gongsun Sheng also controls military affairs. Lin Chong gave us full support, and destroyed Wang Lun. He, and the three who were originally there—Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui—plus us seven make a total of eleven leaders. We have a force of nearly eight hundred men, and grain without measure. There is no way we can repay you for your great benevolence but I have been sent with a letter and a hundred ounces of gold as a token of our thanks to you and Constable Zhu Tong."

Liu Tang opened his pack, produced a letter and gave it to Song Jiang. The clerk read it, then drew a pouch from inside his gown. Liu Tang also took a bundle of gold from the pack and placed it on the table. Song chose only a single gold bar, wrapped it in the letter and put both in the pouch that he again concealed beneath his gown.

"Cover the gold up, brother," he said. He called a waiter to bring wine, a platter of beef, some vegetable dishes and fruit, and to pour the wine for his guest.

Day was drawing to a close when Liu Tang finished drinking. The waiter went out. Liu Tang again opened the bundle of gold on the table. Song Jiang stopped him.

"Listen to me, brother. You seven have just gone to the mountain stronghold. It's time when you can use money. I have a family income I get along on. Keep the rest of this gold for me in the fortress. I'll come for it when I need it. You see I'm not refusing—I've taken one bar. Zhu Tong also has family property. You don't have to give him anything. I'll tell him of your good intentions and that will be enough. I won't ask you to stay the night, brother. If you were recognized it would be no joke. Tonight there will be a bright moon and you'll be able to get back to the stronghold. Don't hang around here. Give my best regards to the leaders and say I hope they'll forgive me for not coming to congratulate them in person."

"We shall never be able to repay you, brother, for your enormous kindness but I have been sent specially with this small token of our appreciation. Ward Chief Chao is our chieftain and Wu Yong is our military adviser. They have ordered me to deliver the gold. How can I take it back? I'll definitely be reprimanded."

"Since your discipline is so strict, I'll write a letter, explaining that you can give them."

No matter how Liu Tang pleaded, Song Jiang remained unyielding. He had the waiter bring pen and paper, wrote a detailed letter and made Liu Tang place it in his pack. Liu Tang was a straightforward fellow. When he saw that Song Jiang was determined not to accept the gold, he wrapped it up and put it away.

It was getting late. "Since you have a reply, brother," said Liu Tang, "I'll deliver it tonight."

"If I don't keep you, you understand why."

Liu Tang bowed four times. Song Jiang summoned the waiter.

"This gentleman is leaving an ounce of silver. I'll drop in tomorrow to settle accounts."

Liu Tang shouldered his pack, picked up his halberd and followed Song Jiang down the stairs. They walked together from the tavern to the end of the lane. Dusk had fallen and a full moon rode in the sky. Song grasped Liu Tang's hand. "Be careful, brother. Don't come here again. There are too many police. It's dangerous. I won't see you off any further. We'll say goodbye here." Liu Tang strode away in the moonlight, heading west. That same night he returned to Liangshan Marsh.

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As Song Jiang walked slowly back to his quarters, he thought: "How fortunate that none of the police spotted him! That really would have put the fat in the fire!" then he mused: "So Chao Gai has turned brigand. And he's doing things in a big way!"

He had made only a couple of turns through the streets when a voice hailed him from behind. "Where've you been, Sir Clerk? I've been looking all over for you." He looked around, and started in surprise. And as a result, the clerk's timidity turned to courage, and his kindly nature became fierce.

Now Lin Chong, having killed Wang Lun and still holding the dagger in his hand, gestured to the onlookers and said: "I, Lin Chong, former instructor of the imperial guard, here present because I was unjustly banished, declare that today I deliberately sought a quarrel with Wang Lun for this reason: when these good men asked to join our band Wang Lun rejected them on a false pretext, owing to his narrow-mindedness and meanness of heart. It was on this account that I quarrelled with him, not because I had designs on his position. Whatever natural ability I may be possessed of, I am not the kind to confront authority or confound the evil counsellors and traitors who surround a leader. But now here is our brother, Chao Gai, a man of known integrity and generosity, richly endowed with both courage and wisdom, whose name none can hear without wishing to serve him. I hereby propose, for the sake of our great cause, that we instate him as leader and chief of this mountain fortress. How say you?"

All present shouted: "These words are good!"

But Chao Gai said: "No, I cannot accept. There is a saying, 'A strong guest seeks not power over his host.' Whatever strength I may have, I am only a newcomer here, a stranger. How can I usurp power?"

But Lin Chong held out his arms, inviting Chao Gai to assume the throne. "The matter has been decided," he said. "You cannot refuse. And if any here disagrees, let him look carefully at Wang Lun." At the third or fourth invitation, Chao Gai was prevailed upon to accept. Lin Chong ordered everyone to prostrate themselves in front of the pavilion. Then he ordered some of the men to return to the main fortress and organize a banquet, while others removed the body and head of Wang Lun. Men were sent also to go everywhere on the mountain and spread the word that everyone was to assemble in the main fortress.

A sedan was now brought and Chao Gai was carried up to the main fortress accompanied by the others on horseback. On arriving before the Assembly Hall of the Heroes they dismounted and went inside. Chao Gai was helped onto the chief's throne and sticks of incense were lit. Then Lin Chong addressed the assembly as follows: "I am only a rough soldier, my only talent is a certain skill at fencing. I have no learning and no great gifts, no wisdom and no art. Today we of this fortress are most fortunate in welcoming these brave men into our midst. From this time on, right shall triumph, and we must bid farewell to past disorder. Let us also ask the Professor here to be our commander-in-chief, to take charge of our military forces and be responsible for their training and deployment. Let him be second to the chief."

Wu Yong replied: "All my learning was acquired in the village, and I am aware that I have no experience in ordering public affairs and no ability to rescue the world from chaos. Although I have read something of the military classics, the treatises of Sun and Wu, I can boast of no practical achievements in this field. How can I take such a responsibility on myself?"

"It is decided, you cannot refuse," said Lin Chong. So Wu Yong was prevailed upon to take the second place.

"Father Gongsun must take the third place, please," said Lin Chong.

At this point Chao Gai interrupted. "This is impossible," he said. "If everyone is going to cede his place to someone else, then I should be the first to withdraw."

"You've no reason to say that," said Lin Chong. "Father Gongsun is famous throughout the rivers and lakes as a skilled tactician, his manoeuvres can outwit ghosts and spirits and he knows how to summon the winds and the rain. Who can equal him?"

"Although I do possess certain powers," Gongsun Sheng said, "I have no ability to save the world, how can I accept? You should fill that post yourself, Instructor."

"Your miraculous powers were on view in the recent victory over our enemies," said Lin Chong. "A tripod has three legs and it cannot do without any one of them.You must not refuse."

So Gongsun Sheng was obliged to accept the third place. But when Lin Chong continued to efface himself in others' favour, all three objected. "We accepted what you said about a tripod having three legs," they said, "and we didn't refuse the positions you made us take. But if you continue to underrate yourself, we will resign." At their insistence, Lin Chong was obliged to occupy the fourth place. "And now," said Chao Gai, "we must invite chiefs Du and Song to take the next places." But Du Qian and Song Wan would not agree to this either. They insisted that Liu Tang take fifth place, and the Ruan brothers sixth, seventh and eighth places. Du Qian then took ninth, Song Wan tenth, and Zhu Gui eleventh. Thus was the order of precedence among the eleven leaders on Mount Liang arrived at.

Seven or eight hundred men from both sides of the mountain now came to render homage. They waited on either side as Chao Gai addressed them: "You who are assembled here, hear me. Today chief Lin Chong has proposed that I assume the leadership of this mountain fortress. Dr. Wu is to take command of the army, with Father Gongsun as his second-in-command. Instructor Lin will be in charge of all matters relating to the administration of the fortress. The rest of you will continue to carry out your original duties in all areas of the mountain. You must look to the barriers and the lakeside landings, and make sure there are no gaps in the defences. I expect every one of you to carry out his duties with the utmost diligence, in the furtherance of our great cause."

Following this he gave orders for living quarters to be prepared for the Ruan family members. The treasures of the looted birthday convoy — gold and pearls and jewels — were brought up the mountain, together with the money, silk and other valuables saved from Chao Gai's manor. All the lesser chiefs and soldiers received a share of these things in front of the Assembly Hall. Then oxen and horses were slaughtered and an offering made to the spirits of sky and earth, to celebrate these new reinforcements to the group. The feasting continued well into the night, and was resumed again next day, in fact it lasted several days in a row. Following this Chao Gai and Wu Yong met with all the other chiefs to discuss plans. Stores were to be checked and counted, defences repaired and weapons manufactured: sabres, swords, bows and arrows, armour and helmets. All had to be made ready to repel the government troops when they came. Boats of all sizes must be prepared and the troops trained and drilled in techniques of water-borne combat. Suffice it to say that all were brought to a high pitch of readiness.

Friendship in those days was stronger than gold,
*The heart's true commitment was valued of old.*
*Here in the Marshes, the hero keeps faith,*
In the face of adversity, danger and death.

At this time Lin Chong saw that Chao Gai was open and generous, liberal with his wealth and just in all his dealings, and that he always had the well-being of everyone at heart, young and old alike. One day Lin Chong suddenly began to think with longing of the wife he had left in the capital. He did not even know whether she was alive or dead. Accordingly he unburdened himself to Chao Gai: "Ever since I came here I have wanted to bring my wife to join me. But Wang Lun was so unreliable and difficult to get on with that I could never make up my mind to do it. I had to leave her in the capital, and I do not even know if she is still living."

"Dear friend," said Chao Gai, "if your wife remains in the capital, why indeed should you not bring her here? Write her a letter at once and we will send someone down the mountain to deliver it and bring her back here by night. That is clearly what we must do."

Lin Chong wrote the letter straight away and sent two of his most trusted men with it. But two months later they returned and told him: "We went straight to the Eastern Capital, to the district where the Grand Marshal's residence is, and found the house of Instructor Zhang. We inquired about your wife and they told us that Marshal Gao had tried to force a marriage upon her and she hanged herself. This had happened six months earlier. Devastated by the grief and uncertainty, Instructor Zhang fell ill and died two weeks ago. The only survivor is your servant, Jin Er. She is now married and living in her husband's house. We asked the neighbours and they all confirmed these things. As soon as we had verified the facts, we returned to tell you."

Lin Chong shed tears on hearing this report but then he put aside his regrets. Chao Gai and the others also sighed when they heard the news. But from now on life in the mountain retreat settled into a routine: everyday they trained and drilled in order to maintain the troops in a state of absolute readiness for the government attack.

Suddenly one day, when the leaders were holding a meeting in the Assembly Hall, a soldier came tearing up the mountain to report: "The Jizhou governor is sending an army of two thousand men and horses and something like four or five hundred boats. They're assembling at Stonetable. I was sent to report this to you."

Disturbed by this news, Chao Gai immediately called in Wu Yong, the army commander, for discussions. "The government forces are coming. How are we going to repel them?"

"You don't need to worry about this," said Wu Yong, full of confidence. "I am fully prepared for them. Remember the old saying? 'When the floods come, the dykes are ready; when the enemy attack, the army's there to meet them.'" Thereupon he summoned the three Ruan brothers and whispered instructions in their ears: "... it must be done thus ... and thus ...." Then he called Lin Chong and Liu Tang and told them, "You two, now .... like so ... and like so ...." Finally he called Du Qian and Song Wan and gave them their instructions. It was really like in the poem:

Marching to encounter Xiang Yu in the West,
This was the day of the first great test!

Now the Governor of Jizhou had appointed Brigadier Huang An, together with someone from the regional anti-bandit bureau, to head an army of over a thousand infantry and horse. They had commandeered all the boats in the area, and deployed their forces near Stonetable Lake. The army was divided into two, in order to attack and seize the marshes in a pincer movement.

Brigadier Huang An embarked his forces in the boats and with banners waving and enthusiastic cries they headed towards Golden Sands Landing. But as they approached the landing, some mournful notes began to sound, ringing out over the water. "Isn't that a bugle?" Huang An said. When they had stopped the boats to listen, three small craft appeared, far off in the distance. There were only five men to each of them, four of them rowing and one standing in the bows. They all wore crimson scarves on their heads and were dressed in identical red silk doublets. They carried halberds. Everyone in the three boats was dressed the same way. Some of the soldiers who recognized them said to Huang An: "It's the three Ruan Brothers!"

"All together, then," shouted Huang An, "row for me all of you till you burst your lungs, we've got to get those three!" Immediately forty or fifty boats on both sides shot forward, the crews cheering lustily. A signal now rose from the three boats and all three turned tail at once. Brigadier Huang, waving his sabre, shouted "Kill the bastards! I'm offering a big reward!" As the three boats fled, the archers in the pursuing government boats released a shower of arrows. The Ruan brothers reached into the holds of their boats for blue fox pelts to cover themselves for protection against the arrows. The government forces had no other thought but to pursue, and they had covered a mile or so when a small boat which seemed to fly over the water came up with them from behind. "Stop the chase!" the occupants shouted. "Our forces in the other division have been killed and cast in the water, and the boats have all been seized!"

"How the devil could they all have fallen into the hands of the enemy?" Huang An exclaimed.

"We were proceeding by water when we saw two enemy boats in the distance heading towards us. There were five men in each one. We made a big effort to try and catch them but before we had gone two miles, seven or eight boats came out from hidden creeks, surrounding us on all sides. They were armed with crossbows, and the missiles began to drop on us like a swarm of locusts. We tried to turn our boats around but we had got into a very narrow channel, and then twenty or thirty men appeared on either bank, hauling on a rope bristling with bamboo spikes. They were holding this contraption across the channel. As we were proceeding forward to take a closer look, lime bottles and stones began to fall on us like rain. The men could only jump into the water and swim for their lives. We managed to escape and make it to the bank but when we looked for our contingent on the bank they were nowhere to be seen. The brigands had grabbed all the horses and the sentries were all lying dead in the water! We managed to find this small boat in the reeds and came to tell you what has happened."

Huang An was horrified and ceaselessly cursed his fate. A white flag was run up, as a signal to his forces to end the chase and return at once. But no sooner had the boats turned, than the three boats they had been chasing, and ten more besides, were pursuing them! Each of these carried no more than three or four men, who were waving red flags and emitting loud whistles. They seemed to fly over the water!

Huang An was about to deploy his boats to meet the new challenge, when the sound of a ballista was heard among the reeds. The next moment he trembled to see a mass of red flags waving on all sides. A shout arose from the pursuing enemy boats: "Huang An can leave but he'll have to leave his head behind!" Huang An ordered his flotilla forward into the thick of the reeds but boats appeared from the little channels on all sides and peppered them with crossbow bolts. Huang An managed to worm his way out of this forest of missiles but he only had three or four boats left. In a desperate attempt to escape he leapt into a small, fast boat. Looking over his shoulder, he saw all his men plunging into the water and swimming for their lives. Those who remained with the boats were mostly killed. Huang An's fast boat raced ahead but a boat shot out from the reeds. Liu Tang stood in the bows. He grappled Huang An's boat with a boat-hook and jumped on board. Catching Huang An by the waist he cried: "Surrender!" All the soldiers who knew how to swim jumped into the water and were killed by crossbow bolts. Those who didn't dare jump were taken alive in the boats.

Liu Tang dragged Huang An to the bank. In the distance Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng could be seen riding down from the mountain to meet them, with swords drawn and leading a force of fifty or sixty foot soldiers and twenty or thirty horse. Two or three hundred of the enemy were captured and all the boats that were taken to the harbour south of the mountain.

All the leaders now rode back to the mountain. Chao Gai dismounted and went to sit in the Assembly Hall. The other leaders, still in battle array, seated themselves around him. Huang An was tied to the central pillar. Gold and pieces of cloth were brought and shared out among the soldiers as their reward. The booty was inspected and six hundred good horses were found to have been captured, thanks to Lin Chong's generalship. The engagement in the east channel was carried out by Du Qian and Song Wan; the Ruan brothers were responsible for the engagement in the west channel. The capture of Huang An was Liu Tang's achievement.

There was great rejoicing. Oxen and horses were slaughtered and there was feasting in the mountain retreat. Good wine flowed, and there were fresh lotus roots and fish from the lake, together with fruit from the southern slopes of the mountain, peaches, apricots, plums, pears, loquats, mountain dates, persimmons and chestnuts. There were homebred chickens, pigs, geese and ducks, and many other good things to eat that we will not trouble to detail here. All gave themselves up to celebration. For such a total victory to come to them so soon after their arrival at the mountain retreat was really something out of the ordinary!

Wang Lun's boasting was nothing but a laugh,
*For a job of this nature he was never the right stuff.*
*Wait till the new chief returns from the attack:*
Then you'll see Mount Liang is on a new track!

But now, in the midst of the feasting, a soldier came and announced: "There's a messenger from down below, from Captain Zhu." When Chao Gai asked what it was about, he said: "Captain Zhu has learnt that a group of merchants is going to pass this way tonight, around ten of them. He sent me to inform you of this."

Chao Gai exclaimed, "It couldn't come at a better time! We're a bit short of money and silk to pay our expenses. Now, who'll go and encounter them?"

"We will," said the Ruan brothers.

"Good but go carefully. Act swiftly and return early."

The Ruan brothers rushed off to change their clothes and buckle on their swords. They equipped themselves also with cutlasses, pitchforks, and boat-hooks. They collected a hundred or so men, returned to say farewell to the leaders and then set off down the mountain. They embarked at Golden Sands Landing and rowed across to Zhu Gui's inn.

Later, fearing that the Ruans might not be able to manage on their own, Chao Gai sent Liu Tang with another hundred men to join them. He instructed them carefully: "Only take the money and goods, do no harm to the merchants." When by midnight no one had reported back he also sent Du Qian and Song Wan with fifty men.

Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng and Lin Chong went on feasting till dawn, when a soldier came in and said: "All credit to Captain Zhu! We've taken more than twenty cart-loads of money and valuables, and forty or fifty donkeys and mules!"

"Was anyone killed?" Chao Gai asked.

"Those merchants all abandoned the carts, livestock and baggage and ran for their lives when they saw the way we looked. No one was hurt."

"That's good," said Chao Gai. "We've only just come to the mountain, and we don't want to start off making a bad impression." He took some silver and rewarded the soldier. Then he ordered wine and fruit to be carried down to the foot of the mountain, to meet the others at Golden Sands Landing. Here the leaders were unloading the carts onto the bank. When this was done the boats were ordered back to fetch the livestock. Everyone was very pleased with the results. After drinking a few toasts they sent a messenger to invite Zhu Gui up the mountain for a feast. Everyone went to the Assembly Hall, where they seated them- selves in a circle round Chao Gai. Some soldiers were sent to fetch the booty, and the bundles were opened one by one. Silk and items of clothing were piled on one side, merchandise and other goods on the other, while the money and jewels were piled up in the middle. Then the stores-master was called and ordered to take half of everything and add it to the reserves. The rest was again divided in two, one half to go in equal parts to the eleven leaders, the other to be divided equally among the soldiers, those down below as well as those on the mountain. The recently captured government troops received tattoos on their faces; the strongest were assigned to feeding the horses and chopping wood, the weakest to maintaining the carts and cutting grass. Huang An was locked up in a secure cell at the back of the fortress.

"We are newcomers here," Chao Gai said. "Originally we only thought to escape from trouble and misfortune, and we intended to place ourselves under Wang Lun's orders, accepting just minor posts. But our dear brother here, Lin Chong, has honoured us with his support, and now quite unexpectedly we have had two immense pieces of luck. The first is the defeat of the government forces and capture of so many men, horses and boats, the general, Huang An, included. The second is this last windfall of goods and money. Is not all this proof of the remarkable talents of all of you here present?"

"It proves that we are fortunate to enjoy your reflected glory, brother," they all replied.

But Chao Gai had not finished. "The seven of us owe our very lives," he went on, "entirely to Registrar Song and Sergeant Zhu Tong. The ancients said, 'He who fails in gratitude is no true man.' Let us not forget where our present wealth and fortune come from. We must prepare gifts and send someone with them to Yuncheng. This must have priority over everything else. Then there's the question of Bai Sheng, lying in Jizhou gaol. We must get him out of there."

Wu Yong said, "Don't worry. I have thought about these things. Song Jiang is a man of honour, and certainly isn't expecting to get anything from us but in spite of that we must repay him. As soon as things are more or less settled here on the mountain, we must send someone. As for Bai Sheng, someone must go who won't be recognized, with gifts to buy the favour of officials at all levels. If we can get them to relax their vigilance he'll be able to escape. But now there are some other questions we must discuss: the state of our provisions, the building of more boats, the manufacture of arms, upkeep of walls and defences, adding to the living quarters, the making of clothes and armour, the supply of spears, sabres, bows and arrows. We must be fully prepared for an enemy attack."
"Very well," said Chao Gai, "we rely fully on your prodigious knowledge of military affairs."
Wu Yong then assigned to each of the captains his specific duties and told them to get on with it. Of this no more.
But now we must leave the stronghold on Mount Liang that did indeed flourish after Chao Gai's arrival, and turn to the Governor of Jizhou, who had by now heard from some survivors of Huang An's routed army how the government troops had been destroyed in the Marshes of Mount Liang and Huang An himself captured alive. They had told him, moreover, that the bandits of Mount Liang were fearless and well-organized and that no one was likely to get near them, let alone capture them; that access by water was exceedingly difficult, and that among that maze of small creeks and channels the defeat of the government forces was inevitable.
This tale made the Governor curse his luck. He spoke to the Grand Preceptor's man. "When Inspector Ho led a big force there, he was the only one to return alive, and that was with both his ears cut off. We sent him home to rest and he still has not recovered. Of the five hundred who went with him not one came back. Then I sent Brigadier Huang An to do the job, with an officer from the regional anti-bandit bureau and a large army but now they too have been destroyed. Huang An is being held prisoner on the mountain, and I don't know how many of the troops have been killed. If they could make no headway, I don't know what we can do next!"
The Governor's mind was filled with horrors and he could think of nothing sensible. At this moment his chief of administration appeared and said: "An official is about to arrive at the east gate reception room. You'd better get over there right away."
The Governor leapt onto his horse and reached the east gate just in time to see the cloud of dust settling as the new official dismounted in front of the pavilion. The Governor invited him inside. They exchanged greetings, and the newcomer presented a decree from the office of the Imperial Secretariat announcing his own appointment as governor, replacing the incumbent. The old Governor read it through, and immediately afterwards took the new appointee to the government offices, where he handed over the official seal and the records of the treasury and stores. He also organized a banquet in honour of his successor.
When the ex-Governor explained about the power of the bandits and how they had destroyed the government forces, his successor's face turned ashen. His thoughts ran like this: "The Grand Preceptor has promoted me to this position but what a place and what a job! There aren't any good troops even, or capable generals. However am I supposed to subjugate that band of brigands? … And suppose the brigands were to come here, looking for provisions? What could we possibly do about it? …"
The former Governor packed his clothes and belongings next day and took himself off to the capital to receive his punishment. We say no more of him.
After taking office, the new Governor summoned an officer who had just been transferred to the garrison of Jizhou and made plans for recruiting troops and purchasing horses, obtaining provisions and fodder, and enlisting some reliable men and experienced officers, in order to prepare a force for the capture of the outlaws of Mount Liang. He composed a memorandum for the office of the Imperial Secretariat, requesting that all government offices in the area be advised that they must cooperate in the operations against the bandits, and at the same time circulated his plans to all the districts, warning them to be extremely vigilant. We say no more of this.
Now the registrar of Jizhou sent an order to the Magistracy of Yuncheng, requiring that they should strengthen the town's defences and be on the lookout for attacks by the bandits of Mount Liang. When the Magistrate saw this, he told Song Jiang to have a proclamation read in every village exhorting vigilance. These instructions gave Song Jiang food for thought. "Chao Gai and his friends never realized they were getting themselves into something as big as this. First they robbed the birthday convoy, then they killed some policemen and mutilated Inspector Ho, then they maimed or killed a whole lot of troops, and took Huang An prisoner. These are crimes serious enough to warrant punishment for nine generations! True, they were forced into a corner, and couldn't really have acted otherwise. But from the legal point of view their crimes are beyond pardon. If their luck doesn't hold, it's hard to see what can be done to help them." Weighed down by these oppressive thoughts, he ordered the secretary, Zhang Wenyuan to make copies of the decree for every village and hamlet and see to their distribution.
Song Jiang then left the government offices for a stroll, with no particular aim in mind. He had not gone twenty or thirty paces when he heard someone shouting behind him: "Registrar!" He turned and saw it was old Mrs. Wang, the matchmaker. She had another lady in tow, to whom she now turned and said: "Fate is smiling on you, my dear. Here is our generous registrar!"
"What do you want with me?" Song Jiang asked.
Mrs. Wang put out her hand to detain him and, pointing to her friend, said: "I want to tell you about this good lady, Registrar. She's from the capital, she's not from here. There's three in the family, you see, Mr. Yan, the husband, her daughter, Poxi, and herself. Now the husband, Mr. Yan, was always a good singer, and he taught the daughter, ever since she was little, so that she knows all kinds of pleasant melodies. She's just eighteen, you see, and she's a pretty girl. Well, they all came here to Shandong in order to seek the protection of a certain official but they couldn't find him. That's how they got to be here in Yuncheng. They discovered that people here aren't much interested in music for banquets and light entertainment and that, and they can't manage to make a living. They've taken lodgings in a little back-alley behind the government offices. But then, yesterday, the husband died, from some epidemic or other. And poor Mrs. Yan hasn't even got the money to bury him! She was at her wits end, when she came to me for help. Well, I said to her, 'In these times, how do you expect me to find the money?' There's just nowhere she can go, you know, to borrow money or pawn something. But then, just as we were thinking there was no way out, I saw you coming this way. Well, I told Mrs. Yan we must hurry up and catch you. I just hope you can take pity on her and lend her enough to buy a coffin!"
"I see," said Song Jiang. "You'd better come with me then. I'll ask them for a brush and ink at the inn on the corner, and write you a note which you can take to Chen's, east of the government offices. He'll make you a coffin. By the way, have you got anything to live on?"
"I wouldn't deceive you, Registrar," Mrs. Yan said. "When I haven't got money for the coffin how could I have money for anything else?"
"I'll give you another ten taels of silver then, for your daily expenses," Song Jiang said.
"Heaven bless you, Registrar, you've saved our lives. I'd work like a donkey or a horse, if there were some way to repay you!"
"There's no need for that!" said Song Jiang, taking out a silver ingot and handing it to her.
Song Jiang went home, and Mrs. Yan took the paper to Chen's and got her coffin. She went back and attended to the burial, and in the end there were five or six taels of silver left, on which she and her daughter were able to live for a while. No more of this.
One fine morning, this Mrs. Yan went to thank Song Jiang, and she happened to observe that there was no sign of a woman about the house. On returning home, she made some inquiries of her neighbour, Mrs. Wang.
"There doesn't seem to be any woman in Registrar Song's house," she said. "Does that mean he isn't married?"
"They say Registrar Song's family home is in the Song village," Mrs. Wang replied. "But I don't know if he has a wife or not. He is only living here temporarily, because of his job as district registrar. He goes around helping people pay for funerals and giving out medicines all the time; he's a real friend to everyone who's in trouble. I should say he isn't married."
"Ah. You know my daughter is a lovely girl," Mrs. Yan said. "She has a lovely singing voice, and she's got all sorts of fetching ways. Even when she was a child, in the Eastern Capital, she was the talk of all the houses of entertainment; there's not one where they didn't love her. Many's the patron who wanted to take her off me but I always said no. We only had her, you see, to look after us in our old age, that's why I didn't want to let her go. I didn't see that it was unfair to her. Anyway, when I went to see Registrar Song the other day, I noticed there didn't seem to be a woman in his home. So I'd like to ask you to talk to him. If he's looking for someone, I'd let him have Poxi, with all my heart. You helped me the other day, and then I'm indebted to Registrar Song for the help he gave me and I've no way to repay him. It would be so nice if we could put it all on a family basis."
Mrs. Wang listened to this, and next day she went to see Song Jiang, to whom she expounded it at length. At first Song Jiang would not hear of it. But a go-between can make the mountains mate, who's to resist her tongue? He consented in the end. He rented a house in a quiet lane in the western district, equipped it with furnishings and kitchen utensils, and installed Poxi and her mother there. Before two weeks were out, Poxi was a fine lady, with pearls and finery to adorn her and silks and satins galore to dress in. Something like this:

Features fair and bearing proud,
*A nature sweet and lady-like;*
*Tresses, spilt in a raven cloud,*
*A crescent moon the brow's sweet arc.*
*One's heart leaps up to glimpse beneath*
*The spotted skirt exquisite feet;*
*Emotions beyond all words explode,*
*When emerald sleeves soft hands disclose.*
*Those eyes like stars are black as lacquer!*
*That melting breast is white as snow!*
*A princess escaped through the palace portals!*
A goddess come down to dwell with mortals!

In a few days Song Jiang had seen to it that even the mother had new dresses to show off, and on Poxi he truly lavished clothes and food.
At the beginning Song Jiang slept with Poxi every night but later his visits grew less frequent. Why so? Well, you must understand that Song Jiang was a man's man. That is, his true passion was the pursuit of arms; women did not count for much with him. Now Poxi was only eighteen or nineteen years old, in the very flowering of her age. For this reason, Song Jiang's inattentiveness greatly displeased her.
One day Song Jiang inopportunely took a colleague back to drink wine in Poxi's house. This colleague was Zhang Wenyuan, who was the secretary in charge of public notices, employed in the same office as Song Jiang. Zhang Wenyuan, whom everyone called Third Brother Zhang, was a handsome fellow, with splendid eyes and fine eyebrows, flashing teeth and sensual lips. He was a great frequenter of the pleasure-gardens, and a follower of the floating life. Along with his confident style and flamboyant looks, he was also a fine musician, master of every stringed instrument you could name.
Now, Poxi, remember, had been brought up as a singer in the cabarets. The moment she set eyes on Zhang, her heart leapt within her, and she resolved to have him. She began by casting significant looks in Zhang's direction, and when Song Jiang got up to go and wash his hands, these were supplemented by suggestive words. As the saying is, "If the wind doesn't blow, the trees won't sway; when the boat doesn't disturb it, the water is clear." A libertine like Zhang, how could he fail to understand this kind of thing? When he saw how Poxi was ogling him, with all her feelings hung out on show, he took good note. He returned later, when Song Jiang was out, pretending that he had come to look for Song Jiang. Poxi insisted he should stay and take tea. There was talk, and more talk, and then it was done! Who could have known that the moment Poxi arranged matters with Third Brother Zhang she would wax as hot as a coal from the fire? But then, Zhang was an expert in these affairs. Well, you know what they say, if you don't want trouble, don't go looking for it! All this befell because Song Jiang — a thousand times foolish, a million times foolish — took this Zhang home for a drink, that's what gave her the opportunity to take a fancy to him. Remember the old saying, "Affairs of the heart can start with tea, and wine's a famous bawd"? Well that's the rule Song Jiang failed to note. Once Poxi and young Zhang got together, she hadn't even half a kind thought to spare for Song Jiang. From now on when Song Jiang paid her a visit, all he got was insults, never the least attempt to please him. However, Song Jiang, as we said, was a man's man: he didn't think this woman's charms worth losing sleep over, so he took to going there only once or twice a month.
So now these two, Zhang and Poxi, were stuck to each other like glue or lacquer, from night till morning; all the neighbours knew about it. Eventually some rumours blew into Song Jiang's ears. Half believing and half doubting, Song Jiang said to himself: "After all, she's not a real wife chosen by my father and mother, so if she doesn't care for me, what's the point in bothering her? The best thing is just to stay away." And from then on he let several months go by without a visit. Mrs. Yan wore herself out sending messages to invite him; Song Jiang simply said he was busy and didn't go. That's the way it is:

A girl in her bloom would follow the running brook;
*A good man's heart isn't set on blooms that fade.*
*Matrons love money, young women fall for a look;*
Love is but pedlar's wares, a treacherous trade.

Here the story divides. One day Song Jiang had left the Magistracy at dusk and gone to sit in a teahouse to order tea. From here he happened to observe the arrival of a tall stranger, wearing a white felt cap in the Fanyang style, a dark-green silk doublet, his legs encased in gaiters with knee-guards, and hemp sandals with eight buckles on his feet. A dagger was stuck in his belt, and he carried a heavy pack on his shoulders. He had been walking so fast he was covered in sweat and panting for breath. His gaze was turned towards the government offices. Thinking there was something very strange about this fellow's movements, Song Jiang quickly rose and left the teashop and began to follow him. After going some twenty or thirty paces, the stranger turned and looked straight at Song Jiang but appeared not to know him. Song Jiang also regarded the stranger, and thought there was something familiar about him. "Now where have I seen that fellow before? Could it be …?" he wondered but for the moment left this thought in the air. Noting Song Jiang's interest, the stranger returned his look, and also seemed to remember something. He stood there looking at Song Jiang but could not bring himself to approach him. "This fellow is behaving very oddly indeed!" Song Jiang thought to himself. "Why does he keep staring at me?" But neither could Song Jiang make up his mind to speak. At this point the stranger went over to a barber's stall beside the road and said, "Friend, who is that official over there?"
"That's Registrar Song," the barber replied.
Immediately, gripping his halberd, the stranger approached Song Jiang and greeted him respectfully: "Your Honour! Don't you recognize your younger brother?"
"Certainly your face is familiar, my friend," Song Jiang replied.
"Will you come with me, please?" the other said. "I would like to talk to you."
Together they drew aside into a quiet lane. "This inn looks a good place for a quiet talk," the stranger said.
The two of them went upstairs. They chose a secluded alcove and sat down. The stranger set down the halberd and took off his pack and thrust it under the table. He then threw himself down in front of Song Jiang, in humble greeting. Song Jiang hurriedly returned his courtesy and said: "May I venture to inquire your name, sir?"
"Benefactor, have you really forgotten me?" said the stranger.
"Who are you?" Song Jiang asked. "Certainly your face is familiar but I'm afraid I just can't remember."
"I had the honour to meet you at the house of Mr. Chao," the other replied, "when you saved my life. I am Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil."
Song Jiang received a great shock. "My dear fellow, what a risk you are taking! Lucky no constable has seen you, there could have been a disaster!"
"If I can show my gratitude, I've no fear of dying," Liu Tang said. "I came especially to give you our thanks."
"How are Mr. Chao and the other friends?" Song Jiang asked. "Did someone send you?"
"Our leader, Chao Gai humbly greets you," Liu Tang said. "You saved his life and now he is chief of the retreat on Mount Liang. Dr. Wu Yong is commander of the army, and Gongsun Sheng is his deputy. Lin Chong has thrown all his weight behind them and has eliminated Wang Lun. Altogether, with Du Qian, Song Wan and Zhu Gui who were already members of the band, and the seven of us, we are now eleven leaders. At present we have about seven or eight hundred men in the stronghold and a vast supply of provisions. Chao Gai has not forgotten your great kindness but he did not know how to repay you. He sends me with a letter and with a hundred taels of gold in token of his gratitude. Afterwards I am to go to thank Sergeant Zhu and Sergeant Lei."
Liu Tang opened his pack and took out a letter which he gave to Song Jiang. Song Jiang read the letter, and then undid his doublet and pulled out a purse, while Liu Tang took out the gold and put it on the table. Song Jiang took just one piece of gold and wrapped it in the letter; he then put them into the purse that he returned to the pocket inside his doublet. "My friend," he said, "take that gold back where it came from." Calling the innkeeper, he ordered wine, a big plate of sliced meat, and a selection of vegetables and fruit. He told the server to pour wine for Liu Tang.
Daylight was fading. After drinking, Liu Tang opened the bag on the table and was about to take out the gold. Song Jiang hurriedly stopped him, saying: "My friend, listen. Now that the seven of you have just joined the mountain stronghold, you are particularly in need of money, whereas I have enough to live comfortably. Take that back to the stronghold, and if I need financial assistance I will send my younger brother Song Qing to ask for it. So that you won't think that I am spurning your friendship, I have taken one piece in token. Sergeant Zhu also has money of his own, and you don't need to give him any. I will convey your feelings to him. As for Lei Heng, he doesn't know I went to warn Mr. Chao; what is more, he is a gambler, and if he should happen to use the money at the tables it could really stir things up, so whatever you do don't give any gold to him. Dear friend, I can't ask you to stay the night with me because some one might recognize you, and that wouldn't be at all funny. But there should be bright moonlight tonight, so you will be able to make the journey back to the mountain retreat. You shouldn't hang around here. Please tell the other chiefs how grateful I am, and beg them to forgive me for not coming to say it in person."
"But we're indebted to your kindness forever," Liu Tang said. "I was specially sent to convey our feelings and bring you this little present, as a mark of those feelings. With Mr. Chao as chief, and with Wu Yong commanding the troops, discipline's much tighter than before. I daren't return like this. I'd have to answer for it in the camp, that's for sure!"
"Since your regulations are so strict," Song Jiang said, "I shall write a note for you to give them. That will make it all right."
Liu Tang implored Song Jiang to accept the gift but Song Jiang would not agree. He took some paper and borrowed a brush and inkstone, and produced a neatly written reply that Liu Tang carefully concealed about his person.
Liu Tang had a straightforward nature: when Song Jiang refused like this, he assumed it was because Song Jiang didn't want to accept, so he took the gold and wrapped it up as before. Then, seeing that it was dusk, he said: "Since you have written a reply, I will go back right away this evening."
"My friend," Song Jiang said. "I can't retain you here but my heart goes with you."
Liu Tang prostrated himself again four times. Song Jiang called the innkeeper and said, "I am leaving a tael of silver here. I'll come round tomorrow and settle up."
Liu Tang shouldered his pack, took up his halberd, and followed Song Jiang downstairs. Leaving the tavern, they walked together as far as the end of the lane. It was still more or less daylight, and the round disk of the eighth-month moon was climbing the sky. Song Jiang took Liu Tang by the hand and said "Take care not to return, my friend, there are too many police about. I cannot escort you further, we must part here."
It was a bright moonlit night. Liu Tang lengthened his pace and set off westwards; it was the middle of the night when he regained the fortress on Mount Liang. As for Song Jiang, when he left Liu Tang he directed his steps slowly homewards, musing as he went, "Lucky no policeman saw, otherwise it might really have started something!" And again, thinking, "That Chao Gai, he's ended by becoming an outlaw, what a business!" He had only passed a few bends in the road when he heard someone shouting behind him: "Registrar, where have you been? I haven't seen you for days." Song Jiang turned to look. It was Mrs. Yan. Had it not been for this meeting, things would have been very different. Song Jiang would never have exchanged caution for recklessness, benevolence for ferocity.

After killing Wang Lun, Lin Chong pointed his broad sword towards the men and said, "I was previously an officer in the army but had been banished. Today these heroes came to join our band but Wang Lun was narrow-minded, and jealous of them so that he wished them to go away. Therefore I killed him, and I did this not because I wanted to be your chief. But if in the future you wish to fight the army and those vile ministers at the capital I am afraid that my courage and strength will not be of much use. Now we have Chao Gai whose wisdom and bravery are known all over the empire. Today I fought for our rights, and now propose that he should be our chief. Do you agree to that?"
"What you say is quite right," said the men.

"That won't do," said Chao Gai. "An ancient proverb says, 'However strong the guest should not try to overthrow his host.' As I have just come from a distant place how could I be your chief?"
Lin Chong gently pushed Chao Gai into the chair, and said, "Our business is now finished so do not decline the offer. If there are any men who oppose us we shall treat them in the same way as we treated Wang Lun." After much pressing he got Chao Gai to take the seat. He then shouted out that everybody must assemble outside and make obeisance to Chao Gai. After doing this the bandits went to prepare a feast. He then told some of the men to remove Wang Lun's body. He also sent some men to summon all the minor leaders to meet at the assembly hall. Lin Chong and the others asked Chao Gai to mount his horse, and the whole company then mounted horses or rode in sedan chairs to the assembly hall. Upon entering the hall they got Chao Gai to take the seat of honour, and then brought in an incense urn which they placed in the centre of the hall.
Lin Chong came forward and said, "I am only a coarse fellow with a little knowledge of how to use the cudgel and lance. I am without learning or ability. Very luckily these heroes have come to our mountain stronghold today. We now all understand the justice of our cause, and therefore we must improve on what has been done here before. As we have Wu Yong here I suggest that we make him the second-in-command, and assign him the duties of adviser controlling both troops and their officers, and also arranging plans of strategy."
"I was only a teacher in a village," said Wu Yong, "and I am afraid that I have not the ability to assist you in military affairs. Although I have some knowledge of the strategems of Sunzi's and Wuzi's *Art of War* (B.C. 4th and 6th century) I yet have done nothing great so how can I become second in command?"
"Our business is now complete," said Lin Chong, "so do not let us be too polite."
Wu Yong thereupon took the seat of the second-in-command.
"Now Gongsun Sheng must take the position of third-in-command," said Lin Chong.
"This will not do," said Chao Gai. "If there is any more of this politeness I shall resign from the leadership."
"You are wrong," said Lin Chong. "Gongsun Sheng is capable in commanding soldiers, and even the spirits do not know his plans. Where is there a man who can control the wind and rain as he does?"
"I have only a few small tricks," said Gongsun Sheng, "and they are not of much help so how dare I become the third-in-command? You ought to occupy that position."
"We have just beaten our enemies," said Lin Chong, "but we know that it was due to your excellent plan. An incense urn has three legs and is useless without the third, so I hope that you will accept the position of the third-in-command."
Gongsun Sheng took his seat as the third-in-command.
"Lin Chong then started to urge another man to take the fourth seat but the three leaders objected and said, "You pointed out that an incense urn should have three legs, and therefore we accepted the three highest positions, and if you persist in urging for a fourth we shall retire from office." They induced Lin Chong to accept the position of fourth-in-command. They then invited Song Wan and Du Qian to take the next positions. But both men were not willing to accept. After a great deal of talk it was agreed, at last, that Liu Tang should be fifth; Ruan the Second, the sixth; Ruan the Fifth, the seventh; Ruan the Seventh, the eighth; Du Qian the ninth; Song Wan the tenth; and Zhu Gui the eleventh. This was how the eleven commands at Liangshan Marsh were arranged. At that place there were about eight hundred bandits, and they assembled in two large bodies and saluted their new leaders.
Chao Gai addressed them saying, "I have been invited by Drill Instructor Lin Chong to occupy the position of commander of your stronghold, with Wu Yong as strategist, and Gongsun Sheng as adjutant. Lin Chong and the other leaders control the affairs of this place, and you men must carry on your affairs as before, guarding the barriers and banks. We must now be all united and with one mind, and must maintain our cause of justice." He then gave orders for the houses to be repaired, and arranged for the use of the families they had brought there. He instructed some of the bandits to fetch the birthday presents seized at the Huangni Ridge and also the valuables from his own village and he divided them among the bandits and their leaders as rewards.
Cows and horses were killed to provide meat for an offering to the spirits of Heaven and Earth, and celebrate their success. They all had a feast, and the leaders only separated until well after midnight.
The celebrations and feasting continued for several days.
Chao Gai, Wu Yong, and the other leaders then held conferences to consider their food supplies in the granaries, repairs to the defence works and embankments, the making of all kinds of accoutrements including spears, swords, bows and arrows, mailed armor, and helmets, so as to be prepared for an attack from the army. They also got their fleet of boats in order, and drilled the men in fighting on water.
One day Lin Chong saw that Chao Gai was so generous in making arrangements for the families brought to the mountain and happened to think of whether his wife at the Eastern Capital was living or not so he decided to tell his affairs to Chao Gai. He said to him, "Ever since I have been here I have had a desire to bring my wife to this place but as Wang Lun's disposition made our future uncertain I hesitated to carry out my plan until now. I do not even know whether she at the Eastern Capital is alive or not."
"Then why not go to the Eastern Capital and bring her here?" said Chao Gai. "You write a letter, and I will at once send a messenger with it."
Lin Chong wrote a letter the same day, and selecting two reliable men he dispatched them with it. In less than two months the men returned and said to Lin Chong, "We arrived at the Eastern Capital, and near the commander-in-chief's headquarters we found the home of Drill Instructor Zhang where we inquired about your wife, and were informed that Marshal Gao Qiu had arranged a marriage with her by force. She had committed suicide about half a year ago. Drill Instructor Zhang had grieved so much that he became sick and also died about half a month ago. The maidservant Jin Er being left alone had married a man, and they now lived at that house. We got all this confirmed by our close inquiries of the neighbours. Being satisfied as to the reliability of these statements we came back here to report to you."
Upon hearing this Lin Chong wept. Chao Gai and the other leaders were very sorry for Lin Chong when they heard the news.
We need not say anything further about the stronghold except that everyday the soldiers were drilled, and got ready to resist an attack from the army.
It happened however that on a certain day while the leaders were discussing matters in the assembly hall, a bandit came and reported that about two thousand soldiers had arrived from Jizhou Prefecture, and were encamped at the Shijie Village where they had about five hundred boats.
Chao Gai was startled upon hearing this, and turning to Wu Yong, his military strategist, asked him, "As the army has arrived how do you suggest that we should meet them?"
The Prefect at Jizhou had instructed the garrison commander Huang An together with the Inspector to take a thousand soldiers, and collect boats from all over the district which were to proceed from the lake of the Shijie Village to Liangshan Marsh by two main routes. Huang An embarked his soldiers and horses on the boats, and with much shouting and fluttering of flags set out for the Jinsha Bank. When approaching that place they heard strange sounds coming from the water. Huang An asked, "Is not that sound from battle horns? Stop the boats!" Looking around they saw in the distance three boats coming towards them. On each boat were four men pulling at two large sculls, and one man standing alone. The man standing wore dark crimson caps, and had red gauze coats, and they each were armed with a spear having a hook behind the head. The men who were sculling were all dressed alike. A man recognized the three men and told Huang An that they were the three brothers Ruan.
"You men must all work together and arrest those three men," ordered Huang An.
About fifty boats started off to arrest the brothers, the soldiers making a great noise. But a whistle was heard and immediately the three boats turned round. Huang An was standing on the leading boat twirling his spear and cried out, "Kill these thieves! I will reward you handsomely!"
The three boats in front received a shower of arrows from the boats behind. The three men descended into the holds of their boats, and brought forth a fox skin which they placed at the sterns of the boats as shields. The boats behind kept chasing after them. When they had gone about a //a small fast boat overtook Huang An's boat, and reported, "We must not pursue! The boats that were following the other route have all been seized, and the men killed."
"How is it that our men were entrapped by those thieves?" asked Huang An.
The man on the swift boat replied, "While we were proceeding with our boats we saw two boats in the distance with five men on each. We pursued them. When we had gone about a //we saw about eight small boats emerge from anchorages on four sides of us. The boats were armed with crossbows, and fired arrows like a cloud of locusts. Our boats turned and retreated but when we got to the narrow mouth of the creek we found about thirty men on each bank, and they had fastened a split bamboo rope across the entrance. When we got up to the rope the men on the bank threw a shower of bottles of lime and stones at us. Our men realizing the dangerous position they were in. all jumped into the water. We reached the bank, and could see neither horses nor men there. All the men in charge of the horses had been killed in the water. Among the reeds we found a small boat so we hurried here to report the matter to you.'
Huang An was upset when he heard this, and taking the white flag signaled to his fleet to stop the pursuit and return. All the boats turned. But before retreating, they saw that accompanying the three boats were now more than ten others with about five men on each who displayed a red flag, and whistled with their fingers, and were approaching at great speed. Huang An was thinking of meeting the attack by spreading out his boats but just then he heard in the reeds on the bank the sound of explosives being fired. He then noticed that on the banks on every side were red flags, and he became much agitated.
The pursuing boats were now close and a voice from them called out, "Huang An, leave us your head before you go."
Huang An took the scull, and forced the boat to the bank. Just then about fifty boats emerged from the small creeks on either hand. They were armed with crossbows that discharged a hail of arrows. In this shower of arrows Huang An was trying to find a way of escape. He had only about four boats left. He jumped into a small fast boat and looking round saw that his men one by one plunged into the water. His boats were seized, and more than half of the men who were aboard them were killed. Huang An was sculling his boat but he had not gone far when he saw near the bank a boat on which was Liu Tang who reached out a hook to draw Huang An's boat and alighted upon it. He seized Huang An by the waist, and shouted out, "Don't struggle!" The soldiers who could swim had now all been killed by the arrows from the crossbows and those who could not swim had been captured alive aboard. Liu Tang dragged Huang An to the bank. In the distance they saw Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng mounted on horses, armed with swords, leading a party of about sixty men and thirty horses, in reserve at the foot of the hill. About two hundred of Huang An's men were captured alive and these with the boats seized were now taken to the stronghold on the south side of the mountain. All the bandit leaders now came to the headquarters.
Chao Gai dismounted and proceeding up the hill took his seat in the assembly hall. The leaders of the bandits assembled there, and laying down their arms took their seats all around the hall. Huang An was brought in, and tied up to a pillar of the building. A lot of gold, silver, and silk was brought in and divided among the bandits as a reward for their victory. It was reported that Lin Chong had seized altogether about six hundred good horses; that Du Qian and Song Wan had performed good services on the eastern side of the hill; that the three brothers Ruan had done meritorious service on the west side; and that Liu Tang had captured Huang An. The leaders were all much pleased, and orders were given that cows and sheep should be slaughtered, and a feast prepared. There was wine prepared on the mountain by themselves; lotus roots and fresh fish from the lake; fresh peaches, apricots, plums, pears, loquats, dates, persimmons, chestnuts, and other fruits which grew on trees near the lake. Chickens, pigs, geese, ducks, and such fowls which were kept on the hill. We need not go to the details but a fine huge feast was given immediately in celebration of the great victory they had accomplished.
During the feast one of the brigands arrived and reported that a man had been sent there by their leader Zhu Gui. Chao Gai inquired as to his business and the man replied that a large party of travellers would arrive that evening and so he wished to report the matter.
"We are just now short of money for expenses so who will go on this expedition?" asked Chao Gai.
The brothers Ruan offered to go.
"Good brothers," said Chao Gai, "you go quickly and come back soon but be careful."
The brothers Ruan left the hall at once, and changing their clothes, armed themselves with swords, halberds, the arresting-fork (with pliable prongs to fasten on legs, arms, or neck), the spear with a hook behind the head, and selected one hundred men to go with them. They reported their departure to the leaders in the hall, and then descending the hill to the Jinsha Bank where they embarked and crossed over to Zhu Gui's wine shop.
But Chao Gai thought that the three brothers were not capable enough to undertake this enterprise so he ordered Liu Tang to follow them with another hundred men as a reenforcement. He then said to Liu Tang, "It will be very fine if you capture the gold and valuables but I do not want you to kill or injure the travellers."
Liu Tang then departed with his men.
Up to midnight no report had been received as to how matters were progressing, so Chao Gai sent Du Qian and Song Wan to take fifty more men as a further reenforcement.
Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and Lin Chong drank wine together till daybreak, and then a soldier arrived who reported that Zhu Gui had captured more than twenty carts loaded with gold, silver, and other valuables, besides fifty donkeys and mules.
"Have they killed any men?" asked Chao Gai.
The soldier replied, "When they saw our threatening aspect they all escaped and left everything behind so that not a single man was killed."
Chao Gai was much pleased at hearing this and said, "Hereafter we must not injure people." He then took an ingot of silver and gave it to the messenger. He gave orders that wine and fruit should be taken down to the Jinsha Bank for the victorious leaders. The leaders also went down the hill, and took the carts carrying the loot on the bank and they instructed boats to be punted across for the horses. All the leaders were much pleased. After drinking some wine a messenger was dispatched to request Zhu Gui to attend a feast at the mountain stronghold.
Chao Gai and the other leaders then went up the mountain to the assembly hall where they took their seats in the spacious easy chairs. He then told the brigands to bring in the booty, and spread it out in the hall. All the silks were piled up in one place; the inferior goods in another place; the gold and silver valuables in the centre. He then instructed the treasurer to take charge of half of the booty, and keep it in the treasury for future use. The other half was to be again divided in half; one part for the leaders and the remainder for the brigands.
Huang An was to be locked up in the prison but all his soldiers were to be branded, and the best men selected to attend to the horses, and gather and cut firewood. The others were to look after the carts, and cut grass for the horses.
Chao Gai said, "Previously we were escaping from danger, and fled to this mountain with the hope of occupying some small rank under Wang Lun but owing to the gracious favour of my worthy brother Lin Chong we were pressed to occupy our present exalted positions. We did not expect so soon to have two such grand affairs, as defeating the army, and seizing a large quantity of men, horses, and boats; and arresting Huang An; and then capturing such a large amount of valuable booty. But was this not due to the fine work of you all?"
The leaders all replied, "It was due entirely to you, our elder brother's good luck."
Chao Gai said to Wu Yong, "All us seven owe our lives to the exertions of Song Jiang and Zhu Tong. The ancients had a saying, 'It is inhuman to forget a generous act.' But where has our present happiness and pleasure come from? We have now plenty of money so I think we ought to send some of it to Song Jiang at Yuncheng County. Again we ought to send a man to Jizhou Prefecture to rescue Bai Sheng from his imprisonment there."
"Sir, do not be anxious," said Wu Yong, "I have a plan. Song Jiang is a just and benevolent man, and he certainly will not expect us to reward him for his services. But we must not be deficient in politeness. We can wait until all the affairs of our mountain stronghold are settled, and then we can send one of our brothers to do the business. In the case of Bai Sheng we can send a man with money to bribe both the higher and lower officials and arrange for his escape from prison. We can now discuss our store of grain; the making of boats; the preparation of more arms; repairing our barriers and defence works; and the building of more houses. We shall put in order our clothes, outer-coats, armor, and make some more spears, swords, bows, and arrows in readiness for another attack from the army."
"All these shall depend on your wise instructions," said Chao Gai.
But we need not go into the question as to what orders Wu Yong gave to all the minor leaders.
We need not mention further how everything prospered at Liangshan Marsh since Chao Gai became the chief there but we will now relate how those soldiers of Huang An who had escaped reported to the Prefect at Jizhou how the army had been defeated and exterminated; and how Huang An had been taken prisoner. They also reported how brave and fierce were the men at Liangshan Marsh; and how difficult it would be to capture them; how difficult it was on the lake to find the way on account of the numerous creeks and anchorages; all this making it impossible for them to be victorious.
The Prefect was distressed upon hearing this, and spoke to the officer from the Prime Minister, "He Tao lost a great many men and horses, and only himself escaped with the loss of both ears. I sent him home to recuperate but so far he has not recovered. I sent five hundred men but they were all lost. I then dispatched garrison commander Huang An with an Inspector and many men but they also have been all lost. We do not know exactly how many have been killed but they could not defeat the bandits, who took Huang An captive."
The Prefect felt so much perplexed and could see no solution of the difficulty. But just then a messenger came in and reported, "There is a new official approaching the town, who will be at the reception hall at the Eastern Gate in a few minutes."
The Prefect immediately mounted his horses, and upon arriving at the East Gate where the reception hall for officials was situated he saw the man dismounting in a cloud of dust. The Prefect dismounted, and entering the arbour saluted the visitor who handed him an appointment from the Imperial government testifying himself to be a new Prefect. He conducted his successor to his *yamen* where he handed him his seal of office, and then gave him particulars of revenues in the treasury, and food on hand.
He then invited the new Prefect to a feast where he explained how strong the bandits were at Liangshan Marsh, and how his soldiers had been defeated and killed.
When the new Prefect heard this statement of affairs, he turned pale, and without speaking he meditated, "When the Prime Minister Cai, promoted me to Prefect I did not think the position was like this. Here there are no efficient troops, or capable generals so how can I capture these brigands? Should they come here to borrow some grain what could I do?"
The next day the old Prefect was ready with his baggage and left for the Eastern Capital to answer the charges made against him.
Soon after the new Prefect had been at his post he invited a military officer who had just been appointed to take charge of the garrison at Jizhou Prefecture. He then gave orders that the army must be brought up to strength, and the bravest and boldest men must be recruited; horses and grain purchased, and preparations made for another attack upon Liangshan Marsh. He also wrote dispatches to the capital asking them to instruct the surrounding villages to join him in this attack. He also ordered the county magistrates in his prefecture to assist in capturing the brigands, and to suppress any disorder in their districts.
The recording secretary sent the Prefect's dispatch to the magistrate at Yuncheng County instructing the latter to get his defences ready in case of an attack from the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. The magistrate after reading the dispatch gave it to his secretary Song Jiang with an order to write dispatches to all the villages to get their defences ready. When Song Jiang read the dispatch he thought that he never expected Chao Gai and his six followers would do such a big thing as the capture of the birthday presents, killing many soldiers; branding He Tao; imprisoning Huang An, and capturing many soldiers and horses. For such an act their families were liable to be decapitated according to the law. Although they were compelled to do this yet according to the law they could not be pardoned. "If they are not careful what hope is there for them?" He was very sorry but told his clerk Zhang Wenyuan to write the dispatches to all the villages as ordered. When the dispatches had been dispatched Song Jiang left the *yamen* but he had not gone more than thirty steps when he heard someone behind calling to him. Looking round he saw a matchmaker, Grandma Wang who was accompanied by another old woman who wished to speak to him. Grandma Wang said to her companion, "Now you are lucky, as the clerk who does benevolent things is coming, and you can tell him your business." Song Jiang turning round asked what she had to say to him.
Grandma Wang, however, told the other woman called Madame Yan to keep quiet, and she herself spoke to Song Jiang: "This woman has just come from Eastern Capital, and with herself there were three in the family—her husband and a girl called Yan Poxi. Her husband could sing very well, and taught his daughter Poxi to sing also with him. She is eighteen years old, and has a good colour. They came to Shandong to find a certain gentleman but after wandering about a lot they have failed to find him. Although they can both sing they have not found men of pleasure in this district, and they now live for the time being in an alleyway just behind the *yamen*. Yesterday her husband was seized with cholera, and died suddenly. She has no money to even bury the corpse so she asked me to help her, and arrange a marriage for her daughter. But I told her that I could not find a suitable man all at once. We were wondering how to borrow some money, when I saw you, so we followed you to ask whether you would provide a coffin for them."
"Follow me to the inn in the alleyway," said Song Jiang, "and there I will give you a letter to Old Chen to provide a coffin for her. But what are you going to do after that?"
"I will not deceive you," said Madame Yan, "I have no means of any kind."
"I will give you ten taels of silver," said Song Jiang.
"You are as generous as a father or mother to us," said Madame Yan, "and we shall have to requite you in some way."
"You need not talk like that," said Song Jiang. So saying he took the silver and gave it to her, and then withdrew and went home.
Madame Yan took the note given to her by Song Jiang, and got a coffin from Chen Sanlang. After the funeral she still had about five taels of silver left to cover further expenses.
Upon a certain morning Madame Yan called at Song Jiang's house to thank him for his kindness, and she noticed that there was no woman in the house so she asked Grandma Wang, the matchmaker, whether Song Jiang had a wife or not.
Grandma Wang replied that Song Jiang's people lived at the Song Family Village but she had not heard that he had a wife. He was the Chief Clerk at the *yamen*, and lived by himself. She was always hearing that he assisted poor people with coffins, medicine, and food. She thought that he had no wife.
"My daughter is very good-looking," said Madame Yan, "and also sings well and is proficient in amusements. When we lived at the Eastern Capital she was young and she often visited the houses of prostitution where she was much liked. Some heads of these brothels very often asked that my daughter be allowed to join them but I would not agree. Because if we had let her go we should have had nobody to look after us. We did not expect that we should have such misery which has already ruined her future. A few days ago I saw that Song Jiang had no wife in his house so I should be glad if you would tell him that if he would like a wife I should be willing to give him my daughter. We have no means of recompensing him for his kind assistance but I would like to make him a relative of mine.

The next day Grandma Wang went to see Song Jiang, and talked this matter over with him. At first Song Jiang was averse to marrying the girl but with Grandma Wang's strong advocacy of the match, he at last agreed to live with the girl. He then rented a house in an alleyway on the west of the *yamen*, and furnished it, and then asked Madame Yan and her daughter to go and live there. In less than a fortnight he gave the girl Yan Poxi many ornaments for the head, and clothed her in rich silks. The mother also had good clothing and there was nothing lacking in the way of luxuriant life.

At that time Song Jiang slept with Yan Poxi every night but gradually he became a less frequent visitor. Now why was this? Previously Song Jiang had been very keen on practicing with spears and cudgels, and prefered this to the pleasures of sex. Yan Poxi was about nineteen years of age, and like all girls of that age was fond of sexual enjoyment. Therefore she grew dissatisfied with Song Jiang.

One day Song Jiang made a mistake in bringing his assistant Zhang Wenyuan to Yan Poxi's house to drink wine. Zhang Wenyuan had beautiful eyes, white teeth, red lips, and spent his leisure idly. He was quite a dandy and was also quite a good player on string and wood instruments. When Yan Poxi saw Zhang Wenyuan she was much pleased with him and noticed him carefully. Zhang Wenyuan being quite the cad, noticed the effect he had produced. He also noticed the sly movements of her eyes and eyebrows, and knew there was something behind them that he accordingly bore in mind.

Whenever Song Jiang was away, Zhang Wenyuan seized the opportunity to go to the house to presumably visit him. Yan Poxi used to invite him to drink tea or wine, and after some talk they became lovers. She never gave a thought of Song Jiang, and when he came she always insulted him. Song Jiang was not a woman chaser and thenceforth he went to the house once every ten days. But Zhang Wenyuan and Yan Poxi stuck together like glue and varnish. He went there at night and left the following morning, and all the neighbours knew this.

Consequently Song Jiang heard rumours, and half believing them, he thought that since his parents had not selected the girl for him that meant that she was merely a concubine and not a wife, there was no reason for him to lose his temper about her. He would simply stay away from the house. So he did not go there for several months. Madame Yan many times sent a man to invite Song Jiang to come to the house but he always sent a reply that he was too busy.

It happened one day that Song Jiang went into a tea-house just opposite the entrance to the *yamen*, and sat down to drink tea. He there noticed a big man wearing a white broad brimmed felt hat, a black and green silk wadded coat, puttees wound round his calves, hempen shoes with eight rows of laces, a sword at his side; he carried a bundle on his back, and was perspiring heavily, and panting for breath. He looked inside the *yamen* as he passed. He was stumbling along, and Song Jiang seeing this, left the tea-house, and followed the man. When they had walked about thirty steps the man looked round but seeing Song Jiang did not recognize him. But Song Jiang saw something in the man's face which seemed familiar, yet he could not remember where he had met him before. He thought a little without finding a clue. The man stopped, and looking carefully at Song Jiang thought that he also knew him but not being certain he did not care to speak.

Song Jiang thought, "This is somewhat strange but why does the man look at me like that?" He also did not like to speak to the man. The man crossed the road, and entering a hairdressing saloon asked, "Who is that clerk over there?" The shopkeeper said that he was Song Jiang. The man taking hold of his sword, and stepping forward saluted Song Jiang by the sound "*nuo*," and then asked, "Do you not recognize me?"

"I think I know your face," said Song Jiang.

"Let us go to another place, and have a talk," said the man.

They then went into a small quiet alleyway where the man suggested that they go into an inn there. They did so, and finding a secluded cabinet upstairs they sat down there. The man took off his sword, placed his bundle under the table, and then suddenly stooped down and kowtowed. Song Jiang did the same and said, "Do not do that. May I know your name?"

"Benefactor! How is that you forget me?" asked the man.

"But who are you?" asked Song Jiang. "I seem to know your face but I quite forget your name."

"I met you before," said the man, "at the village of Chao Gai, where you saved our lives. I am Liu Tang, the Red Haired Demon."

Song Jiang was startled at this, and said, "How brave you are! I am afraid that if the *yamen* people see you you would be in danger."

"I do not care a damn," said Liu Tang. "I have specially come here to thank you for your assistance in the past."

"And how is Chao Gai and his followers?" asked Song Jiang. "Who told you to come here?"

"Chao Gai himself told me to come here to thank our benefactor," said Liu Tang. "He is now commander of the bandits at Liangshan Marsh, and Wu Yong is the second-in-command. Gongsun Sheng is third-in-command. Lin Chong manages everything, and he killed Wang Lun. Du Qian, Song Wan, Zhu Gui, and Lin Chong, the old leaders at Liangshan Marsh together with our seven make a total of eleven leaders now. At our stronghold there are altogether about eight hundred men, and large supplies of grain. They have not forgotten your kindness, and have sent me to present a letter to you, and also one hundred taels of gold. Then I must find Zhu Tong, and also thank him for what he did." He opened his bundle, and taking out a letter handed it to Song Jiang. The latter after reading it lifted up the front part of his long gown, and brought out his letter case. While he was doing this Liu Tang had placed the gold on the table, and Song Jiang picked up one piece and put it into his letter case along with the letter. He then asked Liu Tang to put the remainder of the gold back in his bundle, and ordered the waiter to bring wine, a large piece of meat, vegetables, and fruit for Liu Tang to eat. It was getting evening by the time Liu Tang had finished his food and wine, and the servant had left them. Liu Tang then wanted again to open the bundle, and give the gold to Song Jiang but the latter prevented him from doing so and said, "Younger brother, please listen to me! You seven leaders at the mountain stronghold will be in need of money. I have enough money at home to meet my needs, so I request you to keep this gold at your stronghold, and when I am in need of it I will call for it. I am not polite because I have taken a piece of the gold. Zhu Tong has also got enough money at home, so that you need not send him any money. I will explain the matter to him when I meet him next time. Younger brother, I cannot invite you to come and stay at my house because if anyone saw you it would be very awkward. Tonight there will be bright moonlight and you had better then depart, and get back to your mountain stronghold. Please convey my compliments to your leaders, and ask them to excuse me for not going personally to see them."

"Elder brother and benefactor," said Liu Tang, "I was told to come here, and make a small recompense for your kindness. I have to obey the orders of my leaders Chao Gai and Wu Yong and as I have not done as they required how dare I go back? If I go back like this I shall be punished for dereliction of duty."

"As your commanders are so severe," said Song Jiang, "I will write a letter explaining the matter and give it to you."

Liu Tang pleaded hard for Song Jiang to take the present but the latter was still unwilling to do so. Song Jiang borrowed a pen and ink from the wine shop proprietor, and wrote a letter, and gave it to Liu Tang. Liu Tang was an honest man, and seeing that Song Jiang would not accept the gold he put it back in his bundle. Seeing that it was dark Liu Tang said that he would go, and Song Jiang said that he would not detain him because they knew each other so well. Liu Tang saluted four times, and Song Jiang then called the innkeeper and said to him, "This gentleman leaves here a tael of silver, and I will come tomorrow, and settle your account." Liu Tang then put his bundle on his back, took up his sword, and went out with Song Jiang. It was quite late but there was a full moon as it was then the middle of the eighth month.

Song Jiang took Liu Tang by the hand and said, "Younger brother, please be careful. Do not come here again as it is a dangerous place for you as there are so many policemen about. I cannot go with you any further so I will now take leave of you."

So Liu Tang took his departure by the west road towards Liangshan Marsh. Song Jiang walked home and on the way, he thought, "If a policeman had noticed our meeting what a row there might have been? So Chao Gai has 'fallen into the grass' and is now a bandit. It will surely develop into a great affair."

He had just turned about two corners when he heard a person behind him calling out, "Chief Clerk! Where're you going? I've not seen you for these last few days." Turning round Song Jiang was startled. `Song Jiang was now made fierce, his good heart turned to anger.

## 021

### The Old bawd Brothel-Keeper gets drunk, Strike,s Beats, & shows Bullock Tang the Ox-Er the door; Song Jiang sees red in a Fit of Anger, Slays, & Kills the Girl Yan Poxi While Angry — and Poxi is no more

As Song Jiang ambled back to his quarters along the moonlit street after seeing Liu Tang off, it was Madame Yan who hailed him from behind. She hurried to catch up. "I sent someone with an invitation a long time age but you're so important it's hard to get hold of you," she said. "If my baggage of a daughter has said anything to offend you, forgive her for my sake. I've reprimanded the girl, and told her she must apologize. I'm in luck tonight, running into you. We can go back together."

"I'm busy at the magistrate's office. I can't get away. I'll come another time."

"Nothing doing. The girl is at home longing for you. Comfort her a bit. Why must you be this way?"

"I'm really busy. I'll come tomorrow, for sure."

"No, tonight." She pulled him by the sleeve. "Who's provoking you against her? We're dependent on you for the rest of our lives. Whoever is telling you stories, don't believe him. Make up your own mind. If my daughter has done anything wrong, I'm the one to blame. Please come with me."

"Stop insisting. I'm busy and can't get away."

"The magistrate won't punish you if you put your work off a little while. I'm not likely to run into you again. You must come. I've things to tell you when we get home."

Song Jiang was an impetuous fellow, and the old woman clung to him tenaciously. "Let go of my arm," he said. "I'll go."

"Don't rum away. An old woman like me could never keep up with you."

"What would I do that for!"

They continued on, side by side. At the door, Song Jiang halted. Madame Yan pulled him by the hand.

"You've come this far. Why not go in?"

Song Jiang entered and sat down on a bench. The sly old woman, afraid that he would try to escape, sat down beside him.

"Daughter," she called, "your beloved is here."

Poxi was lying on her bed, staring at the lamp and thinking of nothing in particular. She was hoping that Zhang would come. When she heard her mother say: "Your beloved is here," she thought it was the young rake. She got up quickly and fixed her hair.

"That rogue," she muttered. "He made me wait long enough. I'll box his ears!"

She flew down the stairs and peeked through the lattice wall. The glass lamp in the parlour brightly illuminated the figure of Song Jiang. Poxi promptly turned, went back up the stairs and threw herself down on her bed.

Madame Yan heard her daughter's footsteps come down and then go up again. "Your lover is here, daughter," she shouted. "Why have you gone away?"

From her bed, Poxi replied: "This room isn't so far that he can't reach it! He's not blind! Why doesn't he come up here instead of waiting for me to come down and greet him? Don't gabble so!"

"She's bitter that you stayed away so long," Madame Yan explained to Song Jiang. "That's why she talks like that." The old woman laughed. "I'll go with you."

Song Jiang felt uncomfortable and awkward. But Madame Yan was insistent, and he went with her up the stairs.

The girl's room was fairly large. In the outer half was a dressing-table and bench. The inner half contained on one side a carved bed with railings at head and foot and hung with a red silk canopy. There was a clothing rack and a towel at one end of the bed. At the other was a washbasin. A pewter lampstand rested on gold lacquered table that was flanked by two matching stools. In the centre of the middle wall was a painting of beautiful girl. Four wooden armchairs stood in a row along the wall opposite the bed.

Madame Yan pulled Song Jiang into the room, and he sat down on one of the stools near the bed. The old woman went over and pulled her daughter up.

"Sir Clerk is here. He's been staying away because you've offended him. You have a rotten temper but you think of him often. It hasn't been easy for me to get him to come. Yet instead of getting up and apologizing, you sulk!"

Poxi pushed her hands away. "What are you making such a fuss about? I haven't done anything wrong. If he never comes how can I apologize?"

Song Jiang listened but did not speak. The old woman pulled a chair over beside him and pushed the girl down on it.

"You sit here with him. If you won't apologize, at least behave yourself."

But Poxi refused to sit by Song Jiang. She took a chair opposite. The clerk kept his gaze lowered and remained silent. Poxi averted her face.

" 'Without wine and soy sauce how can you lay a feast?' " quipped Madame Yan. "I've got some good wine. Now all we need is some food and we'll be able to express our apologies. Daughter, keep sir Clerk company. Don't be embarrassed. I'll be right back."

"That old woman has me nailed down tight," thought Song Jiang. "When she goes downstairs, I'll leave!"

But Madame Yan guessed what he was planning, and bolted the bedroom door from the outside after her.

"The old bawd's out-foxed me," Song Jiang said to himself.

Madame Yan went downstairs, lit the lamp by the stove, saw that the water was hot, and added a few sticks of wood. She took some change and, at the end of the lane, bought fruit, fresh fish, a tender chicken, and pickled fish. These she brought home, and put them on plates. After pouring the wine into a jug, she ladled some into a kettle and heated it on the stove. She poured the warm spirits into a wine pot. Then she cooked a few dishes and carried these, along with three cups and three sets of chopsticks, on a tray upstairs.

She set the tray on the dressing table, opened the bedroom door, entered, and placed the food and drink on the table of gold lacquer.

Song Jiang still sat with his head down. Poxi with her face turned.

"Daughter, pour the wine."

"You two drink. I don't feel like it."

"Your father and I spoiled you since childhood. But you shouldn't act like this in front of others."

"What if I don't pour the wine? Will his sword come flying and cut off my head?"

The old woman laughed. "It's all my fault. Sir Clerk is a gentleman. He won't take umbrage at the likes of you. If you won't pour the wine at least turn around and drink with us."

But the girl wouldn't look at Song Jiang, and Madame Yan had to toast him herself. He reluctantly drank a cup.

"Don't blame her," the old woman urged with a smile. "I know there are a lot of rumours. I'll explain everything tomorrow. Some people are envious of you. It burns them up to see you here. They'll say anything that comes into their heads. Just empty farts! Don't listen to them. Now, let's drink."

She filled the three cups and said to her daughter: "Quit acting like a child. Have some wine."

"Leave me alone! I'm full. I couldn't touch another thing."

"Come now, daughter. Drink with your beloved."

Poxi said to herself: "I've given my heart to Zhang. Who wants to stay with this lout! But if I don't get him drunk I suppose he'll be wanting things from me." She forced herself to down half a cup.

Madame Yan laughed. "My girl is upset. Relax, have a few drinks and go to bed. Sir Clerk, drink your fill."

Song Jiang couldn't resist her urgings. He drained four or five cups in a row. The old woman also had quite a few. She went downstairs to heat some more wine. She had been annoyed when her daughter refused to drink. Now that the girl had changed her mind she felt much better.

"If we can inveigle him into staying tonight," she thought, "he'll get over being angry. The thing is to hang onto him for a while longer, then we'll see."

By the stove, she drank another three cups. This only increased her craving, and she filled a bowl and downed that, too. Madame Yan then poured half a kettle of heated wine into the pot and crawled back up the stairs. She found Song Jiang sitting in silence, with lowered gaze. Poxi, her head turned away, was toying with her skirt. The old woman laughed.

"You two aren't made of clay. Why don't you speak? Be a man, sir Clerk. All you have to do is show a little tenderness and whisper a few sweet nothings."

Song Jiang didn't know what to do. He said not a word. To stay or go, both seemed wrong.

"You never come to see me," Poxi thought, "and now you expect me to talk and play around with you as usual. Not a chance!"

Madame Yan had drunk a lot of wine and she babbled all kinds of nonsense. Gossiping about this one, slandering that, she talked a blue streak.

While this was going on, Tang the Ox went looking for Song Jiang. Tang was a pedlar of pickled meats and vegetables who also managed to do some of hustling on the streets of the county town. Song Jiang often helped him financially. Whenever Tang picked up a bit of useful information about court cases and litigants he let Song Jiang know, and the clerk gave him some money. And so, if Song Jiang ever had need of him, Tang went all out.

On this particular evening Tang had lost at gambling, and he went to the county office to put the touch on Song Jiang. But the clerk was nowhere to be seen.

"Who are you looking for in such great haste, brother?" asked one of Song's neighbours.

"What a thirst I've got. I'm looking for my patron but he's not around."

"Who is your patron?"

"Clerk of the county court, Song Jiang."

"I saw him going off with Madame Yan not long ago."

"That daughter of hers is a dirty tramp. She and young Zhang are really hot for each other. The girl's cheating on Song Jiang. He probably got wind of it and stopped going there. Today, the old bawd must have tricked him into paying a visit. I've got no money and my throat is dry. I'll just drop by and borrow enough for a few bowls of wine."

Tang headed for Madame Yan's house. A lamp was burning and the door was not locked. As he reached the foot of the stairs he heard the old woman laughing wildly in the room above.

He tiptoed up the stairs and peered through a crack in the wall. Song Jiang and Poxi both were gazing downward. The old woman was sitting at the head of the table, jabbering twelve to the dozen. Tang stepped in and greeted each of them courteously. He remained standing near the entry.

"Just in time!" thought Song Jiang. He gestured with pursed lips.

Tang was a clever fellow. He got the signal. "I've been looking all over for you," he said to Song. "And you've been here drinking, snug and peaceful, right along!"

"Has something important happened at the county office?"

"You've forgotten, sir Clerk. It's about that matter that came up this morning. The magistrate is having fits in his chambers. He's sent four or five court attendants looking for you. His Worship is raising the roof. You'd better get going!"

"If it's that important, I suppose I must." Song Jiang stood up and headed for the stairs. Madame Yan stopped him.

“Don’t pretend, sir Clerk. I know he’s putting on an act.” She whirled to face Tang the Ox. “Tricky rogue! Think you can fool me? You’ve as much chance as taking the adze from Lu Ban the Great Carpenter! At this hour the magistrate is home drinking and merry-making with his wife. What official business would he bother about tonight? You can’t diddle me with your phony stories!”
“The magistrate is really waiting for him. It’s very urgent. I wouldn’t lie!”
“Dog farts! These old eyes are crystal clear. You saw the clerk signal with his mouth to invent a tale. Instead of encouraging him to stay, you try to lure him away! ‘Killing can be forgiven but never deception,’ as the old saying goes.”
Madame Yan jumped up, grabbed Tang by the neck with both hands, and rushed him stumbling down the stairs.
“Get your hands off my neck,” Tang yelled.
“You’re ruining our business, cutting off our food and clothing! That’s as bad as killing a man’s parents or his wife! Make any more noise and I’ll clobber you, you thieving beggar!”
Tang stepped up to her. “Let’s see you hit me!”
Filled with the courage of wine, Madame Yan slapped Tang so hard he staggered out backwards, taking the bamboo door curtain with him. The old woman, swearing a blue streak, rolled up the curtain, put it inside, closed the double doors and bolted them firmly.
Tang the Ox bawled from the yard: “Dirty whore-monger, if it weren’t for Clerk Song I’d smash your house to smithereens! You just wait. It I don’t get you on an odd day, I’ll get you on an even!” Cursing, he pounded his chest. “If I don’t kill you my name isn’t Tang!”
Madame Yan went back up the stairs. “You shouldn’t pay any attention to that beggar,” she said to Song Jiang. “He came to cadge the price of a couple of drinks. All he does is stir up trouble. A stinking wretch who’ll die in the streets dares to come to my door with his quackery!”
Song Jiang was an honest fellow. Now that the old woman had seen through his attempt, he couldn’t bring himself to leave.
“Don’t hold this against me, sir Clerk. We know how good you are to us. Daughter, drink this cup with sir Clerk. You two haven’t seen each other for a long time. I can imagine how eager you are to get to bed. I’ll just straighten up a bit in here and go.”
She had two more cups with Song Jiang, collected the bowls and dishes, and went downstairs to the kitchen.
“I’ve heard that this girl and Zhang are hitting it off,” the clerk said to himself, “but I’m not sure. There’s nothing I’ve seen with my own eyes. If I go now she’ll think I’m a rube. Besides, it’s late and I want to sleep. I may as well find out how this girl really feels about me.”
The old woman came up the stairs again and called: “It’s late. Go to bed, you two.”
“Mind your business,” snapped Poxi. “Go to bed yourself!”
Madame Yan laughed and went downstairs, saying: “Rest well, sir Clerk. Enjoy yourself. Take your time getting up in the morning.”
She put the kitchen in order, washed her feet, blew out the lamp, and retired. Song Jiang, sitting on the stool, glanced at the girl and sighed. It was already the second watch. Poxi lay down on the bed, fully clothed. She rested her head on her embroidered pillow, and rolled over facing the wall.
“The trollop goes to sleep without even looking at me,” Song Jiang thought irritably. “Her mother wangled me into coming here and plied me with wine. I can’t keep my eyes open. It’s late. I’d better get some rest.”
He removed his head kerchief and put it on the table, took off his tunic and hung it on the clothes rack. The sash around his waist, with its attached dagger and pouch, he draped over the bed rail. Then he pulled off his silk shoes and white socks and lay down with his head towards the girl’s feet.
Half a watch later, he heard her snicker. Song Jiang was furious. How could he sleep? “‘Joy regrets night’s swift race. Misery hates its leaden pace,’” he thought.
By the time the third watch had gone and the fourth begun, he was completely sober. At the fifth watch he got up, washed his face in the basin with cold water, dressed, tied his kerchief on his head. “Unmannerly slut,” he muttered.
Poxi heard him. She hadn’t slept either. She turned around.
“You ought to be ashamed!” she retorted.
Swallowing his rage, Song descended the stairs.
Madame Yan heard his footsteps and called from her bed: “Sleep a little longer, sir Clerk. Wait until daylight before you go. There’s no reason to get up at the fifth watch.”
Song Jiang did not reply. He unbolted the door.
“If you must go, sir Clerk,” said the old woman, “pull the door closed behind you.”
Song Jiang did so. Still smouldering, he set out quickly for his quarters. As he was passing the magistracy, he saw down the street a small lampglow. Grandpa Wang, the medicinal broth seller, was coming to the square in front of the county office to catch the morning market.
The old man hailed him, “What are you doing up so early, sir Clerk?”
“I had too much to drink last night. Just now when I awoke I counted the beat of the watch drum wrong.”
“The wine surely upset your stomach. I’ve just the soup for that. Let me give you a bowl.”
“All right,” said Song Jiang. He sat down on a bench. The old man filled a bowl with thick broth and handed it to him.
As he was sipping it, Song Jiang thought: “I often drink his soups, and he never asks me to pay. Though I promised to buy him a coffin, I still haven’t done it.”
He remembered the gold Chao Gai had sent and the bar he had selected and put in his pouch. “I’ll give him the money now. That will make him happy,” he thought.
“Grandpa, I haven’t given you the money yet I promised you for your coffin,” he said. “I have some gold here which you can have. Buy yourself a coffin and keep it in your home. When you reach a hundred and go to your final rest, I’ll pay your funeral expenses.”
“You’re always so good to me, benefactor, and now you give me money for a coffin. There is no way I can thank you in this life but in my next incarnation I’ll serve you as a donkey or a horse!”
“Don’t talk like that.” Song Jiang pulled up the edge of his over-vest and felt for his pouch. He uttered a groan and thought: “I must have left it on that creature’s bed rail last night. I was so angry I could think only of getting out, and forgot to put on my sash. The gold doesn’t matter but it’s wrapped in Chao Gai’s letter! I was going to burn it when I was with Liu Tang in the tavern but I was afraid he’d go back and say I treated his mission lightly. I decided to destroy it when I returned to my quarters but Madame Yan nabbed me before I could get there. Then last night I thought I’d burn it in the lamp. But I was afraid the girl would see and so I didn’t do it. This morning I left in such a hurry I forgot it! I’ve often noticed Poxi looking at song sheets that means she can read a bit. If she gets her hands on that letter, it will be very bad!”
He stood up and said: “Forgive me, grandpa. I meant what I said. But the gold is in my pouch, and I left home so quickly this morning I forgot it. I’ll get it now.”
“Don’t bother,” said the old man. “Any time will do.”
“You don’t understand. I left something important with it. I need them both.”
Song Jiang set out rapidly for Madame Yan’s house.
Meanwhile, after Poxi heard Song leave, she got up. “That oaf kept me awake all night. Frozen face, hoping I’d apologize and be nice to him. I don’t want him! Zhang and I get along fine. Who wants to bother with Song Jiang! If he doesn’t come around, so much the better!”
She spread the quilt, took off her tunic and skirt, opened her chemise and stepped out of her slip. In the light of lamp by the bedside she saw the sash hanging on the rail. Poxi laughed.
“That black-faced rogue was so drunk he forgot his sash. I’ll give it to my Zhang to wear.”
As she lifted it, with dagger and pouch attached, the pouch felt unusually heavy. Poxi opened it and spilled its contents on the table. Out came a gold bar and a letter. She picked up the gold bar, gleaming yellow in the lamplight.
“A gift from heaven,” she laughed. “My Zhang has been getting too thin. Now I can buy him some good things to eat.”
She put the bar down and opened the letter. She saw Chao Gai’s signature, and what he had written.
“Aha!” she said. “I knew that the bucket went to the well but here we have the well also coming to the bucket. Song Jiang is all that prevents me and Zhang from becoming man and wife. Today I’ve got him in the palm of my hand. So he’s in cahoots with the bandits in Liangshan Marsh, and they’ve sent him a hundred ounces of gold. I’ll fix him!”
She again wrapped the gold bar in the letter and put it in the pouch. “Even with five demons he won’t snatch this away!” she said to herself.
Poxi heard the door downstairs squeak open, and the old woman call from her bed: “Who’s there?”
“Me,” Song Jiang replied.
“I told you it was too early, sir Clerk but you wouldn’t listen. Now you’ve come back. Go up and sleep with Poxi. Wait until daylight, then leave if you must.”
The clerk made no reply but mounted the stairs. Hearing that it was Song Jiang, the girl hastily rolled the pouch and dagger in the sash, got under the covers with the bundle, turned facing the wall, and pretended to snore.
Song burst into the room and went straight to the rail of the bed. His belongings were gone. The clerk was in a panic. He controlled his anger over the shabby way the girl had treated him all night and shook her by the shoulder.
“For the sake of my kindness to you before, give me back my pouch.”
Poxi continued to feign sleep. Song Jiang shook her again.
“Don’t be angry. I’ll apologize to you later.”
“I’ve been sleeping peacefully here. Who wakes me so rudely?”
“Quit acting. You know very well it’s me.”
Poxi turned around. “Oh, Black-Face. What are you saying?”
“I want my pouch.”
“Did you put it in my hands? Why ask me for it?”
“I left on the rail at the foot of the bed. Nobody else has been here. You must have taken it.”
“A demon’s run away with your wits!”
“I behaved badly last night. I’ll apologize to you later. But you must return my pouch. Quit fooling around.”
“Who’s fooling? I never took it!”
“You hadn’t undressed before, or covered yourself with the quilt. You must have taken it when you got up and laid out the bedding.”
Poxi’s lovely brows rose and her starry eyes widened. “Yes, I took it, and I’m not going to give it back. Now have me arrested as a thief!”
“I didn’t say you stole it.”
“I’m not a thief, I’ll have you know!”
Song Jiang’s panic was growing. “I’ve treated you and your mother well. Give it back to me! I’ve things to do!”
“Always mumbling that I was carrying on with Zhang. He’s not your equal in some ways but at least he isn’t a dirty criminal! He doesn’t consort with bandits and robbers!”
“My darling sister, keep your voice down! If the neighbours hear, it won’t be any joke!”
“If you’re afraid people will hear, you shouldn’t do such things. I’m going to hold on to that letter! I might return it but you have to do three things, first.”
“I’ll do thirty, gladly, to say nothing of three!”
“Maybe you won’t agree.”
“Anything in my power, I’ll do. What do you want from me?”
“First, give back my contract of sale to you, and write another transferring me to Zhang in marriage, with a guarantee that you’ll never contest it.”
“Agreed.”
“Second, all the ornaments in my hair, the clothes on my body, the furnishings in the house, all come from you. Write another promise that you won’t ask their return.”
“Agreed.”
“It’s the third thing I’m afraid you’ll balk at.”
“I’ve already agreed to two things. Why not a third?”
“I want those hundred ounces of gold Chao Gai sent you from Liangshan Marsh. In exchange, I’ll let you off your ‘top-magnitude crime,’ and return your purse and what’s in it.”
“Your first two demands I’ve already agreed to. It’s true I was sent a hundred ounces of gold but I refused them, and told the man to take them back. If I still had the gold here I’d gladly present it to you with both hands.”
“Fine words! ‘Money to an official is like blood to a fly.’ They sent you gold and you turned it down? That’s a farting lie! Among officials ‘What cat doesn’t eat meat?’ Does the King of Hell let condemned souls go? Who do you think you’re kidding? Give me that gold. What does it mean to you? If you’re afraid it’ll be identified as stolen goods, melt it down first!”
“I’m an honest man, you know that. I wouldn’t lie. If you don’t believe me, give me three days’ time. I’ll sell my family belongings and raise the money for you. Let me have my pouch.”
The girl laughed coldly. “Tricky, Black-Face, aren’t you? Do you think I’m a child? I give you the pouch and letter today, and three days from now you give me gold? Not a chance! With one hand I take the money, with the other I release the goods. Let’s have it, quick, and get this over with!”
“I don’t have any gold, I tell you!”
“Is that what you’re going to say when I accuse you in court this morning!”
At the mention of the word “court,” Song Jiang began to burn. He glared at the girl.
“Are you going to give it back or not?”
“Dare I refuse, with you so fierce?” she said sarcastically.
“You really won’t give it back?”
“No, a hundred times no! I’ll return it to you in the county court!”
Song Jiang grabbed the quilt covering Poxi and yanked it off. She didn’t care about her nakedness but lay huddled with the bundle clutched to her chest. Song recognized the fringe of his sash.
“So that’s where it is!”
He seized the bundle with both hands. The girl wouldn’t let go. Song hauled for dear life. Poxi clung in a death grip. The clerk gave another hard pull, and the dagger fell out on the mattress. He instinctively pounced on it. The girl looked at the dagger in his hand and screamed.
“Murder! Black-Face wants to kill me!”
It wasn’t until then that the idea entered his mind. All his suppressed fury burst forth like a wave. Before Poxi could scream again he pushed her down with his left hand and with his right slit her throat. Fresh blood spurted. Poxi gurgled. Afraid she wouldn’t die, Song Jiang slashed with his dagger once more. The girl’s head dangled loosely on the pillow.
Song quickly unwound the pouch, extracted the letter and burned it in the lamp flame. He fastened the sash around his waist and went downstairs.
The old woman, lying in bed below, heard the quarrel but hadn’t paid much attention until her daughter screamed: “Black-Face wants to kill me!” Worried, she jumped out of bed, dressed, and hurried up the stairs. She collided with Song, who was just starting down.
“What are you two raising such a row about?” she demanded.
“Your daughter was insufferable! I killed her!”
“Now, now,” Madame Yan smiled, “you may get angry easily, and be a little nasty when you’re drunk but you wouldn’t kill anybody. Stop teasing.”
“If you don’t believe me, go inside and see! I killed her, all right!”
“I don’t believe it,” said Madame Yan. She pushed open the door and looked. Her daughter’s body lay in a pool of blood.
“Frightful,” she gasped. “How could you do such a thing!”
“I’m a man of principle. I won’t run away. Do with me what you will.”
“The jade was no good. You weren’t wrong to kill her. But now I’ve no one to support me in my old age.”
“That’s no problem. You needn’t worry, if that’s how you feel. I have a bit of property. I can see to it that you have plenty of food and clothing for the rest of your days.”
“That’s fine. I thank you, sir Clerk. But what are we going to do about burying my daughter?”
“Easy. I’ll go and buy a coffin. When she’s being placed in it, I’ll deal with the coroner. And I’ll give you another ten ounces of silver for funeral expenses.”

"We'd better get the coffin now, before daylight. We don't want the neighbours to see anything."
"All right. Bring me a pen and paper and I'll write a note, then you go for the coffin."
"Just a note won't solve anything. Unless you go in person, they won't deliver it quickly."
"You're right," said Song Jiang.
They went downstairs. The old woman took a lock and key from the kitchen, locked the house door behind them and put the key in her pocket. Then she and the clerk walked in the direction of the county office.
It was not yet daylight but the gate of the magistracy was already open. As Madame Yan and Song Jiang neared the left of the entry the old woman suddenly clutched him.
"I've got a murderer here!" she yelled.
Song Jiang nearly jumped out of his skin. He clapped a hand over her mouth.
"Shut up!"
But Madame Yan continued her clamour. Several policemen ran over. They saw it was Song Jiang she was clinging to.
"Be quiet, woman," they said. "Our clerk isn't that kind. Speak nicely, if you've anything to say!"
"He's a murderer! I've caught him and I'm taking him to the magistrate!"
Song Jiang had always been very kind, and he was well liked by everyone, above and below. There wasn't a person in the magistracy who didn't defer to Song Jiang. And so none of the policemen was willing to lay a hand on him. Besides, they didn't believe Madame Yan.
At that moment Tang the Ox came by. He was carrying a tray of freshly washed pickled ginger for the early market held in front of the county office each morning. He saw Madame Yan seize Song Jiang and heard her exclamations. Tang remembered the abuse he himself had taken from her the previous night. He put his tray down on one of the benches of Grandpa Wang, the broth seller, and rushed over.
"Old bawd," he shouted. "Why are you handing on to our clerk?"
"Don't you let him get away," Madame Yan shrilled, "or you'll answer with your life!"
Tang the Ox was furious. He pried her hands loose and slapped her so hard she saw stars. She staggered dizzily and let go. Song Jiang walked directly into the market crowds. The old woman fastened herself on Tang.
"Clerk Song killed my daughter and you helped him escape!"
"How did I know!" Tang cried in confusion.
"Policemen, catch that murderer! Otherwise, you'll be implicated too!" Song Jiang's prestige was so high that none of the police would touch him. But Tang the Ox was a different matter. They closed in swiftly. I of them took the old woman, and 3 or 4 grasped Tang and dragged him backwards into the magistrate's court.
Truly, calamity and happiness have no volition. Man brings them on himself. Go in a flaxen cape to put out a fire and you'll be consumed by flames.

As Song Jiang was strolling home after leaving Liu Tang, while the moon shed its brightness on the street, he was suddenly accosted by Mrs. Yan.
"Registrar!" Mrs. Yan shouted as she hurried towards him. "How many times I've sent to invite you! But you're such a great man, and it's so hard to get you! Now, if ever that naughty child of mine has said anything which has given offence, then for the sake of an old woman, please pardon her; I shall talk to her myself, I'll see she apologizes. Really, fate has led me to you this evening, now do let us both go and see her."
"I have matters to attend to at the office today," Song Jiang said, "affairs that cannot be deferred. Can't we make it another day?"
"That won't do at all," Mrs. Yan said. "My daughter is at home, expecting you. Just show her a little kindness, that's all it needs. How can you begrudge her that!"
"But really I am busy," Song Jiang said. "I'll go tomorrow."
"I want to go with you this evening," Mrs. Yan insisted. Then, taking a firm hold of Song Jiang's sleeve, she went on: "Who's turned you against us? You know how we count on you, my daughter and I! You're our support for the rest of our days. The things people say are just idle gossip, you shouldn't listen to them. You should make up your own mind. If my daughter has done you some wrong, then say it's my fault. Come, just one little visit."
Song Jiang said: "Enough! I have business to attend to. I simply don't have the time!"
"Just for missing a little bit of work at the office," Mrs. Yan said, "I know His Excellency won't blame you for that. If you lose this opportunity, it may not be easy to find another. Do come with me and pay just this one little visit. When we get to the house I'll tell you something."
Song Jiang was a man who hated wasting time. Infuriated by the old woman's importuning, he said: "All right, all right, I'll come. But let go of my arm."
"Yes, Registrar," Mrs. Yan cried, "but you won't try to give me the slip, will you? You know I'm an old woman, I couldn't catch you."
"This is intolerable!" Song Jiang growled.
And this is how they arrived before the door, one chasing behind the other. Here's how it was:

The drinker 'tis that's tipsy, not the wine;
*Love's source is in the lover, not in beauty.*
*If what you plan to do brings nought but pain,*
Were it not best from doing it to refrain?

When Song Jiang came to a halt, Mrs. Yan stretched out her arms, to cut off any retreat. "Now you're here, Registrar," she said, "surely you're going to come in?"
Song Jiang entered and seated himself on a stool. The old woman was no fool — remember what they say? "When an old bawd gets her hands on you, there's no escape!" — Mrs. Yan was terrified, you see, that Song Jiang would run away, so she sat herself down beside him and called out: "Poxi, my dear, the one you love is here!"
Poxi just now was lying on her bed, absently gazing at the solitary lamp, counting the hours till Zhang's visit. When she heard her mother call out, "The one you love is here!" of course she thought it was Zhang! She rose hurriedly, and, composing her raven tresses with one hand, muttering to herself the while, "The wretch, to keep me waiting like this! I ought to box his ears for him!", flew downstairs.
Outside the sitting-room, she peeped through a hole in the screen, brightly lit from behind by a porcelain lamp. When she saw that it was Song Jiang, she turned and fled upstairs again. She threw herself down on the bed, in the same position as before.
Mrs. Yan had heard Poxi come downstairs, and heard her go back upstairs. She called out: "Poxi, where are you going? your lover is here!"
Poxi, from her bed, replied: "Is it so far to my room? Can't he come here? He's not a blind man is he? Why can't he come up by himself? Why should it be me who has to go down and receive him? Anyway, what is there to make such a bloody fuss about?"
Mrs. Yan said: "The little wretch is angry because you didn't come before. It's soured her temper. She just wants you to give her some attention, that's why she says these things." She laughed and said, "Come on, Registrar, we'll go up together."
When he heard Poxi going on like this, Song Jiang felt more than a little uncomfortable. But with the old woman hauling on his arm, there was nothing for it but to go upstairs.
It was a six-beam room, divided into two halves. The first half was occupied by a low table with chairs set around it. The other half served as bedroom, and had a bed decorated on three sides with carved reliefs. There was a rail down each side of the bed, and a silk canopy above. At the head, to one side, there was a rack for hanging clothes, with a towel on it. On the other side was a wash-basin. A gold lacquer table supported a lamp with a pewter stand and beside the table there were two stools. Right opposite the bed hung the picture of an elegant lady. Facing the bed were four armchairs arranged side by side.
When Song Jiang reached the top of the stairs, the old woman propelled him into the room. He seated himself on a square stool, facing towards the bed. Mrs. Yan went over to the bed and started to pull her daughter up, saying: "The Registrar is here. Come on, you get in a bad mood and say nasty things to upset him, so then he doesn't want to come here. But then you just lie there moping. Now I've gone to all the trouble of getting him to come, and look at you, you won't even get up and apologize! You can't even bring yourself to be civil!"
Poxi jerked her hand free and said: "What are you raving about? I didn't do anything wrong. He's the one who decided not to come. What am I supposed to apologize for?"
Song Jiang heard all this but said nothing. The old woman got a chair and placed it beside Song Jiang. Then she began tugging at her daughter again, saying: "Just come and sit by your lover's side for a bit. So you don't want to apologize, very well but control your temper. You haven't seen each other for a long time, surely you can find something nice and loving to say?"
But she was totally unmoved, the trollop. The most she would do was seat herself opposite Song Jiang.
Song Jiang remained silent, and didn't look up. And when Mrs. Yan looked at her daughter, the latter also looked away. "Well," said the old woman. "If the wine doesn't flow, the party won't go! And I've got a bottle of good wine stored up, so now I'll just go and get some fruit and nuts and we can make it up to the Registrar. Do you hear me, Poxi? Stay here and keep the Registrar company! And don't be shy. I won't be gone a minute."
"The old woman's trapped me," Song Jiang was thinking. "I can't just leave. But I'll wait till she goes downstairs, then I'll be able to slip away." However the old woman had read his mind. There was a bolt on the outside of the door, and when she left the room, she slid it across. "The old witch has really out-manoeuvred me," Song Jiang said to himself.
Mrs. Yan went downstairs and lit the lamp in front of the stove. She already had a big pot of water warming for foot-baths. She added some wood to the fire, took some money and went off to buy fruit, fresh fish, a spring chicken, pickled fish and jellyfish and other provisions. Returning, she heaped the food on some dishes, and then got the wine and poured half of it into the warmer which she put into the big pot of hot water to warm. Later she ladled the wine into a jug, collected some of the dishes of food, together with three winecups and three sets of chopsticks, and took them upstairs on a big tray. She put all this down on the long table. Then she opened the door of the inner room and laid the food and drink out on the table inside.
Song Jiang was still sitting with lowered head; Poxi was still looking away. "Get up and serve the wine!" Mrs. Yan said to her daughter.
"Drink it yourselves," Poxi said. "It doesn't interest me."
"Come now," Mrs. Yan said. "Your father and I always indulged you, since you were little. But really you can't behave like this in front of other people."
"If I don't serve the wine, so what? A magic sword isn't going to come and chop off my head, is it?"
Mrs. Yan just laughed: "All right, it's my fault," she said. "But the Registrar is a gentleman, he's not like you. If you don't want to serve the wine, all right. But at least turn round and drink a cup with us."
Poxi would not even turn her head. The old woman served Song Jiang herself. Song Jiang had no alternative but to drink.
"Don't be angry, Registrar," said the old woman, forcing a laugh. "Put those nasty rumours out of your mind. I'll tell you all about it another day. People see you coming here, and they can't contain their envy, they talk and they talk, the dirty pissers and farters. But don't you pay them any attention. You just drink your wine." She poured another three cups of wine and set them on the table. "Stop behaving like a child," she said to her daughter, "and at least drink one little cup."
"Oh, why can't you leave me alone!" Poxi said. "I've no appetite, I don't want anything."
"It's not proper," her mother grumbled. "You're supposed to drink, to keep your lover company."
All this while, Poxi was thinking, "To have to sit here and accompany this slob, when I don't want to think about anything but my Zhang! But unless we can get him drunk, he's sure to come and molest me afterwards." So reluctantly she picked up a cup of wine and downed half of it.
"It's nerves, dear, that's all," the old woman said. "You just relax now and drink a cup of wine before you go to bed. You too, Registrar, drink up!" At her insistence Song Jiang had to drink three or four more cups, while the old woman drank repeatedly and then went downstairs to warm more.
It had really worried her when she saw her daughter wasn't drinking; but once Poxi changed her mind and accepted a cup, the old woman began to think gleefully: "Now if we can only persuade him to stay the night, all his resentment will be forgotten. If we can just hold onto him a little longer, then we're in business!"
Excited by these thoughts, she swallowed down three big bowls of wine as she stood by the stove, and then, since the urge came upon her again, poured and drank yet another. Then she filled the jug from the big warmer and clambered up the stairs with it. She found Song Jiang still sitting in silence with lowered head, and her daughter averting her gaze and fiddling with her skirt. She gave a laugh and said, "After all, you're not statues are you? Why is it you don't even make a sound? Come on, Registrar, I know you're supposed to be so manly but surely you can show a bit of affection, or say something to please her?"
Song Jiang couldn't think what to do, so he kept his mouth tight shut; there seemed to be no way forward and no retreat. As for Poxi, she was thinking to herself: "You don't pay any attention to me. You expect it to be like before. You want me to come and grovel, and then join in your little games. Well, I'm not playing!"
The old woman had had a lot to drink, and now she was beginning to jumble everything, extolling the Zhangs and cursing the Lis, reading off a proper rigmarole. There's a poem for her:

To keep the patron in her clutches
*She butters him up with flattering speeches.*
*How many good men has she misled!*
Cut her tongue out when she's dead!

Now there was in Yuncheng a hawker of pickles and preserves called Tang, generally known as the Bullock. As he was an idler, always hanging about in the street, and since Song Jiang had often helped him out, he used to keep Song Jiang informed of what was going on, thus earning himself certain small sums of cash. He would lay his life down for Song Jiang if Song Jiang had need of his services.
That evening he had just got into trouble gambling, and all he could think of was to find Song Jiang, whom he looked for first at the government offices, and then at his house but in vain.
"Who are you looking for, Bullock?" the neighbours asked. "And what's the hurry?"
"I'm up to here in it, that's what." the Bullock said. "I've got to find my protector but I can't see him anywhere."
"And who is your protector?" they asked.
"It's Registrar Song from the Magistracy," the Bullock said.
"I just saw him with Mrs. Yan," someone said, "they were walking together."
"Of course!" said the Bullock. "That Yan Poxi, the cheap slut! She's been going at it with Third Brother Zhang, hot as two coals from the fire, and Registrar Song's the only one who doesn't know. Mind you, I think he got wind of something, because he hasn't been going there lately. I suppose tonight he's been waylaid by that old bawd Mrs. Yan; she dragged him off there, I bet. Well, I'm broke, and up to my neck in it, I think I'll just get down there and see if I can come by the wherewithal to buy a cup of wine or two."
When he reached Mrs. Yan's door, he found the place fully lit, and the door not locked. Entering and penetrating as far as the inner stair, he heard the old woman hooting and cackling above. He tiptoed up the stairs and peered through a chink in the partition. There were Song Jiang and Poxi, both sitting with lowered heads, and Mrs. Yan across the table from them, jabbering on and on about nothing. He slipped into the room, greeted all three in turn, and remained standing to one side.
"This fellow's appearance is most opportune," Song Jiang thought. He made a little sign with his lips.
The Bullock was smart and recognized his cue. Looking straight at Song Jiang, he said: "I looked everywhere. And all the time your Honour was sitting here, drinking. Some people have all the luck!"
"Do you mean to tell me something urgent has come up at the office?" Song Jiang said.
"Your Honour, how come you've forgotten?" the Bullock said. "It's that business this morning, the Magistrate's in the office doing his nut. He's got half a dozen constables out looking for you, none of them can find you. He's not at all pleased about it. You'd better get a move on, sir."
"Well, if it's so urgent, I shall have to go," Song Jiang said. He stood up and began to head for the stairs but the old woman was barring the way.
"Stop acting, Registrar," she said. "Bullock Tang's a real twister." Then, turning to Tang, she said, "Do you think you can deceive an old woman with those dirty tricks? That's really trying to teach your grandmother to suck eggs! His Excellency will have gone home long ago, he'll be sitting at ease with his wife now, drinking wine, what sort of business can there be at the office? You think you're so clever but you don't fool this old woman so easily!"
The Bullock said: "It's the truth, the Magistrate is waiting for him, there's something urgent. I wouldn't tell a lie!"
"Up your mother's!" the old woman said. "I've got eyes, you know, eyes like crystal balls. I saw that sign the Registrar made, to get you to play your part. By rights you ought to help by begging him to come here, not try to steal him away! Well, as they say, 'Murder one can forgive but not an insult to one's feelings!'" With this she sprang up and gripping Tang by the scruff of his neck, roughly thrust him from the room and down the stairs.
"Why d'you have to get rough?" Tang cried.
"Haven't you heard," the old woman yelled, "that to spoil other people's business, and take away their livelihood is as bad as killing your parents and your wife? One more sound out of you and I'll really give you something to squeal about, you thieving parasite!"
"Just you try!" Tang retorted truculently.
Inspired by the wine, the old woman thrust her splayed fingers into Tang's face, dealing him two such blows that he made an instant exit, head over heels, right through the curtain in the doorway. She followed this up by drawing the curtain back behind the door, both leaves of which she then closed and secured, not for a moment ceasing in her curses.
Thus worsted, Bullock Tang stood outside the door and bellowed: "You filthy old bawd! All right! If it wasn't for Registrar Song I'd smash your house to pieces! Never mind, one day — if it's not an even date it'll be an odd one — I'll settle your account for good, or my name's not Tang!"
Finally he took himself off, pounding his chest and still swearing. The old woman went upstairs again. "Why you waste your time with that scum, I simply don't understand," she said to Song Jiang. "He just goes around cadging drinks all the time. He's trouble, that's what. To think that a filthy beast like that, that's going to croak in the gutter some day, should have the nerve to come here and try to throw his weight about in my house!"
Song Jiang was an honest man; the old woman having caught him out, he couldn't just walk away. "Don't take offence, Registrar," she went on. "I've got to look out for myself, that's all. But come now, Poxi, you must drink this cup with the Registrar. I can tell that after not seeing each other such a long time you'll want to go to bed soon. I'll just clear these things away and then I'll leave you alone." After forcing another two cups of wine on Song Jiang, she collected the cups and dishes, and retired downstairs with them to the kitchen.

Song Jiang meanwhile was turning things over in his mind. "I think this girl is having an affair with Zhang but I don't actually know it," he was thinking. "I haven't seen anything with my own eyes. If I leave now I'll seem like a fool. Besides, it's very late. The reasonable thing is to stay and sleep a little. I can observe the girl, and see how she behaves towards me tonight."

Mrs. Yan reappeared at this point. "Goodnight, Registrar," she said. "I do hope you'll both go to bed early."

Poxi answered her: "That's none of your business, go to bed yourself."

The old woman laughed and went downstairs again, saying, "Have a good rest, Registrar. After such an evening of pleasure, you'd better not get up too early in the morning." She tidied up the kitchen, washed her hands and feet, blew out the light and settled down to sleep.

Song Jiang, meanwhile, sat on his chair and waited. What he expected was that Poxi would come to him, as formerly, coy and seductive, and the awkwardness would soon be dissipated. What he didn't know was that Poxi was thinking: "Zhang is all my heart has room for, and now this one has to butt in; he's about as welcome as a skewer through the eye. And the fool expects me to come running to him, like before! Well, that's not this girl's idea at all, not at all. The boat's got to be steered to the shore, I've always heard, not the shore to the boat. So if you don't make the first move, fine! Suits me down to the ground!"

Reader, take heed! This is indeed the most terrible of sports! If the other decides to love you, nothing, not swords and knives, water or fire, will stand in the way, nothing deter her; but if you're not fancied, you can be sitting on mountains of gold and silver, you won't get a blind bit of notice. Remember the saying? If the lady loves, the oaf is an Adonis; if madam has no fancy for him, the gentleman's an oaf. Song Jiang was a brave and honest man, he didn't know how to deal with women. And this Poxi was besotted with her Zhang, who was so attentive, who knew so exactly how to treat her! He dazzled and seduced her and caused such turmoil in her heart, how could she love Song Jiang?

So they both sat there that evening, facing each other in the lamplight, and neither spoke a word; they were at a total impasse, and about as lively as two terracotta images waiting to be carried into the temple. By and by, night deepened; through the window the moon could be seen:

The stars are bright and from far off the moon
*Through the casement slants its chilly sheen;*
*Under the door the cold wind flings night air,*
*The watchtower drum beats out the passing hour —*
*One watch scarce done, the next one on its heels.*
*In a distant yard the anvil coldly rings,*
*A thousand beats herald a thousand more.*
*Bells, tinkling on painted temple eaves*
*Afflict the traveller's lonely heart.*
*The flickering lamp within the sumptuous bower*
*Palely lights the girl's long sigh:*
*The courtesan's heart burning with fierce desire,*
The hero's spirit serene as the rainbow's arch.

As Song Jiang sat there he cast a sidelong look at Poxi and gave a little sigh. It was almost nine o'clock. Poxi, without undressing, lay down on the bed. Resting her head on the embroidered pillow and turning away to face the wall, she composed herself for sleep. "Can the wretch really disregard me completely and go to sleep?" Song Jiang thought. "Today I had to listen to the old woman going on and on, and I had to drink I don't know how many bowls of wine, I just can't take any more. It's late now and I'd best sleep." He took off his cap and laid it on the table, and removed his outer clothing and hung it on the rack beside the bed; he undid his embroidered belt, to which were attached a little dagger and his wallet for holding documents, and hung them all on the bed-rail, removed his silk shoes and stockings, and lay down at Poxi's feet.

An hour or so later he heard Poxi, at her end of the bed, give a contemptuous laugh. Suddenly Song Jiang was filled with anger, how could he sleep? As the saying is, "Nights of pleasure haste away; to the lonely man the hours drag slow." Around midnight the effect of the wine had worn off completely. At last it was nearly dawn, and Song Jiang rose and washed his face in the basin of cold water. Then he put on his outer clothing and his cap, cursing Poxi under his breath: "The cheap slut, she really has no manners!" Poxi couldn't sleep either, and when she heard this, she turned over and retorted: "You ought to die of shame!"

Swallowing his rage, Song Jiang went downstairs. Mrs. Yan, heard his tread on the stair and shouted from her bed: "Registrar, sleep longer, don't go till it's daylight. What's the point of getting up when it's still not even light?" Song Jiang did not answer but simply went and unbolted the door. The old woman shouted again: "If you go out, then, please shut the door after you." Song Jiang went out and closed the door. Not knowing how best to calm his rage, he thought at first of rushing straight home. But as he was passing in front of the government offices, he saw a light burning, and on closer inspection, found that it was Old Wang, the vendor of tonic soup, setting up his stall for the morning market.

When the tradesman saw it was Song Jiang, he hastened to ask: "Why so early this morning, your Honour?"

"I was drunk last night," Song Jiang said. "I misheard the watch."

"It looks as if the wine upset you and you could do with a pick-me-up. You'd better try my tonic soup."

"Excellent idea," Song Jiang said, seating himself on a stool. Old Wang ladled out a bowl of thick soup and handed it to Song Jiang, who drank it. Suddenly a thought came to him: "I've often drunk his tonic soup, and he's never asked me to pay for it. I promised him a long time back that I'd buy him a coffin but I've never done so. There's that gold Chao Gai sent me yesterday, the piece I accepted for myself is in my wallet. Why don't I give it to the old man for his coffin and make him happy?"

He said: "Mr. Wang, in the past I've often promised you I would let you have the money for a coffin but I've never given it to you. Today I happen to have a little gold with me, I'm going to give it to you so you can go to Mr. Chen's and buy a coffin to take home. When you've passed a hundred and fulfilled the term of longevity, I will take care of all your final expenses."

"You are always good to me," Wang said. "Now if you're going to give me this coffin, for my burial, there's no way I can repay you in this life but in the next I'll be your donkey or your horse."

"Please, it's nothing to make a fuss about," Song Jiang said. But when he pulled up his doublet and went to take out the wallet, what an unwelcome surprise! "Holy Heavens! I must have left it last night on that slut's bed-rail. I was so angry at the time, all I wanted to do was leave, I forgot to put my belt on. It doesn't matter about a bit of gold. But the letter from Chao Gai is wrapped round it! I would have burnt it immediately in the winehouse in front of Liu Tang but then when he went back and told them, they would have thought it impolite. I meant to burn it as soon as I got home, only I was interrupted by that Mrs. Yan. I might have burnt it with the lamp last night but I didn't because I didn't want that trollop to see. This morning I was in such a hurry to leave I forgot it completely. I've often seen her reading lyrics of songs, she's not illiterate. If she gets hold of that letter, heaven help me!"

He stood up and said: "Mr. Wang, excuse me. I wasn't trying to deceive you, I thought I had the money in my wallet but I came out in such a hurry I must have left it at home. I'll go and get it for you."

"Don't trouble now," Wang said. "There's plenty of time."

"Ah but there's something else I left with it," Song Jiang said. "So I've got to go and get it." And so saying, Song Jiang rushed back to the Yans' house. Now, you see:

It's clear that problems are this hero's lot.
*Heaven ordained he'd lose the precious purse.*
*Lovers have tiffs, there's nothing new in that.*
But who'd have thought a gift would start the rot!

As for Poxi, when she heard the door close behind Song Jiang, she dragged herself up, muttering to herself: "That shit! He's got me so worked up I didn't sleep all night. He's a real creep, he just sits there waiting for me to go and butter him up. Well, I don't give a damn! I've got my Zhang, why should I put up with you? I hope you never set foot in here again!" Still muttering, she rearranged the covers, undid her bodice, took off her skirt, unbuttoned the front of her dress and removed her underwear. The bedside lamp was still burning brightly. It shone on the red silk belt which Song Jiang had hung on the bed-rail when he took it off. When she saw it, Poxi began to laugh. "Blackie's left his belt; well, it's nothing to him. I shall take it and give it to my Zhang to wear."

When she went to take it, she also picked up the dagger and the wallet. Feeling something heavy in the wallet, she opened it and shook it out on the table. Out fell the piece of gold wrapped in the letter. She examined the little packet. When she saw it was a bright gold piece, shining in the light of the lamp, she laughed to herself again: "Heaven has sent me the wherewithal to buy food and give Zhang a feast. He's been looking thinner lately, I was just wanting to get something special to strengthen him up." She put the gold away and then opened out the letter under the lamp and looked at it. The name Chao Gai was written at the top, and it mentioned all kinds of things. Poxi gave a cry of triumph. "I thought the bucket had to go to the well but now, what have we here, the well has come to the bucket! I want to marry Zhang, and you were all that was in the way, you shit! But now I've got you! So you're in league with the brigands of Mount Liang, are you? And they've sent you over a hundred gold pieces! Don't worry then. I can dispose of you whenever I like now."

She wrapped the letter round the gold piece again, and replaced them in the wallet. "I don't care if you send all the devils in hell to fetch it!" she said.

At this very moment, while Poxi was talking to herself upstairs, the sound of the downstairs door was heard. The old woman shouted "Who is it?"

"It's me," Song Jiang answered.

"I told you it was too early, Registrar but you wouldn't listen to me," the old woman said. "And now you're back. Go back to bed with Poxi for a while, you can leave when it's daylight."

Without replying, Song Jiang rushed upstairs.

When she heard Song Jiang return, Poxi quickly gathered together the belt, the dagger and the wallet and hid them under the covers. Then she lay down facing the wall again and pre-tended to sleep.

Song Jiang burst into the room and went straight to the rail at the head of the bed, to get his things. But there was nothing there. His heart sank. However, it was necessary to restrain the rage that had filled him since the night before. He reached out a hand and shook the girl. "I've been good to you in the past, please return my wallet," he said.

Poxi continued to feign sleep and pretended not to hear.

"Don't be angry," he said. "I'll make it up to you another time."

"I'm trying to sleep. Who is it?"

"You know perfectly well it's me," Song Jiang said. "What's the point of pretending?"

Poxi rolled over and said, "What do you want, Blackie?"

"Give me back my wallet," Song Jiang said.

"You didn't give it to me, what are you talking about?"

"I left it on the bed-rail. No one else has been in here. You're the only one who could have picked it up."

"Bah! You must be seeing things!" she said.

"I was in the wrong last night. Tomorrow I'll make it up to you. But right now give me back my wallet. Stop playing games."

"Who'd want to play games with you? I haven't got it!"

"You went to bed without taking your clothes off, before; now you're sleeping under the covers. Obviously you took it when you got up to make the bed."

Then Poxi, raising her willow-leaf eyebrows and opening her shining eyes very wide, stared at him and said: "All right, I took it. But I'm not giving it back. You can call the police if you like, go on, take me to court for thieving!"

"I haven't suggested you're a thief," Song Jiang said.

"Then you admit *I'm* not a thief!"

Hearing all this Song Jiang felt even more afraid. He said, "I've never treated you and your mother badly, please give it back. I have to go to work."

"I suppose you're angry because of me and Third Brother Zhang," Poxi said. "Well, there's a difference all right, between you two. He's not a criminal who ought to be chopped into pieces. He isn't in league with bandits, like you."

"My dear girl," Song Jiang said, "don't talk so loud. We don't want the neighbours to hear." "You're scared people will hear about it. Well, you've only yourself to blame! I've got the letter and I shall keep it safe. If you want me to let you off, you'll have to agree to three conditions."

"That's all right, I'd accept them if they were thirty!"

"I'm afraid you won't agree to them."

"If they are not impossible they will be performed. Just tell me what they are."

"From today you must return the contract by which I was given to you, and sign another paper certifying that you agree to my marrying Zhang, and will not at any time in the future contest the marriage."

"I accept."

"The second is that you sign a paper saying that you will never ask for the jewels I wear or my wardrobe or the household furnishings, even though they were all provided by you."

"I accept."

"I'm afraid you're not going to accept the third condition."

"I've accepted the first two. Why ever should I refuse the third?"

"Then you must give me immediately the one hundred pieces of gold sent you by Chao Gai of the Marshes of Mount Liang, and in return I will keep quiet about your capital offence and return to you the article contained in the belt."

"I've agreed to both of the first two conditions. But those hundred gold pieces — although they were indeed offered to me, I didn't accept them, I sent them back. If I really had them, I would give them to you with both hands."

"I knew it!" Poxi said. "How true the saying is, 'An official who sees money is like a fly that smells blood.' They send someone to offer you gold, and you ask me to believe you've sent it back? What a load of balls! You're a government official aren't you? 'What cat doesn't like fish?' Does Yama, King of Hell, set the dead free and send them back? Who are you trying to fool? What's so difficult about giving me the hundred pieces of gold? If you're afraid because it's stolen gold, just melt it down and give it to me like that."

"You must know I'm a man of honour," Song Jiang said, "I couldn't tell a lie. But if you won't believe me, give me three days and I'll go home and sell everything to get your hundred pieces of gold. So now give me back the wallet."

Poxi laughed contemptuously. "You're a cunning bastard, Blackie," she said. "You think you can cheat me like a little child. Imagine me giving you the wallet and the letter now, and three days later coming to ask for the gold, that would really be like the paid mourners asking for money after the coffin's gone! No, it's got to be money in one hand, merchandise in the other. Quick, run and get the money, and we'll make the exchange."

"But I assure you the money does not exist," Song Jiang said.

"All right, let's see if tomorrow you still say the same thing at the magistrate's court!"

Hearing the words "magistrate's court," Song Jiang's temper boiled over. There was no way of holding it in now. He gave the girl a ferocious look and said: "You still won't give it back?"

"D'you really think I'm going to give it back, just because you look at me like that?"

"You really won't give it back?"

"I won't, how many more times do I have to say it? The only way I'll give it back is in front of the Magistrate!"

Then Song Jiang tore the bedcovers away from the girl. She had taken the item in question to bed with her; she didn't mind about the bedcovers but she clutched the belt to her breast with both hands. However, as Song Jiang pulled away the bedcovers, he had seen the end of the belt emerging next to the girl's breasts. He gave a cry of triumph: "Here it is!"

Either you must abstain, or you've got to go all the way; half-measures don't work. Song Jiang pulled with both hands. The girl refused to let go. There was Song Jiang at the bedside, pulling for all he was worth, and Poxi holding on for dear life! Then Song Jiang gave a mighty tug and the little dagger was shaken loose and fell out onto the bed. He picked it up.

When she saw Song Jiang with the dagger in his hand, Poxi screamed: "Help! Blackie is going to kill me!"

This cry it was that gave Song Jiang the idea. All that accumulated anger had found no outlet till now. When she screamed a second time, he held her down with his left hand, and brought the right hand down quickly, slashing across the throat. The red blood spurted out. She went on gurgling and Song Jiang struck again, in case she was not dead. This time the head fell on the pillow, the neck practically cut through.

The hand acts and a life is severed;
*A knife falls and the girl is dead.*
*Now the seven wandering senses*
*Repair to the solemn halls of death;*
*Now the three ethereal spirits*
*Must return to the city of the unjustly dead.*
*Bright eyes closed forever,*
*The body lies straight and stiff athwart the couch;*

*Sweet mouth half open,*
*The blood-soaked head has fallen back on the pillow.*
*Beauty's accustomed glamour now is fled:*
Could these poor charms entice you into bed?

Having, in his rage, killed Yan Poxi, Song Jiang grabbed the wallet, pulled out the letter, and burnt it in the flame of the lamp. He then fastened on the belt and ran downstairs. The old woman who was sleeping below had heard them arguing but had not paid much attention. But when she heard her daughter shout: "Help, Blackie is going to kill me!" she didn't know what was going on. She jumped up, dressed, and hurrying upstairs ran straight into Song Jiang. "What are you two making such a fuss about?" she asked.

"Your daughter is really too badly behaved," Song Jiang said. "I've killed her."

"What a thing to say!" said the old woman, laughing. "I know you've got a fierce look about you, and sometimes you can't take your drink but as for killing people ... Registrar, you shouldn't make fun of an old woman!"

Song Jiang said: "If you don't believe me, go to her room and look. I really have killed her."

"I don't believe you," she said. But when she pushed open the door, there was the body lying in a pool of blood.

"Mercy on us!" she cried. "What am I to do?"

"I'm a gentleman," Song Jiang said. "I don't run away. I'll do whatever you wish."

"The wretched girl had a bad character," the old woman said. "I can understand your killing her. But now, you see, I've got no one to care for me in my old age."

"That's no problem," Song Jiang said. "If that's how you feel, there's no need to worry. I have means enough to keep you in food and clothing, and ensure you live out the rest of your days in comfort."

"That's good then, Registrar. I am truly grateful. But what about her, on the bed there, how are we going to bury her?"

"That's quite simple," Song Jiang said. "I will go to Chen's and buy a coffin for you. When the coroner's men come for the burial, I will take care of them. And I'll give you ten taels of silver for the funeral expenses."

"Registrar," she said, pretending gratitude, "we'd better get the coffin quickly before it gets light. We don't want the neighbours to see."

"Good," said Song Jiang. "Bring me paper and ink and I'll write you a note so you can pick it up."

"A note won't do. You'd much better go and fetch it yourself, then they'll get it done at once."

"Yes, you're right."

They went downstairs together. The old woman fetched a padlock from her room. She locked the front door and kept the key.

So now there they were, the two of them, just about to pass the government offices. It was still very early and the day had not yet dawned but the office gates had just been opened. When they were almost level with them, just a little to the left, the old woman suddenly grabbed Song Jiang and shouted: "Help, murder! This is a murderer!"

Song Jiang was horrified. He quickly turned and put a hand over her mouth, saying, "Shut up!" but he couldn't silence her. Some constables who were waiting in front of the government offices came running. When they recognized Song Jiang, they said: "Shut your mouth, you silly old hag. The Registrar can't be a murderer. If there's something wrong, all you need to do is explain properly."

"But it's true," said Mrs. Yan, "he is a murderer. Arrest him for me and we'll go to the Magistrate together."

Now everyone knew Song Jiang for the most upright of men, he was loved by all, high and low. In the whole district there was not a single person who didn't respect him. So none of the constables was willing to lay hands on him, or to give credence to the old woman's accusations. As the verse says:

When the good man is in trouble, everyone is sorry;
*The wicked are hated, even when fortune smiles.*
*If all your life you make restraint your creed,*
You can expect favour in your hour of need.

Just then, while the old woman was shouting in vain for help, Bullock Tang happened to pass, carrying a tray of pickled ginger, off to ply his trade in front of the government offices. He saw the old woman hanging on to Song Jiang and yelling for justice. When he realized it was Mrs. Yan, all the anger of the day before came back to him. He put his tray down on one of the stools belonging to Old Wang, the vendor of tonic soup, and then forced his way through the crowd, shouting: "You old bawd, what do you think you're doing, molesting Registrar Song like this?"

"Bullock Tang," the old woman replied, "don't you try and help him to escape, or you'll pay for it with your life!"

The Bullock was enraged, he wasn't going to listen to her, not on your life! He seized her arm and wrenched it away. At the same time, without stopping to ask questions, he spread his five fingers and dealt the old woman a blow that made her see a whole sky-full of stars. She almost passed out and had to let go. Song Jiang made his escape, disappearing into the crowd.

The old woman now grabbed Bullock Tang, shouting: "Registrar Song has killed my daughter, and you let him go!"

Tang began to be afraid. "How was I supposed to know?" he said.

"All of you help me to arrest the assassin!" the old woman screamed. "If you don't, you're all accomplices." The policemen, out of respect for Song Jiang, had refused to act. But when it came to Bullock Tang, they arrested him without hesitation. They advanced in a group, and while one of them seized Mrs. Yan, three or four of them grabbed Tang. Pushing and pulling him this way and that, they marched him off to the Yuncheng Magistracy. It was really a case of:

Luck & ruin need no door,
*We summon them for ourselves;*
*Who dressed in hemp would fight a fire,*
Ignites himself, and makes the flames burn higher.

When Song Jiang had left Liu Tang he took advantage of the bright moonlight to stroll towards his home but he happened to meet Madame Yan who quickly came forward and said to him, "Although I sent requests for you to come and visit us yet you did not come probably because you are such an important person. My worthless daughter may have said some bad things and offended you but I will punish her and tell her to apologize to you. By chance I meet you this evening so I should be glad if you would come with me."

"I am very busy at the *yamen* today," said Song Jiang, "and I cannot arrange to get away but I will come some other day."

"That will not do," said Madame Yan. "My daughter is expecting you at home, and I think you had better go and console her. Why do you act so harshly?"

"I really am very busy today," said Song Jiang, "but I certainly will go tomorrow."

Madame Yan said, "But I want you to go today." She took hold of Song Jiang's coat, and pulled him, "Who has been estranging your mind against us? I and my daughter will have to depend on you for the remainder of our lives. You must not listen to what other people say about us as that is only idle talk. You yourself must take charge of our affairs. Whatever wrong my daughter has done I am responsible for. I think you had better come with me this time."

"You need not tug at me like that," said Song Jiang, "I am really too busy to go now."

"If you neglect your business a little," said Madame Yan, "the magistrate will not punish you. I let pass this opportunity, I am afraid that we shall have a difficulty in meeting again. I hope you will come with me to my home where I shall have something to tell you."

Song Jiang being a quick-tempered man was annoyed at the woman still holding his coat so he said, "Release me at once! I will go with you."

"Then do not run away," said the woman, "because I cannot catch you."

"Why do you speak to me in such a way!" said Song Jiang.

They both started off, and when they reached the house Song Jiang stopped in front of the door. The woman spread out her arms behind him and said, "As you have come so far why do you not enter?" Song Jiang then entered, and sat down on a stool inside. Now the woman was very crafty, and being afraid that Song Jiang might try to get away, she sat down by his side and called out to her daughter, "Daughter, your lover has arrived!" Yan Poxi was upstairs lying on the bed, and was just idly thinking and gazing at the lamp. When she however heard her mother say that her lover had arrived she at once thought it was Zhang, and got up at once. She put her hair in order while she muttered to herself. "That fellow again. I am tired of waiting for him. I shall have to box his ears!" She hurried downstairs, and looked through the door screen. There was a glass lamp which gave a good light in the room, and by its aid she saw Song Jiang sitting there. Upon seeing this she immediately turned round, and going back upstairs again lay down on the bed. Madame Yan had heard her daughter come downstairs and then go back so she called out:

"Your lover is here. Why did you go back upstairs?"

"Is this room too far away?" asked the girl Yan Poxi, still lying on the bed. "Cannot he come here! As he is not blind why does he not come himself. Or is he waiting for me to fetch him? You are too talkative!"

Madame Yan said, "My daughter has not seen you arrive. She is very bitter about your being absent for so long. You must expect to be abused in this way." Laughingly she said, "How would it be if I go upstairs with you?"

When Song Jiang heard the girl Yan Poxi talk in this way he was somewhat annoyed but as the woman was now pulling at his coat again he gave way and went upstairs. There was a large room upstairs with six rafters, and one half near the entrance was occupied by a table and several stools. The other half was a bedchamber with a bedstead carved on three sides, and railings at the head and foot. The bed had red gauze curtains, and at the side was a clothes horse with towels hanging on it. On a yellow lacquered table was a pewter lamp, a bowl for washing the hands, and a brush. On both sides of the table were two stools. In front of the table there was hanging a picture of a woman. Facing the bed were four plain chairs standing in a row.

Upon entering the room Song Jiang sat down on a small stool close to the bed. Madame Yan went to the bed and assisted her daughter to rise, and said, "The Chief Clerk is here! Your bad disposition and talk has hurt his feelings. He did not want to come here. You stay at home and only think about him. Now after great difficulty I have induced him to come. Why do you not get up, and say something to him? Your manner will turn him against you."

The girl Yan Poxi shook off her mother's hand, and said, "Why are you doing this? I did not do anything bad, and as he himself did not want to come here, what have I got to apologize for?"

Song Jiang heard this but held his peace. The woman placed a chair close to Song Jiang and pulled Yan Poxi towards it saying, "Now you sit down near him. You may not apologize but you must not be so irritated."

But the girl did not want to sit close to Song Jiang, and sat down opposite him. Song Jiang bent his head down, and the girl turned her head to one side so as not to look at him.

Madame Yan said, "If we have no wine how can we have pleasure? I have some wine, and I will buy some fruit and then we can have a talk with this Chief Clerk. My daughter, while I am away I want you to sit near this Chief Clerk, and do not feel ashamed."

"As this woman stays here I am not able to get away," thought Song Jiang. "But as soon as she leaves here I will go after her."

Madame Yan saw that Song Jiang still wanted to leave so when she left the room she fastened the door with a kind of latch so that it could not be opened from inside. Song Jiang perceived the move, and thought that Madame Yan had correctly judged his intention. On getting down below Madame Yan went to the kitchen, and saw a pan of water on the stove so she added fuel to the fire to make it boil. She then went to the alleyway and bought some fruit, fresh fish, cooked chicken, a condiment of fish. Upon returning home she arranged this food on a tray, filled a jar with wine, and half filled a pewter kettle with it, and then placed the latter in the pan of boiling water to warm the wine. When it was warm she poured the wine into a winepot, and filled several bowls with vegetables; brought out several wine cups; three pairs of chopsticks; and placing these all on a tray took them upstairs. She placed them on the table in the outer room, and then opening the door of the inner room, she took them in and placed them on the yellow varnished table.

She saw that Song Jiang was still holding his head down and her daughter turning her head away, so she said, "Daughter, get up and offer a cup of wine."

"You two can drink together," said Yan Poxi, "as I am not in a good frame of mind."

"Daughter," said Madame Yan, "since you were a child your parents have been indulgent to you. But you cannot be wayward to any other person."

"But if I won't offer him wine—what then?" asked Yan Poxi. "Do you think he can throw a sword and cut off my head?"

Madame Yan laughed at this, and said, "Now it is my fault. But he is well-mannered, and not the same as you. If you will not offer him wine, then you can at last turn your head this way and drink the wine."

But as Yan Poxi was still unwilling to turn her head, Madame Yan herself offered Song Jiang a cup of wine, and he felt constrained to drink it. Madame Yan laughed and said, "I hope that you will not be offended. You must not pay attention to other people's idle talk, and tomorrow I will tell you matters fully. People outside saw you come here very often and being jealous spread all kinds of nonsensical stories but they're just farting. Take no notice of what they say. Now drink up your wine." She filled three cups of wine, and placed them on the table. She then spoke to her daughter again, "Do not behave in this childish manner but drink a cup of wine at least."

"You need not bother me any more," said Yan Poxi, "I have had enough to eat."

"Daughter," said Madame Yan, "you ought at least to drink wine with your lover."

Yan Poxi heard this but thought that as she preferred Zhang Wenyuan she would not submit to any annoyance from this fellow. However, if she did not make him drunk he would certainly want more from her. She then exerted herself and drank half a cup of wine.

Madame Yan laughed again and said, "Daughter, do not worry again but cheer up and after drinking two cups of wine you can then go to sleep. Chief Clerk, you also had better drink a few cups of wine."

Because she had exhorted him so much Song Jiang drank about five cups of wine. Madame Yan also drank several cups of wine, and then went downstairs to warm some more wine. She had not been at all pleased when she saw that her daughter would not drink the wine but now that her daughter had done so she was glad and said to herself, "If we can only keep him here for this night his anger will subside, and when that has disappeared we can continue to live with him for some time more." While she was attending to the fire she drank three big cups of wine. She began to feel half tipsy but still she measured out another bowl of wine. She then filled a kettle half full of warm wine and crawled upstairs with it. She saw that Song Jiang still hung down his head, and that her daughter still turning away her head was toying with her skirt. She laughed loudly and said, "You two are not clay images so why do you not say something? Chief Clerk, you are a man you ought to be kind. It would be better if you flirted a little with her."

Song Jiang did not know what to do so he remained silent. He indeed had no plan for getting away from that place. Yan Poxi thought that he never normally came to visit her but now expected her to apologize to him, and laugh and flirt as before. But she was not going to flirt with him just then.

Madame Yan drank much wine, and she was getting fuddled. She criticized loosely about other people and gossiped as she wished.

Now in the town there was a man named Tang Niu-er whose business was to sell pickles. When he had nothing to do he roamed about the streets looking for odd jobs, and Song Jiang had helped him many times. If he heard of any thing he went and told it to Song Jiang who gave him money for the information. He was not afraid of taking risks. Now on this day he had been gambling and had lost all his money so he went to the *yamen* to find Song Jiang. But he could not find him there, and the people on the street asked him whom he was looking for, and why he was in such a hurry.

"I am in a great hurry," said Tang Niu-er, "I am trying to find my patron; but I cannot find him."

"Who is your patron?" asked the people.

"He is the Chief Clerk at the *yamen*—Song Jiang."

The people told him that they had just seen him walking along with Madame Yan.

"That girl Yan Poxi," said Tang Niu-er, "is a deceiving slut. She and that fellow Zhang Wenyuan have the real hots for each other and are now hoodwinking Song Jiang. The latter has heard some rumours and therefore he has not been there for a long time. Now he must have been dragged away by that brothel-keeper Madame Yan who will try and get into his good graces again. So I will now go there, and drink some wine with those two and perhaps also earn a little money." When he reached the entrance of the Yan family's house he saw the lights inside, and noticed that the door was not locked. He entered and standing at the foot of the ladder he heard Madame Yan upstairs laughing loudly. Proceeding stealthily he ascended the ladder, and peeping through a chink in the door saw Song Jiang and Yan Poxi hanging down their heads, Madame Yan was sitting at the side of the table, and was simply driveling. He opened the door, saluted the three, and then awaited.

Song Jiang thought that the fellow had arrived at a very opportune moment so he looked towards him and pursed his lips as a hint for him to speak. Now Tang Niu-er was a smart man, and understood the hint, and immediately said to Song Jiang, "I have been looking for you everywhere. How is it that you are wasting your time and drinking wine here?"

"Are you looking for me because of some urgent business at the *yamen*?" asked Song Jiang.

"Sir," said Tang Niu-er, "why do you forget things? Early this morning there was an affair at the *yamen*. The magistrate was upset, and sent men about five times to find you but they all returned without having found you, and this worried the magistrate very much, sir, you had better go back at once."

As the matter is evidently urgent I must go at once," said Song Jiang. He got up to depart but Madame Yan stood in front of him, and said, "Sir, you must not go. This man is only inventing a false tale." Turning to Tang Niu-er, she said, "You tricky thief. Do you expect to fool me? It reminds me of the old proverb, 'Do not try to get the axe from Lu Ban, the god of the carpenters.' The magistrate will by now have left the court, and returned to his wife to drink wine and enjoy himself. What is the business he is upset about? With such talk you might try to deceive an imp but you cannot get round me with it."

"It is quite true that the magistrate is still waiting to transact that affair, and I am not telling lies," said Tang Niu-er.

Madame Yan abused him, saying, "Your mother is farting like a dog. I have two eyes, and can see things quite clearly. I saw the clerk motion with his lips to you, and give you the lead to say this. You did not induce him to come here so why do you now want to take him away. A proverb says, 'Murder may be pardoned but unreasonableness is hard to forgive.'" She then jumped forward, caught him by the neck, and in the struggle which followed Tang Niu-er fell down the ladder. Standing below he asked why she had assaulted him. The woman shouted, "Don't you understand that ruining one's trade and livelihood is as much as killing one's parents and wife? Now don't make a loud noise about this or I will give you a beating, you thief and beggar!" She had now descended the ladder and Tang Niu-er challenged her, "Hit me!" and without more ado she slapped his face with her hand, and knocked him through the hanging screen at the door. She then put the screen in position, closed both leaves of the door, and bolted them. Tang Niu-er recovering from the blow stood outside the door, and shouted, "You crooked brothel-keeper! You need not hurry! If not for my respect for Song Jiang I would have entered now and smashed all your things up. If I don't meet you one day I shall meet you some other day. If I don't eventually kill you, my name is not Tang." He then departed, beating his breast and cursing as he went.

Madame Yan re-ascended the ladder, and addressed Song Jiang, "Sir, don't take any notice of that beggar. He is a scandal-monger, and only does it for a drink. He sleeps in holes and corners, and will die an untimely death. Such a thief now attempts to fool us at our door!"

Song Jiang was a very honest man, and seeing that she had seen through their ruse he had no means of escape.

The woman continued, "Sir, you must not blame me for this. I know that you have treated me very well before. Now, please drink a cup of wine with my daughter. I guess that as you two have not seen each other for a long time, you want to go to bed early." After pressing Song Jiang to drink two more cups of wine, she picked up the tray, and went downstairs to the kitchen.
Song Jiang being left in quietness upstairs meditated that there might have been something between Madame Yan and her daughter and Zhang Wenyuan but he could not make out whether the rumour was true. Again as it was too late in the night, so he decided to sleep there whereby perhaps he would find out what Yan Poxi's ideas were. He would also be able to find out what were the state of the girl's feelings towards him.
Just then Madame Yan came upstairs again, and remarked that it was getting late, and that she had already told them to go to bed.
"Mind your own business," said the daughter. "You go to bed yourself."
As Madame Yan again departed downstairs she laughed and said, "I hope you will have a peaceful sleep, sir, have much pleasure this night, and get up late tomorrow morning." Upon arriving downstairs she put the things in the kitchen in order, washed her hands and feet, and then went to sleep.
Song Jiang sat on the stool for a long time looking at the girl and then heaved a sigh. It was now about 10 P.M., and the girl without undressing lay down on the bed, with her face turned away from him and went to sleep. He thought that she was a mean detestable person as she had not shown any respect for him but had just gone to sleep. He had been wheedled with so much talk from that old woman, and drunk so much wine, and as it was now so late that he had to go to sleep there. He then took off his headgear, and placed it on the table; took off his outer garments, and put them on a clotheshorse; unloosened his belt, and placed his dagger and secretarial hand bag on the rail at the head of the bed; took off his boots and socks; he then got on the bed and lay down the reverse way to the girl. After a little time he heard the girl laughing in a sneering manner. He felt quite melancholy and could not sleep any way. There is an ancient saying, "When the pleasure is great the night seems short; when one feels lonely the time seems unending." By about 3 A.M. the effects of the wine had vanished, and about five o'clock Song Jiang got up, washed his face in cold water and dressed. He then said, "You common slut! You have no decency."
The girl also did not sleep, and hearing this she turned over, and said to him, "I see that you do not blush." Now Song Jiang was very much upset, and without saying anything he went downstairs.
Madame Yan was still in bed but hearing the sound of footsteps on the ladder she called out, "Sir, you had better take a little rest, and leave when it is quite daylight. But why do you get up at five o'clock?"
Song Jiang did not reply to this but went to the door to open it. Madame Yan called out again, "Well, if you will go will you please close the door as you go out?" Song Jiang did this. He was still very much annoyed, and he thought of going back. Upon reaching the *yamen* gate he saw there a lamp burning brightly on a small stall owned by a medicine vendor named Wang who had opened business to catch the early customers. When the stall keeper saw Song Jiang he quickly asked him, "Sir, why are you out so early?"
"I drank too much wine last night," said Song Jiang, "and mistook the watchman's reports of the time of night."
"As you got drunk last night," said Wang, "you had better have a bowl of this dried orange peel soup which will sober you up."
Song Jiang agreed to this, and sat down on a stool. Wang mixed a very strong dose of his medicinal soup, and handed it to Song Jiang. The latter meditated that this man never asked for money when he drank his soup, because sometime before he had promised to provide a coffin for him but so far had not given it to him. Song Jiang then remembered that he still had in his purse the piece of gold he had accepted the previous day from Chao Gai's agent, and he thought it would please Wang very much if he now gave him the money to buy a coffin. He, therefore, said to Wang, "Sometime ago I promised to give you money to buy a coffin but as I have now got some gold here I will give it to you, and you can go and buy a coffin from Old Chen and keep it in your home. When you die at the age of a hundred, I will also provide some more money."
"My benefactor," said Wang, "I am deeply grateful for your providing me with a coffin. I cannot possibly expect to be able to repay your generosity during this life but in the next life if I am a donkey or a horse I will certainly do my best to make up for your kindness."
"You need not say that," said Song Jiang. He then lifted his gown to get at the purse in a pocket of his waistcoat but he was startled and thought: "How sad! I have forgotten that I left my purse on the rail at the head of the bed, and in leaving in a hurry did not put it back in my belt. The money does not matter much but it is wrapped up in that letter from Chao Gai. I ought to have burnt the letter in the wine shop while Liu Tang was there but I did not want him to tell Chao Gai of such a thing as the latter might think I did not value his letter. I would have burnt it in my lodging had not that woman Yan induced me to go with her. I could have burnt it in Yan's house but I was afraid of that girl seeing me do so. If I had not left so hurriedly this morning I would not have forgotten it. I saw that Yan Poxi was looking at a book of songs, so that she evidently can read and if she finds that letter there will be trouble. He then stood up, and said to Wang, "Please excuse me. I am not telling a lie because I thought I had the money in my purse but now I find that it is not there so I will go back home and get it."
"You need not go for that," said Wang. "It will do if you give it me tomorrow."
"But I have another matter I must attend to at the same place so I had better go," said Song Jiang. He then departed with all speed to Madame Yan's house.
When Yan Poxi heard Song Jiang leave her room she got up, and soliloquized. "That fellow annoyed me so much that I could not sleep. He was so impudent as to expect me to apologize to him. But I won't apologize! I am on very good terms with Zhang Wenyuan, so why should I go out of my way to apologize to Song Jiang. If he does not come here again I shall not mind." While saying this she put the bed in order, took off her outer wadded coat, her waist belt, and her undergarments. There was a lamp burning near the head of the bed, and by its light she saw the purse hanging on the bed rail. Upon seeing this she laughed and said, "Black the Third" (her nickname for Song Jiang) has so many things that he has forgotten his purse. I will take it and give it to Zhang Wenyuan to wear." When she picked it up she felt that it was heavy so she took it and emptied its contents on the table, and saw the bar of gold and the letter. When she saw that it was really gold she laughed again and said, "Heaven intends this gold for me to buy some food for Zhang Wenyuan to eat. He has been rather lean these last few days, so I will buy some food for him as a nourishment." She then picked up the letter, and saw that it concerned the business of Chao Gai. She soliloquized, "I thought the water bucket should be lowered down the well but now the well is inside the bucket. So Song Jiang is in my hands. I can now arrange to marry Zhang Wenyuan as I have that fellow in my hand. You have got a hundred taels of silver from the brigands at Liangshan Marsh as you act as their agent. There is no need for any sudden action, as I can deal with you whenever I like. So I will take this letter and the bar of gold and put them again in the purse, and have no fear of you telling the fairy fox to come here and steal them away."
Just as she was saying this she heard someone pushing at the street door down below, and she also heard her mother call out from her bed "who is that?"
The person outside called out, "It is I!"
Madame Yan replied, "I told you it was too early, and instead of believing my word you would go. And now you realize that it is still early, you have come back. But you can come in, and have another sleep with my daughter, and then depart when it is broad daylight."
The man did not reply but went upstairs. Yan Poxi hearing this knew that it was Song Jiang, and hurriedly hid the purse belt and dagger in the bed quilt. She then lay down on the bed with her face turned to the wall, and pretended to snore as though she was sound asleep.
Song Jiang burst into the room, and went to the head of the bed but when he did not see his belt and purse on the rail where he had left them, he was surprised. But suppressing his temper he shook the girl and said, "Just think of my previous kindness to you, and return at once my purse and belt."
But the girl still pretended to be asleep, and did not reply.
So Song Jiang shook her again and said, "Do not be annoyed at my disturbing you like this. I will come again tomorrow, and explain matters."
Yan Poxi now replied, "I want to sleep. Who is calling me?"
"You know who it is," said Song Jiang, "so why do you pretend like this?"
The girl turned over and said, "Black the Third! What did you say?"
"Give me back my purse," said Song Jiang.
"Why do you ask me for it, seeing that you did not hand it over to me?"
"I left it on the rail at the head of your bed. As evidently no man has been here since I left you must have taken it," said Song Jiang.
"Bah! Did you not see a demon come here?"
"It was my fault last night," said Song Jiang, "and I will apologize tomorrow. But now you give me the purse, and fool me no more."
"Who is trying to fool you? I certainly have not had it."
"When I left you had not taken off your clothes to sleep," said Song Jiang. "But now you have pulled the quilt over you. You must have taken my purse when you got up to put the bed in order."
The girl raised her eyebrows in surprise, and opening wide her eyes said, "Well, I did take it but I won't give it back. You can send some one from the *yamen* and have me arrested as a thief, and give your decision also."
"I will not accuse you of being a thief," said Song Jiang.
"Then you know that it is not me that is the thief?" said Yan Poxi.
When he heard this he became more upset and said, "I always treated both of you well, so give it to me at once. I must go to attend my business."
"You previously did not like me to have anything to do with Zhang Wenyuan," said Yan Poxi. "He may be disagreeable with you but he is not deserving of death. He is anyhow better than you as he has no transactions with bandits."
"Dear sister," said Song Jiang, "do not talk in such a loud voice as it will be of grave consequence if the neighbours hear what you say."
"As you are afraid of people outside hearing of your affair," said Yan Poxi, "you ought not to have done it. I am certainly going to keep your letter. But I will let you off if you will do three things for me."
"Even if you ask me to do thirty things for you I will do them," answered Song Jiang.
"But I am afraid that you won't do them," said Yan Poxi.
"If I can do them I will do them," said Song Jiang. "May I ask what those three things are?"
"First," said Yan Poxi, "you must return to me the document I gave you when you purchased me as your concubine, and also write a letter permitting me to marry Zhang Wenyuan, and promising that you will not make trouble between us."
"That I agree to," said Song Jiang.
"The second," said Yan Poxi, "is that all the jewellery and clothes and other things that you have presented to me shall belong to me, and you will also put that down in writing."
"That also I will do," said Song Jiang.
"But I am afraid that you will not agree to the third condition," said Yan Poxi.
"I have already agreed to two, so why not the third also?" asked Song Jiang.
"You must also give me the hundred taels of gold that you received from Chao Gai at Liangshan Marsh, and I will then return to you the letter which is an extremely important piece of evidence should there be a very big court case."
"I will do the first two things you require," said Song Jiang, "but I am afraid that I cannot do the third, because although they sent one hundred taels of gold yet I refused to accept it. Had I received it I would certainly present it to you with both hands."
Yan Poxi said, "You perhaps remember the common saying, 'If an official sees money he grabs it as a fly sees blood.' Do you expect me to believe that you sent the money back? You're just farting. Officials are like cats, and who ever heard of a cat refusing to eat meat? When a man reaches the afterlife will King Yama let him off? You've got to be kidding! You must give me the money at once. If you are afraid that people will discern it as booty from the bandits you had better get it melted down at once."
"You ought to know that I am an honest man and not given to telling lies," said Song Jiang. "If you however do not believe what I say then give me three days so that I shall have time to sell my household goods, and then I will give you a hundred taels of gold. Now give me my purse."
Yan Poxi sneered at him and said, "How artful you are! You treat me as if I was a child. If I gave you the purse and the letter now it would be like a dirge singer at a funeral asking for payment after the burial. It would be better if you came again with money in your hand, and I will then exchange the letter for the money."
"But I have not got the money," said Song Jiang.
"Then we shall have to go to the court where you can say that you have not got it," said Yan Poxi.
When Song Jiang heard the word "court" he could not restrain his anger any more. He glared at her and said, "Are you not going to hand me that letter?"
The girl replied. "As you are so terrible I won't give it to you."
"So you really mean not to give it to me?" said Song Jiang.
"I won't," said Yan Poxi, "and I can assure you a hundred times more that I would not give it to you. I will only give it to you in the *yamen* court."
Song Jiang pulled the quilt off her. Yan Poxi took the purse, and held it to her breast with both hands. Song Jiang saw the purse in her hands when he pulled the quilt off, and said, "So you have it!" so saying he reached forward with both hands. But Yan Poxi would not let go. Song Jiang was now determined to get it at all costs, whereas the girl was equally determined to die rather than give it up. Song Jiang caught hold of the dagger and with a wrench got it away. When the girl saw that he had got the dagger she called out, "Black the Third! Murder!" This suggested to Song Jiang the idea for the first time and when she called out "murder" a second time he seized her and cut her throat with the dagger. As Song Jiang was afraid that she might not be dead, he took his dagger, and cut off her head that rolled to one side on the pillow. He then took the letter from the purse, and holding it above the lamp burnt it to ashes. He put on his belt, and went downstairs.
Madame Yan down below was not asleep but although she heard the two talking upstairs in rather loud voices she paid no attention to it. But when she heard her daughter call out "Murder," she hastily got up, put on her clothes and was going up the ladder when she met Song Jiang coming down. "What are you two quarreling about?" she asked. "As your daughter had no manners I killed her," he said. "Why do you talk like that?" she asked. "Only your eyes look wild and you are always so bad-tempered when drunk as to be fond of killing someone. Please do not joke with me."
"If you do not believe," he said, "then go upstairs and look in the room. I certainly have killed her."
"I do not believe that," said Madame Yan. But when she pushed the door open she saw the head lying in a pool of blood. She then said, "How awful! What shall I do?"
"I am a hero, and will not try to escape," said Song Jiang, "and I will do whatever you require."
"She was not a good girl," said Madame Yan, "and you were quite right in killing her. But who will support this old woman now?"
"That does not matter," he said. "As you look at it in that way there is no need for grief. I am wealthy, and I will see that you are well provided for for the rest of your life."
"It is very good of you to talk like that," she said, "and I wish to thank you very much. But as my daughter's corpse is here how shall we get rid of it?'
"That will be easy," he said. "I will go to Old Chen and get a coffin for you. I will also send the coroner here to arrange matters without any inquiry being held. I have here ten taels of gold which you can have to cover any small immediate expenses."
She thanked him again and said, "You had better get the coffin sent at once before daybreak so that the neighbours may not know what has happened."
"All right," said Song Jiang. "Let me have pen and ink, and I will write a note for you to take to Chen and get the coffin."
"Instead of writing a letter it would be much better if you go yourself and get the coffin sent here without delay."
"Let it be so, then," he said. They both went downstairs, and Madame Yan locked the street door. They then both went to get the coffin.
It was very early and not yet twilight but as they were passing the *yamen* a man was just opening the door. There Madame Yan took hold of Song Jiang, and called out, "Here is the murderer!" Song Jiang was startled upon hearing this but putting his hand over her mouth, said, "Do not call out!"
Many men in the *yamen* had heard the cry however, and came out to see what was the matter. Upon recognizing it was Song Jiang, they told the woman to desist as Song Jiang was not that kind of man, and that if she had anything to say she need not shout.
Madame Yan however called out, "He certainly is a murderer, and I want you to arrest him, and take him into the *yamen*."
But Song Jiang had always had an excellent reputation, and was generally liked, so that now there was not a single man there who would come forward to lay hands on him, and they did not believe what she said. Just then Tang Niu-er happened to pass that spot carrying a tray of preserved ginger for sale, and he saw Madame Yan holding Song Jiang, and calling out in an offended tone. Now remembering how she had assaulted him during the night he placed his tray on Wang's stall, and making his way through the crowd he shouted: "You brothel-keeper! Why are you holding this clerk?"
"Tang," she said, "do not attempt to get this man away from me, or you will have to answer for it with your life."
But Tang Niu-er took hold of her hand, and wrenched her loose of Song Jiang, and then gave her a sounding smack on the face which made her see stars. Before she recovered from her faintness, Song Jiang had escaped through the crowd.
Madame Yan, however, having taken hold of Tang Niu-er, called out, "Song Jiang has killed my daughter, and this man has helped him to escape."
"How could I know that?" asked Tang Niu-er hurriedly.
Madame Yan appealed to the crowd. "Will some of you assist me in arresting the murderer? If you do not do so you will be charged for allowing him to escape."
As none of the *yamen* aides were afraid of Tang Niu-er so they arrested him and also Madame Yan and took them into the *yamen*.

Fortune has no fixed tendency
It conies as one invites it;
To put out fire in a hempen coat,
One brings the flame on his body.

Tang Niu-er escaped.

## 022

### The old woman Mrs. Yan Raises a Row at the County Office & Makes a Scene in the Magistrate's Court & shelves her grievance when they pay; Constable Sergeant Zhu Tong Gallantly & Righteously Lets Song Jiang Escape & get away

When the magistrate heard that the man the police had arrested was involved in a murder, he hastily came out and convened his court. In swarmed the policemen with Tang the Ox. The magistrate surveyed the people before him. To the left knelt a middle-aged woman, to the right a buffoon of a man. "What's all this about a murder?" the official demanded. "My name is Yan," said the woman, "and I had a daughter called Poxi. I sold her to Clerk Song Jiang as a concubine. Last night the three of us were drinking together. This Tang the Ox barged in and began making trouble. I cursed him and drove him out. All the neighbours know. This morning Song Jiang left early but then he came back and killed my daughter. I was hauling him to the magistracy when Tang the Ox pulled him free. I beg for justice!"
"You dared to help the culprit get away?" the magistrate said to Tang. "I didn't know anything about it. I only went to her house to borrow a little money from Song Jiang for a few bowls of wine. She threw me out. This morning I was on my way to market with some pickled ginger and I ran into her tugging at Song Jiang in front of the county office. I walked over to calm them down, and Song left. How did I know he killed her daughter?"
"You're talking rot," shouted the magistrate. "Song Jiang is an upright gentleman. He'd never kill anyone. The murderer must be you! Where are my officers?"

The court personnel were summoned. Zhang Wenyuan, on learning that Madame Yan had accused Song Jiang of killing her daughter—and his mistress—drew up her allegations in a formal complaint and docketed it. He then called men from the coroner's office, and the local ward chief, plus several neighbours, and they went together to the house of Madame Yan.
An examination of the corpse was conducted. Beside it lay the murderer's knife. A check revealed that death had been caused by cutting the victim's throat. The body was then placed in a coffin and removed to a monastery to await burial. The examining group returned to the county office.
The magistrate was very friendly with Song Jiang and wanted to exonerate him. He questioned Tang the Ox repeatedly. Each time, Tang said: "I know nothing about it."
"Why did you go to their house last night and raise a fuss? You must be involved."
"I only wanted some money for wine ..."
"Nonsense. Beat this lout!"
The attendants pounced on Tang like ravening beasts, trussed him up and gave him forty or fifty blows. But he stuck to his story. The magistrate knew Tang had nothing to do with the murder. It was only his anxiety to help Song Jiang that caused him to put Tang through this grilling. Finally, he had a cangue fastened around Tang's neck and ordered that he be removed to prison.
Zhang Wenyuan respectfully approached the magistrate. "The knife we found is Song Jiang's dagger," he said. "He ought to be brought in for questioning. Then we'll know where we stand."
Zhang was persistent, and the magistrate couldn't very well refuse. He sent men to Song's quarters to get him. The clerk had already fled. The policemen came back with a few neighbours and reported: "The murderer has escaped. No one knows where he's gone."
"His father Squire Song and his younger brother Song Qing live in Song Family Village," said Zhang. "They can be arrested and held as sureties until Song Jiang is caught and questioned."
The magistrate would have much preferred to fix the blame on Tang, and release him later after things cooled down. But Zhang had already prepared the necessary documents and instigated Madame Yan to press her charges. The magistrate had no choice but to send two or three men with a warrant for the arrest of Squire Song and his son Song Qing.
They arrived at the Song family manor and the old man came out to greet them. When all were seated in the hall, they handed him the warrant that he read.
"Please hear me, sirs. Our family have been farmers for generations," he said. "We earn our living from these fields and orchards. But Song Jiang is an unfilial son. Since childhood he's been rebellious. He wouldn't accept his station in life, and insisted upon becoming a court officer in spite of my urgings. I therefore disinherited him a few years ago, officially, before the previous county magistrate, and had him stricken from the family register. He is no longer a family member. He has his own quarters in town, and I and my son Song Qing work our fields here in this little village. Song Jiang does not share our food. He has nothing to do with us. I was always afraid he would do something wrong and get us involved. So I had the magistrate give me a formal disinheritance certificate. I'll show it to you."
Although the policemen knew this was an escape device, prepared long in advance, they were on very good terms with Song Jiang and wouldn't do anything to hurt him.
"We'll make a copy of it," they said, "and bring it back to the magistrate."
The squire feted them with dishes of chicken and goose, poured them wine, and presented them with a dozen ounces of silver. He produced the certificate and they copied it. Then they took their leave of the squire, returned to the county office and reported to the magistrate.
"Squire Song disinherited Song Jiang three years ago," they said. "Here is a copy of the certificate. For that reason we were unable to bring the old man in."
The magistrate was only looking for an excuse not to prosecute Song Jiang. "Squire Song has the certificate and Song Jiang has no other close relatives," he said. "All we can do is offer a reward of a thousand strings of cash for his arrest. Have proclamations to that effect posted everywhere."
At Zhang's instigation Madame Yan again came before the magistrate, her hair dishevelled in a fine display of grief.
"Song Jiang must have been hidden by his brother Song Qing to avoid having to appear in this case! Why doesn't Your Worship arrest him and see to it that I get justice?"
"His father complained about his disobedience three years ago and had him officially stricken from the family register. He has a certificate to prove it. We have no grounds for bringing in the old man and his son as sureties for Song Jiang's arrest."
"Your Worship, everyone knows that Song Jiang is called 'Filial and Gallant Dark Third Master.' That certificate is false! Justice, Your Worship, I beg you!"
"Poppycock! That certificate has my predecessor's official seal. How can it be false?"
Madame Yan sobbed and lamented. "Your Worship, 'The importance of human life is vast as the sky!' If you don't give me justice, I'll have to appeal to the prefecture! My daughter suffered a cruel death!"
Zhang then spoke in Madame Yan's behalf. "If you don't arrest Song Jiang, she'll go to the prefect, and that will be bad," he warned. "Suppose the prefecture starts checking our handling of the case? I won't know what to say."
Clearly there was reason in Zhang's words. The magistrate drew up the necessary papers and summoned constables Zhu Tong and Lei Heng.
"Take some men to the Song manor in Song Family Village and arrest the criminal Song Jiang."
On receiving the written documents, the constables selected about forty soldiers and proceeded briskly to the manor of the Song family. The old man hastily emerged to greet them.
"Please don't blame us, Squire," the constables said. "We're acting under orders. We have no choice. Where is your son, the clerk?"
"Song Jiang is an unfilial son. I have nothing to do with him. The previous magistrate separated him from us, as my certificate attests. Song Jiang was stricken from our family register over three years ago. He doesn't live with us and he never comes here."
"We've been ordered to make an arrest," said Zhu Tong. "I'm afraid we can't take your word for it. We'll have to search. Our superiors won't be satisfied with anything less." He ordered the soldiers to surround the manor, then said to Lei Heng: "I'll guard the front gate. Constable Lei, you go in and search."
Lei Heng entered the manor and explored it from end to end. Finally, he returned to the front gate.
"It's true. He's not in there," he said to Zhu Tong. "I'd better make sure," said Zhu Tong. "Constable Lei, you and our brothers guard the gate. I'm going to look the place over carefully, myself."
"I'm a law-abiding citizen," said Squire Song. "I wouldn't conceal anybody on the premises."
"This is a murder case," said Zhu Tong. "You must forgive us."
"Go right ahead, Constable. Make a thorough search, by all means."
"Constable Lei, you keep an eye on the squire. Don't let him leave."
Zhu Tong entered the manor, leaned his halberd against the wall, bolted the manor gate, and went into the family chapel. He pulled the altar table to one side, raised a trap-door, and twitched a thin rope handing down.
Below, a bell tinkled. Soon after, Song Jiang emerged. He viewed Zhu Tong in amazement.
"Don't blame me, brother, for coming to arrest you," the constable said. "You've always been very good to me, and we never concealed anything from each other. One day when we were drinking you told me: 'In front of the Buddha in my family chapel is an altar table. Beneath that is a trap-door leading to a concealment place below. You can use it if you ever have to hide out.' I remembered that, and today, when the magistrate sent me here with Lei Heng, against my will, I knew I'd have to find some way to cover for you. His Worship, the magistrate, also wants to help but Zhang and Madame Yan have been threatening to go to the prefect if he doesn't pursue the case, so he had to send me and Lei Heng to search the manor. I was afraid Lei Heng might interpret his orders too strictly and, if he saw you, not be flexible enough. So I posted him at the front gate and came here to you directly. This hiding place isn't bad but it's not really safe. Suppose someone found out about it and made a search? What could you do?"
"I've been thinking the same thing, myself," said Song Jiang. "If it weren't for your kindness, brother, I'd be jailed in no time!"
"No need to talk like that. The question is where can you go that's safe?"
"There are three possibilities. One is in Henghai County of Cangzhou Prefecture—the manor of Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind. Another is in Fort Clear Winds in Qingzhou Prefecture—the home of Hua Rong, known as the Lesser Li Guang. A third is in Squire Kong's manor on White Tiger Mountain. He has two sons. Kong Ming, the elder son, is called the Comet. Kong Liang, the younger, is called Flaming Star. I met them both several times in our county seat. But I can't decide which of these three places is best."
"Make up your mind quickly, brother, and act. You must go tonight. There's so time to lose!"
"I'll leave dealing with officials above and below entirely to you, brother. Come to the manor for whatever money you need."
"Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. Just concentrate on getting away."
Song Jiang thanked Zhu Tong and went back into his hideout. The constable replaced the trap-door and the altar table. He opened the door, picked up his halberd and came out.
"He's certainly not in the manor," Zhu Tong announced. And he called to his confederate: "Constable Lei, we'll take Squire Song in, shall we?"
"Zhu Tong is on very good terms with Song Jiang," Lei Heng mused. "Why does he want to arrest his father? That can't be what he means at all. If he says it again, I'll show my own sympathy."
The two constables assembled their soldiers and re-entered the hall. Squire Song courteously served everyone with wine.
"Never mind the drinks," said Zhu Tong. "We have to ask you and your fourth son Song Qing to come with us to the county."
"Why haven't we seen him?" queried Lei Heng.
"I sent Song Qing to the village to have some farm tools made. He's not in the manor. As for that unfilial Song Jiang, I disinherited him three years ago. I have an official document here to prove it."
"There's no use your talking," said Zhu Tong. "We have orders from the magistrate to bring you and your fourth son in."
"Constable Zhu," said Lei Heng, "please listen to me. If Clerk Song committed a crime, there must be some reason. It may not be a capital offence. Squire Song has a certificate—bearing an official seal, so it can't be false. We ought to remember what a good friend Clerk Song has been to us in the past, and make some concessions. If we take back a copy of the certificate, that will be enough."
Zhu Tong said to himself: "I spoke that way deliberately to lull any suspicion Lei might have." Aloud he said: "Since that's how you feel, brother, I don't want to play the villain."
"I sincerely thank you both," said the old man fervently. He had wine served to all, and presented the two constables with twenty ounces of silver. Zhu Tong and Lei Heng turned the money over to their forty men to be shared among them.
After copying the certificate they bid farewell to Squire Song, left the village, and returned with their men to the county.
They went directly to the magistrate, who was holding court. He asked them for a detailed report.
"We searched the entire manor and all the settlements around it twice," they said, "but Song Jiang was nowhere to be found. Squire Song is sick in bed and can't be moved. His condition is critical. Song Qing went away the month before last and still hasn't returned. For that reason, we were only able to bring you this copy of the certificate."
"In that case..." said the magistrate. He drew up a report to the prefect above him and prepared a proclamation calling for Song Jiang's arrest. Of that we'll say no more.
Many in the county office who were friendly with Song Jiang spoke to Zhang Wenyuan on his behalf. Zhang didn't want to offend them. Besides, nothing could bring the girl back to life. Zhang himself had often received favours from Song in the past. And so he let the matter drop.
Zhu Tong gave a sum of money to Madame Yan. He urged her not to appeal to the prefect. Since she accepted the compensation, she had no choice but to agree. He also sent a man with silver to the prefecture to see to it that no action was called for on the magistrate's report.
The magistrate issued a "Wanted" poster and an offer of a thousand strings of cash for Song Jiang's arrest. For "having let a criminal escape," Tang the Ox was given twenty blows, tattooed on the cheek and exiled to a place five hundred *li* away. Those being held as witnesses were released under bond and sent home.

*

Song Jiang's family were farmers. Why did they need a concealment cellar? Because in the Song Dynasty it was easy to get along if you were an official but very difficult if you were a small functionary. Why do we say that? Wicked ministers held sway in the imperial court. They used only their intimates and relatives and grabbed every penny they could lay their hands on. What was so hard about being a functionary? When a clerk committed a blunder in those days, if let off lightly he'd be tattooed and exiled to a wild and distant military outpost. If given the full penalty under the law he would be executed and all his property confiscated. It was wise to have a hiding place prepared in advance.
And to prevent his parents from becoming involved, he had them declare him unfilial and stricken from the family register. They obtained an official certificate as proof. He lived away from home, and had nothing to do with them, conducting all family business secretly in his private quarters. Many a man made such arrangements in the Song Dynasty.
To get back to Song Jiang. He emerged from the underground concealment and discussed the problem with his father and brother. "If it weren't for Zhu Tong," he said, "I would have been caught and prosecuted. We mustn't forget to repay his kindness. Now, brother and I must flee. If Heaven pities us and a general amnesty is declared, we shall return and see you again, father. Send money to Zhu Tong secretly, and ask him to use it discreetly above and below. Tell him to give some also to Madame Yan, so that she won't appeal and make difficulties."
"You can rest assured about that," said his father. "Be careful on the road, both of you. When you reach your destination, send me a letter, if you find a trustworthy messenger."
The two brothers tied their belongings into packs during the night. At the fourth watch they rose, washed, had breakfast, and got ready to go. Song Jiang was wearing a white felt hat with a broad brim, a white silk robe, a plum-pink sash, leggings and hemp sandals. Song Qing was dressed as a servant and carried the packs. They kowtowed and said goodbye to their father in front of the hall. None of them could restrain their tears.
"There is a long road ahead of you," said Squire Song. "Stay out of trouble."
Both sons instructed the vassals to look after the manor and take good care of the old man, and make sure he had plenty to eat. Then they looked on their swords, picked up their halberds and left the Song Family Village.
It was late autumn and early winter, and they moved along briskly. "With whom should we cast in our lot?" they wondered, after covering several stages.
"In the gallant fraternity I have often heard the name Lord Chai, of Henghai County in the prefecture of Cangzhou," Song Qing remarked. "They say he is the direct descendant of the emperors of Later Zhou. Of course, I've never met him. Why don't we put ourselves under his protection? He's chivalrous and generous, they say, and cordially receives all bold fellows and helps men in exile. He's the living incarnation of hospitable Meng Changjun. We ought to join him."
"That's what I've been thinking," Song Jiang responded. "Though we haven't met, he and I have been keeping up a correspondence."
They headed for Cangzhou, crossing mountains and streams, passing county towns and prefectural cities. Travellers stopping at inns must be careful of two things—eating from infected bowls and sleeping in beds where men have died.
But to get back to our story. After several days the brothers came to the borders of Cangzhou. They asked directions to Lord Chai's manor and, when they arrived there, addressed one of his vassals.
"Is Lord Chai at home?"
"No. He's gone to the eastern manor to collect grain rents."
"How far is it from here?" asked Song Jiang.
"Over forty *li*."
"How do we get there?"
"May I presume to ask your names, sirs?"
"I am Song Jiang, from Yuncheng County."
"Not Clerk Song, known as Timely Rain?"
"The same."
"Lord Chai speaks of you often, and says how sorry he is that you and he have never met. I'll be glad to show you the way."
The vassal led Song Jiang and his brother to the eastern manor. They reached it in less than three watches.
"If you two gentlemen will wait in this pavilion," said the vassal, "I will inform the lord that you are here."
"Good," said Song Jiang.
He and Song Qing entered the mountainside pavilion, rested their halberds, removed their swords and packs, and sat down.
Not long after the vassal departed, the central gate of the manor opened and Lord Chai came running out, followed by four or five attendants. He rushed up to the pavilion and dropped to his knees before Song Jiang.
"If you knew how I've been thinking of you! What heavenly wind brings you here? Nothing in my life have I wanted more. What wonderful luck!"
Song Jiang also fell on his knees and kowtowed. "Though only a distant petty functionary, I've come especially to see you!"
Lord Chai raised him up. "The lamp wick flowered last night, and this morning a magpie called. I didn't realize these were portents of your visit, brother!" His face was wreathed in smiles.
Song Jiang was delighted with the warmth of his reception. He introduced his brother.
"Take Clerk Song's luggage," Lord Chai instructed his servants. "They'll be staying in the west room of the rear hall." He led Song Jiang by the hand into the main hall, where they seated themselves as host and guests.
"If you don't mind my asking, brother," said Lord Chai, "how were you able to find time from your duties in Yuncheng County to come to our insignificant village?"
"For a long time your fame has thundered in my ears, my Lord. Although I received letters from you frequently I never could pay my respects in person because unfortunately my humble office always kept me busy. I'm a man of no talent, and I've done a stupid thing, and now my brother and I must find refuge. We recalled your chivalry and generosity, and we've come here hoping to join you."
Lord Chai smiled. "Don't worry, brother. Even if you committed the gravest crime you'd be safe here. I'm not boasting but there isn't a police chief or army officer who dares cock an eye at our little manor."
Song Jiang gave a complete account of how he killed Yan Poxi. Again Lord Chai smiled.
"Forget it. Even if you killed an official appointed by the imperial court or robbed the government treasury, I'd have no compunctions about concealing you here."

He invited the two brothers to bathe, and presented them with fresh clothing, kerchiefs, silken shoes and clean stockings. They bathed, put on their new garments, and a vassal brought their original clothes to their room. Lord Chai invited them to the rear hall where wine and tidbits had been prepared.
Their host asked Song Jiang to sit at the head of the table, while he seated himself opposite. Song Qing sat down at the side. A dozen or so ranking vassals and several overseers were also present. By turns they toasted the guests and waited on them, joining in the merriment. Lord Chai repeatedly urged the brothers to drink without restraint. Song Jiang thanked him again and again. By the time they had drunk half their fill the three were expressing the highest mutual regard and admiration.
Day was drawing to a close, and lamps were lit. "Enough of wine," Song Jiang begged. But Lord Chai wouldn't hear of it. They continued drinking until the first watch. Song Jiang rose to relieve himself. His host directed a vassal to light his way with a lantern to the end of the eastern veranda.
"I'll have to miss the next round," said the clerk. He made a wide detour and came out of the front porch, crossed the courtyard diagonally and mounted the veranda running along the eastern wing.
Song Jiang was eight-tenths drunk, and he staggered along, not looking where he walked. A big fellow, chilled by a malarial attack, was on the veranda huddled over some burning embers on a shovel. Song Jiang, head high, stepped on the handle and bounced the embers into the man's face, startling him so that he broke into a sweat. Angrily he rose and grasped Song Jiang by the front of his tunic.
"Who are you, you son of a bitch, that you think you can play games with me!"
Song Jiang was surprised speechless. But the vassal carrying the lantern cried out: "Don't be rude! He's his lordship's most favoured guest!"
"Guest, guest," the man muttered. "I was a guest too, at first, and 'most favoured' as well. But Lord Chai listens to the lies of his vassals, and has become distant towards me! How true it is that 'friends don't last forever'!"
He pulled back his fist to hit Song Jiang. The vassal dropped his lantern, rushed forward and intervened. But he couldn't separate the two men. Three more bobbing lanterns came flying in their direction.
"I couldn't find you, sir Clerk," said the voice of Lord Chai, as he quickly approached. "What's all the fuss?"
The vassal explained about the shovel. Lord Chai smiled.
"Do you know this illustrious clerk?" he asked the big fellow.
"Illustrious, my foot! Compared to our Clerk Song of Yuncheng, he's nothing!"
Lord Chai laughed. "Have you met Clerk Song?"
"We've never met but the whole gallant fraternity has heard of Song the Timely Rain! He's world famous."
"What's he famous for?"
"It would take too long to tell it all but he's real hero. What he starts, he finishes! As soon as I get over this illness, I'm going to join him."
"Would you like to meet him?"
"Who wouldn't!"
"Bit fellow, he's as far as a hundred and eighty thousand *li*; and as near as right in front of you!" Lord Chai pointed at Song Jiang. "This is Song the Timely Rain!"
"You're not joking?"
The clerk said: "My name is Song Jiang."
The big fellow stared, then dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "I never dreamed I'd meet you today, brother!"
"I don't deserve such courtesy."
"But I was just very discourteous. I beg your pardon. I 'have eyes but didn't recognize Mount Taishan'!"
The man remained kneeling. Song Jiang hastily raised him to his feet. "What's your honourable name, sir?" Lord Chai told Song Jiang the name of the man and where he hailed from. Truly, meeting a tiger in the mountains or bandits in the forest strikes terror to the traveller's heart. But awe at this man's name caused the stars to pale and the rivers to run backwards.

Now when the constables had seized Bullock Tang, they dragged him off to the Magistracy. On hearing it was a question of murder, the Magistrate hurriedly convened his court. The constables pushed Bullock Tang forward in front of the bench. The Magistrate found himself faced with an old woman kneeling on his left and a young oaf on his right. "What is this about a murder?" he asked. The old woman spoke first: "My name is Yan," she said. "I had a daughter called Poxi and she was given to Registrar Song as minor wife. Yesterday evening when my daughter and Song Jiang were drinking together, this Tang came round looking to cause trouble, and when he left he was shouting insults, as the neighbours can testify. Early this morning Song Jiang went out for a while, and when he came back he killed my daughter! I grabbed him and I was just bringing him here but this Tang got him away from me. Your Excellency, I want justice."
"Well, you! What do you mean by helping a criminal escape?" the Magistrate said to Tang.
"I didn't know nothing," Tang said nervously. "All I know is, yesterday when I went to find Registrar Song and ask for the price of a cup of wine, Mrs. Yan grabbed me and chucked me out. This morning I was just going to start selling my ginger when I saw Mrs. Yan holding onto the Registrar in front of the Magistracy. When I saw this I went and remonstrated that I shouldn't have, and he ran off. But I didn't know nothing about his killing her daughter."
"This is all nonsense!" the Magistrate shouted. "Song Jiang is an honest man and a gentleman. How could he go and kill someone? You must be the one who's responsible for this murder. Where are the guards?"
The court officers were summoned. But at this point the clerk, Zhang Wenyuan came on the scene. He heard Mrs. Yan tell how Song Jiang had murdered her daughter — his mistress! He proceeded to take statements from all the witnesses, then drew up an indictment on Mrs. Yan's behalf and entered the case in the register. The district coroner was called. Together with his assistants, the ward chief and a number of the witnesses from the neighbourhood, he went to Mrs. Yan's, where entry was effected, and the corpse produced and examined *in situ*. The murder weapon, a dagger, was found to be lying beside the body. Repeated examinations established that death had resulted from the cutting of the throat while the victim was still alive. When these investigations had been completed, the body was placed in a coffin and sent to the temple, while the witnesses were brought to the government offices.
Now Song Jiang was on excellent terms with the Magistrate, and the latter would have dearly liked to get him off. To this end, Bullock Tang was interrogated repeatedly but all he would say was that he knew absolutely nothing about it.
"Of course you're implicated, you scum!" the Magistrate said. "Why did you go there and make trouble last night?"
"Like I said, I just happened to go there, 'cos I was looking for the price of a cup of wine ..."
"He's lying! Beat him!"
The officers swooped on Tang from all sides like wolves and tigers and tied him up and beat him but even after forty or fifty strokes he still wouldn't change his story. Of course, the Magistrate knew very well that Tang knew nothing. But his idea was to save Song Jiang. So the interrogation continued. Finally a cangue was imposed and Bullock Tang was thrown into gaol.
Zhang Wenyuan now approached the bench and said: "This is all very well but the murder weapon is a dagger belonging to Song Jiang and Song Jiang ought to be brought in and questioned. That's the only way we'll get to the bottom of this."
He kept repeating this demand till in the end there was no way the Magistrate could go on covering up. He had to send officers to Song Jiang's home to arrest him. But by this time Song Jiang had already fled and they returned with no one but a few neighbours. "The murderer, Song Jiang, has escaped," they said. "No one knows where he has gone."
Zhang Wenyuan now came forward again and said: "Since the criminal, Song Jiang, has fled, his father, Squire Song, and his brother, Song Qing, who live in the Song village, must be arrested. A deadline should be set for the criminal's arrest and his family members should be held as hostages until such time as Song Jiang appears in court for questioning."
At first the Magistrate was very reluctant to issue the warrant. He was still hoping to confuse the issue and make Bullock Tang the scapegoat, intending to release him surreptitiously later on, when the affair blew over. But Zhang Wenyuan had drawn up an indictment and was inciting Mrs. Yan to keep returning to the tribunal to demand justice. Realizing that he could not prevent it, the Magistrate had to make out a warrant and send several officers to the Song manor to arrest old Squire Song and the younger brother, Song Qing, and bring them back.
When these officers, bearing their warrant, arrived at Squire Song's, the Squire came out to receive them and invited them to sit with him in the thatched hall. They showed him the warrant. "Please sit down, everybody," he said, "and let me tell you something. Like my ancestors, I engage in agriculture and make my living from cultivating these fields and orchards. Song Jiang is not a filial son, and from childhood he has gone against my wishes. Refusing to keep to his station in life, he chose to go off and join government service, even though I tried a hundred times to dissuade him. For this reason, I went a few years back to the government offices to denounce him and have him struck off the register of my household. Since then he has lived in town, while I and my son, Song Qing, live alone here in the country and work the land. He gets his living separately from us, and has nothing to do with us. I always feared that he might do something untoward and get us into trouble, so I had the previous magistrate make out a certificate for me, testifying to all this. I can show it to you, gentlemen."
The officers were all good friends of Song Jiang's, and they knew perfectly well that this was a precaution that he had taken long before. But the last thing they wanted was to cause him any trouble, so they said: "If you have this certificate, Squire, you'd better show it to us. We'll make a copy and then report back to the tribunal." The Squire for his part had his servants kill some chickens and geese and serve them with wine. He also made the officers a gift of a dozen taels of silver, and gave them the certificate to copy. After this they took their leave of Squire Song and returned to inform the Magistrate. "Three years ago," they said, "Squire Song disowned Song Jiang and obtained an official certificate to that effect. Here is an exact copy of it. In view of this we didn't think it right to arrest him." Only too happy to find excuses for Song Jiang, the Magistrate said: "If there's a certificate and he has no other relatives, all we can do is announce a reward of one thousand cash for his capture, and post 'Wanted' signs everywhere."
Zhang Wenyuan now got Mrs. Yan to appear again before the tribunal. Her hair uncombed and falling about her face, she stood there and complained: "Song Jiang is actually hidden in the house of his brother, Song Qing, who will not give him up to the law. Your Excellency, how can you fail to arrest Song Jiang, how can you deny justice to an old woman?"
The Magistrate said: "His father officially declared him rebellious three years ago and disinherited him. There's an official certificate to prove it, so how can we arrest the father and brother?"
"Your Excellency," Mrs. Yan protested, "everyone knows Song Jiang is as famous for being a good son as for his dark complexion. That certificate is false. I demand justice!"
"Nonsense! The certificate has my predecessor's personal stamp on it, how can there be anything wrong with it?"
Mrs. Yan began to make a great commotion, right there in the court, weeping and wailing and shedding crocodile tears for her daughter. "It's foul murder, it cries out to heaven," she sobbed, "if I don't get justice here I shall go to the provincial court. My poor daughter's been murdered, horribly murdered!" Zhang supported her, saying: "Your Excellency, if you don't take steps to arrest the culprit, this old woman may take her case to a higher authority, and then there will be real trouble. If there's an investigation and they question me, I shall find it difficult to know how to reply."
Recognizing the truth of all this, the Magistrate was forced to issue a warrant and send for the two sergeants, Zhu Tong and Lei Heng. When they appeared he instructed them: "Take an appropriate number of men and go to the Song's and arrest the criminal, Song Jiang." As the poem testifies:

The unwanted burden's lightly cast aside.
*What traveller stops to mourn a broken flower?*
*Once cherished like a flower, Poxi lies dead:*
The sweet cheat has become a thing to dread.

Sergeants Zhu and Lei at the head of a troop of some forty men, took themselves off to the Song village. When Squire Song heard about it, he hurried out to receive them. "Please don't blame us, Squire," they said. "It's not our idea, we're under orders. Where is your son, the Registrar?"
"I beg to inform you, sergeants," said the old man, "that that disobedient son of mine no longer has anything to do with me. I denounced him to the previous magistrate, and I've a certificate here to prove it. He's been living on his own for more than three years now and is no longer a member of my household."
"Well, even if that's so," said Sergeant Zhu, "we are obliged to follow instructions and make the necessary arrests. I am afraid we cannot simply take your word for it that he is not here. You'll have to let us conduct a search before we go back and report." So saying he ordered his men to encircle the compound. "I'll watch the front entrance," he said, "while you go in and search, Sergeant Lei." Sergeant Lei went in and searched the manor from top to bottom. When he came out he said: "He's certainly not here."
"All the same, I'd like to make quite sure," said Zhu Tong. "Sergeant Lei, you and the men guard the gate while I go in and see for myself."
"I'm a law-abiding citizen," said Squire Song. "How could I be hiding him?"
"This is a murder case," said Sergeant Zhu. "Please don't take offence."
"Of course not, Sergeant, if it's necessary. Search as much as you like."
"Sergeant Lei, please keep the Squire here, and make sure he doesn't go anywhere."
Zhu Tong now went inside. He propped his sabre against the wall, locked the door behind him and entered the little shrine. Here he moved the altar table to one side, prised up a plank, and uncovered a rope. He gave the end of this rope a tug and a bell sounded. Immediately Song Jiang emerged from the cellar. When he saw Zhu Tong he got a shock.
"Mr. Song," the Sergeant said, "please don't blame me for coming to look for you here. We've always been good friends and confided in each other. Do you remember how one day when we were drinking you told me there was a hiding-place under the altar to the Buddha? You said that below the image of the Buddha of the Three Ages there was a loose plank right under the altar table, and that if I was ever in serious trouble there was a place I could come and hide. I've always remembered what you said, and when the Magistrate sent me here with Sergeant Lei I thought I'd better throw a little dust in people's eyes. The Magistrate himself is on your side, it's only Third Brother Zhang and the old woman who keep yammering on in court, claiming that the court won't give them justice and threatening to go and complain to the provincial governor. That's why he had to send us to search your house, you see. I was afraid Sergeant Lei might not be as flexible as he ought and if he found you, well, he wouldn't know how to handle it, that's why I fixed it so he'd stay at the front gate and I could come and have a little talk with you. You're all right here, I suppose but it's not really safe. What'll you do if someone gets to know about it and they come and search again?"
"That's just what I've been thinking," Song Jiang said. "If it wasn't for your *savoir-faire* I'd already be under lock and key."
"I wouldn't say that. But I do think you ought to consider where you're going to go."
"I've worked out that there are three possibilities. One is in Cangzhou, the house of Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind. Another is Hua Rong's house in Qingzhou; and the third is Squire Kong's house on White Tiger Mountain — he has two sons, Kong Ming, known as Curly and Kong Liang, known as Hothead. They've often been to see me at the office. I can't decide which of the three places is best, I'm still trying to make up my mind."
"Well, don't take too long about it. If you're going to leave, it had better be soon. In fact, you'd best leave tonight. Any delay is risky."
"I count on you, my friend, whatever they undertake against me! If you have need of anything, money or valuables, please don't hesitate to come here for it."
"Don't worry, sir. I shall do all that's needed. You just think about getting away."
Song Jiang thanked the Sergeant and withdrew into his hiding-place.
Sergeant Zhu replaced the plank and moved the altar back. He unlocked the door and picked up his sabre. When he went out, he said: "You were quite right. He's not in the manor." Then he addressed Lei Heng. "Sergeant Lei, we'll have to take Squire Song into custody, won't we?"
Lei Heng was surprised. "Zhu Tong and Song Jiang are good friends," he thought to himself. "Then what's all this about wanting to take the Squire in? It must be the exact opposite of what he really means. If he mentions it again, I'd better show him I'm on their side."
The sergeants ordered all their men into the thatched hall. Squire Song hurriedly produced wine for them all. "Please don't offer us anything," Sergeant Zhu said. "We'll have to ask you and your younger son to come with us to the government offices."
"By the way, how come we haven't seen your other son?" Sergeant Lei asked.
"He's not here," Squire Song said. "I sent him off to another village to get some farm implements. And you know, Song Jiang is a disobedient son and he left home three years ago. I've got an official certificate proving it."
"How can we accept that!" Sergeant Zhu said. "We've got a warrant from the Magistrate authorizing us to arrest you and your younger son and take you down to the government offices for questioning."
"Wait a bit, Sergeant Zhu," said Sergeant Lei. "What I say is, if Registrar Song has committed some sort of crime there's got to be extenuating circumstances. It can't be a capital offence. And seeing as Squire Song has got that certificate, with an official stamp and all, so we know it isn't a forgery, surely, in view of Registrar Song's previously having been a good friend, why can't we help him out a bit? Surely it would be sufficient if we just copy out the certificate and go back to report?"
Sergeant Zhu, who of course was only saying all this to allay suspicions, said: "Well, if that's what you think, Sergeant, I don't want to be the one to make trouble."
Squire Song thanked them both: "I am truly grateful, Sergeants, for the consideration you have shown me." He now had food and wine served, and he offered them twenty taels of silver as a reward for their helpfulness. They steadfastly refused, and it was finally divided among the men. A copy was made of the certificate and then they took their leave and returned to the government offices.
The Magistrate had just entered the court. When he saw the two sergeants were back, he asked them to give an account of themselves. "We searched the manor twice," they said, "from top to bottom, and the neighbouring village but he's really not there. Squire Song is sick and in bed, he is unable to move, he could pass away at any moment. The younger son went away last month and hasn't returned yet. Therefore all we could do was copy the certificate. Here it is."
"All right then," said the Magistrate, "we shall just have to send this certificate to the Governor and put out a general order for the culprit's arrest wherever he may be." We shall say no more of this.
Now Song Jiang had many friends in the office, and they all went to Zhang Wenyuan and spoke on his behalf. In the end Zhang could not withstand the pressure. In any case, the girl was dead, and Zhang too had received favours from Song Jiang, so he decided to call it a day. Sergeant Zhu got together some money to pay off Mrs. Yan, so she wouldn't appeal to the higher authority. Having got some money out of it, and since there was evidently nothing more to be done, she gave in. Sergeant Zhu also sent someone with a sum of money to the district capital to ensure that the report was accepted. The Magistrate threw all his weight behind these manoeuvres. After announcing a reward of one thousand strings of cash and having "Wanted" notices posted, he had Bullock Tang convicted of "perverting the course of justice by securing the escape of a criminal," and sentenced him to twenty strokes of the cane and tattooing and banishment to a distance of two hundred miles. The witnesses were all released and allowed to return home. But this was all later. There's a poem which goes:

Because of a harlot he's in a real scrape;
*Though hid in the cellar, he may not escape.*
*Zhu Tong is the one who exhorts him to flee;*
That man deserves praise in the highest degree.

By the way, if the Song family were just farmers, how did they come to have a secret hiding-place? Well, back in the Song Dynasty, you see, it was easy to be a high-up official but hard to be a simple clerk. Why was it easy to be a high-up official? Because the court was corrupt and the ministers all flatterers. Positions simply went to relatives and those with money. And why was it hard to be a clerk? Because if a clerk made the smallest slip he was branded and banished to some god-forsaken frontier zone; if his fault was more serious his house and property were confiscated and he might well pay with his life! That is why Song Jiang

had prepared his hiding-place in advance and to prevent his parents being implicated had made them denounce him and strike him off the household register. They lived apart and there was a certificate to prove that there were no further relations between them. But the cellar was set up so that he could live at home secretly. In the Song era there were many who arranged things like this.

Meanwhile Song Jiang had emerged from hiding and was having discussions with his father and brother. "If it hadn't been for Sergeant Zhu's kindness this time, they'd have locked me up," Song Jiang said. "We mustn't forget him. Now Song Qing and I must get away immediately. If heaven is merciful there will be an amnesty some day and then I can return and we'll be together again. Meanwhile, Father, please send someone discreetly to Sergeant Zhu with money and ask him to use it to buy goodwill and to provide Mrs. Yan with an allowance so she won't go and appeal higher up."

"Don't you worry about all that," the Squire said. "You just make sure you and your brother go carefully. Once you find somewhere safe look for a reliable messenger and send me a letter."

That evening the two brothers tied their bundles. Next morning they rose well before dawn, washed and rinsed their mouths and breakfasted. Then they disguised themselves for the journey. Song Jiang wore a white Fanyang hat, a white satin tunic, tied at the waist with a plum-coloured cotton sash, gaiters and hemp shoes with numerous eyelets. His brother was dressed as his servant and carried the baggage. They came out of the thatched hall to bid their father a respectful farewell. All three were unable to restrain their tears.

"You have a long journey ahead of you," the old Squire said, "try not to get too downhearted."

The two brothers told the servants to take good care of the house, serve the master faithfully and make sure he lacked for nothing. Then, each providing himself with a dagger and a sabre, they departed from their ancestral home.

It was late autumn when they started their journey; winter was about to begin:

The lotus all are faded,
*The leaves are falling fast;*
*The cricket's song is ended*
*Among the withered grass.*
*Geese from the sky are dropping*
*Upon the level sand,*
*A thin rain is falling,*
*Wetting the maple stand.*
*Ground frost in the morning*
*Forewarns of winter's waste,*
*It takes a lonely journey*
To teach you Autumn's taste.

Well, they travelled several stages, and all the time they were thinking, "Where can we go and stay?"

"I have often heard people speak the name of Mr. Chai, in the district of Cangzhou," said the younger brother. "They say he is descended from an emperor. I've never actually met him but don't you think we should try him? They say he's a fair and generous man who likes entertaining men of valour and helping those who have been banished. They say he's another Mengchang,[1] in fact. So let's take refuge with him."

"I was thinking the same," said Song Jiang. "Although we have often corresponded, I have never had the chance to meet him."

After this discussion, they took the Cangzhou road. There were many mountains to climb and rivers to ford on the way, and they passed through many different districts. It's the lot of every traveller to stop somewhere for the night, and there are two things he cannot avoid: eating from dirty bowls and sleeping in beds where men have died! But back to the point: the two Song brothers eventually reached the district of Cangzhou and asked where Mr. Chai's house was. They were directed to it, and arriving in front of it they asked a retainer if Mr. Chai was at home.

"Mr. Chai is at his eastern residence, receiving the tithes," the man told them. "He's not here."

"How far is the eastern residence from here?" Song Jiang asked.

"About ten miles."

"Can you tell us how to get there?"

"May I make so bold as to ask your names, sirs?"

"I am Song Jiang of Yuncheng."

"Would you be Registrar Song, the gentleman they call 'The Opportune Rain'?"

"That is correct."

"The master often speaks of you. He often says how sorry he is he's never met you. If you are Registrar Song, I'd better take you there myself."

So saying, the man eagerly set out to show them the way to Chai Jin's eastern manor. In something under six hours they arrived at the gates of a fine well-stocked mansion set in an orderly domain. Here's what they saw:

*A manor-house fronting broad waters and backed by the high hill, situated amid cunningly set groves of acacia and willow, and provided with a number of fine guest-houses. Cattle, sheep, mules and horses graze within its ample confines, while among the fish-ponds roam chickens, geese and other fowl. White cranes stalk in front of the main hall, and painted birds strut in the courts. So open-handed is the master, so ready with aid for the oppressed, that you'd say a second Mengchang is come: he's like another Sunwu, rescuer of the needy and prop of the downfallen. Here you can see why they say, 'When a house is well-provisioned the chickens and dogs are fat; when there's no lack of servants, the children have time to play.'*

"May it please you to wait here, sirs, in this pavilion, while I go and tell the master," said the retainer.

"Very well," said Song Jiang. He and Song Qing put down their weapons and took off their packs and sat down in the pavilion. The man had been gone only a moment when the gates of the house burst open and out rushed Chai Jin, followed by a number of servants. He ran to the pavilion where Song Jiang was waiting, prostrated himself and said: "I have wanted so long to meet you, and now fortune has brought you to my door! My prayers are answered! How happy I am!" Song Jiang likewise prostrated himself and said: "I have come most humbly to beg your protection." Chai Jin raised him up, saying: "Yesterday my lamp was flickering, and this morning the magpies called but I would never have guessed the visitor was going to be someone so important!" His face was radiant with smiles.

Song Jiang rejoiced to see how graciously Chai Jin received them. He now told his brother to pay his respects, and Chai Jin told the servants to take their luggage and prepare a room for them in the west wing, behind the main hall. Holding Song Jiang's hand, he led him into the main hall, where they seated themselves according to the rules.

"May I venture to ask you something, dear brother?" Chai Jin said. "I seem to have heard that you are very much occupied with government affairs in Yuncheng. How have you found time to honour me with this visit?"

"I have known your reputation for many years, and your name has resounded like thunder in my ears. I have received your gracious letters, and it has always been a sore point with me that my wretched job did not leave me time to visit you. But now I am in trouble. I have committed a fault which cannot be repaired, and my brother and I decided that our only course was to come to you and beg your protection, knowing you to be as generous as you are just."

"Then set your hearts at rest," said Chai Jin, delightedly. "Had you committed the most terrible of crimes, once you are in my house, you shall have no cause to worry. I do not wish to boast but I dare to say that whatever troops may be pursuing you, none will wish to confront me!"

Song Jiang now rendered a detailed account of the killing of Poxi. At the end of it, Chai Jin merely smiled and said: "Have no fear, Brother. If you had killed an important minister or robbed the provincial treasury, I would still be happy to harbour you in my house." He then invited them to bathe them- selves and presented them with complete new sets of clothes, including silk headwear and slippers and clean stockings, to change into when they came out of the bath. When they had changed, servants took the old clothes to their room. Then Chai Jin invited them to an inner chamber, where a banquet had been prepared, and made Song Jiang take the place of honour while he sat down opposite. Song Qing sat next to his brother.

When they were all seated, a dozen or so local retainers and overseers began to pour for them and pass round the cups. Chai Jin urged Song Jiang and his brother to cast off inhibitions and drink many toasts with him, and Song Jiang never stopped expressing his thanks. In the end they were all quite drunk and they fell to expressing their undying affection for one another. It grew dark and lamps were lit. Finally Song Jiang said: "I've drunk enough." But Chai Jin would not let them stop. They went on till well into the first night watch.

Suddenly Song Jiang stood up, because he wanted to go to the bathroom. Chai Jin told a servant to take a lamp and show him the way to the east gallery where the ablutions were. "Just count me out for this round," Song Jiang said. He made a big detour, descending from the gallery in front and then circling back till he reached the east gallery. He was about three quarters drunk, and he stumbled a little as he went. But he kept on regardless.

Now there was a man under the gallery, a big ruffian who was suffering from malaria and because he couldn't stand the cold night air was crouching over some hot coals in a shovel. Song Jiang was not looking where he was going and he stumbled against the handle of the shovel, kicking it so that the burning coals flew up into the big man's face. The fellow got such a mighty shock he broke out into a sweat. He leapt up and gripping the front of Song Jiang's clothing began shouting at him: "Who the bloody hell are you? Are you trying to make a fool of me?" Song Jiang was struck dumb. But the servant with the lantern immediately shouted: "Mind what you say! This is the master's special guest!"

"Special guest? Special *guest*? When I first came here I was a special guest, and everyone treated me well. But now the servants are always telling tales about me, everyone ignores me. It's true what they say, 'Nothing lasts forever'!" He made as if to hit Song Jiang. The servant rushed in to stop him, trying without success to calm him down. Several other lanterns were now seen flying towards them down the gallery and Chai Jin arrived himself. "I was wondering what had happened to the Registrar. What's all this noise about?"

The servant explained what had happened. Chai Jin started laughing. "Listen here, Big Man," he said, "this is the celebrated Registrar!"

"Celebrated?" said the other. "Celebrated? I bet he's not as famous as Registrar Song of Yuncheng!"

This increased Chai Jin's amusement. "Do you know Registrar Song then?"

"I don't exactly know him but the brethren of the rivers and lakes all call him the Opportune Rain, I know that much. And he's said to be as generous as he is just. He helps anyone in a tight spot. He's world-famous."

"What's he so famous for, then, Big Man?"

"I can't tell you just now. But he's a real man. He knows what's what, he knows the score! As soon as I'm better I'm going to go and find him!"

"You want to meet him?"

"You bet I want to meet him!"

"Big Man, what's far may be a thousand leagues away but what's near is in front of your nose!" Chai Jin pointed to Song Jiang and said, "This happens to be Song Jiang, the Opportune Rain!"

"Do you mean it, or are you having me on?"

Song Jiang spoke now: "I am Song Jiang," he said.

The big man stared at him very hard, then sank to his knees, saying, "I think I'm dreaming! To meet you face to face!"

"You do me too much honour!" Song Jiang said.

"My behaviour just now was terrible," the big man said. "How can you ever forgive me? I couldn't see what was in front of my nose!" He remained there kneeling and refused to get up. Song Jiang hurriedly helped him to his feet, saying: "May I ask your name?" Chai Jin answered for him. He told his name and his place of origin and it was to have an important bearing on events. Truly one can say:

When tigers are seen on the mountain at play,
*The heart faints, the spirit quails.*
*When outlaws overrun each forest way,*
Courage melts and resolve fails.

In fact, it is a case of:

At mention of his name the moon and stars withdraw,
Rivers reverse their course and run uphill.

THE police having arrested Tang Niu-er took him into the *yamen*, and as soon as the magistrate heard that there was a murder case to be heard he immediately took his seat on the bench. The magistrate saw the prisoner kneeling on the right, and a woman kneeling on his left. He inquired what the case was about, and the woman replied: "My name is Yan. I had a daughter Poxi who was kept by Song Jiang. Last night my daughter and Song Jiang were drinking wine together when this man Tang Niu-er came and made trouble. When he left the house he was cursing so that the neighbours all heard him. Early this morning Song Jiang went out but came back and murdered my daughter. I took hold of Song Jiang but when we were in front of your *yamen* this man Tang Niu-er interfered and so Song Jiang got away."

Addressing the prisoner the magistrate asked, "How dare you assist a murderer to escape?"

Tang Niu-er replied, "I did not know what had happened. Last night I went to find Song Jiang and ask him for a drink of wine, and this old woman took hold of me and turned me out of the house. Early this morning I set out to sell some preserved ginger, and in front of your *yamen* I saw this woman take hold of Song Jiang. I went to try and stop the trouble and Song Jiang got away. I do not know any reason why he should have killed the girl."

"Nonsense!" said the magistrate, "Song Jiang was a very honest man, so how could he recklessly kill anyone? You must have done this yourself. Where is the clerk of the court?"

The clerk of the court Zhang Wenyuan came forward. He knew that it referred to the death of his sweetheart and took a record of the evidence. He also wrote out an accusation for Madame Yan. The coroner was then sent together with the neighbourhood chief and the neighbours and upon arriving at the house opened the door. Taking the corpse outside he closely examined it and found the dagger near the body, and after a careful investigation came to the conclusion that the dagger had been used to murder the girl. He then allowed the people to place the body in a coffin, and deposit it in the courtyard of a monastery. They then all returned to the *yamen*.

Now the magistrate had a good opinion of Song Jiang, and wanted to prove him to be innocent so he cross-examined Tang Niu-er with many questions. But Tang Niu-er said that he did not know what had preceded or followed the murder.

"But why did you go last night to the house and create a disturbance?" asked the magistrate. "You certainly are implicated."

"I just happened to go there for a cup of wine," replied Tang Niu-er.

"Nonsense!" said the magistrate. "Beat him!"

The police seized the prisoner, bound him with a rope, and gave him about fifty blows with the bamboo. But the prisoner still made the same statement as before. The magistrate was apparently aware that the prisoner really did not know anything about the murder but as he wanted to rescue Song Jiang, he could not set Tang Niu-er free, so he gave an order that he was to have a cangue fixed round his neck, and be sent to the prison for further detention.

Zhang Wenyuan, the clerk of the court, then spoke to the magistrate. "But the knife found belonged to Song Jiang, and he used it to keep down his loose gown. If we brought him here we might get some information from him."

The magistrate wished to screen Song Jiang but after Zhang Wenyuan's frequent pleading he at last agreed to send a man to arrest Song Jiang. Upon reaching Song Jiang's home the police found that he had escaped so they detained a number of the neighbours for questioning. But on arrival at the *yamen* the neighbours all protested that they did not know where the murderer Song Jiang had gone to.

Zhang Wenyuan now urged that the father and brother of Song Jiang should be arrested, and cross-examined under torture as to where Song Jiang was. But the magistrate was averse to taking such extreme measures and preferred to throw all the blame on Tang Niu-er. He considered that by and by he could set Tang Niu-er free.

So Zhang Wenyuan then went to Madame Yan and advised her to go to the *yamen* and repeat her accusation. She did this, and the magistrate saw that he could not hush the case up any further so he at last issued a warrant for the arrest of the father and brother of Song Jiang. Upon reaching the Song Family Village the police were received by Song Jiang's father and taken by him into a room. They then handed him the warrant, and when he had read it he said, "Please be seated, and listen to what I have to say. For many generations my ancestors have cultivated the soil here, and have been models of propriety. But Song Jiang has been an unfilial son and disobedient since childhood, and although we urged him also to take up agriculture yet he would always insist on becoming an official. When he at last went to the *yamen* as a clerk I complained to the magistrate about his lack of filial piety and disobedience and disowned him, and he has nothing to do with me now. He lives in the town, and his brother Song Qing stays with me here cultivating the fields for a living. We have lived quite independently of each other so that I now know nothing whatever of his affairs. I was afraid that he would do some bad thing so I did not care to have anything to do with him, and so informed the magistrate a long time ago. The magistrate gave me an official document confirming that arrangement, and I will go to get it, and show it to you."

The policemen were all on good terms with Song Jiang and were well aware that such a document had been issued in anticipation of such a situation in order to prevent harming him. They did not wish to offend Song Jiang so they asked Old Song to let them make a copy of the document which they could then produce at the *yamen*.

Old Song agreed to this, and gave them the document to copy. While this was being done he ordered a meal with chicken, and duck, and wine for them, and also presented them with more than ten taels of silver.

When the policemen got back to the *yamen* they reported to the magistrate that they had not arrested Old Song because of the document he held, of which they presented a copy. To this the magistrate replied, "As there is such a document, and as Song Jiang has no other relatives, the only thing I can do is to offer a reward for his arrest."

Zhang Wenyuan however went to Madame Yan and told her of this, and advised her to go again to the court with disheveled hair, and state that Song Jiang was really hidden at home by his brother Song Qing. She was also to ask why the magistrate had not had Song Jiang arrested for her. She did this.

The magistrate replied that three years ago, Song Jiang had been officially disowned by his father so that it was not possible to hold them as in any way responsible for what had happened.

Madame Yan stated, "But does not everybody know that he was called the 'Filial and Just Son'? The document must be false, and I request that you have them arrested."

"Nonsense!" said the magistrate. "The document was duly issued by my predecessor so how can it be false?"
Madame Yan sobbed, and cried for being wronged. She exclaimed, "Murder is a crime as high as the Heaven! If you will not administer justice then I must appeal to the Prefectural court. I am in great sorrow through the murder of my daughter."
At this point the clerk of the court, Zhang Wenyuan, spoke to the magistrate, "If you do not issue the warrants Madame Yan may appeal to the Prefectural court, and if she does so it will be awkward. When the Prefectural officials go seriously into the matter I do not know what replies I can give to their questions."
The magistrate was aware of the reasonableness of this argument, and at once ordered a warrant to be issued for the arrest of Song Jiang. He summoned the two Inspectors Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, and spoke to them, "I want you to take many men to the Song Family Village, and arrest Song Jiang there."
The two Inspectors took more than forty policemen, and soon reached the village. They were received by Old Song who invited them inside. The two Inspectors said they hoped that he would not be offended at their arrival. It was not their own intention, and they were only obeying orders. They asked where his son Song Jiang was.
"You Inspectors, please listen to me," said Old Song. "I have disowned my unfilial son, Song Jiang, and this was duly registered by the former magistrate. During the last three years we have lived separately, and he never came here."
Inspector Zhu Tong said, "Notwithstanding what you say, our order is quite definite, and we cannot go back before we have carefully searched everywhere." He then ordered the policemen to conduct a close search for the accused. He said, "I will stand at the front door and guard it. You, Inspector Lei Heng, go inside with a search party."
Inspector Lei Heng went inside and after searching in all directions came back and said to Inspector Zhu Tong, "He is certainly not here."
"I do not believe that," said Inspector Zhu Tong. "You stay here while I go and have a very careful search."
"As you know," said Old Song, "I am familiar with the laws of the court, so how dare I hide any criminal?"
"You need not be offended with our search," said Inspector Zhu Tong, "because it is a serious murder case."
"You may do as you wish," said Old Song. "Please go and make a careful search."
"Inspector Lei Heng will look after Old Song, and see that he does not leave here," said Inspector Zhu Tong.
Inspector Zhu Tong then placed his halberd on one side and after entering the house fastened the door behind him. Then going into the ancestral shrine he pushed the altar to one side. In the ground under the altar he found a loose board which he raised. Underneath was the entrance to a cellar and hanging there was the end of a rope which Zhu Tong pulled and heard a bell ring down below. Presently he saw Song Jiang emerge from the celler who startled when he saw the inspector.
"Do not be surprised at my being sent here to arrest you," said Inspector Zhu Tong. In the past we have always been on good terms with each other, and you confided in me with everything. You will perhaps remember that once when we were drinking wine together you told me of this hidden cellar with the entrance under the altar in front of the shrine. You also said that if I got into trouble I could always find a safe refuge there. When the magistrate ordered me and Inspector Lei Heng to come here and arrest you I remembered what you had told me before but I took care not to let anyone know about it. The magistrate himself wanted to hush the matter up but Madame Yan and the clerk of the court Zhang Wenyuan both threatened to appeal to the Prefectural court if something definite was not done and therefore the magistrate reluctantly issued this warrant for your arrest. I was afraid that Inspector Lei Heng would not have the tact to let you go when he sees you but would arrest you according to the literal meaning of the warrant. So I induced him to stay at the front gate while I could come here, and have a talk with you. This cellar is a good hiding place but not quite safe enough for you. If any one knows about it, and come here to search for you what escape have you?"
"I have been thinking about that myself," said Song Jiang. "If it had not been for your great tact I should have been arrested, and bound as a prisoner."
"You should not talk like that," said Zhu Tong. "But have you thought of any place where you can go to?"
"I have thought of three places which would be safe for me to go to," said Song Jiang. "The first would be at Chai Jin, the 'Small Whirlwind's' house at Henghai County, in Cangzhou. The second would be with Hua Rong, nicknamed 'Little Li Guang' at the Qingfeng Fortress on a mountain in Qingzhou. The third would be at Old Grandfather Kong's village near the Baihu Mountain. He has two sons—the eldest called Kong Ming, nicknamed 'Restless Star,' and the second called Kong Liang, nicknamed 'Fiery Star'—and I once met both of them in the town. Of these three places I cannot make up my mind which to go to."
"Then you must make up your mind at once," said Zhu Tong, "because you must get away from here this night."
"I hope that you will do your best to settle the case for me," said Song Jiang. "You can come here again, and take whatever money you require for making arrangement with the officials."
"You need not worry about that," said Zhu Tong, "because I will be responsible for everything. You had better now get things ready for your departure."
Song Jiang thanked Zhu Tong, and then descended into the cellar.
Zhu Tong replaced the board over the entrance, put back the altar in its former position, opened the door, took up his halberd, and said, "He is not in the farmhouse. How would it be if we arrest Old Song instead?"
Inspector Lei Heng thought, "How is it that he wants to arrest Old Song when he is on very good terms with Song Jiang? He evidently means the contrary. So if he says that again I shall speak in favour of Song Jiang." The two Inspectors then summoned the soldiers and went to the main hall. Old Song prepared the wine and served all the men. But Inspector Zhu Tong said, "Do not serve us with wine and food but instead I think it would be better if you and your son Song Qing would have a visit with us to the *yamen*."
"But why have we not seen Song Qing?" asked Inspector Lei Heng.
"I sent him to a neighbouring village to get an agricultural implement made," said Old Song. "As you know, I have the official document confirming that I disowned my son, Song Jiang, three years ago."
"What is the use of telling us that again?" asked Inspector Zhu Tong. "We have to carry out the orders from the *yamen*, and we must therefore arrest both you and your son Song Qing."
"Inspector Zhu," said Lei Heng, "listen to me! It is very probable that Song Jiang had some reason for murdering the girl, and his punishment may not necessarily be death. Now we have the undoubted official document that Song Jiang was disowned by his father, and we both knew Song Jiang very well, we should not be so strict in our duty but should make a copy of the official document, and report the matter at the *yamen*."
"That is my own idea," thought Zhu Tong, "but I do not want him to suspect it." He therefore said, "As you like that I shall have to let you have your own way."
"I shall be greatly indebted to you two Inspectors for your generous treatment," said Old Song. He then spread food and wine on the table, and invited all present to partake of a meal. He also got twenty taels of silver, and presented them to the Inspectors. But the Inspectors refused to accept the money, and gave it to be divided among the forty soldiers.
When they had made a copy of the document referred to, the two Inspectors took leave of Old Song, and returned to the *yamen* with their soldiers.
The magistrate was sitting on the bench when they arrived, and he asked them at once for the result of their search.
The Inspectors reported that they had made two searches in every part of the house and also the village without finding any trace of the criminal. Old Song was seriously ill on his bed and could not get up. His son, Song Qing, had gone last month to some other place, and had not returned yet. Therefore they had made this copy of an official document.
Having heard this, the magistrate wrote a dispatch to his superior official reporting the case, and giving all particulars. He also issued orders to all in his district to arrest Song Jiang.
Now Song Jiang had many friends, and they called on Zhang Wenyuan, and urged him to let the matter drop. Yan Poxi was dead and Zhang Wenyuan remembered that Song Jiang had previously helped him in many ways, and now that many people pressed him to let the matter drop, he at last agreed to do so.
Inspector Zhu Tong also collected together quite a lot, of money and things and presenting them to Madame Yan asked her not to appeal to the Prefectural court but to let the matter drop. To which Madame Yan at last agreed as she saw nothing would be gained by proceeding further. Inspector Zhu Tong also got a lot of money and sent it by one of his men to Jizhou Prefecture to bribe the officials there to allow the case to pass.
The magistrate also offered a reward of a thousand strings of cash for the arrest of Song Jiang and then delivered his judgment that Tang Niu-er had committed a serious offence in helping Song Jiang to escape, and ordered that he should receive twenty blows with the bamboo, should be branded, and banished to some place more than one hundred and fifty *li* from his home. He then released all the witnesses.
Now why had they the hidden cellar at the Song family residence? During the Song Dynasty (A. D. 960–1127) the official duties were easy but the clerical work in the *yamens* was accompanied with difficulties. Why were the official duties easy? This was because the Emperor's ministers were corrupt, villainous, and crafty. If an official had no friend at court and was poor, there was no prospect of promotion.
But why were the clerical duties so difficult? Because for the slightest fault one was to be branded, and banished to distant military post. If the crime was serious not only was the man executed but all his family's property would be confiscated. Because of this many *yamen* clerks had such hiding places for refuge from the officials. Being afraid that some fault of the sons at the *yamen* might bring disaster on the whole family it was a common practice for parents to disown their sons who were clerks in the *yamens*. But although the clerk lived by himself he always kept his money secretly at home.
When Song Jiang at last emerged from his hiding place he spoke to his father and brother, "If it had not been for the protection of Inspector Zhu Tong I should have been arrested. We must not forget to repay him for his benevolent action. I must now escape and take my brother with me. If Heaven is gracious perhaps the Emperor will grant an amnesty, and then we can return home to meet our father again. I hope, father, that you will secretly send money to Zhu Tong, and ask him to bribe all the *yamen* officials to let the matter drop, and also send smaller amounts to Madame Yan and suggest that it would be better for her to withdraw the accusation."
"You need not be anxious about such matters," said Old Song. "You and your brother Song Qing must be careful when traveling. When you reach your destination you must find a reliable man to bring a letter here."
The two brothers packed up what they wished to carry with them, and arising from their beds about 3 A.M. they washed their mouths and faces, took breakfast, and prepared to start. Song Jiang wore a broad brimmed felt hat, a white silk gown, a plum-coloured girdle, puttees round his calves, and hempen shoes. Song Qing was dressed as a servant, and carried the bundles for both. Upon leaving the grass hut they saluted their father.
Old Song burst into tears unceasingly, and he said, "You two have now a very long road in front of you but you must not grieve on the way."
Song Jiang and Song Qing addressed the farm servants, "You must always diligently attend to our father, and see that he always has plenty to eat and drink." They then placed swords in their belts, and carrying halberds in their hands they left the Song Family Village. The two brothers then started. Now it was just between the end of autumn and the beginning of winter. When they had travelled some distance Song Jiang asked, "From whom shall we find refuge?"
"I have heard people say that Chai Jin, of Henghai County in Cangzhou, is a descendant of an Emperor of the Later Zhou Dynasty but we do not know him. Yet I see no reason why we should not go and seek refuge with him. Everybody says that he distributes wealth in good cause and is always assisting good men from all over the empire. He even assists criminals and is very similar to Meng Changjun (B. C. 279). We had better go and seek refuge with him."
"I have also had that idea," said Song Jiang. "I kept up correspondence with him, yet I had no opportunity of meeting him before."
They therefore took the road to Cangzhou. They travelled through prefectures and districts; traversed mountains and waded through rivers. They rested at inns on the way but there were two objectionable things which they, as well as other travellers, had to put up with—they had to use cups and bowls that might have been also used by lepers, and second they sometimes had to sleep on beds where some person might have died some time before.
The brothers however at last reached the border of Cangzhou where they inquired where Squire Chai lived. Upon arriving at Chai's village, they inquired if Squire Chai was at home, and were informed that he was at the eastern estate collecting some grain rents. They were also informed that the eastern estate was thirteen *li* from there. When Song Jiang asked to be shown the way the informant inquired for his "elevated" name.
"I am Song Jiang and come from Yuncheng County," he replied.
"Are you the Chief Clerk known as the 'Welcome Rain'?" inquired the servant.
When he admitted this the servant said, "Squire Chai often talked about your great reputation, and was very sorry that he had never had the opportunity of meeting you. But as you have now arrived I myself will conduct you to Squire Chai at the other estate." They all three started off at once, and in about six hours reached the eastern estate. The servant asked the two brothers to sit down in an arbour while he went to announce their arrival. The servant had not been gone long when the central gate of the farmstead was opened, and the squire emerged accompanied by about five servants. They hurried to the arbour and saluted the two brothers.
"I have thought of you a very great deal," said Chai. "But what favourable wind has blown you here. I am exceedingly pleased to meet you. What great luck! How fortunate!"
Song Jiang kowtowed and replied, "I am only a common clerk, and I have come to seek a refuge with you."
Chai Jin raised up Song Jiang, and spoke softly, "Last night the lamplight was bright, and this morning the magpies were calling but it never occurred to me that you were so near." While he said this his face was wreathed with smiles.
Song Jiang saw that Chai Jin wished to treat him very liberally, and was much pleased at this. He then introduced his brother.
Chai Jin then ordered the servants to prepare a guest chamber for the brothers, and take their baggage there. Then taking Song Jiang by the hand he conducted him to the hall where they sat down as host and guest. Chai Jin then said, "I do not wish to appear impertinent but what has led you to leave your duties, and come to such a desolate place as this?"
"Your fame has long resounded in my ears like thunder," replied Song Jiang. "I was the mean recipient of your letters but I never had the leisure to come and visit you. I have no ability but I did a thing which caused me to come here with my brother. We hope to find a shelter here as we have heard that you distribute wealth in good cause."
"Sir, never mind that," laughed Chai Jin. "You need not be sorry. But what was this great crime which forced you to flee to this place? I will not boast but whatever official Inspector comes here he dare not act as a spy."
Song Jiang then told Chai Jin all the particulars of his murder of Yan Poxi.
Upon hearing this Chai Jin laughed and said, "Never mind, sir. Because even if a man has killed a high official, or stolen things from the Imperial treasury I would dare to conceal him here." He then invited both brothers to take a bath, and also presented them with two new suits of clothes, new caps, new silken shoes, and new socks, and asked them to leave their old clothes in the bathhouse. They did this, and the bath attendant sent their old clothes to their room. This done, Chai Jin asked the brothers to dine with him in a private room at the back, and they took their seats there according to the rules of etiquette. At the meal the three were waited upon by about ten of the chief stewards who kept them supplied with wine and food. Chai Jin many times pressed Song Jiang to take wine, and the latter thanked him repeatedly. All three expressed their pleasure at meeting, and stated how many times they had looked forward to this.
When it was getting dark Song Jiang pointed out that they had drunk enough wine but Chai Jin would not agree to this. So they went on until it was about 8 P.M. when Song Jiang withdrew to the toilet. Chai Jin sent a man with him bearing a lamp. But as Song Jiang had had quite enough wine he intentionally walked very slowly, and went by the longest way. He was nearly tipsy and walked unsteadily. He was going to the eastern veranda but there was a man there who had the ague, and being afraid of cold, had a charcoal brazier to keep him warm. The man was stooping over the fire, and as Song Jiang staggered along the veranda he trampled upon the handle of the brazier and this threw the burning charcoal in the face of the sick man. The man was startled, and perspired freely. He was very angry, and seizing hold of Song Jiang's collar shouted out, "You son of a bitch! But who are you trying to play with?" Song Jiang too, was surprised and fuddled to speak but the servant carrying the lamp spoke to the man, "You must not talk like that as this gentleman is the honoured guest of our master."
The man replied, "Honoured guest! Honoured guest! And wasn't I also an honoured guest at one time? Our master treated me well then but now he listens to all the tittle-tattle of the servants who have turned him against me. The saying puts it, 'Men cannot be friends for very long.' The man attempted to strike Song Jiang but the servant threw down his lamp and interposed. He did not succeed in separating the two men but just then three lamps came flying along the veranda. They accompanied Chai Jin who rushing up asked what the row was about. The servant explained how Song Jiang had accidentally trodden over the charcoal brazier, and this made Chai Jin laugh. He said, "Man, don't you know this celebrated chief clerk?"
"A celebrated chief clerk, hey?" replied the man. "Then perhaps you will ask him how he compares with Song Jiang, the magistrate's secretary, at Yuncheng County?"
"Do you know Song Jiang?" asked Chai Jin laughingly.
"I have not met him," said the man, "but all people talk about him, and call him Song Gongming, the 'Welcome Rain.' He is the most famous man in the whole country."
"But how do you know he is a good man?' asked Chai Jin.
"I cannot recite all the details," said the man. "but he is a celebrated person because everything he does is well done from start to finish. When I am better I intend to go and seek refuge with him."
"Would you like to see him then?" asked Chai Jin.
"If I did not want to see him why should I talk like this?" said the man.
"Man," said Chai Jin, "instead of being six hundred *li* away, he is here now." He pointed at Song Jiang and said, "This is Song Gongming, the 'Welcome Rain.'"
"Is this really true?" asked the man.
"I am that man," replied Song Jiang.
The man looked at him closely, and then kowtowed and saluted saying, "I did not expect to meet you, my elder brother, today."
"You must have made a mistake in holding such an opinion about me," said Song Jiang.
"I have blundered seriously," said the man, "and must ask for your forgiveness. Although I have eyes yet I failed to recognize a great man."
Thereupon he knelt on the ground, and would not get up. Song Jiang hurried to raise him up saying, ""Honoured sir, what's your name?"

A man who frightened tigers
Made brigands' hearts to throb.
If this man's name was mentioned,
The stars and moon grew dim.
If only seen in distance,
The rivers changed their course.

## 023
## Lord Chai Jin Detains a Guest, Accommodates other Guests in Henghai County & entertains his guests with class; Wu Song Fights & Kills the Tiger of Jingyang Ridge on Jingyang Pass & the Brotherhood of Rascals

Lord Chai supplied the answer. "He is called Wu Song. He's from Qinghe County, and is the second son in his family. He's been here a year."
"I've heard his name many times in the gallant fraternity. I never thought I'd run into him today. How fortunate!"
"Truly a happy circumstance when men of courage meet," said the lord. "Let's sit inside, shall we, and talk."
Song Jiang, very pleased, walked hand in hand with Wu Song to the rear hall, where the clerk introduced him to his brother. Chai Jin asked Wu Song to be seated. Song Jiang requested him to sit at the head of the table but Wu Song refused. After some minutes of polite argument, Wu Song took the third seat. Chai Jin called for wine and urged his three guests to drink without restraint.
In the lamplight Song Jiang noted with pleasure what a fine figure of a man Wu Song was, and he asked: "How do you happen to be here?"
"I was drunk one day back in Qinghe County and got into a brawl with the keeper of confidential documents in the local government office. With one blow of my fist I knocked him senseless to the ground. I thought I'd killed him, and ran away and took refuge here in Lord Chai's manor. That was over a year ago. Later I learned that the fellow hadn't died, that he revived. I intended to go home and see my older brother but then I caught this malaria and was unable to leave. I'd the chills and was warming myself by a fire when you stepped on the handle of that shovel. You gave me such a start that I broke into a sweat. It seems to have cured my illness!"
Song Jiang was very glad, and the four men drank until the third watch. The clerk asked Wu Song to live with him and his brother in the west wing. When they arose the next day, Lord Chai had a sheep and a pig slaughtered and gave a feast for Song Jiang. Of that we'll say no more.
Several days later Song Jiang gave Wu Song money so that he could make some clothes. Lord Chai heard about it, and absolutely refused to let the clerk spend anything. He took fine silk material from his own stores and had his private tailor make garments for each of his three guests.
Why, incidentally, had Chai Jin cooled toward Wu Song? When he first arrived, he was treated with the same hospitality as any other guest. But he often got drunk, and he had a bad temper. When he didn't like the service, he would beat the vassals. None of them had a good word to say for him, and they frequently complained about him to Chai Jin. Although the lord didn't ask him to go, his manner grew distant. But after Song Jiang took him in hand, and they drank together everyday, Wu Song no longer indulged in his former failings.
The two were constantly in each other's company for a dozen or more days. But Wu Song was homesick. He wanted to go back to Qinghe County and see his older brother. Chai Jin and Song Jiang urged him not to hurry away. But Wu Song said: "I'm concerned about my brother. I haven't heard from him in a long time."
"If you must go," said Song Jiang, "we won't keep you. Come and see us again, if you have the chance."
Wu Song thanked him. Chai Jin gave the young man some money.
"I have caused you a great deal of trouble, my Lord," said Wu Song.
He wrapped his belongings into a pack, tied on his staff and got ready to leave. Chai Jin gave him a farewell feast. Wu Song was wearing a new red silk robe and a broad-brimmed hat of white felt. He shouldered his pack, took up his staff, and bid his friends goodbye.
"Wait a moment, brother," said Song Jiang. He went back to his quarters, got some silver, and hurried with it to the manor gate. "We'll see you down the road a piece," he said.
He, his brother Song Qing, and Wu Song took their leave of Lord Chai. "I'll be back soon, my Lord," said Song Jiang. The three men left the eastern manor.
"This is far enough, brother," said Wu Song, after they had travelled six or seven *li* "Please go back. Lord Chai is waiting."
"Just a bit more," said Song Jiang.
They chatted as they walked, and covered another three *li* before they knew it. Wu Song took Song Jiang's hand.
"Don't come any further, brother. 'Though you see a friend off a thousand *li*, sooner or later you must part.' Isn't that how the saying goes?"
"Only a few steps more. On the highway ahead there's a little tavern. We'll have a couple of cups and then separate."
The three entered the tavern, and Song Jiang sat at the head of the table. Wu Song, resting his staff, sat opposite. Song Qing took a seat on the side. The clerk ordered wine and some food to go with it. By the time they had downed several cups, the sun was in the western sky.
"It's getting late," said Wu Song. "If you don't scorn me, please receive my four kowtows and accept me as your blood brother."
Song Jiang was delighted. Wu Song made four obeisances. The clerk had Song Qing present him with ten ounces of silver. Wu Song tried to refuse.
"You need that money yourself."
"Don't give it a thought. If you don't take it, I won't acknowledge you as my brother."
Wu Song had no choice but to accept with thanks. He put the money in his purse. Song Jiang paid the bill, Wu Song took up his staff, and the three left the tavern. There were tears in Wu Song's eyes when they parted. Song Jiang and Song Qing watched from the door of the tavern until he was out of sight, then they started back.
They were met by Chai Jin, riding his horse and leading two other animals, before they had gone five *li*. Gratefully, they mounted and returned together. Chai Jin invited them into the rear hall for wine. Thereafter, they continued staying at his manor.

We'll divide our story in two and talk now of Wu Song after he left Song Jiang. That night he put up at an inn. The next morning he rose and had breakfast, paid the bill, tied his pack, took up his staff and set forth.
"Song Jiang is known in the gallant fraternity as Timely Rain," he thought. "He certainly deserves his name! I'll never regret becoming friends with a brother like that!"
He travelled for several days and came to Yanggu County. It was noon and he was a good distance from the county town, and he was hungry and thirsty from walking. Further up the road he saw a tavern. By the doorway hung a pennant reading: *Three bowls and you can't cross the ridge.*
Wu Song went inside, sat down, and rested his staff. "Wine, quickly, host," he called.
The tavern keeper brought three bowls, a pair of chopsticks and a plate of tidbits, placed them on the table, and filled one of the bowls to the brim with wine. Wu Song raised the bowl and drained it.
"This wine has a kick in it! If you've got anything filling, host, I'll buy some to go with the drinks."
"We only have cooked beef."
"Slice me two or three catties of the best part."
The host went back inside and came out with two catties of beef on a large platter that he placed before Wu Song. Then he filled another bowl. Wu Song drank it.
"Very good wine!" he said. And he downed another. That was his third bowl. The host poured no more. Wu Song rapped on the table.
"Host, where's the wine?"
"More beef sir? Coming right up."
"I want beef and wine, both."
"I'll slice some beef for you but I can't give you any more wine."
"That's screwy! Why not?"
"Didn't you see that pennant hanging by my door *Three bowls and you can't cross the ridge!"* queried the tavern keeper.
"What does it mean?"
"Although our wine is just a village product, it's as fragrant as the old brews. Any traveller who drinks three bowls of it gets drunk and can't cross that ridge there. Hence, the name. No one who stops here ever asks for more than three bowls."
Wu Song smiled. "So that's it. I've had three bowls. Why aren't I drunk?"
"My wine is called 'Seeps Through the Bottle Fragrance.' It's also called 'Collapse Outside the Door.' You don't feel anything at first. But a little later, down you go."
"Poppycock! I'm paying, aren't I? Pour me three more bowls!"
Seeing that the wine had little effect on Wu Song, the tavern keeper again filled three bowls with wine. The big fellow drank them.
"Excellent," he cried, "Host, I'll pay you bowl for bowl. Just keep pouring."
"You'd better take it easy, sir. This wine really knocks people out! And there's no medicine that brings them around!"
"Bullshit! Even if you doped it, I've got a nose, haven't I!"
The tavern keeper couldn't convince him. Again he filled the three bowls.
"Bring me another two catties of beef," said Wu Song.
The host served the sliced meat and poured three more bowls of wine. Wu Song's appetite seemed to improve. He put some silver on the table.
"Look here," he called. "Is this enough for the wine and meat?"
"Plenty," said the tavern keeper. "In fact I owe you some change."
"I don't want any change. Just keep the wine coming."
"There are five or six bowls left. But I doubt that you can finish them."
"Five, six, or even more, I'll drink as many as you've got."
"You're a big hulking fellow. If you fall, how am I going to pick you up?"
"If you have to pick me up, I'm no real man!"
The host continued to stall. Wu Song grew irritated. "I'm paying for what I drink," he said. "Don't make me mad, or I'll smash up your place and turn it ass over tea kettle!"
"This rogue is drunk," thought the tavern keeper. "I'd better not provoke him!"
He served Wu Song six more bowls of wine, a total of eighteen in all.
Wu Song grasped his staff and rose to his feet. "I'm not a bit drunk!" He laughed as he went out the door. "Who says 'Three bowls and you can't cross the ridge'?" He started walking away.
The tavern keeper ran after him. "Where are you going, sir?" he shouted.
Wu Song halted. "What's it to you? I don't owe you anything, do I? What are you yelling about?"
"I mean well. Come back. I want to show you a government proclamation."
"What does it say?"
"There's a fierce tiger with a white forehead and bulging eyes on Jingyang Ridge. It comes out at night, and has already killed nearly thirty strong men. The authorities have ordered hunters to capture it, on pain of being beaten, and have posted this warning at every path leading to the ridge. It says travellers must go in groups and cross only between late morning and early afternoon. At all other times the ridge is closed. No one is permitted to travel alone. It's already late, and I saw you setting off without a word. I don't want you to kill yourself! Why not spend the night at my place, and then tomorrow you can gradually get together a band of twenty or thirty travellers and cross the ridge in safety."
Wu Song laughed. "I'm a Qinghe County man. I've crossed that ridge at least twenty times. I've never seen any tiger. Don't try to scare me with that crap. Even if there is a tiger, I'm not afraid."
"I'm only trying to save you. If you don't believe me, come in and have a look at the proclamation."
"Balls! I'm not scared of any tiger. You want to keep me here so that in the middle of the night you can rob me, kill me! That's why you're trying to frighten me with your tiger story!"
"All right! You take my good for evil and talk to me like that! Don't believe me, then! On your way!" The tavern keeper shook his head and went back inside.
Staff in hand, Wu Song strode off towards Jingyang Ridge. After walking four or five *li* he came to the foot of it. A piece of bark had been peeled from a large tree, and on the white patch words were written. Wu Song could read quite well, and he saw that it was a notice with this inscription: *Of late a tiger on Jingyang Ridge has been killing people. Travellers must form bands and cross only between late morning and early afternoon. Do not take risks.*
Wu Song grinned. "That host is a crafty one. Scares his customers into staying the night. Well, he can't scare me!"
He proceeded up the slope, holding his staff level. It was late afternoon by then, and the red sun was pressing on the mountains in the west. Still primed by all the wine he had consumed, Wu Song continued climbing the ridge. Before he had gone another half *li* he came upon a dilapidated Mountain Spirit Temple. A notice was posted on the door. It read:

Yanggu County Notice: Lately, a big tiger has been killing people on Jingyang Ridge. Although all township leaders, village chiefs and hunters have been ordered to capture the beast or be beaten, they have so far failed. Travellers are permitted to cross the ridge only between late morning and early afternoon, and only in bands. At other times, and to single travellers at any time, the ridge is closed, lest the tiger take their lives. Let this be known to all.

So there really was a tiger! The notice with its official seal confirmed that. Wu Song considered returning to the tavern. But then he said to himself: "If I do that, the host will laugh at me for a coward. I can't go back." He thought a moment. "What's there to be afraid of," he exclaimed. "Just keep climbing and see what happens."
He walked on. The warmth of the wine rose in him, and he pushed back the felt hat till it was hanging by the string on his shoulders. Clapping the staff under one arm, he plodded up the slope. When he looked back at the sun, it was almost gone. The days are short in late autumn, and the nights are long. It gets dark early.
"There isn't any tiger," he said to himself. "People just scare themselves and don't dare come up the mountain."
The wine was burning inside him as he walked. With his staff in one hand, he unbuttoned his tunic with the other. His gait was unsteady now, and he staggered into a thicket. Before him was a large smooth rock. He rested his staff against it, clambered onto its flat surface, and prepared to sleep.
Suddenly a wild gale blew, and when it passed a roar come from behind the thicket and out bounded a huge tiger. Its malevolent upward-slanting eyes gleamed beneath a broad white forehead.
*"Aiya!"* cried Wu Song. He jumped down, seized his staff, and slipped behind the rock.
Both hungry and thirsty, the big animal clawed the ground with its front paws a couple of times, sprang high and came hurtling forward. The wine poured out of Wu Song in a cold sweat. Quicker than it takes to say, he dodged, and the huge beast landed beyond him. Tigers can't see behind them, so as its front paws touched the ground it tried to side-swipe Wu Song with its body. Again he dodged, and the tiger missed. With a thunderous roar that shook the ridge, the animal slashed at Wu Song with its iron tail. Once more he swivelled out of the way.
Now this tiger had three methods for getting its victim—spring, swipe and slash. But none of them had worked, and the beast's spirit diminished by half. Again it roared, and whirled around.
Wu Song raised his staff high in a two-handed grip and swung with all his might. There was a loud crackling, and a large branch, leaves and all, tumbled past his face. In his haste, he had struck an old tree instead of the tiger, snapping the staff in two and leaving him holding only the remaining half.
Lashing itself into a roaring fury, the beast charged. Wu Song leaped back ten paces, and the tiger landed in front of him. He threw away the stump of his staff, seized the animal by the ruff and bore down. The tiger struggled frantically but Wu Song was exerting all his strength, and wouldn't give an inch. He kicked the beast in the face and eyes, again and again. The tiger roared, its wildly scrabbling claws pushing back two piles of yellow earth and digging a pit before it. Wu Song pressed the animal's muzzle into the pit, weakening it further. Still relentlessly clutching the beast by the ruff with his left hand, Wu Song freed his right, big as an iron mallet, and with all his might began to pound.
After sixty or seventy blows the tiger, blood streaming from eyes, mouth, nose and ears, lay motionless, panting weakly. Wu Song got up and searched around under the pine tree until he found the stump of his broken staff. With this he beat the animal till it breathed no more. Then he tossed the staff aside.
"I'd better drag this dead tiger down the mountain," he thought. He tried to lift the beast, lying in a pool of blood but couldn't move it. He was exhausted, the strength gone out of his hands and feet.
Wu Song sat down on the rock and rested. "It's nearly dark," he thought. "If another tiger comes I won't be able to fight it. I'd better get off this ridge first, somehow. Then, tomorrow morning, I can decide what to do."
He collected his broad-brimmed felt hat from beside the rock, skirted the thicket, and slowly descended the ridge. Wu Song had travelled less than half a *li* when two tigers leaped out of the tall dry grass.
*"Aiya!"* he exclaimed. "I'm a goner!"
But there in the shadows the two tigers suddenly stood upright. He looked closely and saw that they were men with tiger pelts bound tightly around them. Each held a five-pronged pitchfork. They stared at Wu Song in amazement.
"Have you eaten a crocodile's heart, or a panther's gall, or a lion's leg, that you're so full of courage?" they cried. "How dare you cross the ridge at dusk, alone and weaponless? Are you a man or a demon?"
"Who are you two?" Wu Song demanded.
"We're local hunters."
"What are you doing on this ridge?"
"Don't you know?" the hunters asked in surprise. "There's a big tiger up here! It comes out at night and preys on people. It's killed seven or eight of us hunters alone, and more travellers than we can remember! The county magistrate has ordered the township and village leaders and us hunters to capture it. But it's so powerful nobody dares go near it! We've been beaten time and again because of this but we still can't catch the beast. Tonight it's our turn to try. We've got a dozen peasants with us, and we've laid spring-bows with poisoned arrows all over the place. We were waiting here in ambush when we saw your big form moving down the ridge. You scared the life out of us! Who are you, anyway? Have you seen the tiger?"

"I'm a Qinghe County man. My name's Wu, a second son. I just met the tiger up there beside a thicket. I punched and kicked it to death."
The hunters gaped. "You're kidding!"
"Look at the blood on my clothes if you don't believe me."
"How did it happen?"
Wu Song told them the whole story. The two hunters listened, joyous and astonished, then shouted for their peasant band. The men soon crowded round, carrying pitchforks, snare-bows, knives and spears.
"Why weren't they with you?" Wu Song asked the hunters.
"The tiger was too fierce. They didn't dare come up." The hunters repeated Wu Song's story to the peasants. None of them believed it.
"Come along with me, then," said Wu Song, "and see for yourself."
They had flint and steel and struck a fire, and lit six or seven torches. They went with him up the ridge to where the tiger lay dead in a great heap. Everyone was delighted. A man was sent immediately to report to the village chief and the leading family in charge. Five or six peasants trussed up the tiger and carried it down the ridge slung from a pole.
When the party reached the foot of the ridge seventy or eighty people were already waiting, noisy and animated. They formed a procession, with the dead tiger in front, and Wu Song following on an open litter, and marched to the home of the leading family.
Both the head of the family and the village chief were waiting to welcome him at the entrance to the village. The tiger was placed in front of a hall. Another twenty or thirty men—hunters and the heads of prominent township families—also greeted Wu Song.
"What is you name, young stalwart," they asked, "and where are you from?"
"I'm from the neighbouring county of Qinghe. My name is Wu Song, and I'm a second son. On my way home from Cangzhou yesterday afternoon I got drunk in a tavern on the other side of the ridge. I climbed the ridge and met the tiger." He told in detail how he fought the beast with fists and feet.
"Truly, a hero," his listeners cried.
The hunters presented him with game and drank his health. Wu Song was exhausted from his battle with the tiger and wanted to sleep. The head of the leading family ordered his vassals to prepare a guest-room for Wu Song's use. He sent word to the county seat the following morning, and had a special litter built so that the tiger could be delivered there.
Wu Song got up at daybreak, washed and rinsed his mouth. His host and the others brought a cooked sheep and two buckets of wine to the front of the hall to feast him. Wu Song put his clothes on, adjusted his head kerchief, and went out and joined them. Raising their cups, they toasted him.
"That tiger killed countless people, and for that reason the hunters were beaten several times," they said. "But you came, young stalwart, and rid us of that calamity, bringing us luck and making the road safe for travel! We owe everything to you!"
"I have no talents. I was only borrowing from your predestined good fortune."
Everyone congratulated Wu Song, and they drank all morning. The tiger was placed upon the Utter. Members of the prominent families draped Wu Song with silks and flowers. His luggage was placed in safe-keeping, then everyone marched through the village gate. Emissaries of the magistrate had long since been waiting to escort Wu Song to the Yanggu County office. They greeted him, and ordered four vassals to convey him in an open sedan-chair. Decked with silks and flowers, he followed behind the tiger as the procession advanced on Yanggu County.
When the townspeople heard that a brave young fellow had killed the big tiger on Jingyang Ridge, they all turned out, cheering, and swarmed to the county office. From his sedan-chair, Wu Song looked at the noisy throngs crowding every street and lane. Everyone wanted to see the tiger. The magistrate was waiting in a hall inside the county office compound.
Wu Song descended from the sedan-chair, slung the great beast over his shoulders, walked up to the hall, and placed the tiger in the entrance way. The magistrate gazed at the strapping young man, then at the huge striped animal, and he thought: "No one else could have killed that tiger!"
He summoned Wu Song into the hall. Wu Song hailed him respectfully.
"How were you able to kill the beast?" the magistrate asked.
Wu Song told his story. Everyone listened in stupefaction. The magistrate gave him several cups of wine, and rewarded him with one thousand strings of cash contributed by the prominent families.
"It was only because I was basking in Your Excellency's lucky aura that I was able to kill the tiger. I have no ability of my own," said Wu Song. "How can I accept any reward? I've heard that, because of the tiger, Your Excellency punished the hunters several times. I'd like to give the thousand strings of cash to them."
"If that's how you feel, it's up to you."
Wu Song promptly distributed the money among the hunters. The magistrate, impressed by his generosity and honesty, decided to raise him in rank.
"Although you are from Qinghe, it's very close to our Yanggu County," he said. "I'm thinking of making you a constable here. How about it?"
Wu Song dropped to his knees. "If your Excellency favours me I'll be grateful all my life!"
The magistrate instructed his clerk to draw up the appropriate documents that very day commissioning Wu Song a constable in the police force. All the heads of the leading families came and congratulated him, and drank with him for four or five consecutive days.
"I wanted to go home to Qinghe and see brother," Wu Song said to himself. "Who would have thought I'd wind up a constable in Yanggu!"
Thereafter, he had the affection of his superiors and was famed throughout the countryside.
Two or three days later, he was leaving the county office in search of amusement when a voice hailed him from behind.
"You're fallen into luck, Constable Wu! Is that why you know me no more?"
Wu Song turned around. *"Aiya!"* he exclaimed. "What're you doing here?" If Wu Song had not met that man would bloody corpses have lain in Yanggu? And as a result, heads rolled as steel blades swished, and hot blood flowed as fine swords flashed.

Let me remind you now how Song Jiang, in order to miss a round of drinking at Chai Jin's manor where he was taking refuge after killing his mistress, had gone to wash his hands and, making a detour back to the gallery, had tripped over a shovel full of hot coals, greatly to the annoyance of a certain stranger, who leapt to his feet looking for a fight. And how his host came rushing to the rescue and how he happened to reveal Song Jiang's name, so that the stranger, hearing who he was, threw himself on his knees and refused to get up, saying: "Fool that I am, I couldn't see what was staring me in the face. I insulted you just now. Can you ever forgive me?" and then Song Jiang raised him up and asked: "But who are you? Won't you tell me your name?"
Chai Jin supplied the answer. "This gentleman is from Qinghe. His name is Wu Song, he is the second son in his family. He has been with us a year now."
"I have heard much talk of Mr. Wu among the rivers and lakes fraternity," said Song Jiang. "But I had no idea I was to meet him here today. What a pleasure this is!"
"It's a great thing when men of honour meet by chance like this," said Chai Jin. "We shall celebrate with a dinner, so we can have some talk."
Song Jiang was pleased to take Wu Song's hand and lead him into the inner hall. He called his younger brother Song Qing and introduced him to Wu Song. When Chai Jin invited Wu Song to sit down, Song Jiang immediately asked him to sit beside him in the place of honour. Wu Song naturally refused. This modest show of reluctance went on a long time until finally Wu Song was prevailed upon to take the third place. Chai Jin then ordered the cups filled again and invited them to drink deep. Song Jiang was now able by the light of the lamps to get a better look at his new friend:
*His stature is awesome, his bearing deeply impressive; the eyes blaze like winter stars, the brows are an unbroken line drawn in lacquer; the chest so broad ten thousand foes could never throw him down, the speech forceful, evidence of a soaring ambition; the spirit so brave you'd think the lion which shakes heaven had descended from the clouds, the frame so powerful you'd imagine you were confronting the beast which shatters the world. Truly this seems a god walking the earth, a veritable Mars among men.*
Song Jiang liked what he saw exceedingly, and he asked Wu Song: "Tell me, pray, what is the reason for your staying here?"
"I got drunk one day, back in Qinghe, and had a fight with a confidential secretary," the other replied. "He really riled me. I only hit him the once but I knocked him out cold. Well, I thought I'd killed him, so I cleared off and came here to Mr. Chai's, waiting for it to blow over. Since then I've heard the fellow isn't dead, they revived him. I was planning to go home to see my brother but then I suddenly came down with malaria, so I couldn't travel. Just now I had a shivering fit and I was sitting over those coals in the gallery when you walked into them and gave me such a shock I broke out in a cold sweat, and now I think I'm cured!"
Song Jiang listened delightedly. That night the drinking went on till the small hours. Afterwards Song Jiang insisted that Wu Song go and sleep with them in the west wing. Next day Chai Jin organized a big banquet and had goats and pigs killed to feast Song Jiang. Of this no more.
After a few days Song Jiang took out some money for Wu Song to make himself a new set of clothes. When Chai Jin learnt of this, of course he would have none of it. He went to a chest and took out some pieces of fine silk, and commissioned his own tailor just outside the gates to supply all three of them with suits of clothes made to measure.
Incidentally, Chai Jin was displeased with Wu Song. Why so? Well, when Wu Song first arrived he had received a grand welcome. But later he was always getting drunk and owing to his impetuous temperament he was inclined to get a stick and beat the servants whenever their ministrations failed to meet his standards. Consequently there was not one of them who looked on him favourably. In fact they all hated him, and invented all kinds of stories to tell Chai Jin about him. So although Chai Jin did not turn Wu Song out, his behaviour towards him had grown much cooler. However, now when Song Jiang adopted Wu Song and made him his constant drinking companion, the latter mended his ways.
After Song Jiang had been with them about ten days, Wu Song felt the urge to return home to Qinghe to see his brother. Chai Jin and Song Jiang both urged him to stay on a while but he said: "It's a long time now since I had news of my brother, I think I should go back and see him."
"If you really want to go," Song Jiang said, "we must not detain you. But if you have time later, do let us meet again."
Wu Song thanked Song Jiang and Chai Jin gave him some silver for which Wu Song thanked him, saying: "I am afraid, sir, I have given you a lot of trouble." Then he tied his bundle, took up his cudgel and was ready to depart. But first Chai Jin laid on a little send-off party. Wu Song was wearing a new robe of fine red silk and a white Fanyang hat. With his pack on his shoulders and carrying his cudgel he was finally on the point of leaving, when Song Jiang said: "Dear brother, wait one moment." He went to his room and got some silver and hurried back to the manor gate. "I shall accompany you on the first stage of your journey," he said to Wu Song.
Song Jiang and his younger brother waited while Wu Song said his last farewell to Chai Jin and then Song Jiang also told Chai Jin they would be back in a little and the three of them set off from Chai Jin's eastern manor together. After a couple of miles, Wu Song suggested it was time to part: "Dear friends, you should go back now. Chai Jin will be waiting."
"Just a little further, why not?" Song Jiang said.
They conversed as they went and without noticing it, they had covered another mile or so, when Wu Song stopped Song Jiang and said: "You really shouldn't accompany me any further. You know the saying, 'When you're seeing someone off, you may go with them a hundred miles but still you have to say good-bye!'"
"Allow me to go just a little further," Song Jiang pleaded. "See that little inn on the highroad there, why don't we go in and drink a farewell cup together?"
They went in and Song Jiang seated himself at the head of the table. Wu Song laid down his cudgel and joined him, while Song Qing sat across the table from them. They told the waiter to bring wine and ordered some dishes and a variety of fruit and vegetables which were spread on the table before them. They drank some cups and watched the sun sinking in the west. "It's getting late," Wu Song said. "If you'll allow me, I want to prostrate myself four times so I can call myself your blood brother."
This pleased Song Jiang greatly. The ceremony completed, Song Jiang told his brother to take out ten taels of silver to give Wu Song. Wu Song refused it, naturally, saying: "When I was a guest at Mr. Chai's I received a generous allowance."
"Don't make a fuss about this, dear brother," Song Jiang said. "If you refuse I shall think you do not prize my friendship."
So Wu Song, after prostrating himself again, had to take the money that he put away in his purse. Then, Song Jiang having paid for the wine with some loose change, Wu Song took up his cudgel and the three men left the inn. There at the inn door they said their farewells, Wu Song saluting with tears in his eyes before he departed. Song Jiang and his brother stood there at the door and watched him out of sight. Then they set off on the return journey. They had covered little more than a mile when they saw Chai Jin approaching on horseback, leading two riderless horses. It was a welcome sight. They rode back together to the manor. When they had dismounted, Chai Jin invited them to drink in an inner chamber. For the time being, Song Jiang and his brother stayed at Chai Jin's.
Here our story divides.
Wu Song, after parting from Song Jiang, spent the night at an inn. Next morning, having breakfasted and paid for his room, he tied his bundle, grasped his cudgel and took to the road. As he went along, he mused: "Among the rivers and lakes, they talk all the time about Song Jiang, the Opportune Rain. And what they say is no exaggeration. It's a real privilege to know a man like that!"
After following the road for several days, Wu Song had reached the district of Yanggu but was still some way off the provincial capital. By noon that day, when he was feeling hungry and thirsty, he perceived in front of him a tavern, advertised by a sign with five characters that read: "Three bowls, forget the pass!"
Wu Song walked in and sat down. He laid his cudgel down and called out: "Landlord! Quickly, some wine!"
The innkeeper came with three bowls, chopsticks and a dish that he laid in front of Wu Song. He filled one of the bowls with wine. Wu Song picked it up and drained it in one gulp. "This wine's got a real kick!" he exclaimed. "Now then Landlord, how about something to line the stomach? I'll have something to go with this wine."
"Some boiled beef is all I've got," the man said.
"That'll do," said Wu Song. "Slice me two or three catties."
The innkeeper went in and cut two catties of beef and put it in a big dish which he then placed in front of Wu Song. Then he poured another big bowl of wine. Wu Song drank it off and said: "Now that's what I call good wine!"
One more bowl was poured. And that made exactly three Wu Song had drunk and the host wasn't going to pour any more.
Wu Song started to bang on the table. "Landlord!" he shouted. "Why don't you come and pour the wine?"
"Sir, more meat I'll bring you, if that be what you desire."
"I want more wine — but don't worry, you can cut me some more meat as well."
"If it's meat you want," the landlord repeated, "I'll bring it for you but no more wine."
"What's all this?" Wu Song said to himself. To the innkeeper he said: "Why don't you want to sell me any more?"
"Lord, sir!" said the man. "You seen our sign, haven't you? Says it clear enough, don't it? 'Three bowls, forget the pass!'"
"But what's that supposed to mean, 'Three bowls, forget the pass'?"
"Well, 'tis a local brew, I know that but this wine of ours has got more class than many a famous vintage. Everyone who comes to our inn here, they have just the three bowls and then they're drunk, see, they have to forget about climbing the pass up there! That's why we say, 'Three bowls, forget the pass!' All our guests, just three bowls you know, and after that they don't ask for no more."
Wu Song laughed and said: "Oh, so that's it! But I've had three bowls, how come I'm not drunk?"
The innkeeper said: "They calls her the Perfumed Glory but they also calls her The Knockout. Slips down like mother's milk, she does but she'll go off like a time bomb!"
"Balls!" said Wu Song. "Are you afraid I won't pay you? Bring me another three bowls."
Seeing that Wu Song was still entirely steady, the innkeeper brought him another three bowls.
Wu Song drank and said: "First-class wine. Landlord, whatever I drink, I'll pay for. Just keep me filled up!"
"Oh sir!" the man protested. "Don't go on drinking! When you're drunk on this wine there's no remedy."
"Enough of your bullshit! And if you're thinking of doctoring the wine, watch out, I've got a nose for that sort of thing!"
The innkeeper found it was no good arguing, so he poured another three bowls.
"Bring me another two catties of meat!" Wu Song shouted.
The innkeeper cut another two catties of beef, poured another three bowls of wine and for a long while Wu Song went on guzzling. Finally he took out some silver and called: "Landlord, come and count this silver, see if it's enough to pay for what I've drunk and eaten."
The innkeeper had a look and said: "More than enough, you'll get some change."
"I don't want your change, just give it to me in wine."
"But sir, if you want it in wine, that's another five or six bowls! I'll warrant you can't manage that."
"I don't care if it's more than six bowls, just bring it!"
"You're such a big man," said the innkeeper, "if you pass out, how are we ever going to carry you?"
"If I needed the likes of you to carry me, I wouldn't call myself a man at all!"
But the innkeeper still didn't want to bring the wine.
Wu Song began to lose his temper. "It's not as if I'm not paying you for it. If you don't stop trying to provoke me, I'll smash the place up, I'll turn your bloody house upside down!"
"The bugger's drunk, I'd better humour him," the innkeeper said to himself. And he brought another six bowls, all of which Wu Song drank.
Having consumed altogether no less than eighteen bowls, Wu Song now grasped his cudgel, rose to his feet and saying: "Who says I'm drunk?", marched out of the door. "And you can forget all that stuff about 'Three bowls, forget the pass'," he shouted back.
So off he went, brandishing his cudgel.
But then the innkeeper was chasing after him, crying: "Sir, sir, where do you think you're a-going to?"
Wu Song halted and said: "What are you shouting about? I've paid for everything, haven't I? Why all this song and dance?"
"I'm only trying to help," the innkeeper said. "You'd better come back inside and read the government notice."

"What government notice?"
"There's been this big tiger, see, recently, a monster with bulging eyes and a white forehead, up there in the Jingyang Pass. He comes out to attack people at night. Done for twenty or thirty good men already, he has. The hunters are under orders to trap him, there's a deadline set by the government. And there's signs posted up in all the approaches to the pass, warning travellers to form groups if they want to cross, and only to go morning, noon or afternoon. It's forbidden to cross at any other time. And what's more, single travellers are supposed to wait till there's a group. 'Tis late now, it'll soon be night, and when I saw you walk off like that, without a word to anyone, I said to myself, 'he's just throwing his life away.' You'd much better spend the night here. Tomorrow you can wait till a sufficient number's gathered, and then you all cross the pass together."
Wu Song laughed this suggestion to scorn. "I'm from the region," he said, "and I've crossed this pass a score of times. Who ever heard of a tiger there? It's no good thinking you can frighten me with that sort of shit. Anyway, even if there is a tiger, I'm not afraid of it!"
"I'm telling you what's good for you! If you don't believe me, come inside and take a look at the government notice."
"Balls! I tell you, if there really is a tiger, it doesn't scare me. What you want is to get me to stay in your house so you can come in the middle of the night and rob me of my money and my life. That's why you're trying to intimidate me with some tale of a fucking tiger!"
"Well I never! Here's me, out of the kindness of my heart, trying to help him, and all he does is twist my words around to give them a bad meaning. All right, if you don't believe me, just go ahead!" It was like this, you see:

*Of those that went before, a thousand came to grief;*
*That the next will safely pass is surely beyond belief!*
*In pointing out the facts nothing but kindness is meant;*
*But the fool with his suspicions imagines an ill intent!*

Shaking his head, the innkeeper stepped back inside.
Wu Song picked up his cudgel and strode off towards the Jingyang Pass. After little more than a mile, he arrived at the foot of the pass. Here he saw a big tree, with a white patch where the bark had been stripped off to make room for two lines of writing. Wu Song was a passable reader. He raised his eyes and read:
*In view of the recent attacks by a tiger in the Jingyang Pass, travellers are advised to make the crossing only in the morning, at noon, or in the afternoon, and furthermore to organize themselves into groups for the said crossing. Ignore this advice at your peril!*
Wu Song did not take it seriously. "It must be a trick by that scoundrel of an innkeeper to frighten travellers into staying at his inn. That sort of bullshit won't scare me!" he said, and with his cudgel at the slope he began to climb the pass.
By now the afternoon was drawing on and the sun's red disk was starting to sink behind the mountains. But Wu Song, spurred on by the wine he had drunk, was determined to conquer that pass. He had not gone more than a few hundred yards, however, when he came upon a tumbledown little temple dedicated to the spirits of the mountain. Approaching, he saw that there was a notice bearing an official seal fixed to the door. He paused to read it. It said:
*Yanggu district office announces that due to the recent appearance of a fierce man-eating tiger and the fact that the local hunters commissioned to trap it have not yet succeeded in their objective, all merchants and travellers are accordingly advised not to attempt the crossing of the pass except between the hours of nine and three, and furthermore single travellers are not to attempt the journey alone, lest they perish in the process. Traveller take heed!*
After reading this, Wu Song realized that there was indeed a tiger. At first he thought of turning back and going to the inn but then he said to himself: "If I go back there, I'll have to endure his mockery. It'll look as if I'm scared. So I can't very well turn back." He turned it over in his mind for a while and then concluded: "What the hell am I afraid of? I'll just go on and see what happens."
So on he went. And as the wine began to mount to his head, he took off his hat and strung it on his back, and tucked the cudgel under his arm. Step by step, he trudged on up the pass. Turning to look at the sun, he saw that it was slowly setting. This was real November weather, when the days are short and the nights long, and it's easy for nightfall to catch you unawares. "What's all this nonsense about a big tiger," Wu Song was muttering to himself. "People are scared of the mountain that's all, they don't have the guts to climb it."
He walked on a bit further and the wine began to make itself felt still more. He was feeling hot, so holding his cudgel in one hand he used the other to loosen his clothing and bare his chest. He was swaying and stumbling as he advanced towards a dense thicket. There happened to be a smooth black boulder here, so he laid his cudgel aside and sank down to rest upon the boulder. He was just drifting off to sleep when there came a fierce gust of wind. There's an old four-line verse that exactly describes this wind:

*Formless and invisible, it strikes to a man's heart;*
*It comes in any season and it blows all things apart;*
*Sweeping through the autumn woods it strips the branches bare,*
*Whistling among mountain peaks, it fills with clouds the air.*

For clouds, as we all know, originate with dragons, and wind is associated with tigers.
When the gust had passed, he heard something crashing through the trees and out sprang an enormous tiger, with bulging eyes and a white forehead. When Wu Song saw this a horrified "Aiya!" broke from his lips. He rolled off the boulder and grabbing his cudgel dodged behind it.
Now the tiger was ravenous. It struck the ground with two paws and sprang upwards, intending to land on its prey like a thunderbolt. Wu Song had such a shock that he felt all the wine start out of him in an icy sweat!
It's slow in the telling but happens in a flash. When he saw the tiger spring, Wu Song leapt out of the way, ending up behind it. That's exactly what the tiger didn't like, to have a man at its back. Thrusting upward off its front paws, it flexed its back and twisted round to pounce again. But again Wu Song dodged to one side. Failing to grasp its prey, the tiger gave a roar like half the heavens exploding, a roar that seemed to shake the very mountains, and lashed out at Wu Song with its tail, rigid as a steel bar. Once more Wu Song leapt aside.
Now when the tiger attacks a man, it generally has these three strategies: the spring, the pounce and the tail-swipe. When all these three methods failed, this tiger's spirit was half broken. After failing to catch Wu Song with its tail it gave a loud roar and turned away. Seeing the tiger had turned its back on him, Wu Song grasped his cudgel in both hands and brought it down with all the strength of his body. There was a resounding crash.
But what he had done was demolish a whole tree, branches and all. He looked for the tiger. His staff had not even touched it. He'd rushed his stroke and all he'd achieved was to bring down a dead tree. Now his cudgel was broken in two and he was left with only the broken half in his hand.
The tiger roared, it was enraged, it turned and sprang at him again. Wu Song leapt back, covering ten paces in a single bound. The tiger reared up on its hind legs and came at him with all its claws out. Wu Song threw away his broken stick and suddenly grabbing the tiger's striped neck with his bare hands began forcing it down to the ground. The beast tried to struggle but all Wu Song's strength was employed against it, not for a moment did he relax his grip. With his legs he delivered fearful kicks to its nose and eyes. The tiger roared furiously, and as it thrashed about under this onslaught its paws churned up two mounds of mud. Wu Song thrust the beast's head down into the mud and irresistibly its power began to ebb. Still gripping the striped coat tightly with his left hand, Wu Song managed to work his right hand free and began raining down blows with an iron fist, hammering the beast with all his might. He got in fifty or sixty blows, till from the tiger's eyes, mouth, nose and ears the red blood began to gush.
With all the power of the heroes of old, by the sheer force of his manly spirit, Wu Song was able easily to convert that savage monster into a senseless heap, for all the world like an embroidered bag. There's a traditional account of this:

*On Jingyang Pass a sudden squall,*
*Day hides its face in a thick black pall;*
*Twilight cloaks the desolate wold,*
*And a deadly chill pervades the world.*
*A sound like thunder splits the ears*
*As the king of beasts on the slope appears.*
*He proudly bounds, teeth and claws on show,*
*Filling the antlered tribe with woe.*
*The Qinghe hero, still half tight,*
*Waits alone but ready to fight.*
*To watch that man-eater hunt a meal,*
*Crouch and spring ... it would make you squeal!*
*He falls on the man like an avalanche,*
*But the man's a cliff, he doesn't flinch;*
*He grips with the force of a missile crashing —*
*And the tiger's paws in the mud are thrashing.*
*Blows and kicks, a relentless flood,*
*Both hands soaked in the crimson blood.*
*Dreadful carnage! On the blood-soaked ground*
*Fur and whiskers are strewn around.*
*There it lies now, bright stripes fading,*
*Sprawled among weeds, the wild eyes clouding.*

Now what Wu Song on the mountain provided for that savage tiger, in less time than it takes to eat a simple meal, was a surfeit of blows and kicks: he beat the beast senseless. For a moment it lay helpless, faintly panting. Then Wu Song let go and went to find the broken end of his cudgel. With this, fearing lest the tiger revive, he belabored it a while longer, till the breath was quite gone out of it.
"I might as well drag the carcass down the mountain," he decided. But when he thrust his hands into the bleeding mass and started pulling, he could not shift it. All he did was exhaust himself, till his arms and legs began to fail. So he went back to the black boulder and sat down to rest for a while. Presently he said to himself: "It's getting quite dark now. If another tiger should appear, I don't think I'd be able to cope. I'd better try and get down off the pass. I can come back and deal with this thing in the morning." He picked up his hat that had fallen beside the boulder, and skirting round the thickest part of the forest, set off at a steady pace down the mountain.
He had hardly gone half a mile when he saw, emerging from a thick patch of tall dry grass, two tigers! "Aiya!" he cried, "now I'm finished!" Then in the shadows the two tigers rose on their hind legs, and when Wu Song looked carefully, it was two men who had sewn themselves suits made out of tiger skins, fitting tightly to their bodies. They carried five-tined forks.
They were shocked to see Wu Song. "Have you the courage of a wild beast, a leopard's gall, a tiger's claws?" they said. "Have you a heart so big it won't fit in your body, that you dare, alone in the dark of night and unarmed, to cross the pass? Are you a man or a ghost?"
"Who are you?" Wu Song asked in return.
"We are the hunters," they replied.
"And why are you headed this way, up the mountain?"
They registered amazement. "Haven't you heard? There's a truly enormous tiger, right here in Jingyang Pass. Every night someone is attacked. Seven or eight of our fellows, hunters that is, have lost their lives already, and countless travellers, all devoured by this terrible monster. The Magistrate has made the local authorities and us hunters responsible for capturing it. But it's incredibly ferocious and dangerous to approach, no one dares get too near. We've had I don't know how many beatings on account of this but we just can't catch him. It's our turn again tonight. We've got a few dozen villagers here to back us up. We've put down traps everywhere, loaded with poisoned darts. We had just finished setting our ambush. Imagine our surprise when we saw you strolling down the mountain. Who are you? Did you see the tiger?"
"I'm from Qinghe, my name is Wu and I'm the second in my family. Yes, I ran into the tiger, in a pretty wild part of the mountain too, and I've just beaten it to death."
The hunters' jaws fell open. "Are you joking?" they said.
"If you don't believe it, look at all the blood on me."
"But how did you kill it?"
Wu Song recounted his exploit with the tiger. The hunters were as relieved as they were astonished. They called the villagers, who now came crowding forward, a dozen or more of them, carrying steel-tined forks, foot-bows, knives and spears.
"Why didn't these troops go with you up the mountain?" Wu Song asked the hunters.
"Catch them going up there, with a ferocious beast like that on the loose!" the latter replied.
When the hunters told the villagers that Wu Song had killed the tiger they didn't believe it.
"If you don't trust me, let's all go and have a look," Wu Song said. They had flints and tinder boxes with them, so they lit half a dozen torches and followed Wu Song back up the mountain. There was the dead tiger, sprawled in a heap. Immediately there was great rejoicing. One of the villagers was sent on ahead to inform the district authorities, while the others put a rope round the tiger and carried it down the mountain.
When they reached the bottom a crowd had already gathered. They proceeded on, the tiger going in front and Wu Song now being carried in a mountain palanquin, till they reached the house of a local bigwig. This personage, accompanied by the Magistrate, was waiting for them outside the gate. The tiger was carried to the main hall. Everyone of any standing in the district had come to see Wu Song, and so had all the local hunters, so there were twenty or thirty people all told.
"Won't you please tell us your name and where you come from?" they said to Wu Song.
"My name's Wu Song and I'm the second in my family. I was on my way home from Cangzhou. Last night I stayed at the inn on the other side of the pass and got rather drunk. When I climbed the pass there was this tiger." Once more he gave a detailed account of his pugilistic exploits with the tiger.
"My! This is a real hero!" the audience said.
Wu Song was now offered wine and the hunters produced dishes of game to go with it. Wu Song was exhausted from his fight with the tiger and the master of the house, after telling the servants to prepare a guest-room, urged him to go and lie down.
Next day at dawn the head of the household sent someone to the Magistracy with a report. A frame was constructed for carrying the tiger. As soon as it was fully light Wu Song got up and washed. The important people of the village brought a sheep and a barrel of wine that was served in front of the main hall. Wu Song dressed and put on his hat and came out to meet everyone. They toasted him and said: "Heaven knows how many people this beast injured, or how many hunters suffered floggings because of it. Now at last a hero has appeared and rid us of the menace. What a relief, both for the people of this village and for all travellers, who can now complete their journey in safety! We really owe you a lot!"
"It is not through any merit of my own," said Wu Song modestly. "I must have acted in the shadow of your good fortune."
Everyone had come to congratulate him. When they had breakfasted and drunk wine the tiger was carried out and placed on the frame, while Wu Song was garlanded with a piece of red silk. Wu Song left his bundle and other things in the village, and they all departed through the gate. Immediately some police officers from Yanggu appeared, with orders to escort Wu Song. After some introductions, four servants were instructed to carry Wu Song in an open sedan, while the tiger was borne along in front, draped in red cloth. Thus they proceeded to Yanggu.
The people of Yanggu, having heard about a hero killing the tiger of the Jingyang Pass, all turned out to cheer. The whole district was in an uproar. From his sedan Wu Song saw them pushing and shoving, packing every street and alley, everyone eager for a glimpse of the tiger. The procession reached the government offices and stopped at the entrance to the court. The Magistrate was already in the courtroom, waiting to receive them. Wu Song alighted and the bearers set the tiger down on a raised walkway. The Magistrate, having observed Wu Song's manly aspect and seeing the tiger was such a magnificent specimen, said to himself: "Who but such a fellow could have finished off that enormous animal?" When Wu Song had saluted, the Magistrate said: "Come now, do tell us all about how you killed such a mighty beast."
So Wu Song told his story all over again, in the courtroom. Everyone present heard him with amazement. Toasts were drunk in his honour and he was presented with some money collected by the local dignitaries as a reward, a thousand strings of cash in all. But Wu Song modestly said: "I am simply enjoying the reflection of your good fortune, Your Excellency. I was just lucky to kill the tiger, it was not through any merit of my own. How can I accept this money? I have heard that the hunters here suffered sanctions on account of the tiger. Might we not divide the money and give it to them?"
"If that is your wish," the Magistrate said. "I leave it to you to arrange it."
Wu Song distributed the money among the hunters, and the Magistrate, impressed by Wu Song's open-handedness and humanity, decided he would like to secure his advancement. "Although you are from Qinghe," he said, "that's right next to us here at Yanggu. I would like to offer you a commission in our forces. What do you say?"
Wu Song knelt to thank him. "I shall be forever in your debt for this, Your Excellency," he said.
Accordingly, the Magistrate called the registrar and had him write out the order appointing Wu Song with immediate effect a captain of foot. All the important members of the community came to offer their congratulations and there were celebrations lasting several days. Wu Song thought to himself: "Really, it's amazing. I merely wanted to go home to see my brother, and now here I am, an officer in the Yanggu militia!" From that day on he was honoured by all and his fame spread throughout the district.
Several days had passed, and then one day as Wu Song left the government offices in search of amusement, he heard someone call out behind him: "Captain Wu, you've made your fortune now, is that why you don't come to see me?"
When Wu Song turned and saw who it was, he let out a cry: "Aiya! what are you doing here?"
Had Wu Song not met this person, things would have turned out very differently, and Yanggu would not have witnessed a scene of terrible carnage. As a result of the meeting,

*Blades will whistle and heads will roll,*
*Bright swords be drawn and the hot blood flow.*

We have already related how Song Jiang, in order to avoid drinking more wine, went outside to the toilet and while on the veranda he upset the charcoal brazier, and burnt a man, and how this resulted in Song Jiang's name being disclosed to the man. When the man heard Song Jiang's name how could he get up after kowtowing? He said, "I failed to recognize your eminence and I hope that you will forgive me for that blunder."

Song Jiang raised him up and asked who he was.
"This man," said Chai Jin, "is Wu Song of Qinghe County, and he is a second son. He has lived here for a year."
"I have often heard of Wu the Second but I did not expect to meet him here today. What a good luck!" said Song Jiang.
"It is very unusual for heroes to meet in this way. I request you both to come and have some wine with me," said Chai Jin.
Song Jiang was much pleased at this and taking Wu Song by the hand conducted him to the hall where he summoned Song Qing and introduced him to Wu Song. Chai Jin then invited Wu Song to be seated, and Song Jiang strongly urged him to take the premier position at the table. But Wu Song was unwilling to take the place of honour, and after politely declining for a long time he at last took his seat in the third position. Chai Jin ordered the servants to spread a feast with wine, and when ready he strongly pressed his guests to partake the same.
Song Jiang was exceedingly pleased with the manner and bearing of Wu Song, and at last he asked him why he was staying there.
"While I was at Qinghe County I got drunk and had a fight with some official. I struck him with my fist while I was in a very hot temper, and knocked him nearly insensible. I thought I had killed him, so in order to avoid being arrested I ran away to this place for refuge where I have stayed for more than a year. Afterwards I heard that the man I had struck had not died—he was still alive. I would have liked to return home and find my elder brother but I felt ill and was unable to go. When you overturned the charcoal brazier on the veranda I was very much alarmed, and had a heavy cold perspiration but I think that had cured my sickness."
Song Jiang was much pleased upon hearing this. The feast lasted till nearly midnight. Then Song Jiang took Wu Song to a very comfortable room on the west side where they both slept that night. The next day Chai Jin arranged another feast at which a sheep and a pig were served.
After a few days Song Jiang gave Wu Song some money to buy clothing. When Chai Jin heard of this he wondered how he could let it be done. So he took some rolls of silk and satin, and told his own family tailor to make three suits for them. But Chai Jin had not made such a present before so why did he do it now?
The reason was that when Wu Song first came there for refuge he had been treated as a guest but he was often drunk. Whenever the servants did not treat him well he would become angry and beat them, and therefore there was not a single servant who had a good word for him. They all hated him, and often complained to Chai Jin about his conduct. But Chai Jin would not speak to him about this and only became more distant in his manner towards his guest. When Song Jiang came he sought out Wu Song, and they used to drink wine in each other's company everyday. Soon Wu Song's bad temper had vanished. After about ten days of this mutual friendship Wu Song thought of returning to Qinghe County to visit his elder brother. He was pressed not to go by Chai Jin and Song Jiang but after a little time he spoke to them saying," I have not heard from my elder brother for a long time so I must go and see him."
"As you want to go," said Song Jiang, "we do not wish to upset you by detaining you. But I hope that we shall meet again at some future date."
Wu Song expressed his thanks, and Chai Jin gave him some gold and silver. Wu Song again expressed his thanks, and regretted that he had given them so much trouble. After a parting cup Wu Song made up his bundle, and slung it on his back. He wore a red silk-quilted coat similar to those worn by monks, and had a white felt cap which was made in broad brimmed style. He carried a cudgel in his hand.
Just as he was about to depart Song Jiang asked him to wait a bit, and then went into his own room, and taking some silver met Wu Song at the gate saying, "I will accompany you for a short distance." Song Qing also came with his brother Song Jiang and as the three were taking leave of Chai Jin, Song Jiang said, "Sir, I shall be gone only for a short distance."
When the three had travelled about a couple of *li* Wu Song urged the brothers to return as Chai Jin would undoubtedly be getting anxious.
"What objection can there be for us to go a few steps further?" said Song Jiang.
So they went on for about a *li* more chatting on the way, and then Wu Song took Song Jiang by the hand and said, "You must not come any further. People often say, 'Even if you accompany a guest three hundred *li* you must at last come to the parting place.'"
"I will go a few steps further," said Song Jiang. "Just over there, there is a small inn where we can drink a few cups of wine before parting."
When they reached the inn Song Jiang took the seat of honour, and Wu Song took the lower position after placing his cudgel by his chair. Song Qing sat at the side of the table. They told the waiter to bring fruit and vegetables which were duly supplied. After they had been drinking wine for some time they noticed the red hues of sunset, and Wu Song said, "It is getting late and we had better separate and I will give you four salutations as my adopted elder brother." Song Jiang was much pleased. Wu Song kowtowed four times, and Song Jiang then told his brother Song Qing to take ten taels of silver and presented it to Wu Song. But Wu Song declined to accept it, and asked them to reserve it for they themselves were guests at another's home.
"You must not be so anxious about us, younger brother," said Song Jiang. "If you decline it I cannot recognize you as my younger brother."
So Wu Song took the money. He then shouldered his bundle, and taking his cudgel the three walked hand in hand to the door where they separated with tears in the eyes. The brothers stood at the door of the inn until Wu Song could no longer be seen, and then they departed for home. When they had gone less than two *li* they met Chai Jin riding a horse, and leading two spare ones to welcome them home. They were highly delighted at this, and mounted. They soon reached the village. Upon dismounting they all went into a hall at the back where they drank wine, and after this the two brothers stayed with Chai Jin.
When Wu Song left the brothers he travelled some distance, and then rested for the night at an inn. The next morning after an early breakfast he started on the road again. As he walked he ruminated that all men had said that the 'Welcome Rain,' Song Jiang, was truly a fine man, and he had certainly been well treated by him. After a few days he was approaching Yanggu County about noon when he felt very hungry and thirsty.
Just then he happened to see an inn with a signboard over the door with five characters, meaning, "If you drink three cups of our wine you will be unable to cross the mountain ridge."
Wu Song entered the inn, took his seat, placed his cudgel by his side, and called the proprietor to bring some wine. The proprietor put before him three cups, a tray with some cooked vegetables, and a pair of chopsticks. The proprietor then slowly fill a cup with wine. Wu Song picked up the cup and drank the wine off saying, "This wine is very strong. I wish to have some food, to take with more wine."
"I have some roast beef," said the proprietor.
"That is fine. Bring me about three *jin* of beef."
The proprietor soon brought in a plate of beef and setting it before Wu Song, he again poured out a cup of wine. Wu Song drank the wine and again praised it. The proprietor filled another cup, and then left him.
As the proprietor had not returned Wu Song banged the table and called out. "Proprietor, why do you not serve more wine?"
"If you want more beef I can let you have some," said the man.
"I want wine as well as beef."
"I can give you beef but no more wine," said the man.
"That is strange!" said Wu Song. "Why don't you give me wine while I can pay for it?"
"Did you not see the signboard over the door of this inn?" asked the man.
"What is the idea of such a signboard?" asked Wu Song.
"Although our wine is made here yet it has a very delicate flavour," said the man. "Whenever a guest arrives and drinks three cups of this wine he always gets drunk so that he cannot go over the mountain ridge, and that is why I put up that signboard. When guests stop here they never ask for more than three cups of wine."
"That is the case," said Wu Song laughingly. "But how is it that I am not drunk after three cups?"
"Our wine is called 'The Aroma Penetrates The Bottle,' and also has another name that means 'Upon Leaving The Door You Will Fall Down.' While drinking, it has a fine flavour but in a short time afterwards you will fall down."
"Don't talk nonsense," said Wu Song. "I won't cheat you; I'll pay you, so bring me three more cups of wine."
The proprietor saw that he was not in the least affected by the wine so he filled three more cups.
After drinking Wu Song said, "It is really very fine. I want you to keep on pouring out the wine, and I will pay you for each cup I drink."
"Sir, please give up the idea of drinking any more or you will undoubtedly be drunk, and there is no medicine to prevent it."
"You need not speak such rubbish," said Wu Song. "If you put some drug in the wine I should soon detect it."
The innkeeper could find no answer to this so he poured out three more cups of wine.
Wu Song ordered a further three *jin* of beef. The innkeeper brought in the cold beef and again poured out three cups of wine. Wu Song drank the wine but still wanted more. So he took out his silver and showing it to the innkeeper asked, "Look at this. Is it enough for your wine and beef?"
"More than enough!" said the innkeeper. "Let me have it and I will give you the balance."
"I do not want any change," said Wu Song. "You can pay me the balance in wine."
"Sir," said the innkeeper, "you have had a lot of wine but I still have five or six cups full left. But I am afraid that you will not be able to drink so much."
"As you have about five cups of wine more you can let me have the whole lot," said Wu Song.
"You are a very big man," said the innkeeper, "and how am I going to lift you up when you fall down dead drunk?"
"I should not be a man, should I want you to help me up," said Wu Song.
But the innkeeper was unwilling to pour and any more wine, so Wu Song spoke in an angry tone, "Have I not paid you for the wine! Do not provoke me to anger or I shall smash the whole room to pieces, and turn your inn upside down."
The innkeeper saw that Wu Song was drunk so he decided not to oppose him and poured out all the six cups of wine. Altogether Wu Song drank eighteen cups of wine, and then picking up his cudgel he got up and said, "I am not drunk yet!" He walked to the door laughing, and proceeded on his way.
The innkeeper however called after him, "Sir, where are you going?"
"Why do you call me?" replied Wu Song. "Have I not paid you for the wine?"
"I have a good intention for you," said the innkeeper. "I want you o come to my home and look at a copy of an official proclamation."
"What is the proclamation about?" asked Wu Song.
"Just now there is, on Jingyang Ridge, a large animal with a white forehead and protruding eyes. It comes out in the evening, and has already killed about thirty men, and injured many others. The magistrate has enjoined upon the hunters to catch the animal by a certain time. At all crossroads there is a notice warning travellers of the danger, and ordering them to band themselves together when crossing the ridge. Travellers must cross the ridge only between the hours of 9 A.M. and 3 P.M. and not at any other time. So that, as you are by yourself you must wait and join with some other travellers before you can cross the ridge. It is now well past three o'clock and yet I see you walking off without asking anyone to go with you, and evidently you are running the risk of your life. It will be better if you stay here for the night, and go over the ridge tomorrow in the company of about thirty men."
"I am a Qinghe County man," laughed Wu Song, "and although I have been across the Jingyang Ridge about twenty times I have never seen or heard of a big animal there. So you need not say shit like this just to frighten me. And even if there is a beast I am not afraid of it."
"I only wanted to save your life," said the innkeeper "If you do not believe what I say then come inside and read the official proclamation."
"Bullshit," said Wu Song. "Even if there is a tiger I shall not be afraid. I suppose if I pass the night at your inn you may try to get my money during the night, and perhaps kill me. That is why you now make up this story to frighten me and keep me here."
"Look here!" said the innkeeper. "I am taking good care of you, yet you think I have bad intention. If you do not believe what I say then go your own way." While saying this he shook his head with regret, and entered his inn.
Wu Song picked up his cudgel and started off for the Jingyang Ridge. After walking about two *li* he reached the foot of the ridge, and there he saw a large tree which had had its bark taken away, and on the white timber were two columns of characters written. It was to the same effect as the official proclamation.
On reading it Wu Song laughed and said, "That innkeeper is a clever one. Frighten travellers so that they will stay at his inn. But I am not afraid of that shit." Dragging his cudgel along the ground he proceeded on his way. It was about four o'clock, and the sun was slowly sinking behind the ridge, setting the sky in a red evening glow. The large quantities of wine he had drunk had driven all fear away so he proceeded on his way. He had only gone a little distance when he saw a ruined temple, and on the door was another notice so he went forward and read it. It warned travellers of the danger of crossing the ridge.
So Wu Song at last realized that there was a tiger to be faced, and his first thought was to return to the inn. But he saw in that case the innkeeper would only laugh at him, and regard him as a coward—so that would not do. But after a second thought, he said to himself, "Why be afraid? Why not face the danger?" He went on but soon vomited the wine he had taken. He then took his cap, and pushed it on his back suspended by the tapes. He put his cudgel under his arm, and slowly ascended the ridge. Turning his head he saw that the sun had now sunk to the west. It was now the tenth lunar month so that the autumn days were short, the nights long, and the sunset was soon followed by darkness.
He soliloquized, "Where is that tiger that men are so afraid of that they dare not cross the ridge?" He went a little further, and now felt the effect of the wine. So taking the cudgel in one hand he unloosened his coat with the other hand. Staggering along he entered the forest. He came across a large block of smooth green stone against which he put his cudgel. He then reclined on the stone with the intention of sleeping there. Just then a strong wind sprang up, and he heard a sound among the trees, and at the same moment a large tiger sprang out. With an exclamation he rolled off the stone, seized his cudgel, and slipped to one side of the stone. The tiger was both hungry and thirsty, and crouched on the ground ready for a spring. As the tiger sprang forward Wu Song was startled, and was covered with a cold sweat but slipping to one side he escaped. The tiger immediately turned round, and roared like thunder, so that the ridge almost quaked.
The tiger's tail was erect and stiff as a poker, and was lashed from side to side in rage. Wu Song did not keep still but kept moving about irregularly. In fact the tiger had only three methods of killing men, a crouch, a leap, and a blow with its tail. If these three failed, the tiger at once lost all courage or spirit. In such cases it always turned round, and gave a loud roar. When Wu Song saw it turning round he seized his cudgel with both hands, and using the utmost of his strength he whirled it aloft, and brought it down with a crash. There was a great noise followed by a fall of leaves and twigs from the dense undergrowth. Wu Song saw that he had missed the tiger, and simply in his haste had hit the undergrowth. As his long cudgel was broken in half, he threw a part away. The tiger roared again, crouched, and again leapt at Wu Song. Wu Song again swiftly stepped to one side. The tiger whirled round and came just in front of Wu Song and planted its forepaws on the ground. Wu Song threw the remaining half of the cudgel away, and seized the tiger's forehead skin with both hands, and pressed the tiger down on the ground. The tiger struggled to get up but Wu Song exerted all his strength, and would not let it go the least bit. He kicked it in the eyes. This made the tiger roar, and scoop out holes in the yellow soil with its front paws. Wu Song now pressed the tiger's snout into the hole in the ground, and it had to endure this disgrace as it was losing its strength. Wu Song now grasped the loose skin on the tiger's head in his left hand, and taking his right fist hit the tiger severely.
After about seventy blows blood streamed out of the tiger's eyes, mouth, nose, and ears, and the beast lay panting for breath. Wu Song left it for a moment, and went to get a part of his cudgel. As he was afraid that the tiger was not yet dead he dealt the tiger some blows for some time until he saw evidently that it was no longer alive. He thereupon threw away his cudgel and wondered whether he should drag the tiger down the mountain. The body lay in a pool of blood, and using both hands he tried to move it but he found that it was too heavy. He had used up all his strength so that he now felt weak in hand and foot. So he sat down on the green smooth stone for a short rest, and meditated that the night was quite dark now, and what could he do if another tiger were to attack him. So he decided to leave the ridge and return the following day for the tiger's body. He looked around and found his felt cap, and then started down the mountain.
He had not gone far when he saw two tigers emerging from the dry grass. "*Ai Ya!*" he said. "That's all gone now." But he noticed that the two tigers now stood up on their hind legs, and looking closely he saw that they were two men who had fastened tiger skins very closely on their bodies, and carried in their hands five-pronged forks.
They were surprised at seeing Wu Song, and said, "You... you ... you... , you must have eaten the heart of a wolf, the gall bladder of a leopard, and the legs of a lion so that your whole body becomes a mass of courage. How dare you to cross the ridge during the night without a single weapon in your hand. You... . you... . you... . are you a man or a demon?"
"But who are you?" asked Wu Song.
"We are hunters," replied the men.
"And what are you doing on this mountain?" asked Wu Song.
The men were surprised at such a question and asked, "Do you mean to say that you do not know? On this mountain there is a dangerous tiger which attacks men at night, and has already injured eight hunters, and numerous travellers have been killed. The county magistrate has ordered us, and also the village chief, to come here to catch the tiger. But its strength is so great that it is difficult to come near it. Who dare face it? The magistrate has beaten us repeatedly for not catching the tiger but it makes no difference. Tonight we have come here, accompanied by ten men from the villages, and we are all over the mountain, armed with poisoned arrows, waiting for the tiger. Just here we lay in ambush when we saw you coming from the mountain as bold as brass, and it gave us quite a start. Who are you? Have you seen the tiger?"
"I am a Qinghe County man, and my name is Wu Song. When I got up the mountain I met the tiger, and killed it with my fist and foot."
"It is impossible," said the hunters aghastly.
"You do not believe," said Wu Song. "But do you see the bloodstains on my clothes?"
"But how did you kill it?"
Wu Song then gave them all the details of his fighting with the tiger.
The hunters were both amazed and amused, and then summoned the ten villagers. The villagers soon arrived and armed with pronged forks, crossbows, broad swords, and spears.
"How is it that these men did not stay with you here?" asked Wu Song.
The hunters said, "The animal was very fierce, so how could they dare to come on the mountain?"
When the villagers had all assembled in front of them, the hunters asked Wu Song to recite to them how he had killed the tiger. He did so but they did not believe what he said.
"Well," said Wu Song, "if you do not believe then I will go, and show you the dead animal."
The villagers had flint and steel, and they then used them to strike lights and ignite torches. They went with Wu Song, and soon came to the top of the ridge where they were shown the dead tiger. They were highly delighted, and immediately sent men to report the matter to the chief of the district. The men who were left behind, tied up the carcass, and carried it on their shoulders down the mountain. At the foot of the mountain there were already about eighty men waiting for them, and they made an uproar when they saw the dead tiger. They carried the tiger in front and put Wu Song in a sedan chair. The whole party then started off to the nearest village reporting to the headman there.
Upon arriving there, there were two village heads waiting outside the village to welcome them. The party was conducted to the main room of a cottage where the other hunters of the village and about thirty other men all came to have an interview with Wu Song. He then told them in detail his recent adventure.
They all declared that he was a very brave hero, and brought him some food and wine. But Wu Song was very tired, and wanted to rest. So the servants were told to prepare a bedroom for him where he slept that night.
The next morning a messenger was dispatched to report the matter to the county magistrate and a litter was prepared to carry the tiger's body to the town.
When Wu Song got up and had washed his face, he found in front of the building a large number of men bringing a sheep and a jar of wine which they offered to him as their gifts. They said, "We do not know exactly how many people that beast has killed, or how many bamboo blows our hunters have received but now you have killed the tiger, and our trouble has come an end. We are very happy indeed. Moreover, the travellers can go without danger, and all this is due to your bounteous action."

"It was not due to my skill but was owing to your fortune," replied Wu Song.
The people all saluted him. After an exhilarating feast which lasted all the morning they placed the tiger's body on the litter which was ready. They made garland of silk and red flowers for Wu Song. They were about to start off from the village. A deputy of the county magistrate had already arrived to conduct Wu Song to the court. Four men were sent with a cool sedan chair to convey Wu Song to the court. The litter with the tiger's carcass was in front of the procession and it was also decorated with red flowers and pieces of silk. When the people of the town heard of the great hero who had killed a tiger on the mountain they all crowded to see him, and made such a noise that it could be heard all over the district. Wu Song in his chair saw all the streets were blocked with noisy crowds which were eager to have a look at the tiger. Upon reaching the *yamen* gate, he saw the county magistrate waiting in the hall. The litter and the sedan chair were carried to the court, and laid in the corridor in front of the door.
The magistrate noticed the manner of Wu Song, and also the size of the tiger. He thought that Wu Song was the only person who could kill such a tiger. He summoned Wu Song to come forward. Wu Song approached and called out "*nuo*." The magistrate invited him inside where Wu Song recited his adventure. There was a large crowd of men both inside and outside the hall. They all listened to Wu Song and were greatly astonished. The magistrate offered several cups of wine to Wu Song, and also a gift of one thousand strings of cash which had been subscribed by the wealthy families of the district.
"I am grateful to you for this blessing, sir," said Wu Song. "I was fortunate in killing the tiger, and as it was not due to my own abilities, how dare I accept such generous presents? I have heard that these hunters have been beaten with the bamboo, so why not compensate them with these strings of cash?"
"As you, the hero, suggest this, it can be done as you wish," said the magistrate.
So Wu Song took the strings of cash, and distributed them among the hunters.
When the magistrate saw the noble, virtuous, and benevolent character of Wu Song he wished to recommend him for an official post. So he said to him, "You are a Qinghe County man, and as that place is quite close here I offer you the position of Inpector in this *yamen*. What do you say about that?"
Wu Song knelt down and said, "As you wish to reward me in this way I shall be obliged to you for my life."
The magistrate instructed his secretary to make out the necessary papers, and Wu Song received his commission in the police as an Inspector.
The rich families saluted him, and offered their congratulations, and during the following five days they continually entertained him with wine.
Wu Song meditated that, at first, he had the idea to find his elder brother but it was detained by being made a Inspector at this place. The magistrate liked him, and his fame was widespread in every village.
One day when he was strolling outside the *yamen* he heard a voice behind him calling, "Inspector Wu! As you are an official now, can you not assist me?"
"*Ai Ya*!" exclaimed Wu Song when he turned round. "What are you doing here?"

If these heroes had not met,
Many men would not have died;
Swords would not have chopped off heads,
Nor blood have flown like water.

During the years of the Cheng-ho reign period[33] of Emperor Hui-tsung[34] of the Sung dynasty in Yang-ku district of Shantung Province, there was a man named Wu Chih who was the eldest sibling in his generation of the family. He had a younger brother, by the same mother, whose name was Wu Sung. This Wu Sung was more than six feet in stature and broad-shouldered as they come. From his youth he had cultivated his strength and become expert with the spear and quarterstaff. His brother, Wu the Elder, who was not quite three feet tall, was of a meek disposition and muddleheaded to a ridiculous degree. He was disposed to mind his own business and did not pick quarrels with anyone. Because of the hardship created by a famine in the locality, he decided that he would have to let his younger brother fend for himself, sold the house they had inherited from their forebears, and moved to the district town of Ch'ing-ho. Now at the time that this occurred Wu Sung, because he had beaten up the military affairs commissioner, T'ung Kuan, in a drunken brawl, found himself completely on his own. He had been forced to become a fugitive and had sought refuge on the manor of the Little Whirlwind, Ch'ai Chin that was located in the military prefecture of Heng-hai, in Ts'ang-chou. This Ch'ai Chin enjoyed patronizing the heroes and stout fellows of the world and was so chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth that people called him Little Lord Meng-ch'ang. [45] In fact, Master Ch'ai was a direct descendant of Ch'ai Jung, Emperor Shih-tsung of the Later Chou dynasty. [46] When Ch'ai Chin saw what a fine fellow Wu Sung was, he offered him a place to stay on his manor. But who could have anticipated that Wu Sung would come down with a case of malaria that required him to recuperate on the premises for more than a year? Upon his recovery he bethought himself of his brother, Wu the Elder, bade farewell to his host, and set out for home. After spending several days on the road, Wu Sung arrived on the border between Yang-ku and Ch'ing-ho districts. At that time there was a ridge of hills on the border of Shantung Province called Ching-yang Ridge, and in these hills there was a bulging-eyed, white-browed tiger who had eaten so many people that travellers along that route were few. The authorities had ordered the licensed hunters of the locality, on pain of being beaten, to capture this tiger by a fixed deadline. There were public notices posted on either side of the road warning traveling merchants to form into bands and cross over only between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M., and prohibiting them from crossing the ridge at any other time. When Wu Sung heard about this he laughed out loud and stopped at an inn by the side of the road for a few bowls of wine to bolster his courage. Then, with his quarterstaff at the ready, he staggered off, proceeding straight up the ridge in large strides. Before he had gone so far as half a li he saw another public notice, stamped with an official seal, posted on the gate of a temple to the tutelary god of the mountain. When Wu Sung looked at this notice he saw that the message read as follows: There is a tiger on Ching-yang Ridge that has recently attacked many people. At present, the responsible persons of the relevant sub-districts and the licensed hunters of the locality have been ordered to capture it by a fixed deadline, and the authorities have offered a reward of thirty taels of silver for its capture. If there should be any traveling merchants who wish to use this route, they should first form into bands and cross the ridge only between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. Passage over the ridge is prohibited at all other times, and unaccompanied travellers are forbidden to cross even during daylight hours. Be it known that anyone who disregards these instructions proceeds at his own risk. With a loud voice Wu Sung proclaimed, "What the hell's there to be afraid of anyway! I'll just go on up the ridge and see what kind of a tiger this is." Wu Sung tucked his quarterstaff under his arm and proceeded to stride up the ridge. He looked back and saw that the sun was slowly setting behind the mountains. It was the tenth month when the days were short and the nights long, so it got dark early. Wu Sung continued on his way for a while when he began to feel the effects of the wine. Looking into the distance he saw a tangled clump of trees. When he had made his way, at a fast clip, through this clump of trees he came upon a big, shiny, black rock, the shape of a reclining water buffalo. Propping his quarterstaff against the side of the rock, he laid himself down on top of it and prepared to take a nap. Just at this juncture, out of the blue sky, a strong gust of wind suddenly arose. What was this wind like? Behold, devoid of shape and form, it insinuates itself into men's chests; throughout the 4 seasons, it has the power to blow things into life. Touching the ground, it swirls away the yellow leaves; entering the mountains, it pushes out the white clouds. [47] It so happens that clouds arise in response to dragons; Winds arise in response to tigers.[48] As this gust of wind passed by, the yellow leaves from the clump of tangled trees fell to the ground with a rustling noise and, with a sudden roar, out jumped a ferocious striped tiger, as big as a water buffalo, with bulging eyes and a white forehead. When Wu Sung saw this he cried out, "Ai-ya!" rolled off the black rock, grabbed his quarterstaff, and made haste to put the rock between himself and his assailant.
The tiger was both hungry and thirsty. Pawing the ground with its front claws, it stretched itself and gave first one lash and then another with its tail. Then it gave a roar, like a dry clap of thunder out of the blue that made all the hills and ridges reverberate. Wu Sung's consternation had long since turned the wine in his stomach into cold sweat. The telling is slow; what happened was quick. When Wu Sung saw the tiger pounce at him, he dodged to one side so that the tiger overshot him. It so happens that this ferocious tiger had a short neck so that it was not easy for it to turn its head and look behind itself. Planting its front paws on the ground, it stretched its trunk and made a swipe at Wu Sung with its hindquarters. Wu Sung managed to jump to one side. When the tiger saw that it had failed to sideswipe Wu Sung it gave a roar that shook the ridge. But Wu Sung once again evaded it by dodging to one side. It so happens that when tigers attack people, if they fail to overcome them with a pounce, a sideswipe, or a lash of the tail, their powers are half-exhausted. When Wu Sung saw that the tiger's strength was failing, he turned around, swung his quarterstaff aloft with both hands, and brought it down with all the strength at his command. But the only thing he heard was a loud report and a thrashing noise as the branch of a tree, with all its leaves, came tumbling down in front of him. It so happens that he had not made contact with the tiger at all but had hit the branch of a tree so hard that his quarterstaff had broken in two, and only half of it was left in his hand. Wu Sung was more than a little disconcerted by this. The tiger gave vent to its wrath with a roar and, lashing its tail back and forth in a show of might, pounced at Wu Sung once again. With one leap Wu Sung leapt back some ten paces. The tiger's pounce fell short and its forepaws came to rest right in front of him. Wu Sung threw what was left of his quarterstaff to one side and took advantage of the inertia of the tiger's leap by stepping forward, grabbing hold of the skin on the crown of the tiger's head with both hands, and pressing its head down with all his might. The tiger tried to put up a fight but its strength was already failing. Wu Sung held on for all he was worth, not letting up to the slightest degree. Meanwhile, with his foot, he kicked viciously at the tiger's face and eyes. The tiger roared with pain and pawed so frantically that it heaped up two piles of brown dirt and dug a pit for itself. Wu Sung pressed its head down into the pit and, freeing his right hand, pummeled it with his fist, using all the strength at his command. In no time at all he had beaten the tiger to death. It lay on the ground like an embroidered bag, no longer able to move. There is an ancient-style poem describing Wu Sung's fight with the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge that goes:

On top of Ching-yang Ridge the wind blows wildly;
For ten thousand li dark clouds obscure the sun's light.
Flaming above the length of the river, the crimson sun is red;
Spreading everywhere over the ground, the grass has all turned brown.
Catching the eye, a sunset glow hangs over the woods;
Assailing the inhabitants, a cold fog fills the firmament.
Suddenly the sound of a thunderclap is heard;
From the side of the hill out flies the king of the beasts.
With head held high, flaunting its might, it bares its teeth and claws;
The deer in the valley all flee out of its way.
The foxes and rabbits in the hills keep out of sight;
The deer and gibbons by the stream are startled into panic.
If Pien Chuang[49] had seen it, his souls would have fled;
If Li Ts'un-hsiao[50] had met it, he would have lost heart.
The strongman of Ch'ing-ho while still in his cups,
Suddenly encounters it on the top of the ridge.
Searching high and low for its prey the tiger is famished;
Chancing on Wu Sung it pounces at him with ferocity.
The tiger's pounce at the man is like the fall of a mountain;
The man's response to the tiger is like the collapse of a cliff.
The fall of his arm is like that of a cannonball;
Its claws and teeth gouge a pit out of the earth.
The blows of his fist and foot descend like rain;
His two hands are splattered with fresh blood.
The stench of raw flesh suffuses the forest;
Tufts of fur and whiskers lie scattered over the mountain.
Even close-up, its thousand-stone might appears intact;
Though, seen from afar, its eightfold majesty is diminished.
Its body lies in the underbrush, the pattern of its stripes faded;
Tightly closed, its two eyes will glitter no more.[51]

In less time than it would take to eat a meal, Wu Sung had so beaten this ferocious tiger with his fists and his feet that it was no longer able to move. Panting hard, he let go of the tiger and went looking for his broken quarterstaff that had fallen by the side of a pine tree. He was afraid the tiger might not really be dead, so he hit it another ten blows or so with his stick. But the tiger had already breathed its last. Wu Sung thought to himself, "I might as well take advantage of this stroke of luck and drag the tiger down to the foot of the ridge." But when he approached the pool of blood in which it was lying and tugged at the tiger with both hands, he couldn't get it to budge. It so happens that he had exhausted his strength, with the result that his hands and feet had turned to jelly. Just as Wu Sung was sitting on the rock, resting, he heard a rustling noise in the underbrush on the slope of the hill. From his mouth, no word was uttered but in his heart, he was alarmed. "It's already dark! If another tiger were to jump out at me, how could I hope to overcome it?" Before he had finished speaking, lo and behold, two tigers emerged into view on the slope below. Wu Sung cried out in consternation, "Ai-ya! This time I'm done for!"
Before his very eyes, these two tigers stood up in front of him. When Wu Sung gave a closer look, he saw that they were 2 men, clothed in tiger-skins who were wearing tiger skulls on their heads and carrying 5-pronged spears in their hands. No sooner did they come up to Wu Sung than they bowed their heads in homage saying, "Strongman, are you a human or a god? You must've eaten the heart of an alligator, the liver of a leopard, and the leg of a lion, or be made out of gall! Otherwise, all by yourself, in the waning light, and without a weapon, how'd you've possibly slain this man-eating tiger? We've been on the lookout here for a long time. Tell us the truth, strongman, what's your name?"
Wu Sung replied, "I neither alter my given name when abroad, nor change my surname when at home. I'm a man of Yang-ku district, Wu Sung by name, and the second sibling in my generation of the family." Then he went on to ask, "And who are the two of you?"
"There's no reason for us to deceive you," the two men replied. "We're licensed hunters from this locality. Ever since this tiger appeared on the ridge, it's come out every night and attacked lots of people. We hunters alone have lost seven or eight of our number, and there is no telling how many travellers have suffered the same fate. His honour, the district magistrate, ordered us licensed hunters to capture it by a fixed deadline. He offered a reward of thirty taels of silver if it were captured beforehand but promised us a beating if the deadline expired. Unfortunately, the damned creature is so powerful that no one has dared to go near it. We have been lying in wait for it here, along with several tens of corvée labourers from the sub-district, and have set up spring-bows with poisoned arrows at a safe distance. Then we saw you come striding up the ridge, as cool as you please, take on the tiger and dispatch it, in no time at all, with three blows of your fist and two kicks of your foot. How could you be so strong! We will truss up the tiger for you and then invite you to come down to the foot of the ridge with us, to the district yamen, so you can meet the magistrate and claim the reward."
At this point the corvée labourers from the subdistrict and the licensed hunters, some seventy or eighty men in all, set off, bearing the dead tiger at the head of the procession and carrying Wu Sung in an open litter behind. They headed straight for the compound of a prominent householder in the neighbourhood. This householder and the village head came out to meet them. The tiger was carried into the main room of the house where all the community elders came to see it. They asked Wu Sung his name and he related the story of his conquest of the tiger. Everyone said, "He's really a hero and a stout fellow!"
The hunters provided game for a feast and toasted Wu Sung until he was quite drunk. Then a guest room was prepared for him and he retired for the night. Early the following morning the community elders went to the district yamen to report what had happened. At the same time, a litter was prepared for the tiger and a gaily decorated sedan chair for Wu Sung in which he was escorted to the yamen in appropriate state. The magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district sent runners out to usher him into the courtroom. The people of the whole district, on hearing that a strongman had killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge and was being given a formal welcome, all came out to see the show. The entire district was in an uproar. When Wu Sung arrived at the courtroom, he got out of the sedan chair and the tiger was carried in and laid down in front of him. The district magistrate looked Wu Sung over and thought to himself, "If he weren't such a hefty fellow, how'd he have overcome this fierce tiger?" Then he summoned him to come forward and Wu Sung, after having paid his respects, related the story of his conquest of the tiger from start to finish. The functionaries standing to either side were stupefied with amazement.
The magistrate offered him several cups of wine right in the courtroom and then presented him with the reward of thirty taels of silver that had been contributed by the prominent families of the district.
Wu Sung said respectfully, "It is only owing to Your Honour's benevolent deeds that I have had the accidental good fortune to kill this tiger. It is due to no merit of mine. How could I accept this reward? These thirty taels of silver ought to go to the licensed hunters who have suffered so much at your hands on account of this beast. Why not divide up the reward among them as a demonstration of Your Honour's graciousness and of my own public spirit?"
"If that's what you want," the magistrate said, "you may do as you wish." There and then Wu Sung proceeded to distribute the thirty taels of reward money to the licensed hunters, who went their way. When the magistrate saw that Wu Sung was a man of virtue, integrity, and a stout fellow to boot, it occurred to him that he might be able to do something for him, so he said, "Even though you come from the district of Yang-ku rather than Ch'ing-ho, they are right next to each other. If I were to appoint you to the post of police captain here in Ch'ing-ho with the responsibility for maintaining law and order throughout the jurisdiction, what'd you think?"
Wu Sung knelt down and thanked him, saying, "If Your Honour should deign to raise me up in this way, I'd be grateful to you for the rest of my life." The magistrate ordered his clerk to take care of the necessary paperwork immediately, and he appointed Wu Sung to the post of police captain that very day. All the village heads and prominent householders of the district came to congratulate him and the celebrations attendant upon his appointment lasted for 3 days. Wu Sung had intended to look up his elder brother in Yang-ku district and could hardly have foreseen that he would end up being appointed a captain in Ch'ing-ho. He was so delighted he could scarcely contain himself. The news of this event spread throughout the two districts that comprised the prefecture of Tung-p'ing so that the name of Wu Sung was known to everyone. A poem testifies to this:

The martial prowess of the strongman hero was highly esteemed;
Risking his life he marched straight up Ching-yang Ridge.
Even though drunk he slew the tiger on the mountain;
From then on his renown spread to the 4 quarters.

*

*After parting company with his younger brother because of the hardship created by a famine in the locality, he had moved to Ch'ing-ho district where he rented a house on Amethyst Street. When people observed his meek disposition and unsightly appearance they gave him the nickname Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, in vulgar allusion to his coarse exterior and cramped features. There were many who did not scruple to take advantage of his weakness and naïveté but Wu the Elder did not respond with anger, merely endeavoring to keep out of their way. Gentle reader take note: in this world, the heart of man alone remains vile.[53] It despises the weak while fearing the wicked. If it's too hard it's brittle; if it's too soft it's no use.[54] A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that express this very well to the tune* Moon on the West River*:*

*Flexibility is the root of success;*
Adamancy is the womb of misfortune.
Not to vie or contend is to show true worth;
If I lose out now and then, what's the harm?
*History is but a succession of spring dreams,*
Though the red dust spawns a profusion of talents.

There is no need to scheme or contrive;
It is those who abide by their lot who survive.[55]

To resume our story, Wu the Elder made his living by shouldering his carrying pole and peddling steamed wheat cakes on the street all day. Unfortunately, his wife died, leaving behind a daughter, named Ying-erh, who was just eleven years old. Father and daughter lived together as best they could but before half a year had gone by their resources were exhausted and they had to move into a storefront, on Main Street, belonging to a well-to-do merchant named Chang, where Wu the Elder continued to ply his trade. The servants in Mr. Chang's household, seeing that Wu the Elder was an honest man, looked out for his interests and often patronized his steamed wheat cakes and sat around in his shop when they had nothing better to do. Wu the Elder was always so obliging that everyone was partial to him and spoke up vigorously on his behalf in the presence of their employer whenever the opportunity arose. As a result of these good offices Mr. Chang even went so far as to forgive him his rent. Now this Mr. Chang had the equivalent of ten thousand strings of cash in capital and owned a hundred parcels of real estate. He was more than sixty years old and did not have so much as a foot or an inch's worth of progeny of either sex. His wife, whose maiden name was Yü, ruled the roost with an iron hand so that there was not so much as an attractive servant girl on the premises. One day Mr. Chang struck himself ostentatiously on the breast and gave vent to a sigh. "Your property and wealth are more than sufficient," his wife remarked. "Why on earth should you disturb your leisure with such a sigh?"

"Old as I am," her husband replied, "I still don't have any children. Even though I may be rich, what good does it do me?"

"If that's what's bothering you," said Mrs. Chang, "I'll have a go-between buy two servant girls for you. Once they've been taught to play and sing they ought to be able to look after you."

*Mr. Chang was delighted by this and thanked his wife accordingly.[56] Some time later Mrs. Chang actually engaged a go-between to buy two servant girls, one of whom was called P'an Chin-lien and the other Pai Yü-lien. This P'an Chin-lien was the daughter of Tailor P'an whose shop was located outside the South Gate. She was the sixth sibling in her generation of the family. Because she had always been good-looking and possessed a pair of very small bound feet she was called Chin-lien, or Golden Lotus.[57] After the death of her father her mother was unable to make ends meet, and so, when Chin-lien was only eight years old, she sold her into the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang,[58] where she was taught to play musical instruments and to sing. She was adept at painting her brows and making up her eyes, applying powder and putting on rouge, combing her hair into a chignon, Wearing form-fitting gowns, putting on airs, and making a spectacle of herself.[59] Moreover, she was quick and clever by nature. Before she was fourteen she could draw phoenix designs and execute them in embroidery and perform on woodwind and string instruments, her favourite among which was the p'i-p'a, or balloon guitar. Sometime later Imperial Commissioner Wang died and Chin-lien's mother succeeded in extricating her from the Wang household only to resell her to the Changs for thirty taels of silver. She and Pai Yü-lien entered the household together where they continued to improve their skills as musicians and singers. Chin-lien concentrated on the p'i-p'a and Yü-lien on the cheng, or psaltery. Yü-lien was also just fifteen and was the daughter of a family registered as professional musicians. Because she had always had a fair complexion she was called Yü-lien, or Jade Lotus. The two of them shared the same bedroom. Initially the mistress of the household, Mrs. Chang, treated them very well, not requiring them to work in the kitchen or do any housework, and giving them presents of gold and silver jewellery with which to adorn themselves. Later Pai Yü-lien died unexpectedly, leaving Chin-lien all by herself. She was now seventeen years old and had developed into a slender and curvaceous beauty with cheeks like peach blossoms and eyebrows like the crescent moon. Mr. Chang had wished to take advantage of her for some time but fear of his wife's temper had prevented him from making a move. One day when the mistress of the household was out of the way on a visit to a neighbour, Mr. Chang surreptitiously invited Chin-lien into his room and had his way with her. Truly: the bea,utiful unblemished jade will one day be destroyed. How will the pearl ever regain its former perfection? Once Mr. Chang had had his way with Chin-lien, before he knew it he found himself afflicted with four or five ailments. Truly, what five ailments were these? His:*

*1: loins began to ache.*
*2: eyes began to tear.*
*3: ears began to grow deaf.*
*4: nose began to run.[60]*
*5: urine began to drip.*

And there was still another ailment that doesn't even bear mentioning. In broad daylight he dozed off, and at night he couldn't stop sneezing. When the mistress of the household got wind of what was going on behind her back she quarreled for several days with her husband and gave Chin-lien a terrible beating. Mr. Chang realized that he wouldn't be able to keep her any longer but determined, in spite of his wife, to provide her with a dowry and marry her off to an appropriate person. The servants in the household reminded him what an honourable man Wu the Elder was and pointed out that he was not only currently unmarried but also resided on the premises that would make him a convenient choice. Mr. Chang had hopes of being able to continue his liaison with the young woman, and so, without demanding a candareen from Wu the Elder, he made him a present of her as his wife. After Chin-lien and Wu the Elder were married, Mr. Chang made it a point to look after him. If he were short of capital for his trade in steamed wheat cakes, he would slip him five taels of silver to make up the deficiency. While Wu the Elder was out peddling his wares, Mr. Chang would wait until there was no one about and then steal into their room for an assignation with Chin-lien. Although Wu the Elder occasionally happened upon them in compromising circumstances, he did not dare to make a fuss about it. Mornings and evenings succeeded one another, and this situation had prevailed for some time when Mr. Chang suddenly came down with a venereal chill and alas and alack, died. When the mistress of the household discovered what had been going on, without more ado she angrily ordered the servants to drive Chin-lien and Wu the Elder out of the house, so they no longer had a place to stay. Scarcely aware of the implications of what had happened, Wu the Elder once more found a house on the west side of Amethyst Street, belonging to a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang, in which he rented an inner and an outer room and continued to peddle his steamed wheat cakes as before. It so happens that ever since Chin-lien had married Wu the Elder and had a chance to observe his guileless disposition and unsightly appearance she had taken a violent dislike to him and quarreled with him all the time. She resented what Mr. Chang had done to her and said to herself, "It's not as though there weren't another man in the whole wide world. Why did he have to marry me off to the likes of this? If you tug him, he won't move; if you hit him, he pulls back. The only thing he can be counted on to do everyday is to guzzle his wine. When you get right down to it, you could jab him with an awl without arousing him. What did I ever do in a previous incarnation to deserve such a fate? It's really intolerable." Whenever there was no one around she used to play a song to the tune *Sheep on the Mountain Slope* that testifies to this:

*How did it all begin?*
I was mismatched to him.
I thought he was a real man.
Not that I want to boast,
But how can a crow be a match for a phoenix?
I'm like buried gold,
He's only bogus brass;
How can his luster compare with mine?
He's just a hunk of rough stone;
What right's he got to my mutton-fat jade body?
I'm like a magic mushroom growing out of the muck.[61]
But what can I do?
No matter what he does,
I'll never be satisfied.
Just listen to me:
How can a gold brick be laid
On such a mud foundation?

*Gentle reader take note: Most of the women of this world, if they are blessed with good looks and natural intelligence, will turn out all right if they are only married to a decent man. But as for the likes of Wu the Elder, even the best woman in the world might find it hard to avoid repining. It has always been true that Women of beauty and men of talent are seldom matched; just when you're in the market for gold you can never find a seller. Everyday Wu the Elder shouldered his load of steamed wheat cakes and went out to peddle his wares, not returning until evening. His wife had little to occupy her other than the preparation of three daily meals. After eating she would make herself up and stand behind the bamboo blind that hung over the front door. From that vantage point she was in the habit of provoking attention with her brows, and sending messages with her eyes. Now this fact was not lost on a number of dissolute young scamps in the neighbourhood who were seldom up to any good. When they saw the way that Wu the Elder's wife was dolling herself up so slickly, engaging the breeze and disturbing the foliage, they began to make riddling allusions to her in public and even to engage her in badinage with remarks like, "How did a piece of fine mutton end up in the mouth of such a dog?"[62] Everyone knew that Wu the Elder was a man of meek disposition but many were unaware that he had such a mismatched wife in his house, who was both romantically inclined and clever, in fact, good at everything but particularly adultery. A poem testifies to this:*

*Chin-lien's beauty is certainly worthy of remark;*
When she laughs her eyebrows rise up like spring peaks.
If she ever encounters a dashing young gentleman;
She will make an assignation with him without more ado.[63]

Everyday after she had seen Wu the Elder out the door, this woman would stand inside the blind, cracking melon seeds with her teeth, and revealing her tiny golden lotuses for all to see. Such conduct attracted the aforesaid young gentlemen, who gathered on her doorstep day after day, strumming guitars and ukuleles,[64] and giving voice to every indecent suggestion their fertile imaginations could invent. As a result, Wu the Elder came to feel that he could no longer continue to live on that part of Amethyst Street and wanted to move somewhere else. When he raised this issue with his wife she said, "You lousy muddle-headed ignoramus! If you're content to rent such inadequate lodgings in somebody else's house, it's scarcely surprising that petty-minded people should abuse you. Why don't you get together a few taels of silver, look about for an appropriate place, and take out a mortgage on a house with at least a couple of rooms? If we lived in more presentable quarters nobody would take advantage of us. You're the man of the house but you're always so much at a loss that I end up taking the brunt of things on your account."

"And where'd I get the money for a mortgage?" Wu the Elder asked.

"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a nincompoop! You can sell my hairpins and combs to make up the sum. What's so difficult about that? They can always be replaced later on when we're better off than we are now."

Wu the Elder allowed himself to be persuaded by his wife. When he had scraped together something over 10 taels of silver, he took out a mortgage on a 2-story house near the gate of the district yamen. It was quite cozy, with three rooms on the ground floor, an upstairs room in the front, and two little courtyards. After moving to this new address, on that part of Amethyst Street that ran along the west side of the district yamen.[65] Wu the Elder continued to peddle steamed wheat cakes as before. One day as he was going along the street he heard the din of gongs and drums and noticed several contingents of soldiers with tasseled spears escorting a man in a gaily-decorated sedan chair. Who should this turn out to be but his own younger brother, Wu Sung. Because Wu Sung had killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge the district magistrate had elevated him to the position of police captain, and the community elders were participating in the celebration of this event by accompanying him on the way to his lodgings. When Wu the Elder caught sight of him, he grasped hold of him with his hand and called out, "Younger Brother, now that you're a captain, you've no time for me?"

In the mighty dynasty of Song when Huizong was Emperor, and in the Zhenghe period of his reign (1111-19), there lived at Qinghe, a city of the prefecture of Dongping in Shandong, a dissolute young man whose name was Ximen Qing. He was about twenty-seven years old, and the master of a fine estate. A gay, good-looking fellow, he was, unfortunately, flighty and unstable. His father, Ximen Da, had once travelled through Sichuan and Guangdong dealing in raw medicines, and later he opened a shop near the Town Hall of Qinghe. He lived in a splendid house that had a frontage of five rooms upon the street, and wings that went back even farther. He had a host of servants, and a very considerable number of horses and mules. Though, perhaps, he was not quite a millionaire, he was certainly one of the richest men in the whole district.

Ximen Da and his wife showered affection upon their only child, and allowed him to do exactly as he pleased. While he was still comparatively young, they died. The boy paid scant attention to his studies, idled about, and finally gave himself up entirely to dissipation. Indeed, after his parents' death, he was seldom to be found at home but spent all his time in the pursuit of forbidden pleasures. He learned to box, to wield the quarterstaff, and to play a good game of chess. He gambled a great deal, and became so skilled in the game of *pai* that he could distinguish the different pieces by simply touching them. In fact, so far as such accomplishments were concerned, there was very little he did not know.

His friends and acquaintances were wastrels and spongers who spent all their lives in amusing themselves at other people's expense. The chief among them was Ying Bojue, the son of a silk merchant. He had squandered the wealth his father had left him, and had sunk so low that he spent all his time waiting about the Town Hall, ready to go with anyone to the bawdy house, or to dine with the first-comer who would pay for a meal. People nicknamed him Beggar Ying. He was an expert at kickball, backgammon, chess and all sorts of other games.

Then there was Xie Xida. This man's grandfather had been a minor official at Qinghe, and his parents had died while he was still a youth. He wasted his time, and paid no attention to his duties, so he lost his position, and now led a life of leisure. He played the lute.

These two and Ximen Qing were as thick as thieves, and there were several more, of varying degrees of disreputability. One was Zhu Shinian; another Sun Tianhua, also known as Greedy Chops. Then there was Wu Dian'en, who had once been Master of the Yin Yang for the district. He had been dismissed, and now was always to be found hanging about the Town Hall in the hope of finding a job as witness for the officials in their money-lending transactions. In this way he made the acquaintance of Ximen Qing.

Other friends were Yun Lishou, a younger brother of Colonel Yun; Chang Zhijie; Bu Zhidao; and Bai Laiguang, who was also known as Guangtang. When people remarked that this was a strange name, he would become very indignant and enter upon a long explanation that, by reference to the *Book of History*, was supposed to show that his tutor, when he had conferred that name upon him, had made an admirable choice. "If there had been anything objectionable about it," he used to say, "I should have changed it long ago but, obviously, it has important historical associations, and I shall most certainly retain it."

There were, perhaps, ten of them in all, and, when they discovered that Ximen Qing was not only a very rich man but ready to throw his money about, they led him on to gamble, drink and run after women.

The House of Ximen had fallen upon evil days. It had given to the world an unworthy son, who chose his friends from among those destitute of every virtue. It was inevitably doomed to impoverishment.

Ximen Qing was reckless but when he took it into his head to bestir himself, he was capable of showing that he was no fool. He lent money to the officials and even had dealings with the four corrupt ministers, Gao, Yang, Tong and Cai. So he came to be mixed up in all kinds of official matters, acting as intervener for people at law, arbitrating in cases of dispute, and, sometimes, acting as stakeholder. The people of Qinghe stood in awe of him and spoke of him as "His Lordship Ximen." His first wife, a Miss Chen, died young, leaving him with a little daughter, and this daughter was now betrothed to Chen Jingji, a relative of Marshal Yang, the Commander of the Imperial Guard at the Eastern Capital.

After the death of his wife, Ximen found himself without a housekeeper, and married the daughter of a certain Captain Wu. This lady was about twenty-five years old. As she was born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, her parents called her Yueniang ("Moon Lady"), and she was still known by that name after her marriage to Ximen Qing. She was gentle and quiet, a good wife, and faultlessly obedient to her husband. She had three or four maids and serving women to wait upon her, and Ximen Qing had taken his pleasure with all of them.

As a second wife, he married a girl from the bawdy house, called Li Jiao'er, and as his third, a young woman from South Street, who had been his mistress. She was not very strong, and suffered from so many different illnesses that Ximen Qing again went off to "fly with the wind and sport with the moon!"

One day, when Ximen Qing was at home with nothing to do, he said to his wife:

"It is the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, and on the third of next month, I am supposed to be meeting my friends. I think I will entertain them here, and engage a couple of singing girls, so that we can have our amusement at home without needing to go elsewhere. Will you make the necessary arrangements?"

"I wish you wouldn't mention those horrible creatures to me," Wu Yueniang said. "There isn't a decent fellow among them. Day after day, they come here, like messengers of Hell, putting ideas into your silly mind and making an absolute fool of you. Never, since you've known them, have you spent a whole day in your own house. The Third Lady is anything but well, and I think you might give up these drinking parties, for a while at least."

"Generally," Ximen Qing said, "I find your conversation delightful but today your remarks are a little wearying. To hear you talk, all my friends might be beyond the pale. I don't mind so much what you say about the others but surely Brother Ying is an honest, entertaining fellow. If we ask him to do anything for us, he never raises any objection, and what he does, he does well. Then Xie Xida is clever as well as conscientious. But there is this much to be said. So long as our meetings are irregular and uncertain, we can never develop our friendship on the proper lines. The next time we all come together, the best thing we can do will be to form a brotherhood, and ever afterwards we shall be able to count upon receiving assistance, if we need any."

"I have nothing against this brotherhood idea," Yueniang said, "though I have no doubt whatever that the others will get more assistance out of you than you are ever likely to get out of them. They will be as much use to you as dancing dolls, and not half so lively."

Ximen Qing laughed. "If I find, by experience, that they are to be trusted, why shouldn't I trust them? As a matter of fact, I'm expecting Brother Ying any moment. When he comes, I'll see what he thinks of the idea."

At that moment an intelligent-looking boy with delicate eyebrows and charming eyes came in. This was Daian, Ximen Qing's body servant. "Uncle Ying and Uncle Xie are outside," he said. "They would like to speak to you."

"I was just talking about them," Ximen said. He hastened to the hall. Ying Bojue was dressed in a new black hat and a shabby blue silk gown. He was sitting in the place of honour with Xie Xida opposite. When Ximen Qing came in, they both jumped up and saluted him with great deference. "We are glad to find you at home, Brother," they said. "We have not seen you for some time." Ximen asked them to sit down, and called for tea.

"You are a nice pair," he told them. "I have had a very anxious time lately. I could not leave the house but I haven't seen even so much as your shadows."

"What did I say?" Bojue cried. "I knew our brother would be annoyed!" Then he turned to Ximen Qing. "I am not surprised that you are angry with us but, really, I have been so busy that I haven't known what to do. It is all very well for you to give your orders but it is not so easy for me to carry them out."

"Where have you been, these last few days?" Ximen asked them. "Yesterday, I went to the Li's to see a young lady called Li Guijie. She is Li Guiqing's younger sister, a niece of your Second Lady. I hadn't seen her for some time, and I must say she has become a very pretty girl. There's no telling what she will be like in the future. Her mother urged me to find a handsome young man to make a woman of her. Really, you yourself would not find her too bad."

"If she is so attractive," Ximen said, "I must go and have a look at her." "Brother," said Xie Xida, "if you don't trust him, you can at least take my word for it."

"Well," said Ximen, "that accounts for yesterday but what about the day before?"

"A little time ago, our friend Bu Zhidao died, and I have had to spend several days at his house in connection with the funeral arrangements. His wife asked me to tell you how grateful she is for the incense and things you sent her. Her place is so small and the only entertainment she can offer so unworthy, that she did not venture to invite you to the funeral."

"Alas!" Ximen Qing said, "it seems only a few days since I first heard he was ill. I never thought he would die so soon. He once made me a present of a gilded fan, and I was thinking of giving him something in return. Then I heard of his death."

Xie Xida sighed. "Once there were ten of us, now one has gone. By the way, the third of next month is the day for our meeting. We shall be troubling His Lordship to spend some small sum on the day's amusement."

"I have just been telling my wife," Ximen said, "that these meetings, at which we do nothing but eat and drink, do not represent the essential element in our friendship. We ought to decide upon some temple, have an appropriate document drawn up, and band ourselves into a definite brotherhood. Then we shall be pledged to help one another ever afterwards. When the day comes, I will buy the three offerings needed for the sacrifice. I presume you will all be ready to give something towards the expenses, each according to his means. I do not insist on this but it seems to me that, since we are forming a brotherhood, it will be much more satisfactory if every brother makes some little contribution."

"Certainly, Brother," Ying Bojue said hastily. "A man who never says his own prayers cannot expect to get credit for the incense his wife burns. We must all do something to show that we are in earnest but I'm afraid we're rather like the warts on a rat's tail, there is not much to be got out of us."

"Oh, you funny dog," Ximen said, laughing. "Nobody expects you to give very much."

"If the brotherhood is to be complete," Xie Xida said, "there should be ten of us. Brother Bu Zhidao is dead. Whom can we find to take his place?"
Ximen Qing thought for a while. Then he said: "My neighbour, Brother Hua, the nephew of Eunuch Hua, is the very man. He spends his money without stint, and goes regularly to the bawdy house. He lives next door, and we are very good friends. I will send a boy to invite him to join us."
Bojue clapped his hands. "Do you mean Hua Zixu, who keeps a girl called Wu Yin'er?"
"That is the man," Ximen Qing said.
"Ask him by all means," Bojue said. "If I can only make friends with him, it will mean another house of call for me."
"You silly rascal," Ximen said, laughing. "To hear you talk about eating, one would imagine you were always on the point of starvation."
They all laughed. After a while, Ximen called Daian, and sent him to Hua's house. "Tell him that we are going to form a brotherhood on the third of next month, and that I shall be honoured if he will join us. When you have heard what he says, come back and tell me."
"Shall we come here, or go to a temple?" Bojue asked.
"There are only two temples to go to," Xie Xida said. "One is the Buddhist temple of Eternal Felicity, and the other, the Daoist temple of the Jade Emperor. Either of them would do."
"Not at all," Ximen said. "This forming of a brotherhood is not a Buddhist practice, and, in any case, I don't know the priests of that temple very well. We must go to the Temple of the Jade Emperor. The abbot, Wu, is a good friend of mine; it is quiet there and we shall have room enough."
"You are right, Brother," Bojue said. "He only suggested the temple of Eternal Felicity because the monks there are on such good terms with his wife."
"You old villain," Xie Xida said, laughing. "Here we are, discussing a most serious matter, and you think it a suitable occasion to fart."
They were laughing and talking when Daian came back. "Master Hua was not at home," he said, "but I gave the message to his lady. She was very pleased. 'If Uncle Ximen is so kind as to invite my husband,' she said, 'I am sure he will not fail to come. He shall have the message as soon as he comes in, and when the day for the meeting comes, I will remind him.' She gave me two cakes for myself, and told me to give you her respects."
"Brother Hua's wife," Ximen said, "is not only a very pretty woman but she has intelligence."
They drank another cup of tea, and the two men rose to go. "We will tell the other brothers," they said, "and collect their share of the expenses. Will you make the arrangements with Abbot Wu?"
"Yes," Ximen Qing said, "I'll see to that. Don't let me keep you any longer." He took them to the gate. Before they had gone very far, Ying Bojue turned. "Don't you think it would be fun if we had some singing girls?"
"Yes, indeed," Ximen said, "it will be more amusing if the brothers have someone to laugh and joke with." Bojue made a reverence and went away with Xie Xida.
It was soon the first day of the tenth month. Ximen Qing rose early and was sitting in Yueniang's room when there came a serving boy whose hair had been dressed in grown-up style. He brought with him a gilded and polished card case. First he made a reverence to Ximen Qing; then he came forward and said: "My master, Hua Zixu, sends his compliments. Some time ago you sent your servant with an invitation but he was out on business and did not personally receive the message. He was told that you are arranging a party on the third of the month, and has sent this small gift that he trusts you will use as you think fit. Afterwards he hopes you will tell him what his proper share of the expenses amounts to, and he will make up what is lacking."
Ximen Qing took the packet, examined the label upon it, and wrote a receipt for one tael of silver. "This is more than enough," he said; "your master must certainly not send any more. Remind him to keep the day free. He will have to get up very early so as to be ready to go to the temple with the rest of us."
When the boy was going away, Yueniang asked him to wait a moment. She told Yuxiao, the elder of her two maids, to give him two pieces of fruit-cake. "This is instead of tea," she said to him. "When you get home, give my kind regards to your mistress, and tell her that one of these days I am going to ask her to come and have a talk with me." The boy took the cakes, made another reverence, and went out.
A few moments later, Ying Bao, Ying Bojue's boy, came. He, too, was carrying a visiting case. Daian introduced him. "My father has collected these presents from the others," he said, "and hopes you will accept them." Ximen Qing looked at the packets, saw that there were eight in all, and handed them to his wife without opening them. "Use them," he said to her, "to buy something for our visit to the temple." He dismissed Ying Bao.
Soon afterwards he got up and went to see his third wife, who was ill but he had only just reached her room and sat down when Yuxiao came to tell him that her mistress would like to speak to him again. "Why didn't she say all she had to say before?" Ximen Qing said. He got up and went back to her, finding her with all the packets opened and spread out before her.
"Look here!" she said, laughing. "Ying sends a *qian* and two *fen* of bad silver, and the rest, three or five *fen* apiece. Judging by the colour, some red, some yellow, it might be gold. Certainly, I've never seen anything like it in this house before. If you accept it, our reputation will be gone forever. You must send it back at once."
"What a fuss about nothing!" Ximen said. "This is all right. Don't let me hear any more about it." He went out.
The next day, he weighed four taels of silver and told his servant Laixing to buy a pig, a sheep, five or six jars of Jinhua wine, some chickens and ducks, candles and paper offerings. He put five *qian* in an envelope and told his man Laibao to take it and the other things, and go with Daian and Laixing to the temple of the Jade Emperor. They were to say to the abbot: "Tomorrow, our master proposes to form a solemn brotherhood, and he takes the liberty of asking you to compose an address suitable to the occasion. He would like to take dinner at your temple in the evening, and would be very grateful if you would make the necessary preparations. He will arrive in the morning."
Daian soon returned. He said that he had given the message, and that the abbot agreed.
The day soon passed. The next morning, Ximen Qing washed and dressed, and told Daian to go and ask Hua Zixu to come for breakfast before they joined the others on the expedition to the temple. Soon afterwards, Ying Bojue and the others arrived. They came in, and forming a circle, made reverence together.
"It is time to start," Bojue cried.
"No, breakfast first," Ximen Qing said. He called for tea and refreshments. Afterwards, he changed his clothes for brighter and more handsome attire, and they all set out together for the temple of the Jade Emperor.
Before they had gone very far, they could see the temple gateway. It was lofty and imposing but the sanctuary, with walls reaching almost to the skies, was more commanding still. It was approached by a gate in the shape of the character *ba*, covered with a red wash. Within the precincts were three paths, like the character *chuan*. The buildings were of marble with wave-like markings. The sanctuary, its lofty eaves glittering in green and gold, was in the centre. Images of the Three Pure Holy Ones stood in due order in the middle, and at the far end was Laozi, the Old Lord of the Most High, riding upon his black ox.
They entered the second sanctuary, went around, and passing through a side door, came to the abbot's quarters. On either hand grew grasses as green as jasper and flowers as red as coral. There were pine trees and bamboos. On either side of the door hung scrolls. One bore the inscription: "In Paradise, unending are the months, the years," and the other, "In the Vessel of Heaven there lies another world." On the north was a hall the size of three rooms, where the abbot officiated everyday at morning and evening prayer.
The temple had been specially decorated for the occasion. In the middle of the north wall hung a picture of the Jade Emperor in the Golden Palace of Paradise, and on both sides were the nobles of the Purple Palace. The four generals, Ma, Zhao, Wen and Guan were there too.
Abbot Wu was standing outside the Hall of the Sacred Scriptures. He welcomed them with a priestly reverence, and Ximen Qing and his friends went in. After taking tea, they all got up and began to look at the pictures. Bai Laiguang took Chang Zhijie by the hand, and they examined the portrait of General Ma. He looked very brave and fierce but he had three eyes. "I don't understand this," Bai Laiguang said. "We mortals find that with only two eyes it is well to keep one closed. Can he need an extra eye to keep a watch on us and on our misdeeds?"
Ying Bojue overheard him and went over to them. "You silly fellow," he said. "It is on your account alone that he needs an eye more than anybody else."
Everybody laughed, and Chang Zhijie pointed to the picture of General Wen. "Now here," he said, "there really is something out of the ordinary. He is blue from top to toe. I suppose he must be one of Lu Qi's ancestors."
Bojue burst out laughing. "Come over here, Father Abbot," he cried, "and I'll tell you a story.
"Once upon a time, a priest died and came before the Prince of Hades. The Prince bade him give an account of himself. 'I am a priest,' he said quite simply. Then the Prince ordered one of his officers to search the records and find out what was known of the man. They discovered that he was indeed a priest and a man of excellent character. So the Prince of Hades reprieved him and sent him back to earth.
"When he was once more in the land of the living, he met a man he knew, who worked at a dye works. 'However did you succeed in getting back, Father?' this man said to him. 'I only said I was a priest and they sent me back again,' his friend answered. The man remembered this, and when his time came to go before the Prince of Hades, he too declared that he was a priest. The Prince told his officials to examine the man's body. When they came to his hands, they found them both bright blue. 'What does this mean?' he was asked. 'That comes from the work I have done on General Wen's thing.' "
They laughed. Then they went to the other side to look at the pictures of red-faced Guan and Zhao. Zhao was a black-faced warrior, with a great tiger standing beside him. Bai Laiguang pointed to the tiger, and cried: "Look at that tiger! He must be one of the kind that don't eat meat, or he wouldn't be going about with a man so amiably."
"What!" said Ying Bojue. "Don't you know the tiger is his most trusted servant?"
Xie Xida, who had been listening, said, "If I had a servant like that, a quarter of an hour of his company would be quite enough. I should always be afraid he might take it into his head to eat me."
Bojue laughed: "That's a nice thing to say," he said to Ximen Qing.
"What's that?" said Ximen.
"Well," Bojue said, "Xie here says he would be afraid a trusted comrade might eat him. You certainly ought to go in fear of your life, for there are seven or eight of us, all trusted comrades, and all ready to feed at your expense at any time."
At that moment the abbot came back to the hall. "Do I hear you speaking of tigers, Gentlemen?" he said. "In this very district of Qinghe, one has recently caused very serious trouble. Scores of travellers, and more than a dozen hunters, have found that to their cost."
"Really?" Ximen Qing cried.
"Yes," said the priest. "I am surprised you gentlemen have not heard about it. I should not have known myself but a little while ago, one of my young novices went to ask alms at Master Cai's house in Cangzhou, and he had to stay there several days before it was safe to return. Between Qinghe and Cangzhou there is a ridge called Jingyang, and it seems that a dragon-eyed, white-headed tiger has recently been making raids from there in search of human prey. Travellers have been afraid to pass the hill, and have had to form parties when they went that way. The local authorities are now offering a reward of fifty taels to anyone who kills the tiger but so far, though several attempts have been made, they have all come to nothing. Indeed the hunters have been most unfortunate: they have had nothing but maulings for their pains."
Bai Laiguang jumped up. "We are too busy today, since we have this brotherhood to form but tomorrow we will go and catch the tiger. It will be one way of putting a little money in our pockets."
"Evidently you don't value your life very highly," Ximen Qing said. The other laughed. "Let me get hold of something to spend, and I don't care what happens."
"That reminds me of another funny story," Ying Bojue said. "Once a man fell into a tiger's clutches, and his son, who wished to rescue him, took a knife and went to kill the beast. But the man, though the tiger had him actually in his jaws, cried out anxiously: 'Son, mind where you stick that knife. For goodness' sake, don't spoil the tiger's skin.' "
Abbot Wu was now preparing the offerings for sacrifice. When everything was ready, he came forward and said: "Gentlemen, it is time to burn the sacred papers." Then he produced a document. "I have already written the address," he said, "but I should be glad if you would tell me which of you is the elder brother and in what order I am to put the others. If you will kindly arrange yourselves in your due rank, I shall find it easier to write down your honourable names."
At this there was a chorus: "His Lordship comes first, of course," but Ximen Qing held back. "We should rank according to our age," he said. "Brother Ying is older than I am, and it is for him to take the first place." This was not at all what Ying Bojue wished. "Oh, no, Father!" he cried, I should be ruined. In these days, a man is judged by his wealth or by his position, and since there is no getting away from that, there is no point in taking age into consideration. Besides, there are others older than myself. And there are many other reasons why I should not be made elder brother. Both in dignity and moral standing, I do not rank so high as his Lordship. He is a paragon to the whole world. Then again, I have always been called Ying the Second, and if I were made elder brother I should have to be called Ying the Elder. If I met two acquaintances, and one addressed me as Ying the Elder and the other as Ying the Second, I shouldn't know which of them I ought to answer."
Ximen Qing laughed. "You talk such nonsense, anybody might die of laughing," he said. Xie Xida urged him not to decline but Ximen continued modestly to prefer the others. Finally, after further pressure from Hua, Ying and the rest, he could hold out no longer and took the place of honour. He was followed by Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, and Hua, out of respect for his wealth, was allotted the fourth place. The others arranged themselves in the lower positions. The abbot then filled up the document, lighted candles, and, with all the men standing shoulder to shoulder in their due order, the address was solemnly unfolded and read aloud.

IN THE EMPIRE OF THE GREAT SONG, THE PROVINCE OF SHANDONG, PREFECTURE OF DONGPING AND DISTRICT OF QINGHE

The faithful, Ximen Qing, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Hua Zixu, Sun Tianhua, Zhu Shinian, Yun Lishou, Wu Dian'en, Chang Zhijie and Bai Laiguang, here assembled, do wash their hands and burn incense to ask a blessing.
The oath of fidelity sworn within the Peach Orchard is the model of all loyalty; with humble hearts we seek to take it as our example, and strive to emulate the spirit that inspired it.
The love of Bao and Guan was as the depth of the ocean, and animated by the same spirit, we hope to imitate their solemn purpose.
The peoples of the four oceans may yet be as brethren and they of different names as of the same blood.
*Therefore*
In this period of Zhenghe—Year—Month—Day, devoutly offering meat offerings of pig and sheep before the phoenix chariot, we humbly bow before this holy altar and make our supplications.
We make our obeisance unto the Highest Heaven, where in a golden palace dwell the Jade Emperor, the Guardian Angels of the Five Directions, the Tutelaries of City and Village, and all the spirits who come and go.
We beseech them to accept the incense of our sincerity. May they deign to protect us in all our doings.
We, Qing, etc....., though born each at a different hour, pray that death may find us united. May the bond between us remain ever unbroken. Our pleasures will we take together, and in time of need will we succor one another. The memory of our friendship shall be ever green, and in our wealth will we remember the unfortunate. Thus, at the last, shall our confidence be confirmed: thus, coming with the sun and going with the moon, shall our fellowship be established as high as the heavens and as firm as the earth.
Henceforth, from this our solemn act of friendship, may our love be eternal and our peace unending. May each of us enjoy length of days, and his household unceasing felicity.
In Heaven alone do we place our trust, until our lives' end. In token whereof, we diligently set this down.

REIGN PERIOD OF ZHENGHE.
YEAR.
MONTH.
DAY.

When the abbot had finished the reading of this declaration, the men worshipped, bowing together eight times before the shrine. One last time they bowed, and when the paper money had been consumed, the sacred utensils were removed. The abbot told his acolytes to remove the sacrificial animals and cut them up. Chicken, fish and fruits of every kind were set out in profusion upon two tables. Ximen Qing took the seat of honour, and the rest seated themselves in accordance with their rank. The abbot presided over the feast. Soon the wine had been passed around several times, and the men began to amuse themselves telling riddles and guessing fingers, making the hall ring with noisy laughter.

They saw the sunrise in the distant east
They watched it set behind the mountains.
Deep have they drunk, and now unsteadily go forth
While o'er the trees there hangs the tiny crescent moon.

In the midst of their enjoyment, Daian suddenly came in. He whispered to Ximen Qing, "Mother has sent me to take you home. She says the Third Lady has had a fainting fit, and you must not be late." Ximen rose at once.
"I don't wish to disturb the party, or to be the cause of its breaking up," he said, "but my third wife is ill, and I am afraid I must leave you."
"I go the same way as Brother Ximen," said Hua Zixu. "We will go together."
"If you two rich men both go away," Ying Bojue cried, "how can we stay? Brother Hua, you really must not go."
"There is no man in his house," Ximen said. "We must go back together and set his wife's mind at rest."
"Just as I was coming away," Daian said, "Mistress Hua was telling Tian Fu to saddle a horse and come here."
At that moment the boy arrived. He went to Hua and said, "Your horse is here, and Mother would like you to return."
Before leaving, they thanked Abbot Wu for his kindness, and saluted Ying Bojue and the others. "We are compelled to go now," they said, "but you must stay and have a good time." They went out, jumped on their horses, and rode away. Those who remained were indeed so ravenous that they would have devoured Taishan without leaving a particle of earth. They lingered in the temple and drank deep, and there we may leave them.
When Ximen Qing reached home, he said good-bye to Hua Zixu, and went at once to ask Yueniang how his third wife was.
"I only said she was ill," said Yueniang, "to get you away from those fellows. That is why I made Daian tell you that story. But in truth she has been steadily getting worse, and you ought to stay at home and devote a little of your time to her."
Ximen went to the other side of the house to visit his third wife, and for a few days continued to pay her some attention. On the tenth day of the tenth month, when Ximen Qing had just dispatched a boy to summon the doctor, he was still in the hall when Ying Bojue came in, smiling. Ximen greeted him, and asked him to sit down.
"How is my sister-in-law?" Bojue asked.
"I'm afraid she will never get any better," Ximen said, "it is very doubtful indeed whether anything can be done for her. What time did the party break up the other day?"
"Abbot Wu kept urging us to stay, and it was nearly the second watch before we left. I was very drunk. It was a good thing for you that you came home so early."
"Have you had dinner yet?" Ximen Qing said.
Ying Bojue could not make up his mind whether to say "Yes" or "No," so he asked Ximen to guess.
"I should say you have."

Ying politely put his hand before his mouth, laughed, and said, "You silly man, you've guessed wrong."
"Well, if you haven't, why didn't you say so, you greedy beast?" Ximen said, laughing. "I can't imagine what makes you such a donkey." He told a servant to prepare a meal for Bojue and himself.
"I should have dined," Bojue said, "but I have just heard a most extraordinary piece of news, and I had to come and tell you all about it. We can go and see for ourselves."
"What is this marvelous piece of news?" said Ximen.
"You remember the abbot telling us about the tiger of Jingyang Ridge?" Bojue said. "Well, yesterday a man killed that tiger with his bare fists."
"Don't talk such nonsense," Ximen said. "I don't believe a word of it."
"You say you don't believe me but wait till I've told you all about it." Bojue went on, waving his arms and stamping his feet in his excitement. "The hero is a certain Wu Song, who some time ago got into trouble at Master Chai's house, and had to run away. He fell ill, and, when he recovered, thought he would like to come and see his brother again. On the way here, he had to pass Jingyang Ridge. There he came upon the tiger and killed it with no weapons but his hands and feet." Ying Bojue told this story in such minute detail that he might himself have been an eyewitness. Ximen Qing shook his head.
"In that case," he said, "as soon as we have finished dinner, I'll go with you and see what the tiger looks like."
"Don't let's wait for dinner, or we may be too late," said Bojue. "Let's go to the High Street, and spend an hour or two in the tavern there."
Laixing was setting the table but his master told him not to trouble about the meal, and to ask Yueniang to have some clothes set out for him to wear. In a few moments he had changed, and set off arm in arm with Bojue. In the street they ran into Xie Xida. "Hullo, Brothers," he said, laughing, "are you coming to see the man who killed the tiger?"
"We are," said Ximen.
Xie Xida told them that the crowd was so great as to make the roadway almost impassable, and they went to a tavern overlooking the street. They had not long been there when they heard the sound of drums and gongs. The people were all craning their necks to see. Hunters, marching two by two, carrying their tasseled spears, went before the tiger's body. It was so huge that four men could hardly carry it, and it looked like a great embroidered sack. Then, riding upon a splendid white charger, came the bold fellow who had killed it. Ximen Qing gazed at him, bit his nails, and said, "Just look at that man. He must have the strength of a hippopotamus, or he could never have vanquished that great beast." They drank their wine and discussed the heroic deed.

Full seven feet tall is this majestic figure
A hero striking terror into all beholders
With stern and rugged face, and sparkling eyes that blaze like glittering stars
Clenched fists like sledgehammers.
If he but raise his foot, the tigers in their mountain lair feel their courage wane
One blow with that fist, and the great bear trembles in his lonely valley.
He wears a magic cap with silver flowers
And his long-sleeved gown is soaked with his victim's blood.

This was the man of whom Ying Bojue had spoken. His home was in the district of Yanggu, and it was only because he had taken a sudden fancy to pay a visit to his elder brother that the opportunity of killing the tiger had come to him.
The magistrate had summoned the hero to his presence, and a host of people were waiting to see him arrive at the Town Hall. As Wu Song dismounted, the magistrate took his place in the Hall of Audience, and the people carried the great beast to the front of the Hall. His Honour was greatly impressed by the hero's bearing, and reflected that a man must be strong indeed to kill such a tiger. He called Wu Song forward.
The hero paid his respects, and then told the story of his prowess so vividly that the officials were half paralyzed by fright. Then, in the Hall of Audience, the magistrate solemnly offered him three cups of wine, and from the public treasure that was stored there took fifty taels of silver.
"By your Honour's leave," said Wu Song, "I owe my victory over the tiger more to good fortune than to ability. I have no right to this reward. The hunters here have incurred your Honour's displeasure on account of this same brute, and I shall be grateful if you will give them the silver rather than myself."
"I will do so if you wish it," said the magistrate, and the money was distributed among the hunters. Seeing that Wu Song was generous-hearted and honest as well as a hero, he thought it would be a good idea to offer him a position. "You are a native of Yanggu," he said; "but that is not a great distance from here. I should like to offer you the appointment of captain of my police, and entrust to you the task of sweeping out the brigands that infest the neighbourhood. What do you say?"
Wu Song knelt down. "I shall be eternally grateful to your Honour." The magistrate called his secretary, told him to prepare the necessary papers, and they were sent forward the same day. The notabilities of the district all came to offer their congratulations, and there was feasting for several days.
So Wu Song, who had only thought of his desire to see his elder brother, secured the appointment of police captain in Qinghe. He was delighted with the way things had turned out, and in all the prefecture of Dongping there was none who did not know the name of Wu Song.

A hero this! A mighty hunter
Who climbed the Jingyang Ridge with eager tread.
With strong wine firing his veins he slew the terror of the mountain
And now his fame is spread to every corner of the earth.

One day, as Wu Song was strolling along the street, he heard a voice behind him, crying, "Brother, Brother! Are you too proud to know me, now that you have become captain of the police?" He turned, and to his surprise, recognized the speaker.



**For Money, Grandma Mrs. Wang Being Covetous Spoke Seductively, Arranges a Seduction, & does brisk trade in sin; In Anger, Yunge/Yun Ge's miffed, barges in, Makes a Row, & Riots in the Teashop; the Brotherhood of Rascals, P'an Chin-Lien disdains her mate, plays the Coquette, beneath the Blind Hsi-men Ch'ing Meets Chin-lien; Inspired by Greed Dame Wang Speaks of Romance, the Old Procuress Dame Wang Proposes a 10-part Plan for *Garnering the Glow*, Hsi-men Ch'ing Flirts with Chin-lien in the Teahouse, the Hussy Commits Adultery behind Wu the Elder's Back; Qiao Yün-ko in his Anger Raises a Rumpus in the Teashop, & Ximen Qing Attains his End**

Constable Wu fell to his knees and kowtowed, for it was none other than his brother, Wu the Elder. "I haven't seen you for over a year," said Wu Song. "What are you doing here?"
"You were gone a long time. Why didn't you write? Sometimes I reproached you in my heart, and yet I missed you."
"How is that?"
"When I remembered how you used to get drunk in Qinghe Town, and brawl and be hauled into court, and how I used to suffer, waiting for the judge's decision, with never a moment's peace, I thought of you with reproach. Recently I took a wife but the men of Qinghe are bold, and they kept trying to take advantage, and I've had no one to protect me. If you were home that of them would have dared to so much as fart? Things got so bad I had to move here to Yanggu and rent a house. That was when I missed you."
Reader, please note, these two were born of the same mother. But Wu Song was tall and handsome and enormously strong. Otherwise, how could he have killed the fierce tiger? Wu the Elder was very short, with an ugly face and a ridiculous head. He was known in Qinghe as Three Inches of Mulberry Bark.
Now, it happened that a wealthy family there had a maidservant by the name of Pan Jinlian. In her early twenties, she was quite pretty, and the master of the house began pestering her. Jinlian, or Golden Lotus, didn't want him, and told his wife. He hated her so much for this that he personally provided her with a dowry and married her off to Wu the Elder, free of charge.
Several of Qinghe's dissolute idlers began visiting Wu's house and behaving provocatively. Since nothing about her husband pleased the girl—he was short and grotesque, and had no flair for merry-making whatever—Golden Lotus was quite ready to take a lover. It got so that dandies hanging around outside the door would say openly in front of the timid, law-abiding Wu: "Imagine that luscious piece of meat landing in a dog's jaws!"
The couple couldn't remain in Qinghe. He and Golden Lotus moved to Yanggu Town, and rented a house on Purple Stone Street. Everyday, Wu went out and peddled buns. He was doing this in front of the county office when he saw Wu Song.
Now he said: "The other day I heard people talking on the street, all excited, about how some stalwart named Wu had killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and how the county magistrate appointed him constable. I was pretty sure it was you. Today, at last, we've met. I won't bother selling any more buns. I'll take you home."
"Where is your house, brother?"
Wu the Elder pointed. "On Purple Stone Street, up ahead."
Wu Song carried his brother's shoulder-pole and hampers and Wu the Elder led the way. They wound through several lanes until they came to Purple Stone Street. The house was beside a teashop.
"Wife, open the door," Wu the Elder shouted.
A bamboo curtain was raised, and a woman appeared. "What are you doing home so early?" she asked.
"Your brother-in-law is here. I want you to meet him." Wu the Elder took his carrying-pole and wares inside, then emerged again and said: "Come in, brother, and meet your sister-in-law."
Wu Song raised the curtain and entered. Wu the Elder said: "This is my younger brother. And what do you think—he's the one who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge and was made a constable!"
Golden Lotus clasped her hands in greeting. "I wish you every good fortune."
"Please be seated, sister-in-law." Wu Song dropped to his knees like a collapsing mountain of gold, like a falling pillar of jade, and kowtowed.
Golden Lotus raised him up. "You embarrass me," she courteously protested.
"My respects, sister-in-law."
"I heard from Grandma Wang, next door, that a hero who had killed a tiger was being welcomed at the county office. I wanted to go and see but I was delayed and got there too late. And all along it was you, brother-in-law! Please come upstairs and sit a while."
The three mounted the stairs and sat down. Golden Lotus looked at her husband. "I'll keep brother-in-law company. You prepare some food and drink so that we can entertain him."
"Fine," said Wu the Elder. "Sit a while, brother. I'll be back soon." He went downstairs.
Golden Lotus gazed at the handsome figure of Wu Song. "He's so big," she thought. "You'd never know they were born of the same mother. If I could have a man like that I wouldn't have lived in vain! With the one I've got I'm cursed for good! Three Inches of Mulberry Bark—three-tenths man and seven-tenths monster. What filthy luck! Wu Song beats up tigers. He must be very strong … And I hear he's not married. Why not get him to move in? Why would have thought I was fated to meet my love here!"
Her face wreathed in smiles she asked: "How long have you been in town?"
"Ten days or more."
"And where are you staying?"
"For the time being in the county office compound."
"That can't be very convenient."
"I live alone. My needs are simple. I have a soldier orderly."
"A man like that can't do things properly. Why don't you move over here? Anything you want to eat or drink I'll be glad to make for you. Much better than having some dirty orderly do it. Even if it's only clear water, when you drink it in this house you have nothing to worry about."
"That's very kind of you."
"Do you have a wife? I'd like to meet her."
"I've never married."
"How old are you?"
"Twenty-five."
"Three years older than me. Where were you before coming to this town?"
"I lived in Cangzhou for over a year. I thought brother was still in Qinghe. I didn't know he had moved here."
"I can't begin to tell you! That man is too honest. I've seen it ever since I married him. People tried to take advantage. We just couldn't remain in Qinghe, so we moved here. If we had a big strong fellow like you staying with us, no one would dare abuse us."
"Brother has always been well-behaved. He's not a rowdy like me."
"Why turn things upside-down?" the girl smiled. "As the old saying goes: 'There's safety only in a stiff backbone.' I make up my mind fast, and act. I hate the slow dawdling types who never give you a direct answer."
"At least he doesn't get into trouble and worry you."
While they were talking, Wu the Elder returned with the food and wine he had bought and put them in the kitchen. He went to the foot of the stairs and called: "Wife, come down and get thing ready."
"Where are your manners?" Golden Lotus retorted. "I can't leave brother-in-law just sitting here."
"Don't bother about me," said Wu Song.
"Get Grandma Wang from next door to do it," the girl said to her husband. "Can't you manage even a simple thing like that!"
Wu the Elder asked Grandma Wang over. When the food was ready he carried it up and put it on the table. Besides Fish, meat, fruit and vegetables, there was also heated wine. Wu the Elder placed his wife at the head of the table and Wu Song opposite. He himself sat at the side and poured the wine. Golden Lotus raised her cup.
"Forgive our poor fare," she said to Wu Song. "Please drink this one with me."
"Thank you, sister-in-law. No need to be polite."
Wu the Elder was so busy warming the wine and refilling the cups he had no time for anything else. Golden Lotus was all smiles.
"You haven't touched the fish or meat," she cried. She picked choice morsels and put them on Wu Song's plate.
Wu Song was a straightforward fellow who thought of her only as a sister-in-law. She, from her years as a maidservant, had learned how to please in small ways. Wu the Elder, a timid person, knew little about entertaining guests.
After they had downed several cups, Golden Lotus frankly ran her eyes over the younger man's body. Embarrassed, Wu Song kept his head down and avoided her gaze. They finished a dozen or so cups, and he rose to leave.
"Have a few more first," Wu the Elder pleaded.
"This is quite enough," said Wu Song. "I'll be coming to see you again."
His hosts walked with him down the stairs. "You must move over here," Golden Lotus said. "Otherwise, people will laugh at us. After all, you're our own brother." She turned to her husband, "We'll clean out a room for him and have him move in. We don't want the neighbours criticizing."
"You're right," said Wu the Elder. "Move in with us, brother, and I'll be able to hold up my head."
"If that's what you both want, I'll bring my things over tonight."
"Don't forget," said Golden Lotus. "I'll be waiting."
Wu Song said goodbye, left Purple Stone Street and returned to the county office. The magistrate was holding court. Wu Song made a request.
"I have a brother on Purple Stone Street. I'd like to sleep at his place. I could be here the rest of the time, awaiting orders. But I don't want to move without Your Worship's permission."
"Naturally I won't hamper fraternal devotion. Just make sure you get here every morning."
Wu Song thanked the magistrate and went to pack his belongings—his new clothes and the reward money. He had a soldier carry them to his brother's house. Golden Lotus greeted him with such smiling joy you'd think she'd found a treasure in the middle of the night!
Wu the Elder had a carpenter partition off a room for him downstairs, and put in a bed, a table, two stools and a charcoal brazier. Wu Song arranged his belongings and let the soldier go. After a night's sleep, he rose early the next morning. Golden Lotus got up quickly and brought him water to wash and rinse his mouth with. Wu Song performed his ablutions, tied on his head kerchief and left to sign in at the magistracy.
"Come home early for lunch," his sister-in-law called. "Don't eat any place else."
"I'll be back soon," said Wu Song. He attended all morning to business, then returned to the house.
Golden Lotus had washed her hands and done her nails. She looked very neat and trim. She served the food, and the three of them ate at the same table. After the meal Golden Lotus ceremoniously, with both hands, gave Wu Song a cup of tea.
"I'm too much trouble to you," he said. "I don't feel right about it. I'll get a soldier from the county to help."
"How can you treat us like strangers?" the girl protested. "You're not just anyone, you're our own flesh and blood! With a soldier the kitchen would never be clean. I couldn't stand having that kind of lout around!"
"In that case I'll just have to impose on your kindness."

Enough of idle chatter. After Wu Song moved in, he gave his brother silver to buy tea and tidbits and invite the neighbours. They in turn chipped in and bought gifts for Wu Song. Wu the Elder, then felt constrained to invite them to a meal. All of this is by the way. A few days later Wu Song presented his sister-in-law with a piece of silk of beautiful hue suitable for making clothes. She smiled gaily.
"You shouldn't have done it! But since you already have, I suppose I can't refuse. I'll just have to accept."
From then on Wu Song lived in his brother's house, and Wu the Elder continued to peddle buns on the street. Every morning Wu Song signed in at the magistracy and performed his duties. Whenever he returned home, whether early or late, Golden Lotus had food ready. She served him with obvious pleasure. It rather embarrassed him. She was always dropping subtle hints. But Wu Song was a man of solid virtue, and he paid no attention.
To make a long story short, a little more than a month had gone by, and winter was setting in. The wind blew for days, heavy clouds gathered. Then one morning thick snowflakes began to fall. It was still snowing at the first watch that night.
Wu Song left early the next morning to sign in at the magistracy. By noon he still hadn't returned. Golden Lotus sent her husband out to peddle buns, and asked her next-door neighbour Grandma Wang to buy some wine and meat for her. The girl lit the charcoal brazier in Wu Song's room.
"I'm really going to tempt him, today," she said to herself. "I don't believe he can't be aroused ..."
She stood alone by the door curtain watching the snow till she saw him coming through the falling flakes of white jade. She raised the curtain and greeted him with a smile.
"Cold?"
"Thanks for your concern." He entered and removed his wide-brimmed felt hat. She took it from him with both hands. "Don't trouble," he said. He took it back, shook the snow from it and hung it on the wall. He untied the sash from around his waist, divested himself of his outer tunic of parrot-green silk, went into his room and hung it up to dry.
"I've been waiting for you all morning," the girl said. "Why didn't you come home for lunch?"
"A man in the county office invited me. Just now another fellow suggested we drink. But I wasn't in the mood, and come straight home."
"Oh. Warm yourself by the fire."
"Right." He took off his oiled boots, put on a pair of socks and warm shoes, pulled a stool over beside the fire and sat down.
Golden Lotus bolted the front door, closed the back door, brought in wine and food and tidbits and placed them on the table.
"Where has brother gone that he's not back yet?" Wu Song asked.
"Out selling buns, as he does everyday. We can have a few cups of wine, just the two of us."
"Hadn't we better wait for him?"
"Why should we?" The girl picked up the cylindrical container that the wine was heating in.
"Don't bother, sister-in-law," said Wu Song. "I'll do it."
"Thank you," said Golden Lotus. She too pulled a stool over to the brazier and sat down. On the table that was near the fire was a tray with wine cups. The girl raised one and looked at Wu Song.
"Drink it down."
He took the cup from her and drained it. She refilled it. "It's cold today. You'd better have a double."
"As you say." Wu Song finished this one off, too. He poured a cup and handed it to the girl. She drank it, poured more wine from the heating container and placed it in front of him.
Her swelling bosom slightly exposed, her hair hanging down in a soft cloud, Golden Lotus smiled bewitchingly. "Someone told me you're keeping a girl singer in the east part of town. Is it true?"
"You shouldn't listen to such nonsense. I'm not that kind of person."
"I don't believe you. I'm afraid you say one thing and do another."
"Ask my brother, if you don't believe me."
"What does he know? If he knew about things like that, he wouldn't be a seller of buns. Have another drink."
The girl poured him three or four cups in succession, and had the same number herself. Warmed by a rising, uncontrollable passion, she talked more and more freely. Wu Song understood most of what she said. He kept his eyes down.
Golden Lotus went out to get some more wine. When she came back, Wu Song was poking up the fire in the brazier. Holding the container in one hand, she placed the other on his shoulder and squeezed.
"Is that all the clothing you're wearing in this cold weather?"
Annoyed, he said nothing. She took the poker from him.
"You don't know how to stir up a fire. I'll show you. The idea is to get it good and hot."
Wu Song was frantic with embarrassment. He didn't reply. But the girl was blinded to his state of mind by the urgency of her desire. She put down the poker, poured a cup of wine, drank a mouthful and offered Wu Song the rest.
"Finish this, if you have any feeling for me."
He snatched the cup and flung its contents on the floor.
"Have you no shame!" he cried. He gave her a push that nearly knocked her off her feet. Wu Song glared.
"I'm an upstanding man with teeth and hair who holds his head high, not some wicked immoral animal! Stop this indecent behavior! If I hear any whispering about you, watch out! My eyes may recognize you as a sister-in-law but my fists won't! Let's not have any more of this!"
Crimson, the girl pulled her stool away. "I was only joking! Why are you making such a fuss? Have you no respect!"
She removed the cups and plates to the kitchen and left Wu Song fuming in his room.
Early in the afternoon Wu the Elder came home, carrying his shoulder-pole and hampers. He pushed the locked door a few times, and Golden Lotus hurriedly opened it. He set down his equipment and followed her into the kitchen. Her eyes were red from weeping.
"Who did you quarrel with?" he asked.
"It's all your fault for being such a softy! Letting people pick on me!"
"Who would dare?"
"You know very well! That nasty brother of yours! He came back in the big snow and I served him wine. When he saw no one was around, he tried to get fresh!"
"My brother isn't like that. He's always been very well behaved. And keep your voice down! If the neighbours hear, they'll laugh at us!"
Wu the Elder turned away from his wife and went to Wu Song's room. "Brother," he said, "you haven't eaten yet. We'll have something together."
Wu Song didn't reply. He thought for several minutes, then removed his shoes and socks, put on his oiled boots, his outer tunic and broad-brimmed felt hat, fastened his waist sash and headed for the door.
"Where are you going?" Wu the Elder called.
Wu Song silently continued upon his way.
Wu the Elder returned to the kitchen. "He wouldn't talk to me. He just went off down that street to the magistracy," Wu the Elder said to his wife. "What's wrong with him?"
"You dolt," cried Golden Lotus. "Is that so hard to figure out? He's ashamed, he can't face you, so he left! I forbid you to let that knave live in this house ever again!"
"We'll be scoffed at if he moves out."
"Idiot! I suppose we won't be scoffed at if he makes passes at me! Live with him if you like! I'm not that kind of a woman! Just give me an annulment paper and you can have him all to yourself!"
Wu the Elder didn't dare open his mouth.
At that moment Wu Song arrived with a soldier and a parrying-pole. He went into his room, packed his belongings, and left again. Wu the Elder ran after him.
"Brother," he said, "why are you moving?"
"Don't ask. If I spoke, it would only be hanging out the sign-board of just what kind of merchandise you've got in there! Let me go!"
Wu the Elder was stricken dumb. Wu Song departed, while Golden Lotus cursed.
"Good riddance! Everyone thought how nice to have a constable who looked after his brother and sister-in-law. Little did they know what a traitor he was! 'The prettiest papayas are emptiest inside.' There never was a truer word. He's moved, thank Heaven and Earth! Now at least we don't have an enemy right under our noses!"
Her husband couldn't understand her rage. Unhappiness began to gnaw at his heart with nagging persistence.
Thereafter Wu Song maintained quarters in the county office compound. Wu the Elder peddled his buns on the street as usual. He wanted to go and see Wu Song but his wife issued strict injunctions against "provoking" him, so in the end Wu the Elder abandoned the idea.
Time flowed by, and soon the snow was gone. Another ten days or so passed. The county magistrate in the two and half years since he had assumed office had accumulated a large hoard of gold and silver. He wanted to send it to a member of his family in the Eastern Capital to hold for him, using part to buy him a higher post. But he needed an able, trustworthy person to deliver the money, so that it wouldn't be robbed in transit. Suddenly, the magistrate thought of Wu Song.
"The very man. A hero like that would be ideal."
He summoned Wu Song and said: "I have a load of gifts and a letter I want to send to a relative in the Eastern Capital. But I'm afraid there may be trouble on the road and need a hero like you to bring them. Do this for me, and don't be afraid of the difficulty. I'll reward you well when you return."
"Your Excellency has raised me in rank. I can't refuse. If you give me this task, of course I'll go. Besides, I've never been to the Eastern Capital. I'd like to see it. Get the things ready, Your Excellency, and I'll leave tomorrow."
The magistrate was very pleased. He favoured Wu Song with three cups of wine. Of that we'll say no more.
Wu Song went to his quarters, took some silver, got a soldier, bought a bottle of wine and food and tidbits, and proceeded to Wu the Elder's house on Purple Stone Street. When the older brother returned from bun selling, he found Wu Song sitting outside his door. He told the soldier to go into the kitchen and prepare the meal.
Golden Lotus still had a yen for Wu Song. She saw him arrive with food and wine, and she thought: "The knave must have me on his mind, so he's come back! I'm too much for him! I'll get the story out of him gradually."
She went upstairs, put on fresh make-up, fixed her hair, and changed into more alluring clothes. She greeted Wu Song at the door.
"Have we offended you in some way? You haven't been here for days! I don't understand it. I told your brother to go to you in the county office and apologize but he couldn't find you. Now, happily, today you've come! But you shouldn't spend money like this!"
"I've something to say," replied Wu Song. "I've come specially to speak to you both."
"Well, then, come upstairs and sit."
The three mounted the stairs and entered the parlour. At Wu Song's insistence, his brother and sister-in-law sat at the head of the table. He moved a stool over and sat at the side. The soldier brought up the meat and wine and placed it before them. Wu Song urged Wu the Elder and Golden Lotus to drink. She kept giving him coy glances but he concentrated on his wine.
After five rounds, Wu Song had the soldier fill a pledge cup with wine. Holding it, he faced his brother.
"I've been given a mission to the Eastern Capital by our magistrate. I'm leaving tomorrow. I'll be gone for forty or fifty days, maybe two months. There's something I must say, first. You've always been weak and timid, and people may try to take advantage when I'm not around. If you sell ten trays of buns a day usually, from tomorrow on don't sell more than five. Leave the house late and come back early. Don't drink with anybody. And when you get home, lower the curtain and bolt the door. In that way you'll avoid arguments. If anyone insults you, don't quarrel. I'll take care of him when I come back. Pledge me this, brother, with this cup."
Wu the Elder accepted the cup from Wu Song's hand. "What you say is right, and I agree." He drank the wine.
Wu Song poured a second cup and turned to Golden Lotus.
"Sister-in-law is clever. There's no need for me to say much. My brother is a simple, honest fellow. He needs you to look after him. 'Inner force counts more than outward strength,' as the saying goes. With you running the house properly, he'll have nothing to worry about. As the ancients put it: 'When the fence is strong no dogs get in.' "
A flush crept from the girl's ears till her whole face was suffused. She shook her finger at Wu the Elder.
"You filthy thing! What rumours are you spreading—slandering me? I'm as tough and straightforward as any man! A man can stand on my fist, a horse can trot on my arm! I can show my face proudly anywhere! I'm not one of those wives you need be ashamed of. Ever since I married you, not so much as an ant has dared enter your house! What's this about fences not being strong and dogs getting in? Before you talk wild, you'd better be able to prove it! Every dropped brick or tile must come to earth!"
Wu Song smiled. "Since that's how you feel, sister-in-law, that's fine. Just make sure your deeds correspond to your words. I'll remember what you've said. I ask you to drink to it."
Golden Lotus thrust the cup aside and ran out of the room. Halfway down the stairs she shouted: "You're so smart. Haven't you heard 'An elder brother's wife deserves the respect you give a mother'? When I married your brother I never even heard of you. You come here, I hardly know you, and you try acting like a father-in-law! Just my luck to run into all this shit!"
Weeping, she went downstairs, putting on a big show of injured innocence.
The brothers drank several more cups of wine, then Wu Song rose to leave.
"Come back soon," said Wu the Elder. "I want to see you again." There were tears in his eyes. Wu Song saw them.
"Don't go out selling buns, brother," he urged. "Stay home. I'll send you money for your expenses."
Wu the Elder walked down the stairs with him and saw him to the door.
"Don't forget what I've told you, brother," Wu Song said.
He returned to the county office compound with the soldier and prepared for the journey. Early the next morning he tied up his pack and went to see the magistrate. The official's cases were already loaded on a cart. The magistrate selected two strong intelligent soldiers, plus two trusted servants to go with Wu Song, and gave them private instructions. Then all bid farewell to the magistrate. Wu Song buckled on his armor and took his halberd. The five of them, guarding the cart, left Yanggu Town for the Eastern Capital.
Our story now divides in two parts. We'll talk of Wu the Elder. His wife reviled him for four full days after Wu Song departed. Wu the Elder took her abuse in silence, and remembered his brother's words. He sold only half as many buns as before and came home early. No sooner did he rest his carrying-pole than he lowered the bamboo curtain, bolted the front door and sat himself down. Golden Lotus fumed with resentment. She shook her finger at him.
"Wretched imbecile! I've never seen a house where they close the bloody door when the sun is only halfway across the sky. People will jeer that we're warding off demons! You just listen to your brother's dirty mouth. You don't care that others may laugh!"
"Let them laugh, let them say what they like. My brother's advice is good. It will prevent all sorts of trouble."
"Dolt! You're a man. Why can't you make up your own mind instead of listening to someone else?"
Wu the Elder waggled his hand firmly. "I'm going to do what Wu Song said. His words are pure gold."
For another two weeks she rowed with him about his unvarying schedule. But then she became accustomed to it, and when he was due to come home she lowered the bamboo curtain and bolted the door herself. Wu the Elder was relieved. "It's much better this way," he said to himself.
Another two or three days passed, and winter was nearly over. There was more sunlight, the weather was slightly warmer. Golden Lotus, expecting her husband home shortly, went to the door with a forked pole to lower the curtain over the entrance way.
But then something happened. A man was passing by. As the old saying goes: "Without coincidence there would be no story." The pole she was holding slipped and landed right on the man's head. Angrily, he halted and turned around, ready to blast. But when he saw the lissome creature standing there, he promptly cooled down. His rage went sailing off to Java, and he smiled.
The girl clasped her hands and curtsied apologetically. "I was careless and you've been hurt!"
Adjusting his head kerchief, the man bowed. "It doesn't matter. Think nothing of it."
Grandma Wang, the girl's neighbour, observed all this through the screen of her teashop door. She laughed. "Who told you to walk so close to the eaves of the house," she called. "Serves you right!"
The man smiled. "It's my own fault. I bumped into the lady. I hope she'll forgive me."
Golden Lotus also smiled. "Then you're not angry?"
Again the man laughed. He gave her a sweeping bow. "I wouldn't dare." His eyes roved over her boldly, then he swaggered off with measured pace.
Golden Lotus let down the curtain, took the pole inside, bolted the door, and waited for Wu the Elder's return.

Do you know who that man was? Where he lived? Originally from one of the wealthier Yanggu families, he had come down in the world and opened a drug and medicine shop in front of the county office. He was smooth and cunning, and skilled with fists and stave. Recently, he had grown quite rich again, acting as a go-between in litigation making deals, passing money, corrupting officials. The whole county treated him with careful deference. His family name was Ximen, his given name Qing.
Being a first son, he had been known as Ximen the Elder. But when he again became wealthy, people called him the Right Honourable Ximen.
Shortly after his encounter with Golden Lotus, Ximen returned, entered Grandma Wang's teashop and sat down by the screen.
"Right Honourable," grinned Grandma Wang, "that was quite a bow you gave out there."
Ximen chuckled. "Tell me, godmother, whose woman is that pullet next door?"
"She's the King of Hell's kid sister, daughter of his commanding general. Why do you ask?"
"I'm serious. Give me a straight answer."
"You mean to say you don't know her husband? He peddles food outside the county office everyday."
"Not Xu San who sells date pudding?"
Grandma Wang waved her hand negatively. "No, though they'd make a good pair. Guess again."
"Li Er the silver carrier?"
"No, though they also would be well matched."
"It couldn't be Lu Xiaoyi with the tattooed arms?"
Grandma Wang grinned. "No. They'd be a fine team, though. Guess again, Right Honourable."
"Godmother," said Ximen, "I really can't imagine."
Grandma Wang laughed. "This'll kill you. Her old man is Wu the Elder who sells hot buns!"
Ximen howled and stamped with laughter. "Not Three Inches of Mulberry Bark?"
"The very same."
Ximen groaned. "Such a delicious morsel landing in a dog's mouth!"
"A real pity," Grandma Wang agreed. "But life is like that. 'A magnificent steed gets a dolt for a rider, a charming wife sleeps with an oaf of a husband,' as the saying goes. The marriage god makes some crazy matches."
"What do I owe you for tea?"
"Not much. Let it go. We'll add it up some other time."
"Who is your son working for these days?"
"I hate to tell you. He went up the Huaihe River with a merchant and still hasn't returned. Who knows whether he's alive or dead!"
"How would you like him to work for me?"
Grandma Wang smiled. "If Your Honour were willing to raise him up, that would be fine."
"Wait till he gets back. We'll figure out something."
They chatted a while longer. Ximen thanked Grandma Wang and left. Less than half a watch later, he was sitting by her door screen again, gazing at Wu the Elder's house. Grandma Wang came out from the back of the shop.
"A *mei* plum drink, Right Honourable?"
"Excellent. Make it good and sour."
She soon placed the drink before him respectfully, with both hands. He slowly sipped the concoction, then set the cup down on the table.
"You make very good sour plum drinks, godmother. Do you have a lot in stock?"
Grandma Wang laughed. "I've been making *mei*[*] all my life but I don't keep anyone here!"
"I was talking about sour plum drinks and you're talking about making matches! There's a big difference."
"Oh. I thought you wanted to know whether I was a good matchmaker."
"Since that's your line, godmother, I like you to make a match for me, a first-rate one. I'll reward you well."
"If your wife hears about this she's liable to box my ears!"
"My wife is very tolerant. I already have several concubines at home but none of them please me. If you know someone suitable, don't hesitate to speak. Even a woman who was married before will do, as long as I find her to my liking."
"I came across a good one the other day but I'm afraid you won't want her."
"If she's really good, you arrange it for me, and I'll thank you."
"A very handsome woman but a bit mature."
"A year or two's difference in our ages won't matter. How old is she?"
"She was born in the year of the tiger. At New Year's she'll be exactly ninety-three!"
Ximen laughed. "You're mad! Always joking!"
Still chuckling, he stood up and left. Day was drawing to a close. Grandma Wang had just lit the lamp and was getting ready to lock up for the night when Ximen again flitted in and sat down by the door screen, facing the house of Wu the Elder.
"How about a nice 'get together' drink, Right Honourable?" suggested Grandma Wang.
"Fine. I'd like it a bit sweet."
She brought the beverage and handed it to him. He sat a while, drinking, then rose once more.
"Put it on my bill, godmother. I'll pay you tomorrow."
"No hurry. Rest peacefully, and drop in again soon."
Ximen laughed. Nothing further happened that night.
Early the next morning when Grandma Wang opened her door and looked outside, there was Ximen, walking back and forth in front of the shop.
"That stud sets a fast pace," she said to herself. "I'll spread a little sugar on the tip of his nose, just out of reach of his tongue. He's great at wheedling favours in the county office but I'll show him that he can't get anything from me on the cheap!"
She opened the door wide, started the fire, put the kettle on. Ximen entered immediately and sat down by the door screen, his eyes on the bamboo curtain before Wu the Elder's door. Grandma Wang pretended not to notice, and remained in the rear, fanning the fire.
"Godmother," Ximen called. "Two cups of tea, please."
"So it's you, Right Honourable," Grandma Wang grinned. "Haven't seen you in days. Have a chair."
She set two cups of strong ginger tea on the table before him.
"Have one with me," Ximen invited.
"I'm not your dearie," the old woman cackled.
Ximen also laughed. "Godmother," he queried, "what do they sell next door?"
"Steaming, dripping, hot, spicy, delicious goodies."
Ximen grinned. "You really are a mad woman!"
"Not a bit of it," laughed Grandma Wang. "But she has a husband."
"I'm serious. They say he makes very good buns. I'd like to order forty or fifty. Do you know whether he's home or not?"
"If it's buns you want, wait till he returns. No need to go to his house."
"You're quite right." Ximen sat a while, drinking his tea. He stood up. "Put it on the bill, godmother."
"Don't worry. I'll do that all right."
Ximen smiled and departed.
Soon afterwards, Grandma Wang, tending her shop, glanced outside. Ximen was again pacing in front of the door. He walked to the east, and gave a look. He walked to the west, and looked again. Seven or eight times he did this, then once more entered the teashop.
"A rare visit, Right Honourable!" Grandma Wang hailed him. "It's been a long time!"
Ximen smiled. He took out a piece of silver and handed it to her. "This is for the tea, godmother," he said.
"It doesn't amount to all this much."
"Just hang on to it."
"Got him!" the old woman thought with inner satisfaction. "The stud is really hooked." She put the money away and said: "You look thirsty. A cup of steeped broad-leafed tea—now, that's what you want."
"How did you guess?"
"Easy. I could see it in your expression. 'One look at a man's face tells you whether he's prospering or suffering,' as the old saying goes. Not even the strangest things get by me."
"I have something on my mind this minute. I'll give you five pieces of silver if you can guess what it is."
Grandma Wang grinned. "I don't need three or four guesses. One is enough. Right Honourable, bring your ear down to me. All your coming and going these last two days is because of that person next door. Right?"
Ximen smiled. "Godmother, you're a shrewd woman. To tell you the truth, ever since she beaned me with the pole and I got a good look at her that day, I've been entranced! But I don't know how to get to her. Have you any ideas?"
Grandma Wang laughed uproariously. "Right Honourable, I'll give it to you straight. This teashop is just a front—'the devil playing night watchman.' From the snowy morning on the third day of the sixth month three years ago when I sold my first cup of steeped tea, I've never done much business here. My real trade is in the 'mixed market.' "
"What do you mean 'mixed market'?"
"Mainly, I'm a match-maker. But I'm also a broker, a midwife, a lovers' go-between, and a bawd."
"Godmother, if you can bring this off for me, I'll give you ten pieces of silver to pay for your coffin."
"Listen to me, Right Honourable. These seduction cases are the hardest of all. There are five conditions that have to be met before you can succeed. First, you have to be as handsome as Pan An. Second, you need a tool as big as a donkey's. Third, you must be as rich as Deng Tong. Fourth, you must be as forbearing as a needle plying through cotton wool. Fifth, you've got to spend time. It can be done only if you meet these five requirements."
"Frankly, I think I do. First, while I'm far from a Pan An, I still can get by. Second, I've had a big cock since childhood. Third, my family has a bit of change. Maybe not as much as Deng Tong but enough. Fourth, I'm very forbearing. Even if she struck me four hundred blows, I'd never return one. Fifth, I've plenty of time. Otherwise, how could I keep hanging around here? Godmother, you must help me. If we succeed, I'll pay you heavily."
"Right Honourable, although you say you meet the five requirements, there's still another stumbling block."
"What's that?"
"Forgive me if I'm blunt but these seduction cases are very tricky. Every bit of the money needed must be provided. You mustn't hold back even one penny out of a hundred. You've always been a little tight-fisted. You don't like to throw your money around. That's going to stand in our way."
"We can cure that easily enough. I'll simply do what you say."
"If you're willing to spend the money, Right Honourable, I can arrange a meeting between you and the pullet. But you have to promise me something."
"Anything you want. What's your plan?"
"It's late, today. Come back in three months or half a year and we'll discuss this some more."
Ximen knelt at her feet. "Quit kidding around, godmother," he begged. "You've got to do this for me!"
Grandma Wang chuckled. "Impatient, aren't you? I have a plan, and it's a good one. It may not be foolproof but it's ninety per cent sure. Now here's what we do: This girl was the goddaughter of a wealthy Qinghe family, and she's a fine seamstress. You go out and buy me a bolt of white brocade, a bolt of blue silk, a bolt of white silk gauze, and ten ounces of good silk floss and have them delivered here. I'll go over to the girl's house and have a cup of tea with her. I'll say: 'A kind gentleman has given me some material for burial garments. Would you please look in your almanac and see what's an auspicious day for me a hire a tailor?' If she doesn't respond, then that's the end. If she says: 'I'll make them for you,' and tells me not to bother about a tailor, then we've scored one point out of ten. I'll ask her over to my place. If she won't come and says: 'Bring the material here,' then that's the end. If she's pleased, and agrees, we've scored point two.
"When she comes, the first day, I'll have some wine and tidbits for her. You stay away. The second day, if she says it's not convenient here, and insists on taking the work home, we're finished. But if she's willing to come again, we've won point three. You stay away that day, too.
"Around noon the third day, I want you to arrive, neat and clean, and stand outside the door and cough as a signal. Then you call: 'Godmother, why haven't I seen you these days?' I'll come out and invite you into the rear room. If when she sees you she runs home, I won't be able to stop her, and that will be the end of it. If she stays put, then we've won point four.
"You sit down, and I'll say to the pullet: "This is the benefactor who has given me the material. I'm terribly grateful!' I'll praise your many good qualities, and you compliment her on her needlework. If she doesn't respond, it's over. If she replies, that's point five.
"Then I'll say: 'I'm lucky to have this lady do the sewing for me. I'm very grateful to both of you benefactors. One gives money, the other gives skill. This lady wouldn't even be here if I hadn't gone out of my way to beg her. Won't you help me, Right Honourable, to show her my thanks?' You take out some silver and ask me to buy her something. If she turns and leaves, I won't be able to stop her, and that will be the end. If she remains, we've won point six.
"I'll start for the door with the money and say to her: 'Please keep this gentleman company for a while.' If she gets up and goes home, there's nothing I can do about it. That will be the end. If she doesn't leave, we'll still be winning. Point seven will belong to us.
"When I return with the things I've bought and put them on the table, I'll say to her: 'Rest a while and have a cup of wine. We can't refuse this gentleman's treat.' If she won't drink with you at the same table and leaves, that's the finish. If she only says she wants to go but doesn't, that's fine. Point eight will be ours.
"After she's had plenty to drink and you've started a conversation with her, I'll claim there's no more wine, and tell you to buy some more. You ask me to do it. I'll pretend to go, and close the door, leaving you two alone inside. If she gets upset and runs home, that will be the end. But if, after I close the door, she doesn't make any fuss, we've won point nine. We'll need only one point more for the game.
"But that's the tough one, Right Honourable. You'll have to speak to her sweetly. Take it easy. If you make any sudden moves and spoil everything, there's nothing more I can do for you. Brush one of the chopsticks off the table with your sleeve. Bend down as if to pick it up and pinch her foot. If she screams, I'll come charging in to the rescue, and you will have lost, probably for good. If she doesn't make a sound, that will be point ten. Then, and then, she will be all yours! How do you like my plan?"
Ximen was delighted. "Maybe it couldn't get into the emperor's Hall of Fame but it's excellent!"
"Don't forget my ten ounces of silver!"
" 'Can one forget Dongting Lake while eating its fragrant tangerine peel?' When do we start?"
"I'll have news for you by tonight. I'm going to sound her out today before Wu the Elder gets back. You buy those silks and send them over."
"Put this through for me, godmother, and I won't disappoint you!"
Ximen bid farewell to Grandma Wang, went to the market, bought the brocade, silk, gauze and ten ounces of pure silk floss. He had a family servant wrap and deliver them to the teashop, together with five pieces of silver.
Grandma Wang received the silks and money and sent the servant back. Leaving her place via the rear door, she went to Wu's house. Golden Lotus invited her upstairs to sit a while.
"Why don't you ever come over to my place for a cup of tea?" the old woman asked.

"I haven't been feeling well these last few days. I just don't have the energy," the girl replied.
"Do you have an almanac here? I want to pick a good day to hire a tailor."
"What sort of clothes are you making?"
"I'm getting all kinds of aches and ailments in my old age. If anything should happen, I'd like to have my burial garments ready. Fortunately, a wealthy gentleman, seeing my condition, has given me some fine silks and good floss. I've had them at home for over a year but I can't get them made up. Lately, I've been feeling that my days are numbered. Because it's leap year I wanted to use this extra month to get them done. But my tailor keeps stalling. Says he's too busy, can't come. It's simply awful!"
Golden Lotus laughed. "Maybe you wouldn't like my work but I'd be glad to make them for you, if you'll let me."
The old woman's face was wreathed in smiles. "If you'd apply your precious hands to them, I would be the gainer, even after death! I've heard of your skill with the needle but I never had the courage to ask you."
"Why not? I've said I'd do it, and I will. We must get someone to choose a lucky day for you from the almanac, and I'll start."
"You're my lucky star! As long as you'll do it, we don't need any special day. I recall now I asked someone the other day, and he said tomorrow would be a Most Auspicious Day. I forgot, because you don't really need a Most Auspicious Day to cut materials."
"How can you say that? You do for burial garments."
"In that case, fine. Tomorrow's the day. I'll trouble you to come to my humble home."
"That won't be necessary, godmother, just bring the materials here."
"But I'd love to see you work. Besides, I have no one to watch the shop."
"All right, then. I'll come over after breakfast."
"Grandma Wang thanked Golden Lotus profusely and left. That evening she told Ximen what had transpired, and instructed him to return the day after tomorrow.
Nothing happened that night. Early the next morning Grandma Wang cleaned her house, bought some thread, put on the tea kettle, and waited.
Wu the Elder finished his breakfast, took his carrying-pole and hampers of buns, and went out on the street. Golden Lotus rolled up the front door curtain and proceeded through the back door to the house of Grandma Wang. The old woman greeted her with unrestrained joy. She led the girl into the rear room, poured her a cup of strong tea, spread before her shelled pine nuts and walnuts, and urged her to eat. First wiping the table clean, Grandma Wang laid out the silks. The girl measured them, cut the appropriate lengths and began to sew.
"What technique," marvelled the old woman. "In my nearly seventy years I've never seen such fine needlework!"
Golden Lotus continued sewing until noon, when Grandma Wang served her wine and noodles. The girl resumed sewing until it was nearly dark, then gathered the materials together and went home. Wu the Elder was just entering the door with his carrying-pole and empty hampers. The girl opened the door for him and lowered the screen. As he came into the room he noticed that his wife's face was flushed.
"Where have you been drinking?"
"Grandma Wang, next door, asked me to make some burial garments for her. She served me a snack at noon."
*"Aiya!*/You mustn't eat her food. We may be wanting a favour from her some day. Come home when it's time to eat. Don't trouble her. Take some money with you, if you go again tomorrow, and treat her to wine in return. 'A close neighbour means more than a distant relative.' Don't forget your manners. If she won't let you treat her, take the materials home and work on them here."
The girl listened. Nothing more was said on the subject that evening.
Grandma Wang's plan for getting Golden Lotus over to her house was set. The next morning after breakfast, Wu the Elder departed, and the old woman promptly called for her. She brought out the materials and, as the girl sewed, served her tea. Of that no more need be said.
When noon approached, Golden Lotus handed Grandma Wang a string of copper coins. "Let's have some wine together, godmother."
*"Aiya!*/Who ever heard of such a thing? I've asked you here to do some work for me. I can't let you spend any money!"
"My husband said if you insist on being polite, I'm to take the work home and do it for you there."
"Wu the Elder is too polite," the old woman said quickly. "Since that's how it is, I suppose I'll have to agree." The last thing she wanted was to disturb the arrangement.
She added some money of her own to what the girl had given her, bought some top quality wine and food, and fruits out of season, and served them solicitously to Golden Lotus. Good reader, observe: Nine out of ten women, no matter how clever they may be, invariably are taken in by small attentions and flattery.
The girl ate and drank, and sewed a bit longer. When it began to grow dark, showered with the thanks of her hostess, she returned home.
To skip the idle chatter: The moment Grandma Wang saw Wu the Elder leave after breakfast the third morning, she went to his rear door and called: "I'm here to bother you again ..."
Golden Lotus came down the stairs. "I was just coming over."
The two went to the old woman's rear room, sat down, got out the materials, and the girl commenced to sew. Grandma Wang poured tea that they both drank.
It was nearly noon. Ximen, unable to wait another day, arrived at the door of the teashop on Purple Stone Street. He wore a new kerchief on his head, was smartly dressed, and had brought four or five ounces of silver.
He coughed. "Godmother, where have you been these days?"
The old woman glanced out. "Who's that, calling godmother?"
"It's me."
Grandma Wang hurried into the shop. She smiled. "I had no idea. So it's you, Right Honourable. You're come just at the right time. Please step inside. I want to show you something." She took him by the sleeve and led him into the rear room. To the girl she said: "This is the gentleman I told you about. The one who gave me the materials."
Ximen greeted Golden Lotus respectfully. She quickly put down her work and curtsied.
"I've had the silks you gave me for a year," Grandma Wang told Ximen, "but I couldn't get them made up. Fortunately, this lady is now doing them for me. Her stitches are as fine as any machine weave! So close and exact! A rare skill! See for yourself, Right Honourable."
Ximen picked up the unfinished garment and gazed at it admiringly. "Remarkable. A fairy touch!"
The girl smiled. "The gentleman is making fun of me."
"Godmother," said Ximen, "may I ask? Whose wife is this lady?"
"Guess."
"How can I?"
Grandma Wang laughed. "She's married to Wu the Elder, next door. Did that pole hurt your head the other day? You've forgotten."
Golden Lotus blushed. "It slipped. I hope the gentleman won't hold it against me."
"Of course not," exclaimed Ximen.
"The Right Honourable is very amiable," Grandma Wang interpolated. "He's not the kind to bear a grudge. A very nice man."
"We hadn't met before the other day," said Ximen. "So she's Wu the Elder's wife. I know him. A competent manager. He conducts his business on the street and never offends anyone, old or young. He earns money and has a good disposition. An unusual person."
"That's Wu the Elder," cried Grandma Wang. "And this lady is the most dutiful of wives."
"He's a useless fellow," said Golden Lotus. "You're laughing at us, sir."
"Not at all, madam," protested Ximen. "The ancients say: 'The pliant rise in the world, the hard invite disaster.' An excellent man like your Wu the Elder 'doesn't lose a drop in ten thousand tons of water.' "
"How true," gushed the old woman, beating the drum from the sidelines.
Still uttering compliments, Ximen sat down opposite the girl.
"Do you know who this gentleman is?" asked Grandma Wang.
"No, I don't."
"He's one of the wealthiest men in the county, a friend of the magistrate. He's called the Right Honourable Ximen. He's very rich. He has a medicinal drug shop opposite the county office. His money would overflow the Big Dipper. Rice rots in his granaries. Whatever of his that is yellow is gold, what's white is silver, what's round is pearls, what glitters is jewels. He has rhinoceros horns and elephant tusks ..."
With wild exaggeration, Grandma Wang praised Ximen. The girl listened, her head bent over her sewing. Ximen gazed at her, consumed with desire. He couldn't wait to get her alone. The old woman poured tea and put a cup in front of each of them.
"Have some tea with the gentleman," she said to Golden Lotus.
There was a touch of provocation in the girl's glances. Grandma Wang looked at Ximen significantly and touched her face with five fingers of her hand. He understood. Five-tenths of the battle was won.
"If you hadn't come, I wouldn't have presumed to call on you and invite you," Grandma Wang said to him. "But you two were fated to meet, and here, by lucky coincidence. Although 'One person shouldn't impose on two patrons,' as the saying goes, you have spent money, Right Honourable, and this lady is giving her skill. I hate to bother you any further but don't you think, since she's kind enough to come here, that you might treat her to a little something, on my behalf?"
"How could I be so slow! Here is some money." Ximen took out some pieces of silver and handed them wrapped in a kerchief, to Grandma Wang.
"I can't allow you to do that," said the girl. But she remained seated.
The old woman took the money and went to the door. "Keep Right Honourable company a while," said Grandma Wang.
"You mustn't go to any trouble, godmother," said the girl. She didn't budge.
Ximen and Golden Lotus were strongly drawn to each other. He was frankly staring at her. She, glancing at him from under her lashes, thought him a fine figure of a man, and was already more than half willing. But she kept her head down over her work.
Soon Grandma Wang returned with a cooked fat goose, stewed meat and delicate tidbits. She placed everything on platters and set them on the table.
"Put your sewing away," she said to the girl, "and have a cup of wine."
"You go ahead, godmother. It's not proper for me to join the gentleman," said Golden Lotus. But she didn't leave her seat.
"We're doing this to express my thanks, especially to you. How can you say such a thing?" Grandma Wang laid the dishes on the table. The three sat down, and she poured the wine. Ximen raised his cup.
"Drink hearty, madam," he said to Golden Lotus.
"Thank you, sir," the girl smiled.
"I know you have a real capacity," Grandma Wang said to her. "So don't stint on your drinking."
Ximen picked up his chopsticks. "Godmother, please serve this lady for me."
The old woman selected choice pieces and placed them on Golden Lotus's plate. She poured three rounds of wine in succession, then went out to heat some more.
"May I ask how old you are?" Ximen said to the girl.
"Twenty-three."
"Five years younger than me."
"You're comparing the earth and the sky, sir," the girl said politely.
Grandma Wang came back into the room. "This lady is remarkably clever," she gushed. "Not only does she sew beautifully but she's read all the classics."
"Where can you find such a girl these days?" said Ximen. "Wu the Elder is certainly fortunate."
"You mustn't think I'm trying to provoke anything," said Grandma Wang, "but with all the women in your household, there isn't one who can compare.
"That's quite true. I can't tell you how hard it's been. I guess I was born unlucky. I've never been able to find a really good one."
"There was nothing wrong with your first wife."
"You can say that again. If she were still alive, my household wouldn't be in such a state. Those women are just mouths waiting to be fed. They don't look after a thing."
"How long ago did your wife die, sir?" the girl asked.
"It's sad story. Though she came from a poor family, she was very skilful. She did everything for me. She's been gone three years now. My household is in a mess. That's why I spend so much time outside. It only aggravates me when I'm home."
"Do you mind if I'm frank?" said Grandma Wang. "Your first wife wasn't as handy with a needle as this lady is."
"She wasn't as good-looking, either."
Grandma Wang laughed. "Why haven't you ever invited me to tea in that house you have on East Street?"
"You mean where I'm keeping Zhang Xixi, the ballad singer? She's just a singsong girl. I don't care for her much."
"You've had Li Jiaojiao for quite a while."
"Yes. I keep her at home. If she were like this lady here, I'd have raised her to the status of wife long ago."
"If you could find such a girl, would you have any trouble bringing her into the family?"
"Both my parents are dead. I'm my own master. Who would dare to object?"
"I'm only joking. The problem is, there isn't any girl who would please you."
"Who says there isn't? It's just that my marriage luck has been bad. I've never met the right one."
Ximen and the old woman talked for a while in this manner, then Grandma Wang said: "I'm afraid the wine is nearly finished. Can I trouble you to buy another bottle?"
"There are five ounces of silver in my purse. You can have them all. Take what you need and keep the change."
Grandma Wang thanked him and got up, glancing at Golden Lotus. The dram of wine inside the girl was stirring her passions. She and the man were talking freely. Both were aroused. Golden Lotus kept her head down but she didn't leave. Grinning, Grandma Wang addressed her.
"I'm going out to buy another bottle. Please keep Right Honourable company. There's still some wine in the heating tube. You and he can each have a cup. I'm going all the way down to that shop opposite the county office to get some good wine, so I won't be back for quite a while."
"You needn't go to so much bother," the girl murmured. She remained where she was.
Grandma Wang went out, close and tied the doors of the rear room, then sat herself down on guard.
Ximen poured wine for Golden Lotus. With his wide sleeve, he swept a pair of chopsticks from the table to the floor. Fate was on the side of his amorous quest—they landed right beside the girl's feet. He bent down as though to pick them up and instead squeezed one of her embroidered satin shoes. Golden Lotus laughed.
"Sir, you mustn't! Are you trying to seduce me?"
Ximen knelt before her. "I want you so!"
Golden Lotus raised him to his feet and threw herself into his arms. There in Grandma Wang's room the two hastily undressed. Sharing the same pillow, they revelled joyously.
After the clouds had spent their rain, and Golden Lotus and Ximen were about to put on their clothes. Grandma Wang pushed open the doors and came in. She pretended to be very angry.
"Pretty tricks you two have been up to," she cried, startling the lovers. "A fine thing! I asked you here to make me garments," she said to Golden Lotus, "not to play adulterous games! If Wu the Elder finds out, he'll surely blame me! It would be better for me if I told him about it first!"
She started for the door. The girl grabbed her by the skirt. "Godmother, spare me!"
"Not so loud, godmother," Ximen pleaded.
Grandma Wang chuckled. "I'll spare you both on one condition."
"One or a dozen," said Golden Lotus. "I'll promise you anything!"

"From now on, you must fool Wu the Elder and entertain Right Honourable everyday without fail, in which case I'll spare you. But if you miss a single day, I'll tell your husband!"
"Whatever you say, godmother."
"And you, Right Honourable Ximen, you know what I want. The matter is a complete success. Don't forget your promise. If you do, I'll tell Wu the Elder!"
"Never fear, godmother. I won't forget."
The three drank until afternoon. Golden Lotus rose. "My husband will be home soon. I have to go."
She returned through the back door and was lowering the front door curtain when Wu arrived.
At that moment Grandma Wang was saying to Ximen: "Well, what do you think of my method?"
"Marvellous! I'm sending you a bar of silver as soon as I get home. You shall have everything I promised!"
" 'My eyes watch for the banners of royal reward, my ears are cocked for the sound of glad tidings.' Don't fail me! I don't want to be 'a funeral singer demanding payment after the burial'!"
Ximen laughed and departed. Of that no more need be said.
From then on, Golden Lotus slipped over to Grandma Wang's house everyday to meet Ximen. They were as close as lacquer, as thick as glue. As the old saying has it: "News of good behavior never gets past the door but a scandal is heard of a thousand //away." In less than half a month, all the neighbours knew. Only Wu remained in ignorance.
There was a boy of fifteen or sixteen in the county town whose family name was Qiao. Because he was sired by an army man in Yunzhou Prefecture, he was given the name Yunge. All that was left of his immediate family, besides himself, was his old father. A clever youngster, he earned a living selling fresh fruit in the various taverns outside the county office. Sometimes Ximen gave him a bit of money.
One day, carrying a basket of snowy pears, he wandered along the streets looking for Ximen.
"I know a place where I think you can find him," a gabby fellow said to the boy.
"Please tell me, uncle. I can earn forty or fifty coppers from him. I need them for my old pa."
"He's hooked up with the wife of Wu the Elder, the bun seller. He's with her everyday in Grandma Wang's teashop on Purple Stone Street. You'll probably find him there. You're only a child, so go right in."
Yunge thanked the man, went with his basket to Purple Stone Street and entered the teashop. Grandma Wang was sitting on a little stool, hand-spinning hemp thread. The boy put down his basket and greeted her.
"My respects, godmother."
"What do you want, Yunge?"
"I'm looking for Right Honourable. I can earn forty or fifty coppers for my old pa."
"Which Right Honourable?"
"You know which one, godmother. He's the one I mean."
"Even if he's a Right Honourable, he must have a name."
"His name has two syllables."
"What are they?"
"Are you kidding? Right Honourable Ximen. I have to speak to him."
The boy started for the rear of the shop. Grandma Wang grabbed him. "Where are you going, young jackanapes? There's such a thing as privacy in a person's home."
"I only want to call him out a minute."
"Frigging monkeyshines! Who says I have any Right Honourable Ximen in there!"
"Don't hog him all to yourself. Let me have a lick of the juice too. Think I don't know?"
"Little ape! What do you know!"
"Stingy as cutting vegetables with a hoof-paring knife in a wooden spoon, aren't you? Don't want to miss a bit. Well, all I have to do is speak out, and that bun-selling man is liable to lose his temper!"
The old woman realized he was on to her, and she flew into a rage. "You young scamp! How dare you come in here farting and blowing!"
"A young scamp is better than an old bawd any time!"
Grandma Wang seized him and gave him two lumps on the noggin.
"What are you thumping me for?" yelled the boy.
"Thieving ape! If you don't keep your voice down, I'll slap you right out of here!"
"Dirty old whore-monger! Hitting me for no reason at all!" Grandma Wang held Yunge by the back of the neck with one hand and pounded his skull with the other, while she rushed him through the door. She threw the basket after him, sending the pears rolling all over the street. The boy was no match for her. Cursing and weeping, he picked up his pears. Angrily, he pointed at her shop. "Just wait, old bawd, I'm going to tell him! You'll see if I don't!" He set out in search, basket on his arm. Because of what had gone before, all sorts of misfortune followed. As a result, the grass in the dens of foxes and rabbits was disturbed, and loving ducks on the sand were startled from their slumber.

Now when Wu Song turned round that day and saw who it was that had called him, he threw himself down in respectful greeting, because this person was none other than his elder brother, Wu Da. So Wu Song prostrated himself and said: "I haven't seen you for over a year brother. What're you doing here?"
"You were gone so long," Wu Da said. "Why didn't you write to me? You know, I was furious with you but I missed you!"
"What's that supposed to mean, you were furious with me but you missed me?" asked Wu Song.
"Well, you used to make me so angry in those days, always getting drunk, always getting into fights, always in trouble with the authorities and obliging me to go the court on your behalf. Never a moment's peace, always some headache because of you! That's why I was furious with you. But I missed you when I got spliced recently. People treated me dreadfully, there was no one to stand up for me. If only you'd been there we wouldn't have heard a fart out of them, you can bet your life on it. It got so I couldn't stand it any more, so I've had to move to this place and rent a house. That's why I missed you."
What you must know, friends, is that although Wu Song and Wu Da were born of the same mother, Wu Song was a tall, impressive figure of a man, immensely strong — of course, how else would he have killed the tiger? — but Wu Da was barely four foot and ugly as sin; his appearance provoked nothing but ridicule. The people of his town, on account of his dwarfish stature, had nicknamed him "The Three-Inch Poxy Midget."
Now in Qinghe there was a family who had a maid called Pan Jinlian, or Golden Lotus. At the age of twenty she was rather pretty. Because the master was trying to force his attentions upon her (and she unwilling to accede to his demands), she had gone to complain to her mistress. The master was furious, and after giving her a small trousseau, married her off to the Midget, free, gratis and for nothing. After Wu Da married the girl, certain cheating and dissolute young men of the town began to swarm round his house and disturb the peace. The girl herself, naturally enough in view of Wu Da's lack of inches and unimpressive character, was eager for something better and she made it her prime objective to find herself a lover, as the poem about her says:

She's not the kind to be passed over,
*With charms galore to please a lover.*
*Just wait till a nice young man she meets;*
There'll soon be games between the sheets!

Now once this girl had entered his home, the Midget, who was a timid conventional kind of man, was continually pestered by the shameless gang of good-for-nothings who camped at his gate, making lewd comments like: "What a juicy piece of mutton to fall into the mouth of a dog!" It became impossible for him to go on living in Qinghe, so he moved to Yanggu, where he rented a house in Redstone Road. Here he continued in his old trade, going out everyday to sell bread on the street.
He had been carrying on his business outside the government offices on the morning he met Wu Song. "Well, brother," he said, "the other day the streets were buzzing with the news of a great tiger-killer named Wu, who'd eliminated the monster on Jingyang Pass and been appointed captain by the Magistrate. I wasn't sure but something told me it must be you. Anyway, now that I've found you, I'm going to knock off work and take you home with me."
"Where do you live?" Wu Song asked.
His brother pointed. "Just round the corner in Redstone Road."
Wu Song picked up his brother's carrying-pole, and the Midget guided him past several turnings till they reached Redstone Road. They continued down it and after rounding two more bends came to the house, adjoining the compound of a teahouse.
"Open the door, dear," the Midget called. The bamboo curtain was raised a little, and a woman's face appeared beneath it. "Why are you back so early?" she said.
"Your brother-in-law is here, I want you to meet him." He took his carrying-pole and deposited it inside. Then he came out again and said: "Come on in and meet your sister-in-law."
Wu Song parted the curtain and entered. He greeted the woman. The Midget said to her: "You heard about the person who killed the tiger, dear, on Jingyang Pass? And who was made a captain by the Magistrate? Well, it's my little brother!"
The woman crossed her hands and wished her brother-in-law a thousand happinesses. Wu Song said: "Please stay seated, sister-in-law," and made a most gracious obeisance. The woman darted forward to raise him up, saying: "Please, brother-in-law, this is too much."
Wu Song said: "I am your most humble servant, sister-in-law."
"I heard them saying that a very brave man who had killed a tiger was coming to town," she said. "I planned to go and see but unfortunately I got there late and missed my chance. I never got to see him but now, well, so it's you! Do please come upstairs and sit down."
Here's what Wu Song saw when he looked at his sister-in-law:
*Brows like willow-leaves in early spring but oft-times clouded with the sadness of showers; a face like third month peach blossoms, hinting at romantic desires and amorous thoughts; a slender figure, full of indolent grace and feminine allure; lips red enough to tantalize the bees and butterflies; bewitching beauty, arousing every sense with its soft fragrance.*
She now told the Midget to take his brother upstairs to the sitting-room. When they were all seated she gave the Midget a look and said: "I will take care of your brother. You go and order food and wine for him."
"All right," the Midget said. "You sit here brother; I'll be back in a moment."
When the Midget was gone, the woman covertly examined Wu Song. "They're brothers with the same mother but how well-built this one is!" she was thinking. "If only I'd married this one instead, life would really seem worth living! There's absolutely no comparison with my Three-Inch Poxy Midget, who's only three parts man and seven parts ghost! Oh, how unlucky I am! Judging by the way he killed the tiger, Wu Song must be terrifically strong. Apparently he isn't married yet, so why not get him to come and live here? Surely it's fate that brought him to me!"
Smiling her most winning smile, she asked Wu Song: "How long have you been here, brother-in-law?"
"About ten days," he answered.
"And where are you staying?"
"I doss down at the government offices."
"That doesn't sound very comfortable."
"I'm on my own. I don't need much. And I've got the soldiers of the militia to serve me."
"Soldiers? How can they look after you properly? Why don't you come and live here? Then whenever you wanted something to eat or drink, I'd prepare it for you with my own hands. You wouldn't have to depend on dirty people like that. I'd give you some nice soup for instance, and you'd know it was safe to eat."
"That's very kind of you."
"Or perhaps you have a wife somewhere? You could bring her here to look after you."
"I'm not married."
"Can I ask how old you are?"
"I'm twenty-five."
"That's just three years older than me. Where were you before you came here?"
"I was in Cangzhou for just over a year. I thought my brother was in Qinghe, I didn't know he had moved here."
"Well, you can't imagine the trouble there's been since I married your brother! He's too good you see. People were horrible to him and we couldn't stand to live in Qinghe any more, so we came here. Of course, if you'd been around, a hero like you, no one would have dared to say a word, that's for sure!"
"My brother has always been very correct. He never went around getting into scrapes like me."
"How can you say that? You're twisting things around. Have you forgotten the proverb, 'If you can't stand up for yourself, you'll never live in peace'? Personally, I always like to speak my mind, I can't bear the kind who, you know, ask 'em three times and still they won't tell you what they think!"
"You ought to be thankful my brother keeps out of trouble."
They were still talking when the Midget returned with the meat and fish and fruit and nuts he'd bought. "Come down and cook the meal, dear," he called out as he was coming upstairs.
"What a fool you are!" the girl said. "You're asking me to go downstairs and leave my brother-in-law here all alone?"
"There's no need to worry about me," Wu Song said.
"Why don't you go and get old Mother Wang next door to come and cook for us? Can't you ever organize anything properly?"
So the Midget went and got their neighbour, Mrs. Wang, to prepare and cook the food that he then brought upstairs and arranged on the table. There was no lack of fish and meat dishes, and of course all kinds of fruit and vegetables, and it was not long before the wine was warmed and brought up too. The Midget made his wife sit in the host's place whilst his brother sat opposite and he himself on one side. He then poured wine for each of them. Taking her cup the woman said: "Please drink, brother-in-law, and pardon us for not providing you with better fare."
"Nonsense, sister-in-law. This is a feast," said Wu Song.
The Midget busied himself warming the wine and filling the cups and paid no attention to anything else. Jinlian smiled her most dazzling smile and said: "Why aren't you eating, brother-in-law? You must try a little fish. And some meat." She chose the best pieces and put them in his bowl.
Wu Song was a straightforward fellow and he simply put her attentiveness down to the fact that he was one of the family. But she had been in service and knew how to make the most of these little attentions. The Midget, on the other hand, was a good but ineffectual man, unskilled in the art of entertaining.
After several cups of wine, the woman could no longer take her eyes off Wu Song's body. Wu Song grew embarrassed and lowered his head, no longer liking to look at her. After some twenty cups, he rose to his feet.
"Have some more," the Midget said.
"I've had enough," he replied. "I'll come and see you another day."
They both went downstairs with him and Jinlian said: "You really ought to move in with us, brother-in-law. Otherwise people will laugh at us, they'll say you prefer strangers to your own brother. Husband, why don't you prepare a room and ask him to come and live here? If you don't the neighbours will start making up stories."
"You're quite right," said the Midget. "You must come and live with us, brother, and give us face."
"If that's what you both want, I'll go and get my luggage and bring it here tonight."
"Don't forget," the woman said. "I shall be expecting you."
The woman's interest was decidedly engaged. It was like this:

A brother's wife, that's a taboo relation,
*Though mutual help is an obligation.*
*The hero thinks only of family ties,*
But the wanton sees him in lustier guise.

When Wu Song left his brother's in Redstone Road and went back to the government offices, he found the Magistrate was in session, so he went straight in and made his request: "I have a brother, sir, who's come to live here in Redstone Road. I'd like to move in with him. Naturally I'd always be here for the morning and evening sessions. But I thought I should ask you first. May I have your permission?"
"It's only natural you should want to be with your brother," the Magistrate replied. "Of course I've no objection. It needn't prevent you coming in to work each day."

Wu Song thanked him and went to get his luggage and bed-roll. There was also the new suit of clothes and the other things he'd been given with the reward. He found an orderly to carry all this, and they made their way to his brother's house. When the woman saw him coming she was as pleased as someone who's stumbled on a treasure trove. She couldn't hide her delight. The Midget got a carpenter to come and put up partitions upstairs and make a bed. A table was also put in there, with two chairs and a stove. Wu Song unpacked his things and sent the orderly away. That night he slept at his brother's.

Next morning he was up at dawn. The woman quickly got up too, to heat water for washing and provide him with water to rinse his mouth. When he had completed his toilet, he put on his cap and was ready to report back to work. As he went out, she called after him: "When you finish work, be sure to come straight back here to eat, don't go and eat somewhere else."

"I'll come straight back," he promised.

After the morning's work at the office he returned to the house. Jinlian had washed and manicured her hands and dressed herself up. She served the food and the three of them sat down to eat. But when she offered Wu Song a bowl of tea with her own hands, he protested: "Sister-in-law, it's too much trouble for you. I feel embarrassed about staying here and eating with you. I must get one of the soldiers to come and serve you."

She said quickly: "You're one of the family, you shouldn't treat me like an outsider. With one's own flesh and blood it's not at all the same as serving other people. If you give one of your soldiers charge of the pots and the stove nothing will ever be clean. I just can't stomach those kind of people."

"But really, I must be giving you too much trouble," said Wu Song.

Well, enough of all that. After he came to live with them, Wu Song gave his brother money to buy cakes and pancakes, and tea and fruit, to invite the neighbours for tea. The neighbours got together to return the compliment, and after that the Midget organized another party for them. We say no more of this.

A few days later, Wu Song gave his sister-in-law a fine piece of coloured silk to make a dress. She was delighted with the gift. "You really shouldn't have," she said. "But since it's from you I can't very well refuse, can I? I'll have to accept it."

So now Wu Song was established in his brother's house, and his brother went out everyday as usual to sell his bread on the street. Wu Song went everyday to the office, where he performed a variety of tasks. When he returned, early or late, it made no difference, his sister-in-law had soup and rice ready for him, and counted herself happy to be able to serve him. He was sometimes embarrassed by it. Sometimes, moreover, she made suggestive remarks. But Wu Song was of an innocent, straightforward nature, and he saw nothing in them.

Well, let's concentrate on what's important, and pass over the time when nothing happened. Imperceptibly a month or more had slipped by. It was mid-winter weather: for days a bitter wind had been blowing and reddish clouds filled the sky. Then the snow began to fall, a myriad whirling, dancing flakes.

It went on snowing till evening, by which time it was a world of white, a universe of powdered jade. The next day, Wu Song went to work early, and had not returned by midday. Jinlian pushed her husband out of the house to pursue his trade and then sent the neighbour, Mrs. Wang, off to buy wine and meat. She herself, meanwhile, installed a charcoal stove in Wu Song's room. "Today's my chance," she was thinking, "to get him excited. I really don't believe I can fail to have an effect on him."

So there she stood by the curtain all alone, waiting composedly till the moment she saw Wu Song striding home, crunching through the jade-like snow. She raised the curtain and said, with her most captivating smile: "You must be frozen!"

"Thank you for your concern," he replied politely. Entering, he removed his hat that she took with both hands. "Please don't trouble," he protested, taking it back and brushing off the snow, before hanging it on the wall. Then he took off his belt and his parrot-green robe that he put away in his room.

"I waited for you all morning," she said, "why didn't you come back for lunch?"

"A colleague at the office invited me," he answered. "And then just now someone else wanted me to go and drink with him but I preferred to come straight home."

"Well, then, come closer to the fire," she said.

"Good," he said. He took off his oiled boots and changed his socks and put on warm slippers. Then he moved a chair up to the fire and sat down. She went to fasten the front door, and then the back door, and then fetched some fruit and vegetables to accompany the wine, all of which she took into Wu Song's room and put down on the table.

"Where's my brother?" Wu Song asked. "Why isn't he back?"

"He always goes out to sell his stuff at this time," she said. "You and I are going to enjoy a cup or two together."

"We may as well wait till he comes back and all drink together."

"Why ever should we wait for him? I don't intend to wait!" Before she even finished speaking she had begun to warm the wine.

"You sit down and let me do it," Wu Song said. "I know how to warm it properly."

"If you say so," she said. She moved a chair up and sat down beside the fire. The cups and dishes were laid out on a table near the fire. She took a cup of wine, held it out and looking directly at Wu Song, said: "Drink this cup, brother-in-law."

He took it from her and emptied it. She filled another and said: "It's such a cold day, you should drink this one too, to make a pair."

"If you say so," he answered, taking the second cup and emptying it. Then he filled a cup and handed it to her. She drank, then took the jug and poured again and placed the cup in front of him.

There she was, her bosom half revealed, her raven tresses in partial disarray, wearing the sweetest of smiles. She said: "I have heard some gossip about you. They say you keep a singer, somewhere behind the government offices. Can it be true?"

"You shouldn't believe such rubbish," he replied. "I'm not at all that kind of person."

"How can I trust you? Maybe your heart and your words don't tally!"

"If you don't believe me, ask my brother."

"What would he know about it? If he had any knowledge of the world he'd be doing something better than selling bread. Come on, have another cup."

Another three or four cups were poured and drunk. With three cups of wine inside her, lustful thoughts began to surface, she simply couldn't repress them. Her talk grew more and more suggestive. Wu Song, who could more or less see what she was getting at, dared not even raise his head.

When she went to warm more wine, Wu Song picked up the tongs and began to poke the fire. When she came back with the warmed wine, carrying the carafe in one hand, she rested the other hand on his shoulder. She rubbed the cloth between her finger and thumb and said: "Aren't you cold, with such thin clothes?"

Wu Song, desperately embarrassed, gave no answer. Seeing that he remained silent, she took her hand away. She seized the tongs and said: "You don't know how to make up a fire. I shall poke it for you. We want it to be as hot as a brazier."

Wu Song, now thoroughly alarmed, still remained silent. But she was burning with desire and she didn't notice Wu Song's repugnance. She put down the tongs and poured another cup of wine. She took a sip and then, looking Wu Song straight in the eyes, she held out the cup to him and said: "If your heart responds, drink the rest."

Wu Song seized the cup and dashed it to the ground. "Don't be so shameless!" he said, giving her a push that almost knocked her down. Glaring ferociously, he said: "I am a man of honour, not a wild animal. I don't go in for that kind of disgusting stuff, that's fit only for pigs or dogs. Don't ever dare behave in that disgusting manner again, or start any of that business. If there's the least breath of suspicion, even just enough to stir the grass, I swear to you this: even though my eyes tell me you're my sister-in-law, my fists won't care. So don't ever let that happen again!"

She blushed scarlet. Collecting up the cups and plates, she said: "I was only joking, why do you have to take it so seriously? You really are uncouth!" Carrying the things she took herself off to the kitchen.

The poem says:

Drink's a bawd to goad desire;
*Lust emboldened knows no shame.*
*Aiming to kindle passion's fire*
All she gets is bitter blame.

So Jinlian failed to seduce Wu Song and earned herself a scolding instead, while Wu Song remained in his room, fuming.

It was still early, only mid-afternoon, when the Midget returned with his carrying-pole. As he pushed the door, his wife hurried to open it. He came in and put down the carrying-pole. Then he went into the kitchen. Noticing that Jinlian's eyes were red from crying, he asked her: "Have you been quarrelling with someone?"

"It's all your fault," she said. "You're so weak, you allow people to insult me."

"Who's had the nerve to insult you?"

"Who do you think? Who else could it be but that brother of yours? I went to all the trouble of getting him some wine to drink when he came home, because it was snowing so hard, and then because there was no one else around he tried to make a pass at me."

"My brother's not like that. He's the most honourable person. Anyway, keep your voice down or the neighbours will laugh at us!"

The Midget abandoned his wife and went to Wu Song's room. "You haven't eaten yet, have you brother?" he said. "Come and eat with me."

Wu Song was silent. After hesitating for a long time, he finally took off his slippers and put on his oiled boots again, his coat and his hat, and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" his brother shouted after him but Wu Song went out still without answering.

The Midget went back into the kitchen. "He didn't answer when I called him," he said. "He just went off in the direction of the government offices. I really don't understand what's going on."

"You stupid idiot!" Jinlian said. "Can't you see? He's too ashamed of himself. He daren't look you in the face so he's left! I bet he's sending someone to move his luggage. He won't want to live here any more."

"If he does that the neighbours will laugh at us," the Midget complained.

"You stuffed dumpling! If he stays here and seduces me the neighbours will laugh even more. You can live with him if you like but I'm not going to put up with that kind of thing. Or you can write me out a divorce, if that's what you want, then you can keep him here."

The Midget didn't dare open his mouth again.

At this point Wu Song returned, accompanied by a soldier equipped with a carrying-pole. They went straight to the room, collected Wu Song's things, and came out again. The Midget chased after them. "Why are you moving out, brother?" he asked.

"Don't ask me that. Best to let sleeping dogs lie. Just let me go, it'll be best."

The Midget didn't dare ask again or try to prevent his brother from leaving. All the time the woman was muttering to herself within: "That's nice, that's fine! Everyone thinks you're so lucky if your brother's made up to captain. They think he'll help you. When all he does is go and stab you in the back! Well, like they say, 'Don't judge a crab-apple by its looks!' Thank heaven he's gone. Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

The Midget heard her cursing but he didn't know what to do. This business had unsettled him and he couldn't get it out of his mind. However, he continued to go out each day to sell his bread in the street, after his brother had moved back to the government offices. At first he wanted to go and look for his brother but his wife ordered him not to with such fierce insistence that he dared not. So the two brothers did not see each other.

Time passed in a flash and imperceptibly the snow had melted away. One day — it was about ten days later — the Magistrate, who had been at his post for over two and a half years and had amassed quite a fortune, decided he wanted to send some of his funds back to a relative in the Eastern Capital for safekeeping, and also to buy him a promotion. But he was afraid it might get stolen *en route*. He needed a capable and trustworthy person to send with it. He bethought himself of Wu Song. "Of course, he's the one to send! He's absolutely fearless!"

He summoned Wu Song that very day. "I've got a relative in the Eastern Capital," he told him. "I want to send a load of gifts to him and a letter. But here's the problem. The roads are dangerous and it needs someone with your strength and courage to bring this mission off. Would you be prepared to render me this service, regardless of any difficulty or hardship? You can be sure I will reward you handsomely when you return."

"Your Excellency, I owe my position to you," said Wu Song, "so of course I shall do whatever you tell me, I couldn't possibly refuse. If it is your wish, I shall go. I have never been to the Eastern Capital and it will be a good chance to see the sights. I shall leave straight away tomorrow, if you will have the things ready."

The Magistrate was most satisfied with this answer and offered Wu Song wine. Of this no more.

Having received his instructions from the Magistrate, Wu Song went back to his room, got some silver, and sent an orderly off to buy a bottle of wine, some fish and meat and some dried fruit. With these provisions they went to the Midget's in Redstone Road. About this time the Midget returned after selling his bread and saw Wu Song sitting outside his gate. The orderly was sent into the kitchen to prepare the food. When Jinlian, who secretly still had a soft spot for Wu Song, saw him coming with wine and food, she said to herself: "Can it be he's still thinking of me? Is that why he's come back? Anyway, it looks as if he knows he can't get the better of me. I'll sound him out but I'd better tread carefully."

She went upstairs, powdered her face with care, rearranged her raven tresses and changed into her most glamorous dress. Then she went downstairs again to receive him. "I can't think what we've done wrong, brother-in-law," she said. "You haven't been to see us for days. I really wondered what was going on. Everyday I told your brother to go and see you at the office but he always came back and said he couldn't find you. I'm so glad you've come now. Only what's the reason for all this extravagance?"

"There's something I want to say to both of you," Wu Song said. "That's why I've come."

"In that case we'd better go upstairs and sit down," she said.

They went upstairs to the sitting-room. Wu Song made them sit in the place of honour, while he pulled up a chair and sat down to one side. The orderly brought up more wine and meat and laid them on the table. Wu Song urged his brother and sister-in-law to drink. Jinlian did not take her eyes off Wu Song but he just drank his wine and seemed not to notice. Five cups were drunk in rapid succession. Then Wu Song told the orderly to pour another cup. He took it in his hands and looking fixedly at his brother, said: "Hear what I have to say. I have been entrusted by the Magistrate with a mission to the Eastern Capital. I am leaving tomorrow. It could take two months and won't be less than forty days. Here's what I came to say to you: you've never been a strong kind of man and I'm afraid other people may try to make trouble for you while I'm gone. Now then, let's suppose you usually sell ten baskets of bread a day; from tomorrow on, I want you to sell only five. Start late and come back early. Don't stay out drinking with anyone. Lower the blind as soon as you get home, and bolt the door as early as possible. That way you'll avoid trouble. If anyone tries to provoke you, don't get into a fight, just wait till I come and I'll deal with them. To show you accept my advice now, please drink this cup."

The Midget took the cup and said: "You're absolutely right, I'll do just as you say." And he emptied the cup.

Wu Song poured another two cups of wine and turned to his sister-in-law. "You're a clever woman," he said, "so I don't need many words. My brother's always honest and straightforward with people so he needs you to look after him. A strong character is worth more than muscles, so they say. If you keep the house well, there's no reason why he should have any trouble. You know the old proverb, 'If the fences are strong, the dogs can't get in'."

These words, this lecture from Wu Song, made Jinlian blush from ear to ear. Scarlet with mortification, she pointed at the Midget and screamed: "You stupid idiot! What sort of rumours have you picked up in the street and brought back to persecute me with? I tell you, I may look like a woman but I've a man's spirit! I'm not some useless flibbertigibbet! You could stand firm on this fist, you could race horses up this arm, do you hear? I can hold up my head anywhere. I'm not that kind of woman! Since I married you not so much as an ant has got into this house, so what's all this about bad fences and dogs sneaking in? You've got your facts wrong! You ought to find out what's what before you start flinging accusations!"

Wu Song laughed and said: "Good, I'm glad you've got such confidence. But make sure your heart and your words agree. I shall remember what you say. And now I ask you to drink this cup as a pledge of faith."

She brushed the cup aside and ran to the stairs. Halfway down she paused to shout: "You're so clever but haven't you heard that an elder brother's wife is like a mother? When I got married nobody told me anything about a younger brother. Why should you turn up here to order us all around, even if you are one of the family? It's just my bloody luck to get caught in a mess like this!" And with that she burst into tears and ran downstairs. As the poem says:

For good advice she doesn't give a rap;
*Her smiles and tears are all on tap.*
*She knows what she wants,*
*These are just tricks to get it.*
*If you think she's tragic or feels shame,*
Forget it!

Of course it was all pretence, she was just putting it on!

The two brothers remained there drinking for a while, and then Wu Song said he had to leave. "Take care," said his brother, "and come back as quickly as possible!" As he spoke the tears sprang to his eyes. When he saw this, Wu Song said: "I really think it would be best if you stop work completely and stay home. I can send you money."

The Midget accompanied his brother downstairs. Just before he went out, Wu Song said: "Don't forget what I told you, brother."

Wu Song and the orderly returned to the government offices to prepare his luggage. Next day he rose early, tied his bundle, and went to see the Magistrate. The latter had already commandeered a wagon and had it loaded with boxes and cases. Two sturdy soldiers had been appointed as escort and two trusted servants from his own staff. They all assembled in front of the government offices to bid farewell. Then Wu Song strapped on his armour and took up his pike and together with the cart and its escort left Yanggu and took the road to the Eastern Capital.

Now our story divides in two again. After his brother left, the Midget had to put up with three or four days of recriminations. He bore it in silence. He just let her scold and concentrated on following his brother's advice, only going out to sell half the usual amount of bread each day and coming home early. As soon as he had put down his carrying-pole he would lower the blind and lock the door. Then he would sit down. This infuriated Jinlian. Waving her finger in his face, she would say: "You imbecile! You moron! What do you want to lock the flaming door for when the sun isn't halfway across the sky? The neighbours are going to think we're afraid of our own shadows or something. I know, you have to listen to that blessed brother of yours. You don't care if everyone's laughing at you!"

"Let them. My brother's advice was good. It'll keep us out of disputes."

"Bah! You moron! Can't you decide anything for yourself, do you always have to follow someone else's instructions?"

The Midget merely waved his hand and said: "I don't care what anyone says. My brother's advice is golden."

For the first ten days after Wu Song left, the Midget continued to go out late and return early, locking the door as soon as he got home. His wife kept on reviling him but he got used to it and paid no attention. Finally she herself would go and lower the blind, around the time of his return, and lock the front door. This greatly pleased the Midget. "Now things are really going well!" he said to himself.

Two or three days later — winter was nearly over and the weather was beginning to warm up again — Jinlian went to lower the blind with the forked pole, as it was now her custom to do, just before the Midget's return, and it just so happened that a man walked past. There's an old proverb which says: "It's chance that keeps the story going." She was not holding the pole securely enough: it slipped from her hands and fell, as luck would have it, precisely on top of the man's headdress. He stopped in his tracks, intending to kick up a tremendous fuss. But when he turned to see who was responsible, and saw that it was a devilishly pretty young woman, his heart was softened at once and his anger fled to the Isle of Java, as they say. A smile spread right across his face.

When she saw he was not complaining, Jinlian crossed her hands, curtsied profoundly, and said: "It was an accident. Please forgive me."

The man rearranged his headdress, bowed and said graciously: "It's nothing. Think no more of it."
Now all this was seen by the neighbour, Mrs. Wang. who had been standing in the doorway of her teashop. Mrs. Wang laughed and said: "Who told you to walk so close to the house, anyway? It was a direct hit!"
The man smiled too and said: "Yes, really, it was my own fault. Now I have inconvenienced a lady. I beg you to forgive me!"
Jinlian also smiled and said: "All the same, I'm afraid you must blame me."
He gave the deepest of bows and replied: "How could I do that?" All this time his eyes were devouring her. He made as if to depart. But six or seven times he turned back to look at her. Eventually he swaggered off, stepping jauntily for her benefit.
She collected the pole and put it by the door, and finished lowering the blind. Then she shut the front door and waited for the Midget. As the poem says:

The fence is broken, the dog sneaks in;
*That blind afforded the chance to be seen.*
*To seduction's course Mrs. Wang gives a prod:*
The pole you might say was a fishing-rod.

Now just who exactly was that man? And where did he live? Well, he was the scion of an impoverished gentleman's family of Yanggu, who had set up a medicinal herbs shop opposite the government offices. From his childhood days he'd always been a bit of a crook, good with his fists and with the staff. Recently he'd suddenly become rich. He had good connections in the government and went around brow-beating ordinary people. For a fee, though, he would help them with applications, just like a government official, so everyone in the town kowtowed to him. He had the double surname of Xi-men and his given name was simply Qing. He was a first son and people called him his Nibs. Recently since he'd made his name and fortune they'd taken to calling him Your Honour, as if he was a real government official.
Well it wasn't more than a few moments before his Nibs, Mr. Xi-men Qing, appeared in Mrs. Wang's teahouse and sat himself down beside the entrance curtain.
"That was a fine greeting you gave just now," Mrs. Wang said with a grin.
"Come over here, old woman," he replied, also smiling. "Tell me, that young woman next door, who's her husband?"
"She's the King of Hell's younger sister and daughter of the God of Calamities! Why do you want to know?"
"I'm serious, so stop teasing."
"Then how come you don't know? Her old man's outside the government offices everyday, selling something to eat."
"She's not married to Third Brother Xu, is she, the one who sells date cakes?"
Mrs. Wang shook her head. "No, if it was him they wouldn't make such a bad pair. Guess again."
"Is she the wife of Second Brother Li, the silver carrier?"
Mrs. Wang shook her head again. "No, that wouldn't be such a bad match either."
"Then I suppose it must be young Lu, with the tattooed arms?"
Mrs. Wang laughed. "No, it's not. If it were him they'd make a pair. Have another go."
"Mother Wang, I give up."
Mrs. Wang was laughing her head off. "This is going to kill you," she said. "Her old man's the one who sells bread. He's Wu Da, the Midget!"
His Nibs almost fell over laughing. "You don't mean the one they call the Three-Inch Poxy Midget?" he said. "Not that Wu Da?"
"That's the one," she said.
"Well!" he exclaimed, as the horror of it dawned on him. "What a juicy piece of mutton to fall into the mouth of a dog!"
"That's about the size of it," she said. "Like they always say, 'a lovely woman in the hands of a stupid oaf, that's like a sensitive horse ridden by a clumsy rider.' What was the God of Marriages thinking of when he coupled those two?"
"How much do I owe you for the tea, Mother Wang?" his Nibs asked.
"It's hardly anything," she said. "Leave it, we can settle up another time."
"By the way, who's your son with at the moment?"
"I can't tell you. He went off with someone to the River Huai and since then I've not had a word, not so much as to say if he's dead or alive."
"Why don't you send him along to me?"
"If Your Honour would take him, I'd really like that."
"Wait till he comes back and we can talk about it again."
After some more idle talk of this kind he said good-bye and left.
In something less than an hour he was back at Mrs. Wang's teahouse, sitting by the entrance curtain where he could watch the Midget's front door. Mrs. Wang left him alone for a moment, and then went over and said: "How about some plum soup, Your Honour?"
"All right," he said. "But don't make it too sweet."
Mrs. Wang prepared the bowl of plum soup and gave it to his Nibs with both hands.
His Nibs drank slowly and then put the bowl down on the table. "Excellent," he said. "Mrs. Wang you can certainly pick your plums. Do you have a good supply?"
"A good supply? With all the years I've been in business, I think I can supply any need you might have!"
"I ask you about plum soup and you answer about supplying my needs — are we at cross-purposes?"
"You asked about a supply of plums. I'm just telling you I've got plenty," she said.
"Mother Wang, I know you can move mountains. Suppose I should want you to arrange a little affair for me, a little personal affair? I should certainly know how to show my gratitude."
"And supposing, Your Honour, the lady of your house should get to hear of it, wouldn't I run the risk of getting my face slapped?"
"My wife's a kind and accommodating sort of woman. I've already got several companions at home, the trouble is not one of them exactly suits my taste. If you had the right sort of thing and could arrange it all for me, there wouldn't be any problem — even a widow would do, so long as she was to my taste."
"Well, now, something did turn up just the other day. But I'm not quite sure you'd want her."
"If she's the right thing and you can arrange it for me, I should be most grateful."
"I'd give this one ten plus, except there's a little problem with her age."
"A year or two more or less doesn't make a lot of difference. How old is she, actually?"
"Well, her birth year is the Tiger, so come the new year she'll be just ninety-three."
His Nibs burst out laughing. "Just listen to the woman, she's mad! One just can't have a serious conversation with her!" Still laughing, he got up and left.
As it was getting dark, when Mrs. Wang had just lit the lamp and was about to lock up, the door opened and in walked his Nibs again. He sat down in the same seat beside the door and fixed his gaze on the Midget's front door.
"What do you want to drink, Your Honour?" the old woman cried. "Some wedding soup?"
"All right," he replied. "But make it sweet, Mother Wang."
She prepared a bowl of soup and gave it to him.
After sitting there all evening, he rose and said: "Put it down on my account, Mother Wang, and I'll pay it all together tomorrow."
"That's all right," she said. "Just go and have a good night's rest and tomorrow I hope you'll honour me with another visit." He left with a smile on his face and nothing further occurred that night. Early next morning when Mrs. Wang opened up the teahouse and went to look outside, there was his Nibs pacing up and down in front of the door. "Well, now," she said to herself, "this fellow's properly worked up. I'm going to put something sweet in front of his nose, just where his tongue won't reach. The pig thinks he can get the better of everyone in this town but wait till I get a hold on him, he won't wriggle out of that!"
Indeed there was more to this Mrs. Wang, this teashop owner, than you might suppose. As the poem says:
*She'd deceive a politician when she speaks; her words would defeat the cunningest statesman. Two lone phoenixes, male and female, she'd have them pairing on the spot; a widow and a single man, with just a word she'd get them mating. Always scheming, she'd make a Lohan embrace a mendicant nun; a little calculation, and she'd have Lord Li make love to a she-devil. With sweet words and flattery, she'd win over the most resolute of men; with soft speech and cooing tones she'd arouse the purest of girls. She could move the Weaver Maid to lustful longings or provoke the Moon Goddess to copulation.*
Now as we were saying, Mrs. Wang had just opened up and got the fire going and arranged the tea things and there was his Nibs already at this early hour hanging about in front of the door. He now rushed inside and took up his customary position by the entrance, gazing at the Midget's front door. Mrs. Wang pretended not to see him and instead of going over to ask what tea he wanted, busied herself blowing up the fire.
"Mother Wang!" he called. "Bring me two bowls of tea."
"Oh, it's you, Your Honour!" she replied. "What a long time since we saw you!" She made two bowls of good strong tea and put them on the table.
"Come and drink a bowl of tea with me, Mother Wang," he said.
She cackled. "I'm not your secret lover," she said.
He smiled briefly, then said: "What do they sell next door?"
"All kinds of sweet and delicious stuff, that's what they sell, all hot and spicy it is!"
"There you are, I said you were mad!" he said, laughing.
"I'm not mad," she said. "There's only one thing in her house, and that's a husband."
"Mother Wang, let's be serious now. I've heard that they make delicious rolls there, and I'd like to order thirty or forty of them. I just wonder if there'd be anyone at home?"
"If you want to buy rolls, just wait a bit and you can buy them from him in the street on his way back. What call is there to go to the house?"
"No doubt you're right." He drank his tea, sat there a little longer and then got up to go, saying: "Put it all down, Mother Wang."
"Don't worry," she said, as he went out, "I keep good accounts."
Observing dispassionately from the teahouse Mrs. Wang saw his Nibs pass in front of the door, going first one way and then the other, looking around him this way and that. When this had occurred six or seven times, he wandered back into the teahouse.
"What a surprise, Your Honour," she said. "Haven't seen you in ages!"
Smiling sheepishly, he sat down and took out a tael of silver that he handed to her, saying: "Here's something to settle the account, Mother Wang."
"That's much more than what's needed," she said.
"Just take it," he said.
Secretly she was delighted. "That's it," she thought to herself. "Now I've got him!" She put the silver away carefully and said: "I can see you're thirsty, Your Honour. I expect you'd like some sort of fresh young brew, is that it?"
"How did you guess?"
"Easy. You know the saying, 'When you enter the room, don't ask how things are going, just look at the faces.' You've no idea what kinds of weird and wonderful things I can guess!"
"Well, I've got something in my mind, and if you can guess what it is I'll give you five taels of silver."
"Well, I don't need any clues. From the merest hint I can tell it all. Approach your ear, Your Honour. You keep dashing about, these last few days, like a cat on hot bricks, and I warrant it's all to do with a certain young person next door. Right or wrong?"
"Mother Wang, you're a witch. You'd be a match for the finest and subtlest of statesmen! I'll be honest with you. I don't know how it is but ever since that day she dropped the pole on me and I first saw her face, it's as if I'd surrendered my three souls and seven spirits. The problem is, I just can't think of any pretext to get in there. Do you think you can help me?"
The old woman set up a gleeful cackling. Then she said: "I'll be honest with you too. This teahouse of mine is a front, the kind of place they call 'The Devil strikes the hours.' Three years ago, the day it snowed in early June, I sold a cup of tea but I've hardly had a regular customer since. No, what I rely on to make my living by is 'mixed trade'."
"What do you mean by 'mixed trade'?" he asked.
"Well, to start with, matchmaking and dealing. Then there's pregnancies, I assist with those, and even deliveries. And I can help with affairs of the heart, or simply fix you up with a woman."
"If you can really arrange this business of mine, I'll give you ten taels of silver. You'll have enough to buy yourself a coffin!"
"Listen to me then," she said. "These seduction cases are generally the most difficult. In order to succeed there's five things you must possess: number one, looks like Pan An's; two, a tool as big as a donkey's; three, the wealth of Deng Tong; four, youth, together with all the patience of a needle sewing silk; five, plenty of leisure. If you've got all five of those — call them for short Pan, donkey, Deng, youth and leisure — then you've a hope of succeeding."
His Nibs answered confidently: "I can honestly say that I'm pretty well equipped with all five. For the first one, I may not be Pan An but I'm not bad-looking; for the second, even as a child I had a bloody big prick; for the third, I've no shortage of ready cash, and even if I'm not quite the equal of Deng Tong, there's certainly enough to go on with; for the fourth, I can put up with anything — if she were to hit me a hundred times I wouldn't retaliate; for the fifth, I've more than enough time, as you can see with your own eyes from the fact that I'm round here so often. So Mother Wang, please help me. If you can set it up, you can be sure I shall reward you handsomely."
"Even if you've got the five basic requirements, Your Honour, there's still one big obstacle that's hard to overcome."
"What is it? Tell me quickly!"
"All right but don't blame me for being frank. Generally the tough part in a seduction is this: if you're serious, you've got to be prepared to part with your money or you won't get anywhere. Now as far as I know you've a tendency to be tight-fisted, you don't like throwing money around. That's the problem."
"That's easy to remedy. I shall simply follow your instruc-tions."
"Well, if you're prepared to spend, I've got a plan which will secure you a tête-à-tête with the young person in question. But are you really willing to do as I say?"
"I'll do anything you tell me to, no matter what. What's your plan?"
"It's a bit late now. You'd better go home first. You come back in a few months' time and we'll talk it over then."
His Nibs went down on his knees. "Mother Wang stop fooling and just help me," he implored.
"My, you are in a hurry!" she said, laughing. "My plan's a brilliant one. It may not be exactly something you'd put in the temple of Prince Wucheng but it's worthy of Sun-zi and his Amazons. It's ninety-nine percent sure. Now, listen, here's your instructions. This girl was once a servant in a rich man's house in Qinghe and she's a very good hand at sewing. So you're going to go and buy a piece of white silk, a length of blue silk, a piece of white gauze and ten ounces of good silk floss and have them delivered to me here. I will go and see her and invite her to take tea, and then I'll say to her, 'There's this rich official, he's given me the materials for a set of burial clothes, I wanted to borrow a calendar from you and ask you to choose an auspicious day for me to invite a tailor here to make the clothes up.' Now, if she hears me out and says nothing, then we'll have to forget your affair. But if she says, 'I'll do it for you,' and won't let me call a tailor, well, that's the first step towards your objective.
"Next thing, I shall invite her to come to my house to sew. If she refuses and says, 'No, we'll go to my house,' we may as well give up. But if she's tickled pink and says, 'I'll come and cut them for you and sew them,' then that's the second step completed.
"If she comes to my house, I shall arrange some wine and things to eat. But mind you don't come here, not the first day. The second day, if she says it's not right and she wants to work in her own house, then the whole thing's no good. But if she comes to my house again, that's the third step. Only again, you must keep away.
"On the third day, round about noon, you appear, all dressed up to kill. You give a cough, first, to warn me. Then you call out, 'Mrs. Wang, why haven't I seen you around lately?' I'll come out and invite you in, see. Now, if when she sees you enter she jumps up and rushes off home, there's nothing we can do to stop her. In that case, it's all over. But if she doesn't move, then that's the fourth step.
"After we've sat down, I shall say, 'This is the generous provider of the material. Oh, how grateful I am to him!' I shall praise you in all sorts of ways and you must admire her needlework. If she's not moved to reply, then we're not going to get anywhere. But if she's drawn into a conversation, then that's the fifth step.

"Then I say, 'I just don't know how I'd manage if I didn't have this young lady to help me with the work. Really, I'm so grateful to both of you. One's so generous with his money, the other with her labour. I don't want to sound like a beggar, Your Honour but since she's taking so much trouble, don't you think you should treat us? I mean, cough up the necessary for a little refreshment?' Then you fork out some money and tell me to go and buy things. If she gets up and leaves, we can't stop her, we have to give up. But if she stays put, things are looking good, we've accomplished the sixth step.
"I take the money, and as I go out I say to her, 'Do you mind keeping the gentleman company for a few minutes?' If she then gets up and goes home, I can't do anything, it's all over. But if she stays, that's great, that's the seventh step.
"When I come back with the food, I'll lay it on the table and say, 'Put away your work, dear, and come and have a cup of this wine that the gentleman has so kindly provided.' If she refuses to sit down at the table with you and goes home, forget it. But if she only says she ought to go, and actually doesn't move, then everything's all right, we've got through the eighth step.
"When we're well into the wine and the conversation is warming up, I'll say there's no wine left and ask you if you'll pay for more. You send me off for more wine. As I go out I bolt the door, with you two inside. If she's upset and tries to run away, then you must give the business up. But if she hears me bolt the door and doesn't protest, then that's the ninth step and we're only one step away from success. But this last step may prove the most difficult!
"Now, you're alone with her in the room and you've got to start off with some very sweet words. On no account must you be violent or hasty. You've got to control your hands and feet. If you're rough with her in any way, I won't answer for the consequences. First you pretend to brush the table accidentally with your sleeves so that a pair of bracelets fall out. As you bend down to pick them up, touch her feet gently. If she starts to scream, I shall come to the rescue straight away. Don't try to push the matter any further, you won't get anywhere. But if she keeps quiet, you know the tenth step is over, she's all for it, your success is assured.
"Well, how do you like my plan?"
"I don't know if it would get your portrait hung in the Emperor's hall but it's brilliant," his Nibs cried ecstatically.
"Don't forget to give me the money," the old woman said.
"No one forgets Lake Dongting after tasting its wares," he replied. "When can the plan go into operation?"
"I'll answer that this evening," she said. "I'll take the opportunity while the Midget is still out to go and show her the bait. Meanwhile, you'd better get someone to bring me the material."
"Right you are," he said. "If you can bring this thing off, Mother Wang, I assure you I shall not forget my promise." After leaving Mrs. Wang he went straight to a haberdasher's in the market where he bought all the necessary goods. Arriving home, he told a servant to pack them carefully and take them round to the teahouse, together with five taels of loose change. Mrs. Wang received all this and sent the servant away.

How can lechery's course be stayed?
*The trap is set, the ambush laid.*
*When the ten-step seduction scheme's applied,*
Into the pit she'll blindly slide.

Mrs. Wang now popped out of her back door and went over to the Midget's. Jinlian welcomed her and invited her upstairs to sit down. "Why haven't you been round to see me?" the old woman asked.
"I haven't been feeling very well lately," the girl answered. "I just didn't have the energy."
"Do you by any chance have a calendar you could lend me? I want to find an auspicious day to ask a tailor to come in."
"What clothes are you making, Mother?"
"Well, the fact is at my age there's always something wrong with one, and I've this feeling there may be serious health problems ahead for me. That's why I've been wanting to have some burial clothes made up, so as to be prepared, you know. I was lucky because a rich man I know heard me say this and he provided me with the materials — some fine silk and gauze and plenty of good floss for padding. It's all been sitting around for over a year because I can't manage to do it myself. But I really feel my health is going downhill this year and as we've got two extra days this month I thought I'd take the opportunity to have it done. Only now the tailor's trying to blackmail me, he says he hasn't got time. All this trouble, it's just what I don't need!"
"Well, I don't know if I could do it as well as you want," she said, "but if you'd let me, I'd do the sewing for you."
The old woman's face lit up. "If you'd do it for me," she said, "I know I'd die happy! I've always heard how beautifully you sew, only I just didn't like to ask you myself."
"Then there's no problem. If you agree, I'll be happy to do the work for you. As soon as you've got someone to name an auspicious day, I'll start at once."
"If you're going to do it, that's sure to bring me luck anyway. We needn't worry about the day. Actually I got hold of someone the other day and he said tomorrow is a lucky day for me. I wasn't paying a lot of attention, because I didn't really think it mattered all that much, just for making up some clothes."
"Of course you should have a lucky day for making up burial clothes! What's the point of choosing any other day?"
"If you're going to be kind enough to do it for me, do you think you could start tomorrow? I'd like to invite you to my house."
"You don't have to do that. Why don't I do it here?"
"I'd like to be able to watch you. I can't leave the house because there's no one to look after things there."
"In that case I'll come round after breakfast tomorrow."
With many expressions of gratitude the old woman left. When his Nibs returned that evening, she told him everything had been arranged to start the next day. Nothing else happened that night.
First thing in the morning, Mrs. Wang cleaned and tidied her house. She brought the thread, prepared the water for tea and sat down to wait.
As soon as the Midget had had breakfast, sorted out his wares and taken himself off to start trading, Jinlian hung up the curtain and went round to Mrs. Wang's, leaving by the back door. The old woman greeted her effusively and took her into the sitting-room. She made her a good cup of tea and offered her pine-seeds and walnuts. Then she carefully wiped the table and brought out the material. Jinlian measured and cut it, and started sewing. The old woman was lavish with her praises. "My, what wonderful work! I've lived over sixty years but never have I seen such fine needlework!"
Jinlian went on sewing till midday, when the old woman produced some wine and a catty of noodles and invited her to eat. She continued afterwards until it began to get late, when she tidied up her work and went home. She was just in time to open the door to the Midget, returning with an empty load, and to lower the blind. Noticing that his wife was a little flushed, the Midget asked: "Have you been drinking?"
"It's the neighbour, Mrs. Wang," she explained. "She asked me to go over to make some burial clothes for her, and she invited me to lunch."
The Midget was a little shocked. "Aiya! You shouldn't be eating her food, we ought to invite her. If she asks you to go over and do some work for her you should come back here to eat, you shouldn't go bothering her. If you go there again tomorrow, take some money with you; you can buy the wine and food to return the courtesy. 'A close neighbour's more useful than a distant relative' as the saying is. You don't want to make yourself unpopular. If she won't let you pay, better bring the work back home and give it to her when you've finished." Jinlian said nothing. As the poem says:

Her schemes are deep, layer upon layer;
*What lies beneath, the poor man doesn't see.*
*Forking out money to benefit your betrayer!*
That's just giving your life away for free!

Well, the plan was working, she'd lured the girl to her home! Next morning after breakfast when the Midget had left, Mrs. Wang went round and invited Jinlian back. Arriving at Mrs. Wang's, Jinlian got out her work and started sewing. Mrs. Wang made some tea for them. The morning passed uneventfully.
At midday the girl took out some silver and gave it to the old woman, saying: "Here you are, Mrs. Wang, this is to buy wine and food."
Mrs. Wang protested: "Aiya! Why should you give me this? I asked you here to do the work for me, how can I possibly let you spend your money as well?"
"It's my husband's orders. He said if you don't agree I must do the work at home and give it to you when I've finished."
Mrs. Wang quickly said: "What a stickler your husband is! Well, if you say so, this time I'll have to accept." Apprehensive for her plan, the old woman added some money of her own and went out and bought some particularly good wine and food, and some rare fruits, in order to entertain Jinlian royally. No doubt you've heard, friends, that women are like this: these small attentions, if they're thorough enough, will always get a response, nine out of ten will fall into the trap. Anyway, Mrs. Wang arranged the things on the table and invited Jinlian to eat and drink. Afterwards the sewing continued, and in the evening, after many protestations of mutual gratitude, the girl went home.
Well, to speed things up, on the third day after breakfast Mrs. Wang waited till she had seen the Midget leave and then went to his back door and called out: "Excuse me, my dear ..."
Jinlian ran downstairs. "I was just coming," she said. The two of them went back to Mrs. Wang's. Jinlian sat down, got out the work and started sewing. Mrs. Wang made some tea that they drank.
It was nearly noon. At this point his Nibs, who had scarcely been able to contain himself till this day dawned, put on new headgear and his smartest clothes and with a good supply of loose change in his pocket betook himself to Redstone Road. Arriving at the teahouse door, he coughed and called out: "Mrs. Wang, are you all right? I haven't see you lately."
Mrs. Wang heard the signal and said: "Who is it?"
"It's me," he answered.
She got up and hurried to the door. She smiled when she saw him: "Well, so it's you, Your Honour! I was wondering who it could be. You're just at the right time, I want you to come in and take a look." She caught him by the sleeve and pulled him into the room. "Look who it is," she said to Jinlian. "It's my benefactor! You know, the one who gave me the materials."
His Nibs greeted the girl ceremoniously. She quickly stood up and returned the courtesy.
"You know all that cloth you were so kind as to give me?" the old woman said to his Nibs. "I've had it a year and haven't managed to get it made up yet. But now this young lady has most generously offered to do it for me. Her stitching is a miracle, like tapestry it's so close and even, truly it's a wonder to behold! Come and look."
His Nibs went and looked. Then he sipped his tea and said: "The young lady's work is miraculous, you'd think it the work of a fairy's hand!"
Jinlian smiled and said: "Don't make fun of me, Your Honour!"
"Dare I ask whose house the young lady is mistress of?" he asked Mrs. Wang.
"Why don't you try and guess?" she said.
"I just can't," he replied.
Mrs. Wang laughed happily. "Well, she's the wife of my neighbour, Mr. Wu," she said. "Don't you remember? The other day she dropped the pole on your head — without hurting you of course."
Jinlian blushed scarlet. "It just slipped out of my hands, it was an accident. Please forgive me."
"It was nothing at all," he said.
Mrs. Wang carefully added: "This gentleman never gets angry, he never bears anyone a grudge. He's the kindest of souls."
"I didn't know who you were then," his Nibs said. "I had no idea you were Mr. Wu's wife. I know Mr. Wu as a man who works honourably for his living. I believe he sells something in the street. One who goes simply about his business, giving offence to no man, and who has a good character. Such men are hard to find."
The old woman seconded this: "You're absolutely right. Ever since she was married this young lady has been kept busy all the time observing all his instructions."
"My husband is a feeble useless person, don't laugh at me, please," Jinlian said.
"You're quite wrong," his Nibs said. "Don't you know the proverb, 'He who gives way will live in peace, he who is stubborn will court disaster'? One can say of people like your husband, who always show restraint, that they 'make the most of every drop of water, even in times of flood'."
"That's so true," said Mrs. Wang approvingly.
His Nibs continued to sing the Midget's praises for a moment, and then sat down opposite the girl.
"Do you know what they say about His Honour?" the old woman asked her.
"No," she said.
"He's one of the richest men in the district, you know. He's a friend of the Governor. People call him 'Your Honour,' just like an official. He's got millions. He runs a little medicine shop opposite the Magistracy. Yes, he's got more money than there are stars in the Milky Way! There's more rice in his storeroom than he'd use in a month of Sundays! Gold, silver, pearls, jewels, you name it, he's got it. And other treasures too, rhinoceros horns, elephant tusks ...!" On and on she went, lauding his Nibs to the skies, with her deceitful intent. Jinlian only kept her eyes on her sewing. His Nibs studied the girl avidly, impatient to be alone with her.
Mrs. Wang went and fetched two bowls of tea, handing one to his Nibs and the other to the girl, saying: "Drink this dear, and keep His Honour company."
After they'd drunk the tea the girl seemed, by the faintest quivering of her eyebrows, to betray some feeling. When Mrs. Wang saw this, she gave his Nibs a purposeful look and touched her face. He understood this signal as meaning that he was half-way there.
"If Your Honour hadn't come," the old woman said to him, "I wouldn't have had the courage to go to your house and invite you. So it must be fate, especially since you came just at the right time. But as the proverb says, 'A guest shouldn't ask two hosts for favours at the same time.' Now, since you've contributed the money and the young lady's giving me her skill, well, I was wondering, not wanting of course to seem presumptuous but seeing as the young lady here is so good to me, I was just wondering if I could ask you to play the host? What I mean is, do you think you might offer her a little extra something on my behalf?"
"I'm so sorry I didn't think of it before. Here's some money," he said, taking out his purse and giving it to the old woman for her to buy more food and wine.
"Please don't trouble yourself," Jinlian said. But she did not move. Mrs. Wang took the money and started to leave. Still Jinlian did not stir. As the old woman went out of the door, she said: "May I ask you to sit with Mr. Xi-men, dear?"
"Please, no," the girl said. But she still did not move. Maybe it was fate. But they were both now aware of what was going on. His Nibs, the bastard, was devouring her with his eyes! And she in turn was giving him little covert glances. Most likely in the presence of such a personage she was already more than half won over. However, she lowered her eyes and continued her work.
Mrs. Wang was soon back with some cooked food — plump goose, roast meat, choice fruits — which she put onto dishes and brought upstairs and laid on the table. Then she looked at Jinlian and said: "Put your work away dear, and come and take some wine and food."
"You go ahead, Mrs. Wang. You can serve Mr. Xi-men. It's not for me to do so." But she still made no attempt to leave.
"But this is specially for you," Mrs. Wang said. "You can't refuse!" She arranged the dishes on the table carefully and all three of them sat down. The wine was poured. His Nibs took a cup and said to Jinlian: "Madam, please do me the honour of emptying this cup."
"You are too kind, sir," said the girl.
"I know you can drink wine," Mrs. Wang said to her. "So please drink up and enjoy yourself." There's a poem that says:

Eating together, dangerous habit.
*What can follow but lechery and sin?*
*She didn't remember the Captain's warning:*
The dog's at the fence, about to get in.

Jinlian took the wine and his Nibs picked up his chopsticks and said: "Mother Wang, please ask the young lady to try some of these dishes."
Mrs. Wang chose some of the best pieces and put them on Jinlian's plate. After three rounds of wine, Mrs. Wang went and warmed more.
"May I make so bold as to inquire how old you are, madam?" his Nibs asked Jinlian.
"I am twenty-three sir," she said.
"Then I am just five years older than you," he said.
"The comparison is unworthy," she said.
Mrs. Wang butted in: "Such an accomplished young lady she is, sir. Not only is she a beautiful seamstress but she also knows the hundred philosophers."
"Where could you find her equal?" he said. "Truly Mr. Wu is a lucky man!"
"I don't want to sound critical," the old woman said, "but for all the women in your household, I'll wager you haven't one to equal her."
"Well, that's a long story," he said. "But it's true I have not been blessed. I have never found a good one!"
"Surely your first wife must have been good?" Mrs. Wang said.
"Ah, don't talk of her! If she was still alive, then my house would not be in the mess it's in now. The three or four concubines I have seem to do nothing well except eat, they can't organize a thing."
"How long is it since you lost your first wife sir?" Jinlian asked.
"Oh, that's a sad story," he replied. "My first wife was a wonderful and clever woman, though she came from a very humble background. She managed everything for me. It's three years since I was unlucky enough to lose her, and my household's going to the dogs. Why do you think I go out so much? I can't stand being at home."
"Forgive me for saying this, Your Honour," said the old woman, "but your first wife couldn't match Mrs. Wu for needlework."

"Nor for beauty, I have to admit it."
The old woman laughed. "But you keep a mistress in East Street, don't you? Why haven't you invited me to go and take tea with her?"
"You mean Xixi Zhang, the singer? She's just a common soubrette. I think nothing of her!"
"Haven't you also been with Jojo Li for a long time?"
"Yes, she's living with me now. If she were cleverer at running the household I'd have made her my wife long ago."
"If you did find someone like this young lady, I mean someone who really suited your taste, would there be any problems?"
"Who would object? My parents are both dead, I'm my own master!"
"I'm only joking. I don't suppose there's anyone who would satisfy you."
"Why shouldn't there be? It's just that I never have any luck in these matters. I just haven't met the right one."
These exchanges continued for a while and then the old woman exclaimed: "We've finished all the wine, there isn't any left! What do you say, Your Honour, shall I go and get some more?"
His Nibs said: "I think I've got four or five taels in my purse. Here, take the lot. Spend whatever you like on drink and keep the rest."
She thanked him and stood up. First she cast her eye over the young woman, noting how she had grown quite excited with all the wine she had drunk. The two were now totally absorbed in one another and it looked as if they would not be long in coming to an understanding. The girl kept her head lowered and gave no sign of wanting to leave.
"I'm going to get more wine and then we can continue," the old woman said, grinning happily. "You stay here, my dear, and look after His Honour. Let's just see if there's any more wine left in the pot. Yes, just enough for another two cups for you and His Honour to drink. I'm off to the shop in front of the government offices. They've good wine there. I'll go and get a bottle. It may take me a little while though."
"You don't need to," the girl said but she made no move.
The old woman went out. She tied a string across the door and then went to sit in the street.
Within the house, meanwhile, his Nibs was pouring wine and inviting the lady to drink. Soon his sleeve brushed across the table and the two trinkets rolled out and fell on the floor. Whether by destiny or lucky chance, they came to rest right beside the girl's feet. His Nibs immediately went down on his hands and knees to pick them up. What should he see but those sweet tiny feet, gracefully poised beside the trinkets! Instead of picking up what he had dropped, he gently pinched the tiny brocade shoe. The girl began to giggle. "Heavens, sir, what are you doing?" she said. "Surely you don't mean to seduce me?" On his knees before her, he said: "Madam, have pity on me, I beg you!" She took him in her arms and raised him up. And then, right there in Mrs. Wang's parlour, they both removed their clothes and went to it with a will:
*Ducks in their pairs bill and coo in the water; the phoenixes stroll through the flowers. The trees that interlace their branches are filled with the joy of life; hearts that are at one are joined in sweet concord. Vermilion lips are closely pressed, face lies by powdered face. Gauze stockings are thrown in the air; a slip of crescent moon is glimpsed over his shoulders. Gold hairpins fall to the floor, beside the pillow a cloud of raven tresses floats. A sea of vows, a mountain of promises, provoke a thousand flutterings. A bashful cloud and shameful rain are imminent, as a million secret charms are crushed together in the hand. The quiet oriole's call carries no further than the adjacent ear; in the moist mouth the tongue half advances, half retreats. The willowy waist welcomes spring's bounty; the cherry lips whisperingly exhale. The starry eyes cloud over, a fine dew perfumes the jade kernel. The soft breast ripples, a bubbling spring waters the heart of the peony. Such bliss in union is the end of all things; such stolen moments are indeed the sweetest of delights.*
The climax over, they were just arranging their clothes when Mrs. Wang pushed open the door and marched in. "Well!" she exclaimed, with feigned indignation, "You two certainly don't waste any time!"
The pair looked thoroughly startled.
"Here's a fine thing," the old woman went on, "I asked you here to do some sewing for me, not to have it off with a man! If Mr. Wu finds out, what's he going to think of me? Maybe I'd better go and tell him before he does." She turned round and started to leave. But the girl caught hold of her sleeve and said: "Mrs. Wang, please forgive us." And his Nibs said: "Mother Wang, please lower your voice."
The old woman grinned. "If you want me to let you off," she said, "you've to promise me one thing."
"Not just one," the girl said, "ten if you wish."
"Starting from today, you are to keep everything hidden from the Midget and come here everyday without fail to see His Honour, Mr. Xi-men. If you miss a single day I shall tell the Midget."
"I'll do exactly as you say," the girl said.
"As for you," the old woman said, turning to his Nibs, "there's no need for me to tell you. This business is successfully concluded, so don't forget what you promised. If you go back on anything, I shall tell all to the Midget."
"Don't worry, Mother Wang. I shall keep my promise."
Then they all drank more wine. But it was afternoon already, and soon Jinlian stood up and said: "My idiot of a husband will be coming home, I'd better go."
She slipped into her house through the back door and was just lowering the curtain when the Midget came in.
Meanwhile Mrs. Wang looked at His Nibs and said: "Nice work, eh?"
"I owe it all to you," he said. "I'll go home now and send you a silver ingot. And of course I won't forget everything else I promised you."
"All right then, I shall, as they say, 'watch for the banners and await good news.' But I hope I won't be like the paid mourners, trying to collect their money too late, after the coffin's in the ground!"
His Nibs was laughing as he went out of the door.
From that day on Jinlian went everyday to Mrs. Wang's for her rendezvous with his Nibs. They stuck together close as lacquer, clasped each other tight as rubber. But as the saying has it, 'Good things remain secret, evil will always out.' In less than a fortnight the whole neighbourhood knew about it and only the Midget remained in the dark. As the poem says:

What's the good of all those charms?
*Their taste is greatly overrated.*
*When she fills the house with rude alarms*
He'll rue the day she was instated.

Here we must digress because our story divides in two. There happened to be in that place a young man of fifteen or sixteen by the name of Qiao. His father was a soldier serving in Yunzhou when he was born, and the boy was generally referred to as the Young'un. He lived at home with his old father. He was a lively, quick-witted lad and he was generally to be seen around the local inns selling whatever fruit was in season. Xi-men Qing had often helped him out with funds. Well, on this occasion he had just got hold of a basket of crystal pears that he was toting about the streets in search of Mr. Xi-men, when some busybody said to him: "If it's his Nibs you're wanting, I can tell you where to look."
"All right, Mr. Know-all, tell me where, 'cos I need to earn a spot of cash for the sake of my old pa."
"His Nibs is having it off with the wife of the Midget, the one that sells bread. Everyday he's round at old Mother Wang's in Redstone Road. You'll most likely find him there now. Just go right in, it won't matter since you're only a kid."
The Young'un thanked the man for the information. Next thing, the young monkey picked up his basket and headed straight for Redstone Road. He barged into the teahouse where he found Mrs. Wang sitting on a stool, sewing.
"Greetings, Mother Wang," he said, putting down his basket and looking straight at her.
"What have you come for, Young'un?" she asked.
"I want to see His Honour, 'cos I need a spot of cash to buy food for my old pa."
"His Honour? Who do you mean?"
"I mean the one you know I mean, who else would I mean?"
"If he's that important he has a name, I suppose!"
"Course 'e does, a double-barrelled one too."
"What do you mean, double-barrelled?"
"Oh, come off it! I want to talk to 'is Nibs, Mr. Xi-men." And with this he headed for the inner room. But Mrs. Wang grabbed him first. "Hey! where do you think you're going to, you young jackanapes? You can't just invade people's privacy like this!"
"I'm going inside, 'cos he's there and I want to see him."
"You bloody little ape, how do you expect to find Mr. Xi-men in my parlour?"
"Don't be such a dog-in-the-manger! Why can't I have some of the gravy too? D'you think I don't know what's going on?"
The old woman was furious. She began to shout: "What do you bloody well know, then, you little bastard?"
"I know you want to keep it all to yourself because you're an old meany. All right then, suppose I talk. Let's see how the bread-man takes it!"
This indication that he had cottoned on to the truth made the old woman see red. "You bloody ape!" she screamed. "Who asked you to come farting round here, stinking the place out?"
"If I'm a bloody ape, you're a filthy old tart!" he replied.
She took a firmer grip on him and boxed his ears.
"Ow! Why are you hitting me?" he yelled.
"Shut your noise, you fucking monkey, or I'll beat you all down the street!"
"You ugly old bloodsucker, yer've no right!" Maintaining her grip with one hand and slapping him with the other, she pushed him out into the street. The basket of pears followed, the pears spilling and rolling in all directions. Recognizing he was no match for this ferocious old woman, the boy took himself off, cursing and crying simultaneously, picking up pears as he went down the street and pointing his finger at the teahouse and shouting: "You filthy parasite, you'll be sorry for this! I'll tell him, I'll tell him everything, just see if I don't!" And when he'd picked up his basket, he went straight off to find the person he had in mind. Well, in truth, once an affair's under way, the troubles come all in a bunch:

The den is discovered, the burrow found,
The paired ducks taken where they sleep on the sand.

Wu Song turned round, and when he saw that the man who was speaking to him, was his elder brother Wu the Elder, he knelt down and kowtowed. He said, "I have not seen you for more than a year. But why have you come here?"
"You have been away for a long time," replied Wu the Elder, "but why have you not written to me? Although I did not like you yet I never forgot you."
"Why were you annoyed, and why did you think of me so often?" asked Wu Song. "When you were in Qinghe County you often got drunk and fought with other men," said Wu the Elder. "You were often brought before the magistrate. And when at last you ran away, I had to go to the court repeatedly about your affairs. That was what made me annoyed. And what made me to think of you was that I recently married a Qinghe County woman, and many men came to insult me about that matter, and there was no one like you to assist me. When you were at home who would have dared to come and so much as fart? I could not live in peace there so I removed here, and found a house where I now live. That trouble made me to think of you."
Now dear reader, please note: Wu Song and Wu the Elder were brothers to the same mother. Wu Song was over six feet in height, and he could lift about three hundredweights. If he had not been so strong how could he have killed the tiger?
Wu the Elder was nearly four and half feet in height, and his countenance was ugly. The shape of his head was conical. The people of Qinghe County looked upon him as a dwarf, and had therefore given him the nickname "Three Inches of Mulberry Bark."
Now in Qinghe County there was a big family which had a maidservant named Pan Jinlian who was about twenty years of age, and was quite good-looking. Her master made base suggestions but she told her mistress about it and said that she was not willing to agree to his advances. Because of this the master disliked the maidservant but offered her in marriage to Wu the Elder, and also gave her some presents but he declined to receive any money from Wu the Elder.
Shortly after the marriage there were quite a number of loose profligates who came to Wu the Elder's house to visit his wife. In fact as Wu the Elder was only a small, ugly man his wife looked upon him as being of useless nature, and quite unsuitable as a lover. She did not hesitate to consort with other men.
Wu the Elder was rather a quiet fellow and would not dispute with what these loose fellows did; they shouted out at his street door, "What a nice piece of meat has fallen in a dog's mouth!" As a result of this Wu the Elder did not care to stay in Qinghe County, and removed to a house in Zishi Street, Yanggu County town.
Everyday he acted as hawker selling cakes on the street. On this day he had been selling cakes when he happened to see his brother Wu Song.
"The day before yesterday," said Wu the Elder, "I heard a great many people talking about a man named Wu who had killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and who had been given a commission as Inspector by the county magistrate. I guessed that it was you but how could I expect to meet you today? I will not sell any more cakes just now, and will go with you to my home." "Elder brother, where is your home?" asked Wu Song.
"It is near the Zishi Street," replied Wu the Elder pointing with his finger.
Wu Song carried the load of cakes, and Wu the Elder led him round many corners to his home. He stopped at a house near a tea shop, and called out, "Wife, open the door."
The screen at the door was lifted and a woman appeared who asked, "Husband, why have you returned so soon?"
"Your brother-in-law has arrived," replied Wu the Elder, "please come out to meet him."
Wu the Elder now took the load from Wu Song, and entering the house said, "Brother, come inside and let me introduce you to my wife."
Wu Song lifted up the screen and entered, and was duly introduced.
Wu the Elder said, "Wife, the man, who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and was given a commission as Inspector in the police, is none other than my younger brother."
She at once saluted by folding her arms and said, "Much prosperity, uncle," addressing Wu Song with the level of reverence that her son would have done.
Wu Song asked her to be seated. He kowtowed, and it was as magnanimous as the fall of a golden mountain and a jade pillar.
The woman raised up Wu Song and said, "Uncle, by doing this you lessen the prospects of my life."
"I only ask you to receive my respects," replied Wu Song.
"My adopted mother, Grandma Wang, told me that a big man had killed a tiger and that I must go and see him," replied the woman. "And you are that man. I request you to come upstairs and sit down."
They all three sat down upstairs, and when the woman had had a look at Wu Song, she said to her husband, "I will keep company with your brother, while you go and prepare some food and wine in order to entertain our uncle."
Wu the Elder agreed to this and promised to return soon.
When he had gone, his wife looked more closely at Wu Song, and was pleased with his appearance. She thought that if she had married a man like him, all her life would not have been wasted. Her husband was only three parts a man, and seven parts an imp. What bad luck she had had. As Wu Song had killed a tiger he must be enormously strong. "I think he has no wife, so why should I not ask him to stay here? I think that I shall now find my marriage affinity here after all."
With her smiling face she asked Wu Song how long he had been in that district, to which Wu Song replied that he had been there about ten days.
"Where do you stay then?" asked the woman.
"I am staying temporarily at the *yamen*," replied Wu Song.
"That cannot be very comfortable and convenient," remarked the woman.
"As I am by myself that does not matter," replied Wu Song. "Besides I have soldiers to wait upon me."
"But how can those men look after you properly," said the woman. "Why not come and live here? When you want hot water or food, whether early or late, I can always get the same ready for you, and that would be much better than depending on those dirty men. When you want clear soup you need have no worry about it."
Wu Song thanked her very much for her suggestion.
"But have you an aunt (a wife) living in some other place?" asked the woman. "If so then ask her to come here to live with us."
"I have not married yet," replied Wu Song.
"How old are you?"
"I am twenty-five years of age," replied Wu Song.
"So you are three years older than I. Where have you come from this time?"

"I lived at Cangzhou for more than a year," replied Wu Song, "and then decided to come to visit my elder brother at Qinghe County. I did not know that he had removed here."
"To explain that removal it would take a long time. Since I married your elder brother so many men have insulted him owing to good nature that we could not live any longer at Qinghe County, and therefore we removed to this place. If such a brave man as you had been there who would have dared to say a word against us."
"My brother was always law-abiding and good-natured, and was quite different, from me as I always make disturbances," said Wu Song.
"Why do you make such a false accusation againt yourself?" asked Pan Jinlian. "There is a common saying, 'Men of yielding nature cannot have a stable foothold in society.' I am of a precipitous nature, and cannot bear to see a man who does not even turn his head after being abused three times, and who runs away at the fourth attack."
"My brother does not like to provoke unpleasantness so that there is no need for you to be distressed," said Wu Song.
While they were still talking about him, Wu the Elder returned with the meat, wine, and fruit, and placed them in the kitchen below. He then came upstairs and said, "Wife, you go downstairs and get things ready."
"You see that fellow does not understand things. Here is my uncle and I am told to leave him alone and go to the kitchen," said Pan Jinlian.
"Please suit your own convenience, my sister-in-law," said Wu Song.
"But why not ask my adopted mother Grandma Wang, who lives next door, to do this?" asked Pan Jinlian. "If I have to do the work that will not be very nice."
So Wu the Elder went to the next door, and requested Grandma Wang to come and prepare the food for them—fish, meat, fruit, and vegetables. He also warmed some wine, and put it on the table. All three sat down—Pan Jinlian sat opposite to Wu Song, in a hostess position, and Wu the Elder, at the side. Wu the Elder poured out the wine for all the party.
"Uncle," said Pan Jinlian, picking up a cup of wine, "I hope you won't mind our rough ways. Please drink a cup of wine."
"I am deeply grateful," replied Wu Song, "you need not talk in that manner."
Wu the Elder did not appear to take notice of anything except serving the wine.
"Uncle, why don't you eat a little fish or meat?" asked Jinlian with a smiling face. So saying she selected some of the best bits and placed them in his bowl.
Wu Song was a very straightforward man, and looked upon this great compliment as merely the expression of a real sister-in-law's desire to please. But he did not know previously that Pan Jinlian had been a maidservant, and had acquired the habit of coquetry. As Wu the Elder was an honest and weak-natured man how could he know to entertain a guest?
Jinlian drank several cups of wine, and gazed steadily at Wu Song but he appeared to take no notice of this and simply bowed his head. After he had drunk about ten cups of wine he rose from the table.
"Brother, please drink another cup of wine before you go," said Wu the Elder.
"Not this time," said Wu Song. "I will come to visit you again."
When they were all down below seeing Wu Song off Jinlian spoke to him, "Uncle, I hope that you will not forget to come and live with us here, or else the people will laugh at us. We are relatives, and not strangers." She then addressed her husband, "You had better prepare a room, and ask your brother to come to live here. Do not give our neighbours the opportunity of saying that we do not know how to do things properly."
"What you say is quite right," said Wu the Elder. Turning to his brother he said, "Brother, you must come and live here, and let me be proud of it."
"As you both press me," said Wu Song, "I will get my baggage and come over here this evening."
"Then don't forget to do so," said Jinlian, "because I shall look forward upon you."
Wu Song left them, went down the Zishi Street, and was soon at his quarters. The county magistrate was sitting on the bench, so Wu Song went to him and said, "I have a brother here who lives on Zishi Street, and I should like to go and live with him. I assure you that this would not interfere with my duties here. I would not dare to do it without your authority so I now ask for your esteemed permission."
"That is a matter of brotherly duty," said the county magistrate, "and I cannot place any obstacle in your way. You will of course attend to your duties in the *yamen* as before."
Wu Song expressed his thanks, and then going to his room packed up his things, including the new clothes and other things which had been presented to him. He then summoned a soldier to carry his baggage to his elder brother's home.
Upon seeing him arrive Pan Jinlian laughed and was as delighted as though she had received a great deal of gold at midnight.
Wu the Elder got a carpenter to fix up a room for his brother, and furnished it with a bed, a table, two chairs, and a stove.
When every thing was ready Wu Song brought his baggage upstairs, and then dismissed the soldier.
Early the next morning Jinlian quickly arose, and got ready the hot water for washing the face and cleaning the teeth; she gave it to Wu Song and called him. He dressed and tied his turban to his head. As he was leaving Jinlian spoke to him, "Uncle, I hope you will come back early for your meal, and not go anywhere else."
He promised to do this, and then went to the *yamen* to register his attendance there before 7 A.M. He attended to his duties at the *yamen*, and then left about noon to return home.
Pan Jinlian had had a wash, and manicured her nails. She was very spick-and-span. She had prepared the food, and arranged the table for three persons. They all sat down, and she presented Wu Song with a cup of tea.
Wu Song said, "Please do not be so courteous to me or I am afraid that it will only upset me. I shall then have to send a soldier here to look after me."
Jinlian called out several times, "Uncle, you must make yourself at home. We are brothers of the same parents and I am not treating other people in this way. If you brought a soldier here to cook your food it would not be clean, and that would not suit me."
"In that case I must submit to your kind attentions," replied Wu Song.
Shortly after coming to the house Wu Song gave Wu the Elder some money to purchase cakes, fried crisp, tea, and fruit, and asked him to invite the neighbours to attend an entertainment. They all came with gifts for Wu Song, and Wu the Elder afterwards gave another dinner.
After a few days Wu Song bought a roll of silk, and asked Jinlian to make herself a suit of clothes. Jinlian laughed and said, "Uncle, as you present me with this silk I dare not refuse it."
Thenceforth Wu Song stayed at the house of his brother, and Wu the Elder continued selling cakes on the street while Wu Song attended to his duty at the *yamen* and as usual Jinlian prepared the food, and was evidently much pleased to wait upon Wu Song, who could not help being very grateful. The woman in everything she said never failed to try to stir up Wu Song's feelings towards herself. Being a very virtuous man he did not pay much attention to that.
After staying about a month with Wu the Elder he noticed that it was winter-time. Everyday there was a bitter cold wind, and the sky was covered with clouds. One day there was a heavy downfall of snow, and it continued to fall all the day without stopping.
The following day Wu Song got up early, and went to the *yamen* to register his attendance, and he did not return from his duties about noon. Meanwhile Wu the Elder had been sent off by his wife to hawk the cakes on streets.
Pan Jinlian went to her neighbour Grandma Wang, and asked her to go and buy some wine and meat for her. She then went into Wu Song's room, and lit a charcoal fire. She thought that this was a fine opportunity to make Wu Song conforming to her desires. She was absolutely alone by herself, and stood behind the screen near the front door. She soon saw Wu Song treading his way through the snow as though he were walking through fragments of white jade. She raised the screen, and greeted him with a smile, asking whether he was cold.
Wu Song thanked her for thinking so much about his welfare. He entered, and took off his felt cap. Jinlian held out both hands to receive it from him. But Wu Song said, "I cannot trouble you to wait upon me in this way." He shook the snow off the cap, and hung it on the wall. He then unloosened his cummerbund, and took off his parrot-green silk clothing. He went into his room, and hung up his clothing there to dry.
Jinlian asked him why he had not returned for his dinner at an earlier time as usual, and Wu Song explained that he had met a friend in town who had invited him to dinner. There was another friend who also asked him to dine but he had declined his invitation and came straight home.
"So that was it," she said. "Well, come close to the fire."
"All right," replied Wu Song. He then took off his boots, changed his socks, and put on a pair of warm slippers. He then drew a chair to the fire and sat down. Pan Jinlian went downstairs, and barred the front door, and locked the back door. She then got the wine, fruit, and vegetables and carrying them upstairs, placed them on the table.
"Where has my brother gone that he has not returned yet?" asked Wu Song.
"Your brother has gone selling cakes as usual," replied Jinlian. "We two can drink our wine together."
"We had better wait until he comes when we can dine together," said Wu Song.
"But why wait until he arrives?" said Jinlian. "We need not wait for him." While saying this, she took a jug of warmed wine from the fire.
"Please sit down," said Wu Song. "I will attend to warm the wine."
"Uncle," replied Jinlian, "be at ease." She drew a chair close to the fire and sat down there. Close by her side there was a table, and on it she put some wine and food. Pouring out a small cup of wine she held it in both hands, and looking at Wu Song she said, "Uncle, please drink this full cup of wine."
Wu Song took the cup, and drank the wine at a gulp.
The woman refilled the cup and said, "The weather is very cold so please drink a cup with me."
"Just as you like," replied Wu Song, and drank off the second cup. He then filled a cup, and handed it to the woman who drank the wine. She in turn filled another cup, and placed it in front of Wu Song. She then unloosened her upper dress, and displayed a little of her breasts. A little of her hair was also hanging loosely.
With smiling face she spoke to Wu Song, "A certain man has told me that you are keeping a girl in the east side before the *yamen*. Is that true or not?"
"You should not listen to such nonsense," said Wu Song, "I am not that kind of man."
"I do not believe you, I am afraid that your deeds might differ from your words."
"If you do not really believe me, then ask my brother," replied Wu Song.
"But what does he know," said Jinlian. "If he knew such matters he would not sell cakes on the streets now. Please drink another cup of wine, uncle."
As Wu Song drank the wine she kept filling his cup, so that he had soon drunk about four cups. She also drank the same quantity so that very soon she was unable to restrain her passions, and began to talk unguardedly.
Through her words Wu Song now understood a little but he declined to take any notice of her, and hung down his head. She went downstairs, to put some more wine on the fire and Wu Song stirred up the fire in his room with a poker. She came upstairs again with a fresh jug of wine in one hand and squeezing Wu Song's shoulder with the other she said, "Uncle, are you not afraid of the cold as you wear so little?"
Wu Song now understood more of her ways. He was not pleased but did not reply to her. Seeing his silent attitude, she took the poker out of his hand and said, "Uncle, you need not trouble about the fire. I will poke the fire for you. I wish that your heart could be always as hot as the fire." Now Wu Song understood her almost completely, and was highly upset but he did not say a word. Jinlian was now very lustful so throwing the poker down she filled another cup, drank half of it, and looking at Wu Song said, "If you love me, drink the remainder of this wine." Wu Song seized the cup, and threw it on the floor saying, "Sister-in-law, you evidently have no shame!" and at the same time he pushed her away from him. Glaring at her he said, "I am a decent man, and am not of immoral character. I am not like a pig or dog without morals. You must not be shameless like this. If your lustful words came to my ears, my eyes might recognize you as my sister-in-law but my fist would not take any notice of such relationship. So let us have no more of this."
Jinlian was now blushing all over her face and removing a stool she said, "I was only playful. I did not expect that you would take it serious; you are indeed strange to compliment." She then removed all the dishes and took them down below, while Wu Song remained in his room fuming with rage.
About two o'clock Wu the Elder returned carrying his load of cakes, and knocking at the door he was immediately admitted by his wife. He put his things down in the kitchen, and then noticed that both his wife's eyes were red with crying. He asked whom she had been quarreling with.
She replied, "It is all due to your lack of energy, and your allowing an outsider to insult me."
"Who has insulted you?" asked Wu the Elder.
"Whom do you think?" asked his wife. "It was none other than that fellow Wu Song. I saw him return when it was snowing, and I quickly prepared some mulled wine for him. When he saw me alone he began to flirt with me."
"My brother is not that kind of man," replied Wu the Elder. "He is always honest. Do not speak in such a loud tone or else our neighbours may hear what you say, and they will laugh at us." He pushed her to one side, and went upstairs to see Wu Song. "I see, brother," he said, "you have not eaten your repast; let us have some together."
Wu Song did not speak. He thought just a moment, then took off his slippers, put on his leather boots, and fastened them. He put on his felt cap, buckled his belt, and then walked towards the door.
"Where are you going?" asked Wu the Elder in a loud voice. But he got no reply, and Wu Song left the house without saying a word. Wu the Elder went to the kitchen and asked his wife, "Do you know where he has gone? He did not reply to me, and went in the direction of the *yamen*."
"You stupid ass!" replied his wife. "Isn't it very obvious! He is ashamed of himself, and does not care to face you. I will not approve of your allowing that man to stay here."
"Since he has gone we shall be the laughingstock of our neighbours," said Wu the Elder.
"You idiotic imp!" replied his wife. "His flirting with me would of course make our neighbours laugh! You may live with him if you want. But I cannot tolerate that kind of man to come and live here again. You write out a document divorcing me, and then you can go and join him."
What could Wu the Elder say to this? But while these two were talking they saw Wu Song arrive with a soldier who took away Wu Song's baggage, and they both left the house without saying a word.
Wu the Elder ran after him and asked, "Brother, why are you removing your baggage?"
"Brother, you must not ask, because if I told you you would have to wear a mask. Just let me go," replied Wu Song.
What could Wu the Elder say? So he let Wu Song go.
Pan Jinlian was still muttering to herself in the house. "Well!" she said, "people know that Wu Song is a relative of ours, and also an Inspector, and they will assume that he helped us but they will not understand why he has now turned against us. Truly it is, 'A flower and a cydonia are only nice to look at.' You can go, and I will give thanks to Heaven for your departure, you, an ungrateful cur."
Wu the Elder could not understand his wife being so abusive, and he was very much upset. After Wu Song'a departure Wu the Elder resumed his job of hawking cakes on the street. At first he had thought of going to the *yamen* and talking the matter over with his brother but his wife was emphatically opposed to that idea, therefore he did not go.
About ten days afterwards, the county magistrate, who had been at that place for more than two years, and had amassed a great deal of money, decided to send it to a relative at Eastern Capital for safe-keeping until he could use it to insure promotion. But he was afraid of the dangers of sending it by road, and was on the lookout for a reliable man to convey it. Suddenly he thought of Wu Song who was just the man he wanted. So he sent for Wu Song to talk the matter over, and upon the latter's arrival he said, "In the Eastern Capital I have a relative to whom I want to send some presents, and also a letter inquiring about his health. But I am afraid that on the journey it would not be safe and that a brave man here like you must undertake the task. You would not decline this toilsome task, and if you do this for me I will greatly promote you when you return."
As I am indebted to you for my present position," said Wu Song "how dare I offer excuses? Since you commission me to undertake this work I will go. I have never been to the Eastern Capital, and when I get there I can have a good look around the town. If you, sir, would have the present ready by tomorrow I could leave then."
The magistrate was much pleased at this, and offered him three cups of wine.
Having received the orders of the county magistrate, Wu Song left the *yamen*, and returned to his quarters. Then, he gave a few taels of silver to a soldier and ordered him to buy a bottle of wine, and some dried fish, meat, and fruit and took them to Wu the Elder's house on the Zishi Street. By a lucky concurrence Wu the Elder who had just returned from his cakes selling, happened to see Wu Song at his house door giving orders to the soldier for cooking the food.
When Pan Jinlian saw the wine and food arriving she thought that Wu Song had been thinking of her, and was coming back to her. She would not show that he had aroused her feelings but would quietly ask him a few questions. She went upstairs; powdered her face; dressed her hair; put on some pretty coloured clothes, and then went downstairs to receive Wu Song. She greeted him, "Uncle, I was not aware that I had treated you badly. You have not been here for several days but I wonder what made you to do so. Everyday I told my husband to go to the *yamen*, and talk matters over with you. When he returned he said that he could not find you. I am much pleased to see you here today. But why have you bought so many things?"
"I specially came here today to talk about a matter with you and my brother," replied Wu Song.
"Then let us go upstairs," said Jinlian.
So all three went upstairs. Wu Song conducted Wu the Elder and Jinlian to the seats of honour, and then taking a stool sat down in the inferior position. The soldier brought the wine and food and placed them on the table. Wu Song invited his brother and the latter's wife to partake the wine. Jinlian would not take her eyes away from Wu Song but the latter gave all his attention to the wine. After they had drunk about five cups of wine Wu Song ordered the soldier to fill up the cups again, and then taking his own cup in his hand he addressed Wu the Elder, "Elder brother, today I have been ordered to go to the Eastern Capital, and I have to start on my journey tomorrow. I expect to be gone not less than forty days, or at most two months. Now you have ever been rather weak, and when I am abroad I am afraid that you may be insulted. If you have been selling, say ten lots of cakes each day, then beginning from tomorrow I want you to sell only five lots. Everyday go out late and come back early. Do not drink wine with men. When you return home lower the screen, and lock the door. Avoid scandal at all. If anybody insults you do not have a row with him but wait until I return when I will discuss matters with him. If you will listen to my advice, then drink this wine."
Wu the Elder took the cup of wine from Wu Song, and replied, "Younger brother, what you say is right, and I will follow your advice."
When Wu the Elder had drunk the wine Wu Song refilled the cup, and turning to Jinlian he said, "Madame, you are so clever that I need not say much to you. My brother is sincere, and he has entrusted his affairs to you. People have a saying, 'Outer strength is not so much as a inner strength.' Now sister-in-law, if you look after the household affairs well my brother will not be annoyed. Have you heard of the ancient saying, 'If the fence is not broken the dogs cannot enter.'"
While listening to this, Jinlian was blushed, and her face then turned to brown. When he had finished his speaking she pointed at her husband with her finger and abused him saying, "You stupid ass! What language an outsider is now insulting me with! I do not wear a man's cap but I am quite a termagant. I could hold a man in my fist; I could support a horse on my shoulders; and I could allow men to walk over my face without flinching. I am not like the turtle women who rouge their faces, and then draw their heads in when anybody approaches. Since I married Wu the Elder not even an ant have dared to come in my room, so how could a dog enter even if my fence was broken. You only speak confusedly. If you have anything to say say clearly. If you throw a brick or a tile it will of course strike the ground somewhere."
Wu Song laughed and said, "If you can do things in this way that will be all right. But your words should correspond with your heart. As matters are as you say, I will not forget your words, and must ask you to pledge me with this wine."

But Jinlian pushed off the cup, and ran downstairs. When halfway down the ladder she stopped and shouted, "You may be very clever but do you understand the saying, 'The wife of the eldest brother should be treated like your mother.' Before I married Wu the Elder I never heard of him having a younger brother but now you have turned up. I do not know whether you are a relative or not but you evidently just want to be the boss of this house. My own fate has now many things to face." Having said this she burst out crying and went downstairs. All this was not genuine but full of deceit.
The two brothers drank a few cups of wine more, and then Wu Song got up to take his leave.
"Are you going?" asked Wu the Elder, "I hope that you will soon return, and that we shall meet again." As he said this he could not avoid crying.
Wu Song seeing him in tears said, "Elder brother, you must not do so much peddling but stay at home more. I will repay you for the loss of that."
They then went down, and as they were at the street door Wu Song said, "Brother, do not forget what I have said." He then departed with the soldier.
Early the next day Wu Song packed his things, and then went to the *yamen*. The magistrate had already ordered a cart, and the boxes and baskets had been loaded on it. Two reliable soldiers, and also two confidential servants, had already been instructed. He saluted the county magistrate who was standing in front of the hall. He put his own baggage in the cart, and took his halberd in his hand; seeing everything in order he and all four men soon left Yanggu County on the road for Eastern Capital.
When his brother had gone, Wu the Elder was abused and cursed by his wife for several days. But Wu the Elder smothered his anger, and took care not to forget his brother's words. Each day he only sold about half as many cakes as he had sold before, and it was never late when he returned home. As soon as he had put down his load he always rolled up the screen, and shut the door, and then went inside to sit down.
This vexed his wife, and pointing at him she said, "You stupid ass. I have never seen anyone close the door while the sun is still at its zenith. People will think we have a demon in the house. You listened to what your brother had said but you are not afraid of people laughing at us."
"You may let them laugh. What my brother said is quite right, and it will save us from a lot of trouble if we follow his advice."
"Rubbish! Stupid ass! You are a man! Yet you are not master of your own affairs but listen to other people's orders."
Wu the Elder waved his hand and said, "Take no notice of them. What my younger brother has said are words of gold."
When Wu Song had gone about ten days Wu the Elder continued to go out late everyday, and return early, and when he returned he always closed the door. His wife was always abusing him, so that they both got quite accustomed to it. In fact she often rolled up the screen and closed the door herself when he returned. Wu the Elder was much pleased to see her doing this.
About three days later the winter was nearly over, and the weather was gradually getting a little warmer. On one day when Wu the Elder would be expected to return his wife as usual went outside the door to roll up the screen. As she did this a man happened to pass. The ancients had a saying, "Without luck nothing can be completed." As she took the forked stick in her hand to let down the curtain, she held it so loosely that it fell down, and hit the man on the head. He stopped, in his excitement but turning round he saw a very pretty woman and was rendered helpless. Immediately his anger vanished to Java, and he smiled. She saw that his annoyance had gone so she saluted him with folded arms and said, "My hand slipped; I hope that you are not hurt."
He adjusted his turban with his hand, and bowed to her. He said, "Never mind! I hope that you did not sprain your wrist."
Standing under a curtain at a tea-house which was close by, there was a woman, Grandma Wang, who had noticed all this. She laughed and called out, "Who told you, sir, to pass under the eaves of this house? You deserve what you got."
He laughed and said, "That was my fault. To intrude on women is unusual."
Pan Jinlian laughingly replied, "I hope that you will forgive me."
The man also laughed, and gave her a big slow salute; he then said that he dared not intrude further. At that time he was examining her closely with both his eyes. He then swaggered off, and at each step he turned his head to look at her.
Jinlian then picked up the forked stick, rolled up the curtain, closed the door, and went inside to wait for her husband.
You know what's the name of that man, and where did he live? He was a once wealthy man of Yanggu County but now his property had been ruined. At present he owned a small drug-store opposite the front gate of the *yamen*. In his youth he had been a rascal, and was skillful with the cudgel and hand combat. Now he had gathered some influence and presumed to be an umpire of disputes that came to the *yamen*. He was always making further trouble in petty quarrels; the more he spoke the more money he got, from passing money and bribing officials, so that everybody in the town tried to avoid him. His family name was Ximen and his personal name was Qing. He was the eldest son of his family so that he was often called Ximen the Elder. But now he became a wealthy man, and was called the Honourable Ximen Qing.
Now after that incident with Jinlian he had not gone far before he turned into Grandma Wang's tea-house where he sat down near the door curtain.
Grandma Wang laughed and spoke to him, "What a big slow salute you gave, sir!"
Ximen Qing laughed and replied, "Granny, come here! I have something to ask you. Who is that woman next door?"
"She is the younger sister of 'King Yama,'" replied Grandma Wang, "and the child of a demon. What do you mean by asking her name?"
"I will be straight with you but you must not jest at me," said Ximen Qing.
"How is it that you do not recognize her?" asked Grandma Wang. "Her husband sells warm food daily before the *yamen*."
"Is not that man, Xu San, who sells date cakes?" asked Ximen Qing.
"No, not that man," said Grandma Wang. "If she were his wife they would be a nice couple. Guess again!"
"Oh, perhaps she is the wife of that silverware huckster, Li Er," said Ximen Qing. "Wrong again," replied Grandma Wang. "It would be a good match if she were his wife."
"Oh, then perhaps she is the wife of that tattooed fellow, Liu Xiaoyi," said Ximen Qing.
"No," replied Grandma Wang laughingly. "They would be a suitable pair if it be the case for her. Guess it again."
"I cannot think of anybody else," said Ximen Qing.
Grandma Wang laughed and replied, "If I tell you her husband's name you would be amused very much. He is that seller of cakes named Wu the Elder."
Ximen Qing burst into laughing, and stamped on the ground, and said, "Is not that Wu the Elder who is nicknamed Three Inches of Mulberry Bark?"
"That is the man," said Grandma Wang.
But Ximen Qing had pity for her hard lot. "It is a nice piece of meat in a dog's mouth," he said.
"That is the trouble," replied Grandma Wang. "It reminds me of the ancient saying, 'A fine steed ridden by a silly fellow is like a clever wife always sleeping with a stupid husband.'— But what is the old matchmaker in the moon thinking of such unequal alliances?"
"How much do I owe for the tea, Grandma Wang?" asked Ximen Qing.
"Not much. But rest a little while and I will reckon it up," replied Grandma Wang.
"With whom has your son gone away?" asked Ximen Qing.
"That is a thing I do not care to talk about," replied Grandma Wang. "He went to Huaian Prefecture with a guest, and as he has not returned so far we do not know whether he is living or not."
"Why did you not send him to me to do some business?" asked Ximen Qing.
"If you would take him, and recommend him for promotion that would be very good," replied Grandma Wang.
"When he returns we will discuss the matter in detail," said Ximen Qing. After some further talk he left.
In about an hour's time he returned, and sat down near the curtain at the door of the tea-house looking at the door of Wu the Elder's house which was nearly opposite.
Grandma Wang came and asked whether he would like some brewed plum juice.
"That is a good idea," he replied. "I like it a little tart."
She soon made the plum juice, and handed the bowl to him. He drank it slowly, and when finished placed the bowl on the table and said punningly, "Grandma Wang, this plum juice is very nice. Have you any more in your establishment?'
Grandma Wang laughed and said, "I have acted as a marriage matchmaker for a long time but just at present I have no woman on hand in my house."
"I asked you about '*mei*' (plums), and you replied about '*mei*' (marriages)—there is a wide difference."
"I thought you said that I arranged marriages very well," said Grandma Wang.
"As you are so expert in uniting people in matrimony it would be an extremely fine thing if you would find me a woman. I would reward you abundantly."
"If I introduce you to a woman your wife would be angry and slap my face," she replied.
"My wife is extremely docile and would not mind. I already have several concubines at home but there is not one of them that quite suits me. So if you find me an extremely good one you need not worry about my people raising an objection. Even if she is a widow it does not matter so long as she suits me."
"The day before yesterday there was a nice woman but I am afraid she would not suit you," said Grandma Wang.
"If she is nice, please arrange the marriage for me and I will thank you," said Ximen Qing.
"She is a paragon but unfortunately she is not young," she said.
"If there is only a difference of a few years between us that won't matter. How old is she?" he asked.
"She is of the Year of the Tiger, and is now just eighty-three years of age," said Grandma Wang.
"You crazy woman, making such funny jokes!" so saying he got up and went out with a laughing face.
In the evening when it was getting dark Grandma Wang lit the lamp, and upon going out to close the door she saw that Ximen Qing had come back, and was sitting under the door curtain gazing at the door of Wu the Elder's house as before.
"Honourable Sir, would you like some more plum juice?" asked Grandma Wang.
"Splendid idea," replied Ximen Qing. "But please make them a little sweet this time."
Grandma Wang soon prepared, and brought it to him. She took a seat near him. He asked her to keep an account of what he owed, and that he would pay her the following day.
Grandma Wang said that did not matter. "You need not worry about payment but come here at any time." He then departed and laughed as he went.
Very early the next morning when Grandma Wang went to open the door she saw Ximen Qing pacing backwards and forwards before the door. She soliloquized, "This fellow is getting very keen and comes here so often. I will flick some soft sugar on his nose, and see whether he can lick it off. He is always taking advantage of the people of this town but as he is now in my hands I will see that this time he is defeated." She then opened the door, and came back to kindle the charcoal fire, and boiled some tea. Immediately Ximen Qing entered, sat down near the screen, watching the door of Wu the Elder's house. Grandma Wang pretended not to see him, and busily fanned the fire in the stove. She did not go to ask whether he wanted some tea. But at last he called out for two cups of tea.
Grandma Wang laughed and asked, "Sir, are you arrived? I have not seen you for several days. Please be seated." She then prepared two cups of strong ginger tea, and placed them on the table.
"You come and drink tea with me," said Ximen Qing.
She laughed loudly and said, "But I am not one of your sweethearts."
Ximen Qing was amused at this, and asked, "Granny, what are the people in the opposite door selling?"
"What they're selling is steaming, dripping, hot and spicy. said Grandma Wang.
Ximen Qing laughed and said, "You seem to be mad."
Grandma Wang said, "I am not mad. She has her own husband."
"Granny, I will be straight with you. As they make good cakes I want to ask them to make about fifty for me but I do not know whether they are at home or not."
"If you want to buy some cakes you may wait until her husband returns from cakes selling. What need is there for you to go to the house?" she asked.
"What you say is quite right," said Ximen Qing, and after sipping his tea for a time he got up and asked for his bill.
"Never mind that," she said. "I have put it on account." Ximen Qing laughed again and left the tea-house. But Grandma Wang watched him closely from inside of her tea-house, and saw he went in one direction and looked closely at Wu the Elder's house door, he then returned and passing it again and had another careful look at it, and so on seven or eight times. He then reentered her tea-house. She addressed him, "Sir, I have not seen you for quite a long time."
Ximen Qing took out one tael of silver and gave them to her saying, "Please accept these in payment for my refreshments."
She smiled and asked, "Why give me so much?"
"Never mind that," replied Ximen Qing.
She was really pleased at this, as it showed her that he was defeated. So she took the money, and put it away. She then spoke to him,
"Sir, I see that you are thirsty. How would you like to have some tea?"
"How is it that you can get my idea correctly?" asked Ximen Qing.
"Where is the difficulty in that?" she asked. "There is an ancient saying, 'When a person enters, there is no need to ask him whether his affairs are prosperous or not because his face will always tell you that.' If there is any secret or strange affairs I can guess correctly."
"Well, I have a secret affair and if you can guess what it is, I will give you five taels of silver."
Grandma Wang laughed and said, "That will not need five guesses because I can guess it correctly in a straightway. Honourable Sir, let me whisper it in your ear. For these last few days you have been gallivanting about a great deal. So I know that you are very keen on that woman who is at our next door. Have I guessed rightly?"
"Granny," said Ximen Qing laughingly, "your wisdom is certainly as great as that of Sui He and Lu Jia! I will not try to deceive you. I do not know how it happened but since that woman dropped the forked stick on my head I seem to have lost my 'three souls and seven essences.' And I can think of no plan to get into her presence. Can you contrive a method to accomplish that?"
Grandma Wang laughed loudly saying, "Well, I will be straight with you. I, of course, sell tea but I am generally known as 'devil playing a night-watchman.' Three years ago, on a day in the sixth month when it snowed I sold one cup of tea but ever since no second visitor has come and my livelihood had to depend on 'other jobs.'"
"What are those 'other jobs?'" asked Ximen Qing.
"My chief business," she said, "is acting as a matchmaker, a broker, a midwife, arranging miscarriages, or as a procuress, a *'Maboliu.'*"[66]
66 One who arranges improper or adulterous relations.
"If you can arrange this matter for me," said Ximen Qing. "I will give you ten taels of silver to provide a coffin for you, when the affair is completed."
"Just listen to me," said Grandma Wang. "For seducing the fair sex there are five things that are necessary." She then explained them to him. "One, you must be as handsome as Pan An; Two, you need to be be 'hung like a donkey'; Three you need to be as rich as Deng Tong; Four, you need to be as forebearing as a needle threading cotton wool; Five, you need to make the time and effort. Pan An, donkey, Deng Tong, forebearance, time and effort—you can do it only if you meet these requirements."
"I have some of each of these five," said Ximen Qing. "First, I'm not as handsome as Pan An but I hold my own; second, I've had a big dick since I was young; third, my family has 'some spare change'—not as much as Deng Tong but we manage; fourth I'm very forebearing. If she hit me a hundred times, I wouldn't retaliate even once; fifth, time and effort are not a problem—I'm here after all. Granny, if you will arrange this matter for me, and help me to accomplish it I shall be extremely grateful and reward you."
"I know that you have all these qualifications," said Grandma Wang, "but there is still one thing that stands in the way."
"What is that?" he asked.
"Well, although you have all these things, yet if you are just short of one per cent of what I now refer to it may destroy all your chances. I know that you have always been thrifty, so I should like to know whether you are willing to splash out now."
"Of course I will," replied Ximen Qing, "I will be guided by what you advise."
"As you are willing to spend the money, I have a plan by which you can meet that woman but will you follow my advice?"
"Of course I will do whatever you propose," replied Ximen Qing. "What is your plan?"
She laughed and said, "It is now late, and you had better go. But come back in half a year or three months, and we will discuss the matter further."
Ximen Qing knelt down and appealed to her not to let the matter rest in that way.
She laughed at this and told him that he was getting precipitous. Her plan was an extremely good one, and it would be as successful as the famous military tactician Sunzi (6th century B. C.) who applied his methods to train court concubines into women soldiers. "Now I will tell you this, that woman was previously a servant in the house of a wealthy man at Qinghe County, and she is a very good sewing woman. Now I suggest you to purchase a roll of thin white silk, a roll of blue silk, a roll of pongee silk, ten taels of fine cotton, and give them to me. Then I will go across to meet her and have a chat with her. During tea I will tell her

that a very wealthy man have presented me these silk for making my burial clothes. I will ask her to lend me her almanac to select an auspcious day on which to invite a tailor to make the clothes. If I see that she will not assist me I am afraid that the matter will be finished. But if she offers to help me in making the clothes and asks me not to send for a tailor then that will be the first step towards your object. I will ask her to come to my home to do the work. But if she wants me to go and do the work at her house that will be the end of the matter. If she offers to come here and cut the silk for me, that will be a second step towards your object. If she comes, I will then, of course, ask her to have some wine and cake with me. You need not come the first day. And if on the second day she prefers to take stuff to her house again the matter will be ended there but if she comes everyday to my house that will be the third step towards your object. During that day also you need not come here. On the third day you can come with your best dress, and cough outside the door, saying, 'How is it that I have not seen you for several days, Grandma Wang?' Then I will come and ask you to come inside. If, when you enter, she runs away, I cannot of course detain her, and that again will be the end of the matter. But if she does not move when she sees you then it will be the fourth step towards your object. When we are all seated I will explain to her that you are the person who gave me the silk. I will boast about your great generosity, and you can tease her about the needles and threads. If she makes no reply that will be the end of the matter. But if she replies that will be the fifth step towards your object. Then I will tell you how lucky I am to get her to come and help me. I will also praise both of you as donors; one gave me money and the other gave me assistance. I did not look for you on the street but you both just happened to come here. I will then suggest that you are a good master, and should reward her for her voluntary work. If she runs away when you take out your money, the matter will again be over. If otherwise, that will be the sixth step towards success. When I have the money to buy refreshments I will tell her to entertain you while I am away. If she won't do this the matter is over but if she does not move that will be the seventh stage completed. When I come back with the things I will put them on the table and ask her to put her needles, etc. away and join us in drinking a little wine as provided by you. If she declines and says she must go, the matter will be over but if actually she does not get up, that will be the eighth step toward success. When we have been drinking the wine for some time and are getting merry, I will say more wine is required. I will ask you for the money, and as I go out I will close the door. Then you two will be alone inside. If she gets nervous and runs back, the matter will be over. If she is not anxious when she hears me close the door, and remains inside then that will be the ninth stage completed.

"The last stage may be the most difficult. You must be careful and speak honeyed words to her, and avoid any roughness of manner or speech. Do not touch her with hand or foot or make any violent move, or else it will soon come to naught, and I cannot help you. You had better accidentally brush a chopstick off the table with your sleeve; then you stoop down, and quietly stroke her foot. But if she objects to this you will have to wait until I come to help you. It will be difficult to go any further in the matter. But if she does not say anything then the matter is completed and you can go ahead. What do you think of my plan?"

Ximen Qing laughed and said, "Your plan is extremely well thought out."

Grandma Wang told him that he must not forget to give her the ten taels of silver.

Ximen Qing said, "How can one forget that oranges come from Dongting Lake when one is eating the peel? I will give you the money of course but when can the plan be put into effect?"

"I will report further to you this evening," said Grandma Wang. "As Wu the Elder has not yet returned I will now go across, and lay the bait. You can go and buy the rolls of silk, and engage a man to bring them here."

"You need have no doubt as to carrying out of my part of the bargain," said Ximen Qing. He then took his leave and went to a silk shop where he purchased the silks and ten rolls of pure cotton and told his servant to take them with five taels of silver to Grandma Wang's tea-house.

She duly received the silk, and dismissed the servant. She went out by the back door to Pan Jinlian's house. Pan Jinlian welcomed her, and invited her to go upstairs and sit down there. Grandma Wang asked why Pan Jinlian did not come to her tea-house the last few days, to which Jinlian replied that she had not been very well. Grandma Wang then asked if she had an almanac, as she wanted to select an auspicious day on which to cut out some silk for clothes.

Pan Jinlian asked what kind of clothes she was making.

Grandma Wang said that she had been far from well, and she could not be sure how it would end, so she was going to make some burial clothes for herself. She said at her request a very wealthy local man had given her a lot of silk to make the clothes with. She had had the silk at home for more than a year but now as she felt her end was drawing near she had decided to wait no longer but make the clothes at once. As there was an intercalary month in that year she would like to have made a start during the next two days but the tailor was so busy that he could not come that was very disappointing.

When she heard this Pan Jinlian laughed and said, "I am afraid that I am not properly qualified to do such work but if you would like it I could assist you in that matter."

Grandma Wang also laughed and said, "If you would help me my soul might have a happy destination after my death. I have heard of your skill with needle and thread but I did not dare to come and ask you about the matter."

"There is no obstacle in the way," said Pan Jinlian, "and as I have promised to do it I will certainly stick to my word. I will get a man to select an auspicious day, and then will come and help you on that day."

Grandma Wang said, "If you will help me in this work there will be no need to select an auspicious day because you are such a fortunate person. The other day I did ask a man for an auspicious day, and I now remember that tomorrow is such a day but then I did not think it necessary to select such a day to start with this work, so I did not take pain to remember it."

"It is very important to have an auspicious day on which to start making interment vestures but why wait for another auspicious day?" asked Jinlian.

"As you are quite willing, then I venture to ask you to come to my house tomorrow and we will start work," said Grandma Wang.

"But why would you not come here to do this work?" asked Jinlian.

"Because I would like to watch you work, and as I live by myself I have no one to look after my house," replied Grandma Wang.

"In that case I will come tomorrow as soon as I have had my breakfast," said Jinlian.

When Grandma Wang left, she was very profuse in her thanks for the help offered. That afternoon she went straight to Ximen Qing, and reported to him what had been arranged. She told him to call at her house the day after the next.

The next day Grandma Wang got up early and cleaned and set her room in good order, and prepared water for making tea. She went and bought some thread, and then waited at home for the arrival of her guest. At the other house Wu the Elder had departed with his load of cakes after breakfast. As soon as he had gone his wife let down the door screen, and then went out by the back door to Grandma Wang's house.

Grandma Wang was exceedingly glad to see her, and took her inside and invited her to partake of some strong tea, white pine-seeds, and walnuts which she had prepared. After their repast she cleared the table and brought out the four rolls of silk. Pan Jinlian examined them, measured them, and after cutting them in lengths began to sew. Grandma Wang looked on and applauded all that was done. She said that although she was nearly seventy years old she had never seen such excellent needlework before. Jinlian continued sewing till about noon, when Grandma Wang invited her to stop and dine—food, wine, and vermicelli being prepared. Afterwards the sewing went on until late in the afternoon when Jinlian went home. Shortly afterwards Wu the Elder returned, and his wife opened the door for him and raised the curtain. When Wu the Elder entered the room he noticed that his wife was flushed so he asked her where she had been drinking wine. Pan Jinlian then explained that she had been across the way sewing for their neighbour Grandma Wang who at noon had asked her to partake of some repast.

Wu the Elder did not like this, and said that if she had to go again he preferred that the repast be taken in his own house. He objected to her causing trouble to other people. If she went the following day he wanted her to take some money, buy some food, and invite Grandma Wang to dine with her. There was a saying, "A distant relative is not as good as a near neighbour." He did not however wish her to lose their neighbour's fraternity. But if Grandma Wang did not want to accept her hospitality then she must ask her to bring the work to his house. His wife listened to this but made no comment.

The next day Grandma Wang went on with her deceitful scheme, and as soon as Wu the Elder had gone she came to his house, and asked his wife to go and proceed with the needlework. They both went to Grandma Wang's house, and the sewing was taken up, while Grandma Wang got the tea ready. This went on till near noon when Pan Jinlian took out a string of cash and gave it to Grandma Wang saying that it would be used for some wine for them to drink.

But Grandma Wang would not take it. She said it would be unreasonable. "I have asked you to come here and do this work for me, so how could I allow you to spend money?"

"My husband told me to make this offer," replied Jinlian, "and if you would not accept it then I should do the work at my own home."

"Your husband is very kind," said Grandma Wang. She was afraid that her plans would be upset if she did not accept the money so she took it, added some of her own money and went out to buy the best wine, food, and fruit. Upon her return she took every care to entertain her guest. Now, reader, you should know that the women of this generation, no matter how clever and careful they are, cannot escape the temptations of evil men, and nine out of ten of them will be duped. Grandma Wang prepared some meat and requested Jinlian to dine and drink wine with her. This was done, and in the evening Jinlian returned home.

On the third day Grandma Wang watched for the departure of Wu the Elder and then went by the back entrance to his house, and again requested his wife to come with her. The latter agreed and they both adjourned to Grandma Wang's house where the needlework was continued until nearly noon.

Now Ximen Qing had not forgotten that this was the day for him to appear on the scene, so he put on a new turban, and dressed in his best clothes. Taking about four taels of silver he set out for the Zishi Street. Upon arriving at the door of the tea-house he coughed and said, "Granny Wang, how is it that I have not seen you for so long?"

Grandma Wang went out and asked laughingly, "Who are you?"

"It's I," replied Ximen Qing.

"As first I wondered who it was," she said looking round, "but now I see that it is you, my benefactor. Please come inside and have a look." She took hold of his sleeve and drew him inside, and when he saw Pan Jinlian she said to her, "This is the gentleman who gave me the silk."

Ximen Qing saluted Pan Jinlian, and upon seeing this she dropped her work, and saluted him with both hands.

Grandma Wang then addressed Ximen Qing, "You will remember that about a year ago you gave me a lot of silk. I did not do anything with it, until a few days ago when this lady offered to help me in making the clothes. She is an excellent needlewoman, and very skillful in her work. She does the fine minute parts very well indeed. Just look at the work she has done."

Ximen Qing looked at the silk and said, "How is it possible for anyone to do such wonderful work? It looks as though it had been done by a fairy."

Jinlian laughed and said, "Sir, you need not laugh at me."

Ximen Qing addressed Grandma Wang and asked, "May I dare ask you who this lady is?"

"Honourable Sir, you had better guess," replied Grandma Wang.

"How can I guess?" replied Ximen Qing.

Grandma Wang laughed and said, "This is our neighbour Pan Jinlian. The other day she dropped a forked stick on your head; its fall must have caused no pain that you now have forgotten it?"

Jinlian with a violent red blush said, "On that day my hand unfortunately slipped but I hope that you will not bear me any grudge."

"Nothing of the kind!" replied Ximen Qing.

Grandma Wang interrupted by saying, "This man is always amiable and has never born any grudge towards any one. He is an extremely good man."

"I was then not aware that she was the wife of Wu the Elder," said Ximen Qing. "I know of course that he sells cakes on the street to support his family but he also is quite a good man. He earns money, and is a good-tempered fellow. Such men are very rare."

Grandma Wang remarked, "Do you know that since Wu the Elder married her, she has always been obedient to him in every matter."

"He is a useless man," said Jinlian, "but, sir, you will not laugh at him."

"Madame, you are mistaken," said Ximen Qing. "There is an ancient saying, 'Meekness is essential to success; violence will bring calamities.' As your husband is such a good man he is like the saying, 'Of a vast volume of water not one drop could leak away.'"

Grandma Wang interrupted him by saying, "That is so."

Ximen Qing now sat down opposite to Jinlian, and Grandma Wang asked the latter whether she recognized him but Jinlian replied that she did not know him.

Grandma Wang said, "Well, he is one of the rich men of our town, and is on very friendly terms with the magistrate. He is called the Honourable Ximen Qing. He has a great deal of money, and has a dispensary opposite the *yamen*. At home his store of money is so high it reaches the Big Dipper and has granaries full of rice. At home things yellow are of gold, and that of white are of silver; round things are pearls, and bright are jewels. He has precious rhinoceros horns and elephants' tusks." She indulged in this puff like a quack (as she really did not believe in it herself). While this was going on Jinlian bowed her head over the needlework. But Ximen Qing gazed at her longingly, and was anxious to have her alone. Grandma Wang went and got two cups of tea which she set before them saying that she hoped Jinlian would entertain him. While the two were drinking the tea they made eyes at each other. Grandma Wang stroked her face with her hand, and Ximen Qing knew that he had already got halfway there. She said to him, "If you, sir, had not happened to drop in I could not have dared to ask you to come here. It was very fortunate for you to come today. There is a saying, 'One guest cannot disturb two hosts.' You gave me the money, and she gives me her labour. I did not go on the street looking for you, and this lady just happens to be here when you call, so I hope that as you are a good master, you will entertain her for me."

Ximen Qing expressed regret that he had not thought of that before, and he now took out some money and gave it to Grandma Wang to buy some wine.

Jinlian objected to this but she did not move. Grandma Wang took the money but even then Jinlian did not move. As Grandma Wang left the room to buy some things she turned and asked Jinlian to sit and talk with their guest. Jinlian told her she need not go out to buy the things but still she did not move. It was now evident that Jinlian and Ximen Qing had the same idea. Ximen Qing looked at her steadily, and Jinlian took stealthy glances at him. She liked his appearance, and had almost made up her mind but she dropped her head again and awaited developments. Soon Grandma Wang returned with a fat goose, cooked meat, and very nice fruit which she had purchased. She soon had them arranged on a tray, and brought them into the room, and placed the tray on the table. Jinlian asked Grandma Wang to entertain their guest as she was not justified in doing so, again she did not move.

"But how can you say that," replied Grandma Wang, "because this is particularly to entertain you?"

They all three then sat down at the table, and the wine was poured out. Ximen Qing lifted up a cup of wine and asked Jinlian to drink it.

Jinlian laughed and said, "Sir, I am much obliged to you for your kindness."

"I know that you like the wine," said Grandma Wang, "so I hope that you are not standing on ceremony but drink a few cups of wine."

Ximen Qing then picked up his chopsticks, and asked Grandma Wang to get the lady to eat some food also. Grandma Wang selected some of the best food, and gave them to Jinlian. After they had drunk about three cups of wine each Grandma Wang went for a fresh supply.

While she was away Ximen Qing asked Jinlian how old she was, to which she replied that she was twenty-three years of age. Ximen Qing said that he was five years older. To which she replied, "You are as high as the sky while I am as low as ground."

Just then Grandma Wang returned and said, "What a fine smart lady you are! You are not only good at needle craft but you are also well educated."

Ximen Qing said, "Where is there another lady like her? Wu the Elder was very fortunate in getting such a prize."

"I speak to the point when I say that although you have many women at home I guarantee you have not a lady equal to this one," said Grandma Wang.

"About that matter I am very sorry, I cannot say anything," said Ximen Qing. "except that I have been unfortunate in not getting a really good wife."

"But, sir, your first wife was good," said Grandma Wang.

"I do not care to talk about her," said Ximen Qing, "but if she were alive now my house would not have been turned upside down. Just now I have about three or seven concubines but they are all useless, just mouths waiting to be fed."

"How many years has it been since the death of your first wife, sir?" asked Jinlian.

"I do not wish to say that," said Ximen Qing, "but although she came of a poor family she was exceedingly clever, and managed all my affairs well. Unfortunately, she died. That was three years ago, and since then all my affairs at home have been in great confusion. That is why I do not stay at home now, because there I get nothing but abuse and annoyance."

"Sir, please do not be offended if I speak to you rather straightforwardly," said Grandma Wang, "your first wife was not as good as Jinlian at needle craft."

"She was moreover not as good-looking as this lady," said Ximen Qing.

Grandma Wang laughed and said, "But is it not true that you keep a mistress on the East Street? And yet you have never asked me to go there and have tea with you."

"She is a singsong girl named Zhang Xixi," said Ximen Qing. "But I know that she is also a stranger so that I do not care for her."

"But are you not Madame Li Qiaoqiao's lover for a long time too?" asked Grandma Wang.

"Oh! I have taken her to my home," said Ximen Qing. "If she were as pretty as this lady I would of course have married her long ago."

"And if I find a woman like this lady may I come to your house as a matchmaker to discuss marriage?" asked Grandma Wang.

"Both my father and mother are dead," replied Ximen Qing, "I now manage my own affairs so who can question anything I do?"

"Speaking earnestly," said Grandma Wang, "how could I immediately get a woman who would suit your taste?"

"Why not?" asked Ximen Qing. "So far I have only been unfortunate in marriage and, therefore, I have not met the one as I desire."

They talked further on this subject, and then Grandma Wang pointed out that they had drunk all the wine and said that she should go out to buy some more.

"I have here five taels of silver which I will hand you to buy wine with," said Ximen Qing, "and if it is too much then you can keep the balance."

As she took the money, and arose to go out, Grandma Wang looked at her lady friend, and saw that the wine had had its effect. She still however hung down her head but did not move. Grandma Wang knew that they both had the same object, and that when she left them together they would soon arrange matters.

Grandma Wang was pleased and she said to Jinlian, "I will now go and buy some more wine, so I shall have to trouble you to entertain this gentleman. Is there still some wine left? If any, fill two cups for the Honourable Ximen Qing. There is a place near the *yamen* where I can buy some good wine so that I may be some time before I return."

Jinlian said she did not want any more wine but again she did not move. So Grandma Wang left them but as she went out she fastened the door with a rope, and sat down just on the other side.

Ximen Qing took a cup of wine, and asked Jinlian to drink it. As he did this he brushed a chopstick off the table with his sleeve. This was a trick, as it fell close to the feet of the lady. When he stooped down to pick it up, he saw that she had two small pointed feet. So he stealthily placed his hand on her embroidered shoe. She laughed at this but said, "You need not be so backward."

Ximen Qing knelt down and petitioned her to satisfy his desire. She thereupon embraced him, and he got up. Soon afterwards Grandma Wang returned and pretending to be angry said, "You two look happy." Both Ximen Qing and Jinlian were startled, and Grandma Wang continued, "I asked you to come here to help me to make some clothes, and not to carry on with this man. If Wu the Elder got to know of this he would blame me. I will go and tell him about it at once." She then turned round to leave the room. But Jinlian seized hold of her skirt and begged to be forgiven. Ximen Qing appealed to her not to make a noise.

"If you want me to forgive you, you must do one thing as I tell you," said Grandma Wang.

"I will obey you in everything, not to say one thing," said Jinlian.

"Then from now you must deceive your husband, and not let him know of this affair. You must not break your promise and abuse the kindness of this gentleman, and then I will not disclose the affair. But if you do not come here once everyday, I will immediately tell your husband."

"I will do as you wish," said Jinlian.

"Sir, it is not necessary for me to advise you," said Grandma Wang to Ximen Qing. "This affair is now completed but you must not forget to present me with those things. If you should forget that, I should then have to inform Wu the Elder."

"You need not trouble about that," said Ximen Qing, "I will keep my promise."
The three then sat down, and drank wine until late in the afternoon when Jinlian got up and said that her husband would soon return and she must go now. She left and entered her own home through the back door, Wu the Elder came in shortly afterwards.
Being alone with Ximen Qing, Grandma Wang asked him, "Well, what do you think of my plan?"
"It all passed off very smoothly," said Ximen Qing. "I will now go to my house, and send you the sum of money I promised. How dare I not keep my word?"
"Then I will wait with great expectations," said Grandma Wang. "But do not let me beg for the money after I have rendered the service."
Ximen Qing laughed and departed. Everyday Jinlian stole into Grandma Wang's house, and there continued to meet Ximen Qing. Their feelings were like varnish, and their hearts stuck together like glue. There is an ancient saying, "Good deeds are never heard of outside the door but bad deeds are proclaimed for a thousand *li*." In less than a fortnight all the neighbours knew about this affair, and Wu the Elder was the only one who did not know about it.
We will now consider another matter. In the town there was a boy called Qiao of about fifteen years of age. His father had been a soldier at Yunzhou, an ancient city in Shandong and the boy was nicknamed Elder Brother Yun Ge. He was very cute, and earned a little money by selling fruit at the inns; Ximen Qing had set him up in business by advancing the small capital. One day he was hawking with a basket of "Snow Pears," and was on the lookout for Ximen Qing. Upon his inquiring if anyone had seen Ximen Qing, a man said that if he really wanted to find him he would tell him where to go.
"Well," said Yun Ge, "I you will tell me it will enable me to earn a few cash for the support of my old father."
"Well," said the bystander, "I suppose Ximen Qing is at his usual work of seducing Pan Jinlian. He goes everyday to meet her at Grandma Wang's tea-house in the Zishi Street. He will certainly be there now. As you are only a small boy, there would be no objection raised if you went inside."
The boy went straightway to the Zishi Street, and entering the tea shop saw Grandma Wang seated on a stool weaving the yarn. He put his basket down and saluted her with both hands.
"Yun Ge, what do you want here?" asked Grandma Wang.
"I am looking for an Honourable gentleman to earn a few cash from him," replied the boy.
"What 'Honourable'?"
"You know whom I am looking for," said the boy.
"What is his name?"
"His family name has two characters," replied the boy.
"What are the two characters?"
"Granny, you are only playing with me. I want to speak to the Honourable Ximen Qing." So saying he went towards the next room. But Grandma Wang was quick, and seizing his coat, she asked, "You little monkey! Where are you going? In houses there are places where you cannot go."
"I am only going to look for him inside," he said.
"You stinking monkey!" exclaimed Grandma Wang. "How could Ximen Qing be in my rooms?"
"What I do not know? But as you make money, why not let me share a little of it?"
"You little monkey!" exclaimed Grandma Wang. "What do you know?"
"You are like a chopper cutting vegetables in a wooden bowl," said the boy, "because not the least bit leaks out. If I told what I know I am afraid that the seller of cakes would make trouble."
As soon as Grandma Wang heard this, she knew that he had hold of what she thought was her secret, so she was angry and shouted at him, "You monkey! How dare you come into my house, and fart like that!"
"I am a monkey but you are a pimp!" said the boy.
She thereupon seized hold of him and boxed him on the head with her knuckles.
"What are you beating me for?"
"You thieving monkey! If you make any noise I will box your ears," said Grandma Wang.
"You brothel-keeper! You have no reason for beating me." Grandma Wang dragged him to the street door, and all the way hammered at his head. She then took his basket of snow pears, and threw them through the door, and they were scattered in all directions. That little monkey could not retaliate with force but he began to pick up the pears. Cursing, crying, picking up his pears, and pointing at the teahouse he shouted, "You old pimp! You need not get anxious, be assured that I will certainly go and tell him." He at last picked up his basket, and went off to find a man.

Fox and hare in dons are turned over;
Mandarin ducks (lovers) are roused from sleep.

Wu Sung turned around and saw that it was his elder brother.
Both of them were greatly delighted by their reunion, and Wu the Elder invited Wu Sung to his home where he ushered him to a seat in the upstairs room and called Chin-lien out to meet him. Then he said, "The man who killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge the other day is your brother-in-law. Now he has just been appointed to the post of police captain. He and I are brothers from the same womb."
The woman:
*Stepping forward and saluting him with folded hands,*
said, "Many felicitations, Brother-in-law."
Wu Sung returned her salutation by kneeling down to kowtow but the woman attempted to help him to his feet, saying, "Please rise, Brother-in-law. You'll be the death of me yet."
"Accept my salutation, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. The two of them dickered politely for a while and ended up kowtowing to each other before getting to their feet.
After a brief interval Wu the Elder's daughter served tea to the two of them. Wu Sung saw that the woman was extremely seductive and merely lowered his head. Before long Wu the Elder took it upon himself to provide food and drink for Wu Sung's entertainment and, leaving the two of them to their conversation, went downstairs to buy the necessary provisions. The woman was left upstairs all by herself to keep Wu Sung company.
Chin-lien looked at Wu Sung and saw that:
*His physique was awe-inspiring, and*
*His appearance was imposing.*
His body seemed to be possessed of boundless strength. Were this not so, how could he have overcome the tiger?
"They are brothers, born of the same mother," she thought to herself, "and yet one of them is so big and strong. If I'd been married to him I might have gotten by somehow or other. But look at that Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin of mine! He's only:
*Three parts human, and*
*Seven parts ghoul.*[66]
I must have been so plague-stricken in a previous incarnation that I'm still suffering the ill effects to this day. Wu Sung certainly looks manly enough to me. Why don't I see if I can get him to move in with us here? Who knows? This may turn out to be the very love-match I've been waiting for."
Making herself all smiles, the woman asked, "Brother-in-law, where are you staying right now, and who's looking after your meals?"
"I've just been appointed to the post of captain," Wu Sung said, "so I have to be on duty everyday to await the orders of my superiors. For the sake of convenience I'm making do with lodgings right in front of the district yamen. Two local recruits are detailed everyday to act as my orderlies and take care of my meals."
"Brother-in-law," the woman said, "why don't you move in with us here? It would save you the trouble of having to put up with the services of those orderlies from the yamen who probably aren't any too sanitary where food is concerned. It's more convenient if we all live under the same roof. Then, if you happen to want some soup or something, I can make it for you myself, and you'll know it's safe to eat."
"Thank you very much, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung.
"You must have a wife somewhere," the woman went on. "Why don't you bring her along and introduce her to us?"
"I've never gotten married," said Wu Sung.
"How old are you, Brother-in-law?" the woman asked.
"I'm twenty-seven," said Wu Sung.
"It so happens that you're just three years older than I am," the woman said. "Where have you come from on this occasion, Brother-in-law?"
"I've been living in Ts'ang-chou for more than a year," Wu Sung said. "I thought my brother was still living in our old house and had no idea he had moved here."
*"It's a long story,"*
the woman said. "Ever since I married your elder brother, people have taken advantage of his good-heartedness. That's why we had to move here. If he were only a real man like you, Brother-in-law, who would dare to say him nay?"
"My brother has always minded his own business," said Wu Sung. "He doesn't allow himself to lose his temper the way I do."
"You've got it all backward," laughed the woman. "As the saying goes:
*If you aren't tough enough,*
*You will never be secure.*[67]
I've always been quick-tempered myself, and could never abide the sort of person who:
*If you hit him three times won't turn around; but*
*If you hit him a fourth time goes into a spin.*"[68]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Brother and sister-in-law happen to meet*
like floating duckweed;
With a seductive air she insists on
flaunting her beauty.
In her heart she only wants him
to make love to her;
With deceptive words she sets out
to inveigle Wu Sung.[69]
It so happens that this woman was the sort who is forever protesting her own virtue.
Wu Sung said, "My brother is not a troublemaker, so you have nothing to worry about, Sister-in-law."
Before the two of them had finished speaking, Wu the Elder returned from his shopping expedition, laden with meat and vegetables, fruit and pastries. Putting these down in the kitchen he started up the stairs and called out, "My dear, why don't you come downstairs and fix these things for us?"
"Just see what an ignoramus he is!" the woman responded. "Here you are, Brother-in-law, with no one to entertain you, and he wants me to go downstairs and abandon you."
"Please don't inconvenience yourself on my account, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung.
"Why don't you go next door and ask Godmother Wang if she could help out?" the woman demanded. "Can't you ever figure things out for yourself?" Wu the Elder did as he was bidden and Dame Wang prepared everything very nicely, bringing it upstairs and setting it out on the table for them. The fare consisted of fish and meat, fruit and vegetables, sweetmeats, and the like. As soon as the wine was heated, Wu the Elder asked his wife to play the role of host, with Wu Sung sitting across from her, while he took a seat to one side. When the three of them had sat down at their places Wu the Elder took up the wine and poured a little for each of them.
Picking up her winecup the woman said, "Brother-in-law, don't take it amiss but we've nothing to offer you. Please try a cup of this watery wine."
"Thank you, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. "Please don't talk that way any more."
Wu the Elder was so preoccupied with running up and down stairs to heat and pour the wine that he could hardly concern himself with what went on between them.
The woman gave Wu Sung:
*Such a smile you could have plucked it off her face,*[70]
while her mouth was full of nothing but "Brother-in-law this and Brother-in-law that." "Why don't you help yourself to the meat, or some fruit?" she asked, and she picked out the best tidbits and put them on his plate with her own chopsticks.
Now Wu Sung was a man of straightforward temperament and took this to be no more than his sister-in-law's cordiality. How could he have known that this woman had started her career as a serving maid and become adept at the art of playing up to others? He was quite unaware that in her heart she had designs on him. Wu the Elder, on the other hand, was too naïve to be any good at entertaining guests.
By the time the woman had downed a few cups of wine with Wu Sung she couldn't take her eyes off him. Wu Sung was embarrassed by the way she looked at him and merely lowered his head without responding to her. After they had been drinking for a while the wine ran out and he got up to go. Wu the Elder said, "If you haven't anything else to do, Brother, why not have another cup or two before you go?"
"I've troubled you enough," said Wu Sung. "I'll come and see you again, Brother and Sister-in-law."
When they had seen him downstairs and out the door the woman said, "Brother-in-law, be sure you don't forget to come and move in with us here. People will laugh at us if you don't. After all, you're blood brothers. It's not as though you were anyone else. Besides, if you can stick up for us, you'll actually be doing us a favour."
"Since you're so hospitable, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung, "I'll get my things and move in this very evening."
"Brother-in-law," the woman said, "be sure you don't forget. I'll be waiting for you." Truly:
*The natural beauty of the vista*
*remains unseen;*
*In spring the peach blossoms bloom*
*all by themselves.*[71]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*How reprehensible is Chin-lien*
whose schemes are deep;
She conceals her wanton intent though
her desires are in a tumult.
Wu Sung is steadfast and true,
not easily tempted;
The shining integrity of his name is worth
ten thousand pieces of gold.[72]
That day the woman outdid herself in her efforts to please him.
To resume our story, Wu Sung returned to the inn in front of the district yamen where he had been staying, collected his luggage and bedroll, got his orderlies to carry them for him, and led the way to his brother's house. When the woman saw him she was happier than she would have been if she had:

*Discovered a piece of gold or a precious stone.*[73]
Then she swept out a room and fixed it up nicely for him. Wu Sung sent the orderlies back to the yamen and slept that night at his brother's house.
The next day he arose early and the woman also got up hastily and heated water for him so he could wash his face. Wu Sung washed, combed his hair, put on his turban, and headed out the door to make the morning roll call at the yamen.
"Brother-in-law," the woman said, "after the roll call is over come back for something to eat as soon as you can. Don't go anywhere else for your meals."
Wu Sung assented and then went to the yamen to be in time for roll call. When he returned home after putting in a morning on duty he found that the woman had prepared a full-course meal. After the three of them had finished eating, the woman brought Wu Sung a cup of tea and served it to him with both hands.
"I'm really imposing on you, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. "It makes me:
*Too uncomfortable to sleep or eat in peace.*[74]
Tomorrow I'll have the yamen send an orderly over to help out."
"Brother-in-law," the woman retorted, "how can you make so much of it? Our own flesh and blood! It's not as though I were waiting on anyone else. It's true we've got this little chit, Ying-erh but when I see the way she:
*Picks up this and then picks up that,*
*Floundering about all over the place,*
there's no way I can rely on her. And even if you arrange for an orderly, he won't be any too sanitary where food is concerned. I really can't abide people like that."
"If that's the way it is, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung, "I guess I'll just have to impose on you."
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Wu Sung's demeanor is really*
awe-inspiring;
His sister-in-law's wantonness can
not be checked.
She inveigles him into coming to live
under the same roof;
In order to share the clouds and rain
in a romantic affair.[75]
To make a long story short, after moving into his brother's home Wu Sung took out some silver and gave it to Wu the Elder in order to buy pastries, tea, and fruit to entertain the neighbours on either side. The neighbours, on their part, clubbed together to return the treat, and Wu the Elder, in due course, reciprocated.
But no more of this.
After several days had gone by, Wu Sung presented his sister-in-law with a bolt of variegated satin to make a dress for herself.
With an ingratiating smile the woman said, "Brother-in-law, this will never do. But since you've already given it to me, I can't very well refuse, can I? I guess I'll just have to accept." And she bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations."
From this time on Wu Sung lived in his brother's home. Wu the Elder continued to shoulder his load and go out into the streets to sell his steamed wheat cakes as before. Wu Sung went to the yamen everyday to report for duty and no matter whether he:
*Returned early or returned late,*
the woman would:
*Cook some soup or cook a meal,*
*As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could*
*make her happier.*
This only had the effect of making Wu Sung feel more uncomfortable.
From time to time the woman would try to arouse him with a suggestive comment but Wu Sung was an adamantly straightforward man and did not rise to the bait.
*When there is a story to tell it is long;*
*When there is no story to tell it is short.*
Before anyone knew it more than a month had gone by. It was now the eleventh month and a strong north wind began to blow, day after day. In every quarter what should appear but:
*Dense masses of dark clouds,*
and all of a sudden:
*Fluttering and swirling,*
*A skyful of auspicious snow came flying down.*
Behold:
*To the tune "Immortal at the River"*
*For ten thousand li dark clouds*
are densely massed;
In midair the auspicious omen
ripples the blinds;
The petals of alabaster flowers
dance before the eaves.
It was at just such a time,
on the Shan River,
That Wang Hui-chih's boat,
was immersed.[76]
*In an instant the towers and terraces*
are weighted down;
Rivers and mountains are linked by
an expanse of silver;
Flying salt and scattered powder
fill the sky.
Such was the occasion when
Lü Meng-cheng,
In his dilapidated kiln, bemoaned
his penury.[77]
The snow continued to fall that day until the first watch and made everything look like:
*A world decorated with silver;*
*A universe carved out of jade.*
The next day Wu Sung reported to the yamen in time for the morning roll call, as usual, and had not yet returned home at noon. Wu the Elder had long since allowed himself to be hustled out of the house by his wife to ply his trade. Now she asked Dame Wang, next door, to buy her some meat and wine, and then went into Wu Sung's room and lit a brazier of charcoal.
"Today I'll give his cinders a real stirring," she thought to herself. "Never fear, he's bound to catch fire."
Cold as it was, the woman stood inside the hanging blind at the door, all by herself, until she caught sight of Wu Sung:
*Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade,*
as he made his way homeward through the snow.
The woman raised the blind to let him in and said with a smile, "Brother-in-law, you must be cold."
"Thanks for your concern, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung.
He came in the door and took off his broad-brimmed felt hat. The woman reached out her hand to take it from him but Wu Sung said, "Don't bother, Sister-in-law," and proceeded to brush off the snow and hang it on the wall himself. Then he unfastened his belt, took off his parrot-green silk jacket, and went into his room.
"I've been waiting for you all morning, Brother-in-law," the woman said. "Why didn't you come home for breakfast?"
"A friend of mine treated me to a meal this morning," said Wu Sung. "Just now another one invited me for a drink but I couldn't be bothered, and came straight home."
"In that case, warm yourself at the fire, Brother-in-law," the woman said.
"That's just what I need," said Wu Sung, who proceeded to take off his waxed boots, change his socks, put on a pair of warm slippers, pull over a bench, and seat himself next to the brazier.
By this time the woman had already told Ying-erh to shut the front door and check to see that the back door was closed also. Then she put the wine on to heat, prepared a few dishes of food, brought them into his room, and laid them out on the table.
"Where is my brother?" Wu Sung asked.
"Your brother has gone out to peddle his wares as he does everyday," said the woman, "but I'll share three cups with you, Brother-in-law."
"I'd just as soon wait till he gets home," said Wu Sung.
"Why should we wait for him?" the woman said.
Before she had finished speaking the little girl, Ying-erh, appeared with a flagon of warmed wine.
"You needn't have gone to so much trouble, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung. "Let me do the honours."
The woman also pulled over a bench and sat down next to the brazier. The table was already set. Picking up a cup of wine and holding it out to him in her hand, she looked at Wu Sung and said, "Bottoms up, Brother-in-law."
Wu Sung took the cup of wine and:
*Drained it in one gulp.*
The woman refilled it and said, "The weather's cold, Brother-in-law. Have another cup. It takes two to make a couple."
"Why don't you help yourself, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung but he took the cup of wine and again:
*Drained it in one gulp.*
Wu Sung then poured a cupful of wine and offered it to the woman, who accepted and swallowed it. Picking up the flagon, she refilled the cup and put it in front of Wu Sung. Then and there:
*Her creamy breasts slightly exposed, and*
*Her cloudy locks half askew,*
the woman said to him with an ingratiating smile, "I've heard people say, Brother-in-law, that you're keeping a singing girl on the street in front of the district yamen. Is that true?"
"Sister-in-law, you shouldn't pay any attention to the nonsense people talk," said Wu Sung. "I've never been that sort of person."
"I don't believe you," the woman said. "I only fear that:
*Your mouth is not in harmony with your heart."*
"If you don't believe me, Sister-in-law," said Wu Sung, "just ask my brother and see what he says."
"Ai-ya!" the woman said, "why bring him into it? What does he know about anything? For him:
*Life and death are but a drunken dream.*[78]
If he knew the score he wouldn't be peddling steamed wheat cakes. Brother-in-law, have another drink."
By the time a few more rounds had been poured and drunk the woman had reached that state in which:
*Three cups of wine in the stomach*
*ignite the flames of desire.*
*How could she hope to repress*
*the fire of lust in her heart?*
But she merely continued her idle conversation.
Wu Sung was now 80 or 90 percent aware of what was going on but he merely lowered his head without responding to her.
The woman got up and went to heat some more wine, leaving Wu Sung alone in the room. He picked up the fire tongs and started to poke up the fire in the brazier. After a while, when the wine had been heated, she came back into the room. Holding the flagon in one hand, she reached out with the other and gave Wu Sung a pinch on the shoulder, saying, "Brother-in-law, if that's all you've got on, you must be cold, aren't you?"
Wu Sung was already more than a little uncomfortable about the situation but did not pay any attention to her. When the woman saw that he did not respond, she grabbed the fire tongs out of his hand and said, "Brother-in-law, you don't know how to stir up a flame. Let me show you how. It's got to be red-hot or it won't do any good."
Wu Sung had nearly reached the end of his fuse but did not make any reply. Without noticing that he was upset, the woman dropped the fire-tongs and poured a cupful of wine. She took a sip from this herself, leaving the cup more than half full. Then, looking at Wu Sung, she said, "If you share my feelings, you'll drink the rest of my cup."
Wu Sung grabbed the cup away from her and threw its contents on the floor, saying, "Sister-in-law, how can you be so shameless!"
At the same time, he gave her a push with his hand that nearly knocked her over. Opening his eyes wide, Wu Sung said, "I'm the sort of man who:
*Stands erect between Heaven and Earth,*[79]
*With teeth in his mouth and hair on his head:*[80]

I'm not the sort of pig or dog who:
*Poses a threat to public morality,*[81]
or violates the standards of human decency. Sister-in-law, this kind of shameless behavior must cease! From now on:
*If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,*[82]
*My eyes may recognize you as my sister-in-law,*
*But my fists won't recognize you.*[83]
Let's have no more of this."
The woman's face turned bright red as she listened to this tirade. Calling in Ying-erh to clear the saucers, cups, and other utensils from the table, she muttered under her breath, "I was only kidding. It's hardly worth taking so seriously.
*You wouldn't know a favour if you saw one."*
As soon as the table was cleared she retired to the kitchen. There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Chin-lien's disreputable schemes are*
all too wicked;
Wanton and shameless, she knows no
behavioral norms.
Even at table she seeks the consolation
of clouds and rain;
Only to find herself subjected to the
captain's reprimand.[84]
Not only did the woman discover that Wu Sung would not respond to her advances but she got a good verbal drubbing for her pains.
Wu Sung remained in his room, still fuming, and thinking to himself. Before long it was five o'clock in the afternoon and Wu the Elder, with his carrying pole over his shoulder, made his way home through the snow. After pushing open the door and putting down his load he came into the room and saw that his wife's eyes were red with weeping.
"Who've you been quarreling with?" he asked.
"It's all your fault," the woman said. "You never stick up for yourself, and you allow other people to take advantage of me."
"Who would dare take advantage of you?" Wu the Elder demanded.
"You know perfectly well who it is," the woman replied. "It's really intolerable! That bastard, Wu the Second! When I saw him come home through the snow I went to the trouble of fixing some wine and food for him. Then, when he saw there was no one about, he tried to proposition me. Ying-erh saw it with her own eyes. I'm not making it up."
"My brother isn't that sort of person," stated Wu the Elder. "He's always been an honourable man. Keep your voice down! The neighbours will laugh at us if they hear you."
Leaving his wife where she was, Wu the Elder went into Wu Sung's room and said, "Brother, if you haven't had an afternoon snack yet, I'll have something to eat with you."
Wu Sung made no reply. Instead, after thinking for a while, he took off his silk slippers and pulled his waxed boots back onto his feet. Then he put on his jacket and his wide-brimmed felt hat, fastened his belt, and strode out the front door.
"Brother, where are you going?" Wu the Elder called after him but Wu Sung made no reply and proceeded straight on his way.
Wu the Elder went back into the house to interrogate his wife. "He didn't even respond when I called to him," he said. "He just headed along the street toward the front gate of the district yamen. I really don't know what's the matter with him."
"You lousy muddleheaded worm!" his wife railed at him. "What's so hard to see about it? The bastard's so ashamed of himself he doesn't have the face to confront you, so he's walked out on you. I'll bet he sends someone to fetch his luggage and refuses to live here any longer. I wouldn't put it past you to urge him to stay!"
"If he moves out people will laugh at us," Wu the Elder said.
"You muddleheaded troll!" his wife cursed. "If he starts playing around with *me,* no one will laugh at us I suppose! Go stay with *him;* if that's what you want to do; but I'm not the kind of person to put up with this sort of thing. Just give me a writ of divorce and you can have him all to yourself!"
Wu the Elder scarcely dared open his mouth again in response to this tirade from his wife. The two of them were still going at it when who should appear but Wu Sung, with an orderly in tow, who walked right into the house with his carrying pole, picked up his luggage, and headed out the door.
Wu the Elder ran outside and called after him, "Brother, why are you moving out like this?"
"Don't ask, Brother," said Wu Sung. "If I tried to explain, it would only serve to publicize the problem. Just let me go my own way."
*Wu the Elder dared ask nothing more about it and let Wu Sung do as he wished. Inside the house, his wife continued to rail away. "A fine thing it's, too! Just as they say, it's not easy to collect a debt from a relative. All anybody knows is that you've a younger brother who's been made a captain, and everyone assumes that he's supporting his brother and sister-in-law in fine style. What they don't know is that he's just a sponger. In fact: he's a real quince: good to look at but not fit to eat.*[85] *Now that he's moved out, all I can say is: thanks be to Heaven and Earth; at long last my enemy has been removed from my sight."*[86]
When Wu the Elder heard his wife utter these imprecations, he did not know what to make of it and remained in a state of mental perturbation. After Wu Sung moved back into his room in the inn in front of the district yamen, Wu the Elder continued to go out on the street and peddle his steamed wheat cakes as before. He wanted to look up his brother and have a talk with him but his wife forbade him directly to have anything to do with him. For this reason, Wu the Elder did not dare seek out Wu Sung. A poem testifies to this:
*Chin-lien's dream of clouds and rain did not materialize;*
Who would believe that this evoked hostility in her heart?
Thus did she contrive to get Wu Sung out of the way;
And sow enmity between brothers of the same flesh and blood.[87]
*In making this match, the Old Man under the Moon*[1] *has made a mistake;*
Displaying her talents, P'an Chin-lien flaunts her beauty.
Merely because she dreams of assignations under the moon, beneath the stars;
She attracts the attentions of those beyond the door, outside the screen.
Tempted by greed, Dame Wang employs a crafty scheme;
Peddling his fruit, Yün-ko becomes the object of rancor.[2]
How can she foresee that a later day will bring domestic disaster;
That her blood will spatter the standing screen and make the whole floor red?
Wu Sung had no sooner moved out of his elder brother's house than, in a snap of the fingers, the snow stopped and the weather cleared. This state of affairs prevailed for more than ten days.
To resume our story, two years and more had elapsed since the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho assumed office, and during that time he had been able to put away a tidy sum in gold and silver. It now occurred to him that he should find a trustworthy person to deliver these valuables into the hands of a relative in the Eastern Capital[3] for safekeeping. When he reported to the capital for an audience at the expiration of his three-year term they would come in handy in fixing things up with his superiors. The only problem was that the roads were infested with criminal elements so that he would have to find a fairly formidable person for the task. Suddenly he thought to himself, "That captain, Wu Sung, with his heroic combination of courage and strength, is the very man for the job."
The same day he called Wu Sung into the yamen to discuss this matter, saying, "I have a relative who is serving as an official in the Eastern Capital. His name is Chu Mien, [4] and he holds the post of defender-in-chief in the Palace Command. I'd like to send a consignment of presents to him, along with a letter asking after his health but I'm afraid that the roads may not be safe. You're the only person I can trust with such a responsibility, and I hope you won't refuse on account of the hardships involved. When you return, of course, I'll see that you are amply rewarded."
"Your Honour has already done so much for me," responded Wu Sung, "that I could hardly refuse. Since you have a mission for me to perform, I'll set off at once. Actually, I've never been to the Eastern Capital, so Your Honour is only doing me another favour by giving me this chance to take in the sights of the big city."
The district magistrate was delighted and rewarded Wu Sung with three cups of wine, along with ten taels of silver for his traveling expenses. But no more of this.
To resume our story, after Wu Sung had received his instructions from the district magistrate, he walked out the gate of the yamen and went by his lodging place to pick up an orderly. Then he stopped on the street to buy a bottle of wine and some groceries and proceeded straight to his brother's house. Wu the Elder happened to come home at about the same time and when he found Wu Sung waiting for him on the doorstep, he invited him inside and instructed the orderly to go into the kitchen and start fixing the food.
The smouldering feelings of the lady of the house had not been completely extinguished. When she saw Wu Sung arrive, with wine and food in hand, she thought to herself, "That bastard must not be able to get me off his mind, otherwise why should he come back like this? He may well have found me too much for him after all. I'll have to feel him out gradually."
Hurrying upstairs to:
*Retouch her powdered face, and*
*Recomb her cloudy locks,*
she changed into a more attractive outfit and proceeded to the doorway to welcome Wu Sung.
Bowing as she spoke, the woman said, "Brother-in-law, I don't know what sort of misunderstanding could have arisen to keep you from paying us a visit for such a long time. I've been at my wit's end over it. Everyday I've told your brother to go to the yamen to look for you and try to make it up some way but when he comes home he says you're nowhere to be found. I'm certainly glad you've stopped by again today but what did you have to go and waste your money like that for?"
"There's something I particularly want to tell my brother," said Wu Sung.
"In that case," said the woman, "please come upstairs and sit down."
After the three of them had ascended the stairs, Wu Sung insisted that his elder brother and his wife take the seats of honour, while he pulled up a stool and sat to one side. The orderly served the wine and brought up a hot meal to go with it.
Wu Sung urged his brother and sister-in-law to eat. As they did so the woman kept glancing at Wu Sung but he paid no attention to anything but his wine. After several rounds of drinks, Wu Sung asked Ying-erh to bring a set of pledge cups and then told the orderly to fill one of them with wine.
Taking this cup in his hand, he looked at Wu the Elder and said, "My respects to you, Elder Brother. Earlier today His Honour, the district magistrate, commissioned me to carry out some business for him in the Eastern Capital that will require me to set out tomorrow. At the most I should be away for two or three months, and at the least I should be back in a month. There is something I have come here especially to tell you. You have always been of a meek disposition, and I fear that while I am away people may try to take advantage of you. If you normally sell ten trays of steamed wheat cakes in a day, starting tomorrow, make only five trays. Go out late and come back early, and don't stop to have a drink with anyone. Take down the blind and close the door as soon as you get home. That ought to put a stop to any idle chatter. If someone does try to take advantage of you, don't make an issue of it but wait until I get back and let me handle it for you. If you're willing to do as I suggest, Elder Brother, drink this cup to the bottom."
Accepting the cup, Wu the Elder said, "Your suggestions are good, Brother. I'll do just as you say," and drained it to the bottom.
Wu Sung then filled another cup and said to the woman, "You are a clever person, Sister-in-law, so there's no need for me to say more than a few words. My brother is ingenuous by nature, and totally dependent on you where decisions are concerned. As the saying goes:
*Outer strength is no match for inner strength.*[5]
If my sister-in-law does a good job of managing the household, what will my brother have to worry about? You must be familiar with the old saying:
*If the fence is secure dogs won't get in.*[6]
No sooner did the woman hear these words than:
*A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and*
*In an instant her whole face was purple.*
Pointing her finger at Wu The Elder, she launched into a tirade of vituperation. "You muddleheaded creature! If you had anything to complain about, why did you have to go and spill it to someone else so he could take such a high tone with me?
*I may not wear a turban but I'm a match*
*for any man;*
*I may be only a woman but I'm a real*
*dingdong dame.*
*I can lift a man on my fist,*
*Carry a horse on my arm, and*
*Trample on anyone else's face.*[7]
I'm not the sort of:
*Blood-sucking tick that buries itself in the skin*
*so you can't dig it out.*[8]
Ever since I've been married to Wu the Elder not even an ant has dared to come into the house. What's all this about dogs getting in if the fence isn't secure? You'd better lay off that:
*Wild and nonsensical talk.*
Every word of an accusation has got to have a basis in fact.
*If you throw a brick into the air,*
*It will come down to earth every time."*[9]
Wu Sung laughed and said, "If you take charge in that way, Sister-in-law, everything will be fine; just as long as:
*Your heart and your mouth are in agreement,*[10]
but not if:
*Your heart is not in harmony with your mouth.*
In any case, if that's the way it is, Sister-in-law, I'll remember everything you've said. Please drain this cup."
Pushing the winecup aside with one hand, the woman jumped up and started to run downstairs but before she had gotten half way down she stopped and said, "Since you're so smart you must know the saying that:
*An elder brother's wife is like a mother:*[11]
When I first married Wu the Elder I didn't hear anything about a brother-in-law. Where do you think you come off anyway:
*Acting like a relative whether you are one or not,*[12]
and demanding to play the role of head of the family? It's just my luck to run into this kind of crap!"
She then proceeded the rest of the way down the stairs, crying as she went. There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Good advice proves bitter to the taste,*
as do words of admonition;
Chin-lien resents him for this
and throws a tantrum.
So mortified, herself, that she can

scarcely remain at table;
She arouses the anger of the hero,
young Wu the Second.[13]
The woman succeeded in putting on quite a scene. Wu the Elder and Wu Sung felt so uncomfortable that after a few more cups of wine they came downstairs and bade each other farewell with tears in their eyes.
"After you've gone, Brother," said Wu the Elder, "come back and see me as soon as you can."
"Brother," said Wu Sung, "it would be just as well if you didn't do any business at all but just sat at home. I could send someone to provide you with living expenses."
And just before he left Wu Sung said to him again, "Brother, don't forget what I've told you. Be careful not to let anyone into your house."
"I understand," said Wu the Elder.
Wu Sung took leave of his brother and returned to his lodgings in front of the district yamen where he got together his luggage and the weapons he would need to protect himself on the trip. The next day he took charge of the district magistrate's consignment of presents, checked to see that the gold and silver were properly packed in saddlebags, obtained the waybill authorizing the shipment, and set off on his way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.
To resume our story, after Wu the Elder allowed himself to be admonished by his younger brother, Wu Sung, he had to put up with three or four days of unremitting abuse from his wife. There was nothing he could do but:
*Swallow his anger and keep his own counsel;*[14]
letting her curse herself out. Meanwhile, he followed his brother's advice by making only half as many steamed wheat cakes as usual everyday. After making his rounds he came home before evening and put down his carrying pole, took down the blind, and closed the front door behind him before proceeding any further into the house.
When his wife realized what he was doing she was furious and cursed him, saying, "You ignorant nincompoop! Who ever heard of:
*Locking the jailhouse door while the sun is*
*high in the sky!*
Our neighbours will laugh themselves silly over this futile attempt to keep out the ghosts. You'll do anything your brother says. A lot of good your own cock and balls do you! Aren't you ashamed to make such a laughingstock of yourself?"
"Let them laugh," said Wu the Elder. "My brother's advice is for our own good and ought to put a stop to any idle chatter."
"Phooey!" the woman said, spitting right in his face, "you stupid clod! You call yourself a man, yet you can't make up your mind about anything but let yourself be manipulated by others."
"So what?" said Wu the Elder with a negative wave of the hand. "As far as I'm concerned, my brother's words are as immutable as if they were graven in bronze or stone."
It so happens that from the time that Wu Sung left town Wu the Elder went out late, came back early, and closed the front door as soon as he got home. His wife was:
*So angry she scarcely cared whether she were*
*dead or alive,*
and gave him a hard time about it more than once but eventually she got used to it. From then on, around the time that Wu the Elder got home, she would take down the blind and close the front door herself. When Wu the Elder noticed this he was secretly pleased and thought to himself, "This way everything ought to be all right."
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Careful as he is to lock the door*
and come home early;
There is so little love between them
they are separated by peaks.
Once her desires are aroused
they weave a tangled web;
Even if she were shut up in a cage
it would not avail.
Time flies like a white horse galloping past a crack;[15]
*The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.*
*No sooner has the flowering plum blossomed*
*at winter's end;*
*Than warmer weather proclaims the*
*return of spring.*
One day in the third month, when spring was at its most beautiful, Chin-lien dressed herself up alluringly and could hardly wait for Wu the Elder's departure before taking up her position behind the bamboo blind that hung over the front door. She had become accustomed to standing there until her husband was expected home and then taking down the blind and going inside to wait for him. But this particular day was one of those occasions on which:
*Something was destined to happen.*
Just as she was about to take down the blind a certain person happened to walk by.
*Without coincidences there would be no stories;*[16]
*It is those who are predestined to do so who meet.*
The woman was in the very act of reaching up to take down the blind with a forked stick when a gust of wind dislodged it from her grip so that it fell,
*Neither correctly nor precisely,*
but right onto the hat of the passerby. As she hastened to put on an ingratiating smile she looked at him and saw that he was twenty-four or twenty-five years old and cut quite a dashing figure.
*On his head he wears a tasseled hat,*
Gold openwork hairpins, and
A pair of jade rings inlaid with gold;
On his long torso, a green silk jacket;
On his feet, fine-soled Ch'en-ch'iao[17] shoes, and
Pure cotton stockings;
On his trouser legs, jet drawnwork kneepads.
In his hand he sports a gold-flecked Szechwan fan,
Enhancing a face as handsome as young Chang's,[18]
A countenance as good-looking as P'an Yüeh's.[19]
A man after my own heart,
As romantic as can be,
Beneath the screen he tips a wink at me.
This man, on whose head the forked stick had fallen, stopped in his tracks and was about to make trouble; but when he looked around to see who was responsible he found, to his surprise, that it was a beautiful and seductive woman. Behold, she has:
*Glossy, black, raven's feather tresses;*
*Dark, curved, new moon eyebrows;*
*Clear, cold, almond eyes;*
*Redolently fragrant cherry lips;*
*A straight, full, alabaster nose;*
*Thickly powdered red cheeks;*
*A handsome, silver salver face;*
*A light, lissome, flowerlike figure;*
*Slender, jade-white, scallion-shoot fingers;*
*A cuddlesome, willow waist;*
*A tender, pouting, dough-white tummy;*
*Tiny, turned-up, pointed feet;*
*Buxom breasts; and*
*Fresh, white legs.*
And there is something else as well:
*Tight and squeezy,*
*Red and wrinkly,*
*Pale and fresh,*
*Black and cushioned;*
*Who can tell what it might be?*[20]
The beauties of this woman were such that he could not look his fill. And how is she adorned? Behold:
*The glossy black chignon on her head is enclosed*
in a fret spangled with gold,
Setting off the fragrant clouds of her hair
and studded all round with hairpins.
The spit curl at her temple is embellished with
a double-headed flower;
A comb of aromatic wood holds her hair
in place behind.
Her arched willow-leaf eyebrows would be
hard to depict;
As would the pair of peach blossoms
that grace her cheeks.
Her openwork pendant earrings are
beyond praise;
A glimpse of her smooth creamy bosom is
beyond price.
A pale blue homespun blouse, with wide sleeves
and jacket to match,
Complements the embossed silk of her
beige skirt.
A figured handkerchief dangles
from the mouth of her sleeve;
A sachet of pomander hangs low
at her waist.
The rows of frogs on her bodice
are neatly fastened;
Her ankle leggings, concealed above,
extend below.
The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses
are just visible;
With a pattern of mountain peaks embroidered
on the tips of their toes,
Her raven-hued shoes, with high white satin heels,
are made to order for tripping the fragrant dust;
Her red silk ankle leggings are figured with

orioles among the flowers;
Whether walking or sitting, the breeze parts her
skirts and reveals what lies below.
From her mouth the fragrance of orchid
and musk is constantly wafted;
When her cherry lips open in a smile
her face breaks into bloom.
The mere sight of her makes one's "ethereal and
material souls take flight";
Shown off to such advantage, she is a
beautiful, if heartless, lover.
No sooner did the man catch sight of her than:
*His starch began to melt, and*
*His anger flew to Java,*[21]
as the irate look on his face changed into a broad smile.
The woman knew that she was in the wrong and, folding her hands in front of her, bowed deeply in his direction as she said, "The wind blew it right out of my hand, sir, and it happened to land on you. Please don't hold it against me."
Adjusting his hat with one hand, the man made such a low bow that he almost scraped the ground, saying as he did so, "It doesn't matter at all! Please make yourself easy, miss."
This scene happened to be witnessed by Dame Wang, whose teahouse was situated next door. Breaking into a laugh, the old lady said, "And whatever induced you to walk under these particular eaves, sir? It serves you right."
"It's really my fault," the man replied with a smile. "I've put you out, I'm afraid. Don't hold it against me, miss."
"I do hope you won't take offence, sir," the woman said.
"How could I dream of such a thing?" the man responded with a smile, and he made another low bow, during which his mischievous eyes:
*Long experienced in sizing up the flowers;*
*Adept at assessing romantic possibilities,*
never left the woman's body. As he made his departure he glanced back seven or eight times before proceeding to swagger on his way, concealing his face with his fan. There is a poem that testifies to this:
*In the cool breeze and genial weather*
he has sauntered out for a stroll;
By chance, beneath the blind he encounters
a seductive beauty.
Merely because, "on the point of departure,
she gives him a meaningful glance";[22]
His desires are so aroused that he cannot
call it quits.[23]
The woman, for her part, had had a good look at the man and thought to herself, "He's dashing and romantic as well as soft-spoken, and he seems to be rather taken with me; but I don't even know his name, or where he lives. If he didn't care for me he wouldn't have glanced back at me seven or eight times before going his way. Who knows? This may turn out to be the very love-match I've been waiting for."
She fixed her gaze upon the man until he was out of sight before taking down the blind, closing the front door, and going back inside.
Gentle reader take note: It is scarcely likely that such a person should not turn out to be a man of some property. It so happens that he was the decadent scion of a family of considerable wealth from whom he had inherited a wholesale pharmaceutical business located on the street that ran in front of the district yamen. He had been a dissolute young scamp since his youth and had acquired some skill in such martial arts as boxing and fencing with the quarterstaff. He also liked to gamble, and there was little he didn't know about backgammon, elephant chess, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts. Now that he had come into his inheritance and had money of his own to spend, he had gone into cahoots with the officials and functionaries in the district yamen where he played the role of influence peddler, intervening in public business on people's behalf, for a fee. For this reason everyone in the whole district was rather afraid of him.
This man bore the double surname, Hsi-men, and the single given name, Ch'ing. He was an only son, so people had been in the habit of calling him Master Hsi-men but now that he had come into his inheritance and had money of his own to spend they referred to him as the Honourable Hsi-men. Both his father and his mother were dead, and he had no siblings.
His first wife had died some time ago, leaving behind her only a single daughter. Recently he had been formally remarried to the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard but he was not above availing himself of the four or five serving maids in his establishment. Moreover he had carried on an affair with a girl named Li Chiao-erh from the licensed quarter for some time, and he had just arranged to take her into his household. On top of this he had also been maintaining an unlicensed prostitute called Cho the Second on South Street. This girl's professional name was Cho Tiu-erh, or Toss-off Cho, and he had now moved her into his household as well.
In fact, Hsi-men Ch'ing was a past master at:
*Toying with the breeze and dallying with the moonlight.*
Whenever he established a liaison with a woman, even one of good family, he was wont to take her into his establishment; but if she should then fail to please him in any way, however slight, he would call in a go-between and dispose of her without more ado. It was said that he sometimes resorted to the services of such brokers as often as twenty times in a single month. As a result, no one dared cross him.
Now this Honourable Hsi-men, once he had caught sight of that woman beneath the blind, went home and thought to himself, "What a fine filly! I wonder how I could get hold of her."
Suddenly he bethought himself of Dame Wang, who kept the teahouse right next door to her home. "She can surely do:
*Thus and thus, and*
*So and so,*
and help me to pull this affair off successfully. If it costs me a few taels of silver to reward her for her pains, what does it matter?"
Thereupon, without even waiting to eat, he sauntered out onto the street again, made straight for Dame Wang's teahouse, slipped in unobtrusively, and took a seat inside the beaded portiere.
"That certainly was a fat bow you took just now, sir," said Dame Wang with a laugh.
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come here. There's something I want to ask you. Who does that filly next door belong to?"
"She is King Yama's[24] younger sister, the daughter of the General of the Five Ways,"[25] said Dame Wang. "What do you want to know about her for?"
"I'm serious," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Stop joking."
"How is it you don't recognize her, sir?" asked Dame Wang. "Her old man's the one who sells ready-cooked food in front of the district yamen."
"You don't mean to say she's the wife of Hsü the Third who sells date cakes!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Not him," said Dame Wang with a negative wave of her hand. "If it were him, they'd make a pair. Guess again, sir."
"She must be the wife of Li the Third who sells won-ton," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Not him," said Dame Wang with another wave of her hand. "If it were him, they'd be well matched."
"You don't mean to say she's the wife of Little Liu the Second with the tattooed arms, do you?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Dame Wang laughed uproariously and said, "Not him. If it were him, they'd make another pair. Guess again, sir."
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the truth of the matter is I can't guess who it is."
"In that case," said Dame Wang with a sardonic smile, "I'll tell you, sir," and she burst out laughing again. "The man whose lot it is to cover her is Wu the Elder, who peddles steamed wheat cakes on the street."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he stamped his feet and laughed.
"You don't mean to say he's the Wu the Elder, whom everyone calls the Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin, do you?"
"That's the man," said Dame Wang.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he groaned and said:
*"How did a piece of fine mutton*
*End up in the mouth of such a dog?"*
"It's the same old story," said Dame Wang. "It's always been true that:
*The finest steed may be forced to carry*
*an unworthy rider;*
*The loveliest wife must often share her bed*
*with a clumsy clod.*[26]
That's just the way the Old Man under the Moon arranges things."
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how much do I owe you in the way of tea money?"
"Not much," replied Dame Wang. "Let it go for a few days. It doesn't matter."
"Who is your son, Wang Ch'ao, working for these days?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I don't even want to talk about it," said Dame Wang. "He's gone off with a merchant from the Huai River region and hasn't come home to this day. I don't know whether he's dead or alive."
"Why doesn't he come and work for me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He's a likely looking lad."
"If you saw fit to favour him in such a way, sir," said Dame Wang, "it would certainly be handsome of you."
"Wait till he gets home and we can talk about it again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. When he had finished speaking he thanked her profusely, got up, and took his leave.
Before four hours had elapsed, however, he showed up again, slipping into a seat just inside the beaded portiere of Dame Wang's teahouse and directing his gaze at Wu the Elder's door. In a little while Dame Wang came out and said, "How about a damson punch, sir?"
"That would be great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Make it good and sour."
Dame Wang prepared an order of damson punch and served it to him with both hands. When he had finished drinking it Hsi-men Ch'ing put the cup down and said, "Mother, you really know how to fix a damson. How many more have you got in the house?"
Dame Wang laughed. "I've been fixing up damsels all my life but what would I want with one for myself?"
"It was damsons I asked about," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, laughing in turn, "but you're talking about damsels. There's quite a difference between the two."
"All I heard, sir, was something about fixing damsels," said Dame Wang, "so I thought you were talking about the way I fix them up."
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you're as good as all that at making matches, how about fixing one up for me? If you come up with a good one, I'll see that you're amply rewarded."
"You've got to be kidding, sir," said Dame Wang. "If the lady of your house found out about it, I'm afraid my head's a bit too old to stand up to being boxed about the ears."
"My wife has a most accommodating disposition," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already got a number of bedmates at home. It's just that none of them really tickles my fancy. If you've got anything good to propose, there's no harm in bringing it up. Even someone who's been married before would be all right, as long as she tickles my fancy."
"There was one that looked pretty good just the other day," said Dame Wang, "but I'm afraid you wouldn't be interested, sir."
"If she's really a good prospect, and you can bring it off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll reward you generously."
"She's as talented as she can be," said Dame Wang. "The only thing is she's a little along in years."
"It's always been true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that:
*A mature beauty makes a worthy mate.*[27]
Even if she's been around a year or two longer than one might wish, it doesn't matter. Just how old is she anyway?"
"The lady in question," said Dame Wang, "was born in the year of the pig, so, come New Year's Day, she'll be just ninety-two."
"What a crazy old crone you are," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The only thing you're really any good at is pulling people's legs." And when he was through laughing he got up and took his leave.
Gradually it grew dark, and Dame Wang had just lit her lamp and was about to close her door, when who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing. Once again he slipped inside the beaded portiere, pulled over a bench to sit on, and proceeded to gaze fixedly at Wu the Elder's door.
"How about a concord punch, sir?" asked Dame Wang.
"That would be great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Make it good and sweet, Godmother."
Dame Wang promptly served him a cupful and Hsi-men Ch'ing drank it but he continued sitting there until it was quite late before he stood up and said, "Put it on my bill, Godmother. I'll settle the whole account tomorrow."
"Don't worry about it," said Dame Wang. "Pray let the matter rest. Drop in again tomorrow and we can discuss it then."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and took his leave but when he got home he was:
*Too uncomfortable to sleep or eat in peace.*
He couldn't get the woman off his mind. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
Early the following morning, when Dame Wang opened her door and looked outside, she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already there, pacing back and forth in the street. "This sucker is certainly impatient enough," she thought to herself. "Just watch me:
*Stick some sugar candy on the tip of his nose*
*Where he can't quite get at it with his tongue.*[28]
That bastard is always presuming on his connections in the yamen to take advantage of people. Now that he's fallen into my hands I might as well make him pay for his fun by lining my nest with a few strings of cash."
It so happens that this Dame Wang, the proprietress of the teahouse, was not the sort to abide by her lot. In fact, for years she had:
*Played the procuress,*
*Made a living as a matchmaker,*
*Peddled human flesh,*

*Been a broker,*
*Meddled in midwifery,*
*Acted as accoucheur, and*
*Revealed a knack for every sort of knavery.*
And she had yet another accomplishment that doesn't bear mentioning:
*She could jab a needle through the chignon, and*
*Inject solder into the cranial cavity.*
Truly, this old lady's skills were such as to evade easy detection. Behold:
*When she starts to speak,*
*she excels Lu Chia;*[29]
*When she opens her mouth,*
*she surpasses Sui Ho.*[30]
*She relies on the lethal lips that persuaded*
*the Six States;*[31]
*She depends on the trenchant tongue that won*
*the dominions of Ch'i.*[32]
*The solitary male phoenix and its*
*female counterpart,*
*Are in a trice transformed into*
*a couple;*
*The lonely widow and*
*bereft widower,*
*Are by a single speech induced to*
*form a pair.*
*She knows how to inveigle the young lady*
*locked behind triple gates,*
*Into a tryst with the immortal*
*within his nine-tiered palace.*
*The Golden Lad who tends the incense within the halls*
*of the Jade Emperor;*[33]
*She can drag hither*
*by the arm;*
*The Jade Maiden who transmits messages in the palace*
*of the Queen Mother of the West;*[34]
*She can embrace*
*around the waist.*
*She has but to put in motion*
*one of her crafty schemes,*
*In order to induce an arhat*
*to cosy up to a bhikshuni.*
*She has but to resort to*
*one of her devices,*
*In order to cause Devarāja Lī*[35]
*to embrace Hārītī.*[36]
*Once exposed to her sweet suasions*
*and inviting arguments,*
*Even such a paragon as Feng Chih*[37]
*would start to get ideas:*
*When confronted with her winning words*
*and beguiling promises,*
*Even so chaste a goddess as Ma-ku*[38]
*would find her equanimity disturbed.*
*"Concealing the head of the matter*
*while revealing the tail,"*[39]
*She incites even the Weaving Maid*[40]
*to thoughts of love;*
*"Playing the role of intermediary*
*in passion's heats and chills,"*[41]
*She prevails upon Ch'ang-o*[42] *herself*
*to take a lover:*[43]
Truly, this old lady was:
*Adept at manipulating the breeze and the moonlight*
*to her own advantage;*
*Constantly to be seen in the law courts*
*as an instigator of quarrels.*
The old lady had just opened for business and was engaged in getting her teakettles ready when she caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. After pacing back and forth a few more times he slipped hurriedly inside the beaded portiere and proceeded to stare fixedly at the blind over Wu the Elder's door. Dame Wang pretended not to notice and continued to fan up the fire in her stove rather than coming out to take her customer's order.
"Godmother," called out Hsi-men Ch'ing, "make me two cups of tea."
"Oh, it's you, sir," responded Dame Wang. "Long time no see. Please have a seat."
In no time at all she brought two cups of strong tea and set them down on the table.
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come have a cup of tea with me."
"I'm not the one you're after," said Dame Wang with a laugh. "Why should I have a cup of tea with you?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing also laughed a while and then asked, "Godmother, what do your neighbours have for sale?"
"Their stock in trade," replied Dame Wang, "is fried doughballs, cured coney, stuffed patty-cake, baked buns, noodles with cockle sauce, and hot Schlag in cider."[44]
"Why you crazy old crone," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "all you can do is joke."
"It's no joke," Dame Wang laughed back at him, "she's got an old man of her own."
"I'm serious," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If her husband can make good steamed wheat cakes, I'd like to buy forty or fifty of them to take home with me."
"If all you want to do is buy wheat cakes," said Dame Wang, "he'll be back in a while and you can buy them then. What need is there to pay a formal call?"
"You're right, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, who then drank his tea, sat a little longer, stood up, and took his leave.
Sometime later, as Dame Wang was tending her teashop, she looked out with a sardonic eye only to see another vision of Hsi-men Ch'ing. He was pacing back and forth in front of the door. First he would head east, then turn around and go west, only to repeat the process again and again. This happened seven or eight times in a row. Finally he came right into the teashop.
"This must be my lucky day, sir," said Dame Wang. "It seems like ages since I saw you last."
Hsi-men Ch'ing started to laugh and then fumbled for a tael of silver that he handed to Dame Wang with the words, "Godmother, why don't you take this for the time being to cover my tea money?"
"Why so much?" asked Dame Wang with a smile.
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if it's too much, keep the difference."
"I've got him," the old lady thought to herself. "This is one sucker who's going to get what's coming to him. I might as well take his money. It'll come in handy to pay the rent."
Then she said out loud, "You look a little thirsty to me, sir. How about a well-steeped cup of tea?"
"How'd you guess what I wanted, Godmother?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"What's so hard to guess about that?" said the old lady. "It's always been true that:
*When someone comes in the door don't bother*
*to ask how he's doing;*
*One look at his face will suffice*
*to give you the answer.*[45]
I've guessed the answers to a lot of stranger things than that in my day."
"There is something I've got on my mind," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you can guess what it is, Godmother, I'll give you five taels of silver."
Dame Wang laughed. "There's no need for any:
*Three conjectures and five guesses.*
One conjecture will be quite enough for my guess to hit the bull's-eye. Come a little closer, sir, so I can whisper in your ear. The last two days:
*Your footsteps have been fidgety, and*
*Your inquiries incessant.*
Surely it's because you've got my next-door neighbour on your mind. How's that for a guess?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing began to laugh. "Godmother," he said, "truly:
*In intelligence you rival Sui Ho;*
*In resourcefulness you outdo Lu Chia.*
There's no reason for me to deceive you. I don't know why it is but ever since I caught sight of her when she was taking down the blind the other day, it's been just as though she had stolen away my three ethereal and my seven material souls. Day and night I can't get her off my mind. When I'm at home I don't even feel like eating or drinking and am far too distracted to work. I wonder if there's anything you could do to help me out?"
Dame Wang gave a cynical laugh. "There's no reason for me to deceive you either, sir. I get a customer in my teashop about as often as the devil plays night watchman. Three years ago, when it snowed so heavily on the third day of the sixth month, I sold a cup of tea but I haven't been able to make a go of it since. The only thing that keeps me going is the occasional odd job."
"And what, may I ask, do you mean, Godmother, by the occasional odd job?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Dame Wang laughed. "When I was only thirty-five my old man kicked off and left me with this youngster but without any means of livelihood. At first I tried my hand at matchmaking. Then I went round collecting people's old clothes to sell. I offered my services as an accoucheur and then as a midwife. When the occasion arises I dabble in pandering and procuring. I can also perform acupuncture, moxabustion, and other medical services. And, lastly, I treat the 'proper tea' of every customer as though it were my own."[46]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he burst into laughter. "I had no idea you were as talented as all that, Godmother. If you can actually pull this affair off for me, I'll give you ten taels of silver toward the cost of your coffin. All I want you to do is to arrange a meeting between this filly and myself."
This proposal elicited a hearty laugh from Dame Wang. A poem testifies to this:

That wastrel, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had the wildest ideas; he was willing to go to any lengths to get his way with a woman.
But it was the proprietress of the teahouse, old Dame Wang who engineered the tryst between the Goddess of Witches' Mountain and King Hsiang.[47]
*Beauty does not delude people, they delude themselves;*[1]
But if they become deluded they will suffer the consequences.
Their vitality will be dissipated, their countenances grow pale;
The marrow in their bones will dry up and their strength will wane.
Those who engage in fornication find that their families will break up;

Once venereal disease is contracted it is difficult to cure.
As always, "A full stomach and warm body give rise to disorder;" [2]
Those for whom disaster is imminent never seem to realize it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Dame Wang, "The only thing I'm interested in is a tryst with this filly."

"Godmother," he went on to say, "if you can really arrange this for me, I'll give you ten taels of silver."

"Listen to me, sir," said Dame Wang. "Generally speaking, the words 'garnering the glow' refer to a most difficult matter. Do you know what this term 'garnering the glow' means? It's just another way of referring to what is commonly known as an illicit affair. Now there are five prerequisites that must be possessed by anyone who wishes to consummate such an affair: He must have the

*1: looks of P'an Yüeh,*
*2: member of a donkey,*[3]
*3: wealth of Teng T'ung,*[4]
*4: youth and resilience of a 'needle in a wad of cotton.' (something sharp or dangerous, the nature of which is disguised by a soft exterior.)*
*5: leisure.*

Only if you possess all these prerequisites that are known for short as 'looks, member, wealth, youth, and leisure,'[6] can you hope to consummate such an affair."

"To tell you the truth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I happen to have all five. As for the first: although I may not be as handsome as P'an Yüeh, I can certainly pass muster. As for the second: in my younger days I frequented the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter and reared a 'turtle' [7] of prodigious size. As for the third: I've got a few strings of cash laid away. Although I may not be in the same league as Teng T'ung, I've got more than enough to get by. As for the fourth: I've got the youth and resilience to take anything she can dish out. She could hit me four hundred times without my giving her a blow in return. As for the fifth: I've got leisure to spare. If I didn't, how could I spend so much time over here? Godmother, if you can pull this off for me, I'll make it worth your while."

Hsi-men Ch'ing had now made his intentions explicit.

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "you say you've got all five prerequisites. I understand that. But there's still another problem that might get in the way and make success unlikely."

"Tell me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what might get in the way?"

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "don't take it amiss if I speak bluntly. The hardest thing about this business of 'garnering the glow' is getting you to commit yourself to it 100 percent. Even if you're willing to spend whatever it takes to complete 99 percent of the task, something might still stand in the way of success. I know you've always been a bit tight, unwilling to fling your money about with abandon. This is the only problem that might get in the way."

"That's easy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll just do whatever you tell me."

"If you're prepared to spend the money, sir," said Dame Wang, "I've got a splendid plan for getting you and this filly together. But I don't know if you'll be willing to go along with me or not."

"No matter what you say, I'll go along with it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What is this splendid plan of yours?"

Dame Wang laughed. "It's already getting late today. Why don't you go home for the time being. Come and see me again in half a year, or three months time, and we can talk about it then."

"Godmother," entreated Hsi-men Ch'ing, "stop joking. You've got to help me pull this off.
*Your kindness will be amply rewarded."*

Dame Wang broke into raucous laughter. "You're getting carried away again, sir. Although this plan of mine may not be worthy of commemoration in the Temple of Prince Wu-ch'eng, the God of War, [8] it's certainly superior to that scheme of Sun Wu's which called for drilling the palace ladies.[9] The odds are eight or nine to one that you shall have her.

"Let me give you the lowdown on this filly's background. Although she's only of humble origin she's as clever as can be. She's an excellent musician and singer. And as for needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, the standard repertory of popular songs, backgammon and elephant chess, and so forth, there's very little she doesn't know about any of them. Her given name is Chin-lien and her maiden name is P'an. Her father was the Tailor P'an whose shop used to be located outside the South Gate. After his death she was sold into the household of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant, where she learned to play musical instruments and sing. Later, because Mr. Chang was getting along in years, he released her from the terms of her contract and gave her to Wu the Elder as wife without demanding a candareen in return.

"That was several years ago. Now Wu the Elder is something of a simpleton. Everyday he goes out early and comes home late and doesn't pay attention to anything but his business. Ordinarily this filly is not much given to gadding about. When I've got nothing better to do I often go over to her place to pass the time of day, and when she needs help with anything she asks me to take care of it for her. She addresses me as Godmother just as you do.

"The last few days Wu the Elder has been going out early. If you want to pursue this matter, sir, buy me a bolt of blue pongee and another of white, along with a bolt of white damask. I'll also need ten taels' worth of good-quality silk wadding. When you've brought all these things to me I'll go over and ask to borrow her calendar so I can get someone to pick out an auspicious day on which to engage a tailor to make them up for me. If she responds by picking out a lucky day but doesn't offer to do the work herself, then it'll be all over. But if she says, 'Let me do it for you':

*As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could*
*make her happier,*

and doesn't want me to hire a tailor, then one-tenth of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"If I am successful in inviting her to come over to my place to do the work, then two-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"If she does come over to my place to do the work, at noontime I'll prepare some wine and a snack and ask her to have lunch with me. If she says it's inconvenient and insists on taking the work home with her, then it'll be all over. But if she doesn't say anything and agrees to eat lunch with me, then three-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"On the following day you mustn't show up. But on the third day, around noon, dress yourself up appropriately and cough outside my door as a signal. Then call out, 'It's been days since I've set eyes on you, Godmother Wang. I've come to buy a cup of tea.' I'll come out and invite you to come in and sit down while you drink your tea. If she gets up and retires to her own home when she sees you, I can't very well physically restrain her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she sees you come in and makes no effort to withdraw, then four-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"When you sit down I'll say to the filly, 'This is the very gentleman who was kind enough to give these materials to me. I'm greatly indebted to him,' Then I'll proceed to sing your praises and you can wax extravagant on the subject of her needlework. If she pays no attention and refuses to respond, then it'll be all over. But if she responds by engaging you in conversation, then five-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"Then I'll say, 'It's really kind of this young lady to have volunteered her services on my behalf. I'm greatly indebted to both of you benefactors; to one for providing the money and the other for providing her skills. If I hadn't:

*Asked her a favour, as one trouper to another,*[10]

there would scarcely be any reason for this young lady to grace us with her presence. Why don't you play the role of host, sir, and show this young lady how much her efforts are appreciated.' You then pull out some silver and ask me to buy whatever's needed. If she insists on leaving at this point, I can't very well physically restrain her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she makes no effort to withdraw, the situation will be promising, and six-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"Then I'll accept your money and on my way out the door I'll say to her, 'Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady.' If she refuses and gets up and goes home instead, I can scarcely do anything to prevent her, can I? It'll be all over. But if she doesn't budge, everything will be fine, and seven-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"When I've bought the things I'll put them on the table and say, 'Young lady, why don't you set your work aside for a minute and have a cup of wine? It's a rare treat this gentleman has provided for us.' If she refuses to drink at the same table with you and goes home instead, it'll be all over. But if she only talks about leaving and doesn't budge, everything will be going fine, and eight-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"After she's had enough wine to feel it, and the conversation has started to warm up, I'll say the wine has run out and suggest once again that you buy some. You pull out more silver and ask me to get it for you, along with some delicacies to go with it. I'll put the latch on the door so that the two of you are locked inside the room together. If she gets all hot and bothered and tries to run home, it'll be all over. But if she lets me put the latch on the door without getting hot and bothered, then nine-tenths of this glow-game will have been achieved.

"Only one-tenth will then remain but this last step is the hardest. There in the room, sir, you'll have to move in with the sweet talk but whatever you do, avoid any rough stuff that might wreck the whole affair. In such a case you'd be strictly on your own as far as I'm concerned. You might proceed by brushing a pair of chopsticks off the table with your sleeve and then giving her foot a pinch when you stoop down to pick them up. If she kicks up a fuss, I'll have to come to her rescue, and it'll be all over. That will be the end of the matter. But if she doesn't make a peep, the last tenth of this glow-game will have been achieved, for she will have given her consent to your conquest. If this glow-game is carried to a successful conclusion, how will you thank me?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard her out he was delighted and exclaimed, "Godmother, this plan of yours may not earn you a place in the Ling-yen Pavilion,[11] but it's certainly a splendid, first-class scheme!"

"Whatever you do," said Dame Wang, "don't forget those ten taels of silver you promised me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied: "Whenever one gets so much as a tangerine peel to eat; one should never forget Tung-t'ing Lake[12] from whence it came.[13] Godmother, how soon can this plan of yours be put into operation?"

"I should have something to report this very evening." said Dame Wang. "I'll go over soon and ask to borrow her calendar, before Wu the Elder gets home, and then start to work on her as best I can. You'd better get cracking and send someone over with the pongee, damask, and silk wadding before it's too late."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you can pull this off, how could I ever let you down?"

Thereupon he took his leave of Dame Wang, walked out through the teahouse, and went to buy the three bolts of pongee and damask and ten taels' worth of the best-quality silk wadding. When he got home he instructed his young body servant, named Tai-an, to wrap them up in a bundle and deliver them to Dame Wang's house, where she was only too pleased to accept them and send the lad on his way. Truly:

*Unless the clouds and rain come together on Witch's Mountain;*
*King Hsiang of Ch'u will have erected his terrace in vain.*[14]

A poem testifies to this:

*The two of them feel an affinity as sweet as honey;*
The way Dame Wang brings them together is remarkable indeed.
She devises a ten-part plan for "garnering the glow";
To ensure that they will come together without fail.[15]

When Dame Wang had received the pongee, damask, and silk wadding she opened her back door and went over to Wu the Elder's house. The woman greeted her, invited her upstairs, and offered her a seat.

"Young lady," said Dame Wang, "how is it you haven't been over to my place for a cup of tea the last few days?"

"It's just that I've been out of sorts lately," the woman replied, "and haven't felt like doing anything at all."

"If you've got a calendar in the house, young lady," said Dame Wang, "lend it to me so I can get someone to choose a good day for me to have some tailoring done."

"What sort of tailoring do you have in mind, Godmother?" the woman asked.

"It's just because I seem to be suffering from all:

*Ten aches and nine pains,"*

said Dame Wang. "I'm afraid I could end up:

*High as the hills or deep as the sea,*

at any moment, and my son isn't even here to take care of things if anything should happen to me."

"Why haven't I seen Little Brother around for such a long time?" the woman inquired.

"That rascal is out on the road, traveling with a merchant," said Dame Wang, "and I never hear a word from him. I can't help worrying about him from one day to the next."

"How old is Little Brother this year?" the woman asked.

"That rascal's already sixteen," replied Dame Wang.

"Why don't you find him a wife, Godmother?" the woman said, "so she could lend you a hand?"

"It's just as you say," responded Dame Wang. "I've got nobody to help out. Sooner or later, someplace or other, I'll have to find him one all right. But I'm not going to worry about that till he gets home.

"Right now the problem is that, day and night, if I'm not coughing I'm short of breath; and I hurt all over, just as if I'd been beaten to pieces, so I can't even get any sleep. I've been wanting for some time now to prepare my burial garments, just in case. Fortunately a certain well-to-do gentleman who often drops into my place for a cup of tea—a man who has noticed how reliable I am as a medical practitioner, employment agent, and matchmaker, and insists on patronizing me in matters great and small—has made me a gift of all the materials I need for a complete set of burial garments, enough pongee and damask for both exterior and lining, along with a quantity of fine silk wadding. They've been sitting at home for over a year now without my having the time to get them made up.

"This year I really feel I may not be able to hang on much longer; and since it happens to be an intercalary month[16] in which I've got a few days to spare, I thought I'd get this taken care of. But the tailor is giving me a hard time, claiming he's too busy right now to do it for me. I can't tell you what a hassle it's been."

On hearing this speech the woman smiled and said, "I don't know if I could do a satisfactory job but if you're willing to risk it, I happen to have some spare time right now and could do it for you myself. What do you think, Godmother?"

When the old woman heard this she said with an ingratiating smile, "If you deign to do it with your own hands, young lady, I'll feel myself honoured even in the grave. I've heard for a long time how good you are at needlework but I haven't presumed to impose on you."

"It's nothing, Godmother," said the woman. "I've offered to do it, and I insist. Take the calendar along and get somebody to choose a lucky day so I can begin."

"Young lady," said Dame Wang, "there's no need to pretend with me. There can't be many words in the standard anthologies of poetry and drama that you can't read. What need is there to get someone else to consult the calendar?"

"I'm afraid I never received a proper education," demurred the woman with a faint smile.

"That's a fine way to talk!" said Dame Wang, as she picked up the calendar and handed it to her.

The woman took the calendar in her hand and examined it for a while. "Tomorrow is an unlucky day," she said, "and the day after tomorrow is bad too. The next good day for tailoring is not until the day after the day after tomorrow."

Dame Wang snatched the calendar away from her and hung it back on the wall, saying. "The fact that you're willing to do it for me, young lady, makes you my lucky star. What need is there to be particular about the date. I already asked someone to check for me and he reported that tomorrow is an unlucky day. But I, for one, see no reason to pay any attention to the taboo against doing tailoring on unlucky days."

"Actually," said the woman, "an unlucky day might be the most appropriate for making burial garments."

"As long as you're willing to do it," said Dame Wang, "I'll make so bold as to trouble you to come over to my place tomorrow."

"There's no need for that," said the woman. "It'll do just as well if you bring it over here for me to work on, won't it?"

"The fact of the matter is," said Dame Wang, "I want to see the way you go about it but there's no one to tend the shop for me."

"In that case," said the woman, "I'll come over after breakfast tomorrow morning."

The old lady descended the stairs with:

*A thousand thanks and ten thousand*
*expressions of gratitude.*

That evening she reported what had happened to Hsi-men Ch'ing and reiterated that he was not to turn up until the third day. Of the events of that night there is no more to tell.

The next day, bright and early, Dame Wang tidied up her room, laid out the necessary needles and thread, got the tea things ready, and sat down to wait for her visitor.

To resume our story, when Wu the Elder had eaten breakfast, shouldered his carrying pole, and gone off to work, the woman hung the bamboo blind over the door, told Ying-erh to look after the house, and went over to Dame Wang's place by the back door. The old lady, as pleased as could be, invited her in and offered her a seat. Then she poured her a cup of strong tea, flavoured with walnuts and pine seeds, wiped the table clean, and got out the three bolts of pongee and damask. The woman took her measurements, cut up the material, and began to sew.

As the old lady looked on she kept up an unbroken stream of flattering commentary. "What exquisite skill! I've lived for sixty or seventy years without ever seeing needlework as fine as this."

The woman continued sewing until noon, when Dame Wang prepared some food and wine, along with a serving of noodles, and asked her to lunch. Afterward she continued sewing for a while, until late afternoon, when she put her work aside and returned home.

Wu the Elder happened to come home about the same time, and the woman put the latch on the door and took down the blind. When Wu the Elder came into the room he noticed that his wife's face was a little red and asked her, "Where've you been?"

"Just over at Godmother Wang's next door," the woman replied. "She asked me to make up a set of burial garments for her. At noontime she prepared some food and wine in the way of a snack and asked me to lunch."

"It would have been better not to accept her hospitality," said Wu the Elder. "We may need to call on her for help some time. Even though she asked you to make up these burial garments for her, you could just as easily have come home for a snack. It's not worth it, putting her to all that trouble. If you go back there to continue working tomorrow, take a little money along so you can buy some food and wine and return the treat. As the saying goes: A distant relative is no match for a close neighbour.[17]

We mustn't fall behind in our social obligations. If she won't let you return the treat, bring the work home with you and give it back to her when you're done." There is a poem that testifies to this:
*The machinations of the old matron*
are deep indeed;
But Wu the Elder is too ingenuous
to catch their drift.
By supplying money to return the treat
he rewards her betrayal;
And by so doing gives his wife away
to another man.[18]
The woman agreed to go along with Wu the Elder's suggestion. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, after breakfast, Wu the Elder had no sooner shouldered his carrying pole and gone out than Dame Wang slipped over to press her invitation. The woman accompanied her back to her room, got out the unfinished work, and continued to sew. Dame Wang hastened to pour the tea and had a cup with her. As it drew near midday the woman pulled three hundred cash out of her sleeve and said to Dame Wang, "Godmother, let me buy you a cup of wine."
"Ai-ya!" said Dame Wang. "Who ever heard of such a thing? I asked you here to do something as a favour to me, young lady. How could I consent to let you put up the money? I hope the fare I provided hasn't disagreed with you."
"It's just what my husband told me to do," said the woman. "He said that if you raised any objections I was to take the work home with me and return it to you when I was through."
When the old lady heard this she said, "Wu the Elder really knows how to do things right, doesn't he? If that's the way you want it, young lady, I guess I'll have to accept, at least for the time being."
The old lady was afraid of interrupting the proceedings. Adding some money of her own, she went out to buy food and wine of good quality, along with some unusual delicacies, and waited upon her assiduously.
Gentle reader take note: Nine out of ten of the women of this world, no matter how smart they are, prove susceptible to flattery.
The old lady prepared an enticing repast of food and wine and invited her guest to partake of it. Afterward the woman continued sewing for a while, until late afternoon, when she returned home with:
*A thousand thanks and ten thousand*
*expressions of gratitude.*
To make a long story short, the third day, after breakfast, Dame Wang waited until she had seen Wu the Elder go out and then went to her back door and called out, "Young lady, may I make so bold?"
"I'm on my way," the woman responded from the second floor.
After they had greeted each other they repaired to Dame Wang's room, where she got out her work in order to go on with the sewing. Dame Wang made haste to pour the tea and they had a cup together, after which the woman continued to sew until it was nearly noon.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly been able to wait for this day. Dressing himself up to befit the occasion, taking three or five taels of silver along with him, and sporting his gold-flecked Szechwan fan, he swaggered off in the direction of Amethyst Street.
When he arrived at the door of Dame Wang's teashop he coughed and called out, "Godmother Wang, why haven't I seen anything of you the last few days?"
Dame Wang caught on immediately and responded with the words, "Who is that calling after this old body?"
"It's me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The old lady bustled out to see who it was and then said, with a laugh, "I had no idea who it could be but it turns out to be you, sir. You've arrived in the nick of time. Come into my room and see who's here."
Taking hold of Hsi-men Ch'ing by the sleeve, with one tug she pulled him into the room where, addressing herself to the woman, she said, "This is the very gentleman who was kind enough to give these materials to me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at the woman.
*Her cloudy locks rose up like serried hills;*
*Her fair countenance evoked an air of spring.*
She was wearing a white linen blouse with a peach red skirt and a blue vest as she sat there in the room, working on her sewing. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in she lowered her head.
Hsi-men Ch'ing quickly stepped forward and made her a bow as he uttered a word of greeting. The woman put down her work and returned his salutation.
Dame Wang then said, "It was rare generosity on this gentleman's part to give me these bolts of pongee and damask. They've been sitting at home for over a year now without my having time to get them made up. I'm greatly indebted to this young lady, my next-door neighbour, who has volunteered her services in making them up for me. Her needlework is as regular as any turned out on a loom, it's so close and fine. Such a thing is rarely to be seen. Just come take a look at it, sir."
Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up the garments and made appreciative noises as he examined them.
"Where could this young lady have learned to do such needlework?" he exclaimed. "It looks just like the work of a goddess or immortal."
"Don't make fun of me, sir," the woman said with a smile.
Hsi-men Ch'ing deliberately proceeded to inquire of Dame Wang, "Godmother, I hardly dare ask but whose household does this young lady belong to?"
"Make a guess, sir," said Dame Wang.
"How could I hope to guess correctly?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Dame Wang laughed out loud and said, "Please sit down, sir, and I'll tell you all about it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down across the table from the woman and Dame Wang said, "Let me tell you, sir. Remember what happened to you when you were walking under the eaves here the other day? Well it served you right, sir."
"You mean to tell me she's the one whose forked stick fell on my hairnet[19] the other day as I passed by her door?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I still have no idea whose household she belongs to."
"I'm afraid I may have unintentionally shaken you up a bit the other day, sir," said the woman. "Please don't hold it against me." As she said this she stood up and made him a bow.
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned her salutation with alacrity and said, "How could I dream of such a thing?"
"This same lady," said Dame Wang, "is the wife of Wu the Elder who lives next door."
"So you're Wu the Elder's wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I know your husband only as a hardworking family man who plies his trade in the streets. He has never given offence to anyone, high or low. He knows how to make a living and has a good disposition. Truly, men such as he are not easily come by."
"True enough," said Dame Wang. "Ever since the young lady has been married to Wu the Elder she's been:
*Obedient to his every whim.*
They really hit it off with each other."
"My husband is an utterly useless person," said the woman. "Don't make fun of me that way, sir."
"You're mistaken, young lady," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As the poet says:
*Flexibility is the root of success;*
*Adamancy is the womb of misfortune.*[20]
When one has a husband as irreproachable as yours, who:
*Though he possess ten thousand fathoms of water*
*will not suffer a drop to escape,*[21]
*And strives throughout his entire lifetime*
*to set an example of integrity,*
how could he be anything but an asset?"
For some time Dame Wang kept up a steady drumbeat of praise for Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Turning to the woman she said, "Young lady, do you know who this gentleman is?"
"No I don't," she replied.
"This gentleman," said Dame Wang, "is one of the more substantial citizens of the locality. Even His Honour, the district magistrate, consorts with him, and addresses him as the Honourable Hsi-men. He disposes of property worth tens of thousands of strings of cash and owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen. In his home:
*The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,*
*The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary,*
*What is yellow is gold,*
*What is white is silver,*
*What are round are pearls,*
*What sparkle are jewels.*[22]
And he also possesses:
*Horns off the rhinoceros's head, and*
*Tusks out of the elephant's mouth.*[23]
In addition to which:
*He lends money to officials, and*
*Is very well connected.*
At the time of his present marriage I played the role of go-between. His wife is Battalion Commander Wu's daughter, who's just as clever as can be."
Then, turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she asked, "Sir, how is it you haven't dropped in to my place for a cup of tea for lo these many days?"
"It's all on account of my daughter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She's just been betrothed to someone and I've been tied up for some time."
"Who has your young lady been betrothed to?" asked Dame Wang. "And why didn't you employ me as go-between?"
"She's betrothed to Ch'en Ching-chi,"[24] said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the son of that Ch'en family that's related by marriage to Yang Chien, the commander in chief of the 800,000 imperial guards in the Eastern Capital. He's only sixteen years old and is still going to school. In any other circumstances we would have asked you to represent us, Godmother but they took the initiative by sending a certain Auntie Wen to propose the match; so we countered by asking that Auntie Hsüeh who is constantly to be seen around our place peddling costume jewellery to be coguarantor, and we have consented to the terms. If you would like to come, Godmother, I'll send someone to invite you over, one day soon, when they present us with the ritual gift of tea."
The old lady laughed uproariously. "I was only kidding, sir. We go-betweens are a pretty bitchy bunch. When they were conducting the negotiations I was nowhere to be seen. Why should I be entitled to a share of the feast they have earned by their own efforts? As the saying goes:
*Fellow professionals can't abide each other.*
It will be more appropriate if I wait until the bride has been carried over the threshold and then go pay a call on the third-day or fifth-day celebrations, with a present in hand, in hopes of getting a bite to eat. There's no point in antagonizing people."
The two of them carried on an animated dialogue for some time, in which the old lady pulled out all the stops in her exaggerated praise of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Meanwhile, the woman merely lowered her head and continued to sew. There is a poem that testifies to this:
*It has always been the nature of women*
to be like water;
Behind their husbands' backs they betray them
with other men.
In her heart Chin-lien hankers after
Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Once her desires are aroused she can
no longer control them.[25]
Hsi-men Ch'ing sensed that Chin-lien was well-disposed toward him and could hardly wait to begin coupling with her.
Dame Wang poured two cups of tea and served one to Hsi-men Ch'ing and one to the woman, saying, "Young lady, have a little tea with the gentleman."
By the time they had finished their tea they were already exchanging meaningful glances. Dame Wang looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing and stroked her cheek with a finger. Hsi-men Ch'ing understood that five-tenths of the glow-game had already been achieved. It's always been true that:
*Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and*
*Wine is the go-between of lust.*[26]
"If you hadn't dropped by, sir," said Dame Wang, "I would not have presumed to visit your home in order to issue an invitation. In the first place:
*This meeting was fated to occur;*
and in the second place:
*You've arrived in the nick of time.*
As the saying goes:
*One guest does not trouble two hosts.*[27]
You have provided the money, sir, and this young lady has provided her skills. I'm greatly indebted to both of you benefactors. If I hadn't:
*Asked her a favour, as one trouper to another,*
there would scarcely be any reason for this young lady to grace us with her presence. Why don't you play the role of host, sir, by coming up with the silver to buy some food and wine, in order to show this young lady how much her efforts are appreciated?"
"How stupid of me not to have thought of it myself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got some silver right here." He reached into his wallet, pulled out a lump of silver of about a tael's value, and gave it to Dame Wang to buy the food and wine with.
"There's no need to put the gentleman to all this trouble," said the woman but, although she uttered the protest, she made no effort to withdraw.
Dame Wang accepted the money and on her way out the door said, "Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady. I'll be right back."
"Don't bother, Godmother," said the woman but she made no effort to withdraw.
By now both of them had the same idea in mind. Dame Wang went out the door, leaving them in the room together. Hsi-men Ch'ing couldn't take his eyes off the woman, and she, too, stole surreptitious glances at him. When she saw what a handsome figure he cut she was more than half inclined in his favour but again she merely lowered her head and continued to sew.
Before long Dame Wang returned from her shopping expedition with a plump cooked goose, a roast duck, baked meats, salted fish, and other delicacies.
When she had put them out on platters and plates she arranged them on the table in her room and said to the woman, "Young lady, why don't you set your work aside for a minute and have a cup of wine?"

"You keep the gentleman company if you like," said the woman. "It's not proper for me to do so."
"But all this has been provided for the sole purpose of showing you how much your efforts are appreciated," the old lady protested. "How can you say such a thing?" And she proceeded to set the platters of food down right in front of her.
When the three of them had sat down at their places the wine was poured. Picking up a cup of wine and holding it out to her in his hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed the woman with the words, "Please don't refuse me. Bottoms up."
The woman declined, saying, "You're very kind, sir but I have so little capacity that I couldn't handle it."
"I know perfectly well you could swallow the ocean itself," said Dame Wang. "Please relax and have a cup or two."
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Since "Boys and girls are forbidden,*
to occupy the same mat";[28]
Flaunting one's beauty and inviting seduction
have perennial appeal.
Not only did Cho Wen-chün, once upon a time,
elope with Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju,[29]
But, even today, a Hsi-men Ch'ing may enjoy
the favours of a Chin-lien.[30]
The woman took the cup of wine and saluted each of the others in turn.
Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up his chopsticks and said, "Godmother, do me the favour of urging the young lady to have something to eat."
Dame Wang picked out the best tidbits and put them on the woman's plate. After the third round of drinks the old lady went to heat some more wine.
"I hardly dare ask," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how old you are, young lady?"
"I'm twenty-four," the woman responded. "I was born in the year of the dragon, on the ninth day of the first month, at two o'clock in the morning."
"You're the same age as my wife, then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was also born in the year *wu-ch'en*,[31] the year of the dragon but you're seven months older than she is. She was born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, at midnight."
"How can you compare Heaven to Earth?" said the woman. "You'll be the death of me yet."
"This young lady is an intelligent person," interjected Dame Wang. "She's as clever as can be. It's no wonder her needlework's as good as it is. As for the works of the hundred schools, backgammon, elephant chess, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, she's thoroughly versed in them all. She even writes a good hand."
"Where could one hope to find the like!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Wu the Elder is a lucky man, indeed, to have this young lady as his wife."
"I wouldn't want to make invidious comparisons, sir," said Dame Wang, "but you've got quite a few ladies in your own household, and which one of them is a match for this young lady?"
"That's no more than the truth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
*"It's a long story.*
I guess it's just my bad luck not to have found a good one yet."
"Your first wife was all right, wasn't she, sir?" said Dame Wang.
"Don't talk to me about my first wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she were still alive, things wouldn't be the way they are.
*When the family lacks a ruler,*
*The household is topsy-turvy.*[32]
I've got three, five, maybe seven bedmates around the place right now but a lot of good it does me. All they can do is eat; none of them is willing to take charge of anything."
"If that's the way things are, sir," asked the woman, "how many years has it been since your first wife died?"
"I don't even like to talk about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "My first wife's maiden name was Ch'en. Although she was only of humble origin, she was as clever as could be. She was always able to act on my behalf whenever the occasion arose. But now, unfortunately, she's dead. It happened more than three years ago. Since my remarriage, my second wife has been sick so much of the time she hasn't been able to take charge. As a result, everything in the household is:
*All at sevens and eights.*[33]
That's why I spend so much of my time out of the house. When I'm at home all I do is get upset."
"Sir," said Dame Wang, "don't take it amiss if I speak bluntly. Neither your first wife nor your present wife could match the needlework of Wu the Elder's lady, not to mention her looks."
"For that matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my first wife also lacked the romantic air of Wu the Elder's lady."
The old lady laughed. "Sir, what about that mistress you've been maintaining—the one who lives on East Street—why haven't you had me over for a cup of tea?"
"You must mean the ballad singer, Chang Hsi-ch'un," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When I realized she was nothing but a street musician I grew tired of her."
"Sir," said the old lady, "you've been carrying on with Li Chiao-erh, from the licensed quarter, for some time."
"As for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've already taken her into my establishment. If she had been able to run the household, I would have made her my legitimate wife."
"You're on good terms with Cho the Second too," said Dame Wang.
"I've also taken Cho Tiu-erh into my establishment as my Number Three," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But recently she's come down with an indisposition that she doesn't seem able to shake."
"If I ever came across anyone who might tickle your fancy to the extent that Wu the Elder's lady does," inquired Dame Wang, "would you have any objection if I paid you a call to broach the subject?"
"Both my father and my mother are dead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I'm my own master. Who would dare to say me nay?"
"I'm only joking," said Dame Wang. "Where could I ever find anyone who tickled your fancy to that extent?"
"It's not that there's none to be had," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's just that my meager matrimonial affinities have prevented me from encountering one."
The two of them had carried on an animated dialogue for some time when Dame Wang exclaimed, "Just when we're having such a good time, the wine has run out. Don't take it amiss, sir, if I seem to be ordering you about; but what would you think of buying another bottle of wine?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled out the three or four taels of loose silver remaining in his wallet and gave them to Dame Wang, saying, "You take these and use them to buy more if we run out of anything. If it's too much, keep the difference."
The old lady thanked him and got up to go. When she glanced at Chin-lien she saw that she had reached that state in which:
*Three cups of wine in the stomach*
*ignite the flames of desire.*
*From the manner in which they were talking back and forth, it was obvious that by now both of them had the same idea in mind. The woman merely lowered her head but didn't budge from her seat. Truly: the natural beauty of the vista remains unseen; in spring the peach blossoms bloom all by themselves. A poem testifies to this:*

*The messages conveyed by her eyes and brows have never ceased;*
The love match is about to be consummated with a romantic partner.
In her greed for reward Dame Wang possesses no other skill;
Than flowery words and a cleverly specious tongue.
*Wine and beauty frequently occasion the ruination of the state;*
From of old, good looks have been the undoing of the loyal and the true.
The royal house of King Chou came to an end because of Ta-chi;[1]
The sacred altars of the state of Wu perished on account of Hsi-shih.[2]
Those who care only for the joys of youth, seeking pleasure where they may;
Remain oblivious to the disasters lurking beneath the powdered smile.[3]
Hsi-men Ch'ing allowed himself to become so enamored of Chin-lien's beauty;
That he abandoned the domestic doe to pursue the high-stepping hind.

As Dame Wang started out the door with Hsi-men Ch'ing's money in hand she turned to the woman with an ingratiating smile and said, "I'm just popping out into the street to get a bottle of wine. Be so good as to keep the gentleman company for a few minutes, young lady. There's a little wine left in the pot, so if you run out you can pour another couple of cups and share them with the gentleman. I'm going to go all the way to East Street, where I can be sure of getting a bottle of the best quality, so I'll be gone quite a while."
On hearing this the woman said, "Godmother, don't go. I've already had enough wine. I don't need any more."
"Ai-ya!" Dame Wang exclaimed. "Young lady, it's not as though the gentleman were anyone else. If you haven't anything else to do, why not share a cup with him? What is there to be afraid of?"
Although the woman said, "I don't need any more," she sat where she was and didn't budge from her seat. Dame Wang put the latch on the door and fastened it with a piece of cord so that the two of them were locked inside the room together. Then she sat down on the curb and devoted herself to spinning thread in order to pass the time.
To resume our story, inside the room Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the woman.
*Her cloudy locks were half askew, and*
*Her creamy breasts slightly exposed.*
On her powdered face the colours red and white formed a pleasing contrast. Picking up the pot, he continued to ply the woman with wine.
After a while, pretending to be hot, he took off his green silk jacket and said, "I wonder, young lady, if you would hang this over the bedrail of Godmother's bed for me?"
Nothing loath, the woman took it in her hand and disposed of it as directed. Hsi-men Ch'ing then deliberately brushed a pair of chopsticks off the table with his sleeve so that they fell to the floor. It is clear that:
*This meeting was fated to occur,*
for the chopsticks came to rest right beside the woman's feet. Hsi-men Ch'ing quickly stooped down to pick them up. Behold:
The up-turned points of her tiny golden lotuses,
Barely three inches long,
But half a span in length,
Peeked out beside the chopsticks.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ignored the chopsticks but gave a gentle pinch to the embroidered tip of her shoe.
The woman laughed out loud. "There's no need to beat around the bush, sir.
*If you've got a mind to it,*
*I've got the will.*[4]
Are you actually trying to seduce me?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing got down on his knees with the plea, "Young lady, make a happy man of me."
The woman then embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My only fear is that Godmother may come back and catch us in the act."
"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she's already in on it."
Now, right there in Dame Wang's room, the two of them:
*Took off their clothes, undid their girdles, and*
*Enjoyed each other on the same pillow.*
Behold:
*Their necks entwined, the mandarin ducks sport in the water;*
*Their heads together, the phoenixes thread the flowers.*
*How joyous their delight as the growing branches*
*intertwine;*
*How sweet their pleasure as the lover's knot*
*is tied.*
*The one sticks tightly with his*
*ruby lips;*
*The other clings closely with her*
*powdered face.*
*Silk stockings in the air,*
*Two new moons rise above his shoulders;*
*Gold hairpins askew,*
*A black cloud piles up beside the pillow.*
*Swearing eternal fidelity,*
*He kneads her into a thousand shapes of compliance;*
*Bashful at the clouds and rain,*
*She submits with ten thousand forms of complaisance.*
*The pleasing cries of the oriole,*
*Are never absent from his ears;*
*Forever moist with sweet spittle,*

*She smiles as she sticks out her tongue.*
*Her willow waist droops with the weight*
*of teeming spring:*
*Her cherry mouth is slightly split*
*with panting breath.*
*As her starry eyes grow dim,*
*Tiny beads of sweat form on her fragrant jade body;*
*As her creamy breasts heave,*
*A stream of dewdrops drips into the heart of the peony.*
*Despite the fact that they are both well matched*
*and compatible;*
*How true it is that "Stolen delights always*
*taste the best."*[6]

The two of them had just finished with the clouds and rain and were about to get dressed when they were interrupted by Dame Wang, who pushed open the door of the room and walked right in on them.

*With a great show of consternation,*
*Clapping her hands and beating her palms,*

she said, "A fine thing the two of you have been up to!"

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chin-lien were both caught by surprise. The old woman then addressed herself to the latter, saying, "Fine! Just fine! I asked you over here to do a job for me, not to do a job on a man. When Wu the Elder finds out, I'm going to be implicated. I might as well tell him about it before anyone else does."

Having said which, she turned around and started out the door.

The woman was thrown into such a panic by this that she caught hold of her by the skirt and got down on her knees with the plea, "Godmother, forgive us!"

"You'll both have to agree to one condition if there's to be any hope of that," said Dame Wang.

"Don't talk about one condition," said the woman. "If you were to impose ten conditions, Godmother, I'd agree to them."

"Everyday from now on," said Dame Wang, "you must agree to keep Wu the Elder in the dark and never to disappoint this gentleman, no matter whether he calls for you early or late. Then and only then will I agree to call it quits. If you refuse to come even once I'll tell Wu the Elder all about it."

"I'll do whatever you say," the woman replied.

Dame Wang then said, "As for you, sir, there's no need for me to remind you. All ten parts of this glow-game have been carried to a successful conclusion, so you can't very well renege on what you promised me. If you show bad faith by going away and not coming back again, I'll also tell Wu the Elder all about it."

"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can relax. I won't go back on my word."

"There's no way of holding the two of you to your word," said Dame Wang, "unless you exchange tokens of some kind as mementoes of your feelings."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then pulled a silver hairpin with a gold head out of his own hair and inserted it into the woman's cloudy locks. Fearing that Wu the Elder might suspect something if he saw it, she pulled it out and put it in her sleeve, from which she drew out a handkerchief which she gave to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who also put it away out of sight.

The three of them drank another few cups of wine together, by which time it was late afternoon. The woman then got up and said, "It's about time for that bastard, Wu the Elder, to be getting back. I'd better go home."

She then took her leave of Dame Wang and Hsi-men Ch'ing and slipped into her own house through the back door. Once there, she barely had time to take down the blind over the front door before Wu the Elder came in.

To resume our story, Dame Wang looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Now was that a good scheme, or wasn't it?"

"I'm greatly indebted to you, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Truly:

*In intelligence you rival Sui Ho:*
*In resourcefulness you outdo Lu Chia.*

Not one woman out of ten could escape your designs."

"And did this filly live up to your expectations?" asked Dame Wang.

"Why:

*'She's two under full four words!'*[6]

replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"She got her start in life as a privately owned singing girl," said the old lady. "There isn't much she doesn't know about anything. And it was all my doing that has:

*Cast you in the roles of man and wife, and*
*Contrived to make you a couple.*

Whatever you do, don't forget what you promised me."

"You really outdid yourself, Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When I get home I'll pick out an ingot of silver for you and bring it over myself.

*Whenever I promise anything,*
*I never fail to deliver."*

Dame Wang said:

*"My eyes are on the lookout for the flag of victory,*
*My ears are always on the alert for good tidings:*[7]

Just don't leave me in the predicament of:

*Trying to collect the fee for the professional mourners*
*after the coffin has already been interred."*[8]

Hsi-men Ch'ing replied:

*"Whenever one gets so much as a*
*tangerine peel to eat;*
*One should never forget Tung-t'ing Lake*
*from whence it came."*

Then, after checking to see that the coast was clear, he put on his eye shades, laughed, and departed. But no more of this.

The next day he returned to Dame Wang's shop and called for some tea. Dame Wang offered him a seat and hastened to pour out a cup for him. When he had finished his tea Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled a ten-tael ingot of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to Dame Wang.

Generally speaking, nothing moves the people of this world so much as money.

When the old lady's black eyes caught sight of this "snowflake" silver[9] she tucked it away:

*As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could*
*make her happier,*

and saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a double bow, saying, "Many thanks for your generosity, sir."

She then went on to say, "I haven't seen Wu the Elder go out yet. If you'll wait a minute, I'll step over there and ask to borrow a gourd dipper so I can see if he's still there."

And she proceeded to slip over to the woman's house by the back door. The woman was in the main room serving Wu the Elder his breakfast.

When she heard someone at the door she asked Ying-erh, "Who is it?"

"It's Granny Wang," Ying-erh replied. "She wants to borrow our gourd."

The woman hastened out to greet her, saying, "Godmother, the gourd's right here. You can have it whenever you want. Why don't you come in and sit down for a minute?"

"There's no one over there to tend the shop," said the old lady.

As she spoke she made a sign with her hand which the woman understood to mean that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come and was waiting for her.

As soon as her visitor had picked up the gourd dipper and gone out the door, the woman urged Wu the Elder to finish his breakfast, shoulder his carrying pole, and start on his way.

After going upstairs, redoing her makeup, and changing into an attractive new outfit, she said to Ying-erh, "I want you to look after the house for me. I'm just going over to your Granny Wang's place for a visit; I'll be back before long. If your daddy comes home, be sure to let me know. If you don't do as I say, you little wretch, I'll beat your bottom right off!"[10]

Ying-erh nodded her assent. But no more of this.

The woman went over to Dame Wang's teashop to keep her tryst with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Truly:

*The coupled halves of the peach stone*
*serve to evoke a chuckle;*
*Because inside, it will be found, lie*
*yet another couple.*[11]

There is a poem composed of double meanings that testifies to this:

*This gourd's a gourd, the mouth of which is small,*
the body large.
When young, up in its breezy arbour,
it's high-slung;
But when it grows bigger, it becomes
hard enough to bite.
How could it have hung in there with Yen Hui,
content with privation for principle's sake;[12]
When all it wanted to do was bob about on the water
in the spring breeze?
When you really need it
it falls down on the job;
But whether you want it or not
it's always hanging about;
Until you feel you simply have to
take it in hand.
It contributes its stale share
to the work of the stable;
And is not infrequently called upon
in the teahouse.
You may not want it any more than Hsü Yu did,[13]
but can scarcely do without it;
And from its dark interior you never know
what nostrum will come out.[14]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the woman come in he felt:

*Just as though she had fallen from Heaven.*

The two of them sat down:

*Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,*

while Dame Wang served them a cup of tea.

"When you went home yesterday," the old lady inquired, "did Wu the Elder raise any questions?"

"He asked whether I had finished the work on your burial garments yet," the woman said. "I replied that the garments themselves were finished but that I was still working on the shoes and stockings."

As soon as this problem had been disposed of the old lady made haste to provide some wine. She served it to them in her own room and they immediately fell to exchanging cups and enjoying themselves without restraint. Hsi-men Ch'ing examined the woman closely and she looked even more beautiful to him than the first time he had seen her. After a few drinks, the colours red and white formed a pleasing contrast on her powdered face, the temples of which were adorned with two long spit curls. Truly:

*She was the equal of any immortal, and*
*Excelled even the goddess Ch'ang-o.*

There is a song to the tune "Intoxicated in the East Wind" that testifies to this:

*How provocative are the red and white tints*
of her flesh;

How lovable is this delectable maid.
Trailing a silk skirt of halcyon hue,
Beneath the gathered sleeves of a gold-flecked
blouse;
In her joyous abandon her chignon has fallen askew.
She is the very picture of Ch'ang-o come down
from the moon;
The like of which you could not buy for a
thousand pieces of gold.[15]

Hsi-men Ch'ing couldn't say enough in her praise. Taking her onto his lap, he lifted her skirt far enough to catch a glimpse of her pair of tiny feet, enclosed in black satin shoes, just half a span in length. His heart was filled with delight. The two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them and laughed and joked with each other.

The woman then asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-seven," he replied. "I was born in the year of the tiger on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month, at midnight."

"How many ladies do you have in your household?" the woman asked.

"Aside from my wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got three or four other bedmates at home. It's just that none of them really tickles my fancy."

"And how many sons have you got?" the woman asked.

"All I have is a young daughter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who's about to get married. I don't have any other children."

After they had laughed and joked with each other for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing reached into his sleeve and pulled out a cylindrical silver pillbox that contained breath-sweetening lozenges [16] flavoured with osmanthus. One at a time he proceeded to put these into the woman's mouth on the tip of his tongue. The two of them then fell to:

*Hugging and embracing each other,*
*Like snakes darting out their tongues.*
*The sound of their sucking was audible.*

Dame Wang was so preoccupied with serving food and pouring wine that she could hardly concern herself with what went on between them, and left them in her room to enjoy themselves as they pleased.

In a little while, when they had both had enough wine to:

*Ignite the flames of desire,*

Hsi-men Ch'ing's lustful thoughts got the better of him. Exposing the organ that lay between his loins, he induced the woman to manipulate it with her slender fingers.

It so happens that ever since his youth Hsi-men Ch'ing had frequented the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter and patronized the women who dwelt there. About the base of his member he wore a clasp that had been:

*Beaten out of silver, and*
*Imbrued with drugs,*

which had the effect of making that organ both large and long. It was:

*Dark red, with black whiskers;*
*Straight standing, firm, and hard;*

a fine object, indeed! There is a poem about its characteristics that testifies to this:

*There is an object that has always been*
about six inches long;
Sometimes it is soft and at other times
it is hard.
When soft, like a drunkard, it falls down
either to the east or the west;
When hard, like a mad monk, it runs amok
either above or below.
It makes it's living by traveling in and out
of virgin territory;
It makes its home beneath the navel in the
Province of the Loins.
It has two sons who always accompany it
wherever it goes;
In how many skirmishes, with how many beauties,
has it emerged the victor?

It was not long before the woman had taken off her clothes and Hsi-men Ch'ing discovered, by both visual and tactile means, that her mount of Venus had been depilated of its pubic hair. It was:

*Pale and fragrant,*
*Plump to bursting,*
*Soft and yielding,*
*Red and wrinkly,*
*Tight and squeezy;*
*Beloved of thousands,*
*Craved by tens of thousands;*
*Who could tell what it might be?*

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*Warm and tight, fragrant and dry, it tastes*
better than lotus root;
It knows how to be soft and yielding and to
make itself agreeable.
When happy, it sticks out its tongue, opens
its mouth, and smiles;
When tired, it collapses lazily into itself
and takes a nap.
The name of the place it makes its home
is Crotch County;
Its old garden is to be found beside the
sparsely wooded slopes.
If it should ever encounter a dashing
young gentleman;
It will engage him in battle, without a word,
on the slightest pretext.

To make a long story short, from that day on, the woman slipped over to Dame Wang's teashop everyday to keep her tryst with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

*Their feelings for each other were like lacquer;*
*The love in their hearts was like glue.*

It has always been true that:

*Good deeds seldom become known beyond the gate;*
*Bad deeds are quickly transmitted a thousand li.*[17]

In less than half a month the whole neighbourhood knew what was going on, with the sole exception of Wu the Elder, who remained in the dark. Truly:

*The only thing he knew was that it was his duty*
*to abide by his lot;*
*What did he know about defending himself from*
*deceit or foul play?*

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*As always, "Good deeds seldom become known*
beyond the gate";
Whereas bad deeds and evil talk are quickly
noised abroad.
How pitiful it is that Wu the Elder's
lawful wife;
Should surreptitiously become the consort
of Hsi-men Ch'ing.[18]

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, there was in the same district a certain youngster who was just fourteen or fifteen years old and whose surname was Ch'iao. Because he had been born in Yün-chou, where his father was serving in the army at the time, people referred to him by the nickname Yün-ko, or Little Yün. The only remaining member of his family was his father, who was now well advanced in years. The lad was clever by nature and managed to scrape a living by peddling fresh fruits in the wineshops that were clustered near the front gate of the district yamen. Hsi-men Ch'ing was one of his patrons and often gave him a little extra to help with his expenses.

One day he set out to look for Hsi-men Ch'ing with a basket of snow pears for sale. As he was going his rounds a certain busybody said to him, "Yün-ko, if that's who you're looking for, I can tell you a place where you'll be sure to find him."

"Thanks, Uncle," said Yün-ko. "If you help me find him I can pick up thirty or fifty cash toward the expenses of keeping my old father alive. You'll be doing a good deed."

"Listen to me," said the busybody. "Hsi-men Ch'ing is carrying on an affair with the wife of Wu the Elder, who sells steamed wheat cakes. Everyday he can be found sitting around in Dame Wang's teashop on Amethyst Street. He's almost certainly there at this very moment. You're still just a kid, so even if you walk right in on him it won't make any difference."

On hearing this Yün-ko said, "Thanks for your help, Uncle."

The little monkey then picked up his basket and headed straight for Dame Wang's teashop in Amethyst Street. When he got there he found Dame Wang sitting on a short bench, spinning hemp thread.

Yün-ko put his basket down and bowed to Dame Wang with the words, "Greetings to you, Godmother."

"What brings you here, Yün-ko?" asked the old lady.

"I'm looking for the gentleman in order to pick up thirty or fifty cash toward the expenses of keeping my old father alive," said Yün-ko.

"What gentleman is that?" asked the old lady.

"You know perfectly well who I mean," said Yün-ko. "That's the one."

"He may be a gentleman," said the old lady, "but even gentlemen have names."

"I mean the one who has two characters in his surname," said Yün-ko.

"And what two characters might they be?" inquired the old lady.

"All you ever do is joke, Godmother," said Yün-ko. "I want to have a word with the Honourable Hsi-men."

As he said these words he proceeded to walk in toward the interior of the shop. The old lady grabbed hold of him with one hand and said, "Little monkey, where do you think you're going!

*In every house there are areas that are private,*
*and areas that are public."*

"If you'll just let me into your room," said Yün-ko, "I'll find him for you soon enough."

"You cocksucking little monkey!" Dame Wang cursed at him. "What would the Honourable Hsi-men be doing in my room?"

"Godmother," said Yün-ko:

*"Don't try to keep it all for yourself;*

*Spare me a mouthful of leftover gravy.*[19]
Do you think I don't know what's going on?"
"You little monkey!" cursed the old lady. "What do you know about anything!"
Yün-ko said, "You don't give much away do you? Truly:
*You do your chopping in a wooden ladle with a horseshoe blade:*[20]
*Not one drop escapes:*
*Not even half a drop ever hits the floor.*
If you make me tell the whole story, I fear our brother who sells steamed wheat cakes may kick up a fuss."
When the old lady heard these words that struck her right on her sore spot, she was enraged and shouted, "You cock-sucking little monkey! You think you can come farting around my place, do you!"
"If I'm a little monkey," said Yün-ko, "you're nothing but a procuress, a pandering old bitch!"
The old lady tightened her grip on Yün-ko and gave him a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles.
"Who do you think you're hitting!" Yün-ko yelled at her.
"You lousy mother-fucking little monkey!" the old lady cursed. "If you raise your voice again I'll drive you out of here with a couple of good boxes on the ear!"
"You lousy old bloodsucker!" responded Yün-ko. "You think you can start a fight with me over nothing, do you!" Pushing him before her with one hand around his neck, and rapping him on the head as hard as she could with the knuckles of her other hand, the old lady drove him right out into the street and threw his basket of snow pears after him. The snow pears went rolling hither and yon all over the street. The old woman had been too much for the little monkey to handle. Cursing, crying, and scurrying all over the street after his pears, he pointed at Dame Wang's teashop and unleashed a flood of imprecation. "Don't you worry, you old bloodsucker! Just wait and see whether I tell him what's up and blow this whole thing wide open or not! By the time I'm through your shop will be a shambles and you'll have no way to make a living!" At this point, the little monkey picked up his basket and ran off to search the streets for a certain person but he couldn't find him. If Yün-ko should find this person, truly: though Dame Wang's deeds were done in the past, today the chickens would come home to roost[21] because of this event: the Spirit of the Perilous Paths[22] would strip himself for action; the little monkey's revelations would lead to disaster.

It was his brother Wu Da, the very man he had been hoping so long to meet. During a period of severe famine the brothers had been compelled to separate. Wu Da had moved to Qinghe and taken a house in Amethyst Street. He was a simple-minded man, not impressive in appearance. In fact people called him sometimes Tom Thumb and sometimes Old Scraggy Bark. (This was because his body was deformed and his face pinched.) The poor man was neither very strong nor very intelligent, so he became a constant butt for the wits of the neighbourhood.
Wu Da had no established business but scraped together a living by hawking baskets of cakes. His wife had died, leaving him with a little daughter, Ying'er, who was now about twelve years old. They lived alone together for some months, and then Wu Da fell into low water and removed to the house of a rich man named Zhang who lived in the High Street. Here he obtained a lodging of a single room. Zhang's people found him a very honest fellow, and they did their best for him, and started him off selling cakes. When they had time to spare, they used to go to his little place, and he was very attentive to them. They all liked him and spoke well of him to their master, and he, in consequence, did not worry Wu Da for his rent.
This rich man Zhang was more than sixty years old. He was wealthy and prosperous but he had no children. His wife, a daughter of Master Yu, managed his household with a rod of iron, and he had no pretty maids to amuse him. He was always beating his breast, sighing and lamenting: "Here I am, aged and childless, and though perhaps I am not exactly poor, what use is all my wealth to me?"
"If you feel like that about it," his wife said one day, "I will tell the go-between to buy a couple of girls for you. They can study, morning and night, and learn how to play and sing for your entertainment, and then perhaps you will feel better."
At this, the rich man was delighted, and thanked his wife again and again. Before long, she redeemed her promise, sent for the go-between, and the two girls were bought. One, surnamed Pan, was called Jinlian, and the other, whose surname was Bai, was called Yulian. Yulian was about sixteen years old, and had been born in a bawdy house. She was fair, clear-skinned, dainty, and intelligent. Jinlian was the daughter of a certain Pan Cai who lived outside the South Gate. She was his sixth child, and had been given her name because she was very beautiful even as a child. Her tightly bound feet were particularly charming. When her father died, her mother had been entirely without resources, and when she was only nine years old, she was sold to General Wang. In his house, she learned to play and sing, and, in her spare time, to read and write also. She was clever and industrious, and before she was twelve years old acquired a host of accomplishments. She learned, for example, how to darken her eyes, powder her face, and rouge her lips, and she could play more than one musical instrument. Her needlework had not been neglected and she could read the characters in books. With her hair dressed in a braid, and wearing a simple gown, she made a very pretty picture.
When Jinlian was fifteen years old, General Wang died, and her mother sold her to Master Zhang for thirty taels of silver. She and Yulian were both given music lessons but since she had had some previous experience, she did not find them very difficult. It was decided that she should play the lute and Yulian the zither. They shared the same room.
When the two girls first came to the house, their mistress was very kind and gave them gold and silver ornaments to make them look pretty. Then Yulian died, and Jinlian was left alone. By this time she was eighteen years old and as beautiful as a peach flower. Her eyebrows were arched like the crescent moon. Many times Master Zhang hungered for a closer acquaintance but, under the austere eye of his wife, no opportunity was forthcoming. One day, however, when the mistress of the house had gone to take wine with one of her neighbours, the rich man secretly summoned her to his room, and had his way with her.
Unhappily, after he had thus disported himself with Jinlian, all sorts of troubles came upon him. His nose ran, tears streamed from his eyes, and he could not hear. He had severe pains in the loins, and difficulty in making water. He had not long suffered from these complaints before his lady got to know his secret. She upbraided him for several days, and devised all manner of punishment for Jinlian. Master Zhang, though he knew he was doing something he ought not, secretly provided the girl with a trousseau, and looked about for a suitable man to whom to marry her. Everybody said, "Wu Da is a widower and a very honest fellow," and it occurred to him that no one could be more desirable, for Wu Da lived in the same house, and there would be no need for him to lose sight of the young lady. So he married the girl to Wu Da without asking for anything in return. The marriage once celebrated, Zhang heaped kindnesses upon the bridegroom. If he needed money for the ingredients with which to make his buns, the rich man provided it, and when Wu Da went out with his baskets, the rich man, after making sure that there was no one about, would go to console Jinlian in her loneliness.
Wu Da could not help seeing that Zhang treated his wife as though she belonged to him but he was not in a position to object. Master Zhang came in the morning and stayed until evening, until one day he was overcome by exhaustion and died on the spot. His wife had not been blind to all that was going on, and now, in a rage, she told her servants to turn Wu Da and his wife into the street. The poor man went to Amethyst Street, and there rented a couple of rooms in a nobleman's house, and continued to sell his cakes.
It did not take Jinlian very long to discover that her husband was not much of a man. He was by no means a model of manly vigor, and she came to hate him with an intense hatred. Never a day passed but she found some quarrel to pick with him, and she even cursed Master Zhang. "There is no lack of men in the world," said she. "Why should he have married me to a thing like this? It is always the same. Drive him as hard as I will, he never does a stroke of work, and if I try to push him forward, he only goes backward. No matter how busy the day, he malingers and will not touch his tools. I must have been a great sinner in my last existence to have been doomed to marry such a creature as this. My life is wretched indeed." And when she was quite alone, she sang this song :
This was an ill-made match.
A man I thought him; now I know that he is no true man.
I would not boast but it is plain
The crow can ne'er be mated with the phoenix.
I am as gold deep buried in the ground
And he a lump of common brass
Who may not hope to stand beside my golden glory.
He is nothing but stupid clay.
Shall my jade body, lying in his arms, thrill him with ecstasy
As from a dunghill the dainty sesame springs?
How can I pass my days with him forever?
How can I suffer him so long as life shall last?
I, that am purest gold, can never rest upon a bed so vile.
Women, my dear readers, are all very much the same. If a girl is pretty and intelligent, all goes well so long as she marries a fine specimen of a man. But if her husband turns out a simple-minded sort of fellow like Wu Da, it does not matter how virtuous she may be, some degree of hatred will sooner or later affect her attitude to him. And we must remember that seldom do beautiful maidens succeed in finding handsome husbands. The man who has gold to sell never seems to meet the man who wishes to buy.
Everyday, Wu Da took his baskets and went out to sell his cakes, returning only at sunset, and when the woman had rid herself of him, she used to sit beneath the blind, chewing melon seeds and pushing forward her tiny feet in the hope of attracting the attention of some young ne'er-do-well. And, indeed, there was a constant stream of courtiers before the gate, who spoke in riddles and called out such remarks as:
"What a pity that such a tasty piece of lamb should fall into a dog's mouth!" They poured out smooth words like oil, till Wu Da came to the conclusion that Amethyst Street was no place to live, and decided to remove elsewhere. But when he talked to his wife about the matter, she cried, "You low creature, you are nothing but a fool. You take a wretched little place like this, and of course dishonourable fellows come and say whatever they think fit. The best thing you can do is to scrape together a few taels, find a decent house, and take a couple of rooms in it. Then perhaps we can live more respectably, and people will cease to treat us like dirt."
"Where am I to get the money from to take a house?" Wu Da said.
"You are not a baby, you lump of mud! Why can't you? Are you going to allow your wife to be continually insulted in this way? If you have no money, take my hair ornaments and sell them, then buy a house with the proceeds. We can buy them back again sometime if we wish to."
Wu Da succeeded in getting together ten taels of silver, and took a place not very far from the Town Hall. It had four rooms on two floors, and there were two small courtyards. The whole place was very clean. When they had taken up their abode in West Street, he still continued to make a living by selling cakes.
Now, unexpectedly, he had come across his younger brother, and their hearts overflowed with joy. Wu Da at once invited his brother to go home with him, and took him upstairs to sit down. Then he called Jinlian to come and see Wu Song. "You remember," he said, "the man who killed the tiger on Jingyang hill. He is none other than your brother, the son of the same mother as myself. He has just been appointed captain of police."
Jinlian made a reverence to her brother-in-law, and Wu Song knelt down to return her greeting. She would not allow this, and made him stand up, saying that such condescension on his part would embarrass her beyond measure. Wu Song, however, persisted, and for some time they carried on a polite dispute, until at last they both knelt and kowtowed down to one another. Soon afterwards, the little Ying'er brought tea for the two men. Wu Song, realizing the seductive charm of his sister-in-law, modestly refrained from looking at her. Wu Da, who was anxious to offer his brother some entertainment, went downstairs to buy some wine and refreshments, and left his wife alone with Wu Song in the upper room.
Jinlian admired his manly qualities and the nobility of his bearing, remembering how he had killed the tiger, and thinking what immeasurable vigor he must have. She said to herself: "These two men are both the sons of one mother; why should my husband's body be so ill-shapen that he seems more like a ghost than a man? In which of my former lives did I so misbehave that I should be doomed to marry an object like him? Wu Song is strong and lusty. Why should I not invite him to make his home with us? He seems the very man for me." She smiled sweetly, and said, "Where are you living, Uncle? Who looks after you?"
"I have just been appointed captain of the police," Wu Song said, "and, as I have to be ready for duty at all times, I live near the Town Hall. Two soldiers wait upon me and cook for me."
"Why not come and live here?" the woman said. "It would be much pleasanter for you than living near the Town Hall with only those nasty dirty soldiers to look after you. If you come and live with us, you will find it much more convenient and, any time you want any little thing to eat or drink, I shall be only too glad to prepare it for you myself and it will be perfectly clean."
"It is very good of you to suggest it," said Wu Song.
"Perhaps your wife is living somewhere in the neighbourhood," Jinlian said delicately. "I hope you will ask me to call on her."
"I have never married," said Wu Song.
Then Jinlian inquired politely how old he was, and when he told her he was twenty-eight, she remarked that he was three years older than herself. Finally, she asked where he had been living.
"I have been at Cangzhou for more than a year. I didn't know my brother had moved here but thought he still lived at the old place."
"Ah," Jinlian said, "that is a long story. We had to come here because, ever since I married your brother, people have taken advantage of his excessive meekness and never ceased to insult us. If only he were as strong as you, Uncle, no one would dare to answer him back."
"My brother has always been a good steady fellow," said Wu Song, "not a good-for-nothing like me."
"Don't be so absurd," the woman said, smiling. "There is an old saying that a man who has no spunk cannot long maintain his independence. I have some spirit myself, and I don't care for the sort of man who lets you hit him without turning a hair, and spins round and round like a top the more you strike him."
"If my brother does not make trouble," Wu Song said, "it is because he wishes to spare you unhappiness."
They were still talking in the upper room when Wu Da came back with a host of things to eat, and set them down in the kitchen. He came to the foot of the stairs and called, "Wife, Wife, come down!"
"Where are your manners?" Jinlian cried. "Why do you call me down? There is no one except myself to entertain your brother."
"Please do not trouble about me," Wu Song said.
"Why don't you go next door," the woman said, "and ask old woman Wang to come and get the dinner ready? That's what you ought to do."
Wu Da went off and asked the old woman to come. She busied herself, and when all was ready, took the food upstairs and set it on the table—fish, meat, fruit and cakes. The wine was heated, and Wu Da, having asked his wife to take the host's place, himself sat at the side and put his brother in the seat of honour. When they were all in their places, the wine was poured out. Wu Da himself heated it and served the other two. "Uncle," Jinlian said, as she took her cup, "please excuse our having made no special preparations for you. I am afraid this is very inferior wine."
"Please don't say that," said Wu Song. "It is most kind of you to trouble about me at all."
While Wu Da busied himself with the heating of the wine, Jinlian, all smiles, and with the word "Uncle" continually upon her lips, kept saying, "Will you not have something tasty?" and, taking the choicest parts from different dishes, herself offered them to her brother-in-law.
Wu Song was a simple-hearted fellow and treated her like a sister, not knowing the sort of woman she was. Cleverly enough, she assumed a modest air, and it never occurred to him that she was deliberately trying to seduce him. They sat together and drank several cups of wine but she could not keep her eyes away from him, and this finally embarrassed him so much that he turned his head away. By this time, he had drunk much wine and, as he began to feel a little tipsy, he decided it was time to go and stood up to take his leave.
"What is your hurry?" Wu Da cried. "Stay and have a little more to drink. You have nothing to do now."
"Thank you," said Wu Song politely, "but I shall see you both some other time."
They went downstairs with him, and as he was going out of the door, Jinlian cried, "Don't forget to make arrangements to come here to live. If you don't, the neighbours will have a very poor opinion of our hospitality. Brothers are not strangers, and your company will be a pleasure to us."
"It is very kind of you," Wu Song said. "I will bring my things here this very evening."
"We shall be waiting for you," the woman said.

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Wu Song went to the inn near the Town Hall, packed his baggage and his bedclothes, and told a soldier to carry them to his brother's house. When Pan Jinlian saw him coming, she was as delighted as if she had discovered a hidden treasure. She bustled about preparing a room for her brother-in-law and setting everything to rights. Wu Song sent back the orderly, and stayed the night at his brother's home. The next day, he rose very early, and Jinlian hastened to heat water for him. He washed, combed and tied his hair, and then made ready to go to the office to sign the roll.
"Uncle," Jinlian said, "when you have signed the roll, be sure to come home for lunch. You mustn't think of taking your meals anywhere but here."
After signing the roll, Wu Song waited all the morning in attendance at the office, and finally went home. Jinlian had taken the greatest pains over the cooking, and the three sat down together to lunch. Taking a cup of tea in both hands, the woman offered it to Wu Song.
"You take so much trouble on my account," he said, "that it makes me quite embarrassed. Tomorrow I will arrange for a soldier to come and wait on us."
"Please do no such thing," Jinlian cried anxiously. "We are the same flesh and blood, and this house is home to us all. I am not waiting upon a stranger. Certainly this little Ying'er is not much use, and I can't rely upon her. She always seems to do the wrong thing. But if we get a soldier to help about the house, I shall find him in the way in the kitchen, and it will fidget me to watch him."
"In that case," Wu Song said, "I can only accept your kindness gratefully."
Not long after Wu Song had taken up his abode in his brother's house, he gave Wu Da some money and asked him to make arrangements to give a party for the neighbours. They came with presents to pay their respects to Wu Song, and a little later Wu Da gave another party in return. Wu Song presented his sister with a length of coloured silk to make dresses.
"Oh, Uncle," she cried delightedly, "I can't possibly accept such a magnificent present," but she hastened to add: "Since you have already bought it, I suppose I must not refuse." She made a reverence, and took the silk. From that time, Wu Song was definitely established as a member of his brother's household. Wu Da, as before, went to the street everyday to sell his cakes, and Wu Song went to the Town Hall to perform his official duties. Whether he returned early or late, Jinlian always had something ready for him, and seemed delighted to wait upon him. He noticed this but thought no more about it. Nonetheless, the woman was forever trying to lead him on by pretty speeches, though she found it no easy task, for he was really incorruptible. If he had anything of importance to say, he would stay long enough to say it but if not, he went straight about his business.
A month soon passed. It was the eleventh month, and they began to experience seasonable weather. The north wind blew violently for several days and black clouds gathered on every hand. Then the snow began to fall, and soon it filled the skies.
For miles and miles the skies were filled with thick dark clouds.
Snowflakes, dancing past the window ledge, in midair formed a screen like tiny flowers of jade.
Zi Yu's boat, on the Yan River, was held and forced to tarry.
Soon was a mantle laid on the high palaces

River and mountain bound with a chain of silver
The skies filled with winged salt and driving, powdery dust.
That day, LŪ Meng, in his little hut, sighed
For all his wretchedness.

The snow continued without ceasing until the first night watch; the world was silver everywhere, and it seemed as though the earth had arrayed itself in a glorious garment of jade. Next morning, Wu Song went to the office and stayed till noon. Jinlian bade her husband go and sell his cakes and she went to ask her neighbour, old woman Wang, to go and buy some food and wine for her. Then she went to Wu Song's room, and made up the fire, thinking: "Today I will make sure of him. Beyond a doubt I can do something to wake him up." Afterwards, feeling quiet and lonely, she went and stood beneath the lattice and waited till she saw Wu Song trampling down the glistening snow as he hastened home.

She quickly raised the lattice for him and smiled. "You look frozen, Uncle." He answered her politely and came in, taking off his hat. Jinlian offered to take it but he brushed the snow away himself and hung it on the wall. Then he unloosed his girdle, took off his outer gown of parrot green, and went into the living room.

"I have been expecting you all the morning," Jinlian said. "Why didn't you come back to lunch?"

"One of my friends asked me to lunch," Wu Song replied, "and just now I had another invitation but I decided not to accept it, and came home instead."

"Is that so?" said the woman. "Won't you come a little nearer the fire?" Wu Song thanked her and, taking off his oiled boots, changed his socks and put on a pair of slippers. Then he brought a bench and sat down by the fire. Jinlian told Ying'er to bolt the gate and shut the back door. She herself went to fetch some of the dishes she had cooked, and set them on the table before Wu Song.

"Where is my brother?" he said.

"He has not come back from business yet," the woman answered. "Let us drink a few cups of wine together."

"It is not late," Wu Song said. "We had better wait for him."

"Oh, why should we bother about him?" Jinlian cried.

At that moment Ying'er came in with the wine already warmed. Wu Song again apologized politely for causing so much trouble. Jinlian said nothing but brought a bench to the fire and sat down. There were several dishes on the table but she only took a cup of wine, looked at Wu Song, and invited him to drink it. This he did in one breath. She poured a second cup and handed that to him, saying, "It is so cold, you must drink this to keep the other company." This, too, Wu Song drank straight off. Then he filled a cup for her. She took the wine and sipped it delicately, then poured out still another cup and offered it to him. Her milk-white breast was partially uncovered, and her disordered hair was like a beautiful cloud. Desire had given colour to her cheeks.

"People tell me you keep a singing girl over there by the Town Hall," she said slyly. "Is that true?"

"People always talk nonsense like that but you shouldn't believe them, Sister," Wu Song said. "I never was that kind of man."

"I don't believe you," said Jinlian. "Your heart speaks one language and your tongue another."

"Ask my brother, if you don't believe me."

"What on earth is the use of bringing him into it?" Jinlian said. "His life is one long dream. Judging by the way he goes about, you might think he was always half tipsy. He would not have to spend all his days selling cakes if he had a particle of intelligence. But have another cup of wine."

She filled three or four cups one after the other, and Wu Song drank them all. She drank a few cups too, till the spur of desire pressed her more acutely and the passion within her blazed so that she lost all control of herself and could hardly speak. By this time, an inkling of the true state of affairs was beginning to dawn upon Wu Song, and he looked away from her. After a while she rose and went to heat some more wine. Wu Song, left alone in the room, took up the poker and began to poke the fire. Jinlian was soon back again with a jar of wine that she had warmed. In one hand she held the jar and with the other she gently pressed his shoulder. "Uncle," she said, "you must be cold with so few clothes." Wu Song was now beginning to feel thoroughly uncomfortable, and made no answer. Seeing him thus silent, she snatched the poker from his hand and cried, "You don't know how to poke. Let me do it for you. I want it as hot as a bowl of fire."

Wu Song felt even more uneasy but he still said nothing. Jinlian was not in any way put out. She set down the poker and poured out another cup of wine. She drank a mouthful, looked meaningly at Wu Song, and said, "If you feel like it, drink what I have left."

This was too much. He snatched the cup from her hand and dashed the wine upon the floor, crying, "Don't be so shameless," and at the same time pushed her so violently that she almost fell. Then he gazed haughtily upon her.

"My feet are steadfast upon the earth and I aspire to reach the heavens. I am a man with teeth in my mouth and hair upon my head. I am a man, I say, not a swine or a cur, that I should pay no heed to the sacred laws of honour or flout the precepts of common decency. You must not behave in this shameless way. If I hear any whisper of your ever doing such a thing again, my eyes may tell me that you are my sister but my fist will not recognize you."

This made Jinlian so confused and angry that her face became crimson. She called Ying'er to clear away the dishes, and muttered, "I was only joking. How could you think I was in earnest? You are not an honourable man." When the dishes had been removed, she went down to the kitchen.

So Jinlian came to realize that her blandishments were without effect, except that Wu Song had treated her roughly, while he, now sitting alone, grew angrier and angrier and thought very seriously about the matter.

It was still early, about the hour of the Monkey, when Wu Da came back, carrying his baskets over the snow. He opened the door, put down his burden, and going into the house at once saw that his wife's eyes were red with weeping. "With whom have you been quarreling now?" he said.

"If you were not such a mean-spirited creature," his wife cried, "things like this would not happen. But you never care whether outsiders insult me or not."

"Who has been insulting you?" Wu Da said.

"If you really wish to know, it was that scoundrel, your brother. When the snow was very heavy, I saw him coming back, and I was kindly getting something ready for him, when he saw there was nobody about, and tried to seduce me. It is perfectly true: Ying'er saw him."

"My brother is not that kind of man," her husband said. "He has always been high-principled and straightforward. Don't make so much noise, or the neighbours will hear you and laugh." He went to see Wu Song.

"You haven't eaten your cakes, Brother," he said. "I'll come and have some with you." But Wu Song did not answer him and, after brooding there a while, started to leave the house.

"Where are you going?" cried Wu Da but his brother went off without replying. Wu Da went back to the room and said to his wife, "I called him but he would not answer, and now he has gone down the road to the Town Hall. I'm sure I don't understand what all the bother is about."

"You thievish, stupid worm," Jinlian cried. "There is nothing to understand. The wretch is ashamed and dare not face you. That's why he has gone out. Probably he has not the audacity to inflict himself upon us any longer, and has gone to tell somebody to come and take his things away. I can't imagine why you bother about him."

"If he goes away," Wu Da said, "people will certainly laugh at us."

"You silly creature," Jinlian cried. "He is a shameless, immoral fellow, and he tried to seduce me. Is that a laughing matter? If you want him so much, go and live with him. I won't put up with it. Give me divorce papers if you like, and then the pair of you can live together."

After this, Wu Da did not dare to open his mouth again, and he had to suffer his wife's ill-temper for a long time. They were indeed still quarreling when Wu Song, with a soldier carrying a long pole, came back, packed up his luggage, and went off. Wu Da went after him, crying, "Why are you going away, Brother?"

"Ask no questions," Wu Song answered. "If I tell the truth, your good name will be ruined. Let me go."

Wu Da did not dare to question him any further, and was obliged to let him go with his luggage. Meanwhile his wife was scolding in her room: "That's better. Relations always prove a nuisance in the long run. People don't know the truth. Just because here is a young brother with a position at the Town Hall, they must needs conclude that he keeps his brother and sister. They never think that he is really eating us out of house and home. He is like a yellow quince, good to look at and rotten inside. I shall thank my lucky star if he takes himself off for good and all. Indeed there is nothing I hope more than that I may never set eyes on that piece of ill-fortune again."

Wu Da could not avoid hearing all his wife said but still he could not make out what had really happened, and his heart was troubled. Now that his brother had gone back to live at the inn near the Town Hall, he still sold buns and cakes upon the street. He longed for an opportunity to go to the Town Hall and have a talk but his wife gave him strict instructions that he must not dare to do anything of the sort, and he did not venture to disobey her. After Wu Song's departure, the snow suddenly stopped. Ten days passed.

The magistrate of Qinghe had been stationed there for more than two years and had amassed much gold and silver. Now he wanted a man of courage to take his treasure to the Eastern Capital, so that his relatives might take charge of it. In three years his term of office would expire, and knowing that he would then have to make his report to the Emperor, he thought it would be well to have this gold and silver in hand when he came to deal with officials more exalted than himself. But he felt the need of a stout fellow for the job, as thieves often beset the way. Then he thought of Wu Song. He was just the man. That very day he sent for Wu Song and said to him:

"I am thinking of sending an important present to one of my relatives at the Eastern Capital. I mean Zhu Mian, one of the Grand Marshal's officers. There may be some danger about the journey but if you undertake it, I am sure all will be well. If you will do this for me, I will reward you handsomely when you get back."

"You have shown me so much kindness, Sir, that I should never think of refusing," Wu Song replied. "I will set off as soon as you give me your orders."

The magistrate was now perfectly satisfied. He gave Wu Song three cups of wine, and handed him ten taels of silver as journey money. After receiving his instructions, Wu Song went to the inn and, after getting his orderly to buy some food and a jar of wine at a shop in the street, went to his brother's house. When Wu Da returned, he found his brother waiting on the doorstep. He had told his servant to take the wine and food into the kitchen.

Jinlian had not abandoned all hope, and when she saw Wu Song coming with wine and other delicacies she said to herself: "He must still be thinking about me, or he would not have come back. I may get him yet." So she went upstairs to powder her face and arrange her hair, and when she had changed into a prettier dress, she came down to welcome him.

"I can't imagine what can have displeased you, Uncle," she said, as she made a reverence. "For several days you haven't been near us, and I have often wondered why. It is delightful to see you home again but why did you trouble to bring wine and food?"

"I have something to say to my brother," Wu Song said. "That is why I have come."

Jinlian invited him to go upstairs, and they all three went to the upper room. Wu Da and his wife sat in the places of honour, and Wu Song sat down on a long bench. The orderly brought up the food and Wu Song invited his brother and sister to take some. From time to time, Jinlian glanced meaningly at her brother-in-law but he paid no attention to anything but the wine he was drinking. When they had all drunk several cups, Wu Song asked Ying'er to bring a loving cup and, when the orderly had heated the wine, he took this cup in his hands and said to Wu Da:

"Honourable elder brother: today the magistrate has ordered me to go to the Eastern Capital for him. I am starting tomorrow, and it may easily be two or three months before I get back, though I hope it will be less. What I have come to say to you is this: you have always been a long-suffering kind of man, and I don't intend you to be imposed upon in my absence. Now, listen to me. You have been in the habit of selling ten trays of cakes but in future you must only make five. Then you will be able to go out later and come home earlier. Don't let anyone persuade you to drink; pull down the shutters and bolt the door as soon as you get home. If you do this, you will be saved a great deal of unpleasantness but if anything disagreeable should happen, don't let yourself be drawn into a quarrel. Wait till I come back, and I'll soon settle the matter. Now, my dear brother, if you agree, drink this cup of wine."

Wu Da took the cup and drained it. "I will do whatever you think fit," he said.

Wu Song filled up the cup again and spoke to Jinlian. "Sister, you are no fool, and I don't think I need say any more. My brother is so simple-hearted that the real management of the household is in your hands. You will remember the old saying that a proud appearance is not always the mirror of an honest heart. If you attend to your household duties as you should, my brother will have nothing to worry about. As our fathers used to say: 'When the fence is safe, dogs cannot get in.'"

Jinlian listened, and the crimson colour spread across her face. She shook her finger at Wu Da, and addressed Wu Song through him. "You fool! What do you think you will gain by insulting me like this? I have to wear a woman's clothes, it is true but I am as good as any man. I am always steady and reliable. A man might stand upon my fist or a horse ride over my arm. I am not a turtle to be wounded without bloodshed. Never, since I married Wu Da, has even an ant dared to sneak into my room. How dare you talk about dogs getting in if the fence is not safe? Tell the truth, not a pack of lies. I don't care in the slightest what you say."

Wu Song laughed. "Don't lose your temper, Sister. So long as your heart keeps company with your mouth, all will be well. But I shall remember what you have said. And now, won't you drink this cup?"

Jinlian dashed the cup aside and ran downstairs. Before she reached the bottom, she turned and cried, "You think you're very wise and clever but how is it you don't seem to know that a brother's wife should be respected as a mother? When I first married Wu Da, nobody ever mentioned his having a brother. Where have you come from? Are you really a relative or are you not? One would think you were the master of the house. Oh, it makes me wild to have to put up with such nonsense." She went down the rest of the stairs, sobbing.

The brothers drank several more cups of wine together till they could stay no longer, while Jinlian affected many airs and graces. At last they both went downstairs, and took their leave of one another with tears streaming down their cheeks. "Brother," Wu Da said, "you must go, I suppose but come back as soon as you can and let my eyes rejoice in you once more."

Wu Song said, "Wouldn't it be better if you stayed away from business altogether, and let me arrange with somebody to supply you with funds?" Finally, he cried, "Remember what I say, Brother, and keep a watch on your door." Wu Da promised.

So Wu Song parted from his brother. He went back to the inn, packed his luggage, and saw to his weapons. The next morning he took charge of the magistrate's presents, secured a horse, and set off for the Eastern Capital.

After his brother's departure Wu Da had to endure his wife's scoldings for several days but he held himself in check, swallowed his wrath, and let her scold him. He did what his brother had told him, and made only half the number of cakes he had made before. Everyday he returned before sunset and, setting down his baskets, pulled down the shutters and closed the outer gate before he came to sit down in the room. His wife saw this, and grew more and more resentful everyday. "You horrible creature," she said at length, "one would think you couldn't tell the time. Even jailers don't bar the prison gate while the sun is still in the heavens. Our neighbours must be in fits of laughter and think we are afraid of ghosts. You are just like a newborn babe who has to do what his brother tells him. Aren't you ashamed to have everybody laughing at you?"

"Let them laugh," Wu Da said. "What my brother said is true enough, and may save us much trouble yet."

"Pah, you vile creature!" his wife shouted, and spat in his face. "You, a grown-up man, have no will of your own but have to do whatever anybody tells you."

"Say what you like," Wu Da said with a gesture of weariness. "To me my brother's words are as gold and precious stones." He continued to go out late and return early, and he still shut the door as soon as he got home. This so infuriated his wife that she almost had a fit; she quarreled with him so incessantly that trouble seemed to have become a habit. About the time for his return, she would pull down the shutter and bolt the door, thinking that so she would annoy him but instead of making him angry, this gave him considerable secret satisfaction and he thought: "If she takes things like this, so much the better for all concerned."

The sun's bright horses galloped past the window, and the sun and moon raced like a weaver's shuttles. It seemed but a moment since the winter solstice passed and it was the season when the plum trees blossom, yet now the weather was giving warning of spring's return. One day, in the third month, the sun shone so pleasantly that Jinlian decided to dress herself in her best clothes. Wu Da was out, and she was standing by the door beneath the lattice. Thinking it was nearly time for his return, she prepared to pull down the shutter and go back to the room to wait for him. But now the fates intervened. A man passed beneath the lattice.

In affairs of the heart we always find that Fate brings the lovers together, and a story would not be worth the telling if accidents never happened. Jinlian was holding the pole and preparing to pull down the shutter, when a gust of wind suddenly blew it out of her hand. She could not catch it, and it fell upon the man's head. She smiled her apologies, and stole a look at him. Upon his head he wore a tasseled hat, and golden filigree hairpins, with one of the signs of the zodiac edged with jade. Over slender hips he wore a green silk gown and on his feet a pair of fine but heavily soled shoes, with socks as white as the purest water. He was fanning himself with a gilt fan. He was indeed as handsome as Master Zhang, and worthy of comparison with Pan An.

Jinlian peeped at him from under the lattice. When first the pole struck him, he stopped and seemed on the point of an angry outburst but, as he turned, he suddenly beheld an incredibly pretty woman.

Her hair was black as a raven's plumage; her eyebrows mobile as the kingfisher and as curved as the new moon. Her almond eyes were clear and cool, and her cherry lips most inviting. Her nose was noble and exquisitely modeled, and her dainty cheeks beautifully powdered. Her face had the delicate roundness of a silver bowl. As for her body, it was as light as a flower, and her fingers as slender as the tender shoots of a young onion. Her waist was as narrow as the willow, and her white belly yielding and plump. Her feet were small and tapering; her breasts soft and luscious. One other thing there was, black-fringed, grasping, dainty, and fresh but the name of that I may not tell. Words fail to describe the charm of so beauteous a vision.

Her luxuriant coal-black hair was as thick as the clouds. On each side she wore small pins and, at the back, a pair of combs with a cleverly fashioned flower. Two peach flowers adorned her willow-leaf eyebrows. The jade pendants she wore were remarkable but the glory of her uncovered bosom was that of jade beyond all price. She wore a blue gown bound with a long silk-embroidered sash, and in her cuff a tiny satchel of perfumes. Beneath her delicate throat, a many-buttoned corsage concealed her breast.

Her feet were graced by tiny shoes made like the mountain crow, with tips embroidered to look like the claws. Their high heels were of white silk, so that she seemed always to walk upon a fragrant dust. Her scarlet silken trousers were decorated with birds and flowers and, as she sat or when she rose, the wind would puff out her skirts and flowing undergarments. From her mouth there came a perfume as delicious as that of orchides and musk, while her cherry lips and beautiful cheeks had the glory of a flower. One glimpse of this vision, and the souls of men would flutter away and die. Many handsome young men might perish at the sight.

No sooner had the man set eyes upon all this beauty than he became almost beside himself with desire. His anger sped to Java and his face was quickly wreathed in smiles. Jinlian knew that she was to blame for the disaster, so she made a graceful reverence and said, "The wind suddenly blew the pole out of my hand, and I had the misfortune to strike you. Please do not be angry with me."

The man set his hat straight with one hand, and made a reverence so low that he almost swept the ground. "Lady," he said, "it was not of the slightest consequence. You may do with me what you will."

It so happened that the neighbour, old woman Wang, the tea seller, had seen everything that happened. She was greatly entertained. "Who may you be, Sir," she cried, "who pass by this house to be welcomed with blows upon the head?"

The man laughed. "It was all my fault. I should have been more careful. Please don't be vexed with me, Lady."

"Don't beat me," said the old woman Wang, still enjoying the joke. The man laughed again, and bowed most profoundly to express his regret. His roguish eyes, experienced in amorous adventure and well versed in the value of a woman's charms, could not look away from Jinlian. At last he went off, strutting and waving his fan, though not without turning around seven or eight times.

Jinlian had no sooner set eyes upon the man with his engaging manner and lively ways, no sooner heard him speak so winningly and brightly, than she fell head over heels in love with him. She had no idea who he was or where he lived but she rightly concluded that he would not have turned his head so often unless he reciprocated her feelings in some measure. She stayed beneath the lattice until he was out of sight and then, pulling down the shutter, closed the door and went back to her room.

You may have guessed who this man was. None other than that chief of those who sought the pleasures of the couch, that captain of those who gather precious treasure and pursue unlawful fragrance, his Lordship Ximen. His third wife had just died and been given a solemn burial and, being distressed in mind, he was taking a stroll along the street intending to call upon Ying Bojue and thus secure a little distraction from his gloom. As he passed by Wu Da's house, he received, as we have seen, an unexpected blow on the head. But now that he had seen Jinlian under the lattice, Master Ximen went home again. "That was a splendid woman," he thought. "I wonder how I can get hold of her." He suddenly remembered old woman Wang, the neighbour who kept a tea shop. "She seems a clever old body," he said to himself, "and, if she can bring this affair to the conclusion I desire, she shall have a few taels of silver." He did not stay to eat anything but hurried off to the street and dashed to old woman Wang's tea shop. He went in and took a seat, looking out beneath the awning.

"That was a very fine bow you made, Sir," said old woman Wang, laughing.

"Please come here, Stepmother," Ximen said. "That young neighbour of yours—er—that young woman—ahem— whose wife is she?"

"Oh," the old woman replied, "she is the sister of the King of Hell, the daughter of General Wu Dao. What makes you ask?"

"Don't treat the matter as a joke," Ximen said. "I am speaking seriously."

"Surely you know, Sir," said old woman Wang. "Her husband sells cakes outside the Town Hall."

"What! Xu the Third?" Ximen said.
The old woman shook her head. "No, if it were he, they would be something like a pair. Guess again, Sir."
"Perhaps it is Li the Third, then: he sells cakes."
The old woman shook her head again. "No, if he were the man, I should think they were perfectly matched."
"Well, then," Ximen cried, "it must be Liu Xiao. You know: the man they call Tattooed Arms."
Still the old woman laughed. "No," she said, "even if it were he, I should say they were a well-mated couple. Guess once more, Sir."
"I can't guess, Stepmother," Ximen said almost in despair, while the old woman roared with laughter.
"Well, I'll tell you. Her husband is that fellow Wu Da, who hawks his cakes about the streets."
When Ximen Qing heard this, he nearly jumped out of his chair. "You can't mean that Wu Da whom people call Tom Thumb or Old Scraggy Bark."
"That is the man," replied the old woman.
"Good Heavens," Ximen cried. "What a tasty piece of lamb to fall into a dog's mouth. However can it have happened?"
"It is always the same," old woman Wang replied. "You always find a beautiful horse ridden by some fool of a man, and a pretty girl sleeping with a husband who is not fit to be seen. The old Man in the Moon works things that way."
"How much do I owe you?" Ximen said.
"Nothing worth mentioning," the old woman replied. "We will leave it till another time."
"With whom is your son Wang Chao working now?" Ximen asked.
"He is away with a merchant, a native of Huai but really he has been away so long that I don't know whether he's alive or dead."
"Why not let him come to me? He seems to be a smart lad."
"I am glad he meets with your approval."
"Very well," Ximen said, "when he comes back we must talk about the matter again." He thanked the old woman and went away. But in less than no time he was back again, sitting once more near the door that looked upon Wu Da's house.
"May I offer you some damson broth, Sir?" said old woman Wang, when she came out.
"I should like some very much," Ximen said, "but let it be a little sour, if you don't mind." The old woman made the broth, and offered it to him with both hands. When he had finished it, he put down the cup. "You make excellent damson broth, Stepmother," he said. "Have you got many dam-sons in your room there?"
"I have dealt in damsons all my life," the old woman said, "but I never keep them in my room."
"I was talking about damsons, not damsels," said Ximen. "You are getting a little mixed up."
"It was damsels you were thinking about, nonetheless," the old lady retorted.
"Well," said Ximen, "you admit you sell damsels. What about finding one for me? If you can let me have a nice tasty one, you won't lose by it."
"You are only teasing me," the old woman said. "If your wife heard about it, my old face would have a rough time."
"Not at all," Ximen said. "My wife is a most amiable woman, and I have several girls already but none of them is exactly what I want. If you have a really good girl on your books, you must introduce her to me. I don't care whether she is somebody else's leavings or not but she must be a woman who will satisfy me."
"Ah," the old woman said, "a few days ago I did hear of an excellent girl but I'm afraid she wouldn't do for you."
"If she is the right stuff, just go ahead, and you shall be well paid for your pains."
"She is more than usually good-looking," said the old lady, "but rather old, perhaps."
"Well," said Ximen, "people have always said that a middle-aged woman has a charm all her own. It will not put me off if she happens to be a year or two older than I am. But how old is she?"
"She was born under the planet Mercury and her animal is the Pig, so as my reckoning goes, she will be ninety-three years old next New Year."
"You crazy old woman," Ximen cried. "Why do you screw up your silly old face and make fun all the time?" It was getting late and he decided to go away. The old woman had lighted her lamp and was going to fasten the gate, when Ximen Qing once again appeared. He sat down under the awning and gazed with longing eyes at Wu Da's house.
"Would you like a little allspice soup?" old woman Wang said.
"Yes, please," said Ximen, "but let it be sweet." The old woman hastily brought some soup, and he ate it all. He sat there till it was very late. At last he stood up. "Please make out my bill, old lady, and I will pay you next time I come."
"Don't worry about it," the old woman said; "we shall certainly have another opportunity of settling it." Ximen Qing laughed and went away.
At home, he could take no pleasure either eating or sleeping; his heart was consumed with desire for Jinlian. Wu Yueniang saw him in this sad state but thought it was because of his third wife's death, and did not trouble him. Next morning, as soon as it was light and old woman Wang came out to unbolt her gate, Ximen Qing was already striding down the street.
"Ah," she thought, "new brooms sweep clean, and this one seems to be doing all its sweeping in this direction. I must keep the young man on tenterhooks for a while. In his dealings with the people here, he always manages to come off best but if I get him into my clutches, I shall be surprised if I can't squeeze a little bawdy money out of him."
Old woman Wang's past history was none too creditable. She had been an efficient and busy go-between all her life, and occasionally dealt in children. She had also practiced midwifery, applying the requisite pressure to the mother and receiving the little ones on their arrival. In short, she was a thoroughly accomplished rogue.
The old woman had just opened her door to throw out the tea leaves when she saw Ximen Qing pacing up and down. Finally he came towards the tea shop and stood underneath the awning facing Wu Da's door. He was looking up at the lattice as though he could not take his eyes from it. The old woman pretended not to see him, and went on making a fire in her tea shop, until Ximen Qing, finding that she did not come out to offer him any tea, called to her to bring two cups.
"Ah," the old woman said, "is that you, my lord? Why have you allowed so long a time to pass without coming to see me? Please take a seat." In a few moments, she had made two cups of very strong tea and set them on the table.
"You'll take a cup with me, Stepmother, won't you?" Ximen said.
"I am not your shadow," the old woman said, laughing. "Why should I always drink tea with you?"
Ximen Qing laughed. "What do these neighbours of yours sell?"
"Roasted love darts; dried cuckoo's nests with parsley all around them; good fresh mincemeat; rolls all ready to be stuffed; oyster dumplings, and warm-heart pastries."
"You mad old woman," Ximen said, laughing. "I do wish you would talk sense."
"I am not mad by any means," said the old woman. "If you would rather go and ask the master of the house, you will find him at home."
"I am quite serious," Ximen said. "If they have good buns there, I should like to buy forty or fifty and take them home with me."
"There is no need to go to the house to buy them. The man will be going to the street in a minute or two, and you can get as many as you like."
"That is true," said Ximen. He drank his tea, lingered for a while, and at last went away. Old woman Wang watched him with her stony eyes, and saw him pacing to and fro, looking first to the right and then to the left. This he did seven or eight times. At last he came back to the tea shop.
"How do you do, Sir?" the old lady said. "I had almost forgotten what you look like."
Ximen Qing took a tael of silver from his sleeve and handed it to her. "This is for my tea," he said.
The old woman smiled. "Why do you give me so much?"
"I should take it if I were you," said Ximen, "and not trouble how much it is."
"Now," thought the old woman, "my chance has come. It is time this broom lost some of its bristles. I will take this today, and it will doubtless come in for my lodging tomorrow." She said aloud, "I see there is something you have set your heart upon."
"What makes you think that?" Ximen said.
"It is not very hard to see. There is an old saying, 'When a man enters your door, don't trouble to ask whether he is in luck or not. Look at his face.' I can assure you I've guessed things far more difficult than that."
"If you can guess what I am thinking about," said Ximen, "you shall have five taels of silver."
Old woman Wang laughed. "One guess will be enough. Let me whisper in your Lordship's ear. You have been haunting this neighbourhood for two or three days, and it is quite clear that you have your eye on the lady next door. Am I right?"
Ximen Qing smiled. "Your intelligence, Stepmother, is worthy of Sui He, and you are even sharper than Lu Jia. I shall not attempt to hoodwink you. I don't know how it is but ever since I saw her face under the lattice I seem to have lost both my heart and my head. Day and night I can think of nothing else. When I am at home, I can neither eat nor drink, and work is out of the question. I wonder if you can think of some way to help me."
"I shall not try to hoodwink you either," the old woman said. "People imagine that I keep a tea shop here but to tell you the truth, a ghost playing the night watchman would fill the part as honestly as I do mine. One day, I certainly did sell some tea. It was three years ago, to be precise, when snow fell in the sixth month; but I've sold none since. No, sir, I make my living in quite another way."
"And what may that be?" Ximen asked.
"When I was thirty-six years old, my husband died. He left me with a young boy and not a penny to live on. So I took up the business of a go-between, and also made a little money by making clothes, acting the midwife, and introducing people to one another. Sometimes I let blood for people who are ill."
I had no idea your accomplishments were so many," Ximen said. "If you can arrange this matter to my satisfaction, I will give you ten taels of silver for your coffin. All you have to do is to get that woman to meet me."
"I was only joking," the old woman said. "Why did you take me seriously?"

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Ximen Qing was desperately anxious to possess Pan Jinlian. He gave the old woman no peace.
"Stepmother," he said, "if you bring this business to a happy end, I will give you ten taels of silver."
"Sir," said the old woman, "you may have heard, perhaps, of setting a love snare. The expression implies much that is difficult and is, indeed, what is more commonly known as wife stealing. Before a man can set about this wife-stealing business with any prospect of success, five things are essential. He must be as handsome as Pan An. His member must be at least as large as a donkey's. He must be as rich as Deng Tong, and reasonably young. Finally, he must have plenty of time on his hands, and almost endless patience. If you are possessed of all these qualifications, you may think of going in for this sort of entertainment."
"I think I may say I do possess them all," Ximen Qing said. "I would not venture to compare my handsome figure with that of Pan An but it will serve. Ever since I was a boy, I have played in the lowest and most unsavory haunts, and I must say I have succeeded in keeping a very fat turtle well content. I may not have as much money as Deng Tong but have a good deal put away, certainly sufficient to live upon. As for my patience, I should never think of retaliating though I received four hundred blows. Finally, if I had not plenty of time to waste, you would not be seeing me here so often. Stepmother, do this for me, and you shall not be disappointed with your reward."
"There is one thing more, Sir," the old woman said. "You tell me that you possess the five essential qualifications but I fear this too is indispensable."
"What do you mean?" Ximen Qing cried.
"Forgive my speaking plainly," the old woman said, "but when a man would run off with somebody else's wife, there are very considerable difficulties in the way. A man may spend almost his last penny, and still fail. He must go to the absolute limit. I happen to know that you particularly dislike parting with your money, and that is the difficulty."
"It shall be no difficulty in this case," Ximen said, "for I will do anything you suggest."
"Very well," the old woman said, "if you are really prepared to spend a few taels, I have a plan that should enable you to secure the lady."
Ximen would have liked to hear it but the old woman said, with a laugh, "It is too late today, and time you went home. Come back in six months, or perhaps three, and we will see what we can do."
"Stepmother," said Ximen, "don't joke about it. Only do this for me and you shall have a really handsome present." But the old woman laughed all the more.
"You certainly seem to be very keen," she said. "Nobody ever comes to say his prayers to me at the temple of Wu Cheng Wang but my plan is as good and better than any that fellow Sun Wuzi could have made. He was able to turn girls into soldiers but I could have captured eight out of ten of them. Let me tell you all I know about this woman. She comes of a poor family but she is as clever as can be. She knows how to play and sing, her embroidery is excellent, and she is expert at many games. In fact, there is nothing she doesn't know. Her surname is Pan, and her personal name, Jinlian. Her father was Pan Cai, who used to live by the South Gate. Originally, she was sold to Master Zhang, and at his house she learned to sing and play. When Zhang was very old, he made a present of her to Wu Da. She does not go out very often and, when I am not busy, I go over to her place and get anything she happens to want. She always calls me Stepmother.
"These last few days, Wu Da has been going out early. If you wish to clinch the matter, you must buy some silk, one roll of blue, another of white, another of the finest white silk, and ten taels of good raw silk. Give them to me. I will go to her house to borrow a calendar, and ask her to tell me a day of good omen so that I can engage a dressmaker to come and make me some clothes. It may be that she will find a day for me but not offer to come herself to make the clothes. In that case, there is nothing to be done. If she is very pleasant and says, 'Don't get a dressmaker. I will come and make the clothes for you,' that will be one to us. If I can persuade her to come here to sew, that will be another one to us. If she comes at noon, I will set out refreshments and invite her to have some. She may say, 'I am very sorry but I can't,' and go off home and, in that case, we shall have to give up. On the other hand, she may say nothing but sit down and eat my lunch, and then we score again.
"You must not come tomorrow but the day after. Put on your smartest clothes. Give a cough of warning, and then come to the door and call, 'How do you do, Stepmother? May I come in and have a cup of tea?' I will come out and ask you in. It is possible that, as soon as she sees you, she may want to go home, and, if she does, I cannot stop her. That will be the end. But if she stays where she is, we shall be four points to the good.
"When you sit down, I shall say to her, 'This is the gentleman who gave me the clothes. I can't tell you how grateful I am to him,' and I shall say all sorts of pretty things about your generosity. Then you will compliment her on her sewing. If she does not answer, we are done. If she does answer, and enters into conversation with you, our fifth point is gained.
"Then I shall say, 'Isn't this good lady kind to make my clothes for me?' and praise you both—you for giving me the money and her for making the clothes. I shall say, 'This lady is indeed good-hearted. I was lucky to be able to persuade her to come. Perhaps you would like to offer her some refreshment.' You will take some silver out of your pocket and ask me to go and buy something. If at that moment she decides to go, I can't hold her, and all is over. But, if she doesn't move, we shall have gained our sixth point.
"I shall take your silver and, as I go out, I shall say, 'I wonder if you would mind keeping this gentleman company?' She may jump up at that and, if she does so, I can't very well put my arms around her and hold her but, if she doesn't, we shall have gained another point.
"When I come back with the things, I shall put them on the table and say, 'Lady, put the clothes aside for a while and let us drink a little wine. This gentleman has been good enough to spend his money on us.' If she will not join us but takes her leave, the matter is ended. But if she says, 'Oh, really I can't stay,' but does not make any effort to go, the eighth point is ours.
"If she drinks her wine contentedly and begins to talk to you, I shall say, 'There is not enough wine,' and you will ask me to buy some more, and some fruits too, and give me silver for the purpose. Then I shall shut the door upon you both. If she is shy and tries to run away, we can do no more. But if she lets me fasten the door and does not get angry, we are within an ace of our goal. The last stage is the critical one. You, Sir, will stay in the room with the woman and talk prettily to her but you must not be too rough when you begin to take liberties. If you touch her, and spoil the whole game, it will not be my fault. But it is possible that you might knock down a pair of chopsticks with your sleeve, and touch her foot when you pretend to pick them up. If this makes her angry, I shall come in and make peace between you but all our chances will be gone and we can never hope to retrieve the position. If she says nothing, we gain our tenth point, and the game is ours. If I lead you to victory, what reward may I expect?"
Ximen Qing listened to all this, and was perfectly delighted. "Your plan may not come from the Ling Yan temple," he said, "but it is absolutely flawless."
"Don't forget those ten taels of silver," old woman Wang said.
"If I get but a single piece of orange peel," Ximen said, "I shall never forget the Dongting lake. But when do you propose to put this scheme into operation, Stepmother?"
"Come back this evening," the old woman said, "and you shall know. By this time Wu Da has gone out, and I will go over about the calendar and say my part. You send somebody with the silk as quickly as possible. Don't waste any time."
"I'll see to it at once," Ximen Qing cried. "You may count upon me absolutely." He went to the street to buy the three rolls of silk and the ten taels of raw silk, and told Daian to wrap them up and take them to the old woman. She received them with great satisfaction and sent the boy away.
When the silk had come, the old woman opened her back door and went across to Wu Da's house. Jinlian took her upstairs, and they sat down.
"Why have you not been to take tea in my poor house lately?" asked the old woman.
"I haven't been well these last few days," Jinlian replied, "and somehow I have not felt inclined to move."
"Have you a calendar in the house?" the old woman said. "I should like to see one. I wish to find a day favourable for making clothes."
"What clothes are you thinking of having made?"
"I am always suffering from something or another," the old woman said. "One of these days I shall find myself as high as the mountains and as deep as the ocean. And my son is not at home."
"Where has he been all this time?" Jinlian said.

"He went away with a stranger, and I have never had a word from him since. I worry about him all day long."
Jinlian asked how old the boy was, and when the old woman told her he was seventeen, she said, "Why don't you find him a wife? You would save yourself a great deal of work."
"You may well say that," the old woman said. "There never was a place so lonely as mine. I potter about, as best I can, and sometimes I do think I'll find a wife for him. When he comes home, I really must see about it. Day and night I have trouble with my breathing, and I cough till my body shakes as though it were being torn in pieces. And I can't sleep. I've come to the conclusion that it's time I was getting my funeral clothes together. Fortunately for me, there is a rich gentleman who often comes to have tea at my shop. When there is anybody ill at his place, he sends for me; I buy maids for him and see about marriages. He knows I am to be trusted; that I never neglect any little point, however unimportant it may seem to others. He has given me the material for a full set of funeral clothes, and all the trimmings too. I have had this stuff put away for more than a year and have done nothing with it. But this year I have not felt at all well, and as there is an extra month in it, and I am not very busy, I have taken my chance and I am going to have it made up at last. Unfortunately, all the dressmakers say they are too busy to come and make my clothes. You've no idea how ill all this anxiety makes me."
Jinlian listened to this long story, and smiled. "I'm afraid I can't make the clothes as well as they should be made but I have nothing particular to do, and, if you like, I'll see what I can do for you."
The old lady smiled delightedly. "With your precious hands to make the things, even if I die, my poor old body will rejoice. I have always heard what a good needlewoman you are but I have never dared to come and trouble you."
"Why should I not make them?" Jinlian said. "Anyhow, I've promised now, and I must do them for you. Take the calendar, and get someone to find an auspicious day. Then I'll begin."
"Do you think I don't know that you can read all the characters in the poems and the hundred dramas? Why should I take the calendar to anybody else?"
"I have never had any education," Jinlian said, with a smile.
"Oh, thank you, thank you," the old woman cried, handing her the calendar. Jinlian examined it, then she said, "Tomorrow is no good, and the day after that is no good either. We shall have to wait."
The old woman took the calendar and hung it on the wall. "If you are willing to do the work you yourself are my lucky star. I need not bother whether the day is lucky or not. Others have looked at the calendar and told me that tomorrow is not a good day for the purpose but that doesn't trouble me."
"Well," Jinlian said, "it may be that a day unlucky for other purposes is most suitable for the making of funeral clothes."
"If you don't mind, then come to my poor house tomorrow."
"Why not bring the material here?" said Jinlian.
"Because I should like to watch you sewing, and there is nobody to look after my house."
"Very well," Jinlian promised. "I will come to your house tomorrow after lunch."
"God bless you! God bless you!" the old lady cried. She went downstairs and away. That evening she told Ximen Qing the result of her efforts, and asked him to come two days later. The next morning the old woman swept out her room, prepared needles and thread, made some tea, and waited for Jinlian.
When Wu Da had eaten his breakfast, he went out with his baskets. His wife pulled up the lattice and ordered Ying'er to look after the house. Then she went by the back door to old woman Wang's house. The old lady, who was as pleased as could be, welcomed her and made her sit down. Then she made a cup of very strong tea, with walnuts and beech-nuts, and gave it to Jinlian. After wiping the table, she brought out the three rolls of silk. Jinlian measured them and cut all the garments out. Then she began to sew. The old woman watched her and poured forth a stream of compliments.
"What marvelous skill! I have lived nearly seventy years and never have I seen so swift a needle or such cunning fingers."
Jinlian sewed till noon. Then old woman Wang prepared lunch, and asked her to have some. Afterwards, Jinlian sewed till it was nearly dark; then she packed up the silk and went home. When Wu Da came in with his baskets, she closed the door and pulled down the blind. Wu Da saw that his wife's face was red, and asked her where she had been.
"I have been with our neighbour, Stepmother Wang," Jinlian said. "She asked me to make some funeral clothes for her and at lunchtime she set out some wine and cakes and insisted that I should have some."
"You ought not to eat her food," Wu Da said. "It is our place to invite her. She asked you to make these clothes, it is true but you should take your meals at home and not trouble her. If you go tomorrow, take some money with you and buy some food and wine in your turn. The proverb says: 'Better a neighbour at hand than a relative far away.' Don't let us spoil the friendship between us. If she will not allow you to return her hospitality, you must bring the clothes here and make them."
Jinlian listened but said nothing. The next day, after breakfast, Wu Da took his baskets and went out. Old woman Wang came over to invite Jinlian to go to her house, and soon they had brought the clothes out and were at work upon them again. Old woman Wang made a cup of tea for Jinlian but at lunchtime Jinlian took three *fen* from her sleeve and gave them to the old woman.
"Stepmother," she said, "it is my turn to buy a cup of wine."
"Oh dear!" the old woman cried, "what can you be thinking about? It was I who asked you to come and make these clothes, and I can't possibly allow you to spend your money as well. Why, if I did, your wine and food would poison me."
"You must blame my foolish husband," Jinlian said, "but he said, if you did not take it kindly, I was to go home."
"If your husband feels like that about it," the old woman said, "I suppose I must keep it." She was very much afraid of doing anything that might interfere with her plans, so she put some of her own money to it and went out to buy better food and wine. Then she invited the woman to join her.
It would seem that in all the world there is not a single woman, no matter how intelligent she may be, who cannot be led astray by some trivial act of kindness. Nine women out of every ten are caught this way.
The old woman prepared some refreshments and enjoyed them with Jinlian. Afterwards they went on sewing and, when evening began to fall, the old woman thanked her very heartily, and she went home once more.
After breakfast on the third day, the old woman waited till Wu Da had gone out, then she went to the back door and called out: "Lady, may I make so bold..." Jinlian said she would come in a moment, and soon they were again in the old woman's room, sitting down to work upon the clothes. The old woman made tea as usual. About midday, Ximen Qing arrived.
He had waited anxiously for this day, and now he dressed himself very elegantly, put three or four taels of silver in his sleeve, and sauntered off to Amethyst Street, with a golden fan in his hand. When he came to the old woman's house, he coughed. Then he called, "Where are you, Stepmother Wang? I haven't seen you for ever so long."
"Who is that calling me?" the old woman cried.
"Ximen Qing."
"I could not imagine who it might be," the old woman said, hurrying to the door, "and here you are! You have just come at the right moment. Come in and see what I have to show you." She took him by the sleeve and led him to her room. "This is the very gentleman who gave me the silk," she said to Jinlian.
Ximen Qing opened his eyes wide and gazed at the woman. The masses of her piled-up hair seemed like clouds of the darkest hue. Her rosy cheeks had all the freshness of spring. She was wearing a white linen coat, a dark red skirt, and a blue stomacher. When Ximen came in, she was sewing but she rose at once and made a reverence to him. He came forward and bowed profoundly. Then she put down the clothes and made a more profound reverence.
"I owe this gentleman a great deal," old woman Wang said. "It was he who gave me this material. I had it in the house a year before I could get anyone to make it up." Then she added, "I am greatly indebted to this lady too, for making the clothes for me. Her sewing is as fine as fine can be. Anything so good and fine is seldom seen in these days. Come and look at it, Sir."
Ximen Qing took up the clothes and examined them. "Indeed," he said, "the lady sews so exquisitely that only an angel could rival her."
Jinlian shyly looked at the ground but she smiled. "Do not make fun of my poor efforts," she said.
"Stepmother,' Ximen Qing said, "I hardly dare to ask you but who is this lady?"
"Guess," said the old woman.
"How can I guess?"
"Sit down then, and I will tell you. Do you remember passing by one day and getting a knock on the head?"
"Yes." Ximen said, "I know it is she who struck me that day but I still don't know who she is."
Jinlian bowed her head more deeply and said with a smile, "It was very careless of your slave to strike you. Please don't be angry with me, my lord."
"How could I possibly be?" Ximen said hastily.
"This lady is the wife of my neighbour, Wu Da," the old woman said.
"Is that so?" Ximen said. "I am afraid I was forgetful of my good manners."
The old woman turned to Jinlian and asked if she knew the gentleman.
"I do not," the woman replied.
"He is one of the wealthiest men in our district and a very good friend of the magistrate. It is Master Ximen. He has thousands and thousands of strings of cash, and keeps a medicine shop near the Town Hall. The money in his house is piled so high that it touches the North Star and even his spoiled rice is enough to fill many barns. His gold is yellow and his silver white. His pearls are round and his precious stones brilliant. He has rhinoceros horns and elephants' tusks. It was I who arranged his first marriage. His wife is the daughter of Captain Wu, a very intelligent woman indeed." Then she turned to Ximen. "Why have you not been to have tea with me lately?"
"I have been very busy attending to my daughter's betrothal," Ximen said, "and that has left me very little leisure."
"Whom is your daughter going to marry?" the old woman said, "and why didn't you get me to arrange the marriage?"
"She is going to marry Chen Jingji, the son of that Chen who is related to General Yang, who commands the Imperial Guard. The young man is seventeen years old and still at his studies. I should have asked you to arrange this marriage but a woman named Wen came from his family to ask for the betrothal papers, and Xue, the flower seller, acted for us. They arranged everything between them. But, Stepmother, we shall be giving a party very soon, and, if you care to come, I shall be delighted to have you join us."
"I was only joking," the old woman said. "The go-betweens in this city are all bitches. When they arranged the marriage, I had no finger in the pie, and, now that the dinner is cooked, they certainly won't wish me to have a bite. There is an old saying that there is never any love lost between those who follow the same profession. No, I will wait until the wedding is over and then I will come with a few humble presents, and I may pick up some of the leavings. That will be the best thing I can do. I can't allow myself to be left completely out of it." They chattered away in this strain, the old woman flattering him, and he muttering any nonsense in return. Meanwhile, Jinlian kept her head modestly bowed and went on with her needlework.
Ximen Qing glanced at her from time to time, and could see the passion within her growing stronger. This delighted him beyond measure, and he was more eager than ever to bring the matter to its consummation. The old woman made two cups of tea. She gave one to Ximen Qing and the other to Jinlian, and said: "Lady, won't you take a cup of tea with this gentleman?" She looked at Ximen, and stroked her cheek gently; it was a sign that five of their ten points were already gained. The power of tea to exhilarate, and the power of wine to bring people together, have always been acknowledged as the go-betweens of love.
"If you had not come here," old woman Wang said, "I should never have had the courage to go to your house and invite you. Good fortune brought you here, and good fortune, again, decided the moment of your coming. But there is an old saying: 'One guest never troubles two hosts.' You have given me money, and this kind lady has been good enough to work for me, and I don't know how I can express my gratitude to either of you. If the fates had not been kind, I should have found it hard to bring you two together. I suggest, Sir, that you take my place as host, and give me something to buy a little wine for the lady."
"I don't know whether I have any money with me," Ximen Qing said, feeling in his sleeve. He brought out a tael of silver, gave it to the old woman, and asked her to buy something with it.
"Not for me, please," Jinlian said but she made no attempt to move. The old woman took the silver and, as she prepared to go out, said, "Lady, I wonder if you will be good enough to keep the gentleman company till I come back. I shall only be a few minutes."
"Stepmother, please don't trouble," Jinlian said but still she remained in her place. The old woman went out, and left Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian alone together.
Ximen's eyes seemed to devour the woman. She looked up at him coyly, then bowed her head again and went on with her sewing. Before long, the old woman was back again with cooked goose and roasted duck, meats of various kinds, and some luscious-looking fruits. She put them on dishes and set them on the table. Then she said to Jinlian: "Won't you put the clothes aside for a while, and take a cup of wine?"
"You drink with his Lordship," the woman said. "It is not for me to take such a liberty."
"You mustn't say that," the old woman cried, "it has all been arranged in your honour." She placed the dishes before them and, when they had taken their places, poured the wine.
"Stepmother," Ximen Qing said, "will you ask the lady to take wine with me?"
Jinlian thanked him. She dared not drink, she said, because a very little wine went to her head.
"Oh, you can hold a good deal," the old woman said, "I know that. Don't make a fuss about a cup or two." Jinlian took the wine and raised her glass to the others. Ximen Qing took up his chopsticks. "Stepmother," he said, "ask the lady to take something to eat." The old lady picked out some tidbits and passed them to the woman. The wine went around three times, and old woman Wang went out to warm some more.
"May I ask your age?" Ximen said.
"I am twenty-five," Jinlian said, bowing her head again.
"Then you and my wife are the same age. Her animal is the Dragon, and she was born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month."
"You are putting Earth and Heaven on the same plane," Jinlian said. "You pay me too great a compliment."
"This lady," old woman Wang said, "is as clever as can be, besides being such a good needlewoman. She knows all the philosophies of all the philosophers, not to speak of backgammon and chess. She can write very nicely too."
"Ah," Ximen said, with a sigh, "but where shall we find another like her?"
"I wouldn't say anything impertinent for the world," old woman Wang said, "but though you have many ladies in your house, I doubt whether there is one among them equal to this lady."
"That is true, I fear," Ximen said. "It is a long story. The fates have been unkind to me and I must own that none of them is really any use."
"Your first wife was good enough," the old woman said.
"Don't talk about her," Ximen cried. "If she had lived, things would have been very different but now there is no real mistress in the house and the whole place is going to rack and ruin. There are three, five, nay seven people—all ready enough to eat my food but not so ready to attend to their household duties."
"How long is it since your first wife died? I have forgotten."
"I hate to talk about it," Ximen said. "My first wife Chen came from a very poor family but she was a clever woman and did all I needed. Unhappily, she died more than three years ago. I have married again but my present wife is always ailing and the business of the household is too much for her. My domestic affairs are in complete disarray. Perhaps that is why I spend so much of my time away from home. If I didn't there would be trouble."
"You must excuse me, Sir," said the old woman, "but your late wife and your present wife together were not so skilled in needlework as this lady, or so attractive in appearance."
"My other wives also," said Ximen, "cannot compare with her."
"But what about the establishment in East Street?" the old woman said, laughing. "Why do you never ask me to tea there?"
"You are thinking of Zhang Xichun, the singing girl?" Ximen said. "I found she was a flighty creature and I have given her up."
"That may be," the old woman continued, "but what about Li Jiao'er, who used to be in the bawdy house? You have been on very good terms with her for a long time."
"Oh, I took her into my household some time ago and, if she proves satisfactory, I shall marry her."
"Then there was Miss Zhuo," the old woman suggested.
"Do not mention her name," Ximen said. "I made her my third wife but a short time ago she fell ill and died."
"Dear me! Dear me!" cried the old woman. "Suppose I found a lady like this, one whom you really liked, and came to your house to talk over the matter? Don't you think it would cause a disturbance?"
"My parents are both dead, and I am my own master. Who would dare say a word to me?"
"However, I may try. Where can I find a lady so much to your liking as this one?"
"Oh, there may be one for all we know," Ximen said. "But I loathe the Fates who control my matrimonial affairs. If they had been more indulgent, I might have found such a woman."
They chatted in this way for some time. At last old woman Wang said, "Just when we are ready for a little more wine, it all seems to have gone. I am sorry to trouble you, Sir but may I buy another jar?" Ximen Qing put his hand in his sleeve. There were still three or four taels there. He gave them all to the old lady, "Here you are," he said. "Any time we are short of wine, you need only go and get it."
The old woman thanked him, and got up. She glanced at Jinlian, who, after drinking three cups of wine, was already consumed with passion. The words that passed between them seemed only to add fuel to the fires that burned within. She bowed her head but still she did not move.

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The sun streams through the painted doorway into the bedchamber.
There stands a maiden whom no gold can buy.
She leans against the door
Her lovely eyes, like beams of sunshine, seek to pursue her lover
But he has gone so far, her tender feet may never hope to follow.

Old woman Wang took the money and started for the door. Smiling, she said to Jinlian, "I must go to the street to buy a jar of wine; you will keep his Lordship company, won't you? If there is a drop left in the jar, warm two cups and drink them with him. The best wine is to be had in East Street. I shall have to go there for it, so I may be away some little time."

"Really I can't drink any more," Pan Jinlian cried. "Please don't go on my account."
"You and his Lordship are no longer strangers," said the old woman, "and you have nothing else to do. Drink a cup of wine with him. Why should you be afraid?"
With her lips Jinlian said she did not wish to drink but her body told another story. The old woman shut the door and fastened it on the outside with a chain, imprisoning the two young people in her room. Then outside in the roadway, she sat down and began to roll some thread. Jinlian saw the old woman go, and pulled her chair to one side. As she settled down again, she glanced swiftly at Ximen Qing. He was sitting on the other side of the table, his eyes wide open, staring at her. At last he managed to speak.
"I forgot to ask your honourable name."
The woman bowed, and answered, smiling, "My unworthy name is Wu."
Ximen Qing pretended that he had not heard properly. "Did you say Du?" he said. Jinlian looked up, and said in a very soft voice, "I did not think you were deaf, Sir."
"I am sorry," Ximen said, "it was my mistake. You said 'Wu.' There are not many people called Wu in Qinghe. There is indeed one fellow who sells cakes outside the Town Hall but he is no bigger than my thumb. His name is Wu, Master Wu Da. Is he a relative of yours by any chance?"
Jinlian flushed. "He is my husband," she said, hanging her head.
Ximen Qing was silent for a long time, and seemed to be thinking very seriously. "How sad! How wrong!" he murmured at last. Jinlian smiled, and glanced at him.
"You have no reason to complain. Why should you say, 'How sad!'?"
"I was thinking how sad it must be for you," he said. He muttered many things, almost unintelligibly. Jinlian still looked down. She played with her skirt, nibbled at her sleeves, and bit her lips, sometimes talking, sometimes glancing slyly at him. Ximen pretended to find the heat trying, and took off his green silk coat.
"Would you mind putting my coat on the old lady's bed?" he said. Jinlian did not offer to take the coat. Keeping her head still turned away, she played with her sleeves and smiled. "Is there anything wrong with your own hands?" she said. "Why do you ask me to do things for you?" Ximen Qing laughed.
"So you won't do a little thing like that for me? Well, I suppose I must do it myself." He leaned over the table and put his coat on the bed. As he did so, he brushed the table with his sleeve and knocked down a chopstick. Luck favoured him; the chopstick came to rest beneath the woman's skirt. Ximen, who had already drunk more wine than was good for him, invited her to join him. Then he wanted his chopsticks to help her to some of the dishes. He looked about. One of them was missing. Jinlian looked down, pushed the chopstick with her toe, and said, laughing, "Isn't this it?" Ximen Qing went to her, and bent down. "Ah, here it is!" he cried but instead of picking up the chopstick, he took hold of her embroidered shoe.
Jinlian laughed. "I shall shout, if you are so naughty."
"Be kind to me, Lady," Ximen said, going down on his knees. As he spoke, he gently stroked her silken garments.
"It is horrid of you to pester me so," Jinlian cried. "I shall box your ears."
"Lady," he said, "if your blows should cause my death, it would be a happy end."
Without giving her time to object, he carried her to old woman Wang's bed, took off his clothes and, after unloosing her girdle, lay down with her. Their happiness reached its culmination.
In the days when Jinlian had performed the act of darkness with Zhang, that miserable old man had never been able to offer any substantial contribution to the proceedings, and not once had she been satisfied. Then she married Wu Da. You may imagine the prowess that might be expected from Master Tom Thumb. It could hardly be described as heroic. Now she met Ximen Qing, whose capacity in such matters was unlimited and whose skill was exceptionally refined and cunning.
The mandarin ducks, with necks entwined, sport upon the water.
The phoenix and his mate, their heads close pressed together, fly among the blossoms.
Joyful and tireless, the tree puts forth twin branches
The girdle, tied in a lovers' knot, is full of sweetness.
He, the red-lipped one, thirsts for a close embrace
She, of the powdered cheeks, awaits it eagerly.
The silken hose are raised on high
And two new moons appear above his shoulders.
The golden hairpins fall
And on the pillow rests a bank of lowering clouds.
They swear eternal oaths by ocean and by mountain
Seeking a thousand new delights.
The clouds are bashful and the rain is shy
They play ten thousand naughty tricks.
"Qia Qia," the oriole cries.
Each sucks the nectar from the other's lips.
The cherry lips breathe lightly, lightly.
In those willowy hips the passion beats
The mocking eyes are bright like stars
Tiny drops of sweat are like a hundred fragrant pearls
The sweet full breasts tremble
The dew, like a gentle stream, reaches the heart of the peony
They taste the joys of love in perfect harmony
For stolen joys, in truth, are ever the most sweet.
Just when they had done and were putting on their clothes again, old woman Wang pushed open the door and came in, clapping her hands as though she had never been more surprised in her life.
"A fine state of affairs," she said. Ximen Qing and Jinlian were extremely embarrassed.
"Oh, splendid, splendid!" the old woman said to Jinlian. "I asked you to come here to make clothes, not to make love with someone else's husband. If your Wu Da found this out, he would blame me. I shall have to go and explain the matter to him at once." She turned, and started out. Jinlian caught her quickly by the skirt. She hid her blushing face and could only get out a single sentence: "Spare me, Stepmother."
"You must make me a promise, then," the old woman said. "From this day forward, you must deceive Wu Da and give his Lordship here whatever he desires. If I call you early, you must come early. If I call you late, you must come late. Then I will say no more about it. But, if there should be a day when you do not come, I shall tell Wu Da."
Jinlian was so abashed that she could find nothing to say. "Well," said the old woman, "what are you going to do about it? I must have an answer now." "I will come," the woman whispered. Old woman Wang turned to Ximen Qing. "I need say no more to you, Sir. This is a fine piece of work, and you owe it all to me. You must not forget your promise. You must keep your word. If you try to wriggle out of it, I shall be compelled to speak to Wu Da."
"Don't worry, Stepmother," Ximen said, "I shall not go back on my word."
"I haven't too much confidence in either of you," old woman Wang said. "Give me a pledge of some sort and then I'll believe you."
Ximen Qing took a golden pin from his head and set it in Jinlian's hair. She took it out again and put it in her sleeve, for she was afraid that if she went home wearing it, Wu Da would wish to know where it had come from. She hesitated to produce any pledge herself but the old woman caught her by the sleeve and, finding a white silk handkerchief, handed it to Ximen Qing. Then they all drank several cups of wine. By this time it was getting dark and, saying that it was time for her to go home, Jinlian said good-bye to old woman Wang and Ximen Qing and went to her house by the back way. She pulled down the blind and, soon afterwards, Wu Da came in.
Old woman Wang looked at Ximen Qing.
"Did I play my cards well?" she said.
"No one could have done better," said Ximen.
"Were you satisfied?"
"Perfectly."
"She comes of singing girl stock," the old woman said, "and she must have had plenty of experience. I am very proud that I have been able to bring you two together, especially since I did it all by my own cleverness. Mind you give me what you promised."
"I will send you the silver as soon as I reach home."
"My eyes have seen the banner of victory and my ears have heard a sweet message," the old woman said, "but don't wait until my coffin is being carried out for burial, and then send money for the choirboys."
Ximen Qing laughed. He saw that the street was deserted, put on his eyeshades, and went home.
The next day he came again to the old woman's house. The old lady made tea for him and asked him to sit down. He took ten taels of silver from his sleeve and gave it to her. Money seems to produce an extraordinary effect upon people everywhere. As soon as the old woman's black eyes beheld this snow-white silver, she was as happy as could be. She took it, and twice made reverence to him. "I thank you, Sir," she said, "with all my heart."
"Wu Da is still at home," she continued, "but I will go over to his house and pretend I wish to borrow a gourd." She went by the back way to her neighbour's house. Jinlian was giving her husband his breakfast when she heard the knocking at the door, and told Ying'er to see who was there. It is Grandmother Wang," the girl said, "she has come to borrow a water gourd."
"I will lend you a water jug, Stepmother," Jinlian said, "but won't you come in and sit down a while?"
"There is nobody to look after my house," the old woman said, beckoning with her finger to Jinlian, thus giving her to understand that Ximen Qing had come. She took the gourd and went away, and Jinlian hustled her husband over his breakfast and packed him off with his baskets. She went upstairs and redressed herself, putting on beautiful new clothes, and told Ying'er to watch the house. "I am going to your Grandmother Wang's but I shall be back in a moment. If your father comes home, let me know at once or it will be the worse for your little bottom." She went to the tea shop.
Jinlian came, and to Ximen Qing it seemed that she had come straight down from Heaven. Side by side, close pressed together, they sat. Old woman Wang gave them tea. "Did Wu Da ask you any questions when you got home yesterday?" she said.
"He asked me if I had finished your clothes, and I told him that the funeral shoes and socks had still to be made."
The old woman hastily set wine before them, and they drank together, very happily. Ximen Qing delighted in every detail of the woman's form. She seemed to him even more beautiful than when he had first seen her. The little wine she had taken brought roses to her pale face and, with her cloudlike hair, she might have been a fairy, more beautiful than Chang E.
Ximen Qing could not find words to express his admiration. He gathered her in his arms, and lifted her skirts that he might see her dainty feet. She was wearing shoes of raven-black silk, no broader than his two fingers. His heart was overflowing with delight. Mouth to mouth they drank together, and smiled. Jinlian asked how old he was. "I am twenty-seven. I was born on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month." Then she said, "How many ladies are there in your household?" and he said, "Besides the mistress of my house, there are three or four but with none of them am I really satisfied." Again she asked, "How many sons have you?" and he answered, "I have no sons, only one little girl who is shortly to be married." Then it was his turn to ask her questions.
He took from his sleeve a box, gilded on the outside and silver within. There were fragrant tea leaves in it and some small sweetmeats. Placing some of them on his tongue, he passed them to her mouth. They embraced and hugged one another; their cries and kissings made noise enough but old woman Wang went in and out, carrying dishes and warming the wine, and paid not the slightest attention to them. They played their amorous games without any interference from her. Soon they had drunk as much as they desired, and a fit of passion swept over them. Ximen Qing's desire could no longer be restrained; he disclosed the treasure that sprang from his loins, and made the woman touch it with her delicate fingers. From his youth upwards he had constantly played with the maidens who live in places of ill-fame, and he was already wearing the silver clasp that had been washed with magic herbs. Upstanding, it was, and flushed with pride, the black hair strong and bristling. A mighty warrior in very truth.
A warrior of stature not to be despised
At times a hero and at times a coward.
Who, when for battle disinclined,
As though in drink sprawls to the east and west.
But, when for combat he is ready,
Like a mad monk he plunges back and forth
And to the place from which he came returns.
Such is his duty.
His home is in the loins, beneath the navel.
Heaven has given him two sons
To go wherever he goes
And, when he meets an enemy worthy of his steel,
He will attack, and then attack again.
Then Jinlian took off her clothes. Ximen Qing fondled the fragrant blossom. No down concealed it; it had all the fragrance and tenderness of fresh-made pastry, the softness and the appearance of a new-made pie. It was a thing so exquisite that all the world would have desired it.
Tender and clinging, with lips like lotus petals
Yielding and gentle, worthy to be loved.
When it is happy, it puts forth its tongue
And welcomes with a smile.
When it is weary, it is content
To stay where Nature put it
At home in Trouser Village
Among the scanty herbage.
But, when it meets a handsome gallant
It strives with him and says no word.
After that day, Jinlian came regularly to the old woman's house to sport with Ximen Qing. Love bound them together as it were with glue; their minds and hearts were united as if with gum.
There is an old saying: "Good news never leaves the house but ill news spreads a thousand miles." It was not long before all the neighbours knew what was going on. Only Wu Da remained ignorant.
In Qinghe there lived a boy called Qiao; he was about fifteen years old. As he had been born in Yunzhou, where his father was on military service, he was called Yun'ge. His father was now grown old, and they lived together alone. The boy was by no means without craft. He kept himself by selling fresh fruits in the different wineshops, and Ximen Qing often gave him small sums of money. One day he had filled his basket with snow-white pears and was carrying them about the streets, on the lookout for his patron. Somebody he chanced to meet said to him, "Yun'ge, I can tell you where to find him."
"Where can I find him, Uncle?" the boy said. "Tell me if you please."
"Ximen," the man said, "is carrying on with the wife of Wu Da, the cake seller. Everyday he goes to old woman Wang's house in Amethyst Street. Most likely you will find him there now. There is nothing to prevent you going straight into the room."
Yun'ge thanked the man, and went along Amethyst Street with his basket till he came to old woman Wang's tea shop. The old woman was sitting on a small chair by the door, making thread. The boy put down his basket, looked at her, and said, "Greetings to you, Stepmother."
"What do you want, Yun'ge?" the old woman said.
"I have come to see his Lordship in the hope of getting thirty or fifty cash to help support my father," the boy told her.

"What 'Lordship' are you talking about?" asked the old woman.
"You know him."
"Well, I suppose every gentleman has some sort of a name," the old woman said.
"This gentleman's name has two characters in it."
"What two characters?"
"You are trying to fool me," Yun'ge said. "It is his Lordship Ximen to whom I am going to speak." He started to go into the house. The old woman caught him. "Where are you going, you little monkey? Don't you know the difference between the inside and the outside of people's houses?"
"I shall find him in the room," the boy said.
The old woman cursed him. "What makes you think you will find his Lordship in my house, you little rascal?"
"Stepmother, don't try to keep all the pickings for yourself. Leave a little gravy for me. I know all about it."
"What do you know?" the old woman cried. "You are a young scoundrel."
"And you are one of those people who would scrape a bowl clean with a knife. You don't mean to lose even a single drop of gravy. If I began to talk about this business, I shouldn't be surprised if my brother, the cake seller, had something to say about it."
This made the old woman furious. She was touched to the quick. "You little monkey," she screamed, "how dare you come to my house to let off your farts."
"Little monkey I may be," said Yun'ge, "but you're an old whoremonger, you old lump of dog meat."
The old woman caught him and boxed his ears twice.
"Why are you hitting me?" cried the boy.
"You son of a thief, you little monkey, make a noise like that and I'll thrash you out of the place."
"You knavish old scorpion," Yun'ge cried, "you've no right to beat me." The old woman struck him again, and drove him out into the street, tossing his basket after him. The pears rolled all over the street, four here and five there. There was nothing the little monkey could do. He grumbled and cried as he picked them up. He shook his fist in the direction of the teashop, and shouted, "Wait, you old worm! When I've told about this, you'll be ruined, and then there'll be nothing at all for you." The young monkey picked up his basket and went off to the street to see if he could find Wu Da.

## 025

**Yün-ko lends a Hand by Cursing Dame Wang, the old woman Grandma Wang Devises a Plan, tells his Nibs, & Instigates Ximen Qing; The Hussy Adulterous Wife Pan Jinlian Administers Poison to her old Husband Wu the Elder, the Murder of Wu Da, & Hsi-men Ch'ing Suborns Ho the 9th**

The aggrieved boy, basket in hand, went in search of Wu the Elder. After turning through a couple of streets, he saw the short man coming towards him, carrying his hampers of buns. Yunge halted.
"It's only a few days since I saw you! What have you been eating that's made you so fat?"
Wu rested his load. "I'm still the same. What's fat about me?"
"I tried to buy some bran the other day but couldn't find any anywhere. Everyone said you had some in your house."
"I'm not raising geese or ducks. What would I want with bran?"
"How is it then that you're stuffed so fat you don't even steam when you're trussed up by the heels and cooked in the pot?"
"Mocking me, eh, you young scamp! My wife doesn't sleep with other men. Why are you calling me a cuckold duck?"
"She doesn't sleep with other men, she just sleeps with another man!"
Wu clutched the boy. "Who is he?"
Yunge laughed. "All you do is grab me. But would you dare to bite his pecker off?"
"Tell me who he is, little brother, and I'll give you ten hot buns!"
"I don't want your buns. But if you treat me to three cups of wine, I'll talk."
"If it's drink you want, come with me." Wu picked up his carrying-pole and led the boy to a small tavern. He rested his load, took out a few buns, and ordered some meat and a dram of wine, all of which was set before Yunge.
"That's enough wine," said the young rascal, "but I could use a few more slices of meat."
"Tell me about it, little brother!"
"Keep your shirt on. I will just as soon as I've finished eating. Don't let it get you down. I'm gong to help you to catch him!"
Wu watched the boy polish off the meat and wine. "Now will you tell me?" he pressed.
"Feel these bumps on my head, if you want to know!"
"How did you get them?"
"Today I went looking for Ximen Qing with a basket of snowy pears, to get a little money out of him. I couldn't find him anywhere. Then a fellow on the street said: 'He cozies up with Wu's wife in Grandma Wang's teashop. He goes there everyday.' I was hoping to earn forty or fifty coppers but that sow bitch Grandma Wang wouldn't let me go in and see him! She pounded my skull and threw me out! That's why I've come looking for you. What I said when we met was only to make you mad. Otherwise you wouldn't have asked me about it."
"Can this really be true?"
"There you go again! A real patsy! Those two are having themselves a time. The minute you leave they get together in Grandma Wang's. And you ask whether it's true of false!"
"Frankly, little brother, I have been suspicious lately. She goes over to Grandma Wang's to sew everyday but when she comes back, her face is flushed. So that's what it is! I'll put my pole and hampers away and go over and catch them in the act. How about it?"
"Where are your brains? You couldn't do it alone. That Grandma Wang is a tough old bitch. You'd never get by her. The three of them must have some signal. They'd hide your wife somewhere as soon as you showed up. And that Ximen Qing is a devil. He could take on twenty like you. You wouldn't catch your wife, and he'd give you a beating. He's rich and influential. He'd probably file a complaint as well, and sue you in court. You don't have any strong backing. He'd finish you off!"
"Everything you say is so, little brother. How am I going to get back at them?"
"That old bitch pummeled me. I want to get back at her, too. Now here's what you do: When you go home tonight, don't blow up, act as if you don't know anything, the same as any other day. Tomorrow, make less buns than usual. I'll be waiting for you at the end of Purple Stone Street. If Ximen has gone in there, I'll call to you. You follow me, carrying your hampers, and wait nearby. I'll go and sass the old bitch. She's sure to sail into me. I'll toss my basket out into the street. That's the signal for you to go charging in. I'll butt the old bitch with my head and hold her off. You rush into the back room and start yelling that you've been wronged ... How's that for an idea?"
"All right! We'll do it! But it's going to be hard on you, little brother. Take these strings of cash and buy some rice for yourself. Wait for me tomorrow morning at the entrance to Purple Stone Street."
The boy accepted the money, and several hot buns, and departed. Wu paid the bill, shouldered his carrying-pole and went out to hawk his wares.
Generally, Golden Lotus scolded and chivied her husband in a hundred ways. But she knew she was being unreasonable, and lately she had been treating him somewhat better. When he returned home that evening, he behaved as usual and said nothing out of the ordinary.
"Have you been drinking?" she asked.
"I had a few cups with another pedlar."
Golden Lotus set the food on the table, and they ate. That night nothing special happened.
The next morning after breakfast Wu prepared only two or three trays of buns to put in his hampers. All the girl's thoughts were of Ximen, and she paid no attention to what her husband was doing. Wu shouldered his carrying-pole and set out. No sooner had he gone than Golden Lotus hurried over to Grandma Wang's to wait for Ximen.
When Wu arrived at the entry to Purple Stone Street, he found Yunge already there with his basket.
"What's happening?" Wu asked.
"It's early yet," said the boy. "You sell some buns for a while. He's almost sure to come. Don't go too far away."
Wu was off and back like a whirling cloud.
"Watch for my basket," the boy reminded him. "When I fling it out, you rush in."
Wu stored his pole and hampers in a safe place. Of that we'll say no more.

We'll talk rather of Yunge, and how, with his basket, he entered the teashop.
"Old bitch," he cried. "What right did you have to hit me yesterday?"
Grandma Wang's temper had not improved. She jumped to her feet and shouted: "There's nothing between us, young ape! How dare you come cursing me again?"
"You're a bawd, I say, and a whore-mongering old bitch. So what!"
In a fury, Grandma Wang grabbed Yunge and pummeled him.
"Hit me, will you!" yelled the boy. He threw his basket out into the street. Seizing her around the waist, he butted her in the belly. She staggered backwards until brought up short against the wall, the young scamp's head still rammed into her mid-section.
Wu, raising the front of his gown, strode quickly into the teashop. Grandma Wang tried frantically to stop him but the boy held her firmly pinned to the wall.
"Wu the Elder is here!" She loudly exclaimed.
Golden Lotus, in the rear room, became frantic. She ran over and leaned hard against the door. Ximen dived under the bed. Wu tried to push the door open but couldn't budge it.
"Fine goings-on!" he shouted.
The girl, distraught, stood pressing against the door. "You're always shooting off your mouth what a great fighter you are but in an emergency, you're useless!" she spat at Ximen. "A paper tiger scares you silly!"
This was a plain hint for Ximen to strike Wu down and escape. The recumbent gentleman under the bed, stimulated by these words, crawled out. He pulled open the door and cried: "Don't fight!"
Wu tried to grab him but Ximen lashed out with his right foot and caught the short man square in the centre of the chest, knocking him flat on his back. Ximen then fled. Yunge, seeing that things had gone wrong, pushed the old woman aside and also ran. The neighbours knew what a tough customer Ximen was. They dared not intervene.
Grandma Wang raised up Wu the Elder. Blood was flowing from his mouth, his skin was a waxy yellow. She called Golden Lotus. The wife emerged from the rear room, scooped a bowlful water and brought him round. She and Grandma Wang, supporting Wu under the arms, helped him through the back door and up the stairs of his house, where they put him to bed. Nothing further happened that night.
The next day Ximen inquired and learned there were no repercussions, so he met Golden Lotus as usual. They hoped her husband would die. Wu was ill for five days and couldn't leave his bed. When he wanted soup or water she wouldn't give it to him. When he called her she didn't answer. Each day she made herself up alluringly and went out, returning always with a rosy face. Wu several times nearly fainted from sheer rage but she paid him no heed.
He called her to him and said: "I know what you're up to. I caught the two of you together. You got your lover to kick me in the chest, and I'm more dead than alive, yet you two are still going on with your games! I may die—I'm no match for you. But don't forget my brother Wu Song! You know what he's like! Sooner or later he's coming back. Do you think he's going to let you get away with it? Have pity on me. Help me recover quickly, and when he come home I won't say anything. If you don't treat me right, he'll have something to say to the both of you!"
Golden Lotus did not reply but went next door and told Grandma Wang and Ximen what her husband had said. Ximen felt his blood run cold. He groaned.
"Constable Wu is the man who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge. He was the boldest fighter in Qinghe County! We've been having this affair for some time now, and we've been marvellous together in body and in mind. I forgot all about your husband's brother! What are we going to do? This is a terrible situation!"
Grandma Wang laughed coldly. "I've never seen the like. You're the helmsman and I'm only a passenger but I'm not worried and you're in a flap!"
"Though it shames me to say it, I don't know how to deal with this sort of thing. Have you any idea how to cover for us?"
"Do you want to be long-term lover, or short?"
"What do you mean?"
"If you're satisfied with being short-term lovers, separate after today and when Wu recovers, apologize to him. Nothing will be said when Wu Song comes home. When he's sent out on another mission, you can get together again. If you want to be long-term lovers, and not have to be frightened and alarmed everyday, I have a clever scheme. Of course, you may not be able to do it."
"Save us, godmother! We want to be long-term lovers!"
"The thing we need for this scheme other households don't have. But yours, thank Heaven, does."
"If you ask for my eyes, I'll gouge them out! What is this thing?"
"The wretch is very ill. Take advantage of his misery to do him in. Get some arsenic from your drug shop, let this lady buy medicine for heart pains, mix the two together and finish the dwarf off. She can have him cremated, so there won't be any traces. When Wu Song comes back, what will he be able to do? You know the old sayings: 'Brother and sister-in-law must keep their distance.' 'Parents pick the first husband, widows choose the second.' A brother-in-law can't interfere. You continue to meet secretly for half a year or so till the mourning period is over, then marry her. You'll be long-term lovers, and merry till the end of your days. What do you think of my plan?"
"It's a frightening crime, godmother! Never mind. We'll do it! All or nothing!"
"Good. Pull it out by the roots and it won't grow again. Leave any roots and it sprouts once more, come spring. Get the arsenic, Right Honourable. I'll tell the lady how to use it. When it's over, you'll have to reward me well."
"Naturally! That goes without saying!"
Not long after, Ximen arrived with the arsenic and gave it to Grandma Wang. The old woman looked at Golden Lotus.
"I'll teach you how to mix this in the medicine. Didn't Wu ask you to treat him better? Soften him up with a little kindness. He'll ask you to buy some medicine for his heart. Put this arsenic in it. When he wakes up at night, pour the mixture down his throat, then get out of the way. Once it starts working in him, it will split his guts, and he'll shout and scream. Muffle his cries with a quilt. Don't let anyone hear. Have a pot of hot water boiling, and soak a rag. He'll bleed from every opening, he'll bite his lips. When he dies, remove the quilt and clean away all the blood with the rag. Then into the coffin, off to the cremation, and not a friggin thing will happen!"
"It sounds all right," said Golden Lotus. "Only I'm afraid I'll go soft! I won't be able to handle the corpse!"
"That's easy. Just knock on the wall, and I'll come up and help you."
"Do the job carefully you two," said Ximen. "I'll be back at dawn tomorrow to hear your report." He stood up and departed.
Grandma Wang crushed the arsenic granules with her fingers into powder and gave it to Golden Lotus to hide.
The girl crossed over to her own house and went upstairs. Wu was barely breathing. He seemed to be at death's door. She sat down on the edge of the bed and pretended to weep.
"Why are you crying?" asked Wu.
Golden Lotus dabbed at her eyes. "I made a mistake and let that scoundrel beguile me. I never thought he'd kick you! I've heard about a very good medicine. I'd like to buy it for you but I'm afraid you don't trust me, so I haven't dared!"
"Save my life and we'll forget about the whole thing. I won't hold it against you, and I'll say nothing to Wu Song. Go buy the medicine quickly! Save me!"
The girl took some coppers, hurried to Grandma Wang's house and sent her out for the medicinal powders. Then she brought the packet upstairs and showed it to Wu.
"This is heart balm," she said. "The doctor in the drug shop says you should take it in the middle of the night and cover your head with two quilts to make you perspire. Tomorrow, you'll be able to get up."
"That's fine! I know it's a lot of trouble but stay awake till midnight and give me the potion."
"Don't worry about a thing. Just sleep. I'll look after you."

The day drew to a close and darkness gathered. Golden Lotus lit a lamp. Then she went down to the kitchen, set a pot of water on the stove and put a rag in to boil. When she heard the watchman's drum thump three times, she spilled the arsenic powder into a cup, filled a bowl with hot water, and took them both up the stairs. She called to her husband.
"Where did you put the medicine?"
"Here under the sleeping mat, beside my pillow. Mix it quickly and give it to me."
Golden Lotus took the packet of medicinal powders, sprinkled them into the cup so that they covered the arsenic, then added hot water and stirred with a silver pin which she drew from her hair. Raising Wu with her left hand, she held the cup to his lips with her right.
"It's very bitter," he said after the first sip.
"As long as it cures you, what do you care how bitter it is."
He opened his mouth for another sip, and the girl tilted the cup and forced its entire contents down his throat. She let him fall back on his pillow and swiftly got off the bed.
Wu gasped. "My stomach hurts! The pain, the pain! I can't stand it!"
The girl grabbed two quilts from the foot of the bed and flung them over his face.
"I can't breathe!" he cried.
"The doctor says I should make you sweat! You'll get well quicker!"
Before Wu could reply, the girl, afraid he would struggle, leaped onto the bed and knelt astride his body, pressing down on the sides of the quilts with both hands. He gasped, panted till his intestines split asunder. Then he breathed his last and lay still.
Golden Lotus pulled back the quilts. Wu had lacerated his lips with his teeth, he had bled from every orifice. Frightened, the girl jumped down from the bed and rapped on the wall. Grandma Wang heard the signal, came to the back door and coughed. Golden Lotus went downstairs and opened the door.
"Is it done?" asked the old woman.
"It's done all right but I'm absolutely limp. I can't go on!"
"There's nothing to it. I'll help you."
Grandma Wang rolled up her sleeves, filled a bucket with hot water, put the rag in, and carried them upstairs. Rolling back the quilts, she wiped around Wu's mouth, cleaned up the blood that had spewed from his seven openings, and covered him with his clothes. Slowly, the two women toted him down the stairs. They found an old door and laid him out on it. They combed his hair, tied a kerchief round his head, put on his clothes, shoes and stockings, spread a piece of fine white silk over his face, and covered his body with a clean quilt. Then they went up stairs and set the bedroom in order, and Grandma Wang returned home.
Golden Lotus commenced falsely bewailing the departure of her family supporter. Reader please note, women's lamentations are of three kinds the world over: With both tears and sound it is called crying, with tears and without sound it is called weeping, without tears and with sound it is called wailing. Golden Lotus wailed. By then it was the fifth watch.
The sky was not yet light when Ximen came to hear the news. Grandma Wang related it in detail. Ximen gave her money to buy a coffin and other funerary equipment. He told her to call the girl. Golden Lotus crossed over to Grandma Wang's.
"Wu the Elder is dead," she said. "You're my sole support from now on."
"That goes without saying."
"There's only one more difficulty," said Grandma Wang. "Ho, the local coroner, is a clever man. I'm afraid he may notice something, and not agree to the encoffining."
"Don't worry about that," said Ximen. "I'll have a few words with him. He wouldn't dare go against me."
"You do that, then," said the old woman. "Don't delay."
Ximen promptly left.
By the time the sun was well risen Grandma Wang had bought the coffin, candles and paper ingots, and returned home and cooked some soup and rice for Golden Lotus. They lit a mourning lamp and placed it beside the body. Neighbours came to offer their condolences. The girl covered her powdered face and pretended to weep.
"What illness did Wu the Elder die of?" queried the neighbours.
"He had pains in his heart! They got worse everyday! It was hopeless! And last night, at the third watch, he left me!" Golden Lotus sobbed loudly.
The neighbours knew there was something peculiar about his death but they were afraid to probe too deeply. They gave only the usual advice: "The dead are gone but the living must carry on. Don't take it so hard."
Hypocritically, the girl thanked them, and the neighbours left.
When the coffin was delivered, Grandma Wang sent for Coroner Ho.
All the funerary equipment had been purchased, as well as everything that was needed in the house. Two monks were hired to keep vigil later on. Ho dispatched a few of his men to get things ready.
At mid-morning Ho set out slowly for his destination. When he reached the entry to Purple Stone Street he was hailed by Ximen Qing.
"Where to?"
"I'm on my way to inspect the body of Wu the Elder, the bun seller."
"Can you spare a minute for a chat?"
Ho went with Ximen to a small tavern in a side street, and entered a booth.
"Please sit at the head of the table," said Ximen.
"How can a man of my rank presume to sit together with your Honour?"
"You mustn't treat me like a stranger. Please be seated."
The two sat down and Ximen called for a bottle of good wine. The waiter laid out fruit and vegetables to go with the wine and poured the drinks. Ho was curious. "He never drank with me before," he thought. "There's more here than meets the eye ..."
They drank for an hour or so and Ximen took a ten-ounce bar of silver from his sleeve and placed it on the table. "Please don't scorn this as too trivial. There will be more later on."
"I've done nothing at all," Ho protested, with courteously clasped hands. "How can I accept Right Honourable's silver? Even if there is some way I can be of service, I still wouldn't want it."
"No need to stand on ceremony. Please take it, and I'll tell you."
"Tell me, by all means. I'd like to hear."
"Well, it's this. Soon you'll be going to the house of the deceased, and there also they'll give you some money. When you examine the body of Wu the Elder, I want you to do everything just right. Let an embroidered quilt cover all. That's all I have to say."
"But of course. Why not? How can I take money for a little thing like that?"
"If you don't take the silver it means you're refusing me."
He knew that Ximen was a rascal who had influence with the officials, and he was afraid of him. He had no choice but to accept. They drank several more cups. Ximen told the waiter to charge it to his account, and come tomorrow to his shop for payment. The two walked down the stairs and left the tavern.
"Don't forget," said Ximen. "And keep this quiet. I'll reward you further." He walked away.
Ho's suspicions were aroused. "This is very odd," he mused. "Why should he give me so much money before I inspect the body of Wu the Elder? There must be something fishy!"
At the door of the house, he found his men waiting. "What was the cause of death?" he asked.
"Pains in the heart, his wife says," the men replied.
He raised the door curtain and entered. Grandma Wang greeted him.
"We've been waiting for you."
"A small matter delayed me."
Golden Lotus, wearing plain drab garments, came from the inner room, feigning tears.
"Calm yourself," Ho urged. "What a pity that Wu the Elder had to return to Heaven."
The girl dabbed her eyes. "You don't know the half of it! Who would have thought that he'd die only a few days after his heart started to pain him! I'm so miserable!"
Ho looked her over. "I've heard about Wu's wife but I've never seen her," he said to himself. "So this is the kind of woman he had! There's reason behind those ten ounces of silver of Ximen!" Ho walked over to the body, opened the shroud, and raised the silk covering Wu's face. The coroner had eyes like a hawk, and what he saw caused him to fall over backwards, blood spurting from his mouth. His nails turned blue, lips purple, skin yellow, his eyes lackluster. Truly, his body was like the waning moon being devoured by the mountains at the fifth watch, and life flickered like a dying lamp at midnight.

Now the Young'un, filled with fruitless rage against Mrs. Wang for the beating she had given him, gathered up his pears and dashed off to look for the Midget. He traversed two streets, turned a corner, and there, coming towards him down the street with his carrying-pole and his load of bread, was the Midget.
The Young'un stopped in his tracks and said to the Midget: "I ain't seen yer lately. How come yer gettin' so fat?"
The Midget put down his carrying-pole and said: "I'm the same as I always was, who says I'm getting fat?"
"I wanted some poultry feed the other day an' I couldn't find none. They told me you'd 'ave some."
"Why would I have poultry feed? I don't keep ducks or geese!"
"Oh, yer don't keep geese, doncha? But yer a fat goose yerself and if they hung yer up by the heels in the pot, yer 'd cook lovely!"
"Hey, you watch your tongue, you little twerp! My wife hasn't got a lover, why d'you call me a goose?"
"If yer wife hasn't got a lover, it must be the lover what's got her!"
The Midget grabbed the boy. "Who is it?" he shouted.
The Young'un said: "That's a laugh. Pull me about, go on but it won't do no injury to what he's got between 'is legs."
"Listen, lad," said the Midget, changing his tone. "If you tell me who it is I'll let you have ten rolls."
"Bugger yer rolls! But if you treated me to three cups of wine I'd tell yer."
"So you drink wine, do you?" said the Midget. "All right, come with me, then."
The Midget picked up the carrying-pole and took the Young'un off to a little wineshop. When he'd put his pole down he took out several rolls, bought some meat and ordered a bottle of wine. He told the boy to help himself.
"The wine'll do, don't need no more," the boy said, "but yer can order an extra helping of meat."
"Come on, lad," the Midget said. "You'd better tell me what you know."
"Don't rush me," the boy said. "I'll tell yer when I've eaten. And if yer keep yer 'ead, I'll help yer to nab 'im."
The Midget watched the boy eat and drink. Then he said: "Now are you going to tell me?"
"If yer so interested, just feel these lumps I got on me 'ead!"
"Hm, how did you get them?"
"I'll tell yer. I 'ad this basket of pears, see, and I were looking for 'is Nibs, Mr. Xi-men, to try and get some money out of 'im but I couldn't find 'im nowhere. Then I met someone in the street who said, 'He's at Mrs. Wang's teahouse. He's got something going with the Midget's wife, they meet there everyday.' Well, I were hoping to earn meself a spot of cash, see, so I went down there but that old bitch, Mrs. Wang, wouldn't let me go in to 'im. She started beating me up. That's why I been looking for yer. I only spoke to yer like I did just now in order to get yer worked up, I thought it were the best way to get yer to start asking me about it."
"Is all this true?" the Midget asked.
"There yer go again! I always said you was an idiot. I tell yer, them two's 'aving a great old time. They just wait till you go out, and then they get together at Mrs. Wang's. And all yer do is sit here asking if it's true or not!"
The Midget thought and said: "All right, lad, I'll tell you what. My wife does go off everyday to Mrs. Wang's to make clothes. And she is a bit flushed always when she gets home, and, yes, I was beginning to wonder! That must be it! I'm going to get rid of this load and then I'll go and catch them at it, how about that?"
"Yer supposed to be a grown-up, how come yer 'aven't got more sense! Yer must know what a crafty devil that old woman is! If yer get into her clutches yer'll never escape. Anyway, they must 'ave a signal. When they see yer coming, yer wife'll hide. And 'is Nibs ain't no pushover, he could take care of twenty like you! Yer won't catch them and yer'll get yerself a good beating into the bargain. Besides, 'e's got all that money and influence, 'e'll make an accusation and yer'll wind up in court. And don't expect no one to speak up for yer. Yer'll lose your life for nothing!"
"You're dead right," said the Midget despondently. "How am I ever going to get even?"
"That old bitch beat me up, so I owe her one. I'll tell yer what: go 'ome a bit later than usual tonight and don't let on that yer know anything. Don't go shooting yer mouth off, mind. Just do like yer always do. Tomorrow morning, don't take so much bread out to sell. I'll wait for yer down the end of the road, and if I sees 'is Nibs go in I'll come and fetch yer. What yer do then is, yer wait with yer stuff near the teahouse, on the left, and I'll go in first and get the old bitch angry. She's bound to start hitting me. When I chuck my basket out into the street, you rush in. I'll hold her up, somehow, while yer barge straight in, shouting that yer bein' cuckolded. 'Ow about that?"
"Well, if it works, I shall be in your debt, lad. But wait, here's some silver you can have to go and buy rice. You come early, then, tomorrow, and wait for me on the corner of Redstone Road."
The Young'un picked up the silver and some rolls and departed. As for the Midget, after paying the bill he took up the carrying-pole and went off to do one more round before going home.
Now we have to relate that Jinlian, although she was in the habit of yelling at the Midget and bullying him in a hundred ways, had recently become very attentive towards him, because she felt herself at fault, and had taken to offering him all manner of little comforts. As the poem says:
Though the trollop feigns when home she steals,
*Soft words to hide what she really feels;*
*On her next door beau he's not a patch;*
The evil plan begins to hatch.
When the Midget came home with his pole that evening it was just like any other day; he said nothing. Jinlian asked him: "Shall I go and get some wine, dear?"
"No," he answered, "I've just had a few cups with a merchant."
After that she gave him his dinner, and nothing else happened that evening.
Next day, after breakfast, he made only two or three baskets of bread that he loaded onto his carrying-pole. His wife's thoughts were full of her lover, so she wasn't going to notice if he made a little more or less. Finally he left. Jinlian, who could hardly wait for him to go, went straight off to Mrs. Wang's to await her lover.
Meanwhile the Midget had arrived with his carrying-pole at the entrance to Redstone Road, where he met the Young'un, who was waiting for him there, equipped with a basket.
"Well?" the Midget said.
"It's too early," the Young'un said. "Go and sell some bread first. But I'm pretty sure 'e'll come, so stick around."
The Midget shot off to do a quick round and was back in no time.
"Remember, wait till I throw out my basket and then rush in," the Young'un reminded him.
The Midget put down his carrying-pole — but enough of that!
Now the Young'un picked up his basket and marched into the teashop, shouting: "Look here, yer old bitch, why did yer beat me yesterday?"
True to form, the old woman leapt to her feet and replied: "You little guttersnipe! I've nothing to say to you. What do you mean by coming in here and using bad language to me?"
"An' if I call yer a filthy bawd, a dirty old bitch, who gives a fart for what you think?"
The old woman saw red. She grabbed the boy and started beating him.

The Young'un squealed. Screaming, "'Ow dare yer beat me!" he threw his basket out into the street. The old woman sought to tighten her grip on him but shouting: "Just you dare!" he took hold of her waist and butted her in the stomach with his head. He would have knocked her over but for the wall which prevented her from falling. While the Young'un was employing all his strength to pin the old woman to the wall, the Midget bounded into the teahouse, his robe tucked into his belt for action.
When the old woman saw who it was, she made a desperate attempt to stop him. However the boy pinned her down with might and main and she couldn't move. All she could do was shout: "The Midget's coming!" Within the room the terrified Jinlian rushed to secure the door, while his Nibs tried to hide under the bed. The Midget charged the door and tried to push it open. But it wouldn't budge. All he could do was shout: "You oughter be ashamed of yourself!"
Jinlian continued to hold the door but she was getting desperate. "You're always boasting about your fighting skills," she hissed at her lover. "But in an emergency like this you're useless. Even a paper tiger is enough to scare you." She obviously wanted him to come out and fight the Midget and then make good his escape. The lover, in his hiding place under the bed, finally caught on. He crawled out and said: "My dear, it's not that I can't, I just wasn't sure what was best." He flung open the door and shouted: "No violence!" The Midget tried to grab him but his Nibs caught him with his left foot. Now the Midget being very short, the kick took him in the solar plexus and sent him flying backwards. He collapsed on the ground. His Nibs, having floored his adversary, fled amid the confusion. The Young'un, seeing things weren't looking good, released the old woman and vanished. As for the neighbours, well, they knew Xi-men Qing's power and influence, they weren't minded to interfere.
When Mrs. Wang went to help the Midget up, she found he was bleeding from the mouth and his face was as yellow as wax. She called to Jinlian, telling her to bring a bowl of water to revive him. The two of them supporting him under the shoulders got him out the back way and back to his house, where they put him into his bed and he went to sleep.
Well, this is the way it was going:
Poor three-inch midget, what can you do?
*That bugger Xi-men's too much for you!*
*When the wife has the lover bash her true lord,*
Adultery's taking a worse crime on board.
Nothing more happened that night. Next day, his Nibs, hearing there had been no repercussions, went back as usual for his assignation with Jinlian. Their great hope now was that the Midget would die.
For five days the Midget lay sick, unable to move. What is more, when he wanted a bowl of soup it didn't come, when he wanted water, it didn't come. It was in vain that he called to his wife. In fact he was obliged to watch her go out each day all powdered and adorned. And when she came back, her face was flushed. More than once he fainted from the violence of his rage. But no one paid him the least attention. Finally he called to his wife and said to her: "I know perfectly well what you're up to, I caught you in the act. You even egged on your lover to kick me in the chest, and now here I am hanging between life and death, while you two live it up together. Well, whether I live or die makes little difference, there's nothing I can do to stop you. But my brother's a different matter, you ought to know what he's like. When he returns that he will do sooner or later, do you suppose he'll stand by idle? If you have any feelings at all, help me now to get better and I won't tell him anything when he comes back. But if you refuse to look after me, just wait till he comes, he'll have a few things to say to the pair of you."
Jinlian left without saying a word in reply but she told Mrs. Wang and his Nibs exactly what the Midget had said. When her lover heard this, it was as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water over him. "Oh my God! Captain Wu, the killer of the tiger of Jingyang Pass?" he said. "Of course I know him, he's the toughest customer in the whole of Qinghe! Listen, we've been indulging ourselves all this time, okay, we're happy as can be but we must be crazy! All this you've just told us, whatever are we going to do about it? It's terrible."
Mrs. Wang responded with a scornful laugh. "Well, really!" she said. "You're the helmsman and I'm only crew, yet I'm not afraid. Just look at you, trembling with fear!"
"Just because I'm a man," his Nibs replied, "it doesn't mean I can resolve a situation like this. Have you anything to suggest that will help us to cover up?"
"What do you want from this, a long-term affair or just a quickie?"
"What do you mean, long-term or a quickie?"
"If it's to be a quickie, you'd best say goodbye to each other right now. When the Midget recovers, you can pay him something in compensation and when Wu Song gets back there won't be any trouble. Later, if Wu Song's sent off somewhere again, perhaps you can see each other. That's how it would be for just a quickie. But if you want it long-term, if you want to meet each other without all these alarms and disturbances, then I've got a plan, only it's not so easy to tell you about it."
"Mother Wang, please tell us. We do want it to be long-term."
"In order to carry out this plan we need something which most people don't possess but which you, as heaven will have it, do happen to keep in your house."
"If you said you wanted my eyes, I'd cut them out and give them to you. What is it?"
"At the moment, that poor fool is seriously ill. We must strike while the iron's hot. Go and get some arsenic and we'll get the young lady to buy some medicine for the heart and mix the arsenic with it. That'll settle the dwarf. Then all it needs is a good thorough cremation and there won't be any trace. So when Wu Song comes back, what can he do? You know the saying, 'Brother and sister-in-law should leave each other alone'; and then that other saying, 'The first marriage is to please your family, the second is to please yourself.' What can a brother-in-law say? You just have to be discreet for a few months, until the mourning period is over, and then you can marry the girl. Well, that's what you'll get if you have it long-term, a lifetime's joy, as they say. How does that strike you?"
"Mother Wang, what a proposition!" cried his Nibs. "But they do say, 'If you want to have an easy life, you'll have to work for it.' All right then, in for a penny in for a pound!"
"Of course, it's like they say, 'if you're weeding, get the roots out, kill the growth, else in spring they'll start to sprout.' Now, off you go and get the arsenic, and I'll tell her what to do. Only don't forget, you're going to owe me a lot!"
"Of course," he said. "You don't need to tell me that!"
There's a poem about this.
From love's delights they can't abstain;
*They'd like to have them spread more thick,*
*Little aware that there's more pain*
In Wu Song's blade than arsenic.
It was not long before his Nibs returned, bearing a small package containing arsenic that he handed to the old woman. The latter went to Jinlian and said: "I'm going to tell you how you can give him the medicine, dear. Didn't you say he'd been asking you to help him get better? Well then, what you must do is pay him some special little attentions. Then when he asks you to get him medicine, you can mix the arsenic with some heart medicine. If he resists at all, just pour it down his throat and get out of the way. When the poison gets into his stomach it's going to tear it to shreds and he'll start screaming, so you must cover him with the bedclothes because you don't want anyone to hear. Get a basin of hot water ready and a hot towel. When the poison begins to work he'll bleed from all the seven orifices, and he'll bite his lips that will leave marks. So when he's dead you must take the bedclothes off him and clean him with the hot towel to remove all traces of blood. Then you only have to stick him in the coffin and have him taken out for cremation. You see, it's dead simple."
"It sounds all right," said Jinlian, "only I'm afraid I'm not strong enough and I won't be able to arrange the body when I have to."
"That's no problem. Just knock on the wall and I'll come over and help you."
"Make a thorough job of it, the two of you," said his Nibs. "I'll be over first thing in the morning to find out how you got on." With that he left. The old woman took the arsenic and rolled it in her fingers to turn it into powder and then gave it to the girl to keep.
When Jinlian got home and went upstairs to see the Midget, he was hardly breathing and looked as if he was at death's door. She sat down beside him and pretended to cry.
"Why are you crying?" the Midget asked.
Wiping away the tears, she said: "I was wrong, I know but that blighter led me astray. How could I know he was going to kick you like that? I've been told of some good medicine and I wanted to go out and buy it for you but I was afraid you might think badly of me if I left you again."
"Don't worry," the Midget said. "If you help me get better, we'll say no more of this business, we'll wipe the slate clean. When my brother comes back I won't mention it. Go and get that medicine for me, quickly!"
Jinlian took some change in coppers and went over to Mrs. Wang's. She sat and waited while Mrs. Wang went to buy the medicine. Then she took the medicine home and went upstairs to show it to the Midget. "This medicine is for the heart. The doctor said you were to take it at midnight and then cover yourself with two quilts so that you will sweat. In the morning you'll be able to get up."
"That's wonderful," the Midget said. "You're very good to me my dear. I shall try to sleep for a while now. Wake me up at midnight for the medicine."
"You sleep now," she said. "I shall watch over you."
Gradually it grew dark and the girl lit the lamps in the bedroom. She went downstairs and heated a basin of water, and also warmed a damp towel. She listened for the watch, and when the third watch was sounded at eleven she took the poison and poured it into a cup and poured out a bowl of hot water. She took all this upstairs. "Where's the medicine, dear?" she called.
"Under the mat, beside the pillow," the Midget answered. "Prepare it and give it to me, quickly!"
She turned back the mat and took the medicine and poured it into the cup. She mixed the two powders and poured hot water into the cup. She took a silver hairpin from her hair and stirred it till it was evenly mixed. Then, supporting the Midget with her left hand she gave him the medicine with her right. After the first sip, the Midget said: "This medicine is horrible, dear!"
"What does that matter, so long as it cures you?" she said.
When he'd taken the second mouthful, she tipped the cup and poured it down his throat. Then she quickly released him and jumped off the bed. He groaned and said: "That medicine's given me a dreadful stomach ache. Oh, the pain's terrible, I can't bear it!"
She got the two quilts at the foot of the bed and pulled them over him, covering his face completely.
"I can't breathe," he cried out.
"The doctor said I had to make you sweat so you'd get better sooner."
When he tried to cry out again, she was afraid he might put up a fight, so she jumped on the bed and sat on him, pressing down the covers tightly with both arms. He hadn't a hope of freeing himself:
*His insides are frying, a fire is eating his liver, a blade of ice has pierced his heart, his stomach's being churned by a steel knife. Cold grips his body, blood seeps from the orifices. His teeth are tightly clenched, as the three souls prepare to depart for the realm of the unjustly dead: his throat is burning, as the seven spirits head for the place of judgement. The world of the dead's about to receive another poison victim while the world of the living loses an accuser of adultery.*
He groaned twice and struggled for breath a little longer, and then finally the stomach burst and the Midget — ill-fated wretch! — was still.
When she pulled back the covers, she saw that he had bitten his lips and was bleeding from all seven orifices. Suddenly terrified, she jumped off the bed and went to knock on the wall. Mrs. Wang heard the signal and came to the back door and coughed. Jinlian ran downstairs to open the door. "Is it done?" Mrs. Wang asked.
"It's done," she answered. "But I've no strength left in my arms and legs. I can't clear up."
"Don't worry about that, I'll help you," said the old woman. She rolled up her sleeves and poured out some hot water. She threw the warm towel into it and took it upstairs. After turning back the covers she started wiping the Midget's mouth and lips. Then she cleaned away all traces of blood from the other points where it had seeped out. She placed the clothes on top of the body and then the two of them manoeuvred it down the stairs and laid it out on an old door. They combed the hair, put on a cloth cap, and dressed him, putting on new socks and shoes. They covered the face with a piece of fine white silk. Finally they covered the body with a clean quilt. Then they went back upstairs to tidy up there. When they had finished, Mrs. Wang went home.
Next the girl set up a tremendous hullabaloo, falsely mourning the death of her lord and master. As the reader well knows, there are generally three ways in which a woman weeps: with tears and noise, the kind of thing we call weeping; with tears but silently that we call crying; noisily but with no tears, what we call keening or wailing. Well, on this occasion the woman wailed all night. In the early hours of the morning, before it was light, his Nibs came, in great excitement to hear the news. Mrs. Wang gave him a detailed account. He took out some silver and gave it to her to buy a coffin and the necessary for the funeral. Then he conferred with Jinlian.
"Now my husband is dead, I have to depend on you for everything," she said.
"There's no need to tell me that," he said.
"There's one thing that's urgent," Mrs. Wang said. "Mr. Ho, the coroner, is a very careful person. I'm afraid he may smell a rat and refuse to allow the funeral to go ahead."
"Don't worry about that. I'll have a word with him myself. He won't want to oppose me."
"Then you'd better go and do it at once, Your Honour, don't waste any time."
His Nibs left.
When it was fully light, Mrs. Wang went to buy the coffin. She also bought candles and incense, paper money and suchlike. On her return she helped Jinlian prepare the food for the offering and lit the special lamp which accompanies the spirit of the dead person. Now the neighbours all began to arrive to inquire what had happened. The girl covered her pretty face and falsely wept.
"But what did your husband die of?" they all wanted to know.
"He had heart disease," she replied. "It got worse and worse. I could see it was hopeless. He went last night around midnight." She began to snivel and sob again. The neighbours all knew perfectly well that the death was suspicious but they didn't like to go on questioning her, so they merely tried to console her by saying: "Well, his spirit is fled now, and the soul has departed for other regions. Try not to upset yourself too much." She made a show of thanking them and they went away.
Mrs. Wang had the coffin delivered and went to fetch the coroner, whom most people knew as Uncle Ho. She had already bought everything necessary for the funeral, including a number of kitchen utensils. She now sent for two monks, who would be needed later on to watch over the body. Meanwhile, Uncle Ho had sent along some assistants to get everything ready.
It was almost noon when Uncle Ho set out himself. He was in no particular hurry. When he got to the beginning of Redstone Road, he met Xi-men Qing, who called out: "Where are you going, Uncle?"
"I'm going over to inspect the body of Wu Da, the bread-seller," he replied.
"Do you mind accompanying me a moment? I'd like a word with you."
Uncle Ho went with Xi-men Qing to a little wineshop on the corner of the street, where they found a quiet room to sit. "Please take the place of honour, Mr. Ho," said his Nibs.
"I'm just a simple man, how should I presume to sit down with Your Honour?"
"Please don't stand on ceremony. Do sit down."
When they were seated a bottle of the best wine was ordered. The waiter brought dishes of vegetables and fruit, together with the wine that he poured for them. Uncle Ho was becoming quite suspicious. Privately he was thinking, "This man has never invited me before, there must be some special reason for this." They had been drinking there about an hour when his Nibs suddenly took from his sleeve ten taels of silver and placed them on the table. "Please don't despise this, Uncle," he said. "Later on I'll find a way to express my gratitude more suitably."
"But I've done nothing for you," Uncle Ho said, "nothing at all. How can I take your money? Even if there is something you'd like me to do, I can't accept the money now."
"Please, for my sake, Uncle, take it and then we can talk."
"Say whatever you wish, Your Honour, I am listening."
"It's not something special, and in any case, the family will presently be rewarding you for your pains. It's just that you are going along to lay out the body of Mr. Wu and I want you to make sure everything is done nicely; it would be a good idea to cover the body with an embroidered quilt, that's all."
"If that's all it is, there's no problem at all. How can I accept your money for this?"
"If you don't take it, I shall be offended."
Now Uncle Ho knew very well that this man was a crook and had many government officials in his pocket, so he thought it best to accept the gift. After they'd had a few more cups, his Nibs called the waiter and told him to make out the bill and come round to his shop to collect the money next day.
They went downstairs together. As they were going out of the door, his Nibs said: "Don't forget, Uncle. Keep it to yourself and I'll reward you later on."
Uncle Ho was now highly suspicious. "There's something very odd about this business," he said to himself. "I haven't seen the body of the Midget and here he is giving me all this money. There must be something going on." When he arrived at Wu Da's, his assistants were waiting around outside.
"What did Wu Da die of?" he asked them.
"They say in there he died of heart disease," they said.
When Uncle Ho drew back the curtain and went in, Mrs. Wang received him. "We've been waiting a long time for you, Mr. Ho," she said.
"There was some business that held me up," he said, "that's why I'm a little late."
At this point Jinlian, who was dressed in plain white funeral clothing, started crying loudly inside.
"You must control yourself, madam." Uncle Ho said. "However sad, he's departed now."
The girl covered her eyes and said: "It's so awful sir! I never thought that my husband's heart disease would carry him off so suddenly, leaving me here like this!"

Uncle Ho examined her closely. He was thinking: "I'd only heard about the Midget's wife, I never actually saw her till now. So this is what the Midget managed to get himself by way of a wife! I'm beginning to understand why his Nibs offered me that money!" He now proceeded to the examination of the body. He pulled back the shroud and lifted the piece of silk. However, when his sharp and perceptive eyes took in the body, Uncle Ho gave a startled cry and fell to the floor. He was seen to be bleeding from the mouth; his fingernails were blue and his lips purple. His face had a yellowish tinge and his eyes were glazed. His whole body resembled the moon setting behind the mountain in the hour before dawn, and anyone would have said his life was like a lamp at midnight when the oil's exhausted.

As a result of the beating, the boy Yun Ge wanted to take revenge on Grandma Wang, and taking his basket of pears he set forth to find Wu the Elder. He had not gone far before he saw him coming with his load of cakes. The boy stopped, and when Wu the Elder came up to him, he said, "I have not seen you for a long time. But what do you eat to get so fat?"
Wu the Elder put his load down, and replied, "I am not fat at all. I am always like this."
"These last few days," said Yun, "I have been trying to buy some bran but I could not find a shop that would sell, and people all said that you had some bran at home."
"At my home I do not keep either geese or ducks," said Wu the Elder, "so what should I want with bran?"[69]
"You say you have no bran but you are so round and fat that if you were turned upside down it would not make much difference. If you were dropped into hot water you would not display any temper."
"You monkey!" said Wu the Elder. "You certainly know how to insult people. My wife has no sweetheart, so how could I be a cuckold."
"Your wife may not have a sweetheart but she has a lover," said the boy.
Wu the Elder seized hold of him, and demanded proof of his statement.
"I only joke with you and yet you seize me like this," said the boy. "But why don't you seize hold of that fellow?"
"Good little boy! If you will give me the name of that fellow, I will give you ten of my cakes."
"I do not want your cakes. If you will treat me as a guest by inviting me with three cups of wine I will tell you the man's name."
"So you want to drink wine! Then come along," said Wu the Elder. He then carried up his load of cakes, and went on till he came to a wine shop where he put it down again. He ordered a kettle of wine, and some meat, and using some of his own cakes, he invited the boy to partake of same.
"There is enough wine now but what do you say to our having some more meat?" said the boy.
"Good boy," said Wu the Elder, "we will arrange that afterwards but now tell me what you have to say."
"There is no need for hurry," said the boy. "Let us eat first, and talk afterwards. You need not be angry by what I say, because I will help you to capture the man."
Wu the Elder watched the little monkey eat the food, and drink the wine, and when he had finished he again asked him to speak.
"Please take your hand and feel the lumps on my head," said Yun.
Wu the Elder did so, and asked how the boy had got such lumps.
"I will now tell you," said the boy Yun. "Today I took this basket of pears and tried to find Ximen Qing and ask him to buy them. I could not find him anywhere but a man on the street told me that Ximen Qing would be at Grandma Wang's tea-house with your wife as he goes there everyday. I hoped to make a few cash by selling this fruit to Ximen Qing but that pig Grandma Wang would not let me in, and beat me many times. So I came to find you, and tell you. Now you understand the meaning of those remarks about your having 'bran' at home."
"Can things be true like this?" asked Wu the Elder.
"It is so," said Yun. "Those two are right at it. You had better go to Grandma Wang's tea-house, and then you will see for yourself whether it is true or not."
"Younger brother," said Wu the Elder, "I will tell you something. My wife has been going everyday to Grandma Wang's tea-house to make some clothes, and when she returns her face has been so red that I suspected something. What you say may be correct. I will now leave this load here, and go to seize the adulterer." Yun said, "You are an old man, and have no knowledge of such things. That old bitch Grandma Wang, is very fierce and brave, so how could you stand up to her assaults? Moreover, those three will undoubtedly have a secret signal. When they see you they will take your wife and hide her. That man Ximen Qing is very strong, and would face even twenty men like you. If you could not seize him, you would only suffer one blow from his fist. He is so wealthy and has such influence, that he would take out a summon against you for assault. You could get no one to assist you against such a man, and you would have no chance of winning."
"What you say is only too true," said Wu the Elder. "But what can I do?"
"Well, today I have been beaten by that old bitch, and I want revenge. Now I tell you what to do. When you go back home, do not say anything about this. Tomorrow morning make less cakes and leave your house as usual, and I will be waiting for you at the entrance of a side alley. If I see Ximen Qing go into that house I will tell you about it. Then you can put down your load, and follow me. When I enter the house, Grandma Wang will again hit me, and throw my basket on the street, and then you rush in. I will hold that old woman while you rush into the room and cry out. What do you think of that plan?"
"That will do very well," replied Wu the Elder. "Here is some money for you to buy some rice with. Don't forget to be at the entrance of the alleyway off the Zishi Street very early tomorrow morning, and wait there for me." The boy took the money, and also a few cakes, and then departed.
Wu the Elder paid the bill at the wine shop, took his load, and went on the way selling cakes as before.
Now his wife had always previously abused and thoroughly deceived him. But recently she had began to realize the error of her ways, and had treated him decently. On this day when Wu the Elder returned home he put down his load as usual but never said a word. His wife, however, said, "Husband, do you want some wine?" To which he replied that he had just met some friends with whom he had had several cups of wine. His wife then prepared the evening meal, and they ate together without anything particular being said.
The next day after breakfast Wu the Elder took only a few cakes. But his wife did not notice this as all her thoughts were about Ximen Qing. She was waiting for him to go so that she could run across to Ximen Qing.
Wu the Elder was soon on Zishi Street where he saw the boy Yun Ge on the lookout inside an alley, and asked him for the news. The boy said it was too early. He asked Wu the Elder to go around selling cakes, and return shortly when he must stop on the left side of the street. Wu the Elder went off at great speed, and was soon back when the boy spoke to him, "Now you watch for my basket being thrown out, and then you come speedily, and enter the house."
The boy Yun Ge picked up his basket, and entering the door of Grandma Wang's tea-house made insulting remarks. "You bitch! What did you hit me for yesterday?"
Grandma Wang was still angry, and when she heard this she jumped up and shouted, "You little monkey! I have nothing to do with you, and yet you come to insult me."
"You are an old pimp, and that is why I insult you," replied the boy.
Grandma Wang was very angry, and took hold of him to beat him. Yun Ge cried out, "You are hitting me again," and so saying he threw his basket through the door on the street. He then put his arms round her waist, and thrusting his head against her stomach he pushed her backwards, and she would have fallen down had it not been for the wall at her back. He held her there until he saw Wu the Elder rush in with his long gown tucked up. When Grandma Wang saw Wu the Elder, she struggled and tried to arrest him but the boy held her tight against the wall. Grandma Wang shouted out, "Wu the Elder is here." Upon hearing this Pan Jinlian who was inside rushed to the door of the room, and fastened it while Ximen Qing dived under the bed and hid there. Wu the Elder pushed against the door but he could not force it open. He shouted out, "What are you doing?" His wife was crouching with fear behind the door. But she shouted out, "You always said that you could use your fists or a stick but now that there is a fight you will not use them. Now you see a paper tiger you are scared stiff before it." What was her idea in talking like this? It was simply to summon Ximen Qing to come out, and beat Wu the Elder, and then get away. Ximen Qing understood her idea, and crawling out from under the bed he pulled the door open and shouted out. "Do not fight!" Wu the Elder was just going to hit Ximen Qing when the latter kicked him in the breast and he fell to the ground. Seeing Wu the Elder on the floor, Ximen Qing ran out of the house. The boy Yun Ge seeing that things had not turned out as he expected released Grandma Wang. The neighbours knew that Ximen Qing was an influential man, so how could they be expected to interfere? Grandma Wang went to help Wu the Elder to get up, and saw that he was spitting blood, and that his face turned yellow. She told Jinlian to bring a cup of water, and this revived Wu the Elder. They lifted him on his feet, and helped him to walk through the back door to his own room where they put him to bed.
The following day Ximen Qing did not hear anything from Wu the Elder so he hoped that he had died, and went to the house as usual to meet the woman.
Wu the Elder lay sick for five days, and although he called for his wife he got no reply. If he wanted soup or water he could not get it. Yet everyday he saw his wife dress herself neatly, and rouge her face before going out, and when she returned her face was always flushed. Wu the Elder was often unconscious but no one came to nurse him. One day he called his wife and said to her, "You are doing bad things, and I have discovered the adulterer. You told your lover to kick me on the breast, and now whether I live or die you go on with your dalliance. Even if I die it will not matter, because I have not enough energy left now to argue with you. But you know the disposition of my brother, and when he returns, whether it is early or late, he will certainly settle this matter for me. But if you would take pity and nurse me, then when he returns I will not say anything about this affair. But if you don't look after me now, then when he returns he will have something to say to you." But although his wife heard all this she did not say a word in reply but sailed off, and discussed it with Ximen Qing and Grandma Wang.
When Ximen Qing heard this news he felt as though his body was in an ice house, and he said, "Horrible! I know that Wu Song killed a tiger on the Jingyang Ridge, and that he is the great hero of Qinghe County. But I have loved you for so long that our hearts are now one, and we cannot change. But what can we do? The situation is awkward."
Grandma Wang sneered and said, "We are in the same boat; I am the passenger but I am not afraid. This is the first time I have seen the man at the helm in such a state."
"I am a useless man," said Ximen Qing, "and in a situation like this, I cannot arrange anything, so if you have any plan I hope that you will not keep it from us."
"Well, do you want to be a couple for your whole life or for only a short time?" asked Grandma Wang.
"What do you mean? asked Ximen Qing.
"Well, if you wanted to be a couple for a short time then now is the time for you two to separate," said Grandma Wang, "and when Wu the Elder gets better you must apologize to him. Then when Wu Song returns there will be nothing said to him, and after waiting until Wu Song departs on some other business you two can come here again as before. But if you two wish to continue as husband and wife for life without further trouble then I have a plan but I do not care to mention it now."
"Please tell us at once how we can be husband and wife for life," said Ximen Qing.
"To carry out that plan we should require a very rare thing which however you have at your house," replied Grandma Wang.
"Even if you wanted my eyes you could have them," replied Ximen Qing. "But what is the thing you want?"
"This fellow is very sick," said Grandma Wang, "but when he is much worse we can use my plan. At your house you have some arsenic. You can tell Jinlian to go and buy some medicine for her husband's sickness, and she can mix the arsenic with the medicine, and poison him and then burn his body so that there will be no trace left behind, and when Wu Song returns what can he do? An old saying has this, 'An elder brother's wife should not talk matters with her brother-in-law.' 'The first marriage must be in accordance with the wish of the parents but the second marriage is your own affair only.' Wu Song can raise no objection. After Wu the Elder's death you two can secretly come here and continue as before for about six months or a year, and then after the mourning is over you can be formally married, and be husband and wife for life. Live happily together ever afterwards. Is that a good plan?"
"I am afraid that we should be found out," said Ximen Qing. "But still, still, still. If I don't do it I shall have no rest."
"I am glad to hear that," said Grandma Wang. "There is a saying, 'If the roots are removed the grass will not come up again. But if the grass is only cut, then the next spring it will revive.' Sir, you had better go at once and get the arsenic, and in the meanwhile I will instruct this lady how to use it. When this affair is finished you will both be deeply indebted to me."
"That will be so without your saying," said Ximen Qing. He went for the arsenic, and upon returning with it handed it to Grandma Wang. Grandma Wang the looked at Jinlian, saying. "I will teach you how to make the 'medicine.' Wu asked you to nurse him better. Be kinder to him. He will ask you to get him some medicine, and when you give it to him, add this arsenic in it. When he wakes up at night, pour it down the hatch. Once it starts to do its work, it will tear open his guts and he'll scream for sure, so muffle him up with quilts. You must not let anyone hear him. Get a pot of boiling water and soak a rag. He'll bleed from every orifice and bite his lips. When he dies, remove the quilts, clean up the blood with the rag. Then shove it all in the coffin with him, cremate the lot and there's not a damned thing anyone can do about it!"
"Fine then," said Jinlian, "Though I'm afraid that I might not be able to handle the corpse!"
"That's easy," said Grandma Wang "just knock on the wall and I'll come and help."
"Make sure you do it carefully and I'll come back at 5 A.M. to hear all about it" said Xinmen Qing and departed. Grandma Wang prepared the arsenic powder and gave it to Jinlian.
Upon reaching her home Jinlian saw her husband lying on the bed hardly breathing, and almost lifeless. She went to the side of the bed and pretended to cry.
Wu the Elder asked her why she came there to cry, and his wife dried her eyes, and said that she had made a mistake in that affair but she had been deceived. "Who could have foreseen that you would have been kicked in that brutal manner," she said. She added that she had found a good medicine but did not buy it because she was afraid that he would suspect her.
"Well, if you now save my life," said Wu the Elder, "I will forgive you, and when my brother arrives I will not say anything to him. Go at once, and buy the medicine, and so save my life."
So Jinlian went to Grandma Wang, who went to buy the medicine for her. Upon returning to the bedroom with the medicine Jinlian showed it to her husband and said, "The doctor says that you must take this during the night. You will perspire freely so you must have two quilts over your head."
"That is all right," said Wu the Elder. "Thanks very much. You had better not go to sleep tonight but stay up and administer the medicine to me."
"You can go to sleep, and I will look after you," said Jinlian. She saw that it was getting dark so she lit a lamp, and kindled a fire to boil some water. She took a rag, and put it in the water. The night watchman just then sounded the hour of midnight on his drum. She then placed the arsenic in a bowl, and poured some hot water in another bowl. She took these upstairs, and called out, "Husband! Where is the medicine?" Wu the Elder replied that the medicine was underneath the mat on which he was lying at the side of his pillow. He asked her to let him have the medicine at once. She raised the mat, took out the medicine that, together with the bowl of water, she poured into the bowl of arsenic. She then took a silver hairpin, to stir the decoction; she raised Wu the Elder with her left arm, and gave him the bowl to drink. He drank some, and then said, "Wife! this medicine is not easy to take."
"It will do you good, so never mind if it has a bad taste," she said.
He took two mouthfuls and each time his wife tipped up the bowl so that he should take plenty, and at last the bowl was empty. She then laid him down on the bed, and quickly left him. Her husband gave a retch and said, "Wife! That medicine is giving me pain in the stomach. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I cannot bear it." At this she took two quilts from the foot of the bed and put them over his head. He called out, "I am almost suffocated." His wife replied, "That is in accordance with the doctor's orders, as he wished you to perspire freely, and so you would be better more quickly." The next time he attempted to speak she was afraid that he was going to get free, so she sprang on the bed, knelt on his body, and pressed down the quilts with her hands so that he could not move. He gave several gasps but he was soon suffocated, and lay quite still. She raised the quilts, and looked at him. His teeth were set tight; and blood was flowing from every orifice; and this sight gave her a fright. She jumped off the bed, and running to the partition wall knocked. Grandma Wang upon hearing the sound went to the back door of Jinlian's house and coughed gently. Jinlian immediately went downstairs, and opened the door.
"Is it finished?" asked Grandma Wang.
"Yes! All is over," replied Jinlian. "But I feel too weak to do anything else."
"What is the difficulty? I will help you," said Grandma Wang. She thereupon rolled up her sleeves; filled a bucket full of hot water; put a rag in the bucket; and took it upstairs. She took the quilts off the bed and washed the corpse; she made it all clean, and then covered it with ordinary clothes. The two women then took the body downstairs and placed it on an old door. They combed the hair, put on a turban, dressed the remains with clothes, socks, and shoes. They put a piece of silk over his face, and placed a clean quilt over the body. They then went upstairs, and cleaned the room. When all had been finished Grandma Wang returned to her own house. Jinlian began a very good imitation of crying for her husband. Now generally when a woman weeps for her husband there are three kinds of crying: (1) When there are both tears and voice that is called "sob"; (2) when there are tears but no voice that is called weeping; (3) when there is voice but no tears that is called crying. This woman was crying but not weeping and she did it well up till about 4 A.M. It was not quite dawn when Ximen Qing arrived to hear what had been done. When Grandma Wang told him that all had been satisfactorily finished he gave her money to buy a coffin. He asked her to call Jinlian to discuss matters, and when she arrived she said to Ximen Qing, "My husband is now dead, so that I am dependent upon you."
"It is hardly necessary to mention that," said Ximen Qing.
"There is, however, still an important thing," said Grandma Wang.
"The chief of this neighbourhood is He Jiushu who is very particular, and I am afraid that if he discovers any loophole he will place difficulties in the way of a burial."
"That does not matter," said Ximen Qing. "I will talk to him and square him. He will certainly attend to what I say."
"Then you had better go at once, and get that matter settled," said Grandma Wang. And Ximen Qing acted accordingly.
When it was daylight Grandma Wang went and purchased the coffin, and also some incense and paper joss money. She and Jinlian prepared the sacrificial food for the spirit of the dead, and lit the seven-wicks lamp to be placed underneath the door plank on which the corpse lay. The neighbours came in to offer condolence, and Jinlian was very busy with her artificial crying. The neighbours wanted to know of what complaint Wu the Elder had died, to which Jinlian replied that he had had severe heart pains which got worse and worse everyday, and the doctor had not been able to cure him. Unfortunately he had died last night about midnight. So saying she gave a good display of simulated sobbing and crying. The neighbours, however, did not believe that Wu the Elder had died a natural death but dared not ask further questions. So they consoled her, saying, "He is dead but you are still alive so don't grieve so much." She thanked them, and they then all withdrew.
Grandma Wang, after getting the coffin, went to inform the neighbourhood chief—He Jiushu. She bought all the articles necessary for the funeral, and also engaged two monks to come that evening to perform the necessary prayers. The neighbourhood chief duly engaged two corpse burners to cremate the body. He then went himself to visit the house but when he reached the Zishi Street he met Ximen Qing who asked where he was going. He Jiushu replied that he was going to look the body of Wu the Elder who had died the previous night.
Ximen Qing said, "I have something to tell you about that." So He Jiushu followed him round a corner to a restaurant where Ximen Qing asked him to take the seat of honour but He Jiushu declined this. They both sat down at last, and Ximen Qing called for wine. The waiter brought it with fruit and vegetables.
Now He Jiushu could not understand what was at the bottom of this condescension as previously Ximen Qing had never offered him wine. He was therefore suspicious. After they had been drinking wine for about an hour Ximen Qing took out an ingot of ten taels of silver from his sleeve, and placing it on the table said, "You must not think that this is rather small, because tomorrow there will be some more."
He Jiushu expressed his thanks by saluting with both hands, and said, "But I am not aware of having done anything for you, so why do you present me with this silver? But even if you wish me to do something I do not care to accept this silver."
"I hope that you will not treat me in that way," said Ximen Qing. "Please take the money, and I will then tell you something!"
"Please, sir, speak without any reserve and I will listen," said He Jiushu.
"The fact is," said Ximen Qing, "that they may offer you a gift themselves. When you are inquiring into the death of Wu the Elder it would be much better for you not to go into details but just cover up the fact without any comment."
"Why are you so deeply concerned about such a small affair?" asked He Jiushu. "How can I accept money in such a case?"
"If you do not accept the money I am afraid that you will decline to act as I suggest," said Ximen Qing.

He Jiushu had ever been afraid of Ximen Qing because he was crafty and had influence with the officials so he thought it better to take the money. When they had drunk some more wine Ximen Qing called for the bill, and promised to call again the following day and pay. They both went downstairs, and when at the street door Ximen Qing asked He Jiushu not to forget what he had said, and also not to mention this matter to anyone else, and in a few days he would reward him still further.

Now He Jiushu thought all this was very strange, and he became more suspicious. He thought he was only going to inspect the body, and authorize the burial, and yet this man had given him so much money, so there must be a trick somewhere. When he reached Wu the Elder's house he saw the men engaged to cremate the corpse and asked them of what sickness Wu the Elder had died. They replied that the people of the house said that he had died from some disease of the heart. He raised the curtain over the door, and upon entering he was received by Grandma Wang who said that she had been waiting for him a long time, He Jiushu explained that he had been delayed by a little affair and that was why he was a little late. He saw that Jinlian had already put on the mourning clothes, and was pretending to cry. He said to her, "Please do not grieve so much. Your husband has returned to Heaven."

Jinlian covered her eyes so that he should not see that there were no tears, and said, "I cannot say all there is to say. I did not expect that this heart trouble would carry him off so quickly. He has left me with all this sorrow and misery." He Jiushu looked at her very carefully while she was saying this and remembered that he had often heard others speak about her but this was the first time he had seen her. He now understood why Ximen Qing had given him the ten taels of silver. He Jiushu then removed the shroud screening the corpse, and took the veil from the face. Upon noticing that the lips were purple, and that blood had issued from the mouth; the face was yellow, and the eyes were dull; the fingernails were dark coloured, he fell down in a swoon with a loud exclamation.

Life like the waning moon at dawn,
Or lamp at midnight without oil.

*If you ever apprehend the Ch'an enigma posed by the word "romance";*
You'll find that good affinities often turn out to be bad affinities.[1]
In the heat of passion, everyone becomes enamored of it;
Looked at dispassionately, everyone comes to despise it.[2]
The flowers by the wayside ought not to be plucked;
Natural beauty and sound substance are safer by far.
A rustic wife, your own children, and everyday fare;
Are unlikely to lead to either lovesickness or penury.

Yün-ko, after his rough treatment at the hands of Dame Wang, had no place to vent his spleen. When he picked up his basket and ran off to search the streets it was Wu the Elder that he was looking for. He hadn't gone more than two blocks when whom should he see but Wu the Elder, shouldering his load of steamed wheat cakes, coming along the very street he was on.

As soon as he saw him Yün-ko stopped in his tracks and said to Wu the Elder, "I haven't seen you for ages. You're really putting on the fat aren't you?"

Wu the Elder put down his carrying pole and said, "I'm just the same as I've always been. Since when am I putting on any fat?"

"The other day," said Yün-ko, "I wanted to buy some bran but couldn't find any, no matter where I looked. Everyone said you had some at home."

"I don't raise geese or ducks," said Wu the Elder. "What would I want with bran?"

"You say you've no use for bran," said Yün-ko. "In that case, how did you get so overstuffed yourself? Even if I picked you up by the feet and put you in a pot to boil, you wouldn't let off any steam?"

"You cocksucking monkey!" said Wu the Elder. "That's a fine suggestion to make! My wife isn't playing at ducks and drakes with anyone, so why should you call me a 'duck'?"[3]

"If your wife isn't playing at ducks and drakes with anyone," said Yün-ko, "she's playing at drakes and ducks."

Wu the Elder grabbed hold of Yün-ko and said, "Tell me who it is then."

"You're laughable," said Yün-ko. "You may be brave enough to grab hold of me but I'll bet you aren't brave enough to bite off his left one for him."

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Elder, "Just tell me who it is and I'll give you ten steamed wheat cakes."

"Steamed wheat cakes alone won't do the trick," said Yün-ko. "But if you treat me to three cups of wine I'll tell you."

"I didn't know you could drink," said Wu the Elder. "Follow me."

Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and led Yün-ko to a small wineshop. When they got there he put down his load, took along a few steamed wheat cakes, and then ordered up some meat and a jug of wine.

When Yün-ko had finished these off he said, "Don't bother with any more wine but I could use a few more slices of meat."

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Elder, "please! Tell me who it is."

"Don't worry," said Yün-ko, "I'll tell you as soon as I've finished eating. And don't get too upset. I'll help you to nab him."

When Wu the Elder had watched the monkey finish off the meat and wine he said, "Now, tell me who it is."

"If you want to know," said Yün-ko, "take your hand and feel these lumps on my head."

"Where did you ever get such lumps from?" asked Wu the Elder.

"I'll tell you," said Yün-ko. "Today I took this basket of snow pears and set out to look for the Honourable Hsi-men, in the hope of getting a little something out of him. But I couldn't find him anywhere I looked. Someone on the street told me, 'He's probably in Dame Wang's teashop. He's carrying on an affair with Wu the Elder's wife and hangs around there all the time.'

"I had hoped that if I ran into him I could pick up thirty or fifty cash to spend but that intolerable old pig and dog, Dame Wang, not only wouldn't let me into her room to look for him but drove me out of her place with a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles. So I set out especially to look for you. When I ran into you just now I needled you a few times, deliberately. If I hadn't needled you, you never would have asked anything about it."

"Really," said Wu the Elder.

*"Can such things be?"*[4]

"There you go again," said Yün-ko. "I was afraid you might be just such a fart of a fuck-off! The two of them are certainly having an easy time of it. All they have to do is wait until you're out of the way and then make out together in Dame Wang's room. And you ask me if it's true or if it's false! Do you think I'm just kidding you for the fun of it?"

When Wu the Elder heard this he said, "Brother, there's no reason for me to deceive you. That woman of mine has been going over to Dame Wang's place everyday, allegedly to help her with some sewing of clothes, or shoes and stockings. When she comes home her face is red. My first wife left a daughter behind, and whenever that woman feels like it she:

Beats her in the morning and curses her at night,[5] or doesn't give her any food to eat. Moreover, the last couple of days she's been acting rather peculiar, as if she wasn't any too happy to see me. In fact, I've been wondering what was wrong myself. What you've told me would explain it. Now then, I'd better leave my load in a safe place and go catch them in the act. What do you say?"

"For a man of your age," said Yün-ko, "you haven't any sense. That old bitch, Dame Wang, is not to be trifled with. If you have a run-in with her you're not likely to escape unscathed. Moreover, the three of them must have a prearranged signal, so if the old lady sees you come in to nab them, your wife will have time to hide. That Hsi-men Ch'ing is a pretty tough customer. He can handle twenty of the likes of you. If you fail to catch them in the act you may end up getting a good drubbing for your pains. On top of which, he's got both money and influence. If he were to lodge a complaint against you, and you were dragged into court without anyone to take your side, you could easily end up losing your life for nothing."

"Brother," said Wu the Elder, "everything you say is true; but how can I let off this head of steam?"

"I took a beating at Dame Wang's hands," said Yün-ko, "and I too have no place to vent my spleen. Let me suggest a move to you. Today, when you go home, don't kick up a fuss or say anything about it. Just act the same way you do everyday. Tomorrow morning, make a smaller number of steamed wheat cakes than usual and come out to sell them. I'll be lying in wait at the mouth of the alley, and when I see Hsi-men Ch'ing go in I'll come and tell you. You can then shoulder your carrying pole and wait nearby while I go in and distract the old bitch, who's sure to pick a fight with me. At that point I'll throw my fruit basket out into the middle of the street as a signal for you to come charging in. I'll pin the old lady against the wall with my head while you dash into the room and raise the hue and cry. How's that for a plan?"

"If it goes as you say, Brother," said Wu the Elder, "I'll be greatly indebted to you. I've got several strings of cash here which I'll give you. Be sure to be there first thing in the morning to wait for me at the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street."

Yün-ko collected his few strings of cash and some steamed wheat cakes and then went his way. Wu the Elder, for his part, paid the bill, shouldered his carrying pole, and made another round before heading for home.

It so happens that the woman, accustomed as she was to railing at Wu the Elder and abusing him in every way, had been sufficiently troubled in recent days by a bad conscience to go out of her way to be nice to him. That evening when Wu the Elder came home, shouldering his carrying pole, he acted just the way he always did and didn't bring anything up.

"Darling," said the woman, "how about a cup of wine?"

"I've just had three cups with another vendor," said Wu the Elder.

The woman then prepared supper and they ate it together. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, after breakfast, Wu the Elder made only two or three trays of steamed wheat cakes and loaded them on his carrying pole. The woman was too preoccupied with Hsi-men Ch'ing to notice how many wheat cakes he made. Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and went out to ply his trade. The woman could hardly wait until he was out the door before slipping over to Dame Wang's teashop to wait for Hsi-men Ch'ing.

To resume our story, Wu the Elder shouldered his carrying pole and headed straight for the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street, where he found Yün-ko already on the lookout, with his fruit basket in hand.

"Has anything happened?" asked Wu the Elder.

"It's early yet," said Yün-ko. "You might as well make one of your regular rounds. By the time you're through that bastard will probably have shown up. You just wait nearby, don't go too far away."

Like a cloud scudding before the wind, Wu the Elder completed one of his regular rounds and came back again.

"You just watch for my fruit basket," said Yün-ko. "When it comes flying out, you go charging in."

Wu the Elder stowed his load in a safe place. But no more of this.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

*Tigers deploy the revenants of their prey;*[7]
birds are snared with decoys;
Victims remain in the dark until the trap is sprung,
while predators do as they please.
Yün-ko exposes Hsi-men Ch'ing's crime
for all to see;[8]
But Dame Wang's handling of the affair
is remarkable indeed.

To resume our story, Yün-ko picked up his basket and headed straight for the teashop, where he opened fire on Dame Wang with the words, "You old pig and dog! Just who did you think you were hitting yesterday?"

The old lady's character remained unaltered. Jumping to her feet, she shouted at him, "You little monkey! I've never had anything to do with you. What are you coming around here to abuse me again for?"

"If I curse you," replied Yün-ko, "for being a procuress and a pandering old bitch, it matters about as much as my prick!"

The old lady was enraged and, grabbing hold of Yün-ko, started to beat him with her fists.

With the shout, "You dare to strike me, do you!" Yün-ko threw the fruit basket in his hand out into the middle of the street.

The old lady tried to get a firmer grip on him but the little monkey, with another cry of "You dare to strike me, do you!" put both arms around Dame Wang's waist, buried his head in the pit of her stomach, and pushed for all he was worth. He nearly knocked her over but she backed into the wall that prevented her from falling down. The monkey held her pinned against the wall with all his strength.

At this point Wu the Elder lifted up his clothes and came charging into the teashop in giant strides. When the old lady saw who it was and realized that he meant business, she tried to block his path but the little monkey continued to hold her pinned against the wall with all his strength and wouldn't let her budge. All the old woman could do was to yell out, "Wu the Elder has come!"

Inside Dame Wang's room the woman, who was already entwined with Hsi-men Ch'ing, was barely able to extricate herself fast enough to rush to the door and hold it fast. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, proceeded to dive under the bed.

Wu the Elder charged up to the door and gave it a shove but he was unable to push it open and could only call out, "That's a fine thing you're up to!"

The woman was in a state of panic. Continuing to hold the door shut she said, "You're always shooting off your fucking mouth, boasting about how good you are at the martial arts but when it comes to the crunch you're no use at all! Even a paper tiger can scare you to death!"

The woman's words were clearly intended to get Hsi-men Ch'ing to confront Wu the Elder and fight his way out of the predicament. Hsi-men Ch'ing was still under the bed but when he heard these words they had the effect of stimulating him to action.

Crawling out from his hiding place he said, "Lady, it's not that I don't have what it takes. It's just that, for the moment, I couldn't think what to do." Then, unbarring the door, he called out, "Come in, if you dare!"

Wu the Elder made a grab at him but Hsi-men Ch'ing countered with a swift kick, and his assailant was so short that Hsi-men Ch'ing caught him squarely in the solar plexus with his foot and knocked him flat on his back.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Wu the Elder was down and out he took advantage of the confusion to beat a hasty retreat. Yün-ko also, seeing that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, abandoned Dame Wang and took to his heels. The neighbours in the area all knew that Hsi-men Ch'ing was a tough customer, and none of them wanted to interfere in the matter.

At this point Dame Wang attempted to get Wu the Elder back on his feet. When she saw that he was spitting blood and that his face had turned as sallow as wax, she called the woman out to fetch a bowl of water, with the help of which they succeeded in reviving him. Putting his arms over their shoulders, the two of them managed to help him through the back door and up to the second story room of his own house, where they put him to bed. Of the events of that night there is nothing more to tell.

The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing found out that nothing had come of the incident, he showed up at Dame Wang's place to keep his tryst with the woman as usual. Their only hope was that Wu the Elder would die.

The injuries he had sustained were serious enough to keep him from getting up or going out for five days. On top of which:

*When he wanted soup, there was none to be had;*
*When he wanted water, there was none to be had.*[9]

Everyday he called on his wife for help but she refused to respond. He had to lie there and watch as she dolled herself up before going out, and when she returned her face was red.

The woman even prohibited his daughter, Ying-erh, from coming to his aid, threatening her with the words, "You little wretch! If you give him so much as a cup of water to drink without telling me, you'd better look out."

Ying-erh was so intimidated by this that she didn't dare serve her father a mouthful of soup. On several occasions Wu the Elder fainted away from sheer indignation but there was no one to pay any attention.

One day Wu the Elder told his wife he had something important to say to her and addressed her as follows: "As for what you've been up to, I caught you red-handed in the act of adultery, and you turned around and egged your lover into kicking me in the solar plexus, so that now:

*Though I seek to live, I cannot live;*
*Though I seek to die, I cannot die,*[10]

while all the time the two of you are off enjoying yourselves together. If I die it scarcely matters. I don't have the strength to contend with you any longer. But my younger brother, Wu the Second—you know what sort of a person he is—when he returns—as he will, sooner or later—he'll scarcely be willing to call it quits. If you consent to take pity on me, and help me to recover as soon as possible, when he comes back I won't say anything about it. But if you refuse to look after me, when he comes home he'll have something to say to you."

When the woman heard this speech she made no reply but slipped over to Dame Wang's place and repeated it, word for word, to the old woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard what she had to say it was:

*Just as though he had been dunked in a*
*tub of ice water.*[11]

"That's bad!" he said. "I understand that Captain Wu who killed the tiger on Ching-yang Ridge is the number one stout fellow in Ch'ing-ho district. But right now:

*Having been lovers for many a day;*
*Our feelings and thoughts are one,*

*We can never agree to be separated.*[17]
If what you say is true, what are we to do? It's a bad situation all right!"
Dame Wang laughed sardonically and said, "I've never seen anything like it. You're the helmsman and I'm merely a sculler but I'm not worried about it while you're in a state of panic."
"I may be a man," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but for all that, when it comes to situations like this, I don't know what to do. If you've got any ideas, please do whatever you can to protect us."
"If you want me to protect you," said Dame Wang, "I've got a plan that should do the trick. Do you want to be 'long-term man and wife' or 'short-term man and wife'?"
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what do you mean by 'long-term man and wife' and 'short-term man and wife'?"
"If you want to be 'short-term man and wife,' " said Dame Wang, "you should separate from each other this very day, wait until Wu the Elder has recovered, and offer him an apology. Then, when Wu the Second comes back, he won't say anything about it, and you can wait until he's sent away on another mission to get together again. That's what I mean by 'short term man and wife.' But if you want to be 'long-term man and wife,' to spend everyday together without having to:
*Anticipate surprise and suffer fear;*[18]
I've got a splendid plan for you. The only thing is it's not an easy subject to broach."
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "please help us out. The only thing we want is to be 'long-term man and wife.' "
"This plan," said Dame Wang, "requires something that no one else has got but which you, sir:
*As Heaven begets so Heaven disposes;*[19]
happen to possess."
"Even if it were my eyes you wanted," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'd gouge them out and give them to you. What is this thing anyway?"
"Right now," said Dame Wang, "this 'knockabout'[15] is in pretty bad shape. This presents you with the opportunity to take action against him while he's incapacitated. You, sir, should go home and pick up some arsenic from your pharmaceutical shop and then get the young lady to buy a dose of heart medicine, mix the arsenic in with it, and polish off this runt once and for all. If you cremate the body afterward you'll have gotten him completely out of the way, without leaving a trace behind. Then, even if Wu the Second comes back, what will he be able to do about it? It's always been the case that:
*In one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;*
*In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.*[16]
Your brother-in-law will have nothing to say in the matter. You can continue to see each other clandestinely, and after half a year or a year the dust will have settled. Then, as soon as the mourning period for your husband expires, the gentleman can pop you into a sedan chair and take you into his household as a concubine. Then you can be 'long-term man and wife' and:
Live happily ever after.
How's that for a plan?"
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this plan is splendid indeed. It's always been true that:
*If one wants to be able to enjoy life,*
*One has to be prepared to risk death.*[17]
Enough! Enough! Enough! One must either:
*Refuse to do something;*
*Or not stop at anything.*[18]
"That's the spirit," said Dame Wang. "This is a situation in which:
*One must cut the weeds and pull up the roots,*
*So that new sprouts will not grow;*
*If one cuts the weeds without pulling up the roots,*
*When spring comes new sprouts will grow.*[19]
The only problem remaining is how to proceed. You, sir, should go straight home and bring this ingredient as quickly as possible. I'll instruct the young lady on what she is to do. When the affair is accomplished I expect to be amply rewarded."
"Naturally," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that goes without saying."
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Obsessed with thoughts of clouds and rain,*
the two of them are inseparable;
Yearning for beauty, hankering after flowers,
he will not call it quits.
In the final analysis, in this world
such things do happen;
Wu the Elder will lose his life
at the hands of a painted face.[20]
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had not been gone for long when he returned with a packet of arsenic that he handed over to Dame Wang, who put it away.
Turning her attention to the woman, she said, "Young lady, I'll tell you how to administer the medicine. Didn't Wu the Elder say to you, this very day, that he wanted you to help him recover? You must take advantage of this opening by playing up to him with every trick at your disposal. If he asks you for any medication, mix this arsenic in with some heart medicine before administering it to him. If he realizes that something is wrong and starts to struggle, just pour the rest of it down his throat before you jump off the bed. When the poison starts to take effect his stomach and intestines will burst and he may cry out. You must muffle his cries with a quilt so no one will hear, holding the quilt in place as tightly as you can. You must also heat a pan of hot water beforehand and put a rag to soak in it. When the poison takes effect there may be hemorrhaging from all his seven apertures as well as telltale marks where he has bitten his lips. After he stops breathing you must remove the quilt, take the rag that you have soaked in hot water, and wipe away any signs of blood. Then he can be popped into a coffin, carted out of town, and cremated. There's nothing to it."
"That's all very fine," said the woman, "but I'm afraid, when the time comes, I may lose my nerve and be unable to handle the corpse."
"That's no problem," said the old lady. "Just knock on the wall and I'll come over to help you."
"Do the best you can," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow morning at the fifth watch I'll come by to see what's happened." Having said which, he made his way home.
Dame Wang took the arsenic and rolled it between her fingers into a fine powder, after which she gave it to the woman to take home and hide away in a safe place. The woman went upstairs to see how Wu the Elder was and found him:
*With barely two breaths left in his body;*[21]
manifestly on the brink of death. The woman sat down on the side of the bed and pretended to weep.
"What are you weeping about?" asked Wu the Elder.
The woman wiped away her tears and said, "In a moment of weakness I let that Hsi-men Ch'ing take advantage of me but I never expected he would end up kicking you in the solar plexus. I've heard of a place that has good prescriptions for sale, and I'd like to go buy one for you but I'm afraid you might be suspicious, so I haven't ventured to go and get it."
"If you help me to recover," said Wu the Elder, "so I'm all right again, I'll:
*Wipe the slate clean with a single stroke,*[22]
and won't even hold a grudge against you. When Wu the Second comes back I won't say anything about it. Please go buy the medicine as quickly as possible and help me to recover."
The woman picked up some copper cash and went directly to Dame Wang's place, where she sat down and got the old lady to buy the medicine for her.
Then she took it back upstairs and showed it to Wu the Elder, saying, "This is a dose of heart medicine. The doctor said if you take it late in the evening and then get a good night's sleep, with a couple of quilts over you to make you sweat, you can be up and about tomorrow."
"That's wonderful," said Wu the Elder. "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble. If you're willing to sacrifice a little sleep tonight, you can stay up and fix it for me when the time comes."
"Just relax and try to get some sleep," said the woman. "I'll take care of everything for you."
Gradually darkness began to fall. In the house the woman lit a lamp and heated a large pan of hot water, into which she put a rag to soak. She listened for the sound of the drum that signaled the night watches and eventually heard the third watch struck. First the woman poured the arsenic into a cup and then she scooped up a bowl of boiling water and took them upstairs.
"Darling, where did you put the medicine?" she called out.
"It's under the bed mat, beside my pillow," said Wu the Elder. "Hurry up and fix it for me."
The woman lifted up the mat, shook the medicine into the cup, and set the packet aside. Then she poured the hot water into the cup and, pulling a silver hairpin out of her hair, used it to stir the contents until it was all dissolved. With her left hand she helped Wu the Elder sit up in bed while with her right hand she held the medicine to his mouth.
Wu the Elder swallowed a mouthful and said, "Darling, this medicine really tastes awful."
"As long as it cures what ails you," the woman said, "what difference does it make whether it tastes awful or not?"
While Wu the Elder was swallowing his second mouthful the woman took advantage of the situation to pour the entire contents of the cup down his throat in one gulp. Then she laid him back down and hastily jumped off the bed.
Wu the Elder gave a groan and said, "Darling, no sooner did I swallow the medicine than my stomach began to hurt. It's bad! It's bad! It's more than I can take."
The woman then proceeded to take two quilts from the foot of the bed and put them hugger-mugger over his head and face.
"I'm suffocating," called out Wu the Elder as loudly as he could.
"The doctor told me," the woman responded, "that if I really made you sweat you'd get better that much faster."
Wu the Elder tried to say something more but the woman was afraid he might put up a struggle so she jumped onto the bed, sat astride Wu the Elder's body,[23] and pressed down on the edge of the quilt with all her might, not letting up to the slightest degree. Truly:
*Hot grease sears his chest and lungs;*
*Flames scorch his liver and intestines.*
*His heart cavity is encroached upon*
*by gleaming blades;*
*His entrails are rudely invaded*
*by steely knives.*
*His whole body feels as cold as ice;*
*His seven apertures all begin to hemorrhage.*
*His teeth are tightly clenched;*
*His three ethereal souls flee to the*
*City of the Unjustly Dead.*
*His throat is dry and parched;*
*His seven material souls head for the*
*Terrace of Homeward Gazing Spirits.*[24]
*The legions of Hell are further augmented*
*by one poison-eating ghost;*
*The world of the living is diminished*
*by one adulterer-seizing man.*[25]
At this point Wu the Elder groaned twice and panted for a little while. Then his stomach and intestines burst and:
*Alas and alack,*
he was no longer able to move.
When the woman removed the quilt and saw that Wu the Elder had been:
*Grinding and gnashing his teeth,*[26]
and that he had hemorrhaged from all seven apertures, she was afraid. It was all she could do to jump off the bed and knock on the wall. When Dame Wang heard the knock she came over to the back door and gave a cough, at which the woman came downstairs to let her in.
"Is it all over or not?" asked Dame Wang.
"It's all over all right," said the woman, "but I've lost my nerve and can't handle it."
"What's so hard about it?" said Dame Wang. "I'll help you take care of everything."
The old lady rolled up her sleeves, scooped up a bucketful of hot water, threw the rag into it, and lugged it upstairs. Then she rolled up the quilts, wiped away all traces of coagulated blood from around Wu the Elder's lips and seven apertures, and placed his clothes on top of the body. The two of them then carried him downstairs, one step at a time, and laid him out on the leaf of an old door. Once there, they combed his hair, placed a turban on his head, dressed him, and put on his shoes and stockings. Then they stretched a strip of white damask over his face and covered the corpse with a clean quilt. After they had gone back upstairs and cleaned everything up, Dame Wang went home and the woman commenced the charade of loudly bewailing the loss of her provider.
Gentle reader take note: It so happens that, generally speaking, the women of this world have three ways of weeping. If there are tears as well as sound, it is called weeping. If there are tears but no sound, it is called sobbing. If there are no tears but there is sound, it is called howling.[27]
The woman howled, without shedding a tear, for the remainder of the night.
The next morning at the fifth watch, before it was light, Hsi-men Ch'ing hurried over to find out what had happened. When Dame Wang had told him all the details he pulled out some silver and gave it to her to cover the cost of a coffin and the other funeral arrangements. Then they called the woman over for a conference.
When the woman arrived she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Now that Wu the Elder is dead I'm completely dependent on you, sir. Don't put me in the position of:
*The rings that hold your hairnet in place: always*
*at the back of your head.*[28]
"What need is there for you to trouble yourself about that?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"And if you should betray me," the woman asked, "what then?"
"If I ever betray you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I suffer the same fate as your Wu the Elder."

"Sir," said Dame Wang, "that's enough idle chatter for the time being. Right now there's only one thing that's important. Later this morning the local constable must supervise the encoffining ceremony, and if the coroner's assistant notices anything suspicious, what will we do then? The head coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth, doesn't miss a trick. My only fear is that he may not permit the encoffining."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "I'll simply tell Ho the Ninth what to do. He wouldn't dare refuse a request from me."
"You'd better go speak to him immediately," said Dame Wang, "before it's too late."
Having turned the silver over to Dame Wang to buy the coffin, Hsi-men Ch'ing then went off to deal with Ho the Ninth. Truly:
*The three luminaries cast shadows but*
who can catch them;
The ten thousand things have no roots, they
just arise of themselves.[29]
Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets
is not seen until they fly;
Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots
is not known until they speak.[30]
*How reprehensible is the wanton fellow, enamored*
of the flowers by the wayside;
It is because of his insatiable lust that he
brings troubles on his head.
His body will perish and his life be lost
solely on this account;
His property will be destroyed and his family ruined
for this reason alone.
Romantic passion lasts but a moment; what value
does it have?
Its taste is quite ordinary; it is
nothing to boast about.
One day "catastrophe will arise within the
screen-wall of the house";[1]
And it will owe its inception to the
machinations of Dame Wang.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to deal with Ho the Ninth.
To resume our story, Dame Wang took the silver and set out to buy a coffin and appropriate objects to bury with the dead. She also bought incense, candles, paper money, and so forth. After she had returned she consulted with the woman, and they lighted a vigil lamp and placed it before Wu the Elder's spirit tablet.
The neighbours from the locality all came to see what was going on, and the woman pretended to hide her painted face as she shed crocodile tears.
"What illness did Wu the Elder die of?" the neighbours asked.
"My husband suffered from severe pains in the region of the heart," the woman replied. "Who could have anticipated that they would grow worse and worse as the days went by, until it became apparent that he was unlikely to recover? Unfortunately last night, during the third watch, he died. It's really terrible!" And she commenced once more the charade of loud weeping and wailing.
The neighbours were perfectly well aware that the deceased had died under suspicious circumstances but they did not venture to inquire into them any too closely. They all attempted to comfort her with the words, "The dead are dead. The living must get on as best they can. Try to control your grief, young lady. The weather's too hot for it."
The woman had no choice but to pretend to thank them all, and they went their separate ways.
When Dame Wang had supervised the delivery of the coffin she went out again to request the attendance of the head coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth, and to buy everything that was required for the encoffining ceremony and other household needs. Then she went to the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, and engaged two Ch'an monks to come that evening to keep vigil and perform a mass for the dead. It was not long before Ho the Ninth sent a couple of coroner's assistants ahead of him to take care of the preliminaries.
To resume our story, at about 10:00 A.M. Ho the Ninth himself set forth at a leisurely pace. When he arrived at the mouth of the alley on Amethyst Street he encountered Hsi-men Ch'ing, who called out to him, "Ho the Ninth, where are you headed?"
"I'm just going down the street here," replied Ho the Ninth, "to encoffin the corpse of Wu the Elder, who sold steamed wheat cakes."
"Walk a few steps with me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got something to say to you."
Ho the Ninth followed Hsi-men Ch'ing into a small wineshop on the corner, where they occupied a private booth.
"Old Ninth, please take the seat of honour," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Who am I," said Ho the Ninth, "to presume to sit down in your presence, sir?"
"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why be so standoffish? Please, have a seat."
The two of them dickered politely for a while and then sat down. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the waiter to bring a bottle of their best wine. The waiter set out an array of appetizers, nuts, and so forth, suitable to accompany a drinking party, and then heated the wine for them.
Ho the Ninth was somewhat apprehensive. "Hsi-men Ch'ing has never bothered to have a drink with me before," he thought to himself. "This cup of wine today is sure to have something funny behind it."
The two of them had been drinking together for some time when, lo and behold, Hsi-men Ch'ing fumbled in his sleeve, pulled out an ingot of "snowflake" silver, and placed it in front of him, saying, "Old Ninth, please don't despise this, insignificant though it may be. I'll give you a further expression of my gratitude another day."
Ho the Ninth folded his hands in front of him and said, "Having never done the slightest thing to deserve it, sir, how could I possibly accept this silver from you? But if you have a command, sir, I could scarcely presume to refuse."
"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't be so standoffish. Please take it."
"Tell me what you have in mind, sir," said Ho the Ninth, "no matter what it is."
"It isn't anything much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and in a little while the family will also give you something for your pains. The only thing is, right now, when you encoffin Wu the Elder's corpse, I'd be much obliged if you'd take care of everything, and:
*Draw an embroidered quilt over it,*[2]
that's all. Need I say more?"
"I thought you were going to ask me to do something demanding," said Ho the Ninth. "What does a little thing like that matter? How could I possibly accept your silver for that, sir?"
"Old Ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you don't accept it, you'll be refusing me."
Ho the Ninth had always been rather afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing for his unscrupulousness and his influence in official quarters, so he felt that he had no recourse but to accept the proffered silver.
After they had finished another few cups of wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned the waiter and said, "Put it on the tab and come to my shop to collect the money tomorrow."
The two of them then went downstairs and out the door of the wineshop.
As they were on the point of parting Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Old Ninth, be sure to remember. If you keep your mouth shut I'll reward you further on another day."
Having issued his instructions, he then went about his business.
Ho the Ninth was somewhat apprehensive. "It's my responsibility to encoffin Wu the Elder's corpse," he thought to himself. "Why should he give me these ten taels of silver? There's sure to be something funny about this business."
When he arrived at the door of Wu the Elder's house he found the pair of coroner's assistants that he had sent ahead waiting for him there. Dame Wang had also been waiting for a long time and had been questioning them about his whereabouts.
Ho the Ninth asked the coroner's assistants, "What illness did Wu the Elder die of?"
"His family says he died of heart trouble," said the coroner's assistants.
Ho the Ninth approached the door, pulled the hanging blind aside, and went inside.
Dame Wang greeted him with the words, "We've been waiting for you a long time. The Yin-yang Master's already been here half the day. Old Ninth, what's been keeping you so long?"
"Something came up that prevented me from getting here any sooner," said Ho the Ninth. "I'm afraid I'm a little late."
At this point he caught sight of the woman who came out from the interior of the house dressed in plain white clothes, with a white paper cap over her chignon, feigning tears.
"Try to control your grief, young lady," said Ho the Ninth. "Your husband is surely in Heaven by now."
The woman pretended to wipe away her tears, saying, "I can't tell you how terrible it is. My husband was stricken with heart trouble and in only a few days lost his life, just like that. It's really terrible to be so bereaved."
Ho the Ninth looked the woman over from top to toe and thought to himself, "Hitherto I've only heard tell of Wu the Elder's wife without ever having set eyes on her myself. So this is the sort of woman Wu the Elder managed to keep in his house. Hsi-men Ch'ing's ten taels of silver have not been spent for nothing." Then he went over by the spirit tablet and prepared to examine Wu the Elder's corpse. As soon as the Yin-yang Master had finished reciting his text, Ho the Ninth lifted aside the funeral banderole and removed the strip of white damask that had been stretched over the face of the deceased. No sooner did he concentrate the gaze of those vigilant organs of his, with their 5 concentric rings, 8 precious attributes, and 2 spots of magic liquid[4] than he perceived that Wu the Elder's fingernails were black, lips were purple, face was sallow, eyes protruded,[5] and knew he had been poisoned.

When deep in mystic contemplation
Sounding the shallows of this world's emptiness,
Even the marriage most blessed by Fate seems full of evil.
Men in their folly crave for love,
Yet, when in calm collectedness they study it,
Hateful it seems.
Leave the wild grasses
Gather not the idle flowers
So, thy truest self, the vigor of thy manhood,
Will know the peace of Nature.
A simple wife, young children, and plain fare
With these need no man suffer the pangs of love
Or lose his fortune.

Yun'ge could not contain his anger at the way old woman Wang had treated him. He took his basket and went to find Wu Da. He had gone through two streets before he met the man for whom he was looking. Wu Da, carrying his buns, was coming towards him. The boy stopped. "It is some time since I saw you last," he said, looking hard at the man. "How fat you have grown."
"Fat?" said Wu Da. "What do you mean? I am just the same as I always was."
"A few days ago," Yun'ge said, "I wanted some chicken food. I went for miles but couldn't get any. Yet everybody tells me you have lots of it at your house."
"I keep neither geese nor ducks," Wu Da said. "Why should I have chicken food?"
"So you say," Yun'ge retorted, "but what makes you so much like a capon? Why! If you were held topsy-turvy, you would never turn a hair; you'd keep quite cool if you were being boiled in a cauldron."
"This is an insult, you young scoundrel," Wu Da cried. "My wife has not run off with anybody's husband. What makes you call me a capon?"
"Indeed?" the boy said. "So your wife has not run off with anybody's husband, hasn't she? Perhaps I should have said she has run off with *somebody's* husband."
"Who is the man?" Wu Da cried. "Tell me."
"You make me laugh. You can do what you like with me easily enough but you won't find your wife's new friend so easy to dispose of."
"Good little brother, tell me who he is and I will give you ten cakes." "Cakes won't do. I'd rather you were my host and gave me some wine. Three cups, and I'll tell you the whole story."
"If it's wine you want, come along," Wu Da said. He led the way to a little wineshop. Calling for a jar of wine and some meat, he took cakes from his basket and invited Yun'ge to join him. "Good little brother," he said, "you really must tell me."
"There is no hurry. Wait till I have finished my food. Then I'll tell you. You mustn't be impatient. I'll help you to catch them."
Wu Da waited till the young monkey had finished, and again asked him to explain himself.
"If you would like to know," the boy said, "put your hand on my head and feel the bumps."
"How did you get them?"
"I'll tell you. Today I have been carrying my pears about looking for his Lordship, Ximen. I walked and walked but couldn't find him anywhere. Then somebody in the street told me he was at old woman Wang's tea shop, amusing himself with Mistress Wu; that he went there everyday. I thought I might see him there, and get thirty or fifty cash from him but the old sow Wang wouldn't let me in. She drove me away, and then I thought I'd come and see you. I was rather rude but, if I hadn't made you wild, you wouldn't have asked me any questions."
"Is this the truth?"
"Don't you believe me?" the boy cried. "Didn't I say you were a white-livered fellow? Those two are making merry at this very moment. They wait till you have gone out, and then they go and meet at the old woman's house. You say, 'Is this the truth?' What reason have I for deceiving you?"
"Little brother, it is true. My wife goes everyday to this old woman's house to make clothes and shoes, and when she comes back she has a red face. My first wife left me with a little daughter. This woman beats her every morning and scolds her every night. She gives her hardly anything to eat. Lately she certainly has been looking as if something was on her mind. She looked balefully at me, and I wondered whether anything was wrong. You have told the truth. I will put my baskets down and go and catch these evil-doers in the act."
"You may be old as years go," Yun'ge said, "but for the little you know of the world, you might be a child. That old bitch Wang is not afraid of anybody. She would throw you out of the house. Besides, your wife and Ximen have a secret signal. If they knew you were coming, Ximen Qing would hide your wife. He is a very strong man and could dispose of twenty like you. You will never be able to touch him; much more likely you'll find his fist in your mouth. He is so rich and powerful that he would bring an accusation against you, and have you hauled to the courts. You have nobody to help you, and you'd come to an unhappy end."
"You are right, little brother but what can I do to revenge myself?"
"I want revenge too," Yun'ge said, "for the old woman beat me. Listen to me. Go home today, show no sign of being angry, and don't say one word about the matter. Just behave as usual. Tomorrow, don't make more than a few cakes. Go out with them. I shall be waiting at the entrance to the lane. If Ximen Qing comes, I will give you a call, and you can take your baskets and wait for me somewhere near by. I will go first and plague the old bitch. She will certainly come out to hit me. I will throw my basket far into the street, and then you can run in. I will hold the old woman, and you can rush into the room, and tell them what you think about them. Don't you think that's a good plan?"
"I am greatly indebted to you," Wu Da said; "here are two strings of cash. Come early tomorrow and wait at the entrance to Amethyst Street."

Yun'ge took the money and some of the cakes, and went off. Wu Da paid the reckoning, picked up his baskets, and went back to the street to sell his cakes. A little later he went home.
His wife had never ceased to grumble at him and had found a hundred ways of making life unpleasant to him but of late her conscience had smitten her and she showed signs of relenting. This evening, when Wu Da came home with his baskets and said nothing, as was usual, she asked him to have some wine. He refused, saying he had already taken wine with some merchants. She laid out his supper but still he did not offer to speak, and next morning, after breakfast, he made only two or three trays of cakes, and put them in his baskets. Jinlian was so taken up with her thoughts of Ximen Qing that she did not notice how many cakes he made. She waited impatiently until he had gone out and then went to the tea shop to wait for her lover.
Wu Da took his baskets to the entrance to Amethyst Street. Yun'ge, also with a basket, was looking around.
"Well?" Wu Da said.
"It is too soon yet. Go and sell your cakes till he comes. Wait at the corner, and don't go far away."
Wu Da hurried away but was soon back again. "The moment you see me throw down my basket," the boy said, "dash into the room." Wu Da put down his own basket and waited.
Yun'ge went to the tea shop. "You old pig," he said, in the most irritating tone he could command. "What did you mean by hitting me yesterday?"
Old woman Wang jumped up at once. "I have not done anything to you, you little monkey. Why have you come to insult me again?"
"For a very good reason, you old bitch, you old strumpet mistress. My ramrod to you!"
This made the old woman furious. She dashed at Yun'ge and tried to hit him. "Would you beat me?" he cried, and threw his basket as far as he could into the street. The old woman tried to hold him but the little monkey cried, "Hit me if you can," put down his head, and butted her in the belly. She would have fallen if there had not been a wall behind her. The young monkey pushed as hard as he could and pinned her against the wall, while Wu Da pulled up his skirts and strode into the tea shop. The old woman saw him, and would have stopped him if she could but the boy kept her close against the wall and she could not free herself.
"Wu Da is here," she cried.
Jinlian and Ximen Qing did not know what to do. Jinlian threw herself against the door, and Ximen Qing crawled under the bed. Wu Da tried to force open the door but failed. "This is a fine game you're playing," he cried. Jinlian was filled with confusion but she succeeded in holding the door against him.
"You talk about the strength of your fists," she said to Ximen Qing, "and you are always boasting about your skill with the staff; why don't you come out and do something? Why, even a paper tiger is enough to frighten you." This she said to shame him into coming out, so that he might strike down Wu Da and make his escape. Ximen, in his hiding place under the bed, did grow bolder when he heard what she said. He crawled out nervously.
"I wasn't afraid," he said, "only a little taken by surprise." He threw open the door, and cried, "Stand back there!" Wu Da tried to close but Ximen kicked out at him and, as the man was very small, the foot caught him in the ribs, and he fell backwards. Ximen Qing went out, and Yun'ge, seeing that matters had not turned out as he had hoped, released the old woman and ran away.
The neighbours knew Ximen Qing's power, and none of them dared to come and interfere. Old woman Wang lifted up Wu Da. His face was as yellow as a tallow candle, and he was spitting blood. She told Jinlian to bring a cup of water to revive him and then, each holding him by one arm, they took him home by the back way and put him to bed.
Next day Ximen did not hear any bad news, so he went as usual to the old woman's house to make merry with Jinlian. He hoped that Wu Da would die, and indeed for five days the poor man was very ill, and unable to leave his bed. He longed for food and could obtain none; he sighed for a drink and none was given him. Day after day he appealed to Jinlian but she never answered. She went out, dressed in her best clothes, and came back with a flushed face. His daughter Ying'er had been forbidden to do anything for him. "If you dare to do anything for him and don't tell me," the woman had said, "you shall pay for it." After this the child did not venture to give her father a spoonful of soup or even a drop of water. Several times Wu Da fainted in his anger but nobody paid the least attention to him. One day he cried to his wife, "You have done this because I found you out. You told that wicked man to kick me over the heart. And now I can neither die nor live. And the pair of you are as happy as can be. If I die, it is a small matter; you have nothing to fear from me. But don't forget Wu Song. Sooner or later he will come back, and he will have something to say about all this. Show me a little kindness and help me to get well as quickly as possible and I won't tell him anything. But if you still refuse to do anything for me, I shall have my reckoning with you on his return."
Jinlian listened but made no answer. She went next door and told old woman Wang and Ximen Qing everything Wu Da had said. Ximen shivered as though a bucket of cold water had been poured over him. "This is most awkward," he said. "This brother is the Captain Wu who killed a tiger on Jingyang Hill. And now I have learned to love you. We get on together so perfectly. It is not conceivable that we should separate but it means thinking out some way of dealing with the problem. Really, it is most unfortunate."
Old woman Wang laughed. "I've never seen such a man. You are at the helm and I am only at the oar, yet, while I see no difficulty, you seem to have no notion what to do."
"I am ashamed," Ximen said, "but I must admit I don't know what to do. Have you any plan for getting us out of the difficulty?"
"If you really wish for my help, I have a plan," the old woman said. "First, I must know whether you wish your relations to be permanent or temporary."
"What do you mean, Stepmother?"
"If you will be satisfied with a temporary arrangement, you must separate today. When Wu Da is well, you must ask his forgiveness. Then nobody will say anything to Wu Song about this affair. You will have to wait till some business takes him away again, and then you can meet once more. That is what I mean by 'temporary arrangement.' If you wish for something more permanent, I have an excellent idea but it is one that I hesitate to tell you."
"Stepmother," Ximen said, "please do anything you can to keep us always together."
"There is one thing I need for this plan. It is not to be had everywhere but I have no doubt you have some of it."
"If you want my eye, you shall have it," Ximen cried. "What is it you mean?"
"Wu Da is dangerously ill. Let us take the chance while we have it. Go to your shop, get some arsenic and give it to this lady. Then she can buy some medicine for Wu Da's sore chest and put the arsenic into it. So we shall rid ourselves of that little man. When he is dead, we will burn his body till not a trace remains. When Wu Song comes back, he can do nothing about it. A young man, when he takes a wife, marries to please his parents but when he marries again he makes his own choice. What can a younger brother do? Six months or a year later, when the lady is out of mourning, there is nothing to prevent you marrying her. If you live together happily all your lives, won't that be permanent enough for you?"
"It is an admirable plan, Stepmother. As the proverb says: 'The treasure of a happy life can only be secured by desperate deeds.' Yes, one evil deed deserves another."
"So you think my scheme a good one!" the old woman said. "Well, there is nothing like pulling up the roots when we cut the grass. It never grows again. Go home, Sir, and bring the stuff to me. I'll show the lady what to do with it. But, when all is over, I shall expect a present worth having."
"Of course," Ximen said, "that goes without saying."
He went at once to his shop and soon returned with a packet of arsenic that he gave to old woman Wang. She looked at Jinlian.
"Now, Lady, I am going to tell you how to use this. Wu Da has begged you to save him, and that gives you an opening. You must make a great show of affection. When he asks you for something to make him better, put this arsenic into some medicine to soothe his chest. When he complains of pain, pour it down his throat. As soon as the poison has got to work, his bowels will burst and he will cry out. So put the bedclothes over him, and press down the coverlet, and make sure that no one hears him. One thing you must do is to heat some water, and put a napkin into it. When the poison has taken effect, blood will stream from the seven openings of his body, and there will be marks on his lips. As soon as he is really dead, you must take off the bedclothes, and wipe away the blood. All that remains is to put him into a coffin and get him out of the way."
"I see," Jinlian said, "but my arms are weak. I shall not have strength enough."
"That doesn't matter. Knock on the wall, and I will come and help you."
"You must both be very careful," Ximen Qing said. "I will come tomorrow at the fifth watch to hear what news you have."
Old woman Wang powdered the arsenic and gave it to Jinlian, who went home. Wu Da was breathing so feebly that it seemed as though his soul had already left him. She sat on his bed, and pretended to cry.
"Why are you crying?" Wu Da said.
Jinlian dried her tears. "Because I allowed myself to be led astray by that Ximen Qing and, for a time, yielded to temptation. But I never meant him to kick you in the chest. Now, I have heard of some very good medicine, and I would go and buy some to make you well, if I were not afraid you would be suspicious. As it is, I don't dare go."
"If you will only save my life," Wu Da said, "I'll forgive you everything, and never hold this business against you. And I won't tell Wu Song anything about it, when he comes home. Go and buy the medicine, and save my life."
The woman took a few coins, and went to old woman Wang's, to make it appear as though she had asked her neighbour to go and buy it. When she came back, she showed the medicine to her husband. "This will soon cure you," she told him. "The doctor says you must drink it during the night, and cover yourself with one or two blankets to make you sweat. Then go to sleep, and tomorrow you will be able to get up."
"Splendid," Wu Da said. "I am very grateful to you. Don't go to sleep but make up the medicine for me in the middle of the night."
"Go to sleep again," the woman said. "I will bring it to you without fail." It was beginning to grow dark. Jinlian lighted the lamp. Then she went downstairs, put a great cauldron of water on the fire, and dipped a cloth into it. The watchman sounded the third night watch. She put the arsenic into a cup, filled it up with water, and took it upstairs.
"Brother, where is the medicine?"
"Here, underneath the mattress. Please make it for me at once."
Jinlian lifted the mattress, and took the medicine. She put it into a cup, then filled up the cup with the liquid she had brought, stirring it with a silver pin she took from her hair. With her left arm she supported her husband. Then she poured the medicine down his throat. Wu Da drank a mouthful.
"Sister," he said, "this medicine is very nasty."
"We are only trying to make you well. Don't be put off by the bitter taste."
Wu Da drank again, and the woman emptied the cup down his throat. She lowered him on to the bed again, herself got down from it. Wu Da groaned.
"Sister, I have taken the medicine but the pain in my belly feels worse, worse. Oh, I can't bear it."
Jinlian took two coverlets from behind his head, and pulled them entirely over his head.
"I can't breathe," Wu Da cried.
"It is what the doctor told me to do. It will make you sweat, and you'll be better much sooner."
Wu Da again tried to speak, and Jinlian was afraid he might struggle. She leaped upon the bed and, riding astride his body, pressed down the bedclothes so that he could not move at all.
His lungs were fried in boiling oil, his liver and bowels burned with fire,
His heart was pierced as by a butcher's knife, his belly stirred as by a sword's sharp edge.
Then froze his body to an icy cold, the seven openings all streamed with blood.
Through clenched teeth his three spirits sped to the city of ghosts.
From his parched throat his seven souls fled to the watchtower of Hell.
Thus to the ghosts of all the poisoned deep in Hades
Was joined another,
And in the world of living none was left
To hinder wantonness.
Wu Da groaned twice, and gasped for breath. Then his bowels burst, and he died.
Jinlian pulled down the bedclothes. Wu Da's teeth were tight clenched, and blood streamed from the seven openings. She was frightened and, getting down from the bed, knocked on the wall. When old woman Wang heard the knocking, she came to the back door and coughed. Jinlian went downstairs and opened the door.
"Is it all over?" the old woman asked.
"Over? Yes, it is over. My hands and feet fail me, and I can do no more." "What is the matter with you?" the old woman said. "I'll help you." She rolled up her sleeves, took a tub of boiling water and put a napkin in it. Then she took them upstairs and gathered up all the bedclothes. She wiped Wu Da's lips, and cleaned away the blood from the seven openings. Then she piled the clothes on his body and, step by step, the pair of them carried him downstairs. There, they took an old door, and lifted the corpse onto it. They combed his hair and put a hat on his head, dressed him, and put shoes and socks upon his feet. They covered his face with a piece of white silk, and set clean bedclothes over him. Then they went upstairs again, and straightened the place. Old woman Wang went home, and Jinlian pretended to mourn for Wu Da, crying, "Husband! Husband!"
Readers, though there are many women in the world, they have but three ways of lamenting. Sometimes they weep and sob at the same time; sometimes they sob and do not weep; and sometimes they weep and do not sob. Jinlian sobbed for half the night but not a tear accompanied her sobbing.
Next morning, just before dawn, Ximen Qing came to hear how the thing had gone. Old woman Wang told him all about it. He gave her some silver to pay for the coffin and the funeral expenses, and they called Jinlian to discuss the arrangements. When she came, she said to Ximen Qing:
"Wu Da is dead, and you are all I have in the world. All I have done, I have done for you. You must not, some day, cast me aside like a woman's hairnet that is no more needed."
"There is no fear of that."
"But what if ever you change your mind?"
"If I do, may I have the place that now is Wu Da's."
The old woman interrupted them. "There is one thing that must be attended to at once. We must have him put in his coffin without any delay. The coroner's officers might see that there is something wrong, especially He the Ninth, who is a smart man. He might even refuse to put Wu Da in his coffin."
"There will be no trouble from that quarter," Ximen said. "I will speak to He the Ninth. He will do anything I wish,"
"In that case," the old woman said, "you had better go and speak to him at once. Don't waste a moment." So Ximen Qing set out to find He the Ninth.
The sun, the moon, the stars, all cast their shadows
We cannot reach them.
The multitude of happenings that have no roots save in themselves,
Comes into being.
The herons are behind the clouds
We see them only when they fly.
The parrot is hidden in the willow tree.
We hear him only when he speaks.

*

When Ximen Qing left the old woman's house, it was broad daylight. Old woman Wang went out and bought a coffin, some paper offerings, incense, candles and paper money. When she came back, she lighted a lamp, and set it before Wu Da's body. The neighbours came to offer their condolences, and Pan Jinlian covered her lovely face and pretended to sob.
"How did the gentleman die?" the neighbours asked.
"There was something amiss with his heart, and, although we never expected anything like this, he got worse and worse and at last we saw that he could not get better. Last night, about the third watch, he died." Jinlian pretended to sob.
The neighbours thought that there was something mysterious about the manner of this man's death but they did not venture to ask any more questions. They consoled Jinlian. "The dead are dead," they said, "but the living must live in peace. Do not grieve so much, Lady. It is too hot."
Jinlian thanked them, and they went away. Old woman Wang had the coffin brought, and went to see He the Ninth, the undertaker. She made all the arrangements, not only for the funeral but for the household generally. She went to the Temple of Eternal Felicity and asked for two choirs of monks to come that night and sing a dirge for the departed.
He the Ninth sent some of his assistants in advance to set everything in order, and it was some time before he sauntered along himself. At the entrance to Amethyst Street, he met Ximen Qing.
"Where are you going, old Ninth?" Ximen said.
"I am just going to perform the last offices for Wu Da, the cake seller," said He the Ninth.
"Wait a moment, I want to speak to you." He the Ninth went with Ximen Qing till they came to a small wineshop at the corner of the street, and there they went into a small room.
"Take the upper seat, old Ninth," Ximen said.
"Who am I," said Ho, "that I should take the liberty of being seated in your presence?"
"Don't stand on ceremony, old Ninth; please sit down." They argued politely for a while, and then took their places. Ximen Qing ordered the waiter to bring a bottle of good wine. Refreshments were set out, and the wine warmed. He the Ninth wondered what was to come. "Ximen Qing has never taken wine with me before," he said to himself. "I wonder what he wants." They drank together for a long time. At last Ximen took from his sleeve a piece of pure silver, and put it down on the table before his companion.
"Old Ninth," he said, "do not think this too poor a present. I will express my thanks more worthily tomorrow."

"I have done nothing for you, Sir." He the Ninth said, making a reverence. "How can I take your silver? Any matter that you may care to entrust to me will naturally receive my most careful attention."
"Old Ninth," Ximen said, "don't behave as though you were a stranger. Please take it."
"Tell me what I can do for you," He the Ninth said.
"Only this. You are going to see about the disposal of Wu Da's body and, of course, his people will pay you for what you do there. But if in the course of your duties you should happen to notice anything, pay no attention but cover him up with the bedclothes. That is all."
"I expected you to ask something really important," He the Ninth said, "and it is nothing more than this. It will be no trouble, and I couldn't think of taking your money."
"If you won't accept my money, I take it that you refuse to do this for me."
He the Ninth was aware of Ximen Qing's influence in official circles, and hesitated to offend him. He could not refuse to accept the money. They drank several more cups of wine, then Ximen Qing said to the waiter: "Put this down to my account, and come to my shop tomorrow for the money." They went downstairs and left the inn. As they took leave of one another, Ximen Qing said:
"Old Ninth, don't forget what I have told you but not a word must be said about this. Later on, I will show my appreciation more tangibly." He walked away.
He the Ninth pocketed the silver. "I don't know what all this means but it is evidently something to be kept quiet. Anyhow, here is the silver and if, as I expect, Wu Song has a few questions to ask when he comes back, I can produce it as evidence." A little later, he said to himself, "I need some money very badly just now, so I had better use this. When Wu Song comes back, I must think of something else." He came to Wu Da's house, where his men were all waiting for him at the door. Old woman Wang was also waiting anxiously.
"What did Wu Da die of?" He the Ninth said to his men.
"His wife says he suffered from pains at the heart, and died," his men said. He the Ninth pulled up the lattice and went in.
"We have been waiting a very long time for you," old woman Wang said, "and the Master of the Yin Yang has been here half a day. Why are you so late, old Ninth?"
"I had some business to attend to. That made me late."
Jinlian, wearing plain clothes, with a white covering on her head, sobbed as though her heart were breaking. "Do not grieve so, Lady," He the Ninth said. "Your husband is already on his way to Heaven."
"My sorrow is greater than I can bear," Jinlian said, drying her eyes. "My husband suffered from his heart and, after only a few days' illness, he died and left me inconsolable."
He the 9th looked the woman up and down. "I've often heard people speak of Wu Da's wife," he said to himself, "but this is the first time I've seen her. So this is the lady Wu Da married. Ximen Qing's getting good value for his ten taels of silver." He went to the bed and examined the body. By this time, the Master of the Yin Yang had finished his ritual, so He the 9th pulled aside the mortuary emblems and removed the white silk. He stared. Wu Da's fingers were green and his lips purple; face was yellow, and eyeballs protruded. The undertaker saw at once that a crime had been committed.

The two coroner's assistants who were standing to either side asked him, "Why is it that his face is purple, there are toothmarks on his lips, and signs of bleeding around his mouth?"
"Don't talk such nonsense!" said Ho the Ninth. "The weather's been extremely hot the last couple of days. A certain amount of deterioration is unavoidable under the circumstances."
He then proceeded, hugger-mugger,[8] to go through the motions of a formal examination of the corpse, presided over the encoffining, and directed his subordinates to drive the two "longevity nails" into either side of the lid of the casket.
Dame Wang did her best to expedite the proceedings and when they were finished produced a string of cash for Ho the Ninth and his men and sent them on their way.
"When will the interment take place?" he asked.
"The lady of the house," replied Dame Wang, "wants the funeral procession to take place on the third day, after which the body will be cremated outside the city wall."
The coroner's assistants then went their separate ways.
That evening the woman laid on a feast and invited guests. The second day four monks were engaged to recite sutras. Early on the morning of the third day, during the fifth watch, the coroner's assistants came to carry the coffin. There were also a few neighbours from the locality who put on mourning and joined in the funeral procession.
The woman donned her mourning attire, sat in a sedan chair, and all along the way continued the charade of loudly bewailing the loss of her provider. When they arrived at the crematorium outside the city walls a fire was ignited, the coffin, along with Wu the Elder's corpse, was completely incinerated, and his bones were scattered in the pond provided for that purpose.
It so happens that the refreshments provided for the guests at the funeral ceremony that day were all paid for by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When the woman returned home she set up a spirit tablet in the upstairs room on which were inscribed the words "Spirit Tablet of My Deceased Husband, Wu the Elder." In front of the spirit tablet she lit a glass lamp, hung up some gilded funeral streamers, and made offerings of paper money, imitation gold and silver ingots, and the like.
That day when Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman got together they sent Dame Wang back to her own home. The two of them then went upstairs and enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content. It was no longer the way it had been in Dame Wang's teashop when they had been confined to the furtive pleasures of:
*Snitching chickens and filching dogs.*[7]
Now that Wu the Elder was dead there was no one in the house to hinder them and they were able to:
*Give free rein to their desires, and*
*Sleep together all night long.*[9]
At the outset Hsi-men Ch'ing had been worried that the neighbours would realize what was going on, so he had always made a point of sitting around in Dame Wang's place for a while to keep up appearances. But now that Wu the Elder was dead he brought his body servant with him and went straight into the woman's house through the back door.
From this time on, he and the woman were inseparable.
*Passion pervaded their breasts;*
*Their mutual love was like glue.*[9]
He often stayed over with her for three or five nights in a row without going home. As a result, the members of his household, both high and low, were:
*All at sevens and eights,*
and became increasingly unhappy about the situation.
It so happens that the allure of feminine beauty ensnares men in such a way that:
*Where there is initial success,*
*There will be ultimate disaster.*[10]
There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:
*With lustful daring as big as the sky they can*
no longer control themselves;
Their passions deep, their love fast, the two
are inseparable.[11]
In their greed for pleasure they no longer care
whether they live or die;
When infatuated who bothers to engage in
self-cultivation?
*As affection grows deeper,*
The passions cloy;
The greater the love, the more long-lasting
the resentment.
If one wished to dispel the enmity between
the states of Wu and Yüeh;[12]
Earth might age and Heaven waste away
before it could be accomplished.
Light and darkness alternate swiftly;
*The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.*

"Why is his face purple?" the two assistants asked. "What is the cause of these teeth marks and the blood on his lips?"
"Don't be silly," He the Ninth said. "It is very hot. How can you expect a corpse not to alter?" The men put the body into the coffin and nailed it up with two longevity nails. Old woman Wang asked He the Ninth to give his men a thousand cash between them.
"When is the funeral to be?" the undertaker asked. "The lady says," old woman Wang told him, "that we'll take the body outside the city wall to be burned, three days hence." He the Ninth went away. That night, Jinlian prepared wine for the funeral supper, and the next day four monks came and read the funeral service.
On the third day at the fifth watch the bearers came to carry the coffin, and some of the neighbours followed behind. Jinlian, dressed in mourning clothes, seated herself in a sedan chair and, all the way along the street, pretended to bemoan her husband. At last they came to an open place outside the city. Here the funeral pyre was, and word was given for the fires to be lighted and the coffin burned. Soon everything was consumed and the ashes thrown into a pond. All the fees at the temple were paid by Ximen Qing.
The woman returned home, and, in the upper room, set up a tablet with the words "In Memory of Wu Da, my beloved husband." Before it she placed a lamp, golden flags, paper money, and ingots of imitation gold and silver. That day, she sat with Ximen Qing and bade the old lady go home. So these two enjoyed each other's company without hindrance, not as before at the house of old woman Wang, where their pleasure had been as uncertain as that of a chicken thief. Now Wu Da was dead they were alone in the house. They were able to spend the whole night together without thought of consequences. At first, Ximen Qing was afraid the neighbours might discover what was going on, and he used to go to old woman Wang's house, wait there for a little while, and then go to Jinlian's back door. But afterwards they seemed to find it almost impossible to separate, and for three or five nights at a time he would not go home. His household was at sixes and sevens, and everybody was unhappy. The days passed quickly, the sun and moon crossed and re-crossed like a weaver's shuttles.

## 026
## Coroner Uncle Ho attends the funeral & Steals Bones from the Funeral Pyre

When Coroner Ho fell to the ground, his assistants hurried to raise him. "He's been possessed by an evil spirit," Grandma Wang asserted. "Bring water, quick!" She sprayed two mouthfuls in his face. He stirred, and gradually revived somewhat. "Take him home," she directed. "They can decide what to do."
Using an old door as an improvised stretcher, two assistants carried Coroner Ho back to his house. His family received him and put him to bed. His wife burst into tears. "All smiles he was when he left! To come home like this! Who knew he'd be taken by an evil spirit!"
She sat on the edge of his bed and wept. Ho saw that his assistants had gone and that he and his wife were alone. He nudged her with his foot. "I'm all right," he said softly. "Don't worry. On my way to inspect Wu's body for en-coffining, at the entrance to his street I met Ximen Qing who has a medicinal drug shop in front of the county office. He treated me to wine and gave me ten ounces of silver, saying: 'Put a cover over everything when you inspect the corpse.' I went to Wu's place. I could see that his wife was not a good person, and I became suspicious. I opened the shroud. Wu's face was purple. There was blood in his ears, eyes, nose and mouth. He had bitten his lips. Obviously, he had been poisoned. I was going to announce this but then I thought—he has nobody to stand up for him; if I offend Ximen Qing I'll only be stirring a hornets' nest. I was going to let it go and approve the en-coffining. But then I remembered that Wu has a brother—Constable Wu who beat a tiger to death on Jingyang Ridge. He's the sort who could kill a man without batting an eye. Sooner or later he's coming home, and then this whole thing is going to blow up!"
"Just the other day I heard someone say: 'Yunge, the son of Old Qiao in the rear lane, went with Wu the Elder to Purple Stone Street to nab adulterers. There was a terrific row in the teashop!' " mused Ho's wife. "So that's what it was! You go on with your investigation. What's so hard about that? Get your assistants to approve the encoffining, and find out when the funeral will be. If they keep the body at home till Wu Song returns and then bury it, there won't be any complications. If they bury it now, let them, for the time being. But if they're going to cremate it, something surely is wrong. You attend the ceremony, and take a couple of bones from the pyre when no one is looking. These, plus the ten ounces of silver, will be important proof. If Wu Song doesn't ask any questions when he comes home, you say nothing. You won't be scraping any skin off Ximen Qing's nose, and we'll dine well on his money."
"You're a good wife and a very clever one!"
Ho got up and instructed his assistants. "I've been taken ill and can't go to Wu's place. You see to the encoffining. Find out when the funeral is to be and let me know immediately. Whatever money they give you, divide fairly among yourselves. If they offer you anything for me, don't accept."
The assistants presided over Wu being placed in his coffin. When the casket and memorial tablet were set properly in position, they returned and reported to Ho. "His widow says they're going to cremate him three days from now outside the city." They divided the tip among themselves and left.
"It's just as you predicted," Ho confided to his wife. "I must go and get those bones!"
At the urging of Grandma Wang, Golden Lotus kept vigil by the coffin all night. The following day, four monks were hired to chant prayers. On the third morning the coroner's assistants arrived to serve as pall-bearers. Several of the neighbours accompanied the funeral cortege. The widow, dressed in mourning, wept the loss of the family bread-winner all the way to the cremation grounds in the outskirts of the city. She directed the attendants to light the funeral pyre. Coroner Ho made his appearance with a string of paper gold ingots. Grandma Wang and Golden Lotus greeted him.
"How fortunate that you've recovered!"
"I owe Wu the Elder for a tray of buns he sold me several days ago. I thought I'd give him this for his journey."
"What an honest man," said Grandma Wang.
Ho ignited the paper sacrificial money and helped burn the coffin.
"You're very kind," said the two women. "When we get home we'll show our thanks more adequately."
"I'm only trying to make myself useful," said Ho. "You ladies needn't bother. Why not look after the neighbours waiting in the rest hall? I'll attend to things here."
At his persuasion, the two women left the pyre. He poked among the ashes, picked out two pieces of bone and doused them in the pool specially used for that purpose. They were flaky and black. He concealed them on his person, then joined the gathering in the rest hall. Soon the coffin was completely consumed. The flames were extinguished, the bones removed and cooled in the pool. The neighbours departed and Ho returned home with the samples he had taken.
On a sheet of paper he wrote the date and the names of those who had attended the cremation. He wrapped the paper around the silver bar, and put them both in a cloth sack that he hid in his house.
When Golden Lotus got home, she set the memorial tablet before the partition wall on the ground floor. It read:

In Memory of Wu the Elder, my Departed Husband.

Before the tablet, she lit a glass lamp. Inside the room, she hung scripture pennants, sacrificial paper money and ingots, and funeral ribbons. But upstairs everyday she sported with Ximen. This was much better than their furtive meetings in Grandma Wang's house, for no one could see them, and they could spend the whole night together whenever they wished. There wasn't a single neighbour on all of Purple Stone Street who didn't know about it. But they were afraid of the knavish violent Ximen, and no one dared interfere. "Ecstasy begets tragedy, from misery good fortune springs." Time quickly passed. More than forty days elapsed. Wu Song carried out the assignment given him by the county magistrate and escorted the cart to the relative's home in the Eastern Capital and delivered the letter and the crates. He spent a few days looking around the busy streets while awaiting the written reply, then returned to Yanggu with his men. The whole mission had taken exactly 2 months.
It was the end of winter when Wu Song had departed. When he returned it was the start of the third lunar month. He had felt uneasy in his mind all the time he was away, and he was anxious to see his brother. But first he delivered the reply to the magistrate.
The official was very pleased. After reading the letter that said that the valuables had been delivered safely, he rewarded Wu Song with a large silver ingot, and wined and dined him. That goes without saying.
Wu Song went to his quarters, changed his clothes, shoes and stockings, put on a fresh head kerchief, locked his door, and hurried to Purple Stone Street. Alarmed neighbours on both sides of the thoroughfare broke into a sweat. They said in an undertone: "Here comes trouble! This big stalwart won't just let the matter rest! Something bad is bound to happen!" Wu Song raised the door curtain and entered. The first thing he saw was the tablet with the inscription:

In Memory of Wu the Elder, My Departed Husband

Shocked, he stared. "Can I believe my eyes?" he thought. "Sister-in-law," he called, "I'm back. It's me, Wu Song." Ximen was asleep after frolicking with Golden Lotus upstairs and had a long nightmarish vision.

Now when Mr. Ho fell to the ground, his assistants rushed to help him, and Mrs. Wang said, "He's having a fit. Quickly, get some water!" After two mouthfuls had been administered, Mr. Ho began to stir and gradually regained consciousness. Mrs. Wang said: "Take Mr. Ho home, we can arrange this matter later." Two of the assistants carried him home, using a door as stretcher. All his family, young and old, came out to meet them and he was put to bed and went to sleep. His wife wept. "He was in the best of humours when he went out," she sobbed. "And now look what sort of a state he comes back in. I've never known him to have one of these fits before."

But as she sat there crying at the bedside, Uncle Ho, having made sure that the assistants were out of earshot, nudged her with his foot and said: "You don't need to worry; there's nothing wrong with me. On the way to Wu Da's to lay out the body, just at the entrance to his street, I met Xi-men Qing — you know, his Nibs, the one that has the medicine shop in front of the government offices. He treated me to a cup of wine and then gave me ten taels of silver and said, 'When you lay out the body, just make sure everything's properly covered, will you?' Well when I got to the house, I could see the wife was not a good sort of person, so I was already practically certain something was wrong. And when I took off the shroud and looked at the body, I found the face was dark purple, blood had seeped out of all the apertures, and the lips bore the marks of his own teeth. I was convinced he'd died of poisoning. I would have announced this but then I thought, no one's going to stick up for the Midget, and I would only be making an enemy of his Nibs. Obviously I didn't want to stir up a hornet's nest. So the best thing to do was turn a blind eye and let them get on with the funeral. But then, the Midget has a younger brother, the one who killed the tiger on Jingyang Pass the other day and was made a captain. He's the sort that could kill a man without batting an eyelid. Sooner or later he's going to come back, and that could mean big trouble."

His wife said: "I also heard that the other day the Young'un — old Qiao's son, you know, who lives in one of those back alleys — went to Redstone Road to help Wu Da set a trap for his wife's lover and caused a commotion in the teahouse. That must have something to do with it. You'd better question the Young'un, discreetly of course. Actually, this business shouldn't be too difficult to manage. Just get your assistants to go and deal with the body and find out when they're going to hold the funeral. If they're going to keep the coffin in the house till Wu Song comes back, then it's all perfectly above board. Even if they want to take it out for burial immediately, let them. But suppose they plan to cremate it, then there's something fishy. When the time for the ceremony comes, you'd better find a time when no one's looking and pinch two pieces of bone. Put them together with the ten taels of silver and you'll have evidence. If Wu Song doesn't ask any questions when he comes back, then forget about it. We won't have upset his Nibs and we'll have made a little profit for ourselves into the bargain."

"I've a wonderful wife," Uncle Ho said, "how clever she is!" He called his assistants and said to them: "I can't go myself because I have these fainting fits. So you must go and see about the body. Ask them when the funeral is going to be, and then come back and tell me. If they give you any silver or silk, you can share it amongst you. But make sure everything's done properly. If they give you money or silk for me, don't accept it."

The assistants went to Wu Da's, as instructed, to oversee the business of putting the body in the coffin and positioning it correctly, and then returned to inform Mr. Ho: "The mistress of the house says the funeral will be in three days' time and the body will be taken and cremated outside the town." They left after dividing up the money.

Uncle Ho said to his wife: "It's just as you predicted. I'll have to find the right moment to go along and take those bones."

Meanwhile Mrs. Wang had been busying herself: she told Jinlian to watch over the body all night and invited four monks on the second day to recite Buddhist scriptures. Early on the third day the coroner's assistants arrived to carry out the coffin. There were also a number of neighbours and local people to see the dead man off. Jinlian followed, dressed in mourning and shedding false tears for her late husband. When they arrived at the cremation ground outside the town, the fire was lit. At this moment Uncle Ho appeared, carrying some paper money. Mrs. Wang and Jinlian welcomed him, saying: "Mr. Ho, we're so glad to see you're better."

"I bought a basket of bread off Mr. Wu the other day," Ho said, "and I hadn't paid him. So now I've brought this paper money to burn with him."

"What a conscientious person you are, Mr. Ho!" Mrs. Wang said.

Ho lit the money and burnt it. Then he set about the business of the cremation. Mrs. Wang and Jinlian thanked him. "It's really kind of you to help like this, Mr. Ho. When we go back, we must find a way to show our gratitude."

"It's always a pleasure to be of use," he replied. "Now, why don't you two leave all this to me and go and look after your friends and neighbours in the funeral hall? I'll keep an eye on things for you here."

As soon as they had departed, he took a pair of tongs and picked two pieces of bone out of the fire. He dipped them quickly in the tank reserved for this purpose. They had turned completely black. He hid the bones away and then went and mingled with the crowd in the funeral hall for a while. When the coffin had been consumed by the flames, the fire was put out and all the bones were collected and immersed in the tank, after which the neighbours all went home. Mr. Ho took his two pieces of bone home and wrote out a label recording the exact date and the names of those present at the ceremony and wrapped them together with the money in a canvas bag which he stored in his house.

When Jinlian returned home, she set up a memorial tablet in front of the niche for the ancestors' spirits, bearing the words: "In memory of Wu Da, my late husband." She placed a glass lamp before the altar and decorated it with Buddhist invocations, paper gold, pieces of gold and silver, coloured paintings and suchlike. From now on, she and her lover could disport themselves freely in the bedroom everyday; it was no longer as formerly when they were obliged to steal their pleasure furtively in Mrs. Wang's parlour, for now there was absolutely no one in the house to hinder them. They could stay together the whole night if they wished. Often his Nibs would not return home for four or five nights on end. Of course no one in his household liked this state of affairs. And in the end such womanizing can only ruin a man. Catastrophe inexorably approaches. As the poem says:

Who love's delights can view with enlightened eyes
*Knows luck in love is actually a curse.*
*To marry a woman plain as daily rice*
Will shield your heart from shocks and spare your purse.

So now all day long his Nibs and Jinlian played undisturbed, leading a life of total debauchery, quite unconcerned about what people might think. For by now, not one of the neighbours, far or near but knew everything. Since they were all scared of his Nibs, however, and knew what a crook he was, no one dared to meddle.

Nevertheless, as the proverb says: "Pleasure contains the seeds of sadness, in misfortune relief is born." Time passed quickly and soon over a month had gone by. Wu Song, in accordance with the governor's instructions, had escorted the convoy to the residence of the governor's relative in the Eastern Capital, delivering the letter and handing over the baskets and boxes. He had spent a few days looking round the city, while he waited for the reply, and then with his party set out for Yanggu again. The whole journey, there and back, had lasted about two months: it was early spring when he started, and here he was returning at the beginning of summer. Even during the journey something already made him feel uneasy. He felt somehow both a physical and a mental disquiet. On arrival he would have liked to go and see his brother at once but first he had to report to the government office and deliver the reply.

The governor expressed great satisfaction. When he had read the letter, and learnt that the delivery of the valuables had all gone without a hitch, he rewarded Wu Song with a large silver ingot and entertained him with a banquet. Of this no more.

Finally Wu Song went back to his room, and changed his clothes, shoes and socks. He put on a new headdress and, locking the door behind him, headed for Redstone Road. When the neighbours on both sides saw Wu Song was back they had such a shock the palms of their hands became sticky with sweat. "Look out for domestic storms now!" they whispered to each other. "If he's back, don't expect him to stay quiet, a firebrand like that! He's bound to raise hell!"

Meanwhile, Wu Song had arrived at the door. When he drew back the curtain and walked in, the first thing he saw was the altar with the plaque bearing the scant inscription "In memory of my husband, Wu Da." He was dumbfounded. At first, he stared in horror, wondering if there was something wrong with his eyes. Finally, he called out: "Sister-in-law, it's me, Wu Song." At this moment, his Nibs and Jinlian were asleep upstairs after having made love and Nibs was having a long nightmarish vision.

When He Jiushu saw these marks he fell down in a faint and the corpse burners rushed in and lifted him up. Grandma Wang called out, "He has been made sick by some poison! Bring some water!" She got the water herself and taking it in her mouth spurted it over He Jiushu's face. Slowly he recovered consciousness. Grandma Wang then told the corpse burners to take him home. They took a leaf of door, placed him on it, and carried him off. His people received him and placed him on a bed where he went to sleep.

His wife cried and asked, "He went out this morning laughing and in good spirits. How is it that he returns like this? He has never had such an attack as this before." She sat at the side of the bed sobbing very bitterly. He Jiushu opened his eyes and seeing that the corpse burners had all gone he then explained all that had happened and told his wife that the corpse showed signs of poisoning. "But I did not say anything as I was also afraid there was no man there who would take the matter up. If I had said anything would it not have been like disturbing a wasp, and getting stung? If I had stupidly sanctioned the corpse being put in the coffin then I should have had to face his younger brother, Wu Song, the Inspector who killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and who can kill men without moving an eyelash. When he returns there is bound to be a row."

"I heard a man say a few days ago that the boy, Yun Ge, had assisted Wu the Elder in an endeavor to catch the adulterer in a tea-house on Zishi Street," said his wife. "It must have been connected with this case. You had better go and cross-examine him. At present there is no difficulty, and you can just allow the corpse burners to put the corpse in the coffin, and they can get their instructions from the wife as to when the funeral will take place. If they postpone the funeral until Wu Song returns we can assume that everything is really above-board. Even if they bury the dead before he arrives we need not worry. But if they arrange for the body to be cremated then indeed we may expect that there has been something strange. You can attend the funeral without creating any suspicion, and after the cremation you can get some bones which, and together with those ten taels of silver will be very important proofs. If Wu Song does not make any inquiries then Ximen Qing will not 'lose face,' and everything will be finished."

"A wise wife in the home I have," said He Jiushu. "You see things quite clearly." Forthwith he told the corpse burners that he was sick and they themselves could go and dress the body, and ask Pan Jinlian when the funeral would take place. They must report to him what she said. If she gave them money they could divide it equally among themselves but if she wanted to give him money he would not accept it.

The corpse burners went to Pan Jinlian's house, and duly dressed the body. After everything had been arranged they returned to He Jiushu, and told him that Jinlian had said that the funeral would take place after three days, and they were to cremate the body outside the town. They then divided the money, and departed.

He Jiushu said to his wife, "What you said has come true, and I will go to the funeral and get the bones as you suggested."

During the night Grandma Wang had repeatedly urged Jinlian to stay with the dead. The next day she got four monks to intone their prayers. On the third day the corpse burners came to carry away the coffin, and many of the neighbours followed in the procession. Jinlian was in her white mourning clothes, and on the way she pretended to bewail her loss. When outside the town they came to the crematorium, where the attendants were told to get the fire ready. There they saw He Jiushu with paper joss money waiting for them, and Grandma Wang and that woman Jinlian spoke to him saying, "We are glad to see that you are better."

"Some days ago I bought some cakes from Wu the Elder and was worried because I had not paid him, so I decided to come to his funeral and pay this paper money to his spirit."

"How honest you are!" said Grandma Wang.

When He Jiushu had burnt his offering, he told Jinlian that the men were now ready for the cremating. The ladies thanked him for his trouble to which he replied that he was only too pleased to be able to do some assistance. He then suggested that they might retire to the guest room in the adjoining temple and entertain the neighbours. He would attend to the other part of the business. When they had gone he supervised the burning of the corpse, and when it was over he took two bones and dipped them in a pool of water near at hand. He saw that they were quite black. After hiding the bones he went to the guest room of the temple, and joined in the general conversation. After a time the corpse, burners gathered the bones of the body and cooled them in the pool of water. At last all the neighbours had left on their way home. He Jiushu took the two bones home, wrapped them in paper, and recorded carefully on a paper the date, and also the names of the neighbours who had been to the funeral. He then wrapped them along with the silver in a bundle, and put them carefully away in the house.

Upon returning home Pan Jinlian erected a tablet in the front room, and wrote on it the characters: "In memory of the late Wu the Elder." She then placed a glass lamp in front of the mourning curtain and hung there much paper joss money, gold and silver imitations. But everyday she received Ximen Qing in her bedroom. Previously at Grandma Wang's place there had always been need for caution but now in her own house there was not the least cause for any restraint, and Ximen Qing could stay there all night. All the neighbours knew what was going on but they were all so afraid of Ximen Qing's power and influence that they dared not say a word about it. There is a saying, "Extreme pleasure is followed by sorrow; extreme sorrow must be followed by something better."

Now let us turn to Wu Song. Time passes with great speed. He duly reached the Eastern Capital, and presented the magistrate's letter and the presents to the latter's relative in accordance with the orders he had received. After doing this he had several days of leisure, and spent them strolling about the streets. Then he received the reply, and departed for Yanggu County. Altogether, his journey there to and fro, had taken about two months. When he had left it was the middle of winter but upon his return it was the beginning of spring. On the return journey he did not feel easy in his mind, and was anxious to get back and see his elder brother again. Upon entering the town he went straight to the *yamen*, to present the reply, and the magistrate was much pleased to see him. The magistrate reading the letter, knew that all the presents had been delivered, and he rewarded Wu Song with an ingot of silver, and entertained him with wine and food.

Upon reaching his lodging Wu Song changed his clothes, shoes, and socks, and put on a new turban. He then locked the door, and left for his brother's in Zishi Street.

The neighbours on all sides were all rather upset at seeing Wu Song coming back. They whispered to one another. "Now trouble will arise within the doors but what will be the end of it? There will certainly be some trouble."

Upon reaching the house he lifted the door screen and entering he saw the mourning curtain and the tablet with the inscription, "In memory of the late Wu the Elder," at which he was dumbfounded. He said to himself, "Surely my eyes are deceiving me." He then called out, "Sister-in-law, I've returned." Now Ximen Qing happened to be upstairs with Jinlian and he was having a long nightmarish vision.

## 027
## Dame Wang Fetches Wine & Encounters a Downpour

*More than 2 months had now elapsed since Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman first consummated their affair. One day the Dragon Boat Festival, on the fifth day of the fifth month, rolled around. Behold the swaying branches of the green willows hang like emerald threads; the spots of colour formed by the pomegranate blossoms are as red as rouge. Ever so slightly, the breeze disturbs the curtains; in whispering gusts, its coolness invades the doors. Far and near, when the Dragon Boat Festival comes round; in every house, goblets are raised in celebration. Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his way back from a visit to the fair at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak[13] when he stopped in at Dame Wang's teashop and sat down. The old woman hastily poured out a cup of tea and asked, "Where're you coming from, sir; and why don't you go over and look in on the young lady?"*

"I've been at the temple fair today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "On a festive occasion like this she's very much on my mind, so I thought I'd come pay her a visit."

"Her mother, old Mrs. P'an, is here today," said Dame Wang. "I doubt if she's left yet. I'll run over there for a look and then report back to you, sir."

When the old lady went over to her neighbour's house by way of the back door she found her drinking wine with old Mrs. P'an, just as she had expected.

As soon as the woman saw who it was she hastened to offer her a seat and said, with a smile, "Godmother, you've arrived in the nick of time. Keep my mother company, and:

*If you drink a cup of wine on entering the door,*
*You'll bear a bonny baby some day."*[14]

"I haven't any old man," laughed the old lady, "so how could I produce a baby? But you're young and strong, perfectly fitted to produce one."

To which the woman replied, "As the saying goes:

*Young flowers bear no fruit;*
*It's the old flowers that bear the fruit."*

At this, Dame Wang turned to old Mrs. P'an and said, "Just look at the liberties your daughter takes with me. She's calling me an 'old beggar.'[15] But she'll find a use for this 'old beggar' yet."

"She's been sharp-tongued like that ever since she was a child," said old Mrs. P'an. "You've got to make allowances for her, Godmother."

It so happens that Dame Wang, having brought Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman together, and enabled them to consummate their affair, devoted herself, early and late, to running errands for them, going out with the jug to buy wine, and so forth, and was dependent for her living on what she could make out of these transactions.

So she said to Chin-lien's mother, old Mrs. P'an, "This daughter of yours is just as clever as can be. She's a fine woman, make no mistake about it. I wonder what sort of man will have the luck to possess her in the future?"

"Godmother," said old Mrs. P'an, "since you're a matchmaker we must count entirely on you to bring that matter to a happy conclusion."

In the meantime the woman provided another place setting and poured out a cup of wine for her. Dame Wang drank a few cups with them until her face became bright red but she was worried about keeping Hsi-men Ch'ing waiting too long, so she took the first opportunity to tip the woman a wink, said goodbye, and went home.

The woman realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come and did her best to expedite her mother's departure. Then she tidied up the room, lit some exotic incense, removed the remains of the repast she had been sharing with her mother, and prepared a brand new supply of wine and delicacies for the entertainment of Hsi-men Ch'ing. When that gentleman appeared on the terrace at the back of the house the woman came down the stairs to meet him, led him upstairs, greeted him with a bow, and offered him a seat.

It so happens that ever since Wu the Elder's death the woman had shown no inclination to wear mourning. She had put her husband's spirit tablet in a corner of the upstairs room and covered it with a sheet of white paper, and she neglected to set any offerings of soup or rice before it. Everyday she dolled herself up, put on bright-coloured clothing, made herself as attractive as possible, and enjoyed herself with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had not visited her for the last two days, so the woman started out by giving him a hard time. "You unfaithful scoundrel! What do you mean by abandoning me like that? You must have found another sweetheart somewhere to think you can just leave me in the cold and neglect to pay any further attention to me."

"One of my concubines died the other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I've been busy with the funeral arrangements for the last two days. Today I went to the temple fair and bought some hair ornaments, jewellery, clothes, and the like for you."

The woman was delighted by this. Hsi-men Ch'ing called in his pageboy, Tai-an, and then took the gifts out of the felt bag he had been carrying and showed them to her one at a time. Not until he was finished did the woman bow in thanks and put them away.

The woman had beaten her stepdaughter, Ying-erh, into such a state of terrified submission that she no longer felt it necessary to conceal anything from her and actually ordered her to serve tea to Hsi-men Ch'ing. The woman herself set the table in order to keep him company while he drank his tea.

"There's no need for you to bother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already given the money to Godmother to go out and buy wine, meat, appetizers, nuts, and so forth. On a festive occasion like this I wanted to spend a little time with you."

"This was originally prepared for my mother," said the woman, "but I saved enough of it to make a complete meal. If we wait until Godmother gets back it may be quite a while. Why don't we go ahead and start?"

The woman sat down next to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

*Cheek to cheek,*
*Thigh to thigh, and*
*Shoulder to shoulder,*

and they began to drink wine together.

To resume our story, Dame Wang had picked up a basket, taken along an eighteen-ounce steelyard, and gone out into the street to buy wine and meat.

It happened, at that time, to be early in the fifth month, when heavy rains were a frequent occurrence. Though the red sun might appear to dominate the sky, a thunderhead might appear at any moment and release a downpour like an overturned basin. Behold:

*Black clouds arise on all sides;*
*Dark fog immures the far heavens.*
*With a rushing sound,*
*It flies along, filling the heavens and*
*blocking out the sun;*
*With pattering drops,*

*It beats a tattoo, as it strikes against*
*the leaves of the plantain.*
*Assailed by a wild wind,*
*Skyscraping old cypresses*
*are overturned;*
*Battered by thunderclaps,*
*The peaks of Mounts T'ai, Hua, Sung, and Ch'iao*
*are shaken.*
*It quenches the flames and dispels the heat;*
*It moistens and nurtures the sprouts in the fields.*
*It quenches the flames and dispels the heat,*
*So that beauties are prone to appreciate it.*
*It moistens and nurtures the sprouts in the fields,*
*So that travellers are willing to forget the mud.*
Truly:
*The waters of the Yangtze, Huai, Yellow, and Chi rivers*
*are newly augmented;*
*The emerald bamboo and the red pomegranate blossoms*
*are rendered pristine.*[16]
The old lady had picked up a bottle of wine, bought a basketful of fish, meat, chicken, goose, vegetables, fruit, nuts, and the like, and was returning along the street when she encountered this downpour. She ducked under the eaves of a house as quickly as she could and wrapped a kerchief around her head but her clothes were completely soaked. She waited a while, until the rain let up a bit, and then raced for home like a cloud scudding before the wind.
Once inside the door, she put the provisions in the kitchen and then went upstairs, where she found the woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing drinking wine together.
"While you and the young lady have been living it up, sir," she said with an ingratiating smile, "just look at what's happened to my clothes. They're completely soaked. I'll have to ask you to replace them for me, sir."
"Just look at the old lady," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Did you ever see such an inveterate scrounger?"
"I'm no inveterate scrounger," said the old lady, "but at the very least, sir, you'll have to provide me with a bolt of aquamarine material."
"Godmother," said the woman, "what you need is some hot wine."
The old lady drank three cups with them and then said, "I'm going down to the kitchen to dry out my clothes."
After she had suited her actions to her words she cut up the chicken and goose, prepared the appetizers, put the fruit and nuts and so forth onto plates and saucers, and set them out in the upstairs room, together with some newly heated wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman:
*Poured out some more of the superior wine,*
*Shared with each other the rare repast, and*
*Fell to exchanging cups, thigh over thigh.*
As he was drinking Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that there was a *p'i-p'a*, or balloon guitar, hanging on the wall, and said, "I've heard for some time what a fine musician you are. Today, whatever happens, you'll have to entertain me with a song while I drink my wine."
"I only picked up a few lines when I started to study music as a child," laughed the woman. "I'm really not very good. You mustn't laugh at me, sir."
Hsi-men Ch'ing took the *p'i-p'a* down from the wall, lifted the woman onto his lap, and watched her as she placed the instrument on her knees:
*Deftly extended her slender fingers,*
*Gently manipulated the icy strings,*
and played a languid accompaniment as she sang a song to the tune "Liang-t'ou nan":
*Without her headdress, too indolent to perform her toilet,*
Her clouds of black silk coiled in a chignon and gleaming over her temples,
She fastens them in place with a slanting gold hairpin.
She calls out, "Maidservant, Open the clothes chest for me,
So I can put on an outfit of plain white silk."
So attired, she rivals Hsi-shih herself in loveliness.
Emerging from her boudoir,
She calls out, "Maidservant,
Roll up the blind for me,
So I can burn a stick of evening incense."[17]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was so delighted he scarcely knew what to do with himself.
Putting an arm around her powdered neck, he gave her a kiss as he praised her performance, saying, "Darling, whoever would have thought you were as smart as all that? Not one of the singing girls I've known in the streets and alleys of the licensed quarter can play or sing as well as you do."
"After all you've done for me," laughed the woman, "I'm content, for the present, to be:
*Obedient to your every whim.*
Just be sure you don't forget me in the future."
Hsi-men Ch'ing pinched her cheeks and said, "How could I ever forget you, darling?"
The two of them were:
*Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,*[18]
*Laughing and joking at each other's expense.*
After a while Hsi-men Ch'ing took off one of her embroidered shoes, held it in his hand while he put a little cup of wine in it, and then drank a "shoe cup"[19] for the fun of it.
"My feet aren't as small as all that," said the woman. "Don't make fun of me, sir."
It wasn't long before the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, whereupon they closed the door of the room, took off their clothes, got into bed, and began to play with each other.
Dame Wang put the crossbar on the front door and joined Ying-erh in the kitchen, where they made short work of the leftovers.
The two lovers in the upstairs room:
*Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,*[20]
*As inseparable as fish from water,*[21]
*as they gave themselves over completely to pleasure. The woman's mastery of the arts of the bedchamber was equal to that of any prostitute, and she made every effort to impress in her endeavors to please her partner. Hsi-men Ch'ing, too, was on his mettle and eager to display his spearsmanship,* [22] *to best advantage. A woman of beauty and a man of talent, both of them were in the prime of life. A poem describes the picture they presented:*

*In the seclusion of the nuptial chamber the pillow and mat are cool;*
The man of talent and woman of beauty approach the climax of their game.
No sooner have they embarked on "dipping the red candle upside down";[23]
Than they suddenly switch to "punting the boat by night."[24]
Rifling its fragrance, "the butterfly nibbles at the calyx of the flower";[25]
Sporting with the water, "the dragonfly darts, now high, now low."
When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense, and feelings know no bounds;
As the mouth of the "divine turtle" disgorges its "silvery stream."[26]

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing dallied in the woman's house until evening fell. As he was about to go home he left behind a few pieces of loose silver [27] to take care of her expenses. The woman did her best to keep him a while longer but to no avail. Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his eyeshades, walked out the door, and departed. After the woman had taken down the blind, closed the front door, and drunk a little more wine with Dame Wang, they went their separate ways. Truly, lingering at the door, she saw young Master Liu upon his way; amid the misty waters and the peach blossoms, he was soon lost to sight.

It was now two months and more since Ximen Qing had first possessed the woman. It was the Dragon Boat Festival. Ximen Qing was on his way back from the Temple of Yue and, calling at the old woman Wang's tea shop, he sat down there. The old woman quickly made him a cup of tea. "Where have you been, sir? Why haven't you been to see your lady?"
"I have just been to the Temple," said Ximen, "and as it is the Summer Festival, I thought of her and came to see her."
"Her mother, old woman Pan, has been here today," the old woman said. "I fancy she is still here but I'll go and find out for you." She went to the back door and found Jinlian drinking wine with her mother. They asked her to sit down.
"Drink a welcoming cup," Jinlian said, smiling, "and have a lovely baby."
"But I have no husband," laughed the old woman. "Where shall I get a baby? You are still young. You're the one to have babies."
"The young tree bears no fruit; but the old tree bears well," Jinlian said, quoting an old saying.
"Do you hear your daughter making fun of me?" the old woman said, turning to Madam Pan. "She calls me old beggar but she'll be glad enough of her 'old beggar' one of these days."
"She has always had a sharp tongue, Stepmother," old woman Pan said, "but you must not pay too much attention to it."
"Yes, indeed, your daughter is as clever as they make 'em. She is a good woman. Some lucky man will snap her up one of these days."
"You are a go-between, Stepmother," old woman Pan said, "and it rests with you." She set out a cup and chopsticks, and Jinlian poured out some wine. The old woman drank several glasses, and her face grew red. She was afraid that Ximen Qing would grow tired of waiting, so she gave a sly wink to Jinlian, said good-bye to them, and went back to her own place.
Jinlian understood that Ximen Qing had come and hurriedly sent her mother away. She tidied the room, burned some fine incense, took away what was left of her mother's food, and prepared some special dishes for Ximen Qing. Then she went down to the back door to meet him.
She took him into the room, made a reverence to him, and sat down. She had given up wearing mourning very soon after Wu Da's death, and had put his tablet aside with a sheet of white paper over it. She never dreamed of putting offerings of soup or food before it. Everyday she painted her face, put on coloured dresses, and looked very charming indeed. Ximen Qing had not been to see her for some days, and she scolded him.
"What a fickle rascal you are! Why have you run away from me? Have you another sweetheart hidden somewhere that you leave me in the cold?"
"I have been very busy these last few days," Ximen said, "but today I have been to the temple to buy you some ornaments, and some pearls and clothes."
This pleased her. Ximen called Daian and, unfastening the package, showed the things one by one to Jinlian. She thanked him and put them away. She no longer troubled to keep the matter secret from Ying'er, who was afraid of being punished, and told her to bring tea for Ximen Qing. She herself laid the table, and then sat down with him.
"You should not take so much trouble for me," he said. "I have given Stepmother some, money to go and buy a few things. Now that the Summer Festival is here, the only thing I want is to sit here with you."
"It was for my mother originally," said Jinlian, "but this is quite fresh. If we wait for Stepmother to come back with her purchases, we shall have to wait a long time. Let's eat some of this." She pressed her cheek close against his, entwined her legs with his, and, side by side, they drank their wine.
The old woman had taken a basket and gone to the street to buy wine and meat. It was the beginning of the Fifth Month, and the rain was incessant. At one moment the sun was bright in the sky, the next it was hidden by black clouds, and there came down a torrent like the emptying of a washbasin.
Lowering clouds gather from the four corners of the sky
A chain of mist binds the far distances.
*Xi-la-la.* The air is filled with flying drops that veil the sun.
*Pit-pit.* They beat upon the plantain tree.
The winds blow, and the old juniper tree is uplifted,
Uplifted and overthrown.
Once its topmost branches threatened the sky.
The crashing thunderclaps grow louder,
The mountains of Tai and Song are shaken as by an earthquake,
Yet now the sultry heat is washed away, its heaviness is banished.
The fields of young corn are fresh again
New water races down the four rivers.
The green bamboo and scarlet pomegranate
Are made clean once more.
The old woman had just bought a jar of wine and a basketful of green stuff and fruits, and was walking along the street when the downpour came. She ran under the balcony of a house and tied her kerchief over her head but her clothes were wet through. She waited a while till the rain began to slacken, then rushed home like a flying cloud and set down her wine and meat in the kitchen. Ximen Qing and Jinlian were drinking wine.
"Yes, my Lord and Lady," cried she, laughingly, "you are drinking but look at me! My clothes are drenched. I shall have to have a new dress."
"Oh, you old woman," Ximen said, "you are one of those spirits who always find somebody to throw the blame on."
"I am not a spirit at all," the old woman said, "but you will have to make me a present of a roll of the deepest indigo silk."
"Drink a cup of hot wine, Stepmother," Jinlian said.

The old lady drank three cups of wine with them and then said she must go to the kitchen to dry her clothes. When she had dried them, she made ready chicken, goose, and rice, carving and chopping till all was to her liking, set the other things on plates and dishes, and then took them into the room and warmed the wine. Ximen Qing and Jinlian again poured the wine and, close pressed together, drank from the same glass.
While Ximen was drinking, he saw a lute hanging on the wall. "A long time ago, I was told how well you play. You must play me a tune, and I shall enjoy my wine all the more."
"When I was a small child," Jinlian said, "I learned one or two bits of tunes but none too well. Please do not make fun of me." Ximen took down the lute and made the woman sit on his knee. She placed the lute in her lap and, gently stretching her delicate fingers, slowly plucked the strings and sang in a low sweet voice:
I set no headdress on my brow; my idle hands refused to serve me.
Round and round I furled the silken tresses, black as night, the curls like clouds in shadow.
Golden pins, thrust crosswise, restrained the lowering masses.
"Oh, maiden, open wide the chests," I cried
And dressed in robes of whitest silk
I came forth from my tiring room, glorious as Xi Shi.
"Oh, maiden dear, throw back the lattice for me, come and burn a stick of evening incense."
This song sent Ximen Qing almost into ecstasy. He drew his loved one to him and put his arms about her white neck.
"I never realized how clever you were," he said. "I have often wandered through the haunts of singing girls but never were their songs or music so exquisite as yours."
"It is kind of you to praise me, my Lord. I am ready to do whatever you wish. All I pray is that the time may never come when you forget me."
"How can I forget you?" Ximen cried, as he stroked her soft cheeks. Then, lazily, they played the game of rain and clouds, joking with one another and making merry. Ximen took off one of her embroidered shoes, poured a cup of wine into it, and drank.
"My feet are small enough," cried Jinlian. "Why should you make fun of them?"
Soon they had taken their fill of wine and, shutting the door of the room, they undressed and got onto the bed. Old woman Wang closed the gate, and sat down in the kitchen with Ying'er. Jinlian and her lover turned over and over, like the cock pheasant and his mate, and played as merrily as the fishes in the water. Her skill in the arts of love was a hundred times greater than that of any strumpet, and Ximen Qing himself was no mean performer. They were at the age when a woman's beauty is at its loveliest and a man's vigor at its highest. Youth was theirs.
Ximen Qing spent the whole day at his lover's house, and gave her several taels of silver for household expenses. At last she could not persuade him to stay longer; he put on his eyeshades, and went home. Jinlian pulled down the lattice and fastened the gate, then she and old woman Wang drank wine together, and went their ways.

## 028

### *Auntie Hsüeh Proposes a Match with Meng Yü-lou & Ximen Qing meets her, Aunt Yang Angrily Curses Chang the 4th*

*I play the role of matchmaker and am really rather good at it;*
Entirely owing to the assiduity with which I ply my 2 legs.[1]
My lethal lips are practiced at persuading widowers to remarry;
My trenchant tongue is capable of stirring the chaste widow's heart.
Lucky ribbons of festive red constantly adorn my head;
Party favours from wedding feasts are always present in my sleeves.
There is only one thing wrong with what I do:
Half my clients are helped but the other half are ruined.

one day the same Auntie Hsüeh who was constantly to be seen around Hsi-men Ch'ing's household peddling costume jewellery set out with her box of trinkets and looked everywhere for Hsi-men Ch'ing but was unable to find him. Chancing to meet his pageboy, Tai-an, she asked, "Where is your master?"
"Father's in the shop," replied Tai-an, "going over the accounts with Uncle Fu the Second."
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing's family were the proprietors of a wholesale pharmaceutical business, the hired manager of which was named Fu Ming. His courtesy name was Tzu-hsin, and he was the second sibling in his generation of the family that is why he was referred to as Uncle Fu the Second. Auntie Hsüeh went straight to the door of the shop, pulled the hanging blind aside, and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was indeed inside, going over the accounts with his manager. She nodded to him and motioned for him to come outside. On seeing that it was Auntie Hsüeh, Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately abandoned his manager and came out to meet her, the two of them walking to a secluded spot where they could talk in private. Auntie Hsüeh bowed to him with a word of greeting, and Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her what she had to say. "I've come about a match that I'd like to propose to you, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I guarantee she'll tickle your fancy, and she can take the place left by the death of your Third Lady. I've just been in the First Lady's quarters. She bought some of my trinkets and detained me for a cup of tea. I was there for an age but I didn't dare bring up this subject. I thought it would be better if I found you first and broached it directly to you. The young lady in question is someone you probably already know about, sir. She's the legitimate widow of the owner of the Yang family's textile business outside the South Gate, and she's got a tidy sum of money at her disposal. She owns two Nanking beds, with retractable steps; four or five trunks full of clothing for all four seasons, figured gowns and so forth, packed so tightly you can't stick your hand into them; and pearl headbands and earrings, gold jewellery set with precious stones, and gold and silver bracelets and bangles, it goes without saying. In ready cash alone, she has more than a thousand taels of silver at her disposal. And she has two or three hundred bales of fine cotton drill[2] as well. Unfortunately, her husband died far away from home while he was out on the road selling textiles. She has been observing mourning for him for over a year now. She doesn't have any children of her own to worry about, only a young brother-in-law, who's just nine years old. There wouldn't be any point in maintaining her widowhood just for him. Her husband's paternal aunt is trying to persuade her to remarry. This year the young lady's no more than twenty-four or twenty-five. She's tall of stature and good-looking; in fact, when she's properly done up, she's as pretty as a figure on a decorative lantern. She's romantic and quick-witted, just as clever as can be, and as for the ability to take charge of a household, needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, backgammon and elephant chess, and so forth, that goes without saying. There's no reason for me to deceive you, sir. Her maiden name is Meng, she's the third sibling in her generation, and she lives on Stinkwater Lane. Also, she's an expert performer on the moon guitar. If you consent to see her, sir, I guarantee you'll hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow.[3] How could anyone be as lucky as you, sir, to get all that dowry and a young lady to boot?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the woman could play the moon guitar it struck a responsive note in his heart, so he asked Auntie Hsüeh, "How soon can I arrange to have a look at her?"
*"I'll tell you what, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh, "having a look at her is not the first order of business. Right now the senior member of the Yang family is her husband's paternal aunt. There's also a maternal uncle of her husband, named Chang the Fourth but since he's on the distaff side, he's like the meat of the hickory nut: there's always a husk in between.[4] This old lady was originally married to Crooked-head Sun and lives in a house belonging to Eunuch Director Hsü on Half-side Street in the northern quarter of the city. Since Crooked-head died, the old lady has maintained her widowhood for thirty or forty years. She doesn't have any children of either sex and depends on her nieces and nephews for support. "It's too late to do anything about it today but tomorrow I'll come meet you, sir, and we'll go dump the whole proposition in her lap. If you appeal for help, appeal to Chang Liang: if you appoint a general, appoint Han Hsin. [5] The only thing this old lady cares about is money. She knows perfectly well that her nephew's widow is well provided for. She doesn't really care whom she marries as long as she can make a few taels of silver out of it. Promise her a little extra silver, sir, and throw in a bolt of that thin satin you have so much of at home. Then, if you go talk it over with her in person, and present her with a bearer's load of appropriate gifts, you'll knock her over with one blow.[6] If anyone else raises any objections, as long as you've this old lady behind you, there isn't much they'll dare do about it."*
*This single conversation with Auntie Hsüeh had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that joy manifested itself about his temples and between his brows; delight spread itself across his cheeks and smiling face.[7] The matchmakers of this world are not really interested in anything but making money for themselves. What do they care whether their clients end up dead or alive? They will describe a marriage prospect that holds no office as an officeholder and a position as concubine as though it were a position as legitimate wife. They are such inveterate liars they would attempt to deceive Heaven itself, and there is no truth whatever to be found in their asseverations. Truly:*

*Though the matchmaker did her utmost to promote the union;*
Meng Yü-lou had already decided to marry a rich man.
Those with affinities will meet though separated by a thousand li;
Those without affinities will miss each other though face-to-face.[8]

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed with Auntie Hsüeh that the next day would be a good time to buy some presents and go to the northern quarter of the city to pay a visit to Aunt Yang. When Auntie Hsüeh finished her spiel she picked up her box of trinkets and departed. Hsi-men Ch'ing went back into the shop and continued to go over the accounts with Manager Fu. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell. The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing rose early and dressed himself to befit the occasion. Then he picked out a bolt of material, bought four trays of preserved fruit, and hired a bearer to carry them. Hsi-men Ch'ing rode on horseback, accompanied by his pageboy, and Auntie Hsüeh led the way straight to the door of Aunt Yang's dwelling in the house belonging to Eunuch Director Hsü on Halfside Street in the northern quarter of the city.
Auntie Hsüeh went in first to alert Aunt Yang to the fact that she had a visitor.
"A man of property from hereabouts," she told her, "is respectfully waiting outside your door. He is interested in discussing a match with the young lady. I told him that you were the senior member of the Yang family and suggested that he should pay you a visit and discuss the matter before I would presume to take him outside the gate to see the lady herself. I brought him along with me today, and he has already dismounted and is waiting outside your door at this very moment."
"Ai-ya!" the old lady exclaimed when she heard this. "Matchmaker, why didn't you let me know ahead of time?"
On the one hand, she ordered her maidservant to sweep the parlour, tidy it up, and brew some good tea, while on the other hand, she said, "Please, invite him to come in."
Auntie Hsüeh lost no time in taking charge of the proceedings. First she had the load of gifts brought in and properly displayed, and it was only after the bearer had been dispatched with his empty containers that she invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to come in.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a large palmetto hat, a long gown fastened at the waist with a sash, and white-soled black boots. When he entered the door and met the old lady he bowed to her 4 times. Leaning on her staff, the old lady made haste to return his salutation.
Hsi-men Ch'ing would not let her proceed, protesting again and again, "Aunt, please accept my salutation."
The two of them dickered politely for a while until the old lady agreed to accept a half kowtow from him. They then sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host while Auntie Hsüeh took her place to one side.
"What is the gentleman's name?" the old lady asked.
"I just told you," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but you've already forgotten. This is the Honourable Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Ch'ing-ho district. He owns the large wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen. He also engages in moneylending to both officials and functionaries. In his home:
*The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,*
*The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary,*
but he lacks a wife with the ability to take charge of the household. On hearing that the young lady from your family who lives outside the South Gate wishes to remarry, he has come especially in order to discuss this match with you."
"As long as the two of you relatives-to-be are both here," Auntie Hsüeh continued:
*"The holes in the water clock let it all spill out;[9]*
*If you have anything to say, now's the time to say it.*
There's no call for you to complain about the lies of us matchmakers. Since you're the senior member of the family on the bride's side, if anyone who had anything to say didn't come talk to you first, Aunt, who else should they talk to?"
"If you wanted to discuss a match with my nephew's widow," the old lady said, "all you needed to do was drop by for a chat. What need was there to go to the trouble of buying all these presents? You put me in a position in which it would be:
*Discourteous to refuse, and*
*Embarrassing to accept."*
"Worthy Aunt," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm afraid these presents are hardly worthy of the name."
The old lady bowed to him twice, expressed her gratitude, and had the presents put away, after which Auntie Hsüeh took the trays outside to where the bearer was waiting and then returned to keep them company.
Tea was served, and after they had finished drinking it, the old lady started the conversation by saying, "As far as I'm concerned:
Not to speak up when you ought to is to be a coward.[10] When my nephew was alive he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself, and now that he has, unfortunately, died it has all fallen into the hands of his widow. At the very least she is worth more than a thousand taels of silver. Whether it is your wish, sir, to make her your concubine or your legitimate wife is no concern of mine. All I care about is that a proper sutra-reading should be performed on my nephew's behalf. As his paternal aunt I am related to him by blood; it is not a distaff or marriage relationship. If you were to provide me with the cost of a coffin, it would not be as though I had made any exorbitant demands on you. In return, I'm prepared to hazard whatever face I've got left in this matter. I'll:
*Cast myself in the role of a stinking rat;[11]*
for the benefit of that old dog, Chang the Fourth, and stick up for the two of you, come what may. After she has been carried over your threshold, sir, if you were to permit her to pay me a visit now and then on birthdays and such occasions, and acknowledge me as a poor relation, I would endeavor not to inflict my poverty upon you."
"Madam," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can relax on that score. I fully understand everything you've just said. Since you've broached the subject, madam, the cost of a single coffin is nothing to me. Even if it were ten coffins you wanted, I could afford it."
As he spoke, he reached inside the leg of his boot and drew out six ingots of five taels each, making a total of thirty taels of "snowflake" government silver.
Setting these down in front of her, he said, "This may not amount to much, madam but I hope you will use it to buy a cup of tea. In the future, when the bride has been carried over my threshold, I will provide another seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin toward your funeral expenses. You will always be a welcome guest in my home at any time of the year."
Gentle reader take note: In this world, money is like the brain and spinal cord of man in that it is the one indispensable thing that governs his every move.
When the black pupils of the old vixen's eyes saw the twenty or thirty taels of shiny government silver, she said with an ingratiating smile, "Worthy sir, I don't wish to be thought avaricious but it has always been true that:
*If the terms are settled at the outset,*
*Misunderstandings can be avoided later on."*
"Madam," interjected Auntie Hsüeh from the side, "you're being more fastidious than you need to be. Such considerations are quite unnecessary in this case. The honourable gentleman is not that sort of person. After all he:
*Sought to make your acquaintance with presents in hand.*
You may not know it, madam but even His Honour, the prefect, and His Honour, the district magistrate, consort with him. He is acquainted with people in many walks of life from all over the empire. You're not likely to make much of a dent in his resources."
This single conversation had such an effect on the old lady that she was ready to:
*Fart ferociously and pee in her pants;[12]*
in her excitement. After she had entertained her guests a while longer and they had drunk a second serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing indicated that he was ready to be on his way. The old lady politely endeavored to detain him but to no avail.
Auntie Hsüeh said, "Since we've been able to see you today, Aunt, and discuss this matter, tomorrow we can proceed to go outside the South Gate and take a look at the young lady."
"There's no need for the gentleman to take the trouble to pay a call in order to size up my nephew's widow," said the old lady. "Matchmaker, just tell her that I said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?' "
Hsi-men Ch'ing said his farewells and got up to go.
"Sir," said the old lady, "I didn't know you were coming, and I was unable to make proper preparations on the spur of the moment. Please forgive me for not offering you anything better."
Leaning on her staff, she accompanied him out the door and saw him several steps along his way before Hsi-men Ch'ing succeeded in persuading her to go back inside. Auntie Hsüeh remained outside to see Hsi-men Ch'ing into his saddle.
"Wasn't I right to propose this way of going about it?" she said. "It's much better to have started out by dumping the whole proposition in the old lady's lap than it would have been to rely on the good offices of anyone else. You go on home, sir," she continued. "I'm going to stay here and have another word with her. We've already agreed to meet and go outside the South Gate together first thing tomorrow."
Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled out a tael's worth of silver and handed it to Auntie Hsüeh to cover the hire of a donkey. After she had accepted the money he got on his horse and went home, while she remained behind at Aunt Yang's house, chatting and drinking wine until dark, before going home herself.
To make a long story short, the next day Hsi-men Ch'ing dressed himself to befit the occasion, slipped his betrothal gifts into his sleeve, and mounted a large white horse. Then, accompanied by his two pageboys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, and by Auntie Hsüeh, riding a donkey, he proceeded outside the South Gate to the door of the Yang family compound on Stinkwater Lane off Hogmarket Street. This establishment consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis.
Hsi-men Ch'ing reined in his horse at the gate, and Auntie Hsüeh disappeared into the interior for some time before coming out to usher him in. After he had dismounted, the first thing he confronted was a two-story structure housing the main gate that was situated on the south side of the street, facing north. Just inside the gate stood a gray screen-wall. Inside the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard the entrance was screened by a hedge of crape myrtle and a fence of woven bamboo splints. The courtyard itself was decorated with pomegranate trees and potted miniature plants. Along a raised platform there stood a row of indigo vats for dyeing and two benches for fulling cloth.
Auntie Hsüeh pushed open the red latticework doors of the eighteen-foot-wide, south-facing reception hall, on the centre of the back wall of which there hung in the place of honour a scroll depicting the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of the Water Moon, accompanied by her attendant, Sudhana. [13] Landscape paintings by well-known artists hung on the other walls. There was also a marble standing screen, to either side of which stood tall, narrow-necked, bronze vases of the kind used in the game "pitch-pot."[14] All in all:
*The chairs and tables were shiny, and*

*The screens and lattices were posh.*
Auntie Hsüeh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to take one of the seats reserved for distinguished guests and then disappeared into the interior once again.
After a while she came out and whispered in Hsi-men Ch'ing's ear, "The young lady hasn't finished her toilet yet. Please have a seat and wait a little longer, sir."
At this juncture a young servant brought out a cup of tea flavoured with fruit kernels, and after Hsi-men Ch'ing had drunk it, she took the cup and its raised saucer away again.
Auntie Hsüeh, after all, was a matchmaker by profession, so she kept up an animated monologue:
*Gesticulating with both hands and feet,*[15]
for Hsi-men Ch'ing's benefit.
"Aside from Aunt Yang," she said, "the most important person in this family is the young lady. Of course there is her husband's younger brother but he's still a minor and doesn't understand anything. Originally, when her late husband was still running the enterprise, in a single day, not even counting the silver, they sold enough blue cotton cloth of the kind used for making shoes to take in two large basketfuls of copper cash. He used to charge thirty cash a foot for the stuff. I've seen with my own eyes that on a given day they often had to feed as many as twenty or thirty dyers, and everything was managed by the young lady.
"She has two maidservants and a pageboy at her beck and call. The older one, who's fourteen, and already dresses her hair in adult fashion, is called Lan-hsiang. The younger one's just eleven and is called Hsiao-luan. In the future, when she's carried across your threshold, they'll all come with her.
"If I succeed in bringing off this match for you, sir, I hope to be able to take out a mortgage on a couple of rooms in a better location than that out-of-the-way corner in the northern quarter where I'm living now. It's not convenient for me to get to your place from there. When you bought Ch'un-mei last year, sir, you promised me several bolts of muslin that you still haven't given me. I'll forget about that when this is all over if you'll compensate me for both occasions at once.
"On your way in just now, sir," she continued, "you must have noticed those two cabinets for displaying cloth. When Mr. Yang was still alive, I don't know how much money he put into the improvement of the retail shop that opens onto the street. This compound must also be worth seven or eight hundred taels of silver. It contains five interior courtyards and extends all the way back to the street that runs behind it. When she gets married, I'm afraid she'll have to leave it all to her young brother-in-law."
Auntie Hsüeh was still talking when a maidservant came out to summon her. Some time passed and then, lo and behold:
*To the tinkling of girdle pendants,*
*Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,*
the woman herself appeared. She wore a kingfisher blue surcoat of figured silk, emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin,*[16] over a wide-cut gown of figured scarlet silk. On her head:
*Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;*
*A phoenix hairpin was half askew.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at the woman. Behold:
*She is tall and slender in build;*
*Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.*
*Her figure is neither plump nor thin;*
*Her stature is neither short nor tall.*
*On her face, though barely visible,*
*Are several inconspicuous pockmarks,*
*That give her an air of natural beauty;*
*Hidden beneath her skirt,*
*Are a pair of tiny golden lotuses,*
*That are well-formed and attractive.*
*Two gold rings, set with pearls,*
*Hang low beneath her ears;*
*A pair of phoenix hairpins,*
*Juts aslant at either temple.*
*She has only to move,*
*In order to make her openwork jade pendants tinkle;*
*Wherever she sits,*
*The reek of orchid and musk assails the nostrils.*
*It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down*
*from her palace in the moon;*
*She is exactly like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain*
*descending her jasper steps.*[17]
Hsi-men Ch'ing no sooner saw her than his heart was filled with delight. Auntie Hsüeh made haste to hold aside the portiere over the doorway in order to facilitate her entrance. The woman came in and:
*Neither correctly nor precisely,*
bowed and uttered a word of greeting, after which she sat down in a seat directly across from that occupied by her visitor. Hsi-men Ch'ing scrutinized her from head to toe with such intensity that the woman lowered her head.
Then he opened the conversation by saying, "My wife has been dead for some time and I would like to make you my legitimate wife and put you in charge of the household. What do you think of this proposal?"
"How old are you, sir," the woman asked, "and how long has your wife been dead?"
"I'm twenty-seven," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I was born on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month, at midnight. Unfortunately my former wife has been dead now for more than a year. I hardly dare ask how old you are, young lady?"
"I'm twenty-nine," the woman replied.
"So you're two years older than I am," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Auntie Hsüeh interjected from the side:
*"When the wife is two years older,*
*Yellow gold never moulders;*
*When the wife is three years older,*
*Yellow gold piles up like boulders."*[18]
As she was speaking, a young maidservant came in carrying three servings of tea flavoured with candied kumquats in carved lacquer cups inlaid with silver and provided with silver teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves. The woman got up, brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the first cup with her slender fingers, and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing. As he took the proffered cup in his hand, she bowed to him and expressed her good wishes.
Auntie Hsüeh seized the opportunity to step forward and lift the woman's skirt with her hand, revealing:
*The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses,*
*Barely three inches long,*
*But half a span in length,*
*Peeking out beneath her skirt.*
She was wearing scarlet shoes that had tips decorated with cloud patterns of gold brocade and high white satin heels. As he beheld this sight, Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart was filled with delight.
The woman took the second cup of tea and handed it to Auntie Hsüeh, after which she took the remaining cup for herself and sat down again to keep them company while they drank.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Tai-an to present the square box containing his betrothal gifts that consisted of two embroidered handkerchiefs, a pair of jeweled hairpins, and six gold rings. When these had been transferred to a tray and taken inside, Auntie Hsüeh prompted the woman to express her gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow.
"When are you planning to hold the ceremony, sir," the woman went on to ask, "so that I can make the necessary preparations?"
"Since you have deigned to accept my proposal," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll present you with some further insignificant gifts on the twenty-fourth day of this month, and hold the ceremony proper on the second day of the sixth month."
"If that's the way it's to be," the woman said, "I'll send someone tomorrow to inform my late husband's paternal aunt, who lives in the northern quarter of the city."
"Yesterday," said Auntie Hsüeh, "the gentleman paid her a call in order to discuss this matter."
"What did she say?" the woman asked.
"When she heard that the gentleman was interested in this match," Auntie Hsüeh replied, "she was as happy as could be, and suggested that I should bring him here so the two of you could meet. She said, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry? I'll support this match, come what may, and even undertake to act as guarantor.' "
"If that's really what Aunt said, everything will be fine," the woman said.
"My dear young lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "surely you don't mean to suggest that a matchmaker such as myself would dare to fabricate a speech like that, do you?"
When she had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing said his farewells and got up to go.
Auntie Hsüeh accompanied him as far as the mouth of Stinkwater Lane and said, "Now that you've seen the young lady, sir, what do you think?"
"Auntie Hsüeh," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I am indeed deeply indebted to you."
"You go ahead, sir," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I want to have another word with the young lady before I leave."
Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and headed back into the city but Auntie Hsüeh turned around and went inside again, where she said to the woman, "Young lady, with a husband like that you'll never have anything to worry about."
"Does Hsi-men Ch'ing have any women in his household or not?" the woman asked. "And what does he do for a living?"
"My dear lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "even if he does have a few women about the place, none of them amount to anything. If what I say isn't true, when you get there you'll find out for yourself. His reputation is known to everyone. He is numbered among the most substantial men of property in Ch'ing-ho district, and he is renowned as the Honourable Hsi-men who owns a wholesale pharmaceutical business and lends money to both officials and functionaries. Even the district magistrate and the prefect consort with him. And recently he has become related to Commander Yang of the Eastern Capital, who recognizes him as a kinsman by marriage at four removes. No one dares to cross him."
The woman entertained Auntie Hsüeh with wine and a meal. Just as they were enjoying this repast together, who should turn up but Aunt Yang's pageboy, An-t'ung, bearing a gift box containing sweetmeats that came from the country, including four slices of date cake made of glutinous millet flour, two pieces of candy, and several sugar dumplings made of glutinous rice flour.
"I've been sent to ask whether you've accepted that person's betrothal gifts or not," he reported. "My mistress says, 'If you don't marry a man like this, what manner of man are you going to marry?' "
"Please thank your mistress for her concern on my behalf," the woman said. "I have in fact already accepted his betrothal gifts."
"My Heavens!" said Auntie Hsüeh. "How lucky it is we matchmakers never tell anything but the truth. And now the good lady has sent her servant to confirm it."
The woman took the date cake and other sweetmeats out of the gift box and refilled it with a full complement of appetizers and cured meat. Then she gave it to An-t'ung along with fifty or sixty cash for himself and said, "When you get home, give my compliments to your mistress, and tell her that the other party has decided to make the formal presentation of his gifts on the twenty-fourth day of this month and to hold the wedding ceremony on the second day of the next month."
When the pageboy had left Auntie Hsüeh said, "How about giving me a little something of whatever the lady sent you to wrap up and take home with me for the children?"
The woman gave her a piece of candy and ten sugar dumplings and she went out the door with:
*A thousand thanks and ten thousand*
*expressions of gratitude.*
But no more of this.
To resume our story, Chang the Fourth, the maternal uncle of Meng Yü-lou's deceased husband, had hopes of being able to exploit his relationship with his young nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, as a means of laying his hands on some of her property. He had a candidate of his own as a matrimonial prospect for her, for whom he was prepared to act both as advocate and guarantor. This was the widower Provincial Graduate Shang, the son of Prefectural Judge Shang who lived on Main Street. If someone else of no particular distinction had been proposed as a rival candidate he would have had a case to make; but when he heard, unexpectedly, that she was betrothed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, the owner of the wholesale pharmaceutical business in front of the district yamen, whom he knew to be possessed of clout in official circles, he felt himself to be stymied. After devoting much thought to the problem he decided that:
*Of the thousand schemes and hundred plans,*
*The best plan is a frontal assault.*
Chang the Fourth, therefore, paid the woman a visit and said to her, "Young lady, you really oughtn't to have accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's betrothal gifts but should have gone along with my suggestion and married the son of Prefectural Judge Shang, the provincial graduate. He comes from a cultivated family that not only values poetry and propriety but also possesses enough landed property for you to live on quite comfortably.
"He would certainly be preferable to Hsi-men Ch'ing. That bastard has been throwing his weight around in official circles for years. He's a tough customer. Moreover, he's already got a legitimate wife who's the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu. You're used to being a legitimate wife, and if you marry him you'll only be a concubine; won't that be quite a comedown for you? Moreover, he's already got three or four other bedmates about the place as well as maidservants who aren't old enough to put their hair up yet. If you enter his household, as the saying goes:
*When people are many, mouths are many,*
and you're likely to have a hard time of it."
"It's always been true," the woman said, "that:
*A multitude of boats need not clog the channel.*[19]
If there's already a First Lady in his household, I'm willing to acknowledge her seniority and be a younger sister to her. Even if he does have a few other bedmates about the place, if my husband takes a fancy to me, do you think I'll try to keep him to myself? And if he doesn't take a fancy to me, I can't very well physically restrain him, can I? I'm not afraid; even if there are a hundred people to contend with, I can scull my own boat. To say nothing of the wealthy and prominent, among whom there is hardly a household without four or five concubines, when you get right down to it, even the beggars in the streets:
*With boys in hand and girls in arms,*
often have three or four concubines tagging along at their heels. You're really making much ado about nothing. When I enter his household I'll know how to handle the situation so it won't be a problem for me."
"Young lady," said Chang the Fourth, "I've heard that this man is given to trading in human flesh and is an old hand at:
*Beating his women and abusing his wives.*
Whenever one of them fails to please him in any way, however slight, he calls in a go-between and disposes of her without more ado. Are you willing to expose yourself to this temper of his?"
"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mistaken. No matter how rough a man may be, he won't beat a wife who is diligent and knows what she's about. As a member of his household, if I manage to run a tight ship, so that:
*Words spoken inside do not get out, and*
*Words spoken outside do not get in,*[20]

what can he do to me? If a wife:
*Likes to eat but hates to work,*
*Has a big mouth and a long tongue, and*
*Devotes herself to stirring up trouble,*
then:
*If her husband doesn't beat her,*
*Should he beat the dog instead?*[21]
"But that's not all," said Chang the Fourth. "I've also heard he has a thirteen-year-old daughter at home who isn't married yet. I'm really afraid that if you enter his household you'll end up having to:
*Make three nests where there's only room for two.*[22]
Just remember that:
*When people are many, mouths are many.*
How will you ever be able to handle it?"
"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you don't know what you're talking about. As a member of his household I'll remember that:
*Seniors are senior, and*
*Juniors are junior;*
and that:
*The state of the river depends on what comes*
*downstream from the source.*[23]
If I treat his children well, there's no reason to fear that my husband will think ill of me, or that his children will be disrespectful. To say nothing of a single child, even if there were ten of them, it wouldn't be a problem for me."
"As I see it," said Chang the Fourth, "this is the sort of man whose:
*Conduct is lacking in rectitude.*
He's always away from home:
*Sleeping among the flowers and lolling*
*beneath the willows.*[24]
Moreover, he's:
*Solid without but hollow within,*
and is up to his neck in debt. I'm only afraid he'll be the ruination of you."
"Old Fourth," the woman said, "you're mistaken again. Even if he does, sometimes, go out on the town and:
*Careen about rather recklessly,*[25]
as a woman:
*I can only concern myself with what goes on*
*within the triple gates;*
*I can't concern myself with whatever may happen*
*without the triple gates.*
You don't really expect me to follow him about all day long, do you? As the saying goes:
*Money, in this world, is but a*
*sometime thing;*[26]
*Where is the family that is long rich*
*or forever poor?*[27]
In fact, when you get right down to it, even His Majesty the Emperor himself, when he suffers from a temporary shortage of cash, has been known to appropriate the funds realized by the sale of brood mares from the Court of the Imperial Stud. [28] To say nothing of merchants that of whom would ever be content to let his money sit idly at home, or scruple to:
*Depend upon his wife's connections for his daily bread;*[29]
if the need should arise? There's really no need for you to be so concerned about me."
Chang the Fourth saw that the only effect his arguments were having on the woman was to bring down her countercriticisms on his own head. Feeling that he had lost face, he finished his second cup of plain tea, got up, and departed. There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Chang the Fourth, in uttering his hurtful words,*
was only wasting his breath;
Marriage affinities, whatever one may think,
are predetermined.
The woman of beauty felt herself predisposed
in favour of Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Though he had talked himself hoarse
it would have been to no avail.
Chang the Fourth went home in a state of mortification and discussed the situation with his wife. They decided that the only thing to do was to wait until the day when the woman's trousseau was to be delivered to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in advance of the wedding and then, making a pretext of protecting the interests of their nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, attempt to appropriate whatever they could of the woman's belongings.
To make a long story short, on the twenty-fourth day of the fifth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for the "presentation of the gifts." He invited his sister-in-law, who was married to his wife's eldest brother, to ride in the sedan chair and take charge of the gift-bearing procession. What with clothing and jewellery, formal gowns for all four seasons, preserved fruit, tea and pastries, bolts of cotton and silk, supplies of pongee and silk floss, the procession included more than twenty loads of gifts. On Meng Yü-lou's side, she invited Aunt Yang and her own elder sister to accept the gifts formally on her behalf and help to entertain the visitors but there is no need to describe this in detail.
On the twenty-sixth, Meng Yü-lou engaged twelve Buddhist monks of high repute to recite a sutra and perform a "land and water" mass for the benefit of her deceased husband, after which his spirit tablet was burned. It was Aunt Yang who insisted on these observances.
As the day approached on which the trousseau was to be delivered to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, Chang the Fourth recruited a number of neighbours from the locality to join him in coming to have a word with the woman. That day Auntie Hsüeh showed up with a few idlers who had been hired for the purpose by Hsi-men Ch'ing and ten or twenty soldiers that he had borrowed from the commandant's yamen.
As they started inside to move the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks in which her trousseau was packed, Chang the Fourth intercepted them and said, "Matchmaker, don't carry them away yet. I've got something to say about it."
After he had invited the neighbours to come inside and sit down, Chang the Fourth opened the parley by saying, "Distinguished neighbours, listen to me. The young lady is here, and I, Chang Lung, oughtn't to have to say it but your husband, Yang Tsung-hsi, and your young brother-in-law, Yang Tsung-pao, are both my nephews, my elder sister's sons. Now, unfortunately, your husband is dead but he succeeded in amassing a considerable sum for himself while he was alive. There are people who are trying to tell you what to do in this situation, and I, as a relative on the distaff side of the family, am not in a position to interfere in your affairs. Enough said. Nevertheless, my second nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, is a young karmic encumbrance, the weight of which will fall entirely on my shoulders. He and your husband were born of the same womb. Do you mean to maintain that he is not entitled to a portion of the family property?
"Now that all these distinguished neighbours are here today to act as witnesses—and, after all, whether you've got a tidy sum of money in your hands or not, there's no way I can prevent you from marrying someone if you want to—just open up your trunks and let everyone see for themselves what you've got in there, before letting them be carried off the premises. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you but only in clarifying the situation. Young lady, what do you say?"
When the woman heard these words she started to cry and said, "Neighbours, listen to me. You are mistaken, sir. It's not as though I plotted with evil intent to murder my husband. Isn't it enough today that I have to bear the opprobrium for entering into another marriage? Whether or not my husband was successful in making money is public knowledge. But what few taels of silver he accumulated were all plowed back into this house. And the house I'm not taking with me. I'm leaving it all to my young brother-in-law. All the furnishings are being left absolutely intact. In fact, there are three or four hundred taels worth of outstanding debts, the papers for which have already been turned over to you to collect as they become due. Since when has there been any excess of silver over and above the expenditures required to maintain the establishment?"
"If you haven't any silver, then that's all there is to it," said Chang the Fourth. "All I'm asking you to do, now, is to open up your trunks in front of these witnesses so they can see for themselves whether you do indeed have any or not. Then you can carry it all off as you like. I'm not interested in taking anything away from you."
"No doubt you want to have a look at my shoes and footbindings too!" the woman said.
Just as they were beginning to wrangle, who should emerge from the rear of the house, leaning on her staff but Aunt Yang.
"Aunt Yang is here," everyone said with one voice as they bowed to her in greeting.
After Aunt Yang had returned their salutation and sat down to keep them company, she addressed them as follows, "Distinguished neighbours: As the paternal aunt, I am related by blood; this is not a distaff or marriage relationship. Would anyone suggest that I have no say in this matter? The one who is dead was my nephew; the one who is alive is also my nephew.
*Every one of the ten fingers,*
*Hurts equally if bitten.*[30]
Quite aside from the fact that her husband really didn't have any money laid by; even if he had a hundred thousand taels of silver, you wouldn't be entitled to do anything more than take a look at it. She has no children and is still:
*A young and delicate lass.*
If you interfere and try to prevent her from remarrying, just what do you want to keep her around for, may I ask?"
In a chorus of loud voices the neighbours responded, "What Aunt Yang says makes sense."
"You don't mean to retain what she brought with her by way of a dowry from her own family, do you?" demanded the old lady. "She hasn't given me a thing behind anybody's back, yet you suggest that I'm being partial to her. Let's be fair about it. There's no reason for me to deceive any of you. This nephew of mine was so kind and just in everything he did that his loss is hard for me to bear. He was always so considerate to me. If that were not the case I wouldn't bother to concern myself about the matter."
Chang the Fourth eyed the old lady from one side and said, "Are you out of your mind?
*The phoenix doesn't deign to alight where*
*there's no treasure to be had."*
These words struck the old lady right on her sore spot. In an instant her face became purple with rage. Grabbing hold of Chang the Fourth, she started to curse him in earnest.
"Chang the Fourth," she said, "you'd better lay off that:
*Wild and nonsensical talk.*
I may be neither able nor talented but at least I'm a certifiable member of the Yang family. You old oily mouth! What Yang family prick were you sired by?"
*"I may have a different surname," said Chang the Fourth, "but my two nephews are the offspring of my own elder sister. You old bloodsucker! Don't you know that a girl faces outward from the moment she's born?*[31] *You're engaged in: setting fires with one hand, and pouring water on them with the other."*[32]
"You lousy, shameless, old dog-bone!" retorted Aunt Yang. "She's still:
*A young and delicate lass.*
Just what do you have in mind in wanting to keep her at home, may I ask? If you aren't hoping to slake your lust with her you must be plotting to fatten yourself at her expense."
"I'm not out for anybody's money," said Chang the Fourth. "But my nephew is my own sister's child, and if anything goes wrong, it's going to be me that's out of pocket, not you. You old gallows bird! You're out to:
*Snatch the big, and*
*Snitch the little.*
*You may be a brown cat but you've got a black tail."*[33]
"Chang the Fourth!" Aunt Yang retorted. "You old beggar! You old slave! You old mealy-mouth! If you keep on talking such rot with your deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue, you'll die so poor your family won't be able to afford the rope to hoist your coffin with!"
"You waggle-tongued old whore!" replied Chang the Fourth. "You've had to work so hard for your money you've burnt out your tail. No wonder you don't have any children."
*This sally really got under Aunt Yang's skin. "Chang the Fourth, you louse!" she cursed at him. "You whoreson old dog! I may have no children but I'm still better than your mum's. She divides her time between Buddhist and Taoist temples, humping the bonzes, and fucking the priests while you're still asleep in dreamland!"*
At this point the two of them would have come to blows if the neighbours had not intervened, saying, "Old Fourth, let the lady have her say."
Meantime, Auntie Hsüeh, who had noticed that the two of them were preoccupied with their quarrel, took advantage of the confusion by placing herself at the head of Hsi-men Ch'ing's servants and hired hands, along with the soldiers who had been sent from the yamen. At her direction, they swooped down, hugger-mugger, on the woman's beds and curtains and the trunks containing her trousseau and carried them all off, any which way, like a gust of wind. When Chang the Fourth realized what had happened, his eyes swelled with rage but though he dared to be angry, he dared not speak. [34]The neighbours, for their part, seeing that there was nothing further to be done, attempted to smooth things over for a while and then went their separate ways. On the second day of the sixth month Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched a large sedan chair and four pairs of red silk lanterns to fetch the bride. Her elder sister, Mrs. Han, acted as her escort, and she was also accompanied by her young brother-in-law, Yang Tsung-pao, who had his hair done up in a topknot, wore a long green gown, and rode on horseback as he escorted his sister-in-law on her way to the wedding ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with a bolt of satin brocade and a jade belt buckle. The bride was accompanied by her two maidservants, Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, whose job it was to make the beds and fold the quilts. She also brought along to wait on her the pageboy, Ch'in-t'ung who was just 14 years old. On the third day Aunt Yang and the woman's two sisters-in-law, the wives of her brothers, Meng the Elder and Meng the Second, came to participate in the "third-day celebrations." Hsi-men Ch'ing presented Aunt Yang with seventy taels of silver and two bolts of satin, and from that time on the families enjoyed uninterrupted relations. Hsi-men Ch'ing prepared three rooms on the western side of the rear courtyard to serve as his new bride's living quarters. She was designated as the Third Lady in the hierarchy of his wife and concubines and bore the appellation Yü-lou, or Tower of Jade. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that all the members of his household, from top to bottom, should address her as Third Lady. Beginning with the evening of the wedding day he spent three successive nights in her room. Truly, Within the bed-curtains of gold lamé, 2 new partners performed their perennial roles; Beneath the quilt of red brocade, 2 used objects were brought into play. [35]There is a poem that testifies to this:

*To encounter close up such a paragon of feeling and romance:*
Is a consummation that, "Without good fortune one can't enjoy."[36]
Wherever has Lieh-tzu allowed the wind to carry him;[37]
When night after night the beauty of the moon shines in the willow branches?

One day there came to Ximen Qing's house an old woman called Xue. She was a seller of flowers made of kingfisher feathers, and was carrying a box of them. She could not find Ximen but seeing Daian, asked him where his master was.
"My father," said the boy, "is in the shop, going through the accounts with Uncle Fu."
The old woman went straight to the shop door, pulled aside the lattice, and looked in. Ximen Qing was going through the books with his manager. With a movement of the head she signaled to him to come out. He left the shop at once, and they sought a quiet place in which to talk.
"What is your business with me?" Ximen Qing asked her.

"It is just an idea about a marriage that has come into my head," the old woman said. "The marriage I am thinking of should be satisfactory to you in every sense of the word, and it would fill the gap left in your household by the death of your Third Lady."
"Who is the lady?" Ximen asked.
"You probably know her. Her family name is Meng, and she is the widow of a cloth merchant, named Yang, who used to keep a shop outside the South Gate. She is by no means poor. She has a couple of Nanjing beds, and four or five chests so full of clothes for every season of the year that there isn't room to put a finger inside them. Her jewellery is beyond counting. She has about a thousand taels of ready money, and two or three hundred rolls of cloth woven with three shuttles. It is a year or more now since she became a widow, and she has no children of her own, only a younger brother of her husband, who is about ten years old. She is quite young, with no one to love, and her aunt thinks it is time she married again. She is about twenty-four years old this year, and very tall and beautiful. When she is dressed, she looks like a figure on a painted lantern. She is lively and charming, and just as intelligent as can be. She can govern a household, do needlework, and play backgammon and all kinds of games. There is nothing to hide. The lady's name is Meng, and she is the third of her family. She lives in Stinking Water Lane. I forgot to mention that she can play the moon guitar too. You will certainly fall in love with her the moment you see her."
Ximen was delighted when he heard that the girl could play the moon guitar. "When can I see her?" he cried.
"I don't anticipate any difficulty," the old woman said, "but one thing you must bear in mind. There is only one member of her family who counts for anything, and that is her aunt. There is indeed another relative, Zhang the Fourth but he is like a mountain walnut, all shell. Many years ago this aunt married Crooked-Headed Sun, and they used to live in Master Xu's house on the north side of the High Street. But Sun has been dead these forty years. She has no children, and is entirely dependent upon her nephew and niece.
"She is the only person we have to consider. She cares about nothing but money, and she knows quite well that her nephew's widow has property. It is nothing to her whom her niece marries, so long as she gets a few taels of silver for herself. You have plenty of excellent silk. I suggest you take a roll of it, buy some presents, and call upon this old aunt. You might give her a little silver at the same time. If you do that, you will have disposed of her once and for all. Later, if anybody should venture to raise objections, the old lady will have her way and the objector will find himself powerless."
All this pleased Ximen Qing immensely. His face beamed with delight. They decided that the next day would suit their purpose, and that he should buy some presents and take them to the house of the young lady's aunt. Xue took up her box and went off, and Ximen Qing went back into the shop and continued to go through the books with Fu.
The next morning, Ximen rose early, and dressed himself in his finest clothes. He took a roll of silk and, buying four large dishes of beautiful fruits, had them put into carrying baskets and told a man to carry them. Then, on horseback, with Daian in attendance and old woman Xue leading the way, he set out to Aunt Yang's house. Xue went in to give the old lady warning.
"One of our neighbours," she said, "a very rich man, would like to have a word with you about your niece's marriage. I told him that you are the only person of any account in the family, and that he must come and see you before he goes to see the lady. I have brought him here today, and at this moment he is at the gate waiting your pleasure."
"Oh dear!" said the old lady. "Why didn't you tell me before?" She told a maid to prepare some fine tea, and gave orders that Ximen Qing should be asked to come in. Xue suggested that the presents should be sent in first, so that the empty baskets might be brought out again, and that then he should go and see the old lady.
He was wearing a large hat of woven palm and a pair of white-soled boots. When he came into the old lady's presence he made four reverences. Leaning on her stick, she hastily prepared to return them but he would not allow this. "Please, Aunt," he said, "be so kind as to accept my greeting." They disputed amicably for some time, and the matter ended with half the required reverences. Then they sat down, hostess and guest in their proper places, and old woman Xue sat down beside them.
"May I know your honourable name, Sir?" said the old lady.
"This gentleman," answered Xue for him, "is the richest or the second richest man in Qinghe. He is Master Ximen, who keeps a medicine shop by the Town Hall. The money in his house reaches higher than the North Star, and his barns are filled with more spoiled rice than is to be found in the Imperial Storehouses. Now his household is without a mistress and, since he has heard that our lady is ready to marry, he has come expressly to talk to you about the marriage."
"Sir," the old lady said, "if you wanted my niece, you had only to come and tell me. Why have you spent your money upon a present for me? It has put me in the position that if I refuse it, I shall be impolite, and if I accept it, I shall feel ashamed."
"Most worthy Aunt," Ximen said, "this is not fit to be called a present." The old lady made two reverences as a sign of thanks and accepted the present. Tea was brought in and, as they were drinking it, the old lady said:
"You will think me lacking in intelligence if I fail to make myself quite clear. My nephew, when he was alive, was very rich but unfortunately he is dead, and all his wealth has come into my niece's hands, probably no less than a thousand taels of silver. I am not in the least concerned whether you want her for the mistress of your household or as a second wife but I should like to have a requiem sung for my nephew's soul—I am his own aunt—and a little money for my coffin. Of course, all this will cost you nothing. I would do anything to get the better of that old dog Zhang the Fourth, and I will see that this marriage is arranged. Perhaps, when you are married, you will allow her to come occasionally to see her poor old aunt, on my birthday and perhaps at the Summer Festival. I don't imagine you will find my poverty infectious."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Please make your mind quite at rest," he said. "I understand perfectly. If you arrange this matter for me, you may have a dozen coffins if you like."
He told Daian to bring his visiting box. From it he took six bars of the purest white official silver, worth thirty taels, and set them before her. "This is only a trifle, Lady but I hope you will use it to buy a cup of tea. After the marriage, I will give you another seventy taels and two rolls of silk. That may suffice for your funeral. And at the four seasons and the eight festivals, I will certainly allow her to visit you."
When the cunning old woman set her black eyes on the thirty taels of shining white silver, her face became all smiles. "Honourable Sir," she said, "don't think that I am grasping but it has always been considered the wisest plan to be quite definite at the very beginning. It avoids disputes later on."
"You are a very intelligent woman," old woman Xue said, "and, really, you need not have any fears. His Lordship is perfectly reliable. If he had not been, he would not have brought his box with him when he came to discuss the matter. Perhaps you are unaware that he is on friendly terms with the local officials. They know how open-handed he is. You need not be afraid of exhausting his resources."
The old lady was more and more delighted, and gave vent to her feelings in more ways than one. They drank two more cups of tea, and Ximen stood up to take his leave, though the old lady urged him to stay longer.
"Now that we have seen you," old woman Xue said, "we will go tomorrow to pay our respects to the young lady."
"His Lordship need not trouble to go and see my niece," the old lady said. "You go and tell her that I say if she won't marry a gentleman like this, I should like to know whom she will marry."
Ximen Qing prepared to leave.
"A poor old woman like me," the old lady said, "could never have dreamed that you, Sir, would condescend to come and see me, so I was taken unprepared. Please forgive my allowing you to go away empty-handed."
She took her stick and hobbled a few steps with him, till he begged her to return. As he was mounting his horse, Xue said, "Wasn't that a good idea? Go home now, I have a little more to say to the old lady. I will call for you early tomorrow morning."
Ximen Qing gave her a tael of silver to pay for the hire of a donkey, mounted his horse, and rode home. Xue went back again to the old lady, and they talked and drank together till the sun was setting. Then she went home.
The next morning Ximen Qing dressed himself exquisitely, put his purse in his sleeve, and rode on a white horse. His two boys, Daian and Ping'an, were in attendance, and old woman Xue rode on a donkey. They set off for the South Gate and soon reached the young lady's house.
The gatehouse was as large as an ordinary room and had a black-and-white screen. Xue asked Ximen Qing to dismount, and they went in together. They came to the inner door with another screen and a low fence of bamboo. There were flower pots with pomegranates in the courtyard and, on the steps, a row of blue jars and two long benches for beating cloth. The old woman pushed open the scarlet double doors and they went into a parlour, with seats arranged as for host and guests. The tables and chairs were new and brightly polished, and the curtains and blinds in excellent taste.
Old woman Xue told Ximen Qing to sit down, and she went to the courtyard. Very soon she returned and whispered, "The lady has not finished dressing yet. Do you mind waiting?" A boy brought in some Fujian tea and, while Ximen Qing was drinking it, the old woman with much gesticulation gave him what information she thought fit.
"Apart from the aunt, this young lady is the only person of consequence in the family. Her husband had a brother but he is still very young and ignorant. When Master Yang was alive, they used to sell enough to fill two large baskets with coins, not to speak of silver, everyday. He charged three *fen* a foot for the black cloth used for making shoes and twenty or thirty men were employed in the dye shop. This lady managed everything. She has two maids and a boy. The elder maid is fifteen, and has already had her hair dressed as a woman. That is Lanxiang. The little maid, Xiaoluan, is twelve. When she marries, they will go with her. If I bring off this marriage, I only ask one thing. I should like to be able to take a couple of rooms to live in."
"There will be no difficulty about that," Ximen said.
"But last year," the old woman said, "when you bought Chunmei, you promised me several rolls of silk. I have never had them. Perhaps you will remember that when you reward me on this occasion." A maid came to call her, and in a little while Ximen Qing heard the tinkling of ornaments and there came to him the fragrance of exquisite perfume. The old woman pulled up the lattice and Mistress Meng came in.
Ximen Qing was delighted with her the moment he saw her. She came into the room, modestly made a reverence, and sat down opposite him. He stared at her so fixedly that she bowed her head. "Lady," he said at last, "it is now a long time since my wife died, and I should like to take you to wife to govern my household. May I know your honourable wishes in this matter?"
The lady looked at him. He seemed a pleasant-looking fellow and she was well enough satisfied. She said to old woman Xue, "How old is this gentleman and how long is it since his lady died?"
"I have misspent twenty-eight years," Ximen Qing said, "and my wife unfortunately died more than a year ago. May I know how many fruitful springs you have seen?"
"I am thirty years old," the lady said.
"Then you are two years older than I am."
"When the wife is two years older than the husband," the old go-between said, "the yellow gold increases day by day; and when the wife is three years older, the yellow gold is piled up mountains high."
The little maid brought three cups of tea and some preserved golden oranges. Mistress Meng stood up, took one of the cups, and with her slender finger wiped the water from its rim, then offered it to Ximen Qing, at the same time making a reverence. Old woman Xue found an opportunity to lift the lady's skirt slightly, displaying her exquisite feet, three inches long and no wider than a thumb, very pointed and with high insteps. They were clad in a pair of scarlet shoes, embroidered in gold with a cloud design, with white silk high heels. Ximen Qing observed them with great satisfaction.
Mistress Meng gave a cup of tea to Xue, then took one herself and sat down. Ximen Qing told Daian to bring in the box of presents. In it were two silk handkerchiefs, a pair of jeweled pins, and six gold rings. Ximen took them out of the box and, putting them on a tray, presented them to the lady. The old woman prompted her to thank him. "When do you wish the ceremony to be performed?" she asked. "I shall have preparations to make."
"I take this as a pledge of your kind intention," Ximen Qing said. "On the twenty-fourth day of this month I will send my small gift, and I would suggest the second of next month for the wedding day."
"I must speak to my aunt about the matter," Mistress Meng said.
"His Lordship called upon your aunt yesterday, and discussed the matter," old woman Xue said.
"What did she say?" Mistress Meng asked.
"She was very pleased. Indeed, she said that if this gentleman was not good enough for you, she didn't know who would be. She will be very satisfied with you when she learns that you have agreed to marry his Lordship."
"If she really said that, all will be well."
"Ah, Lady," the old woman said, "you have to thank me for this good fortune."
Ximen Qing rose and said good-bye. Old woman Xue went with him as far as the entrance to the lane.
"Well," she said, "you have seen the lady. What do you think of her?"
"Sister," Ximen Qing said, "I thank you."
The old woman asked him to go home without her. She said that she had still something to say to Mistress Meng. Ximen mounted his horse and returned to the city, and the old woman went back to the room.
"You must feel satisfied, now that you have arranged to marry this gentleman," she said.
"But he may have a wife already for all I know," said Mistress Meng, "and I have no idea what his business is."
"My good lady," the old woman said, "supposing he is married, I can assure you that none of his ladies has any intelligence to speak of. When you marry him, you will find that I am telling the truth. As for his reputation, everybody knows that he is the famous medicine merchant, money lender to the officials, and the first or second richest man in the district. The magistrates, both of the prefecture and of the district, are on very intimate terms with him, and only recently he became a relation by marriage of Marshal Yang of the Eastern Capital. With a relative like that, who dare interfere with him?"
Mistress Meng prepared some refreshments. While they were eating, a boy came from Aunt Yang's house. He brought a box in which were four pieces of cake made of yellow rice and dates, two pieces of sweetmeat, and several dozen little pastries.
"My mistress would like to know whether you have accepted the man's proposal," the boy said. "She says if you don't accept him, she can't imagine whom you will have."
"Thank your mistress for her kind message," Mistress Meng said, "and tell her that I have accepted him."
"Now you have a proof that I was not lying to you," the old woman said. "Your aunt did know all about it."
Mistress Meng took the cakes out of the box, and gave it back filled with buns and cured meats. She gave the boy a handful of coins, and said, "Thank your mistress for me. Tell her that he is going to send his present on the twenty-fourth, and the wedding is to be on the second of next month." Then the boy went home.
"What did your aunt send you?" the old woman asked. "May I have some to take home to my children?" Mistress Meng gave her a piece of sweetmeat and a dozen pastries, and she went away.
Now, the lady's uncle, Zhang the Fourth, was very anxious to secure the guardianship of his nephew Yang Zongbao in order that he might get the woman's property into his own hands. He hoped that she would become the second wife of a certain Scholar Shang, who was the son of a local magistrate. Had it been any less important person, a few words would have settled the matter but he knew that Ximen Qing was on good terms with the officials, and dared not oppose him openly. After thinking over every possible way of dealing with the situation, he decided that the best plan was to introduce some element of discord between them. So he came to see his niece.
"You mustn't think of accepting Ximen Qing's proposal," he said. "Shang is the man for you. He is a poet of distinction, owns several farms, and enjoys a very comfortable existence. He would be a much better match than that fellow Ximen, who has had too many dealings with the officials and is a truculent upstart and a ne'er-do-well. Ximen has one wife already. She was a Miss Wu. If you marry him, you won't be the mistress of his house; you'll be nothing but an underling. He has three or four other wives, and several young maids. No, if you marry him, with so many people already in the household, I'm afraid you'll have to put up with a great deal of unpleasantness."
Meng realized that Zhang the Fourth wished her to break off her engagement, and she decided to tease him. "There is an old saying," she said, "that though there are many ships upon the water, the traffic still goes on. I see no reason why we should not all get along very well. If he has a wife already, I will gladly revere her as an elder sister. If he has other wives, I will place absolute confidence in him. If I afford my husband pleasure, I don't mind how many wives he has; if not, even if I should be his only wife, life would be utterly miserable. In every rich family there are four or five ladies. My dear old uncle, don't trouble yourself any more about the matter. When I get there, I shall know how to look after myself. I don't anticipate any trouble on that score."
"But that is not all," Zhang the Fourth continued. "He is continually beating his women and ill using his wives. He makes a business of buying and selling young people, and if anyone in his establishment gives him the slightest cause for annoyance, he sends for the go-between and gets rid of her. Are you ready to put up with that sort of treatment?"
"No, Uncle, you are mistaken," his niece said. "Even a bad-tempered husband cannot punish a wife who does her duty and keeps her wits about her. If I marry him and perform my household duties properly, and if I know when to keep my mouth and other people's mouths shut, he will find no excuse for treating me badly."
"I am told," Zhang the Fourth persisted, "yes, I am told that he has a young unmarried daughter about fourteen years old, and I can't help thinking, if you marry him, that the girl will take every possible opportunity of annoying you."
"Why do you think that, Uncle? If I marry him, old is old and young is young. I treat children very kindly. I don't believe either that my husband will be dissatisfied with me, or that my daughter will be undutiful. If he had ten daughters, it wouldn't worry me."
"One more point," said Zhang the Fourth, "and perhaps this is the most serious of all. The fellow's behavior is atrocious. Strumpets and bawdy houses are the only interest he has in life. Moreover, he is a man of straw and frightfully in debt. What I fear most of all is that he will involve you in his downfall."
"Uncle, you are mistaken again. The man is young and occasionally he may philander away from home. There is nothing extraordinary about that, and there is no way in which wives can prevent their husbands from so amusing themselves. As for his financial position, you should remember the old saying: 'Money has no roots.' We have no means of telling whether a person will always be rich or always be poor. No, Uncle, marriages are made in Heaven, please don't distress yourself so much about this one."
Zhang the Fourth was forced to realize that there was nothing he could say to change his niece's purpose. She paid no heed to anything he advised. So he made a wry face, drank two cups of plain tea, stood up, and went home extremely crestfallen.
He talked over the matter with his wife, and they decided to wait until the wedding day, and then to use their nephew Yang Zongbao as an excuse for laying hands on Mistress Meng's belongings.
On the twenty-fourth Ximen Qing sent his marriage pledge. On the twenty-sixth twelve monks came to chant a dirge for the repose of the soul of the late Master Yang, and burn his tablet. Aunt Yang was definitely on Ximen's side but, on the eve of the wedding, Zhang the Fourth asked a number of neighbours to accompany him and went to make a last attempt to dissuade his niece. Old woman Xue, with Ximen's servants and ten or twenty soldiers of the garrison, came to bring away the lady's bed, her curtains, and all her boxes. Zhang met them and stopped them. "Madam Go-between," he said, "please do not remove these things. I have a few words to say about the matter." Then he and all the neighbours went in to see Mistress Meng. They sat down and Zhang the Fourth addressed the company.
"Honourable neighbours all, please listen to what I have to say." Then he turned to his niece. "You are the mistress here, and I have nothing against that. But your husband Yang Zongxi and his younger brother Yang Zongbao were both nephews of mine. The elder of these two nephews is now dead and what he possessed has been inherited by others. That is right and fitting. But my second nephew Yang Zongbao is still a child, and the burden of this matter falls upon me. He was born of the same mother as your late husband, and has naturally a right to some share in the property. I call upon these honourable neighbours to witness. We will open all the boxes and everybody shall see what there is. Then we shall know whether there is much or nothing."
"Honourable neighbours," Mistress Meng said, beginning to cry, "now hear what I have to say." She turned to Zhang the Fourth. 'You are mistaken, old gentleman. I did not wickedly murder my husband, so that I might marry again to my dishonour. It is no secret that he had money. He laid by many taels of silver, and spent them on the building of this house. I am not taking this house away. I leave it for my young brother-in-law. I am not even taking away a single article of furniture. Three or four hundred taels of silver were due to me but I handed over to you the contracts and documents, you collected the money, and I have used it to live upon. What else could I do?"
"Doubtless you have no money," Zhang said. "I am quite ready to agree. But in the presence of these good people, let the boxes be opened so that everyone can see for himself. Even if they turn out to be full of silver, you can take it away. I don't want it."
"Perhaps you would like to see my shoes too," Mistress Meng cried.
They were in the midst of this dispute when Aunt Yang came in, leaning on her stick. "Here comes the aunt," all the neighbours cried. They saluted her respectfully. She returned their greeting and sat down. Then she began.
"Honourable neighbours here present. I am her aunt, and it is natural that I should have something to say about all this. He who is dead was my nephew, and he who lives is just as much my nephew. If any one of our fingers is bitten, it is no less painful than any other. It has been stated that her husband was rich. Well, even if he had a hundred thousand taels, you should still treat her fairly. She has no children and she is young. What right have you to prevent her marrying again?"
"Quite right, quite right," said all the neighbours.

"Do you claim the things that came to her from her own family?" the old lady continued, addressing Zhang the Fourth. "She has had no secret understanding with me. All I want is justice." She turned again to the bystanders. "If my niece had not always been so good-hearted and sweet-natured, honourable neighbours, I should not be bothering my old bones about her. I hate to see her leave this place."
Zhang the Fourth glared at the old lady. "Oh," said he, "I know how full of fine ideas your mind is. I also know that the phoenix does not lay his head where there is no treasure."
This remark infuriated the old lady. Her face became purple. She shook her finger at Zhang the Fourth. "Don't talk such rubbish, Zhang the Fourth. I may not be the rightful representative of the Yang family but as for you, old slippery tongue, what have you to do with the Yangs?"
"Even if I am not a Yang, these two nephews are my sister's sons. You biting old reptile, a woman ought to consider her husband's family. What is the use of lighting a fire with one hand and pouring water on it with the other?"
"You good-for-nothing old dog bone," the old lady cried. "She is a young and helpless woman. You wish to keep her in this house but what is it you are really after? Either you have nasty lustful designs upon her yourself, or you are devising some scheme to grow fat upon her money."
"I don't want her money," Zhang the Fourth retorted, "but there will be nothing for Yang Zongbao when he grows up. I am not your sort, ripe for the slaughter, one who takes up with the rich and deceives the humble. You are like a yellow cat with a black tail."
"Zhang the Fourth, you offshoot of generations of beggars, you miserable old slave, you old mealy mouth, how dare you be such a humbug and talk like this? What utter nonsense! There will be no cords to tie your coffin when you die."
"You garrulous old whore, you want the money yourself to put a little warmth under your tail. No wonder you never had any children!"
The old lady became more and more wild.
"Zhang the Fourth, you son of a bawd. Pig! Dog! So I've no children, eh? Well, that's better than having an old woman who goes to the temple to sleep with the monks and carry on with the priests. You don't know what you're talking about."
By this time the pair were on the point of coming to blows. Fortunately, the neighbours stopped them. "Uncle, let the lady have her say," they said to Zhang the Fourth.
Old woman Xue, while the dispute was at its height, told Ximen's servants and the soldiers to hurry in. They carried out all the chests and beds, some on their shoulders and others on poles. It was like a whirlwind. Zhang the Fourth was furious but he could only look on, speechless. The neighbours could not understand what the trouble was all about. They tried to make peace, and finally they went away. On the second day of the sixth month, Ximen Qing sent a large sedan chair, with four pairs of lanterns, for Mistress Meng. Yang Zongbao, his hair dressed in a knot, wearing green clothes, rode on a horse and acted as his sister-in-law's escort. Ximen Qing gave him a roll of silk and a piece of jade. Lanxiang and Xiaoluan, the two maids, went with her to be her chambermaids. Qintong, her boy was now 15 years old, and he too went to serve her. On the third day after the marriage, Aunt Yang and Mistress Meng's sisters-in-law called to offer their congratulations. Ximen Qing gave Aunt Yang seventy taels of silver and two rolls of silk, and from that day forward their friendship was never broken. He prepared 3 rooms in the western wing for Mistress Meng, established her as his third wife  there calling her, "Yulou" [Tower of Jade], and giving orders to his household that she must be spoken of as the Third Lady. For two nights he slept in her room. The golden hangings seemed to indicate the coming of a new bride but the story told by the scarlet silk coverlets was not new.

## 029

### All Night Long, P'an Chin-lien yearns for Hsi-men Ch'ing, During the Tablet-burning, Monks Overhear Sounds of Venery & the Magic Diagrams

*In the silent bedchamber, all by herself, she wonders;*
The mandarin ducks are separated; no news of him has come.
Before the fragrance of her powder has vanished from his arm;
The *p'i-p'a* at the head of her bed is covered with dust.
Her face has grown so thin it scarcely registers in the phoenix mirror;
Her clouds of hair are so loose the jade hairpins are falling out.
His mettlesome steed does not come; her gazing eyes are tired;
All alone with her mandarin duck pillow, tears flood her cheeks.

from the time that Hsi-men Ch'ing took Meng Yü-lou into his household he:

*Enjoyed himself with his new wife.*[1]

They were:

*Like glue and like lacquer.*[2]

Moreover, the Ch'en family sent Auntie Wen to announce that they would like to have his daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, carried across their threshold in marriage on the twelfth day of the sixth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing found himself so:

*Pushed and pressured,*

that he was unable to procure a bed for his daughter's trousseau in time for the occasion and had to supply her with one of the gilt lacquer Nanking beds with retractable steps that had formed part of Meng Yü-lou's dowry. What with the "third-day celebrations" and "ninth-day celebrations" attendant on this event, he was kept busy for more than a month and was unable to pay a visit to P'an Chin-lien.

As a consequence of this, everyday found her:
*Leaning against one doorjamb after another,*
*Wearing out her eyes with constant gazing.*

She twice sent Dame Wang to inquire about Hsi-men Ch'ing but the servants at his gate, who were familiar enough with the old lady and knew that she had been sent by P'an Chin-lien, paid scant attention, merely reporting that their master was busy.
The woman was frantic with longing. When the old lady reported the results of her mission, the woman vented her wrath on her stepdaughter, driving her out into the street, in her turn, to look for him. How could that little chit have dared to penetrate his:
*Vast courtyards and secluded mansions?*
All she did was to lurk in the vicinity of his gate a couple of times without catching sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. When she returned home her stepmother spat in her face, slapped her, and abused her for being of no use. She even made her kneel on the floor until noon without giving her anything to eat.
At that time the summer solstice had already passed and the weather was extremely hot. The house was so uncomfortable the woman could hardly bear it and ordered Ying-erh to heat some water and prepare the tub so she could take a bath. She also put a tray of meat dumplings into the steamer so she would have something to offer him if Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to show up.
Wearing nothing but a short shift of thin floss silk, she sat on a low stool longing in vain for Hsi-men Ch'ing to come. Pouting with her lips, she cursed him a couple of times for a fickle scoundrel.
*Bereft of thought or feeling,*
*Depressed and silent,*
with her slender fingers she took off her two red embroidered shoes and used them to cast a "love hexagram"[3] in the hope of ascertaining whether Hsi-men Ch'ing would come or not. Truly:
*In front of others she is reluctant to declare*
*herself too loudly;*
*Secretly she casts her lot with coins inquiring after*
*her distant lover.*[4]
There are two songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testify to this:
*Clad in "wave-tripping" silk stockings,*
Looking almost natural,
Divested of their red-tipped shoes that
now form a "love diagram,"
*They are like lotus roots that have begun to sprout,*
Like lotus pods that have shed their blossoms.
How were they ever bound tightly enough to make them
so very tiny?
Measured with a willow wand, they are
but half a span in length.
As for him,
He doesn't think of me;
As for me,
I think longingly of him.
*Quietly taking down the bamboo blind,*
Leaving the door to creak,
All I can do is lie underneath my quilt,
cursing his name.
How can you care so much for "misty willows,"
That you won't come to my place anymore?
"My eyebrows have lost their colour; who will
repaint them for me?"[5]
Before whose house has he tethered his horse
to the green willows?
As for him,
He is unfaithful to me;
As for me,
I am yearning for him.[6]
At that time, after the woman had tried casting "love diagrams" for a while and realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not going to show up, she felt herself overcome by drowsiness, stretched out on her bed, and dozed off. When she woke up, about two hours later, she was not in the best of moods.
"I've heated the water, Mother," Ying-erh said. "Are you going to take a bath or not?"
"The dumplings must be done by now," the woman said. "Bring them in here so I can have a look."
Ying-erh hastened to obey and brought them into the bedroom. The woman counted them off, one by one, with her slender fingers. She had made a full tray of thirty dumplings but now, though she counted them back and forth a number of times, she could only count twenty-nine. There was one dumpling missing.
"What could have happened to it?" she asked.
"I haven't any idea," said Ying-erh. "You must have counted wrong, Mother."
"I counted them myself, twice," the woman said. "I made thirty dumplings so I'd have something to offer your father if he comes by. Why did you have to go and snitch one? You're spoiled rotten, you wanton little slave! I suppose you were suffering from such:
*Acute consumption or avid craving,*
that you simply couldn't help eating this particular dumpling, while the rice I feed you:
*Whether in large bowl or in small,*
you can barely manage to choke down. What I'm going to do next is intended to teach you a lesson."
Thereupon:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
she stripped the clothing off the little chit's body and picking up a riding crop proceeded to give her twenty or thirty strokes with it. She whipped the girl until she:
*Howled like a stuck pig.*
"If you don't confess," she threatened, "I'll certainly give you a hundred strokes."
When the girl could stand the beating no longer she cried out, "Don't whip me any more, Mother. I was desperately hungry and took one of them to eat."
"If you took it," the woman said, "why did you claim that I had counted wrong? You're nothing but a confirmed, mischief-making little whore! When that cuckold was still alive you may have gotten away with:
*Telling tales and embroidering on the facts:*
but where is he now? You think you can continue to be:
*Up to your preternatural pranks,*
right under my nose, do you? You mischief-making little whore! I'm going to beat your bottom right off for you!"
The woman whipped her a while longer and pulled her drawers back on before letting her up. Then she ordered her to stand beside her and cool her with a fan.
After she had fanned her for a while the woman said to her, "You lousy little whore! Stick your face over here, so I can give your cheeks a good scratching!"
Ying-erh really did stick her face out, and the woman gouged two bloody scratches in her cheeks with her sharp fingernails before letting her off.
After a while Chin-lien went over to her mirror stand to get dressed and put on some new makeup and then came out and stood inside the blind in the doorway. It just so happened that:
*As providence would have it,*
what should she see but Hsi-men Ch'ing's pageboy, Tai-an, who was riding past her door on horseback with a package wrapped in felt tucked under his arm.
The woman called him to a halt and asked, "Where are you going?"
Now this pageboy had always been glib with his tongue and had often accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing when he visited the woman's house. She was in the habit of tipping him generously and always spoke up on his behalf when he was in hot water with Hsi-men Ch'ing. For this reason he was already on easy terms with the woman.
Dismounting from his horse, he said, "Father sent me to deliver a gift to the commandant's yamen."
The woman invited him inside and asked, "What's your father been up to at home? Why hasn't he come to see me or given me so much as a glimpse of his shadow for so long? It must be that he's found another sweetheart somewhere and put me in the position of:
*The rings that hold his hairnet in place: always*
*at the back of his head."*
"Father hasn't taken up with any sweetheart," said Tai-an. "It's just that the last few days he's had so much to do at home that he hasn't been able to get away and come to see you."
"Even if he has been busy at home," the woman said, "that's no reason to neglect me for half a month at a time without sending me so much as a word of news. It's obvious that I haven't been very much on his mind. Just what is it that's keeping him so busy, anyway?" she demanded of Tai-an. "Tell me all about it."

The pageboy giggled but wouldn't tell her anything.
"There's been something to preoccupy him, that's all," he said. "Why do you insist on:
*Blowing aside the hairs only to look for trouble?*[7]
"My dear little oily mouth," the woman said, "if you don't tell me I'll never forgive you."
"If I tell you," the pageboy said, "you mustn't tell Father that it was I who told you."
"I won't tell him, that's all," the woman said.
Tai-an then proceeded, thus and so, to give a full account, from beginning to end, of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken Meng Yü-lou into his household. Nothing might have happened if the woman had not heard about this but having heard about it, she could not prevent the teardrops in her eyes from coursing down across her fragrant cheeks.
Tai-an was thrown into a panic by this response, and said, "It's precisely because you're so sensitive that I didn't want to tell you about it, and now that I have, look at the way you're carrying on."
The woman leaned against the doorjamb and gave a long sigh, saying, "Tai-an, you don't know how much love I've lavished on him, from the first day we met, and now, how can he just abandon me like this?"
As she spoke she was unable to prevent a copious fall of tears.
"Why should you torment yourself so?" said Tai-an. "At home, Mother doesn't even try to keep him in hand."
"Tai-an," the woman said, "listen to my plaint." There is another song to the previous tune that testifies to this:
*My naughty lover is fickle;*
He hasn't come for a month.
I've been alone beneath the mandarin duck quilt
for thirty nights.
His feckless affections are otherwise engaged,
While I remain an infatuated fool.
I never should have allowed myself
to become so involved.
"What is easily acquired is
easily relinquished."[8]
As for him,
His passion has cooled;
As for me,
It's just my luck.[9]
No sooner was she done than she started to cry all over again.
"Don't cry," said Tai-an. "I shouldn't wonder if Father turned up during the next couple of days, on his birthday. If you write a few words to him, I'll make sure that Father sees them, and he's certain to come."
"I'll really be beholden to you," the woman said. "If you can induce him to come, I'll make a pair of nice shoes for you to wear. I'll wait for him here in order to offer my birthday congratulations. If he doesn't come, I'll hold you accountable, you little oily mouth. And if he asks you what you were doing here, how will you answer him?"
"If Father asks me," said Tai-an, "I'll say that I was watering the horse in the street when you sent Granny Wang to ask me over and gave me this note, along with the injunction to tell him how much you wanted to see him."
"You little oily mouth," the woman laughed, "you're really:
*A second Hung-niang: always able to*
*bring people together.*"[10]
When she had finished speaking she ordered Ying-erh to serve Tai-an a plateful of the steamed dumplings on the table, along with some tea. While this was being done she went inside, fetched a sheet of flowered notepaper, and:
*Lightly grasping the jade tube, and*
*Gently toying with the sheep's hair brush,*
dashed off a lyric to the tune "Mistletoe," which read as follows:
*I'm taking my heartfelt words and*
Sending them to you on this flowered notepaper.
I remember the time I first cut off
a lock of my black tresses for you.
I leaned against one doorjamb after another
and took down the bamboo blind,
Anticipating surprise and suffering fear for you,
trivial though they may have been.
And now you're actually betraying
my love.
If you're not going to come, return my
fragrant silk handkerchief.[11]
When she had finished composing her note she folded it into a lozenge-shaped lover's knot, sealed it, and gave it to Tai-an with the words, "Be sure to tell him, whatever he does, to come pay me a visit on his birthday. I'll be here waiting for him."
When Tai-an had finished eating his snack the woman also gave him several tens of cash.
As he was about to go outside and mount his horse she said to him, "When you get home and see your father, tell him, 'She really cursed you out.' And if he refuses to come, tell him, 'She's threatening to get into a sedan chair one of these days and come to pay you a visit herself.' "
Tai-an replied, "I feel just like:
*A clapper-sounding southern salesman who runs into*
*a dung-cake peddler and exclaims:*
*'Don't bother to run through your inventory;*
*it only gives me the creeps!'*
*You'd crack melon seeds astride the wooden mule*[12]
*en route to your own execution:*
*How superfluous can you get?"*
When he had finished speaking he mounted his horse and departed.
Everyday the woman spent her time:
*Waiting for long periods as well as short,*
but it was just as though he were:
*A stone sunk in the vast sea.*[13]
She never caught so much as a glimpse of Hsi-men Ch'ing's shadow.
Seven days went by in this way until, finally, it was the day of his birthday. To the woman:
*Each day was like three months of autumn;*
*Each night seemed like half a summer.*[14]
She:
*Waited all day,*
*Without any news of him;*
*Watched for a long time,*
*But caught not a glimpse of him.*
Before she became aware of it she began to:
*Silently gnash her silvery teeth, as*
*Tears overflowed her starry eyes.*
When evening came she invited Dame Wang over, plied her with food and wine, and then pulled a silver hairpin with a gold head out of her hair and gave it to her, entreating her to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house on her behalf and press her invitation.
"If I show up this late in the day," said Dame Wang, "he'll already be:
*Anticipating tea or recovering from wine,*
and will certainly not consent to come. I'd do better to wait until first thing tomorrow morning to go to the gentleman's mansion and extend your invitation."
"Godmother," the woman said, "be sure you don't forget."
"Since when," the old lady asked, "have I ever undertaken anything for you without carrying it through?"
At this juncture the old lady, who was the sort who:
*Wouldn't do anything except for money,*[15]
having accepted the hairpin for her pains and drunk until her face was bright red, proceeded to make her way home.
It so happens that, in her bedroom, the woman:
*Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, and*
*Deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick,*
but could not get to sleep. Giving vent to:
*Long sighs as well as short,*
she:
*Tossed first this way and then that.*
Truly, it is a case of:
*She who is wont to diligently strum her* p'i-p'a
*late into the night:*
*When all alone in her deserted chamber can scarcely*
*bear to play it.*[16]
At this juncture, accompanying herself on the *p'i-p'a*, she sang a suite of four songs to the tune "Making Silk Floss," which testifies to this:
*In the beginning I loved you for*
being so romantic;
We exchanged locks of our hair and
burned incense together.
When we sported with the clouds and rain
we were perfectly suited;
Behind my husband's back I carried on
an affair with you.
What did I care when people said, "Spilt water
can never be recovered?"[17]
If you are really betraying
my true love,
You're: "Climbing a tree in search of fish,"[18]
and deserve whatever you get.
*Who would have thought you'd have*
found another sweetheart?
It makes me so mad I'm:
"Half drunk and half crazy."
Leaning against the standing screen, I

try to figure it out;
I don't understand it, how could you
abandon me this way?
Though I: "Send letters and post notes,"
you still refuse to come.
If you are really betraying,
my affections,
If no one else gets to you first,
Heaven will destroy you.
*I certainly never loved you*
just for your money;
I loved you because I found you
such an appealing lover.
You knew just how to handle me;
you were always so clever.
I was a lovely flower that had
just blossomed in the garden;
But once the butterfly had supped its fill
it did not return.
Love of the kind that we once
felt for each other,
Must have been predestined in a former life
to be fulfilled in this.
*I turn things over in my troubled heart*
until I'm depressed.
As the sayings go, "Women are
easily infatuated,"
And, "Lovers alone are
never satisfied."
The affair I had with you
was my first;
It was a fresh flower I brought you;
how could you give it up?
Now that you've found yourself
another soul mate;
In the Temple of the God of the Sea[19]
I'll bring an action against you.[20]
It so happens that all night long the woman:
*Tossed first this way and then that,*
but could not get to sleep.

The next morning she said to Ying-erh, "Go next door and see if Granny Wang has gone to invite your father or not."
Ying-erh did as she was told and, before long, came back and reported, "Granny Wang left a long time ago."
To resume our story, the old lady got up early in the morning and set out as soon as she had combed her hair and washed her face.
When she arrived at Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate she asked the servants on duty, "Is the gentleman at home?" but they all said, "We don't know," so she went over and waited by the wall across the street.
Before long, Manager Fu showed up to open the shop. The old lady went up to him, bowed and uttered a word of greeting, and then said, "May I trouble you with a question? Is the gentleman at home?"
"What do you want with him," said Manager Fu, "that you should be asking me so early in the morning? If you had asked anyone else, they wouldn't have known but I'll tell you. Yesterday was the gentleman's birthday, and he spent the day entertaining guests in his home. They had been drinking all day long, and when evening came he took his friends off to the licensed quarter, where they must have made a night of it because he hasn't come home yet. That's where you ought to look if you want to find him."
After the old lady had bowed in gratitude and bade him farewell, she crossed the square in front of the district yamen and started along East Street in the direction of the lane that led into the licensed quarter. At this point, what should she see in the distance but Hsi-men Ch'ing coming toward her on horseback. He was accompanied by two pageboys and was sufficiently the worse for wear so that:
*His eyes were bleary with drink,*
and he was:
*Rocking backward and forward,*
in the saddle.
"Sir!" the old lady hailed him in a loud voice. "Why don't you have a little less to drink?"
As she spoke, she stepped forward and brought him to a halt by taking hold of the horse's bit with her hand.
"You're Godmother Wang, aren't you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired drunkenly. "What have you got to say for yourself?"
The old lady had whispered no more than a few words in his ear when Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "The pageboy gave me the message when he got home. I know she must be angry with me. I'll go to her place right now."
Hsi-men Ch'ing followed the old lady, and the two of them carried on an animated dialogue all the way to their destination.
When they got to the woman's door, Dame Wang went in first and reported, "Young lady, I've got good news for you. Thanks to my efforts, in less than an hour I've succeeded in bringing the gentleman here with me."
When the woman heard that he had come, she hastily ordered Ying-erh to tidy up the room and then went out to welcome him. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was still:
*More than a little addled with wine,*
swaggered right in, fanning himself as he came, and bowed to the woman as he uttered a word of greeting.
The woman returned his salutation and said, "Sir:
*The more eminent you are, the harder you are to see.*[21]
How could you simply drop me like this, without giving me so much as a glimpse of your shadow for so long? No doubt, with your new bride to keep you company at home, you're:
*Like glue and like lacquer,*
and scarcely have any reason to think of me. How can you still claim, sir, that you haven't had a change of heart?"
"You shouldn't pay any attention to the nonsense people talk," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What would I want with a new bride anyway? It's only because my young daughter got married that I was kept busy for a few days and didn't have the time to pay you a visit. That's all there is to it."
"You think you can pull the wool over my eyes, do you?" the woman said. "If you haven't:
*Become enamored of the new and abandoned the old,*
or found yourself a new sweetheart somewhere, you'll have to swear an oath on that all too vigorous body of yours before I'll believe you."
"If I ever betray you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I be afflicted with:
*Boils as big as bowls,*
*Three to five years of jaundice,*[22] *and*
*A bite on the balls by a centipede*
*as big as a carrying pole."*
"You lousy two-timer," the woman said, "what does:
*A bite on the balls by a centipede*
*as big as a carrying pole,*
have to do with you?"
As she spoke she reached out with her hand, snatched the hat off his head, and threw it on the floor. Dame Wang saw that it was a brand-new, tasseled, "tile-ridge" hat, shaped like the roof of a pavilion with flaring eaves,[23] and hastily picked it up and put it on the table for him.
"Young lady," she said, "you've been complaining about my failure to invite the gentleman here for you; and now look how you're treating him! If you don't put his hat back on for him he'll catch cold."
"Fat chance!" said the woman. "If that fickle ruffian died of a venereal chill, I wouldn't care."
As she spoke she pulled a pin out of his hair and held it in her hand while she examined it. It was a polished gold hairpin with two rows of characters engraved on it that said:
*The horse with the golden bridle neighs*
*amidst the fragrant verdure:*
*The visitor to the jade tower is drunk*
*at apricot blossom time.*[24]
It had been given to him by Meng Yü-lou but the woman assumed that it was a gift from some singing girl, so she put it in her sleeve and refused to return it, saying, "And you claim not to have had a change of heart! Where did the hairpin I gave you get to, that you should be wearing this one from someone else?"
"As for that hairpin of yours," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the other day I got drunk and fell off my horse, so hard that my hat was knocked off and my hair came undone. When I looked for your pin I couldn't find it."
"You wouldn't fool a two-year-old child with that story," the woman said. "You mean to tell me you were so befuddled with drink that you couldn't even see a hairpin when it fell on the ground?"
"Young lady," interjected Dame Wang from one side, "you can't hold the gentleman to blame.
*He can detect a bee defecating forty li outside the city,*
*But trips over a mangy elephant on his own doorstep:*
*He can see things at a distance,*
*But not close to home."*
"It's bad enough to have her giving me a hard time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "without your joining in the fun."
The woman saw that he held in his hand a fine gold-flecked Szechwan fan, with red slats and a gold hinge-joint,[25] and proceeded to snatch it away from him and hold it up to the light.
It so happens that the woman was an old hand where anything about the relations between the sexes was concerned. When she saw that there were traces of tooth-marks all over the fan, confirming her suspicion that it had been given to him by some light-of-love:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
she broke it in two. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing attempted to rescue it, it had already been torn to tatters.
"That fan was given to me by a friend named Pu Chih-tao,"[26] he protested. "I've only had it for three days, and you've torn it to tatters."
The woman had been harassing him for some time when Ying-erh came in with a cup of tea. Her stepmother told her to put it down and kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You've been nagging away for half the day already," said Dame Wang. "Enough is enough. Don't let yourselves miss the boat. I'll go downstairs and see to things in the kitchen."
The woman told Ying-erh to set up the table in the room where they were. In no time at all the wine and delicacies that had been prepared in advance for the celebration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, including, as might be expected, roast chicken, cooked goose, fresh fish, potted meat, fruits, and the like, were gotten ready, brought into the room, and set out on the table.
The woman opened a trunk and took out the things she had prepared for Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday. She then arranged these on a tray and set it down in front of him, so he could see what she was giving him. There were: a pair of jet satin shoes; a pair of scent bags with the drawnwork inscription:
*In secret tryst a lover's vow,*
*I'll follow you where'er you go;*
a pair of russet satin kneepads, the borders of which were decorated with a motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends"; a sand-green waistband of Lu-chou pongee, decorated with the motifs of auspicious clouds and the symbolic representations of the "eight treasures," lined with watered-silk, fastened with purple cords, and enclosing a pocket filled with aromatic lysimachia and rose petals; and a hairpin in the shape of a double-headed lotus blossom, engraved with a pentasyllabic quatrain that read:
*I have a lotus blossom with two heads:*
To help keep your topknot in place.
As they grow from the same stem on your head,
So may we never abandon each other.
No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing see her gifts than his heart was filled with delight.
He pulled her into an embrace with one arm and gave her a kiss, saying, "Who would have thought you were as clever as this? Such skills are a rare thing."
The woman told Ying-erh to hold the winepot and pour a cup of wine for Hsi-men Ch'ing. Then:
*Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,*
*Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,*

she kowtowed to him four times. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to pull her to her feet and the two of them:
*Sat down shoulder to shoulder,*
*Exchanging cups as they drank.*
Dame Wang took several cups of wine with them, until her face became bright red, and then said good-bye and went home, leaving the two of them to enjoy themselves as they pleased. After Ying-erh had seen Dame Wang on her way she locked the front door and went in to sit in the kitchen. The woman continued drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing for some time.
Little by little evening began to fall. Behold:
*Dense clouds obscure the evening peaks;*
*Dark mists streak the distant heavens.*
*Hosts of stars vie with the white moon*
*in their brilliance;*
*Green waters contend with the blue sky*
*in shades of aquamarine.*
*Monks make their way toward old temples:*
*Where, deep in the woods, they elicit*
*the cawing of crows.*
*Travellers head for desolate villages:*
*Where, among the lanes, they arouse*
*the barking of dogs.*
*Perched on his branch, the cuckoo cries*
*at the night moon;*
*Within the garden, the powdered butterfly*
*flirts with the flowers.*[27]
At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing told his pageboys to take the horse and go home since he had decided to spend the night at the woman's house. That evening the two of them were:
*Just like cavorting sparrow hawks:*
*Exhausting themselves to please each other,*
*Indulging their lusts without restraint.*
As the saying goes:
*When joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow;*
*When prosperity is at its height, adversity follows.*[28]
*Light and darkness alternate swiftly.*
Let us now return to the story of Wu Sung. After taking charge of the district magistrate's letter and the consignment of presents, he set out from the district of Ch'ing-ho and escorted the shipment all the way to Defender-in-chief Chu Mien's establishment in the Eastern Capital. Once there, he duly turned over the consignment and engaged in several days of idle sightseeing; after which, having obtained a reply, he set out with his companions once again on the highway that led back to Shantung.
He had started out on his journey during the third or fourth month but by now, on his return trip, the heat of summer had diminished and it was already early autumn. It rained continuously along the way, and the delays that this occasioned prevented him from returning in the expected time. What with one thing and another, the round trip was going to end up taking him more than three months. Held up as he was by the rains and flooding along the route, his spirit was troubled and he felt uneasy in mind and body.
Anxious to hurry back as fast as he could in order to see his elder brother, he dispatched one of the local recruits in his party to travel ahead and inform the district magistrate of their situation. He also privately entrusted him with a family letter for his brother, Wu the Elder, in which he said he would be home before long, no later than sometime in the eighth month.
The local recruit delivered his report to the district magistrate and then set out to look for Wu the Elder's house. It just so happened that:
*As providence would have it,*
Dame Wang was in the front of her shop at the time.
When the local recruit saw that the door of Wu the Elder's house was shut, he was about to call for someone to open up when the old lady asked him, "Who are you looking for?"
"I've been sent by Captain Wu," replied the local recruit, "to deliver a letter to his elder brother."
"Wu the Elder's not at home," the old lady said. "They've all gone out to pay a visit to the family graves. If you've got a letter for him, you might as well give it to me. As soon as he comes home I'll see that he gets it. It's all the same whether he gets it from you or from me."
Bowing to her with an expression of gratitude, the local recruit pulled out the family letter and handed it over to Dame Wang; after which he hurriedly leapt onto his horse and flew on his way.
Dame Wang took the letter and went over to the woman's house by way of the back door that Ying-erh opened to let the old lady in. It so happened that the woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing had been at it for half the night and were sleeping late. It was almost lunchtime but they weren't up yet.
"Sir! And young lady!" Dame Wang called out to them. "Get up! There's something urgent I need to tell you about." She then proceeded:
*Thus and thus, and*
*So and so,*
to relate what had happened. "Wu the Second has sent a local recruit to deliver a letter to his elder brother, saying that he'll arrive back before long. I accepted the letter on his behalf and managed to fob off the messenger with a few words. This matter will brook no delay. You must decide on the best thing to do as soon as possible."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, nothing might have happened but having heard these words, truly, it was just as though:
*The eight-boned structure of his skull had been*
*split asunder;*
*Only to have poured into it half a bucketful*
*of icy snow.*[29]
As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman had gotten up and put on their clothes, they invited Dame Wang into the room and offered her a seat. She took out the letter and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to read. Wu Sung said in the letter that he would arrive home no later than the Mid-autumn Festival, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. This threw both of them into a panic.
"What are we going to do about this?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Godmother, please do whatever you can to protect us.
*Your kindness will be amply rewarded,*
*We will never dare to forget it.*
Right now:
*Our mutual passions are as deep as the sea;*
*We can't bear to be parted from each other.*
But when that bastard, Wu the Second, comes back we'll have to separate. What can we do?"
"Sir," said the old lady, "what's so hard about that? As I pointed out to you once before:
*In one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;*
*In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.*
It's always been the case that:
*Brothers and sisters-in-law do not*
*ask after each other.*[30]
Right now, Wu the Elder's 'hundredth day' is about to come up, and the young lady should engage a few Buddhist monks to preside over the burning of his spirit tablet. As soon as that ceremony is completed, and before Wu the Second gets back, you can pop her into a sedan chair, sir, and take her into your household as a concubine. Then, when that bastard, Wu the Second, arrives back, I'll explain the situation to him and he won't have anything to say in the matter. From then on the two of you can:
*Live happily ever after,*
and the whole damn business will come to nothing."
"Godmother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're absolutely right. Truly:
*If you aren't tough enough,*
*You will never be secure."*
That day, by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman had finished eating breakfast, they had decided that on the sixth day of the eighth month that was Wu the Elder's "hundredth day," they would engage monks to perform the Buddhist rites and burn the spirit tablet of the deceased; and that on the evening of the eighth day Hsi-men Ch'ing would send a sedan chair to carry the woman across his threshold. Not long after the three of them had completed their deliberations, Tai-an came back with the horse to take Hsi-men Ch'ing home. But no more of this.
*Days and nights speed by like arrows;*
*The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.*
Before long it was the sixth day of the eighth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing had brought several taels of loose silver and two pecks of polished rice to the woman's house to defray the expenses of the religious observances. He sent Dame Wang to the Pao-en Temple to engage the services of six Buddhist monks, who were to come to the house and perform a "land and water" mass for the benefit of Wu the Elder, and then preside over the burning of his spirit tablet the same evening.
The foreman of the lay workers from the temple arrived early in the morning, at the fifth watch, bearing with him the sutras that would be used in the liturgy. He prepared the consecrated space in which the ceremony would be held and hung up Buddhist effigies. Dame Wang, in the kitchen, supervised the cook who had been engaged to prepare the vegetarian offerings that would be required for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the preceding night at the woman's house.
Before long the monks arrived and started to sound their hand-chimes and strike their drums and cymbals as they embarked upon their declamatory recitations. The liturgy included excerpts from the *Lotus Sutra*[31] and the *Litanies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty*.[32] That morning they dispatched petitions inviting the representatives of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, to confer efficacy upon the ceremony by authenticating the covenant. These sacred beings were then invited to partake of the offerings presented to them. At noon the souls of the departed, on both land and water, were summoned to partake of the sustenance provided for their benefit but there is no need to describe this in detail.
To resume our story, how could P'an Chin-lien bring herself to observe the appropriate abstentions? She remained in bed with Hsi-men Ch'ing and, though the sun was already high in the sky, they had not yet arisen. It was only when the monks requested the presence of the ordainer of the rites to burn incense, sign the petitions, authenticate the covenant, and worship Buddha that she got up, washed her face and combed her hair, made a specious show of putting on mourning, and came out to pay her respects before the Buddhist effigies.
When the company of monks caught sight of Wu the Elder's wife:
*Each and every one of them became oblivious to*
*his Buddha nature and his meditative mind;*
*Each and every one of them lost control of*
*"the monkey of his mind and the horse of his will."*[33]
*All at sevens and eights,*
*They melted into a heap.*
Behold:
*The rector becomes flippant;*
*In reciting the Buddhas' names*
*he gets them backward.*
*The precentor becomes confused;*
*In chanting the words of the sutras*
*his intonation goes astray.*
*The incense-burning acolyte,*
*Knocks over the flower vase.*
*The candle-bearing ascetic,*
*Picks up the incense case instead.*
*The lector who declaims the covenant,*
*Reads the "Great Sung Empire"*
*as the "Great T'ang."*
*The teacher who enacts the rite of repentance,*
*Reads "Wu the Elder"*
*as "Grandfather Wu."*
*The abbot is so flustered;*
*He grabs the hand of an acolyte*
*instead of his drumstick.*
*The novice is so carried away;*
*He hammers on the pate of an old monk*
*instead of the bronze chime.*
*All the merit of their former austerities*

*comes to nothing in a moment:*
*Even a myriad guardian deities*
*could not reduce them to order.*[34]
As soon as the woman had burned incense before the effigies, signed the petitions, and paid homage to Buddha, she returned to her room to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company as before. A feast of wine and meat was laid on, and they gave themselves over to pleasure.
"If anything should come up," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Dame Wang, "just take care of it yourself. Don't let them come around and pester the lady of the house."
"You can relax, sir," the old lady said with a laugh. "Just leave those shaven-pated bastards to me. The two of you might as well enjoy yourselves."
Gentle reader take note: In this world Buddhist monks of such high virtue and attainments that they can remain:
*Impervious to the temptations of the flesh;*[35]
are few. A man of old has said:
*In one word they are "bonzes,"*
*In two words they are "Buddhist monks,"*
*In three words they are "purveyers of demonic music,"*
*In four words they are "sex-starved hungry ghosts."*[36]
Moreover, as Su Shih[37] has said:
*The untonsured are not vicious,*
*The unvicious are not tonsured,*
*The vicious are most likely to be tonsured,*
*The tonsured are most likely to be vicious.*[38]
The subject of this disquisition is how hard it is for monks to keep their vows. Living as they do in their high halls and spacious structures, occupying their sanctuaries and dormitories, supported by the alms of their benefactors so that they can count on three meals a day without having to plant or to plow, and without a worry in the world to occupy their minds, they are able to devote all their attention to lust. Laymen, on the other hand, no matter whether they be scholars, farmers, artisans, or merchants, and even though they be wealthy, distinguished, respected, and well-favoured, are often so preoccupied with the pursuit of fame and profit or the demands of social intercourse that even though they have beautiful wives or young concubines at their disposal, the sudden recollection of some besetting problem, or the discovery that the rice-jar is empty and the woodshed short of fuel, is enough to make them lose all interest in such things. This is an arena in which they are no match for the monks.[39] There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Sex-starved hungry ghosts, they are like*
long-haired monkeys among the beasts;
Disregarding their vows in the pursuit of lust,
they sully the way of the patriarchs.
These creatures are only fit to be seen
in their natural habitat;
They should never be invited into the decorated
halls of one's home.[40]
That morning when the company of monks beheld the spectacle presented by Wu the Elder's wife, it made an indelible impression on them. When they came back from the temple, to which they had returned for their midday repast and a rest from their labours, the woman was in her room drinking wine and enjoying herself with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
It so happens that the woman's bedroom was right next to the consecrated space that had been set aside for the performance of the Buddhist ceremony. There was only the single thickness of a board wall between them. One of the monks, who had arrived before the rest, went up to the basin outside the woman's bedroom window to wash his hands. Suddenly he overheard the woman:
*In a trembling voice and melting tones,*
*Sighing and moaning,*
*Panting and groaning,*
just as though she were engaged in the act of sexual intercourse with someone in her room. At this the monk, pretending to wash his hands, stood there eavesdropping for quite a while.
He overheard the woman appealing in a soft voice to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Daddy, how long are you going to keep on banging away like that? I'm afraid the monks may come back and hear something. Let me off for now and come as quickly as you can."
"There's no need to get so excited," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. I still haven't burnt the moxa on the top of your mons."[41]
Who would have thought that everything they said to each other was so clearly overheard by that shaven-pated rascal that he might well have ejaculated:
*"Is it not delightful?"*[42]
After a while, when the whole company of monks had reassembled and they resumed their performance of the liturgy, the word passed from mouth to mouth until they all knew that the woman was carrying on with a man in her room. Imperceptibly they began to reenact the imagined scene:
*Miming it with their hands, and*
*Dancing it with their feet.*[43]
By the time the Buddhist ceremony was nearing its completion that evening and the celebrants had moved outside to send the spirit of the departed on its way and burn the paper money that it would need in the other world, the woman had long since divested herself of her mourning and changed into a more colourful outfit. She and Hsi-men Ch'ing stood, shoulder to shoulder, just inside the hanging blind in the doorway, and watched the monks as they prepared to burn Wu the Elder's spirit tablet. Dame Wang brought out a bucket of water, a torch was lit, and in no time at all the spirit tablet and the Buddhist effigies were consumed by the flames.
The shaven-pated rascals with their cold eyes perceived the silhouettes of the man and the woman standing shoulder to shoulder inside the screen and were reminded of the goings-on they had overheard during the day. With one accord they fell to beating their drums and banging their cymbals as if their souls depended on it. A gust of wind blew the abbot's Vairocana hat onto the ground, exposing a bluish, finely polished, shiny pate. No one picked it up but they all continued banging their cymbals, beating their drums, and:
*Falling into a heap with laughter.*
"Reverend sir," called out Dame Wang, "the paper money has already been burnt. Why do you keep on banging away like that?"
"We still haven't burnt the incense on the top of the furnace,"[44] replied the monk.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he told Dame Wang to distribute the fee for their services as quickly as possible.
"Won't the lady who ordained the rites come out so we can thank her?" asked the abbot.
"Dame Wang," the woman said, "tell them I'd prefer to be excused."
*"We'd better let her off for now," the monks replied and went their way convulsed with laughter. Truly, if one's real work had ever found favour in the eyes of one's contemporaries; one would not have had to spend money on rouge in order to paint peonies.*[45] *There is a poem that testifies to this:*

*Even while burning the spirit tablet the wanton woman is dissatisfied;*
Listening by the wall-side eavesdropping monks get an earful.
If Buddhism or Taoism were really capable of absolving her of her sins;
Even the dead, on hearing of such things would be dispirited.

Higher and yet higher the red dawn
Creeps slowly up the casement.
She wakes and throws her silken wrapper
Carelessly across one breast.
Is it not strange
This rising while the sun is not yet high?
Blown by the gentle breeze
The hastening flowers wander through the tower of jade.
She could not sleep
The image of her loved one lingered always with her.

Now that Ximen Qing had married Meng Yulou, their love was so deep that they could not bear to be away from one another even for a moment. One day old woman Wen came on behalf of the Chen family to propose that the marriage arranged between their son and Ximen's daughter should be celebrated on the twelfth day of the sixth month. Ximen Qing, in a great state of excitement, took one of his new wife's gilded Nanjing beds for his daughter. For more than a month he was so busy preparing for the ceremony that he could not find time to go and see Pan Jinlian. Day after day she leaned upon the door, and looked out for him till her eyes could see no longer. At last she asked old woman Wang to go to his house. The old woman went but the servants knew whence she had come and paid no attention to her. Jinlian waited and waited but still Ximen did not come and, after old woman Wang's fruitless visit, she told Ying'er to go to the street and see if she could see him. The girl did not venture to enter the great house, or even the courtyard but stood in the gateway and peeped inside. But she too could see no sign of Ximen Qing and had to go back again. When she got home, Jinlian spat in her face, cursed and beat her, because, she said, she was no use. She made the child kneel down until midday, and would give her nothing to eat. Then, finding the hot weather very trying, she told Ying'er to heat some water that she might take a bath, and to cook some little meat pasties for Ximen Qing to eat if he should come.
Jinlian was wearing a thin gossamer shift, and she sat on her little bed. When her lover did not come, she cursed him for a fickle rogue. This made her only the more sad. With her slender fingers she took off her red embroidered shoes, and began to use them for working out the magic diagrams of love. There was no one she could talk to, and she used coins to try and find out what her absent lover was thinking of.
Jinlian played at the love diagrams for a long time. Then she tired of them and lay down to sleep. An hour later she awoke in a very bad temper. "Mother," Ying'er said, "the water is hot now; will you take your bath?"
"Are the pasties cooked?" Jinlian asked. "Bring them here and let me see." Ying'er hastily brought them, and Jinlian counted them with her dainty fingers. She had made a tray of thirty but, though she counted again and again, she could not find more than twenty-nine.
"Where is the other one?" she cried.
"I haven't seen it," Ying'er said: "you must have counted wrong."
"I have counted them twice. I want thirty for your father to eat. How dare you steal one? You are an impudent, whorish little slave. I suppose you were dying of starvation, and couldn't do without one of these particular pasties! A bowl of rice, whether large or small, is not good enough for you. Do you imagine I made them for you?"
Without giving the girl a chance to say a word, she stripped off her clothes and beat her twenty or thirty times with a whip, till she squealed like a pig being killed. "If I have to ask you again, and you still lie to me, I will most certainly beat you a hundred times."
The girl could bear no more. "Mother, don't beat me," she cried, "I was so hungry I had to take one."
"Why did you say I'd counted them wrongly, when you knew you'd stolen one? I knew it was you, you little whore, you thief. When that turtle was alive, you knew one or two things, and told him a great deal more than you really knew. Now he is not here. You play your tricks right in front of my eyes. I will break every bone in your whorish little body."
She beat the girl for some time longer, then made her put on her drawers, and told her to stand beside her and fan her. When the girl had fanned her for a long time, Jinlian cried, "Turn your face to me, you little strumpet, and I'll pinch it." Ying'er turned and the woman, with her long sharp nails, pinched it till the blood came. Then she let go. After a while, she went to the dressing table to dress again before going to stand at the door.
At last the Heavens relented. Daian on horseback, carrying a parcel, passed her door.
"Where are you going?" she cried.
The boy was by no means lacking in intelligence, and he had often come with his master to this house. Jinlian was in the habit of giving him little presents. He knew her quite well. He dismounted and said, "I have been with a present to one of the officers and now I'm going home."
"What is happening at your Father's?" Jinlian said. "Why hasn't he been here? It looks as though he had another sweetheart."
"He has no new sweetheart. But for the last few days everybody in the house has been very busy, and he couldn't get away."
"If he has been so busy, why didn't he send me word? I have been worried about him for ever so long. Tell me, what is he really doing?"
The boy smiled. He did not answer, and this made Jinlian think there must be something behind it all. Once again she asked him eagerly, "What has been happening?"
"Well, if there was anything," Daian said, smiling, "why should you want to know all about it?"
"If you don't tell me, little oily mouth, I will hate you all your life."
"If I tell you," the boy said, "you mustn't let my master know I did so."
Jinlian promised, and Daian told her how his master had married Meng Yulou. The woman could not prevent the tears from falling over her beautiful face. Daian was very much embarrassed. "Oh, Aunt," he said, "how easily upset you are. That is just why I didn't want to tell you." Jinlian leaned upon the door and sighed deeply.
"You don't understand," she said, "you don't know how fond of one another we used to be. And now he has cast me aside." Her tears fell faster and faster.
"You shouldn't let yourself be so distressed," Daian said. "Even our Great Lady can't keep him in order."
"Listen to me, Daian," said Jinlian. She sang a song to him about the fickleness of men.
Then she began to cry again. "Please don't cry," Daian said, "I'm sure he will come and see you very soon. Write him a short note and let me take it to him. He will certainly come when he gets it."
"I will, indeed," Jinlian said, "and, if you will be so kind, you shall have a fine pair of shoes for your pains. I should like him to come in time for me to congratulate him on his birthday but whether he comes or not will depend absolutely on your little oily tongue."
She told Ying'er to put some of the pasties onto a dish, and asked Daian to have some tea. Meanwhile she went into her room, took a sheet of flowered paper, and wrote with a sheep's-hair brush in a jade holder. In a few minutes she had written this poem:
The words upon this flowered paper come from my heart.
I remember that our hair once mingled on the pillow.
How often I have leaned upon the door, under the lattice, filled with countless fears.
Now, if you are false to me, if you will not come
Give back to me my dainty handkerchief.
When she had written this, she folded the paper in a lover's knot and gave it to Daian. "Tell him he must come on his birthday. I shall be waiting most anxiously for him."
When the boy had eaten the cakes and the pasties, Jinlian gave him a handful of coins. As he was about to mount his horse, she said, "When you get home and see your Father, tell him that I am very angry with him. Tell him that if he does not come here, I shall get a sedan chair and come to him."
"Lady," the boy said, "you mustn't do anything of the sort. You would be like a dumpling seller trying to do business with a fortune-teller. You would never get a fair deal." He rode away.
Day after day, early and late, Jinlian waited for Ximen Qing but he did not come. It was the end of the seventh month and his birthday was approaching. To Jinlian everyday seemed like three autumns and every night like half a summer. Still no word came from him. She clenched her pearly teeth and rivers of tears flowed from her eyes. One evening she prepared a meal, and asked old woman Wang to come and see her. She took a silver pin from her hair and gave it to the old woman, entreating her to go to Ximen's house and ask him to come.
"This is no time to go," the old woman said, "he will certainly not be able to come now. I will go and see him tomorrow morning."

"You must not forget, Stepmother."
"I am not unused to such business," the old woman said. "I'm not likely to lose any time in a matter of this sort."
Old woman Wang never did anything without being paid. This time the pin was her reward. She drank till her face was very red, and then went home.
Jinlian burned incense to perfume the bedclothes, and lighted the silver lamp. Long and softly she sighed to express the inmost feelings of her heart. All through the long night she played the lute, till the silence and loneliness of the empty house made her feel that she could play no longer. And as she played, she sang. She tossed about all night, unable to sleep. As soon as it was light, she sent Ying'er to see whether old woman Wang had gone to see Ximen Qing. The little girl came back and told her that the old woman had gone.
It was still early when old woman Wang reached Ximen's gate. She asked the servants about him but they all said they knew nothing. She waited a long time, standing by the wall opposite the gate, till Clerk Fu came out and opened the shop. She went over and greeted him respectfully. "Excuse me," she said politely, "but is his Lordship at home?"
"What do you want with him?" Fu said. "Yesterday his Lordship entertained a number of guests to celebrate his birthday and, after drinking all day here, they went to the bawdy house last night. He has not come back yet, and you will probably find him still there."
The old woman thanked him and set off down East Street to the lane in which the bawdy house was. There she met Ximen, on horseback, coming from the opposite direction, and two boys attending him. He was half drunk, nodding to and fro upon his horse, and his bleary eyes could hardly see. "You ought not to get as drunk as this, Sir," old woman Wang shouted. She took hold of his bridle.
"Hello, Stepmother Wang, is that you?" Ximen Qing drunkenly mumbled. "I suppose Sister Wu has sent you to look for me?"
The old woman whispered something. "My boy said something about it some time ago," Ximen said. "I hear she is very angry with me. I'll go and see her now." He chatted with the old woman as they went along. When they came to the door, old woman Wang went in first.
"Now you ought to be happy, Lady," she said. "In less than half an hour I've brought his Lordship to you."
Jinlian was so delighted that he seemed like a visitor from Heaven. She ran downstairs to meet him. Ximen Qing waved his fan airily and went in, still neither drunk nor sober. He gave the woman a nod, and in return she made a profound reverence.
"You are indeed a nobleman, my Lord, and not the sort of man who is to be gazed upon any day. Where have you been all this time? I suppose you have been so taken up with your new wife that you haven't had time for me?"
"My new wife!" Ximen said. "What do you mean? Surely you don't believe all the tittle-tattle you hear. I have not had time to come and see you. I have been busy making arrangements for my daughter's wedding."
"Still trying to deceive me, are you?" Jinlian cried. "Well, if this is not a case of off with the old love and on with the new, you must take oath upon your body."
"If I have forgotten you," Ximen Qing said, "may my body become the size of a bowl of rice and may I suffer for three years or more from yellow sickness. May a caterpillar as large as a carrying pole bite a hole in my pocket."
"You fickle rascal, what harm will it do you if a caterpillar as large as that does bite a hole in your pocket?" She went up to him and, snatching off his hat, threw it on the floor. Old woman Wang hastily picked it up and put it on the table.
"Lady," she cried, "you were angry with me because I didn't make his Worship come, and, when he does come, you treat him like this."
Jinlian pulled a pin from his hair, held it up, and looked at it. It was of gold, with two rows of characters engraved upon it.
The horse, with golden bridle, neighs on the sweet turf.
In the season of apricot blossoms, they who dwell in the jade tower drink till they are merry.
This pin belonged to Yulou but Jinlian thought some singing girl had given it to him. She thrust it into her sleeve. "Now will you say you haven't changed? Where is the pin I gave you?"
"The other day," Ximen said, "I was rather tipsy and fell off my horse. My hat blew away and my hair was all in a mess. I looked everywhere for the pin but could not find it."
Jinlian snapped her fingers in his face. "Brother, you are so drunk you don't know what you're saying. A child of three would see through a story like that."
"Don't be so hard on his Lordship," old woman Wang said. "He is one of those men who can see a bee piddling forty miles away but not an elephant outside their very own doors."
"When she is nearly done," Ximen Qing said, "you begin."
Jinlian saw a scarlet-trimmed finely gilded fan. She snatched it from him and took it to the light to look at. She was well skilled in the arts of love, and she was sure that certain marks upon it had been caused by teeth. She came to the conclusion that some girl must have given him the fan, and without a word tore it into pieces. Before Ximen Qing could stop her it was in shreds.
"My friend Bu Zhidao gave me that fan," he said, "and I've kept it put away for a long time. I've only been using it for two or three days, and now you've gone and spoiled it."
Jinlian plagued him a little longer, and then Ying'er brought in tea. The woman told her to put down the tray and kowtow to Ximen Qing.
"You two have been quarreling quite long enough," old woman Wang said. "Don't forget that you have more important business to attend to. I'll go into the kitchen and get something ready for you."
Jinlian told Ying'er to bring wine and refreshments in honour of Ximen's birthday. The girl obeyed and soon a meal was set upon the table. Jinlian brought out her own present and, setting it on a tray, offered it to him. Besides a pair of black silk shoes, there was a pair of breeches made of purple silk, double sewn and embroidered with a design of pine, bamboo, and plum blossom, the three cold-weather friends. They were lined with green silk, scented with fragrant herbs, and the braces were again of purple. The stomacher was embroidered with roses. There was also a pin like the petals of the double lotus, on which was engraved a verse of four sentences, each sentence consisting of four characters:
A double lotus, I,
To dress your hair.
Do not forget me
Like a neglected ornament.
Ximen Qing was delighted with these presents. He caught Jinlian to him and kissed her. "I never knew you were so clever," he said.
Jinlian told Ying'er to bring the wine jar that she might offer Ximen a cup of wine. As she bowed four times in reverence before him, she seemed as graceful as a branch laden with blossoms, and each time she stood up as straight as a candle. Ximen Qing quickly lifted her up, and they sat together side by side. Old woman Wang drank several cups of wine with them and then went home, her face very red. Then they abandoned all restraint, and drank for a long time till darkness fell.
Dark clouds have gathered over the mountains
A chain of deepest mist stretches far into the distance.
Stars come out to challenge the brightness of the moon
And the green waters of the lake mirror the sky.
The monks return to their ancient temples
While, in the depths of the forest, the crows fly, crying
Caw, caw, caw.
People hasten back to the distant villages
And in the tiny hamlets the dogs bark
Bow, wow, wow.
Ximen Qing decided to stay the night with Jinlian, and ordered the boys to take his horse home. That night they spent their whole strength in the enjoyment of one another, and their passionate delight knew no bounds. Yet, as the proverb says, "When joy is at its height, there comes sad news." The time flew by.

* * *

We must now return for a while to Wu Song. He had taken the magistrate's treasure to the palace of the Grand Marshal in the Eastern Capital. When he had safely handed over the letters and the chests, he stayed some time waiting for the return letter, and then ordered his men to start back to Shandong. When he had started, it was the third or fourth month; now it was already autumn. Rain fell incessantly, and they had to halt for a few days. He had already been away about three months, and somehow, on this journey homewards, he seemed unable to rid himself of a feeling of great uneasiness. At last he made up his mind to send one of the soldiers before him to carry a report to the magistrate and a letter to his brother, Wu Da. In this he said he would be home some time during the eighth month.
The soldier arrived and, after giving the letter to the magistrate, went off to find Wu Da. It so happened that old woman Wang was standing outside her door when the soldier was just about to knock at Wu Da's house. She went across and said to him, "What is it you want?"
"I have orders from Captain Wu," the soldier said, "to give this letter to his brother."
"Master Wu Da is not at home," the old woman said. "He has gone to visit his family tombs. Give me the letter and he shall have it as soon as he comes back. That is the best thing you can do."
The soldier saluted, took out the letter, and gave it to the old woman. Then he jumped on his horse and rode away. Old woman Wang immediately brought the letter to Jinlian's back door. She and Ximen Qing were not yet up; they had spent half the night in amorous combat.
"Get up, Master and Mistress," the old woman cried, "here is news for you. Wu Song has sent a soldier with a letter for his brother to say he is coming back shortly. I took the letter and sent the soldier about his business but you will have to do something about it, and not waste any time."
Ximen Qing was feeling perfectly contented with life but, when he heard this news, it seemed to him that the eight pieces of his skull had fallen apart and somebody was pouring a great jar of ice and snow through the opening. He and Jinlian quickly leapt out of bed, threw their clothes on, and asked the old woman to come in. She gave the letter to Ximen Qing to read. It only said that Wu Song would be back not later than the Autumn Day but this was enough to make the lovers beside themselves with anxiety.
"What shall we do, Stepmother?" they cried. "If you can only think of some way out for us, we shall be so grateful that we shall find a splendid reward for you. We are so fond of one another that we cannot bear to be apart. But, if Wu Song comes back, we shall be obliged to separate, and life won't be worth living."
"Sir," said the old woman, "why all this to-do? I told you once before that first marriages were arranged for people by their parents but that second marriages are the concern of no one but the parties themselves. Nobody has ever suggested that a man and his brother's wife belong to the same family. Wu Da has been dead a hundred days or so. Lady, you must ask a few monks to come and burn his tablet before Wu Song comes back. Then you, Sir, must send a sedan chair and take her into your establishment. When Wu Song does come back, I will have a word with him, and what is there he can do? You will be able to spend all your lives together. Isn't that good enough for you?"
"You are right, Stepmother," Ximen Qing said. He and Jinlian breakfasted together, and it was decided that on the sixth day of the eighth month there should be a final requiem for Wu Da, when they would send for monks and have the tablet burned. Two days later Ximen Qing would take Jinlian into his own household. When all these arrangements had been made, Daian came with a horse and Ximen went home.
Time sped like an arrow in flight. The sun and moon crossed and recrossed like a weaver's shuttles. It was the sixth day of the eighth month. Ximen Qing brought several taels of silver to Wu Da's house, and told old woman Wang to go to the Temple of Eternal Felicity and ask six monks to come and sing a dirge for Wu Da and to burn his tablet the same evening. Before it was fully light the temple attendants came with their sacred books and instruments. They set up a lectern and hung their pictures all around, and old woman Wang in the kitchen helped the cooks to prepare vegetarian food. Ximen Qing spent the whole day there. Soon the monks arrived, tinkling their bells and beating their drums. They read their sacred books and intoned their exorcisms.
Jinlian would perform none of the due purifications. She slept with Ximen Qing till the sun was high in the heavens, and she would not have risen then, had not the monks come to invite her to burn incense, sign the documents, and make her reverence to Buddha. Finally she dressed herself in white and went to worship Buddha.
As soon as the monks saw her, their Buddhist hearts were troubled and their Buddhist natures stimulated to a furious degree, so that their passions ran away with them, and they were in such a state that they did not know what they were doing.
The precentor lost his wits and, as he read the sacred books
Knew not if they were upside down.
The holy priests went mad and read their prayers
By no means sure what line they read.
The thurifer upset the vases, and the acolyte seized the incense boat
Thinking it was his candle.
The lector should have read "The Mighty Empire of Song"
But called it "Tang" instead.
The exorcist, who should have chanted "Master Wu" cried "Mistress Wu."
The old monk's heart so wildly beat
He missed the drum and struck the young monk's hand.
The young monk's mind was so distraught
He used the drumstick on the old monk's head.
Long patient years of novicehood were all undone
And had ten thousand saints come down to earth
It would have been no better.
Jinlian burned incense before the image of Buddha, signed the papers, and made a reverence. Then she went back to her room and began again to play with Ximen Qing. She never even dreamed of abstaining from wine or any kind of food.
"If there should be anything that requires attention," Ximen said to old woman Wang, "you attend to it, and don't let anybody come to disturb the lady."
"You young people enjoy yourselves," the old woman said, laughing. "If there is anything to be done for these shaven-headed fellows, I'll do it."
Now that the monks had seen how beautiful Wu Da's widow was, they could not put her out of their minds. When they came back again from their temple after the evening meal, Jinlian was still drinking and making merry with Ximen Qing. There was only a wooden partition between her room and the temporary chapel. One of the monks had come back before the others and was washing his hands in a basin outside the window of her room when he heard soft whisperings and gentle murmurings that left him in little doubt about what was going on. He stopped washing his hands and stood still to listen. He heard Jinlian say, "Sweetheart, how long will you continue? The monks will be back soon and they may hear us. Do let me go. We must finish."
"Don't be in a hurry," Ximen's voice said. "I should like to 'set the cover on fire' just once more." It never occurred to them that there was a monk listening to every word they said.
Then all the monks came back, and they began to make music and intone their orisons. One told another, till there was none who did not know that Wu Da's widow was entertaining her lover in the house. They waved their arms and feet wildly without the slightest idea of what they were doing. Thus were the Buddhist services performed, and thus, this night, they sped Wu Da's spirit on its lonely journey.
Jinlian took off her mourning robes, dressed herself beautifully, and came to stand with Ximen Qing behind the lattice. They watched the monks preparing to burn the tablet and old woman Wang carrying water and fire. At last the tablet and the Buddhist pictures were completely consumed.
Thievish shaven-heads peered with cold eyes through the lattice. A man and a woman standing shoulder to shoulder could vaguely be seen. This brought to their minds the remembrance of what had happened before, and they struck their instruments discordantly. An old monk's hat was blown off by the wind and his bluish bald pate appeared. He did not pick up his hat but went on thumping his instrument and roaring with laughter. Old woman Wang called, "Reverend Fathers, you have finished your service. Why do you beat your instruments any longer?"
"We haven't set fire to the cover of a paper stove yet," one of the monks cried.
Ximen Qing heard this, he told the old woman, "Give them their fee and send them packing."
But the old monk insisted, "We must see the lady first and thank her."
"Please tell them that's quite unnecessary," Jinlian said.
But the monks answered with one voice, "Do let us go." Then roaring with laughter, they all went off

## 030

## Hsi-men Ch'ing Conspires to Marry P'an Chin-lien, Captain Wu Song seeks to avenge his Brother & Mistakenly Assaults Li Wai-ch'uan

There is a lyric to the tune *Partridge Sky* that goes:

*With lustful daring as big as the sky, they can no longer control themselves;*
Their passions deep, their love fast, the two are inseparable.
Preoccupied with the present and the pleasures that they share;
How can they anticipate what future dangers lurk within their screen-walls?
*Greedy for delight, they set their fancies free:*
But the stouthearted hero, for his part is bent on revenge.

The Lord of Heaven has his own way of disposing such affairs;
Victory and defeat, success and failure, never cease to alternate.

By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien were finished with the burning of Wu the Elder's spirit tablet they had already exchanged their mourning for more colourful garments. That evening they prepared a feast to which they invited Dame Wang in order to bid her farewell. Chin-lien turned Ying-erh over to Dame Wang to look after and they then instructed her as follows: "When Wu the Second comes back, just say that the young lady had no way to support herself, and her mother urged her to take steps for the future, so she married a merchant from another town and went off with him." The woman's trunks had already been dispatched to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house the day before. The broken-down furniture and old clothes that remained were all bequeathed to Dame Wang. Hsi-men Ch'ing also rewarded her for her exertions with a tael of silver. The next day, in a single sedan chair, accompanied by four lanterns and escorted by Dame Wang and Tai-an, he had the woman carried off to his home. There was no one who lived on that street, whether far or near, who did not know about this affair but they were all afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was not above resorting to strong-arm tactics and possessed both money and influence, so who would have dared to interfere? Someone who lived in the locality composed a doggerel quatrain in commemoration of this event that sums it up very well:

*Hsi-men Ch'ing's lack of shame is truly laughable;*
"First seducing and then marrying,"[2] his ill fame is notorious.
Inside the sedan chair there sits a wanton whore;
While tagging at her heels, there follows an old procuress.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing took the woman into his household he had the three ground-floor rooms of the two-storied belvedere in his garden made ready to serve as her living quarters. She had a little courtyard all to herself, to which the only entrance was a postern gate, and flowers and potted miniature plants had been provided for decoration. It was an extremely secluded place where people seldom came even during the daytime. One of the rooms served as her living room and another as her bedroom.

Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently laid out sixteen taels of silver to buy her a black lacquer bedstead, elaborately adorned with gold tracery, bed curtains of scarlet silk with gold roundels, a dressing case ornamented with floral rosettes, and a complete complement of tables, chairs, and porcelain taborets embossed with patterns of ornamental brocade.

Wu Yüeh-niang, the First Lady of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, employed two maidservants in her quarters, one of whom was named Ch'un-mei, or Spring Plum Blossom, and the other Yü-hsiao, or Jade Flute. Hsi-men Ch'ing reassigned Ch'un-mei to Chin-lien's quarters, directing her to serve her new mistress diligently and address her as Mother. He then laid out five taels of silver to buy another young maidservant, named Hsiao-yü, or Little Jade, to wait on Yüeh-niang, and a further six taels of silver to buy a scullery maid for Chin-lien, whose name was Ch'iu-chü, or Autumn Chrysanthemum.

P'an Chin-lien was designated as the Fifth Lady in the hierarchy of Hsi-men Ch'ing's wife and concubines. There was a former maidservant, named Sun Hsüeh-o, or Snow Moth, who had come into his household as part of the dowry of his deceased wife, née Ch'en. She was about nineteen years old, petite in stature, and good-looking. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already granted her the right to wear the fret on her chignon that was a mark of nonservile status and had designated her as his Fourth Lady. That is why Chin-lien was designated as the Fifth Lady. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.

No sooner had this woman been brought across the threshold than the members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, both high and low, became unhappy about the situation.

Gentle reader take note: In this world, women with fire in their eyes are extremely numerous. No matter how worthy and intelligent a wife may be, or how much she may protest that she will not be annoyed if her husband should take a concubine, when she is actually confronted with the situation and sees her husband going off to someone else's room to enjoy the pleasure of:

*Sharing the same bed and a single pillow,*
though she be ever so fine by nature, to a greater or lesser extent:
*Her countenance will sour and her heart be ill-disposed.*
Truly:
*What a pity that, in its perfect fullness,*
*the moon of this night:*
*Should shed its pure radiance on other gardens,*
*so near and yet so far.*[3]

That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing slept in Chin-lien's chambers.
*Like fish sporting in the water;*[4]
*Their pleasure could not be exceeded.*

The next day the woman combed her hair and made herself up, put on her most attractive outfit, directed Ch'un-mei to accompany her with the ceremonial tea, and set out for the quarters of the First Lady, Wu Yüeh-niang that were located in the rear of the residential compound. The purpose of this visit was to pay her respects to the ladies of the household and to present the First Lady with the customary pair of "presentation shoes," which had been made by her own hand.

From her seated position Yüeh-niang carefully scrutinized her visitor. She saw that the woman was no more than twenty-four or twenty-five years old and was very good-looking. Behold:

*Her eyebrows are shaped like willow leaves*
*in early spring:*
*Forever conveying a sense of longing*
*for the clouds and rain.*
*Her face is like peach blossoms*
*in the third month;*
*Covertly suggesting thoughts*
*of breezes and moonlight.*
*Her slender waist is lissome;*
*So constricted as to render her*
*an idle swallow or languid oriole.*
*Her sandalwood mouth is dainty;*
*Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction*
*and butterflies to madness.*
*Her jade countenance is alluring,*
*a flower that can also speak;*
*Her fragrant visage is enticing,*
*a jade that exudes its own bouquet.*[5]

As Wu Yüeh-niang:
*Scanned her from head to foot,*
*Her glamour ran downward apace;*
*Surveyed her from foot to head,*
*Her glamour flowed up with her gaze.*[6]
*If one were to describe her glamour;*
*It is like a shining pearl*
*rolling on a crystal plate.*
*If one were to speak of her demeanor;*
*It is like a red apricot on a branch-tip*
*caught in the morning sun.*[7]

When Yüeh-niang had looked her over for a while:
*From her mouth no word was uttered but*
*In her heart she thought to herself,*
"When the servants came home they used to talk a lot about Wu the Elder's wife but I had never set eyes on her. Now I can see that she really is as good-looking as they say. No wonder that ruffian of mine is so enamored of her!"

Chin-lien first kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and presented her with the customary pair of shoes. Yüeh-niang allowed her to kowtow to her four times. After this Chin-lien also paid her respects to Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o, with whom she exchanged salutations on an equal footing as sisters. When these formalities were completed she stood to one side until Yüeh-niang ordered a maidservant to bring her a seat and had her sit down. Yüeh-niang directed the maidservants and other serving women in the household to address her as Fifth Lady.

The woman sat to one side and devoted her undivided attention to sizing up her new companions. She observed that Wu Yüeh-niang was about twenty-six years old and learned that she was called Yüeh-niang, or Moon Lady, because she had been born on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, the day of the Moon Festival. She had:

*A face like a silver salver;*
*Eyes like apricots;*
*Was gentle in her movements;*
*Sedate, and of few words.*

The Second Lady, Li Chiao-erh, had been a singing girl in the licensed quarter. She was pleasingly plump, rather heavy in build, and had the habit of merely giving a little cough when she was introduced to people. Although she was well versed in all the techniques that might be used to please a patron in bed, as might be expected of a well-known courtesan, she was no match for Chin-lien at the game of breeze and moonlight.

The Third Lady was Meng Yü-lou, who was the most recent addition to the household. She was about twenty-nine years old and had:

*A pear-blossom complexion;*
*A willowy waist;*
*A tall stature;*
*And a melon-seed face,*
*With the addition of a few barely perceptible pockmarks.*

She was possessed of a natural beauty, to be sure but the golden lotuses that peeked out from underneath her skirt were neither all that big nor all that small.

The Fourth Lady, Sun Hsüeh-o, had entered the household as a personal maid. She was:

*Petite in stature;*
*Dainty in demeanor;*
*Adept at making bouillabaisse;*
*And could do a pretty pirouette upon the emerald disk.*[8]

Chin-lien was able to size them all up in her mind with one sweep of her eyes.

After the "third-day celebrations" were over she got up early every morning and came to Yüeh-niang's quarters, where she kept her company in doing needlework or making shoes. She always insisted on:

*Fetching things, whether they were wanted or not; and*
*Doing things, whether they were called for or not.*[9]

In giving orders to the maids and addressing Yüeh-niang, the words "First Lady" were seldom out of her mouth.

She didn't have to play up to her with every trick at her disposal very often before Yüeh-niang was so delighted she scarcely knew what to do with herself. Yüeh-niang started to address her as Sister Six because she was the sixth sibling in her generation of the family, presented her with some of her favourite articles of clothing and jewellery, and invited her to eat her meals and drink tea at the same table with her.

When Li Chiao-erh and the others saw the misguided favour that Yüeh-niang showered upon her they were not happy about it.

"We've been here a lot longer than she has," they grumbled, "but who pays any attention to us? How long has she been here, anyway, that she should be pampered so? Our elder sister doesn't know what she's doing."

Truly:
*Though the preceding carriages have overturned*
by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.[10]

To resume our story, once Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken P'an Chin-lien into his household she found herself dwelling in:

*Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,*
and was provided with clothing and jewellery to match.
*A woman of beauty and a man of talent,*
*Both of them were in the prime of life.*
In everything they were:
*Like glue and like lacquer;*
She was:
*Obedient to his every whim.*

And as for their lewd desires, no day went by on which they were not gratified. But let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it.

Let us now return to the story of Wu Sung. He arrived back in Ch'ing-ho district before the first ten days of the eighth month were over, reported immediately to the district yamen, and handed over the reply he had brought back from the capital. On reading it the district magistrate was very pleased to learn that his consignment of gold and other valuables had reached its destination safely. He rewarded Wu Sung with ten taels of silver and treated him to wine and food but there is no need to describe all this.

Wu Sung then returned to his lodgings, changed his clothes and shoes, put on a new hat, locked the door of his room, and headed straight for Amethyst Street. When the neighbours who lived to either side saw that Wu Sung had come back, they felt so apprehensive they broke into a sweat.

"This is one of those times when:

*Catastrophe will arise within the*
*screen-wall of the house,"*

they said to themselves. "Once this wrathful god has returned he'll never be willing to call it quits. Something dire is bound to happen."

Wu Sung strode up to his elder brother's front door, pulled aside the bamboo blind, and poked his head inside. Catching sight of no one but the young girl, Ying-erh, who was twisting thread in the hallway under the stairs, he said to himself, "My eyes must be deceiving me?" He called out, "Sister-in-law," but there was no reply. He called out, "Elder Brother," but, again, there was no reply. "My ears must be playing tricks on me," he thought. "Why is it that I don't hear any response from my elder brother or my sister-in-law?"

He went up to the young girl, Ying-erh, to ask what was going on but when she saw that it was her uncle who had come back she was too frightened to say anything.

"Where have your father and mother gone?" Wu Sung demanded but Ying-erh only started to cry and made no reply.

As he continued to press his inquiry Dame Wang, next door, overheard him and realized that it was Wu the Second who had returned. Fearful lest the cat be let out of the bag, she hurried over to help Ying-erh cover up the situation as best she could.

When Wu the Second saw that it was Dame Wang from next door he made her a bow and asked, "Where has my elder brother gone? And why is my sister-in-law nowhere to be seen?"

"Brother Two," the old lady said, "have a seat and I'll tell you all about it. After you left town, sometime in the fourth month, your elder brother came down with an awkward illness and died."

"When in the fourth month did my brother die?" Wu the Second demanded to know. "What kind of an illness was it? And whose medicine did he take?"

"It was on the twentieth day of the fourth month," said Dame Wang, "that your elder brother suddenly came down with an acute case of heart trouble. He was sick for eight or nine days.

*The gods were besought and diviners consulted.*[11]

Every kind of medical prescription was tried but nothing availed, and so he died."

"My elder brother never suffered from such an ailment before," said Wu the Second. "How could he get heart trouble and die, just like that?"

"Captain," said Dame Wang, "how can you talk that way?

*Weather is characterized by unexpected storms;*
*Man is subject to unpredictable vicissitudes.*[12]
*When you take off your shoes and socks today;*
*Who knows whether you will put them on tomorrow?*[13]
*Who can be sure that nothing will ever happen to him?"*[14]

"Where is my elder brother buried at the present time?" Wu the Second demanded to know.

"By the time your elder brother breathed his last," said Dame Wang, "there wasn't a candareen left in the house. Your sister-in-law, after all, is like a legless crab. Where could she go to look for a grave site or anything like that? Fortunately a wealthy man in the neighbourhood who was barely acquainted with Wu the Elder saw fit to help out by providing a coffin. There was nothing for it. After the body had lain in state for three days, it was carried outside the town and cremated."

"Where has my sister-in-law gone to now?" Wu the Second asked.

"She's still:

*A young and delicate lass,"*

said Dame Wang, "and had no means of support. She managed, somehow or other, to get through her hundred days of mourning, after which her mother urged her to take steps for the future. So, last month, she married a merchant from another town and went off with him. She left this karmic encumbrance of a step-daughter behind and asked me to look after her until you came back. Now that you're here, I can turn her over to you and thus fulfill my responsibilities in the matter."

When Wu the Second had heard her out, he thought to himself in silence for some time and then, abandoning Dame Wang unceremoniously, strode out the door and headed back to his lodgings in front of the district yamen. Opening the door, he went into his room, changed into a set of plain white garments, and sent his orderly out into the street to buy a hempen sash, a pair of cotton shoes, and a mourning cap to wear on his head. He also picked up some fruits and sweetmeats, incense sticks and candles, paper money and imitation gold and silver ingots, and so forth. Returning to his brother's home, he set up a new spirit tablet to Wu the Elder, prepared the soup and rice he had brought with him, lit lamps and candles on the table in front of the tablet, laid out the sacrificial wine and delicacies, and hung up funeral streamers with appropriate quotations from the sutras inscribed on them. It took him less than four hours, all told, to complete these arrangements.

A little after the first watch Wu the Second lit the incense, prostrated himself, and kowtowed, saying, "Elder Brother, hear me, if your departed soul be not too far away! When you were in this world you were of a meek disposition, and now that you are dead the circumstances remain unclear. Look you, if you have:

*Suffered injustice and harbour resentment,*

as the victim of a murder, appear to me in a dream. As your brother I will undertake to:

*Requite your wrong and assuage your resentment."*

Pouring the wine to make a libation, and burning the paper money, Wu the Second commenced to weep aloud, saying, "After all:

*We came into this world by the same route."*

He wept to such effect that among the neighbours to either side there were none who were not moved.

When Wu the Second had finished weeping he shared the soup and rice, wine and delicacies, with his orderly and Ying-erh. As soon as they had eaten he sought out two sleeping mats, instructed his orderly to bed down beside him in the room where they were, sent Ying-erh off to her own room, and then, taking the other mat for himself, lay down in front of the table on which Wu the Elder's spirit tablet was located.

It was around midnight and Wu the Second:

*Tossed first this way and then that,*

but could not get to sleep. All he could do was to give vent to long sighs. His orderly, meanwhile, lay there, snoring away, stretched out as if he were a dead man. Wu the Second got to his feet to look around and saw that the glass lamp on the table that held the spirit tablet seemed to be:

*Half alight and half extinguished.*

He sat down on the mat again and started to talk to himself, saying, "When my elder brother was alive he was of a meek disposition, and now that he is dead the circumstances remain unclear."

Before he had finished speaking he suddenly became aware of a gust of cold wind swirling up from underneath the table that held the spirit tablet. Behold:

*Devoid of shape and form,*
*Neither fog nor mist;*
*Swirling like an eerie wind,*
*its chill invades the bones;*
*Icy as a baleful breath,*
*its cold penetrates the flesh.*
*Nebulous and dark,*
*It causes the lamplight before the tablet*
*to grow dim;*
*Somber and spectral,*
*It makes the paper money on the wall*
*fly every which way.*
*All too dimly, it conceals*
*the poison-eater's ghost;*
*With a flutter, it ruffles*
*his soul-inducting banner:*[15]

This gust of cold wind made Wu the Second's hair stand on end. When he took a close look, he saw someone climbing out from underneath the table that held the spirit tablet, who called out to him, "Younger Brother, I died a grievous death!"

Wu the Second could not see him distinctly but by the time he started forward to enquire further the cold wind had dissipated and the figure was no longer to be seen.

Wu the Second collapsed onto the mat and sat there thinking to himself, "How uncanny!

*Was it a dream or not a dream?*

Just now my elder brother wanted to tell me something but my vital spirits caused his soul to disperse. It seems clear that this death of his must have been the result of foul play."

As he listened he heard the watchman strike the third quarter of the third watch. He looked over at his orderly, who was still fast asleep, and then, muttering unhappily to himself, "I'll have to wait till dawn before I can do anything about it," he fell into a fitful sleep.

Eventually, at the fifth watch, the cock crowed and it began to grow light in the east. The orderly got up to heat some water. After Wu the Second had washed and rinsed out his mouth, he woke up Ying-erh, so she could look after the house, and went out, taking the orderly with him.

As he went along the street he asked the neighbours who lived in the vicinity, "How did my elder brother come to die? And who has my sister-in-law married herself off to?"

The neighbours who lived on that street knew perfectly well what had happened but they were all afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, so no one cared to interfere.

All they would say was, "Captain, there's no need to enquire any further. Dame Wang lives right next door. Just ask Dame Wang and you'll find out what you want to know."

A certain busybody also told him, "That Yün-ko who sells pears and Ho the Ninth, the coroner's assistant, are two people who know a good deal about it."

Wu the Second proceeded immediately to the commercial centre of town to look for Yün-ko but couldn't find him at first. Then he spotted the little monkey, carrying a basket woven out of willow osiers in his hand, on his way back from the rice store.

"Yün-ko," called out Wu the Second, "your brother salutes you."

When the young scamp saw that it was Wu the Second who accosted him, he said, "Captain Wu, you've shown up just a step too late. And another thing. My father's in his sixties and there's no one else to look after him. I can't very well let myself get involved in a lawsuit with you just for the fun of it!"

"Good Little Brother," said Wu the Second, "come with me." Leading him to the upper floor of a restaurant, he summoned the waiter and ordered him to have two meals prepared for them.

"You may be young, Little Brother," Wu the Second said to Yün-ko, "but you've got the filial desire to maintain your family. I'm afraid I don't have anything much to offer."

After groping around in his pocket, he produced five taels worth of loose silver and gave it to Yün-ko, saying. "You take this for the time being and use it to provide for your father's expenses. There's a matter in which you can be of use to me. Once it's taken care of I'll give you another ten taels or so of silver that you can employ as capital in your trade. Now tell me in detail, whom did my elder brother quarrel with? Who plotted to do him in? And who carried my sister-in-law off in marriage? Tell me everything you know about it and don't conceal anything."

Yün-ko accepted the silver with alacrity, thinking to himself as he did so, "This five taels of silver is enough to provide for my father for three to five months. So even if I get involved in a lawsuit with him it won't matter."

"Brother Two," he said, "hear me out, and try not to get too upset at what I tell you."

Thereupon he told him the whole story, from beginning to end: how he had gone looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing to peddle some pears, how he had subsequently been beaten by Dame Wang, who wouldn't let him into her room, how he had helped Wu the Elder to catch them in the act of adultery, how Hsi-men Ch'ing had kicked Wu the Elder in the solar plexus, how he had suffered from pain in the region of the heart for several days, and then died under suspicious circumstances.

When Wu the Second had heard him out, he asked, "Is what you tell me really true?" Then he asked again, "And who did my sister-in-law marry herself off to?"

"Your sister-in-law," said Yün-ko, "was carried off to his own house by Hsi-men Ch'ing, so he could knock the bottom out of her at his leisure. And you ask me if it's true or if it's false!"

"You'd better not be lying," said Wu the Second.

"Even if I have to tell it in front of the magistrate," said Yün-ko, "I'll tell it the same way."

"Little Brother," said Wu the Second, "if that's the way things stand, let's have something to eat."

In no time at all they polished off a meal served in:

*Large platters and large bowls*.

When Wu the Second had paid the reckoning and the two of them had come downstairs, he said to Yün-ko, "You go home now and turn over the living expenses to your father. Early tomorrow morning meet me in front of the district yamen, and be prepared to testify on my behalf." Then he went on to ask, "Where does Ho the Ninth live?"

"It's a little late in the day to be looking for Ho the Ninth," said Yün-ko. "Before you came back, three days ago, he took himself off to who knows where."

Wu the Second let Yün-ko go his own way and then went home.

The next day Wu the Second got up early in the morning and went to Master Ch'en's house for assistance in drafting a formal complaint. Then he went to the front gate of the district yamen, where he found Yün-ko was already waiting. Taking him along with him, he went straight into the courtroom, knelt down, and began loudly to complain of a case of injustice.

When the district magistrate saw him, he recognized that it was Wu Sung and asked, "What is your plea? And what injustice do you have to complain of?"

Wu the Second pled as follows: "My brother, Wu the Elder, has been the victim of collusion between the influential malefactor, Hsi-men Ch'ing, and my sister-in-law, née P'an, with whom he has been carrying on an adulterous affair. The accused, having kicked my brother in the solar plexus, then contrived, at the instigation of Dame Wang, to conspire with his paramour in his murder. Ho the Ninth connived with them by fudging the coroner's inspection and cremating the body, thereby destroying the evidence of the crime. At the present time, Hsi-men Ch'ing has sequestrated my sister-in-law by taking her into his house as a concubine. The youngster, Yün-ko, who is now present, is prepared to testify to the truth of these allegations. I trust that Your Honour will see that justice is done."

When he had finished making his plea, Wu the Second presented the written text of his complaint. The district magistrate accepted it, and then asked, "Why is Ho the Ninth not here?"

"Ho the Ninth is aware of his culpability and has decamped," Wu the Second replied. "His whereabouts are unknown."

The district magistrate took Yün-ko's verbal deposition and then withdrew from the courtroom in order to consult with his subordinates.

It so happens that the district magistrate, the vice-magistrate, the assistant magistrate, and the docket officer had all of them, high and low, been engaged in hanky-panky with Hsi-men Ch'ing. For this reason they were unanimous in concluding that this case would be a difficult one to try.

When the district magistrate came back into the tribunal he summoned Wu Sung before him and said, "You are, yourself, a police captain on the staff of this court, and yet you seem to be ignorant of the law. It has always been true that:

*To prove adultery, you must nab both parties;*
*To prove theft, you must produce the loot;*
*To prove homicide, you must find the wound.*[16]

The corpse of that elder brother of yours is no longer available as evidence, and you have not nabbed the accused in the act of adultery. For you to rely solely on the verbal allegations of this youngster in pressing a charge of murder against them is surely to make a travesty of justice. You ought not to act rashly but think it over to yourself.

*If you decide to proceed, then proceed:*
*If you decide to desist, then desist."*

"If Your Honour will permit me to speak," said Wu the Second, "all of these allegations are true. I have not invented a single one of them."

"You may rise, for the present," said the district magistrate. "Let me:
*Consider what course would be best.*
If it turns out to be feasible to do so, I will have them arrested for you."
Only then did Wu the Second get to his feet and go outside. Yün-ko, however, was detained in the yamen and not permitted to return home.
It was not long before someone reported these events to Hsi-men Ch'ing, informing him that Wu the Second had returned and had taken Yün-ko with him to court to make a formal charge against him. Hsi-men Ch'ing was sufficiently alarmed by this development to send his trusted servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang, with their sleeves full of silver, to take care of the officials involved, all of whom were bought off.
The next morning Wu the Second showed up in the courtroom bright and early and petitioned the district magistrate to proceed with the arrest of the accused. Who would have thought that this official coveted the bribe he had received?
As soon as the case was called, he said, "Wu the Second, you oughtn't to let yourself be misled by anyone else into becoming an antagonist of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The truth in this matter is not clear, and it would be a difficult case to try. As the sage has said:
*If even what one sees with one's eyes,*
*May be feared suspect;*
*How can words spoken behind one's back,*
*Be completely trustworthy?*[1]
You ought not to act rashly, on the spur of the moment."
The docket officer, who was standing to one side, also said, "Captain, since you work in the yamen, you must be acquainted with the law. In any case involving an accusation of homicide there are five prerequisites that must be possessed by the prosecutor before he can proceed to trial: the corpse of the victim, the wound, the medical cause of death, the weapon, and evidence that implicates the accused. The corpse of that elder brother of yours is no longer available as evidence. How can such a case be tried?"
"Since Your Honour denies my suit," said Wu the Second, "you must have your reasons."
He then recovered the written text of his complaint, left the courtroom, and returned to his lodgings with Yün-ko, whom he then released from his obligation and allowed to go home.
Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he gazed up to Heaven and gave a long sigh.
*Grinding and gnashing his teeth,*
he kept muttering, "That damned whore!" to himself, over and over again. How was this man to find a vent for his anger?
Wu Sung headed straight for Hsi-men Ch'ing's wholesale pharmaceutical shop, with the intent of finding the culprit and taking matters into his own hands.
Manager Fu, who was in charge of the shop, was sitting inside the counter when Wu the Second strode up in an obviously belligerent mood, saluted him, and asked, "Is the Honourable Gentleman at home?"
Manager Fu recognized that it was Wu the Second and replied, "He's not at home, Captain. What have you got to say to him?"
"Walk a few steps with me, if you please," said Wu the Second. "I've got something to say to you."
Manager Fu did not dare to refuse and, coming outside, allowed Wu the Second to lead him to the mouth of an out-of-the-way alley for a chat. No sooner did they get there, however, than Wu the Second adopted a menacing manner, took hold of him by the lapel:
*Opened wide his weird eyes,*
and demanded, "Do you want to die, or do you want to live?"
"With all due respect, Captain," said Manager Fu, "I've never done anything to offend you. What are you so angry about, Captain?"
"If you want to die," said Wu the Second, "don't bother to reply. But if you want to live, tell me the truth. Where is that bastard, Hsi-men Ch'ing, at this moment? And how long is it since he took my sister-in-law into his household? If you tell me everything I ask, I'll let you go."
Manager Fu was not a courageous man. When he saw that Wu the Second meant business, he became panic-stricken and said, "Calm yourself, Captain! My position in his household is only that of an employee whom he hires for two taels of silver a month to manage his shop. I am not privy to his private affairs. The Honourable Gentleman really isn't at home. Just a little while ago he went out with an acquaintance to have a drink at the Great Tavern on Lion Street. I wouldn't dare tell you a lie."
It was only on hearing these words that Wu the Second released his grip and, with giant strides, flew off in the direction of Lion Street, like a cloud scudding before the wind. Manager Fu was so frightened it was some time before he could stir from the spot. Wu the Second made straight for the tavern just below the bridge on Lion Street.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the company of one of the black-robed lictors on the staff of the district yamen, who was known as Li Wai-ch'uan, or Leaky Li. This man played the role of influence peddler in both the district and the prefecture, intervening in public business on people's behalf, and keeping his ear to the ground as he ran back and forth, for a fee. If two parties were engaged in a lawsuit, he would peddle his services as a conduit of confidential information. Or if anyone wished to offer a bribe to the officials or functionaries, he would take a cut from both sides. For this reason he was known around the district yamen by the nickname Leaky Li.
That day, when he saw the district magistrate reject Wu Sung's suit, he had no sooner acquired the news than he came looking for Hsi-men Ch'ing to tell him that Wu the Second's suit had failed. Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited him to have a drink with him on the second floor of the tavern, where he presented him with five taels of silver.
Just as they were settling down to enjoy their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to look out the window and caught sight of the formidable-looking Wu Sung, racing up toward the tavern from below the bridge. Realizing immediately that he could be up to no good, he excused himself on the pretext of going to the bathroom, leapt out a rear window, fled along the ridge of an adjacent roof, and jumped down into someone's rear courtyard.
Wu the Second dashed up to the front of the tavern and asked one of the waiters, "Is Hsi-men Ch'ing here?"
"The Honourable Hsi-men," the waiter replied, "is upstairs drinking wine with one of his acquaintances."
*Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes,*
Wu the Second flew upstairs, where the only thing he saw was a man, occupying the place of honour, with a pair of painted singing girls sitting to either side of him. He recognized that it was Li Wai-ch'uan, the lictor from the district yamen, and knew that he must have come to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing the news.
Enraged, he went up to him and demanded, "Where has Hsi-men Ch'ing gone?"
When Li Wai-ch'uan saw that it was Wu the Second he was too dumbstruck to get a word out for some time. With a single movement of his leg, Wu the Second kicked over the table, smashing the cups and saucers to smithereens. The singing girls were frozen with fright. Wu the Second struck Li Wai-ch'uan right in the face with his fist.
Crying out, "Don't you...!" Li Wai-ch'uan jumped onto the bench he had been sitting on and tried to make his escape through the rear window but Wu the Second picked him up with both hands and hurled him clear through the front window, so that he fell, headfirst, into the street below, and was knocked unconscious.
When the waiters on the ground floor saw that Wu the Second was running amok they were scared out of their wits. None of them dared to intervene. The pedestrians on either side of the street all stopped and stared. Wu the Second was still on the rampage. Racing downstairs, he saw that his victim was already half dead from the impact of his fall and lay there, at full length on the ground, unable to move anything but his eyes. Thereupon, square in the crotch, he gave him two additional kicks with the result that alas and alack; he stopped breathing and died.
"Captain!" everyone exclaimed. "This man is not Hsi-men Ch'ing. You've attacked the wrong person."
"I asked him a question," said Wu the Second. "Why didn't he respond? That's why I assaulted him. Now, it appears that, without even suffering a beating, he has died."
The local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit saw that a homicide had occurred but did not dare to accost Wu the Second directly in order to place him under arrest. All they could do was to gradually edge closer to him until they had him surrounded and then keep him under strict surveillance.
The proprietor of the tavern, Wang Luan, and the two singing girls, whose surnames were Pao and Niu, were also taken into custody, after which they all proceeded to the yamen to appear before the district magistrate. By this time, all Lion Street was dumbfounded; the district of Ch'ing-ho was disturbed. The spectators who gathered in the streets could not be numbered. They all said, "Hsi-men Ch'ing must not have been fated to die. When his assailant discovered that he had made good his escape, he took out his wrath on this man instead." Truly, Mr. Chang drinks wine but Mr. Ligets drunk; the mulberry tree is cut with a knife but the willow bark is scarred.[2] While one person enjoys himself; another is haled into court. Can such things be? A poem testifies to this:

The hero, endeavouring to assuage his resentment, suffers the rigors of the law;
What can the Lord of Heaven be up to, that such murk should be allowed to spread?
In the Nine Springs the poison-eating sojourner has died in vain;
While, deep in her boudoir, Chin-lien laughs her head off.

So Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian burned Wu Da's tablet. The next day they invited old woman Wang to a farewell party, and gave Ying'er into her charge.
"When Wu Song comes back," Ximen Qing said, "how am I to prevent his learning that I have married this lady?"
"I shall be here," the old woman said, smiling, "and no matter how inquisitive Wu Song may be, I shall have an answer ready for him. Don't worry about that."
Ximen Qing was only too glad to receive such a comforting reply, and gave the old woman three taels of silver. The same evening he took all Jinlian's belongings to his own house; the furniture and clothes were given to old woman Wang. The next day he sent a sedan chair with four lanterns, and Jinlian in her best clothes seated herself in it. Old woman Wang went with her as though she represented the bride's family, and Daian acted as escort. So Jinlian went to her new home. Everybody in the neighbourhood knew what was happening but people feared the rich and powerful Ximen Qing, and nobody dared to interfere. But someone composed a little poem in honour of the occasion.
Ximen Qing received his new bride, and had an apartment of three rooms set aside for her in the garden. There was a small gate in one of the corners of the courtyard, easily overlooked for it was hidden by flowers and flowerpots. Few people came that way. It was very secluded. One of the three rooms was furnished as a sitting room, and one as a bedroom. Ximen paid sixteen taels of silver for a bed of black lacquer and gilt with a crimson silk net. The chairs and tables were beautifully carved, and everything was arranged with excellent taste.
Wu Yueniang had two maids, Chunmei and Yuxiao. Ximen Qing directed that Chunmei should act as maid to his new wife, and paid five taels for a little girl called Xiaoyu to take her place with the Great Lady. For another six taels he bought a maid called Qiuju and gave her to Jinlian as a kitchen maid.
Ximen Qing's first wife, Chen, had brought with her a servant called Sun Xue'e. She was now about twenty years old, fairly tall and not badlooking. Ximen had allowed her to assume the position of his fourth wife, so that Jinlian ranked as the fifth of his ladies.
Now that Jinlian was actually established in his own house, Ximen spent every night with her. They played together as merrily as fishes in water, and nothing could have surpassed their pleasure in each other. On the day after her arrival Jinlian put on her finest clothes and, when Chunmei had served her with tea, went to Wu Yueniang's room to make the acquaintance of the other members of the household. She took with her as a present a pair of shoes. Yueniang sat in her place as mistress of the house, and looked closely at the new bride. She was about twenty-five years old, and very beautiful.
Yueniang looked at her from her head to her feet; every inch of that exquisite body seemed endowed with the power of fascination. She looked at her from her feet to her head; this extraordinary charm seemed to issue from her as water from a fountain. She was like a translucent pearl lying on a crystal dish, like the early morning moon shining above the topmost branches of a pink apricot tree. Yueniang gazed at her without speaking, and she said to herself, "When the boys came home, they used to say, 'How strange that Wu Da should have so beautiful a wife.' I have never seen anyone so beautiful. No wonder that brave husband of mine fell in love with her."
Jinlian kowtowed to Yueniang, and offered her a present. When the Great Lady had acknowledged her reverence, she turned to Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, and Sun Xue'e, and greeted them as sisters. Then she stood till Yueniang bade a maid give her a chair and speak to her as the Fifth Lady.
Jinlian sat down and secretly considered her new sisters. Yueniang was about twenty-seven years old; her face was as beautiful as a bowl of silver and her eyes were like the kernel of an apricot. Her manner was gentle and her speech careful. Li Jiao'er, who had been a singing girl at the bawdy house, was inclined to be corpulent and not so attractive. Though she had been a famous strumpet, her skill in the arts of love was not to be compared with that of Jinlian. Yulou was about thirty years old. Her face was like the pear blossom, and her waist as slender as the willow. She was tall, and her oval face was marked by a few slight scars. But she was very beautiful, and it would have been difficult to say whether the tiny feet that peeped from beneath her skirt were larger or smaller than those of Jinlian herself. Xue'e had been a maid; she was not very tall and her manner was sharp. But there was no kind of soup she could not make and her skill with dishes and plates was almost miraculous.
In a very short time Jinlian had made herself acquainted with the characteristic features of her companions.
When the first three days were over, she rose early every morning and, as soon as she was dressed, went to Yueniang's room to sew and make shoes. She pretended to be very eager to do anything she could, moving things that did not need to be moved, calling Yueniang Great Lady, as all the maids did, and giving her little presents. This delighted Yueniang. She called Jinlian Sister, and gave her some clothes and ornaments of her own that she valued highly. They always took their meals together.
Li Jiao'er and the others became very jealous of the attentions that Yueniang paid Jinlian, and in secret had much to say about it. "We are wives of old standing," they said, "but the Great Lady cares not a whit about us. This woman has been here only a few days, and she is shown all these favours. Our eldest sister is not discreet."
Ximen Qing was now married to Jinlian, living in a splendid house and wearing the finest of clothes. So close was the attachment between this fascinating woman and her dissolute bridegroom that nothing could have separated them. Everything was as merry as could be, and Ximen Qing took advantage of the situation without ceasing.
It was the beginning of the eighth month when Wu Song reached Qinghe. First, he went to the Town Hall to give the magistrate the letters he had brought from the Eastern Capital. The magistrate was glad to know that his presents had been duly delivered. He gave Wu Song ten taels of silver and entertained him. After this, Wu Song went back to his own place, changed his clothes, put on a new hat, locked the door, and went straight to Amethyst Street. The neighbours saw that he was back and were tremendously excited, breaking into a perfect sweat. "Now the trouble will begin," they said. "This prince of the haughty spirit will not let this matter pass lightly."
Wu Song went to his brother's door and pulled up the shutter. Ying'er was sitting outside the room, making thread. He called, "Brother," but there was no reply. Then he cried, "Sister," but still there was no answer. He thought, "I must be getting deaf if I can't hear one or other of them." He spoke to Ying'er but she was so terrified she could not utter a word.
"Where are your father and mother?" Wu Song said. Ying'er burst into tears.
Meanwhile old woman Wang had heard that he was back, and she was afraid that all would be discovered. She hurried over. When Wu Song saw her coming, he saluted.
"Where is my brother, and how is it my sister-in-law is not here?"
"Sit down, please," the old woman said, "and I will tell you. Some time during the fourth month, shortly after you had gone away, your brother was taken very ill, and died."
"When did he die? What did he die of? Who attended him?" Wu Song cried.
"About the twentieth of the fourth month your brother suddenly began to suffer from pains at the heart. After a week or so we went to make supplication to Heaven. We called in soothsayers, and got every medicine we could think of but it was all no use. He died."
"My brother never suffered from anything of the sort before," Wu Song said. "It is a very curious thing that he should die of heart trouble so unexpectedly."
"Captain," the old woman said, "you should not say things like that. Heaven sends its storms upon us without warning, and, though we may take off our shoes and socks tonight, who can tell whether tomorrow morning we shall put them on again? Nobody can be certain that some sudden calamity will not befall him."
"When was my brother buried?" Wu Song asked.
"When your brother gave up the ghost," the old woman said, "he had not a halfpenny in the world. His wife was no better off than a crab without feet. She could never have bought a grave for him. Fortunately, one of our more wealthy neighbours, who happened to be a friend of your brother, provided a coffin, and, when Master Wu had been dead three days, we had the funeral ceremonies and cremated him."
"Where is my sister-in-law now?" Wu Song asked.
"She was a young and tender woman, with nothing to live on, so she wore her mourning for a hundred days, and then her mother persuaded her to marry some stranger who lives a long way from here. She left this troublesome little girl in my care, and said I was to give her to you when you came back. When I have done that, I shall have done all I was called upon to do."
Wu Song listened to this story, and pondered it for a while. Then he left old woman Wang. He went to his own rooms near the Town Hall and changed into white clothes. Then he told his servant to buy a hempen cord, a pair of cotton socks, and a mourning hat. He bought fruits, cakes, candles, and paper money. Returning to Wu Da's house, he prepared a new tablet, made ready soup and food, lighted the candles, set out the wine and food, and hung up all the paper offerings. By the time he had done this, it was already the first night watch.
Then Wu Song burned incense, and knelt down and said: "Brother, may your spirit draw near. When you were on earth, you were weak and feeble. Now you are dead, and I do not know the cause of your death. If you met your death at the hands of others, and your brooding spirit can find none to avenge it, send me a dream, and I will avenge you." He poured wine upon the ground, and burned all the paper money. Then he sobbed aloud. The neighbours heard him and were sorry for him, for they knew that Wu Song was brother to Wu Da.
When all was done, he gave the wine, food, and dishes to the soldiers. Then he brought two pallets, and told the soldiers to sleep in the outer room. Ying'er was asleep in the inner room, and he himself took a pallet and lay down before Wu Da's tablet. It was now midnight. He tossed over and over, unable to sleep. He could only sigh. The soldiers were sleeping as soundly as the dead. He rose, and it seemed that the lamp on the table was flickering, half light, half dark. He sat up on his pallet and said to himself, "My brother was very weak, and there is something very mysterious about his death...." He had not finished this sentence when, over the table that supported his brother's tablet, there came an ice-cold wind.
Formless and shadowless, neither mist nor smoke
Round and round it moved,
Like a spirit wind striking cold to the marrow,
Gloomy and dark,
Like the icy mist over a war-stricken land
Chilling the flesh.

The lamp before the tablet lost its brightness
Sad and uncanny.
The paper money hanging on the wall
Whirled round and round.
It seemed as if, within this mist, the souls of all the poisoned marched,
Their ghostly standards fluttering in the wind.

The cold wind made Wu Song's hair stand on end. He stared at the tablet and it seemed to him that there slowly emerged the form of a man who cried, "Oh, younger brother, I died in agony." Wu Song could not distinguish the figure very clearly and would have gone forward to question it but, as he waited, the cold mist faded away and the figure vanished.

Wu Song sank down upon the pallet. "This is truly a strange thing," he thought, "a dream yet not a dream. My brother seemed to wish to tell me something but the vigor of my body was too much for his frail spirit. Nevertheless, I am sure there is a mystery about his death." Then he heard the watchman striking the third watch. He went to look at the soldiers but found them fast asleep. His soul was troubled. He watched till daybreak, when the cocks began to crow and the dawn broke in the eastern sky. Then the soldiers got up and heated some water for him, and he washed his face and cleansed his mouth. Calling Ying'er, he told her to look after the house, and went off with the soldiers.

As he passed down the street, he asked all the neighbours to tell him how his brother had died, and whom his sister-in-law had married. They knew all there was to be known, of course but they were afraid of Ximen Qing and did not wish to get mixed up in the matter. "Captain," they said, "it is no use asking us. Old woman Wang is the nearest neighbour, go and ask her. Then you will learn the truth." One of the more talkative added: "Yun'ge, the pear seller, and He the Ninth know all about it, too."

Wu Song went down the street to find Yun'ge. At last he found that young monkey carrying a basket, coming back from buying some rice. He hailed him. When the boy saw that it was Wu Song who called him, he said, "Captain Wu, you have come back too late. You will not find it easy to get to the bottom of the matter and, if you take it to the courts, there will be no one to look after my poor old father."

"Come with me," Wu Song said. He took the boy to an eating house, and ordered two bowls of rice. "Brother," he said, "you are not very old but I see that you pay proper respect to your father. That is as it should be." He took five taels of silver from his sleeve. "Take this for the present," he said, "and when I have attended to this matter, I will give you another ten taels to set you up in business. Now, I want you to tell me who it was who quarreled with my brother, who is responsible for his death, and who has married my sister-in-law. Tell me the whole story and don't hide anything."

Yun'ge took the silver. He decided that it would be enough to supply his father's needs for three or four months, and that he need no longer be anxious about going to the law courts. "Brother," he said, "listen but do not be impatient." Then he told the whole story from beginning to end. Wu Song listened attentively. "Is this absolutely true?" he said. "Who took my sister-in-law away?"

"Ximen Qing took your sister to his place," the boy said. "She has given herself to him absolutely. Why do you ask whether I am telling the truth?"

"It is essential that you shall not tell any lies," Wu Song said.

"What I have told you is what I shall say at the law courts," the boy replied. Wu Song called for food and, when they had finished it, he paid the reckoning and they left the shop.

"Go home and give the silver to your father," Wu Song said, "and tomorrow morning come to the Town Hall to give your evidence. Tell me, where does He the Ninth live?"

"You won't find him," the boy said, "he disappeared three days ago, as soon as he heard you had come back."

Wu Song left Yun'ge and went to his own place. The next morning, he asked Master Chen to write an accusation for him, and went to the Town Hall. Yun'ge was already waiting for him. He went into the Hall of Audience, knelt down, and presented his accusation. The magistrate recognized Wu Song at once and asked what was the accusation he wished to make.

"My brother Wu Da has been murdered by that villain Ximen Qing, who was carrying on an intrigue with my sister-in-law. First, my brother was kicked in the chest; then old woman Wang devised a plan for murdering him. After his death the undertaker He the Ninth allowed his body to be cremated without properly examining it, and now Ximen Qing has carried off my sister-in-law to be one of his concubines. This boy, Yun'ge, is here to give evidence as to the facts, and I pray your Lordship to see that justice is done."

"Why is the undertaker He the Ninth not here?" the magistrate said.

"When he knew that the secret was out he ran away," Wu Song said. "Nobody knows where he is."

The magistrate examined Yun'ge and wrote down his evidence. Then he withdrew and called together his officials. The magistrate himself, his deputy, and all the other officers were very intimate with Ximen Qing, and the case was one they did not care to decide. The magistrate came back to Wu Song and said, "You are a captain in my district, and I am surprised to find that you don't seem to know the law. In cases of alleged adultery, it has always been customary to require that the guilty pair should be caught in the act; and, in cases of murder, to insist upon direct evidence. Your brother's body has been burned, and you did not, in fact, lay hold of the adulterers. It would not be right for me to give judgment in the case simply upon the evidence of this little fellow. Think over the matter for yourself, calmly."

"Sir," Wu Song replied, "what I have told you is the simple truth, not some fantastic tale of my own imagining. I beg you to order the arrest of Ximen Qing, the woman Pan, and old woman Wang. Let the law take its ordinary course with them, and the truth will come out. If I lie, I am ready to suffer the consequences."

"Well," the magistrate said, "I must think this over. If I decide that they ought to be arrested, I will arrest them." Wu Song rose and went out, leaving Yun'ge in the court.

By this time Ximen Qing had heard what was going on. He was greatly alarmed, and at once gave large sums of money to his trusted servants, Laibao and Laiwang, and sent them to bribe the officials. The next morning, when Wu Song went to the court in the hope of persuading the magistrate to have the criminals arrested, he found that all the officials had accepted Ximen's bribes and refused to have anything to do with his accusation.

"Wu Song," one said, "don't believe busybodies who simply wish to make trouble between you and Ximen Qing. There is really no evidence in this case, and it would be impossible to give a fair judgment upon it. A wise man says: 'Things I see with my own eyes, I can hardly credit; how shall I believe what others tell me?' You must not be so impetuous."

"You work in this office," another said, "and of course you understand the law. You know all that is to be known about murders and murderers. Now, before the case can be opened, five things are essential: the corpse, the wounds, the disease, the instruments by which the crime was committed, and the traces of the crime itself. Your brother's body has already disappeared. How can we decide this case?"

"If that is how you look at it," Wu Song cried, "my brother's murder will never be avenged. It is clear that the magistrate does not intend to deal with the matter, and I must do things my own way." He took away his accusation and went back to his place, sending Yun'ge home. Then he gazed towards the heavens and sighed deeply, gnashed his teeth, and cursed his sister-in-law's wantonness. Wu Song at that moment was ferocity itself! His anger was beyond control. He set off at once for Ximen Qing's shop, with his mind made up to engage Ximen in single combat. But only Fu the manager was there.

"Is your master at home?" Wu Song said.

Fu recognized Wu Song. "No," he said, "he is not at home. Is there anything I can tell him for you, Captain?"

"I must trouble you to come here," was the only reply. Fu did not dare refuse, and went with Wu Song to a secluded place. Suddenly, Wu Song turned and caught him by the throat, glaring wildly at him.

"Do you wish to live or to die?"

"Captain," Fu cried, "I have never done you any harm. Why are you so angry?"

"If you wish to die, say nothing. If you wish to live, tell me the truth. Now, where is that fellow Ximen? When did he marry my sister-in-law? Tell me everything, and I will let you go."

Fu was a poor-spirited creature, and Wu Song's rage made him panic-stricken. "Pleas don't be so angry, Captain," he stammered; "I work in his shop and he pays me two taels a month. My business is to look after the shop, nothing else, and I have no notion how he spends his time. Truly, my master is not at home now. He and his friends have gone to a wineshop in Lion Street. I would not dare to tell you a lie."

Wu Song released Fu, and rushed off to Lion Street as though possessed of wings. Fu was so terrified that he could not move for a long time. While Wu Song was striding towards the wineshop, Ximen Qing was drinking there with a man called Li the Merchant of Secrets. This man was one of the court runners and had a finger in the pie in all the matters that came up at the District Office. He used to find out everything that was to be found out and use the knowledge to his own advantage. If any dispute arose, he would suggest courses of action to both parties, and, if they thought of bribing the magistrate, he smoothed over any little difficulties. So he came to be called Merchant of Secrets. Today, after the magistrate had rejected Wu Song's accusation, he was reporting the matter to Ximen Qing. Ximen invited him to take wine and made him a present of five taels of silver.

They were contentedly drinking their wine when Ximen Qing happened to glance around to see what was going on in the street, and saw Wu Song, like an angry god, coming over the bridge towards the inn. He knew that Wu Song could have no peaceful intent, and was frightened out of his wits. He would have escaped but could not get down the stairs in time, so he pretended he wished to change his clothes and hid himself somewhere at the back of the inn.

Wu Song came to the door and asked the waiter where Ximen was. "Master Ximen is taking wine with one of his friends upstairs." Wu Song pulled up his skirts and dashed upstairs. Ximen Qing had vanished. There was only a man sitting before a table, and a couple of singing girls on either side. Wu Song recognized the runner Li and knew that he must have been telling Ximen Qing what had happened. In a fury, he went forward and shook his fist at Li.

"You villain," he cried, "what have you done with Ximen Qing? Tell me at once or I'll give you a drubbing."

The very sight of Wu Song had terrified the runner, and, when he was spoken to so roughly, he could not get out a word in reply. Wu Song, finding that he received no answer, grew angrier and angrier, and kicked down the table. The cups and dishes were smashed. The two singing girls were so frightened that they swooned away. The runner realized that Wu Song meant him no good, and, though he did not find it easy, managed to pull himself to his feet and tried to shuffle downstairs. Wu Song pulled him back.

"I have asked you a question and you don't answer. Where do you think you're going? Be so kind as to eat one of my fists. I'll see whether you'll answer me or not." He struck Li a terrific blow in the face.

"Oh dear!" the man cried, finding his tongue at last, and agonized by the pain. "Ximen Qing has gone to the back to change his clothes. Please let me go, it has nothing to do with me."

Wu Song with both hands lifted the runner and hurled him out of the window. "If you wish to get out, there you are," he cried, and flung the merchant of secrets into the street.

Wu Song went to the back of the house to find Ximen Qing. Ximen had heard the disturbance and was in a terrible state of fright. Without giving a thought to the danger, he jumped out of the window, ran along the balcony, and found his way to somebody's courtyard. Wu Song could not find him and, thinking that Li had lied to him, he ran downstairs to where the run ner was stretched out on the ground, half dead, though his eyes still moved. Wu Song kicked him twice in the guts, and he died.

"This is runner Li," the bystanders said. "What's he done to annoy you, Captain, that you'd kill him like this?"

"It's Ximen Qing I was really after," Wu Song said, "and this ill-starred fellow happened to be with him. So he met his death at my hands." The police officer saw that a man had been killed but he did not venture to take Wu Song by force. He went slowly towards him and tried to detain him by persuasion. A bond was put on the waiter, the 2 singing girls, and they were all taken together to the town hall. The news soon spread through the street and everybody was talking about it. They did not know that Ximen Qing had escaped but thought Wu Song had killed him.

## 031

### Wu the 2nd is Condemned to Exile in Meng-chou; Hsi-men & his Harem Revel in the Hibiscus Pavilion & Hsi-men Ch'ing and His Cronies Form the Brotherhood of 10

In the morning, you may read the yogācāra sutras;
In the evening, recite disaster-dispelling dhāranīs.
If you plant melons, you will surely harvest melons;
If you plant beans, you will surely harvest beans.
*Sutras* and *dhāranīs* have no minds of their own;
Once you have made your karma how can it be unmade?
Hell on the one hand and Heaven on the other;
Are only the consequences of our own actions.

Once Wu Sung and the others had been taken into custody by the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, they all proceeded to the yamen to appear before the district magistrate.

*

Let us now return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Having leapt out a rear window on the second floor of the tavern and fled along the ridge of an adjacent roof, he had concealed himself in someone's rear courtyard. It so happens that this was the residence of Old Man Hu, the doctor. While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still attempting to make himself inconspicuous, what should he see but a large, fat maidservant from Dr. Hu's household coming out to the privy to relieve herself. Just as she was in the process of jutting out her beefy behind, she suddenly caught sight of a man, on all fours, at the foot of the courtyard wall. Dashing back the way she had come, without even taking the time to put herself to rights, she screamed out, "Thief!" so lustily that Old Man Hu hurried into the courtyard to see what was the matter and recognized that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Congratulations, sir!" he said. "When Wu the Second failed to find you he killed the other person instead. The local constable has already taken him to the district yamen to appear before the magistrate. There is little reason to doubt that he will be convicted of a capital crime. You are free to go home, sir. Nothing will come of it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then bade Old Man Hu a grateful farewell and swaggered off to his home, where he gave P'an Chin-lien a word-for-word account of everything that had happened. The two of them clapped their hands and laughed for joy, thinking that their only cause for worry had been eliminated.

"Spread a little extra money around, high and low," the woman advised Hsi-men Ch'ing. "See to it that they finish him off, so there'll be no danger of his ever getting free again."

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent his trusted servant, Lai-wang, to convey a set of gold and silver wine vessels and fifty taels of "snowflake" silver to the district magistrate. He also distributed a good deal of additional money, high and low, to the other functionaries, including the docket officer. The only purpose behind this largess was to see to it that Wu the Second was not treated leniently. The district magistrate accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribe.

The next morning, at the early session of the court, the district magistrate took his place on the bench and the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit escorted Wu the Second, along with the proprietor of the tavern and the singing girls who were to act as witnesses, into the courtroom and had them kneel down in front of the dais.

The district magistrate had altered his demeanor overnight. "Wu the Second, you rascal," he said. "Only yesterday you tried to bring a specious suit. I don't know how you could have shown such disrespect for the law. And now you have actually killed someone for no reason at all. What have you got to say in your defence?"

Wu the Second kowtowed and pled as follows: "I trust that Your Honour will see that justice is done on my behalf. My quarrel was really with Hsi-men Ch'ing but when I unexpectedly ran into this man on the second floor of the tavern and asked him where Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone, he refused to give me an answer. In a momentary fit of rage, I wrongly killed him."

"This rascal is talking nonsense," proclaimed the district magistrate. "How could you have failed to recognize that he was a lictor on the staff of the yamen? You must have had an ulterior motive and are refusing to tell the truth."

Then he called out to his minions, "Put him to the question.

*Man is a miserable creature;*
*Unless you beat him he'll never confess.*[2]

From either side three or four lictors and jailers appeared, bearing a full panoply of instruments of torture. They turned Wu Sung over, and the blows of the light bamboo fell on him like rain. In no time at all they had administered twenty strokes but, despite the beating, Wu the Second continued to protest, again and again, that he was being treated unjustly.

"In the past," he said, "there have been occasions when I exerted myself to the utmost on Your Honour's behalf. How can you show no pity for me now? Your Honour ought not to subject me to such cruel torture."

When the district magistrate heard these words he became even more incensed. "You scoundrel!" he replied. "You've killed someone with your own hands and you're still trying to tough it out. You can't stick anyone else with your own guilt." Then he called out, "Put the squeezers on him and give him a good squeezing."

Thereupon the finger-squeezers were applied to Wu Sung and, after being tightened in place, were struck fifty times with a heavy bamboo. He was then put into a long cangue and incarcerated in the district prison, while the witnesses in the case were temporarily detained in the gatehouse of the yamen.

Now among the vice-magistrate and other subsidiary officials there were some who had been on friendly terms with Wu the Second, who knew him to be a man of righteous and heroic cast, and who would have liked to help him out. But because they had all accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes, their mouths were sealed, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Wu Sung continued to protest that he was being treated unjustly that delayed matters for a few days but eventually he was driven into making a hugger-mugger confession. The docket officer on duty, the coroner's assistant, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, the witnesses, and so forth, were all escorted to Lion Street where a formal inquest was performed on Li Wai-ch'uan's corpse, and the inquest report form filled out. The said document read as follows:

Wu Sung demanded reparation from the deceased for the unequal division of a sum of money, and, failing to receive satisfaction, in a drunken rage, assaulted him with both fists and feet and threw him to the ground with fatal results. The left rib cage, the face, the solar plexus, and the scrotum of the deceased all exhibit livid marks produced by injuries of varying degrees of severity.

After the inquest was completed, they returned to the district yamen. One day, after a formal report of the particulars had been prepared, the prisoner was escorted under guard to Tung-p'ing prefecture to await the final disposition of his case. Now the prefect of Tung-p'ing was named Ch'en Wen-chao. [3] He was a native of Honan and was an official of absolute integrity. As soon as he learned that the prisoner had arrived, he took his position on the bench. What was this official like? Behold:

*All his life he has been correct and upright;*
*By natural endowment, he is worthy and perspicacious.*
*In his youth he studied his books by light reflected from the snow;*[4]
*Once grown up he responded to imperial inquiries in the Palace of Golden Bells.*[5]
*He constantly harbours a loyal and filial heart;*
*He is always motivated by humane and kind considerations.*

*The population of his jurisdiction grows;*
*The taxes are honestly levied;*
*Common people who sing his praises fill the streets.*
*The number of lawsuits is diminished;*
*Banditry and robbery are curtailed;*
*The clamour of elders extolling his virtues is heard in the marketplace.*
*The people curb his carriage and tug at his stirrups;*[6]
*Enshrining his name in the history books for a millennium.*
*His merits are carved on stone and engraved on stelae;*
*So that his fame as a prefect will be acclaimed for all time.*
*Correct and upright, of absolute integrity, he is the father and mother of the people;*
*Worthy and good, square and proper, he deserves the epithet "Azure Heaven."*[7]

Now the prefect, Ch'en Wen-chao, already knew something about this case and gave immediate orders that both the accused and the witnesses should be brought before him. The first thing he did, right there in the courtroom, was to examine the report of the case that had been forwarded from Ch'ing-ho district as well as the various depositions and the recommended sentence. Truly, what did this report say? The text read as follows:

Ch'ing-ho district reports a case of homicide to Tung-p'ing prefecture, as below: The accused, Wu Sung, twenty-seven years of age, is a native of Yang-ku district. Because of his unusual strength, the magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district appointed him to the post of police captain. On his return from an official mission, while preparing to make a ritual sacrifice in commemoration of his deceased elder brother, he learned that his sister-in-law, née P'an, had remarried before the expiration of her mourning period. The said Wu Sung, on making further inquiries in the streets, made his way, as he should not have done, to the second floor of Wang Luan's tavern in Lion Street, where he encountered the initially unknown but now identified Li Wai-ch'uan. Upon drunkenly demanding repayment of a prior loan of three hundred cash and meeting with a refusal from Li Wai-ch'uan, he engaged him, as he should not have done, in an affray, neither one being willing to submit to the other. In the course of being seized, beaten, kicked, and thrown to the ground, the victim suffered such severe injuries that he died on the spot. Two singing girls, surnamed Niu and Pao, were present at the time as witnesses of the affray. The accused was taken into custody by the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit. An official was deputized to proceed to the site of the crime, summon the coroner's assistant, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, the witnesses, and so forth, and conduct an inquest. Depositions were taken, bond was posted for the witnesses, and the inquest report form was duly filled out and submitted. If no conflicting evidence is adduced during retrial, the recommended sentence is as follows: According to the article of the penal code that reads "In cases of involuntary manslaughter resulting from an affray, no matter whether the fatal injury be inflicted by hand, foot, other object, or metal blade, the penalty shall be strangulation,"[8] Wu Sung should be sentenced to death by strangulation. The testimony of the proprietor of the tavern, Wang Luan, and the singing girls surnamed Niu and Pao indicates them to be innocent of any crime. The case hereby is duly forwarded to your tribunal for final disposition.

Date: The nth day of the eighth month of the third year of the Cheng-ho reign period (1113).

Signed: Li Ta-T'ien, District Magistrate
Yüeh Ho-an, Vice-Magistrate
Hua Ho-lu, Assistant Magistrate
Hsia Kung-chi, Docket Officer
Ch'ien Lao, Clerk, Office of Punishment

When the prefect had finished reading this document he called up Wu Sung, who knelt down in front of the dais, and asked him, "Why did you kill Li Wai-ch'uan?"

Wu Sung kowtowed and appealed to the prefect, saying, "Lord 'Azure Heaven,' to appear before you is to see the light of day. If you permit me to speak, I will presume to speak."

"Pray speak up, then," the prefect responded.

"I was actually bent on avenging the death of my elder brother," said Wu Sung. "In the course of seeking out Hsi-men Ch'ing, I wrongly assaulted and killed this person."

He then gave an account of the foregoing events, concluding as follows, "The truth is that I have:

*Suffered injustice and harbour resentment.*

The power of Hsi-men Ch'ing's money is too great for me to withstand. The only thing that rankles is that my brother, Wu the Elder, still bears a grudge in the nether world and has lost his life for nothing."

"You need not say another word," the prefect responded. "I already know all about it."

He then called up the clerk from the office of punishment, Ch'ien Lao, and ordered him to be given twenty strokes with the light bamboo, saying, "That district magistrate of yours doesn't deserve to continue in office. How can he have put justice up for sale so flagrantly?"

Thereupon, after taking the depositions of all the witnesses once again, he picked up his brush and rewrote Wu Sung's confession.

Turning to his subsidiary officials, he said, "This man was seeking to avenge the death of his elder brother when he wrongly killed this Li Wai-ch'uan. He is a man of honour, motivated by righteous indignation. This is not an instance of 'deliberate homicide of an innocent person.' "

On the one hand, he ordered that Wu Sung's long cangue be taken off and replaced with the lighter one prescribed for lesser offences, and had him incarcerated in the prefectural prison, while he sent the witnesses back where they came from to await the final disposition of the case. On the other hand, he sent a dispatch to Ch'ing-ho district ordering the magistrate to apprehend the influential malefactor, Hsi-men Ch'ing; the sister-in-law of the accused, née P'an; Dame Wang; the youngster, Yün-ko; and the coroner's assistant, Ho the Ninth; to subject them to honest interrogation; and to report the results before taking any further action.

While Wu Sung was in prison in Tung-p'ing prefecture, since everyone knew that he was the victim of a miscarriage of justice, the jail warden and the guards actually provided him with food and wine without demanding a candareen for themselves.

It was not long before someone reported these events back to Ch'ing-ho district, and when Hsi-men Ch'ing got wind of them he was more alarmed than before. Ch'en Wen-chao was an official of absolute integrity, and he was afraid to try to bribe him. He had to go ask for help from the Ch'en family, to whom he was related by his daughter's marriage. That very night he dispatched one of their trusted servants, along with his own servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang,[10] to travel to the Eastern Capital and deliver a letter to Yang Chien, the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard.

The commander, in his turn, sought the aid of the grand councilor and grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching. The grand preceptor, fearing lest the reputation of District Magistrate Li be tarnished, immediately sent an urgent secret message to Ch'en Wen-chao in Tung-p'ing prefecture, directing him not to insist on haling Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien into court.

Now this Ch'en Wen-chao had been the director of one of the two divisions of the Court of Judicial Review in the capital when he was promoted to the position of prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, and Grand Preceptor Ts'ai had been his examiner when he qualified for office by passing the civil service examinations. He was also aware that Yang Chien, as the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, was an official who had the ear of the emperor himself. Thus:

*His obligations cancelled each other out.*[11]

All he could do under the circumstances was to save Wu Sung from the death penalty. His judgment was therefore rendered as follows:

Recommended sentence: that the accused shall be beaten forty strokes on the back with the heavy bamboo; that the name of his offence shall be tattooed on his face; and that he shall be condemned to military exile for life at a distance of 2,000 li.

In addition: whereas Wu the Elder is already dead; and whereas his corpse is no longer available as evidence; and whereas nothing more than suspicions have been adduced as to the circumstances of his death; the matter shall not be pursued further. All other persons involved with this case may be released and permitted to return to their homes.

The records of the case were forwarded to the Ministry of Justice in the capital, and thence to the Censorate for ratification, and, one day, a directive came down ordering that the sentence be carried out without delay. Ch'en Wen-chao had Wu Sung brought out of prison, and the imperial decree was read out loud to him in the courtroom. His cangue was then removed, and there was no way to avoid the infliction of forty strokes on the back with the heavy bamboo. He was then fastened into a seven-and-a-half catty, ironclad, round-ended cangue, and two columns of gold-coloured characters were tattooed on his face, preparatory to his removal to the prison camp at Meng-chou.

After the other persons involved in the case had been sent on their way, the prefect, right there in the courtroom, stamped the necessary documents with his seal and deputed two guards to escort Wu Sung to Meng-chou and turn him over to the authorities there.

That very day Wu Sung and the two guards left Tung-p'ing prefecture and returned to his brother's house in Ch'ing-ho district. He auctioned off whatever furnishings remained in order to provide the two guards with expense money along the way.

Then he approached a neighbour, Yao the Second, and asked him to look after Ying-erh for him, saying, "If, by imperial grace, an amnesty should ever be proclaimed that would allow me to return home:

*Your kindness will be amply rewarded,*
*I will never dare to forget it."*

The neighbours in the vicinity and the prominent householders who had been on good terms with Wu the Second, knowing that he was a man of honour who had had the misfortune to suffer this punishment, all helped him out with gifts of silver, or by providing food and wine, cash, or rice.

*Wu the Second then went to his own lodgings and asked his former orderlies to bring out the bundle of his personal effects. That very day they set out on their journey, leaving Ch'ing-ho district, and wending their way along the highway toward Meng-chou. The weather was that of the middle month of autumn. With regard to this trip, truly: if one is only able somehow to preserve his foolish life; he will be happy to go hungry for the rest of his days.*[12] *A poem testifies to this:*

*The prefect, in investigating this case, maintained the utmost impartiality;*
He was successful in rescuing Wu Sung from the brink of death.
Though he was condemned to military exile in a distant prison camp;
The sickly verdure recovered its health upon exposure to the genial breeze.[13]

Wu the Second set off on his way to military exile in Meng-chou. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that his enemy had taken to the road, he felt as though the stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground; the blockage in his heart had been miraculously removed. He was as happy as could be. Thereupon he ordered his servants, Lai-wang, Lai-pao, and Lai-hsing, to tidy up and sweep clean the Hibiscus Pavilion in the rear flower garden, set up standing screens, suspend gold-coloured partitions, and makes all the necessary preparations for a feast. Having engaged musicians to provide Wind and string instruments, song, and dance, for their entertainment, he invited the First Lady, Wu Yüeh-niang, the Second Lady, Li Chiao-erh, the Third Lady, Meng Yü-lou, the Fourth Lady, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the Fifth Lady, P'an Chin-lien, to join him in a party for the Jollification of the entire family. The wives of his household retainers, along with maidservants and waiting women, stood in attendance on either side. What were the revels like that day? Behold:

*Incense smoulders in precious tripods;*
*Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.*
*The table service is an array of exotic antiques from Hsiang-chou;*[14]
*The hanging blinds are adorned with shining pearls from Ho-p'u.*[15] *Crystal platters,*
*Are piled high with the magic jujubes and pears that confer immortality;*
*Chrysoprase goblets,*
*Are filled to the brim with the jade and carnelian hued nectars of the gods.*
*There are deep-fried dragon livers,*
*And roast phoenix entrails;*
*Truly, one has but to use one's chopsticks to exhaust ten thousand cash.*
*There are black bears' paws,*
*And purple dromedaries' pads;*
*When these are presented after the wine their fragrance suffuses the table.*

And there are:

*Tenderly steamed fragrant rice garnished with red lotus blossoms;*
*And neatly sliced gray mullet large enough to swallow an official seal;*[16]
*Bream and carp from the I and Lo rivers,*
*Truly, more costly than beef or lamb;*[17]
*As well as longans and litchis,*
*Verily, the finest fruits of the Southeast.*
*As the phoenix tablets are crushed;*[18]
*Foaming whitecaps of brick tea break in white jade cups;*
*As the carnelian liquid is poured,*
*The pure bouquet of vintage wine bursts from the golden flagon.*
*In fine, the sumptuousness of this repast could put Lord Meng-ch'ang to shame,*[19]
*This feast, alone, required such wealth as might have beggared Shih Ch'ung.*[20]

On this occasion, as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang had occupied the positions of honour, the rest of the ladies, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, and P'an Chin-lien, arrayed themselves on either side and the drinking began:

*With the raising of glasses and passing of cups;*[21]
*Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.*

Who should appear at this juncture but the pageboy, Tai-an, who led into their presence a young boy and a young girl, with their hair cut straight across their foreheads, prepossessing in appearance, and carrying a pair of gift boxes.

"They're from Eunuch Director Hua's house, next door," he said. "They've brought over some flowers for the ladies to put in their hair."

The two messengers went up and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang, and the others, and then stood to one side, saying, "Our mistress has sent us over to deliver this box of pastries and some flowers for Madam Hsi-men to wear in her hair."

Yüeh-niang pulled aside the hanging blind to take a look at the gifts. One box contained stuffed, spiced, gold-coloured pastries, of a kind reserved for use in the imperial palace. The other box contained newly picked fresh plantain lilies.

"I've been the occasion of putting your mistress to too much trouble once again, I fear," said Yüeh-niang, utterly delighted.

She saw to it that the two of them were offered something to eat and then gave the young girl a handkerchief and the young boy a hundred cash.

"Tell your mistress many thanks," she said, and then asked the young girl, "What's your name?"

"I'm called Hsiu-ch'un," she replied, "and the boy's called T'ien-fu." After they were gone, Yüeh-niang turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "This lady from the Hua household next door is really nice. She's always sending her pageboy and maidservant over here with gifts for me, and I'm afraid I haven't yet done anything to reciprocate."

"It hasn't even been two years," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "since Brother Hua the Second took this woman to wife. He tells me himself that she has a most accommodating disposition, otherwise she'd never consent to keep two such attractive young girls as personal maids."

"Not long ago," said Yüeh-niang, "in the sixth month, when the old gentleman of their household passed away, I met her by the graveside while attending the funeral. She is petite in stature and has a round face, delicately curved eyebrows, and a fair complexion. She seems very considerate by nature and must still be quite young, not more than twenty-three or twenty-four."

"You don't know the story," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was originally the concubine of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh when he was regent of the Northern Capital at Ta-ming prefecture, so her union with Hua Tzu-hsü is a case of remarriage, though she brought him a considerable fortune."

"The fact that she has sent over these gift boxes indicates a desire to get better acquainted," said Yüeh-niang. "We are next-door neighbours, after all. We mustn't be remiss in our social obligations. One of these days we'd better send something over there in return."

Gentle reader take note: It so happens that the maiden name of Hua Tzu-hsü's wife was Li. Because she was born on the fifteenth day of the first month, and someone had made her family a gift of a pair of fish-shaped vases on that day, her informal name was P'ing-erh, or Vase. She had formerly been a concubine in the household of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh in Ta-ming prefecture. Privy Councilor Liang was the son-in-law of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital. [22] His wife was extremely jealous by nature and had beaten numbers of maidservants and concubines to death and buried them in the rear flower garden. Li P'ing-erh, consequently, resided outside the women's quarters in her husband's studio, where she had a waiting woman to look after her.

It happened that on the fifteenth day of the first month of the first year of the Cheng-ho reign period,[23] during the Lantern Festival, Privy Councilor Liang and his wife were enjoying themselves on the upper floor of the Blue Cloud Tavern, when Li K'uei slaughtered their entire household, old and young alike, during a bandit raid on Ta-ming prefecture.[24] Privy Councilor Liang and his wife were forced to flee for their lives. On this occasion Li P'ing-erh managed to escape the carnage, along with her waiting woman but not before she had appropriated a necklace of one hundred large, Western Ocean [25] pearls and a pair of onyx gemstones weighing a good two ounces, with which she made her way to the Eastern Capital to seek refuge with relatives.

At that time Eunuch Director Hua had just been promoted from his post in the imperial palace to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan. Because his nephew, Hua Tzu-hsü, was still without a mate, he sent a matchmaker to propose a marriage, and Li P'ing-erh thus entered the household as a legitimate wife. When the old eunuch departed to take up his post in Kuang-nan, he took them with him but after they had lived there for something over half a year, he unfortunately fell ill and petitioned the throne for permission to retire to his native place. Because he was originally from Ch'ing-ho district, it was there that he had come to live in retirement.

Now that Eunuch Director Hua had died, his entire estate fell into the hands of Hua Tzu-hsü, who made it a daily practice to frequent the licensed quarter with his friends, one of whom was Hsi-men Ch'ing. They had formed a club, of which Hsi-men Ch'ing was the senior member.

The second member was named Ying Po-chüeh, or Sponger Ying. He had started life as the son of Master Ying, the merchant, who owned a fine-silk-goods store but once the business had come into his hands, he had lost his capital and fallen on hard times. He now made his living by squiring young rakes about the licensed quarters and picking up whatever he could along the way. He was an expert performer at kickball and knew all there was to know about such games as backgammon and elephant chess.

The third member was named Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh, whose courtesy name was Tzu-ch'un. He, too, was a profligate hanger-on as well as being an expert performer on the *p'i-p'a*. He had nothing to do everyday but to haunt the licensed quarter and live off:

*The tea and rice afforded by romance.*

There were also other members with names such as Chu Jih-nien, or Sticky Chu; Sun Kua-tsui, or Blabbermouth Sun; Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu; Yün Li-shou, or Welsher Yün; Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang; Pu Chih-tao, or No-account Pu; and Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai. There were ten of them in all. [26] Pu Chih-tao had died recently, and Hua Tzu-hsü, or Nobody Hua, had been allowed to take his place.

Every month the ten of them met together somewhere and engaged the services of two singing girls so they could enjoy themselves:

*Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.*

The other members of the club, observing that Hua Tzu-hsü was the profligate scion of a eunuch household and that he had:

*Money to spend and silver to squander;*[27]

were anything but backward in encouraging him to patronize singing girls in the licensed quarter, with the result that he often stayed out for three or five nights in a row without going home. Truly:

*On the purple roads spring is at its height;*
In the red bowers the music is intoxicating.
How long a span of life are we allotted?
Not to enjoy it is to live in vain.[28]

Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing and his wife and concubines enjoyed a feast in the Hibiscus Pavilion for the:

*Jollification of the entire family.*

The party did not break up until evening. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing retired to P'an Chin-lien's quarters he was already half drunk and, exhilarated by the wine, wanted to play at clouds and rain with her. The woman hastily lit some incense and laid out the bedding, after which they:

*Took off their clothes and went to bed.*

Hsi-men Ch'ing, however, did not proceed directly to the clouds and rain. Knowing that the woman was partial to "toying with the flute,"[29] he sat down inside the green gauze mosquito netting and ordered her to get down on all fours beside him. After:

*Lightly adjusting her golden bracelets,*

she took hold of his organ with both hands and popped it into her mouth. Hsi-men Ch'ing:

*Bent his head in order the better to savor,*
*The marvelous sight as it went in and out.*
*She sucked it audibly for some time, until*
*Their lewd excitement was redoubled.*

At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing called out to Ch'un-mei to come in and bring them some tea. The woman was afraid the maidservant would see what they were up to and hastily let down the bed curtains.

"What are you afraid of?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Brother Hua the Second next door," he went on, "actually has two attractive young girls as maid-servants in his rooms. The one who delivered the flowers today was the youngest. There is another one, as old as Ch'un-mei, whom Brother Hua the Second has already had his way with. I caught sight of her once, when she had followed her mistress to the front door, and could see that she has a good figure. Who would have thought that Brother Hua the Second, young as he is, would carry on that way in his own house?"

When the woman heard this, she gave him a look, saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! If you want to have your way with this maidservant, go ahead and take her. What need is there to:

*Beat around the bush; or point out a mountain and promise a millstone.*[30]

Why drag anyone else into it? In the first place, I'm not that sort of person; and, in the second place, she's not really my maidservant to begin with. If that's the way things stand, tomorrow I'll pay a visit to the rear compound and leave the way open for you. Just call her into the room and have your way with her. That's all there is to it."

When she had finished speaking, she went back to "toying with the flute" until Hsi-men Ch'ing ejaculated. Only then did they go to sleep:

*Arm around head and thigh over thigh.*

Truly:

*Past mistress of the intimate arts, she caters to her lover's whim;*
*How quick she is, and diligent, to "play the purple flute."*[31]

There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:

*The scent of orchid and musk pervades the gauze netting;*
The delicate beauty is an old hand at "playing the flute."
Her snow-white jade body is visible through the bed curtains;
It's enough to make one's "ethereal and material souls take flight."
*On jade wrists she gently adjusts golden bracelets;*
Both of them are passionate, "half drunk, half crazed."
The talented gentleman is moved to enjoin his partner,
"Take it easy, so you can go on sucking a little longer."[32]

The next day, sure enough, the woman went to pay a visit to Meng Yü-lou's quarters in the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing called Ch'un-mei into the room and had his way with the young girl.

*When spring touches the apricot and peach trees, their new buds burst into red flower;*
*When the breeze plays among the willow fronds, they are made to bend their green waists.*[33]

From this day on, her mistress treated her with special favour, no longer sending her to the kitchen to:

*Do the cooking or clean the stove but only asking her to serve inside her own rooms, to:*
*Make the beds and fold the quilts,*

or to fetch tea. She presented her with some of her favourite articles of clothing and jewellery, and encouraged her to bind her feet in order to keep them delectably tiny.

It so happens that Ch'un-mei was quite unlike Ch'iu-chü. She was naturally intelligent, enjoyed repartee, was quick on the uptake, and rather good-looking. Hsi-men Ch'ing was very partial to her. Ch'iu-chü, on the other hand, was stupid and dull, and could not be relied upon to perform her tasks. She was the one who got beaten by her mistress. Truly:

*The swallows and sparrows round the pond make quite a clamour with their chatter;*
All appeal to humanity and righteousness and judge each other stupid or worthy.
Though they may belong to different species, they are alike in being birds of the air;
And yet, noble and base, high and low, even they are not all the same.

Wu Song was taken by the watch to the city jail. Meanwhile Ximen Qing, who had jumped out of the wineshop window, found himself in a courtyard that belonged to old Doctor Hu. One of the maids had just gone to the privy and had lifted her skirts. Suddenly she saw a man crouching at the foot of the wall. As she could not run away, she called, "Thief! thief!" as loudly as she could, and Doctor Hu ran out to see what was the matter. He recognized Ximen Qing, and said:

"My Lord, I must congratulate you on your escape from Wu Song. He has killed a man, and they have taken him to the lockup. But you may go home now, Sir, I don't think there is likely to be any more trouble."

Ximen thanked the doctor, and went home with all the assurance in the world. He told Pan Jinlian what had happened, and they clapped their hands with delight to think that all their troubles were now over. Jinlian advised Ximen to send bribes to all the officials, so that they might make sure that Wu Song would be sentenced to death, for they by no means desired to set eyes on him again. Ximen Qing called his servant Laiwang, and told him to take the magistrate a set of gold and silver drinking cups, with fifty taels of silver, and sums of money for all the other officials, both great and small, and to ask that Wu Song should be punished with all the rigor of the law. The magistrate accepted the bribe and, the next morning, as soon as he entered the Hall of Audience, had Wu Song brought before him, with the waiter and the two singing girls. His manner had now completely changed.

"Wu Song," he said, "you are a desperate fellow and have brought accusations against perfectly innocent people. I have overlooked this more than once. Now you yourself have killed a man, without the slightest cause. Why don't you obey the laws?"

"My quarrel was really with Ximen Qing," Wu Song said, "but, as ill luck would have it, I met this man. He refused to tell me where Ximen Qing was, and I lost my temper and killed him. My Lord, I implore you to give me justice, and bring Ximen Qing to answer to the law for my brother's death. As for myself, I am ready to give my life for this dead man's."

"You are talking nonsense," the magistrate cried. "Do you mean to say you did not know he was an officer of this court? You must certainly have had some other reason for killing him. Why do you try to drag Ximen Qing into the matter? I can see that I shall never get the truth out of you without a beating."

He ordered his attendants to punish Wu Song. Three or four of them pulled him down and gave him twenty strokes of the rod, like drops of rain falling. Wu Song continued to insist that he was being unjustly dealt with. "I have done much for you," he cried, "and you should deal with me accordingly and not have me beaten so severely."

This only made the magistrate more angry. "You killed a man with your fist," he cried. "Now your boldness seems to have gone into your mouth." He ordered the thumbscrews to be put on, and Wu Song's fingers were pressed and his hands beaten fifty times, after which a cangue was put about his neck and he was returned to prison.

Some of the officers had been Wu Song's friends and knew that he was a man who had taken upon himself to avenge another's quarrel. They would have liked to clear him but, as they had accepted Ximen Qing's bribes, their mouths were sealed and they were unable to do anything. As Wu Song persisted in demanding justice, the magistrate waited a few days and then drew up a dossier without hearing any evidence. All he did was to appoint an officer to go to Lion Street to examine Li's body and fill in the necessary particulars. Then the crime sheet was drawn up as follows:

The accused Wu Song called to see Li, and there was a dispute with regard to the division of certain moneys. The parties became drunk and began to fight. The deceased was kicked and beaten and thrown from a high place. Green and red marks were found on his left side, his face, ribs, and groin.

After completing their examination, the officials went back to the office, and a document was drawn up to be sent with Wu Song to the Prefect of Dongping, where the matter would have to be further investigated and the final judgment made.

The Prefect of Dongping, His Excellency Chen Wenzhao, was a native of Henan and an official of exceptional probity. As soon as the documents were brought to him, he began the hearing of the case.

Chen Wenzhao went to his court and ordered everyone to be brought before him. He read through all the documents that had come from Qinghe and examined the depositions. The indictment said:

**PREFECTURE OF DONGPING DISTRICT OF QINGHE**

**An Indictment**

The accused Wu Song is twenty-eight years of age, formerly domiciled in the District of Yanggu. On account of his splendid physique he was appointed Captain of the Police in this District.

After returning to this District from a tour of duty, the accused visited his brother's tomb. He ascertained that his sister-in-law had not observed the required period of mourning but had remarried. The same day he inquired from people in the streets concerning the matter, and ultimately proceeded to a wineshop in Lion Street, where he met Li Waichuan. Being drunk, he endeavored to recover the sum of three hundred cash that he alleged Li had previously borrowed from him but Li refused to pay the money and the two men fought. Li was struck and kicked, and so severely injured that he died shortly afterwards.

In proof whereof the singing girls Niu and Bao are witnesses.

The watch arrested Wu Song, and officers deputed for that purpose proceeded to the place where Li's body lay and made a careful examination. We then heard Wu Song and prepared the accompanying depositions. We trust that upon further investigation you will find the particulars to be correct.

It is our submission that Wu Song fought with and killed the man, and that he should be executed in accordance with the law for the capital offence, not for fighting or the dispute over money. The waiter Wang, and the two girls Niu and Bao, appear to be guiltless in the matter, and we only await your permission to release them.

Dated this eighth day of the eighth month of the third year of Zhenghe:

Li Dadian, *Magistrate*
Luo He'an, *Deputy Magistrate*
Hua Helu, *Keeper of the Archives*
Xia Gongji, *Prosecutor*
Qian Lao, *Chief Jailer*

When the Prefect had read this document, he asked Wu Song how he had come to kill Li Waichuan. Wu Song kowtowed.

"My Lord of the Blue Heavens," he said, "I trust that, in your court, justice may be done. If you will allow me to speak, I will tell the truth about the matter."

"Say on," the Prefect ordered.

Wu Song told him the whole story, not omitting a single detail, from Ximen Qing's seduction of Jinlian to the rejection of his accusation at the Qinghe court. He ended by saying: "I wished only to avenge my brother, and it was Ximen Qing of whom I was in search. Unhappily, I did kill this man but the fault is not mine alone. Ximen Qing is very rich, and the officers did not dare to arrest him. I am not afraid of death. My sole desire is to avenge my murdered brother, whose remains lie in the tomb awaiting vengeance."

"I understand the case," the Prefect said. "That will do for the present." He called forward Qian Lao and ordered him to be given twenty strokes. "Your magistrate does not seem to know how to perform his duties. He should not allow himself to be moved by personal interest and sell justice in this way."

Again, he questioned Wu Song, and amended the indictment that had come from Qinghe. Finally, he said to his officers: "This fellow was anxious to avenge his brother and killed this man more or less accidentally. He seems a good man and he ought not to be treated like a common criminal."

He gave orders that the cangue should be removed from Wu Song's neck and a lighter one put in its place, and that he should be detained in the prison. The rest of the party were sent back to Qinghe with instructions to the magistrate that Ximen Qing, Jinlian, old woman Wang, Yun'ge, and He the Ninth should be sent to the Prefect to be examined. When all this had been done, the Prefect said, he would send forward the documents to the Imperial Court. Wu Song was still in prison but the officials soon found what a good fellow he was, and sent him wine and food without taking anything in return. The news reached Qinghe and, when Ximen Qing heard it, he was greatly alarmed. He knew that Chen Wenzhao was incorruptible, and did not dare to try to bribe him but he decided to send word to his relative Chen and ask for help. He told Laiwang to go to the Eastern Capital in all haste with a letter to Marshal Yang, the Provincial Commander-in-Chief, begging him to use all his influence with the Imperial Tutor Cai. When Cai heard of the matter he was afraid that the magistrate Li would suffer, so he secretly wrote to the Prefect of Dongping asking him not to proceed with the examination of Ximen Qing and Jinlian. Now Chen Wenzhao had been the chief magistrate of Dalisi before he had been appointed to the Prefecture of Dongping. He had been befriended by Cai, and knew that Marshal Yang was in high favour at court. He finally decided that the best thing he could do was to settle the matter without injury to either side. He reprieved Wu Song but ordered him to be given forty strokes, branded, and banished 2000 li. In Wu Da's case, it was declared that, as the body had been burned, the matter must be considered closed. The others were ordered to be sent home. This was all duly written down, and the documents sent, first to the Provincial Office, then to the Court. They were returned by the higher authorities with orders that the Prefect's proposals should be put into execution. Chen Wenzhao took Wu Song from the jail, read over the papers in the case, gave him forty strokes, and set a cangue upon him. Two columns of characters were branded on his face, and he was ordered to leave for Mengzhou in the charge of two officials, who took the document with them. Then the other parties in the case were dismissed. That day Wu Song, in the charge of two officers of the court, left the prefecture of Dongping for Qinghe. There, he sold all his furniture and gave the money to the officers, and asked one of his neighbours, named

Yao, to look after Ying'er. "If His Majesty pardons me," he said, "I'll pay you back. I can never forget your kindness." Wu Song's neighbours knew well that he was a good man in misfortune, and they gave him, some silver, some a little wine; others offered food, money, and rice. He went once again to his own rooms and got a soldier to bring his personal belongings, and the next day they set off from Qinghe along the high road for Mengzhou.

When Ximen Qing heard that Wu Song had really started for Mengzhou, he felt secure at last. The canker that had ravaged his heart so long was now removed, and he felt completely at ease. He gave orders to Laiwang, Lai Po, and Laixing to make preparations in the garden. They set up folding screens and arranged embroidered hangings in the Hibiscus Arbour; a banquet was prepared, and a band of musicians engaged to sing and dance. Yueniang and the other ladies enjoyed the repast, and menservants, serving women, and maids waited upon them.

Incense was burned in precious censers, and flowers set out in golden vases
Treasures from Xiangzhou in all their glory.
When the lattice was raised, the shining pearls from He Pu gleamed.
Flame-like dates and pears from Jiao heaped on crystal dishes
Cups of green jade filled with a precious juice, a liquid jade.
Of roasted dragon's liver, of fried phoenix giblets, one chopstick's load was worth ten thousand pence.
The palms of black bears, the hooves of purple camels
Mingled their sweet savor with the wine's, filling the air.
Then were ground the phoenix balls of tea,
And a small clear wave rose in the white jade cups.
As the precious liquid was outpoured, there came fragrance from the golden jar.
The lord Meng Chang was now outdone
The wealth of Shi Chong rivalled.

Ximen Qing and Yueniang sat in the place of honour, and the other ladies arranged themselves according to their position in the household. As they passed the cups from one to the other, they seemed as full of grace as the flowers of a posy or the pattern upon a piece of brocade.

They were drinking when Daian brought in a boy and a young maid of great beauty, whose hair was dressed in a fringe upon her brows. She was carrying two boxes.

"Our neighbours the Huas," Daian said, "have sent some flowers for the ladies."

The maid came before Ximen and Yueniang, kowtowed to them, and said, "My mistress has sent me with this box of cakes and these flowers for you." Yueniang opened the boxes. One contained pastries, some of which were stuffed with fruit, and others with peppers. They were like those made in the Imperial palaces. The other box contained freshly picked lilies. She was greatly pleased, and told the little girl to thank her mistress. After giving them something to eat, she presented the girl with a handkerchief and the boy with a hundred coins.

"Tell your Mistress," she said, "that I am most grateful to her." She asked the little girl her name.

"I am called Yingchun, and this boy is Tian Fu." Then they both withdrew.

"Mistress Hua is really very kind," Yueniang said to Ximen Qing. "She is always sending her servants with something or other for us, and I have never made her any return."

"Brother Hua married the lady two years ago," Ximen said. "He himself told me what a sweet disposition she has but that is clearly to be seen from the excellence of her maid."

"I saw her once," Yueniang said, "at her father-in-law's funeral. She is moderately tall and has a round face. She has two delicately arched eyebrows and a very clear skin. She certainly seems very gentle, and still quite young, not more than twenty-four or twenty-five, I should think."

"You may not know," Ximen said, "that before she married Hua, she was one of the second ladies of Minister Liang. She brought Hua a very good fortune."

"Well, she has sent us these two boxes," Yueniang said, "and we must not be less courteous than she is. I will send her something in return tomorrow."

The family name of Hua Zixu's wife was Li. She was born on the fifteenth day of the first month, and on that day somebody had sent the family a pair of fish-shaped vases. She was given the name of Li Ping'er. She had once been the concubine of Minister Liang of the Prefecture of Daming, a son-in-law of the Imperial Tutor Cai. His wife was a very jealous woman, and had made an end of several maids and concubines, and buried their bodies in the garden. So Li Ping'er had to live hidden away in his study, with an old woman to wait on her.

On the fifteenth of the first month in the third year of Zhenghe, Minister Liang and his wife were in the Green Jade Pavilion, when the whole family except Li Ping'er and her servant were murdered by Li Kui. They succeeded in escaping. Li Ping'er taking with her a hundred large pearls and a pair of jewels as black as a raven's wings. They went to the Eastern Capital in the hope of finding some relatives there. At that time Eunuch Hua, one of the Imperial Chamberlains, had just been appointed to the Governorship of Guangnan. His nephew Hua Zixu was unmarried, so the eunuch secured the services of a go-between and arranged a marriage between his nephew and the woman. The eunuch went to Guangnan and they with him but they had not been there very long before old Hua fell ill, had to resign his appointment, and go home again. His home was in the district of Qinghe. Then he died, and all his property came to his nephew. Everyday this gentleman and his friends frequented the bawdy houses, and he had become a member of the brotherhood that Ximen Qing had founded.

With Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and the rest, he amused himself with singing girls, and they were all most intimate. It was well known that he was a nephew of one of the Imperial Chamberlains and very free with his money, and his friends were always dragging him away to the bawdy house. Often he did not return for three or four nights at a time.

Ximen Qing and his ladies made merry in the Hibiscus Arbour. They drank till it was late, and then went to their own apartments. Ximen Qing went to Jinlian's room. He was already half drunk, and soon wished to enjoy the delights of love with his new lady. Jinlian hastily burned incense, and they took off their clothes and went to bed. But Ximen Qing would not allow her to go too fast. He knew that she played the flute exquisitely. He sat down behind the curtains of the bed, and set her before him. Then Jinlian daintily pushed back the golden bracelets from her wrists and stimulated his penis with her lips, while he leaned forward to enjoy the delight of her movements. She continued for a long time, and all the while his delight grew greater. He called Chunmei to bring in some tea. Jinlian was afraid that her maid would see her, and hastily pulled down the bed curtains.

"What are you afraid of?" Ximen said. "Our neighbour Hua has two excellent maids. One of them, the younger, brought us those flowers today but there is another about as old as Chunmei. Brother Hua has already taken her virginity. Indeed wherever her mistress is, she is too. She is really very pretty, and of course no one can tell what a man like Brother Hua may do in the privacy of his own home."

Jinlian looked at him.

"You are a strange creature but I will not scold you," she said. "If you wish to have this girl, have her and be done with it. Why go beating about the bush, pointing at a mountain when you really are thinking about something quite different. I know you would like to have somebody else to compare with me but I am not jealous. She is not actually my maid. Tomorrow, I will go to the garden to rest for a while, and that will give you a chance. You can call her into this room and do what you like with her. Will that satisfy you?"

Ximen Qing was delighted. "You understand me so well!" he said. "How can I help loving you?" So these 2 agreed and their delight in each other and in their love could not have been greater. After she had played the flute, they kissed each other, and went to sleep. The next day Jinlian went to the apartments of Yulou, and Ximen Qing called Chunmei to his room, and had his pleasure of her. From that day, Jinlian showered favours on this girl. She would not allow her to go and wait at the kitchen but kept her to attend to her bedroom, and serve her with tea. She chose beautiful clothes and ornaments for her, and bound her feet very tightly. Chunmei was a very different kind of girl from Qiuju. She was extremely intelligent and full of fun, and she had a pretty skill with her tongue, besides being very beautiful. Ximen Qing found her irresistible. Qiuju, on the other hand, was both simple and stupid: Jinlian was always punishing her.

## 032

### P'an Chin-lien instigates the Beating of Sun Hsüeh-o; Hsi-men Ch'ing Decides to Deflower Li Kuei-chieh/Guijie, the Singing Girl

Once P'an Chin-lien was established in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household she:

*Relied on his favour to become arrogant;*
*Transmuting the "cold" into the "hot,"*

to such effect that, day or night, there was no longer any peace and quiet to be had. She was extremely suspicious by nature and was forever:

*Listening at the fence or eavesdropping by the wall,*

on the lookout for an excuse to make trouble. Nor was her maidservant, Ch'un-mei, any model of forbearance.

One day, as ill luck would have it, Chin-lien was upset over some insignificant matter and spoke a few intemperate words to Ch'un-mei. Ch'un-mei, having no place else to vent her spleen, went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and started:

*Pounding the table and banging the pans,*

in no mood to be trifled with.

Sun Hsüeh-o, who found this behavior annoying, twitted her sarcastically with the words, "You crazy good-for-nothing! If you're hard up for a man, go be hard up someplace else. I can do without your high-handedness around here."

When Ch'un-mei, who was still at the height of her ill-humour, heard these words, she flared up immediately.

"Just who is insinuating that I'm on the lookout for a man?" she demanded to know.

Hsüeh-o saw that she was really out of sorts and managed to keep her mouth shut. Ch'un-mei, however, took off in a huff for the front compound, where she gave Chin-lien a provocative word-for-word account of this exchange:

*Thus and thus, and*
*So and so,*

with a few additional details thrown in for good measure, such as, "She claimed that you connive with me to share our favours with him as a means of keeping him all to ourselves."

Chin-lien had had a bellyful. She was already feeling rather tired from having to get up earlier than usual in order to see off Wu Yüeh-niang on her way to a funeral. She took a nap and then went out to sit in the pavilion in the garden.

While she was there, who should come strolling along but Meng Yü-lou, who addressed her with an ingratiating smile, saying, "Sister, how come you're so silent and glum?"

"I don't even want to talk about it," said Chin-lien. "I'm feeling all tired out this morning. Where've you come from, Sister Three?"

"I've just paid a visit to the kitchen in the rear compound," said Meng Yü-lou.

"And what did that woman have to say to you?" asked Chin-lien.

"Sister didn't have anything to say," replied Yü-lou.

Although Chin-lien said no more about it at the time, she stored up the resentment in her heart and, henceforth, regarded Sun Hsüeh-o as her enemy. But no more of this.

The two of them did some needlework together for a while when Ch'un-mei appeared with a pot of hot water and Ch'iu-chü with two cups of tea. After finishing their tea, the two of them set out the pieces of a board game and started to play with each other.

Just as they were at a critical point in their game, the pageboy, Ch'in-t'ung, whose job it was to watch the garden gate, suddenly appeared and announced, "Father has come home."

The two women made haste to put the game away but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had already crossed the threshold of the garden, caught sight of them. They were wearing their everyday chignons enclosed in frets of silver filigree, from which two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple, pendant onyx earrings, blouses of white silk, pink vests, drawnwork skirts, and two pairs of tiny shoes, the up-turned points of which were adorned with red mandarin ducks. Each of them appeared to him to be:

*Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.*

Without his even being aware of it, Hsi-men Ch'ing's face became wreathed in smiles, and he blurted out, "They look just like a pair of painted faces, and they'd cost a pretty penny too."

"We're no painted faces," declared Chin-lien. "But if that's what you're looking for, you can find the genuine article in the rear compound."

At this sally, Meng Yü-lou excused herself and started back toward her own quarters but Hsi-men Ch'ing caught her with one hand and said, "Where are you off to? Do you have to leave as soon as I show up? Tell me the truth, now; when I'm not at home, what do the two of you do around here?"

"We're bored to distraction," said Chin-lien, "and were only playing a couple of rounds of a board game here. We really haven't stolen anything. How were we to know that you would turn up?"

As she spoke, she helped him off with his outer clothes and then said, "You've come back from the funeral early today."

"Most of the guests at the reception," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "were either eunuchs or official colleagues of the deceased. Moreover, the weather was hot. I couldn't stick it out, so I came home before it was over."

"Why isn't our elder sister home yet?" asked Meng Yü-lou.

"Her sedan chair has probably reached the city walls by now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already sent two servant boys back to meet her."

When he had finished taking off his outer clothes, he sat down and asked, "What do the two of you wager when you play games together?"

"We were only playing for the fun of it," said Chin-lien. "Why should we have to wager anything?"

"Let me play a game with you," proposed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever loses will have to forfeit a tael of silver and treat the rest of us."

"But we don't have any money," said Chin-lien.

"If you don't have any money," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can pull out one of your fancy hairpins and pawn it with me. It all comes to the same thing."

Thereupon, they set up the board and the three of them played a game together. P'an Chin-lien lost. While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still counting the pieces, the woman upset the board and then ran over beside a clump of sweet-smelling daphne, leaned against an ornamental rock, and pretended to busy herself picking flowers.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing located her, he said, "All right, little oily mouth! It was you who lost the game, and now you're trying to hide over here, are you?"

When the woman saw Hsi-men Ch'ing coming, she broke into giggles, saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! It was Meng the Third who lost but you didn't dare enforce the rules on her but have come to bother me instead."

As she spoke, she tore the petals off the flowers in her hand and scattered them all over Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Stepping forward, Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her with both arms, pushed her up against the ornamental rock:

*Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue;*
*Mingled his sweet spittle with hers,*

and began to toy with her in earnest.

At this juncture, Yü-lou appeared on the scene and called out, "Sister Six, the First Lady has arrived home. I'm going back to the rear compound."

Only then did the woman abandon Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Brother, I'll have something more to say to you later," Chin-lien said to him as she went off to accompany Yü-lou on her way back to the rear compound.

When they had paid their respects to Yüeh-niang, she asked them, "What are the two of you laughing about?"

"Today Sister Six played a board game with Father," replied Yü-lou, "and lost a tael of silver. Tomorrow she'll have to play host and invite you to join the fun."

Yüeh-niang smiled. Chin-lien, on this occasion, did no more than put in a pro forma appearance before Yüeh-niang and then head back to the front compound in order to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company. She ordered Ch'un-mei to light some incense in her room and to prepare the bathing tub and heat some bath water so that that evening she and Hsi-men Ch'ing could:

*Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water.*[3]

Gentle reader take note: Although Wu Yüeh-niang was the First Lady of the house and occupied the master suite, she was sick so much of the time that she hadn't been able to take effective charge of household affairs. All she really did was to go out and pay the social calls that propriety demanded. The household expenditures and receipts were all in the hands of the excourtesan, Li Chiao-erh. Sun Hsüeh-o was in charge of the wives of the household retainers who worked in the kitchen, and it was her responsibility to supply the needed food and drink to the separate quarters of the various residents. For example, if Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in one of his concubine's quarters and needed anything to eat or drink, or a particular kind of soup, it was Hsüeh-o's responsibility to see that it was duly prepared, and the maidservants from the rooms in question would come to fetch it. But no more of this.

That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in Chin-lien's quarters where they drank wine for a while, and then, when they had finished bathing, went to bed.

The next day was one of those occasions on which:

*Something was destined to happen.*

Hsi-men Ch'ing had promised Chin-lien that he would visit the fair at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak and buy some pearls for her to make into a headband. For this reason he rose early and expressed a desire for some lotus-blossom cakes and pickled fish and vermicelli soup for breakfast. As soon as he got up he asked Ch'un-mei to go to the kitchen and order these things for him but she refused to budge.

"Don't send her back there," said Chin-lien. "There's someone there who goes around saying that I encourage her to connive with me in sharing your favours as a means of keeping you all to ourselves. She's forever:

*Pointing at the pig but cursing the dog.*[4]

and abusing the two of us every way she knows how. What would you want to send her back there for?"
"Who is it that says that sort of thing or abuses her?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know. "Tell me who it is."
"What's the point of talking about it?" said Chin-lien.
*"Even basins and jugs have ears.*[5]
Just don't send her back there but send Ch'iu-chü instead, that's all."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, therefore, called in Ch'iu-chü and told her to go back to the kitchen and give Hsüeh-o his instructions. Enough time went by in which to eat two meals; the woman had already set the table but still no food was forthcoming. By this time Hsi-men Ch'ing was getting very hot and bothered.
When the woman saw that Ch'iu-chü had not returned she turned to Ch'un-mei and said, "You go back there and see what's going on. That slave still hasn't come back. She must have:
*Taken root and sent up sprouts,*
by now."
Ch'un-mei was rather out of sorts to begin with and marched off to the kitchen in a huff.
When she saw that Ch'iu-chü was still waiting for the food, she started to curse at her, saying, "You lousy, sleepy-eyed slave! Mother's going to beat the legs right off you! 'Why haven't you come back?' she'd like to know. Father's being kept waiting. As soon as he's eaten he wants to go to the temple fair. There he is up front, anxious to be on his way, and getting increasingly hot and bothered. I've been sent to see if I can drag you back with me."
If Sun Hsüeh-o had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them, she became enraged and started to curse, saying, "You crazy little whore! You may think I'm like:
*The Mohammedan bowing to Mecca,*[6]
*So whoever shows up gets a bow.*
But:
*The saucepan is beaten out of iron;*
*Things take a little time to make.*
The congee I had already prepared, he doesn't want to eat. Instead, all of a sudden, he comes up with a brand new idea, and expects me to start grilling cakes and making soup. How was I supposed to know what he wanted? After all, I'm not a:
*Tapeworm in his belly.*"[7]
Ch'un-mei was incensed at her cursing and responded, "Stop talking through your cunt! If the master hadn't ordered us to come for it, who would have dared to demand anything of you? Whether you come up with it or not, we're going back up front and report. Why make such a fuss about it?"
Taking hold of Ch'iu-chü by the ear, she set off toward the front compound.
"Like mistress, like slave," muttered Hsüeh-o. "Do you think you can carry on so high-handedly, and remain in favour, forever?"
*"If you've got the favour,*
*You might as well flaunt it,"*
said Ch'un-mei. "I wouldn't sell the two of us short if I were you."
Thereupon, she marched off in a fit of high dudgeon.
When Chin-lien saw her come in the door, her face waxen with rage, dragging Ch'iu-chü behind her, she asked, "What's the matter?"
"Why don't you ask her?" said Ch'un-mei. "When I went, she was still mooning around in the kitchen, waiting, while the other one:
*Just as slow and easy as you please,*
had only started to knead the dough. Although I probably shouldn't have, I said, 'Father's up front waiting, and Mother wants to know why you haven't come back yet. She's sent me here to get you.' Whereupon that insignificant harlot started to curse me, calling me 'slave' a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. She said, 'Father seems to think I'm like:
*The Mohammedan bowing to Mecca;*
*So whoever shows up gets a bow.*
Someone must have been putting ideas in his head. The congee I had already prepared, he doesn't want to eat. Instead, out of the blue, he comes up with a brand new idea, and calls for cakes and soup.' She was so busy with her cursing in the kitchen that she couldn't get around to the cooking."
"Just as I said," interjected the woman, "you shouldn't have sent her back there. As long as someone's so ill-disposed toward her, and claims that she and I are keeping you all to ourselves here in our quarters, she's bound to get nothing but abuse for her pains."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he became enraged. Marching back to the kitchen:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
he kicked Hsüeh-o several times and cursed her, saying, "You lousy, splay-legged whore! When I sent her here to ask after the cakes, what did you curse her for? You called her a slave, did you? Why don't you:
*Piddle a bladderful of piss, and*
*Take a good look at yourself?*"[8]
Hsüeh-o had to suffer Hsi-men Ch'ing's kicking and abuse but:
*Though she dared to be angry,*
*She dared not speak.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly gone out the kitchen door when Hsüeh-o turned to the wife of the head servant, Lai-chao, whose nickname was "The Beanpole," and said, "This must be my unlucky day! It's a good thing you were here to see it. I didn't say anything to her. She came marching in here like an avenging spirit:
*Making all kinds of threatening noises,*
and dragging the other maidservant away. Then she went:
*Talebearing and embroidering on the facts,*[9]
in front of the master, so that he came storming in here and abused me this way for no reason at all. I'm going to keep my eyes peeled from now on. The two of them are like mistress, like slave. Do they think they can carry on so high-handedly forever? They'll come a cropper if they don't watch out."
Unbeknownst to her, Hsi-men Ch'ing had overheard everything she said.
He came back in and struck her several additional blows with his fist, cursing as he did so, "You lousy slave of a whore! And you still claim you weren't abusive to her, when I've heard you cursing her with my own ears?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing beat her until:
*The pain was difficult to bear,*
and then went back to the front compound. Hsüeh-o was left in the kitchen with the tears running down her face. Convulsed with sobs, she began to cry out loud.
Wu Yüeh-niang had just gotten up and was in the master bedroom combing her hair.
"What's the ruckus in the kitchen all about?" she asked Hsiao-yü.
Hsiao-yü came back and reported, "Father wanted some cakes to eat before going to the temple fair. They say the lady in the kitchen was cursing at Ch'un-mei, from the Fifth Lady's quarters, when Father overheard her and gave her a few kicks. That's why she's started to cry."
"I don't remember his ever asking for cakes before," said Yüeh-niang. "But all she needed to do was to make them up as fast as she could and send him on his way. What need was there for her to curse the maidservant from the other quarters?"
Thereupon, she sent Hsiao-yü to the kitchen to urge Hsüeh-o and the servants' wives to hurry up with the preparation of the soup. Hsi-men Ch'ing finally ate his breakfast, mounted his horse, and set off for the temple, accompanied by one of his pageboys. But no more of this.
Sun Hsüeh-o couldn't get over her resentment at what had happened, so she went into Yüeh-niang's room and started telling her about it. But she didn't realize that Chin-lien had stolen up outside and was standing by the window, eavesdropping.
Chin-lien saw that Hsüeh-o was inside the room and overheard her saying to Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh, "She's got him completely monopolized. Behind your back:
*There's nothing she won't do.*[10]
Mother, you don't know that whore. When you get right down to it, she's more insatiable than any mere adulteress. She can't stand to go even a single night without a man. She's always up to something behind your back.
*Things no one else would do;*
*She can bring herself to do.*[11]
Originally, when she was living in her own home, she poisoned her husband to death. And now that she's here, she's trying her best to bury the rest of us alive. She's turned our husband into an angry fighting cock who glares at us as though he doesn't even see us."
"I don't remember your ever acting this way before," said Yüeh-niang. "If he sent a maidservant from the front compound to ask for cakes, all you needed to do was to make them up as best you could and send him on his way. What need was there for you to start cursing her for no good reason?"
"I'll call her bald or blind if I like!" retorted Hsüeh-o. "Just a little while ago, when that maidservant worked for you, if she refused to do as she was told when I was on duty in the kitchen, I would give her a smack with the back of a knife. And you didn't say anything about it. But now that she's fallen into the hands of that other one, she's started to carry on as though she owns the place."
While they were still talking, Hsiao-yü came in and said, "The Fifth Lady is outside."
A minute later, Chin-lien came into the room and said to Hsüeh-o, "If I really did do in my former husband, you had no business allowing your husband to bring me into the household in the first place. That way I could never have monopolized him or taken your place away from you. As for Ch'un-mei, she wasn't even my own maid to begin with. If you're so angry about it, all you have to do is make her go back to serving the First Lady. That way if you want to quarrel with her, I won't get dragged into it. No one feels good about losing a husband and having to marry another but, right now, there's really nothing difficult about it. Just wait till he gets home and have him give me a writ of divorce. I'll go, and that will be the end of it."
"I don't know what's at the bottom of all this," said Yüeh-niang, "but it would help if the two of you would be a little more sparing of words."
"Just look at her, Mother," protested Hsüeh-o:
*"Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate.*[12]
Nobody can get the better of her. And she's always wagging her tongue in front of our husband, turning him against us, so he scarcely recognizes us any more."
"If you had your way," she continued, turning to Chin-lien, "except for Mother, the rest of us would all be driven away, so you'd be the only one left."
Wu Yüeh-niang just sat there and let the two of them continue to trade insults, without saying a word. It didn't take long for it to heat up even further.
"You may call me a slave," said Hsüeh-o, "but it's you who are the real slave."
They were on the verge of coming to blows when Yüeh-niang decided she had had enough of it and told Hsiao-yü to drag Hsüeh-o back to the kitchen.
P'an Chin-lien, for her part, went straight back to her quarters, where she:

*Took off her fancy attire,*
*Washed away her makeup,*
*Let loose her raven locks, and*
*Left her flowery countenance in disarray.*
She wept until:
*Her two eyes were the colour of peaches and threw herself down on her bed.*

When the sun began to set in the west, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from the temple fair, carrying four ounces of pearls in his sleeve. No sooner did he enter her room and see the state she was in than he asked, "What's the matter?"
The woman started to cry out loud, demanding a writ of divorce from Hsi-men Ch'ing and pouring out, thus and so, the entire story.
"I certainly never loved you just for your money, and now that I've joined my fate to yours, how can you let anyone abuse me so? She said I had done in my husband, a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. What's it to me if I:
*Pick up something that I already have, or*
*Lose something that never belonged to me?*
If I have to do without a maidservant, so be it. What do I want with a maid from someone else's quarters to wait on me, if I have to take all this abuse for it? I've got one shadow too many as it is."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them:
*The spirits of his Three Corpses*[13] *became agitated:*
*The breaths of his Five Viscera*[14] *ascended to Heaven.*[15]
Like a whirlwind he descended upon the kitchen, seized Hsüeh-o by the hair, and proceeded to beat her with a short stick as hard as he could.
Luckily for her, Wu Yüeh-niang intervened, grabbing him by the hand and saying, "Why doesn't everyone take things a little easier? You're just upsetting the master of the house."
"You lousy, splay-legged whore!" exploded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I heard you cursing in the kitchen with my own ears, and you're still trying to drag other people into it. If I don't beat your bottom right off for you, I might as well forget it."
Gentle reader take note: As a direct result of the beating of Sun Hsüeh-o this day, P'an Chin-lien would find that:
*Though her deeds were done in the past,*
*The chickens would come home to roost.*
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Chin-lien, by relying on her husband's favour,*
could count on his support;
But, in so doing, she aroused the deepest enmity
in Sun Hsüeh-o.
It has always been true that gratitude for kindness
and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand or ten thousand years
will never be allowed to gather dust.[16]
On this occasion, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had beaten Hsüeh-o, he returned to the front compound and endeavored to mollify Chin-lien. He brought out from his sleeve the four ounces of pearls that he had bought at the temple fair that day and gave them to her to make into a headband. When the woman saw that her husband had taken action on her behalf and thereby enabled her to vent her spleen, there was no reason for her to be anything but delighted. From this time on:
*Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold;*[17]
and the favour shown her was even greater than it had been before.
One day thereafter, she fulfilled her obligation by giving a little party in the garden to which she invited only Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, so the four of them could have a drink together.
To make a long story short, Hsi-men Ch'ing had formed a club, the membership of which consisted of ten friends, who met together once a month for a drinking party.[18]
The first of them was named Ying Po-chüeh, or Sponger Ying. He was the decadent scion of what had once been a substantial family but had managed to completely squander his patrimony, and now made his living by squiring wealthy young rakes about the licensed quarters and picking up whatever he could along the way. His nickname was Beggar Ying.

The second was named Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh. He had inherited the right to a position as a battalion commander in the Ch'ing-ho Guard but, having lost his parents while still a child, had become:
*A dedicated idler, devoted to his leisure.*[19]
He was an expert performer at kickball and also liked to gamble. Having abandoned his prospects of a career, he was now a confirmed hanger-on.
The third was named Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu. He had been a yin-yang master on the staff of the district yamen but had been removed from his post for cause. He now made his living by hanging around in front of the yamen and acting as a guarantor for loans to the local officials and functionaries. This was how he had become acquainted with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The fourth was named Sun T'ien-hua, whose nickname was Sun Kua-tsui, or Blabbermouth Sun. He was more than fifty years old and specialized in talking his way into the brothels in the licensed quarter without purchasing their wares.[20] He made himself useful to the singing girls by:
*Delivering letters and passing notes,*
or helping them to attract customers, thus depending for his living on the emoluments of romance.
The fifth, who was the younger brother of Assistant Regional Commander Yün, was named Yün Li-shou, or Welsher Yün.
The sixth, who was the nephew of Eunuch Director Hua, was named Hua Tzu-hsü, or Nobody Hua.
The seventh was named Chu Jih-nien, or Sticky Chu.
The eighth was named Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang.
The ninth was named Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai.
Together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, they made ten in all. The other members of the club, out of consideration for Hsi-men Ch'ing's supply of ready cash, insisted on his taking the position of senior member. Every month they met together somewhere for a drinking party, at which they took turns playing host.
One day it was the turn of Hua Tzu-hsü to convene the club at his home that was right next door to that of Hsi-men Ch'ing. As befitted the household of a eunuch, everything was done on a lavish scale, with:
*Large platters and large bowls.*
The others had already arrived but Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy that day, and by midafternoon had still failed to show up, though they were careful to keep a place for him.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing finally arrived, he was immaculately dressed and accompanied by four pageboys. The whole company got up from their seats to welcome him. When they had finished with the social amenities, the host sat down in the appropriate place and Hsi-men Ch'ing took the seat of honour. A performer with a painted face and two other singing girls were there to entertain them, playing a *p'i-p'a*, a psaltery, and a mandola, and singing in front of the gathering. Truly, words are inadequate to describe:
*The graceful beauty of the denizens of the Pear Garden,*[21]
*Whose beauty and talent both approached perfection.*
Behold:

*Their silk garments are like drifts of snow;*
*Their jeweled chignons are like storeyed clouds.*
*They have cherry mouths, apricotlike faces,*
*and peach-coloured cheeks;*
*They possess willow waists, orchidaceous hearts,*
*and epidendronlike natures.*
*The sound of their singing is melodious;*
*Their voices are like the warbling of orioles*
*as they sport upon the branch.*
*The style of their dancing is fastidious;*
*Their postures resemble the pacing of phoenixes*
*as they move among the flowers.*
*Their tunes adhere to classic standards;*
*Their music has the air of spontaneity.*
*Their dancing waylays the bright moon*
*into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in;*
*Their singing diverts the moving clouds*
*into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u.*
*High or low, allegro or andante,*
*they adhere to the appropriate modes;*
*Spitting out jade and expectorating pearls.*
*Light or heavy, scherzando or legato,*
*they follow the prescribed melodies;*
*Like plangent metal or tinkling jade.*
*The bridges on the psaltery are ranged like wild geese;*
*making each note distinct.*
*The wood of the clappers is inlaid with red ivory;*
*so every beat sounds new.*[22]

After a little while, when:
*Three rounds of wine had been consumed; and*
*Two suites of songs had been performed,*
the three singing girls laid aside their instruments, came forward, and:
*Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze;*
*Sent the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,*
As they kowtowed to the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for his pageboy, Tai-an, and instructed him to take three sealed gift packets out of his letter case. There were two mace for each of them. After they had kowtowed once again to express their gratitude, they withdrew.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked his host, Hua Tzu-hsü, "What's the name of this girl? She can really sing!"
Before his host could reply, Ying Po-chüeh interjected, "You're certainly becoming rather forgetful not to recognize her, sir. The one who was playing the psaltery is Brother Hua the Second's sweetheart, Wu Yin-erh, or Silver, from the back alley in the licensed quarter. The one who was playing the mandola is Greenhorn Chu's daughter, Chu Ai-ai, or Love. And this one who was playing the *p'i-p'a* is the daughter of Auntie Li the Third, from Second Street. She's the younger sister of Li Kuei-ch'ing and her informal name is Kuei-chieh, or Cassia. Since her paternal aunt is a member of your household, how can you pretend not to know her?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "It's been six years since I saw her last, and she's grown up to be a woman already."
A little later, when they had run out of wine, the girls came out to replenish their drinks, and Kuei-chieh performed her task most ingratiatingly, engaging them in flirtatious conversation as she did so.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her, "What are Auntie Three and your sister, Kuei-ch'ing, doing at home these days? Why haven't they paid me a visit recently, or come to see your aunt?"
"My mother's been in bad shape since last year," said Kuei-chieh. One of her legs is partially paralyzed to this day, so she can't even walk without someone to lean on. My elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, has been engaged by a merchant from the Huai region for the last six months. He's always taking her off to stay with him in his inn, and he won't let her come home for two or three days at a time. There's hardly anyone to be relied on at home these days. My mother is completely dependent on me to come out and sing everyday, helping to entertain the few gentlemen that we're acquainted with. It's a hard life. We simply haven't had the time to pay a visit at your house, or look in on my aunt. How is it, Father, that you haven't been inside the quarter for such a long time? And why haven't you let my aunt come home to visit with my mother?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that her manner was congenial and her conversation clever and sprightly, he felt himself rather attracted to her.
"If I arranged with two of my friends to escort you back to your place today," he asked, "how would that be with you?"
"Don't joke with me, Father," said Kuei-chieh. "How could:
*Such distinguished feet tread on such humble ground?*"[23]
"I'm not joking," said Hsi-men Ch'ing; and he actually reached into his sleeve, pulled out his handkerchief, along with a toothpick and a box of breath-sweetening lozenges, and gave them to Kuei-chieh as a pledge.
"When do you plan to leave?" asked Kuei-chieh. "I ought to send the servant back home right away, to let them know, so they'll be able to make some preparations."
"As soon as the party breaks up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we can set out together."
Not long thereafter, when they had finished passing around the wine, it was lamplighting time and the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him, and, without even bothering to go home, they set out, on horse and mule back, to accompany Kuei-chieh into the licensed quarter, to the Li family establishment. Truly:

*Into the brocaded nest,*
*It is not nearly as good to venture*
*as it is to stay away;*
*Into the red floss noose,*
*It is easy enough to stick your head*
*but hard to extricate it.*[24]

There is a song to the tune "The Water Nymphs" that testifies to this:

*A human pitfall, secretly constructed,*
like an underground dugout;
A circean cave, as artfully designed
as a penitentiary;
A charnel house, openly laid out
like a butcher shop;
Its sole purpose is to love you to death
while devouring you alive.
On its signboard you will find written
in large characters:
"For the cost of his entertainment
the patron will receive no discount;
For the expenses incurred
the madam alone will accept payment;
For the price of their favours
the girls will not extend credit."[25]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and the others had escorted Li Kuei-chieh's sedan chair to the door of her establishment, Li Kuei-ch'ing came out to meet them and ushered them into the main room. After they had finished with the appropriate amenities, they invited her old mother to come out so they could pay their respects.
Before long, the old procuress made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, for she suffered from partial paralysis on one side of her body.
When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing she saluted him with the words, "My Heavens! It's my distinguished kinsman. What wind has blown you this way?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "I've been so busy recently I haven't been able to stop by. I hope you won't take it amiss."
"And who may these two gentlemen be?" asked the procuress.
"They're two good friends of mine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta. We had a meeting of our club at the Hua residence today and ran into Kuei-chieh there, so we decided to see her home together. Bring on the wine. We'd be happy to have three cups with you."
The procuress asked her three guests to be seated at the upper end of the room while she busied herself with seeing that tea was served, a dining table wiped off, and wine and delicacies prepared. In a little while a servant came in with the table, the lamps and candles were lit, and an array of wine and foodstuffs appeared.
Kuei-chieh returned to her room and changed her clothes before coming back out to help entertain them. It was truly:

*A nest of breezes and moonlight;*
*A lair of orioles and flowers.*
There was nothing for it for the two sisters but to:
*Fill their golden goblets to the brim; and*
*Tune their jade mandolas to one melody,*

as they sang and served the wine. A poem testifies to this:

*Inside glass goblets,*
The amber fluid is rich.
From the small press the wine drips
in pearls of red.
Frying dragons and roasting phoenixes
weep jade fat.
Silk screens and embroidered curtains

contain the perfumed air.
Blow dragon flutes!
Beat alligator drums!
Let white teeth sing!
Slender waists dance!
All the more, since verdant spring
must not be spent in vain,
And silver lamps reflect the voices
of alluring damsels.
No wine now wets the earth
of Liu Ling's[26] tomb.[27]

On this occasion, Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh sang a suite of songs together, while at the table the guests were having such a good time that:

*Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.*[28]

Turning to Kuei-ch'ing, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Since the two of you are both here today, and I've heard for a long time what an accomplished performer of southern melodies Kuei-chieh has become, why not ask her to sing us a song, as a means of encouraging our two guests to have another cup of wine? What do you think?"

"We really oughtn't to put her to the trouble," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but are prepared to wash our ears in hopes of hearing a superb performance."

Kuei-chieh simply sat there with a smile on her face for some time, without making a move.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gotten the idea into his head that he might like to deflower Kuei-chieh, and that was why he had first expressed a desire to hear her sing a solo. This fact did not escape the practiced eyes of the denizens of the quarter, who:

*Knew a ghost when they saw one,*

and had already guessed 80 or 90 percent of what was afoot.

Li Kuei-ch'ing, who was sitting by her side, was the first to speak, saying, "I'm afraid our Kuei-chieh has been spoiled ever since she was a child. She's always been rather shy, by nature, and doesn't like to sing for people on a merely casual basis."

At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for his pageboy, Tai-an, drew a five-tael ingot of silver out of his letter case, and placed it on the table, saying, "This doesn't amount to anything but may help to defray the cost of Kuei-chieh's makeup for the time being. On another day I'll send over a few sets of brocade clothing for her."

Kuei-chieh hastily rose to her feet and expressed her thanks, after which a maidservant was directed to put the money away, on the one hand, while on the other, a small table was placed out for her, and Kuei-chieh was invited to leave her place at the main table and sing for them.

Thereupon, Kuei-chieh:

*Neither hurriedly nor hastily;*
*Lightly raising her silken sleeves,*
*Setting her beige skirt in motion,*

and with a pink, tasseled handkerchief, decorated with a motif of:

*Fallen blossoms on flowing water,*

dangling from the mouth of her sleeve, sang a song to the tune "Stopping the Clouds in Flight:"

*Though her demeanor is nonchalant,*
She has outdone every rival in the quarter
to take top billing.
Her every move is escorted by a fragrant breeze,
And never fails to elicit respect.
Ch'a!
She is a piece of jade sullied in the muck;
Hardly run of the mill.
With a single, unaccompanied song,
She takes her audience by storm.
Just like the epiphany
in King Hsiang's dream.[29]
Just like the epiphany in King Hsiang's dream.[30]

By the time she had finished her song, Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted he scarcely knew what to do with himself. He ordered Tai-an to take the horse home with him, and that evening he spent the night in Li Kuei-ch'ing's room. Merely because Hsi-men Ch'ing felt an inclination to deflower this girl, and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were on the spot to aid and abet him in this enterprise, he took the bait.

The next day he sent a pageboy to his house to fetch fifty taels of silver and also to a silk goods store to buy four sets of clothing, explaining that he planned to deflower Li Kuei-chieh. When Li Chiao-erh heard that it was her own niece, from her old establishment, that he was planning to deflower, how could she have been anything but delighted? She promptly produced a silver ingot of fifty taels weight and gave it to Tai-an to deliver to the licensed quarter.

A set of jewellery was made up, clothing was tailored, tables of food were ordered, and with:

*Wind and string instruments, song and dance;*
*Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,*

there were three days of nuptial festivities. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta also persuaded Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, and Cadger Ch'ang to come up with five candareens each, in the way of a gift, when they came to offer their congratulations. Every last thing, including the bedding, was paid for by Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Day after day they regaled themselves in the licensed quarter with:

*Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.*
*Amid dancers' skirts and singers' clappers he is forever seeking novelty;*
But when all the yellow gold is spent nothing but his body remains.
A word of advice to wealthy young men:
"Don't spend it all too fast; the practice of economy is like good medicine, for it can cure poverty."

Pan Jinlian, now settled in her new home and confident of Ximen's favour, grew more and more arrogant, and made so much trouble that the whole place was in a turmoil. She was suspicious too, and spent much time listening at doors and peeping through windows.

Chunmei was not a model of patience. One day she had been doing some trifling thing for her mistress, and Jinlian found fault with her about it. She could not vent her bad temper upon her own mistress, so she went to the kitchen and there began to thump the table and knock the chairs about. Sun Xue'e did not appreciate such behavior, so she said:

"You strange creature, if you are so anxious to find a husband, kindly try some other place. Why come here to display your nasty temper?"

Chunmei was already very angry, and this made her even more furious. "Who is the wretch who accuses me of wanting a man?" she cried.

It was quite clear that she was in a very bad temper, and Xue'e pretended not to hear her. Chunmei, however, continued in the same strain, and finally went to the front court where, with a few additions of her own, she related the story to Jinlian, to annoy her. "She says you asked his Lordship to have me so that we could try to keep him all to ourselves."

Jinlian was herself in the worst of moods. She had been obliged to get up very early to help Yueniang to dress for a funeral. She was tired, and decided to lie down for a while. When she awoke, she went to the arbour and there met Meng Yulou, who looked as charming as ever.

"Why are you looking so miserable, Sister?" Yulou said.

"Don't ask me," Jinlian said, "I had to get up very early, and I am tired. Where have you been?"

"I have just come from the kitchen."

"And what did you hear there?"

"I didn't hear anything."

Jinlian hated Xue'e but she said nothing to Yulou. They sewed for a while in the arbour. Chunmei brought them tea and, after it, they wearied of their work and set out a chess table. Then Qintong came and told them that Ximen Qing had returned. Before they had time to clear their game away, he came through the garden gate.

The two women were wearing white silk hairnets, and their hair peeped out beneath. They had black jeweled earrings, and, in their white silk dresses, red bodices, embroidered skirts, and little red shoes, so tiny, arched, and tapering, they looked like figures carved in jade. Ximen Qing smiled at them.

"You are like a pair of singing girls," he said. "You must be worth a few hundred taels of silver."

"We are not singing girls," Jinlian said, "but if you want one you will find one in the back court."

Yulou was going to leave them but Ximen Qing pulled her back. "Where are you going?" he said. "The moment I come in, you try to run away. Tell me, what do you do when I'm not here?"

"We were both feeling very miserable," Jinlian said, "so we came here to have a game. We don't play tricks behind your back but we didn't expect you so early." She took his cloak. "The funeral was soon over," she said.

"There were many court officials at the temple, and it was so hot I couldn't stand it any longer. That is why I am home so early."

Yulou asked if Yueniang had come back, and Ximen said that he had come away before her, and had sent two boys to meet her. "I see you are playing chess," he said, sitting down. "What is the stake?"

"We are playing for love," Jinlian said. "Why should we have a stake?"

"I will play you both in turn," said Ximen, "and the loser shall spend a tael of silver, and treat us."

"We have no money," Jinlian said.

"Well, if you have no money, take one of your hairpins and pawn it with me. That will do."

The chessmen were set up, and Ximen Qing played against Jinlian. She was beaten but, as soon as Ximen began to count the pieces, she jumbled them all together and ran away to a rock garden where there were many flowers, and pretended to be gathering them.

"Here, little oily mouth," Ximen Qing cried, and ran after her, "you lose, and then you run away." Jinlian laughed at him.

"You wonderful creature," she cried, "it was Yulou you beat, go and bother her instead of coming and plaguing me."

She had some flowers in her hand and, pulling them to pieces, she threw them at him. Ximen Qing went up to her and, taking her in his arms, set her down upon the rock garden, and gave her some sweets from his own mouth. They were amusing themselves in this way when Yulou came up. She told them that Yueniang had returned, and asked Jinlian to go with her to the back court that they might greet her. Jinlian left Ximen Qing, and, as she went, she called out, "Young man, I shall have something to tell you when I come back." She and Yulou then went to make their reverence before the mistress of the house.

"What are you laughing about?" Yueniang said.

"The Fifth Lady has been having a game of chess with Father," Yulou said. "She lost a tael of silver to him. Tomorrow, she is going to give a party. Of course, you must come."

Yueniang smiled. Jinlian stayed only a few moments, and then went back to the front court to Ximen Qing. She told Chunmei to burn incense in her room and to prepare the bath, that they might enjoy the pleasures of fishes in the water that evening.

Yueniang was the first wife but she was always ill, and could not take her proper place in the management of all the household affairs. Engagements with friends and relatives and all the financial business of the household were attended to by Li Jiao'er. Xue'e acted as housekeeper and attended to the preparation of meals in the kitchen for the whole family. Wherever Ximen Qing happened to be spending the night, if he wished for anything, Xue'e would get it ready, and the maid of the lady with whom he was staying would go to the kitchen for it.

That night Ximen Qing slept in Jinlian's room. They drank wine, took a bath, and went to bed. The next morning it soon became apparent that trouble was brewing. Ximen Qing had promised Jinlian that he would go to the temple and buy a jeweled ornament for her hair. He got up very early and asked for some lotus cakes and soup. He told Chunmei to go to the kitchen for them but Chunmei did not move.

"Just as well not tell her to go," Jinlian said. "Someone has said that I allow her liberties so that she and I may keep you all for ourselves. They called us all the nasty names they could think of. It will be much better not to send her."

"Who said such a thing? Tell me," Ximen Qing said.

"I shall not tell you," Jinlian said. "The basins and jars in this house have a way of hearing things. Just don't send her, that's all. Tell Qiuju to go."

Ximen Qing told Qiuju to go to the kitchen and tell Xue'e what he wanted. A very long time passed. Jinlian set the table but there was no sign of food, and Ximen Qing grew more and more angry. Jinlian told Chunmei to go and find her fellow maid. "Go and see what that slave is doing. She doesn't seem to be coming; she must have taken root there." Chunmei went angrily to the kitchen and found Qiuju still waiting for the food.

"You thievish slave," she cried, "mother is going to take your trousers down. Why have you been all this time? Father is all ready to go to the temple, and he wants his cakes. He is in a terrible temper, and has sent me to fetch you."

Xue'e was greatly annoyed. "You marvelous little whore," she cried, "you behave like a Mohammedan Ma keeping a feast day. You think that if you want anything, you have only to run over here for it. I assure you the pans are made of iron, and things take time to cook. I made some gruel, and he won't eat it. Now he must have something new, cakes and soups and so on. I should like to know who is the worm at work in his belly."

This was too much for Chunmei. "Don't you begin any of your indecencies," she cried. "If Father hadn't sent me, I shouldn't be here. Are you going to get it ready or are you not? We will go and see what the master of the house has to say about it." She took Qiuju by the ear, and set off with her to the front court.

"Mistress and slave are far too insolent," Xue'e shouted after her, "but my time will come."

"Time or no time," Chunmei said, "we shall see what happens." She rushed off in a terrible temper.

Jinlian saw her pulling Qiuju along, and noticed that her face was very pale. She asked what was the matter.

"Ask her," Chunmei said. "When I got to the kitchen, she was acting the lady in there, waiting while they slowly stirred the flour. I just said a single sentence: 'Father is waiting, and Mother wants to know why you have not returned.' The one who lives in that little place cursed me in every way she could think of, as if I were a slave. She said Father is like some Mohammedan Ma, who thinks everyone's as devout as he is. She supposed Father had to ask permission from somebody or other before he could have anything to eat. She said they had made gruel for him, and then he has to have soup and cakes. She cursed everybody in the kitchen and would not do a thing."

"I told you so," Jinlian cried. "I told you not to make her go there, or somebody would make trouble with her, and say that we are always monopolizing you, and overwhelm us with insults."

Ximen Qing flew into a rage. He went to the kitchen and, without waiting to hear any explanation, kicked Xue'e several times.

"You crooked, thievish bone," he cried, "I told that maid to come here and ask for some cakes. What right had you to curse her? You called her a slave; but if you want to see a slave you'd better piddle and look at your own image in the pool you make."

Xue'e had to suffer Ximen's ill-usage. She was very angry but dared not offer any excuses. When he had left the kitchen, she said to the Beanpole, Laizhao's wife:

"You see what bad luck I'm having today. You heard all that went on this morning. I didn't say anything very terrible but in she came like a roaring demon and created all that disturbance. Then she dragged off the other maid, and went and told his Lordship, making a mountain out of a molehill, and he came here and made all this trouble. There's no rhyme or reason in it. But I will keep my eyes open and be on the watch for them. The mistress and the slave are both of them haughty but one of these days they will take a false step."

Unfortunately for Xue'e, Ximen Qing heard everything she said. He went back, and struck her several blows with his fist. "You thievish slave, you strumpet," he cried, "you can't say now that you didn't insult her, for I have just heard you saying things about her." He continued to chastise the poor woman, causing her considerable pain. Then he went back to the front court. Xue'e shed many tears and sobbed loudly. Yueniang had just risen and was dressing herself. She said to Xiaoyu, "What is all that noise in the kitchen?"

"Father is going to the temple and he wished for some cakes before he left," Xiaoyu said, "but the Kitchen Lady was rude to Chunmei. Father heard about it. He kicked the Kitchen Lady several times and made her cry."

"I never heard of such a thing," Yueniang cried. "If he wants anything to eat, it is her business to make it for him as soon as she can, and be done with it. There is no reason for her to be rude to the maid."
She told Xiaoyu to go to the kitchen, stir up Xue'e and the maids, and order them to make some soup at once. They did so, and sent it to Ximen Qing. Then he set off to the temple.
Xue'e could not settle down. She went to Yueniang and told her all that had happened. While she was talking, Jinlian happened to come that way and stood outside the window to listen. She heard Xue'e say: "Why should she try to get our husband all for herself and make him do everything she wishes? It seems to me, Mother, you don't realize that this strumpet is more lustful than a woman who has half a dozen husbands. She can't bear to sleep alone even for a single night. Nobody else would ever have dreamed of making such a plot. She poisoned her husband, and now she wants to bury us alive. She has made our husband like a black-eyed chicken. He looks at us but never gives us a thought."
"In my opinion, it is you who are in the wrong," Yueniang said. "He told the maid to come to you for some cakes, and, if you had given them to her, there would have been no trouble. There was no need for you to insult her."
"Well, I only brought more trouble upon myself," Xue'e said. "There was a time when that maid served in your part of the house. She was disobedient even in those days, and once I had to use the back of a knife upon her. You never said anything then, Mother. Why should she have become so high and mighty now that she belongs to the Fifth Lady?"
Then Xiaoyu came in and said, "The Fifth Lady is here," and a moment later Jinlian entered the room.
"Let us suppose I did murder my husband," she said, looking straight at Xue'e. "Why didn't you do something to prevent your husband from marrying me? There would have been no question then of my getting him all for myself and your nest being empty. Chunmei is not my maid. If you have anything against her, kindly tell the Great Lady, and let her return to her service. Then there will be no further trouble between you, and I shall be well out of the matter. As for the present state of affairs, there need be no difficulty about that. When he comes back, let him give me papers of divorce, and I will go away. Then, perhaps, you'll be satisfied."
"These squabbles are beyond me," Yueniang said, "you'd better both be quiet."
"Mother," Xue'e cried, "you must realize that her mouth is as the Huai River. There is not a person living who could get on with her. It is perfectly clear that she deceives our husband but, even if she winks, she denies it the next moment. If you had your way," she added, turning to Jinlian, "you would have us all kicked out, except, perhaps, our mistress, so that you could be in sole possession."
Yueniang sat and said nothing, letting them bandy insults as they wished. Soon they began to curse each other. "You called me a slave," Xue'e cried, "but you are the genuine article and no doubt about it." At this, there was nearly a fight but Yueniang would not allow things to go so far, and told Xiaoyu to take Xue'e to her room. Jinlian went to her own apartments, took off her beautiful dress, washed the powder from her cheeks, and pulled her dark hair about till she was hardly fit to be seen. She cried till her eyes had the colour of peaches, and then lay down on the bed.
The sun was going down in the west when Ximen Qing came back from the temple with four taels of pearls. He went to Jinlian's room and asked what was the matter but she sobbed louder than ever and demanded papers of divorce.
"From the very beginning," she cried, "I have cared nothing about your wealth. You were all I wanted. And in return you let everybody trample on me. They said I murdered my husband. If I had had no maid, there would have been no trouble. Why did you give me somebody else's maid, and then allow other people to insult her?"
Ximen Qing flew into a terrible rage. He rushed like a whirlwind to the back of the house, caught Xue'e by the hair, and thrashed her as hard as he could with a short stick until, fortunately, Yueniang came and stopped him.
"You should behave yourselves, all of you," she said. "Why do you make your master so angry?"
"You thievish, crooked bone," Ximen cried to Xue'e, "I heard you in the kitchen cursing them, yet you still try to blame other people. I don't care if I break every bone in your body."
If Jinlian had not carefully plotted the whole scheme beforehand, Ximen Qing would never have struck Xue'e that day. It was all her doing.
When he had done with Xue'e, Ximen Qing went back to Jinlian's room and gave her the pearls he had brought from the temple. Now that her husband had taken her side and vented her spite for her, there was no reason why she should remain upset, so for one loving overture on his part she repaid him tenfold. Their delight in each other grew unceasingly.
One day, it was Hua Zixu's turn to give a party in his house, next door to Ximen Qing's. There was a great feast, and all the brothers were present. Ximen Qing had another engagement, and did not arrive until the afternoon. They would not take their wine without him, and waited. When at last he came, they made reverences to one another and took their seats, with Ximen in the place of honour. Two singing girls played the lute, the cithern, and the flute.
Soon the wine had been passed three times, and the musicians had played twice. The singing girls put down their instruments, and came towards the guests. They had all the delicacy of a branch of flowers. When they had kowtowed, Ximen Qing told his servant to take two envelopes from his purse, each of which contained a small sum, and give it to them. They thanked him, and went back to their places. Then Ximen Qing said to his host, "These girls sing extraordinarily well. Who are they?" Hua said nothing but Ying Bojue replied:
"My Lord, you have a very poor memory. Don't you remember them? The one who plays the cithern is Brother Hua's sweetheart, young Wu Yin'er. She lives in one of the back streets in the bawdy district. The one who plays the lute is the girl I told you about some time ago. Her name is Li Guijie, and she is the younger sister of Li Guiqing. One of your ladies is her aunt. It's no use pretending you don't know her."
Ximen Qing smiled. "Oh, that's who she is! I haven't seen her for about six years. I never thought of her as being grown up."
A little later the girls came to pour wine for them. Guijie pressed Ximen to drink a great deal, and murmured loving words in his ear.
"What are your mother and sister doing now?" Ximen said. "Why do they never come to see your aunt?"
"Since last year," Guijie said, "my mother has not been at all well. Even now she can hardly get about, and she has to have someone to lean upon if she wishes to walk. My sister Guiqing has taken up with a merchant from Anhui, and for some months she has been staying at the inn with him. He will not allow her to come home even for a few days, so there is no one at home but me. I have to support the household by going out day after day to sing at parties, and I'm very tired of it all. We are always thinking about coming to see Aunt but really we never get an opportunity. Why have you not been to see us for so long, Father? It would be kind of you to send my aunt to see her sister one of these days."
Ximen Qing thought the girl very pleasant, and she talked intelligently. He soon found himself falling in love with her. "I think I shall invite one or two friends to help me take you home tonight," he said. "What do you say?"
"Don't make fun of me, Father," the girl said. "How can such noble feet as yours tread our unworthy ground?"
"I am not making fun of you," Ximen said. He took a handkerchief, a toothpick, arid a box of tea leaves from his sleeve, and gave them to her.
"When will you come?" Guijie asked. "I must tell the servant to go home, and give them a chance to get ready."
"We shall start as soon as the party is over."
Soon the wine was finished and it grew dark. Ximen Qing invited Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, and, without going home first, they went off together to Guijie's house in the bawdy district.

A dark, deep pit is this for man's ensnarement
Built like a prison pen, a cavern for the enticement of souls
Like a butcher's yard, with corpses piled and laid in order.
Here love brings death, and only money lives.

The sign is written in great characters:

"Here, golden brothers, you'd purchase love, pray don't offer silk for hairdressers. Before she yields her blossoms to you, Madam must've cash. In this house, sisters are to be had only for ready money."

Ximen Qing followed Guijie's sedan chair to her door. Guiqing opened it, and took them into the hall, and, after greeting them with due politeness, went to ask her mother to come and receive them. Soon the old procuress came, supporting herself on a stick, for she was almost paralyzed. As soon as she saw Ximen Qing, she cried, "Heavens, Sir, what wind has blown you here?"
Ximen Qing smiled. "Please forgive me but I have been so busy, I couldn't come."
The old woman turned to Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. "Why haven't you two been here?"
"I have been busy too," Bojue said. "We have been to a party at Hua's house today, and we met Guijie there. Master Ximen and we have brought her home. But give us some wine as quickly as you like, and let us drink a cup or two and have some fun."
The old woman made the three sit down in the place of honour, and offered them tea. Meanwhile the table was laid, and wine and refreshments set out. Candles and lamps were lighted, and a plentiful repast was set before them. Guijie changed her clothes and came to sit beside them. The two sisters, their jade wrists keeping time together, filled the golden cups. They passed the wine and sang songs.
"I have been told," Ximen said to Guiqing, "that your sister can sing songs of the South. Here are these two gentlemen. Won't you ask her to sing a song in their honour?"
"Oh, I really could not trouble her," Bojue said. "I am only basking in your reflected glory, Sir but I shall of course clean my ears the more respectfully to hear the exquisite melody."
Guijie sat and smiled but did not get up. Ximen Qing really wished to make a woman of her, and that was why he asked her to sing. Her old mother was experienced in such matters and saw what was in the wind.
"My sister," Guiqing said, "has always been very independent. She won't let anybody hear her sing unless she thinks fit."
Ximen Qing told Daian to take five taels of silver from his purse, and set it on the table. "This is a mere trifle," he said, "but it may suffice to buy you some powder and rouge. I will send you some pretty clothes one of these days."
Guijie jumped up and thanked him, and, telling the maid to take the present away, she prepared to sing. Now, though she was very young, she was much more seductive and clever than many another. There was no flurry or haste about her. She gently touched her silken sleeves, and swung her dainty skirts. A handkerchief, tasseled and embroidered with a design of flowers and water, hung from her sleeve.
When she had ended her song, Ximen Qing was delighted beyond all measure. He told Daian to take the horse home, and spent the night with Guijie. He had been ready enough to make a woman of this girl, and, when Ying Bojue and Xie Xida urged him to do so, he yielded to their suggestions without raising any difficulties.
The next day he sent a boy home for fifty taels of silver and four sets of clothes. These were to be the present customary on such occasions. When Li Jiao'er heard the news, she was delighted, for Guijie was her niece. She gave Daian a piece of silver, and he brought the clothes to the bawdy house. There a banquet was prepared, and there was singing, dancing, and wine for three days. They were all as merry as could be. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida brought along Sun Guazui, Zhu Shinian, and Chang Zhijie, and they all offered a few coins in token of congratulation. Ximen Qing provided the silken bedclothes, and everyday there was wine and food without stint. They enjoyed themselves immensely.

## 033
## P'an Chin-lien Suffers Ignominy for Adultery with a Servant & Narrowly Escapes Disaster; Stargazer Liu Purveys Black Magic in Pursuit of Gain

How laughable is the parvenu Hsi-men Ch'ing;
Whoever possesses money is welcomed as a patron.
His whole household is in a state of disorder;
Who cares about standards of decency or propriety?
His days are spent consorting with boon companions;
His nights devoted to sleeping with a painted woman.
Though this may not be a long-lived relationship;
It still counts as "a fling in the spring breeze."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so infatuated by Li Kuei-chieh's beauty that he lingered in the licensed quarter for nearly half a month, without going home. Wu Yüeh-niang sent a servant with his horse to bring him home on numerous occasions but the proprietors of the Li family establishment even hid his clothes and hat, so reluctant were they to let him leave the premises. As a result, the women in his household were all left at loose ends.
This might have been tolerated by the rest of them but as for P'an Chin-lien:

She was still in the springtime of her youth, not thirty years old;
The flames of her desire could not be banked but flared up ten feet high.

Modelled in plaster, carved of jade;
Displaying white teeth and red lips,

Everyday, without fail, she and Meng Yü-lou would make their way to the front gate, looking as though they were:

and lean against the doorjamb as they gazed out into the street, often remaining there until dusk.
In the evening when Chin-lien returned to her room she found that:
On her glossy pillow, amid deserted bed curtains,
There was no companion on the Phoenix Terrace.[3]
Unable to sleep, she would wander into the garden where she:
Gently paced the flower-strewn moss, and
Watched the moon bobbing beneath the water;
fearful lest Hsi-men Ch'ing's:
Heart should prove as difficult to capture.
She objected to the lovemaking of the tortoiseshell cats,
For the tumult it engendered in her fragrant heart.
At the time when Meng Yü-lou had entered the household, she had brought with her a pageboy named Ch'in-t'ung, who was about fifteen years old and had just begun to wear his hair in adult style. He was:
Bright-eyed and clean-cut,
as well as being:
Artful and accomplished.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had entrusted the keys of the garden to him and made him responsible for keeping it properly swept. At night he slept in a small side chamber just outside the garden gate.
During the day, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou often met in the pavilion in the garden and did needlework together, or played board games with each other. This pageboy was adept at performing little favours and, when he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived home, was in the habit of coming to let the women know before telling anybody else. For this reason Chin-lien was fond of him and often invited him into her room and treated him to a drink of wine. As a result, the two of them:
Morning after morning and evening after evening;
Exchanged looks with eyes and eyebrows,[4]
until they both began to get ideas.
It happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month was approaching. When Wu Yüeh-niang realized that he was still in the licensed quarter, so enamored of the mist and flowers that he had no thought of return, she sent the pageboy, Tai-an, to take his horse to the Li establishment and try to bring him back home.
P'an Chin-lien secretly addressed a note to him and gave it to Tai-an, with the injunction, "Slip this to your father inconspicuously, and tell him, 'The Fifth Lady hopes you'll come home as soon as possible.' "
Tai-an did not dare to be remiss but mounted the horse and proceeded straight to the Li family establishment in the licensed quarter. What should he see when he got there but Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, Blabbermouth Sun, and Cadger Ch'ang, the whole bunch of them in fact, keeping Hsi-men Ch'ing company as he embraced his painted lady:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade;
Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Tai-an had arrived, he asked, "What have you come for? Is everything all right at home?"
"Everything's all right at home," replied Tai-an.
"Tell Uncle Fu the Second to try to collect those unpaid bills that are still outstanding in the shop up front," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll look over the accounts when I get home."
"The last few days Uncle Fu the Second has collected quite a few of them," said Tai-an. "He'll present the accounts when you get home."
"Did you bring that outfit for your Aunt Kuei-chieh?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"I've got it right here," replied Tai-an.
He then reached into his felt bag, drew out a red blouse with a blue skirt to match, and handed them to Kuei-chieh. Kuei-chieh and Kuei-ch'ing both bowed to express their thanks, and the present was put away. After which, they made haste to give orders that Tai-an should be properly entertained with food and wine in the servants' quarters.
As soon as the pageboy had finished his food and wine he came back into the main room to await his instructions, and he took advantage of the occasion to approach Hsi-men Ch'ing and:
Whisper into his ear in a low voice,[5]
"The Fifth Lady at home asked me to deliver this note. She hopes you'll come home as soon as possible."
Just as Hsi-men Ch'ing was reaching out his hand to take it, Li Kuei-chieh caught sight of the transaction and, assuming it to be a love letter from some prostitute in the front sector of the quarter, snatched it out of his hands and tore it open to see for herself. It turned out to be a sheet of fancy note paper with a diapered border, on which there were a few lines of handwriting. Kuei-chieh handed it to Sticky Chu and asked him to read it out loud to her.
Sticky Chu saw that the missive was in the form of a pair of songs to the tune "The Wind Scatters the Plum Blossoms" and proceeded to declaim them to the company, as follows:
Yearning for him at twilight,
Longing for him by day;
I've tired myself out waiting,
but my lover doesn't come.
Solely on his account, only for his sake,
I've worn myself to a frazzle.
Alas, beneath my brocade coverlet,
I sleep alone.[6]
The lamp is guttering out,
Everyone else is asleep;
All that remains, peeping through my window,
is the bright moon.
Sleeping alone, even if my heart
were hard as iron;
How could it endure the desolation
of this night?[7]
The note was signed:
Respectfully,
Your favourite, P'an the Sixth
When Kuei-chieh heard the contents of this missive, she left the table, went back to her room, threw herself down on the bed, and lay there with her face to the wall.
To resume our story, as soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that Kuei-chieh was upset, he took the note and tore it to shreds and then, in front of everybody, kicked Tai-an twice with his booted foot. He also sent someone twice to ask Kuei-chieh to return but she did not come back. Hsi-men Ch'ing was so flummoxed by this that he made his way back to her room himself and carried her out to rejoin the party.
Upon his return he said to Tai-an, "I order you to take the horse and go home. If any whore at my place sends you here again, no matter who it is, when I get back I'll beat her to a stinking pulp!"
Tai-an returned home in tears but we will say no more of that.
"Kuei-chieh," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there's no need to be so upset. This note is not from anyone else, it's only from the fifth concubine back at my place, asking me to go home because there's something she needs to take up with me. That's all there is to it."
Sticky Chu continued the joke, saying, "Kuei-chieh, don't you believe him. He's only trying to fool you. This P'an the Sixth is really a prostitute from another part of the quarter that he's recently taken up with. She's a real looker. You shouldn't let him off the hook."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and pretended to hit him, saying, "You goddamned louse! All you ever do is plague people to death. She's giving me enough trouble as it is without you and your nonsense on top of everything else."
"It's you who are in the wrong, brother-in-law," said Li Kuei-ch'ing. "As long as you have people at home to keep you in line, what need is there for you to deflower a painted woman in the first place? You might as well stick to the ones you've already got, period. How long have the two of you been together, after all, that you should already be prepared to abandon her?"
"You've got a point there," interjected Sponger Ying. "Sir," he continued, turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you'll only take my advice, you won't have to go home, on the one hand, and Kuei-chieh won't have to be upset, on the other. From this day on, let's agree that if anyone gets into such a spat again, each of the culprits will have to forfeit two taels of silver and buy meat and wine to treat the rest of us."
And sure enough, the four or five boon companions at the table:
The talkers talking,
The jokers joking;
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits,
Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine,
finally succeeded in mollifying Kuei-chieh. Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her and sat her on his lap with an ingratiating smile, while the two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them as they drank.
Before long, seven cups of tea were brought in on a vermilion tray of bright red lacquer. The teacups were the colour of snowy linen, the teaspoons were in the shape of apricot leaves, and the tea itself that was flavoured with marinated bamboo shoots, sesame seeds, and osmanthus, was of a bewitching fragrance.
When a cup had been placed in front of each of them, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I know a song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the virtues of tea:
The tender leaves,
Of this high-grade tea,
Are nourished by the spring breeze.
Though, if neglected, they will wither away;
The slightest infusion brings out their true colours.
Incomparable, extraordinary;
Hard to depict or to describe;
Often savored in the mouth;
When drunk, you long for them;
When sober, you adore them;
But a single armful will cost you a bundle.[8]
Tagalong Hsieh laughed, saying, "If the Honourable Gentleman is:
Spending his money and wasting his goods,
without hoping to get such an armful, what else could he be hoping for? Now, everyone ought to pitch in, by singing a song if he knows one, or, if he can't sing, by telling a joke, to help Kuei-chieh down her wine."
Tagalong Hsieh, himself, was the first to tell a joke. "Once upon a time there was a mason who was engaged to repave a courtyard in the licensed quarter. Because the madam had been less than generous with him, he surreptitiously stuck a brick in her covered drain. [9] As a result, when it rained, her whole courtyard filled up with water. The madam, in a state of consternation, sought him out, gave him all he could eat or drink, weighed out a mace of silver, and begged him to get rid of the water for her. The mason consumed the food and wine and then stealthily removed the brick from her drain, whereupon all the water immediately drained away. 'Foreman,' asked the madam, 'what was the problem?' To which the mason replied, 'The problem with your drain was the same as it is with you:
It's only dough that makes things flow;
Without the dough, there'd be no flow.' "
It so happens that this joke reflected badly on Kuei-chieh's profession that induced her to speak up, as follows, "I've got a joke of my own with which to regale you gentlemen. Once upon a time, the Taoist adept Sun Ssu-miao [10] had prepared a feast and wished to summon his guests, so he sent the tiger who was customarily in attendance beneath his dais to invite them. The tiger proceeded to eat each and every one of the guests while they were en route to the feast. The Taoist waited until evening but not a single guest had arrived. Everyone told him, 'That tiger of yours must have eaten the guests on their way here.' Before long the tiger arrived and the Taoist asked him, 'What has become of the guests I sent you to invite?' To which the tiger, who could speak the language of men, replied, 'You should know, master, that I've never been known to invite people to partake of anything. The only thing I'm any good at is devouring people.' " [11]
This joke reflected badly on the whole bunch of them.
"It would seem," said Sponger Ying, "that all we know how to do is free-load off your patron, without being able to stand him a treat in return."
Thereupon, he extracted a silver-plated earpick from his hair that weighed one mace. Tagalong Hsieh contributed the pair of gilded rings he used to hold his hairnet in place that were found to weigh nine and a half candareens. Sticky Chu pulled an old handkerchief out of his sleeve that was assessed at a value of two hundred discounted cash. Blabbermouth Sun divested himself of the white cotton breechcloth he wore around his loins that was pawned for enough to buy two and a half jars of wine. Cadger Ch'ang had nothing he could contribute, so he asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for the loan of a full mace of good-quality silver.
The entire proceeds of the collection were handed over to Li Kuei-ch'ing, to defray the expenses of standing Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuei-chieh a treat. Kuei-ch'ing turned the money over to the servant, who managed to buy a mace worth of crabs, a mace worth of pork, and a chicken. The Li establishment threw in a few side dishes of its own, and everything was duly prepared in the kitchen and served up in:
Large platters and large bowls.
Once the company was seated they scarcely needed an invitation before setting to.
The telling is slow;
What happened was quick.
Behold:
Everyone's mouth goes into motion,
Each of them lowers his head to the task.
Obscuring the sky and bedimming the sun,[12]
They are like a swarm of locusts
all descending at once;
Squinting their eyes and hunching their shoulders,
They are like starving prisoners
just let out of jail.
This one sets to with flailing arms,
As though it has been years
since he saw food or wine;
That one holds his chopsticks together,
As if it has been ages
since he attended a feast.
One of them has sweat pouring from his face,
As he engages in a grudge match
with a chicken bone;
Another wipes the oil from his lips,
As he wolfs down bristle and rind
with his hog's flesh.
When they have eaten but a while,
The cups and plates are in a state of disarray;[13]
By the time they are through,
The chopsticks lie about helter-skelter.
The cups and plates are in a state of disarray;
As spic-and-span as though washed.
The chopsticks lie about helter-skelter;
As neat and clean as though scoured.
This one rates the designation
Commander in Chief of the Gourmands;
That one has earned the sobriquet
General of the Trenchermen.[14]
The wine pots are drained dry,
but they continue to upend them;
The platters are quite empty,
yet they scan them in vain.
Truly:
Delicacies of every variety
have perished in but a moment;

Sacrificed upon the altar
in the Temple of the Five Viscera.[15]
On this occasion, the bunch of them cleaned the place out as thoroughly as any Buddha King of Purifying Light[16] could have done. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuei-chieh barely had two cups of wine apiece, and a few meager gleanings from the dishes on the table, before everything was gobbled up by the ravenous horde.
That day two of the chairs at their table were broken. The pageboy who waited out front with the horse was not invited in for a snack, so he knocked the image of the tutelary god off its pedestal in the shrine by the door and deposited a bulging pile of hot shit in its place. On his way out the door, Blabbermouth Sun stuffed the gilded brass Buddha from the Li family's parlour into his waistband. Sponger Ying, pretending to kiss Kuei-chieh, snitched a gold-filled pin from her hairdo. Tagalong Hsieh pocketed Hsi-men Ch'ing's Szechwan fan. Sticky Chu went into Kuei-ch'ing's room to have a look at himself and made off with her mercury-backed mirror. Even the discount on the mace of silver that Cadger Ch'ang had borrowed from Hsi-men Ch'ing was put onto the reckoning.
It so happened that this bunch of men had nothing better to do than keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company in his revels. What a time they had together! There is a poem that testifies to this:
The prostitutes of the licensed quarter
are as coquettish as monkeys;
They are only fit to be visited
on the impulse of the moment.
If one allows himself to become infatuated,
with no sense of satiety;
To whom can he safely entrust
the keys to his coffers?
His boon companions continued to cluster around Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Enjoying themselves as they drank up the wine.
But let us put this aside for a moment and return to the story of Tai-an.
When the pageboy returned home with the horse, Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in her room with Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien.
As soon as she saw Tai-an, she asked, "Have you brought your father back with you or not?"
Tai-an had been crying so hard that both his eyes were as red as could be. He gave an account, thus and so, that concluded, "I only got kicked and cursed by Father for my pains. And he also said, 'Whoever sends after me again will hear from me when I get home.' "
"Just look at him," said Yüeh-niang. "How unreasonable can you get? If he won't come home, so much for that; what business does he have abusing the pageboy? How can he allow himself to be so bewitched by that vixen?"
"It's bad enough to kick a pageboy," said Meng Yü-lou, "but how can he threaten to abuse us into the bargain?"
"Nine out of ten of those whores in the licensed quarter," said P'an Chin-lien, "don't have any real feelings for their customers. As the saying goes:
Not even shiploads of gold and silver,
Can fill up the camps of mist and flowers."
Chin-lien simply blurted out what she had to say, without remembering that:
Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass.[17]
Ever since Tai-an had returned from the licensed quarter, Li Chiao-erh had stolen up outside and had been standing by the window, eavesdropping. When she overheard P'an Chin-lien abusing the members of her own household to Yüeh-niang and referring to them as whores a thousand times, if not ten thousand times, she secretly stored up the resentment in her heart and, henceforth, regarded Chin-lien as her enemy. But no more of this. Truly:
Honeyed words and plausible speeches
can make the twelfth month warm;
Cruel words that are hurtful to others
can turn the sixth month cold.[18]
Chin-lien's only consideration was
the need to make herself heard;
How could she anticipate that a bystander
could be the cause of calamity?
We will say no more for the moment about the enmity that Chin-lien incurred in Li Chiao-erh but return to the story of that woman herself.
When Chin-lien returned to her room:
Each half hour was like three months of autumn;
Each two-hour period seemed like half a summer.
Knowing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not coming home that night, she sent her two maidservants off to sleep, made a pretense of going out for a stroll in the garden, invited Ch'in-t'ung into her room, drank wine with him until he was drunk, closed the door:
Took off her clothes and unfastened her girdle,
and proceeded to couple with him. Truly:
With lustful daring as big as the sky,
what is there to fear?
Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:
a lifetime of passion.[19]
Behold:
One of them shows total disregard
for ethical norms or distinctions of status;
The other does not discriminate between
above and below or high and low.
One of them, inspired by perverse lustful daring,
Cares nothing for the severity of her husband;
The other, carried away by lecherous desires,
Ignores a clear-cut violation of the law.
One of them, breathing heavily with staring eyes,
Sounds like an ox snoring in the willow's shade;
The other, with coy words and inarticulate cries,
Reminds one of an oriole warbling among the flowers.
One of them, murmurs in her partner's ear
of passions evoked by clouds and rain;
The other, swears by the pillow side
to be as faithful as the hills and seas.
The garden with its hundred flowers,
Has been transformed into a pleasure ground;
The bedroom of his lawful mistress,
Has turned into a Kingdom of Cockaigne.
Almost before they know it, a glob
of donkey's spunk,
Has been deposited in Chin-lien's
jadelike body.[20]
From this time on, every night the woman invited the pageboy into her room for a repeat performance and sent him on his way again before dawn. She secretly let him have two or three of her gold-headed pins to wear in his hair, and she also gave him the brocade scent bag she wore suspended at her waist, together with the gourd toggle that held it in place, so he could wear them under his clothes.
How could she have known that this pageboy:
Was not the sort to abide by his lot,[21]
but constantly went out into the street to drink and gamble with his fellow servants, where he was so indiscreet as to allow these gifts to be seen? As the saying goes:
The best way to avoid being found out,
Is not to do it in the first place.[22]
One day wind of this came to the ears of Sun Hsüeh-o and Li Chiao-erh, who said to each other, "That lousy whore is forever hypocritically protesting her own virtue. How is it, then, that today she's been caught red-handed committing adultery with a pageboy?"
The two of them went off together to tell Yüeh-niang about it but Yüeh-niang expressed herself repeatedly to be incredulous.
"It's all because the two of you are on the outs with her," she said. "But how can you help offending Sister Meng the Third by such an accusation? She'll say you're just trying to get rid of her pageboy."
This response reduced the two to silence.
Sometime after this, the woman was carrying on with the pageboy in her room one night when she forgot to close the back door. Her maidservant, Ch'iu-chü, happened to come out to relieve herself and saw what was going on. The next day she reported what she had seen to Hsiao-yü in the rear compound, and Hsiao-yü mentioned it to Hsüeh-o. Hsüeh-o and Li Chiao-erh again sought out Yüeh-niang and told her about it.
It happened to be the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month, the eve of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, and he had just come back from the licensed quarter to celebrate it. The two of them recounted everything, thus and so.
"The maidservant from her own quarters has reported it with her own mouth. It's not just a case of our trying to do her in. If you won't say anything about it, we'll go tell Father ourselves. You'd do as well to forgive a whore like that as you would to forgive a scorpion!"
"He's only just come home," said Yüeh-niang, "and it's a special day for him to boot. If you two disregard me and insist on telling him about it, in a little while, when the trouble starts, you'll have to look out for yourselves."
The two of them did not take Yüeh-niang's advice but waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing came into his room and then told him all about how Chin-lien had been committing adultery with the pageboy.
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them:
Anger flared up in his heart, and
Malice accrued in his gall.[23]
Marching out to the front compound, he sat down and called out in a loud voice for Ch'in-t'ung.
It was not long before someone reported these events to P'an Chin-lien.
In a state of panic she sent Ch'un-mei to call the pageboy into her room, where she enjoined him, "Whatever happens, don't admit to anything!"
She demanded back the pins he was wearing in his hair but she was so flustered she forgot to recover the scent bag with the gourd toggle.
Summoned into the front reception room, the pageboy was made to kneel in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who ordered three or four servants to stand by with heavy bamboo canes.
"You lousy slave!" Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed him, "Do you acknowledge your crime?"
Ch'in-t'ung was too frightened to answer for some time.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his minions, "Take off his hat and pull out the pins in his hair. I want to take a look at them. He's been seen sporting two gold-headed silver pins." Then, addressing him directly, he demanded, "What's become of the gold-headed silver pins you've been wearing?"
"I've never had any silver pins," said Ch'in-t'ung.
"The slave is still up to his tricks," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Strip off all his clothes and beat him with the bamboo."
The two or three servants in attendance set about their task. One of them, while engaged in stripping off his clothes, took down his trousers, disclosing the fact that underneath them he was wearing a jade-coloured damask tunic, from the waist-string of which there hung a brocade scent bag with a gourd toggle.
Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed it immediately and called out, "Bring it here so I can have a look at it."
Recognizing it as the very object that P'an Chin-lien customarily wore suspended at her waist, he became enraged.
"Where did you get this?" he demanded. "Tell me the truth. Who gave it to you?"
The pageboy was so frightened that it was some time before he could open his mouth to reply.
"It's something I picked up one day while I was sweeping in the garden," he said. "Nobody gave it to me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing gnashed his teeth in rage and shouted out the order, "Tie him up and give him a real thrashing."
Then and there Ch'in-t'ung was bound, hand and foot, and the blows of the cane fell on him like rain. In no time at all they had administered thirty strokes of the heavy bamboo, so severely that:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood flowed down his legs.[24]
Hsi-men Ch'ing also gave orders to his chief household retainer, Lai-pao: "Pluck out the hair on the slave's temples and throw him out of here. See that he never sets foot on the threshold again."
When Ch'in-t'ung had kowtowed to his master, still weeping and wailing, he was given the gate. This pageboy, only because:
Last night he flirted with the nymph who keeps the books
in the Palace of the Jade Emperor;
Today, guilty of a clear-cut violation of Heaven's law,[25]

is banished to the realms below.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Tigers deploy the revenants of their prey,
birds are snared with decoys;
Chin-lien was not the sort to remain chaste
within her empty boudoir.
Today she's in an untenable position
for adultery with a servant;
From now on, if she encounters criticism
she has no one to blame but herself.
On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had Ch'in-t'ung beaten and then ejected him from the household.
When P'an Chin-lien, in her room, heard what had happened, it was:
Just as though she had been dunked in a tub of ice water.
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her quarters. The woman trembled with fright as if the pulse had stopped beating in her body. When she went up to him, obsequiously, to take his outer garments, Hsi-men Ch'ing slapped her in the face so hard he knocked her down. He ordered Ch'un-mei to lock the front and back gates and not let anyone in. Then he got himself a small chair, sat down in the courtyard underneath the flower arbour, pulled out a riding crop, and, brandishing it in his hand, commanded, "Whore! Take off your clothes and get down on your knees."
The woman, troubled as she was by a bad conscience, did not dare to disobey. She actually took off all her clothes, above and below, and knelt down before him:
Hanging her powdered face in shame,
not daring to utter a sound.
"You lousy whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's no use pretending you're:
Still asleep in dreamland.
I've just gotten the truth out of that slave. He's confessed to everything. Tell me the truth. While I've been away from home, how many times have you made out with him?"
"My Heavens!" the woman wept. "You really do me a mortal injustice, that's all there is to it. During the whole time you've been away from home the last half month or so, I've spent my days in the company of Sister Meng the Third, doing needlework together, and in the evenings I've locked the gate early and gone to bed. Without some reason I haven't presumed to step outside the postern gate. If you don't believe me, just ask Ch'un-mei, that's all. If I'd been indulging in any:
Illicit salt or illicit vinegar,[26]
she could hardly fail to know about it." Then, calling to Ch'un-mei, she said, "Sister, come over here and tell your father all about it."
"You lousy whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing cursed. "They say you gave two or three of your gold-headed hairpins to that pageboy on the sly. How can you deny it?"
"They do me a mortal injustice, that's all there is to it," the woman said. "It's all the doing of some backbiting whore, who will come to a bad end, eating her heart out when she sees how often you come to my room to spend the night, and angry enough to try to nail me with such a preposterous [27] story. As for the hairpins you've given me, there are only so many of them, and every last one is accounted for. Take a look for yourself. What could I be thinking of to give them to that slave for no reason at all? Someone like that, who hardly even makes the grade as a slave! He's such a babe in the woods it would be no exaggeration to say he hasn't even learned to piss yet. It's all a story someone has made up out of whole cloth to get back at me."
"Forget about the hairpins," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, reaching into his sleeve and pulling out Ch'in-t'ung's scent bag. "This is something that belongs to you. How did it come to be discovered hanging underneath the clothes of that pageboy? Brazen that out if you can."
As he spoke, the gorge rose within him and he brought down the riding crop, with a whistling slash, across her pale and fragrant flesh. He struck the woman so hard that:
The pain was difficult to bear, and
Tears streaked her powdered face.
"Please, Father!" she blubbered. "If you let me speak, I'll speak. If you don't let me speak, you can beat me to death if you like, and make a stinking mess of the place. As for this scent bag and its gourd toggle; while you were away from home one day, I was going past the banksia rose trellis, on my way into the garden to do some needlework with Sister Meng the Third, when my girdle came undone. It must have fallen off at that time. I've looked for it everywhere. Who could have known that this slave would pick it up? I certainly never gave it to him."
This explanation happened to accord perfectly with what Ch'in-t'ung had just stated in the front reception room when he said he had picked it up in the garden. Moreover, when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the woman's flowerlike body that had been stripped stark naked, kneeling before him as she uttered her:
Winsome sobs and melting words,[28]
His anger flew to Java,
and he became 80 or 90 percent disposed to clemency.
Calling over Ch'un-mei, he sat her in his lap, and asked her, "Has the whore really been engaged in hanky-panky with the pageboy or not? If you tell me to forgive the whore, I'll forgive her."
Affecting the:
Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,[29]
Ch'un-mei sat down in his lap and said, "As for that, Father, needless to say, all day long Mother and I have been:
As inseparable as the lip and the cheek.[30]
How could she have had anything to do with that slave? This is all something fabricated by someone who is jealous of Mother and me. Father, you ought to think what you're doing, or you'll only make an ugly reputation for yourself that won't sound any too good when it gets abroad."
With these few words she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence. Throwing aside the riding crop, he told Chin-lien to get up and put on her clothes, on the one hand, while he also gave orders to Ch'iu-chü to fetch something to eat and set the table so they could have a drink.
The woman thereupon filled a cup of wine to the brim and, holding it in front of her with both hands, knelt down on the ground:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
as she offered it up to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing admonished her as follows: "I'll forgive you this once. But whenever I'm away from home, I want you to:
Cleanse your heart and reform your ways.[31]
Lock the doors early and don't allow yourself to:
Give way to foolish fancies.[32]
If I find out anything, I certainly won't forgive you again."
"I hear and I obey," the woman said, and then:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times. Only then did she take her place at the table and keep him company as they drank wine together. Truly:
If you're going to be a human being,
don't be a woman;
Or your every joy and sorrow will be
dependent on another.[33]
This woman, P'an Chin-lien, had been so favoured by Hsi-men Ch'ing in the past as to lose all sense of decorum but today she had brought this shameful ignominy on herself. There is a poem that testifies to this:
No matter how congenial and compliant
Chin-lien might appear;
She flaunted her favour to compete for affection
and thereby aroused enmity.
Had it not been for Ch'un-mei's intervention
on the day in question;
How could her parents' legacy of skin and flesh
have borne up under the lash?
While Hsi-men Ch'ing was still drinking wine in Chin-lien's room, they were interrupted by the sound of a pageboy knocking at the gate, who announced that Hsi-men Ch'ing's brothers-in-law, Wu Yüeh-niang's eldest brother Wu K'ai [34] and second brother Wu the Second, along with his shop manager, Fu Ming, his daughter and son-in-law, and other relatives, had arrived in the front reception room to offer presents and wish him a happy birthday. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing relinquish Chin-lien, readjust his clothing, and go out front to entertain his guests.
On this occasion, there were gifts from Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and the other members of the club, and Li Kuei-chieh's establishment in the licensed quarter also sent a servant with a gift. Hsi-men Ch'ing was kept busy in the front compound, acknowledging the presents people had sent and issuing invitations. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Meng Yü-lou heard that Chin-lien had been thus humiliated, she waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing was out of the house, took pains to evade the notice of Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o, and came to pay Chin-lien a visit.
Finding her lying on her bed, she asked, "Sister Six, what's the real story behind this? Tell me all about it."
Her eyes brimming over with tears, Chin-lien sobbed out, "Sister Three, just look at what that insignificant whore has done. Today, behind my back, she's provoked our husband into giving me such a beating. From now on, the enmity between those two whores and me will be as deep as the sea."
"Even if you had a bone to pick with them," said Yü-lou, "you didn't have to do it in such a way that my pageboy got thrown out of the household, did you? Sister Six, don't let yourself get too depressed about it. After all, it's not as though our husband will no longer listen to anything we have to say. If he doesn't come into my quarters someday soon, there won't be anything I can do about it but if he does come into my quarters, I'll see if I can't put in a good word for you."
"Many thanks for your help, Sister," said Chin-lien. She then called in Ch'un-mei to bring them some tea, and they sat down and chatted together for a while, until Yü-lou said good-bye and returned to her own quarters.
That evening, because Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was visiting in the master suite, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Yü-lou's quarters to spend the night.
Yü-lou took the opportunity to say to him, "You really oughtn't to flout Sister Six's feelings for you. She never did anything like that. It's all because, in the past, she's had words with Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o, and now, for no reason at all, these charges have been trumped up against my pageboy. Without so much as enquiring into the:
Blue or red, black or white,[35]
of the situation, you've done him an injustice. You mustn't blame Sister Six. You've really been too hard on her. I'm prepared to swear an oath on her behalf. If anything like that had really happened, do you think Elder Sister wouldn't have told you?"
"I asked Ch'un-mei about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and she said the same thing."
"She's in her room right now," said Yü-lou, "feeling miserable. Why don't you go look in on her?"
"I know," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go to her quarters tomorrow."
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day was Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday, and a lot of distinguished guests had been invited to attend a party, including the commandant, Chou Hsiu, [36] the judicial commissioner, Hsia Yen-ling, the militia commander, Chang Kuan, and Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law, Wu K'ai. A sedan chair was dispatched to bring Li Kuei-chieh, and the services of two other singing girls were also engaged, to sing at the daylong celebration.
When Li Chiao-erh saw that her niece had come, she led her in to meet Yüeh-niang and the others, and she was invited to sit down in the master suite and have a cup of tea. She asked to meet P'an Chin-lien, and maidservants were sent after her twice but Chin-lien refused to put in an appearance, claiming that she felt out of sorts.
In the evening, when Kuei-chieh was about to go home, she came to say goodbye to Yüeh-niang, who gave her a vest of cloud-patterned damask, a handkerchief, and some other trinkets, and, together with Li Chiao-erh, accompanied her to the main gate.
On their way, Kuei-chieh herself went up to Chin-lien's postern gate in the garden, saying, "Come what may, I'd really like to meet the Fifth Lady."
When Chin-lien heard she had come, she sent Ch'un-mei to shut the postern gate and:
Lock it tight as an iron bucket, so that
Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through,[37]
while repeating, quite audibly, the words, "I won't let her in."
As a result of this rebuff, the prostitute returned home:
Her face crimson with mortification.
Truly:
Distribute your favours widely;
In this life you never know where
you will meet again.
If you make a lot of enemies;
You'll encounter them in a tight spot
where there's no escape.[38]
We will say no more for the moment about how Li Kuei-chieh went home but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing. That evening he appeared in Chin-lien's quarters and she met him at the door with her:
Cloudy locks in disarray, and her
Flowery countenance dispirited,
as she helped him off with his clothes. She waited on him with tea and hot water to wash his feet, playing up to him with every trick at her disposal in the endeavor to please him. That night as they shared pillow and mat:
Like fish sporting in the water;
She humbled herself to the most shameful acts.
There was no length to which she would not go.[39]
"Darling," she said, "who is there in the whole household who really loves you? Out of all these cases of:
Cohabitation amid the dewdrops,[40]
among all these 'remarried goods,' you and I are the only ones who really understand each other. When the others see how much you care for me, and how much time you spend with me, it makes them angry, and they fabricate things behind my back and try to make trouble between us. My foolish lover, what have you been thinking of, to allow yourself to be made the instrument of someone else's revenge? How could you have treated the person you love with such heartless cruelty? As the saying goes:

If you beat domestic fowl,
they'll hop around in circles;
If you beat wildfowl,
they'll fly high into the sky.[41]
Even if you were to beat me to death, I'd still be right here in this room. Where else would I dare go? Just the other day, for example, when you were in the licensed quarter and kicked and cursed your pageboy—fortunately Elder Sister from the master suite and Sister Meng the Third were there to corroborate this—didn't I say something—and it was well-intentioned—about my fears that the painted woman in that establishment would exhaust your vitality—that the singing girls in the licensed quarter are only in it for the money and don't have any real feelings for their customers—what do they really care for you? How was I to know that this would be overheard by an interested party and that the two of them would connive against me behind my back? It's always been the case that:
When other people are out to get you it's seldom fatal;
It's only when Heaven is out to get you that it's fatal.
Later on:
With the passage of time the truth will become clear.[42]
The only thing is you've got to stand up for me, that's all."
On this occasion, with no more than these few words she succeeded in mollifying Hsi-men Ch'ing. That night the two of them:
Indulged their lusts without restraint.
The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing had his horse prepared and set off for the licensed quarter with the two pageboys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, in attendance.
To resume our story, Li Kuei-chieh was all dressed up and engaged in entertaining a customer. When she heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, she hastily returned to her room, where she:
Washed away her makeup,
Took off her pins and earrings,
Threw herself down on the bed, and
Pulled the coverlet over her head.
Upon his arrival, Hsi-men Ch'ing had to wait a long time before anyone came out to keep him company. At long last, the old lady appeared, bowed to him in greeting, and offered him a seat.
"How now, Kinsman?" the madam said. "It's been days since you've paid us a visit."
"It's only on account of all the busywork in connection with my birthday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."
"My daughter imposed on your hospitality the other day," said the madam.
"Why didn't her elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, come with her that day?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Kuei-ch'ing is not at home," the madam replied. "Her patron has taken her to stay with him in his inn and hasn't let her come home the last few days."
They talked for a long time. After a while, someone brought tea and she kept him company while he drank it.
"What's become of Kuei-chieh?" Hsi-men Ch'ing finally asked.
"You mean you don't know about it, Kinsman?" the madam asked. "It's childish of her, and I don't know what it was that happened but she was upset about something when she came home that day. She's been out of sorts ever since and has taken to her bed. In fact, she hasn't set foot outside her room from that time to this. It's really too cruel of you, Kinsman, not to have come to see her."
"Is that so?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I didn't know anything about it." And he went on to ask, "Which room is she in? I'll go pay her a visit."
"She's sleeping in her bedroom at the back of the house," the madam replied, and immediately ordered a maidservant to show him the way.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to her room, where he found the painted woman with:
Raven locks in disarray, and
Pale countenance unadorned,
sitting on the bed, with the coverlet wrapped around her, and her face to the wall. When she saw it was Hsi-men Ch'ing, she made no response of any kind.
"What went wrong when you were at my place the other day?" he asked.
Receiving no reply, he asked again, "Who was it who upset you? Tell me all about it."
He kept on asking for a long time before Kuei-chieh replied, saying, "Well, anyway, it was the Fifth Lady of your household. Since you've already got someone who's so good at:
Playing up to people and trading on her looks,
what need is there for you to bother yourself with whores like me? We may have been born to the trade but when we put our legs in the air we do a better job of it than any of those amateurs on the outside, no matter what their social standing. I wasn't there in my professional capacity the other day, to provide entertainment but came to bring you a gift, like the other guests. The First Lady treated me very cordially, as did the other two ladies, and presented me with clothes and trinkets. Under the circumstances, if I hadn't asked to be introduced to her, she would have said that we denizens of the licensed quarter were ignorant of the rules of proper behavior. Having heard people say there was a Fifth Lady in your household, I assumed I might ask to be introduced to her. But she refused to make an appearance. When I was about to come home, together with my aunt, I went to say goodbye to her but she sent her maidservant to shut the gate in my face. Really:
She wouldn't know a favour if she saw one."
"Don't hold it against her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was really feeling out of sorts that day. If she had been feeling all right, she could hardly have refused to come out and meet you. What a whore she is! Why, several times, on account of her backbiting and troublemaking, I've been on the verge of giving her a beating."
Kuei-chieh brushed Hsi-men Ch'ing across the face facetiously with the back of her hand and said, "What a shameless fellow! You'd actually beat her, would you?"
"You don't know what I'm capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Except for my regular wife, it's nothing for me to give any one of the other concubines or maidservants a beating. When you get right down to it, if twenty or thirty strokes with a riding crop are not enough to subdue them, I'll even go so far as to cut off their hair, whether they like it or not."
"Decapitation's too good for you," said Kuei-chieh. "This calls for 'delinguification,' if there's any such thing. You probably:
Bow down to them thrice, and
Say yes to them twice,[43]
for all I know. If you're really up to it, when you get home, just cut off a single hank of hair, and bring it here to show me. Only then will I acknowledge your claim to fame as a real devotee of the licensed quarters."
"Are you willing to shake on it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I'd shake on it a hundred times," said Kuei-chieh.
That day Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in the licensed quarter. The next day, around dusk, he said goodbye to Kuei-chieh and mounted his horse to return home.
Kuei-chieh said:
"My eyes are on the lookout for the flag of victory,
My ears are always on the alert for good tidings.
Darling, if the quest for this object proves unsuccessful, you needn't expect to see me again."
Hsi-men Ch'ing's dander was up as a result of her needling, and he was already inebriated by the time he returned home. He didn't go anywhere else but headed straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound. When the woman saw that he was in his cups, she waited on him with more than usual care. In reply to her questions, he said he didn't want any food or wine but ordered Ch'un-mei to wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat and then close the door and leave them alone.
Sitting down on the bed, he ordered the woman to take off his boots. The woman did not dare to refuse. In no time at all she had taken off his boots and helped him into bed. But Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to sleep. Sitting up on a pillow, he ordered the woman to take off her clothes and kneel down on the surface of the bed before him.
The woman was so apprehensive she broke into a sweat. Without any idea what it was all about, she knelt down on the bed and began to weep out loud in a quavery voice, saying, "Father, if you'd only give me a clear-cut idea of what's going on:
I'd be prepared to die if I must.[44]
Even when you:
Keep me on tenterhooks,[45]
all evening and I do my level best to watch my step, I don't seem to be able to suit your fancy. How can I bear it when all you do is saw away at me with a blunt knife?"
"You lousy whore!" cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you don't take off your clothes I'm going to lose my patience."
"The riding crop's hanging on the other side of the door," he called out to Ch'un-mei. "Bring it here for me, will you?"
Ch'un-mei deliberately refused to come into the room. Only after he had called for some time did she push open the door and come in:
Just as slow and easy as you please.
She saw the woman kneeling on the surface of the bed in the lamplight, with her hair tumbled before her like oil pouring from an overturned table. Hsi-men Ch'ing repeated his order but she didn't budge.
"Ch'un-mei, my sister," the woman pled with her. "Help me! He's going to beat me."
"Little oily mouth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't pay any attention to her. Just fetch me the riding crop so I can give this whore a beating."
"Father, how can you carry on so shamelessly?" demanded Ch'un-mei. "What business of yours has Mother ever ruined, that you should take the word of some whore, whose only interest is to:
Stir up a storm in untroubled waters,[46]
and persist in making such capricious demands on her? How can you expect anyone to be:
Of one heart and one mind,
with you under the circumstances? You'll be lucky if they give you a second glance."
Ch'un-mei refused to obey him, latched the door behind her, and went off to the front of the compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:
At a loss for what to do next,
laughed loudly and said to Chin-lien, "I won't beat you then. You can get up. If I ask you for something, will you give it to me, or won't you?"
"Darling," the woman said, "my whole body, bones and flesh alike, is completely at your disposal. Whatever it is you may want, I could not refuse to comply. But I don't know what it is you've set your heart on."
"What I want," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is a lock of the best hair from the crown of your head."
"Dear heart," the woman said, "any part of my body is yours for the asking. You can burn it with moxa wherever you like and I'll go along with you. But to cut off my hair is out of the question. The very thought of it scares me to death. From the time I left my mother's womb twenty-five years ago, I've never done anything like that. On top of which, recently the hair has already begun to thin out on the crown of my head. You really ought to take pity on me, that's all."
"You were upset at my annoyance with you just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but when I ask you for something, you refuse to comply."
"If I didn't comply with your desires," said the woman, "with whose should I comply?" She then went on to ask, "Tell me the truth. What do you want this hair of mine for, anyway?"
"I want to make a hairnet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If you want to make a hairnet," said the woman, "I'll make it for you. Just don't give it to that whore so she can use it to cast a spell on me."
"I won't give it to anybody, that's all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I only want your hair to make the main cord of a hairnet to bind my topknot with."
"If all you want it for is to make a cord for your topknot," said the woman, "I'll cut it off for you."
Thereupon, the woman undid her hair and let Hsi-men Ch'ing himself take a pair of scissors and neatly cut off a large lock from the crown of her head. He wrapped it in paper and put it in his wallet.
The woman then fell into Hsi-men Ch'ing's arms and, weeping coquettishly, said, "I'll do anything you want. I only hope you don't forget your feelings for me. No matter how stuck you become on anyone in the quarter, just don't abandon me."
That night they:
Enjoyed each other even more than usual.
The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and, as soon as the woman had fed him his breakfast, went outside, mounted his horse, and headed straight for the licensed quarter.
"Where's the hair you've cut off her head," Kuei-chieh demanded.
"I've got it right here," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. He then reached into his wallet, pulled it out, and handed it to Kuei-chieh. She opened it and took a look, and when she saw that it was really a lock of beautiful hair, as glossy and black as oil, she promptly tucked it into her sleeve.
"Now that you've seen it, give it back to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Last night she made all kinds of difficulties about cutting this hair. It was only when I changed countenance and got angry that she let me cut off this single lock of it. I fooled her by saying I only wanted it to make the main cord of a hairnet to bind my topknot with, and then brought it straight here to show you. You can see, I'm as good as my word."
"What sort of a rarity is this," said Kuei-chieh, "to have put you into such a state? When you're ready to go home I'll give it back to you. If you're as afraid of her as all that, you shouldn't have cut it off in the first place."
"Who's afraid of her?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's just that I don't want to go back on my word."
Kuei-chieh induced Kuei-ch'ing to keep him company for a drink of wine, and then, as soon as she was out of sight, inserted the woman's hair into the linings of her shoes, so she could trample her underfoot everyday. But no more of this.
Now that she had Hsi-men Ch'ing in her clutches, she kept him there for several consecutive days, without letting him go home.
From the time that Chin-lien allowed the cutting off of this lock of her hair, she became dispirited. Everyday she:
Confined herself to her room,
Too languid to consume tea or food.
Wu Yüeh-niang, consequently, sent a pageboy after a certain Dame Liu, whose services were frequently called upon in the household, to come and take a look at her.
"Madam has contracted a black humour," the old lady said, "which continues to rankle in the heart and can't be eliminated. Your head aches, you feel nauseous, and you have no appetite."
On the one hand, she opened her medicine bag and left behind two doses of medicine, in the form of black pills that were to be taken in the evening along with a decoction of ginger, while, on the other hand, she said, "I'll get my old man to come by tomorrow and ascertain whether or not you're fated to suffer any calamities during the current year of your horoscope."
"So your old man can also tell fortunes, can he?" said Chin-lien.
"Even though he's blind," said Dame Liu, "there are two or three things he can do. First of all, he's an expert at the Yin-yang School of fortune-telling and can either avert peoples' calamities or offer them protection against them. Secondly, he's well versed in acupuncture, moxabustion, and the treatment of pyogenic infections of the skin. His third skill is one that I really shouldn't talk about but he's always helping people to perform 'turnabouts.' "
"What does the word 'turnabout' mean?" asked the woman.

"Well, for example," said Dame Liu, "if a father and son are at odds, or two brothers are not getting along harmoniously, or a legitimate wife and a concubine are quarreling with each other; if one of the parties calls on the services of my old man, he can employ a counteractive agent on his or her behalf in order to keep the other party in check, or provide him or her with a philter containing a counteractive spell that, if given to the other party to drink, will cause, within three days, the father and son to become intimate, the brothers to become harmonious, or the wife and concubine to cease to quarrel. Or if someone's business is not doing well, or his real estate is not prospering, he can 'open the door to wealth' for him, or enable him to 'turn a profit.' And as for such things as the treatment of disease, the performance of ritual purification, the exorcism of the spirits of baleful stars, [47] or the invocation of the Great Dipper, he's good at all of them. For this reason people all call him Stargazer Liu.

"There was one case, I remember, of a newly married daughter-in-law, of humble social origin, who was somewhat light-fingered and was constantly stealing things from her mother-in-law's household and taking them back to her own family. Whenever her husband found out about it she was regularly beaten. My old man was able to perform a 'turnabout' for her, by writing two spells that were burnt, and the ashes buried under the water jar. The whole family drank water from the jar, after which the daughter-in-law could steal things right in front of their eyes without their noticing it. He also provided her with a counteractive agent that was placed under her pillow, with the result that whenever her husband slept on that pillow it was just as though his hands had been restrained and he no longer beat her."

When P'an Chin-lien heard this, she took it to heart and ordered her maidservant to provide Dame Liu with tea and something to eat. When the latter was about to leave, Chin-lien wrapped up three mace of silver for her medical services. She also weighed out an additional five mace to enable her to buy paper money and other ritual objects, and asked her to bring her blind husband back with her at breakfast time the next day to burn the spirit money for her. Dame Liu then took her leave and went home.

The next day, sure enough, bright and early in the morning, Dame Liu showed up with the blind rascal in tow and proceeded to come straight in through the front gate. That day Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the licensed quarter, from which he had not yet returned home.

The pageboy in charge of the gate asked the blind man where he thought he was going, to which Dame Liu replied, "Today we've come to burn paper for the Fifth Lady."

"Dame Liu," said the pageboy, "if you've come to burn paper for the Fifth Lady, you can lead him right in but look out for the dog."

The old lady took her husband by the hand and led him straight to P'an Chin-lien's parlour, where they had to wait a long time before the woman finally appeared. The blind man saluted her and then sat down.

The woman told him the eight characters that determined her horoscope,[48] and after the blind rascal had performed some calculations on the fingers of his hand, he said, "Madam was born in a *keng-ch'en* year, in a *keng-yin* month, on an *i-hai* day, during the hour *chi-ch'ou*. Since the solar term 'Spring Begins' fell on the eighth day of the first month that year, one day before the day of your birth, your horoscope begins in the first month of the year. According to the orthodox interpretation of the Tzu-p'ing School,[49] although this horoscope of yours is certainly splendid and remarkable, you will not, in this life, receive any support from your 'husband star,' which corresponds to the stem *keng*. There will also be some difficulty as far as your 'children star' is concerned. The element wood, associated with the stem *i* in the combination *i-hai* that designates the day of your birth, is the governing element in your horoscope but your horoscopic 'body' cannot be said to 'flourish' when this element occurs in the first month. If the effect of this unpropitious factor is not counteracted, the element is likely to burn itself up. Moreover, the reduplication of the element metal, associated with the stem *keng* in the combinations *keng-ch'en* and *keng-yin* that designate the year and month of your birth, indicates that the influence of the baleful star Yang-jen, or Ram's Blade, is too great. This will create difficulties for your 'husband star.' Only after you have gained the ascendancy over two husbands will you be all right."

"I already have," the woman said.

The blind rascal then continued, "As for this horoscope of yours, madam, excuse me for saying so but the Tzu-p'ing School attaches great importance to the horoscopic categories called the 'killer' and the 'seal,' which would correspond, in your case, to the elements metal and water. These two elements would normally be quite compatible but the presence of the element water, associated with the stem *kuei*, in the 'one-sided seal' pertaining to the combination *i-hai* that designates the day of your birth, and the recurrence of the same element in the horoscopic category called 'injurer of the official' pertaining to the combination *keng-ch'en* that designates the year of your birth, indicates an excess of water that produces a 'collision' with your governing element of wood. This is inadequately compensated for by the presence of the element earth, associated with the stem *chi* in the combination *chi-ch'ou* that designates the hour of your birth. Since the stem *keng* that is your 'official,' and the stem *hsin* that is your 'killer,' are both associated with the element metal, they conflict with each other. As the authorities say:

If the 'killer' is in the ascendant for a man,
he will exercise authority and power;
If the 'killer' is in the ascendant for a woman,
she is sure to 'punish' her husband.

"All of this indicates that you must be intelligent, adept at adapting yourself to changing circumstances, and sure to attract the favourable or unfavourable attention of others. But there is one problem. This year of your horoscope is a *chia-wu*[50] year, and the indications are that during this 'annual fatal period' calamities are likely to occur. You are fated to suffer difficulties resulting from encounters with the influence of the two baleful stars Hsiao-hao, or Little Waster, and Kou-chiao, or Strangler. Although you may escape unharmed, the indications are that there will be disharmony resulting from the 'matched shoulders' between your governing element and that associated with the stem *chia* in the designation of this year in your horoscope, both of which are wood. The wagging tongues of petty persons may often cost you some groaning and discomfort."

When the woman had heard him out, she said, "I'd be much obliged to you, sir, if you could do whatever you can to effect a 'turnabout' on my behalf. I've got a tael of silver here for you, sir, as a token of my gratitude. I hope it will suffice to buy you a cup of tea. I don't ask for anything else; all I want is to keep petty persons at a distance, and to be assured of the love and respect of my husband."

Retiring into her bedroom, she pulled out two of her hair ornaments and handed them to the blind rascal, who accepted them and tucked them into his sleeve.

"If you want me to effect a 'turnabout,' " he said, "I'll take a piece of willow wood and carve a pair of male and female effigies out of it. They must be inscribed, respectively, with the sets of eight characters that determine your and your husband's horoscopes, and then bound together with seven times seven, or forty-nine, strands of red thread. A strip of red gauze must be fastened over the eyes of the male effigy, love grass must be stuffed into its heart cavity, its hands must be secured with needles, and, below, its feet must be stuck together with glue. The effigy must then be concealed inside the pillow on which he sleeps. In addition to this, I will write a spell for you, using vermilion ink that you must burn to ashes, and surreptitiously stir into a cup of strong tea. If your husband drinks the tea and sleeps, the same night, on the pillow, in no more than three days, the magic will naturally take effect."

"Please, sir," the woman asked, "tell me, what's the significance of these four things?"

"I'll explain them to you, madam," the blind rascal said. "The fastening of the gauze around the eyes is to make you appear in your husband's sight as captivating and voluptuous as Hsi-shih. The stuffing of the heart cavity with love grass is to make him love you in his heart. The securing of the hands with needles is to prevent him from daring to strike you, no matter what you do, so that, in fact, he'll even get down on his knees to you. The sticking together of the feet with glue is to make it impossible for him to go out and sow any more wild oats."

When the woman heard tell that:

Such things could be,
she was utterly delighted. Thereupon, the incense, candles, and paper money were all prepared and the ceremony of burning spirit money on the woman's behalf was duly carried out.

The next day Stargazer Liu sent his wife to deliver the spell for the making of the philter and the other counteractive agents that he had promised. The woman took care of everything just as she had been told. Having burnt the spell to ashes, she stirred it into some good tea and, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, had Ch'un-mei serve it to him. That night the two of them:

Shared a single pillow on the same bed.
As time passed:
One day became two,
Two days became three, and they became:
As inseparable as fish from water, and
Enjoyed each other as usual.

Gentle reader take note: No matter whether your household be great or small, it is best to avoid the services of priests and nuns, Buddhists and Taoists, wet nurses and go-betweens. There is no telling what they will do behind your back. A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition, in the form of a quatrain, that express this very well:

To the formal reception room of your house never admit female professionals;
Always keep your back door securely locked in order to deny them admission.
If you have a well in your courtyard, repair even the slightest fissure;
Then your catastrophes will be few and your stars of good fortune many.

The tree is pitiful that stands alone
Its branches fragile and its roots uncertain.
The dew may give it moisture but the wind
Blows it to one side and the other.
There is none to raise the silken coverlet
I must sit and keep my watch from night to morning.
Sorrow has made me thin
No loving wish of yours has given me
This slender waist.

Ximen Qing was so delighted with Guijie's beauty that he stayed at the bawdy house for several days. Many times Wu Yueniang sent servants with horses to bring him back but Guijie's family hid his hat and clothes, and would not let him go. The ladies of his own household were for once at a loss for something to do. Most of them were quite content but Pan Jinlian was still not thirty years old, and her passions were by no means under control. Day after day, she made herself look as pretty as a jade carving, and stood at the main gate with gleaming teeth and scarlet lips, leaning upon the door and waiting for her husband to return. Not until evening did she go to her room, and there the pillow seemed deserted, and the curtains forlorn, and there was none to share the joys of her dressing table. Sleep would not come to her, and she went to the garden, walking delicately upon the flowers and moss and, when she saw the moon reflected in the water, she thought of the uncertainty of Ximen's nature, and as she watched the tortoiseshell cats enjoying each other's company, it brought only disturbance to her own sweet heart.

Qintong, the boy who had accompanied Meng Yulou when she married Ximen Qing, was now sixteen years old, and for the first time took his place in the household as a full-grown youth. He had finely arched eyebrows and eyes full of intelligence, and was indeed both clever and attractive. Ximen Qing had entrusted him with the care of the garden, and he slept every night in a small room there. Jinlian and Yulou sometimes sewed or played chess in an arbour in the garden, and at such times Qintong waited upon them attentively, and, whenever Ximen Qing was about, would come and give them warning. Jinlian liked him and often summoned him to her room and gave him wine. So morning after morning, and evening after evening, they exchanged understanding glances, and were not entirely indifferent to one another.

It was now about the seventh month and Ximen's birthday was drawing near. Yueniang was well aware of her husband's doings, and once again told Daian to take a horse and go for him. Jinlian privately wrote a note, and told the boy to give it to Ximen Qing in secret. "Tell him," she said, "that I hope it will not be long before he comes back." Daian rode off to the bawdy house, and there found all Ximen's boon companions keeping company with him, kissing the girls, and being very merry.

"What has brought you here?" Ximen Qing said, when he saw Daian. "Is there anything wrong at home?" "No," said Daian. "Well, tell your uncle Fu to collect the money that is owing, and, when I come back, I'll settle up with him."

"He has been collecting some during the last few days," the boy said, "and he is only waiting for you to come home to go through the accounts."

"Did you bring the clothes for your Aunt Guijie?"

"Yes," the boy replied, "here they are." He took a red vest and a blue skirt from a parcel, and gave them to the girl. She made a reverence to him, and called for food and wine to be given him. When he had finished, he came over to Ximen and whispered in his ear: "The Fifth Lady has given me a note for you, asking you to go home soon."

Ximen Qing was just about to take the note when Guijie saw it. She thought it was a love letter from some other girl, and made a dash for it. When she opened it, she found a sheet of patterned paper, with several columns written in black ink, and handed it to Zhu Shinian, asking him to read it for her.

I think of him as evening falls; I think of him when the sky is bright.
I think about my lover till my thoughts overwhelm me, and I faint
Yet still he does not come.
For him I am wounded; for him my spirit faints.
Oh, it is sad.
I lie alone under the figured coverlets; the flickering lamp is nearly out.
The world is sleeping, and the moonbeams creep across the window.
That heart is unrelenting, like a wolf's
How can I bear this agony another night?

Guijie listened to this, then left them and went to her room, where she threw herself face downwards on the bed. Ximen Qing saw that she was upset, tore the note to pieces, and kicked Daian. Twice he implored Guijie to come back but she paid no heed. Finally, getting more and more excited, he went to her room and carried her out.

"Get on your horse and go home," he said to Daian. "As for the strumpet who told you to come, when I get home, I'll beat her till she comes to a disgusting end." Daian went home with tears in his eyes. "Please don't be so angry," Ximen said, "it is only from my fifth wife. She wants me to go home to talk about something or other. There is nothing else."

Zhu Shinian teased them. "Don't believe him, Guijie. He is deceiving you. Jinlian is his latest flame, a very pretty girl too. Don't let him go."

Ximen Qing slapped him. "You ruffian! You'll be the death of somebody with these silly jokes of yours. She is angry enough without your talking rubbish."

"Brother," Guiqing said, "you are not fair. If you were a good husband, you would not run about teaching singing girls the arts of love, you should stay at home. Then all would be well. Why, you've only been here a few hours, and now you're getting ready to go away again."

"That's quite true," Bojue said. "You had better take my advice, both of you. Your Lordship must stay here, and you, Guijie, must not lose your temper. The first person to leave will have to spend a couple of taels and treat the rest of us."

Ximen Qing took Guijie on his knee, and they drank together happily. Soon afterwards seven cups of the most delicious tea were brought and handed around.

"Now we'll have a song from everyone who can sing," Xie Xida said. "He who can't sing must tell a funny story, and we'll persuade Guijie to take a little more wine with us. I'll begin."

"Once, a bricklayer was doing some paving in a house, and the lady of the house treated him shabbily. So he quietly took a brick or two and stopped up the drain. Not very long afterwards it began to rain and, of course, the water flooded the whole place. The woman didn't know what on earth to do, and ran to find the bricklayer. This time she gave him a meal, and offered him some money, and got him to make the water flow again. When he had eaten his fill, he went to the gutter, took the bricks out, and the water flowed away at once. "What was the matter with it?" the lady of the house asked him. "Just what is the matter with you," the bricklayer replied. "If there is any money about, the water gate will open; but, if not, there will be no admission."

Guijie thought that this story was aimed at her, and she lost no time before retaliating.

"I should like to tell you a story," she said. "Once upon a time, Sun, the Immortal, thought he would give a banquet to his friends, and sent his tiger around to invite them. As ill luck would have it, the tiger gobbled them all up on the way. The Immortal waited until it was dark but nobody came. At last the tiger came back. 'Where are my guests?' the Immortal said. 'Master,' said the tiger, 'I fear I am not a success at inviting people. Somehow I seem much better at eating them up.' "

This did not please the brothers at all. "Oh, indeed," Ying Bojue said, "so we are always sponging, are we?" He took a small silver pin from his hair. Xie Xida found in his hat a pair of gilt rings of no great value. Zhu Shin-ian took from his sleeve a tattered old handkerchief worth a pittance. Sun Guazui took a white apron from around his waist. Chang Zhijie had nothing, so he borrowed a small piece of silver from Ximen Qing. They handed all these things to Guiqing, and asked her to provide a feast in honour of Ximen Qing and Guijie. She turned them over to a servant to buy some pork and a chicken but all the rest she had to pay for herself. Soon everything was brought in, and they sat down. The order was given: "Chopsticks into action." Our description must take time but there was nothing slow about the movements we describe.

Then every mouth was opened wide and every head was bent.
No sun or sky was to be seen; it was like a cloud of locusts.
They blinked their eyes, their shoulders heaved.
Starvelings they might have been, from some dark dungeon.
One quickly snatched a piece of leg, as though no food
Had passed his lips for years.
One waved his chopsticks thrice, it was as though for years and years
He had not seen a meal.
Sweat trickled down the cheeks of one, he carved a chicken bone
As though inspired by hatred.
Gravy adorned his comrade's lips. With copious drafts of spittle

He gobbled down the pork, with hair and skin.
They ate, and in a flash, the cups and plates were clean
It might have been a den of wolves.
They ate, and in a flash again, the flying chopsticks
Crossed and recrossed the table.
This is the marshal of the King of Gluttons
This, the general of the Lickers-up.
Though it has long been empty, from the wine jar
They try to fill their cups.
Though all the food has gone long since,
They search and search again.
The luscious meal, with all its hundred flavours
Has vanished in a moment.
To worship has it gone,
To worship in the temple of the belly.

They cleared up everything till the plates and dishes looked like the head of a shining bald-pated Buddha. Ximen Qing and Guijie could get nothing but a cup of wine each. They did indeed pick out a few pieces of food but the others snatched them away. Two of the chairs were broken. The boys, who were looking after the horses, could not get in to share in the repast, and contented themselves by pulling down the statue of the divinity of the place and piddling upon it. When the time came for them to go away, Sun Guazui took a gilded image of Buddha that was venerated in an inner room, and slipped it inside his trousers. Ying Bojue pretended to kiss Guijie, and stole a gold pin from her hair. Xie Xida went off with Ximen's fan. Zhu Shinian went secretly to Guiqing's room and stole her mirror. As for Chang Zhijie, he did not hand over the money he had borrowed from Ximen Qing but had the sum put down to his account. They were all in the highest spirits. When Daian reached home, he found Yueniang, Yulou, and Jinlian sitting together. They asked him if his master was coming. "Father kicked me and cursed me," the boy said, his eyes still red. "He says that anyone who tries to get him away will find herself in trouble."

"What an outrageous fellow he is," Yueniang cried. "It is quite bad enough that he refuses to come, without ill-treating this poor boy."

"It was bad enough for him to kick the boy but why should he threaten us?" Yulou said.

"The affection of a dozen of these strumpets wouldn't amount to anything," Jinlian said. "There is an old saying that a shipload of gold and silver would never satisfy people of their sort."

Li Jiao'er had seen Daian return, and, as Jinlian was speaking, she came to the window and listened. They could not see her. She heard Jinlian speak of her family as a host of strumpets. After that, she hated Jinlian from the bottom of her heart, and there was always enmity between them.

Jinlian, while Ximen was away, found that the days passed very slowly. When she realized that he did not mean to return, she waited till her two maids had gone to bed and then, making believe to go and walk in the garden, called Qintong to her room and made him drunk. Then she shut her door, undressed, and the pair made love together.

After this, she called the boy to her room every night and kept him there until daybreak. She gave him two or three of her golden pins, and put them in his hair. On another occasion she gave him a perfume box that she wore on her skirt. Unfortunately, the boy was not very discreet and, as he frequently went drinking and gambling with his fellow servants, it was not long before the affair became known. As the proverb says: "If you would have none to know your secret, you must do no evil." One day the rumour came to the ears of Xue'e and Li Jiao'er.

"That thievish strumpet has been high and mighty for a long time," they said, "but now we have her." They went and told Yueniang. She would not believe a word they said.

"You only wish to make things unpleasant for her," she said, "but you will annoy the Third Lady, and she will say you are slandering her boy." They said no more, and went away.

That evening Jinlian and the boy were amusing themselves. The woman had forgotten to shut the kitchen door. The maid Qiuju chanced to use that door on her way to the privy, and saw everything that was going on. The next morning, she told Xiaoyu, and Xiaoyu told Sun Xue'e.

Once again Xue'e and Li Jiao'er went to tell Yueniang. They gave her all the details, and added: "Her own maid told us about it; it is not something we have invented to get her into trouble. If you will not do anything in the matter, we will tell Father ourselves. If he can forgive a whore like this, he can forgive a scorpion."

It was the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month when Ximen Qing came back from the bawdy house to celebrate his birthday.

"He has just come back," Yueniang said to the two women, "and this should be a happy day for him. If you will not listen to me, and are still determined to tell him, I will not be responsible for the consequences."

They paid no attention to her, and, as soon as Ximen came in, they both ran up and told him that Jinlian was carrying on with one of the boys. Ximen Qing had been in an amiable mood but at this he flew into a towering rage. He went to the front court, and called, "Qintong! Qintong!" over and over again. Jinlian had heard what was happening, and, with trembling hands and feet, she told Chunmei to call the boy to her room. She begged him not to say a word to his master, and took the pins out of his hair but she was so excited that she forgot the perfume box.

Ximen Qing ordered the boy to the hall, and made him kneel down. Then he told some of the other servants to get a large bamboo and make it ready for use.

"You rascally slave," he cried, "do you confess your guilt?" Qintong made no reply.

"Take out his pins and let me see them," Ximen said to the boys. They looked but could not find any.

"What have you done with the silver pin with a golden head?"

"I have no silver pin," Qintong said.

"Ah, you slave, you think you will deceive me, do you?" Ximen said, and ordered the boys to take down his trousers. Three or four of them stripped Qintong. On the jade-coloured short trousers he was wearing the perfume box hung. As soon as Ximen caught sight of it, he made the boys show it to him, and recognized at once that it was the same one that used to hang on Jinlian's skirt.

"Where did you get this?" he cried in a fury. "Tell me the truth. Who gave it to you?"

The boy was so terrified that it was a long time before he could speak but at last he said, "I was tidying the garden one day, and picked it up. Nobody gave it to me."

This reply made Ximen still more angry. He bit his lips, and told his servants to beat the boy with all their strength. Qintong was bound and given thirty terrible stripes till his flesh was torn and the blood ran down his legs. Then Ximen told Laibao to cut the boy's hair at the temples and turn him out, and on no account to allow him to return. Qintong kowtowed, wept, and went away.

Jinlian soon heard all that had happened and felt as though a stream of icy water had been poured over her. It was not long before Ximen Qing arrived. She was so frightened that she trembled, and the blood in her veins seemed to freeze. She went forward to take his clothes but Ximen Qing boxed her ears so hard that he knocked her down. Then he told Chunmei to shut all the doors and keep everybody out. He took a small chair, went out, and sat in the courtyard in a shady place. Then he took a horse whip, and made the woman take off her clothes and kneel before him. She bowed her white face but did not dare to make a sound.

"You rascally whore," Ximen cried, "don't pretend you are dreaming. I have questioned that slave and he has confessed everything. You had better tell me the truth. When I was away, how many times did you play your games with that boy?"

"Oh, Heavens! Heavens!" Jinlian said, sobbing, "somebody has been telling lies about me, and I shall die if you believe them. All these days you've been away, I have spent my whole time sewing with Yulou. As soon as it was dark, I locked my door and went to bed. Unless there was something very urgent, I never even ventured to go beyond the corner door. If you don't believe me, ask Chunmei. There was nothing I could do without her seeing." She called to Chunmei: "Sister, come here and tell your Father all about it."

"You rascally whore," Ximen said again, "I know you gave the boy two or three gold pins. Why don't you admit it?"

"These suspicions will be the death of me," Jinlian cried. "Some nasty-minded strumpet who will come to a foul end has been telling you lies. I suppose she was jealous because she saw you always coming to sleep in my room. You know how many pins there were, there is not one missing. Count them yourself, and see. How can you suspect me of being so base as to carry on with a slave? If he were a full-grown slave, they would probably tell the same story but this short-haired lad is hardly out of his cradle. There is not a word of truth in the story. They have made up the whole chapter of scandal."

"We will leave the pins out of it," Ximen said, taking the perfume box from his sleeve. "This, I think, belongs to you. How do I come to find it on that boy's person? Now perhaps you will not have so much to say."

And with these words, Crash! fell the whip on her delicate white body. The pain was so great that she burst into tears. "Oh, dear good Father," she cried, "you mustn't treat me like this. If you will only give me a chance, I can explain everything. If you won't give me the chance but beat me to death, you'll make a very nasty mess here. As for that perfume box, one day when you were away Yulou and I were doing some needlework in the garden. It wasn't firmly attached, and it must've fallen down as I was going through the flower arbour. I looked everywhere for it but the boy must have picked it up. I'm sure I did not give it to him."

This certainly seemed to agree with what Qintong had said. Ximen looked again at the woman. Her flower-like body, unclothed, was kneeling as she uttered these softening words and wept so touchingly. His anger flew to Java, and he began to cool down. He called Chunmei and kissed her.

"Did she play heads and tails with that boy? If you tell me I ought to forgive the little strumpet, I will do so."

Chunmei sat on his knee, and made herself most charming and affectionate. "Father," she said, "you are making a fool of yourself. Mother and I never left one another the whole time. How can you possibly imagine that she would have anything to do with that slave? No, the whole thing is a plot made up by somebody, who is jealous. You must deal with the matter yourself, Father. If the story gets about, and you make yourself a laughingstock, that won't be very pleasant."

Ximen Qing could say no more. He told Jinlian to stand up and dress, and bade Qiuju prepare a meal. Jinlian poured out a full cup of wine and, offering it to him with both hands, knelt to wait for its return.

"This time I forgive you," Ximen said. "Whenever I am away, you must keep your mind pure and your ways clean. Shut your door early, and be on your guard against thoughts of evil. If I ever hear of anything of this sort again, there will be no more forgiveness."

"Your word is my law," Jinlian said meekly. She kowtowed four times, and sat down to drink with him.

So Jinlian, despite the high favour in which she was held by her husband, brought shame upon herself.

Ximen Qing was drinking wine in Jinlian's room when a boy knocked at the door and told him that Yueniang's two brothers, Fu, the manager of his shop, Ximen's daughter Ximen Dajie and her husband, and several other relatives had called to congratulate him on his birthday. He left Jinlian and went to receive his guests. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and the other brothers had also brought presents. Even Guijie had sent a servant with a gift. Ximen Qing was soon very busy receiving all his presents and sending out letters of invitation in return.

Meanwhile Meng Yulou, who had heard all about Jinlian's trouble, seized the opportunity while Ximen was not there, and went to see her without the others knowing anything about it. When she came, Jinlian was lying on the bed.

"Do tell me what it is all about, Sister," she said.

Jinlian cried bitterly. "That little strumpet has been telling tales about me. She made our husband so angry that he thrashed me. I hate those two whores with a hate as deep as the ocean."

"If you had to play tricks with the boy," Yulou said, "you might at least have made sure that I shouldn't lose him. But don't be unhappy. Our husband is bound to look at things from our point of view. If he comes to see me tomorrow, I shall tell him what I think about him."

"It is good of you to trouble about me," Jinlian said. She called Chunmei, and told her to serve tea. They chatted for a while, and Yulou went back to her own rooms. That night, Mistress Wu was staying with Yueniang and Ximen Qing went to sleep with Yulou.

"It was very wrong of you to distress Jinlian so unreasonably," Yulou said. "She did not do anything. This trouble has all come from her quarrel with Xue'e and Li Jiao'er. Without taking the trouble to make any inquiries, you had my boy beaten. You have certainly been most unjust, and it makes things very awkward for the poor woman. Do you imagine our mistress would not have told you, if there had been any truth in the story?"

"I did ask Chunmei," Ximen Qing said, "and she said exactly what you say."

"The Fifth Lady is very much upset," Yulou said. "Why don't you go and see her?"

"I will go and see her tomorrow," Ximen promised.

The next day was Ximen's birthday, and many visitors came to take wine with him, Major Zhou, the magistrate Xia, Captain Zhang, and Uncle Wu, Yueniang's brother. Ximen Qing sent a sedan chair for Guijie, and engaged two singing girls, who performed throughout the day.

As soon as her niece arrived, Li Jiao'er took her to visit Yueniang and the others, and she drank tea with them. They asked Jinlian to come and see her, and twice a maid went to her room to invite her but she said she was not very well and refused to come. Later in the evening, when Guijie was about to go home, Yueniang gave her a silk handkerchief and some artificial flowers, and went with Li Jiao'er to see her off. Guijie was anxious to go to the garden and pay her respects to Jinlian but as soon as Jinlian heard she was coming, she told Chunmei to bolt and bar the corner door. When Guijie got there, Chunmei said, "My Mistress's orders. I dare not open the door." Guijie had to go away, greatly abashed.

That evening Ximen Qing went to see Jinlian. Her beautiful tresses were all in disorder, and she seemed very weary and faded. But when he came, she took her clothes, served him with tea, and hot water to wash his feet, and showed him a hundred signs of affection. That night, as they played together, she did for him whatever he asked of her.

"Brother," she said, "who in all this household really cares about you? They are all just stale married women, nothing more. I am the only one who understands you, and you understand me. The others see that you show me favour and spend most of your time here; it makes them jealous, and they try to vent their spite on me. How could you be caught by such talk, and treat me so unkindly? There is an old saying: 'When a farmyard chicken is beaten, it turns round and round; a wild one flies away.' You may beat me to death but I shall never run away. The other day, when you were at the bawdy house and kicked Daian, I never complained. The Great Lady and Yulou know that quite well. I said I was afraid the girls there would do you no good. I said singing girls in places like that care for nothing but money. What is true love to them? Is there a single one of them who really loves you? That is all I said. Somebody came slyly up and secretly listened, and then they plotted together to get me in disgrace. Fortunately, while people may injure others, they cannot kill them; it is only those whom Heaven wishes to destroy who die. In the future you will realize that I am speaking the truth, and you will know what to do if such a thing happens again."

Ximen Qing was completely won over, and his delight in her was greater than ever.

Some days afterwards he mounted his horse and went off to the bawdy house, attended by Daian and Ping'an. Guijie had other visitors but as soon as she heard he was coming, she went to her room, washed off her powder, removed her rings and ornaments, lay down on the bed, and pulled the bedclothes over her. Ximen Qing came in. He waited for a long time before the old woman appeared and made a reverence to him.

"Why is it so long since you were here?" the old lady said. She asked him to take a seat.

"I was very busy on my birthday," Ximen Qing said, "and there is no one at home who seems able to attend to things."

"I am afraid my daughter must have been a trouble to you," the old lady said.

Ximen asked why Guiqing did not come to see him on his birthday. The old woman told him that she had been away; a traveller had taken her to stay with him at the inn, and she was still there. They talked for a while, and the old woman offered him tea.

"Where is Guijie?" Ximen said at length. "Don't you know, Sir!" the old woman said. "Ever since the child came back from your house, she has been terribly overwrought. She is not at all well. I can't tell you what is the matter with her but she has stayed in bed all the time and refused to leave her room. You must have a heart like a wolf's not to have been to see her before."

"This is the first I have heard of it," Ximen said. "Where is she? I will go and see her."

"She is lying down in her bedroom," the old lady said. She told a maid to go and raise the lattice. Ximen Qing went into the room. Guijie, covered with the bedclothes, was sitting on the bed, her face turned to the wall; her hair was in disorder and she seemed in a sad way. She did not move when Ximen came in.

"Why have you been ill since you were at my place?" Ximen said. The girl did not reply.

"What has made you so angry? Tell me." He questioned her for a long time, and at last she said:

"It is all your Fifth Lady's doing. Since you have someone in your own home who is as good as any strumpet, I can't imagine why you come here and make love to a wicked girl like me. I may have been brought up in this house but I don't believe I'm any worse than some in other houses I could mention. I did not go as a singing girl that day; I came to give you a present. Your great lady was very kind and gave me flowers and clothes, and when I heard you had a fifth lady, I asked to be allowed to pay my respects to her. If I hadn't done so, she would have said that the girls from the bawdy house are very ill-mannered but I *did* ask, and she refused to see me. When I was leaving your house, I asked once more, and she ordered her maid to shut the door in my face. Really she is lacking in the very elements of politeness."

"You mustn't blame her too much," Ximen Qing said. "She wasn't very well that day. If she had been, I'm sure she wouldn't have refused to come and see you. But I've often felt like giving that little strumpet a beating. She's always hurting somebody with that sharp tongue of hers."

Guijie slapped him lightly on the face. "Why haven't you beaten her, then, you shameless fellow?"

"You don't know how severe I can be," Ximen Qing said. "I have punished most unmercifully all the women and maids in my house, except, of course, my first wife. Sometimes I use a whip upon them twenty or thirty times or even more, and sometimes I cut their hair off."

"Oh," said Guijie, "I've met men before who talk about cutting the hair off their womenfolk but never one who did more than brag about it. You may have bowed three times and made reverence twice to them for all anybody could prove. If you mean what you say, go home and cut off a single tress, bring it here, and show it to me. If you do that, I'll believe you are the greatest hero there is in this part of the world."

"Your hand upon it," Ximen cried.

"A hundred times, if it pleases you."

Ximen Qing spent the night with Guijie, and the next day, as he was mounting his horse to go home, she called after him: "If you don't bring it to me, don't dare to show your face here again."

This made Ximen very excited, especially as he was already half drunk. As soon as he got home, he went straight to Jinlian's room. She saw that he had had some wine, and was most careful in her attentions. She offered him something to eat but he would have none of it. He told Chunmei to make the bed, then sent her away and shut the door. He sat on the bed and ordered the woman to take off his shoes. She took them off. Then he got on to the bed but he would not go to sleep, and sat on a pillow. He bade Jinlian undress and kneel down. She was so terrified that the sweat rolled down her body. She had not the faintest notion what was amiss, and could only kneel down sobbing quietly.

"Father," she said, "tell me what is wrong, even if it kills me. I have been so careful all day, and still I don't seem to satisfy you. You are just sawing me asunder with a blunt knife. How can I bear it?"

"You rascally little whore," Ximen cried, "if you don't take your clothes off, I will show you no mercy." He called to Chunmei: "Bring me the whip that is hanging behind the door."

Chunmei would not go into the room, and he had to call for a long time before she slowly pushed the door open and went in. Jinlian was on her knees, and the lamp had fallen down beside the table. In spite of Ximen's orders, the maid did not obey him.

"Chunmei, Sister, please help me," Jinlian cried, "he is going to beat me again."

"Don't worry about her, little oily mouth," Ximen said. "Give me the whip. I am going to beat the strumpet."

"How can you be so shameless, Father?" Chunmei cried. "What has Mother done wrong? You seem to listen to anything any bad woman likes to tell you, making a storm in a teacup all the time. Mother is one heart and mind with you. What makes you so changeable? I shall not do what you say." She shut the door and went out. Ximen Qing could only burst out laughing.
"I won't beat you this time," he said to Jinlian. "Come here. I want you to give me something. Will you give it me or not?"
"My precious darling," Jinlian said, "I belong to you, heart and soul. Whatever you ask, it is yours. What do you want?"
"I want some of your hair," Ximen said.
"Heavens!" Jinlian cried, "if you had asked me to set myself on fire, I would have done it. But to cut off my hair... that is too much. You must wish to frighten me to death. From the day of my birth, twenty-six years until this very day, I have never done such a thing. And lately my hair has been falling out of its own accord. Do, please, spare me that indignity."
"You are always complaining about my bad tempers," Ximen Qing said, "yet you won't do a single thing I ask you."
"If I don't obey you, I don't obey anybody. But tell me, why do you want my hair?"
"I am thinking of having a hairnet made," Ximen said.
"If you want a net, I will make one for you but you must not take my hair to that strumpet to lay a spell on me."
"I won't give it to anybody," Ximen said, "but I must have your hair to make the foundation for a net."
"Very well," Jinlian said, "in that case I will let you cut some off." She parted her hair. Ximen took a pair of scissors and cut a large tress from the crown of her head. He wrapped it in paper, and put it in his sleeve. Jinlian pressed close to him and wept quietly.
"I will do anything you wish," she said. "The only thing I ask is that you love me always. You may play with others as much as you please but you must not forget me."
That night their joy in each other seemed more glorious than ever. The next morning, when Ximen Qing got up, she served him with tea; then he mounted his horse and rode to the bawdy house.
"Where is the hair you were going to cut off?" Guijie cried.
"Here you are," said Ximen. He took the hair from his sleeve, and handed it to her. She opened the packet. It contained a tress of beautiful hair, as black as the blackest coal. She put it into her sleeve.
"You have seen it now," Ximen said. "Give it back to me. She was terribly upset because I insisted on cutting off that hair, and, until I changed countenance and frightened her, she wouldn't hear of my cutting it off. I told her I wanted it to make a net. You see, I have brought it to you. Perhaps now you will believe that I always do what I say."
"I don't see why you should be so alarmed," Guijie said. "There is nothing so very extraordinary about it. I'll let you have it before you go. You shouldn't have taken it, if you are so frightened of her."
"What makes you think I'm afraid of her?" Ximen Qing said, laughing. "If I were, I shouldn't tell anybody."
Guijie asked her sister to take wine with Ximen Qing, and, going to a quiet place, put some of the hair into her shoe, that she might tread it underfoot everyday. She kept Ximen a prisoner for several days and would not allow him to go home.
Jinlian was very unhappy for several days after her hair had been cut. She refused to leave her room and seemed too languid to take food or tea. Yueniang sent one of the boys to bring old woman Liu, an old favourite of hers, to see what was the matter.
"The lady is suffering from some secret grief," the old woman said, "and because the trouble is insistent and she can't free herself from it, she has headaches and gnawing pains at the heart, and does not feel inclined to take her food."
She opened her medicine box, and, taking out two black pills, told Jinlian to take them in the evening with some ginger water. "I will bring my husband tomorrow," she said. "He will tell your fortune for the coming year and see whether there is any bad luck in store."
"Can your husband really see what is in one's life?" Jinlian asked.
"He is blind," the old woman said, "but there are three things he can do. He can tell fortunes and read the Yin-Yang, and so save people from misadventure. He can bleed the sick, cauterize, and cure wens. The third thing is only to be mentioned with discretion but, as a matter of fact, he can make philters to change people's hearts."
"What are these philters for?" Jinlian said.
"Well," old woman Liu said, "suppose father and son do not agree as well as they might, or there is a slight misunderstanding between brothers, or a quarrel between wives, if my husband is told the true state of affairs, he will make a spell and write a charm. This is put in water, and the people concerned are given it to drink. Three days after drinking this water, father and son will love one another again, brothers will reach a perfect understanding, and wives will live in harmony together.
"Again, when a man is unsuccessful in business, or his lands and family are not doing very well, my husband can produce the necessary money and increase profits. And when it comes to curing illnesses and making people immune, praying to the stars and invoking the planets, my husband is absolutely a master. People call him Liu the Master of the Stars. I remember the case of a household where there was a new wife who came from a family that was none too well off. She was inclined to be light-fingered, and was always stealing things from her mother-in-law to give to her own people. When her husband found her out, he beat her. My husband exercised his art on her behalf, made a charm, and when it had been burned to ashes, the ashes were put into the cistern. The whole family drank the water from this cistern, and afterwards, even if they actually saw her stealing, they didn't seem to realize what she was about. He also put another charm under her pillow, and when her husband had once slept on that pillow, his hands might have been tied, for he could not beat her any more."
Jinlian listened to this and stored it away in her mind. She told the maid to give the old woman some tea and cakes, and, when she was about to take her departure, she gave her not only three *qian* of silver for her fee but five more to buy the materials needed for making a charm. She told her to bring the blind man early the next day so that he could burn the charm. The old woman went home, and next morning very early she brought the blind old rascal to the gate, and was about to go to the inner court. Ximen Qing was standing in the courtyard, and the gatekeeper asked the blind man what his business was.
"We have come to burn some papers for the Fifth Lady," the old woman said.
"Very well, in you go," the boy said, "but mind the dog doesn't bite you."
The old woman led her husband to Jinlian's apartments, and they waited some time for her. When she came, the blind man made a reverence to her; then they sat down, and Jinlian told him the eight characters of her destiny. The blind rascal reckoned for a while on his fingers, and said; "Lady, I will now interpret the eight characters of your destiny. They are *Gengchen* for the year, *Gengyin* for the month, *Yihai* for the day, and *Jichou* for the hour of your birth. The eighth of the month is the Spring Day, we must reckon your fate as from the first month. According to the admirable doctrine of Zi Ping, though your eight characters are indeed both clear and remarkable, you will never have the husband star in a favourable conjunction. The question of children, too, does not seem to be decided in your favour. The *Yi* tree grows in the first month and, though this would seem to show that you will enjoy good health, you must be careful lest you overdo things. *Geng* gold appears twice, and the *Yangren* star is unduly prominent, while the husband star is very troublesome. I should say that you will only reach contentment when you have outlived two husbands."
"I have already outlived one," Jinlian said.
"I beg you to excuse me, Lady," the blind rascal went on, "but though your life appears to be of the type known as *Shayin,* you are handicapped by the fact that there is the water of *Gui* in the *Hai* as well as in the *Chou.* This is decidedly a superabundance of water, and it rushes out of a single *Ji* earth. The stars *Guan* and *Sha* are confused. In the case of a man, if the influence of the *Sha* star is predominant, he will attain to dignity and prominence but, in the case of a woman, such a state of affairs indicates that she will be dangerous to her husbands. The fact that you belong to this class shows that you know very well what you're about and that you attract men.
"With regard to your fortune for the present year, this year is *Jiachen* in the cycle, and this is a sign of coming calamity. The two stars *Xiaohao* and *Goujiao* are influencing you, and, though this does not indicate any real catastrophe, you will have trouble from friends and relations, and backbiters will prove a nuisance."
"It is kind of you to have gone so carefully into all this for me," Jinlian said, "and now I should like you to make a spell for me. Here is a tael of silver to spend on a cup of tea. All I want is that backbiters shall leave me in peace, and that my husband shall have a high esteem for me." She went to her room, found a couple of hair ornaments, and gave them to the blind man. He put them in his sleeve.
"If you would like me to make a spell," he said, "I shall take a piece of willow wood and fashion it into two figures, one male and the other female. On one I shall write your husband's eight characters and on the other your own. Then I shall bind them together with forty-nine red threads. I shall cover the man's eyes with a piece of red cloth and stuff him with the leaves of artemisia. I shall put a needle through his hands and stick the feet with gum. You must put the figures under his pillow, secretly. I shall also write a charm in red ink, and the ashes of this you must put into his tea. Then providing he sleeps on this pillow, you will see the result in three days at the utmost."
"What is the meaning of all this?" Jinlian said.
"I'll explain," the old rogue replied. "The covering of the eyes with cloth will make you appear to him as beautiful as Xi Shi. Stuffing the figure with artemisia will make him love you. If I put a needle through the hands, that will ensure that, whatever your faults, he will not be able to raise his hand against you. Finally, the sticking of the feet with gum will prevent his wandering away from you."
Jinlian found this extremely satisfactory, and she wasted no time in getting candles and paper to burn the charms. The next day old woman Liu brought them, with water and the spell figures. Jinlian did with them as she had been told. She burned the charm to ashes, and prepared some of the best tea. When Ximen Qing came back, she told Chunmei to give him some of the tea. That night they slept on the same pillow. Two or three days passed, and their happiness was as great as that of fishes sporting in the water. Every household, no matter whether it be great or small, should make a rule that nuns, priests, nurses, and procuresses like these should always be kept at a distance.

## 034
## Li P'ing-erh Makes a Secret Tryst over the Garden Wall; the Maid Ying-ch'un Peeks through a Crack and Gets an Eyeful

*Since there's no such thing in this life as complete satisfaction;*
In one's way of coping with the world do not be too demanding.[1]
It's a good thing always to pay heed only to the words of superior men;
When disputes arise never listen to the words of petty persons.[2]
Only regard the customs of the age as a source of amusement;
While respecting the intentions of others by keeping them at a distance.
If one were to address perceptive women with a word to the wise;
It would be, "Don't ever confide your troubles to your sweetheart."[3]

One day earlier that summer,[4] on the fourteenth day of the sixth month, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came in from the front compound and went into Yüeh-niang's room, she said to him, "While you were out today, the Hua household sent a pageboy over with a note inviting you for a drink. 'Ask him to come over whenever he gets home,' he said."
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the invitation that read, "Can you join me for a chat at Wu Yin-erh's place in the licensed quarter at noon today? Come over to my place so we can go together. I do hope you can make it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon dressed himself to befit the occasion, ordered two of his attendants to prepare his best horse, and proceeded directly to the Hua household next door. How could he have known that Hua Tzu-hsü would not be at home? His wife, Li P'ing-erh, was standing on the raised stone platform just inside the second gate, the unfinished vamp of a sand-green Lu-chou pongee shoe in her hand. She was wearing a summer outfit that consisted of:
*A chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree,*
*Pendant amethyst earrings in gold settings,*
*A blouse of pale lavender silk, opening down the middle,*
*And a white silk skirt with drawnwork borders,*
*Beneath which there peeked out a pair of tiny shoes,*
*The points of which bore the beaks of red phoenixes.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing, quite unaware of what was in store for him, proceeded through the gate, and the two of them ran smack into each other.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had already had her on his mind for some time. Although he had caught a glimpse of her by the graveside at the old Eunuch Director's funeral the previous summer, he had not yet had a chance to savor the details. Now that he was able to meet her face to face and saw that she had a naturally fair complexion, was petite in stature, and had a face shaped like a melon seed and delicately curved eyebrows, before he knew it:
*His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and*
*His material souls dispersed among the nine heavens.*[5]
Stepping forward with alacrity, he gave her a deep bow, and the woman returned his salute, after which she turned around and disappeared into the interior of the house. But she sent out the maidservant with her hair cut straight across her forehead, named Hsiu-ch'un, to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to take a seat in the parlour, while she herself stood just inside the postern gate:
*Half revealing her captivating countenance,*
and addressed him, saying, "Please sit down for a little while, sir. He's gone out on an errand just now but he'll be back any minute."
Before long she sent out a maidservant with a cup of tea, and while Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking it, she conversed with him from the other side of the gate, saying, "At this drinking party over there that he's invited you to today, sir, whatever happens, for my sake, couldn't you urge him to come home a little earlier than usual? Our two menservants will both accompany him, leaving only these two maidservants and myself, so there won't be anyone to be relied on at home."
"Sister-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're certainly in the right. My brother really ought to:
*Pay more attention to his family affairs.*
Since you have so instructed me, Sister-in-law, I'll be sure to stick by his side.
*Together we'll go and together return.*
How could I do anything detrimental to my brother's interests?"
While they were still speaking, who should appear but Hua Tzu-hsü himself, and the woman returned to her own quarters.
Hua Tzu-hsü saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing and then said, "How good of you to accept my invitation. Something came up just now that I simply had to run out and take care of. Forgive me for not being here to greet you myself."
Thereupon, they took their places as guest and host, and a pageboy was ordered to bring tea.
It was not long until they had done with the tea, and Hua Tzu-hsü instructed the pageboy, "Tell Mother to prepare the refreshments. I'm going to share three cups of wine with Mr. Hsi-men here before we set off."
Then, turning to his guest, he continued, "Today is the birthday of Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter, and so I've invited you to join me in paying her a visit in order to celebrate the occasion."
"My Good Brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't you say so before?"
Turning to Tai-an, he ordered, "Go home at once, get five mace of silver put into a sealed packet, and bring it back to me here."
"What need is there for you to put yourself to such trouble, Brother?" protested Hua Tzu-hsü. "I'm afraid I'm to blame."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the servants were setting up a table, he said, "Brother, there's no need to entertain me here. Let's go into the quarter and do our drinking there."
"I wouldn't presume to detain you," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "Just stay a little longer."
Whereupon, in:
*Large platters and large bowls,*
such delicacies as chicken feet and fresh pork were set before them. A high-stemmed silver goblet in the shape of a sunflower was provided for each of them. There were also four "spring rolls" left over when they had finished eating that they saved as a treat for the boys who tended their horses.
Before long, after Tai-an had returned with the requested gratuity, the two of them mounted their horses and set off together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was accompanied by Tai-an and P'ing-an, and Hua Tzu-hsü by T'ien-fu and T'ien-hsi, so they had four pageboys in their retinue as they made their way directly to Madam Wu the Fourth's establishment in the back alley of the licensed quarter in order to celebrate Wu Yin-erh's birthday.
After they got there:
*Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,*
*Song and dance and wind and string instruments,*
they continued drinking until the first watch before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that Hua Tzu-hsü got stinking drunk, while at the same time, in response to Li P'ing-erh's request, he actually accompanied him on his way home. When the calls of the pageboys had succeeded in getting someone to open the front gate, they helped their master into the parlour and set him down. Li P'ing-erh and her maidservants, carrying lamps and candles, came out and supported Hua Tzu-hsü on his way into the interior of the house.
His mission accomplished, Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to take his leave when the woman came back out to thank him.
"My poor husband is a sorry lot and something of a sot," she said. "It's very kind of you to have put up with him for my sake and to have brought him home with you. Please don't laugh at my solicitude, sir."
"How would I dare?" replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, hastening to make a low bow in response to her salutation. "Since you gave me my marching orders this morning, Sister-in-law, I have shown myself capable of:

*Leading the army forth, and*
*Leading it back again.*
How could your wish that I should accompany your husband home be anything but:
*Imprinted in my heart and engraved on my bones?*[6]
Had I failed to do so, it would not only have added to your worries but would have shown me to be:
*Undependable in the performance of my task.*
The people at that establishment would have had Brother in their clutches if I hadn't insisted on urging him to leave. But as we passed by the gate of the Star of Joy establishment—the one that features the painted face, Cheng Ai-hsiang, whose nickname is Cheng Kuan-yin, or Goddess of Mercy Cheng, and who's quite a looker—Brother would have ventured in there, if I hadn't done everything in my power to stop him. 'Brother,' I said to him, 'let's go home. There's time enough to come another day. Sister-in-law's at home worried to death about you.' It was only then that he consented to come straight home with me. Otherwise, if he'd gone into the Cheng place, he wouldn't have been home all night.
"With all due respect, Sister-in-law—I really shouldn't say this sort of thing—but Brother's a fool. With such a young wife and such a large house to look after, how can he simply abandon you and stay away from home for whole nights at a time? It doesn't make any sense."
"It's just as you say," the woman responded. "Simply because of this philandering of his, and his refusal to take anyone's advice, I get so upset here at home that my body aches all over. From now on, sir, whenever you run into him in the licensed quarter, whatever happens, for my sake, urge him to come home as soon as possible.
*Your kindness will be amply rewarded,*
*I will never dare to forget it."*
Now this Hsi-men Ch'ing was the sort of man of whom it is said:
*If you hit him on the top of his head,*
*The soles of his feet will ring.*
He had been a habitué of the world of breeze and moonlight for so many years that there wasn't much he didn't know about anything. Therefore, on this particular day, the fact that the woman was opening up a wide avenue of approach to herself was not lost on him.
His face wreathed in smiles, he laughed, saying, "How can you talk that way, Sister-in-law? Really! What are friends for, anyway? I'll certainly do my best to admonish my brother. You can rest assured, Sister-in-law."
The woman bowed to him again to express her thanks and also directed a young maidservant to bring out a cup of tea, flavoured with fruit kernels, in a carved lacquer cup with a silver spoon.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished the tea, he said, "I'd better be on my way. Be careful not to let anyone into the house."
Whereupon, he took his leave and went home.
From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing made up his mind that he would contrive to make a conquest of this woman. Time and again he saw to it that Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and the rest of that crowd detained Hua Tzu-hsü in the licensed quarter, carousing all night long, while he slipped out and made his way back to his own home. Once there, he would stand around in front of the gate until the woman and her two maidservants appeared at the front gate next door. She noticed that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing, who gave a discreet cough as he passed in front of her door. First he would head east, then turn around and go west, or come to a halt in front of the gateway across the street and stare fixedly in the direction of her door. The woman would show herself in the doorway and then, when she saw him coming, duck inside, only to stick her head out again as soon as he had passed by. As for:
*The messages in their eyes and the expectations*
*in their hearts;*
*There was no longer any need to express them in words.*
One day, as Hsi-men Ch'ing was standing in front of his gate, the woman sent her young maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, to invite him over.
"What are you inviting me for, Sister?" Hsi-men Ch'ing pointedly asked. "Is your father at home or not?"
"Father's not at home," Hsiu-ch'un replied. "It's Mother that's inviting you, sir. There's something she wants to ask you."
This was just the signal Hsi-men Ch'ing had been waiting for. He complied with alacrity, was shown into the parlour, and took a seat.
After some time, the woman came out and saluted him, saying as she did so, "I'm extremely grateful for your consideration the other day.
*It is imprinted in my heart,*
*My gratitude knows no bounds.*
Since my poor husband went out last, it's been two days in a row now that he hasn't come home. I wonder if you happen to have come across him or not, sir?"
"Yesterday, along with three or four others, he was drinking in the Cheng family establishment," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Something happened to come up that brought me home, and today I haven't had a chance to go into the quarter, so I don't know whether he's still there or not. If I'd been there I could hardly have failed to urge him to come home as early as possible. I'm well aware how upsetting it is for you, Sister-in-law."
"It's just as you say," the woman responded. "I suffer constantly from his refusal to take anyone's advice, his frequent resort to the quarter:
*Sleeping among the flowers and lolling*
*beneath the willows,*
and his refusal to pay any attention to family affairs."
"If one had to assess Brother's character," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he's certainly humane and righteous enough but he does have this one flaw."
As they were talking, the young maidservant brought tea, and they drank it together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid Hua Tzu-hsü might come home and thought it imprudent to linger, so he prepared to take his leave.
The woman, for her part, begged Hsi-men Ch'ing, in no uncertain terms, "If you happen to go there tomorrow, whatever happens, urge him to come home as soon as possible. Your kindness will be rewarded. You can be sure I'll make it worth your while, sir."
"Say no more, Sister-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, Brother and I are just like that together."
After saying which, Hsi-men Ch'ing went home.
The next day, when Hua Tzu-hsü came back from the licensed quarter, the woman complained to him, saying. "While you've been out:
*Indulging your taste for wine and sex,*
we've become more than a little obligated to our next-door neighbour, the Honourable Hsi-men, who has, more than once, helped to see you safely home. You really ought to buy him a present of some kind to express your gratitude if you don't want to fall behind in your social obligations."
Hua Tzu-hsü immediately bought four boxes of presents and a jar of wine and sent the pageboy, T'ien-hsi, to deliver them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted them and gave the messenger a generous tip but we will say no more of this.
Wu Yüeh-niang, who was present on this occasion, asked, "What is the Hua household sending you this batch of presents for?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "This must be because, the other day, when Brother Hua the Second invited me to join him in the licensed quarter to help celebrate Wu Yin-erh's birthday, he got drunk, and I had to help him to get home. And also because his wife is aware that I constantly urge him not to spend the night in the quarter but to go home as early as possible, and she can't get over her feelings of gratitude at my consideration. I imagine she must have suggested to Brother Hua the Second that he buy these presents in order to thank me."
Wu Yüeh-niang folded her hands in front of her chest and made him a bow in the manner of a Buddhist priest, saying, "Brother, you really ought to take a good look at yourself. You're just like:
*The earthenware idol preaching to the idol of clay.*
You, too, stay away from home for days at a time:
*Seducing people's daughters and carrying on*
*with their wives,*
and you have the face to preach to someone else's husband."
"I don't suppose," she continued, "that you're planning to simply accept these presents from them without doing anything in return. Whose name was written on the card that came with the gifts, anyway? If it was his wife's name, then we can write an invitation in my name today and invite her over for a visit. She's been anxious to make our acquaintance for some time. If it was her husband's name, invite him or not, as you please. It's no business of mine."
"It was in Brother Hua the Second's name," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll invite him over tomorrow, that's all."
The next day, sure enough, Hsi-men Ch'ing made the necessary preparations and invited Hua Tzu-hsü over for a visit. They spent the better part of the day drinking together.
When he got home, Li P'ing-erh said to him, "We mustn't be remiss in our social obligations. We sent him a set of presents and he has reciprocated by inviting you over for a drink. Some day soon you ought to make the necessary preparations and invite him back over here for a drink. Turnabout is fair play."
*Light and darkness alternate swiftly.*
Before long the Double Yang festival,[7] on the ninth day of the ninth month, rolled around. Hua Tzu-hsü took advantage of the occasion to engage the services of two singing girls, and sent an invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing to come over and enjoy the chrysanthemums with him. He also invited Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun to keep them company. Playing the game:
*"Passing the Flower to the Beat of the Drum,"*[8]
they:
*Enjoyed themselves as they drank up the wine.*
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*The raven and the hare*[9] *move in their orbits*
as swiftly as arrows;
Among the festivals in the human world
it is again the Double Yang.
The red leaves on a thousand branches
supply autumn colour;
The yellow blossoms on the garden paths
emit unusual fragrance.
But the black-hatted young official is not seen
ascending the heights;
He is still dreaming of a silk-clad young lady
offering him wine.
Amid embroidered hangings, behind latticed doors,
they gaze at each other;
From this time on, their mutual love
will never be forgotten.
That day the bunch of them continued to drink until after the lamps had been lighted. At this juncture Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to get up from his place and go outside to relieve himself. He did not anticipate that Li P'ing-erh would be standing there, eavesdropping, just on the other side of the latticework partition, and the two of them ran smack into each other. Before Hsi-men Ch'ing could get out of the way, the woman, who had hastily withdrawn behind the postern gate on the west side of the courtyard, surreptitiously sent her maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, to waylay him in the shadows.
"Mother has sent me to ask you, sir," she whispered, "if you won't take it easy on the wine and go home as early as you can. Right now she's contriving a way to hustle Father off to the quarter to spend the night. This evening, thus and so, Mother would like to have a word with you."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:
*His delight knew no bounds.*
He returned to the party, after relieving himself, and from that point on surreptitiously disposed of his drinks, concealing what he was doing behind his sleeve. As the singing girls continued to play their instruments, sing, and ply the guests with wine, he pretended to be too drunk to have any more.
Before long it was already the first watch, and Li P'ing-erh kept coming back impatiently to eavesdrop outside the screen. She saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting in the place of honour, pretending to have fallen asleep, while Sponger Ying and Tagalong Hsieh were sitting there, as if their bodies were nailed to their chairs. They were so drunk they bobbed about like the float valve in an oil jar but they wouldn't get up to go. It got so bad that Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun finally left but the two of them still wouldn't budge. Li P'ing-erh was beside herself.
Hsi-men Ch'ing eventually got up to go but Hua Tzu-hsü wouldn't let him get away.
"I must not have done my duty as a host today," he said. "Brother, how can you refuse to stay a little longer?"
"I'm really drunk," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can't swallow another drop." Whereupon, making a deliberate display of:
*Swaying to the east and tumbling to the west,*
he prevailed upon his two pageboys to help him back home.
"I don't know what's the matter with him today," said Sponger Ying, "that he kept refusing to have anything more. He got drunk when he'd hardly had anything to drink. But since our host has gone to so much trouble on our behalf, let's ask our two sisters here to bring out some larger cups, and we'll have another forty or fifty rounds before breaking up."
When Li P'ing-erh heard this, from her vantage point on the other side of the screen, she cursed them unremittingly for a pair of slobber-pussed jailbirds, and inconspicuously sent the pageboy, T'ien-hsi, to call Hua Tzu-hsü out for a word with her.
"If you want to go on drinking with that bunch," she told him, in no uncertain terms, "you can take yourselves into the licensed quarter, this minute, and do your drinking there. Don't stick around the house and bother me anymore. Before I know it, it'll be:
*The third watch in the middle of the night,*
and you'll still be:
*Burning oil and wasting fuel.*
I've had enough of it."
"If I go into the licensed quarter with them at this hour," said Hua Tzu-hsü, "I'll never make it back home tonight. You'd better not give me a hard time about it."
"You go ahead," the woman said. "I'll not give you a hard time about it, that's all."
This was just the signal Hua Tzu-hsü had been waiting for. He came back and told the others about it, thus and so, saying, "Let's go into the licensed quarter."
"Really?" said Sponger Ying. "Sister-in-law said that? It's no use trying to fool us. You'd better go back and ask Sister-in-law again before we get going."
"My wife just spoke to me about it a minute ago," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "She told me not to come home till tomorrow."
"I've got it," said Tagalong Hsieh. "She just couldn't take any more of Beggar Ying's palaver. Now that our brother's succeeded in getting her permission, we can go without anything to worry about."
Thereupon, along with the two singing girls, the whole party set off for the licensed quarter. T'ien-fu and T'ien-hsi accompanied their master, Hua Tzu-hsü, and his two guests. When they arrived at Wu Yin-erh's place in the back alley of the quarter it was already the second watch. They called until someone opened the gate. Wu Yin-erh had already gone to bed but she got up, lit some candles in the reception room, and invited them to come in and have a seat.
"The patron of your establishment," explained Sponger Ying, "invited us to his place to enjoy the chrysanthemums and have a drink today. Having already drunk to the point where we can't stop, he's also invited us to look in on you here in the quarter. Whatever you've got in the house to drink, serve it up, so we can continue drinking."
We will say no more, for the moment, about Hua Tzu-hsü's drinking bout in the licensed quarter but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he arrived home, still feigning drunkenness, he went into P'an Chin-lien's quarters. No sooner had he taken off his outer clothes, however, than he went out into the front garden and sat down to await a signal from Li P'ing-erh's side of the wall. After some time had passed, he heard them chasing the dog and locking the gate on the other side. Not long after this, what should appear in the dark shadows over the wall but the maidservant, Ying-ch'un. She pretended to be calling a cat but when she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in the pavilion, she gave him a message. Hsi-men Ch'ing then moved over a table and a bench and, by mounting on top of them, was able to get over the wall. A ladder had already been put in place on the other side.
Now that Hua Tzu-hsü was out of the way, Li P'ing-erh had already:
*Removed her headdress,*
*Carelessly coiled her raven locks, and*
*Adorned herself with demure elegance,*
before coming out to stand in the veranda. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come over the wall:
*Her delight knew no bounds.*
She welcomed him into her room that was brightly illuminated by lamps and candles, and where she had already laid out a magnificent spread of wine and delicacies, condiments and appetizers.
There was a small pot:
*Filled to the brim with fragrant wine.*
The woman:
*Lifting high a jade goblet,*
with both hands, allowed Ying-ch'un to fill it from the wine pot, and then offered it to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a deep bow, saying, "We've been obligated to you in the past, sir, and you have even gone to the trouble of entertaining us. It's enough to make me:
*Uneasy in my heart.*
Today I took it upon myself to prepare this cup of watery wine and invite you over, sir, as a means of expressing some small part of my inadequate feelings. And then I've had to contend with the refusal of those two goddamned slobber-pusses to leave. I was really beside myself. But now I've succeeded in packing them all off to the licensed quarter."
"My only fear is that Brother Two might come home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I've already told him to spend the night there and not come back," said the woman. "The two menservants have both gone with him. There's no one else left at home but these two maidservants and Old Mother Feng, who looks after the gate. She's been a servant in my family since I was a child and is completely trustworthy. The front and back gates are already locked."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was completely delighted. The two of them then sat down together:
*Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,*
*Exchanging cups as they drank,*
while Ying-ch'un stood at their side to pour the wine and Hsiu-ch'un went back and forth to serve the food. When they began to feel the effects of the wine; within the brocade bed curtains, the maids:
*Perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, and*
*Put in its place the coral pillow.*
The servants then removed the table at which they had been drinking and put the latch on the door, after which the two of them:
*Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport.*
It so happens that well-to-do households are equipped with double windows, the outer layers of which are called shutters, and the inner layers, casements. When the woman sent her maidservants out of the room, she closed the two casements on the inside, so that even though the room was illuminated by lamps and candles, no one could see in from the outside.
Now the maidservant, Ying-ch'un, was already sixteen years old and knew something of the world. When she saw that the two of them were going to engage in an illicit liaison that night, she stealthily pulled a hairpin out of her headdress, poked a hole in the paper of the lower part of the casement, and peeped inside.
Truly, what were the two of them doing with each other? Behold:
*By the gleam of lamplight,*
*Amid mermaid silk curtains:*
*One comes, the other goes,*
*One butts, the other lunges.*
*One of them stirs his jade arms into motion,*
*The other raises her golden lotuses on high.*
*This one gives vent to the warbling of an oriole,*
*That one gives voice to the twittering of a swallow.*
*It is just like Chang Chün-jui's rendezvous*
*with Ts'ui Ying-ying;*[11]
*It much resembles Sung Yü's secret tryst*
*with the Goddess of Witches' Mountain.*[11]
*Promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas,*
*Still resonate within their ears;*
*The butterfly is enamored, the bee distraught,*
*They are not yet willing to call a halt.*
*The engagement is protracted,*
*The coverlet disturbed by crimson waves;*[12]
*Until the transfusing touch of the "magic rhinoceros*
*horn*[13] *penetrates her creamy breast;*
*The battle is prolonged,*
*The bed curtains clipped by silver hooks,*
*Until the twin arcs of her painted eyebrows*
*wilt on her jade face.*
Truly:
*The third time that lip meets lip*
*passion is stronger than ever;*
*A single melting sensation suffuses the body*
*when lovers meet in secret.*
While the two of them were in the room playing at clouds and rain, who would have thought that everything they did was so clearly seen and heard by Ying-ch'un from her vantage point outside the window that she might well have exclaimed:
*"Is it not delightful?"*[14]
She could hear everything that they said.
"How old are you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked the woman.
"I was born in the year of the ram," said Li P'ing-erh, "so, this year, I'm twenty-two."
She then went on to ask, "How old is your first lady?"
"My wife was born in the year of the dragon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "which would make her twenty-five."
"So she's three years older than I am," said the woman. "One of these days I ought to buy a set of presents and go pay a call on your First Lady. My only fear is that she may not be any too friendly."
"My wife has always had a most accommodating disposition," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If that were not the case, how could I ever manage to keep so many bedmates around the place?"
"When you came over here, just now," the woman went on to ask, "did the First Lady know about it or not? If she should ask you about it, what would you say?"
"My wives all live in the rear compound," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "four courtyards back from the front of the house. The only exception is my fifth concubine, née P'an, who lives all by herself in a two-storied belvedere in the front garden but she doesn't dare interfere with me."
"And how old is the Fifth Lady?" the woman asked.
"She was born in the same year as my wife," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"That's good," the woman said. "If she doesn't think it presumptuous of me, I'd like to acknowledge her as an elder sister. Someday soon, if you can get hold of the outlines of the First Lady's and the Fifth Lady's feet for me, I'll make two pairs of shoes for them, myself, and take them over with me, as a token of my feelings."
The woman then pulled out two gold pins from among those that held her headdress in place and gave them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, enjoining him, "If you should go into the licensed quarter, don't let Hua Tzu-hsü see them."
"I understand," Hsi-men Ch'ing promised.
Thereupon, the two of them:
*Like glue and like lacquer,*
dallied with each other until the fifth watch, when:
*The cock crowed outside the window, and*
*The eastern horizon began to grow light.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing, fearing that Hua Tzu-hsü might come home, got up and put his clothes in order.
"You can climb over the wall the same way you came," the woman said.
The two of them agreed on a set of signals between themselves. Whenever Hua Tzu-hsü was safely out of the way, a maidservant on this side would look over the wall and give a surreptitious cough as a signal, or first throw a piece of tile over the wall to see if the coast was clear before climbing up to communicate with him. Hsi-men Ch'ing could then use a ladder to climb over the wall, where he would find another already in place to receive him. The two of them could thus:
*Communicate across the intervening wall,*[15]
as they engaged in:
*Pilfering jade and purloining perfume.*[16]
As long as they did not go in and out the main gates, there would be no way for the neighbours in the vicinity to find out about their clandestine affair.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*In your eating, go easy on the salt and vinegar;*
Don't bother to go places where you don't belong.
If you want to be respected, study diligently;
If you don't want a deed discovered, don't do it.[17]
To resume our story, as the day dawned, Hsi-men Ch'ing climbed back over the wall the way he had come and went to P'an Chin-lien's room.
Chin-lien, who was still in bed, asked him, "Where did you go off to yesterday without anyone's knowing it? You didn't come home all night, and you didn't tell me where you were going."
"Once again," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was Brother Hua the Second who sent a pageboy over to invite me to join him on an excursion into the licensed quarter. We've been drinking half the night, and I came home as soon as I could tear myself away."
Although Chin-lien believed him, the shadow of a doubt still lingered in her mind.
One day, after dinner, she and Meng Yü-lou were sitting in the pavilion in the garden doing some needlework together when a piece of tile came flying over the wall and landed right in front of them. Meng Yü-lou was so preoccupied with stitching the sole of the shoe she was working on that she didn't notice anything. But P'an Chin-lien swiftly surveyed the scene and caught an indistinct glimpse of a white face that poked over the top of the wall and then immediately withdrew.
Chin-lien nudged Yü-lou, pointing to the place where the head had appeared, and said, "Look, Sister Three, that was the older of the two maidservants in the Hua household next door. She must have climbed up to look at our flowers over the wall and then, on seeing us here, gotten down again."
Although this is all that she said at the time, she didn't let it go at that.
Later the same evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home after a social engagement and came into Chin-lien's quarters. When she helped him off with his outer garments and asked if he wanted anything, he expressed no interest in food or tea of any kind but made a beeline for the front garden. P'an Chin-lien, on the principle that:
*One thief knoweth another,*
decided to spy on him and observed that, after he had sat there for some time, the same maidservant as before peeked over the wall, whereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing clambered up a ladder and disappeared over the wall himself.
Once there, he was met by Li P'ing-erh, who conducted him into her room for a rendezvous but there is no need to describe this in detail.
P'an Chin-lien returned to her room where, all night long, she:
*Tossed first this way and then that,*
but could not get to sleep.
At dawn the next day, who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who pushed open the door to her room and came inside. The woman pretended to be asleep and did not pay him any attention. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already feeling somewhat uneasy about the situation, came up and sat down beside her on the edge of the bed.
When the woman saw what he was doing, she jumped up into a sitting position herself, took hold of him by the ear with one hand, and berated him, saying, "You unfaithful scoundrel! Where did you really go off to last night, anyway; leaving your old mother to fret the whole night through?"
"No sooner do I let you out of my sight," she continued, "than you're up to your old tricks. But I already know all about them, and you're beginning to try my patience. Tell me the truth at once, all this while, how many times have you made out with that whore in the Hua household next door? If you confess to everything, I may let you off the hook; but if you try to deceive me by so much as a single word, the next time you set one foot over there, I'll raise such a hue and cry before you can get your other foot over the threshold, you fickle jailbird, that:
*You'll die without a plot to be buried in.*[18]
"You've been arranging to have your cronies latch onto her husband and keep him overnight in the licensed quarter while you're here making out with his wife. If it's trouble you want, I'll give you enough so that:

*When you've had your fill, there'll be enough left over*
*for you to wrap up and take home with you.*
No wonder, yesterday, when Sister Meng the Third and I were in the garden doing our needlework, what should appear but that elder maidservant from her place:
Sticking out her head and craning her neck,
over the wall? It turns out she was nothing but a ghost-snatching demon sent by that whore to snatch you away. You think you can fool your old mother, do you? The other night when that cuckold of hers supposedly invited you to join him for an excursion into the licensed quarter, it was his own home that was the licensed quarter, wasn't it?"
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them, he was flustered enough to adopt the posture of a dwarf.
Stamping his feet in exasperation, he knelt down on the ground with an ingratiating laugh and pleaded with her, saying, "You crazy little oily mouth! Not so loud! The truth of the matter is that, thus and so, she asked how old the two of you were and said that, someday soon, if she can get hold of the outlines of your feet, she'll make a pair of shoes for each of you. She'd also like to acknowledge you both as elder sisters. She's quite content to be a younger sister to you."
"I don't need that whore to acknowledge me as any older brother or older sister," exclaimed Chin-lien. "She steals other people's husbands and then comes around offering to do them little favours as a means of cementing the relationship. Your old mother is:
*Not the sort of person to let dust*
*be thrown in her eyes.*[18]
She thinks she can get away with that kind of mischief right under my nose, does she?"
As she spoke, she pulled open his trousers with one hand, exposing to view his limp and flaccid organ that still had a silver clasp fastened around it.
"Tell me the truth," she demanded. "How many times did you make out with that whore last night?"
"Only once that would really count," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You'll have to swear an oath on that all too vigorous body of yours before you can get me to believe that," said the woman. "One time only and it's:
*As soft as driveling snot and thick as gravy.*[19]
It might as well have been stricken with paralysis. The slightest sign of vitality would be cause for hope."
As she spoke, she removed the clasp with a single motion of her hand, and continued to berate him, saying, "You shameless ruffian!
*You may be a brown cat but you've got a black tail.*
No wonder I turned the place upside down looking for it, and all the time it was you who had spirited the thing away in order to screw around with that whore."
Affecting an ingratiating smile, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You crazy little whore! You'll be the death of me yet. She has repeatedly asked me to convey the message that someday soon she'll come over and kowtow to you. And she's going to make a pair of shoes for you too. Yesterday she sent her maidservant over for an outline of the feet of the one from the Wu family. And today she asked me to deliver this pair of hairpins in the shape of the character for long life to you as a present."
Thereupon he took off his cap, pulled them out of his headdress, and presented them to Chin-lien. Taking them into her hand and looking them over, Chin-lien saw that they were a pair of gold, openwork pins, in the shape of the character for long life that had been deeply chased in intaglio and inset with azurite. It was obvious from the extraordinary intricacy of the craftsmanship that they had been manufactured for imperial use and came from the palace.
Chin-lien was utterly delighted and said, "Well, if that's the way things stand, I won't say any more about it, that's all. When you go over there in the future, I'll act as a lookout, so the two of you can screw away to your hearts' content. How would that be?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted he put both arms around her and said, "My precious child, if you really do that, it will prove the truth of the adage:
*You don't raise a child in the hope it will*
*shit gold and piss silver;*
*All you can hope for is that it will*
*respond empathetically to you.*[20]
Tomorrow I'll go myself and buy you a set of patterned clothing to express my gratitude."
"I don't trust that:
*Honeyed mouth and sugared tongue,*
of yours," the woman responded. "If you want your old mother to fix things up for the two of you, you'll have to agree to three conditions."
"No matter how many conditions you impose, I'll agree to them all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The first condition," the woman said, "is that you will have to give up frequenting the licensed quarter. The second condition is that you must do as I say. The third condition is that when you go over to sleep with her, when you come home, you must tell me all about it, without deceiving me by so much as a single word."
"Those conditions are no obstacle," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll agree to all of them, and make an end to it."
From this time on, whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing came back after spending the night next door, he would regale the woman with an account of his adventures.
"Li P'ing-erh has a naturally fair complexion," he would say. "Her face is shaped like a melon seed. She's very amorous and she drinks like a fish. We often bring a box of delicacies inside the bed curtains and play cards there and drink for half the night before going to sleep."
One day, he reached into his sleeve and pulled out an object that he handed to Chin-lien to look at, saying. "This is an album of paintings from the Palace Treasury that the old eunuch director obtained during his service in the Imperial Household Department. The two of us consult it by lamplight and then attempt to emulate the proceedings."
Chin-lien took the album in her hand and opened it up to take a look. There is a lyric that testifies to this:
*Mounted on patterned damask in the imperial palace,*
Fastened with ivory pins on brocade ribbons;
Vividly traced in outlines of gold,
enhanced by blue and green colours;
The square painting on each folio leaf
is neatly framed.
The women vie with the Goddess of Witches' Mountain,
The men resemble that handsome paragon, Sung Yü.[22]
Pair by pair, within the bed curtains, they show
themselves to be practiced combatants.
The names of the positions are
twenty-four in number;[23]
Each one designed to arouse the
lust of the beholder.
Chin-lien, having perused it from beginning to end, was reluctant to let it out of her hands and, turning it over to Ch'un-mei, said, "Put it away safely in my trunk so we can amuse ourselves with it whenever we want to."
"You can look it over for a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but then you'll have to return it to me. This is a prized possession, belonging to someone else that I borrowed to bring home and look at, on condition that I return it to her afterward."
"If it belongs to her, what's it doing in my house?" demanded Chin-lien. "I didn't take it out of her hands. And even if I had, she couldn't get it out of me now."
"It wasn't you who asked her for it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was I who borrowed it. You crazy little slave. Stop fooling around."
As he spoke, he went after her and tried to wrest the album out of her hand.
"If you try to grab it," said Chin-lien, "I'll go you one better. I'll tear it to shreds and then nobody will be able to enjoy it."
"I guess I'm outmaneuvered," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "Do as you like with it but return it when you're through, that's all. If you give this back to her, she's got another remarkable object I can borrow for you in the future."
"My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous?" said Chin-lien. "Bring it here first, and then I'll let you have this album back."
The 2 of them continued their badinage for some time. That evening, in her room, Chin-lien perfumed with incense the mandarin duck quilt, deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick, Made herself up alluringly, washed her private parts, and, together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, opened up the album inside the bed curtains, preparatory to enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss. Black magic and sorcery have existed since ancient times. If you look at the way in which Chin-lien, from the time she prevailed upon the blind Stargazer Liu to effect a "turnabout" on her behalf, in no time at all contrived to so complicate the situation that Hsi-men Ch'ing's annoyance and anger were transformed into favour, while he seclusion and disgrace were transmuted to joy with the result that he no longer dared to control her; can the existence of such arts be doubted? Truly, though you may be as devious as any demon, one will drink the water she's washed her feet in. There is a lyric to the tune *Partridge Sky* that testifies to this:

*She remembers that time in the studio when they had just met;*
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp-shed only a half-light.
*Thinking of the past, her dreaming soul deluded;*
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes, their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them will never be separated.

One day, when Ximen Qing went to Wu Yueniang's room, his wife told him that Master Hua had sent a boy to invite him to take wine that day. Ximen looked at the message. It said: "Come and talk with me this afternoon at Wu Yin'er's house. Call for me, and we will go together. I greet you heartily."
He dressed quickly and, summoning two boys to attend him, set off upon a fine horse to call on Master Hua. He was surprised to find that Hua was not at home but Li Ping'er was standing on the steps that led to the inner part of the house. She wore a silken hairnet, with golden earrings set with amethysts, a coat with white trimmings, and an embroidered skirt, beneath which peeped forth a pair of dainty little feet. Ximen had entered hurriedly, and they bumped into one another.
Although he had seen her once before, in the country, he had not paid any particular attention to her but she had made some impression upon him. Now they met face to face. She was pale and clear-skinned, rather short, with a face as oval as a melon seed, long, with two finely arched eyebrows. He was enraptured.
Quickly he went forward and made a reverence to her, and she as quickly returned his greeting. Then she turned and went to the inner court. She sent to him a maid whose name was Xiuchun, a girl who had just grown out of childhood, and told her to ask Ximen to take a seat in the hall. She herself stood at the door of the courtyard, so that only half her charming face was visible.
"Pray sit down for a while, my lord," she said. "My husband has gone out but he will be back in a few moments."
The maid brought Ximen a cup of tea.
"My husband has asked you to take wine with him today," Mistress Hua said, "but please, for my sake, persuade him to come home early. The two boys will be with him, and there will be nobody here but the two maids and myself."
"You have every right to speak as you do," Ximen Qing said. "The claims of a man's household should have his first attention. Since you wish it, we will not only go together but come back together."
At that moment Hua Zixu returned, and his wife retired to her own room. The two men exchanged greetings.
"It was very good of you to come," Hua said. "I had to go out for a moment on business, and I hope you will forgive me for not being here to welcome you."
They sat down in the places appointed for host and guest, and Hua ordered a servant to bring tea. When they had drunk it, he said to the boy: "Ask your mistress to prepare some refreshments for us. I should like to drink some wine with Master Ximen before we go." He turned to Ximen and said, "It is Wu Yin'er's birthday today. That is why I asked you to come and have a little amusement."
"Why didn't you tell me earlier?" Ximen said. He told Daian to go home at once and bring five *qian* of silver. The servants were setting the table but he said, "Don't let us stay any longer. We might as well take our wine at the bawdy house."
"I will keep you a very short time," Hua Zixu said, "but stay for a minute or two."
In a few moments refreshments were brought, and they drank a few cups of wine together. The cups were of silver with long stems like a sunflower. They ate some little buns, and gave what were left to the servant. When Daian had brought the silver, they went out and, mounting their horses, rode to Wu Yin'er's house to celebrate her birthday. There was singing, dancing, and music, and they were as happy as the flowers in a posy, drinking wine together till the first night watch. Ximen Qing deliberately made Hua very drunk, and then took him home, as Li Ping'er had asked him. The boys called for the gate to be opened, and they helped Master Hua to a chair in the hall. Li Ping'er and one of the maids brought a lamp, and took him to the inner part of the house.
Ximen Qing told her all that had happened, and was going away when she thanked him again.
"My foolish husband," she said, "has very little sense. He is too fond of wine, and I am afraid you must have found him a nuisance. It was out of kindness to me that you brought him back. Please, my lord, do not be too scornful of him."
"Not at all," Ximen said, bowing politely, "it was your desire. How could I do other than set your words in my heart and engrave them on my bones? If I had not brought him back, not only would you have been uneasy but I should have shown myself no gentleman. My brother went to the bawdy house and they tried to keep him there but I made him come home. When we were passing the Hall of the Joyful Star, he saw one of the girls standing outside. She was a very pretty girl and he would have liked to go in but I would not let him. I told him that you were waiting anxiously for his return, and we came on together. If he had stayed there, he would not have come back tonight. Sister-in-law, it is not for me to say that my brother is a fool but you are so young, and this is such a large house to be in. He ought not to leave you here alone at night. It is not right."
"No, indeed," Li Ping'er said. "He is always roaming about and making a fool of himself. I have reproached him till I have made myself quite ill. I do beg of you, my lord, if you meet him at the bawdy house, do, for my sake, persuade him to come home early. I shall always be grateful to you."
There never was a man more clever in the ways of women than Ximen Qing. He had spent many years pursuing them, and there was very little about such matters he did not know. It was perfectly clear to him that the woman was making overtures, and he appreciated the situation admirably. He smiled.
"Sister-in-law," he said, "there is really no need for you to say this. What are friends for? I cannot help feeling that my brother is very much to blame but do not worry about it a moment longer."
Li Ping'er made a reverence to him, and told a maid to bring tea and fruits. Ximen drank the tea. "I must go home now," he said. "I hope you will see that all the doors are shut safely after me." Then he said good-night and went home.
From that day Ximen Qing racked his brains for a plan whereby he might make this woman his own. Several times he got Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and the others to take Hua to the bawdy house to drink and pass the night but he himself escaped from them and went home. He used to stand outside his own gate, and Li Ping'er, with her two maids, would stand outside hers. When he saw her, he would cough affectedly and walk up and down, or he would stand outside his gate and look towards her. When she saw him, Li Ping'er used to hide inside her gate, and put the door between them but, as soon as he went away, she would put her head out to look after him. They longed for each other in their hearts but showed their feelings only with their eyes.
One day Ximen Qing was standing outside the gate when Xiuchun brought him an invitation.
"Why does your lady invite me?" he said, pretending not to know. "Is your master at home?"
"Master is not at home," the maid said, "but my mistress would like to have a chat with you."
Ximen Qing did not wait for more but set out at once. He went into the hall and sat down. After some time Li Ping'er came to him, made a reverence, and said: "I am extremely grateful for your kindness the other day. Indeed I have engraved it on my heart, for my gratitude is beyond expression. My husband has now been away two days. Perhaps you have seen him?"
"He was at the Zhengs' house yesterday, drinking with a few friends," said Ximen, "but I had some business to attend to and came away. Today I haven't been there, so I don't know whether he is still there or not. If I had been there, I should have considered myself in honour bound to persuade him to come home and not to make you so unhappy."
"He will not do a single thing I ask, and it is almost more than I can bear," Li Ping'er said. "He spends all his time playing with women of that sort and cares nothing at all about his home."
"If it were not for that one failing," Ximen said, "my brother's character would be beyond reproach."
The maid brought tea but Ximen was afraid that Hua Zixu might return, and did not venture to stay very long. Li Ping'er said to him, "Whenever you do see my husband, please beg him to come home, and I shall be eternally grateful to you."

"We are such good friends," Ximen said, "that I should do so without your asking." He went home.
Next day Hua Zixu came back from the bawdy house. "All you care about," his wife said, "is strong wine and strange women. It is a good thing our neighbour, Master Ximen, has more than once taken some interest in our establishment. If you wish to keep his friendship, I should advise you to buy him a present to show your gratitude."
Hua wasted no time but bought four boxes of presents and a jar of wine, and sent a servant with them to Ximen Qing. When he had accepted them and given the boy a present, Yueniang asked: "Why has Hua sent you these things?"
"Some time ago," Ximen said, "Brother Hua asked me to go with him to celebrate the Wu Yin'er's birthday. He got drunk, and I brought him home. Indeed, more than once I have urged him not to stay so late at the bawdy house but to go home early. His lady seemed very grateful, and I imagine she must have told him to send me this present."
Yueniang folded her hands in an attitude of devotion. "I think you might begin by practicing a little self-control yourself. To me this seems a, case of a Buddha made of clay preaching to a Buddha made of mud. Why, there isn't a day when you don't go off to play with some woman or other, and here you are giving pious exhortations to other people's husbands. We can't accept this present without making some return. Whose name is written on the card? If it is Mistress Hua's, I must write and ask her to call. I'm sure she would like to come. If it is his name, you can invite him or not as you please. It is no concern of mine."
"It is Brother Hua's name," Ximen said; "I will ask him to come tomorrow." He sent an invitation to Hua Zixu to come and take wine with him.
"We must not be lacking in politeness," Mistress Hua said, when her husband returned. "We sent him a few small presents and in return he has asked you to take wine with him. Next time, you must get some wine and ask him."
The days passed quickly. It was the Feast of the Ancestral Tombs. Hua Zixu engaged two singing girls and sent to ask Ximen Qing to come and admire the chrysanthemums. He also sent invitations to Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Zhu Shinian, and Sun Tianhua to come and play at passing the flower while the drums beat. So, in the best of good spirits, they drank their wine.
They drank till the lamps were brought. Then Ximen Qing left the table and went out to wash his hands. Li Ping'er was standing behind a screen peeping in at them. Ximen did not see her until he had almost run into her. She went to a door in the corner and told her maid Xiuchun to go over in the shadow to Ximen Qing and whisper, "My mistress asks you not to drink much wine but to go home early. She has something to tell you tonight."
No message could have been more welcome to Ximen Qing, and though, after washing his hands, he went back to the table, he would not drink. The singing girls pressed wine upon him but he pretended to be drunk and would have no more. It was about the first night watch. Li Ping'er paced up and down on the other side of the screen. She could see Ximen Qing lolling in his chair pretending to be half asleep. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida showed not the slightest intention of leaving, and sat there as if they were nailed to their chairs. Even when Zhu Shinian and Sun Guazui took their leave, the others still did not move, much to Mistress Hua's annoyance. Once Ximen Qing started to leave but Hua Zixu stopped him. "It must be that I have not yet offered you becoming entertainment," he said.
"Really, I'm quite drunk already," Ximen said. "I can't possibly drink any more. He rolled about till Hua sent him home with two boys to assist him.
"I can't think what's wrong with him today," Ying Bojue said. "He won't drink. He has taken very little, yet he's drunk. You have been very kind, and so have these two good little sisters. May I have a large cup? We must drink ever so much more before we think of parting."
At this Li Ping'er, who was on the other side of the screen, secretly cursed them as a set of unprincipled ruffians, and told Tian Xi, one of the boys, to ask her husband to come out and speak to her.
"If you must drink with rascals like these," she said, "get off to the bawdy house at once. Don't stay here making yourselves a nuisance. It is midnight, and you have wasted fire and oil enough. This sort of behavior I will not have."
"You encourage me to go to the bawdy house as late as this?" said Hua Zixu. "Very well. If I can't get back, you mustn't blame me afterwards."
"Run along. I won't blame you."
Hua Zixu was only too pleased to receive such instructions. He went back to the others and said, "Now we will go to the bawdy house."
"Really?" cried Ying Bojue. "Don't try to be funny. You must see what your lady has to say about it first."
"I have spoken to her," Hua said, "and she says I may stay until tomorrow."
"Of course," put in Xie Xida, "Beggar Ying is too clever. Master Hua knows what he is about. Let us go without more ado." With the two singing girls they set off to the bawdy house. The two boys Tian Fu and Tian Xi went with them. It was about the second night watch.
Ximen Qing had gone home, pretending to be drunk. He went to Jinlian's room but, as soon as he had changed his clothes, he went and sat down in the garden. There he waited for a summons from Li Ping'er. Some time passed; he heard the dog being driven out and the gate fastened next door. Then the maid Yingchun climbed up on the wall in a dark place, pretending to call the cat. Seeing Ximen Qing sitting in the arbour, she made a sign to him. He took a bench, mounted it, and got down a ladder that had been placed for him on the other side of the wall.
When Li Ping'er had made sure that her husband had gone, she took off her headdress and allowed the clouds of black hair to fall about her. Dressed simply but still charming, she stood in an arbour. When Ximen came, she was delighted and quickly took him indoors. She had already prepared a table with wine, refreshments of various sorts, and fruit. The lamp was burning brightly. The wine jar was filled with a most fragrant wine, and, taking a jade cup in her hands, she offered it to Ximen Qing and made a most profound reverence.
"I have been anxious to show my gratitude to you for a long time," she said, "but you have given us present after present and put yourself out so much that I feel unbearably embarrassed. Today I have made ready this poor cup of wine and asked you to come so that I may at least give some expression to my feelings. Unfortunately those two shameless rogues stayed on and on, till I grew angry and packed them out of the house."
"I suppose Brother Hua will be coming back," Ximen said.
"He will not come back," the woman replied. "I told him to spend the night somewhere else. Both the boys have gone with him. There are only my two maids here, and old woman Feng who acts as doorkeeper. She is my old nurse and absolutely devoted to me. All the doors have been bolted."
This was all very pleasing to Ximen Qing. They sat as closely together as they could and drank each from the other's cup. Yingchun served the wine, and Xiuchun came in and out to take away the dishes. Under the silken net incense perfumed a coral bridal bed. When they had drunk together long enough, the two maids took away the jar and the dessert, and shut the door. The lovers went to bed to enjoy what pleasure they might.
The houses of wealthy families usually have double windows, the outer of which is called the window proper and the inner the casement. When Li Ping'er sent the maids away, she shut the casement so that, though there were lights in the room, they could not be overlooked from outside. But Yingchun was seventeen years old and not without experience. Realizing that her mistress and Ximen Qing were enjoying their unlawful loves, she quietly went between the windows and made a hole in the paper with a pin, so that she could see all that happened. The lovers accomplished their destiny, and all they did was seen by Yingchun as she stood outside the window.
"May I ask your age?" Ximen said.
"I am twenty-three." Li Ping'er said. "What is your lady's honourable age?"
"She is twenty-six."
"Three years older than I am. I should like to buy a present and call upon her but perhaps she does not care to make friends."
"She is extremely good-natured."
"Does she know you come here?" Li Ping'er said. "What will you say if she asks you questions?"
"She lives well within the house," Ximen said. "My fifth wife, Jinlian, lives in the garden where she has a little house all to herself. But she dare not interfere."
"What is the honourable age of your Fifth Lady?" Li Ping'er said.
"She is the same age as my first wife."
"Good! Unless she considers my poor self too unworthy, I shall be happy to call her Sister. Tomorrow I will ask the size in shoes of your two ladies and make two pairs as a sign of affection." Then she took two golden pins and put them on Ximen's head. "Don't let Hua Zixu see them, if you go to the bawdy house."
Ximen Qing promised. Then they renewed their pleasures together as though they would never part. It was the fifth night watch. Outside the window a cock crew, and the light flooded the eastern sky. Ximen Qing was afraid lest Hua Zixu should take it into his head to come back, so he dressed and climbed back over the wall. Before he went they agreed upon a secret signal. When Hua Zixu was not at home, one of the maids should come to the wall and cough, or throw over a piece of brick, and, if there were nobody about on Ximen's side of the wall, she should climb up and he should get a ladder and come over. So this naughty couple made love over the wall, stealing hours of happiness together. Since they never went around by the gate, the neighbours could not possibly know what was going on.
The moonbeams shine upon the flowers
The water clock seems very slow.
They meet. It seems like Gao Tang's dream.
She takes the silver lamp to light them
In the deep night.
Fearful lest, through the crevices, the light should pass.
When Ximen Qing had climbed over the wall, he went to Jinlian's room. She was in bed.
"Where have you been?" she asked. "You have been away all night and you never told me where you were going."
"Brother Hua sent a boy," Ximen said, "and asked me to go with him to the bawdy house. We drank till the small hours of the morning, and then I was able to get away."
Jinlian suspected him but she pretended to be satisfied. One day, however, when she and Yulou were sewing in the arbour after dinner, a piece of brick suddenly seemed to drop from the skies quite close to them. Yulou was bending down to fasten her shoe and did not see it but Jinlian looked everywhere till at last she saw a pale face at the wall. She could not be certain whose it was. The face appeared once and vanished. Jinlian pulled Yulou by the sleeve.
"Look there! There's the elder of Hua's two maids. She must have been admiring our flowers, and jumped down as soon as she saw that we were here." They thought no more about it.
That evening when Ximen Qing came home from a party, he went to Jinlian's room. She took his clothes and asked if he would like anything to eat but he said no. She offered him tea but he would not drink it. He paced to and fro in the garden, and Jinlian watched him quietly. Soon the maid's face appeared again over the top of the wall. Ximen Qing took a ladder and climbed over to join Li Ping'er, who was waiting for him on the other side. Jinlian went to her room and tossed about on her bed. She did not sleep the whole night through. At daybreak Ximen Qing came back. He opened the door but Jinlian pretended to be asleep and did not speak. Ximen, somewhat embarrassed, went and sat on her bed. Jinlian jumped up and caught him by the ear.
"You fickle scamp!" she cried. "Where have you been? All night long I have been worried about you but now things are so clear that I don't need to ask you for an explanation. The best thing you can do is to tell me the truth at once. What have you been doing with that strumpet who lives next door, and how many times did you do it? Tell me every little thing and I'll forgive you but miss out a single word and tomorrow you shall march in front, and I'll march behind and I'll tell the whole world what you've been up to. You disgraceful rogue, I'll make you so dead you won't need to be buried. You have got a lot of fellows to keep her husband in the bawdy house, while you go and visit her. Very well but I'll show you what's what. No wonder yesterday when Yulou and I were sewing, we saw that maid bobbing up and down over the wall, and in full daylight too. She is playing the part of the devil who runs after lost souls, and enticing you away to that whore. You don't think you can deceive me any longer. Only the day before yesterday that turtle of a fellow fetched you away in the middle of the night to go to the bawdy house. Why! his own house would have done as well."
This was extremely disturbing to Ximen Qing. He knelt down as though to make himself small.
"You funny little oily mouth," he said, smiling. "Don't speak so loud. I won't tell you any lies. She asked me how old you are, and one of these days she is going to find out your size in shoes and make you a pair. She would love to consider you her elder sister."
"I don't want a strumpet like her to consider me a sister, or a brother either for that matter. First she seduces another woman's husband, and then tries to offer some insignificant courtesy in return. I will not have dust thrown in my eyes. Why should I let people play such tricks on me?"
She pulled down Ximen's trousers and perceived that the warrior seemed anything but ready for the strife, though he still wore his silver armor.
"Tell me the truth," she cried, "how many times has this fellow returned to the attack?"
"That is an easy question to answer," Ximen said. "Once was enough for him."
"Will you swear that it was only once?" Jinlian said. "Why should he be so dejected, then? He seems half paralyzed. If he showed the slightest sign of courage, I might credit his master with some manly qualities at least." She stripped the warrior of his armor, and cursed him.
"You abandoned scoundrel. There cannot be another like you in all the world. You take this thing with you on the sly when you go to play with that wicked creature."
"You funny little strumpet," Ximen cried, "you are enough to drive a man crazy. She asked me several times to tell you that she is coming to kowtow to you, and she is going to make you a pair of shoes. Yesterday she sent a maid to find out what size Yueniang takes, and today she has given me this pair of pins, with the character *Shou* engraved upon them, for you." He removed his hat, took the pins from his hair, and gave them to Jinlian. She examined them. The lucky character was designed in gold upon an emerald ground. They were of very fine workmanship, for they had been made in a royal palace. She was delighted with them.
"Ah well," she said, "if that is how the land lies, I'll say no more about it. Indeed, when you go to call on her, I'll keep a lookout for you on this side, and the pair of you can enjoy yourselves in peace. Now what do you say?"
Ximen Qing was delighted. He took Jinlian in his arms. "You are a darling," he said. "The sort of baby I like is one who knows how to deal with a situation when it arises, as you do, not a miraculous creature who brings forth gold and silver when he performs his natural functions in the privy. Tomorrow I will show what I think about you by buying you a suit of fine embroidered clothes."
"I don't believe that honeyed tongue and that sugary mouth of yours," Jinlian said; "if you want me to help the pair of you, you must promise three things."
"I promise," said Ximen; "ask what you will."
"To begin with, I forbid you the bawdy house. Secondly, when I ask you to do anything, you must do it. And thirdly, every time you go to visit your sweetheart, I must know all that happens; you must not keep a single thing back."
"That will be easy," Ximen said. "I agree to all your conditions."
The next time Ximen Qing went to spend the night with Li Ping'er, he told Jinlian how white and flawless was the body of his lady love, as yielding as the softest down; how amorous her temperament; and how she loved wine. "We took a basket of fruits into the net with us," he said, "and played dominoes and drank wine, before we went to sleep." He took something from his sleeve and handed it to Jinlian.
"Her father-in-law brought this from the palace and, when we had lighted the lamp, we used it as a model of deportment."
Jinlian unfastened the roll of pictures and looked at it from end to end. Twenty-four subjects were painted upon it, and it was most exciting. She decided to keep it. She handed it to Chunmei and said, "Put this away in my chest. No doubt I shall find much to learn from it."
"You may have it for a few days," Ximen Qing said, "but I must have it back again. She thinks a great deal of it, and I only borrowed it to look at. I must return it to her."
"You shouldn't have given it to me, then," Jinlian said. "I didn't steal it from her. You will find it loves me so much it won't leave me."
"Little slave," Ximen cried, "don't be such a tease." He tried to take back the roll.
"If you try to snatch it," Jinlian said, "we will have a snatching match. I'll tear it into shreds and then it will be lost to all of us forever."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Have it your own way. I can't help myself but I beg you to give it back to her when you've done with it. She has something else that is very interesting and, if you let her have this back, I'll ask her to let me show you the other."
"I wonder who trained you in artfulness, young man," Jinlian said. "You'll have this back when you bring me the other." They talked for a long time, and that night Ximen stayed with Jinlian. She perfumed the bed and lighted the silver lamp. She dressed herself with all the skill at her command, performing her most intimate toilet, and they looked at the roll so that they might emulate the lovers who were painted upon it. The wonders of witchcraft have been known to us since the most remote periods of antiquity. Very soon, after the blind Liu had made a spell for Jinlian, her shame was turned to happiness and Ximen's displeasure to favour. He dared refuse her nothing. Though he had all the cunning of a ghost, he was compelled to drink the water in which she washed her feet.

## 035

## Hua Tzu-hsü the Cuckold Succumbs to Chagrin & Loses his Life; Li P'ing-erh invites Seduction & Attends a Party

*The message in her eyes and expectation in her heart*
will brook no further delay;
She is not content merely to fiddle with
her hairpin of jade.[1]
When spring blooms on her smiling countenance
the flowers look seductive;
At the slightest perturbation of her delicate brows
the willows droop in sorrow.
While blushes suffuse her peachlike cheeks
she dreams of matrimony;
As the chill invades her orchid-scented chamber
she longs for togetherness.
If only she could contrive to comply
with Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's wishes;
Without suffering the fate of Cho Wen-chün
when she sang the "Song of White Hair."

One day when Wu Yüeh-niang was feeling out of sorts, her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, came to pay her a visit and she invited her to stay overnight.
While she was entertaining her visitor in her room, the pageboy, Tai-an, happened to come in, carrying his master's felt bag, and reported, "Father's come home."
Wu K'ai's wife promptly moved over to Li Chiao-erh's quarters in order to get out of the way.
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, took off his outer garments, and sat down. Hsiao-yü brought him a cup of tea but he didn't drink it.
Yüeh-niang noticed that he looked rather worried and asked, "Why is it that you've come home so early from your club meeting today?"
"It was Ch'ang Shih-chieh's turn to entertain us today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he doesn't have room in his own house, so he invited us to make an excursion to the Temple of Eternal Felicity, at Wu-li Yüan, outside the South Gate. Then Brother Hua the Second invited Brother Ying the Second and several of the rest of us, four or five in all, to join him for a drink at Cheng Ai-hsiang's place in the licensed quarter. Just as we were beginning to enjoy ourselves, all of a sudden, a group of official lictors appeared, and:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
arrested Brother Hua the Second and took him into custody. This development caught all of us completely off guard, and in my alarm I fled to Li Kuei-chieh's place and hid out for a while. Still uneasy about it, I sent someone to make inquiries.
"It turns out that Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, from Brother Hua the Second's branch of the old eunuch's family, are suing him for a share of the family property. They have filed a suit in the prefectural yamen at K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, and, since the suit has been accepted, the authorities in this district have been ordered to arrest the defendant. It was only after ascertaining the facts that we felt secure enough to break up and come home."
When Yüeh-niang had heard him out, she said, "It serves you right! You've been spending altogether too much of your time hanging around and playing the god with that bunch, without so much as thinking of coming home. All you want to do is fool around outside. It's only appropriate that something like this today should happen before you're ready to call it quits. If you don't give it over now, sooner or later you're going to get involved in a brawl in which they'll drag you off somewhere and:
*Pound you into a bloody sheep's head;*[3]
before you abandon this kind of behavior once and for all.
"When your legitimate wife, at home, gives you her well-meant advice, you seldom pay any attention. But whenever a whore in the licensed quarter says a few words to you, you prick up your donkey's ears and do as she says. Truly:
*The words of your family*
*are wind in your ears;*
*The words of outsiders*
*are sutras in letters of gold."*
"Who would have the:
*Seven heads and eight galls,*
to assault me?" scoffed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You good-for-nothing," Yüeh-niang responded. "You're given to shooting off your mouth at home all right but if it came to the crunch, you'd be so terrified your tongue would hang out."
As they were talking, who should come in but Tai-an, who reported, "Hua the Second's wife, next door, has sent T'ien-fu to ask Father if he would step over there to have a word with her."
This was just the signal Hsi-men Ch'ing had been waiting for, and he lost no time in starting on his way.
"One of these days," said Yüeh-niang, "if you don't watch out, it's going to be you that gets nabbed."
"It's right next door," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What harm can it do? I'll just go over and see what she has to say."
Thereupon, he went over to Hua Tzu-hsü's place. Li P'ing-erh sent a pageboy to invite him into the rear of the house for a talk. What should he see when he got there but the woman, with her:
*Silk tunic in disarray, and*
*Pale countenance unadorned,*
coming out of her room, so frightened her face had turned as sallow as wax?
Kneeling down before Hsi-men Ch'ing and making repeated supplications, she said, "Sir, there's no help for it!
*If you won't do it for the priest's sake,*
*do it for the Buddha's.*[4]
As the saying goes:
*When calamities strike the home,*
*Neighbours help each other out.*
It's all because of my poor husband's refusal to take anyone's advice, coupled with his unwillingness to pay any attention to serious family affairs. He reposes his trust in the people he fools around with outside and stays away from home for days at a time. It's only appropriate that today he should have allowed himself to be taken advantage of and gotten himself into this kind of a fix.
"And now that it's come to the crunch, at this late date, he sends his pageboy to me and wants me to pull strings and get him off the hook. I'm only a woman, after all, about as much good as a legless crab; where does he think I'm going to go to find the strings to pull on his behalf? I get so angry when I think of his refusal to take anyone's advice, I'm tempted to let him be dragged off to the Eastern Capital and beaten to a pulp. It would serve him right. The only thing that deters me is that it would reflect unfavourably on the late old eunuch director's reputation.
"I hadn't any alternative, sir but to ask you to come over and appeal to your generosity. Forget about him! But if you could only find it in you, for my poor sake: if you know of any strings to pull, whatever happens, be good enough to pull one. I just don't want to see him abused, that's all."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the woman kneeling before him, he quickly said, "Sister-in-law, please get up. It's no problem. At first, today, I didn't know what was going on. We were all at the Cheng establishment drinking wine together when a group of official lictors suddenly appeared and carried brother off to the Eastern Capital."
*"It's a long story,"*
the woman said. "The trouble is being caused by the nephews of my father-in-law, the late eunuch director, who belong to the same collateral branch of the family as the one from which my husband was adopted. The eldest nephew, Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, Hua the Fourth, and my husband are all natural brothers. The eldest is called Hua Tzu-yu, the third is called Hua Tzu-kuang, the fourth is called Hua Tzu-hua, and my husband is called Hua Tzu-hsü. They are all the consanguineous nephews of the old eunuch director.
"Although the old gentleman had succeeded in amassing a tidy fortune for himself, he saw clearly enough that this husband of mine would not amount to anything; so, when he came back from Kwangtung, he put his property into my hands for safekeeping. He even went so far, at times, as to give my husband a regular caning. The other nephews, too, had tasted enough of the stick at his hands not to dare to interfere.
"Last year, when the old gentleman died, Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth were given something in the way of furniture and household effects to take home with them but they didn't receive so much as a candareen's worth of silver. I said at the time, 'We'd better take care of them by giving them a little something.' But this husband of mine spent all his time fooling around on the outside and was unwilling to pay any attention at all to serious matters. Now, today, they've been able to:
*Act so quietly not a breath of air escaped,*
and he's allowed himself to be undone."
When she had finished speaking, she let herself go and began to weep out loud.
"Don't worry, Sister-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was afraid it would be something big. But, as it turns out, it's only a case of members of the same branch of the family suing each other over the division of property. It shouldn't be too difficult to handle. As long as you want me to, I'll:
*Treat my brother's affairs as my own, and*
*Treat my own affairs as my brother's.*
No matter what you ask of me, I'll be only too happy to comply."
"If you'll only deign to help out, sir," the woman said, "everything will be fine. I'll need to know, though, how much money will be required in order to pull the necessary strings, so I can get it ready."
"It won't require all that much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand that Prefect Yang, who presides over the prefectural yamen in K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, is a protégé of the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, along with my kinsman by marriage at four removes, the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien, are both people who have the ear of the reigning emperor himself. If these two men can be induced to interest themselves on your behalf, and they both speak to Prefect Yang, he could hardly refuse to comply. No matter how important a matter it might be, that ought to take care of it. Now we will certainly need to make a present to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai but since Commander in Chief Yang is related to me by marriage, he will probably refuse to accept anything."
The woman then went into her room, opened a trunk, and brought out sixty large ingots of silver, weighing fifty taels each, making a total of three thousand taels that she handed over to Hsi-men Ch'ing to expend, both high and low, as he saw fit, in the endeavor to pull the necessary strings.
"Half of that would do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need is there to use so much?"
"If there's anything left over, you can keep it for me, sir," the woman said. "Concealed behind my bed there are four lacquer chests decorated with gold tracery that contain python robes, jade-ornamented girdles, jeweled cap buttons, chatelaines, pendants, and bracelets, as well as valuable jewels and objets d'art. If you could take these off my hands at the same time, sir, and keep them over at your place, I could ask for them whenever I need anything. If I don't take precautions ahead of time but leave everything to him, we're going to end up having trouble making ends meet. It's obvious that:
*Three fists are no match for four hands.*[5]
If we let ourselves be outnumbered, sooner or later they'll get the better of us and make off with the property, and I'll be left in the lurch with nowhere to turn."
"But what will happen when Brother Hua the Second comes home and starts looking for this stuff?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"These are all things," the woman replied, "that the old gentleman, while he was still alive, personally handed over to me for safekeeping. My husband doesn't know a thing about them. You can feel free to take charge of them, sir."
"If that's what you want me to do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send someone over to move them as soon as I get home."
Thereupon, he went straight home and consulted with Yüeh-niang about it.
"As for the silver," said Yüeh-niang, "we can send pageboys over to carry it back in food boxes. But if we bring the stuff in the chests in at the front door, we can hardly avoid attracting the attention of the neighbours. The best thing to do is, thus and so; if we hoist it over the wall at night, it will be less conspicuous."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted by this suggestion and immediately dispatched the four servants, Lai-wang, Tai-an, Lai-hsing, and P'ing-an, with two sets of food boxes, to carry the three thousand taels of silver over to his house on their carrying poles. Later that evening, when the moon rose, Li P'ing-erh, on her side, together with her two maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, by putting a bench on top of a table, managed to hoist the chests up to the top of the wall. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on his side, accompanied only by Yüeh-niang, Chin-lien, and Ch'un-mei, set up a ladder to receive them. They spread a strip of felt over the top of the wall and then hoisted the chests over the top, one at a time, and deposited them in Yüeh-niang's room.
You may well ask:
*"Can such things be?"*
*If you want to get rich,*
*You've got to take risks.*
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*Wealth and success are often attained*
by strokes of good luck;
Profit and fame, on the other hand,
bring troubles of their own.
If you are destined to attain them,
you will do so in the end;
If you are not destined to attain them,
no amount of effort will avail.[6]
Hsi-men Ch'ing had succeeded in taking into his own possession a considerable quantity of his neighbour's disposable wealth, in the form of gold and silver and other valuables, without the other residents of the neighbourhood being any the wiser. The same day he had the requisite monies packed up, requested a letter of introduction from his son-in-law's family, the Ch'en household, and sent a servant off to deliver them to the Eastern Capital.
Along the way this messenger:
*Each morning took to the purple road;*
*Each evening tramped the red dust;*[7]
until, one day, he arrived in the Eastern Capital and turned over the letter and presents to the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien. The latter, in his turn, requested the grand councilor and grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, to send a note to Prefect Yang in the prefectural yamen at K'ai-feng.
Now this prefect was named Yang Shih,[8] his courtesy name was Kueishan, and he was a native of Hung-nung district in the province of Shensi. He had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1103 and had risen to the position of chief minister of the Court of Judicial Review before receiving his current appointment as prefect of K'ai-feng. He was an official of absolute integrity. But the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, had been his examiner in the *chin-shih* examination and Yang Chien was a favoured and highly placed official, so he could hardly refuse to do the requested favour.
At the same time Hsi-men Ch'ing had also dispatched a letter to Hua Tzu-hsü, informing him of the steps that were being taken on his behalf, and saying, "The officials involved have all been taken care of. When you appear in court and are interrogated about the whereabouts of the inherited property, simply say that all of the money has been spent and that nothing remains but the houses and real estate."
To resume our story, one day Prefect Yang Shih ascended the tribunal, and the functionaries of the six local offices stood in attendance. Behold:
*His official conduct is honest and correct:*
*His actions reveal integrity and intelligence.*
*He always harbours a compassionate disposition;*
*He constantly possesses benevolent intentions.*
*In cases of disputes over the ownership of land,*
*He distinguishes between the crooked and the straight*
*before taking action.*
*In instances of mutual contention or affrays,*
*He weighs the lightness or heaviness of the offense*
*before passing sentence.*
*In moments of leisure he fingers the zither*
*or entertains guests;*
*He also devotes himself to the investigation*
*of the condition of the people.*
*Despite the fact that he is a presiding official*
*in the capital,*
*He really is a father and a mother to the people*
*in his jurisdiction.*[9]
That day, Prefect Yang Shih ascended the tribunal and ordered that Hua Tzu-hsü be taken out of the lockup and brought before him. When the parties to the suit had been assembled in the courtroom and knelt down before the dais, the prefect began his interrogation as to the whereabouts of the inherited property.

All Hua Tzu-hsü would say was, "After the death of the old eunuch director, the money was all expended on the funeral and services for the dead. All that remains are two houses and a country estate. As for the furniture and household effects, they have all been divided up among the other members of the family."
"It is difficult to ascertain anything about the property of eunuchs," pronounced Prefect Yang. "It is a case of:
*Easy come, easy go.*[11]
Since the money has apparently all been spent, I hereby rule that the presiding magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district be ordered to depute functionaries to assess Eunuch Director Hua's two houses and country estate, to sell them off for their market value, to divide up the proceeds among Hua Tzu-yu and the other two plaintiffs, and to report back to me in writing."
Hua Tzu-yu and the others wanted to kneel down before the tribunal and petition the prefect to continue to hold Hua Tzu-hsü in custody until the whereabouts of the missing money could be determined but Prefect Yang angrily rejected their petition, saying, "You rascals are lucky to have escaped a beating. When this eunuch director of yours died, why didn't you bring a suit at that time, instead of waiting until now when:
*The affair is over and the circumstances have changed,*
to kick up such a fuss and waste the paper and brushes required to file a suit?"
Thereupon, without beating Hua Tzu-hsü a single stroke, he signed an order authorizing the return of the defendant to Ch'ing-ho district, and the assessment of the real estate. But no more of this.
No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing's retainer, Lai-pao, ascertain the facts about the disposition of the case than he traveled back, post haste, to report to his master. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the prefect, Yang Shih, had proven responsive to pressure and had released Hua Tzu-hsü and allowed him to return home, he was extremely pleased.
Li P'ing-erh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over to her place to discuss the matter and said to him, "Why don't you get together a few taels of silver and buy the house we're living in? After all, it won't be long now before I'm completely yours."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went home and broached the issue with Wu Yüeh-niang.
"No matter what it's officially assessed at," Yüeh-niang said, "you ought not to enter into an agreement to buy that house. What will you do if her husband should start to suspect something?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing made a mental note of what she had said.
Not many days thereafter, Hua Tzu-hsü arrived home. The district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho deputed Vice Magistrate Yüeh to carry out the assessment, with the following results. The eunuch director's mansion, located on Main Street in An-ch'ing ward, was evaluated at 700 taels of silver. It was sold to a distaff relative of the imperial family named Wang. The country estate outside the South Gate was evaluated at 655 taels of silver. It was sold to the commandant, Chou Hsiu. All that remained was the modest house in which Hua Tzu-hsü was currently residing. It was evaluated at 540 taels of silver but because it was right next door to Hsi-men Ch'ing's property, no one dared to buy it.
Hua Tzu-hsü repeatedly sent people over to make representations but Hsi-men Ch'ing stalled, maintaining that he couldn't afford it, and refused to rise to the bait. The district magistrate was anxious to settle the matter so that he could file the required written report. Li P'ing-erh, in desperation, secretly sent Old Mother Feng over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to suggest that he use 540 taels of the silver she had deposited with him to make the purchase. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing agree, and the silver was duly weighed out in the presence of the officials. Hua the Elder even signed the paper that formalized the transaction.
That very day the necessary documents were completed and a report was sent up to the higher authorities. The sale of the old eunuch's real estate holdings had produced, in all, a total of 1,895 taels of silver that was evenly divided among the three plaintiffs.
Hua Tzu-hsü had come out of this lawsuit without anything for himself. His money, his houses, and his landed property were all gone. Not a trace remained of the 3,000 taels of silver, in large ingots, that had been stored in his coffers.
In a state of severe perturbation he demanded an accounting of Li P'ing-erh. "How was the silver that you provided to Hsi-men Ch'ing actually spent? And how much of it is left over? After all, we have to come up with the money to buy another house."
The only result of these queries was that he had to endure four or five days of abuse at the hands of his wife.
"Phooey! You muddleheaded troll!" she railed at him. "Day after day you neglected your proper concerns, going out and:
*Sleeping among the flowers and lolling*
*beneath the willows,*
without bothering to come home. It only serves you right that someone should have been lying in wait for you and succeeded in luring you into this trap.
"Once you landed in jail, you sent someone to speak to me, urging me to pull strings on your behalf. I'm only a woman, after all. I've scarcely ventured out so far as the front gate.
*I may be able to run but I can't fly.*[11]
What do I know about such things? Who do I know, anyway, that might be able to pull strings for you?
*Even if I were made of iron, how many nails*
*could you get out of me?*
I had to run all over the place, saying 'Please sir' and 'I beg you, madam,' before I could find anyone that could be of any use. If you haven't planted any seeds in the past, when the going gets rough, who's going to pay any attention to you?
"Thank goodness, our next-door neighbour, Hsi-men Ch'ing, out of consideration for our former relationship, was willing, despite the coldness of the weather and the ugly winds that were blowing, to send his servant all the way to the Eastern Capital, where he succeeded in bringing this affair of yours to a satisfactory conclusion.
"But now that you've escaped the clutches of the law and find yourself with:
*Both feet on level ground again,*[12]
what do you do but:
*Once your life's been saved, think of money;*
*Once your wound's been healed, forget the pain,*
and come home to demand an accounting of your wife?
"Even if there were anything left over, it wouldn't be yours to fritter away on your own gratification. After all, I've still got the note you sent me. If I didn't have your written authorization, it's not very likely that I'd have laid out your money in order to pull strings for you entirely on my own hook, or have simply handed it over to somebody, is it?"
"Of course I sent you that note," said Hua Tzu-hsü. "But the truth of the matter is I was hoping there would be something left over. We've got to come up with enough money to buy another house and have something to live on before we can worry about anything else."
"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a nincompoop! I'm just wasting my breath on you. If you'd only paid some attention a little bit earlier, instead of:
*Ignoring things when you're flush, and*
*Starting to worry when you're in the hole!*
You may accuse me of spending too much a thousand times, or ten thousand times if you like but where do you suppose those three thousand taels of yours went, anyway? I wouldn't underestimate the appetites of people like the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching, or the commander in chief of the Imperial Guard, Yang Chien, if I were you. If they had been offered any less, do you suppose you could have escaped with impunity from your bout with the law, without suffering so much as a lash with a wisp of straw on your cuckold's body, only so you could come home and shoot off your mouth?
"Hsi-men Ch'ing is no connection of yours. You've got no claim on him. And which of your beloved relatives or friends would have been willing to:
*Travel north and journey south,*
or go to such lengths or spend so much money, in order to come to your rescue? When you got home you should have laid on a feast and invited him over to express your appreciation, instead of:
*Trying to sweep it all under the rug with a*
*single stroke of the broom;*[13]
or demanding that everything be accounted for after the fact."
It did not take very many such pointed and derisive speeches to reduce Hua Tzu-hsü to silence.
The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an over with a gift to Hua Tzu-hsü to help calm his flustered spirits. Hua Tzu-hsü reciprocated by preparing a feast, hiring two singing girls, and extending an invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing to express his gratitude. He intended to take advantage of the occasion to ask what had become of his money, and he hoped to be able to rely on Hsi-men Ch'ing for the return of several hundred taels of silver that would enable him to buy another house.
Li P'ing-erh did not want this to happen, so she secretly sent Old Mother Feng over to say to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Don't accept this invitation. Provide him with a false account of how the money was spent, claiming that it was all used up in taking care of the officials involved in the case, both high and low."
Hua Tzu-hsü did not catch on but sent his servant over two or three times to press the invitation. Hsi-men Ch'ing actually went so far as to hide out in the licensed quarter, while ordering his servants to report that he was not at home. Hua Tzu-hsü was giddy with rage at this treatment but all he could do was stamp his feet in frustration.
Gentle reader take note: As a rule, when a wife has had a change of heart and no longer sees eye to eye with her husband, even a man with the strength and resolution to chew up nails will find it difficult to defend himself against her secret wiles. It has always been true that:
*Man is responsible for what lies outside the household;*
*Woman is responsible for what lies within it.*[14]
Yet, on many occasions a man's reputation is ruined by a woman. Why is this so? It is always because he doesn't know how to handle her. To sum it up in a nutshell, the secret lies in the saying:
*The husband sings and the wife follows.*[15]
Where:
*Beauty and virtue attract each other,*
*Affinities are mutually compatible,*
*The man admires the woman, and*
*The woman admires the man,*
one can, perhaps, be confident that there will be no problem. But, if the slightest distrust develops between them, it will soon turn into revulsion and hatred. As for the likes of Hua Tzu-hsü, who spent his days in:
*Insensate dissipation, and*
*Unrestrained license;*
for such a man to hope that his wife would not get other ideas into her head, was futile indeed. Truly:
*If one's own resolution is supported,*
*There is no tempest that can shake it.*[16]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*If success and accomplishment could be won*
by intelligence and effort;
In ancient times Tao Chih[17] would have
been made a marquis.
If one's actions are righteous, one is truly
deserving of respect;
If one is lustful and uncaring, how can one fail
to be ashamed?[18]
The scion of the Hsi-men family was given over to
lust and dissipation;
His adulterous and fickle paramour was nothing but
a captivating wench.
Hua Tzu-hsü became so engorged with rage
his tender guts gave way;
But another day, in the court of the underworld,
he would be revenged.
To make a long story short, Hua Tzu-hsü could only scrape together 250 taels of silver, with which he bought a house on Lion Street for them to live in. He was already suffering from the ill effects of his rage, and no sooner had they completed their move than he was unfortunate enough to come down with an acute intestinal fever.
He took to his bed early in the eleventh month and was unable to get up again thereafter. Li P'ing-erh responded to his entreaties by calling in Dr. Hu from Main Street but later had to dispense with him in order to save money. From then on it was merely a matter of time.
*One day became two,*
*Two days became three,*
until finally, on the last day of the month:
*Alas and alack;*
*He stopped breathing and died.*
At the time of his death he was twenty-three years of age. No sooner had he taken to his bed than his eldest servant, T'ien-hsi, absconded with five taels of silver and vanished without leaving a trace.
Once Hua Tzu-hsü was dead, Li P'ing-erh lost no time in sending Old Mother Feng to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing over for a consultation. A casket was purchased, the encoffining ceremony completed, sutras were duly recited, and Hua Tzu-hsü's body was escorted out to the graveyard and buried. Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, together with their wives, all came to offer their condolences, and after they had returned from accompanying the coffin to its final resting place they went their separate ways.
On the day of the funeral Hsi-men Ch'ing also had Wu Yüeh-niang arrange for a table of food and wine in their name so that they could offer a sacrifice at the graveside of the deceased.
That day, when Li P'ing-erh had returned home in her sedan chair, she procured a spirit tablet for her dead husband and set it up in her room. But, although she went through the motions of keeping vigil for him, all she could think of was Hsi-men Ch'ing. Even while Hua Tzu-hsü was still alive she had encouraged Hsi-men Ch'ing to make free with her two maidservants, and now that he was dead the two families became closer than ever.
Before long it was the ninth day of the first month and Li P'ing-erh had ascertained that it was P'an Chin-lien's birthday. Even though the fifth of the seven weekly commemorations of Hua Tzu-hsü's death had not yet been observed, she bought presents, got into her sedan chair, all dressed up in a white satin jacket over a skirt of blue brocade, with a white hempen snood over her chignon, held in place with a pearl headband, and came to pay a call in honour of Chin-lien's birthday. Old Mother Feng carried her felt bag, and T'ien-fu escorted her sedan chair.
The first thing she did after crossing the threshold was to kowtow to Wu Yüeh-niang four times:
*Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,*
saying as she did so, "The other day at the graveside I'm afraid I provided you with but meager fare. And thank you very much for your lavish present."
After she had paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she asked to be presented in turn to Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou. It was only then that P'an Chin-lien came in.
"So this is the Fifth Lady," the visitor exclaimed, as she kowtowed once again, repeating as she did so, "Elder Sister, please accept my salutation."
Chin-lien demurred at first and the two of them dickered politely for a while until they settled the matter by kowtowing to each other. Chin-lien thanked her for her birthday presents. The visitor was also introduced to Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of her elder brother, Wu K'ai, and to Chin-lien's mother, Old Mrs. P'an.
Li P'ing-erh then asked to be allowed to pay her respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing but Yüeh-niang told her, "Today he's gone to the Temple of the Jade Emperor outside the Eastern Gate to attend the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal[19] in honour of the Jade Emperor's birthday."

She urged her visitor to sit down, and another serving of tea was called for and consumed. After some time had passed, who should come wandering in but Sun Hsüeh-o.
Li P'ing-erh, observing that she was slightly less well dressed than the others, got up and asked, "Who might this lady be? Since I did not know of her, I'm afraid I didn't ask to be presented to her."
"She's just one of my husband's young ladies," said Yüeh-niang.
Li P'ing-erh hastily prepared to kowtow to her but Yüeh-niang intervened, saying, "There's no need for you to go to all that trouble. A bow to each other will be quite sufficient."
When the two of them had finished saluting each other as directed, Yüeh-niang invited Li P'ing-erh into her own room to change her clothes and instructed a maidservant to set up a table in the parlour and serve tea.
Before long wine was brought in, and they:
*Drew round the newly replenished brazier, and*
*Decanted the finest Yang-kao*[20] *vintage.*
Thereupon, Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, and Li P'ing-erh, took the seats of honour, Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh assumed the role of hosts, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien sat to one side, and Sun Hsüeh-o, not daring to presume on their company for too long, went back to look after things in the kitchen.
Yüeh-niang, observing that Li P'ing-erh never refused a drink, served a round of wine herself and then directed Li Chiao-erh and the others each to serve a round in turn.
They joshed with their guest freely, saying, "Mrs. Hua, you've moved so far away that we sisters must:
*Spend more time apart than together.*[21]
You no longer give us a thought. It would really be too cruel of you if you don't promise to visit us again."
"If it hadn't been for P'an the Sixth's birthday," said Meng Yü-lou, "you wouldn't even have come to see us today."
"My dear First Lady, and Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "thanks to the kindness all of you have shown me, I've wanted to come and pay you a visit for a long time. But, on the one hand, I'm still in mourning, and on the other hand, after my poor husband's death, there's been no one to look after the place. In fact, I've hardly observed my husband's fifth weekly commemoration yet. If I hadn't been afraid of offending the Fifth Lady, I wouldn't have ventured to come today."
She then went on to ask, "First Lady, when does your birthday come?"
"It's a bit early yet for my birthday," said Yüeh-niang.
"The First Lady's birthday," said P'an Chin-lien, taking over the conversational lead, "is on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. I hope, whatever happens, you'll be able to come visit us then."
"Needless to say," said Li P'ing-erh, "I'll be sure to come."
"Now that you're here," said Meng Yü-lou, "why don't you give us the pleasure of your company by making a night of it, and not bothering to go home?"
"I really would welcome the chance to have a good talk with all of you," said Li P'ing-erh. "To tell you the truth, I find myself living in reduced circumstances, a newcomer to the neighbourhood, and ever since my poor husband died, there's been no one to look after the place. The back wall of my house abuts on the garden of that distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao. It's as desolate as can be, and at night there are often fox spirits about:
*Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,*[22]
and I'm afraid. We used to have two pageboys but the eldest of them has run away. T'ien-fu, here, looks after the front gate but the back of the house is completely deserted. I'm entirely dependent on Old Feng. She's been with me a long time, and she often comes over to do the laundry and help the maidservants make shoes. I'm really beholden to her."
"How old is Mother Feng?" asked Yüeh-niang. "She certainly looks like a good, dependable body. I've never even heard her raise her voice."
"She's fifty-five years old this year," said Li P'ing-erh. "She was born in the year of the dog. She has no children of her own, either male or female, and depends on matchmaking for her living. I supply her with clothes from time to time. Ever since the recent death of my poor husband I've asked her to come over and keep me company. At night she sleeps on the same k'ang with the maidservants."
"There you are," said P'an Chin-lien, who was always quick on the uptake, "as long as you've got Old Feng to look after the house for you, you might just as well spend the night here. After all, since Mr. Hua is dead, there's no longer anyone to tell you what to do."
"If you'll do as I say," said Meng Yü-lou, "you'll send Old Feng home with the sedan chair and forget about going yourself."
Li P'ing-erh only smiled, without uttering a sound.
As they were talking:
*Several rounds of wine had been consumed.*
Old Mrs. P'an was the first to get up and make her way toward the front of the compound. P'an Chin-lien then followed in her mother's wake and went off to her own quarters.
"I've already had enough wine," Li P'ing-erh kept insisting, as she refused to accept any more but Li Chiao-erh said, "How is it that you've been willing enough to drink at the hands of the First Lady and the Third Lady but when I offer you wine, you refuse to drink any? It's really too discriminatory."
Thereupon, she picked up a larger cup and proceeded to fill it.
"My dear Second Lady," protested Li P'ing-erh, "I really can't manage any more. I'm not just pretending."
"After you've finished this cup," said Yüeh-niang, "you can rest awhile."
Only then did Li P'ing-erh accept the proffered cup and put it down in front of her while she continued to engage them in animated conversation.
Meng Yü-lou, noticing that Ch'un-mei was standing to one side, asked her, "What's your mother doing up front, anyway? You go up there and invite both your mother and Old Mrs. P'an to come back here. Tell them that the First Lady invites them back to help her keep Mrs. Hua company while she drinks wine."
Ch'un-mei had not been gone for long when she returned and said, "Old Mrs. P'an is not feeling well and has gone to bed. Mother is in her room putting on her makeup. She'll be here any minute."
"I've never seen anything like it," said Yüeh-niang. "After all, you're one of the hostesses, and yet, before anyone even knows what you're up to, you abandon your guest and run off to your own room. I don't know how many times a day this sister of mine has to redo her face. Whenever she feels like it she runs off to do it again. She's fine enough in other respects but about this one thing she's still rather childish."
While she was still speaking, who should appear but P'an Chin-lien. She was wearing a saffron-coloured jacket of Lu-chou silk that opened down the middle and was decorated with a motif of wild geese holding bulrushes in their mouths. It had a stiff-standing white satin collar with purfled edging and gilt buttons that depicted honeybees rifling chrysanthemum blossoms. Beneath this she wore a drawnwork skirt with a foot-wide, gold-spangled border representing sea horses sporting in the waves, shoes of scarlet silk with high white satin heels, and figured ankle leggings. She also sported pendant onyx earrings and a pearl headband. In fact, she was dressed identically with Meng Yü-lou. Yüeh-niang, on the other hand, had on a scarlet silk jacket, a plain blue satin cloak, and a skirt of sand-green pongee, while on her head she wore a fret over her chignon, enclosed in a sable toque.
Meng Yü-lou was the first of the party to catch sight of Chin-lien as she made a conspicuous entrance:
*Heavily made up and richly attired,*
with a gold pin in the shape of the character for long life carelessly stuck in the hair over her temple.
She proceeded to josh her, saying, "A fine wench you are, Slavey Five. You're the one who was you know what 'under a lucky star'[23] this very day, yet you've abandoned your guest and run off to hide in your room. And you call yourself a human being!"
Chin-lien laughed loudly and gave her a playful slap.
"You're a pretty nervy wench, Slavey Five," exclaimed Yü-lou. "It's your turn to offer our guest a drink."
"I've already had more than a little at the hands of the Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh. "I've reached my limit."
"What you had to suffer at her hands is her business," said Chin-lien. "I, too, make bold to offer you a cup."
Thereupon, she tucked up her sleeves, filled a large cup to the brim, and presented it to Li P'ing-erh, who merely allowed it to sit in front of her, without venturing to take a drink.
Yüeh-niang, who had withdrawn into the master suite with her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, came out and saw that Chin-lien had sat down to help entertain Li P'ing-erh.
"Why doesn't Old Mrs. P'an come out and provide some company for our guest?" she asked.
"My mother isn't feeling well," replied Chin-lien. "She's stretched out in my room, and even if you send for her, she won't come."
Yüeh-niang caught sight of one of the pins in the shape of the character for long life that was visible in the hair over Chin-lien's temple and asked Li P'ing-erh, "Where was this pair of pins that you gave Sister Six made? They're really very fine. In the future I'd like to get them reproduced so we could each have a pair to wear."
"If you'd like some, First Lady, I still have a few more of them at home," said Li P'ing-erh. "One day soon I'll send over an additional pair for each of you. They are made to imperial specifications and were smuggled out of the palace by the old eunuch, my late father-in-law. Workmanship of this kind is not to be found on the outside."
"I was only having a little joke at your expense," said Yüeh-niang. "There are such a lot of us, you could scarcely be expected to have that many to give away."
As the group of womenfolk continued to drink and amuse themselves, the sun was gradually sinking in the west. Old Mother Feng, who had been plied with wine in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters at the rear of the compound, came out with a very red face and urged Li P'ing-erh to make up her mind either to leave or, if not, to send the sedan chair back home.
"Don't go," said Yüeh-niang to her guest. "Just tell Old Feng to go home with the sedan chair."
Li P'ing-erh merely said, "There's no one to look after the place. I'll come again sometime soon to pay my respects to all of you. There'll be time enough for me to stay the night another day."
"Why be so insistent on having your own way?" said Meng Yü-lou. "It looks as though none of us carries much weight with you but if you won't send the sedan chair off, just wait until Father comes home in a little while; you can be sure he'll try to persuade you to stay, too."
This argument had the effect of overcoming Li P'ing-erh's objections. Taking out the keys to the house, she handed them to Old Mother Feng, saying, "Since all these ladies are so insistent on my staying, if I were to refuse, it would only show that:
*I didn't know a favour when I saw one.*
You can dismiss the sedan chair for today but tell the bearers to come back for me tomorrow. When you and the pageboy get home, be careful not to let anyone into the house."
She also called Old Mother Feng over to her and:
*Whispered into her ear in a low voice,*
"Tell my head maid, Ying-ch'un, to get the keys to the trunk in my bedroom and take four pairs of pins in the shape of the character for long life out of the small jewelry box with the gold tracery on it. Bring these to me first thing tomorrow morning. I want to give them to the four ladies here."
When Old Mother Feng had received her instructions she took formal leave of Yüeh-niang.
"Have something to drink before you go," Yüeh-niang said.
"I've had both food and wine just now in the quarters of the young lady at the rear of the compound," said Old Mother Feng. "I'll be back first thing tomorrow morning."
Whereupon, with:
*A thousand thanks and ten thousand*
*expressions of gratitude,*
she made her exit. But no more of this.
Shortly thereafter, when Li P'ing-erh refused to have anything more to drink, Yüeh-niang invited her into the master suite to have some tea with her sister-in-law.
All of a sudden, who should come in but the pageboy, Tai-an, carrying his master's felt bag. Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, and his first words upon lifting aside the portiere and entering the room were, "So Mrs. Hua is here."
Li P'ing-erh jumped hastily to her feet and the two of them exchanged salutations, after which she sat back down again. Yüeh-niang called Yü-hsiao to help Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his things.
Turning to Wu K'ai's wife and Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Today I've been attending the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal in celebration of the birthday of the Jade Emperor at his temple outside the Eastern Gate. It was my turn to preside this year. Otherwise, I would have come home after the vegetarian feast at noon. As a consequence I had to join the others in going over the accounts in Abbot Wu's room and, what with one thing and another, have been tied up all this time."
He then went on to ask, "I take it that Mrs. Hua is not going to go home today?"
"She kept refusing our invitations and proposing to leave," said Meng Yü-lou, "until, by combining our efforts, we carried the day by main force."
"There's no one to look after the place," said Li P'ing-erh. "I can't help worrying about it."
"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The night patrols have been very strict recently. What is there to be afraid of anyway?
*If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,*
all I'd have to do is send a note to Commandant Chou Hsiu and he'd:
*Act upon it even in defiance of the law.*[24]
"Why have you been neglecting Mrs. Hua so?" he added. "Has she been given anything to drink, or hasn't she?"
"All of us have been trying our hands at persuading her," said Meng Yü-lou, "but she affects an inability to drink."
"You're not up to the task," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let me give it a try. She's got no mean capacity."
Although Li P'ing-erh said the words, "I can't handle any more," she made no effort to withdraw.
Thereupon, the maidservants were instructed to reset the table and an elaborate spread of meat and vegetable dishes, along with other dainties of every kind that had been prepared in anticipation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's return, was laid before them. Sister-in-law Wu, sensing that the time had come to take flight, asserted that she did not wish to have any more wine and withdrew to Li Chiao-erh's quarters to get out of the way.
Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh was seated in the place of honour, Hsi-men Ch'ing drew up a chair across from her and assumed the role of host, Wu Yüeh-niang sat on the k'ang with her feet on the frame of the brazier, and Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien sat down at the other two sides of the table. As soon as the five of them had taken their places they started to decant the wine. They didn't use small cups either but called for large goblets of chased silver.
It was a case of:
*First a cup for you,*
*Then a cup for me.*
As the saying goes:
*Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and*
*Wine is the go-between of lust.*
As the cups passed back and forth, the woman continued to drink until:
*Her painted eyebrows drooped low, and*
*Amorous glances escaped the corners of her eyes.*
Truly:
*A pair of peach blossoms bloomed upon her cheeks,*[25]
*Her brows and eyes proclaiming her a wanton wench.*
When Yüeh-niang saw that the two of them were:
*As stuck on one another as sugar candy,*[26]
and that:
*The conversation was becoming rather risqué,*[27]
she found it so offensive that she withdrew to her own room and sent for her sister-in-law to keep her company, leaving the other three to entertain their guest.
They continued drinking until the third watch. By that time Li P'ing-erh's:

*Starry eyes were all a blur.*
Hardly able to stand on her own legs, she asked Chin-lien to accompany her to the bathroom in the rear of the compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, too, was:
*Swaying to the east and tumbling to the west,*
as he went into Yüeh-niang's room to ask her where they should put their guest for the night.
"Let her sleep in the room of the one whose birthday she came to celebrate," said Yüeh-niang.
"Where shall I spend the night, then?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Spend the night wherever you like," said Yüeh-niang. "Or, better yet, go spend it with her if you want."
"Whoever heard of such a thing?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he called for Hsiao-yü to help him off with his clothes. "I'll sleep in here tonight, then."
"Don't be so delirious," said Yüeh-niang. "Or do you want to provoke me into a real tirade? If you stay here, where do you suppose my sister-in-law is going to sleep?"
"Enough! Enough!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go and sleep with Meng the Third." Whereupon, he went off to Yü-lou's quarters to spend the night.
After she had accompanied Li P'ing-erh to the bathroom, P'an Chin-lien took her up to her own quarters in the front part of the compound, and that night she shared a bed with Old Mrs. P'an.
The next morning Li P'ing-erh got up and was combing her hair in front of the mirror when Ch'un-mei brought her some hot water to wash her face and helped her with her toilet. She noticed how clever Ch'un-mei was and, knowing that she was a maidservant who had enjoyed Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual favours, she made her a present of a gold chatelaine with three pendant charms in the shape of three miniature toilet articles.
Ch'un-mei immediately reported this gift to her mistress and Chin-lien was profuse in her thanks, saying, "I've put you to the additional expense of being so generous to her."
"You really are lucky, Fifth Lady, to have such a fine maid," said Li P'ing-erh.
That morning Chin-lien had Ch'un-mei open the gate to the garden and took Li P'ing-erh and Old Mrs. P'an on an extended tour of the entire premises.
Li P'ing-erh noticed that a gate had been opened in the wall that had formerly separated Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence from hers, and asked, "When is Father Hsi-men going to start construction on the new building?"
"Recently he had the yin-yang master come over to give him an appraisal," said Chin-lien. "He's planning to:
*Break ground and start construction,*
*Put it up and top it off,*
in the second month. He's going to tear down your old house and combine the two pieces of property into one, erect an artificial hill and a summer-house in the front, and make a large garden out of it. Then he's planning to build another three-room belvedere, to be called the Flower-viewing Tower that will be lined up with my own to form one boundary of the grounds."
Li P'ing-erh made a mental note of everything she was told.
While the two of them were still talking together, Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü to invite them back to the rear of the compound for some tea. The three of them then made their way to the master suite where they found Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou keeping Sister-in-law Wu company as they waited for them, with the tea things already laid out.
Just as everyone was enjoying the tea and the snacks that accompanied it, who should suddenly appear but Old Mother Feng. When they had offered her a seat and served her some tea, Old Mother Feng pulled an old kerchief out of her sleeve, in which the four pairs of pins in the shape of the character for long life were wrapped, and handed it to Li P'ing-erh. No sooner had she accepted them than she presented one pair to Yüeh-niang, and afterward, a pair each to Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o.
"These must have cost you a pretty penny," said Yüeh-niang. "This will never do."
"My dear First Lady," laughed Li P'ing-erh, "It's not as though they were genuine rarities. I'm only offering them to you to give away to someone if you like."
Yüeh-niang and the others bowed in gratitude before venturing to stick the pins in their hair.
"I hear that your front door opens right on the Lantern Market," said Yüeh-niang. "It must be quite exciting. If we go for a look at the lanterns someday soon, we'll come pay you a visit. Pray don't pretend you're not at home."
"Let me extend an invitation to all of you ladies for that day," said Li P'ing-erh.
"You may not know it, elder sister," said Chin-lien, "but I've heard that the fifteenth is actually our guest's birthday."
"That settles it," said Yüeh-niang. "If it's really your birthday, every last one of us will come to wish you many happy returns."
*"My humble abode is scarcely fit to accommodate a snail,"*
laughed Li P'ing-erh, "but if you ladies deign to visit me, consider yourselves invited."
It was not long before they finished their morning repast, after which wine was served and they fell to drinking again. The time passed swiftly as they enjoyed each other's company until the sun began to sink in the west and the sedan chair came back to pick her up. Li P'ing-erh said her farewells and her sorority of hostesses could not persuade her to stay any longer. Before leaving, she asked if she might be permitted to say goodbye to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He had to get up early this morning," said Yüeh-niang, "and go outside the city gate to see off the district vice-magistrate." Only then, with 1000 thanks and 10000 expressions of gratitude, did Li P'ing-erh get into her sedan chair and go home. Truly, the coupled halves of the peach stone serve to evoke a chuckle; because inside, it will be found, lie yet another couple.

One day, Wu Yueniang was not feeling well, and her brother's wife came to see her. Yueniang pressed her to stay a few days, and they were sitting together in her room when Ping'an came to announce his master's return. Mistress Wu went to Li Jiao'er's room.
Ximen Qing came in, took off his cloak, and sat down. Xiaoyu brought tea but he did not drink it, and his wife noticed that he was very pale.
"Why have you come back so early?" she said.
"It was Brother Chang's turn today," he replied, "but his house is not very large, and he asked us to go to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city. Brother Hua and Brother Ying—there were four or five of us in all—went to the Zhengs' bawdy house for some wine. We were enjoying ourselves when several constables appeared. Without a word they seized Hua and took him off with them. This scared us all. I went to Guijie's house, and hid there for a long time. I was so worried that I sent a man to find out what had happened. It seems that Hua's brothers have some grievance about the disposal of the family property. They made complaint at the Eastern Capital, and the courts have sent an order for Hua's arrest. When I had heard this, I didn't worry so much, and the rest of us came back."
"The best thing you could do," Yueniang said. "You have been going with those scamps day after day, gadding about and neglecting your home. Now, you see, there has been trouble. After this, I trust you will break with them completely. If you don't, you will find yourself involved in squabbles and disasters, and you will end by being beaten till you look like a rotten sheep's head. You will never believe what I tell you and stop this unbecoming manner of life but the whores in the bawdy house can tell you any old story and you'll listen to them with your donkey's ears. You are the kind of man who lets the advice of his own people go in at one ear and out at the other, and treats everything outsiders tell him as if it were written in the golden characters of a sacred book."
"Who do you imagine would have courage enough to strike me?" Ximen said, laughing.
"Oh, you are a splendid braggart by your own fireside," Yueniang said.
Daian came in. "Our neighbour, Mistress Hua, has sent her boy to ask Father to go and talk to her."
Ximen Qing tried to escape as quietly as he could.
"Aren't you afraid people will talk about you?" Yueniang said.
"We are only neighbours. There's nothing in it. I must go and see what she has to say." He went to Hua's house.
Li Ping'er had given instructions that he was to be taken at once to the inner part of the house, and there Ximen Qing found her, wearing a silken gown. She looked disheveled and weary, and her face was as pale as wax. She came and knelt down before him.
"My lord," she said, "the priest may be nothing to you but I pray you consider the glory of Buddha. There is an old maxim that when disaster overtakes a household, neighbours should do what they can to help. My husband has never paid any attention to me; he has never troubled in the least about domestic affairs but has always gone elsewhere and played the fool. Now he has got into serious trouble and is in a difficulty, he sends one of the servants to say that I must get him out of it. I am a woman, and no more use than a crab without feet. How am I to find anybody who will take the trouble to do anything for him? When I realize how he has always refused to listen to me, I can't help thinking that it serves him right even if he is sent to the Eastern Capital and beaten till he rots. But my father-in-law's memory must be considered, and this would bring disgrace upon him. I feel bound to ask you to help me to persuade the officials not to send him there. Think of my poor face, and plead for him. I should not like him to suffer hardship."
Ximen Qing saw her kneeling before him and asked her to get up. "It can't be anything very serious," he said, "but so far I don't know what the trouble is."
"It will take some explanation," Li Ping'er said.
"My late father-in-law had four nephews. Ziyu was the eldest, Ziguang the third, and Zihua the fourth. My husband was the second. They are all blood relations. My father-in-law was very wealthy but he knew that my husband was a fool and, when he came back from Guangnan, gave everything into my charge. The other three had all annoyed him in some way, and never dared to visit the old man. Last year, my father-in-law died. The other brothers divided between them a good deal of the furniture and some of the beds and curtains but they got none of the money. I told my husband several times that he should give them something but he would do nothing at all in the matter. Now, he has got himself into a hopeless situation, and the others have the whip hand." She burst into tears.
"Sister," Ximen Qing said, "don't distress yourself about it any more. I was under the impression that the matter was really serious but it is only a family squabble. You have told me what you wish, and I will give my brother's business as much attention as if it were my own. Tell me what you wish me to do and I will do it."
"My lord," Li Ping'er said, "if you are really willing to undertake this, I could wish for nothing better. Tell me how much you will need for presents, and I will get it ready for you at once."
"Not very much," Ximen said. "I believe the Governor of Kaifengfu is a ward of the Imperial Tutor Cai. Both Cai and my relative, Marshal Yang, have a certain influence with his Majesty. If we send two presents and get those gentlemen to speak to Governor Yang, I don't think he will refuse anything they ask, no matter how serious the case may be. We must send a present to the Imperial Tutor but, as Marshal Yang is a relative of mine, he can hardly accept a present from me."
Li Ping'er went to her room and took from a chest sixty large bars of silver each worth fifty taels. She gave them to Ximen Qing. The total value was three thousand taels of silver.
"Half of this will be enough," Ximen said. "Why do you give me so much?"
"Keep anything that is left for me," Li Ping'er said. "There are four chests behind my bed, full of the finest embroidered ceremonial clothes, jade girdles, and so on, without mentioning cap buttons, jewelry, and things of that sort. They are worth a great deal of money. Will you look after them for me and keep them in your house, so that when I want anything I can ask you for it? I feel very unsafe with all this stuff here. If anybody should come and take it away from me, I should be in a desperate fix."
"But what will you say when Brother Hua comes back and asks questions?" Ximen said.
"My father-in-law gave me all these things secretly," Li Ping'er said. "My husband knows nothing about them. You can take them without hesitation."
"I must go and see what my wife says," Ximen Qing said. "When I get home, I will send somebody for them." He went home to discuss the matter with Yueniang.
"We can tell the boys to take food boxes for the silver," she said, "but the chests and big things we must bring over the wall when it is dark. Then we shall be sure that the matter is kept secret; for, if we bring the stuff around by the gate, everybody in the neighbourhood will know what is happening."
Ximen Qing thought this an excellent plan. He told Daian, Laiwang, Laixing and Ping'an to take two food boxes and bring the three thousand taels of silver. That evening, when the moon had risen, Li Ping'er and her two maids, Yingchun and Xiuchun, brought benches to the wall and lifted up the chests. On Ximen's side, Yueniang, Jinlian, and Chunmei set up a ladder and put a blanket on the top of the wall to receive the various articles one by one. Everything was taken to Yueniang's room.
In this manner Ximen Qing got into possession of many fine and delicate things, both gold and silver, while his neighbours had not the faintest inkling of what was afoot. He quickly prepared several loads of presents, and, after getting someone to write a letter to go with them, sent Laibao to the Eastern Capital. He was to ask Marshal Yang to send the presents to the Imperial Tutor, asking him to communicate with Governor Yang of Kaifengfu.
The Governor's name was Yang Shi, and he was also known as Guishan. Born at Hongnong in Shaanxi, he had obtained the third literary degree in the period of Guiwei. He had formerly been an official at Dalisi, and had been promoted to his present position at the Eastern Capital. He was an honest and fair-dealing official but the Imperial Tutor had been his guardian, and Marshal Yang was in high favour at the palace, so he could not but fall in with their wishes.
When the presents arrived, the Governor went into his hall and, bringing Hua Zixu and the others from prison, questioned them about their property. Hua Zixu had received a message from Ximen Qing, so he knew how matters stood.
"When my worthy ancestor departed this life," he said to the Governor, "I spent what money there was upon his funeral expenses and the reading of the Buddhist sutras. There was nothing else beyond a parcel of land and a couple of houses. The furniture has already been distributed among the members of the family."
"It is never possible," the Governor said, "to be quite certain about the amount of a chamberlain's wealth. It comes easily but it goes easily too. If you have spent all you had, I will send instructions to the magistrate at Qinghe to put up for sale your two houses and the parcel of land, and to share the proceeds between Ziyu and the others."
Hua Ziyu pleaded that his brother should be made to hand over to them all his property but the request irritated the Governor. "You seem to be asking for trouble," he said. "When the chamberlain died, you made no complaint. Why are you trying to rake up matters that are over and done with?"
Hua Zixu escaped without the chastisement he had anticipated. The Governor sent a document to Qinghe, ordering the officials there to make a valuation of the houses and land, and dispose of them.
As soon as Laibao had heard the decision, he traveled posthaste to give the news to Ximen Qing, who was delighted to hear that Hua Zixu was free and on his way back. Li Ping'er sent for him to talk over the situation, and suggested that he should take some of her money and buy the house. "I shall be yours entirely then," she said. Ximen again went home to discuss the matter with Yueniang.
"I don't see how her husband can fail to have his suspicions," Yueniang said, "if he finds that you intend to buy his house. How do you propose to manage it?"
Ximen Qing considered what she said but he did not answer.
In a few days Hua Zixu returned, and the magistrate of Qinghe appointed his deputy to make an inventory of the old chamberlain's estate. One house in the Street of Peace and Good Fortune was sold to the princely family of Wang for seven hundred taels, and the land by the South Gate to Major Zhou for six hundred and fifty-five taels. The house in which Hua Zixu had been living was valued at five hundred and forty taels but nobody made an offer for it, because it was so near to Ximen Qing's house. More than once, Hua Zixu sent a messenger to ask Ximen to buy it but he always said he had no money and didn't care to pass the transaction through his accounts. Meanwhile, seeing that the local authorities seemed anxious to get the matter over and done with, Li Ping'er grew more and more anxious, and secretly sent old woman Feng to Ximen to beg him to take five hundred and forty taels from the money that she had left in his care. Finally Ximen consented, and paid the money to the officials. Hua Zixu hurriedly signed all the documents, and his three brothers divided the eighteen hundred and ninety-five taels between them.
Hua Zixu was at last clear of the law but he had not a penny to bless himself with, and both houses and land had been taken from him. The large bars of silver, amounting to three thousand taels that he had had in his two chests, seemed to have completely vanished, a circumstance that he found exceedingly annoying and disturbing. He wished Li Ping'er to ask Ximen how much had been spent on his behalf and what was left, so that he could buy a house with the remainder but the only reply he got from his wife was ill humor for several days.
"You idiot," she cried, "you have never paid the slightest attention to your own affairs; you have spent all your time chasing after women, and as a result you found yourself in a hole and were thrown into jail. You then condescended to ask me to find somebody to help you. I am not a woman given to gadding about. What do I know about matters of this sort? Whom do I know and where should I have found anybody to do anything for you? I am a creature of such insignificance that, if my body were made of iron, very few nails could be made out of me. All I could do was to go around like a baby, appealing for help, and, fortunately for you, Master Ximen remembered that you had once been his friend, and when things looked cold and bleak for you, sent his servant to the Eastern Capital to get everything settled for you. It was exceedingly kind and thoughtful of him. Now you are out of the mess and your feet are once more on dry land, you begin to think about money, though your life has only just been given back to you. As soon as your troubles are over, you forget all you have gone through, come back to rake up a business that has already been done with, and want to know whether there is any money left.
"Here is a letter from you, written in your own hand. Without this authority I should never have dared to spend your money on getting assistance for you. I am not so bold that I would steal your money and give it away."
"Although I said so in my letter," Hua Zixu said, "I did hope to keep a little something, sufficient, at least, to buy a house to live in."
"Pah, you dirty fool!" Li Ping'er cried, "you ought to have thought about that before. When you had money, you never gave it a thought; but it seems a very different matter now. You keep on saying that I have spent too much money. What was three thousand taels? Do you imagine that the Imperial Tutor Cai and Marshal Yang are so moderate in their desires? If I hadn't sent them a handsome present, do you think they would have attended to the matter so effectively that you never even felt the weight of a straw on your turtle's body but got off scot-free? And you are proud of the fact! You have no influence with them. You are no relative of theirs that they should trouble to be kind to you. Unless it was for something worthwhile, why should they go tearing about to save your skin? Yet you come home, and instead of preparing a banquet and showing your gratitude by entertaining Ximen Qing, you brush everybody on one side and only think about reopening the whole business."
This was like a blow in the face to Hua Zixu. He said no more. Next day Ximen Qing sent Daian with a present to console him in his distress. In return he prepared wine, and invited Ximen Qing, hoping that he might get an opportunity to ask him about the money. As a matter of fact, Ximen would gladly have sent him a few hundred taels to buy a house with but Li Ping'er would not hear of it. She sent old woman Feng to tell him not to come, and to send her husband a falsified account, making it appear that all the money had been spent.
Hua Zixu had not brains enough to see through the trick. He sent repeated invitations to Ximen Qing. But Ximen went off to the bawdy house, and told his servants to say that he was not at home whenever a message came for him. This so upset Hua Zixu that he almost fainted, yet he could do nothing but stamp his feet with impatience.
Readers, if a woman once ceases to love her husband and becomes unfaithful to him, he will never be able to find out her secrets, though he have strength enough to bite through iron. It is traditionally a man's duty to attend to matters outside the household and a woman's to govern within it but over and over again a man's good repute has been brought to nothing by his wife. Why is this? It is because he has not treated his wife as the Sacred Principle requires. The relations between husband and wife should be based upon a generosity of spirit that gives rise to mutual understanding and brings their feelings into complete accord. When this is the case, the husband sets the tune and the wife follows; there is no reason to anticipate trouble. Hua Zixu lost his head and was blown hither and thither by every wind; he had no ideas at all about the management of a household. This being so, it could hardly be expected that he would exercise any control over his wife's doings.
Soon after this Hua Zixu succeeded in borrowing two hundred and fifty taels of silver and bought a house in Lion Street. But he was still smarting beneath a load of anger, and had not long been in his new house before he fell ill of a fever. At the beginning of the eleventh month he took to his bed, and never rose from it again. Early in his illness he was attended by a doctor but he objected to the expense and allowed the illness to run its course till, on the twentieth, he breathed his last. He was only twenty-four. While he was ill, Tian Xi, one of his boys, stole five taels of silver and made off.

Hua Zixu was no sooner dead than his wife sent old woman Feng to ask Ximen Qing to come and talk to her. A coffin was bought, Hua was put into it, monks were engaged, and the coffin was sent to the tomb. The brothers Hua with their wives all came in deep mourning to assist at the funeral. Ximen Qing asked Yueniang to prepare a funeral offering of wine and food. Li Ping'er went to the funeral and returned in a sedan chair. She set up a tablet in her room but, though it was a time when she should have respected her husband's memory, she could think of nobody but Ximen Qing.

While Hua Zixu was still alive, Ximen Qing had taken over the two maids but after his death the two households were practically united. One day Li Ping'er heard that it was Pan Jinlian's birthday, and, though it was not five weeks after her husband's death, she bought some presents and went in a sedan chair to offer her congratulations. She wore a white silk gown and a blue skirt with gold embroidery, and upon her head was a white covering adorned with pearls. Old woman Feng attended her, and Tian Fu walked behind the sedan chair.

Li Ping'er kowtowed four times to Yueniang. "I am sorry," she said, "that at the graveside I had nothing better to offer you. It was kind of you to send such a handsome offering." After her reverence to Yueniang, she asked to see Li Jiao'er and Meng Yulou. Jinlian came in.

"Is this the Fifth Lady?" Li Ping'er said, preparing to kowtow to her. She repeatedly called her Elder Sister, and begged her to accept her reverence. But Jinlian would not do so, and, after disputing amicably for a long time, they ended by making equal reverences. Jinlian thanked her for her birthday present. After greeting Mistress Wu and Madam Pan, Li Ping'er asked after Ximen Qing.

"He has gone to make his devotions at the Temple of the Jade Emperor," Yueniang said. She asked Li Ping'er to sit down, and offered her tea. A little later Sun Xue'e came in. Li Ping'er saw that her attire was not so rich as that of the others but she stood up. "Who is this lady?" she said, "I should have asked to be presented, had I known there was anyone else."

"She is one of my husband's ladies," Yueniang said. Li Ping'er would have made a reverence to Xue'e but Yueniang would not allow her to do so. "Lady," she said, "you should make the reverence of an equal." So they greeted each other. Yueniang took Li Ping'er to her own room to change her clothes, and ordered the maids to set a table in the middle room. Charcoal was put into the brazier, and wine and food were brought. Mistress Wu, Madam Pan, and Li Ping'er sat in the place of honour; Yueniang and Li Jiao'er in the hostess's place, and Yulou and Jinlian sat at the side. Xue'e went to the kitchen to see to the serving of the meal, and it was some time before she took her own place.

Yueniang saw that Li Ping'er never refused any cup of wine that was offered. She herself poured wine for everyone, and told Li Jiao'er and the others that they must do so in their turn.

"Mistress Hua," she said, "since you have gone so far away, we do not see so much of one another but I often think about you. It has been cruel of you not to come to see us."

"You would not have come today," Yulou said, "if it had not been the Fifth Lady's birthday."

"Good ladies," Li Ping'er said, "it is very good of you to say such kind words. I should have been only too glad to come but I am still in deep mourning and there is nobody to leave at home. Even now it is only about five weeks since my husband died, and if I had not been afraid of incurring the Fifth Lady's displeasure, I should not have come today." She turned to Yueniang, and asked the date of her birthday.

"It is still a long way off," Yueniang said but Jinlian contradicted her.

"Our Great Lady's birthday is the fifteenth day of the eighth month. You must come and see us that day." Li Ping'er promised to come. Yulou suggested that she should spend the night with them.

I should enjoy the pleasure of your company very much indeed," Li Ping'er said, "but, as you know, I have only just removed to this new place and, since my husband died, there is not a soul in the house. The back of my house adjoins the garden of the princely family Qiao; it is very lonely and desolate. There are many nights when foxes come and throw bricks and tiles into my house, and it makes me very nervous. I used to have two serving boys but the older of them has run away, and there is only young Tian Fu to attend to the front door and no one at all to keep watch at the back. Very fortunately for me, old woman Feng, an old friend, comes in frequently to do my washing."

"How old is Madam Feng?" Yueniang said. "She seems a very decent quiet old body."

"She is fifty-six this year," Li Ping'er replied. "She has no children but lives upon her earnings as a go-between and what she makes by washing clothes for me. When my husband died, I asked her to come and live with me, and now she and the maid sleep in the same bed."

"Since there is old woman Feng to look after your house," Jinlian said, "there can be no possible reason why you should not spend the night here. In any case, Master Hua is dead, and you are not answerable to anybody but yourself."

"Do what I tell you," Yulou said, "and tell old woman Feng to send the sedan chair away. You don't go back today."

Li Ping'er laughed but said nothing.

The wine had now gone around several times. Old woman Pan was the first to rise, and she went to the front court with her daughter. Li Ping'er repeatedly declined to drink any more but Li Jiao'er said, "Mistress Hua, you drank everything the other ladies offered you, yet you refuse me. That isn't fair." She took a large cup and filled it to the brim.

"My dear lady," Mistress Hua said, "I can't drink any more. I am not pretending."

"Just one cup more," Yueniang said, "and then we will let you off."

Li Ping'er took the cup, and put it down on the table. She went on talking to the ladies. Suddenly Yulou noticed Chunmei standing beside her.

"What is your mistress doing in the front court?" she said. "Go and tell her and old lady Pan to come back at once. The Great Lady wishes them to help to entertain Mistress Hua."

Chunmei went away but was soon back again. "The old lady is not very well and has gone to bed," she said. "My mistress will be back in a moment. She is powdering her face."

"I never saw such a hostess," Yueniang said, "running away and leaving her guest like this. She is a good soul but she behaves like a child at times."

When Jinlian came back, Yulou saw that she had dressed herself in her most beautiful clothes. She certainly looked very charming.

"Fifth Maid," Yulou said, jokingly, "my good woman, this is the feast of your donkey and horse, yet you ran away to your own room and left your guest behind. Do you call yourself a human being?"

Jinlian laughed, and slapped her playfully.

"You hussy of a fifth maid," Yulou cried, "come and pour out the wine." "The Third Lady has given me too much wine already," Li Ping'er said, "I have had as much as I can take."

"What she gave you is her affair," Jinlian said, "but you must take a cup from me." She poured out a large cup for her guest. Li Ping'er took it but did not drink it. Yueniang noticed that Jinlian was wearing in her hair a pin with the lucky character in gold. "Where did you buy your lucky character pins?" she said to Li Ping'er. "They are exactly like those the Fifth Lady is wearing. I must get a pair with the same design."

"If you would like some," Li Ping'er said, "I have several more pairs, and tomorrow I shall be delighted to offer a pair to each of you. They are some that my late father-in-law brought from the palace, and it is impossible to buy them outside the Court."

"You mustn't take me seriously," Yueniang said, there are too many of us. You can't possibly give us so many pins."

The ladies laughed and drank till the sun went down in the west. Old woman Feng had been drinking in the kitchen with Xue'e, and her face was very red. At last she went into the room and said to Li Ping'er, "Are you ready to go now? I must arrange about the chair."

"Don't go, Mistress Hua," Yueniang said. "Tell Madam Feng to send the chair away."

"There is no one at home," Li Ping'er persisted. "I will come and see you again some other day."

"You are very obstinate, Mistress Hua," Yulou said. "It looks as though you don't care in the least what we should like, since you won't send the chair away. If Father had been here, he would soon have persuaded you."

They finally persuaded her to give her key to old woman Feng. "These ladies have all urged me to stay," she said to the old woman, "and if I don't, it will be discourteous on my part. Send the sedan chair away and tell the men to call for me tomorrow. You take the boy home, and see that all the doors are shut." She added in a whisper: "Tell Yingchun to unlock the small box in my room. There is a little gilt case in it, and I want her to take four pairs of gold lucky-character pins out of it. Bring them to me tomorrow morning. I wish to make a present of them to these four ladies."

Old woman Feng made a reverence to Yueniang and went home. A little later, seeing that Li Ping'er would not drink any more, Yueniang asked her to go to the upper room and take tea with Mistress Wu.

Shortly afterwards Daian brought in the wrapper, and Ximen Qing came in. He pulled up the lattice and, as he entered the room, said, "Surely this is Mistress Hua!" Li Ping'er rose and made a reverence to him. Yueniang told Yuxiao to take his clothes.

"I have been outside the city to worship at the Temple of the Jade Emperor," Ximen Qing said. "I have to preside this year, and the Abbot and I had to go through the accounts in great detail. That is why I am so late. Are you staying the night, Mistress Hua?"

"Mistress Hua has made several attempts to get away," Yulou said, "but we succeeded in persuading her to stay."

"My only reason for wishing to go was that there is no one to look after my house," Li Ping'er said.

"That is nonsense," Ximen Qing said. "The constables have been very active lately, and there is nothing to be afraid of. If you should feel the least bit anxious, I would send my card to Major Zhou. He will do anything I ask him. But why do you sit there like a mouse, Lady Hua? Have you had any wine?"

"We have tried to persuade her to drink some but she would not," Yulou said.

"You are none of you any good," Ximen cried. "Let me see what I can do. She can really drink quite a lot more."

Li Ping'er kept declaring that she could not drink another drop but her objections were only half-hearted, and the maids once more set the table. Some dishes and dessert had been kept for Ximen Qing, and these were now brought out. Mistress Wu declined to drink any more, and went to Li Jiao'er's room. Li Ping'er now sat in the seat of honour, with Ximen Qing opposite to her, and Yueniang sat on the bed and warmed her feet at a small brazier. Yulou and Jinlian sat at the side. The wine was poured again, and they pledged each other in large cups. They drank so long that Mistress Hua's eyebrows grew heavy and her eyes could hardly see.

When Yueniang saw that both her husband and Li Ping'er had drunk more than was good for them, and were chattering nonsense to each other, she waited no longer but went to join her sister. The others stayed drinking till the third night watch, and then Li Ping'er could neither see straight nor stand upright. Jinlian helped her to the back court to wash her hands, and Ximen Qing, who was rolling in all directions, went to Yueniang's room.

"Where is she going to sleep?" he asked.

"In her hostess's room, I imagine," said his wife.

"Where shall I sleep, then?" Ximen said.

"Anywhere you like, though I expect you will go after her," Yueniang said.

"Nonsense," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "I'll stay here." He called Xiaoyu to help him undress.

'Don't be dirty," Yueniang said. "Where is my sister-in-law going to sleep if you stay here? Don't provoke me or I shall tell you what I think about you."

"All right! all right!" Ximen cried. "I'll go and sleep with Yulou." He went off to her room.

When Jinlian had shown her guest where to wash her hands, she took her to the front court and they slept with old woman Pan. Next morning Li Ping'er got up and dressed with the aid of Chunmei. She knew that the girl had passed through Ximen Qing's hands. She gave her a set of golden hair ornaments. Chunmei immediately went to tell Jinlian, and the Fifth Lady thanked her guest most effusively.

"I feel as though we were imposing on you, Mistress Hua," she said "Not at all, Fifth Lady, you are fortunate to have so admirable a maid." When they were dressed, Jinlian took her and old woman Pan into the garden, sending Chunmei to open the gate. Li Ping'er saw that a new gate had been made in the wall, and asked when Ximen was going to rebuild the house.

"The Master of the Yin Yang has been here," Jinlian said, "and he suggests our starting on the foundations in the middle of the second month. His Lordship proposes to make your old house and ours into one. In the front he is going to build an artificial mound, a pergola, and a large garden. At the back he will build a garden house of three rooms like mine."

Li Ping'er listened attentively. Then Yueniang sent Xiaoyu to invite them to take tea in the back court, and the three women went to her room. Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, Yulou, and Mistress Wu were waiting for them.

While they were having breakfast old woman Feng came in. She took an old handkerchief from her sleeve, in which were wrapped four pairs of gold pins, and gave the pins to her mistress. Li Ping'er gave them in turn to Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, Yulou, and Xue'e.

"I feel that I ought not to accept them," Yueniang said. "It is really too kind of you."

Li Ping'er smiled. "There is nothing very wonderful about them," she said, "I only offer them as playthings." Yueniang and the others thanked her, and put them in their hair.

"I believe the Feast of Lanterns is to be held near your house," Yueniang said. "It will be very lovely, and, when I go to see it, I will pay you a call. That is, unless you tell me you won't have me."

"I shall be only too glad to invite you all," Li Ping'er said.

"Perhaps you do not know, Sister," Jinlian said to Yueniang, "that it will be Mistress Hua's birthday on the fifteenth."

"In that case," Yueniang said, "we will make a definite arrangement now to come and offer our congratulations that day."

"My little room's no better than a snail's," Li Ping'er said, smiling, "but if you'll condescend to come, I'll be only too happy." They finished their breakfast, and wine was brought. It was now late in the morning, and the sedan chair came for Li Ping'er. She said goodbye to them all and though they urged her to stay still longer, she prepared to go. As she was about to start, she asked for Ximen Qing but Yueniang told her that he had gone early to say farewell to one of his friends who was going away. Li Ping'er got into her sedan chair and went home.

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## Beauties Enjoy the Sights in the Feast of Lanterns-Viewing Belvedere; Hangers-on Abet Debauchery in the Verdant Spring Bordello

*As the sun sinks amid the western hills, the moon rises in the east;*
Even the span of a hundred years is like wind-blown tumbleweed.
Before one knows it, the red-cheeked lad one so admires,
In the twinkling of an eye turns into a white-haired gentleman.
Do not waste the fullness of your youth, so quickly does it pass;[2]
Even Heaven-scaling wealth and success are as evanescent as clouds.
One might as well seek to divert oneself among scarlet skirts;
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red in houses of pleasure.

Light and darkness alternate swiftly, and before anyone knew it, the fifteenth day of the first month was at hand. The day before, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent his pageboy, Tai-an, to deliver four trays of preserved fruit, two trays of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a jug of wine, a tray of birthday noodles, and a set of heavy silk brocade clothing to Li P'ing-erh in honour of her birthday. The gifts were sent in Wu Yüeh-niang's name, accompanied by a card that read, "Respectfully presented with straightened skirts by the lady, née Wu, of the Hsi-men household."

Li P'ing-erh had just gotten up and she was still engaged in doing her toilet. Calling Tai-an into her bedroom, she said, "I'm afraid I imposed upon your First Lady's hospitality the other day, and now she has gone to the further trouble of sending me these gifts."

"Mother sends her greetings," said Tai-an, "and Father sends his greetings too. They told me to say, 'It's only a little something for you to give away to someone if you like,' "

Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to set up a small table outside in the parlour. There Tai-an was entertained with tea and four little boxes of delicacies. As he was about to leave, she gave him two mace of silver and a handkerchief of shot silk decorated with the symbolic representations of the "eight treasures."

"When you get home," she said, "please convey my greetings to all the ladies of the house. I'll send Old Mother Feng around with written invitations. Whatever happens, I hope they will all condescend to pay me a visit tomorrow."

When Tai-an kowtowed and went outside she also gave him a hundred cash for the two carriers who had brought the boxes containing her presents. Li P'ing-erh lost no time in dispatching Old Mother Feng with a letterbox containing five written invitations, inviting Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o to visit her on the fifteenth. At the same time she also sent Hsi-men Ch'ing a private note asking him to drop in on her later that evening to help celebrate her birthday.

The next day Wu Yüeh-niang, having told Sun Hsüeh-o to stay behind and look after the house, set out with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien in four sedan chairs. All of them were dressed in clothing of figured brocade. Accompanied by the pageboys Lai-hsing, P'ing-an, [3] Tai-an, and Hua-t'ung, they arrived in front of Li P'ing-erh's newly purchased house that was located in the Lantern Market on Lion Street.

The house consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage and three interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. The first part of the building was a two-story structure with windows on the upper floor that opened directly over the street. Inside the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard there was a row of three rooms on either side and a formal reception hall. A passageway through an antechamber led into the third courtyard that contained three bedrooms and a kitchen. The open space behind the third courtyard, abutted directly on the garden of a distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao.

Li P'ing-erh, knowing that Wu Yüeh-niang and the others were coming to see the lanterns, had furnished the second-story room that overlooked the street with standing screens, chairs and tables, and an array of decorated lanterns. She first ushered her guests into the formal reception hall and then, after they had performed the customary exchange of greetings, invited them back to the parlour in the rear courtyard for some tea. When they had finished changing their clothes in her room, tea was served but there is no need to describe this in detail.

At noontime Li P'ing-erh invited her guests to return to the reception hall where four place settings had been provided and two singing girls, named Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan, had been engaged to entertain them as they enjoyed the feast. After:

*Five rounds of wine had been consumed: and*
*Three main courses had been served,*

Wu Yüeh-niang and the others were invited to go up to the second-story room that overlooked the street to enjoy the display of lanterns as they continued their feast.

Hanging blinds of speckled bamboo had been let down under the eaves, from which an array of brightly coloured lanterns were suspended. Wu Yüeh-niang was wearing a full-sleeved jacket of figured scarlet material, a stylish green silk skirt, and a sable cloak. Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien all wore white satin jackets and blue silk skirts, over which Li Chiao-erh also wore a brocaded aloeswood-coloured vest, Meng Yü-lou a brocaded green vest, and P'an Chin-lien a brocaded scarlet vest. On their heads:

*Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;*
*Phoenix hairpins were half askew,*

while, from just behind the hair over their temples, there dangled innumerable pendant earrings in the shape of miniature lanterns of every description.

Leaning out of the windows of the second-story room, they looked down on the Lantern Market below where:
*Crowds of people had congregated; and*
*The merrymaking was at its height.*
Several tens of elaborate lantern-stands had been erected in the street, and peddlers were busy hawking their wares on all sides.
*The men and women come to see the lanterns;*
*Were red as flowers and green as willows.*
*Carriages and horses rumbled like thunder;*
*Hills of lanterns soared into the Milky Way.*[4]
What did this wonderful Lantern Market look like? Behold:
*Insinuating themselves among the mountain rocks, a pair*
*of dragons sports in the water;*
*Concealed amid the sunset clouds, a solitary crane*
*ascends to the heavens.*
*Golden Lotus lanterns,*
*Tower of Jade lanterns,*
*Scintillate like a cluster of pearls;*
*Lotus blossom lanterns,*
*Hibiscus lanterns,*
*Scatter a thousand embroidered rosettes.*[5]
*Hydrangea lanterns,*
*Are chaste and immaculate;*
*Snowflake lanterns,*
*Are tumbled and tossed.*
*Scholar lanterns,*
*Bow and scrape, advance and retreat,*
*Preserving the manners of Confucius and Mencius;*
*Housewife lanterns,*
*Display virtuous demeanors and gentle dispositions,*
*Emulating the fidelity and resolve of Meng Chiang.*[6]
*There is a Buddhist monk lantern,*
*Depicting Yüeh-ming and the courtesan Liu Ts'ui;*[7]
*And an underworld assessor lantern,*
*Showing Chung K'uei seated with his little sister.*[8]
*There is a shamaness lantern,*
*Fluttering her feathered fan,*
*Pretending to subdue evil spirits;*
*And a Liu Hai lantern,*
*Bearing the golden three-footed toad on his back,*
*As it gobbles its string of cash.*[9]
*There are camel lanterns,*
*And green lion lanterns,*
*Bearing priceless rarities,*
*Snorting and roaring;*
*As well as gibbon lanterns,*
*And white elephant lanterns,*
*Proffering treasures fit to ransom cities,*
*Gamboling and playing.*
*All arms and legs,*
*Crab lanterns,*
*Cavort in the clear waves;*
*With gaping mouths and long beards,*
*Catfish lanterns,*
*Gulp down green algae.*
*Silver moths vie with one another in brilliance,*
*Snowy willows compete with each other in beauty;*
*Pair by pair, they follow in the wake of brocade sashes*
*and dangling pomanders,*
*Branch by branch, they brush against decorated pennants*
*and turquoise carriage curtains.*[10]
*Fish and dragons sport on the sand,*
*As the Seven Perfected Ones and the Five Ancients*[11]
*present their vermilion texts;*
*Tasseled portieres are suspended,*
*While the Nine Barbarians and the Eight Tribes*
*come to offer their tribute.*
*Parading village mummers,*
*Troupe after troupe, drum up a dreadful din;*
*Peddlers of toys and knickknacks,*
*Item by item, tout the uniqueness of their wares.*
*Among the revolving lanterns,*
*One comes, the other goes;*
*Amid the suspended lanterns,*
*One bobs up, another down.*
*There are vitreous vases,*
*Depicting only a beautiful woman or rare flower;*
*As well as mica screens,*
*Portraying paradises on both mountains and seas.*
*To the east,*
*There are bedsteads of carved lacquer,*
*And bedsteads of inlaid mother-of-pearl,*
*The golds and greens of which blend their hues;*
*To the west,*
*There are lanterns spangled with gold,*
*And lanterns striped with colours,*
*Producing brocade effects that dazzle the eye.*
*To the north,*
*There are exhibited antiques and curios;*
*To the south,*
*Calligraphy, painting, vases, and incense burners.*
*Patrician youths are out in force,*
*From beneath low balustrades their kickballs*
*rise into the clouds;*
*Wellborn young ladies escort each other,*
*As within lofty belvederes they show off*
*their good looks.*
*The booths of the fortune-tellers are massed like clouds,*
*The stalls of the physiognomists are arrayed like stars;*
*They are prepared to expatiate on one's fortune*
*in the impending spring,*
*Or determine the success or failure of a lifetime*
*with sure precision.*
*Then there are those,*
*Professional storytellers,*
*Who, standing on a slope,*
*Relate in doggerel and song the exploits of Yang Yeh;*[12]
*And see those others,*
*Itinerant Buddhist monks,*
*Who, clapping their sounding cymbals,*
*Elaborate upon the adventures of Tripitaka.*[13]
*The sellers of Lantern Festival dumplings,*
*Make imposing piles of their ingredients;*
*The makers of artificial plum blossoms,*
*Attach them ubiquitously to dead branches.*
*Paper cutouts of spring moths,*
*Stuck rakishly in the hair over the temples,*
*quiver in the east wind;*
*Gold-flecked gimcrack hairpins,*
*Twinkle atop chignons with a glitter*
*that rivals the sun's.*
*Standing screens depict the extravagant Shih Ch'ung*

*and his brocaded windbreak.*[14]
*Beaded portieres display the twin perfections*
*of plum blossom and moonlight.*
*Though the attractions of the hills of lanterns*
*cannot be exhaustively ennumerated;*
*They surely must portend a bumper harvest*
*and a happy year to come.*
Wu Yüeh-niang contemplated the spectacle for a while, after which, observing that the crowd below was getting rowdy, she and Li Chiao-erh withdrew to the table and sat down to enjoy their wine. P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou, however, along with the two singing girls, continued to lean out over the windowsills and gaze at the scene below. P'an Chin-lien went so far as to tuck up the sleeves of her white satin jacket, revealing the brocaded lining and exposing her ten slender fingers that sported six gold stirrup-shaped rings. Leaning halfway out the window, she cracked melon seeds with her teeth and spit the empty shells onto the heads of the people below. All the while she and Meng Yü-lou maintained a steady stream of laughter and banter.
One minute she called out, "Elder Sister, come and see. Look at the two hydrangea lanterns hanging from the eaves of the house over there:
*One comes, the other goes;*
*Bobbing up, bobbing down.*
They're really something to see."
The next minute she said, "Second Sister, come and see. On the stand just across the street there's a big fish lantern with all kinds of small fry, turtles, shrimp, crabs, and so forth, tagging at its heels. They're really fun to watch."
A minute later she called to Meng Yü-lou, saying, "Third Sister, just look at the old lady lantern and the old man lantern over here."
As she spoke, a sudden gust of wind blew up and tore a gaping hole in the abdomen of the old lady lantern. When Chin-lien saw what had happened she laughed uproariously.
This had the effect of attracting the attention of the sightseers below.
*Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,*
*Lifting their heads and gazing upward;*
*Jammed together into an indivisible mass,*
*Treading on one another's heels,*
in no time at all a considerable crowd of onlookers had gathered. Among them were to be found some dissolute young scamps who were not averse to offering their own assessments of the situation.
One said, "They must be dependents of some princely or noble household on an outing."
Another hazarded, "They must be the seductive concubines of some relative of the imperial family, come to see the lanterns. Otherwise, what are they doing dressed in palace style?"
Another ventured, "They must be whores from the licensed quarter that some big spender has engaged to entertain him while he enjoys the lanterns."
Still another strolled over and said, "I'm the only one who can identify them. None of you will ever guess right. If you take them for whores, how do you account for the other four at the back? I'll tell you who they are: those two women don't belong to just anybody. They might as well be mates of King Yama himself or concubines of the General of the Five Ways. They're the womenfolk of the Honourable Hsi-men Ch'ing who owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen and engages in moneylending to both officials and functionaries. You'd be well-advised to leave them alone. They must have come here along with his wife to see the lanterns.
"The one wearing the brocaded green vest I don't recognize but the one wearing the brocaded scarlet vest with the turquoise beauty patch on her face looks like the wife of Wu the Elder who used to peddle steamed wheat cakes on the street. When Wu the Elder tried to catch her in the act of adultery in Dame Wang's teashop, the Honourable Gentleman just mentioned gave him such a kick that he died of the effects, after which he took her into his household as a concubine. Later on, her brother-in-law, Wu Sung, came back from the Eastern Capital and lodged a complaint against him but ended up killing the lictor, Li Wai-ch'uan, by mistake, so that Hsi-men Ch'ing was able to get his assailant condemned to military exile, while he himself got out of the affair completely unscathed. She hasn't shown herself in public for the last year or two but she's looking better than ever."
At this point another busybody chimed in, saying, "What's the point of wasting our time talking about the likes of them? Let's move along."
When Wu Yüeh-niang, from her vantage point in the upstairs room, became aware that a large crowd had assembled below, she told Chin-lien and Yü-lou to come back and join her at the table, where they listened to the two singing girls perform songs in celebration of the lantern festival while they drank their wine.
After a while, Yüeh-niang indicated that she was ready to make her departure by saying to her hostess, "I've had enough to drink. The Second Lady and I will go ahead home but we'll leave our two sisters behind to keep you company a little longer and show our appreciation for your hospitality. Our husband isn't at home today, so there's no one to look after the place. When only the maidservants are there, I can't help worrying about it."
Li P'ing-erh could hardly let them go without a protest.
"My dear First Lady," she said, "I've scarcely had a chance to show my respects to you. Since your arrival today I haven't even had the opportunity to help you to a proper serving of anything. It's a festival occasion, after all, and yet you want to go home before the lanterns are lit or dinner is served. Even if Father Hsi-men is out today, as long as the young ladies are there, what is there to worry about? Wait until the moon rises, at least, and I'll see you all home myself."
"It's not that," said Yüeh-niang. "It's just that I'm not accustomed to drinking so much. If I leave my two sisters behind it will be just as though I were here myself."
"Even if you don't want any more yourself," said Li P'ing-erh, "that's no reason why the Second Lady shouldn't have another cup. The other day, at your house, I accepted cup after cup without demur, and you ladies refused to let me off. Now that you've been good enough to visit these cramped quarters of mine, though I have nothing to offer, you must let me do the best I can."
Thereupon, she took a large silver goblet and handed it to Li Chiao-erh, saying, "Second Lady, you must have a cup, no matter what. I know the First Lady has had enough, so I don't dare offer her a big one but only a little one."
So saying, she filled a cup to the brim and offered it to Yüeh-niang, and then did the same for Li Chiao-erh, encouraging her as she did so with the words, "Second Lady, do drain this cup."
Yüeh-niang gave two mace of silver to each of the singing girls, and then, after waiting for Li Chiao-erh to finish her wine, got up to go.
Turning to Yü-lou and Chin-lien, she said, "The two of us will go on ahead. When we get home, I'll send a pageboy back with a lantern to fetch you. Do come home then; there's no one to look after the place."
Yü-lou assented to this suggestion. Li P'ing-erh then saw Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh out the door and into their sedan chairs before returning upstairs to keep Yü-lou and Chin-lien company as they continued to drink wine. Gradually, as it grew late:
*The jade hare rose in the east.*[15]
and the lanterns on the second floor were lit. The singing girls entertained them with songs as they drank their wine. But no more of this.
To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to dine with him at home, after which they set out together to enjoy the sights in the Lantern Market. When they arrived at the eastern end of Lion Street Hsi-men Ch'ing, because he knew that Yüeh-niang and the others were being entertained in the front second floor room of Li P'ing-erh's house and he didn't want his companions to see them, did not proceed to the western end of the street where the big lanterns were displayed but came to a halt when he had gotten no further than the shop that sold gauze lanterns.
No sooner had he turned around than he ran into Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu, who saluted him with the words, "We haven't seen you for ages, Brother but you've been very much in our thoughts."
Seeing that he was accompanied by Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, they upbraided them, saying, "A goddamned fine couple of fellows you are; going out on the town with our elder brother without giving us the word!"
"Brother Chu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're doing them an injustice. We've only just run into each other on the street."
"Well now, where are you headed, then, after you've seen the lanterns?" asked Sticky Chu.
"We might as well go to the Great Tavern right here on Lion Street and have a few drinks together," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'd invite you all home with me if it weren't for the fact that my womenfolk are all out at a party today."
"Rather than letting you treat us to a round at the tavern," said Sticky Chu, "why don't we all go into the licensed quarter together and pay a visit to Li Kuei-chieh? It's only appropriate on a festival occasion like this that we should go wish her a happy new year and have some fun together. The other day when we were over at her place she appealed to us, and actually broke down and cried, saying that ever since she became indisposed last month not even your shadow has been into the quarter to see her. All we could do was to say that you must be busy in order to cover up for you. Since you're free today, we'll be happy to accompany you inside to pay her a visit."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was preoccupied by his assignation with Li P'ing-erh later that evening, tried to excuse himself, saying, "I'm afraid I can't make it today; I've got something to do. How about tomorrow?"
But he was quite unable to withstand the urgings of his cronies who:
*Dragged him off, dead or alive.*
Thereupon, he consented to go into the licensed quarter with them. Truly:
*The shadows of the flowers under the willows*
hold down the dust on the road;
Each time one sets out to enjoy them
one's pleasure is renewed.
If one could only assess the sums spent for a smile
in the metropolis;
Who knows how many commoners' households
they would serve to support?[16]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing and his companions arrived at the Li family establishment they found Li Kuei-ch'ing, all made up, standing in the doorway. She ushered them into the main room and greeted each of them in turn.
Sticky Chu then called out in a loud voice, "Invite Auntie Li the Third to come out at once! It's only thanks to our combined efforts that we've induced the Honourable Gentleman to pay you a visit."
Before long, the old procuress made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick.
After they had finished with the appropriate amenities, she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I hope we haven't been remiss in the entertainment we've provided you, Kinsman. How is it that you haven't dropped in to see my daughter for such a long time? You must have taken up with a new sweetheart somewhere else."
"You've hit the nail on the head, madam," interjected Sticky Chu. "The Honourable Gentleman has recently had his eye on another tart of incomparable beauty and has been spending all his free time at her place. He doesn't give a thought to your Kuei-chieh any longer. In fact, if the two of us hadn't run into him in the Lantern Market just now and dragged him along with us, he wouldn't be here now. If you don't believe me, just ask Blabbermouth Sun here." Then, pointing at Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, he continued, "And this goddamned pair, for their part, are:
*Deities of the same persuasion.*[17]
When the old procuress heard these words she cackled out loud, saying, "Well, Brother Ying, we've never done anything to get on the wrong side of you. Why don't you use your good offices to put in a word for us with our kinsman here? However complicated his affairs in the quarter may be, as the saying goes:
*A practiced profligate doesn't confine his attentions*
*to a single whore;*
*A practiced whore doesn't reserve her blandishments*
*for a single patron.*
*The hole in the cash has much the same shape*
*wherever you find it.*
There's no need for me to boast about our Kuei-chieh's looks. The gentleman has eyes of his own and doesn't require anyone to point out the obvious to him."
"To tell the truth," interposed Blabbermouth Sun, "this new tart that Brother's taken up with isn't even an inhabitant of the quarter. She's an outsider who doesn't give a fuck for the insiders."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he chased Blabbermouth Sun around the room, pretending to hit him, exclaiming as he did so, "Madam, don't pay any attention to this:
*God-damned and man-condemned;*[18]
old oily mouth! All he ever does is plague people to death."
This exhibition only caused Blabbermouth Sun and the rest to collapse in a heap with laughter.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to pull three taels of silver out of his sleeve and hand them to Li Kuei-ch'ing, saying, "On this festival occasion I'd like to stand my friends a treat."
"I really couldn't agree to such a thing," Kuei-ch'ing affected to reply. "Give it to my mother."
"How now?" Auntie Li responded. "My kinsman must think so little of us that he doesn't think we can afford to furnish a feast, even on a festival occasion, for the entertainment of his distinguished friends. If you have to reach into your own pocket to defray the expenses, it will look as though we denizens of the licensed quarter are only interested in money after all."
At this juncture Ying Po-chüeh interrupted her, saying, "Auntie, if I were you I'd take what you're offered. As the saying goes:
*Don't risk your luck by refusing the first gleanings*
*of the New Year: stash them away.*
Just bring on the wine, now, as quickly as you can."
"That will never do," said the procuress but even as she persisted in her protestations she accepted the silver and slipped it into her sleeve.
Making a deep bow, she said, "Thank you for your generosity, Kinsman."
"Wait a minute, Auntie," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got a story for you. A certain young man was having an affair with a prostitute in the licensed quarter. One day, just for the fun of it, he disguised himself as a pauper and paid a visit to his regular establishment. When the madam saw how shabby his clothing was, she paid him no attention and let him sit there for some time without even offering him a cup of tea. The young man said, 'Auntie, I'm hungry. If you've got any rice, please bring me something to eat.' To which the old procuress replied, 'The bin is completely dry. Where would I get you any rice from?' 'Since you're out of rice,' the young man said, 'If you have any water, please bring me a little to wash my face with.' To which the old procuress replied, 'We haven't been able to pay the water carrier, so he hasn't delivered any water the last few days.' At this, the young man reached into his sleeve, pulled out a silver ingot weighing ten taels, put it on the table in front of him, and told her to buy rice and order water with it. This flustered the old procuress so much that she blurted out, 'Kinsman, would you rather eat your face before washing your rice, or wash your rice before eating your face?' "
Everyone laughed uproariously at this.
"I see you're still as quick to make fun of people as ever," said Auntie Li. "It so happens that, as the saying goes:
*Such a thing may be said but*
*It ain't necessarily so."*
"Lend an ear," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got something else to tell you. The Honourable Gentleman has recently engaged the services of Brother Hua the Second's former sweetheart, Wu Yin-erh, from the back alley of the quarter. He isn't interested in your Kuei-chieh any longer. If we hadn't dragged him along with us today, do you think he'd be here now?"
"I don't believe you," laughed the procuress. "Our Kuei-chieh can be said, without exaggeration, to be superior to Wu Yin-erh in every way. Our establishment and our kinsman's family are bound together by ties that:
*The sharpest knife could never sever.*
What do you take our kinsman for, anyway? He's seen enough of the world, if you get right down to it, to know the value of true gold when he sees it."
When they had finished with their palaver, four folding armchairs were set up in the parlour, on which Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Sticky Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun sat down, in the positions of honour, while Hsi-men Ch'ing assumed the place of host, across from them. The old lady then excused herself in order to supervise the preparation of the wine and accompanying delicacies for the party.
Sometime after her departure, Li Kuei-chieh herself finally appeared. Her hair was done up in a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, fastened in place with a gold filigree pin. Her coiffure was further augmented by plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, a pearl headband, and gold lantern earrings. She was wearing a white satin jacket that opened down the middle, with purfled edging and green brocade sleeve linings, over a red silk skirt. Indeed, she was so made up as to look as though she were:
*Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.*
After having:

*Neither correctly nor precisely,*
made a bow to the company and uttered a word of greeting. Kuei-chieh sat down with Kuei-ch'ing at the two unoccupied ends of the table. Before long, one of the girls of the establishment brought in seven cups of tea on a square tray of painted lacquer. The teacups were the colour of snowy linen, the silver teaspoons were in the shape of apricot leaves, and the tea itself that was flavoured with attar of roses and the kernels of melon seeds, was of a bewitching fragrance. Kuei-ch'ing and Kuei-chieh served a cup to each of their guests and kept them company until the tea was finished and the raised saucers were cleared away.
A servant then came in to wipe off the table and began to lay out the delicacies to go with the wine. Just at this juncture, from behind the hanging blind over the door, a number of shabbily dressed young men, known to the trade as "cribbers," were observed:
*Sticking out their heads and craning their necks,*
awaiting the right moment to make their way inside and kneel down in front of the company.
They held three or four pints of melon seeds in their hands that they presented to the host with the words, "A humble offering to Your Honour on this festival occasion."
Hsi-men Ch'ing recognized their leader as a fellow called Yü Ch'un, or Stupid Yü, and asked him, "Which of you are here today?"
"Tuan Mien, or Half-baked Tuan, Sha San, or Yokel Sha, and Nieh Yüeh, or Tiptoe Nieh, are just outside," replied Stupid.
Half-baked Tuan and the others then came inside and, noticing that Ying Po-chüeh was one of the company, kowtowed to him, saying, "Master Ying, you're here too."
Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up, announced that he would take the melon seeds, and then, rummaging in his purse for a tael's worth of silver, tossed it on the floor.
When Stupid Yü had picked it up, he and his companions kowtowed on their hands and knees, saying, "Thank you for your generosity, sir," and beat a hasty retreat.
There is a song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the conduct of these "cribbers."
*Assembling at one place,*
Congregating at another,
Their status may be low but their pretensions
are great.
If you rub them the wrong way, they'll
give you a hard time.
No part of the licensed quarter
is off their beat.
At parties they'll join the fun,
Ever ready with idle conversation;
Only after doing their turn
will they disperse.
The money they make isn't much,
So why do they make such a fuss?
They live off the spittle licked from
the tiger's mouth.[19]
As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had gotten rid of the "cribbers," wine was served and the party settled down to drink. Kuei-chieh:
*Filled the golden cups to the brim,*
*Dangling her pair of red sleeves.*
*Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,*
*Fruits were provided just in season.*
*Hugging the turqoise and cuddling the red,*
*The flowers were gorgeous and the wine heady.*
After:
*Two rounds of wine had been consumed,*
Kuei-ch'ing and Kuei-chieh, one playing the psaltery and the other the *p'i-p'a,* accompanied themselves as they sang the song suite on the beauties of spring, the first number of which, to the northern style tune "Flowers in Brocade," begins with the words:
*The fair weather is balmy:*[20]
Spring is at its most beautiful.
Now lightly warm, now lightly cool.
It reveals itself in flowering branches.
Deep in secluded courtyards,
The swallows suddenly return.
On purple roads and fragrant streets,
Fine steeds with golden bridles neigh.
Parks and woods are bright with silks,
Peach and apricot blossoms vie in fragrance.
The sounds of imperial music,
Drift across the Dragon Pool.
Fragrant verdure gradually blends into the green mist.
Truly, on such a fine day,
One revels joyously in the beautiful scene.
TO THE TUNE "GOLD LAMÉ CURTAINS" (SOUTHERN STYLE):
The lingering cold is chilly;
Layers of emerald curtains are drawn.
Throughout the imperial capital, spring has returned.
The east wind grows more importunate.
The scene is at its most beautiful;
Bright with silks and jewels.
Having moistened the flowers, the rain has cleared.
The rain has cleared,
And the flowering branches reach to the ground.
The smell of flowers permeates the fragrant streets;
Subtly invading the sleeves of the passersby.
On Bronze Camel Street, they have roamed everywhere.
They have roamed everywhere,
In love with the long days and genial sun.
TO THE TUNE "PLUCKING THE CASSIA" (NORTHERN STYLE):
On the roads of the pleasure quarter
lissome willows are trailing;
On the banks of the Wei River
the genial sun lingers.
Reds and purples exude fragrance;
Plum branches lose their powdery blooms;
Peach trees venture into flower;
Crab apples and pears vie with their snowy blossoms.
Blowing the willow catkins
the fragrant breeze is gentle;
Embracing the roving wheels
the emerald grass is luxuriant.
Let carnelian goblets overflow;
Exchange songs and lyrics.
Meeting with times of peace
and glorious days;
In every place they celebrate
the season of the flowers.
TO THE TUNE "RIVER WATER" (SOUTHERN STYLE):
Spring colours live up to the revelers' desires;
The fragrant breeze penetrates their silks.
See how they compete to display flowery lanterns;
How the light of the moon shines refulgently;
And how, clustering on the branches of fiery trees,
Tens of thousands of candles envelop them.
The silver river and pearly dipper grow dim.
This festive day, the fifteenth of the first month,
Surpasses the revels at the Jasper Pool.
Bright lotus lamps illuminate the hills of lanterns,
Truly, they are magnificent.
Crowds surge about vermilion wheels, traffic on
the celestial streets is slow.
Reining in their jeweled horses are the
imperial guards by their ten thousands,
Watching until the shadows of the trees fall east
and the moon sinks west.
TO THE BINARY TUNES "WILD GEESE ALIGHT" AND "VICTORY SONG" (NORTHERN STYLE):
Arabesques of incense float from jeweled censers;
The oriole's song shatters the silence of dawn.
Spring breezes waft the fragrance of flowery plants;
Lingering sunlight enhances rivers and mountains.
Frowning-eyebrow willow leaves expand their greens;
Rain-drenched crab apple blossoms drip in threads.
Village mummers and country folk enjoy themselves;
At the Lustration Festival wine cups are set afloat.
Everyone must know,
The myriad nations are now all at peace;
Upon prescribed topics,
One must compose poetry on phoenix notepaper.
TO THE BINARY TUNES "REITERATIVE BROCADE" AND "INTOXICATED IN THE EAST WIND" (SOUTHERN STYLE):

Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways,
And spring will soon depart.
Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways,
And spring will soon depart.
The cuckoo cries,
Only causing the flowers to fall and
the willow catkins to fly.
The effects of the east wind permeate everything;
On these fine days when spring is in its glory,
Half the flowers have already fallen,
Leaving only a few branches of peony behind.
Outside the painted pavilions,
One is surrounded by misty peaks and emerald waves.
Behold: swings kick into view behind the walls,
Revealing pearls and kingfisher feather ornaments,
Which set off to perfection golden bridle trappings.
Our only fear is that greens darken the alleyways,
And spring will soon depart.
Climbing high towers, leaning on
all the balustrades,
On the eve of the spring festival, fires are
prohibited, one eats cold food.
Windblown red petals stick to the picnic mats.
In the I-ch'un Park there is banqueting.
Begrudging what remains of spring,
One lies intoxicated in the slanting sunlight.
In the shadow of the weeping willow trees,
The calls of auspicious birds awaken the slumberer.
As one traverses the twenty-four divisions
of the flowering cycle,
One can calculate how much of the glorious season
has already gone by.
TO THE BINARY TUNES "RIVER-BOBBED OARS" AND "SEVEN BROTHERS" (NORTHERN STYLE):
Traversing willow paths,
Crossing peach tree streams,
Skimming the clear waves,
Pairs of swallows fly.
Fragrant verdure grows wild and luxuriant;
Fallen willow catkins lie soiled in mud.
Cuckoos cry incessantly,
But cannot call a halt to spring's
wending way.
Only the myriad willow fronds
impede its progress.
The beautiful scene basks in genial sunlight.
Truly: as greens darken reds dwindle.
The most touching element is a pair of orioles,
Warbling to the humans.
Harmonizing with the notes of pipe and song.
As the sun moves, flower shadows traverse
hanging painted screens.
Truly: Chinese and barbarians alike share in
the enjoyment of these years of peace.
TO THE TUNE "WAVE-BOBBING OARS" (SOUTHERN STYLE):
The realm of luxury,
Is apparent in the picturelike towers and terraces.
Beside the dance floors, swallows kick
blossoms into flight.
Performing new music, the mandola and psaltery
are tuned to a low pitch.
As though calling to the revelers, orioles
compete in song.
TO THE BINARY TUNES "PLUM BLOSSOM WINE" AND "ENJOYING THE SOUTH" (NORTHERN STYLE):
See how in spring pools,
Brocadelike carp leap.
Hear how in green trees,
Yellow orioles warble.
Everything conveys the idea of spring.
Each is content;
Each is happy.
The east wind blows the willow catkins,
Skidding over the green verdure,
As far as the horizon.
They cannot be restrained,
Seeing spring on its way,
Alighting on the fallen blossoms,
Entangled in floating gossamer.
Outside the ornate mansion,
West of the little bridge,
The new plums are like beans,
The willow leaves like eyebrows.
Remember mid-spring in the Southern Park,
homeward bound, treading the green;
After doing a stint on the swing,
showing off one's silken garments.
Slowly singing "Golden Threads" and
toasting with golden goblets;
Idly apostrophizing the peonies and
appreciating the yellow roses.
Truly: an auspicious festival in a glorious season,
Thanks to the unification of the Great Ming,
favouring Chinese and barbarian alike.
CODA:
Of all the beauteous seasons of the year,
one must remember,
Throughout the human world, the glory of spring
is most enjoyable.
May the good fortune and long life of our
Sage Sovereign equal Heaven.

Just as they were in full voice, three young men appeared, wearing black clothing and brown leather boots, who were known to the trade as "ball clubbers."

They held a gift box containing a roast goose and two bottles of vintage wine in their hands that they presented to the company, after making a half obeisance, with the words, "A humble offering to Your Honour and his distinguished friends on this festival occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was already acquainted with them. The first was called Pai T'u-tzu, or Baldy Pai, also known as Mohammedan Pai, the second, Hsiao Chang Hsien, or Trifler Chang, and the third, Lo Hui-tzu, or Mohammedan Lo.

"Wait outside a little while," he said to them, "until we've finished our wine. Then we'll come out and kick three rounds with you."

So saying, he sent them on their way with four plates of delicacies from the table, a large jug of wine, and a saucerful of savories for their refreshment.

When the "ball clubbers" had eaten their fill and inflated their ball, Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside and played a round of kick-about with them in the courtyard. After him it was Kuei-chieh's turn, and she joined a pair of them to form a triangular threesome in which the other two faced off as receivers to field her endeavors. As she did her best to "hook" and "chip" with her kicks, they were lavish with meretricious praise, and whenever she made a mistake they were quick to retrieve the ball for her.

When they were through, they made up to Hsi-men Ch'ing in the hope of reward, saying, "Kuei-chieh's 'ball-handling' is more professional than ever. When she 'volleys' with a 'flick pass' or a 'chip kick' we hardly know what to do with ourselves. In another year or two she and her sister will rank among the best 'ball-handlers' on this side of the quarter. There won't be another 'hooker' or 'chippy' in the same league. Already they're ten times better than the girls from the Tung establishment on Second Street."

By the time Kuei-chieh had kicked two rounds:

*Dust had settled about her eyebrows,*
*Sweat had moistened her cheeks;*
*She was panting and puffing, and*
*Her limbs ached with exhaustion.*

Extracting a folding fan from her sleeve, she endeavored to cool herself with it while she stood hand-in-hand with Hsi-men Ch'ing and watched Kuei-ch'ing engage Hsieh Hsi-ta and Trifler Chang in the same three-cornered game of kick-about. Baldy Pai and Mohammedan Lo stood on the sidelines, emptily gesturing with their feet and running back and forth to retrieve the ball when any of the players made an error.

There is another song to the tune "Imperial Audience" that describes the conduct of these "ball clubbers."

*Idle when at home,*
Forever on the make,
No honest trade for them,
Yet their kickballs are never far from their sides.

Everyday they haunt the street corners,
Paying no heed to the poor,
But toadying to the rich.
From early morning till late at night,
They seldom eat a full meal.
Though they never make much money,
They make ends meet by hiring out the favours of their wives.

*Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the licensed quarter, looking on at his companions as they challenged each other to backgammon, played at kickball, and drank wine, when Tai-an arrived on horseback to fetch him. Approaching his master as inconspicuously as possible he Whispered into his ear in a low voice, "The First Lady and the Second Lady have already gone home. Mrs. Hua told me to ask you to come over as soon as you can." On hearing this message, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Tai-an whispered instructions to take the horse around to the back door and wait for him there. Then, without even taking another drink, he accompanied Kuei-chieh back to her room and sat down with her for only a few minutes, after which, feigning the need to answer a call of nature, he came out to the back door, jumped on his horse, and disappeared in a cloud of dust. Before he had made good his departure, Ying Po-chüeh sent the servant of the house out to intercept him but Hsi-men Ch'ing merely said, "I've something to attend to at home," and refused to return. He did remember, however, to leave Tai-an a tael and five mace of silver with which to take care of the three "ball clubbers." The proprietors of the Li family establishment were so worried lest Hsi-men Ch'ing be on his way to visit Wu Yin-erh's place in the back alley that they sent a maidservant after him who tailed him all the way to the gate of the quarter before coming home. Ying Po-chüeh and the rest continued drinking, and it was not until the second watch that the party finally broke up. Truly, if any curse me, curse away; I'll have my pleasures anyway.*

The days passed quickly. It was the birthday of Li Ping'er on the fifteenth of the eleventh month. The day before it Ximen Qing told Daian to get ready four courses of food, a large jar of wine, birthday cakes, and pastries. He himself added a suit of quilted silken clothes embroidered in gold. He wrote Wu Yueniang's name on a card, and sent everything as a birthday present from Yueniang to Li Ping'er.

Mistress Hua was dressing when Daian brought the present. She ordered the boy to be brought to her.

"It is only a few days," she said to him, "since your lady last troubled herself on my account. Now she has placed me in her debt again by sending this magnificent present."

"I was told to say that this is only a trifle that you may well pass on to your maids."

Li Ping'er told Xiuchun to give Daian some cakes. As he was about to go, she gave him two *qian* and a coloured handkerchief. "Tell your ladies," she said, "that I am going to send old woman Feng to ask them all to brighten my poor house by their presence."

Daian kowtowed and went away. Li Ping'er paid the porters, and sent old woman Feng with five cards of invitation to ask the ladies to come the following evening. Secretly she was to ask Ximen Qing to come later and take wine with her.

The next day Yueniang left Sun Xue'e to look after the house. She and the other ladies, all most charmingly dressed, got into their sedan chairs to go to Lion Street, where the Feast of Lanterns was being held. Laixing, Laian, Daian, and Huatong escorted them.

The house in which Li Ping'er now lived had three rooms at the front, and went back for the same distance. On the street it was two stores high, and, as one entered the gate, there were rooms on either side. Three formed a hall and one served as a passage to the third court, where there were three bedrooms and a kitchen. At the back of the house a wall separated the property of Li Ping'er from the garden belonging to the princely family of Qiao.

Yueniang and the others were coming specially to see the lanterns, and Li Ping'er set out screens, tables, and cushions, and hung up floral lanterns in the rooms that overlooked the street. When her guests arrived, she welcomed them and took them to the inner court for tea. They sat down, and two singing girls, Dong Jiao'er and Han Jinchuan, sang for them and served the wine. Afterwards refreshments were set out in the upper rooms, and she invited her guests to go upstairs and look at the lanterns. The windows had been decorated with bamboo shades, lanterns, and silken streamers.

Yueniang was dressed in a red-quilted cloak with an emerald green skirt, and she wore a mantle of leopard skin. Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, and Pan Jinlian were wearing white silk gowns and blue skirts. Li Jiao'er had a brown wrap embroidered in gold, Yulou a green one, and Jinlian a red one. They all wore masses of pearls and jade on their heads, and phoenix pins peeped out from their hair. They looked out of the window at the fair.

There were hosts of people at the fair, and it was a wonderful sight. Dozens of arches, with lanterns hanging all around them, had been set up in the street. There were all kinds of booths, surrounded by crowds of men and women admiring the lanterns, some red as roses, and some green as willows. Horses and carriages made a noise like thunder.

Dragons flit through mountain peaks and sport in couples in the water.
Lonely storks gaze at the skies, shining as the clouds themselves.
Lanterns of the golden lotus; lanterns like towers of jade, glimmering like a mass of jewels.
Lanterns of mimosa, lotus lanterns, shedding a thousand radiant hues.
Lanterns of gossamer, light and dainty; sunflower lanterns, bobbing in the wind
Student lanterns, bowing back and forth, attentive to the bidding of Confucius and Mencius.
Wife lanterns, tender and obedient, picturing the virtues of Meng Jiang.
Monkish lanterns, with Yue Ming and Liu Cui standing side by side.
Lanterns of the Scribe of Hell, Zhong Kui and his sisters, sitting down together.
Lanterns like witches with fluttering fans, conjuring up evil spirits.
Lanterns of Liu Hai, with a golden frog, devouring precious treasure.
Camel lanterns and green lion lanterns bearing gifts beyond price.
Monkey lanterns and white elephant lanterns, with treasure worth the ransom of many cities.
Crabs sporting with the incoming breakers, on their backs, all hands and feet.
Bull-headed fishes, with monstrous mouths and long beards, swallowing the river plants.
Silver moths, vying in beauty; snow-white willows, each more glorious than the last.
Fishes and dragons playing on the sands.
The seven immortals and the five ancients with their sacred books
The nine barbarians and the eight uncivilized coming to offer precious gifts.
The drums at the fair beat sharply twice.
A hundred toys, each more cunning than its neighbour
The lanterns move round and round
The hanging lanterns bob up and down
There are glass vases painted with delicate maidens and exquisite flowers
There are screens of tortoiseshell, with Ying Zhou and Lang Yuan painted on them.
The young men gather at the rails where the ball is kicked as high as the eyes.
Hand in hand the maidens go to the upper floors that the beauty of their charms may be seen.
The booths of the palmists are like the clouds, and the tents of the readers of faces like the stars
They tell the fortunes of the coming year and read in the lives of men the joy and sadness that are to come.
They who sing the song of Yang Gong stand on the slopes.
Elsewhere, the wandering priests strike their cymbals and tell the story of San Cang.
There are sellers of Yuan Xiao, their pastries stuffed with fruits
And sellers of plum blossom with the dried branches cut away.
Hair ornaments sporting with the winds of spring; cold weather ornaments brightening the hair, their golden glory gleaming in the sun.
Round screens, painted with the gorgeous net of Shi Chong.
Lattices of mother of pearl, adorned with plum blossom and crescent moon, charming to the eyes.
We may not see all the beauties of Ao Shan
But before us is a year of happiness and joyful living.

Yueniang looked out upon the lanterns until the noise became too great for her. Then she and Li Jiao'er went back to their places to drink for a while. Jinlian, Yulou, and the two singing girls, stayed and still looked out of the window at the fair.

Jinlian flaunted her silken sleeves and pointed with her fine fingers, showing off the gold rings on them. She leaned half out of the window, biting melon seeds and throwing the skins at the passersby. She and Yulou laughed all the time. She pointed to something in the street, and cried, "Great Sister, come and look at the two hydrangea-lanterns over at that house. They look so pretty, as the wind blows them to and fro." Then: "Second Sister, come and look at the great fish lanterns hanging over that door, and all the little fishes, crabs, and lobsters below. They are ever so funny." And again: "Third Sister, come and look at the old-man-and-woman lanterns."

Suddenly a gust of wind made a large hole in the lower part of the old-woman-lantern, and Jinlian laughed merrily. People standing below the window stared up at her, crowding till they almost trampled on each other. There were several dissolute young fellows among them. They pointed at the woman, and began to discuss her.

"She must have come from the palace of some duke or earl," one said.

"She is a concubine of one of the princely households, come to see the lanterns," another said. "She must be, or she would not be dressed in such splendid style."

"She is one of the little girls from the bawdy house, and some nobleman has engaged her to come here and sing," said a third.

Then another young man spoke. "You will never guess who they are. But I know. Those two women indeed belong to a distinguished family: they are the wives of the King of Hades, concubines of the General of the Five Directions. In other words, they belong to Master Ximen who keeps a medicine shop near the Town Hall and lends money to the officials. He is not at all the sort of man to fall out with. Probably they have come with the mistress of their household to see the lanterns. I don't know the one wearing the green wrapper but the other, in red with the artificial flowers, looks like the wife of Wu Da the cake seller. Wu Da caught them misbehaving in old woman Wang's tea shop. His Lordship kicked Wu Da to death, and then took the woman to be one of his ladies. Her brother-in-law, Wu Song, went to the courts to bring an accusation but, in mistake, killed the runner Li, and his Lordship had him punished. It is a year or two since I saw her last. She has certainly become very beautiful."

Yueniang saw that a crowd was collecting in the street, and told Jinlian and Yulou to come and sit down. They drank wine and the two singing girls sang the Lantern Song to them.

Yueniang was anxious to go home. "I have had as much wine as I can drink," she said, "and I and the Second Lady must leave you. But the others may stay and entertain you, Mistress Hua. My husband is not at home today, and there are only a few maids to look after things. I can't help being anxious."

Li Ping'er tried to persuade her to stay. "Good lady," she said, "if you go, it must be because I have entertained you so poorly. Today is a great holiday, and the lamps are not yet lighted or the food prepared. You mustn't think of going home. Even if Master Ximen is out, you have a number of maids. Why should you be uneasy? As soon as the moon rises, I will see you all home."

"Mistress Hua," Yueniang said, "I am afraid that is impossible. I never drink much wine. But I will leave the others here to take my place."

"Great Lady and Second Lady," Li Ping'er said. "Neither of you will drink with me. It is not fair. When I was at your house, your ladies would not let me off though I drank one cup after another. Today you have come to this poor place of mine, and though I can offer nothing worthy of you, I should like to do something to show my feelings."

She took a great silver cup, and asked Li Jiao'er to drink. Then she turned to Yueniang. "I dare not offer you so large a cup," she said, "but here is a small one." She poured out a cup of wine and offered it.

Yueniang gave each of the singing girls two *qian* of silver and, when Li Jiao'er had finished her wine, they prepared to leave. "We will go first," Yueniang said to Yulou and Jinlian, "and I will send the boys with lanterns to bring you home. You must not be too late, for there are not many of us at home." Li Ping'er took Yueniang and Li Jiao'er to the door, and saw them off in their sedan chairs. Then she came back to drink wine with Yulou and Jinlian. It was getting dark, and the lamps in the room were lighted. As they drank, they listened to the playing and singing of the two girls.

Ximen Qing dined at home with Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, and afterwards they set out to the Lantern Fair. When they reached the end of Lion Street, Ximen was afraid his companions might see the ladies drinking wine at Mistress Hua's house, so he turned aside into another street to look at the large lanterns. They went as far as one of the great booths and then came back. They met Sun Guazui and Zhu Shinian.

"It is a very long time since we saw you last," the newcomers said. "Our hearts were thirsting for the sight of you." They turned to Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. "You are a fine pair of rascals! You have been enjoying yourselves with our brother and never said a word to us about it."

"You are unfair to them," Ximen said. "I only met them in the street a moment ago."

"Well," Zhu Shinian said, "now that we've had enough of the lanterns, where shall we go?"

"Let us go to the wineshop and drink," Ximen Qing said. "I will not ask you to my place, because all my women have gone to a party."

"Why a wineshop?" Zhu Shinian said. "Why not call on Li Guijie? This is a great occasion. We will go and wish her a Happy New Year and enjoy ourselves at the same time. A few days ago we were at her place, and the very thought of you brought tears to her eyes. She told us she had been ill ever since the twelfth month but not even your shadow had crossed her threshold. Brother, you have nothing else to do, and we shall be very glad to go with you."

Ximen Qing remembered that he had to go and see Li Ping'er that evening. He declined. "I have certain matters to attend to today," he said, "I'll go with you tomorrow." But they hustled him and dragged him till he found himself at the bawdy house in spite of himself.

When Ximen Qing and his companions reached the house, Guiqing, dressed very daintily, was standing outside the door. She brought them into the hall and made a reverence to each in turn.

"Come here at once, Mother," Zhu Shinian cried at the top of his voice. "We have been lucky enough to persuade his Lordship to come." The old procuress came, hobbling along with the help of her stick. She greeted Ximen Qing.

"I am a poor old body who has never done you any wrong," she said. "Why have you kept away from your sisters so long? Perhaps you have another girl somewhere."

"A good guess," Zhu Shinian said. "His Lordship has made the acquaintance of a very pretty girl, and he goes to see her everyday. Now you know why he never bothers about Guijie any more. If we hadn't run into him at the Feast of Lanterns and dragged him along, he would not be here now. If you don't believe me, ask Sun." He pointed to Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. "Those unholy rascals belong to the same family of immortals as Master Ximen himself."

The old woman found this very amusing. "Good brother Ying," she said, "I have always treated you well. Why couldn't you speak for us to his Lordship? He is a busy man, and, of course, as the proverb says, a young man is never faithful to one girl. All the coins in the world are made with the same sort of hole. I don't mean to boast but my daughter is a good-looking girl. Your own eyes, Sir, will tell you that much."

"Let me explain," Sun Guazui said. "His new girl does not live in any bawdy house. She is independent."

Ximen Qing ran after Sun Guazui and slapped him. "Don't believe this old oily mouth and all his crazy stories. His proper place is the slaughterhouse."

Sun and the others roared with laughter. Ximen took three taels of silver from his sleeve and offered it to Guiqing, saying that he would like to give his friends a treat on this festival day. Guiqing would have nothing to do with it; she passed it on to the old procuress.

"What does this mean?" the old woman cried. "Do you think that on a festival day like this I cannot myself entertain your friends? If you offer me this silver, it is quite clear you believe we never think of anything but money."

Ying Bojue went to her. "Take my advice and accept the money," he said, "and get us some wine at once."

"It is not right," the old woman mumbled, still pretending to refuse the money, though she put it into her sleeve. Finally she thanked Ximen Qing, and made a profound reverence to him.

"Wait a moment, Mother," Bojue cried. "I have a funny story to tell you. There was once a young man who kept a girl at the bawdy house, and one day, when he called to see her, he pretended to have been ruined. The old woman saw how shabby his clothes were and would have nothing to say to him. He sat for a long time, and she never even offered him a cup of tea. 'May I have some rice, Mother?' the young man said at last. 'I am very hungry.' 'My rice bin is empty,' the old woman replied. 'Where shall I find rice for you?' 'If you have no rice,' said the young man, 'perhaps you will give me a little water to wash my face?' But the old woman said, 'I can't afford to buy any water; we have had none for days.' But then the young man produced a piece of silver, about ten taels in weight, and put it on the table. Again he asked for rice and water. The old woman became quite excited. 'Eat your face and wash your rice, Brother,' she cried, 'and when you have washed your rice, eat your face."

They laughed. "You are trying to make fun of me," the old woman said. "I have heard stories like that before but I don't believe a word of them."

"Listen," Bojue said, "I'll tell you something. This girl his Lordship has been courting is Brother Hua's girl, Wu Yin'er, who lives in the back lane. He doesn't care for Guijie any more."

"I don't believe you," the old woman said, laughing. "I don't wish to boast but my daughter is certainly as good-looking as Wu Yin'er. Brother is so wrapped up in us that not even the sharpest of knives could cut him away from us. And he is not a fool either. He can tell real gold when he sees it." With this, she went to see about the preparation of the feast.
In a short time Guijie came in. Her hair was dressed in the Hangzhou style, with pins inlaid with gold, and green plum ornaments. She wore a pearl headdress, a pair of golden earrings, a crimson silk skirt and a white silk coat. She looked as beautiful as a carving in jade. When she had greeted them all, she sat down by the side of her sister, and a little later tea was brought in. Guijie handed the tea and kept a cup for herself. Then a maid came to clear away the tea things and set the table.
Suddenly several men, whose dress showed that they were of low degree, appeared before the lattice, and looked in on them. Then they came in and knelt down. They brought three or four measures of melon seeds.
"We bring you this present," their spokesman said, "in honour of the festival."
"Who are you?" Ximen asked. He only recognized the leader, Yu Chun.
"Nie Yue is outside," said Yu Chun. "He belongs to our party."
Nie Yue came in. When he saw Ying Bojue, he said, "So you are here, Master Ying." He kowtowed.
Ximen Qing took the melon seeds and threw a tael of silver to Yu Chun. Then the fellows thanked him politely and went away.
When Ximen Qing had got rid of them, he settled down to his wine. Guijie filled the golden cups, making great play with her crimson sleeves. The food was of the rarest and the dessert of seasonable fruits. The men reveled in the fragrance of the two girls, and the wine they drank only seemed to add to the charm. The cups were filled twice, then Guijie and her sister sang "The Sweetness of the Glorious Day," one playing the cithern and the other the lute.
While they were singing, three members of the Ball Club came in, wearing dark clothes and bringing two roast geese and a couple of jars of wine. They made a profound reverence to Ximen Qing, and offered their gifts. Ximen knew them all. There were Bai Tuzi, little Zhang Xian, and Muslim Luo. "Wait for us outside," he said, "and, as soon as we have finished our wine, we will come and have a game with you." He gave them four dishes of food, a large jar of wine, and some cakes. They got their ball ready and waited. When Ximen had drunk a little more wine, he went out to the courtyard to watch the ball game and asked Guijie to play with two of them, one to pitch and one to strike. She jumped about, kicked, elbowed, and struck the ball to the great admiration of those looking on. If sometimes she could not catch it, they hastily caught it for her. When the game was over, they went to Ximen Qing for money. "Guijie's form's very greatly improved," one said. "When she elbows the ball, it takes us all our time to hold it. In a year or two, she may well be the finest ball player in all the bawdy houses. She's infinitely better than the Dong girls who live in the second lane."
By the time Guijie had played two games, dust covered her eyebrows and her cheeks were damp with sweat. Her limbs ached and she panted for breath. She took the fan from her sleeve and fanned herself, then held Ximen Qing's hand, while they watched Guiqing, Xie Xida, and Zhang Xian play a game. The others stood at the sides to pick the ball up for them. Ximen Qing drank wine as he watched them. Then Daian came with a horse. "My mistress and the other ladies have now been gone some time," he whispered. "Mistress Hua hopes that you'll come as soon as you can." Ximen told the boy to take the horse to the back and wait for him there. He refused to drink any more but took Guijie to her room for a while, and then pretended to go out to wash his hands. Leaving her room, he opened the back door, mounted his horse, and was off like a flash. Ying Bojue saw him go and told a servant to detain him but Ximen would not wait; he declared that he had business at home to attend to. He left Daian to give a tael and five *qian* to the ballplayers. Thinking that Ximen had gone to Wu Yin'er's house, they sent a servant to follow him there. Bojue and the others drank till the second night watch, and then the party broke up.

## 037

## Hsi-men Ch'ing Is Inspired by Greed to Contemplate Matrimony & Li Ping'er Is Betrothed; Ying Po-chüeh Steals a March in Anticipation of the Ceremony

*Doubt not the existence of beauties who can topple kingdoms and cities;*
Yet dreams of clouds and rain on Witches' Mountain are ever deluded.
Too great an infatuation with rouge and powder can melt the sturdiest bones;
And lead one to neglect the claims of friendship in favour of moth eyebrows.
In Warm Soft Country one's prowess is still undiminished;
Affected by the Alluring Breeze one's carriage remains dashing.
The heedless fellow is not awake to the evanescence of spring;
Having spent a thousand for a night of pleasure he is reluctant to quit.

As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had made his way out the gate of the licensed quarter that day, with Tai-an in attendance, he whipped up his horse and headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's house on Lion Street. Arriving at her front door and dismounting, he saw that the gate was tightly shut and surmised that her guests must already have returned home in their sedan chairs. He told Tai-an to rouse Old Mother Feng, who opened the door for them.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, Li P'ing-erh was standing in the candlelit reception room:
*Her flowery headdress in perfect order,*
*Her white mourning-clothes very becoming,*
as she leaned against the latticework of the door, cracking melon seeds with her teeth.
As soon as she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, she:
*Lightly moved her lotus feet,*[1]
*Gently lifted her beige skirt,*
and descended the steps to welcome him, saying as she did so, "If you'd come a little earlier your Third Lady and Fifth Lady would still have been here. They only got into their sedan chairs and departed for home a few minutes ago. Your First Lady left early today. She said you weren't at home. Where have you been?"
"This morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I set out with Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to see the lanterns. We had hardly passed by your front door when we happened to run into a couple of friends who dragged us off to visit one of the establishments in the licensed quarter. We've been carrying on there ever since. I was afraid you might be waiting for me, so when the pageboy showed up I pretended to have to go to the bathroom and made my escape through the back door. If I hadn't taken matters into my own hands that crew would have hung onto me so tenaciously I could never have gotten away."
"Thank you very much, sir, for your generous presents," said Li P'ing-erh. "Your ladies refused to stay any longer. They kept saying there was no one at home to look after the place but I can't help feeling rather left in the lurch."
Thereupon:
*More vintage wine was poured, and*
*Another rare repast was spread.*
In the reception room:
*Decorated lanterns were lit up,*
*Heat-holding drapes were let down.*
*Animal-shaped briquettes replenished golden braziers,*
*The scent of ambergris wafted from jeweled censers.*
On the festive board:
*Rare delicacies rose in piles,*
From the goblet's rim:
*Fragrant wine overflowed.*
The woman handed Hsi-men Ch'ing a cup of wine and then kowtowed to him, saying, "Now that my poor husband is dead I'm completely alone in the world. I offer you this cup of wine today in the hope that you will accept responsibility for me in the future. Sir, if you only saw fit not to reject me for my inadequacies, I'd be more than willing to:
*Make the beds and fold the quilts,*
for you. If you could just permit me to play the role of a younger sister among the ladies of your household:
*I'd be prepared to die if I must.*
But I don't know what you think about this."
As she spoke her eyes brimmed over with tears.
Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the wine and said with a smile, "Please get up. Since you have deigned to express so much love for me, rest assured that where any request from you is concerned:
*It is imprinted in my heart.*
As soon as your mourning period is over you can leave the rest to me. There's no need for you to worry any more about it. Today is your birthday. Let's drink to it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, drank off the wine and then, after refilling the cup, offered it in return to the woman. She bade him take the seat of honour, and Old Mother Feng went off to busy herself with the preparations in the kitchen. Before long she brought in a serving of birthday noodles.
As they ate, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who had provided the entertainment during the day, and Li P'ing-erh replied, "Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan were here today. When the party broke up they accompanied your Third Lady and Fifth Lady home to pick up some artificial flowers they had been promised."
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat on the left side of the table and the two of them fell to drinking together:
*Exchanging cups as they drank.*
Li P'ing-erh's maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, stood in attendance, pouring wine and fetching food for them as occasion demanded. Who should come forward at this juncture but Tai-an, who prostrated himself on the floor and kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh, wishing her a happy birthday.
Li P'ing-erh promptly rose to her feet and returned his salute, telling Ying-ch'un as she did so, "Get Old Mother Feng to set aside some noodles and savories in the kitchen, along with a jug of wine, for Tai-an."
"As soon as you've finished eating," Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "you can go home with the horse."
"When you get there," said Li P'ing-erh, "if your mistress should ask, don't tell her that your master is here."
"Leave it to me," said Tai-an. "I'll just say that Father is spending the night in the licensed quarter and wants me to come and fetch him in the morning."
Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded approvingly, and Li P'ing-erh was as pleased as could be. "What a clever lad," she said.
*"He doesn't miss a wink."*[2]
She ordered Ying-ch'un to fetch two mace of silver for him, saying, "Here's a little something to help you celebrate the festival. Buy yourself some melon seeds to crack. If you bring me the outlines of your feet sometime soon, I'll make a nice pair of shoes for you."
Tai-an hastily kowtowed, saying, "How could I dream of such a thing?" and then withdrew to the kitchen.
When he had finished eating he led the horse outside, and Old Mother Feng put the crossbar on the front door to secure it for the night.
Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ch'ing played at guess-fingers as they drank. After a while, a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes[3] was brought out. A madder red strip of felt was placed over the table and the two of them played dominoes and drank by the light of the suspended lanterns.
They enjoyed themselves in this way for some time, after which Li P'ing-erh ordered Ying-ch'un to light the candles in her bedroom.
It so happened that after the death of Hua Tzu-hsü, Hsi-men Ch'ing had already enjoyed the favours of both Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, so there was no need to hide anything from them. They were instructed to prepare the bed and to bring along the food boxes and wine service from the reception room.
Thereupon, inside the bedstead, within the purple brocade curtains, the woman exposed her powder-white body and was joined by Hsi-men Ch'ing. With their:
*Fragrant shoulders huddled together, and*
*Jade bodies snuggled up against each other,*
the two of them continued to play dominoes and drink wine out of large goblets.
As they were so engaged, Li P'ing-erh asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "When are you going to be finished with the reconstruction work you plan to do over there?"
"I'm only waiting until sometime next month to:
*Break ground and start construction,"*
replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm going to tear down your old house and combine the two pieces of property into one. Then I'll erect an artificial hill and a summerhouse in the front, and make a garden and pleasure ground out of it. I'm also planning to build another three-room belvedere, like the one I already have, and call it the Flower-viewing Tower."
"In the tea chest over there behind the bed," the woman said, pointing as she spoke, "I've got forty catties of aloeswood, two hundred catties of white wax, two jars of quicksilver, and eighty catties of imported pepper stored away. If you will have it taken away sometime soon and sold off for its cash value, I'll contribute the proceeds of the sale to your building expenses. If you don't see fit to reject me for my inadequacies, please, whatever happens, tell your First Lady when you get home that I'd be more than willing to play the role of a younger sister among the ladies of your household. It wouldn't matter where I was ranked in the hierarchy. Darling, I just can't go on without you."
As she spoke a cascade of tears began to fall from her eyes.
Hsi-men Ch'ing solicitously endeavored to wipe them away with his handkerchief, saying, "Your feelings are fully understood by me. But we'd better wait until your period of mourning is over, on the one hand, and until I've finished the new construction work, on the other. Otherwise, if I took you into my household, you'd have no place to stay."
"If you really intend to take me into your family," the woman responded, "be sure, whatever you do, to locate the quarters you build for me next to those of your Fifth Lady. I don't know what I'd do without her, she's such a nice person. She and the Third Lady, née Meng, who lives in the rear compound, were just as friendly as could be to me on our very first meeting. The two of them are so alike they seem less like fellow-wives than sisters born of the same mother. Only your First Lady seems somewhat ill-disposed, as though:
*Nobody amounts to much in her eyes."*
"Actually," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this humble wife of mine, née Wu, has a most accommodating disposition. If that were not the case, how could I ever manage to have so many bedmates at my disposal? What I plan to do is to build a three-room belvedere on your former property for you to live in, just like the one on mine, and provide access through two postern gates. What do you think of that?"
"Sweetheart," the woman replied, "that would please me no end."
Thereupon, the two of them:
*Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,*
*Indulging their lusts without restraint.*
It was the fourth watch before they finally:
*Fell asleep on the same pillow,*
*Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.*
The next day it was past lunchtime before they stirred. The woman had not yet combed her hair when Ying-ch'un brought in some congee. She and Hsi-men Ch'ing had hardly finished half a bowl of the congee when wine was brought in and the two of them fell to drinking again.
It so happened that Li P'ing-erh was fond of doing it doggie fashion. Getting down on all fours, she made Hsi-men Ch'ing sit on the pillow and insert himself into her inverted flower while she:
*Moved back and forth as she wished.*
Just as the two of them were approaching their climax, what should they hear but Tai-an knocking at the gate, having arrived on horseback to fetch his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing called him over to the window and asked him what was up.
"There are three merchants from Szechwan and Hu-kuang waiting for you at home," replied Tai-an. "They have some excellent stock to dispose of and would like to weigh it out with Uncle Fu the Second and settle accounts. They are asking only a hundred taels down to conclude a contract, with the balance due in the middle decade of the eighth month. The First Lady sent me to ask you to come home and take care of the matter."
"You didn't say I was here, did you?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I told her you were at Li Kuei-chieh's place in the licensed quarter," said Tai-an. "I didn't tell anyone you were here."
"She doesn't know how to handle things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she had to do was tell Uncle Fu the Second to take care of it. What need was there to send for me?"

"Uncle Fu the Second proposed to do just that," replied Tai-an, "but the merchants wouldn't agree to it. They refused to sign the contract until they had seen you in person."
"As long as they've sent the boy after you," said Li P'ing-erh:
*"Business comes first.*
If you don't go home you'll only upset the lady of the house."
"You don't know these lousy southern bastards," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They never come knocking at your door, trying to unload their goods, unless the market is slow and they've got nowhere else to dispose of them. You've got to buy on time, for three months or half a year. If you pay them off any sooner than that they'll start getting ideas. I've got the largest store in the whole Ch'ing-ho district and do the largest volume of business. It wouldn't matter how long I kept them waiting, they'd still have to come looking for me in the end."
*"To refuse a business deal,*
*Is to risk making an enemy,"*
said Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you do as I say: go on home, take care of them, and come back later? After all:
*There are as many days ahead of us as there are*
*leaves on the willow tree."*[4]
Hsi-men Ch'ing acknowledged the force of Li P'ing-erh's rhetoric by slowly getting up, combing his hair and washing his face, donning his hairnet, and putting on his clothes. After Li P'ing-erh had provided him with something further to eat, without more ado, he put on his eye-mask and rode home on horseback.
There were four or five merchants waiting for him in the shop who went about their business as soon as he had supervised the weighing out of the merchandise, settled the account, and signed the contract.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters.
"Where did you go yesterday?" she demanded to know. "If you tell the truth, I'll forget it; but if you don't, I'll kick up a real rumpus."
"Since you were all out being entertained at the Hua house," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I went for a tour of the Lantern Market with a few of my friends, after which we went into the licensed quarter and made a night of it. I didn't get home until the pageboy came to fetch me this morning."
"The pageboy went to fetch you all right," said Chin-lien, "but I doubt if any part of the licensed quarter saw so much as your ghost. So much for that! You lousy two-timer, you still think you can fool me do you? That whore yesterday was so anxious to get us out of the way it was obvious she was:
*Up to her preternatural pranks.*
She must have invited you over so you could screw the night away. She didn't let you go till you were screwed out, I dare say. And as for that lousy jailbird, Tai-an:
*He's such a practiced old hand,*
he had one story for the First Lady and another story for me.
"Initially, when he came back with the horse and the First Lady asked him, 'Why hasn't your father come home? Who's place is he drinking at?' he replied, 'He went for a tour of the Lantern Market with Uncle Ying the Second and that crowd. They're all in the licensed quarter now, having a party at Li Kuei-chieh's place. He told me to come back and fetch him in the morning.'
"Later on, however, when I called him into my room and interrogated him myself, he just giggled and wouldn't say anything. Only after I began to give him a hard time did he say, 'Father's really at Mistress Hua the Second's place on Lion Street.' The lousy jailbird! How did he know that you and I are:
*Of one heart and one mind?*
You must have told him it was all right to tell me."
"I did nothing of the sort," said Hsi-men Ch'ing evasively.
Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, however, he went on to tell her all about Li P'ing-erh's invitation of the previous night.
"When I arrived she offered me a cup of wine and apologized for the scant entertainment she had been able to provide you. Then she started to weep and wail, telling me that her household was understaffed, that the rear part of the property was deserted, and that she was afraid to be alone there at night. Her one desire is that I will marry her. She asked when I was going to finish building the new house. She also showed me several hundred taels worth of aromatics, wax, and other valuable goods, and suggested that I broker them for her and keep the proceeds to help defray the building expenses. She wants me to start on the construction work as soon as possible so she can move in next to you and be a sister of yours. But I fear you may not agree to that."
"It's not as though I have:
*A shadow too many,*
here as it is," said the woman. "I only hope she does move in. That would be fine by me. This place of mine is completely deserted, and I'd love to have somebody to keep me company. It's always been true that:
*A multitude of boats need not clog the channel,*
*A multitude of carts need not block the road.*[5]
I could hardly refuse her the same sort of welcome I once received myself. It's not as though she were trying to take my place away from me or anything like that. My only fear is that:
*Other people may not be as well disposed as I am.*
You'll have to find out what the First Lady thinks about it."
"It's only something to talk about at the moment," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Her mourning period isn't even over yet."
Their colloquy at an end, the woman was helping Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his white satin jacket when an object fell out of his sleeve with a tinkling sound. Taking it in her hand, she found it had a heavy feel to it and was about the size of a fowling pellet. She scrutinized it for some time but couldn't tell what it was. Behold:
*To the tune "Immortal at the River"*
*First introduced as a product*
of the barbarian armies;
It has found its way by recommendation
to the capital itself.
Its body is miniature,
its interior hollow.
Once set in motion
by the merest touch;
It will roll around spontaneously,
stridulant as a cicada.
*Adept at arousing consternation*
in the beauty's heart;
A veteran contributor
to the vigor of the loins;
Its sobriquet is "Brazenfaced
Valiant Vanguard."
On the victory honours list
forever number one;
It has won renown as
"The Titillating Bell."[6]
The woman examined it for some time before asking. "What on earth is it? And why does it give me a numb feeling halfway up my arm?"
"This is something you wouldn't be familiar with," Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed. "It's called a 'titillating bell' and comes from the southern country of Burma. Good ones cost four or five taels of silver."
"What do you do with it?" the woman asked.
"If you put it in your 'crucible' before doing the deed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:
*"It's too wonderful for words."*
"You've been experimenting with Li P'ing-erh, haven't you?" the woman said.
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave a full account of the events of the preceding night, with the result that Chin-lien's:
*Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.*
Though it was broad daylight, the two of them:
*Took off their clothes and went to bed.*
Truly:
*Who knows what reason there might be*
*that Wang-tzu Ch'iao;*[7]
*No sooner learned to "play the flute"*
*than he became transported.*[8]
To make a long story short, one day Hsi-men Ch'ing met with the appropriate brokers and weighed out the aromatics, wax, and other goods that had been stored in the tea chest behind Li P'ing-erh's bed. In all he was able to realize 380 taels of silver by the sale. Li P'ing-erh kept only 180 taels out of this sum for her own expenses and turned over the balance to Hsi-men Ch'ing to help defray the cost of the new building.
The yin-yang master was consulted and the eighth day of the second month chosen to:
*Break ground and start construction.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing turned over five hundred taels of silver to his head servant, Lai-chao, and his manager, Pen the Fourth, and put them in charge of procuring the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone, supervising the work, and handling the accounts.
This Pen the Fourth, whose name was Pen Ti-ch'uan, or Scurry-about Pen, was a young man who was by nature:
*Dashing and affected,*
*Versatile and clever.*
He had begun his career as a flunky in the household of one of the imperial eunuchs. But because he:
*Was not the sort to abide by his lot,*
*Took his cut of both outgo and income;*[9]
and got caught cooking the books, he had been dismissed. He supported himself for a while as a catamite, after which he took a job as a servant in a well-to-do household. From this position he had subsequently absconded with a wet nurse, whom he took as his wife, and set himself up as a dealer in the secondhand clothes trade. On top of all this he was also a proficient performer on the *p'i-p'a*, the flute, and other wind instruments.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was so impressed by the variety of his talents that he often patronized him, allowing him to weigh out the goods in his wholesale pharmaceutical business and earn commissions as a middleman. As a result, he had come to feel, in matters both great and small, that he could hardly do without him.
On the appointed day, Pen Ti-ch'uan and Lai-chao supervised the artisans of the various trades as they began the construction work. First they demolished the old house on what had been the Hua property and took down the intervening wall, then they laid the foundations and erected a summerhouse, an artificial hill, pavilions, terraces, and other recreational facilities. This was not the work of a day but there is no need to describe it exhaustively.
*Light and darkness alternate swiftly,*
*The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing had remained at home overseeing the construction of his new garden for more than a month when the hundredth-day anniversary of Hua Tzu-hsü's death that fell in the first decade of the third month, became imminent. Li P'ing-erh invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over beforehand to discuss the arrangements.
"I intend to burn Hua Tzu-hsü's spirit tablet," she said. "I don't know whether you plan to sell this house or not but I wish you would send someone over to look after it and take me into your own household as soon as possible. I don't want to stay here any longer than necessary. At night it's completely deserted and I'm afraid. There are often fox spirits about doing their best to drive me to distraction. When you get home, please tell the First Lady that if she would only take pity on me it would save my life. It wouldn't make any difference where you chose to rank me in the hierarchy, I'd be more than willing to:
*Make the beds and fold the quilts,*
for you without repining." As she spoke:
*Her tears fell like rain.*
"There's no need to get so upset," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I already mentioned what you told me to my wife and Fifth Lady after I got home the other day. Just wait until the house I'm building for you is finished. By that time your mourning period will be nearly over. It won't be any too late to have you carried over the threshold then."
"Fine enough," said Li P'ing-erh. "But if it's really true that you intend to marry me, I wish you'd expedite the building of the house and take me over there as soon as possible. If I were able to live for even a day as a member of your household:
*I'd be prepared to die if I must.*
As long as I stay here:
*Each day is like a year."*[10]
"I understand what you're saying," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Even if the house isn't finished on time," said Li P'ing-erh, "once I've burnt the spirit tablet I could occupy the upper floor of the Fifth Lady's belvedere for a few days and then move into the new building after it's completed. Whatever else you do, when you get home speak to the Fifth Lady about it. I'll be waiting for your answer. The tenth of the third month is the hundredth-day anniversary of his death. I'll have to have a sutra reading and burn his spirit tablet then."
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave his assent and stayed overnight with the woman.
The next day he repeated everything she had said, word for word, to P'an Chin-lien.
"Of course, that would be fine," said Chin-lien. "I'd be perfectly happy to set aside a room or two for her to live in. It's the others I'd be worried about. You'll have to find out what the First Lady thinks about it. As far as I'm concerned:
*There's water enough in the channel*
*for all the boats.*[11]
It all depends on what our elder sister has to say."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went straight to Wu Yüeh-niang's room. He found her combing her hair and proceeded to give her a complete account of Li P'ing-erh's desire to marry into the family, from beginning to end.
"You really can't very well marry her," said Yüeh-niang. "In the first place: her mourning period isn't over yet. In the second place: you were formerly on intimate terms with her husband. And in the third place: you've already been engaged in hanky-panky with her, first buying their house and then stashing away all the valuables she entrusted to you for safekeeping. As the saying goes:
*The loom may stay put but the shuttle gets around.*[12]

I've heard people say that Hua the Elder from her husband's branch of the family is a tough customer. If any word of this should get about you'd only be:
*Inviting lice onto your own head to scratch.*[12]
What I say is in your own best interests but:
*Be you Chao, Ch'ien, Sun, or Li,*[14]
*I've had my say, you may do as you please."*
With these few words she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence. He went out to the front reception hall and sat down in a chair all by himself to ponder the situation. He didn't see how he could either convey this reply to Li P'ing-erh or refuse to go back and see her. After thinking it over for some time he returned to Chin-lien's room.
"When you went to see our elder sister, what did she say?" asked Chin-lien.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her everything Yüeh-niang had said.
"Her objections are certainly reasonable enough," said Chin-lien. "First you bought his house and now you want to marry his wife into the bargain, a woman with whom you only became acquainted through your long-standing relationship with her husband. And there's another thing to consider too. Since even between friends:
*Though there may be no secrets, there*
*are some constraints,*
if it ever came to the attention of the authorities, they would take a dim view of it."
"I think I could handle that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What worries me is that bastard, Hua the Elder. No doubt he resents the fact that he:
*No longer has an arena for his tricks.*
If he finds out about this and tries to make trouble on the grounds that her mourning period isn't over yet, what am I to do? Right now I'm at a loss how to reply to her."
"Phooey! What's so hard about that?" said Chin-lien. "Tell me, are you planning to give her your answer today or tomorrow?"
"She wants me to give her an answer of some kind today," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"When you go there today then," said Chin-lien, "this is what you do. Say to her, 'I talked it over with the Fifth Lady when I got home but there are such quantities of raw pharmaceuticals in storage on the second floor of her belvedere that there'd be no place to put your furniture if you moved in. You might as well wait a little longer. Your house is 70 or 80 percent completed already. I'll urge the artisans to speed up their work on the decorating, painting and varnishing, and other finishing touches, and by the time they're through your mourning period will be nearly over. If I take you in then, everything will be in proper order. That would be a lot better than having you move in on top of the Fifth Lady right now, while you're still in a ritual status that makes you:
*Neither fish nor fowl.*
You'd only get in each other's way and find it difficult to keep up appearances.' If you do as I suggest, I guarantee she'll give up the idea."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was so delighted by what he heard that he set out for Li P'ing-erh's house without delay.
"How did it go with that request of mine when you got home?" the woman asked.
"The Fifth Lady said," reported Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you'd do better to wait until they've finished painting and varnishing your new house before moving in. Right now there's so much stuff:
*Strewn about higgledy-piggledy,*
on the second floor of her place that if you went over there there'd be no place to store your things. And there's another problem as well. If your husband's eldest brother should complain that your mourning period isn't over yet, what would we do then?"
"He wouldn't dare interfere in my affairs," said the woman. "Quite aside from the fact that:
*Each of us has his own life to live,*
and that a formal settlement of the matter of the disputed property has already been reached; as far as I'm concerned:
*In one's first marriage one must obey one's parents;*
*In subsequent marriages one can suit oneself.*
It's always been the case that:
*Brothers and sisters-in-law do not*
*ask after each other.*
My husband's eldest brother has no business interfering in my private affairs. As it is, he can see I'm having a hard time making a go of it but what does he care? If he so much as lets off a fart, by the time I'm finished with him, he'll:
*Die in his chair,*
*Not daring to die in his bed.*
You can relax on that score, sir. He won't dare give me any trouble."
"As for this house of yours," she then went on to ask, "how soon is it going to be finished anyway?"
"I've already instructed the artisans," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to give priority to the three-room belvedere I'm building for you. By the time they're done with the painting and varnishing it will be the beginning of the fifth month."
"My darling," the woman said, "push ahead with it as fast as you can. I'm willing to wait until then if I must."
When they had finished talking, a maidservant brought in wine and the two of them fell to enjoying themselves and drinking together for the rest of the night.
From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing came to see her every three to five days, without fail but there is no need to describe this in detail.
*Light and darkness alternate swiftly,*
The construction work in Hsi-men Ch'ing's residential compound had already been under way for more than two months, and the three-room belvedere, called the Flower-viewing Tower, was nearing completion. All that remained was the summerhouse, for which the foundation had not yet been laid.
One day the Dragon Boat Festival, on the fifth day of the fifth month, rolled around.
*In each household artemisia leaves adorn the gate,*
*In every dwelling efficacious charms deck the door.*[15]
Li P'ing-erh prepared a feast in honour of the occasion and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over to share the festival *tsung-tzu* with her, on the one hand, and to discuss the date she would be carried over his threshold, on the other. They decided that on the fifteenth day of the fifth month she would engage Buddhist priests to hold a sutra-reading and burn the spirit tablet of her deceased husband, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrange to have her carried over his threshold.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Li P'ing-erh, "On the day you burn the spirit tablet, are you planning to invite Hua the Elder, Hua the Third, and Hua the Fourth, or not?"
"I'll send them each an invitation," the woman replied. "They can come or not as they please."
Now that their plans had been made, all that remained was to wait for the fifteenth day of the fifth month. The woman engaged the services of twelve monks from the Pao-en Temple, who came to her home on the appointed day to perform the sutra-reading and preside over the burning of the spirit tablet.
The same day, Hsi-men Ch'ing wrapped up three mace of silver as a birthday present for Ying Po-chüeh. In the morning he also gave five taels of silver to Tai-an and instructed him to buy chicken, goose, duck, and whatever else was needed for a feast that evening to celebrate the end of Li P'ing-erh's mourning period. Then, taking P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung with him to look after the horse, he set out in the early afternoon for Ying Po-chüeh's house.
Among those attending the party that day were Tagalong Hsieh, Sticky Chu, Blabbermouth Sun, Heartless Wu, Welsher Yün, Cadger Ch'ang, Scrounger Pai, and the new recruit to the company, Scurry-about Pen. All ten members of the club were present, not one of them having failed to put in an appearance. Two boy actors had also been engaged to play and sing for them.
After everyone had been served with wine and they had taken their places at the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing called the two boy actors over to him. He recognized the first of them to be Wu Yin-erh's younger brother, Wu Hui.
The other, whom he did not recognize, knelt down and said, "I am Cheng Ai-hsiang's elder brother, Cheng Feng."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who occupied the seat of honour, rewarded each of them with two mace of silver.
The party continued until the sun began to sink in the west. At this juncture Tai-an arrived with a horse to fetch his master.
Coming right up to the table, he whispered into Hsi-men Ch'ing's ear, "The lady would like you to come over as soon as you can."
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded with a wink, and Tai-an had started on his way out of the room when he was called to a halt by Ying Po-chüeh, who demanded, "You lousy dog-bone! Come over here and tell me the truth. If you don't tell the truth, I'll give your little ear a permanent twist. How many birthdays do you think your Daddy Ying has in a year, that you should come with the horse to fetch your father while the sun is still high in the sky? Where are you off to anyway? And who really sent you here? It may have been one of your mistresses at home but it may just as well have been that 'Eighteenth Youngster' [16] from the licensed quarter. If you don't tell me, a hundred years will go by before I ever put in a good word with your father to find this little dog-bone of his a wife."
Tai-an's only response was to say, "The truth is: nobody sent me. I feared it was getting late and thought Father might want to be on his way, so I brought the horse along early to await his convenience."
Ying Po-chüeh harassed him a while longer, without effect, and then said, "If you don't tell me what's afoot, and I find out about it later on, see if I don't settle accounts with you, you little oily mouth."
So saying, he poured out a cup of wine and selected half a saucerful of savories for Tai-an to eat when he had retired from their presence.
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing withdrew to the bathroom in order to adjust his toilet.
Summoning Tai-an, he drew him aside and asked him, "Who all showed up at the Hua house today?"
"Hua the Third is off in the country somewhere," reported Tai-an. "And Hua the Fourth is at home suffering from an eye ailment. No one came from either of their families. Only Hua the Elder and his wife showed up. After they had eaten their fill of the vegetarian fare, the husband went home first, leaving his wife behind. When she was ready to leave, Mistress Hua called her into her room and presented her with ten taels of silver and two sets of clothes, for which she actually kowtowed in gratitude."
"Did she have anything to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"She didn't venture so much as a word about it," replied Tai-an. "All she said was that when Mistress Hua is carried over your threshold she'd like to pay you a call on the 'third-day celebrations.' "
"Did she really say that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"How would I dare lie about it," responded Tai-an.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this his heart was filled with delight. "Are the oblations completed as yet?" he went on to ask.
"The monks left some time ago," replied Tai-an. "The spirit tablet has already been burned. Mistress Hua said she'd like you to come over as soon as you can."
"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go outside and take care of the horse."
Tai-an was on his way out when, unexpectedly, Ying Po-chüeh, who had been eavesdropping in the corridor, suddenly accosted him with a shout that gave him quite a start.
"You lousy little dog-bone!" he cursed. "You wouldn't tell me anything but I've already contrived to hear all about it. A fine thing your father and you are up to!"
"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't make such a fuss or everyone in the place will find out about it."
"If you'd taken me into your confidence in the first place," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I might not have said anything about it."
Thereupon he went right back to the table and, thus and so, told everyone the whole story.
Taking hold of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Brother, what sort of a person are you anyway?
*Can such things be,*
that you should keep them to yourself without even letting your brothers in on them? Even if Hua the Elder had had anything to say about it, all you would have had to do was give us the word. Once we had spoken to him, he would have gone along with anything, never fear. If he had dared to utter so much as a single 'no,' we would have given him his lumps, make no mistake about it.
"Honestly, though, is this marriage set, or isn't it? Tell us all about it. Really! What are friends for, anyway? If there's anything we can do for you, we'd be willing to:
*Go through fire for you, or*
*Go through water for you.*[17]
In fact:
*We seek not to have been born the same day;*
*We seek only to die, every man for himself.*[18]
As long as we're prepared to treat you this way, unless you have some reason you haven't disclosed, why should you want to keep us in the dark?"
Tagalong Hsieh picked up where he left off.
"Brother," he said, "if you refuse to tell us any more, we'll make such a fuss in the licensed quarter that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh will hear about it and everyone will be embarrassed."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "All right, then, I'll make a clean breast of it. The wedding has all been arranged."
"The day for the ceremony, when you have her carried over the threshold, hasn't been set yet, has it?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"The day you carry our sister-in-law over the threshold," said Tagalong Hsieh, "we'll come to congratulate you. Whatever else you do, Brother, you'll have to engage four singing girls and invite us to a wedding feast."
"That goes without saying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Of course, all of you will be invited."
"Rather than waiting to congratulate our brother on a future occasion," said Sticky Chu, "why don't we offer him a toast in advance?"
Thereupon, Sponger Ying presented the toast, Tagalong Hsieh held the flagon, Sticky Chu proffered some viands, and the rest of them all knelt down too, to keep them company. The two boy actors were also dragged into the act, being made to kneel down and sing the song suite entitled "30 Melodies," which begins with the words:

*How happy this auspicious day.*[19]

The planet Venus has appeared, dimly discernible
amid variegated clouds.
See how the jade tree before the reception hall,
Has once again put forth a magic sprout.
Having been invited to attend the feast,
We offer a curved kingfisher feather
with a sharp quill,
And a round gold embroidery frame
of paltry diameter,
As tokens of esteem for this lovely new face;
And in the hope that you will remain a happy pair,
And continue to live harmoniously together

for a hundred years.
Five hundred years ago your destiny
was sealed,
Only to be fulfilled today.
Here in your magistrate's tribunal,
on the occasion of this birthday,
We offer a toast to your long life.
As pure as jade,
As captivating as a flower,
This is the flawless jewel of the age.
At this feast to celebrate the bathing of the child,
On this auspicious day,
The whole household is happy as can be.
Necklaces and bracelets hold in place
the mermaid silk.
Our only wish is that,
Your longevity be that of a mountain,
Your good fortune as deep as the sea,
And that you share glorious success.
The happy hubbub at this elegant feast
is not inconsiderable.
Truly: the Queen Mother of the Western Pool
has temporarily abandoned paradise;
Immortal lads amid the clouds proffer
the peaches of immortality.
With her patent of nobility she is entitled
to a coach and four,
The phoenix headdress and cloud-patterned cape.
Surrounded by attendant beauties,
Entitled to golden insignia and purple seal-ribbons,
He has returned to his old home,
Where, dressed in motley, he can join his family
in enjoying the season.
If the proper rites are not observed it may
give rise to resentment;
Human nature is such that one must be chary
of too intimate relationships.
We are happy to live in an era of good government
when the people are not disturbed,
And wish the nation to be at peace and
the wind and rain harmonious.
A jade *ch'i-lin* has fulfilled the bear's
portent of a noble birth.
So now that famous beauty, the elder Ch'iao,
is as lucky as her little sister,
And with a baby to boot,
To bring glory to its ancestors,
And continue the family tradition of
wearing gold and sable.
Tortoise and crane portend good fortune,
sporting in pool and pavilion;
Pine and cypress intertwine their branches,
intimating endurance.
Grain grows in double ears; phoenixes
alight in respect.
They are like birds that fly only in pairs,
like mating phoenixes.
Shadows of flowers tumble and toss on the screen;
The sound of singing resounds in the air.
The dancers with willowy waists like Hsiao-man's
are danced out;
The tune "Rainbow Skirts and Feathered Garments"
is finally over;
As they turn their heads, cloud-shaped palace
head ornaments fall out.
The ornate halls are deep,
The gardens and courtyards secluded.
The incense floating from jeweled censers
is curling upwards.
Roll up the embroidered curtains
and beaded portieres;
Let the swallows come and nest
if they will.
We are confronted with crimson peaches,
seemingly afire,
Just as they should be.
We see butterflies, one pair after another,
flying around us.
At this auspicious feast, this
festival of flowers,
The small zither and great zither
are in harmony.
Let us enjoy the music of
pipes and woodwinds;
Unbutton our collars,
Open our mouths in laughter;
Give way to drunkenness, empty
the golden flagons;
And leave the red apricot blossoms to revel
on their branch tips.
May your wealth and distinction flourish
like the three months of spring,
And may the voice of the cuckoo never be heard
to portend their end.
CODA:
May the incense of your sacrifices never cease,
your flowers never grow old;
May your good fortune be deep as the Eastern Sea,
your longevity ever increase;
May you fulfill your days with mutual respect
and enjoy your life together.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was made to swallow three or four cups of wine in a row. "Brother," said Sticky Chu, "on the day you invite us to the feast, you must be sure to include Cheng Feng and Wu Hui as well. That's settled then. Whatever happens, the two of you must go."

Cheng Feng, deferentially covering his mouth with his hand, replied, "We promise to report to your home for duty at an early hour."

Before long, after everyone had been served with wine, they returned to their places, sat down, and embarked upon another bout of drinking.

The day gradually waned and Hsi-men Ch'ing grew restless. As soon as he thought no one was looking, he got up and tried to slip away but Ying Po-chüeh attempted to block the door and prevent his escape.

"Brother Ying," intervened Tagalong Hsieh. "let him go. We wouldn't want to spoil his plans and arouse the resentment of our sister-in-law." Hsi-men Ch'ing seized the opportunity to leap on his horse and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

When he arrived at Lion Street, Li P'ing-erh had already divested herself of her mourning and changed into a more colourful outfit. In the reception room:

*Ablaze with lamps and candles;*[20]

the table was laid with a full complement of wine and delicacies, with a single folding armchair standing at its head.

Not until Hsi-men Ch'ing had assumed the place of honour was a jug of wine broached and decanted. A maidservant held the flagon, from which Li P'ing-erh proceeded to fill a cup to the brim and offer it to her guest.

She then kowtowed to him four times:

*Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,*

and said, "Today the spirit tablet of my poor husband has been burnt. If you, sir, deign not to reject me, I will enjoy the pleasure of:

*Waiting upon you with towel and comb,*

thereby:

*Fulfilling my desire for connubial bliss."*

When she rose to her feet after completing her obeisances, Hsi-men Ch'ing also got up from his seat and proffered the woman a cup of wine in return. Only then did they sit down to enjoy themselves together.

"Did Hua the Elder or his wife have anything to say today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"After the noon vegetarian meal," replied Li P'ing-erh, "I invited them into my room and told them about your intentions. He expressed nothing but pleasure at the news and didn't have a word to say against it. All he said was that he'd have his wife pay you a call on the 'third-day celebrations.' I gave them ten taels of silver and two sets of clothes. The two of them were as happy as could be and thanked me again and again on their way out the door."

"If that was their only response," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I might as well let them come calling: what does it matter? But if they utter a single word of criticism, I'll never forgive them."
"If either of them so much as lets a hot fart on the subject," asserted Li P'ing-erh, "I won't let them get away with it."
Thereupon, Old Mother Feng brought out some soup and an assortment of appetizers from the kitchen. Li P'ing-erh had taken the trouble to:
*Wash her hands and trim her nails,*
before personally preparing some miniature steamed dumplings with a stuffing of minced scallions and mutton. From a chased silver goblet filled with southern wine, Hsiu-ch'un poured out two cups for her mistress and her visitor. Hsi-men Ch'ing drank only the first half-cupful of his wine and presented the remainder to Li P'ing-erh.
*One goes, the other comes;*
and thus they proceeded to drink several cups in a row. Truly:
*The sway of passion takes one's years away;*
*The force of setting makes the wine flow free.*[21]
Because the day of her marriage was impending, Li P'ing-erh was even happier than usual. Her face was wreathed in smiles.
"While you were drinking just now at the Ying place," she said, "you kept me waiting a long time. I was afraid you might get drunk, so I sent for Tai-an to ask you to come over as soon as possible. Did anyone there catch on?"
"Beggar Ying, as usual, guessed that something was afoot," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He pressured the pageboy into letting out a few words about it, and then clowned around for a while. The members of the club demanded a chance to offer their congratulations, so I guess I'll have to engage singing girls and throw a party for them. They also ganged up on me and made me swallow a few cups of wine. As soon as I thought no one was looking, I tried to slip away but they blocked the door, and:
*Argued the pros and cons,*
among themselves before letting me go."
"The fact they let you go shows they understand a thing or two," said Li P'ing-erh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, having noticed that:
*Her drunken demeanor invited license; and*
*Her passionate eyes expressed desire,*
lost no time in abandoning all restraint. He:
*Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue; and*
*Nuzzled her apricot cheeks.*
Li P'ing-erh embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My darling, if you really do plan to marry me, make it as soon as possible. It's inconvenient for you to have to come and go this way. Don't leave me here to long for you day and night."
When she had finished speaking, they:
*Tossed first this way and then that;*
*Till they were intertwined into one.*
Truly:
*A beauty who could topple kingdoms and cities*
*belonged to Emperor Wu of Han;*[22]
*A goddess who could make clouds and make rain*
*appeared to King Hsiang of Ch'u.*[23]
There is a poem that testifies to this:

*In passion's thrall breast presses close to breast;*
In tender aftermath, arms are gently enlaced.
Let the silver lamp burn brightly as it will;
They're still afraid it's nothing but a dream.

Ximen Qing left the bawdy house. With Daian following, he went to see Li Ping'er at her house in Lion Street. When they found the gate closed, they knew that the guests had got into their sedan chairs and departed. Daian called to old woman Feng to open the door. She let Ximen Qing in. Li Ping'er, holding a candle, was waiting for him in the hall. She looked very charming in her pretty headdress and soft white clothes. She had been leaning on the framework of the lattice longing for him to come; and when he came, she ran downstairs to meet him, her lotus-like feet moving swiftly, her silken skirt fluttering.
"If you had been a little earlier," she said, smiling, "you would have found two of your ladies still here. They have only just gone. The Great Lady went away early, because she said you were not at home. If that is so, where have you been?"
"Brother Ying and Brother Xie asked me to go and see the lanterns with them," Ximen Qing said, "and we were passing your door when we met two other friends. They carried me off to the bawdy house, and I could not get away before this late hour. I thought you would be waiting for me, and, as soon as the boy came, I said I was going to wash my hands. I slipped away through the back door. If I hadn't done so, they would have kept me and I should never have been able to get away."
"Thank you very much for the splendid present you sent me," Li Ping'er said. "I could not prevail upon your ladies to stay. They said there was no one at home but nonetheless I felt ashamed."
She heated some excellent wine and served food to him. The lanterns were lighted in the hall and the curtains drawn. Charcoal was put into the golden brazier and precious incense into the incense burner. She kowtowed before him and offered him a cup of wine.
"My foolish husband is dead now," she said, "and I have no other relatives. Today, my lord, I offer you this cup of wine and implore you to take me under your protection. Do not despise my lack of comeliness, for I wish nothing more than to be your slave and a sister to all your ladies. I have told you my wishes but what you may think about it I do not know." As she said this, she shed tears.
Ximen took the wine and raised her up. "Do not kneel," he said, "I am grateful for your love. When your period of mourning is over, I shall know what course to take. You need worry no longer. This is your lucky day, and we can enjoy our wine without a care." He drank his own wine and poured a cup for Li Ping'er. Then they sat down and, in a little while, old woman Feng, who was in charge of the kitchen, brought them some dumplings.
"Who were the singing girls today?" Ximen Qing said.
"Dong Jiao'er and Han Jinchuan," Li Ping'er said. "They went after your ladies to get some flowers from them."
They sat on the bed and drank wine, exchanging cups. Xiuchun and Yingchun waited upon them. Daian came and kowtowed to Li Ping'er to congratulate her upon her birthday. She rose quickly and returned his greeting. She asked Yingchun to tell old woman Feng to give him some birthday dumplings, cakes, and a jar of wine in the kitchen.
"You may go home as soon as you have finished," Ximen told him.
"And when you get home," Li Ping'er said, "if any of the ladies ask where your master is, don't tell them he is here."
"I understand," the boy said. "I will tell them that Father is spending the night somewhere else. Tomorrow morning I will come back for him." Ximen nodded approval and Li Ping'er was very pleased. "What an intelligent boy he is," she cried. "You can see it in his eyes." She told Yingchun to give him two *qian* of silver with which to buy melon seeds. "Let me know what size you take," she said to him, "and I will make you a pair of shoes."
Daian kowtowed again, thanked her, and went away when he had had a meal in the kitchen. Old woman Feng bolted the gate. Ximen Qing and Li Ping'er guessed fingers, and then, taking a set of thirty-two ivory tablets, set a cloth upon the table and played dominoes as they drank their wine. Then they told Yingchun to light them with a candle to the bedroom. Now that Hua Zixu was dead, both Yingchun and Xiuchun had yielded to Ximen's desire. The lovers did as they pleased in the presence of these maids, and were quite at their ease. They called for the bed to be prepared and for fruit and wine to be placed within the purple silk net. Li Ping'er unveiled her white body and Ximen Qing sat beside her. They went on with their game of dominoes, and drank great cups of wine together.
"When are you going to begin the rebuilding of the house?" Li Ping'er asked suddenly.
"I shall get the work in hand at the middle of the second month," Ximen said. "I propose to make the two properties into one and let the gardens run together. At the front I am having an artificial mound and a shelter made, and at the back a garden pavilion of three rooms where we can go to enjoy the flowers."
"In some tea chests behind that bed," Li Ping'er said, "there are thirty or forty pounds of aloes, two hundred pounds of white wax, two jars of quicksilver, and eighty pounds of pepper. Take them all away and sell them; you can use the money to help pay the building expenses. If I find favour in your sight, when you get home tell the Great Lady that I hope to take a sister's place among your ladies. Give me any place you choose but I cannot live without you." She began to sob again.
Ximen Qing took out his handkerchief and wiped away her tears. "I understand perfectly," he said, "but you must wait till the building is finished and your mourning is over. Until then there will be no place where you can live."
"If you really intend to marry me, you will build a little pavilion for me near that of your Fifth Lady. She is so nice, and I am very fond of her. The Third Lady too is very kind to me. One would never take them to be anything but sisters. The Great Lady is not quite so agreeable. Somehow those eyebrows of hers seem supercilious."
"My foolish wife is really one of the kindest of souls," Ximen Qing said, "or she would never have managed to keep such a large household in order. I will build a three-roomed pavilion with two little doors for you, as fine as the place in which you live now. What do you think of that?"
"Oh, Brother, what more could I wish for?" Li Ping'er said.
They played together unrestrainedly, as the male phoenix plays with his mate, and their delight was so great that it was the fourth night watch before they went to sleep. Then, close pressed in each other's arms, they slept until morning. Breakfast time came but they did not rise, and Yingchun brought them some rice porridge. They ate a little of it, and then called for wine. Li Ping'er liked to play at being a horse. She made Ximen Qing take up his position on a pillow, and she placed herself in the manner of a flower inverted. They were enjoying themselves like this when Daian, who had brought Ximen Qing's horse, came and knocked at the door. Ximen called him to the window and asked what he wanted.
"Three merchants from Sichuan and Guangdong have come to see you," the boy said. "They are waiting with a host of fine things. They have shown them to Uncle Fu. All they ask for them is a hundred taels of silver on the signing of the contract, and the rest in the eighth month. My mistress told me to ask you to come and see them."
"You didn't tell her I was here, did you?" Ximen Qing said.
"No," said the boy, "I told them you were spending the night at Guijie's house."
"They have no sense," Ximen said. "Your uncle Fu could have managed this perfectly well. Why send and bother me?"
"Uncle Fu has talked to them," Daian said, "but the strangers will not settle with him. They will not sign the contract unless you go yourself."
"Your family has sent the boy for you," Li Ping'er said. "Business must come first. You must go, or the Great Lady will be angry."
"You don't know these thievish barbarians," Ximen said. "They miss the proper season, can't get rid of their goods, and then come to me. If I show myself at all eager to accept their terms, they will very soon ask for more. In the whole of this district mine is the only wholesale house, and they must come to me, whatever I choose to offer."
"In business matters," Li Ping'er said, "you should take care not to turn friends into enemies. Please do as I tell you. Go home, and get rid of them. There are still as many days before us as there are leaves upon a willow tree."
Ximen agreed to do as she wished. He got out of bed in a leisurely manner, combed his hair, washed his face, and put on his hairnet and clothes. Li Ping'er served him with food. When he had eaten it, he put on his eye-shades and rode home.
Four or five merchants were waiting in the shop for him to check the goods and give them the money. When this had been done, they signed the contract and went away. Ximen Qing went to Jinlian's room.
"Where did you spend last night?" Jinlian cried. "Tell me the truth, or I will stir the dust with my complainings."
"You were all drinking wine with Mistress Hua," Ximen said, "so I went to the Lantern Fair with my friends. Afterwards we went to the bawdy house and spent the night there. This morning Daian came to bring me back, and here I am."
"I know the boy went to fetch you but pray, in which of the bawdy houses does your particular ghost live? You fickle rogue, you are trying to deceive me. Last night that strumpet turned us out and invoked the aid of gods and devils alike to get you to go to her. When you have had enough, you come home. That thievish lump of knavery, Daian, is cunning enough to tell one story to his mistress but it is quite another one he tells me. Last night when he came back, the Great Lady said, 'Why hasn't your Father come back? Where is he drinking?' and he said you and Uncle Fu had gone to see the lanterns, and that you had gone to Guijie's house to drink, and he was going to bring you back this morning. But afterwards, when I questioned him, he laughed and kept his mouth shut. When I pressed him, he admitted that you were spending the night with Mistress Hua in Lion Street. You villain, how does he know that I always let you do as you please? I suppose you told him."
"Indeed I did nothing of the sort," Ximen Qing said. He told her how Li Ping'er had asked him to take wine with her, how sorry she was that Jinlian had returned so early, how she cried and told him that she had no one to help her and was always terrified at night because her house was so lonely. "She begged me to marry her, and asked when I was going to rebuild the house. She has some incense and candles and all kinds of valuable stuff there, and she asked me to take it and use the money to pay the builder. She is very anxious that I should get the house finished quickly, so that she can come here and live with you as a sister. But it looks as though that won't suit you."
"One shadow more or less will not worry me," Jinlian said. "I shall be glad to have her, for, as things are, I'm very lonely, and, if she comes, she will keep me company. The fact that there are many ships on a river does not necessarily mean a block, and a road is not stopped because there are many carts upon it. There is no more reason why I should refuse to welcome her than others might have found when I came here myself. But I'm very much afraid you will not find everybody so amiably disposed as I am. You still have to see what our mistress thinks about it."
"Although I am talking about this matter now," Ximen said, "of course she is still in mourning."
Jinlian took Ximen's silken gown. Something dropped out of the sleeve, and fell tinkling to the ground. She picked it up and weighed it in her hand. It was like a little ball but very heavy. She looked at it for a long time but could not imagine what it was for. Jinlian stared at it.
"What is it?" she said, "and why does it seem so heavy?"
"Don't you know?" Ximen said, laughing. "They call it the Bell of Fecundity, and it comes from Burma, a country somewhere in the south. A good one is worth four or five taels of silver."
"Where do you put the thing?" the woman asked.
"First, you put it inside, then get on with what has to be done. The results are quite indescribable."
"Did you use it with Mistress Hua?" Jinlian asked.
Ximen Qing told her all that had passed during the night, and this so stirred up Jinlian's ardent mind that, though it was still day, these two disrobed themselves and behaved in a manner better befitting the night.
Ximen Qing went to see the valuers, taking with him the candles and wax and other things that belonged to Li Ping'er. They were all weighed up and sold for about three hundred and eighty taels of silver. Out of this Li Ping'er would take only one hundred and eighty taels, making Ximen Qing spend the rest on the house. He consulted the Master of the Yin Yang, and work was begun on the eighth day of the second month. He gave five hundred taels to his servant Laizhao and his manager Ben the Fourth, to buy bricks, tiles, timber, and stone, and gave them instructions to superintend the work and keep account of the expenditure. Ben the Fourth was a dissipated young fellow, something of a windbag but efficient and cunning. He began life as servant to a eunuch but was sent away because of some irregularity. Then he lent himself to practices of doubtful morality and, still later, took employment as domestic in a family of position. But he seduced the nurse and ran off with her. For a while he acted as a tailor's tout. He could play the lute, the flute, and the double flute. Ximen Qing, who appreciated such accomplishments, gave Ben the Fourth help from time to time, and finally found a place for him in his shop, so that he could earn commission. In this way Ben the Fourth came to have a finger in the pie of all Ximen's enterprises.
Ben the Fourth and Laizhao supervised the workers during the building of the house. To begin with, the old rooms of Hua's house were demolished, then the walls were pulled down and new foundations laid. They constructed the shelter, the artificial mound, and all the arbours and apartments. This took a considerable time.
The days passed quickly. The sun and moon crossed and recrossed like the shuttles of a weaver. A little more than a month after Ximen's setting to work upon the gardens, it was a hundred days since Hua Zixu died. Li Ping'er asked Ximen to go and see her, to talk over the future. "I will have Hua's tablet burned," she said, "and you must decide whether you wish to have this house sold or not. You need only to give your orders but you must marry me as soon as you can. Give me any position you like in your household. So long as I can be your chambermaid, I shall be quite happy." Her tears fell like rain.
"Don't cry," Ximen said. "I have told the Fifth Lady that, as soon as the house is finished and your mourning is over, I am going to marry you."
"If you really want me," Li Ping'er cried, "get my apartment finished first, and take me there. If I spend a single day in it and then die, I shall die content. Anything would be better than staying here, where each day seems like a year."
"I know," said Ximen.
"Why should I not go to live with the Fifth Lady for a few days, as soon as the tablet has been burned, and move into the new apartment as soon as it is finished? Go home and see what the Fifth Lady thinks of that, and I will wait. The hundredth day is the tenth of the third month, and I will arrange to have the dirge sung and the tablet burned."
Ximen Qing agreed, and spent the night with Li Ping'er. The next day he went home and told Jinlian all she had proposed.
"Very well," Jinlian said, "I am quite ready to clear a couple of rooms for her but you must go and ask the Great Lady first. As for me, I am like the water in the river, there is no reason why I should not do my part in washing the boats."
Ximen Qing went at once to see Yueniang. She was dressing her hair, and Ximen told her the whole story.

"It is not at all a suitable arrangement," Yueniang said. "To begin with, she is still in mourning. Secondly, you were a very intimate friend of her husband. Thirdly, you have already had dealings with her, purchased her house, and stored many of her goods. The proverb says, If the loom is not speedy, the shuttle is. I understand that one member of her family, Hua the Elder, is a rogue. If he gets wind of this, I very much fear we shall find many fleas about our heads. What I have said is plain common sense. By Zhao, Qian, Sun and Li, think the matter over and see if you don't agree with me."
Ximen could think of no answer to make. He went and sat on a chair in the hall, and pondered the matter. He was by no means decided how he should answer Li Ping'er but he could not make up his mind to give her up. The problem troubled him for a long time, and finally he went back to Jinlian's room.
"What did the Great Lady say?" Jinlian said. Ximen told her all that had passed.
"She is right," Jinlian said. "You did buy her house and you do wish to marry the widow of one of your most intimate friends. And, for that reason, you must forgo what otherwise you might have had. If you do not, your influential friends will look upon you with grave suspicion."
"That doesn't trouble me in the least," Ximen said, "but I am anxious about that fellow Hua the Elder. I don't want him to start interfering. If he hears what is going on, he will bring pressure to bear upon her before she is out of mourning. What can I do then? But I really don't know what to say to her."
"I see no difficulty at all," Jinlian said. "All you need do is to go and say to her, 'I have mentioned the matter to the Fifth Lady but it appears that there is a great stock of merchandise stored on the upper floor of her apartments, and there is no room for your things. You must wait a few days more. My place is nearly finished, and I will hurry on the workmen and get the painting and decorating done as soon as possible. By that time your mourning will be over and I will marry you. That seems much the best plan, far better than your staying with the Fifth Lady, packed like herrings in a barrel, neither one thing nor another.' That ought to satisfy her."
Ximen Qing was delighted with this counsel, and went at once to see Li Ping'er. "The Fifth Lady says: Wait till the painting and decoration of your apartment are finished, and go straight there. At present there is a whole heap of things in her place, and there would be no room for your belongings. There is one thing more I must remind you of. May not your brother-in-law say that your period of mourning has not been duly fulfilled? What can we do about it?"
"He has no authority over me," Li Ping'er said. "We have already come to an arrangement about the property and we have signed a document in the courts to say that our relationship is at an end. We women certainly have our first marriages arranged for us but for the rest we can surely please ourselves. There is a proverb that says: Brothers and sisters-in-law have no right to interfere in each other's affairs. My brother-in-law has not the slightest power to say a word in any matter that concerns myself alone. If I could not support myself, he would never raise a finger to help me. No, if that fellow dares to fart about, I shall tell him to die in his chair, and after that, he will not venture to die in his bed. Please don't let him worry you, my lord. He can do me no harm. When will the apartment be finished?"
"I have given orders for it to be painted and decorated before anything else. At the beginning of the fifth month it will certainly be ready."
"I will gladly wait till then but you must do your best to hurry it on." The maids brought wine, and they spent the night most pleasantly together. Thenceforth Ximen Qing went every few days to visit Li Ping'er.
It was not long before Ximen Qing had finished some of the side rooms and the three-roomed apartment. Only the arbour still remained to be done. It was the Summer Day, the fifth day of the fifth month.
Li Ping'er made preparations, and invited Ximen Qing to unfold the three-cornered dumplings, and also to talk over the arrangements for the wedding. She had decided to send for the monks to sing a dirge on the fifteenth day of the month, and then she proposed that Ximen should take her to his house.
"Are you going to invite the Hua brothers to the ceremony?" Ximen Qing said.
"I shall send each of them a card, and they may come or not as they please," Li Ping'er said. So the matter was settled.
On the fifteenth day of the fifth month, she asked twelve monks from the Temple of Eternal Felicity to sing a dirge at her house. The same day Ximen Qing took three *qian* of silver as a birthday present for Ying Bojue, and gave Daian five taels to spend in celebration of Li Ping'er's coming out of mourning. Just before noon Ximen mounted his horse and went to Ying Bojue's house. Ping'an and Shutong rode behind him. At Ying's house the ten brothers were already gathered, with Ben the Fourth, the latest accession to the band. Bojue had engaged two young actors to play and sing and serve them with wine. When everybody was seated, Ximen Qing called the actors to him. One of them, Wu Yin'er's brother, he knew already but not the other, who knelt down and introduced himself as Zheng Feng, the brother of Zheng Aixiang.
Ximen Qing, who was sitting in the place of honour, gave each of the boys two *qian* of silver. They drank till it grew dark, and Daian appeared to escort his master home. The boy went to Ximen Qing and whispered, "Mistress Hua hopes you will not stay very late."
Ximen Qing winked at him and made to leave the table. Bojue cried, "You thievish bone of a dog! Come here and tell me what it is all about, or I will pull your little ears till they are both on the same side of your head. How many birthdays a year do you think I have? The sun is still high in the heavens, and you come here with a horse. Who told you to come? The ladies of your family, or someone else we know? If you don't tell me, I will never ask your father to find a wife for you, even if you live to be a hundred years old, you little bald-pated dog."
"Really," said Daian, "nobody told me. I thought it was going to be a rough night and that it would be better for Father to go home early, so I brought the horse and came to wait for him."
Ying Bojue questioned the boy for a long time but Daian did not tell him the true story.
"So you won't tell me?" Ying Bojue cried. "Well, tomorrow I shall hear all about it, and then I'll settle with you, little oily mouth."
He gave Daian a cup of wine and half a dish of cakes, and told him to go away and eat them. Soon afterwards Ximen Qing came down to change his clothes. He called Daian to a quiet place.
"Who has been at the Huas' house today?" he asked.
"Hua the Third has gone to the country, and Hua the Fourth has something the matter with his eyes. Only Hua the Elder and his wife were at the funeral banquet. Master Hua went away first, and, before his wife followed him, Mistress Hua took her into her room and gave her ten taels of silver and two dresses. She kowtowed to Mistress Hua."
"Didn't she say anything?"
"Not a word, except that, when Mistress Hua was married, she would come to pay her respects on the third day."
"Did she really say that?" Ximen cried.
"I would not dare to lie to you," Daian said.
This was extremely satisfactory. Ximen asked if the service was over. "The tablet has been burned and the monks have gone," said Daian. "Mistress Hua says she hopes you will go as soon as you possibly can."
"Very well," said Ximen, "go and get the horse ready."
Daian was about to do so, when Ying Bojue, who had been listening in the passage, suddenly shouted and frightened him. "You thievish little dog bone," he cried, "you wouldn't tell me but now I've heard everything. This is a nice little plot you and your father are hatching together."
"Don't make so much noise, you funny dog," Ximen Qing said.
"Talk nicely to me and I won't," Bojue answered.
They went back to the party, and Bojue told them all that had happened. Seizing Ximen Qing's hands, he cried, "Do you really call yourself a man, Brother? You have something like this on hand, and not a word of it do you mention to any of us. Why, if Hua the Elder had tried to say anything, all you had to do was to tell us, and we would have gone and dealt with him. One word from him, and we would have raised a fine big bump on him. There would have been no difficulty in getting his assent. We had no idea that this marriage was decided. Tell us all about it, or what use is there in calling ourselves a brotherhood? If we can serve you in any way, we will gladly go through fire and water. That is how we feel about you. Yet you keep your secrets from us."
"If you won't tell us," Xie Xida said, "we will tell Guijie and Wu Yin'er tomorrow. Then there will be trouble."
"Give me a chance to tell you," Ximen said, laughing. "The marriage has been definitely arranged."
"When is our new sister-in-law going to your house?" Xie Xida asked. "We must come and pay our respects, and you must engage four singing girls to serve us with wine. So we will celebrate your wedding."
"Of course," said Ximen, "I shall do myself the honour of sending you invitations."
"Far better drink the wedding cup now," Zhu Shinian said. Ying Bojue took the cup, Xie Xida the wine jar, Zhu Shinian held the dish, and the others knelt down. The two young actors also knelt and sang the thirteen melodies known as "Happy Is This Joyful Day." Ximen Qing swallowed three or four cups one after the other.
"If you invite us to take wine with you on the wedding day," Zhu Shin-ian said, "you must have these two boys at the house." Turning to the young actors, he said, "You must make a point of going that day." Zheng Feng replied, "We will most certainly attend the banquet."
After a while the wine was finished, and they all sat down to dinner. By this time it was dark, and Ximen Qing would stay no longer. He seized the first opportunity, and got up. Ying Bojue would have stopped him but Xie Xida said, "Let him go, Brother Ying. Don't make him late when he has such important business to attend to. Our sister-in-law will be angry." So Ximen managed to escape, and went to Lion Street.
Li Ping'er had taken off her mourning clothes and changed into a dress of bright colours. The fire and lamps were burning brightly in the hall. She had prepared the finest of dishes and wine, and had set a single chair in the place of honour. She asked Ximen Qing to take it. One of the maids held the wine jar, and Li Ping'er poured out a cup of wine and kowtowed four times.
"This day the tablet has been burned," she said. "I am most grateful for the favour which will allow me to assist you at your dressing. The joys of marriage with you will be joys indeed." She rose, and Ximen Qing rose in his turn to offer her a cup of wine. Then they both sat down.
"Did Hua the Elder and his wife have anything to say?" Ximen said.
"I took them to my room after the banquet," said Li Ping'er, "and told them about our marriage. Hua said that, three days after it, he would tell his wife to come and see me. I gave them ten taels of silver and two dresses. They both seemed quite satisfied. In fact, they thanked me again and again."
"If they talk in that strain," Ximen said, "I shall have no objection to their coming. We have nothing to be ashamed of. But if they begin to talk any nonsense, I will never forgive them."
"If they dare to make a sound, I will never forgive them either," Li Ping'er said.
Xiuchun poured the wine into inlaid silver cups and handed them to her mistress. They drank many cups together. Though love may diminish with age, wine improves more and more. It is a question of circumstances. Li Ping'er rejoiced because her wedding day was drawing hear, and was even more lively than usual.
"You were drinking at Ying's house," she said, smiling, "when Daian went to ask you to come and see me. Do they know anything about this matter?"
"Ying Bojue guessed," Ximen Qing said. "He tried to get the boy to tell them, and they teased me for a long time. The Brothers insisted on congratulating me. They asked me to give a dinner party and send for singing girls. They tossed the wine down their throats, cup after cup. When I thought I had a chance, I tried to get away but they held me back. I gave them pleasant words and unpleasant words, and at last they were compelled to let me go."
"They know a thing or two, all the same," Li Ping'er said. "They let you come away." Ximen Qing saw that she was burning with desire, and he was by no means cold himself. He could refrain no longer. They passed fragrant sweetmeats from one to the other, and pressed their cheeks together. Li Ping'er kissed him. "If you love me truly," she said, "you'll make me your wife soon. I feel like a prisoner here. Don't leave me here alone by day or night." They turned again to the delights of love.

## 038
## Censor Yü-wen Impeaches Commander Yang; Li P'ing-erh Takes the Amorous Doctor Chiang Chu-Shan as Mate

*To the tune "Partridge Sky"*

*She remembers that time in the studio when they had just met;*
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp shed only a half light.
*Thinking of the past, her dreaming soul deluded;*
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes, their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them will never be separated.[1]

The twentieth day of the fifth month was the birthday of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command. When the day came, Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver and two handkerchiefs in a packet, as his contribution toward the cost of the celebration. Then, having dressed himself to befit the occasion, he mounted a large white horse and, accompanied by four pageboys, set off for the commandant's home to offer his birthday greetings. Among the others attending the party were the judicial commissioner, Hsia Yen-ling, the militia commander, Chang Kuan, the battalion commanders Ching Chung[2] and Ho Chin, and other military officials. The guests were met with drinks at the door and received to the strains of martial music. A southern-style play, of the genre known as hsi-wen,[3] was performed for their entertainment, and four singing girls had been engaged to ply the guests with wine.
Tai-an took Hsi-men Ch'ing's outdoor clothes and went home with the horse. When the sun began to sink in the west, Tai-an set out on horseback to fetch his master.
As he was passing by the western end of Lion Street he ran into Old Mother Feng and asked her, "Mother Feng, where are you going?"
"Mistress Hua sent me to ask your master over," replied Old Mother Feng. "Silversmith Ku has finished the jewelry she ordered for the betrothal ceremony and delivered it today in a box. She wants your master to come and see it. She also has something she wants to talk to him about."
"My master's at Commandant Chou's place attending a party today," said Tai-an. "I'm on my way to fetch him. You can save yourself a trip. When I get there I'll give him the message."
"I'm imposing on you," said Old Mother Feng, "but, whatever you do, be sure to mention it. Mistress Hua is waiting for him."
Tai-an whipped up his horse and headed straight for the commandant's headquarters. The officials at the party were devoting themselves to their cups and having a high time of it.
Tai-an went up to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place at the table and said to him, "On my way back from home with the horse just now, I ran into Old Mother Feng in the street. Mistress Hua had sent her to invite you over. She said that Silversmith Ku had delivered the jewelry and she wanted you to come and see it. She also has something she wants to talk to you about."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he gave Tai-an some savories, soup, and rice to eat and prepared to make his departure. Commandant Chou was reluctant to let him go, blocking the door and foisting a large cup of wine upon him.
"Since you do me the honour, sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will drink this cup at your behest. But there is something I must attend to that prevents me from enjoying your hospitality to the full. Forgive me. Forgive me."
Thereupon, he:
*Drained it in one gulp,*
bade farewell to Commandant Chou, got on his horse, and headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's house. When he had finished the tea with which the woman welcomed him, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Tai-an to take the horse home and come to fetch him in the morning.
After Tai-an had left, Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to get the jewelry out of its box for Hsi-men Ch'ing to look over. All ablaze like golden fire, it was a fine set of jewelry indeed.
When it had been put away, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You won't have to wait any longer than the twenty-fourth for the presentation of the betrothal gifts, and we'll hold the ceremony proper next month, on the fourth."
The woman's heart was filled with delight. She promptly brought out the wine, and she and Hsi-men Ch'ing drank deeply and unburdened themselves to each other. After they had been drinking for a while, she ordered a maidservant to wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat in her room, and the two of them took their places inside the gauze netting.
*The incense was redolent of orchid and musk;*
*The bedspread was fashioned of mermaid silk.*
Taking off their clothes, they sat:
*Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh;*
*Drinking wine and making merry with each other.*
After some time:
*The glint of spring pervading their eyes;*[4]
*They were carried away by lecherous desires.*
Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by engaging the woman in the sport of clouds and rain for a while. After that, responding to a drunken whim, he ordered her to lie down across the mat and indulge him by "toying with the flute." Behold:
*To the tune "Moon on the West River"*
*The scent of orchid and musk pervades*
the gauze netting;
The delicate beauty lightly proceeds
to "play the flute."
Her snow-white jade body is visible
through the bed curtains;
It's enough to make one's "ethereal and
material souls take flight."
*A single cherry might describe*
her tiny mouth;
Tender stalks are not as gentle

as her fingers.
The talented gentleman is moved
to remark to his partner,
"I never knew the magic rhinoceros horn
could feel so good."[5]
At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in his cups, playfully asked the woman, "In the old days, when your Hua Tzu-hsü was still alive, did you ever do anything like this with him?"
*"When he wasn't asleep he was in dreamland,"*
the woman replied. "How could I ever have had the patience to do this sort of thing with him? All he ever wanted to do was fool around outside. And even when he came home, I wouldn't ordinarily let him touch me. Moreover, as long as the old eunuch director was alive, we slept in separate rooms. As for my husband, I used to curse him till he looked as though:
*His head had been sprayed with dog's blood.*[6]
If he gave me any trouble, all I had to do was tell the old eunuch about it and he'd give him a regular caning. He scarcely counted as a human being. What sort of stuff do you think he was made of, anyway? If I had played around this way with him it would only have given me the creeps. Who is there besides you who could suit me so perfectly? You're just what the doctor ordered. By day and by night, all I do is long for you."
The two of them fooled around for a while and then got back to business. Ying-ch'un waited on them, bringing in a small square box filled with assorted dainties, including nuts, rissoles, chicken and goose giblets and feet, and rose- and chrysanthemum-flavoured cakes. A small gold flagon was:
*Filled to the brim with carnelian-hued nectar.*
From dusk, when the lamps and candles were lighted, they intermittently played with one another and drank until the time of the first watch.
All of a sudden they were interrupted by the sound of loud knocking at the outer gate. When they sent Old Mother Feng to open the door and see who it was, it turned out to be Tai-an.
"I told him to come and fetch me tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What's he doing coming back at a time like this?"
When he called him into the room to question him, the pageboy made his way as far as the door in a state of obvious agitation. Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman were still in bed, so he did not dare go inside but he spoke to them from the other side of the portiere.
"Your daughter and son-in-law have arrived," he said, "along with a large number of boxes. The First Lady sent me to ask you to come home as quickly as possible to discuss the situation with her."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he didn't know what to make of it.
"At such an hour, what could have happened?" he wondered. "I'd better go home and see what's going on."
He got up hastily. The woman helped him on with his clothes and heated a cup of warm wine for him to drink.
Whipping up his horse, he went straight home, where he found the rear reception room brightly lit with lamps and candles. His daughter and son-in-law were both there, along with a large pile of boxes, beds and curtains, and other family belongings.
Hsi-men Ch'ing could hardly believe his eyes.
"What are you doing arriving home at such an hour?" he demanded.
His son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, kowtowed and said, with tears in his eyes, "Recently our kinsman, the venerable Yang Chien, was impeached by a supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny, with the result that an imperial edict has come down ordering his arrest and incarceration in the South Prison to await the final disposition of his case. His protégés, relatives, and employees have all been tentatively sentenced to public exposure in the cangue and military exile. Yesterday his factotum, Yang Sheng, by traveling day and night, managed to get word of this to my father. My father was thrown into such a state of consternation by the news that he directed me to take your daughter, along with some boxes of family belongings, and seek temporary lodging with you until things blow over. He himself immediately set off for my paternal aunt's place in the Eastern Capital, to find out whatever more he could. When things return to normal:
*Your kindness will be amply rewarded,*
*He will never dare to forget it."*
"Did your father give you a letter, or anything?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I've got his letter right here," said Ch'en Ching-chi, pulling it out of his sleeve and handing it to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing broke open the seal and found that it read as follows:
Respectfully indited by his devoted servant, Ch'en Hung,[7] for the perusal of my most virtuous kinsman, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
I will dispense with the customary formalities. The northern barbarians are currently encroaching upon our frontiers, and their incursions have extended beyond the borders of Hsiung-chou. The failure of the minister of war, Wang Fu, [8] to dispatch adequate defense forces has resulted in a military debacle in which our kinsman, the venerable Yang Chien, is also implicated. They have both been impeached on charges of the utmost gravity by a supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny.
His Majesty is incensed and has ordered their arrest and incarceration in the South Prison, pending a formal inquiry by the Three Judicial Offices. Their protégés, relatives, and employees have all, in accordance with precedent, been tentatively sentenced to military exile in frontier guard units.
On hearing this news, my entire family has been thrown into consternation, having no place to turn. I have taken the initiative of sending my son and your daughter, along with what they are able to carry with them in the way of boxes of family belongings, to seek temporary refuge in your household. I am leaving immediately for the capital, where I plan to stay with my elder sister's husband, Chang Shih-lien,[9] and await word of the final disposition of the case.
Once my affairs are in sufficient order to permit my return home:
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never dare to forget it.
Fearing that there may be some repercussions in the district, I have also ordered my son to provide you with five hundred taels of silver, in the hope that, as my kinsman, you will do what you can to cope with the situation.
I shall endeavor to requite you
in the future;
Not forgetting your kindness
as long as I live.[10]
Written in haste, by lamplight, I am unable to express myself more fully.
Date: The twentieth day of the middle month of summer.
*Signed: Hung, again, respectfully salutes you.*
By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing finished reading the letter he was extremely perturbed. He instructed Wu Yüeh-niang to prepare food and wine for his daughter and son-in-law, and ordered the servants to sweep out the three rooms on the eastern side of the courtyard in front of the main reception hall for the couple to stay in. The boxes of valuables were all stored away in Yüeh-niang's room in the master suite. Ch'en Ching-chi brought out the five hundred taels of silver and turned them over to Hsi-men Ch'ing to cover whatever expenses might be incurred in attempting to cope with the situation.
Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned his manager, Wu Tien-en, and gave him five taels of silver, along with instructions to go that very night to the office of the chief clerk in the district yamen and make a copy of whatever relevant documents had come down from the Eastern Capital. What did the texts in the government gazette actually say?
Memorial Submitted by Yü-wen Hsü-chung,[11] Supervising Secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for War, and Others
In Re: An Urgent Request for an Imperial Decision in Favour of Summary Execution for the Traitorous Ministers Who Abuse Their Power and Betray the National Interest, with a View toward Reinvigoration of Our Armed Forces and Elimination of the Barbarian Threat
Your servant has heard that the danger posed by the barbarians has existed since ancient times. In the Chou dynasty, the Hsien-yün; in the Han, the Hsiung-nu; in the T'ang, the T'u-chüeh; and in the Five Dynasties, the Ch'i-tan, all gradually became strong. And since our own Imperial Sung dynasty was established, the Great Liao has made incursions into the Central Plain for no little while. But I have never heard of a state being threatened by barbarians from without when it did not already harbour barbarians within.[12] As the proverb says:
When frost descends, the bell
of Feng-shan sounds;
When rain falls, the plinth under
the pillar sweats.[13]
That like breeds like is a necessary principle. The situation is analogous to that of a sick individual whose vital organs have long been ravaged by disease. When his natural vitality is sapped from within, he becomes susceptible to the penetration of malign influences from without. Once the entire body has become infected, not even Pien Ch'üeh of Lu[14] would be able to save him. How could he then long endure?
The present situation of the empire is just like that of an invalid in the final stages of debilitation. The ruler resembles his head; the chief ministers resemble his vital organs; and the lesser officials resemble his four limbs. If Your Majesty sits in state upon the throne above, and your officials fulfill their responsibilities below, the natural vitality of the body politic will be replenished within; its defenses will be strong without; and the menace of barbarian invasion will be eliminated.
At the present time, among those whose conduct has led to the menace of barbarian invasion, no one is more culpable than the grand academician of the Hall for the Veneration of Governance, Ts'ai Ching. His artful, specious, cunning, and dangerous nature, further abetted by the lack of integrity or shame, permits him to engage, indifferently, in slander and flattery. Above, he is incapable of supporting his sovereign in the exercise of his prerogatives, assisting in the primary tasks of ordering and transforming the realm. Below, he is incapable of promoting virtue or implementing policy, protecting and cherishing the common people. Solely devoted to fattening himself at public expense, he curries imperial favour in order to consolidate his position; engenders factions in order to conceal his traitorous designs; deceives his sovereign by keeping him in the dark; and underhandedly stigmatizes men of worth. The corps of loyal servants of the state has been dispersed;[15] the hearts of the citizens of the realm have turned cold; yet an unbroken stream of high officials, clad in crimson and purple, continues to congregate at his door.
Recently, as a result of the failure of his policy in the Ho-Huang region, the initiation of hostilities with the Liao, the cession of the three commandaries, the revolt of Kuo Yao-shih, [16] and the sudden proliferation of our losses, the Chin barbarians have broken their covenant and encroached upon the heartland of the empire. These egregious examples of betrayal of the national interest are all due to Ts'ai Ching's malfeasance.
Wang Fu is rapacious, mediocre, and unreliable; his conduct more befitting that of a buffoon. Having been dredged up by Ts'ai Ching, to whose recommendation he owes his post in the government, he was, before long, mistakenly entrusted with military power. He is ready to engage in appeasement in order to maintain his position but is quite without any policy to advance. Recently, on the occasion of Chang Ta's annihilation at T'ai-yüan, [17] he was too panic-stricken to know what to do. And now that the barbarians are threatening the interior, he has fled south with his wife and children, concerned only for his personal safety. [18] The enormity of this betrayal of the national interest is such that execution is too good for him.
Yang Chien was originally nothing but a gilded and pampered youth who, by availing himself of inherited privilege, and thereby exploiting the favour shown to the dead, has succeeded in obtaining access to military power and unwarranted responsibility for external defense. He is but an arrant traitor, feigning loyalty, [19] whose pusillanimity knows no parallel.
These three officials have conspired to form a cabal that fosters corruption in both the capital and provinces and is like a noxious venom gnawing at Your Majesty's vitals. For years now, their conduct has invited catastrophes and induced anomalies, destroying the health and vitality of the body politic. The burdens of corvée and taxation are heavy and vexatious; the common people are dislocated and scattered; banditry is rife; the barbarians have ceased to be loyal; the resources of the empire are exhausted; and the moral bonds that hold society together have broken down. Though we were to pluck out the hairs of our heads, they would not suffice to enumerate the crimes of Ts'ai Ching and his coadjutors.[20]
If your servants, who but await punishment in the aforesaid office in the discharge of their responsibilities as censors, were to see these traitorous ministers betray the national interest without calling the fact to Your August Majesty's attention, they would fail in their obligations to ruler and father, above, and violate the principles to which they have devoted a lifetime of study, below. We, therefore, humbly request an imperial decision, whether it be to relinquish Ts'ai Ching and the other malefactors of his faction to the hands of the penal authorities, in order to display your clemency; to subject them to the extreme penalty, in order to demonstrate their conspicuous disgrace; or to sentence them to public exposure in the cangue, in accordance with precedent, and condemn them to military exile on the distant frontier,[21] where they may contend against monsters and demons.[22]
Should such measures be adopted, there would be reason to hope that the favour of Heaven might be restored[23] and the hearts of the people made glad. Should the law of the land be thus reaffirmed, the barbarian threat would dissolve of itself. The empire would then be fortunate indeed! Your subjects would then be fortunate indeed!
This memorial had elicited an imperial rescript that read as follows:
Let Ts'ai Ching remain in office, for the time being, in order to assist Us in Our government. Let Wang Fu and Yang Chien be remanded to the Three Judicial Offices that will conduct a joint inquiry and report the result to Us.
Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.
There followed a quotation from the report of the joint inquiry by the Three Judicial Offices that read as follows:
Wang Fu, Yang Chien, and the other malefactors of their faction are found guilty of malfeasance in regard to their military commands. In permitting the barbarians to penetrate deeply beyond our frontiers and wreak havoc with our populace, they have sustained heavy losses of officers and men and abandoned control of our territories. For such crimes the penalty prescribed by law is execution. Among the henchmen, clerical subofficials, functionaries, relatives, and adherents who have abetted them in their iniquities are Tung Sheng, Lu Hu, Yang Sheng, P'ang Hsüan, Han Tsung-jen, Ch'en Hung, Huang Yü, [24] Hsi-men Ch'ing,[25] Liu Sheng, Chao Hung-tao, and others. For all of the above whose names have been ascertained, the recommended sentence is: public exposure in the cangue for one month, followed by military exile in frontier guard units.
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not read these documents nothing might have happened but having read them:
*In his ears all he heard was a*
*sighing rush of air,*
*As his ethereal and material souls fled*
*he knew not where.*
Truly:
*The shock affected all six of his vital organs,*
*including liver and lungs;*
*The fright damaged the three bristles and seven*
*apertures of his heart.*[26]
Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately turned his attention to the task of getting together a quantity of gold, silver, and valuable antiques, and seeing that they were properly packed.
He then summoned his servants, Lai-pao and Lai-wang, into his bedroom and gave them secret orders:
*Thus and thus, and*
*So and so:*
"Hire horses for yourselves and leave for the Eastern Capital this very night to find out what's happening. Make no effort to seek out the place where my relative by marriage, Ch'en Hung, is staying. If you get wind of any adverse repercussions, do your best to fix things up by any means you can think of, and hurry back to report to me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing had already provided the two men with twenty taels for their traveling expenses. Early in the fifth watch they hired drivers and set out on their way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to get to sleep all night long. Early the next morning he directed Lai-chao and Pen the Fourth to put a stop to the construction work in the garden and send all the artisans of the various trades home for the time being. He gave orders that the main gate of his compound was to be kept tightly closed everyday, that his servants were not to venture outside the premises except on specific business, and that if anyone were to knock they should not be admitted.
Hsi-men Ch'ing confined his activities to his own quarters, restlessly walking outside and then back in again from time to time.
*Worry piled upon worry;*
*Depression augmented by depression;*[27]
he was just like:
*A millipede on a hot surface,*[28]
and forgot his undertaking with Li P'ing-erh as effectively as though it had been:
*Relegated to outer space, beyond the nine heavens.*[29]
When Wu Yüeh-niang saw the way he kept to his room everyday:
*His brows contracted by melancholy;*

*His face exhibiting a worried hue,*[30]
she said to him, "It's a matter that primarily concerns the family of our kinsman by marriage, Ch'en Hung. After all:
*For every injustice there is a perpetrator;*
*For every debt there is a creditor,*[31]
why should you be so upset over something that hardly concerns you?"
"You're only a woman; what would you know about such things?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Ch'en Hung is our relative by marriage, and those two karmic encumbrances, my daughter and son-in-law, have moved into our house to live. This is an inescapable fact. The neighbours in the locality who have had reason to be annoyed with us in the past are extremely numerous. As the saying goes:
*The loom may stay put but the shuttle gets around.*
*When the sheep is beaten, the colt and donkey tremble.*[32]
If there should be any troublemakers about to point the finger at us or:
*Pull up the trees to investigate the roots,*[33]
you and I would be hard put to protect ourselves."
Truly:
*Though you sit in your house behind closed doors,*
*Catastrophe may yet strike you out of the blue.*[34]
Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home in a state of deep depression but we will say no more about it.
To resume our story, Li P'ing-erh waited first one day and then another but nothing happened. She sent Old Mother Feng to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place twice in succession but the main gate was:
*Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that*
*Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.*
She waited around half the day but nobody came out, so there was no way for her to discover what was going on.
When the twenty-fourth finally arrived, Li P'ing-erh again sent Old Mother Feng to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to deliver the jewelry she had had made for their betrothal and to ask him to come and have a word with her. Unable to get anyone to open the gate, she was waiting under the eaves of the house across the street when who should appear but Tai-an, who came out to water the horse.
On catching sight of her, Tai-an said, "Old Mother Feng, what are you doing here?"
"Mistress Hua sent me to deliver the jewelry," said Old Mother Feng. "Why is there so little sign of activity around here? She wants your master to come over and have a word with her."
"My master has been occupied with inconsequential affairs for some days," said Tai-an, "and hasn't had any free time. You'd better take the jewelry back with you for the time being. When I get done watering the horse I'll be sure to tell my master what you've said."
"My good fellow," said Old Mother Feng, "I'll wait right here if you'll just take the jewelry inside and speak to your master about it. Mistress Hua is annoyed enough with me as it is."
Tai-an was prevailed upon to tether the horse and go back inside. After some time he came out again and reported, "I've told my master what you said and he's agreed to accept the jewelry. He wants you to tell Mistress Hua to wait a few days longer until he's able to pay her a visit and speak to her in person."
Old Mother Feng went straight home and reported this message to her mistress, who had no alternative but to wait a few days longer.
Before she knew it, the fifth month came to an end and she found herself in the first decade of the sixth month.
*Pining by day and longing by night;*
*Of news from her lover she has none.*
*Beset by dreams, harried in spirit;*
*Her day of consummation is delayed.*
Truly:
*Too indolent to paint her moth eyebrows,*
*Too abashed to retouch her powdered face;*
*Her bosom swells with unexpressed resentment,*
*Her jadelike spirit is utterly distraught.*
The woman waited expectantly for Hsi-men Ch'ing but he did not come. Everyday:
*Her intake of tea and food diminished,*
*Her spirits became ever more deranged.*
At night:
*Sleeping alone upon her pillow,*
*She tossed and turned obsessively.*
Suddenly she heard a knocking at the gate and seemed to see Hsi-men Ch'ing coming in. The woman:
*Welcomed him at the door with a smile, and*
*Led him into the room by the hand.*
*She asked him why he had failed to keep their tryst, and*
*Each of them expressed their innermost thoughts.*
*Inseparable and impassioned,*
*They devoted the night to pleasure.*
*Only when the cock crowed and the day dawned,*
*Did he extricate himself and return home.*
The woman awoke with a start and gave a great cry but:
*Her soul had already escaped.*
Old Mother Feng hurried into the room to see what was amiss.
"Hsi-men Ch'ing just left," the woman said. "Have you locked the gate after him yet?"
"Your longing has addled your wits," said Old Mother Feng. "How could the Honourable Gentleman have been here? I haven't seen so much as his shadow."
From this time on, the woman's:
*Dreamscapes were haunted.*
Night after night she was disturbed by fox spirits with:
*Assumed names and appropriated identities,*
who came to sap her vitality. Gradually her countenance grew wan and emaciated; she lost her appetite and took to her bed.
One day Old Mother Feng said to the woman, "I've asked that doctor, Chiang Chu-shan, who lives at the end of Main Street, to come and see you."
This man was still young, no more than thirty.
*Petite in stature,*
*Precious in bearing;*
he was as frivolous and untrustworthy a person as you could find.
Invited into the woman's bedroom, he found her with:
*Misty locks and cloudy tresses,*
*Lying huddled in her bedclothes;*
looking, for all the world, as though she were suffering from insurmountable grief.
After he had consumed the obligatory tea, a maidservant placed a cushion in the appropriate spot and Chiang Chu-shan approached the bed and proceeded to palpate the patient's pulse. The fact that the woman was good-looking was not lost upon him as he embarked upon his diagnosis.
"In attempting to ascertain the cause of your indisposition just now, I find that your hepatic pulse is thready, becoming full after passing the *ostium pollicare*[35] on the wrist; whereas your yin pulses are sluggish in their ascent from the *ostium pollicare* to the *linea piscis*[36] at the foot of the thenar eminence. This indicates a condition, engendered by the six desires and seven passions, in which:
*Yin and yang contend with one another,*
*Producing alternate fevers and chills;*
and is characterized by a feeling of internal melancholic congestion that cannot be dissipated.
*It appears to be malaria but is not malaria,*
*It seems to be the ague but is not the ague.*
By day you feel:
*Enervated and sleepy,*
*Lacking all vitality;*
and by night:
*Your spirit will not keep to its abode,*
*But dallies with demons in your dreams.*
If not treated in time, it may develop into a consumptive inflammation of the bones that is nearly always fatal.[37] What a pity! What a pity!"
"If you will be good enough to prescribe an efficacious remedy," the woman said, "should I recover I will see that you are amply rewarded."
"I will, of course, do my best," said Chiang Chu-shan. "If you take my medicine I am sure you will be restored to perfect health."
When the consultation was over he got up to go. Li P'ing-erh gave Old Mother Feng five mace of silver and sent her after him to fetch the prescription.
That evening the woman took the medicine he had prescribed and was able to sleep undisturbed. Gradually her appetite improved and she began to comb her hair again and get up and about. In the space of a few days her spirits were back to normal.
One day, having prepared a feast and set aside three taels of silver, she sent Old Mother Feng to invite Chiang Chu-shan to come over so she could thank him for his pains.
Now, ever since Chiang Chu-shan had diagnosed Li P'ing-erh's illness he had been coveting her[38] for no little while. Thereupon he no sooner heard the invitation than he changed his clothes and presented himself. He was ushered into the reception room where the woman, resplendantly attired, came out to greet him.
After the tea had been twice replenished, she invited him into her boudoir where:
*Wine and viands were already laid out,*
*Amid the frangrance of orchid and musk.*
The young maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, stood in attendance, ready to present him with the three taels of silver on a platter decorated with gold tracery.
The woman:
*Lifting high a jade goblet,*
came forward and saluted him, saying, "The other day, when I was feeling so out of sorts, you were good enough to prescribe an efficacious remedy that provided immediate relief. Today I have prepared a meager cup of watery wine and invited you here to express my gratitude."
"That was only my professional responsibility" said Chiang Chu-shan, "something that principle required. What need is there to make so much of it?"
Then, seeing the three taels that were being offered in return for his services, he said, "How could I presume to accept such generous remuneration?"
"It is but a paltry expression of my gratitude, far less than propriety would demand," the woman said. "I sincerely hope that you will be good enough to accept it."
Only after repeated demurrals did Chiang Chu-shan consent to take it.
The woman presented him with the wine and they took their seats. After:
*Three rounds of drinks had been consumed,*
Chiang Chu-shan stole a glace at the woman and saw that she was:
*Modeled in plaster, carved of jade;*
*Astonishingly seductive and voluptuous.*
Without further ado he determined to see if he could get a rise out of her.
"I hardly dare ask," he said, "how old you are, young lady?"
"I'm twenty-three," the woman responded.
"There's another thing I'm curious about." he said. "Why on earth should someone like you, still in the flower of youth, born and bred in respectable circumstances, with ample means to supply all your needs, have been suffering the other day from a melancholic congestion and feeling of insufficiency?"
When the woman heard this, she smiled, and said, "I will not deceive you, sir. Since my poor husband passed away my domestic circumstances have been desolate. I am all alone in the world and beset by worry and longing. How could I avoid falling ill?"
"How long has it been, in fact, since your husband died?" asked Chiang Chu-shan.
"My poor husband," the woman replied, "during the eleventh month of last year, came down with an acute intestinal fever and died. It must be nearly eight months ago by now."
"Who prescribed for him?" asked Chiang Chu-shan.
"Dr. Hu from Main Street," the woman replied.
"You don't mean that Hu the Quack who lives in Eunuch Director Liu's house on East Street, do you?" said Chiang Chu-shan. "He never attended the Imperial Academy of Medicine as I did. What does he know about the pulse? Why did you call upon someone like that?"
"It was only because my neighbours recommended him," the woman said, "that I engaged his services. But my poor husband was simply not fated to live. It had nothing to do with him."

"Do you have any boys or girls?" Chiang Chu-shan went on to ask.
"No," the woman replied.
"What a pity," said Chiang Chu-shan, "that in the youthful prime of life you should be living the lonely life of a widow, without any children to keep you company. Why don't you seek some means of improving your lot? If you resign yourself to such melancholy seclusion how can you help becoming ill?"
"Recently I have entered into an engagement to be married," the woman said. "I'll be crossing my husband's threshold sometime soon."
"May I ask who it is you plan to marry?" inquired Chiang Chu-shan.
"It's the Honourable Hsi-men Ch'ing, who owns the wholesale pharmaceutical business on the street in front of the district yamen," the woman replied.
When Chiang Chu-shan heard this, he said, "That's bad! That's bad! Why would you want to marry him? I've often been called on to perform medical services in his household and know all about it. He's nothing but an influence peddler in the district yamen, and a loan shark as well. His home is a veritable flesh market. Not counting the maidservants, he's already got five or six bedmates, of higher and lower status, about the place, whom he subjects to a regular caning if they get out of hand. Whenever one of them fails to please him in any way, however slight, he calls in a go-between and disposes of her without more ado. He's:
*The foreman of the wife-beaters,*
*The leader of the lotharios.*
"It's a good thing you told me about it. Otherwise, if you had entered his household, it would have been like:
*A moth darting into the flame.*[39]
You would have been trapped, unable to escape in any direction, and it would have been too late to think better of it. Moreover, he has recently been implicated in an affair involving his kinsman by marriage and is holed up in his home, unable to come out. The construction work he has undertaken is only half-finished and has all been abandoned. Documents have been dispatched from the Eastern Capital ordering the prefectural and district authorities to arrest the implicated parties. It looks as though the buildings he was working on are likely to end up being confiscated by the government. Why on earth, for no good reason, would you want to marry someone like that?"
With this single speech he reduced the woman to tight-lipped silence. On top of everything else, there were all the valuables that she had stashed in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
She pondered this for some time and kicked herself, thinking, "No wonder when I invited him again and again he never showed up. It really was because he was embroiled in something at home."
She also noticed that Chiang Chu-shan's conversation was animated and his demeanor unassuming and respectful.
"If I could only manage to marry someone like that in the future," she thought to herself. "I wonder if he already has a wife or not."
"I am much indebted to you for your advice," she went on to say. "If any family of your acquaintance should have a suitable match to propose, I would have no reason to refuse it."
Chiang Chu-shan rose to the bait. "May I ask what sort of person you have in mind, so I can come tell you about it if I should hear of anyone that fits the bill?"
"It really wouldn't matter to me whether his social status were high or low," the woman said. "Someone just like you would be fine."
If Chiang Chu-shan had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them:
*His joy was so great,*
*He lost his bearings.*[40]
Thereupon, he got up from his seat, knelt down before her, and said, "I will not deceive you. I have lost my helpmate and no longer have anyone to look after me. [41] I have been living the life of a widower for some time and have no children. If you should be so considerate as to bestow your affections upon me and consent to a marriage alliance, it would fulfill the wish of a lifetime. Though I should have to:
*Carry rings and knot grass;*[42]
*I will never dare to forget it."*
The woman smiled and took him by the hand, saying, "Please get up. I don't even know how long you've been a widower, or how old you are. If you would like to marry me, you must engage a go-between to propose the match in order to fulfill the demands of propriety."
Chiang Chu-shan went down on his knees again and importuned her as follows: "I am twenty-eight years old and was born on the twenty-seventh day of the first month at six o'clock in the morning. Unfortunately, my poor wife died last year. I possess but meager resources and my origins are humble. Since you have been good enough to grant your gracious consent, what need is there for the intercession of a matchmaker?"[43]
When the woman heard these words she smiled, saying, "If you don't have any money, I have an old waiting woman here, named Feng, who can serve as go-between and witness. There's no need for you to present any betrothal gifts. All we need to do is pick an auspicious day and I will take you into my household as my husband. What do you think?"
Chiang Chu-shan hastily threw himself at her feet, with the words, "Young lady, you're like another set of parents to me, a reborn father and mother.[44]This must have been fated in a prior existence,[45]Such good fortune would suffice for three lives."[46]
Immediately, in the room they were in, the two of them exchanged loving cups, and the marriage contract was concluded. Chiang Chu-shan continued to drink with her until evening before going home. The woman discussed the situation with Old Mother Feng, saying, "Since Hsi-men Ch'ing's household's implicated in such an affair, the outcome is unpredictable. Moreover, I'm so alone here that when I fell ill I was lucky to escape with my life. Under the present circumstances, I might just as well take this doctor as my husband and try to make a go of it with him; why not?"
The next day she sent Old Mother Feng to communicate with him. She had selected the eighteenth day of the sixth month as the most auspicious date for the occasion, and when the time came she brought Chiang Chu-shan across the threshold and they became man and wife. After the "third-day celebrations" were over, the woman got together three hundred taels worth of capital and had a twelve-foot-wide segment of the frontage of her residence opened up to serve as a dispensary for Chiang Chu-shan. As a result, everything was put on an entirely new footing. [47]Originally, when he made calls on his patients, he had had to go on foot. But now he was able to buy a donkey to ride. He cut quite a figure as he came and went in the streets. But no more of this. Truly, even a puddle of stagnant water, completely undisturbed, may yet find its surface ruffled by the spring breeze.
The twentieth day of the fifth month was Major Zhou's birthday. Ximen Qing wrapped up five taels of silver and a pair of handkerchiefs, dressed himself in his best clothes, and, with four boys in waiting, set off to pay his respects, riding on a great white horse. Magistrate Xia, Captain Zhang, and other military gentlemen were there, and music and drama were performed for their entertainment. Daian took Ximen's cloak and went home with the horse. In the afternoon he came back to escort his master home. On his way through West Street, he met old woman Feng and asked where she was going.
"Silversmith Gu," the old woman said, "has finished my lady's headdress. He brought it today and she has sent me to ask your master to go and have a look at it. She wishes to have a talk with him."
"He is at a party at Major Zhou's house," the boy said, "and I am on my way to bring him back. Go home. I'll tell him what you say as soon as I see him."
"Tell him that my lady is expecting him."
Daian went on to Major Zhou's house. The gentlemen were still drinking together. He went to Ximen and said, "As I was bringing the horse for you, I met old woman Feng. She says the silversmith has finished Mistress Hua's headdress, and that her lady would like you to go and see it." This made Ximen anxious to get away but Major Zhou urged him to stay and pressed him to drink another great cup of wine.
"I am most grateful for all your kindness," Ximen said, "but really I mustn't drink so much. I have a number of things to attend to, and I'm sorry I can't permit myself the pleasure I should wish."
He drank the wine, said farewell to Major Zhou, mounted his horse, and rode off to see Li Ping'er. She welcomed him, and Daian was told to take the horse away and come back the next morning. Li Ping'er bade her maid take the headdress from its box, and show it to Ximen Qing. It was indeed very bright and handsome. They put it away again. Then they arranged that the wedding gifts should be sent on the twenty-fourth day of that month, and the bride should leave for her new home on the fourth of the following month.
Li Ping'er was now perfectly content. She brought wine and drank it with her lover in great delight. She told the maids to prepare the summer bed. The lovers took off their clothes and sat side by side within the silken net on coverlets of the rarest silk, perfumed with orchids and musk. They laughed and played together till the flush of desire mounted to their brows and the passion in their hearts made them tremble. Then they performed the mystery of clouds and rain, and did whatever the wine inspired. Ximen sat on the bed and made Li Ping'er place herself upon the cushions and play the flute for him.
Not from bamboo or stone, not played on strings,
This is the song of an instrument that lives,
That makes the emerald tassels quiver.
Who shall say whether the mode is *Gong* or *Shang*
Or *Jiao* or *Zheng?*
The red lips open wide; the slender fingers
Play their part daintily.
Deep in, deep out. Their hearts are wild with passion.
There are no words to tell the ecstasy that thrills their souls.
Ximen Qing was more than half drunk. "Did Hua Zixu enjoy himself with you like this?" he said.
"His life was one long dream," Li Ping'er said, "and he was still dreaming when he died. I had never any desire to act with him in this way. Day after day he went out and played the fool, and when he returned I would never allow him to come near me. In my father-in-law's lifetime I never shared my husband's room, and I cursed him till the dog's blood went to his head. I was always telling my father-in-law about him and getting him into trouble. No, I should have died of shame if anything of this sort had passed between us. But who could satisfy the cravings of my heart as you do? You act upon me just like a drug. I can think of nothing else by day or night."
They played some time longer, and once again performed the mystery. Yingchun brought in a small square box with all sorts of dainties, and a small golden jar of precious wine. From early evening till the first night watch they drank and sported together. Then, suddenly, they heard a loud knocking at the gate, and sent old woman Feng to see who was there. It was Daian.
"I told you to come for me tomorrow," Ximen Qing said. "Why have you come back tonight?" He told the boy to come in.
Daian, in a great flurry, ran first to the door of the room but, when he found that his master and Li Ping'er were in bed, he did not venture to go in. Standing outside the lattice, he said, "Sister and Brother-in-law have just come home, and brought all their luggage with them. The Great Lady has sent me to ask you to come home at once."
Ximen wondered what could have brought them at this late hour, and decided to go home. He jumped out of bed, and Li Ping'er helped him to dress. She gave him a cup of hot wine. He mounted his horse, and rode away.
In the hall the lamps and candles were lighted. His daughter Ximen Dajie and her husband were there with trunks, hangings, and furniture, all piled up. This alarmed him. He asked why they had come. His son-in-law, Chen Jingji, kowtowed and said, weeping, "A few days ago, the Censor brought an accusation against our kinsman, Marshal Yang, and his Majesty has given orders that he shall be put in the Southern Prison to await his trial. All his relatives and dependents have been put in the cangue, and banished. Yesterday Yang's people brought word to my father, traveling day and night without resting. My father was much upset and bade my wife and myself bring these things here for you to keep, for the time being. He has gone to the Eastern Capital to try to find out from my aunt what has really happened. When the danger has passed, he will make you a handsome present, and he will remember your kindness so long as he lives."
"Did your father send me any letter?" Ximen asked.
"Here it is," Chen Jingji said. He took a letter from his sleeve and handed it to Ximen, who opened it.
Your kinsman Chen Hong [he read] kowtows and offers this to the most worthy Ximen. The matter of which I have to speak is most urgent. Some time ago the border garrison sent word of a surprise attack, as a result of which the enemy have already invaded Xiongzhou. Wang, the Minister of War, did not send the necessary troops, and the military situation has become disastrous. In consequence of this our kinsman Yang has been accused by the Censor in the most direct terms. His Majesty is extremely angry and has ordered Yang's arrest and his incarceration in the Southern Prison. He is to be tried by three justices. Orders have been given that all those under him and his relatives shall be banished to the frontier.
When this news reached us, we were all much distressed, for we have no possibility of escape. I am sending my son and your honourable daughter, with their belongings, to stay with you for a while. I myself am just about to leave for the Eastern Capital, to visit my brother-in-law, Zhang Shilian, to see if I can hear any news. We hope to return when the matter has been settled.
I shall be eternally grateful to you for your kindness. Even in your district there may be some little difficulty, so I am giving my son five hundred taels that perhaps you will be good enough to expend on his account. I kowtow to express my gratitude, and so long as I have a tooth in my mouth I will remember your kindness.
Under the lamp, in haste, and without a proper expression of my affection.
Midsummer, the twentieth.
Your most obsequious kinsman Hong.
After reading this letter Ximen Qing was so perturbed that he did not know what to do with himself. He told Yueniang to give his daughter and her husband something to eat, and instructed the maids to make ready three rooms at one side of the hall for them to live in. The trunks and valuables were taken to Yueniang's room. Chen Jingji handed the five hundred taels to his father-in-law. Then Ximen gave one of his servants five taels, and sent him posthaste to the Town Hall to make a copy of the *Imperial Gazette* from the Eastern Capital. This is what it said:

**THE PROCURATOR FOR MILITARY AFFAIRS, YUWEN XUZHONG**

**A Memorial**

This is respectfully to implore Your Sacred Justice to punish the traitors in high places, that the morale of the army may be reconstituted and the disturbance at the frontier quelled.
I am not unaware that during every Dynasty there have been frontier attacks. In the Zhou dynasty this happened at Taiyuan; in the Han dynasty at Yinshan; and in the Tang dynasty at Hedong. During the period of the Five Kingdoms these attacks went on unceasingly. Since the great dynasty of Song has been established, our four frontiers have more than once been threatened. It is common knowledge that signs of decay without are an indication of the depredations of worms within. There is an old saying that when the bell booms in the hall, it is a sign of frost; and when the foundations are flooded, we may know that there has been rain. Good fortune and ill fortune alike have their proper causes. This is apparent in every case of sickness. When the heart and stomach suffer from disease, that disease has long been acquiring strength, and the patient's physique has been gradually sapped from within. Then, one day a cold wind blows, and the chill affects every part of his body. Even the physicians Lu and Bian can do nothing for that man and his days are numbered.
The condition of this Empire is precisely that of such an invalid, thin and wasted to a most precarious degree. Your Majesty is the head; the Ministers are the stomach and heart; and the lesser officers the limbs. Your Majesty sits in sublime state above the Nine Degrees, and, if the officers whose duty it is to carry on the business of the Empire are loyal and dutiful in their less exalted stations, then the natural vigor of the Empire will be sound indeed; the armies will afford protection against attack from without; and the menace of these barbarians can remain unheeded.
Now, of those who are chiefly to be held responsible for the trouble between our soldiers and the barbarians, there is none more infamous than Cai Jing, the Minister of the Palace of Chong Zheng. His courses of action have been both dangerous and unpolitic, and he is, moreover, improvident and without shame. Since he but flatters your Majesty, he is unable to assist you and your ministers to maintain the Sacred Authority and to improve the condition of the people. He is unable to foster virtue and concord among the lower orders, thus promoting peace among the people. He maintains himself by selling profit and position, seeking only for favour and to make his own position secure. He has set up a faction of his own, and harbours evil designs. All this he has done in secret, deceiving your Sacred Majesty. He has done injury to all the well-affected, and faithful men have been alienated. There is in his household none who has not robed himself in red and purple garments of office. Lately, when there broke out disorder in He Huang, he suggested a declaration of war in the east, and lost three districts. The rebellion of Guo Yaoshi was the cause of the Jin country's denouncing its treaty with us; and we lost its friendship.
These are his greatest misdeeds, and they are due entirely to his disloyalty. Wang Fu is greedy for money and misconducts himself, behaving like an actor but Cai Jing recommended him for appointment. Only a short time after securing this appointment, he led the army to disaster, and then, in the hope of saving his own skin, made a patched-up peace, without having any notion of further consequences. Now that Zhang Da has been defeated at Taiyuan, Wang Fu is terrified and all soldiers in a panic, so that by this time the invaders have already reached the interior, while he has escaped with his wife and children to the South. The guilt of such treasonable conduct deserves a punishment worse than death.
Yang Jian is nothing but a wealthy and ignorant young man, who relies upon the reputation of his ancestors and the favour of those in high official positions. He obtained a command but has succeeded very indifferently in this very vital position on the frontier. Though in reality he is a man of evil character, he poses as a devoted subject. His lack of determination is unrivaled.
These three officers have been in very intimate relations and, both within and without the Court, have been guilty of deceitful conduct. They are, as it were, the disease that has affected your Majesty's heart and stomach. For many years they have been the cause of troubles, and have brought upon us calamities that are sapping away the natural vigor of the body politic and undermining the State. Taxes have increased and the people have migrated in consequence. Bandits and thieves have shown unexampled boldness, and even bear arms against their lawful sovereign. The Imperial Treasury is exhausted and the laws of the Kingdom made of no effect. The crimes that these men have committed outnumber the hairs on their heads.
I accept responsibility for what I have said but it is my duty to point out that which is in need of amendment, and if, when I perceive traitors meddling in the affairs of State, I fail to convey the fact to Your Majesty, I should be untrue to myself and unworthy the favour of a Lord and Father. I pray therefore that Your Exalted Justice will summon Jing and the others before the officers of the law that due chastisement may be awarded.
The penalties suggested are
The Extreme Penalty
The Cangue
Banishment to a Far Country
Thus may the evil course be stayed and the favour of Heaven restored, while the desires of the common people will be satisfied. If the laws of this Empire are duly enforced, all disorders and troubles will come to an end of themselves. This would be indeed fortunate for our Empire, and for both officials and people.
Here follows the sentence of the Imperial Sage.
Cai Jing shall remain in office for the time being. Wang Fu and Yang Jian shall be sent before the Justices. Let them be tried with due care and the report sent to us.

**TAKE HEED, TAKE HEED, AND OBEY.**

**The Findings of the Court**

The traitors Wang Fu and Yang Jian are found guilty of negligence of duty as military commanders. They have permitted the soldiers of other nations to invade the interior, and many have lost their lives in consequence. Our armies have been defeated, many officers killed, and the territory of this Empire lost.

The Law decrees their execution.

Their households, secretaries, and underlings, Dong Sheng, Lu Hu, Yang Sheng, Bang Xuan, Han Zongren, Chen Hong, Huang Yu, Liu Sheng and Zhao Hongdao are all accessories in their crime, and, after wearing the cangue for one month, shall be banished to the frontiers as private soldiers.

When Ximen Qing had read this, his good humor vanished. He fell into a terrible state of agitation. At once he began to get ready gold, silver, and jewels, packed them with the greatest care, and, calling his two servants Laibao and Laiwang to his room, gave them secret instructions. They were to hire several beasts of burden, go to the Eastern Capital, traveling both night and day, and get all the information they could about the matter.

"It will be better for you not to go to Chen's house," Ximen said. "If the news you hear is bad, do what you can with these things, and come back and report to me." He gave them twenty taels of silver. Next morning, before it was light, they rose, hired drivers, and started for the Eastern Capital.

All that night Ximen Qing never closed his eyes. The next morning he ordered Laizhao and Ben the Fourth to cease work upon the garden and send all the workmen away. Everyday he had the gate most carefully secured, and no one in his household was allowed to go out except on business of the utmost urgency. Ximen himself paced up and down his room like a centipede on hot earth, brooding over his sorrows and anticipating all manner of trouble. As for his marriage with Li Ping'er, all thoughts of that were banished to regions beyond the clouds. Yueniang saw how greatly his anxieties weighed upon her husband—his appearance showed that clearly— and tried to console him.

"You need not be so distressed over this misfortune of our kinsman Chen," she said. "Hatred and debt always pursue their proper object."

"Oh, woman! what do you know about it?" Ximen cried. "Chen is my kinsman, and so long as my daughter and her husband live with us, they will be a millstone about our necks. Nearly all our neighbours detest us, and as the old proverb says: Though the loom be slow, the shuttle is speedy, and Beat the sheep, and the young donkeys will stir up trouble. If there are any small-minded men among them who take it into their heads to uproot the tree to see what the roots are like, neither you nor I will be safe from them, to say nothing of the rest of the family. Even if we lie low here and keep our door shut, trouble will find its way through the roof."

Ximen Qing remained sadly at home.

Li Ping'er waited for him, one day, two days but he did not come. She ordered old woman Feng to go to his house. The old woman went twice but the gate was shut as closely as the iron cover of a well, and, though she waited a very long time, not a sign of life was to be seen and she could not find out what was amiss. The twenty-fourth day was drawing near, and again Li Ping'er told old woman Feng to take the headdresses to Ximen and ask him to come and talk to her. The old woman knocked at the door but no answer was vouchsafed, so she took her stand beneath the eaves of a house opposite and waited. After a while Daian came out to water the horses, and saw her standing there.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"My mistress told me to bring these headdresses and find out why she has had no message from your master. She would like to see him."

"My master has been too busy to go out these last few days," Daian said. "Take the things back, old lady, and as soon as I have finished watering the horses I will tell him what you say."

"Take them in, good little brother," the old woman said, "and tell him that my lady is not at all pleased. I will wait here."

Daian tethered his horses, and went in. Some time later he came out again. "I have told my master, and he has taken the headdresses. He says you must ask your lady to wait a few days longer, and then he will come and see her."

The old woman went home and told her mistress all that had happened. For several days more she waited for him, till the fifth month had nearly come to an end. Morning and evening she longed for him to come but there was not a word from him. Her dreams were dashed to the ground, her good fortune seemed to have come to an end.

Ximen Qing's absence made Li Ping'er lose her appetite. She became very languid. Night after night she slept alone, tossing about on her bed, the same ideas constantly re-echoing in her mind. Suddenly, she heard a knocking at the door. Ximen Qing had come at last. She opened the door for him and smiled, taking him by the hand to lead him within. She asked why he had so long delayed their marriage, and they spoke to each other the deepest thoughts of their hearts. They spent the whole night in the enjoyment of their love. When day broke and the cock crew, he rose and went away. It was a dream. The woman woke with a start, gave a great cry, and fainted away. Old woman Feng heard and quickly ran in.

"Master Ximen has just gone," Li Ping'er said. "Have you bolted the door?"

"Where is his Lordship?" the old woman said. "Your mind is wandering. Not even his shadow has been here."

From this time onward Li Ping'er dreamed many unseemly things and, night after night, foxes came, taking upon themselves human form, and sucked away her very life. By degrees her face grew pale and thin. She could neither eat nor drink but lay all day upon her bed, unable to get up. With her permission, old woman Feng asked Doctor Jiang Zhushan of the High Street to come and see her. This Jiang was not more than thirty years of age, not very tall, and a very pleasant fellow. When he came in, Li Ping'er was lying on the bed with the bedclothes over her, her hair about her like a mist of cloud. The doctor could see that she was anything but well. After he had taken tea, a maid gave him a cushion, and he went to the bedside to feel his patient's pulse. This gave him an opportunity to find out how pretty she was.

"Lady," he said, "I think I know what is the matter with you. There is considerable irregularity in the pulse of the liver that, above the wrist, appears to be too strong. As for that pulse which is peculiar to ladies, it is so weak above the wrist that it cannot be felt but appears to have betaken itself to the hollow beneath the thumb. This is clearly due to the fact that the masculine and feminine principles are at war within you, thus interfering with the six passions and the seven emotions. So you sometimes feel hot and sometimes cold. Evidently you are suffering from repression of some sort. This produces a state of affairs rather like a fever, though it is not a fever, and makes you feel cold, though you are not cold. During the day it makes you weary, low-spirited, and anxious to lie down all the time; and at night you feel as though your spirit were on the point of departure, and dream that ghosts come and misconduct themselves with you. Unless something is done about it at once, the trouble will take a still more serious turn and you may even die. Oh, it is very serious, very."

"Doctor," Li Ping'er said, "please let me have some of your very best medicine, and when I am better you shall have a handsome fee."

"I will take the utmost care, Madam," Zhushan said, "and, when you take my medicine, you will soon be quite well again." He went away.

Old woman Feng took five taels of silver and went to the doctor's house for the medicine. The same evening Li Ping'er took it, and enjoyed an undisturbed night's rest. Gradually her appetite returned; she was able to get up and dress; and, in a very short time, was completely recovered.

One day she spent three taels, and sent old woman Feng to invite the doctor to dinner. As soon as Jiang Zhushan received the invitation, he dressed and went to the lady's house, for indeed, ever since he had first attended her, he had desired to possess her. Dressed in her most beautiful clothes, Li Ping'er received him in the hall. She made a reverence to him and offered him tea. Then she asked him to go into the inner room, where wine and dishes were set out and there was a delightful fragrance of orchids. Xiuchun came, holding a gilded tray upon which were three taels of white gold. Li Ping'er raised a jade cup high before her, and again made a reverence to the doctor.

"I was very ill," she said, "and I find it hard to express my gratitude to you for giving me such excellent medicine and curing me. Today, doctor, I have hastily prepared a poor cup of wine in token of my thankfulness, and now I beg you to accept it."

"It was no more than the business of a poor scholar like myself," Zhushan said. "It was my duty to come and attend you, and there was no occasion for you to give the matter a second thought." Then he saw the white gold. "I cannot possibly accept this," he said.

"It only represents a fraction of my gratitude," Li Ping'er said, "and is in no way what you deserve. But I hope, doctor, that you will condescend to accept it."

After much show of hesitation Zhushan finally accepted the present. Li Ping'er poured wine for him, and they sat down and drank together. Zhushan looked at her and realized how charming and attractive she was. He began to wonder what words he should choose to make an impression upon her.

"May I ask how old you are?" he said at last.

"I have lived twenty-four ill-spent years," she said.

"But that is a delightful age," Zhushan cried, "yet you live in such seclusion. You seem to be quite comfortably off and everything should be well with you. Why should you suffer so from depression?"

Li Ping'er smiled. "I will tell you, doctor," she said. "Since I lost my husband, things have been very lonely here. I live alone and worry. Does it surprise you that I should be ill?"

"When did your husband die?" the doctor said.

"It was the eleventh month of last year when he died of a fever. About eight months ago now."

"Ah," Zhushan exclaimed, "and whose medicine did he take?"

"Doctor Hu, who lives in the High Street, attended him."

"What? That foxy-mouthed Hu, who used to live in East Street in Eunuch Liu's house? He is not a member of the Royal Society of Medicine. He knows nothing about the pulse. What can have induced you to call him in?"

"The neighbours recommended him, and really I don't think it was his fault that my husband died so young."

"Have you any children?" Zhushan asked.

"None," said Li Ping'er.

"It is most unfortunate that you should have become a widow so young," Zhushan said, "especially since you have no children. Why do you not consider the desirability of another mode of life, something better than living by yourself like this and bringing sickness upon yourself?"

"As a matter of fact," Li Ping'er said, "I became engaged only a little while ago, and we are going to be married almost immediately."

"May I venture to ask to whom you are betrothed?"

"To Master Ximen, who keeps a medicine shop over by the Town Hall."

"Dear, dear!" Zhushan said. "Surely you haven't become engaged to him! I know him quite well. I often go to attend the members of his household when they are ill. He is the man who arranges things behind the scenes at the Town Hall and is mixed up in shady money-lending transactions. He makes quite a business of dealing in women. Apart from his maids, he must have at least half a dozen wives. He is always thrashing them. If one of his women upsets him in the slightest, he sends at once for the go-between and gets rid of her. In fact, he is a captain among wife beaters and a shining light among those who lead women astray.

"I am glad you have told me this, Lady, for otherwise you would have gone blindly to him, like a moth rushing headlong into a flame. If you do this, you will be in a hopeless position and it will be too late to repent. Moreover, only recently, one of his relatives has got into trouble. Ximen has had to hide away in his house and dares not go outside his own door. His new house is only half built but all the work upon it has been stopped. An order has come from the Eastern Capital that he is to be arrested and his property confiscated to the State. How can you think of marrying him?"

Li Ping'er could think of no answer to make to this. She reflected that all her wealth was stored in Ximen's house, and her foot tapped nervously upon the floor. "Now I know why he has not been to see me though I have invited him more than once," she said to herself. "There is evidently something seriously wrong. Zhushan seems very agreeable and pleasant. If I married a man like him, I should not do so badly but he may have a wife already for all I know."

"I am most grateful for your advice," she said aloud. "Thank you with all my heart. If you can think of anyone more suitable and will be kind enough to recommend him, I will take your advice."

Zhushan did not let this opportunity slip. "I have no idea what kind of man you would like," he said, "but I may be able to arrange matters for you, if you will speak quite frankly."

"Whether his family is of high or low degree is of no consequence to me," Li Ping'er said, "I should be quite satisfied with a man like you."

At this the doctor was so overjoyed he could hardly contain himself. He threw himself on his knees before her. "I have been long without a mistress in my house," he said, "and I am childless. Lady, if you will take compassion on me and link your destiny with mine, I can wish for nothing better. Even if you give me the work of a menial to do, I shall be eternally grateful."

Li Ping'er laughed and helped him to rise. "Please do not kneel," she said. "How long have you been a widower and under what star were you born? If you really wish to marry me, the Rites insist that you should send a go-between."

Zhushan kneeled down again. "I am now twenty-nine years old, and was born at the hour of the Hare on the twenty-seventh day of the first month. I grieve to say that my wife died last year. I am very poor, and, if you give me your promise, why should we trouble about a go-between?"

"If you cannot afford it," Li Ping'er said, smiling, "I have an old lady named Feng living with me, and we will make her our go-between. As for a betrothal present, don't worry about that. We will select an auspicious day, and you shall marry me and come and live here."

Zhushan bowed. "You are both father and mother to me, and have given me a new lease of life. Obviously our marriage was ordained several generations ago, and it is the greatest piece of luck I have had in any of my three lives."

They drank each other's health, and so this marriage was decided. Zhushan remained till nightfall. When he had gone away, Li Ping'er discussed the matter with old woman Feng, "Ximen Qing's," she said, "now in a bad way. It's impossible to say whether his luck will ever turn. There's no one to bother about me and I've been so ill I nearly died. The best thing I can do is to marry this doctor. There seems to be no reason why I'd not." The next day she sent old woman Feng with a letter to the doctor, saying:

The 18th day of the 6th month appeared to be an auspicious day. You're to come then and live with me.

3 days afterwards, she gave Zhushan 300 taels of silver, so that he could open a couple of rooms and decorate his surgery tastefully. Before this, he had always gone on foot to visit his patients. Now he bought a donkey and rode up and down the street.

**039**

**Lai-pao Takes Care of Things in the Eastern Capital; Ch'en Ching-chi Supervises the Work in the Flower Garden; Ximen Qing Bribes Officers of the Court**

It is deplorable but man's heart is more venomous than a snake;
Who is aware that the eye of Heaven rolls as relentlessly as a wheel?
The property once purloined from one's neighbour to the east;
Will someday revert to the family on the north.
Unrighteous riches are like snow sprinkled with scalding water;
Unearned property is like sand propelled by the tide.
If one takes craft and cunning to be the secret of success;
It will prove as evanescent as the morning and the evening clouds.

At this point, the story divides into two. We will say no more, for the moment, about Chiang Chu-shan's marriage into Li P'ing-erh's household but return to the story of Lai-Pao and Lai-Wang's trip to the Eastern Capital to fix things up on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf. Every morning they took to the purple road; each evening they tramped the red dust. When hungry they ate, when thirsty they drank; proceeding by moonlight, enveloped in stars. One day, they arrived at the Eastern Capital, entered through the Myriad Years Gate, and sought out an inn at which to take lodgings for the night. The next day, they set out to see what they could learn in the streets. By listening to the "wind-borne words" of passers-by who put their heads together to whisper, Gossiping in the streets and discoursing in the alleys, they ascertained that on the previous day the report of the joint inquiry with regard to the minister of war, Wang Fu, had elicited an imperial rescript confirming the sentence of execution after the Autumn Assizes. But because not all of the relatives and adherents of Commander Yang Chien had yet been apprehended, a final determination of his case was still pending, though further developments were expected to occur that very day. Lai-pao and his companion, carrying their presents with them, lost no time in making their way to the gate of Ts'ai Ching's residence. Since they had come to the capital to take care of things twice before, they already knew their way around. Taking their stand beneath the commemorative arch on Dragon's Virtue Street, they waited to see what they could find out about the situation inside the mansion. Before long, they saw a figure, clad in black, hurriedly coming out of the grand preceptor's residence and heading toward the east. Lai-pao recognized him to be the factotum, Yang Sheng, on the domestic staff of Commander Yang Chien. He was on the verge of stopping him to ask how matters stood when he thought to himself, "The master didn't tell me to call on him." So he held his peace and let him go his way. After waiting for some time, the two of them went up to the door of the mansion and saluted the gatekeeper with a deep bow, saying, "Might we ask, is His Honour, the grand preceptor, at home or not?"

"His Honour is not at home," the gatekeeper replied. "He has not yet returned from the deliberations at court. Why do you ask?"

"If you would be so kind," Lai-pao continued, "as to invite out the major-domo, Chai Ch'ien; I have something to report to him."

"The majordomo, Uncle Chai, is also not in," the functionary replied. "He went out together with His Honour."

"Wait a minute," Lai-pao thought to himself. "He's not being very forthcoming. He must be expecting to receive a little something for his pains."

Thereupon, he pulled a tael's worth of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to him.

The functionary took it and then asked, "Is it His Honour you want to see, or His Excellency, the academician? If it's His Honour you want, the person to go through is the principal majordomo, Chai Ch'ien. If it's His Excellency you want, the person to go through is the secondary majordomo, Kao An. Each of them has his own responsibilities. Moreover, His Honour has not yet returned from court; only His Excellency, the academician, is at home. If you have something to take up with him, I can invite out Majordomo Kao for you. Whatever your business may be, he can arrange an interview with His Excellency for you. It's all the same."

Lai-pao took advantage of the occasion by equivocating, "We are here on business from the household of Commander Yang."

When the functionary heard this, he dared not be remiss but went straight into the mansion. After some time, Kao An appeared.

Lai-pao hastily made his obeisance and offered him ten taels of silver, saying, "I am a servitor of Commander Yang's who came to get the news from His Honour along with the factotum, Yang Sheng. Because I stopped on the way to get something to eat, I'm a bit late. It never occurred to me that he would come right ahead, so I was unable to catch up."

Kao An accepted the gratuity, saying, "Your factotum, Yang Sheng, left just a minute ago. His Honour is still detained at court. If you will wait a little bit, I'll see if I can arrange an interview for you with His Excellency."

So saying, he conducted Lai-pao past the great reception hall in the second courtyard, through an interior gate on one side, and up to a spacious eighteen-foot-wide structure that was situated with its back to the north and its front facing south. This building was adorned with a green-painted balustrade and displayed a vermilion plaque over the lintel that had been presented by the emperor himself. It was inscribed with four large gold characters in the imperial hand, set off against an intaglio ultramarine ground, that read "The Academician's Music Chamber."

It so happened that Ts'ai Ching's son, Ts'ai Yu,8 was also a favourite of the emperor's. At the time in question he held concurrently the posts of academician of the Hall of Auspicious Harmony, minister of rites, and superintendent of the Temple of the Supreme Unity.

Lai-pao waited outside the door while Kao An went in to confer with his master. When he came out, he summoned Lai-pao to follow him inside and kneel in the middle of the hall. A beaded blind was suspended at the upper end of the room, behind which Ts'ai Yu was seated, wearing an informal gown and a soft cap.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"I am a servant of Commander Yang's kinsman, Ch'en Hung," Lai-pao replied. "I came in the company of the commander's factotum, Yang Sheng, in order to ask His Honour for news. Unexpectedly, he got a head start on me, and I have been unable to catch up with him."
Thereupon, he pulled a document out of his breast pocket and handed it up.
When Ts'ai Yu saw that the words "Five hundred piculs of white rice"9 were written on it, he called Lai-pao to come up closer, and said to him, "His Honour, because of the allegations against him on the part of the censors, has for some days now avoided participation in the work of the Secretariat. Responsibility for such matters, including yesterday's report of the joint inquiry of the Three Judicial Offices, is in the hands of the minister of the right, Li Pang-yen.10 It is said that, with regard to the accusations against Commander Yang, news leaked out of the palace yesterday that His Majesty is disposed to be magnanimous and will reserve the matter for special treatment. Those of his subordinates and employees whose names have been ascertained will be tried as soon as the investigation is completed. You would be well advised to go to Li Pang-yen's place to make your plea."
Lai-pao kowtowed repeatedly, saying, "I have no entrée to Minister Li's mansion. I hope that Your Excellency will deign to show me some consideration, for Commander Yang's sake."
"Go to the area just north of the Heavenly River Bridge," Ts'ai Yu responded, "and look for a great gateway standing at the top of a rise. Ask for the residence of the minister of the right, grand academician of the Hall for Aid in Governance, and concurrently minister of rites, Li Pang-yen. Everyone will know where it is. However, I might as well send someone from my staff to take you there."
There and then, he ordered an usher to fetch a sheet of stationery, affixed his seal to it, and sent the majordomo, Kao An, to escort him to Minister Li's place and argue, thus and so, on his behalf. Kao An took the document and accompanied Lai-pao out the gate of the mansion, where they picked up Lai-wang to carry the presents. After traversing Dragon's Virtue Street they headed straight for the gate of Li Pang-yen's mansion above the Heavenly River Bridge.
It so happened that Li Pang-yen had just returned home after the morning audience. He was at the door, dressed in a scarlet crepe robe, with a jade-ornamented girdle about his waist, in the act of seeing off a senior official, who got into his sedan chair and went his way. When he returned to the reception hall, the gatekeeper announced that His Excellency, the academician Ts'ai Yu, had sent his majordomo to see him. He first summoned Kao An into his presence and talked to him for a while before calling on Lai-pao and Lai-wang to come inside, where they knelt down below the dais at the upper end of the hall. Kao An stood to one side and passed up Ts'ai Yu's sealed letter and the list of presents. Lai-pao then proceeded to make a formal presentation of the gifts from below.
When Li Pang-yen saw them, he said, "In view of the fact that you are asking a favour on behalf of His Excellency, Ts'ai Yu, and that you also represent a kinsman of Commander Yang's, how could I ever accept these presents? Moreover, as far as Commander Yang is concerned, yesterday His Majesty's heart was moved to clemency, so his problems are already over. The only thing is that a number of his subordinates, because of the gravity of the charges brought by the censors, are sure to be tried and sentenced."
There and then, he ordered an attendant clerk to fetch the list of names that had been forwarded by the Office of Scrutiny the day before and show it to Lai-pao. It read as follows:
Under the name of Wang Fu: clerical subofficial Tung Sheng; henchman Wang Lien; and foreman Huang Yü.
Under the name of Yang Chien: miscreant clerical subofficial Lu Hu; factotum Yang Sheng; domestic clerks Han Tsung-jen and Chao Hung-tao; foreman Liu Sheng: relatives and adherents Ch'en Hung. Hsi-men Ch'ing, Hu the Fourth, etc.
All of the above-named persons:
Fall into the category of
mere falcons and hounds;11
Are of the same ilk as the
"fox who flaunted the tiger's might."12
By manipulating their superiors they have been able to take advantage of their power to do harm to others. In rapaciousness and cruelty they are without parallel, and the catalogue of their abuses has reached mountainous proportions. On their account the common people have been made to knit their brows and the marketplaces are in an uproar.
We humbly request that Your Majesty relinquish the members of this entire faction to the hands of the judicial authorities and either condemn them to military exile on the distant frontier, where they may contend against monsters and demons, or subject them to condign punishment, in order to reaffirm the law of the land. They ought not to be permitted to remain at large for even a single day.
When Lai-pao read this document, he was thrown into consternation and kowtowed repeatedly, pleading, "I am a retainer of Hsi-men Ch'ing's. I hope Your Honour will see fit to open wide your all-embracing heart and save my master's life."
Kao An also got down on his knees and made a plea on his behalf.
When Li Pang-yen saw that he was being offered five hundred taels of silver to deal with but a single name, he could hardly refuse to do the requested favour. There and then, he ordered his attendants to bring in his writing desk, took up his brush, and so altered the name on the document that, instead of reading Hsi-men Ch'ing, it read Chia Lien.13 At the same time he indicated his acceptance of the presents and had them put away.
When Li Pang-yen had finished taking care of the matter, he wrote a note in reply to the academician Ts'ai Yu, and also rewarded Kao An, Lai-pao, and Lai-wang with a sealed packet containing fifty taels of silver. Once they were out in the street, Lai-pao and Lai-wang took their leave of the majordomo, Kao An, and went back to their inn, where they got their luggage together, paid the bill, and set out posthaste to return to Ch'ing-ho district.
As soon as they arrived home, they went to see Hsi-men Ch'ing and told him, from beginning to end, everything they had done in the Eastern Capital. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard what they had to say it was:
Just as though he had been dunked in a
tub of ice water.
"It's a good thing I sent someone to take care of things," he said to Wu Yüeh-niang. "Otherwise, who knows what might have happened?"
Truly, on this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing's life was like:

Lai-pao Takes Care of Things in the Eastern Capital

The setting sun that has already sunk
behind the western hills;
When it is summoned forth once more
to scale the Fu-sang tree.14
Only then did he feel as though:
The stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground.
By the time two days had gone by, his gate was no longer closed, the construction work in his garden was resumed, and he began, gradually, to appear in public again.
One day, Tai-an was riding on horseback along Lion Street when he noticed that a large pharmaceutical shop had been opened in the front part of Li P'ing-erh's residence, with sizable stocks of raw and prepared pharmaceuticals visible within. There was a small red counter, a lacquered plaque over the door, and a shop sign hanging outside. Business appeared to be brisk.
When he got home, he told Hsi-men Ch'ing about it.
Not yet knowing that Chiang Chu-shan had married into Li P'ing-erh's household, Tai-an merely said, "Mistress Hua has acquired a manager somewhere and opened a pharmaceutical shop."
On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing only half believed it.
One day, in the middle decade of the seventh month, when:
The autumn wind begins to sough, and
The jade dew grows more chilly,15
Hsi-men Ch'ing was riding his horse along the street when he ran into Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta.
The two of them called him to a halt and when he dismounted saluted him, saying, "Brother, where've you been keeping yourself all this while? We went by your place several times but saw that the gate was shut and didn't venture to intrude. We've been utterly at a loss for lo, these many days. Really, Brother, what have you been up to at home, anyway? Have you taken our new sister-in-law to wife? You haven't invited us yet to help celebrate the occasion."
"It was something I didn't feel like mentioning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Because the Ch'en family, to whom I'm related by marriage, got into a sticky predicament, I had to busy myself with their affairs for a few days. The wedding has had to be postponed."

"We didn't know you had anything to worry about," said Ying Po-chüeh. "But now that we've run into you today, we're not about to let you get away scot-free. Come share three cups with us at Wu Yin-erh's place in the licensed quarter. It will help dispel your gloom."
So saying:
Without permitting any further explanation,
they dragged Hsi-men Ch'ing off into the licensed quarter, leaving Tai-an and P'ing-an to follow after them with the horse. Truly:
On the return trip one only grieves
that the days are short;
When homesick one is prone to regret
that the horse is slow.
Worldly wealth, painted faces, and wine
in the sing-song houses;
Who is there who is not deluded
by these three things?16
That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing allowed himself to be dragged off to Wu Yin-erh's place by the two of them, where they proceeded to drink the day away. Not until evening began to fall and he was half inebriated did they let him go.
Whipping up his horse, he was passing by the end of East Street on his way home when he ran into Old Mother Feng, who was coming from the south in a great hurry.
Hsi-men Ch'ing reined in his horse and asked, "Where are you going?"
"Mistress Hua sent me to attend the Ullambana17 services at the temple outside the South Gate," replied Old Mother Feng. "She asked me to have a coffer of paper money burned on behalf of the deceased Hua Tzu-hsü. I have had to hurry in order to get back before the gates are closed."
"Is Mistress Hua at home and well?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, drunkenly. "I'll come have a word with her tomorrow."
"Why should you ask after her anymore, sir?" demanded Old Mother Feng. "You had a ready-made, fully cooked meal there for the asking but you let someone snitch the pot away from under your very nose."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was astonished.
"You don't mean to say she's married someone else?" he asked.
"Mistress Hua sent me over to your place to deliver the jewelry again and again," Old Mother Feng replied. "But I was never able to see you. Your gate was closed. I persuaded your servant to go inside and urge you to action but you didn't pay any attention. Now someone else has taken her. What have you got to say about it?"
"Who is it?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Old Mother Feng told him the whole story, from beginning to end. How, during the third watch in the middle of the night, the woman had been troubled by fox spirits and had fallen ill. How she gradually approached the brink of death. How she had engaged Dr. Chiang Chu-shan who lived on Main Street to come and see her. How she had taken his medicine and subsequently recovered. How, on such and such a day, she had brought him across the threshold and they had become man and wife. And how she had now produced three hundred taels worth of capital and set him up with a pharmaceutical shop of his own.
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this nothing might have happened but having heard about it, he was so angry he tried to stamp his feet though he was still on horseback.
"That's bad!" he called out. "If you'd married anyone else, it wouldn't bother me. But how could you bring yourself to marry a stunted little cuckold like that? What can he do for you?"
Thereupon he whipped up his horse and headed straight home. He had just dismounted and was going through the inner gate when he came upon Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and his daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in the courtyard outside the front reception hall, where they were amusing themselves by skipping rope18 in the moonlight. As soon as they saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh withdrew to the rear of the compound. P'an Chin-lien, alone, remained behind, leaning against one of the pillars of the reception hall while she fiddled with her shoe.
"So you whores are bored enough to scream, are you!" Hsi-men Ch'ing shouted at her, drunkenly. "Don't you have anything better to do than jump rope?"
As he spoke, he went up to Chin-lien and kicked her twice. When he arrived in the rear of the compound, instead of going into Wu Yüeh-niang's room to change his clothes, he went back to an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard that he was accustomed to use as a study, where he demanded his bedding and proposed to spend the night. All the while, he proceeded to:
Beat the maidservants, and
Abuse the pageboys,
giving every indication of being in a foul mood.
His womenfolk huddled together in consternation, not knowing how to account for it. Wu Yüeh-niang was very critical of Chin-lien.
"You could tell he was drunk when he came in," she said. "All you had to do was take a few steps to get out of his way. Instead of which, you did everything you could to attract his attention, doubling up with laughter and fiddling with your shoe. As a result:
The locust and the grasshopper,
Are cursed in the same breath."19
"It's bad enough to abuse us," said Meng Yü-lou, "but how can he call our elder sister a whore? The unprincipled good-for-nothing!"
"It seems I'm the only one in the house fit to be taken advantage of," said Chin-lien, picking up where Yü-lou had left off. "The three of you were all there, just as I was but I'm the only one who got kicked. It would appear that some people are more privileged than others."
This incensed Yüeh-niang, who said, "Then why didn't you get him to give me a kick too, just for starters? If you're not privileged around here, I'd like to know who is? You don't know your place, you lousy baggage but at least I keep quiet about it; while you're always spouting off, yakkety-yak, with that mouth of yours!"
When Chin-lien saw that Yüeh-niang was angry, she tried to deflect the conversation in an effort to cover her tracks.
"Sister," she said, "that's not it at all. The fact is, whenever he gets upset anywhere, for whatever reason, he vents his spleen on me. He's always opening his eyes wide and threatening a thousand, if not ten thousand, times to beat me to a stinking pulp."
"Whoever told you to provoke him in the first place?" Yüeh-niang demanded.
If he doesn't beat you,
Should he beat the dog instead?"
"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "why don't you call in the pageboy and ask him where he's been drinking today? Why should he have gone out in a perfectly good mood in the morning and come home in such a state?"
In no time at all, Tai-an was summoned into their presence and subjected to interrogation.
"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang railed at him. "If you don't tell the truth, I'll send for one of the older servants to hang you up and give you a real flogging. You and P'ing-an will both get ten strokes with the heavy bamboo."
"Don't beat me, mistress," said Tai-an. "I'll tell you the truth. Today the master, along with Uncle Ying the Second and company, had a drinking party in the Wu family establishment in the licensed quarter. They broke up early and, as he was passing the end of East Street on the way home, he ran into Old Mother Feng. She told him that Mistress Hua, having waited for him in vain, had married that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan who lives on Main Street. The master was as upset as could be all the way home."
"I can well believe it," said Yüeh-niang. "So that shameless perverted whore had such hot pants she couldn't wait to get married, did she? And now he comes home and vents his spleen on us."
"Mistress Hua didn't marry herself off to Dr. Chiang Chu-shan," said Tai-an. "She brought him across the threshold into her own household. And now she has put up the capital he needs to open a really prosperous big pharmaceutical shop. When I came home and told the master about it, he didn't, at first, believe it."
"If you stop to consider it," said Meng Yü-lou, "how long has her husband been dead, anyway? To marry someone like that, before her mourning period is even over, simply won't do at all."
"Nowadays," said Yüeh-niang, "who pays any attention to what will, or won't, do? It's not as though she were the only one with such hot pants she couldn't wait to get married until the mourning period for her husband was over. From whores like that, who spend all their time with their lovers:
Lolling in their cups, or
Snoozing in a stupor,20
what kind of marital fidelity can you expect?"
Gentle reader take note: This speech of Yüeh-niang's;

Hit two people with one swipe of the stick.21
Both Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien had remarried before their mourning periods were over. When they heard these words, all they could do was return to their quarters, feeling somewhat discomfited. But enough of this. Truly:
One may find things less than satisfactory
eight or nine times out of ten;
But it is seldom wise to tell anyone about
even two or three of them.22
To resume our story, that evening Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard.
The next day, he arranged to have his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, cooperate with Pen the Fourth in the task of supervising the construction work in the garden and handling the accounts, and he reassigned Lai-chao to responsibility for the main gate. His daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, spent the daylight hours in the rear of the compound, joining in the amusements of Wu Yüeh-niang and the other womenfolk, and only in the evening returned to the rooms on the eastern side of the front courtyard to sleep. Ch'en Ching-chi, on the other hand, spent his days in the garden supervising the construction work and did not venture as far as the rear reception hall unless asked. His meals were brought out to him from the back of the compound by pageboys. As a result, the female members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had not even had a chance to meet him.
One day, Hsi-men Ch'ing was away from home, attending a farewell party for Battalion Commander Ho Chin of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Wu Yüeh-niang had been feeling concerned for some time that ever since Ch'en Ching-chi had moved in with them he had been working hard supervising the construction in the garden, and they had never even invited him for a meal to express their appreciation for his labours.
On this occasion, she said to Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh, "I've wanted to do something about it but have been afraid my husband would criticize me for interfering; if I don't do anything, though, it just doesn't seem right to me. When someone else's child is visiting you and gets up early and goes to bed late everyday, working as hard as he can, to accomplish some task on your behalf, is it right that no one should think of some way of thanking him for his efforts?"
"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "you're the mistress of the household. If you don't concern yourself about it, who else is going to do so?"
Wu Yüeh-niang thereupon sent orders to the kitchen to prepare a table of wine, delicacies, and savories, and at noon she invited Ch'en Ching-chi to come in and share a meal with them.
Ch'en Ching-chi dropped his work, told Pen the Fourth to take over, and went straight into the rear compound. When he had finished bowing and paying his respects to Yüeh-niang, he sat down to one side. Hsiao-yü provided him with tea and, after he had done drinking it, brought in a table for him and served up a selection of vegetable dishes and hors d'oeuvres.
"Son-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you've been working hard everyday supervising the construction in the garden. I've wanted to invite you in for a visit but haven't had the opportunity. Today your father-in-law is not at home and I'm not otherwise engaged, so I've prepared a cup of watery wine as a means of expressing our appreciation for your labours."
"Your son is much indebted to both of you for your kindness," said Ching-chi. "What labours have I performed that you should put yourself to so much trouble?"
Yüeh-niang offered him a drink and Ching-chi sat down again to one side. Before long, the full complement of delicacies arrived, and Yüeh-niang kept him company for a while as he drank.
"Go and invite our daughter to join us," she said to Hsiao-yü.
"Mistress Ch'en is busy right now," said Hsiao-yü. "She'll be here in a minute."
Before long, they heard the sound of dominoes23 being played in the inner room.
"Who is it playing dominoes?" Ching-chi asked.
"Your wife is playing dominoes with my maidservant, Yü-hsiao," replied Yüeh-niang.
"You can see she has no sense of propriety," said Ching-chi. "When you call for her, she doesn't come but stays in the room and goes on with her game."
Sometime later, Hsi-men Ta-chieh lifted aside the portiere and came into the parlour, where she sat down across from her husband to have a drink with him.
"Is our son-in-law any good at dominoes?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"He knows something of the rudiments," said Mistress Ch'en.
At that time, Wu Yüeh-niang thought of Ch'en Ching-chi only as a worthy son-in-law and did not realize that, in fact, he was a young scamp. When it came to poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies; backgammon and elephant chess; or the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, there was:
Nothing he had not mastered,
Little he did not know.
There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:
Artful and accomplished from his youth,
Romantic and dashing as can be;
He loves to wear duck green, spend
newly minted silver,
Or take a hand at backgammon
or elephant chess.
Master of the p'i-p'a, pipes, and woodwinds;
Adept at fowling, horse racing, and kick-ball;
There is only one chink in his armor:
When he sees a pretty face he's a goner.
"Since your husband knows his dominoes," said Yüeh-niang, "why don't we all go inside and play a few hands together?"
"You and my wife play, Mother," said Ching-chi. "Your son really oughtn't to presume."
"It's all in the family, Son-in-law," said Yüeh-niang. "What is there to worry about?"
So saying, she led the way into the inner room. There they found Meng Yü-lou sitting on the bed, over which a madder-red strip of felt had been placed, playing with the dominoes.
On seeing Ch'en Ching-chi come in, she got up to go but Yüeh-niang said, "It's only our son-in-law, not an outsider. Just give him a bow in greeting."
Then, turning to Ch'en Ching-chi, she said, "This is your Third Lady."
Ching-chi promptly made her a bow and Yü-lou returned his salute.
Thereupon Yü-lou, Mistress Ch'en, and Yüeh-niang played a threesome together, while Ching-chi kibitzed on the sidelines. After they had played for a while, Mistress Ch'en lost and stepped down, allowing Ching-chi to take her place.
When play was resumed, Meng Yü-lou melded a double six, a one-six, and a double one to produce the combination known as "Heaven and Earth Separated."24 Ch'en Ching-chi added a five-six and another double six to Yü-lou's double six to produce the combination known as "One Spot Short."25 Wu Yüeh-niang put down a pair of double fours and a double three, attempting to make the combination known as "Eight that Don't Add Up,"26 but could not play her double three on the double one.
Trying first this and then that,
she was unable to combine her dominoes with those on the board in order to make a scoring combination.
Just at that moment, P'an Chin-lien lifted aside the portiere and walked in. She was wearing a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree into which she had inserted a fresh cactus flower.
Looking as captivating as ever, she laughed, saying, "I was wondering who it could be in here, and it turns out to be Master Ch'en."
When Ch'en Ching-chi swiveled his neck to see who had come in, she burst upon his sight to such effect that:

On Seeing P'an Chin-lien Ch'en Ching-chi Loses His Wits
His heart quivered, his eyes wavered but
His soul had already escaped.
Truly:
Five hundred years ago these lovers were
fated to meet this day;
Thirty years of bliss may be the result of
just such an encounter.27
"This is your Fifth Lady," said Yüeh-niang. "Just give her a bow in greeting, Son-in-law."
Ching-chi promptly stepped forward to make her a deep bow, and Chin-lien returned his salute.
"Take a look at this, Sister Five," said Yüeh-niang. "The young fledgeling has got the old corbie beat."
Chin-lien stepped closer, leaning against the bedrail with one hand and flirting a white gauze circular fan with the other, as she advised Yüeh-niang, saying, "That's not the best way to play your dominoes, Elder Sister. If you put the double three over there instead, you'll have the combination "Heaven All Different,"28 which will beat Master Ch'en and Sister Three."
Just as the group of them were in the midst of enjoying their domino game, who should come in, carrying his master's felt bag but Tai-an, who said, "Father's come home."
Yüeh-niang hurriedly told Hsiao-yü to escort Master Ch'en out by the postern gate.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had dismounted and come inside he went first to the front part of the compound to take a look at the construction work and then slipped into P'an Chin-lien's quarters.
Chin-lien made haste to receive him and helped him off with his outdoor things, saying, "You're home early from your farewell party today."
"Battalion Commander Ho Chin of the Provincial Surveillance Commission has just been promoted to the post of commander of Hsin-p'ing Stockade," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All his acquaintances from the entire guard battalion went out to the suburbs to see him off. Since he sent me an invitation, I could hardly decline to show up."
"You could use something to drink," said Chin-lien. "I'll tell the maidservant to bring you some wine."
Before long, a table was prepared for a drinking party and appropriate dishes were set before them. As they were drinking, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought up the fact that the ridgepole of the summerhouse in the garden would be put in place within a few days. A lot of friends and relatives would be invited, who would bring boxes of candied fruit, wine, and congratulatory red banners to commemorate the occasion; and they would have to hire caterers to supply a feast for their entertainment.
When they had talked for a while, it began to grow late. Ch'un-mei took a lamp and returned to her room, leaving the two of them to go to bed by themselves.
Because he had gotten up early to go to the farewell party, Hsi-men Ch'ing was tired. After only a few cups of wine he became drunk. No sooner did his head hit the pillow than he was:
Snoring thunderously;
Stertorously unwakable.
The weather was that of the third decade of the seventh month, so the nights were still rather hot. Under the circumstances, how could P'an Chin-lien be expected to get to sleep?
Suddenly, she became aware of the thunderous drone of mosquitoes inside the green gauze netting. Standing up, stark naked, she took a lighted candle in her hand and searched the interior of the net for mosquitoes, burning them one at a time as she found them.
Looking down, she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, lying faceup on the pillow, fast asleep. She shook him but could not wake him up. The organ that lay between his loins was constricted by a clasp so that:
It was tumid and long.29
Before she knew it, her:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.
Putting down the candlestick, she began to manipulate his organ with her slender fingers. After she had toyed with it for a while, she squatted down and began to suck it, moving it first this way and then that.
Hsi-men Ch'ing woke up and cursed at her, "You crazy little whore! Your daddy's asleep and you still want to plague him to death."
So saying, he got up and sat on the pillow, telling her to stay where she was and suck away. Meanwhile, he:
Bent his head to observe the action,30
In order to augment his pleasure.31
Truly:
No wonder the beauty has become
so extremely libidinous;
Late at night she practices in secret
on the purple phoenix flute.
There is a lyric composed of double meanings on the subject of the mosquito that testifies to this:
To the tune "Treading the Grass"
I love its diminutive body,
And its attenuated waist.
With its throbbing sussuration
it's forever buzzing about.
At dusk, when people forget to close
their red doors,
It surreptitiously sneaks inside
the gauze netting.
Gently nuzzling the fragrant flesh,
Casually enamored of the jade body,
Whatever its mouth touches
it stains with rouge.
In one's ears it produces
a constant hubbub;

Late at night, refusing
to let one sleep.
The woman continued to toy with him for about the time it would take to eat a meal when Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly had an idea. He summoned Ch'un-mei to decant some wine and stand beside the bed with flagon in hand. Then he moved the candle onto the backboard of the bed and ordered the woman to turn around and get down on all fours in front of him. Inserting his organ into hers in order to:
Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains,32
he told her to move back and forth as she liked while he proceeded to drink and enjoy himself from his superior vantage point.
"You insinuating ruffian!" the woman cursed at him. "Since when did you come up with this brand new way of doing things? How weird can you get? With the maidservant looking on to boot! What do you think you're up to?"
"I've told you before," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your sister P'ing-erh and I often used to do it like this. We'd get her maidservant, Ying-ch'un, to hold the flagon and pour the wine for us. It's amusing to do it this way."
"I'd only be wasting my breath on you!" said the woman. "My sister P'ing-erh! Sister my prick! What are you dragging that whore into it for? As far as I'm concerned:
Even the best intentions go quite unrequited.33
That whore had such hot pants she couldn't wait for you but went off and married somebody else, didn't she?
"The other day, when you came home after you'd been drinking and found the three of us skipping rope in the courtyard together, you singled me out to vent your spleen on. I was the only one you chose to kick; and for that I was even given a hard time in certain quarters. It would seem that I'm the only one fit to be taken advantage of around here."
"Who gave you a hard time?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"After you came in the other day," the woman said, "the lady in the master suite got into quite an altercation with me. She accused me of talking back to her and called me a baggage who didn't know my place. The more I think about it, the more it seems that:
All you get for raising toads is dropsy.34
So now everyone's down on me."
"That's not it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm not down on you. What happened the other day was that brother Ying the Second and that bunch dragged me off to Wu Yin-erh's place for a drink. On my way home I ran into Old Mother Feng in the street and she told me, thus and so, all about it. I was so angry I was stupefied. If she'd married anyone else, I could have taken it; but Dr. Chiang Chu-shan, that lousy stunted little cuckold! It's a wonder Hua the Elder hasn't bitten his balls off! What can he do for her that she should take him into her household and set him up with the capital to open a rival store and start doing business, as cool as you please, right under my nose?"
"It's a wonder you have the face to mention it," the woman said. "Didn't I tell you at the time that:
The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat?35
But you didn't pay any attention to me and insisted on getting Elder Sister's permission. As the saying goes:
To defer when you differ,
Is to give up the dipper.36
It was your mistake. You've got no one to blame but yourself."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was so exasperated by these few words of the woman that:
The fire that ignited in the core of his crater,
Turned half the cloud-capped volcano into magma.
"Let her do as she likes," he said. "If that undutiful whore says another word about it, she'll find out soon enough how much attention she can expect to get from me."
Gentle reader take note: It has always been true that malicious words and deceitful conduct are not unknown even between rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and elder and younger brothers; to say nothing of friends. If even so worthy and chaste a wife as Wu Yüeh-niang, who enjoyed the status of principal consort, could become abruptly alienated from her husband merely because Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to listen to the mischievous pillow talk of P'an Chin-lien, how much the more should one be on one's guard in matters of more moment.
From this time on, relations between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang were so embittered that they refused to speak to each other when they met. Yüeh-niang let him spend the night with whomever he liked and made no attempt to interfere. No matter whether he arrived late or departed early, she paid no attention. Even when he came into their rooms to get something she would tell the maidservant to deal with it and pay him no heed. Thus the two of them let their feelings for each other grow cold. Truly:
Though the preceding carriages have overturned
by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.
To resume our story, from the time that relations between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang became embittered, P'an Chin-lien saw that her husband had succumbed to her wiles and believed that she had gained her objective. Everyday she plucked up her spirits and:
Tricked herself out conspicuously,
To curry favour and court affection.
As a result of her meeting with Ch'en Ching-chi in the rear compound that day, she had noticed that the young scamp was:
Artful and accomplished,
and got it into her head to see if she could seduce him; but she was too afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing to dare try anything. Whenever her husband was out of the house, however, she would send her maidservant to invite him into her room for a cup of tea, and they often spent their time playing board games together.
One day, the ridgepole of Hsi-men Ch'ing's newly constructed summerhouse was ready to be put in place, and relatives and friends came to commemorate the occasion by hanging up congratulatory red banners. Many of them also brought boxes of candied fruit. The artisans of the various trades were all presented with gifts in reward for their services. The male guests were entertained in the main reception room, and it was sometime in the afternoon before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing waited to see that everything was properly put away and then went back to the rear compound to get some sleep.
Ch'en Ching-chi came into Chin-lien's room and asked for some tea.
Chin-lien, who was sitting on the bed fiddling with her p'i-p'a, said, "You mean to tell me they've been celebrating up front for half the day, ever since the ridgepole was put in place, and you haven't had anything to drink but have to come into my room looking for tea?"
"Your son would not deceive you, ma'am," said Ching-chi, "but since I got up in the middle of the night I've been busy these ten hours or more and haven't had anything to eat or drink."
"Where's your father-in-law?" the woman asked.
"He's gone to the rear compound to get some sleep," Ching-chi replied.
"Well, if you really haven't had anything," the woman said, turning to Ch'un-mei, "Get some of those stuffed steamed-shortcake pastries out of my cabinet and give them to Master Ch'en to eat."
Thereupon, four saucers of savory appetizers were dished up on Chin-lien's bed table for the delectation of the young scamp. As he ate, he noticed that the woman was strumming her p'i-p'a and asked her, playfully, "Fifth Lady, what tune is that you're playing? Why don't you sing me a song?"
"My good Master Ch'en," the woman laughed, "I'm not the one you're after. Why should I sing you a song? Just wait till your father-in-law gets up and see if I don't tell him what you've been doing."
Ching-chi promptly fell to his knees with an ingratiating giggle and pled with her, "I beseech you, Fifth Lady, take pity on me. Your son won't dare do it again."
At this, the woman couldn't help laughing. From that time on, the young scamp and the woman: became more intimate by the day. Drinking tea and eating meals; traversing rooms and entering chambers; engaging in badinage and repartee; rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows; they carried on without restraint. Wu Yüeh-niang, taking him to be no more than a boy, allowed her disingenuous son-in-law the run of the house. By so doing, she showed herself to be blind to her own shortcomings. Truly, knowing only how to rifle flowers in order to elaborate honey; the bee knows not for whom it labours to provide something sweet. It is deplorable but Hsi-men Ch'ing's vigilance leaves much to be desired; this fact encourages his peach and plum blossoms to smile in the spring breeze. Under his layers of embroidered quilts there sleeps a rogue; with 3 meals of delicacies a day he nurtures a tiger. Enamoured of her person, his son-in-law covets his concubine; attracted by his wealth, he is prepared to do his father-in-law in. And there is yet another privilege of which he can boast; traversing rooms and entering chambers, he can dally, as he likes.

Laibao and Laiwang set out to the Eastern Capital to try to put matters right there. They traveled at early dawn when the rising sun threw a purple haze over their path; they traveled in the evening when its setting cast a rosy light upon the dust. At last they came to their destination and entered the city through the Gate of Eternal Life. They found an inn and rested there. The next day they set out to pick up what news they could in the street. They heard people saying that Wang, the Minister for War, had been tried the previous day, and that the Emperor had ordered his execution in the coming autumn. Of Marshal Yang it was said that his case was not yet done with, for his household and his staff had not all been arrested.
Laibao and Laiwang took the treasures they had brought and went in haste to the palace of the Imperial Tutor. They had been there before and knew the way well but, when they came to the Arch of Dragon Virtue, they waited for a time to see if they could learn anything more of interest. After a while a man wearing black robes came hurriedly from the palace and went eastwards. Laibao recognized him as one of the household of Marshal Yang. He would have liked to go and ask a few questions but his master had told him to keep in the background, and he let the man pass. At last they went up to the palace gate, politely greeted the keeper of the gate, and asked if his Eminence was at home.
"His Eminence is still detained at the Court," the keeper of the gate said. "What is your business?"
"We should like to see Master Zhai the Comptroller of the Household," Laibao said. "Will you be good enough to ask him to see us?"
"His Lordship is not at home," the keeper of the gate said.
Laibao realized that the officer was not telling the truth and that something was expected of him. He took a tael of silver from his sleeve and gave it to the gatekeeper.
"Whom did you say you wished to see?" the man said. "His Eminence or his Excellency the Vice Chancellor? Zhai Qian is the great Comptroller of the Household and matters affecting the Imperial Tutor are referred to him. The lesser Comptroller Gao An deals with the Vice Chancellor's affairs. Their duties are quite distinct. The Imperial Tutor himself is not at home but the Vice Chancellor is. What is the real nature of your business? Shall I ask Master Gao to come and see you? He will serve your purpose just as well."
"We are from Marshal Yang's palace," said Laibao, "and shall be very glad to see anyone."
The officer of the gate hastened into the palace, and, after a short delay, Gao An appeared. Laibao went forward and made a reverence, at the same time offering ten taels of silver. "I was to have come," he said, "with one of Marshal Yang's household. We hoped to see the Imperial Tutor to find out what is happening. But I had to stay for food, and so was late and missed the officer."
"Marshal Yang's courier has just gone," said Gao An, accepting the present, "but if you will wait a moment or two I will take you to see the Vice Chancellor." He took Laibao through the entrance hall, and passing through a side door they came to three large rooms on the north. Here was a green screen, with a scroll upon which the Emperor had written in his own hand 'The Music Chamber of the Vice Chancellor.' Cai Yu, the son of Cai Jing, was, like his father, a favourite at court. He was an Imperial Delegate at the Temple of the Great Monad and held high office at the Xiang He Palace and in the Board of Rites.
Laibao waited till Gao An, who had gone to announce him, came to summon him. Then he went in and knelt down. Cai Yu was dressed in his ordinary attire with a soft hat. He asked Laibao where he had come from.
"I am a servant of Chen Hong's household," said Laibao. "He is a kinsman of Marshal Yang. I was to have come with the Marshal's courier in the hope of seeing his Eminence and obtaining some information. Unfortunately, the courier got here before me." He took a paper from his sleeve and offered it to the minister. Cai Yu read on it the words "Five hundred measures of purest rice," and called Laibao nearer.
"His Eminence," he said, "has avoided becoming mixed up in this matter in view of the fact that his own name was mentioned to the Emperor in the Censor's report. Li, the Minister of the Right, dealt with the case yesterday. But so far as Marshal Yang is concerned, we heard from the Court that his Majesty is inclined to be merciful and will not deal severely with him, though his underlings, no doubt, will still have to be tried and sentenced. You must go and see Li."
Laibao kowtowed. "I am quite unknown at Li's palace," he said. "Pray have pity on me for Marshal Yang's sake."
"Go as far as the Bridge of the Heavenly River," said Cai Yu. "North of it you will see a very high building, and there you must ask for Li Bangyan, Minister of the Right. Everybody knows him. But I will send someone with you."
He called for official paper, set his seal upon it, and instructed Gao An to go with Laibao and introduce him. The two men left the hall together. They called to Laiwang to bring the presents, went down the Street of Dragon Virtue, and, passing the Bridge of the Heavenly River, came to the palace of Li Bangyan.
The minister, who had just returned from the Presence, was still wearing his robes of crimson silk and a girdle around his waist, fastened by a jade clasp. After bidding farewell to some man of rank, he had gone to his hall when the gatekeeper informed him that Vice Chancellor Cai had sent his Comptroller, Gao An, with a message. Gao An was then summoned, and, after he had exchanged a few words with the minister, Laibao and Laiwang were called forward. They went into the hall and knelt down. Gao An stood beside them and handed Cai Yu's note and the list of presents they had brought to the minister. Bangyan looked at it.
"You are connected with Marshal Yang," he said, "and Cai has been good enough to send you to me. How can I possibly accept presents from you? Besides, his Majesty is now quite well disposed to Marshal Yang: he will not be troubled further. But I fear the Censor has been so severe upon some of the Marshal's subordinates that they can hardly escape punishment." He called for the memorial that the Censor had laid before the Emperor the previous day.
"Wang Fu's archivist, Dong Sheng; his chamberlain, Wang Lian; Captain Huang Yu; Yang Jian's servant, the scrivener Lu Hu; Yang Sheng, his administrator; Fu Quan, his comptroller; Han Zongren; Zhao Hongdao; Captain Liu Sheng; Chen Hong; Ximen Qing; and Hu the Fourth. These are all men of utter unworthiness, scoundrelly fellows who, like foxes, invest themselves with the dignity of a tiger. We pray that justice may be done upon them. Some should be banished to the frontier that there may be an end to their deceits. Some should be put to death that the majesty of the law may be vindicated."
When Laibao heard this document read, he was greatly excited. Again and again he prostrated himself before the minister. "In truth, your Excellency," he cried, "I am Ximen Qing's servant. I implore you to be generous and spare my master's life." Gao An knelt down and added his prayers to those of Laibao. The minister allowed his glance to fall upon the gold and silver. There were, in all, five hundred taels, and it seemed to him that such a present might suffice to purchase the name of a single man. Why should he hesitate? He called for writing materials, took up a brush, and changed the name of Ximen Qing to Jia Lian. Then he accepted the presents and dismissed the men, sending a polite message to the Vice Chancellor Cai Yu. To each of the three domestics he gave five taels of silver. Laibao and Laiwang took their leave of Gao An, returned to their inn, packed their luggage, paid their reckoning, and made haste back to Qinghe.
As soon as they reached home, they hurried to Ximen and told him all that had happened in the Eastern Capital. When he realized how narrowly he had escaped, he shivered as though he had been plunged into a bath of ice-cold water.
"If I had not bestirred myself at the right moment," he said to Yueniang, "I dare not think what would have happened. It would have been too late to do anything now."
A stone comfortably at rest upon the ground could not have felt more solidly established than Ximen Qing now. The gate was opened again; the work upon the garden restarted, and, in a little while, Ximen resumed his saunterings through the streets.
One day, Daian, riding down Lion Street, passed the house of Li Ping'er. He noticed that a large drug shop had been opened there, with a small red counter and a lacquer sign. It seemed to be prospering. When he reached home, he told Ximen Qing but, as he knew nothing of the marriage between Li Ping'er and Jiang Zhushan, he said she had engaged a manager and opened a medicine shop. Ximen Qing did not pay much heed.
About the middle of the seventh month the autumn winds blew and the dew was cold and chill. Ximen Qing mounted his horse and set out for the main street. There he was hailed by Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, and got off his horse to greet them.
"Where have you been all this time, Brother?" they said. "We have been to your house several times but the gate was fast shut and we did not venture to call. We could not imagine what was wrong. What have you been doing, keeping within doors like that? Have you married the lady? You never sent for us to take wine with you."
"It is not a very agreeable story," Ximen said, "but a near kinsman of mine, Chen, has been in trouble, and I have had to devote all my energies to getting him out of his difficulties. I had to put off my marriage."
"We knew nothing of any troubles," Bojue said. "Anyhow, now that we have run into you today, we shall not let you go. Come with us to see Wu Yin'er and drink some wine to drown your sorrows." They would take no refusal and rushed Ximen Qing to Wu Yin'er's house.
They drank all day, and not till night was falling and Ximen Qing was half drunk, would they let him go. On his way down East Street he saw old woman Feng hurrying along. "Where are you going?" he called, reining in his horse.
"My lady has sent me to the temple outside the city to burn paper offerings for my late master."
"How is your mistress?" Ximen said tipsily. "I'm going to come and have a chat with her one of these days."
"What is the use of asking after my mistress now?" the old woman said. "The rice was cooked but you let someone else walk off with the pan."
Ximen was greatly agitated when he heard this. "You don't mean to say she's gone and married someone else?" he cried.
"My lady sent me to show you her wedding headdress, and I called at your house several times but the gate was closed and I could not see you. I spoke to your boy and told him to ask you not to delay but you paid no heed. It's no use complaining now if you find your place occupied by someone else."
"Who is the man?" Ximen cried.
Old woman Feng told him the whole story. She explained how Li Ping'er came to send for Jiang Zhushan, and finally married him, and how she gave him three hundred taels to set him up in a medicine shop.
"Terrible! Terrible!" Ximen cried. He flew into a furious rage and stamped his feet. "I wouldn't have minded so much if it had been anybody else but that miserable little turtle! What use does she think he'll be to her?" He whipped up his horse and galloped home.
When he passed through the inner door, Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Ximen Dajie were skipping in the courtyard. When Ximen came, they withdrew to the inner court. But Jinlian leaned against a pillar and began to tie her shoelaces.
"You little strumpet," Ximen cried, "have you nothing better to do than fool about like this?"

He kicked her twice and then went to the inner court but, instead of going to change in Yueniang's room, he went to his own study in the wing and demanded bedclothes so that he could pass the night there. With unrelenting fury he beat the maids and cursed the boys, till all the women gathered together in terror, wondering what could be amiss. Yueniang blamed Jinlian. She said, "If you had got out of his way when you saw him in such a rage, all would have been well. Instead, you stayed there in front of him, laughing and playing with your shoelaces, and he cursed us like a host of grasshoppers, yes, and caterpillars too."
"It would not have mattered so much," Yulou said, "if he had only cursed us but to abuse the Great Lady and call her a strumpet! Really, he is a most unmannerly fellow!"
"It was me he picked on," Jinlian cried. "You were all there but I was the one to suffer. Why should I be selected to receive his special favours?"
This made Yueniang angry. "Why didn't you ask him to kick me?" she said. "You were treated neither worse nor better than anybody else. You don't know your place."
Jinlian saw that Yueniang was angry and she changed her tune. "Oh, Sister," she said, "I didn't mean that. He doesn't know what is the matter with him and he thought he would vent his spite on me. He set up a tremendous outcry and swore he would bring me to a doleful end."
"Nobody told you to make fun of him," Yueniang said. "He would have been all right if you had not given him cause to beat you."
"Great Sister," Yulou said, "let us send for the boy and find out where he was drinking this afternoon. He was in a perfectly good temper when he went out this morning. What has made him come back like this?"
Daian was summoned.
"You wicked young scoundrel," Yueniang said to him, "if you don't tell me the truth you shall have a thrashing. Ping'an too. You shall both have ten strokes of the rod."
"You need not beat me," Daian cried, "I will tell all there is to tell. Father spent the day drinking with Uncle Ying at Wu Yin'er's house. Afterwards, as he was going down East Street, he met old woman Feng and she told him that Mistress Hua had not waited but had married the Doctor Jiang who used to live in the High Street. Father was fearfully angry, even in the street."
"So, just because that shameless hussy chooses another man, he must come home and take it out on us!" Yueniang said.
"That was not all," Daian said. "Mistress Hua has taken him to live with her and set him up in a fine medicine shop. I told Father so once before but he wouldn't listen to me."
"It is only a few months ago since her husband died," Yulou said, "and she was not out of mourning. It is most unseemly."
"In these days," said Yueniang, "nobody stops to think whether things are unseemly or not. If she took a man before she was out of mourning, she was not the first one. Strumpets like her will drink or sleep with any man. How can one expect them to consider the virtuous estate of widowhood?"
This was a blow at Yulou and Jinlian. Both had married before their widowhood was over. Yueniang's remark made them feel so uncomfortable that they went to their own rooms and did not wait to hear what she would say next.
Ximen Qing spent the night in his study. The next day he sent his son-in-law, Chen Jingji, to the garden to superintend the work there and keep the accounts with Ben the Fourth. Laizhao, whose place he took, was given charge of the gate. Ximen's daughter, Ximen Dajie, took her meals in the inner court with Yueniang and the others, and only went to the front court to sleep. From morning till night Jingji labored in the garden. He never went into the other parts of the house unless he was invited, and, as all his meals were taken to him by the boys, the ladies of Ximen's household never set eyes on him.
One day, when Ximen Qing was at a farewell party for Captain He, Yueniang remembered that Jingji had to work very hard and that his services were poorly requited.
"If I do anything about it," she said to Yulou and Li Jiao'er, "his Lordship will say I meddle in things that don't concern me but really I can't allow this sort of thing to go on. The boy is one of ourselves. He rises early and goes to bed late every single day, and all on our account. Nobody lifts a finger to make things more comfortable for him."
"Lady," Yulou said, "you are the mistress of the house, and if you do nothing, nobody else can."
Yueniang told a boy to lay a table for Jingji and ask him to join them. The young man at once handed over his work to Ben the Fourth and hurried to pay his respects to Yueniang. He made reverence to her and sat down. Xiaoyu brought tea and the table with refreshments was carried in.
"You work terribly hard," Yueniang said. "I should have asked you before to come and spend a few moments' leisure with us but there has never been an opportunity. However, your father is away today and I am free. This is a poor sign of our appreciation of all you do for us."
"Mother," Jingji said, "you are too good to me. I have done nothing to deserve this."
They drank together, and Yueniang told a maid to invite his wife to come and join them. The maid told them that she was washing her hands and would be with them in a moment. Then they heard the clatter of dominoes in the next room, and Jingji asked who was playing there.
"It is your wife," Yueniang said, "playing with Yuxiao."
"She is most ill-mannered, not to come the moment you invite her."
Soon, however, she came, sat down, and drank with them. Yueniang asked her whether Jingji knew how to play. "He knows the difference between 'pleasant scent' and 'evil odor,'" Ximen Dajie said.
Yueniang believed that Jingji was all that could be desired as a son-in-law. She did not know that never was a rascal so well versed in poetry, backgammon, songs, and every other form of low amusement. "If you know how to play," she said, "why should we not go and take a hand?"
"Mother," Jingji said, "pray go and play with your daughter. It would be presumption on my part."
"Not at all," Yueniang said, "you are a close kinsman. Why shouldn't you join us?"
In the next room Yulou was playing, sitting on the bed on which a crimson coverlet had been laid. She rose when they came in and would have retired. "Our brother is no stranger," Yueniang said. "You must treat him as one of ourselves. This is the Third Lady," she said to Jingji.
The young man bowed, and Yulou returned his greeting. Then the three ladies began to play while Jingji stood and looked on. When Ximen Dajie was beaten, her husband took her place.
Jinlian came in. She was wearing a flower in her hair. "I wondered who was here," she said, laughing. "I see it is Brother Chen."
Chen Jingji turned quickly. When he saw Jinlian, his breath seemed to stop. It was as though, after five hundred years of separation, he met his loved one again.
"This is the Fifth Lady," Yueniang said, "you need only exchange simple greetings."
Chen Jingji rose to his feet and bowed low. Jinlian returned his greeting. Then Yueniang invited her to come and see how an old crow could be beaten by a greenhorn. Jinlian, with one hand resting on the bed and the other fluttering her fan, advised Yueniang how to set out her pieces, and they were all playing with great excitement when Daian came and told them that Ximen Qing had returned. Yueniang told Xiaoyu to take Jingji away by the corner door.
When Ximen had dismounted, he went to the outer court to see how the work in the garden was progressing. Then he went to Jinlian's room. She welcomed him and took his clothes. "You are back very early today," she said.
"Yes," said Ximen, "Captain He has just been promoted, and all the officials went out beyond the city gates to say good-bye to him. I was asked to join them, and I couldn't very well refuse."
Jinlian asked if he would like to drink, and told the maid to bring wine. Soon the table was laid. They sat together and enjoyed their food.
"We shall finish the work in the garden tomorrow," Ximen said; "I suppose some of our friends will be coming with presents and scrolls. We shall have to hire some extra cooks and have a banquet."
They talked for a while; then it began to grow dark. Chunmei went to her own room, and Ximen Qing and Jinlian went to bed. He had been up early and was very tired. A few cups of wine made him very sleepy. He was soon fast asleep and snoring like thunder.
It was the twentieth day of the seventh month, and the weather was very sultry. Jinlian could not sleep, the noisy buzzing of mosquitoes in the net annoyed her. Without putting on any clothes, she got up and with a candle in her hand searched all around the bed curtains for mosquitoes, burning each one in the flame as she caught them. Then she looked around. Ximen Qing was fast asleep. She shook him but he would not wake. His weapon, with the clasp still upon it, seemed limp and heavy. The sight of it set her naughty mind in a whirl. She put down the candlestick and fondled it with her exquisite hands. After doing this for a short time, she bent her head and kissed it. Ximen woke and stormed at her. "You funny little strumpet. Your darling is sleepy, and you are a terrible nuisance." But he got up. Sitting on the bed, he told her to go on with what she was doing. He watched her, and found the sight particularly attractive. Here is a poem about the mosquito:
I love that dainty body, its wondrous lightness,
The beauty and softness of that tender waist.
Music and song go where it goes.
When evening comes, before the crimson doors are shut
It steals within and seeks the silken net,
Settles so lovingly on the fragrant flesh
And lightly falls upon the jade-like form.
Where those lips touch, there stays a rosy flush.
It sings a hundred songs in people's ears
Allowing none to sleep though it be midnight.
Jinlian continued for a long time, then Ximen Qing thought of a new plan. He called Chunmei to heat some wine and come and stand beside the bed to hold the wine jar. He set the candlestick beside the bed and told Jinlian to go down on all fours before him. When he saw her like this, he was quickly excited again, and gave himself once more to the delights of love, drinking wine as he did so.
"What a naughty fellow you are," Jinlian cried. "Where did you learn to carry on like this? A fine thing, to let the maid stand by and watch us in such unseemly circumstances."
"Li Ping'er and I used to do it," Ximen said. "She always told Yingchun to stand beside us and hold the wine jar. I think it is most amusing."
"I can't tell you what I think of you," Jinlian said. "And what do I care for that woman? Why do you bring her into it? I had to wait for what I wanted but she couldn't wait; she had to go and find another man. I haven't forgotten how, when the three of us were skipping in the courtyard, you came home drunk. You vented your spite on me, kicked me, and got me into trouble with the others. I must be one of those who are fated to be ill-used."
"With whom did you have trouble?" Ximen asked.
"When you had gone into the house, she who lives in the upper room made a fine to-do. She accused me of deliberately raising my voice against hers and swore I did not know my place. She doesn't want anyone to like me."
"That day," Ximen said, "Brother Ying dragged me to the Wu Yin'er's house to drink. On the way back I met old woman Feng, and she told me what had happened. It was that which made me so furious. If she had married anybody else, I should not have cared but Doctor Jiang, the wretched little turtle! What could she be thinking about to marry a man like that, take him to live with her, and give him the money to open a medicine shop right in front of me? And the business seems to be doing well!"
"It's all very well talking like that now," Jinlian said, "but what did I tell you? The one who is the first to cook the rice is always the first to eat it. You wouldn't listen to me; you went and asked what the Great Lady thought about it. I tell you: those who must always take the opinion of somebody else will never get what they want. You went the wrong way about things, and nobody is to blame but yourself."
Ximen Qing flew into a temper. "Let her say what she likes, the strumpet! I will never speak to her again."
Thenceforth Yueniang and Ximen Qing would have no dealings with each other. When they met, they would not speak. Yueniang paid no heed to Ximen's goings and comings, and never asked any questions. If he went to her rooms for anything, she told her maid to attend to him but would do nothing for him herself. Their hearts were cold to one another.
After this quarrel Jinlian knew that she could do what she liked with her husband and she became more arrogant than ever. She flaunted herself about and made herself as pretty as she could, all to secure Ximen's favour and attentions for herself. When she met Chen Jingji, she was so impressed by that young man's smartness and liveliness that the idea of seducing him came into her head but she was too afraid of Ximen Qing to attempt it. But when Ximen was out, she sent a maid to invite the young man to take tea in her room and they played chess together.
At last the work in the garden was completed, and relatives and friends came to present red scrolls of congratulation, some bringing boxes of fruits also. Ximen gave all the workmen food and money, and received his guests in the hall, where the celebrations were kept up until noon, when the party broke up. Ximen had been up so early that he decided to go to the inner court for a rest, and Jingji went to see Jinlian and ask her for a cup of tea. He found her sitting on her bed, playing the lute.
"In the outer court," she said, "they have been house warming and drinking wine. How is it that you have had nothing but must come to me for tea?"
"To tell you the simple truth," Jingji said, "I was up before dawn and have been busy ever since. I never had a moment for food."
"Where is your father?" Jinlian said. Jingji told her that Ximen was resting in the inner court. "Well," she said, "since I see you have had nothing to eat, Chunmei must pick out some of my own pastries for you."
The young man sat on her bed, and a small table with four plates of light refreshments was brought in for him. As he began to eat them, he saw that Jinlian had been playing the lute, and asked her whether she would not sing for him. She laughed. "My dear good Brother," she said, "I don't belong to you. Why should I sing for you? When Father gets up, I 'll tell him what you've asked."
Jingji smiled. He knelt before her and said, "Please, Mother, forgive your son. I'll never offend again." Jinlian laughed at him. Ever afterwards, they were on terms of intimacy, taking tea and meals together almost everyday. Jingji used to go to her room to joke with her, and they sat close together without the slightest scruple. All this time Yueniang treated the young man as though he had been her own son, never dreaming how utterly faithless he was.

## 040

### Snake-in-the-grass Shakes Down Chiang Chu-Shan; Li P'ing-erh's Feelings Touch Hsi-men Ch'ing & his Vengeance

*When flowers bloom they do not disdain the plots of the poor;*
The moon shines on mountains and rivers so that all are bright.
In this world the heart of man alone remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven show him favour.
The foolish, the deaf, and the dumb everywhere prosper;
While the clever and the intelligent suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled by fate rather than man.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had been constructing a formal garden and summerhouse in his residential compound for nearly half a year before the final decorating, painting, and varnishing were completed. From front to back:
*Everything was put on an entirely new footing.*
The housewarming celebrations lasted for several days. But no more of this.
One day, during the first decade of the eighth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to help celebrate the birthday of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling at his newly purchased country estate. He had engaged the services of four singing girls, a band of musicians, and a troupe of tumblers and acrobats to entertain his guests. At ten o'clock in the morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having dressed himself to befit the occasion, set off on horseback, accompanied by four pageboys.
Wu Yüeh-niang, during her husband's absence, prepared a feast of wine and delicacies and invited Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, Mistress Ch'en, and P'an Chin-lien to join her. They opened the gate of the new garden and proceeded to enjoy it at their leisure. When they surveyed the scene within:
*Flowers and trees, pavilions and terraces,*
*Stretched before them as far as the eye could see.*[2]
Truly, it was a fine garden. Behold:
*At the main entrance, fifteen feet high,*
*There stands a red-lacquered memorial arch;*
*All the way round, in twenty segments,*
*There stretches a crenellated wall of crushed limestone.*
*At the portal there is a gate tower;*
*Terraces and kiosks spread in all directions.*
*There are artificial hills and genuine waters;*[3]
*Blue-green bamboos and glaucous pine trees.*
*The structures that are high but not pointed*
*are called terraces;*
*Whereas those that are lofty but not forbidding*
*are called kiosks.*
If one wishes to enjoy the four seasons, there are places for each of them:
*In spring there is Swallow-flight Hall,*
*Where cypress and cedar vie in verdancy.*

*In summer there is Brookside Lodge,*
*Where lotus and water lily display their colours.*
*In autumn there is Halcyon House,*
*Where the golden chrysanthemum braves the frost.*
*In winter there is Hidden Spring Grotto,*
*Where the white plum blossom gathers snow.*
Just see how:
*Capricious blossoms immure the narrow paths;*
*Lissome willows brush the carved balustrades.*
*Tossed in the breeze, willow fronds*
*raise their mothlike eyebrows;*
*Laden with raindrops, flowering crab apples*
*display their delicate features.*
*Before Swallow-flight Hall,*
*The daffodils seem about to open but haven't opened;*
*Behind Hidden Spring Grotto,*
*The holly is in half bloom but not yet full bloom.*
*The pale plum blossoms east of the Lowland Bridge*
*bloom and fade;*
*The redbuds above the Cloud Repose Pavilion*
*are not yet in flower.*
*By the ornamental rocks,*
*The elecampane has just blossomed;*
*Beside the painted railings,*
*The dianthus has just appeared.*
*With a flutter of wings the purple swallows*
*penetrate the curtains;*
*In a burst of song the yellow orioles*
*traverse the shadows.*
And there are also:
*Moon windows and snowy grottoes;*
Not to mention:
*Waterside retreats and breezy pavilions.*
*The banksia rose arbour,*
*Runs into the rose-leaved raspberry trellis;*
*The peach tree with its thousand leaves,*
*Confronts the willow of the three springs.*
And there are also:
*Lilacs,*
*Mimosa,*
*Caragana,*
*Yellow roses,*
*Jasmine,*
*And narcissus.*
In front and behind the summerhouse there are:
*Juniper hedges and bamboo-lined walks,*
*Serpentine streams and square pools.*
*Plantains and palm trees shade the steps;*
*Helianthus and pomegranate catch the sun.*
*Amid the waterweeds frolicking fish*
*startle the beholder;*
*Among the flowers powdered butterflies*
*dance in pairs.*
Truly:
*The peonies have hardly begun to reveal*
*their bodhisattvas' faces;*
*Before the litchis are ready to put forth*
*their mārarājas' heads.*[4]
Thereupon, Wu Yüeh-niang led the other womenfolk into the garden.
*Some hold hands as they wander*
*along the flowery paths;*
*Others, seated on the fragrant grass,*
*compare botanical specimens.*
*One, approaching the balustrade to survey the scene,*
*Playfully picks red lovers' beans*
*to toss at the goldfish;*
*Another, leaning on the railing to enjoy the flowers,*
*Gigglingly flirts her silken fan*
*to startle the butterflies.*
Wu Yüeh-niang made her way to the highest point in the garden, the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where she proceeded to play a board game with Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh. P'an Chin-lien, along with Mistress Ch'en, and Sun Hsüeh-o, ascended the Flower-viewing Tower, from which they could see extending before them:
*The tree peony grove,*
*The garden peony bed,*
*The crab apple bower,*
*The seven sisters trellis,*
*And the banksia rose arbour;*
Not to mention:
*That "cold-enduring gentleman," the bamboo,*[5]
*And that "snow-despising grandee," the pine.*[6]
Truly:
*All four seasons produce their*
*never-fading flowers;*
*All eight festivals appear one*
*everlasting spring.*[7]
*Such a vision is not exhaustible;*
*Such a view exceeds comprehension.*[8]
Before long, the wine was served. Wu Yüeh-niang took the seat of honour, with Li Chiao-erh sitting across from her. To either side of them, Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, P'an Chin-lien, and Mistress Ch'en sat down in order of precedence.
"I forgot to invite Master Ch'en," said Yüeh-niang. Turning to Hsiao-yü, she said, "Quickly! Run up front and ask our son-in-law to join us."
It was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi presented himself:
*His head adorned with an ultramarine silk cap,*
*His body clad in an informal gown of purple satin,*
*His feet shod in white-soled black boots.*
After making his bow of greeting, he sat down next to his wife, Mistress Ch'en.
After they had been drinking for a while:
*With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,*
Wu Yüeh-niang went back to playing board games with Li Chiao-erh and Mistress Ch'en, while Sun Hsüeh-o and Meng Yü-lou climbed the Flower-viewing Tower to enjoy the view.
Chin-lien wandered off by herself, beside the flower beds in front of the artificial hill, where she amused herself by batting at the butterflies [9] with her round white-silk fan. Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had crept up behind her to see what she was up to, addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, you don't know how to go about batting a butterfly. Let me show you how it's done. These butterflies dart up one second and down the next, as if they can't make up their minds. They certainly are elusive creatures."
Chin-lien swiveled her powdered neck and gave him a sidelong glance. "You lousy short-life!" she berated him. "If anyone should overhear you, you'd be done for; though I suppose you're too far gone to care."
With a giggle, Ch'en Ching-chi pounced up to her, embraced her, and gave her a kiss. The woman responded by giving him a shove with her free hand that knocked the young scamp head over heels.
Though neither of them realized it, this scene had been observed from a distance by Meng Yü-lou, atop the Flower-viewing Tower, who now called out, "Sister Five, come over here. I've got something to tell you." Only then did Chin-lien abandon Ching-chi and go off to climb the tower.
Thus it happened that neither of the two butterflies were caught that day.
*Though they may have made a swallows' tryst*
*or orioles' assignation,*[10]
*The bee's antennae had no more than grazed*
*the corolla of the flower.*[11]
Truly:
*Though distracted bees and wanton butterflies*[12]
*are sometimes to be seen:*
*Once they fly into the pear blossoms*
*they disappear from view.*[13]
On seeing that the woman was gone, Ch'en Ching-chi returned to his room without a word. Finding himself beset by melancholy, he improvised a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" in order to dispel his depression.
*I saw her rakishly sporting a spray of blossoms;*
Smiling as she toyed with her spray of blossoms.
On her ruby lips she wore no rouge;
But looked as though she did wear rouge.
When we met the other day,
And then met again today;
She seemed to have feelings for me,
But displayed no feelings for me.

Though she wished to consent;
She never gave her consent.
It looked as though she refused me;
But she really never did refuse me.
When can we make another assignation;
When will we ever see each other again?
If we don't meet,
She may long for me;
When we do meet,
I still long for her.[14]

We will say no more, for the moment, about Wu Yüeh-niang and the others as they feasted in the garden but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing's visit to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling's country estate outside the South Gate.

On his way home, after the party was over, he happened to pass through the Southern Entertainment Quarter.[15]

Now in days gone by, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been a habitué of the:

*Three quarters and two alleys,*

of the pleasure precincts, so all the "knockabouts" there were known to him. The people called "knockabouts" at that time, during the Sung dynasty, corresponded to what are vulgarly referred to today as "bare sticks." Among these were two men, named Snake-in-the-grass, Lu Hua, and Street-skulking Rat, Chang Sheng, who had often been patronized by Hsi-men Ch'ing, and belonged to the:

*Chicken-pinching and dognapping ilk.*

Hsi-men Ch'ing caught sight of the two of them that day as they were engaged in a gambling game and pulled up his horse in order to have a word with them. The two men immediately came up and greeted him by falling to one knee, asking, "Sir, where are you headed at such an hour?"

"Today is the birthday of His Honour, Hsia Yen-ling, of the Judicial Commissioner's Office," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He invited some of us to his country estate outside the South Gate to help celebrate the occasion. There is a favour I'd like to ask of you. Will you agree to do it or not?"

"Needless to say, sir," the two replied, "we are mindful of everything you've done for us in the past. If you now have a task for us to perform:

*Though we should have to go through fire and water,*
*We would not decline to suffer ten thousand deaths.*"[16]

"If that's the way you feel about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come to my house tomorrow and I'll give you your instructions."

"Why wait till tomorrow?" the two demanded. "Tell us about it now. Really, what's up?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing then:

*Whispered into their ears in a low voice,*

and related the whole story of how Chiang Chu-shan had deprived him of Li P'ing-erh. "All I want you two fellows to do is to help me vent my spleen," he concluded.

Still on horseback, Hsi-men Ch'ing hitched up his clothes and groped for his wallet that turned out to contain four or five taels worth of loose silver. Pouring it all out and handing it to the two men, he said, "Take this and buy yourselves some wine to drink. If you manage to pull this affair off successfully for me, I'll reward the two of you further."

Lu Hua refused to accept the money, saying, "It's not as though you haven't already done us any favours in the past, sir. I thought you might want to send us:

*Down to the floor of that great sea, the Eastern Ocean,*
*To wrest the horn from the Green Dragon's head;*
*Or up to the very summit of Mount Hua, the Western Peak,*
*To wrench the tusk from the White Tiger's jaws;*

in which case, we might not be able to comply. But if it's only such a piddling task as this, where's the difficulty? This silver I absolutely refuse to accept."

"If you won't take it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't trouble you any further." Whereupon, he told Tai-an to repossess the silver, whipped up his horse, and started on his way.

Chang Sheng, however, stopped him, saying, "Lu Hua, you don't understand His Honour's disposition. If you don't take what you're offered, it will seem as though we're trying to get out of it."

Lu Hua then accepted the silver and kowtowed on his hands and knees, saying, "Just go home and relax, sir. In two days or less, you can absolutely rely on us to give you something to laugh about."

"As for me," said Chang Sheng, "if you could only manage, in the future, to wangle some sort of position for me with His Honour Hsia on the staff of the Judicial Commissioner's Office, that would be quite sufficient."

"Is that all?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That goes without saying."

Gentle reader take note: Afterward, Hsi-men Ch'ing did recommend Chang Sheng to Hsia Yen-ling, who got him a job on the domestic staff of Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command. But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.

These two "knockabouts" took their newly acquired silver and went back to gambling as before. By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing had ridden into the city through the South Gate and arrived home, the sun was already setting in the west.

When Wu Yüeh-niang and the others heard that he had come home they all went back to the rear compound. Only P'an Chin-lien remained in the summerhouse to see that everything was properly put away. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go back to the rear compound but came straight into the garden. When he saw the woman supervising the clearing up in the pavilion, he asked, "What have you all been up to here during my absence?"

"Today," Chin-lien said with a smile, "Elder Sister and the rest of us decided to open up the gate and have a look at the garden for ourselves. How could we have known you would get home so early?"

"Hsia Yen-ling really put himself out today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was at his country estate. He had engaged four singing girls and four acrobats to entertain us, and there were only five guests there. Because I was worried about the distance, I left early."

The woman helped him off with his outdoor things and then said, "You could use something to drink. I'll tell the maidservant to bring you some wine."

"You can take the rest of the dishes away," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Ch'un-mei. "Just leave a few saucers of delicacies and decant a flagon of grape wine for me."

Sitting down in the place of honour, he noticed that the woman was wearing a blouse of aloeswood-coloured moiré with variegated crepe edging that opened down the middle, over a drawnwork skirt of white glazed damask. Shoes of scarlet iridescent silk, with white soles, satin high heels, and gold-spangled toes were visible beneath her skirt. On her head she wore a chignon, enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, in front of which there was a tiara of jade, enchased with gold, representing the scene "plucking the cassia in the moon palace." Her hair was further adorned with plum-blossom shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and a host of trinkets were stuck about the temples that had the effect of further enhancing:

*The fragrant redness of her ruby lips, and*
*The glossy whiteness of her powdered face.*

Before he knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:

*Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.*

Taking her two hands in his, he embraced her and gave her a kiss. Shortly thereafter, Ch'un-mei brought in the wine and the two of them passed the same cup back and forth between them. As they drank they sucked each other's tongues so assiduously that the sound of the sucking was quite audible. The woman then hitched up her skirt and sat in his lap. Once there, she took a sip of wine and then proceeded to transfer it into the mouth of her companion like a bird feeding its young, after which she picked up a fresh lotus pod from the table with her slender fingers and fed it to him.

"That's not very appetizing," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why feed me that?"

"My son," the woman said, "don't push your luck. You'd do better not to refuse anything from your mother's hand."

Thereupon, she put a fresh walnut kernel in her mouth and passed it to him before desisting.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to play with the woman's breasts, so she unfastened the gold chatelaine with its three pendant charms that she wore at her collar and held it between her teeth while she pulled open her silk blouse, revealing:

*The beautiful unblemished jade, of*
*Her fragrant and creamy bosom;*
*Her tight and squeezy breasts.*

Hsi-men Ch'ing fondled and caressed them for some time, sucking at the teats like a young calf. The two of them laughed and joked together as they:

*Enjoyed to the full the pleasures of connubial bliss.*

In the midst of his euphoria, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the woman, "I've got something to tell you that will give you something to laugh about in a day or two. You may have heard that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan has opened a pharmaceutical shop right under my nose. Well, one of these days, you can rely upon it, he's going to look as though he's opened a fruiterer's shop on his own face."

"Why's that?" the woman asked.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her the whole story of how he had run into Lu Hua and Chang Sheng outside the South Gate that day.

"What a depraved creature you are," the woman laughed. "There's no telling how much evil karma you will have accumulated before you're through."

She then went on to ask, "Isn't that Dr. Chiang the same Dr. Chiang whom we often call in to perform medical services here? He always looks circumspect and polite enough to me. He lowers his gaze whenever he sees anyone. The poor fellow! You really oughtn't to give him such a hard time."

"He's got you fooled," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You say he lowers his gaze when he sees you. That's only the better to ogle your feet."

"You delirious oily mouth!" the woman exclaimed. "He actually ogles the feet of other people's wives!"

"You don't know the half of it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Someone nearby called on him once while he was on his way home carrying a fish from the market. When he was intercepted, he said, 'Let me take the fish home first, and come after that.' His interlocutor said, 'I've got someone seriously ill at home. Please, doctor! Come right away.' This Chiang Chu-shan then followed him home. The sick person was on the second floor so he was invited upstairs. It turned out to be a woman who was ill, and a good-looking one at that. When he came into the room, she stuck her hand out so he could palpate her pulse. The rascal had her wrist in his hand when he suddenly thought of his fish that had been left hanging on a curtain hook downstairs, and forgot himself, asking, 'You don't have a pussy down there do you?' When her husband, who was standing there in the same room, heard this, he strode over, grabbed him by the hair, and beat him to a stinking pulp. He not only lost his fee but had his clothes torn to tatters by the time he made his escape."

"A likely story!" the woman said. "I don't believe a cultivated man like that would do any such thing."

"If you go by appearances," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you'll miss the boat. As far as he's concerned:

*Outside he may be the picture of propriety;*
*But inside he harbours cunning and villainy."*

When the two of them had talked and laughed with each other for a while, they stopped drinking wine, finished putting the things away, and went back to Chin-lien's room to spend the night. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.

To resume our story, two months or so had now passed since Li P'ing-erh brought Chiang Chu-shan across her threshold in wedlock. Initially, out of his desire to please her, Chiang Chu-shan had concocted various aphrodisiacs. He had even bought some "Yunnanese ticklers," [17] "ladies' delights,"[18] and the like in front of the city gate, in the hope of arousing her passion. What he failed to realize, however, was that the woman had already experienced every kind of:

*Violent storm and sudden downpour,*[19]

at the hands of Hsi-men Ch'ing, so that his inexperienced efforts often left her unsatisfied. Little by little she began to despise him, until the day finally came when she smashed the sexual implements to smithereens with a stone and threw them all away.

"You're just like a shrimp or an eel," she railed at him, "with no real strength in your loins. What's the point of your buying all this junk to titillate your old lady with? I thought I was getting a real hunk of meat but it turns out you're:

*Good enough to look at but not fit to eat.*[20]

You're about as much use as a 'pewter spearhead'[21] or a 'dead turtle'!"

Li P'ing-erh cursed her husband till he looked as though:

*His head had been sprayed with dog's blood,*

and drove him out to sleep in the shop up front, though it was the third watch in the middle of the night.

From then on, she could think of no one but Hsi-men Ch'ing, and she refused to let her husband into her bedroom. Every day she nagged him about the accounts and tried to monitor the expenditure of her capital.

One day, feeling that he had had a bellyful, Chiang Chu-shan had gone into the shop and was sitting there behind the narrow counter when who should appear but two men, staggering and stupefied with drink, who made their way in and sat down on a bench.

"Have you got any 'dog-yellow' in this shop of yours?" one of them demanded.

"You're pulling my leg," laughed Chiang Chu-shan. "I've only got 'ox-yellow.'[22] Who ever heard of 'dog-yellow'?"

"Well, if you haven't any 'dog-yellow,' " his interlocutor continued, "I suppose 'ice-ashes' will do. Let me see some. I'll buy a few ounces from you."

"Pharmaceutical houses only carry 'ice-crystals,' "[23] said Chiang Chu-shan, "the best quality of which comes from Borneo in the South Seas. Who ever heard of 'ice-ashes'?"

"It's no use asking him," the other one said. "He's only been open a few days and could hardly be expected to carry pharmaceuticals like these. We'd do better to go to the Honourable Hsi-men Ch'ing's shop."

"Come over here," the first one said. "We'd better get down to serious business. Brother Chiang, there's no use pretending you're:

*Still asleep in dreamland.*

The principal and interest on those thirty taels of silver you borrowed from Brother Lu here three years ago when your wife died are mounting up. We've come to collect from you today. If we'd simply demanded payment as soon as we entered the door, seeing as how you've managed to marry money and open a brand new shop, we were afraid it might reflect on your reputation.[24] So we thought we'd do you a good deed by starting out with a few words of nonsense, so you could see the need to take your medicine. If you refuse to take your medicine, you'll have to repay him the silver just the same."

When Chiang Chu-shan heard these words he was stupefied with amazement. "But I never borrowed any silver from him," he stated.

"If you didn't borrow the money," said his interlocutor, "why should we be dunning you for it? It has always been true that:

*Flies don't cluster on eggs*
*unless they're cracked.*[25]

You'd better not stick to that line."

"I don't even have the honour to know the names of you gentlemen," said Chiang Chu-shan.

*"I've never met you before.*[26]

On what grounds can you simply appear and demand money of me?"

"Brother Chiang," his interlocutor stated, "you are mistaken. It has always been true that:

*Those who achieve office are seldom poor, and*
*Those who repudiate debts are seldom rich.*

Remember those days before you made a place for yourself when you had to peddle your nostrums with bell in hand like any mountebank. It was Brother Lu here who came to your aid then and made it possible for you to arrive at your present state."

"My surname is Lu and my given name is Hua," the other one asserted. "In such and such a year you borrowed thirty taels of silver from me to pay for your wife's funeral expenses. Including principal and interest, you owe me forty-eight taels by now. You'll have to repay me whether you like it or not."

"Since when did I ever borrow any money from you?" Chiang Chu-shan demanded in consternation. "And even if I did, there would have been a contract and a guarantor."

"I was the guarantor," stated Chang Sheng. Whereupon, reaching into his sleeve, he pulled out a contract and waved it in his face.

Chiang Chu-shan was so angry his face had turned as sallow as wax. "You gallows bird!" he cursed. "You servile cur! You think you can play the 'knockabout,' coming in here from out of nowhere and intimidating me, do you?"

When Lu Hua heard these words he reacted with outrage. From the other side of the narrow counter he sent a clenched fist whistling across that flew right into Chiang Chu-shan's face, knocking his nose to one side. At the same time he started pulling the pharmaceuticals off the shelves and hurling them into the street.
"You lousy 'knockabout'!" cursed Chiang Chu-shan. "How dare you despoil my merchandise?"
All he could do was call for T'ien-fu to come to his aid but Lu Hua kicked him into a corner with one swing of his foot and he was too frightened to make a further move.
Chang Sheng pulled Chiang Chu-shan out from behind the narrow counter and made a show of staying Lu Hua's hand, saying, "Brother Lu, you've already waited long enough as it is. Give him another couple of days to come up with the cash, and make an end of it. What do you say, Brother Chiang?"
"I never borrowed his money in the first place," said Chiang Chu-shan. "But even if I had, you could have raised the issue more politely. What's the idea of all this rough stuff?"
"Brother Chiang," said Chang Sheng, I can see that:
*You've swallowed the flesh of a bitter olive,*
*but the pleasing aftertaste is coming out;*[27]
*You've only endured a slap with a flour sack,*
*but you've done a complete about-face.*[28]
If you had only changed your tune a little earlier, I might have asked Brother Lu to forgive you some of the interest. As it is, even if you have to do it in two or three installments, the only thing to do is pay it off. It won't get you anywhere to talk tough and refuse to acknowledge it. After all, you can hardly expect him to simply forget it."
When Chiang Chu-shan heard these words, he said, "I can't take any more of this! I'll go to court with him. Who ever saw the colour of his money?"
"Have you been hitting the bottle again this morning?" Chang Sheng responded.
Without any warning, Lu Hua struck Chiang Chu-shan another blow with his fist, knocking him flat on his back and nearly precipitating him headfirst into an open drain. His hairdo came undone, and his cap and headband were covered with filth.
"In broad daylight too!"[29] Chiang Chu-shan started screaming at the top of his voice. This attracted the attention of the head of the local mutual security unit, who proceeded, without more ado, to truss him up with a length of rope.
When Li P'ing-erh, inside the house, heard the sound of this altercation and came to peek out through the front door blind, she was just in time to see the local constable leading her husband away in bonds and was so angry she was stupefied. She sent Old Mother Feng out to take down the plaque over the door and the shop sign. The better part of the pharmaceuticals that had been thrown into the street had been appropriated by passersby. There was nothing to do but close up shop and return inside to sit it out.
It was not long before someone reported these events to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who immediately dispatched a message to the local constable telling him to hale the suspect before the Judicial Commissioner's Court first thing the following morning. At the same time he sent a personal note about the case to Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling.
Next morning, the prisoner was brought into the courtroom. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia had taken his position on the bench, he read the deposition of the arresting officer and summoned Chiang Chu-shan before him.
"I see that your formal name is Chiang Wen-hui," he said. "Why did you borrow money from Lu Hua and then not only refuse to repay it but abuse him into the bargain. Such conduct is reprehensible."
"I don't even know this person," said Chiang Chu-shan, "nor have I ever borrowed money from him. I was in the process of trying to reason with him but he wouldn't pay any attention, and started kicking and beating me. He even despoiled me of my merchandise."
Commissioner Hsia then called Lu Hua before him and asked for his side of the story.
"He originally borrowed the money from me to pay for his wife's funeral expenses," said Lu Hua. "Since then, it's been three years by now that he's postponed paying me back. The other day I heard that he had married into someone's family and had gone into business for himself in a big way. But when I asked him to settle up, he started to hurl every kind of abuse at me, even claiming that I was despoiling his merchandise. I've got the contract for the original loan right here. This Chang Sheng was the guarantor. I hope Your Honour will look into the matter."
As he spoke, Lu Hua reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a contract that he handed up to the bench. When Commissioner Hsia opened it, he found that it read as follows:
The contracting party, Chiang Wen-hui, a physician of this district, finding himself without sufficient funds to defray the funeral expenses of his deceased wife, has arranged, through the good offices of the guarantor, Chang Sheng, to borrow the sum of thirty taels of silver from one Lu Hua at a rate of 3 percent interest, compounded monthly, for his personal use, and undertakes to repay the principal and interest by a year from this date. If he should default, his personal effects to the equivalent value are offered as collateral. Lest questions should arise in the future, this written contract is set down as evidence of the above transaction.[30]
When Commissioner Hsia finished perusing this document, he struck the table in high dudgeon, saying, "It's outrageous! In the face of the guarantor and the contract, how can he continue to deny his liability? I can see this rascal is given to:
*Hairsplitting and logic-chopping.*[31]
He has the look of a reneger about him." So saying, he called out to his minions, "Take him down and give him a good flogging with the heavy bamboo!"
Thereupon:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
three or four lictors turned Chiang Chu-shan over on the ground and gave him thirty hard strokes with the heavy bamboo. They beat him so severely that:
*The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and*
*Fresh blood flowed down his legs.*
Two runners were then dispatched to escort Chiang Chu-shan to his place of residence, and a bench warrant was issued authorizing the requisition of thirty taels of silver with which to make restitution to Lu Hua; failing which, the prisoner was to be remanded to the yamen for further detention.
Chiang Chu-shan's legs had been beaten so severely that he was barely able to waddle. When he made his way home, weeping and wailing, and pled with Li P'ing-erh to give him the money to pay off Lu Hua, she spat in his face and cursed him, saying, "You shameless cuckold! Whose money do you think you're giving away? You've got a nerve demanding money of me. If I'd known that:
*Even if you lost your head, you'd leave*
*a stump of debts behind;*[32]
I'd never have been blind enough to marry you. You turtle! You're:
*Good enough to look at but not fit to eat."*
When the two runners and the plaintiffs, who were waiting outside, heard the woman berating her husband, they kept up their unremitting pressure, calling out, "Chiang Wen-hui, if you can't raise the money, there's no point in delaying any further. Let's go back and report to the yamen."
Chiang Chu-shan had to come out to placate the runners and then go back inside to continue pleading with his wife. Getting down on his knees, so his torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post, [33] and weeping and wailing as he spoke, he said, "Just look upon it as a good deed, like a pilgrimage to:
*The mountains of the four directions or*
*the five sacred peaks;*[34]
*Almsgiving, or providing vegetarian*
*meals for monks.*
If you don't give me these thirty taels of silver, and I have to go back to court, how will my lacerated buttocks ever take another flogging? It will be the death of me, that's all."
The woman had no alternative but to dole out thirty taels of "snowflake" silver to her husband. Chiang Chu-shan, in due course, turned this over to Lu Hua in the presence of the magistrate, who tore up the contract and thus brought the matter to a conclusion.
Lu Hua and Chang Sheng took the thirty taels of silver they had thus obtained and paid a visit to Hsi-men Ch'ing to report on the success of their venture. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them into the summerhouse and entertained them with wine and food while they regaled him with their exploits. He was absolutely delighted and said, "You two have enabled me to vent my spleen that was all I wanted."
Lu Hua offered to turn over the thirty taels of silver to Hsi-men Ch'ing but he refused to accept it, saying, "You two take it and buy yourselves a jug of wine. You can regard it as an expression of my thanks. I may have further favours to ask of you in the future."
The two of them thanked him again and again as they got up to go and then set off with the silver in hand to resume their gambling. Truly:
*He was ever prepared to enjoy the pleasure of,*
*"abusing the innocent and good";*
*As a makeshift substitute for the delight of,*
*"addiction to clouds and rain."*[35]
To resume our story, when Chiang Chu-shan went home after handing over the silver in the judicial commissioner's courtroom, his wife refused to let him stay there.
"Just who do you think you are?" she demanded. "You might as well regard the whole episode as a fit of delirium on my part, and those thirty taels of silver as the fee for your treatment. The sooner you move out of here the better. If I let you stay any longer, I'm likely to discover that even the value of this house of mine will not suffice to pay off your debts."
Chiang Chu-shan realized that they had come to a parting of the ways and hobbled off on his painfully wounded legs, weeping and wailing, to look for a place to stay. He had to leave behind all the stock that had been purchased with his wife's money. She pressed him to remove the medical supplies, mortar and pestle, pharmacological sieve, and other impedimenta that he had brought with him, and the two of them severed their relationship forthwith. At their final parting, as he was on his way out the door, the woman even sent Old Mother Feng to dip up a pewter basin full of water and throw it after him, saying:
*"At last my enemy has been removed from my sight."*
From the day that she got rid of Chiang Chu-shan, the woman could think of no one but Hsi-men Ch'ing. She heard, moreover, that the difficulties he had been in had come to nothing, and she much regretted what she had done. Every day found her:
*Too languid to consume tea or food,*
*Too lazy to paint her moth eyebrows;*
*Leaning against one doorjamb after another,*
*Wearing out her eyes with constant gazing;*
longing in vain for someone to come. Truly:
*His pillow words remain,*
But now his love is dead;
In her room he is not seen,
In silence her soul melts.[36]
We will say no more for the moment about how Li P'ing-erh longed for Hsi-men Ch'ing but relate instead how, one day, Tai-an happened to pass by her house on horseback and noticed that the front door was shut tight, the pharmaceutical shop was no longer open for business, and everything looked as quiet as could be. When he arrived home he reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who said, "I imagine the beating he got was more than that stunted little cuckold could take. He's probably confined to his room while he recuperates. It'll be half a month, at best, before he can come out and resume business." He saw no need to take any further action in the matter.
One day, it was Wu Yüeh-niang's birthday, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, and a lot of female guests were being entertained in the main reception hall. Because Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang were no longer on speaking terms, he took himself off to the licensed quarter to pay a visit to Li Kuei-chieh's establishment. Once there, he said to Tai-an, "Take the horse home right away, and come back to fetch me this evening."
Later on, he sent someone to invite Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him for a game of backgammon. Li Kuei-ch'ing was also at home that day, and the two sisters kept their guests company and plied them with wine. After a while, they all went into the courtyard together and amused themselves by playing at "pitch-pot."[37]
As the sun was setting in the west, Tai-an came back with the horse to fetch his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the toilet at the rear of the establishment, engaged in the act of defecation. When he caught sight of Tai-an, he asked, "Is everything all right at home?"
"Everything's all right at home," replied Tai-an. "The guests in the main reception hall have already left and the things have all been put away. The First Lady has asked her eldest brother's wife and Aunt Yang to come back to her own room and visit for a while.
"Mistress Hua from Lion Street sent Old Mother Feng over today to deliver some birthday presents to the First Lady, including four trays of preserved fruit, two trays of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, birthday noodles, a bolt of material, and even a pair of shoes she had made for her with her own hands. The First Lady gave Old Mother Feng a mace of silver and explained that you weren't at home but didn't bother to invite her over."
Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that Tai-an's face was red and asked him, "Where've you been drinking?"
"Just now," said Tai-an, "Mistress Hua sent Old Mother Feng to invite me over and offered me some wine. I told her I didn't drink but she put so much pressure on me I ended up taking two cups after all. That's why my face is red.
"Mistress Hua has now come to regret what she did. She cried like anything when she saw me. When I told you what had happened the other day, you hardly believed me. It seems that the very day Chiang Chu-shan was released from the Judicial Commissioner's Court, she sent him packing. She's really very sorry for what she did, and still has her heart set on marrying you.
"She's a lot thinner than she used to be. She begged me to ask you to go see her, no matter what, and get you to decide what you're going to do. If you indicate your assent, she wants me to go right back and let her know about it."
"That lousy worthless whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she's already found a husband for herself, that ought to be that. What does she want to continue bothering me for?
"Well, if that's the way things stand, I haven't the time to go see her. Tell her to forget about the ritual presentations of tea and betrothal gifts. Let her pick a good day and I'll have the whore carried across my threshold, and be done with it."
"I understand," said Tai-an. "She's waiting at her place for me to go back and give her the word. I'll get P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung to come wait on you here."
"Go ahead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand."
Tai-an went out through the gate of the licensed quarter and straight to Li P'ing-erh's house, where he told her what had happened. The woman's heart was filled with delight.
"Good Little Brother," she said, "I'm very much indebted to you today for settling this matter with your master for me."
Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh took the trouble to:
*Wash her hands and trim her nails,*
before going into the kitchen and personally preparing some dishes, so she could regale Tai-an with food and wine.
"I'm shorthanded here," she said. "I hope you can come over tomorrow, no matter what, to help T'ien-fu supervise the movers in carrying my stuff over to your place."
She hired five or six porters, with their carrying poles, and it took them four or five days to get everything moved. Hsi-men Ch'ing didn't even bother to tell Wu Yüeh-niang what was happening but simply had her effects piled on the upper floor of the newly erected Flower-viewing Tower.
On the afternoon of the twentieth day of the eighth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched a large sedan chair, a length of red satin, and four lanterns, together with an escort consisting of Tai-an, P'ing-an, Hua-t'ung, and Lai-hsing, to have the woman carried across his threshold. Li P'ing-erh sent Old Mother Feng to take her two maidservants to their new home ahead of time and waited for her return before getting into the sedan chair and setting off herself. She turned her own house over to Old Mother Feng and T'ien-fu to look after.
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go out anywhere that day but sat in the new summerhouse, wearing an informal gown and everyday hat, awaiting the woman's arrival. When her sedan chair was set down in front of his gate, a long time elapsed before anyone came out to receive her.
Meng Yü-lou went to the master suite and said to Yüeh-niang, "Sister, you are the mistress of the household. Right now she's already at the gate. If you don't go out to receive her, how can you help annoying our husband? He's just sitting in the summerhouse, and the sedan chair has already been at the gate for an age, without anyone going out to meet it. Under the circumstances, how can she be expected to come in?"
Wu Yüeh-niang was in a quandary. On the one hand, she could go out to receive her but she was still angry about it and didn't want to give in. On the other hand, if she refused to go out, she was afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing's violent temper. Finally, after pondering the matter for a while, she:
*Lightly moved her lotus feet,*
*Gently lifted her beige skirt,*
and went out to receive her.
Li P'ing-erh, holding the ritual "precious vase"[38] in her arms, was conducted directly to the new dwelling that had been constructed for her. Her two maidservants, Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, had already had time to put everything in proper order, so she had nothing to do but await the arrival of Hsi-men Ch'ing that evening.
How could she have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing was still so angry with her that he refused to enter her chamber?
The next day she had to come out and make a formal visit to Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, where she paid her respects to the other female members of the household and was designated, in order of precedence, as the Sixth Lady. As was customary, a large feast was held on the third day, to which many female guests and relatives were invited. But her husband had yet to appear in her chamber.
The evening of her arrival he had gone to P'an Chin-lien's quarters to spend the night.

"She's your bride, after all," said Chin-lien, "and this is her first day in your home. How can you leave her in the lurch at such a time?"
"You don't know her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That whore has a little too much fire in her eyes for my taste. I'll give her the cold shoulder for a couple of days and then go in to her in my own good time."
On the third day, after the guests had departed, Hsi-men Ch'ing still refused to set foot in her chamber but went, instead, to Meng Yü-lou's quarters in the rear compound to sleep. In the middle of the night, when Li P'ing-erh saw that her husband had avoided coming into her room for the third night in a row, she sent her two maidservants off to sleep, abandoned herself to her tears, and then, alas, stood up on her bed, threw her foot bindings over the rafter, and hanged herself. Truly:
*The enamored branches having failed to intertwine*
*beneath the mandarin duck curtain;*
*Her resentful soul is the first to find its way*
*to the realm of the Nine Springs.*[39]
The two maidservants, who had dozed off, awoke to find the lamp guttering out and were getting up to trim the wick when they suddenly saw their mistress suspended over the bed. Frightened into a state of panic, they ran next door to call Ch'un-mei, saying, "Our mistress has hanged herself."
P'an Chin-lien hurriedly got up and came over to see for herself. She found the woman, dressed completely in scarlet, hanging down, stiff and straight, over the bed. She and Ch'un-mei promptly cut the foot bindings by which she was suspended and laid her down. Only after they had administered artificial respiration for some time did she spit up a mouthful of colourless saliva and regain consciousness.
"Run back to the rear compound and ask your master to come here," Chin-lien said to Ch'un-mei.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was in Meng Yü-lou's room, drinking wine, not having gone to bed yet. Before this happened, Meng Yü-lou had been remonstrating with him, saying, "How can you bring her into your household and then not darken her doorstep for three days in a row without arousing ill feelings? It makes it look as though we give this one thing priority over everything else, and insist upon our rights of seniority, begrudging her even one night of your company."
"Let her wait a full three days, then I'll go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You don't know her. That whore's got a tendency to:
*Wolf down the rice in her bowl,*
*While keeping one eye on the pot.*[40]
If you think about it, she has nothing to reproach me for. From the time her husband died, right up to the present, we've been on the closest of terms. What promises didn't she make to me? And then, at the last minute, she up and married that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan. As though I were no match for that scoundrel! So now, what's she running after me for?"
"You have every right to be upset," said Yü-lou. "But she also was imposed upon."
As they were talking, they heard the sound of knocking at the inner gate. Yü-lou sent Lan-hsiang to see who it was, and she reported that Ch'un-mei had come to fetch her master because the Sixth Lady had hanged herself in her room.
Meng Yü-lou lost no time in urging Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, saying, "I told you you ought to go look in on her but you paid no attention. It's not surprising something like this has happened."
Thereupon, with lighted lanterns, they set out for the front compound to see for themselves. When Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh heard what had happened, they also got up and went to her room. They found Chin-lien holding Li P'ing-erh up in a sitting position and asked, "Sister Five, have you given her any ginger extract yet?"
"When I first got her down, I gave her some," Chin-lien replied.
Li P'ing-erh choked for some time before she was able to cry audibly. Only then did Yüeh-niang and the others feel as though:
*The stone on their heads had finally*
*fallen to the ground,*
so they could tuck her back in bed and return to their own rooms to get some rest.
It was not until noon or thereabouts the next day that Li P'ing-erh was able to get down some congee and broth. Truly:
*Her body was like the moon at the fifth watch*
*as it is swallowed by the hills;*
*Her life was like a lamp at the third watch*
*as it begins to run out of oil.*[41]
"Don't you believe that whore," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to Li Chiao-erh and the others, "she's only putting on that suicide act to scare us. I'm not going to let her get away with it. Wait and see. This evening I'm going to go into her room and get her to stage another hanging for my benefit before I believe her. And if she balks at the idea, I'll give her a good taste of the riding crop. That lousy whore! Who does she take me for, anyway?"
When his womenfolk heard these words, they all broke into a sweat on Li P'ing-erh's behalf.
That evening, sure enough, they saw Hsi-men Ch'ing conceal a riding crop in his sleeve and head for her room. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien ordered Ch'un-mei to lock the door and not let anyone in, while they took up positions by the postern gate that led into Li P'ing-erh's courtyard and eavesdropped to see what was happening inside.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the woman was lying facedown on her bed, crying, and that she made no move to get up when she saw him come in, he was more than a little annoyed. The first thing he did was to chase her two maidservants into an empty room and tell them to stay there. Then he sat down on a chair, pointed his finger at the woman, and reviled her, saying, "Whore! If you were really sorry for what you did, what need was there to come to my house to hang yourself. You should have stuck it out with that stunted little cuckold of yours. Who asked you to come here? I haven't done you any harm, so what are you pissing those tears out of your cunt for? I've never seen anyone hang themselves before. Today you can put on a command performance for my benefit."
Thereupon, he pulled out a length of cord and threw it in her face, ordering the woman to hang herself. Li P'ing-erh remembered what Chiang Chu-shan had told her, that Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
*The foreman of the wife-beaters,*
*The leader of the lotharios.*
"What did I ever do in a previous incarnation to deserve such a fate?" she thought to herself. "Today, with my eyes wide open, I've plunged right into the fiery pit all over again."
The more upset she became the harder she cried.
This made Hsi-men Ch'ing even angrier. "Get down off that bed," he ordered. "Take off your clothes and get down on your knees."
The woman was dilatory about taking off her clothes, until Hsi-men Ch'ing turned her over on the surface of the bed, pulled the riding crop out of his sleeve, and gave her a few strokes with the whip. Only then did she take off all her clothes, above and below, and, trembling with fright, kneel down before him on the surface of the bed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down again and proceeded to subject the woman to a thorough interrogation, from beginning to end, saying, "I told you, clearly enough, to wait a little while, because I was tied up by something at home. So why did you ignore my request and rush into a marriage with that scoundrel, Dr. Chiang Chu-shan? If you'd married anyone else, it wouldn't have bothered me. But that stunted little cuckold! What could he do for you? You brought him across your threshold and then supplied the capital to set him up in business, opening a shop right under my nose, in order to take away my livelihood."
"I've already told you," the woman said, "how much I regret what I did but it's too late to do anything about that now. It was only because you left me and didn't come back that I began to go crazy with longing. The garden of that distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao that abuts on the rear of my compound, is haunted by fox spirits. At the third watch in the middle of the night they constantly:
*Assumed names and appropriated identities,*
appearing to me in your guise in order to sap my vitality, and departing only when the day dawned and the cock crowed. If you don't believe me, just ask Old Feng or the two maidservants. They'll corroborate my story.
"As time passed, my vitality was so sapped that I gradually approached the brink of death and would certainly have perished before long. It was only then that Dr. Chiang Chu-shan was engaged to see me and, like a fool, I:
*Fell right into the paste pot,*[42]
and allowed the scoundrel to take advantage of me. He said that you were implicated in some affair and had gone off to the Eastern Capital. It was only for lack of an alternative that I went down the road I did.
"How could I have known he was the sort of scoundrel who:
*Even if he lost his head, would leave*
*a stump of debts behind?*
Before I knew it, his creditors were banging on the gate and he was:
*Haled before the judge and exposed in the courtroom.*[43]
There was nothing I could do but:
*Swallow my anger and keep my own counsel.*
It cost me several taels of silver to do it but I sent him packing without delay."
"I hear you tried to get him to make out a complaint against me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "over all those things of yours I have in storage. If so, what are you doing in my house today?"
"Why you! It ought to go without saying," the woman said. "If I ever did any such thing, may my body rot completely away!"
"Even if you had," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it wouldn't scare me. They say that:
*If you have the means, you can change husbands at will.*
But I'm not about to let you get away with that sort of thing. I might as well tell you the truth. Those two guys who beat up the doctor:
*Thus and thus, and*
*So and so,*
were acting on my instructions. I had only to:
*Put in motion one of my schemes,*
in order to fix that scoundrel so he had:
*No place to run.*
All I would have to do is:
*Resort to one of my devices,*
in order to put you, too, in a position to be:
*Haled before the judge."*
"I know it was all a trick of yours," the woman said, "but take pity on me. If I'm left all by myself in some deserted place, it will be the death of me, that's all."
As she spoke, Hsi-men Ch'ing's wrath was gradually assuaged.
"Whore!" he demanded. "Come over here. Let me ask you. How do I stack up compared to that scoundrel, Dr. Chiang Chu-shan?"
"How can he be compared to you?" the woman said.
*"You're the sky;*
*He's a shard of brick.*
*You're higher than the Thirty-third Heaven;*
*He's lower than the Ninety-ninth Hell.*
Quite aside from the fact that you are:
*Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with your wealth,*
*Have a voice like plangent bronze and tinkling jade,*[44]
*Command a clever and articulate tongue,*[45]
*Dress in silks and wear brocades;*[46] *and*
*Are ever attended by three or five servants;*[47]
thereby showing yourself to be:
*A man above other men;*
even the delicacies that constitute your daily fare are such things as he would never see, were he to live for hundreds of years. How can he be compared to you? You're just what the doctor ordered. Ever since I experienced love at your hands, by day and by night all I do is long for you."
This last statement had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that:
*His delight knew no bounds.*
Throwing aside the riding crop, he helped the woman to her feet and allowed her to get dressed, after which he took her onto his lap and said, "My child, what you say is true. What does that scoundrel know about anything? To him, a saucer may look as big as the sky."
With that, he called for Ch'un-mei and told her, "Set the table at once and then go back to the rear compound and fetch us some food and wine as quick as you can." Truly, to the east the sun is shining, to the west there are clouds; just as you think it will never clear, it is already clear.

After many months of labor the work in Ximen Qing's garden was completed. The place seemed quite new. So many people came to offer congratulations that the feasting lasted for several days. One day, about the beginning of the eighth month, Xia, the magistrate of the military court, celebrated his birthday in his new house. He engaged four singing girls, a band of musicians, and a troop of actors. Ximen Qing was invited, and set off early in the morning. At home Wu Yueniang prepared a feast for the ladies of the household, and they all went to the garden to admire its arrangement. There were flowers and trees, and buildings specially placed so that they afforded a beautiful view, and everything was delightful.
There was a gatehouse, fifteen feet high and broad around, with a belvedere in each of the four directions. There was an artificial mound and a lake beside it. Bamboos, with their light green foliage, stood out against the darker green of the pines. Summerhouses, high and flat-roofed, contrasted with buildings that, though imposing, were not so high. There was provision for each of the seasons. In the spring could be seen the swallows flitting through the halls, and peach blossoms striving to outdo the apricots in beauty. In summer, from the arbours, you could look down upon the running rivulets, and delight in the happy colours of the artemisia. In autumn, from the Hall of the Humming Bird, one might gaze upon masses of golden chrysanthemums. In winter there was the Tower of Hidden Spring, where the white plum blossom held out its dainty petals.
The narrow paths were carpeted with lovely flowers, and sweet-smelling trees drooped their branches over the carven doors. There were willow trees sporting in the wind, touching, as it were, their eyebrows; and cherries, like raindrops, peeping shyly out.
Before the hall, where the swallows played, the lantern flowers were breaking into blossom; behind the Tower of Hidden Spring white apricots were just coming out. The marigold was opening beside the mound, and the bamboo shoots were springing up beside the balustrade.
The purple swallows flew daintily between the hangings; the twittering orioles flashed amid the green shadows.
There were windows shaped like the moon, and caverns of snow; halls of the wind, and halls of the waters. There were arbours of white roses and ramblers intertwined, and the thousand-leaved peach stood face to face with the willow of the Three Springs. The pine trees formed a wall, and the bamboos a passage.
There were winding streams and square ponds. Palms stood gloriously upon the steps, with sunflowers making the round after the sun. Fishes swimming among the reeds suddenly jumped, and the powdered butterflies danced in couples among the flowers.
The white peony blossomed like the face of Buddha, and lichee covered the branches like the head of the King of the Demons.
Yueniang led the others into the garden. They held each other's hands, walked on the beautiful paths, and sat on the soft fragrant moss. One leaned against an arbour and admired the view, then tossed a red cherry at the gold-fish. Another rested on the balustrade and laughingly frightened the butterflies with her silken kerchief. Yueniang herself went to the highest point, called the Hall above the Clouds, and there played chess with Li Jiao'er and Meng Yulou. The others stood at the flower summerhouse and looked down upon the white roses, the peonies, the ramblers, and the other flowers. They looked at the bamboos that bore the cold like supermen, and the proud pine trees boldly contemptuous of the snow. Throughout the four seasons the flowers never faded, and at the eight festivals it always seemed like spring. There was too much to appreciate in a single visit: it needed to be enjoyed slowly.

Wine was brought. Yueniang took the place of honour, Li Jiao'er sat opposite and the other ladies on either side. "I forgot to invite our brother," Yueniang said, and sent Xiaoyu to the outer court to invite Chen Jingji to join them. He came, dressed in a light blue hat, a long purple gown, and black boots with white soles. When he had greeted them, he sat beside his wife. After the wine had been passed around, Yueniang again played chess with her stepdaughter and Li Jiao'er. Sun Xue'e and Meng Yulou went up to admire the view, and Pan Jinlian, alone with her white silk fan, played with the butterflies near the lake by the mound. Jingji crept up behind her quietly.

"Fifth Mother," he said suddenly, "you don't know how to catch butterflies. Let me catch one for you. They go up and down. They are not quite sure what they want, and wander this way and that."

Jinlian turned and looked at him. "You must wish to die before your time, you rogue," she said. "It is clear your life means nothing to you." Jingji laughed, went closer to her, then took her in his arms and kissed her. She pushed him away and the young man stumbled. At that moment, Yueniang saw them from the steps.

"Fifth Sister," she called, "I have something to tell you. Come here!" Jinlian left Jingji and went up the steps.

When Jinlian had left him, Jingji went sadly to his own room, and wrote a poem to express his melancholy.

I saw her with a flower in her hair
With lips uncarmined though they seemed so red.
Once before, I met her, then today again
And thought she loved me, though I could not see the love.
She may give herself to me but it is not likely
She may reject me but I do not think she will.
When can we meet? When is the time for meeting?
I think of her although I cannot see her
And when I've seen her, think of her again.

Ximen Qing, after Magistrate Xia's party, passed through South Lane. He went so often about the streets and lanes, that he knew all the ne'er-do-wells who haunted them. To two of them he often gave money—Lu Hua, otherwise known as Viper in the Grass, and Zhang Sheng, who was nicknamed Rat Scurry down the Street. They were both scoundrels who spent all their time in chicken stealing and mean thieveries of every kind. Today, they were gambling as Ximen Qing passed. Reining in his horse, he called to them. They ran to him at once, made a reverence, and asked where he had been.

"It is Magistrate Xia's birthday," Ximen said, "and he invited me to take wine with him. There is a little matter I should like you to attend to for me. Do you mind?"

"Your Lordship," they said, "you need not ask. We have received too many kindnesses at your hands. If there is anything we can do for you, even if it means going through fire and water, we will do it."

"'Very well," Ximen said, "come and see me tomorrow and I will tell you what it is."

"Why wait till tomorrow?" they said; "please tell us now."

Ximen Qing lowered his voice and told them the story of Jiang Zhushan and Li Ping'er. "I want you to avenge my dishonour," he said, and pulling up his clothes, took about five taels of silver from his purse. "This will buy you some wine. If you do the business to my satisfaction, there shall be more for you."

Lu Hua would not take the money. "You have been so good to us," he said. "When you mentioned our doing something for you, I imagined you wished us to go to the Eastern Sea and take the horns from the Green Dragon, or to the Western Mountains, to draw the Magic Tiger's teeth— something really difficult. But there is nothing at all in this. We cannot accept your money for a job like this."

"If you will not take my money," Ximen said, "I shall not ask you to do it for me." He handed the money to Daian, and made ready to ride away.

Zhang Sheng stopped him. "Lu Hua," he said to his companion, "you don't understand his Lordship. If we refuse to take his money it will look as though we decline to do anything for him." They took the silver and made a profound reverence. "Your Lordship," they said, "wait for us. In less than a couple of days, we promise we'll bring a smile to your face." Zhang Sheng added that he hoped Ximen Qing would recommend them to Xia, and this he promised to do, a promise that he later redeemed.

When Ximen Qing reached home, the sun had set. Yueniang and the others went to the inner court but Jinlian stayed in the summerhouse and watched the servants clear away the remains of the feast. Ximen went straight to the garden, and found her there.

"What have you been doing while I've been away?" he said.

Jinlian laughed. "The Great Lady brought us to see the garden," she said. "We did not expect you back so early."

Ximen Qing explained. "Xia was good enough to engage four singing girls, though there were only five guests. I remembered what a long way I had to come, and came back early."

Jinlian took his long gown. "If you have had no wine," she said, "I will order some for you." Ximen Qing told Chunmei to clear everything away, except some dessert, and a jar of grape wine.

He sat down on a chair, and gazed at Jinlian admiringly. She was wearing an incense-coloured silken gown that opened down the middle, with varicoloured ribbons at the sleeves. Below was a shimmering embroidered skirt, and beneath the skirt, red shoes with white high heels. On her head she wore a net of silvery silk, a gold inlaid comb, a plum-blossom pin, and many pretty ornaments. Her lips seemed redder, and her face whiter than ever before. Ximen was seized with sudden desire for her, took her hands, pulled her to him, and embraced her. When Chunmei brought the wine, they drank it together, and kissed more passionately still. Then Jinlian pulled up her skirts, and sat upon his knee. She passed wine from her own mouth to his, and picking a fresh lotus seed with her dainty fingers, offered it to him. But Ximen refused it; he said it was too bitter.

"My son," Jinlian said, laughing, "if you refuse anything your mother offers you, you are tempting the fates." But instead of the lotus seed, she gave him a walnut. Then Ximen wished to play with her bosom, and opening her silken gown, she uncovered her exquisite, flawless, fragrant breasts. He fondled them and kissed them, delighting in their firmness. So they sat together, and enjoyed each other's company. Ximen Qing was very happy.

"I have something to tell you that will make you laugh," he said. "You remember that Doctor Jiang set up a medicine shop. When I've done with him, he'll be setting up a vegetable shop on his face." Jinlian asked him what he meant, and he told her of the arrangement he had made with Lu and Zhang.

"If you do that," said Jinlian, "you will arouse a good deal of ill feeling. Is it the Doctor Jiang who sometimes comes to see us when we are ill? I have always thought him a most modest man. He always looks at the ground when he examines us. You ought to sympathize with him, instead of treating him like this."

"You don't understand his tricks," Ximen said. "You say he looks down but, don't you see, he looks down so that he can look at your feet?"

"What a nasty-minded fellow you are!" Jinlian said. "I don't believe he ever thinks of women's feet. He is an educated man, and wouldn't dream of such a thing."

"If you judge him by appearance, you make a mistake. He pretends to be decorous but he's a very dangerous fellow at heart."

They chattered and joked for a long time. Then the wine was finished, and the table cleared, and they went to bed.

It was now two months since Li Ping'er had married the doctor. In the early days of their marriage, he was very anxious to satisfy his wife. He prepared love potions, bought some interesting pictures and other devices for stimulating love, and did, in fact, everything he could to make the lady happy. But Ximen Qing had been a more strenuous lover, and Jiang failed to come up to her expectations. She came more and more to hate the sight of him. She took the instruments of love and smashed them with a stone. "There is no strength in your loins," she cried. "You are no better than an eel. What is the use of buying things like these? You have deceived me. I thought you a piece of good meat but I find you are only good to look at, not to eat. You are like a waxen spearhead, a dead turtle."

Several times she sent him away in the middle of the night, and he had to go to the shop to sleep. She could only think of Ximen Qing, and would not allow the doctor to enter her room. Every day she went most carefully through his accounts.

It was on one such day as this, when Doctor Jiang had gone to sit down in his shop, that two men appeared. They were both tipsy, swaying from side to side, and their eyes stared wildly. They found chairs, and sat down. "Have you any dog-yellow in your shop?" they said.

Zhushan laughed, and asked them not to make fun of him. "I have ox-yellow but no dog-yellow," he said.

"Well, if you have no dog-yellow, show me some ice ashes."

"The drug shops," said the doctor, "sell ice pieces that come from Persia over the Northern Sea but no ice ashes."

"Don't ask him for such things," the other man said. "The shop has only been open for a few days, how can you expect him to have such things? We have more important business to talk about."

"Brother Jiang," he continued, "do not pretend not to know what you're about. Three years ago, when your wife died, you borrowed thirty taels of silver from Brother Lu. That and the interest now make quite a lot of money. We have come to call for it. It might have seemed discourteous if we had asked you for it as soon as we came into the shop, and you might have thought we had no consideration for you, seeing that you have just married and opened this shop. So we had our little joke. We suppose you will admit your indebtedness. But if you don't, you will have to pay just the same."

The doctor was startled. "I've never borrowed any money from you," he said.

"If you had not, we shouldn't be asking you to pay. Don't forget the old saying: If there is no crack in the egg, the flies can't get in. It's no use saying that."

"But I do not even know your honourable names," the doctor said, "and I have certainly never had the honour of your acquaintance. Why do you ask me for this money?"

"Brother Jiang, you are taking up the wrong attitude. Remember the old saying that those in authority are never poor, and men who don't pay their debts are never rich. Just think how poor you used to be. You used to go around ringing a bell and selling your plasters, when, fortunately for you, you met brother Lu, and he befriended you. You would not be where you are today, if it had not been for him."

"I am Lu Hua," the other man said. "In such and such a year you borrowed thirty taels from me and spent the money on your wife's funeral. Now you owe me forty-eight taels, counting the interest, and I want the money."

"I never had the money," cried the doctor excitedly. "If you say I did, let me see the contract."

"I was the witness," Zhang Sheng said. He took a document from his sleeve and handed it to the doctor.

Zhushan's face became the colour of wax. "You meat fit for the gallows! You low hounds!" he cried. "Whence have you sprung to cheat me?"

Lu Hua's fist flew over the counter into the doctor's face and the doctor's nose was twisted to one side. They pulled all the medicines from the shelves and threw them into the street.

"Robbers," Zhushan wailed, "how dare you steal my things?" He called his boy to help him but Lu Hua cuffed the boy away, and he dared not come again.

Zhang Sheng pulled the doctor over the counter, and rescued him from Lu Hua. "Brother Lu," he said, "he has been very slow to repay this debt but we might give him a few more days. What do you say, Brother Jiang?" he added, turning to the doctor.

"I never borrowed his money," Zhushan cried, "and if I did, why can't he talk about the matter quietly? Why does he behave like a savage?"

"Brother Jiang," Zhang Sheng said, "you talk as if you had been eating something bitter, and still had the taste in your mouth. If you had behaved reasonably, I would have asked Brother Lu to forgive you some of the interest, and you might have paid him in two or three installments. That would have been the proper method of procedure. Why did you refuse to admit the debt, and so rudely too? Did you really think that he would not ask for his money?"

"My temper got the better of me," Zhushan said. "I will go with him before the judge, and then we shall find out who had his money."

"Dear, dear!" said Zhang Sheng, "you must be drunk again."

Lu Hua suddenly let fly his fist; the doctor stretched his length on the ground and indeed nearly fell into the gutter. His hair was disarranged and his hat covered with dirt. "Oh, blue skies and glorious sun!" he cried. At that moment, the policeman arrived, and took them all into custody.

Li Ping'er, hearing the noise, went to the lattice and, peeping through, saw the policeman taking her husband away. This alarmed her, and she told old woman Feng to take down the shop signs. Meanwhile all the things in the street had been stolen. She hastily bolted the door and sat down in her own room.

Ximen Qing very soon learned what had happened. Early the next day he sent a man to the court with a message to his friend Xia, the magistrate. Xia took his place in the hall, and ordered the doctor and the accusers to be brought before him. After reading the accusation he questioned Zhushan. "You are Jiang," he said; "why did you not pay Lu Hua the money you owed, instead of striking him? A most improper proceeding!"

"I do not even know him," Zhushan said. "Certainly I never borrowed any money from him. I tried to explain but he would not listen. He beat me and kicked me and stole my belongings."

The magistrate called Lu Hua. "What have you to say about it?" he asked.

"Indeed he did." Lu Hua said. "He spent this money on his wife's funeral. For three years he has kept putting me off. I heard he had married again and had a fine shop, so I went and asked for my money. He insulted me for all he was worth, and now he says I stole his things. Here is the contract, and Zhang Sheng is the witness. I beg your Worship to investigate the matter thoroughly." He brought out the document and handed it to the magistrate.

"Jiang Wenhui, doctor of this town, writes this [it said]. His wife has died, and he has no money to pay for the funeral, therefore he engages, with Zhang Sheng as surety, to borrow thirty taels of pure silver from Lu Hua. The interest shall be three *fen* monthly. He will spend this money, and repay the thirty taels next year with the interest without any deduction. In witness whereof, this document is drawn up."

When the magistrate had read the paper, he banged his fist upon the table angrily. "Here," he cried, "are both the document and the surety. Do you think you can hoodwink me? I see you are a smooth-spoken rascal but obviously you won't pay your debts." He told the attendants to pick out a strong bamboo and beat Jiang Zhushan with all their might. Three or four of them threw him to the ground and beat him severely thirty times, till his skin was torn and the blood flowed. Then the magistrate told two constables to take a white warrant board, and escort Zhushan to his house, there to collect the thirty taels for Lu Hua. If the money was not forthcoming, he was to be taken to prison.

The doctor, dragging his aching limbs, reached home, weeping. He begged Li Ping'er to give him the money for Lu Hua. She spat in his face and cursed him. "You shameless turtle," she cried, "have you ever given me any money that I should give some to you? I've known for a long time, you turtle, that you're nothing but a braggart and a sponger. Why, I must have been blind to marry a turtle like you, good to look at and useless for anything else."

The constables, who were standing outside, heard this squabbling and became more urgent. "If Jiang has no money," they said, "there is no use wasting time. We must get back to the court at once and let his Worship know." Zhushan went out to appease them and returned again to plead with Li Ping'er.

"Treat this matter in the spirit of charity," he begged, kneeling on the ground before her, "and let it be as an offering of thirty taels to the Holy Ones of the Four Mountains and the Five Shrines. If you will not, I must go back to the court, and how can I bear more punishment on my poor torn legs? It would mean my death."

Li Ping'er could hold out no longer, and gave him the thirty taels. He gave the money to Lu Hua in the presence of the constables. The contract was torn up and the matter ended.

After Lu Hua and Zhang Sheng had got the money they went straight to Ximen Qing. He offered them wine and food in the arbour, and they told him the whole story. He was delighted. "You have avenged me; that is all I want," he said, and when Lu Hua offered him the thirty taels, he refused them. "Keep the money to buy a jar of wine," he said, "and what I gave you too. One of these days I may want something more of you." They thanked him and went away to gamble.

After Jiang Zhushan had paid the money he returned but Li Ping'er would have no more of him.

"I regard those thirty taels as money paid to rid me of a plague. Now you must go somewhere else, for if you stay here any longer, all I have in the house will not suffice to pay your debts."

The doctor wept bitterly. His legs pained him and he had nowhere to go but he was obliged to find other quarters. Everything that Li Ping'er had given him he had to leave behind, and he hired a cart to take away his old medicine box and his mortar.

When he had gone, Li Ping'er told old woman Feng to throw a basin of water after him. "I am so glad that this plague is out of my sight," she said. She longed for Ximen Qing all the time, and when she heard that his difficulties were over, she was sorrier than ever. She languished so that she did not trouble about her tea or her food and left her eyebrows unpainted. She leaned upon the door and gazed till her eyes seemed to start out of her head but nobody came.

One day Daian, riding past the house, saw that the gate was shut and the medicine shop closed. Everything seemed quiet. He went home and told Ximen Qing.

"I imagine," Ximen said, "that the little turtle has had such a good drubbing that he has to keep to his room. He won't be able to go out and attend to his business for a long time." He forgot all about the matter.

The fifteenth day of the eighth month was Yueniang's birthday, and many ladies came and were entertained in the great hall. Ximen Qing, who was still not on speaking terms with his wife, went to the house where Li Guijie lived, telling Daian to take back his horse and come again in the evening. He invited Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to play backgammon with him. Li Guiqing was there, and the two sisters together served the wine. After a while they all went to the courtyard to play Arrows through the Jar. In the afternoon Daian came back with Ximen Qing's horse, and found his master washing his hands in the back court. Ximen asked the lad what had happened at home during his absence. "Nothing particular," Daian said. "Most of the ladies have gone, and the Great Lady is in the inner court with Aunt Wu. Mistress Hua sent old woman Feng with a birthday present. There were four plates of fruits, two long-life noodles, a roll of silk, and a pair of shoes. Mother gave old woman Feng a *qian*. She said you were not at home, and did not send an invitation to Mistress Hua."

Ximen Qing saw that the boy's face was flushed. "Where have you been drinking?" he asked.

"Mistress Hua," said the boy, "told old woman Feng to ask me to go and see her. It was she who gave me the wine. I told her that I never drink but she pressed me to drink a cup or two. That's what has made my face red. She is very sorry now for what has happened, and cried for a long time. I told you before but you wouldn't believe me. After Doctor Jiang was at the court, the lady would have no more to do with him. She is very, very sorry and still wishes to marry you. She is much thinner than she was. She told me I must ask you to go and see her, and if you can, please tell me, because she is waiting to hear what you say."

"The rascally whore!" Ximen cried. "She has a man already. Why can't she leave me alone? If you are telling the truth, say I'm too busy to go. Say she need not send presents, just let her choose an auspicious day and I'll take the strumpet home."

Daian said that, as Li Ping'er was waiting for an answer, he would leave Ping'an and Huatong to go home with his master. "Go along, then," said Ximen, "it is all perfectly simple."

Daian went to the house in Lion Street, and told Li Ping'er what his master had said. She was delighted. "My good brother," she said, "I am grateful to you for what you have done for me." She went herself to the kitchen to cook something for the boy. "I have not enough boys here," she said, "and you must come one of these days to help me to get my things removed."

The next day she hired five or six porters to carry her belongings, and they were busy for four or five days. Ximen Qing said nothing to Yueniang but simply gave orders that the things were to be put in the new house. On the twentieth day of the eighth month, he sent a large sedan chair for Li Ping'er, with a roll of silk, and four pairs of red lanterns. Daian, Ping'an, Huatong, and Laixing were sent to escort the sedan chair. It was afternoon when they arrived. Li Ping'er sent her two maids in charge of old woman Feng, and when the old woman returned, she got into the sedan chair, leaving her house in the care of the old woman and Tian Fu.

That day Ximen Qing stayed at home and sat in the new summerhouse, wearing his everyday clothes and hat, waiting for Li Ping'er. The sedan chair reached the gate but, for a long time, no one came out to receive it. Yulou went to Yueniang's room. "Sister," she said, "you are the mistress here. The woman has come, and, if you do not go out to welcome her, his Lordship will be angry. He is in the garden, and the sedan chair is at the gate. How can she come in if nobody goes out to receive her?"

Yueniang at last decided to go, fearing that if she did not, her husband would fly into a temper. So, after hesitating a while, she went to the gate to receive Li Ping'er. With a precious vase in her hands, the new wife went to the room which the maids had prepared for her, and there waited for Ximen Qing. He was still angry with her and would not go that night. The next day she was taken to Yueniang's room, and there was formally given her rank and place as the Sixth Lady in the household. For three days there were celebrations. Ximen Qing invited his relatives and friends but still did not go to visit her. The first night he went to Jinlian's room.

"She is the last of us," Jinlian said, "and this is her first night. You should not let her room be empty."

"You don't realize that strumpet's eagerness," Ximen said. "I will leave her to herself for a day or two. Then I will go."

But even on the third day, when all the guests had left, instead of going to her, Ximen Qing went to Yulou's room.
Seeing that for three nights her husband kept away from her, Li Ping'er told her two maids to go to sleep, and, after sobbing for a long while, she stood upon her bed, and fastening her shoelaces to the beam, tried to hang herself.
The two maids woke. They saw that the lamp in their mistress's room was very low and got out of bed to turn it up. Then they saw the woman hanging there. They were frightened and ran at once to tell Chunmei. Jinlian got up and went to see Li Ping'er. She was hanging very stiff and straight above the bed, wearing a red dress. Jinlian and Chunmei quickly cut her down and laid her on the bed. After a while some saliva dribbled from her mouth and she began to come around.
Jinlian told Chunmei to go to the back court and ask Ximen Qing to come. He was drinking wine with Yulou and had not gone to bed. Yulou had been remonstrating with him. "You have married her," she said, "yet for three nights you do not go near her. She will be miserable and think that this is all our doing."
"You don't understand," Ximen said. "She is the sort of woman who, not content with the rice, must have the pan too. How do you expect me to be anything but annoyed? We were on the most intimate terms even before her husband's death, and I know all there is to know about her. Then she went and married that Doctor Jiang. Evidently I wasn't good enough for her. Now she wants me again."
"Oh, I understand how you feel," Yulou said, "but the other fellow deceived her."
While they were talking a knock came at the door. Yulou told her maid Lanxiang to see who was there. The maid came back and said that Chunmei had come to ask for her master because the Sixth Lady had hanged herself in her room.
"I told you so," Yulou said excitedly, urging Ximen Qing to go at once. "I told you to go to her, and you wouldn't listen to me. Now the trouble has begun." They took a lantern and went to the Sixth Lady's room.
Yueniang and Li Jiao'er also heard the news, and went to see the woman. When they arrived, Jinlian was holding her up. They asked whether she had been given any ginger broth. Jinlian told them that she had given her some as soon as she had been cut down. Li Ping'er made a gurgling noise and then began to show signs of coming around. Yueniang and the others were much relieved. They spoke consolingly to her and made her lie down. Then they went back to their own places.
The next day about noon Li Ping'er was persuaded to eat some gruel. "Don't give her a thought," Ximen Qing said to Li Jiao'er and the others. "She is playing this game in the hope of frightening me but I will see she does not get away with it. Tonight I shall go to her room and see that she hangs herself again. If she refuses, she shall taste my whip. That's the only way to show her the kind of man I am."
When the ladies heard this, they were so afraid for Li Ping'er that the sweat rose upon their brows.
That night Ximen Qing took a whip and went to her room. Yulou and Jinlian told Chunmei to shut the door and allow no one to come in. They both stood outside and quietly listened to all that went on. Ximen went into the room where Li Ping'er was lying upon the bed, sobbing. She did not get up when he came in, and this annoyed him all the more. He ordered the two maids out of the room and sat down on a chair.
"Now, you strumpet," he shouted, pointing his finger at the woman, "you have already caused me trouble once. What do you mean by coming and hanging yourself in my house? You should have gone on living with your little turtle. Nobody asked you to come here. I have done you no harm. Why should you come here with your piddling tricks? Well, I've never yet seen a woman hang herself, and I'll begin by watching you." He threw a cord to her.
Li Ping'er remembered that Jiang Zhushan had told her of Ximen's prowess as a wife beater, and wondered what misdeed in a former existence had brought her to such a pass that day. She sobbed more loudly.
Ximen Qing, in a terrible rage, ordered her to get down from the bed, strip, and kneel before him. When she hesitated, he threw her to the ground and beat her several times. Then she took off her clothes and knelt down trembling. Ximen still sat still and related all her misdeeds. "I told you," he said, "that you must wait a while for me because I was busy. You paid no attention but married that fellow Jiang. If it had been anybody else, I would not have cared but to marry a miserable creature like him... You took him to live in your own house and gave him money to set up a shop beneath my very eyes. I suppose you thought you would try to start a rival shop to mine."
"It is too late for me to be sorry now," the woman said. "But I did wait for you, and thought about you day and night till I became crazy. The garden of the noble family of Qiao is at the back of my house, and there were many foxes there that came in the middle of the night in human form and sucked the marrow from my bones. When morning came, they disappeared. If you don't believe me, ask old woman Feng and my two maids. I nearly died, and they sent for Doctor Jiang to cure me. I was quite helpless and he deceived me. He told me you had gone to the Eastern Capital, and there was nothing for me to do but marry him. I didn't realize what a good-for-nothing braggart he was. Then someone came and set upon him at the door, there was trouble at the court, and it was all very troublesome for me. I lost my money and drove him away."
"You told him," Ximen said, "to accuse me of having detained your property. Why do you come back to me now?"
"Wherever did you hear that nonsense?" Li Ping'er cried. "I would have been torn in pieces first."
"It would not have mattered to me if you had," Ximen said. "You may have money enough to get a new husband when you want a change but you shall not behave like that here. Let me tell you this. It was I who got the men to set upon Doctor Jiang. It was no trouble to me but it was quite enough to set that fellow spinning round and round looking for a hole to crawl into. If I had taken the matter more seriously, you would have been taken to the court too, and made to give up everything you have."
"I knew it was your doing," Li Ping'er said, 'but forgive me, I beg you. If you treated me as you say, there would be nothing for me to do but die."
Ximen's ill temper was gradually dying away. "Tell me, you strumpet, who's the better man, Jiang or I?"
"How can he compare with you?" the woman said. "You are like the heavens, and he is nothing but a piece of clay. It was such a man as you who set the tiles upon the palace of the Jade Emperor in the thirty-third heaven, and he is fit only to dig coal for the King of Hell in the ninety-ninth abode beneath the earth. Don't mention yourself in the same breath with him. Why, such food as you have upon your table every day, he has never seen and never will see, though he live to be hundreds of years old. How can I compare him with you? Not only he but Hua, my first husband too. Had he been the least like you, I'd never have desired you. But you're just what I need. Ever since I came into your hands I have never ceased to think about you day and night."
With such words, she made Ximen remember his old affection for her and his heart was happy again. He threw the whip aside, lifted the woman up, made her put on her clothes again, and took her in his arms. "Daughter," he said, "you say but the truth. Indeed he's never seen a sky as large as a plate." He told Chunmei to set out a table and bring wine and food.

## 041

### Meng Yü-lou High-mindedly Intercedes with Wu Yüeh-niang; Hsi-men Ch'ing Wreaks Havoc in the Verdant Spring Bordello & the Reconciliation

*In this world, one has a role to play for 70 years;*
What need is there both day and night to overtax one's spirits?
The affairs of this world in the end bring naught but regret;
The fleeting luxury that beguiles the eye is wont to prove unreal.
Poverty and want, wealth and distinction, are allocated by Heaven;
Success and failure, glory and luxury, are but dust in a crack.
So why not let yourself go, enjoying pleasures as they come;
Rather than waiting for the gray hairs to invade your temples?

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by the few:
*Soft-spoken sentiments and tender words,*
addressed to him by Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom that:
*His anger turned to joy.*[2]
After he had helped her to her feet and allowed her to get dressed, the two of them fell to:
*Hugging and embracing each other,*
*As inseparable as they could be.*
Meanwhile, he called Ch'un-mei into the room and told her to set the table and then go to the rear compound to fetch some wine.
To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou had been standing outside the postern gate eavesdropping upon the events within. The door of Li P'ing-erh's room was closed but Ch'un-mei was waiting in attendance, all by herself, in the intervening courtyard. Chin-lien had taken Yü-lou by the hand, and the two of them were gazing through the cracks in the gate to see what they could observe. They saw that her room was lit by lamp and candle light, and could tell that the two were talking inside but were unable to overhear what was being said.
"We're not as well off as that lousy little piece Ch'un-mei," said Chin-lien. "She can hear everything perfectly."
Ch'un-mei listened surreptitiously outside the window for a while and then strolled over toward the gate.
"What's going on inside the room," Chin-lien demanded in a whisper.
When Ch'un-mei heard the question, she came over and relayed the story to the two auditors on the other side of the gate, saying, "Father told her to take off her clothes and get down on her knees but she wouldn't take her clothes off, so Father got angry and gave her a few strokes with the riding crop."
"Did she take them off when he whipped her?" asked Chin-lien.
"Only when she realized how angry he was," said Ch'un-mei, "was she frightened enough to take her clothes off and kneel down before him on the bed. Father's interrogating her right now."
Meng Yü-lou, who was afraid Hsi-men Ch'ing might overhear them, said, "Sister Five, let's go over to the other side," and proceeded to pull Chin-lien around to the postern gate on the west side of the courtyard. It was early in the third decade of the eighth month and the moon had just come up. Chin-lien cracked melon seeds with her teeth as the two of them stood there in the dark shadows and chatted together, while they waited for Ch'un-mei to come out with a further report.
"Our sister must have thought she was in for a tasty treat," Chin-lien said to Yü-lou. "The only thing she wanted was a chance to move in here, and now:
*Before being able to so much as shake her head;*[3]
she's had to face this initiatory ordeal, and brought down these strokes of the whip on herself. As for that totally inconsiderate good-for-nothing of ours, as long as you go along with him he may be all right but:
*He's just like hot taffy;*
*Whether you try to twist it or whether you don't,*
*you get stuck either way.*[4]
Remember what happened to me when that slavey of a concubine tried to nail me with her talebearing? And then there was that prostitute from the quarter. No matter how circumspect I tried to be, she got him to give me a hard time. How I cried over it! As for you, Sister, how long have you been here, anyway? You still don't know what you're up against."
Not long after the two of them had begun their conversation, the postern gate was heard to open and Ch'un-mei came out on her way to the rear compound.
Unexpectedly, her mistress, who was standing in the dark shadows, demanded, "You little piece, where are you off to?"
Ch'un-mei laughed but continued on her way.
"You crazy little piece," said Chin-lien. "Come over here. I want to ask you something. What are you in such a hurry for, anyway?"
Only then did Ch'un-mei stop and give an account, thus and so, of what had happened.
"First she cried, and then did a lot of talking," she said, "until Father so far relented that he lifted her up and embraced her. Then he had her put her clothes back on and told me to set the table. Right now, I'm on my way to the rear compound to fetch some wine for them."
When Chin-lien heard this, she turned to Yü-lou and said, "That lousy shameless good-for-nothing!
*The thunder may have been loud but*
*The raindrops didn't amount to anything.*[5]
To hear him tell it, he was going to give her a real thrashing, raise royal hell with her; but when it came to the crunch, nothing happened at all. I can see it now. I'll bet you anything, when she brings the wine, he'll have Ch'un-mei serve it. The lousy little piece! You'd think she didn't have any maidservants of her own. If you go fetch his wine for him, when you get to the rear compound that slavey of a concubine, Hsüeh-o, is likely to start shooting off her cunt about it the way she did before. I've had enough of that, thank you."
"As long as Father sent me, what's it all to me?" said Ch'un-mei, as she went off with a giggle.
"That little piece of mine is the limit," said Chin-lien. "When I give her a regular job to do, she's so slow to get a move on, you'd think she was dead. I don't know why it is but whenever there's some;
*Pussyfooting errand,*[6]
to be run for anyone else, she's ready to:
*Stick her head into any cranny;*[7]
to get a crack at it, and takes off like a flash. You know perfectly well she's got two maidservants of her own but you'll run your legs off in their stead. What's it to you? That little piece of mine is like:
*The radish peddler who tags along after the salt vendor:*
*forever horning in where she doesn't belong.*[8]
"Why do you suppose it is?" said Yü-lou. "If I tell my own senior maidservant, Lan-hsiang, to get to work on something, she may look like she's going to but she doesn't. While if her master puts her up to any piece of mischief, she not only obeys but goes off like a flash too."
As they were talking, who should suddenly turn up from the rear compound but Yü-hsiao, who said, "I see the Third Lady is still here. I've come to fetch you."
"You crazy little bitch! You gave me quite a start," exclaimed Yü-lou, who then went on to ask, "Does your mistress know you're here?"
"I put my mistress to bed some time ago," said Yü-hsiao. "I was coming out to the front compound to see what was up, just now, when I ran into Ch'un-mei, on her way back to fetch some wine and appetizers."
"What happened after the master went into her room?" she then went on to ask.
"When he went into her room," Chin-lien interjected, "it was the same old story:
*Like the ugly lady with the pointed head who tried to*
*improve matters by banging it against the privy wall:*
*She's got everything shipshape."*
Yü-hsiao had to ask Yü-lou again for an explanation, and she told her all that had happened.
"You don't mean to say, Third Lady," exclaimed Yü-hsiao, "that he really made her take off her clothes and get down on her knees, and then gave her five strokes with the riding crop?"
"He only started whipping her when she refused to get down on her knees," said Yü-lou.
"So he whipped her over her clothes," said Yü-hsiao. "If he'd whipped her without them, how could her fair white skin ever have endured it?"
"You crazy little bitch," laughed Yü-lou. "You're really sensitive enough to:
*Empathize with the sorrows of the ancients.*"[9]
As they were talking, who should appear but Ch'un-mei and Hsiao-yü, with the wine and appetizers. Ch'un-mei had the wine and Hsiao-yü was carrying a square box with the food. They headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's room.
"You lousy little piece!" said Chin-lien. "I don't know why it is but whenever you get wind of a job like this, you seem to think it's:
*Like a rat stationed in the clouds:*
*The 'furry pest' Heaven has to offer.*"[10]
"Well, make your delivery and get it over with," she ordered. "And let her own maidservants look after her from now on. Don't you pay any further attention to them. I've got something for you to do."
Ch'un-mei merely giggled and went inside with Hsiao-yü. Once there, they laid the wine and food out on the table and then came outside again, leaving Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un in the room to wait on them.
When Yü-lou and Chin-lien had finished questioning them, Yü-hsiao said, "Third Lady, let's go back to the rear compound," and the two of them went off together.
Chin-lien told Ch'un-mei to lock the postern gate and then went back to her room to spend a solitary night. But no more of this. Truly:
*What a pity that, in its perfect fullness,*
*the moon of this night:*
*Should shed its pure radiance on other gardens,*
*so near and yet so far.*[11]

We will say no more, for the moment, about P'an Chin-lien's solitary night but turn instead to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li P'ing-erh. The two of them:
*Indulged their mutual affection,*
*Drinking wine and talking together,*
until the middle of the night before they:
*Spread the kingfisher-coloured quilt,*
*Laid out the mandarin duck pillows,*
*Got into bed and prepared to sleep.*
Indeed:
*Under the flickering lamplight,*
*They remind one of phoenixes singing a duet*
*within a mirror;*
*Enveloped in fragrant incense,*
*They resemble butterflies doing a pas de deux*
*among the flowers.*
Truly:
*This evening let the silver lamp burn*
*brightly as it will;*
*They're still afraid this tryst of theirs is*
*nothing but a dream.*[12]
There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:
*Her eyebrows lightly penciled,*
her comb stuck askew;
She has no heart to continue
doing her embroidery.
Deep within cloudy windows,
in misty chambers;
Her orchidaceous heart
studies to please.
*Beautiful as can be,*
Ever more lovely;
She is a goddess incarnate,
unknown to this world.
From now on she can abandon
that lovesick refrain;
Brocade itself is no fit simile
for such a consummation.[13]
The two of them slept until lunchtime the next day. Li P'ing-erh was just getting up to look in the mirror and comb her hair when who should appear but Ying-ch'un, who had been to the kitchen in the rear compound. She was carrying four saucers of fancy appetizers: one of squash and eggplant julienne in a sweet sauce, one of Chinese cabbage vinaigrette, one of smoked pork, and one of minced shad preserved in fermented red mash. In addition there was a bowl of boiled squab and another of junket flavoured with yellow leeks. These were accompanied by two silver-mounted bowls of fresh white fragrant nonglutinous rice and two pairs of ivory chopsticks.
The woman had rinsed out her mouth and joined Hsi-men Ch'ing in drinking half a cup of wine when she turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Decant some of that Chin-hua wine[14] in the silver flagon that was left over from yesterday."
Goblets were set out and she kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company as they drank two bumpers apiece before she washed her face and completed her toilet. She then proceeded to open up her trunks and display her valuables, jewelry, and clothing for Hsi-men Ch'ing's benefit. She brought out the necklace of one hundred large, Western Ocean pearls that she had originally appropriated from the household of Privy Councilor Liang Shih-chieh and showed it to him. She also produced an onyx cap button in a gold setting that she said had belonged to the late eunuch director. Detached from its cap and put on the scales, it turned out to weigh four mace and eight candareens. Li P'ing-erh suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that he take it to a silversmith and have it made into a pair of pendant earrings for her.
She also brought out a fret of gold filigree that weighed nine ounces and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Do the First Lady and the others have frets like this one or not?"
"Some of them do have frets of silver filigree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but none of them has anything as elaborate as this."
"I'd better not wear it, then," the woman said. "Take it to the silversmith for me, to be melted down, and then have him make me a pin for holding my chignon in place, in the shape of nine golden phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks. With whatever's left over, have him make me a tiara of jade, enchased with gold, representing 'the goddess Kuan-yin in her full glory' like the one the First Lady wears in front of her coiffure."
Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted these commissions, combed his hair and washed his face, put on his clothes, and prepared to go out.
"There's no one to look after the other house," said Li P'ing-erh. "Whatever you do, you ought to go by there to check things out and assign someone to take care of it in T'ien-fu's place so he can come and serve here at home. Mother Feng, the old good-for-nothing, is getting so doddery I don't feel right leaving her there all by herself."
"I'll do just as you say," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he put the fret and the cap button into his sleeve and headed for the door.
He was on his way out of the compound when he was unexpectedly accosted by P'an Chin-lien, who was standing by the postern gate on the east side of the courtyard with her hair in disarray and an unwashed face.
"Brother, where are you off to?" she demanded. "At this hour of the morning you look:
*Day-blind enough to catch a sparrow in the eye."*
"I've got an errand to run," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You crazy good-for-nothing," said Chin-lien. "Come back here. What are you in such a hurry for, anyway? I've got something to say to you."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how importunate she was, he had no alternative but to come back and allow himself to be led into her room.
The woman sat down on a chair and, taking his two hands in hers, said, "I'll only be wasting my breath on you. Are your legs on fire, you crazy three-inch good-for-nothing? No one's going to:
*Stew you in a pot and eat you.*[15]
What are you so anxious to get away with, anyway? Come over here. I want to ask you something."
"That's enough, you little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why be so importunate? I've got an errand to run. I'll tell you when I get back."
As he spoke he started outside but the woman felt his sleeve and, detecting something heavy in it, said, "What's this? Take it out and show it to me."
"It's the wallet I carry my silver in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The woman didn't believe him and, sticking her hand into his sleeve to see for herself, pulled out the fret of gold filigree.
"This is her fret, isn't it?" she said. "Where are you taking it?"
"She asked me whether any of you had frets like this one," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I told her you didn't. So she wants me to take it to the silversmith to be melted down and made into another two pieces of jewelry for her to wear."
"What does this fret weigh," asked Chin-lien, "and what does she want it made into?"
"It weighs nine ounces," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She wants it made into a nine-phoenix pin and a tiara of jade, enchased with gold, representing 'the goddess Kuan-yin in her full glory,' like the one the First Lady wears in front of her coiffure."
"A nine-phoenix pin," said Chin-lien, "would only take three ounces and five or six mace of gold, at the most. And as for that tiara of the First Lady's, I've weighed it myself, and it only comes to one ounce and six mace. Whatever you do, have him use what's left over to make another nine-phoenix pin, just like hers, for me."
"She wants the setting of that 'Kuan-yin in her full glory' to be solid and sturdy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Even if it were made solid and sturdy," said Chin-lien, "it wouldn't take more than three ounces. At the very least, barring any monkey business, he ought to be able to squeeze two or three extra ounces of gold out of it that would be enough to make a pin for me."
"You little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself. You've got to have your finger in every pie."
"My son," said Chin-lien, "you would do well to heed your mother's words. If you don't get that pin made up for me, I'll have something further to say to you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing put the fret back in his sleeve, laughed, and started out the door.
"Brother," joked Chin-lien, "you've met your match at last."
"What do you mean I've met my match?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If you haven't met your match," said Chin-lien, "how come, last night:
*The thunder may have been loud but*
*The raindrops didn't amount to anything?*
You were threatening to give her a real thrashing and make her hang herself. But this morning all she had to do was pull out a fret in order to:
*Make a ghost at the millstone out of you.*[16]
You dog of an oily mouth! There's nothing you won't do for her."
"You little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he finally made his exit. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."
To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in her room with Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh when they suddenly heard a servant outside calling for Lai-wang but unable to find him. Who should it turn out to be but P'ing-an, who lifted aside the portiere on the threshold.
"What do you want him for?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"Father is waiting impatiently for him," said P'ing-an.
Yüeh-niang took her time in responding, before finally saying, "I've sent him on an errand."
It so happens that earlier that morning Yüeh-niang had sent him to Nun Wang's monastery to deliver a votive gift of incense, oil, and white rice.
"I'll simply tell Father you've sent him on an errand," said P'ing-an.
"You crazy slave!" Yüeh-niang retorted angrily. "Tell him whatever you like."
P'ing-an was so taken aback by her response that he went out without daring to utter another word.
Yüeh-niang turned to Yü-lou and the others and said, "If I say anything about it, he claims it's none of my business. If I don't say anything, I get so frustrated I could burst. He's brought that person into our household, bag and baggage, so why doesn't he just sell off that house of hers and be done with it? What's the point of all this rot about:
*Ringing bells and beating drums;*[17]
in order to protect the place? In any case, she's already got that Old Mother Feng of hers there, so the most we need to do is send an unmarried pageboy over to spend the nights. Does he think the house is going to walk away on him? After all:
*If you're going to be a wet nurse,*
*You've got to handle the shit that goes with the job.*
But no one else but Lai-wang and his wife will do, despite the fact that she's suffering from:
*Seven ailments and eight pains.*[18]
If she should happen to come down with something and take to her bed over there, who would look after her?"
"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "you are my senior, and I may be speaking out of turn but you are the mistress of the household. The fact that you and our husband are not on speaking terms makes it difficult for any of the rest of us to know what to do and leaves the servants with nowhere to turn. The way our husband has been carrying on the last few days:
*Alienated from this one and abusive of that,*
indicates that he, too, is completely at loose ends. Wouldn't you be willing to consider, for our sake, saying a few words to him and making it up somehow?"
"Third Sister Meng," said Yüeh-niang, "you'd better get those ideas out of your head. I haven't picked any quarrel with him. He's simply making a show of his temper for no reason at all. I don't care how long a face he pulls, that's not going to get me to give him another look. He's been calling me an undutiful whore behind my back. How have I been undutiful, I'd like to know? It's only now, after I've allowed him to bring six or seven bedmates into the place, that he's discovered how undutiful I am. It's always been true that:
*If you wish to get along, say what people want to hear;*
*If you try to be honest, you'll only arouse antagonism.*[19]
"As for my husband, originally, when I did what I could to talk you out of marrying her, I was thinking only of your own best interests. Since you had already stashed away all those valuables of hers, and bought her husband's house into the bargain, if you were then revealed to have designs upon his wife, and it had come to the attention of the authorities, they would have taken a dim view of it. On top of which, her mourning period wasn't even over yet, so you really couldn't very well marry her, I said.
"How was I to know that behind my back the trap had already been sprung? Every day:
*Betrothal gifts were exchanged between them,*[20]
while I was the only one kept in the dark. They might as well have:
*Put a water crock over my head.*[21]
One day he claimed he was 'spending the night in the quarter,' and the next day he claimed he was 'spending the night in the quarter.' How was I to know that all he wanted was to get her into his own house so he could 'spend the night in the quarter' the more conveniently?
*"He's so susceptible to other people's:*
*Showy glamor and gaudy airs,*[22]
they can:
*Conjure dragons and depict tigers,*

as a cover for their:
*Two faces and three knives;*[23]
and he thinks they're:
*As wonderful as can be.*[24]
Meanwhile, people like myself, who try to be honest but whose:
*Good advice proves bitter to the taste;*[25]
can't even get his attention, and end up being treated like enemies. Truly:
*Though the preceding carriages have overturned*
by the thousands;
The carriages that follow continue to overturn
in the same way.
No matter how clearly one may point out
the safest route;
One's honest words are misconstrued
as ill-meant advice.
"If you won't pay any attention to me, I won't demand anything of you. So long as you don't begrudge me three meals a day, I'll make do as though I no longer had a husband at all, and live the life of a widow here in my room. The rest of you had better let me do as I like. It's none of your business."
This speech of Yüeh-niang's left Yü-lou and the others at a loss for words for some time.
At this juncture, who should appear but Li P'ing-erh, who had combed her hair and made herself up in order to come to the master suite and offer Yüeh-niang and the others the customary ceremonial tea. She was wearing a silk blouse of scarlet brocade that opened down the middle, over a long trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue figured silk, and was accompanied by Ying-ch'un, bearing a silver pitcher of hot water, and Hsiu-ch'un, with a box of tea. Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to bring her a seat and had her sit down. A little later Sun Hsüeh-o also came in, and after Li P'ing-erh had served tea to each of them in turn they all sat down together.
P'an Chin-lien, who had a sharp tongue, broke the ice by saying, "Sister Li, come over here and kowtow to your elder sister. To be frank with you, our elder sister and Father have not been on speaking terms with each other for quite a while now, all on your account. We've just spent half the day interceding with her for your sake. Some day soon you really ought to prepare a feast for them and see if you can't get the old couple to make it up somehow."
"I'll do just as you say, Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.
Thereupon, she knelt down on the floor in front of Yüeh-niang and:
*Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;*
*Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;*
*Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;*
kowtowed to her four times.
"She's only pulling your leg, Sister Li," said Yüeh-niang.
Turning, then, to Chin-lien, she continued, "Fifth Sister, you can all give up your efforts to persuade me. I've already sworn an oath. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never be reconciled to him."
As a result of this, none of them dared bring it up again.
Chin-lien had picked up a small brush and was standing beside Li P'ing-erh, smoothing her coiffure with it, when she noticed that she was wearing in her hair a gold openwork pin in the shape of a cricket and an ornamental comb decorated with the motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends," in gold filigree.
"Sister Li," she said, "you really oughtn't to wear anything as intricate as this cricket pin. It's likely to get tangled in your hair. Something like that gold-enchased 'Kuan-yin in her full glory' that our elder sister wears in her coiffure would be better. It's more solid and sturdy."
Li P'ing-erh replied quite innocently, "I plan to get the silversmith to make one just like it for me."
A little later, Hsiao-yü and Yü-hsiao came up to replenish her tea and took advantage of the occasion to tease her.
Yü-hsiao began by asking, "Sixth Lady, what office in the Imperial City was that old eunuch director of yours originally attached to?"
"He started out as director of the Firewood Office in the Imperial Palace," said Li P'ing-erh, "and served in the Imperial Bodyguard. Later on he was promoted to the position of grand defender of Kuang-nan."
"It comes as no surprise, then," laughed Yü-hsiao, "that yesterday you seemed to be so intimately acquainted with the stick."
"Last year the community heads and elders from all the villages outside the city walls were looking for you everywhere," chimed in Hsiao-yü. "They wanted you to go to the Eastern Capital on their behalf."
Li P'ing-erh, who was still a bit slow on the uptake, asked, "Why were they looking for me in particular?"
"They said you really knew how to abase yourself effectively in pleading for flood relief," laughed Hsiao-yü.
"Yesterday:
*You were like the old biddy from the countryside on a*
*pilgrimage to the Temple of the Thousand Buddhas,"*
resumed Yü-hsiao.
*"You kept on kowtowing as if there were no end in sight."*
"The other day, it is reported," Hsiao-yü continued, "the emperor sent four border patrol agents[26] to ask if you would consent to go abroad in order to make a marriage alliance with the Huns. Is that really so?"
"I didn't know anything about it," said Li P'ing-erh.
"They said you had an irresistible way of saying 'Huney,' " laughed Hsiao-yü.
These sallies reduced Yü-lou and Chin-lien to helpless laughter.
"You crazy little stinkers!" Yüeh-niang finally intervened. "Go on about your business. Haven't you anything better to do than tease her?"
By this time Li P'ing-erh was so embarrassed her face had become a patchwork of red and white blotches. She was so ill at ease she didn't know whether to get up or stay put but finally escaped to her own quarters.
Some time later, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room to tell her that Silversmith Ku had agreed to make the jewelry to her specifications.
In the course of consulting with her, he said, "Tomorrow we'll send out invitations asking the male friends of the family to come to a wedding reception on the 25th. We can scarcely avoid sending an invitation to Hua the Elder."
"His wife came to the third-day feast," said Li P'ing-erh, "and was anxious that he be invited. It doesn't matter. You might as well go ahead and invite him."
"As for the other house," she continued, "I guess Old Mother Feng can handle it, after all. If you would just send someone to take turns with T'ien-fu spending the night over there, that ought to take care of it. There's no need to make Lai-wang move in. My elder sister in the master suite says his wife is in such poor health she won't be able to go with him."
"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He proceeded forthwith to summon P'ing-an and instructed him, "You and T'ien-fu take turns, on alternate days, spending the night at the house on Lion Street." But no more of this.
To make a long story short, in no time at all it was the 25th, the day of the wedding feast for male friends and relatives in Li P'ing-erh's honour. The main reception hall was decorated with flowers, and four singing girls as well as a troupe of tumblers and acrobats were engaged for the occasion. The brothers-in-law, Hua the Elder and Wu K'ai, were seated at the head table. Wu Yüeh-niang's younger brother, Wu the Second, and her eldest sister's husband, Mr. Shen, were seated at the second table. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were seated at the third table. Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun were seated at the fourth table. Cadger Ch'ang and Heartless Wu were seated at the fifth table. Welsher Yün and Scrounger Pai were seated at the sixth table. Hsi-men Ch'ing took his place as host with his managers, Fu Ming and Scurry-about Pen, and his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, arrayed to either side.
Before the feast, shortly after noon, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Tung Yü-hsien, and Han Chin-ch'uan arrived in their sedan chairs and were entertained by Yüeh-niang in the master suite. The male guests, upon their arrival, were seated in the newly erected summerhouse and served tea. After everyone had arrived, they moved into the main reception hall where the tables were already set up, with place cards indicating who was to sit in the positions of greater and lesser honour at each table.
The appetizers consisted of wildfowl wrapped in pastry and a soup of eight ingredients. The first main course was roast goose. As the food was being served, the musicians struck up a tune and the tumblers put on a performance that turned out to be a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen. [27] After they went off, the two boy actors, Li Ming and Wu Hui, came on to play and sing for the company. They were followed by an instrumental interlude, after which the four singing girls came in to ply the guests with wine.
At this juncture, from his place at the table, Ying Po-chüeh spoke up, saying, "Today is our elder brother's wedding feast. Though it may not be my place to do so, I have screwed up the courage to request that our new sister-in-law be invited out so we may pay her our respects. That would put the seal on our intimacy. What /think may not matter too much but your esteemed kinsman Hua the Elder, your two brothers-in-law, and Mr. Shen are all here today. What else did they come for?"
"My insignificant concubine is far too unworthy to receive such an honour," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Pray excuse her."
"That's no way to talk," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "You promised us beforehand. Were it not for our sister-in-law, why should we have come? Moreover, our sister-in-law's esteemed kinsman, Hua the Elder, is here.
*At first only a friend,*
*Now he is our kinsman.*
It's not as though she were being invited out to meet a stranger. What is there to worry about?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed but did not make a move.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "don't laugh. We've all brought our reception fees with us. We're not asking her to come out and meet us for nothing."
"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."
Unable to resist these repeated importunities any longer, he called over Tai-an and told him to convey the request to the rear compound.
After some time, Tai-an reappeared and reported, "The Sixth Lady begs to be excused."
"That's enough of your monkey business, you little dog-bone," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You think you can fool me by pretending to go inside and then coming up with such a tale? You may swear as much as you like but if you stick to your story, I'll have to go back there myself."
"You don't mean to suggest I'd try to fool the likes of you, do you?" protested Tai-an. "Go ahead back, then, and see for yourself."
"You think I wouldn't dare?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, the garden is familiar territory. Suppose I go inside and drag out the whole lot of your mistresses, how would that be?"
"That big pug of ours is something fierce," said Tai-an. "I'd hate to see you lose your balls."
Ying Po-chüeh made a great show of jumping up from his place, chasing after Tai-an, and giving him a couple of kicks.
"A fine little dog-bone you are!" he laughed. "You know how to get at me all right. Now go back there again, as quick as you can, and invite her out. If you fail, it'll cost you twenty of the best with the cane."
This performance caused everyone, including the four singing girls, to burst into laughter.
Tai-an returned to the host's position at the foot of the hall and stood there watching his master, without making a move.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:
*At a loss for what to do next,*
had no alternative but to call Tai-an over and instruct him, "Tell the Sixth Lady to get herself ready and come out to meet the guests."
After Tai-an had been gone for some time he came out again and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing to go inside. The servants of the guests were then herded outside and the inner gate was closed. The four singing girls went back to the interior to supply a musical accompaniment for Li P'ing-erh's entrance. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien did their best to encourage her, helping to smooth her coiffure and put on her jewelry, before pronouncing her ready to go out.
Brocaded rugs and embroidered carpets were laid down in the reception hall, whereupon:
*Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,*
*To the strains of strings and woodwinds,*
conducted on her way by the four singing girls, the woman made her appearance at last.
She was wearing a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated silk over a skirt of sand-green material, sprigged with gold-stemmed and green-leaved flowers. Behold:
*Her waist is encircled by,*
*A lady's girdle inset with plaques of green jade;*
*Her wrists are enclosed in,*
*Gold bangles that double as sleeve-weights.*
*On her breast there lies,*
*An amulet suspended from a necklace;*
*By her skirt is heard,*
*The tinkling of girdle pendants.*
*On her head,*
*Pearls and trinkets rise in piles:*
*Beside her temple,*
*A jeweled hairpin is half askew.*
*Gold rings with amethyst pendants,*
*Hang low beneath her ears;*
*Phoenix pins with dangling pearls,*
*Jut from either side of her chignon.*
*Her powdered face makes a perfect ground*
*on which to display beauty marks;*
*Her beige skirt only enhances the sight*
*of her tiny red mandarin duck shoes.*
*It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down*
*from her palace in the moon;*
*She is exactly like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain*

*deigning to grace the feast.*
The four singing girls, playing the *p'i-p'a*, psaltery, and three-stringed banjo, clustered around her as she saluted the company with a formal kowtow:
*Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;*
*Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying.*
There was not a man present who did not make haste to rise from his place and return her salute.
To resume our story, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li Chiao-erh clustered around Wu Yüeh-niang behind a hanging screen in the reception hall to see what they could hear and see of the proceedings. They heard the singing girls perform the song to the tune "Clever Improvisation" that begins with the words:
*How pleased we are by your success,*
*You have been doubly favoured.*
And then continues:
*Heaven has made this perfect match;*
Like male and female phoenix are husband and wife.
Wearing golden seal and purple ribbon,
marks of glory and distinction,
Today we thank our parents,
Profoundly grateful for their loving care.
Chorus:
How happy we are to meet again,
How happy we are to meet again.
In the decorated hall ranks of pearls
and head ornaments are arrayed.
The happy hubbub of feasting and music
is graced with a spring breeze.
This day we will renew our marriage vows,
Enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss,
Like fish sporting in the water.
They then proceeded to the next song in the suite, to the tune "Flirtatious Laughter," which begins with the words:
*Gaily laughing we celebrate this happy occasion,*
By raising our phoenix goblets on high.
To the sound of ivory clappers, silver psaltery, and jade flute,
Let them bring on in cups and platters,
The fruits of sea and land to grace the auspicious feast.
The name of the winner of top honours is emblazoned on the tiger placard.
Behold: in perfumed hall and painted chamber, we feast from brazen vessels.

The song concluded with the words:
*May they live happily together as husband and wife forever and ever.*[28]
TO THE TUNE "CONGRUENT WAYS":
Formerly we feared the shame of
public exposure;
Our temporary anger was only
a pretense.
We did not anticipate that you
would reject us;
At that time we had no way of
keeping you.
But now that we have arrived at the present day,
Let us enjoy ourselves and endeavor
to get drunk.
Endeavor to get drunk,
But never forget the role played in the past
by the gaily coloured ball.
TO THE TUNE "THE DOLL":
How joyous our delight as tortoiseshell mats
are spread for the feast.
In the fine haze, incense curls from golden
lion-shaped censers.
We are surrounded by red, encircled by emerald,
like piles of embroidered brocade.
Hear how the musicians play in perfect unison;
Truly: it is a model occasion.
TO THE TUNE "IMPOSTER'S SONG":
In spring we enjoy this famous park;
the flowers are like silks;
The scene is most remarkable.
Amid ten li of lotus blossoms
oars move lightly;
Everything is perfect.
In the decorated hall, day after day,
fine feasts are spread.
Do not fail to take advantage of
such auspicious occasions,
Such auspicious occasions;
But give others cause to celebrate the story of
*The Gaily Coloured Tower*.
TO THE TUNE "SACRED BHAIṢAJYA-RĀJA":
The notes are harmonious,
The melodies entrancing;
Happily we celebrate the occasion
by providing this feast.
Never parted for a moment,
Following in each other's steps;
In such a good marriage, truly,
we will never separate,
But enjoy forever the pleasures
of connubial bliss.
TO THE TUNE "PLUM BLOSSOM WINE":
At every festival, in every season,
May our wishes be granted, our moods happy.
Let fragrant breezes sweep courtyards
gay with the sound of song.
Pour frothing bumpers,
Float golden wine cups.
Chorus:
In decorated halls let happy laughter reign.
Who is as lucky as you and I,
Sharing the delights of the nuptial chamber,
Able to spend the rest of our lives
with branches entwined?
Crimson curtains and embroidered hangings,
Hide fairy caverns, the realms of the blessed.
It is just like stumbling on the
Peach Blossom Spring.
Such glory and distinction,
Are unmatched in this world.
Chorus:
In decorated halls let happy laughter reign.
Who is as lucky as you and I,
Sharing the delights of the nuptial chamber,
Able to spend the rest of our lives
with branches entwined?
CODA:
It seems we must have been united
in a former life;
How happy we are to have met again
in this incarnation.
Father and mother, husband and wife,
Are reunited and all wish them well.
At this point Chin-lien turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "Elder Sister, listen to what they're singing. She's only a concubine, after all. That really isn't an appropriate song suite to sing on a day like this. If they're to be like fish in the water, and 'live happily together as husband and wife for ever and ever,' where does that leave you?"

Now although Yüeh-niang was a good person by nature, when she heard these words she couldn't help being somewhat dismayed and feeling resentful in her heart. She also observed the way in which Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and the rest of the company carried on when Li P'ing-erh came out to greet them. It seemed as though they:
*Wished they had more mouths than nature had provided;*[29]
the better to praise her with.
"This sister-in-law of ours," rhapsodized Ying Po-chüeh, is truly something:
*Seldom seen in the universe;*[30]
*Without peer in this world.*[31]
Quite aside from the fact that she is:
*Compliant and virtuous by nature, and*
*Dignified and stately in demeanor;*[32]
she cuts such a striking figure that in all the world you could hardly hope to find the like. Who else but our elder brother deserves to enjoy such good fortune? We who have been privileged to see her today will have been the gainers though we should die tomorrow."
At the conclusion of this peroration he called out to Tai-an, "Make haste to escort your mistress back to her quarters. I fear we may be overtaxing her. It isn't worth the risk."
When Wu Yüeh-niang and the others overheard this speech they cursed him unremittingly for a rot-talking, glib-tongued jailbird.
After an appropriate time Li P'ing-erh prepared to withdraw. The four singing girls, observing that she had money at her disposal, all made up to her, saying:
*Ma'am this and ma'am that,*
as they adjusted her trinkets and straightened her clothes for her. In fact:
*There was no length to which they would not go.*[33]
When Wu Yüeh-niang returned to the master suite she felt very much out of sorts. Who should appear in her room at this juncture but Tai-an and P'ing-an, bearing a lot of complimentary gifts of cash, bolts of material, articles of clothing, and other expressions of regard on a pair of trays.
Yüeh-niang wouldn't even look at them but said angrily, "You lousy jailbirds! Take them up to the front compound, why don't you. What do you want to bring them in here for?"
"Father told us to bring them into your room," said Tai-an.
Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to take care of them, and she tossed them onto the bed.
Before long, her eldest brother, Wu K'ai, after finishing the second course of the banquet, came into the rear compound to pay his sister a visit. When Yüeh-niang saw her brother come into the room, she hastily proceeded to greet him with a kowtow:
*Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,*
and then sat down with him.
"My wife imposed on your hospitality the other day," said Wu K'ai. "And I'm much obliged to your husband for sending along a sampling from the feast. When she got home she told me that my brother-in-law and you were not on speaking terms, and I had made up my mind to come say something to you about it, even before receiving your husband's invitation today.
"Sister, if you persist in this course, all the good feeling you have built up in the past will be lost. It has always been true that:
*Foolish men fear their wives but*
*Virtuous women fear their husbands;*[34]
*The 'three obediences' and 'four virtues,'*
*Are the norms that govern female conduct.*[35]
From now on, Sister, don't try to interfere with anything he wants to do. I dare say my brother-in-law would never do anything really wrong. Only by playing the role of a 'Mr. Yea-sayer'[36] can you show what a dutiful wife you are."
"No doubt if I'd been a more dutiful wife I wouldn't have aroused such antagonism in the first place!" said Yüeh-niang sarcastically. "Now that he's got this rich baby of his, a poor officer's daughter like myself might just as well be dead for all he cares. It's none of your business. Leave it to me. Let him do as he pleases. You lousy ruffian! Since when have you been so concerned about me, anyway?"
As she spoke, Yüeh-niang broke into tears.
"Sister," said Wu K'ai. "It's not right of you to carry on this way. You and I are not that sort of people. You really ought to put a stop to it immediately. If the two of you are on good terms with each other, it makes it much more propitious for relatives like myself to come visiting."
He remonstrated with her for a while, after which Hsiao-yü came in to serve tea. When they were done with the tea, Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to set the table and invited her brother to stay and have some wine with her.
"Needless to say, Sister," said Wu K'ai, "I'm already stuffed with wine and food from the feast. I just came in to pay you a visit."
Wu K'ai sat a little longer until a pageboy was dispatched from the front compound to invite him to rejoin the party, whereupon he said his farewells and followed him back outside. Thereafter, the company continued to drink until after the lamps were lighted before finally breaking up. The four singing girls each received a gold lamé handkerchief and five mace of silver from Li P'ing-erh that day and went home in a happy state.
From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent several nights in a row in Li P'ing-erh's room. This might have been tolerated by the rest of his womenfolk but P'an Chin-lien was in high dudgeon about it. She did her best to provoke ill feeling between Wu Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh by criticizing the former behind her back and alleging that she was intolerant of others. Li P'ing-erh innocently fell into Chin-lien's toils, addressing her as Elder Sister and becoming more intimate with her than ever. Truly:
*On first meeting one should express no more than*
*three-tenths of one's thoughts;*
*Never under any circumstances should one disclose*
*the whole content of one's heart.*[37]
From the time that Hsi-men Ch'ing brought Li P'ing-erh over his threshold, in the course of doing which he had picked up two or three dubious increments to his property, his affairs became more prosperous than ever. On his country estate outside the walls and in his residential compound:
*Everything was put on an entirely new footing.*
*The rice and millet overflowed his granaries,*
*His mules and horses became teeming herds,*
*His slaves and servants were arrayed in ranks.*[38]
Hsi-men Ch'ing changed the name of Li P'ing-erh's pageboy, T'ien-fu, or Heavenly Blessing, to the more elegant Ch'in-t'ung, or Lute Boy that had formerly been the designation of that servant of Meng Yü-lou's who had been driven out of the house for his suspected adultery with P'an Chin-lien. He also bought two new pageboys, whom he named Lai-an and Ch'i-t'ung. The four maidservants, Ch'un-mei from P'an Chin-lien's quarters, Yü-hsiao from the master suite, Ying-ch'un from Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters, were dressed in identical outfits of clothing and jewelry and sent out to an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard to be instructed in the arts of singing and performing on musical instruments by Li Chiao-erh's younger brother, the musician Li Ming. Ch'un-mei learned to play the *p'i-p'a*; Yü-hsiao the psaltery, Ying-ch'un the three-stringed banjo, and Lan-hsiang the two-stringed barbarian fiddle. Every day Li Ming was regaled with:
*Three teas and six repasts;*[39]
and he received five taels a month as wages.
Hsi-men Ch'ing also had a twelve-foot-wide segment of the frontage of his residence opened up, and he weighed out two thousand taels of silver to his manager, Scurry-about Pen, with which to start a pawnshop on the premises. His son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, was given charge of the keys of both shops and made responsible for collecting unpaid debts but he did not handle the stock. Scurry-about Pen kept the accounts and weighed out the merchandise, while the manager, Fu Ming, was in overall charge of both the pharmaceutical business and the pawnshop, with responsibility for assessing the silver and buying the stock. The second floor of P'an Chin-lien's belvedere was used as a warehouse for the pharmaceuticals, and the second floor of Li P'ing-erh's dwelling was lined with shelves for the accommodation of the articles of clothing and jewelry, antiques, books, paintings, and curios pledged by customers of the pawnshop.
The outlay of silver in the pawnshop on any given day was considerable. Every day Ch'en Ching-chi got up early and went to bed late. He carried the keys and went over the receipts and expenditures with the manager. He wrote a good hand and was quick at arithmetic. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw all this, he was as pleased as could be.
One day, while they were sharing a meal in the front reception hall, he said to him, "Son-in-law, the fact that you show such aptitude for business here in my household would be a source of great comfort to your father in the Eastern Captital if he only knew about it. I, too, have found someone I can trust. As the saying goes:
*If you have a son, rely on your son;*
*If you lack a son, rely on your son-in-law.*[40]
In consideration of what you and my daughter are to me, if I should happen to die without a son of my own, all this property of mine might someday be yours."
"Your son has suffered the misfortune," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "of seeing his family implicated in legal trouble. Distantly separated from his father and mother, he has sought refuge here with his parents-in-law and has been fortunate enough to find favour in their sight.
*My obligations to you are so great.*
*I can hardly repay them dead or alive.*
But I am still young and ignorant. My only hope is that you will both be patient with me. How could I presume to expect anything more?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he had a way with words and was intelligent and quick-witted, he was more pleased with him than ever. From that time on, he relied on him to handle all the correspondence that came in or out of the household, in matters great or small, in the form of letters, invitations, lists of presents, and so forth. When guests came, he was always invited to help entertain them, and whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing drank tea or ate a meal his company was felt to be indispensable.
How could he have known that this young scamp was really:
*A needle in a wad of cotton;*
*A thorn in the flesh?*[41]
Or that he was given to:
*Constantly peeping through embroidered curtains*
*to steal a peek at Chia Wu;*
*Frequently invading the innermost chambers*
*to purloin the perfume of Han Shou?*[42]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
*A winsome son-in-law on the "eastern couch"*[43]
is much to be desired;
How much the more so if he is in his prime,
a prepossessing youth.
When guests are entertained he always finds
a place at the table;
As a matter of course he is given free run
of the postern gates.
In both front compound and rear courtyard[44]
he flirts egregiously;
Under the guise of foolish frolicking
he hides his treachery.
However much you may sing his praises
for being "half a son";
In the final analysis his bones and flesh
form no link with your own.
Days and nights speed by like arrows;
*The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.*
*Before one has finished enjoying the mid-autumn moon,*
*The chrysanthemums are blooming on the eastern hedge.*
*High in the sky the desolate wild geese*
*wing their way south;*
*Before you know it, snowflakes cover the ground.*
One day, during the third decade of the eleventh month, Hsi-men Ch'ing's club convened for a drink in the home of his friend Cadger Ch'ang but the party began to break up early. Before even waiting for the lamps to be lit, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, along with Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu, and the four of them set off on horseback together. No sooner had they emerged from Cadger Ch'ang's gate than, lo and behold:
*Dense masses of dark clouds,*
appeared in the heavens and, all of a sudden:
*Fluttering and swirling,*
*A skyful of snowflakes came drifting down.*
"Brother," said Sponger Ying, "if we were to go home at such an hour as this our families would hardly be prepared to receive us. I know it's been some time since you've been into the licensed quarter to see Li Kuei-chieh. Today, just as 'Meng Hao-jan Braved the Snow to Look for Plum Blossoms,'[45] we ought to take advantage of the fact that it's snowing to go pay her a visit."
"Brother Ying the Second is right," said Sticky Chu. "Every month, whether you're kept away by wind and rain or not, you shell out twenty taels of silver to maintain her as your mistress. If you don't even bother to visit her, she's certainly having an easy time of it."
Allowing himself to be persuaded by this barrage of:
*First a word from you,*
*Then a sentence from me,*
on the part of his three companions, Hsi-men Ch'ing, there and then, redirected his horse into East Street and headed in the direction of the licensed quarter. By the time they arrived at Li Kuei-chieh's establishment it was already getting dark. They found the lamps and candles in the reception room already lit and a maidservant busy sweeping the floor. After the old lady and Li Kuei-ch'ing had come out to greet them, four folding chairs were set out and they sat down.

"I'm afraid Kuei-chieh arrived late at your house the other day," said the old procuress, "and imposed on your hospitality. Thank you also for the handkerchief and trinkets your Sixth Lady was kind enough to give her." "She fared none too well, I fear," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I didn't want to keep them too late, so as soon as the guests left, I sent them home."
As he spoke, the madam ordered tea to be served, and when they were done with the tea, a maidservant set the table and furnished it with appropriate appetizers.
"What's become of Kuei-chieh?" Hsi-men Ch'ing finally asked.
"Kuei-chieh has been at home waiting for you for days on end, Kinsman," the madam said, "but you have not seen fit to pay her a visit. Today just happens to be her fifth maternal aunt's birthday, and she sent a sedan chair for her, so she's gone out to help celebrate her aunt's birthday."
Gentle reader take note: It so happens that in this world Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, and singing girls are three professions of which it may be said:
*If they do not see the colour of your money,*
*They will not open their eyes.*
*Despising the poor and toadying to the rich;*[46]
*Prevarication and trickery,*
*Are two things they cannot do without.*
The fact is that Li Kuei-chieh had not really gone out to help celebrate her fifth maternal aunt's birthday. In recent days, seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was remiss in coming to see her, she had taken up with a certain Ting the Second, whose sobriquet was Ting Shuang-ch'iao, the son of Mr. Ting, the silk merchant, from Hang-chou. Having disposed of a thousand taels worth of silk, he was staying at an inn in the vicinity and was in the habit of coming into the licensed quarter to patronize the prostitutes without his father's knowledge. His first move had been to offer ten taels of silver and two sets of heavy Hang-chou silk clothing for Li Kuei-chieh's favours, as a consequence of which he had spent the last two nights with her. Only a moment ago, he had been drinking with Li Kuei-chieh in her room when Hsi-men Ch'ing had unexpectedly arrived. The old procuress had hurriedly bundled Kuei-chieh and her customer off to a little-used room in the third courtyard at the back of the house to get them out of the way.
At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who took the madam's story at face value, said, "Well, old lady, even if Kuei-chieh isn't here, bring on the wine and we'll await her return at our leisure."
The old procuress retired to the kitchen and did her best to expedite the proceedings, so that wine and delicacies, along with additional appetizers, were quickly forthcoming and soon covered the surface of the table. As for Li Kuei-ch'ing:
*The bridges on her psaltery were ranged like wild geese;*
*The songs that she performed were set to new melodies;*
as she endeavored to entertain them. The company was soon busy:
*Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.*
Just as they were settling down to enjoy their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to go to the back of the house to relieve himself. This was one of those occasions on which:
*Something was destined to happen.*
Suddenly he became aware of the sound of people laughing in an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard. As soon as he had finished relieving himself he went up to the window of the room in question and stole a peek. What should he see inside but Li Kuei-chieh drinking wine in the company of a southerner who was wearing a square-cut scholar's cap. Before he knew it:
*A fire blazed up in his heart.*[47]
He strode back to the front of the house and, with a single movement of his hand, turned over the table at which his companions were drinking, smashing the saucers and cups to smithereens. He then called out the four pageboys who had accompanied him to look after the horse, P'ing-an, Tai-an, Hua-t'ung, and Ch'in-t'ung, and:
*Without permitting any further explanation,*
ordered them to smash up the doors, windows, walls, beds, and curtains of the Li family establishment.
Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu did their best to restrain him but to no avail. Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to protest, again and again, that he was going to drag out that jailbird of a southerner and that painted face, truss them up together with a single length of rope, and lock them up in his gatehouse.
Now Ting the Second was not a brave man, and when he heard the rumpus that was being kicked up outside he was so frightened he hid under the bed in the inner room and called out to Kuei-chieh to save him.
"Phooey!" said Kuei-chieh. "You can depend on my mother, whatever happens. It doesn't amount to anything. Let him blow off steam if he wants to but no matter how he blusters, you stay where you are."
To resume our story, when the old procuress saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had made a wreck of the place:
*Neither hurriedly nor hastily,*
she made her appearance, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, and said a few inconsequential words to smooth things over. This had the effect of making Hsi-men Ch'ing even angrier and, pointing his finger at her, he began to curse. There is a song to the tune "Courtyard Full of Fragrance" that testifies to this:
*Madam, you are not a good sort of person.*
Welcoming the new and seeing off the old,[48]
You live off beauty by prostituting it.
With specious words you would deceive me,
Faultfinding here and eulogizing there.[49]
In your house alone I must have spent,
At least a thousand taels of yellow gold.
You sell dog meat advertised as mutton.[50]
I'll tell you what you really are:
One of those vixens who bewitch people,
Whose every wile is absolutely false.
The madam responded in kind:
*Good sir, let me tell you something.*
If you stop patronizing my daughter,
I'll find a replacement for you.
My whole house looks only to her,
For its means of livelihood.
If we are to feed and clothe ourselves,
We are dependent on her for firewood and rice.
There is no excuse for your raving like thunder.[51]
You may object that we are lacking in good faith,
But you forget your own deficiencies;
She's not your wedded wife by aid of go-between.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard her reply, he became even angrier, and almost came to blows with the old lady. This was only prevented thanks to the strenuous efforts of Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, and Sticky Chu, who had to intervene physically in order to restrain him.
After creating this great disturbance, Hsi-men Ch'ing swore an oath never to cross the threshold of the Li family establishment again and then mounted his horse and rode home through the snow. Truly:
*To sleep with every casual flower, when they*
number in the millions;
Is not as good a plan as going home to share
a bed with your wife.
Even though, beside your pillow, she may leave
something to be desired;
She will sleep with you until the morrow dawns
without demanding money.[52]
Or again:
*Such women do no weaving and their*
menfolk do not plow;
The flaunting of their beauty is their
only stock in trade.
Though your wealth be measured by the peck
or by the cartload;
It will not suffice to fill the madam's
bottomless pit.
Or again:
*Their false feelings and specious sentiments*
resemble the real thing;
With deceptive phrases and clever words[53]
they put on a good show.
How many otherwise intelligent gentlemen
have been done in by them?
Only after death will their tongues
be plucked out in Hell.

They walk along the flowery glades
Where screening trees leave but a little space,
Hiding themselves from curious eyes
Always afraid lest others should see them.
The thorns upon the bushes cut and tear
They seek escape among the climbing roses.
They brush aside the rustling branches
Seeking to return again
And look for some forsaken corner.
The swallow, from his nest beneath the eaves,
Guides them to the silken curtains.
Li Ping'er, with her sweet ways and persuasive words, dispelled Ximen Qing's anger. He raised her up and made her dress again. They embraced and were perfectly happy. Ximen told Chunmei to set a table and go to the inner court for wine.
After Ximen Qing had gone in, Pan Jinlian and Meng Yulou stood outside the door to see what they could hear. As the other door was closed, there was no one but Chunmei about, and the two women peeped through the crack in the door. They could see the light but could not hear a word of what was said.
"Chunmei, the young rascal, is better off than we are," Jinlian said, "she can hear."
The maid stood outside the window for a while and then went over to them.
"What are they doing?" Jinlian whispered.
"Father made her take off her clothes and kneel down," Chunmei said. "At first she would not, and Father was angry and took the whip to her."
"Did she take her clothes off then?"
"Yes, when she saw that Father was really angry, she undressed and knelt down. Father asked her a lot of questions."
Yulou was afraid that Ximen would hear them, and, taking Jinlian by the hand, she drew her away to the other door.
It was about the twentieth day of the eighth month and the moon was late in rising. Jinlian and Yulou stood together in the dark, waiting for Chunmei.
"Sister," Jinlian said, "she thought she would get something good here. That's why she was so anxious to come. And now, at the very start, she has had a good thrashing. She seems to be one of those people who do not care for authority. If she does what she is told, all will be well but if she behaves deceitfully, she will have to pay for it. Indeed, she will have to pay in any case. I remember how that young woman told stories to me and about me, and, although I was as careful as could be, I had to weep before him or I should not have been forgiven. You have been here for a long time. Do you understand him?"
The door opened. Chunmei came out and went to the back court. Jinlian, from the shadows, called to ask where she was going but Chunmei only laughed and went on. Then Jinlian called her again, and this time she stayed. "She wept and told Father a long story," the maid said. "Now he is quite content. He has raised her up and made her put on her clothes again. He has told me to lay the table and bring them some wine."
"What a shameless creature!" Jinlian said to Yulou. "All that thunder, and so little rain to follow! It all ends in smoke. Nothing will come of it. She will just offer him wine. And you, you scamp," she said to Chunmei, "she has maids of her own, why should you fetch wine for her? When you get to the kitchen, that Xue'e woman will make a fuss, and I simply won't put up with it."
"I can't help it," Chunmei said, "I'm only doing what Father told me." She laughed and went away.
"The young rascal," Jinlian cried. "Ask her to do something that is her business and she is as lazy as a corpse. But when it's something she is not supposed to do, she rushes around and takes all the care in the world. That woman has two maids of her own. Why should Chunmei take this upon herself? She is a meddlesome young hussy."
"Oh, it is often so," Yulou said. "There is my maid Lanxiang. If I ask her to do anything for me, she takes no pains at all but if *he* has any trick for her to play, she bustles about and doesn't mind what trouble she takes."
Yuxiao came to them. "Third Mother," she said to Yulou, "I have come to take you to your room."

"You frightened me, you little wretch," Yulou said. "Does your mistress know you're here?"
"I have just helped her to bed," the maid said, "and now I've come to see what is happening. I saw Chunmei going to the inner court. What is Father doing?"
Jinlian pointed to the door. "Go there," she said, "and you'll hear a strange story." Yuxiao wished to hear more, and Jinlian told her.
"Did Father really make her take off her clothes, and beat her?" the maid asked.
"He beat her," Yulou said, "because she would not take them off."
"Well," the maid said, laughing, "it is better to be beaten with them on than with them off. The bare skin is not too fond of punishment."
Chunmei brought the wine. Xiaoyu, with a square food box, came with her. They both went into the room.
"Look at those young rascals," Jinlian cried. "Why are they doing this? They are like rats flying in the skies. Take it in quickly," she said to Chunmei, "and let her own maids serve them. You must not occupy yourself there. I have something else for you to do."
Chunmei laughed and went in with Xiaoyu. After setting the things on the table they came out again, and her own maids served Li Ping'er and Ximen Qing. Yulou and Jinlian had many questions to ask Chunmei. Then Yuxiao said: "Third Mother, it is time for us to go," and they went away together. Jinlian told Chunmei to shut the door, and went to sleep by herself.
Ximen Qing and Li Ping'er drank together and talked till midnight, rejoicing in their love. Then they spread the coverlets and arranged the bed. In the bright candlelight they might have been the phoenix and his mate singing in harmony before a mirror. Fragrant incense was in the burner, and they were like a pair of butterflies dancing among the flowers. That night they took the silver lamp and gazed upon each other, fearful lest their coming together might be but fantasy.
Next day they slept till breakfast time. Then Li Ping'er got up and dressed her hair before the mirror. Yingchun brought in the breakfast. Li Ping'er rinsed her mouth and ate with Ximen but very little. She told her maid to heat what remained of the wine, and drank it with her husband. After a little while she went on with her dressing. Then she opened her boxes and showed all her fine headdresses and clothes to Ximen Qing. There were a hundred pearls from the Western Ocean that had once belonged to Grand Secretary Liang, and a cap button of dark green that, she said, had been her father-in-law's. She weighed this and asked Ximen to take it to the silversmith's and have a pair of earrings made from it. Then she brought out a hairnet of gold thread that weighed about nine taels and asked him if the Great Lady or any of the others had a net like it. When she heard that they had silver nets but nothing to compare with hers, she said it would be unbecoming for her to wear it. "It will be better for you to take it to the silversmith's and get him to make a nine-phoenix pin, with pearls between the teeth. And with what is left he can make a comb like the Great Lady's, a Guanyin of gold and jade."
When Ximen Qing had taken the things and was about to go out, Li Ping'er said: "There is now nobody in my house. It would be well to send a man there to take care of it, and let Tian Fu come here to wait on me. Old woman Feng is too old to walk, and herself causes me more than a little anxiety."
Ximen Qing agreed and went out. On his way he came upon Jinlian, with her hair in disorder, standing by the gate.
"You are up very late, Brother," she called to him. "Where are you going?"
"I am going out on business," Ximen said.
"What is your hurry, you funny creature? Come here. I have something to say to you."
When Ximen saw that she was serious, he turned back and went with her into her room. She sat on a chair, and held his two hands.
"It is hard to find words bad enough for you," she said. "Are you afraid someone is going to put you in a pan and boil you, that you are in such a hurry to get away? Stay here. I want to tell you something."
"Oh, you little strumpet," Ximen said, "what is it you want? I have something to attend to, and you must wait till I come back."
He started out but Jinlian caught him by the sleeve. It seemed very heavy. "What have you got there?" she asked. "Take it out and let me see."
"It is my purse," Ximen said.
Jinlian would not believe him. She put her hand into his sleeve and took out the golden hairnet. "This is her net," she said. "What are you going to do with it?"
"Well," Ximen said, "when I told her that none of you had one like it, she didn't care to wear it herself, and so she asked me to take it to the silversmith's and change it for something else."
Jinlian asked how much it weighed, and what Li Ping'er wished to have made instead of it. Ximen told her.
"For such a pin," Jinlian said, "three taels and five or six *qian* of gold will be quite enough. The Great Lady's comb has only one tael and six *qian* in it. You must have one made for me with what is to spare."
"But she wants a solid stem," Ximen said.
"Even if she does, it will only take three taels, and there will be enough left to make a pin for me."
"You little strumpet," Ximen said, laughing, "you are never satisfied unless you are getting something out of somebody. You're always on the make."
"My son," Jinlian said, "don't forget what your mother tells you. If I don't get my pin there will be trouble."
Ximen Qing put the net into his sleeve again and laughed. As he passed through the door, Jinlian called to him: "You have come out of this business rather easily. He asked her what she meant. "Well," she said, "yesterday there was a great deal of thunder but very little rain. You told her to hang herself, and here you are with her hairnet. She has twisted you around her little finger, and she isn't afraid of you in the least."
Ximen laughed. "You're talking nonsense," he said, and went out. Yueniang, Yulou and Li Jiao'er were sitting together in Yueniang's room when there was some excitement among the boys. They were looking for Laiwang. Ping'an pushed aside the lattice and was going in. Yueniang said: "Why do you want him?" Ping'an told her that Ximen Qing wanted him at once. After some time Yueniang told the boy that she had sent Laiwang on an errand. She had told him to go with a present of oil and rice to the nuns.
"I will tell Father that you have sent Laiwang on some business," Ping'an said.
"Tell him what you like, you young scamp," Yueniang said. The boy went away.
"If I open my mouth," Yueniang said to Yulou and the others, "he says I take too much upon myself. If I do not, I feel I am not doing my duty. Now that woman has come here, of course her house ought to be sold. There is a tremendous fuss, ringing of bells and beating of drums, and somebody must be sent to take charge of the place. Old woman Feng is there, and an unmarried boy was chosen to keep her company. That was all that was necessary. The house won't run away. Now he must have Laiwang and his wife to go there. There is always something wrong with Laiwang's wife, and who's going to wait upon her if she has to stay in bed?"
"Lady," Yulou said, "it is not for me to say anything but, after all, you are the mistress of this house and you ought not to refuse to speak to him. It has made us all very unhappy, and the boys don't know to whom they must go. He is all muddled these days, and you really must take our advice and speak to him again."
"Third Sister," Yueniang said, "you don't know what you're talking about. I did not begin this quarrel. He flew into a temper without any excuse at all. I am not afraid of him, and no matter what he does, I shall not look at him with a friendly eye. He has said insulting things about me behind my back and called me a whore. What right has he to say things like that? He has seven or eight women here and he says I am not a lady. But it has always been the same. Fall in with other people's wishes and they will say nice things about you: tell the truth and everybody will hate you. I reproved him perfectly justly. I told him he had accepted things from her, bought her house, and that if he married her, all the gentlemen at the office would scorn him. Her mourning was not over, and I said it was not the right time to marry. I never dreamed that they were making plans the whole time. They used to meet regularly and I never knew a thing about it. It was like putting me inside a big jar. One day he would tell me he was at the bawdy house; the next night, he said, he was at another bawdy house. And all the time he was staying with her.
"Yes, he goes to the bawdy houses, where all the people are like beautiful foxes and behave like dragons and tigers. They swindle him and cheat him, and he thinks everything they do is perfect. I have done my duty by him and spoken to him fairly, and now he has not a word for me. But I want nothing from him. Let him give me three meals a day and I can do without a husband. Let him allow me to go my own way and he can go his."
Yulou and the others could think of no reply to make to this. After a while Li Ping'er came in, beautifully dressed. She wore a gown of red silk embroidered with gold and a skirt with an embroidered pattern of green leaves. Yingchun came with her, carrying a silver pot, and Xiuchun, with a box of tea leaves. They came to offer tea to Yueniang and the others. Yueniang told Xiaoyu to offer the Sixth Lady a chair. Then Sun Xue'e came and all the ladies had tea.
"Sister," Jinlian said to Li Ping'er, "you owe apologies to our Great Sister. Let me tell you that for a long time she and Father have not spoken to one another, and it is all on your account. We have done our best to smooth matters over. You must give a party and try to get the old couple to talk to one another again."
Li Ping'er agreed. She kowtowed four times before Yueniang. "Sister," Yueniang said, "she is teasing you. You must not urge me any more," she said to Jinlian. "I have taken an oath that I will not speak to him even if I live to be a hundred years old." There was nothing more to be said.
Jinlian took a brush and began to brush Li Ping'er's hair. She noticed that the new wife was wearing a set of golden hair ornaments with designs representing different insects, and a comb with an inlaid pattern showing the Three Friends of Winter, the bamboo, the plum and the pine.
"Sister," said Jinlian, "you should not wear these pins. They catch your hair. A golden Guanyin with a solid stem, such as the Great Lady wears, is much more suitable."
"I have thought of having one made like Great Sister's," Li Ping'er said.
Xiaoyu and Yuxiao, when they came in to wait upon the ladies, did not show due respect to Li Ping'er. Yuxiao said to her: "Sixth Mother, what office did your father-in-law hold at court?"
"He was in the Department of Forestry," said Li Ping'er.
"Ah," Yuxiao said, laughing, "so your acquaintance with the rod did not begin yesterday."
Then Xiaoyu began. "Last year," said she, "some old men, the elders of the village, were seeking you, to get you to go to the Eastern Capital."
Li Ping'er did not understand this remark. "Why were they seeking me?" she asked.
"Because you are so clever at dealing with floods," Xiaoyu said.
Then Yuxiao began again. "Where you come from, Mother, the ladies all worship the Thousand Buddhas. That, I suppose, is why you kowtowed so often yesterday."
And Xiaoyu said: "Yesterday, four officers were sent from the court to ask you to visit the Mongols in Tartary. Isn't that so?"
"I don't know what you mean," said Li Ping'er.
Xiaoyu laughed. "They said you knew how to speak the language." Jinlian and Yulou were greatly amused at all this but Yueniang upbraided her maids and told them to go and attend to their business. As for Li Ping'er, she flushed and paled in turns, and did not know whether she should stay or go away. After a little while she went back to her own room.
When Ximen Qing returned, he told her that he had given her ornaments to the silversmith. Then he said that on the twenty-fifth, he proposed to give a banquet and invite her late husband's eldest brother.
"There is no need to invite him again," Li Ping'er said, "I settled that with his wife but, if you like to do so, by all means do.
"Old woman Feng can look after my house alone," she added; "all you need do is get someone to take turns with Tian Fu. There is no necessity to send Laiwang there. I hear his wife is not very strong and really not fit to go there."
"I did not know that," Ximen said. He called Ping'an and told him to go to the house on Lion Street every other day to relieve Tian Fu.
On the twenty-fifth Ximen Qing gave a banquet for all his relatives and friends. A band of players and four singing girls were engaged, Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, Dong Yuxian and Han Jinchuan. They came about noon. The guests took tea under the awning, and, when they had all assembled, went to the great hall. The guests, who included the band of brothers as well as Ximen's relatives, sat at six tables. Ximen Qing himself sat in the host's place, with his son-in-law, Ben the Fourth, and Fu, the manager of his shop, at his table. The musicians played several melodies, and two youths, Li Ming and Wu Hui, sang a song. There was more music and then the four singing girls came to serve the wine.
"Today," said Ying Bojue, "is a very happy day in our brother's life. I say so with great diffidence but I should very much like to pay my respects to our new sister-in-law and assure her of our affectionate regard. I do not wish to cause any inconvenience but here are two venerable uncles, and I should like to know what they have come for if not to see her."
"My wife is not at all beautiful," Ximen said. "It will be better to dispense with this visit."
"Brother," Xie Xida said, "do not say that. We have told you what we wish. Why should we have come if we did not desire to see our sister-in-law? Then here is your honourable relative Hua the Elder. Once he was only a friend; now he is a relative. You cannot treat us as strangers. Please ask the lady to come and see us. There is nothing to be afraid of."
Ximen Qing laughed but did not move.
"Brother," Bojue said, "don't laugh. We have all brought our presents. We don't ask the lady to come out for nothing."
"Oh, you're talking nonsense," Ximen said. However, they pressed him again and again, and at last he told Daian to go to the inner court and ask Li Ping'er to come to them. There was a long delay. Then Daian came back and said that the Sixth Lady thought there was no need for such a ceremony.
"It is you, you little dog bone," Ying Bojue said. "You're playing tricks. You haven't been to the inner court at all. You have just come back and made up this story."
"I should not dare to do such a thing, Uncle," the boy said. "If you don't believe me, go yourself and ask her."
"You think I dare not go," Bojue said. "I know my way about your garden well enough. I will go and drag the lady out, whether you will or not."
"We have a strong dog and a fierce one," Daian said. "He will bite your legs."
Bojue left his seat and kicked Daian. "You young scamp," he said, laughing, "you have had your joke. Now be quick and ask the lady to come. If you don't succeed, I will give you twenty strokes with one of these palings."
The singing girls laughed. Daian went back a little way and looked to his master for instructions. Ximen Qing could not help himself. He told the boy to ask the Sixth Lady to dress and come to them. Daian went and after a while came back for Ximen Qing. All the menservants were dismissed and the second door was closed. Yulou and Jinlian urged Li Ping'er to go out, and arranged the flowers on her head. The servants spread beautiful rugs on the ground, and the four singing girls went to the inner court. They played their instruments and walked in front of Li Ping'er. The incense was delightfully fragrant and the music exquisite.
Li Ping'er wore a long gown of red silk embroidered in five colours. Her skirt was green and bore the design of the Hundred Flowers, with golden stems and leaves of many colours. She wore a girdle with a green jade clasp. On her wrists were golden bangles. There were pearls upon her breast and jade tinkled at the hem of her skirt. Pearls and flowers were piled high upon her hair, and two jewels were upon her brow. Pendants came down over her white cheeks. Tiny shoes, with embroidered love birds on them, peeped out from beneath her skirt. The four singing girls played their instruments about her. She looked like the stem of a blossom bending in the wind; her embroidered girdle flowed behind her. She greeted them all with a low reverence, and they quickly left their chairs to return her greeting.
Yulou, Jinlian and Li Jiao'er stood behind the screen with Yueniang to watch the proceedings. They heard the song of congratulation to one who has reached exalted rank, the song that declares that Heaven has joined these two together and compares them to the phoenix and his mate living together in wedded bliss for generation after generation.
"Sister," said Jinlian, "do you hear that? That is not a fitting song for this occasion, for if they are to live together for generation after generation, what about you?"
Yueniang, in spite of her equable temperament, could not help feeling annoyed. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida and the others paid compliments to Li Ping'er as though they hated themselves because they had only one mouth to sing her praises. "Is this Sister-in-law?" they said. "Why! in all the world, we have never seen anyone so beautiful. We need not speak of the sweetness of her nature and her virtue. And how exquisitely she carries herself. There is no other like her in all the world. Brother, we envy you. Now that we have seen this lady once, we shall be happy if we die tomorrow."
"Take the lady back to her room at once," they said to Daian. "We must not let her tire herself."
Yueniang heard this and cursed them for a pack of rogues.
Li Ping'er retired. The four singing girls, seeing that she was rich, flattered her in their turn, calling her Mother this and Mother that, arranging her ornaments and putting her clothes in order, leaving nothing undone.
Yueniang, feeling very unhappy, went to her own room. Daian and Ping'an brought to her presents, money, rolls of silk, dresses and boxes but Yueniang would not look at them. All she said was: "You rascals! Why have you brought that stuff here? Take it to the outer court."
"Father told us to bring it here," Daian said.
Yueniang told Yuxiao to take the presents and put them on the bed.
When Yueniang's brother, Wu the Elder, had had his second course, he went to pay a visit to his sister. She rose as soon as he came in and made a reverence to him. Then they sat down to talk.
"It was very kind of you to entertain my wife yesterday," said Wu the Elder, "and now my brother-in-law has done the same for me. My wife tells me that you have not been on speaking terms with your husband for some time, and I was thinking it would be my duty to remonstrate with you, when he happened to invite me here. Sister, if you persist in this course, you will lose all merit. There is an old saying that a man is a fool who fears his wife but that a woman of gentle birth stands in awe of her husband. Obedience and virtue are the ordinary lot of woman. Whatever he does, you should not interfere. Take everything as a matter of course, and he will appreciate the good qualities that are in you."
"It is too late now to show him my good qualities," Yueniang said, "or I should not be treated with such contempt. Now, you see, he has a rich wife and I am treated as a maidservant, as if I didn't even exist. You need not worry. I shall put up with his treatment of me. He has changed his manner to me for some time now." She burst into tears.
"Sister," Uncle Wu said, "you are doing the wrong thing. You and I are not people of that sort. You must not behave like this. If you and your husband live together in harmony, it will redound to our credit."
He argued with Yueniang for a long time, and Xiaoyu brought him tea. When he had drunk it, a boy came from the hall to ask him to return to the party, so he took leave of his sister and went back. The feast continued until evening and then broke up. Li Ping'er gave each of the singing girls a handkerchief with a gold pattern, and five *qian*. They went away delighted.
Thereafter Ximen Qing spent every night with Li Ping'er. The others were quite happy about it except Jinlian, who secretly told stories to Yueniang about Li Ping'er, and to Li Ping'er about Yueniang, in the hope of stirring up trouble between them. Li Ping'er had no means of knowing the truth, so she fell into the trap, called Jinlian her sister, and became very intimate with her.
After his marriage with Li Ping'er, Ximen came into possession of more ill-gotten wealth, and was richer than ever. His house was refurnished, inside and out; rice and wheat were piled high in his barns; his mules and horses were in droves, and his maids and menservants would have made a small army.
Ximen Qing changed Tian Fu's name to Qintong. He bought two more boys, one called Qitong and the other Laian. He engaged Li Ming, Guijie's brother, to teach music to the maids. Chunmei was to learn the lute; Yuxiao, the cithern; Yingchun, the banjo; and Lanxiang, the four-stringed fiddle. Every day they dressed themselves beautifully and went to a room at the west side of the hall to study. Ximen gave Li Ming many meals and paid him five taels a month. He gave two thousand taels to Fu and Ben the Fourth, and instructed them to open a pawnshop. Chen Jingji, his son-in-law, kept all the keys and went out to collect the debts. Ben the Fourth kept the accounts and weighed the stock. Fu managed the medicine shop and the pawnshop, assayed the silver, and looked after the business generally. The medicine was stored in the loft above Jinlian's rooms. Shelves were made and put up in the loft over Li Ping'er's rooms, and on them were stored clothes, headdresses, curios, books and pictures from the pawnshop. Piles of silver came in every day.

Chen Jingji got up early every day and went to bed late. He was responsible for all the keys, and checked the accounts and the money. He was very clever at taking in and paying out, writing and making out accounts, and Ximen Qing was very pleased with him. One day when they were sitting together in the hall, Ximen said: "You have done very well since you have been here. If your father knew, he would be pleased. You know the saying that he who has a son must depend on that son, and he who has no son must depend on his son-in-law. If I have no child, this property will all come to you and your wife."

"Misfortune came upon me," Chen Jingji said, "and my family has had a very hard time. My father and my mother have both had to go far away, and I had to come to you. I have received the greatest kindness at your hands, and, whether I live or die, I can never hope to repay you. But I am young and inexperienced, and only ask that you will not be too severe with me. I dare not hope for anything beyond that."

Words of this kind were pleasing to Ximen Qing's ears, and he was more delighted than ever. Afterwards all the domestic affairs were entrusted to this young man. He dealt with the letters and present lists. Whenever Ximen's friends came to visit him, Jingji was invited to keep them company, and he was always about. Nobody could have suspected the treacherous villainy of this young man.

The time passed very quickly and it was soon the end of the eleventh month. Ximen Qing went to a party at Chang Zhijie's house. The party finished early, and, before it was time to light the lamps, he, with Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and Zhu Shinian, got on their horses and started back. When they left the house, the snow clouds were very heavy.

"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "if we go home now there is nothing for us to do. It is a long time since we saw Guijie. It is going to snow. Let us go and see her, like Meng Hao-jan walking on the snow in search of Chunmei."

"It is a very good idea," Zhu Shinian said. "You give her twenty taels a month. If you never go there, she gets it all for nothing."

The three men badgered Ximen until he agreed to go to the house in East Street. It was dark when they got there. The maid was sweeping the floor in the hall. The old procuress and Guiqing came to greet them. They sat down.

"Guijie has enjoyed your hospitality," the old woman said, "and she thanks your Sixth Lady for the handkerchiefs and the flowers."

"I am sorry I treated her so shabbily," Ximen said, "but it was getting late, and, as soon as the guests left, I sent her home."

The old woman offered them tea and a maid set the table.

"Where is Guijie?" Ximen asked.

"She waited for you a long time," the old woman said, "but you did not come, and today, as it is her aunt's birthday, she has gone in a chair to wish her many happy returns."

As a matter of fact, Guijie had not gone to her aunt's. When she found that Ximen Qing did not come to see her for a long time, she welcomed the attentions of a gentleman called Ding Shuangqiao, the son of a silk merchant of Hangzhou. He had come with a thousand taels' worth of silk to sell, and was living at an inn. He defrauded his father and went to play in the bawdy house. He paid ten taels of silver and two dresses of heavy Hang-zhou silk, and spent two nights with Guijie. He was, in fact, drinking in her room when Ximen suddenly arrived. The old woman sent them both to a secluded little room in the inner court to wait till he had gone.

Ximen Qing believed what the old woman told him. "If Guijie isn't in," he said, "let's have some wine and we'll wait for her."

The old woman went to the kitchen and hastily got something ready. Guiqing played for them and sang a new song. They guessed fingers and drank. Then something happened. Ximen Qing went to the backcourt to change his clothes and suddenly heard laughter coming from a room there. When he had done what he went to do, he crept to the window and peeped in. Guijie was drinking with a southerner who was wearing a square cap. Ximen could not contain himself. He went back again, threw over the wine table, and smashed all the plates and dishes to pieces. Then he called his 4 boys and told them to tear the curtains from the windows. His 3 friends tried to stop him but Ximen was in a fury. He determined to tie the man and the girl together and throw them out of the door. Ding was not a very brave young man. When he heard the noise, he crawled under the bed and implored Guijie to save his life. "Keep quiet," said Guijie, "Mother's here. It's quite a usual thing in our house. Let them make as much noise as they like, don't you stir." The old woman saw Ximen devastating the place and still tried to lie and argue with him. He would not listen but urged his boys to break up the house. He would have struck the old woman but fortunately for her, his 3 friends prevented him. He made a great to-do and swore that he would never enter the house again. Then he went home in the snow.

## 042

### Wu Yüeh-niang Relents & Sweeps Snow in Order to Brew Tea; Ying Po-chüeh Runs Errands on Behalf of Flowers

Troubled in her sorrowing heart, she murmurs to herself,
"This good affinity has turned out to be a bad affinity."[1]
In retrospect she rails against that "willow" in the quarter;[2]
Though shamefaced to confront the "lotus" of the Jade Well.[3]
Only because his spring dalliance has been carelessly revealed,
Have the phoenix mates been forced to go their separate ways.
Who is able to dip up the waters of the River of Heaven,
That they may wash their former sins completely away?

By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the quarter it was already the second watch. When the pageboys had succeeded in getting someone to open the front door he dismounted and:

Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade,
made his way as far as the inner gate which led into the rear compound. He found the gate standing half open though there was:
Not a human sound to be heard,[5]
from the courtyard within.
From his mouth no word was uttered but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"There's something strange about this."

Thereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing stealthily took up a position behind the whitewashed spirit screen just inside the gate in order to see what was up. No sooner had he done so than he saw Hsiao-yü come out and set up a table in the courtyard beneath the loggia that ran along one side.

It so happens that Wu Yüeh-niang, ever since the falling out with her husband that had resulted in their no longer being on speaking terms with each other, had been in the habit of fasting on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh days of each month. On these occasions she would pay obeisance to the dipper and burn incense at night, praying to Heaven that it would protect her husband and grant him an early change of heart so that he could devote himself to the regulation of the household and the begetting of an heir in order to accomplish:

The plan of a lifetime.[6]

Hsi-men Ch'ing was quite unaware of this. He continued to look on as Hsiao-yü finished setting out the incense table. Before long Yüeh-niang emerged from her quarters, carefully attired, and proceeded into the courtyard where she ignited a full censer of incense.

Looking up at the sky and making a deep bow she prayed, "Your humble servant, nee Wu, has been joined in wedlock with Hsi-men Ch'ing. However, because my husband is enamored of the 'mist and flowers'; though yet in the prime of life, he remains without an heir. Wife and concubines, there are six of us in all but none of us has borne a child, so that we lack anyone to continue the care and worship of the ancestral graves. Day and night I worry about this lest we be left with no recourse. Therefore, without my husband's knowledge, I have sworn an oath that on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh of each month, beneath the moon and stars, I shall offer up a prayer to the 'three luminaries,' beseeching them to protect my husband and grant him an early change of heart, that he may abandon his extravagant ways and devote himself wholeheartedly to family affairs. That one of his six consorts, no matter that should soon bear him a son, in order to accomplish:

The plan of a lifetime,
is my sincerest wish."

Truly:

As she slips out of her chamber
the night air is cool;
Fragrant mist fills the courtyard,
the moon glimmers bright.
Bowing to Heaven, she spills out
all her heartfelt desires;
Quite unaware that anyone might be
listening beyond the wall.

Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not overheard this but having heard Yüeh-niang's prayer:

From his mouth no word was uttered but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"It turns out I've been mistaken in my resentment toward her all this time. Everything she said was inspired by concern for my welfare. She and I really are husband and wife after all."

Suiting action to words, he strode out from behind the whitewashed spirit screen and embraced Yüeh-niang. His wife, who had just finished with the incense burning and never expected him to show up on such a snowy night, was so startled that her first impulse was to flee back to her room. But Hsi-men Ch'ing prevented this by embracing her with both arms.

"Darling," he said, "I had absolutely no idea that you've really been inspired by concern for me. I've been wrong about you all this time I've been giving you the cold shoulder. By now, I'm afraid, it's rather late to repent."

"You must have lost your way in the snow," said Yüeh-niang. "I dare say these really aren't the quarters you're looking for, anyway. You're barking up the wrong tree. I'm that 'undutiful whore,' remember. Since there's nothing between us, where do you get that stuff about concern for you? What reason should you have to pay any further attention to me? If we were never to see each other again:

For a thousand years or all eternity,
it would be all right with me."

Hsi-men Ch'ing took Yüeh-niang by the hand and pulled her into the room where he proceeded to look her over by lamplight. She was wearing her usual attire: a scarlet jacket of Lu-chou silk that opened down the middle, and a skirt of a soft yellow material. On her head she wore a sable toque over her chignon and, in front of her coiffure, a tiara of gold representing "Kuan-yin in her full glory," setting off to perfection:

Her silver salver face, modeled in plaster, carved of jade;
The clouds over Ch'u peaks, her cicada chignon and raven tresses.

How could Hsi-men Ch'ing have been anything but captivated?

Without further ado, he made a deep bow before Yüeh-niang, saying, "I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, have been so deluded for a time that I have failed to heed your sound advice and flouted your good intentions. Truly:

Though I have eyes I have failed to identify the 'Jade of the Ch'u Mountains';
And have treated it as though it were no more than an ordinary stone.[7]
It is after the event that one recognizes a gentleman;[8]
Then and only then does the good man become known.

All I can do is hope that you'll forgive me."

"I'm not the one you've set your heart on," said Yüeh-niang. "No matter what I do, I don't seem to be able to suit your fancy. Since when did I ever offer you any sound advice? Just leave me alone in my room here to:

Fend for myself.[9]

There's no need for you to pay any attention to me. There isn't room for you in here, anyway. You'd better get out of here before I have the maids throw you out."

"I've had:

A bellyful of anger,[10]
out of the blue today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and came home through the snow just to tell you about it."

"Whether you get angry or not is no concern of mine," said Yüeh-niang. "Far be it from me to try to control your conduct. Why don't you go tell it to someone who does?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Yüeh-niang refused to give him so much as a look, he bent his knees, adopted the posture of a dwarf, and knelt down on the ground before her.

Sticking out his neck like a chicken on the chopping block,[11]
he began to plead with her, saying, "Darling this," and, "Darling that."

Yüeh-niang could abide it no longer and said, "If you're really going to carry on that shamelessly, I'll call the maid."

As good as her word, she called out for Hsiao-yü.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Hsiao-yü coming in, he promptly leapt to his feet and, casting about for an excuse to get her out of the room, said, "The snow outside must have covered the incense table by now. Why don't you go bring it inside?"

"I've already brought it in," said Hsiao-yü.

Yüeh-niang couldn't help laughing. "What a shameless character," she said. "Even the maids have to put up with your barefaced effrontery."

Hsiao-yü went out and Hsi-men Ch'ing once again got down on his knees to plead with his wife.

"If I didn't care for the opinion of the world,"[12] said Yüeh-niang, "it would serve you right if I paid you no heed for another hundred years."

Only after this speech did Yüeh-niang consent to sit down with her husband and order Yü-hsiao to serve him some tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon told her the whole story, how that day, after the meeting of the club at Ch'ang Shih-chieh's place had broken up, he had allowed himself to be persuaded by Ying Po-chüeh and the others to pay a visit to the Li family establishment, and how, thus and so, they had gotten into an altercation.

"I had the pageboys tear the Li place apart," he said. "If the others hadn't intervened, I would have done worse. I've sworn an oath never to cross the threshold of the quarter again."

"Whether you go there or not is no concern of mine," said Yüeh-niang. "I wouldn't presume to tell such a simpleton what to do. But as long as you're shelling out the hard cash to maintain her as your mistress, if you don't even bother to visit her, you can be sure she'll manage to take on someone else. Where people in that profession are concerned:

You can tie up their bodies but
You can't tie up their hearts.

Do you really think you can put your seal on her and make it stick?"

"What you say is true enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he started to undress, sent the maids out of the room, and proposed to go to bed with Yüeh-niang and seek his pleasure with her.

"If I let you into the kitchen,
You'll only make a pig of yourself,"
said Yüeh-niang. "It's concession enough if I allow you into my bed tonight. If you've got anything else in mind, forget it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by exposing his organ to Yüeh-niang.

"It's all your doing," he joked. "You've made him so angry he's having a dumbstruck fit."

"What do you mean 'he's having a dumbstruck fit'?" demanded Yüeh-niang.

"If he's not having a dumbstruck fit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come his eye is bulging so wide but he can't get a word out?"

"You must be delirious," responded Yüeh-niang. "What makes you think I've got even half an eye for the likes of you?"
At this point Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Without permitting any further explanation,
lifted Yüeh-niang's two fresh white legs onto his shoulders, inserted his organ into her vagina,[13] and gave free rein to:
The oriole's abandon and the butterfly's pursuit.
Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,
They are not yet willing to call a halt.[14]
Truly, it is a case of:
Among the crab apple boughs, orioles dart quickly to and fro;
Between the halcyon hued rafters, swallows parley incessantly.[15]
Before they knew it they arrived at that stage in which:
The transfusing touch of the magic rhinoceros horn
Produces a pleasure that cannot be exceeded.
Her musky tongue is partially protruded,
The fragrance of her rouge pervades his lips.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing's excitement was at its height he softly besought Yüeh-niang to call him "Daddy." Yüeh-niang accordingly:
Beneath lowered curtains, on their shared pillow,[16]
Responded as voluptuously as anyone could ask,[17]
calling him "Darling" without cease.
That night the two of them indulged:
The passions evoked by clouds and rain,
Joining their heads and twining their necks,
within the bed curtains. Truly:
When feelings converge, one is apt to forget what happens to a brocade girdle;
When overcome by excitement, who cares about the dropping of a golden hairpin?
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Coiffure in disarray, hairpins askew,[18]
she is deeply stirred;
Her passions in full sway, she dreads
the interminable night.
At evening, all alone, she stands
before her dressing mirror;
Not bothering to paint her eyebrows
into pale spring peaks.[19]
That evening husband and wife enjoyed themselves together. But no more of this.
To resume our story, the next day, bright and early in the morning, Meng Yü-lou paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. Before going in she called out, "Is that slavey, Number Six, up yet?"
"Mother's just gotten up. She's doing her hair," said Ch'un-mei. "Won't you come in and sit down, Third Lady?"
Meng Yü-lou went inside and found Chin-lien sitting in front of her dressing mirror combing her fragrant clouds of hair.
"I've come to tell you about something that's happened," she said. "Do you know about it yet?"
"In an out-of-the-way corner like this," said Chin-lien, "how would I ever hear about anything? Really, what's up?"
"When Father got home last night during the second watch," said Yü-lou, "he went into the master suite and made it up with Mistress Wu. He spent the night in her room."
"We tried so hard to persuade her," said Chin-lien, "and she kept repeating that she'd never make it up with him in a hundred or two hundred years. Now she's wantonly taken the initiative by foisting herself upon him without any further urging."
"I only found out about it this morning," said Yü-lou. "My senior maid, Lan-hsiang, overheard the pageboys talking about it in the kitchen. It seems that yesterday Father and Ying the Second were having a drink at Li Kuei-chieh's house in the quarter when they caught the whore out at something and smashed the place to pieces. He came home through the snow in high dudgeon and when he reached the inner gate found the First Lady burning night incense. He must have overheard something that brought about a reconciliation between them.
"According to her maid, the two of them talked away the night together. She said Father got down on his knees to the First Lady, calling her 'Mother,' and that the First Lady herself put on such a show it was enough to give you the creeps. I guess if she chooses to carry on that way there's nothing more to be said about it. But if it had been anyone else, you can be sure she would have been ticked off for her wantonness."
"It's lucky for her she's a principal wife," said Chin-lien, picking up where Yü-lou had left off. "Who knows what she's capable of?
She's such a practiced old hand.
If you're going to burn night incense you ought to do your praying silently. Whoever heard of making a performance out of it only in order to attract your husband's attention? The very idea! Without any urging, to go and make it up with your husband on the sly. It would have been more becoming of her to tough it out with him. She's forever hypocritically protesting her own virtue."
"It's not just a case of hypocritically protesting her own virtue," said Yü-lou. "She really wanted to make it up with him but couldn't bring herself to admit it. She may have claimed to be:
A crazy wife who will never give in,
but that was only because she was afraid that if she allowed us to intercede we might:
Engage in idle tittle-tattle,[20]
at her expense after the fact, saying that, 'when the two of you had that altercation it was only thanks to our intervention that you were reconciled.' Instead of which, the one of them happened to come home in high dudgeon from the quarter just when the other was burning night incense. A perfect coincidence! Truly:
In seeking a match they dispensed with both go-between and witness;
Secretly tying their love-knot together all by themselves.
"Right now you and I must contrive some way to prevent her from hogging all the credit. As soon as you've done with your hair, go tell Li P'ing-erh about it. If the two of us each come up with five mace of silver, we ought to be able to get Li P'ing-erh to contribute a tael, since she was the occasion of the whole to-do in the first place. Then we can throw a party today. On the one hand, it will give us a chance to offer a toast to the couple, and on the other hand, it will provide a fitting occasion for the master and mistress of the household to appreciate the snow and enjoy themselves for a day. Why not?"
"You're right," responded Chin-lien. "I wonder if Father has any prior commitments today."
"During a heavy snow like this, what commitments could he have?" said Yü-lou. "When I came over here the two of them hadn't even stirred. The door to the master suite had just been opened and Hsiao-yü was taking in the water."
Chin-lien hastily finished doing her hair and accompanied Yü-lou over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. They found her still in bed.
"The Third Lady and the Fifth Lady have come to see you," Ying-ch'un reported.
Yü-lou and Chin-lien went inside, saying, "Sister Li, you've really got it made. Still abed at such an hour.
The lazy dragon is just beginning to uncoil itself."
Chin-lien stuck her hand in under the quilt and discovered an incense burner for fumigating the bedclothes in the shape of a silver globe.[21]
"Sister Li has laid an egg," she said, pulling aside the covers as she spoke and revealing the white flesh of the body that lay within.
Li P'ing-erh made haste to get into her clothes.
"That's enough of your tricks, Fifth Sister," said Yü-lou. "Sister Li, it's time you got up. There's something we've come to tell you about. Yesterday, thus and so, Father and our elder sister were reconciled. Each of us is going to put up five mace of silver. You ought to give a little more since you were the occasion of the trouble between them in the first place. It's snowing heavily today and we really ought to do something to appreciate the snow. So we thought we'd throw a party and invite Father and our elder sister, to spend some time with us. What do you say?"
"I'll be happy to contribute whatever you suggest," said Li P'ing-erh.
"A tael ought to be sufficient," said Chin-lien. "Weigh it out so we can go back to the rear compound and see what we can get from Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o."
Li P'ing-erh put on her clothes and bound her feet, telling Ying-ch'un, in the meantime, to open the trunk and get out the silver. She came up with a piece which Chin-lien put in the scale and found to weigh one tael, two mace, and five candareens.
Yü-lou suggested that Chin-lien stay and keep Li P'ing-erh company while she did her hair. "I'll go back to the rear compound myself and see what I can get from Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o," she said.
Chin-lien looked on as Li P'ing-erh washed her face and worked on her hair. Nearly two hours elapsed before Yü-lou returned from the rear compound.
"If I'd only known, I never would have undertaken this business," she complained. "It's something that concerns us all, and yet you'd think I was trying to get something for nothing out of her. The little whore said, 'I'm so out of favour our husband doesn't bother to come into my room anymore. Where would I get any silver from?' When I insisted, she wouldn't come up with so much as a mace. I pled with her for half the day before she produced this silver hairpin. Put it in the scale and see how much it weighs."
Chin-lien did as she was told and it was found to weigh only three mace and seven candareens.
"What about Li Chiao-erh?" she asked.
"At first she said, 'I don't have anything of my own,' " reported Yü-lou. " 'Although the money for household expenses may pass through my hands every day, everything has to be accounted for. I only receive enough to defray actual costs. There isn't anything left over.' I had to argue with her half the day before I got anywhere. 'How can you say you don't have any money to spare when you're in charge of the household expenses,' I demanded. 'It's not as though the rest of us are any better off. Are you claiming that:
The summer sun just happened to skip your door?
It's something that concerns us all but you're just not going to cooperate. So much for that!' I had to stalk off in a huff before she was embarrassed enough to send the maid after me and come up with something at last. All this trouble for no reason at all!"
Chin-lien took Li Chiao-erh's contribution and put it in the scale. It came to just four mace and eight candareens.
"That simulating whore!" she cursed. "No matter what happens, even without any other funny business, she simply will not give full value but is always just a little short."
"She's quick enough to get out the big scale with its yellow yard and weigh out the money[22] when it's for herself," said Yü-lou, "but if you want to get anything out of *her*, it's like trying to extract it from her bones. Nobody has a good word to say for her."
When they had toted up the money that came to three taels and one mace in all, including the contributions of Yü-lou and Chin-lien, they sent Hsiu-ch'un to fetch Tai-an.
Before anything else, Chin-lien asked him, "When you were out with Father yesterday, what was the altercation at the Li place all about?"
Tai-an told them the whole story. "They had a meeting of their club at Ch'ang Shih-chieh's house but it broke up early, and Father ended up accompanying Messrs. Ying and Hsieh to Li Kuei-chieh's place. The madam reported that she was not at home, having gone to her fifth maternal aunt's house to celebrate her birthday. Who would have thought that, some time later, when Father went to the back of the establishment to relieve himself, he found the painted face and a Southerner drinking wine together and realized she had been giving him the slip. He was so enraged that:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he ordered us to tear the whore's place apart and would have had the Southerner and the painted face locked up together in the gatehouse had Ying the Second and the others not intervened. Father then got on his horse and came home in a huff, swearing along the way that he would take steps to settle the whore's hash."
"That lousy whore!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "I'll bet she thought she had:
A permanent grip on the honey jar,
but now, somehow or other:
It's ended up smashed to pieces."[23]
"Did Father really say that?" she asked Tai-an.
"Would I have the nerve to deceive you?" he replied.
"You lousy jailbird," said Chin-lien. "Even if he does neglect her, she is your master's mistress, after all. Since when are you entitled to curse her? I remember how it was at the outset, whenever I asked you to do anything you used to claim you were too busy. 'Father has sent me to deliver some money to Auntie Kuei's place,' you used to say, giving such a sweet inflection to the words 'Auntie Kuei.' Now that she's fallen out of favour and your master's angry with her, even you start calling her a whore. Just wait and see if I don't tell your father about it the next chance I get."
"Ai-ya, Fifth Lady," exclaimed Tai-an.
"The sun must have risen in the West today,[24]
that you should be taking her part for a change. If Father hadn't called her a whore on the way home, do you think I would have dared do so?"
"If your father cursed her, that's his business," said Chin-lien. "Does that entitle you to do so?"
"If I'd known you were going to give me such a hard time about it, Fifth Lady," said Tai-an, "I never would have mentioned it to you."
"That's enough out of you, you little jailbird," said Yü-lou. "Here are three taels and one mace of silver, with which we want you and Lai-hsing to go buy some things for us, thus and so. We're planning to give a party today and invite your father and the First Lady to join us, so we can enjoy the snow and have a drink together. If you can manage to give us a break on the squeeze, I'll get the Fifth Lady not to tell your father what you said."
"If you send me on an errand," said Tai-an, "would I have the nerve to take any squeeze?"
Thereupon, together with Lai-hsing, he went off to buy the provisions.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had just gotten up and was performing his ablutions in the master suite when he saw Lai-hsing coming through the snow on his way to the kitchen with a chicken, a goose, and other comestibles, while Tai-an came in carrying a jug of Chin-hua wine.
"Who's that stuff for, that the servants are bringing in?" he asked Hsiao-yü.
"The ladies of the house are giving a party today," said Hsiao-yü. "They're going to invite you and the First Lady to join them in order to enjoy the snow."
"Where does that Chin-hua wine come from," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The Third Lady gave me the money to buy it," said Tai-an.
"Ai-ya," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We've got plenty of wine in the house already. What need is there to go out and buy any more?"
"Take the key to the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard," he instructed Tai-an, "and bring back two jugs of the high-quality jasmine wine you'll find there. We can mix some of this wine in with it."
Thereupon, in the living room of the master suite that opened onto the rear courtyard:
Standing screens and brocaded windbreaks like Shih Ch'ung's[25] were set up;
Warming drapes of oiled paper sprigged with plum-blossoms were suspended.

Braziers were filled with animal-shaped briquettes;
All the appurtenances of a feast were duly arrayed.
It was not long before the necessary preparations in the kitchen were completed and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh came to invite Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang to join them.
Thereupon, Li Chiao-erh served the drinks, Meng Yü-lou held the flagon, P'an Chin-lien proffered the side dishes, and Li P'ing-erh also got down on her knees beside them. The first drink was offered to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Taking the cup in his hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, with a laugh, "My children, you've gone to a lot of trouble just to please the old man. A bow will suffice."
P'an Chin-lien, who was always quick on the uptake, interjected, "That's enough of your airs, my son. Do you think anyone here is going to kowtow to you while you remain on your feet? You're just like:
The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall;
The longer it stays there the hotter it gets.[26]
If you don't get down on your knees you'll:
Forfeit a myriad years worth of fodder.[27]
If it weren't for our elder sister, who do you think would be kowtowing to you today?"
Thereupon, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had been offered the first drink, the cup was refilled to the brim and Yüeh-niang was asked to assume the place of honour so that a drink could be offered to her in turn.
"None of you spoke a word about it," said Yüeh-niang. "Who would have thought you would go to so much trouble on my account?"
"It doesn't amount to anything," laughed Yü-lou. "We just thought we'd offer a cup of watery wine to our patriarch and matriarch after this heavy snow, to help them dispel their gloom. Sister, please be seated and accept our salutations."
Yüeh-niang refused to permit this and insisted on kowtowing to them in return.
"Unless you agree to be seated," said Yü-lou, "the rest of us will refuse to get up from our knees."
They bickered back and forth about it for some time before Yüeh-niang agreed to accept half a kowtow from them.
"Elder Sister," said Chin-lien, in jest, "it's only right that you should be forewarned. You may consent to forgive him this once, out of consideration for us but if he should do anything of the kind to offend you again, we'll wash our hands of the whole affair."
Then, turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she continued, "What do you think you're doing, remaining in your seat up there:
Playing the fool and putting on airs?
Why aren't you down on your knees, offering Sister a cup of wine, and apologizing for your misconduct?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed but did not move from his seat.
After Yüeh-niang was finally induced to accept the proffered drink, she got up from her place, ordered Yü-hsiao to hold the flagon, and poured a drink in return for each of her sisters. Only Sun Hsüeh-o received the wine on her knees. The others all accepted theirs with the ceremony appropriate to sisters of equal standing.
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang occupied the seats of honour at the head of the table, while Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh ranged themselves on either side.
"Sister Li," said Chin-lien, "you really ought to offer our elder sister a cup of wine yourself, since you were the occasion of the whole to-do in the first place.
You hardly have to be as stiff as wood, like Old Lin."[28]
Li P'ing-erh actually rose from her seat and was going to follow Chin-lien's suggestion but Hsi-men Ch'ing stopped her, saying, "Don't pay any attention to that little whore, she's only fooling. We've already been presented with a round of drinks. There's no need for any more."
Only then did Li P'ing-erh desist.
Thereupon, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, struck up a tune on their instruments, the *p'i-p'a*, psaltery, three-stringed banjo, and mandola. They sang the southern-style song suite that begins with the tune "Pomegranate Blossoms" and opens with the words:
It was the night of their assignation,[29]
Which had been planned for this evening.
People were silent;
The moon was high.
He had been instructed not to
knock at the gate,
But ever-so-gently to sway the
flowering branches,
So that their shadows would appear on the silken window,
And she would know that her
lover had arrived.
What was the need for butterfly messengers
or bee go-betweens?
The tryst would take place between the
phoenix lovers.
TO THE SAME TUNE
"Who could have known my fickle lover would
fail me on this fine night?
My bedchamber is silent,
As I endure my solitude.
The shadows of the wind-blown bamboos move
fitfully on the latticework;
With the result that my dreams are interrupted,
my soul is troubled.
I sigh that we spend more time apart than together.
When I gaze back toward the Radiant Terrace of Ch'u,I
mountains and barriers intervene.
For want of clouds and rain, my eyebrows have faded,
my fragrance has dissipated.
Unhappily the road to the Blue Bridge is blocked."
etc., etc.
TO THE TUNE "FISHERMAN'S PRIDE, WITH A VARIATION"
"Late at night I get up and trim the silver lamp to look for him,
But my shadow is solitary and my image lone.
Who could have anticipated that the pleasure of last evening,
And the even greater pleasure expected tonight,
Should end up, after we separated, without further communication?
All day long it has been preoccupying me.
Perhaps he is drunk and his feelings are topsy-turvy;
Perhaps he is performing on his zither for other ears;
Perhaps he has taken up with some other flower by the wayside;
Perhaps he has what it takes to get started but he won't carry through."
"All on his account I am neglecting my toilet;
Too tired to paint my eyebrows.
All on his account, I no longer enjoy tea or food;
My thoughts are too disturbed.
All on his account my good feelings have turned to vexation.
All on his account my heart is sore and I suffer from boredom.
How can I dispel these feelings at separation?
I'll end up as prematurely gray as P'an Yüeh as emaciated as Shen Yüeh."
"He has suddenly forgotten our vows beneath the moon and stars.
He has suddenly forgotten our singing and laughter.
He has suddenly forgotten the poems he indited on my mermaid silk handkerchief.
He has suddenly forgotten the tiny shoe I gave him as a keepsake.
He has suddenly forgotten the deft needlework with which I fashioned his spring gown.
He has completely forgotten that we burned incense together to solemnize our union.
He has suddenly forgotten the peach-red stain on the fragrant silk handkerchief."
"As for my lovesickness, how can I quickly dispel it?
Will the debt created by our intertwining branches ever be paid?
Truly, the fallen blossom would like to float with the current,
But the heartless current is too turbulent to bear it along.
Concluding that this anguish may be something I'm fated to endure,
I secretly cast my lot with coins but get no clear answer.
I would appeal to Heaven itself but Heaven is too high."
Coda
If she were ever to see him again, how could she ever forgive him?
Her only regret was that she was not able to devastate him with a single tirade.
But once they were reunited, they got along just as well as before.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he asked, "Whose idea's it to sing this particular suite?"
"The Fifth Lady told us to sing it," said Yü-hsiao.
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave P'an Chin-lien a look, saying, "You little whore! You can't resist the temptation to:
Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves,[30] can you?"
"Who am I to tell them what to sing?" said Chin-lien. "You're just picking on me again."
"Why don't we ask our son-in-law to join us for a bit?" said Yüeh-niang, and, suiting her action to her words, she dispatched a pageboy to the front compound to convey the invitation.
Before long Ch'en Ching-chi showed up and bowed to each member of the party before taking a seat next to Hsi-men Ta-chieh. Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to provide him with a place setting. Now that the whole family was assembled:
Animal-shaped briquettes replenished golden braziers;
The finest wine of Yang-kao vintage was decanted.[31]
As they enjoyed the wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing glanced outside the rolled-up bamboo blinds and saw that the snow was falling heavily. It looked just like:
Shredded cotton wadding,[32] or
Wildly dancing pear blossoms.[33]
Truly, it was a magnificent snow. Behold:
Initially resembling willow catkins,
Gradually it turns into goose down.

Scarcely audible, it reminds one of crabs moving across the sand;[34]
In rich profusion, it is like shattered alabaster piled on the pavement.[35]

With every move one makes,
One's clothes catch six-pointed stars;
At every other moment,
One must brush away the bee's whiskers.[36]
Now it flurries, now it stops;

The Dragon Lord is yet rehearsing the steps of his dance.
The power of spring remains weak;
The Jade Maiden is still entranced producing her whirlwind.
Enhancing jasper terraces,
Jade dragon's-scales appear to pervade the firmament.[37]
Brushing powdered foreheads,
White crane's-feathers seem to settle gently to earth.[38]
Truly:
Congealing upon "towers of jade," its cold raises goose bumps;
Wavering before "silver seas," its dazzle creates a blur.[39]
When Wu Yüeh-niang saw how much snow had accumulated on the T'ai-hu rockery[40] in front of the spirit screen, she got up from her place, told Hsiao-yü to fetch the tea jar, and proceeded in person to sweep up enough snow to brew some Phoenix Tablet Sparrow Tongue tea from Chiang-nan for the company. [41] Truly:
Foaming whitecaps of brick tea, break in white jade cups;
The pure bouquet of vintage wine, bursts from the golden flagon.[42]
As they were enjoying the tea, who should come in but Tai-an, who reported, "Li Ming has come. He's waiting in the front compound."
"Tell him to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long, Li Ming appeared. After performing a kowtow to the assembled company, he made a leg as well, and then stood deferentially to one side.
"You've arrived in the nick of time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Where've you been?"
"Nowhere in particular," said Li Ming. "I've been teaching a couple of youngsters at Eunuch Director Liu's house near Wine Vinegar Gate in the Northern Quarter. I thought I'd look in on them today but then remembered that the young ladies at your place haven't got some of their songs quite right yet, so I came over here to see what I could do."
Hsi-men Ch'ing handed him what was left of the cup of tea, flavoured with osmanthus and kumquats, that he had been drinking from, saying, "When you've finished with that, stick around and perform a song suite for us."
"Whatever you say," said Li Ming, retiring an appropriate distance to drink his tea.
When he had finished, he came forward, tuned the strings of his psaltery, and:
Commencing to sing in full voice;
Facing forward with his feet together,
launched into the song suite on winter that begins with the southern style tune "Spring in the Metropolis" and opens with the words:
A cold wind has overspread the land,[43]
The frost-braving branches of the golden larch
retain their coin-like leaves.
The oranges are green and the tangerines yellow.
The trees on the embankment are bare but
the maple leaves are red.
The movements of the hands on the jade clepsydra
are faintly audible;
Somewhat enhancing the effect of the new frost
in the frozen night.
It is time to clear the stackyards, bring in the harvest,
Drill the troops, and practice archery.
TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE" (NORTHERN STYLE)
The southward returning geese,
The crows resting at night,
Perch in the trees and alight on the flat strand.
When one surveys the vista it is worthy of a painting.
During Indian summer there are still plants in flower;
Several verdant peach blossoms have been spared.
Travelers halt their steeds to admire the scene.
TO THE TUNE "SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN SLOPE" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
In painted chambers beaded portieres have just been lowered.
Wintry hues oppress the distant mountains.
Beside the brazier wine is poured and portions
of savory meat are divided.
Three passages are played on the drums.
Icy strings stretch over bridges ranged like wild geese.
Golden braziers are replenished, burning incense
redolent of orchid and musk.
The shivery effect of the cold gradually
becomes more intense.
"Let us imbibe 'sunset clouds,'
And feast on 'jade peaches' in fabled love nests,
As, everywhere in the capital,
Pipes and voices resound in a myriad houses."
TO THE TUNE "DANCERS' ENSEMBLE" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
In several places flute-players in moon-viewing
kiosks are heard.
Wine is amply decanted, poems are slowly indited.
There is no helping the fact that the chill
has somewhat increased.
For a time the curtains have been let down half way.
The winter solstice is at hand, after which
we will welcome the lengthening days.
TO THE TUNE "GOLD CHRYSANTHEMUM'S FRAGRANCE" (NORTHERN STYLE)
The ashes of reed pith have been blown from
all six yin pitch-pipes.
The sun's shadow has moved across the line
on the sundial.
Like translucent jade, morning frost covers
the turquoise tiles;
Like glistening alabaster, water congeals into
ice crystals.
"Let us raise jade goblets and decant 'sunset clouds.' "
TO THE TUNE "GOURD OF VINEGAR" (NORTHERN STYLE)
The cold-weather plants gradually begin to bud;
The mountain plum is about to burst into bloom.
In frosty courtyards the p'i-p'a is plucked
in time to the dance.
The fragrance fades from garden and wood
as the year winds to an end.
In several places monks pause in reading their sacred texts,
To observe that in the distant sky the force of the wind
is blowing the geese out of line.
TO THE TUNE "WEN-CHOU SONG" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
The dark clouds obscuring it,
Blown off by the evening wind,
The image of the moon traversing the void
illuminates the snow.
Its single hue of alabaster is truly bright,
obscuring the open country.
It falls densely on the sing-song houses,
and flutters into monkish abodes.4
Wavering before "silver seas,"
its dazzle creates a blur.5
In no time at all it has half covered
the whitewashed wall.
TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
As we idly climb to a lofty kiosk,
Moonlight gleams on white jade girdle pendants,
and shines on white horses.
In the evening the view over the river
is resplendent;
A solitary rain-caped fisherman returns home,
worthy of a painting.
The tiles of golden gates and jade structures
are frozen in white.
Brushing windows and infiltrating blinds, the snow
continues to flutter down,
An auspicious omen, presaging an era
of universal peace.
TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD" (NORTHERN STYLE)
The rivers and mountains present an imposing vista.
Psaltery and mandola are called for to celebrate the season.
Superior wine is served within curtains of gold lamé;

Enhanced by clear breezes, phoenix tablet tea is sipped.
Donning crane's-down cloaks we search for plum blossoms,
Emulate Wang Hui-chih's abortive visit to Tai K'uei
on a snowy night.6
And show off our poetic effusions by the bridge at Pa-ling.7
The jasper terraces in the bright moonlight resemble,
The Celestial Emperor's abode in the Isles of the Blest.
TO THE TUNE "THE JADE GIRDLE" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
A subtle fragrance suffuses the air;
Taking advantage of the mild weather, the early plum
has burst into bloom.
Its white beauty is pure and perfect.
Gracing moonlit terraces and breezy kiosks,
It stoops over low fences and thatched cottages.
Its jade bones and icy flesh are
cleansed of makeup.
Interspersed with bamboo and pine
it inspires poetic fancy.
TO THE TUNE "BLACK SILK ROBE" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
As in the past, its quintessential nature is resplendent.
Its glossy flesh, tinged with powder, adorns
shallow waters and flat strands.
Its sparse branches encage the moon, casting
their shadows aslant.
Last night it bloomed amid the snow
in the nearby village;
But under Lo-fu Mountain in the south,
It lends its presence to the wineshops.
Its aura of purity is truly astonishing;
Its white decor is beauteous and elegant.
Illuminated by moonlight, set off by bamboo,
what more could one ask?
TO THE TUNE "THE GREENHORN" (NORTHERN STYLE)
Beside glowing braziers, the banquet spread,
the banquet spread is just over.
Lifting golden cups, toasts are exchanged,
toasts are exchanged in "sunset clouds."
Snow is swept together and ice broken up
with which to brew fine tea.
Inserted into silver vases, several sprigs of
plum blossoms are displayed.
On the festival of the eighth day of the twelfth month,
The populace celebrates boisterously,
Effigies of Śākyamuni Buddha are bathed,
And public devotions proceed unhindered.
The year is drawing to an end; and once spring arrives,
spring wind and spring light will fill the world,
Just as the sage emperor governs the myriad states,
and ensures peace in the realm.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING THE OLD CRONE" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
Welcoming the new spring, we gradually perceive
that the cold is receding.
En route to festive feasts, we ride in perfumed carriages.
Carefully we decant the apotropaic T'u-su wine,
And set off firecrackers on New Year's Eve.
New peachwood talismans are exchanged for the old.
When spring arrives, the wicks in jade lamps
shed their ashes.
Fires are lit, illuminating the frosty tiles;
To the beat of drums the exorcistic No rites are performed;
As, troupe by troupe, the dancers put on a noisy show.
Portraits of the demon queller Chung K'uei are hung up.8
At midnight New Year's toasts are everywhere exchanged.
Pepper-flavoured wine is served and its praises sung.
Rowdy friends disturb their stabled horses;
Rows of torches scatter the roosting crows.9
CODA (SOUTHERN STYLE)
The sage ruler of the Great Ming dynasty
has pacified the realm.
He has brought peace and contentment to
natives and foreigners alike.
Within the four seas all is tranquil
and the populace is happy.
etc., etc.

When Li Ming had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing called him over in order to reward him with a drink of wine. He told Hsiao-yü, who was holding a round-handled chicken-crop flagon with a curved spout, to pour a full measure into a peach-shaped cup of silver-mounted cloisonné. Li Ming knelt on the ground and drank off three full cups. Hsi-men Ch'ing also selected from the delicacies on the table a saucerful of bulging white steamed buns, a bowl of clam broth flavoured with leeks and marinated bamboo shoots, a platter of large slices of fat jellied goose, as well as saucersful of savory cured coney, steamed dried shad, and squab baked in junket, and handed them to Li Ming on a tray.

Li Ming retired an appropriate distance and gobbled it all down in:

Three mouthfuls and two swallows.[44]

When he had licked the platter clean and wiped his lips with a napkin, he came back and stood at attention beside the latticework partition.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him all about what had happened at Li Kuei-chieh's place the day before.

"I didn't hear a word about it," said Li Ming. "I haven't been over there very often recently. If you stop to think about it though, it's not really Kuei-chieh's fault. It's all the doing of our old madam, Li the Third. You mustn't be too upset about it. I'll give her a real telling off the next time I see her."

That day, the party continued until the first watch, and the wife and concubines of the household had a good time together. Ch'en Ching-chi and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were the first to leave, going straight back to their quarters in the front compound. After that, when the wine was about to run out, Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded Li Ming with another drink and sent him on his way.

"If you go over there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing in parting, "don't say anything about having been here today."

"I understand," replied Li Ming.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered a servant to see him to the door and the front gate was closed for the night. Wife and concubines then went their separate ways but Hsi-men Ch'ing spent another night with Yüeh-niang in the master suite. There is a poem that testifies to this:

A marriage affinity bound with red cord[45]
is not to be doubted;
Having had to burn their door-bars for fuel,
they are of one mind.[46]
Like fish and water, perfectly suited,[47]
from this time forth;
Their mutual feelings will surely sustain
a lifetime of bliss.[48]

To resume our story, by the next day the snow had cleared. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta had been induced by the offer of a roast goose and a jug of wine to act as emissaries for the Li family establishment that was worried that Hsi-men Ch'ing might be moved by anger to attempt the ruination of their house. They therefore showed up in order to respectfully invite Hsi-men Ch'ing to accompany them into the quarter and accept the proffered rites of propitiation.

Yüeh-niang had finished her morning toilet and was eating a breakfast snack with Hsi-men Ch'ing when who should come in but the pageboy, Tai-an, with the report that Master Ying and Master Hsieh had come to visit and were waiting in the reception room out front.

Hsi-men Ch'ing put down the piece of pastry in his hand and was halfway out the door when Yüeh-niang stopped him, saying, "Who knows what those two ghost-snatching demons have come for? You might just as well finish your breakfast before rushing off to meet them. Let them cool their heels outside a while. What are you in such a fearful hurry to get out of here for, anyway? There's no telling where they'll drag you off to in the snow."

"Tell the pageboy to bring the pastry out front," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll share it with the two of them."

So saying, he got up and started out of the room.

"When you're through eating," Yüeh-niang instructed him, "don't allow yourself to be inveigled into going off somewhere with those two. After a heavy snow like this, you really ought to stay home and relax for a change. Tonight we're going to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday."

"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he went out to meet Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, who greeted him with a bow, saying, "Brother, after you went home in a huff the other night, we really gave them a hard time. 'All this while,' we said, 'our brother's been:

Spending his money and wasting his goods,
here in your house. Even if he hasn't been around much lately, that's no reason for you to change your tune. After all, if you let your painted-face take up with some Southerner on the sly:
Enemies are apt to meet in narrow straits.[49]
If he catches them red-handed, how could he be anything but angry? And, quite aside from our brother's anger, we can hardly be expected to countenance such goings on ourselves.'

"Mother and daughters alike, we really told them a thing or two. They're all thoroughly embarrassed about the whole thing. Early this morning they invited us over to their place and got down on their knees to us with a good deal of weeping and wailing. They're so worried about what you might do in your anger that they've prepared a cup of watery wine and want you to come back so they can make it up to you."

"I'm no longer angry," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'm not going back into the quarter anymore."

"It's only right that you should be annoyed," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you stop to think about it though, it's not really Kuei-chieh's fault. That Ting the Second was actually a patron of her elder sister, Li Kuei-ch'ing, and never made any overtures to Kuei-chieh. It all originated out of the fact that his father's boatload of goods was moored next to the boat of a National University student, named Ch'en, who is a fellow townsman of his. This Ch'en, whose sobriquet is Liang-huai, only arrived two days ago. He's the son of Administration Vice Commissioner Ch'en who formerly served in the Palace Library.

"This Ting the Second had engaged to pay ten taels of silver for a party at the Li place in order to entertain his fellow townsman Mr. Ch'en. He had just stopped by to deliver the money when we showed up, and Kuei-chieh, unable to think of any other means of avoiding an awkward situation, concealed the presence of the Southerner by hiding him in the rear part of the compound, where you happened to catch sight of him.

"The truth of the matter is that he has never laid a hand on Kuei-chieh. Today, mother and daughters alike:

Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
Kowtowing and performing obeisances,
begged the two of us to do whatever we could to induce you to pay them a visit so they could explain this misunderstanding to you themselves and perhaps alleviate some of your anger."

"I've already made a vow to my wife that I would never set foot in the place again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's not that I'm still angry or anything like that. You can tell them that they have no cause for further concern. I've got some matters to attend to at home today, so I really can't go."
This reply threw his two visitors into such consternation that they fell to their knees and spoke with one voice, saying, "Brother, how can you say such a thing? It may not matter for you not to go but since they have asked us to intercede on their behalf, it would look as though we had so little influence with you that we couldn't even get you to accede to an invitation. All you have to do is show up and sit for a while and then come home if you like."
By the time the two of them finished with their pitch:
As though their lives depended on it,
they had talked Hsi-men Ch'ing into giving his assent.
Before long, a table was set up and their host invited them to share the remainder of his breakfast pastry with him. When they had finished eating, soon thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to fetch his outdoor clothes.
Yüeh-niang, who was sitting with Meng Yü-lou when he came in, asked Tai-an, "Where's your father off to?"
"I have no idea," said Tai-an. "He only told me to come fetch his clothes."
"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang railed at him. "You think you can keep me in the dark, do you? If your father gets home late today, I'll hold you personally accountable. We're celebrating the eve of the Third Lady's birthday tonight, so you'd better get him home in plenty of time. If you wait until:
The sky is black and the earth is dark,
I'll see that you get a good beating, you lousy jailbird, if I have to do it myself."
"Why should you beat me, Mother?" said Tai-an. "What have I got to do with it?"
"I don't know why it is," said Yüeh-niang, "but as soon as he heard those two gaffers had come, he took off as though his life depended on it. We were eating breakfast at the time but he dropped his bowl and headed out the door on the spot. Who knows where they may drag him off to:
Parading the campground and disturbing the dead,
or when he'll ever get home."
It was the twenty-sixth day of the eleventh month, the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and a family party had been prepared for the occasion. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the invitation of his two friends to accompany them into the licensed quarter. The Li family establishment had already prepared a regular feast in their main reception room and engaged two singing girls to help with the entertainment. Li Kuei-chieh and Li Kuei-ch'ing, all dressed up for the occasion, met their guests at the door. The old procuress came out and knelt down to offer her apologies for the misunderstanding. The two sisters served the wine and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta stood to either side, keeping up a steady stream of jokes and wisecracks.
"I wore away half the skin on my lips in getting your lover to come see you," said Ying Po-chüeh to Kuei-chieh. "And now you've no further use for me and don't even offer me a cup of wine. You've only got eyes for your lover, I can see. If he'd kicked up a fuss and refused to come, just now, not only would you have cried yourself blind and been reduced to making your living as an itinerant singer but nobody would have cared a straw about you anymore. It's only my skills as a mouthpiece that have saved you from such a fate."
"You crazy beggar!" Kuei-chieh railed at him. "You're delirious. I'd only be wasting my breath on you. So you think I'd be reduced to being an itinerant singer, do you?"
"Just look at the way the lousy little whore carries on," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"After the sutra has been recited,
She takes the stick to the monk.[50]
At this rate, she won't acknowledge anyone in the future. When he wouldn't come, you were all aflutter; but now that he's here:
Your wing feathers are dry enough for flight.[51]
Come over here and give me a kiss to fend off the cold."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss.
"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" laughed Kuei-chieh. "Don't knock the wine all over Father."
"Little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I can see through your tricks. Right now you're so concerned about your lover, 'Don't knock the wine all over Father,' you say, giving such a sweet inflection to the word 'Father.' Am I nothing but a stepchild, that you haven't a word for me?"
"If I called you anything," said Kuei-chieh, "it would be 'my child.' "
"Come over here," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got a joke to tell you. A crab and a frog once swore brotherhood together and made a wager that whichever of them could jump over a ditch should be the elder brother. The frog made it to the other side in a hop or two. Just as the crab was about to jump, two girls came along to draw water and trussed him up with a piece of string to take home with them when they were through. They forgot about him when they were ready to leave, however, and neglected to take him. When the frog saw that his companion had not followed him he came back to see what had happened and asked, 'What's been keeping you?' 'I would have made it across,' said the crab, 'if I hadn't been tied up in knots by those two little whores.' "
Thereupon, the two sisters both took out after Ying Po-chüeh while Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed himself silly. They continued to enjoy themselves:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Laughing and joking at each other's expense.
But no more of this.
To resume our story, back at home Wu Yüeh-niang had prepared a feast, partly in return for the one to which she had been treated the day before, and partly in order to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, Aunt Yang, and two Buddhist nuns had been invited for the occasion and were seated in the master suite. As they waited the sun eventually set but still there was no sign of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Yüeh-niang was becoming extremely agitated.
At this point, P'an Chin-lien, tugging Li P'ing-erh by the hand, said to Yüeh-niang with a giggle, "Elder Sister, since he still hasn't shown up, why don't the two of us go out to the front gate and look out for him?"
"Who's got the patience to look out for him?" said Yüeh-niang.
Chin-lien also took Meng Yü-lou by the hand, saying, "Let the three of us go out to look for him together."
"I want to hear the joke the abbess is about to tell," said Yü-lou. "Let's wait till she's done before we go."
Only then was Chin-lien induced to stay.
As they sat in a circle around the two nuns to hear what jokes they would tell, she said, "We only go for meaty fare. Don't give us any of that vegetarian stuff."
"Let them tell us whatever they want," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't be so demanding."
"Elder Sister," said Chin-lien, "you may not realize it but the abbess here can really tell a joke if she wants to. The last time she was here in the rear compound we refused to let her off and she came up with a whole string of good ones."
Then, turning to the abbess, she said, "If you've got any, let's have them."
At this point,
Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
Nun Wang, who was sitting on the k'ang, said, "A certain man was walking down the road when he encountered a tiger who wanted to eat him. 'Spare my life,' said the man, 'for the sake of my eighty-year-old mother who has no one else to look after her. Or else come home with me. I've got a pig there I could let you eat.' The tiger accordingly spared him and accompanied the man back to his home, where he told his mother about it. His mother, who was making bean curd at the time, couldn't bear to relinquish the pig, so she said to her son, 'Why don't you give him a few pieces of bean curd to eat?' 'You don't understand, Mother,' the son replied. 'He's not accustomed to vegetarian fare.' "
"That's no good," said Chin-lien. "We don't want to listen to any more of that vegetarian stuff. Let's have some meatier fare."
Nun Wang then told them another one. "A certain family with three daughters-in-law was celebrating the birthday of the head of the household. First it was the turn of the senior daughter-in-law to offer her father-in-law a cup of wine. 'Sir,' she said, 'you're just like a magistrate.' 'How am I like a magistrate?' the father-in-law asked. 'When you sit up there like that,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'everyone in the whole household is afraid of you. How can you say you're not like a magistrate?' Next it was the turn of the second daughter-in-law to offer a cup of wine. 'Sir,' she said, 'you're just like a yamen lictor of tigerlike ferocity.' 'How am I like a yamen lictor of tigerlike ferocity?' the father-in-law asked. 'When you shout a command,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'everyone in the whole household trembles. How can you say you're not like a yamen lictor?' 'You're really giving me a hard time,' the father-in-law said. Finally it was the turn of the third daughter-in-law to offer a cup of wine. She stepped forward and said, 'Sir, you're not really like a magistrate or like a lictor.' 'Then what am I like?' the father-in-law demanded to know. 'Sir,' said the daughter-in-law, 'you're just like a head yamen clerk.' 'How am I like a head yamen clerk?' the father-in-law asked. 'If you're not like a head yamen clerk,' the daughter-in-law replied, 'how is it that you have the run of all six chambers?' "[52]
Everyone laughed at this joke.
"You bald-pated rascal!" said Chin-lien. "You've managed to get us all into it. What sort of a yamen clerk would have the nerve to venture into every chamber? The bald-pated dog would be lucky to escape with his nether regions in one piece."
After this exchange, Chin-lien, Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh went off to the front gate together to look for Hsi-men Ch'ing but he was nowhere to be seen.
"What's Father doing away from home on such a snowy day?" asked Yü-lou. "I wonder where he's gone."
"If you ask me," said Chin-lien, "he's sure to be at that whore Li Kuei-chieh's house in the quarter."
"But he smashed the place up he was so upset with her," said Yü-lou. "He swore an oath never to set foot in it again. Why should he go back there? Let's make a bet on it. I'm sure he's not at her place."
"Sister Li can be our witness," said Chin-lien. "Are you willing to shake on it? I say he's gone to her house today. It was day before yesterday that he trashed the whore's place. Yesterday that cuckold Li Ming came here to size up the situation. Today Ying the Second and that Hsieh fellow showed up at the crack of dawn, like ghost-snatching demons, and dragged him off with them. My guess is that the old procuress and that whore have:
Laid plans and hatched a scheme,[53]
in order to get him back there again. If they're able to work their wiles on him, somehow or other, and succeed in propitiating him, they'll have a chance to:
Relight the furnace and restore the account.
Who knows how long he'll be tied up, or what the probabilities are as to whether he'll come home or not; but our elder sister just keeps waiting for him."
"Even if he doesn't come home," said Yü-lou, "he ought to send a pageboy back to let us know about it."
As they were talking, who should come by but a vendor of melon seeds, so the two of them, standing in the gateway, bought some melon seeds and stood there cracking them in their teeth. All of a sudden, they caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing coming toward them from the east, and the three ladies beat a hasty retreat.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was on horseback, sent Tai-an ahead of him on foot, saying, "See who it is standing there in the gateway."
Tai-an ran forward a step or two and reported, "It's the Third Lady, the Fifth Lady, and the Sixth Lady, buying melon seeds at the gate."
In due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, dismounted, and walked back through the inner gate that led to the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh had gone ahead to the master suite to tell Yüeh-niang of his arrival but Chin-lien lay in wait for him, concealing herself in the black shadow behind the whitewashed spirit screen.
When he encountered her, Hsi-men Ch'ing was startled and said, "You crazy little whore! Coming upon you so suddenly gave me quite a start. What were you all doing out at the front gate?"
"You have a nerve to ask," said Chin-lien. "Where have you been all this time, that you should only be coming home now, leaving your mothers with nothing to do but wait for you at the door?"
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite. Yüeh-niang had prepared a feast for the occasion which was laid out on the table with everything:
Straight and proper.[54]
She told Yü-hsiao to hold the flagon and Hsi-men Ta-chieh to serve the wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing was served first, after which, when all of the sisters had been served in turn, they sat down at their places. Ch'un-mei and Ying-ch'un played and sang for them in the lower part of the room.
After they had eaten for a while, the first course was cleared away and the sweetmeats in honour of Meng Yü-lou's birthday were served, consisting of forty saucersful of delicacies of every kind.
The finest vintage poured from the flagon,[55]
Iridescent liquid overflowed the cups.
Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, was induced to occupy the seat of honour but retired to her room during the first watch because she did not like to drink too much wine. Wu Yüeh-niang and the sorority of concubines, however, continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company, throwing dice:
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.
When it was Yüeh-niang's turn to call the game, she said, "If you want me to set the rules for this round, the scoring will be based on domino combinations. Each player in turn must come up with the name of a song tune, the names of two domino combinations, and a line from the *Hsi-hsiang chi* (The romance of the western chamber),[56] strung together so as to make some semblance of sense. He or she must then throw the dice and drink a cup of wine as a forfeit if any of the numbers thrown correspond to those in the domino combinations he or she has named."
Yüeh-niang went first, saying, " 'The Sixth Lady,' like a 'Drunken Yang Kuei-fei,'[57] drops her 'Eight-pearled Bracelet.'[58] 'Gossamer strands catch on the rose-leaved raspberry trellis.' "[59]
When she threw the dice, none of the numbers corresponded to those in either of the domino combinations she had named.
Next it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn. He said, " 'The Beautiful Lady Yü,' observing 'Ch'u and Han Contend for Supremacy,'[60] feels threatened by 'The Regular Cavalry.'[61] 'Beside my ears gongs and drums resound to the skies.' "[62]
Sure enough, when he threw the dice he got the combination called "The Regular Cavalry" and had to drink a cup of wine as a penalty.
Li Chiao-erh came next. She said, " 'The Water Nymphs,' because 'Two Gentlemen Intrude upon Peach Blossom Spring,'[63] are startled out of their idyll in which 'Flowers Blossom and Butterflies Fill the Branches,'[64] As a result, 'Fallen red petals cover the ground, their rouge now cold.' "[65]
When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.
Then came Chin-lien, who said, " 'The Old Crone' 'Ventures among the Flowers in Her Dotage,'[66] thereby flouting 'The Three Bonds and Five Constants,'[67] 'If not arrested for seduction, it will be for robbery.' "[68]
Sure enough, when she threw the dice she got the combination called "The Three Bonds and Five Constants" and had to drink a cup of wine as a penalty.
Next it was Li P'ing-erh's turn. She said, " 'Decorous and Pretty,' she 'Mounts a Ladder to Gaze at the Moon,'[69] waiting until 'The Spring Equinox, when Day and Night are Equal in Length.'[70] At that time, 'Separated from him by the intervening wall, she might have turned to stone awaiting her husband.' "[71]
When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.
Then came Sun Hsüeh-o, who said, " 'The Pockmarked Young Man,' on seeing 'The Flock of Crows Attack the Phoenix,'[72] only succeeds in tripping up 'The Wild Goose with the Broken Leg.'[73] 'I'll be damned if I do and damned if I don't.' "[74]
When she threw the dice, she escaped unscathed.
Finally, it was the turn of Yü-lou to finish the round. She said, " 'Nien-nu Is Charming.' Propping up the drunken 'Red Doublet Four,'[75] she trails 'The Hem of Her Brocaded Skirt.'[76] How often will she enjoy 'Spring breezes and moonlit nights amid gold lame bed curtains.' "[77]
Sure enough, when she threw the dice she got the combination called "Red Doublet Four."
Yüeh-niang completed her round as mistress of ceremonies by saying to Hsiao-yü, "Pour some wine for the Third Lady."
Turning to the latter, she continued, "You'd better drink three large cups. This evening it's your turn to spend the night with the bridegroom."
Addressing herself then to Chin-lien, Li Chiao-erh, and the rest, she said, "As soon as she's finished her wine, we must all see the two of them to their bridal chamber."
"If that is Elder Sister's decree," said Chin-lien, "how could we dare not to comply?"
This badinage reduced Yü-lou to a state of utter confusion.
Not long thereafter, the wine was finished and Yüeh-niang and the others escorted Hsi-men Ch'ing as far as the door of Yü-lou's chamber before going their separate ways. Yü-lou invited them to come in and visit for a while but none of them would stay.
"My child," teased Chin-lien, "see that the two of you get a good night's rest. Your mother will come back to see you in the morning. Don't be naughty now."
Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, she continued in the same vein, "Kinswoman, my child is still a youngster. For my sake, if anything comes up, give her the benefit of the doubt."
"Slavey Six," said Yü-lou:
"The best vinegar takes time to ferment.
I'll have something to say to you tomorrow."
"As for me," said Chin-lien, "I'm like:
The go-between who has to climb the stairs:

Quite inured to such alarms."
"My child," said Yü-lou. "Won't you stay a little longer?"
"We're only outsiders, after all," said Chin-lien, "from the other side of the wall."
Thereupon, along with Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh she set out to return to the front compound. Just as they reached the inner gate, Li P'ing-erh lost her footing on a slippery patch of ground and fell down.
Chin-lien made a big to-do about it, calling out, "Sister Li, you might as well be blind. With every move you make you come a cropper. When I tried to catch you, one of my own feet slipped into the snow and now my shoe is all muddy."
Yüeh-niang overheard this, and said, "It must be that pile of snow by the inner gate. I've told the pageboys to take care of it more than once but the lousy slaves simply won't cart it away. It's no wonder someone has taken a spill."
Then, turning to Hsiao-yü, she said, "Take a lantern and escort the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady back to the front compound."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, in Yü-lou's room, said to her, "Just take a gander at that lousy little whore. She steps in the mud, trips someone up, and then has the nerve to suggest that the other party has gotten mud on her shoe. She invariably picks on someone who's unlikely to give her any lip in return. It's just like her, little whore that she is. I'm sure it was she, yesterday, that put the maidservants up to singing:
It was the night of their assignation."
"What was the point of that particular song suite?" asked Yü-lou.
"What she meant to suggest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is that my wife's encounter with me was not really just a coincidence but something done by design; as though she was burning incense at night in the expectation that I would discover her in the act."
"Sister Six seems to know every song in the repertory," said Yü-lou. "The rest of us don't understand such things."
"You don't know what that whore is capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she ever does is engage in backbiting at other people's expense."
We will say no more, for the moment, about how Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in Yü-lou's room but turn instead to P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh.
The two of them chatted as they walked along, Chin-lien addressing her companion sometimes as Sister Li and sometimes as Sister Hua. They accompanied Hsi-men Ta-chieh as far as the inner gate that led into the front courtyard, where she returned to her quarters. Hsiao-yü, holding a lantern, then escorted the two of them into the garden.
Chin-lien was already half drunk. Taking Li P'ing-erh by the hand, she said, "Sister Hua, I'm a little tipsy today. Be good enough, whatever happens, to accompany me into my room."
"You're not drunk, Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.
Before long, they arrived at Chin-lien's quarters, and Hsiao-yü was sent back to the rear compound. Chin-lien invited Li P'ing-erh to sit down and have some tea.
"You were talking just now," said Chin-lien, "about that time when you were unable to enter the household. Who do you suppose you have to thank for the present situation? Who would ever have thought that today we'd be sisters: Walking along the same gangplank? [79] I don't know how much unpleasantness I had to put up with on your account, or all the things that were said about me behind my back. As for my good intentions, they're known only to Heaven. That's all there's to it."
"I know how much trouble you went to," said Li P'ing-erh. "Your kindness will be amply rewarded; I'll never dare to forget it."
"As long as you're aware of it," said Chin-lien, "we can be on talking terms with each other." In a little while, Ch'un-mei served the tea and, after finishing it, Li P'ing-erh took her leave and went back to her own quarters while Chin-lien went to sleep by herself. But no more of this. Truly, just as it seems that first to last, there is nothing to regret, no sooner are the branches formed than they begin to proliferate.

The north wind pierces like an icy torrent
The powdered snow seems whiter
A steam of mist rises from the beasts
But it is warm within the silken curtains
Where dainty fingers tear apart fresh oranges
And pluck the lute strings.
Who goes to stand on guard?
A low voice asks.
The third night watch has sounded on the city wall.
It is better not to go. The horses slip upon the icy road
And there is no one now upon the way.

It was late when Ximen Qing set out for home. When he reached there, the boys opened the gate. He dismounted and, walking over the snow, found the door to the back court partly open. Everything seemed quiet and, thinking that this was strange, he stood there silently, hidden by the screen. As he waited, listening, Xiaoyu came from the room and set a table in the passage. Since Wu Yueniang had ceased to speak to her husband, she had abstained from rich food three times a month, and, every day that had a seven in it, paid worship to her star and burned incense. This she did, imploring Heaven to change her husband's heart. Ximen Qing himself knew nothing of this. The maid set out the table, and, in a little while, Yueniang in her most beautiful dress came out and burned incense in the middle of the court. Then she bowed low towards the Heavens and prayed: "I am she who married Ximen Qing. My husband loves light women, and, though he is now of middle age, he has no son to carry on his name. He has six wives but all are childless and there will be none to worship at our tomb. Day and night, my heart is heavy within me because I have no son to lean upon. Here then I swear: I will pray every night to the Three Great Lights of Heaven. I beseech you to save my husband. Make him amend his ways. Cause him to forsake things that are vain and turn with all his heart to the things of his own household. Let one of us six women, I care not which, soon bear a son that so our future may be secure. This is my only prayer."
Secretly she went forth into the sweet night
The courtyard was filled with fragrant mist
And a strange light illumined the snow,
There she prayed to Heaven,
And paced in loneliness through the long night.
When he heard Yueniang's prayer, Ximen's heart was touched by shame. "Truly," he said to himself, "I have not appreciated her as I should. She loves me and is a true wife." He could hold back no longer. He came from behind the screen and took her in his arms.
Yueniang had not expected that he would come home while the snow was so heavy. She was startled and opened the door of her room but her husband held her closely. "Sister," he said to her, "though I should die, I could never realize too well the goodness of your heart. You love me, and I have wronged you. I have made your heart cold. Now I am sorry."
"The snow is so thick it has made you mistake the door," Yueniang said. "This is not your room and I am not a respectable woman. What have you and I to do with one another? I have no wish to see you. Why should you come and bother me? Though I live for a thousand years I never wish to see your face again."
Ximen Qing carried her into her room. In the lamplight she looked even more beautiful. She was wearing a scarlet coat and a soft yellow skirt. There was a dainty ornament in her hair. He could not help loving her.
"I have been a fool for a long time," he said. "I have not taken your good advice and I have misinterpreted your intentions. I have been like those who did not recognize the jade of the Jing Mountain and thought it but a piece of common stone. Now I know that you are indeed a lady. You must forgive me."
"I am not she whom your heart desires," Yueniang said. "I do not know what you are talking about. What good advice have I ever given you? If you insist on staying here, please do not speak to me. Indeed I find your presence most distasteful. Kindly remove yourself at once, or I shall be compelled to call the maid to drive you out."
"Today," Ximen said, "I have had my fill of anger. That is why I came home though the snow was so heavy. I should like to tell you what the trouble was about."
"Trouble or no trouble," Yueniang said, "I have no desire to hear you. I do not live for you. Pray go and tell the person who does."
Finding that Yueniang would not condescend even to look at him, Ximen Qing knelt down, like a little boy, crying, "Sister! Sister!" all the time. Yueniang would have nothing to do with him. "You are an utterly shameless fellow. I shall call the maid," she cried. But when Xiaoyu came in, Ximen Qing stood up and began to think of a plan for getting rid of her.
"It is snowing," he said. "Hadn't you better bring the table from the courtyard?"
"I have already done so," Xiaoyu told him.
Yueniang could not help laughing. "You worthless rascal," she said. "Now you're trying to play tricks with my maid." Xiaoyu disappeared and Ximen Qing again knelt down. "If it were not for common humanity," Yueniang said at last, "I would have nothing to do with you, not for a hundred years."
Ximen rose, found a seat for himself, and ordered Yuxiao to bring some tea. Then he told his wife what had happened that afternoon in the bawdy house. "I have taken an oath never to go there again," he said.
"I don't care whether you go or not," Yueniang retorted. "You have poured out gold and silver like water to get that girl, and the moment you stay away, she sets out to find another lover. And with women of that sort you can never be sure of their hearts, even if you can make sure of their bodies. You can't put a seal on her, and seal her up."
"You are quite right," Ximen said. He sent the maid away, and began to undress, imploring Yueniang to be gracious to him.
"Today," she said, "I have allowed you to sit on my bed. That is enough. I am surprised you dare ask for any more. I shall certainly never allow it."
"Look at this fellow," Ximen said, making his intentions still more obvious. "He's another who is angry and won't speak. He opens his eye but not a word has he to say for himself."
"You dirty rascal!" Yueniang cried. "Do you think I would look at you, even with my eyes half shut?"
Ximen Qing was not in a mood to bandy words. He set her white legs over his shoulders, and had his way. Their delight in each other was like that of the butterfly, as it sips the nectar from the blossom. Beauty and love were theirs in the fullest measure. Fragrance as of orchid and musk seemed to pass from one to the other. Ximen Qing, in the seventh heaven of delight, murmured, "Darling," and Yueniang answered him in a soft low voice. Soon they were sleeping, their faces close pressed together.
The next morning, Meng Yulou went to see Pan Jinlian. Before she opened the door, she asked if the Fifth Lady was out of bed. Chunmei answered: "My mistress has just got up and is dressing her hair. Please come in." Yulou went in and found Jinlian at her toilet before the dressing table. "I have news for you," she said.
"Have you heard anything?"
"How should I hear anything," Jinlian said, "living, as I do, tucked away in a corner? What is it?"
"Last night," Yulou said, "his Lordship came home about the second watch, went to the upper room and made his peace with the lady who lives there. He stayed all night."
"Oh!" Jinlian said, "when we proffered our humble advice, she swore that, though she lived a hundred years, nothing would induce her to speak to him. And now with no excuse at all and nobody to act as peacemaker, she goes and makes friends!"
"I heard all about it just now," Yulou said. "My maid Lanxiang happened to be in the kitchen and she heard the boys saying that our master and Ying Bojue went yesterday to drink at Guijie's place. He caught the wench about some dirty business and smashed up the house. Then he came back, though it was snowing hard. When he got to the door leading to the inner room, she who lives there was burning incense. I fancy he must have heard something she said. Anyhow, he went to her and, the maid tells me, they talked all night. He went down on his knees and she behaved most scandalously. It is all very well for her to go on in this way but if anybody else behaved like that, she would have a great deal to say."
"There are a great many advantages in being the first wife," Jinlian said. "I wonder what gave her the idea of burning incense. If she really wished to pray she could have said her prayers in secret. There was no need for her to go singing them out so that her husband might hear her. Well, she has become reconciled to him on the sly, without any assistance from anybody. I thought she would hold out but it was evidently all pretence."
"I don't think so," Yulou said. "She really wanted to make friends with him all the time but, being the first wife, she didn't care to talk to us about it. She thought that if she allowed us to intervene, we should take liberties afterwards. She ought to have realized that what goes on between husband and wife concerns others besides themselves."
"We must not let this opportunity slip. Hurry up and finish your hair dressing. I will go and see the Sixth Lady. You and I will contribute five *qian* but I shall ask Li Ping'er for a whole tael, because it is really all her fault. We will buy some wine and a few delicacies and then we'll go and offer wine to them and afterwards have a feast to enjoy the snow. We'll spend all day over it. What do you think?"
"A very good idea," Jinlian said. "But he may be busy today."
"How can he be busy on a day like this? When I came past their door, everything was quiet. Xiaoyu was taking them some water."
Jinlian hurriedly finished dressing her hair and went with Yulou to see Li Ping'er. She was still in bed but her maid went in to say that they had come.
"What a lazy woman you are," they said as they went in. "There you are, lying in bed like a lazy dragon."
Jinlian put her hand under the bedclothes and discovered a ball of perfume that had been used to make the bed sweet. "Ah," she said, "you have been laying an egg, Sister." She pulled off the coverlets and looked down at the white body.
Li Ping'er hastily jumped out of bed and began to dress. Yulou scolded Jinlian. "Hurry up and dress," she said to Li Ping'er, "we have something to tell you. The master and mistress of this house made friends yesterday. We are going to give five *qian* each but it will be more for you because you're really responsible for all the trouble. It is snowing hard. We are going to have a feast; invite the happy pair, and enjoy the beautiful snow at the same time. Doesn't that seem good to you?"
"Excellent," Li Ping'er said. "How much do you want from me?"
"A tael," Jinlian said. "Get it weighed out at once, because we must go and collect something from the others in the back court."
Li Ping'er quickly dressed. Then, calling her maid, she opened a chest and took out a piece of silver. Jinlian weighed it and found that it was rather more than a tael. Then Yulou asked Jinlian to help the Sixth Lady to dress her hair, and she herself went to the back court to try to get some money from Sun Xue'e and Li Jiao'er. Meanwhile Jinlian sat and watched Li Ping'er complete her toilet. After a very long time, Yulou came back.
"If I had known what would happen," she said, "I would never have started this business. It is a matter in which we are all equally concerned, yet anybody would have thought I was begging money for myself. The little whore said to me: 'I am a poor downtrodden creature. My husband never comes near me. Where do you think I'm going to find any money?' I talked to her for a long time but all I got out of her was this silver pin. Weigh it and see how much it's worth."
Jinlian took the scales and found it did not amount to four *qian*.
"What did you get from Li Jiao'er?" she asked.
"First she said she didn't have any money," Yulou told them. "Though every day the money passes through my hands,' she said, 'it is all checked carefully, and I have to give back every bit left over. I have nothing at all of my own.' I told her that none of us had any money to spare. 'It's a matter that concerns us all,' I said, 'but if you don't wish to give anything, don't.' I lost my temper and went out. That frightened her and she sent a maid to bring me back. Then she gave me something but it's all most annoying."
When Jinlian weighed the silver that Li Jiao'er had contributed, it turned out to be a little less than five *qian*.
"What a cunning wench she is," she cried. "Even if you did everything you could think of, she'd give you short measure. Now we haven't sufficient."
"Yes," Yulou said, "but when she is measuring other people's silver, she uses a measure large enough. Getting money out of her is like getting blood out of a stone. I wonder how many times she has been cursed for it."
Jinlian and Yulou put all the money together. It came to just over three taels. They sent a maid to fetch Daian.
"Yesterday," Jinlian said to him, "you went with your master to Li Guijie's house. What happened there to make him so angry?"
Daian told them the whole story. "Father got very angry," he said. "He told us to break all the windows, doors and partitions, and he would have tied the pair together if Uncle Ying hadn't stopped him. He was still furious when he got on his horse, and on the way home he swore he hadn't done with the whore yet."
"The rascally strumpet!" Jinlian cried. "I always thought she acted like a woman with a jar of honey and held on to it tightly but this time she's let it drop. Did your master really say so?" she said to Daian. The boy assured her that he had told the truth. Then she began to scold him.
"You young scoundrel," she said; "no matter how wicked she may be, she is your master's girl and you have no right to call her names. I remember once when I asked you to do something for me, you said you were very busy and hadn't any time. But when your master handed you some silver and told you to take it to that girl, you called her Auntie Guijie, and were as sweet as you could be. Now she is out of favour and your master is angry with her, you call her a whore. One of these days I will tell him what you said."
"Oho!" Daian said, "so you, Fifth Mother, are beginning to take her part now. That is indeed like the sun rising in the west. If Father hadn't called her a whore I wouldn't have, either."
"Just because your master says things like that, you need not think you can do so," Jinlian said.
"If I had known you would take it this way, Lady, I would never have said a word."
"Be quiet, you young scamp," Yulou said. "Here are three taels and a *qian*. You and Laixing must go and make some purchases for us. We are giving a snow feast to your master and mistress. If you can keep your hands off the things you buy for us, I'll ask the Fifth Lady not to say anything to your master."
Daian swore that he would never dream of stealing anything, and, calling Laixing, went off with him to do the shopping.
As Ximen Qing was dressing in Yueniang's room, he saw Laixing going to the kitchen with chickens and ducks and Daian carrying a jar of Jinhua wine.
"What are those boys doing?" he asked the maid.
Yuxiao told him that the ladies were going to give a party to Yueniang and himself. Then he asked Daian where he had got the wine, and the boy told him that Yulou had given him money to buy it. "Dear, dear," Ximen said, "why go out to buy wine when there is so much in the house already? Take a key and go and get some jasmine wine from the front court. We will mix it with this."

Curtains and screens had been set out in the hall; the winter season awning, with its design of Chunmei, had been put in position, and the stove well supplied with charcoal. Food and wine were daintily arranged. The ladies came and invited Ximen Qing and Yueniang to join them. Li Jiao'er poured wine into the cups while Yulou held the wine jar. Jinlian served the dishes. Li Ping'er knelt down and offered a cup of wine to Ximen Qing. He took it and said, laughingly, "This is very kind of you, my child. You are indeed a dutiful daughter. But an ordinary reverence is enough."

"Who do you think is paying reverence to you, you overgrown boy?" Jinlian said. "Like the onion that grows by the south wall, the older you grow, the hotter you get. Why, if it were not for the Great Lady, we shouldn't be paying any reverence to you today." They offered Yueniang a cup of wine. She thanked them pleasantly and said she had never expected such kindness.

"It is nothing at all," Yulou said, smiling. "We thought we should like to offer this poor repast to your honourable selves this wintry weather. Please sit down, Sister, and accept our reverences." Yueniang did not wish to do this without making equal reverence in return. But Yulou said they would remain on their knees forever unless Yueniang sat down. At last, after much friendly argument, they were content with half the prescribed salutation.

"Sister," Jinlian said, "we ask you to forgive him for our sakes this once. If he is ever rude to you again we shall not bother about him any more." Then she turned to Ximen Qing. "Why do you sit there like a fool? Come down at once from that place of honour, offer a cup of wine to the Great Lady, and make your apologies."

Ximen Qing laughed. The wine was passed around and afterwards Yueniang, bidding Yuxiao take the jar, herself poured out the wine and offered it to the ladies in return. Xue'e knelt down to receive her cup but the others took theirs without doing so. Then Ximen Qing and Yueniang sat down in the place of honour, and all the other ladies, with Ximen's daughter Ximen Dajie, sat on either side.

"Sixth Sister," Jinlian said to Li Ping'er, "you ought to offer a special cup of wine to the Great Lady."

Li Ping'e rose and was about to do as she was told but Ximen Qing stopped her. "Don't pay any attention to that little strumpet. She is teasing you. You have already offered us wine once and there is no need to do so again." Li Ping'er sat down.

Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang then brought their instruments and sang the song of the Thousand Blossoms of the Pomegranate that is all about a second honeymoon. Ximen Qing asked them who had suggested that song, and Yuxiao told him that Jinlian had done so. Ximen looked at Jinlian and told her he did not know what she was thinking about. Yueniang suddenly thought of Chen Jingji and sent a boy to fetch him. When he came, he made reverence to them all and sat beside his wife. Yueniang had wine and food set before him and soon the whole family was enjoying a very merry time. Through the window Ximen Qing looked out upon the snow. It was as white as cotton wool and the falling flakes seemed like the whirling petals of the pear blossom. It was a very beautiful sight.

Snow like tender willow seeds
Snow like down from a goose's back
Falling softly with no more sound
Than a crab that creeps over the sand.
Piling up mountains of powdered jade
And dressing wayfarers with glittering spangles
Till they look like bees covered with pollen
And the palaces are covered deep.
The snowflakes whirl like a dragon of jade
Tossing his scales high in the air
The white powder scatters like the feathers
That fall from a stork
The lofty mansions are a mass of ice.
So cold is it that the body tingles
The earth shines like a silver ocean
And the flame of the candle seems like a flower upon it.

Yueniang noticed that the snow lay deep upon the mound in the garden. She sent a maid for a teapot and herself put snow in it, and, from the snow, made boiling water with which she made most fragrant tea for all of them.

They were drinking this tea when Daian came and said that Li Ming had come and was awaiting instructions. Ximen gave orders that he should be brought in. He came, made reverence, and stood before them. "You have come at a good time," Ximen said. "Where have you been?"

"I have been at Master Liu's by the Wine and Vinegar Gate. I give lessons to his children and today I have been to see how they are getting on. I heard that your maids know several tunes but that their time is perhaps not quite perfect, so I thought I would come and see if I could help them at all."

Ximen Qing poured out for him a cup of tea, telling him to drink it and then come and sing a song. Li Ming took his cup of tea and retired to drink it. Then he came back, tuned his zither, cleared his throat, and stood before them, his feet close together. He sang to them of winter in the capital. When he had done, Ximen Qing made Xiaoyu pour wine into a silver peach-shaped cup, and Li Ming, upon his knees, drank it. Then Ximen took four dishes from the table, set them on a tray and gave them to Li Ming, who went outside to eat. A little later, having wiped his mouth on a napkin, he returned and stood by the screen. Ximen Qing told him of the trouble there had been with Li Guijie.

"Of that I know nothing," Li Ming said. "It is some time since I was at my sister's house. But I cannot believe it was Guijie's fault. It must have been the old woman. Please do not be angry with her. I will go and see her."

All day until the first night watch, they drank wine together and the ladies enjoyed themselves immensely. Then Chen Jingji and his wife went to the front court, and they drank no more. Ximen Qing gave Li Ming a final cup of wine and told him that, if he should go to Guijie's house, he must on no account say that Ximen Qing was at home. Li Ming promised, and Ximen sent a servant to take him to the gate. The ladies went to their apartments and Ximen Qing again went to Yueniang's room.

The next day it had ceased to snow. Guijie and her mother were still afraid that Ximen Qing would seek vengeance, so they sent a roast goose and a jar of wine to Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, begging them to go and see Ximen and ask him to pay them a visit that they might express their sorrow for what had happened.

Yueniang had just finished dressing and was eating cake with her husband when Daian told them that the two friends had come. Ximen Qing put down his cake and was about to go to them but Yueniang said: "I can't think what has brought those two villains here today. Finish your cake and let them wait. Why should you hurry? I can't imagine where they think they are going to take you on a snowy day like this." But Ximen told a boy to take food to the front court and said he would eat it there with Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. Then he got up to go. "Don't go out with them when you have finished your cake," Yueniang said. "Remember we are going to celebrate Yulou's birthday this evening." Ximen promised and went to greet his two friends.

"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "you were very angry yesterday. So were we, and we told them what we thought about them. We said you had spent a great deal of money in that house in times past and that, just because they had not seen you lately, there was no reason why they should start to sing another tune. Yet they took that Southerner in. Unfortunately for them, you caught them. We asked how they could expect that you would not be annoyed. And not only you, we said but we were angry too. We gave them a good talking to, until they felt very much ashamed of themselves. This morning they sent for us, and both mother and daughter knelt before us and sobbed bitterly. They are very much afraid of what you will do, so they have prepared a simple little feast and have asked us to persuade you to go to see them. They are anxious to apologize."

"I have no intention of doing them any harm," Ximen Qing said, "but I shall never go to that house again."

"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "it is natural that you should be angry but, as a matter of fact, it really was not Guijie's fault. That young man Ding had no intentions upon her. He is one of her sister's old lovers. But there was another young man on his father's boat, a young fellow called Chen, a son of Privy Counselor Chen, and Ding thought he would like to spend ten taels and give him a party at Guijie's. The very moment he came to give them the money you suddenly arrived. They lost their heads and hid the Southerner in the back room where you discovered him but he never so much as laid a finger on Guijie. This morning both mother and daughter swore this to us. They prostrated themselves before us and begged us to persuade you to go and see them so that the whole unpleasant business may be cleared up and you will not be angry any more."

"I have taken an oath," Ximen Qing said. "I have promised my wife that I will not go there again. I am no longer angry. Please tell them so, and that they need not trouble themselves on my account. I am very busy and cannot go to see them."

Ying Bojue and Xie Xida became excited. They knelt down. "Brother," they said, "if you refuse to go just for a few moments it will look as if you pay no attention to us. Do please go." They worried him so much that he finally gave way and, when they had eaten their cakes, told Daian to bring his clothes.

Yueniang was sitting talking to Yulou. "Where is your master going?" she asked the boy. But he said he did not know and that he had only been told to bring the clothes.

"You are lying, you young rascal," Yueniang cried. "It is the Third Lady's birthday today, and, if your master comes home late, you shall be whipped."

"Why should I be whipped?" the boy said, "I can do nothing."

"When he heard his friends had come," Yueniang said, "he dashed out as though his life depended on it. He was just having lunch but he left everything. Where they'll take him, I can't imagine, or when he'll come back." She went on with her preparations for the evening.

Ximen Qing and his two friends went to Guijie's house. A table with refreshments had already been set out in the hall and two other singing girls had been brought in. Guijie and her sister Guiqing, dressed in their best clothes, went out to welcome the visitors, and the old procuress knelt on the floor to show how sorry she was for what had happened.

"You owe me a good deal," Ying Bojue said to Guijie. 'I have hardly any mouth left, I have had to do so much talking to persuade your young man to come. Now you give him wine and leave me without. If I hadn't dug him out you would have cried yourself blind and had to go singing in the street. You'd better talk nicely to me."

"Oh, Ying, you beggar," Guijie said, "you're such a loathsome creature, I can't find words bad enough for you. Why should I go singing in the street, begging?"

"You little strumpet," Bojue said, "you'd say your prayers, then beat the priest, would you? There was nothing you wouldn't do for me until he came but now your wings are dry. I don't count any more. Come here and give me a kiss to warm me a little." He caught her by the neck and kissed her. Guijie laughed. "Look what you're doing, you've spilt the wine all over his Lordship."

"Oh, you little wretch! You love him so much you're afraid a drop of wine might fall on him. All your nice words are for him—there are none for me. I might be the son of a concubine."

"Well, you may be my son," Guijie said.

"Come here and I'll tell you a story," Bojue said. "Once upon a time a crab and a frog swore they would be brothers. They decided that the one who could jump over a certain brook should be the elder brother. The frog tried several times and at last succeeded. Just as the crab was about to see what he could do, two girls came up to draw some water from the brook. They tied a string to the crab but, when they had got the water they had come for, they forgot to take the crab with them. The frog came back to the water's edge. 'Why don't you jump?' he said. 'Of course I can jump it,' said the crab, 'but just for the moment, I can't. Those two little whores have tied me up.' "

Guijie and her sister went and slapped Ying Bojue. Ximen Qing laughed heartily.

In Ximen's house, Wu Yueniang prepared a feast in celebration of Meng Yulou's birthday. Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang were there, and two nuns, and they all sat together in the upper room. They waited for Ximen Qing until sunset but he did not come. Yueniang was much annoyed. Then Pan Jinlian took the hand of Li Ping'er and suggested that they should go to the gate and look out for him. Yueniang told them she wondered they had the patience to do so. Then Jinlian asked Yulou whether she would not go with them but Yulou said she would wait until she had heard the nuns tell some stories. So Jinlian ceased to trouble them, though when they gathered around to hear the story, she asked the nuns not to waste any time. Nun Wang, who was sitting on the bed, told them one story but when she had finished it, Jinlian said: "That's not much of a story, tell us another."

The nun told them another story. Then Jinlian, with Yulou and Li Ping'er, went to the gate to look for Ximen Qing.

"Where do you think he's gone today?" Yulou asked the others.

"I expect he's gone to that strumpet Guijie's house," Jinlian said.

"But he has sworn never to go there again," Yulou said. "I'm sure he hasn't gone there. What will you bet me?"

"Anything you like," Jinlian said. "Clasp hands on it. The Sixth Lady is the witness. I'm sure he has gone there today. The other day there was a row and that little scoundrel Li Ming came to see how the land lay. Those murderous ghosts Ying and Xie came here this morning and went off with him. They and that young strumpet have schemed to get him there so that they can apologize. Then he'll set the fire going in his old stove again. In my opinion, he'll stay there ever so long. Probably he won't come back at all today. It is silly of the Great Sister to wait for him."

"But if he doesn't come back," Yulou said, "he'll surely send a boy to tell us so."

While they were talking a seller of melon seeds came along, and they were buying some seeds from him when they suddenly caught sight of Ximen Qing, and all ran indoors. Ximen Qing was on horseback. He said to Daian: "Run and see who they are." Daian ran a little way, then came back and told Ximen that the three ladies were buying melon seeds. He got off his horse and went in by the second door. Yulou and Li Ping'er went to Yueniang's room and told her of Ximen's return but Jinlian hid behind a screen, and, when Ximen Qing came up to it, jumped out and startled him.

"You frightened me, you little villain," Ximen cried. "What were you doing outside the gate?"

"Is that a question for *you* to ask?" Jinlian said. "You were late and we went to look for you."

Ximen went to join the ladies. Yueniang had everything ready and told Yuxiao to take the wine jar while she poured out wine for all of them. Ximen Qing was the first and then the others in their due order. They took their places and Chunmei and Yingchun played and sang for them. After a little while the things were cleared away and the birthday wine for Yulou was brought in, with forty different dishes. It was excellent wine, and of a colour as exquisite as that of the clouds at sunset. Aunt Wu sat in the place of honour and they drank until the first night watch. By this time Aunt Wu could drink no more and went to her own room but the others stayed, dicing with Ximen Qing, guessing fingers, and making up charades.

Yueniang suggested that they should take the title of a song and the name of a domino and make them fit with a line of the "Story of the Western Pavilion." Whoever happened to hold the domino that was named must drink a cup of wine as a forfeit. She herself began. "The Sixth Lady is drunk. Yang Fei dropped her eight jewels, and her hair is caught by the roses."

No one held the "eight jewels," and Ximen Qing began: "The lovely maiden Yu watched the battle between Chu and Han. The chief marshal was wounded and the noise of gongs and drums seemed like the heavens quaking." The lady who held the "chief marshal" had to drink a cup of wine. They continued till the turn came around to Yulou.

"A beautiful woman leans upon the scarlet rail, holding her silken skirt. She prays that the winds of spring may bring the moon within her net of gauze." She herself had the "scarlet rail," and Yueniang told Xiaoyu to pour a cup of wine for her.

"Drink three great cups," she said. "Tonight your bridegroom will spend the night with you." She turned to Li Jiao'er and Jinlian, "When we have finished our wine, we will all escort them to their room."

"Your word is law, and must be obeyed," Jinlian said. Yulou was very shy.

Soon afterwards Yueniang and the others took Ximen Qing to the Third Lady's room. Yulou asked them to stay a while but they would not, and Jinlian said jokingly: "Sleep well, my child. Tomorrow your mother will come and see you. Now don't be naughty." Then, to Yueniang, "My daughter is still very young. I hope you will excuse her for my sake."

"You bad girl," Yulou cried, "you're like old vinegar. Wait till tomorrow and see what I'll do to you."

"I'm only like a go-between on her way upstairs," Jinlian said, "on tenterhooks as you might say." Then they all ran away.

As they came to the entrance to the inner courtyard, Li Ping'er slipped and fell. "Sister," Jinlian cried, "you're as bad as a blind woman. Just one slip and down you fall. I'd come and help you but I'm over my ankles in the snow, and my shoes are in such a mess!"

"It is all this show," Yueniang said. "I've told the boys about it twice but the thievish little scamps haven't cleared it away. Now the Sixth Lady has fallen down. Get a lamp," she said to Xiaoyu, "and take the ladies to their rooms."

Ximen Qing overheard this. "Listen to that little strumpet," he said to Yulou. "She gets into the snow and pulls the others after her. Then she talks about people treading on her toes. I'm surprised the others don't tell her what they think about her. Yesterday she said she never told the maids to sing that song but I know she did."

"What did she mean by it?" Yulou asked.

"Well, she was trying to make out that the Great Lady deliberately burned incense in such a way that I was sure to find her doing it."

"She knows the meaning of all the songs," Yulou said. "The rest of us don't."

"Ah," Ximen said, "you don't realize how eager that woman is to score over others." They went to bed together.

Xiaoyu got a lantern and took Jinlian and Li Ping'er over the snow to their rooms. Yueniang went to her own place. Jinlian, who was already half drunk, took her companion by the hand. "Sister," she said, "I am tipsy and you must come to my room with me." Li Ping'er told her she was not drunk but went with her and sent Xiaoyu back. Jinlian gave the Sixth Lady tea.

"You remember," she said, "how once you found it hard to join us here. Now we walk upon the same path. I had much to put up with for your sake and everybody had something to say about me. Still, my heart's in the right place, and I'd not have it otherwise. Heaven, at least, knows the truth."

"I realise how kind you've been to me," Li Ping'er said, "I'll never dare forget it."

"I only want you to understand," Jinlian said.

Chunmei brought tea. When they had drunk it, Li Ping'er said, "Goodnight," and went to her own room. Jinlian got into bed alone.

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### Hsi-men Ch'ing Secretly Seduces Lai-Wang's Wife; Ch'un-mei Self-righteously Denounces Li Ming & Song Huilian

If you're clever, you'll be considered laboured if you're awkward, idle;[1]
If you're good, you'll be disdained as weak if you're bad, callous.
If you're rich, you'll meet with envy if you're poor, disgrace;[2]
If you're diligent, you'll be thought grasping if you're economical, stingy.
If you deal with things consistently, you'll be scorned as simple;

If you adapt yourself to circumstances,[3] you'll be suspected of deceit.
If you think about it, it is hardly possible to satisfy anyone;[4]
The role of human being is an arduous one to be a man is hard.[5]

The next day Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and other female guests had all assembled to celebrate Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Yüeh-niang presided over the party that took place in the reception room in the rear compound. This would all have been well enough had it not given rise to a certain incident.

Because Lai-wang's wife had finally died of consumption, Yüeh-niang had recently found a new wife for him. Her maiden name was Sung and she was the daughter of the coffin seller, Sung Jen. She had originally been a maidservant in the household of Assistant Prefect Ts'ai but had lost her position there because of a scandal, and then married a cook named Chiang Ts'ung, or Sauce and Scallions. This Chiang Ts'ung was often hired for temporary duty in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and Lai-wang, who was sent to his home to fetch him, early and late, thus became acquainted with his wife. The two of them sometimes drank wine together and bandied words, with the result that Lai-wang succeeded in seducing her.

One day, unexpectedly, Chiang Ts'ung got into a quarrel with his fellow kitchen workers over the division of their pay. This turned into a drunken brawl in the course of which knives were drawn and Chiang Ts'ung was stabbed to death. His assailant succeeded in scaling the wall and making good his escape. His widow begged Lai-wang to intercede with Hsi-men Ch'ing, who sent a note to the vice magistrate of the district, with the result that the offender was apprehended, convicted of a capital crime, and executed in atonement for the death of Chiang Ts'ung.

Later on, Lai-wang deceived Yüeh-niang into believing that the widow had been the wife of a small householder and was good at needlework, and he persuaded her to lay out five taels of silver, two suits of clothes, four bolts of blue and of red fabric, and a few hairpins, bracelets, and the like, in order to acquire her as a new wife for him. Because her given name was Chin-lien, Yüeh-niang thought it would be awkward to have two people of the same name in the household and had her change her name to Hui-lien.

This woman was born in the year of the horse and was two years younger than Chin-lien that made her twenty-five years old that year.[6] She possessed:

A clear off-white complexion.
Her figure was neither plump nor thin;
Her stature was neither short nor tall.
Her bound feet were even smaller than Chin-lien's. She was:
Clever by nature,
Highly adaptable,
Adept at adorning herself,
As able at making waves as a dragon or tiger;
In fact:
A champion among seductresses,
A leader of the homebreakers.
If one were to summarize her accomplishments, she was able to:
Stand leaning idly against the doorjamb,[7]
Following each passerby with her eyes;
Lean cheek on hand or bite her nails,
Adjusting her attire for no good reason;
Sitting or standing, swing her legs,
Singing to herself in a husky voice;
Open windows and thrust apart shutters,
With needle poised, losing herself in thought;[8]
Smile expectantly before speaking,
Betraying the fact she is having an affair.[9]

When she first arrived, she took her part in the kitchen work along with the other servants' wives and made no effort to doll herself up, or even think about doing so. Later on, after she had been there a month or more, she began to notice the way in which Yü-lou, Chin-lien, and the others were tricked out, and responded accordingly. She built up the chignon under her fret until it became higher and higher, affected a bouffant hairdo, and adorned her temples with two long spit curls. As a result, when she:

Served tea or served water,[10]
to her employers, she began to catch Hsi-men Ch'ing's eye.

One day he formulated a plan according to which he would send Lai-wang to Hang-chou with five hundred taels of silver in order to arrange the manufacture of brocaded python robes for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on the occasion of his birthday, as well as the purchase of clothing for all four seasons to supply the future needs of his own household. The round trip ought to take as much as half a year. His departure was arranged for around the middle of the eleventh month, and he accordingly set out at that time to travel by cart on the overland route. Hsi-men Ch'ing was determined that sooner or later he would have a chance to make a play for his wife.

It was now the day of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and Yüeh-niang was entertaining the female guests in the reception room in the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to be at home, not having any outside engagements that day.

"Set up a separate table for him in the master suite," Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "and see that he is served a full complement of wine and food, including soup, rice, and savories."

Through the hanging blind Hsi-men Ching observed Sung Hui-lien serving wine to the guests at the party, wearing a red crepe jacket that opened down the middle over a skirt of violet silk.

Feigning ignorance, he asked Yü-hsiao, "Who is that in the red jacket?"

"It's Lai-wang's new wife, Hui-lien," replied Yü-hsiao.

"Why on earth is she wearing a violet skirt with a red jacket?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's most unbecoming. Tell your mistress in the future to find her a skirt of some other colour that will match better."[11]

"That violet skirt is one she borrowed from me," said Yü-hsiao.

This reply put a stop to the matter for the time being and, before long, Meng Yü-lou's birthday was over.

One day, Yüeh-niang paid a visit to the home of Ch'iao Hung, a well-to-do commoner who lived across the street from them, in order to celebrate a birthday. That afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to come home somewhat tipsy. He arrived at the inner gate just as Hui-lien was on her way out, and the two of them ran smack into each other.

Hsi-men Ch'ing impulsively reached out with one hand, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss, murmuring as he did so, "My child, if you'll allow me to have my way with you, you can have anything in the way of jewelry or clothing that you wish."

The woman said not a word, pushed aside Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand, and continued on her way to the front compound.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite he told Yü-hsiao to deliver a bolt of blue silk to Hui-lien's room and, thus and so, to say to her, "The other day Father saw you serving wine at the party wearing a violet skirt along with a red jacket, a combination that was most unbecoming and really didn't do you justice. I told him that the violet skirt was one you had borrowed from me. He opened up the clothes cabinet, just now, and took out this bolt of silk which he sent me to give you in order to make into a skirt."

Hui-lien opened it up and saw that it was a bolt of turquoise blue silk, figured with roundels of flowers from each of the four seasons and pairs of magpies face-to-face, a rebus for the words "happy reunion."

"If I make this up," said Hui-lien, "Mother is bound to notice it and ask where it came from. What then?"

"Father will tell Mother what he's done," said Yü-hsiao. "You have nothing to worry about. Father also said that if you go along with him in this matter he'll buy you whatever you want. He'd like to have a tryst with you today while Mother's not at home. What do you think?"

On hearing this proposition the woman smiled slightly but did not immediately say anything.

"When does Father plan to come?" she finally asked. "Shall I wait for him here?"

"Father says it would be awkward if he were seen going into your room by the pageboys," said Yü-hsiao. "He wants you to slip secretly into the grotto under the artificial hill in the garden. There's never anybody there so it's a suitable place for a tryst."

"I fear the Fifth Lady or the Sixth Lady might get wind of it," the woman said. "That would be embarrassing."

"The Third Lady and the Fifth Lady are playing a board game in the Sixth Lady's quarters right now," said Yü-hsiao. "You can go ahead. The coast is clear."

Now that the arrangements were complete, Yü-hsiao went back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing. The two principals then proceeded to the grotto where they consummated their affair while Yü-hsiao stood at the garden gate to act as a lookout.

It so happened that Chin-lien and Yü-lou were playing a board game in Li P'ing-erh's quarters when who should appear but Hsiao-luan, who had come to fetch Yü-lou, saying, "Father has come home."

The party then broke up and Yü-lou returned to the rear compound. Chin-lien went to her own quarters and made up her face, after which she also set out for the rear compound. As she came through the inner gate, she encountered Hsiao-yü standing outside the door of the master suite.

"Is your father inside?" she asked.

Hsiao-yü made a negative gesture with her hand and pointed toward the front compound. Chin-lien understood at once and made her way back toward the postern gate that led into the garden where the artificial hill was located. There she found Yü-hsiao barring her way. Suspecting that it was she who had been dallying there with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she tried to force her way through that reduced Yü-hsiao to panic.

"Fifth Lady, you can't go in there," she said. "Father's in there and he's busy."

"You crazy little bitch!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "As if I were afraid of your father!"

Whereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
she marched into the garden and proceeded to search it from one end to the other. When she reached the grotto under the artificial hill that had been given the name Hidden Spring Grotto,[12] the couple within had just brought their transaction to a conclusion. The woman, hearing someone coming, had just managed to refasten her skirt and start outside when she ran into Chin-lien and turned crimson with embarrassment.

"You lousy little stinker! What do you think you're doing here?" Chin-lien demanded.

"I came to look for Hua-t'ung," the woman replied and then, under her interlocutor's gaze, disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Chin-lien went inside where she found Hsi-men Ch'ing in the act of fastening up his trousers.

"You lousy shameless good-for-nothing!" she railed at him. "You've been up to your tricks in here with that slave of a whore in broad daylight. I should've boxed that whore's ears for her but she managed to get away. So you're the Hua-t'ung she was looking for, are you. Tell me the truth. How many times have you made out with that whore? If you don't level with me, just wait till Elder Sister gets home in a little while and see if I don't tell her all about it. If I don't beat that slave of a whore's face till she looks like a bloated pig, I might as well quit. Here we all are, bored enough to scream as it is, and she comes along and wants to horn in on the action. Well I'm not the one to let her get away with it."

"You crazy little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Keep your voice down. Do you want everyone to know about it? I'll tell you the truth. Thus and so, today included, I've only made out with her once."

"Once? Twice? I don't believe you," said Chin-lien. "But if you think you can continue to carry on your tricks with that slave of a whore while:
Deceiving spirits and stupefying demons,[13]
you've got another think coming. If I ever find out about it, then forgive you me but I'll have something to say to the two of you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and made his exit.

When Chin-lien returned to the rear compound she overheard the gossiping maidservants saying, "When Father came home today he sent Yü-hsiao to the front of the compound with a bolt of blue silk wrapped up in a kerchief but we don't know whom it was intended for."

Chin-lien realized that it had been a present for Lai-wang's wife but she kept the information to herself, not even mentioning it to Meng Yü-lou.

Hui-lien, for her part, endeavored every day to get on the right side of Chin-lien by cooking special treats for her, offering to help with her needlework, or playing up to her in disingenuous ways while she was engaged in board games with Li P'ing-erh. Chin-lien, too, when there was no one else about, would facilitate Hui-lien's liaisons with Hsi-men Ch'ing as a means of further ingratiating herself with her husband.

From the commencement of Hui-lien's affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing, quite aside from the clothing, handkerchiefs, jewelry, breath-sweetening lozenges, and the like, with which he kept her supplied on the sly, she was observed to have ready money by the tael at her disposal, with which she bought ornamental trinkets and cosmetics at the front gate of the compound. Gradually it became apparent that she was no longer dressing the way she used to do. Hsi-men Ch'ing also spoke to Yüeh-niang about her, suggesting that since she made such good soup she ought to be relieved of her duties in the main kitchen and assigned to share the responsibility with Yü-hsiao for looking after the small stove behind the master suite, boiling tea water and supplying snacks for Yüeh-niang's consumption, and helping her with her needlework but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Gentle reader take note: The head of a household ought never to engage in compromising intimacies with the wives of his slaves or servants. Sooner or later such conduct:
Confuses the distinction between high and low,
Opens the door to surreptitious abuses, and
Poses a threat to public morality,
until the situation gets out of hand. There is a poem that testifies to this:
Since Hsi-men Ch'ing, in his lust, ignores
distinctions of status;
It is inevitable that his concubines
will compete for his favour.
How can he bear to treat Yüeh-niang as though
she does not exist;
While disrupting the bonds of society by
seducing his servant's wife?

One day, on the eighth day of the twelfth month, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up earlier than usual, having prearranged with Ying Po-chüeh to go together to attend the funeral procession of the wife of Prefectural Judge Shang, who lived on Main Street. He told the pageboys to prepare two horses and was waiting for Ying Po-chüeh, who had not yet arrived, when Li Ming appeared in order to give another lesson to Ch'un-mei and the other three household musicians. Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting by the stove in the main reception room at the time, and he ordered that Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ying-ch'un, all four of them, should get dressed up and come out front so he could look on as Li Ming gave them their lesson. His son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, was also there to keep him company.

They embarked on the song suite the first number of which, to the northern style tune "Powdery Butterflies," begins with the words:
"3 Variations on the Plum Blossom,"[14]
In the frontier watchtower the bugle has
finished playing it.
The wheel of the moon shines aslant
on the gauze window.
Supporting her fragrant cheek on her hand,
Her eyes overflow with tears.
Beneath the shaded lamp,
She tosses and sighs.

The words he had whispered in her ear have turned out
to be nothing but empty talk.
TO THE TUNE "GRIEVING FOR YEN HUI" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
"My fickle lover is too inconstant.
This playfulness of his is something out of the ordinary.
He went out the door easily enough,
And now he's at the sea's rim or the sky's edge.
He was supposed to return late last year,
But, in no time at all, spring and summer
have passed.
When he left, the frost had already aged
the lotus blossoms,
And now, once again, the water is
chilling the reeds."
TO THE TUNE "POMEGRANATE BLOSSOMS" (NORTHERN STYLE)
"I have dissipated the best years of my life
beside the green gauze windows.
For a long time now, I have not bothered
to put on any makeup.
My bowels that are wrenched nine times a day,
are ever more constricted.
It is nearly enough to kill me;
On top of which I suffer from spectral visitations.
Sometimes I entrust my fate to azure Heaven by
consulting the tortoise oracle;
But I am quite unable to interpret the
conflicting results.
All of a sudden, I happen to pick up a
fragrant silk handkerchief,
Only to find that it is aptly embroidered
with a double-headed flower."
TO THE TUNE "GRIEVING FOR YEN HUI" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
"The slippery villain,
His heart is impossible to fathom.
He is always deceiving people with his clever tongue,
While he floats about restlessly,
Just like willow catkins in the wind.
The more I think about it the clearer it is,
Your lustful daring has ever been
as big as the sky.
You have devoted yourself to pilfering jade
and purloining perfume,[1]
In order to violate the mansions and offices
of the rich and powerful."
TO THE TUNE "FIGHTING QUAILS" (NORTHERN STYLE)
"This hateful separation seems to go on
for year after year;
It is not to be compared to a brief space
or a short time.
Vexation has worn away the twin arcs
of my eyebrows;
And so emaciated my waist that it is
only a handful.
Here I am, yearning for him every morning
and every night,
But when does he ever bother
to remember me?
Unable to mount to the azure firmament
aboard a phoenix,
He has tethered his horse to the willow tree
at some girl's house."
TO THE TUNE "MOTH FLYING INTO THE LAMP" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
"Hungering for love is like grasping sand;
This lonely suffering is like chewing wax.
Who knows where he is, cuddling up to
some smiling face,
While I'm putting up with all this anxiety
for no good reason?
And there's no way for me to get
any news of him.
In the end the day will come when he
returns home.
I'll enumerate the entire gamut
of his peccadillos,
And take him to task for each
and every one of them."
TO THE TUNE "MOUNTING THE LITTLE TOWER" (NORTHERN STYLE)
"I have always remained completely unblemished,
And he has always known the rules of propriety.
Yet, for no good reason, I have had to suffer
all this desolation;
Put up with all this loneliness;
And endure all this ill treatment.
It is obvious that the bronze-dragon spouts
on the clepsydra have run dry;
The horse-shaped iron chimes on the eaves sound in vain;
The incense in the duck-shaped metal burner is burnt out.
The hardest time to endure is this remnant of
the twelfth month at the end of winter."
TO THE TUNE "MOTH FLYING INTO THE LAMP" (SOUTHERN STYLE)
The wind soughs wildly, sou-sou,
The snow falls densely, fen-fen,
Ch'i-ch'i, the phoenix pillow is desolate,
Ch'en-ch'en, the mandarin duck curtains
are porous and thin,
She-she, the brocade coverlet lies cold,
Cho-cho, the silver lamp flares violently,
Wu-wu, the nomad flute wails on the ramparts,
Tung-tung, the last night watch is sounded,
Ya-ya, the crows on the trees scatter at dawn.
CODA
Once again, Cho Wen-chün must elope in her perfumed carriage.
Her sole fear, that she has misconstrued the zither's message,
And will only join Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju to become a topic of scandal.
And had not yet finished it when Ying Po-chüeh came in the door, accompanied by his eldest son, Ying Pao, carrying his father's felt bag. Ch'un-mei and her three companions started to return to the rear compound but Hsi-men Ch'ing called them to a halt, saying, "After all, it's only old Ying the Second. Come pay him your respects, why don't you. There's no need to hide."
He and Po-chüeh saluted each other with a bow and were about to sit down when he ordered the four of them, "Come over here and kowtow to old Ying the Second."
Ch'un-mei and the others turned to face the guest and kowtowed to him before withdrawing a few steps.
Ying Po-chüeh hurriedly bowed to each of them in turn and complimented his host, saying, "You have all the luck, Brother. What fine young ladies the four of them have all turned out to be.
Like bulrushes, each one is prettier than the last.
I'm afraid I'm somewhat at a loss, though, having come out today empty-handed. I found myself so:
Pushed and pressured,
this morning that I neglected to bring anything along with me. I'll have to give them a little something for rouge and powder on another day."
Shortly thereafter, Ch'un-mei and the others, haying paid their respects, went inside, and Ch'en Ching-chi bowed to the visitor and sat down.
"What kept you so long today?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I don't even like to talk about it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "My eldest daughter has been sick for some time and has only recently begun to get better. My wife is concerned about her and has invited her to come home and relax for a few days. I've been tied up until now arranging with Ying Pao to engage a sedan chair for her and buying a few things for her visit. I'm a bit late I'm afraid."
"I've been waiting for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's have some congee and be on our way."
"Go fetch some congee from the rear compound for us to eat," he then instructed a pageboy.
When Li Ming saw Ying Po-chüeh he came up and greeted him by falling to one knee.

"I haven't seen you for some time, Li Ming," said Po-chüeh.
"Well, here I am," said Li Ming. "I've been working at Eunuch Director Hsü's place in the Northern Quarter the last couple of days and only just came over here."
As they spoke, two pageboys set up a table and fetched the congee for them to eat. There were four salty main courses and ten side dishes. The main courses had been slow boiled and consisted of a bowl of ham hocks, a bowl of squab, a bowl of steamed junket flavoured with potherb mustard greens, and a bowl of chicken wonton. These served to accompany three silver-mounted bowls of congee made from nonglutinous rice that had been cooked with hazelnuts, pine seeds, chestnuts, fruit kernels, rose hips, and crystallized sugar.
Hsi-men Ch'ing joined Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'en Ching-chi in consuming this repast and then called for small silver cups and filled them with Chin-hua wine. When they had each had three cups there was still more than half a flagon of wine left over and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Hua-t'ung to take it, along with the table that contained the remainder of their breakfast, into an antechamber and offer it to Li Ming.
He then put on his outdoor clothes and set off with Ying Po-chüeh to join the funeral procession for the wife of Prefectural Judge Shang, leaving Li Ming to consume the leftovers in the anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard.
No sooner had Yüeh-niang's maidservant, Yü-hsiao, together with Lan-hsiang and the others, seen Hsi-men Ch'ing out the door than they began:
Horsing around till they were all in a heap,
in the side chamber in which they were awaiting their lesson. After a while they trooped across to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard and continued their horseplay there. Ch'un-mei alone remained where she was, and Li Ming proceeded to give her a lesson on the *p'i-p'a*.
Li Ming had had something to drink. Ch'un-mei's sleeve opening was wide and her hand became caught in it. When Li Ming reached over to help extricate her hand he pressed it more heavily than necessary. Ch'un-mei was immediately incensed and began to tell him off in no uncertain terms.
"You lousy cuckold!" she railed at him. "What do you think you're doing squeezing my hand and making a pass at me? You lousy dead duck of a cuckold! You don't know who it is you're messing around with. Here you are being plied with:
The best wine and the finest meat,[15]
and it only brings out more clearly the fact that you have the soul of a cuckold. Squeeze my hand, will you? You lousy cuckold!
You've stuck your spade in the wrong place,
this time. Ask around and you'll soon find out if I'm the sort of person to play your tricks on. Just wait till he gets home and I tell him about it. You lousy cuckold! You'll be:
Driven away from this door for good,[16]
with the aid of a stick. I suppose you think that without your cuckold's services we couldn't learn how to sing. As though there weren't another cuckold to be had in the licensed quarter! Well the muck's on you, you cuckold!"
Calling him a cuckold a thousand times, if not ten thousand times, Ch'un-mei railed at him until Li Ming picked up his things and fled, as though:
Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for him to hide.[17]
Truly:
With two hands he tore open the road between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.[18]
Li Ming fled in consternation, and Ch'un-mei headed back toward the interior of the compound in a rage, cursing as she went. Chin-lien was in her room playing a board game with Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and Sung Hui-lien when she heard Ch'un-mei come in, uttering imprecations as she came.
"Who are you railing at, you lousy little piece?" asked Chin-lien. "Who's been bothering you?"
"You know perfectly well who it is," Ch'un-mei said angrily. "It's not to be borne. When Father was about to leave he told a pageboy, out of the kindness of his heart, to take what was left of the dishes on the breakfast table and the remainder of the congee and offer them to that cuckold Li Ming. Yü-hsiao and the others were also there:
Horsing around till they were all in a heap.
It was a case of:
You push me,
I push you,
and:
Showing their teeth and making faces,[19]
at that cuckold as though they'd lost all sense of decorum. After clowning around for a bit, they all trooped off to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard.
"No sooner did that cuckold see there was nobody about than he gave my hand a squeeze, as hard as he could, gazing at me with a drunken simper. As though I'd let him get away with something like that! When he saw me raise a hue and cry and start to give him what for, he snatched up his things and ran for it. I should've boxed that cuckold's ears for him. The lousy cuckold! You'd better learn to:
Suit your conduct to the person you're dealing with.
I'm not the sort of wanton baggage who is:
Neither fish nor fowl,[20]
that would be likely to put up with the tricks of a cuckold like you. I'll beat your cuckold's face until it's black and blue."
"You crazy little piece," said Chin-lien. "What does it matter whether you continue your lessons or not? You've gotten so angry your face is all sallow. Just wait till your father comes home and tell him about it. He'll give the lousy cuckold his walking papers and that will be the end of it. Who does he think he is, anyway? He's only a paid entertainer, after all. Does that give the cuckold the right to make a pass at my maid? I know all about that lousy cuckold.
His crock of bad karma is already full."[21]
"It's just his bad luck," said Ch'un-mei. "No doubt he's relying on the fact that he's the Second Lady's brother. But who's afraid of the Second Lady? I suppose he thinks if she has it in for me she can just order me five strokes with the cane, or something like that."
"If you stop to think about it," chimed in Sung Hui-lien, "he's only a musician who's been hired to come here and teach his stock in trade. What business does he have making a pass at a girl of good family?
For every coin you receive from your patron,
You should be as grateful as to your parents.
Not to mention the fact that every day you're regaled with:
Three teas and six repasts."
"And on top of all that," said Chin-lien, "he demands his wages before he leaves. He's being paid at the rate of five taels of silver per month. You lousy cuckold!
You're sacrificing at the wrong grave.[22]
Just ask around among the pageboys in the household and see if any of them have the nerve to show their teeth and grin at Ch'un-mei, or give her any lip. If they caught her in a good mood, they might get off with a curse or two. But if they caught her in a bad mood, she'd have them dragged in front of the master and given a beating for their pains. In fact, if it comes to that, she's quite capable of brazening it out with the master himself. You really picked the wrong person this time. You lousy cuckold! You've run out of luck. You may have gotten her ginger up but you don't even know how hot she can make it for you yet."
"And what were you up to?" she continued, turning to Ch'un-mei. "When Father left, you could have come inside and nothing would have happened. What on earth did you stay in that side room with him for, and give that cuckold the opportunity to make a pass at you?"
"It was all because Yü-hsiao and the others were only interested in horsing around:
Falling into a heap with laughter,
and didn't want to come in," said Ch'un-mei.
"You mean to say the three of them are still in the side chamber out there?" asked Yü-lou.
"They've all gone over to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room on the other side of the courtyard," said Ch'un-mei.
"I'll go see what's going on," said Yü-lou, getting up and suiting her action to her words.
Sometime later, Li P'ing-erh also returned to her quarters and sent Hsiu-ch'un out to summon Ying-ch'un.
That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, Chin-lien gave him a word for word account of the incident, with the result that he ordered Lai-hsing not to let Li Ming into the house in the future. Now that access was denied him, he didn't dare come around any more. As far as Li Ming was concerned, truly:
Though his deeds were done in the past,
The chickens would come home to roost.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
By hiring a tutor to teach his maids to sing,
he flaunted his munificence;
Every day, in the deserted courtyard,
they fiddled with their sound boxes.
Who would have thought that Li Ming
would be driven from his post;
Thereby raising Ch'un-mei's reputation
as high as the skies?

The next day the birthday celebrations were continued. Aunt Wu, Aunt Yang and old woman Pan spent the day with the ladies of the household in the inner hall.
Some time before, Laiwang's wife had died of a wasting sickness and Yueniang had found a new wife for him. This was the daughter of Song Ren, a coffin seller of the town, and her name, like the Fifth Lady's, was Jinlian. Originally, Cai, the Junior Prefect, had bought her for a maid but she misconducted herself, had to leave, and ultimately married Jiang Cong the cook. This Jiang Cong often worked for Ximen Qing, and so it came about that Laiwang was frequently at his house on some errand or other. On such occasions he would drink wine and chat with the cook's wife, and they got on very well together. One day when Jiang Cong had been drinking, there was a quarrel among the cooks about the sharing out of certain moneys, and he was killed. The other cooks escaped over the wall. His wife then went to Ximen Qing and asked him to communicate with the authorities. This he did; the cooks were arrested and sentenced to death. Laiwang told Wu Yueniang that the young widow was a good needlewoman, and she gave him five taels of silver, two dresses, four rolls of black and red cloth, and some headdresses, and told him to marry the woman. But she changed her name to Huilian, for, there being already one Jinlian in the household, it would have been confusing to have another.
Song Huilian was twenty-four years old, two years younger than Pan Jinlian. She had a clear white skin, and her body was admirably proportioned, not too tall and not too short, neither too plump nor too slender. Her feet were even tinier than those of Jinlian. She was intelligent and wide awake, and had excellent taste in self-adornment. But she was indeed a captain among those who dally with men and a leader of those who disturb the harmony of households.
When she first came to Ximen Qing's place, she worked with the other maids and serving women in the kitchen, as plainly dressed as the rest. But, after a while, she noticed Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian and began to copy them, dressing her hair high upon her head, with a long ringlet on either side. And when she served the ladies with tea or water, Ximen Qing gazed at her and gazed again. One day he formed a plan. He decided to send Laiwang to Hangzhou with five hundred taels to buy some dragon robes of ceremony for the Imperial Tutor, and other clothes for the family, an errand that would occupy him for about six months. It was about the middle of the eleventh month when Laiwang at last set off, and thereafter Ximen Qing never ceased to think of the delights that awaited him in Huilian's arms.
This day, Yulou's birthday, Yueniang and the others were enjoying a feast in the inner hall. Ximen Qing did not appear and Yueniang told Yuxiao to prepare a meal for him in her room. Through the lattice he chanced to see Huilian. She was wearing a double coat of red silk and a purple skirt. "Is that Laiwang's new wife?" he asked Yuxiao. "Why does she wear a red coat with a purple skirt? It looks very odd. Tell your mistress she must give her a skirt of another colour."
"Even that purple skirt she borrowed from me," Yuxiao said.
The birthday passed, and on one of the following days Yueniang went to visit a friend. That day Ximen Qing drank heavily and went home in the afternoon. As he reached the second door, Huilian came out and they bumped into each other. Ximen Qing threw his arm around her neck and kissed her. "My daughter," he murmured, "if you do what I wish, you shall have all the ornaments and clothes you can desire." The woman made no reply but pulled her hand away from Ximen Qing and ran off to the other courtyard. He went to his wife's room and told Yuxiao to bring him a roll of blue satin.
"Take this to Huilian," he said to the maid, "and tell her that the other day I saw her dressed very unbecomingly. She must make herself a new skirt of this silk."
Yuxiao took the roll and Huilian looked at it. It was of bright blue satin, with the flowers of the four seasons as a design.
"If I make a new skirt," she said, "how shall I explain matters to our mistress?"
"You need not worry about that," Yuxiao told her. "Father will make any explanation that is necessary. He says if you do what he tells you in this matter he will buy you anything you like. The Great Lady is not at home and he wishes to see you. What have you to say about it?"
Huilian smiled but for a long time she did not answer. At last she said: "When is he coming? I must clean my room."
"He says he will not come here," Yuxiao said. "He is afraid one of the servants might see him He wants you to go to the grotto beneath the artificial mound. It is very quiet there and an excellent place for you to meet."
"But if the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady hear of this, they will be angry," Huilian said.
Yuxiao assured her, saying that Yulou and Jinlian were playing a game with Li Ping'er and that she need not fear she would be disturbed. So the matter was settled and Yuxiao went back to tell Ximen Qing. He and Huilian went to the grotto, and Yuxiao kept watch for them.
Jinlian and Yulou were playing with Li Ping'er when a maid came and told them that Ximen Qing had come home. They separated. Yulou went to the inner court. Jinlian first went to her room to powder her face, then she, too, went to the inner court. When she came to the second door, she found Xiaoyu standing outside Yueniang's rooms. She asked the maid if Ximen Qing was there but Xiaoyu only waved her hand in the direction of the outer court. Jinlian understood and went to the little gate near the artificial mound. There Yuxiao stopped her. Jinlian suspected that Yuxiao herself was carrying on a secret intrigue with Ximen and prepared to force her way in.
"You mustn't go in," Yuxiao cried in great confusion, 'Father is very busy."
"What if he is?" Jinlian cried. "What do I care?"
She went in and tried to find him. When she came to the grotto, matters were reaching a climax but Huilian, hearing someone about, hastily set her clothes in order and came out. She flushed when she saw the Fifth Lady.
"What are you doing here, you scoundrelly slut?" Jinlian said.
Huilian muttered something about looking for Huatong and ran away like a streak of smoke.
Jinlian went into the grotto and found Ximen Qing hastily adjusting his girdle.
"Oh, you shameless object," she said angrily, "is this the way you behave with your slaves? In the daytime too! I would have boxed her ears but she ran away too quickly. So you're Huatong, are you? She's been looking for you. Now tell me the truth. How often has this happened before? You must tell me, or, when the Great Lady comes back, I'll tell her all about it. If I don't have that strumpet's face beaten till it's as plump as a pig's, I shall know what to think of myself. You wait till you think we are amusing ourselves and then you play your games here. But you can't escape your old mother's keen eyes.
Ximen Qing laughed. "Be quiet, you funny little rogue. Don't let the whole world hear about it. I give you my word this is the first time."
Jinlian declared she did not believe a word he said, and Ximen Qing went off, laughing. When she went to the inner court, she found all the maids talking. They said their master had come home and sent Yuxiao for a roll of satin, and they wondered whom it was for. Jinlian realized it must have been for Huilian but she said nothing to Yulou.
From that day onwards Huilian prepared soup and food for Jinlian every day and sewed for her. When she went to play chess with Li Ping'er, the woman would help her with advice. And, whenever there was a suitable opportunity, Jinlian helped Ximen Qing in his amorous adventure, hoping thereby to make herself more secure in his favour.
Ximen kept his promise to Huilian. He bought her clothes, ornaments, and perfumed tea leaves, and gave her silver that she spent on artificial flowers and powder. So, in course of time, she adopted a style of dress quite unlike that to which her poverty had originally constrained her. Further, Ximen told Yueniang that Huilian could make excellent soup and suggested that, in future, she and Yuxiao should not be sent to the common kitchen with the rest but that they should attend to the provision of tea and water at the smaller fire, and generally confine themselves to attendance upon Yueniang.

It was the eighth day of the twelfth month, and Ximen Qing had made an appointment with Ying Bojue to attend the funeral of one of their notable fellow citizens. He told the boys to saddle two horses and waited for his friend. Bojue was late and, meanwhile, Li Ming arrived. Ximen sat by the side of the fire in the great hall and looked on while Li Ming gave a music lesson to Chunmei, Yuxiao, Yingchun and Lanxiang, who were all dressed for the occasion. His son-in-law, Chen Jingji, sat beside him and talked. After they had heard one tune, Bojue came in with his boy Ying Bao, carrying a rug. Chunmei and the other girls were about to retire but Ximen Qing said: "This is only Uncle Ying. There's no need to run away from him. Come and greet him properly." Then Ximen and Ying Bojue exchanged greetings and sat down, and the four girls came and kowtowed. Bojue rose quickly to acknowledge their greeting.

"Brother," he said, "what a lucky man you are to have four young ladies so beautiful as these, each more beautiful than the other. What a pity it is I left my house in such a hurry that I forgot to bring any money with me. One of these days I will give you something to buy some powder and things with." Chunmei and the others withdrew. Then Chen Jingji greeted Bojue and sat down.

"What makes you so late?" Ximen said.

"My eldest daughter has been very ill," Bojue said, "but she is a little better now, so my wife has decided to bring her home for a change. This has made me rather busy. I had to get a chair and buy one or two things before I could come."

"Well," Ximen said, "I have waited a long time. We had better have some gruel." He gave orders that some should be brought.

Li Ming greeted Ying Bojue, who asked what he had been doing lately. They all chatted while the table was being set. Four bowls of gruel were brought, with ten plates of other refreshments. The bowls were made of silver, and the gruel was mixed with nuts of various kinds and fruits with white sugar on the top. Ying Bojue finished off the gruel and drank a small cup of wine. As half the wine still remained in the jar, Ximen told a boy to take it with the dishes that were left and give them to Li Ming in one of the side rooms. Then he dressed, and he and Ying Bojue mounted their horses and rode to the funeral.

For a while after Ximen had gone, Yuxiao and Lanxiang went on with their music but soon they stopped and went to the room where Ximen's daughter Ximen Dajie lived. Chunmei was left alone with Li Ming who was teaching her to play the lute. Li Ming had had too much to drink and, when his hand became entangled in Chunmei's broad sleeve, he freed himself with undue clumsiness.

"How dare you touch my hand, you thievish turtle!" the girl cried. "You must be anxious to die. You seem to have very strange ideas about the kind of girl I am. Every day you have good wine and good food but today you must have taken leave of your senses. Would you dare touch my hand! You put your shovel in the wrong place. Before you do a thing like that, you should ask leave. I will tell Father the very minute he comes home and he will send you packing. Do you think you're the only person who can teach us songs? We can find a teacher anywhere, and we don't need you, you ugly turtle."

She used the word *turtle* very freely, and Li Ming gathered up his things and escaped as quickly as he could.

Chunmei was very angry and, still cursing Li Ming, went to the inner court. Jinlian, Yulou, Li Ping'er and Huilian were playing chess in Jinlian's room when the girl came in. "Whom are you cursing?" Jinlian said. "Who's annoyed you?"

"Who but that disgusting little turtle, Li Ming?" Chunmei said. "When Father went out, he had the kindness to leave food and wine and gruel for him. Yuxiao and the other girls behaved most unbecomingly. They might not have had any modesty at all. They played there for a while and then went off to our mistress's room. When that turtle saw there was nobody in the room, he touched my hand and laughed at me—he was quite drunk— but I cried and cursed him and he took his things and went. What a pity I didn't box his ears! The thievish turtle doesn't choose the right people to play his tricks with. I am not the kind of girl to stand that sort of thing. I'll beat his turtle's face till it is green."

"You silly girl," Jinlian said, "there is no reason why you should study music if you don't wish to. Why allow yourself to become so angry that your face goes yellow? We will tell Father. He will send the rascal about his business, and that will be the end of it. We are not having you taught music to make money, and I won't have a rapscallion like that behaving in such a way to one of my maids. I know the turtle. He's full to the very brim of vice."

"He is the brother of the Second Lady," Chunmei said, "but that doesn't trouble me. She can hardly have me beaten to avenge her brother."

"He is a music master, and gives lessons here," Huilian said. "He has no business to make free with any of the girls. No matter how little he may be paid, he should treat us with the same respect as his own father and mother. Besides, he is always having his meals here."

"Not only that," said Jinlian, "we pay him five taels of silver every month. He will come to a bad end if he goes on in this way. Is there one of our boys who would dare to show his teeth to his master? Is there one who would dare to joke with him? They know that if they did they would get a cursing if Father happened to be in a good temper, and a beating if he were in a bad one. This turtle is playing with fire, and Father will teach him how hot the fire is." She turned to Chunmei. "Why didn't you come here as soon as your master went out? Why did you stay and give that turtle a chance to play tricks?"

"It was all because of Yuxiao and the others," the maid said. "They stayed, and would not come."

"Where're they now?" Yulou asked. Chunmei told her that they had gone to Yueniang's room. Jinlian rose and went to see them. Li Ping'er also went away and sent to fetch Yingchun. In the evening when Ximen Qing returned, Jinlian told him what had happened. He sent for Laixing and gave instructions that Li Ming was not to be allowed to enter the house again.

## 044

### Yü-Hsiao Acts as Lookout by Yüeh-niang's Chamber; Chin-lien Eavesdrops outside Hidden Spring Grotto & Ximen Qing's Dalliance with Song Huilian

There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that goes:

In conduct, heedless of Heaven's principles;
His actions disregard established norms.
Doing just as he pleases, he is ever ready to deceive;
Relying on clout, he scorns others and reveres himself.
He goes out in embroidered robes on a fine steed;
He returns to enjoy the damsels of Wu and Yüeh.
But gold and jade do not furnish a secure foundation;
Even they are not immune to the vicissitudes of fortune.

The twelfth month ended and spring began, It was the festival of the New Year.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was out paying courtesy calls and Wu Yüeh-niang was away on a visit to the home of her elder brother, Wu K'ai. That noon Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were in Li P'ing-erh's rooms playing a board game with her.

"What should we bet on the outcome today?" asked Yü-lou.

"Let's play three games," said Chin-lien, "and make the loser fork out five mace of silver and stand us all a treat. We can spend three mace on Chin-hua wine, the other two on a pig's head, and get Lai-wang's wife to braise it for us. They say she really knows how to braise a pig's head and can do it to a turn with a single stick of firewood."

"Our elder sister is not at home," Yü-lou pointed out. "What should we do about that?"

"We can always save a portion for her," said Chin-lien, "and have it sent to her room. It's all the same thing."

When they had finished talking about it the trio set out their pieces and proceeded to play three games. Li P'ing-erh was the loser and forfeited five mace of silver. Chin-lien sent Li P'ing-erh's maid, Hsiu-ch'un, to summon Lai-hsing and turned the money over to him, telling him to buy a jug of Chin-hua wine and a pig's head along with four trotters.

"Take them to the kitchen in the rear compound," Chin-lien instructed him, "and get Lai-wang's wife, Hui-lien, to braise them immediately. Then have her deliver them to the Third Lady's room and wait for us there. We'll be over in a jiffy."

"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "it would be better to have her put them in a box when she's done and bring them back here for us to eat. If we move to the rear compound Li Chiao-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o will see what's going on and we'll have to worry about whether or not to invite them to partake."

Chin-lien acceded to Yü-lou's suggestion.

It wasn't long before Lai-hsing came back to deliver the wine and pig's head he had purchased to the kitchen. Hui-lien was in the rear compound just then, sitting with Yü-hsiao on the stone stylobate outside the master suite, playing jacks.

"Sister Hui-lien," Lai-hsing said to her, "the Fifth Lady and the Third Lady have a request to make of you. They sent me out to buy some wine and a pig's head, along with the trotters, all of which are now sitting in the kitchen. They'd like you to braise them till they're properly done and then deliver them to the Sixth Lady's quarters in the front compound."

"I don't have the time," replied Hui-lien. "I'm busy stitching shoe soles for the mistress. Anyone can do the braising for you. Why insist on singling me out for the job?"

"Braise them or not thatever you please," said Lai-hsing. "It's up to you now. I've got something else to do." Saying which, he walked nonchalantly out without more ado.

"You'd better leave off and do that braising as requested," said Yü-hsiao. "You know what sort of a mouth the Fifth Lady has. The next thing you know we'll have another ruckus on our hands."

"How on earth does the Fifth Lady know I can braise pig's head?" laughed Hui-lien. "Why should she insist on singling me out to do the job for her?"

Thereupon she got up, went into the kitchen, dipped out a wokful of water, trimmed the pig's head and trotters carefully, shoved a single long stick of firewood into the stove, mixed a large bowlful of oil, soy sauce, and star anise in just the right proportions to add to the brew, and then fitted the lid of the pewter braising pan tightly in place. In less than two hours the pig's head was braised to the point that:

The skin was separated and the flesh falling apart.
Redolently fragrant:
All five flavours were fully represented.[1]

Arranging her handiwork on a large platter with accompanying saucers of chopped ginger and garlic, Hui-lien got a pageboy to put it in a square box and deliver it to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound while she opened the jug of Chin-hua wine and prepared it for serving.

Meng Yü-lou set aside a generous plateful of the finest meat and a flagon of Chin-hua wine for Yüeh-niang's benefit and ordered a maidservant to take them to the master suite. The three women then sat down around the table and proceeded to pour themselves some wine. Just as they were enjoying their repast, who should walk into their presence with an ingratiating giggle but Hui-lien.

"My mistresses," she said, "try a little of this pig's head. Did I manage to braise it to your satisfaction today?"

"The Third Lady has just been praising your skill," said Chin-lien. " 'This pig's head is as tender as can be,' she said."

"Is it really true," Li P'ing-erh asked, "that you only used a single stick of firewood?"

"To tell you the truth," Hui-lien replied, "it doesn't even take a whole stick of firewood. If I'd used the whole stick the meat would have fallen away from the bones."

"Fetch a large winecup," Yü-lou said to Hsiu-ch'un, "and pour out a cupful of wine for your sister to drink."

Li P'ing-erh promptly ordered Hsiu-ch'un to do as she was bidden while she herself filled a saucer with meat from the pig's head and handed it to Hui-lien, saying, "You made it yourself. Have a taste and see what you think."

"I know you don't like things to be overly salty," said Hui-lien, "but I'm afraid I went a little too easy on the soy sauce. It's all right, I guess but the next time I braise anything for you I'll be able to do it better."

Thereupon:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,

she kowtowed to them three times and only then took up a position standing beside the table and joined them in their drinking.

That evening, when Yüeh-niang returned home and the womenfolk of the household came to greet her, Hsiao-yü brought out the portion of pig's head they had sent over and showed it to her mistress.

"We were playing a board game for stakes in Sister Li's place today," said Yü-lou, "and won a pig's head from her. We set aside part of it for you."

"That seems just a bit unfair," said Yüeh-niang. "Everyone wants to be a winner. It's hardly right that a single loser should have to bear the brunt. Why don't we plan to do it this way instead? It's only appropriate that during the holiday season each of us sisters ought to take her turn playing hostess to the rest. We can engage Big Sister Yü to entertain us during the evenings. What is there to prevent it? Wouldn't that be better than insisting on having winners and losers and making one person pay the piper? What do you think of my suggestion?"

"Elder Sister's suggestion is a good one," they all said with one voice.

"Tomorrow is the fifth day of the first month," said Yüeh-niang. "Let me start things off. I'll send a pageboy to engage the services of Big Sister Yü."

Thereupon Li Chiao-erh opted for the sixth, Meng Yü-lou took the seventh, and P'an Chin-lien took the eighth.

"I'm getting off easy," said Chin-lien. "That's the eve of my birthday so I'd have to throw a party anyway. This way I can:

Kill two birds with one stone."[2]

When they asked Sun Hsüeh-o she made no reply for quite a while.

"Let her be," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't try to pressure her into anything. Let Sister Li take the next day."

"The ninth is Sister Six's birthday," said Yü-lou. "I'm afraid Old Mrs. P'an and your elder brother's wife will be here."

"Since we won't be free on the ninth," said Yüeh-niang, "we'll get Sister Li to do her stint on the tenth, that's all."

With that they all felt that everything had been decided.

To make a long story short, Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home on the fifth, having gone to a social engagement at a neighbour's house. Wu Yüeh-niang hosted a feast in the master suite, at which Big Sister Yü provided the musical entertainment, and all the womenfolk drank merrily and made a day of it before the party broke up.

The next day it was Li Chiao-erh's turn, after which came Yü-lou's and then Chin-lien's but there is no need to describe this in detail.

In no time at all it was Chin-lien's birthday and Old Mrs. P'an and Yüeh-niang's elder brother's wife came to participate in the celebration.

Finally the tenth came and it was Li P'ing-erh's turn to play the role of hostess. She sent Hsiu-ch'un to the rear compound to invite Sun Hsüeh-o to join the party twice. Each time Hsüeh-o said that she was coming but failed to show up.

"Just as I said, I didn't think she would come," remarked Yü-lou, "but Sister Li keeps insisting on inviting her. She actually said to someone, 'You people with the money can take turns standing each other treat for ten days if you like. But don't expect the likes of me to:

Chase barefoot after the donkey's hooves.'

The way she put it, leaving aside the insult to the rest of us, would seem to imply that she takes our elder sister to be a donkey's hoof."

"As long as that worthless baggage knows enough to stick to her place," said Yüeh-niang, "there's no need for us to pay any attention to her. Don't bother to keep on inviting her."

Thereupon the wine was served and everyone assembled in Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound for the feast. Big Sister Yü was there to provide the musical entertainment. Yüeh-niang's elder brother's wife and Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, were also present, making altogether a party of eight.

That day Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, having gone out to a social engagement.

"If your father comes home and wants a drink," Yüeh-niang said to Yü-hsiao, "you might as well serve it to him in the master suite."

Yü-hsiao nodded her assent.

Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrive home early that afternoon. Yü-hsiao came forward and helped him off with his outer clothes.

"Where has Yüeh-niang gotten to?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They're all at the Sixth Lady's place in the front compound," Yü-hsiao replied, "drinking wine with Wu K'ai's wife and Old Mrs. P'an."

"What kind of wine are they drinking?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"It's Chin-hua wine," replied Yü-hsiao.

"We've still got that crock of jasmine blossom wine that Ying Po-chüeh sent over as a New Year's present," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well open it up and give it a try."

Accordingly he instructed Yü-hsiao to broach the jasmine blossom wine.

Hsi-men Ch'ing tasted it, remarking as he did so, "It's just the thing for your mistresses to drink," and told Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü to lug it to Li P'ing-erh's place in the front compound.

When Hui-lien, who was standing beside Yüeh-niang just then in order to pour for her, caught sight of Yü-hsiao delivering the wine, she adroitly hastened over to take the jug from her. Yü-hsiao took the opportunity to tip her a wink and give her a pinch on the hand, the significance of which was not lost on the woman.

"Who sent you to deliver the wine?" Yüeh-niang asked Yü-hsiao.

"Father sent me," Yü-hsiao replied.

"How long has your father been home?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"He only just arrived," said Yü-hsiao. "He asked what kind of wine you were drinking and when I said it was Chin-hua wine he told me to take this crock of jasmine blossom wine that Master Ying the Second gave us and bring it out for you to drink."

"If your father wants anything himself," Yüeh-niang said, "set up a table for him in the master suite. There are some ready-made dishes on hand that you can serve him."

Yü-hsiao nodded her assent and returned to the rear compound.

Hui-lien continued standing in attendance at the party for a while and then said disingenuously, "Let me go back to the rear compound and fetch some tea for you to drink."

"Tell your sister," Yüeh-niang instructed her, "that there's some Liu-an tea[3] in the cabinet in the master suite. You can steep a pot of that and bring it back for us to drink."
That woman took off for the rear compound so fast that her feet:
Beat out a festive paradiddle as she went.[4]
She found Yü-hsiao standing in the doorway of the master suite. After fetching the tea for her she made a meaningful moue, at which the woman lifted aside the portiere and walked right into Yüeh-niang's parlour.
What should she see there but Hsi-men Ch'ing, sitting in a chair and drinking wine. Without more ado she went up to him and proceeded to park her posterior in his lap, whereupon the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues. While, down below, the woman grasped his organ in her hand, up above, she took a sip of wine and transferred it into the mouth of her companion.
"Father," the woman said to him, "if you've got any breath-sweetening lozenges give me a few more. The ones you gave me the other day are all gone."
"I also owe several mace to Auntie Hsüeh for trinkets," she went on to say. "If you've got any money handy give me a little so I can pay her."
"There ought to be a tael or two left in my wallet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go ahead and take it."
As he spoke Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to unfasten her trousers.
"It won't do," the woman said. "I'm afraid someone might come along and see us."
"Don't go out front today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Stay in the rear compound and we can have some real fun together tonight."
The woman shook her head, saying, "The rear compound reminds me of what happens when:
The wagons from the Firewood Office block the road:
There are too many sticks about.
We'd better make it the Fifth Lady's place again. That would be:
Two under full four words."[5]
Thereupon Yü-hsiao resumed her place outside the door of the master suite to act as lookout and permitted the two of them to dally with each other as they pleased.
As the saying goes:
Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass.
All their precautions did not prevent Sun Hsüeh-o from happening along from the back of the compound and overhearing the sound of laughing voices from inside the master suite. At first she thought it was Yü-hsiao engaged in badinage with Hsi-men Ch'ing but who could have anticipated that Yü-hsiao turned out to be sitting on the veranda. On seeing this she came to a halt.
Yü-hsiao was afraid that she might go into the room, so she immediately endeavored to divert her by saying, "The Sixth Lady from the front compound is expecting you. Why don't you go along and have something to drink?"
"I'm totally out of favour," Hsüeh-o snorted sardonically.
"Plant a mulberry in a marshland, and
Nobody will climb it.
Mount a person on a racehorse, and
Nobody will overtake him.
Where would I get the wherewithal to take my turn with the rest of them in standing each other treat for ten days?
I'm such a menial underling,
I can't afford my underthings."
Her monologue was brought to a halt by an audible cough from Hsi-men Ch'ing inside the room which induced Hsüeh-o to take herself off to the kitchen.
Yü-hsiao lifted aside the portiere and the woman, once she saw the coast was clear, nimbly stepped out and headed toward the rear of the compound to take care of the tea.
In no time at all Hsiao-yü came in from outside and called out, "Sister Hui-lien, the mistress wants to know how come you went to get the tea and never came back with it."
"The tea's ready," the woman said. "I'm just waiting for the fruit kernels to flavour it with."
Before long, with Hsiao-yü carrying the cups and raised saucers and Hui-lien lugging the teapot, they went straight back to the front compound.
"How come it took you so long to get the tea?" demanded Yüeh-niang.
"Father was drinking wine in the parlour," said Hui-lien, "so I didn't dare go in myself. I had to wait while Sister fetched the tea leaves and the fruit kernels were peeled."
Thereupon everyone was served with tea, after which Hsiao-yü collected the cups and raised saucers and returned to the rear compound.
Hui-lien stood there, leaning against the table, and looked on as Yüeh-niang and the others threw dice.
"Mistress," she said, deliberately raising her voice, "your double ones and double sixes make the combination 'Heaven and Earth Separated,' so you've beaten the Fifth Lady."
"Sixth Lady," she said next, "your double sixes and double fours make the combination 'Brocade Screen' and add up to twenty spots, whereas the Third Lady's one, three, and double fives only add up to fourteen spots, so she loses."[6]
This irritated Yü-lou so much that she said, "For a servant's wife like you to:
Stick your beak in and wag your tongue,[7]
while we're playing dice together is completely out of place."
These few words put the woman in a situation where she could neither:
Stand her ground, nor
Rise up to go,
without embarrassment. The blood flew to her cheeks and she was compelled to beat a hasty retreat. Truly:
Even if one could draw off all the water of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away this day's shame.[8]
The womenfolk continued their drinking until lamplighting time, when whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing lifting aside the portiere and coming into the room.
"You're certainly making a day of it," he said with a laugh.
Wu K'ai's wife jumped up, saying, "Brother-in-law has arrived," and hastily offered him her seat.
"Why don't you continue to do your drinking in the rear compound?" said Yüeh-niang. "We're all women here and you're a man. What's the idea of barging in on us this way?"
"If that's the way you want it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll go elsewhere."
Thereupon, suiting his action to his words, he went over to Chin-lien's quarters. Chin-lien made haste to follow him there and saw that he was half drunk.
Taking hold of Chin-lien, he said, "Little oily mouth, I've got a favour to ask of you. I'd really like to keep Hui-lien overnight in the rear compound but there's no convenient place there. Do you think you could make room for us to spend the night at your place? How about it?"
"I'd only be wasting my breath on you," retorted Chin-lien. "That's enough of your delirious nonsense. You can screw around with her wherever you like, her and her simpering ways, without having to do it at my place. I don't have any place to put her. And even if I were willing to go along with you, Ch'un-mei, that lousy little piece, would never consent to have her here. If you don't believe me, I'll call that little piece, Ch'un-mei, in here and you can ask her yourself. If she agrees, I'll go along with you, even if it means her staying in my own bedroom."
"If neither of you will agree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that's that. I'll go spend the night with her in the grotto underneath the hill in the garden. Order one of your maidservants to take a set of bedding there and light a brazier or we'll never be able to stand the cold."
"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," Chin-lien couldn't help laughing. "That lousy slave of a whore! You'd think she was the mother that bore you. You're another Wang Hsiang, braving the frigid cold of the twelfth month and lying on the icy surface of that stone bench to prove your filiality."[9]
"You crazy little oily mouth!" Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at her. "Stop making fun of me. Enough is enough. Whatever happens, get a maidservant to light a brazier for us."
"You go ahead," said Chin-lien. "I know what to do."
That evening, when the party for the women of the household broke up, Chin-lien actually did order Ch'iu-chü to bundle up some bedding and carry live coals out to make the necessary preparations in Hidden Spring Grotto, as the whitewashed "snow cave" under the artificial hill was called.
Hui-lien accompanied Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Yü-lou as far as the inner gate that separated the front and rear compounds.
"Mistress," she said disingenuously at this point, "I won't accompany you any further but go back up front."
"That's all right," said Yüeh-niang. "Go back up front and get some sleep."
After seeing Yüeh-niang and the others safely inside, the woman remained standing for a while outside the inner gate. As soon as she was sure there was no one about she disappeared under the artificial hill in a puff of smoke. Truly:
There is no need for King Hsiang to wear out his longing eyes;
The Goddess of Witch's Mountain delivers the clouds and rain herself.[10]
When Sung Hui-lien passed through the garden gate, thinking that Hsi-men Ch'ing might not be inside yet, she did not put on the latch and thus left the door standing closed but unlocked. When she arrived in Hidden Spring Grotto, however, whom should she see but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had preceded her and was already:
Sitting there with candle in hand.[11]
Once inside the woman became aware that:
A cold wind assailed her,[12] and
The couch was thick with dust.
Thereupon she drew two sticks of incense out of her sleeve, lit them from the candle in the lantern, and stuck them in the ground. Even though there was a brazier of burning charcoal on the floor it was cold enough to make her shiver. The woman first unrolled the bedding on the bench and then laid a sable robe, cut like a Ch'an monk's cassock, on top of it. Then the two of them:
Closed tight the double-leaved door,
Got into bed and prepared to sleep.
Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his outer garments and sat on the bench in his white satin tunic, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest. Removing the woman's trousers, he took her onto his lap with her two legs splayed to either side and abruptly inserted his organ into her vagina. The two of them embraced each other and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the task at hand.
They remained quite oblivious of P'an Chin-lien who, as soon as she ascertained that the two of them were:
Safely in the harbour,
took off her headdress in her room:
Lightly moved her lotus feet,
and crept stealthily toward the garden to see if she could overhear what the two of them said to each other in private. When she reached the postern gate she gave it a shove and, finding it open, proceeded to enter with:
Slow and surreptitious step.
Not fearing lest:
The dank green moss should chill her "wave-tripping" stockings; or
The thorns on the flowers do an injury to her skirt or jacket,
she proceeded with:
Skulking step and furtive stance,
to take up an eavesdropping position beneath the moon window of Hidden Spring Grotto.
She saw that the lanterns and candles were still alight and overheard the woman saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, "You're just the sort of benefactor who'd:
Donate ice to a homeless shelter in the dead of winter.
Is there no limit to the discomfort you'll put up with, you old beggar? Do you mean to say you can't come up with a better place for a tryst than this Cold Ice Hell?[13] I'd better:
Put a rope in my mouth so if I freeze to death,
You'll have something to haul me out with."
"It's frigid in here!" she continued. "Let's go to sleep. What are you so intent on examining my feet for anyway? You'd think you'd never seen anyone with small feet before. The only thing is I don't have any shoe uppers. Couldn't you contrive to buy me a pair somehow? I see other people making shoes all the time but I can't make any for myself."
"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that's no problem. Tomorrow I'll buy you several mace worth of different patterned uppers. Who would have thought your feet are even smaller than the Fifth Lady's?"
"There's no comparison," the woman said. "The other day I tried on one of her shoes and found that I could wear it over my own. But it's not size that matters so much as the stylishness of the shoe."
When Chin-lien heard this from her vantage point outside the room she muttered to herself, "That slave of a whore! I'd better listen a little longer and see what else she has to say."
Thereupon she continued to eavesdrop for some time and overheard the woman asking Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How long is it since you married that fifth 'object of Ch'iu Hu's roving eye'[14] of yours? Was she a virgin when you married her, or had she been married before?"
"She'd been married before," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"No wonder:
She's such a practiced old hand,"
the woman said. "So, once she'd caught your eye, it was a case of:
Cohabitation amid the dewdrops."
Nothing might have happened if Chin-lien had not overheard this but having heard it, she got so angry where she stood outside the room that her two arms went soft on her and it was some time before she could stir from the spot.
"If that slave of a whore is allowed to carry on this way," she said to herself, "it won't be long before she pushes the rest of us aside."
She would have raised a rumpus then and there but was afraid of arousing Hsi-men Ch'ing's nasty temper, the end result of which might be only to enhance the whore's status. On the other hand, if she allowed her to get away with it, she feared that the woman could not be called to account in the future.
"The thing to do," she thought to herself finally, "is to leave her a clue so she'll realize that she's been overheard and then settle accounts with her tomorrow."
Thereupon she went out by the postern gate, pulled a silver hairpin from her head and stuck it through the hasp so that the door was locked from the outside, and then returned to her room in high dudgeon and went to bed for the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.[15]
Bright and early the next morning, Hui-lien was the first to get up, hurried into her clothes, and went out without doing her hair. She noticed that the postern gate was unlatched and felt a sudden pang of consternation. When she tried the door, however, she shook it for half a day but could not get it to open. She ran back to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing, who called to Ying-ch'un in the adjacent courtyard to open it for her. When she saw that the gate had been locked with a hairpin she recognized it as one of Chin-lien's and realized that she must have been eavesdropping on her the night before.

Feeling as though she were:
Carrying a spectral fetus,[16]
the woman hurried out to the front of the compound and was just opening the door to her living quarters when whom should she encounter but P'ing-an, who emerged from the privy and greeted her with a knowing grin.
"You crazy jailbird!" Hui-lien said to him. "Who do you think you're showing your teeth to with such a grin?"
"Sister," said P'ing-an, "it seems that even a smile is enough to drive you mad."
"At the crack of dawn," retorted Hui-lien, "what is there to laugh about for no good reason?"
"I'm laughing at you, Sister," said P'ing-an, "because it seems that:
Not having had a bite for three days.
You've got flowers before your eyes.[17]
My guess would be you didn't manage to make it home at all last night."
On hearing these words, the woman's face turned red and she started to curse, saying, "You lousy, scurrilous jailbird! You've been seeing things. Just what night was it that I didn't sleep in my own room or show up at home?
If you throw a tile into the air,
It's got to come down to earth."
"I noticed that your door was locked on the outside only a minute ago," said P'ing-an. "You can scarcely weasel out of that."
"I got up early this morning," Hui-lien asserted, "and went to the Fifth Lady's place. It was only just now I was able to come back out. Where've you been all this time, you jailbird?"
"I hear the Fifth Lady has asked you to pickle crabs for her," said P'ing-an, "because of your reputation as a leg-splitter. No wonder she sent you out to the front gate to watch the winnowers at work. They say you've mastered the art of rotating your tongue the way they rotate their winnowing sieves."
This sally really got under the woman's skin. Snatching up a door-bar, she chased P'ing-an around the courtyard, cursing as she went.
"You lousy, delirious jailbird! Just wait and see whether I tell about this or not. You'll get something to remember me by, never fear. Have you lost all sense of decorum, or what?"
"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "Take it easy, will you! Just who are you going to tell about it? Of course, I know you've flown to a higher branch than the rest of us."
Hui-lien was so aggravated all she could do was continue to chase after him with the door-bar.
Who could have anticipated that at just this juncture Tai-an should stride out through the portiere of the pawnshop and seize the door-bar in his hand, saying, "Sister, what are you trying to beat him for?"
"Why don't you ask that grinning devil of a jailbird?" replied Hui-lien. "He's got me so angry with his:
Ridiculous blatherskite,
that my arms have gone soft on me."
P'ing-an seized the opportunity to make himself scarce.
Pushing the woman before him, Tai-an said to her, "Sister, don't:
Let your temper get the better of you.
You'd better go home and do your hair."
The woman then reached into the gourd purse at her waist, took out three or four candareens of silver, and gave them to Tai-an, saying, "Could I trouble you to pick up a large bowl of broth and two kinds of prepared ingredients for a pot-au-feu? You can put the broth right into my saucepan."
"That's no problem," said Tai-an. "I'll go take care of it."
Accepting the money with one hand, he hurriedly washed his face and then saw to the preparation of the pot-au-feu. The woman gave a bowlful to Tai-an and ate a bowlful herself. Only then did she comb her hair, lock the door, and go report for duty at Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound.
This done, she made her way to Chin-lien's place where she found her sitting at the mirror in the process of performing her morning toilet. Hui-lien played up to her punctiliously by standing deferentially to one side, offering to hold the mirror for her as she brushed her hair, and fetching the water for her to wash her hands with. Chin-lien did not so much as look at her or pay her the slightest attention.
"I've rolled up your sleeping shoes and foot bindings," said Hui-lien. "Shall I put them away for you?"
"Let them be," said Chin-lien. "Leave them where they are. I'll have the maidservant come in and put them away."
"Ch'iu-chü!" she then called out. "The lousy slave. Where could she have gotten to?"
"Ch'iu-chü's sweeping the courtyard," said Hui-lien, "though Sister Ch'un-mei is over there doing her hair."
"Don't worry about it," said Chin-lien. "Let them be. You'd better leave them for the maidservants to put away. After all, they've been in contact with these:
Crooked-hooved clodhopping feet,
of mine. I wouldn't want you to soil your hands with them. You'd do better to save your attentions for your father. You seem to be the only sort of person capable of pleasing him. The rest of us are all guilty of:
Cohabitation amid the dewdrops.
We're all 'remarried goods.' You're the only one, Sister, to have entered the household in a real bridal palanquin, to be his legitimate wife, the true 'object of Ch'iu Hu's roving eye.' "
These words had the effect of striking the woman's sore spot from the night before. Thereupon, falling to her knees, she said, "Mother, you're one of my mistresses, after all. If you don't see fit to:
Lift high your gracious hand,[18]
I would have no place to stand for even an instant. From the very outset, without your generous consent, I would never have presumed to accede to Father's demands. Even the First Lady in the rear compound is really no more than a figurehead. It's you who have done the most for me. You don't suppose I'd dare take liberties with you, do you? You can investigate as much as you like. If I have ever taken any liberties with you by so much as a word, may I come to a bad end. May I develop a boil in every hair follicle."
"That's not the point," said Chin-lien. "I'm:
Not the sort of person to let dust
be thrown in her eyes.
So long as my husband wants you, you don't suppose I'd stoop to competing for him, do you? But I'm not going to let you get away with any of your mischief or:
Idle words and idle chatter,
in front of him. If you think you can trample the rest of us underfoot, leaving you with a free field in which to kick up your heels, Sister, let me tell you, you'd better get any such thoughts out of your head."
"Look into it further, Mother," protested Hui-lien. "I've never dared take any liberties with you. I fear you must have misheard me last night."
"My foolish sister," said Chin-lien. "Do you think I'd have the patience to eavesdrop on you? Let me tell you something. Not even ten wives could hope to satisfy a man's every desire. Even though your father has these several wives of his at home, every time he chooses to entertain a powdered face outside, when he comes back he conceals nothing from me but gives me a word for word account of everything that happened. Ask around a bit. You'll find that even back when he and the Sixth Lady were so close that they seemed to:
Breath through the same nostrils,[19]
there was nothing he didn't tell me about their doings when he got home. And you're not even in the same league with her."
This speech had the effect of reducing the woman to silence. She stood around the room for a while and then went out.
As she was going through the enclosed passageway beside the inner gate she ran into Hsi-men Ch'ing and accosted him, saying, "A fine fellow you are! You're about as much good at keeping things to yourself as a greased chute! You've gone and spilled every word I said to you yesterday, and today I've had to stand the gaff. Whatever I say to you in the future, keep it to yourself, even if you have to keep it till it rots. What can you have been thinking of to tell such things to anyone else? That mouth of yours is:
Nothing but a leaky trough.[20]
Even if I have something to say, I'll never tell you anything again."
"What are you talking about?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know anything about it."
The woman merely gave him a look and stalked off toward the front of the compound.
In the past this woman had always possessed a glib tongue. She was in the habit of hanging around at the front gate:
Buying this and buying that.[21]
She addressed the manager, Fu Ming, familiarly as Brother Fu; Ch'en Ching-chi as Brother-in-law; and Pen the Fourth as Old Four. Since commencing her affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing she had become even bolder in public than before. In fact:
Engaging in badinage and repartee,
She was completely without restraint.[22]
For example, she might say, "Brother Fu, allow me to salute you. Would you be so kind as to keep your eye out for any peddler of cosmetics that might come by the front gate."
Manager Fu was a decent sort and would actually keep on the lookout for her around the front gate and, if he saw a peddler come by, stop him and call her out to make her purchases.
Tai-an made a point of teasing her about this by saying, "Sister, the cosmetics man went by early this morning. If you had only been out early enough with the steelyard you might have weighed out as much as you liked."
"You lousy monkey!" the woman railed at him. "It's the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady from inside who commissioned me to buy face powder for them. What do you mean by your talk of weighing it out with the steelyard, as if I were buying three catties of rouge or two catties of powder? Those whores would really have to lay it on thick to get through quantities like that. Just wait and see whether I tell on you or not when I go back inside."
"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed Tai-an. "Whatever I do, you try to overawe me with the Fifth Lady."
Before long she came out again, saying, "Pen, Old Four, would you be so kind as to keep your eye out for any peddler of costume jewelry that might come by the front gate. I'd like to buy a pair of plum blossom and a pair of chrysanthemum hair ornaments."
Pen the Fourth, neglecting his business, made a special point of keeping a lookout for her and, when a peddler of costume jewelry did come by, stopped him and called her out to make her purchases. The woman stood inside the inner gate, opened up the peddler's box, and picked out two pairs of large artificial flower ornaments to wear in the hair over her temples, as well as two purple, shot satin, gold lame handkerchiefs, costing in all a total of seven mace and five candareens of silver.
The woman reached into her pocket, groped out a fragment consisting of about half a silver ingot, and asked Pen the Fourth to cut it for her and weigh out the seven mace and five candareens that she owed the vendor. Pen the Fourth was engaged at that moment in writing up the accounts but he dropped what he was doing, came over to where she was standing, squatted down on the ground, and began to chisel away at the silver for her.
Who should come up just then but Tai-an, who said, "Let me chisel it for you, Sister."
He took the silver in one hand but instead of chiseling it, subjected it to a close examination.
"You're not chiseling it, you lousy monkey!" said the woman. "What do you expect to find by examining it so closely? You mean to say you didn't hear the dog biting an intruder in the middle of the night? It's stolen silver."
"I wouldn't say it was stolen," said Tai-an. "But it does have a familiar look about it. In fact, I'd say it came out of Father's wallet. It looks to me like this silver is the half ingot left over when Father had a piece cut to pay off that Southerner who sells square-cut scholar's caps in the Lantern Market the other day. My memory is:
As certain as certain can be."[23]
"You lousy jailbird!" the woman protested. "There are look-alikes aplenty even among the people of this world. How could Father's silver have ended up in my hands anyway?"
"How should I know what transactions were involved?" laughed Tai-an.
At this, the woman ran after him and gave him what for with her fists. In the end, the pageboy chiseled off seven mace and five candareens worth of silver and gave it to the vendor of the costume jewelry but kept the remaining silver in his hand and refused to return it.
"You lousy jailbird!" exclaimed the woman. "If you dare walk off with my money, I'll call you a brave man."
"I wouldn't take anything of yours," said Tai-an. "Why don't you give me a little of what's left over and I'll buy us something to eat?"
"You lousy monkey!" the woman said. "Hand it over and I'll give you something."
When she had thus tricked Tai-an into surrendering his spoils, she merely tossed him a fragment weighing four or five candareens, stuffed the remainder into her pocket, and went straight back inside the compound.
From this time on, she was constantly to be seen at the front gate, buying fabric samples, costume jewelry, handkerchiefs, and the like, by the tael; or even going so far as to purchase four or five pints of melon seeds at a time and distribute them among the maids of the various apartments to share with their mistresses. Her coiffure was adorned with a pearl headband and gold lantern earrings, of glittering aureate hue. Beneath her upper garments, she wore red trousers of Lu-chou silk with drawnwork kneepads. In her wide sleeves she carried breath-sweetening lozenges flavoured with osmanthus, while three or four sachets of pomander were suspended at her waist. Her expenditures of this kind averaged two or three mace of silver a day, all of which had been given to her by Hsi-men Ch'ing on the sly. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
From the time Chin-lien revealed the fact that she had seen through her devices, this woman started to haunt Chin-lien's room on a daily basis, playing up to her with every trick at her disposal. She prepared tea and boiled water for her, stitched shoes and did needlework:
Fetching things, whether they were wanted or not; and
Doing things, whether they were called for or not.
With regard to her real job in Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, all she did each day was to put in a pro forma appearance and then come out to Chin-lien's place in the front compound. Every day she made a threesome with Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh to play board games or dominoes. If Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to show up while the woman was present, Chin-lien saw to it that she stood at his side to pour the wine and then sat down beside him as one of the company. As a result she was able to regale herself every day with:
Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.
Chin-lien did all this solely in order to ingratiate herself with her husband while Hui-lien, for her part, became completely dependent on her patronage. Truly:
The wanton willow catkins dance wherever the wind carries them;
The fickle peach blossoms float wherever the water takes them.[24]
A poem testifies to this:

Chin-lien, desirous of favour, deploys a devious stratagem;
Hui-lien, temporarily reprieved, invades her master's bed.
The crowing hen fails to anticipate imminent disaster;
Once the catastrophe has occurred, there is no going back.

Winter at last gave place to spring. It was the beginning of a new year. Ximen Qing went to celebrate the festival with his friends, and Wu Yueniang paid a visit to her brother. In the afternoon Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian played chess with Li Ping'er. When Yulou asked what should be the stakes, Jinlian said five *qian* of silver, three to be spent on wine, and the other two on a pig's head.
"We will ask Laiwang's wife to roast it for us," she said. "She can do it with a single faggot and make it very tender."
"But the Great Lady is not at home," Yulou said. "How can we do it in her absence?"
"We will save some for her," Jinlian said.
They began to play. They played three games and Li Ping'er lost. Jinlian told a maid to call Laixing, and gave him the money, telling him to buy wine, a pig's head, and four pig's trotters. When he had bought them, she said, he was to take them to Laiwang's wife, ask her to cook them and take them to the Third Lady's room.
Yulou suggested another plan. "Sixth Sister," she said, "say that when she has cooked the head, she must put it in a container and bring it here. Li Jiao'er and Sun Xue'e will be there, and I am not sure we want them." Jinlian agreed.
After a while Laixing came back from his errand and took the pig's head to the kitchen. Song Huilian and Yuxiao were there, playing a game with melon seeds. "Sister Huilian," Laixing said, "the Fifth Lady and the Third Lady sent me to buy some delicacies. I have put them in the kitchen and the ladies wish you to cook them. When they are done, will you please take them to the Sixth Lady's room."

"I am busy now," said Huilian, "I'm making a pair of shoes for my Lady. Ask somebody else to attend to it. Why come to me?"
"Well, please yourself," Laixing said, "here they are. I've got other things to see about." He went away.
"We had better stop this game," Yuxiao said, "and you go and cook the things. You know what a sharp tongue the Fifth Lady has. Don't set it wagging."
Huilian laughed. "I wonder how she knows that I can cook pig's head?" She went to the kitchen, filled a cauldron with water, cleaned the pig's head and the trotters, found a suitable faggot and put it underneath the oven. Then she filled a large bowl with salt, put spices into it and mixed the ingredients together. She put the pig's head into a container. In less than an hour it was so tender that the skin began to peel. With all the flavour of the spices it smelled exceedingly appetizing. She set the head on a large tray and put the tray, with saucers of ginger and onion, into a large square box. This she carried to the Sixth Lady's room. Then she warmed the wine and took that in. Yulou chose some of the tastiest part, put it on a dish, set aside a jar of wine, and told a maid to take it to Yueniang's room. Then they all sat down to enjoy their feast.
Huilian came in smiling. "How do you like my cooking, Ladies?" she asked.
"The Third Lady," Jinlian said, "was just saying how clever you are. It is as soft and tender as can be."
"Is it really true that you only use a single faggot?" Li Ping'er said. "Hardly that," Huilian replied. "If I did, it would be overcooked." Yulou told a maid to pour some wine for the woman, and Li Ping'er picked out some meat and invited her to try some of her own cooking.
"I knew," Huilian said, "that you did not like things too salty but I did not make it quite tasty enough. However, next time, I shall know exactly what you like." She kowtowed three times and stood beside them.
They drank till evening when Yueniang returned. Then they went together to receive her. Xiaoyu showed her the delicacy that had been put aside for her. "We have been playing chess today," Yulou said, with a smile, "and this is what we won from the Sixth Lady. We saved some for you."
"It is hardly fair," Yueniang said, "that one should pay for what all enjoy. I'll tell you what. We will have a kind of festival, and each of us in turn shall give a party to the rest and we will have Miss Yu here to sing. That seems to me a better plan than gambling. What do you think?" They all agreed, and Yueniang continued: "Tomorrow is the fifth of the month, I will begin. Li Jiao'er can take the sixth, Yulou the seventh, and Jinlian the eighth."
"That will suit me very well," Jinlian said, "for it is my birthday and I shall kill two birds with one stone."
They approached Xue'e but she did not welcome the suggestion. Yueniang said they would not ask her again and Li Ping'er should take her turn. Yulou said that the ninth would be Jinlian's birthday and perhaps her mother and Aunt Wu would come. It was decided that Li Ping'er should entertain them on the tenth.
On the following day Ximen Qing went to visit a friend and Yueniang gave her party. Miss Yu, the singer, sang and played for them. Then came the turn of Li Jiao'er, Yulou, and Jinlian. On Jinlian's birthday old woman Pan and Aunt Wu came to spend the day. Then it was the turn of Li Ping'er. She sent Xiuchun twice to invite Sun Xue'e but, though she promised to come, she did not.
"I told you she wouldn't come," Yulou said, "there is no use asking her. She always tries to make out that we have all the money and she is as poor as an unshod donkey. Since she chooses to take that attitude, we'd better leave her alone."
"She is quite impossible," Yueniang said, "we won't bother about her any more." They all went to visit Li Ping'er. Miss Yu went with them to make music, and there were eight of them in all, including Ximen Dajie and Aunt Wu. Ximen Qing himself was not at home and Yueniang told Yuxiao that, if he should come in and ask for wine, she should see it was given him.
It was afternoon when Ximen returned. When Yuxiao took his clothes, he asked where Yueniang was, and she told him that all the ladies, with their guests, were with Li Ping'er, taking wine.
"What kind of wine are they drinking?" Ximen asked. When he was told, he called for a jar of Lily wine that Ying Bojue had brought, and told Yuxiao to open it. He tasted a little and said: "This wine is just what ladies like," and told the maids to take it to them. It happened that Huilian was serving wine to the ladies, and when she saw Yuxiao bringing the new jar, she very cunningly went to meet her. Yuxiao winked at her and pressed her hand so that she understood that Ximen had returned. Yueniang asked Yuxiao who had told her to bring the wine, and the girl told her. Then she asked how long Ximen had been back. "If your master wants anything to drink, set a table in my room. There is plenty to eat if he wants anything. You can wait upon him." Yuxiao went away.
Huilian stayed a while and then said she was going to the kitchen to make some tea. "There is some Liu'an tea in my room," Yueniang said, "use that." Huilian went to the inner court. There, Yuxiao was standing outside the door of the upper room, making a sign to her to go in. She pushed aside the lattice and went in. Ximen Qing was drinking wine. She went over to him and seated herself upon his knee, and they embraced each other lovingly. She fondled him with her hand until it became evident he was greatly stirred, and, from her mouth, she passed wine to his.
"Father," she said, "I have used all the fragrant tea leaves you gave me the other day; may I have some more? And have you any money? I owe some to Xue."
"There are a few taels in my purse," Ximen said, "you may take them." Then he would have unloosed her girdle but she restrained him, saying she was afraid someone might come.
"If you stay in tonight," Ximen said, "we can enjoy ourselves." Huilian shook her head. "There are so many difficulties in the inner court. We had better go again to the Fifth Lady's room."
While they were amusing themselves Yuxiao kept watch for them outside the door. Xue'e happened to come into the court and heard the sound of laughing and talking. At first she thought it was Yuxiao talking to Ximen Qing but then she saw the maid standing by the door. She stopped, and Yuxiao began to fear that she would decide to go in. "The Sixth Lady has sent for you several times," she said. "Why won't you go?"
Xue'e laughed contemptuously. "I am one of those women who never have any luck," she said. "However speedy the horse I ride, I can never catch up with them. How can I play with them? They can have ten parties, while I haven't even the undergarments I need."
Ximen Qing coughed and Xue'e went back to her kitchen. Yuxiao pushed the lattice to one side, and Huilian seized the opportunity and slipped away.
She went to the kitchen to make some tea, and soon Xiaoyu came and said that Yueniang wanted to know why the tea was so long coming. "It is just ready," Huilian said, "I am only looking for some nuts." She found the nuts and, with Xiaoyu carrying the tray, took the tea to the ladies.
"Why has it taken you so long to make the tea?" Yueniang said.
"Father is drinking wine in your room," the woman said, "and I did not venture to go in. I had to wait for your maid to get the tea for me and then I had to go to the kitchen for the nuts."
The ladies drank the tea and began to play. Huilian leaned over the table and made comments on the game until Yulou grew angry. "Why must you put in your word when we are playing?" she said. "It is not your place to speak here." Huilian was abashed. She blushed and did not know what to do with herself. Finally she went away.
The ladies drank wine until nightfall. Then Ximen Qing came in. "You all look very jolly," he said, laughing. Aunt Wu stood up and offered her place to her brother-in-law. "The place for you to drink is in the inner court," Yueniang said. "Why do you, a man, come and join a party of ladies?"
"Very well! I will go, " Ximen said, and he went to Jinlian's room. She followed him. He was already half drunk.
"Little oily mouth," he said, taking her by the hands, "I want to ask you just one favour. I wished to enjoy Huilian in the inner court but there was nowhere we could go. May we come here?"
"You are a dirty creature," Jinlian cried, "and I can't find words bad enough for you. I don't mind what you do with that woman elsewhere but there is no place for you here. Besides, even if I were willing, that young scoundrel Chunmei would object. Ask her, if you don't believe me. If she doesn't mind, I will raise no difficulties."
"Very well," Ximen said, "you won't do what I wish. I shall have to spend the night in the grotto. Please ask the maids to take some bedclothes and light a fire for me there. It is rather chilly."
Jinlian laughed. "Really, I can't tell you what I think of you. That slave's wife might be your mother and you might be Wang Xiang, carrying out the duties of filial piety in winter. Only you'd rather lie on a warm bed than on ice."
"Don't tease me," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "but tell the maids to light a fire." Jinlian agreed, and when the ladies separated that night, she told Qiuju to take bedclothes and a stove to the grotto under the artificial mound. Huilian, after escorting Yueniang, Li Jiao'er and Yulou to their apartments, asked if there was anything more she could do for them, and was told to go to her bed in the front court. She stood there for a short time and then, seeing that no one was about, went swiftly to the artificial mound.
Huilian thought, when she went into the garden, that Ximen Qing had not come yet, so she did not close the gate but when she reached the grotto she found he was already there. She went in. It was very cold and the ground was covered with dust. She took two sticks of incense from her sleeve, lighted them and set them in the ground, shivering although there was a stove. She first covered herself with the bedclothes and pulled a sable cloak over her, then Ximen shut the door of the grotto, got on to the bed, removed his long gown and unloosed the woman's girdle. She placed herself upon him with legs outstretched. Then they came together and enjoyed the work of love to the full.
Jinlian heard them go to the garden, took off her headdress, and going very softly, opened the garden gate and went to the mound. She did not trouble whether the moss made her feet cold, or whether the branches of the shrubs tore her skirt. She stood quietly outside the door and looked in. The light was burning brightly. She heard the woman say laughingly, "Showering ice upon an icy bed! You are in no better case than a beggar. You can find nowhere else to go, so you come to this icy hell. You are like a man who swallows a long string so that when he comes to die of starvation somebody will pull him out." Then she went on: "It is so cold! Let us go to sleep. You do nothing but look at my feet though you know them perfectly well already. I have no new shoes. Will you buy some tops for me, and let me show you what beautiful shoes I can make?"
"My child," Ximen said, "of course I will. You shall have all colours tomorrow. Your feet are smaller than the Fifth Lady's."
"There is no comparison between hers and mine," the woman said. "I tried on her shoes yesterday and found I could get into them with my own shoes on my feet. But, so long as the feet are straight, it doesn't matter much whether they are large or small."
Jinlian heard all this and was anxious to hear more.
"Was your Fifth Lady married before she came here?" she heard Huilian say.
"Yes," Ximen replied, "she is one of the changeable kind."
"But how charming she is," Huilian said, "I don't wonder that she and you are like dew and water together."
Jinlian listened and was almost paralyzed. "If I allow this strumpet to carry on like this," she said to herself, "she will be the end of me." She would have gone at once and taxed the couple with their misdeeds if she had not been afraid of Ximen's hasty temper. She knew that if she let the matter pass too long he would refuse to admit it, and decided to leave something behind to mark the fact that she had been there. The next day she would confront him with it. She went back to the garden gate, and, taking a silver pin from her hair, put it in the latch. Then she went to her own room, in a very evil humor.
The next morning Huilian got up and went out, her hair hastily arranged. When she came to the garden gate, she was startled. The gate had not been locked, yet though she pushed, she could not open it. She had to go back to Ximen Qing, who called to Chunmei on the other side of the wall to come and open the gate. Then he saw the pin and knew that it belonged to Jinlian. He realized that she knew everything that had happened the night before. As for Huilian, it was as though she carried a ghost child in her womb. In the outer court she met Ping'an coming from the rooms on the east side. He looked at her and smiled.
"Why are you laughing at me, you young rascal?" she cried.
"Sister," Ping'an said, "what is the matter with you? I was only smiling."
"Why should you smile without any reason, and before breakfast, too?"
"Well, Sister, I'm smiling because you look as if you had had nothing to eat for three days. There is a hungry look about your eyes. I hear you weren't in your room last night."
Huilian flushed, and cursed the boy. "You thievish, gawpy, ghost-catching young imp! What night was I not in my room?"
"Your door is locked this very moment," the boy said. "I've just seen it. How do you explain that?"
"I got up very early to go to the Fifth Lady's room and I haven't been able to get back before now. Where have you been?"
"I suppose," the boy said, "that the Fifth Lady sent for you to salt crabs because you are so clever at anything to do with legs. And she sent you to the gate to find a basket seller because you are so good at putting one and one together."
Huilian snatched up a door bar and chased Ping'an around the courtyard. "You young rascal," she cried, "I'll tell my husband about this and he will treat you as you deserve. You are mad."
"Don't be angry, Sister. By the way, whom did you say you'd tell?" This made her still more angry and she ran after him again.
Daian, who happened to come from the shop, took the bar from her and asked her why she wished to beat the boy.
"Ask the wicked little chatterbox himself," Huilian cried angrily. "I haven't a particle of strength left."
Meanwhile Ping'an took advantage of the opportunity, and made off. "Don't be angry, Sister," Daian said. "Go to your room and dress your hair."
Huilian took some small change from her pocket. "Will you buy me a large bowl of soup?" she said.
"Certainly," the boy replied. He took the money, washed his face, and then went to buy the soup. When he brought it, Huilian gave half of it to him. She dressed her hair, then closed her door and went to the inner court to wait upon Yueniang.
Then she went to see Jinlian. The Fifth Lady was doing her hair, and Huilian served her most attentively, holding the mirror, carrying hot water and doing one thing and another. Jinlian never so much as glanced at her.
"May I put your sleeping shoes under the bedclothes?" Huilian said.
"Please yourself," Jinlian said. "If it is too much trouble, I'll tell my maid." Then she called to Qiuju: "Where are you, you thievish slave?"
"She is sweeping the floor," said Huilian, "and Sister Chunmei is dressing her hair."
"Please do not concern yourself about my maids but go away," Jinlian said. "I will have my own maids to attend to me. Besides, my dirty place will soil your shoes. Hadn't you better go and wait upon his Lordship? He likes to have women of your sort about him. He and I are the dew-and-water kind of husband and wife, and I am a twice-married woman. You, Sister, are of a very different kind; you came in a sedan chair. You are the real wife."
When Huilian heard these bitter words, she knew that all the happenings of the night before were known to Jinlian. She threw herself upon her knees. "Mother," she cried, "you are my true mistress. Unless you raise your hand, there is no place for me to stand. Without your kind aid, I should never have been able to do what my master wished. The Great Lady is only a shadow but you are my benefactress and I shall always be faithful to you. Mother, you may watch me as much as you like, and if ever you find me deceiving you, may I not die peacefully in my bed."
"I do not like to have dust thrown in my eyes," Jinlian said. "If my husband wants you I shall not interfere but I will not have you playing tricks and putting me in an invidious position. You must think twice before you decide to come between us."
"Mother," Huilian said, "question me if you will. I shall not dare deceive you. Last night you did not really hear what was said."
"I don't believe you," Jinlian said. "Let me tell you this. One woman can never bind a man, and your master not only has several wives here but a host of lady friends outside. But he always tells me what he does. There was a time when the Great Lady had some control over him, and in those days he used to tell her things, and did not tell me. You have not the authority of the Great Lady."
There was nothing Huilian could say. She stood there for a while, and then went away. As she came to the passage by the second door, she saw Ximen Qing.
"Oh, you good man," she said, "you have let other people know all that we did last night, and I have had to suffer in consequence. You should keep to yourself the things we say to one another, until you forget them. Why should you let everybody know? Your mouth runs over like a water trough, and I will never tell you anything again."
"What's that!" Ximen cried, "I don't know what you're talking about." Huilian scowled at him and went away.
She was very careful and cunning in her dealings with other people in the household. If she was buying anything at the gate she would call Fu "Master Fu" and Chen Jingji "Uncle." Ben the Fourth was always "Old Fourth." Now that she had had this affair with Ximen Qing, she was much less sedate in her manner, and was often at the gate joking with some man or other. She would go after Fu and say to him, "Master Fu, I wonder if you would mind buying some powder for me?" Fu was a simple-minded fellow and looked out for the powder seller for her but he was not altogether comfortable about it at heart.
One day Daian said jokingly, "Sister, you should have been out with your scales earlier. The powder seller has gone."
"You rascal," Huilian said, "the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady have asked me to buy some powder for them. What do you mean by talking of two measures of rouge and three of powder? They powder their faces many times a day. I shall tell them what you say."
"Oh, Sister!" the boy said, "you always try to frighten me by talking about the Fifth Lady."
Once she said to Ben the Fourth: "Old Fourth, please keep a lookout for the flower seller, and buy me two branches of plum blossom and a couple of chrysanthemums." Ben the Fourth waited about for the flower seller, neglecting his own business. When the man came, he told her, and, standing by the second door, she picked out the flowers she liked best, and two purple and gold handkerchiefs. She spent seven *qian* and more. She took a piece of silver from her purse and asked Ben the Fourth to weigh it for her. He was busy upon his accounts but left them, weighed the silver, and was about to cut off the amount she wanted. Then Daian came up.
"I will cut off the silver you want," he said. He took the piece but instead of cutting it, looked at Huilian.
"Well," she said, "you thievish monkey! Why don't you cut it? Why stand there looking at me? Did you hear the dogs barking the night I stole the money?"
"I don't say you stole the silver," Daian said, "but somehow or other it seems familiar. It is just like some Father had in his purse. The other day, he had a piece cut into two at the lantern market. One piece he gave to the goldsmith and this is the other. I remember it perfectly."
"Don't you know that many things in this world look alike? What should I be doing with your master's silver?"
Daian laughed. "I know what that silver paid for," he said. Huilian slapped him. He cut the silver and gave the money to the flower seller but made no offer to give Huilian the change.
"You rascal," she said, "you must be a brave man to dare to take my money."
"I'm not robbing you," the boy said, "I'm only going to buy some fruit."
"You thievish monkey," Huilian cried, "give it back to me and I'll give you something." When Daian handed back the silver, she gave him a small piece and put the rest back in her purse. After that, she often stood at the gate to buy artificial flowers and handkerchiefs, sometimes spending several taels. She would buy 4 or 5 measures of melon seeds, give them to the maids, and serving women. For herself she bought a pearl headband and a pair of bright gold earrings. She wore red silk trousers and a broad-sleeved gown in which she kept fragrant tealeaves. She carried several perfume boxes. Every day she spent at least two or three *qian*, all of which came from Ximen Qing. After Jinlian knew of her relations with Ximen, Huilian went to the Fifth Lady's room every day and waited on her with the utmost diligence. She served her with tea and water and sewed for her, doing many things that were quite unnecessary, and many things that she had no desire to do. She did not go to Yueniang even once a day for all her time was spent with Jinlian waiting upon her when she played chess or dominoes with Li Ping'er. Sometimes Ximen Qing would come in while they were playing, and then Jinlian would purposely ask Huilian to serve the wine. Sometimes they would sit and play together to please him.

## 045

### The Ladies Celebrate the Feast of Lanterns & Ching-chi Flirts with a Beauty on the Lantern Festival; Hui-Hsiang Angrily Hurls Abuse at Lai-Wang's Wife

Candles in silver sconces burn high,[1] as inebriation reigns;
The party has become convivial, laughter is frequent.
Lissome waists dance superbly like the "willow" in the quarter;[2]

Sandalwood lips sing lightly of "Spring in the Imperial Park."
Wafts of perfume invade his clothes as though intentionally;
Flowerlike ornaments fall to the ground to be noiselessly retrieved.
Were it not for this telltale detail of breeze-borne romance;
How would Han Shou ever have awakened from his drunken trance?
The first full moon of the new year in Heaven,
Is the evening of the Lantern Festival on earth.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had the reception hall in his home prepared for the occasion by:
Suspending decorated lanterns, and
Spreading out silken tablecloths.
It was the sixteenth day of the first month and a feast was laid on for the:
Jollification of the entire family.
In front they were protected by:
Standing screens and brocaded windbreaks like Shih Ch'ung's.
The scene was illuminated by:
Three hanging lanterns suspended on ropes of pearls.
To either side there were arrayed:
Many standing lanterns of exquisite workmanship.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yüeh-niang occupied the places of honour, while the other members of the household, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, arranged themselves on the two sides. All of them were dressed in brocaded clothing with white satin jackets and blue skirts, except for Wu Yüeh-niang, who wore a full-sleeved robe of scarlet brocade and a sable cloak over a flower-sprigged skirt, while on her head:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;
A phoenix hairpin was half askew.
Ch'un-mei, Yu-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, stood in attendance playing the psaltery and sounding the clappers as they performed Lantern Festival songs. A separate table was set up on the eastern side of the room for Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi.
The usual:
Three soups and five courses,
were served.
Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits were provided just in season.[4]
Hsiao-yü, Yüan-hsiao, Hsiao-luan, and Hsiu-ch'un came and went to pour the wine.
Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, was unable to participate in the party but sat on a chair beneath the loggia, cracking melon seeds with her teeth. She waited until someone at the feast ordered more wine and then, raising her voice, called out, "Lai-an! Hua-fung! The mistress needs more heated wine for the party. Fetch it, and be quick about it. The lousy jailbirds! Not a single one of them is available to wait on them. I don't know where they could have gotten to."
Who should appear at this juncture but Hua-t'ung, who came in carrying the heated wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing took him to task, saying, "You lousy slave! Not a single one of you is available to wait on us. Where could you have gotten to? You lousy slave! You're lucky to escape a beating."
The pageboy came out and complained to Hui-lien, "Sister, just who had gone off anywhere, that you should tell tales to the master, make such a fuss about it, and provoke him to curse me?"
"When they called for wine up there," said Hui-lien, "who told you not to be here to wait on them? What's it got to do with me? If he doesn't curse you, who should he curse?"
"The ground around here was nice and clean," said Hua-t'ung, "but now the whole area is covered with your melon seeds. If the master sees it, I'll get cursed all over again."
"You lousy jailbird!" said Hui-lien.
"Like a loan taken out in the sixth month,
You'll get paid back soon enough.[5]
What's the big deal? If you had to:
Carve the eyes of a Buddhist idol,[6]
or something difficult like that, your complaint might be justified. If you don't want to sweep them up, leave them where they are. I'll have another pageboy do the sweeping. And if Father should ask me about it, I'll just tell him what happened."
"Ai-ya, Sister!" exclaimed Hua-t'ung. "Take it easy, will you! What do you want to quarrel with me for, anyway?"
Thereupon he fetched a broom and swept up the melon seeds for her. Sung Hui-lien continued to sit outside, cracking melon seeds with her teeth, as before. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, from his vantage point at the head of the feast, noticed that his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, was out of wine and called this to P'an Chin-lien's attention. The latter hastily came down from her place, poured out a full cup of wine, and offered it to Ching-chi with a giggle, saying, "Son-in-law, your father has commanded it. Whatever you do, drain this cup of wine for me."
While accepting the wine, on the one hand, Ching-chi took the opportunity to give her a prolonged sidelong glance, on the other, saying, "Fifth Lady, please make yourself easy. Let me drink it at my leisure."
Contriving to cast Ching-chi into the shadow by interposing her body between him and the lamplight, the woman held the wine in her left hand until Ching-chi reached for it and then proceeded to give the back of his hand a pinch with her right hand. Ching-chi continued, for his part, to direct his gaze at the rest of the company while, at the same time, giving Chin-lien's little foot a playful kick under the table.
The woman smiled and said in a low voice, "You crazy oily mouth! If your father-in-law were to see what you're up to, what would you do?"
Gentle reader take note: The two of them had no thought for anything but their own surreptitious fun and games and remained quite oblivious to the presence of the woman, Sung Hui-lien, who observed their every move so clearly through the latticework in the window that she might well have exclaimed:
"Is it not delightful?"
Truly:
Those actually involved are befuddled:[7]
It is the bystander who sees clearly.[8]
Although the people at the feast had not noticed anything, Hui-lien was enabled by the apertures in the window lattice and the light of the lamp to see every detail.
From her mouth no word was uttered but
In her heart she thought to herself,
"Ordinarily, around the likes of us, she's always careful to protest her own virtue. Who would have thought that on the sly she's been carrying on an affair with that young scamp all the time. Now that I've caught her out at something, if she ever gives me a hard time in the future, I'll have something to say to her."
Truly:
From a white rose blooming
in someone's garden,
She has secretly purloined
two or three sprigs.
Hidden within her silken sleeves
they cannot be seen;
Their fragrance is first detected
by the butterflies.
After the wine drinking had continued for some time, a servant from Ying Po-chüeh's place unexpectedly arrived with an invitation that Hsi-men Ch'ing come over to enjoy the lanterns and have a drink.
"You all:
Enjoy yourselves to your heart's content,"
Hsi-men Ch'ing enjoined Yüeh-niang. "I'm going over to Brother Ying the Second's place for a drink."
The two pageboys, Tai-an and P'ing-an, accompanied him when he left.
Yüeh-niang and her sisterhood of wives continued to enjoy the pleasures of the feast for a while when, behold:
The silver river is clear and shallow;
The pearly dipper sparkles and glitters.[9]
The perfect orb of a resplendent moon rises in the east,
Illuminating the courtyard till it is as bright as day.
Among the women there were some who:
Returning to their rooms, changed their clothes.
Some who:
Underneath the moon, adjusted their coiffures.
And some who:
By glow of lantern light, stuck flowers in their hair.
The trio composed of Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, who were also joined by Hui-lien, went out in front of the reception hall to watch Ch'en Ching-chi set off the fireworks, while Li Chiao-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh followed Yüeh-niang's lead in returning to the rear compound.
"Father's not at home today," Chin-lien remarked to her two companions. "Why don't we ask our elder sister if we can go out for an excursion in the streets?"
Hui-lien, who was standing by their side, interjected, "If you do go, take me along with you."
"If you want to come too," said Chin-lien, "go back to the rear compound and ask the First Lady about it. Ask the Second Lady too and see if she wants to go. We'll wait for you here."
Hui-lien hastened off to the rear compound.
"She's not up to the job," said Yü-lou. "I'd better go along and make the request myself."
"I'm going back to my room to put on something more to wear," said Li P'ing-erh. "It'll be cold by the time we get back. It's likely to be late at night."
"Sister Li," said Chin-lien. "If you've got an extra cloak handy, bring one out for me to wear. It will save me a trip back to my room."
Li P'ing-erh nodded her assent and went off on her errand. This left Chin-lien all by herself to watch Ching-chi set off the fireworks. When she saw that no one else was about, she stepped right up and gave him a pinch, saying with a smile, "Son-in-law, if that thin clothing is really all you've got on, you must be cold aren't you?"
But she had failed to notice that the head servant, Lai-chao's, boy, Little Iron Rod, was giggling and dancing about right in front of them, tugging at Ching-chi's clothing and begging, "Master Son-in-law, give me some fire-crackers to set off."
Ching-chi was afraid the boy would interrupt the proceedings, so he could hardly wait to give him a couple of "Lantern Festival crackers"[10] and thus induce him to go outside and play.
Thereupon:
Engaging in badinage and repartee,
he proceeded to flirt with Chin-lien, saying, "If you've noticed what thin clothing I've got on, what are you going to do about it? How about giving me something of your own to wear?"
"You lousy short-life!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You've gotten away with enough as it is. You were playing footsie with me just now, and I didn't say anything about it. And now you've got the colossal nerve to ask me for something of mine to wear. I'm not the one you're after. Why should I give you something of mine to wear?"
"If you refuse, that's all there is to it," said Ching-chi. "What's the idea of trying to scare me with such trumped up charges?"
"You lousy short-life!" responded Chin-lien. "You're just like:
The sparrow on the city battlements:
A creature quite inured to such alarms."
As they were speaking, Yü-lou came out again, along with Hui-lien, and reported to Chin-lien, "The First Lady is feeling poorly in her present condition and Hsi-men Ta-chieh is not in the mood, so they won't come. The rest of us are to go ahead as long as we try to be back by a reasonable hour. Li Chiao-erh's legs are bothering her, so she won't come. When Sun Hsüeh-o saw that our elder sister wasn't coming, she was afraid Father would be annoyed with her if he happened to come home and also refused to go out."
"So none of them want to come," said Chin-lien. "You and I and Sister Li might as well go by ourselves then. If Father comes home while we're out, let him curse anyone he wants to. Better yet, let's get that little piece Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao from the master suite, Lan-hsiang from your place, and Ying-ch'un from Sister Li's place, and take them all along with us. Then if Father comes home and wants to know what's going on, she'll have even more explaining to do."
Hsiao-yü came up, at this juncture, and said, "Since my mistress isn't going, let me go along with the rest of you."
"Tell your mistress you're coming," said Yü-lou. "We'll wait for you up front."
After some time, Hsiao-yü came back out after asking Yüeh-niang's permission with a happy giggle on her face.
Thereupon the three women were ready to set out with their crowd of male and female retainers in tow. The two pageboys, Lai-an and Hua-t'ung, accompanied them with hanging, gauze-covered lanterns. The son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, stood on the mounting platform setting off fireworks and igniting firecrackers to amuse the ladies.
"Master Son-in-law," Sung Hui-lien said to him, "whatever happens, wait a minute for me, will you? The ladies are taking me with them on their ramble. I'm going to my room to do up my hair. I'll be right back."
"But we're ready to start right now," Ching-chi protested.
"If you don't wait for me," said Hui-lien, "I'll be annoyed with you for the rest of my life."
Thereupon she went to her room where she changed into an outfit consisting of a jacket of green silk material, shot with red, that opened down the middle, over a white drawnwork skirt. She also did up her hair in a red, gold lame kerchief, pasted three gold-flecked turquoise beauty patches on her fore-head, and put on a pair of gold lantern earrings.
Thus attired, she came out to join the rest of the party in the traditional Lantern Festival custom of "walking off the hundred ailments."[11]
By the light of the moonbeams,

They appeared to be goddesses.
The three ladies were all wearing white satin jackets and brocaded vests. On their heads:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;
setting off their:
Powdered faces and ruby lips.
Ch'en Ching-chi and Lai-hsing, one on the left and the other on the right, set off:
"Slow-blooming lotus blossoms,"
"Golden thread chrysanthemums,"
"Ten-foot high orchids," and
"Brighter than moonlights,"[12]
as they proceeded on their way.
When they emerged into the marketplace on the main street, behold:
The fragrant dust never settles,
The revelers swarm like ants,[13]
Firecrackers thunder,
Lantern lights shimmer,
The din of flutes and drums resounds,
The merrymaking is at its height.
The bystanders to left and right were treated to the spectacle of a contingent of gauze-covered lanterns lighting the way for a bevy of men and women, all of whom were:
Sporting red and trailing green.[14]
Assuming that they came from the household of some noble family, they:
Scarcely dared to gaze upon them,[15] and
Endeavored to keep out of their way.
One moment Sung Hui-lien was saying, "Master Son-in-law, set off a rocket[16] for me, will you?"
The next moment she was saying, "Master Son-in-law, set off some 'Lantern Festival crackers' for me, will you?"
One moment she was dropping some item of her costume jewelry and then picking it up again.
The next moment she was losing her shoe and then leaning against a certain party while she fiddled with it.
Trying first this and then that,
her sole concern was to carry on a flirtation with Ch'en Ching-chi.
Meng Yü-lou could abide it no longer and took her to task, demanding, "How come you're the only one who keeps losing her shoe?"
"She's afraid it's muddy underfoot," said Yü-hsiao, "so she's wearing a pair of the Fifth Lady's shoes over her own."
"Tell her to come here and let me see," said Yü-lou. "Can she really be wearing the Fifth Lady's shoes?"
"She did borrow a pair of my shoes the other day," said Chin-lien. "Who would have thought the preternatural bitch would put them on over her own?"
Hui-lien thereupon hitched up her skirt for Yü-lou's benefit and revealed that she was, indeed, wearing two pairs of red shoes on her feet, underneath ankle leggings the ends of which were tied in place with lengths of sand-green cord. Yü-lou did not say another word on the subject.
Before long they had traversed the main street and arrived in the Lantern Market.
"As long as we're here," Chin-lien said to Yü-lou, "why don't we go pay a visit to Sister Li's house on Lion Street?"
Thereupon, they instructed Hua-t'ung and Lai-an to go in front with their lanterns and then proceeded to wend their way along Lion Street. The pageboys went ahead and knocked on the gate.
Old Mother Feng had already gone to bed for the night. There were two young girls that were being offered for sale as indentured servants sleeping on the same k'ang with her. Old Mother Feng bestirred herself to open the door and usher in the crowd of lady visitors. After which she poked up the fire in the brazier, put on the teakettle, picked up a jug, and started out into the street to fetch wine for the company.
"Wait a minute, Old Feng," said Meng Yü-lou. "There's no need to go out after wine. We've had more than enough to eat and drink at home. If you've got any tea handy, just pour us a cup or two, that's all."
"If you're going to serve people wine," said Chin-lien, "the least you could do is order up a feast to go with it."
"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "a mere bottle or two will be;
Hardly enough to discolour the water.[17]
That will never suffice. You'll have to lay in a full jug or two."
"She's only kidding," said Yü-lou. "There's no need to go out for anything. Just serve us some tea."
Only then did the old woman come to a standstill.
"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "why don't you come over to my place for a visit once in a while? I really have no idea what you do with yourself all day over here."
"Mistress," the old woman said, "you can see for yourself. I've got these two karmic encumbrances on my hands with nobody else to look after them."
Yü-lou then asked, "Who is putting the two serving girls up for sale?"
"One of them," the old woman replied, "was a chambermaid in a household in the Northern Quarter. She's twelve years old, and they only want five taels of silver for her. The other was the wife of a retainer in the household of Usher Wang of the Court of State Ceremonial. Her husband ran away so her master has impounded the fret indicating her status as a married woman and had her taken away to be put up for sale. He wants ten taels of silver for her."
"Let me tell you something, Old Mother," said Yü-lou. "I know someone who's in the market for such wares, and you ought to be able to turn a tidy profit for yourself."
"Third Lady," said the old woman, "who have you got in mind? Tell me who it is."
"At the present time," said Yü-lou, "the Second Lady has only Yüan-hsiao to wait upon her, so she's shorthanded. She's looking for a more mature serving girl to work for her. You might as well offer to sell her the older of these two."
"How old is this girl?" she went on to ask.
"She was born in the year of the ox," the old woman replied, "so this year she should be sixteen."
As they spoke, the tea was brought in and everyone had some to drink. Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, and Hui-lien took the opportunity to make a complete tour of the premises, from front to back. They also went up to the second-story room that overlooked the street, pushed open the windows, and surveyed the scene.
Ch'en Ching-chi pressed them, saying, "It's already late. As soon as you've had your look, we'd better start on our way home."
"You crazy short-life!" protested Chin-lien. "You're pushing us so hard:
Our arms and legs never stop moving.
What's the rush?"
Thereupon, it was not until Ch'un-mei and the others had been called downstairs that they were ready to start. Old Mother Feng accompanied them out the door.
At this juncture Li P'ing-erh bethought herself to ask, "Where has P'ing-an gotten to?"
"He hasn't shown up yet today," the old woman replied. "Though it's:
The third watch in the middle of the night,
he'll keep me waiting up to:
Open the gates and close the doors,[18]
for him."
"Today," pointed out Lai-an, "P'ing-an accompanied Father to Second Master Ying's place."
"Old Mother," Li P'ing-erh enjoined her, "just lock up and go to bed. Most likely he won't even show up and you won't have to lose any sleep. Come over to the house and report to me first thing in the morning. You're as bad as:
The abbot of the Stone Buddha Monastery:[19]
Every time you're asked to officiate you make excuses."[20]
"Don't I know who my mistress is?" the old woman exclaimed. "I'd never presume to make excuses to you."
"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "There's no need for you to:
Bandy words about it.[21]
Just see that you deliver that serving girl to the Second Lady first thing in the morning."
At the conclusion of this exchange they watched as the old woman closed the outer gate. Only then did the flock of men and women set out for home.
As they approached their own gateway they became aware of the voice of Auntie Han, the wife of Mohammedan Han, who rented a room on the street front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's property. Her husband was on night duty with the staff of the eunuch in charge of the local Imperial Stables. While at home alone she had joined some neighbours in "walking off the hundred ailments" and returned to her dwelling in a drunken state, only to learn that late that night someone had cut his way through her front door and stolen her dog. Some other things were missing too. She was sitting right in the street engaged in a drunken tirade.
The flock of women had no sooner come to a halt than Chin-lien directed Lai-an, "You go call Auntie Han over here so we can find out what's going on."
Before long she was haled before them and asked, "What's all this about?"
Auntie Han:
Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
Stepping forward and saluting them with folded hands,
bowed twice and said, "If you three ladies will be so good as to listen, I'll tell you all about it from the beginning. There is a song to the tune 'Playful Children' that testifies to this:
It was an auspicious occasion in an era of great peace,
the night of the Lantern Festival,"
etc., etc.
When Yü-lou and the others had heard her out, they all reached into their sleeves and came up with some small change and holiday delicacies to give her. They then summoned Lai-an and instructed him, "Tell Master Ch'en to see that she gets home all right."
Ch'en Ching-chi's sole concern at the moment was to carry on a flirtation with Hui-lien, so he refused to help her on her way.
Chin-lien then directed Lai-an to see that she got home safely and instructed him, "Tell her to come to the house first thing in the morning to do the laundry. I'll speak to your father about it and get him to take appropriate measures on her behalf."
At this, Auntie Han returned home with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.
Yü-lou and the others had barely passed beyond Auntie Han's door when who should they see but the wife of Pen the Fourth, wearing a red jacket, a jet silk vest, and a jade-coloured skirt, with her hair done up in a gold lame kerchief.
She stepped forward with a giggle and said, "Many felicitations. Where have you three ladies been on your excursion? If you see fit to do so, deign to enter my humble abode and permit me to offer you some tea."
"We only stopped just now because of that youngster's bawling," said Yü-lou. "We felt obliged to ask her what was going on. Thank you for your hospitality but it's already late and we'd better not come in."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pen the Fourth's wife. "You three ladies are:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door.[22]
No doubt you find it laughable enough that such mean folk as ourselves can come up with a cup of tea."
She dragged them into the house as though her life depended upon it. It so happened that there were representations of the Goddess Kuan-yin delivering sentient beings from the eight disasters, [23] and of His Holiness Kuan Yü, the God of War,[24] on ritual display outside the dwelling. A lantern in the shape of a snowflake was suspended over the front door. When they lifted aside the portiere they found her thirteen-year-old daughter, Chang-chieh, inside. There were two gauze-covered lanterns standing on a dining table on which a complete complement of seasonal delicacies were arrayed.
Having offered the three ladies a seat, she hastily called Chang-chieh over to kowtow to the visitors and serve them tea. Yü-lou and Chin-lien gave her a pair of artificial flowers apiece and Li P'ing-erh pulled a handkerchief out of her sleeve and also presented her with a mace of silver to buy melon seeds with. This pleased Pen the Fourth's wife so much that she kowtowed in gratitude again and again. But she was unable to detain them any longer.
Yü-lou and the others got up and made their departure. When they arrived at the main gate of their residence the pageboy, Lai-hsing, was there to greet them.
"Has your father come home or not?" Chin-lien asked him.
"Father hasn't come home yet," Lai-hsing responded.
The three ladies lingered at the gateway to watch as Ch'en Ching-chi set off three "ten-foot high chrysanthemums," a single "great smoky orchid," and a single "gold lamp on a silver stand."[25] Only then did they return to their quarters inside the compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not arrive home until the fourth watch. Truly:
Once drunk, one does not even know that night has fallen;
Let the bright moon set, if it will, behind the western chamber.[26]
To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi had seized the opportunity provided by "walking off the hundred ailments" to flirt with Chin-lien and the other women all along the way. Moreover, from the manner in which he and Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, were:
Talking back and forth,
it was obvious that by now both of them had the same idea in mind.
The next morning, when Ching-chi had finished his ablutions, he did not report to the shop but headed straight for Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound. Whom should he find there but Li Chiao-erh and Chin-lien, who were seated around the bed table on the k'ang, keeping Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, company. Tea had just been served. Yüeh-niang had withdrawn into her Buddhist chapel to burn incense. The young scamp stepped forward, saluted the company with a bow, and sat down.
"Son-in-law, a fine person you are!" Chin-lien said to him. "Yesterday, when you were asked to take Auntie Han home, you refused to budge, and we had to send the pageboy to do the job instead. Moreover, you were constantly:
Engaging in badinage and repartee,
with that servant's wife. Who knows what you were up to? When your mother-in-law is through burning her incense, just wait and see whether I tell her about it or not."
"How can you say such things?" rejoined Ching-chi. "Yesterday your son very nearly:
Came down with a crick in the back.[27]

I accompanied you the whole way on your excursion and then we went to the house on Lion Street. How many li is it there and back do you suppose? I was already worn out with all the walking, and then you wanted me to take on Mohammedan Han's wife as well. So what if you did have to get the pageboy to see her home? I'd barely gotten to sleep before it was daylight again. It was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."
As they were speaking, Yüeh-niang came back from her incense burning and Ching-chi made her a bow.
"What was Auntie Han doing yesterday," Yüeh-niang demanded, "indulging in such a drunken tirade?"
"She had been out walking off the hundred ailments,' " Ching-chi explained, "when someone cut his way through her front door and took her dog. So she sat down right in the street, weeping and wailing and cursing away. This morning when her husband came home he gave her a good drubbing, as a result of which she isn't up even yet."
"It's lucky we came along when we did and persuaded her to go inside," said Chin-lien. "Otherwise, if Father had come home and run into her, what sort of impression would that have made?"
When they had finished speaking, Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all went into Yüeh-niang's room to have some tea. Ching-chi also took tea with them.
Afterwards, when they went back to their quarters, Hsi-men Ta-chieh had a few things to say to Ching-chi.
"You death-defying jailbird!" she railed at him. "What were you doing:
'Engaging in badinage and repartee,'
with Lai-wang's wife? If word of any such thing were to come to Father's attention, even if that whore escaped unscathed, you'd be lucky to find a place to die in!"
That day Hsi-men Ch'ing had spent the night in Li P'ing-erh's room and was late getting up. Who should appear at this juncture but Battalion Commander Ching Chung, who had just been promoted to a concurrent position as military director-in-chief of another jurisdiction and had come to pay a courtesy call. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had just arisen from bed, hastily combed his hair, put on his hairnet, straightened his clothes, and came out to entertain his guest in the main reception room, simultaneously dispatching P'ing-an to the rear compound to fetch some tea.
Sung Hui-lien was in the courtyard outside the master suite just then, engaged in a game of jacks with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü for the privilege of spanking the loser.[28] They had been:
Horsing around till they were all in a heap.
Hsiao-yü was riding astride Yü-hsiao, who was face down on the ground, and laughing as she cursed her, saying, "You lousy whore! You've forfeited a spanking and now you won't let yourself be spanked."
She then called out to Hui-lien, "Come over here and hold on to one of the whore's legs. If she doesn't want a spanking I'll give her a poke."
Just as they were in the midst of their fun, who should appear but P'ing-an, who called out, "Sister Yü-hsiao, Old Man Ching is in the front compound and I've been sent to fetch the tea."
Yü-hsiao didn't pay any attention to him but continued her playful tussle with Hsiao-yü as though nothing had happened.
P'ing-an pressed his case, saying, "He's been sitting out there all this time already."
"You crazy jailbird!" interjected Sung Hui-lien. "If Father wants tea, go ask whomever's on duty in the kitchen for it. Why hang around here bothering us? We're only responsible back here for preparing the tea for the master suite. It's not our job to take care of the front compound."
P'ing-an accordingly went to the kitchen where the person on duty that day was Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang.
"You crazy jailbird!" Hui-hsiang protested. "I've got my hands full with the cooking in here. Just go ask for two cups of tea back at the master suite. Why insist on getting your tea from me?"
"I've already been back there," said P'ing-an, "but they wouldn't give me any tea. Sister Hui-lien said, 'That's the responsibility of whoever's on duty in the kitchen. Go ask her for it.' She wouldn't do anything about it."
"That lousy slattern!" Hui-hsiang cursed. "I suppose she's made up her mind that she's to be on the staff of the master suite while I'm preordained to slave in the kitchen. I'm in the midst of preparing the food for the whole household, and I also have to stir-fry some vegetarian fare for the First Lady. How many hands do you think I've got to spare? If you think about it, all she has to do is pour out the tea but she insists on singling me out for the job. As though I were at her beck and call! If the tea never gets served, so be it. I'm certainly not going to take care of it."
"Old Man Ching has been sitting out there all this time already," protested P'ing-an. "Sister, hurry up and give me some tea to take out to him. If you delay any further you'll bring Father's curses down on your head."
Thereupon, while:
This place tried to foist the job on that;
That place tried to foist the job on this,
until nothing got done for half a day. By the time P'ing-an had waited for Yü-hsiao to supply condiments and teaspoons and was finally able to bring the tea out, Director Ching had been sitting in the reception room for a long time. He tried to make his departure more than once but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not let him go.
Then the tea turned out to be so cold it was not fit to drink. Hsi-men Ch'ing roundly cursed P'ing-an and had to order him to replace the original tea before Director Ching finally drank it and went his way.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside he demanded to know, "Who was it who made the tea today?"
"It was made by the person on duty in the kitchen," said P'ing-an.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the master suite and complained to her, "What sort of tea was that to serve to a guest today? Go to the kitchen, find out what servant's wife is on duty, and then bring her out here for interrogation and give her a few strokes with the bamboo."
"It should be Hui-hsiang on duty today," said Hsiao-yü.
"That splay-legged whore is asking for it!" Yüeh-niang said in some consternation. "How can she continue to turn out that sort of tea?"
At the same time she sent Hsiao-yü to fetch Hui-hsiang, made her kneel down in the courtyard, and asked how many strokes she should be given.
"It was only because I was busy cooking," Hui-hsiang protested, "and had to stir-fry your vegetarian fare into the bargain, that I had my hands full and the tea got a little cold."
Yüeh-niang berated her for a while and then permitted her to get up.
"From now on," she commanded, "whenever your father has guests to entertain in the front compound, let Yü-hsiao and Hui-lien make the tea back here. Whoever is on duty in the kitchen should only be responsible for preparing the food and tea for the household as a whole."
When Hui-hsiang returned to the kitchen she was:
Unable to contain her chagrin.[29]
She only waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing had left the premises before coming back in a rage to seek out Hui-lien. Pointing her finger at her, she launched into a tirade of abuse.
"You lousy whore! I hope you're satisfied, that's all. I suppose you're preordained to be in favour and serve on the staff of the master suite while I'm just to be a woman who slaves in the kitchen. You insisted on the pageboy's singling me out to make the tea. As though I were at your beck and call! As for you and me:
The rice is already cooked.[30]
You know it and I know it.[31]
The cricket won't eat the flesh of a warty toad,
Because both inhabit the same spadeful of earth.[32]
In any case, if you're not Father's concubine, that's all there is to it; and even if you are his concubine, I'm not afraid of you."
"You're completely off the mark," retorted Hui-lien. "If you didn't make the tea right and Father took exception to it, what's that got to do with me? How dare you come here and vent your spleen on me?"
When Hui-hsiang heard these words she became more enraged than ever and railed at her, "You lousy whore! How is it that when you did your best to get me a caning just now I wasn't ordered to be beaten after all? When you were working for the Ts'ai family, the lovers you took couldn't be counted, and now that you're here, you're still up to your old tricks."
"If I've taken a lover, you've never seen it," replied Hui-lien. "Don't talk such stinking rot. And as for you, Sister, you're not exactly:
An immaculate nun,[33]
yourself."
"Who says I'm not an immaculate nun?" retorted Hui-hsiang. "And if I chose to put my legs in the air, I'd do a better job of it than any whore like you, I can tell you. I didn't choose to start this tale-telling but where men are concerned:
If you've had one, you've had a bushelful.[34]
There isn't a man out at the front of the compound you haven't been after. You may think nobody knows what you're up to behind their backs. The way you talk when you think you're safe, even the ladies of the house mean nothing to you, let alone their inferiors."
"What have I said behind anyone's back?" demanded Hui-lien. "And who means nothing to me? You can give me as hard a time as you like. I'm not afraid of you."
"You've got someone to stand up for you," replied Hui-hsiang. "That's why you're not afraid."
The two of them were still mixing it up when Hsiao-yü fetched Yüeh-niang, who ordered them apart. "You lousy little stinkers! Why don't you go about your business? What are you mixing it up over, anyway? If your master gets wind of it there'll be another ruckus for sure. The last time there was no caning administered but if you carry on any longer there will be."
"If I get a single stroke," said Hui-lien, "I'll hook that whore's guts out right through her mouth before I'm ready to call it quits! I'll put my life up against yours any day; what's it to me, even if we both have to leave the house?"
So saying, she marched off to the front compound.
After this, Sung Hui-lien's conduct became more outrageous than ever. Relying on her clandestine affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she:
Took no further account,[35]
of anyone in the household, high or low. Every day she could be found hobnobbing with Yü-lou, Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Ch'un-mei in their daily pastimes.
That same day Old Mother Feng brought over the twelve-year-old serving girl, as she had promised. She took her to Li P'ing-erh's quarters first, to be looked over, and then escorted her to Li Chiao-erh's place. Li Chiao-erh bought her for five taels of silver in order to serve in her apartment. But no more of this.
Truly:
The plum blossom licentiously displays its springtide feelings;
Undaunted by the threat of Aunt Feng's[36] stern commands.[37]
A poem testifies to this:

Outside the palace a craze for hunting, inside a craze for sex;[38]
If one dabbles a bit in such things, what's the harm in it?
In the morning he rides forth upon an embossed saddle;
At nightfall, he returns to scent of rouge and powder.

Candles blaze in silver sconces
Wine is heated in the jars
The guests are merry and their laughter never ceases.
Untrammeled hips sway as the willows of Zhang Tai
Unpainted lips sing as the spring in the imperial gardens
From the fragrance of their attire we know their will with us
Flowers fall from their hair and are gathered in silence.
If it were not for the delights of love
Would Han be sober after drinking?
The day came when the moon shines in the heavens and lanterns shine upon the earth. Ximen Qing had all his lanterns set out and a splendid feast prepared in the great hall. On the sixteenth day of the first month the whole household assembled, with Ximen Qing and Wu Yueniang in the place of honour, and the other ladies all beautifully dressed. The four maids who acted as the musicians of the family played and sang many songs about the lanterns. A small table was laid specially for Chen Jingji. The food was exquisite and the fruits appropriate to the season. Four maids served the wine, and Laiwang's wife Song Huilian sat on a chair outside the door, chewing melon seeds, waiting for the wine to be brought from the kitchen. It was her duty, when wine was wanted in the hall, to send Laian and Huatong to the kitchen to fetch it. She said: "The rascals have all run away; there is no one here." Then Ximen Qing saw Huatong bringing the wine, and asked him where he had been, saying he deserved a whipping. When the boy came out of the hall, he complained to Huilian.
"Sister," he said, "why did you tell Father stories about me? I haven't been away at all."
"I can't help that," Huilian said, "they called for wine and you were not there. If you are not to blame, who is?"
"Sister," said the boy, "it is very nice and tidy here, yet you are throwing down melon seeds. If Father sees it he will be angry again.
"Don't you bother about me, you young rascal," Huilian said. "If youwon't sweep them away, I'll tell one of the other boys, and if Father sees them, I'll take all the responsibility."
"Oh, don't make a fuss about it," the boy said. "I'll sweep them away for you."
Ximen Qing saw that his son-in-law Chen Jingji had no wine and told Pan Jinlian to give him some. She stood up quickly, poured out a cup of wine and smilingly handed it to Jingji.
"Brother," she said, "Father says I must give you some wine. Now you must drink it."
Jingji took the cup and looked slyly at Jinlian. "Fifth Mother, please don't trouble. I will drink it."
Jinlian, with the light between Ximen Qing and herself, squeezed Jingji's hand as he took the cup from her. He pretended to be paying attention to the others but touched her tiny feet.
"What shall we do if Father sees us?" Jinlian whispered with a smile. They made love in front of the others, without anyone knowing what they were about. But Huilian, who was standing outside the window, saw quite clearly everything that passed between them.
"This woman," she thought, "is always trying to get the better of me, and here she is, behaving like this with that young man. Next time she treats me badly, I shall know what to say."
They had been drinking for some time when a message came from Ying Bojue inviting Ximen Qing to go with him to see the lanterns. Ximen told Yueniang to enjoy herself with the others, and he, with Daian and Ping'an in attendance, went to join Bojue.
Yueniang and her companions went on with their feast till the stars grew dim and the full moon, rising in the east, made the courtyard bright as day. Then some of the women went to their rooms to change their dresses; others adorned themselves in the light of the moon, and others put flowers in their hair in the lantern light. Meng Yulou, Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Huilian stood in front of the great hall to watch Chen Jingji set off the fireworks.
Li Jiao'er, Sun Xue'e and Ximen Dajie went with Yueniang to the inner court.
"He is out," Jinlian said to the others. "Shall we ask the Great Lady to let us go to the street?"
"If you go," said Huilian, "please take me with you."
"If you wish to go, you must ask the Great Lady," Jinlian said. "If she and the Second Lady would like to go too, we will wait here for them."
Huilian was about to go to the inner court but Yulou said: "She will do no good. I will go myself and ask them." Li Ping'er said: "I am going to my room to find a warmer cloak. It will be cold as the night gets older."
"Sister," Jinlian said: "if you have a cloak to spare, bring one for me. It will save my going back to my room." Li Ping'er promised, and went away.
Only Jinlian was left to watch Chen Jingji setting off the fireworks. She went over to him and pinched him slightly. "Brother," she said, laughing, "don't you feel cold with such thin clothes on?"
A boy called Little Iron Rod was jumping about begging Jingji to give him some fireworks. The young man thought that here was an opportunity. He gave the lad a few fireworks and told him to go and set them off outside the gate.
"So you think my clothes are too thin," he said to Jinlian. "Have you anything warmer for me?"
"You are determined to get something out of me," Jinlian said. "You touched my feet, and I did not complain. Now you have the audacity to ask me for clothes. I don't belong to you. Why should I give you clothes?"
"If you won't give me any, well and good," Jingji said, "but why try to frighten me?"
"Oh, you're like the birds that gather on the city walls, always afraid of something."
They were talking when Yulou and Huilian came back. "The Great Lady," Yulou said, "says she will not go out because she is not very well but we may go if we promise to come back in good time. Li Jiao'er has a bad leg and she doesn't feel like walking."
"Well," Jinlian said, "if they won't go, we must go with the Sixth Lady; then, if he comes back, we shall be the only ones to blame. Do you think we should take Chunmei, Yuxiao, your maid Lanxiang, and the Sixth Lady's Yingchun?"

Xiaoyu came up and asked if she might go, and Yulou said she might if she obtained her mistress's permission. This she did, and came back to them, smiling.
Then the three ladies set off with their maids. The two boys Laian and Huatong escorted them with lanterns. Jingji set off several fireworks on the mounting stone.
"Uncle," Huilian cried, "wait a moment for me. I am just going to my room for a second."
"We are off now," Jingji said.
"If you don't wait for me, I will never love you again," Huilian cried. She ran to her room and changed into a dress of red silk with a white skirt, set a red and gold kerchief on her head, pins and flowers in her hair. Finally she put on a pair of gold lantern-shaped earrings. Then she joined the ladies in their walk "to gain immunity from the hundred sicknesses." The ladies all wore white silk gowns. They had masses of pearls and flowers on their heads. With their white faces and red lips they looked like angels in the moonlight.
Chen Jingji and Laixing walked beside them, setting off fireworks as they went along. There were lotuses that slowly threw forth fire, golden thread chrysanthemum, and orchids ten feet high. When they came to the street, there was a never-ending stream of incense, and the revelers were as plentiful as ants. Crackers exploded with a sound like thunder and the lanterns were bright with a thousand different hues. Flutes and drums sounded wildly. It was a splendid festival.
When the people in the street saw a procession advancing with lanterns of various colours, they imagined that it must have come from some noble household, and gave way immediately. "Uncle," Huilian said, "light a rocket for me." And a little later: "Uncle, set off a full moon for me." First, her ornaments fell off; then she lost a shoe, and had to wait while someone helped her on with it again. She jumped about and joked incessantly with Chen Jingji. Yulou did not approve of this behavior.
"Why do your shoes keep coming off?" she asked.
Yuxiao said, "She was afraid of soiling her own shoes, so she put a pair of the Fifth Lady's over them." Yulou demanded that she should come and show her feet.
"She asked me yesterday to give her a pair of my shoes," Jinlian said, "but I never dreamed the scamp would think of putting them on outside her own."
When Huilian pulled up her skirt, Yulou saw that she was indeed wearing two pairs of red shoes, bound to her ankles by green laces. She said no more.
After a while they crossed the street and went to the lantern fair. "Let us go first to the Sixth Lady's house in Lion Street," Jinlian said to Yulou. She ordered the boys to take them there. Old woman Feng had gone to bed and two girls who had been entrusted to her to sell were asleep with her but when the boys knocked at the door, she got up hastily and opened it, and the ladies went in.
The old woman opened the stove to boil some water, then took a jar and was about to go out to buy some wine but Yulou told her they did not wish for any wine, they had had so much at home before they came. "But we shall be glad to have some tea if you will give us some," she said.
"If you invite people to take wine with you, you must give them something to eat," Jinlian said.
"Yes," said Li Ping'er, "and if you think of giving us wine, we shall want a couple of large jars. No small ones for us!"
Yulou told the old woman that they were only teasing her. "Don't go," she said, "just make some tea for us." Then the old woman decided not to go.
"Why is it so long since you came to see me?" Li Ping'er asked old woman Feng. "What are you doing, these days?"
"You see these two girls," the old woman said. "Who is there to look after them if I go out?" Yulou asked who was selling them.
"One is a maid belonging to a neighbour," the old woman said. "She is thirteen years old, and they only want five taels of silver for her. The other is the wife of a servant in the Wang household. Her husband ran away, so they sent her to me. They ask ten taels for her."
"I know someone who wants a girl, so there is a chance for you," Yulou said.
"Who is that, Third Lady?" the old woman asked.
"The Second Lady has only one maid," Yulou said, "and that, of course, is not enough for her. She needs someone rather older, so you can sell the older of the two to her. How old is she?" The old woman said that she was seventeen. Tea was brought and she served it to the ladies.
Chunmei, Yuxiao and Ximen Dajie went upstairs to look out over the street. Then Chen Jingji warned the ladies that it was getting late, and almost time to return. Jinlian told him to mind his own business. However, she called down Chunmei and the others, and they left the house. As the old woman was seeing them to the door Li Ping'er asked where Ping'an was.
"I haven't seen him all day," the old woman said, "but then I often have to wait till midnight for him."
Laian told them that the boy had gone with his master to Ying's house.
"Lock your door, and go to bed," Li Ping'er said to the old woman, "he will not be back tonight. Come and see me tomorrow and bring the maid for the Second Lady. You know you are like the Abbot of the Stone Buddha Temple: you never do anything unless you are made." They waited till she had locked the gate, and then went home again.
When they reached their own gate, they found a woman called Han, the wife of a Mohammedan, making a terrible to-do. Her husband was away on duty with a Chamberlain of the Royal Stables, and she had been out on the walk to cure the hundred illnesses. She had come home drunk. Now she said that somebody had broken open her door, stolen her dog, and a lot of things were missing. She was sitting at the side of the road and cursing everybody. The ladies stopped and Jinlian told Laian to bring the woman over to them to tell them what was amiss. The woman came, made reverence and told her story. The ladies gave her some money and fruits, and Yulou told Laian to ask Jingji to take the woman home. Jingji made fun of the whole affair and wouldn't do anything for the woman, so Jinlian bade Laian take her home. "Come and see me tomorrow," she said. "You can do some washing for me, and I will tell my husband and see that you get your rights." At this the woman Han smiled, thanked them repeatedly, and went home.
The ladies went on. When they came to the gate, Ben the Fourth's wife was standing there. She smiled, made a reverence to them, and invited them to take tea with her. Yulou told her that they had been delayed by listening to Madam Han's story, and that it was too late for them to accept her invitation, though they thanked her very much. But Ben the Fourth's wife pressed them and at last they went in. In her room there was an image of the Buddha of the Eight Calamities, and another of the sage Guan. A snow-flower lantern hung by the door. When they had all sat down, she told her daughter, a girl of fourteen years called Changjie, to greet the ladies and hand around the tea. Yulou and Jinlian each gave the girl two flowers, and Li Ping'er gave her a handkerchief and a *qian* of silver, with which, she said, she might buy some melon seeds. Ben the Fourth's wife was delighted and thanked them repeatedly. After a while they left. Laixing met them at the gate, and, when they asked whether Ximen Qing had come home, told them he had not. They stood at the gate for a few moments while Chen Jingji set off two large chrysanthemum fireworks, a large orchid, and a golden goblet with a silver stem. Then they retired. It was the fourth night watch before Ximen Qing came back.
At the festival Chen Jingji and Jinlian had been laughing and chatting with Huilian, and he had already begun to feel some attraction for the woman. The next morning he dressed, and, before going to the shop, went to the inner court to pay his respects to Yueniang. When he came to her room, Li Jiao'er, Jinlian and Aunt Wu were there, about to have some tea. Yueniang herself had gone to burn incense at the shrine of Buddha. The young man greeted them politely.
"You're a nice man, Brother Chen," Jinlian said. "When I asked you to take home that Han woman last night, you wouldn't move an inch, and in the end I had to get one of the boys to do it. You could think of nothing but joking and chattering with Huilian. I wonder what the understanding is between you. Wait till the Great Lady comes back. You'll see whether I tell her or not."
"How can you say such a thing?" Jingji said. "After all that long walk my back was nearly broken. How many miles do you think it is from here to Lion Street? Yet in spite of my tiredness you asked me to take that woman home. It was only fair that one of the boys should do it. I had had hardly any sleep and it was already nearly daybreak."
They were still wrangling when Yueniang came back. Jingji made a reverence to her, and she asked him what had been the matter yesterday when Han's wife was drunk and cursing all the world. Jingji told her that the woman had been to a party, and, when she came back, discovered that someone had stolen her dog, so she sat on the pavement and cried and shouted and insulted everybody. "When her husband comes back today, I imagine he'll give her a drubbing. She hasn't got up yet."
"If we had not pressed her to go home," Jinlian said, "Father might have seen her, and then there would have been a fine to-do."
Yulou, Li Ping'er and Ximen Dajie came to tea with Yueniang. Jingji joined them and afterwards went with his wife to their own room.
"You rascal," his wife said, when they were alone, "what do you mean by fooling with Laiwang's wife? If my father hears about it, it will be all very well for that strumpet but you won't know where to find a hole to die in."
A few days later, Ximen Qing had slept in the room of Li Ping'er, and was dressing, when a certain Captain Jing, who had recently been appointed to the district, came to call upon him. Ximen hastened to the hall to greet him, telling Ping'an to bring them tea. The boy went to the kitchen. Huilian, Yuxiao and Xiaoyu were playing in the courtyard. Xiaoyu was riding on Yuxiao's back laughing, and crying, "You bad girl, you've earned a beating. Why won't you let me beat you? Come here, Huilian, catch her by the leg and see what I do to her."
Ping'an intervened. "Sister Yuxiao," he said, "Captain Jing is in the hall, and Father has ordered me to take them some tea."
Yuxiao paid no attention but went on playing with Xiaoyu.
"Captain Jing has been here a long time already," the boy said.
"Go to the kitchen for your tea," Huilian cried, "don't come and bother us. We only make tea for the ladies. We have nothing to do with the hall."
Ping'an went to the kitchen. Laibao's wife was on duty but she told him she was busy cooking, and that he must go to the inner court.
"I have already asked them in the inner court," Ping'an said. "They say they have nothing to do with the hall. Huilian says it is your business to provide tea for that part of the house."
"Oh, that strumpet!" Laibao's wife cried. "She thinks she only has to say that she serves the Great Lady. I seem to be the only one in the kitchen. I am cooking for several people already, and I have plain food to get ready for Aunt Wu. How many hands do you think I have? If you want me to make tea, well and good but why try to make out that I alone have to work in the kitchen? You have no right to treat me as if I were the scullery maid. You won't get any tea from me."
"Captain Jing has been here for hours, Sister," Ping'an said. "Please make the tea or Father will be dreadfully angry." The boy was pushed from pillar to post. He had already wasted a long time. At last Yuxiao brought what was needed, and Ping'an took it to the hall. Captain Jing was preparing to take his leave. Ximen Qing urged him to stay but the tea was cold. Ximen scolded Ping'an and ordered him to change it but, by the time the fresh tea had been brought, Captain Jing had gone.
Ximen Qing went to the inner court to find out who was responsible, and Ping'an told him that the scullery maid had made it. Then he went to his own room and told Yueniang what had happened.
"Go to the kitchen," he said, "and find out who made the tea. When you've done so, see that she has a beating."
Xiaoyu told her that it was the day for Laibao's wife to attend to the cooking.
"Oh, the wretch," Yueniang cried, "she must be eager to die, making tea like that."
She told Xiaoyu to fetch the woman. Laibao's wife came and knelt before Yueniang in the courtyard.
"How many blows do you want?" Yueniang said. Laibao's wife said the tea was cold because she had had to cook the dinner and also plain food for Aunt Wu. Yueniang scolded her for a time and then forgave her. Then she addressed all the maids and serving women. "Henceforth," she said, "whenever visitors come to the hall, Yuxiao and Huilian must make the tea, and those in the kitchen must see about the tea and food for our own people."
Laibao's wife went back to the kitchen in a fury. As soon as Ximen Qing had gone out, she went in a rage to the inner court. When she found Huilian, she shook her finger at her. "You abandoned, scoundrelly woman," she cried, "now you are satisfied. You have the luck. You do service for the mistress, and I am but the scullery maid. You told the boy to come to me for tea, and it was you who told him to call me scullery maid. Who are you to call me scullery maid? The cricket does not eat the flesh of a spotted toad, for they are akin. You are not one of the master's ladies, so why should you consider yourself superior to me? And if you were, I shouldn't be afraid of you."
"You are talking nonsense," Huilian said. "You made the tea badly, and Father didn't like it. What has that to do with me? Why vent your spite on me?"
This made Laibao's wife more angry still. "You thievish whore," she cried, "you wanted to get me a beating. You had a man on the sly when you were with the Cai family, and your wickedness is past all bounds. Now you come and play the same tricks here."
"Did you see me have a man on the sly?" Huilian said. "Well, dear Sister, you are yourself no virgin."
"No virgin?" Laibao's wife cried. "I'm better than you, anyway. You've had as many men as there are grains in a heap of corn. You can't set eyes upon a man without beginning your tricks. And you fancy nobody knows what you are up to. You have no respect for the ladies here, so why should you have any for us?"
"What are you talking about?" Huilian said. "In what way do I fail in respect to the ladies? Say all the nasty things you like. I don't care."
"No, you don't care," Laibao's wife shouted, "you don't care, because you have somebody behind you."
They went on quarreling until Xiaoyu asked Yueniang to intervene. "You rogues," Yueniang said, "instead of doing your work, you spend all your time squabbling. If your master hears of this, there will be more trouble. You've not been beaten yet but certainly will be. Do you wish to be beaten?"
"If I'm beaten," Laibao's wife cried, "I'll pull this woman's guts out. I'll give my life to get even with her and we'll go together." She went back to the kitchen. After this, Huilian was more arrogant than ever. Because of her relations with Ximen Qing, she thought the rest of the household unworthy of consideration. Every day she played with Yulou, Jinlian, Li Ping'er, Ximen Dajie, and Chunmei. A few days later old woman Feng brought the younger of her two maids, taking her first to Li Ping'er, and then to Li Jiao'er. Li Jiao'er paid 5 taels for the girl and kept her.

## 046
## Hsüeh-o Secretly Divulges the Love Affair; Lai-Wang Drunkenly Vilifies Hsi-men Ch'ing out of Jealousy

Amid terraces and kiosks of prominent houses
a myriad blossoms bloom;
Manipulating the ropes of their swings
girls vie voluptuously.
The morning sun lends added warmth
to their new brocades;
The spring breeze gusts congenially
across old gates and walls.
By jade flagstones orchid shoots may grow,
in many a beauteous pair;
But crimson bed curtains should enclose
a single preferred spray.
How laughable that the domestic doe should
breed domestic doom;
The women's quarters, from this time on,
know no behavioral norms.
The Lantern Festival having passed,
The Ch'ing-ming Festival[1] was at hand.

Ying Po-chüeh called on Hsi-men Ch'ing that morning to extend an invitation and found him already entertaining Ch'ang Shih-chieh at breakfast in the summerhouse in the garden. They looked on as a considerable number of silversmiths who had been called in for the purpose plied their trade in front of them. Sun Kua-tsui had offered to stand treat and had invited them all to join him in a festive excursion to the suburbs.
Before this Wu Yüeh-niang had already had the frame for a swing constructed in the garden. Now that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home and the ladies were at leisure, she led her sisters into the garden to try it out and thus dispel the ennui of the spring day.
Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou were the first to sit down on the swing and try it together. After they had enjoyed it for a while they got off and suggested that Li Chiao-erh and P'an Chin-lien take their places. Li Chiao-erh begged off on the grounds that she was too heavy to work the swing and suggested that Li P'ing-erh should take a turn with Chin-lien.
After they had swung for a while, Yü-lou called out, "Sister Six, how about joining me in doing a standing swing? Don't anybody laugh. Just see how we do."
Thereupon, the two women:
Grasping the gaudy ropes with their jade hands,
Stood themselves erect upon the painted board.
Yüeh-niang told Sung Hui-lien to stand underneath to push the swing for them and she was joined in this task by Ch'un-mei. Truly, it is a case of:
Red-rouged powdered face facing
red-rouged powdered face;
Jade-white creamy shoulders next to
jade-white creamy shoulders.

Two pairs of jadelike wrists
tug and then retug;
Four tiny golden lotuses are
tossed and then retossed.[2]
Chin-lien, who was the uppermost of the pair, was:
Falling into a heap with laughter.
"Sister Six," Yüeh-niang called out to her. "There's nothing wrong with your laughing so hard up there but if you were to slip and fall:
It would be no laughing matter."[3]
As she spoke, who could have anticipated it but the painted board was slippery and it was hard to maintain a steady footing on it in high-heeled shoes. All they heard was a clattering sound, and Chin-lien came tumbling off the swing. Fortunately she managed to catch hold of the frame and save herself from a severe fall but she nearly dragged Yü-lou off with her.
"I warned you not to laugh so hard, Sister Six," said Yüeh-niang. "It serves you right to have fallen off."
Then she turned to Li Chiao-erh and the others and continued, "The one thing not to do when swinging is to laugh. What's the point of laughing too hard, anyway? Your legs are sure to go soft on you and off you fall. Back when I was still a girl in my own home, the family of Censor Chou next door had a garden in which they had set up a swing. It was just like this on a day during the festival season in the third month that their daughter, Miss Chou, along with three or four of us other girls, were playing on the swing. We too were laughing uncontrollably, and Miss Chou slipped off and landed astride the painted board that ruptured her hymen. Later, when she got married, the groom's family claimed she was not a virgin, repudiated the match, and sent her back to her family. From now on, when you swing, avoid laughing above all else."
"Meng the Third isn't up to snuff," said Chin-lien. "Let me and Li P'ing-erh do a standing swing together."
"The two of you be careful now," said Yüeh-niang.
She ordered Yü-hsiao and Ch'un-mei to stand to their right in order to push the swing for them.
Just as they were about to start, who should come in from outside but Ch'en Ching-chi, who said, "So you ladies are in here playing on the swing, are you?"
"Son-in-law, you've arrived in the nick of time," said Yüeh-niang. "You can push the swing for the two ladies. The maidservants aren't strong enough to do it properly."
As for Ching-chi, it was just like the time:
When the old monk neglected to ring the bell:[4]
This was just the signal he'd been waiting for.
Thereupon,
Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes,
he stepped forward and said, "Let me push the swing for the two ladies."
Then, pausing to tuck Chin-lien's skirt in place, he said, "Steady on your feet, Fifth Lady. Your son-in-law will give you a push."
The swing flew up into the air, so that they looked just like a pair of immortals in flight.[5]
When she saw how high the swing was going, Li P'ing-erh called out apprehensively, "It's not straight. Son-in-law, you'd better give me a push too."
Somewhat flustered, Ch'en Ching-chi replied, "Don't be so demanding. If you let me take my own time I can manage you both. If you go on at this rate, first one of you calling for me and then the other, it will bring on a case of consumption, and I won't have the stamina to do the job."
Thereupon, he proceeded to adjust the bottom of Li P'ing-erh's skirt, exposing the extremities of her scarlet underdrawers, as he gathered it into a bunch.
"Son-in-law," Li P'ing-erh said, "Take it easy. My legs are going soft on me."
"You shouldn't call for more if you're not up to serious drinking," said Ching-chi. "Only a moment ago you were making such a fuss my head was spinning."
"Sister Li, you're stepping on my skirt," complained Chin-lien. "It's a wonder you haven't pushed me right off the swing."
The two of them continued to swing for some time and then stepped down.
Ch'un-mei and Hsi-men Ta-chieh then took a turn.
Finally, Yü-hsiao and Sung Hui-lien were induced to try a standing swing together. Hui-lien grasped the gaudy ropes with her hands, stood straight up with her feet firmly planted on the painted board below, and without asking anyone to give her a push caused the swing to soar up into the clouds, and then suddenly fly down again. Truly, they were just like a pair of immortals in flight, a captivating sight.
When Yüeh-niang saw this, she said to Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh, "Just look! That chambermaid can really swing."
As she spoke, a gust of wind caught Hui-lien's skirt, exposing her scarlet underdrawers of Lu-chou silk, tucked into sand-green leggings, adorned with fine variegated silk embroidered kneepads, the ends of which were tied in place with pink cord.
Yü-lou pointed this out to Yüeh-niang but she only laughed, cursed, "What a lousy preternatural creature," and let it go at that.
Yüeh-niang and the others continued to enjoy their swinging. But no more of this.
At this point the story divides into two. Let us now return to the story of Lai-wang, who had gone to Hang-chou to arrange the manufacture of the garments for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on the occasion of his birthday. He had now returned, in charge of numerous saddlebags and trunks full of valuables. Leaving his cargo at the dock, he went ahead in order to announce his arrival.
When he reached the gate, he tied up his horse and went inside, dusted himself off, stowed away his gear, and headed for the rear compound. The first person he saw was Sun Hsüeh-o, who was standing in the doorway of the master suite.
He made her a bow and Hsüeh-o greeted him, all smiles, saying, "Good. You've come home. You must be tired from:
The wind and the frost on your journey.[6]
It's not that long since I've seen you but you've gotten swarthier and put on weight."
Lai-wang then asked, "Where are the master and mistress?"
"Your father has been invited by Ying the Second and that bunch to join them in an excursion outside the South Gate," said Hsüeh-o. "Your mother and Hsi-men Ta-chieh are in the flower garden playing on the swing."
"Ai-ya!" said Lai-wang. "What do they want to do that for? Swinging is a pastime introduced by the northern barbarians.[7] Southerners don't do it. The women there, in the third month of spring, merely amuse themselves by comparing botanical specimens."
Hsüeh-o then went into the kitchen and poured out a cup of tea for him, asking as she did so, "Have you eaten or not?"
"I don't want anything to eat right now," said Lai-wang. "As soon as I've seen the mistress, I'll go back to my room and wash up."
Then he went on to ask, "How come I don't see my wife around the kitchen?"
Hsüeh-o gave a sardonic laugh, and said, "Your wife is no longer your wife of old. She's risen to quite another plane. Nowadays she spends all her time palling around with the ladies of the household, playing at board games with them, or jacks, or dominoes. She scarcely condescends to do any work in the kitchen."
While they were talking, Hsiao-yü had gone into the garden to report to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Lai-wang's here."
Yüeh-niang came back from the front of the compound and sat down. Lai-wang stepped forward and kowtowed to her, after which he stood to one side. She asked him about the events of his journey and rewarded him with the gift of two bottles of wine.
After a while his wife, Sung Hui-lien, showed up and Yüeh-niang said, "That's enough for now. You must be tired. Go back to your room and wash up and have a rest, so you'll be ready to report to your father when he gets home."
Lai-wang then went back to his room. Hui-lien handed him the key and he opened the door. She dipped up some water for him to wash his face and clean up with and brought in his bag.
"You lousy black jailbird!" she said. "It's not that long since I've seen you but you've certainly put on a lot of weight."
She helped him change his clothes and fixed something for him to eat. He took a nap, and by the time he got up it was already sunset.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, Lai-wang came to see him and reported, "The garments for presentation to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching on his birthday, and the clothes for the family, have all been successfully procured in Hang-chou. They have been packed in four trunks and transported on a government boat. All that remains is to hire bearers and see them through customs."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted and gave him the silver to pay the bearers. The next morning Lai-wang arranged to have the trunks carried into the city, had them properly stowed away, and settled accounts with his master. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with five taels of silver for his personal use and continued to employ him, as before, as a purchasing agent for the household.
Lai-wang had done some business of his own on the side and surreptitiously presented Sun Hsüeh-o with two satin handkerchiefs, two pairs of figured ankle leggings, four boxes of Hang-chou powder, and twenty cakes of rouge.
Hsüeh-o secretly confided to him, "Ever since you went away, during the last four months or so, your wife has been carrying on an affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing. It all started with Yü-hsiao playing the role of pander and delivering a gift of silk. They've used Chin-lien's quarters as their nest, meeting at first in the grotto underneath the artificial hill in the garden, and then, later, actually going to it in her room. They're at it all day long:
Sleeping from morning to night.
And then from night to morning.[8]
He gives her clothing and jewelry, trinkets and silver that she carries around with her in a big bag. She gets the pageboys to buy things for her at the front gate at the rate of two or three mace of silver per day."
"No wonder," said Lai-wang, "her trunk is full of clothing and jewelry. When I asked her about it, she said the mistress had given them to her."
"It's not your mother that gave them to her," said Hsüeh-o. "It's your father who gave them to her."
Lai-wang made a mental note of what she had said.
That night, he went into the rear compound and had a few cups to drink. When he returned to his room, as the saying goes:
Wine releases the words stored in the gut.
On opening her trunk and coming across a bolt of blue silk of unusually fine design, he asked his wife, "Where'd this silk come from? Who gave it to you? Tell me the truth immediately."
His wife:
Not understanding the true state of affairs,[9]
put on a smile and replied, "You crazy louse of a jailbird! What are you asking about that for? It's just a bolt of silk that the mistress in the rear compound gave me when she saw I didn't have a proper jacket to wear. I put it away in the trunk and haven't had time to make it up yet. Really, who do you think would give me such a thing?"
"You lousy whore!" Lai-wang cursed. "You think you can still fool me with such tricks, do you? Who was it who really gave it to you?"
"And where did this jewelry come from?" he went on to ask.
"Phooey!" the woman replied. "You crazy jailbird! Who doesn't have a mother and father?
Even if you sprung from a crack in a rock, you'd have a nest.
Even if you were born from a date stone, you'd have a pit.
Even if you were sired by a clay figurine, it must have been animate.
Even if you were begotten by a stone tablet, you'd still have a base.
How can anyone who is human lack relatives or relations? These hairpins and combs were lent to me by my maternal aunt. Who do you suppose gave them to me? How can you be so:
Barefaced and red-eyed?[10]
You'll be seeing things till the day you die, you jailbird!"
At this point Lai-wang gave her a blow with his fist that nearly knocked her off her feet.
"You lousy whore! Still shooting off your mouth, are you? I know someone who's actually seen you engaging in hanky-panky with that degenerate pig or dog. I know all about how that maidservant Yü-hsiao played the role of pander and delivered a gift of silk to you; how the two of you made out together in the front garden; how, later on, you moved the scene of operations into that whore P'an's room where you could carry on openly; and how you keep it up all day long till you're fucked out. You lousy whore! And you have the nerve to come around me with all that highfalutin talk!"
The woman then broke into tears, saying, "You'll come to a bad end, you lousy jailbird! What do you think you're doing, coming home and beating me up? What business of yours have I ruined?
Those may be words but they don't make utterances.[11]
If you throw a brick or a tile into the air,
It's got to come down to earth.
Some backbiting:
Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,[12]
person, bent on:
Making something out of nothing,
must have put you up to abusing your old lady. Well your old lady's not the sort of unbacked commodity to be trifled with.
Even if you abuse a person to death,
You'd better have clear-cut grounds.
Who says so, anyway? If you don't believe me, just ask around a bit about that Sung girl. If I've slipped up in any way, you might as well turn my name Sung on its head. Would I dare open my mouth to accuse anyone else of anything? That whore and that cuckold have the nerve to bad-mouth me, do they? And as for you, you lousy jailbird:
Before you even get wind of anything,
You're ready for the rain.[13]
The only thing that ought to matter is the truth.[14]
If someone told you to kill a person, I suppose you'd just kill him."
With these few words, Lai-wang was reduced to silence.
After some time, he said, "It's not that I intended to beat you. It's just that
I've allowed that bastard to get the better of me."
"As for that bolt of blue silk," Hui-lien continued, "I might as well tell you all about it. It was during the eleventh month last year, on the Third Lady's birthday, that the mistress noticed I was wearing a violet jacket along with a skirt I had borrowed from Yü-hsiao that didn't match. 'That's most unbecoming,' she said. 'What a way to dress! It won't do.' It was on that occasion that she gave me this bolt of silk. But who's had the time to make it up? Someone who didn't know the facts must have made up this tale about me. But they don't know who they've got to contend with. Your old lady's not the sort to let anyone off easy. Tomorrow I'll give them a sample of what I can do in the way of a good cursing out. I might as well put my life on the line since nobody's willing to stick up for me."
"As long as you haven't done anything, forget it," said Lai-wang. "Why pick a quarrel with anyone for no good reason? Just make up the bed for me, and be quick about it, so I can get some sleep."
As the woman unfolded his bedding, she muttered, "You'll drop dead in your tracks someday, you crazy jailbird! Once you've had your snootful of that 'saffron soup,'[15] you just sack out and enjoy yourself, leaving your old lady to curse you to your fucking face for nothing."
Thereupon, by the time she had turned Lai-wang over on the k'ang, with his face to the wall, he was:
Snoring thunderously.

Gentle reader take note: Most of the adulterous women of this world, no matter how smart their husbands are, even if they are tough enough to chew nails, can get around them with a few phrases that:
Misstate wrong as right,[16]
so effectively that nine out of ten of them are deceived. Truly:
Like the bricks in the privy:
They're both hard and smelly.[17]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Hui-lien's illicit affair enables her to
monopolize her master;
Lai-wang, while in a state of drunkenness,
abuses his wife.
Hsüeh-o secretly divulges Chin-lien's share
in arranging the tryst;
Thereby giving rise to open hostilities
in the bosom of the family.
Sung Hui-lien succeeded in placating Lai-wang, and the night passed without further event.
The next day she went to the rear compound and interrogated Yü-hsiao as to who had given the game away but did not succeed in finding out anything. All she could do was to utter an indiscriminate tirade but Hsüeh-o did not acknowledge her guilt.
One day, the impending catastrophe occurred in the following way. Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü to fetch Hsüeh-o, and she looked all over without being able to find her. As she was going past Lai-wang's door in the course of her search, she saw Hsüeh-o coming out of his room and assumed that she must have been talking to his wife. But who would have thought that when she returned to the kitchen she found Hui-lien there engaged in cutting meat?
Some time later, Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the front compound engaged in a parley with Ch'iao Hung, his neighbour from across the street, who asked him to intervene on behalf of the Yang-chou salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng, who had been incarcerated in Ts'ang-chou by the military commissioner and was willing to promise him two thousand taels of silver if he would ask Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching to have him released as a personal favour. As soon as he had finished with Ch'iao Hung, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Lai-wang, and he was seen to come running out of his room. Truly:
Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets is not seen until they fly;
Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots is not known until they speak.
As a result of this, everyone knew that Hsüeh-o had been engaging in hanky-panky with Lai-wang.
One day Lai-wang got drunk and started angrily railing against Hsi-men Ch'ing in the presence of the servants and pageboys in the front compound.
"I know all about it," he said. "When I was away from home he went after my wife. He sent Yü-hsiao to her room with a bolt of blue silk as an inducement and contrived to get her into the garden so he could have his way with her. And I know how, later on, they set it up so they could:
Sleep together all night long,
and how P'an Chin-lien provided cover for them. Well, so much for that. But he'd better not fall into my hands, that's all I can say, or it'll be a case of:
A white blade going in, and
A red blade coming out.[18]
For better or for worse, I might as well kill that whore named P'an into the bargain. After all, I've only got one life to lose. You just watch and see:
What I can say,
I can do.[19]
Come to think of it, when that whore named P'an was still in her own house, she killed off her first husband, Wu the Elder. And when her brother-in-law Wu Sung came back and lodged a complaint against her, who was it she had to thank for going off to the Eastern Capital to fix things up for her and getting Wu Sung condemned to military exile? Now that she's got:
Both feet on level ground again,
you'd think she'd be content to enjoy it but instead she encourages my wife to commit adultery. My enmity for her is as big as the sky. As the saying goes, one must either:
Refuse to do something;
Or not stop at anything.
If they cross my path again, they'll have me to reckon with.
If you're willing to risk death by slow slicing,
You can afford to tackle the emperor himself."
Lai-wang was completely oblivious to the fact that:
Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass.
It did not occur to him that every word he said would be overheard by his fellow servant Lai-hsing.
Now this Lai-hsing was originally a native of Kan-chou, in the far northwest, who had been brought back as a servant by Hsi-men Ch'ing's father, Hsi-men Ta, after he made a trip there to engage in the woolen trade. As a consequence, his name had been changed to Kan Lai-hsing. Twelve or thirteen years had gone by since then, and he had married and had children. Hsi-men Ch'ing customarily employed him as a purchasing agent for the foodstuff required by the household, a lucrative position. Recently, on account of his affair with Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken the job of purchasing agent away from him and given it to Lai-wang. As a result, Lai-hsing was on bad terms with Lai-wang, and a deadly enmity had grown up between the two men. On hearing these words of Lai-wang's, his:
Sense of grievance and desire for revenge,[20]
could not help being activated.
Thereupon, he set out for P'an Chin-lien's quarters to tell her what he had heard. Chin-lien was sitting with Meng Yü-lou at the time.
On seeing Lai-hsing lift aside the portiere and come in, Chin-lien asked him, "What have you come for? Whose place has your father gone off drinking to today?"
"Today," said Lai-hsing. "Father and Ying the Second have gone outside the South Gate to attend a funeral. Right now, there is something I want to tell you about. But you must keep it to yourself. Don't tell anyone I told you."
"What is it?" asked Chin-lien. "Go ahead and speak. It doesn't matter."
"It's nothing but this," said Lai-hsing. "It's really intolerable. Lai-wang went out somewhere and got stinking drunk yesterday. Then he spent the rest of the day cursing in the front compound:
Making all kinds of threatening noises,
Pointing at the pig but cursing the dog.
He even tried to pick a fight with me but I kept out of his way and paid no attention. Right in front of the whole household, high and low, he cursed Father and you."
"The lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "What did he say about me?"
"I hardly dare tell you," said Lai-hsing. "The Third Lady is here; it's not as though she were anyone else. That rascal said that Father had deliberately gotten him out of the way so he could go after his wife; that he had sent Yü-hsiao to her room with the gift of a bolt of silk (she could testify to the truth of this allegation); that you had provided cover for them and inveigled his wife into your room where they made out together:
Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning.
He's had a knife made for himself and threatens to kill Father and you, saying it would be a case of:
A white blade going in, and
A red blade coming out.
He also said that back when you were still in your own house you had poisoned your husband, and that you had him to thank for going off to the Eastern Capital to fix things up for you, thereby saving your life. He said that you were now:
Requiting kindness with enmity,[21]
by encouraging his wife to commit adultery.
"As far as I'm concerned:
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.[22]
If I didn't come and warn you, sooner or later, that rascal might do you in."
When Meng Yü-lou heard Lai-hsing's story it was:
Just as though she had been dunked in a tub of ice water.
She was quite dumbfounded. As for Chin-lien, nothing might have happened if she had not heard about this but having heard these words:
Her powdered face became suffused with red;[23]
Her silver teeth were ground to smithereens.
"That criminal slave!" she cursed. "I've had:
No grudge against him in the past,
No enmity against him in the present.[24]
If his master saw fit to play around with his wife, why should I be dragged into it? If I permit that slave to remain in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, I might as well not be his wife. So he thinks I owe my life to him, does he?"
Then she instructed Lai-hsing, "You can go, for now. When your father comes home, if he should ask you about this, be sure you tell him just what you told me."
"How can you talk that way?" said Lai-hsing. "It's not as though I'm traducing him, or anything.
If I've got a sentence,
I'll say that sentence.[25]
No matter what Father asks me, I'll tell it the same way."
When he had finished speaking, Lai-hsing went back to the front compound.
Meng Yü-lou then asked Chin-lien, "Is it really true that Father could have done such a thing?"
"What's the point of asking anything about that shameless good-for-nothing?" exclaimed Chin-lien. "A fine woman she is! No wonder he finds himself in a position to be threatened by a slave. She was formerly employed in another household, where she underwent a full:
Nine calcinations and eighteen firings,
as a slave of a whore at her master's hands. Originally, when she was at Assistant Prefect Ts'ai's place, she got caught colluding with her mistress in a case of adultery, as a result of which she had to leave and marry the cook Chiang Ts'ung. When she catches sight of a man, she can't help waving her hand.
If she's had one, she's had a bushelful.
There isn't much she doesn't know about anything.
"That lousy ruffian of ours:
Deceiving spirits and stupefying demons,
did send Yü-hsiao to her with a gift of silk to make a jacket out of. If I know her, if she ever has the guts to wear it in public, I'll call her a real lady.
"It all happened last winter. I meant to tell you about it at the time but never got around to it. It was on that day when our elder sister had gone to a birthday party at our neighbour Ch'iao Hung's place. You remember, we were all in the front compound playing a board game when a maidservant came in and said that Father had come home, so the party broke up.
"Later, as I came through the inner gate on my way to the rear compound, I saw Hsiao-yü standing in the veranda. When I asked her if Father was inside, she made a negative gesture with her hand. When I retraced my steps as far as the garden, I ran into that little bitch, Yü-hsiao, standing at the postern gate. It so happens that she was acting as a lookout for the two of them but I hadn't caught on yet. When I tried to go into the garden she barred my way and wouldn't let me proceed, saying that Father was inside. I gave her a piece of my mind, saying, 'You lousy little bitch! Since when have I been afraid of your father?' It was then I began to suspect he was up to some funny business with her. Who would have thought that when I went inside I found the two of them going at it in the grotto underneath the artificial hill. When the woman saw me come in, her face turned crimson with embarrassment and she beat a hasty retreat. When Father saw me he was quite at a loss for words, and I told him off for being such a shameless creature.
"Afterwards that woman came to my room and groveled around on her knees, begging me not to tell Mother about it. Later on, in the first month, Father wanted me to put that whore up in my own quarters so he could spend the night with her there but both Ch'un-mei and I gave him a real talking to. Since when have we ever abetted him in getting so much as a glimpse of her shadow? That lousy death-defying slave! Don't you try to drag me into it. You say I put them up to it, do you? That slave of a whore with her simpering ways! As though I'd let them get up to their dirty tricks in my own room! And even if I hadn't raised any objections, that little piece Ch'un-mei of mine would never have consented to such a thing."
"No wonder," said Yü-lou, "the lousy little stinker's been putting on such airs. When I find her sitting anywhere, she makes as though she's going to stand up but doesn't do it. Who could have known she was up to such tricks behind our backs?
"If you stop to consider it, Father really oughtn't to play around with her. After all, it's not as though there aren't any other women to be had. If you give your slave an excuse to raise a rumpus about it outside, what does it look like? It won't sound any too good when it gets abroad."
"The fact is," said Chin-lien, "left or right:
He doesn't have his own boots on straight.
You play around with the wife of a slave, and the slave seduces your own concubine behind your back. You only end up taking turns in your skulduggery. That slavey of a concubine is forever telling tales. She's done it a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. Right now, even if I give her a slap on the mouth, she won't be able to say anything."
"Do you think we'd better tell Father about this," Yü-lou asked Chin-lien, "or not tell him about it? Our elder sister isn't likely to do anything. If that rascal really means what he says, and we don't say anything about it, and Father doesn't know what's going on, he could end up falling prey to him someday. Truly:
When the mindful plot against the unmindful,
How can the unprepared cope with the prepared?[26]
Sister Six, you really ought to say something about it. Truly:
You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,
So long as you don't injure the redbud tree."[27]
"I wouldn't let that slave get away with anything," said Chin-lien, "even if he had begotten me!"
Truly:

If you do nothing in your lifetime to make people raise their eyebrows;
There should be no one in the world prepared to gnash his teeth at you.[28]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Lai-wang, while in his cups, recklessly
vilifies his master;
Lai-hsing, harbouring resentment, stirs up
the wind and waves.
Chin-lien, upon hearing the truth about
herself revealed,
Grinds her silver teeth to smithereens,[29]
in a fit of rage.
That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, he found Chin-lien in her room with her:
Cloudy locks in disarray, and her
Fragrant cheeks wrinkled from sleep,
while her eyes were bleary with weeping. When he asked the reason for this, she told him all about Lai-wang's drunken tirade and his threats to kill his master.
"Now there's Lai-hsing," she said, "who personally heard him cursing you, one day, and uttering these threats against you. If you stop to think about it, while you were plotting to seduce his wife behind his back, he simply turned around and took your own concubine behind your back.
You don't have your own boots on straight.
If that rascal should kill you, it would only serve you right. But what's it got to do with me, that he should want to kill me into the bargain? If you don't do something about it right away, some night, sooner or later, since:
Men don't have eyes in the backs of their heads,[30]
I fear he may get the better of us."
"Who's been engaging in hanky-panky with that rascal?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know.
"There's no need to ask me," said Chin-lien. "Just ask Hsiao-yü in the master suite and you'll find out."
"It's not the first time that slave has taken liberties with me," she went on.
"He said that to begin with I had poisoned my husband, and that after you married me it was only thanks to his efforts that my life had been saved. He's been out making these allegations in front of people. It's a good thing I haven't:
Produced a son, or
Borne a daughter.
If I had:
Produced a son, or
Borne a daughter,
that lousy slave's allegations wouldn't bear listening to. He'd say things like, 'Originally, before your mother established her position in the household, it was only thanks to your father's string-pulling that her life was saved.' Such allegations would not redound to your credit. You may be devoid of shame but I won't stand for it. What would I want to go on living for?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing, heeding:
The words of his spouse,[31]
went to the front of the compound, sought out Lai-hsing, found a place where they could be alone, and interrogated him about the whole incident, from beginning to end. The servant gave him a word for word account of the affair. Then he went to the rear compound and took Hsiao-yü's testimony that did not conflict with what Chin-lien had said.
"It's true," she said, "that on such and such a day I saw Hsüeh-o coming out of Lai-wang's room when his wife was not there. That's really what happened."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was enraged and gave Sun Hsüeh-o a beating. It was only after repeated intercessions by Yüeh-niang that he stopped but he ordered that all her jewelry and finery should be taken away, and that she should henceforth only be allowed to work in the kitchen along with the servants' wives and no longer be permitted to appear in society. Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.
Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently sent Yü-hsiao to call Sung Hui-lien into the rear compound and privately interrogated her.
"Ai-ya, Father!" the woman protested. "Needless to say, he never said any such thing. I'd be ready to swear an oath to that effect on his behalf. He may have had a cup or two too many to drink but he would hardly have the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to curse you that way behind your back. If he should:
Live off King Chou's largesse,
And yet call King Chou a villain,[32]
on whom could he depend to make a living?
"Father, you shouldn't be so ready to believe what people say. Just let me ask you, who did you hear this story from, anyway?"
This speech of the woman's had the effect of reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence. When pressed for an answer, he replied, "It was Lai-hsing who told me about it. He said he'd been getting drunk every day and, according to the wind-borne words' he had heard, he'd been going around outside cursing me."
"Lai-hsing," retorted Hui-lien, "because you gave the job of purchasing agent to this guy of mine, has been saying we took it away from him, depriving him of the opportunity to make any more money out of it. On account of this grudge against my husband, he's made up this story out of whole cloth and spit this mouthful of blood on him. And you fell for it. Was there ever such an injustice? But I'm not going to let him get away with it.
"Father, do as I say. Don't keep my husband around at home any more. When he's here he only gets into trouble. Give him a few taels of silver as capital and send him out to engage in trade somewhere where he can be:
Free as he pleases,[33]
Far away from home.[34]
Don't keep him around here where he's got time on his hands. It has always been true that:
A full stomach and warm body give rise to disorder;
Hunger and cold conduce to thoughts of thievery.[35]
How could he not get up to mischief? If he were not around but out on the road somewhere, it would be a lot more convenient whenever you had anything to say to me."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was utterly delighted and said, "My child, what you say is true enough. I had originally intended to send him to the Eastern Capital in charge of the birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai but since he just returned from a trip to Hang-chou I felt it wouldn't be right to send him on another mission so soon and decided to send Lai-pao instead. After what you've told me, I'll send him off in the next few days after all. When he gets back, I'll consign a thousand taels of silver to him and send him off with a manager to Hang-chou to engage in the silk trade. How would you feel about that?"
The woman was delighted by this, and said, "Father, if you only do that, it would be great. Don't keep him around at home anymore. The best thing you can do with him is to:
Keep the horse to a steady pace."[36]
As she spoke, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that there was no one about, pulled her over, and gave her a kiss. The woman responded by sticking her tongue into his mouth, and the two of them fell to sucking each other's tongues.
"Father," the woman said, "you promised you were going to have a proper fret made up for my hair. How come you haven't had it made yet? If I'm not to wear it now, when am I to wear it? I suppose I'll have to keep on wearing this excuse of a hairpiece from one day to the next."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send eight taels of silver over to the silversmith's tomorrow so he can pull it into wire for you."
"I'm afraid your mother may ask about it," Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say. "How will you reply?"
"That's no problem," the woman said. "I'll have a story ready for her. I'll just say I borrowed it from my aunt's place to wear for a while. What is there to be afraid of?"
The two of them talked together for some time and then went their separate ways.
The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the reception hall and summoned Lai-wang into his presence.
"Get your clothes and your gear together," he said. "The day after tomorrow, the twenty-eighth day of the third month, I'm going to send you off to escort my shipment of birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai. And when you get back, I'm going to send you on another business trip to Hang-chou."
Lai-wang was delighted by this and readily consented. He returned to his room to get his gear together and then went out to buy a few things.
As soon as Lai-hsing heard what had happened he came and reported it all to Chin-lien. Upon inquiry, Chin-lien was told that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse in the garden and went there but did not find him. All she found was Ch'en Ching-chi, who was supervising the packing of the python robes and bolts of fabric.
Before this time Hsi-men Ch'ing had hired silversmiths to come to his residence and create a piece in which four male figurines were depicted holding up a representation of the character for long life. Each of the silver figures in this work was more than a foot high, and it was very skillfully wrought. In addition, there were two gold pitchers in the shape of the character for long life, two sets of jade cups in the shape of peaches, and two python robes of heavy scarlet variegated silk that had been manufactured in Hang-chou. All that was lacking were two bolts of jet abaca linen and two python robes of light scarlet silk that he had been unable to purchase anywhere.
"On the second floor of my place over there," said Li. P'ing-erh, "I've got a number of python robes that haven't been made up yet. Let me go take a look."
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing joined her, and they went up to the second floor of her belvedere to have a look. She pulled out four items, two bolts of jet abaca linen and two python robes of light scarlet silk with variegated insignia and brocade borders, ten times better in quality and design than the ones from Hang-chou. Hsi-men Ch'ing was as pleased as could be. These were the materials that Ch'en Ching-chi was having packed up in the summerhouse.
"Where's your father?" Chin-lien asked him. "And what are you packing?"
"Father was here just a minute ago," said Ching-chi. "He's gone up to the second floor of the Sixth Lady's place. I'm packing up the birthday gifts for Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital."
"Who's being sent to deliver them?" Chin-lien asked.
"I heard that yesterday Father ordered Lai-wang to go," replied Ching-chi. "No doubt he's sending Lai-wang."
Chin-lien was just stepping down off the stylobate to head for the garden when she ran into Hsi-men Ch'ing and pulled him into her room.
"Who are you sending to the Eastern Capital tomorrow?" she asked.
"Lai-wang and my manager, Wu Tien-en," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's that matter of the thousand taels of silver to fix things up for the salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng. That's why I'm sending two people."
"You may do as you please," the woman said. "You don't pay attention to anything I say but listen only to the one-sided words of that slave of a whore. Whatever she does is only designed to cover up for her husband. He's already uttered threats against you on more than one occasion. He may well decide to go for broke, abandon his wife to you, appropriate your goods, and abscond somewhere:
Just as easy as you please,[37]
without giving you a second thought. You may be willing to take your own losses, however gratuitous but it's too bad about that thousand taels of silver that belongs to somebody else. Never fear, you'll have to compensate him. As for what I say:
Mull it over in your mind; then
Do as you please, do as you please.
"Whatever that woman has had to say for some time now has only been spoken on behalf of that slave of yours. Simply because you covet that wife of his, it's no good keeping him at home, and if you send him away on business it's no good either. If you keep him at home, you'll run the risk, sooner or later, of letting down your guard. If you send him away somewhere and he makes free with your capital, first off, you'll not be in a very good position to accuse him of anything. If you really want to have that slave's wife to yourself, you'd better first contrive to have that slave:
Driven away from this door for good.
As the saying goes:
If one cuts the weeds without pulling up the roots,
New sprouts will grow up as before;
If one cuts the weeds and pulls up the roots,
New sprouts will never grow again.[38]
For your part, then, you'd have nothing to worry about, and the woman, too, would be able to:
Resign herself to her fate."[39]
The effect of this speech on Hsi-men Ch'ing was such that:
It was as though he had just been awakened from a drunken stupor.[40]
Truly:
A few words serve to disclose the proper path to a gentleman;
A single speech suffices to awaken the sleeper from his dream.

The Feast of Lanterns was over and the Festival of Spring had come again. Ying Bojue came to ask Ximen Qing to go for a day in the country as the guest of Sun Guazui, and they went away together. Before the festival, Wu Yueniang had had a swing set up in the garden, and, while Ximen Qing was out, she took all the ladies to it that they might dispel that languor which the coming of spring seems to bring. The first to swing were Wu Yueniang herself and Meng Yulou, and, when they had done, she asked Li Jiao'er and Pan Jinlian to take their places. Li Jiao'er declined, saying she was not feeling well, so Yueniang asked Li Ping'er to be Jinlian's partner. Then Yulou cried, "Come here, Sister, and swing standing with me. But you mustn't laugh." They grasped the rope with their beautiful hands and stood on the board. Yueniang told Huilian and Chunmei to push the swing for them.
Jinlian laughed so much that Yueniang cried, "Don't laugh. It is dangerous. You will fall off." The words were hardly out of her mouth when Jinlian fell with a crash, for the board was slippery and she was wearing high-heeled shoes. But she caught the frame of the swing and saved herself from falling to the ground, though Yulou was nearly thrown off.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "I told you not to laugh. Now, you see, you've fallen." She turned to Li Jiao'er and the others.
"Never laugh when you're swinging," she said, "it makes the legs give way, and down you fall. I remember, when I was a girl, our neighbour Zhou had a swing in his garden. One spring holiday, his daughter and I and two or three other girls were swinging on it, and laughing just as the Fifth Lady was. Miss Zhou was thrown off. She fell across the board and broke her maidenhead. Later, when she married, people said she was not a pure girl, and she was divorced. Yes, it is a mistake to laugh, when one goes in for games of this sort."
"The Third Lady is no good," Jinlian cried, "I will swing standing with the Sixth Lady."
"Be careful, both of you," Yueniang said. She told Yuxiao and Chunmei to start them. Then Chen Jingji came.
"You are swinging, I see," he said.
"Yes," Yueniang said, "you have come at the right moment. You can push the swing for the ladies: the girls are not strong enough."
Jingji was as pleased as an old monk when the dinner bell goes. He gathered his clothes around him and hurried forward to offer his services. The first thing he did was to busy himself about Jinlian's skirt.
"Hold fast, Fifth Mother," he said, "I am going to push you." The swing flew up in the air so that the ladies looked like two winged angels. So high did it go that Li Ping'er was frightened.

"Brother," she cried, "I am falling, come and help me."
"Don't be alarmed, Lady, I will come in a moment," Jingji said. "If I am called first to one side and then to the other, I don't know where I am." He lifted Li Ping'er's skirts till her red trousers could be seen. Then he pushed the swing.
"Gently, Brother," Li Ping'er cried, "my legs are not very strong."
"Ah," said Jingji, "you shouldn't drink so much."
Then Jinlian complained that Li Ping'er was treading on her skirt, and they stopped swinging. Chunmei and Ximen Dajie took the places of the two ladies, and afterwards Yuxiao and Song Huilian swung standing. Huilian grasped the rope and, standing perfectly upright, danced upon the seat. She would have no one to push the swing for her but herself drove it high into the air and down again. It was indeed a wonderful sight. Yueniang said to Yulou and Li Ping'er, "Just look at that woman. She certainly knows how to swing."
Laiwang had gone to Hangzhou to buy the clothes that were to be presented to the Imperial Tutor Cai. When they were ready, he had them packed in chests, and brought them back. As soon as he reached home they were unloaded, and he went to the inner court. Sun Xue'e was standing by the door of the hall. He made a reverence to her.
"Welcome home," she said, smiling graciously. "You must have had a very tiresome journey. It is only a short time since I saw you but you have grown very stout."
"Where are my lord and my lady?" Laiwang asked.
"Your master has gone for a day in the country with Master Ying and the others," Xue'e said, "but your mistress and her daughter are swinging in the garden."
"Why do they play such games as that?" Laiwang said. Xue'e brought him a cup of tea and asked if he would like something to eat. "I will not have anything to eat," he said, "till I have seen the Great Lady, and I must go and wash first." Then he added: "I don't see my wife. Is she in the kitchen?"
Xue'e smiled sourly. "Your wife, indeed! Are you sure you still have a wife? She has become a great personage, and spends all her time playing chess and dominoes with the ladies. She doesn't condescend to come to the kitchen any more."
While they were talking Xiaoyu had gone to the garden to tell Yueniang that Laiwang had come. She came from the front court. Laiwang kowtowed and stood while she asked him about his journey. She gave him two jars of wine. Then Huilian came.
"You must be tired," Yueniang said. "Go to your room; wash and rest, and you can tell your master all about your business when he comes home."
Laiwang went to his room. Huilian gave him the key, and herself went to get him some water and unpack his luggage. "You black rogue," she said, "you have been away only a short time. What have you been eating to get as fat as this?" She helped him to change his clothes and prepared some food. When he had eaten something, he went to bed. The sun was setting when Ximen Qing came home. Laiwang got up and went to the front court to make his report.
"The birthday presents for the Imperial Tutor and the clothes for the members of his household are all in order," he said. "I had them packed, and brought them in four chests. They are at the customs office, and we must take porters to clear them."
Ximen Qing was pleased. Besides giving Laiwang money for the porters, and telling him to fetch the things next day, he gave him five taels of silver for himself and set him in charge of the buying department of the household. Laiwang had privately done a little business on his own account, and, secretly, he gave Xue'e two handkerchiefs, two pairs of silken trousers, four boxes of Hangzhou powder, and twenty cakes of rouge.
"Less than four months after you went away," Xue'e told him, "your wife began to carry on with his Lordship. Yuxiao was their go-between, and they made their nest in the Fifth Lady's room."
She told him how they had begun their naughty games in the grotto beneath the artificial mound but had later made use of Jinlian's room, where they slept from morning till night and from night until morning.
"He has given her clothes," she said, "ornaments and artificial flowers, costing a lot of money, and she has been wearing them all the time. She is always giving the boys money and getting them to buy things for her, and she spends several *qian* of silver every day."
"No wonder her box is full of clothes and ornaments," Laiwang cried. "When I asked her where they came from, she said her mistress had given them to her."
"Mistress, indeed!" Xue'e said. "Master, more likely!"
Her words made a great impression on Laiwang. Wine helps a man to unburden his soul, and that night he drank deeply before he went to his room. He opened his wife's box, and found in it a roll of very handsome blue figured satin.
"Where did you get this satin?" he cried. "Who gave it you? Tell me the truth at once."
His wife did not know what was wrong but she forced a smile and answered: "You funny old rascal. Why do you ask? It came from the inner court, and was given me to make a dress of. I haven't had time to make it up yet, so I put it in the chest. Where else do you think I could expect to get such a present?"
"You strumpet," Laiwang shouted, "don't try to keep up this pretense. Who gave it you, and where did you get these ornaments?"
"Pooh," said his wife, "you talk as if people had no relations of their own. Why, even if I had come out of a piece of stone, I should have come from somewhere. I borrowed these ornaments from one of my aunts. Where else do you think I got them?"
Laiwang struck her with his fist so that she all but fell. "Strumpet!" he cried, "you are trying to deceive me. I know for certain that you have been carrying on with that foul fellow. Yes, Yuxiao was the go-between. It was she who brought you this satin. You began in the garden, and afterwards amused yourselves all day long in the room of that whore Jinlian. Now, do you think you can deceive me any longer?"
"You wicked villain," Huilian cried, "you will come to a violent end, without a doubt. How dare you strike me? What have I done? You come and throw stones at me without the slightest cause. Explain yourself. Some backbiting sneak has been telling you a pack of lies about me, and you lay your hands on me. I assure you you shall not treat me as if I were dirt. If I am going to die, I will die clean. Ask anybody you like about the women of my family. If there is anything shady about me, my name is not Song. There is no reason at all for this fuss you are making. It's like a rainstorm without any wind. But there is something behind it, all the same. I suppose if it were suggested to you you would murder anybody?"
Laiwang did not know what to answer, and his wife went on: "I will tell you all there is to tell about this roll of blue satin. It was our mistress's birthday on the third day of the eleventh month, and she gave it me then because she saw me wearing a purple gown and skirt that I had borrowed from Yuxiao. She thought they did not suit me. I have been too busy ever since to make it up, and now I have put up with all this to-do. You have done me wrong. But I am not the sort to overlook a thing like this, and tomorrow you shall see. I'll let some of these people know what I think about them. My life is not worth living, and the sooner I find somebody to put an end to it, the better."
"If there is really nothing in it," Laiwang said, "there's no reason to make such a fuss. Get my bed ready."
"You scamp, you'll come to a bad end," Huilian said as she got the bed ready. "You go and drink a lot of wine and then come home and abuse your old woman instead of going quietly to bed." She hustled him off, and, in a very short time, he was snoring like thunder.
Unfaithful wives are always like this. However intelligent their husbands may be, with a few words their wives can twist things about in such a way that their husbands are completely hoodwinked. Such women are like the privy floor. They stink but they hold their ground.
So Huilian made a fool of her husband and the night passed. Next day, she went to the inner court and asked Yuxiao who had been telling tales about her. As neither of them could fix upon the right person, she could only go about suspiciously, grumbling.
One day Yueniang wanted Xue'e and sent Xiaoyu to find her. Though the maid looked everywhere she failed to find her, until she went to the front court. There she saw Xue'e coming out of Laiwang's room. She supposed that the woman had been chatting with Laiwang's wife but, when she reached the kitchen, Huilian was there, mincing meat. Meanwhile, in the front court, Ximen Qing had been talking to Master Qiao, who had come on behalf of a certain Wang Sifeng, a soda merchant of Yangzhou, who had been put in prison by the magistrate of that district. Qiao had brought two thousand taels of silver and wanted Ximen Qing to approach the Imperial Tutor, and secure the soda merchant's release. As soon as he had seen Master Qiao to the gate, Ximen called for Laiwang, who promptly came from his own room.
After this everybody knew that Xue'e and Laiwang were carrying on together.
One day when Laiwang had been drinking, he began to revile Ximen Qing before the servants in the front court. "When I was away," he said, "he got Yuxiao to take a roll of blue satin to my place and seduced my wife. At first, he had his way with her in the garden but afterwards the Fifth Lady made a nest for them in her place. Let him look out for himself. If he falls into my hands, I will certainly kill him. My knife shall go in white, and it will be red when it comes out. Yes, and I'll kill that whore Pan as well, and get rid of the pair of them at the same time. You shall see whether I don't do as I say. I haven't forgotten how, when that whore Pan murdered her husband Wu Da, and her brother-in-law Wu Song brought an accusation against her, it was me they got to go to the Eastern Capital to get her off and have Wu Song banished. Now that she feels herself secure once more, she forgets all about the one who saved her life, and makes a whore of my wife. My hatred for her is as deep as the heavens. But there is a proverb which says that a man may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I don't care whether I die or not but I'll thrash his Majesty, even if I get chopped in ten thousand pieces."
Laiwang talked in this strain without realizing that anyone was eavesdropping but Laixing overheard everything he said. Laixing was the servant to whom Ximen Qing had originally entrusted the business of buying and changing money for the household but, after Ximen had fallen in love with Laiwang's wife, that business had been handed over to Laiwang. Since then Laiwang and Laixing had not been on the best of terms. So, when he had heard the kind of thing his rival was saying, Laixing slipped away to Jinlian's room. When he pulled up the lattice and came in, she was sitting with Yulou.
"What can I do for you?" she said. "Where is your master amusing himself today?"
"He has gone to a funeral with Uncle Ying," Laixing said. "Lady, I have something to tell you but you must keep it to yourself, and not let anybody know I told you."
"If you have anything to say, let us hear it," Jinlian said.
"It is only this," Laixing said. "That rascal Laiwang got drunk somewhere yesterday, and made a fine hullabaloo, cursing everybody the whole day long. He wished to pick a quarrel with me but I came away and left him. In front of everybody he cursed Master, and you too, Fifth Mother."
"Why should the rogue curse me?" Jinlian said.
"I hardly like to tell you," Laixing said, "but since there is only the Third Lady here, and she is not a stranger, I will. He said Father had got him out of the way so as to be able to make love to his wife. He also said that you, Fifth Mother, had arranged everything for them, and allowed his wife to sleep with Father in your room from morning till night and from night till morning. He has got a knife to kill you both, and says it may be white when it goes in but it will be red when it comes out. He says you poisoned your first husband and sent him to the Eastern Capital to hush up the matter, and that though you owe your life to him, you only repay his kindness by injuries and help his wife to be unfaithful to him. I felt I ought to warn you. Fifth Mother, you must be continually on your guard against this fellow's plottings."
Yulou might have been plunged in a cold bath, she was so shocked when she heard this. Jinlian flushed beneath her powder and ground her silvery teeth. "The murderous villain," she cried, "I've never done him any harm in the past, and I'm not doing any now. If his master takes a fancy to his wife, what's that to do with me? That slave and I shall not both remain in Ximen's household. How dare he say I got him to save my life? You may go now," she said to Laixing, "and if your master asks you any questions when he comes back, be sure to tell him what you've told me."
"Fifth Mother," Laixing said, "I have only told the truth. I have repeated exactly what I heard. If Father questions me, I can only tell him what I have told you." He went to the front court.
"Is it true that there is anything between his master and that woman?" Yulou said.
"Did you ever know that unprincipled scamp to lose an opportunity of getting hold of a pretty woman?" Jinlian said. "Now he has given himself into that slave's hands. The strumpet was once a servant in Cai's house, and there she and her mistress played the whore together till they were found out and she was sent packing. Then she married Jiang Cong. Was one man enough for her? No, indeed, she must have lovers like grains of rice. She is up to every trick you could think of. That wretched husband of ours, who is cunning enough to deceive even the spirits—he could play tricks on a spook—told Yuxiao to take her a piece of satin to make a gown of. I meant to tell you this before. Don't you remember the day the Great Lady went to a party at Master Qiao's house? We were all playing chess in the front court when one of the maids came and said, 'Father has come back.' We stopped our game and I went to the inner court. Well, when I got to the gate, Xiaoyu was standing in the passage and, when I spoke to her, she didn't answer. She made some sort of a sign with her hand. I went on, and when I reached the garden, that little scamp Yuxiao was standing at the corner gate. She was keeping a lookout for them. Still I didn't realize what the game was and was going on but Yuxiao got in my way and wouldn't let me go farther. 'Father is there,' she said. I cursed her, because I had an idea that she was up to some trick of her own but when I did get in, there he was in the grotto with that woman. She blushed crimson when she saw me, and ran away. He didn't know what to say, and he had to listen to a few remarks from me, the shameless fellow."
"Afterwards the woman came to see me. She knelt down and begged me not to say anything to her mistress. Then, in the first month, he was going to bring the whore to spend the night with him in my room but I and Chunmei told him plainly what we thought about him. We said, of course, we would not allow him to do anything of the sort. The wretch tried to get me mixed up in the business but I was not going to have that pretty little whore carrying on with him in my place. Even if I had been willing, young Miss Chunmei would never have allowed it."
"No wonder the wicked little wretch never stands up when we come in," Yulou said. "I should never have dreamed of anything of the sort. It is most improper on his part to want her when he can get a woman anywhere. Look at the opportunity to talk scandal he gives the slaves!"
"Yes," Jinlian said, "but it is tit for tat. If he has fallen in love with the slave's wife, the slave has done as much for him. There's a nice little exchange going on. That little thief Xue'e has had plenty to say about us but now even if I give her a smack on the face, she will have to keep her mouth shut."
"Shall we tell him or not?" Yulou said. "The Great Lady will not do anything about it, and if that fellow really has made up his mind, and we keep silence about it, Father will know nothing, and, some time or other, the slave will get him. I think you ought to mention it to him."
"If that slave were my father," Jinlian said, "I might possibly forgive him but he isn't, and nothing will ever induce me to do so."
Late that evening Ximen Qing came home. He found Jinlian in her room, her cloudlike tresses in disorder, her fragrant cheeks heavy with slumber, and her eyes red like two peaches from weeping. When he asked what was amiss, she told him that Laiwang had got drunk and was going about saying he was going to kill his master. "Laixing heard this with his own ears," she said. "While you were stealing that slave's wife, he was doing as much for you. If the wretch only intended to murder you, I shouldn't worry so much but he means to kill me too. If we don't do something about it at once, sooner or later we shall fall into his clutches. We have no eyes at the back of our heads."
"Who has been telling tales?" Ximen said.
"It's no use asking me," Jinlian said. "Ask Xiaoyu. The slave said several nasty things about me. For one thing he said I poisoned my husband and, after you married me, we sent him to find somebody to save my life. This is the sort of thing he has been saying all around the place. It is a good thing I have no children. That slave's scandal-mongering would not make good hearing for them. 'When your mother first came to this house,' he would say, 'she was in a very unpleasant predicament. She had to ask me to get her out of it. I saved her life.' And if he goes around talking in that strain, what about your good name? It won't be any too glorious. If you are devoid of decent feeling, I'm not, and if that is the sort of life I've got to live, well, I just won't live."
Ximen Qing listened. Then he went to the front court, called Laixing to a quiet spot, and asked him many questions about the matter. Laixing told him in detail everything that had happened. Ximen Qing went back to the inner court and questioned Xiaoyu. Her account of the matter agreed perfectly with that of Jinlian. She told him how she had seen Xue'e coming out of Laiwang's room one day when his wife was out. It was a fact, she said.
Ximen Qing flew into a rage. He gave Xue'e a drubbing till Yueniang made him desist. He took away her ornaments and fine dresses and made her work in the kitchen with the maid servants, and forbade her ever to come out. Later, in the inner court, he told Yuxiao to bring Huilian to him in secret, so that he could hear what she had to say.
"Oh dear! Oh dear!" she cried. "Father, you mustn't talk like that. I am ready to swear by all I love that he never said anything of the sort. He may have been drunk but no matter what state he was in, he would never have forgotten himself so far as to curse you. Why, how could he accept favours from Zhou Wang and then turn around and accuse Zhou Wang of being a scoundrel? He is dependent upon you for his livelihood. Don't believe everything people say to you, Father. Who told you this story?"
Ximen Qing shut his mouth firmly. He would not answer until the woman pressed him. At last he said: "It was Laixing."
"Father," Huilian said, "you gave Laixing's job to us and he credits us with having got him out of it. He can't make so much money as he used to. So he hates us and spits out slanders against us with his bloody mouth. And you believe him! If my husband were really plotting a thing like that, I would never forgive him. Father, do what I tell you. Don't keep him here. Give him a few taels and send him away somewhere to act as your agent. When he has gone, you and I can talk together whenever we feel inclined, and it will be much pleasanter for both of us."
Ximen Qing thought this an excellent idea. "You are right, my child," he said, "I think I'll send him to the Capital to see the Imperial Tutor about this business of Wang Sifeng. He can take the birthday presents at the same time. But he has only just come back from Hangzhou and I didn't think it was fair to send him off again so soon. I made up my mind to send Laibao instead. But now you suggest it, I will send him to the Capital and, when he returns, he shall have a thousand taels of silver and I'll send him to Hang-zhou with someone else to act as a manager, and set him up in the silk business there. Will that suit you?"
Huilian was delighted. "Nothing could be better," she cried. Ximen Qing saw that there was no one about. He took her in his arms and kissed her. She slipped her tongue into his mouth, and they exchanged a long passionate kiss. "You promised me a new hairnet," Huilian said. "Why haven't you got it for me? If you don't get it now, I never shall have one. I shall have to wear this old one every day."
"Don't be impatient," Ximen said, "tomorrow I will give the silversmith eight taels of silver, and he shall make one for you. But your mistress will probably ask you where you got it. Then what will you say?"
"Don't worry," the woman said, "I shall find an answer. If anybody asks me, I shall say I borrowed it from my aunt. That will be all right." They talked a little longer and then parted.
Next day Ximen Qing took his seat in the hall and sent for Laiwang. "Get your clothes and luggage packed," he said. "Tomorrow is the twenty-eighth day of the third month, and you will start for the Capital to see the Imperial Tutor. When you come back, I am going to send you to do business at Hangzhou." Laiwang was very pleased. He bowed, and went back to his room to pack. Then he went out to buy a few things.
Laixing heard what was going on and went to tell Jinlian. She was told that Ximen Qing was in the bower in the garden and went there but she could not find him. Chen Jingji was there, packing up the presents.
"Where is your father?" she said. "What is that you're packing up?" "Father was here a moment ago," Jingji said. "He has gone to see the Great Lady and get the silver for that affair of Wang Sifeng. These are the presents for the Imperial Tutor."
"Who is going to take them?" Jinlian asked.
"I believe Father has told Laiwang to go," Jingji said.
As Jinlian was going down the steps towards the garden, she met Ximen Qing bringing the silver. She asked him to go to her room. "Whom are you sending to the Eastern Capital?" she said.
"Laiwang and Clerk Fu are going together," Ximen said. "You see, there aren't only the presents, there's this silver to be spent for the soda merchant Wang Sifeng. Two will be safer than one."
"You always think you know best," Jinlian said. "Why don't you do what I tell you? You believe every word that strumpet tells you. There isn't the slightest doubt she's thinking of her husband. Only a day or two ago that slave declared before all the servants in the house that you've taken his wife and he'll have your money. If you lose your money, my good Brother, you'll do so with your eyes open. You might as well make him a present of a thousand taels and have done with it. You want his wife. Very well. If you keep him here, it'll be awkward and if you send him somewhere else, you'll be no better off. If you let him stay here, we'll never be safe against his evil designs and if you send him away, he'll run off with every penny of your money. As long as you are after his wife, he'll care a fig for nothing you say. The best thing you can do is to get rid of him for good and all. You know the proverb: 'If you cut the grass but don't pull up the roots, new shoots will spring up as before but if you pull up the roots, there can be no new shoots to come up.' You'd have no reason to be anxious and could do what you liked with the woman." These words made Ximen Qing think.

## 047

### Lai-Wang Is Sent under Penal Escort to Hsü-Chou; the Tragic End of Sung Hui-lien who is Shamed into Committing Suicide

Be careful, whatever you do, never to say,
"It doesn't matter";
No sooner have you said, "It doesn't matter,"
than it will matter.
Those who always strive for precedence
resort to evil devices;

Words that are uttered in due turn
have a more enduring savor.
A surfeit of tasty foodstuffs will end up
making you sick;
Pleasurable events, once over, are sure to
result in disaster.
Rather than having to seek for medicine
after you are sick;
It would be better to take preventive steps
before falling ill.[1]

On hearing Chin-lien's argument, Hsi-men Ch'ing changed his mind.

The next day Lai-wang got his gear together and stood ready to start packing the saddlebags and set off on his journey to the Eastern Capital. He waited around until noon but saw no sign of any activity.

What should he see at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who came out to the front compound, summoned Lai-wang into his presence, and said, "I was thinking it over last night and concluded that since you've hardly been back any time at all from your trip to Hang-chou, if I were to send you off to the Eastern Capital now it would be too hard on you. It would be better to let Lai-pao go in your stead and give you a chance to get a few days of rest here at home. I'll look around in the near future for some new business I could open on the street front of my property and put you in charge of it."

It has always been true that:

The owner may do with his property as he likes;
The customer may choose whether or not to buy.[2]

How could Lai-wang presume to protest? All he could do was to accept the situation.

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon turned the birthday gifts, the valuables and silver, the saddlebags and letters all over to Lai-pao and his manager, Wu Tien-en, who set off for the Eastern Capital on the twenty-eighth day of the third month. But no more of this.

Lai-wang went back to his room, enraged that his master had decided not to put him in charge of escorting the birthday gifts but to send Lai-pao instead. He managed to get falling-down drunk in his room, uttering all kinds of nonsense, taking it out on Sung Hui-lien, and threatening to kill Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hui-lien gave him a piece of her mind.

"Don't you know that:

The dog that bites does not show its teeth.[3]

Those may be words but they don't make utterances.

Walls have cracks,
Fences have ears.[4]

Now you've had your snootful of that saffron soup, just sack out and sleep it off."

She managed to get him to bed, and he fell asleep.

The next day she went to the rear compound and induced Yü-hsiao to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come out and see her. The two of them went to a secluded spot beneath the rear wall behind the kitchen to have a talk, while Yü-hsiao stood at the back gate to act as a lookout for them.

The woman complained vociferously to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Father, what kind of a man are you? Originally you said you would have him go but now you've changed your tack and decided to send someone else. You've got:

The mind of a ball:
Bobbing down, bobbing up.[5]

You're like:

A walking stick made of rush:
Not to be relied upon.[6]

If you were to:

Build a temple and put up a flagpole:
It would sway back and forth like the Lord of Vacillation himself.

Your prevarications are really just as noisome as your farts. I won't believe anything you say from now on. I argued it all out with you but it doesn't seem to have had any effect whatever."

"That's not it at all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "If it hadn't been for one thing, I would have sent him; but I was afraid he wasn't quite as familiar with the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai in the Eastern Capital, so I sent Lai-pao instead. I'll keep him here and find something for him to do on the street front of the property."

"Tell me," the woman demanded, "just what sort of business will you find him to do?"

"I'll have him engage a manager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and open a wineshop by the front gate."

When the woman heard this she was utterly delighted and, going back to her room, told Lai-wang about it, word for word. They only awaited Hsi-men Ch'ing's further instructions.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the front reception hall and summoned Lai-wang into his presence. Six packages of silver had been placed on the table.

"My child," he said, "when you got back from Hang-chou recently you were quite worn-out. I would have sent you to the Eastern Capital but I was afraid you weren't completely familiar with the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, so I sent Lai-pao and manager Wu instead. Today I'm turning over to you these six packages of silver, three hundred taels in all, so you can engage a manager and open a wineshop by the front gate. You ought to be able to pay me some interest on a monthly basis and still make a profit on it."

Lai-wang promptly prostrated himself on the floor and kowtowed.

Taking the six packages of silver back to his room, he said to his wife, "He's:

Done a complete about-face.

He's offering me this business in order to placate me. Today he's turned over these three hundred taels of silver to me and wants me to engage a manager and open a wineshop for him."

"You crazy louse of a black jailbird!" the woman said. "And you only got angry when I told you that:

One spadeful of earth won't dig a well:[7]
Things take a little time to make.

How is it that today you're going into business after all? I only hope you'll:

Abide by your lot and behave yourself,[8]

and stop getting drunk and giving vent to all that:

Ridiculous blatherskite."

"Put the silver into the trunk," Lai-wang said to his wife. "I'm going out to look for a manager."

Thereupon, he went out to look for a manager. He continued his search until evening but failed to find a manager and came home very drunk, where his wife put him to bed.

This was one of those occasions on which:

Something was destined to happen.

He had not been asleep very long when, sometime in the first watch as people were just settling down for the night, a hubbub arose in the rear compound and cries of "Catch the thief!" were heard. His wife nudged Lai-wang awake and, although he was still stupefied with drink, he crawled to his feet, reached for the quarterstaff he kept at one end of the bed, and set off for the rear compound to chase the thief.

"It's late at night," his wife expostulated. "You'd better find out what's going on. You ought not to just rush into the situation."

Lai-wang said:

"One maintains troops for a thousand days,
For the one day on which they are needed.[9]

How can one hear there's a thief on the premises without giving chase?"

Thereupon, with his quarterstaff at the ready, he raced through the inner gate in large strides.

What should he see but Yü-hsiao, standing on the stylobate of the reception hall and calling out in a loud voice, "A thief has got into the garden!"

Lai-wang headed straight for the garden. When he got as far as the postern gate by the anterooms on the side of the courtyard, he was taken by surprise as a bench came flying out from the black shadows and tripped him up. What should he see next but a knife falling to the ground with a clatter nearby. From either side four or five pageboys came rushing out, calling loudly, "Catch the thief!" Converging upon Lai-wang, they proceeded to take him into custody.

"But I'm Lai-wang!" he exclaimed. "I came to catch the thief. How can you turn things upside down by seizing me?"

His assailants:

Without permitting any further explanation,
With two strokes of a stick for every step,

drove him to the reception hall. What should he see there but Hsi-men Ch'ing, sitting in state in the main reception hall which was:

Ablaze with lamps and candles.

"Bring him up here," Hsi-men Ch'ing called out.

Kneeling down on the floor, Lai-wang said, "I heard there was a thief on the premises, so I came in to catch the thief. How can you end up seizing me instead?"

Lai-hsing then placed the knife in front of him so Hsi-men Ch'ing could see it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was highly incensed and cursed him, saying:

"Of all living beings man is the most difficult to save.[10]

This rascal is really a murderer. When I saw you come back from your trip to Hang-chou, I turned over three hundred taels of silver to you so you could go into business. Why, then, should you sneak into the interior of my home late at night with the intent to murder me? If that were not your intent, what did you have this knife for? Bring it here so I can have a good look at it by lamplight."

It was a thick-bladed, fine-edged knife that tapered to a piercing point and was as sharp as frost.

On examining it, Hsi-men Ch'ing became angrier than ever and shouted to his attendants, "Take him to his room and bring back those three hundred taels of silver."

The crowd of menservants thereupon escorted him to his room.

When Hui-lien saw them she began to cry out loud, saying, "He went into the rear compound to catch the thief. How can you seize him for a thief?"

Then, turning to Lai-wang, she said, "I told you not to go but you didn't pay any attention; and now, sure enough, you've allowed yourself to be made the instrument of someone else's revenge."

She opened the trunk and took out the six packages of silver that were taken back to the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing opened them by the light of the lamps and found that only one of them contained silver. The others all contained ingots of pewter or lead.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was highly incensed and demanded, "How could you hope to get away with such a substitution? Where's my silver gotten to? The sooner you tell me the truth the better for you."

Lai-wang wept, saying, "Father was kind enough to give me the opportunity to go into business. How could I dare take such a liberty as to substitute anything for your silver?"

"You had this knife made," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and wanted to kill me with it. The knife is right here as evidence. How can you make any further excuses?"

Then he called for Kan Lai-hsing and had him kneel down and give his evidence.

"Didn't you, on such and such a day," Lai-hsing said, "openly state, in the front compound in front of everybody, that you were going to kill Father, because you were so angry that he was no longer steering any business your way?"

Lai-wang could only sigh.

His mouth dropped open, and
He was unable to close it.

Summoning his menservants, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to them, "Since the goods and the weapon are in evidence, tie him up and lock him in the gatehouse. Tomorrow I'll have a formal complaint drawn up and turn him over to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission."

Who should appear at this point but Sung Hui-lien, who came running into the reception hall in such a state that:

Her clouds of hair were in disorder, and
Her clothes were in disarray.

Kneeling down to perform an obeisance to Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Neither correctly nor precisely,

she said, "Father, this business is all your doing. He went inside to chase the thief with the best of intentions, and you've had him seized as though he were a thief! I put those six packages of silver of yours away myself, and:

The original seals have not been tampered with.[11]

How could any substitution have been made for no good reason? You can't just bury someone alive like this without offending against Heavenly principle. If he has committed some offense, just give him a beating appropriate to the offense. Where are you sending him off to with such a fuss?"

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her:

His anger turned to joy,

and he said, "My child, it has nothing to do with you. You can get up. This unreasonable and outrageous behavior of his has been going on for sometime. Now he has secreted a knife on his person and tried to kill me. You knew nothing about it, so you can relax. It's not your affair."

Then he turned to the pageboy Lai-an and ordered him, "Quickly now, help your elder brother's wife back to her room; and don't do anything to upset her."

Hui-lien remained on her knees and refused to get up, saying, "Father, how can you be so cruel!

If you won't do it for the priest's sake, do it for the Buddha's.

When I plead with you this way, won't you accede to my request? As for him, although he does drink too much, he would never do such a thing."

She pestered Hsi-men Ch'ing until he was frantic and ordered Lai-an to help her to her feet and coax her back to her room.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing wrote a personal note about the matter and instructed Lai-hsing to be prepared to testify as a witness, to take the formal complaint with him, and to escort Lai-wang to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. He was to say that on such and such a day, while in his cups, he had secreted a knife on his person and, late at night, made an attempt on the life of his master; and also that he had substituted base metal for the silver he had been given, etc.

Just as they were about to set out, who should appear but Wu Yüeh-niang, who:

Lightly moved her lotus feet,
and came out to the main reception hall, where she repeatedly urged clemency on Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "If a slave does anything wrong, why don't you punish him at home and make an end of it? Why should you want to make such a fuss and have him:
Haled before the judge and exposed in the courtroom?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words he:
Opened wide his two eyes,
and shouted at her, "You're only a woman who doesn't understand anything. The slave intended to kill me and yet you urge me to forgive him!"
Thereupon, disregarding Yüeh-niang's plea, he ordered his minions to escort Lai-wang to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.
All that Yüeh-niang could do was to retire in confusion and go back to the rear compound, where she said to Meng Yü-lou and the others, "Right now in this household:
Chaos is king.
The nine-tailed fox fairy has appeared in the world.[12]
I don't know whose words he's been taken in by that he should drive a servant out of the household for no good reason. Even if you're going to falsely accuse him of being a thief:
The only thing that ought to matter is the truth.
What justification is there for:
Pasting a paper coffin on someone?[13]
He's really acting like an irrational, good-for-nothing, benighted ruler!"
Sung Hui-lien knelt down in front of her and wept.
"Child," said Yüeh-niang, "you can get up. There's no need to weep. Your husband, in any case, cannot be convicted of a capital crime. Even people guilty of manslaughter sometimes get off. That lousy ruffian has:
Swallowed a soul-disorienting drug.[14]
Nothing we say is worth listening to. We're like:
Women serving in the army:
Merely taking up space."[15]
Yü-lou said to Hui-lien, "Your father is just at the height of his rage. Later on we'll approach him gradually and try again to dissuade him. You'd better calm down and return to your room."
Let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it but return to the story of how Lai-wang was escorted to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent Tai-an ahead to deliver "a hundred piculs of white rice" to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling and Battalion Commander Ho Chin. Only after they had accepted this gratuity did they take their seats in the tribunal.
Lai-hsing handed up Hsi-men Ch'ing's formal complaint that stated that Lai-wang, having previously accepted a sum of silver with which to start a business:
On seeing the money developed ideas,[16]
and substituted base metal for the silver; whereupon, fearing that his master would discover the imposition, he had late at night secreted a knife on his person and intruded into the inner reception hall with the intent of killing his master, etc. On perusing the complaint, Hsia Yen-ling and Ho Chin were greatly incensed and had Lai-wang haled before them to answer the charges.
"I hope Your Honour will look carefully into the matter," pled Lai-wang. "If you permit me to speak, I will presume to speak. If you don't permit me to speak, I will not presume to speak."
"You rascal," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "the evidence of your guilt is clear. There's no getting around it. You'd better tell me the truth lest I put the screws on you."
Lai-wang gave a full account of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had initially deputed someone to tempt his wife, nee Sung, with a bolt of blue silk, how he had then flirted with and seduced her, and how he was now deliberately framing him in order to get him out of the way so he could have sole possession of his wife.
Judicial Commissioner Hsia shouted to his minions to slap the prisoner across the mouth, saying, "You slave! You've betrayed your master. This woman of yours was provided for you by your master to be your wife. He also entrusted capital to you so you could start a business. While you:
Not thinking to repay your obligation,[17]
instead got drunk and broke into his sleeping quarters late at night, secreting a knife upon your person with the intent to murder him. If every slave were like you, the people of the empire would not dare to employ servants."[18]
Lai-wang continued to claim he was being dealt with unjustly until Judicial Commissioner Hsia called up Kan Lai-hsing to testify against him. At this, Lai-wang:
Though he had a mouth, had nothing further to say.
Truly:
Though he was master of all the Heavenly arts,
He could not avert the calamity before his eyes.[19]
Judicial Commissioner Hsia thereupon ordered his minions to bring out the largest grade of ankle-squeezers. These were applied to Lai-wang, and, after they were tightened in place, he was given twenty strokes with a heavy bamboo. They beat him so severely that:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood flowed down his legs.
The lictors were then ordered to take him away and put him in the lockup.
Lai-hsing and Tai-an went home and reported what had happened to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was utterly delighted.
He gave orders to his servants, as follows, "None of you is to deliver any bedding or food to Lai-wang in prison. Even the fact that he was beaten; I don't want any of you coming home and telling his wife about it. Just say that he was not beaten a single stroke in the yamen, and that after he's been held for a few days they'll let him go."
The servants all assented, saying, "We understand."
Sung Hui-lien, from the time that Lai-wang was taken away:
Did not comb her hair,
Did not wash her face,
Allowed her features to become sallow,
Did not straighten her skirt,
Scuffed around with her slippers on backwards,
Wept behind closed doors, and
Consumed neither tea nor food.[20]
Hsi-men Ch'ing became frantic about it and sent Yü-hsiao and Pen the Fourth's wife to her room, again and again, to try to reason with her.
"You ought not to take it so hard," they said to her. "Because of the way he got drunk and misspoke himself, Father has just had him locked up for a few days to teach him a lesson. It won't be long before he'll let him out again."
Hui-lien did not believe them. She sent the pageboy Lai-an to deliver food to him in prison and when he returned interrogated him about it but he repeated the same story.
"When Elder Brother went before the magistrate," he said, "he was not beaten a single stroke. He ought to be home in a day or two. He said for you to stay home and not to worry about it."
Only after hearing these words did Hui-lien stop crying. Every day, she:
Lightly painted her moth eyebrows,[21]
Judiciously applied rouge and powder,
and came out and went about her business. Hsi-men Ch'ing frequently came and went outside the door of her room.
From beneath the bamboo blind the woman called to him, saying, "There's nobody else here. Won't you come in and sit down for a while?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing slipped into the room and the two of them had a tête-a-tête together.
Hsi-men Ch'ing deceived her, saying, "My child, you can relax. For your sake I wrote a note to the officials so that he has not been beaten a single stroke. They're going to keep him locked up for a few days to teach him a lesson but he ought to be out in a day or two, after which he can resume his business as before."
The woman put her arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck, saying, "My own daddy! Whatever you do, for my sake, give him a hard time for a few days and then let him out again. I don't care whether you have him open a business for you or not. Once he gets out this time, I'll see to it that he stops drinking altogether. No matter whether you:
Send him near or send him far,
he can hardly refuse to go. Or better yet, if you feel the situation is too inconvenient, find another wife for him. That would settle the matter as far as he's concerned, and I would no longer feel that I belonged to him forever."
"Dear heart," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what you say is true. One day soon I'll buy the Ch'iao family's property across the street and fix up a three-room house for you to live in. Once you've moved in over there the two of us can:
Enjoy ourselves to our heart's content."
"Darling," the woman said, "Whatever you propose to do will be all right with me."
When they had concluded their parley they closed the door of the room.
It so happened that during the summer months the woman was in the habit of going without her underdrawers, so she only had on a pair of skirts. On the occasion of this encounter with Hsi-men Ch'ing, all she had to do was to lift her skirts out of the way and they could fall to it. She kept a breath-sweetening lozenge in her mouth at all times.
Thereupon:
Untying her girdle pendant, she discloses the jade of the Nymph of the Hsiang River;[22]
Distending her ruby lips, she displays the cloves of the Han dynasty Secretariat.[23]
Her pair of wild ducks flies to his shoulders;[24]
As they consummate a bout of clouds and rain.
The woman unfastened the white silver-striped silk drawnwork scent bag with four dangling tassels that hung at her waist—it was filled with pine and cypress seeds, rose petals, and aromatic lysimachia from Annam and was adorned with a drawnwork eight-character inscription reading:
Winter and summer forever green,
Delicate, fragrant, beautiful, and lovely—
and had Hsi-men Ch'ing tie it to his own waist-string. He was as pleased as could be with this and only wished the two of them could:
Swear fealty in life and death,
Unable to tear themselves apart.
Reaching into his sleeve he fished out one or two taels of silver and gave it to her to buy sweetmeats with.
As they dallied with each other in her room he repeatedly reassured her, saying, "There's no need to worry. I'm afraid you'll only worry yourself sick. Tomorrow I'll write a note to His Honour Hsia and have him released."
After they had spoken for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid someone would come by and hurriedly took his leave.
The woman, having obtained this promise from Hsi-men Ch'ing, went to the rear compound where, in speaking to the maidservants and wives, she did not succeed in preventing some intimation of it from leaking out in her words and expression.
Meng Yü-lou soon found out about it and came to tell P'an Chin-lien what she had heard, saying, "Father has determined, sooner or later, to release Lai-wang and find another wife for him. He's going to buy the Ch'iao family's residence across the street, move her over there, set aside a three-room house for her to live in, and buy a maidservant to wait on her. He's going to have a fret of silver filigree and other jewelry made for her as well."
Word for word she recounted the whole story. "She'll be on an equal status with you and me. What sort of behavior is that? And our elder sister won't do anything to prevent it."
Nothing might have happened if P'an Chin-lien had not heard about this but having heard about it:
Anger swelled her breast but there was no place to put it;
The red of her two cheeks was further augmented with red.
"So he's really going to accede to her demands?" she said. "I refuse to believe it. I'll tell you right now, if I let that slave of a whore become Hsi-men Ch'ing's seventh concubine—and this is no idle boast—you might as well turn my name P'an on its head!"
"If our husband ignores the proprieties," said Yü-lou, "and his legitimate wife won't do anything about it:
We may be able to run but we can't fly,
Where can we hope to get to?"
"You're really hopeless," said Chin-lien. "What's this life worth anyway!
Though you live to be a hundred, you'll only be butchered for your meat.
If he doesn't go along with me, I'll put my life up against hers any day; what's it to me?"
"I don't have the stomach to cross him," laughed Yü-lou. "If you've got what it takes, I'll stand by and watch you take him on."
To make a long story short, that evening Hsi-men Ch'ing took a seat in his study in the Kingfisher Pavilion in the garden and was about to send for Ch'en Ching-chi to get him to draft a note for him to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, instructing him to release Lai-wang, when Chin-lien suddenly showed up, leaned over the writing desk, and asked, "What note are you having your son-in-law draft for you, and who is it addressed to?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Could not conceal the situation,[25]
and told her all about how he intended to have Lai-wang punished with a few strokes and then released.
The woman stopped the servant, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Don't send for your son-in-law."
Then she sat down beside him and said, "You only pretend to be a real man while all the time you're just a good-for-nothing who:
Adjusts his rudder to the wind,[26] and
Pushes the boat along with the current.[27]
You ignore everything I took the trouble to say to you and go along with that lousy slave of a whore's every whim. No matter what lengths you go to:
Mixing granulated sugar with honey,
for her to eat every day, she will still only hanker after that husband of hers. Now if you insist on releasing that slave, you really can't very well take on his wife without giving him a pretext to use against you. If you keep her around the house under such circumstances she'll be:
Neither fish nor fowl.
What sort of status will you assign to her? If you treat her as your concubine, that slave will still be in the way. If you treat her as the wife of your slave, you've been indulging her too inappropriately. She's been:
Assuming privileges above her station,[28]

for everyone to see, making a real spectacle of herself. Even if you found another woman for that slave so you could appropriate his wife; in the future, if the two of you were sitting together someplace and that slave came in to report something, how could he help being angry when he saw you two together? When the woman saw him, should she stand up or remain seated? Just to start out with, this alone wouldn't look right. If it got around, not only would your neighbours and relatives laugh at you but even the members of your own household, high and low, would not be able to take you seriously.
Truly:
If the ridgepole is not straight,
The rafters will be crooked.[29]
"If you are really determined on this business you're acting like someone who:
Swears he want's to be a loach but
Is afraid of getting mud in his eyes.[30]
You would do better to be:
Once ruthless, ruthless to the end,[31]
and polish off this slave once and for all. Then you could embrace his wife with an easy mind."
With these few sentences she succeeded once again in persuading Hsi-men Ch'ing to change his mind.
A note was written and dispatched to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, directing Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling to settle the case against Lai-wang within three days. He was subjected to a severe interrogation during the course of which he was squeezed and beaten until he was scarcely recognizable. The two judicial commissioners, as well as the inspectors, the detectives, the orderlies, and even the turnkeys in the jail, both high and low, had all been paid off by Hsi-men Ch'ing to see that the prisoner was treated severely rather than leniently.
Among them there was a chief clerk in charge of the files whose name was Yin Chih, or Good Deed.[32] He was a native of Hsiao-i[33] district in Shansi province and was an exceedingly benevolent and honest man. Because the officials of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, both high and low, had accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's bribes and colluded in framing the prisoner so that he could appropriate his wife, they had indicted him for the serious crime of "a servant coveting his master's property and attempting to murder him with knife in hand."[34]
Yin Chih thought to himself:
"One must have some regard for Heaven's principles.[35]
Officials, too:
Raise sons and raise daughters,
Hoping that they will grow to adulthood."[36]
He repeatedly refused to make out the papers that would enable Lai-wang to be brought to trial and argued the case with the judicial commissioners face to face. However, the two judicial commissioners had both been bought off by Hsi-men Ch'ing. The result was an impasse that made it difficult to proceed any further.
Moreover, Lai-wang had no money of his own to distribute in the jail, so he was subject to mistreatment. Fortunately for him, Yin Chih took pity on the fact that he had:
Suffered injustice and harboured resentment,
and was without resources of his own, and ordered the jailers in the prison to treat him leniently and look out for him.
Yin Chih succeeded in delaying the disposition of the case for several days but eventually:
His obligations canceled each other out,
and Lai-wang was given forty strokes of the bamboo in the courtroom and sentenced to be remanded under penal escort to the jurisdiction of Hsü-chou, his native place. It was determined that seventeen taels of the misappropriated silver had already been spent and the remainder, along with the five packages of pewter or lead, were turned over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's retainer, Lai-hsing, to be returned to their rightful owner. A note was written by the authorities and dispatched to Hsi-men Ch'ing to inform him of the outcome of the case.
It was ordered that the prisoner should set out under penal escort that same day. The judicial commissioners issued the necessary papers on the bench, and two guards were deputed to bring Lai-wang before the court. He had already been beaten to a pulp. He was subsequently fastened into a cangue that was duly sealed, and the guards were ordered to set out that same day for Hsü-chou and turn him over to the authorities there.
Lai-wang was in a pitiable state. He had been incarcerated for half a month or so without any money of his own. As a result his body was lacerated, his clothes were tattered, and he had nowhere to turn.
Weeping unceasingly, he appealed to his guards, saying, "With all due respect to you two brothers, I've just been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. As a result:
I haven't a candareen to my name,
Nor so much as an inch of cloth.
If I am to come up with something in the way of remuneration for you two, I've got no place to raise it. If you will only take pity on me and escort me to my master's residence, my wife is there and also a boxful of my clothes. If I can get them out and sell them off, I should be able to realize enough to compensate you for your trouble and make things a little easier for us on the road."
The two guards said, "You don't know what you're up against. Since it's your master, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who is responsible for your predicament in the first place, what likelihood is there that he would consent to relinquish your wife or your boxes? Don't you have any other relatives or friends? Out of consideration for Master Yin, we might be willing to:
Deceive our superiors but not our inferiors,[37]
and take you there to raise some money or rice for the expenses of the trip. Who's expecting anything else in the way of remuneration from you?"
"My two brothers," said Lai-wang, "for pity's sake, just take me as far as the gate of my master's house and I'll beg two or three neighbours to put in a good word for me.
If there isn't a lot, there'll be a little."[38]
"All right," said the two guards, "we'll escort you as far as his gate."
Lai-wang first applied at the house of Ying Po-chüeh but Po-chüeh pretended not to be at home. He then asked Hsi-men Ch'ing's close neighbours, Chia Jen-ch'ing, or False Feelings, and I Mien-tz'u, or Ostensibly Benign,[39] if they would intercede on his behalf for the return of his wife and things. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not appear himself but sent out five or six pageboys with sticks to prevent them from making any further disturbance outside his gate. Chia Jen-ch'ing and I Mien-tz'u were thoroughly mortified. His wife, Sung Hui-lien, who was in her room at the time, was kept as completely in the dark as if she had been:
Locked tight in an iron bucket,
and didn't know a word about it. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that any pageboy who leaked information on the subject would be sentenced to twenty strokes with the bamboo.
The two guards then escorted Lai-wang to the house of his father-in-law, the coffin seller, Sung Jen, where Lai-wang, thus and so, tearfully told him the whole story. Sung Jen sent him off with a single tael of silver and came up with one string of copper cash and a peck of rice for the two guards in the way of traveling expenses.
It was the first decade of the fourth month when, weeping and wailing, Lai-wang set out on his journey away from Ch'ing-ho district along the highroad toward Hsü-chou. The wounds from his beating had broken open, and he lacked sufficient funds for the trip. He was miserable indeed. Truly:
If one is only able, somehow, to preserve his foolish life;
He will be happy to go hungry for the rest of his days.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The file clerk, in investigating this case,
maintained the utmost impartiality;
He was successful in rescuing Lai-wang
from the toils of incarceration.
Though he was condemned to penal escort
all the way back to Hsü-chou;
The sickly verdure recovered its health
upon exposure to the genial breeze.[40]
We will say no more about how Lai-wang was sent under penal escort to Hsü-chou.
To resume our story, Sung Hui-lien remained at home looking forward every day to her husband's release. The pageboys continued to be dispatched as before in order to deliver food to him but as soon as they got outside they ate it themselves.
When they returned Hui-lien would interrogate them, and they reported, "Brother ate the food. Nothing is happening in the jail. Otherwise he would have been released by now. For the last several days their honours the judicial commissioners have not come to the yamen to conduct business. He should be home in another day or two."
Hsi-men Ch'ing also deceived her, saying, "I've sent someone to take care of it. He should be out before long."
The woman believed this to be true.
One day, she overheard "wind-borne words" to the effect that Lai-wang had been let out of jail and escorted to the front gate where he had asked for his box of clothes and then gone off somewhere or other. The woman asked about this several times but the pageboys wouldn't tell her anything.
Then she happened to see Tai-an, who was bringing Hsi-men Ch'ing's horse back to the house, and asked, "How's your brother Lai-wang doing in jail, and when will he get out?"
"Sister-in-law," said Tai-an, "I might as well tell you. By this time my brother must have reached the River of Flowing Sands."[41]
When Hui-lien demanded to know what he meant, Tai-an, though he:
Never, ever, should have done it,[42]
told her, thus and so, "He was beaten forty strokes and remanded under penal escort to the jurisdiction of Hsü-chou, his native place. But you must keep it to yourself. Don't tell anyone I told you."
If the woman had not heard about this, nothing might have happened but having heard these words that she recognized to be the truth, she closed the door to her room and began to cry out loud, saying, "My husband, since you've been in this household what business of his have you ever ruined that he should want to:
Paste a paper coffin on you,
and conspire against you behind your back? Since you've been a slave of his you haven't even stashed away so much as a decent article of clothing for yourself. So now it's only fitting that you should be traduced into being packed off:
Far away from home,
leaving me in a pretty predicament. While you're on the road:
I don't know whether you're alive or dead,
I can't tell whether you'll survive or perish.[43]
They might as well have:
Put a water crock over my head,
for all I knew about it."
She wept for a while and then took a long towel, fastened it to the lintel over her bedroom door, and hanged herself.
Who could have anticipated that Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," whose room was adjacent to hers, happened to have come back from the rear compound and heard her crying for a while, after which there was a period of silence, finally succeeded by the sound of panting. She knocked on the door of her room and called to her but received no response. Becoming panic-stricken, she got the pageboy, P'ing-an, to pry open the window and shin himself inside. Finding the woman, dressed in her everyday clothes, neatly suspended in the doorframe, he cut her down and opened the door, after which they administered artificial respiration and poured ginger extract into her mouth.
It was not long before news of the event reached the rear compound and Wu Yüeh-niang, leading Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Li P'ing-erh, Yü-hsiao, and Hsiao-yü, all came to see what had happened. Pen the Fourth's wife also came to have a look. "The Beanpole" was sitting on the ground holding her in an upright position. She was making choking noises but was still unable to cry audibly. When Yüeh-niang spoke to her she only hung her head, drooling saliva and phlegm from her mouth, and did not respond.
"You're being a silly child," said Yüeh-niang. "If you had anything to complain about, it would have been better to speak up. Why should you feel that you had to resort to this way out?"
She then asked "The Beanpole," "Have you given her any ginger extract yet?"
"I've just given her some," said "The Beanpole," "and she swallowed it."
Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to help prop her up and then personally appealed to her, "Hui-lien, my child, no matter what it is you've got on your mind, you'd do better to blurt it out truthfully. It won't be held against you."
She continued appealing to her for some time but the woman only sobbed inaudibly for a while and then began to cry out loud:
Clapping her hands and beating her palms.
Yüeh-niang told Yü-hsiao to help her onto the k'ang but she refused to get onto it. After Yüeh-niang and the others had endeavored to placate her for some time, they returned to the rear compound, leaving only Pen the Fourth's wife and Yü-hsiao to keep her company in her room.
Who should appear at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who lifted aside the portiere and came in.
Seeing that she was sitting, weeping, on the cold ground, he ordered Yü-hsiao, "Help her onto the k'ang."
"Mother told her to get up there just now," said Yü-hsiao, "but she refused to do so."
"What a stubborn child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'll get a chill from the cold ground. If you have something to say, tell me about it. How could you do such a foolish thing?"
"Father," said Hui-lien, shaking her head, "a fine man you are! That's quite a stunt you've managed to pull off behind my back! Who cares whether you call me your child or not? It turns out that you're just:
An executioner who likes to play with his victims.[44]
You're so inured to burying people alive that you can bring yourself to:
Kill a person off and then attend the funeral.
All day long you kept on deceiving me. One day you said he'd be released, and the next day you said he'd be released, until you had me believing that he would really be freed. If you were going to have him sent into exile, you could, at least, have let me know what you were up to. Secretly, without giving me so much as an inkling, to send him off so far away! You must have some regard for Heaven's principles. How can you express your confidence in someone and then subject him to such drastic measures? The trap had already been sprung but you continued to keep me in the dark. If you were determined to get him out of the way, why didn't you get us both out of the way? What are you keeping me around for?"
"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile, "it's got nothing to do with you. Why should I want to get you out of the way because that rascal was at fault? You just relax and leave it to me."
Then he said to Yü-hsiao, "You and Pen the Fourth's wife keep her company overnight. I'll send a pageboy with some wine for you to drink."
When he had finished speaking, he went outside.
Pen the Fourth's wife, after some time, succeeded in getting her to sit up on the k'ang. She and Yü-hsiao sat down together with her and did their best to comfort her.
It so happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the shop on the street front of the compound and asked Manager Fu for a string of cash, with which he bought a mace worth of deep fried cutlets that he had put into a box, together with a bottle of wine, and ordered Lai-an to deliver it to Hui-lien's room.
"Father sent me to deliver these things for you to eat, Sister-in-law," he said.
When Hui-lien saw this, she cursed, "You lousy jailbird! Take them away at once before I throw them all over the floor.
First he beats a person with his big fists,
And then he rubs the bruises with his hand."[45]
"You'd better keep them, Sister-in-law," said Lai-an. "If I take them back, Father will only beat me."
Thereupon, he set them down on the table and went out. Hui-lien jumped off the k'ang, grabbed the wine, and would have run out and thrown it after him, if "The Beanpole" had not stopped her.
As Pen the Fourth's wife was keeping watch and "The Beanpole" was biting her fingernails, who should appear but Pen the Fourth's daughter, Chang-chieh, who had come to fetch her mother, saying, "Father's just arrived home and wants something to eat."

Pen the Fourth's wife and "The Beanpole" went out as far as "The Beanpole's" door, where they found Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang, talking to each other.
They asked Pen the Fourth's wife where she was off to, and she replied, "My husband's just arrived home and wants something to eat. I'll just look in there and then come back. I only came over to see what was happening, and then Father insisted that I stay and keep her company. How could I have known I'd get tied up and be unable to get away?"
"What could she have been thinking of," they went on to ask, "that led her to take this way out?"
"It's lucky for her I happened to come back from the rear compound," said "The Beanpole," picking up where Pen the Fourth's wife had left off. "I could hear her crying in her room and then I didn't hear anything. That disturbed me, so I tried to force my way through her door but it wouldn't open. Then I called P'ing-an and got him to jump in through the window. It was only then that he succeeded in cutting her down. If he'd been a minute later she would have been a goner, like:
The bearded oldster who blew out the lamp,
Only to burn himself to death."[46]
"When Father was in her room just now, what did she have to say?" asked Hui-hsiang.
Pen the Fourth's wife laughed, saying, "Who could have known that Lai-wang's wife would turn out to be such a peppery article? She gave him tit for tat, just as though they were equals. Who ever heard of a servant's wife carrying on so high-handedly?"
"This servant's wife," said Hui-hsiang, "is not like other servants' wives. She's more like a daughter-in-law who can hardly be wrested from her father-in-law's embrace. Who is there in this whole household, high or low, who is her equal?"
Having had her say, Hui-hsiang went home.
"Sister-in-law," said "The Beanpole," "Hurry back after you get home."
"Needless to say," replied Pen the Fourth's wife. "If I didn't come back, Father would be really upset with me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing had Pen the Fourth's wife and "The Beanpole" sit with Hui-lien during the daylight hours and Yü-hsiao sleep with her at night.
Little by little Yü-hsiao endeavored to talk her round, saying, "Sister Sung, you're an intelligent person. You ought to take advantage of the fact that you're in the prime of life, a flower that has just opened. The fact that your master loves you shows that your:
Affinities are mutually compatible.
Right now:
Though you may not measure up to your superiors,
You are more than a match for your inferiors.[47]
To be attached to a master is better than to be attached to a slave. Now that he's gone, he's gone for good. It doesn't matter that much that you're so upset but if you should cry yourself sick, you'd be risking your life. As the saying goes:
Whoever is a monk for a day,
Must strike the bell for a day.[48]
After all, a reputation for chastity is hardly going to end up on your head."
When Hui-lien heard this, all she did was weep, refusing every day to eat either food or congee.
Yü-hsiao reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who told P'an Chin-lien to go and speak to her in person but Hui-lien remained adamant.
This annoyed Chin-lien, who said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "That lousy whore! All she cares about is her husband. She says a thousand times:
One night as man and wife gives rise to a hundred nights of love.[49]
She says ten thousand times:
To walk a hundred steps with one another,
Is enough to develop a lingering affinity.[50]
With a woman as chaste as that, what can you use to secure her affections?"
"Don't you believe those specious arguments of hers," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she were really as chaste as all that, she would have remained faithful to the memory of the cook, Chiang Ts'ung, instead of consenting to marry Lai-wang."
He then proceeded to take his seat in the front reception hall and summoned all the pageboys and menservants before him for an interrogation.
"Some days ago," he said, "when Lai-wang was sent away under penal escort, who was it who told his wife about it? Whoever is willing to identify the culprit, I will not beat so much as a single stroke. Otherwise, if I find out who it was, anyone who knew about it and did not confess will receive thirty strokes of the bamboo and be:
Driven away from this door for good."
Suddenly Hua-t'ung knelt down and said, "Your servant dares not speak."
"Speak up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it won't do you any harm."
"The other day," said Hua-t'ung, "when Tai-an was bringing Father's horse back to the house, I overhead Sister-in-law ask him about it in the enclosed passageway, and he was indiscreet enough to tell her."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened but having heard them, he became enraged and shouted out for someone to go find Tai-an. Tai-an was quickly apprised of this and immediately went to seek refuge in Chin-lien's room, from which he refused to come out.
Chin-lien was washing her face when the pageboy ran into her room, knelt down, and wept, saying, "Fifth Lady, save me!"
"You lousy jailbird!" Chin-lien upbraided him. "You came in so suddenly you gave me quite a start. What have you been up to this time?"
"It's because I told Sister-in-law how Lai-wang had been sent away," said Tai-an, "that Father wants to beat me. Whatever you do, Mother, put in a word for me. Otherwise, if I go out while Father is just at the height of his rage, I'll be as good as dead."
"You crazy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "You're as frightened as a ghost. I wondered what it could be that should so:
Startle Heaven and shake the earth.[51]
But it turns out to be nothing but the affair of that slave of a whore. I order you to remain in this room and don't go out."
Thereupon, she hid him behind the door.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing found that he was unable to summon Tai-an into his presence, he raved like thunder in the front reception hall. He sent two pageboys, one after another, to Chin-lien's room to look for him but they were forced to leave, empty-handed, with Chin-lien's curses on their heads.
Finally, like a gust of wind, Hsi-men Ch'ing descended upon Chin-lien's room in person, with a riding crop in his hand, and demanded, "Where is that slave?"
Chin-lien paid no attention until Hsi-men Ch'ing had made a search of the premises, dragged Tai-an out from behind the door, and was about to beat him.
At this point, Chin-lien grabbed the riding crop out of his hand, threw it on top of the tester above the bed, and said, "You shameless good-for-nothing! It's a wonder you have the face to play the master. That slave of a whore so hankered after her husband that she hanged herself, and you're so mortified you vent your spleen on a pageboy. What's it got to do with him?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing was bug-eyed with rage.
"You go back to the front of the compound," Chin-lien said to the pageboy, "and go on about your business. Don't pay any attention to him. If he tries to beat you again, he'll have me to contend with."
Taking advantage of this reprieve, Tai-an headed straight for the front of the compound. Truly:
With two hands he tore open the road between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.
P'an Chin-lien, having witnessed several such instances of Hsi-men Ch'ing's preoccupation with Sung Hui-lien, thereupon:
Came up with a plan in her mind.[52]
Going into the rear compound, she set out to provoke Sun Hsüeh-o, saying, "Lai-wang's wife has been talking about how you seduced her husband and told him what she was up to, with the result that Father became angry and had her husband gotten out of the way. When he gave you that beating the other day and took away your jewelry and finery, it was all because of her talebearing."
Sun Hsüeh-o, having been regaled with such an earful of venom, developed a heartful to match.
Taking her leave of Hsüeh-o, Chin-lien then proceeded, in one breath, to make her way to the front of the compound and do the same to Hui-lien, saying, "Sun Hsüeh-o has been talking in the rear compound about how when you were a slave employed by the Ts'ai family you were already an old hand at inveigling your master into adultery. If you hadn't been making out with your master behind your husband's back, he would never have been driven out of the household. She claims that those tears of yours are only crocodile tears."
Chin-lien's efforts stirred up a:
Sense of grievance and desire for revenge,
on both sides.
One day it was one of those occasions on which:
Something is destined to happen.
It was the eighteenth day of the fourth month, Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and Auntie Li and Li Kuei-chieh from the licensed quarter had come to help celebrate the occasion. Wu Yüeh-niang invited them to join the other female guests in the rear reception room for a feast. Hsi-men Ch'ing had accepted a social engagement elsewhere and was not at home.
Sung Hui-lien, having eaten breakfast and put in an appearance in the rear compound during the morning, slipped back to her room and slept until the sun began to sink in the west. One maidservant after another was dispatched from the rear compound to call her but she ignored them all and refused to come out. This was just the pretext that Sun Hsüeh-o had been looking for.
Going to her room to call her, she said, "Sister-in-law, you must think you're Wang the Beauty,[53] you're playing so hard to get."
Hui-lien paid no attention to her but continued to lie on the bed with her face to the wall.
"Sister-in-law," Hsüeh-o continued, "no doubt you're thinking of your Lai-wang. It would have been better if you had thought about him a little earlier. If it hadn't been for you he wouldn't be dead. He'd still be here in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."
On hearing these words, Hui-lien was reminded of what P'an Chin-lien had said to her.
Turning over and jumping out of bed, she said to Hsüeh-o, "There's no need for you to come here to work off your wanton rancor. If it was on my account that he was gotten out of the way, how come you were given such a beating and relegated to a position in which you can't even appear in decent society any more? You ought to consider yourself lucky people refrain from confronting you about it. Everyone should exercise some mutual forbearance. What need is there for you to stick your neck out and find fault with anyone?"
Hsüeh-o became enraged and cursed her, saying, "Why you adulterous whore of a lousy slave! Have you got the colossal nerve to criticize me?"
"If I'm a whore of a slave," retorted Hui-lien, "you're nothing but the mistress of a slave. If I've committed adultery, at least it was with my master; which beats your adultery with a slave. First you seduce my husband behind my back, and then you have the nerve to come around and kick up a fuss about me."
These few words were clearly designed to hit Hsüeh-o where it hurt, and they had the desired effect. Before Hui-lien could do anything to protect herself, Hsüeh-o stepped forward and slapped her full in the face, turning it bright red.
"How dare you strike me?" Hui-lien exclaimed.
Thereupon, she went for her assailant and the two of them started to tussle with each other. Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," hurriedly came over and tried to persuade them to break it up. Even after Hsüeh-o had been forcibly disengaged from her, the two of them continued to:
Revile each other without ceasing.[54]
Wu Yüeh-niang came up and gave them a piece of her mind, saying, "Neither of you have the slightest regard for propriety. No matter whether there are guests present or not, you're willing to:
Turn the whole household upside down.[55]
Just wait till your master comes home and see whether I tell him about it or not."
At this, Hsüeh-o stalked off to the rear compound.
Seeing that Hui-lien's hairdo had been pulled undone, Yüeh-niang said to her, "You'd better comb your hair as quickly as you can and come back to the rear compound."
Hui-lien did not say a word in reply but saw Yüeh-niang on her way and then went into her room, locked the door on the inside, and gave herself up to tears. She continued to cry until it was time to light the lamps. Everyone was busy with the feast for the female guests in the rear compound. Alas, the woman:
Unable to contain her chagrin,
took out two of her foot bindings, fastened them to the doorpost, and:
Hanged herself until dead.[56]
At the time of her death she was twenty-four years of age. Truly:
The good things of this world are none too enduring;
Coloured clouds are prone to scatter and glass is brittle.[57]
At just that time:
Strange as it may seem,[58]
who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang should pass right in front of Hui-lien's room as she was seeing off Auntie Li and Kuei-chieh. The door was closed and all was silent within that made her feel rather apprehensive. As soon as she had seen Auntie Li and her daughter into their sedan chairs, she came back and pushed at Hui-lien's door and called to her but was unable to get it open. Becoming panic-stricken, she had a pageboy jump in through the window as before. Truly:
The earthenware crock cannot avoid being broken on the well curb.[59]
They cut the foot bindings by which she was suspended, laid her down, and administered artificial respiration for some time but, though nobody knew just when it had happened:
Alas and alack,
she was already dead. Behold:
Her four limbs are cold as ice,
Her breath is an extinguished lamp.
Her fragrant soul is dim;
Already headed for the Terrace of Homeward Gazing Spirits.
Her starry eyes are dark;
Its spirits fled, her body lies on the bare ground.[60]
Who knows to what place her vital essences have flown;
Unless they are in the flying clouds and the autumn waters?[61]
When Yüeh-niang realized that their efforts to revive her would prove unsuccessful, she was thrown into consternation and hurriedly sent the pageboy, Lai-hsing, to ride on horseback outside the South Gate and ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come home.
Sun Hsüeh-o was afraid that when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home he would:
Pull up the trees to investigate the roots,
and end up putting the blame on her. So she went to the master suite and groveled around on her knees, imploring Yüeh-niang not to mention the fact that she had quarreled with her.
Although Yüeh-niang saw how frightened she was, she couldn't bring herself to let her off completely and said, "If you're as afraid as all that, wouldn't it have been better if you had both had a little less to say in the first place?"
That evening, however, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, she only said, "Hui-lien was hankering after her husband and cried all day long. Then, when everyone was busy in the rear compound, we don't even know when exactly, she committed suicide."

"She was just a foolish woman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who was not destined to be happy."
He sent a servant to the district magistrate, Li Ta-t'ien, with a written report of the incident that stated:
The said woman was responsible for the silver utensils during a feast for female guests in the household of the deponent and was unable to account for a silver cup. Fearing that the master of the house would investigate and punish her, she hanged herself until dead.
He also presented the magistrate with thirty taels of silver. For this reason, the district magistrate was anxious to do him a favour and routinely dispatched the clerk from the office of punishment, along with a number of coroner's assistants, who conducted a perfunctory examination of the corpse. Hsi-men Ch'ing then purchased a coffin, obtained a red death certificate, and deputed Pen the 4th and Lai-Hsing to deliver the corpse to the Ksitigarbha Nunnery outside the South Gate to be cremated. They gave the workers at the crematory five mace of silver for the purchase of additional fuel, and they were just about to light the fire when who could have anticipated that Hui-lien's father, the coffin seller, Sung Jen, having heard what had happened, should arrive on the scene and put a stop to the proceedings. He loudly proclaimed that an injustice was being perpetrated and that his daughter had died under suspicious circumstances. "Hsi-men Ch'ing," he claimed, "must've surely endeavored to force his attentions upon her. My daughter, wishing to preserve her honour, refused to go along with him and he's coerced her into committing suicide. I plan to lodge formal appeals to the governor and the surveillance commissioner. Who dares to cremate the corpse?" The workers promptly dispersed, not daring to carry out the cremation. Pen the 4th and Lai-hsing had no alternative but to leave the coffin in the nunnery and return to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Truly, the Green Dragon and the White Tiger accompany each other; good fortune and bad fortune can't be safely predicted.

As Wu from Yue is parted, so I from my lord
Through the passing years the jade pillow marks our separation.
I climb the watchtower and look towards the north
I see but heavy mist and rain.
I turn again and cry to the moon hanging in the skies.
The night is dark and hides the spears beside the gate
I wander through the corridors and sleep alone.
I seek in vain for you in the inner chamber
My spirit goes to the wastelands and my soul to the waters.

After Pan Jinlian had talked to him, Ximen Qing changed his mind once more. The next day, though Laiwang, with his luggage all ready, waited for the order to start, noon passed, and still he received no word. At last Ximen Qing came and called Laiwang to him.
"During the night, I have been thinking the matter over," he said. "I remembered that you had only just come back from Hangzhou, and I decided that, instead of sending you to the Eastern Capital as I had intended, it would be too much for you, and I ought to send Laibao and give you a rest. Later on I will find something nearer home for you."
In matters of this sort, the master invariably has the last word. Laiwang could only acquiesce. Ximen gave the silver and the presents to Laibao and Clerk Fu, and, on the twenty-eighth day of the third month, they set out. Laiwang went back to his room in a temper, drank more than was good for him, and said all manner of foolish things, telling his wife he was going to kill Ximen Qing.
Huilian scolded him. "A dog that really means to bite never shows its teeth," she said. "You are talking nonsense. Remember the walls have ears. You are drunk again." She sent him to bed.
Next day, she went to Yuxiao's room in the inner court and asked her to go for Ximen Qing. They found a quiet place behind the kitchen wall where they could talk and Yuxiao kept watch for them by the door. Huilian was very angry.
"What a man you are!" she cried. "You promised me to let him go. Why have you changed your mind and sent somebody else instead? You have a mind just like a ball. It does nothing but bob up and down. You can't keep steady long enough to hold a candle. One of these days I shall build a temple in your honour and set up a banner pole, and bestow on you the title of Father of Lies. Never again will I believe a word you say. I did trust you but evidently you don't care about me any more."
"Don't say that," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "it was not that I didn't want him to go but I was afraid he didn't know his way about the Imperial Tutor's palace. That's the only reason I sent Laibao, and kept him at home. I'll see if I can't find some business for him here."
"What sort of business will you find for him?" Huilian cried. "Tell me." "I will get a manager for him and set them up in a wineshop, not far away."
This delighted Huilian. She went back to her room and told Laiwang all about it. Then they waited for Ximen Qing's orders. One day Ximen called Laiwang to the front court. Lying on a table were six packets of silver. "My son," Ximen Qing said, "you must have had a very trying journey from Hangzhou. I did mean to send you to the Eastern Capital but I thought perhaps you didn't know Cai's palace well enough, so I decided to send Laibao instead. Here are six packets of silver, three hundred taels altogether. Take them, find someone to act as your manager, and set up a wineshop somewhere not far away. You will bring the interest dutifully to me every month. That seems to me the best thing we can do for you."
Laiwang knelt down and kowtowed. He took the six packets of silver to his room. "He is using this business as a trap," he said to his wife. "He has given me these three hundred taels, and he says I am to find a manager and start a wineshop."
"You are a funny creature," his wife said. "It takes more than one shovel to dig a well; you must take your time. You have a business now and you will have to settle down, do your duty, and give up drinking so much wine. It's that which makes you talk so much nonsense."
"Well, I'm going to the street to find a partner," Laiwang said. He told his wife to put the silver in a chest. He went to the street but, though he looked about till late, he found nobody to suit him. Instead, he got very drunk and went home again. His wife sent him to bed, and, soon afterwards, Yuxiao called her away to the inner court.
Laiwang slept for a long time. It was the first night watch when he awoke. He was not yet sober and his head whirled. Suddenly he heard someone outside the window calling softly: "Brother Laiwang, why don't you get up and see what your wife is doing? That bad fellow has taken her to the garden again and, while you are asleep here, suspecting nothing, they are having a fine time." This made Laiwang wake up. He opened his eyes to see who was there. Huilian was not in the room. He decided that the voice must have been Xue'e's, and that she had come to tell him of something she had seen.
"You will be unfaithful before my very face, will you?" he cried, jumping out of bed in a fury. He opened the door and ran straight to the garden. He had just reached the garden gate when, suddenly, a stool was thrown out of the darkness and he was knocked down. At the same time a knife fell clattering on the ground. Servants came running from all directions, shouting: Thief! Thief!" and some of them pounced on him.
"It is only Laiwang," he cried. "I have come to look for my wife. Why are you seizing me?"
Nobody would listen to him, and he was dragged, struggling and fighting, to the great hall. There, among many brilliant lights, Ximen Qing sat, shouting, "Bring him in!"
"I woke up," Laiwang said, kneeling down, "and I couldn't see my wife anywhere, so I went to find her. What have I done to be seized and treated like a thief?"
Laixing produced the knife for his master to see. Ximen Qing cried angrily, "Animals one can deal with but human beings are impossible. This fellow is a murderer. There was I, thinking he had just come back from Hangzhou, and giving him three hundred taels to set him up in business. Then, in the depth of night, he comes to murder me. If that was not what you were after," he said to Laiwang, "what were you doing with this knife?" He shouted to the attendants: "Take him to his room and bring me back my three hundred taels." The servants took Laiwang away.
Huilian was talking to Yuxiao in the inner court when she heard the news. She rushed at once to her room and, seeing what was happening, began to cry. "You went to bed drunk," she said. "What need was there for you to get up and start looking for me? Now you have fallen into a trap."
They opened the chest, took out the six packets of silver, and went back to the hall. Ximen Qing unwrapped the packets and examined the silver in the light of a lamp. Only one contained genuine silver, the others had nothing in them but tin.
"How dare you change my silver?" Ximen cried. "What have you done with my money? Tell me at once."
"Master," Laiwang sobbed, "you very kindly entrusted the silver to me so that I might set up in business. How could I think of cheating you and putting tin in its place?"
"You took a knife to murder me," Ximen cried. "Here it is. It is no use your trying to make excuses." He called forward Laixing, who knelt down and testified: "The other day, outside, didn't you say before a number of people that you were going to kill Master because he hadn't found anything for you to do?"
Laiwang gaped, his mouth wide open. "Now," Ximen Qing said, "the case is clear. The stolen property, the witness, the knife and the staves are all here. Chain him and put him into the gatehouse," he said to the servants. "Tomorrow I will write an accusation and send him before the magistrate."
At this moment, Huilian, her hair in disorder and her dress disarranged, ran into the hall and threw herself on her knees before Ximen Qing. "Father," she cried, "this is your doing. He was looking for me quite peacefully. Why should he be taken and treated as a thief? As for those six packets of silver, I was looking after them, and the original seal was never even broken. It cannot possibly have been changed. Though you may wish to get rid of the man, do not forget the justice of Heaven. What has he done? Why are you sending him to be beaten? Where are you going to send him now?"
Ximen Qing smiled sweetly upon her. "This has nothing to do with you, my good woman," he said. "Stand up. He has no regard for propriety, and he has been exceedingly impudent for some time. Now he has even attempted to murder me. But, of course, you know nothing about this. Be calm, you are not concerned in the matter at all." He said to Laian: "Take your sister very gently to her room, and see that she is not alarmed in any way."
Huilian, however, would not rise from her knees. "How stony-hearted you are, Father," she said. "If you will not listen to the priest's voice, at least hearken to the voice of Buddha. Won't you do this for me when I ask so earnestly? Though he did get drunk, he really would never have dreamed of doing a thing like this."
Ximen Qing grew impatient and told Laian to pick her up and take her back to her room.
Next day Ximen wrote an accusation and told Laixing, as the witness, to take the papers and Laiwang to the court. "Upon a certain day," the accusation ran, "this man got drunk, and, in the middle of the night, made to kill his master with a knife. He is further charged with fraudulently changing money, etc." The party was about to set off for the court when Yueniang came into the hall. She pleaded earnestly with Ximen Qing. "If the slave has done wrong," she said, "we can deal with him here, and settle it ourselves without bothering the officers and disturbing the court."
"Woman," Ximen shouted, rolling his eyes, "you have no idea of what is fitting. This slave deliberately tried to kill me. Do you come here and ask me to forgive him?" He would not listen to her, and shouted to the servants: "Away with him to the court." Yueniang flushed and withdrew.
"What a cantankerous fellow the master of the house is," she said to Yulou and the others. "There is a nine-tailed fox at work somewhere. I wonder whose advice he is taking in this business. He is sending the slave away quite unjustifiably. It is all very well for him to say the slave is a thief but he must prove it. Putting a man into a paper coffin like this is no way to behave. He is an unprincipled tyrant." Then Huilian came and knelt down, weeping.
"Stand up, my child," Yueniang said, "they can't execute your husband when they have examined him. That villain has been drinking something to make him crazy; he won't listen to a word I say. His wife, it would seem, is about of as much account as a private soldier in the army."
"Just now, your master is in a temper," Yulou said to the woman. "We can only win him over by degrees. Don't worry. Go to your room."
Laiwang was taken to the court. Ximen Qing had taken the precaution of sending Daian with a hundred measures of rice to Magistrate Xia and Captain He. They accepted the present. They took their places in the hall of audience and Laixing presented the accusation. The magistrates were told that Laiwang had been given a sum of money with which to establish a business but that the sight of the silver had put the idea into his head of replacing it by tin. Then, it was said, he became afraid lest his master should find out, and, in the middle of the night, he took a knife and went creeping to the hall to murder his master. The two officers angrily summoned Laiwang before them. He knelt down and pleaded: "If you, heaven-born officers, will permit me to speak, I shall be able to explain everything; but if you will not, I dare not say a word."
"Now, fellow," Magistrate Xia said, "the stolen property and the evidence are both here. It is no use your attempting to clear yourself. All we want from you is the truth. Then, perhaps, we shall not be so hard on you."
Laiwang began to tell how Ximen Qing sent a piece of blue satin to his wife, Huilian, and had seduced her. "Now," he said, "he has accused me of this crime, so that he can get me out of the way and enjoy my wife as he pleases."
Magistrate Xia shouted at him and ordered the attendants to strike him on the mouth.
"You slave," he cried, "this is all part of your plot to murder your master. If it were not for him, you would not have a wife, and now he has given you a business as well. Yet instead of trying to repay his kindness, you get drunk, sneak into his bedroom in the middle of the night, with murder in your heart. Why, if all servants were like you, nobody would dare to keep one."
Laiwang went on saying that he was innocent but the magistrate called upon Laixing to give his evidence, and, after that, there was nothing more he could say.
The magistrate ordered his attendants to pick out the cruelest thumb-screws they could find and apply them to Laiwang. Then he ordered twenty strokes of the weightiest bamboos. The poor man's skin was broken and his flesh torn. Blood poured from him. After this the jailers were told to put him into prison. Laian and Laixing went home and gave Ximen Qing a full account of the affair. Ximen was delighted. He gave orders that none of the servants should take bedclothes to Laiwang or even so much as a scrap of food. Moreover, they were not to tell Huilian that her husband had been beaten. All they were to say was that he would be out again in a few days.
After Laiwang's arrest, Huilian refused to dress her hair or wash her face. She would do nothing but shut herself in her room and cry, taking neither tea nor food. This alarmed Ximen Qing, and he sent Yuxiao and Ben the Fourth's wife several times to reason with her.
"Don't worry about your husband," they would say. "He got drunk and talked wildly but our master has only sent him to prison to cool his heels for a few days. He will have him out again soon." Huilian did not believe them. She sent Laian to the prison with some food, and questioned him when he came back. He told her the same story. "My brother came before the magistrates but they did not punish him. He says you must not worry about him; he will be out in two or three days."
After this, Huilian dried her tears, and every day painted her eyebrows carefully, powdered her face, and resumed her old lively ways.
One day, when Ximen Qing passed her door on his way home from somewhere, Huilian, who was standing under the eaves, called to him: "There is nobody in my room, Father. Won't you come in and sit down for a while?" Ximen went in and talked to her.
"My child," he said, still keeping up the pretense, "your mind ought to be quite at ease now. For your sake I have written to the court, and he has not received a single blow. He must stay in prison a day or two to teach him a lesson, and then he shall come out and I'll set him up in business."
Huilian threw her arms around his neck. "Dearest," she cried, "if you love me, let him come out soon. I don't care whether you set him up in business or not but when he comes out, I will see he keeps away from drink, and he cannot object if you decide to send him away. If that is not good enough, find another wife for him and all will be well. I have not belonged to him for a long time."
"Very well, my precious one," Ximen said, "I am going to buy the house across the road that belongs to Master Qiao, and I will set aside three rooms for you there. When you are established there, we shall have greater freedom to enjoy ourselves."
"Do just what you like, darling," the woman cried. When they had said what they had to say, she closed the door. In the summer months, she wore nothing but an open skirt without trousers, so that, whenever she came together with Ximen Qing, he had only to pull aside the skirt and proceed. Then the girdle was unloosed and the jade treasure of Chen Fei disclosed: eyebrows with all the fragrance of Han Shu were brought near together. They were like a pair of love birds flying shoulder to shoulder, or the meeting of clouds and rain.
Huilian was wearing a perfume satchel of fine silk, embroidered in silver. There were fir and cypress leaves in it, and some fragrant herbs, and on it were embroidered the four words: "delicate," "fragrant," "beautiful" and "seductive." She gave it to Ximen Qing. He was so delighted that his one regret was that he could not there and then make oath that he would live and die together with her. He took a few taels of silver from his sleeve and gave them to her to buy delicacies, saying several times: "Don't worry any longer, or you will make yourself ill. I'll write to his Lordship Xia tomorrow, and have him set free." They talked for a while, and then Ximen Qing became alarmed lest anyone should come, and hurriedly went away. Now that she had extracted this promise from him, Huilian went once more to the inner court and made merry with the maids and serving women.
Yulou heard of this and went to tell Jinlian. "Sooner or later," she said, "Father will set the fellow free. He is going to buy Master Qiao's house opposite, and install the woman there. She is to have three rooms and a maid, silver headdresses and nets. She will be as good as we are. Did you ever hear of such a thing? And the Great Lady will do nothing to prevent it."
When Jinlian heard this, she flew into a fury. A dark flush deepened the redness of her cheeks. "Don't you imagine," she said, "that he will be able to do exactly what he likes! Here and now I tell you that if I let that thievish whore become Ximen Qing's seventh wife... my name is not Pan."
"Our husband is a bad lot," Yulou said, "and the Great Lady does nothing to keep him in order. As for us, we cannot fly, we can only walk. What can we do to stop him?"
"You haven't a good enough opinion of yourself," Jinlian said. "Why do you think we are alive? To live a hundred years so that others can make a meal of us? No, if he doesn't do what I tell him, I shall kill myself, and he will be responsible. I'm not far from it now."
Yulou laughed. "I'm afraid I'm not very brave. I haven't the courage to make him angry. I'll watch and see whether you're clever enough to deal with him."
That night Ximen Qing was sitting in his study in the Hall of the Kingfisher, about to send for his son-in-law to write a letter to Magistrate Xia. Jinlian suddenly appeared in front of him.
"What letter is this you are going to get Brother Chen to write?" she asked, leaning over the table.
Ximen Qing could not hide anything from her. "I have decided to let Laiwang come out of prison, when he has been beaten," he said. One of the boys was going to fetch Chen Jingji but Jinlian stopped him.
"You flatter yourself," she said to Ximen, "that you are a very fine fellow but, actually, you steer your course according to the wind and go wherever the current takes you. You will not do what I tell you but you listen to everything that thievish strumpet says. What do you think you're doing? You may feed her on honey and sugar every day but it will be her husband she really thinks about. Now listen to me. If you set that slave free you won't find it such an easy matter to enjoy his wife. There will be nothing to prevent his making a scandal. If you keep her here she will be neither one thing nor another. How do you propose to treat her? If you make her your concubine, he will be here: if she is to remain his wife, you have already made her so conceited that her airs and graces are unbearable to us all. As for the plan of keeping her for yourself and finding another wife for him, what is going to happen when you are sitting somewhere together and he comes in to serve you? Can he be anything but furious? And, when she sees him, is she to stand up or remain seated?"
"The whole thing is most improper, and, if it gets about, I hardly need say that all our friends and kinsmen will think very badly of you. Indeed, the whole household will look down upon you. If the master beam is not in position, the rafters cannot be expected to keep their place. If you are in earnest about the matter, you must not stick at a little harshness. Finish off the slave. Then you can embrace his wife with an easy mind."
Ximen Qing changed his mind again. The letter he sent to the magistrate asked him to reopen the case at the end of three months, and to put Laiwang to the torture. The unfortunate man was hardly treated as a human being. The two magistrates, the prosecutor, the police, and the jailers had all accepted presents from Ximen Qing, and were severe in consequence. But among them was a scrivener who came from Xiaoyi in Shanxi, Yin Zhi by name, a man both humane and incorruptible. He realized that Ximen had manufactured this trouble so that he could take possession of Laiwang's wife, and he declined to make out the papers that would have brought Laiwang before the magistrates. Indeed, he went so far as to tell them what he thought, so that they found it difficult to proceed as they had intended, and finally compromised by giving Laiwang forty strokes more and banishing him to Xuzhou. They accounted the alleged stolen property as seventeen taels of silver and five packets of tin and ordered Laixing to return it to his master. An official wrote the reply to the accusation, saying that Laiwang was being banished that day.
The two magistrates made out a warrant and sent two runners to bring out Laiwang. He was severely beaten and put into sealed fetters, and the men were ordered to start immediately for Xuzhou, and leave Laiwang in charge of the governor there. Laiwang had been so long in prison that he was in a wretched condition. His clothes were falling to pieces. There was no one to whom he could appeal for help.
"Brothers," he said to the two runners, "now that I have been through this trouble, I have not a penny in the world. I should like to get some traveling money for you. Will you have pity on me and take me to my master's house? My wife is there. She will give me clothes and things and I will sell them for journey money, and so make things more agreeable."
"You don't seem to realize," the runners told him, "that this is all your master's doing. He will give you neither your wife nor your boxes. Isn't there anyone else whom you can ask? We don't mind overlooking it for Master Yin's sake, and taking you there to get a little money and rice for the journey. Don't worry about traveling money for us."
"Brothers," Laiwang again said, "for pity's sake, take me to my master's door first. There are one or two neighbours whom I will ask to say a good word for me. Probably I won't get much but I may get something."
The two runners agreed. Laiwang went to see Ying Bojue but Bojue pretended not to be at home. Then he persuaded his two left-hand neighbours, Jia Renqing and Yi Mianzi, to go and plead with Ximen Qing that he might be allowed to have his wife and his possessions. Ximen would not even come out to see them and ordered his servants to drive them away from the door. Jia and Yi were so greatly abashed that they did not know what to do. Huilian, Laiwang's wife, was unaware of all this. She never heard a word of it, because Ximen had given orders that any servant who mentioned it to her should be given twenty strokes.

The two runners took Laiwang to the house of his father-in-law, the coffin merchant Song Ren. Laiwang wept as he told his father-in-law the story, and Song Ren gave a tael of silver to the runners and a peck of rice to his son-in-law for food upon the way. So, weeping and bewailing, Laiwang set out on the highway for Xuzhou, leaving Qinghe at the beginning of the fourth month.

Day after day Huilian expected her husband to come. She gave the boys food to take to him but they ate it themselves as soon as they were outside the gate. They came back and said: "Brother enjoyed that food and all is well at the prison. He would have been out before this but the magistrates haven't been to the court for a few days. In any case, he will be home in a day or two."

Ximen Qing deceived her. "I have sent to the court," he told her, "and he will be out very soon now." Huilian believed them but, one day, she heard a rumor that her husband had been taken out of prison and had been begging at the door for his clothes. No one knew where he had gone. She questioned the boys time after time but none of them would speak. One day, however, she caught Daian as he was coming back from waiting upon his master, and said to him: "How is your brother getting on in prison, and when is he coming out?"

"Sister," Daian said, "I will tell you. By this time he has reached the River of Shifting Sand." Huilian pressed him, and at last Daian, with a great show of reluctance, told her how Laiwang had been beaten and banished to Xuzhou. "Don't get excited about it," the boy said, at the end, "and above all, don't let anybody know I told you."

It was more than Huilian could bear. She shut herself in her room and sobbed bitterly. "Oh, my man," she cried, "how could you fall into the trap and let yourself be treated so? All these years you have served him, and now you have not even a single suit of good clothes to cover you, and they have driven you far away. How bitter it is! Buried away as I am, I do not even know whether you are alive or dead." She sobbed a while. Then taking a long kerchief, she fastened it to the lintel of the door and hanged herself.

The Beanpole, Laizhao's wife, lived next door to Huilian. As she was coming from the inner court, she heard the woman weeping in her room. Then she noticed that the sound stopped and she could only hear a kind of gasping. She knocked at the door but there was no answer. She was frightened and made Ping'an, one of the boys, climb through the window and get into the room. Huilian, with all her clothes on, was hanging from the lintel. The boy cut her down at once and opened the door. They brought ginger broth and poured it down her throat, then sent word to the people in the inner court. Wu Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Li Ping'er, Ximen Dajie, and the two maids, Yuxiao and Xiaoyu, all came to see, and Ben the Fourth's wife also came to look. The Beanpole was sitting on the floor supporting Huilian who was sobbing soundlessly. Yueniang spoke to her but she only hung her head. A froth came from her mouth.

"What a foolish child you are," Yueniang said. "If there was anything wrong, you should have told me. What sense is there in behaving like this?"

She told Yuxiao to help support her, and said again: "Huilian, my child, if anything is troubling you, tell me what it is." But though she spoke several times, Huilian did not answer. After she had questioned her for a long time, the woman began to cry, making a great noise and beating her hands together. Yueniang told Yuxiao to help her to bed but she would not go. Then Yueniang and the others spoke firmly to her, and went back to the inner court, leaving Yuxiao and Ben the Fourth's wife to look after the woman.

After a while Ximen Qing pulled up the lattice and came in. Huilian was still sitting on the cold floor, and he told Yuxiao to put her to bed.

"My mistress has told her to go to bed," Yuxiao said. "but she won't go."

"What an obstinate child you are," Ximen cried, "you'll get cold there on the ground. If you have anything to say to me, say it, and don't behave in this silly way."

Huilian shook her head. "Father," she said, "you are a fine fellow, and you have deceived me splendidly. Why do you call me your child? I am no child of yours. You are an executioner in disguise: to bury a man alive means nothing to you. And not only are you ready to put him to death, you must needs see his funeral also. Day after day, you lied to me. One day you said: 'He will be here tomorrow,' and the next day you said: 'He will be here tomorrow,' and I thought he really would come. Why have you sent him away and said nothing to me about it? You did it secretly, and had him sent far, far away, while I knew not a thing about it. To do a cruel thing like that you can have no conscience at all. Even after you had done your worst, you still kept the matter hidden from me. If you wished to get rid of us, why didn't you get rid of us both? Why keep me here?"

"My child," Ximen said, "I have no quarrel with you. That fellow was a scoundrel and I had to send him away. Settle down quietly. I will look after you." He said to Yuxiao: "You and Ben the Fourth's wife spend the night here and look after her. I will tell one of the boys to bring you some wine." He went out, and, after Ben the Fourth's wife had helped Huilian to bed, she and Yuxiao tried to console her.

Ximen Qing went to the shop and asked Fu for a thousand cash. With the money he bought a roast and had it put on a tray with a jar of wine, and told Laian to take the tray to the woman's room.

"Father told me to bring you this," the boy said. When Huilian saw the tray, she cursed him.

"You thievish young rascal. Take it away at once or I will throw it on the floor."

"Do keep it, Sister," Laian said. "I can't take it away again or Father will beat me."

He lay the tray on a table. Huilian jumped out of bed and took up the jar of wine. She was going to throw it on the floor but the Beanpole stopped her. Ben the Fourth's wife looked at the Beanpole and put her finger on her mouth. They were sitting together when Ben the Fourth's son came in and said to his mother: "Father has come home and wants his dinner." The two women went out. When they came to the Beanpole's door, Ximen's daughter Ximen Dajie was there gossiping with Laibao's wife. They asked Ben the Fourth's wife where she was going.

"My man has come home and wants his dinner," she said. "I am going to see what he wants and then I'm coming back again. I did not mean to stay but his Lordship pressed me, otherwise I shouldn't have been there as long as this."

"What did Father say to her?" Laibao's wife said.

"I should never have thought Huilian was so peppery," Ben the Fourth's wife said. "She gave Father a piece of her mind and no mistake. There are very few serving women who would dare to say as much."

"She is not like other women," Laibao's wife said. "She has received his Lordship's special favours. You can't expect the rest of us to do what she can do." She went away. The Beanpole said to Ben the Fourth's wife:

"Don't be long, Sister."

"You needn't trouble to say that," Ben the Fourth's wife said. "If I don't come back, Father will kill me."

Ximen Qing told Ben the Fourth's wife and the Beanpole to stay with Huilian, and late that night he sent Yuxiao to sleep there, hoping that the woman would gradually calm down.

"Sister," they said, "you are no fool. Why don't you take advantage of this opportunity while you have it? You are like a flower that has just blossomed. Our Master loves you and that is as Fate has decided. You cannot, of course, rank yourself among the ladies but you are much better off than the rest of us. It will be far better for you to cast in your lot with Father than with a slave. Besides, he has already gone. You may feel a little sad—there's no harm in that—but if you keep on crying you will get in a bad way, and that will be just throwing your life away. There is an old saying: Strike the gong for a day, and be a priest for a day. After that, you need never bother yourself again about such things as virtue and chastity."

Huilian cried and sobbed. Days passed, and she still refused to take any food. Yuxiao told Ximen Qing and he sent Jinlian to talk to her. It was no use. Jinlian returned and said to him: "That whore can think of nothing but her husband. Everybody knows that after one night of marriage, the pleasure persists for a hundred nights; and lovers need walk but a hundred paces together for affection to remain with them forever. What hope do you think you have of capturing the heart of a woman as virtuous as this?"

Ximen Qing laughed. "Don't you believe it," he said. "If she is really so virtuous, why did she get rid of Jiang Cong the cook, and marry Laiwang?"

He sat down in the hall and sent for all the boys. He determined to find out who had told Huilian of her husband's banishment. "If the culprit confesses," he said, "he shall not receive a single blow but if he doesn't, and I find out who he is, there shall be thirty strokes for him and he shall be sent away from the house."

Shutong knelt down. "The other day," he said, "when Daian came back with you, I heard my sister asking him questions in the passage. It was he who let it out and told her."

"Go and find Daian," Ximen cried in a rage. But Daian had already heard what was going on and had run away to take refuge in Jinlian's room. She was washing her face when the boy came in.

"Mother, save me! Save me!" he cried, kneeling before her.

"What do you mean by coming and frightening me like this, you little rascal?" Jinlian said. "What have you been doing?"

"Father is going to thrash me because I told Huilian about Laiwang's being sent away. Mother, you must go and pacify him. If he sees me when he is in such a temper, he will certainly kill me."

"You funny little rascal," Jinlian said. "You're as scared as a ghost. I thought it must be something serious enough to shake heaven and earth, and it's only some trifling thing connected with that strumpet. Stay here."

Daian hid himself behind the door.

Ximen Qing created a terrible uproar in the front court when Daian was not to be found. He twice sent boys to Jinlian's room but each time she drove them away with curses. Finally, with a horsewhip in his hand, he came along, like a whirlwind.

"Where is the slave?" he cried.

Jinlian did not pay the slightest attention to him. He went round and round, searching, and at last dragged Daian from behind the door. He was going to thrash the boy but Jinlian snatched the whip from him and threw it on the top of the bed.

"You shameless creature," she said, "you are not fit to be a master. That whore spends her time thinking about her husband, and goes and hangs herself, and you try to vent your spite by ill-treating this boy. What harm has he done?"

Ximen Qing rolled his eyes about but Jinlian said to the boy: "Get off to the front court, and go on with your work. Don't be afraid of him." Daian slipped away and went to the front court.

Jinlian could see that Ximen Qing still cared for Huilian, and decided upon a plot. She went to the inner court and told tales to Xue'e. "Laiwang's wife," she said, "is telling everybody that you were in love with her husband and created such a scandal that Father was angry and sent Laiwang away. You remember how he struck you and took away your ornaments and dresses. It was all her doing."

So Jinlian touched a very sore spot. She saw the effect she had produced and went off to Huilian with a different story.

"Xue'e," she said, "has been saying nasty things about you in the kitchen. She says you used to be a slave in the Cais' household and that you are an expert at stealing other people's husbands and carrying on with men. I heard her say: 'If she has not been playing tricks of that sort with our husband, why did he send Laiwang away? She had better save her tears to wash her feet.' "

In this way Jinlian stirred up hatred in their hearts. One day it became obvious that trouble was brewing.

It was the eighteenth day of the fourth month, and Li Jiao'er's birthday. The old procuress and her daughter Li Guijie came to congratulate their kinswoman. Yueniang asked them to stay and entertained them with the other ladies in the hall. Ximen Qing had gone to a banquet. Huilian had taken some food, and, that morning, spent a few moments in the inner court. Then she went back to her room and slept till the sun was low. The maids came several times to call her but she paid no attention and would not leave her room. At last Xue'e, who was only waiting for the opportunity, went to see her.

"You must be a person of most surpassing beauty, Sister," she said, "since you cannot be persuaded to accept our invitations." Huilian did not answer. She was lying on the bed with her face to the wall.

"Are you thinking of your husband, Laiwang?" Xue'e said. "It would have been better if you had thought of him before. If it hadn't been for you, this would never have happened and he would still be in Ximen's household."

Huilian remembered what Jinlian had told her. She jumped off the bed. "Why have you come here," she cried, "with your lewd tongue and your filthy temper? Even if I was the cause of his being sent away, it is not for you, of all people, to come and tell me so. You did not get off scot-free yourself. You ought to be very thankful that some people did not say all they knew. You are the last person to give yourself airs and talk about other people's misdeeds."

Xue'e lost her temper. "You thievish slave, you loose woman," she cried, "how dare you insult me?"

"I may be a slave and a loose woman," Huilian said, "but at least I am not a slave's mistress. I may have carried on with Master but that is better than carrying on with a servant. You stole my husband and now you come here and make a song about it."

Xue'e was now almost beside herself. She dashed forward and struck Huilian in the face. The woman was taken by surprise and her cheeks flamed scarlet.

"Will you strike me?" she cried, and made for Xue'e with her head. They closed with one another and fought, till the Beanpole separated them. Then Yueniang came and upbraided them. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," she said. "You never stop to consider whether there are visitors here or not. Wait till your master comes home and you'll see whether I tell him or not."

Xue'e went to the inner court, and Yueniang, seeing how Huilian's hair was all in disorder, said, "Go and attend to your hair. Then come and join us."

Huilian did not reply. She took Yueniang politely to the door and went back into the room. She locked the door behind her and cried bitterly. It was now getting dark and the people in the inner court were busy with the evening meal. Huilian could bear no more. She took two long ribbons, like those used for binding the feet, tied them to the lintel of the door, and hanged herself. She was only twenty-five years old.

Later that evening as Yueniang was taking old woman Li and Guijie to the gate, she passed Huilian's door. It was shut and there was no sign of life. She wondered what had happened. When she had taken leave of her guests, she came back and knocked at the door. There was no reply. This frightened her and she told some of the boys to climb through the window. They cut the ribbons and took the woman down. For a long time they tried to bring her back to life, for they did not know how long she had been dead.

When Yueniang found that it was impossible to revive the woman, she was greatly upset, and told Laixing to take a horse at once and go for Ximen Qing. Xue'e, for her part, was very much afraid that, when he came, he would try to find out how this had happened. She paced up and down the hall and finally knelt down before Yueniang and begged her not to tell her husband of the quarrel. She was in such a state of terror that Yueniang began to feel sorry for her.

"You are afraid now," she said. "Why didn't you have a little less to say before?"

Then Ximen Qing came home. They told him that Huilian had been thinking about her husband and had cried the whole day. Then, at a time when everybody was busy, she had seized the opportunity and hanged herself. Nobody knew exactly when she did so.

"Oh, the silly woman!" Ximen cried, "the Fates have treated her hardly." He sent a servant to report the matter to Li, one of the local magistrates. "The family was entertaining visitors," he was told to say, "and this woman who's responsible for the silver, lost a silver cup. She's afraid her master would punish her and killed herself."

At the same time, he was to make the magistrate a present of thirty taels of silver. The magistrate acted as was expected of him and only sent one of his officers with a few of the coroner's men to view the corpse. Ximen Qing bought a coffin and applied for a certificate. Then Ben the Fourth and Laixing took the body to the cemetery outside the city. They gave the firefighters five *qian* of silver to burn the body. A heap of wood had already been piled around the coffin and they were just about to set fire to it when Huilian's father, Song Ren the coffin dealer, suddenly came up and stopped them. There was something mysterious about his daughter's death, he said, and he accused Ximen Qing of abusing his authority and trying to seduce her. "My daughter's," he said, "an honest woman and repulsed him. She'd met her death at his hands. I'm going to take the matter to the Governor of the Province, so let no one presume to burn her body." The firefighters were afraid to complete their task and went away. Ben the Fourth and Laixing were obliged to leave the coffin in the temple. They went back to tell their master what had happened.

## 048

### Li P'ing-erh communicates a Secret in the Kingfisher Pavilion; P'an Chin-lien Engages in a Drunken Orgy under the Grape Arbour in the Garden of Delights

The Azure Heaven over our heads he would wantonly defy;
Taking peoples' lives[1] to gain possession of their wives.
You must know that his thousands of crafty and evil schemes;
Will only result in putting his own household in jeopardy.
Excess and debauchery have always arisen from ill-gotten wealth;
Avarice and anger, if one but repents, need not prevent salvation.
The Lord of Heaven still sees fit to let man propagate himself;
Despite the fact that human hearts remain so intractably perverse.[2]

Lai-Pao on returning from his trip to the Eastern Capital, dismounted and went to the summerhouse to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "On arriving in the Eastern Capital," he said, "I first went to see the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien, who reports directly to the grand preceptor, and gave him your letter. Afterwards he took me to see the grand preceptor himself, who glanced at your communication and then had your presents taken inside. When this transaction was completed, he gave instructions that a letter should be written within a few days and dispatched posthaste to the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, [3] directing him to release the salt merchant, Wang Ssu-feng, and the others, twelve men in all, who have been incarcerated in Ts'ang-chou. Uncle Chai also sent his respects to you and said that he hoped you would come to the capital yourself for the grand preceptor's birthday on the fifteenth day of the sixth month, because there is something he would like to discuss with you."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this report, he was utterly delighted. Lai-Pao himself had profited from this trip to the tune of 50 taels of silver from the salt merchant Wang Ssu-feng. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent him off to report the news to Ch'iao Hung. Who should appear now but Pen the Fourth and Lai-Hsing. When they saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse talking to Lai-pao, they waited to one side.

As soon as Lai-pao had gone off to Ch'iao Hung's house, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Pen the Fourth, "Are you back already from taking care of the cremation?"

Pen the Fourth was too frightened to answer but Lai-hsing came forward and:

Whispered into his ear in a low voice,

thus and so, "Sung Jen showed up at the crematory, laid claim to the corpse, and refused to let it be cremated. His language was so discourteous I would not dare repeat it."

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, nothing might have happened but having heard these words, he became enraged and cursed, "That dead duck of a 'bare stick'! How contemptible can you get!"

Turning immediately to a pageboy, he said, "Go fetch my son-in-law to write a note for me."

He dispatched Lai-hsing to deliver the note to the district magistrate, Li Tat'ien, who forthwith deputed two lictors, with a length of rope, to haul Sung Jen before the bench, where he was charged with attempting a shakedown, relying on the corpse of the deceased in order to extort money. Right there in the courtroom he was put in the squeezers and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo, so severely that:

Fresh blood flowed copiously down his legs.

He was required to sign a legal recognizance forbidding him to make any further trouble for the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The local constable was also ordered to have the crematory workers, in the presence of someone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, carry out the cremation forthwith and report back to the magistrate.

Sung Jen had been beaten so severely that his two legs were covered with wounds. When he returned home he developed an acute fever, contracted a seasonal ailment, and before a few days had passed:

Alas and alack,

he died. Truly, it was a case of:

A sleepy slugabed encountering the General of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into Chung K'uei.[4]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The greed and corruption of the district magistrate
are truly lamentable;
On receipt of gold and silk he is prepared to
commit any iniquity.[5]
Because of his daughter, Sung Jen is condemned to
tread the road to the shades;
The resentful souls of the victims of injustice
pervade the entire yamen.
No sooner had Hsi-men Ch'ing disposed of the case of Sung Hui-lien than he proceeded to get together three hundred taels of silver and engage Silversmith Ku, at the head of a considerable number of other silversmiths, to come to the summerhouse in his garden and create a piece in which four male figurines were depicted holding up a representation of the character for long life in honour of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's birthday. Each of the silver figures in this group was more than a foot high. He also had them manufacture two gold pitchers in the shape of the character for long life and obtained two sets of jade cups in the shape of peaches. It took less than half a month to get everything ready. Hsi-men Ch'ing unpacked the python robes that Lai-wang had had manufactured for him in Hang-chou but was still lacking a bolt of abaca linen and a python robe of light silk. He doled out the money and sent people looking for these items everywhere but was unable to find any of good quality and had to make do with the best they could find.
One day, on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month, when the birthday presents had been properly packed up, he turned them over to Lai-pao and his manager, Wu Tien-en, and they departed from Ch'ing-ho district and set off for the Eastern Capital.[6] But no more of this.
Two days later it was the first day of the sixth month, the beginning of the dog days of summer. Truly:
Great heat does not exceed that of the *wei* and *shen* days of the sixth month;
Great cold does not exceed that of the *ch'ou* and *yin* days of the twelfth month.[7]
The weather was extremely hot. It was that time when:
The "red raven" is at its zenith,
An umbrella of fire suspended in space,
Without half a speck of cloud cover,
Melting rock and liquefying metal.[8]
A poet of yore has left us a poem that describes this heat:
Chu-jung has come from the south, whipping
his fiery dragon;
His flaming banners are all ablaze, turning
the heavens red.
The sun's wheel is at its zenith, immobilized,
refusing to move;
The myriad nations feel as though they are in
a red-hot furnace.
On the Five Peaks all verdure is parched,
the clouds obliterated;
The God of Waves, beneath the sea, is afraid
his domain will dry up.
Will that evening ever come when the metallic
autumn wind will blow;
And favour us by sweeping away the heat
from the world below?[9]
Your narrator would remark that in this world there are three kinds of people who fear the heat, and three kinds of people who do not fear the heat. What are the three kinds of people who fear the heat?
The first kind of people who fear the heat are the farmers in the countryside. Every day they till their fields and tread their dikes, pushing the plow and dragging the harrow. In order to meet the deadlines for the semiannual agricultural taxes, they must relinquish whatever surplus grain is in their storehouses. During the dog days of summer, if there is no rain for their fields, their hearts burn within them as though afire.
The second kind are the merchants who must travel in pursuit of trade. They are away from home for years on end,[10] peddling their safflower and gromwell, their beeswax and breath-sweetening lozenges.[11] On their shoulders they bear heavy burdens, with their hands they push cumbersome barrows. As they travel along the road, they become hungrier and hungrier, thirstier and thirstier. Their faces are bathed in sweat and saliva, their clothes are soaked through, and they cannot find so much as an inch of shade. Truly it is rough going.
The third kind are the soldiers on the frontier. Their heads burdened with heavy helmets, their bodies clad in iron mail, when thirsty they lick the blood from their swords, when tired they rest on the pommels of their saddles.[12] They campaign for years on end without being able to return home. Their clothes are infested with lice, their wounds suppurate, and not an unscathed patch of skin remains on their bodies.[13]
These are the three kinds of people who fear the heat. There are also three kinds of people who do not fear the heat.
The first of these are those who dwell within the inner precincts of the imperial palace. By their waterside rotundas and breezy pavilions, serpentine streams form pools and flowing springs make ponds. Large pieces and small pieces of ornamental jade are juxtaposed to objects sculpted out of reversed-pattern rhinoceros horn.[14] By lapis lazuli balustrades are planted exotic fruits and rare flowers. In crystal basins are piled objects of agate and coral. On tables of inlaid crystal are arrayed inkstones from Tuan-ch'i, writing brushes with ivory stems,[15] ink cakes that once belonged to Ts'ang Chieh,[16] and note-paper designed by Ts'ai Yen,[17] as well as crystal brush racks and white jade paperweights. When suffering from ennui, such men compose rhapsodies and indite poems. When affected by drink, they take naps in the southern breeze.
And then there are the nobility and distaff relatives of the imperial house, the members of wealthy households and prominent families. Every day is spent in their "snow caves" and cool pavilions. All day long they occupy their breezy studios and waterside retreats. Their hanging screens are made of raddled "shrimps' whiskers," their bed curtains are fashioned of woven mermaid silk. Jasmine-scented pomanders are suspended in their quarters. On their beds of inlaid mother-of-pearl are spread cool mats of ripple-patterned bamboo and coral pillows adorned with mandarin ducks. Punkahs are everywhere in motion to stir up the air. Ready at hand are basins of ice water in which lie soaking submerged plums and floating melons,[18] red caltrops and snowy lotus roots, bayberries and Chinese olives, apples and water chestnuts. And there are also flowerlike beauties[19] standing by to cool them with their fans.
And then there are the Taoist priests and Ch'an monks in their temples and monasteries, occupying their cloud-encroaching scripture halls and their skyscraping bell towers. In moments of leisure they resort to the abbot's cell to explicate the Way of Nirvana or recite *The Scripture of the Yellow Court*.[20] From time to time they visit their monastic gardens to pluck the peaches of immortality or exotic fruits. When suffering from ennui, they summon their acolytes and strum the zither athwart their knees in the shade of the pines. When affected by drink, they take along their chessboards and chat with their friends in the shade of the willows.
These are the three kinds of people who do not fear the heat. There is a poem that testifies to this:
The red sun blazes as if it would set
everything afire;
In the fields below half the crops are
withered and scorched.
The hearts of the farmers are like
seething caldrons:
While in their belvederes the nobles
ply their fans.[21]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and saw how hot it was, he decided not to go out that day but to stay at home, leaving his hair undone and merely throwing on a tunic,[22] in order to avoid the heat. He went to his summerhouse in the garden, the Kingfisher Pavilion, and watched the pageboys as they watered the flowers. What should he see, right in front of the Kingfisher Pavilion but a planter of sweet-smelling daphne in full flower. Hsi-men Ch'ing had the pageboy, Lai-an, fetch a small sprinkling can and looked on as he watered it.
At this juncture who should appear but P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, dressed in their everyday garb of white silver-striped silk blouses and long trailing skirts of honey yellow silk brocade with a drawnwork motif of "phoenixes traversing the flowers." Li P'ing-erh was wearing a vest of scarlet abaca linen and Chin-lien one of pink, both of which were trimmed with purfled gold-spangled edging. Chin-lien was not wearing a formal headdress but had done her hair up into a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, fastened in place with a cloud-shaped ornament with kingfisher feather inlays. Two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple, next to which, on the forehead of her powdered face, she had pasted three gold-flecked turquoise beauty patches that served to further enhance her:
Powdered face and glossy hair,[23]
Ruby lips and white teeth.[24]
The two of them, holding hands and giggling to each other, suddenly arrived on the scene and saw Hsi-men Ch'ing supervising the watering of the flowers.
"So this is where you are," they said, "seeing to the watering of the flowers. Why, you haven't even done your hair yet!"
"Tell a maidservant to go fetch some water," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can do my hair right here."
"Put your sprinkling can down," said Chin-lien to Lai-an, "and go back to my room. Tell one of the maidservants to bring some water and a comb, and be quick about it. Your father wants to do his hair here."
Lai-an assented and went off on his errand.
Chin-lien noticed the sweet-smelling daphne and was about to pick a blossom to stick in her hair when Hsi-men Ch'ing stopped her, saying. "Hands off, you crazy little oily mouth! I've got a blossom for each of you here."
It so happened that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already plucked a few partly opened blossoms from the sides of the cluster and had put them to soak in a turquoise gallbladder-shaped porcelain vase.
"My child," said Chin-lien with a laugh, "What do you mean plucking all these blossoms for yourself without presenting one to your mother?"
Thereupon, she snatched one of them, before he could give it to her, and stuck it in her hair. Hsi-men Ch'ing presented another one to Li P'ing-erh.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, carrying a dressing mirror and comb, and Ch'iu-chü, with the water for him to wash his face in.
Hsi-men Ch'ing handed three of the blossoms to Ch'un-mei and instructed her, "Deliver these to Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou to wear in their hair, and ask the Third Lady to join us. Tell her I'd like to hear her play something for me on the moon guitar."
"Give the one for Meng the Third to me," said Chin-lien. "I'll deliver it to her. You can have Ch'un-mei deliver the ones for the First Lady and Li Chiao-erh and then come back. And give me one more of those blossoms for myself. Since I'm going to the trouble of calling the singing girl for you, I deserve another one."
"You go ahead," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll give it to you when you come back."
"My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous?" said Chin-lien. "You think you can trick me into calling Meng the Third for you, and then you won't give me a thing. I won't go. You'll have to give it to me first before I'll go for her."
"You lousy little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Even in something like this you've got to have your finger in the pie."
Thereupon, he gave her another blossom, and Chin-lien stuck it in the hair beside her temple. Only then did she consent to go off to the rear compound, leaving Li P'ing-erh alone with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the Kingfisher Pavilion.
Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that beneath her light silk skirt she was wearing scarlet silk underdrawers that were:
Delicately translucent,[25]
when she stood in the sunlight, exposing her:
Jade bones and icy flesh.[26]
Before he knew it, his:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.
Seeing that:
There was nobody about,[27]
he neglected to comb his hair but bending Li P'ing-erh over a cool-surfaced summer bench:
Turned up her beige skirt,
Took down her red drawers,
and, stooping over her back, proceeded to:
Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains.
He kept at it for some time and had not yet ejaculated, as the two of them:
Enjoyed to the full the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Who could have anticipated that P'an Chin-lien did not actually go back to the rear compound to call Yü-lou but went only as far as the postern gate leading out of the garden and then turned over Meng Yü-lou's blossom to Ch'un-mei to deliver for her. She thought for a while and then retraced her steps, silently tiptoeing up to the latticework window of the Kingfisher Pavilion in order to eavesdrop on the events within. She continued to eavesdrop for some time and could tell that the two of them inside were just in the thick of things.
"Dear heart," she overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing saying to Li P'ing-erh, "Your daddy doesn't love anything else so much as this delectable white bottom of yours. Today you're letting your daddy enjoy it to the full."
After some time, she heard Li P'ing-erh say in a low voice, "My own daddy! Don't bang away at me quite so hard. I'm feeling poorly in my present condition. You were a little too rough with me the last time and left me with a pain in the lower abdomen that has only begun to get better in the last few days."
"What do you mean," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "when you say you're feeling poorly in your present condition?"
"I won't keep you in the dark any longer," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'm expecting and am already approaching my final month of pregnancy. So please go a little easy with me."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words he was utterly delighted and said, "Dear heart! Why didn't you tell me before? If that's the way it is, your daddy will be content to make only a casual game of it. Thereupon:
When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense;
Responding to her with abandon,[28]
he gripped her around the hips with both hands and:
Ejaculated like a geyser.[29]
The woman, from underneath, arched her hips, the better to receive his semen.
Some time elapsed, during which all that could be heard was Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Panting and puffing,
and the woman:

Cooing softly like an oriole.
All of this was so clearly overheard by Chin-lien from her vantage point outside the window that she might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
While she was still listening, who should appear but Meng Yü-lou, who suddenly arrived from the rear compound and said, "Slavey Five, what are you doing here?"
Chin-lien silenced her with a negative wave of the hand, and the two of them then proceeded to walk into the summerhouse together. Hsi-men Ch'ing was so flustered he hardly knew what to do with himself.
"I've been gone half the day," Chin-lien said to him, "and what have you been up to? It seems you haven't even combed your hair or washed your face yet."
"I've been waiting for a maidservant to bring the jasmine soap," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I could wash my face."
"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," said Chin-lien. "You're so insistent on having that particular soap for your ablutions, it's no wonder your face has been scrubbed even whiter than a certain person's bottom."
Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this remark but chose to ignore it.
Later, after he had done his hair and washed his face, he sat down with Yü-lou, and asked, "What have you been up to in the rear compound? Did you bring the moon guitar with you?"
"I've been in the master suite," said Yü-lou, "stringing pearls and other ornaments for Elder Sister to wear in her hair when she goes to the tea-present ceremony for her nephew Wu Shun-ch'en's bride-to-be, Third Sister Cheng, a few days from now.[30] Ch'un-mei has gone to fetch the moon guitar."
Before long, Ch'un-mei showed up and said, "I've delivered the blossoms to the First Lady and the Second Lady and they've acknowledged them."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then told her to prepare some wine for them.
It was not long before:
In basins of ice water there lay soaking,
Submerged plums and floating melons;
In cool pavilions he indulged himself,
Cuddling the red and hugging the turquoise.[31]
"Why don't you send Ch'un-mei to invite Elder Sister to join us?" said Yü-lou.
"She doesn't like to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's no point in inviting her."
The four of them then settled down to make a party of it. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in the place of honour, and the three women ranged themselves to either side. Truly, it is a case of:
The finest vintage poured from the flagon,
The rarest delicacies graced the platter.
P'an Chin-lien refused to sit on her chair but sat down on a pea-green cool porcelain taboret instead.
"Sister Five," said Meng Yü-lou, "come over and sit on this chair. I'm afraid that cool taboret may give you a chill."
"It doesn't matter," said Chin-lien. "Old as I am, and without any fetus to chill, what is there to worry about?"
After a while, when:
Three rounds of wine had been consumed,
Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to fetch the moon guitar for Yü-lou to play and the *p'i-p'a* for Chin-lien and said, "You two sing me the song suite that begins with the tune 'Cries of the Wild Geese in Flight' and opens with the words:

The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze in the Great Void."[32]

Chin-lien refused, saying, "My child, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? If we sing, the two of you will have nothing to do but enjoy yourselves. I won't do it, unless Sister Li also has an instrument to play."
"But she doesn't know how to play anything," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If she can't play," said Chin-lien, "let her stand to one side and keep time with the clappers."
"This little whore!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All she ever does is pick nits."
He instructed Ch'un-mei to go fetch a pair of red ivory clappers and had Li P'ing-erh agree to hold them in her hand. Then the 2 musicians with Yü-lou's maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, standing by to cool them with her fan deftly extended their slender fingers, gently strummed the silken strings, and sang together to the tune "Cries of the Wild Geese in Flight":
The Red Emperor holds sway, ablaze in the Great Void.
There is not a trace of fragrant breeze from the south.
Even sucking ice and nibbling snow would be of no avail.
Though fans are kept in constant motion,
Beads of perspiration hang like pearls,
Serving to enervate jade bones and icy flesh.
Moving to the verdant hillside,
Boys are ordered to shake the bamboos to attract a breeze,
And thereby momentarily alleviate the oppressive heat.
WITH A MODIFIED OPENING
"The long days are exhausting,
Powder becomes damp and perfume sticky.
Though fans move over ice to cool one off, it is impossible to sleep.
Late at night,
The two of us,
Move where the pure fragrance of the lotus blossoms is most pervasive,
In the hope that by that time the power of the heat will have abated.
In waterside pavilions we can join voices to sing 'Golden Threads,'[13]
Submerge red plums and float green melons as we drain a few cups together."
"WINDBLOWN SAND"
As they lean against the carved balustrade the sun sets in the west.
While they watch the mandarin ducks playing amid the ripples,
Before they know it, the evening chill creeps into their sleeves.
In the gaps between the duckweed, they see the moon invade the water,
Sending gilded waves sailing into the clumps of blue-green lotus.
With visages illuminated by the evening light,
Showing off their loveliness to best advantage,
They contemplate a double-headed lotus blossom.
Its fragrant heart, unfortunately, is not able to speak.
For whom does it wait there in its frozen beauty?
"The incense burner diffuses the scent of aloes-wood throughout the courtyard.
In such an attractive setting,
The spirits are invigorated,
And the feelings are relaxed.
Sticking jasmine blossoms in our hair,
Reciting newly composed poems,
How many can experience scenes such as this?
What need is there for pillows and mats or bedsteads with gauze netting?"
"A BUNDLE OF OARS"
The clear night is short,
With flagon at hand, it is meet to pass the cup.
When days are long,
How is one to combat the cruel heat?
One hopes that on the watchtower,
The bronze clepsydra will slow its pace.
After two or three cups of wine,
What does it matter if one is late getting to sleep?
CODA
"The milky way still turns,
The jade clepsydra drips;
We'd better catch a little rest by the southern window.
Tomorrow night we can come to cool off again in the same place."

When they had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing presented each of them with a cup of wine.
As the party continued, P'an Chin-lien made herself conspicuous by the assiduity with which she gulped down ice water and devoured fresh fruit.
"Sister Five," protested Yü-lou, "how come you're consuming only fresh cold things today?"
"Old as I am," laughed Chin-lien, "there's nothing of any consequence going on in *my* belly, so why should I worry about eating cold or glutinous things?"
This so embarrassed Li P'ing-erh that her face became a patchwork of red and white blotches.
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Chin-lien a look and said, "You little whore! All you ever do is talk nonsense."
"You've got too much to say yourself," said Chin-lien. "After all, I'm only like:
The bedridden old woman trying to eat cured meat:
I can only cope with a single shred at a time.
What's it to you, anyway?"
As they continued drinking, all of a sudden:
Clouds massed in the southeast,
Fog obscured the northwest.[33]
Thunder rumbled indistinctly,[34] and
A heavy downpour occurred,
as a result of which the flowers and vegetation in front of the summerhouse were completely soaked. Truly:
The waters of the Yangtze, Yellow, Huai, and Chi Rivers are newly augmented;
The emerald bamboo and the red pomegranate blossoms are rendered pristine.[35]
Before long the rain stopped, the remnant of a rainbow hung suspended in the distant sky, and a glimpse of the sun reappeared in the west. Truly, it is a case of:
The passing of a fine rain imparts a sheen to the azure promontory;
The cooling of an evening breeze enhances the purity of the courtyard.
Who should appear at this juncture but Hsiao-yü, who came out from the rear compound looking for Meng Yü-lou.
"Elder Sister wants my help," Yü-lou explained. "There are still some pearls and ornaments that need to be strung. I'd better go or she'll be annoyed with me."
"The two of us can go together," said Li P'ing-erh. "I want to see how Elder Sister is doing with the stringing of the pearls and ornaments too."
"Let's give you a send-off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, he picked up the moon guitar and gave it to Yü-lou to play while he clapped his hands in accompaniment as they all sang together, to the tune "Liang-chou Prelude":
As evening falls, rain passes over the
southern pavilion,

Disordering the rouged surface
of the pond.
Spring thunder rumbles indistinctly;
The rain is over and the clouds disperse.[36]
For ten li, the fragrance of lotus blossoms
pervades the senses;
The new moon is a solitary hook.
The beauty of this scene is infinite.
Emerging from the orchid-scented water,
Her evening makeup mussed,
It is dusk in the secluded courtyard, and
she is too languid to sleep.
Chorus:
Sing "Golden Threads,"[37]
Drain "azure funnels,"[38]
By icy mountains and snowy balustrades,
prepare to feast.
How many people live to see
such times of peace?
They continued to sing to the same tune with a modified opening:
In the shade of the willows, the stridulation
of the new cicada resounds,
Flittering fireflies become visible as they
invade the courtyard.
Somewhere the song of caltrop gatherers is heard,
Returning at evening in their painted boats.
Behold, the stars of the "Jade Rope"
hang low,[39]
Within red gates there is no sound.[40]
This scene is even more to be envied.
Rising, he takes her by the silk-white hand,[41]
And straightens her coiffure.
The moon shines on the gauze-curtained bedstead,
but they are not yet asleep.
Chorus:
Sing "Golden Threads,"
Drain "azure funnels,"
By icy mountains and snowy balustrades,
prepare to feast.
How many people live to see
such times of peace?
They continued to sing to the tune "Higher Ever Higher":
Amid the ripples, mandarin ducks play,[42]
Overturning the green lotus leaves;
Pure fragrance is wafted abroad as
jeweled drops spatter.
A perfumed breeze fans,
The banks of the fragrant pond,
Beside the secluded pavilion.
Sitting here, quite unawares, one's
spirits are refreshed.
What need is there for Gardens of Paradise
or Isles of the Blest?
Chorus:
We only fear the west wind will once more
surprise us with autumn;
Before we know it, all unobserved, the
flowing years have passed.[43]
As they sang, before they knew it, they had arrived at the postern gate. Meng Yü-lou handed her moon guitar to Ch'un-mei and went back to the rear compound with Li P'ing-erh.
"Meng the Third," P'an Chin-lien called after her, "wait for me. I'm coming too."
She was about to abandon Hsi-men Ch'ing and go with the others, when he reached out and grabbed her with one hand, saying, "Little oily mouth, you may be slippery but I'm not going to let you get away."
He gave her such a tug as he spoke that it was a wonder she didn't lose her footing.
"You crazy good-for-nothing!" said the woman. "I'*m* fully dressed. Haven't you seen enough of my arm by now? Tiresome child! The two of them are both gone. I wonder what you want to keep me around for."
"Let's get some wine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have a game of pitch-pot[44] here under the T'ai-hu rockery, just for the fun of it. Come, share three cups with me."
"You crazy good-for-nothing!" the woman exclaimed. "If we're going to play at pitch-pot, let's do it in the pavilion. Why do it here, of all places? If you don't believe me, just try it out on that little piece, Ch'un-mei. She won't even fetch the wine for you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to run this errand for them, and Ch'un-mei relinquished the moon guitar to her mistress and went nonchalantly off without more ado.
The woman took the moon guitar in her hand and strummed at it a while, saying, "I've had Meng the Third teach me a few lines."
As she was playing she noticed that beside the T'ai-hu rockery there was a pomegranate blossom in full bloom after the rain.
Playfully plucking a sprig, she stuck it on one side of her cloudy locks,[45] saying:
"Not having had a bite for three days,
I've got flowers before my eyes."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he stepped forward and, hoisting her two tiny golden lotuses into the air, threatened mischievously, "You little whore! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, I'd fuck you to death."
"You crazy good-for-nothing!" the woman retorted. "Cut the kidding. Wait till I get rid of this moon guitar."
Thereupon, she casually leaned the moon guitar against the side of the raised flower bed and said, "My child, the more demanding you get, the less likely you are to succeed. Just now you've been off screwing around with Li P'ing-erh and don't know how to cover your embarrassment. What do you want to pester me for?"
"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense. Who's been up to anything with her?"
"My child," the woman said:
"No matter what you do, you cannot deceive the local tutelary god.
Who do you think your mother is, that you should try to deceive me? While I was off delivering that blossom in the rear compound, those were fine doings the two of you were up to."
"You crazy little whore!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Cut the nonsense."
Thereupon, bending her down beneath the flower bed, he gave her a kiss.
The woman promptly responded by sticking her tongue into his mouth.
"If you call me 'My own daddy,' " said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll forgive you and let you up."
The woman found him to be too much for her and said, "My own daddy!
I'm not the one you're after, so what are you pestering me for?"
As for the two of them, truly:
Inspired by sunshine, the oriole's tongue displays its virtuosity;
Moistened with rain, the flowery branch is more than ever enticing.[46]
After the two of them had toyed with each other for a while, the woman said, "Why don't we go over by the grape arbour and play our game of pitch-pot there. Come on, let's go."
Thereupon, balancing the moon guitar on one arm as she walked, she played the concluding song to the suite that begins with "Liang-chou Prelude," to the tune "Higher Ever Higher":
On this clear evening, hearts are light;
it is gloriously cool;
Moonlight bathes the Pure Empty Hall
on the Jasper Terrace.[47]
Immortal lovers,
Spread tortoiseshell mats,
For yet another revel.
Let the silver arrows of the jade clepsydra
press forward as they may,
The sounds of pipe and song will continue
in the Crystal Palace.[48]
Chorus:
We only fear the west wind will once more
surprise us with autumn;
Before we know it, all unobserved, the
flowing years have passed.
Coda:
Light and darkness alternate swiftly,
like lightning flashes;
Even this wonderful evening is, alas,
drawing to its end.
Risk everything for pleasure, as song
and laughter resound.[49]
Day after day, a feast among the flowers;
Night after night, jade damsels as companions.
How long a span of life are we allotted?
What are we to do if not enjoy it?[50]
The two of them walked along shoulder to shoulder. Before long they had made their way around the azure pool, skirted the banksia rose trellis, passed in front of the Kingfisher Pavilion, and arrived at the grape arbour. They opened their eyes wide and took a good look and, truly, it was a fine grape arbour. Behold:
On all sides are carved balustrades and stone masonry;
On every hand the emerald leaves are densely massed.

Glaucous hues greet the eyes,
A thousand clusters of purple pellets dangle like beaded tassels;
Autumn scents assail the nostrils,
Ten thousand banks of green cloud trail brocaded sashes.
Suspended "mare teats":[51]
These crystal spheres contain carnelian juice;
Tumbling green pearls:
The gilded arbour is decked with emerald drapes.
These species have been transplanted from the Western Regions;
Their fragrance has been cultivated in the Sweet Springs Palace.[52]
Truly:
In all four seasons it is embellished by rare blossoms on flowering trees,
The bright moon and clear breeze cannot be purchased at any price.[53]

It so happened that when the two of them arrived underneath the grape arbour, they found that four cool porcelain taborets had been placed there with a bronze vessel for the game of pitch-pot to one side. Chin-lien leaned the moon guitar against one of the taborets and started to play pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

At this juncture, what should they see in the distance but Ch'un-mei bringing the wine and Ch'iu-chü toting a box of delicacies, with a bowl of iced fruit on top of it.

"You little piece!" the woman exclaimed. "You went off in a huff just a minute ago. How come, now, you're delivering the goods after all?"

"We've been looking all over the place for you," Ch'un-mei complained. "Who could have anticipated that you'd sneak over here?"

Ch'iu-chü put down her burden and left.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the box and found it divided into eight compartments with a different delicacy in each. One compartment contained goose gizzards and goose feet preserved in a fermented mash. One contained shreds of cured meat that had been pressed into laminated sheets and bundled together like the pages of a document. One contained preserved whitebait flavoured with osmanthus. One contained split sun-dried pullet breasts and wings. One contained fresh lotus seeds. One contained fresh walnut meats. One contained fresh caltrops. And one contained fresh water chestnuts. There were also a small silver flagon of grape wine[54] with a spout shaped like the crop on the neck of a bird, two tiny gold cups in the shape of lotus seedpods, and two pairs of ivory chopsticks.

When these things had been set out on a low cool-surfaced table, Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman sat down across from each other and continued to amuse themselves at pitch-pot. They played the variations called "Crossing the Bridge," "Inserting the Arrow Upside Down," "A Pair of Wild Geese in Flight," "Passing the Examinations and Qualifying for Office," "The Two Ch'iao Sisters Read a Book,"[55] "Yang Kuei-fei Takes a Spring Nap," "The Black Dragon Penetrates the Cave," and "Rolling the Pearl Curtain Bottom Side Up."[56]

By the time they had played ten games or more, the woman had become quite drunk. Before she knew it:
Peach blossoms had bloomed upon her cheeks, and
Amorous glances escaped the corners of her eyes.

Hsi-men Ch'ing still wanted to drink some medicated Five Spice Wine[57] and sent Ch'un-mei to fetch it.

"Little oily mouth," Chin-lien said, "please do me another favour while you're at it. Go to my room and bring a cool bamboo bed mat and a pillow. I'm completely pooped and would like to lie down here for a while."

Deliberately affecting the coquetry of a spoiled child, Ch'un-mei said, "Enough is enough! Haven't I already got my hands full with all these errands? Who's got the energy to go fetch anything for you too?"

"If you don't want to do it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just tell Ch'iu-chü to bring them here while you go after the wine."

Ch'un-mei went off, shaking her head as she went.

After what seemed like half a day, Ch'iu-chü was the first to appear, holding a cool bamboo bed mat, a pillow, and a quilt in her arms.

"Put the bedding down," the woman instructed her, "and latch the garden gate on your way out. Then go look after the room, and don't come back unless I call for you."

Ch'iu-chü nodded in assent, put down the bedding, and went off straightaway.

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon stood up, took off his jade-coloured silk tunic, hung it over the balustrade, and went over under the flower trellis beside the juniper hedge on the west side of the peony bed to relieve himself.

By the time he returned, the woman had already unrolled the cool bamboo mat and positioned the pillow and quilt to her satisfaction. She had stripped herself so that not a stitch of silk remained on her body, above or below, and was reclining face-up on the mat, wearing scarlet shoes on her feet, and cooling herself with a white silk fan that she held in her hand.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back and beheld this sight, how could it help but:
Stimulate his lecherous desires?

Thereupon, exhilarated by the wine, he took off his own clothes, above and below, sat down on a cool porcelain taboret, and started out by titillating her clitoris with his toe. He titillated it to such effect that her vaginal fluids began to flow, like a snail secreting its slime. [58] He then took off the woman's red embroidered shoes, unwound her foot bindings, and amused himself by using them to suspend her two feet from the grape arbour overhead, so that she looked just like "A Golden Dragon Extending Its Claws." As a result:
Her vaginal orifice was greatly distended,
Her "Red Hook" was completely exposed, and
Her "Chicken Tongue" protruded from within.

Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by stooping over her and placing his jade chowrie handle[59] inside the mouth of her vagina,[60] thus demonstrating the position known as "Inserting the Arrow Upside Down." Supporting himself with one hand on her pillow, he proceeded to thrust with all his strength. He continued to thrust until her vaginal secretions flowed uninterruptedly, making a sound like a school of loaches plunging through the mud.[61] The woman, from underneath, inarticulately called out, "Daddy!" unceasingly.

Just as they were approaching the height of bliss, who should appear but Ch'un-mei, who had come with the heated wine. As soon as she saw what was happening, she put down the wine flagon and fled straight to the top of the artificial hill, the highest point in the garden, where she leaned over a chess table in the Cloud Repose Pavilion and toyed with the chess pieces.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked up and saw where she had gone, he beckoned to her with his hand but was unable to induce her to come down.

"Little oily mouth!" he exclaimed. "If I can't get you down here, I might as well give up."

Thereupon, abandoning the woman, he set off in pursuit but by the time he had run up the stone steps in great strides, all the way to the pavilion on the summit, Ch'un-mei had come down by way of a winding "sheep's-gut" path on the right side of the hill, passed through the whitewashed "snow cave" of Hidden Spring Grotto, and arrived at the Dripping Emerald Cavern halfway down in the "waist" of the hill, where the flowering vegetation was at its thickest.

Just as she was in the act of hiding there, Hsi-men Ch'ing unexpectedly caught sight of her and, embracing her around the waist as she stood in the shadows, said, "Little oily mouth! I've got you after all."

He then lightly picked her up and carried her down to the grape arbour where, saying with a laugh, "You must have a cup of wine," he proceeded to sit her down on his lap and the two of them passed a cup of it back and forth between them.

When Ch'un-mei saw that the woman's two feet were suspended from the arbour, she said, "What do the two of you think you're up to? In broad daylight too! If anyone should happen along and catch you in the act it would look most unbecoming."

"Was the postern gate closed or not?"[62] Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.

"I put the latch on it when I came in," said Ch'un-mei.

"Little oily mouth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can look on as I play a game of 'pitching into the fleshly pot.' This variation is called 'Shooting the Silver Goose with a Golden Pellet.' You watch; for every pellet that hits the target I'll drink a cup of wine."

Thereupon, he reached into the bowl of ice water for a jade-yellow "imperial damson" plum[63] and pitched it at the orifice of the woman's vagina. He pitched three of these in a row and each of them struck the clitoris. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly downed three cups of the medicated Five Spice Wine. He also had Ch'un-mei pour a cup of wine and give it to the woman to drink.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then inserted a damson plum into the woman's vagina and neither removed it nor proceeded to any further action that had the effect of arousing the woman until:
Her amorous desires were in a tumult, and
Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,
but she was too embarrassed to call out. Instead:
Her starry eyes grew dim, and
Her four limbs lay inert upon pillow and mat.[64]
Finally she called out:
Her oriole's voice all aquaver,
"What a cruel lover! You'll do me to death yet."

Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention to her but told Ch'un-mei to stand by and cool him with a fan as he devoted himself to the wine. As the cups passed back and forth, he continued to drink until he ended up reclining faceup on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair and fell fast asleep.

As soon as Ch'un-mei saw that he was in a drunken stupor, she came over to make sure by giving him an experimental caress and then disappeared in a cloud of dust through the whitewashed "snow cave" on her way back to the rear compound. She heard someone calling to get in through the postern gate, and when she opened it, it turned out to be Li P'ing-erh.

No one disturbed Hsi-men Ch'ing's nap, and he slept for about two hours before waking up. When he opened his eyes he saw that the woman's two fresh white legs were still splayed to either side as they hung suspended from the grape arbour overhead.

Unable to restrain his lust,[65]
he noticed that Ch'un-mei was no longer in evidence and, turning to the woman, said, "All right, I'll let you have it now."

Thereupon, he first fished the damson plum out of her vagina and made the woman eat it. Then he sat down on a pillow, pulled the bag of sexual implements out of the wallet attached to his silk jacket, and fastened in place first the silver clasp and then the sulfur-imbrued ring. [66]

At first he only dallied back and forth in the mouth of her vagina, refusing to penetrate deeply that had the effect of arousing the woman until she arched her back in response to his every movement, while crying out unceasingly, "Daddy, hurry up and get inside! You're driving this whore of yours crazy! I know you're upset with me on account of Li P'ing-erh and are deliberately pulling out the stops to teach me a lesson. After what you've put me through today, I won't dare defy you anymore."

"You little whore," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as long as you understand what's what, we can negotiate the better."[67]

Thereupon, after titillating her clitoris a little further, he withdrew his organ, opened the bag from his wallet, picked out a glob of the aphrodisiac ointment called "Amorous Cries of Boudoir Beauties" [68] with his finger and thumb, and, daubing it in the mouth of his urethra, plunged the object into her vagina and gave a few thrusts with it. In no time at all his organ became proud and firm.

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
as it became engorged with rage. Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Bent his head the better to observe,
The coming and going, thrusting and retraction;[69]
Savoring the sight as it went in and out.[70]

As the woman lay beside the pillow:
Her starry eyes grew dim, and
She moaned incessantly,
inarticulately calling out, "My big-dicked daddy! What are you up to? Go all the way in and be done with it. The itch in the clitoris of the cunt of this whore of yours has entered into the marrow of her bones. Take pity on me and let me off for now."

In the mouth of this whore no expression, no matter how unspeakably obscene, was left unsaid.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, once he got started he was good for three or four hundred thrusts at a time. Supporting himself facedown on the pillow and mat with both hands, arching his back and exerting all his strength, responding to her movements and raising himself to the task, he retracted his organ as far as its neck and plunged it in all the way up to the root another hundred times or so. [71] The woman, from underneath, used a napkin to wipe away her vaginal secretions but they continued to flow, as a result of which the mat was completely soaked. Hsi-men Ch'ing alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, moving back and forth and teasing her without mercy.

Turning to the woman, he said, "I'm going to demonstrate the position known as 'The Old Monk Rings the Dinner Bell.' "

All of a sudden, he arched his back and lunged forward, thrusting himself inside her until the tip of his organ penetrated all the way to her cervix. The cervix is the innermost recess of the vaginal chamber and contains a fleshy growth like the budding pistil of a flower. When the glans of his penis penetrates to this point without being deflected, the man will feel a melting sensation the pleasure of which is indescribable.[72]

The woman was hurt and responded with a sudden upward buck of her body, as a result of which, what could be heard but a cracking sound as the sulfur-imbrued ring broke inside her. As for the woman:
Her eyes dimmed, her respiration slowed,
The sound of her breathing was barely audible,
The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and
Her four limbs lay inert upon the mat.[73]

Hsi-men Ch'ing became alarmed and hastily unfastened the foot bindings by which her feet were suspended from the arbour. He then fished the sulfur-imbrued ring and the "titillating bell" out of her vagina and broke them in two.

Thereupon, he helped the woman into a sitting position, and it was only after what seemed like half a day that:
Her starry eyes flashed open with surprise,[74]
and she gradually came back to her senses.

She then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, with coquettish tears,[75] "My own daddy! How could you be so cruel to me today? You almost cost me my life. From now on you must never do anything like that again.
It would be no laughing matter.
As it is:
My head feels so dizzy,
I hardly know where I am."[76]

Noticing that the sun was already sinking in the west, Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily helped her on with her clothes and called for Ch'un-mei and Ch'iu-chü to put away the bedding and help him get her back to her room.

Ch'un-mei returned to the garden to oversee Ch'iu-chü as she cleared up the tableware from the feast. Just as she was about to close the garden gate, the head servant Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, came scrambling out from underneath the flower trellis and pestered her for some fruit to eat.

"Where did you come from, you little jailbird?" said Ch'un-mei, giving him a few damson plums and peaches. "Your father's drunk. Hadn't you better get back to the front of the compound? If he sees you, I fear, you're likely to get a beating."

The little monkey took the fruit and went off straightaway. Ch'un-mei closed the garden gate and then went back to the room where she helped Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman as they:
Got into bed and prepared to sleep.

But no more of this. Truly:
In the morning he attends feasts in Golden Valley,[77]
In the evening, he favours beauties in ornate houses.
But do not consider these occasions for joy,

Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.

Laibao returned from the Eastern Capital and made his report to Ximen Qing. "When I reached the Capital," he said, "I went to see the Comptroller of the Household and gave him your letter. Then I was taken to the minister. When his Eminence had looked at the list of presents, he accepted them. Then I explained the case. His Eminence said: 'I will send at once to the Governor of Shandong and ask him to liberate the salt merchant Wang Sifeng of Yangzhou and the others.' Master Zhai sent his greetings to you. He says he would like to have a talk with you and that you ought to go to the Capital for his Eminence's birthday on the fifteenth day of the sixth month."

Ximen Qing was satisfied. He sent Laibao to tell Master Qiao. While he was speaking, Ben the Fourth and Laixing came in but seeing their master occupied, they stood aside until Laibao had gone. Then Ximen Qing said to Ben the Fourth: "I suppose you have come back from the funeral?" Ben the Fourth hardly dared to speak but Laixing came forward and whispered: "Song Ren came to the funeral pyre, and refused to allow the body to be burned. He said it was extremely irregular. He said other things that I should not like to repeat."

Ximen Qing was very angry. "What a detestable, hateful creature!" he cried. He sent a boy at once for Chen Jingji, told the young man to write a letter to Magistrate Li, and sent Laian with it to the Town Hall. The magistrate dispatched two runners who bound Song Ren and took him to the court. He was charged with blackmail and attempting to use the dead woman as a means of extorting money. He was brought in fetters to the Hall of Audience and there given twenty strokes so severe that the blood flowed down his legs in streams. The magistrate then bound him over never again to be a nuisance to Ximen Qing. At the same time he ordered police and firemen to go with Ximen's servants to the place of burning and burn the body. Song Ren, his legs all beaten and bleeding, crawled home. He was so exasperated that he took a fever and died, bitterly lamenting his fate.

Now that he had finally disposed of Huilian, Ximen Qing got ready gold and silver to the value of three hundred taels and sent for Silversmith Gu and several others to make a set of silver figures for the birthday of the Imperial Tutor. They worked beneath the awning at Ximen Qing's house. Each of the figures was over a foot high. They also made a pair of golden flagons with the character *Shou* engraved upon them. Ximen had bought two pairs of peach-shaped cups of jade, two sets of crimson robes from Hangzhou, and dragon cloaks embroidered in five colours. He still wanted two rolls of a particular kind of black cloth and some crimson dragon silk but he could not find it at any price. Then Li Ping'er said to him, "I have some sets of dragon robes that have never been made up. They are upstairs in my place. Come and look at them."

Ximen Qing went with her and they picked out four sets, two of crimson silk and two of the special black cloth. They all were edged with gold braid, and embroidered with five-coloured dragons. They were certainly much finer than anything they could have bought. Ximen Qing was delighted. He had them all packed up and Laibao and Clerk Fu left again for the Eastern Capital on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month.

Two days later it was the beginning of the sixth month. The weather was very hot, and at noon the fiery sun was like a blazing umbrella in a cloudless sky. Not a particle of cloud was to be seen and it seemed hot enough to scorch the stones or to melt metal.

It was so hot that Ximen Qing did not go out. He stayed at home with his hair undone and his clothes unbuttoned, trying to keep cool. He sat in the bower by the Kingfisher Hall watching the boys watering the flowers. In front of the Kingfisher Hall there was a bowl of sweet-smelling daphne. He told Laian to take a little watering can, and watched him sprinkle the flowers.

Jinlian and Li Ping'er were both dressed in the lightest of silver silk, with skirts of dark red and a fringe of gold thread. Li Ping'er was wearing a short crimson cape and Jinlian had one of silver and red. Jinlian wore nothing on her head but a blue Hangzhou headdress, through which four braids of hair peeped out. On her brow were three flowers made of kingfisher feathers that enhanced the beauty of her white face and glossy hair, her red lips and pearly teeth. The two women came smiling, holding each other's hands.

"You here, watering the flowers!" Jinlian cried, when she saw Ximen Qing. "Why don't you go and dress your hair?"

"Tell one of the maids to bring me some water," Ximen said, "and I will do my hair here."

"Put down your watering can," Jinlian said to Laian, "and send a maid with some water and a comb. Be quick about it." Laian bowed and went to do what he was told. Then Jinlian, seeing the sweet-smelling daphne, was going to pick some to put in her hair but Ximen Qing stopped her. "Don't touch them, little oily mouth. I will give one to each of you." He had already picked a few blossoms and put them into a crackleware vase.

"Ah, my son," Jinlian said, "so you've been plucking the flowers, have you? What do you mean by hiding them there instead of offering them to your mother?" She snatched one up and set it in her hair. Ximen Qing gave one to Li Ping'er. Then Chunmei came with a mirror and comb, and Qiuju brought water. Ximen gave three flowers to Chunmei, for Yueniang, Li Jiao'er and Yulou, and said: "Ask the Third Lady to come and play her zither for me."

"Chunmei can go to the Great Lady and Li Jiao'er, and if you want Yulou, I'll go and fetch her," Jinlian said. "When I come back, I shall expect another flower, and, if I bring someone to sing for you, still another one."

"Go first." Ximen said, "and we'll see about that when you come back."

"My son," Jinlian said, "wherever can you have been brought up? What a naughty boy to think of trying to cheat me like that! If I go and fetch Yulou, I shall never get one. No, let me have it first, and then I'll go."

"You wicked little rascal," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "even in trifles like this you will have your own way." He gave her the flower. Jinlian set it in her hair, and went towards the inner court, leaving Li Ping'er alone with Ximen Qing.

Through the light silk skirt, Ximen could see her crimson trousers; the sun's rays made them so transparent that he could clearly distinguish the cool flesh beneath them. The sight aroused his passion, and finding that they were alone, he stopped dressing his hair, and carried Li Ping'er to a long summer couch. He pulled aside her skirt, took down the crimson trousers, and played with her the game that is called Carrying Fire over the Mountains. They played for a long time without his bringing matters to a conclusion, and their pleasure was like that of a lovebird and his mate.

Jinlian did not go to the inner court. She went as far as the corner gate and then decided to give Yulou's flower to Chunmei. She went back on tiptoe to the Kingfisher Hall. There, she stood listening outside the window, and, for quite a long time, could hear the lovers amusing themselves.

"My darling," she heard Ximen Qing say to Li Ping'er, "above all else I love your little white bottom. I shall do my very utmost to give you pleasure today."

After a pause, she heard Li Ping'er say softly, "My dearest, you must be gentle with me, for I am really not too well. The other day you were rough with me, and my belly hurt so much that only during the last day or two has it begun to feel better."

"You are not well?" Ximen cried. "What do you mean?"

"I will not keep it from you any longer," Li Ping'er told him. "For a month now, I have been cherishing a little one within me. Please treat me with some indulgence."

Ximen Qing was delighted beyond all measure. "Why, my precious one," he said, "why didn't you tell me before? If that is how things are, I will bring this game to an end at once." His happiness reached its culmination and his joy was complete. He set both hands upon her legs, and the evidence of his delight was overwhelming. The woman beneath him raised herself to welcome it.

After a while, Jinlian could hear Ximen breathing heavily, and his lover's gentle voice, like an oriole's, answering him. No sound escaped her as she stood beneath the window. Yulou came up suddenly from behind. "What are you doing here?" she asked. Jinlian signed to her to be silent, and they both went into the summerhouse. Ximen Qing was a little taken aback and did not quite know what to do.

"What have you been doing all this long time I've been away?" Jinlian said. "How is it you haven't washed, or combed your hair?"

"I am waiting for a maid to bring me some jasmine soap," Ximen said.

"I have no patience with you," Jinlian cried. "Why must you have that particular kind of soap? Is that why your face is cleaner than some people's bottoms?"

Ximen Qing paid no attention to this remark but, when he had finished dressing, sat down beside Yulou. "What have you been doing in the inner court?" he said. "Have you brought your zither?"

"I have been making a pearl flower for the Great Lady to wear at a party. Chunmei is bringing the zither."

Soon Chunmei came. She said she had given the flowers to the Great Lady and the Second Lady. Ximen told her to set out wine, and a bowl of ice with plums and melons in it was brought. In the cool summerhouse Ximen Qing enjoyed the society of his ladies.

"Why didn't you tell Chunmei to ask the Great Lady to come?" Yulou said. "She does not care for wine," Ximen Qing said, "I thought there was no purpose in troubling her."

Then Ximen took the seat of honour and the three women sat down facing him. The exquisite wine was poured out for them and many delicacies were placed before them. Jinlian would not sit on a chair but took a porcelain stool for herself.

"Come and sit on a chair," Yulou cried, "you will find that stool too cold."

"Don't worry," Jinlian said, "I am getting old. I've no reason to fear an internal chill or anything of that sort. Why should I?"

The wine was passed around three times and Ximen Qing told Chunmei to give Yulou her zither, and a lute to Jinlian. "Play the tune 'The God of Fire Rules the World and His Glory Fills the Void.'" Jinlian refused. "How well you must have been brought up," she cried, "to ask us to sing while you two sit there and enjoy yourselves. I will not play for you. Tell the Sixth Lady to play something."

"She doesn't know how to play," Ximen said.

"Well, even if she doesn't know how to play, she certainly knows how to count the beats," Jinlian said.

Ximen Qing laughed. "You little whore," he cried, "you always try to pick on something," but he told Chunmei to give Li Ping'er a pair of red ivory castanets. Then the two women began to play, spreading their exquisite fingers and slowly plucking the silken strings. They sang the song of "The Geese Flying Over the Sand," while Xiuchun stood at the side and fanned them. When the song was over, Ximen offered each of them a cup of wine. Jinlian went to the table, drank deeply of iced water, and ate some fruit.

"Why are you eating only cold things today?" Yulou said.

"Nothing of any particular interest is happening in my distinguished belly," Jinlian replied. "Why should I be afraid of cold things?"

Li Ping'er was so embarrassed that she became white and red in turns. Ximen Qing glanced sharply at Jinlian. "You little villain," he said, "you do nothing but talk nonsense."

"Brother," Jinlian said, "old women like me get nothing but dry meat to eat. We have to eat it sinew by sinew."

As they were drinking, the clouds began to gather. Far away the thunder rolled and suddenly a storm broke, drenching the flowers in front of the summerhouse.

In a few moments the rain stopped again. A rainbow appeared in the sky. The sun came out again, and in a twinkling the jasper steps glistened and a cool evening breeze freshened the courtyard. Xiaoyu came from the back court to call Yulou.

"The Great Lady wants me," Yulou said. "I have still some pearl flowers to finish. I must go now or she will be angry."

"I will go with you," Li Ping'er said. "I should like to see the flowers." Ximen Qing said he would go with them too. He took the zither and asked Yulou to play. He beat time with his hands and they all sang together.

It is evening.
The storm has passed over the southern hall
Red petals are floating on the surface of the pool.
Slowly the gentle thunder rolls away
The rain is over and the clouds disperse
The fragrance of water lilies comes to us over the distance.
The new moon is a crescent
Fresh from the perfumed bath, decked for the evening
Over the darkening courtyard it wanes
Yet will not go to rest.
In the shade of the willow the young cicada bursts into song
Fireflies hover over the ancestral halls.
Listen. Whence comes this song of Ling?
The painted boat is late returning
The jade cords sink lower and lower
The gentlefolk are silent.
A vision of delight.
Let us rise and take each other by the hand
And tire our hair.
The moon lights up the silken curtains.
But there are no sleepers there.
The brave mandarin duck tumbles the lotus leaves
On the gently rippling water
Sprinkling them with drops like pearls.
They give forth fragrance.
A perfumed breeze moves softly over the flower beds
Beside the summerhouse
How can our spirits fail to be refreshed?
Why crave for the islands of the blessed, the home of fairies?
Yet, when the west wind blows again, Autumn will come with it.
Though we perceive it not, the seasons change.

So singing, they reached the corner gate almost before they knew it. Yulou gave her zither to Chunmei and went to the inner court with Li Ping'er.

"Wait for me," Jinlian cried, "I am coming too," Ximen Qing caught her by the hand and pulled her back.

"So you would run away from me, little oily mouth," he cried. "I shall not let you go." He pulled so hard that she almost fell.

"You funny creature," Jinlian cried. "They are both going. Why won't you let me go?"

"We will drink a little wine together," Ximen said, "and play Flying Arrows Beneath the Tai Hu Rock."

"We can play quite well in the summerhouse," Jinlian said. "Why stay here? And it's no use asking this young scamp Chunmei to bring any wine. She won't do it."

Ximen Qing told Chunmei to go. She handed the zither to Jinlian and went off with her head in the air. Jinlian strummed the zither for a while. "I have learned a few bars from Yulou," she said. She saw how freshly the pomegranate flowers were blooming after the rain, and laughingly plucked one and set it in her hair. "I am an old lady, wearing on my brow a 'starving-for-three-days' flower."

Ximen Qing seized her tiny feet. "You little villain," he cried, "if I weren't afraid of somebody seeing us, I'd make you die of delight."

"Don't get so excited, you naughty fellow," Jinlian said. "Let me put down this zither." She laid the instrument beside a flower bed. "My son," she said, "you have only just finished amusing yourself with the Sixth Lady. Why should you come and plague me now?"

"You are still talking nonsense," Ximen said, "I never touched her."

"My boy," Jinlian said, "you may try as hard as you like but you will never succeed in deceiving the God who watches over Hearth and Home. What is the use of trying to hoodwink an experienced old woman like me? When I went to the inner court to take that flower, the pair of you wasted no time."

"Oh, do not talk such rubbish," Ximen cried. He set her down among the flowers, and kissed her lips. She slipped her tongue into his mouth.

"Call me 'darling,' and I'll let you get up," he said. Jinlian could not help herself. She called him darling but, she added, "It isn't me you really love, so why do you bother me?"

They amused themselves for a while, and then Jinlian suggested that they should go and play Flying Arrows in the Arbour of the Vines. She took the zither into her lap and played.

They walked side by side. Soon they had turned by the shaded pool and passed the Hall of the White Rose. Then they went in front of the Kingfisher Hall and came to the Arbour of the Vines. It was a very beautiful place.

They came to the arbour. There were four summer stools there, and near them a vase for the game of Flying Arrows. Jinlian set down the zither and played the arrow game with Ximen Qing. Then Chunmei came with wine, and Qiuju carrying a basket of delicacies, with a bowl of iced fruits.

"You went off in a huff, young woman," Jinlian said. "What has made you decide to bring the things?"

"We have looked everywhere for you," Chunmei said. "How were we to know that you'd take it into your head to come here?"

Qiuju set out the refreshments and Ximen Qing opened the basket. There were eight rows of exquisite fruits and sweetmeats in it, a little silver jar of grape wine, two small Jinlian cups and two pairs of chopsticks. These they set upon a rustic table. Ximen and Jinlian sat down before it but went on with their game. They played Feathers through the Arch, The Geese Flying on their Backs, The Qiao Sisters Studying Their Books, and Yang Guifei Asleep in the Spring. Then they played The Dragon Entering His Cave and Pearls upon the Blind. Altogether, they had more than ten games. Then the wine went to Jinlian's head. The peaches began to bloom upon her cheeks, and her eyes lost their shyness. Ximen Qing thought he would like to drink the love potion known as the wine of the five fragrances, and told Chunmei to go and fetch it.

"Little oily mouth," Jinlian said, "you can do something for me too. In my room you will find a summer mat and a pillow. Bring them here. I feel very sleepy, and I think I shall lie down."

Chunmei professed to raise objections. "Oh dear," she said, "you give so many orders that nobody could possibly carry them all out."

"If you won't go," Ximen said, "send Qiuju. You bring the wine and we'll leave it at that." Chunmei went off, tossing her head. After a while Qiuju came back with the mat, the pillow and some coverlets. Jinlian ordered her to set them out. "Then fasten the garden gate and go to your room, and don't come back until I call you." Qiuju did as she was told, and went away.

Ximen Qing rose, and took off his jade-coloured light gown. He hung it on the trellis, and went to wash his hands by the peony arbour. When he came back, Jinlian had already prepared the mat and its cushions inside the arbour of the vines, and had undressed till not a thread of silk remained upon her body. She lay flat on her back, a pair of crimson shoes still upon her feet, fanning herself with a white silk fan to gain some relief from the heat.

When Ximen Qing saw her, his wanton heart was quickly stirred, for the wine had not been without its effect upon him. He took off his clothes, and sat down on a stool, letting his toes play around the treasure of this beautiful flower.

Then proof of her pleasure oozed from her like the slime of a snail leaving its tortuous white trail. Ximen pulled off her decorated crimson shoes, loosened the ribbons that bound her feet and tied her ankles to the trellis, so that she looked like a golden dragon baring its claws. The gate of womanhood was open, its guardian was aroused, and a deep scarlet vale appeared.

Ximen Qing lay down and, taking his weapon in his hands, prepared to storm the breach, resting one hand upon the pillow, and proceeding to the attack as he had played Feathers through the Arch when at the Flying Arrow game. He strove with all his strength, till from the scene of combat a mist arose, spiraling, like an eel rising from the mud.

Jinlian beneath him never ceased to murmur, "Darling, my darling." Then, as he was just about to reap the fruits of victory, Chunmei came suddenly with the wine for which Ximen had asked. But when she saw them, she put down the jar of wine and fled to the top of the artificial mound, and there went into the arbour that was called the Land of Clouds. She rested her elbows on the chess table, and amused herself setting out the chessmen. Ximen Qing lifted his head and looked at her; then he beckoned her to come down but she refused. "If you don't come down, I will make you," he cried. He left Jinlian and ran up the stone steps to the arbour. Chunmei fled down a tiny path to the right, through the grottos, till she reached a point halfway, where among the hanging foliage and flowers she tried to hide. Ximen Qing caught her there, and took her in his arms. "I've got you at last, little oily mouth," he cried. Then he carried her like a feather to the Arbour of the Vines.

"Have a cup of wine," he said, laughing, setting her on his knee, and they drank together mouth to mouth. Suddenly Chunmei saw that her mistress's feet were tied to the trellis.

"I don't know how you could do such a thing," she said. "It is the middle of the day, and if anybody should come in, what would they think of such goings on."

"Isn't the corner gate shut?" Ximen asked.

"Yes," Chunmei said, "I shut it when I came in."

"Now," Ximen said, "watch me. I'm going to play Flying Arrows with a living target. The game is called Striking the Silver Swan with a Golden Ball. Watch! If I hit the mark at the first shot, I shall treat myself to a cup of wine." He took a plum from the iced bowl, and cast it to the gate of womanhood. Three times he cast; three times he reached the inmost flower. One plum stuck there but he neither removed it nor finished the work he had begun until the girl became faint and her distress from the effort was evident. Her starry eyes were half closed, and her body fell back limply upon the mat. "You are indeed a roguish enemy," she murmured. "You will be the death of me." Her voice trembled.

Ximen paid no attention to her but told Chunmei to fan him, while he refreshed himself with wine. Then he lay down in an easy chair, and went to sleep. When Chunmei saw that he was asleep, she went softly over and touched him, then ran like a wisp of smoke to the Snow Grotto and so to the other side of the garden. There she heard someone knocking, opened the gate, and saw Li Ping'er.

Ximen Qing slept for an hour or so, and when he opened his eyes, Jinlian's white legs were still hanging from the trellis. Chunmei had gone. Again his passion was aroused.

"Now, you abandoned little creature," he cried, "I'll attend to you." He took out the plum, and gave it her to eat. Then, sitting on the pillow, he took from a pocket in his gown a case of love instruments. First he put on the clasp, and tied a sulfur ring about the root of evil. He refused to dismount her but played so long about her entrance that she cried in fury. "My darling, my dearest, be a man quickly or I shall go mad. I see what it is. You are angry with me because of Li Ping'er. That is why you tease me like this. But now I have found how cunning you can be, I will never make you angry again."

"Ah," cried Ximen, laughing, "so you have learned your lesson. Well, speak nicely to me."

With one thrust he seemed to reach her inmost parts. Then he withdrew; searching in his pocket he found some of the powder that is called Delight of the Bedroom and Fragrance of the Penis, and applied it to the frog's mouth. He returned to the attack, and immediately a tall, proud warrior appeared, full of fire and fury; Ximen surveyed the struggle with admiration. She lay on the mat with half-closed eyes murmuring, "Oh my beloved darling! You don't know what you're putting into me. That thing has driven me to frenzy. Spare me, please." She spoke without shame but Ximen instantly drove forward with full strength, his hands on the mat, tearing, and digging, plunging into her depths a hundred times before withdrawing again. She wiped her wounds with a handkerchief but in vain; the mat bore clear traces of battle, and the warrior, still erect and fierce, would not desist. "The time has come," cried Ximen, "the monk shall smite the timbrel."

Suddenly he lunged, and reached the inmost citadel; for within the gate of womanhood there lies a citadel, like the heart of a flower that, if touched by the conqueror, is infused with a wonderful pleasure. She felt pain and withdrew; but the sulfur ring broke inside her body with a crack. She closed her eyes and her breath came faintly; only a faint murmur issued from her lips, the tip of her tongue became icy cold, and her body fell back apparently lifeless upon the mat. Ximen Qing was alarmed. He hastily untied the ribbons, and removed the sulfur ring. It was broken into 2 pieces. Then he helped the woman to sit up and at last, her starry eyes began to gleam again and she showed signs of life once more. In a caressing voice she said, "Darling, why did you treat me so cruelly today? You nearly killed me. You mustn't do this again. It isn't simply fun. My head and eyes swim so that I hardly know where I'm."

The sun was already setting. Ximen hastily helped her into her clothes and then called Chunmei and Qiuju to come and take away the mat and the pillows. Then they supported her to her room. Chunmei came back to the garden to see that Qiuju removed all the empty cups. She was just shutting the garden gate, when suddenly Laizhao's little son Little Iron Rod jumped out of the summerhouse, and asked her to give him some fruits. "What've you been doing, you young rascal?" Chunmei cried. She gave him a few peaches and plums. "Your father's been drinking," she told him, "and you'd better run off for he'll certainly beat you if he sees you." The little monkey took the fruit and disappeared. Chunmei fastened the garden gate, returned to her mistress and Ximen Qing, and helped them to retire.

## 049

### The 2 Shoes & Ch'en Ching-chi Teases Chin-lien about a Shoe; Hsi-men Ch'ing Angrily Beats Little Iron Rod

In tempestuous surroundings, it is hard to maintain one's footing;
In one's way of coping with the world do not be too demanding.[1]
Everything that happens goes wrong because of haste;
One's heart should ever seek to find contentment in quietude.
Where the road is level one can proceed in greater safety;
When people's feelings are constant, they will withstand scrutiny.
Just as it seems that, first to last, there is nothing to regret;
No sooner are the branches formed than they begin to proliferate.[2]

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had helped the woman into her room he took off his own clothes, above and below, wearing nothing but a short undershirt of thin floss silk and leaving the rest of his body stark naked. The woman wore nothing but a bodice of thin red silk. The 2 of them sat down:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh;
Refilled their empty cups, and
Resumed drinking the fragrant wine.

Putting an arm around her powdered neck, Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to drink with her, passing the same cup back and forth between them.

They could not have been more affectionate.

Looking at the woman out of the corner of his eye, he saw that:

Her cloudy locks were somewhat askew,[3]
Her creamy breasts were half exposed,[4]
Her captivating eyes were all a blur, so that
She resembled a drunken Yang Kuei-fei.

With her slender fingers she toyed uninterruptedly with the organ that lay between his loins until:

The organ started up in response.[5]
It still had the silver clasp fastened around it but, limp, flaccid, and limber:
It was tumid and long.[6]

"Are you still fooling around with him?" Hsi-men Ch'ing joked. "It's all your fault, earlier, for scaring him into such a dumbstruck fit."

"What do you mean by 'a dumbstruck fit'?" the woman asked.

"If he's not having a dumbstruck fit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come he's so flaccid and feverish that he can't even stand up for himself? You'd better get down on your knees and see what a little coaxing will do."

The woman gave him a laughing glance and then, squatting down and pillowing her head on one of his thighs, proceeded to tie the waist-string from his underpants around the base of his organ.

Taking it in her hand, she addressed it, saying, "You rascal, you! Just a little while ago you were so heady and wide-eyed you made me dizzy, and now you pretend to be having a dumbstruck fit and play dead."

After she had manipulated it for a while, she laid it against her powdered cheek and brushed it back and forth for some time before putting it in her mouth and sucking it.[7] She then proceeded to explore the mouth of his urethra with the tip of her tongue, and in no time at all his organ became engorged with rage.

In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells itself erect.[8]

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat up on the pillow and ordered the woman to remain on all fours inside the gauze mosquito netting and suck away:

In order to augment his pleasure.[9]

Before long:

His lewd excitement was rekindled,[10]
and he engaged her in intercourse another time.

The woman pled with him, saying, "Daddy, let me off for now! Do you really mean to pester me again?"

That night the two of them:

Indulged their lusts without restraint.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The battle at its height, joy reaches its zenith,
the clouds and rain disperse.
Her captivating eyes are all a blur.
Holding the jade stalk in her hand,
it remains as hard as ever.
She pleads with her talented gentleman,
"Take it easy just a bit!"
Urging each other to drain the golden cup to the dregs,[11]
Both of them are passionate, "half drunk, half crazed."
Her snow-white jade body is visible
through the bed curtains;[12]
Her mouth is like a cherry, her fingers
are like reeds.
A single rivulet flows between them,
each drop distinct;
Their mutual feelings are enmeshed,[13]
deluded by lust.
Tossed first this way and then that,
fish nibble at the algae;
Slowly advancing and lightly retreating,
the cat devours the chick.
So long as the "divine turtle" does not disgorge
the water of its sweet spring:
How can the Goddess of the Moon be induced to
temporarily disengage.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing went out, and it was almost lunchtime before the woman got up. Taking off the pair of sleeping shoes she had on, she looked around for the pair of red ones she had worn the day before:

Trying first this and then that,
but was unable to find one of them.

She asked Ch'un-mei about it, and she said, "Yesterday, when Father and I helped you inside, it was Ch'iu-chü who brought in your bedding."

The woman called for Ch'iu-chü and asked her about it.

"Yesterday," Ch'iu-chü said, "I didn't see you wearing any shoes when you came in."

"What rubbish!" the woman said. "If I wasn't wearing any shoes when I came in, do you mean to say that I came in barefooted?"

"Mother," said Ch'iu-chü, "if you had your shoes on, why aren't they here in the house?"

"You lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her, "still playing the innocent, are you? But if it is here in the house, you'd better give it a thorough going over."

Ch'iu-chü searched everywhere, in all three rooms, on top of the beds and under the beds but was unable to come up with the missing shoe.

"It seems this house of mine is haunted," said the woman. "Some demon has made off with this shoe of mine, I suppose. If you can't even keep track of the shoes I wear on my feet, what do I need a slave like you in the house for, anyway?"

"Maybe you've just forgotten," said Ch'iu-chü, "that you left it somewhere in the garden, and didn't have it on when you came in."

"No doubt I was screwed silly!" the woman said. "And didn't even know whether I had my shoes on my feet or not."

Then she called for Ch'un-mei and said, "Take this lousy slave into the garden and have her conduct a search. If she comes up with it, that will be that; but if she fails to come up with my shoe, make her kneel down in the courtyard with a stone balanced on her head."

Ch'un-mei escorted her all over the garden, including the vicinity of the grape arbour but, search as she would, there was not a shoe to be found. Truly:

It was just as if one of the six Ting gods[14] had stolen it away;
Amid the reed catkins, by bright moonlight, it was hard to find.[15]
After searching the entire garden, they returned empty-handed.
Ch'un-mei mocked her, saying, "You slave, you're in the same pickle now as:
The go-between who lost her way: you've no occasion to speak; or
Dame Wang who sold her grindstone: you've no way to grind your axe."[16]
"It's uncanny," said Ch'iu-chü. "Who could have made off with Mother's shoe? I didn't see her wearing any shoes when she came in. I wouldn't be surprised if when you opened the garden gate yesterday you let someone in who picked up Mother's shoe."
Ch'un-mei responded by spitting a thick glob of saliva in her face and cursing at her, "You lousy slave! You've been seeing things. And now you're trying to drag me into it. When the Sixth Lady called to open the gate, I shouldn't have opened it, I suppose! But you would have it that I let someone in. It was you who brought in her bedding and didn't check things out properly, and you still have the nerve to shoot your mouth off."
Ch'un-mei then escorted Ch'iu-chü back to the house and reported to her mistress, "She didn't find the shoe."
The woman told her to take her out to the courtyard and make her kneel down there.
Ch'iu-chü started to cry, saying, "Let me go make another search of the garden. If I fail to find it this time, Mother can beat me if she likes."
"Don't you believe her," said Ch'un-mei. "The garden grounds have been swept as clean as can be. Even a needle could have been found there. What chance is there of turning up a shoe?"
"Wait till I fail to find it," said Ch'iu-chü, "and then let mother beat me. Why do you have to keep on wagging your tongue on the sidelines?"
"All right," the woman said to Ch'un-mei. "You go along with this slave and see where she goes to look for it."
Ch'un-mei once again escorted her on a round of the garden, including the "snow caves" underneath the artificial hill, the flower beds, and the juniper hedge but it was not to be found. Ch'iu-chü began to panic, and Ch'un-mei gave her a couple of boxes on the ear and started to drag her back to confront her mistress.
"There's still that other 'snow cave' where we haven't looked yet," said Ch'iu-chü.
"You mean the Hidden Spring Grotto?" said Ch'un-mei. "That's Father's hideaway. And besides, Mother hasn't been in there for some time now. I'll watch while you take a look but if you don't come up with anything I'll have something further to say to you."
Thereupon, she escorted her into the whitewashed "snow cave" of the Hidden Spring Grotto. There was a couch facing the door with an incense table beside it but Ch'iu-chü found nothing there and began to rummage in Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter case.
"That letter case is where Father keeps his calling cards and stationery," said Ch'un-mei. "How would Mother's shoe get in there? You're just up to your tricks, playing for time. If you muss everything up that way and he ever finds out about it, there'll be another ruckus for sure. You splay-legged whore, you're just asking for it."
After some time, lo and behold, Ch'iu-chü exclaimed, "Isn't this Mother's shoe? It's wrapped up in a paper bag together with some sticks of incense and lysimachia."
She took it out and showed it to Ch'un-mei, saying, "How is it that I've come up with Mother's shoe after all? And just now you were inciting her to beat me."
Ch'un-mei looked at it and, sure enough, it was a scarlet flat-soled shoe.
"If it really is Mother's," she said, "how did it ever get into this letter case? It's very strange indeed."
Thereupon, they went back to see their mistress.
"So you have my shoe, do you?" the woman asked. "Where did it turn out to be?"
"It was in a letter case in Father's hideaway in the Hidden Spring Grotto," said Ch'un-mei, "that we found it. It was in with his calling cards and stationery, wrapped up together with some lysimachia and benzoin."
The woman took it in her hand and then picked up her other shoe to compare with it. They were both embroidered shoes of scarlet silk, figured with flowers from each of the four seasons and the symbolic representations of the "eight treasures," with flat, white satin soles, green heel lifts, and blue hook and eye fastenings. Only the chain stitching of the two shoes was slightly different. One was chain stitched with sand-green thread, and the other with turquoise-blue thread. Without careful scrutiny they could not have been told apart.
The woman tried them on her feet to test the fit and found that the newly discovered shoe was slightly tighter than the old one. Only then did she realize that it must have belonged to Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien.
"Who knows when," she thought to herself, "she must have given it to that lousy ruffian of ours. He didn't have the nerve to bring it into the house so he surreptitiously hid it there. How could he have anticipated that it would be turned up by this slave?"
After looking at it for a while, she said, "This is not my shoe. You slave, you'd better get out there right away and kneel down as you've been told."
Turning to Ch'un-mei, she said, "Find a stone and make her balance it on her head."
Ch'iu-chü started to cry, saying, "If it isn't Mother's shoe, whose shoe is it? Even though I found the shoe for you, you still intend to beat me. If I'd been unable to find it, who knows what a beating I would have had."
"Hold your tongue, you lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her.
Ch'un-mei accordingly lifted up a large stone and balanced it on top of Ch'iu-chü's head.
The woman then changed into another pair of shoes and, feeling that the room was too hot, told Ch'un-mei to take her dressing mirror up to the Flower-viewing Tower so she could do her hair there. After doing her hair she intended to give Ch'iu-chü a beating. But no more of this.
To resume our story, that morning Ch'en Ching-chi had come in from the pawnshop to look for some clothing. When he got to the postern gate leading into the flower garden he encountered Little Iron Rod, who was playing there.
Seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi was carrying a pair of silver hairnet rings in his hand, the youngster asked, "Uncle, what's that you've got there? Let me have them to play with."
"This is a pair of hairnet rings that somebody pawned," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "They've come to redeem them, and I'm taking them out to return to them."
"Uncle," said the little monkey with an ingratiating smile, "Let me have them to play with. I'll give you something nice in exchange."
"A fine child you are!" said Ch'en Ching-chi. "These are things that somebody pawned. If you want, I'll find another pair for you to play with. What sort of nice thing have you got? Let me see it."
The monkey then reached inside his waistband, pulled out a scarlet embroidered shoe, and showed it to Ching-chi.
"Where'd it come from?" asked Ching-chi.
"Uncle," the monkey said with an ingratiating smile, "I'll tell you all about it. Yesterday I was playing in the garden and saw that Father had suspended the Fifth Lady's two feet from the grape arbour overhead and they were having quite a stormy time of it. Later, after Father had gone inside, I pestered Auntie Ch'un-mei for some fruit to eat and picked up this shoe under the grape arbour."
Ching-chi took it in his hand and saw that it was:
As curved as the new moon at heaven's edge,
As red as the fallen petal of a lotus blossom.
When he cradled it in his palm, it was:
Barely three inches long,
and he knew that it must be an object that had graced Chin-lien's foot.
"Give it to me," he said, "and tomorrow I'll find another pair of nice rings for you to play with."
"No fooling, Uncle," the monkey said. "Tomorrow I'll come and demand them of you."
"I'm not fooling you," said Ching-chi.
At this the monkey laughed and went off to play.
Ch'en Ching-chi tucked the shoe into his sleeve and thought to himself, "I've flirted with her more than once, and she always sounds ready enough; but when it comes to the point, she's proven elusive. Who would have thought that:
As providence would have it,
this shoe should have fallen into my hands. Today I'll give her cinders a real stirring. Never fear, she's bound to come around."
Truly:
There is no need for the people of today to practice threading needles;
How could the Weaving Maid have the leisure to confer such dexterity?[17]
Ch'en Ching-chi, with the shoe in his sleeve, headed straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters. When he had made his way around the spirit screen, what should he see but Ch'iu-chü kneeling in the courtyard.
"Young lady," he joked, "what have you done this time? It looks as though you've joined the New Army and have to spend your time lifting stones."
Chin-lien overheard this sally from her vantage point on the second floor and called to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Who is it who says she's lifting stones? I wouldn't be surprised if the slave's taken the stone off her head."
"It's your son-in-law," said Ch'un-mei. "Ch'iu-chü has still got the stone on her head."
"If it's you, Son-in-law," the woman called out, "there's no one else up here. Why don't you come upstairs."
The young scamp:
Quickening his pace and hiking up his clothes,
raced up the stairs. What should he see but the woman, sitting on the second floor, with two windows open in front of her, over which bamboo blinds had been let down, gazing into her dressing mirror and doing her hair. Ch'en Ching-chi went right up beside her and sat down on a low stool.
He looked on as the woman combed lock after lock of her glossy black hair that reached all the way to the floor. Then she bound it with a red silk ribbon and did it up in a "bag of silk" chignon, over which she placed a fret of silver filigree in such a way as to set off a coil of fragrant hair. She had placed a quantity of rose petals inside her fret, and two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple. In fact she was so made up as to look like an avatar of the Goddess Kuan-yin.
In a little while, as he watched the woman complete her toilet, she put away her dressing mirror, rinsed her hands in a washbasin, put on her outer clothes, and called to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Bring our son-in-law a cup of tea."
While this was going on, Ching-chi merely smiled, without saying a word.
"What are you smiling for?" the woman finally asked.
"I'm smiling," said Ching-chi, "because I know that you've lost something."
"You lousy short-life!" the woman said. "If I've lost anything, what's it to you? And what do you know about it, anyway?"
"You see," said Ching-chi:
"Even my best intentions are treated like the entrails of an ass.
You'd rather mock me, would you? Well, if that's the way it is, I might as well go."
So saying, he got up and started down the stairs.
The woman grabbed hold of him with her hand, saying, "You crazy short-life! You can put on quite an act, can't you? Now that Lai-wang's wife is dead, you've no one to think about, and so you've contrived to remember your old mother."
"Go ahead and guess," she went on to say. "What is it that I've lost, do you think?"
Ching-chi pulled the shoe out of his sleeve and dangled it by its heel lift, saying with a laugh, "Look at this. Who does this goody belong to?"
"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said. "So it was you who made off with my shoe, causing me to beat my maidservant and search all over the place."
"Make a guess," said Ching-chi. "How do you suppose it came into my hands?"
"Who else ever comes into my place?" the woman said. "You must have sneaked in here:
Like a furtive thieving rat,[18]
and made off with this shoe of mine."
"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Ching-chi. "Since when have I been in your place the last couple of days? How could I have stolen anything of yours?"
"A fine, lousy short-life you are!" the woman said. "Just wait till I tell Father about it. First you steal my shoe, and then tell me I ought to be ashamed of myself."
"All you ever seem able to do," said Ching-chi, "is try to use Father to scare me.
"You've got quite a nerve, don't you?" the woman said. "You knew perfectly well that Father was:
Playing at sevens and eights,[19]
with Lai-wang's wife but you flirted with her anyway. As though that whore would share her favours with the likes of you! If it wasn't you who stole my shoe, how did it fall into your hands? The sooner you confess the truth and return my shoe, the better for you. It has always been true that:
When an object meets its owner,
It is sure to be repossessed.[20]
If you dare utter so much as:
Half the word 'no,'[21]
I'll see to it that:
You'll die without a plot to be buried in."
"You're just like a plainclothes officer:
You've got a real knack for knavery,"[22]
said Ching-chi. "There's no one else here, so we can talk freely. If you want this shoe, you'll have to give me something in exchange for it. Otherwise, you couldn't beat it out of me with a steelyard."
"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said. "It's my shoe, and you ought to return it to me. What do you want in exchange for it, anyway?"
"Fifth Lady," said Ching-chi with a laugh, "if you give your son that handkerchief in your sleeve, your son will return your shoe to you."
"I'll find you another nice handkerchief tomorrow," the woman said. "Your father has seen this one often enough to recognize it, so it wouldn't do to give it to you."
"I don't want another one," said Ching-chi. "Even if you gave me a hundred, it wouldn't make any difference. My heart is set on this particular handkerchief."
"A fine short-life you are!" the woman said.
"You're such a practiced old hand,
I don't have the strength to contend with you any longer."
Thereupon, she reached into her sleeve and pulled out a fine, tasseled, white satin handkerchief, decorated with a drawnwork motif of:
Ts'ui Ying-ying Burning Evening Incense,[23]
which also had a silver chatelaine with three pendant charms attached to it, and tossed it over to him. Ching-chi deftly caught it in his hands and made her a deep bow.
"You'd better keep it well hidden," the woman instructed him. "Don't let your wife see it. She's got a nasty tongue in her head."
"I understand," Ching-chi said, handing her the shoe, and then proceeded, thus and so, to give a full account of how "Little Iron Rod picked it up in the garden yesterday and this morning offered to exchange it for a pair of hairnet rings for him to play with."
When the woman heard this:
Her powdered face became suffused with red, as she
Silently gnashed her silvery teeth.

“Look at this,” she said. “That lousy little slave with his greasy hands has smudged my shoe till it’s as black as lacquer. Just see if I don’t get Father to give him a thrashing.”
“You’ll do me in yet,” protested Ching-chi. “I don’t care if he gets a beating as long as I’m not implicated. Whatever you do, don’t say that I told you about it.”
“As for sparing that little slave,” the woman said, “I’d sooner spare a scorpion.”
Just as they were in the midst of their conversation, they suddenly heard that the pageboy, Lai-an, had come looking for Ch’en Ching-chi.
“Father’s in the front reception hall,” he reported, “and wants Uncle to go write some gift cards for him.”
The woman hurriedly sent him on his way.
After coming downstairs, she told Ch’un-mei to fetch a bamboo cane so she could beat Ch’iu-chü.
Ch’iu-chü protested and refused to lie down, saying, “I found Mother’s shoe, and now Mother still wants to beat me.”
The woman showed her the shoe that Ch’en Ching-chi had just given her and cursed her, saying, “You lousy slave! You tried to pass off that other shoe as mine but where did you put this one?”
When Ch’iu-chü saw it, she stared at it for some time but refused to acknowledge her mistake, saying, “What a strange business! How could Mother turn out to have three shoes?”
“You impudent slave!” the woman said. “First you try to palm somebody else’s shoe off on me, and now you suggest that I’m a three-legged toad![24] How do you account for this shoe then?”
Without permitting any further explanation,
she ordered Ch’un-mei to bend her over and proceeded to give her ten cuts with the cane.
Weeping and trying to protect her bottom with her hands, Ch’iu-chü turned to Ch’un-mei and said, “It was all your doing. When you opened the garden gate yesterday, you must have let someone in who picked up Mother’s shoe. And now you’re inciting Mother to beat me.”
“It was you who brought in Mother’s bedding and lost her shoe,” Ch’un-mei cursed at her. “Mother has only given you these few strokes with the cane, and you have the nerve to try to blame someone else. It’s a good thing it was only this old shoe. No doubt if it had been Mother’s hairpin or earring that was lost, you’d be even more anxious to find a scapegoat. Mother has been lenient in letting you off so lightly. If it were up to me, I’d call in one of the pageboys from outside and get him to give you twenty or thirty sharp cuts with the cane and see how you liked that.”
This tirade reduced Ch’iu-chü to silence. There was nothing she could do but:
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel.
Hsi-men Ch’ing had summoned Ch’en Ching-chi to the front reception hall in order to take charge of sealing up a bolt of material and other gifts to be sent to Battalion Commander Ho Chin from the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, who had recently been promoted to the post of principal judicial officer in the Huai-an office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. His friends and relatives from the local Guard Battalion were all going to give him a farewell party at the Yung-fu Ssu, or Temple of Eternal Felicity. But no more of this.
After Hsi-men Ch’ing had sent off Tai-an to deliver the gifts, he joined Ch’en Ching-chi in having something to eat in the reception hall and then went back to Chin-lien’s quarters. Chin-lien, though she:
Never, ever, should have done it,
told him the whole story of how Little Iron Rod had picked up her shoe.
“You ill-bred good-for-nothing!” she railed at him. “It was your pointless shenanigans that led to that lousy death-defying little slave’s being able to pick up my shoe in the first place. If he took it outside the compound, who knows who might have seen it. As soon as I found out about it, I managed to get it back from him. If you don’t give him a couple of licks he’ll soon be incorrigible.”
Hsi-men Ch’ing didn’t bother to ask how she had found out about it but made off in a fit of rage for the front of the compound. The little monkey, who was quite oblivious to the situation, was playing on the stone stylobate around the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch’ing grabbed hold of him by the tuft of hair on the crown of his head and assaulted him with both fists and feet. Not until he howled like a stuck pig, did he desist.
The little monkey was left lying unconscious on the ground and remained so for quite a while until Lai-chao and his wife showed up in consternation and succeeded, after some time, in reviving him. They saw that the youngster’s nose was bleeding and had to carry him back to their room. Only after prolonged interrogation did they ascertain that it was all because he had picked up Chin-lien’s shoe and exchanged it for a pair of hairnet rings from Ch’en Ching-chi that the trouble had started.
Lai-chao’s wife, “The Beanpole,” fuming with rage, went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and:
Pointing to the east while cursing the west,[25]
gave vent to an indiscriminate tirade, saying, “You’ll come to a bad end, you lousy whore and you cuckold’s spawn! What have you got against my son? He’s only twelve or thirteen years old. What does he know about anything? He doesn’t even know where your cunt is located. But you go out of your way to incite your man into giving him a thrashing for no good reason, and beat him until his nose bleeds. Suppose you had killed him. It would have gone the worse for you, you whore and you cuckold. And what purpose of yours would that have served?”
Thereupon, having given vent to her tirade in the kitchen, she went up to the front of the compound and gave a repeat performance, continuing along the same lines for a whole day or two without stopping. Because Chin-lien was in her quarters drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch’ing, she still knew nothing about it.
That evening, when they went to bed for the night, Hsi-men Ch’ing noticed that the woman had on a pair of sand-green pongee sleeping shoes with scarlet heel lifts and said, “Ai-ya! What are you wearing those things on your feet for? They look weird and don’t become you.”
“I only have one pair of red sleeping shoes,” the woman said, “and that little slave picked up one of them and soiled it for me. Where would I get a second pair?”
“My child,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “make a new pair tomorrow and wear them on your feet. You don’t know how much your daddy prefers the sight of you in red shoes. It excites me just to see them.”
“You crazy slave!” the woman said. “So that’s the way it is? But that reminds me of something I meant to bring up and then forgot.”
So saying, she ordered Ch’un-mei. “Bring that other shoe here and let him see it. Do you recognize whose shoe this is?”
“I don’t know whose shoe it is,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.
“Just look at him!” the woman exclaimed. “Still playing the innocent!
You may be a brown cat but you’ve got a black tail.
Those are fine tricks you’ve been up to behind my back. You took this shoe off the stinking hoof of Lai-wang’s dead wife, treasured it like the pearl on a piece of jewelry, and secreted it in your “snow cave” in the Hidden Spring Grotto, under the artificial hill in the garden, carefully tucked away with the stationery in your card case, wrapped up together with sticks of incense. As though it were some exotic rarity! It’s really outrageous. No wonder that lousy whore went straight to the Avici Hell[26] when she died.”
Pointing to Ch’iu-chü, she continued her tirade, saying, “That slave turned it up, thinking it was my shoe, and I had to give her a beating.”
Then, turning to Ch’un-mei, she instructed her, “Throw it out of here, this minute.”
Ch’un-mei tossed the shoe onto the floor and said to Ch’iu-chü, “Here’s something you can wear if you want it.”
Ch’iu-chü took it up in her hand, saying, “This shoe of Mother’s is so small I’d be lucky if I could get a toe into it.”
“You lousy slave!” the woman cursed at her. “Whose cunt of a mother are you talking about? She must have been your master’s mother in an earlier incarnation. Otherwise, why should he treasure her shoe in such a way, as though it were a family heirloom to be passed on from generation to generation? The shameless good-for-nothing!”
Ch’iu-chü picked up the shoe and started out of the room but the woman called her back, saying, “Fetch me a knife so I can chop that whore into pieces and throw them into the privy. I’ll fix it so that lousy whore ends up:
On the far side of the mountains of Hell;
Never again to be reborn in human form.”[27]
Then she turned to Hsi-men Ch’ing, saying, “The more it hurts you to see this, the more thoroughly I’ll cut it up, just to show you.”
Hsi-men Ch’ing laughed, saying, “You crazy slave! Why don’t you call it quits? What do I care about it?”
“If you don’t care,” said the woman, “swear an oath on it. As for that whore:
Nobody knows where the dead end up going to.[28]
So what are you still keeping her shoe around for? It must be that whenever you think of her, early or late, you want some memento to remind you of her. Meanwhile, for those of us who are properly married to you, you haven’t a thought to spare. How can you expect anyone to be:
Of one heart and one mind,
with you under the circumstances?”
“That’s enough, you crazy little whore!” laughed Hsi-men Ch’ing. “You’re always up to your tricks. When she’s alive she never failed to perform what duty demanded of her where you’re concerned.” Thereupon putting an arm around her powdered neck, he gave her a kiss, and the 2 of them proceeded to engage in the game of clouds and rain together. Truly, the spring beauty arouses the beholder, complaisantly alluring; the fragrant corolla attracts the butterfly, in redolent surrender.[29] A poem testifies to this:

Vainly expressing her fragrant heart, to whom is she to speak;
Where can she hope to find a fit repository for her longings?
Though her longings may end, her passion is unending;
Everyday it returns to affect her during all 24 hours.

After Ximen Qing had taken Pan Jinlian to her room, he took off all his clothes. She wore only a piece of fine silk upon her breast. They sat down side by side and began to drink again. Ximen caressed her white throat with his hand, and they drank their wine, one from the other’s mouth. They were profoundly happy in their love. Jinlian allowed her hair to fall about her; her delicate bosom was half disclosed, her eyes challenged him. She seemed like Yang Guifei inflamed by wine.
Her slender fingers played with the warrior between his thighs; it was exhausted after the battle. Still bound by the silver ring, it looked overworked but not quite spent. “Why don’t you leave it in peace?” said Ximen. “It’s your fault. You frightened it so much that it can hardly move.”
“It can hardly move?” she replied. “What are you saying?”
“If it could move,” said Ximen, “it would not be drooping like a fading flower, refusing to rise. Why don’t you ask its pardon on bended knees?”
She looked at it and smiled. Then she squatted down, put her head on his thigh, undid his trousers and grasped the weary warrior. “You are he who raised his head so proudly, whose eye was so fierce that it terrified me. Now you pretend you are tired, and lie as if you were dead.”
Meanwhile she played with it; she pressed it on her soft cheeks, caressed it with her hand, and then she brought it to her lips and kissed the frog’s mouth. Immediately the warrior, boiling with passion, sprang up, its head was a talon, its eye was fire, its jaw bristled with hair, its body was stiff as iron.
Ximen Qing rested on a pillow and told Jinlian to go down on all fours, within the silken curtains, and put forth all her strength, the more to increase his pleasure. Immediately his passion blazed forth again, and again he engaged with the woman. “Darling,” she pleaded with him, “you must spare me. Don’t play with me again.” That night their joy in each other was boundless.
The night passed. Next day Ximen Qing went out, and Jinlian got up about dinnertime. When she was ready to put on her shoes, she looked for the crimson pair she had been wearing the day before but could not find them anywhere. She asked Chunmei where they were.
“When Father and I brought you back yesterday,” Chunmei said, “Qiuju brought the coverlets and things.”
Jinlian called Qiuju.
“I didn’t notice you wearing any shoes when you came in,” the maid said.
“Nonsense,” Jinlian cried, “I didn’t come in barefoot.”
“Well, Lady, if you were wearing any shoes, they must be in your room.”
“Don’t be such a fool,” Jinlian cried, “of course they must be here somewhere. Look for them.”
Qiuju searched the different rooms, on the bed and under the bed but could not find the odd shoe anywhere.
“There must have been a ghost in my room for my shoe to have vanished like this,” Jinlian said. “Off my very feet too. What are you here for, you slave?”
“Probably you’ve forgotten, Mother, and left it somewhere in the garden,” the maid suggested. “You weren’t wearing it when you came in.”
“You must be out of your senses,” Jinlian cried. “Do you think I don’t know whether I had my shoes on or not?” She turned to Chunmei: “Take the thievish slave with you and go and look in the garden. If you find it, well and good but if it isn’t found, she will have to kneel down in the courtyard with a piece of stone on her head.”
Chunmei took Qiuju to the garden but though they looked everywhere, and searched the Arbour of the Vines, they could not find the shoe.
After searching a long time they began to go back. On the way Chunmei scolded Qiuju. “You are like a go-between on the wrong track,” she said. “What are you going to say now? You’re as bad as old Goody Wang buying a mill. What’s the good of it?”
“I’m sure I don’t know who stole Mother’s shoe,” Qiuju said. “She wasn’t wearing it when she came in. Perhaps you left the garden gate open and somebody got in and went off with it.”
Chunmei spat in her face. “You slave,” she cried, “you are frightened and you think you’ll put the blame on me. Mother told me to open the door for her. What else could I do? Nobody could possibly have got in then. You brought the coverlets and you didn’t take the trouble to look what you were doing. Now you make up a silly story like this.”
She took Qiuju to her mistress and said that they had not been able to find the shoe. “Take her into the courtyard and make her kneel down,” Jinlian cried.
The maid sobbed and cried. “Do let me go to the garden and look again,” she begged. “Then, if I don’t find it, punish me.
“Don’t listen to her,” Chunmei said, “she will never find it. We searched the garden so thoroughly that we could not have missed a needle.”
“Why do you put in your spoke?” Qiuju cried. “If I don’t find it, I’ll ask Mother to beat me.”
“Well,” Jinlian said, “take her back once more, and let us see whether she finds it.”
Chunmei took her to the garden. They looked beneath the artificial mound, around all the flowerbeds and under the evergreen hedges but though they searched a long time, they found nothing. Qiuju began to get flustered. Chunmei boxed her ears twice, and began to drag her back to Jinlian.
“We haven’t looked in the Snow Cave yet,” Qiuju said.
“That is Father’s summerhouse,” Chunmei said. “Mother did not go there, and you will not find it there. You might just as well come with me and confess.” But she went to the Snow Cave. Facing the door was a couch, and beside it a small table for incense. They looked around but saw nothing. Then they went to the bookshelves.
“Father’s papers and visiting cards are on those shelves,” Chunmei said. “It’s no use looking there for Mother’s shoe. You’re just trying to put off the evil hour. If you upset those papers there will be more trouble, and you’ll come to an evil end, for sure.”
“Isn’t this the shoe?” Qiuju cried. She pulled out a packet perfumed with incense and fragrant herbs, and gave it to Chunmei. “This must be it,” she said, “and only a minute ago you were urging Mother to beat me.”
Chunmei looked at it. There was no doubt about it, it was a crimson low-heeled shoe. “Yes,” she said, “it is her shoe. How on earth did it get here? There’s something very funny about this.” They went back to Jinlian.
“Yes,” she said, “this is my shoe, sure enough. Where did you find it?”
“We found it on the bookshelves in Father’s summerhouse,” Chunmei said. “It was among his visiting cards, wrapped up with sweet herbs and incense.”
Jinlian took it in her hand and compared it with another of her shoes. They were both of crimson silk, embroidered with the flowers of the four seasons, the lower part white and also embroidered with flowers. The heels were green and the sides blue. The only difference between them was that the thread of the seam was green in one case and blue in the other, though, unless they were examined very carefully, it would have been impossible to tell them apart.
She tried on the shoe. It was a little tighter than her own. Then she realized that it must have belonged to Huilian. “This shoe belonged to Laiwang’s wife,” she said to herself. “I wonder when she gave it to that scoundrel. He did not dare bring it to any of the rooms, so he hid it. Now the slave has fished it out.” She gazed at the shoe for a while. Then she said: “This is not my shoe. Go and kneel down at once, you slave.” She told Chunmei to find a piece of stone and put it on the girl’s head.
“But whose shoe is it, if it isn’t yours?” Qiuju said. She wept. “I’ve found your shoe, yet you are going to beat me just the same. I wonder what you would do if I hadn’t found it.”
“Shut your mouth, you thievish slave,” Jinlian shouted. Chunmei brought a large piece of stone and put it on the maid’s head.
Jinlian found another pair of shoes and put them on. The room was oppressively hot, and she told Chunmei to take the dressing case to the summerhouse. She went there to dress her hair.
The same morning, Chen Jingji had to come from the shop to get some clothes. When he reached the corner gate that led into the garden, Little Iron Rod was playing there. The boy saw that he was carrying a pair of silver necklets.
“What is that you’ve got, Uncle?” he said. “Let me have it to play with.”
“They are necklets somebody has pawned,” Chen Jingji said, “and I’m taking them back.”
“Give them to me, Uncle,” the boy cried. “I will give you something nice instead.”
“You silly boy,” the man said, “they don’t belong to me but, if you like, I’ll see if I can find another pair for you. What’s this pretty thing you’re going to give me?”
The little monkey took a crimson embroidered shoe from his girdle and showed it to Jingji. “Where did you find this?” Jingji said.

"I'll tell you, Uncle," the boy said, laughing. "I was playing in the garden yesterday, and I saw Father in the Arbour of the Vines with Fifth Mother. He had tied her feet and they were shaking and jumping about. Then Father went away, and I saw Auntie Chunmei and asked her for some fruit. I picked this up in the Arbour of the Vines."
Chen Jingji took it in his hand. It was curved like the crescent moon and as red as a fallen lotus blossom. As he held it on his palm, it seemed no more than three inches long. He knew it must belong to Jinlian.
"Give it to me," he said to the boy, "and tomorrow I'll find a splendid necklet for you to play with."
"Don't try to cheat me," the boy cried, "I shall ask you for it tomorrow."
"I won't cheat you," the man said, and the little monkey ran away to play.
Chen Jingji put the shoe in his sleeve. "I have had some fun with that woman more than once," he thought, "but I have never made quite sure of her. Each time when it has come to the point, she has managed to escape me. Now the Fates have been kind enough to put this shoe in my hands, and today, I'll go and try my luck with her in real earnest. This time, I imagine, I shall get her."
With the shoe in his sleeve, Chen Jingji went at once to Jinlian's room. As he passed the screen, he saw Qiuju kneeling in the courtyard. "Young Lady, what's the meaning of this?" he said, laughing. "Are you practicing weight-lifting because you've joined the army?"
Jinlian was upstairs. She heard this remark. "Who is that talking about practicing weight-lifting?" she said to Chunmei. "Surely the little wretch hasn't put it down?"
"No," Chunmei said, "the stone is still on her head. It is Master Chen."
"Come upstairs, Brother-in-law," Jinlian cried, "there is nobody here."
The young man gathered up his clothes and hastened upstairs. Jinlian was sitting near the open window with the blinds pulled down, dressing herself before a mirror. He came to her side, sat down on a stool, and watched her doing her coal-black hair, so long that it nearly touched the floor. She dressed it with red silk ribbons, setting on it a headdress of silver thread, and arranging the hair beneath, till it seemed like a sweet-scented cloud. In her hair she placed rose petals, and made four braids of it. She looked as beautiful as the living Guanyin. She finished her hair and put away the dressing case. Then she washed her hands, completed her dressing and told Chunmei to bring some tea for Chen Jingji. The young man smiled.
"Why are you laughing?" Jinlian cried.
"I'm laughing because I'm sure you have lost something."
"If I have lost something, you short-lived rascal," Jinlian said, "what business is it of yours? And, anyway, who told you about it?"
"Well," Jingji said, "if that's the way you look at it, treating my kind heart as if it were the entrails of a donkey, and talking in that nasty tone, I may as well be off."
He rose and started downstairs. Jinlian pulled him back again. "Don't make such a to-do," she said. "Now that Laiwang's wife is dead and you haven't anybody else to make love to, you condescend to call on your poor old mother. Well, you've guessed right this time. I have lost something."
Jingji took the shoe from his sleeve and dangled it in front of her. "Whose is this?" he said, laughing.
"Ah, you pretty rogue," Jinlian cried, "so it was you who stole my shoe, making me send my maids all over the place to look for it!"
"Why should I steal your shoe?" Jingji said.
"Well, you're the only person who ever comes to my room. It was you, you rat, who stole it."
"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Jingji said. "I couldn't possibly have stolen it. I haven't been to your room for several days."
"You wait," Jinlian cried. "I'll tell your Father you stole my shoe, and we'll see if you say I ought to be ashamed of myself."
"You can't terrify me by using Father's name," Jingji said.
"Oh, aren't you brave? Though you knew quite well he was carrying on with Laiwang's wife, that didn't prevent you from finishing his work for him. After that, of course, you are not afraid of anybody. However, the proverb tells us that when a man sees his own belongings, he is entitled to take them back again. If you even suggest that you will not give it back, I will kill you."
"Lady," Jingji said, "you are so clever you might be a Mongol. There is nobody about, and we have an excellent opportunity to discuss the matter. If you want your shoe, what are you prepared to give me in exchange? If you don't give me something, not even lightning shall get it away from me."
"It's my shoe, you wretch," Jinlian cried, "and you must give it to me. What right have you to ask for anything in return?"
Jingji laughed. "Fifth Mother," he said, "I will have that handkerchief you have in your sleeve. If you give me that, I will let you have your shoe, like a good, dutiful son."
"But your Father knows this too well," Jinlian said. "I dare not give you this one. I'll find another one for you tomorrow."
"No," the young man said, "a hundred other handkerchiefs will not satisfy me. This is the one I want."
Jinlian laughed. "Oh, what a practiced villain you are. Well, I haven't the strength to quarrel with you." She took the handkerchief from her sleeve and gave it to him. It was of fine lace, with white silk needlework, and attached to it were three silver characters. She gave everything to him.
Jingji bowed low and took the handkerchief. Jinlian told him to take good care of it. "Don't let your wife see it," she said, "she has too sharp a tongue." Jingji promised and gave her the shoe. He told her that Little Iron Rod had picked it up in the garden and given it him in exchange for a necklet.
Jinlian flushed with anger. "The dirty little slave has made it quite black. I will tell his master to give him a thrashing."
"If you do," Jingji said, "it will be the end of me, for whether the boy gets beaten or not, I shall get the credit for the business, for it was I who told you. For goodness' sake, don't say anything about it."
"I will forgive a scorpion sooner than that little slave," Jinlian cried.
They were talking when Laian came to find Jingji. "Father is in the outer hall," he said, "and he is asking for Master Chen. He wants a present list written."
Jinlian hurried the young man away. She went downstairs and told Chunmei to fetch a rod so that she might beat Qiuju. Qiuju objected strongly. "I found your shoe, Mother," she cried. "Why should you still wish to beat me?"
Then Jinlian showed her the shoe she had just been given by Chen Jingji. "You thievish slave," she said, "if the other was my shoe, what is this?" The maid stared at it open-mouthed, and said: "It is very funny. Where has this third shoe come from?"
"You impudent hussy," Jinlian cried, "you tried to palm somebody else's shoe off on me. You might as well call me a three-legged fox." She would hear no more but made Chunmei give the girl ten strokes.
Qiuju tried to protect her bottom, crying all the while to Chunmei: "It was you who left the gate open, and let somebody get in and steal the shoe. Now you tell Mother to beat me."
Chunmei cursed her: "No, it was you who brought in the coverlets. You lost the shoe, and you try to put the blame on me, when Mother gives you a few strokes. All this fuss about an old shoe. I suppose if Mother misses an earring or a ring some day, you'll still blame everybody but yourself. Mother is very kind to let you off so lightly. If I were she, I would send for one of the boys, and make him give you twenty or thirty stiff strokes, and then see how you'd like it." Qiuju swallowed down her anger and was silent.
Ximen Qing had sent for Jingji to pack up a roll of silk and other presents for Captain He, who had just been promoted to be magistrate at Huaian, with full rank. His kinsmen and friends were giving him a send-off at the Temple of Eternal Felicity.
When Ximen had sent Daian with the presents, he and Jingji dined together in the hall. Then he went to Jinlian's room. Jinlian, with much ado, told him how Little Iron Rod had picked up her shoe.
"It is all your fault, you good-for-nothing," she said, "that that little slave—he deserves to be cut into a thousand pieces— got my shoe. He has taken it outside and by this time everybody must have seen it. I found out about it and got it back. If you don't give him a taste of a thrashing, he will always be spoiled."
Ximen did not wait to ask how she came to hear about it but went off in a temper to the front court. The little monkey suspected nothing and was playing on the stone steps. Ximen caught him by the plaits of his hair, struck him with his fist and kicked him till the boy squealed like a pig being killed. When he let him go, the little monkey lay fainting on the ground for some time. Laizhao and his wife came running along to rescue their child. After a while the boy came to himself, though his nose was still bleeding. His parents carried him to their room and asked him what it was all about, and so learned that he had picked up a shoe.
The Beanpole was furious. She went to the kitchen and made a tremendous fuss. She poured forth streams of curses.
"You thievish, death-dealing whore, you young turtle, what has my boy done that you should bear a grudge against him? He is only ten years old. What does he know about your cunt? You have kicked up all this fuss for nothing, and got him beaten till the blood is pouring from his nose. If he dies, you whorish turtle, I'll make you suffer. It shall be the worse for you."
When she had finished cursing in the kitchen, she went to the front court and continued there. If she had gone on for a couple of days she would not have exhausted herself.
Jinlian was drinking with Ximen Qing in her room, and heard nothing of all this. That night, as they were together on the bed, he noticed that she was wearing a pair of green silk bed shoes, with crimson tops. "Why do you wear shoes like that?" he cried. "I can't bear the sight of them."
"I only had one pair of red ones," Jinlian said, "and that little slave has ruined one of them. Where do you expect me to get another in place of it?"
"My child," Ximen said, "you must make another pair tomorrow and put them on at once. They make me feel so loving when I see you wearing them. You know your sweetheart can't bear to see shoes of any other colour."
"What a funny slave you are," the woman said. "And that reminds me. There was something I meant to tell you but I forgot all about it." She told Chunmei to bring the shoe and said to him: "Do you recognize this?"
"No," Ximen said, "I haven't a notion whose it is."
"Don't look at it as if it frightened you, then," Jinlian said. "You can't deceive me. That was a nice trick of yours! Huilian's stinking hoof, kept in your summerhouse, among your visiting cards, as if it were some precious jewel, wrapped up in paper and incense! Pray, what makes it so precious? When that thievish whore died, she went to the lowest depths of Hell." She pointed to Qiuju. "That slave thought it was mine and brought it to me, so I gave her a beating. Throw it away," she said to Chunmei.
Chunmei threw it on the floor and said to Qiuju: "I'll make you a present of it. You can wear it."
Qiuju picked it up. "Mother's shoe is so small, I couldn't even get one of my toes into it," she said.
"You slave," Jinlian cried, "how dare you call that vile creature 'Mother'? She must have been your master's mother in a former life, or he wouldn't be guarding her shoe as jealously as if it were a precious heirloom, the low fellow."
Qiuju took the shoe and was going out with it but Jinlian called her back and told her to get a knife. "I'm going to cut that whore's shoe into little pieces and throw it in the privy. That will banish the thievish strumpet forever beyond the hills of Hades, so that never again can she come to life." She said to Ximen Qing: "If it distresses you so much to see me cut it, I will cut it all the more."
Ximen Qing laughed. "That's enough, you queer little slave," he said, "I don't feel in the least distressed."
"If you don't," Jinlian said, "take an oath on it. The whore is dead, and we don't know where she is. Why do you keep her shoe? Obviously because you like to look at it and remember her. I have spent many years with you but you don't really care for me. There is always another woman in your heart."
"You funny little strumpet," Ximen said, smiling. "Why do you say such things? She ever did you no harm when she's alive." He put his arm around her white neck and kissed her. Then the 2 once more did the work of clouds and rain.

## 050

### The Fortune-Teller Divine Immortal Wu Physiognomises the Exalted & the Humble; P'an Chin-lien enjoys a Midday Battle in the Bathtub

One has but a hundred years of autumn moons and spring flowers;
So one might as well relax one's frowning brows rather than repine.
Recite a few verses in order to dissipate the worries of the world;
Pour a couple of cups of wine to while away the fullness of youth.
When idle, play at board games in order to amuse oneself;
When depressed, pluck the inlaid zither to elevate your mood.
Of human affairs and the events of the times take no heed;
Just make poetry and wine the preoccupations of your life.[1]

The next morning P'an Chin-lien got up early and sent Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way. Remembering that she wanted to make a new pair of red shoes for herself, she took her sewing box into the garden with her and sat down on the stylobate of the Kingfisher Pavilion, where she began to sketch the design to be embroidered on the vamps of her new shoes. She sent Ch'un-mei to invite Li P'ing-erh to join her.
When Li P'ing-erh arrived, she asked, "What's that you're sketching, Sister?"
"I want to make a pair of shoes," said Chin-lien, "out of scarlet iridescent silk, with flat white satin soles, the toes of which will be embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach.' "
"I've got a square of scarlet variegated silk," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'll make a pair just like your's, except that I want high heels on mine."
Thereupon, she fetched her sewing box and the two of them sat down to work together.
When Chin-lien had finished sketching the pattern on one vamp, she set it aside, saying, "Sister Li, sketch the other one for me, will you? I'm going to the rear compound to fetch Sister Meng the Third. She told me yesterday that she was going to make a pair of shoes too."
She went straight to the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou was in her room, leaning on the bedrail, stitching away at a shoe that she held in her hand.
When Chin-lien came in the door, Yü-lou said, "You're up and about early today."
"I got up early," said Chin-lien, "and sent Father off to attend the farewell party for Battalion Commander Ho Chin outside the South Gate. I've arranged with Sister Li to do some needlework together in the garden while it's still cool in the morning. In a little while the sun will be too hot and we won't be able to continue. I've just finished sketching the design for one shoe and asked Sister Li to do the other one for me while I came straight over here to invite you to join us. The three of us can do our work together."
"What kind of shoe is that you're working on right now?" she went on to ask.
"It's that pair of jet silk shoes you saw me start on yesterday," Yü-lou replied.
"What a fine fellow you are," exclaimed Chin-lien. "You've managed to finish one of them already."
"I stitched that one yesterday," said Yü-lou, "and I've already done a good deal on this one."
Chin-lien asked to have a look at it and said, "What kind of decoration are you going to put on the toe?"
"I'm not to be compared with you youngsters," said Yü-lou, "with your flashy fashions. I'm too old for that. I'll have gold-spangled toes, with a motif of white mountains around them, stitched out with sand-green thread, white satin soles, and high heels. How does that sound?"
"All right," said Chin-lien. "Get your stuff together now. Let's go. Li P'ing-erh is waiting for us."
"Sit down," said Yü-lou, "and have some tea before we go."
"Let's not drink it here," said Chin-lien, "but take it with us and drink it there."
Yü-lou instructed Lan-hsiang to make the tea and deliver it to them in the garden. The two women then tucked the shoe vamps into their sleeves and set out for the front compound, holding hands as they went.
Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in the veranda outside the master suite and asked, "Where are you going?"
"Sister Li sent me to fetch Meng the Third for her," said Chin-lien, "to help her sketch the design for a pair of shoes."
So saying, they went straight out to the garden where the three of them sat down together, pulled out their vamps, looked over each other's handiwork, and proceeded to compare notes. Before this, Ch'un-mei had already served them with tea; later on, tea was provided from Li P'ing-erh's quarters; and, finally, Lan-hsiang arrived with more tea from Meng Yü-lou's place, and the three of them drank it together.
"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "what are you making flat-soled red shoes for? They don't look as nice as high-heeled shoes. If you're worried that wooden heels are too noisy, you can put felt on them, as I do, and they won't make a noise when you walk."
"They aren't for everyday wear," said Chin-lien. "They're sleeping shoes. It's all because I couldn't find one of my sleeping shoes that turned out to have been stolen by that little slave, who soiled it into the bargain, that Father told me to make a new pair of shoes."
"Speaking of shoes," said Yü-lou, "and:
This is not just talebearing,[2]
mind you, Sister Li is here to bear me witness; yesterday, all on account of this missing shoe of yours that got picked up in the garden somehow or other by Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, and which you mentioned to Father when you found out about it, he gave Little Iron Rod a thrashing. They say Father beat the monkey until his nose bled and left him lying on the ground unconscious for quite a while. This upset The Beanpole' so much that she indulged in an indiscriminate tirade in the rear compound, saying, That whore and that cuckold's spawn incited him into beating my son. That son of mine, who's still such a child he scarcely knows how to piss, what does he know about anything, that she should egg her man into giving him such a beating? It's a good thing he's still alive. If he'd been dead, that whore and that cuckold's spawn would never get away with it.' I didn't know at the time whom she was cursing as a whore and a cuckold's spawn. It was only later on, when Little Iron Rod came into the rear compound and Elder Sister asked him, 'Why did Father beat you?,' that the youngster said, 'While playing in the garden I picked up a shoe and asked Uncle if I could exchange it for a pair of hairnet rings. I don't know who it was who told Father about it and got him to give me a beating. I'm looking for Uncle right now so I can ask him for those rings.' Having said which, he ran right out front again. So it turned out to be Ch'en Ching-chi that she was cursing as a cuckold's spawn. Luckily, the only person sitting there at the time was Li Chiao-erh. Hsi-men Ta-chieh didn't happen to be there. If she had heard it all, there would have been another ruckus, for sure."
"Did Elder Sister have anything to say about it?" asked Chin-lien.
"You might well ask," said Yü-lou. "Elder Sister had quite a lot to say about you. She said, 'Right now in this household:
Chaos is king.

The nine-tailed fox fairy has appeared in the world,
and has got that benighted ruler so befuddled he'll be:
Banishing his son and divorcing his wife,
before you know it. Just remember what she did to that servant, Lai-wang, who's no longer with us. He'd only just gotten back, as nice as you please, from a trip to the south, when she started telling:
First a tale to the east,
And then one to the west,
about how his wife was carrying on with his master, how he was playing the thief all day long:
Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,[3]
while she was busy committing adultery. She managed to frame him so effectively he was driven out of the household, whereupon she turned her attention to his wife and made her life so unbearable she committed suicide. And now, all on account of a single shoe, she's stirred up enough of a rumpus to:
Startle Heaven and shake the earth.
If it was your shoe, why didn't you keep it on your foot where it belonged? How did it get anywhere where that youngster could pick it up, in the first place? I'll bet it was only because she got drunk out in the garden and was up to something with that man of ours, contriving to be:
As stuck on one another as sugar candy,
that she lost track of her shoe. And now, unable to cover her own embarrassment, she's made a scapegoat of that youngster and he's ended up getting a drubbing. And it's not even over anything important!' "
When Chin-lien heard this, she exclaimed, "She should stop talking through her cunt! If murder isn't something important, what is? That slave was out to kill his master with knife in hand!"
Then, turning to Yü-lou, she continued, "Luckily, Sister Three, you're not to be deceived about that. The two of us both heard what Lai-hsing had to say and were scared as could be. And as for you, Elder Sister, you're his primary wife, and yet you dismiss it like that.
'If you won't do anything about it,
I won't do anything about it.'
She wouldn't have seen fit to do anything about it until that slave had murdered our husband. Meanwhile, the slave's wife was on duty in that rear compound of yours all day long, and you let her do as she pleased, without taking her to task; allowing her to:
Deceive her superiors and oppress her inferiors,[4]
picking fights with first this one and then that one. After all:
For every injustice there is a perpetrator;
For every debt there is a creditor.
If you can make accusations against me,
I can make accusations against you.
And when she hanged herself, you still didn't tell our husband the whole story. Luckily for you, by spending money and pulling strings the affair was successfully hushed up. Otherwise there never would have been an end to it. And you pretend to be so pure and:
Put such a good face on things.
After all:
What's so is so.[5]
If I put our husband up to it, so be it. As for that pair of slaves, husband and wife, if I hadn't been able to get them:
Driven away from this door for good,
with the aid of a stick, what good would I be? No matter what happens:
No one is going to force me down a well."
When Yü-lou saw how angry Chin-lien had become, as:
Her powdered face became suffused with red,
she admonished her, saying, "Sister Six, you and I are sisters. It's just as though we were the same person. When I hear something, how could I fail to tell you about it? But now that I've told you, you must keep it to yourself. Don't let it get about."
Chin-lien did not do as she was bid. That evening she waited until Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room and then gave him a word for word account of what she had heard.
"Lai-chao's wife, 'The Beanpole,' has been cursing at us in the rear compound," she reported, "saying that you gave her child a beating, and threatening to make trouble for us."
Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard this but having heard it, he made a point of remembering it.
The next day he was going to expel Lai-chao and his family, all three of them, from the household. It was only owing to the repeated remonstrances of Yüeh-niang that he relented. But he would not permit them to reside any longer in the compound and packed them off to look after the house on Lion Street, relieving P'ing-an, who returned home to take charge of the main gate. Afterwards, when Yüeh-niang found out who was responsible, she was very angry with Chin-lien. But enough of this. Truly:
If you don't think thrice before doing something, you will later regret it;[6]
When people have occasion for self-satisfaction, it is time to repent.[7]
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the front reception hall and presided over the departure of Lai-chao and his family, all three of them, to look after the house on Lion Street.
One day he happened to be sitting in the front reception hall when P'ing-an, who was now in charge of the front gate, came in and reported, saying, "His Honour Chou Hsiu of the commandant's headquarters has sent around a physiognomist, called Immortal Wu, who is waiting at the gate to see you."
"Send in the man who brought him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing; and after the latter person had presented the commandant's card, he said, "Invite him to come in."
Before long, Immortal Wu floated ethereally in from the outside.
On his head he affected a black cotton Taoist cap,
On his body he wore a cotton robe and black sandals,
At his waist hung a yellow silk sash with two tassels,
In his hand he held a tortoiseshell-patterned fan.[8]
He appeared to be something over forty years of age.
His spirit was as pure as the hoary moon over the Yangtze River;
His visage was as ancient as a tall pine on the summit of Mount Hua.[9]
His demeanor was awe-inspiring,
His Taoist aura was imposing.[10]
It so happens that immortals are possessed of four unusual attributes:
Their bodies are like pines,
Their voices are like bells,
Their repose is like a bow,
Their movement like the wind.[11]
Behold:
Master of the discriminating mirror of physiognomy,
Adept at interpreting the rules of Hsü Tzu-p'ing;[12]
By examining celestial phenomena he understands the yin and yang,
By perusing the *Dragon Canon* he can assess geomantic conditions.[13]
Profoundly conversant with the Five Planetary Features,[14]
Deliberating to himself upon the Three Fates;[15]
By scrutinizing the astrological circumstances,
He can determine the success or failure of a lifetime;
By observing the humor and the complexion,
He can decide the good or evil of one's allotted years.
If he is not Ch'en T'uan, the realized adept who sojourned on Mount Hua,[16]
He must be Yen Chün-p'ing, who sold fortunes in the market of Ch'eng-tu.[17]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Immortal Wu come in, he hastened down the steps to welcome him and escorted him into the reception hall. On meeting Hsi-men Ch'ing, Immortal Wu performed a low bow, saluted him in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, and sat down.
A little later, after tea had been served, Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed his guest, saying, "I venture to inquire of Your Reverence:
What are your lofty name and elegant style,
What immortal realm do you hail from,[18]
and how do you come to be acquainted with His Excellency Chou Hsiu?"
Immortal Wu inclined his body slightly where he sat and replied, "My surname is Wu, my given name is Shih,[19] and my Taoist appellation is Shou-chen. I am a native of Hsien-yu district in Chekiang province. In my youth I took instruction from a master and was ordained as a priest in the Purple Void Temple of Mount T'ien-t'ai. In the course of my peregrinations in the capital region I decided to seek the Way at Mount T'ai that brought me into your distinguished vicinity. Commandant Chou asked me to treat his wife, who is suffering from an eye ailment, and has made a point of sending me to your honourable abode to proffer my services as a physiognomist."
"What schools of yin-yang do you practice, Reverend Sir," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and what varieties of physiognomy do you profess?"
"I am roughly familiar with all thirteen schools[20] of Hsü Tzu-p'ing's method," replied Immortal Wu. "I am thoroughly conversant with the *Ma-i hsiang-fa* (The physiognomic technique of the Hemp-robed Master),[21] and equally so with the divine oracles generated by the six recurrences of the *jen* stem in the sexagenary cycle.[22] I constantly distribute medicine in order to cure people. Having no love of mundane wealth, I conform to the times and take the world as I find it."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he respected him all the more and praised him by saying, "Truly, you live up to the definition of an immortal."
Then he ordered his attendants to set out a table and provide vegetarian fare for Immortal Wu's entertainment.
"Commandant Chou sent me over here," said Immortal Wu, "and before I have had a chance to examine your physiognomy or read your horoscope, you offer me a vegetarian repast."
"You have come from a distance, Your Reverence," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile, "and must not have had breakfast. It won't be too late for you to tell my fortune after having something to eat."
Thereupon, he joined Immortal Wu in a vegetarian repast. After the plates had been removed, the table was wiped clean, and a brush and inkstone were procured.
"May I begin by having a look at your horoscope?" said Immortal Wu. "After that I will physiognomize your respected countenance."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him the eight characters determined by the celestial stems and terrestrial branches for the year, month, day, and hour of his birth, saying, "I was born in the year of the tiger and am twenty-eight years old. My birth took place in the seventh month, on the twenty-eighth day, during the *tzu* hour that falls around midnight.
Immortal Wu silently:
Calculated on the joints of his fingers,[23]
and, after some time, said, "Your horoscope, sir, indicates that you were born in a *ping-yin* year, during a *hsin-yu* month, on a *jen-wu* day, during the *ping-tzu* time period.[24] In that year the solar term 'White Dew' fell on the twenty-third day of the seventh month, so your horoscope begins in the eighth month of the year.
"For a person with this horoscope, the combination *hsin-yu* that designates the month of your birth corresponds to the horoscopic category 'injurer of the official.' Tzu-p'ing says of this situation:
When the 'injurer of the official' has done its injury it serves to augment 'wealth';
When 'wealth' is 'flourishing' it begets 'the official'bringing prosperity in its wake.[25]
Your 'mansion of fate' corresponds to the branch *shen*. The symbol of your 'containing note' is 'earth on the city wall.'[26] The first of your 'decennial periods of fate'[27] began in your seventh year and was designated by the stem-branch combination *hsin-yu*, the second began in your seventeenth year and was designated by the combination *jen-hsü*; the third began in your twenty-seventh year and was designated by the combination *kuei-hai*; the fourth will begin in your thirty-seventh year and be designated by the combination *chia-tzu*, and the fifth will begin in your forty-seventh year and be designated by the combination *i-ch'ou*.
"As I interpret your horoscope, it indicates that:
You are destined to be distinguished and flourishing,
Your eight characters are splendid and remarkable,
If you do not achieve distinction you will gain glory.
However, your 'one-sided official'[28] is the element earth associated with the stem *wu*, and you were born in the seventh or eighth month that means that your horoscopic 'body' is too 'flourishing.' Fortunately the stem *jen*[29] in the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth is associated with the element water and also consorts with the stem *kuei* that is likewise associated with water.
When water and fire complement each other,[30]
Thereby a mighty instrument may be forged.[31]
"You were born during the *ping-tzu* time period. When the stems *ping* and *hsin* occur in the same horoscope,[32] it indicates that in the future you are sure to:
Hold a position of authority,
Enjoy lifelong prosperity,
Be both happy and secure,
Strike it rich, be promoted,
And beget a distinguished son.[33]
You will be characterized by:
Upstanding firmness throughout your life, and
Single-mindedness in the conduct of your affairs.
When happy, you will exhibit:
The genial atmosphere of the spring breeze.[34]
When aroused to anger, you will become like:

A clap of thunder or a raging conflagration.
In the course of your life you will gain much wealth through marriage alliances and will not fail to wear the silk hat of an official. On your deathbed there will be two sons to accompany you to your grave.[35]
"This year of your horoscope is a *ting-wei*[36] year. The stems *ting* and *jen* are 'harmonious,'[37] but at present the element fire associated with the stem *ting* is in its 'destructive' phase. But this is compensated for by the fact that:
What 'destroys' the 'self is its 'official'or 'devil,'[38]
which in your case is the element earth that 'destroys' fire. This must portend the joy of:
An ascent to the clouds from the level ground,
and the glory of:
Appointment to office and augmented emolument.
Your present 'decennial period of fate' is designated by the stem-branch combination *kuei-hai*. The element earth associated with the stem *wu* that is your 'one-sided official,' will be moistened by the element water associated with the stem *kuei* that is sure to stimulate growth. In the near future you can be expected to benefit from the auspicious star and the horoscopic conjunction known as:
The Red Phoenix and Celestial Joy,[39] and
The portent of the 'black bears and brown,'[40]
indicating the birth of a son. Moreover, since both your 'mansion of fate' and your 'post-horse'[41] correspond to the branch *shen*, this event will occur before the end of the seventh month."
In the end what is my 'fatal limit' to be?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Will I suffer any calamities or not?"
"Sir," said Immortal Wu, "don't take offense at what I say but it is unpropitious to have an excess of the *yin* element water in one's horoscope. Later, during the 'decennial period of your fate' designated by the combination *chia-tzu*, you may maintain your ascendancy over women, who represent the *yin* element but will find yourself inconvenienced by the 'star of effluence,' and the adverse influence of the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth. The indications are that before your thirty-sixth year you will suffer from:
The calamity of spitting blood, and discharging pus, and
The affliction of desiccated bones and emaciated frame."
"What about my situation at the present time?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"In this year of your horoscope," said Immortal Wu, "the only problem is that the combination *jen-wu* that designates the day of your birth is adversely affected. The 'five devils' will make mischief in your household and may cause you some grief but not enough to constitute a calamity. All these troubles will be dissipated by the visitation of the gods of felicity."
"Are there any further setbacks in my fortune?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Years follow in the wake of months.
Months follow in the wake of days,"
replied Immortal Wu. "It's really hard to say."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was utterly delighted.
"Sir," he then went on to say, "how would it be if you were to physiognomize me?"
"Turn your respected countenance so that it faces straight ahead," said Immortal Wu, "and I will take a look at it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing adjusted his seat accordingly.
"It is a dictum in the art of physiognomy," said Immortal Wu, "that:
Where mind exists without likeness,
Likeness will appear in accord with mind;
Where likeness exists without mind,
Likeness will disappear in accord with mind.[42]
When I look you over, sir, the following principles apply:
One whose head is round and whose neck is short,
Is sure to be a person who enjoys good fortune.
One whose body is sturdy and whose muscles are strong,
Is certain to be an individual of heroic cast.
One whose forehead is high and prominent,[43]
Will not lack clothing or emolument in his lifetime.[44]
One whose chin is square-cut and full,
Will certainly acquire glory and honour in old age.[45]
These are all among your good points but there are also a few deficiencies that I hesitate to mention."
"Immortal sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "pray express yourself without constraint."
"Be so good, sir," said Immortal Wu, "as to take a couple of steps for my benefit."
Hsi-men Ch'ing took a few steps, as requested.
Immortal Wu said, "It is true of you that:
If one's gait is like a wind-tossed willow,[46]
He is certainly fated to lose a wife.
If one's canthi are marked by many lines,
He is destined to suffer enervation.[47]
If one's eyes do not weep, and yet they fill with tears,
If one's mind is untroubled, and yet his eyebrows are knit,[48]
If he fails to suffer grievous losses,
He will surely sacrifice his own life.
Only after you have gained the ascendancy over your 'wifely mansion' will you be all right."
"I already have," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Be so good as to let me have a look at your hand," said Immortal Wu.
Hsi-men Ch'ing extended his hand so that he could examine it.
Immortal Wu said:
"Wisdom and intelligence are manifest in skin and hair,
Sorrow and joy can be observed in hands and feet.[49]
If one's hands are fine, soft, plump, and smooth,
He is sure to enjoy good fortune, ease, and emolument.[50]
If one's two eyes are of different dimensions,
He is destined to be wealthy but untrustworthy.[51]
If one's eyebrows project at both ends,
He will always be self-satisfied and happy.[52]
If the bridge of one's nose is crossed by three lines,
His substance will surely be wasted or squandered.[53]
If the skin adjacent to one's canthi is red or purple,
He will gain much wealth through marriage alliances.
If a yellow aura emanates from one's upper brow,
He is sure to become an official within ten days.[54]
If a red colour appears beneath one's left eye,
This year he is sure to beget a distinguished son.[55]
But there is yet another item that I hesitate to mention.
If the flesh under one's eyelids is full and thick,
It is a sure indication of a lustful disposition.[56]
If the pubic hair around one's anus grows rank,
He will merit a reputation for lasciviousness.[57]
But fortunately for you:
The nose, as the indicator of one's wealth,
Governs the fortune of one's middle years.[58]
The hollow under the lower lip, and the chin,
Control the success or failure of one's old age.[59]
The hollow under the lower lip, and the chin,
should be full and prominent;
The tip of the nose is the indicator of one's wealth
and occupies the middle place.
The vicissitudes of a lifetime
are all determined by fate;
The mysterious dictates of physiognomy
brook no exceptions."
When Immortal Wu had finished his analysis, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Would you be so kind, immortal sir, as to physiognomize my wife and concubines?"
Having said which, he directed a pageboy, "Go to the rear compound and ask the First Lady to come out."
Thereupon Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and company all followed the First Lady out to the front reception hall and eavesdropped on the proceedings from behind a hanging screen.
When Immortal Wu saw Yüeh-niang come out, he saluted her in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead. Not presuming to sit down in her presence, he stood to one side in order to observe her.
"Be so kind, my lady, as to turn your respected countenance so that it faces straight ahead," he said.
Wu Yüeh-niang redirected her gaze until she was looking right outside the reception hall.
After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for a while, he said, "As for you, my lady:
If one's face is like the full moon,
Her household fortunes will prosper.
If one's lips are like red lotus blossoms,
Her supply of clothing and food will be ample.[60]
If the features of one's face are evenly placed,
She is sure to gain distinction and bear a son.[61]
If the sound of one's voice is ethereal and clear,
She is sure to benefit her husband and gain wealth.[62]
Be so good as to let me see your hand."
Yüeh-niang extended it from the mouth of her sleeve, exposing her ten slender fingers.
Immortal Wu said:
"If her hands are like dried ginger,
A woman will be good at housekeeping.[63]
If the hair at her temples is glossy,
A female will have an aura of elegance.
These are all among your good points but there are also a few deficiencies. Please don't take offense if I speak frankly."
"Immortal sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "pray express yourself without constraint."
Immortal Wu said:

"If one has black moles on the flesh under her eyelids,
She will suffer from lasting ills or do in her husband.
If one has wrinkled lines underneath her eyelids,
She will be incompatible with her six relations.[64]
If a woman's deportment is sedate and proper,
and she has an attractive appearance,
And if she walks as inconspicuously
as a turtle emerging from the water,
If her movements do not disturb the dust,[65]
and her words observe due measure,
And if her shoulders are barely perceptible,
she will marry a man of distinction."[66]
When he had finished physiognomizing her, Yüeh-niang retired.
"There are also my concubines," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you would be so kind as to take a look at them."
Thereupon Li Chiao-erh stepped up.
After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for some time, he said, "As for this lady:
If her forehead is pointed and her nose small,[67]
She will be a concubine or marry three husbands.
If her flesh is heavy and her body plump,[68]
She will have ample food and clothing and live in luxury.
If her shoulders project and her voice is whiny,
She will either be menial or forsaken.
If the bridge of her nose should be too low,
She will either be poor or short-lived.[69]
Be so good as to take a few steps for my benefit."
When Li Chiao-erh had taken a few steps, Immortal Wu said:
"If her forehead is pointed, her posterior sticks out,
and she moves like a snake,
In her early years she is sure to have fallen into
the world of wind and dust.[70]
If it turns out that she does not become
the denizen of a brothel,
She is sure to be a concubine whose place it is
to stand behind the screen.[71]
When he had finished physiognomizing her, Li Chiao-erh withdrew.
"Third Sister Meng," Wu Yüeh-niang called out, "come over here and let him take a look at you."
After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, "As for this lady:
One whose 'three sections' are of equal dimensions,
Will not lack clothing or emolument in her lifetime.[72]
One whose 'six treasuries' are full and prominent,[73]
Will certainly acquire glory and honour in old age.[74]
She will suffer few ills in her lifetime,
All because her 'lunar comet' shines bright.
She will reach old age without mishap,
Since her 'palace of longevity' is sleek.[75]
Be so good, young lady, as to take a couple of steps for my benefit."
When Meng Yü-lou had taken a few steps, Immortal Wu said:
"If her mouth is as square as the character 'four,'
and her spirit is clear,
She will be genial and generous, fit to be compared to
a pearl on the palm.[76]
She will both command respect and know how to please,
being destined to wealth,
And will gain the ascendancy over her husbands,[77]
two or more of them."
When he had finished physiognomizing Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien was called for but she merely giggled and refused to come out. Only after Yüeh-niang had urged her repeatedly did Chin-lien consent to present herself for inspection.
Immortal Wu raised his head to scrutinize the woman and then pondered to himself for some time before saying, "As for this lady:
If the hair by one's temples is thick and luxuriant,
She will cast sidelong glances and revel in wantonness.[78]
If one's face is pleasing and one's eyebrows are arched,
Her body will quiver spontaneously without any impetus.
If there are black birthmarks on one's countenance,
She is sure to gain the ascendancy over her husband.
If one's philtrum is short and abrupt,[79]
She is sure to suffer a premature death.[80]
If her movements are light and frivolous,[81]
she will be given to wantonness,
If her eyes are like dots of lacquer,[82]
she will destroy human relationships.
Under the moon, beneath the stars,
if she is never satisfied,
Though she should dwell in spacious structures,
she will find little peace."[83]
When Immortal Wu had finished physiognomizing Chin-lien, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Li P'ing-erh to come out and let him examine her.
After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, "As for this woman:
One whose skin is fragrant and smooth,
Will be the daughter of a well-to-do family.
One whose countenance is upright and correct,[84]
Will be the virtuous matron of a prominent house.[85]
The only problem is that:
If the glint in the eye suggests intoxication,
Assignations amid the mulberries are indicated.
If captivating dimples languidly appear,
Trysts beneath the moon are hard to rule out.[86]
If the fold under one's eyelid is glossy and purple,
She is sure to give birth to a distinguished son.[87]
If one's body is white and one's shoulders are rounded,
She is sure to enjoy the favour of her husband.
She will constantly suffer from illness and distress,
If the root of her nose is dingy and sunken.[88]
She will frequently encounter auspicious omens,
If the flesh over her eyebrows is clear and glossy.[89]
These are all among your good points but there are also a few deficiencies that you should be on your guard against.
If the root of one's nose is blue or black,
She will weep before or after her twenty-seventh year.
If the lines by one's nostrils are taut or contorted,
How can she survive the years of the cock or the dog?[90]
Beware! Beware![91]
With a flowerlike or moonlike countenance,[92]
she is sparing of her pinions;
Throughout her lifetime her best friends are
the male and the female phoenix.
The wealth and emoluments of a noble household
are hers to depend on;
Do not make the mistake of regarding her as
merely an ordinary bird,"[93]
When he had finished physiognomizing her, Li P'ing-erh withdrew. Yüeh-niang then ordered Sun Hsüeh-o to come out and let herself be inspected.
After having scrutinized her, Immortal Wu said, "As for this lady:
If one's body is short and one's voice high,
If her forehead is pointed and her nose small,
though she may have:
Left the dark valley and mounted on high,[94]
nevertheless, throughout her lifetime:
She will laugh sardonically without feeling, and
Her conduct will be devious and mean-spirited.[95]
But she is also destined to suffer from the four deformities that eventually:
Are sure to indicate a violent death.[96]
The four deformities are as follows:
The lips are deformed in having no projection,
The ears are deformed in having no auricles,[97]

The eyes are deformed in having no spirit, and
The nose is deformed in not being straight.[98]
If one has a swallow's body and a wasp's waist,
she will be but a menial,
If one's eyes wander like flowing water,
without integrity or truth,[99]
If one stands leaning idly against the doorjamb[100]
as a general practice,
If neither maid nor concubine, she will fall into
the world of wind and dust."[101]
When Sun Hsüeh-o had withdrawn, Yüeh-niang told Hsi-men Ta-chieh to come and be inspected.
Immortal Wu said, "As for this woman:
If the bridge of one's nose is too sharp,
Her patrimony and her family will be destroyed.[102]
If one's voice is like a broken gong,[103]
The substance of her house will be squandered.
If the skin on one's face is too tight,
Though her philtrum be long, her life will be short.[104]
If her gait is like the hopping of a sparrow,
She will dwell at home but lack food and clothing.
Before completing her twenty-seventh year,
She should suffer a calamity.
If adverse bickering with her husband should be
her most potent propensity,
The food and clothing inherited from her parents
will barely sustain her.
If her appearance and her bearing evince inhibition,
success will elude her,
She will either fall victim to an untoward death
or the direst adversity.[105]
When he had finished physiognomizing Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Ch'un-mei was also called out to undergo inspection. Immortal Wu opened his eyes wide and saw that Ch'un-mei was not more than seventeen years of age.
Wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a white drawnwork blouse, a peach red skirt, and a blue silk vest, replete with:
Compressed hands and bound feet,[106]
she came out and bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations."
After Immortal Wu had scrutinized her for some time, he said, "As for this young lady:
Her 'five governing features' are sedate and proper;[107]
Her skeletal structure is splendid and remarkable.[108]
If one's hair is fine and one's eyebrows thick,
Her nature will be demanding and strong.
If one's spirit is quick and one's eyes round,
Her character will be hot and bothered.[109]
If the root of one's nose is not discontinuous,
She is sure to have a distinguished husband and give birth to a son.[110]
If one's two brows pay court to each other,
It indicates that at an early age she will wear a pearl-decked cap.
If one's gait resembles an immortal in flight,
And the sound of one's voice is ethereal and clear,
She is sure to benefit her husband and gain wealth,
Obtaining a title of nobility at twenty-six.
But she is disadvantaged because:
If the left eye is large,
She will lose her father at an early age.
If the right eye is small,
She will lose her mother within the year.[111]
If one has a mole beneath the left corner of the mouth,
She will suffer constant trouble from backbiting.[112]
If one has a mole on the right cheek,
She will win her husband's lifelong love and respect.
If one's forehead is sedate and proper, and one's
'five features' are well-matched,
If one's mouth appears to be daubed with rouge,
and one's gait is easy-going,
If one's 'treasuries' and 'storehouses' are full,[113]
one's wealth and emolument ample,
She can rely on obtaining the lifelong affection
of some distinguished person."[114]
When Immortal Wu had finished physiognomizing them, the women all bit their fingers, acknowledging the supernatural efficacy of his art. Hsi-men Ch'ing had sealed up five taels of silver to give to Immortal Wu and also provided five mace of silver for the servant from Commandant Chou's headquarters, along with a note of thanks for his master.
Immortal Wu repeatedly refused to accept this remuneration, saying, "This humble Taoist:
Wanders like a cloud among the four quarters,[115]
Dining in the wind and sleeping in the dew,[116]
Transforming and saving the myriad creatures.
It was no more than a momentary impulse that led Commandant Chou to send me over here. What would I want this money for?[117]
I absolutely refuse to accept it.[118]
Hsi-men Ch'ing had no alternative but to bring out a bolt of muslin, saying, "Won't you accept this, Reverend Sir, to make a topcoat out of?"
Only then did Immortal Wu deign to accept it. Instructing his pageboy to stow it in his scripture bag, he bowed in thanks to Hsi-men Ch'ing and saluted him in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead. Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him as far as the main gate, where he proceeded nonchalantly to:
Float ethereally upon his way.[119]
Truly:
At the two ends of his staff he bears the sun and the moon,
Within his solitary gourd he conceals mountains and rivers.[120]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished seeing off Immortal Wu, he returned to the rear reception hall and asked Yüeh-niang and the others what they thought of the fortunes that had been predicted for them.
"The fortunes were all fine enough," said Yüeh-niang, "but there are three people whose physiognomies he was unable to read aright."
"Which three people's physiognomies was he unable to read aright?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It was no great feat to suggest that Sister Li was expecting and would give birth to a distinguished son," said Yüeh-niang, "since it is obvious enough that she is pregnant right now. So much for that. In physiognomizing our own Ta-chieh, he said that in the future she would suffer a calamity but he didn't specify what sort of a calamity it would be. In physiognomizing Ch'un-mei, he said that in the future she, too, would give birth to a distinguished son. No doubt he figured that you must have had your way with her. After all:
Who can anticipate what children and grandchildren an individual may have?
But the prediction that I find it hardest to believe is that in the future Ch'un-mei will wear a pearl-decked cap and receive a title of nobility. After all, nobody in our family is an official, so where would a pearl-decked cap come from? And even if there were a pearl-decked cap, it would hardly end up on her head."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "He predicted that I would have the joy of:
Ascending to the clouds from the level ground,
and the glory of:
Appointment to office and augmented emolument.
Now where would I get an official appointment from?
"When he saw Ch'un-mei standing together with the rest of you but dressed differently than a servant, wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, he must have assumed that she was either a natural or adopted daughter of ours, who might someday marry into a prominent household or bring a distinguished husband into the family. That's why he said that she might be fated to wear a pearl-decked cap.
"It has always been true that:
You may calculate a person's fate,
But you can't predict his conduct.[121]
Likeness will appear in accord with mind,
Likeness will disappear in accord with mind.
Since Commandant Chou sent him to us, we could hardly disregard him. I had him physiognomize us so as not to be discourteous, that's all."
When he had done speaking, Yüeh-niang served him lunch in the master suite. After he had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing took a plantain-leaf fan in his hand and strolled idly into the garden, ending up in the great summer-house, the Hall of Assembled Vistas.
All the way round blinds are suspended over the latticework,
On all four sides flowers and trees cast intersecting shadows.[122]
It was just high noon. All he could hear was:
From deep in the green shade,[123]
The strains of the cicada's stridulation.
Suddenly:
A breeze wafted the scent of the flowers,[124]
Invading the senses as it struck the nose.
There are two poems that testify to this:
Amid green trees the shade is luxuriant;
the summer days are long;
The reflections of towers and terraces
are upside-down in the pond.
The curtain of crystal beads is stirred
as the gentle breeze blows;
A single arbour of roses fills the entire
courtyard with fragrance.[125]
In the secluded grounds of the country villa
the summer grass is green;

The pomegranates are everywhere in bloom,
shining through the blinds.
Shadows of locust trees cover the ground;
it is just high noon;
From time to time one hears the stridulation
of new-fledged cicadas.[126]

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on a chair and was cooling himself with the fan in his hand when he saw the two pageboys, Lai-an and Hua-t'ung, come in to draw some water from the well.

"One of you come over here," he said, "and fetch some ice from the underground storehouse to put in a basin for me."

Lai-an promptly came forward, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Go to the rear compound and tell your sister, Ch'un-mei, that if she has any damson punch, she should bring a jug of it here and put it in the ice bowl to cool."

Lai-an assented and went off on his errand. After some time had elapsed, who should appear but Ch'un-mei. She was dressed in her everyday garb, with her head uncovered, wearing an informal cloud-shaped chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a pale blue homespun tunic, and a peach red linen skirt. In her hand she carried a jug of candied damson punch.

Giggling as she came, she asked, "Have you had anything to eat yet?"

"I've already eaten in the master suite in the rear compound," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"No wonder you didn't come into our quarters," Ch'un-mei said. "I'll put this damson punch into the ice here, so you can drink it when it's chilled."

Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded his head. When Ch'un-mei had finished icing the damson punch, she came over and leaned on the back of his chair.

Taking the plantain-leaf fan out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand, she proceeded to fan him with it, asking, "What was the First Lady talking to you about just now?"

"About the way Immortal Wu physiognomized us," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"That Taoist stated, out of the blue, that I would wear a pearl-decked cap," said Ch'un-mei, "which caused the First Lady to remark, 'even if there were a pearl-decked cap, it would hardly end up on her head.' As the saying goes:

Ordinary individuals cannot be judged by their faces;
The ocean's waters cannot be measured by the peck.[127]

It has always been true that:

What you can't round on the lathe,
You can round with an axe.[128]

How can one foretell who may not:

Depend upon his wife's connections for his daily bread?

Does she mean to suggest that I'm doomed to remain a slave in your household forever?"

"Little oily mouth," Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, "that's nonsense. If you should bear a child someday, you'll get to put your hair up like a regular lady."

Thereupon, taking her onto his lap, he took her hand in his and began to toy with her, asking, "Is your mother in the rear compound, or in her own quarters? How is it I haven't seen her?"

"Mother's in her room," said Ch'un-mei. "She told Ch'iu-chü to heat some water for a bath but couldn't wait for her to finish and lay down on her bed for a nap."

"After I've drunk the damson punch," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I'll go have some fun with her."

Thereupon Ch'un-mei reached into the ice basin and poured out a cupful of damson punch for Hsi-men Ch'ing. When he had swallowed a mouthful, the bone-chilling cold:

Pierced his heart and numbed his teeth,
in the same way that:
Sweet dew suffuses the heart.[129]

In a little while he finished the punch and then, leaning on Ch'un-mei's shoulder, made his way around by the postern gate until he arrived at Chin-lien's bedroom. When he lifted aside the portiere and went in, he saw that directly in front of him the woman was lying asleep on her newly purchased bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl.

It so happens that, because Li P'ing-erh had an alcove bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl in her quarters, the woman had subsequently induced Hsi-men Ch'ing to spend sixty taels of silver in order to buy a balustraded bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl for her. Facing the interior of the bed, the two side panels were decorated with inlaid mother-of-pearl designs depicting:

Towers and terraces, halls and chambers,[130]
Flowers and foliage, birds and animals.[131]

The three comb-back shaped back rests inside were decorated with the motif of pines, bamboos, and plum blossoms, the "three cold-weather friends." From the tester there hung:

Bed curtains of purple gauze,
held in place by:
Brocade sashes and silver hooks,
while from either side:
Aromatic pomanders were suspended.
The woman's:
Jade body was completely naked.
Wearing nothing but a bodice of red chiffon, under a coverlet of red silk, her head resting on a mandarin duck pillow, she lay on the cool bamboo bed mat:
In a state of slumbering oblivion.[132]
Within the room:
An exotic fragrance assailed the nostrils.[133]
No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing catch sight of her than, before he knew it, his:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.

Ordering Ch'un-mei to close the door and go outside, he quietly took off his clothes and got into bed. When he lifted aside the silk coverlet, her jade body lay half concealed and half revealed. Bent on mischief, he gently separated her two thighs, positioned his jade chowrie handle, and slowly inserted it into her vagina. By the time:

Her starry eyes flashed open with surprise,
he had already succeeded in thrusting and retracting several tens of times.[134]

Opening her eyes wide, the woman laughed, saying, "You crazy ruffian! When did you sneak in here without anyone's knowing it? I was sleeping and didn't realize it. I was just enjoying my sleep and you still want to plague me to death."

"It's only me, so it doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But if it were a strange man who got in, you'd probably still pretend not to realize it."

"I'd just be wasting my breath on you!" the woman said. "Who else would have the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to come into this room of mine? You're the only one allowed in here. How can you be so:
Oblivious to distinctions of status?"[135]

It so happens that the woman, because she had overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing praising the whiteness of Li P'ing-erh's body in the Kingfisher Pavilion the other day, had secretly mixed the stamens of jasmine blossoms with butter-fat and face powder and rubbed the mixture over her entire body, until it was:

White and glossy, shiny and smooth,
Exuding a palpable exotic fragrance,[136]
in the hope of gaining Hsi-men Ch'ing's affection and replacing her rival in his favour.

Thereupon Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing that her body was snow-white, and that she was wearing the pair of scarlet sleeping shoes that she had just made, assumed a squatting position on top of her, lifted up her thighs with his two hands, and proceeded to thrust with all his strength:

Bending his head the better to observe,
The sight presented as he went in and out.[137]

"You *crazy* good-for-nothing!" the woman said. "What are you looking at so attentively? My complexion is black; no match for the white of Li P'ing-erh's body, that's all there is to it. Now that she's pregnant, you're:
Casually enamored and anxiously concerned,[138]
on her behalf. The rest of us are only pickups that you can pester like this whenever you please."

"I hear you've been waiting for me to take a bath," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"How did you know that?" the woman asked.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told her what Ch'un-mei had said.

"You go ahead and bathe," the woman said. "I'll have Ch'un-mei bring the water in."

It wasn't long before the bathing tub was carried into the room and filled with hot water. The two of them got out of bed in order to:

Bathe together in the orchid-scented bath, and
Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water.

Thereupon:

Replenishing the bath and changing the water,[139]
they proceeded to bathe for a while.

Acting on a whim, Hsi-men Ch'ing placed the woman so that she was reclining faceup on the bathing-board, took her pair of feet in his two hands, straddled her and thrust away, lifting her body into the air as he rammed away at her no less than two or three hundred times. The sound they made was just like:

Crabs scuttling in the mud;
The noise was incessant.
The woman, fearing lest her:
Fragrant locks should tumble awry,

held her clouds of hair in place with one hand while holding onto the bathing-board with the other. Meanwhile:

The swallow's cries and oriole's notes,[140]
that issued from her mouth:
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.
What did this battle look like? Behold:
The waters of the flowery pond are agitated, the ripples turbulent;
The turquoise curtains are rolled high, autumn clouds threaten.
The talented gentleman's feelings are aroused, he wants to engage;
The woman of beauty's heart is impatient to show off her skill.
One of them is all aquiver as he sticks out his adamantine spear;
The other is all aswagger as she brandishes her implacable sword.
One of them "risks death and forgets life,"[141] as he bores his way in;
The other proves "addicted to clouds and rain,"[142] as she strives for victory.
With a *p'u-p'u tung-tung* the backsides beat a tattoo;
With a *pi-pi po-po* the spear collides with the sword.
With a *p'a-p'a t'a-t'a* they create a resounding racket;
With a *p'eng-p'eng p'ai-p'ai* they end up all of a heap.
Low-low, high-high, the water seems to run upstream;
Splashing, plashing, the overflow creates a freshet.
Slippery, slithery, how can they call a halt?
Grasping, shoving, it is hard to stay in place.
One comes, the other goes, ranging south and north;[143]
One lunges, the other butts, seeking east and west.
Hot steam, billowing, gives rise to ominous clouds;
Redolent, perfumed; fragrant vapour is dispersed.
One of them, propelling her craft against the current,
Sets her jade legs into motion.
The other, just as the helmsman grips the tiller,
Keeps her golden lotuses in hand.
One of them, like a stallion run amok, shows off his prowess;
The other, like a pale-faced sorceress, meets his cavalry charge.

Happy and joyous are the feelings of the beautiful woman;
Rough and ready are the desires of the young gentleman.
Topsy-turvy, their only pursuit is gratification;
Higgledy-piggledy, their feelings are all in a daze.
"A life-or-death struggle,"[144] neither one will call a halt;
"To triumph in every battle,"[145] they vie with heart and gall.
Continually protesting, again and again, she threatens murder;
High-spirited and stiff-necked, his ardour remains undimmed.
In ancient times and modern, such contests have been countless;
But none of them was the equal of this battle in the bathtub.

At the time, the two of them tangled in the water for a while, until Hsi-men Ch'ing ejaculated, bringing the contest to a halt. When they had rubbed themselves clean, the bathing tub was removed. Wearing nothing but short undershirts of thin floss silk, they got onto the bed, where a bed table had been prepared for them, replete with wine and delicacies.

"Bring some distilled spirits for your father to drink," the woman instructed Ch'iu-chü.

She also took some stuffed pastries out of a square box on the shelf of her bed cabinet and gave them to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat, fearing he might have an empty stomach.

It was some time before Ch'iu-chü reappeared with a silver flagon of wine. The woman was just about to pour it into a cup when she felt it and, finding it to be ice cold, threw the contents right into Ch'iu-chü's face, soaking her:

Head and face alike.

"Why you lousy dead duck of a slave!" she railed at her. "I told you to decant it for him but how could you have brought cold wine for Father to drink? Who knows what you've got on your mind?"

"Drag this slave out to the courtyard for me," she told Ch'un-mei, "and make her kneel down there."

"I had just gone out back," said Ch'un-mei, "to roll up Mother's foot bindings for her. I was hardly out of the way for a moment, and you've already gotten into mischief."

Pouting with her lips, Ch'iu-chü mumbled to herself, "Father and Mother have been drinking iced wine every day. Who could have known that today they would change their tune?"

When the woman heard this, she cursed her, saying, "*Why* you lousy slave! *What* did you say? Drag her over here."

"Give her ten slaps on each side of her face," she ordered Ch'un-mei.

"I wouldn't want to dirty my hands on that thick-skinned face of hers," said Ch'un-mei. "Mother, just have her kneel down with a stone balanced on her head, that's all."

Thereupon:

Without permitting any further explanation,
she was dragged out to the courtyard and made to kneel with a large stone balanced on her head. But no more of this.

The woman, once more, instructed Ch'un-mei to warm some wine and shared several cups with Hsi-men Ch'ing. The wine and the table were then removed, the silk bed curtains were let down, and Ch'un-mei was instructed to fasten the door to the room. The two of them then:

Arm around head and thigh over thigh,
Physically exhausted, went to sleep.

Truly:

If you do not find her on the peak of the Mountain of Teeming Jade,
You must seek her in King Huai's dream upon the Radiant Terrace

Next day Pan Jinlian rose early and set Ximen Qing upon his way. Then, taking her sewing basket, she went to the Kingfisher Hall, and, sitting down on the steps, began to design her shoes. She sent Chunmei to ask Li Ping'er to join her.

"What is that you're drawing?" Li Ping'er said.

"I am making a pair of crimson silk shoes with white flat soles, and on the toe I am going to embroider a cockatoo pecking at a peach."

"I have a piece of flowered crimson silk," Li Ping'er said. "I will copy your design but I shall make my shoes with heels." She fetched her sewing basket and they sat down together. When Jinlian had drawn the pattern on one shoe, she asked Li Ping'er to draw the other. She said she was going to the inner court for Meng Yulou. "The other day," she said, "she told me she was going to make some shoes."

She went to the inner court and found Yulou in her room, bending over a table, putting the lining into a shoe.

"You are about early this morning," Yulou said.

"Yes," Jinlian said, "I was up early and saw Father off to Captain He's farewell party. Then I asked the Sixth Lady to come and work with me in the garden. It is cooler there. I have just finished drawing the pattern of one shoe and the Sixth Lady is doing the other for me. Now I've come for you. It will be jolly for us all to work together. What is that you're doing?"

"It is the mate to that black silk shoe I showed you yesterday," Yulou said. "You do work hard," Jinlian said, "you have actually come to the lining already."

"I finished one yesterday and the other is half done," Yulou said.

Jinlian examined the shoe carefully. "What kind of a toe are you going to put on it?" she said.

"Oh, I am not like you two children," Yulou said. "You must have lots of flowers and pretty things. I am a staid old lady and shall simply have the toes of gilded sheep skin, bound around the edges with green thread. What would you suggest?"

"Oh, that will do well enough," Jinlian said, "but hurry up. Li Ping'er is waiting for us."

"Won't you sit down and drink a cup of tea first?"

"No," Jinlian said, "bring the tea with you, and drink it there."

Yulou told her maid to make some tea and bring it out to them. Holding hands, with the shoes in their sleeves, the two women went to the garden. As they passed Wu Yueniang, who was sitting under the eaves outside her own apartments, she asked where they were going. Jinlian told her that Li Ping'er had sent her for Yulou and that they were going to design some shoes. They went on to the garden. There they all sat down together, and looked at each other's work.

"Why do you always make crimson low-heeled shoes?" Yulou said to Jinlian. "They don't look nearly so pretty as the high-heeled ones. If you don't care for wooden soles, you can use felt, as I do."

"They are not walking-out shoes," Jinlian said, "they are for bedroom use. A little slave ruined my others, and Father told me to make some new ones."

"Speaking of shoes," Yulou said, "I hope the Sixth Lady will not think me a gossip but yesterday you lost one of your shoes, and Father gave Little Iron Rod a beating. The boy fell down and lay in a faint for a long time. That upset Laizhao's wife, and she cursed like anything, up and down the back court. 'That whorish young turtle,' she cried, 'he has been telling tales about my boy and now the poor boy has had a thrashing. It's a good thing he didn't die, or that vile creature would have had to pay for it.' We couldn't make out whom she was cursing but some time afterwards Little Iron Rod came along and the Great Lady asked him why Father had beaten him. 'I was playing in the garden,' he said, 'and I picked up a shoe. Uncle Chen came with a necklet and I asked him to give it to me for my shoe. I don't know who told Father and got me beaten.' Then he said he was looking for Uncle Chen so that he could get the necklet he had been promised, and ran off. You see the turtle in question is our brother-in-law. Fortunately, only Li Jiao'er was there, and not the Great Lady, or there would have been trouble."

"Why?" Jinlian said, "did the Great Lady have anything to say about it?"

"You may well ask that," Yulou said. "Indeed she had a good deal to say. She said: 'In this wretched household, there is now a nine-tailed fox who seems determined to rule the roost. I remember how comfortable everybody was when Laiwang came back from his journey to the south, until stories began to fly around. First that Laiwang's wife was flirting with his Lordship, then that he himself had got a knife and carried a club. All this ended in the poor man's being banished and his wife hanging herself. Now, all for the sake of a paltry shoe, she sets both heaven and earth in a turmoil. If she had been wearing the shoe in a proper and decent manner, it would not have been there for the boy to pick up. I suppose she was playing some dirty game in the garden with that man of hers, and drinking, and dropped her shoe. Now in order to keep the shameful business dark, she throws all the blame on the boy. After all, it is not a matter of any importance."

"She is talking out of her cunt," Jinlian cried. "What does she consider an important matter, I wonder. Surely murder is important enough, and the slave took a knife to murder his master." She turned to Yulou. "Sister, we have never had any secrets from one another. You remember how terrified we both were when Laixing came and told us, yet she, the first wife, talks in this strain. However, if it doesn't matter to her, it doesn't matter to me, and if the slaves like to kill their master, they may. That woman Huilian was one of her maids but she never made the slightest attempt to control her, and the slave deceived her betters, and behaved badly to those beneath her. She flew into tempers first with one and then with another. Well, people must find somebody to let loose their hatred upon. If she is going to say nasty things about me, she will get as good as she gives. When that Huilian hanged herself, she didn't tell her husband the truth. She spent a lot of money hushing it up. If she hadn't done so, it would not have passed over so easily. She managed to scrape out of it, and now she puts on this high and mighty air. She accuses me of interfering with her husband. Well, if I don't make him kick out that slave and his wife, you can consider that I count for nothing. I don't intend to let myself be pushed down a well."

Yulou saw that Jinlian was growing purple with rage. "We are such firm friends, Sister," she said, "that I always tell you anything I hear but when I do tell you things, you must keep them to yourself and not get so excited."

Jinlian did not take this advice. That night, when Ximen Qing came to her room, she told him the whole story. "Laizhao's wife," she said, "was screaming up and down the inner court that you had beaten her boy, and the first chance she got, you should pay for it."

Ximen Qing did not forget this. The next day he would have sent away Laizhao and his wife and child but, fortunately, Yueniang persuaded him not to do so. Still, he would not keep Laizhao in the house, and sent him to take charge of the house in Lion Street in place of Ping'an whom he brought back and put in charge of the gate. Yueniang realized what had happened and was very angry with Jinlian.

One day Ximen was sitting in the front hall, when Ping'an came in and said: "Major Zhou has sent a fortune-telling gentleman, called Wu the Immortal. He is waiting at the gate to see you." Ximen gave orders that the man should be admitted, and, after looking at Major Zhou's card, he bade the fortune-teller welcome. Wu the Immortal was wearing a black Daoist hat, a long cloak, and straw sandals. He was girt by a girdle of yellow silk with two tassels, and carried a tortoiseshell fan. He stalked in with a majestic air. He seemed at least forty years of age. His spirit was as proud as the moon, and he was as venerable in appearance as the tall pines that grow upon the summit of Mount Hua.

There are always four marks by which an Immortal may be distinguished. His body is like the pine tree; his voice like a bell. When he is seated, he is like a bow, and when he walks, like the wind.

When Ximen Qing saw Wu the Immortal about to come in, he hurried down the steps to greet him and took him into the hall. The Immortal saluted Ximen with a religious reverence, and sat down. Tea was brought at once and Ximen said: "May I ask your Immortality's glorious and illustrious names? From what fairy country have you come, and how did you make the acquaintance of Major Zhou?"

The Immortal raised himself slightly. "I am called Wu," he said, "and my personal name is Shih. My name in religion is Shou Zhen. I was born in Xian Yu of Zhejiang but while I was still a boy I went with my Master to the temple of the Purple Void on the Tiantai mountain. Afterwards, I wandered as a cloud over the earth, and have come at last to seek the Sacred Principle upon Taishan. On my way, I happened to pass through your esteemed city, and General Zhou was good enough to allow me to examine the eyes of his ladies. Then he bade me come to you to tell your fortune."

"Oh, Venerable Prince of the Immortals," Ximen Qing said, "to which school of magic do you belong, and what system of physiognomies do you follow?"

"I have a slight acquaintance with thirteen schools," the Immortal said, "and practice the method of Ma Yi. But I also understand the Liu Ren and the Magic Ke. I give my simples to cure people but worldly wealth I never accept, knowing that I am upon this earth for but a short space."

Ximen Qing felt considerably more respect for his visitor. "You must indeed be a true Immortal," he said. He told his servants to prepare a table with monastic fare.

"But I have not yet performed my office," the Immortal said. "How can I eat your food?"

"Master," Ximen said, smiling, "you have come a long way, and I feel sure you have not yet breakfasted. There will be plenty of time afterwards for you to tell our fortunes." He sat down himself and shared the monastic fare with the Immortal. Then the table was cleared, and he called for writing materials.

"Sir," the Immortal said, "tell me first the eight words of moment in your honourable life, and I will relate the future for you." Ximen Qing told him the Eight Characters, saying that his animal was the Tiger, his age twenty-nine, and the hour of his birth noon on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month. The Immortal silently made some calculations upon his fingers and said: "Sir, your horoscope would appear to show the year as *Wuyin,* the month as *Xinyu,* the day as *Renwu* and the hour as *Bingwu.* Now the twenty-third day of the seventh month is the Day of White Dew. We must therefore reckon your fate as from the eighth month. Taking the months in order, *Xinyu* is the controlling month, so obviously *Shangguan* is the controlling factor in your life. As Zi Ping says: wealth increases and riches multiply. You will obtain an official position. Then your luck will change again. Your fate depends upon *Shengong,* so your fortune starts from the seventh year *Xinyu.* Then at seventeen, it moves towards *Renxu,* at twenty-seven to *Guihai,* at thirty-seven to *Jiazi* and at forty-seven to *Yichou.* Your horoscope, Sir, as I see it, indicates that you will fill a position of authority and that you will be prosperous. Your Eight Characters are certainly clear and unusual. But though this is so, you are adversely affected by the Earth Element in *Wu,* seeing that you were born between the seventh and the eighth months, a fact that gives you too great physical vigor. Fortunately the day of your birth was *Renwu* and the Water Element of *Gui* comes between *Zi* and *Chou,* thus producing an equilibrium between water and fire, and putting beyond doubt the fact that you will profit by your abilities. The hour was *Bingwu,* and this fits in very well with *Xin,* so you may look forward to a career of great dignity: you will prosper, be happy, and at peace all your life. Your fortune will increase; you will obtain promotion, and you are destined to leave behind you an honourable descendant. Throughout your life you will be honest and fair dealing; when once you have made up your mind you will not change it. In joy you will be as agreeable as the breeze in spring, and in anger as terrible as the sudden thunder and the fierce lightning. You will enjoy many women, great wealth, and not a few of the insignia of office, and when at last you leave this world there will be two sons to speed you on your way. This year, *Ding* and *Ren* come together, and the fire of *Ding* will be in the ascendant. This means the coming of officials and ghosts, and certainly indicates your elevation to the clouds, or, otherwise, that you will receive an appointment and come into great wealth. Your fortune is now moving towards *Guihai,* so that the Earth of *Wu* moistened by the Water of *Gui,* and from the intermingling of water and earth, one naturally anticipates growth. I see the star of the Red Phoenix, and this is undoubtedly a sign of the coming of a son. Then, too, the controller of your life appears on horseback going towards *Shen,* so before the seventh month is out, these things will certainly come to pass."

"What about my life in the more distant future?" Ximen Qing said.

"Sir," the Immortal said, "I trust you will forgive me but I am sorry to say that your Eight Characters do not go well with so much *Yin* water, and, when you reach the high tide of your fortune in the year *Jiazi,* the water will wash out the *Renwu* day, and the inconstant stars will then affect you. Before you reach your thirty-sixth year, you will suffer from sores, hemorrhage and wasting sickness."

"What then of the present?" Ximen said.

"This year you meet the five spirits of destruction. This means some slight trouble in your household. It will not be very serious, for the omens are favourable, and the trouble will pass away."

"Is there any great calamity in my life?" Ximen asked.

"Days lengthen into months, and months into years," the Immortal said, "it is hard indeed to prophesy."

Ximen Qing was satisfied. "Master," he said, "what do you read in my face?"

"Please turn your honourable countenance straight towards me," the Immortal said. Ximen Qing moved his chair slightly, and the Immortal said:

"What is this outward seeming? Without the mind it would be nothing, for outward seeming springeth from the heart. Whither the heart goeth, the appearance goeth also. I perceive that your Lordship's head is round, and your neck short. You are clearly a man favoured by fortune. Your body is robust and your muscles strong, a sign that you are a man of heroic courage. Your brow is high and projecting, and all your life you will never lack raiment or wealth. Your chin is square and full, and in your old age you will fill an exalted office. Such are the good things I see. There are evil things also but shall I venture to tell you these?"

"Pray tell me all, Immortal," Ximen said.

The Immortal asked Ximen Qing to take a few steps, and continued: "Your walk is like the shaking of the willow. It is a sign that you should outlive a wife, and if you do not do so, you will certainly suffer hurt. I trust you have already done so."

"I have," Ximen said.

The Immortal asked to see his hand, and Ximen Qing held it out. "Perfect wisdom," the Immortal said, "is always to be discerned by the skin and hair, and sorrow and happiness may be foretold by the hands and feet. Your hand is so fine and soft and firm, you are certainly destined by fortune for the enjoyment of wealth and happiness. Of your eyes, one is male and one female, a sign that you are wealthy and alert of mind. Each of your eyebrows has a fork that shows that all through your life pleasure will mean much to you but below them are three wrinkles that mean that in middle age you will suffer a great loss. Your *Jianmen* is red; you will enjoy wealth and women all your life. Your brows are yellow, and in a few days you will receive an official appointment. There is red upon your *Sanyang, and this very year a fine son will be born to you. One thing that I hesitate to mention, is that your Leitang* are thick and long, indicating a fondness for the flower maidens but your nose, the star of wealth, would seem to promise a wealthy middle age. The *Zhengjiang* is hollowed, and from that we may foretell the fortunes and misfortunes of your next life."

The Immortal was silent. Ximen Qing asked if he would tell the fortunes of his ladies, and sent a servant to summon Wu Yueniang. She came with Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, and Sun Xue'e, and they stood behind a curtain to listen. When the Immortal saw Yueniang, he quickly saluted her. He would not sit down in her presence but stood to tell her fortune.

"Lady," he said, "your face is like the full moon, a sign that the household flourishes under your care. Your lips are like the red lotus, and so I know that you are prosperous and that you will have the dignity of motherhood. Your voice is sweet and fairy-like, and you will help your husband towards the attainment of happiness. Please show me your hands." Yueniang drew her delicate fingers from her sleeves. "Your hands," continued the Immortal, "are like dried ginger, a sign that you are well capable of controlling those under your charge. The hair upon your temples shines as does a mirror that shows, according to the doctrine of Kun, that you are a very clever woman. These are the good points. There are others not so favourable but these I hesitate to tell." Ximen Qing urged him to continue. "In your *Leitang* there is a mole, and if you were not so frequently ill, you would most certainly destroy your husband. There are wrinkles beneath your eyes that show that your six relatives are as ice and as ashes."

She stands erect, beautiful to see
With footsteps slow and light, like a turtle coming from the water
When she walks, the dust is not stirred. Her words are measured.

The slender shoulders show that she must wed an honourable husband.
When Yueniang had withdrawn, Ximen Qing said: "There are still some ladies of lesser rank: will you see them?" Li Jiao'er came forward. The Immortal looked at her for a long time, and said: "This lady's brows are very abrupt, and her nose is small. If she were not a concubine, she would certainly marry three husbands. She is plump and well favoured, a sign that she will want for nothing. She enjoys comfort and is a peaceable person. Her shoulders are high and her voice is shrill, so, unless she is an orphan, she is a person of low degree. The bridge of her nose is rather low, and she will be poor, or die young." He asked her to walk a few steps, and said:
The tapering brow, the sinuous back
Show that in youth she trod the path of wind and dust.
One of two things she must be, a girl from a house of evil fame
Or a woman who stands behind the screen.
Li Jiao'er went back to her place, and Yueniang said to Yulou: "Now it is your turn."
"This lady," the Immortal said, "has forehead, nose and chin all well proportioned. She will have no anxiety about material things. The six natural treasuries are full to overflowing and she will have fortune and honour in her old age. She will suffer little from sickness, for her mouth is favoured by a bright and dazzling comet, and in truth her *Niangong* is smooth and beautiful. Kindly walk a step or two, Lady."
Then he said:
Her mouth is like the character *Si*; her spirit pure and keen
Her gentleness and charm are like a pearl resting on a palm
Honour and dignity will be hers, wealth and prosperity.
She will outlive two husbands.
When Yulou had retired, Jinlian was asked to take her place but she laughed and refused. Yueniang pressed her, and finally she went out. The Immortal raised his head and gazed at her for a long time. Then he said slowly: "This lady's hair is thick and uncommonly heavy at the temples, and her glance is not direct. This is a sign of a very passionate nature. Her cheeks are full of charm, her eyebrows arched, and, even when she is standing still, her body quivers. The moles upon her face mean that she will be the end of her husbands, and her upper lip that is short, indicates that her own life will not be long."
Lightly and unrestrained she moves, craving the pleasures of love,
Her eyes, sparkling like fragments of lacquer, show that she is the cause of men's undoing
Beneath the moon, before the stair, never can she be sated
But, though she lives in a great mansion, her heart is not at rest.
Ximen Qing called for Li Ping'er, and asked the Immortal to predict her future. "Your complexion," the Immortal said, "is so sweet and fragrant that I know you for a maiden of high degree. Your bearing is modest, so that you may be told for a virtuous woman of high rank. Yet there is a sparkle in your eyes as though you had taken wine, and this suggests an engagement behind the mulberry tree. Your eyes are dark ringed that shows that what happens to you each month gives trouble. Yet the sleeping silkworm is glossy and purple, and beyond a doubt you will bring forth a precious son. Your skin is white and your shoulders round, and your husband loves you dearly. You are often sick, for the roots are dark and deep, yet you constantly meet with omens of great joy, for the star of your fortune is bright and favourable. These are the points in your favour but there are others not so favourable, and, Lady, you must be careful. The mountain root is black, and before your twenty-seventh year there are signs of tears, yet if you keep good counsel, you may survive the cock and dog years. Yet beware, beware!"
Her countenance is like the flowers and the moon, yet she must guard her plumage
Close to her lover till life is done, like the phoenix and his mate.
Trust in the wealth of the red doors
And do not mix with humbler birds.
Li Ping'er withdrew, and Yueniang told Xue'e to take her place. The Immortal looked at her and said: "This lady's body is short and her voice shrill. Her brow is pointed and her nose small. Though she has come from the valley to the heights, her portion is of sneers and friendlessness. She manages her affairs well, and is not without guile but she suffers from a fourfold "turn up," and it may be that disaster shall overtake her. The fourfold "turn up" is lips curling yet without an edge, ears curling yet without a curve, eyes turned up yet without a sparkle, nose turned up yet crooked."
Her body is like a bird's, her waist like a wasp's. She is not of high degree.
Her eyes are like flowing waters; she is not chaste.
She stands and leans upon the door
If she does not become a maidservant, worse things will befall her.
Xue'e withdrew, and Yueniang told Ximen's daughter, Ximen Dajie, to come and let the Immortal see her.
"This lady's nose is low and flat," he said; "she will bring discredit upon her ancestors and ruin upon her household. Her voice is like a cracked gong, and all her family wealth will be dispersed. Her complexion is coarse; she will die young and in distress. She walks like the hopping of a sparrow, and though she lives in her own home, she is in need of food and clothing. Calamity will fall upon her before she is twenty-seven."
Though she seems wise, she is not at peace with her husband
Only the food and clothes her parents give keep warmth in her
She is not handsome and honour will not visit her.
Even if violent death should be spared her, there are hard times in store.
Then Chunmei came to be examined. The Immortal opened his eyes wide as he looked at her. She was about eighteen years old, he saw. A silver hairnet was on her head, a white gown with a peach-coloured skirt, and a fine blue silk wrap. She made a reverence to him when she came forward. The Immortal gazed at her for a long time. At last he said:
"This young lady has the five sense organs well developed. She is exquisitely made. Her hair is fine but her eyebrows are thick. This is a sign of hot temper. Her spirit is volatile and her eyes round. This denotes that she easily becomes excited. Her nose is straight: she will marry an officer of high rank and bear him a son. Her brows are prominent: this is a sign that she will wear a pearl headdress while she is still young. She walks like a flying angel; her voice is clear and her spirit pure. She will bring wealth to her husband, and by the age of twenty-seven will assuredly receive high honour. Unfortunately her left eye is rather large. This means that she lost her father in her childhood. And the right eye is small that shows that her mother died when she was one year old. The mole beneath the left corner of her mouth is the sign of a quarrelsome disposition but the mole on her right cheek indicates that she will be respected and loved by her husband as long as she lives."
Her brow is high, the five sense organs as they should be
Her lips are red as though with rouge; her steps are light.
There will be wealth in plenty for her, and rich food
And men of rank and dignity will love her all her days.
When the Immortal had said this, the women bit their nails and thought over his words. Ximen Qing put five taels of silver into a packet and offered it to the Immortal. He gave five *qian* to the Major's servant, with a visiting card to express his thanks. But the Immortal would not accept the silver. "I wander over the earth as a cloud," he said. "I take my meals, exposed to the winds, and my bed is in the dew. What use is money to me? I cannot take it."
Then Ximen gave him a roll of cloth with which to make himself a habit. This the Immortal accepted, and told his young disciple to take it. He made a reverence to Ximen Qing and thanked him. Ximen took him to the gate, and there the Immortal proudly took leave of him.
When Ximen Qing came back to the inner court, he asked Yueniang and the others what they thought of what the Immortal had said.
"He was clever enough," Yueniang said, "but I think he was mistaken about three people."
"Which three?" Ximen said.
"He said that the Sixth Lady was ill but that she would bear a son. She is with child now, so that he may be partly right. Then he said that there are hard times in store for our daughter. I don't see how he can make that out. He told us that Chunmei would have a son. You have probably done your part but I see no signs of her having a child. And certainly I don't believe what he said about her wearing a pearl headdress and being a lady. We have nobody in this household of official rank, so I don't know where the pearl headdress is coming from, and even if there were one, it would not be for her head."
Ximen Qing laughed. "He said that I should rise from the ground to the clouds, that position and wealth would come to me but really, I don't see where they are coming from. It seems to me that when you and Chunmei were standing together he got mixed up because of your dresses. She was wearing a silver hairnet, and he thought she was our daughter. He thought she would probably marry into some family of position and so would come to wear a pearl headdress. People have always said that it is better for us when the fortune-tellers are wrong. If our minds and our appearance had any relation to one another our mind would be different every time the appearance changed. But since Major Zhou sent him here, we couldn't very well refuse to let him try his hand."
Yueniang had a meal served in the hall, and they all took part in it. Afterwards, Ximen Qing took a palm-leaf fan and strolled about the garden. When he came to the pavilion of the Glorious Landscape, near the great arbour, he pulled down the blinds and curtains. Outside, the flowering shrubs and trees cast a refreshing shade. In the depth of the foliage, a band of cicadas were singing, and from time to time the breeze wafted the fragrance of the flowers towards him.
Ximen Qing sat on a chair and fanned himself. Laian and Huatong came to the well to draw some water.
"Come here, one of you boys," Ximen said.
Laian came. "Go to the inner court," Ximen said to him, "and tell your sister Chunmei to bring me a pot of plum juice."
Some time afterwards, Chunmei, wearing her silver hairnet, came to him with a pot of plum juice. She was smiling. "Have you had anything to eat?" she said.
"Yes, I had something in the inner court."
Chunmei pretended to be annoyed. "You do not come to see us," she said, "you only send to us when you want plum juice. Wait till I make it cool enough."
Ximen Qing nodded. When the girl had made it ready, she came and rested on his chair. She took the palm-leaf fan from his hand and fanned him.
"What did the Great Lady say?" she asked.
"She talked about Wu the Immortal."
"Oh, that absurd monk said I should wear a pearl headdress, and the Great Lady said that even if there ever was one in this household, it wouldn't be for my head. But the proverb says we should never judge by appearances, and the water in the ocean cannot be measured with a pint pot. Even when you can't use a lathe, it is always possible to use a knife. It is a most uncertain business foretelling what is going to happen to people. Do you imagine I shall always be a slave in your household?"
"Little oily mouth," Ximen said to her, "if you give me a son, you shall wear a headdress, certainly." He took her in his arms and fondled her. "Where is your mistress?" he said, "I haven't seen her for some time."
"She told Qiuju to heat some water for a bath," Chunmei said, "but she got tired of waiting, and now she is asleep on the bed."
"When I have drunk this plum water, I'll go and play a trick on her," Ximen said.
Chunmei took the pot from the ice, and gave it to him. He drank a mouthful. It was so cold that he could feel it in his bones. It went through his body and made his teeth chatter. It seemed like gentle dew dropping upon his heart. After a while, he finished the plum water and, resting his hand on Chunmei's shoulder, went to Jinlian's room. She was asleep on the mother-of-pearl bed that he had recently bought for her. It was facing the door. Li Ping'er had a bed similar to this one and Jinlian had asked him to buy one for her. It cost something like sixty taels of silver. It was a four-poster and the panels all around it were made of mother-of-pearl cunningly designed to represent flowers, grasses and birds. The curtains were of purple silk, with silver hooks.
Jinlian was completely undressed, except for a light, scarlet vest. The bedclothes were of the finest silk and there was a Yin Yang pillow beneath her head. She lay upon the summer mattress, fast asleep. Seeing her, Ximen Qing's desire was stirred. He told Chunmei to close the door and go away, and quietly took off his own clothes. Then he took away the gossamer coverlet, got upon the bed, and admired the sight of his body beside that of his beloved. Then he played a trick on her. He parted her legs, gripped his penis and put it between them. She opened her eyes wide in astonishment but Ximen had already moved in and out ten times.
"You strange rascal," Jinlian said, laughing, "when did you come in? I was asleep and didn't see you. Yes, sleeping so sweetly, yet you came and disturbed me."
"Since it is I, no harm is done," Ximen Qing said. "If it had been a stranger, you would pretend you didn't know the difference."
"What can I say to curse you?" Jinlian said. "Who do you think would be bold enough to come into my room? Only a rude man like you would do a thing of that sort."
After Jinlian had heard Ximen Qing, in the Kingfisher Hall, saying how white and beautiful Li Ping'er's body was, she had made a mixture of the hearts of jasmine flowers, cream and powder, and had rubbed it into her skin all over her body to make it smooth and white, so that she might be favoured as Li Ping'er had been. Her body now seemed as white as snow, with only a pair of scarlet sleeping shoes upon her feet. Ximen Qing squatted on the bed, and holding fast to her legs, plunged forward with all his might. He looked down so that he might enjoy the sight of what he was doing.
"Why are you looking at me, you funny creature?" Jinlian said. "My body is black, and cannot rival the Sixth Lady's white skin. I suppose that is why you are looking at it. Now that she is with child, you love and think only of her, and I am considered fit for nothing but the rubbish heap. You think you can treat me as you like."
"I am told you are waiting for a bath," Ximen Qing said. "Is that so?"
"Who told you?"
"Chunmei."
Then Jinlian asked if he would like to join her, and told the maid to bring the water. The bathtub was set down, the water poured in, and the two got down from the bed to bathe in the fragrant water. They played about as merrily as fishes. When they had spent some time washing themselves, Ximen Qing set Jinlian on the bathing board and, holding her feet in his two hands, mounted upon her and thrust forward. They jumped up and down, and shook about, two or three thousand times, making a noise like a crab crawling in the mud. Jinlian was afraid that her hair would be disar-ranged, so she put one hand on her head, and supported herself on the edge of the tub with the other. She made herself as charming as could be.
They played in the water for a long time. Then Ximen Qing yielded, and they stopped. They cleansed their bodies, and the bathtub was taken away. Ximen put on a short thin cotton coat and got on to the bed. A table was placed on it so that they might eat some fruit and drink wine. Jinlian bade Qiuju bring some white wine, and gave him some fruit pastries, because she thought he must be hungry. After a very long time, Qiuju brought a silver pot of wine. Jinlian poured out a cup. It was as cold as ice. She threw the wine in Qiuju's face, and it splashed all over her.
"You slave!" she cried, "you are not fit to live. What do you mean by bringing this cold wine for your father? I don't know what you're thinking about."
She told Chunmei to take the girl to the courtyard and make her kneel down there.
"I was only out of the room for a moment," Chunmei said to Qiuju, "getting some ribbons for mother's feet, and you go and upset the whole place like this."
"The other day," Qiuju said, pouting, "they wanted iced wine. How was I to know that they would want something different today?"
Jinlian heard this and cursed her. "What's that you say, you thievish slave? Come here!" she said to Chunmei, "Give her a good slapping, ten times on each side of her face."
"Oh, Mother," Chunmei said, "you can't even see the skin on her face and it'd make my hands dreadfully dirty. Won't you make her kneel down and put a piece of stone on her head?" Without more ado, Qiuju was dragged to the courtyard and made to kneel down with a piece of stone balanced on her head. Then Jinlian told Chunmei to warm the wine and she drank a few cups with Ximen Qing. When they had had enough, the table was removed; they pulled down the curtains and told Chunmei to shut the door. Then they put their arms around each other's necks and entwined their legs. They were very tired and soon went to sleep.

## 051

### Lai-Pao Escorts the Shipment of Birthday Gifts; Hsi-men Ch'ing Begets a Son, Guan'ge & Gains an Office

Success and failure, flourishing and decay,[1] are all inconsequential;[2]
To deploy every device at your disposal[3] is likewise of no avail.
Human desires are never satisfied,[4] like a snake swallowing an elephant;[5]
The affairs of this world, in the end, are like a mantis seizing a cicada.[6]
There is no medicine that is able to cure[7] the aging of high officials;
No amount of money will purchase the virtue of one's sons and grandsons.[8]
To rest content with one's ordinary lot and take things as they come;
Is the way to enjoy a carefree life of casual wandering.[9]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and P'an Chin-lien had finished bathing, they went to sleep together in her room. Ch'un-mei was sitting on a cool chair outside in the corridor, stitching the sole of a shoe, when what should she see but Ch'in-t'ung sticking out his head and craning his neck, around the postern gate.
"What have you got to say," Ch'un-mei asked.
Ch'in-t'ung also noticed that Ch'iu-chü was kneeling in the courtyard with a stone balanced on her head and proceeded to prance around and point at her.
"You crazy jailbird!" Ch'un-mei railed at him. "If you have something to say, just say it, that's all. Why bother:
Gesticulating with both hands and feet?"
Ch'in-t'ung continued laughing for some time before saying, "Chang An, the caretaker of the family graveyard, is waiting outside to speak to Father."
"You lousy jailbird!" Ch'un-mei said. "So it's Chang An, is it? What's the need for:
Such a great show of consternation,
as though you'd seen a ghost, or something? Keep it quiet. Father and Mother are asleep inside the room. If you wake them up, you'll be done for. Just tell Chang An to wait outside a while."
Ch'in-t'ung went outside and, after waiting there for what seemed like half a day, came back again and peered around the postern gate, asking, "Sister, is Father up yet or not?"
"You crazy jailbird!" exclaimed Ch'un-mei.
"Barging right in without more ado,
that way! You gave me quite a start.
As though you didn't know any better,[11]
you've come back a second time like a homeless ghost."
"Chang An is still waiting for Father to come out and see him," said Ch'in-t'ung. "After speaking to him, he has to get out through the city gate before it's closed for the night."
"Father and Mother are fast asleep," said Ch'un-mei. "Who would dare disturb them? Tell Chang An to wait a little longer before going. If it becomes too late for him to get home today, tell him to go back tomorrow."
As they were talking. who would have thought that Hsi-men Ch'ing over-heard them from inside the room.
Calling Ch'un-mei inside, he asked, "Who's talking?"
"Ch'un-mei replied, 'The pageboy, Ch'in-t'ung, has come in to say that the caretaker of the graveyard, Chang An, is outside and wants to have a word with you.' "
"Get me something to put on," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll get up and go out."
While Ch'un-mei was helping Hsi-men Ch'ing into his clothes, Chin-lien asked, "What has Chang An come to talk about?"
"Chang An came the other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "to tell me that Widow Chao's country estate that is adjacent to our ancestral graveyard, is being offered for sale, landed property and all. The asking price is three hundred taels of silver but I'm only willing to give her two hundred and fifty taels. I instructed Chang An to negotiate with her. If the sale is agreed to, I'll have Pen the Fourth and Ch'en Ching-chi go out to pay over the silver.
"There are four wells on the grounds, complete with well railings, from which water can be drawn. If I buy this property, I'll open it up and combine it with my own. I plan to build three summerhouses, three reception halls, an artificial hill, a garden, a juniper hedge, a locust tree arbour, well pavilions, an archery range, a kickball field, and other recreational facilities. It may cost a few taels of silver to do it but what of that."
"What indeed!" said the woman. "Go ahead and buy it. In the future when your womenfolk have occasion to visit the graveyard, they'll have something pleasurable to do when they get there."
When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the front of the compound to talk to Chang An.
Chin-lien got up and, pausing in front of her dressing mirror to:
Retouch her powdered face, and
Recomb her cloudy locks,
came out into the courtyard to see to the beating of Ch'iu-chü. Ch'un-mei went outside and called in Ch'in-t'ung to wield the cane.
Chin-lien interrogated the culprit, saying, "I told you to fetch the wine. But how could you have brought cold wine for your father to drink? It seems that if anyone in the household, great or small, has the temerity to offer you a word of criticism, you're prepared to brazen it out:
With nail-like mouth and iron tongue."[11]
She then shouted an order to Ch'in-t'ung, "Give this slave twenty strokes with the cane, well laid on."
Ch'in-t'ung had only administered ten strokes when, luckily for the culprit, Li P'ing-erh came over with an ingratiating smile and persuaded her mistress to put an end to the punishment, so Ch'iu-chü was spared ten lashes. Chin-lien ordered her to kowtow to Li P'ing-erh, after which she let her get up and go off to the kitchen.
"Old Mother Feng," said Li P'ing-erh, "has shown up with a fourteen-year-old slave girl in tow. Our second sister in the rear compound is going to buy her to serve in her quarters. The asking price is seven taels and five candareens of silver. She'd like you to come have a look at her before she completes the transaction."
Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh thereupon went back to the rear compound together. As expected, Li Chiao-erh asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for the money and paid seven taels of silver for the slave girl. She changed her name to Hsia-hua and employed her in her quarters. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment and speak of something else.
Let us now return to the story of how Lai-pao and Wu Tien-en escorted the shipment of birthday gifts to the capital. From the time they set out from Ch'ing-ho district, all along the way:
Every morning they took to the purple road;
Each evening they tramped the red dust.
When hungry they ate, when thirsty they drank;
Stopping by night and traveling by day.[12]
It was the time of the greatest heat, when:
The weather is steaming hot,
Melting rock and liquefying metal,
and travelers find it extremely rough going.
To make a long story short, one day they arrived outside the Myriad Years Gate of the Eastern Capital and sought out an inn at which to take lodgings for the night. The next day, bearing the consignment of birthday gifts with which they had been entrusted, they proceeded straight to the gate of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's mansion by the Heavenly River Bridge, where they paused to reconnoiter. Lai-pao told the manager, Wu Tien-en, to take charge of the gifts, while he, himself, donned his black livery and proceeded to salute the gatekeeper with a bow.
"Where do you come from?" the gatekeeper asked.
"We are servants of the Honourable Hsi-men Ch'ing of Ch'ing-ho district in Shantung," Lai-pao replied, "and have come to present birthday gifts to His Honour."
"You lousy dead duck of a convict!" the gatekeeper railed at him. "You may make much of your Honourable 'Eastgate' or Honourable 'Westgate'[13] where you come from. But at the present time, His Honour, our master, is:
Under but one man, and
Above a myriad men.[14]
No matter whether it be one of the:
Three dukes or eight ministers;
or whether it be a:
Noble scion or royal princeling;[15]
who would dare to use such presumptuous language before His Honour's mansion? Stand back, and make it snappy!"
Among the gatekeepers there was one who recognized Lai-pao and placated him, saying. "This is a newly appointed gatekeeper who has only been on the job a few days. He didn't recognize you. Don't take offense. If you want an audience with His Honour, wait until I ask Uncle Chai Ch'ien to come out and see you."
Lai-pao then reached into his sleeve, pulled out a packet of silver weighing one tael, and gave it to the man.
"That's not necessary as far as I'm concerned," the man said. "But add an equal amount and give it to these two functionaries. You've got to make allowances for them."
Lai-pao hastily produced three packets of silver, one tael for each, and distributed them accordingly. Only then did the original gatekeeper show something like a smile.
"Since you have come from Ch'ing-ho district," he said, "just wait a little, and I'll take you in first to see the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien. His Honour has just returned from burning incense at the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity[16] and is taking a nap in his studio."
It was some time before the majordomo, Chai Ch'ien, appeared. He was wearing sandals, white socks, and a long black silk Taoist robe.
As soon as Lai-pao saw him, he kowtowed, and Majordomo Chai returned his salutation, saying, "Your efforts on a former occasion are appreciated, and now you have come to present birthday gifts to His Honour."
Lai-pao handed him a sealed document and, after a servant had presented two bolts of Nanking silk and thirty taels of silver, said, "My master, Hsi-men Ch'ing, sends his respects to Master Chai.
Having nothing suitable to express his feelings,
he offers these paltry gifts for Master Chai to dispense as he sees fit. On a former occasion, in connection with the Wang Ssu-feng affair, he is deeply appreciative of Master Chai's efforts."
"These gifts," said Chai Ch'ien, "I really ought not to accept. But, enough! Enough! I will provisionally accept them."
Lai-pao also handed him the list of birthday presents for the grand preceptor.
After perusing it, he returned it to Lai-pao, telling him, "Have the gifts carried in and wait inside the second inner gate."
It so happened that on the west side of the courtyard inside the second inner gate there was an eighteen-foot-wide structure, situated with its back to the south and its front facing north, where miscellaneous persons and those who came and went on errands were entertained with tea while they waited. In no time at all a young pageboy brought out two cups of tea and gave them to Lai-pao and manager Wu Tien-en to drink.
In a short while, the grand preceptor, Ts'ai Ching himself, came into the reception hall. Chai Ch'ien first reported the situation to the grand preceptor, after which the latter ordered Lai-pao and Manager Wu to present themselves, and the two of them knelt down below the dais. Chai Ch'ien first handed up the list of birthday presents for the grand preceptor to peruse, while Lai-pao and Manager Wu made a formal presentation of the gifts. Behold:
Blazing yellow,
Gold pitchers and jade cups;
Glittering silver,
Enchased immortal figurines.
Created by skilled craftsmen, they cost much expenditure of effort;
Wrought by deft artificers, they are seldom seen among mankind.
Brocaded python robes,
Whose variegated colours dazzle the eye.
Heavy Nanking silks,
The golds and greens of which blend their hues.
The finest Yang-kao vintage from Fen-chou,
Encrusted with its authenticating seals.
Exotic fruits and seasonal rarities,
Piled high in platters and boxes.
How could he help but be pleased?[17]
"As for these gifts," he said, "It really wouldn't be right to accept them. You had better take them back with you."
This threw Lai-pao and his companion into such a state of consternation that they kowtowed below the dais, saying, "Our master, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Having no other way to pay his respects,[18]
proffers these:
Paltry and insignificant gifts,[19]
to His Honour for him to dispense as he sees fit."
"If that is the case," said the grand preceptor, "let my attendants take possession of them."
The attendants and waiting men to either side then proceeded to remove all the presents and put them away.
The grand preceptor further went on to say, "The other day, in connection with that matter of the merchant Wang Ssu-feng in Ts'ang-chou, I have already sent someone to deliver a letter about the case to your grand coordinator, Hou Meng. Has he acted on the requested favour or not?"
"As a result of Your Honour's celestial grace," Lai-pao replied, "your letter no sooner arrived than the salt merchants involved were all taken before the Salt Distribution Commission, had their tallies returned to them, and were duly released."
The grand preceptor then turned to Lai-pao and said, "The presents I have provisionally accepted. But I have repeatedly benefited from your master's efforts on my behalf:
Without having anything to offer in return.
What am I to do? Does your master hold any post or commission?"
"My master," said Lai-pao, "is but:
A humble villager.
What post or commission could he hold?"
"So he holds no post or commission," said the grand preceptor. "Yesterday the emperor happened to consign several blank orders of appointment[20] to me. If I were to appoint your master to the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, in order to fill the vacancy left by the promotion of Assistant Judicial Commissioner Ho Chin, how would that be?"
Lai-pao hastily kowtowed in thanks, saying:
"His obligations to you are so great,
that even if my master and his entire household should have:
Their heads pulverized and their bodies dismembered,[21]
They could hardly hope to repay you."
Thereupon, the grand preceptor directed an attendant clerk to bring in his writing desk and forthwith signed and sealed a blank order of appointment, filling in Hsi-men Ch'ing's name, and designating him a battalion vice-commander in the Left Guard of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, and concurrently, assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission.
Turning to Lai-pao, the grand preceptor said, "The two of you have gone to great pains in delivering these birthday gifts to me."

He then went on to ask, "What is the relationship to you of the person kneeling behind you?"
Lai-pao was about to report that he was an employee, when Manager Wu stepped forward and said, "I am Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law. My name is Wu Tien-en."
"So you are Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law," the grand preceptor said. "You look to me to have a decent enough demeanor."
Then he directed an attendant clerk to bring him an order of appointment, and said, "I'll appoint you to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station. You ought to be able to handle that."
Wu Tien-en was so flustered by this that he proceeded to:
Kowtow as though he were pounding garlic.[22]
The grand preceptor then took up another order of appointment and filled in Lai-pao's name, appointing him as a commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün.[23]
Both of them kowtowed in gratitude and took possession of their orders of appointment.
The grand preceptor instructed them, "Tomorrow morning you must report to the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War in order to register your names, receive your credentials, and learn the deadlines by which you must report for duty in order to carry out your commissions."[24]
He also instructed Chai Ch'ien, "See that they are entertained with food and wine in the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, and get ten taels of silver to give the two of them for their expenses on the road."
But no more of this.
Gentle reader take note: At that time, during the reign of emperor Huitsung:
The empire was badly governed;
Wicked ministers held positions of power,[25]
Slanderers and sycophants filled the court.[26]
The four wicked ministers, Kao Ch'iu, Yang Chien, T'ung Kuan, and Ts'ai Ching, presided at court:
Selling offices and bartering justice,[27]
Flagrantly trafficking in bribes;[28]
Promoting officials with scales in hand,
Pointing to the post and demanding the price.
Those who resorted to:
Truckling and insinuation,
Rapidly rose to high position.
Those who were:
Worthy, able, honest, and straightforward,
Went for years without appointment.
As a result:
Public mores deteriorated.
Venal officials and corrupt functionaries,
Overspread the entire empire.
The burdens of corvee and taxation were heavy,
The people were impoverished and bandits arose.
The empire was ripe for revolt.[29]
Solely because the wicked and sycophantic occupied positions of power,
It was only appropriate that the Central Plain should become soaked in blood.[30]
Chai Ch'ien then proceeded to invite Lai-pao and Manager Wu into an antechamber to be entertained. From the kitchen there appeared a complete array of soups, dishes, and savories, in:
Large platters and large bowls;
The meat as rich as flower cakes,[31]
The wine as lustrous as amber.
After they had eaten their fill, Chai Ch'ien turned to Lai-pao and said, "There is something that I would like to request your master to take care of for me but I don't know if he would be willing to undertake it or not."
"How can you talk that way, Master Chai?" said Lai-pao. "In view of the way you have looked after my master's interests in dealing with His Honour, no matter what you might ask, you have but to command, and he will:
Not fail to comply with your orders."
"There is no reason for me to deceive you," said Chai Ch'ien. "In my attendance on His Honour, day in and day out, I have but the single person of my wife to solace me. I am approaching forty years of age, constantly suffer from a variety of ailments, and have not been able to have any children. In forwarding my request to your master, just ask him if there should happen to be any healthy young girls in your neighbourhood, around fourteen or fifteen years old, if he could seek one out and send her to me. For whatever cost this may incur, I will see that he is fully remunerated."
Thereupon, he sealed up a return present and a reply for Hsi-men Ch'ing and entrusted them to Lai-pao, also presenting the two of them with five taels of silver for their expenses on the road.
Lai-pao repeatedly refused to accept this gratuity, saying, "Just now His Honour has already rewarded us. You had better take this back, Master Chai."
"That was His Honour's business," said Chai Ch'ien, "while this is mine. There is no need for you to refuse."
When they had finished eating and drinking, Chai Ch'ien said, "I'll send a functionary from our staff to accompany you to your lodgings and facilitate your visit to the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War tomorrow morning, to register your names, receive your credentials, and get started on your way. That will save you the need to go back and forth on the road in order to return here tomorrow. On receipt of my instructions, the ministries will not dare to delay in issuing your documents."
Thereupon, he summoned a functionary named Li Chung-yu and told him, "You accompany these two gentlemen tomorrow when they go to the ministries to register their names and receive their credentials, and then report back to me."
That functionary, along with Lai-pao and Wu Tien-en, then said goodbye, went out the gate of the mansion, and proceeded to the vicinity of Heavenly River Bridge, to a tavern that sold distilled spirits, in order to have a chat. After treating him to wine and food, Lai-pao gave Li Chung-yu three taels of silver and arranged with him that, early the next morning, he should take them first to the Ministry of Personnel and then to the Ministry of War, to register their names and receive their credentials.
On hearing that they came from His Honour the grand preceptor's mansion, who would have dared to be dilatory, or refuse to:
Act upon it even in defiance of the law?
Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Imperial Insignia Guard, promptly applied his seal, signed the authorizing documents, and transmitted them to the heads of the appropriate offices, thereby appointing Lai-pao to serve on the staff of the Princely Establishment of the Prince of Yün in Shantung. He also sent a calling card in reply to Majordomo Chai Ch'ien.
In less than two days, everything necessary had been taken care of, so they hired mounts and set out that very day to return to Ch'ing-ho district and report the good news. Truly:
Wealth and distinction are only to be gained by guile and craft;
Success and fame are utterly dependent on Teng T'ung's money.[32]
To resume our story, one day, during the dog days of summer, when the weather was extremely hot, the members of the Hsi-men family gathered in the great summerhouse, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, in order to enjoy the lotus blossoms, escape the heat, and drink wine together. Wu Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the places of honour, the various concubines and Hsi-men Ta-chieh arranged themselves on the two sides, and Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yu-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, the four household musicians, stood in attendance to play their instruments and sing. What were the revels like that day? Behold:
Urns are planted with green shrubs,
Vases are studded with red blossoms.
Portieres of beaded crystal furl their "shrimps' whiskers."
Screens of inlaid mica display their peacocks' tails.
Platters are piled with unicorn flesh;
Smiling beauties proffer goblets of iridescent hue.
Basins harbour submerged iced peaches;
Lovely women raise on high beakers made of chrysoprase.
Dainties are prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits are provided just in season.
Pipes and strings accompany the songs,
Producing a surge of pure melody and lovely harmony.
Clad in silks and decked with jewelry,
There stand two rows of dancing girls and singing boys.
During the feast the red ivory inlays of the clappers resound,
The entire surface of the dancing skirts is comprised of brocade.
Thus does one dissipate the idle days within the Taoist's gourd;[33]
Journeying beyond the corporeal realm in the universe of the drunk.[34]
As Hsi-men Ch'ing's wife and concubines were enjoying their wine, it was noticed that Li P'ing-erh was absent.
Turning to Hsiu-ch'un, Yüeh-niang asked, "What has your mistress returned to her room for? Why doesn't she come and drink wine with the rest of us?"
"My mistress is suffering from pains in the abdomen," Hsiu-ch'un replied. "She's sprawled out in her room at the moment but will be here shortly."
"Why don't you quickly go and speak to her?" said Yüeh-niang. "Tell her not to sprawl about that way but come and sit down with us properly, and listen to the singing for a while."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yüeh-niang, "What's up?" and she replied, "Sister Li has suddenly developed abdominal pains and is lying down in her room. I've just sent her junior maidservant to ask her to join us."
Turning then to Yü-lou, she said, "Sister Li must be in the last month of her term. I fear it may be a miscarriage."
"Elder Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "how could she be due in this month? My guess is it will be an eighth-month child. It's early days yet."
"If it's still too early," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "send a maidservant to invite the Sixth Lady to come and listen to the singing."
Before long, Li P'ing-erh duly made her appearance among them.
"I fear you've caught a chill of some kind," Yüeh-niang said to her. "Have a cup of hot wine and I'm sure you'll feel better."
Before long, the cups in front of each of them were filled with wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Ch'un-mei, "Sing the song suite that begins with the words:

Everyone fears the days of summer, for us."

Ch'un-mei and the other members of the quartet, after seeing to it that:
The bridges on the psaltery were ranged like wild geese,

And:

The silken strings of the mandola were properly tuned,
Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,[35]

and proceeded to sing the song suite beginning with the tune "A Single Missive," the first line of which is:
Everyone fears the days of summer,[36]
But I love the glory of burning days and summer heat.
Wherever one looks there are things to celebrate.
Bamboo shoots become stalks, sunflowers burst into bloom;
Clouds soar into strangely shaped peaks by the thousands and ten thousands;
Pomegranates produce clusters of three or four red-capped blossoms;
The cicadas are clamorous,
The rain has just stopped,
From the green grass around the pond, frogs are heard everywhere.
With nothing on our minds,
Who is our equal?
From time to time we glimpse a pair of swallows darting about the curtains."
CHORUS
"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,' and exchange mutual toasts."

TO THE TUNE "BLACK SILK ROBE"

"In the twinkling of an eye it is the Dragon Boat Festival.
Because of the genial weather, one is not too aware of the summer heat.
When it is appropriate to sing lustily, one should sing lustily,
Don't let the fine days and lovely scenery go unappreciated.
Having just experienced the joys of the nuptial chamber,
We try tugging together on the gaudy ropes of the swing.

Enjoying calamus wine and festival *tsung-tzu*.[14]
We feast and drink together.
There is no reason one should not choose to pick the fruit from the branches."
CHORUS
"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,' and exchange mutual toasts."

TO THE TUNE "A SPLENDID CALABASH"

"All of a sudden we perceive the scent of hidden blossoms.
A fragrant breeze ruffles the lotuses in the pond.
We watch the mandarin ducks sport in the water, their necks entwined.
Coming this way and going that way,
They startle the frolicking fish into surfacing in the azure waves.
From the vantage point of a waterside retreat,
We observe the lotus gatherers singing their lotus-gathering songs."
CHORUS
"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,' and exchange mutual toasts."
TO THE TUNE "MUSIC CALMS THE SPIRIT"
"In the evening, having bathed,
We enjoy the breeze, gaze at the moon, and lightly pluck the *p'i-p'a*.
Beauties can be heard laughing responsively behind gauze windows.
From time to time, one can hear their whispered endearments.
The word is that it will be a fine night,
Much cooler than the night before.
We might as well enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Inebriated among the flowers,
The taste of the wine is alluring.
What need is there for punkahs with flagon at hand?"
CHORUS
"In this cool pavilion, you and I,
Alternately pour out 'sunset clouds,' and exchange mutual toasts."
CODA
"Laughing, we enter the bedstead with gauze netting.
In this breezy compartment and cool chamber, let us linger.
Where jade bones and icy flesh are concerned, anything goes."
etc., etc.
Li P'ing-erh had put in an appearance at the party but her brows were knit, and without even waiting till the song suite was finished, she returned to her room. Though Yüeh-niang was listening to the lyrics of the songs, she was worried about her and sent Hsiao-yü to her quarters to see how she was.
When she returned, she reported, "The Sixth Lady is suffering from abdominal pains and is writhing about on her k'ang."
Yüeh-niang exclaimed in consternation, "I said that her time must have come but Sister Six here insisted that it was too early for that. Why don't you call in a pageboy and send him to fetch a midwife as quickly as possible?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately ordered Lai-an, "Run like the wind and go fetch Midwife Ts'ai."
Thereupon, the wine-drinking came to a halt, and they all went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to ask after her.
"Sister Li, how do you feel inside?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"First Lady," Li P'ing-erh replied, "in both my chest cavity and my lower abdomen I have a painful sensation of downward pressure."
"You ought to sit up," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't lie down any more. I'm afraid you might injure the fetus by writhing about that way. We've sent for the midwife, and she should be here any minute now."
In a little while, Li P'ing-erh's birth pangs gradually became more severe, and Yüeh-niang demanded to know, "Whoever was sent after the midwife, that she hasn't shown up by this time?"
"Father ordered Lai-an to go," said Tai-an.
"You jailbird!" Yüeh-niang cursed at him. "Why don't you get a move on yourself, and go meet them? It was absolutely senseless to send that child of a slave on such an errand. He doesn't know what's urgent and what isn't."
"Quickly, get on a mule and go after them," Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an.
"It's a matter of fiery urgency," said Yüeh-niang, "and you handle it like any ordinary affair:
Just as slow and easy as you please."
Now P'an Chin-lien, on seeing that Li P'ing-erh was about to give birth to a child, could not help being somewhat sore at heart. After observing the goings on in Li P'ing-erh's quarters for a while, she pulled Meng Yü-lou outside with her, and the two of them stood by a pillar under the eaves of the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, to get a breath of fresh air and have a chat.
"Ai ya-ya!" she exclaimed. "On top of everything else, when it's as hot as it is, to crowd a whole roomful of people in there. It's not as though a child were being born but as if they all want to see an elephant lay an egg."
After some time, who should they see coming through the gate but Midwife Ts'ai, who approached the group and asked, "Which of you is the mistress of the house?"
"This is the First Lady," said Li Chiao-erh, at which Midwife Ts'ai prostrated herself and performed the kowtow.
"We're imposing on you, Granny," said Yüeh-niang, "but why has it taken you so long to get here?"
"Listen to me, and I'll tell you all about it," said Midwife Ts'ai:
I'm a midwife whose surname is Ts'ai,
Whose two feet can move really fast.
Bedecked with strange green and queer red,
Whatever fret I've got on, it's awry.
My wire-inlaid earrings shine bright,
My yellow kerchief is fixed with a pin.
On arrival, I demand a tip wrapped in red,
Once seated, I expect good entertainment.
Be my client a spoiled girl from a noble house,
An imperial relative, or the mother of an emperor;
She'll have to let me examine her as I like,
Strip off her clothes and handle her at will.
A breech birth will require a cesarean,
Difficult deliveries call for rough handling.
Whether it be the umbilical cord or the placenta,
If need be, I may have to tear it with my hands.
If the child live, I attend the third day lustration;[37]
If it should die, I clear out as fast as I can.
For these reasons, my patrons are numerous,
So, when called for, I'm not to be found."
"That's enough of your idle chatter," said Yüeh-niang. "Be so good as to take a look at this lady, who's about to bear a child."
Midwife Ts'ai approached the bed, felt Li P'ing-erh's body with her hands, and announced, "Her time has come." She then went on to ask, "First Lady, do you have on hand the swaddling clothes and absorbent grass paper that will be needed?"
"I do," replied Yüeh-niang, who then instructed Hsiao-yü, "Quickly now, go to my room and fetch them."
To resume our story, when Meng Yü-lou saw that the midwife had arrived, she said to Chin-lien, "Midwife Ts'ai has come. Why don't we go into the room and see what's going on?"
Chin-lien, on the one hand, refused to budge, and on the other, said, "If you want to watch, go ahead; but, as for me, I don't want to see it. She's the sister with a child, so she's in favour. Why shouldn't people want to see her?
"A while ago, when I made the mistake of remarking that it seemed to me her child wasn't due this month, and probably wouldn't be until the eighth month, I got publicly chastised for it by Elder Sister. It seems to me that I really didn't deserve anything like that, and it's been bothering me ever since."
"I, too, thought it would be a sixth-month child," said Yü-lou.
"Now you're talking nonsense, too," said Chin-lien. "Let me work it out for you. She came here in the eighth month of last year. And she wasn't any:
Chaste chrysanthemum of a virgin,[38]
either. The child could have been:
Conceived at an earlier time,
Only to be born in our house.
As a remarried wife, there's no knowing how many men she may have been involved with. Moreover, it takes a month or two for the fetus to develop. Even if you assume it to be a child belonging to our family, and that I spoke incorrectly; if it had been an eighth-month child, there might have been a semblance of our family in it. But if it is a sixth-month child, it's a case of:
Stepping on a low stool to paste up an effigy of the Spirit of the Perilous Paths;
You'll end up falling a hat's-height too short.[39]
Once it has strayed out of familiar territory,
Where can you go to look for the missing calf?"[40]
As they were talking, whom should they see but Hsiao-yü, carrying the absorbent grass paper, swaddling clothes, and a little sleeping mat out from the rear compound.
Meng Yü-lou said, "These are things that Elder Sister has prepared for her own use when she is brought to bed with a child, sooner or later, herself. She is letting them be used today in response to the emergency."
"One of them is the legitimate wife," said Chin-lien, "and the other is merely a concubine. But it seems that, in the future, so long as it's a childbearing competition they're engaged in, though neither one should produce a satisfactory baby, any piecemeal excuse for one will do. Even if my case should be like that of:
The purchased hen who doesn't lay eggs;
do you mean to say he'll simply kill me?"
"In any case," she went on to say, "No matter whether:
Things land right side up or upside down,[41]
one oughtn't to make the mistake of:
The dog who bites the inflated bladder;
Only to find his excitement deflated."[42]
"What kind of talk is that, Fifth Sister?" said Meng Yü-lou.
After that, whenever she saw that Chin-lien was blurting things out:
Without any consideration for the consequences,
she simply lowered her head, fiddled with her skirt, and declined to say anything in reply.
P'an Chin-lien leaned against the courtyard pillar with one hand, and stood with her foot resting on the raised threshold, cracking melon seeds with her teeth.
What should they see at this point but Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound, who had heard that Li P'ing-erh was in the process of bearing a child and had come running up in a state of obvious agitation:
Stumbling at every step,[43]
to see what was happening. Carelessly, in the dark shadow of the doorway, she tripped over the edge of the stylobate and nearly came a cropper.
Chin-lien, on seeing this, said to Yü-lou, "Just look at that ingratiating slavey of a concubine! You'd better take it easy! What are you in such a hurry to risk your life for? If you had really come a cropper by tripping up in the shadow there and had broken a tooth, it would cost a pretty penny. Sister, you're like:
The radish peddler who tags along after the salt vendor: forever horning in where you don't belong.[44]
If you ever bear a child yourself, I suppose they'll reward you, concubine that you are, with the silk hat of an official."
After some time, from inside the room they heard:
The sound of a gurgling cry,[45]
and knew that the baby had been born.
"Tell the head of the household," announced Midwife Ts'ai, "to prepare an appropriate gratuity. She has given birth to a boy."

When Wu Yüeh-niang reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he hastily washed his hands:
Lit a full burner of incense,[46]
and made a vow, before Heaven and Earth and the tablets of his ancestors, to sponsor an elaborate performance, of one hundred and twenty degrees, of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, in order to pray for:
The safety of mother and child,
A fortunate parturition,[47] and
An untroubled accouchement.[48]
Now P'an Chin-lien, realizing that the birth of the child was resulting in the:
Jollification of the entire family who were:
All of a heap with excitement,
only became angrier than ever. Taking herself off to her own room, she closed the door, lay down on her bed, and wept.
At the time it was the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the sixth year of the Cheng-ho reign period.[49] Truly:
One may find things less than satisfactory eight or nine times out of ten;
But it is seldom wise to tell anyone about even two or three of them.
Midwife Ts'ai took charge of the baby, biting off it's umbilical cord, and burying the placenta. She then decocted a "heart stabilizing potion"[50] for Li P'ing-erh to take and saw to it that the baby was comfortable. Yüeh-niang invited the midwife into the rear compound and entertained her with food and wine. When she was about to leave, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a single ingot of silver weighing five taels and also promised her a bolt of satin if she would come and preside at the third-day lustration ceremony. Midwife Ts'ai went out the gate with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.
That day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came into the room and first saw the armful of baby flesh, with its very fair complexion, he was as pleased as could be. The whole household was delighted. That night he slept in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, in the room that had the bed in it, and constantly came over to the room with the k'ang, where the mother and child were, in order to see the baby.
The next day, before daylight, he got up early and sent off pageboys to deliver ten square boxes of celebratory noodles to his relatives, neighbours, and friends. When Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta heard that a son had been born to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and that he had sent celebratory noodles to them, they hastened:
Covering two steps with every one,[51]
to come and offer their congratulations. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to have some noodles with him in the summerhouse.
He had no sooner seen them on their way and was busy in the reception hall, about to send a pageboy for a go-between in order to locate a wet nurse to suckle the child, when Auntie Hsüeh suddenly showed up with a wet nurse in tow.
It so happened that she was a wife, of humble social origin, twenty-nine years old, who had just lost a child, less than a month before. Her husband was a soldier and couldn't make a go of it. Fearing that if he went on campaign there would be no one to support her, he had decided to sell her and was only asking six taels of silver.
When Yüeh-niang saw that she seemed well-favoured enough, she talked it over with Hsi-men Ch'ing, weighed out six taels of silver, and retained her services. She gave her the name Ju-i, or As You Like It, and assigned her the task of caring for the baby and suckling him, early and late.
Old Mother Feng was also sent for, to look after the needs of the lying-in room, while Li P'ing-erh recuperated from childbirth. She was given five mace of silver per month to take care of the laundry.
The household had been in an uproar all day, when P'ing-an suddenly announced that Lai-pao and Manager Wu had returned from the Eastern Capital and were now dismounting at the front gate. Before long, the two of them came inside and, on seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing, congratulated him.
"What is there to be congratulated about?"[52]
asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The two men then gave a full account, from beginning to end, of how they had arrived in the Eastern Capital, obtained an interview with Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, and presented the gifts to him.
"When His Honour saw the gifts, he was very pleased," reported Lai-pao. "He said, 'I have repeatedly been the recipient of your master's munificence:
Without having any means of repaying him.'
He then asked if your ancestors had held any appointments, and I said, 'He is but:
A humble villager,
who doesn't hold a commission of any kind.'
"His Honour the grand preceptor then said that the emperor had consigned several blank orders of appointment to him, and that he would assign one of them to you. So he filled in your name, designating you as a battalion vice-commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, and appointing you to the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, in order to fill the vacancy left by the promotion of Assistant Judicial Commissioner Ho Chin. He then appointed your servant to the post of commandant of the Iron Bell Guard, to serve on the staff of the Prince of Yün, and appointed Manager Wu to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station."
Thereupon, he took out the three uniformly signed and sealed orders of appointment, together with the authorizing credentials from the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War, and the patent of nobility for his wife, and placed them on the table for Hsi-men Ch'ing to see.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that these documents were stamped with numerous seals, indicating imperial authorization according to precedent,[53] and that he really had been appointed to the position of battalion vice-commander, before he knew it:
Joy manifested itself about his temples and between his brows;
Delight spread itself across his cheeks and smiling face.
Picking up the imperial decrees in his hand, and taking them back to the rear compound to show to Wu Yüeh-niang and the other members of the family, he said, "His Honour the grand preceptor has favoured me with an appointment to the position of battalion vice-commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard that carries with it the title of grand master of the fifth rank. This entitles you to receive a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, to ride in a carriage embellished with seven aromatic spices, and to be addressed by the honourific title of lady. He also concurrently appointed Manager Wu to the post of station master of the Ch'ing-ho Postal Relay Station, and Lai-pao to the post of commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün.
"When Immortal Wu physiognomized me he concluded that I would 'not fail to wear the silk hat of an official,' and would enjoy 'an ascent to the clouds from the level ground,' and today those predictions have come true. In hardly half a month both of these happy events have come to pass."
Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "This baby boy that Sister Li has just borne is certainly starting out on a firm footing. At the lustration ceremony on the third day, when we choose a name for him, let's call him Kuan-ko, or Official Son, in commemoration of the occasion."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished showing the documents to Yüeh-niang, Lai-pao came in, kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and the rest, and talked to them for a while.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Tomorrow morning, take the documents to the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission to show to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and have Manager Wu deliver his documents to the district yamen."
Lai-pao then took his leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing and went home.
The following day, by the time the third-day lustration ceremony was completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing's relatives, neighbours, and friends all knew that his Sixth Lady had given birth to a boy, and that, before three days were out, he had had the good fortune to see:
Officialdom and emolument descend upon his gate,
in the form of an appointment, out of the blue, to the post of battalion vice-commander. Nor did anyone fail to try his best to curry favour with him by bearing gifts and offering congratulations.
People come and people go,[54]
All day long, without ceasing.[55]
As the saying goes:
When fortune comes, who does not come;
When fortune does not come, who comes?
Truly:
When fortune comes, even the crudest iron looks shiny;
When luck recedes, even the truest gold lacks luster.

After their bath, Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian went to sleep. Chunmei settled herself under the eaves outside their room and busied herself making shoes. After a while Qintong came to the door in the corner, looking about him as though he were in search of someone. "What do you want?" Chunmei said. The boy looked at Qiuju who was kneeling in the courtyard with a piece of stone balanced on her head, and, instead of answering, pointed to the maid. Chunmei scolded him.
"What do you want, you young rascal? Why do you wave your hands about like that?"
Qintong did not stop laughing for a long time but at last he told her that Zhang An, the grave keeper, had called to see Ximen Qing.
"Oh," Chunmei said, "only Zhang An! And you make as much fuss as if it were a ghost. Don't make such a noise. They are both asleep, and, if you wake them up, there will be trouble. Tell Zhang An to wait."
The boy did as he was told but, after waiting a long time, he came again to look in at the corner gate and asked Chunmei whether his master was not yet up.
"You little rogue," the maid cried, "you frightened me, rushing in suddenly like that. It's nothing but a trifle, yet you dash about like a homeless spirit."
"Zhang An wants to see Master but he has to go to town too, and he's afraid he'll be too late."
"Well, they're both sound asleep, and I dare not wake them. Tell Zhang An to wait, and, if he is too late today, he must wait until tomorrow."
At that moment Ximen Qing woke up, and, hearing voices, called out to ask Chunmei who was there. The girl told him. "I will get up," Ximen said. "Let me have my clothes." When Chunmei had brought the clothes, Pan Jinlian asked what Zhang An had come about.
"The other day," Ximen said, "he came to tell me that the widow Zhao, who owns the property next to our family graves, is anxious to sell it. She asks three hundred taels and I am prepared to give two hundred and fifty, so I told Zhang An to go and talk the matter over with her. There is a spring on the land with four places where water can be drawn. If I buy the place, I shall join it up with our own and build a fair-sized arbour and a hall. I shall make an artificial mound, lay out gardens, put a cover over the well, and clear a space for practicing archery. I may make a ball ground where we can play when we feel like it. It will cost me quite a sum of money to do all I am thinking of doing."
"Buy it by all means," Jinlian said, "then we shall be able to have some fun when we go to visit our graves."
When Ximen Qing had gone to the outer court to see Zhang An, Jinlian got up, powdered her face and dressed her hair, and went to the courtyard to beat Qiuju. Chunmei went to bring Qintong with a rod.
"When I told you to bring your master some wine," Jinlian said to the maid, "why did you bring cold wine? One would think there was no discipline in the house at all. When I tell you to do anything, you stand there and argue, as brazen-faced as you can be.
"Give her twenty strokes," she cried to Qintong, "as hard as you can."
The boy had given the poor maid ten strokes when, fortunately, Li Ping'er came. With a smile, she bade him stop, and Qiuju was spared the ten remaining blows. Jinlian told her to kowtow to Li Ping'er, and then sent her to the kitchen.
"Old mother Pan," Li Ping'er said, "has come with a maid about fifteen years old, and our second sister has bought her for seven taels to wait upon her. She would like you to go and see her."
Together, they went off to the back court. Ximen Qing had given Li Jiao'er the money to buy a maid, who was given the name of Xiahua.
Laibao and Master Wu had set off upon their journey with the birthday presents. The weather was so hot that it was not an easy one. They ate when they were hungry, and when they were thirsty they drank, and so, after some days, came to the Eastern Capital. There they put up at an inn by the Gate of Ten Thousand Blessings. The next day they made ready their chests of presents and went straight to the Bridge of the Milky Way and the palace of the Imperial Tutor. Laibao, who had dressed himself in a suit of black clothes, asked Wu to look after the presents and went himself to the gate. He made a reverence to the gatekeeper who asked him whence he came.
"I am one of the household of Master Ximen who lives at Qinghe in Shandong. I have come with presents for the birthday of the venerable Imperial Tutor."
The gatekeeper upbraided him. "You scoundrelly rogue! What is Master Ximen to me, or Master Dongmen either? Let me tell you that my venerable lord has but one superior. All other men are far beneath him. I don't care what a man's position is. He may be a duke or a prince but when he comes here, he does not dare to flaunt himself as you have done. Stand back, fellow!"
Fortunately, among the officers who were standing by, there was one who knew Laibao, and he came up and smoothed the matter over.
"Don't let this disturb you," he said to Laibao. "This gentleman has only just come here and he does not know you. Wait a few moments and I will ask the Comptroller, Master Zhai, to come and see you."
Laibao took a tael of silver from his sleeve and gave it to the officer.
"Really, there is no need for this," the officer said, accepting it, "but if I may make a suggestion, you might offer something to these other two gentlemen, and so you will avoid any difficulty on their part."
Laibao brought out two more taels of silver and gave them to the officers. At this, the faces of the officers became more pleasant.
"So you have come from Qinghe," the gatekeeper said. "Wait a few moments and I will take you to see Master Zhai. His Eminence has just returned from the Temple of Ether, Glorious and Indefectible, where he has been offering incense. He is resting in his study."
Some time later Zhai came. He was wearing light shoes, white socks, and a devotional robe of black silk. Laibao knelt down before him. The Comptroller greeted him, and Laibao handed over the list of the presents he had brought, while servants came forward with two rolls of Nanjing silk and thirty taels of white gold.
"My master, Ximen Qing, offers this to you with his best respects. He knows that he has nothing in any way worthy to repay your kindnesses but you may be willing to distribute these trifles among your servants. You had so much trouble over the affair of Wang the Fourth, the salt-merchant."
"I really cannot accept this present," the Comptroller said, and a little later, "Well, perhaps I must."
Laibao presented the list of gifts that his master had sent for the Imperial Tutor. When the Comptroller had examined it, he handed it back to Laibao and told him to have the presents carried to the inner courtyard and to wait there. To the west of the inner door was an antechamber where all who had business in that place were entertained. Here an attendant brought tea for Laibao and Wu. After a while Cai, the Imperial Tutor, came to the hall, and after the Comptroller had told him of their visit, Laibao and his companion were summoned. They knelt at the foot of the steps while the Comptroller gave the present list to the Imperial Tutor. Then the two men brought in the gifts, vases of shining yellow gold, cups of finest jade, figurines and the multicoloured dragon robe of ceremony. There was silk from Nanjing glimmering with green and gold. This was not all. Provisions of meat and wine had been carefully preserved, and were piled high beside fresh and seasonable fruits. The Imperial Tutor could not fail to be pleased.
"I feel quite embarrassed by such splendid presents," he said. "You must really take them away."
Laibao and Wu kowtowed and said, "Our master, Ximen Qing, knows only too well that he has no adequate means of expressing his filial devotion to your Eminence. He sends these trifles in the hope that you may at least think them not unworthy to be distributed among your attendants."
"Then I will tell my servants to remove them," said the Imperial Tutor. A host of attendants carried the presents away. "A little while ago," he said, "there was a little business about some salt merchants at Zangzhou. I think I wrote to the Governor on your behalf. Was the result satisfactory?"
"Thanks to your Eminence's gracious intervention," Laibao said, "as soon as your dispatch arrived, the whole party was set at liberty."
"Your master has been at great trouble and expense on my account," the Imperial Tutor said, "and I have no means of expressing my kindly feeling towards him. Has he any official position?"
"What position should he hold?" Laibao said. "He is only a simple countryman."
"Since he has not," the Imperial Tutor said, "I shall see that he is given an appointment as a law officer in Shandong. He shall be made Deputy Captain in He Jin's place. Only yesterday his Majesty placed a few appointments at my disposal."
Laibao kowtowed and thanked the Imperial Tutor. "I am most grateful," he said, "for your Eminence's extreme magnanimity. If all the members of my master's household should throw ashes upon their heads and dust upon their bodies, they could never repay such kindness."
The Imperial Tutor called for writing materials and filled up a blank warrant of appointment. Then he said to Laibao: "You two have brought me these presents at great inconvenience to yourselves. Who is that kneeling behind you?"
Laibao was about to say that this was his partner when Wu himself came forward and said that he was related to Ximen Qing, and that his name was Wu Dian'en.
"So you are related to Ximen Qing?" said the Imperial Tutor. "Well, you look a very respectable person." He called for another blank warrant and told Wu that he was appointing him an officer of the Imperial Post for the district of Qinghe. This made Wu so excited that, in his thanks, he beat his head upon the ground as though he were pounding garlic in a mortar. Upon another blank the Imperial Tutor inscribed the name of Laibao, appointing him tallyman at the palace of Duke Yun in Shandong. They both kowtowed and thanked his Eminence, and the documents were handed to them. They were told that the next day they must go to the Boards of War and Civil Service, that their papers might be duly registered and their credentials made out, after which they should assume their offices in due course. Finally the Imperial Tutor instructed his Comptroller to entertain the two men with food and drink, and gave each of them ten taels of silver for traveling money.
In such manner was the administration brought into disrepute during the reign of the Emperor Huizong. Faithless ministers held posts of most responsibility, and the court was besieged by sycophants and men of deceit. Worst of all were Gao, Yang, Zong and Cai. Abusing their position at Court they bartered offices and accepted bribes for setting prisoners at liberty. The bribery was utterly barefaced. Appointments were given to men by the scales, and the price demanded was according to the rank of the appointment. Pushful men and those skilled in intrigue took hold upon all the offices of greatest worth, while those who were competent, wise, capable, and honest might wait for years, and still receive nothing.
Thus social morals became corrupt. Rapacious officials and their foul underlings overran the empire. Pressgangs and forced labor weighed heavily on the people. Taxation increased, so that the people were impoverished, and bandits and thieves multiplied. The Empire was completely demoralized. So, because of these faithless ministers and men in office, the people of the Middle Kingdom were drenched with blood.

Zhai took Laibao and Wu to a room at the side of the courtyard, and there entertained them so liberally that they had as much as they could eat. He said to Laibao: "I should very much like to ask a favour of your master but I don't know whether he would care to do it or not."
"Uncle Zhai," Laibao said, "how can you say such a thing? You have done so much with his Eminence on my master's behalf that I am sure he will be only too glad to do anything you like to ask."
"I am always ready to do anything I can for him," Zhai said. "Now, I have only one wife, and I am getting on in years. My wife is always ill and she has not borne a child. What I should like to ask is this: if your master knows of a pretty girl about fifteen or sixteen years old, perhaps he will be good enough to send her to me. I will gladly pay whatever expenses he may be put to."
He gave Laibao a letter and some presents for Ximen Qing, and offered the two men each five taels of silver as traveling money. Laibao steadily refused to accept it. "We have had a present from his Eminence," he said, "so, Uncle Zhai, pray do not press this upon us."
The Comptroller insisted. "That was his Eminence's own affair," he said, "this is mine. Let us not stand too much on ceremony."
By this time they had finished their meal and Zhai told them that he would send someone to their inn who would accompany them next day to the Boards of War and Civil Service so that they might set their papers in order, and be able to start straight away without having to return to the Imperial Tutor's palace.
"The Boards will be more expeditious," he said, "if I send an order with you." He called an officer called Li Zhongyu and said to him: "Go with these two gentlemen to their respective Boards to register their appointments and secure the necessary papers. Then report to me."
Laibao and Wu Dian'en took leave of the Comptroller and left the palace with the officer. They went to a wineshop in the street near the Bridge of the Heavenly River, and there Laibao offered entertainment to Li Zhongyu, and gave him three taels of silver. They arranged that, next morning very early, they would go first to the Board of Civil Service and then to the Board of War. So indeed they did, registered their names and secured their papers, for, when the officers of these Boards knew that they had come from the Imperial Tutor's palace, they did not dare delay but quickly prepared the documents that were as quickly sealed by the responsible officer and sent down to the other part of the office. In two days everything was settled. Then Laibao and Wu Dian'en hired animals and set off as fast as they could to Qinghe, traveling day and night in their anxiety to tell the happy news.
One very hot day in the hottest part of summer, Ximen Qing was at home admiring the lotus flowers and drinking cooling wine in the great arbour. Wu Yueniang sat with him in the place of honour and the other ladies, with Ximen Dajie, sat on either side. Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang were there to sing and play for them.
The ladies were drinking together when they suddenly missed Li Ping'er. Yueniang said to her maid: "Why has your mistress gone to her room?"
"She has a pain and has gone to lie down," the maid told her.
"Go quickly," Yueniang said, "and tell her not to lie down there but to come and enjoy the music with us."
Ximen Qing asked Yueniang what she was saying, and she told him.
"Our sister is about eight months gone with child," she said to Meng Yulou, "and I don't wish her to do anything that may harm it."
Jinlian cried: "Oh, Great Sister, it is far from eight months yet." And Ximen Qing said:
"If her time is still some way off, we must send and tell her to come and listen to the music."
Soon Li Ping'er came back again. "You must not catch a chill," Yueniang said to her. "Drink a little warm wine and then you'll be all right."
Wine was poured for them all. Ximen Qing said to Chunmei: "Sing 'People All Dread the Summer Day' for me."
Chunmei and her companions had just touched the strings; they were opening their rosy lips and showing their white teeth, ready to begin: "All people...," when Li Ping'er knitted her eyebrows in pain. She did not wait for the song to be finished but went again to her room. Yueniang heard the song out but she was uneasy about Li Ping'er and ordered Xiaoyu to go to her room. When the maid came back, she said that Li Ping'er was in severe pain and rolling about on the bed.
"I was sure her time had come," Yueniang said, excitedly, "and you said it was too soon. Send a boy to fetch the midwife."
Ximen Qing ordered Ping'an to run like the wind and fetch old woman Cai. They did not stay to finish their wine but all went to the Sixth Lady's room.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "tell me how you feel."
"Great Sister, there is such a pain at the pit of my stomach and lower down that I feel as if all my insides were being dragged out of me."
"You had better get up," Yueniang urged. "Don't lie down any longer. It will not be good for the baby. I have sent for the midwife, and she will be here in a minute."
After a moment or two the pains grew worse and Yueniang asked anxiously: "Who has sent for the old woman? Why hasn't he come back?"
"Father told Laian to go," Daian said.
"You rascal," Yueniang cried. "Go and find him at once. What a silly thing to send a little slave on a business like this! Why, he doesn't know the difference between what is urgent and what is not."
"Get a mule quickly," Ximen Qing said to Daian, "and go yourself."
"Even when things are of the utmost urgency," Yueniang complained, "you go on in the same careless way."
Pan Jinlian was thoroughly annoyed when she realized that Li Ping'er was about to bear a child. She stayed in the room only a few minutes and then dragged Yulou out with her. They stood together beneath the eaves, where the breeze gave them a little coolness.
"How crowded it was in that room," Jinlian said, "it made the place so hot. Really, one would think they were watching an elephant laying galls, instead of an ordinary woman giving birth to an ordinary child."
At last Cai the midwife came. "Who is the mistress of the house?" she said.
"This is the Great Lady," Li Jiao'er said, indicating Yueniang.
The old woman knelt down and kowtowed but Yueniang told her to waste no time on ceremony. "Why have you been so long?" she said. "Kindly come and examine your patient at once."
The midwife went to the bed and carefully examined Li Ping'er. Then she said: "The time has come. Great Lady, have you got ready the paper that will be needed when the child is born?"
"Yes," Yueniang said. She sent Xiaoyu to bring what was needed.
When the midwife came, Yulou said to Jinlian: "Here is the midwife. Let us go in." But Jinlian would not. "If you wish to see," she said, "go by yourself. I don't want to have anything to do with it. She is going to have a child and she is a favoured person in consequence. I don't want to see her. I said that I did not think she had reached the time, and the Great Lady was furious with me. Whenever I think about it, it makes me wild."
"I said I thought it was the sixth month," Yulou said.
"Then you are a fool too," Jinlian said. "Let me see. It was the eighth month of last year when she first came here. She was not a virgin. She married after her husband's death and did not remain any too chaste. She may have been gotten with child two or three months before she came here. Yet they are all quite sure that this child belongs to the family. What I say is: if this really is an eighth-month baby, it may possibly bear some resemblance to our family. But if it is a sixth-month child, even if we get upon a bench to make a god, we still can't get near it by a head. But when a young animal once gets away from its native place, there's no tracing it."
As they were talking, Xiaoyu came bringing paper bandages and tiny bedclothes. "These are things the Great Lady prepared for her own use," Yulou said, "now she is giving them to the Sixth Lady."
"Oh," Jinlian said, "one is great and one is small. They seem to have a competition in this baby getting. Rather than produce nothing they would be satisfied with any bit of rubbish. I'm one of those hens that never lays an egg, yet does anybody dare to eat me? Look at them there, stretching and pulling, like a dog gnawing at a bladder. All this fuss and delight over nothing at all."
"What are you saying, Fifth Sister?" said Yulou. But Jinlian did not answer. She hung down her head and played with the ribbons on her skirt. Xue'e, who had heard that Li Ping'er was about to bear a child, came bustling over from the back court, hurrying so that she did not notice the step and nearly fell down.
"Look at that little toady," Jinlian said. "Why can't she walk decently instead of dashing along like that? She might be running for her life. If she falls down and knocks her teeth out, it will cost some money. Just because the Sixth Lady has a baby, one would imagine this wretched woman would get a ceremonial hat."
At last, the sound of a cry came to them from the room. The midwife said someone must tell the master to get ready a present for her, because the lady had borne a son. Then Yueniang took word to Ximen Qing, who quickly washed his hands and burned incense in a full burner before the shrine of Heaven and Earth and of his Ancestors, and vowed that he would offer a solemn thanksgiving of a hundred and twenty degrees, with prayers for the happiness and prosperity of mother and child, and that the birth might be without danger and accompanied by good fortune. Now that Jinlian knew that the child was born and saw everyone in the household happily engaged about the mother and the child, she became angrier still, went to her own apartments, shut the door, threw herself upon the bed, and began to sob. It was the twenty-third day of the sixth month, in the fourth year of the reign period Zhenghe. Madam Cai washed the child, cut the navel string, disposed of the after-birth, and then prepared soothing medicine for Li Ping'er. When all was done, Yueniang invited her to go to the inner court for refreshments. As she was about to go away, Ximen Qing gave her a piece of silver weighing five taels and promised that when she came again on the third day she should have a roll of silk. The old woman thanked him effusively and went away. Ximen went to see the baby. It was very dainty and white, and he was delighted with his son. The whole household was elated. He spent that night in the apartments of Li Ping'er, and it seemed as though he could not take his eyes off his son.
Before dawn he rose, had ten boxes made ready, and sent the boys to his neighbours and kinsmen with the noodles of good fortune. As soon as Ying Bojue and Xie Xida received theirs and so learned that Ximen Qing had a son and heir, they set off, taking two steps in one, to offer their congratulations. Ximen entertained them in the arbour. When they had gone, he was about to send one of the boys to find a nurse, when old woman Xue came to introduce one. This was a woman of low degree, about thirty years old, who had lost her own child not a month before. Her husband was a poor soldier who was afraid that when he went to the wars there would be no one to look after his wife. He wanted no more than six taels of silver for her. Yueniang decided that the woman was clean and asked Ximen to pay the six taels and give her the charge of the newly born child. She was called Ruyi'er. Afterwards they sent for old woman Feng to work for Li Ping'er, promising her five *qian* of silver every month, besides her clothes. They were all very busy when suddenly Ping'an came and told them that Laibao and Wu Dian'en had returned from the Eastern Capital. They were at the gate and had just dismounted. Soon they came in with the good news for Ximen Qing. When he questioned them, they told him all that had happened on their journey, and how the Imperial Tutor had given appointments not only to Ximen Qing but to themselves. Laibao produced the sealed documents that they had brought from the Boards of Civil Service and of War and laid them on the table. Ximen Qing saw that there were many seals upon the papers, and it was clear that they had come from the court. He had been made a Deputy Captain. His brow lighted up and his face beamed. He took the document to show Yueniang and the others. "The Imperial Tutor has been good enough to raise me to the position of a Deputy Captain that is an appointment of the fifth grade," he said. "So now you're a real lady and must wear the ceremonial dress of your rank." He told them also about the appointments that had been given to Laibao and Wu Dian'en. "Wu the Immortal," he said, "told us that I'd be given a hat of ceremony and have the good fortune to rise from the ground to the clouds. Not more than half a month's gone by and two of his prophecies have come true already. The Sixth Lady's this boy," he said to Yueniang, "and he seems to be a good solid lad. After his washing on the third day, we will call him Guan'ge." Laibao came in and kowtowed to Yueniang and the others. Ximen Qing told him to take the documents to Magistrate Xia the next day and told Wu to go to the town Hall. Then Laibao took leave of his master and went home. The next day was the day for the solemn washing of the child. The neighbours and relatives all heard that Ximen Qing's wife had borne him a son and that he had been raised to official rank and they came, all, to offer their congratulations. All day long, people came and went without ceasing. As the proverb says: When fortune favours a man, so do other men; but when fortune departs, his friends depart too.

## 052
## Ch'in-t'ung Conceals a Flagon after Spying on Yü-Hsiao; Hsi-men Ch'ing Holds a Feast & Drinks Celebratory Wine & Qintong Hides a Wine Pot

TO THE TUNE "Moon on the West River":

If his family be rich, the person will be distinguished;
When others meet him they are sure to yield him precedence.
Poor officials presume on the indulgence of their superiors;
Each of them acknowledging the deference due to money.
In marriage alliances he looks only for social prestige;
In business transactions he seeks merely to gain influence.
Not knowing that success and failure reside in the heart,
He relies only on what he can see before his eyes.

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Lai-pao to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and to the district yamen to deliver his credentials. At the same time he commissioned someone to make an official hat for him and summoned Tailor Chao to come to his home with four or five other tailors to take charge of measuring and cutting the fabric in order to provide him with a set of official garments. He also called in a contingent of artisans to manufacture seven or eight four-finger-wide official girdles for him, with decorative plaques made of carved openwork, mica, rhinoceros horn, "crane's crest red,"[1] tortoiseshell, fishbone, and aloeswood.[2] We will say no more, for the moment, about the goings on in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household.
To resume our story, that same day Wu Tien-en paid a visit to Ying Po-chüeh's house and repeatedly besought his aid in asking Hsi-men Ch'ing for a loan of silver to expend, both high and low, in connection with his appointment as station master.
"If I am successful in borrowing the silver," he promised Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll set aside ten taels in order to buy you a present as an expression of my gratitude, Elder Brother."
As he spoke, he got down on his knees that threw Ying Po-chüeh into such consternation that he helped him up with one hand, saying, "This is a case of:
Helping someone to accomplish his legitimate desires.[3]
The fact that His Honour saw fit to send you on this mission to the Eastern Capital that made it possible for you to benefit by the windfall of this position, is no ordinary event."
He then went on to ask, "How much will you need for present purposes?"
"There is no reason to deceive you, Elder Brother," Wu Tien-en replied.
"The situation of my household is such that I haven't a candareen to my name. In the days to come the costs of assuming office, calling upon my superiors, supplying:
The customary presentation gifts,[4]
hosting a banquet, and providing myself with appropriate clothing, horse and saddle, etc., at the very least, will come to seventy or eighty taels of silver. How am I to cope with it? Now I have drafted a promissory note but have not yet presumed to write in the amount. I hope that whatever happens, Elder Brother, you will consent to help me out by putting in a good word from the side. If I am successful:
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never dare to forget it."
Ying Po-chüeh looked over the promissory note and then said, "Brother Wu, this seventy or eighty taels of silver that you propose to borrow will not be sufficient for your needs. If you take my advice, you'll pick up a brush and write in the sum of a round hundred taels. More likely than not, out of consideration for me, he won't demand any interest from you, and you'll have enough to cover your expenses. It won't be too late to pay him back, a little at a time, in the future, after you've assumed office. As the common saying aptly puts it:
Borrowed rice will go into your pot;
Begged rice will not go into your pot.[5]
As long as you can stall him off:
Every day is another morning and afternoon.[6]
How much the more should this be true since you've done business on his behalf. These few taels of silver for you are hardly anything likely to weigh on his mind."
When Wu Tien-en heard these words, he thanked him again and again and proceeded, on the spot, to write in the sum of a hundred taels on the promissory note. Thereupon, having finished their tea, they got up together and made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate.
Ying Po-chüeh asked the gatekeeper, P'ing-an, "Is your father up yet, or not?"
"Father's already up," replied P'ing-an. "He's in the summerhouse watching the artisans who are making up official girdles for him. I'll go tell him you're here."
Thereupon, he went straight in and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ying the Second and Uncle Wu the Second are here."
"Ask them to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long the two of them found themselves inside, where they saw that there were a considerable number of tailors and artisans working away, hugger-mugger, at their tasks. Hsi-men Ch'ing, wearing an informal skullcap and a brocade robe, was sitting in the veranda with Ch'en Ching-chi, looking on as the latter wrote out his curriculum vitae in an accordion-bound album for presentation to his official superiors. When he saw the two of them, he bowed and offered them a seat.
"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh asked, "have you presented your curriculum vitae and your order of appointment yet?"
"This morning," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "I sent a servant to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission to deliver my order of appointment. I'm getting my curriculum vitae ready now but I haven't sent it to Tung-p'ing prefecture or the district yamen yet."
When he had finished speaking, the pageboy, Hua-t'ung, served them with tea. After they were done with the tea, Ying Po-chüeh said nothing about Manager Wu's business but stepped down from the veranda to take a look at the artisans as they worked on the manufacture of the official girdles.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him pick up a girdle to examine it, he played directly to the gallery, saying, "Take a good look. What do you think of these girdles I've managed to procure for myself?"
Ying Po-chüeh:
Expressing the most fulsome admiration,[7]
praised them, saying, "Who else but you, Brother, would know where to find the like? Each of them is a finer girdle than the last. They are rarely to be seen as wide and capacious as this. Regarding the rest of them, enough said; but as for this girdle with its decorative plaque of rhinoceros horn, and this one of 'crane's crest red,' you couldn't find the like in the entire metropolis, though you had the money in hand.
I am not flattering you to your face.[8]

They say that Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital, though he may possess girdles of jade and girdles of gold, does not have anything to compare to this rhinoceros horn girdle. This is the horn of the water rhinoceros, not the horn of the dry land rhinoceros. The latter is not worth anything. The horn of the water rhinoceros is called 'Heaven penetrating rhinoceros horn.'[11] If you don't believe me, bring a bowl of water, put the rhinoceros horn in it, and it will divide the water in two. This is:
A priceless treasure.[10]
Moreover, if you ignite it at night it will illuminate an area of a thousand li, and the flame will not be extinguished all night."
"Brother," he went on to ask, "how much silver did it cost you to obtain this rarity?"
"You two try to guess the price," Hsi-men Ch'ing said.
"There's no market rate for things like this," said Ying Po-chüeh. "How could we ever guess correctly?"
"I'll tell you then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This girdle comes from the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang on Main Street. Yesterday evening someone heard that I was in the market for girdles and came particularly to tell me about it. I sent Pen the Fourth back and forth several times with seventy taels of silver to try to buy this girdle from them but they insisted on holding out for a hundred taels."
"It would be hard to find one as wide and handsome as this," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Brother, when you put it on and go forth in days to come you'll cut quite a figure. Even your colleagues will covet it when they see it."
Thereupon, after fulsomely praising it for a while, he sat down.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Manager Wu and asked him, "Have you delivered your credentials or not?"
"Brother Wu has not yet delivered his credentials," Ying Po-chüeh responded. "Today he has made a point of begging me to trouble you on his behalf. Although he has benefited from your patronage in sending him to the Eastern Capital to escort the consignment of birthday presents, as a result of which he has received this appointment from the grand preceptor, so that it is just as if you had uplifted him yourself, it is also his personal good fortune. As the saying goes:
From the first rank to the ninth rank,[11]
All are the subjects of the emperor.
However, at the present time he doesn't have any money available at home. So he has besought my aid, saying, 'At present the costs of assuming office, calling upon my superiors, hosting a banquet, and providing myself with appropriate clothing, and the like, will amount to a sizable sum of silver.
One guest does not trouble two hosts.
Where am I to go to come up with it?'
"Brother, there's no help for it. Out of consideration for me, if you have any silver to spare, lend a few taels to him in order to sustain him in this exigency. If you help him out in this matter, in the future, when he has assumed his official post, he will:
Carry rings and knot grass,[12]
never daring to forget that you are his great benefactor. Aside from the fact that he is an old employee in your establishment, who is accustomed to come and go as your protege, from first to last, who knows how many officials and functionaries in:
Other cities and other prefectures,
you have helped out in similar circumstances. If you were not to do so, where would you have him go to take care of this matter?"
"Brother Wu," he went on to say, "bring out that promissory note of yours and let His Honour see it."
Wu Tien-en hastily pulled it out of his pocket and gave it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to examine. When he saw that it was made out for a loan of a hundred taels of silver, that Ying Po-chüeh was the guarantor, and that it promised to pay interest of five percent per month, Hsi-men Ch'ing took up a brush and crossed out the interest.
"Since Brother Ying the Second is acting as guarantor," he said, "it will suffice if you repay me the principal of one hundred taels in the future. I imagine you will need a sum of silver like this to negotiate things, both high and low, satisfactorily."
Thereupon, he put away the promissory note.
Just as he was about to send to the rear compound for the silver, all of a sudden, a card was delivered from Judicial Commissioner Hsia of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, who had also sent along a professional scribe for his benefit. The three categories of functionaries in the yamen had also sent copies of their curricula vitae and deputed twelve orderlies to be placed at his service. They wanted to know the date on which he intended to assume office and what his courtesy name and style were, so that his colleagues in the yamen could prepare the customary gifts when they came to offer their congratulations.
Hsi-men Ch'ing consulted Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, who determined that the stem-branch combination designating the second day of the seventh month ended with the branch *tzu* that is governed by the god Green Dragon, making it an auspicious day, and that the hour *ch'en* (8:00 A.M.) that is governed by the god Metal-bound Casket, would be an appropriate time at which to assume office.[13] He therefore sent a calling card with this information to Judicial Commissioner Hsia and rewarded the scribe with five mace of silver but there is no need to describe this in further detail.
Ying Po-chüeh and Wu Tien-en were still sitting in the summerhouse when what should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi emerging from the rear compound with the sum of a hundred taels of silver in hand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed him to give it to Manager Wu, saying, "Brother Wu, in the future if you merely return me the capital that will suffice."
Wu Tien-en accepted the silver, on the one hand, and then kowtowed in gratitude.
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I won't keep you any longer. Go take care of your business at home. But Brother Ying, here, I'll retain a while. There's something I want to talk to you about."
Wu Tien-en, holding the silver in hand, went out the gate as happy as could be.
Gentle reader take note: Later on, after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, the state of the family was such that:
Its fortunes collapsed and its influence declined.
Wu Yüeh-niang preserved a chaste widowhood and gave her maidservant Hsiao-yü to Tai-an as his wife. The household pageboy P'ing-an absconded with jewelry stolen from the pawnshop and squandered it on a pair of prostitutes in the Southern Entertainment Quarter. When he was apprehended and brought before Station Master Wu, the latter subjected him to severe finger-squeezing and flogging. coercing him into false testimony that Yüeh-niang had been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an, in order to force her to appear in court, thereby:
Requiting kindness with enmity.
But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it. Truly:
Flowers that do not bear seeds
should not be planted;
People that lack righteousness
should not be cultivated.[14]
At this juncture, Pen the Fourth, who had been sent to Tung-p'ing prefecture and the district yamen to deliver copies of Hsi-men Ch'ing's curriculum vitae, came back to report on his mission, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him to join Ying Po-chüeh and himself in keeping company with Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, for a meal.
Just as they were eating their meal, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, who had come to pay his respects. Master Hsü then got up to leave and, after a while, Ying Po-chüeh also bade his host farewell, went out the gate, and headed straight for the home of Manager Wu.
Wu Tien-en had already set aside and sealed up ten taels of silver as a guarantor's fee that he proffered to Ying Po-chüeh with both hands and then proceeded to kowtow.
Ying Po-chüeh said, "If it hadn't been for the clever way I broached the subject with him, no matter what you had done, he could never have been induced to make this loan to you. As for this hundred taels of silver he's given you, no matter how you expend it, both high and low, you won't have any need to spend it all, so you can keep half of it to defray your household expenses."
Wu Tien-en, having duly rewarded Ying Po-chüeh, provided himself with an official girdle and appropriate clothing and selected a propitious day on which to report to his superiors and assume office. But no more of this.
At the same time, the presiding magistrate of the district, Li Ta-t'ien, together with his three principal colleagues, the vice-magistrate, assistant magistrate, and docket officer, sent someone to deliver the traditional congratulatory gifts of mutton and wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Magistrate Li also sent him, along with his card, a young man to wait upon him. He was just seventeen years old and was a native of Ch'ang-shu district in Su-chou prefecture. His nickname was Little Chang Sung, [15] and he had begun his career as a "gate-boy" in the district yamen.[16] He had a naturally clear-cut appearance:
His face looked as though it were powdered,[17]
His teeth were white and his lips were red.[18]
Moreover:
He knew how to read and write,
and was good at:
Singing southern-style songs.
He was wearing a long gown of black chiffon, sandals, and white socks.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how accomplished the young man appeared to be, he was utterly delighted. He sent a card expressing his appreciation to Magistrate Li, agreed to retain the young man in his service, and changed his name to Shu-t'ung, or Book Boy. He had a complete outfit of clothes made for him, including new boots and a new hat, and did not have him accompany him when he went out on horseback but put him in charge of his studio, where he was responsible for his social correspondence, and gave him custody of the key to the garden gate.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's crony, Chu Jih-nien, also recommended a fifteen-year-old pageboy to wait on him. His name was changed to Ch'i-t'ung, or Chess Boy.[19] Every day he and Ch'in-t'ung were deputed to carry his letter case and card case and accompany him when he went out on horseback.
On the day that he assumed office, Hsi-men Ch'ing hosted a lavish banquet in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. Summonses were issued mandating the attendance of musicians from the licensed quarter, together with their file leaders and appearance monitors, to:
Play wind and percussion instruments and sing,
for the entertainment of the guests. The party in the rear hall of the yamen continued until sunset before breaking up.
Every day Hsi-men Ch'ing paraded through the streets riding on a large white horse, wearing on his head the black silk hat of an official, dressed in a round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square of variegated embroidery featuring a lion with a ruffled mane, [20] a four-finger-wide girdle with a decorative plaque of gilded aloeswood, and white-soled black boots, escorted by not less than ten orderlies who shouted to clear the way, holding aloft a large black flabellum to protect him from the sun:
Clamoring in front and crowding behind.[21]
When he came home after formally assuming office, he first went to pay his respects to his fellow officials in the prefectural and district yamens, the Regional Military Command, the office of the local military director-in-chief, and the left and right battalions of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, and only after that, to his relatives, friends, and neighbours. His public proceedings were on a gloriously lavish scale, while at home he:
Accepted presents and received cards,
All day long, without ceasing.
Truly:
On a white horse with bloodred trappings
he is newly caparisoned;[22]
Even those with no claim to relationship
insist on being related.[23]
When fortune comes, even the crudest iron
looks shiny;
When luck recedes, even the truest gold
lacks luster.
From the time that he assumed office, every day Hsi-men Ch'ing officiated in the local yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where he took his place on the bench, held roll call, and tried the cases that came before him.
Light and darkness alternate swiftly.
Before anyone knew it, the full-month celebration[24] of Li P'ing-erh's accouchement rolled around. Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and many other female relatives and neighbours all sent presents in honour of Kuan-ko's full-month celebration. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter, on learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing had been appointed to the post of assistant judicial commissioner in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and had concurrently fathered a son, also sent lavish presents and engaged sedan chairs to come and offer their congratulations.
On that day Hsi-men Ch'ing provided a feast in the great reception hall in the front compound for the entertainment of the female guests. Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all dressed up to befit the occasion and joined Yüeh-niang in the banquet area to pour the wine and hold the flagons for the female guests.
It so happens that every day when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen, on arriving at the reception hall in the front compound he would take off his formal clothes and have Shu-t'ung fold them up for him and put them in his studio, wearing only his official hat as he proceeded into the rear compound. When he got up the next morning, he would send a maidservant to the studio to get them for him.
Recently he had fixed up an antechamber on the west side of the courtyard housing the great reception hall as his studio and furnished it with a bed, desk, table, chairs, a standing screen, brushes, inkstones, a zither, books, and the like. At night Shu-t'ung would place his bedding on the footboard of the bed and sleep there. The next morning, before Hsi-men Ch'ing had appeared, he would straighten things up, sweep the studio clean, and be prepared to wait on him. Whoever's quarters Hsi-men Ch'ing might choose to spend the night in, in the morning a maidservant from those quarters would be sent out to the front compound to fetch his formal clothes for him.
What with all this:
Coming to fetch and taking away,
who would have thought that this young man who, in the first place, had begun his career as a "gate-boy" and was a likely looking lad with a naturally clear-cut appearance, and, in the second place, was given the opportunity of:
Engaging in badinage and repartee,
with the maidservants from all the quarters, should have ended up becoming familiar with them. Thereupon, he secretly struck up a flirtation with Yü-hsiao from the master suite.
One day it was one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen.
The young man had just gotten up, ignited a stick of incense on the surface of the bed in the studio, set his dressing mirror on the windowsill to do his hair, and was engaged in binding it with a red silk ribbon, when, unexpectedly, Yü-hsiao from the master suite pushed open the door and came in.
When she saw what he was doing, she said, "You lousy jailbird! Late as it is, you're still:
Painting your brows and making up your eyes.
Father will be right out as soon as he's finished eating his congee."
Shu-t'ung paid no attention but continued binding up his topknot.
"Father's clothes have been folded up," said Yü-hsiao. "Where did you put them?"
"They're lying right there at the southern end of the bed," Shu-t'ung said.
"He's not wearing that outfit today," said Yü-hsiao. "He told me to tell you that he wants to wear that jet[25] brocade round-collared robe emblazoned with a gold lame mandarin square, and the jade-coloured undergown."
"That outfit is in the clothes cabinet," said Shu-t'ung. "I put it away only yesterday, and today he wants to wear it again. Sister, open up the door of the cabinet and take it out yourself."
Yü-hsiao, however, did not proceed to get the clothes but came right up to him and watched him binding his hair.
"You crazy louse of a jailbird!" she teased him. "You're binding your hair with red ribbon just like a woman, and affecting such a bouffant hairdo over your temples too."
Then, noticing that on his undershirt of bleached Hsiang-yang ramie there were suspended a pink silk scent bag and a green silk scent bag, she asked him for one of them, saying, "Give me this pink one."
"Even someone else's prized possession you want for yourself," said Shu-t'ung.
"It's inappropriate for a boy like you to wear a pink one," said Yü-hsiao. "But it would be just right for me."

"It's a good thing that's all you want," said Shu-t'ung. "If it were a man in question, you'd hanker after him too, I suppose."
Yü-hsiao deliberately gave him a pinch on the shoulder, saying, "You lousy jailbird, you're like someone:
Reduced to peddling his effigies of the Gate Gods[26]
in a narrow passageway:
Who knows what sort of rubbish you'll come up with."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
she took hold of the two scent bags and, without bothering to untie them, tore them loose from the cords by which they were fastened, and tucked them into her sleeve.
"You're certainly no respecter of persons," protested Shu-t'ung. "You've managed to rip my girdle apart."
Yü-hsiao gave him a playful blow with her fist that provoked Shu-t'ung into responding, "Sister, stop pestering me. Wait until I've finished binding up my hair."
"Let me ask you," said Yü-hsiao, "since I haven't heard. Where's Father off to today?"
"Today," Shu-t'ung replied, "Father's going to see off the third officer in the district yamen, Assistant Magistrate Hua Ho-lu. There's to be a party hosted by Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the local imperial estates. He should get home early. This afternoon, I understand, he's arranged to meet with Uncle Ying the Second in order to pay out the silver for the purchase price of the Ch'iao family's property across the street. They'll be having a drink over there."
"You wait right here. Don't go anywhere else," said Yü-hsiao. When I come back, I'll have something to say to you."
"I understand," said Shu-t'ung.
Thereupon, having reached an understanding with him, Yü-hsiao took the clothes and went straight back to the rear compound.
In a little while, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, called for Shu-t'ung, and instructed him, "You stay at home. Don't go anywhere else. First off, I want you to write out twelve invitations, on scarlet paper, with sealed envelopes. Tomorrow, on the twenty-eighth, I'm inviting some official guests to a party to celebrate the birth of Kuan-ko. Tell Lai-hsing to purchase the provisions, engage the necessary cooks and waiters, and see that all the place settings are properly prepared. Send Tai-an with two orderlies to deliver the invitations and engage the singing girls. Let Ch'in-t'ung stay here to look after the wine for the female guests."
When he had finished with his instructions, Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and set off for his farewell party.
By this time the female guests invited by Wu Yüeh-niang and her sorority of concubines had all arrived. At first they were served tea in the summer-house, and only after that did they take their seats in the great reception hall, where:
Screens display their peacocks' tails, and
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.[27]
Four singing girls had been engaged to play and sing for the entertainment of the company.
Sure enough, Hsi-men Ch'ing did return home in the early afternoon, where a table setting of wine and delicacies had been set aside for him. After inviting Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'en Ching-chi to join him, he set out with seven hundred taels of silver in hand for the closing on his purchase of the Ch'iao family property across the street.
While the female guests were in the midst of drinking their wine, lo and behold, Yü-hsiao secreted a silver flagon of wine, along with four pears and a tangerine and headed straight for the antechamber to give them to Shu-t'ung to enjoy. When she pushed open the door, to her surprise, Shu-t'ung was not there. Fearing lest someone should see what she was doing, she set her burden down, flagon and all, and took herself off.
Strange as it may seem,
Ch'in-t'ung, who was tending to the wine up in the reception hall, happened to look out with a sardonic eye and catch sight of Yü-hsiao going into the studio, and then, after a while, coming out again. Assuming that Shu-t'ung was inside, without anyone's knowing it, he slipped into the room himself to see what was up.
Who could have anticipated that Shu-t'ung had gone out and not yet returned but the flagon of warm wine and the fruit were still sitting there under the bed. Ch'in-t'ung hastily hid the fruit in his sleeve and then, concealing the flagon of wine behind his body, carried it straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Ying-ch'un and her mistress were both in the reception hall and had not yet come back from the party. Only the wet nurse, Ju-i, and Hsiu-ch'un were in the room looking after Kuan-ko.
"Where is Elder Sister?" Ch'in-t'ung asked as soon as he came in the door.
"She's up in the reception hall," replied Hsiu-ch'un, "pouring wine for the mistress. Why do you ask?"
"I've hold of something good that I want her to keep for me," said Ch'in-t'ung.
"What is it?" asked Hsiu-ch'un but he refused to produce it.
As they were talking, Ying-ch'un came in from the reception hall, carrying a plate of roast goose and a saucerful of steamed corn flour pastries with rose-flavoured stuffings for the wet nurse to eat.
When she caught sight of Ch'in-t'ung, she said, "You lousy jailbird! What are you laughing at here instead of being up in the reception hall tending to the wine?"
Only then did Ch'in-t'ung pull the flagon out from underneath his clothes, and say, "Sister Ying-ch'un, keep this for me."
"This is one of the flagons used for pouring wine in the reception hall," said Ying-ch'un. "Why have you bothered to bring it here for no reason at all?"
"Sister," said Ch'in-t'ung, "don't you worry about that. This is a case of Yü-hsiao from the master suite:
Playing at sevens and eights,
with that pageboy Shu-t'ung. She purloined this flagon of wine, along with a tangerine and some pears, and brought them to the studio for him to enjoy. When I saw that no one was looking, I lifted them off him for myself. You just keep them good and safe for me. No matter who comes looking for them, if you don't trot them out, I'll have picked up something for nothing."
Thereupon he pulled out the pears and the tangerine for Ying-ch'un to see and said, "This is perfect for me, since, after I finish tending to the wine, it's my turn to spend the night at the house on Lion Street."
"In a little while," said Ying-ch'un, "if they turn the place upside down looking for the flagon, you'll take responsibility for it, I suppose?"
"After all, I'm not the one that stole their flagon," said Ch'in-t'ung. "It's true for everyone that while:
Those actually involved may be disturbed,
Those removed from the scene are relaxed.
What's it got to do with me?"
When he had finished speaking, he went nonchalantly off without more ado. Ying-ch'un put the flagon out of sight on a table in the inner room but no more of this.
That evening, when the party broke up, the utensils were checked, and a flagon was found to be missing. Yü-hsiao went to the studio to look for it but came up empty-handed, for it was nowhere to be found.
When she asked Shu-t'ung about it, he said, "I was out on an errand and don't know anything about it."
Yü-hsiao then proceeded to panic and tried her best to blame it all on Hsiao-yü.
"You must have been screwed silly, you whore!" Hsiao-yü cursed at her. "I was in the rear compound seeing to the tea, while you were holding the flagon in order to pour wine for Mother at the party. And now that the flagon has disappeared, you try to blame it on me."
A thorough search was conducted but it did not turn up.
After some time, Li P'ing-erh returned to her quarters, where Ying-ch'un reported, thus and so, to her, "Ch'in-t'ung brought one in here and asked me to keep it safe for him."
"That jailbird!" Li P'ing-erh exclaimed. "What did he bring that flagon of theirs in here for? In the rear compound, all on account of this flagon, the place is really being turned upside down. Yü-hsiao is blaming it on Hsiao-yü. Hsiao-yü is blaming it on Yü-hsiao. That senior maidservant is so upset she's:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
while all she can do is cry. You'd better take it back there immediately. If there's any further delay, I promise you, it'll be you that ends up being blamed for it, you little whore!"
Only then did Ying-ch'un bring out the flagon and prepare to take it back to the rear compound.
Meanwhile, in the rear compound, Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü were still quarreling over the disappearance of the flagon, and the two of them carried their dispute to Yüeh-niang.
"You lousy little stinkers!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "What are you still presuming to make such a ruckus about? What were the two of you in charge of at the time the flagon disappeared?"
"I was in the reception hall helping Mother serve wine to the guests," declared Yü-hsiao, "while she was in charge of the silver utensils. Now that it's disappeared, she's trying to blame it on me."
"Mother's senior sister-in-law wanted some tea," protested Hsiao-yü, "so didn't I go back to the rear compound to fetch it? Since it was you who were holding the flagon, how did it come to disappear? I dare say:
The hole in your bottom's so big:
Your mind has dropped out,[28]
or something of the sort."
"I fear there weren't any unfamiliar people at the party today," said Yüeh-niang, "so how could something just disappear like that? Let's wait a bit and see if this flagon won't turn up somewhere. If we wait until your master gets wind of it, and the flagon is still missing, I promise you there'll be a beating for each of you."
"If Father gives me a beating," expostulated Yü-hsiao, "and I ever let that whore off the hook, I might as well quit."
As they continued to wrangle, who should walk in from the outside but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who asked, "What's all the ruckus about?"
Yüeh-niang told him about the disappearance of the flagon.
"Just take your time and look for it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What's the point of making such a fuss about it, for no good reason?"
"If you lose a flagon like this every time you have a party," said P'an Chin-lien, "and don't make a fuss about it:
Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang:[29]
When the first sample of vinegar is not sour,
The whole batch will turn out to be insipid."[30]
Gentle reader take note: These words of Chin-lien's were intended to reflect satirically on the fact that though Li P'ing-erh was the first woman in the household to bear a child, something valuable had been lost on the occasion of its full-month celebration that was an unlucky omen.
Hsi-men Ch'ing understood this clearly enough but did not utter a sound.
What should they see at this point but Ying-ch'un coming in to return the flagon.
"So the flagon is here after all!" exclaimed Yü-hsiao.
"Where did this flagon actually turn out to be?" Yüeh-niang asked Ying-ch'un.
Ying-ch'un explained all about it, saying, "Ch'in-t'ung brought it into my mistress's quarters from outside somewhere and asked me to keep it for him. I don't know where it came from."
Yüeh-niang then asked, "Where is that slave, Ch'in-t'ung, right now?"
"It's his turn today to spend the night in the house on Lion Street," said Tai-an.
Chin-lien, who was standing to one side, couldn't help snickering at this.
"Just what are you laughing at?" Hsi-men Ch'ing then demanded to know.
"Ch'in-t'ung is *her* servant, after all," said Chin-lien. "And he stashed the flagon in *her* quarters. He must have had some reason for wanting to conceal the whereabouts of the flagon. If it were up to me, I'd send a pageboy after that slave right now and subject him to a real beating, in order to get to the bottom of this. Otherwise, those two maidservants will have been falsely accused. Truly, that would be to:
Let the guardian deity escape while indicting the Buddha."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became enraged, opened his eyes wide, looked directly at Chin-lien, and said, "From the way you put it, no doubt Sister Li was so enamored of this flagon that she appropriated it herself! Just let well enough alone, why don't you? What reason do you have to make such a fuss about it?"
Chin-lien's face turned crimson with embarrassment, and she said, "I certainly never meant to imply that Sister Li doesn't have enough money of her own."
When she had finished speaking, she withdrew to one side in a huff.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was then invited away by Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in, saying, "Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, has sent someone to deliver a gift. You'd better go up front to see him."
Chin-lien, who was standing to one side with Meng Yü-lou, started to curse, saying, "You'll come to a bad end, you lousy ruffian, sorting people so differentially into:
Three classes and nine categories.[31]
The last few days, the way you've been carrying on, you'd think you could defy death itself. Ever since she gave birth to this seedling, you've been treating her just as though she'd produced the crown prince. But when you run into the rest of us, you're like the incarnation of a baleful deity and haven't so much as a good word to say for us. Whatever we do, you open wide those two cunt-hole eyes of yours and start yelling at us. Who doesn't know that Sister Li's got money? In the future, I suppose, when her pageboys and maidservants have been allowed to get away with their fornication and thievery till they've screwed everyone in sight, you'll still refuse to crack down on them."
As she was speaking, they noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing, after sitting a while longer, got up and went out to the front compound.
"Aren't you going, too?" Meng Yü-lou asked. "He's sure to be headed for your place."
"As he said himself," Chin-lien retorted, "it's more lively when there's a child in the place. The quarters of people like us, who don't have any children, are forlorn."
As they were speaking, what should they see but Ch'un-mei coming in from the outside.
"I told you he was headed for your place," said Meng Yü-lou, "and you wouldn't believe it. Now Ch'un-mei has come to fetch you."
She then called Ch'un-mei over to ask her.
"I've come to ask Yü-hsiao for my handkerchief," said Ch'un-mei. "She borrowed my handkerchief to wear today."
"Where is your father?" asked Yü-lou.
"Father has gone to the Sixth Lady's place," Ch'un-mei replied.
When Chin-lien heard this, it was just as though a torch had been applied to her heart, and she started to curse, saying, "That lousy ruffian! In the future:
For a thousand years or all eternity,
I'd rather see him break his leg than try to come into my room. If he so much as sets foot on the threshold, that incorrigible jailbird, may he break his anklebone!"
"Sister Six," said Yü-lou, "why are you denouncing him so venomously today?"
"That's not it at all," said Chin-lien. "It's just that that lousy three-inch good-for-nothing of a ruffian has a:
Rat-stomach chicken-gut,[32]
heart with a capacity of no more than three inches. We're all your wives after all. Only because she's produced this piddling bladder's spawn of hers, do you mean to say you're going to carry on like this? What do you mean by:
Raising one person up, and
Putting another down,[33]
only to:
Trample them into the mud?"[34]

Truly:
Whenever a great wind blows down the phoenix tree,
There are sure to be bystanders to comment on it.[35]
Chin-lien continued to make a show of her temper. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the front compound, he found that Eunuch Director Hsüeh had sent a servant to deliver a jar of wine from the imperial palace, a sheep, two bolts of satin brocade, a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, and four rare delicacies; in the first place, to wish him a happy birthday; and in the second place, to offer his congratulations. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave the messenger a generous tip and sent him on his way.
When he returned to the rear compound, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh were preparing to take their leave and go home.
"The two of you ought to stay over another day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow, the twenty-eighth, I've invited His Honour Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, His Honour Hsia Yen-ling of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, His Honour Ching Chung, the military director-in-chief, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the imperial estates, and Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, to a birthday party. There will be a troupe of tumblers and actors from the licensed quarter, so all the two of you will have to do is serve the wine."
"If you're going to keep us here," said Kuei-chieh, "I'd better send someone home to let Mother know, so she'll be less inclined to worry."
Thereupon, the sedan chairs of the two of them were sent on their way. But no more of this.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the great reception hall prepared by:
Arraying brocaded screens, and
Spreading out silken tablecloths,
for the party for official guests, the invitations to which had already been issued in advance. Because, the previous day, he had met Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, while he was being entertained at the imperial estates, and that dignitary had joined with Eunuch Director Hsüeh in sending him gifts for the occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had also sent an invitation to him. He had also invited Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to help keep his guests company. By lunchtime, having dressed themselves to befit the occasion, the two of them had already arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had ushered them into the summerhouse, where they were served tea.
"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "what particular guests have you invited to the party today?"
"There are the two Eunuch Directors, Liu and Hsüeh," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "His Honour Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, my colleague Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, and my brothers-in-law, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second. My old neighbour, Ch'iao Hung, just sent someone over today to say that he couldn't make it. Together with the two of you, that's all the guests there are."
No sooner had he finished speaking than Wu K'ai and Wu the Second arrived, bowed in greeting, and sat down with them. The attendants set up a table and served something to eat.
When they had finished eating, Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "At the full-month celebration yesterday, was your son brought out and shown to the company?"
"The assembled female guests did want to see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but my wife said not to bring him out lest he catch a cold. His wet nurse said it didn't matter. So she told the wet nurse to wrap him in a quilt and bring him out to the master suite so everyone could have a glimpse of him in honour of the day, after which she took him back to his mother's room."
"Sister-in-law also invited my wife that day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and she wanted very much to come. But in the midst of all the goings on, that old ailment of hers broke out again, and she was unable to get up from her k'ang. She was as upset as could be about it. Right now, before the other guests have come, why don't you say the word and have your son brought out so we can have a look at him?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then gave the directions, "Have Kuan-ko carefully brought out from the rear compound but don't do anything to frighten him. Tell your mistress that my elder brother-in-law and second brother-in-law are here, along with Ying the Second and Mr. Hsieh, who would like to take a look at him."
Yüeh-niang told the wet nurse, Ju-i, to wrap him tightly in a little red satin quilt and take him as far as the postern gate leading to the summerhouse, where she could turn him over to Tai-an to carry the rest of the way.
The company opened their eyes wide and took a good look at him. Kuan-ko was wearing an undershirt of scarlet silk:
His face was white and his lips were red,
and he had quite an affluent appearance. Everyone sang his praises and paid him exaggerated compliments without end.
Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta each pulled out of his sleeve a satin brocade waistband with a small silver pendant attached but Po-chüeh also presented a skein of variegated threads on which there were strung ten or more "longevity coins."
Turning these gifts over to Tai-an, Ying Po-chüeh said, "See that you carry him carefully back to his room. Don't do anything to frighten the baby."
He then continued by saying, "His features are regular. He's the natural-born embryo of someone fated to wear the silk hat of an official."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted, bowed, and thanked the two of them for their generous presents.
"Don't embarrass us, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. "These are no more than tokens of our esteem."
As they were speaking, it was suddenly announced that Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to don his formal clothes and went out to the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard to greet them. The two eunuchs arrived riding in sedan chairs borne by four bearers each, wearing python robes on which the body of the python extended around their shoulders,[36] and escorted by a contingent of soldiers with tasseled spears who shouted to clear the way.
Hsi-men Ch'ing first ushered them into the great reception hall, where he paid his respects, ran through the customary social amenities, and saw that they were served with tea.
After that, in no time at all, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and the other military officials, dressed in clothing of figured brocade, escorted by soldiers holding rattan rods and large flabella who shouted to clear the way, and accompanied by their subordinates, all arrived at the front gate. The whole area was rendered black by the number of their servitors, while inside:
Drums and music resound to the heavens,[37]
Pipes and flutes are alternately heard.
As they were about to take their seats preparatory to the serving of the wine, they were introduced to the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh. There were twelve tables arranged along the upper end of the hall. On all of them:
Valances are fastened with brocade ribbons,
Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.
On each table were arrayed:
Cone-shaped piles of fruit and ingot-shaped cakes.
On the floor were spread:
Brocade carpets and embroidered rugs.
Hsi-men Ch'ing started off by urging his guests, with flagon in hand, to take their seats but the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, repeatedly declined to take the seats of honour, saying, "What about these other distinguished gentlemen?"
"The two senior eunuch directors," said Commandant Chou:
"Are exalted in both age and virtue.
As the saying goes:
Those who have served as palace eunuchs for three years,
Take precedence over princes and dukes.
Of course they are entitled to the seats of honour.
What need is there for further discussion?"
After they had dickered politely for a while, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "Brother Liu, since the distinguished gentlemen are unwilling to precede us, we are making things difficult for our host. Let's take our seats and be done with it."
Thereupon, after bowing all the way around to salute the company, first Eunuch Liu on the left and then Eunuch Hsüeh on the right, having first had handkerchiefs placed on their seats, and accompanied by two pageboys to fan them, finally took their places. Only after that did Commandant Chou, Military Director-in-chief Ching, and the rest do likewise.
Before long, from beneath the steps, they heard:
The strains of a classic melody,[38]
as the musicians began to play. What were the revels like that day? Behold:
Dainties were prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits were provided just in season.
Before long:
Five rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Three courses of soup had been served.
The chef then came out and carved the minor entree of roast goose, after which Eunuch Liu, occupying as he did the seat of honour, rewarded him with five mace of silver.
The file leader from the Music Office then knelt down and proffered him a scarlet paper, accordion-bound album listing the program of pieces they were prepared to perform, after which, in the courtyard below the steps, the actors put on a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen.[39]
First the *wai* (*supernumerary male role*), playing the Adjutant, comes on and recites the opening verse:
*wai*:
When laws are just Heaven's attitude is favourable;
When officials are honest the populace is content.
When the wife is worthy the husband's mishaps are few;
When children are filial the father's mind is relieved.[40]
It's not as though I were anyone else. I'm the Adjutant of this troupe, with many a star performer among the strolling players at my disposal. Yesterday in the marketplace I bought a standing screen on which there was inscribed a poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion. [41] I asked someone about it, and he said that it was composed by Wang Po[42] of the Tang dynasty, who won success in the Palace Examination, though he was not quite three feet tall.[43] He also said that this person could:
Create a composition with a flourish of the brush;[44]
and that he was:
Extensively possessed of knowledge and erudition;
in short, a man of talent. Now I might as well call for the *fu-mo (supporting male role*) to go looking for him and invite him over so I can make his acquaintance; why not? Where's the *fu-mo?*
*fu-mo*:
From in the hall a single call;
Below the steps a hundred yeps.[45]
At your service, Adjutant. What is your command?"
*wai*:
Yesterday I observed that the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion inscribed on that standing screen is very well written. I've heard that it was composed by Wang Po of the T'ang dynasty, who won success in the Palace Examination, though he was not quite three feet tall. Now here's a yardstick to measure him by, I want you to go looking for him immediately, and invite him over. If you are successful, I'll reward you with a mace of silver. If you are unsuccessful, you'll get twenty lashes with a hempen rope. I'll beat you for certain and not let you off.
*fu-mo*:
I understand, (*mimes exiting*) This Adjutant is a fool! As for that Palace Graduate Wang Po, from the T'ang period to the present time is not less than a thousand years or more. Where would he have me go to look for him? All I can do is:
Come this way and go that way,
until I arrive at the gate of the Confucian Temple. In the distance, there, I see an erudite-looking scholar coming this way. What else can I do but ask him. "Sir, are you, by any chance, the Palace Graduate Wang Po who composed the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion and are not quite three feet tall?"
*ching* (*comic-villain role, playing a scholar; aside, laughing*):
The Palace Graduate Wang Po was a man of the T'ang dynasty. Where would one find him today? I'll just play him along and see what happens, ( *addresses him*) Yes, I am the Palace Graduate Wang Po, and it was I who composed the poem about the Prince of T'eng's Pavilion. I'll recite a few lines from the preface to convince you.
The city of Nan-ch'ang in the old Yü-chang commandery,
Is now the metropolis of the new Hung-chou prefecture.
It accords celestially with the mansions I and Chen ...[46]
The effulgence of its dragon swords shoots
up to the Herd Boy and the Dipper.[47]
Its men are superlative and its territory is numinous;
The worthiness of Hsü Chih induced Ch'en Fan
to lower his suspended cot.[48]
*fu-mo*:
The Adjutant gave me this yardstick and said he only wanted someone who is three feet tall, and if he should be off by so much as a finger's-width, not to invite him. With that body of yours, how could you ever pass muster?
*ching*:
That doesn't matter.
The Way is what man makes of it.[49]
Look over there. Another Palace Graduate Wang Po is coming this way. (*mimes adopting the posture of a dwarf*)
*fu-mo*:
I'll measure him with this yardstick.
*ching*:
I'll shrink myself a little further.
*fu-mo*: (*laughing*)
You'll pass muster, I guess.
*ching*:

There's just one thing. When I see this Adjutant of yours, be sure to remember; whatever happens, I've simply got to have a low stool to rest on. Now we:
Come this way and go that way,
until we arrive at the Adjutant's gate.
*fu-mo*: (*orders the* ching)
You wait outside.
*ching*:
I've simply got to have a low stool to rest on.
*fu-mo*: (goes inside to report to the Adjutant)
*wai*:
Have you been successful in inviting that Palace Graduate Wang Po?
*fu-mo*:
He's waiting outside the gate this very moment.
*wai*:
Tell him I'm waiting to meet him inside the ceremonial gate that leads into the second courtyard. I'll regale him with tea flavoured with hazelnuts and pine seeds, sliced roast meat, and congee, ( *they mime greeting each other*)
*wai*:
This really is none other than the Palace Graduate Wang Po.
Were one but to see your distinguished features,
Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.[50]
Pray accept my kowtow.
*ching*: (*miming consternation*)
Where is that low stool?
*wai*: (*continues*)
From ancient times until the present day,
Such good fortune is not easily met with.[51]
Though I have:
Heard of your name without having seen your face,
today I find:
Seeing your face is better than hearing your name.[52]
Allow me to kowtow again.
*ching*: (*miming consternation*)
Where is that low stool?
*fu-mo*: (*mimes running off stage*)
*wai*:
I have heard that you possess:
Broad erudition and an extensive memory,
and that:
Your brush engenders dragons and serpents.[53]
Truly, you must be a man of talent. Your servant is:
Like a thirsty person longing for drink;
Like a parched person longing for coolness.[54]
Allow me to kowtow to you twice more.
*ching*: (*urgently breaking in*)
Is your father well? Is your mother well? Are your elder and your younger sister, and the other members of your household all well?
*wai*:
They're all well.
*ching*:
Why you mother-fucking dog! If the members of your household, both high and low, are all in such good shape; (*straightening himself up*) I shouldn't have to stay bent out of shape any longer.
Truly: (*recites the closing verse*)
A hundred jewels adorn her girdle,
Pearls entwine her leather sleevelets.
A smile moves dimples near her eyes,
Dance done, brocade enwraps her head.[55]
Another round of wine was served at the feast, and the audience of officials all laughed. Eunuch Director Hsüeh was delighted. He called up the head of the troupe and rewarded him with a tael of silver, after which the man kowtowed to express his thanks.
Before long, Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy actors, came before them to play and sing. One of them accompanied himself on the psaltery and the other on the *p'i-p'a*.
Commandant Chou first raised his hand and deferred to the two eunuchs, saying, "The senior eunuch directors should condescend to instruct these two as to what song suites they should perform."
"You distinguished gentlemen go first," said Eunuch Liu.
"Senior Eunuch Directors," said Commandant Chou:
"It is a self-evident principle;[56]
There is no need for discussion."
Eunuch Director Liu then said, "Let the two boys perform the song suite that begins with the line:
Alas! This floating life of ours is like a dream."[57]
The events of the past have already come to naught.
In a snap of the fingers, the red disk
sinks in the west;
In a trice, dust rises from what was once
a wide blue sea.
The youngster's glossy black hair
has turned to gray;
The red-cheeked youth's head is white,
his eyebrows bushy.
In a turn of the head we will all be ghosts
under the Pei-mang Mountains.
Merely to mention the subject is enough
to induce sorrowful reflection.
We might as well let wine soak the sleeves
of our gowns,
And flowers weigh down the brims
of our hats."[5]
TO THE TUNE "FREE AND EASY WANDERING"
"Without any entanglements,
I might just as well rest
at my ease.
I can sleep until the sun is three rods high[16]
without getting up.
I amuse myself with poetry, wine,
zither, and chess,
And am able to be united with my children
and my rustic wife.
Wealth and distinction, success and fame,
are external affairs.
I am tired of striving for them and being
driven by others.
I would rather relax and give free rein
to my fancy,
Indulge my natural feelings,
Extend my horizons and unknit my brow."
TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE"
"Why strive for fame and fortune?
Why differentiate you from me?
In the twinkling of an eye our old friends
are few and far between.
Gradually our red-cheeked countenances
become altered;
Before we know it white hairs
encroach upon us.
To mention the subject induces sorrowful reflection.
The fact is, we cannot prevent time from flying
like a white horse galloping past a crack."[17]
TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD"
"Alas! Time passes like a dream.
The fullness of youth flows away like water.
One can only observe the endless affairs of the world,
While draining the finite cups this life affords.
Do not become deluded.
Resolutely reverse course while the current is swift.[18]
By the banks of P'an Stream the fish are lovely as ever.[19]
On Shou-yang Mountain the ferns are full-grown.[20]
The peaks of Mount Hua in the west remain striking.[21]
On the Tung-t'ing Lake the breezes are still gentle."[22]
TO THE TUNE "A PAIR OF WILD GEESE"

"It is better to learn the wisdom of returning home
as early as possible,
Where one can enjoy the leisure to study ultimate principles.
There one will not be encumbered by
disgrace or glory.
One can live in honest poverty and avoid controversy,
Distance oneself from the red dust and practice the Tao."
TO THE TUNE "GOURD OF VINEGAR"
"When spring comes, one listens to the oriole
singing on the branch.
One hears the call of the cuckoo beneath the flowers,
Repeating with every cry the message,
'why not go home?'
As for the money in your wallet, I urge you
not to begrudge it.
You might as well sober up when drunk, the better
to get drunk once more.
The shadows of the flowers move across the mat
even as you feast."[23]
TO THE SAME TUNE
"When summer comes, one observes the rippling light
on the surface of the lake.
The fragrant breeze is gentle everywhere,
Flapping one's lapels and loosening one's hair,
on the willow-shaded embankment.
A day gained, is a day lived through,
and one day the less.
Why strive for fame or fortune?
In this life, from of old, those who live
to seventy are few."[24]
TO THE SAME TUNE
"When autumn comes, one watches the chrysanthemum
by the hedge blossom into gold.
One enjoys the watery moon in the distant sky.
Truly, the river reflects the autumn landscape
as wild geese take flight.[25]
It pleases the heart to laugh and talk
while sharing cups of wine.
When able to do so with a soul mate,
One returns home with yellow blossoms
stuck all over one's head."
TO THE SAME TUNE
"When winter comes, alabaster flakes
come swirling down.
Eddies of shredded goosedown start to fly.
Shadows of plum blossoms by the wattled fence
are projected across the window.
In one's humble parlour one fills cup after cup
of wine to the brim.
Once inebriated one can take a nap,
And let the red dust billow back and forth
wherever it will."
CODA
"Do not seek the snail's tentacle of fame;
Do not covet a fly's head worth of profit.
The crane's legs are long, the duck's legs short,[26]
they cannot be equalized.
In the end, who can say who is
in the right?
The best course for me is to conceal myself
amid the vulgar herd,
And let someone else carry the gourd from now on."
"Senior Eunuch Director," said Commandant Chou, "That is a piece about the life of retirement and disillusion with the world. Today we are celebrating His Honour Hsi-men's happy event, and it is also his birthday. It wouldn't do to sing that."
Eunuch Director Liu tried again, asking, "Can you sing the song suite that begins with the lines:
Though I am not one of the eight ministers entitled to wear the purple sash;
I command the denizens of the six palaces with their golden hairpins.[58]
When I hear the purple whip crack,
To bring the civil and military ranks to attention,
I observe the raising of the purple curtain as His Imperial Majesty comes in.
Though I may not be fit material to be a general or a minister,
I attend the imperial equipage and enjoy the ruler's regard.
At the behest of the consorts and empress in the various palaces,
I supervise a lighthearted bevy of 800 beauties,
And command the charming company of 3000 palace women."
"That is from the tsa-chü drama Ch'en Lin carrying the dressing-case," said Commandant Chou. "Today is a celebratory occasion. It wouldn't do to sing that."
"Have those two come up here," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh. "Let me tell them what to do. You know that set of songs to the tune 'Plucking the Cassia'[59] that begins with the line:
It seems that in this life the hardest thing
to bear is separation.[60]
Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling laughed out loud at this, saying, "Senior Eunuch Director, that piece is on the subject of separation. It's even more inappropriate for this occasion."
"Our responsibilities as eunuchs are such," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "that all we know how to do is to wait upon the pleasure of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years. We have no taste for the subtleties of lyrics or songs. Let them sing whatever they want."
Judicial Commissioner Hsia, after all, held a substantive appointment in the Imperial Insignia Guard and was able to rely on his status as an officer in the legal system, so, when one of the musicians came up, he instructed him, "You sing the song suite entitled 'Thirty Melodies.' [61] Today we are celebrating His Honour Hsi-men's:
Appointment to office and augmented emolument.
And it is also his birthday. And, in addition he has had:
The joy of giving his son a jade scepter to play with.[62]
That is the appropriate suite to sing."
"What is all this about:
The joy of giving his son a jade scepter to play with?"
Eunuch Director Hsüeh asked.
"My two senior eunuch directors," said Commandant Chou. "Today is also the full-month celebration for the birth of His Honour Hsi-men's young scion. We colleagues of his have all brought meager gifts in honour of the occasion."
Eunuch Director Hsüeh started to say, "We," and then, turning to Eunuch Director Liu, said, "Brother Liu, I guess we'll have to make restitution by bringing our congratulatory gifts tomorrow."
Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed his gratitude, saying, "The fact that your pupil has been able to sire a shoat or a whelp:
Is not worthy of congratulation.
There is really no need for the senior eunuch directors to go to so much trouble."
When he had finished speaking, he summoned Tai-an and told him to call Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh out from the rear compound to serve a round of wine at the feast. The two singing girls made themselves up and came outside, then:
Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
facing the company:
Neither correctly nor precisely,
Just as though inserting tapers in their holders,
they kowtowed four times. After which, they stood up, took flagons in hand, and respectfully offered a serving of wine to each person present. The two musicians then proceeded to sing a new set of song lyrics:
The sound of their singing is melodious;
truly possessing:
A timbre that lingers around the rafters.[63]
That evening the company was entertained:
First with singing and then with dancing,
Amid clinging brocade and clustering blossoms.[64]
The drinking continued until after the first watch of the night before Eunuch Director Hsüeh stood up and said, "Your pupils, in the first place, have already benefited excessively from your lavish hospitality; and in the second place, because it has been such an occasion for rejoicing, have been insensibly enticed into drinking too deeply, and disturbing you to the fullest possible extent. We beg to take our leave."
Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "In response to my:
Humble invitation for a cup of tea,
You have condescended to pay a visit,
thereby abruptly:
Enhancing the glory of my humble abode.[65]
I hope you will relax and stay a little longer,
In order to exhaust your remaining pleasure."
All the guests then got up from their places and said, "Your pupils have put you to a great deal of trouble.
The effects of the drink are more than we can handle."
Each of them then:
Bent his body to perform an obeisance,[66]
as an expression of gratitude. Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly urged them to stay but to no avail. All he could do was to accompany them to the main gate, along with his eldest brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, and Wu the Second. There, as the strains of:

Drums and music resound to the heavens,
while on either side:
Lanterns and torches flare resplendently,[67]
With crowds of escorts in front and behind,[68]
setting up a shout to clear the way, they made their departure.
Truly, it is a case of:
When happy one dislikes the shortness of the day;[69]
Deliberately burning high candles to illuminate the red makeup of the crab apples.

The next day Ximen Qing sent Laibao with the documents to the magistrate's court, and had a hat of ceremony made for himself. Then he sent for Zhao the tailor and gave him orders to make a coloured cloak as quickly as possible. Several men were set to making girdles of office. That day Wu Dian'en went to call upon Ying Bojue and told him all about the appointment he had received. He begged Bojue to borrow some money for him from Ximen Qing so that he could expend whatever was necessary at his office. He promised to give Bojue ten taels for himself. So eager was he, that he knelt down before Bojue. Ying hastily raised him to his feet. "What could be more pleasant," he said, "than to do things for others? Thanks to Ximen's generosity, you have acquired this position, and this is no ordinary occasion. How much will you need?"

"I must own to you," Wu Dian'en said, "that, though my household manages to keep going, I have not a penny to spare. I shall have to give presents to my superiors in office and there must be a banquet. I shall need clothes and a horse. All this will cost seventy or eighty taels at least. I have made out a note but without stating any definite amount. Do help me and I promise you shall be well repaid."

Ying Bojue looked at the note. "Brother Wu," he said, "I can't believe this is enough. You had better make it a hundred. I am sure that if I ask him, Master Ximen will not require interest from you, and you can pay him back in installments when you have taken up your duties. You will remember the proverb: Borrowed rice may be stored in the jar but rice that has been begged will never find its way there."

Wu thanked his friend effusively and wrote a hundred taels upon the note of hand. They had tea and set off together to call upon Ximen Qing. Ping'an announced them, and as they went in they saw the tailors busy at their work. The Deputy Captain and his son-in-law were sitting under the eaves, watching a clerk writing visiting cards. The two visitors greeted them and then sat down to talk.

"Brother," Bojue said, "have you sent your papers to the office?"

"Yes," Ximen said, "I sent them to the courts this morning, and now I am arranging for Ben the Fourth to take my card to the Prefecture at Dongping Fu and the District office here."

A boy brought tea. Bojue did not at once mention the business about which he had come but went to watch the tailors at work upon the girdles. Ximen Qing saw him taking them in his hands and said with great pride: "What do you think of my new girdles?"

Bojue praised them: "Wherever did you get them, Brother? Each one seems to excel the other. Buckles as fine as these are not to be met with every day. And this rhinoceros horn; this button shaped like a stork's head! Why, you might take your money in your hand all around the Eastern Capital, and never be able to find anything like it. This is not flattery. Princes and nobles in the Capital have their girdles of jade and gold but you would never find them with one of rhinoceros horn so good as this. And not the land rhinoceros... this is the water kind, and ever so much more valuable. You know, the water rhinoceros they call *Tong Tian*. If you don't believe me, give me a cup of water. I will put the horn into it and you will see that it divides the water into two parts. It is indeed a priceless treasure. How much did you pay for it, Brother?"

Ximen Qing invited him to guess the price but Bojue declared that such things had no definite price, and he could not possibly guess.

"I will tell you," Ximen Qing said. "It comes from the palace of the princely family Wang in the High Street. Yesterday someone heard that I was wanting a girdle and came to tell me about it. I sent Ben the Fourth, with seventy taels, to buy it but they would not part with it for less than a hundred."

"Well," Ying Bojue said, "it would be a very difficult matter to find another so fine and beautiful. You will certainly look very grand when you go out in it, and your colleagues at the courts will fall in love with it." He went on in this strain for a long time and finally sat down.

"Have you taken your papers?" Ximen Qing said to Wu. Ying Bojue answered for him. "It was precisely because Brother Wu wishes to do so that he asked me to come here and trouble you. How extraordinarily kind to him you have been! You sent him to the Eastern Capital, and, though his appointment was actually given him by the Imperial Tutor, it really comes to him from you. It was a real piece of good luck. Whether he belongs to the first grade or the ninth, he is none the less an officer of the Court now. He has just told me that he wants to go to his office to make the acquaintance of his colleagues but it will cost a lot of money to offer them a banquet and he doesn't know where to get it. One guest, Brother, does not inflict himself upon two hosts. For my sake, I want you to lend him a few taels so that he can enter upon his duties. Later, when he has taken up his appointment, there will be nothing too much for him to do for you. He has served your family long and well. Brother, you help many people in the Capital and elsewhere. If you will do nothing for him, it will be very awkward indeed for him."

He turned to Wu. "Brother Wu, bring out that charm of yours, and let his Lordship see it."

Wu Dian'en quickly drew out the paper and handed it to Ximen Qing. The sum of a hundred taels was mentioned, Ying Bojue's name appeared as witness, and interest was promised at the rate of five percent each month. Ximen took a pen and crossed out the part about the interest. "Since Brother Ying is the witness," he said, "I shall not ask you to do more than repay the hundred taels. I had thought you would need some money." He put the document in his sleeve.

As he was about to go to the inner court to get the money, there came an underling with a card from Magistrate Xia. He sent twelve soldiers to await Ximen's orders. The clerk asked when Ximen Qing proposed to enter upon his duties and what titles he would use. All the officials of the district were anxious to come and to congratulate him, and bring their present. Ximen sent for the Master of the Yin Yang, asked him to find a suitable date, and it was arranged that upon the morning of the second day of the seventh month he should take possession of his office. Ximen sent a card in return to the magistrate, gave five *qian* of silver to the underling, and sent him back again.

Chen Jingji brought a hundred taels and Ximen handed them to Wu Dian'en, saying: "Brother, take this and repay me." Wu Dian'en took the money and kowtowed. "I will not detain you," Ximen Qing said, "you have business of your own to attend to. But, Brother Ying, I have something to say to you."

Wu Dian'en went happily away with his money.

Ben the Fourth, who had been to the office at Dongping Fu, now came back and Ximen invited him to take a meal with them. Besides Ying Bojue, Xu the Master of the Yin Yang was there. While they were eating, Uncle Wu came to congratulate Ximen Qing. Then the Master of the Yin Yang took his leave, and, shortly afterwards, Ying Bojue also went away. He went straight to see Wu Dian'en, who had ten taels of silver ready waiting for him. He held it out with both hands. "If it had not been for the clever way you spoke for me," he said, "he might never have lent me this money." Then he set about making his robes of ceremony and selected a day on which to assume office.

Li, one of the magistrates of the district, now joined with his colleagues in sending a present of sheep, wine and other things to Ximen Qing. In addition, he sent with his card a youth about eighteen years of age. This was a native of Changshou in Xuzhou, and his name was Little Zhang Song. He had been one of the boys who waited upon the district officers. He was clear-skinned and good-looking. His face was white like powder, his teeth glistened, and his lips were red. He could read, write, and sing the songs of the south. He was wearing a gown of black silk with light shoes and white socks. Ximen Qing was very pleased to discover such an accomplished young man, and, sending a card of thanks to the magistrate, he at once took the boy into his service. He called him Shutong, and had new clothes, shoes, and a hat made for him. He decided that he would not have the young man to follow his horse like the other boys but would use him rather as a secretary to take charge of his study, receive presents when they came, and take charge of the keys of the pavilions in the garden.

Zhu Shinian also recommended a boy to him. This one was only fourteen years old. Ximen Qing called him Qitong and appointed him to carry his visiting card case, and parcels, and to follow behind the horse with Qintong.

At last the day came when he was formally to take up his duties. A great banquet was given at the office and musicians were engaged from three of the bawdy houses. The party went on all day until sunset.

After this, Ximen Qing rode out every day upon a big white horse. He wore a black ceremonial hat and a robe of office with long-maned lions embroidered in five colours upon it. A girdle, four fingers broad, encircled his waist, and his feet were shod in white-soled boots. An escort of soldiers accompanied him and a large black fan was borne behind him. Men went before him, shouting to clear the way; others followed close upon his horse's heels. No less than ten were in attendance upon him. Up and down the streets he went.

As soon as he had left the office he went to see the Captain of the garrison and the various official personages of Qinghe. Then it was the turn of his kinsmen, friends and neighbours. It was a glorious occasion. Meanwhile, presents and visiting cards came to his house in shoals.

Now that he had definitely entered upon his duties, he went every day to the courts and took his seat in the great hall. There he examined official documents and attended to official business. The time passed very quickly.

Li Ping'er was now able to get up. Many ladies, both relatives and friends of the household, came with presents to celebrate the completion of the baby's first month of life. Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er, who had heard of Ximen's good fortune, made ready presents and came in their sedan chairs to congratulate him. Ximen Qing had a splendid feast prepared in the front hall for the ladies. Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang, all dressed in their most beautiful attire, served wine to the guests.

Every day as soon as Ximen Qing returned from the office, he took off his robes in the outer hall and Shutong took them, folded them, and put them away in the study. When he went to the inner court, he only kept on his hat. In the morning, he used to send a maid to the study to bring the clothes. A room at the side of the great hall had been specially arranged to serve him as a private room. There a bed, tables both large and small, chairs, screens, curtains, writing materials and books were set out, and, every night, Shutong slept at the foot of the bed. When Ximen slept in this room, he would send a maid in the morning to bring his clothes from the outer court. So, with all this sending backwards and forwards of clothes, Shutong, who was of very doubtful antecedents besides being taking in his ways and good looking, found plenty of opportunity to play tricks upon the maids from all the different rooms, and in particular, became a close friend of Yuxiao.

One day when this young man had just got up and was dressing his hair with red ribbon before a mirror on the windowsill, Yuxiao opened the door and came in. She saw that he was dressing his hair. "Ah, you young rascal," she said, "so you are still painting your eyebrows and your eyes. Father will be here as soon as he has finished breakfast."

Shutong paid no attention to her but went on dressing his hair. "Where are Father's clothes?" she asked.

"By the side of the bed," the boy said.

"No, this is not the suit he wants today. He told me to ask you for the robe of black silk with the gold and embroidery down the front."

"They are in the cupboard," Shutong said, "I put them there only yesterday, and now he wants them again. Open the cupboard and get them yourself."

Yuxiao did not get the clothes. Instead she went over to the young man and watched him dressing his hair. "You funny thing," she said jokingly, "you are like a woman, putting red ribbons in your hair and making quite a headdress." She noticed that he was wearing a short coat of white material with two satchels for perfume, one of pink and one of green silk. "Give me the pink one," she said.

"You always want those things that people care most about," Shutong said.

"But you are a boy, and shouldn't wear such things," the maid said. "That pink one is much more suitable for me."

"That," Shutong cried, "is only a bag. What would you think if it were a husband?"

Yuxiao pinched him on the shoulder. "You young scamp," she said, "do not try to palm off your picture of the god of the door as if it were a genuine work of art." Without more ado, she broke the cord that held the two perfume bags and put them in her sleeve.

"Really," Shutong said, "your behavior is hardly becoming. You have broken my girdle."

Yuxiao slapped him playfully but the young man was a little put out. "Sister," he said, "please do not play with me. I must finish doing my hair."

"Tell me," Yuxiao said, "have you heard where Father is going today?" "Yes," the boy said, "he is going to say good-bye to Master Hua, the Deputy Assistant Magistrate for the district, for whom a farewell banquet is being given at Eunuch Xue's house. I expect he will be fairly late coming back as he is also going to Uncle Ying's to see about the payment for Master Qiao's house across the way. I should not be surprised if he drank wine there too."

"Well," Yuxiao said, "don't you go out. I may come and have a talk with you."

Yuxiao took the clothes, and went to the inner court.

Some time later Ximen Qing came. He told Shutong that he must not leave the house that day, and that he must write out twelve cards of invitation and put them in red envelopes. These invitations were all for gentlemen to come and celebrate Guan'ge's first month of life. Before he went out, Ximen Qing told Laixing to make all the necessary purchases, to engage extra cooks and, indeed, to do everything that was necessary. Daian and two soldiers were ordered to take out the invitations, and to engage singers. Qintong was to serve the guests with wine. After giving all these orders, Ximen Qing mounted his horse and set out.

Today was the ladies' party. Yueniang and her companions received their guests in the arbour. Tea was served there. The banquet was laid in the great hall, where gorgeous screens were set out, and cushions embroidered with lotus flowers. The four maids who were trained in music were told to be in attendance.

As soon as Ximen Qing returned in the afternoon, he had a box of wine and refreshments prepared, and asked Ying Bojue and Chen Jingji to go with him to Master Qiao's house, where he was to take seven hundred taels.

While the ladies were drinking, Yuxiao took a silver wine jar, a cup, and some pears, and went with them to the study. She expected to find Shutong. But when she opened the door, Shutong was not to be seen. She was afraid that someone might see her, so she quietly put down the things and slipped out again. Qintong, who was attending to the wine for the guests, saw her with his sharp eyes. He saw her go to the study and come back again. He thought that Shutong was there and ran to see him but the young secretary, of course, was not there. Qintong spied a jar of warmed wine and some fruit at the foot of the bed. He hastily put the fruit into his sleeves, and, picking up the jar of wine, quietly made off with it to the Sixth Lady's room. The nurse Ruyi'er and Xiuchun were looking after the baby. Qintong asked where Yingchun was.

"She is serving wine in the hall," Xiuchun said. "What do you want with her?"

"I have something good here," Qintong said. "I want her to keep it for me."

"What is it?" Xiuchun said but the boy would not show her.

At that moment, Yingchun came from the hall bringing a plate of hot goose and cakes made of rice flower and almonds for the nurse.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal?" she said. 'You ought to be attending to your duties in the hall."

Qintong brought the wine jar from under his clothes. "Sister," he said, "please keep this for me."

"But this is the jar we use for heating wine in the hall," Yingchun said. "Why did you bring it here?"

"Sister," the boy said, "Yuxiao took it to the study for Shutong. She stole it and some pears and took them to him but, when there was nobody about, I slipped in and took it. I want you to keep it for me, and if anybody comes looking for it, let them go away without it. It was a real piece of good luck for me." He showed the pears and oranges to Yingchun.

"Well," Yingchun said, "if anybody starts looking for this jar and there is trouble about it, it will be your lookout."

"I didn't steal it," Qintong said. "There's no reason why I should be worried. Let those who did steal it be alarmed. I am out of it. It won't be my legs that get the beating." He went away in a most cheerful frame of mind. Yingchun put the wine jar on a table.

In the evening when the guests had all gone, the silver was checked and one wine jar was missed. Yuxiao went to the study to look for it but it was nowhere to be found. When she asked Shutong, he said he knew nothing about it and that he had not been there. Then the trouble began. Yuxiao accused Xiaoyu, and Xiaoyu cursed her. "You silly strumpet," she cried, "I was making tea all the time. You were serving wine. If the jar is lost, what has it to do with me?" They looked everywhere but still it could not be found.

When Li Ping'er went to her room, Yingchun told her that Qintong had brought the jar there and asked her to keep it for him.

"The young rascal!" Li Ping'er cried. "Whatever made him bring it here? There is a terrible fuss in the inner court about it. Yuxiao says it is Xiaoyu's fault, and Xiaoyu says it is Yuxiao's fault, and Yuxiao is taking all sorts of oaths and crying. You had better take it back at once or all the blame will be put on you."

While Yingchun was on her way to take the jar back to the inner court, Yuxiao and Xiaoyu had gone to see Yueniang, both talking away at one another as hard as they could.

"What," cried Yueniang, "are you still shouting? What were you doing to lose the jar?"

"I was serving wine in the hall," Yuxiao said, "and she was in charge of all the silver. Yet now the jar has been lost she says it is my fault."

"No," Xiaoyu said, "Aunt wanted tea, and I went to the inner court to take her some. You had the wine jar when it was lost. Your brains must have gone the way your dinner goes.

"There were no light-fingered people at today's party," Yueniang said. "Why should we lose a wine jar? We must wait till your master returns. When he hears what has been lost, certainly you will both get a beating."

In the middle of the squabble, Ximen Qing came in. He asked what the fuss was about, and Yueniang told him of the lost wine jar.

"You should keep calm," said Ximen. "What need is there for all this excitement?"

Jinlian interrupted. "If one jar is lost every time we have a party," she said, "you may be as rich as Wang the Millionaire but you'll find that the early promise you seem to expect is not fulfilled."

In this way Jinlian was trying to be unpleasant. Li Ping'er had just borne a child and the losing of a wine jar at this particular time was of ill omen. Ximen Qing understood quite well what she meant but he said nothing. Then Yingchun came in with the jar, and Yuxiao recognized it at once. When Yueniang asked where it had come from, Yingchun told them that Qintong had brought it to her mistress's room but she did not know where he had found it. Yueniang asked where the boy was. Daian told her that it was his turn to go to the house in Lion Street, and he was there.

Jinlian sneered, and Ximen Qing asked what she was sneering about. "Qintong," she said, "is one of her household, so it is natural that he should take the jar to her room. It must be plain to you what the jar was doing there. If I were you, I should send a boy to fetch that young slave, and beat him till the truth about the matter comes to light. If we blame these two maids, we shall be missing the mark completely."

This made Ximen Qing extremely angry. He glared at Jinlian. "I suppose you think the Sixth Lady coveted this jar for herself. Well, here it is. Let that be the end of the business. What need is there for you to try to make trouble?"

Jinlian flushed. "I didn't mean anything," she said. She went away in a very bad temper. When Chen Jingji came to discuss some business with Ximen Qing, she stood and talked bitterly with Meng Yulou.

"They will come to a bad end," she stormed. "The place is full of rogues and thieves. Why, she might have been going to die the other day. Now that she has this baby, she gives herself such airs one would think she had given birth to a prince. She looks like the goddess of Good Fortune whenever she meets us. She is too grand to condescend even to speak to us. And when she moves about, she opens her eyes as wide as two cunts and yells at everyone. We know she is rich. It seems to me she allows her boys and maids to carry on as they please, and if they rob all the rest of the household no one will hinder them."

Ximen Qing, who had finished talking to Jingji, went in the direction of the front court.

"You had better go," Yulou said. "He seems to be going to your room."

"Surely not," Jinlian said. "He finds it much pleasanter where the baby is. It is so cheerless where there is no baby."

At that moment, Chunmei came. "I told you he was going to your room," Yulou said, "and you wouldn't believe me. Now here is Chunmei come to fetch you!"

They called Chunmei and questioned her.

"I have come to ask Yuxiao for a handkerchief," she said.

"Where is your master?" Yulou said.
"He has gone to the Sixth Lady's room."
When Jinlian heard this, she became furiously angry. "The rogue," she cried. "May his legs be broken for a thousand years, and until the end of time he shall never cross my threshold again. May the rascal break the bones of his ankles."
"Why do you use these horrid words about him today?" Yulou said.
"You don't know that cheap bandit," Jinlian cried. "His mind is like a rat's belly, and his guts like a chicken's, not more than three inches long. We are all his wives. Why should he save all his favour for a woman who brings forth a seed wrapped in a bladder? Why should he raise one so high and kick the others into the mud?"
When Ximen Qing had gone to the front court, Eunuch Xue's servant came with a jar of rice wine, a sheep, two rolls of silk, a dish of lucky noodles and a dish of peaches. These were gifts to congratulate Ximen on the birth of his son, and his new appointment. Ximen gave a considerable present to the servant and dismissed him. Then he went to the inner court. Guijie and Wu Yin'er were about to go home. He asked them to stay.
"I have invited a number of gentlemen for the celebration," he said, "and there will be several performers of different kinds. I should like you two to serve the wine."
"If you wish us to stay," Guijie said, "I must arrange for someone to let my mother know so that she will not be anxious about us." Then she dismissed the two chair men.
The following day, the great hall was made ready for the feast. Silken screens were placed in position and embroidered cushions set around. Some time before, Ximen had made the acquaintance of Eunuch Liu, the controller of an Imperial brick manufactory. Both Liu and Xue had sent him presents, and Ximen, in return, had sent them cards of invitation. He had also asked Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to come and help him receive the guests. The two friends, dressed in suitable attire, came about dinnertime, and Ximen Qing asked them to sit down in the arbour and have tea.
"Whom have you invited today?" Ying Bojue said.
Ximen told them. "The two eunuchs Liu and Xue, Major Zhou, Jing Nanjiang, my colleagues, Magistrate Xia, Captain Zhang of the Militia and Captain Fan. My two brothers-in-law will be there too. Master Qiao has sent a man to say that he will not be able to come, so that, even including yourselves, there will be only a few guests."
The two Uncles Wu arrived. After greetings had been exchanged they all sat down. The servants set a table and served them with food.
When they had finished, Bojue said: "Has your young son been out yet, now that he is a month old?"
"Well," Ximen said, "the ladies were all anxious to see him. My wife thought we ought not to take him out lest he should catch cold but the nurse said she did not think it would do him any harm, so he was wrapped up in a blanket and taken to my wife's room. This was just so that the day might be duly celebrated. He was taken back immediately."
"The other day," Bojue said, "you were good enough to send us an invitation, and my wife would have liked very much to come but, unfortunately, she had a return of her old illness and could not get up. She was very upset about it, and before the guests arrive I take this opportunity of apologizing on her behalf. Won't you have your son brought here so that we may have a look at him?"
Ximen Qing sent word to the inner court that the baby was to be brought but very carefully lest he should be frightened. "His two uncles are here," he said, "and also Brothers Ying and Xie, and they are anxious to see him."
Wu Yueniang bade the nurse Ruyi'er wrap the baby in a tiny shawl of fine red silk and take him to the corner door. There Daian received him and carried him to the arbour. They all looked at him. Guan'ge was dressed in a scarlet woolen vest. His skin was clear and his lips were red. He looked healthy. The guests paid him all sorts of compliments. The two Uncles Wu and Xie Xida each presented him with a stomach protector of figured satin with a small silver pendant attached. Ying Bojue had nothing  better than a skein of five-coloured threads and a few lucky coins. These things were all solemnly given to Daian for the child, and he was told to take Guan'ge back very carefully and be sure not to frighten him.
"The child looks very dignified and upstanding," said Ying Bojue. "He is obviously born to wear a hat of ceremony."
This pleased Ximen Qing immensely. He bowed in thanks to Ying Bojue.
Then news was brought that the two eunuchs had arrived. Ximen hastily put on his robes and went to the second door to welcome them. They were waiting, each in a sedan chair carried by four men. They were wearing robes with embroidered dragons, and were accompanied by a bodyguard with tasseled spears to clear the way. Ximen Qing asked them to go with him to the great hall. There he greeted them and offered tea. Then Major Zhou, Master Jing, Xia and the other military gentlemen arrived, all wearing their embroidered robes, with men attending them bearing staves and large fans, and runners shouting to clear the way.
In a moment there was a crowd of attendants about the gate. Inside the courtyard there was a deafening sound of drums and instruments, and a never-ending succession of melodies and songs. Ximen Qing welcomed them in turn and introduced them to the two eunuchs Liu and Xue. At the upper end of the hall were twelve tables, and Ximen Qing, taking up a wine cup, prepared to put the guests in their proper places. The two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, repeatedly refused to take the places of honour. "Let others take them," they said. Major Zhou insisted that they should do so. "Most Worshipful Sirs," he said, "your age and dignity demand respect. As the proverb says: to be a Chamberlain at the Imperial Court for the space of three years confers more dignity than a barony. Obviously then, you must take the place of honour at once, and stand on ceremony no longer."
The two old gentlemen disputed for a long time over the first place. At last Xue said: "Brother Liu, since the other gentlemen will not take the upper seat, we must not be a nuisance to our host. Let us sit down."
They bowed politely to the guests. Liu took the left-hand place and Xue the right. Each placed a handkerchief on his knees and had a small boy to stand beside and fan him. When they had seated themselves, the others did so. Then the music blared in the courtyard, and food, exquisite and rare beyond description, was set before the guests. After the wine had gone around five times and three soup courses had been served, a troop of actors began their performance.
After the comedies, the two young singers, Li Ming and Wu Hui, came forward, one with a dulcimer, the other with a lute. Major Zhou raised his hand. "Most Worshipful Sirs," he said to the two eunuchs, "will you not tell these singers what songs they shall sing?"
"But only," Liu said, "when you have made your own choice."
"No," Major Zhou said, "it is right and fitting that you should give your orders first. Pray do not stand on ceremony."
"Well," Liu said, "I should like to hear 'Life Is Like a Dream.'"
Major Zhou demurred. "That is a song," he said, "for those who have withdrawn from the world and are weary of its enjoyments. This is a happy occasion for our excellent host Ximen. We are celebrating the birth of his son, and I really don't think it is suitable."
Liu tried again. "Can you sing," he asked the boys, "'Though He Is Not a Purple-girdled Minister of the First Eight Grades, He Governs the Young Ladies Who Wear Golden Pins in the Six Palaces'?"
Major Zhou objected again. "That alludes to Chen Lin and the dressing box, and is not suitable for an occasion like this."
"Send the two singers to me." Xue said, "and I will choose a song. Do you remember 'The World Is Full of Merriment, Yet Separation Is the Bitterest of All Life's Troubles'?"
Xia burst out laughing. "Most Worshipful Sir," he said, "that is worse still, for it speaks of separation."
"Well," Xue said, "we officials of the court are so wrapped up in our duties towards his Majesty that perhaps we don't know very much about songs and melodies. Let them sing what they like."
Xia, who was a magistrate and enjoyed such authority as a magistrate may claim, took advantage of his position and called for the thirty melodies. "Today," he said, "we are celebrating Master Ximen's appointment and at the same time the birth of his son. So let us have the song of the toy scepter."
"Why do you mention a 'toy scepter'?" Eunuch Xue said.
"Oh, Most Worshipful Sirs," Major Zhou said. "today our host's son is a month old. We have all been offering a little present in honour of the occasion."
"Is that so?" Xue said. "Brother Liu, we shall have to send a present tomorrow."
Ximen Qing thanked them. "This ignorant fellow has but a little dog. The occasion is not worthy of such honour, and I beg you not to trouble yourselves."
Daian was sent to the inner court to summon Wu Yin'er and Guijie to serve the wine. The two singing girls, as dainty as the flowers on the branches of a tree, kowtowed four times like a pair of candles. They took the wine jar and served wine to everyone and the two young musicians sang a new song. So delicate were their throats and so flexible, their voices echoed through the rafters.
That night with dancing and singing they enjoyed themselves immensely, and drank until the first watch of the night. Then Eunuch Xue stood up. "You have been exceedingly kind," he said, "and as this was a special occasion, we felt we ought to stay and enjoy ourselves but now we must have outstayed our welcome and we will go."
"I've offered you the meanest of entertainments," Ximen said, "but you've condescended to visit me and my poor house's been illumined by your presence. I beg you; stay a little longer that my happiness may be complete."
All the guests rose. "You've been extremely kind," they said, "but we really can drink no more wine." They bowed to Ximen Qing and thanked him. Ximen repeatedly urged them to stay but in vain. So with his 2 brothers-in-laws, he escorted them to the gate. The music rose to the skies and outside the gateway on both sides, torches and lanterns blazed. The guests went away with men going before to guide them and men going behind to protect them. There was much shouting to clear the way.

## 053
## Li Kuei-chieh (Guijie) Adopts a Mother & Is Accepted as a Daughter; Ying Po-chüeh Cracks Jokes & Dances Attendance on Success

As the saying goes, "Riches constitute the foundation of distinction";
When "wealth" is "flourishing" it begets "the official" as everybody knows.
To get a leg up on the road to officialdom one must rely on patronage;
Only by means of truckling to the powerful can one hope for promotion.
Marriage alliances with factional malefactors will make everyone fear you;
If one relies on the influence of the prominent who will dare to defy you?
It were better to forgo the blaze of success in favour of tranquility;
How can human effort hope to contend with the decree of fate?[1]

When the party for the group of officials broke up that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing urged his elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to stay a little longer.
He arranged for the musicians and other performers to be provided with wine and food and, when they had finished, instructed them, "You must come back again and do another stint tomorrow. I have invited the four principal officers from the district yamen to a party, so be sure that you are properly attired for the occasion. When it's all over, I'll compensate you for both days' work at the same time."
"We will, of course, do our best," responded the musicians. "Tomorrow we'll report for work in brand new regulation costumes."
As soon as they had finished consuming their wine and food, they left.
After a while, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh came out with their hair done up in kerchiefs and said, with an ingratiating smile, "Father, we fear it's getting late. Our sedan chairs have come for us. We'd better be off."
"My children," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're certainly having an easy time of it. The two old gentlemen are still here but rather than offering to sing a song for our senior brother-in-law, you just want to take off, do you?"
"If you hadn't spoken up," said Li Kuei-chieh, "you might have been written off as a dog who couldn't bark. We haven't been home for two days now. Who knows how anxious Mother may be to see me?"
"What's she so anxious to see?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Have you pinched a jade yellow "imperial damson"[2] for her, or what?"
"That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. Let the two of them go. After all, they've been exerting themselves for two days in a row. I'll get Li Ming and Wu Hui to sing us a song."
"Have you had anything to eat?" he then went on to ask.
"Just now, the First Lady gave us something to eat in the master suite," said Li Kuei-chieh.
Thereupon, they both prostrated themselves and kowtowed as though inserting tapers in their holders.
"The two of you must come again day after tomorrow,' Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed them, "and also engage another two singing girls on my behalf. It doesn't matter who you get. Cheng Ai-hsiang would do, and Han Chin-ch'uan would do also. I'm throwing a party for my relatives and friends."
"What a piece of luck for the little whores," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you have them engage the singing girls for you, they'll collect the commission to spend on themselves."
"You're not a 'cribber'[3] yourself," exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "How do you come to know so much about it?"
After saying which, they departed, laughing as they went.
"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, "who are you going to invite the day after tomorrow?"
"That day," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I plan to invite my old neighbour, Ch'iao Hung, my two senior brothers-in-law, Hua the Elder, Mr. Shen, the husband of my wife's elder sister, and all the sworn brothers from our club. We'll make a day of it."
"It goes without saying," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that we have imposed too much on you as it is. The day after tomorrow, the two of us ought to come early so we can help you out by serving as assistant hosts."
"That would be only too kind of you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When they had finished speaking, Li Ming and Wu Hui came up with their instruments and sang a song suite for them. Only after that did elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, and the rest of the guests get up to go. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited the four principal officers from the district yamen to a party, and they sent gifts beforehand to congratulate him on having just sired a son. That day Eunuch Director Hsüeh arrived early, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse and served him with tea.
Eunuch Director Hsüeh then asked, "Eunuch Liu hasn't sent his gift yet, has he?"
"Eunuch Director Liu has already sent a gift," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied.
After some time, Eunuch Hsüeh said, "Might I request that your son be brought out so that I can have a look at him and wish him a long life?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to refuse this request and could only instruct Tai-an, "Go back to the rear compound and tell them to have the baby brought out."
Before long, the wet nurse brought Kuan-ko out as far as the postern gate leading into the garden, where she turned him over to Tai-an to carry the rest of the way.
When Eunuch Hsüeh saw the baby, all he could do was to sing his praises, exclaiming, "What a wonderful little brother!"
He then called out, "Where are my pageboys?"
In no time at all, two servants clad in black produced a pair of square lacquer gift boxes decorated with inlaid gilt designs, containing a bolt of red government-quality shot silk, four gold-plated silver coins bearing the characters for:
Good fortune, long life, health, and tranquility,[4]
a toy clapper-drum[5] decorated with a varicoloured, gold-flecked portrait of the God of Longevity, and two taels worth of silver trinkets in the shape of the "eight treasures."
"I am but a poor eunuch," he said, "with nothing fit to offer. I only hope your son will find these insignificant gifts amusing."
Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed and thanked him, saying, "I am much indebted to Your Excellency for your consideration."
When they had finished looking at the presents, Kuan-ko was carried back to his room. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company as he drank his tea, after which an Eight Immortals table[6] was set out and refreshments provided in the form of twelve bowls of assorted appetizers and fresh new rice.
No sooner had they finished eating than the gatekeeper came in to announce that the four principal officers of the district yamen had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily adjusted his attire and went out to the gate that led into the second courtyard to greet them. They were District Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien, Vice-Magistrate Ch'ien Ch'eng, Assistant Magistrate Jen T'ing-kuei,[7] and Docket Officer Hsia Kung-chi.
Each of them first presented his calling card and then performed the rituals of greeting in the reception hall. Only after this did Eunuch Hsüeh come out to meet them. The assembled officials all insisted that Eunuch Hsüeh take the seat of honour. Among those present was the provincial graduate Shang Hsiao-t'ang, who also came out to greet them. After they had taken the seats appropriate for guests and host, a round of tea was served.
In a little while, from beneath the steps:
Drums and music begin to sound,
Pipes and voices rise in concert.
Wine was served, and someone from the Music Office presented the program, from which Eunuch Hsüeh picked the four scenes of the tsa-chü drama entitled *Han Hsiang-tzu sheng-hsien chi* (Han Hsiang-tzu induces Ch'en Pan-chieh to ascend to the realm of the immortals).[8] A number of ensemble dance pieces were also presented, performed with superb execution. Eunuch Hsüeh was delighted by this and called on his attendants for two strings of cash with which to reward the performers. We will say no more about how the group of officials continued their drinking until evening before the party broke up.
To resume our story, when Li Kuei-chieh arrived home, in recognition of the fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing had become a judicial commissioner, she and the old procuress:
Laid plans and hatched a scheme.
The next day, she bought a box of stuffed pastries, a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two bottles of wine, and a pair of women's shoes, consigned the load of gifts to a servant to carry, and set out in a sedan chair, first thing in the morning, in order to make obeisance to Wu Yüeh-niang as her godmother, and get herself accepted as an adopted daughter.
When she came in, before doing anything else, she faced Yüeh-niang with an ingratiating smile and proceeded:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
to perform:
Four brace makes eight kowtows.[9]
Only after that did she kowtow to her aunt and to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
This had the effect of so cozening Yüeh-niang that she was utterly delighted and said, "The other day we received a lavish present from your mother, and today you have put yourself to the trouble of buying all these gifts."
Kuei-chieh laughed, saying, "Mother says that since Father has now become an official, it's not like it used to be when he could frequent the licensed quarter all the time. I'd be more than willing to settle for the status of your adopted daughter, so we could come and go as relatives, and I could visit in your home."
This flustered Yüeh-niang to such an extent that she hastily told her to take off her outside clothes and sit down.
After her things had been put away, Yüeh-niang went on to ask Kuei-chieh, "What of Wu Yin-erh and those other two; how come they haven't arrived yet?"
"I arranged everything with Wu Yin-erh yesterday," replied Kuei-chieh. "I don't know why she hasn't come yet. The day before yesterday, Father instructed us to engage Cheng Ai-hsiang and Han Chin-ch'uan for him, and when I set out, their sedan chairs were already waiting at the door for them. They should be here any minute now."
She had not yet finished speaking, when whom should they see but Wu Yin-erh and Cheng Ai-hsiang, along with another young painted face wearing a gown of scarlet silk, come in the door, carrying their garment bags. Before doing anything else, they faced Yüeh-niang and kowtowed to her:
Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying.
When Wu Yin-erh saw that Li Kuei-chieh had already taken off her outer clothing and was seated on the k'ang, she said, "A fine person you are, Kuei-chieh! Without waiting for the rest of us, you just came ahead by yourself."
"I *was* waiting for you," protested Kuei-chieh, "but when Mother saw that my sedan chair was at the door, she said, 'I fear Yin-erh must have gone ahead. You'd better be on your way.' Who could have anticipated that you'd get here even later?"
Yüeh-niang laughed, saying, "It's not late. Take your seats and we can all have tea together."
"And what is the name of this other girl?" she then went on to ask.
"She is Han Chin-ch'uan's younger sister, Yü-ch'uan," Wu Yin-erh replied.
Before long, Hsiao-yü brought in a table and set out eight saucers of assorted delicacies and two of sweetmeats for the refreshment of the four singing girls. Li Kuei-chieh, making a show of her status as Yüeh-niang's adopted daughter, sat on Yüeh-niang's k'ang and joined Yü-hsiao in cracking nuts and putting the kernels into serving boxes, while Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-hsiang, and Han Yü-ch'uan sat below on a row of stools to one side.
Li Kuei-chieh forthwith plucked up her spirits, calling out, on one occasion, "Sister Yü-hsiao, might I trouble you, if there is any tea, to pour a cup for me?" and, on another occasion, "Sister Hsiao-yü, if there's any water handy, bring some here so I can rinse these hands of mine."
Hsiao-yü actually did dip up a pewter basinful of water for her to rinse her hands in. Wu Yin-erh and the others looked on with wide-open eyes but did not dare say anything.
Li Kuei-chieh then said, "Yin-erh, why don't the three of you get out your instruments and entertain Mother with a song. I've sung for her already."
Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh were sitting right across from her, so when Wu Yin-erh heard these words of Kuei-chieh's she had no alternative but to do as she was told.
Thereupon, with Cheng Ai-hsiang playing the psaltery, Wu Yin-erh playing the *p'i-p'a*, and Han Yü-ch'uan singing along with them, they sang the song suite beginning with the tune "Eight Beats of a Kan-chou Song," the first line of which is:
Concealed amid clusters of turquoise hair ornaments.[10]
And a hazy nimbus of incense like sunset clouds,
By the wavering glare of red candlelight,
Under moon-shaped rafters and cloudlike beams,
Enclosed within twelve latticework partitions held up with golden hooks,
In the gilded chamber, standing screens surround a feast on tortoiseshell mats.
Where fragrant foam floats on the contents of white jade goblets,
An aura of exhilaration pervades the breast,
As faces are suffused with the air of spring.
In no time at all, they finished singing and put down their musical instruments, after which Wu Yin-erh started off by asking Yüeh-niang, "Which official guests has Father invited to the party today?"
"The guests your father has invited today are all relatives and friends," Yüeh-niang replied.
"Are those two eunuchs not going to be here today?" asked Kuei-chieh.
"Eunuch Hsüeh was the only one who showed up yesterday," said Yüeh-niang. "The one named Liu didn't come."
"Eunuch Liu is all right," said Kuei-chieh, "but that Eunuch Hsüeh is given to mischief. He pinches you until you think you'll go out of your mind."
"After all, he's only a eunuch," said Yüeh-niang, "so what does it matter? You might as well let him have a little fun."
"That's a fine thing to say," complained Kuei-chieh. "He's enough to drive a person crazy."
As they were talking, who should they see but Tai-an, who came in to pick up the serving boxes of nuts they had been preparing.
When he saw the four singing girls sitting in the room, he said, "Half the guests have already arrived, and they're just about to take their seats. Hadn't you better get yourselves together and go up to the reception hall?"
Yüeh-niang then asked, "Who all have arrived up front?"
"Old Mr. Ch'iao, Hua the Elder, Wu the Elder, Wu the Second, and Mr. Hsieh have all been here for some time," reported Tai-an.
"Are that beggar, Ying the Second, and Pockmarked Chu going to be here today?" asked Kuei-chieh.
"Of the ten members of the club," said Tai-an, "not one of them will be absent today. Ying the Second showed up at 8:00 A.M. and Father sent him off on an errand but he said he'd be right back."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Kuei-chieh. "Every time it's those same chunks of knife-bait. Who knows how long they'll keep on pestering us? I won't go out there today. I'd rather stay here in her room and sing for Mother's benefit."
"You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it," said Tai-an as he picked up the boxes of nuts and went his way.
"Mother, you just don't know how it is," said Kuei-chieh. "That Pockmarked Chu, when he's at a party, keeps his two lips going so incessantly that all you can hear is the sound of his talking. No matter how people take him to task for it, he doesn't pay any attention. He and that Blabbermouth Sun are nothing but a pair of slobber-pusses."
"That Pockmarked Chu," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "the one who constantly runs around with Ying the Second, showed up at our place the other day with Little Chang the Second, who produced ten taels of silver and wanted to engage my younger sister Ai-yüeh. Mother told him, 'She has just been deflowered by a Southerner, not more than a month ago, and the "Southerner has not yet left town, so how can I agree to retain you as her customer?' She explained all this to him but he repeatedly refused to accept it and made such a nuisance of himself that in her botheration she locked herself in and refused to come out and see him.
"That Little Chang the Second has really got money to burn. He rides around on a large white horse with four or five pageboys to accompany him. He just sat there in our reception hall that day and refused to budge that got Pockmarked Chu so flustered that he knelt down in the courtyard, so his torso looked as though it were sticking out of the ground like a post, and begged us, saying 'Whatever happens, ask your mother to come out and accept this money of his. If Sister Ai-yüeh will do no more than come out to see him and serve him a cup of tea, we'll leave.' It really made us laugh. He was just like someone abasing himself to plead for flood relief, the slobber-pussed good-for-nothing!"
"I thought Little Chang the Second was keeping Tung the Cat," said Wu Yin-erh.
"Because, in the course of his devotions, he burnt incense in two places on her tiger's mouth,"[11] said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "their affair has been 'a-nail-eighted'[12] for some time. Right now they're running loose."
Then, turning to Kuei-chieh, she said, "The other day while attending a wake on a country estate outside the gate, I ran into Chou Hsiao-erh, who asked me to give you his best. He said that the day before yesterday he went to your place with Nieh Yüeh but you weren't at home."
Kuei-chieh tipped her a wink, saying, "I was here at Father's place that day. It's my elder sister, Kuei-ch'ing, that he's interested in."
"If you haven't had anything to do with Chang[13] in the past," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "why are you carrying on with him now?"
"Why that fucking Liu the Ninth!"[14] Kuei-chieh exclaimed. "As though I'd take him as a customer! What sort of a good-for-nothing is that? He'd only have given me the creeps. After he got out of that affair he was implicated in, people I ran into said that he was angry at me for refusing to see him. Mother told him, 'If you were to stick to our place, we might be willing to lay out a little something to entertain you; what would it matter? But if you insist on carrying on with someone else, we're not stupid enough to countenance you any further.' Truly:
If you put on fake crystals to contemplate that southern exposure;
It'll only look more repulsive."[15]
Everyone laughed at what was being said but Yüeh-niang, sitting on her k'ang listening to the conversation, protested, "You've been talking all this while, and I haven't understood a word of it. I don't know what sort of lingo you're talking."
Let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it. To resume our story, in the front compound all of the guests had arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, supervised the serving of the wine. The company insisted that Ch'iao Hung should take precedence, and he was the first to offer a toast to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Just at this juncture, the three singing girls came out from the rear compound. Behold:
On their heads:
Pearl-decked caps are all aquiver;
From their bodies:
The scent of orchid and musk reeks.
No sooner did Ying Po-chüeh spot them than he started to joke, saying, "Where did these three sweethearts of yours come from? Stop them. Don't let them come in."
"Mr. Host," he then went on to ask, "why didn't Li Kuei-chieh come out with the rest of them?"
"I have no idea," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
To start off with, Cheng Ai-hsiang played the psaltery, Wu Yin-erh the *p'i-p'a*, and Han Yu-ch'uan the mandola as they:
Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,
and sang the set of songs to the tune "The Water Nymphs," beginning with the one the first line of which is:
With his tiger-head tally minted out of horse-hoof gold.[16]
With his duck green, velvet lined, tortoiseshell armour,
His mutton-fat jade belt plaque with its lion and barbarian king,
He is fit material to be an imperial general or minister.
May His Excellency and his lady remain true till their heads are white;
May His Excellency's ancestors be en-feoffed 3 generations back;
May His Excellency's fame be broadcast throughout the four seas;
May His Excellency daily advance up the golden ladder of success.
After some time had elapsed and everyone had been provided with wine, Ch'iao Hung took the seat of honour, followed in order of precedence by Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua the Elder, Brother-in-law Shen, Sponger Ying, Tagalong Hsieh, Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, Welsher Yün, Cadger Ch'ang, Scrounger Pai, Manager Fu, and Scurry-about Pen, making a party of fourteen. There were eight tables in all, and Hsi-men Ch'ing presided as host at the lower end of the seating arrangement.
Words are inadequate to describe the scene:
The sound of their singing is melodious,
The style of their dancing is fastidious;
The wine flows as copiously as waves,
The viands are piled as high as hills.[17]
When they reached the point at which:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Three suites of songs had been performed,
Ying Po-chüeh began to hold forth, saying, "Mr. host, there's no need to have them sing anymore. Whether you look at it this way or that, one way or the other, it's always the same couple of suites, as monotonous as a dog scratching at the door. Who wants to listen to it? It would be better to get your servant to set another three places for them and let them serve the company with wine rather than continuing to sing."
"Just let them show their respects to the guest of honour and the rest of the company with a couple more suites of songs," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You dog! You're always ready to:
Disturb the feast and break up the party."[18]
"Beggar Ying," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you're the type who:
Lets off fireworks behind the gate:
Unable to wait for evening."[19]
Ying Po-chüeh got up from his place and cursed, saying, "You crazy little whore! I care about as much whether it's evening or not as your mother's cunt!"
Then, instructing Tai-an, "Come over here, and take their instruments away from them," he took one of them by each hand and forcibly dragged them up to where the company was seated and told them to serve the wine.
"You crazy good-for-nothing!" protested Cheng Ai-hsiang. "You're dragging me so fast:
My limbs can hardly touch the ground."[20]
"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "The truth of the matter is that:
Time is running out.
At any moment:
The 'blue-bladed horse' may 'come.'[21]
Serve the wine. I can't hold out any longer."
"What do you mean by the 'blue-bladed horse'?" asked Hsieh Hsi-ta.
"When you wind up with a 'shiver like a cold crow,' " said Ying Po-chüeh, "the 'blue-bladed horse' always 'comes.' "
Everyone laughed at this sally.
Thereupon, Wu Yin-erh served Ch'iao Hung, Cheng Ai-hsiang served Wu K'ai, Han Yü-ch'uan served Wu the Second, and they then proceeded to work their way, one at a time, down the two sides of the seating arrangement.
When Wu Yin-erh finally arrived in front of Ying Po-chüeh, he asked her, "Why didn't Li Kuei-chieh come out with the rest of you?"

"Master Two," said Wu Yin-erh, "you mean you still don't know about it? Li Kuei-chieh has now been acknowledged by the First Lady as her adopted daughter. Whatever I tell you about this, keep it to yourself. Talk about premeditated schemes! Day before yesterday, when the party broke up here at Father's place, we all went home together and agreed that we would meet early this morning in order to come over here together. I got myself all ready at my place and was just waiting for her, while who could have known that, all the time, she had intended to buy presents in advance and set out ahead of me, leaving me to wait for her all this time.
"I sent a maidservant to your place to see what was up, and she reported that you had already left that earned me a real scolding from Mother. So I hastened, along with the other two, to catch up with you. If you were going to get yourself acknowledged as an adopted daughter by Father and Mother, what difference would it have made to tell me about it? It's not as though I wanted to take your place or anything like that, so you would feel justified in doing things behind my back.
"No wonder she was sitting there on the First Lady's k'ang just now, making a show of the fact that she was Mother's adopted daughter, cracking nuts and putting the kernels into serving boxes:
Picking up this and then picking up that,
and spurning the rest of us under her feet.
"I hadn't known about it until the Sixth Lady surreptitiously told me, just now, in the rear compound. She made a pair of shoes for the First Lady, bought a box of stuffed pastries, two ducks, a set of pig's trotters, and two bottles of wine, and came here in a sedan chair before any of the rest of us."
She gave a full account of the affair, from beginning to end.
When Ying Po-chüeh had heard her out, he said, "If she's here today but won't come out to entertain us, it doesn't matter; but I'd really like to show that lousy little whore a thing or two. Let me tell you, she must have planned all this together with the madam of her place. On seeing that His Honour has become an official, and moreover that he holds a judicial appointment, in the first place, they were afraid of his power and influence; and, in the second place, they feared that he would visit the licensed quarter less often; so they took advantage of this scheme to get her acknowledged as an adopted daughter to ensure that their relationship would continue and not be broken off. Have I got it right, or not?
"I'll tell you what to do. She got the First Lady to accept her as an adopted daughter. Now you, too, should buy some presents and get the Sixth Lady to acknowledge you as an adopted daughter. After all, you and she have both been:
Traveling companions on the same road,
along with the late Hua Tzu-hsü.
Everyone must do the best he can for himself.[22]
Is what I say right, or not? There's no reason for you to get upset with her."
"What you say is right," responded Wu Yin-erh. "When I get home, I'll speak to Mother about it."
When she had finished speaking, she served him with wine and then moved on.
The next person to serve him with wine was Han Yü-ch'uan.
"Sister Han," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble. Don't bother to perform a proper obeisance. What's your elder sister up to at home these days?"
"Someone is maintaining my elder sister at home," replied Han Yü-ch'uan. "She hasn't come out to sing for some time now."
"I remember visiting your place in the fifth month last," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and not seeing anything of your sister."
"On that occasion," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "why didn't you stick around a little longer, instead of running off so soon?"
"I would have stayed longer that day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but there were two people there that I don't get along with, and your father here also wanted me to join him, so I left early."
When Han Yü-ch'uan saw that he had drunk his cup of wine, she poured out another cup.
"That's enough," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Take it easy. I can't drink any more."
"Master Two," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "take your time about it, and when you're finished I'll sing a song for you."
"Sister mine," said Ying Po-chüeh, "whoever told you? That's the surest way to my heart. As the saying goes:
You don't raise a child in the hope it will shit gold and piss silver;
All you can hope for is that it will respond empathetically to you.
You're a true denizen of the Verdant Spring Bordello.[23] In the future, you needn't worry about not having anything to eat. You're certainly superior to that lousy little splay-legged whore from the Cheng place. Slippery as she is, she never consents to sing."
"Beggar Ying the Second," exclaimed Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you're delirious again. What a thing to say!
"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just a while ago, you were objecting to their singing, and now you're giving her a hard time about it."
"That was a while ago," responded Ying Po-chüeh. "Now that they've served the wine, should we not have a song? As long as I've got three mace of silver to my name, I can afford to:
Make a ghost at the millstone,[24]
out of that little whore."
Han Yü-ch'uan had no alternative but to pick up her *p'i-p'a* and sing four songs for the amusement of the company.
Ying Po-chüeh then enquired of Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How come you didn't have Li Kuei-chieh come out to entertain us today?"
"She's not here today," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I heard her singing, a while ago, in the rear compound," said Ying po-chüeh, "and now you're telling lies on her behalf."
Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "Whatever happens, go into the rear compound and tell her to come out, and be quick about it."
Tai-an refused to budge, saying, "Master Two, you haven't heard right. It's the blind professional singer Big Sister Yü that's singing for the ladies."
"You lousy little oily mouth!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "do you think you can fool me? Wait till I go back there myself to fetch her."
Sticky Chu then said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, it doesn't really matter but why not just ask Li Kuei-chieh to come out and serve a round of drinks to your distinguished relatives? If she doesn't sing, it doesn't matter. I know that she is here for personal reasons today."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to withstand the pestering of his cronies and felt compelled to send Tai-an back to the rear compound and ask Li Kuei-chieh to come and join them.
Li Kuei-chieh was in the master suite, playing her *p'i-p'a* and singing for the entertainment of Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and company.
When she saw Tai-an come in to call for her, she asked, "Who sent you here?"
"Father told me to come," replied Tai-an, "and ask you to go out to the reception hall and serve a round of drinks."
"Mother," said Li Kuei-chieh, "Father's not making any sense. I said, just now, that I wasn't going to go out, and now he's calling for me anyway."
"It was only because Father was unable to withstand the pestering of the company," said Tai-an, "that he sent me back here for you."
"It doesn't matter," said Yüeh-niang. Just go out, serve a round of drinks, and come back as quickly as you can, that's all."
"Was it really Father who sent for me?" Kuei-chieh again asked Tai-an. "If it was, then I'll go. But if it was Beggar Ying the Second, I wouldn't care if he called me for an age, I'd never go."
Thereupon, she availed herself of Yüeh-niang's mirror stand to retouch her makeup and adjust her attire and then went out to the reception hall.
When the company looked up, they saw that on her head she wore:
A chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree,
fastened in place all round with:
Gold filigree pins and combs,
on which:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles.
Above, she wore:
A blouse of pale lavender silk;
below, she wore:
A skirt of turquoise satin,
revealing:
The upturned points of her tiny golden lotuses,
Decorated with a pair of red phoenixes.
On her painted face she wore:
Three turquoise beauty patches;
From her body:
A gust of exotic fragrance[25] assailed the nostrils.
Facing the seat of honour:
Neither correctly nor precisely,
she performed but a single kowtow, after which:
Hiding her face behind her gold-flecked fan,
While coyly adjusting her hair ornaments,
she took her stand in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an to set out a brocade-covered stool for her at the head of the seating arrangement so she could offer wine to the guest of honour, Ch'iao Hung.
Ch'iao Hung, however, hastily bowed to her, saying, "There's no need for you to trouble yourself on my behalf. What about these other distinguished relatives?"
"Start off with Master Ch'iao," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Li Kuei-chieh, thereupon:
Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Raised high the golden flagon,
and offered Ch'iao Hung some wine.
"Distinguished sir," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh from one side, "Please resume your seat and let her serve you. For these painted faces from the Verdant Spring Bordello, providing entertainment and serving wine are their professional responsibilities. You mustn't be overindulgent with them."
"Master Two," responded Ch'iao Hung, "This young lady is the sweetheart of our distinguished host. How could I possibly presume to put her to any trouble? It would make me:
Ill at ease either sitting or standing."
"You can relax on that score," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She is no longer playing the role of a strumpet. On seeing that His Honour has become an official, she has volunteered herself for acceptance as an adopted daughter."
Li Kuei-chieh's face turned red, and she said, "You're delirious! Whoever said such a ridiculous thing?"
"Really," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta.
"Can such things be?
We didn't know anything about it. We ought to take advantage of this occasion, when all of you gentlemen are here, not one of us being absent, to contribute five candareens of silver apiece as a gift to our brother here, in celebration of his acquisition of this adopted daughter."
Ying Po-chüeh picked up where Hsieh Hsi-ta had left off, saying, "It's a good thing Brother has become an official. It has always been true that:
There is less need to fear officials,
Than there is to fear the officious.[26]
Now that you've acquired an adopted daughter to boot, in the future, if you sprinkle a little water on her, barren as she is, she may end up producing a juicy little niece or nephew for me."[27]
"You lousy dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing railed at him. "All you ever do is resort to outlandish irony over nothing."
"Even foreign iron can be forged into a cutting instrument," retorted Ying Po-chüeh.
"Beggar Ying the Second," interjected Cheng Ai-hsiang, who was serving wine to Mr. Shen, "If Li Kuei-chieh can be his goddaughter, maybe you can become his godson that, if you scramble the letters a bit, would make you a gone sod."[28]
"You lousy little whore!" railed Ying Po-chüeh. "You're nothing but a dead duck. I'll stop giving you a hard time about as soon as you start reciting Buddha's name."
"Sister Ai-hsiang," said Li Kuei-chieh, "Why don't you tell off this beggar for me?"
"Don't pay any attention to him," said Cheng Ai-hsiang. "To cite a few familiar phrases, he's just a:
'Cock' a doodle doo,
'Hold' onto your hat;
who's:
A 'dillar,' a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar,
Yes,' my darling daughter."[29]
"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You may abuse me all you want with that highfalutin lingo of yours. Needless to say, if I were really as infamous as you make out, I'd have ripped off your mother's pant strings a long time ago. Don't worry about it. In the future, if I don't give you something to remember me by, you'll refuse to acknowledge the General of the Five Ways as a god."
"We'd better not bother him any further," said Li Kuei-chieh. "He's showing all the symptoms of desperation."
"This Beggar Ying the Second," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "is worse than ever today.
He puts his 'ugly' 'niece' on a pushcart:
the better to parade his 'ugliness.'[30]
Like the flowers of the wax gourd:
he stinks in and out of season.
It so happens that, he's really a 'son of a nun.' "
"This little splay-legged whore!" protested Ying Po-chüeh. "Nobody else will have her. I'm the only one willing to make the best of it."

"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "What a clean mouth you've got! You're knocking the tartar right off her teeth. Father, why don't you give him a slap or two? Just look at the way he's carrying on."
"You crazy clod of a dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing berated him. "You were the one who wanted them to serve the wine in the first place, so what are you teasing them for?"
Going up to his place at the table, he gave him a slap.
"You lousy little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You think that as long as you've got your lover's influence behind you, I'll be afraid of you. Just listen to how sweetly she pronounces the word 'Father.' "
"But don't have her serve any more wine," he went on to say. "That's letting her off too easily. Bring on the instruments, and let her sing a suite of songs for us, or she'll slip back to the rear compound. She's been giving us the slip enough as it is."
"Master Two," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "you're like:
The intendant of the Ts'ao-chou Military Defense Circuit:
The area of your jurisdiction is broad."[31]
There in the front reception hall:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
they continued to drink wine and enjoy themselves. But no more of this.
Let us now return to the story of P'an Chin-lien. Ever since Li P'ing-erh had borne a child, she noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing constantly chose to spend the night in her quarters. Thereupon, she:
Constantly harboured jealous thoughts,[32] and
Frequently nurtured dissatisfied ideas.
Knowing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was entertaining in the front reception hall, she approached her mirror stand:
Deftly painted her moth eyebrows,
Retouched her cicada-shaped coiffure,
Lightly rouged her ruby lips,
adjusted her attire, and emerged from her room.
On hearing the baby crying in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she walked right in and asked, "Since his mother isn't even here, why is he crying so?"
"His mother has gone to the rear compound," the wet nurse Ju-i replied. "He's crying this way because he wants his mother."
Affecting an ingratiating smile, P'an Chin-lien stepped up and started to play with the baby, saying, "You've hardly been here any time at all, you're just a newborn sprout, and yet you already know enough to look for your mother. Let me carry you back to the rear compound, and we'll see if I can't find your mother for you."
She was about to loosen her blouse and pick the child up, when the wet nurse Ju-i said to her, "Don't pick the baby up, Fifth Lady. I fear he might go wee-wee on you."
"You crazy little stinker!" said Chin-lien. "What is there to worry about? If I hold him on a diaper-cloth, there won't be any problem."
She then took Kuan-ko into her arms, embraced him, and set off straight for the rear compound. As she went through the ceremonial gate leading into the rear courtyard, she raised the child up as high as she could hold him.
Who could have anticipated that Wu Yüeh-niang would be standing in the loggia outside the master suite, overseeing some servants' wives, who were busy replenishing dishes of savories for the party, while Li P'ing-erh and Yü-hsiao were just inside the door, making butterfat "abalone shell" sweets.[33]
P'an Chin-lien, with an ingratiating smile, looked at the child and said, as though in his voice, " 'What are you doing, First Mother?' Now say, Your little Kuan-ko has come looking for his mother.' "
Yüeh-niang, abruptly lifting up her head to see who it was, said, "Fifth Lady, what are you saying? It's a good thing his mother isn't here. Late as it is, what are you doing carrying him back here for no good reason? And lifting him so high up, to boot? I'm afraid you may frighten him. His mother has her hands full just inside the door there."
She then called out, "Sister Li, come outside. Your son has come looking for you."
When Li P'ing-erh hastily came outside and saw Chin-lien holding her baby, she said, "Little Kuan-ko, I left you, perfectly content, in my room, in the arms of the wet nurse. Why have you come looking for me, for no good reason? See that you don't go wee-wee on your fifth mother's clothes."
"He was in your room," said Chin-lien, "crying like anything for you. So I thought I'd bring him out with me for a walk."
Li P'ing-erh hastily loosened her blouse and took possession of her child.
Yüeh-niang playfully teased the baby for a while and then said, "Carry him carefully back to your quarters, and try not to frighten him."
When Li P'ing-erh got back to her quarters in the front compound, she said quietly, "Wet nurse, if he starts to cry, you should take your time and try to comfort him until I get back. Why did you let the Fifth Lady take him back to the rear compound looking for me?"
"That's just what I told her," said Ju-i, "but the Fifth Lady insisted on carrying him off."
Li P'ing-erh took the time to watch as Ju-i breast-fed the baby and then put him to bed. Who could have anticipated that, not long after he had fallen asleep, the child started to cry as though something had frightened him in a dream. In the middle of the night, he started to suffer from alternating chills and fever. The wet nurse tried to breast-feed him but he rejected the milk and continued to cry. Li P'ing-erh became alarmed.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's party in the front compound broke up, he sent the four singing girls home. Yüeh-niang gave Li Kuei-chieh a set of heavy chiffon velvet brocade clothing and two taels of silver but there is no need to describe this in detail.
Late that evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see his child, he saw that it was crying and asked what had happened.
Li P'ing-erh did not bring up the fact that P'an Chin-lien had carried him off to the rear compound, merely saying, "I don't know why but after falling asleep, he woke up and has been crying like this ever since. He also rejects his milk."
"Do your best to pet him back to sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Then he upbraided Ju-i, saying, "Why didn't you look after Kuan-ko properly? What were you doing to frighten him like that?"
Returning to the rear compound, he told Yüeh-niang about it. Yüeh-niang, although she knew that it was Chin-lien's taking him out that had frightened him, did not mention a word about it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, merely saying, "Tomorrow I'll send for Dame Liu to have a look at him."
"Don't have that old whore come and subject him to her:
Bogus acupuncture and quack moxabustion,"[34]
said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get a licensed pediatrician to treat the child."
Yüeh-niang did not accede to his suggestion, saying, "For a baby who's barely a month old, what need is there for any such thing as a licensed pediatrician?"
Early the next day, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing off to work at the yamen, she sent a pageboy to ask Dame Liu to come and take a look at him. She said that he was suffering from a fright, and she was given three mace of silver for her pains. Only after the baby had been made to swallow some of the medicine she prescribed did he start to sleep soundly and stop rejecting his milk that enabled Li P'ing-erh to feel as though:
The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.
Truly:
A whole breastful of intimate concerns,
Resides in what is not expressed in words.

After drinking their fill, the principal guests had gone away. Ximen Qing, however, pressed the two Uncles Wu, Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to remain. He told the musicians to go for their refreshment, bidding them come again next day. "I am entertaining the gentlemen from the District offices," he said, "and you must put on your best clothes. I will pay you for everything tomorrow."
The musicians answered: "Your servants will take the utmost care, and tomorrow we will dress ourselves in new clothes of the official type." They had food and wine, then kowtowed and went away. Soon afterwards, Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er came in side by side. They smiled and said: "Father, it is late and our sedan chairs have come for us. We must go."
"My children," Ying Bojue said, "your audacity surprises me. Here are two very worthy gentlemen but instead of singing for them you just go off."
"Oh yes," said Guijie, "you would talk like that. We haven't been home for two days and mother will be wondering what has become of us."
"Why should she worry?" Bojue cried, "that yellow jade-coloured old plum with a piece bitten out of her!"
"That is enough!" Ximen said, "let them go. They have had to work very hard these last few days. Li Ming and Wu Hui shall sing for us." He asked the two girls if they had had anything to eat. Guijie told him that Yueniang had given them refreshments. When they had kowtowed and were about to go away, Ximen Qing said: "I shall expect you the day after tomorrow. Bring another two girls with you. Han Jinchuan and Zheng Aixiang will do. I am inviting a few relatives and friends to dinner."
"You are lucky, you little strumpet," cried Ying Bojue, "you get away and do well out of it."
"I wonder what it is that makes you so clever," Guijie said. They laughed and went away.
"Whom are you going to invite, Brother?" Bojue said to Ximen Qing.
"Master Qiao, the two Uncles Wu, Brother Hua, Uncle Shen and the members of our brotherhood. We will spend the whole day enjoying ourselves."
"Though I realize that I am troubling you too greatly, "Bojue said, "I will come to assist you in receiving the guests."
Ximen Qing thanked him. Then Li Ming and Wu Hui came with their instruments and sang a few songs. Finally the men all went away.
The day when Ximen Qing had invited the officers from the District offices, Eunuch Xue was one of the first to arrive. Ximen offered him tea in the arbour. The eunuch asked whether his colleague Liu had sent a present. Then he asked to see the child that he might give him his blessing. Ximen Qing modestly deprecated such an honour but at last told Daian to go to the inner court for the baby. The nurse brought the child to the corner gate where Daian received him and brought him to them. Xue looked at Guan'ge and praised him. "A very fine child!" he said. He called for his attendants. Two servants, dressed in black, brought a square gilt box, and from it took two packets of gifts. There was a length of royal silk, a roll of watered red silk, and four silver gilt coins, each with one of the lucky characters upon it: Good Fortune, Long Life, Health, and Peace. There was a small *Bo Lang* drum, painted in gold and various colours, and a set of amulets. "I am only a poor eunuch," he said, "and have nothing worth offering but these trifles may serve to amuse your son."
Ximen Qing made a reverence to the eunuch and thanked him very heartily. When they had drunk tea, refreshments were served but, before they had finished them, the expected guests were announced. Ximen Qing put straight his robes and went to the second door to welcome them. These were District Magistrate Li Datian, Assistant District Magistrate Qian Zheng, Chief Secretary Ren Tinggui, and Prison Governor Xia Tianji. They presented their cards and then went to the hall and greeted their host. Ximen asked Eunuch Xue to come and meet his guests, and the officers insisted that the old man should take the seat of honour. Among the guests was a graduate of the second degree named Shang.
When they had all taken their proper places, tea was served. After a while the sound of drums and music was heard in the courtyard. The actors came to offer wine to the chief guest and showed him their repertory. Eunuch Xue looked at it and bade them sing the song of Han Xiangzi attaining immortality. They danced to accompany this song. The performance was excellent. The eunuch was pleased and told his servant to give the musicians two strings of money. The party was very successful and did not break up until late.
Guijie went home. Now that Ximen Qing was an officer, she and her mother thought of a scheme for taking advantage of the situation. They bought four different kinds of presents and Guijie made a pair of shoes. The next day, she told her servant to put them in a box and, very early in the morning, got into a sedan chair and set off to ask Yueniang to accept her as a ward. She went in smiling, and kowtowed four times to Wu Yueniang, then to her and Ximen Qing together. Yueniang was greatly flattered.
"Only the other day," she said, "your mother sent me a valuable present and now you have gone to all this trouble to buy expensive gifts for me."
Guijie smiled. "Mother says that now his Lordship is an officer, of course he will not be able to come so often to see her. I have come to offer myself as his adopted daughter. Then there will be no difficulty about my coming here because we shall be relatives."
Yueniang told her to take off her long cloak and asked why Wu Yin'er and the others had not come with her.
"I spoke to Wu Yin'er about it yesterday," Guijie said. "I can't understand why she has not come. The other day, Father told me to bring Zheng Aixiang and Han Jinchuan. As I was coming along, I saw the chairs waiting outside their doors, so they are sure to be here before long."
Almost at that moment Wu Yin'er, Zheng Aixiang, and a young girl dressed in scarlet, came and kowtowed to Yueniang. They had brought their clothes in a bag. When Wu Yin'er saw Guijie sitting on the bed with her outdoor clothes already taken off, she said: "You are a fine friend, Sister Guijie. You would not wait but came along without us."
"I was going to wait for you," Guijie said, "but when my mother saw the chair at the door she said: 'It looks to me as though your sister has already gone. You had better make haste.' I didn't realize you were not ready."
"She is not too late," Yueniang said, smiling. She asked the name of the newcomer. "She is Han Jinchuan's younger sister, Han Yuchuan," Wu Yin'er told her.
Yuxiao brought refreshments for the singing girls. Guijie, who was anxious to show that she was now the adopted daughter of Yueniang, sat on Yueniang's bed and helped Yuxiao to crack the nuts and put them into the fruit box. Wu Yin'er and the other girls sat together on a bench. Guijie lost no opportunity of making clear her new importance. "Sister Yuxiao," she would say, "would you mind giving me a cup of tea?" or "Sister Xiaoyu, may I have some water to rinse my hands?" Wu Yin'er and the others looked at her in astonishment but Yueniang and Li Jiao'er were sitting opposite and they could say nothing.
"Sister Wu Yin'er," Guijie said, "you must get your instrument and sing a song for my mother. I have done my part already."
Again Wu Yin'er could not help herself. She picked up her instrument, and the four girls together sang the Eight Melodies of Ganzhou.
"What guests has Father invited today?" Wu Yin'er asked.
"They are all kinsmen and friends," Yueniang said.
"Are the two eunuchs coming?" Guijie said. Yueniang said no; that Xue had called the day before but not Liu.
"His Lordship Liu is a fine man," Guijie said, "but Xue is always up to tricks. Sometimes he pinches me till I nearly faint."
"After all," Yueniang said, "he is a eunuch and there is something lacking about him. There is no harm in letting him have his little fun."
"You are right," Guijie said, "but sometimes I find him rather a nuisance."
Daian came for the box of fruits. When he saw the four girls sitting there, he said: "Half the guests are here already, and they are just about to take their places. Why do you not dress and go?"
Yueniang asked who had come, and Daian told her that Master Qiao, Uncle Hua, the two Uncles Wu and Uncle Xie were there. Guijie said: "What about Beggar Ying and Pockmarked Zhu? Have they come?"
"The ten gentlemen of the brotherhood are all here," Daian said. "Uncle Ying was here early and Father asked him to attend to a certain matter for him. He went away but I think he will be back soon."
"Oh dear!" Guijie said, "every time I come into contact with those sharpers, I wonder how I shall be stung. I shall not go. I shall stay here and sing songs for Mother."
"You take too much upon yourself," Daian said. He took the fruit box and went back to the hall.
"Mother," Guijie said to Yueniang, "do you know that Pockmarked Zhu never allows his lips to stop moving when he is at a party? The others complain but he pays no attention. He and Greedy-Chops Sun have not an atom of shame about them."
"Yes," Zheng Aixiang said, "Pockmarked Zhu is always about with Ying. They came to our house the other day with Little Zhang the Second. Little Zhang had twenty taels and wanted my younger sister Zheng Aiyue. My mother told them that my sister had just been made a woman by a Southerner. It had only been a month before and the Southerner had not gone away yet, so we could do nothing for him. They would not listen to her, and my mother lost her temper, locked the door from the inside, and would have nothing to do with them. Young Master Zhang is very well off. He rides a great white horse and there are always four or five boys in attendance on him. Well, he simply sat down in our hall and refused to go away. Pockmarked Zhu knelt down in the courtyard and said: 'Old Lady, you must really come out and take this money. All we ask is to see Zheng Aiyue and have a cup of tea. Then we will go away.' This made us laugh like anything. He was like the man who comes to tell us about the floods. He's an utterly shameless fellow."
"That young Zhang," Wu Yin'er said, "once had the *dong* cat."
"Yes," Zheng Aixiang said, "and set fire to the tiger's mouth, and then the turtle broke with her."
She turned to Guijie. "Yesterday I met Zhou Xiao outside our door and he told me to tell you that the other day he and Nie Yue went to call upon you but you were not at home."
Guijie glanced sharply at her. "Why, of course," she said, "I was here that day. It was my sister Guiqing he went to see."
"If there is nothing between you," Aixiang said, "why are you always so friendly?"
"You are as fond of your joke as old Liu the Ninth. Do you think Zhou means anything to me? I should be ashamed to have anything to do with that fellow. There was a row, and he told everybody he was coming to see me. He was very much annoyed because I wouldn't let his mother say so. Of course, I can't help his coming to our house. But I should be a piece of stone, whatever he had to do with anyone else. If I were so foolish, it would be like looking towards the South and driving a nail into my bosom."
They all laughed. Yueniang, who had been sitting on the bed listening to them, said: "I have not understood a single word of what you have been saying all this time. I do not even know what language you are speaking."
The guests in the front court had now all arrived. Ximen Qing, dressed in his robes of ceremony, served them with wine. Master Qiao was asked to take the place of honour and he offered the first toast to Ximen Qing. The three singing girls came from the back court. They wore glittering pearl headdresses on their heads and their bodies were exquisitely perfumed with musk. Bojue, as soon as he saw them, said, jokingly: "Where have you three odd things come from? Stop. You may not come in. Why is Guijie not here?" Ximen Qing declared he did not know.

Zheng Aixiang took the zither, Wu Yin'er the lute, and Yuchuan the castanets. They opened their red lips, showed their pearly teeth, and sang.
Besides Master Qiao, who sat in the place of honour, all the members of the brotherhood were present, with Fu, the manager of the shop, and Ben the Fourth. There were fourteen guests, and eight tables. Ximen Qing sat in the host's seat. It was a very splendid feast. Charming voices, exquisite dancing, wine like rolling waves, and food piled up mountains high. When the wine had been passed several times and three songs had been sung, Ying Bojue said: "Host, do not allow them to sing any more. They sing the same tune over and over again like a dog scratching at the door. I have no patience for any more of it. Won't you ask one of the boys to bring three chairs, so that they can sit down and serve wine for us? That would be much better than this singing."
"Leave them alone, you dog," Ximen said. "Why should you upset the whole party?"
"Oh, Beggar Ying," Aixiang cried, "you're letting off fireworks from your behind. You can't wait till evening."
Bojue rose in his place. "You marvelous little strumpet," he cried, "evening or not evening, what has it to do with you, you mother's cunt? Come here, Daian. Bring the thumbscrews, and let them have a taste. Then they may serve the wine."
"Oh, you scamp," Aixiang cried, "you have lifted me right off the ground."
"Listen!" Ximen cried, "we have not all the time in the world. Serve us with wine at once. I will wait no longer."
Wu Yin'er poured wine for Master Qiao, Zheng Aixiang for the elder of the Wu brothers and Yuchuan for the younger, then they went to the others in turn. When Wu Yin'er gave wine to Ying Bojue, he asked her why Guijie had not come.
"The Great Lady has accepted her as a ward," Wu Yin'er said. "I will tell you about it, Uncle but please keep it to yourself. She is up to some trick. The other day, when we left here, we went home together and it was arranged that we should all come together early today. This morning I dressed and waited for her. I never dreamed she would buy some presents and come here by herself. The result was that we were all late. We sent our maid to call for her, and she was told that Guijie had gone. My mother was very angry. I don't see why she should not have told us that she was going to be made a ward. We couldn't do anything about it. But she made a great secret of it and, when we were in the inner court, she sat on the Great Lady's bed and fussed about to show off her new dignity. She cracked the nuts, set the fruit boxes in order, did this, that, and the other thing and kept us at our distance. I really don't know exactly how it all came about but the Sixth Lady told me that Guijie had made a pair of shoes for the Great Lady, bought a box of fruitcakes, two ducks, a pair of large hams and two bottles of wine, and brought them with her in a sedan chair very early this morning."
"So now she will not come," he said. "Well, I will see that the little strumpet does come. It looks to me as though she had arranged all this with her mother. She knows that Ximen has been given an appointment; she is anxious now that he has become powerful, and afraid he may not go to their house quite so often. So, to make sure that their relationship continues, she gets herself made his ward. Isn't that it? Now here is some advice for you. She has persuaded the Great Lady to accept her as a ward. Tomorrow, get a few presents yourself and come here and ask the Sixth Lady to adopt you. You and she are connected through your relationship with your dead Uncle Hua, and it will be well for you to keep together. Don't let Guijie think you are annoyed."
"You are right," Wu Yin'er said. "I will tell my mother as soon as I get home."
She took the wine pot to the next guest. Yuchuan poured wine for Ying Bojue. "Sister," he said, "this is very kind of you. Pray do not make a reverence to me. What is your sister doing at home?"
"My sister has been at home for a long time," Yuchuan said. "She has not been out singing. Her time has been fully taken up."
"I remember," Bojue continued, "that I enjoyed your hospitality in the fifth month but since then I have not seen her."
"The other day, Uncle, you came but you would not stay. You insisted on going away early."
"Well, as it happened," Ying Bojue said, "there was a little dispute that day, and I had some business with your uncle. Except for that I should certainly have stayed longer."
Yuchuan saw that Ying Bojue had finished his cup of wine and poured out another for him.
"It must be only a little," he said, "I dare not drink any more."
"Drink it slowly, Uncle," the girl said, "and when you have finished, I will sing you a song."
"Sister," Bojue said, "you seem to do just what I would have you do. I wonder how it is. You remember the proverb that says: We do not wish our children to make water of silver, or desire that their excrement should be of gold. All we ask is that they should be ready to act as the occasion demands. There can be no doubt that a girl like you need never be anxious about her livelihood. You are much more agreeable than that little strumpet Zheng Aixiang. That piece of mischief is simply trying to get out of singing."
"Beggar Ying, are you feeling ill?" Aixiang said. "How dare you insult me?"
"You dog," said Ximen Qing," you persuaded her to sing, and now you are teasing her,"
"Oh, that is all dead and done with," Bojue said. "She is serving the wine now. I was bound to ask her to sing. Now here I have three *qian* of silver. I will hire the little strumpet to turn the millstone like a ghost."
Yuchuan took up her lute and sang a short song. Then Bojue asked Ximen why he did not send for Guijie.
"She is not here today," Ximen said.
"But I have just been told that she is singing in the inner court. Why do you tell me such a lie?"
He told Daian to go to the inner court and fetch her. Daian made no move.
"Uncle Ying," he said, "you are mistaken. It was someone else who was singing for my mistress in the inner court."
"You rascally young oily mouth," Bojue cried, "so you too try to deceive me. Very well, I will go myself."
Zhu Shinian said to Ximen Qing: "Brother, please send for Guijie and ask her to serve wine to all of us. We will not ask her to sing, for I understand she has gone up in the world."
Ximen Qing was finally compelled to give way. He sent Daian to summon Guijie.
When the boy came to the inner court, Li Guijie was in Yueniang's room, playing the lute and singing for the ladies there. She asked Daian who had told him to come for her.
"Father said I was to ask you to come and serve one round of wine to his guests. Then you can come straight back."
"Mother," Guijie said to Yueniang, "you see Father is quite mad. I told him I would not go and yet he sends for me."
"The others urged him," Daian said. "They persuaded him to send me." "You had better go, and serve them all with wine once, then come back," Yueniang said.
"If it is really Father who wants me," Guijie said, "I will go but if it is that Beggar Ying, nothing he can do will ever persuade me, not if I live for a thousand years." She stood before Yueniang's mirror, repainted her face, and went to the hall.
The guests all gazed at her. Upon her head was a hairnet of silver thread; her pins and combs were gilt, and masses of pearls and emeralds were piled upon her hair. She wore a coat of "Lotus root" thread and a skirt of green satin. Her tiny feet were shod in scarlet shoes. She wore emerald pendants upon her cheeks. A strange fragrance came from her scented body.
Guijie kowtowed once towards the table but it was carelessly done. She held a gilded fan before her face, assumed an air of modesty and dallied with her ornaments. Then she came and stood before Ximen Qing. He ordered Daian to place a chair with a cushion for her and asked her to pour a cup of wine for Master Qiao. But Qiao bowed hastily and said: "I must not trouble you but will you not serve these other honourable gentlemen?"
"Of course she must begin with you," Ximen said.
Guijie lightly fluttered her silken sleeves and, taking a golden cup, raised it high in the air and handed it to Qiao.
"Most worthy Qiao," Bojue said, "pray be seated and let her stand beside you. These powdery-faced girls from the Li's house, it is their duty to serve wine. You must not indulge them."
"But, my dear Ying the Second," Qiao said, "this young lady is now the daughter of our honourable host. How can I trouble her? It would embarrass me."
"Do not worry yourself," Bojue said; "now that our honourable host has become an officer, she is not content to be a strumpet any longer; she must be his ward."
Guijie flushed. "Are you mad that you talk such nonsense?"
"But is this true?" Xie Xida cried. "I had heard nothing of it. Now all here, without exception, must all give five *fen* of silver to celebrate the occasion."
"It is a great thing to be an officer," Bojue interrupted. "Ever since the beginning of things people have never been afraid of officers in general but only of those with whom they come into close contact. Now his Lordship has taken her as his ward, we shall have to sprinkle water on her body to wash the filth away."
"You talk the most arrant nonsense," Ximen Qing cried.
"Perhaps," Bojue returned, "but you can make an excellent knife out of barbarian iron."
Zheng Aixiang was pouring wine for Uncle Shen. "Beggar Ying," she said, "Sister Guijie is now his Lordship's ward. I advise you to become his adopted son but, if you would rather, you can doubtless assume a more ambiguous relationship.
Bojue cursed her. "You little whore! Do you wish to die? Wait till I start on you, and then you'd better say your prayers."
"Curse him for me, Sister Aixiang," Guijie said.
"Don't worry about that looking-towards-Jiangnan tiger from the Ba Mountain, beshitten pants from the Eastern Hills."
"You little strumpet," cried Bojue. "Now you are even using the 'Confucius said' to curse me. I have said nothing. I am just a white ghost. I will tear the girdle that holds up your mother's trousers. Wait until tomorrow and see if I don't show you what I can do. Otherwise you will have no respect for me. You won't treat the general as a god."
"We had better not bother about him any more," Guijie said, "Little Brother's going to be angry."
Aixiang smiled. "Ah, dear Beggar Ying," she said, "you are like the devil in a cart with a lot of ugly-looking melons, so ugly that there are even none for you."
"You little crooked bone," Bojue said, "I can't deal with you all at once. I shall have to give way."
"You funny little pocketknife," Guijie said, "nice clean lips you've got. You have already broken everybody else's gums. Father, I'm surprised you don't beat him instead of sitting there, watching his naughty tricks."
Ximen Qing scolded him. "You dog, I asked her to come and pour wine, and you have no business to make game of her." He went over and slapped Ying Bojue.
"You thievish little strumpet. You simply depend upon your father's authority. Do you think I am afraid of you? Look at you, the heartfelt way you call him 'Father.'" Then he added: "Don't let her pass the wine. It is too good a job for her. Let us have the musical instruments and she shall sing a song for us. She has spent quite long enough in the inner court."
"Uncle," Yuchuan said, "you are like the soldier who came from Caozhou, managing everything the way you do."
So they drank wine and played and joked together.
After the birth of a son to Li Ping'er, Jinlian saw that Ximen Qing always slept in the Sixth Lady's apartments. She could not rid herself of her jealousy, and constantly thought of revenge. today she knew that Ximen Qing was entertaining guests in the front hall, and she stood before her toilet table painting her moth-like eyebrows carefully, dressing and redressing her hair, and putting a touch of colour on her lips. Then she arranged her dress and went out from her room. As she passed Li Ping'er's room, she heard the baby crying. She went in and asked what was the matter with him.
"His mother has gone to the inner court," the nurse, Ruyi'er, said. "He wants her, and cries."
Jinlian smiled, went forward, and patted the baby.
"You are a real little man already," she said, "wanting your mother even at your age. Let us go to the inner court to find her."
"Fifth Mother," Ruyi'er said, "you had better not take him. He will make your clothes dirty."
Nonsense," Jinlian said, "I will put some more clothes on. It will be no trouble at all." She took the child to her breast, and went off with him to the inner court. When she reached the second door, she lifted him high in the air. Yueniang was sitting underneath the eaves, watching the maids and women cooking and changing the dishes. Jinlian looked at the baby, and smiled.
"Mother," she said, "what are you doing? The baby has come to look for his mother."
Yueniang looked at him. "Fifth Sister," she said, "what are you thinking about? His mother was not in her room but you should not have brought him out. And why carry him up in the air like that? He will be frightened. His mother is inside, busy." She called to Li Ping'er and told her that her son had come to see her.
Li Ping'er hastily came out. When she saw Jinlian with the child, she said: "Oh, baby, you were quite happy with your nurse. Why should you want me? You will make your Fifth Mother's clothes dirty."
"He was crying," Jinlian said. "He wanted you, so I brought him along."
Li Ping'er opened her clothes and took the child. For a while, Yueniang played with him. Then she told his mother to take him to her own room, and be careful lest he should be frightened.
When Li Ping'er came to her own room, she said to Ruyi'er: "If the baby was crying, you should have done something to keep him quiet, and waited for me to come. Why did you get the Fifth Lady to bring him to the inner court?"
"I told her she should not do so," Ruyi'er said, "but she would not listen to me."
Li Ping'er watched the nurse feeding the child, and at last he went to sleep. Before he had been asleep very long, he woke from his dreams with a cry. In the middle of the night, he seemed first hot and then cold, and refused to take his nurse's milk. He would do nothing but cry, and Li Ping'er was alarmed about him.
When the party in the front court was over, Ximen Qing dismissed the four singers. Yueniang gave Guijie a dress of heavy silk and two taels of silver.
During the evening, Ximen Qing went to the rooms of Li Ping'er to see his son. The child was crying but when he asked the reason, Li Ping'er did not tell him that Jinlian had taken him to the inner court.
"I don't know," she said, "what has made him cry and refuse to take his milk."
"Give him a few gentle pats," Ximen said. "That will make him sleep." Then he scolded the nurse. "You have not been careful enough of him. What have you been thinking about? You must have frightened him."
He went to the inner court to tell Yueniang. She, too, realized that the child had been frightened when Jinlian brought him to her room, yet she did not breathe a word of this to her husband. "I will send for old woman Liu tomorrow," she said, "she can look at him."
"You mustn't think of sending for that old rogue," Ximen said, "she will use the needle and the flame without hesitating. We must get the royal children's doctor to come and examine him."
Yueniang did not agree. "The child's only a month old," she said. "A doctor can do him no good."
The next day, Ximen Qing went to his office and Yueniang told one of the boys to go for old woman Liu. The old woman said, "The child had had a fright," and they gave her three *qian* of silver to make some soothing medicine for him. When he had taken the medicine, the boy slept quietly and kept down his milk. Li Ping'er smiled as though she felt like a stone that has come to rest at last upon the ground.

## 054
## Ch'en Ching-chi loses his Keys & Is Dis-trained to Sing; Han Tao-kuo (Daoguo) liberates his Wife to Compete for Admiration

In this life, although we are not
endowed with foreknowledge,[1]
Wealth and distinction, success and fame,
are not won by exertion.
It is vain to take riches and silk
as one's foundation;
How can human effort hope to contend
with the decree of fate?[2]
The customs of the age, heat and cold,
vainly beguile the eye;
Worldly cares, separation and reunion,
are better quite forgotten.
The superior man proceeds or halts
as he is used or discarded;[3]
If you do not un-knit your brow and laugh,
what are you waiting for?[4]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the yamen, he had no sooner come in the door than he asked Wu Yüeh-niang, "Is the child any better? Have you sent a pageboy after the doctor?"
"I've already had Dame Liu here," replied Yüeh-niang, "and he's been taking the medication she prescribed. The child is no longer rejecting his milk and has been sleeping soundly for some time. He seems to be somewhat better."
"How can you trust that old whore, with her:

Bogus acupuncture and quack moxabustion?"
said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The right thing to do would have been to engage the services of a licensed pediatrician. If he's better, so much for that. If he's not any better, I'll have her taken to the yamen and give the old whore's fingers a good squeezing for her pains."
"You and your:
Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,
abuse!" complained Yüeh-niang. "Your child is currently taking the medication she prescribed and has gotten better. Yet you persist in sticking your mouth out and cursing people!"
When she had finished speaking, a maidservant brought in something to eat.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had scarcely done eating when who should he see but Tai-an, who came in to announce, "Master Ying the Second has come."
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed the pageboy, "Take some tea out and ask Master Ying the Second to have a seat in the summerhouse."
Then, turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "Leave the dishes that I've been eating from just as they are and have a pageboy take them out, together with some rice, and ask our son-in-law to join him for a snack. I'll be there momentarily."
"Where did you send him off to yesterday morning," asked Yüeh-niang, "that he should be so late getting back?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained to her, "Brother Ying the Second is acquainted with a merchant from Hu-chou, a certain Magnate Ho, who has five hundred taels worth of spun silk in storage at his inn outside the South Gate that he is anxious to dispose of so he can start on his way home. He has let me know that his friend is willing to unload it at a discount. I only agreed to pay four hundred fifty taels of silver. Yesterday I sent him, along with Lai-pao, to take two large silver ingots as samples of the quality of my silver. The deal has already been struck, and we have arranged to pay over the silver today.
"My thinking is that since the house on Lion Street is empty, I might as well open two rooms on the street front there, have them fixed up to serve as a silk goods shop, and engage a manager to take care of it. Moreover, since Lai-pao is now nominally on the staff of the Prince of Yün that entitles him to a government salary, he can continue to stay there, along with the manager, to look after the house, on the one hand, and take charge of the business, on the other."
"There's no getting around the need to find another manager," said Yüeh-niang.
"Brother Ying the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has told me that he has an acquaintance named Han who was originally in the silk goods trade but is currently out of capital and sitting idle at home. He says that he is proficient at writing and arithmetic, and that:
His conduct is upright and correct,
and has repeatedly offered to stand as a guarantor for him. One of these days he's going to bring him to meet me and we'll arrange the terms of a contract."
When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing weighed out four hundred fifty taels of silver and told Lai-pao to take charge of it. Ch'en Ching-chi had already finished eating with Ying Po-chüeh in the summerhouse. The latter had waited until he was:
Burning with impatience,
but when he saw the silver brought out, he was:
Delighted in his heart.[5]
Bowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "After imposing on your hospitality yesterday, I got home late, and it was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."
"I've weighed out four hundred and fifty taels of silver here," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll have Lai-pao fetch a bag and pack it while we both look on. Today is an auspicious day for such a proceeding, so we'll hire a pushcart to transport the goods, and lock them up for the time being in the house over there. That ought to take care of it."
"What you propose makes sense, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. Where these Southerners are concerned:
If you delay things you'll only give them ideas.[6]
Have the goods carted in and the business will be completed."
Thereupon, he and Lai-pao mounted their horses and, taking the silver with them, went straight out to the inn outside the South Gate and completed the transaction. Who could have known that Ying Po-chüeh had colluded with Magnate Ho on a price of only four hundred twenty taels of silver, so that he profited by a kickback of thirty taels? For public consumption, when the deal was closed a commission of only nine taels of silver was forthcoming that Ying Po-chüeh and Lai-pao divided equally between them. They then proceeded to hire a pushcart and have the goods transported into the city that very day, stored them in an empty room in the house on Lion Street, locked the door, and came back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ying Po-chüeh to pick an auspicious day and bring Manager Han to see him. He turned out to be short of stature and twenty-nine-years-old.
His speech was voluble,
His appearance was imposing.
His face was blithe as the spring breeze,[7]
His manner was congenial.
That very day Hsi-men Ch'ing signed a contract with him, by the terms of which he and Lai-pao were to receive the capital from him to hire workers to dye silk, open up a storefront [8] in the house on Lion Street, and offer a complete line of silk goods for sale. Every day they sold several tens of taels worth of merchandise. But no more of this.
Light and darkness alternate swiftly;
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.
Before anyone knew it, it was the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Wu Yüeh-niang's birthday. A group of female guests was invited to a party to celebrate the event, and her elder brother Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, and Aunt Yang were asked to stay overnight so they could listen to the two Buddhist nuns recite sacred texts and sing Buddhist songs for them. On such occasions they often stayed up until the second or third watch before going to bed.
On this particular night, because his sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was staying in the master suite and it would be inconvenient for him to be there, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound to have a look at Kuan-ko and intended to sleep in Li P'ing-erh's room.
"The child is only now a little better," said Li P'ing-erh, "and I'm not in the mood for it. Why don't you go spend the night in the Fifth Lady's room?"
"I won't bother you then," Hsi-men Ch'ing said with a laugh.
Thereupon he went over to P'an Chin-lien's place. When Chin-lien heard her husband come into her quarters, she felt just as though she had:
Discovered a piece of gold or a precious stone,
and lost no time in bundling Old Mrs. P'an off to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's place.
In her bedroom she then proceeded to:
Ignite the highly placed silver lamp,
Deftly unroll the embroidered quilt,
Light incense and wash her private parts,
so that she could sleep together with Hsi-men Ch'ing that night.
The feelings expressed by the pillow side,
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.
Her every endeavor was designed to ensnare her lover's heart so that he would not stray into anyone else's room. Truly:
Drumming its antennae, the roving bee,
Finding the tender corolla half open, beguiles away the spring;
Sipping fragrance, the powdered butterfly,
Resting deep in the womb of the flower, disports itself by night.[9]
When Li P'ing-erh saw Old Mrs. P'an come over to her place, she hastily offered her a seat on the k'ang and ordered Ying-ch'un to serve wine and bake some wheat cakes so they could enjoy an evening chat. The night was half over before they went to sleep.
The next day she gave Old Mrs. P'an a pale green satin jacket, two pairs of satin shoe uppers, and two hundred candareens that pleased the old lady so much she was ready to:
Fart ferociously and pee in her pants.
Returning to her daughter's quarters, she showed these things to Chin-lien, saying, "These were all given to me by your sister over there."
When Chin-lien saw them, however, she criticized her mother, saying, "How can you be so:
Mean-spirited and covetous?[10]
What's so great about these things that you should be taking handouts from her?"
"A fine one to talk you are!" said Old Mrs. P'an. "When someone has been considerate enough to give me something, you start talking like that. What did *you* ever give me to wear?"
"I can't be compared to those sisters who have money of their own," said Chin-lien. "I don't have anything to wear myself. What would I give to you? And now, for no good reason, you've accepted favours at someone else's hands. In a little while, we'll simply have to get together a few dishes of something, pour out a flagon of wine, and go over to her place to return the favour. Otherwise, in the future, someone is sure to:
Engage in idle tittle-tattle.
I've had enough of that, thank you."
She then directed Ch'un-mei to prepare eight dishes of food, four boxes of delicacies, and a pewter flagon of wine. Having ascertained that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, she told Ch'iu-chü to put the things in square boxes and carry them over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she was to say, "Mother and Grandmother would like to come over, if you are free, and share a cup of wine with you."
"I've put your mother to trouble again," said Li P'ing-erh.
In a little while, Chin-lien and Old Mrs. P'an came over, and the three of them sat down together for a drink. Ch'un-mei stood in attendance upon them, and poured the wine.
As they were talking, who should they see but Ch'iu-chü, who had come to call Ch'un-mei, saying, "Son-in-law Ch'en is over at our place looking for some clothes that have been pawned. He wants you to go open the outer door to the second floor for him."
"Tell our son-in-law," instructed Chin-lien, "that after he has retrieved the clothes, he should come over here and have a goblet of wine before going on with his business."
Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi found the several sets of clothes he was looking for and headed out toward the front of the compound.
Ch'un-mei came in and reported, "He won't come in."
"Whatever it takes, drag him in if necessary," said Chin-lien, and she sent Hsiu-ch'un out, who succeeded in inviting him in.
Old Mrs. P'an was sitting on the k'ang beside a small table, arrayed with various dishes and delicacies, while Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh kept her company in drinking wine. Ch'en Ching-chi hastily made them a bow.
"I told you to come have a drink with the best of intentions," said Chin-lien. Why have you made excuses and refused to come? At this rate you'll be out of luck before you know it."
Making a meaningful moue, she instructed Ch'un-mei, "Fetch a capacious cup and fill it for our son-in-law to drink."
Ch'en Ching-chi put the clothes he had come for down on the k'ang and sat down. Ch'un-mei, who was a practiced hand at the routine, fetched a tea bowl, filled it to the brim, and handed it to him.
"It's very gracious of you, Fifth Lady," Ching-chi exclaimed in consternation, "but I'd rather drink two small cups, if you don't mind. There are a lot of people out in the shop waiting for their clothes."
"Let them wait," said Chin-lien. "I insist upon your drinking this big cup. Who has the patience to bother with those piddling little cups?"
"Let the young man go after this one cup," said Old Mrs. P'an. "I fear his business is pressing."
"Don't you believe it," said Chin-lien. "What's he got to be busy about? He can manage no small quantity of wine. In fact:
On a gold-varnished wine bucket,
He can drink down as far as the second hoop."
Ching-chi laughed at this and addressed himself to the wine.
He had barely swallowed two mouthfuls, when Old Mrs. P'an said to Ch'un-mei, "Sister, give him a pair of chopsticks. Don't have him drink on an empty stomach."
Ch'un-mei did not provide him with a pair of chopsticks but, in the endeavor to bedevil him further, picked two walnuts out of a partitioned box and offered them to him.
Ching-chi took them from her, saying, "No doubt you expect to get a laugh at my expense if I'm unable to crack them."
Thereupon, putting them between his teeth, he broke them into pieces with a single bite and downed them along with his wine.
"He's still a youngster," said Old Mrs. P'an, "with a good set of teeth in his mouth. For an old body like myself, if things are at all hard, I just can't eat them."
"There are only two things in this world," boasted Ching-chi, "that I am unable to eat. Pebbles and water buffalo horns."
When Chin-lien saw that he had downed the cup of wine, she told Ch'un-mei to refill it, saying, "That first cup was for me. But are not my mother and the Sixth Lady as worthy of the honour as myself? I wouldn't want you to drink too much. Just down these three cups and I'll let you off."
"Fifth Lady," pled Ching-chi, "take pity on your son. I can't drink any more. With just this one cup, I fear my face must be red, and Father may take it amiss."
"So you're afraid of your father-in-law are you," said Chin-lien. "I thought you weren't afraid of him. Where is he going to go out drinking today?"
"This afternoon he's going to Station Master Wu Tien-en's place for a drink," reported Ching-chi. "Right now he's across the street at Ch'iao Hung's house, supervising the alterations."
"Mr. Ch'iao's family moved out yesterday," said Chin-lien. "Shouldn't we have sent them a present of tea today?"
"The present of tea was sent off this morning," said Ching-chi.
"Where have they moved to?" asked Li P'ing-erh.
"They've spent one thousand two hundred taels of silver," said Ching-chi, "to buy a great big place on East Main Street, not very different from our own. It's got a forty-two-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis."
As they were talking, Ching-chi managed by holding his nose to swallow a second cup of wine, after which, as soon as he thought no one was looking, he grabbed up the clothes and disappeared in a puff of smoke.
"Mother," Ying-ch'un then remarked, "look at that. Your son-in-law has forgotten to take his keys with him."
Chin-lien proceeded to pick them up and then sit down on top of them, saying to Li P'ing-erh, "When he comes looking for them, don't any of you give the game away. Let me have a little fun with him before returning them."
"My child," said Old Mrs. P'an, "you really ought to return them. What do you want to fool around with him for?"
When Ch'en Ching-chi returned to the pawn shop and groped in his sleeve, he couldn't find the keys and headed straight back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to look for them.
"Whoever saw any keys of yours?" Chin-lien said. "You must have had the keys in your hand while doing something else and left them there without realizing it."
"I fear you may have left them locked in the second floor storage area," said Ch'un-mei. "I didn't notice your having them with you just now."
"I remember bringing them out with me," said Ching-chi.
"What a child!" said Chin-lien. "I dare say:
The hole in your bottom's so big:
Your mind has dropped out.
Who knows who it could be, either at home or abroad, who's got such a hold on you that:
You possess a soul but lack perception;
Your heart is no longer over your liver."

"There are customers waiting to redeem their clothes," said Ching-chi. "What am I to do? Before Father comes back, I'll have to call in a tinker to get the second-floor door open and see if they're there or not."
Li P'ing-erh could no longer contain herself and started to giggle.
"Sixth Lady," exclaimed Ching-chi, "if you have picked them up, give them to me."
"I've never seen anything like it," said Chin-lien. "I don't know what Sister Li is laughing at him about, as though we'd taken his keys or something."
Ching-chi was so anxious all he could do was:
Turn round and round like a millstone,[11]
until his roving eye caught sight of the ribbon attached to the keys that was sticking out from underneath Chin-lien's body.
"Aren't those the keys there," he exclaimed.
Just as he was about to reach for them with his hand, Chin-lien slipped them into her sleeve and refused to give them to him, saying, "How could any keys of yours have fallen into my hands?"
This so flustered the youngster that all he could do was to kneel down on the ground before her:
Dragging his knees like a chicken on the chopping block.
"They say you can sing a pretty song," said Chin-lien, "but you perform only for the benefit of the pageboys in the shop out front. Why don't you sing me a song? Take advantage of the fact that your grandmother and the Sixth Lady are here today. If you select good ones, that we haven't heard before, and sing four of them for us, I'll let you have those keys. Otherwise, though you should:
Jump as high as the top of the White Pagoda,[12]
the keys will not be forthcoming."
"This Fifth Lady," exclaimed Ching-chi, "is enough to give one a case of heartburn. Whoever told you I could sing?"
"Still up to your tricks, are you?" said Chin-lien.
"Just as Nanking has its Shen Wan-san,[13]
Peking has its withered willows;[14]
Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow."[15]
The young scamp, unable to withstand her teasing any longer, said:
"It's not going to kill me.[16]
I'll sing for you then. I've got a bellyful of songs. If I were to really:
Exercise my mind and poke up my liver;
should you demand a hundred, I'd come up with them."
"Still shooting off your mouth, are you, you short-life!" Chin-lien berated him.
She personally poured a full measure of wine for everyone present and then said to him, "Have another cup to cover your stage fright as you sing."
"I'll sing first and then drink at my leisure," said Ching-chi. "I'll sing a couple of songs for you on the names of fruits and flowers[17] to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope.' "
When we first met, we "plighted our faith
in the Peach Orchard."[18]
Once we were acquainted, I put you on a pedestal
like an "imperial damson."
Everyone said that you were carousing amid the
turquoise blossoms in the green bowers;
Which upset me so much I scratched your apple cheeks
to smithereens.
You louse, you took after the barberry in being
"solid without but hollow within";
Which upset me so much the pearly tears fell from
my plum-shaped eyes.
I sent a pair of slave-catching peaches[19]
to track you down.
They caught you dating under the wild persimmon tree,
so I knew you had left me;
Which upset me so much I looked like a
"crane's crest red" litchi,
And was reduced to cutting off a hank of
my black plum-thread hair.
You're as smooth as any mandarin, yet
you say I don't make sense.
"Go, mango! You're as stubborn as an ox!"
I curse the ruffian.
"If you press me too hard, I'll just hang myself
from a drooping branch,
And look to see, next autumn, whom you've got to
depend on in my place."
I heard the golden sparrow (caragana) warbling
before my eyes;
But he abandoned me as lightly as a goose feather
(chrysanthemum),
Leaving me to cry my heart out underneath
the speckled bamboo blind.
When a pair of auspicious magpies announced
the good news,[20]
I wondered who it might be;
Never expecting the cassia, for whom I had
been "Gazing toward the Southland."
I had not yet finished redoing my coiffure
under the smartweed blossoms,
When the dog-teat (foxglove) ran to the door
to bite my visitor.
I surreptitiously sent my maid, Jasmine Blossom,
to look everywhere for you.
You leaned on the seven sisters trellis,
Stuck out your clove-shaped tongue,
And called me your plantain lily.
The Chinese lantern plant, acting as my Hung-niang,[21]
slowly led you into my quarters.
Under the blossoms of the verdant peach trees,[22]
we compared botanical specimens a while.
Then you had your way with me; I dropped the
marigold in my hand,
And we became entangled with each other
amid the passionflowers.
I ended up calling you my handsome
pomegranate blossom.
But if you suffer my maid, Chrysanthemum,
To tell the tale to my seven sisters,
What sort of picture would that convey?
It would only make a laughing stock of me.
When he had finished singing he asked Chin-lien for the keys, saying, "Fifth Lady, give them to me right away. The manager in the shop has been waiting for me for ever so long. I'm afraid Father might show up at any moment."
"You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it," said Chin-lien. "And you put it so cleverly. If your father should ask me, I'll just say you were out drinking somewhere, lost the keys, and came into my room looking for them."
"Ai-ya!" Ching-chi exclaimed. "Fifth Lady, you're really:
An executioner who likes to play with his victims."
Li P'ing-erh and Old Mrs. P'an repeatedly chimed in from the sidelines, saying, "Sister, let him have them so he can go about his business."
"If it weren't for the good offices of my mother and the Sixth Lady," said Chin-lien, "I'd certainly make you sing until the day is done. At the outset you boasted that you could come up with a hundred or two hundred. And now, after singing only two songs, you want to take flight. I'm not going to let you get away with it."
"I've still got a couple of specialty numbers up my sleeve," said Ching-chi. They're a pair of songs on the terminology of silver and coinage[23] to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope,' which I might as well offer for your delectation."
Thereupon:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
he sang:
Dear enemy! Your absence has made a mopus[24] of me
for lo this whole month;
Leaving me to pound my breast in vain, quite unable
to sycee[25] things up.
I sent that little nugget, Lion-head, with a yellow
chit to summon you;
But you were in Ministry of War Hollow,[26] having a merry
night of it at the Silver Ingot.
I'm willing to put up with your brass, verdigris
and all, to avoid abandonment;
You're imprinted in my heart like stamped silver;
there's no way I can do without you.
If I call out for you, you turn away your obverse
side and pay me no heed;
Even when I use blowpipes to heat up your crucible,
you make me wait half the night.
The bamboo pattern stamped on my face turns sallow,
and I gnash my silver teeth;

Invoking the Goddess of Legal Tender,[27] I bolt fast
the door to my room.
That defaced brockage[28] of a man may hammer in vain,
I'll pay him no heed.
I curse him for a remelted, thrice-cast, specimen of
a two-timing crooked louse.
I've poured the molten metal of my heart into your mint,
only to be rejected as too hot-blooded.
Sister! When you were at K'ai-yüan's[29] place the two of us
burned incense and swore oaths together.[30]
I spent jingling cash[31] and shiny-edged coins in order to
be one of those who danced attendance on you.
But you claimed your furnace[32] was out of order, and I
couldn't take the goose-eyes[33] of your madam.
It may be said of you that "elm-pod cash[34] are lightweight,
and brush-handles are hollow."
Sister! Like an antique cash; your body's shrunk and your
hole's too big, no longer of any use;
Unless you let some bare stick,[35] with a worn legend,
play up to you with his oily mouth.
Baring your shiny tail, milled rim,[36] and baked lacquer[37] hue,
he'd debase you into utter compliance,
And then leave you so topsy-turvy you wouldn't be worth
so much as a single black sand-plate.[38]
"Sister!" I call out. "You two-faced androgynous mule![39]
Just you try and listen to what I say.
It would be a pity if this shiny gold-back[40] were paired with
such a wrinkle-faced, mis-struck ingot."

Ching-chi having finished his song, Chin-lien was about to have Ch'un-mei pour out more wine for him, when Wu Yüeh-niang suddenly showed up from the rear compound.

Noticing that the wet nurse Ju-i was sitting on the stone stylobate outside the door, holding Kuan-ko on her lap, she said to her, "The child is just recovering, you bitch! And here you are, holding him out here and exposing him to the wind. Why don't you take him inside?"

"Who is that speaking?" asked Chin-lien.

"The First Lady is here," Hsiu-ch'un replied.

Ching-chi hastily grabbed his keys and fled outside, as fast as he could go, while the rest of them came down the steps to welcome Yüeh-niang.

"What is our son-in-law doing here?" Yüeh-niang asked.

"Sister Li has prepared a snack and asked my mother over for a visit," said Chin-lien. "When our son-in-law came looking for some clothes, she invited him in for a drink. Sister, please have a seat. It's good sweet wine. Won't you have a cup?"

"I won't have any," said Yüeh-niang. "My elder brother's wife and Aunt Yang are in the rear compound, about to go home. I was concerned about the child and came straight over to see how he is. Sister Li, you're not paying adequate attention. You've let the wet nurse take him outside and sit down where he's exposed to the wind. The other day Dame Liu said he had caught a chill. You really ought to look after him more carefully."

"We were just having a drink with Old Mrs. P'an," Li P'ing-erh said. "Who could have known that lousy little stinker would carry him outside without anyone's knowing it."

Yüeh-niang sat down for a bit and then returned to the rear compound.

A little while later, she sent Hsiao-yü to invite Old Mrs. P'an, the Fifth Lady, and the Sixth Lady to come back to the rear compound for a visit. P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh put their makeup to rights and accompanied Old Mrs. P'an to the rear compound to join the other ladies for a drink with Yüeh niang's sister-in-law and Aunt Yang. At sundown they all went out with Yüeh-niang to see their visitors off outside the front gate, where they got into their sedan chairs and departed.

As they were standing in the gateway, Meng Yü-lou started things off, saying, "Elder Sister. Since Father's not at home today, having gone to station master Wu's place for a drink, why don't we take advantage of the opportunity to go take a look at the former Ch'iao family's house across the street?"

Yüeh-niang asked the pageboy P'ing-an, who was in charge of the gate. "Who's got the keys to the place over there?"

"If you ladies want to go over and have a look," said P'ing-an, "the door's open. Lai-hsing is supervising two laborers who are at work on the place."

"Go tell them to get out of the way while we take a look," Yüeh-niang instructed him.

"You ladies go ahead and have your look," said P'ing-an, "it won't be any problem. They're all at work:
Mixing lime and sifting sand,
in the big empty structure four courtyards back from the street. I'll just go and call them out."

Thereupon, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh were carried, one at a time, in a sedan chair, for the short haul to the house across the street, by the two laborers, who acted as bearers. On entering the ceremonial gate, they found an eighteen-foot-wide reception hall, beyond which, in the second courtyard, there was a two-story structure.

Yüeh-niang started to go up to the second floor but:
Strange as it may seem,
before she was halfway up the stairs that were unexpectedly steep, she was heard to utter a gasp, and one of her feet slipped out from under her. Fortunately, she was able to grab hold of the banisters to either side of the stairway, while Yü-lou, exclaiming in consternation, "What is it, Sister?" hastily gripped her by the arm and was able to prevent her from falling.

Yüeh-niang had been taken by surprise and refused to proceed any further. By the time her companions had helped her down to the foot of the stairs, the shock of the unexpected occurrence had turned her face as sallow as wax.

"Sister," asked Yü-lou, "what happened? Your foot must have slipped on the way up. Have you hurt yourself anywhere?"

"I may have managed to escape a fall," said Yüeh-niang, "but I've twisted my waist, and the shock has made:
My heart jump into my mouth.
The stairs are steep, and I made the mistake of assuming they were just like the ones we have at home. My foot slipped on the way up. It's lucky I was able to grab hold of the banisters. Otherwise, who knows what might have happened."

"On top of everything else," said Yü-lou, "you're feeling poorly in your present condition. It would have been better not to climb the stairs in the first place."

Thereupon, the group of sisters escorted Yüeh-niang back home but no sooner did they arrive there than, as if in response to a call, she began to suffer from abdominal cramps. Unable to withstand the pain, Yüeh-niang took advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence to send a pageboy after Dame Liu to come and treat her.

"You've already ceased menstruating," said Dame Liu, "and now you've hurt yourself. I'm afraid it's all over."

"I've been pregnant for more than five months," said Yüeh-niang, "and now I've wrenched myself going up the stairs."

"You'd better take a dose of my medicine," said Dame Liu. "If you can't carry it to term, you might as well abort it."

"All right, I'll abort it then," Yüeh-niang replied.

Dame Liu thereupon left behind two doses of medicine, in the form of large black pills, and told Yüeh-niang to take them along with a decoction of artemisia-flavoured wine. Before the night was half over, she evacuated the fetus, and when they lit a candle to examine the contents of the commode, it turned out to be that of a male child that had already assumed recognizable shape. Truly:
Before the embryo was able to emerge into the fullness of life,
Its true soul first made the journey to the Realm of the Shades.

Fortunately, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home that day, he did not sleep in the master suite but spent the night in Meng Yu-lou's quarters instead. The next day, Yü-lou paid a visit to the master suite in the morning, to ask Yüeh-niang how she was feeling.

"Sure enough," Yüeh-niang reported, "in the middle of the night, I was unable to retain it and suffered a miscarriage. And it turned out to have been a boy."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Yü-lou. "Does Father not know about it?"

"Father had been drinking when he got home," explained Yüeh-niang. "He came into my room and started to take off his clothes but I said to him, You go to someone else's quarters tonight. I'm feeling out of sorts.' It was only then that he went over to your place. I didn't tell him anything about it. Even now I'm still suffering from vague pains in the abdomen."

"I fear there may be some remaining blood that you still haven't voided," said Yü-lou. "If you drink some wine suffused with pot soot,[41] that should take care of it."

"Sister," she went on to say, "you really ought to look after yourself for a few days. Stay in your room and don't go out. The consequences of a miscarriage can be even harder to treat than those of a regular childbirth. If you were to catch cold under these circumstances, it would be hard on your system."

"That goes without saying," Yüeh-niang responded. "But I don't want it bruited about till everybody hears of it. They'll make a big fuss for no good reason, and say I'm brooding over an empty nest, or something like that. It will only cause tongues to wag."

For this reason, Hsi-men Ch'ing was never told what had happened. Now that this matter has been explained, we will say no more about it.

To resume our story, the manager that Hsi-men Ch'ing had just engaged to take charge of his new silk goods shop was not the sort to abide by his lot. His surname was Han, his given name was Tao-kuo, and his courtesy name was Hsi-yao. He was the son of a decadent man-about-town named Baldy Han but had now fallen on hard times. He had succeeded to his grandfather's hereditary position as a commandant on the staff of the Prince of Yün. At present he resided on Oxhide Lane, off East Street.

Frivolous and flighty by nature,
His words overstate the facts.[42]
Possessed of a clever tongue,
He is a glib conversationalist.
Those to whom he promises money, end up
Catching at shadows and clutching the wind;[43]
But bilking others of their due, he finds
As easy as groping for something in a bag.[44]

For these reasons, the people in his neighbourhood, observing how meretricious he was, casually referred to him as Posturer Han.

Now that he had begun to do business for Hsi-men Ch'ing and felt flush with the money and silk at his disposal, he invested in a brand new outfit of "dung beetle skins," [45] in which he swaggered about the neighbourhood, hunching up his shoulders and putting on the dog. When people saw him, they did not refer to him by his courtesy name as Han Hsi-yao but as Han I-yao, or Swaggery Han.

His wife was a younger sister of Butcher Wang, who slaughtered cattle for a living. She was called Wang Liu-erh, or Wang the Sixth, because she was the sixth sibling in her generation. She was tall of stature, had a face shaped like a melon seed, and a rosewood complexion, and was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. She had given birth to a daughter, so there were three of them living together in the family.

Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, was nicknamed Trickster Han. He was a gambler and "knockabout" and lived apart from his brother's family. He and his sister-in-law were engaged in a long-standing illicit affair. Whenever he felt like it, he would take advantage of Han Tao-kuo's absence, on the days he had to spend the night at the shop, to drop in and have a drink with the woman; and, when it became late, if he was on the make, he would refuse to leave.

Who could have anticipated that there were a number of dissolute young scamps in the neighbourhood who took note of the way in which the woman was given to:
Putting on rouge and applying powder,[46]
and making a spectacle of herself by standing in the doorway at all hours in order to ogle the passersby. Yet if anyone rose to the bait by making a suggestive remark to her, she would respond by being:
Both hard and smelly,
and showering him with vituperation.

For this reason, these young scamps in the neighbourhood were something less than well disposed toward her.

Gathering together in twos and threes,
they surreptitiously discussed her conduct and determined to find out if she were engaged in hanky-panky with anyone behind her husband's back. It took them less than half a month to ascertain the fact that she was, indeed, carrying on with her brother-in-law, Han the Second.

It so happens that the house in which Han Tao-kuo resided on Oxhide Lane had an eighteen-foot-wide frontage, was bounded by the houses of neighbours to either side, and had a rear gate that opened onto the embankment of a reservoir. Whenever this group of young scamps saw Han the Second go inside, they would engage the services of an old woman to intrude by offering to sprinkle the courtyard; or, at night, they would climb onto the hind wall to keep an eye on things; or, by day, send a little monkey onto the rear embankment, pretending to chase after moths; their one endeavor being to catch them in the act.

Who could have anticipated that, one day, Han the Second, having ascertained that his elder brother was not at home, brought some wine with him, got drunk with the woman in broad daylight, locked the door on the inside, and fell to it with her in the bedroom. Unbeknownst to them, the group of young scamps, having got wind of this, sent a little monkey to climb over the wall and open the rear gate, on which the whole bunch of them rushed in together and contrived to jerk open the door to the room. Han the Second tried to bolt out the gate but one of the youths managed to:
Knock him over with one blow,
and he was taken captive. The woman was still on the k'ang, trying desperately to get into her clothes, when one of them came in and prevented this by grabbing her pants in his hand.

The two of them were trussed together with a single length of rope and taken outside, where, in no time at all, a crowd had gathered around the gateway and followed them to the township subprecinct station on Oxhide Lane. As a result of this, the entire street was in an uproar.
This one came to ask,
That one came to see.

Everyone said that Han Tao-kuo's wife had been caught in an illicit affair with her brother-in-law.

A certain oldster among them, on seeing the man and the woman trussed up together, asked the people standing around, "What's this affair all about?"

A busybody next to him replied, "You mean you haven't heard about it, sir? This is a case of a brother-in-law engaging in illicit intercourse with his elder brother's wife."

The oldster nodded his head, saying, "How reprehensible! It so happens that when a brother messes around with his sister-in-law, if they should be convicted of violating the statute governing illicit relations between brother and sister-in-law, both of them would be condemned to strangulation." [47]

The busybody by his side recognized the oldster to be the notorious Crud-crawler T'ao, who was known to have "crawled in the crud" successively with all three of his daughters-in-law.[48]

For this reason he intruded himself further by saying, "You appear to be well versed in the law, sir. Since this case of a brother-in-law having sexual relations with his elder brother's wife is a crime entailing the punishment of strangulation, if a father-in-law were to do the same with his daughter-in-law, of what crime do you think he would he be guilty?"[49]

The oldster, noting the untoward turn the conversation was taking, lowered his head, without saying another word, and beat a hasty retreat. Truly:

Every person should sweep the snow in front of his own eaves;
Without bothering about the frost upon his neighbour's roof.[50]
We will say no more for the moment about how Han the Second and his paramour were caught in the act but return to the story of Han Tao-kuo.
That day was not one of those on which he had to spend the night at the shop, so he was able to leave for home early. It was the middle decade of the eighth month. Sporting an outfit of light silk and soft damask, a newly blocked hat, a pair of fancy hairnet rings, jet satin shoes, and pure velveteen socks, and fanning himself as he went, he swaggered along the street:
Cutting a wide swath with his exaggerated strides.
Whenever he chanced to meet anyone, he made an occasion of it, either sitting or standing, while:
His words flowed like a cataract,[51]
Billowing out without interruption.[52]
Among those he encountered were two acquaintances, Chang the Second, the proprietor of a paper shop, and Pai the Fourth, who was a silversmith, to whom he hastened to make an obeisance and raise his hand in greeting.
"Brother Han," responded Chang, whose nickname was Chang the Importunate, "Long time no see. I hear that you are to be congratulated for going into business in the shop that His Honour Hsi-men Ch'ing has just opened on his premises. We are lacking in courtesy not to have offered our felicitations before this. I hope you won't take it amiss."
As he spoke, he offered him a seat.
Adopting a lofty expression and flaunting the fan in his hand, Han Tao-kuo sat down on a bench, and said, "Though your pupil is devoid of talent, thanks to the diffracted radiance shed by you gentlemen, I have been enabled to become a manager in the employ of my gracious master, His Honour Hsi-men Ch'ing. We split the profits on a 30 to 70 percent ratio, I have enormous sums at my disposal and am in charge of shops at several locations. Indeed, I am treated with such respect as to set me apart from others."
A certain Hsieh Ju-huang, whose nickname was What a Whopper, responded, "From what I hear, Brother Han, all he has seen fit to charge you with is the management of his silk goods shop."
"There are things of which you two gentlemen are ignorant," pronounced Han Tao-kuo with a laugh. "The matter of the silk goods business is no more than an empty title. Nowadays that one of the accounts of the various enterprises of his establishment, both great and small, are not in my hands?
He listens to my words and follows my advice,[53]
Fortune and misfortune are shared between us.
Without me, he couldn't get along for so much as an hour.
"Every day, when he comes home from the yamen, he invites me to share his meal with him. Without me, he wouldn't even have the appetite to eat anything. The two of us while away the time in his little studio, eating delicacies and chatting with each other; often sitting there until the night is half over before he goes back to the rear compound.
"The other day, on his First Lady's birthday, my wife went in a sedan chair to pay her respects, and his lady kept her so long at the party that she didn't get home until the second watch.
Our two families are so intimate,
There are no restraints between us.[54]
I probably oughtn't to tell you this but even the most private events in his bedchamber are among the topics on which he often consults with me.
"To begin with:
My conduct is upright and correct,
My heart opposed to all compromise.
On behalf of my wealthy patron, I am able to:
Promote profit and prevent loss,[55]
Rescuing him from water or fire.[56]
In all cases, I am:
Scrupulous where money is concerned,[57]
Acquiring it only by legitimate means.
Even Manager Fu the Second stands somewhat in awe of me. It's not that I'm boasting about myself, the fact is that His Honour values me precisely for this quality."
Just as his tongue was in full spate, all of a sudden, someone came running up in a state of obvious agitation, saying, "Brother Han, what are you still jabbering here for? I wasn't able to find you at the shop."
Drawing him aside to a secluded spot, he told him, "At your house:
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
your wife and your younger brother have been caught in the act by the neighbours, who have trussed them up and taken them to the subprecinct station. Tomorrow morning they'll be escorted to the district yamen to appear before the magistrate. You'd better bestir yourself to pull whatever strings you can, if you want to take care of this matter."
When Han Tao-kuo heard this, he:
Turned pale with consternation,[58]
Licking his lips, above, and
Stamping his feet, below,
in his haste to take flight.
At this point, Chang the Importunate called out to him, "Brother Han, you haven't finished your story. Why are you so anxious to get away?"
Han Tao-kuo raised his hand in acknowledgment, saying, "Your pupil has an insignificant matter to attend to at home that prevents me from keeping you company any longer." After which, he made a hasty departure. Truly:

Even if one could draw off all the water of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away this day's shame.

As soon as Ximen Qing reached home, he hurried to Wu Yueniang to ask if his little son was better. The doctor must be sent for at once, he said. But Yueniang told him that it was not necessary. She had sent for old woman Liu, and the baby, now that he had taken the medicine she had prepared, was sleeping peacefully and able to retain his food.
"I can't understand your faith in that old hag," Ximen cried. "She is far too ready with her lancings and cauteries. We ought to have the specialist who attends the children of the Royal House. If the child really is better, well and good but if he is not, I'll have that old woman at the court and let her fingers feel the screws."
"How unreasonable you are with your scoldings and threats," Yueniang said. "I tell you the baby is much better now that he has taken her medicine. Why do you make all this fuss?"
A maid brought something to eat, and Ximen Qing was finishing it when Daian said that Ying Bojue had come. Ximen told one of the boys to take tea to the arbour and said he would join his friend there. He asked Yueniang to have the remaining dishes sent out to them. He sent for Chen Jingji to keep them company, saying that he himself would be there in a moment.
"Where did Ying the Second go for you yesterday, and what has brought him here again today?" Yueniang said.
Ximen told her. "Brother Ying knows a stranger from Huzhou called He who has five hundred taels' worth of raw silk and thread at an inn outside the city gate. He is in a hurry to go home and is prepared to sell his goods cheaply. I offered to pay four hundred and fifty taels and sent Laibao with Ying yesterday to let him see two bars of my silver as samples. The business was settled, and we are to pay for the goods today. The house in Lion Street is empty, and I propose to take two rooms on the street, set them in order, and open a shop there. Now that Laibao has got this appointment in Duke Yun's palace, I must look out for another manager, and arrange for him and one of the boys to keep the shop and look after the house at the same time."
Wu Yueniang agreed. Ximen said: "Brother Ying says he has a friend called Han who knows all there is to know about the thread business but he has no money of his own and, for the moment, is out of work. Brother Ying says he is a capable business man, honest and straightforward; in fact, he recommends him very strongly. He is going to bring Han to see me, and we will fix up a contract."
He weighed the four hundred and fifty taels of silver and told Laibao to take them. Meanwhile Chen Jingji and Ying Bojue finished their meal in the arbour in a state of anxious impatience. They felt much happier when they saw the silver on the way. When Ximen Qing came, Bojue made a reverence to him and apologized for being late. He said that, after enjoying such hospitality the day before, he had found it hard to get up that morning.
"Well," Ximen said, "here are the four hundred and fifty taels. Laibao shall put them into a big sack. This is a day of happy omen, and I will hire a cart to bring back the goods, and put them away safely."
"You are very wise, Brother," Bojue said. "If we waste any time, I shouldn't be surprised to find that shifty fellow playing a trick on us. But if we get the stuff away, all will be well."
He and Laibao mounted their horses and went with the silver to the stranger's inn, and completed the transaction. As a matter of fact, Ying Bojue had made an arrangement of his own with He that the actual price should be four hundred and twenty taels, so that he got thirty taels for himself. He shared with Laibao the regular commission of five taels. They hired a cart and brought the merchandise to the city. They stored everything in the empty house in Lion Street, locked the door, and returned to give an account to Ximen Qing, who told Bojue to bring Han to see him on the next auspicious day.
Han was a short man, about thirty years of age, unguarded of speech and of a lively temperament. When Ximen Qing had made a contract with him, he and Laibao were given some money to engage workers to dye the thread. When everything was ready, the shop in Lion Street was opened, and there they dealt in threads of many colours, selling considerable quantities every day.
The time passed quickly. The sun and moon crossed and recrossed like the shuttles of a weaver. It was the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Wu Yueniang's birthday. A number of ladies had been invited, and Aunt Wu, Aunt Yang and old woman Pan were there. Two nuns were among the guests, and at night they used to recite the Buddhist scriptures for the edification of the others, continuing till the second or third night watch.
Ximen Qing, hearing that Aunt Wu was in Yueniang's room, did not go there but to the apartments of Li Ping'er. She told him she was still anxious about the child, and suggested that he should go to Pan Jinlian instead. Ximen smiled, said he did not wish to be a nuisance, and did as he was told.
When Jinlian found her husband was coming, she was delighted. She might have discovered a hidden treasure. She hurriedly packed off her mother to sleep in one of the rooms belonging to Li Ping'er, lighted the silver lamp, delicately spread and smoothed the silken bedclothes, and perfumed her body daintily. She made the most intimate of preparations and awaited her master's pleasure.
That night they took their pleasure to the full. Jinlian was determined to gain possession of her husband's heart, so that he should go no more to the rooms of the others. He was like a wandering bee, stretching forth his proboscis among the tender petals that the winds of spring bestirred, or a flower-devouring butterfly, reveling by night within the deepest recesses of the blossoms.
When old woman Pan came, Li Ping'er asked her to come and sit on the bed, and told Yingchun to bring some refreshments. They talked till the night was late, and, the next morning, she gave the old lady a gown of white silk, two pieces of satin with which to make shoes, and a small sum of money. The old woman smiled and beamed delightedly. She took the things and showed them to her daughter. Jinlian said: "Mother, your eyes are too small and your skin too thin. How can you take gifts from her?"
"My good child," the old woman said, "other people are sorry for me and give me things. Why should you talk like this? What do you ever give me?"
"I have nothing to give you," Jinlian said. "You cannot compare me with the others. How can I possibly give you clothes when I have none to wear myself? But you go and accept favours from outsiders, and I shall have to get something ready—a few dishes and some wine, I suppose—and send them in return. If I don't, something will be said, and I can't have that."
She told Chunmei to prepare eight dishes, four boxes of fruits, and a jar of wine; then, seeing that Ximen Qing had gone, she ordered Qiuju to put them on a square tray and take them to Li Ping'er. "My mother and my grandmother," she was to say, "have nothing to do at the moment and would very much like to come and take wine with you."
Li Ping'er thanked her, and, in a few moments, Jinlian and old woman Pan came. When all three had taken their places, the wine was poured out and they talked together while Chunmei stood at hand to serve them.
Suddenly Qiuju came. "Brother-in-law is trying to find some clothes," she said to Chunmei. "He wants you to go and open the door of the room upstairs."
"When he has found the clothes," Jinlian said, "ask him to come here and take a cup of wine with us."
But when Chen Jingji had taken the clothes he wanted—they belonged to several different people—he hurried away, and Chunmei had to return to tell Jinlian that he would not come.
"He must come," the woman cried. She sent one of the maids for him. At last he did come and made a reverence to them.
Jinlian scolded him. "I was kind enough to send and invite you to take wine with us. Why wouldn't you come? Your luck will fail you." She told Chunmei to bring Jingji a large cup of wine. He put the clothes on the bed and sat down. Chunmei thought she would play a trick on him and brought a large bowl such as is used for tea and filled it to the brim with wine. Jingji was taken aback.
"Fifth Mother," he said, "if you insist upon my taking wine with you, I should much prefer a small cup. There are several people in the shop waiting for their clothes."
"Let them wait," Jinlian said. "I insist upon your drinking this large cup. A small cup will not do at all."
"Let our brother off with this one cup," old woman Pan said. "Perhaps his business is pressing."
"Don't believe a word he says," Jinlian cried. "What does he mean by being busy? He can drink good wine. If we gave him a pail of gold, he would drink it down to the second rib."
Jingji laughed and took the cup. Before he had drunk three mouthfuls, the old woman said to Chunmei: "Give your brother a pair of chopsticks. We can't have him drinking 'widow' wine."
Chunmei did not give him the chopsticks but, as a joke, took a couple of walnuts from the box and handed them to him.
"You think I can't crack them, do you?" he said, laughing, and putting them in his mouth, he broke them with one bite and ate them with his wine.
"You seem to have very good teeth still, young man," old woman Pan said, "I can't eat things that are at all hard, myself."
"There are only two things I can't eat," Jingji said: "stones like goose's eggs and ox horns."
Jinlian saw that he had finished his wine and told Chunmei to give him another cup. "The first cup was of my offering," said she. "You can't consider my mother and the Sixth Lady of less importance than myself. I don't wish to make you drink too much, so drink three cups and I will let you go."
"Really, Fifth Mother," Jingji said, "you must have mercy on me. I can't possibly drink any more. This cup I have already taken has made my face so red that I am afraid Father will be angry when he sees me."
"Are you afraid of your father?" Jinlian said. "I think not. By the way, where is he taking wine today?"
"He went to Master Wu's house this afternoon," Jingji said, "but now he is looking after the alterations that are being made in the house which used to belong to the Qiaos."
"They moved yesterday, didn't they?" Jinlian said. "Why haven't we sent them a present of tea?" Jingji told her that the tea had been sent that morning. Then Li Ping'er asked where they had gone. Jingji said that they had bought a very large house, as large in fact as Ximen's own, in the High Street. It had a frontage to the street of seven rooms and was five rooms deep. They went on talking and Jingji held his nose and swallowed another cup. Then, while Jinlian had her head turned away for a moment, he snatched the clothes from the bed and vanished like a cloud of smoke.
"Mother," Yingchun said, "he has gone off and forgotten to take the key." Jinlian took it and put it beneath her. "When he comes back to look for it," she said to Li Ping'er, "don't say a word. We will have some fun with him before I give it back."
"Don't tease him, Sister," old woman Pan said. "Give it to him."
Chen Jingji went back to the shop. He searched his sleeves and, of course, could not find the key. Finally he went back to Jinlian's room.
"Who's seen your old key?" she said. "What are you thinking about, putting it somewhere and then forgetting where you put it?"
"You must have left it in the room upstairs," Chunmei said.
"No," Jingji said, "I remember having it here."
"Ah, young man," Jinlian said, "the trouble with you is that a certain part of you is so large that you lose your brains when you really mean to get rid of something quite different. I wonder who it is, here or elsewhere, who makes you so absent-minded that your intelligence has got completely out of place."
"There are customers waiting for their clothes," Jingji said distractedly. "What shall I do? Father is not here, and I shall have to go and get a locksmith to force the door. Then we shall find out whether I left the key inside or not."
Li Ping'er could not help laughing. "Sixth Mother," Jingji cried, "you've picked it up. Do give it to me."
"I don't know what you're laughing about," Jinlian said. "You make it look as though we had his keys." Jingji became as excited as an ox prancing around a millstone. He looked at Jinlian and caught sight of the key string sticking out from beneath her.
"There's my key," he cried but, before he could take it, she whipped it into her sleeve. She still refused to give it up.
"How can I possibly have your key?" she said. The young man was all of a flutter, like a chicken about to be killed stretching out its legs.

"They tell me," Jinlian said, "that you have a very sweet voice, and that you often sing for the boys in the shop. Why shouldn't you sing a song for me? Grandmother and the Sixth Lady are here, so you had better choose one of the latest and best. Then you shall have your key. If you will not sing, you may jump as far as the White Pagoda but nothing shall induce me to give it to you."
So the young man was compelled to obey. "Very well," said he, "I do not propose to lose my life for it, so I will sing. As a matter of fact, I have such a stock of songs that I can sing you a hundred if you like."
"Boastful, short-lived rascal!" Jinlian said. She poured wine for all of them, saying to Jingji: "You had better take one more cup and then you will not be too shy to sing."
"No," Jingji said, "I'll finish the song first, and then I'll drink."
When he had done, he again asked Jinlian to give him the key. "Mother," he said, "give me the key now. I don't know what the clerks in the shop are doing, and Father may come at any moment."
"You think too much of yourself," Jinlian said, "and your tongue is too ready. If your father does come, and says anything to me about it, I shall tell him you got drunk, lost the key, and came here to look for it."
"Dear, dear!" cried Jingji "You might be an executioner, the way you play with your wretched victim." Then Li Ping'er and old woman Pan took pity on him and pleaded for him with Jinlian.
"If Grandmother and the Sixth Lady had not asked me," she said, "I would have made you sing till the sun went down. You have boasted that you know a hundred or two hundred songs but so far you have only sung one. Yet you begin to spread your wings to take flight. I won't let you get the better of me."
Chen Jingji offered to sing another song. He had just finished it, and Jinlian was telling Chunmei to pour out another cup of wine for him, when Yueniang suddenly came from the inner court. Ruyi'er was sitting on the stone steps outside the door with Guan'ge in her arms. Yueniang scolded her.
"The baby is just getting a little better, and here you have him in a draft. Take him in at once."
Jinlian heard the voice and said: "Who is that?" One of the maids told her that Yueniang was coming. This put Jingji in a flurry. He hastily picked up the key and made for the door but it was too late. The ladies were on their way to receive Yueniang.
"What are you doing here, Brother Chen?" she said.
Jinlian answered for him. "The Sixth Lady," she said, "was kind enough to entertain my mother, and brother-in-law came to look for some clothes. We asked him to take a cup of wine with us. Great Sister, will you not sit down too, and drink something? The wine is very mellow."
"I must not stay to drink," Yueniang said. "My sister-in-law and Aunt Yang are getting ready to go. I came to ask after the baby. I am anxious about him. Sister, why don't you take better care of him, instead of allowing the nurse to have him in a draft? The other day old woman Liu told us that he had a bad chill. You really must be more careful."
"I was taking a little wine with Grandmother," Li Ping'er said. "I never dreamed the rascally slave would take him out."
Yueniang stayed with them a few moments and then went again to the inner court. She sent Xiaoyu to ask the two ladies and old woman Pan to come. Jinlian and Li Ping'er powdered their faces and went with the old woman to the inner court. They drank wine with the two aunts until sunset. Then Yueniang and the others went with their guests to the gate and saw them off in their sedan chairs.
As they were standing at the gate, Meng Yulou said: "Great Sister, Father is not at home. He has gone to a banquet at Master Wu's. Why should we not go and have a look at Qiao's house on the other side of the road?" Yueniang asked the gatekeeper for the key and was told that Laixing was in the house watching the laborers at their work.
"Tell them to withdraw," Yueniang said. "We wish to see it."
"Oh, Mother," Ping'an said, "just go over. They are all busy sifting the sand in the fourth big room." Yueniang and the others were carried across in their chairs. They went in, and found themselves in a large hall. The house had two stories, and Yueniang decided to go upstairs. She had hardly gone halfway—the stairs were very steep—when she missed a step. She slipped and cried "Ah!" Then she gripped the banisters on either side. Yulou was startled and asked what was the matter, grasping one of Yueniang's arms to prevent her from falling. Yueniang was frightened. She would go no farther, and the others helped her down the stairs again. Her face was as pale as wax. Yulou said: "What made you slip, Great Sister? Have you hurt yourself?"
"No," Yueniang said, "I didn't fall but I wrenched my waist. It gave me such a fright that my heart is in my mouth even yet. It is because the stairs are so steep. I was thinking of those in our own house, and I missed one. Luckily I was able to take hold of the railing, or I don't know what would have happened to me."
"We really ought not to have gone upstairs with you in your present condition," Li Jiao'er said. They took Yueniang home but, when they were back, she cried that the pains in her belly were so severe she could not endure them. Ximen Qing had not yet returned, and they told a boy to run for old woman Liu.
"I am afraid you have hurt the baby," old woman Liu said. "Indeed, in my opinion the damage is fatal."
"I am more than five months on the way." Yueniang said, "and now I have slipped on the stairs and given myself a wrench."
The old woman suggested that, as it was too late to save the child, Yueniang should take some medicine and get rid of it. When Yueniang agreed, the old woman gave her two big black pills and told her to take them with a little herb wine. Just before midnight the medicine took effect and the child was delivered into one of the pails used for the horses. They took a light to look at it and found that it would have been a boy. Indeed, it was already a boy. Its shape was that of a perfect male child.
Fortunately, Ximen Qing had decided to spend the night with Yulou. The next morning, Yulou came to see Yueniang and asked how she felt. Yueniang told her the whole story.
"It is very sad," Yulou said. "Does Father know?"
"No," Yueniang said. "After the party he came to my room. He was going to take off his clothes but I told him I did not feel very well and asked him to go somewhere else. Then he went to you. I said nothing to him about it. There is still a little pain."
"Perhaps you have not got rid of all the blood," Yulou said. "I think, if we had some wine heated and you take some medicine to warm you, you will soon be well again. But you must be careful for a few days, Sister, and keep to your room. You see, these miscarriages take longer to recover from than a regular birth. You must take particular care not to catch cold or you will be really ill."
"You are quite right," Yueniang said. "Don't mention the matter to anybody, for, if you do, the news will be spread abroad; people will talk of my 'nest being empty,' and everybody will have some comment to make." Nothing was said to Ximen Qing about the matter.
Clerk Han, whom Ximen Qing had recently engaged, was anything but a reliable character. He was the son of a needy fellow whom people nicknamed Han the Bald, and his personal name was Daoguo. He was a poor man, though there had been a time when he had served in Duke Yun's guard, a post that his grandfather had held before him. Now he was constrained to live in a mean alley off East Street. Though he was nothing but a man of straw, he had a good deal to say for himself, did not spare his words, and was careful to watch which way the wind blew. Trying to get money out of him was as futile as grasping at a shadow, or trying to lay hold of the wind but, when he himself was getting money from anyone else, his hand burrowed far into the sack. Now that he had secured a post with Ximen Qing, he put on extra swagger. He had some clothes made, lifted his shoulders higher, and strolled jauntily through the streets. People changed his name to Show-off Han in consequence. His wife was a sister of Butcher Wang, the sixth in the family. She was tall, her face was dark and shaped like a melon seed; she was about twenty-eight years old. They had a little daughter. Han's younger brother, Han the Second, was known as Han the Trickster and belonged to one of the regular gambling sets. This young man had long made love to his brother's wife, and whenever Han Daoguo had gone to attend to the shop, he would come to the house and drink with his sister-in-law. He often stayed all night.
There were several high-spirited young fellows among the neighbours. They saw the woman painted and powdered, standing in her fine dresses at the door and ogling the passersby. Yet whenever they tried to make advances, they found her unkind and unresponsive. Indeed, she was so unsparing of her tongue that her young neighbours became irritated. In twos and threes they discussed the situation, and made up their minds to find out who was the favoured suitor. It did not take them long to discover that it was her young brother-in-law.
Three rooms of the Hans' house looked upon the street; the rest of the house was bounded by the houses of the neighbours. At the back was a raised bank, and from this the young men watched, climbing upon the wall at night to look in. Sometimes, during the day, they would pretend to be catching butterflies on the bank but actually they were trying to discover what was going on in the house. One day, Han the Second, knowing that his brother was out, bought some wine and took it to drink with his sister-in-law. They bolted the door and prepared to have a very merry time. But the young men were on the track, climbed over the wall, opened the back door, and all went in. When they burst open the door of the room, Han the Second tried to escape but one of the young men knocked him down with a single blow. The woman was still upon the bed. She had no time to put on her clothes before one of the young ruffians was able to secure them. They bound the couple together with one cord. Before long the news spread all down the street and a crowd gathered before the door. While one asked what was amiss, another would go to have a look. In the crowd was an old man who, seeing the man and woman tied together, asked what was the matter. One of the more garrulous of the bystanders informed him.
"Venerable Sir," he said, "you may not know but this is a case of unlawful relationship between a man and his elder brother's wife."
"Dear, dear," the old man said, nodding his head, "a younger brother and his sister-in-law indeed. I fear they will have their necks stretched when the matter comes before the courts."
Unfortunately, the garrulous fellow knew all about the old man's reputation. He had three daughters-in-law, and his relations with all of them had been such that he had been given a rude nickname in consequence.
"Venerable Sir," the fellow said, "doubtless no one is better acquainted than yourself with the law on such matters. As you say, their necks will be stretched. But I wonder what is the punishment dealt out to a man who carries on with his sons' wives."
The old man decided that the conversation was taking an inconvenient turn. He bowed his head and went off without another word.
That day it was not Han Daoguo's turn to stay late at the shop, and he left for home early. It was about the middle of the eighth month and he was wearing a light silk gown and a new hat. Whisking his fan about and walking along the street with an air of consequence, he stopped now and again to exchange a few words with his friends, babbling away like a flowing brook. Then he chanced to meet two of his friends, one a certain Zhang the Second, who kept a paper shop, the other Bai the Fourth, a silversmith.
"Brother Han," Zhang said, "it is quite a while since I last met you. I hear you are now set up in a splendid establishment belonging to his Lordship Ximen Qing. It shows, I fear, a great lack of courtesy on my part that I have been so remiss in offering my hearty congratulations. Pray forgive me." He invited Han to take a seat.
Han Daoguo sat down on a bench, lifted up his head and fanned himself importantly. "Indeed," he said, "I recognize my own little worth. I place all my confidence in the generosity of others. That is how I have entered the service of my gracious master Ximen. We share the profits in the proportion of three to seven. His wealth is truly immense and he has numerous establishments of one sort and another. He thinks much of me and treats me on a different footing from others."
"I was given to understand," Bai the Fourth said, "that you were selling thread for him."
Han Daoguo smiled. "You don't understand, my dear brother. The thread business is only a sideline. As a matter of fact, I am in charge, and all the money that comes in and goes out passes through my hands. His Lordship always takes my advice and falls in with all my suggestions. Whatever the fates have in store, whether good fortune or ill, we meet it hand in hand. Why, he can't exist a single moment without me. Every day, when he comes back from his official duties, he sends and asks me to dine with him. Without my company he has not the heart to eat. We spend our time in his retiring room, eating and chatting at our ease, till the night is very late and he goes to the ladies' apartments. It was his lady's birthday the other day, and my wife went in a sedan chair to the party. Ximen's lady kept her so late that it was the second night watch before she returned.
"Ximen and I, in fact, are bosom friends, and there are no secrets between us. Perhaps I should not say so but he even goes so far as to tell me all that happens on the most intimate occasions. Such things, indeed, form one of the most frequent subjects of conversation between us.
"I must say, of course, that I have always acted strictly as a man of honour, and have never been guilty of any kind of indiscretion. My sole desire has been to assist a man of high standing to acquire more wealth, with the object of succoring those in need and rescuing the drowning and the afflicted. In money matters, no matter what their nature, my hands are clean. Long ago I made up my mind that all my actions in such affairs should be strictly in accordance with the highest standards of probity. Even Fu cannot disregard my wishes. Please understand: I do not mean this as a boast; all I do is to carry out my master's wishes."
The conversation was proceeding pleasantly when a man rushed up in a great state of excitement. "What, Brother Han," he cried, "are you still gossiping here? I've been to the shop for you but missed you." He dragged Han Daoguo to a quiet corner and told him all that had been happening at home. "You'll have to bestir yourself," he said, "and find somebody to get the matter settled. They're to come before the courts tomorrow morning."
Han Daoguo changed colour. He sucked his tongue and stamped about, only wishing he could take wing and fly away. "Old Brother Han," cried Zhang, "why're you going? We've not finished talking." Han raised his hands. "His Lordship's waiting for me. We've some important business to transact and I'm afraid I must leave you." He hurried away.

## 055

### Shu-t'ung relies upon his Favour to Broker Affairs; P'ing-an Harbours Resentment & Wags his Tongue, & Ximen Qing Administers Justice

In relying upon one's official prestige in order to do as one pleases;
One ought not to let joy or anger confuse the spheres of public and private.
Coveting wealth, he pays no heed whatever to the violation of ethical norms;
Given to lust, he shows total disregard for breaches of propriety and reason.
His hangers-on avail themselves of his name to seek personal advantage;
His wanton slaves employ ingratiating gestures to effect surreptitious ends.
If you wish to know the principles that govern subsequent success or failure;
The doings of the day provide all one needs to extrapolate them by analogy.

When Han Tao-kuo arrived home and found that his wife and his brother, Han the Second, had been trussed up and taken to the sub-precinct station, he hastened back to the shop on Lion Street to consult with Lai-Pao, "You'd better go directly to Uncle Ying the Second," said Lai-Pao, "and ask him to intercede with your master. If he sends a note about it to Magistrate Li in the district yamen, no matter how important a matter it might be, that ought to take care of it."
Han Tao-kuo went straight to Ying Po-chüeh's house but his wife sent out a maidservant who reported, "He's not at home. Who knows where he may have gotten to. More likely than not, he's at His Honour Hsi-men's place."
"If he's not at home," said Han Tao-kuo, "let me speak to Ying Pao." But it turned out that he had gone out with his father.
This threw Han Tao-kuo into a panic, and he went looking for him in the licensed quarter.
It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh had been invited for a drink by Ho Liang-feng, the younger brother of Magnate Ho from Hu-chou, in the establishment of the singing girl, Ho Chin-ch'an, on Fourth Street. When Han Tao-kuo succeeded in tracking him down, he invited him to come outside and have a word with him.
Ying Po-chüeh had been drinking until his face became bright red and was sporting a toothpick in the brim of his hat. Han Tao-kuo bowed to him and then, drawing him aside to a secluded spot, told him, thus and so, what had happened.
"Since such an event has occurred," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I cannot do otherwise than go with you."
Thereupon, he said goodbye to Ho Liang-feng and accompanied Han Tao-kuo to his home, where he interrogated him about the details of the affair.
Han Tao-kuo beseeched him, saying, "My only hope is that you will go to His Honour's residence and ask him to write a note on my behalf. I anticipate that tomorrow morning when they are taken to the district yamen the case will be adjudicated by Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien. If he could only request him to:
Look upon the matter with favourable eyes,[1]
so that my wife is not required to come before the bench, when the affair is over, I will see that you are richly rewarded, and even kowtow to you."
As he spoke, he knelt down on the ground but Ying Po-chüeh pulled him up by the hand, saying, "Worthy friend, in such a trifling affair as this, I could scarcely fail to intervene on your behalf. Get a sheet of paper and write out an explanatory note. I'll accompany you to His Honour's residence right now and speak to him about it. You should dispense with any idle chatter. Just say, 'I am frequently away from home, and in my absence this bunch of "bare sticks" from the neighbourhood are constantly:
Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,
in order to insult my wife.' Because your younger brother, Han the Second, couldn't get over his resentment at this, he got into a brawl with them, only to find himself surrounded by this bunch who dragged him to the ground and started kicking and beating him. As a result, he and your wife now find themselves trussed up together in the subprecinct station. Ask His Honour to write a note to Magistrate Li explaining the situation and urging that your wife not be required to come before the bench. You can be sure that he will prove responsive to such a request and that will be the end of it."
Han Tao-kuo fetched brush and inkstone, promptly wrote out an explanatory note, and tucked it into his sleeve. Ying Po-chüeh then led him straight to the door of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and asked the gatekeeper, "Is your master at home?"
"The master is in his studio in the flower garden," P'ing-an replied. "Master Second and Uncle Han, please go right in."
Ying Po-chüeh was such a regular visitor that even the dog did not attempt to bite him. With Han Tao-kuo in tow, he proceeded through the ceremonial gate, around the main reception hall, and through the vaulted right angle turn in the gallery connecting the gable of the reception hall to the anterooms on the side of the courtyard, straight to the postern gate leading into the garden. Skirting the juniper hedge that ran along either side of the banksia rose arbor, they came to the small three-roomed summerhouse on the other side of the hedge called the Kingfisher Pavilion. This was the place where Hsi-men Ch'ing sought to cool off during the summer months.
In front and behind,
Screens and lattices set each other off;
On all four sides,
Flowers and bamboos are thick and shady.
All the way round are displayed,
Rare birds and exotic animals,[2]
Ultramundane plants and amaranthine blossoms,[3]
Each a perfect specimen of its kind.
The studio consisted of three compartments, one well-lighted parlour, and two less well-lighted inner rooms.
The page boy, Hua-t'ung, who was sweeping the ground outside, announced, "Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han are here."
The two of them lifted aside the blind and stepped into the parlour, where they found Shu-t'ung on duty in the study within.
When he saw that it was Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han, he said, "Please have a seat. Father has just gone back to the rear compound." He then told Hua-t'ung to go and ask him to come out again.
Ying Po-chüeh observed that facing each other on the upper and lower ends of the room were ranged two rows of six low-slung, bow-back, folding armchairs of the type called Tung-p'o chairs, [4] embellished with Yunnan agateware lacquer, gilt nails, and wickerwork rattan seats. On the two sidewalls were hung four landscape paintings by well-known artists, mounted on ultramarine patterned damask with white satin borders. On one hand there stood a side table, the cabriole legs of which were carved in the shape of a protruding "mantis belly" [5] that tapered down into "dragonfly feet,"[6] and the top of which was inlaid with an oblong, letter-shaped, slab of marble, chosen for its pictorial quality.[7] On this table there was displayed an antique bronze incense burner in the shape of a gilded crane. In the center of the back wall there hung a plaque emblazoned with the three characters for Kingfisher Pavilion, with a pair of framed hanging scrolls suspended to its left and right, on the coated paper of which was inscribed the couplet:

The breeze is tranquil, shadows of locust trees purify the courtyard;
The day is long, fragrance from an incense burner suffuses the latticework.
Thereupon, Ying Po-chüeh took a seat in one of the chairs facing the entrance, Han Tao-kuo pulled over a chair and sat down at right angles to him, while Hua-t'ung went back to the rear compound to find Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After some time had passed, Ying Po-chüeh wandered into the inner study, where he found standing on the floor a black lacquer summer bedstead with incised gold ornamentation and a decorative marble panel, and fitted with bed curtains of blue silk. To either side of this there were painted lacquer bookcases adorned with gold tracery that were filled with the conventional presentation gifts of privately printed books with brocade wrappers and bolts of fabric. There was also a desk, piled high with writing implements and books. Under the green gauze window there stood a black lacquer zither stand and a solitary folding chair inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A letter case was also visible containing Hsi-men Ch'ing's social correspondence, calling cards, and lists of people with whom Mid-autumn Festival gifts had been exchanged.
Picking up the first list, Ying Po-chüeh opened and perused it. He found inscribed there the names of His Honour Ts'ai Ching, His Excellency Ts'ai Yu, Defender-in-chief Chu Mien, Defender-in-chief T'ung Kuan, His Honour Privy Councilor Ts'ai the Fourth, [8] His Honour Commandant Ts'ai the Fifth,[9] as well as the names of the four principal officers from both the local district and prefectural yamens. The second list contained the names of Commandant Chou Hsiu, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the two Eunuch Directors Liu and Hsüeh. The items indicated were bolts of satin brocade, preserved pork, wine, gold-coloured pastries, preserved shad, salted seafood, chicken, goose, and other gifts appropriate for major occasions, each gradated differentially according to the status of the recipient.
The two of them continued to wait for their host. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Hua-t'ung went back as far as Chin-lien's quarters and asked, "Sister Ch'un-mei, is Father here?"
"You lousy little slave! You've been seeing things," Ch'un-mei railed at him. "Father's next door at the Sixth Lady's place, isn't he? Why insist on running over here to ask after him?"
Hua-t'ung then went over to the other side, where he found Hsiu-ch'un sitting on the stone stylobate, and asked her in a low voice, "Is Father here? Master Ying the Second and Uncle Han have come and are waiting in the studio to have a word with him."
"Father is here," replied Hsiu-ch'un. "He's watching Mother make some clothes for the baby."
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come up with two bolts of material, one of scarlet silk, and one of parrot-green Lu-chou pongee, out of which he had told Li P'ing-erh to make undershirts, cloaks, vests, skullcaps, and the like for Kuan-ko. On the gold-flecked k'ang frame a scarlet strip of felt had been laid down to create a working space for this purpose. The wet nurse was holding the baby on one side, and Ying-ch'un was standing by with an iron in her hand. Whom should they see at this juncture but Hsiu-ch'un, who came in and surreptitiously gave a tug at Ying-ch'un.
"What are you tugging at me for?" demanded Ying-ch'un. "If you're not careful, you'll knock some of the coals from the iron onto the strip of felt."
Li P'ing-erh then asked, "Why are you tugging at her for no good reason?"
"Hua-t'ung says that Master Ying the Second has come," said Hsiu-ch'un, "and would like to have a word with Father."
"You little slave!" said Li P'ing-erh. "If Master Ying the Second has come, you should come in and explain the situation, that's all. *Why* insist on tugging at her?"
"Just ask Master Ying the Second to have a seat," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Hua-t'ung. "I'll be there in a minute."
Thereupon, he continued to watch the cutting out of the baby things until the task was completed and then went out to the studio in his informal clothes to see Ying Po-chüeh and his companion.
When they had bowed to each other and sat down, with Han Tao-kuo occupying a seat to one side, Hsi-men Ch'ing called Hua-t'ung and told him to bring them some tea. Before long he brought out three cups of tea flavoured with candied kumquats in carved lacquer cups with silver teaspoons, and after they had drunk it, he took the cups and their raised saucers away again.
Ying Po-chüeh then started things off by saying, "Brother Han, if you've got anything to say, tell His Honour what it is."
"If you've got something to say, speak up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Han Tao-kuo was about to say, "There is a bunch of ruffians in my neighbourhood, whose names are unknown to me," when he was interrupted by Ying Po-chüeh, who said, "Worthy friend, that's not the way to go about it. It won't do to.
Conceal the bones in your mouth and merely expose the flesh.
In front of His Honour your employer here, you would do better to:
Open up the back door and speak right out.
Brother Han often has to spend the night at the shop that means that there is no one left at home but his wife and their child. In his neighbourhood there are a number of persons who are:
Neither fish nor fowl,
who, seeing that there is no man in the house, are constantly:
Pitching bricks and tossing tiles,
driving her crazy with their tricks and insults. His younger brother, Han the Second, being fed up with this behavior, gave them a piece of his mind when he came to visit, only to find himself set upon by this bunch of 'bare sticks' who:
Without permitting any further explanation,
surrounded him and beat him to a stinking pulp. Right now, his brother and his wife have both been trussed up and taken to the subprecinct station. Tomorrow morning they'll be escorted from there to the township station and the district yamen and brought before the presiding magistrate, His Honour Li Ta-t'ien.
"Weeping and wailing, he has come and respectfully begged me to ask you to write a note on his behalf, and send someone to speak to Magistrate Li about it, requesting that he:
Look upon the matter with favourable eyes.
If his brother has to be arraigned, that will not matter too much, so long as his wife is not required to appear before the bench."
He then went on to say, "Get out that explanatory note of yours, and show it to His Honour, so that he can send someone to take care of it for you."
Han Tao-kuo then reached into his sleeve, pulled out the note, and hastily getting down on his knees, said, "Unworthy as I am, your humble servant has been the recipient of your patronage. My only hope is that Your Honour, out of consideration for Uncle Ying the Second, will deign to show me some consideration in this matter. Should you do so, my entire family will be:
Unable to forget your kindness as long as we live."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by this speech that he pulled him up by one hand, saying, "Please get up."
Thereupon, glancing at the note that read, "Please look with favour on the female defendant, nee Wang, and exempt her from the obligation to appear before the bench," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "This note ought not to be worded this way. You should refer only to your younger brother, Han the Second, and leave it at that."
Then, turning to Ying Po-chüeh, he said, "Rather than my addressing a note to the district yamen, it would be better to instruct the local constable to alter his report so that tomorrow the case will be dealt with in my yamen instead."
"Brother Han," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "You should make an obeisance to His Honour. This way of handling it is better yet."
Han Tao-kuo once again knelt down and kowtowed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "You go outside immediately and call in one of the foremen on duty there."
Before long an adjutant in black livery was called in and stood to one side awaiting orders.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to step forward and instructed him, "You go to the residence of Manager Han on Oxhide Street, find the local constable of the relevant neighbourhood subprecinct station, and have him speak to the neighbourhood head of the relevant mutual security unit. You can say that it is my personal directive that he should release the defendant, nee Wang, immediately; ascertain the names of the 'bare sticks' involved; and alter the report so that tomorrow morning the case will be brought before my yamen, the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, for adjudication."
The adjutant assented to the orders he had received and went out the gate.
"Brother Han," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you might as well go along with him and take care of your business. I still have a few words to say to His Honour."
Han Tao-kuo took his leave, with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude,
and accompanied the adjutant to Oxhide Street to convey his orders.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then sat down to keep Ying Po-chüeh company in the Kingfisher Pavilion. Ordering Tai-an to set up a table, he said to him, "Go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady to open and decant some of that osmanthus-flavoured lotus blossom wine that Eunuch Director Liu of the Imperial Brickyard sent us the other day. I'd like to share it with Uncle Ying the Second. And have some of that preserved shad in fermented mash steamed for us as well."
Po-chüeh raised his hand at this point and said, "I still haven't thanked you, Brother, for the two fine shad that you were kind enough to send me the other day. I gave one of them to my elder brother and said to my wife, with regard to the other, 'Cut it in two with a cleaver, and send a piece to our daughter. As for what's left over, chop it into thin slices, marinate it in the red mash it came in, mix in a little sesame seed oil, and store it in a porcelain jar, so that, early or late, when we're having a meal, or if a guest should show up, we can steam a saucerful for our delectation, thereby not failing in our appreciation of Brother's lavish generosity.' "
Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Eunuch Director Liu's younger brother, Company Commander Liu, because he has made a good thing for himself out of the management of the Imperial Reed Beds below the river, has recently bought himself an estate at Wu-li Tien and appropriated timber from the Imperial Lumber Depot to build a house on it. Recently this matter was brought before our yamen, and my colleague Hsia Yen-ling, despite having accepted a bribe of one hundred taels of silver, threatened to memorialize about the case and forward the records to the Ministry of Justice in the capital. This threw Eunuch Director Liu into such a panic that he came to me in person, with a hundred taels of silver in hand, and begged me repeatedly to do what I could to quash the case. There's no reason for me to deceive you. I make enough at my business concerns not to have to worry about getting by, so that sort of money means nothing to me. Moreover, Eunuch Director Liu is a long-standing friend of mine, from whom I have often received gifts, so I could scarcely afford to lose face over such a trifling affair. Thus I refused to accept anything from him, simply telling him to see that the house in question was torn down overnight. When the case came before the bench, I merely had Company Commander Liu's servant, Liu the Third, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and thereby disposed of the matter.
"When the affair was concluded, Eunuch Director Liu could not get over his feelings of gratitude at my consideration, so he slaughtered a pig and came in person to present it to me, along with a jug of homemade lotus blossom wine, two packages of preserved shad weighing forty catties, and two bolts of figured satin brocade.
It redounds to the credit of both of us,
that we were able to exchange favours this way. What need was there for money?"
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "Money may not mean anything to you but His Honour Hsia Yen-ling started life in the ranks, so that from the time he:
Put down roots and stood up straight,
he's had to do without it. If he doesn't grab some for himself when the opportunity offers, what is he to live on? Brother, since taking office you must have heard quite a few cases with him."
"Great and small, I have heard quite a few cases with him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As for the rest, everything is fine enough; the only trouble is:
His greed and avarice know no bounds.
When cases come before him, without so much as enquiring into the:
Blue or red, black or white,
of the situation, if money comes into his hands, he frees the parties concerned. What sort of justice is that? I have consequently balked at his proposals more than once and refused to go along with him. After all, although we are both only military officials, we are charged with the administration of justice and ought to have some regard for appearances."
Before he had finished speaking, wine and delicacies were laid before them. First there were four saucers of hors d'oeuvres, after which another four dishes of cold appetizers were served to go with the wine, consisting of fresh red T'ai-chou duck eggs, crescent-shaped golden prawns from Liao-tung on a bed of julienned cucumber, fragrant deep-fried pork ribs, and plump dry-steamed pieces of split sun-dried chicken. The second course consisted of four more dishes of hot appetizers: a bowl of roast duck steamed in its own juice, a bowl of jellied pig's trotters, a bowl of braised pork, and a bowl of quick-fried pork kidneys. Only after that, on a porcelain platter decorated with a blue and white pattern both inside and out, was there served up a whole red and savory steamed preserved shad, with a bewitching aroma.
It melted on entering the mouth,
Even its bones were fragrant.
Hsi-men Ch'ing poured the lotus blossom wine into gold cups in the shape of chrysanthemum blossoms and kept Ying Po-chüeh company as they enjoyed their repast. But we will say no more about how the two of them sat together and chatted for more than two hours before breaking up.
To resume our story, the bunch of young scamps concerned in the affair, on observing that an adjutant in black livery had shown up at the subprecinct station and effected the release of the woman, nee Wang, who was allowed to go home; had interrogated the neighbourhood head of the relevant mutual security unit in order to ascertain the names of the parties involved; and had directed that the next morning they were all to be escorted to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission for a hearing; could only:
Gaze at each other in consternation.[10]
It dawned on them that Han Tao-kuo was a manager in the employ of Hsi-men Ch'ing and must have asked his master to put in the fix on his behalf, with the result that Han the Second was now the only person in custody at the subprecinct station.
With one voice they exclaimed, "This matter has taken a turn for the worse."
Han Tao-kuo had slipped five mace of silver to the adjutant, who promptly saw to it that the head of the relevant mutual security unit wrote down the names of the parties involved and sent them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, preparatory to their being haled into court the following morning.
The next day the two officials, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia, went to the yamen and took their places on the bench, while the local constable and the neighbourhood head of the relevant mutual security unit delivered their charges to the court. The first party brought forward was Han the Second, who knelt down before the bench. Judicial Commissioner Hsia first perused the report that read:
The resident of Oxhide Street and neighbourhood head of the fourth neighbourhood of the first subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho, Hsiao Ch'eng, reports a case of disturbance of the peace in the said neighbourhood. The first party involved is called Han the Second; the second is Ch'e Tan, or Hogwash Ch'e; the third is Kuan Shih-k'uan, or Busybody Kuan; the fourth is Yu Shou, or Loafer Yu; and the fifth is Hao Hsien, or Idler Hao.
All of these persons were then called on to come forward and sign their names, after which the magistrate asked Han the Second, "What is this all about?"
"My elder brother is engaged in commerce," said Han the Second, "which often requires him to be away from home. He and his wife are a young couple and have consequently been taken advantage of during his absence by this bunch of 'bare sticks' from the neighbourhood, who are constantly strumming guitars and ukuleles, gathering on her doorstep to sing:
Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,
pitching bricks over the wall at night, and insulting her in every way. I live apart from my brother's family but when I came by his house and saw what was going on, I was unwilling to put up with it and gave them a piece of my mind, as a result of which this bunch of 'bare sticks,' like a pack of tigers:
Without permitting any further explanation,
dragged me down to the ground and started kicking and beating me. Now that I have been brought before Your Honour's bench, I hope Your Honour will look into the matter."
Addressing himself to the other parties in the case, Judicial Commissioner Hsia then asked, "And what is your story?"
As though with one voice, that group of individuals responded, "Your Honour, don't allow yourself to be taken in by his specious testimony. He's nothing but a gambler and trickster who has been taking advantage of his brother's absence from home to carry on an affair with his sister-in-law, nee Wang; while she, for her part, has displayed the brazen audacity to vilely abuse her neighbours. Yesterday we caught them in the act, and we have her underpants to present as evidence."
Judicial Commissioner Hsia then asked the neighbourhood head, Hsiao Ch'eng, "Why is the woman, nee Wang, not here in court?"
Hsiao Ch'eng did not feel that it would be appropriate to say that the adjutant had released her, so he simply said, "Her feet are small, so she has trouble walking on the street. She'll be here soon enough."
Han the Second, from his position beneath the bench, merely fixed his two eyes on Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing inclined his body in Judicial Commissioner Hsia's direction and said, "My senior colleague, it seems unnecessary to arraign the woman, nee Wang. It is probable that she is rather good-looking, and that when she refused to respond to the propositions of these 'bare sticks,' they have retaliated by concocting this trap for her."
He then called for their leader, Ch'e Tan, to come forward and asked him, "Where was it that you apprehended this Han the Second?"
"It was yesterday, in her house, that we apprehended them," the group replied.
He then went on to ask Han the Second, "What is the woman nee Wang's relationship to you?"

The neighbourhood head replied, "She is his sister-in-law."
He then continued to question the neighbourhood head, saying, "And how did this bunch of people get into her house?"
"They got in by climbing over the wall," the neighbourhood head responded.
Hsi-men Ch'ing became very angry and upbraided them, saying, "What is to be done with a bunch of 'bare sticks' like you! Since he is her brother-in-law, the woman, nee Wang, falls within the scope of his five mourning relationships [11] as defined by law, so what objection can there be to his frequenting her home? As for the likes of this bunch of 'bare sticks,' what is your relationship to her? How dare you enter her house by climbing over the wall? Moreover, you did so while her husband was away from home, and she had only a young daughter in the house. Whatever you had in mind:
If it was not seduction, it must have been robbery."[12]
Then he shouted to the attendants, "Bring out the ankle-squeezers. Give each of them a squeezing and then administer twenty strokes of the heavy bamboo."
They were beaten until:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood spurted out.[13]
Moreover, the four or five of them were all young scamps who:
From the time they left their mothers' wombs,
Had never undergone judicial punishment,
so that in every case, as a result of the beating:
Their cries shook the heavens, and
Their groans filled the courtroom.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, without waiting for Judicial Commissioner Hsia to open his mouth, ordered, "Han the Second is to leave the court and await the further disposition of the case. The other four are to be incarcerated until such time as their depositions can be taken and they can be escorted to a higher court to stand trial."
When the four of them found themselves in jail, they engaged in mutual recriminations, each of them feeling as though he were:
Carrying a spectral fetus.
The other prisoners in the jail further intimidated them by saying, "If the four of you are escorted to a higher court to stand trial, you will be sentenced to penal servitude, and if you are exiled to some faraway prefecture, subprefecture, or district it will be the death of you."
The whole bunch of them were in a state of panic, and as soon as the servants from their families showed up to deliver food to them, they each sent letters home instructing their fathers and elder brothers to spend money both high and low in order to pull whatever strings they could.
Among these there was one who approached Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, who responded, "The husband of this woman, nee Wang, is a manager employed by His Honour Hsi-men Ch'ing. As long as he remains adamant about this matter, insisting that they be escorted to a higher court to stand trial, since he is a colleague of mine, there is not much I can do about it. You had better find some way of pulling strings with him if you want a favourable outcome."
There were also those who induced Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to intervene in the matter but without result. Everyone was aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had money to spare, so they felt it would be futile to offer him anything directly.
At this point, the fathers and elder brothers of the four families involved were in a state of panic and held a conference together, at which one of them said, "There's no point in another approach to Battalion Commander Wu since he has already turned us down. But I've heard it said that Ying the Second, the Younger brother of that Ying the Elder who has a silk goods store on East Street, is thick with him. The best thing to do is for each of us to ante up some silver, enough to come to several tens of taels altogether, and then seal it up and offer it to Ying the Second. If he can be persuaded to intervene on our behalf, the outcome is bound to be auspicious."
Thereupon, the fathers and elder brothers of the families involved, with Ch'e Tan's father, Old Man Ch'e, the proprietor of a local wineshop, at their head, each came up with ten taels of silver, making the sum of forty taels in all. They then proceeded as a group to Ying Po-chüeh's house to beg him to intervene with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Ying Po-chüeh agreed to accept the money and sent them on their way.
His wife then said to him, "Since you've already come to the aid of Manager Han by helping to land this bunch of scamps in their present predicament, how can you now turn around and accept this money to speak up on their behalf without antagonizing Manager Han?"
"Of course, it's going to be an awkward business," said Ying Po-chüeh. "To start with, thus and so, I'll take fifteen taels of silver and surreptitiously present it to Shu-t'ung, the page boy in charge of his studio, asking him to exercise his ingenuity in broaching this matter with his master. You don't know the extent to which His Honour depends on him in matters great and small, taking everything he says seriously. I guarantee he'll:
Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow."
Thereupon, having weighed out fifteen taels worth of silver, wrapped it up, and tucked it into his sleeve, he headed straight for Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Hsi-men Ch'ing had not yet returned home. Ying Po-chüeh proceeded as far as the reception hall when he saw Shu-t'ung coming out of the studio on the west side of the courtyard. On his head he wore a "tile-ridge" hat, and the two tufts of his hair were bound into knots with jet satin ribbons and sported gold-headed pins in the shape of lotus blossoms. On his body he wore a long gown of Su-chou chiffon, a jade-coloured silk tunic, sandals, and white socks.
"Master Second," he said, "please have a seat in the parlour."
He then ordered Hua-t'ung to go to the rear compound and fetch some tea, saying, "Page boy, I'm sending you to fetch some tea for Master Ying the Second but instead of getting a move on, you're continuing to fool around. Just wait until Father comes home and see if I tell him about it or not."
Only then did the page boy set off to fetch the tea.
"It looks as though he's not back from the yamen yet, is he?" Ying Po-chüeh then asked.
"Just now one of his attendants came by," replied Shu-t'ung, "to say that the court session is already over but that he and His Honour Hsia have gone outside the South Gate to pay a social call together. Master Second, what is it that you have to say to him?' "
"It's nothing in particular," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"With regard to that matter concerning Manager Han that you spoke to him about the other day," said Shu-t'ung, "Father went to the yamen yesterday and had that bunch of scamps beaten and incarcerated. Tomorrow he is going to draft the necessary documents and have the defendants escorted to a higher court to stand trial."
Drawing him aside to a secluded spot, Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Right now a further complication has arisen. The relatives of that bunch of scamps, thus and so, on hearing the proposal that they be escorted to a higher court to stand trial, have all become fearful about the situation. Last night they came to my home, weeping and wailing, and begged me repeatedly, on bended knee, to speak to your master on their behalf. I thought to myself, 'since I have already spoken to him previously on Manager Han's behalf, how can I very well intervene on their side without antagonizing Manager Han?' I had no alternative but to tell the four families to come up with fifteen taels of silver and ask you to exercise your ingenuity in broaching the subject with your master, to see if there is any way he might see his way clear to letting them off the hook."
As he finished speaking, he reached into his sleeve, pulled out the silver, and handed it to Shu-t'ung.
Shu-t'ung unwrapped it, saw that it consisted of four ingots of varying sizes along with four smaller pieces, and said, "As long as it's for your sake, Master Second, you can tell them that if they come up with another five taels I will undertake to speak on their behalf but I don't know whether Father will agree to their request or not. Last night his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, came in person to speak to him about this matter, and he refused to agree. As for me:
With the visage of a flea,
How much face have I got?[14]
To tell you the truth, Master Second, this silver must take care of more than myself. I'll have to spend a little something to enlist the services of the Sixth Lady, the one who has borne him a son. Only if I approach him in this roundabout way will there be any hope of success."
"If that's the way it is," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll explain the situation to them. Whatever you do, put your heart into it. They'll be coming for an answer later this afternoon."
"I don't know when Father will get home," said Shu-t'ung. "You'd better tell them to come back tomorrow morning."
When they had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh made his departure.
Shu-t'ung took the silver into the shop, chiseled off a piece worth one tael and five mace, and sent someone out to buy a jug of Chin-hua wine, two roast ducks, two chickens, one mace worth of fresh fish, a leg of pork, two mace worth of stuffed cream puff pastries, and one mace worth of fruit-flavoured sweet rolls. Then he carried these ingredients to Lai-hsing's quarters and asked his wife, Hui-hsiu, to prepare them for him, so they would be ready to be served.
That particular day it so happened that P'an Chin-lien was not at home. Early in the morning she had taken a sedan chair to Old Mrs. P'an's place outside the South Gate in order to celebrate her mother's birthday. Shu-t'ung directed Hua-t'ung to put the delicacies he had provided into square boxes and deliver them to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Only after he had done so did he plan to pick up the jug of Chin-hua wine and go inside himself.
"Where did all this come from?" Li P'ing-erh asked.
"It's Brother Shu-t'ung's way of showing his respect for you," Hua-t'ung replied.
"The lousy jailbird!" laughed Li P'ing-erh. "Why should he be showing any respect to me?"
After a while, Shu-t'ung came in and saw Li P'ing-erh seated on the gilt lacquer frame of the k'ang, extending her jade wrists, the colour of snowy lotus root and encircled by gilded bracelets, in the effort to induce a tortoiseshell cat to play with Kuan-ko.
"You lousy jailbird!" she said. "For whom have you provided all these goodies here?"
Shu-t'ung merely smiled.
"What do you mean," asked Li P'ing-erh, "by not saying a word and merely smiling that way?"
"To whom should I show respect," Shu-t'ung replied, "if not to you?"
"You lousy jailbird!" said Li P'ing-erh. 'Why should you appear to go to such pains for no good reason only to show respect for me? Unless you explain yourself, I'll refuse to eat any of it. As the saying goes:
The superior man does not eat food of unknown origin."
Shu-t'ung opened the jug of wine, arrayed the delicacies on a small table, told Ying-ch'un to decant the wine into a silver flagon, poured some of it into a cup, and offered it up to her with both hands.
Getting down on his knees, he said, "Only after you have drunk this cup will I explain things to you."
"What is this all about?" demanded Li P'ing-erh. "Only after you have explained it to me will I eat anything of yours. If you refuse to explain it, you can kneel to me for a hundred years and I still won't eat anything."
"You can stand up to explain it," she added.
Shu-t'ung then gave her a complete account from the beginning of Ying Po-chüeh's request on behalf of the four defendants.
"Since he had initially intervened on behalf of Manager Han," he explained, "he felt awkward about speaking up for the other side, so he asked me to present his petition to you first. If Father questions you about it, don't tell him I had anything to do with it. Just pretend that your brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu, sent someone to speak to you about it. I've written out a note in the front studio that I will say that you gave me, with instructions to show it to him. If you will just put in a good word while he's in your room, that ought to do it. Moreover, the other day, Father has already given them a taste of the bamboo for their sins. If he can be induced to settle the case by letting them go free, it would be a truly momentous good deed."
"So that's what it's all about," laughed Li P'ing-erh. It's no big deal. As soon as your father comes home I'll speak to him. That's all there is to it. What made you think you had to prepare all these goodies for no good reason?"
"You lousy jailbird!" she went on to say. "No doubt you made him pay dearly for your services."
"There's no reason for me to deceive you," said Shu-t'ung. "He gave me five taels of silver for my pains."
"You lousy jailbird!" said Li P'ing-erh. "You're becoming quite an expert at:
Setting people up and shaking them down."
Thereupon, instead of using small cups, she told Ying-ch'un to fetch a pair of large goblets of chased silver. After drinking off two goblets herself, she poured another gobletful and presented it to Shu-t'ung.
"I don't dare drink anything." Shu-t'ung said, "or my face will get red, and Father will notice it."
"I'm bestowing it on you," said Li P'ing-erh. "What is there to be afraid of?"
Thereupon, he kowtowed to her, stood up, and drank it off with one gulp. Li P'ing-erh picked out a sampling of each of the delicacies and put them on a saucer for him to eat. The page boy kept her company by draining two large goblets in succession, after which, fearing that his face would turn red, he dared not drink any more but took his leave and went out to the shop at the front of the compound.
Half of the sweetmeats and delicacies he had bought were left over and he laid them out on the counter, along with two flagons of wine, and invited Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, Ch'en Ching-chi, Lai-hsing, and Tai-an to share them with him. The bunch of them fell to and polished everything off in no time, like:
A gust of wind sweeping away vestiges of clouds.[15]
But he forgot to invite P'ing-an to join them.
P'ing-an just sat at his post at the main gate, pouting with his lips. Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would arrive home from the social call he had been paying outside the South Gate early that afternoon. P'ing-an saw him coming but did not say anything to warn of his arrival. When Shu-t'ung heard the sound of his escorts shouting to clear the way, he was so flustered he did not have time to clear up the mess but raced to the reception hall in two or three strides in order to take charge of Hsi-men Ch'ing's formal clothes.
"Has anyone been here today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him.
"No one has been here," Shu-t'ung replied.
Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his formal clothes, doffed his official headgear, exchanging it for a cap and headband, and then went into the studio and sat down. Shu-t'ung fetched a cup of tea and served it to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing drank a mouthful and then set the teacup down again.
Noticing that his face was red, he asked him, "Where've you been drinking wine?"
Shu-t'ung then pulled out a note from under the ink stone on the table and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "This is a note that the Sixth Lady called me into her room to give me. It has something to do with Ch'e Tan and that bunch and was sent over here by her brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu. The Sixth Lady told me to take it with me in order to show to you. Because she bestowed a cup of wine on me, I guess my face must be red." Hsi-men Ch'ing glanced at the note that said:
Please look with favour on the 4 offenders Ch'e Tan & company.
And then having read it, he handed it to Shu-t'ung and instructed him, "Put it in my letter case, and have the officer on duty remind me about it in the yamen tomorrow."
Shu-t'ung put the note in the letter case, then left the room to stand outside while a singing girl came over, and stood in attendance at his side. When Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that after a few drinks, the colours red and white formed a pleasing contrast on her face and the fragrant redness of her lips revealed a mouthful of teeth as white as glutinous rice, how could he have been anything but captivated? Thereupon his lecherous desires were suddenly aroused. Taking her onto his lap, the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues. The young woman had a cinnamon-flavoured breath-sweetening lozenge in her mouth and her whole person exuded a pungent fragrance. Hsi-men Ch'ing hiked up her clothes with one hand, took down her flowered drawers, and began to fondle her buttocks. As he did so, he enjoined her, "You shouldn't drink too much wine or you'll spoil that face of yours."
"Your instructions are duly noted," said the girl.
The two of them then continued to carry on with each other in the study. To resume our story, a figure, clad in black and riding a horse, arrived at the main gate of the compound, leapt off his horse, and, bowing to P'ing-an, who was tending the gate, asked him, "Is this the residence of His Honour Hsi-men, the judicial commissioner?" Now P'ing-an was still pouting over the fact that Shu-t'ung had failed to invite him to partake of his treat and was not in the best of moods, so he did not reply for some time. The man continued to stand there and said, "I've been sent by Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command to deliver a circular announcement to His Honour Hsi-men. Tomorrow he is throwing a party at the Temple of Eternal Felicity in order to see off His Honour Hsü Nan-ch'i, who has been promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade. Their Honours Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan will also be there. Contributions of one tael apiece have already been received from them. I have come straight here to deliver this communication. Might I trouble you, as his gate tender, to pass it on to him? I will wait for an answer."
Only then did P'ing-an take the circular notice and go back to the rear compound, where he learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in his studio in the flower garden. Proceeding in that direction, he had just skirted the juniper hedge when he caught sight of Hua-t'ung, who was sitting on the stone stylobate outside the window. When the latter saw him, he gave a negative wave of his hand, and P'ing-an realised that Hsi-men Ch'ing must be engaged in some less than pressing business with the singing girl. Silently approaching the window, he had been eavesdropping for some time when he heard the sound of heavy breathing coming from inside, accompanied by a creaking of the floorboards that was quite audible. "My child," he overheard Hsi-men Ch'ing say, "hold your body straight and don't move."
After that, some time elapsed without his hearing anything, when what should he see but Shu-t'ung coming out to fetch some water so Hsi-men Ch'ing could wash his hands. When he caught sight of P'ing-an and Hua-T'ung standing under the window, his face turned crimson with embarrassment, and he hurried off to the rear compound to complete his errand. P'ing-an took the circular announcement and went inside, where Hsi-men Ch'ing read it, took up a brush, and wrote "noted" in the appropriate place; after which he instructed him, "Go to the rear compound and ask the Second Lady for a tael of silver. Then get my son-in-law to seal it up and give it to the messenger."
P'ing-an assented and went on his way.
When Shu-t'ung came back with the water, Hsi-men Ch'ing washed his hands and then went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
"Would you like some wine?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I'll have a maidservant decant some for you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, noticing that there was a jug of Chin-hua wine under the table, asked, "Where did that come from?"
Li P'ing-erh did not feel comfortable explaining that Shu-t'ung had bought it in order to present to her, so she merely said, "I felt like having some wine a while ago, and consequently sent a servant out onto the street to buy this jug of wine for me. After opening it, I only drank two cups before I had had enough."

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've laid in plenty of wine in the front compound, and you go spending silver on it. Just the other day, I purchased a consignment of forty jugs of Ho-ch'ing wine on credit from Ting the Southerner that is sitting in an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard. If you want anything to drink, just send a servant after the key and have him go get some for you."
When he had finished speaking, Li P'ing-erh remembered that she still had a saucer of roast duck, a saucer of chicken meat, and a saucer of fresh fish that had not been touched left over from the earlier repast, so she instructed Ying-ch'un to make them into four saucers of appetizers, with the addition of a saucerful of sliced smoked pork, and set up a table in her room so she could have a drink with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing did not ask where these delicacies had come from. It is apparent that he was so accustomed to eating this kind of fare, whether enjoying it at home or entertaining guests, that he did not go a single day without it.
While he was drinking, Hsi-men Ch'ing bethought himself to ask Li P'ing-erh, "Was that note that Shu-t'ung handed me just now given to him by you?"
"It's from my brother-in-law, Hua Tzu-yu, from outside the gate," replied Li P'ing-erh. "He sent someone over with it to try to persuade you to be lenient with that bunch of scamps."
"Just the other day my brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, spoke to me about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I refused his suggestion. If it weren't for this, I would certainly have insisted on that bunch of 'bare sticks' being escorted to a higher court to stand trial. Out of consideration for your brother-in-law, however, when I go to the yamen tomorrow, I'll just have each of them given a beating and then let them go."
"What need is there to beat them again?" said Li P'ing-erh. "When people are beaten into:
Showing their teeth and making faces,
it's not a pleasant sight."
"Our yamen is that kind of yamen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It makes no difference to me whether people show their teeth or not, as persons more delicate and pampered than they have found out before now.
"The other day we heard a case in the yamen concerning the family of the deceased Vice Commissioner Ch'en from our district. Since Vice Commissioner Ch'en died, his wife has maintained her widowhood. She has a daughter, Miss Ch'en, who was standing at the front door to see the lanterns on the sixteenth of the first month when a young scamp named Juan the Third, who lived across the street from her, was setting off firecrackers and happened to notice how pretty she looked. This inspired him to flirt with her by strumming his guitar or *p'i-p'a*, and serenading her in song. When Miss Ch'en heard this, her forbidden desires were stirred and she sent her maidservant to surreptitiously summon him to her door, where the two of them exchanged a kiss. But after that there was no way for them to meet.
"Who could have anticipated that Juan the Third would become so lovesick that he was bedridden for five months. His father and mother lavished money widely on physicians to treat him but he gradually approached the brink of death until he was expected to die at any moment.
"At this point, a friend of his named Chou the Second came up with a plan and said to him, 'Every year at the time of the Middle Primordial Festival[16] on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the mother and daughter of the Ch'en household go to Nun Hsüeh's place at the Ksitigarbha Nunnery to burn incense during the Ullambana services. If you promise ten taels of silver to Nun Hsüeh, and she consents to conceal you in her monastic quarters so that you can have a tryst with the young lady, I am sure that it will cure you of what ails you.'
"Juan the Third was delighted by this and actually adopted his proposal. Nun Hsüeh accepted his ten taels of silver with the result that, as the young lady could scarcely have anticipated, while taking a noonday nap in the abbess's quarters, she ended up having illicit relations with Juan the Third. The latter had just arisen from his sickbed, however, where he had long been given to licentious thoughts, and when his desires were suddenly fulfilled in this way, he died on top of the young woman's body.
"This threw her mother into a panic, and she hurriedly took her daughter back home but Juan the Third's parents were scarcely willing to leave it at that[17] and lodged a complaint before the yamen, with the result that both Mrs. Ch'en and her daughter were taken into custody.
"Hsia Yen-ling, knowing that the Ch'en family was well-to-do, wanted to charge the daughter with the crime but I refused to go along with him, saying. 'Although it is true that Miss Ch'en had illicit relations with Juan the Third, the latter had long been hankering after her without result and, moreover, had not fully recovered from his illness. Under the circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that such a sudden indulgence in illicit relations should have proven to be fatal. Nun Hsüeh falsely employed, as she should not have done, a Buddhist ceremony as a means of covering up an illicit assignation that resulted in the loss of life; and, moreover, she received a bribe for so doing.'
"She was, therefore, condemned as an accessory before the fact, stripped of her clothing, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and ordered to return to lay life. The girl's mother, nee Chang, took her daughter, as she should not have done, to a Buddhist temple to burn incense that is detrimental to public morals. She and her daughter, therefore, were both subjected to the finger squeezers that were struck twenty times, after which their depositions were taken and they were released. If it had not been handled in this way, and the case had been forwarded to Tung-p'ing prefecture, the girl would certainly have forfeited her life." [18]
"That was a truly momentous good deed on your part," said Li P'ing-erh. "As long as you are an officer in the legal system, you ought, whenever you can, to utilize your position in the court to treat people favourably. If for no other reason, it would serve to accumulate merit for this little bit of a child of yours."
"What would you suggest?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Quite aside from anything else," said Li P'ing-erh, "it must have been very hard on that young lady. How could her delicate little fingers ever have withstood such treatment without being hurt?"
"She was hurt so badly that the fingers of her two hands were streaming with blood," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"In the future," said Li P'ing-erh, "you ought to subject people to the squeezers and the bamboo more sparingly.
Where you can afford to be lenient, you should be lenient.
There are opportunities to accumulate good fortune everywhere."[19]
"One can't afford to take feelings into account in the conduct of public affairs," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Just as the two of them were drinking together there, whom should they see but Ch'un-mei, who lifted aside the portiere and came into the room.
On seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li P'ing-erh were drinking together, thigh over thigh, she said, "The two of you are doing just as you please, having a good time and drinking wine. Late as it is, you haven't thought to send a servant out to meet my mistress. Lai-an is the only one accompanying her sedan chair.
What with all the intervening gates and doors,
I'm afraid she may be late but you don't seem to care about it."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that:
Her flowery headdress was in disarray,[20] and Her clouds of hair were in disorder,
his whole face became wreathed in smiles, and he said, "Little oily mouth! My guess would be that you've been sleeping."
"The drawnwork kerchief on your head has jumped out of place," remarked Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you pull it back down where it belongs?"
Then, offering it to her as she spoke, she said, "Here's some good, sweet Chin-hua wine. Won't you have a cup?"
"Have some," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I'll send a servant to meet your mistress."
Leaning on the end of the table with one hand while she fiddled with her shoe, Ch'un-mei said, "I've only just gotten up, and I'm not feeling very well. I don't want anything to drink."
"Just look at you, little oily mouth!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You've had more than a little already."
"In any case, your mistress is not here today," said Li P'ing-erh. "You might as well have a cup. What is there to be afraid of?"
"Sixth Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "you go ahead and drink. I really don't have a mind for it. Whether my mistress is here or not doesn't make any difference to me. Even when she is present, if I don't feel like it, and she offers me some, I refuse it."
"If you don't want any wine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "have a mouthful of tea. I'll send Ying-ch'un out front for a servant to go and meet your mistress."
As he spoke, he offered her the cup of tea, steeped with osmanthus, sesame seeds, and cured bamboo shoots, that he had been holding in his hand.
Ch'un-mei accepted it as indifferently as though she were:
Uncertain whether it was there or not,[21]
and, after merely swallowing a mouthful, put it down, saying. "You needn't send Ying-ch'un after anyone. I've already called in P'ing-an, who's right here. He's older than the others; you might as well send him."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for P'ing-an through the window, and the servant responded, "I'm here, awaiting further orders."
"If you go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will tend the front gate?"
"I've deputized Ch'i-t'ung to look after the gate," said P'ing-an.
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take a lantern with you and hurry off to meet your mistress."
Thereupon, he took a lantern and set straight off to meet P'an Chin-lien. Before he had gone halfway, whom should he see but Lai-an accompanying her sedan chair as it approached from the south.
It so happens that the two chair-bearers were persons with whom he was already familiar. One of them was called Chang Ch'uan-erh, and the other was called Wei Ts'ung-erh.
P'ing-an went up to them, took hold of one of the shafts with his hand, and said, "I've come to meet the mistress."
Chin-lien then proceeded to interrogate him, saying, "P'ing-an, is your father at home yet? Was it he who sent you to meet me, or somebody else?"
"For Father to send me," said P'ing-an, "is not likely at all. Not likely at all. It was Sister who sent me to meet you."
"I imagine that your father is not yet home from the yamen," said Chin-lien.
"Not yet home?" said P'ing-an. "He went to pay a visit to someone outside the gate but he's been home since this afternoon. He's in the Sixth Lady's room having a good time and drinking wine. If Sister hadn't called me inside and pressured him to send me with a lantern to meet you, I wouldn't be here now. It seemed obvious to me that since Lai-an, who's still so young, was the only one accompanying your sedan chair, and there was reason to fear you might be late, or suffer some inconvenience on the road, you really needed an older servant to come meet you. But since that would have left no one to tend the front gate, I deputized Ch'i-t'ung to look after it, before being free to come myself."
"When you left," Chin-lien went on to ask, "where was your father?"
"When I left," said P'ing-an, "Father was still in the Sixth Lady's room drinking wine. It was only after Sister importuned him on your behalf that Father sent me to meet you."
When Chin-lien heard this, she remained silent for some time in her sedan chair before expostulating sardonically, "That lousy ruffian! I might just as well be dead for all he cares. More than ever, he's taken to sleeping all the time in that whore's room, that's all there is to it. And this may cause her to think that in the future she can depend forever on that piddling bladder's spawn of hers. She had better beware of the fact that:
After high noon the sun has passed its zenith.
"Chang Ch'uan-erh, just let me ask you, since there are no outsiders present, and you frequent:
The doors of a thousand households,
The gates of ten thousand families,
which of them would clothe a baby who has only just been ejected from the womb in garments made from whole bolts of silk or satin?
Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang,
Would that do, or would it not do?"
"If you hadn't mentioned it," said Chang Ch'uan-erh, picking up where Chin-lien had left off, "I would not have presumed to say anything about it but that would never do. To say nothing of the extravagance, I fear it would only serve to diminish his share of good luck. He hasn't yet come down with smallpox, measles, chicken pox, or rubella. It's no easy thing to raise a child to adulthood.
"Just last year there was a case, outside the East Gate, of a certain prominent family with its own large landed estates, the patriarch of which was in his sixties. He occupied a hereditary post and had incalculable wealth at his disposal, being one of those of whom it can be said that:
His oxen and horses form teeming herds,
His stores of grain are inexhaustible.
And as for his maidservants and concubines, to mention only those with the ability to take charge of a household and wear formal robes, he had seventeen or eighteen at his disposal. But however much he wanted a son to show for it, he did not have any. So he:
Performed ceremonies in the Eastern Temple,
Presented offerings in the Western Monastery,
Donated sutras and contributed effigies,
leaving no stone unturned in his quest, when, contrary to all expectation, his seventh concubine bore him a son that made him as happy as could be. Just as in the case of the master of your household, all day long he pampered the child as though it were a pearl on the palm, wrapping it in a nest of brocade and embroidery, satin and silk. Moreover, he replastered five rooms for it, until they looked like snow grottoes, and purchased four or five waiting women to look after it, carrying on all day as though he were touched in the head. But before it was three years old it came down with smallpox and died. If you don't mind my saying so, it's really better to:
Let them go and let them come like spilt water."
"Let them go and let them come like spilt water,
indeed!" responded Chin-lien. "His only regret is that he can't keep him wrapped in gold all day long."
"There's something else I'd better tell you about," said P'ing-an. "If I don't tell you, and you find out about it later, you'll hold it against me. It's about that bunch of scamps that Manager Han spoke to Father about. He has had them put in the squeezers and beaten in the yamen, has incarcerated them in the lockup, and intends to have them escorted to a higher court to stand trial. This morning Ying the Second came and spoke to Shu-t'ung about it. I imagine he must have received a number of taels of silver from him, because he took a sizable packet to the shop and insisted on having two or three taels worth chiseled off for his use. He then bought quite a lot in the way of delicacies and so forth, had Lai-hsing's wife prepare them for him, and proceeded to carry them off to the Sixth Lady's quarters. He also purchased a jug of Chin-hua wine. After first sharing these things with the Sixth Lady, he then took the remainder to the shop up front, where he invited Uncle Fu the Second, Pen the Fourth, your son-in-law, Tai-an, and Lai-hsing to join him in making a communal feast of it. They enjoyed this treat right up until the time Father came home, before breaking up."
"Didn't he offer you anything to eat?" asked Chin-lien.
"Offer me anything!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "That impudent southern slave! Why even you ladies of the household don't carry any weight in his mind. I ought not to mention it but Father is spoiling him rotten. Just to start out with, he has been up to dirty business with him in his studio. It's really not surprising since he was formerly a 'gate-boy' in the district yamen. There isn't much he doesn't know about anything. If Father doesn't get rid of that southern slave soon, before long the entire household will be corrupted by him."
"When he was drinking wine in Li P'ing-erh's quarters," asked Chin-lien, "how long did it go on?"
"They were drinking the better part of the day," replied P'ing-an. "I saw with my own eyes that he didn't come out until his face was bright red."
"When your father came home," said Chin-lien, "didn't he say anything to him about it?"
"Father's lips were sealed," said P'ing-an. "What could he have to say about it?"
"That lousy shameless ruffian of a benighted ruler!" exclaimed Chin-lien.
He'd sell his own son to obtain a son-in-law:
Both of them are going about it ass-backwards.
At the same time you're plotting to plug his shitty asshole, that slave, for his part, is busy fucking your favourite concubine."
She then enjoined P'ing-an, "If you ever catch him up to this kind of dirty business anywhere with that southern slave again, come and tell me about it."
"Your instructions are duly noted," replied P'ing-an. "I can count on old Chang Ch'uan-erh here not to leak inside information. Having served the needs of our household for lo these many years, he's an oldtimer. As far as I'm concerned:
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.
Since you're my mistress, if I have anything to say, how could I fail to report it to you? But you must keep it to yourself and not mention so much as a word about me."
Thereupon, he accompanied the sedan chair, talking as they went, all the way to the front gate of the compound.
As P'an Chin-lien stepped out of the sedan chair, above the waist she wore a blouse of lilac-coloured, cloud-patterned Nanking silk that opened down the middle, emblazoned with a variegated embroidered mandarin square enclosing a roundel that featured a pair of magpies face to face, a rebus for the words "happy reunion." Below the waist she had on a long trailing drawnwork skirt of white glazed damask with a foot-wide border that featured a motif of playing children tugging on a branch of vine. [22] On her bosom she had fastened a gold openwork brooch that held the two sides of her collar together, and beneath this she held a purse made of gold-spangled sheepskin.
Thus attired, she went first to the master suite in the rear compound to pay her respects to Wu Yüeh-niang.
"You could have stayed overnight," said Yüeh-niang. "What led you to come back so soon?"
"My mother wanted me to stay," replied Chin-lien, "but she's taken the eleven-year-old daughter of my maternal aunt into her household to raise, and we would all have been squeezed together on the same k'ang. *Who* wants to stay over under such conditions? I was afraid that:

What with all the intervening gates and doors,
I'd better just come home. My mother asked me to tell you how much she appreciated your generous gifts."
Thereupon, having paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she went to the quarters of Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and the others to say hello and then headed back to the front compound. On learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she went straight there to pay her respects to Li P'ing-erh. When Li P'ing-erh saw her come in, she promptly stood up and welcomed her with a smile.
After they had exchanged mutual salutations, Li P'ing-erh said, "Sister, you've come home early. Please sit down and have a cup of wine."
Turning to Ying-ch'un, she said, "Quickly, fetch a chair for the Fifth Lady to sit on."
"I've already had something to drink today," said Chin-lien. "Rather than indulging in two feasts on the same day, I'd better excuse myself."
After saying which, she prepared to take herself nonchalantly off without more ado.
"A fine slave you are!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How impudent can you get! You come home and don't even bother to salute me with a kowtow."
Chin-lien picked up where he left off, saying, "I kowtow to you! You've not earned the right to it. If a slave isn't to be impudent, who is to be impudent?" Gentle reader take note: These few words of Chin-lien's were clearly intended to reflect satirically on Li P'ing-erh. Since she had first shared a few drinks with Shu-t'ung, and later done the same with Hsi-men Ch'ing, was this not a case of indulging in two feasts on the same day? But Hsi-men Ch'ing had no way of grasping the point of her remarks. Truly, it is clear that words serve as both the needle and thread; that bring out discordant patterns from the fabric's ground.

Han Daoguo hastened to the Town Hall to see what he could find out. There he discovered that his wife and brother had both been thrown into prison.
He rushed back to the shop to ask Laibao's advice. "If I were you," Laibao said, "I should go and ask Uncle Ying to speak to our master about it. If he sends a card to the magistrate, I'm sure everything will be well, no matter how serious the case."
Han Daoguo went straight to Ying Bojue's house. He was told that Ying was out and nobody knew where he had gone. Perhaps he was at Ximen's house. Han said this was not so, and asked for Ying Bao. Ying Bao had gone with Bojue. This was very disturbing. Han decided to go and look for his man in the bawdy house. He the Second, the brother of He of Huzhou, had invited Ying Bojue to a party at a house in the Fourth Lane, and there Han Daoguo found him, well filled with wine, and red in the face. He took him aside and told him all his troubles.
"You are in a very serious position," Bojue said. "I can't do less than go with you." He said good-bye to He, and went with Han to his house, where he asked for all the details of the story.
"I very much fear," Han Daoguo said earnestly, "that the case will come up tomorrow. I can see only one means of escape, and that is if you will go to my master and ask him for a card to the magistrate. If all goes well, I will not forget you." He knelt down before Ying Bojue.
"My good lad," Bojue said, pulling him up, "of course I'll see what I can do for you. Write out a petition and don't say anything that isn't necessary. Say that you are often away from home, and, during your absence, a number of young scamps among your neighbours are always throwing bricks and tiles, and insulting your wife. This enraged your brother and he had a row with them but, unfortunately, they seized him, kicked, pulled, and beat him, and finally tied him and your wife together. Then ask his Lordship to send a card to the magistrate to ask that your wife shall not be compelled to appear before the court. I am sure all will be well."
Han Daoguo took brush and ink, wrote quickly, and put the paper in his sleeve. Then Bojue went with him to call upon Ximen Qing. When they reached the house, they asked Ping'an, the doorkeeper, if his master was at home. "He is in his study in the garden," Ping'an said. "Please go straight in." Ying Bojue's visits to the house were so frequent that the dogs had ceased to bark at him. They went in by the second door, passed through the hall, and came to the Kingfisher Hall. Here Ximen Qing was wont to seek coolness in the hot summer days. There were blinds and curtains on both sides, flowers everywhere, and bamboo trees spread a pleasant cool shade. Huatong was sweeping the floor. When he saw the two men, he cried: "Uncle Ying and Uncle Han are here." They pulled up the blind and went in. Shutong asked them to be seated. "My father has just gone to the inner court," he said. Then he told Huatong to go and find Ximen Qing.
The boy went first to Jinlian's room and asked Chunmei if his master was there. Chunmei called him a thievish, deceitful little slave. "Father is in the Sixth Lady's room on the other side. You know that well enough. Why do you come here and ask?" The boy then went to the other side of the court. The maid Xiuchun was sitting on the steps. "Uncle Ying and Uncle Han are here," he said. "They are waiting for Father to come and talk to them."
"He is in the room," Xiuchun said, "watching my mistress make some clothes for the baby."
Ximen had taken two rolls of material, one of scarlet linen, and the other of light parrot-green silk, so that Li Ping'er might make some little shirts, a little gown, a vest and a hat for Guan'ge. They had laid a cover on the bed. The nurse was there with the baby, and Yingchun was ready with an iron. Xiuchun went in and quietly pulled the other maid's sleeve.
"Don't pull me," Yingchun said, "I shall drop the iron." Xiuchun told her that Huatong had come to say Master Ying wished to speak with his master.
"You naughty little slave," Li Ping'er said, "if Uncle Ying is here, why didn't you come and say so instead of pulling Yingchun by the sleeve?"
Ximen Qing told the boy to ask the two men to wait: he would join them in a few moments. He watched the women finish cutting out the clothes, and went to the study in his ordinary dress. When he had greeted Bojue, they sat down to take tea. Han Daoguo sat facing them. At last Ying Bojue said: "Brother Han, you have, I think, something to say. Pray tell his Lordship what it is."
Han Daoguo had just begun to say that certain wicked neighbours of his, whose names he didn't know..., when Bojue interrupted him. "My dear boy," he said, "you are going the wrong way about it. You shouldn't wrap up the bones of the affair, and simply show the flesh. Be perfectly frank. Brother Han has been spending most of his time at the shop. There was no one to look after his house except his wife and his little daughter. The neighbours are not by any means what they should be, and, when they saw that there was no man in the place, they began to throw bricks and tiles, and play tricks generally. His worthy younger brother, Han the Second, found this sort of behavior to be too much. He came to the house and told the rascals what he thought about them. Then they all set upon him, beat him nearly to death, and finally seized him and shut him up in jail. Now he has to appear before the magistrate in the morning. Brother Han came to me and wept and asked me to beg you to send a card to his Worship so that his reputation might in some degree be saved. If only his brother goes before the magistrate, it will not be so bad but his wife should not be allowed to appear." He said to Han Daoguo: "Let your master see the paper you have written. Then he will send a man to get the matter arranged for you."
Han hastily took the paper from his sleeve, and knelt down before Ximen. "I have had the good fortune to be employed in this household," he said. "Will you not, for Master Ying's sake, deign to do something for me, and I and all my house will not forget your kindness so long as the teeth are in our mouths."
Ximen Qing pulled him up and read the paper. "The accused woman Wang," it said, "implored you of your goodness, to withdraw the prosecution." "That is not how you should write it," Ximen said. "Mention your brother only." He said to Ying Bojue: "I will certainly send a card to the court but I think a much better plan would be to arrange for the charge to be altered so that the young man appears before me."
"Brother Han," Ying Bojue said, "your master's idea is excellent. You should make a reverence to him." Han Daoguo knelt down again and kowtowed.
Ximen ordered Daian to go at once for the officer of the police on duty, and, in a little while, a policeman in black clothes was ready in attendance. Ximen Qing called him forward. "Go to Han's house and find out to which quarter of the town it belongs. Then go to the officer of that quarter and tell him that it is my order that he shall release Mistress Han forthwith. Afterwards, take the names of the young men concerned, make the necessary alterations in the charge sheet, and see that all the rascals are brought to my court tomorrow for examination.
The officer went away. "Brother Han," Bojue said, "you had better go with him and see after things. I have something else to talk to his Lordship about."
Han Daoguo repeatedly thanked them both and went home with the policeman.
Ximen Qing and Bojue sat in the Kingfisher Hall, and Ximen told Daian to go to the Great Lady and ask for the wine that Eunuch Liu had sent. He was to ask for the mackerel too. Hearing the word "mackerel," Bojue lifted his hands.
"Oh dear," he said, "I haven't thanked you yet. Those two mackerel you sent me yesterday were excellent. I sent one of them to my brother, and told my wife to send a portion of the other to our dear daughter. The rest she minced, put in sweet oil and preserved in a porcelain jar, so that I may have some to eat whenever I feel like it, and if a friend should call, he too may have a little and participate in your generosity."
Ximen told him how the fish had been given him. "Liu Bohu," he said, "Eunuch Liu's brother, has done pretty well out of the Imperial osier beds. A short time ago he built a house at Wulitian. Unfortunately, he used the imperial timber to build his house, and Magistrate Xia, who, as you know, is a colleague of mine, got to know about it. Not only did he propose to fine Liu a hundred taels but also to send the papers to the Provincial Courts. This was very distressing to Eunuch Liu, and he came to see me about it. He brought a hundred taels with him and said there was nothing he desired more than to see the matter ended. Now I don't mind telling you, I don't do so badly out of my business, and the money he offered was nothing to me. Eunuch Liu is a friend of mine: we see a good deal of one another and he often gives me presents. When he asked me to help him, I could hardly turn a deaf ear. But I wouldn't touch a penny of his money. I told them to pull the house down as fast as they could. Liu the Third's servant was beaten forty stripes and that was the end of the matter. Eunuch Liu was very grateful. He killed a pig and sent it with a jar of lotus wine of his own brewing, two fish, about forty *jin* in weight, and two rolls of flowered silk, with gold embroidery. He came in person to thank me, and each of us appreciated the advantages of friendship a little better than we had done before."
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "money means very little to you but Xia has been a soldier. He has never had anything of his own, and now he must make what he can. Have you had much to do with him since you have held your present post?"
"We have tried a few cases together, some great, some small. On the whole he is fair enough but he is too fond of taking little presents. To him, so long as he gets his fee, all cases are of the same complexion, and the parties are set free. It is quite contrary to justice, and I have protested several times. We are both, as I tell him, officials of no very high degree, yet we represent the law and we should maintain its dignity."
When wine and dishes had been set before them, Ximen poured the lotus wine into a golden cup. They drank together and chatted till after the first night watch.
Meanwhile the black-robed policeman did as he had been told. Han's wife was set free and allowed to go home. The officer in charge of the records was sent for; the young men's names were taken down and they were ordered to appear before the court the following morning. Then they began to look at one another. They knew that Han Daoguo was employed by Ximen Qing, and realized that he had secured Ximen's help. They saw that Han the Second alone was detained, and began to think that the matter would end badly for them.
The next day, Ximen Qing and Xia took their places in the great hall and the police brought in the culprits. Han the Second came first and knelt down before the dais. Xia read the charge.
"Ox Hide Alley, in the fourth quarter of the first ward. officer of the Records Xiu Zheng reports a breach of the peace by the following, Han the Second, Che Dan, Guan Shikuan, Yu Shou and Hao Xian."
He asked Han the Second how the trouble began.
"My brother is a tradesman," Han the Second said, "and he is seldom at home. Only a young girl and myself were there. There are a number of young ruffians living about there, and they used to gather around the door and sing lewd songs. At night they used to throw bricks at us and insult us in every conceivable way. One day when I was at my brother's house, I found these insults more than I could stand, and said a few words to that effect. The scoundrels would not listen to me. They threw me on the ground, kicked, and struck me. And now we are all before you. I pray, Sir, that you will establish the truth of the matter."
Xia asked the others what they had to say. "Your Worship," they cried, "do not believe these cunning stories. Han the Second is a gambler and a rogue. When his brother was out, he made love to his sister-in-law. As for her, she is always trying to show how clever she is and insulting her neighbours. Yesterday we caught them in the act, and her trousers are here for evidence."
At this, Xia asked the policeman why Mistress Han was not before the court. The policeman did not dare to say she had been released, so he said her feet were so small that she could only walk slowly and would come later. Han the Second looked at Ximen Qing. A few moments later, Ximen bowed to Xia. "Your Worship," he said, "it seems hardly necessary to bring the woman before us. I suppose she is a pretty woman, and these young rascals hoped to have some fun with her and were disappointed. They probably plotted this in revenge."
He called Che Dan forward and questioned him. "Where did you catch Han the Second?" he asked.
"We caught him in the woman's room," the man said. Then Ximen said to Han the Second: "What relation are you to this woman?" A policeman said that she was his sister-in-law. Then he asked the police: "How did these fellows get into her room?" The policeman told him that they had climbed over the wall.
Ximen put on an air of great indignation. "You scoundrels!" he cried, "since he is her brother-in-law, they are near relations. Why should he not go to see her? What is his business to you, you scamps? How dared you climb over the wall? The husband was out, and she had only a little daughter in the house. It must have been one of two things. Either you intended to rob her, or you meant to rape her. Bring the rack," he shouted to the attendants, "rack each of them once, and give them twenty stripes with a heavy rod." Then they were all beaten and racked till their flesh was torn and the blood gushed forth. As none of them had been so punished from the day he left his mother's womb, they shrieked and yelled loudly enough to rend the skies and then lay groaning on the ground.
Ximen Qing did not give Xia an opportunity to speak but ordered Han the Second to be taken away to await further examination. The other four were to be put in jail until they confessed. They bemoaned their fate, and their friends in the prison frightened them the more by saying that they would be banished and probably die in exile. This put them all in a terrible state, and, when their people sent food to them in prison, they secretly sent messages to their fathers or elder brothers to spend more money bribing the officials both high and low. Someone went and attempted to bribe Xia. "The woman's husband," said Xia, "is employed by his Lordship Ximen Qing. So long as he is concerned in the matter, I can do nothing. He is my colleague. You had better go and talk to him."
One of them thought of going to see Uncle Wu but as for Ximen himself, they knew that he was very rich, and dared not offer money to him. So the fathers and brothers of the poor young men were greatly put about and finally held a conference.
"It is no use going to Master Wu," one said, "he can do nothing for us. But they tell me that Ying, the silk merchant's brother, is on very friendly terms with Ximen. We had better get together as much silver as we can, and ask him to plead with Ximen for us. Then we may have some success."
Che, the wineshop keeper, Che Dan's father, acted as spokesman. The others contributed ten taels apiece, so that they had forty taels in all; then they went to Ying Bojue's house to implore him to intercede with Ximen. Bojue accepted the money and sent them away.
"You have already worked for Han against these people," his wife said. "How can you take their money now and act for them? Han will be very angry."
"Do you think I haven't foreseen that difficulty?" Ying Bojue said. "I know what to do." He weighed out fifteen taels of silver, wrapped them up, put them in his sleeve, and set off for Ximen Qing's house.
Ximen had not yet returned, and Ying went into the hall. Shutong was coming from the study in the west wing. The boy was wearing a tile-shaped hat, with a pin fashioned like a lotus. His gown was of Suzhou silk with a jade-coloured jacket, summer shoes, and white socks.
"Pray sit down in the guest's place, Uncle Ying," he said. Then to Huatong: "Boy, go at once and bring some tea for Uncle Ying. If you stay there playing knucklebones, I shall tell Father the moment he comes in." Huatong went to get the tea.
"Is your Father not back yet from the courts?" Ying Bojue asked.
"A message has just come to say that, after leaving the office, he went with his Lordship Xia to make a call. Is there anything I can do for you, Uncle?"
"I want nothing." Ying Bojue said.
"Uncle," the boy said, "the other day you came here on Clerk Han's business. Yesterday my master had those fellows beaten and sent to prison. Tomorrow the papers will be made out and they will be sent for trial."
Ying Bojue took the boy aside. "I will tell you one thing," he said, "their people have heard that they are to be examined further, and they are very much alarmed. Last night they came to me, cried and knelt down before me, and begged me to speak to your master for them. I realized that as I had already taken a hand in the matter, I could do nothing for them without upsetting Han, so I suggested that they should give me fifteen taels of silver, thinking that I might come to you, and perhaps you might think fit to mention the matter to your father, and we shall see whether he takes pity on them or not."
He took the money from his sleeve and handed it to Shutong. The boy broke open the packet. The silver was in four large and four small pieces.
"Uncle Ying," he said, "I will, of course do anything you command but I think I should have five taels more. Then I will mention the matter to Father, though, naturally, I can't say whether he will be willing to listen. Uncle Wu was here yesterday and Father refused him point-blank. My influence is no bigger than a sesame seed, so what can I do? Really, Uncle, I cannot expect to succeed without some help. I shall have to lay out the money on the Sixth Lady, who has just borne a son. We must get to work indirectly."
"Very well," Bojue said, "I will add a word too but remember: they want their answer tonight."
"I don't know when Father will be back," Shutong said. "They may have to wait until tomorrow."
Bojue went away, and Shutong took the silver to the shop, keeping a tael and five *qian*. This he spent on a jar of wine, two roast ducks, and two chickens, two *qian* on fruit pastries and delicate pastry, and one on sweet rolls. He ordered these things to be sent to Laixing's room, and then went to ask Laixing's wife to set them out for him.
Jinlian was not at home that day. Early in the morning she had taken a sedan chair and gone outside the city to celebrate her mother's birthday. Shutong borrowed a square tray and sent Huatong with the delicacies to Li Ping'er. He himself took the jar of wine.
"Who has sent these things?" Li Ping'er said. Huatong told her they were a present from Shutong. "The young rascal!" Li Ping'er cried. "What does he mean by this?"
Then Shutong came in. Li Ping'er was sitting on a gilt bed, playing with the baby and a tortoiseshell cat.
"You young scamp," she said, "for whom have you brought all these things?"
Shutong laughed but did not answer.
"Why don't you answer instead of standing there laughing?" Li Ping'er said.
"If it is not for you, for whom do you imagine I have brought them?"
"You rascal," Li Ping'er said, "I don't suppose you are doing this without a reason. If you don't explain yourself, I shall not accept them."
Shutong opened the wine jar, set down the dishes on a small table, and asked Yingchun to bring a silver wine pot. Then he poured out a cup of wine and offered it to Li Ping'er with both hands.
"When you have drunk this, I will tell you," he said, kneeling before her.
"Say what you have to say before I drink it," Li Ping'er said. "Otherwise, you may kneel there a hundred years but I will have none of it. Stand up at once and tell me."
Shutong told her how Ying Bojue had spoken to him about the four prisoners. "He had already done something for Han, and he did not see how he could work for the other side too. He suggested that I should come to you. If Father questions you about it, don't say I told you but tell him that Uncle Hua sent someone to see you about it. Meanwhile I will go to the study in the front court and write a petition, and show it to him. I will tell him that you gave it to me, and perhaps you will say anything else that seems necessary. After all, Father has already had the men punished, so if you persuade him to make an end of the matter and let them go, it will be a very gracious action."
"If that is all," Li Ping'er said, "there need be no difficulty. I will speak to your master as soon as he returns. There was no need for you to get all these things for me. You rogue, I suspect you've made something out of them."
"I will not deceive you, Lady," Shutong said. "They gave me five taels for myself."
"You are a clever young rascal, making money in this way." She would not drink a small cup but made Yingchun bring a large one shaped like a flower. After drinking two cups herself she poured one out for Shutong.
"I dare not drink," the boy said. "It would make my face red, and I should not like my master to see me."
"What does it matter if I give it to you?" Li Ping'er said.
The boy kowtowed to her and drank the wine at a breath. Li Ping'er took some of each of the dishes and made the boy eat some. He drank two more cups of wine, then dared not drink any more, for fear his face should be red. Then he went to the shop where he had left half the cakes and dishes he had bought. He set them on the counter, bought another jar of wine, and invited Clerk Fu, Ben the Fourth, Chen Jingji, Laixing and Daian to have some. The dainties vanished like a whirlwind or like melting snow. He forgot to invite Ping'an, the gatekeeper, who sat outside the gate pulling a long face.
It was afternoon when Ximen Qing came back from visiting his friends. Ping'an saw him coming but gave no warning. Shutong heard the shouts of the attendants clearing the road for their master before he had time to put away the things. He had to rush out in a great hurry to take Ximen Qing's clothes.

When Ximen asked if anyone had called to see him, Shutong said: "No." Ximen Qing took off his hat and cloak and, after putting on a cap, went into his study and sat down. Shutong gave him a cup of tea. When he had drunk a mouthful, Ximen put it down. He noticed how red the boy's face was. "Where have you been drinking?" he said.
Shutong took a paper from beneath the ink slab on the table and gave it to his master. "The Sixth Lady gave me this," he said. "She told me Uncle Hua had sent it. It is about the four prisoners, and she asked me to take it and bring it before you. She gave me a cup of wine, and that is why my face is red."
Ximen Qing looked at the paper. "The four accused implore your clemency," it said.
When he had read it, he handed it back, and told Shutong to put it in the letter case and give it to the soldier-servant that he might be reminded about it next day. Shutong put the paper in the case and left and a singing girl came in, stood beside her master, and drank. After the wine he had drunk, the high colour in her cheeks stood out in striking contrast to the fairness of her skin. Ximen could not resist the temptation. He drew the girl to his bosom, and kissed her passionately. The girl had aromatic tea and some tablets of cinnamon in her mouth. Her body was scented with a sweet fragrance. Ximen undid the girl's dress, pulled down her multicoloured undergarments, and caressed her gently. "You mustn't drink so much wine," he said. "It'll ruin your complexion."
"I'll do your bidding in all things," the girl said.
Meanwhile, an equestrian clothed in black rode up to the gate, dismounted, and bowed to Ping'an. "Is this the house of his Lordship Ximen Qing?" he said.
Ping'an was still sulking and pulling a long face, because Shutong had not invited him to the feast. He did not answer. The man waited a long time and finally said: "I have brought this letter from Major Zhou. Tomorrow there is to be a reception to General Xing Pingzhai at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. Three of the officers have given a tael of silver each towards the expenses, and I have come to see your master. Please be good enough to tell him. I will wait for his reply."
Ping'an took the paper and went in. Someone told him that Ximen was in the garden room and he went into the garden past the pine tree grove. Huatong was sitting on the steps beside the window. He waved his hand and Ping'an suspected that something must be going on between his master and a minor girl. He tiptoed to the window, peeped, and listened, and did not miss certain signs of agitation in the room. He heard Ximen Qing say: "Stand this way, my girl, and don't move."
Then there was silence for a long time. At last, Shutong came to fetch water for Ximen Qing to wash his hands. When he saw Ping'an and Huatong standing at the window, he flushed, and hurried away to the inner court. Ping'an took in the subscription list and Ximen Qing set his signature to it. "Go to the Second Lady for a tael of silver," he said. "Then get your brother-in-law to wrap it up and give it to the messenger."
Ping'an went away. When Shutong had brought the water, Ximen washed his hands and went to see Li Ping'er.
"If you would like something to drink, I will tell a maid to heat some wine," she said.
Ximen saw a jar of Jinhua wine underneath the table. "What is that?" he said.
Li Ping'er did not wish to tell him that Shutong had brought it. She said: "I thought I should like something to drink, so I sent a boy to the street to buy it. I opened it and drank a cup or two. Then I had had enough."
"We have plenty of wine in the outer court," Ximen said. "Why should you spend your money? I got forty jars of Heqing wine from Ding, the southerner, the other day. I haven't paid him for it yet but the wine is all in the west wing. If you want any, you need only send a boy with a key to get some."
Plates of roast duck, chicken and fish were ready and Li Ping'er told Yingchun to prepare more. When the dishes were set on the table, she ate them with her husband. It did not occur to Ximen to ask where they had come from, for such things were plentiful in his house. "Shutong has just given me a paper," he said as they were drinking. "He says you gave it him."
"Yes," said Li Ping'er, "Uncle Hua came and begged me to ask you to let those fellows go."
"Wu came yesterday about the same matter," Ximen said, "but I wouldn't promise him anything. I really intended to have the business still further examined but, since Hua has been here to ask, I will have them given another beating and set them free."
"Why beat them again?" Li Ping'er said. "You have already punished them till they opened their mouths and showed all their teeth. Really, a most repulsive sight!"
"I don't care whether they show their teeth or not," Ximen said. "My office is not conducted on those lines, as other people, of greater dignity than they, have found before now."
"Brother," Li Ping'er said, "you are an officer of the law, I know, yet your office does not forbid you to show mercy. To be merciful is to be virtuous, and you must lay up a stock of virtue for our child's sake."
"What do you mean?" Ximen said.
"In the future, do not rack and beat the people as you have been doing, and, when you have a chance to be kind, take it. So, you will certainly lay up for yourself a treasure in heaven."
"If I do my duty, I must not be too lenient," Ximen said.
They were still drinking when Chunmei thrust aside the blind and came in. It seemed to her that Ximen and Li Ping'er were sitting in a very affectionate position. "Here you are enjoying your wine," she said. "You have forgotten all about sending a boy to meet my mistress. She has gone a long way outside the city, and only Laian is with her. She will be very late, I fear but that doesn't seem to worry you."
Ximen saw that the girl's headdress was disarranged and her hair tumbling down. He laughed, and said: "You've been asleep, little oily mouth." Li Ping'er told her that the kerchief on her head needed to be set in order and added: "This is beautiful Jinhua wine. Won't you have a cup?"
"Drink a cup," Ximen Qing said, "and I will send some of the boys for your mistress."
Chunmei, with one hand on the table as she leaned over to pull up her shoes, declined. "I don't feel very well," she said, "and I have only just got up. I don't want anything to drink."
"It is very good wine, little oily mouth," Ximen said. Li Ping'er said: "Your mistress is not at home; why make all this fuss over a cup of wine?"
"Please drink the wine yourself, Sixth Lady. It makes no difference whether my mistress is at home or not. If she were at home and I were asked to drink when I did not feel well, I should refuse."
"If you will not have wine, have some tea," Ximen said. "I will tell Yingchun to send a boy for your mistress."
He passed his own cup to her. Chunmei took it reluctantly, drank a mouthful of tea, and set the cup down.
"You need not send Yingchun," she said, "I have brought Ping'an. He is bigger than the others."
Ximen called through the window and Ping'an answered. "If you go," Ximen said, "who will attend to the gate?"
"I have told Qitong to look after the gate," the boy replied.
"Very well," said Ximen, "take a lantern and go to meet your mistress."
When Ping'an had gone halfway, he met the sedan chair. He knew the two bearers. One was Zhang Chuan, the other Wei Cong.
"I have come to escort my mistress," he said, going forward and taking hold of the shafts.
"Who told you to come?" Pan Jinlian said. "Your father?"
"Not so much my father as my sister," the boy said.
"I suppose your father has not come back yet from the office," Jinlian said.
"Not come back, indeed!" the boy replied. "He came back very early and is now drinking good wine in the Sixth Lady's room. If Chunmei had not fetched me and insisted that I should be sent with a lantern to meet you, I shouldn't be here now. I knew you had nobody with you but Laian, that the road was bad and you ought to have somebody bigger, so I came."
When you left the house, where was your master?"
"He was still in the Sixth Lady's room. He only sent me when Chunmei insisted."
Jinlian remained silent for a long time. Then she smiled, coldly. "The brigand seems to think I am a corpse already. He would spend every night in that strumpet's room if he could. She pins her faith to that water bladder of a baby, and I only hope she may not find out she has made a mistake. Zhang Chuan, you are one of the household and you have seen a good deal of the world. Why should they cut up a whole roll of silk to make clothes for that puling brat? Even Wang the millionaire wouldn't do a thing like that."
"Lady," Zhang Chuan said, "I should never have dared to mention the matter, if you had not done so but you are certainly right. They should not. It is not the silk I am thinking about but I am afraid they will spoil the baby. He has not gone through all his childish ailments yet, and he will not be reared without some trouble. I remember a sad case that happened last year. It was a very rich old gentleman who lived outside the Eastern gate, about sixty years old he was, living on a property that had belonged to his ancestors. He was as rich as rich could be but he was childless. He kept his fast in the Eastern Temple and offered sacrifice in the Temple of the West. He made all manner of benefactions to religion, yet still no son was born to him. Then, suddenly, his third wife presented him with one and he was as delighted as our master has been. All day long, he would gaze upon that child and have him carried about in an embroidered silken cradle. He had three rooms for a nursery painted as white as driven snow. Three or four nurses were bought especially for the baby and, all day long, he was sheltered from the slightest breath of wind. Yet before he was three years old, he took the smallpox and died. I beg your pardon but I can't help thinking it is better to bring up a baby a little more roughly."
"Roughly indeed!" Jinlian cried. "Their only trouble is that they can't keep him in a pile of gold."
"There is something else I have to tell you," Ping'an said. "If I do not, you will be angry with me when you hear about it. It is about that business of Clerk Han and the others. Father had the young men beaten and thrown into jail, and it was his intention to send the matter further. But this morning Uncle Ying came and had a talk with Shutong. I think he must have given Shutong a few taels, for he took quite a large packet of silver to the shop and had two or three taels cut off. He spent this on dainties that he got Laixing's wife to arrange, and took them, with a couple of jars of Jinhua wine, to the Sixth Lady's room. They drank some of the wine; then he went back to the shop and gave a party to his friends. When Father came back, the party broke up."
"Didn't he ask you to join the party?" Jinlian said.
"Ask me? Not he! He is the boldest of slaves and is not even afraid of you, so why should he bother about me? It is all Father's doing. I know that, for I caught the pair of them together in the study. He was once a servant at the officers' quarters, and you may be sure there is not much he does not know. If Father does not soon get rid of this slave, the whole household will suffer from his goings on."
"How long was he in the Sixth Lady's room, drinking?" Jinlian asked.
"A long time. When I saw him, he had evidently been drinking for a long time. His face was very red."
"Didn't your father speak to him about it?"
"My father's lips were sealed. How could he say anything?"
"Oh, the scoundrel! The shameless prince of all evil scoundrels!" Jinlian cried. "He must have a turn at everything. If ever you catch him and this slave playing their dirty games again, come and tell me at once."
Ping'an promised. "Please remember one thing," he said. "Don't let anyone know I told you." Then he went behind the sedan chair and they went on their way.
As soon as they reached home, Jinlian went to the inner court to pay her respects to the mistress of the house.
"What made you come back so soon?" Wu Yueniang said. "You might have spent another night."
"My mother asked me to stay," Jinlian said, "but one of my nieces was there, a girl about twelve years old, and I should have had to sleep in the same bed with her. Then, it seemed a very long way off, and I thought I had better come. My mother asked me to give you her compliments, and thank you for your kind presents."
She went in turn to the rooms of each of the other ladies, and finally to the front court. Ximen Qing was still talking to Li Ping'er.
When she came in, Li Ping'er quickly stood up and welcomed her with a smile. "Sister," she said, "you have come back very early. Won't you sit down and have a cup of wine?" She told Yingchun to give Jinlian a chair.
"I have had something to drink already," Jinlian said, "and, as for food, I've had enough for two. I won't sit down, thank you."
She turned and went out with her head in the air. Ximen Qing called her back. "What, you slave!" he cried. "Are you so bold that you decline to make your reverence to me when you return from your visits?"
"Make a reverence to you indeed!" said Jinlian. "If slaves aren't bold, who'd be?"



## Harbouring Resentment Hsi-men Ch'ing Punishes P'ing-an; Playing a Female Role, Shu-t'ung Entertains Hangers-on & the Favourite

Do not enter the subprefectural yamen
or the district yamen;
Practice diligence in the performance
of your daily tasks.
The pond accumulates water in order to
guard against drought;
Business, if conducted industriously,
will support a family.
In teaching your sons and grandsons,
teach them a craft;
Plant mulberry trees or date trees,
do not plant flowers.
Try not to pay any attention to
idle gossipmongering;[1]
When thirsty, drink spring water,
if dejected, drink tea.[2]
THE BURDEN of the above eight lines of regulated verse is simply that fathers and mothers must train their sons and grandsons from infancy to:
Study their lessons and learn propriety,[3]
so they will know how to be:
Filial and obedient to their parents,[4]
Respectful to their elders and superiors,
Harmonious with their neighbours, and
Content with their various occupations.[5]
On no account should they permit their young offspring to:
Become arrogant, indolent, or unruly,
Congregate in groups of three or five,
Turn into dedicated idlers, devoted to their leisure,
Sport bows and flaunt arrows,[6]
Make a hobby of raising caged birds,
Play at kickball and suchlike sports,[7]
Drink wine or engage in gambling,
Toy with the breeze and patronize prostitutes, or
Do whatever they please without restraint.
If they do, in the future they are sure to:
Devote themselves to stirring up trouble, and
Bring their families to rack and ruin.[8]

Families such as this only succeed in involving their sons in the meshes of the law, with the result that, at the worst:
Their lives are lost and their families ruined;[8]
or, at the least:
They suffer chastisement and endure incarceration,
Their property is prey to government confiscation,
Their conduct is governed by petty functionaries,
Their fathers and elder brothers are implicated,
They are troubled by remorse and subject to sorrow.
What benefit is there to be derived from this?
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the yamen the next morning, he first withdrew from the courtroom to consult with Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, to whom he said, "These four men have repeatedly sent people to me seeking to pull strings on their behalf, in order to secure lenient treatment for them."
"People have come to my place about it, too," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but I hesitated to raise the issue with you. Since that's the way things stand, we might as well simply have them brought into court here and now, give them a warning, and let them go."
"What you say makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
They then ascended the tribunal and ordered the attendants to bring them before the court. The culprits, Ch'e Tan and company, knelt down before them. Afraid they would get another beating, they kowtowed for all they were worth.
Without waiting for Hsia Yen-ling to initiate the proceedings, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "What am I to do with a bunch of 'bare sticks' like you! How did you ever get so many people to speak up on your behalf? You all ought to be escorted to a higher court to stand trial but I'll let you off this once. If any of you ever falls into my hands again, I'll see to it that you die a living death in prison. Now get out of here."
Whereupon, along with Han the Second, they were all shouted out of the courtroom and fled, as though:
Whether their fates were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for them to hide.
This is the way the case was settled. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh, with five taels of silver in hand, sought out Shu-t'ung to get word of what had happened, and surreptitiously slipped him the silver. Shu-t'ung accepted it and put it in his sleeve but P'ing-an, from his vantage point at the gate, caught sight of this transaction.
Shu-t'ung thereupon said to Ying Po-chüeh, thus and so, "I spoke to Father about it yesterday, and today he has gone to the yamen to settle the case."
"The fathers and elder brothers of those four have approached me repeatedly about it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They are afraid that they will be subjected to further punishment."
"You can rest easy on that score," said Shu-t'ung. "I can assure you they won't suffer so much as a single stroke."
On receiving this information, Ying Po-chüeh hurried off to communicate this news to them.
By lunchtime the four scamps had returned to their homes, where each and every one of them laid hold of their fathers and elder brothers and began to weep out loud. Each of them had lost no inconsiderable amount of silver, only to end up with the scars of a beating on their haunches. They would not dare to recklessly foment any trouble in the future. Truly:
Catastrophe ever follows in the wake of officious actions;
Vexation is always the consequence of lack of forbearance.
To resume our story, before Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home that day, Shu-t'ung called Lai-an into the studio to sweep the floor and, while he was there, opened a food box, in which someone had sent a place setting of decorative confectionery, and gave him some molded sugar candy[9] to eat.
As a result, that page boy, though he:
Never, ever, should have done it,
said to him, "Brother Shu-t'ung, I've got something to tell you. Yesterday, when brother P'ing-an went to meet the Fifth Lady's sedan chair, he told all kinds of tales about you along the way."
"What did he say about me?" Shu-t'ung demanded to know.
"He said that you had managed to squeeze a few taels of silver out of someone, with which you made bold to buy wine and meat and have it delivered to the Sixth Lady's quarters, where you remained eating and drinking for half the day before coming out. And that you had then employed the leftovers to treat the staff in the shop in the front compound but had not offered him anything to eat. He also said that you and Father had been up to some kind of business in the studio."
Nothing might have happened if Shu-t'ung had not heard this but having heard it, he made a point of remembering it, though he allowed the rest of the day to go by without saying anything about it.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had made prior arrangements not to go to the yamen that morning but to go to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate, where the farewell party to see off Stockade Commander Hsü Nan-ch'i to his new post was being held.
It was not until that afternoon that he returned home, when he dismounted and instructed P'ing-an, saying, "If anyone should come looking for me, just tell them that I haven't come home yet."
When he had finished speaking, he went to the front reception hall, where Shu-t'ung helped him off with his outer garments.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "Did anyone show up today?"
"No one," Shu-t'ung replied. "But His Honour Hsü Feng-hsiang, the supervisor of the State Farm Battalion, sent you two packages of crabs and ten catties of fresh fish. I sent off a thank-you note in reply and gave the messenger two mace of silver. Also, your elder brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, sent six invitations inviting the ladies of the household to attend the third-day celebrations tomorrow."
It so happens that Wu K'ai's son, Wu Shun-ch'en, had just married Third Sister Cheng, the niece of their former neighbour Ch'iao Hung's wife. Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent them the customary present of tea, and this is why they had received these invitations.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Wu Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound and showed her the invitations, saying, "You had all better prepare yourselves to attend the party tomorrow."
When he had finished speaking, he came out to his studio and sat down. Shu-t'ung hastened to add some charcoal to the brazier, put some pellets of sweet-smelling incense in the burner, and then offered him a cup of tea with both hands. As Hsi-men Ch'ing held the teacup in his hand, the page boy slowly moved closer until he was standing right beside him at the end of the table. After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a meaningful moue, signalling to him to close the door as his favourite singing girl entered, and then pulled her onto his lap with one hand, while he pinched her cheeks with the other. Hsi-men Ch'ing stuck out his tongue, and the little girl who was holding a phoenix-embossed breath-sweetening lozenge in her mouth, transferred it to him while at the same time stroking her jade stalk below. "My child," Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Shu-t'ung, "Has anyone out there been giving you a hard time?"
"There's something," the servant took the opportunity to say, "but if Father had not asked, I would not have presumed to bring it up."
"Say what you like. It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Shu-t'ung then proceeded to tell him about P'ing-an, saying, "The other day when you had called me into the studio, he and Hua-t'ung were eavesdropping outside the window. When I went outside afterwards to fetch some water so you could wash your hands, I saw them with my own eyes. Moreover, in talking to people outside, he called me a southern slave and abused me in every conceivable way."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became enraged and fulminated, "If I don't beat that slave's bottom right off for him, I might as well forget it."
We will say no more for the moment about this conversation in the studio. For some time now, P'ing-an had been on the watch for any such goings on, so before anyone knew it, he barged into her room and told Chin-lien all about it. Chin-lien responded by sending Ch'un-mei to the front compound to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing if he would come speak to her. No sooner had she rounded the corner of the juniper hedge than she encountered Hua-t'ung who was playing with a pine moth caterpillar and said, "What've you come for, Sister? Father's in the studio."
Ch'un-mei merely gave him a rap on the head with her knuckles. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the rustling of skirts outside, he knew that someone was coming. Hastily pushing the little girl away and hiding her, he went over to the bed and lay down while Shu-t'ung pretended to busy himself with brush and ink stone at the desk. Ch'un-mei pushed open the door and came in. When she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, she licked her lips, and said, "The two of you are certainly keeping to yourselves in the room here, with the door closed, no less. No doubt you're enjoying your honeymoon but Mother's something she wants to say to you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was lying face-up with his head on the pillow, said, "Little oily mouth! What does she want to say to me? You go ahead. I'll come along after I've laid down for a while."
Ch'un-mei was adamant and said, "If you refuse to go, I'll drag you out of bed myself."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to withstand her insistence on:
Dragging him away, dead or alive,
and allowed himself to be dragged off to Chin-lien's quarters.
"What was he up to in the front compound?" Chin-lien asked.
"He and the page boy, just the two of them, were in the studio, with the door latched," replied Ch'un-mei. "They were so quiet you'd think they were trying to catch a fly. Who knows what sort of funny business they were up to? It was just as though they were enjoying their honeymoon. When I went in, the page boy was at the desk, pretending to be engaged in his secretarial duties. I opened my eyes wide but that one merely lay back on the bed, and was reluctant to come, even when I tried to drag him."
"When he comes into this room of mine," said Chin-lien, "it's just as though he were afraid someone was going to:
Stew him in a pot and eat him.
The worthless, shameless good-for-nothing! As though he still possessed a sense of shame! What do you suppose he was up to, in broad daylight, closing himself inside the room with that slave, for no good reason? No doubt he was busy boring his way into the stinking asshole of that slave; and at night he'll come into my room and want to sleep with me. How fastidious can you get!"
"You believe all the nonsense that little oily-mouth tells you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. Since when did I do any such thing? I was looking on as he wrote out some gift cards and had just lain down on the bed."
"Why should you go out of your way to write out gift cards behind closed doors?" said Chin-lien. "What sort of:
Classified information or ominous rumor,
were you dealing with? Had you discovered:
A three-legged guardian deity, or
A double-horned elephant,
that you were afraid to let anyone see?
"Tomorrow sister-in-law Wu's family is holding a 'third-day party' to celebrate her son's marriage, and she has dropped us an invitation.
Neither too long, nor too short,[11]
you've got to come up with some piece of goods that I can take with me as a complimentary gift for the occasion. If you don't provide me with something, I'll have to find some other lover to demand it from. Elder Sister is presenting a complete outfit of clothes and five mace of silver, and some of the others have hairpins, or ornamental flowers. If I am the only one without anything. I won't go."
"Take a bolt of red silk from the clothes cabinet in the front compound as your complimentary gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I won't be able to go then," said Chin-lien. "Who wants that diaphanous silk stuff, anyway? If I trot out something like that, everyone will only laugh at me."
"Don't get all worked up about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Wait till I go look on the upper floor over there. I'll find something suitable for you to give her. Right now I still need several more bolts of material for the congratulatory gifts I'm sending to the Eastern Capital, so I can pick up something for you as part of the same lot."
Thereupon, he went to the upper floor of Li P'ing-erh's belvedere and picked out two bolts of jet silk emblazoned with brocaded mandarin squares that featured a *ch'i-lin*, two bolts of Nanking variegated satin, one bolt of scarlet silk that featured a *tou-niu*[12] design, and a bolt of kingfisher blue cloud-patterned satin.
He then said to Li P'ing-erh, "How about coming up with a blouse of cloud-patterned damask for Chin-lien to give as a complimentary gift tomorrow? If you don't have anything like that available, I can send a servant with a note to get one from the silk goods store."
"There's no need for you to get anything from the store," said Li P'ing-erh. "I've got an outfit lying around of brocaded cloud-patterned damask, with a scarlet blouse and blue skirt, that I never use. The two of us can join together in presenting it as our complimentary gift."
Li P'ing-erh proceeded to open a trunk and take it out, after which she personally took it over to show to Chin-lien, saying, "Pick whichever you like, Sister, either the blouse or the skirt. The two of us might as well wrap them both up in a single package and present it as our complimentary gift that will save us the trouble of sending out for something else."
"As long as it's yours," said Chin-lien, "it's hardly right that I should make use of it."
"My good sister," said Li P'ing-erh, "how can you talk that way?"
She had to urge her for some time before Chin-lien consented to the arrangement. They then took the package out and had Ch'en Ching-chi replace the label and write their two names on it. Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the task of selecting bolts of material in the rear compound. But no more of this.
To resume our story, P'ing-an was at his post at the front gate when whom should he see but Hsi-men Ch'ing's friend Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai, who sauntered up and asked, "Is the honourable gentleman at home?"
"The master is not at home," replied P'ing-an.
Scrounger Pai did not believe it but walked straight in as far as the reception hall, where he noticed that the latticework doors were closed and said, "So he really isn't at home. Where has he gone?"
"Today he's gone outside the South Gate to see someone off," said P'ing-an. "He hasn't come home yet."
"If he was seeing someone off," said Scrounger Pai, "he ought to be home by now."
"Uncle Pai," said P'ing-an, "if you have something to say, say it to me, and I'll tell him about it when he comes back."
"It's not anything in particular," said Scrounger Pai, "it's just that we haven't seen each other for some time, and so, finding myself at leisure, I've dropped by to pay him a visit. Since he's not here, I'll wait for him."
"I fear he may not come back for some time," said P'ing-an. "You'll merely wait for him in vain."
Scrounger Pai chose to ignore this suggestion and, pushing open the latticework doors, walked into the reception hall and sat himself down in a chair. The page boys paid no attention to him but let him do as he pleased.
Who could have anticipated that:
As providence would have it,
at that very time Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ying-ch'un to carry the bolts of material he had chosen and proceeded to accompany her toward the front compound. Just as they came around the hanging screen, the first thing he saw was Scrounger Pai sitting there in the reception hall. Ying-ch'un put down the bolts of material she was carrying and headed back to the rear compound as fast as she could go.
"So my brother is at home after all!" exclaimed Scrounger Pai as he came down from the hall and greeted him with a bow.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon seeing him, had no alternative but to offer him a seat. When he surveyed Scrounger Pai, he saw that:
On his head he sported a washed-out, reblocked, old silk cap, that looked as though it had made the pilgrimage as far as the summit of Mount T'ai;[13]
On his body he wore a stiffly-starched white cotton gown, with a frayed collar and worn lapels, that looked as though it had been rescued from a fire;
On his feet he had antique bronze-textured, edible tree fungus-shaped, black boots, that curled up at toe and heel, had hopelessly split seams, and squeaked like the beats of a clapper keeping time to a song;
Into which were stuffed a pair of stirrup-like stockings, barely held together by tangled string, the yellow threads of which were beginning to turn fragrant.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him but did not call for tea.

Noticing that Ch'in-t'ung was standing in attendance nearby, Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Take the bolts of material to the guest room and get our son-in-law to have them properly wrapped up and sealed."
Ch'in-t'ung assented and proceeded to carry the bolts of material off toward the antechamber.
Scrounger Pai lifted his hand in salutation and said, "I'm afraid I've been remiss in not coming to see you for some time."
"Many thanks for your concern," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've been constantly away from home myself. Every day I'm tied up with business at the yamen."
"Brother," asked Scrounger Pai, "do you have to go to the yamen every day?"
"Every single day I have to be in attendance at both sessions of the court," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "On ordinary days we have to sit on the bench and hear cases, and on the first and fifteenth days of every month we also have to perform the ceremonies of bowing before the imperial tablet, taking the formal roll call, presiding over the general disposition of pending cases, and mustering the local constables, the neighbourhood heads of the relevant mutual security units, and the police officers on rotational duty. Then there is a lot more busywork when I get home. I really don't have a moment's worth of free time.
"Today I had to go outside the South Gate because Hsü Nan-ch'i has just been promoted to the post of commander of the Hsin-p'ing Stockade, and his colleagues held a party to see him off. I've only just arrived home. Tomorrow Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the imperial estates, has invited me to a party but it's too far away, so I can't go. Day after tomorrow I've got to find out what is entailed in going to welcome the new regional investigating censor for Shantung. On top of all this, Ts'ai T'iao, the fourth son of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital, has been appointed commandant-escort upon his marriage to Princess Mao-te,[14] and T'ung T'ien-yin, the nephew of T'ung Kuan, the defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, has just been appointed to headquarters and promoted to the post of commander of the guard, with a substantive appointment as notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs. Congratulatory gifts to the several relevant levels will be required. What with all this, I've been completely worn out for the last few days."
They had been talking for what seemed like half a day before Lai-an showed up with some tea. Scrounger Pai had just picked up his teacup and swallowed a mouthful, when whom should he see but Tai-an, who came flying toward the interior of the compound with a large red missive in his hand.
"Judicial Commissioner Hsia is here," he reported. "He's just dismounting outside."
While Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the rear compound to change his clothes, Scrounger Pai concealed himself in an antechamber on the west side of the courtyard, from which vantage point he could observe what happened by looking out through the hanging blind.
After some time, Judicial Commissioner Hsia came in. He was wearing a round-collared robe of jet moiré emblazoned with a mandarin square of variegated embroidery featuring a golden lion with a ruffled mane, over a kingfisher blue silk undergown. Around his waist he wore an official girdle with a decorative plaque of aromatic liquidambar wood mounted in a gold setting. On his feet he wore black court boots. A bunch of keys dangled from his waist. The whole area was rendered black by the number of his servitors as he made his way in to the reception hall.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, having donned his official cap and girdle, came out from the rear compound to greet him. When they had finished with the social amenities, the two of them sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host. Before long, Ch'i-t'ung came out with two cups of tea on a square platter of carved Yunnan agateware lacquer. The bodies of the teacups were made of fine plaited bamboo splints, covered with a thin layer of lacquer and mounted in silver. The teaspoons were of gold, in the shape of apricot leaves. The tea was steeped with osmanthus and cured green soybeans.
After they had finished their tea, Judicial Commissioner Hsia said, "With regard to that matter I mentioned the other day of going to welcome the new regional investigating censor, I sent someone to inquire about it today. It turns out that his surname is Tseng, and that he became a metropolitan graduate last year, in the year *i-wei*.[15] His certificate of appointment has already been received in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, the seat of his jurisdiction. Our colleagues are all planning to set out tomorrow to welcome him at a distance. Although you and I are military officials, we serve as judicial commissioners in a yamen authorized by express imperial command, so we are not the same as the authorities in regular army and guard units. Consequently, we can delay our departure until the day after tomorrow and look for a place ten li outside the city at which to prepare a meal in order to welcome the new regional investigating censor."
"What my senior colleague proposes is just the thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But there is no need for you to trouble yourself about it. Your pupil will send someone to find a suitable Buddhist or Taoist temple or monastery, or a private estate would also do, and send a cook ahead to make all the necessary preparations."
"In that case," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "I'll impose upon my colleague once again."
After they had finished their conversation and drunk another serving of tea, Judicial Commissioner Hsia got up and took his leave. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen him off, he came back inside and changed out of his formal clothes but Scrounger Pai had still not departed.
Striding back into the reception hall, he sat down and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ever since you stopped attending the monthly meetings of our club two months ago, it has been in danger of breaking up. Old Sun, although he has the necessary seniority, is unable to take charge of anything, and Brother Ying the Second is dodging his responsibilities. The other day, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, we held a meeting at the Temple of the Jade Emperor in conjunction with the celebration of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal during the Middle Primordial Festival, at which, including myself, only three or four of us showed up. There was no one to foot the bill, since all of us had turned up empty handed. It was an embarrassment to Abbot Wu who, after the ceremony of dismissing the marshals that evening, had engaged the services of a professional storyteller to entertain us, at considerable expense to himself. Although he didn't say anything about it, all of us:
Felt uneasy at heart.[16]
It's not like it was in the old days when you presided over the club and were able to take charge of things. It won't be long before we'll have to ask you to start attending again."
"Needless to say," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if the club must break up, let it break up. I scarcely have the time to worry about such things. If I have the leisure, I'll continue to arrange for Abbot Wu to perform the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal once a year in order to requite Heaven and Earth but that's it. You all can continue to meet, or not, as you please but you needn't bother to tell me about it."
With these few words of reproof he succeeded in reducing Scrounger Pai to silence but he continued to sit there as before. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was not going to leave, he had no alternative but to call for Ch'in-t'ung and have him set up a table in one of the antechambers. He then went and fetched four saucers of appetizers:
Both meaty and vegetarian,
including one of pan-fried wheat gluten, and one of roast pork. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company as he ate, and poured the wine. He sent to the rear compound for a pair of large chased silver goblets and poured out several cupfuls for him before he got up to take his leave.
Hsi-men Ch'ing accompanied him as far as the gate that led into the second courtyard, where he said, "You'll have to excuse me if I don't see you off any further. I'm wearing an informal skullcap in which it wouldn't do for me to be seen in public."
At this point Scrounger Pai finally said farewell and made his departure.
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the reception hall, pulled out a chair for himself, and called in a loud voice for P'ing-an.
When P'ing-an appeared before him, Hsi-men Ch'ing cursed at him, saying, "You lousy slave! Still standing are you?"
He then called for three or four of the orderlies on duty to stand in attendance on either side. P'ing-an did not know what it was all about. So frightened that his face turned as sallow as wax, he got down on his knees.
"When I came in the gate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I instructed you that, no matter who came to see me, you were to reply that I was not at home. Why did you not obey me?"
"When Uncle Pai came to call," replied P'ing-an, "I told him that you had gone outside the South Gate to see someone off, and had not yet returned home; but he didn't believe me and insisted on coming inside anyway. I followed him in and said to him, 'Uncle Pai, if you have something to say, all you have to do is tell me what it is, and when Father comes home, I'll report it to him.' He didn't say anything in response but pushed open the latticework doors to the reception hall himself and took a seat. Afterwards, who could have anticipated that you would come out and run into him?"
"Why you slave," cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can stop shooting off your mouth! You've got some nerve! No doubt you'd let anyone come in while you're off gambling and drinking somewhere, instead of sticking to your post at the front gate."
Then, turning to the attendants, he ordered, "Smell his breath"
The orderlies smelled his breath and reported, "There's no odor of wine there."
"I want two of you who are experienced at administering punishment to stand by," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Give this slave a real finger-squeezing for me."
Thereupon, what with:
Two men having to deal with but one,
they put on the finger-squeezers and proceeded to tighten them.
They squeezed P'ing-an until:
The pain was difficult to bear,
and he called out, "I really did say that Father was not at home but he forced his way in."
The orderly who had put the finger-squeezers on pulled the string taut, knelt down, and reported, "the squeezers are in place."
"Give the squeezers fifty strokes," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have someone count them off from the side."
When the squeezers had been struck fifty times, they stopped.
"Give him an additional twenty strokes with the light bamboo," ordered Hsi-men Ch'ing.
In no time at all, he was given twenty strokes of the bamboo, with the result that:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
His haunches were completely covered with weals.
"Let him go," shouted Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The two orderlies stepped forward to remove the finger-squeezers, and when they did so, P'ing-an screamed with pain.
"What am I to do with you, you lousy slave!" cursed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You say you were on duty at the gate but I imagine you have been demanding bribes from my visitors and thereby damaging my reputation abroad. If any hint of such things should ever come to my ears, I'll have that slave's bottom of yours beaten right off for you."
P'ing-an kowtowed, got to his feet, hitched up his trousers, and made his way outside.
Noticing that Hua-t'ung was standing nearby, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Take this little slave down and give his fingers a squeezing too."
The page boy, in his turn, was thereupon subjected to the squeezers until he:
Howled outlandishly like a stuck pig.
But we will say no more at present about how Hsi-men Ch'ing went about subjecting people to the squeezers in the reception hall.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien came out of her quarters and headed toward the rear compound but she had not gotten any further than the ceremonial gate behind the main reception hall when she observed Meng Yü-lou, all by herself, eavesdropping behind the hanging screen.
"What are you listening to here?" Chin-lien asked.
"I'm here listening to Father having P'ing-an beaten," Yü-lou replied. "Even that little slave, Hua-t'ung, has been put in the finger-squeezers and given a squeezing. I don't know what it's all about."
In a little while, Ch'i-t'ung came by, and Yü-lou called him to a halt and asked him, "Why is P'ing-an being beaten?"
"Father's angry with him for letting Scrounger Pai into the house," Ch'i-t'ung replied.
"It wasn't really because he let in Scrounger Pai," said Chin-lien, picking up where Ch'i-t'ung had left off, it must be because he's been:
Busting his ivories.
If he hadn't been:
Busting his ivories,
why should he have beaten the page boy this way for no good reason? That lousy shameless good-for-nothing! It's a wonder he still has the face to play the master of the house, utterly devoid of shame as he is."
At this point, Ch'i-t'ung went about his business.
"What did you mean, just now, by saying that he had been:
Busting his ivories?"
asked Yü-lou.
"I've been wanting to tell you but haven't gotten around to it," said Chin-lien. "Day before yesterday, I went to my mother's place to celebrate her birthday. It has come to my ears that, while I was not at home, that southern 'sweetie' [17] of a page boy, having managed to squeeze a few taels of silver out of someone in return for his good offices, proceeded to lay them out on delicacies that he had prepared for him in the front compound, put in square boxes, along with a jug of Chin-hua wine, and delivered to the Sixth Lady's quarters, where he remained eating and drinking with her for half the day before coming out.
"When that shameless good-for-nothing came home, he was told about it but he had nothing to say. On top of which, he locked himself inside the studio in the garden together with that page boy. Who knows what sort of business the two of them were up to. The page boy, P'ing-an, happened to come inside to deliver a notice from somebody and, seeing that the door was closed, was standing there outside the window, when that southern page boy opened the door and saw him there. I imagine he must have reported this to that lousy shameless good-for-nothing, and today he's getting his revenge by beating P'ing-an in order to get his rocks off. Who knows but what, one of these days, that southern slave is going to be the ruination of the whole household. But what's it to him!"
"That's a fine way to talk!" said Yü-lou. "If you include the whole household:
There are both the wise and the foolish.[18]
You don't mean to say that all of us are corruptible, do you."
"That's not it," said Chin-lien. "Let me explain it to you. Right now in this household there are only two people who hold a preferential place in his heart. One of them is a member of the household and the other is not. All day long he carries on just as though his soul has become fixated upon their bodies. Whenever he sees them:
He talks, and he laughs;
while the rest of us are so out of favour that, no matter what we do, he treats us like an angry fighting cock. The lousy fickle ruffian, he'll come to a bad end! It's just as though his heart has been bewitched by a vixen so that he has eyes only for them. Third Sister, just you listen to me. In the future they're bound to bring about:
Eight strange and seven untoward events,
around here.
"Just today, on the matter of a complimentary gift, I had a quarrel with him. When he came home, he didn't go to her quarters but went to his studio instead, where who knows what he was up to. I sent Ch'un-mei with instructions to find out where he was and ask him to come and see me. Who could have anticipated that, in broad daylight, he had shut himself up in the studio with that southern slave, behind closed doors. Ch'un-mei pushed open the door and went in that startled him to such an extent that he was rendered:
Wide-eyed and speechless.
When he came to my quarters, I gave him a piece of my mind but he did his best to evade the issue:
Concealing the left and covering up the right.[19]
At first he offered me a bolt of red silk material to serve as my complimentary gift but I rejected it. Afterwards, he went over to the upper floor of Li P'ing-erh's belvedere to look for something more suitable.
The thief suffers from a sense of guilt.[20]
Troubled as she was by a bad conscience, she took an outfit of brocade clothing out of her trunk and personally came to offer it to me, saying, 'Sister, see if you don't think this outfit would do. It would save me the trouble of breaking it up if the two of us shared in making it our complimentary gift.' I said, 'As long as it's yours, it's hardly right that I should make use of it. I'll just get Father to send for something from the silk goods store instead.' She became flustered at this and said, 'Sister, why make such a fuss about it. Pick whichever you like, either the blouse or the skirt, and when you're satisfied, we can have it taken up front so Son-in-law Ch'en can attach a label and write our names on it.' She pressured me into accepting it for half the day before I finally assented. She let me pick the blouse."
"So that's that," said Yü-lou. "It was kind of her to insist on offering it to you."
"You don't understand," said Chin-lien. "It's not right to concede anything to her. In this day and age:
One merely fears the wide-eyed guardian deity;
There's no need to fear the closed-eyed Buddha.
No matter whether it be wives or husbands, if you cut them the slightest bit of slack, you'll end up being treated like:
Warden Wang's lictors;
Not even worth a fuck."
"Slavey Six," teased Yü-lou:
"You're just like wheat gluten;
As hard to masticate as leather."
At this sally the two of them laughed together.

Whom should they see just then but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "Third Lady and Fifth Lady, you're invited to the rear compound to eat some crabs. I'll go on to invite the Sixth Lady and Mistress Ch'en."
The two of them walked toward the interior, hand in hand, where they found Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh sitting in the veranda outside the door of the master suite.
"What are the two of you laughing about?" they were asked.
"I'm laughing at Father for beating P'ing-an," said Chin-lien.
"I was upset by all the wild screaming and yelling," said Yüeh-niang, "and figured that he must be having somebody beaten. So it turns out to have been him. What was it all about?"
"It was because he had been:
Busting his ivories,"
said Chin-lien.
Yüeh-niang, who was ingenuous by nature, then asked, "What ivories are you talking about? Where were they, and how did he come to break them?"
At this, P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou started to guffaw:
Falling into a heap with laughter.
"I don't know what you're laughing at," said Yüeh-niang, "if you don't explain it to me."
"Sister," said Yü-lou, "you don't know about it but Father had P'ing-an beaten because he let Scrounger Pai into the house."
"So what if he did let Scrounger Pai into the house," said Yüeh-niang. "But what's all this about his:
Busting his ivories?
I've never seen the like of that loafer, without a stake of his own to venture, sitting at home with his idle prick between his legs, and only venturing out for no good reason:
As though he didn't know any better,
in the hopes of picking up something at somebody else's place."
"He just came to call on Father," said Lai-an.
"A likely story!" said Yüeh-niang. "I suppose he just fell off his k'ang and decided to come pay a call. Don't talk such stinking rot! It's enough not to accuse him of coming only to scrounge something to eat."
After some time, Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh showed up, and the group of them sat down in a circle to enjoy the crabs.
"There's still some of that grape wine in my room," Yüeh-niang said to Hsiao-yü. "Go and decant some of it for the ladies to drink."
At this, Chin-lien, sharp-tongued as ever, said, "To go with the crabs, it would be even better if we had some Chin-hua wine to drink."
"It's too bad we've got only the crabs to go with the wine," she went on to say. "If we had a roast duck, we could tear it into pieces to complement the wine."
"At this hour, where would you go to buy a roast duck?" said Yüeh-niang.
Among those present, when Li P'ing-erh heard this, her face turned crimson with embarrassment. Truly:
The burden of the tale contains a deep meaning;
The topic of the story conceals a hidden intent.
Yüeh-niang, however, was a straightforward person. How could she be expected to understand:
The story within the story?
We will say no more, at present, about how the ladies ate their crabs.
To resume our story. P'ing-an had been punished so severely that he was barely able to waddle as he made his way to his room at the front of the compound. His fingers had been squeezed so badly that he had to keep them splayed apart.
Pen the fourth, Lai-hsing, and company all hurried over to ask him, "P'ing-an, what did Father have you beaten for?"
"How should I know?" wailed P'ing-an.
"Father was angry with him for letting Scrounger Pai into the house," said Lai-hsing.
"Luckily you were there at the time," said P'ing-an, "and saw how I attempted to stop him twice, and reported that Father was not at home. But he insisted on going in and made his way inside the latticework doors to the reception hall. I said to him, 'If you have something to say, say it to me. Father has gone outside the South Gate to see someone off. I don't know when he'll be back. You'll merely wait for him in vain.' He said, 'I'll wait for him anyway,' and without another word, he proceeded to take a seat. Who could have anticipated that Father would come out from the rear compound and run into him? He really didn't have anything to say to him, except, 'I've happened by to pay you a call.' After tea had been served to him, he still wouldn't get up to leave, when who should appear but His Honour Judicial Commissioner Hsia. I assumed he would leave then but he concealed himself in an antechamber and still refused to depart. Father had no alternative but to invite him to remain. Anyone with the slightest sense of shame would have stayed a little while and then made his departure but he refused to leave until wine had been served to him. Father was so irritated that when he came back inside he had me beaten, saying that I had been shirking my duties at the gate and letting people into the house. If you say it's just my rotten luck that I failed to stop him, I can only reply, 'Didn't I try to stop him? It was he that insisted on coming in and sitting down, and he got away with it, while I got beaten.
What's it got to do with me?'
"That god-damned louse of a dog-bone!
His sons will be thieves and his daughters whores![21]
May the food he scrounged in our house be evacuated through his backbone!"
"If it rots his backbone, it will only be doing him a favour," said Lai-hsing. "It will leave room for him to scrounge even more in the future."
"I hope he develops a case of dysphagia!" exclaimed P'ing-an. "May cancer devour his esophagus! The world is full of people who exhibit shameless effrontery but none of them is a match for this shameless dog-bone. He comes barging into our household so often the dog doesn't even bite him. The lousy scrounging beggar! He's been fucked so often, the lousy cuckold, it's a wonder his asshole hasn't putrefied!"
"If his asshole had putrefied," laughed Lai-hsing, "who would be the wiser? People would merely attribute the stench to the rankness of his body odor."
Everyone laughed at this sally.
"I dare say he doesn't have enough rice to make his evening meal," said P'ing-an. "Who knows what hunger his wife must endure? He's at such loose ends he's reduced to scrounging something to eat at someone else's place to save the cost of a meal at home.
That's not a long-term solution.[22]
He'd do better to let his wife take on a lover, and play the role of cuckold. At least that would be to show some sign of vitality, rather than abjectly exposing himself to abuse at the hands of other people's servants."
Truly:
On the outside he may play the role of wastrel,
But at home his wife can only nibble her toes.
Tai-an was in the shop having his hair cut. When he had paid the barber and sent him on his way, he came out and said, "P'ing-an, if I don't say anything, I'll be so frustrated I could burst. You serve your master as a servant but you still don't understand the nature of the head of the household. How can you blame anyone else for your troubles? As the saying goes:
You don't raise a child in the hope it will shit gold and piss silver;
All you can hope for is that it will respond empathetically to you.
What you were faced with is not to be compared to the situation when Uncle Ying the Second or Uncle Hsieh come to pay a call. If you respond to them that he is at home, or not at home, they are on such intimate and familiar terms with each other that it really doesn't make any difference. But where anyone of lesser standing is concerned, and when he has specifically instructed you to tell them that he is not at home, how could you just let them in?
If he doesn't beat you,
Who should he beat instead?"
"P'ing-an," said Pen the Fourth in jest, "has reverted to his childhood. His fingers are splayed like those of a baby learning to play pat-a-cake. Or, perhaps, he's just been playing with himself[23] too strenuously all day."
Everyone laughed again at this sally.
"If he got it for letting someone in," said Pen the Fourth, "what did Hua-t'ung do to entitle him to a share of the squeezers? A tasty treat, indeed, to have to share with anyone, the way you'd keep someone company in:
Drinking wine or eating meat!
When your ten fingers are fastened in the squeezers, what need is there for someone to share the treat?"
Hua-t'ung was still rubbing his hands and crying.
"My child, stop crying," Tai-an said to him in jest. "Your mother has really spoiled you. She's taken the trouble to tie these crullers between your fingers, and you don't even seem to enjoy them."
We will say no more, at present, about how the servants carried on at the front of the compound.
In the meantime, Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy in the anteroom supervising Ch'en Ching-chi and Shu-t'ung as they wrapped up the gifts and bolts of material, and wrote out the accompanying documents, so that they could be dispatched to the Eastern Capital the following day, to be delivered to Commandant-Escort Ts'ai T'iao and Commander T'ung T'ien-yin. But no more of this.
The next day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to his yamen, Wu Yüeh-niang and his other womenfolk, riding in five sedan chairs, wearing pearl and jewel-bedecked caps on their heads, clad in brocaded gowns, and with Lai-hsing's wife accompanying them in a smaller sedan chair, set out for the house of her sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, to participate in the third-day celebrations after the marriage of their son, Wu Shun-ch'en, to Third Sister Cheng. Only Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were left at home to look after the house.
That morning, Han Tao-kuo sent gifts to thank Hsi-men Ch'ing for his efforts on his behalf, including a jug of Chin-hua wine, a jellied goose, a set of pig's trotters, four roast ducks, and four shad. On the accompanying card he had written, "Presented by your pupil, Han Tao-kuo, with his compliments." Because there was no one at home, Shu-t'ung declined to formally accept them but detained the entire consignment, boxes, carrying pole, and all, until Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen, when he brought them out to show to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ch'in-t'ung to the shop to fetch Manager Han and proceeded to berate him for his lack of savoir faire, saying, "What did you have to go buying these gifts for? I cannot possibly accept them."
"Your Honour," said Han Tao-kuo, with a bow:
"My obligations to you are so great,
for having taken pity on me in my plight, and providing me with a way to vent my spleen, that my entire family:
Will never be able to thank you enough.[24]
These insignificant things are merely intended to be:
A token of my gratitude.
I hope Your Honour will see fit to accept them with a smile."
"This will never do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, as an employee of mine:
You're like a member of the family.
How can I accept presents from you?"
He then turned to the original bearer of the gifts and said, "Carry them back where they came from."
Han Tao-kuo was thrown into such consternation by this that he pled with him for half the day before Hsi-men Ch'ing was induced to instruct his attendants, saying, "I will only accept the goose and the wine. Have the other gifts carried back where they came from."
He then ordered page boys to take cards and go to invite Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to pay him a visit.
Turning to Han Tao-kuo, he said, "This afternoon, ask Lai-pao to look after the store for you, and come sit with us for a while."
Saying, "You won't even accept my gifts, and now I'm putting Your Honour to additional trouble," Han Tao-kuo assented and left.
Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged to have his household lay in a lavish quantity of additional provisions and, that afternoon, had an Eight Immortals table set up in the summerhouse in the garden, the Kingfisher Pavilion. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were the first to arrive.
"Manager Han has gone to the trouble to buy gifts in order to thank me for my intervention on his behalf," Hsi-men Ch'ing told them. "Despite the fact that I repeatedly refused to accept them, he has pulled out all the stops in begging me to do so. I have consented to keep only the goose and the wine but it would hardly be right to enjoy them all by myself. So I have invited the two of you to come keep him company during his visit."
"He consulted with me about buying gifts in order to thank you," said Ying Po-chüeh. "But I said to him, Whatever you give him is not going to mean anything to someone who lives on such a lavish scale. Don't put yourself to the trouble. Even if you send the gifts, he is certain not to accept them.' So how has it turned out? It's just as though I'd:
Made the trip through your belly.
Sure enough, you refused to accept what he sent you."
When he had finished speaking, he had a drink of tea, and the two of them started to play a game of backgammon.
Before long, Han Tao-kuo showed up, and after the two of them had exchanged salutations, they all sat down together. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta occupied the seats of honour, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over the feast as host, and Han Tao-kuo sat down to one side.
Four plates and four bowls were immediately provided, and the table was spread with an assortment of delicacies in such profusion that they could not have been finished. In addition there were two large platters piled high with steamed corn flour pastries basted with rendered goose fat. Hsi-men Ch'ing' took the jug of Chin-hua wine and ordered that Lai-an should open it in their presence and heat it in a brass warming pan, that Shu-t'ung should serve it to them, and that Hua-t'ung should be in charge of fetching additional condiments and dishes from the rear compound, as needed.
When the wine had been poured, Ying Po-chüeh instructed Shu-t'ung, saying, "Go back to your First Lady's quarters in the rear compound and ask, 'Why haven't any of the crabs been trotted out for Master Ying the Second to eat?' Go and say that I want a taste of the crabs."
"You silly dog!" expostulated Hsi-men Ch'ing, "There's not a crab to be had. To tell you the truth, His Honour Hsü Feng-hsiang, the supervisor of the State Farm Battalion, did send me two packages of crabs the other day but by now the ladies of the household have eaten them all up. The few that are left over have already been pickled."
Turning to a page boy, he instructed him, saying, "Split up a few of the pickled crabs and bring them out for us."
"The ladies of the household are not at home today," he went on to explain. "They've gone to my Sister-in-law Wu's place for the third-day celebration of her son's marriage."
Before long, Hua-t'ung came out bearing two platters of pickled crabs that Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta proceeded to polish off completely between them.
Noticing that Shu-t'ung was pouring the wine, Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "In his whole life, your Uncle Ying has never been able to abide drinking wine without a song to accompany it. [25] You boast of being able to sing southern-style songs but I haven't heard any of them. Today, whatever happens, I won't drink this wine unless you sing one for me."
Shu-t'ung was about to clap his hands and start to sing, when Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "You could sing ten thousand that way but it wouldn't amount to anything.
If you portray a dragon it must resemble a dragon;

If you portray a tiger it must resemble a tiger.[26]
It won't do unless you step aside and put on your makeup and costume, like the actor who plays the female lead in a play."
Shu-t'ung remained where he was, merely looking to see what Hsi-men Ch'ing's reaction would be.
"You dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing berated Ying Po-chüeh with a laugh. "All you ever do is give people a hard time."
Then, turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Since he's so insistent about it, I'll have Tai-an go out front and ask one of your sister servants for the loan of some clothes. You can come back after stepping aside somewhere to make yourself up for the part."
Tai-an first went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound and asked Ch'un-mei for the loan of some things for this purpose but she refused. He then went to the master suite in the rear compound and approached Yü-hsiao, from whom he succeeded in borrowing four silver hairpins, an ornamental comb, a pin for the front of the coiffure in the shape of a Taoist goddess, a pair of imitation lapis lazuli pendant earrings in gold settings, a blouse of scarlet chiffon that opened down the middle, a green skirt of heavy silk brocade, a purple gold lame headband, and some rouge and powder, with which Shu-t'ung dressed up in the studio until he looked exactly like a woman, made up in the most alluring fashion.
So attired, he returned to the feast and proffered Ying Po-chüeh a cup of wine with both hands. Whereupon:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
he stood to one side and sang a song to the tune "Jade Lotus Blossoms":
Scattered red flowers bob on the water;[27]
The plums on the branch tips are small.
For all this time my eyebrows have grown pale;
who is there to paint them?
It was the spring that brought this load of
sorrow in its wake;
Now that spring has gone, why has my sorrow
not dissipated?
Since our separation,
We are parted by distant mountains, distant waters.
Only on your account,
I have calculated the day of your return so often,
I have worn away the tip of my comb.[28]
When Ying Po-chüeh heard this, he indulged in exaggerated compliments without end, saying, "For such a servitor as this, it's no wonder you see fit to provide him with a bowl of rice. Just listen to that throat of his; it's a veritable flute. People may praise the singing girls from the licensed quarter but they stick to the same repertory. We've heard it all before. How can any of them sing as mellifluously as this? Brother:
We are not flattering you to your face,
but to have a person like this as your body servant cannot but be a source of gratification to you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, and Ying Po-chüeh said, "Why do you laugh? What I'm saying is perfectly serious. You mustn't let this youngster down. With regard to everything, including his clothing, you should look on him with a favourable eye. It must have been difficult for Magistrate Li to relinquish him to you. It is an indication of his generous feelings toward you."
"It's just as you say," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Nowadays, when I'm not at home, every single requirement in connection with my studio, whether great or small, such as the acceptance of gift cards, the sealing of correspondence, the entertainment of guests, and so forth, is taken care of by him, along with my son-in-law. But my son-in-law also has to look after things in the shop."
When Ying Po-chüeh had drunk the proffered wine, he poured out another two cups and said to Shu-t'ung, "Have a little wine at my behest."
"I wouldn't presume," said Shu-t'ung. "I don't know how to drink."
"If you refuse to drink it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you'll make me angry. I'm awarding it to you. What is there to be afraid of?"
Shu-t'ung's only response was to fix his eyes on Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Master Ying the Second is awarding it to you. Go ahead and drink it."
The page boy knelt down on one knee, languidly:
Bending low his powdered neck,
and took a sip of wine from the cup, leaving half a cupful inside, and proffering it in turn to Ying Po-chüeh, who drank it off. Only then did he turn around and offer a cup of wine to Hsieh Hsi-ta, for whom he sang a second song to the same tune.
New lotus blossoms bend in the pond;
Sprinkled with pearly drops of rain.
The fragrant southern breeze disturbs even the
billing swallows and cooing orioles.[29]
Traces of tears transgress the boundaries
of what remains of my makeup;[30]
My waist has so wasted away it is
reminiscent of Hsiao-man's.[31]
Since our separation,
I have suffered a thousand ills, ten thousand ills.[32]
Only on your account,
I have longed so for the day of your return,
I have worn away the jade balustrade.[33]
Hsieh Hsi-ta asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, how old is this Book Boy of yours?"
"He has just turned fifteen this year," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsieh Hsi-ta then asked him, "How many southern-style songs do you know?"
"I don't know all that many songs," replied Shu-t'ung. "I can only do my best to entertain you gentlemen at your feast."
"What a prepossessing lad," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta, offering him some wine in his turn.
Shu-t'ung then stepped down to wait on Han Tao-kuo, who protested, "His Honour deserves precedence. "How could I presume to take such a liberty with him?"
"Today you're a guest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Whoever heard of such a thing?" said Han Tao-kuo. "Only after His Honour has been served will I consent to have any wine."
Shu-t'ung stepped over to offer wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing and then proceeded to sing a third song to the same tune.
Beside the eastern hedge chrysanthemums bloom;
By the gilded wellhead the phoenix trees fade.[34]
In the southern bower, sad cries of frontier geese
disturb the breast.
My spring feelings urge me to entrust news of the
plum blossoms to a courier;[35]
But when the migrating geese return, my lover
does not return.
Since our separation,
News has miscarried, tidings have miscarried.
Only on your account,
I have so resented your failure to return,
I have stamped my embroidered shoe out of shape.[36]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished drinking, Shu-t'ung moved over in front of Han Tao-kuo, who was so flustered he hastily jumped up to receive the proffered wine.
"You'd better sit down," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so he can feel more comfortable singing."
Only then did Han Tao-kuo sit down, and Shu-t'ung proceeded to sing a fourth song to the same tune.
Filling the heavens the willow catkins fly;
Wings of bees and butterflies wildly cavort.
Atop the ridge the southern branch of the flowering
plums has blossomed.
I should pluck a spray of plum blossoms and entrust it
to the royal courier;
How many times have I paused in my needlework, only
to utter long sighs?
Since our separation,
I have pined for you by day, pined for you by night.
Only on your account,
I have calculated the day of your return so often,
I have worn out the tips of my fingers.[37]
Han Tao-kuo did not even wait for the song to be finished before he hastily took the cup of wine and:
Drained it in one gulp.
While they were drinking, what should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Uncle Pen the Fourth has come and wants to speak to Father."
"Tell him to come in here and speak to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long Pen the Fourth, wearing a black silk jacket, a sash with a single dangling tassel, and white-soled black boots, came forward and bowed to the company, after which he was given a seat to one side. Tai-an promptly provided him with a cup and a pair of chopsticks, and Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered him to go to the rear compound and fetch him a complement of food.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "How's the work going on the improvements to our country estate?"
"The front tier of buildings has just been tiled," Pen the Fourth reported. "The foundations for the summerhouses behind them were laid just yesterday. But we still lack the building materials for the anterooms on either side and the living quarters in the rear. We will also need five hundred one-foot two-inch square bricks for the paving of the reception hall and the summerhouses. The old materials won't do. We also lack the large ornamental tiles for the coping on the corners of the wall. We have already used more than a hundred cartloads of dirt in order to lay the foundations and build up the artificial hill, and we will also need twenty taels worth of lime."
"The lime won't be any problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At the yamen tomorrow I'll order the registered lime-burners to deliver it to you. The other day Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, promised to let me have some bricks. If you make out a list of what you need and send it to him, along with a few taels of silver, he'll be pretty sure to comply as a partial return favour to me. All that we need now is the lumber."
"The other day," said Pen the Fourth, "you wanted me to go look the situation over at that country estate outside the gate. This morning I dropped by the graveyard to pick up Chang An, and we went to take a look at it. It turned out to be the estate of the distaff relatives of the imperial family named Hsiang. Hsiang the Elder has died, and his younger brother, Hsiang the Fifth, is prepared to sell off even the paved avenue leading to the tombs of his ancestors and the mausoleum. We would hardly want to demand anything like that. In discussing it with him, we agreed that it would suffice for our purposes to pull down the three reception halls, six antechambers, and a tier of auxiliary rooms. His asking price was five hundred taels but if we come back to him with three hundred fifty taels in hand, we ought to be able to dismantle what we need. To say nothing of the timber and lumber, the bricks, the tiles, and the dirt alone are worth several hundred taels."
"I wondered who it was you were talking about," said Ying Po-chüeh. "So it's the estate of Hsiang the Fifth. A suit has been brought against him for illegal appropriation of land, and it is being tried by the military intendant of the State Farms Circuit. He has already expended a lot of silver on the suit, and he is also maintaining Lo Ts'un-erh in the licensed quarter, so that, right now, he has managed to end up with no money on hand. If you want what he has to offer, give him three hundred taels of silver for it, and he'll have to settle. After all:
A cold hand can hardly hold onto a hot dumpling;
At whose altar is he to recite the Buddha's name?"
"Tomorrow," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Pen the Fourth, "take two large ingots of silver with you and, along with Chang An, go to negotiate with him. If he agrees to a selling price of three hundred taels of silver, you can proceed to demolish whatever you need."
"I understand," Pen the Fourth responded.
After some time, a bowl of soup and a platter of steamed pastries was brought out from the rear compound for Pen the Fourth to eat. Wine was poured, and he kept company with the others as they continued to drink. Shu-t'ung sang another song and then stepped into the background.
"There's not much fun in drinking wine this way," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It would be better if we had a dicebox so we could game at forfeits as we drink."
"Go to the Sixth Lady's quarters up front," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "and fetch a dicebox for us."
Before long, Tai-an brought a dicebox and put it down in front of Ying Po-chüeh, after which he slipped over to Hsi-men Ch'ing's side and, covering his mouth with his hand, whispered to him, "The baby in the Sixth Lady's room is crying. Ying-ch'un would like you to send someone to fetch the Sixth Lady."
"Put the wine flagon down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and quickly go send a page boy to take a lantern and go after her."
"Where are those two page boys, anyway?" he went on to ask.
"Ch'in-t'ung and Ch'i-t'ung," said Tai-an, "have already gone off with two lanterns to meet her."

Ying Po-chüeh saw that there were six dice in the dicebox and, taking up one of them in his hand, said, "I'm going to cast a die but first, each of you in turn must come up with a line associated with the name of a domino combination, and numbers appropriate to it. When the die is cast, if any of the numbers you have mentioned should match the number on the die, you will have to drink a large cup of wine yourself, as a forfeit, and the next player in line will have to sing a song, or, if he is unable to sing a song, tell a joke. If he is unable to do either of these things, he will definitely have to drink a large cup of wine as a forfeit."
"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why make it so complicated?"
"When the master of the revels chooses to fart," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it must be:
Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.
You have no jurisdiction over me."
Then, turning to Lai-an, he said, "You pour a cup, first off, as a forfeit for your master. Only after that can we proceed with our game of forfeits."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and drank it off.
"Listen up, you all," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'm going to start the game, and if I do anything wrong, I, too, will have to pay a forfeit."
Then he said:
"Young Chang has fallen down drunk
in the western chamber.[38]
How much wine has he consumed;
One large flagon, or
Two small flagons?"
Sure enough, the number that came up when he threw the die was a one spot. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Shu-t'ung to rejoin them and pour the wine for Ying Po-chüeh's forfeit. Hsieh Hsi-ta, the next player in line, was slated to sing a song.
"I'll sing you a song to the tune 'Plucking the Cassia,' " said Hsieh Hsi-ta, and, clapping his hands to keep time, he sang:
How captivating is this alluring damsel,
just sweet sixteen.
Her every feature is romantic;
In each particular she is hip.[39]
Her brows suggest spring peaks;
Her eyes transmit autumn waters;[40]
Her temples flaunt raven tresses.
In vain do I long for her;
Unable to rid my thoughts of her for
a single hour or half a minute.[41]
Though next to each other;
We are as isolated as if relegated to
the sea's rim or the sky's edge.[42]
I'm getting thin on her account;
I'm getting sick on her account.
Whoever might help us to consummate
our marriage affinity,
Would be a compassionate bodhisattva,
relieving our distress.[43]
Ying Po-chüeh drank his wine and then passed the dicebox to Hsieh Hsi-ta, whose turn it was to cast the die, after which it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn to sing.
Hsieh Hsi-ta picked up the die and said:
"Thanks be to Hung-niang[44] for
helping him to bed.
What time is it?
The third night watch,
The fourth period thereof."
It so happened that:
Strange as it may seem,
the number that came up when he threw the die was a four spot.
"Hsieh Hsi-ta will have to drink four cups of wine," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"Spare me two cups," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I can't drink that much."
Shu-t'ung poured out two full cups of wine for him, and he drank off the first cup while waiting for Hsi-men Ch'ing to sing. While this was going on, he and Ying Po-chüeh between them had managed to finish off a whole saucerful of fresh water chestnuts.
"I can't sing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I'll tell you a joke instead. A man went into a fruiterer's shop and asked if he had any torreya nuts for sale. The shopkeeper replied that he did and brought them out for his inspection, whereupon the customer began to put one after another into his mouth without stopping. At this, the shopkeeper demanded to know, 'If you're not going to buy them, why are you eating them so assiduously?' 'I'm eating them,' the man said, 'for their soothing effect on the lungs.' 'You may be eating them to soothe your lungs,' the shopkeeper replied, 'but it only gives me a case of heartburn.' "
Everyone laughed at this.
"Though it give you a case of heartburn," said Ying Po-chüeh, "bring on another saucer or two. I'm like:
The old matchmaker picking up horse droppings;
As fast as they drop I take them home to dry."
Hsieh Hsi-ta finished off his remaining cup of wine, after which it was the turn of the third player, Hsi-men Ch'ing, to cast the die.
He said:
"She left behind her gold hairpin
to be a keepsake.
How much did it weigh?
Five or six,
Or seven mace."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then picked up the die, and the number that came up when he cast it was a five spot. Shu-t'ung poured out two and a half cups of wine for him.
"Brother has a great capacity," exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta. "It doesn't make sense that he, too, should get off with only two cups of wine. Brother, you really ought to drink four cups. Just take it that each of us is showing you his respects."
It was now the turn of Han Tao-kuo to sing but he declined, saying, "I yield to Brother Pen the Fourth's seniority."
"I can't sing," said Pen the Fourth, "so I'll tell you a joke instead."
Hsi-men Ch'ing drank off two cups of wine, after which Pen the Fourth said, "A magistrate was interrogating a suspect in a case of illicit sexual intercourse and asked him, 'Initially, how did you go about violating her?' To which the man replied, 'Her head was facing east, and her feet were also facing east, when I did it.' 'Nonsense,' the magistrate responded. 'How could you do justice to the office with anybody in such a crooked position?' At which point a bystander came forward, knelt down, and said, 'Your Honour, as for that crooked position in the Office of Justice, if there are any openings in that body, I would be happy to fill them.' "[45]
"A fine one you are, Brother Pen the Fourth!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You know how to look out for yourself, don't you! After all, His Honour is not yet old. There might be something to be said for anything else but you can hardly offer yourself as a replacement where his performance in the bedroom is concerned."
When Pen the Fourth heard these words, he was so startled that his face turned crimson with embarrassment.
"Uncle Two," he stammered, "what kind of talk is that! No such thought ever entered my head."
Ying Po-chüeh said, "You've given me the upper hand.
What kind of talk is that?
It's got a sandalwood haft.[46]
Having relinquished the blade,
You've nothing but the sheath."
Pen the Fourth was too uncomfortable to remain where he was but also found it awkward to leave. He felt as though he were:
Sitting on a pincushion.[47]
Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon proceeded to finish off what remained of his four cups of wine, after which it was Pen the Fourth's turn to cast the die.
Just as he was about to pick up the die, whom should he see but Lai-an, who came in and said, "Uncle Pen the Fourth, there's someone outside looking for you. When I asked him what it was about, he said he was from the kiln."
Pen the Fourth could hardly wait for an excuse to absent himself, so as soon as he heard these words, he disappeared like:
A golden cicada molting its skin.[48]
"Manager Han," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Now that he has gone, it is your turn to cast the die."
Picking up the die, Han Tao-kuo said, "I will comply with the rules.
The old lady took up a rod with which
to chastise Hung-niang.
How many strokes did she give her?
Eight or nine,
Or ten strokes."
"It's my turn to sing," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but instead of singing, I, too, will tell you a joke."
Turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Fill up the cups all around the table, including your master's. Then prepare to listen to my joke. A Taoist priest, together with his disciple, were on their way to deliver a written invocation to the house of a donor. When they arrived at the donor's door, the disciple loosened his sash so that his gown hung straight down. When you wear it that way,' his master said, 'it looks as though you don't have any bottom at all.' 'If I didn't have a bottom, Master,' the disciple retorted, turning to face him, 'you wouldn't be able to stand it for a single day.' "
"You perverted dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"One can hardly expect ivory to emerge
from the mouth of a dog."[49]
We will say no more, for the moment, about how they continued to carouse.
To resume our story, before this Tai-an had gone to the front of the compound and set out with Hua-t'ung, taking a lantern with them, to fetch Li P'ing-erh home from the party at Wu Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law's place. When Li P'ing-erh heard that her child was crying back at home, she determined not to wait for the formal presentation of the gifts to the bride and groom but left her complimentary gift behind, intending to take her leave and set out for home.
Her host, Wu K'ai's wife, and Wu the Second's wife were reluctant to let her go, saying, "Whatever you do, at least wait until the formal presentation of the gifts to the bride and groom."
"Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you don't understand the situation. It would be better to let her go home. There isn't anyone there to take care of things, and the baby is really crying for her. The rest of us can stay a little longer without its making any difference."
Only then did Wu K'ai's wife consent to let Li P'ing-erh make her departure. Leaving Hua-t'ung behind, Tai-an took Ch'in-t'ung with him, and the two of them accompanied Li P'ing-erh's sedan chair back home before the rest of the party. Some time later, when the female guests were ready to depart after the formal presentation of the gifts, Yüeh-niang and the others set out for home in their four sedan chairs. They had only one lantern to light their way, and it was the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month, when the moon is dark.
"Where's the other lantern?" asked Yüeh-niang. "How come there's only one available?"
"We originally brought two with us," said Ch'i-t'ung, "but Tai-an demanded one of them and took Ch'in-t'ung with him to accompany the Sixth Lady home before the rest of the party."
To Yüeh-niang the issue was like a dormant account, not worth pursuing any further but Chin-lien took it to heart and asked Ch'i-t'ung, "How many lanterns did you bring with you originally?"
"Ch'in-t'ung and I brought two lanterns with us when we came to get you," said Ch'i-t'ung, "but later, when Tai-an showed up with Hua-t'ung, he demanded the use of one of them, took Ch'in-t'ung with him in place of Hua-t'ung, and escorted the Sixth Lady home before the rest of you."
"Did that jailbird, Tai-an, not bring a lantern with him?" Chin-lien demanded to know.
"He and I brought another lantern with us when we came," reported Hua-t'ung.
"Since he already had one, that should have sufficed," said Chin-lien. "Why did he demand this other one of you?"
"That's just what I said to him," reported Ch'i-t'ung, "but he insisted on taking it anyway."
Chin-lien then addressed herself to Wu Yüeh-niang, saying, "Sister, just look at the way that sycophantic slave carries on. When we get home, I'll have something to say to him."
"Why bother?" said Yüeh-niang. "The baby was anxiously awaiting her at home, so he took an extra lantern to escort her back. What of it?"
"Sister," said Chin-lien, "that's not it at all. It doesn't make any difference to me. It's you, as the mistress, who ought not to be so lax in enforcing household discipline. On a bright night it might not matter but when the moon is as dark as this, how can it be right for four sedan chairs to be lighted by a single lantern?"
As they were speaking, the sedan chairs arrived at the gate, and Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh went back to the rear compound. Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou got out of their sedan chairs together.
No sooner were they inside than Chin-lien demanded to know, "Where is Tai-an?"
"He's on duty in the rear compound," reported P'ing-an.
He had hardly finished speaking when Tai-an appeared.
Chin-lien gave him a piece of her mind, saying, "I hardly know what to do with you, you sycophantic jailbird! You'd better look out from now on. You may choose to dance attendance only on those who bask in temporary favour but you'd better watch your step or you'll slip up. If you already had one lantern, that should have sufficed. Why should you have so far succumbed to delirium as to have insisted on usurping another one, as well as exchanging page boys? You appropriated two lanterns to escort her single sedan chair, while our four sedan chairs only rated a single lantern. Are the rest of us not also Father's wives?"

"Mother, you're doing me an injustice," protested Tai-an. "When Father learned that the baby was crying, he sent me to take a lantern, and go, as quickly as possible, to fetch the Sixth Lady home before the others. He was afraid the baby might cry himself into a serious state. Surely you don't think that if Father hadn't sent me, I'd have taken it upon myself to go and fetch her."
"That's enough out of you, you jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "He may have sent you to fetch her but he didn't tell you to take all the lanterns for yourself. Brother, you're like:
The sparrow who only flies where the pickings are best.
Make no mistake about it. It's always wise to:
Add a stick of fuel to the cold stove,
As well as a stick of fuel to the hot.[50]
It's not as though we are preordained to be out of favour forever."
"Mother, what are you saying!" protested Tai-an. "If any such thought ever entered my head, may I be thrown from my horse and fracture my breastbone."
"You deceitful jailbird!" ranted Chin-lien. "Don't you worry! From now on I'm going to rinse my eyes, the better to keep track of you."
While still continuing to speak, she and Meng Yü-lou headed back toward the rear compound together.
Tai-an, for his part, turned to his fellow servants and complained, "What a purely provoking business! Father sent me to go fetch her, and now, for no reason at all, I have to put up with such a tirade from the Fifth Lady."
When Yü-lou and Chin-lien got as far as the ceremonial gate, they ran into Lai-an and asked him, "Where is your father to be found?"
"Father, along with Master Ying the Second, Master Hsieh, and Uncle Han, is in the summerhouse drinking," replied Lai-an. "Shu-t'ung has dressed himself up as a singing girl and is singing for them. You ladies ought to go take a look."
Chin-lien took Yü-lou by the hand and said, "Let's go have a look."
When the two of them went up outside the summerhouse and looked through the latticework, what did they see? Ying Po-chüeh was sitting in the seat of honour, with his cap askew, so drunk that he appeared just like a puppet on its strings.[51] Hsieh Hsi-ta was too drunk to keep his eyes open. Shu-t'ung in his disguise as a singing girl, was standing at their side, pouring the wine, and singing southern-style songs. Hsi-men Ch'ing had surreptitiously instructed Ch'in-t'ung to paint Ying Po-chüeh's face with powder, and surreptitiously slip a garland of straw over his head.
Chin-lien and Yü-lou, as they looked on from outside, couldn't help laughing uncontrollably, exclaiming, "The lousy jailbirds! When they die at some future date, they'll have nothing left to atone for, having already fully exposed their ugliness to view."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the laughter outside, he sent a page boy out to ask who it was. Only then did the two of them continue on their way to the rear compound. By the time the party broke up, it was already the first watch. That night Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to sleep.
When Chin-lien returned to her quarters, she asked Ch'un-mei, "When Li P'ing-erh got home today, did she have anything to say?"
"No, she didn't say anything," replied Ch'un-mei.
"Did that shameless good-for-nothing go into her room or not?" Chin-lien went on to ask.
"When the Sixth Lady came home," said Ch'un-mei, "Father paid a visit to her quarters; in fact, he went there twice."
"Was it actually on account of the baby's crying that he sent someone to fetch her home?" Chin-lien asked.
"In the afternoon the baby did start to cry unusually hard," said Ch'un-mei. "He cried when he was picked up and cried when he was put down. No one knew what to do."
"And where did that slave, Shu-t'ung, get the clothes he was dressed up in?" Chin-lien went on to ask.
"At first Tai-an came and tried to get some from me but I sent him packing," said Ch'un-mei. "In the end he managed to borrow them from Yü-hsiao in the master suite. It was only after the situation with the baby had been reported to Father in the front compound that he sent the page boys after her."
"Well, if that's the way it was, I guess that's all there is to it," said Chin-lien. "I figured his sending someone to bring her home was just another case of that shameless good-for-nothing sorting people differentially into:
Three classes and nine categories."
"And if anyone should come after clothes again," Chin-lien continued, "see that you don't give any to that 'sweetie' of a slave to wear."
When she had finished speaking, realizing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was not going to come to her quarters that night, she closed the door in a huff and went to bed.
To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh was already aware that Pen the Fourth was making money from being in charge of the work on Hsi-men Ch'ing's country estate, and now, on top of that, he heard that the next day he would be going with silver in hand to purchase the demolition rights to the buildings on the estate of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Hsiang the Fifth, from whom, at the very least, he was certain to get a kickback of some taels of silver. So when it happened in the course of the game of forfeits that Pen the Fourth was indiscreet enough to tell such a joke, Ying Po-chüeh took advantage of the occasion to take him to task and thereby give him something to think about.
Sure enough, Pen the Fourth had been frightened. So, the next day, he sealed up three taels of silver and went in person to Ying Po-chüeh's home to kowtow to him.
Affecting an air of innocence, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I haven't done all that much for you. What's all this about?"
"I have been lacking in courtesy with regard to you for some time," said Pen the Fourth. "I only hope that, early and late, you will continue to do what you can to uphold my interests where His Honour is concerned. My gratitude will know no bounds."
Ying Po-chüeh thereupon accepted the silver, entertained him with a cup of tea, and saw him out the door.
Taking the silver with him, he went into the interior of the house and said to his wife:
"If the old man is reluctant to be ruthless,
His old lady will lack even a cotton skirt.
I acted as both advocate and guarantor for that dog-bitten rascal Pen the Fourth, and now that he's gotten his hands on a good piece of business, he:
Hogs the contents of his own ricebowl,
and has no further use for me. His Honour has put him in charge of the work at his country estate, and tomorrow he has commissioned him to take silver in hand and close a deal on the estate of Hsiang the Fifth. He's making money enough and to spare. Yesterday at our drinking party I took him to task for something he said, and he panicked. There was no reason to fear that he wouldn't come seek me out today and present me with these three taels of silver. I'll use them to buy a few bolts of cloth that should suffice to make winter clothing for our children."
Truly:
He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;
He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.[52]
One merely resents that his idle sorrows are such an annoyance;
Before discovering that the foolish fare better than the clever.

Ximen Qing went early to his office. When they left the Great Hall, he spoke to his colleague Xia. "Che Dan and the others," he said, "have sent to me repeatedly to express their regret. I think we might be indulgent on this one occasion."
"I have had a number of visits too," said Xia, "but I hesitated to mention the matter to you. Since you have spoken of it, however, I suggest we have them before us, give them a beating, and let them go."
"An excellent idea, Sir," said Ximen.
They went back to the hall of audience and ordered the prisoners to be brought before them and made to kneel down. The unfortunate men were afraid of being punished again, and kowtowed. Ximen Qing did not give Xia time to speak but said: "Why have you rogues sent so many people to us to plead on your behalf? I ought to send you for further trial but this time I will forgive you. If ever you fall into my hands again, I shall send you to prison and there you shall die." He sent for Han the Second. The men, full of expressions of gratitude, ran off as though their lives depended on it. So this matter was happily settled.
Meanwhile Ying Bojue went to see Shutong and secretly gave him another five taels of silver. The boy put the silver into his sleeves but Ping'an, who was watching from the gate, saw it. Shutong told Ying Bojue what he had done. Yesterday, he said, he had told his master about the whole affair, and the matter was to be settled that day.
"Their fathers and elder brothers told me," Ying Bojue said, "that they are very much afraid the rascals will have another beating."
"Do not worry," Shutong said. "I am prepared to promise that nothing more will happen to them."
Ying Bojue returned and told the good news to the young men's people. About midday, the four young men were all home again. They embraced their families and there was much weeping. They had lost more than a hundred taels of silver, and their legs were very sore. Never again did they give any trouble.
Before Ximen Qing came home, Shutong told Laian to sweep the study floor. From a box he took some delicacies that had been sent as a present and gave them to Laian. With a great show of secrecy and reluctance Laian said to Shutong: "Brother, there is one thing I wish to say to you. Yesterday, my brother, Ping'an, when he went to meet the Fifth Lady's chair, told her a long story of your misdeeds."
"What did he say?" Shutong asked.
"He said you took money from people and had the impertinence to buy presents of food that you gave to the Sixth Lady. When you were in her room, you drank for a long time and then went to the shop to eat but didn't give him anything. He also said that you and Father had been playing tricks together in the study."
Shutong determined to remember this but he said nothing. The next day Ximen Qing went early to a party that the officers had arranged at the Temple of Eternal Felicity to bid farewell to one of their number who was leaving for another post. He did not go to his office but returned early in the afternoon. When he dismounted, he said to Ping'an: "If anyone calls, tell him I am not at home." Then he went into the hall and Shutong took his clothes. Ximen asked the boy whether there had been any visitors. "No," Shutong said, "but Mayor Xu's sent two baskets of crabs and some fresh fish. I gave his servant one of your cards. He gave me a *qian* of silver. And Uncle Wu has sent six invitations, one for each of the ladies, to a 'Third Day' party."
Uncle Wu's son, Wu Shunzhen, had married a young lady named Zheng, a niece of Master Qiao's wife. Ximen Qing had sent him some tea, and this was why invitations had been sent. Ximen Qing went to the inner court and Wu Yueniang showed him the cards of invitation. "You must put on your best clothes and go," Ximen said. Then he went back to the study and sat down. Shutong made haste to burn incense in the burner and with both hands, offered Ximen a cup of tea. When he had taken the tea, the boy gradually came closer and stood beside the table. After a while, Ximen pursed his lips. This was a sign to the boy to make fast the door and bring the little girl in and he did. Then he drew the girl to her bosom and with one hand stroked her cheeks. He put his tongue into her mouth; the girl passed him a sweetmeat and stroked his erect penis.
"My son," Ximen said to Shutong, "are you being well treated by the people here?"
The boy seized his opportunity. "There is one thing but except to you, Father, I'd not dare to mention it."
"Tell me," Ximen said. "Keep nothing back."
Then Shutong told him about Ping'an. "The other day, when you and I were here together, he and Huatong were secretly spying through the window. When I went out to get water for you to wash your hands, I saw them. Besides that, he's treated me as a slave before outsiders and bullied me in a hundred different ways."
Ximen Qing was very angry. "If I do not pull that slave's trousers down," he said, "I am not fit to be called a man."
Meanwhile Ping'an himself was not idle. He went quietly to Pan Jinlian and told her that his master and Shutong were again together. Jinlian ordered Chunmei to go at once to the frontcourt and ask Ximen Qing to come and speak to her. As the maid passed the hedge, she saw Huatong making a pine tiger. "What do you want, sister?" he said. "Father's in the study."
Chunmei slapped his face. Ximen Qing, in the study, heard the rustling of skirts and knew that someone was coming. He hastily hid the little girl, climbed upon his bed, and lay down. Shutong busied himself with the brushes and ink slabs on the table. Chunmei pushed open the door and went in. "All very quiet," she said, "very quiet indeed! And the door shut too! Drawing the bonds of family closer, I suppose. My lady would like you to go and talk to her."
Ximen Qing did not move. "What does she want with me, little oily mouth?" he asked. "You go first and I will come in a moment. Let me have my rest."
Chunmei would have none of this. "If you will not come of your own free will, I shall have to drag you," she cried, and pulling and tugging, she forced Ximen Qing to go to Jinlian's room.
When they reached there, Jinlian said to her maid: "What was he doing in the front court?"
"He was with that boy in the study. They had the door shut, and everything was so quiet they might have been just on the point of catching a fly. I don't know what their little game was but it looked to me as if there was something very close between them. When I went in, the boy was standing at the table pretending to write, and this one was lying on the bed. I had to drag him here, for he didn't want to come."
"Yes, he was afraid he would get into hot water if he did come," Jinlian said. "You shameless creature! Haven't you any self-respect left at all? In broad daylight, shutting yourself up in your study with that slave. What for? Just to make a beast of yourself with that mangy slave. And then, at night, you come to our place to sleep with us. A nice clean fellow!"
"You believe all that little oily-mouthed creature tells you," Ximen said. "I was simply lying on the bed and watching the boy write a visiting card."
"Why shut the door to write a visiting card?" Jinlian cried. "What secret, important words do you need for that? What three-legged Indra, or two-horned elephant, do you hide away in there that you are afraid someone may go in and see it? Tomorrow is Uncle Wu's birthday and we have all been invited to go there. Without making any bones about it, you can find something for me to offer when I go. If you will not, I will find some other husband who will. The Great Lady is going to give a dress and five *qian* of silver, and the others have flowers and ornaments to give. I am the only one who has nothing, and I had better stay at home."
"You may have a roll of fine red silk from the cupboard in the front court," Ximen Qing said.
"No," Jinlian cried, "I will not go at all if I have to take that red silk. Everyone will laugh at it."
"Be quiet and wait a minute," Ximen said. "I will go upstairs and get something for you. I am thinking about sending some presents to the Eastern Capital, some silk among them, and I will find something for you at the same time."
He went to the rooms of Li Ping'er, where he went upstairs and took two rolls of black silk woven with a gold thread, two of Nanjing coloured silk, one of scarlet mixture, and one of kingfisher blue cloudy satin.
"I want to find a dress of taffeta for Jinlian to give as a present," he said to Li Ping'er. "If there isn't one, I must send a note to the silk shop and get one."
"There is no need to send to the silk shop," Li Ping'er said. "I have one, and a scarlet under-dress, and a blue skirt. There is no purpose in keeping one without the others, so she shall have them all." She took the clothes from a chest and herself carried them over to Jinlian.
"Sister," she said, "take either the under-dress or the skirt whatever you like. We will wrap them up together and let the present be from both of us. That will save the trouble of going to the shop."
"But these are yours," Jinlian said, "I cannot take them."
"Why say that?" Li Ping'er said. They argued pleasantly for some time, and at last Jinlian agreed. She asked Chen Jingji to write both their names on the card.
While this was happening, Bai Laiguang came to the gate.
"Is your master at home?" he said.
"No," said Ping'an, "he is not."
Bai Laiguang did not believe him and went into the house. There he found the window shut. "Well," he said, "it seems he really is not at home. Where has he gone?"
"He has gone outside the city to a farewell party," Ping'an said.
"Then he ought to be back soon," Bai Laiguang said.
"Uncle Bai," the boy said, "tell me what it is you wish to say, and I will give the message to my master when he comes back."
"Oh," Bai Laiguang said, "it is nothing very important but I haven't seen him for a long time, so I thought I would call today. Since he is not here, I think I'll wait for him."
"I'm afraid he won't be back till very late," Ping'an said. "You will be tired of waiting."
Bai Laiguang paid no attention. He pushed open the door, went into the hall, and sat down on a chair. None of the boys did anything for him; they left him quite alone. But the Fates were kind to him. Ximen Qing and Yingchun, coming from the inner court with a roll of silk, passed the screen and came right upon him as he sat in the great hall. Yingchun put down the silk and hastily retired to the inner court.
"Isn't this my brother?" Bai Laiguang cried. "So you are at home after all."
There was no escape. Ximen Qing could only ask Bai Laiguang to be seated. Upon his head was a refurbished, remolded, ancient gauze hat, like those worn by the pilgrims to the summit of Taishan. He was wearing a white stuff gown that would hardly hold together and was fit only for the fire, the collar torn and the front all frayed. Upon his feet a pair of clapperclopper black boots, out of shape and torn almost to shreds. And, inside the boots, socks like stirrups of yellow silk that would not have imprisoned a fly.
They sat down but Ximen Qing did not call for tea. Qintong was waiting beside him, and he ordered the boy to take the silk to the guestroom and ask Chen Jingji to wrap it up.
"I have not been to see you for a long time," Bai Laiguang said, waving his arms. "I am sorry."
"It is kind of you to remember me," Ximen Qing said. "Now that I have to go to the office every day, I have not much time to spend at home."
"What, Brother?" Bai Laiguang said. "Do you go to the office every day?" "Yes," Ximen said, "I go twice every day and hear cases in the Hall. On the first and the fifteenth of every month I have to pay reverence to the tablets and to sign and stamp public documents and carry out public business, and attend to the police reports. Even when I get home, I have a great deal to do; I hardly have a moment's leisure. Today I have been outside the city with all the officers to say goodbye to Xu Nanxi, who has just been given a military appointment. The Governor of the Royal Estates, Eunuch Xue, has invited me to take wine with him tomorrow but his place is so far away that I really shall not be able to get out there. The day after tomorrow I have to go and welcome the new provincial governor, and the same day the fourth son of the Imperial Tutor in the Eastern Capital is to marry a princess. Then Grand Marshal Tong's nephew, Tong Tianyin, has recently been promoted to be the controller of the Palace Guards. All this makes me very busy, what with presents and so on, and, the last few days, I have been tired to death."

They talked for a long time, and, at last, Laian brought some tea. Bai Laiguang had taken only one mouthful when Daian hurried into the room with a red card in his hand. "His Lordship Xia is here," he said. "He is dismounting outside the gate."
Ximen Qing hastily went to the inner court to put on his ceremonial clothes. Bai Laiguang retired to a room in the wing, and from there looked through the lattice. He saw Xia come into the great hall and Ximen Qing, dressed in his robes of ceremony, come to receive him. They greeted one another and sat down in the places of host and guest. Qitong brought cups of tea.
"Yesterday," Xia said, "we were talking about the reception of the new governor. Today I have learned that his name is Zeng, and that he graduated in the third degree in the year *Yiwei*. His warrant has already reached Dongchang, and all our colleagues are going out to welcome him. Though you and I are military officers, there are administrative duties attached to our appointments, and it is one of our duties to enforce the law that makes us rather different from mere soldiers. I think, therefore, that we should go the day after tomorrow and find a place a little distance from the town, where we may offer the new governor a dinner of welcome."
"That is an excellent idea," Ximen Qing said, "but pray do not trouble yourself about the matter. I will find some temple or private estate, and send servants and cooks to make all the necessary preparations."
"It is extremely kind of you," Xia said.
They drank another cup of tea and the magistrate took his leave. Ximen went to the gate to see him off. Then he came in again and took off his robes. Bai Laiguang had not gone. He came back into the great hall, sat down, and said to Ximen:
"For the last month or two, Brother, you have not been to our meetings, and the brotherhood is practically at an end. Sun is certainly old but he has no capacity for organization, and Brother Ying does not trouble. In the seventh month, we went to the Temple of the Jade Emperor to celebrate the *Zhongyuan (on the 15th day of the 7th month) and there were only three or four of us there including myself, and nobody with any money. All were empty-handed. We gave a great deal of trouble to* Abbot Wu. He was very agreeable, and had engaged a storyteller specially for us but he had to pay the man himself. The Abbot did not say anything but we all felt most embarrassed. It was different when you were in charge. You always knew exactly what to do and how to do it. We hope it will not be long before you come and join us again."
"No, I think not," Ximen said, "the brotherhood had better be dissolved. I really have no time for things like that nowadays. If I can manage it, I will send a little offering to the Abbot as a thanks offering. But that must suffice. In the future you need not give me notice of any more of your meetings."
After this there was nothing for Bai Laiguang to say, yet he remained sitting there. Ximen Qing, seeing that he made no move, bade Qintong set a table in the side room. He had something to eat with Bai Laiguang, ordered wine to be warmed, and poured out several cups for him. At last, Bai Laiguang asked permission to leave. Ximen went with him only as far as the second door. "If you will excuse me," he said, "I will not go with you any farther. I have not my ceremonial hat and, in the circumstances, it would not be becoming that I should see you off." Then Bai Laiguang went away.
Ximen Qing returned to the great hall, pulled out a chair and sat on it. Then he shouted for Ping'an, over and over again. Ping'an came in and Ximen cursed him. "You thievish slave, how have you the audacity to stand there before me?" He called for his official attendants, and three or four men appeared immediately. Ping'an had no idea what was the matter, and was so terrified that his face became the colour of wax. He knelt down.
"When I came home," Ximen Qing said, "I told you that if anyone called you were to say I was not at home. Why did you not obey me?"
"When Uncle Bai came," Ping'an said, "I told him you had gone outside the city to a farewell dinner, and had not yet returned. He would not believe me and forced his way in. Then I followed him and asked if he would leave a message with me. He said nothing but opened the door of the hall, went in, and sat down. Just at that moment, unfortunately, you came and met him."
"Don't try and deceive me with a lot of words," Ximen cried. "You are a coward. Where were you gambling and drinking, that when somebody came you were not attending to your duties at the gate?" He ordered the men to go and smell Ping'an's breath. They did so but said: "We cannot smell any wine."
"You two, who can use the rod, give this slave a fair and honest finger-squeezing."
Two of the soldiers seized Ping'an, and one put the thumbscrews on the lad's fingers. They turned the screw till he could bear the pain no longer and screamed: "Indeed, I told him you were out. He forced his way in."
The soldiers released the screws and knelt before Ximen. "It is done," they said.
"Give him fifty stripes," Ximen cried. The number was counted; they went to fifty and stopped.
"Give him twenty more," Ximen said. They did so. The boy's skin was torn; the flesh was bruised, and blood poured down his legs.
"Stop," Ximen cried.
The soldiers removed the thumbscrews and the boy screamed shrilly.
"You rascally slave," Ximen said, "you said you were at the gate. It is my belief that you are always trying to get money out of people, and so, spoiling my good name. Let me hear not so much as a whisper of anything of the sort. If I do, you shall lose your legs."
Ping'an kowtowed, rose, and, pulling up his trousers, made off as fast as he could.
Then Ximen Qing saw Huatong standing beside him.
"Down with him," he cried to the soldiers, "and put the thumbscrews on him." The boy began to howl like a pig being killed.
Pan Jinlian was coming from her room to the inner court and, as she passed the door that opened into the great hall, she saw Meng Yulou standing behind the screen listening with all her ears.
"What is going on?" Jinlian said.
"I am listening to Father. He is having Ping'an beaten, and setting the thumbscrews on Huatong. I don't know why."
Qitong passed by. Yulou stopped him and asked what the punishment was for.
"Father is angry because Ping'an let Bai Laiguang come in," the boy said.
"Oh, that is not the real reason," Jinlian said. "The boy must have ruined something very precious or he wouldn't be beaten like that. What a shameless fellow Father is. He pulls a long face to show that he is the master of the house but he is utterly without shame."
"What do you mean by saying that the boy must have ruined something very precious?" Yulou said, when Qitong had gone.
"I was going to tell you," Jinlian said, "but so far I have not had a chance. The other day, I went to see my mother on her birthday. While I was away, that little slave Shutong accepted several taels of silver from somebody, and went and bought two boxes of food and a jar of Jinhua wine and took them to the Sixth Lady's room. She and the young rascal drank there for a long time. Then he went away. When our shameless husband came back, he had not a word to say but he and the boy went off to the study in the garden, locked the door, and goodness only knows what they did there. Ping'an had to take him a visiting card, found the door shut, and was standing by the window when Shutong opened the door and saw him. I imagine the young rascal must have told that shameless fellow all about it and today he is having the boy punished in revenge. I am very much afraid that in the future that young man will make mischief for everybody in the household, and be getting everybody into trouble."
"That is a nice thing to say," Yulou said, laughing. "Of course, in a household like this, some of us are wise and some are foolish but not all of us have evil minds."
"No, you are quite wrong," Jinlian said. "Let me tell you this. At the present time there are only two people he really and truly cares for. One is a member of the household, and the other is not. His mind dwells continually upon those two. When he sees them, he laughs, he talks. But the rest of us are out of luck. He treats us like black-eyed chickens. The robber! He will never come to a natural end. He is fickle because the foxes have got hold of him, and he has become just like themselves. Sister, mark my words. There is going to be serious trouble in this household. Today, I have had a bother with him over the present. As soon as he comes in, he goes to his study. Today, I sent Chunmei to ask him to come and see me. Would you believe it, even in broad daylight that little slave had fastened the door. Chunmei pushed it open, went in and gave him a shock. He opened his eyes very wide and didn't know what to do. When he came to me, I cursed him well but he simply protested and excused himself as best he could. He offered me a piece of red silk but I would not have it. Then he went to the Sixth Lady's room to find something for me. The brigand knew he was in the wrong, so he took a dress of material woven with gold thread from her chest, and she brought it to me herself. I refused to take it. 'Sister,' she said, 'why think twice about it? Take the gown or the skirt thatever you like best, and when you have made your choice, we will go to Brother Chen and get him to write a card for us.' At last I gave way, and she persuaded me to take the gown."
"Well," Yulou said, "that seems fair enough. I think she treated you very well."
"You don't understand," Jinlian said. "We have to yield place to her. In these days, the whole world fears the wide-eyed *Jin Gang*, and nobody bothers about the Buddha whose eyes are closed. In these affairs between husband and wife, if one gives the other the least bit of rope, he becomes like General Wang's orderly and looks upon you as one not worth the trouble of even the crudest affection."
"Really," Yulou said, laughing, "you are as hot as pepper."
They both laughed. Then Xiaoyu came to invite them to go to Yueniang's room to eat crabs. She told them she was going to ask Li Ping'er also. Hand in hand, they went to the inner court and found Wu Yueniang and Li Jiao'er sitting beneath the eaves.
"What are you laughing about?" Yueniang asked.
"We are laughing at Father. He has been punishing Ping'an."
"No wonder I heard screams like those of a man running for his life," Yueniang said. "I didn't realize it was Ping'an being beaten. But why was this?"
"Because he broke something precious," Jinlian said.
"What was this precious thing?" Yueniang asked, seriously, "and how did he break it?"
Jinlian and Yulou broke into peals of laughter.
"I really don't understand why you find it so funny," Yueniang said, "or why you don't tell me what the joke is."
"Great Sister," Yulou said, "you do not know, of course. Father was beating the boy because he let Bai Laiguang come in."
"If that was all," Yueniang said, "well and good. But why did you talk about his breaking something precious? Really, I never heard of such a man. It would be far better if he sat on his behind in his own house instead of rushing into other people's houses when he has nothing to say worth saying."
"He came to see Father," Laian said.
"Nobody had fallen out of bed," Yueniang said, "and nobody is going to put up with behavior of that sort. It would be much nearer the mark to say that he came to fill his belly."
After a while, Li Ping'er and Ximen Dajie came. They sat in a circle and enjoyed the crabs. "There is some grape wine in my room," Yueniang told Xiaoyu. "Get it and warm some for the ladies."
"Oh but when we eat crabs," Jinlian said, "we ought to have Jinhua wine." And, a little later: "It is a pity we have only this one course. How much nicer it would be if we had roast duck with our wine."
"It is late now," Yueniang said, "how can we have roast duck?"
Li Ping'er flushed. The words were meant for her, and they showed what was being thought of her. Yueniang was a simple-minded woman and did not appreciate the meaning of what was said.
When Ping'an had been beaten, he went outside. Ben the Fourth, Laixing, and the others hurried to discover why he had been punished.
"How should I know?" Ping'an said, weeping.
"I suppose Father was angry because you let Bai Laiguang come in," Laixing said.
"Well," Ping'an said, "I did all I could to stop him but he insisted upon going in and then, unfortunately, Father came from the inner court and saw him. He had really nothing to talk about but even after tea had been served he did not go away. Then his Lordship the Magistrate came and I was sure he would go but he only retired to the wing room, and made no move to depart. Only when he had been given wine did he go. So I was punished like this. Father says I didn't stop him but it was simply my bad luck that he would come in. Why should my poor legs be beaten for him? May heaven destroy this dog bone, may his sons become thieves and his daughters harlots! May the food he ate here break his backbone!"
"If his backbone breaks," Laixing said, "he will do well to dash in."
"May he choke and his gorge burst!" Ping'an cried. "Of all the shameless, faceless people in the world, there is none so shameless as this dog bone. He sneaks in so silently that the dog doesn't even bark: he shows his teeth and gobbles down our food. It was a beggar got him, and his rump will rot, the thievish turtle!"
"But if his rump does rot," Laixing said laughing, "none of us will ever know. He will tell us he is dribbling."
They all laughed.
"I suppose he has no rice to cook for his supper," Ping'an said. "How hungry his wife must be if he has nothing else to do but come to other people's houses to get food, and so save his own. This cannot go on. He had better let his wife keep another man on the quiet, and be himself a turtle. That would be more straightforward and he would not get himself cursed by the servants of other households."
Meanwhile Daian finished having his hair cut, paid the barber, and came away. To Ping'an he said: "I don't wish to say anything but I can't help it. You are our master's servant. How is it you don't understand his temperament? You have no reason to complain. The proverb says: No one wants a boy to make water of gold and lay eggs of silver. What people do want is a boy who realizes what the situation is and acts accordingly. If Uncle Ying and Uncle Xie come, it is all right to let them come in whether Father is at home or not. They are good friends and have no secrets from one another but as for the rest, if they come when our master has told you to say that he is not at home, why do you let them in? If he does not punish you, whom should he punish?"
Then Ben the Fourth made a joke. "Ping'an," he said, "you must learn how to be a little boy and play again. You see, he too knows how to play, and plays kickball all day."
They all laughed at this, and Ben the Fourth said: "You're punished for letting someone come in but what had Huatong done? The fruit's not so tasty that you needed anyone else to help you enjoy it. When we've a banquet, we like to have others to keep us company but I've never heard that the same thing's true when we're wearing thumbscrews."
Huatong rubbed his hands and cried. Daian said jokingly to him: "My son, stop crying. Your mother has brought you up too tenderly. Now somebody has given your fingers something to taste. Why don't you settle down to enjoy it?"
Ximen Qing watched Chen Jingji packing up the presents and the rolls of silk, and writing cards. The following day these gifts were to be sent to the Eastern Capital for their patrons there.
The next day, Ximen went to his office. Yueniang and the others, with pearls and jewels in their hair, and silk and embroidery upon their bodies, took sedan chairs to join the festivities at Aunt Wu's house. Laixing's wife, in a smaller chair, was in attendance upon them. Only Sun Xue'e and Ximen Dajie stayed at home to look after the house. In the morning, Han Daoguo sent a number of presents as a token of gratitude to Ximen. There was a jar of Jinhua wine, a teal, a pair of pig's trotters, four roast ducks, and four smoked fish. On the card that came with them was written: "The young student Han Daoguo kowtows and offers these."
Because there was no one at home, Shutong did not accept them, and the boxes were set down. When Ximen Qing came back from the office, the boy showed them to him. Ximen bade Qintong go to the shop and bring Han Daoguo to him.
"What is this?" he said. "Why do you bring these presents? I cannot possibly accept them."
Han Daoguo made a reverence. "You've been extremely kind to me," he said. "You had compassion on me and avenged me. All my household and I are grateful to you. These trifles only express a tiny part of my gratitude. Take them, please, even if only as a joke."
"I cannot do so," Ximen Qing said. "You are associated with me in business, and that means that you are like one of my own household. Kindly send someone to take the things away."
Han Daoguo grew excited and insisted that Ximen Qing should accept them. After a long discussion, Ximen told one of the servants to take the ducks and the wine but nothing more. The rest, he said, must all be taken back. Then he sent a boy with his card to invite Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. He said to Han Daoguo: "Tell Laibao to look after the shop this afternoon, and you come and join us."
"So besides not taking anything from me," Han Daoguo said, "you pile kindness after kindness upon me." He promised to come, and went away.
Ximen Qing bought many fresh fruits and dishes, and that afternoon, in the arbor by the Hall of the Kingfishers, they were all set out upon a square table. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida came early.
"Han has been at a great deal of trouble to buy presents for me," Ximen Qing said, "but I would not take them. He implored me to accept them but I would only have the wine and ducks. I didn't wish to keep these all for myself, so I sent for you."
"He spoke about the matter to me," Ying Bojue said; "he said he was going to buy you some presents but I told him you certainly would not accept them and that he should not take the trouble. Was I not right? I might have been in your very mind. You did refuse them."
They drank tea and played backgammon, and soon afterwards, Han Daoguo came. When they had greeted one another, he sat down. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida were in the places of honour, Ximen Qing in the host's seat, and Han Daoguo opposite. Four plates and four bowls were immediately brought in, with a host of dishes. Laian was told to open the jar of Jinhua wine, and heat it in a brass jar. Shutong was told to serve it.
"Go to the inner court," Ying Bojue said to Shutong, "and ask your mistress if she will not send some of her crabs for your Uncle Ying. Tell her I like them very much."
"You foolish dog," Ximen cried, "there are none left. Mayor Xu sent me a basket or two but the ladies have eaten them all. We preserved the few that were left."
He told a boy to bring a few pickled crabs. "Today," he said, "the ladies have gone to a celebration at the Wus' house."
Before long, Huatong brought the pickled crabs. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida tried to see who could eat the faster, and ate them every one.
"Your Uncle Ying," Bojue said to Shutong, "never thinks of drinking wine without a song to it. You are always boasting of the way you can sing the songs of the South but I have never heard you sing any. Let us have one today, and then I'll drink my wine."
Shutong began to beat time with his hands, and made ready to sing. Ying Bojue stopped him. "If that's the way you're going to sing, you may go on as long as you like but I shan't pay any attention. When you play the part of a dragon, try to look like a dragon; and when you play the tiger, be a tiger. Off you go, get your face painted, and put on a girl's dress."
Shutong stood still, glancing at Ximen Qing to see what his master had to say to this. Ximen only laughed and cursed Ying Bojue, saying that he was just the kind of man who would seek to deprave a serving boy.
"Since he must have it so," he said to Shutong, "send Daian to the front court, and tell him to ask one of the maids for some clothes. Then go and paint your face."
Daian went first to Jinlian's rooms and asked Chunmei. She refused him. Then he went to Yueniang's apartments, and Yuxiao lent him four silver pins, a comb, a pendant, a pair of gilded imitation jade earrings, a scarlet double-fronted silk dress and a green skirt with purple trimmings. Then Shutong took powder and rouge to the study and dressed himself. So charmingly did he adorn himself that he looked exactly like a real girl. He went back to the table and offered a cup of wine to Ying Bojue with both hands. Then he cleared his throat and sang.

Red withered leaves swirl down towards the water
Though the plums are still young upon the branches.
My brows lack colour: who shall give it to them?
Spring comes, and sorrow with it.
Spring goes but sorrow stays.
Mountains and deep waters sunder us; we are together no more.

I count the days until you come again
And the tip of my brush is wounded by my grief.

Bojue applauded vigorously. "Anyone like you," he said to the boy, "need feel no shame when he eats his food. Your voice is as sweet as a flute, and the girls in the bawdy house simply cannot compare with you. Many, many times I have heard them sing but there isn't one of them with a voice so sweet and rich as yours. Brother," he added, turning to Ximen Qing, "I don't wish to flatter you but you really ought to be delighted to have such a boy in your household."

Ximen Qing smiled.

"Why do you smile?" Ying Bojue said. "I am perfectly serious. You must not undervalue this boy. You should regard him with unusual favour in all things. It was most fortunate that Li thought fit to send him to you. He did you a great favour."

"Yes, indeed," Ximen said. "Now, when I am out, this boy and my son-in-law are responsible for everything connected with the study. My son-in-law is mainly concerned with the shop."

Ying Bojue drank his wine and poured out two cups. "I shall be angry if you do not drink this," he said to Shutong. "Since I offer it to you, there is no reason why you should not."

Shutong looked at Ximen Qing.

"Since it is your uncle who offers it to you," Ximen said, "you had better drink it."

The boy knelt on one knee, gracefully bent his white neck, and sipped a mouthful, giving the rest of the wine back to Bojue. Then he turned to offer wine to Xie Xida, and sang another song.

"How old is this boy, Brother?" Bojue asked.

"Just sixteen," Ximen said.

Then Xie Xida asked the boy how many southern melodies he knew. "Indeed, I know only a few," Shutong said. "I have sung for the amusement of Uncle Ying and yourself."

"You are certainly a clever boy," Xie Xida said, and he, in turn, offered Shutong some wine. Then the boy went to Han Daoguo but Han Daoguo said: "How shall I take such a liberty in his Lordship's presence?"

"Today you are my guest," Ximen said.

"It is not to be thought of," Han Daoguo said, "your Lordship must drink first, and then perhaps I may make bold myself."

Shutong offered wine to his master, and again sang a song. When Ximen had drunk it, the boy went to Han Daoguo. Han stood up to take the wine. "Sit down," Bojue said. "The boy will sing for you." Han sat down, and Shutong sang again. Before the boy had finished his song, Han Daoguo had swallowed all his wine in one breath.

They were still drinking when Daian came and said: "Uncle Ben the Fourth is here, and would like to speak to you." Ximen gave orders that he was to be shown in. Ben the Fourth came in, made a reverence, and sat down. Daian brought chopsticks and a cup for him, and was told to go to the inner court for more dishes.

"How is the work getting on?" Ximen Qing asked Ben the Fourth.

"We are putting the tiles on the first story," Ben the Fourth said, "and yesterday we laid the foundations of the arbor. But we have not yet got the materials for the wings or for the back part of the living rooms. We are having to wait another five days for the flooring tiles: we cannot use any of the old ones. And we are still without some of the materials we need for the walls. We have earth enough to fill up the foundations and the artificial mound. Then we need a hundred cartloads of lime, and they will cost twenty taels of silver."

"Do not trouble about the lime," Ximen said. "When I go to the office tomorrow, I will order the lime burners to get it for you. Yesterday, Eunuch Liu of the brick kilns promised he would send me some. All you need to do is to tell him what you want and send a few taels, for this matter is as much one of friendship as of business. You will only need to buy the wood."

"Yesterday," Ben the Fourth said, "you told me to go outside the city to look at another place there. Early this morning Zhang An and I went. The place belongs to a noble family but now the head of the family has died, and they are anxious to dispose of it. It is no use to us as it is, and I told them we should pull most of it down. They want five hundred taels for it but, in my opinion, if we decide to have it, we had better take some money with us and go to talk the matter over with them. We certainly ought to secure it for something like three hundred and fifty taels. Besides the wood, the tiles, bricks and mortar will amount to one or two hundred taels."

"Let me think whose house this is," Bojue said. "It must be Xiang the Fifth's. Xiang the Fifth was brought by somebody before the military court, and the case cost him a great deal of money. He used to keep Luo Cun there, and that is why he is so short of ready money. I'm sure he will be satisfied with three hundred taels. His hands are so cold that he will gladly welcome something to warm them."

"Tomorrow," Ximen said to Ben the Fourth, "you and Zhang An take two large bars of silver and go and talk to him. If he will accept three hundred taels, get on with the work."

After a while a bowl of soup and a plate of cakes were brought from the inner court. Ben the Fourth ate them, and then drank in company with the others. Shutong sang another song, and went away.

"It is very dull drinking wine like this," Ying Bojue said. "Won't you send for a dice box and let us have a game?"

Ximen Qing told Daian to go to the Sixth Lady's room and get a dice box. The boy brought it and set it down before Bojue. Then he went over and whispered to Ximen Qing: "Little Brother is crying, and Yingchun told me to ask you to send someone to fetch the Sixth Lady."

"Put down your wine jar," Ximen answered quickly, "and send a boy with a lantern at once. Where are the two boys?"

"Qintong and Qitong have already gone with lanterns to bring the ladies home," Daian said.

Ying Bojue noticed that there were six dice in the dice box. "I will cast a number," he said, "and I want the name of the tablet to agree with the number I throw. If there be anyone who cannot tell it, he must drink a cup of wine for forfeit, and the one next to him must sing a song. If he can't sing, he must tell a story instead."

"Ah, you funny dog," Ximen Qing cried, "you are too well versed in tricks."

"When the commander-in-chief lets forth a fart," Bojue said, "it must be obeyed as if it were the Emperor's command. It is no use your trying to keep me in order."

He said to Daian: "Pour a cup of wine as a punishment for your master, and then I will give my orders."

Ximen Qing laughed and drank the cup of wine.

"Listen, all of you," Bojue said, "I am going to give an order. If I make a mistake, I am ready to be punished for it. Here you are: 'Zhang Sheng got drunk and lay down in the Western Pavilion. How much did he drink? One large jar or two small ones?' Indeed it is a *yao* (one)."

Ximen Qing told Shutong to pour the wine, and Xie Xida had to sing. Bojue drank the wine and passed the dice box to Xie Xida, that he might cast the dice. It was Ximen Qing's turn to sing. When he had thrown the dice, Xie Xida said: "Thanks be to Hong'er who helped me to bed. What time was it? The third night watch, and the fourth division thereof." Strangely enough, he really threw a four.

"Brother Xie," Bojue said, "that is four cups for you."

"Give me two," Xie Xida said, "I am no great drinker."

Shutong poured out two cups and Xie Xida drank one, then waited for Ximen Qing to sing. Meanwhile, he and Ying Bojue made short work of the nuts. Ximen Qing told them he could not sing, and would tell them a story, instead.

"There was once a man," he said, "who went to a fruit shop and asked the shopman if he had any olives. 'Yes,' said the shopman, and brought some out to show his customer. The man tasted a number of them. 'I am glad you like them,' said the shopman, 'but why don't you buy some, instead of popping them into your mouth like that?' 'I like them,' the customer said, 'because they are so soothing to the chest.' 'All you think about,' the shopman retorted, 'is soothing your chest. It never occurs to you that you are giving me a pain.' "

Everybody laughed. Ying Bojue said: "If you have a pain at the heart, order another two plates of nuts for us. I am like the old woman who went around picking up horses' droppings. The moister they are, the more drying they take."

Xie Xida drank the second cup, and it was Ximen Qing's turn to throw the dice. "I have left my gold pin and token behind. How much do they weigh? About fifty or sixty *qian*." He threw a five. Shutong poured out two half-cups of wine.

"Brother," Xie Xida said, "you are no poor drinker. If you drink only two cups it won't be fair, drink four. I offer them to you myself."

Then it was Han Daoguo's turn but he asked Ben the Fourth to throw before him, for Ben the Fourth, he said, was older than he.

"I, too, cannot sing," Ben the Fourth said, "so I must tell a story." When Ximen Qing had drunk his two cups of wine, Ben the Fourth began. "Once upon a time a magistrate had to investigate a case of unlawful association. He asked the man how he set about the business. 'My head to the East,' said the man, 'and my feet to the East also.' 'Nonsense,' said the magistrate, 'whoever heard of going about sexual intercourse in that unsatisfactory way?' At that moment a man ran up and plumped himself on his knees before the magistrate and said: 'If you're in need of a clerk who knows how to be unsatisfactory in intercourse, I'm the very man for you.'

"Ah ha! Brother Pen," said Ying Bojue, "you don't intend to miss any chances! Your master is not an old man. You might be excused for anything else but how can you think of getting a job like that which is evidently in your mind, in his household?"

Ben the Fourth was flustered. He blushed and said: "Uncle Ying, what do you mean? Such a thing never entered my head."

"What I said is like a scabbard made of sandalwood. The sword is gone and only the scabbard remains."

This made Ben the Fourth extremely uncomfortable but he could not escape. He felt as though he were sitting on a cushion of needles. Ximen Qing finished his four cups of wine and it was Ben the Fourth's turn to throw the dice. Just as he was about to take them up, Laian came in and said that he was wanted by somebody from the tile works. Ben the Fourth was so anxious to get away that, as soon as he heard this, he ran off like a golden cicada breaking out of its chrysalis.

"Now that he has gone," Ximen Qing said, "it is your turn, Han."

Han Daoguo took up the dice. "I obey your orders," he said. "The old lady beat Hong Niang with a rod. How many blows did she administer? About forty or fifty."

"It is now my turn to sing," Bojue said, "but I shan't. I am going to tell a story." Then he said to Shutong: "Pour out wine for all of us, not excepting your master. Then listen to my story.

"Once a priest and his disciple went to a house to take some religious papers. When they came to their benefactor's door, they found that the pupil's girdle had become loose and the papers had fallen out. 'It looks as though you had no bottom,' the priest said to the young man. 'If I hadn't,' returned the pupil, 'you would not be able to exist for a single day.' "

"You dirty dog," Ximen cried, "but with a dog's mouth like yours, I suppose we must not expect elephant's teeth."

The party went on.

Daian went to the front court and called for Huatong. They set off with a lantern to Aunt Wu's house to find Li Ping'er. When they had told her that the baby was crying, she did not even wait to pay her respects to the young couple but presented her gift and asked to be excused. The two Wu ladies would not let her go.

"You must wait for the bride and bridegroom," they said.

Then Wu Yueniang intervened. "Please excuse her," she said, "there is no one at home, and the baby is crying for her. We will stay, for we have no such reason for anxiety." So the Wu ladies allowed Li Ping'er to go. Daian left Huatong, and he and Qintong accompanied the chair on its way home.

After the bridal pair had received them, Yueniang and the others set off in their four chairs but they only had one lantern to guide them. It was the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month and extremely dark. Yueniang asked where the other lantern was. "Why have we only one?" she said.

"I brought two," Qitong said, "but Daian and Qintong took the other when they went back with the Sixth Lady."

Yueniang said no more but Jinlian took up the matter. "How many did you bring from the house?" she asked the boy.

"Qintong and I brought two, then Daian and Huatong came and took one of them. Daian left Huatong behind, and went off with Qintong after the Sixth Lady's chair."

"Didn't Daian bring a lantern with him?" Jinlian said.

Then Huatong answered. "We did bring one."

"If he had one, why did he take another?"

"That is what I told him," said Qintong, "but he took it by force."

"You see how it is," Jinlian said to Yueniang. "That rascally Daian is trying to curry favour with her. When I get home, I shall have something to say about this."

"Oh," said Yueniang, "how easily you get excited. They are only boys, and their master sent for her. Why shouldn't they take the lanterns?"

"Really, Sister," Jinlian said, "that is no way to talk. The rest of us might put up with it but you are the chief among us, and you ought to see that discipline is maintained in the family. If it were not dark, it would not matter but it is dark, and here we are with four chairs and only one lantern. Really there is no excuse for it."

At length the chairs reached the door. Yueniang and Li Jiao'er went to their own rooms; Jinlian and Yulou got out together. As they went in, Jinlian asked where Daian was. Ping'an was telling her that the boy was serving in the back court when Daian came out. Jinlian cursed him roundly. "You flattering young ruffian. You keep your eyes open and think you'll wait on those who are in favour. But mind your step. You had one lantern. That was enough. The way you go on will not do at all. You took another lantern by brute force, and you changed the boys. So she got two lanterns for her one chair and we, with four chairs, had only one lantern. Do you consider we are not your master's ladies?"

"Mother," Daian said, "you have no reason to blame me. When Father heard the baby was crying, he told me to take a lantern and come at once to bring the Sixth Lady home. He was afraid the baby might make himself ill, crying. If Father hadn't told me to do so, I should never have dreamed of doing such a thing."

"Don't try to deceive me, you rascal," Jinlian cried. "He may have told you to bring her home but he did not tell you to take all the lanterns. Little Brother, you are one of those birds that always fly to the places where things are going best. Don't make a mistake. You should put your hand to the cold stove as well as to the hot one. I suppose you think our luck is out."

"How can you say that?" Daian said. "If such a thing ever entered my mind, one day when I am riding my horse, may I fall off and break my ribs."

"You deceitful young scamp," Jinlian said, "don't try to go too fast. I shall keep my eye on you." She and Yulou went to the back.

"I always seem to get into scrapes of this kind," Daian said to the other servants. "Father told me to go and fetch the Sixth Lady, and now the Fifth Lady turns and scolds me."

At the second door, Yulou and Jinlian met Laian. They asked him where Ximen Qing was. The boy told them that he was with Ying Bojue, Xie Xida and Han Daoguo, drinking wine.

"Brother Shutong," he added, "has dressed up as a singing girl and is singing for them. Wouldn't you like to go and see?"

The two ladies went and peeped through the window. Ying Bojue, already drunk, sat in the upper seat. His hat was on one side and his head was bobbing about as though it were pulled by strings. Xie Xida could not keep his eyes open. Shutong was still dressed as a girl, serving wine and singing Southern melodies. Ximen Qing told Qintong to put some powder on Bojue's face. Afterwards, the boy made a circlet of grass and, stealing behind Bojue, put it on his head. Yulou and Jinlian, standing outside, could not help laughing. "The scoundrel!" they said. "Sin will be his companion as long as he lives. He behaves just about as badly as anybody could do."

Ximen Qing heard the laughter outside and sent a boy to see who was there but the two women slipped away to the inner court.

It was the first night watch before the party broke up. Ximen Qing went to sleep in the Sixth Lady's room. When Jinlian went to her own apartment, she said to Chunmei: "What did the Sixth Lady say when she came home?"

"Nothing." Chunmei said.

Then Jinlian asked: "Did that shameless creature go to see her?"

"After the Sixth Lady came back," Chunmei said, "Father went twice to see her."

"Did the child really cry so much that he sent the boys to bring her home?"

"Yes," Chunmei said, "he screamed terribly this afternoon. Whether he was carried about or put in his cot, it made no difference. He cried, and no one could do anything for him. So somebody went and told Father, and he sent a boy to fetch her."

"In that case," Jinlian said, "all right. I suspected that that shameless creature had made up the whole thing so as to get her back. Whose clothes is Shutong wearing?"

"Daian came to me," Chunmei said, "but I soon packed him about his business. Finally, he got some from Yuxiao."

"If they ever come again," Jinlian said, "give nothing for that boy to wear." She realized that Ximen Qing was not coming to her that night, and she fastened her door and went angrily to bed.

To return to Ying Bojue. He had noticed that Ben the Fourth was in charge of all the work that was being done, and apparently making money thereby. Tomorrow he was going to take money to buy Xiang's house and would make at least several taels of silver out of that deal. So he was glad of the chance to score off Ben the Fourth, when he was so indiscreet as to tell that story, and to point out his little weaknesses. He had meant Ben the Fourth to know what he was doing. Ben the Fourth was greatly perturbed, and, the next day, he packed up three taels of silver and took them to Ying Bojue's house. Bojue pretended to be greatly surprised. "I have done nothing for you," he said, "why should you do this?"

"It is a long time since I made you any present," Ben the Fourth said, "and all I ask is that you will speak well of me to my master. If you will, I shall be eternally grateful to you."

Ying Bojue took the silver, offered a cup of tea to Ben the Fourth, and escorted him to the door. Then he took the silver to his room. "If a husband doesn't make his power manifest," he told his wife, "the wife will never get a new dress. I introduced that son of a dog Ben the Fourth to Ximen Qing and now he's his finger in every pie. And everything that comes in, he puts into his own bowl and ever thinks no more about it. Ximen leaves all the work on the estate to him and now he's going to buy Xiang the Fifth's place. He's done well for himself. But at the party yesterday, my chance came and I took it and showed him up. That frightened him and as I expected, today he came and gave me three taels of silver. Now we can buy some cloth and make clothes for the children through the winter."

## 057

## Chai Ch'ien Sends a Letter asking for a Young Girl; Hsi-men Ch'ing Patronises & Entertains the Laureate Principal Graduate Ts'ai

From Fu-ch'uan gazing into the distance west of Chien-chiang:!
I see only a solitary cloud formation blocking the sunset.

The tears that I am wont to shed, are lost amid the misty trees;
There is no way to transmit a letter, geese and fish are scarce.
My wish to enquire after you is impeded by three thousand li;
Separated as we are, I only long in vain all twenty-four hours.
Broad as the sea and high as Heaven[2] are my thoughts of you;
On whom can I rely to let you know the date of my return?

The next day Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling went out to the suburbs to welcome the new regional investigating censor. He also took the occasion to visit his country estate and reward the construction workers for their services. That evening, when he arrived home, he had no sooner come in the gate than P'ing-an reported, "Today a courier on his way from Tung-ch'ang prefecture to deliver documents to the capital stopped by to drop off a letter. He said that it was a letter addressed to you from His Honor Chai Ch'ien of the grand preceptor's household. I accepted it and had it taken back to the First Lady's quarters. The messenger will return for an answer tomorrow afternoon."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he went back to the master suite, opened the letter, and proceeded to peruse it. What did it have to say?

Respectfully indited by his devoted servant in the capital, Chai Ch'ien, for the perusal of the newly promoted officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing:

I have long admired your lofty eminence without having had the opportunity to meet you in person. As the repeated recipient of your lavish kindness, my sense of indebtedness knows no bounds. The instructions which you formerly transmitted to me are imprinted in my heart. In all things I will do everything in my power to uphold your interests where His Honor is concerned.

As for that trifling matter that I made bold to trouble you with by means of your esteemed servant, I imagine that you have already taken care of it for me. At present, taking advantage of a convenient messenger, I present you with my card and ten taels of silver as an inadequate expression of my esteem, as well as my concern for your well-being. I respectfully hope that you will see fit to vouchsafe me a reply, for which:

My gratitude will be impossible to contain.[3]

In addition, the new principal graduate Ts'ai, who is His Honor's adopted son, has received an imperial dispensation to return to his native place in order to visit his parents. His route will take him by your honorable place of abode, and I hope that you may be able to entertain him for a meal, a favor that he likewise will never dare to forget. Such is my earnest supplication.

Indited one day after the solar term Autumn Begins.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the letter, he sighed incessantly, saying, "Quickly, send a page boy to summon a matchmaker. What have I been doing to completely forget such a thing as this and allow it to slip out of my mind?"

"What is it?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang. "Tell me about it."

"Chai Ch'ien," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "the majordomo of His Honor the grand preceptor's household in the Eastern Capital, sent me a letter some time ago saying that he was without a son, and asking me if I could seek out a young girl hereabouts, no matter whether she be rich or poor, cost being no object, since all he cares about is that she be healthy. He wants her for the purpose of procreation. He said that no matter what the dowry and bride price might be, I should simply send him an itemized account, and he would promptly remit the silver. He promised that in the future he would do everything in his power to uphold my interests where His Honor is concerned with regard to my official career. I've been so busy for some time, what with assuming office and:

Seven of this and eight of that,[4]

that I completely forgot about it and allowed it to slip out of my mind. Lai-pao, also, has been going to the shop every day and has failed to remind me.

"Today, far away as he is, he has sent someone to deliver a letter asking how the nuptial arrangements are going, and also enclosing ten taels of silver in lieu of a congratulatory present. Tomorrow, when the courier comes for his answer, how am I to reply? He'll be as annoyed as can be.

"When the matchmaker comes, tell her, for better or for worse, to seek out such a person for him as fast as possible. He doesn't care whether the status of the family is high or low, as long as the girl is healthy. A fourteen- or fifteen-year-old, or even a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old, would do. Whatever the bride price may be, I will take care of it. Or, better yet, we could take Hsiu-ch'un from Li P'ing-erh's quarters-she's not bad looking- and give her to him."

"I must say," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "Are your legs on fire, you good-for-nothing? What have you been doing with yourself the last two or three months? When someone makes such a request of you, you ought to look for a genuine virgin on his behalf if you expect him to be grateful. As for that maidservant, you've already had your way with her, so how could it be appropriate to send her? If you take his request seriously, he'll exert his efforts on your behalf in the future. Right now you're trying to:

Sculpt a Buddhist effigy on the one hand,
While burning incense to it on the other.

Into such turbulent water you can hardly hope to insert an oar.

It's not like setting out to purchase something, when you can simply take your silver to the marketplace and buy it. Even young girls brought up in the women's quarters are not all the same. You've got to give the matchmaker time to deliberately make her rounds and size up the possibilities. You talk about it as nonchalantly as though it were an easy matter."

"Tomorrow, when he comes for an answer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what am I to tell him?"

"It's a wonder that someone like you, who is accustomed to adjudicating matters, should be at a loss to handle someone in a matter of this kind," said Yüeh-niang. "When that man comes tomorrow, give him a generous tip, and send him off with a written reply. All you need to say is that you've found a girl for him, but that her trousseau and dowry have not been entirely taken care of yet, and that you'll send someone from here to escort her on her way as soon as the preparations are complete. In the meantime, it won't be too late for you to delegate someone here to look for a suitable prospect. Thereby, you will:

Accomplish two objectives with a single act,[5]

bring about a favorable outcome, and feel that you have complied appropriately with his request."

"You've got a point there," Hsi-men Ch'ing said with a smile.

He then proceeded to send for Ch'en Ching-chi and instructed him to write the reply overnight.

The next day, when the courier arrived, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to interview him in person and asked, "When will the principal graduate Ts'ai's boat get here, so that I can prepare to receive him?"

"When I left," the man said, "His Honor Ts'ai had just taken leave of the court and was preparing to start out from the capital. Majordomo Chai said that he feared His Honor Ts'ai might be temporarily short of funds for the trip home, and that he hoped you might be good enough to lend him something, for which he would undertake to reimburse you if you wrote him the amount required."

"Tell His Honor Chai," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that no matter what he might need, I will:

Not fail to comply with his orders."

Having finished speaking, he directed Ch'en Ching-chi to usher him into an antechamber and entertain him with food and wine. When he was ready to leave, he turned the reply over to him and gave him five taels for his traveling expenses. The courier bowed in thanks, went happily out the gate, and set out on his long journey. Truly:

When thoughts are pressing one wants to wave the flying squirrel flag;
When the mind is eager one beats to tatters the purple flowered whip.[6]

Gentle reader take note: Originally An Ch'en[7] had been placed at the head of the list in the *chin-shih* examinations, but the censors had argued that because he was the younger brother of An Tun,[8] the grand councilor of a previous reign whose name had been proscribed, he could not be designated the first scholar of the realm. Emperor Hui-tsung thus had no alternative but to elevate Ts'ai Yün[9] to the number one position in his stead. Having been designated the principal graduate, he had offered himself as a protégé to Ts'ai Ching and been accepted as his adopted son. He had thereupon been appointed to a position as proofreader in the Palace Library and granted permission to return home in order to visit his parents.

To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang despatched page boys from the household to summon Old Mother Feng, Auntie Hsüeh, and other matchmakers, whom she directed to enquire everywhere for any family that had a healthy young daughter, so they could obtain a card with her vital statistics and discuss the match. But no more of this.

One day Hsi-men Ch'ing despatched Lai-pao to the port on the New Canal to wait for the arrival of Principal Graduate Ts'ai's boat. It so happens that he was traveling on the same boat with his fellow *chin-shih* graduate An Ch'en. This metropolitan graduate An Ch'en, because his family was too poor, had been unable to find a second wife. He had:

Lost out on the east, and
Fallen short on the west,

as a consequence of which, he, too, had taken leave of the court and was on his way home to seek a second wife. For this reason the two of them were traveling on the same boat.

When they arrived at the port on the New Canal, Lai-pao went aboard with Hsi-men Ch'ing's calling card and presented them with a gift for the road consisting of wine, noodles, chicken and goose delicacies, salt, soy sauce, and the like.

On top of all this, while Ts'ai Yün was still in the Eastern Capital, Chai Ch'ien had already said to him, "In Ch'ing-ho district there is a certain Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing who is also one of His Honor's protégés. He presides over a prominent family and is one of those who is:

Wealthy yet observant of the rites.[10]

As a result of His Honor's patronage, he currently holds a post as a judicial commissioner. When you arrive there, he is certain to entertain you lavishly."

Since this information was already:

Firmly fixed in his mind,

When Ts'ai Yün saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent his servant some distance to welcome him, and that he had also provided such a generous present, he was completely delighted.

The next day, when they arrived at Ch'ing-ho, he and his fellow metropolitan graduate, An Ch'en, went into the town to call upon Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, had already engaged a cook to prepare a feast on his premises. Because he had attended a party in the yamen of District Magistrate Li Ta-t'ien, where he had been impressed by the singing of a troupe of Su-chou actors, he had asked Shu-t'ung about them and been told that they were staying at Mo-tzu Ying-erh outside the South Gate. He had consequently engaged the services of four of them for the occasion.

Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün that day had wrapped up and sealed a chiffon kerchief, a book, and a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes, while Metropolitan Graduate An Ch'en had also prepared the customary book and kerchief, four bags of tender leaf tea, and four Hang-chou fans as presentation gifts. Both of them wore their official robes and black silk hats as they sent in their calling cards. Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, came out and ushered them into the reception hall, where they went through the social amenities and exchanged bows of salutation. Only after a servant had presented their gifts did they consent to sit down in the positions appropriate for guests and host.

Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün initiated the proceedings by raising his hand, inclining his body in his host's direction, and saying, "Worthy Sir, Chai Ch'ien in the capital was loud in your praise as the:

Distinguished scion of a prominent house,[11]

one of the great lineages of Ch'ing-ho. We have long admired your virtue and reputation without having the opportunity to make your acquaintance. Now that we have been enabled to pay our respects beneath your hall, we are fortunate indeed."

"You do me too much honor," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day I received a letter from Chai Ch'ien stating that the equipages of you two venerable gentlemen might condescend to come my way. I should certainly have gone forth to welcome you had I not been prevented from doing so by my official responsibilities. I hope that you will be magnanimous enough to forgive me."

"Might I enquire as to the native places and courtesy names of you two gentlemen?" he went on to ask.

"Your pupil is named Ts'ai Yün," replied Principal Graduate Ts'ai. "Though I currently reside in K'uang-lu, my native place is Ch'u-chou. My courtesy name is I-ch'üan, or One Spring. I have been lucky enough to be designated principal graduate and have received an appointment as proofreader in the Palace Library. I have been given an imperial dispensation granting me permission to return home and visit my parents. Not having anticipated Chai Ch'ien's praise of your surpassing virtue, I fear I have been tardy in paying my respects."

"Your pupil is a native of Ch'ien-t'ang district in Chekiang," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "and my courtesy name is Feng-shan. I currently hold a position as observer in the Ministry of Works and have also been granted permission to return home in order to seek a second wife. May I make bold to enquire, Worthy Sir, as to your distinguished courtesy name?"

"I am but a low-ranking official occupying a military office," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could I presume to affect a courtesy name?"

Only after being pressed repeatedly did he say, "My courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan, or Four Springs. Thanks to repeated acts of patronage on the part of His Honor Ts'ai Ching, and the support of Chai Ch'ien, I have been granted the rank of battalion commander in the Embroidered Uniform Guard and occupy a post as a judicial commissioner, for which, if the truth must be known, I am hardly qualified."

"Worthy Sir," responded Principal Graduate Ts'ai," you are:

A man of no ordinary ambition.[12]

Your reputation for elegance is well-known. There is no need to be so self-effacing."

When they had finished with the social amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited his guests to visit the summerhouse in his garden so they could loosen their formal clothing and relax, but Principal Graduate Ts'ai declined, saying, "My desire to return home is pressing, my boat is moored by the shore, and I feel compelled to be on my way. But having had the pleasure of contemplating your distinguished countenance, I do not wish to depart precipitously. What is to be done? What is to be done?"

"If you two gentlemen will condescend not to reject my snail-like abode," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I humbly beseech you to plant your literary banners here for the nonce, that I may detain you for the space of a meal, and thereby gratify my desire to offer you a meager entertainment."

"Since that is your gracious desire," responded Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "your pupils will comply with your command."

Thereupon, divesting themselves of their formal robes, the two of them sat down, while the attendants served another round of tea. Ts'ai Yün took advantage of the occasion to visually survey Hsi-men Ch'ing's premises.

Noting that the garden pools and decorated pavilions, the secluded luxuriance of the flowers and trees:

Stretched before them as far as the eye could see,

he was delighted by the prospect and:

Expressing the most fulsome admiration,

remarked hyperbolically, "Truly, a vista to rival the Isles of the Blest."

Thereupon, a table with an inlaid chessboard on its surface was set before them, and they commenced a game.

"I happen to have a couple of actors in attendance today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to enhance the pleasures of the feast."

"Where are they?" asked Metropolitan Graduate An. "Why not tell them to come in so we can have a look at them?"

In no time at all, the four actors knelt down and kowtowed to them.

"Which two play the leading male and female roles?" asked Principal Graduate Ts'ai. "And what are their names?"

Thereupon, a member of the troupe came forward, and said, "I play the leading male roles, and my name is Kou Tzu-hsiao. That one over there plays the leading female roles, and he is called Chou Shun. This one, who plays subsidiary female roles, is called Yüan Yen. And that one, who plays young male lead roles, is called Hu Ts'ao."

"Where are you actors from?" asked Metropolitan Graduate An.

"We are all natives of Su-chou," replied Kou Tzu-hsiao.

"Make yourselves up and come perform something for us," said Metropolitan Graduate An.

When the four actors retired to put on their makeup, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that female clothing, hairpins, and combs should be fetched from the rear compound and told Shu-t'ung to get dressed up with the rest. As a result, there were three actors playing female roles, and two playing males. The first piece they played was from the southern-style ch'uan-ch'i drama entitled *Hsiang-nang chi* (The scent bag).

Two place settings were provided for Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An at the upper end of the reception hall, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host below in order to keep them company. As they continued their drinking, the actors performed a scene from the play and then came over to join them.

Shu-t'ung's performance in a junior female role caught the eye of Metropolitan Graduate An, who asked, "And where does this actor come from?"

"This is my paltry servant, Shu-t'ung," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Calling him over, Metropolitan Graduate An rewarded him with a drink of wine, saying, "This youngster is absolutely marvelous. He could not be improved upon."

Principal Graduate Ts'ai also called the other performers over and rewarded them with wine, saying, "How about singing that song to the tune "New Year's Audience" that begins with the words:
Beside the flowers, beside the willows."
Kou Tzu-hsiao responded by standing to one side, clapping his hands to keep time, and singing:
Beside the flowers, beside the willows,
Beyond the eaves threads of gossamer curl.
Before the mountains, before the waters,
On horseback the eastern breeze is soft.
I sigh that the course of my journey,
Is like that of tumbling tumbleweed.
Though I gaze longingly toward my native place,
The geese are distant, the fish are submerged.[13]
The sorrow of separation fills my breast,
but who is there to transmit it?
Like the day lily, my mother's days are short.
My dreaming soul is drawn to her in vain.
Chorus:
Lo-yang is far away,
When will I ever ascend to the golden halls
of the nine-gated palace?[14]
When he had finished singing the first song, he went on to sing the next song in the suite, to the same tune as before:
Ten years have I toiled at blue lamp and yellow scrolls,[15]
Applying myself by firefly light at study window.[16]
At snow-lit desk I have expended studious effort,[17]
Hoping to shed honor on my family,
And bring added luster to my name.
I will enter the lists in the literary tournament.
Having mastered the three thousand rules of deportment,[18]
The five hundred successful heroes will contend
for their standings in the rank.
Quickly apply Tsu T'i's whip,[19]
The sooner to earn an audience with the emperor.
Chorus:
Lo-yang is far away,
When will I ever ascend to the golden halls
of the nine-gated palace?[20]
Metropolitan Graduate An addressed himself to Kou Tzu-hsiao, saying, "Do you know the song from the play *Yü-huan chi* (The story of the jade ring), which begins with the words:
Your kindness and virtue are without bounds?"
"That's a song to the tune 'Prelude to Painted Eyebrows,' " replied Kou Tzu-hsiao. "I do know it."
Your kindness and virtue are without bounds.
My feelings at meeting my new parents
are not shallow.
I am fortunate to be able to entrust my life to you,
Who have also granted me your daughter in marriage.
This meeting of wind and cloud[21] will enable me to
take flight on some future day;
This mating of male and female phoenix will lead to
inseparable harmony here and now.
Chorus:
Clearly they are not husband and wife
for this life alone,
In a former life jade was planted in Indigo Field.[22]
Shu-t'ung poured a round of drinks and then, clapping his hands to keep time, proceeded to sing the next song in the suite, to the same tune as before:
My tender body has just come of age.
The profoundness of my parents' kindness[23]
is as vast as the heavens.
Blushing at my inability to repay them,
This heart of mine is entangled.
For this mating of the mandarin ducks
I am bathed in their kindness.
Serving my husband with dustpan and broom,
I look forward to his success.
Chorus:
Clearly they are not husband and wife
for this life alone,
In a former life jade was planted in Indigo Field.[24]
It so happens that Metropolitan Graduate An Ch'en, as a native of Hang-chou, was enamored of the "southern breeze."[25] When he saw how well Shu-t'ung could sing, he pulled him over by the hand and the two of them passed the same cup of wine back and forth between them as they drank.
After some time, the wine ran out, and Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted them on a tour of the garden, after which they returned to the summerhouse and played a game of chess. He ordered a page boy to fetch two partitioned tabletop boxes containing thirty varieties of delicacies, fresh things in season, and so forth, for them to enjoy with their wine.
"Your pupils have just met you for the first time," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai Yün. "We really ought not to be the cause of any further inconvenience in your secluded mansion. It is growing late, and we had better bid you farewell."
"Whoever heard of such a thing?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Are you two gentlemen, when you depart, planning to return to your boat?" he went on to ask.
"We have arranged to avail ourselves of temporary quarters in the Buddhist Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate," replied Principal Graduate Ts'ai.
"Right now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "even if you are only going outside the gate, it's rather late. The best thing to do would be to keep a couple of your retainers here to wait on you, and send the rest back there, with instructions to return and fetch you in the morning. That way we could both have the opportunity to fully express our feelings."
"Although it is an indication of your love of hospitality, Worthy Sir," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "how can we avoid putting you to inordinate inconvenience?"
Thereupon the two of them directed all of their retainers, on the one hand, to return to the Buddhist temple outside the gate to spend the night, and, on the other, to bring horses to fetch them early the next morning. The crowd of retainers assented and took their leave. But no more of this.
The two of them played two games of chess in the summerhouse. The actors performed another two scenes from the play for their entertainment, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing, fearing that it was getting late, paid them for their services and sent them on their way. He only retained Shu-t'ung to pour the wine and wait on them at the feast. Gradually, as they continued drinking, it became time to light the lamps, and the two of them went outside to adjust their toilets.
Drawing Hsi-men Ch'ing aside with his hand, Principal Graduate Ts'ai said to him, "Your pupil, on this return home to visit his parents, is somewhat short of traveling expenses."
"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need for you to remind me. You can be sure that I will faithfully comply with Chai Ch'ien's esteemed behest."
After some time, he ushered his two guests back into the flower garden, saying, "There is another cozy little structure I would like you to see."
Showing the way to the two of them, he skirted the juniper hedge until he came to the "snow cave" in that secluded nook, the Hidden Spring Grotto. The interior was brightly illuminated with lamps and candles, and on a low zither stand there had already been laid out a lavish spread of delicacies and wine.
The couches and beds were precisely right;
Zither and books were elegantly displayed.
The drinking party was resumed, and Shu-t'ung was there to entertain them with his singing.
"Do you happen to know the song that begins with the words:
Red has entered into the palace peaches?"
asked Principal Graduate Ts'ai.
"That's a song to the tune "Moon over the Brocaded Hall," said Shu-t'ung. "I know it."
"Since you do know it," said Principal Graduate Ts'ai, "sing it for us."
Thereupon, after pouring another round of wine, Shu-t'ung, adopting a southern style of delivery, clapped his hands to keep time and sang:
Red has entered into the palace peaches,
Green has returned to the royal willows.
Orioles sing in the imperial park during early spring.
Blinds are rolled up to admit the eastern breeze,[26]
In silken garments the morning chill is still sharp.
Blessed that an immortal maiden has seen fit to
give a letter to the blue bird;[27]
I recall the kindness of my solicitous mother,
in emulation of the black crow.[28]
Chorus:
The prospect is beautiful.
I only wish our human situation were an eternal spring;
So we could prolong our revels on the Isles of the Blest.[29]
When Metropolitan Graduate An heard this performance, he was:
Unable to contain his delight,[30]
and, remarking to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "This youngster is deserving of respect," he raised his cup of wine and drank it off at one gulp.
Shu-t'ung, attired in:
Turquoise sleeves and red skirt,
and adorned with a gold lamé headband:
Lifting high a jade goblet,
offered up the wine and sang, to the same tune as before:
Hard to repay, our mother's exertions,
Her maternal kindness is without limit.
May she live as long as Red Pine and Wang-tzu Ch'iao.[31]
To wait upon her morning and evening.
Among my kin, there is my elder brother's wife.
In the spring breeze, the flowers of the cherry trees[32]
share their fragrance;

In the evening of the year, the pine and the cypress
maintain their integrity.
Chorus:
The prospect is beautiful.
I only wish our human situation were an eternal spring.
So we could prolong our revels on the Isles of the Blest.[33]
That evening they continued drinking until the middle of the night before retiring to rest. In both the Hidden Spring Grotto and the Kingfisher Pavilion, Hsi-men Ch'ing had provided beds and curtains and supplied quilts and mattresses of satin and brocade. After having deputed the two page boys, Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, to wait upon his guests, Hsi-men Ch'ing bade them good night and returned to the rear compound.
The next day, the attendants of Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An came to fetch them with bearers, sedan chairs, and horses. Hsi-men Ch'ing had a repast prepared for his guests in the reception hall and provided platters of assorted snacks, wine, and rice for their servitors. He had the two page boys bring forth his parting gifts in square boxes. For Principal Graduate Ts'ai there were a piece of satin brocade, two pieces of spun silk fabric for collar facings, five hundred pellets of storax, and a hundred taels of silver. For Metropolitan Graduate An there were a piece of variegated satin, one piece of spun silk fabric for collar facings, three hundred pellets of storax, and thirty taels of silver.
Principal Graduate Ts'ai repeatedly refused to accept the proffered gift, saying, "A loan of merely thirty taels would be sufficient. What need is there for such prodigality, and with your generous gifts to boot?"
"It is fitting that my fellow graduate should accept," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "but it would hardly be appropriate for me to do so."
"It is but a paltry gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "no more than an expression of my feelings on this occasion, Venerable Sir, of your triumphant return home in order to remarry. It is my humble hope that it may serve to alleviate the cost of a cup of tea."
Thereupon, the two of them both got up from their places to express their thanks, saying:
"These sentiments, this kindness,
When will they ever be forgotten?"[34]
After which, instructing their retainers to accept the gifts and put them away in their felt bags, they took their leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Once your pupils have departed, we will be:
At opposite ends of the world.[35]
Temporarily absenting ourselves from your instruction, on our return to the capital at some future date:
Should we advance but an inch in our careers,[36]
we will naturally feel obliged to repay your generosity."
"Though we must part today," said Metropolitan Graduate An, "I trust that on some future occasion we will have the opportunity to reciprocate by receiving your distinguished countenance."
"Though you've condescended to visit your pupil's snail-like abode," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I fear you've experienced but too shabby a reception. I hope that you'll be considerate enough to overlook it. I really ought to see you off for some distance weren't it for the responsibilities of my office. I must therefore bid you a premature farewell." Accompanying his two visitors as far as the gate, he watched as they mounted their horses and departed. Truly, having won the right of "returning to one's home in brocade robes"; [37]such success alone "enables one to believe that he is a real man."

My heart is oppressed when I think of the distance before me
My spirit shrinks with fear before the journey I must take.
How can I not dread the hardship of the way?
Yet always I think of my duty to my country.
Ji Bu never forgot his promise
Hou Ying was faithful to his word.
In human hearts devotion always conquers
And men give up the thought of gold.

The next morning, Ximen Qing went with his colleague Xia to welcome the new governor. He also went to see his new property and distributed gifts to all the workmen to show his appreciation of their labors. It was late when he reached home. As soon as he came to the gate, Ping'an told him that a messenger from Dongchangfu had brought a letter for him from Zhai, the Comptroller of the Imperial Tutor's household. "I took the letter to my mistress's room," he said. "Tomorrow about noon the messenger will call for your answer." Ximen Qing hastened to the upper room, opened the letter, and read it.
To be delivered at the mansion of the most worthy Ximen [it read]. For long I have been hearing of your fame and great renown, but it is long too since I beheld your glorious countenance. I have often benefited by your most gracious kindness, and it is almost impossible for me to express my sense of indebtedness.
Some time ago, you were good enough to convey to me your instructions, and I have engraved them upon my heart. In every possible manner, I have done my utmost to serve you with his Eminence. So now, if I may trouble you about a trifle, there is a matter that I have already mentioned to your worthy attendant, and, doubtless, you have done what I desired. I take this opportunity of sending you my humble card together with ten taels of gold. Now I await your convenience. Meanwhile, may I present my best respects and trust that your high-mightiness will condescend to reply. Your kindness shall be ever in my heart.
The new laureate, Cai Yiquan, is His Eminence's ward. He has just received the Imperial Command to return to his native place to visit his parents. He will pass by your honorable mansion and I trust you may find it possible to entertain him. He will be grateful for any kindness you may show him.
From my heart, the day after the Autumn Day, your servant Zhai Qian at the Capital.
When he had read this letter, Ximen Qing sighed. "Send a boy for a go-between at once," he cried. "However did I come to forget all about this matter?"
"What are you talking about?" Wu Yueniang said.
"Comptroller Zhai, of the Imperial Tutor's household," Ximen said, "wrote to me the other day. He said he had no son and asked me to find a young girl for him. He does not care whether she is rich or poor, and expense is no object with him. He simply wishes to find a good girl who will present him with a son and heir. He said if I told him what I spent on wedding presents he would repay me in full. And he said he would do all he could for me with the Imperial Tutor. But I have been so busy going to the office and attending to one matter and another, that I had forgotten all about it, and Laibao has not reminded me, since he is at the shop every day. Now Zhai has been put to the trouble of sending someone all this way with a letter, and he asks me what has been done in the matter, and sends a present of ten taels. Tomorrow the messenger is coming for an answer. What can I say to him? He will be very angry. Send at once for the go-between and tell her to find a girl without delay. She need not trouble about the girl's family. She must be a good girl and somewhere about sixteen or eighteen years old, that's all. Whatever it costs, I will pay. Wait! Why shouldn't we send him Xiuchun, the Sixth Lady's maid? She is a pretty girl."
"You lazybones!" Yueniang said, "what have you been thinking about? He asked you to get him a really fine girl, and you ought to have done so. But you yourself have not left Xiuchun alone; we can't send her. You must treat this business as one of real importance. Sometime in the future Zhai may be very useful to you. If you let your boat drift into the rapids, how can you use your oars? It isn't like buying ordinary merchandise, where you go to the market with your money and carry off what you like. When you are buying a girl, you must wait and give the go-between a chance, and see one after another. Some girls are good and some are bad. You don't seem to realize that it is not a simple matter."
"But he wants an answer tomorrow," Ximen Qing said. "What am I to say to him?"
"Have you been a magistrate all this time and can't manage a little affair like this? Tell the boy to be ready for the messenger when he comes; give him plenty of journey money and a letter saying that you have found the girl, but that her clothes and things are not ready yet, and you will send her as soon as they are. When the messenger has gone, you can get someone to find a girl for you. There will be plenty of time. That's the way out of your difficulty, and you will have done a good day's work."
Ximen Qing smiled. "You are right," he said. He sent for Chen Jingji to write the letter. Next day when the messenger came, Ximen Qing himself went to see him and questioned him. "When does the Laureate's boat arrive? I must get ready to welcome him."
"When I left the Capital," the man said, "he had just left the court. Master Zhai said he feared the Laureate might be short of money for his expenses, and perhaps you would lend him some. Then, perhaps, you will write to Master Zhai, and he will repay you."
"Tell Master Zhai," Ximen Qing said, "that no matter how much the Laureate needs, I will gladly lend it to him." He told Chen Jingji to take the messenger to an anteroom and entertain him. When he was ready to leave, Ximen gave him a letter and five taels of silver for journey money. The man made a reverence and set out well pleased upon his long journey.
It may be remembered that some time before, An Shen had passed the examination in the highest place, but that the censors had objected that he was the younger brother of An Zhun, who had been the first minister in the last reign. As a younger son of an evil party, they declared, he must not be placed at the head of all the scholars. Consequently, Huizong could not do otherwise than put Cai Yun in the position. Cai Yun then went to the palace of the Imperial Tutor to be his ward. Later, he was appointed head of the office of Secret Archives, and given leave to go and visit his parents.
Wu Yueniang sent a boy for the two old women Feng and Xue, and another marriage maker. She told them to make a thorough search for a good girl, and to bring her full particulars when they thought they had found one.
One day Ximen Qing instructed Laibao to go to the river to see what he could find out about Cai's boat. Cai was traveling on the same boat as An Zhun, who had been given the third degree at the same examination as himself. An was so poor that he had not remarried. He seemed to be unlucky in every way. He had left the Court to try to find a wife in his native place, and so the two scholars came to be traveling together on the same boat.
Laibao took Ximen Qing's card and went on board. He had a dinner sent from the shore.
Before the Laureate had left the Capital, Zhai had told him that at Qinghe he would meet a certain Captain Ximen, one of the Imperial Tutor's clients. "He is a rich man," Zhai had said, "and a very pleasant fellow. It was through his Eminence's influence that he came into his present position. I am sure that he will entertain you most hospitably if you should go there."
The Laureate had not forgotten this and he was delighted when he found that Ximen Qing's servant had come so far to meet him, bringing such a handsome present.
The next day, he and An came to call on Ximen Qing who had arranged a feast in their honor. Ximen had seen a number of actors and singers from Suzhou, and now he sent for four of them. Cai offered a present of a silk handkerchief, a number of books, and a pair of shoes. An brought a gift of books and a handkerchief, with four bags of young tea and four Hang-zhou fans. Both the scholars wore robes of ceremony and black hats, and sent their cards before them. Ximen Qing, wearing his ceremonial hat, welcomed them and invited them to go to the great hall. There they made reverences to one another; the two young men offered their presents to Ximen Qing, and they all sat down in the proper order of guests and host.
"My friend Zhai at the Capital," the Laureate said to Ximen Qing, "has spoken very highly of you. He says your honorable family is the most important in Qinghe. Consequently, I have been longing to see you for some time, but this is the first opportunity I have had. Now that today I have been permitted to enter your hall, I feel that Heaven has indeed been gracious to me."
"You are unduly kind," Ximen said. "I had a letter from Master Zhai the other day telling me that your worthinesses were about to visit us on your emblossomed boat. I should have been there to welcome you, but, unfortunately, my official duties would not allow me. I must most humbly beg your pardon. May I be allowed the honor of knowing from what enchanted country and glorious family you worthy gentlemen come?"
"The humble student before you," Cai said, "is a native of Kuanglu in Chuzhou, and his poor name is Yiquan. I had the good fortune to take the first place in the examination and to receive an appointment as head of the Department of Secret Archives. At the moment, I am on leave, and on my way to visit my parents."
"The humble student before you," An said, in his turn, "is a native of Qiantang of Zhejiang, and his undistinguished name is Fengshan. I have just received the appointment of Inspector of the Board of Works. I, too, am on leave and am returning to marry in my native place. May we know your own honorable second name?"
"I am only a poor military officer of low rank," Ximen Qing said. "How should I dare to allow myself to be called by my second name?" When they pressed him, he said at last: "My poor name is Siquan. I have frequently been favored by the kindness of his Eminence through the good offices of Master Zhai, and, in that way, was granted my present appointment as Captain. I perform certain legal duties but am really quite unfitted for the post."
"Honored Sir," the Laureate said, "you are not a man of mean ambition, and your reputation for delicacy has long been known. Do not let us stand on ceremony with one another."
Ximen Qing invited them to take off their robes of ceremony in the pavilion in the garden. But the Laureate said: "I am anxious to get home and our boat is at the wharf. Really I ought to go now. Yet, since I have basked in the sunshine of your company, I feel I cannot leave you so soon. What shall I do? What shall I do?"
"If you two noble gentlemen," Ximen Qing said, "do not disdain this snail's abode, pray let the banner of literature rest here a while. Take a little food with me, and let a small repast of celery prove the earnest of my goodwill."
"Since we are offered such exalted hospitality," the Laureate said, "we humble students can do no less than obey your commands." They took off their ceremonial robes and sat down.
The servants brought more tea. Cai looked about him. The garden, the pool, the pavilions and the flowers stretched so far and were so luxuriant that he could not see everything at a single glance. "This is fairyland," he said delightedly. A table was set and they played chess.
After a while, Ximen said: "I have brought a few actors here today for your amusement."
"Where are they?" An said. "Why not send for them?"
In a moment the four actors appeared and kowtowed.
"Which of you take the part of the hero and heroine?" Cai said. "And what are your names?"
One replied: "I take the hero's part; my name is Gou Zixiao. This is the heroine and he is called Zhou Shun. This one takes the second part: he is called Yuan Dan, and the other, the young man, is Hu Zao."
An asked them where they came from. Gou Zixiao said they were from Suzhou. "Good!" said An. "Now go and dress and then play for us."
The four actors went away to dress. Ximen Qing told someone to find women's clothes and ornaments for them. He told Shutong to dress up too. So, three women and two men, they played from *The Incense Sachet*.
At the upper end of the great hall two tables were set. The two scholars sat in the seats of honor, and Ximen Qing in the host's place. While they drank their wine the actors finished one act. An saw Shutong dressed as a girl and asked who he was.
"That is my boy Shutong," Ximen Qing told him. An called the boy to him and gave him some wine. "This boy excels all the boys I have ever seen," he said. Meanwhile Cai summoned the actors who had taken the parts of girls and gave wine to them. Then he called for the song of Chao Yuan. Gou Zixiao obeyed, and, clapping his hands, began.
By the willows and the flowers
The spider weaves a glistening web under the eaves.
Beside the mountains and the waters
The east wind is kind to the horse's back.
But I must journey like a wandering spirit
Dreaming about my home, whether I will or not.
The geese are silent, and the fishes deep beneath the water
And my heart is broken with the pain of separation
The day is short. My mother, in the northern hall, wearies of her dreams.
When shall I come to the Ninth Palace of Gold?
Then An asked Shutong, if he knew the lines beginning: "The mercy of the gods is infinite" from *The Jade Bracelet*. "I do," Shutong said, and began.
The mercy of the gods is infinite
I met my father and my mother again
It is a kindness man may seldom hope for.
Fortune has given me a peaceful life, a worthy mate.
I fly as the clouds fly in the wind
My love to me is like a female phoenix to her mate.
True it must be that not in this life marriages are made
And, in my last life, I must have set the jade in Lantian.
An, who was from Hangzhou, was fond of boys. He was delighted with Shutong's singing, held his hand, and took wine from his mouth.
After a time they had all had wine enough, and Ximen Qing took his guests to look at the gardens. They played chess in the summerhouse. Ximen told the boys to bring two boxes filled with every kind of delicacy to eat with their wine.
"This is the first time we have met you," the Laureate said. "We must not place too great a strain upon your hospitality. It is late and we should go."
"Noble Cai," Ximen cried, "how can you think of going yet? Are you really thinking of going back to your boat?"
"I propose to spend the night in the Temple of Eternal Felicity, outside the walls," Cai said.
"It is too late for you to go outside the city now," Ximen Qing said. "Keep one or two of your attendants here and let the rest return tomorrow for you. Then we shall all be content."
"I greatly appreciate your kindness," Cai said, "but I hesitate to give you so much trouble." Nevertheless, he and his companion told their servants to go to the temple and spend the night there, and come again in the morning with their horses. They played two games of chess in the summerhouse, and the actors performed till it was late. Then Ximen paid and dismissed them. Shutong alone remained to serve wine and other things.
They drank till it was dark and the lamps were lighted. Then they went to change their clothes. The Laureate took Ximen Qing's hand and said to him:

"I am going home to see my parents, and I am a little short of money."
"Please do not let that trouble you," said Ximen, "I shall be only too glad to do what Master Zhai suggested."
He asked the scholars to go into the garden with him and led them around the white wall till they came to the Cave of Spring and into the Snow Cavern. There the lamps and candles were lighted. The place was comfortable and warm. A table was set with fruits and wine, and couches were arranged, with books and musical instruments. There they drank wine again and Shutong sang for them.
"Do you know the song about the Fairy Peaches touched with red?" the Laureate asked Shutong.
"Yes, I think I remember it," the boy answered, "it goes to the tune of the 'Moon in the Hall of Tapestries.'" He poured wine for them, then clapped his hands and began to sing.
An's feelings were indescribably moved. "The boy is perfectly adorable," he said to Ximen Qing. He emptied his cup.
Shutong was wearing a green gown with a red skirt, a golden ribbon at his waist. He raised the jade cup high in the air to offer wine to them, and then sang another song. They enjoyed themselves until far into the night. At last they were ready to go to bed. Ximen Qing had had silken coverlets prepared for them in the Cave of Spring and the Kingfisher Hall. He told Shutong and Daian to wait on them. Then he said good-night and went to the inner court.
The next morning the servants came for the two scholars, bringing horses and sedan chairs. Ximen Qing had food made ready in the great hall, and refreshments for all the attendants. Two boys brought in square boxes of presents. To the Laureate Cai he offered a roll of gold silk, and silk for making collars, perfume and a hundred taels of white gold. He gave to An a roll of colored satin, one piece of silk for collars, perfume, and thirty taels of white gold. The Laureate at first refused to accept it. "Ten taels will be quite sufficient for my needs," he said. "Why should you give me so much? You are too generous."
"Brother Cai," An said, "you accept, but I dare not."
Ximen Qing smiled. "These trifling things are nothing more than a token of my regard for you. You are going home and you are about to take a wife. I should like to help you to get a little tea."
The scholars rose and thanked him. "We shall never forget your kindness," they said. Then they bade their servants remove the presents. "We must go," Cai said to Ximen Qing, "and renounce the benefit of your instruction for a while. But before long we shall be returning to the Capital. Then, if a slight measure of advancement should come to us, we shall do something to return your kindness."
"I hope to behold the glory of your dignity again," An said.
"Indeed," Ximen said, "I only hope your honour's not been tarnished by this stay in my snail's nest. I beg your indulgence for all that has been done amiss. I'd come to see you on your way but unfortunately, my duty calls me and I can only say goodbye." He took them to the outer gate and watched them mount their horses.

## 058
## Old Mother Feng Urges the Marriage of Han Ai-chieh; Hsi-men Ch'ing Espouses Wang Liu-erh as a Mistress

Time passes languidly aboard the light vessels on the waterways of Wu;
Parting cups were refilled and you indulgently supported my unsteady gait.
On the blue sea you may be assailed by sorrow as light flickers lambently;
Among scattered peaks I can hardly object to the colors of divergent shades.
As you are propelled forward by your orchid oars how full are your feelings;
While I am reduced to leaning on the balustrade as the sun sets in the west.
Amid misty waves, so near and yet so far, how vast is the distance between us;
There is no need for you to harbor in your breast a sense of redoubled sadness.

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw off Principal Graduate Ts'ai and Metropolitan Graduate An as they made their departure.
One day, as he was riding on horseback, wearing his eye shades and preceded by an escort who shouted to clear the way, he ran into Old Mother Feng.
He sent a page boy to call her to a halt and question her, saying, "Father says to ask you how things are going with that girl you were commissioned to look for. Why haven't you come to the house to report on it?"
The old woman promptly stepped up to him and said, "These last few days, although I've looked over a number of prospects, all of them were the daughters of butchers or carriers, about whom it would not have been appropriate to report back to you. Who could have anticipated that:
As providence would have it,
there has been a girl from a suitable family right before my eyes all along, that I simply failed to remember. She's as talented as she can be and was born in the year of the horse, so next year she'll be just fourteen years old. If I hadn't passed by her place yesterday and been invited in for a cup of tea by her mother, who was standing at the door, I wouldn't have had the chance to see her. It hasn't been more than a few days since she's started to put up her hair in a cloud-shaped chignon. Her posture is as straight as the handle of a writing brush. She has two tiny bound feet. Her face is heavily made up, and she's got a little bit of a mouth. In fact, she's as captivating as an elf.
"Her mother says that she was born on the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month, and her informal name is Ai-chieh, or Love. Quite aside from the fact that she appears to be lovable to us womenfolk, if you were to set eyes on her yourself, sir, you'd fall in love with her to I know not what extent."
"What a crazy old crone you are!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What would I want with her for no good reason? I've got more than enough of that sort of thing at home as it is. The truth of the matter is that Master Chai Ch'ien, the majordomo of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital, is looking for a concubine, with a view to procreation, and asked me to see if I could find one for him. If you can come up with a prospect that satisfies him, it will certainly redound to your benefit."
"Who's daughter is it?" he went on to ask. "See if you can get a card from them with the year, month, day, and hour of her birth, and bring it to me to look at."
"Who's family does she belong to?" said Old Mother Feng. "I'll tell you all about it, sir.
Distant, it is not a thousand li;
Close, it is but a stone's throw.[1]
It's not as though she were anyone else. She's the daughter of Han Tao-kuo, the manager of your silk goods shop. If you want to take a look at her, just wait until I've had a word with her old man, obtained the card with her vital statistics, and settled on a day, and you can go see for yourself."
"If you can manage it thus and so," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed her, "go ahead and speak to him about it, and, if he agrees, get the card with her vital statistics, and come back to my place to report on the situation."
The old woman assented to this and went her way.
Two days later, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting in the front reception room, he suddenly caught sight of Old Mother Feng, who had come back to report to him. She handed him the card with the girl's vital statistics, which read, "The young woman, née Han, is fourteen years old and was born on the fifth day of the fifth month, at midnight."
"I told her old man what you had said to me," she reported, "and he replied that if Your Honor should see fit to show her such favor, it would also be his daughter's good fortune. The only problem is that his household is poor, so they don't have the wherewithal to handle the necessary expenses."
"Tell him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that it won't cost him so much as a thread in the way of expenditure. Everything required in the way of clothing, jewelry, trousseau, furniture, etc., will be taken care of by me, and I'll even provide him with twenty taels of silver in the way of a bride price on behalf of the groom. Tell him that if his household takes care of no more than her shoes and footbindings, that will suffice. When the time comes, I'll also arrange to have her old man escort her to the Eastern Capital.
"Her status will not be comparable to that of an ordinary concubine. Majordomo Chai is seeking a mate with a view to procreation and may well treat her like a wife. If his daughter should be fortunate enough to bear him so much as:
A single boy or half a girl,[2]
there is no reason to doubt that she would end up enjoying great wealth and distinction."
"They would like to know," asked Old Mother Feng, "when you will pay them a visit in order to have a look at her, so they can prepare themselves accordingly."
"As long as they are agreeable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll just go over there tomorrow and take a look at her. He's been sending me one letter after another, he's so anxious about it. Tell them not to make any special preparations for me. I'll just drink a cup of clear tea and be on my way."
"Your Honor," said Old Mother Feng, "you're:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door.
Though what they provide may not amount to anything special, you ought to stay and sit for a while. Since it's your own employee's home, you can hardly expect them to skimp if you pay them a visit."
"You've got it all wrong," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What you don't understand is that I've got other things to do."
"If that's the way it's to be," said Old Mother Feng, "I'll go tell them about it."
She then betook herself to Han Tao-kuo's house and told his wife, Wang Liu-erh, word for word, everything that had been arranged, saying, "His Honor, back at his residence, took a look at the card with your daughter's vital statistics and was as pleased as could be. He says that it won't cost you so much as a thread in the way of expenditure. Everything required in the way of dowry and trousseau will be taken care of at his place, and he'll even provide you with twenty taels of silver in the way of a bride price on behalf of the groom. All you'll need to do is to make sure that your daughter is supplied with the customary handmade shoes and footbindings for the occasion. When the day arrives, he'll even arrange for your husband to escort her to her new home. And if, by any chance, your daughter should become pregnant in:
A year or half a year,[3]
it will be a piece of good luck for your entire family, and there is no reason to doubt that you will end up enjoying great wealth and distinction.
"Tomorrow, when his stint at the yamen is over, he'll pay you a visit in order to take a look at her. He says that you shouldn't make any special preparations for him, or expect him to stay for long; that he'll just drink a cup of tea, have a look at her, and be on his way."
"Really, Mother," said Wang Liu-erh. "You wouldn't tell me a story, would you?"
"Surely you don't mean to suggest that, if your employer had not spoken thus, I would come and try to put one over on you. It's not as though he's got nothing else to do. At his place:
People come and people go,
Altogether without ceasing."
When the woman heard these words, she got together some wine and food for the old lady and then sent her on her way with the injunction, "Come and help me out first thing tomorrow."
That evening, when Han Tao-kuo got home, the woman settled the arrangements for the morrow with him. In the morning, he got up early and went to Kao-ching, or High Well,[4] to order a carrier-load of sweet water, and he also bought some premium-grade nuts, which he left off at home before setting out for the shop to conduct his business.
He left his wife at home:
Alluringly dressed and heavily made up,
decked out in such a way as to make a spectacle of herself. She took the trouble to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before wiping clean the cups and goblets, shelling the nuts, and brewing some good tea, as she awaited the advent of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Old Mother Feng had already showed up to make sure everything was ready for her visitor.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing was through with his duties at the yamen, he went home to change into informal clothes, donned a "loyal and tranquil hat," [5] mounted his horse, put on his eye shades, and, accompanied by the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, proceeded straight to Han Tao-kuo's house, where he dismounted and went in.
Old Mother Feng hastened to invite him inside and gave him a seat. After some time, Wang Liu-erh, leading her daughter Ai-chieh, came out to greet him. Hsi-men Ch'ing hardly bothered to look at the daughter but couldn't take his eyes off the woman. He saw that, above, she was wearing a jacket of purple satin, a jet silk vest, and a jade-colored skirt, beneath which appeared the up-turned tips of her two feet, enclosed in black satin shoes with gold spangled toes. She was tall of stature and had a rosewood complexion and a face shaped like a melon seed, the temples of which were adorned with two long spit curls. Truly:
Before knowing what she's like on the inside,
One observes how slickly she is tricked out.
Behold:
Glossy and smooth,
Without benefit of makeup,[6]
By nature, her demeanor is alluring.[7]
Slender and graceful,[8]
Too indolent to use powder,
Innately, her persona is enchanting.[9]
Her two eyebrows resemble distant hills;
Her pair of eyes are like autumn waters.[10]
Her sandalwood mouth is barely open;
Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction
and butterflies to madness.
Her slender waist is constricted;
Covertly suggesting thoughts
of breezes and moonlight.
If she is not Ts'ui Ying-ying
bent on an assignation;[11]
She must surely be Cho Wen-chün
appreciating the zither.[12]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her:
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,
to such an extent that:
He was unable to control himself.
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"So this is the sort of woman Han Tao-kuo keeps in his house. No wonder that bunch of scamps the other day were out to molest her."
He also noticed that her daughter cut quite a striking figure and thought to himself, "With a mother who looks like that, how could her daughter be anything but good-looking?"
The woman made him an obeisance, after which she instructed her daughter, Ai-chieh, to come over. Facing Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
she kowtowed to him four times, after which she got up and stood in attendance to one side. Old Mother Feng made haste to bring in some tea, and the woman brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup before telling her daughter to offer it to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked the young woman over from tip to toe.
Raven locks pile up beside her temples;
Powder and cosmetics adorn her cheeks.

Her carriage exhibits the rare beauty of a secluded flower;
Her full flesh is a delicate jade that exudes its own bouquet.[13]
He then ordered Tai-an to get the betrothal gifts, consisting of two embroidered handkerchiefs, four gold rings, and twenty taels of silver, out of his felt bag and directed Old Mother Feng to place them on the tea tray. Her mother lost no time in putting the rings on her daughter's hands, after which she bowed to him in thanks and returned to her room.
"In another couple of days," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the woman, "I'll send someone to bring your daughter over to my place to be fitted for her trousseau. You can use this silver to make shoes and footbindings for her at home."
The woman hastily kowtowed to him once more and thanked him, saying, "We all belong to Your Honor:
From the crowns of our heads to the soles of our feet, and we have put you to this additional trouble on behalf of our daughter. The two of us:
Though we should forfeit our lives could not repay you.[14]
We are obliged to Your Honor for everything and are especially grateful for your generous provision of betrothal gifts."
"Is Manager Han not at home?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"This morning, after discussing matters with me, he went off to the shop," the woman said. "Tomorrow I'll have him go over to your place and kowtow to you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing that the woman was glib with her tongue, and that the words "Your Honor this, and Your Honor that" were seldom out of her mouth, felt himself irresistibly attracted to her.
As he was about to take his leave, he announced to her, "I'm on my way."
"Stay a little longer," the woman said.
"I can't stay any longer," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, he proceeded out the door, went straight home, and told Wu Yüeh-niang everything that had happened.
Yüeh-niang said, "It is a case of:
A marriage affinity between people a thousand li apart connects them by a single thread.[15]
As long as this daughter of Manager Han's is suitable, we will not have expended our efforts in vain."
"Sometime soon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send someone to bring her over here to stay for a couple of days in order to be fitted for her trousseau, and, right now, I'll begin by spending ten taels of silver to have half a set of jewelry, hairpins, bracelets, and the like, made up for her."
"You'd better have them made up as quickly as possible," said Yüeh-niang. "If we can get her old man to escort her on this trip, we won't have to send anyone ourselves."
"We might as well resign ourselves to closing the shop for a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and get Lai-pao to accompany him, so he can enquire at the residence whether or not the gifts for Commandant-Escort Ts'ai T'iao that we despatched by the adjutant the other day have actually arrived."
To make a long story short, two days later Hsi-men Ch'ing actually sent a page boy to fetch the daughter of the Han family. Her mother, Wang Liu-erh, had purchased an appropriate gift and personally accompanied her.
When they arrived, she kowtowed and was introduced to Yüeh-niang and the rest of the womenfolk of greater and lesser status, saying, "I'm imposing upon you."
"His Honor and the First Lady," she went on to say," as well as all the rest of you ladies, have condescended to show such favor to our daughter that, speaking for the two of us:
Our gratitude knows no bounds."
At first they were served tea in Yüeh-niang's room, after which they were entertained in the main room of the master suite. Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh all kept them company.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had purchased two bolts of red and green Lu-chou pongee and two bolts of poplin, with which to make lingerie for her, and had also called in Tailor Chao to make her two sets of brocaded satin clothing and a gown of figured scarlet satin.
Her mother, Wang Liu-erh, did her best to set her daughter at ease before going home that evening.
Hsi-men Ch'ing also bought a lacquer chest adorned with gold tracery for her trousseau, a dressing case, a mirror stand, boxes and jars, a brass and a pewter basin, a slop pail, a brazier grate, and so forth.
This was not the work of a day, but everything was finally taken care of. A letter was written and the tenth day of the ninth month was selected for her departure. Hsi-men Ch'ing obtained the services of four couriers from the district yamen and also deputed two orderlies, carrying dispatch cases and armed with bows and arrows, to accompany her. Lai Pao and Han Tao-kuo hired four horses for themselves and, following closely behind the wagons and the closed sedan chair, escorted her on her way to the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.
Wang Liu-erh, who was left at home without either her husband or her daughter for company, cried over it for two or three days.
One day Hsi-men Ch'ing, having nothing else to do, rode his horse over to look in on the house on Lion Street, where Old Mother Feng offered him some tea.
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a tael of silver, saying, "I'm much indebted to you in that matter of Manager Han's daughter the other day. You can buy something to wear with this tael of silver."
The old woman made haste to kowtow to him in gratitude.
"Have you been over to their place anytime in the last couple of days?" Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask.
"Not a day has gone by that I haven't gone over there to keep her company," said Old Mother Feng. "Ever since her daughter left she's really had no one to rely on at home. As a mother she had grown dependent on her. She cried over it for two or three days. It's only in the last couple of days that she's reconciled herself somewhat to the situation.
"She also said that she was much beholden to you in the matter of her daughter and asked me, 'Has His Honor given you anything in the way of a gratuity for your pains?' I replied, 'The gentleman is busy, and I haven't been over to his place the last several days. It is not my place to concern myself with how much or how little he may give me.' She also promised that when her husband returned I would be handsomely rewarded."
"When her old man returns," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he's bound to have picked up a little something and could hardly fail to express his gratitude to you."
After they had talked for a while, seeing that:
There was nobody about,
he stealthily whispered into the old woman's ear, thus and so, "Whenever you're free, go over to her place and exercise your ingenuity in broaching the subject, but just say politely that I'd like to drop by and visit her for a while sometime when I'm free, and see how she reacts, whether she agrees or not. I'll come back tomorrow to find out how she responds."
The old woman covered her mouth with her hand and laughed sardonically, saying, "Sir, you're just like:
An itinerant shoemaker tempted by an unmarried girl;
Wherever two hides meet you'll cobble them together.[16]
Having dug up a silver doll with a thrust of the spade;
You are bent on acquiring its mother into the bargain.
Later this evening I'll gradually make bold to broach the subject with her. You're not acquainted with this woman, sir. She's the younger sister of Butcher Wang, who slaughters cattle on our back street here. As the sixth sibling in her generation of the family, she's called Wang Liu-erh, or Wang the Sixth. She was born in the year of the snake, so she's twenty-eight years old. Although she dolls herself up in such a way as to make a spectacle of herself, it doesn't follow that she is promiscuous. Be sure to come back tomorrow, sir, after I've had a chance to sound her out, and I'll have something to report to you."
"That's it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and, having finished speaking, he mounted his horse and went home.
The old woman, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, prepared a meal for herself, ate it, locked the door of the house, and made her way slowly to Oxhide Lane where the woman lived.
The woman opened the door, ushered her into an inner room, and offered her a seat, saying, "Yesterday I prepared a batch of noodles for you, but you didn't show up."
"I certainly intended to come," the old woman said, "but I went to someone else's place and got so tangled up with one thing and another that I was unable to get away."
"I've just prepared some steaming hot rice," said the woman, "and some stir-fried wheat gluten. Have something to eat."
"I've just finished eating," the old woman said, "but I'll sip some tea."
The woman then served her a cup of strong tea, and she looked on as her host ate her meal.
"You can see how forlorn I am," the woman said. "I've allowed myself to become so dependent on that heartless darling of mine that, ever since she left, the house seems completely deserted. I've got to do everything myself now, with the result that:
My nose is dingy,
My mouth is sooty,[17]
and I hardly look like a human being. It might even have been better if she had died and left me with a broken heart. This way, when she's so:
Far away from home,
how would you have me put her out of my mind? However urgently I long to see her, there's no way it can be done."
As she spoke her eyes felt sour and she began to cry.
"It hardly bears repeating," the old woman said, "but it was ever thus.
When a boy is born, everyone feels hot with excitement;
When a girl is born, everyone feels coldly indifferent.
Though she should live to be a hundred years old;
Sooner or later, she will belong to someone else.
However much you may complain about it today, in the future, when your daughter is installed in the mansion, she will start out on a firm footing. If she should bear so much as:
A single boy or half a girl,
the two of you will be in a position to enjoy yourselves and no longer have any reason to complain about me."
"When it comes to the doings in a prominent household," the woman said, "there are bound to be:
Layers within layers.
Who knows how things will turn out? By the time any child of hers amounts to anything, our jawbones may have long since been exposed to the elements somewhere."
"How can you say such a thing?" the old woman said. "Your daughter is as smart as they come. There's no need to worry about her as far as needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments are concerned. Who is there that scruples to:
Depend upon his marriage connections for his daily bread,
that you should be worried on her behalf?"
The two of them talked for some time, passing the same cup of wine back and forth between them, until the conversation gradually started to warm up, whereupon the old woman said, "I've got a silly proposition to make to you. Your husband is away from home, so that both the front and rear quarters of your house are completely deserted. In the evenings, when you're left all by yourself, aren't you afraid?"
"You're a fine one to talk when it's you who got me into this fix in the first place," the woman said. "You really ought to come over in the evenings to keep me company."
"Just in case I might not be able to make it sometime," the old woman said, "if I offered to stand as guarantor for someone else to come keep you company, would you be willing to agree to it?"
"And who might that be?" the woman asked.
The old woman covered her mouth with her hand and laughed, saying:
"One guest does not trouble two hosts.
His Honor from the mansion came over to the other house yesterday and said to me, thus and so, that since your daughter had left home, leaving you all by yourself, he'd like to drop by and visit you for a while sometime. What do you say? There isn't anyone else here. If you were to go along with him, you wouldn't have to worry about having enough to eat, to wear, to spend, or to use. Once such a liaison was established, in the future, he'd even be willing to look for another house for you, which would be better than this out-of-the-way corner where you are now."
On hearing this the woman smiled and said, "With a houseful of goddess-like women at his disposal, what would he want with an ugly piece of goods like myself?"
"How can you say such a thing?" the old woman said. "It has always been true that:
In one's lover's eyes one appears like a veritable Hsi-shih.[18]
It is clear that:
This meeting was fated to occur.
It's not as though His Honor has nothing else to do. If he weren't particularly interested in you, he would not have made a point of coming to my place yesterday, giving me a tael of silver, and saying that he was much indebted to me in that matter of your daughter the other day. Later on, when there was no one else present, he brought up the subject with me and told me to come here and broach it to you, saying that, if you were willing to consider it, he would be waiting for an answer from me.
In mortgaging land to make the deed,
The parties involved must be agreed.
Surely you don't mean to suggest that I would lie about it."
"If he deigns to visit me," said the woman, "invite him to come over tomorrow. I'll be waiting for him."
The old woman, seeing that she had indicated her assent, sat with her a while longer, after which, with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude,
she made her departure.
The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, she gave him a complete account, word for word, of what the woman had said. Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Unable to contain his satisfaction,[19]
and promptly weighed out a tael of silver for Old Mother Feng so she could purchase wine and delicacies for the occasion.
The woman, on hearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was coming, straightened up the interior of her house:
Lit incense and hung curtains,
and laid in a supply of:
Fine tea and fine water.
Before long, the old woman showed up with a basketful of chicken, fish, appetizers, groceries, and fruits, which she had purchased, and took them into the kitchen to be properly prepared. The woman took the trouble to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before baking a small quantity of wheat cakes and wiping the tables and chairs until they shone.

Sometime after noon, Hsi-men Ch'ing donned a skullcap and informal clothes, put on his eyeshades, and headed straight for her door, accompanied by the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'i-t'ung. Upon dismounting to go inside, he directed that the horse be taken back to the house on Lion Street and brought back for him that evening, while he kept only Tai-an to wait on him in the meantime. Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded into the parlor and sat down.

After some time, the woman, having dressed herself to befit the occasion, came out to greet him, saying, "I'm afraid we imposed on you the other day. You've gone to so much trouble on behalf of our daughter that:

Words do not suffice,
to express our gratitude."

"If there's anything I may have overlooked," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I hope the two of you will not hold it against me."

"With regard to our whole family," the woman said:

"Our obligations to you are so great,
we could never hold anything against you." After saying which, she kowtowed to him four times.

Old Mother Feng then brought in some tea, and the woman served it to him. Observing that the horse had been sent away and that Tai-an had closed the front door, the woman sat with Hsi-men Ch'ing for a while and then ushered him into an interior sitting room, at the other end of which a k'ang frame was set in an alcove behind a sliding paper door. The room was decorated with a set of four hanging scrolls, in frames carved with a motif of bees enjoying the fragrance of the flowers, depicting the story of Chang Chün-jui's meeting with Ts'ui Ying-ying [20] in the form of a collage of pieces of variegated silk and satin. The table was crowded with a dressing case, a mirror stand, boxes and jars, pewter utensils, and other objects, and a stick of incense was burning on the floor beneath it. In the place of honor there was a folding Tung-p'o armchair, in which Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat. The woman then poured a cup of strong tea, flavored with walnuts and marinated bamboo shoots, and served it to him. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished it, the woman took away the cup, sat down on the edge of the k'ang at the lower end of the room to keep him company, and asked him for a while about how things were going at home.

Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that the woman handled the tray herself and said, "You really ought to have a girl to help out around here."

"The truth of the matter is," the woman said, "that ever since our daughter left home, things have been less convenient. In those days she was always here to help out, but now I've got to do everything myself."

"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow, just get Old Mother Feng to find a twelve- or thirteen-year-old maidservant for you who can relieve you, at least to some extent, of the burden of housework."

"It will have to wait till my husband gets back," the woman said, "when we'll simply have to:

Scrape together something from the east or the west,
with which to get Old Mother Feng to find such a girl for us."

"There's no need for that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whatever it may cost, I'll pay her myself."

"How could it be appropriate to put you to such additional trouble and expense?" the woman said. "It's not as though we haven't imposed on Your Honor enough as it is."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she had a way with words, his heart was filled with delight, and when Old Mother Feng came in to set up a table for them, he spoke to her about the matter of finding a maidservant.

"Since His Honor has already agreed to it," Old Mother Feng said, "you ought to kowtow to him in thanks. Auntie Chao's place in the southern quarter has a twelve-year-old girl available. I can bring her here for you to look over tomorrow. She's a girl of humble social origin who was raised by her own family. Her father is a military patrolman whose horse was killed in a fall. Being unable to pay the cost of reparation, and fearful of the beating he would be subjected to by the commandant of the Regional Military Command, he has had to sell his daughter. The asking price for her is only four taels of silver. You might as well get His Honor to buy her for you."

The woman hastened forward and bowed to him in gratitude. Before long the table was spread with saucers of food and the wine was ready to be poured. The woman filled a cup to the brim and proffered it to Hsi-men Ch'ing with both hands.

She was about to kowtow to him as well, but Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to pull her up with one hand, saying, "You've already saluted me just a while ago. There's no need for any further obeisance. A simple bow will do."

The woman, with a broad smile on her face, made him a bow and then sat down to one side on a low stool. In the kitchen, Old Mother Feng prepared the appetizers, fruits, and other dishes and served them up one at a time. There were also a couple of chopsticks worth of thin pancakes, which the woman filled with shredded pork and vegetables selected with her own hand, rolled up into spring rolls, and offered to Hsi-men Ch'ing on a saucer. The two of them proceeded to:

Pass their winecups back and forth,
as they drank together in her room. Tai-an was also provided with a place to sit in the kitchen, where Old Mother Feng kept him company and gave him something to eat. But no more of this.

When they had shared a few rounds of drinks, the woman moved her seat closer to Hsi-men Ch'ing, so that she could talk to him and serve him more conveniently. After this, Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to drink with the woman, passing the same cup of wine back and forth between them. Seeing that no one came in, he embraced her by the neck, and they fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues. The woman then stuck her hand out below and grasped Hsi-men Ch'ing's jade stalk. Mutually:

Carried away by lecherous desires, they called a halt to their drinking, closed the door to the room, and stripped off their clothes. The woman then proceeded to spread out her bedding on the k'ang frame in the alcove.

By this time the sun was already setting in the west. Hsi-men Ch'ing, exhilarated by the wine, took the silver clasp out of his wallet and fastened it in place, while the woman pumped his organ with her hand. She observed that:

Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
It became empurpled and shiny,
Tumid, and extremely thick.

On the one hand, she sat down in Hsi-men Ch'ing's lap, while on the other hand, up above, the two of them fell to embracing each other by the neck and kissing. The woman then raised one of her legs, guided his organ into her vagina with her hand, and the two of them poked away for a while. Hsi-men Ch'ing, fondling the soft smoothness of the woman's body and the fineness of her pubic hair, wanted to fully engage with her, so he ordered her to lie faceup on the end of the bed, and then, supporting himself on his two hands and wrapping her feet around the small of his back, devoted himself to retracting and thrusting. What did this bout of clouds and rain look like?

Behold:

An awe-inspiring aura obscures the halcyon couch,
A baleful breath immures the mandarin duck quilt.
On the coral pillow they display their prowess,
Behind kingfisher curtains they vie in audacity.
The male warrior is enraged;
Thrusting himself forward, he stabs away
with his black-tasseled spear.
The female commander is angry;
Spreading her hips, she makes a show of
her life-threatening sword.
One comes, the other goes;
As An Lu-shan consorts with
Yang Kuei-fei.[21]
One butts, the other lunges;
As Chang Chün-jui makes up to
Ts'ui Ying-ying.[22]
To left and right they join together;
In the Milky Way the Weaving Maid
meets the Herd Boy.[23]
Above and below they coil about;
In the fairy cave the immortal maiden
confronts Juan Chao.[24]
The spear comes, the bucklers bear the brunt;
Ts'ui Huai-pao unites himself with
Hsüeh Ch'iung-ch'iung.[25]
The ballista attacks, the blade fends it off;
Shuang Chien conjoins himself with
Su Hsiao-ch'ing.[26]
This one gives vent to the warbling of an oriole;
It much resembles Wu Tse-t'ien's rendezvous
with Hsüeh Ao-ts'ao.[27]
That one gives voice to the twittering of a swallow;
It is just like Shen I-chi's consorting
with Empress Lü.[28]
When they first engage;
The short spear stabs indiscriminately,
While the sharp blade responds in kind.
Subsequently to that;
Both ballistae fire simultaneously,
And the bucklers ward the missiles off.
The male warrior is excited;
Wielding his spear, he wants to penetrate
as far as the heart cavity;
The female commander is agitated;
Opening her orifice, she tries to swallow
her assailant, head and all.
The one who deploys the pair of ballistae,
Comes and goes, in his assault upon
the forces of the Inner Crotch;
The one who brandishes the pair of bucklers,
Above and below, defends herself against
the General Beneath the Navel.
One, adopting the position "The Golden Cock
Standing on a Single Foot,"[29]
Raises high her jade leg in order to
display her spirit.
The other, assuming the pose "The Bare Tree
Extending Its Roots,"[30]
"Inserts the arrow upside down"[31] in order to
penetrate the vagina.
The engagement is protracted,
His starry eyes grow dim,
The slightest move produces
a melting sensation.
The battle is prolonged,
Her slender waist writhes gently,
As the duel continues she worries
how long she can last.
The Matron of the Cave of Scanty Hair
backs across the bridge,
Releasing her waters to drown the invader.
The General of the Raven Black Armor[32]
waves his spear in vain,
Turning about in the endeavor to escape.
He of the navel aphrodisiac is unhorsed;
In an instant, he is trampled underfoot,
his flesh reduced to dust.
She that is warm and tight feigns confusion;

In a moment, she collapses into herself,
sinking down into the abyss.
He of the heavy armor, finds it to be
scattered hither and yon,
Just like falling flowers, driven about
by a drenching rain.[33]
She of the brocade noose, finds her
vigor gone, her muscles lax,[34]
Just like withered leaves, swirled around
by a violent wind.[35]
The Marshall of the Sulfur Ring,
His helmet awry and armor shattered,
has nowhere he can flee.
The General of the Silver Armor,
Sticks close to her own encampment,
loath to let him escape.
Truly:
The threatening clouds rise up as high as
the nine-layered heavens,
While down below the defeated combatants
lie tumbled on the field.[36]

It so happens that the woman suffered from a malady. Whenever she engaged in sexual intercourse she required her partner to pluck the flower in her rear courtyard, while she stimulated her clitoris below, before she was able to experience orgasm. If not, no matter what happened, she could not come. Even when Han Tao-kuo engaged in intercourse with her, he approached her by the rear entry more often than not, coming in by the front door no more than two or three times a month. A second malady of hers was that she was inveterately fond of sucking cock. She would keep it in her mouth for the longest time, even all night long, without being satisfied. No matter how much spunk her partner may have ejaculated, once subjected to her sucking and titillation, his member would re-erect itself forthwith. It was precisely these two maladies of hers that struck a responsive note in Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart.

That day he continued to engage with her until the first watch before going home.

"Come a little earlier tomorrow, sir," the woman said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while it is still daylight, so we can have time to take off all our clothes and really play together."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly delighted. The next day he went to the silk goods shop on Lion Street, where he weighed out four taels of silver and gave them to Old Mother Feng so she could purchase the maidservant for Wang Liu-erh's use, whose name was changed to Chin-erh.

Obsessed with the sweet prospect before him, on the second day, Hsi-men Ch'ing again rode his horse to the woman's home to pay her a visit. Originally both Ch'i-t'ung and Tai-an accompanied him, but when they got to her door, he told Ch'i-t'ung to take the horse back to the house on Lion Street.

Old Mother Feng devoted herself to going out with the jug to buy wine, picking up things on the street to prepare for them, running errands on their behalf, and so forth, and was dependent for her living on what she could make out of these transactions. Every time Hsi-men Ch'ing paid her a visit, he gave the woman one or two taels of silver for her expenses. He would come while it was still daylight and remain right up until the first watch before going home.

The members of his household were kept as completely in the dark as if they had been:

Locked tight in an iron bucket.

Since Old Mother Feng was working so hard at the woman's place every day, she seldom showed up at Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Li P'ing-erh sent page boys to summon her two or three times, but she claimed she' was unable to get away. Whenever she felt like it, she would lock the door and stay away for a whole day at a time.

One day the page boy, Hua-t'ung, ran into the old woman and brought her home with him.

"Old Mother," Li P'ing-erh complained to her, "I haven't seen so much as your shadow for days on end. What kind of:

Pussyfooting errands,

have you been up to? Every time I send after you, you're not there. You seem to have completely given up stopping by here. Are you really as busy as all that? I'm left with this accumulation of clothes, waistbands, and the baby's bedding that I've been waiting for you to come and help the maidservants launder for me, but you never show up."

"My dear mistress," the old woman exclaimed, "that's a fine thing to say!

If you insist on sending a scribe to arrest a deserter,
He can do no more than cite a body of precedents.
If you endeavor to turn a salt peddler into a sculptor,
He'll only end up making an 'idol' use of his time."[37]

"Old Mother," said Li P'ing-erh, "you're as bad as:

The abbot of the Stone Buddha Monastery:

Every time you're asked to officiate, you're too busy.

I'm sure you're out making money for yourself all day long, it's just that I don't know where you are."

"As for me," the old woman expostulated:

"The tempest having blown away the rest of my face,
My mouth can hardly be expected to keep up.

What money have I been making that you should have reason to be angry with me? You can be sure that I've had it anxiously in mind to drop by, but I just haven't been able to make it. I hardly know myself what it is that's been keeping me so busy all day. Some time ago the First Lady in the rear compound gave me the silver and asked me to pick up a rush prayer mat for her Buddhist devotions outside the South Gate, but I forgot all about it. Yesterday, when I finally remembered her request, the lousy southern slave of a mat seller was nowhere to be found. What will I say to her?"

"Do you mean to say that you still don't have that prayer mat for her?" exclaimed Li P'ing-erh. You might as well have been:

Free as you please,

and run off somewhere with a bonze. She's already given you the silver for it, and after all this time you still haven't bought it for her. How can you go on:

Playing the fool and putting on airs, that way?"

"It has had to wait," the old woman said, "until I've had a chance to explain the situation to the First Lady, but when I do, I'll return this silver to her. Yesterday, when I was riding a mule, I almost lost it."

"If you had lost that money of hers," said Li P'ing-erh, "you'd be a dead duck."

The old woman then headed straight for the rear compound, but before going into Yüeh-niang's room she went into the kitchen to reconnoiter, where she found Yü-hsiao sitting together with Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu.

Upon seeing her, Yü-hsiao said, "So you've finally showed up, Old Feng. Where have you come from, exalted person that you are? Your Sixth Lady is ready to eat your flesh alive. She claims that you haven't been showing her so much as a glimpse of your shadow."

The old woman went up to them, bowed twice, and said, "I've just been in her place up front where she nagged away at me for some time."

"What about the rush prayer mat that Mother asked you to pick up for her?" asked Yü-hsiao.

"I went outside the South Gate yesterday with silver in hand," said the old woman, "but the vendor who sells rush prayer mats has sold out his stock and gone back where he came from. He won't return until the third month of next year. I've still got the silver right here. Sister, let me turn it over to you."

"You crazy crone!" laughed Yü-hsiao. "Father is still in the room weighing out silver. After he comes out, you can return it to her personally."

"Sit down for a while," she then went on to say. "I've got something to ask you. How long has it been since Manager Han set out to escort his daughter to the capital? He ought to be back any time now, and when he returns it ought to be a piece of good luck for you. He's bound to express his gratitude to you in some way."

"Whether he thanks me or not is up to him," the old woman said. "As of today, he's only been gone eight days. He won't be back before the end of the month."

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing finished weighing out the silver, turned it over to Pen the Fourth to take out to the country estate, and then went out himself.

The old woman went into the master suite to see Yüeh-niang but still hesitated to produce the silver, simply saying, "That southerner had only a few coarse prayer mats available and went home after selling them off. He'll come back next year with good rush prayer mats of higher quality."

Yüeh-niang, who was a straightforward person, said, "Well that's that. You might as well hold onto the silver, and next year I'll ask you to pick up two of them for me, that's all."

She gave the old woman some tea cakes to eat, after which she returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.

"Did the First Lady give you a hard time?" Li P'ing-erh asked.

"I was able to paper things over in such a way as to satisfy her," the old woman said. "She actually gave me some tea to drink and rewarded me with a couple of large cakes when I took my leave."

"Those must have been the cakes left over from her visit to the Ch'iaos' house yesterday to celebrate the full-month ceremony for the birth of their daughter," said Li P'ing-erh. "Old Mother, that mouth of yours, true to form, is as lethal as:

The mosquitoes in the sixth month:

They bite you to death."

"As long as you're here today," she went on to say, "you might as well take care of the laundry before going home."

"Get your things together and procure some starch," the old woman replied. "I'll come by first thing tomorrow morning. This afternoon I still have to go to the home of an old client of mine to conduct some business."

"You old baggage!" exclaimed Li P'ing-erh. "You're never content unless you can:

Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves.

If you don't show up tomorrow, I'll have something to say to you."

The old woman talked and laughed for a while before taking her leave.

Li P'ing-erh urged her to stay, saying, "Don't leave until you've had something to eat."

"I'm still full," the old woman replied. "I don't need to eat anything."

Whereupon, fearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing might have preceded her in paying a visit to Wang Liu-erh's place, she hastened on her way:

Covering two steps with every one.

Truly:

The matchmaker is like a secondary ghost that haunts the locality;
Going back and forth, one party to the other, wiping the oil from her lips.
In a single day she manages to go a thousand times a thousand steps;
But merely succeeds in engendering hardship for her pair of legs.

Though she be dressed in rags, such is her charm
It makes its presence known.
The flashing eyes reveal the ardor of her love
And he who listens to the music of her soul
Must yield himself her prisoner forever.
They meet within the hall of flowers
The breeze is gentle and the moon is calm.
Softly they talk, and tenderly they smile,
Draw near the bed with phoenixes in flight
Embroidered on its curtains.
Then silently unloose the scented girdle.

After saying good-bye to his guests, Ximen Qing went out on horseback, wearing shades upon his eyes. Soldiers cleared the way for him. In the street he met old woman Feng and told one of the boys to stop her.

"What about this finding a girl for me?" he said. "How is it I have heard nothing from you before this?"

"During the last few days," the old woman said, "I have inspected several girls, but they all turned out to be the daughters either of butchers or of hawkers. Of course, they were out of the question. Then, fortunately, Heaven granted me a miracle, and I remembered a girl who lives quite close to me. She is a beauty of the very first order, and is but fifteen years old. Her animal is the Horse. If I had not happened to pass her door, and she had not invited me to call, I should not, even now, have thought of her. She has just reached the age for her hair to be dressed. She is as upright as the holder of a brush; her feet are tiny, and she knows how to paint her face most charmingly. Her little mouth is so dainty she might be an elf. Her mother says she was born on the fifth day of the fifth month. I think she is beautiful, and I'm sure you will fall in love with her yourself as soon as you set eyes on her."

"You crazy old woman," Ximen said, laughing, "I don't want to fall in love with her. I have plenty on my hands without her. As a matter of fact, Zhai, the comptroller of the Imperial Tutor's household in the Eastern Capital, is anxious to ensure the continuance of his family, and he has asked me to find a girl for him. If you only find the right one, so much the better for you. Who is the girl? You must send me the necessary papers."

"She lives not a thousand miles away," the old woman said. "In fact, there is hardly a brick between us at this moment. She is the daughter of Han Daoguo who looks after your thread shop. If you wish, I will get her father to have the necessary papers made out, then we can fix a day and you can go to look her over."

"Very well," Ximen said, "go and see him, and if he has no objection, get him to give you the papers and bring them to my house."

Two days later Ximen was sitting in the great hall when old woman Feng came with the papers. In them the girl was described as "the maiden Han, fifteen years of age, whose birthday is the fifth day of the fifth month."

"I told her father what you said," the old woman began, "and he said that, thanks to your generosity, the girl has certainly a great future in store for her. But he is afraid that, being a poor man, he cannot provide what is necessary for the marriage."

"Go and tell him," Ximen said, "that I don't want a single thread from him. Everything she needs—clothes, ornaments, toilet boxes and everything else—shall be prepared here. Moreover, I will make him a present of twenty taels. If he provides her with shoes and socks, that will be all that is needed. As soon as everything is ready, we shall ask him to escort her to the Eastern Capital. You see, she is not going to be an ordinary concubine. The comptroller hopes that she will bear him a son and he will treat her as his wife. So long as she furnishes him with a boy or even a bit of a daughter, she will have nothing to worry about."

"When will you go and see her?" the old woman asked. "They would like to know so that they can make preparations."

"Since he has agreed, I may as well go tomorrow. Zhai is in a hurry for her. But tell Han not to make any preparations on my account. He need only offer me a cup of tea. Then I shall take my leave."

"Oh dear," the old woman cried, "it is not very often you condescend to go and see anyone. You may not want anything, but you must not rush away. He is one of your people; he can't allow you to go away with an empty stomach."

Ximen Qing explained that he was very busy, and the old woman went off to tell Wang Liu'er, Han Daoguo's wife, all that he had said.
"Don't tell stories," Wang Liu'er said.
"Indeed, he did say so," the old woman said. "Why should I deceive you? You know how busy he is, with people coming and going at his house all the time." Wang Liu'er gave the old lady some food and wine. Then she went away, promising to come the next morning to await the master.
That night, when Han Daoguo came home, his wife talked to him and they discussed the whole matter. In the morning he got up early, went to the High Well for some sweet water, and bought the finest nuts he could find. These he left at home, then went to the shop to attend to the business. His wife, alone in the house, dressed herself in her prettiest clothes, powdered her face, and made herself look very charming. She washed her hands, cleaned her fingernails, polished the teacups, cracked the nuts, and made some excellent tea. Then old woman Feng came and helped the woman to put everything in order.
Ximen Qing, when he came back from the office, put on plain clothes and set out on horseback. Daian and Qintong followed him. When they came to Han's house, he dismounted and went in. Old woman Feng received him and took him into the sitting room. He sat down. Soon Wang Liu'er and her daughter came to see him.
Ximen Qing did not look at the girl; he could not take his eyes from the mother. She was wearing a coat of purple silk, a scarf of black and gold upon her shoulders, and a jade-colored skirt, beneath which Ximen could see two perfect little feet. She was tall, and her face, shaped like a melon seed, had a high color.
Ximen Qing was almost beside himself. He decided that, seeing what manner of woman Han Daoguo's wife was, it was not surprising that the young men who lived near her had been inclined to play tricks. The girl was very beautiful too, but this did not surprise him when he had seen the mother.
Wang Liu'er made a reverence to him and called her daughter forward. The girl kowtowed four times before Ximen, bowing as gracefully as a bunch of flowers before the wind. Then she rose and stood before him, and the old woman went to bring tea. Wang Liu'er rinsed the cup before she would allow the old woman to hand it to Ximen. Then Ximen looked the girl over from head to foot. The black hair was piled gracefully upon her head and her cheeks were delicately powdered. She seemed like a lonely flower, with a kind of quiet fascination. Her skin was like the purest jade, tender and fragrant.
Ximen told Daian to take from a box two silken handkerchiefs, four gold rings and twenty taels of white gold. He told the old woman to put them on a tray. From it Wang Liu'er took a ring that she set on her daughter's finger. The girl again made reverence to Ximen Qing, and withdrew.
"In a day or two," Ximen said, "I will ask you to bring your daughter to my house so that the necessary clothes may be prepared for her. Meanwhile, perhaps, you will be good enough to use this money to provide her with shoes and socks."
"All that we have upon our heads and all we wear upon our feet," Wang Liu'er said, kneeling down, "we owe to you. Now you have been kind enough to arrange this marriage for my daughter. Even if my husband and I laid down our lives, we could never sufficiently repay you for your kindness. Again I thank you for your precious gifts."
"Is your husband not at home?" Ximen said.
"No," the woman said, "this morning he told me what I must do in this matter, and then went to the shop. I will tell him to come and kowtow to you."
Ximen thought that the woman talked very charmingly. She called him Father in nearly every sentence. He was touched. "I must go now," he said, rising. "Please tell your husband what I have said."
Wang Liu'er pressed him to stay longer, but he would not. He went straight home to report the business to Wu Yueniang.
"Really," she said, "the marriage cord unites people, even when a thousand miles lies between them. Since you say this girl is very beautiful, we have not spent our labor in vain."
"As soon as possible," Ximen said, "we will bring her here so that her clothes may be made. I will take ten taels of silver at once and have them made into ornaments, rings, pins and other things."
''The sooner the better," Yueniang said, "then we will ask her father to go with her to the Eastern Capital. We need not send anyone else."
Ximen Qing thought it would be better to close the shop for a few days and let Laibao go too. He wished, he said, to make sure that a present he had recently sent had been safely delivered.
Two or three days later Ximen sent a boy to escort the girl. Her mother, Wang Liu'er, came with her, bringing a few small presents. When they came in, they kowtowed before Yueniang and the others.
"Father and Mother," Wang Liu'er said, "and you other ladies, I thank you for the kindness you have shown my daughter. My husband and I will be eternally grateful to you."
They took tea in Yueniang's room and then were entertained in the great hall. Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er joined them. Ximen Qing had provided rolls of red and green silk, material for undergarments, and Tailor Zhao had made two dresses of gold and silver-figured silk and a scarlet satin long gown.
Wang Liu'er said a few words to reassure her daughter and went home.
Ximen bought for the girl a small suite of furniture, a gilded chest, a dressing mirror and a hand mirror, boxes, jars, and vessels of bronze and pewter, even a pail to serve a purpose we need not mention. In a few days, everything was ready; a letter was written to go with the party, and the tenth day of the ninth month appointed for the start.
Ximen borrowed four men and two non-commissioned officers from the local police office to act as escort. Han Daoguo and Laibao hired four horses, and, riding behind the wagons and the sedan chair, set off for the Eastern Capital.
Wang Liu'er was left alone. She felt very lonely as she went about her daily duties. For some days indeed, she wept nearly all the time.
One day, when Ximen Qing had nothing particular to do, he mounted his horse and rode down to Lion Street to see what was happening at the house there. Old woman Feng met him and brought him tea.
"I was very satisfied with the way you managed that little business the other day," he said. "Here is a tael of silver for you to buy some cloth." The old woman kowtowed and thanked him.
"Have you been to Han's house lately?" Ximen said.
"Oh yes," the old woman said, "I go every day to cheer up his wife. Now that her daughter has gone she is all by herself. She has never been separated from the girl before, and until the last day or two, she has been crying all the time. 'You have been to a good deal of trouble over my daughter's marriage,' she said to me. 'Has his Lordship given you your fee?' I told her you had been very busy, and I had thought it better not to trouble you. I said I knew it would be safe to wait, and, doubtless, when her husband returned, there would be something coming to me from that quarter."
"Of course that will be so," Ximen said. He looked cautiously around. Seeing there was no one about, he whispered: "When you have an opportunity, just let her know that I should very much like to call and see her. Tomorrow tell me what she says about it."
The old woman put her hand over her mouth and chuckled knowingly. "Now that your shovel has dug you up a golden baby, you want to dig again and find the mother. Well, this very evening, I'll see if I can do anything for you. I suppose you know who she is? She is a sister of Butcher Wang in the back street, the sixth of her family, and about twenty-nine years old. She dresses in smart clothes and may look rather forward, but, to the best of my knowledge, she is virtuous. If you like to come here tomorrow, I will see if I can't have some news for you." Ximen agreed, mounted his horse, and rode home.
When old woman Feng had dined, she locked up the house and set out to see the woman. Wang Liu'er opened the door and asked her to go in. "I cooked some noodles for you yesterday, and waited," she said, "but you never came."
"I meant to come," the old woman said, "but I was obliged to go and see someone else. What with one thing and another, I couldn't manage to get here."
"Well," Wang Liu'er said, "I have a rough meal ready. Will you have something?"
The old woman said she had just had dinner, and would have nothing but a cup of tea. Wang Liu'er made a cup of strong tea for her and ate her own dinner while the old woman sat and watched her.
"I feel very lonely," the woman said. "Always before, I have had my child to fall back upon. Now she has gone the place seems empty, and I have to do everything for myself. My face gets dirty, and everything is horrid. I'd rather die than live like this. She has gone so far away, and if I want to go and see her, I can't. How can I help being upset?" She began to cry.
"It has always been the same," old woman Feng said. "When there are boys in a family, it is always busy, but with girls, it is always lonely. For a girl, if she lives long enough, sooner or later will leave the home and go elsewhere. Things seem bad to you now, but you must remember that, when your daughter settles down in that palace and has borne a son or even a daughter, you and your husband will reap the benefit. When that time comes, you will have nothing to complain of."
"In families of rank," Wang Liu'er said, sadly, "there are always ups and downs. How can we ever say what will happen? Even if she prospers, how am I to know where my bones will be rotting, when that time comes?"
"Oh, don't talk like that," the old woman cried. "Your daughter is certainly not a bigger fool than anybody else. She is a clever needlewoman, and everybody has the fortune that is his due. There is nothing for you to worry about."
They chatted for a long time in this strain, and at last the old woman decided to broach more serious matters. "I hope you won't think I'm talking nonsense," she said, "but now that your husband is away, don't you feel lonely during the night?"
"Do you ask that?" Wang Liu'er cried. "Why, you're the very one who has made me so. Indeed, since you are responsible, I am expecting you to come and keep me company in the evenings."
"I'm afraid I can hardly do so," the old woman said, "but perhaps I know someone who can. You may not care about it, though."
"Whom do you mean?" Wang Liu'er said.
Old woman Feng put her hand before her mouth and laughed. "One host suffices for a single guest," she said. "I mean our master. Yesterday, he came to see me, and said you must be very lonely now that your daughter has gone away, and he would like to come and try to console you. What do you think? No one else is concerned in the matter, and if you are kind to him, you need never worry again about a livelihood. Indeed, if he comes often, he will probably buy you a house, and you will find it much more pleasant than living in a hole like this."
Wang Liu'er smiled. "He has already many ladies of his own, beautiful enough to be the wives of the gods. What can he want from an ugly thing like me?"
"You must not say that," the old woman said. "There is an old proverb that says: Beauty springeth from the lover's eyes. Fate has decided this for you. If he had not taken a fancy to you he would not have come to see me yesterday. He gave me a tael of silver, and said it was for arranging your daughter's marriage. Then, seeing there was no one to hear him, he spoke to me about yourself, and now he is only waiting for your answer. After all, it is like selling a field: a piece of business that depends solely on the will of the two parties concerned. It has nothing to do with me."
"Well," the woman said, "if he would really like to come, tell him I shall expect him tomorrow."
Old woman Feng, now that she had gained her point, stayed a little longer and then took her leave. The next day Ximen came again to see her and she told him the result of her visit. He was delighted and gave her another tael of silver to buy wine and food.
When Wang Liu'er knew that Ximen was coming, she swept out her room, burned fragrant incense, set clean hangings around the bed, and prepared some special tea. Old woman Feng came first, with a basket full of fresh vegetables and fruits. She went into the kitchen to prepare them. Wang Liu'er washed her hands, cleaned her nails and prepared some food. In the sitting room, she scrubbed and cleaned the tables and chairs till they shone.
It was afternoon when Ximen Qing came, dressed in his civilian clothes, and wearing shades upon his eyes. Daian and Qitong followed him. When Ximen had dismounted, he gave orders that the horses should be taken to the house in Lion Street and brought again that evening. He only kept Daian with him. Wang Liu'er, exquisitely dressed, came to the sitting room to welcome him.
"It was very kind of you to take so much trouble over my daughter's wedding," she said. "It is hard for me to find words to express my gratitude."
"Not at all," Ximen said politely, "I must ask you and your husband to pardon me for what I failed to do."
"What complaint could we possibly make," the woman said, "since everyone in our household is so much in your debt?" She kowtowed to him four times. Old woman Feng brought tea, and Wang Liu'er handed it to Ximen Qing. Meanwhile Daian saw the horses taken away, and bolted the gate.
Ximen Qing and the woman sat for a while, and at last she invited him to go and see her own room. The windows and doors were papered; there were a long bed and a few chests. On the wall were four pieces of tapestry that depicted Zhang Sheng meeting with Ying Ying, and bees and flowers. There were tables and tea tables, large mirrors and small, boxes and pewter, all set out in their proper places. A stick of incense was burning. In the place of honor was a chair, in which Ximen Qing sat down, while the woman again prepared some tea with walnuts and offered it to him, taking the cup when he had finished it.
Wang Liu'er sat down on the edge of the bed and chatted about matters of no particular importance. Ximen saw that she brought in all the trays herself.
"You ought to have someone to wait on you," he said.
"Ah," the woman said, "now my daughter has gone, things are certainly difficult. I have to do everything myself."
"You must not put yourself out," Ximen said. "I will arrange with old woman Feng to find a girl about thirteen or fourteen years old for you. She may be able to save you a little."
Wang Liu'er suggested that she must wait until her husband came back, but Ximen hastily assured her that not only would he make all the arrangements, but he would also pay the expenses.
"Have I not troubled you enough already?" the woman said.
Ximen Qing was delighted to discover how intelligent the woman seemed. When old woman Feng came in to set the table, he spoke to her about the girl.
"You must thank his Lordship," the old woman said. "Sister Jiao, down in the South of the city, has just the girl you need, thirteen years old, and she only asks four taels for her. In my opinion, that is the girl you should ask his Lordship to buy for you."
Wang Liu'er bowed to Ximen. Then the food was brought, and the wine heated. She poured out a full cup of wine and presented it to him with both hands. She was about to kneel before him, but he would not allow this.
"You have already made one reverence to me," he said; "there is no need for you to repeat it."
The woman smiled, and sat down upon a small bench. Old woman Feng brought the dishes from the kitchen, one by one, and finally a kind of savory paste. Wang Liu'er selected the tastiest morsels of meat, took some of the vegetables, rolled them up in the paste and handed the roll to Ximen on a small plate. They passed their wine cups to one another and drank together. Meanwhile old woman Feng offered Daian a chair in the kitchen, and saw that he was well fed.
When they had taken a few cups together, the woman moved her seat nearer to Ximen's, and they passed their wine from mouth to mouth. After making sure that there was no one about, Ximen threw his arms around her, kissed her and caressed her tongue with his own. She took the jade scepter into her hand. Their passions were stirred into flame. They drank no more, but saw to the fastenings upon the door. Then both took off their clothes, and the woman prepared the coverlets upon the bed. It was the hour before sunset. The wine had set Ximen Qing on fire. He took the silver clasp from its case, and put it in position, while the woman fondly touched him with her slender hands. She thought his weapon looked magnificent; the veins swelled with dark red blood, and the flesh was firm and powerful. She sat on his knees; they threw their arms around each other's necks, and kissed again. Then she raised one of her legs, and, with her hand, helped that sword to find its scabbard. For a while they jousted together. Ximen Qing allowed his hands to wander over the woman's body. It was very soft but firm. The hair was fine and delicate. Eventually he told her to lie on the bed; he pulled her legs around his body and threw himself fiercely into the struggle.
The god of battle now holds sway over the green-clad bed.
The coverlets, with silk-embroidered love birds, feel the press of strife.
Heroes display their prowess on the coral pillows
Striving for victory within the silken curtains.
The hero dashes madly to the fray, plunges his spear with fury home.
The heroine's heart beats wildly. She yawns and gapes and fain would all devour him.
Then up he brings his pair of culverins, and lets them loose upon the enemy skulking in the trousers.
The other raises her shield to meet the mad attack of the great general stationed beneath the navel.
One plays the golden cockerel, standing on single leg, raising the other high, to show his mettle
The other, like a stripped tree, with roots that spread in all directions, thrusts forth to meet the foe.
When they have fought a while, the shining eyes are dimmed
A single movement makes them squirm and quiver.
Though their limbs tremble, they still fight on
Clashing a hundred times, they cannot break away,
Then, letting loose the dam, the captain of the scanty hair would drown his enemy in the flood.
The general in black armor feigns to make a thrust, but turns aside and seeks to fly.
The warden of the navel is unhorsed, thrown down and ground to dust in but a moment.
Lord "warm and tight" now plays the fool, tumbling he falls to the far depths of the abyss.
The heavy mail is broken into pieces, like faded blossoms when the storm breaks on them
The silken cap gives way beneath the strain, like fallen leaves before the raging winds
And Marshal "sulfurous," his crest awry, can find no place to flee.
Prince "Silver Armor" holds his ground, and swears he'll stand till death.
The skies are hidden by a sad dark cloud
The warriors roll stricken on the field.
Wang Liu'er liked one game more than any other. When she had joined with him as lovers do, she wanted him to enjoy the flower in her bottom while she played with the flower in her womb. Satisfied in this way, she reached the blissful oblivion that is the aim of lovers. She used to practice this game so often that in thirty days Han Daoguo would take his pleasure at the front gate no more than three times. Apart from this, she titillated his ivory scepter with her lips and fondled it all night with never-failing desire; if its master flagged, her lips returned his strength.
Nothing could have given Ximen Qing greater pleasure. All that day they played, till the watchman gave his first warning. Then he went home.
Before Ximen left her, Wang Liu'er asked him to come again the next day, and to come early. She promised that if he did so, he should not go away unsatisfied. Ximen could have asked for nothing better.
The next day he went to the thread shop in Lion Street, and took four taels of silver. These he gave to old woman Feng, and told her to purchase the maid. Two days later, Ximen, who could not forget the sweetness of his last visit, went again to visit Wang Liu'er. Qitong and Daian went with him. When they reached the house, he told Qitong to take his horse to Lion Street. Old woman Feng came to attend to the wine and other things, and set them out. By such small services as these, she hoped to enrich her belly with oil and vegetables.
This time, Ximen Qing gave to Wang Liu'er a few taels of silver for household expenses. It was day when he arrived, and night when he went away. Not one word of the matter did he mention to any member of his own household.
Old woman Feng went every day to work for Wang Liu'er, so she seldom had time to go to Ximen Qing's house. Li Ping'er sent a boy two or three times to summon her, but she was far too busy to come. Often, indeed, she locked her door and stayed out all day. One day, Huatong ran across her in the street and made her go with him to Li Ping'er.
"Now, old woman," her mistress said, "for some days I have not seen even your shadow; what game is this you're playing? Every time I have sent after you, you have been out. It looks as if you didn't wish to come. Here I have been, as busy as could be, with a pile of clothes and the baby's bed-clothes, all waiting for you to come and help the maids to wash them. And you never came."
"It is easy for you to talk, my lady," the old woman said, "but I have been like a scrivener running after a deserter. I am as busy as anybody can be. One day I seem to be a salt seller, and the next I have to turn myself into a carpenter. I don't have a moment."

"It is all very well," Li Ping'er said. "When I ask you to come, you say you are too busy, but I should like to know where you have been earning your daily bread these last few days."
"I am like a vase whose ears the wind has blown away; it can't get them back with its mouth ( i.e. I'm not in a position to argue with you.). I have not earned anything. You are angry with me, I see, but I simply have not had a chance to come and see you. I have been too busy to know where I am. The other day, the Great Lady gave me some money to buy her a cushion for her prayers, and I forgot all about it. When I did remember, yesterday, the rogue of a cushion seller had taken himself off, and I don't know what to say to her."
"Do you mean to say you have come without the cushion?" Li Ping'er said. "I should advise you to see if you can't find some monkey to run off with you. She gives you the money; you come empty-handed, and then pretend you don't know what you're about."
"I am going to give the Great Lady her money back," the old woman said. "Yesterday I went for a ride on a donkey and nearly fell off."
"If it happens again," said Li Ping'er, "you will certainly be killed."
Old woman Feng went to the inner court to see Wu Yueniang, but first she called at the kitchen. Yuxiao and Laixing's wife were sitting together. When they saw her, one of them said: "Why, here is old woman Feng! Well, honorable madam, and where have you been? The Sixth Lady is ready to eat you up."
The old woman greeted them. "I have just come from her," she said, "and a nice to-do she made."
"My mistress wants to know whether you have bought her cushion," Yuxiao said.
"Yesterday," the old woman said, "I took the money and went outside the city, but the cushion seller had sold his stock and gone home. He will not be here again before the third month next year. Here is the silver. Please take it, Sister."
"You marvelous old woman," Yuxiao said. "At the moment our master is weighing some silver. When he has gone, you had better see our mistress for yourself. Meanwhile, please sit down. By the way, it seems a long time since Han went off with that daughter of his. He ought to be back now, surely. When he does come, you will be in luck. He will certainly have to give you something."
"Something or nothing," the old woman said, "that is his concern. But he has only been gone about eight days. I don't see how he can be back before the end of the month."
Ximen Qing finished weighing the silver and gave it to Ben the Fourth to spend on the estate. Then he went out, and the old woman went to the upper room to see Wu Yueniang. She did not produce the money but said that the cushions which the merchant had were not good enough. The better ones were sold, and he had gone home to fetch some of an especially good quality. Yueniang was simple and unsuspecting. She said: "That is all right. Keep the money and bring me two cushions next year." She gave the old woman some cakes and old Feng then went back to see Li Ping'er.
"Did the Great Lady scold you?" Li Ping'er said.
"No," said the old woman. "I told her something that made her very happy and she gave me some tea and a few cakes."
"The cakes have come from the Qiao family," Li Ping'er said. "It was the day of the first full month for them yesterday. Well, old woman, your mouth has been stopped. You are like the mosquitoes that come in the fourth month, those that have such a deadly bite. Anyhow, now you are here, you must stay and wash some clothes for me."
"Put the things in soak," the old woman said, "and I will come early tomorrow. This afternoon, I have to go and do some business for a very special client of mine."
"Oh, you old rogue," Li Ping'er said, "you always find some excuse. If you don't turn up tomorrow, you'll see what happens."
The old woman laughed. She stayed a little longer talking with Li Ping'er, and then prepared to go. Her mistress asked her if she would have some food before she went, but she said she was not hungry, and would not stay. Really, she was wondering whether Ximen Qing might not be going to see Wang Liu'er, and she scuttled away as fast as her old legs would carry her.

## 059

### Hsi-men Ch'ing Subjects Trickster Han to the Third Degree; P'an Chin-lien is Melancholy on a Snowy Evening Toys with her P'i-p'a

Though her lovely person is warm and soft, she is a practiced old hand;
Like a jade flagon illuminated by moonlight, she is made to inspire passion.
Lightly turning her jadelike countenance, the flowers look seductive;
At the slightest perturbation of her delicate brows, her cloudy chignon falls loose.
Attractive enough to drive bees to distraction, the peach blossom's pistil is open;
Sufficiently alluring to drive butterflies to madness, her willowy waist is pristine.
The heart of the beholder is held in thrall, subject to lasting infatuation;
May she not take after the "willows" in the quarter who respond with pallid affection.[1]

when Old Mother Feng had proceeded as far as the postern gate leading to the front reception hall, she saw Tai-an standing in attendance outside the latticework doors to the hall with tea tray in hand.
Tai-an made a meaningful moue in her direction, saying, "You go on over there. Father and Master Ying the Second are talking together. As soon as they're done, and he's seen him off, he'll start out himself. He's already sent Ch'i-t'ung ahead to deliver the wine."
As soon as the old woman heard these words, she hastened on her way:
Covering two steps with every one.
It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh had come to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing about the merchant contractors Li Chih and Huang the Fourth, who had undertaken the assignment to procure one-third of the annual quota of thirty thousand taels worth of incense, wax, and other materials for use by the imperial household. Their share, therefore, in addition to whatever interest they could make on the transaction, would amount to ten thousand taels of silver, which would be paid over to them in bullion upon delivery of the consignment to Tung-p'ing prefecture.
"I've come to consult with you," he said, "about whether or not you would care to take a hand in the transaction."
"Why should I want to become a purveyor?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. They:
Substitute the counterfeit for the genuine,
Bribe officials and promise them kickbacks.
When such cases come before my yamen, we are required to proceed against them. Why should I involve myself in such a business?"
"If you don't participate," said Ying Po-chüeh, "they'll just go to someone else. All you have to do is lend them two thousand taels of silver, on which they will pay you five percent interest per month, and when they receive payment for their consignment they will return your original investment. What do you think? If you agree to the undertaking, I'll speak to them and have them bring the contract to you tomorrow."
"Only out of consideration for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll put up a thousand taels of silver for them. Right now, because of the construction work on my country estate, I'm short of cash."
When Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had indicated his assent, he said, "Brother, if you're so strapped for cash, couldn't you, somehow or other, come up with another five hundred taels worth of merchandise in order to make up an even one thousand five hundred for them? They wouldn't dare let you down."
"If they let me down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll know how to handle them. But there's another thing, Brother Ying the Second. If I put up any money for them, they mustn't run around on the outside flaunting my name in order to:
Fleece people to the east and cheat them on the west.
If I get wind of anything like that, I fear there'll be more than enough room to accommodate them in the lockup at my yamen."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how can you say such a thing?
The supervisor cannot relinquish his responsibility.
If they run around on the outside flaunting your name and no harm is done, so much for that. But if they should do any damage, what am I good for? You can simply relax on that score. If anything goes amiss, I'll be the first to tell you about it. If you agree, I'll let them know so they can be prepared to draft the contract tomorrow."
"Don't have them come tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got something to do. Have them come the day after tomorrow."
When they had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh took his leave.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to prepare his horse, put on his eye shades, and asked, "Has Ch'i-t'ung already left?"
"He's still here," said Tai-an. "He's gone to fetch your riding crop."
Before long, the riding crop was fetched, and Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse and set off for Oxhide Lane.
Who could have anticipated that Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, or Trickster Han, who had lost at gambling and managed to get stark staring drunk, should turn up at his elder brother's house looking for something more to drink.
Pulling a string of small sausages out of his sleeve, he said, "Sister-in-law, since my elder brother hasn't returned yet, why don't the two of us share a jug of distilled spirits."
The woman, who was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might show up and was aware that Old Mother Feng was in the kitchen, did not take him up on it, saying, "I don't want anything, but if you insist on a drink, take it out of the way somewhere and indulge yourself. I'm sick and tired of the way you:
Devote yourself to stirring up trouble,
when your elder brother is away from home. What are you coming around again for, anyway?"
Trickster Han, opening wide his bleary eyes, refused to leave. Catching sight of a jug of wine underneath the table, with a white clay stopper and a red paper label attached to it, he asked, "Sister-in-law, who's wine is that? Open it up and decant a flagon's worth for us to drink. Ai-ya, you're keeping it all for yourself."
"Don't you dare touch it," the woman exclaimed. "It's a gift from His Honor in the mansion. Your elder brother hasn't even seen it yet. There'll be time enough to pour out a cup for you after he gets home."
"Why should I wait for any elder brother?" said Han the Second. "Even if it belonged to the emperor himself, I'd help myself to a cup."
He was just about to pull out the clay stopper when the woman gave him a precipitate shove with her hand, snatched up the wine jug, and lugged it into her bedroom.
It took a while for Trickster Han, who had been knocked flat on his back, to regain his feet.
His discomfiture turning into anger,[2]
he muttered abusively, "You lousy whore! I brought these sausages over with the best of intentions, thinking that you must be lonely all by yourself and would be happy to share a cup of wine with me. You've not only ignored my suggestion, but knocked me down into the bargain. Don't you worry. You may have found yourself another lover with plenty of money and decided to ignore me. You may want to break up with me, so you're deliberately giving me a hard time, disregarding me, mocking me, and driving me away. You'd just better not let me catch the two of you together, you worthless whore, or it'll be a case of:
A white blade going in, and
A red blade coming out."
No sooner did the woman hear these indiscreet words than:
A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and
In an instant her two cheeks were purple.
Picking up a laundry bat in her hand, she drove him out of the house, cursing as she went, "You lousy starveling of a gallows bird! You've had it! You think you can guzzle yourself drunk somewhere and then turn up at my place and freeload, do you? Well I'm not going to let you get away with it."
Muttering imprecations as he went, Trickster Han cursed her for a whore all the way out the door.
Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would come riding along just at this juncture and, catching sight of him, demand to know who it was.
"You know perfectly well who it is," the woman replied. "It's that bastard Han the Second. Seeing that his elder brother is away from home, he's in the habit of losing at gambling and then coming around here in his cups to make trouble for me. When his elder brother is at home, he gives him a beating when he runs into him."
Trickster Han, observing the lay of the land, disappeared in a puff of smoke.
"That dead duck of a beggar!" Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed. "Tomorrow, when I get to the yamen, I'll give him something to remember me by."
"I've just provided you with another source of irritation," the woman said.
"You don't understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We can't let him get away with that sort of thing."
"What you say is right," the woman responded. "It has always been true that:
Goodness is taken advantage of by others,
Benevolence merely gives rise to disaster."[3]
As she spoke, she ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing into the parlor and offered him a seat.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Ch'i-t'ung to return home with the horse and said to Tai-an, "You keep watch at the front door. If that 'bare stick' so much as flaunts his shadow around here, lock him up, and bring him to the yamen tomorrow."
"When he heard that you had arrived," said Tai-an:
"Who knows where his soul ended up going to."
Hsi-men Ch'ing took a seat. The woman, after making him an obeisance, promptly directed her maidservant Chin-erh to bring out a cup of tea, flavored with fruit kernels, from the inner room and serve it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which she told her to kowtow to him.
"That will do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She looks like a nice enough girl. You might as well make what use of her you can."
"Old Mother Feng is here, isn't she," he went on to say. "Why don't you have her take care of the tea?"
"As for that old body, Mother Feng," the woman said, "I've asked her to busy herself in the kitchen."
"That wine that I had the page boy deliver a while ago," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is 'Bamboo Leaf Green' [4] that was given to me by a eunuch. It contains a lot of medicinal ingredients and has a very bracing taste. I noticed the other day that the wine you obtained around here was not fit to drink. That's why I had this jug of wine brought over for you."
The woman made him another bow, saying, "Thank you very much for the wine. It's just as you say. We're so out of the way, living in this obscure alley, that we don't even have access to a decent wine shop. Where would we get high-quality wine without going all the way to Main Street?"
"When Manager Han gets home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you ought to talk it over with him. I'd be willing to spend a few taels of silver to buy a house on Lion Street so the two of you could simply move over there to live. It would be nearer the silk goods store, on the one hand, as well as being more convenient for shopping and everything else."
"What you say is right," the woman said. "If you could see fit, somehow or other, to show us such favor, so that we could manage to get away from this place, it would be wonderful. Even with regard to your coming and going, it would have the advantage of obviating a good deal of gossip on the part of petty-minded people. As long as what we do is right, there's no reason to be afraid of anybody. If this is something you've made up your mind to do, go ahead and do it. It's all the same whether he's at home or not. After all, there's no other road for him to take."
After they had talked for a while, a table was set up in the inner room, and she invited Hsi-men Ch'ing inside to loosen his clothes, sit down, and relax. Before long, wine and food were prepared, and the table was spread with chicken, duck, fish, pork, as well as appetizers and snacks of all kinds. The woman kept him company and poured the wine.
It was not long before the two of them sat down together:
Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,
and proceeded to drink in earnest. When they began to feel the effects of the wine, they took off their clothes:
Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport,
Enjoying each other to their heart's content.
The woman had long since laid out a thick layer of bedding on the k'ang frame and fumigated it until it exuded a pungent fragrance.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was aware that the woman was fond of the game of breeze and moonlight and was anxious to see what he could do to arouse her. Before leaving home, he had secreted a brocaded bag in his sleeve, which he now opened to reveal a silver clasp, a "ladies' delight," a sulfur-imbrued ring, a medicated band of white satin, a "pendent jade ring," a navel aphrodisiac plaster, and a "titillating bell," a full complement of sexual implements. The woman:
Lay down faceup on the pillow,
Raised her jade legs on high, while
Her "chicken-tongue" protruded from within.
Hsi-men Ch'ing first had the woman insert the "titillating bell" in her vagina, after which he fastened the silver clasp to the root of his organ, fitted the sulfur-imbrued ring around the neck of his glans, and stuck the navel aphrodisiac plaster on his navel. The woman guided his organ into her vagina with her hand until:

The two of them were joined together, and
It gradually penetrated more than halfway.
"Daddy!" the woman exclaimed, "I'm afraid your legs will start to hurt if you squat that way. Pull the pillow over so you can sit on it, and let this whore of yours do the moving."
"I'm afraid you're not really comfortable," she went on to say. "Why don't you try fucking me with one of my legs suspended? How would that be?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing actually unwrapped one of her foot bindings and tied it around her foot in such a way that one leg was suspended from the latticework partition of the bed. Thereupon he lowered his head and proceeded to thrust and retract until her vaginal fluids began to flow uninterruptedly, like a snail secreting its slime.[5] In the process of retracting, a good deal of white discharge emerged.
"Why are you producing this white discharge?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
He was about to wipe himself off when the woman said, "Don't wipe it off. Let me suck it for you."
Thereupon, she squatted down in front of him and lapped it up so thoroughly that:
The sound of her sucking was audible.
This so affected Hsi-men Ch'ing that his:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.
Turning her over, he set out, with her cooperation, to pluck the flower in her rear courtyard. His turtle head was encumbered with the sulfur-imbrued ring so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was difficult to proceed. The woman knit her brows and silently endured the pain for some time before he succeeded in immersing the knob of his glans. Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon began to thrust and retract in earnest, while the woman rubbed his organ with her hand until:
It gradually penetrated more than halfway.
Parking her posterior in Hsi-men Ch'ing's lap, and:
Turning her head around with an amorous glance,
she said, in a quavery voice, "Daddy! Slow down a bit. The rest of it is even thicker and larger. How will this whore of yours ever endure it?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing lifted her haunches in order to:
Observe the sight as he went in and out.[6]
Then, addressing her by her informal name, he said, "Wang Liu-erh, my child, your daddy doesn't know why it is, but this is the one thing that delights him the most. Who would have thought that today I should meet up with you. You're truly a woman after my own heart. In the days to come you and I will be:
Inseparable in life or death."
"Daddy!" the woman replied. "I only fear that in the future you will grow tired of playing with me and pay me no heed. What then?"
"Once we become acquainted," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you'll see that I'm not that sort of person."
As they talked together, the two of them had been going at it for about the time it would take to eat a meal. Hsi-men Ch'ing told the woman that she would have to utter promiscuously whatever:
Obscene sounds and wanton words,
occurred to her before he would come. The woman, from underneath, raised her hips with her hands, the better to receive his semen.
When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense,
and Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Ejaculated like a geyser.[7]
When they were finished, he retracted his organ which still carried the sulfur-imbrued ring, and the woman sucked it clean for him before the two of them lay down to sleep:
Head to head and thigh over thigh.[8]
Truly:
The predilection appealing equally to his taste,
He chooses to pluck the flower in the rear courtyard.
There is a song that testifies to this:
My handsome lover,
Particularly loves to pluck the flower in the rear courtyard.
Ordinarily he comes in by the front door,
But it is already occupied by the Brazenfaced Vanguard.[9]
When he presses his way into the portal, it is hard to bear,
But he pulls up on the reins,
Wheels his steed about, and
Returns triumphant to the fray;
Infusing my body with a melting sensation.
My powdered face is utterly abased;
My powdered face, suffused with the glow of sunset clouds.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman embraced each other until the second watch. It was only when the page boy arrived to fetch him with the horse that he got up and returned home.
The next morning, as soon as he got to the yamen, he sent two bailiffs to arrest Trickster Han and hale him before the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where he was arraigned for petty larceny in the neighborhood. Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he was subjected to the ankle-squeezers and given twenty strokes of the bamboo, so severely that:
Fresh blood flowed down his legs.
As a result, he was confined to his bed for a month and very nearly forfeited his life. After that, he was so intimidated that he dared not molest the woman with so much as his shadow. Truly:
He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;
He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.
A few days later, Lai-pao, Han Tao-kuo, and their retinue arrived back from the Eastern Capital.
Lai-pao gave a complete report on their mission to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, on seeing the girl, was very much delighted and said to thank you for your trouble. He put us up in the grand preceptor's mansion for two days, while we awaited his answer. He has sent you a black horse as a gift. He sealed up a present of fifty taels of silver for Manager Han, by way of the bride-price for his daughter, and also gave me a gift of twenty taels for my traveling expenses."
"That was only appropriate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When he read the letter he had received in reply, it was no more than an expression of the idea that:
His gratitude knew no bounds.
From this time on, the two households exchanged visiting cards employing the terminology appropriate for married relations and addressed each other as kinsmen. But no more of this.
When Han Tao-kuo had kowtowed in gratitude and was about to go home, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Manager Han, you must keep this bride-price for your daughter as a fitting reward for the kindness the two of you displayed in raising her."
Han Tao-kuo repeatedly refused to accept it, saying, "Thanks to your gracious magnanimity, we have already received compensation some time ago. How could it be right for me to accept this silver in addition? We've already imposed upon you more than enough as it is."
"If you don't agree," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll be annoyed. Take it home with you, but don't spend it. I've got something in mind for it."
Han Tao-kuo then kowtowed in gratitude, took his leave, and went home. When his wife saw that her husband had come back, she was utterly delighted. On the one hand, she took his luggage and brushed the dust off his clothes, while, on the other, she asked how things had gone, and whether their daughter had been well received when they arrived at their destination.
Han Tao-kuo told her about the events of the trip, both going and coming, saying, "It's a very decent establishment. When our daughter arrived there, she was provided with a suite of three rooms for herself, with two maidservants to wait on her, as well as clothing and hair ornaments, it goes without saying. The next day, she was taken to meet the lady of the house. Majordomo Chai was extremely pleased with her. He put us up for two days and regaled us with more wine and food than we or the servants could eat. He also provided a gift of fifty taels of silver, by way of a bride-price, which I repeatedly refused to keep for myself, but His Honor wouldn't take it and insisted that I bring it home with me."
Thereupon he proceeded to turn the silver over to the woman, who put it away. Only then did the woman feel as though:
The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.
"Tomorrow," she said, turning to Han Tao-kuo, "we ought to provide a tael of silver as an expression of thanks to Old Mother Feng. While you were away, I have been much indebted to her for constantly coming to keep me company. His Honor has also seen fit to reward her with a tael."
While they were speaking, whom should he see but a maidservant who came in to serve them with tea.
"Where did this young lady come from?" asked Han Tao-kuo.
"This is a maidservant that we have just purchased," the woman replied. "Her name is Chin-erh. Come over here and kowtow to your father."
After she had performed her kowtow, the maidservant went off to the kitchen.
His wife then proceeded, thus and so, to relate the whole story of her affair with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"After you went away, he dropped by here three or four times before coming up with the four taels of silver with which I was able to purchase this maidservant. Every time he comes by, he's good for a tael or two of silver. Han the Second, who really:
Doesn't know his place,[10]
got angry about it and came over here looking for trouble, but he happened to run into him and ended up being dragged off to the yamen, where he was beaten to a stinking pulp. Up until now, he hasn't dared show his face around here any more. His Honor, seeing how inconvenient our present location is, has promised to buy a house for us on a main street, and have us move in there to live."
"No wonder he refused to accept this silver just now," said Han Tao-kuo. "He told me to take it home with me, but not to spend it. So this is what it turns out to be about."
"Now that we've already got this fifty taels of silver in hand," the woman said, "in the future he's sure to add a few taels in addition and find a decent house for us. It's all owing to my willingness to surrender my body to him. We might as well take advantage of the opportunity to get what we can out of him and improve our life-style."
"After I've gone to the shop tomorrow," Han Tao-kuo said, "if he should show up, pretend that I don't know anything about it. Don't be remiss in your treatment of him, but cater to his every whim. It's not all that easy to make money these days. How did you ever happen on this way of doing it?"
"You lousy ruffian!" his wife laughed. "You'll drop dead in your tracks someday. You're certainly proficient enough at:
Eating the bread of idleness.[11]
You don't have any idea what your old lady has had to put up with."
The two of them laughed about it a while longer, after which she fed him his supper, and husband and wife prepared themselves to rest.
The next morning, Han Tao-kuo stopped by the mansion to fetch the keys and then proceeded on his way to open the shop, where he gave Old Mother Feng a tael of silver to reward her for her pains, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
One day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling were returning from the yamen, the judicial commissioner noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was riding a tall dappled black horse and asked him, "My colleague, how does it happen that you're no longer riding that white horse of yours but have exchanged it for this one? It certainly seems to be a fine steed, but what does it look like in the mouth?"
"I'm letting that horse rest at home for a couple of days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This horse was sent to me as a gift the other day by my kinsman Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital. It had been presented to him by Assistant Regional Commander Liu of the Hsi-hsia [12] army. It only has four teeth as yet in its mouth. It has a good gait, either fast or slow, its only faults being that it insists on hogging the manger and is prone to kick. When it first arrived, it had lost a good deal of weight from the rigors of the road, but in the last couple of days it is looking better on a regular diet."
"This horse of yours steps along pretty well," said Hsia Yen-ling. "You might as well ride it regularly as you traverse the streets every day, but don't try to take it too far. I would guess that hereabouts it must be worth at least seventy or eighty taels of silver. That horse that I customarily ride was lamed yesterday, so in order to come to the yamen this morning I had to send a note to borrow this horse from a relative of mine. It's been most inconvenient."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you don't have a horse at the moment, I've got a sorrel at home that I could let you have."
Judicial Commissioner Hsia raised his hand in acknowledgment and said, "If my colleague will deign to help me out, I will pay you whatever it is worth."
"There's no need to haggle over it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As soon as I get home, I'll send someone over with it."
When the two of them reached the western end of Lion Street, Hsi-men Ch'ing raised his hand in farewell and made his way home. As soon as he arrived there, he sent Tai-an to deliver the horse as he had promised.
When Judicial Commissioner Hsia saw it, he was delighted, rewarded Tai-an with a tael of silver, and gave him a note in reply, saying, "Thank you very much. I'll express my gratitude in person when I arrive at the yamen tomorrow."
After two days had gone by, it being the middle decade of the tenth month, Judicial Commissioner Hsia, having prepared some homemade chrysanthemum wine [13] and engaged the services of two boy actors, invited Hsi-men Ch'ing over for a chat, as a means of expressing his gratitude for the gift of the horse. Hsi-men Ch'ing, after eating his noonday meal at home and taking care of some business, set out for Hsia Yen-ling's house to attend the party.
It so happens that the judicial commissioner had provided an elaborate feast for the delectation of Hsi-men Ch'ing alone. When he saw that he had arrived, he was:
Unable to contain his delight,[14]
hastened down the steps to welcome him, and ushered him into the reception hall, where they exchanged salutations.
"My colleague," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need was there for you to go to so much trouble?"
"This year I've had some chrysanthemum wine made in my humble abode," said Hsia Yen-ling. "Being at leisure, I thought I'd see if you would condescend to come by for a chat. I haven't presumed to invite any other guests."
Thereupon, having exchanged the customary amenities, they discarded their formal clothes and sat down in the positions appropriate for guest and host. After tea had been served, they played a board game together and then took their places at the table, where they proceeded to drink wine and chat, while the two boy actors entertained them, playing their instruments and singing by their side. Truly, it is a case of:
Wine is presented in golden goblets,
brimming with fragrant foam;
Ivory clappers accompany the psaltery,
as they sing "Partridge Sky."
We will say no more about Hsi-men Ch'ing's participation in the drinking party at Hsia Yen-ling's home.
Let us return to the story of P'an Chin-lien. When she observed what a long time it had been since Hsi-men Ch'ing had paid a visit to her quarters, every day:
Her halcyon hued coverlet felt cold;[15]
Her hibiscus bed curtains were chill.[16]
That night she left the postern gate ajar, while inside her bedroom:

She brightly lit the silver lamp,
Leaned against the standing screen,
And idly strummed her *p'i-p'a*.
She kept up her vigil until the second or third watch and sent Ch'un-mei out to look several times, but there was nothing to be seen. Truly:
She who is wont to diligently strum her *p'i-p'a*
late into the night;
When all alone in her deserted chamber can scarcely
bear to play it.[17]
Picking up her *p'i-p'a* and laying it across her lap she gently played a song to the tune "River Water, with Two Variations" in order to dispel her languor. Unable to fall asleep on the bed with her clothes on, what was she to do?
Languidly I lean against the standing screen,
Or force myself to lie down in my clothes.
Suddenly she heard the wind chimes on the eaves of her room:
Make a peal of sound.
Thinking it was Hsi-men Ch'ing who had come and was making the racket with the door knocker, she hastily sent Ch'un-mei out to take a look. But she reported, "Mother, you're mistaken. The wind has come up outside and it's started to snow." The woman then continued to accompany herself as she sang:
I hear the roaring of the wind,
I see the snow blowing against the casement.
Let the frozen flakes flutter!
Before long:
The lamp grew dim and the incense burnt out.[18]
She thought to herself that she ought to trim the wick and relight the incense, but, seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing hadn't come, she felt no inclination to move. She sang:
Too lazy to trim the precious lamp,
Too listless to relight the incense burner;
Truly:
Each day was like three months of autumn;
Each night seemed like half a summer.
Even if I last through this night,
I'll only be afraid of the morrow.
The more I think about it, the more I wonder,
when will this botheration ever end?
"You fickle scoundrel!" she thought to herself. "When I think of all the things you said to me at the start, how can I help feeling hurt?"
Coda:
Whenever I think of it, and especially tonight,
it really burns me up!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.
"Who would have thought you'd land me in such a fix, with no place to go?" she cursed[19] at him.
From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through![20]
To resume our story, around the time of the first watch, Hsi-men Ch'ing left the drinking party at Hsia Yen-ling's and set out for home. The sky was overcast the whole way and the precipitation, which was half rain and half snow, melted as soon as it landed on his clothes. All he could do was whip his horse toward home, lighted along the way by a servant carrying a lantern.
When he arrived, he didn't go into the rear compound but headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she met him at the door and brushed the snow and sleet off his clothes. Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a white satin riding outfit emblazoned with a blue silk mandarin square that featured an embroidered lion, [21] a "loyal and tranquil hat,"[22] black boots, a palmetto cloak, and a sable scarf. After Li P'ing-erh had taken his outer garments, he sat down on the bed, wearing only a loosely cut satin robe, and asked, "Is the young fellow asleep yet?"
"The little fellow's been playing for some time," Li P'ing-erh replied, "but he's just fallen asleep."
"Let the child sleep," Hsi-men Ch'ing directed her. "We'll have to avoid any heavy movements or we may startle him awake."
Ying-ch'un then brought them some tea. When they had finished drinking it, Li P'ing-erh asked, "How did you happen to come home from your drinking party so early today?"
"It's all because of that horse I gave him the other day," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that Hsia Yen-ling went to the trouble of laying on a feast today, entirely on my account. He also engaged the services of two young actors. After I'd enjoyed his hospitality for quite a while, I noticed that it had started to snow, so I came home early."
"Would you like some wine?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I can get the maidservant to decant some for you. You must be chilled from making your way home through the heavy snow."
"If there's still some of that grape wine around," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can decant some of that for me. The wine he served at his place today was a chrysanthemum wine he had made for himself. It tasted pretty insipid to me, so I didn't really have a lot to drink."
Ying-ch'un then brought out a table with several saucers of marinated chicken appetizers, fancy fruit and vegetable delicacies, and the like. Li P'ing-erh sat down on a stool to one side and ordered a small brazier to be placed underneath the table.
While the two of them were having a drink together in Li P'ing-erh's bedroom, P'an Chin-lien, all by herself in her deserted quarters, was sitting on the bed fondling her *p'i-p'a*. On her table:
The lamp grew dim and the candle guttered out.
At one and the same time, she wanted to go to sleep but was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might turn up after all, and she wanted to stay awake but kept nodding with fatigue. And on top of everything else, it was cold. There was nothing for it but to remove her headdress:
Carelessly coil her raven tresses,
let down one side of her bed curtains, and:
Sit there all wrapped up in her coverlet.
Truly:
Leaning languidly against the embroidered bed,[23]
she's too depressed to sleep;
Inside the hanging brocade bed curtains
the embroidered coverlet is empty.
"It's all too obvious that my fickle lover
has lightly abandoned me.
How could he bring himself to thus betray
my ever loving heart?"
Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:
I hate my fickle lover for lightly abandoning me.
Depressed and apart, I give way to idle annoyance.
She called Ch'un-mei over to her once more, saying, "Go outside and take another look to see if your father's showed up or not; and report back to me right away."
Ch'un-mei went out and returned after some time, saying, "Mother, you still delude yourself into thinking Father hasn't come home, do you? When Father came home he couldn't be bothered coming in here. Who's that drinking wine in the Sixth Lady's rooms if it isn't him?"
Nothing might have happened if the woman had not heard these words, but having heard them:
It was just as if she were being stabbed in the heart
with one knife after another.
She cursed him a number of times for a fickle scoundrel, and, before she knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow from her eyes. Putting her *p'i-p'a* high out of reach, she continued her song:
They say, "Murder may be excused;
But reason cannot be evaded."[24]
"No fickle deed escapes the eye of Heaven."
"Just thinking about it reminds me how much I love him, on the one hand, and how much I hate him, on the other."
"The pain of heartache is hard to dispel."
"In a sorrowful breast depression feeds on itself."
"You lousy, heartless lover!" she cried out. "What's she got that I haven't got?
This salt is just as salty;
This vinegar just as sour.[25]
This brick is just as thick;
This tile just as thin.[26]
Then, one fine day, you:
Abandoned the old in favor of the new."[27]
You've, "Cast off a sweet peach,
To seek out a sour date."[28]
"I never should have fallen for you in the first place."
While I've completely, "Misread the stars
on your steelyard."[29]
Coda:
Whenever I think of it,
it really burns me up!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.
From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through.[30]
Truly:
If you're going to be a human being,
don't be a woman;
Or your every joy and sorrow will be
dependent on another.[31]
It's the old story of the, "Fond female
and the fickle fellow";[32]
If only she hadn't taken him so seriously
to begin with.
Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:
I'll always remember the first time we met;
When I fondly imagined we'd grow old together.
"Who would have thought that today he'd have a change of heart; that one fine day he'd lightly cast me aside and pay me no further heed? It's just like those times when:"
The Ch'u peak was shrouded in clouds;[33]
The Blue Bridge was inundated by water;[34]
The male and female phoenixes were driven asunder.
"So that now:
Though we talk, face to face,
Our hearts are separated by a thousand mountains.[35]

Though divided by a single wall,
Those few feet prevent our seeing each other."
Our hearts are distant, though the road's not far.
"Our love has dissolved:
Like salt falling into water;
Like water falling upon sand."
Our feelings are estranged, so letters are few.
"In vain do I find myself:
Possessed of a plaint without a place to lodge it."
The Earth is thick and Heaven is high.[36]
"In vain do I find myself:
Lacking a dream to take me to the Radiant Terrace."[37]
My dreams are interrupted, my soul is troubled.[38]
My handsome lover, at the critical juncture,
has had a change of heart.
Coda:
Whenever I think of it,
it really burns me up!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.
From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't carry through.[39]

Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine with Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom when he suddenly heard the sound of someone playing the *p'i-p'a* in a nearby dwelling. "Who's playing the *p'i-p'a?*" he asked.

"It's the sound of the Fifth Lady, over there, playing her *p'i-p'a*," replied Ying-ch'un.

"So the Fifth Lady hasn't gone to bed yet," said Li P'ing-erh. "Hsiu-ch'un, run over there and ask the Fifth Lady to come have a drink of wine. Say, 'It's Mother who invites you.' "

When Hsiu-ch'un had gone, Li P'ing-erh hastily directed Ying-ch'un, "Put another place at the table and set out a wine cup and chopsticks."

Some time later, Hsiu-ch'un came back and reported, "The Fifth Lady has already taken down her hair. She won't come."

"Ying-ch'un," said Li P'ing-erh, "You go and ask the Fifth Lady again. Say, 'Mother and Father both invite the Fifth Lady.' "

Not long afterwards, Ying-ch'un came back and reported, "The Fifth Lady has locked the postern gate. She says she's already blown out the lamp and gone to bed."

"Don't you believe a word that little whore says," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's go over there, the two of us, and drag her here, by main force if necessary. It would be fun to play a board game with her."

Thereupon, he and Li P'ing-erh went over together and knocked at her postern gate. They had to knock for some time before Ch'un-mei came out and opened the door for them. Hsi-men Ch'ing, pulling Li P'ing-erh behind him, went right into her bedroom, where they found the woman sitting inside the bed curtains with the *p'i-p'a* lying beside her.

"You crazy little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how come you have to be asked two or three times, and still refuse to come?"

Chin-lien just sat there on her bed:
Without turning a hair,[40]
and pulling a long face. It was some time before she spoke. "It's only appropriate that someone so out of favor should be relegated to this desolate chamber. As long as you're determined to let me:
Fend for myself,
what's the point of coming around to pay me any further attention? Don't waste your affections here; save them for someplace they'll be better appreciated."

"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"An eighty-year-old crone may lack teeth,
But she's still got plenty of lip.
Sister Li is inviting you over to her place to play a board game with her. She's been waiting all this time and you still haven't come."

"What's wrong, Sister?" said Li P'ing-erh. "We've already set out the pieces over in my room. We've both got time on our hands. Come play a game and we'll wager a cup of wine on it."

"Sister Li," said Chin-lien, "the two of you go right ahead. I've already taken down my hair. You wouldn't understand, but I'm really not interested in anything at the moment. I'm going to go to bed. I don't feel free and easy like the rest of you. These last few days I've barely been hanging on. Not even a drop of:
Saffron soup or plain water,
has crossed my lips. It's all I can do nowadays to put a good face on it and go through the motions."

"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're perfectly fine. What's the matter with you? If you haven't been feeling well inside, why haven't you told me about it, so I could call in a doctor to examine you?"

"If you don't believe me," said Chin-lien, "just ask Ch'un-mei to bring me my mirror. Let me take another look. These last few days I've gotten so thin I hardly seem human."

Ch'un-mei actually brought the mirror and handed it to the woman, who looked at herself by lamplight. Truly:
Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror,
and retouch her powdered makeup;
She has wasted away on her lover's account,
losing the freshness of her complexion.
Closing her door, she is no longer concerned
with the idle breeze and moonlight;
Henceforth she will leave it to the plum blossoms
to do whatever they please.[41]

Once again she started to sing, to the same tune as before:
Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror;
Too listless to paint in my moth eyebrows;
Secretly, my spirits have wasted away,
My good looks have become ravaged,
I am utterly emaciated and none too well.

Hsi-men Ch'ing snatched the mirror out of her hands and looked at himself, saying, "Am I any less emaciated than you are?"

"Who can be compared to you?" demanded Chin-lien. "Every day, what with:
Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,[42]
you're forever fattening yourself up, only the better to give other people a hard time."

At this point, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Without permitting any further explanation,
sat down unceremoniously on the bed right beside her, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss. Exploring underneath the quilt with his hand, he ascertained that she had not yet undressed, whereupon he stuck both hands into her waistband and said, "My child, it's true you've lost a little weight."

"You crazy good-for-nothing!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Your hands are ice-cold! I'm freezing to death. Did you think I was only trying to fool you? Truly:"
The fragrance has faded from the begonia's beauty;
The clothing is slack around the willow waist.

Pearly tears cascaded over her fragrant cheeks as she continued her plaint, "Nobody knows the troubles I endure. All I can do is:
Consign my tears to my stomach."[43]
Depression only augments my boredom,
Do what I will to dispel it;
And now, even my store of pearly tears
is utterly exhausted.
Coda:
Whenever I think of it,
it really burns the hell out of me!
You've ruined the springtime
of my youth.
From the way you've walked out on me, it's clear:
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you won't follow through.[44]

After a brief altercation, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally succeeded in dragging her off:
Willy-nilly, dead or alive,[45]
to Li P'ing-erh's bedroom, where they played a board game and drank together for a while. When she got up to go, Li P'ing-erh noticed the sour expression on her face and persuaded Hsi-men Ch'ing to go over to her place to spend the night.

Truly, it was a case of:
When her waist is thin you can be sure
she's upset about something;
Traces of tears indicate the depth of
the sorrow of separation.

A poem testifies to this:
Ever since their separation, she has lost
the freshness of her complexion;
Tossing and turning a myriad or a thousand times,[46]
she is too listless to leave her bed.[47]
It was only due to the intercession of P'ing-erh,
who chose to do her a favor;
That the Goddess of Witches' Mountain was able
to have her tryst with King Hsiang

When old woman Feng came to the door beside the great hall, Daian was standing there with a tea tray in his hands, waiting. He looked at the old woman, made a face and said: "You go first. We shall start as soon as Father has finished talking to Uncle Ying. Qitong has already gone with the wine." The old woman quickened her pace and hurried away.

Ying Bojue had come to say that Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth, the contractors, had secured orders for the provision of thirty thousand lots of incense and wax for the annual contribution to the Emperor, in value about ten thousand taels. "Of course, there will be interest," he said, "and they are to be paid the money in Dongpingfu when the contract is completed. I have come to see what you think about it, and whether you would like to take a hand."

"Why should I?" Ximen said. "These contractors are all rogues. They will bribe the officials so as to get some advantage for themselves. Now that I am an official myself, I must not get mixed up in affairs of that sort."

"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "if you feel you cannot, I must ask somebody else. But I venture to ask you to lend two thousand taels, with interest at five per cent. to be paid monthly, and the capital to be repaid when they get their money. What do you say to that?"

"Since it is you who come to ask," Ximen said, "I think I might manage a thousand taels for them, but I am spending a great deal of money on my estate and have not much to spare."

Ying Bojue, seeing that his friend showed less disinclination in this matter, said: "If you can manage it, why not add five hundred more and make it fifteen hundred? They will not dare to be late with their payments."

"If they are late," Ximen said, "I shall know how to deal with them. Just one word, Brother Ying. If I let them have this money, I won't have them going here there and everywhere, using my name and doing dirty work under my banner. If I hear of anything of that sort, they will discover that the local jail is a most uncomfortable lodging."

"You should not say that, Brother," Ying Bojue said. "If they have responsibilities, they must carry them out. If they go about using your name, it will be all right for them, but if they do anything wrong, what shall I do? Please do not think any more about that, Brother. If there is anything wrong, I will answer for it. Now that you have made up your mind, I will bring them tomorrow to sign the document."

"Don't bring them tomorrow," Ximen Qing said, "I shall be busy. The day after will be more convenient."

Bojue went away, and Ximen Qing told Daian to saddle his horse. He put on his eyeshades and asked if Qitong had gone. "He came and took the net for the wine jar and went off with it," Daian said. He helped Ximen Qing on to his horse, and they set out for Ox-hide Alley.

One day Han the Second, Han Daoguo's younger brother, the ne'erdo-well, lost all his money gambling, drank till his eyes almost came out of his head, and then went to his brother's house to ask Wang Liu'er to give him some more wine. He took some little sausages from his sleeve and said: "Sister-in-law, my brother is away and I am going to drink a jar of wine with you."
The woman was afraid. She knew Ximen Qing was coming, and old woman Feng was in the kitchen. She would have nothing to do with him.
"I'm not going to drink," she said. "If you wish to, go and drink by yourself. I have no patience with you. Your brother is not at home. Why do you come here and bother me?"
Han the Second glared with his greedy eyes and refused to go away. Then, underneath the table, he saw a jar of wine, sealed and with a label of red paper. "Sister-in-law," he said, "where did you get that wine? Open it and have a pot warmed for me. You know how to enjoy yourself."
"You must not touch it," Wang Liu'er cried, "it came from the Master's. Your brother has not seen it yet, but when he comes back, you shall certainly have some of it."
"Why should I wait for my brother?" Han the Second cried. "I don't care if it belongs to the Emperor. I am going to have a cup."
He was going to remove the seal, but the woman snatched it out of his hand, and took it to her room. As she did so, she pushed Han the Second, and he fell to the ground, his face upturned to the skies. He had considerable difficulty in getting to his feet again, and his shame was turned to anger.
"You thievish whore!" he mumbled. "I am kind to you and bring you something to eat. I remember that you are lonely and come to have a drink with you. But instead of taking any interest in me, you knock me down. Let me tell you this. Don't you get on any high horse. I know you have a rich lover. That is why you won't have anything to do with me. You want to get me out of the way, so you insult me and push me about. You took very good care not to let me know. If you had done, you worthless wretch, you would have seen my knife go in white and come out red."
When Wang Liu'er heard him talking so unpleasantly, the color came into her cheeks and spread from her ears until her whole face was crimson. She took a dolly pin in her hand, beat him, and cursed him. "You starving thief! Where did you get drunk before coming here to spread your wild fire? I will never forgive you."
Han the Second, mumbling and calling her evil names, finally went out, still cursing.
At that moment, Ximen Qing arrived. He saw what happened and asked who the man was. "Who is he, indeed?" Wang Liu'er cried. "Why, that Han the Second. He knew his brother was not at home, so when he had lost his money gambling, he got drunk and came here to knock me about. His brother often had to give him a thrashing when he was here."
When Han the Second saw Ximen Qing, he was off like a streak of smoke.
"The beggar!" Ximen Qing said, "tomorrow I will give him a little moral instruction at my office."
"I am sorry he made you angry," Wang Liu'er said.
"You don't know," Ximen said. "With fellows like that, one must not be too indulgent."
"You are right," the woman said, "it never pays to be generous with some people."
She asked Ximen Qing to go in and sit down. He told Qitong to take back his horse, and said to Daian: "You stand at the door, and, if you see even so much as that rascal's shadow, tie him up, and I'll have him before me at the office tomorrow."
"When he knows you are here," Daian said, "his spirit will not know where to hide itself."
Ximen Qing sat down, and Wang Liu'er made a reverence to him. Then she bade her young maid bring some tea with nuts for him. She told the girl to kowtow.
"She seems a good girl." Ximen said. "You must use her as you think fit." Then he added: "Old woman Feng is here. Why doesn't she bring the tea?"
"The old lady is in the kitchen," Wang Liu'er said. "She is doing some work I told her to do, and busy at the moment."
"That wine I told a boy to bring you," Ximen said, "was presented to me by a eunuch. It is 'Bamboo Leaves' wine, which has a good many drugs mixed with it and is very potent. The other day I found that the wine you have is not good enough for me, and so I sent this jar."
Wang Liu'er again made a reverence to him. "Thank you for the wine," she said. "We are unpretentious people, and live in this hole-and-corner street where there is no good wineshop at which I can get any of the best wine. If I want it, I have to go to the High Street to buy it."
"When your husband comes back," Ximen said, "I am going to arrange with him to buy a house in Lion Street, and then you can go to live there. It is near our own shop and in a good district for buying things."
"How kind of you, my lord, to think of me like that. I have been anxious for a long time to get away from this place. If we move, it will be easier for you to come and see me, and we shall escape people's chatter. Of course, my behavior is perfectly correct, and I don't care what they say. Father, do whatever seems good to you, whether my husband is at home or not."
They talked for a while, then Wang Liu'er set out a table in her own room, and invited Ximen to go in and take off his cloak. Wine and dishes were brought, and she poured wine for him and drank with him. She sat upon his knees, and so they drank. When they had had wine enough, they took off their clothes and went to the bed, where they played together merrily and without constraint. Wang Liu'er had placed soft bedclothes on her bed, and perfumed them with most powerful scent. Ximen Qing had discovered that she was well skilled in the arts of love, and was anxious to show her that he himself was no mean performer.
In his sleeve he had a silken kerchief. He opened it. Inside were a silver clasp, a lover's cap, a sulfur ring, a white silk ribbon with medicinal properties, and all manner of things for increasing passion. Wang Liu'er set her head upon the pillow.
She lifted her ivory-white legs to show her cock's tongue. Ximen asked whether he could put his medicine into it; he attached the silver clasp to the root of his penis, added the sulfur ring and smeared his belly with ointment from the navel downwards. She grasped his treasure and put it deep inside her, embracing him hard and long.
"Are your legs tired?" said Wang Liu'er. "Hold the bed; I'll move my body." And again, "I hope you're not in pain. Shouldn't I lift my legs higher?"
Ximen tied her leg to the bed and pressed down with his body. The juice of love flowed continually from her body like snail's slime. Something white came out too, and Ximen asked, "Why have you got so much of this?"
He was about to clean himself, but Wang Liu'er said, "Wait, I'll clean you in my own way," knelt down, and licked him clean with her sensuous tongue.
Then Ximen, again fired with desire, turned her over and started on the flower in her bottom. But the sulfur on his penis proved sticky, so progress was difficult and she grimaced with pain. He made little headway, and Wang Liu'er, feeling about with her hand, found that he had gone only halfway. She turned around and said, with a winning look, "Darling, please go in slowly. The root of your prick is bigger than I can take." Ximen lifted his legs so that he could see himself going in and out.
"Wang Liu'er, my daughter," he said, "there is nothing I enjoy more than this. It is well that I met you: you please me greatly. I will never leave you."
"Dearest," Wang Liu'er said, "my only fear is that you will tire of me and put me aside."
"If you had known me longer, you would know that I am not that kind of man."
They talked and sported together for a long time. "Unless you speak lovingly to me," Ximen said at last, "I will not yield to you." Then Wang Liu'er raised herself upon her hands to receive the stream of life. Ximen had such an orgasm that the liquid flowed like a torrent. He withdrew, still wearing the ring. Wang Liu'er washed him orally, and they lay down together.
Ximen Qing and Wang Liu'er embraced, and lay together till the second night watch. Then a boy came with a horse, and he went home.
The next day, when he reached his office, he sent two policemen to seize Han the Second. The young man was treated as a footpad, and, without any trial, the screws were put upon him and he was given twenty stripes. The blood ran down his legs. For a month he had to keep his bed. Indeed, he nearly died. This frightened him so much that he never again passed anywhere near the woman's door.
The days passed. Laibao, Han Daoguo and the others came back from the Eastern Capital and gave an account of their journey to Ximen Qing. "Comptroller Zhai," Han Daoguo said, "was very pleased with my daughter, and told us to thank you very much. We stayed a few days with him. Then he gave me a letter of thanks, and sent you a black horse as a present. Clerk Han got fifty taels of silver, and I got twenty as journey money."
"Money enough," said Ximen Qing. He read the letter of thanks. Ever afterwards, Zhai and Ximen Qing regarded one another as kinsmen and addressed each other as such.
Han Daoguo kowtowed to Ximen Qing and made ready to go. "Han," Ximen said, "the money is yours. A daughter like that is worth it."
Han Daoguo hesitated to take it. "Only the other day," he said, "you were good enough to lend me money. How can I take this now? I have already troubled you enough."
"If you do not take it, I shall be annoyed. Take it home with you, but do not spend it. I will tell you why later."
Han Daoguo expressed his gratitude and went away. His wife was very pleased to see him. She took his luggage, cleaned the dust from him, and asked him question after question about her daughter's affairs. Han Daoguo told her about the journey.
"It is an excellent household," he said. "When our daughter arrived, she was given three rooms for herself, and two maids to wait on her. As for clothes and jewels, they were too many for me to give you any idea of them. The day after her arrival she went to pay her respects to the Lady, and Comptroller Zhai was delighted with her. He asked us to stay a day or two, and entertained us so well that, even with the servants, there was too much for us. He gave me a present of fifty taels that I did not mean to keep, but our master would not have it, and told me to keep it."
He gave the money to his wife. She was as delighted as a piece of stone when at last it comes to rest upon the ground. "We must give a tael to old woman Feng," she said. "She has very kindly come here all the time you have been away. Our master has already given her one tael."
As they were talking, the little maid brought them tea. "Who is this?" Han Daoguo said.
"I have just bought her," his wife said, "and her name is Jin'er." Then she said to the girl: "Come here and kowtow to your father." The little girl did so and then retired to the kitchen.
Wang Liu'er told her husband all about her dealings with Ximen Qing. "Since you have been away," she said, "he has been here three or four times. He gave me four taels of silver to buy this little girl, and, every time he comes, he gives me a tael or two. That younger brother of ours, who does not know the difference between high and low, came piddling around. Master Ximen happened to see him, and he was haled to the office and well beaten there. Since then he has never dared to show his face again. Our master says this place is not very convenient, and he has promised to buy a house in the main street, and let us go there."
"I see now why he would not take the silver," Han Daoguo said, "but asked me to take it and not to spend it. Now I understand what he was thinking about."
"Well," Wang Liu'er said, "here are fifty taels. We will add a few more, and buy a really fine house. Then we shall have a comfortable life, good eating and fine clothes. It is obviously worth while my letting him have me."
"Tomorrow," Han Daoguo said, "if he should happen to come when I have gone to the shop, pretend that I know nothing about it, and don't treat him unkindly. Do everything he would have you do, for it is no easy matter making money nowadays, and I know no better way than this."
Wang Liu'er laughed. "You rascal. It is easy money for you, but you don't know the sufferings I have to endure." They both laughed heartily. She prepared supper, and they went to bed.
The next day Han went to Ximen's house to get the key, then opened the shop and gave old woman Feng a tael of silver for her pains.

* * *

One day Magistrate Xia and Ximen Qing left the office together. Xia saw that his colleague was riding a big dappled black horse. "Why don't you ride your white horse now, but this black one? This is a fine horse, but I am not so sure about his mouth."
"I am letting my white horse have a few days' rest," Ximen said. "This one was sent to me by my kinsman Zhai at the Eastern Capital. He got it from General Liu of Xixia. It has good teeth, and is not too fast or too slow, but it has one slight defect: it won't let any other horse get near the manger. When I first had it, it lost its sleekness for a while, but it has been eating better these last few days."
"It seems to me to go very well," Magistrate Xia said, "but if I were you, I should keep it for riding about town and not take it too far. A horse like that would cost seventy or eighty taels to buy here. There has been something wrong with my horse, and before I could come to the office today, I had to borrow this one from a relative. It is a very poor beast."
"Don't let that upset you," Ximen Qing said. "I have another one at home, a chestnut. You shall have that."
Magistrate Xia bowed. "If you are really so kind, I must pay you, of course."
"Don't think of such a thing," Ximen said. "As soon as I get home, I will have it brought to you." They came to West Street and there separated.
When Ximen reached home, he told Daian to take the horse to his colleague Xia. The magistrate was very pleased and gave the boy a tael of silver. "Thank your master for me," he said, "and I will thank him myself when I see him at the office."
Two months went by. Magistrate Xia made some chrysanthemum wine, engaged two young actors, and invited Ximen Qing. Ximen dined at home, attended to some business, and then went to the party. Xia had prepared an excellent repast especially for Ximen Qing, and was very pleased when he arrived. He came down the steps to welcome his guests, and they greeted each other in the hall.
"Why have you been to so much trouble on my account?" Ximen said.
"I have simply made a little chrysanthemum wine," said Xia, "and thought I might perhaps invite you to my poor house for a talk. I have not invited anyone else." They took off their ceremonial clothes, and sat down in the places of guest and host. After tea, they played chess. Then they sat and drank wine while they talked. The young actors played and sang for them.
For a long time, Ximen Qing had not been to the apartments of Pan Jinlian. She felt the loneliness of her curtained bed, the coldness of its dainty coverlets. One day, she opened the corner gate and lighted the silver lamp in her room. She leaned upon the screen and played her lute. It was about midway between the second and the third night watches. Several times, she sent Chunmei to look for her husband, but Chunmei could never see him.
Through the long night she played her silver lute, but the room seemed so lonely that she could not bear to continue. Then she took the lute and laid it upon her knees. She played softly to herself and sang
I rested sadly on the lattice
Then sought my rest without undressing.
Suddenly, she thought she heard a sound on the gong outside and imagined it was Ximen's signal. Hastily, she bade Chunmei go out to see. "You were mistaken, Mother," Chunmei said when she returned, "it was only the wind. It is going to snow." Then Jinlian sang again.
I hear the sound of the wind
The snow is fluttering against my window
And the ice flowers drifting one by one.
The lamp grew dim, and the incense burned out. She would have drawn the wick, but there was no sign of Ximen Qing. She could not summon energy enough to touch it. She sang again.
I am too languid to trim the jeweled lamp
I am too languid to light the incense
I make shift to pass the night
Dreading the morrow that must come.
When I think of you, how shall my sadness end?
When I think of you, my mind is consumed.
You have despoiled my tender years, the flower of my youth
You have deserted me.
You have not fulfilled the promise you made in days gone by.
About the first night watch, Ximen Qing returned from Magistrate Xia's house. As he rode along, the sky was dark and lowering. The sleet covered his cloak and melted where it fell. He pressed his horse homeward. The boys carried lanterns for him. He did not go to the inner court but straight to the room of Li Ping'er. Li Ping'er welcomed him, brushed off the snow, and took his clothes. Dressed only in his silken gown, he sat on her bed and asked if the baby was asleep. "He has been playing for some time and now he has gone to sleep," Li Ping'er told him. Yingchun brought tea.
"Why have you come back from your party so early?" Li Ping'er said.
Ximen Qing said: "Some time ago, I gave Xia a horse, and today he gave a feast especially for me, and engaged two young actors. I saw that it was going to snow, so I came back in good time."
"Would you like to drink again?" Li Ping'er said. "I will tell the maid to heat some wine for you. You came back through the snow and you must not catch cold."
"We have some good grape wine," Ximen said. "Heat some of that for me. The wine I drank at Xia's place was homemade chrysanthemum wine, but I do not care much for its strong odor and I did not have enough to drink."
Yingchun set out a table with refreshments and fruits. Li Ping'er sat down on a little bench opposite Ximen. There was a small charcoal burner under the table. They sat together drinking. Meanwhile, Jinlian was cold and lonely in her room. She sat on the bed with her lute still upon her knees. The lamp had gone out, and the candles were dim. She would have gone to sleep, but she still hoped that Ximen might come. She was sleepy and cold. At last, she took off her headdress, tied her hair carelessly, pulled down the curtain, and sat on the bed with the bedclothes huddled over her.
I cast myself upon the embroidered bed too sad to sleep.
I draw the silken curtains.
But there is only emptiness within them.
Would that I had known his faithlessness before
My trusting heart meets with an ill reward.
Again she sang:
I hate him for his cruelty, so lightly he deserted me.
In hours of idleness, our separation tortures me.
Once again, she bade Chunmei go outside to look for Ximen. "Go once more to see if Father is coming," she said. "Come back quickly and tell me."
The maid soon returned. "Mother," she said, "are you still thinking that Father is not back? He came back a long time ago and he is drinking in the Sixth Lady's room."
This was more than Jinlian could bear. It made her suffer as though her heart had been pierced by knives. Over and over again she cursed him for a fickle-hearted rogue. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She lifted her lute and sang.
My heart aches. I cannot comfort it

Sorrow and misery consume me utterly
He casts aside the tender peach and seeks a bitter fruit.
He, whom I made my guide, led me astray.
When I think of you, my mind is consumed.
You have despoiled my tender years, the flower of my youth
You have deserted me.
You have not fulfilled the promise you made in days gone by.
Ximen Qing suddenly heard the strains of the lute. "Who is playing the lute?" he asked.
"It is the Fifth Lady," Yingchun said.
"Hasn't the Fifth Lady gone to bed yet?" Li Ping'er said. "Go at once," she said to Xiuchun, "and ask her to come and take wine with us. Tell her I ask her to come."
Xiuchun went out, and Li Ping'er told Yingchun to place another seat for the Fifth Lady and to set out cup and chopsticks. When the maid came back, she said Jinlian would not come, she had gone to bed. "You go and ask her," Li Ping'er said to Yingchun. But Yingchun came back with the same story.
"The Fifth Lady has fastened the corner gate and blown out her lamp. She has gone to bed."
"Don't believe the little strumpet," Ximen Qing said. "Let us go and drag her out. We will make her come and then we will play chess with her."
He went with Li Ping'er to the corner gate. After they had knocked for a long time, Chunmei came and opened it. Ximen Qing took Li Ping'er by the hand, and they went together into Jinlian's room. She was sitting inside the bed curtains, with the lute beside her.
"You funny little strumpet," Ximen said, "why do we have to send for you three times, and still you won't come?"
Jinlian sat on the bed and did not make the slightest show of moving. She looked sulky. After a long wait, she said: "Unlucky people like me are only fit to be left in the cold. Let me live my own life. Don't trouble about me. Don't try to be kind to me. Save all your attentions for others."
"You marvelous little slave!" Ximen said, "you are like an eighty-year-old woman who has lost her teeth but can still make shift to chatter without them. Your Sixth Sister wants to play chess, and we have waited for you a long time."
"Yes, Sister," Li Ping'er said. "I have set out the chess, and we have nothing better to do. Let us play and win some wine to drink."
"Sister," Jinlian said, "please go away. I shall not come. You don't seem to realize that I am not very well. I need sleep. I have more to worry me than you have. These last few days I have had a wandering fit. Who but I would have to taste yellow soup and plain water? I have had to spend my days looking at my own face."
"There is nothing at all the matter with you," Ximen Qing said. "Why do you pretend to be ill? If you really are, tell me, and I will send for the doctor."
"You don't believe me, do you?" Jinlian said. "Chunmei, bring me my mirror and let me look at myself. I have been growing thinner and thinner day by day."
Chunmei brought her a mirror and she looked at her reflection in the lamplight. Ximen took the mirror from her and looked at himself in it. "I am not very thin," he said.
"You don't expect me to look like you, do you?" Jinlian said. "You drink wine day after day, and gobble down huge slices of meat. You have grown fat. Now you are making fun of me."
Ximen Qing said no more, but seated himself beside her on the bed. He put his arm around her neck and kissed her. He would have stretched out his hand to smooth her body, but she was still wearing her clothes. He put both hands around her waist. "My daughter," he said, "you really are thinner."
"How cold your hands are, you funny creature," Jinlian said. "You make me feel like ice. Did you think I was trying to deceive you? Nobody cares if I'm sad and my tears flow down to my own stomach." She resisted for a little longer, but Ximen Qing dragged her bodily to the room of Li Ping'er. There they played chess and drank wine. When Jinlian had to go away, Li Ping'er noticed that her face was sour, and urged Ximen Qing to go with her.

## 060

### Hsi-men Ch'ing Holds Chiao Rites at the Temple of the Jade Emperor; Wu Yüeh-niang Listens to Buddhist Nuns Reciting their Sacred Texts

Emperor Wu of the Han ordained lustral rituals, erecting an altar at night;
Pouring libations of numinous water, he offered *chiao* rites to the immortals.
In front of the palace halls Jade Maidens arranged the incense tables;
At the edge of the clouds brazen colossi elevated dew-catching pans.[1]
When will the crimson standards of the goddess ever reappear in his dream?
Where are the peaches of immortality that might enable him to mount the phoenix?[2]
In his tomb at Mao-ling the buried armaments are shrouded in mist and rain;
The stone horses that mark the site are silent, the spreading creepers are cold.[3]

On that occasion Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in P'an Chin-lien's quarters. The woman's only regret was that she couldn't:
Bore her way into his belly.[4]
Beside the pillow she:
Played up to him a thousand ways,
Ensnared him with a myriad wiles;[5]
Wiping away her tears with mermaid silk,
Responding to him with warm compliance;
hoping thereby that she could engross her lover's heart. How could she have known that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already initiated an affair on the outside with Han Tao-kuo's wife, Wang Liu-erh?
For this woman he had laid out a hundred twenty taels of silver to purchase a house on the east side of the stone bridge on Lion Street. The house consisted of a twelve-foot-wide frontage and four interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. The second courtyard was occupied by a passageway in addition to a nine-foot-wide reception room. The third courtyard consisted of a three-foot-wide anteroom for the display of Buddhist effigies and ancestral tablets, a six-foot-wide living apartment, in the interior of which there were the usual recessed k'ang frame and, across from it, a fire pit for burning charcoal, all of which had been newly replastered. The fourth courtyard, in addition to a six-foot-wide kitchen, contained a three-foot-wide storage room for charcoal and space in the rear for a latrine, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
Ever since they moved into their new house, the neighbors in the area were all aware that Han Tao-kuo was a manager employed by Hsi-men Ch'ing. In addition, noticing the fact that he wore an outfit of tailored damask clothing and swaggered his way along the street, and that his wife constantly did herself up till her head was aglitter with gold and made herself conspicuous by standing at the front gate, they did not dare to be remiss. All of them sent boxes of tea and presents to celebrate the housewarming. Those of middling social standing addressed them as Brother Han and Sister-in-law Han, while those of lower status addressed them as Uncle and Aunt.
Whenever Hsi-men Ch'ing came to visit, Han Tao-kuo would spend the night at the shop, leaving his wife to entertain him, so they could:
Enjoy themselves to their heart's content.
Mornings and evenings succeeded one another, and the neighbors all became aware of what was going on, but they were afraid of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who possessed both money and influence, so who would have dared to cross him? It was observed that, in the course of a month, Hsi-men Ch'ing would come to pay her a visit three or four times; that he and Wang Liu-erh were:
As hot for each other as burning charcoal;[6]
and that the clothes she wore and the household furnishings were no longer what they had been in the past.
Before anyone knew it, the twelfth month came around, and Hsi-men Ch'ing found himself busy at home preparing New Year's gifts to be sent to people in the Eastern Capital, the officials of the local prefecture and district, the local army and guard units, and the yamen of his own Embroidered Uniform Guard. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor sent a disciple of his to deliver four boxes of presents to him. One box contained pork, one box contained whitebait, and two boxes contained stuffed steamed-shortcake pastries. He also delivered the texts of the memorials to Heaven and Earth customarily burnt on New Year's Eve, new spring talismans consisting of auspicious couplets to be pasted up on either side of the front gate on New Year's Day, and a writ thanking the Kitchen God for his good offices, to be burnt on the eve of his annual departure, on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth month, to report to the Jade Emperor on the conduct of the family during the preceding year.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the master suite eating a meal when Tai-an brought in his card, which read, "Respectfully presented by the humble Taoist prelate of the Temple of the Jade Emperor, Wu Tsung-che." Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the boxes to take a look and said, "He is someone who has left home to become a priest, yet I have put him to the trouble of sending me these generous gifts."
He then instructed Tai-an, "Go immediately and get Shu-t'ung to seal up a tael of silver and send a card to him in reply."
Yüeh-niang, who was at his side, responded to the situation by saying, "He is someone who has left home to become a priest, yet at:
The head of the year or the tail of the festival,
you are always accepting presents from him. It appears that you have forgotten the vow you made some time ago, when Sister Li bore her child, to sponsor a performance, of such and such a magnitude, of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal. You might as well have him perform it."
"It's lucky you mentioned it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I vowed to sponsor a performance of a hundred twenty degrees of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, but I completely forgot about it."
"You're just an inveterate chatterbox!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Whose vow was it, that you should forget it so easily? If you make a vow, in which:
The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it,[7]
the gods will all remember it. No wonder the child is forever:
Moaning and groaning.[8]
It so happens that this unfulfilled vow is oppressing him. It's all your doing."
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll fulfill my vow by arranging to have the *chiao* rites that I promised celebrated during the first month of the new year at Abbot Wu's temple."
"Yesterday," Yüeh-niang said, "Sister Li reported that the child was suffering from aches and pains and asked if there were any place where we could go to seek the protection of a religious name for him."
"Why should we go anywhere else to seek a religious name for him?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well arrange a naming ceremony for him in Abbot Wu's temple."
Then, turning to Tai-an, he asked, "*Who* is it who came from the temple?"
"It's his second disciple, Ying-ch'un, who delivered the presents," replied Tai-an.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon stepped outside to see him, Ying-ch'un hastily strode forward and kowtowed, saying, "My master bids me express his respects to Your Honor on his behalf. Having nothing else fit to offer on this occasion, he has sent me to deliver these memorials to Heaven and Earth, and some insignificant gifts for you to give away to someone if you like."
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned only half a salutation to him, saying, "Many thanks to your master for his generous presents."
Upon being offered a seat, the disciple demurred, saying, "How could I presume to be seated?"
"Sit down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There's something I want to say to you."
The Taoist acolyte was wearing an informal skullcap on his head, his body was clad in a long black cotton gown, while below he wore sandals and white socks. Only after declining several times did he move a chair over and sit down to one side.
After drinking the new tea that Hsi-men Ch'ing called for, he asked, "What are Your Honor's commands?"
"During the first month of the new year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I would like to fulfill a vow that I have made by troubling your master to perform a number of *chiao* rites in your temple. On the same day, I would like to enroll my young son under your master's protection by having him bestow a religious name upon him. But I don't know whether your master will be free or not."
The acolyte hastily stood up, saying, "If Your Honor were to ordain such a thing, no matter what ceremonies anyone else might commission, my master would not presume to undertake them. Permit me to ask Your Honor, on what date would you like the ceremony to take place?"
"You might as well arrange it on the ninth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the birthday of His Lordship. Make it that day."
"That is, indeed, the birthday of the Jade Emperor, the Lord of Heaven," responded the acolyte, "as is clearly recorded in the *Register of the Jade Casket*.[9] Ritual authorities have declared it a suitable day for celebration. The gods of the five blessings will be in conjunction. That is a most auspicious time for the celebration of a fast or the performance of *chiao* rites.[10] On that day we will open up the main hall of the temple in order to set up an altar on Your Honor's behalf. May I inquire of Your Honor, how elaborate would you like the rites to be?"
"Earlier this year, during the sixth month,"[11] said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "upon the occasion of siring a young son, I swore a vow to sponsor the performance of a hundred twenty degrees of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal. Up until now, I have been too distracted to undertake it, but I might as well arrange to fulfill the vow next month. I'll turn my young son over to your master so he can dedicate him to the protection of the Three Treasures[12] and solicit the conferral of a religious name upon him."
"May I ask," said the acolyte, "how many officiants you would like to employ on the day of the ceremony?"
"Have your master engage the services of sixteen priests," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When they had finished speaking, his attendants provided a table and served another round of tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing first sealed up fifteen taels of silver to pay for the ceremony and then sealed up another tael as recompense for the Abbot's festival gifts.
He then went on to say, "There is no need for your master to lay out anything in the way of compensation for the celebrants. I'll see to the provision of everything required in the way of paper money, incense, candles, and so forth."
This pleased the acolyte so much he was ready to:
Fart ferociously and pee in his pants.
As he prepared to take his leave, he thanked him again and again and kowtowed more than once.
When the eighth day of the first month came round, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an ahead to deliver a picul of white rice, a carrier-load of paper money, ten catties of government-grade candles, five catties of aloeswood, sandalwood, and mirabilite for the making of incense, and twelve bolts of porous ramie fabric, to provide for the needs of the celebrants. He also sent two bolts of capital brocade, two jugs of southern wine, four fresh geese, four fresh chickens, a pair of pig's trotters, a leg of lamb, and ten taels of silver, as a gratuity for Kuan-ko's naming ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing had also sent out invitations, inviting his brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Hua Tzu-yü, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join him for the ceremony. The same day, Ch'en Ching-chi also rode out on donkeyback to make an obeisance on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf.
On the ninth, Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to the yamen but got up bright and early, donned his official cap and girdle, set off on his large white horse, followed by a retinue of servants:
Clamoring in front and crowding behind,
and proceeded out the East Gate in the direction of the Temple of the Jade Emperor. From a distance he could see the bunting and pennants and the temporary arches spanning the street, with their announcements of the nature of the ceremony. He had proceeded no more than about five li outside the gate when he arrived at the Temple of the Jade Emperor and dismounted outside the gate. When he opened his eyes wide and took a good look, truly, it was an imposing temple edifice, resembling a celestial palace in its construction. Behold:
The verdant pines are luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses are dense.[13]
Gilt nails emboss vermilion gates,[14]
Jade arches cast shadows within the sacred halls;
Azure tiles bedeck sculpted eaves,[15]
Embroidered drapes hang over jeweled balustrades,[16]
The forty-two-foot-wide great hall,
Displays an imperial plaque in gold characters;
The two long colonnades flanking it,[17]
Exhibit colorful frescoes of gods and generals.
Amid the shadows of auspicious clouds,
The gateways with their entablatures reach high into the azure skies;[18]

Under the light of a propitious haze,
The Yü-lo Terrace of Grand Veil Heaven[19]
soars straight into the milky way.
In their golden palaces,
Are arrayed the presiding deities
of the Thirty Two Heavens;[20]
In the White Jade Capitoline,[21]
They emit a myriad rays of light
from between their eyebrows.[22]
Outside the gates of the Three Heavens,[23]
Li-lou and Shih-k'uang manifest
their bellicosity;[24]
Beside the stairs, to left and right,
The White Tiger and Green Dragon show
their intrepidity.[25]
Before the main hall, immortal consorts
and Jade Maidens,
Attired in roseate shawls present
offerings of tulips;
Beneath the jade steps, the four ministers
and nine chamberlains,
Shod in red shoes do homage before
vermilion phoenix gates.
On a nine-dragon throne sits the
indestructible golden body,[26]
Of the supreme patriarch of the
myriad heavens,
The Jade Emperor and prime deity,
surnamed Chang.[27]
On his head he wears the royal crown
with twelve tassels;[28]
His body is clad in an azure-hued
imperial dragon robe;
His waist is bound by a girdle adorned
with Indigo Field jade.[29]
Correlating himself with the eight
trigrams and nine palaces,[30]
Grasping in his hands a tablet
of white jade,
He monitors compliance with the three refuges
and five precepts.[31]
When the metal bell is struck,
The sentient beings of three chiliocosms[32]
all confess their allegiance.
When the jade chime is sounded,
The myriad phenomena in their diversity[33]
unite to worship the ultimate.
In the Homage to Heaven Pavilion,
Empyreal breezes waft down the sound
of pacing the void.[34]
On the Altar for Ritual Performance,
Moonlit nights make audible the tinkle
of immortal pendants.
Just such as this must surely be the
true Purple Elysium;[35]
What need is there to seek elsewhere
the Isles of the Blest?[36]

As Hsi-men Ch'ing entered through the main gate, he noticed that, suspended from either side of the first entablatured gateway, there was a pair of seven-foot-long vermilion tablets on which were inscribed in large characters these parallel statements:

The shining zodiac is revealed in the sky,
Auspiciously opening the celestial portals
of the Nine Heavens,
As we greet golden chariots with their halcyon canopies
and acquire grace.
The mysterious altar is bathed in sunlight,
Brightly illuminating the heraldic pennants
of the myriad sages,
As we incant the holy scriptures in their jeweled cases
and preach salvation.

When he reached the main hall, there was suspended a twenty-four-character announcement of the ritual to be performed, written in a large script, which read:

Numinous Treasure[37] ritual altar erected in order to:
Recompense Heaven and compensate Earth,[38]
Requite the state for benefits received,
Enact nine recitations of the *Jade Pivot*,[39]
Fulfill the covenant by conferring a name,
And universally bestow auspicious fortune.

To either side there hung the following parallel statements:

Anterior Heaven[40] establishes the ultimate;
Looking up to the loftiness of the Great Tao,
We are able to display our utmost sincerity.
The Supernal Emperor accords his presence;
Scrutinizing the sedulousness of the rituals,
By means of which we requite his vast favor.

Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to the front of the incense table in the altar space, where a young attendant offered him a basin and towel. When he had finished washing his hands, a verger knelt down and requested him to offer incense. A rug was laid for him on which he completed the ceremony of paying homage to the altar.

It so happens that Abbot Wu's personal name was Tsung-che, and his religious name was Tao-chen. He was of imposing stature and had a full beard, an uninhibited temperament,[41] a wide circle of acquaintances, and a charitable disposition. At present he was serving as the abbot of the Temple of the Jade Emperor. For this reason many persons of high status and prominent officials chose to patronize him. The *chiao* rituals and other ceremonies that he presided over were sure to be all that they should be, and, in:

Welcoming visitors and treating guests,[42]
his manner was congenial. He also had three to five disciples and acolytes[43] who were:
At his beck and call.[44]

The members of Hsi-men Ch'ing's brotherhood of ten frequently had *chiao* rites performed there and on birthdays and festivals did not fail to supply donations for the services performed. How much more was this true of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had become an officer in the judicial system and had provided lavish gifts in order to sponsor a ritual performance and enroll his son under his protection through the bestowal of a religious name. Abbot Wu could not help but treat him with respect, and on that day he had undertaken to act as chief celebrant in presiding over the ceremony.

On his head he wore a ninefold-yang thunder cap[45] adorned with a jade ring, his body was clothed in a wide-sleeved ultramarine vestment on which were represented the constellations of the twenty eight lunar mansions, and his waist was enclosed with a silken sash.

Hastening down from the lectern, he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, saying, "This humble Taoist has been the recipient of Your Honor's misplaced affection and repeatedly lavished gifts, to such an extent that it would be:

Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept.

As for the bestowal of a religious name upon your son, it is only appropriate that I should respectfully entreat the Three Treasures to assure his well-being and prolong his life. It would hardly be a sufficient return for Your Honor's past kindness for me to do so. How can I consent to accept the additional generous gifts that you have seen fit to bestow upon me? It is truly embarrassing. The compensation you have provided for the performance of the ceremony is also overly munificent, which makes me even more uneasy."

"I have put you to a great deal of trouble and effort," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:

"Without having anything to offer in return.[46]
These paltry gifts are no more than an expression of my feelings."

When they had finished exchanging amenities, the Taoist priests on either side came up to salute him, and he was invited to retire to the abbot's outer quarters, an eighteen-foot-wide open chamber called Pine Crane Studio. It was embellished on all sides with translucent vermilion latticework and was a pleasant place to sit while being served tea. Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the four walls were whitewashed, an ornamental rock formation was elegantly displayed, and the chairs and tables in the room were shiny. On the left and right sides were suspended the following parallel lines:

From the Yellow Crane Tower he ascends
in broad daylight;[47]
Over the Tung-t'ing Lake he has passed
for the third time.[48]

On the back wall were a pair of framed hanging scrolls displaying the following couplet in cursive calligraphy:

Raising two sleeves swelled by a clear breeze[49]
we posture like cranes;
Facing a chamber suffused with bright moonlight
we expound the scriptures.[50]

Hsi-men Ch'ing had no sooner sat down than he instructed his page boy, Ch'i-t'ung, "Take the horse and go to fetch Master Ying the Second. I fear he may not have a horse available, otherwise he ought to have been here by now."

"The donkey ridden by your son-in-law is still here," said Tai-an.

"That will do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he ordered Ch'i-t'ung, "Mount it quickly and go to fetch him."

Ch'i-t'ung then led the donkey out the temple gate, mounted it, and went straight off on his errand.

Abbot Wu, having finished with the scripture he was reciting, came down from the lectern, offered his guest a cup of tea, and sat down to chat with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Cognizant as I am of the:
Single-minded sincerity,[51]

with which Your Honor reveres the gods," he said, "I could hardly presume to offend you by being remiss. The entire clerical staff got up at the fourth watch and reported to the altar in order to commence the task of incanting the various sacred texts and the *Scripture on the Deeds of the Jade Emperor*.[52] Today we will perform in their entirety the rituals of the three audiences and the nine recitations of the *Jade Pivot*. I have also prepared a document containing the eight characters that determine your son's horoscope and presented it before the Three Treasures, conferring upon him the religious name Wu Ying-yüan, and invoking the wish that:

The Grand Monad, the Director of Destiny,
And T'ao K'ang, whose cognomen is Ho-yen,[53]
Shall eternally guarantee his longevity,
And maintain his wealth and distinction.

In addition, I have taken it upon myself to augment the program with twenty-four degrees of ritual expressing gratitude to Heaven and Earth, twelve degrees in praise of the Sovereign Deity, and twenty-four degrees for the salvation of the departed, making a *chiao* ceremony of one hundred eighty degrees in all."

"You have gone to a lot of trouble," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Before long the ritual drum began to sound and Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to enter the altar space and peruse the documents. Changing into his scarlet ceremonial robe with its variegated mandarin square featuring an embroidered lion, and wearing a girdle round his waist decorated with a plaque of gilded rhinoceros horn, Hsi-men Ch'ing entered the altar space, where a lector, who was standing by in his crimson mantle of descent,[54] proceeded to declaim the text of the announcement, laying out the nature and purpose of the ceremony, as follows:

In order to uphold the Way and invoke grace, fulfill the *chiao* rites and ensure well-being, the faithful office holder Hsi-men Ch'ing, resident of such and such a precinct and subprecinct of Ch'ing-ho district in Shantung province of the Great Sung Empire, who was born at midnight on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month in the year *ping-yin*; joined by his wife, née Wu, who was born at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the year *wu-ctien*.

"Are there any other relations of yours that I have failed to include?" the lector interrupted his recitation to ask.

"Just add my spouse, née Li," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "who was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei*, and our son, Kuan-ko, who was born at 4:00 P.M. on the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the year *ping-shen*."

On behalf of myself and my aforesaid dependents, I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, wish on this occasion to express my sincere devotion, and invoke your vast magnanimity. Insignificant creature that I am, a representative of the least of the Three Powers, [55] in my comings and goings, rising and repose, I am constantly aware of the protection of dragon kings and devas; as the seasons of cold and heat alternate, I am forever conscious of the support vouchsafed by deities and sages. By office enrolled in the ranks of military officials, I am fortunate to have been attached to the Palace Guard. Basking in the gracious light of imperial favor, I enjoy the disposition of generous emoluments. Ever since my appointment to office in the judicial system, I have sought a means to repay my debt of gratitude for the glorious age in which I have been born and the protection and support on which I rely. For this reason I am sponsoring the performance of a *chiao* rite of twenty-four degrees, to requite Heaven and Earth for their vast favor, and repay the imperial sovereign for his liberal beneficence. In addition I am sponsoring a *chiao* rite of twelve degrees, on this occasion of the birthday of the Lord of Heaven, in praise of the various sovereign lords and perfected lords, and to solicit the extension of the five blessings, and invite the descent of the heavenly worthies. Also, on the twenty-third day of the sixth month of last year, my secondary wife, née Li, gave birth to a son, Kuan-ko, and in order to pray for:

An untroubled accouchement, and
A fortunate parturition,

I promised to entrust my aforesaid son, Kuan-ko, to the protection of the Three Treasures, under the religious name of Wu Ying-yüan, in the hope that he would reach maturity in safety. Moreover, I vowed before Heaven and Earth to sponsor the performance of a *chiao* rite of one hundred twenty degrees, to ensure the continuation of my paternal line, and prolong the life of my child. Also, in order to pray for the salvation of the souls of the departed ancestors of the Hsi-men household for the past three generations, my grandfather Hsi-men Ching-liang, my grandmother, née Li, my father Hsi-men Ta, my mother, née Hsia, my deceased wife, née Ch'en, together with the souls of those who died before and will die after them, whether they should have ascended to Heaven or fallen into Hell, I have sponsored the performance of a *chiao* ceremony of twenty-four degrees, in the expectation that with the merciful assistance of the power of the Tao, they will all be entitled to rebirth in a higher sphere. The entire program thus consists of a *chiao* ceremony of one hundred eighty degrees, which I beseech you in your transforming mercy to acknowledge as the fulfillment of my vow. On this, the ninth day of the first month of the third year of the Hsüan-ho reign period, [56] on the propitious occasion of the birthday of the Lord of Heaven, I have reverently engaged the services of these duly ordained Taoist officiants to perform a plenary, day and night, Numinous Treasure ritual, in order to recompense Heaven and compensate Earth, requite the state and fulfill the covenant, glorify the spirits and ensure well-being, confer a religious name and recite the scriptures, and universally bestow auspicious fortune. I hereby invoke the presence of the presiding worthies of the Three Realms and invite the participation of the deities of the myriad heavens, that I may daily derive joy from exposure to their pure radiance, as they go in and out through the Golden Gate; and in the hope that they will periodically bestow desirable posts upon me, and vouchsafe me patents of nobility that will enhance my prestige, that my entire household may ever enjoy equal well-being, and that in all four seasons their public and private undertakings shall prosper. It is only by respectfully invoking the power of the Tao that such great blessings may be anticipated. Such is my reverent intent.

When the text of the announcement had been declaimed, a large number of documents and talismans were laid out, which the lector invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to examine one by one.

Opening up the first of these, he said, "This is the text of the announcement of your son's election to quit the world and devote himself to a Taoist vocation, and a petition of invocation addressed to the Sovereign Deity who presides over the Three Realms of the Three Heavens, the Perfected Lords of the Ten Directions, the Three Officers and Four Sages, the executive officers of the Great Mystic Metropolis, the celestial official the Perfected Lord of August Satisfaction, the celestial official the Perfected Lord of the Bureau of *Chiao* Rites, and the celestial official the Perfected Lord of the Bureau of Divine Descent, requesting their presence in the altar space in order to validate and superintend the proceedings."

Opening up the second document, he said, "This is a petition of invocation addressed to the Great Heaven-reaching Life-governing Sacred God of the Eastern Peak, the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons, the Sacred Mother Goddess *Who* Superintends Birth and Safeguards Confinement, as well as the gods who received your prayer on the occasion when you first made your promise, asking them to clear your account by accepting today's ceremony as the fulfillment of your original vow. The officiants will burn perpetual incense to the numinous deities of the three religions to ensure that they clear the account created by Your Honor's original vow, and also issue a summons to the functionaries of the seventy-five bureaus of the underworld, requiring their attendance in the altar space to accept the prayers for the salvation of the souls of the departed members of your family and escort them to rebirth in Heaven.

"This lot consists of orders authorizing the submission of memorials to the gates of the Three Heavens by the Jade Maidens, numinous officers, gods and generals, functionaries of the Merit Sections who transmit talismans, tutelary gods, and other relevant deities.

"This one is a potent talisman summoning the myriad gods of the Heaven of Jade Clarity and requiring them to take cognizance of the official documents dispatched by the high priest.

"This one is a talisman addressed to the Great General of the Bell of Fluid Gold and Fire,[57] the concretization of the Yang Rays of the Nine Stars of the Big Dipper, commanding him to open the Gates of Heaven."

When they had finished looking at the material there, the lector conducted Hsi-men Ch'ing to another table, where he opened up the first document and said, "This is an invocation issued at the morning audience, inviting the Unflatterable Grand Guardian Marshal K'ang, the Bearer of Efficacious Talismans from the Nine Heavens and Inspector of the Rites, to exercise strict supervision over the ceremony, and monitor the kitchen facilities.

"This document is an invocation inviting the Protectors of the Orthodox Way, the Four Great Marshals Ma, Chao, Wen, and Kuan, [58] and the Four Great Celestial Lords Ts'ui, Lu, Tou, and Teng,[59] to oversee the altar space and guard the portals; and inviting the Four Potent Divine Lords of the Mysterious Altar, and the Nine-headed Phoenix, the General-in-chief Who Purges Pollution,[60] to cleanse the altar space and dispel pollution in order to attract the Perfected Lords.

"This lot consists of a memorandum dispatched at the morning audience, invoking the presence of the Five Masters, and another memorandum dispatched at the evening audience thanking the Five Masters.

"This lot consists of true writs ordaining the recreation of the two cosmic entities, yin and yang, the raising of the curtain,[61] and the transformation of the altar.

"This lot consists of a yang missive inviting the General-in-chief of the Divine Empyrean Who Dispels Pollution to sound the metal bell, and a yin missive inviting the General-in-chief of the Divine Empyrean *Who* Seals the Altar to strike the jade chime.[62]

"This lot consists of invocations in seal script addressed to the Perfected Beings *Who* Preside over the Five Directions, i.e., the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Eastern Heaven of the Nine Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Southern Heaven of the Three Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Western Heaven of the Seven Pneumas, the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Northern Heaven of the Five Pneumas, and the true writ in jade characters addressed to the Ruler of the Central Heaven of the One Pneuma, inviting these sovereign deities, the Five Ancients, to preside over the boundaries of the altar space, in order to validate and superintend the proceedings. Each of them is drawn in the color appertaining to the direction in question. [63]

"This lot consists of nine memorials, i.e., the one submitted at the time of the first recitation of the scripture during the morning audience to the Jade Clarity Perfected Ruler of the Most Exalted Divine Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of Long Life of the Southern Apogee; the one submitted at the time of the second recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Azure Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of Verdant Efflorescence Who Nurtures Life of the Eastern Apogee; the one submitted during the third recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Emerald Empyrean, the Celestial Worthy of the Thunderclap of Universal Salvation That Resonates with the Primal Essence of the Nine Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the fourth recitation during the noon audience to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Jade Empyrean, the Great Sovereign Ancestor of Thunder of the Nine Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the fifth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Alabaster Empyrean, the Upper Clarity Great Celestial Emperor of the Grand Monad in the Azure Jade Palace of Purple Tenuity; the one submitted at the time of the sixth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Cosmic Empyrean, the Great Sovereign of the Cavernous Depths of the Six Heavens; the one submitted at the time of the seventh recitation during the evening audience to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Purple Empyrean, the Celestial Monarch and Sovereign Lord of the Subaqueous Realm; the one submitted at the time of the eighth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Luminous Empyrean, the Suzerain and Perfected Lord of the Blue Citadel and the Bureau of Merited Supplementary Longevity; and the one submitted at the time of the ninth recitation to the Ruler of the Most Exalted Crimson Empyrean, the Perfected Lord and Investigation Commissioner of the Nine Heavens. [64] These nine memorials are accompanied by memoranda addressed to the four bureaus in charge of undeserved emolument, retribution, concealed injustice, and cumulative accomplishment, and thanking the said four bureaus for their attention.

"This lot consists of orders authorizing the high priest to respectfully submit a memorial before the jade steps of the Three Heavens during the noon audience, accompanied by the Princess of Yellow Purity, [65] and the Red-robed Guardian,[66] and requiring the relevant functionaries of the Merit Sections on duty this day, those responsible for dispatching the edicts and talismans generated by the *chiao* ceremony, and their armored escorts, to take cognizance thereof, and transmit them safely to the Hall for the Reception of Memorials.

"This lot consists of various Numinous Treasure talismans addressed to the General-in-chief of the Three Heavens Who Holds the Precious Registers, along with the Golden Dragon and Scaly Dragon Mounted Couriers, the Messenger Boys of the Ministry of Fire, and so forth, too many to be enumerated in full.

"This lot consists of a benedictory memorial to be presented at the evening audience, rendering thanks for favors received and expressing sincere devotion, as well as orders for the distribution of quantities of imitation cloud-crane patterned brocade, paper money, [67] and paper effigies of the gods[68] appropriate for the one hundred eighty degrees of the *chiao* ceremony, including the presentations of memorials, and the recitations of scripture."

Moving to yet another table, the lector continued, "This lot consists of the documents conferring a religious name upon your son and entrusting him to the protection of the Three Treasures, along with an amulet on its cord, and the authorization papers that go with it. As for the rest, there is no time to examine them all in detail. I trust that you will be so good as to express your gratitude to His Reverence the High Priest, who is really exerting himself on your behalf today."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon lit some incense in front of the principal altar table[69] and put his signature to the documents. His attendants then presented a bolt of silk to Abbot Wu in return for his signing the papers. Only after repeatedly refusing to accept the proffered gift did he direct a young attendant to put it away.

After this, a Taoist acolyte in a corner of the hall began to strike the ritual drum with a rub-a-dub-dub that sounded like a roll of spring thunder, and the entire group of celebrants joined in to produce a peal of music. Abbot Wu, clad in a crimson Taoist robe with variegated cloud-patterned embroidery, shod in red cloud-heeled flying-duck shoes,[70] and holding an ivory tablet in his hands, prepared to dispatch the documents, take his place at the altar, and summon the generals. As bells were sounded on either side, a verger ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing into the altar space, where he offered incense before the altar of the Three Treasures and the deities whose effigies were ranged on left and right. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look, truly, the altar space was laid out in an imposing fashion. Behold:

The stations accord with the five directions,
The altar space is divided into eight stages.
On the top level homage is rendered to,
The Three Pure Ones and the Four August Ones,[71]
The Perfected Lords of the Eight Poles,
The Nine Empyreans, the Ten Directions,
And the various sages of the cloud palaces.
On the middle level homage is rendered to,
The deities of the Five Peaks and the Four Rivers,
The tutelary gods of the soil and of walls and moats,
The dwellers in the blessed abodes and grotto heavens,
And all the spirits of the broad and massive earth.
On the bottom level homage is rendered to,
The officers of the dark realm of the nether regions,
The underworld courts of Mount Lo-feng,[72]
The gods of the rivers, lakes, and seas,
And the denizens of the watery kingdom of the grave.
The twin ranks of officiants at the rites are in place,
The officers and marshals in the hall are duly arrayed.
As an auspicious nimbus of incense arises,
A thousand painted candles disperse their light;
Amid clustering blossoms on the brocade mat,
A hundred silver lamps diffuse their brilliance.
In the Pavilion of Heaven and Earth,
To left and right, the Golden Lads and Jade Maidens,
Pair after pair, lift high their feather flabella;
In the Hall of the Jade Emperor,
On either side, holding basins and presenting swords,
Rank after rank, teem pennants with divine effigies.
The breeze is clear, from the Three Worlds are heard sounds of pacing the void;
The moonlight is cold, from the Nine Heavens descend veils of nocturnal mist.
When the metal bell is struck,
The high priest proffers his memorial, presenting it to the Sovereign of the Void;
When the jade pendants tinkle,
The chief cantor advances to the altar, doing his homage before the Jade Emperor.
On the crimson silk robe, stars and constellations glitter;
On the hibiscus-petal cap, golds and greens blend their hues.
The divine marshals who guard the altar manifest their bellicosity;
The duty officers of the Merit Sections display their intrepidity.
The Taoist priests collectively declaim the sacred litanies,
Ascending the Jade Terrace, they pour libations and proffer flowers;

The Perfected Beings join in incanting the numinous texts,
Holding their ritual swords, they tread the stars and pace the dipper.
The Green Dragon imperceptibly advances along the shining zodiac;
The white crane with a flutter descends from the Purple Palace.[73]
No sooner had Hsi-men Ch'ing finished making the rounds of the various altar tables in order to light incense than he was invited by the attendants to return to his seat in a compartment of the Pine Crane Studio, where:
The floor was covered with brocade carpets, and
The brazier was burning animal-shaped briquettes.
Before long, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta appeared.
After greeting him with a bow, each of them produced a sealed mace of silver in lieu of the customary present of tea, saying, "The truth is that we had intended to bring you some tea, but it would have taken us too far out of our way. We hope these paltry gifts may serve, instead, to alleviate the cost of a cup of tea."
Hsi-men Ch'ing rejected their offerings with the words, "You needn't have bothered. I only invited you in order to keep me company for a while, you didn't have to go to all this trouble. My brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, will provide tea. Everything is already taken care of. There's no need for you to come up with anything like that."
Ying Po-chüeh hastily made another bow, saying, "If Brother is really in earnest, we might as well take them back."
Then, turning to Hsieh Hsi-ta, he continued, "It's all your doing. I told you Brother would never accept anything from us. And now that we've come up with something, we've only elicited a good scoffing for our pains."
After some time, Wu K'ai and Hua Tzu-yü appeared, each of them bringing two boxes of fancy tea and assorted delicacies as gifts for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that these be turned over to Abbot Wu. When they had finished their tea, a vegetarian repast was laid out for everyone on two tables, replete with salty main courses, vegetarian specialties, sweetmeats, soup, and rice, lavishly and spotlessly prepared. Hsi-men Ch'ing then discarded his formal clothes and sat down to share the morning meal with his guests.
It so happens that Abbot Wu had engaged the services of a professional storyteller who regaled them with the episode known as "The Banquet at Hung-men" from the *P'ing-hua on the Western Han Dynasty*.[74]
When Abbot Wu had finished dispatching the documents required by the *chiao* ceremony, he came over to keep them company and asked, "Will your son be coming today, or not?"
"The fact is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the youngster is still very frail, and my wife was afraid that he might be disturbed having to come such a distance, so he won't be here. At noontime, we can present some clothes of his before the Three Treasures for their acceptance and blessing. It will amount to the same thing."
"I had thought of that myself," said Abbot Wu. "That will be fine."
"Everything else about him is all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he is somewhat timid. We've got three or four maidservants and waiting women at home, who take turns looking after him, but he's still afraid of things. They don't even dare let cats or dogs come near him."
"It's no easy thing to raise a child to adulthood," opined Abbot Wu.
As they were talking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh from the licensed quarter have sent Li Ming and Wu Hui here to deliver gifts of tea."
"Tell them to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Li Ming and Wu Hui came in carrying a pair of boxes, knelt down, and opened them up for inspection. They were filled with cream puff pastries, pine pollen pastries, little molded cakes sprinkled with crystallized sugar with the character for long life embossed on their surfaces, and rose hip flavored pastry rolls. All of these, at Hsi-men Ch'ing's direction, were turned over to Abbot Wu.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Li Ming and asked, "How did you know that I was sponsoring a *chiao* ceremony here today?"
"This morning," replied Li Ming, "I happened to run into Uncle Ch'en Ching-chi on the road, riding a donkey. It was only after I asked where he was headed that I found out you were sponsoring a ritual performance here today. When I got home I told Li Kuei-chieh and Aunty Li the Third about it and said to them, 'Why don't you act quickly and buy some presents for the occasion?' Later they got in touch with Wu Yin-erh, and so we are here. They asked us to convey their best wishes to you, and to say that they would have come in person but didn't know if it would be appropriate. These boxes of inferior tea things are only for you to give away to someone if you like."
"The two of you must stay a while and have some vegetarian fare," directed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Abbot Wu conducted the two young men out of their presence to a place where they could sit down. Even the porters who had come with them were all enabled to eat their fill.
To make a long story short, when the time came for the noon audience, after the memorials had been dispatched, Abbot Wu showed them a large portable table[75] on which there had been prepared:
Cone-shaped piles of fruit, ingot-shaped cakes, and
High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery,
together with forty saucers and bowls containing different kinds of steamed and fried vegetarian dishes ingeniously made to counterfeit nonvegetarian fare, sweetmeats, soup, and rice, as well as a jug of Chin-hua wine. Also prepared for Kuan-ko there were a jet satin gold lamé Taoist cap, a jet silk Taoist robe, a little undergown of green cloud-patterned satin, a pair of little white damask socks, a pair of little blue Lu-chou pongee shoes with stitched facings, a sash of yellow wool yarn, a yellow cord bestowed upon him under the aegis of the Three Treasures, a locket on a purple cord bestowed upon him under the aegis of the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons,[76] a silver amulet to be worn around the neck, on which were incised the words:
Gold and jade fill up the hall,[77]
Long life, wealth, and success,[78]
and a talisman of yellow damask designed to dispel pollution, on which were written in vermilion ink the eight characters:
The Grand Monad, the Director of Destiny,
And T'ao K'ang, whose cognomen is Ho-yen,
and which was attached to the aforesaid yellow cord. The above objects were all displayed on the table in square trays, along with four trays of preserved fruit.
A young attendant was instructed to take the texts of the various documents and petitions written on safflower red paper,[79] and an itemized program, in sequential order, of all the rituals performed during the three audiences, out of the scripture cases in which they had been put, and show them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they were packed up with the other gifts enumerated above, making eight carrier-loads in all, and sent ahead to the Hsi-men residence.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was extremely pleased and promptly dispatched Ch'i-t'ung to accompany them home, with instructions to reward the acolyte in charge of the consignment with two handkerchiefs and a tael of silver.
To resume our story, that day was P'an Chin-lien's birthday, and Wu K'ai's wife, Old Mrs. P'an, Aunt Yang, and Big Sister Yü had all forgathered in the master suite, where they were sitting with Wu Yüeh-niang and the other female members of the household. When they heard that a vegetarian repast had been delivered from the temple, together with lots of preserved fruit, and a portable table for the display of gifts, so much, in fact, that not even four tables could accommodate it, they all bustled out to see for themselves.
"Sister Li," exclaimed P'an Chin-lien, "why don't you hurry out and see what's here? Your son's master from the temple has sent it all for him. There are lots of things, including a little Taoist cap, a Taoist robe, and, my, just look at this, even a pair of little shoes."
Meng Yü-lou then stepped forward, picked them up, and examined them, saying, "Elder Sister, look at this. How clever the Taoist priests are. These little shoes have white damask soles, which have been backstitched in a pattern of interlocking lozenges. This ornamental cloud-pattern is also very well done. My guess is they must have wives to help them, otherwise they would never be able to produce such fine stitchwork themselves."
"Needless to say," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "as people who have left home to become priests, how could they have wives? Surely they must have hired someone to make them."
P'an Chin-lien, picking up where Yüeh-niang left off, said, "If that is evidence that Taoist priests have wives, it follows that Buddhists like Nun Wang and the abbess, here, who are good at embroidering handkerchiefs, must have husbands."
"Taoist priests," said Nun Wang, "can disguise themselves by putting a hat over their topknots and go anywhere they want. We Buddhist members of the Sangha, on the other hand, can be readily recognized whatever we do."
"I have heard tell," said Chin-lien, "that the Taoist Temple of Mystic Illumination is located right behind the Kuan-yin Nunnery where you reside. As the saying goes:
If a male convent lies next to a female convent,
Though nothing need occur, something may occur."
"This Sister Six," said Yüeh-niang, "is prone to indulge in such:
Ridiculous blatherskite."
"And this," said Chin-lien, continuing with the inventory, "is the locket on a purple cord bestowed upon him when his name was consecrated under the aegis of the Goddess of Sons and Grandsons. And here is a silver amulet to be worn around the neck, on which there are eight characters incised. It ought to look very good when he has it on. And his name is engraved on the back, Wu something or other yüan."
"That's the name chosen for him by the master," said Ch'i-t'ung, "Wu Ying-yüan."[80]
"So that's the character ying, is it?" said Chin-lien. "Elder Sister, these Taoists are impertinent. What reason could there be to change the child's surname?"
"Now see here," said Yüeh-niang, "you just don't understand the ritual involved."
Then, turning to Li P'ing-erh, she said. "Why don't you go fetch your son and bring him here so we can try out this Taoist costume on him and see what it looks like, how would that be?"
"I've just put him down for a nap," said Li P'ing-erh. "Do I need to get him up and bring him out again?"
"It won't do any harm," said Chin-lien. "Just pat him until he wakes up."
Li P'ing-erh did, in fact, go after him.
Now P'an Chin-lien knew how to read, and, picking up a red paper envelope and pulling out one of the petitions that had been sent from the temple, she noticed that under Hsi-men Ch'ing's name it read, "joined by his wife, née Wu," after which there were only the words, "and his spouse, née Li," without mention of anyone else.
More than a little incensed by this, she showed it to the others, saying, "Just you tell me if that lousy ruffian, sorting people so differentially into:
Three classes and nine categories,
is practicing favoritism or not. The only one whose name is written on here is the one who bore the child. The rest of us simply don't count. We've all been:
Relegated to the realm of the superfluous."[81]
"Is Elder Sister's name there, or not?" asked Meng Yü-lou.
"If Elder Sister's name were not there," said Chin-lien, "that would really be laughable."
"That's enough," said Yüeh-niang. "As long as one of us is there, it's all the same thing. You don't mean to say that if a family had a whole troop of women, their names should all appear. Wouldn't that give the Taoist priests a laugh."
"Are we all nothing but:
The ghosts of Liu Chan's daughters?"[82]
demanded Chin-lien. "Compared to whom is it alleged that we:
Don't amount to anything?[83]
Which of us did not undergo ten months of gestation in the womb?"
As they were speaking, Li P'ing-erh came back from the front compound carrying Kuan-ko.
"Hand me his clothes," said Meng Yü-lou, "so I can help him on with them."
Li P'ing-erh held him while Meng Yü-lou fitted the Taoist cap onto his head and put the amulet around his neck, together with the two cords. The baby was so frightened at this that he closed his eyes tight and:
Hardly dared to breathe,[84]
for some time.
When Meng-Yü-lou had finished fitting him into his Taoist costume, Wu Yüeh-niang said to Li P'ing-erh, 'You ought to take these documents and petitions, along with a bundle of paper money, and go to the Buddhist chapel in the rear to burn them yourself."
After Li P'ing-erh had departed on this mission, Meng Yü-lou, who was holding the baby and playing with him, said, "Dressed in these clothes, he's just like a little Taoist priest."
Chin-lien picked up on this, saying, "A little Taoist priest, my eye! He's more like a little god."
This sally provoked a serious reprimand from Wu Yüeh-niang, who said, "Sister Six, what kind of talk is that? You mustn't speak that way about the child."
Chin-lien was at a loss for words and had nothing more to say.
After a while, the baby, who was frightened by the new clothes he was wearing, began to cry and, when Li P'ing-erh hurried over to take him and change his clothes, produced a diaperful of shit.
Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "What a fine Wu Ying-yüan! It seems that even when he shits, he's good for a trayful."
Yüeh-niang hurriedly directed Hsiao-yü to fetch some absorbent grass paper and wipe up the mess. Before long the baby reclined on Li P'ing-erh's breast and fell asleep.
"Little Brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "you seem to be tired. Mother will take you back up front and put you to sleep."
Wu Yüeh-niang then distributed the place settings of gifts that had been sent from the temple and invited Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and the others to come into the outer room and enjoy a vegetarian repast. As they did so, it gradually grew late.
It so happens that, on the eighth day of the month, because Hsi-men Ch'ing was going to participate in the *chiao* ceremony on the following day, he was expected to abstain from meat and wine. For that reason the eve of Pan Chin-lien's birthday had not been celebrated in the customary way, and it was not until he returned home on the evening of the day itself that he would be able to offer her a congratulatory cup of wine. She went out and stood by the main gate in expectation of his arrival, but how could she have anticipated that at sunset time all she could see was Ch'en Ching-chi returning home on his donkey.
"Is Father on his way?" Chin-lien asked.
"I'm afraid Father will not be able to make it," said Ching-chi. "The *chiao* ceremony is not over yet. They've just begun the ritual of penance, which is likely to go on until the first watch. How likely are Taoist priests to:
Let anyone lightly out of their clutches?[85]
And after that, still to come, are the ceremony of dismissing the generals and a banquet."
When Chin-lien heard this, without saying another word, she went back to the master suite in a huff and said to Yüeh-niang, "It seems that:
Blindman Chia, the masseur, unaware of the time,
Got up at the fifth watch for nothing.
If you throw your guts over the wall,
You must resign yourself to your fate.
If the string on your waistband breaks,
On what can you depend?
Just now, I stood for a while at the gate, and all I saw was Ch'en Ching-chi coming along on his donkey. He said that Father would not be able to make it because the *chiao* rites were not yet over and had elected to send him back in his stead."
"If he's not coming home, so be it," said Yüeh-niang. "That leaves us free this evening to listen to the abbess and Nun Wang recite tales of karmic cause and effect, and sing Buddhist songs.
As she was speaking, what should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who lifted aside the portiere and came in, already half inebriated, saying, "I've come to kowtow to the Fifth Lady."
Turning to his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, he said, "If there's a goblet around, find it, and fill it with wine, so I can offer her a drink."
"Where would I find a goblet?" said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "All you need to do is kowtow to the Fifth Lady. If it comes to that, I'll offer her a drink on your behalf. Just listen to that drunken voice of his. It's just as though the *chiao* rites today were only for your benefit, that you've come home in such a befuddled state."
"Is your father really not coming home?" enquired Yüeh-niang. "Is that slave, Tai-an, not returning either?"

"Father saw that the *chiao* rites were not over yet," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and fearing that there was no one at home to look after the place, sent me ahead for that purpose. He's retaining Tai-an there to wait on him. The Taoist priests were importunate in their unwillingness to release me.
Willy-nilly, dead or alive,
they insisted on my drinking two or three big bumpers before letting me go."
"Who all are there with him today?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"Today there are your elder brother, Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Hua the Elder from outside the gate, Uncle Ying the Second, Uncle Hsieh Hsi-ta, and also Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy actors. Now that night has fallen, who knows how long they'll carry on. Only your elder brother, Wu K'ai, has gone home today. Father insisted that Hua the Elder from outside the gate remain with them. It looks like it will be an all-night affair."
Chin-lien, noticing that Li P'ing-erh was not present, said, "Son-in-law Ch'en, even you persist in calling him Brother-in-law Hua. How he is entitled to claim such a relationship only her dead husband knows. If he were really any brother-in-law of ours, it would be appropriate to refer to him as Brother-in-law Li. How can you refer to him as Brother-in-law Hua?"
"Fifth Lady," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you ought to emulate:
The country girl who brings herself to marry Cheng En,[86]
By keeping one eye open, and one eye shut.
If a son is born too soon after the wedding,
Who knows whose account he should be chalked up to?
All you can do is split the difference."
"You lousy jailbird!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Hurry up and perform your kowtow. The sooner you go up front and sleep it off the better. That's enough of your delirious nonsense."
Ch'en Ching-chi thereupon asked Chin-lien to assume the position of honor and then proceeded to kowtow to her four times before staggering off for the front compound.
Before long, the room was lighted with lamps and candles, a table was set up and spread with viands, and Old Mrs. P'an, Aunt Yang, Wu K'ai's wife, and the others were all assembled. After drinks had been offered in celebration of the occasion, they all sat down and consumed the birthday noodles. When the wine ran out, the utensils were put away, and the table removed from the room.
Yüeh-niang then ordered Hsiao-yü to close the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds. After this, a small table was placed on the k'ang, and they all gathered around it, the two nuns occupying the center, where they burnt incense and set up a pair of wax candles, so they could listen to them recite a tale of karmic cause and effect.[87]
The abbess began the recitation as follows:
I have heard tell that, in the *Great Buddhist Canon*, a story is told of the Buddhist Dharma, relating how the Thirty-second Patriarch[88] of the Western Heaven descended to the world to be born in the Eastern Land and transmit the mind-seal of the Buddha.[89] It was in former days, during the third year of the Hsien-heng reign period[90] of Emperor Kao-tsung of the T'ang dynasty,[91] but we will not elaborate on national affairs in the Central Kingdom. To resume our story, in P'ao-tu village of Ling-nan township, there was a certain householder, named Chang, whose family was very well-to-do, possessing quantities of gold and silver, with slaves and maidservants at their beck and call.[92] This householder had taken unto himself eight wives, who enjoyed themselves day by day, basking in diurnal luxury, enamored of romance, and neglectful of good works. It happened one day that Master Chang went out the gate for a stroll when he came upon a crowd of true believers, carrying incense, lamp-oil, polished rice, and such things, and reciting Buddha's name. Approaching them, he asked, "Where are you believers going?" One among them answered, saying, "In the first place, we are going to share a vegetarian repast, and in the second place, we are going to listen to the scriptures." The householder went on to ask, "What merit will accrue to you for fasting and listening to the scriptures?" To which the crowd of believers replied, "For humans living in this world,[93] the Buddhist Dharma is hard to hear,[94] human existence is hard to obtain.[95] As the *Lotus Sutra* puts it so well, if human beings who are fortunate, and who worship Buddha, do not give alms in this life, from whence can they expect to receive glory and luxury, wealth and honor[96] in the life to come? As a man of yore has told us:
A dragon, upon hearing the Dharma,
achieved enlightenment;
A python, upon hearing the litany,
was reborn in Heaven.[97]
How much the more should this be true for human beings." When Householder Chang returned home, he ordered a page boy to go into the interior of the house and invite his eight wives to come into his presence. Before long, they were all assembled in the hall, where the householder addressed them, saying, "Ladies, I am presently going to go to the Huang-mei Temple to embark upon the religious life. I will divide the family property into eight parts, and allow each of you to fend for yourselves. It seems to me that at the present time you and I are preoccupied with the pleasures of the moment, with no consideration for the life to come.[98] If we do not take up religious practice, in hope of escaping the fiery pit, we are sure to fall into the three evil paths and the five forms of suffering." One of his wives, upon hearing these words, said, "Sir, you possess the eight-treasured body of an arhat. What karmic impediment could you be encumbered by? Your situation is not to be compared to that of us womenfolk, who in the process of giving birth to boys and girls inevitably offend the purity of the gods. You can engage in your religious practices at home, and the eight of us will take the burden of your guilt upon ourselves. There is no need for you to leave." Truly:
When his wife undertook to dissuade
her husband;
The householder laughed sardonically
several times.
The abbess having recited for a while, it was time for Nun Wang to continue with a gatha, and Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, as well as Yü-hsiao, all chimed in by reciting the Buddha's name in unison. Nun Wang then continued with a gatha in decasyllabic verse:
All eight of his womenfolk,
asked him to stay;
Saying to him, "Don't go away.
Practice at home.
Now if you are so cruel,
as to leave us;
The little ones will be distraught,
'twill break your heart.
We sisters here will be forlorn,
with nowhere to go;
How will we, one and all,
get through the day?
Since our youth, we've been mates,
partnered for life;
If on the way, we're left behind,
who can we trust?"
Boy tugs at dad, girl tugs at mom,
beat breast stamp feet;[99]
The whole house, old and young,
cry out in pain.
To the tune "Sutra in Letters of Gold":
When his wives heard these words,
they wept unceasingly;
Urgently trying to deter their husband
from entering the cloister.
"Think of your home;
Remain ever united with your children.
Don't go far away;
Practice at home, it all amounts
to the same thing."
Prose:
The householder then said, "I wish to thank all of you eight wives. In the future, when I am dead in the world of the shades, you can take the burden of my guilt upon yourselves. Today I will offer you a cup of wine, in the hope that tomorrow, when you appear before King Yama, you will undertake this responsibility, as promised." As they drank wine together, the householder decided to play a trick, saying, "Wives, will one of you trim the wick of the lamp for me?" While the householder thereby fooled his wife into trimming the wick, he blew the lamp out, causing all eight of his wives to turn pale and call hastily to a maidservant, "Quickly, relight the lamp."
The householder had pulled out
a steel-bladed sword;
Which frightened all eight of
his wives half to death.
Gatha in decasyllabic verse:
The old householder, called a maidservant,
to relight the lamp;
With the steel blade, held in his hand,
he pointed at his wives.
"Which of you, took the bright lamp,
and blew it out;
Coveting my wealth, taking my life,
to marry someone else?
If you don't confess, with a single stroke,
your head will fall";
Each one of them, was sore afraid,
falling to the ground.
All eight of his, elderly wives,
hastily knelt down;
"We beg you sir, temper your rage,
spare our poor lives.
It's clear you, with one breath,
blew out the lamp;
In your cups, flushed with wine,
waving your sword.
If you really, kill us all,
eight of your wives;
In Hell itself, we'll tell King Yama,
to seize your soul."
Prose:
The householder laughed sardonically, and then said to his eight wives, "You're fooling me. If you won't even acknowledge that you blew out the lamp right in front of my eyes; when I am in the world of the shades, how could you take the burden of my guilt upon yourselves? You eight womenfolk are merely fooling me. It's enough to give anyone possessed of age and virtue a laugh." This speech reduced his wives to silence. The householder thought to himself, "Wealth and success in this life are all the results of religious practice in former lives." [100] Then he called in a page boy and told him, "Quickly, go and load several carts with incense, lamp-oil, rice, and flour, together with every kind of vegetarian fare, cash, valuables, and such things. I am going to go to the Huang-mei Temple in order to commit myself to fasting on vegetarian fare and listening to the scriptures."
To the tune "Sutra in Letters of Gold":
"Ladies, listen to my explication
of first things.
The Brahman prince, Sakyamuni,
forsook his realm.
Ridding himself of desires,
He sought a means of salvation for all men.
For which he gave away everything,
Attaining immortal fame for all time
in the world of men."
The householder departed that very day
to take up the religious life;

All his relatives and neighbors assembled
to see him off upon his way.
After Nun Wang had recited for a while, Wu Yüeh-niang said, "Our preceptors must be hungry. Pray set the scripture aside for the moment, and have something to eat."
She then told Hsiao-yü to set out four vegetable dishes, two salty main courses, and four saucers containing sugar crisps, steamed-shortcake pastries, chrysanthemum-flavored cakes, and twisted crullers, of which she invited Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, and Old Mrs. P'an to partake, in company with the two nuns.
"We really shouldn't," said Wu K'ai's wife. "We've all just eaten our fill. Offer something to Aunt Yang though. She's been on a vegetarian diet."
Yüeh-niang hastened to take small lacquer dishes adorned with gold tracery and fill them with a sample of each of the delicacies.
Offering them first to the two nuns, she then offered one to Aunt Yang, saying. "Won't you have a little something to keep our two preceptors company?"
"My Lord Buddha!" the old lady said. "I really oughtn't to. I've had enough to eat already."
"And take this dish of pork ribs away," she went on to say. I'm afraid I might get some into my mouth by mistake."
This provoked a hearty laugh from everyone present.
"My good lady," said Yüeh-niang, "This is counterfeit nonvegetarian fare sent over from the temple just now. Eat as much as you like. It won't do any harm."
"So long as it's really vegetarian fare," said Aunt Yang, "I'll have some of it. My eyes must really be deceiving me. I was sure it was meat."
As they were eating, Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu, came in.
"You lousy little stinker!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "What are you doing here?"
"I've come, like the rest of you, to hear the song singing," said Hui-hsiu.
"The ceremonial gate is closed," said Yüeh-niang. "How did you get in?"
"She was in the kitchen banking the fire," said Hsiao-yü.
"No wonder you're in such a state," exclaimed Yüeh-niang.
"Your nose is dingy,
Your mouth is sooty.
What would an:
Inveterate mischief-maker,[101]
like you want to listen to any scriptures for?"
Thereupon, the group of maidservants and womenfolk gathered around the two nuns as they consumed the assorted delicacies, after which the tea things were cleared away, and the lectern for the scripture recitation was wiped clean. Yüeh-niang trimmed the wicks of the lamps and candles anew and lit some incense, while the two nuns struck up their hand chimes and proceeded with the recitation in a loud voice.
They told how Householder Chang devoted himself to religious practice in the Huang-mei Temple; by day:
Kneeling upright to listen to the scriptures;
and, by night:
Engaging in meditation in the lotus position.[102]
How the Fourth Ch'an Patriarch[103] recognized that:
This was no ordinary person,
but, surely:
A true monk born into this world.
How he enquired as to the location of his native place, and what his name might be. To which the householder responded by relating the preceding events, "Your disciple has abandoned his family property, his wives, and children; sincerely desiring to escape samsara by leaving his home." How the fourth patriarch accepted him as a disciple under his tutelage, instructing him to plant trees by day, and to pound rice by night. How after six years his regimen of austerities was complete, startling the celestial deva and protector of the Dharma, Wei-t'o, and awakening the attention of the Fourth Patriarch, who instructed him to seek a place to:
Achieve security and fulfill his destiny.[104]
How he bestowed upon him three treasures, a hooded cloak, a rain cape, and a crooked date-wood staff, and sent him south to the banks of the Turbid River[105] in order to:
Enter the womb and take an abode,[106]
thereby securing a new habitation for himself. "After three hundred sixty days:
The fruit of your practice will be complete.
You are now well advanced in years, and your habitation is too dilapidated to permit you to transmit the true wonderful Dharma, or accomplish the salvation of the multitude of living beings."
The recitation continued to the point where the Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold was washing clothes by the bank of the Turbid River with her sister-in-law, when she encountered a monk who asked her if she could lend him a habitation. Though she ought not to have, she responded to him, whereupon the old man jumped into the river.
At this point, P'an Chin-lien, who was drowsy with boredom, went off to her room to sleep. In a little while, Hsiu-ch'un came from Li P'ing-erh's quarters to say that Kuan-ko was awake, and she too left, leaving only Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, Old Mrs. P'an, Sun Hsüeh-o, Aunt Yang, and Wu K'ai's wife, who elected to remain.
They heard how a large fresh peach came floating along in the river, and how the virgin, though she ought not to have, ate. it, returned home, and, finding herself pregnant:
Bore the fetus in her womb for ten months.[107]
Nun Wang then sang a song to the tune "Playful Children":
The numinous soul's true nature[108]
enters into her womb.
Who is there who is cognizant
of these tidings?
No one grasps the meaning of the
coming from the west.[109]
With no more than a squeak[110]
she bears a child,
Who, acknowledging his mother,
wears the iron-visage,
That, alone, enables him to see
the glory of paradise.
From the summit of Mount K'un-lun
he makes chiliocosms spin;
Venerable Amitābha, who allocates
the four directions.[111]
The recitation continued:
The Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold came into her sister-in-law's room, and said, "It's all because the two of us went to wash our clothes by the bank of the Turbid River that I encountered that old man who asked me if I would lend him a habitation. When he jumped into the river that way, he startled me so that my heart was in a state of trepidation. Then I ate an immortal peach. And now I suffer from a feeling of congestion, and am greatly disturbed. The state of my belly indicates that I have become pregnant." Truly:
For ten months, within her belly,
the mother bore the fetus;
Tears wet the cheeks of the Virgin Worth
a Thousand Pieces of Gold.
Gatha in decasyllabic verse:
The Virgin said, "In my boudoir,
I have become pregnant.
Ruefully I must, swallow my anger,
and keep my own counsel."
In one month, the fetus is,
just like the dew.
In two months, the fetus is,
still without form.
In three months, the fetus is,
like a blood clot.
In four months, the fetus has,
just formed its joints.
In five months, the fetus is,
sexually defined.
In six months, the fetus has,
all six sense organs.
In seven months, the fetus has,
all seven apertures.
In eight months, the fetus has,
the form of a human.
In nine months, the fetus is,
nearly complete.
In ten months, the fetus is
ready to be born.
To an unnamed tune:
The Fifth Patriarch enters the womb[112]
in his mother's belly,
In order to save the multitude of living beings.
The men and women of this sahā world[113]
are loath to repent.
The Ancient Buddha descends to this world
transformed into a mortal body.
Borrowing a womb and emerging from his integument,
In the future he will save his mother, conveying
her to the celestial palace.
The Fifth Patriarch with his Buddha nature,
Enters the womb inside his mother's belly.
Residing there temporarily for ten months,
He becomes a mortal to save living beings.
When the recitation had continued to this point, Yüeh-niang noticed that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had gone off to bed, that her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, was sprawled out asleep on the bed in the inner room, that Aunt Yang also was yawning, and that the two wax candles on the table had burnt themselves out.
"What time has it gotten to be?" she asked Hsiao-yü.
"It's already the fourth watch," said Hsiao-yü. "The cock has crowed."
Only then did Yüeh-niang tell the two nuns to put their sacred texts away. Aunt Yang went off to sleep in Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and Big Sister Yü spent the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound, leaving only the two nuns. Yüeh-niang arranged for the abbess to share a bed with Li Chiao-erh, and for Nun Wang to join her in sleeping on the k'ang in the master suite. The two of them waited for Hsiao-yü to heat up a cup of tea before going to bed. Wu K'ai's wife was sleeping on the bed in the inner room, together with Yü-hsiao.
Yüeh-niang took the occasion to ask Nun Wang, "Later on, when the Fifth Patriarch grows up, how does he reap the true fruit?"
"The girl's father and mother," said Nun Wang, "on seeing that she was pregnant, told her elder brother, Chu Hu, to drive their daughter, the Virgin Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold, out of the house, with the intent of killing her. Fortunately, her second brother, Chu Lung, had a benevolent heart, and let her escape with her life. She found her way under a weeping willow tree, where she tried to hang herself, which attracted the attention of the god Li Chin-hsing of the Great White Planet Venus, who taught her how to:

Seek after tea and beg for rice,
Accept one's lot and live one's days.[114]
Before she knew it:
The ten months of her pregnancy were fulfilled,[115]
and she came upon a temple in the Village of the Immortals, where she gave birth to the Fifth Patriarch.
Purple mist and red light,[116]
filled the hall of the temple. The Virgin, on seeing that no sooner was her child born than he:
Folded his legs in the lotus position,
was fearful at heart, realizing that this was:
Something out of the ordinary.[117]
Later, she made her way to T'ien-hsi village, where she was asleep on the threshing floor of a householder named Wang, when a fire broke out. When she was apprehended and brought to see the householder, he was so struck by her beauty that he offered to keep her as a concubine, at which both mother and son bowed down to him, which had the immediate effect of causing the householder and his wife to faint dead away.[118] The household retainers and the gardener seized the mother and son, but when the householder later recovered consciousness, he said, 'I imagine they are innocent people,' and chose to keep them in his home. Only after he had been nurtured there for six years did the Fifth Patriarch start to talk, on which, without asking his mother's consent, he went straight to a hollow tree on the bank of the Turbid River, recovered his three treasures, and headed straight for the Huang-mei Temple, in order to hear the Fourth Patriarch expound the Dharma, as a result of which he reaped the true fruit. Later he also accomplished the salvation of his mother, so that she was reborn in Heaven."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she became an even firmer believer in the Buddhist Dharma. A poem testifies to this:

Hearing the Dharma and heeding the scriptures, she is afraid of death;
The red lotus-blossom tongue of the preacher emits rays of light.[119]
Who is responsible for leaving us the empty words of Ch'an Buddhism;
Only to provide nuns and bonzes with an excuse to beg their bread?

Ximen Qing stayed the night in Pan Jinlian's room. It seemed to her detestable that she could not unite herself even more completely with her lover. In a thousand delightful ways she made love to him: in ten thousand different manners she sported with him. Her tears fell softly on the silken coverlets, and her words were warm and gentle. She wished, more than all else, to win her husband utterly for herself.
She did not know, however, that Ximen was on such intimate terms with Wang Liu'er. He spent a hundred and twenty taels of silver on a house east of the stone bridge for Wang Liu'er to live in. Two rooms stood upon the street, and it was four rooms deep. There was a guest room, a shrine for the worship of Buddha and the ancestors, a bedroom, and a kitchen. When they removed there, the neighbors knew that Han Daoguo was Ximen Qing's clerk, and no one dared to behave other than kindly. Many sent boxes of tea and presents to celebrate the housewarming. They called Han Daoguo Brother Han or Son-in-law Han, and the young people addressed them as Uncle and Aunt.
Whenever Ximen Qing came to the house, Han Daoguo would sleep at the shop so as to allow complete freedom to his wife and her lover. Ximen came in the morning and went away in the evening and all the neighbors knew of it. Yet they were so in awe of his power and wealth that none of them dared to say a word. In less than a month, Ximen Qing visited the woman at least three or four times, and their passion for each other was as fiery as burning charcoal.
The end of the year was approaching, and Ximen was busy arranging to send presents to the Eastern Capital. He also prepared gifts for the civil officers of the district and those of his own department. About this time, Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor bade his novices take to Ximen Qing four boxes of gifts, "Heaven and Earth" pictures, charms for the coming spring, and prayers to the God of Fire. Ximen Qing was taking a meal in his wife's room when Daian brought a card upon which was written: "The unworthy priest, Wu Zongjia, offers these things with his most respectful compliments." Ximen Qing read it.
"This priest," he said, "has troubled himself on my account again." He told Daian to ask Shutong to give a tael of silver with his card to the young novice.
"He is a priest," Wu Yueniang said, "and every new year and every festival you take presents from him. You would do well to make the sacrifice you promised when the Sixth Lady's baby was born."
"Thank you for reminding me," Ximen Qing said. "I did promise to make a first-class sacrifice, but I had forgotten all about it."
"You are a splendid example of gratitude," Yueniang said. "Whoever heard of anyone forgetting a promise of that kind? Your mouth makes promises readily, but your mind is elsewhere at the time. The gods do not forget. No wonder the baby is always cross. It must be because you have not kept your word."
"If you think that," Ximen said, "we will have the sacrifice at Abbot Wu's temple at the beginning of the new year."
"The Sixth Lady told me yesterday that the boy had not been very well," Yueniang said. "She was thinking about giving the boy a name."
"Well, we have the very place," Ximen Qing said. "We will enroll him at the Temple of the Jade Emperor." He said to Daian: "Who has come from the temple?"
"The novice Ying Chun," Daian told him.
Ximen Qing went out to see the young man. The novice kowtowed and said: "My master sends his compliments to you. He has nothing worthy to offer you, but ventures to send these trifles. They are for you to distribute among your servants."
Ximen Qing made a moderate reverence to Ying Chun, and asked him to thank the Abbot for his gifts. Then he invited the young novice to take a seat. Ying Chun bowed. "How dare I sit in your presence?" he said. But Ximen made him sit down, saying that he wished to talk to him. The novice was wearing a small hat and a long black gown. He was very modest in his bearing, and only after much hesitation was persuaded to take a chair and sit down. "What are your commands?" he asked. "In the first month of the new year," Ximen Qing said, "I wish to make a sacrifice, and would venture to ask your master to make the necessary arrangements. And I wish, too, to enroll my son's name in the register of your temple. But perhaps your master is too busy?"
The novice rose hastily. "Since such is your desire," he said, "even if we had other religious duties on that day, we should put them off."
"Then what about the ninth day?" Ximen Qing said. "Isn't that the birthday of the Gods?"
"Yes, that is the birthday of the Gods," the young priest said, "and it is written in the *Book of the Jade Casket* that upon that day we should pray the Gods to bless us, and the five blessings will descend together. It is an excellent day for fasting and worship. May I ask how many degrees of sacrifice you will require?"
"My son was born in the seventh month," Ximen Qing said. "At that time I vowed to make sacrifice of a hundred and twenty degrees."
"How many priests do you wish to take part in the sacrifice?"
"Let there be sixteen," Ximen Qing said.
A table was set, and the young priest was offered tea. Ximen gave him fifteen taels of silver for the expenses of the sacrifice, and one tael in return for the Abbot's gift. "There is no need for your master to prepare things," he said to the novice. "I myself will send paper offerings, incense and candles."
The young priest was so delighted that he completely forgot himself. He pissed himself and farted like thunder. He thanked Ximen Qing over and over again.
On the eighth day of the first month, Daian was sent to the temple with a measure of fine rice, a supply of paper money, and ten catties of official candles. He also took with him five catties of incense, and sixteen rolls of unbleached material for other things that were needed by the priests. In addition, Ximen Qing sent two rolls of brocade, two jars of Southern wine, four live geese, four live chickens, a set of pig's trotters, a leg of mutton and ten taels of silver. All this was for the enrollment of the baby's name.
Cards of invitation to the ceremony were sent to Uncle Wu, Uncle Hua, Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. Chen Jingji, on horseback, went to the temple to see that everything was in order.
The ninth day came. Ximen Qing did not go to his office, but rose very early, dressed, then mounted a great white horse and set off by the East Gate to the Temple of the Jade Emperor. Attendants marched before and behind him. Even from a far distance they could see the banners, decorations and arches that had been set up. Soon they reached the temple gate and Ximen dismounted.
Passing through the first gate, he came to another, the Gate of the Meteor, on either side of which were scarlet boards, seven feet long, with these words written upon them.
Then Ximen Qing came to the main sanctuary. There, written in twenty-four characters, they saw a sign:
In gratitude to Heaven and Earth we offer our treasures.
May our land be blessed and our benefactors rewarded.
We take an ally to ourselves, and enroll his name.
May all good fortune descend abundantly upon our altar.
On either side were scrolls, bearing the inscriptions:
Established before the Heavens
May we behold the majesty of DAO
And manifest our singleness of heart
and
Here is the honorable dwelling of the Most High,
Here can we behold the glory of the Pure Cultivation,
Here would we show our gratitude for every blessing.
Ximen Qing went up to the shrine. Before the table of incense stood a boy, with a ewer, in which Ximen Qing washed his hands. Then an acolyte knelt down and invited him to burn incense. Ximen Qing prostrated himself before the altar. Abbot Wu was wearing a hat of the Nine Yang Thunder, with rings of jade and a sky-blue vestment, broad-sleeved and embroidered with the crane and the twenty-eight stars. A silken girdle was about his waist. He came down from the lectern and made a priestly reverence to Ximen Qing.
"Unworthy priest that I am," he said, "your misdirected kindness has often made me its object, and I have frequently received precious gifts from you. Consequently I feel that if I refuse them, I shall not be truly sincere; and if I do accept them, I must be ashamed. It is my duty to pray that your son may have length of days. Why should you send me such valuable presents? I am truly embarrassed. Besides, your gifts for the purposes of the sacrifice have been far too generous."
"But it is I who feel grateful for the trouble you have taken," Ximen Qing said. "I have done nothing to repay you. These things are a very slight token of my appreciation, and nothing more."
After these polite exchanges, the priests who stood on either hand came to greet Ximen Qing, and he was invited to go to the Abbot's cell. This was a large hall, three rooms wide, called the Hall of Pine Trees and of Cranes. There tea was served.
Ximen Qing sat down and told Qitong to take a horse for Ying Bojue. "I don't think he can have a horse, so that is why he has not arrived yet."
"The donkey that Brother-in-law Chen rides, is here," Daian said.
"Very well," Ximen said, "let him take that." Qitong went away.
When the Abbot had finished his reading of the sacred books, he came to offer tea to Ximen and then sat down to talk. "Realizing the keenness of your desire to worship Heaven," he said, "I rose this morning at the fourth watch and read many sacred texts at the altar for you. Today is the third dawn and the ninth revolution, and I performed all the necessary exercises for the worship of the Jade Pivot. I also prepared a document with your son's birthday and his eight characters, and presented the name to the Three Most Mighty Ones. The name I chose for him was Wu Yingyuan, calling upon him every blessing, continual prosperity and strength of body. I made ready a sacrifice of twenty-four degrees to offer to Heaven and Earth, twelve more for the glory of the gods, and still another twenty-four for the dead. So we have a hundred and eighty degrees in all."
Ximen Qing thanked the Abbot. After a while the drum was heard, and he was asked to go to the altar to see the document of enrollment. He dressed himself in a scarlet robe of ceremony with a five-colored badge of rank. Then he fastened about himself the girdle with the buckle of gilded rhinoceros horn. When he came to the altar, a lector, robed in purple, began the reading of the sacred purpose.
The devout Ximen Qing, dwelling in Xianpaifang of Qinghe in the Province of Shandong, venerating the sacred Principle, comes to implore a blessing, to offer sacrifice, and to pray for peace. He was born at the hour of midnight, on the twentieth day of the seventh month of the year *Bingyin*. His wife Wu was born at the hour of midnight, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the year *Wuzhen*.
There the lector stopped. "Have you," he said to Ximen Qing, "any other members of your household whom you would wish me to include?"
"Simply write this." Ximen said. "Li, born at the hour of dawn on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *Xinwei*, and the boy Guan'ge, born at the hour of *Shen* on the twenty-third day of the seventh month in the year *Bingshen*."
The lector repeated this after him and returned to his reading.
This day, I, Ximen Qing, and all my household come to fulfill our humble duty and to do worship before the Mighty Creator. My life is but a particle of dust from the lowest order of the Three Forces. Yet when I go out and come in; when I rise from my bed or seek it, I am ever indebted to the protection of the Dragon Heaven. Seasons change from hot to cold, yet the mercy of the Almighty never faileth me.
I have an appointment among the soldiery and a post in the Imperial Guard: I bask in the sunshine of the Emperor's favor; wealth and riches have come to me.
Therefore, with humble devotion, I make this sacrifice towards the twenty-four regions in thankfulness for the great mercies bestowed on me by Heaven and Earth and to acclaim the benefits of the Kingly One. Twelve sacrifices I offer in honor of the True God whose birthday we celebrate this day.
May I be blessed by the Five Fortunes, may I prosper and the gifts of Heaven descend upon me.
On the twenty-third day of the seventh month last year, my second wife Li bore me a son, Guan'ge. At that time I prayed for her safe delivery and that good fortune might be with the child. This son, Guan'ge, I pray may be received into the religious life in the sanctuary of the Three Holy Ones, receiving the name Wu Yingyuan.
I vowed that I would make sacrifice of a hundred and twenty degrees that my seed may be continued after me and that this my son may enjoy length of days.
I desire to do worship to the spirits of three generations of the House of Ximen, to my grandfather Ximen Jingliang, to my grandmother Li, to my father Ximen Da and my mother Xia, to my late wife Chen, and all those who have died, one after the other. Whether they have ascended to Heaven I know not, or whether they have gone down to the place below. I offer twelve sacrifices that the omnipotent DAO may set them all upon the way of life. In all I offer a hundred and eighty degrees of sacrifice. Look graciously upon this petition and grant these blessings.
Upon this the ninth day of the first month in the third year of the reign Xuan He, the feast of the birthday of the Gods, in humble duty I come to the sanctuary of the Most Beneficent Jade Emperor, here, by the ministry of the priests, to give thanks to Heaven and Earth, and to pray that the Gods may bestow their blessing upon me and give me peace. Here I have enrolled the name of my son and recited the sacred scriptures that blessings may be multiplied. I have kept the great fast for a day and a night to invoke the glory of the Three Worlds and to welcome the Chariot of the God of Ten Thousand Heavens.
May He grant lasting peace to all my household and ensure that the Four Seasons shall be harmonious and fruitful.
For this I place my trust in the power of DAO and pray that manifold blessings may be bestowed.
This have I set down with faithful care.
When this had been read, the priests brought many talismans, petitions and papers and asked Ximen Qing to look at them one by one. There were between a hundred and eighty and a hundred and ninety of them, all well done and in excellent order. Then they showed him the talismans, petitions and papers for the enrollment of the child's name under the protection of the Three Holy Ones. The task was too great for Ximen Qing. He had observed the great care that the Abbot brought to his duties, so he contented himself with offering incense and signed the documents. He called for a roll of silk to be brought and given to Abbot Wu. The Abbot refused it for a long time, but finally bade a boy receive it.
Then a priest at the corner of the sanctuary beat the drum with a roaring like spring thunder and the others played their instruments. The Abbot vested himself in a scarlet robe with embroidery of the five colors, and red shoes. He took up an ivory scepter. Then he dispatched all the documents and went to the altar to await the coming of the Gods, and a bell was rung on either side. Ximen Qing was escorted to the altar, and there offered incense on both sides of the sanctuary of the Three Holy Ones. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at them. Ximen Qing went around the altar and offered incense. When he was done, the servers invited him to go to the Hall of the Pine Trees. In the innermost room, a fine carpet had been laid and animal charcoal was burning in the brazier. After a while Ying Bojue and Xie Xida arrived. They greeted Ximen Qing and each of them offered a star of silver as tea money. "We should have liked to send some tea," they said, "but it is a long way, and we offer this trifle instead."
Ximen Qing would have none of it. "Really," he said, "I have no patience with you. I invited you. Why should you do this? My relative Wu will bring something for tea, and that will be enough for all of us."
Ying Bojue hastily made reverence and said: "If you insist, we must take it back." Then he looked at Xie Xida. "It is your fault," he said, "I told you our brother would not accept it. Now, you see, he upbraids us."
Then Wu and Hua came, and each of them brought two boxes of fine cakes to have with tea. Ximen Qing asked Abbot Wu to accept them. After tea a vegetarian meal was prepared, and Ximen Qing and the others took part in it. The Abbot had engaged a storyteller, who told them all about Hong Men of the Han Dynasty.
When the Abbot had finished attending to the papers, he came in and sat down with them. He asked if Guan'ge himself was to be brought that day.
"No," Ximen Qing said, "he is very small, and my wife was afraid that the distance might be too much for him. But this afternoon his clothes are coming and we will offer them before the Three Holy Ones. I imagine that will have the same effect."
"I agree," Abbot Wu said, "it is the best thing you could do."
"In every other respect," Ximen Qing said, "the child is getting along very well, but he is much too easily alarmed. I have three or four maids and a nurse to look after him, but something is always disturbing him. We dare not let dogs or cats come anywhere near him."
"Rearing a child is no easy business," Uncle Wu said. Then Daian came and said that Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er had sent Li Ming and Wu Hui with tea. Ximen Qing ordered them to be brought in. The two boys came, carrying boxes, which they presented on their knees. When the boxes were opened, it was seen that they contained all kinds of delightful cakes, and tea with rose petals. Ximen Qing asked Abbot Wu to accept them.
"How did you come to know about this?" he asked Li Ming. "This morning," Li Ming said, "I met Uncle Chen riding along the street. He told me that you were performing your devotions here today, and I went home and told Guijie's mother. She told Wu Yin'er, and they asked us to come and bring you their best wishes. Really they would have come themselves, but it would have been hard for them to get here. These poor cakes are to be given to your servants."

Ximen Qing said that the two boys must have food, and the Abbot sent them to a room aside. Even the porters who had come with them were given a meal.
In the afternoon there were further devotions. The Abbot had prepared a large table of food, a jar of Jinhua wine, and, for the baby, a Daoist hat of black silk, with trimmings of gold, a black Daoist gown made of linen, and another of green cloudy silk. There were tiny black silk shoes and a yellow girdle, a yellow cord from the shrine of the Three Holy Ones, a purple cord from the Patroness of Children, and a silver necklet, on which was engraved: "Gold and jade fill the hall. Long Life, Honor and Riches be thine." There was a talisman of yellow silk with red characters to drive away devils. This bore the inscription: "God said the word" and "Long Life and Health." The parcels were tied with yellow string and set upon a square tray. Plates of fruit were on the table.
A boy was told to take from a bag copies upon red paper of all the texts they had been reciting, and the Abbot asked Ximen Qing to look at them. The papers were then put into boxes, and in all there were eight bundles to be sent to Ximen's house. Ximen was very pleased. He told Qitong to go at once and tell the people at home that the messenger must be given two handkerchiefs and a tael of silver.
This day was Pan Jinlian's birthday. Aunt Wu, old woman Pan, Aunt Yang and Miss Yu were sitting in Yueniang's room when the presents came from the temple. They set them on four tables, but even so there was not room for all. The ladies came to look at them.
"Come quickly, Sixth Sister," Jinlian said to Li Ping'er, "your baby's teacher has sent him some presents. Here is a little Daoist hat and robes. Oh, look! There are some little shoes too."
Yulou went forward and took the little shoes in her hands. "See how very careful those priests are," she said. "These little shoes with their white silk heels are done in *Daokou* work, and the laces in *Fangsheng*. The clouds are very well done. The priest who did this must have a wife. He could never do such good needlework himself."
"Nonsense," Wu Yueniang said, "if he is a monk, how can he have a wife? He must employ someone to do the work for him."
"If the Daoist monks have wives," Jinlian said, "Nun Wang here and the Abbess can make excellent girdles; must we assume that they have husbands?"
"Oh, the monks," Nun Wang said, "can go anywhere in those hats of theirs, but we of the Buddhist persuasion are recognized wherever we go."
"They tell me," Jinlian said, "that your convent, the Temple of Guanyin, is opposite the Daoist monastery. You remember the saying: ' When a house of nuns stands near a house of monks, something is bound to happen.' "
"The Fifth Lady loves to talk nonsense," Yueniang said.
"Ah," Jinlian said, "here is the purple cord talisman. With this the priest dedicates the child to Guanyin. And here is a silver necklet with a medal attached, and eight characters engraved upon it. How nice the baby will look when he puts it on. And on the back is the child's name—Wu—something —Yuan."
"That is the name the priest gave him," Qitong said. "Wu Yingyuan." "Yes, the character is Ying," Jinlian said. "But the priest is certainly impertinent to change the baby's surname."
"That's what you think," Yueniang said. She asked Li Ping'er to bring Guan'ge, that they might see him dressed in his monastic habit. But Li Ping'er said: "He has just gone to sleep and I don't like to disturb him."
"It will do him no harm to wake him up," Jinlian said, and Li Ping'er then went to bring her son. Jinlian, who could read, took the parcels of red papers, pulled out the texts, and in one of the documents discovered that after Ximen Qing's name, only those of Wu Yueniang and Li Ping'er were mentioned. There were no others. This made her jealous.
"Look how that obstinate scoundrel arranges people in ranks and classes. Isn't it clear that he has his favorites. This paper mentions only one and the rest of us are left out. We don't count. We are pushed on one side."
"Is the Great Lady mentioned?" Meng Yulou asked. "Oh, it would be a joke if she were not there," Jinlian said.
"There is nothing the matter with it," Yueniang said. "If it mentions one of us, that is enough. Just because we have a regiment of women in the house, there is no reason why everybody's name should go down. The priests would laugh."
"We are no worse than anybody else," Jinlian said, "we all took the same length of time to come into the world."
Then Li Ping'er brought Guan'ge.
"Give me the clothes and I will dress him," Yulou said. Li Ping'er held the child while Yulou put on him the hat, the necklet and the two strings. The baby was frightened, closed his eyes, and, for a long time, held his breath. Yulou put on the little monastic dress.
"Take these papers and some paper money," Yueniang said, "and go to our domestic chapel and burn them there." Li Ping'er did so.
Yulou held the baby and played with him. "Now that you are wearing these clothes," she said to him, "you are a little priest."
"A little priest indeed!" Jinlian said, "rather the Great Omnipotent himself."
"Why do you say a thing like that?" Yueniang said seriously. "You must not talk in that way in the child's presence." Jinlian was abashed and said no more.
The wearing of these new clothes seemed to frighten the child and he began to cry. Li Ping'er came back, took him and undressed him. While she was doing so, he soiled her dress.
"Oh, you good little Wu Yingyuan," Yulou said, laughing, "if you're going to make messes, you must have something to sit on."
Yueniang bade Xiaoyu take paper, and put things to rights. Then the child lay on his mother's breast and went to sleep. Yueniang distributed all the cakes and invited Aunt Yang, Aunt Wu, and old woman Pan to come and eat the food that had been sent from the temple. It was growing dark.
The day before, Ximen Qing, in preparation for his sacrifice, had taken no meat or wine. Now, Jinlian, who had been unable to celebrate her birthday at the proper time, waited for him to come back from the temple that she might offer wine to him. She went and stood at the gate. About sunset, Daian and Chen Jingji came riding back. Jinlian asked Jingji if Ximen was returning.
"I don't think so," Jingji said. "When we left, the service was not over. They had only begun it, and I don't see how they can finish before the first night watch. Priests never let people go without a struggle. They want to thank the Gods and drink a cup of wine."
When Jinlian heard this, she said nothing but went to Yueniang's room in a bad temper. "I have just come from the gate," she said. "There I saw Brother-in-law Chen come back on horseback. He says that Father will not be here yet because the service is not finished. He himself came back before the others."
"That is all right," Yueniang said, "we shall be more at our ease. Tonight we will listen to these two nuns talking about religion and singing hymns."
Chen Jingji pulled the lattice aside and came in. He was a little tipsy.
"I have come," he said, "to pay my respects to Fifth Mother." He turned to his wife and asked her for a cup.
"Why should I get you a cup?" his wife said. "Kowtow to the Fifth Lady and I will offer the wine for you. Look at you! You are drunk! It is clear you found this sacrifice a splendid excuse for drinking. Coming back in a state like this!"
Yueniang asked him whether Ximen Qing was really not coming back, and whether Daian had returned.
"Father saw that the service would not be finished for some time," Jingji said, "and as he knew there was no man in the house, he told me to come back, and Daian to stay and wait upon him. The Abbot would not let me go. He pulled me and dragged me about, and gave me two or three great cups of wine. Then, at last, I got away."
Yueniang asked him how many people were at the temple. "Uncle Wu, and Uncle Hua, who lives outside the gates, Uncle Ying and Uncle Xie. The two young actors Li Ming and Wu Hui are there too. When the party will come to an end, I don't know. I only know that Uncle Wu was going home, and that Uncle Hua was not allowed to do so. In my opinion they will spend the night there."
Jinlian saw that Li Ping'er was not there.
"Why do you call him Uncle Hua?" she said to Chen Jingji. "What relation was he to the departed? You ought to know that he should be called Uncle Li."
"Fifth Mother," Jingji said, "you should take a lesson from the country girl who married Zheng En. Keep one eye open and the other shut."
"Kowtow and be off, you scamp," his wife said. "Don't come here with your scandalous talk."
Jingji asked Jinlian to take the proper position. He kowtowed four times, drunkenly, then went to the outer court.
After a while, candles and lamps were brought and the tables were set. They all ate noodles and wine, and then everything was cleared away. Yueniang told Xiaoyu to close the second door and put a small table on the bed. They all sat in a circle with the two nuns in the middle. They burned incense; then, with only two candles burning, listened to the two nuns telling religious stories. First the chief nun began. She told how the Thirty-second Sage came down from the Western Heaven to the Eastern World. Here he preached the teaching of the Buddha, the sacred doctrine of the Master, and the principle of retribution. She told the story of Master Zhang, a very wealthy man, giving one episode after another, very slowly. She spoke of the nobleman who was converted to the teaching of Buddha, left his house, his garden, and his belongings and went to lead a religious life in the Temple of the Yellow Plum.
When she had finished these stories, Nun Wang chanted a psalm. Then Yueniang said: "Teachers, you must be hungry, we had better have something to eat." She bade Xiaoyu bring four plates of vegetarian food and another four plates of buns and cakes, and asked Aunt Wu, Aunt Yang, and old woman Pan to join the two nuns.
"I have just had something to eat," Aunt Wu said. "Ask Aunt Yang. She has been fasting."
Yueniang put the cakes on small gilded plates and offered them first to Aunt Yang and then to the two nuns. "Take some more, old lady," she said to Aunt Yang, but the old lady protested that she had had enough.
"There are some bones on the plate," Aunt Yang said. "Please, Sister, take them away. I might put them in my mouth by mistake." This made everybody roar with laughter.
"Old Lady," Yueniang said, "this is vegetarian food made to look like meat. It has come from the temple, and there can't possibly be any harm in eating it."
"If it is really vegetarian," Aunt Yang said, "I will taste it. My eyes are so bad I thought it was meat."
As they were eating, Laixing's wife, Huixiu, came in.
"What do you want, you rogue?" said Yueniang. Huixiu said she had come to hear the nuns sing.
"How did you manage to get in, since the second door is closed?" Yueniang asked.
Yuxiao answered. "She was in the kitchen, putting out the fire."
"Then no wonder your nose and mouth are so black. You look like a spiritual drumstick. What use is there in your coming to listen to religious admonitions?"
The ladies and the maids still sat around the two nuns. When the cakes were done with, everything was cleared away; the lights were trimmed, and more incense burned. The two nuns beat small gongs and began their chanting again. They told how the nobleman Zhang, in the Temple of the Yellow Plum on the mountainside, spent all his days upon his knees listening to the sutras, and all his nights in meditation. They told how the Fourth Sage perceived that Zhang was no common man, so he took the nobleman among his disciples, gave him three precious favors and bade him go to the bank of the River of Foulness, there to find a womb wherein he might be born again. Then they told how the Virgin of a Thousand Pieces of Gold was washing clothes on the bank of the River of Foulness. She met a monk who begged for a place in which to live, and when she did not answer, the monk jumped into the river.
Jinlian was very sleepy, and her head kept nodding. After a while she went to her room to bed. Then Xiuchun came to tell Li Ping'er that Guan'ge had waked up, and she, too, went away. Only Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Sun Xue'e, old woman Pan and the two aunts remained to listen to the end of the story.
They were told how, from the river, there came a big scaly fish, and the maiden ate it. Then she went home, and bore a child after ten months.
By this time, Yueniang noticed that her stepdaughter had gone to bed and Aunt Wu, who was lying on Yueniang's bed, was fast asleep. Aunt Yang was yawning and the candles had already been renewed twice. She asked Xiaoyu what time it was. "It's the fourth watch," Xiaoyu said, "and the cock's crowed."
Yueniang told the 2 nuns to take their books. Aunt Yang went to Yulou's room and Miss Yu to the inner court to sleep with Xue'e. The Abbess slept with Li Jiao'er and Nun Wang remained with Yueniang. They waited for Xiaoyu to make them some tea and then went to bed. Aunt Wu slept in the inner room with Yuxiao. "How did the Fifth Sage grow up?" Yueniang asked Nun Wang. "Did he become a true Immortal?" Nun Wang told her how the maiden's parents drove her from their home and went to Xianrenzhuang where the Fifth Sage was born. When he was six years old, he went to the River of Foulness, recovered his three precious gifts and returned again to the Temple of the Yellow Plum to listen to the teaching of the Fourth Sage. Afterwards he became an Immortal and took his mother with him to Paradise. Yueniang heard the whole story from beginning to end, and afterwards believed even more fervently in the teaching of Buddha.

## 061

### Holding Her Boy in Her Arms Li P'ing-erh Curries Favour; Dressing Up as a Maidservant Chin-lien Courts Affection,; Wu Yueniang & the Nun

Good works must be done because you want to;
Without the intent they accomplish nothing.
Whatever merit accrues to good works you do;
Cannot be shared by anyone except yourself.
Though sacred texts pile up like mountains;
Without karmic affinity you won't read them.
Money and goods heaped higher than the walls;
When danger comes cannot be taken with you.
The dead to whom you tender devout offerings;
Are quite incapable of rising up to eat them.
Though sons and grandsons overflow your halls;
Once you are dead they cannot take your place.[1]

Yüeh-niang slept on the same k'ang with Nun Wang that night. "Why is it," Nun Wang took the occasion to ask, "that you haven't thus far shown any indication of a happy event?"
"Now that you bring up the subject of a happy event," said Yüeh-niang, "in the eighth month last year, because we had bought the house of Mr. Ch'iao across the street, for no good reason, we all went over to take a look at it. While I was climbing the stairs over there, my foot slipped, and the wrench I suffered resulted in the miscarriage of a fetus I had been carrying for six or seven months. From that time until now, there haven't been any indications of another child."
"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "in six or seven months it would already have assumed recognizable shape."
"In the middle of the night," said Yüeh-niang, "I evacuated the fetus into the commode, and when the maidservant and I examined it, it turned out to be a boy."
"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "what a pity. How did you manage to wrench yourself, or was it just that the embryo was not properly seated in the womb?"
"All I was doing," said Yüeh-niang, "was climbing their stairs, which were narrow and steep, when, somehow or other, one of my feet slipped out from under me. Fortunately, Sister Meng the Third caught hold of me with one hand. Otherwise, I would have fallen all the way down."
"If you were to bear a son," said Nun Wang, "it would do you more good than it would anyone else. Just look at the case of the Sixth Lady in the front compound. She had hardly crossed the threshold any time at all when she gave birth to a son, and now she is treated with such favor."
"Whether any of us bear children or not is up to Heaven," said Yüeh-niang. "That's all there is to it."
"It doesn't matter," said Nun Wang. "A colleague of mine, Reverend Hsüeh, is adept at producing efficacious spells and potions. Year before last there was the case of the wife of Dr. Ch'en, who had reached middle age without any children, having suffered from a series of miscarriages that prevented her from carrying her pregnancies to term. But after taking a fertility potion provided by Reverend Hsüeh, she has given birth to a real armful of handsome baby boy, and the whole household is as happy as can be. The only thing is that the formula requires an ingredient that is hard to obtain."
"What ingredient is that?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"It requires the afterbirth of a firstborn child," said Nun Wang. "It must be washed in wine, burnt to ashes, and mixed with the potion. Then, selecting a *jen-tzu* day:[2]
Unbeknownst to humans,
Unperceived by ghosts,[3]
you must take it with some rice wine on an empty stomach. If you calculate the date correctly, you will be sure to conceive within the month."
"Is this person a monk or a nun," asked Yüeh-niang, "and where does the reverend reside?"
"She's a nun like myself," said Nun Wang, "and she's more than fifty years old. Originally she lived in the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, but recently she has moved to the Lotus Blossom Nunnery in the southern quarter, where she is currently the abbess. She is known for her exemplary conduct, and for her knowledge of any number of scriptures. In addition, she can explicate the *Chin-kang k'o-i*, or *Liturgical Exposition of the Diamond Sutra*, as well as every kind of 'precious scroll' relating tales of karmic cause and effect. She can go on for a month without exhausting her repertoire, and constantly frequents prominent households where they ask her to stay for ten days or a fortnight before letting her go."
"Why don't you ask her to come here for a visit sometime soon," said Yüeh-niang.
I'll take care of it," said Nun Wang, "at the same time that I solicit the potion that I spoke of, on your behalf. But that one ingredient is hard to obtain, and there's no place to look for it around here. Unless, thus and so, you were to take advantage of the occasion by digging up the afterbirth of that child from the front compound and using it for the purpose."[4]
"How could I bear to:
Harm someone else,
To benefit myself?"[5]
said Yüeh-niang. I'll give you some silver so you can seek one elsewhere at your leisure."
"This is something that one can only obtain from a midwife," said Nun Wang. "If I succeed in preparing this potion for you, and you take it in the prescribed manner, I guarantee that you will conceive a child. If you should be fortunate enough in the future to bear him another son, no matter how many rivals you may have:
Even ten twinkling stars,

Are no match for the moon."
"Don't tell anyone what you're about," Yüeh-niang admonished her.
"My dear lady," said Nun Wang, "I'm not so foolish as to say anything about it."
After they had talked for a while, they each fell asleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the temple. Yüeh-niang had just gotten up and was combing her hair. After Yü-hsiao had taken his outer garments, he sat down.
"Last night," Yüeh-niang took the occasion to say, "Sister Six was waiting up for you to help celebrate her birthday. Why didn't you come home?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her all about how the *chiao* ceremony was not over, how their kinsman Abbot Wu had gone to such trouble to lay on an elaborate feast that evening, how his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, had left early, but how the abbot had kept him, along with Brother Hua the Elder, Brother Ying the Second, and Hsieh Hsi-ta, to be entertained by the playing and singing of the two boy actors.
"We continued drinking for half the night. This morning, I was the first to leave and come into the city. Brother Ying the Second and the other two are still at it. Yesterday our kinsman Abbot Wu really put himself out and spent a great deal of money."
Yü-hsiao brought him a cup of tea, and after drinking it, instead of going to the yamen, he went to his studio in the front compound, sprawled out on the bed there, and went to sleep.
Sometime later, after having combed their hair, P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, the latter holding her baby in her arms, made their way to the master suite to join Yüeh-niang in a cup of tea.
"Father has been back for some time," Yüeh-niang said to Li P'ing-erh. "He's gone to the front compound. I wanted him to have something to eat with his tea, but he wouldn't take anything. The maidservants have prepared a meal for him. Why don't you dress your little Taoist priest in his vestments and take him up front to show to his father."
"I'll go too," said Chin-lien. "Let me put the vestments on the Taoist priest for you."
Thereupon, she fitted the gold lamé Taoist cap onto his head, dressed him in his Taoist robe, hung the amulet on its cord around his neck, and pulled his tiny shoes and socks on for him.
Chin-lien was going to take the baby herself, but Yüeh-niang said, "You'd better let his mother carry him. Especially since that honey yellow drawnwork skirt of yours won't take dirt. If it should be soiled however slightly, it will be ruined."
Thereupon, Li P'ing-erh carried Kuan-ko in her arms, with P'an Chin-lien trailing behind her, as they made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's studio on the western side of the front courtyard. When Shu-t'ung saw the two women lifting aside the portiere to come in, he promptly got out of the way.
When Chin-lien saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying on the k'ang frame with his face to the wall, she pointed to the child and said, "What a slugabed you are, you old beggar! The little Taoist priest has come in person to summon you. A meal has already been laid out in the First Lady's room, ready for you to eat, but you refuse to get up promptly and continue to play possum."
Now Hsi-men Ch'ing was a person who had been drinking all night. No sooner did his head hit the pillow than he became oblivious to:
Heaven above and earth below,[6]
and was soon:
Snoring thunderously.
Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh sat down, one on each side of the bed, and placed the child right in front of his face. How could anyone have withstood such pestering? In no time at all they managed to awaken Hsi-men Ch'ing, who opened his eyes to see what was going on and observed Kuan-ko right in front of his face, wearing the gold lamé Taoist cap on his head, dressed in the tiny Taoist robe, with the amulet on its cord around his neck. He was so delighted:
His eyebrows arched and his eyes lighted up,[7]
as he hastily picked him up, sat him on his lap, and gave him a kiss.
"What a clean mouth to kiss a baby with!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Little Taoist priest, Wu Ying-yüan, you ought to throw up in his face. Tell us, where were you yesterday:
Driving a water buffalo to plow the land,[8]
that you should be so exhausted today as to insist on going to sleep in broad daylight? Yesterday you kept your Fifth Lady waiting for you all day. You've got some nerve not to have come home to kowtow to your Fifth Lady on her birthday."
"Yesterday the *chiao* rites went on rather late," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and in the evening there was the ceremony of dismissing the generals. In addition, the abbot had prepared a banquet, and we ended up drinking all night long. Today, late as it is, I'm trying to catch a nap while I can, because I still have to go to Provincial Graduate Shang's place to attend a party."
"Why don't you skip it?" said Chin-lien.
"His household sent an invitation yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If I don't show up, they'll be sure to take offense."
"If you go," said Chin-lien, "come home a bit earlier tonight. I'll be waiting for you."
"The First Lady has had a meal laid out for you," said Li P'ing-erh, "and prepared some broth with marinated bamboo shoots. She invites you to come and have something to eat."
"I don't feel particularly like eating anything," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'll go and have some broth."
Thereupon, he stood up and went off to the rear compound.
When P'an Chin-lien saw that he was gone, she plumped her posterior down in the middle of the bed, rested her feet on the rim of the recessed brazier below, and said, "So this is a bed frame with a k'ang underneath it."
Reaching out her hand to feel the bedding, she said, "The k'ang has certainly been heated until its boiling hot."
Noticing that on a table to one side there was a warmer, with a cover of brass wire, used for heating ink stones, she casually picked it up in one hand and said, "Sister Li, the ivory box on the incense stand over there contains pellets of sweet-smelling incense. Hand it to me, will you."
On the one hand, she opened the box and put some pellets into the warmer, while, on the other hand, she inserted it into her crotch and wrapped her skirt tightly about it, so that it would warm her body and fumigate her clothes at the same time.
After they had sat there for a while, Li P'ing-erh said, "Let's go back inside. I imagine Father has finished his meal and will be coming out again before long."
"What if he does?" said Chin-lien. "Are you afraid of him?"
Thereupon, the two of them, carrying Kuan-ko with them, went back to the rear compound.
After some time, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished eating, he instructed an orderly to prepare his horse and set off, sometime after noon, to attend the party at the home of Provincial Graduate Shang. Old Mrs. P'an had already departed before he did.
To resume our story, that night, when Nun Wang was about to return home, Yüeh-niang surreptitiously gave her a tael of silver and said to her, "Don't tell the abbess anything about it, but, whatever you do, contrive to go see Nun Hsüeh and bring a dose of that potion for me."
Nun Wang accepted the silver and said to Yüeh-niang, "After I leave now, I won't be able to come back before the sixteenth, but I'll endeavor to locate that ingredient for you."
"That's fine," said Yüeh-niang. "If you manage this affair successfully for me, I'll provide you with another expression of my gratitude."
Thereupon, the nun bade her farewell and departed.
Gentle reader take note: Generally speaking, the heads of prominent households should not patronize monks, or nuns, or go-betweens of this sort. In your:
Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
they establish intimacy with the womenfolk on the pretext of preaching about Heaven and Hell:
Expounding scriptures and explicating texts;
while, behind your back, they:
Name articles and cite clauses,[9]
On passion's heats and chills.
There is no telling what they will do. In nine cases out of ten, you will end up suffering calamity at their hands. There is a poem that testifies to this:
Black-robed Buddhist nuns are the most
unspeakable of creatures;
In vast courtyards and secluded mansions
they deceive beauties.
If persons of this ilk were really capable
of attaining Buddhahood;[10]
The Western Paradise would remain forever
a realm immersed in murk.[11]
To resume our story, that evening when Chin-lien was getting ready to go to Yüeh-niang's room in order to visit with the rest of the company, she approached the mirror stand, took off the fret enclosing her chignon, and did up her hair in two curled knots on either side of her head. She then made up her face until it was snow white, painted her lips bright red, put on a pair of gold lantern earrings, applied three beauty patches, adorned herself with a purple gold lamé headband, and donned an outfit consisting of a jacket of scarlet brocade over a blue satin skirt. The idea was to present herself in the guise of a maidservant in order to have some fun with Yüeh-niang and the others.
When she asked Li P'ing-erh over to take a look, she:
Rocked backward and forward,
with laughter, saying, "Sister, you're the spitting image of a maidservant. Let me go back ahead of you. I've got a red cotton kerchief in my room I can put over your head to serve as a veil. I'll give them a scare by announcing that Father has found himself another maidservant, and they'll be sure to fall for it."
As they set off for the rear compound, with Ch'un-mei carrying a lantern ahead of them, they ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who said with a laugh, "I wonder who this can be? It can only be the Fifth Lady up to some trick or other."
"Son-in-law," exclaimed Li P'ing-erh, "come over here and let me explain. You go in first, and when you see them, do:
Thus and thus, and
So and so."
"I'll know what to do," said Ching-chi. "Leave it to me."
Thereupon, he proceeded into the master suite, where everyone was sitting on the k'ang, drinking tea.
"Mother," said Ching-chi, "take a look at this. Father, for no good reason, has engaged the services of Auntie Hsüeh to buy a twenty-four-year-old girl who knows how to play and sing from another household. She's just been delivered to our door by sedan chair."
"Really?" said Yüeh-niang. "Why didn't Auntie Hsüeh come and tell me about it beforehand?"
"She was afraid you'd give her a hard time," said Ching-chi, "so, no sooner did the sedan chair arrive than she took off, leaving the servants to bring her inside."
Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, didn't say anything, but Aunt Yang said, "His Honor has all of you ladies at his disposal already. What does he need another one for?"
"My dear lady," said Yüeh-niang, "how can you stop him? If he's got the money to do it, he can buy a hundred and it wouldn't be too many for him. We're like:
Women serving in the army:
Merely taking up space,
in these rooms here, that's all."
"Let me go take a look," said Yü-hsiao.
What should she see coming forward under the moonlight but a figure, wearing a veil over her head and dressed in red clothing, while Ch'un-mei, who had originally been carrying the lantern, had turned it over to the page boy Lai-an and was following in her wake, along with Li P'ing-erh. The situation created such a stir that Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh also came out to survey the scene.
In due course, they came into the room, where Yü-hsiao led her up to Yüeh-niang's side and said, "This is your mistress. Aren't you going to kowtow to her?"
So saying, she lifted the veil off her head, and Chin-lien proceeded to kowtow:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
but couldn't help breaking into a titter of laughter as she did so.
"Some maidservant you are!" said Yü-lou. "First you forget to kowtow to your mistress, and then you break out laughing."
Yüeh-niang also laughed, saying, "This Sister Six is such an inveterate prankster that she managed to fool all of us."
"Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "I was not deceived."
"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "how did you manage to see through it so as not to be deceived?"
"When Sister Six has kowtowed in the past," explained Yü-lou, "she has always done it that way; first touching her forehead to the floor, and then getting up and retreating two steps before making her bow."
"It took you to see through it," said Aunt Yang. "As for me, I would have fallen for it."
"I fell for it too," said Li Chiao-erh. "Just now, if she hadn't taken off her veil and then started to laugh, I wouldn't have recognized her."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying Hsi-men Ch'ing's felt bag and reported, "Father has come home."
"You go stay out of sight in the parlor," Yü-lou said to Chin-lien. "When Father comes in, we'll have some fun with him."
It was not long before Hsi-men Ch'ing came in. Aunt Yang and Wu K'ai's wife had already gone elsewhere in anticipation of his coming. When he entered the room, he sat down on a chair.
Yüeh-niang, who was situated to one side, had nothing to say, but Yü-lou said to him, "Today Auntie Hsüeh brought a maidservant in her twenties from someone else's household over here by sedan chair, saying that you had told her to deliver her here because you wanted her. Old as you are, and with an official career in hand, it seems you remain as insatiable as ever."
"Since when did I tell her to buy any maidservant for me?" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could you believe that old whore? She was pulling your leg."
"Just ask Elder Sister," said Yü-lou, "if it isn't so. The maidservant in question is right here. I'm not fooling. If you don't believe me, I'll call her out for you to see for yourself."
Thereupon, she told Yü-hsiao, "Go drag that new maidservant in here to meet her master."
Yü-hsiao put her hand over her mouth and laughed, scarcely daring to do as she was told.
After venturing into the other room, she came back, saying, "She refuses to come."
"Let me go drag her in here," said Yü-lou. 'What an impudent slave!
Before being able to so much as shake her head,
she's defying her master. She's the sort who will never take instruction from anybody."
After she had proceeded into the parlor, the rest of them heard a voice saying, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! I'm not going in. All you seem to be able to do is drag me around. You're dragging me so fast:
My limbs can hardly touch the ground."
"A fine slave you are!" laughed Yü-lou. "Whoever taught you to be so unmannerly as to refuse to come in and kowtow to your master?"
And with that she dragged her into the other room. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look under the lamp light, he saw that it was P'an Chin-lien with her hair done up in two curled knots so as to look like a maidservant, which made him:
Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared.[12]
Chin-lien sat down on a chair next to him, and Yü-lou said, "What an impudent maidservant! For someone who's:
Newly come and just arrived,[13]

how can you be so:
Discourteous and ill-bred,[14]
as to sit down, as cool as you please, in front of your master, and splash muck on him to boot?"
Yüeh-niang laughed and said, "Take the occasion of your master's return home to kowtow to him."
Chin-lien made no move to comply but went into Yüeh-niang's inner room, took the pins out of her hair, put the fret back on her chignon, and came out again.
"What a wanton you are!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Whoever gave you permission to affect a fret on your chignon?"
Everyone laughed at this sally for a while longer.
Yüeh-niang then addressed herself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Today our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's family sent Ch'iao Tung over with six invitations, inviting us to a lantern-viewing party. Tomorrow we ought to send them some gifts in return."
She told Yü-hsiao to show the invitation card to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who saw that the text read as follows:
On the twelfth instant, our humble household has prepared a meager potation. If you deign to mount your elegant equipage and condescend to attend, our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.
The above is addressed to the dressing table of the venerable consort of our eminent kinsman of great virtue and renown, Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Cheng, of your humble kinsman of the Ch'iao family.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the invitation, he said, "Tomorrow morning, tell Lai-hsing to buy four appropriate delicacies and a jug of southern wine to send over to them. That ought to suffice. At the same time, we should send out invitations of our own for the fourteenth. We can invite Ch'iao Hung's wife, Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung's wife, His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's wife, and our kinsman Chang Kuan's wife. Our sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, will not have to return home in the interim. We'll get Pen the Fourth to hire a fireworks specialist to make several racks of fireworks for us, and engage the troupe of actors maintained by Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to put on a performance of *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. While you're at home enjoying the lanterns and drinking wine, I'll invite Brother Ying the Second and Hsieh Hsi-ta to join me for a drink on the second floor of the house on Lion Street."
After he had finished speaking, it was not long before a table was set up and wine was served. P'an Chin-lien offered him a cup of wine and the other sisters followed suit, as they caroused for a while.
Now Hsi-men Ch'ing had been struck by the vision of Chin-lien disguised as a maidservant, and he observed under the lamplight that she was:
Alluringly dressed and heavily made up.
As a result, before he knew it, he was:
Carried away by lecherous desires,
and winked at her so incessantly, that she had no trouble knowing what was on his mind. Consequently, she continued to drink with the company for a while and then went off to her quarters in the front compound, where she doffed her headgear, did her hair up into a casual chignon in the Hang-chou style, and proceeded to:
Retouch her powdered face, and
Rerouge her ruby lips.
It so happens that she had long since set out a table for a drinking party, complete with fancy fruit and vegetable delicacies, in the expectation that Hsi-men Ch'ing would come to her room, so she could offer him a cup of wine.
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing actually showed up. When he saw that her hair was still done up in a cloud-shaped chignon, his heart was filled with delight. He embraced her, and the two of them sat down on the same chair together and proceeded to laugh and talk with each other. It did not take long for Ch'un-mei to serve the wine and delicacies, and the woman once again offered him a cup of wine.
"Little oily mouth!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You already offered me one earlier, and now you're going to the trouble all over again."
"That drink amidst a crowd of people doesn't count," laughed Chin-lien. "This one represents my personal undertaking to offer you a cup of wine on my own behalf. Year after year I have put you to considerable expense. I hope you don't regret it."
This speech caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to:
Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,
and he promptly pulled her onto his lap and sat her on his knee, while Ch'un-mei poured the wine and Ch'iu-chü served the dishes.
"Let me ask you," said Chin-lien. "On the twelfth, did the Ch'iao family ask all of us to go, or only the First Lady?"
"Since they sent invitations to all of you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why shouldn't you go? When the day comes, I'll have the wet nurse take the child along, so he won't cry after his mother if left at home."
"The First Lady and the others all have appropriate clothes to wear," said Chin-lien. "Old fogy that I am, all I've got is that limited number of outdated things. I don't have anything really worth looking at. *Why* don't you take some of those newly purchased fabrics from down south and distribute a few pieces of them to the members of your family so they can be made up into something to wear? Are you hoarding them in the expectation that they'll propagate themselves, or what? That way, when the day comes for us to entertain the wives of all those officials, we'll be fit to be seen, and not just a laughingstock. I'm always reminding you of this, but you act oblivious to the problem."
"If that's the way it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow I'll call in Tailor Chao to make up some new clothes for all of you."
"There are only two days left," said Chin-lien. "If you wait until tomorrow to set the tailor to work, by the time he finishes the job, it will be too late."
"I'll tell Tailor Chao to bring some additional helpers along with him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As long as they can make up a few items for each of you in a hurry, it will suffice. Whatever work is left over, they can do at their leisure, and it won't be too late."
"As I've urged you before," said Chin-lien, "whatever you do, see that they make two first-class outfits for me. I'm not to be compared to the others, who all have wardrobes of their own. You haven't had any formal clothes made especially for me."
"You lousy little oily mouth!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You've got to have your finger in every pie."
The two of them continued to talk and drink together until the first watch before going to bed. The pair of them were like:
Mandarin ducks beneath the quilt;[15]
Phoenix mates within the curtains.[16]
The swallows twittered in the boudoir;
As their cloudy passions intermingled.
It was some time before they were willing to call a halt, as they kept at it for fully half the night.
The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned from the yamen, he had the chests opened up and took out a bolt of block printed tussore fabric from the Imperial Silk Manufactory in the south. He then dispatched a page boy to call in Tailor Chao to make up full-sleeved robes of figured material for each of his womenfolk: one outfit of brocade, and one of figured fabric for each of them. Only Yüeh-niang was to get two scarlet full-sleeved brocade robes, and four outfits of figured material.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse when he dispatched Ch'in-t'ung to fetch Tailor Chao. The tailor was at home, eating his dinner. When he heard that he was being summoned to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, he hastily dropped his rice bowl, picked up his scissors and rule, and set forth. A contemporary composed several lines of verse to commemorate the strong points of this tailor:
I'm a tailor whose surname is Chao,
On call to my patrons each month.
Thread and needle I'm never without,
Rule and scissors are stuck in my boot.
Pleats and folds I find time to produce,
Faulty cuts I can fix in a trice.
Who cares if my clothes do not fit,
The lapels and the collars too tight?
Each day I eat meat at three meals,
And insist on two servings of wine.
Fabric samples I sell at my door.
Temple fairs I attend thrice a month.
When I've money my wife's mouth is sleek,
When I've nothing the children all cry.
No matter whose clothes they may be,
In the pawn shop I put them to rest.
Though you pester me for them all day,
I've a ready excuse in my mouth.
If you claim you must have them at once,
I'll put others in pawn in their stead.
If you ask what it is I do best,
I remain once for all on the take.
Before long the tailor arrived, found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting at the upper end of the room, and made haste to kowtow to him, after which he spread out a strip of felt on the table, took out his scissors and rule, and set to work.
To start off with, he made Yüeh-niang a full-sleeved scarlet jacket of variegated figured brocade, a satin robe emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin* being worshiped by the other animals, a robe of jet variegated silk with an edging of gold brocade featuring a pattern of phoenix mates traversing flowers inside a gourd-shaped border, an outfit consisting of a full-sleeved jacket of scarlet satin brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin*, over a wide trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue brocade, and an outfit consisting of an aloeswood-colored jacket of figured silk brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square, over a trailing scarlet skirt sprigged with gold-stemmed and green-leaved flowers.
For the others, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, he made a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated satin with a figured pheasant motif, and two outfits of figured tussore fabric for each of the four of them. For Sun Hsüeh-o he only made the two outfits but did not make a robe.
In no time at all he had cut out the patterns for some thirty articles of clothing. Hsi-men Ch'ing paid him five taels of silver for his services and engaged ten or more other tailors to make up the garments as fast as possible in his own home. But no more of this. Truly:
Golden bells and jade earrings disguise the sheltered virgin;
Brocaded silks and pearl headgear adorn the beauteous maiden.

Nun Wang and Wu Yueniang lay together upon the same bed. "Lady," said the nun, "has any sign of good fortune yet been granted you?"
"Good fortune!" Yueniang said. "In the eighth month of last year we bought the house belonging to the Qiao family, on the other side of the street from here. I went to look at it, but I slipped on the stairs, and the child, which was about six or seven months on the way, came from me. Since then there has been no sign of another."
"If it was seven months on the way," the nun said, "it must have been well formed."
"It fell into the pail in the middle of the night," Yueniang said, "and when the maid brought the light near I saw it was a boy."
"What a sad affair," Nun Wang said. "But it seems to me not that you strained yourself, but that your womb is not so strong as it might be. It would be much better for you to have a child than any of the other ladies. The Sixth Lady has been here only a little while, and see how happy she is with her child."
"Heaven decides whether we shall bear children or not," Yueniang said.
"Never mind," the nun said, "I have a friend called Xue who makes excellent charms and medicine. Last year there was Secretary Chen's wife. She was well on in years and had never borne a son, though she had several miscarriages. After she had taken my friend Xue's charms, she had a very fine boy. Everybody was so pleased. But one of the ingredients is very difficult to get."
"What is that?" Yueniang asked.
"First we need the afterbirth of a boy. This must be washed in wine and burned to ashes. Then the ashes must be mingled with the charm and medicine, and, on the *Renzi* day, in absolute secrecy, so that no evil spirit may interfere, you must swallow them with a little yellow wine upon an empty stomach. After that, all you have to do is to make a note of the date, and you will find that in exactly one month you will conceive. It is always so."
"Is your friend a monk or a nun?" Yueniang said, "and where does he or she live?"
"She is a nun about seventy years old," Nun Wang replied, "and once she lived at the Dizang Temple. Now she has gone to be the Abbess of the Fahua Temple. She is wonderfully learned. She knows all the religious texts and stories and can preach upon the Diamond Sutra and the sacred doctrine of Cause and Effect. She can talk for a month without exhausting her stock of learning. She only visits families of distinction, and, sometimes when they get hold of her, they will not let her go for ten days or a fortnight."
"Will you go tomorrow and ask her to come here?" Yueniang said.
"I will," said the nun, "and, moreover, I will ask her for the charms and medicine you need. There is only the one thing that is difficult to get, and I don't know what we can do about that. I think we had better dig up the Sixth Lady's and use that."
"Why should I hurt others to benefit myself?" Yueniang said. "I will give you some money, and you must try to get another one for me somewhere."
"For things like that we must go to the midwives," the nun said. "I will get the medicine for you, and, if you take it, I give you my word that you will have a baby like a moon that not even ten bright stars can outshine."
"Don't mention the matter to anyone," Yueniang said.
"What are you thinking about, my good Lady?" the nun said. "I should never dream of mentioning it."
At last they went to sleep.
Next day, when Yueniang had just got up, Ximen Qing came back from the temple. Yueniang was dressing her hair. Yuxiao took his clothes and he sat down.
"Yesterday," Yueniang said, "the Fifth Lady wished to offer wine to you on her birthday. Why did you not come back?"
"The sacrifice was not over," Ximen Qing said, "and kinsman Wu had arranged to entertain us to dinner. We stayed all night drinking. Brother Hua, Ying Bojue and Xie Xida were there, and two young actors sang to us. This morning when I came back, Brother Ying and the others were still drinking there."
Yuxiao brought tea. That day Ximen did not go to the office. He went to his study, lay on the bed and slept. Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er dressed their hair and went with the baby to Yueniang's room.
"His father has been back some time," Yueniang told them. "I asked him to have something to eat, but he would not. Now dinner is ready. Dress the baby in his Daoist robes; then take him to the front court and show him to his father."
"Let me put on the baby's clothes," Jinlian said. "I will go with you."
They dressed the child in his Daoist hat with its gold bands, the Daoist habit, with the necklet, the medals and the tiny shoes and socks. Jinlian wished to carry the baby, but Yueniang said: "Let his own mother carry him. Your yellow embroidered skirt might easily be soiled. If the baby wets it even a little, it will be ruined."
So Li Ping'er carried Guan'ge, and Jinlian went with them. When they came to the room in the wing, Shutong pulled aside the lattice and came out. Jinlian saw Ximen Qing asleep, his face turned to the wall.
"How soundly you sleep, you old beggar," she cried. "Here is a young priest come to pay you a call. Dinner is ready in the Great Lady's room, and he has come to ask you to go. Get up at once. Don't stay there sleeping."
Ximen Qing had been drinking all night, so that when his head touched the pillow he forgot how high the sky is and how thick the earth. He snored like thunder. Jinlian and Li Ping'er sat down on either side of the bed and put down Guan'ge before Ximen Qing's face. When he opened his eyes, there was Guan'ge dressed in his priestly robes. Ximen was so delighted that he opened his eyes wide and smiled. He took the child in his arms and kissed him.
"What a nice clean mouth to kiss the baby with!" Jinlian said. "Now little Master Priest, Wu Yingyuan, spit in his face and ask him over what field he has been toiling like an ox that he is so sleepy he would sleep all day. Yesterday poor Fifth Mother waited and waited for him. But he is so grand he would not come and kowtow to Fifth Mother."
"The service finished very late," Ximen said. "I had to thank all the gods, and we were drinking all through the night. My head is still heavy with wine and I should like to sleep a little longer because I have to go to a party at Master Shang's."

"You ought to have done with drinking for a while," Jinlian said.
"He sent me an invitation yesterday, and, if I do not go, he will be annoyed."
"Well, if you do go, you must come back at once. I shall expect you."
Li Ping'er said: "The Great Lady has had dinner prepared, and some bitter bamboo shoots specially for you. She wants you to go and have some."
"Really I don't feel like eating anything," Ximen Qing said, "but I will go and have some soup." He got up and went to the inner court.
When he had left, Jinlian sat on the bed and put her feet on the warmer below the floor. "This is indeed a warm bed," she said. Then she touched the mattress and cried: "The bed is quite hot." On a table was a small stove made of tiles, with a guard about it. She took it in her hands. Then she said: "Sixth Sister, there is a box on that table with some fragrant tablets in it. Give it to me." She opened the box, took out a few tablets, and, wrapping them in her skirt, put them between her legs to perfume her body.
They sat there a long time till Li Ping'er said: "Let us go. He will be coming back in a moment."
"What if he does?" Jinlian said. "I don't care." But they took Guan'ge and went to the inner court.
When Ximen Qing had finished his dinner, he ordered a servant to get ready his horse. Then he went to Master Shang's house for the party. Old woman Pan left that afternoon. When Nun Wang was about to go, Yueniang told her she must not speak to the Reverend Mother about the arrangement between them. She gave the nun a tael of silver and asked her to remember the charms and the medicine. Nun Wang took the silver. "I cannot come before the sixteenth," she said, "but then I will bring what you wish for." Yueniang promised that she should have more silver, and the nuns went away.
My dear readers: monks, nuns and go-betweens should never be allowed to enter the palaces and dwellings of the gentry where there are ladies. They pretend to talk of religion and to tell edifying stories, but secretly they do all manner of mischief.
In the evening, Jinlian stood before her dressing table, dressed her hair in simple braids, powdered her face till it was as white as snow, and freshly painted her lips. She put on two earrings like tiny lanterns, set ornaments upon her cheeks, and bound her hair with a ribbon of purple and gold. Then she took a gown of scarlet woven with gold, and a skirt of blue satin. She dressed up like a maid, to make fun with Yueniang. She sent for Li Ping'er, who laughed until she shook.
"Sister," Li Ping'er said, "you look exactly like a maid. I have a red handkerchief in my room, and you shall have it to put over your head. Then I'll go to the back court and tell them that Father has bought a new maid. They will certainly be taken in."
Chunmei took a lantern and they went to the front court. When they came to the second door they met Chen Jingji. He laughed. "I should never have dreamed it was the Fifth Lady," he said.
"Come here, Brother-in-Law," Li Ping'er said, "I'll tell you what to do. You go in first and say so and so."
"Oh, I'll deceive them," Chen Jingji said.
He went before them to Yueniang's room. The people there were sitting on the bed drinking tea.
"Mother," said Jingji, "Father has gone and told old woman Xue to buy a maid for sixteen taels of silver. She is twenty-five years old and knows how to play and sing. She has just come in a sedan chair."
"Indeed?" Yueniang said. "Why didn't Xue come and tell me?"
"She was afraid you would scold her, so she only brought the sedan chair as far as the gate and then went away. The servants received the maid."
Aunt Wu was silent. Aunt Yang said: "He has so many wives already that I should have thought he had enough without buying another girl."
"My good Lady," Yueniang said, "you don't understand. If a man is rich, he may buy a hundred women and still not be satisfied. We are like a regiment of women soldiers."
"I will go and have a look at her," Yuxiao said. She went out, and saw Chunmei coming along in the moonlight, a lantern in her hand. Chunmei gave the lantern to Laian, and she and Li Ping'er assisted the new maid. The girl's head was covered with a red cloth, and she wore a scarlet gown. Yulou and Li Jiao'er were greatly excited. They came out to see. The maid came in. Yuxiao stood beside Yueniang.
"This is our mistress," she said to the maid. "Kowtow to her."
She took off the cloth that covered the new maid's head, and Jinlian gracefully kowtowed to Yueniang. But she could not help laughing.
"You maid," Meng Yulou said, "what do you mean by laughing instead of making your reverence?"
Yueniang laughed too. "Fifth Sister," she said, "you might have been a spirit, you deceived us all so well."
"She didn't deceive me," Yulou said.
"How could you tell?" said Aunt Yang.
"Because the Fifth Lady always kowtows in this way. She went backwards two steps and then bowed her body."
"You are quite right," Aunt Yang said, "but she certainly deceived me." "She deceived me too," Li Jiao'er said. "I should never have recognized her with that cloth on her head, or until she laughed."
Qintong came with the wrapper and said his master had come.
"Hide yourself in the other room," Yulou said to Jinlian. "We will have some fun with him." Ximen Qing came in.
"Today," Yulou said to him, "Xue brought a maid in a sedan chair. She said you told her to buy her. You are not young, and the burden of the household is upon your shoulders. Why do you play games like this?"
"I never told her to buy a maid," Ximen said, laughing. "Do you believe everything that old rascal tells you?"
"Ask the Great Lady whether I am telling the truth or not," Yulou said.
"The maid is here now. If you don't believe me, send for her." She said to Yuxiao: "Go and bring the new maid to see your father."
Yuxiao laughed and put her hand before her mouth, but she did not go. She took a few steps forward, then came back again. "I don't think she will come," she said.
"You are a brave maid to disobey your master's orders," Yulou said. "I will go for her. If she will not do what she is told, she will be no use as a maid."
She went into the next room. Then they heard: "You wonderful creature. I won't go. And don't pull me about like that."
Then Yulou said: "You slave, where were you brought up? Wherever did you learn to be so stubborn as to refuse to do reverence to your master?" Jinlian was dragged out.
In the light of the lamp, Ximen saw that it was Jinlian dressed as a maid, her hair done as a servant's. He laughed till he could not open his eyes. Jinlian took a chair and sat down.
"You bold maid," Yulou said, "you have only just come to the house, and yet you take such liberties that you even dare to sit in your master's presence."
"This is your master," Yueniang said. "Kowtow to him."
Jinlian did not move. After a while, she went to Yueniang's room, took off her ornaments and redressed her hair. They all laughed.
"Today," Yueniang said to Ximen Qing, "the Qiaos have sent six cards of invitation asking us to go on the twelfth and see the lanterns. I think we ought to send them some presents first."
"Tell Laixing to buy some food and a jar of Jinhua wine. That will be enough. We will send invitations to Madam Qiao, Madam Zhou, Madam Jing, Madam Xia and Madam Zhang for the fourteenth. Aunt Wu will be able to stay until then. I will tell Ben the Fourth to get the firework makers to make some fireworks for us. We will engage the young actors from the household of the Wangs, and Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er can come. You can all stay at home, see the fireworks, and drink wine, and I, Brother Ying, and Brother Xie will go to a wineshop in Lion Street."
The tables were set and wine was brought. Jinlian served the wine and all the ladies drank her health. Ximen Qing thought how pretty she had looked in the lamplight, dressed as a maid, and his heart grew warm towards her. He looked meaningly at her. Jinlian realized what was in his mind and went to her own room. She dressed herself again, doing her hair after the manner of Hangzhou. She painted her lips and powdered her face. Then she prepared some especially dainty dishes, set out wine, and waited for her husband.
Before very long Ximen Qing came. He noticed that she had dressed her hair again, and was pleased. He sat down on a chair and took her upon his knee. They laughed and talked, and Chunmei brought in food and wine. Jinlian again offered wine to him.
"Little oily mouth," Ximen said, "you have offered me wine already in the outer court. Why do you take the trouble to do so again?"
Jinlian smiled. "That was nothing," she said. "There, you were drinking with the others. This is my special offering to you and to no one else. Year after year you have been good enough to spend your money on me, and I trust you have no reason to complain."
This speech delighted Ximen. He took the wine immediately and set the woman on his knees. Chunmei served the wine, and Qiuju served the dishes.
"The Qiaos have asked us all to go to their place on the twelfth," Jinlian said, "but I think only our Great Lady ought to go."
"Since you have all been invited," Ximen Qing said, "why shouldn't you all go? I will tell the nurse to take the baby, so that he will not cry for his mother."
"The Great Lady and the others all have dresses," Jinlian said. "I am like an old priest: I only have old ones. Not one of them is fit to be seen. Won't you give me some of the new clothes you have just had made in the South, or some material so that I can make a dress for myself? There is no sense in your hoarding it up. Surely you don't expect it to increase and multiply! When it is our turn to give a party, and all the honorable ladies come, I shall have to dress properly to receive them or they will laugh at me. I have spoken to you about it several times, but you never pay any attention."
Ximen Qing laughed. "I will send for the tailor tomorrow, and he shall make you some clothes."
"It will be too late tomorrow. There are only two days left."
"I will tell him to bring more tailors with him and make two or three dresses for you at once. The rest can be done more slowly."
"I have mentioned it before," Jinlian said. "This time I shall expect some first-class material. All the others have beautiful clothes, and I have none. You have never bothered about clothes for me."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Ah, little oily mouth," he said, "you always insist on having the best of everything." They talked and drank until the first night watch. Then they went to bed, and were like the lovebird and his mate beneath the bedclothes, or a couple of phoenixes behind the curtains. They sported wildly for half the night. The next day, when Ximen Qing came back from the office, he opened his boxes and took out some rolls of southern silk, enough to make a long gown, a suit of figured satin, and another embroidered suit. For Yueniang he ordered two long-sleeved scarlet satin gowns and four embroidered dresses. Then, sitting under the arbor, he ordered Qintong to go for the tailor. The tailor came and kowtowed. He took his tape and scissors, covered the tables, and cut out the material. First he cut out the long-sleeved satin gown of five colors; then another with a stomacher embroidered with the head of a wild beast; a black cloak with the five colors and gold ribbons, with designs of gourds and flowers intertwined; a gown of scarlet satin woven with gold, and another stomacher with the head of a wild beast; and a skirt of light blue woven with gold. Then he prepared a gown with a stomacher of sandalwood color, with embroidered flowers, and a scarlet skirt to match, of the 100-flower design, and all the flowers had gold branches and green leaves. These were for Wu Yueniang. For Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Li Ping'er, a long-sleeved satin cloak of scarlet with the five colors, embroidered with flowers and birds, and two dresses of embroidered silk. There was no cloak for Sun Xue'e, and only one dress. The tailor cut them out very quickly, though there were more than thirty pieces in all. Ximen Qing gave him five taels of silver, and then he brought another ten tailors to make up the clothes in his house.

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### Hsi-men Ch'ing Forms a Marriage Alliance with Ch'iao Hung for the Baby Guan'ge's Betrothal; P'an Chin-lien Engages in a Quarrel with Li P'ing-erh

Equally endowed with wealth and distinction,[1] his inheritance is ample;
Streams of officials, in crimson and purple, congregate at his door.
His office is high and his position important, like those of Wang Tao;[2]
His family is prominent and his estate affluent, like those of Shih Ch'ung.[3]
Amid painted candles and brocade curtains, he whiles away the moonlit night;
Surrounded by silk clothing, rouge, and powder, he is drunk in the spring breeze.
As indulgence in pleasure, by day and by night,[4] continues year after year;
How can he ever make the effort to remain constant from beginning to end?

The clothes for his womenfolk that Hsi-men Ch'ing had engaged the tailor to come to his home to make were all finished before two days were over. On the twelfth, the Ch'iao family sent someone to remind them of the invitation to their lantern viewing party. That morning Hsi-men Ch'ing had already sent appropriate presents over to their place. That day Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, along with her sister-in-law, the wife of her eldest brother Wu K'ai, set out together in six sedan chairs, leaving Sun Hsüeh-o behind to look after the house. They were accompanied in two smaller sedan chairs by the wet nurse, Ju-i, carrying the infant Kuan-ko, and Lai-hsing's wife, Huihsiu, whose job it was to wait on them and fold their clothes. Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home, where he looked on as the fireworks specialist hired by Pen the Fourth prepared the racks of fireworks, and lanterns were hung in the main reception hall and the summerhouse. He also sent a page boy with a calling card to the mansion of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to engage the services of his troupe of actors, but there is no need to describe this in detail. That afternoon he paid a visit to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. Chin-lien was not at home, but Ch'un-mei waited upon him, serving him with tea and something to eat, and setting up a table at which he could have some wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Ch'un-mei, "On the fourteenth, when we are entertaining the wives of the various officials, it would be a good idea if the four of you senior maidservants would all get dressed up and assist your mistress in serving wine to the guests."
When Ch'un-mei heard this, she leaned nonchalantly on the table and said, "If you call on anyone to do that, call on the other three. As for me, I'm not going to do it."
"Why won't you do it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The ladies of the household have all had new clothes provided for the occasion," said Ch'un-mei, "so they will look good when entertaining the wives from the official families. As for us, each and every one looks just like a scorched pastry roll. Why should we have to put in an appearance for no good reason, only to make laughingstocks of ourselves?"
"Each of you have clothing and jewelry for yourselves," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can come out in full dress, with your cloud-shaped chignons sporting ornamental flowers bedecked with pearls and kingfisher feathers."
"I guess I can make do with my head ornaments," said Ch'un-mei, "but how can I wear that couple of old rags of mine, the only ones that amount to anything? I'd be ashamed to be seen in them."
"I understand you, little oily mouth," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The ladies of the household have had new clothes made for them, which has put you all in a huff. It doesn't matter. I'll get Tailor Chao to come and make up three articles of clothing for each of the four of you, and my daughter, Hsi-men Tachieh, into the bargain. Each of you shall have an outfit consisting of a satin jacket and skirt and a brocade vest."
"I'm not to be compared to them," said Ch'un-mei. "I demand a white satin skirt to wear, along with a vest of scarlet brocade."
"If that's what you want," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it doesn't matter. But I'll have to provide one for Hsi-men Ta-chieh as well."
"The young lady already has one, but I don't," said Ch'un-mei. "She's got nothing to complain about."
Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon procured the key, opened the door to the second floor room, and selected five outfits of satin clothing, two brocade vests, and a bolt of white satin, out of which two white satin jackets that opened down the middle were to be made. Only Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Ch'un-mei were to have vests of scarlet brocade, while those of Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all of blue, their outfits consisting of scarlet satin gold lamé jackets that opened down the middle, to be worn over trailing skirts with kingfisher-blue borders. It added up to seventeen items of clothing in all.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sent for Tailor Chao and had them all duly made to order. Ch'un-mei also demanded that a bolt of yellow silk be used to make the linings for the skirt waists, all of which were to be of Hang-chou silk. Only then did Ch'un-mei profess satisfaction and agree to spend the rest of the day drinking wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing. But let us put the situation at home aside for the moment and say no more about it.
To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives duly proceeded on their way to the home of Ch'iao Hung. It so happens that on that day Ch'iao Hung's wife had invited the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang Hsiao t'ang, the wife of her next-door neighbor Censor Chu, her husband's elder sister Mrs. Ts'ui, her nephew Ts'ui Pen's wife Big Sister Tuan, and her niece Third Sister Cheng, the wife of Wu Shun-ch'en, and had also engaged two singing girls to entertain the gathering.
When she heard that Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, along with Yüeh-niang's sister-in-law, the wife of her elder brother Wu K'ai, had arrived, she hastened out to the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard and ushered them into the reception hall in the rear compound, where the usual amenities were observed. She addressed Yüeh-niang as Aunt, and Li Chiaoerh and the others as Second Aunt, Third Aunt, and so forth, adopting the terms of address she had heard employed in the home of Wu K'ai's wife. When the newcomers had finished exchanging greetings with the wives of Provincial Graduate Shang and Censor Chu, Big Sister Tuan and Third Sister Cheng came forward to pay their respects, and everyone sat down in order of precedence.
When the maidservants had finished serving everyone with tea, Ch'iao Hung himself came out to greet them, and to thank them for their presents, after which his wife invited her guests into the master suite where they could loosen their formal clothing and relax. A table was set up for tea, at which the fare consisted of fancy steamed and deep-fried appetizers, stuffed pastry treats, preserved fruits, sweetmeats, and every kind of delicacy, all set out in a most elegant fashion. The guests were invited to sit down and partake of the repast, while the wet nurse, Ju-i, and Hui-hsiu looked after Kuan-ko in another room, where they were separately entertained.
In a little while, after the guests had finished their tea, they moved into the reception hall, where:
Screens display their peacocks' tails, and
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.
There were four tables arranged along the upper end of the hall. Yüeh-niang was seated in the place of honor, followed in order of precedence by the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Wu K'ai's wife, the wife of Censor Chu, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, while Ch'iao Hung's wife assumed the role of hostess. Another table was set up to one side to accommodate Big Sister Tuan and Third Sister Cheng, making a party of eleven in all.
The two singing girls, situated to one side, played and sang for their entertainment. After soup and rice had been served, the chef came out to present the first course, which was jellied goose, and Yüeh-niang rewarded him with a tip of two mace of silver. The second course was slow-boiled pig's trotters, for which Yüeh-niang rewarded him with a tip of another mace of silver. The third course that he presented was roast duck, for which Yüeh-niang rewarded him with yet another mace of silver. Ch'iao Hung's wife then left her place in order to serve wine to her guests. After serving Yüeh-niang first, she went on to serve Provincial Graduate Shang's wife.

At this point, Yüeh-niang got up and retired to the inner room to change her clothes and redo her makeup. Meng Yü-lou also followed suit. When they arrived in their hostess's bedroom, what should they see but the wet nurse Jui who was looking after Kuan-ko. She had put him down on a little sleeping mat that was spread out on the k'ang frame, where he was lying right next to Chang-chieh, the newborn daughter of their host. The two of them were playing happily at:
You hit me a blow and I'll hit you one back,
which tickled Yüeh-niang and Yü-lou no end.
"The two of them are just like a couple," they exclaimed.
On seeing Wu K'ai's wife come in after them, they said to her, "Come and take a look. The two of them are really like a little couple."
"That's true," said Wu K'ai's wife with a smile. "The way the children on the k'ang are:
Reaching out their hands and kicking their feet,
playing at:
You hit me and I'll hit you,
makes them look like a predestined little couple."
When Ch'iao Hung's wife and the other female guests came into the room, Wu K'ai's wife repeated what she had said, thus and so.
"Distinguished kindred, listen to me," responded Ch'iao Hung's wife. "Such mean folk as ourselves would hardly dare aspire to a marriage alliance with the household of such a one as our aunt."
"My dear kinswoman, how can you say such a thing!" Yüeh-niang protested. "What sort of person do you take my elder brother's wife to be? What sort of person is Third Sister Cheng? It is wholly appropriate that you and I should:
Cement the bonds of affection with the bonds of marriage.
After all, the little boy from my household is unlikely to disgrace the daughter of your house. How can you say such a thing?"
Meng Yü-lou nudged Li P'ing-erh, saying, "Sister Li, what have you got to say?" But Li P'ing-erh only smiled.
"If my kinswoman, Mrs. Ch'iao, does not consent," said Wu K'ai's wife, "I'll be upset."
The wife of Provincial Graduate Shang and the wife of Censor Chu chimed in, saying, "Mrs. Ch'iao, in response to the generous sentiments of your kins-woman, Mrs. Wu, you really ought not to decline."
They then went on to ask, "Your girl Chang-chieh was born in the eleventh month of last year, wasn't she?"
"Our little boy was born on the twenty-third day of the sixth month," said Yüeh-niang, "so he is the older by five months. They truly would make a couple."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
the whole group insisted on dragging Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, and Li P'ing-erh to the front reception hall, where the matrons of the two households formalized the betrothal of the children by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses,[5] while the two singing girls played and sang to entertain them.
Once the situation had been explained to Ch'iao Hung, he brought out boxes of candied fruit, along with the customary three strips of red bunting, and proceeded to serve his guests with wine. Yüeh-niang, for her part, ordered Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to return home immediately in order to let Hsi-men Ch'ing know about it, and they subsequently returned bearing two jugs of wine, three bolts of satin, artificial flowers made of stiff velvet and gold thread, with red petals and green leaves, and four boxes, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, containing candied fruit.
The members of the two families then proceeded to hang up the red bunting and celebrate the occasion with a drinking party. Within the reception hall:
Painted candles are elevated on high,
Decorated lanterns flare resplendently,[6]
The fragrance of musk is luxuriant,
The sound of joyous laughter resounds.
In front of the gathering, the two singing girls:
Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,
Lightly plucked their jade mandolas, and
Casually grasped their balloon guitars,
as they sang the song suite that begins with the tune "Fighting Quails."[7]
Inside kingfisher-hued window gauze,
Underneath mandarin duck azure tiles,
Hidden by peacock-adorned silver screens,[8]
Amid hibiscus-decked embroidered couches,
Curtains of gossamer silk are rolled up,
Incense smolders in duck-shaped censers.[9]
Lamps are suspended above,
Blinds are lowered below.
This is the residence of a Minister of the Department of State Affairs,
The son-in-law of the reigning emperor.
To the tune "Prelude to Purple Blossoms"
The soldiers in his entourage are clad in red, bearing painted halberds;
The officers of his command wear "Hooks of Wu" hanging from brocade belts;[10]
The guest at his feast sports an embroidered cap adorned with palace flowers.[11]
The entertainment accords with that of the Music Office,
The extravagance compares with that of the Palace Garden.
The tempo is provided by clappers of red ivory.[12]
The strains of a classic melody are about to be performed.
Two rows of beauties as pretty as pictures stand to either side.
Powdered faces abut silver psalteries,
Jade fingers pluck at balloon guitars.[13]
To the tune "Golden Plantain Leaves"
All I can see is crimson candles burning brightly in silver candlesticks,
As slender fingers raise aloft jade goblets.
Noting that his demeanor is both dignified and elegant,
I go over under the lamplight so I can take a good look at him.
To the tune "Flirtatious Laughter"
This gentleman is surely someone I have seen somewhere before.
Can it be that my eyes are deceiving me?
Ah! Putting my hand to my teeth,[14] I try to remember.
Once having set eyes on him, I can't help being disturbed at heart.
Could he turn out to be my adversary in delight[15] from five hundred years ago?[16]
Before whose house has he tethered his horse to the green willows?[17]
It must have been no more than a dream vision of clouds and rain in Witch's Gorge.[18]
To the tune "Impatiens Blossoms"
Having played through the melody on the jade flute[19] under the verdant peach trees,
A single moment was worth a thousand pieces of gold.[20]
Under the lamplight he is looking me over out of the corners of his eyes,
In such a way that my face is suffused with the glow of sunset clouds.
My master is afraid I am remiss in letting your wine cup remain empty.
I am just seventeen, and have not been betrothed,
A budding peony, delicately nurtured[21] by my master.
To the tune "The Spectral Triad"
He has uttered but a handful of disconsolate words,
Which cause my tears to fall in incessant cascades.
I cannot control the monkey of my mind and the horse of my will.[22]
I am no more than a delicate Lo-yang flower,
In danger of becoming a target of romantic gossip.[23]
These words may sound like a joke, but they're not a joke;
This allegation may seem to be false, but it isn't false.
That one is trying to pull up the trees to investigate the roots,
While this one is pointing to a deer and calling it a horse.[24]
To the tune "Shaven-Pated Rascal"
My efforts to admonish him are as futile as trying to immerse a melon in water;[25]
His staring at me is about as effective as gazing at flowers in a mirror.
It is said that young scholars have always been frivolous in their affections;
And here he is flirting with a dainty maiden from a good family.
To the tune "Sacred Bhaiüajya-R[illegible]ja"
How am I to rescue the situation?
My master is difficult to placate.
As in the receptions of Kung-sun Hung, there is a hubbub in the Eastern Vestibule.[26]
The feast on tortoiseshell mats is disrupted.
The parrot-beak-shaped conch goblets are discarded.
The silver candlesticks and crimson silk lamp shades have been kicked over.
He has drawn his three-foot sword from its scabbard.
CODA
It has always been true that scholars possess lustful daring as big as the sky,[27]
Which frightens this fainthearted Cho Wen-chün half to death.[28]
It's a case of a too hot-tempered Cho Wang-sun,
And an overly ardent Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju of the Han.[29]
Thereupon, the assembled guests saw to it that Wu Yüeh-niang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Li P'ing-erh stuck the artificial flowers in their hair, while red bunting was hung up, drinks were offered to them, and they formally saluted each other. When this ceremony was completed, the feasting was resumed, and everyone sat down to continue drinking together.
The chef first presented a course consisting of little molded cakes of glutinous rice flour, with a sweet stuffing, and the character for long life embossed on their surfaces, along with a lotus pod soup filled with auspicious ingredients, such as double-headed lotus blossoms, that suggest the beauty of a summer pond, after which he proceeded to carve a dish of roast marbled pork.
Yüeh-niang, who was seated in the place of honor, was utterly delighted by all this and, calling Tai-an over, instructed him to award the chef with a bolt of crimson fabric, and to give one to each of the two singing girls as well, for which gratuities they all kowtowed in gratitude.
Ch'iao Hung's wife was still unwilling to let her guests go, but invited them back to the rear hall to sit down a while longer. A profusion of serving dishes, along with partitioned boxes of assorted delicacies, were laid out for them there. The party continued until the first watch before Yüeh-niang finally said her farewells and prepared to go home.
"Kinswoman," she said to her hostess, "tomorrow, whatever you do:
Deign to drop in on our humble abode,
and visit with us for a while."
"Kinswoman," replied Ch'iao Hung's wife, "I appreciate your generous hospitality. But my husband has said that it might not be appropriate for me to join you on this occasion. I'll come and visit you another day."
"My dear kinswoman," protested Yüeh-niang, "it's not as though there will be anyone else there. You're just being standoffish."
She then suggested that her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, should remain overnight, saying, "If you don't go home today, you can accompany Kins-woman Ch'iao to our place tomorrow."

"Kinswoman Ch'iao," said Wu K'ai's wife, "it doesn't matter if you don't go on any other day, but you surely mustn't fail to pay a visit on the fifteenth, which is your new kinswoman's birthday."
"If the fifteenth is my kinswoman's birthday," said Ch'iao Hung's wife, "how could I presume not to go?"
"If my kinswoman fails to come," said Yüeh-niang, "I've turned the responsibility over to you, Sister-in-law, and I'll hold you accountable."
Thereupon, after insisting that Wu K'ai's wife remain behind, Yüeh-niang and her entourage said goodbye and got into their sedan chairs. Two orderlies preceded them, holding large red lanterns, and shouting to clear the way, while two page boys, also holding lanterns, brought up the rear. Wu Yüeh-niang's sedan chair went first, followed by those of Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yülou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, in single file, while the chairs of Ju-i and Hui-hsiu followed in their wake. Inside her sedan chair, the wet nurse saw to it that Kuan-ko was tightly wrapped in a little red satin coverlet, to protect him from the cold, while she propped her feet on a brass warmer below. With the two page boys following behind, they arrived in due course at the front gate and dismounted from their sedan chairs.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking wine in the master suite when Yüeh-niang and the others came in, exchanged salutations, and sat down, after which the maidservants came in and kowtowed to them. Yüeh-niang wasted no time in telling him all about the betrothal that had been arranged at the feast that day.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard her out, he asked, "Who were the other female guests at the party today?"
"There were the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang," said Yüeh-niang, "along with the wife of Censor Chu, our host's elder sister, Mrs. Ts'ui, as well as her two nieces."
"If you've made a betrothal," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I guess that's that. But it's not an entirely appropriate match."
"The fact is, it was all my sister-in-law's doing," said Yüeh-niang. "When she saw their newborn baby daughter and our child reclining on the k'ang frame together, under the same coverlet, and playing at:
You hit me a blow and I'll hit you one back,
she thought they looked just like a little couple and called us over to see. She brought the possibility up, and right at the party:
Without premeditation or forethought,[30]
we agreed to this marriage alliance. It was only then that I sent the page boys over to tell you about it, and to arrange for the delivery of the artificial flowers, red bunting, and boxes of candied fruit."
"Since you've made this betrothal, I guess that's that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. But it's not an entirely appropriate match. Although the Ch'iao family is wealthy enough at present, he is no more than a well-to-do householder in the district, of commoner status. Whereas, in our case, I currently occupy this official position and manage affairs in the yamen. In the future, at the betrothal celebrations, he will only be entitled to wear the informal skullcap of a commoner. How will he be comfortable associating with an official family such as ours? It really won't look right.
"Just the other day, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung sought the aid of our relative Chang Kuan of the local garrison, in repeatedly suggesting to me a marriage alliance with his family. He said that their daughter was just five months old, so that she would be the same age as our child. But I was concerned that she didn't have a proper mother, having been born to a concubine, so I refused the offer. I scarcely anticipated that we would end up making such a marriage alliance after all."
P'an Chin-lien, who was standing to one side, picked up on this, saying, "If you object to someone's having been born to a concubine, who among the parties involved was not born to a concubine? This child of the Ch'iao family was also born to a concubine. Truly:
When the Spirit of the Perilous Paths runs into the God of Longevity;[31]
If you refrain from commenting about my height,
I'll not complain about that shortness of yours."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was enraged and cursed at her, saying, "You lousy whore! Mind your own business. While we're talking here, for you to:
Stick your beak in and wag your tongue,
is completely out of place."
Chin-lien's face turned crimson with embarrassment, and she beat a hasty retreat, muttering as she went, "Whoever said I had the right to speak? It's obvious I haven't the standing to say anything."
Gentle reader take note: When Chin-lien observed the way in which Yüeh-niang and Ch'iao Hung's wife agreed to the betrothal at the party that day, with the result that Li P'ing-erh was draped in red fabric and had artificial flowers stuck in her hair, while wine was presented to her, she became very sore at heart. The fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing saw fit to curse at her this way on her return home only made matters worse, and she withdrew to Yüeh-niang's inner chamber to cry.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "How come your sister-in-law didn't come back with you?"
"Kinswoman Ch'iao," explained Yüeh-niang, "on learning that so many wives of officials would be at our place tomorrow, declined my invitation, and I suggested that my sister-in-law stay on at their place, so she could bring her along with her on the morrow."
"Just as I said," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the seating plan at the party tomorrow is going to be awkward to arrange. I don't know how we're going to handle it when we get together in the future."
They talked for a while longer, after which Meng Yü-lou came into the inner room and found Chin-lien crying there.
"What are you so upset about?" she asked. "Let him have his say, and forget about it."
"Fortunately you were there to hear it with your own ears," said Chin-lien. "What did I say that was disparaging of him? But I had a point to be made. He said that the other family's child was born to a concubine. I said, 'Was the Ch'iao family's child not born to a concubine? She was also born to a concubine.' Does he think that:
By wrapping it in a paper bag,
He can fool anyone?
You'll come to a bad end, you lousy ruffian! Then he opened his eyes wide and started cursing at me in a way that was so:
Unfeeling and unjustifiable.
Why shouldn't I have the right to say what I think? He's had a change of heart, and, in the days to come, he'll:
Suffer the consequences before my very eyes.[32]
What I didn't say was that that infant relative of the Ch'iao family's at least came into this world with something of Old Man Ch'iao's spunk in her, whereas that child of your's:
Has strayed out of familiar territory.
Who knows whose seed he was sired by? If people want to play the game of seeking marriage alliances in order to enhance their social standing, what right does that give you to take out your annoyance on me? What's my cunt got to do with it that you should start in cursing me? How old is your son, anyway? He's nothing but a puny armload of a bladder's spawn. And you're already putting him on the marriage market for no good reason.
You've got so much money you don't know what to do with it.
If you tug on the sheet until it's torn, you'll have no cover.
The dog who bites the inflated bladder, will find his excitement deflated.
Right now the relationship may be wet enough, given the age of the parties involved, but, in the future, if you don't watch out, it may turn out to be no more than an arid pseudo relationship.
If you blow out the lamp and close your eyes,
You can hardly expect to see what is to come.
People may feel well disposed toward each other at the time they make such alliances, but, more often than not, they end up feeling differently three or five years later."
"As disingenuous as people may be nowadays," said Meng Yü-lou, "they seldom go in for this sort of thing. If you stop to consider it, it's early days yet. For children who are hardly out of the womb, what's the point of exchanging cuttings from your lapels? It's no more than playing the game of seeking marriage alliances in order to enhance one's social standing, that's all."
"Even if that wife of yours is so wantonly anxious to play the marriage alliance game," said Chin-lien, "what right does that give the lousy refractory ruffian to start cursing at me for no good reason? It seems that:
All you get for raising toads is dropsy.
What's the point of it all?"
"Whoever told you to blurt out your thoughts in such an imprudent way?" said Yü-lou.
"If he doesn't curse you,
Should he curse the dog instead?"
"It would have been awkward for me to say it right out," said Chin-lien. "Was I supposed to pretend that the child was not born to a concubine, but to the principal wife? Even though the Ch'iao family's child was born to a concubine, at least it came into the world with something of Old Man Ch'iao's spunk in her, whereas that child of your's:
Has strayed out of familiar territory.
Who knows whose seed he was sired by?"
When Yü-lou heard this, she sat for a while without saying another word, until Chin-lien went back to her quarters.
On noticing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone outside, Li P'ing-erh, once again:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Elder Sister, in this matter of the child today, I thank you for all the trouble you went to."
Yüeh-niang, with a smile, knelt down and returned her salutation, saying, "Congratulations to you."
"And to you, too, Elder Sister," said Li P'ing-erh.
When they had finished kowtowing to each other, Li P'ing-erh got up and sat down to chat with Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh.
What should they see at this juncture but Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who came in to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and greeted Li Chiao-erh and Li P'ing-erh in turn. Hsiao-yü served them with tea.
As they were drinking their tea, what should they see but Hsiu-ch'un, the maidservant from Li P'ing-erh's quarters, who came to fetch her mistress, saying, "The little fellow is looking for you in your room, and Father has sent me to ask you to return there."
"The wet nurse hurried off without anyone's knowing it," said Li P'ing-erh, "and carried him back to the room. It would have done just as well for us to go back together. As it is, there was probably no lantern for the child."
"When we came in the gate just now," said Yüeh-niang, "I told her to take him back to your room. I feared it was getting late."
"Ju-i took him back just a while ago," said Hsiao-yü. "Lai-an carried a lantern and escorted them on the way."
"That's all right then," said Li P'ing-erh, who, thereupon, took her leave of Yüeh-niang and returned to her quarters, where she found Hsi-men Ch'ing and Kuan-ko, who was asleep in the arms of the wet nurse.
"So there you are," she said. "Why didn't you speak to me before carrying him off that way?"
"The First Lady saw that Lai-an was there with a lantern," said Ju-i, "so I took advantage of that fact to bring him home. The little fellow cried for a while, and I only now managed to pat him back to sleep."
"He clamored after you for some time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "before finally going to sleep."
When Li P'ing-erh had finished asking about the baby, she turned to him with a simpering smile and said, "Today the child has been betrothed, for which I'd like to express my gratitude to you with a kowtow."
Thereupon:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she knelt down and made him a kowtow. This pleased Hsi-men Ch'ing so much that his face became wreathed in smiles, and, hastening to help her to her feet, they sat down together, and she told Ying-ch'un to serve them with wine. The two of them then proceeded to drink wine together in her room.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien returned to her quarters in a huff and was not in the best of moods, knowing perfectly well that Hsi-men Ch'ing was at Li P'ing-erh's place.
As a consequence, when Ch'iu-chü was slow about opening the gate, no sooner was she inside than she boxed her ears twice and cursed her in a loud voice, saying, "You lousy slave of a whore! How is it that I've had to call all day long before you opened the gate? What have you been up to? I'll not have anything more to say to you today."
Thereupon, she went into her room and sat down.
When Ch'un-mei came in to kowtow to her and serve her with tea, the woman asked her, "That lousy slave! What was she doing in here?"
"She was just sitting in the courtyard," said Ch'un-mei. "When you called for her I urged her to get a move on, but she didn't pay any attention."
"I'm perfectly aware," said Chin-lien, "that when he and I have a falling out, it's just like the way:
Defender-in-chief Tang Chin learned to eat steamed dumplings,
By imitating the way other people did it.[33]
She thinks she, too, can take advantage of me."
Chin-lien wanted to give her a beating there and then but was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in the adjacent quarters, would hear her, so she kept her anger to herself. Meanwhile, she took off her fancy attire, had Ch'unmei lay out her bedding, got into bed, and went to sleep.
The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone off to the yamen, the woman made Ch'iu-chü balance a flagstone on her head and kneel down in the courtyard until she had finished combing her hair. She then told Ch'unmei to pull down her trousers and bring her a heavy bamboo cane with which to flog her.
"What a filthy slave!" complained Ch'un-mei. "If you have me pull down her pants, it will only dirty my hands."
She then went up front and called for the page boy Hua-t'ung to come and pull down Ch'iu-chü's drawers for her.
The woman then proceeded to cane her, cursing as she did so, "You lousy slave of a whore! Since when did you become so uppity? Other people may see fit to favor you, but I'll never favor you. Sister:
You know it and I know it.
You'd do better to slack off a bit. What need is there for you to stick your neck out and put on airs for no good reason? Sister, you'd better give up any such presumptions. From now on, I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where you're concerned."
As she vilified her, she continued to beat her, and as the beating continued, she gave vent to further vilification. The caning continued until Ch'iu-chü:
Howled like a stuck pig.
Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, had just gotten up and looked on as the wet nurse suckled Kuan-ko and then put him back to sleep. He was startled back awake, however, by the commotion next door. She overheard perfectly clearly everything that Chin-lien had to say while caning her maidservant, as she blurted things out:
Without any consideration for the consequences.
Rendered quite speechless, in her consternation, she merely covered Kuanko's ears and told Hsiu-ch'un, "Go over and say to the Fifth Lady, 'Don't beat Ch'iu-chü any more. The baby has just had some milk and has gone back to sleep.'"
When Chin-lien heard this, she beat Ch'iu-chü all the harder, cursing as she did so, "You lousy slave! You'd think someone were sticking ten thousand knives into you, the way you scream for mercy. Well, it's just my temperament, but the more you scream, the harder I'll beat you. You've already succeeded in arresting the attention of a passerby, who's come to contemplate the sight of a maidservant being beaten. Well, my good Sister, you can always tell your husband about it, and get him to give me a hard time."
Li P'ing-erh, from her vantage point next door, understood perfectly well that Chin-lien's abuse was really directed at her. She was so upset by it that her two hands turned cold, but she chose to:
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel.
Though she dared to be angry,
She dared not speak.
That morning she didn't even have a drop of tea but clasped Kuan-ko in her arms and went back to sleep on the k'ang.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from the yamen, he came into her room to see Kuan-ko and found that Li P'ing-erh was lying on the k'ang, and that her eyes were red with weeping.
"How come you still haven't combed your hair or straightened yourself up?" he asked. "The lady in the master suite would like to have a word with you. What have you been rubbing your eyes for, until they're so red?"
Li P'ing-erh made no reference to the way in which Chin-lien had vilified her, but simply said, "I'm not feeling very well."

"Our kinfolk of the Ch'iao family have sent birthday presents for you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "A bolt of fabric, two jars of southern wine, a tray of sweet-meats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, and four kinds of savories. They've also sent some holiday gifts for Kuan-ko, consisting of two trays of Lantern Festival dumplings, four trays of candied fruit, four trays of premium grade nuts, two beaded hanging lanterns, two folding-screen-shaped lanterns spangled with gold, two bolts of crimson government-grade satin, a black satin cap with gold pins representing the eight auspicious symbols [24] attached to it, two pairs of boy's shoes, and six pairs of women's shoes. Before we have even paid them a formal visit, they have sent these holiday gifts for our child.

"Right now, the lady in the master suite would like you to go and discuss the situation with her. They have sent the go-between, Auntie K'ung, to represent them, along with their servant, Ch'iao T'ung, who is in charge of delivering the gifts, and our sister-in-law, the wife of Wu K'ai, has come ahead to say that Kinswoman Ch'iao will not be able to come tomorrow but will pay a visit the following day.

"Their family also has a relation, Madame Ch'iao, who is the widow of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Ch'iao the Fifth. When she heard that they were forming a marriage alliance with us, she was pleased as could be, and she would also like to visit us on the fifteenth. We'll have to send her an invitation."

When Li P'ing-erh had heard all this, she finally got up, reluctantly, to comb her hair and set off for the rear compound to pay her respects to Sister-in-law Wu and Auntie K'ung. She found that tea was being served to them in Yüeh-niang's room, and that the presents were on display in the parlor. After looking them all over, she arranged to send back the boxes in which they had come, gave gratuities of two handkerchiefs and five mace of silver apiece to Auntie K'ung and Ch'iao T'ung, wrote a thank-you note, and also sent someone to deliver an invitation to Madame Ch'iao. Truly:

Only inclined to entertain their favorites with bells and drums,
Would they have herded with dogs and sheep for the nation's sake? [25]

A poem testifies to this:

Hsi-men Ch'ing, enjoying his singular wealth, is altogether too complacent;
Agreeing to a marriage alliance for his son, while he is still in diapers.
Not only does he squander his property as though it were mere muck;
But he ought to pay more attention to the fate of his posterity.

Ximen Qing watched the tailors as they hastily made up the dresses, and the work was finished in two days. On the twelfth, a messenger came from the Qiao household to renew the former invitation. That morning Ximen Qing had sent presents. Wu Yueniang, Aunt Wu, and the others set off together in six sedan chairs, leaving Sun Xue'e behind to look after the house. The nurse, Ruyi'er, took Guan'ge, and Laixing's wife, Huixiu, went with them to act as tiring maid. They too went in sedan chairs. At home Ximen Qing watched the firework makers making their fireworks, and superintended the hanging of the lanterns in the great hall. He sent a boy with his card to the house of the princely family of Wang to engage the actors.

In the afternoon he went to Pan Jinlian's room. Jinlian was not there, and Chunmei gave him something to eat.

"I have invited several ladies to come on the fourteenth," he told her. "You four girls must wear your best clothes when you wait upon them."

Chunmei leaned over the table. "You should say that to the other girls. There will be no dressing for me."

"Why?" said Ximen.

"The ladies will all be dressed in their new clothes," Chunmei said. "They will be very smart, and we shall look like burned paper. Everybody will laugh at us."

"But you all have dresses and ornaments, and pearls and flowers," Ximen Qing said.

"The ornaments are all right, but we have no clothes," Chunmei said. "I have only two old dresses and I am not fit to be seen."

"I see," Ximen said, laughing. "I have had clothes made for the ladies, and you are jealous, little oily mouth. Never mind. I am going to tell the tailor to make three dresses for my daughter, and you four girls shall each have a suit and a short dress of figured satin."

"Don't put me in the same class with the rest," Chunmei said. "I want a white silk coat and a scarlet-figured silk wrapper."

"If it were only for you," Ximen said, "it would be all right; but if you have one, my daughter will have to have one."

"Your daughter has one already," Chunmei said. "I have not. I don't see how she can object."

Ximen Qing took the keys and went upstairs. He chose enough material for five dresses and two figured satin wrappers, and took a roll of white silk for two double-breasted white cloaks. The wrappers for his daughter and Chunmei were scarlet; those for the other three maids were bluish green. There were scarlet satin short coats and light blue skirts for all of them, seventeen pieces of material in all. Ximen told the tailor to make the clothes, and gave him a roll of thin yellow silk for the tops of the skirts, and Hangzhou lining silk for the linings. Chunmei was satisfied. She laughed and talked all day with Ximen Qing and served him with wine when he wished for it.

Madam Qiao had invited several ladies to her party. There was the wife of Master Shang, Censor Song's wife, a young woman named Cui who was connected with the family, two nieces, Miss Duan and Wu Shunzhen's sister-in-law Zheng. She had engaged two singing girls to play for them. When Wu Yueniang, Aunt Wu, and the others arrived, Madam Qiao went to the second door to welcome them and took them to the great hall. There they exchanged greetings. She called Yueniang Aunt, and the others Second Aunt, and Third Aunt, and so on. Then she introduced the other ladies and took their places in due order. The maids brought tea, and Master Qiao came to greet the ladies. When they had greeted him, he told his wife to ask them to go to the inner room to take off their cloaks. A table was set, tea brought, and they all sat down to drink it. Ruyi'er and Huixiu looked after the baby and were entertained in another place.

After tea they came back to the great hall, where handsome screens were placed about and cushions embroidered with lotus flowers. Four tables were set and Yueniang was asked to take the place of honor. The eleven ladies all sat at one table, except for Miss Duan and Miss Zheng, who were at a table apart. The two singing girls sang for them. When soup and rice had been served, the cooks served up a crystal goose. Yueniang gave them two *qian* of silver. Then stewed trotters were served, and Yueniang gave the cooks another *qian*. Then came roast duck and again Yueniang gave the cooks a *qian*. After this course Madam Qiao rose and offered wine, first to Yueniang and then to Master Shang's wife. Yueniang left the table and went to the inner room to change her clothes and powder her face.

Yulou went to Madam Qiao's room, where Ruyi'er had the baby Guan'ge. He was in a small crib placed on the bed, and, lying beside him, was the little girl baby of the Qiaos. The two babies were playing together, putting out their hands to touch one another. This delighted Wu Yueniang and Meng Yulou. "These two babies," they said, "are like bride and bride groom." Aunt Wu came in, and they said to her: "Come here, Aunt Wu, and look at this young couple."

"Yes," Aunt Wu said, smiling, "they are stretching out their hands and kicking their little heels, touching one another, just like a young husband and wife."

Madam Qiao and the other ladies heard what Aunt Wu said. "How might an inconsiderable family like mine," Madam Qiao said, "aspire so high as to ally itself with that of my aunts?"

"You are very kind," Yueniang said, "but indeed what manner of lady are you, and Miss Zheng too? I should very much like to enter into an alliance with this household, if only my son will not make your house ashamed. Do not say that."

Yulou pushed forward Li Ping'er. "Sister," she said, "what have you to say?" Li Ping'er smiled but said nothing.

"If Madam Qiao does not agree," Aunt Wu said, "I shall be very disappointed."

Master Shang's wife and the Censor's lady both said together: "For the sake of your kinswoman, Lady Wu, you must not stand too much on ceremony. Your Zhangjie was born in the eleventh month of last year."

"And our baby," Yueniang said, "was born on the twenty-third day of the sixth month. He is just five months older. Their ages could not be more suitable."

The others would allow no further parley. They urged Madam Qiao, Wu Yueniang and Li Ping'er to the great hall. There, pieces were cut from the bosoms of their dresses. The two singing girls sang for them and Master Qiao was told. He brought out fruits, three pieces of red cloth, and offered wine. Yueniang told Daian and Qintong to go home and refer the matter to their master. In a short time, two jars of wine, three rolls of silk, red and green thread, flowers of gold wire, and four large boxes of cakes and fruit were brought from Ximen's place, and the two households together hung up red charms and drank wine to celebrate their union.

Tall silver candlesticks blazed with light in the hall. Flower-shaped lamps burned brightly. Incense filled the air with delightful perfume. Smiling serenely, the two singing girls opened their ruby lips, showed their white teeth and gently plied their jade plectrums. They held their lutes in one hand and sang. The ladies put flowers and red talismans on the heads of Yueniang, Madam Qiao, and Li Ping'er. When wine had been served, the ladies made reverence to one another and began their banquet again. As the first course, the cook brought in a snowflake pie, filled with mincemeat. The word "Long Life" was fashioned upon it. There was lotus-seed soup, which looked as delightful as a pool, the seeds floating side by side upon its surface. Yueniang sat in the place of honor; she was very happy. She told Daian to give the cook a roll of silk, and each of the singing girls a roll of silk also. They all kowtowed to thank her.

Madam Qiao would not allow the ladies to go. She took them to the inner court, where she had prepared all kinds of delightful refreshments for them. It was not until the first night watch that Yueniang was able to leave.

"My dear relative," she said to Madam Qiao, "you must come to our poor house tomorrow."

"You are very kind," Madam Qiao said. "My husband has spoken to me of your invitation, but I fear I am no fit person to come to your party just now. Perhaps you will allow me to come some other time."

"There will be no strangers present," Yueniang said. "Please do not stand on ceremony." Then she said to Aunt Wu: "There is no reason why you should leave when we do. You will be coming with Madam Qiao tomorrow."

"Madam Qiao," said Aunt Wu, "if you do not care to go tomorrow, any other day will serve as well, but the fifteenth is your new kinswoman's birthday, and that day you must not fail to go."

"Oh," Madam Qiao said, "if it is my relative's birthday, how should I dare not go?"

"If Madam Qiao does not come to see me, I shall blame you," Yueniang said to Aunt Wu. Then, leaving Aunt Wu behind, she said good-bye and got into her chair. Two soldiers carried a large red lantern before the sedan chair, and behind it were two boys with lanterns. Yueniang was at the head of the procession, then Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Li Ping'er each in her place. Then came the chairs with Ruyi'er and Huixiu. The nurse had Guan'ge closely wrapped in a red silk coverlet, and as still further protection against the cold, she had a brass warming pan in the chair. Two more boys followed her.

When they came to their gate and got out of their chairs, Ximen Qing was drinking in Yueniang's room. Yueniang and the others came in and made reverence to him. Then Yueniang sat down and all the maids came to kowtow to her. She told her husband about the betrothal. He asked what ladies had been present. She told him.

"This marriage," he said, "is all very well, but the families are not of equal rank."

"It was my sister-in-law's doing," Yueniang said. "She saw the Qiaos' baby lying on the same bed as Guan'ge, covered with the same bedclothes, so that the children looked like two young lovers, and she called to me to look at them. When we were having supper, we could not help talking about it, and it was arranged. I sent the boy to tell you and get you to send the boxes of fruits."

"Now that it has been settled," Ximen Qing said, "it doesn't matter, but there is a certain inequality of position. Qiao has some property, but he is only a private citizen, while I am an officer and have duties at the courts. If we have to ask him to a party here, he will wear an ordinary hat, and I don't see how I can invite him to sit with me. It will be most awkward. Only the other day Jing Nangang sent one of his people to try to arrange a marriage. His daughter was five months old, the same age as our own child, but I did not care much for the arrangement because the baby's mother is dead. Besides, she was not the daughter of the first wife. So I would make no promises. Now, without my knowing anything about it, you have gone and settled everything yourself."

"If you did not care for that child because she is a second wife's daughter, what are you going to do now?" Jinlian said. "The Qiao baby is a second wife's daughter too. It seems to me like Xian Daoshen and the God of Long Life, one complaining that the other is too tall, and the other objecting that the first is too short."

This made Ximen Qing very angry. "You strumpet," he shouted, "why don't you take yourself off? We are talking, but nobody asked you to put in your word."

Jinlian flushed and went out of the room. "Of course," she said, "I have no right to speak in this place, or in any other place, for that matter."

When, at the party, Jinlian saw the arrangements being made between Madam Qiao and Yueniang, and Li Ping'er wearing flowers and red charms upon her hair, it had made her very jealous. Now that Ximen Qing spoke angrily to her, she was still more upset and went to cry in Yueniang's inner room.

"Why has Aunt Wu not come back with you?" Ximen Qing asked Yueniang.

"Madam Qiao said she would not come tomorrow because we have ladies of rank coming, so I left Aunt Wu there, and they will come together."

"I told you there would be difficulties about precedence," Ximen said. "I don't know what you are going to do about it."

Some time later, Yulou went into the inner room and found Jinlian in tears. "Why are you so upset?" she said. "Let him say what he likes."

"You heard what I said to him," Jinlian cried. "It was nothing wrong. He said that child was not born in proper wedlock, and I said that neither was the Qiao baby. There is nothing there to complain about. But that bandit— he will come to a bad end—glared at me and swore without rhyme or reason. What does he mean by saying I had no right to speak? He has changed his tune completely. I'll see he gets paid back for it. There is that baby, a miserable, puny little thing that can do nothing but piddle, and they begin arranging a marriage for him. It is because they have so much money they don't know what to do with it. May he tear his coverlets and have nothing to cover him! May he be like a dog snapping at a bladder and get no joy out of it.

"Today the prospects of this marriage seem rosy. Let us hope they won't look different in time to come. They are behaving just like a man who puts out the light, blinks his eyes, and wonders what on earth is going to happen next. They think this is a good house to marry into; we shall see what they think in four or five years' time. This is the only child he has."

"In these days, people are always trying to be clever," Yulou said. "I don't care much for this sort of behavior, myself. It seems to me too early. The baby is so young. They might have dispensed with the cutting of the cloth. But perhaps they only want to be friendly and do this sort of thing for fun."

"If it is meant for fun, well and good," Jinlian said, "but why should that rascal curse me?"

"You shouldn't have said what you did say," Yulou said. "He couldn't help himself."

"I find it hard to say all I think about it," Jinlian said. "That woman is not a second wife any longer. She is the lady of the house. But even if Qiao's baby is the daughter of a second wife, there is no doubt she has old Qiao's blood in her veins. Whereas, in our household, people have not always gone straight, and who knows whose blood runs in our baby's veins?"

Yulou said nothing. They talked a while longer, then Jinlian went to her own room. Li Ping'er waited until Ximen Qing had gone away, then she kowtowed most gracefully to Yueniang.

"I am grateful to you," she said, "for all that you have done for my child today."

Yueniang smiled and returned her reverence. "It is you who are to be congratulated."

"You also, Sister," Li Ping'er said. She stood up while Yueniang and Li Jiao'er sat down to talk. Sun Xue'e and Ximen's daughter came in and kowtowed to Yueniang, making an equal reverence to Li Ping'er. Xiaoyu brought tea. While they were drinking it, Xiuchun came and said the baby needed his mother. Ximen Qing had told her to come.

"It was thoughtless of the nurse to take the child to my room," Li Ping'er said. "I ought to have gone with them, for I don't suppose there was a light."

"When they came home," Yueniang said, "I told Ruyi'er to take the child to your room. It was so late."

"I saw Ruyi'er with the baby," Xiaoyu said. "Laian was carrying a lantern for them."

"That is all right, then," Li Ping'er said, and went to join her baby. She found Ximen Qing in her room and the baby asleep at his nurse's breast.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to bring the child here?" she said to the nurse.

Ruyi'er told her that Yueniang had seen Laian with a lantern and told her to bring the baby to his mother's room. "Young Master cried for a while," she said, "but I have got him to sleep now."

"Yes," Ximen Qing said, "the baby wanted you for a while, but he has gone to sleep now."

"He has been betrothed today," Li Ping'er said, "and I must kowtow to you." She knelt down. Ximen was very pleased with her and beamed with delight. He quickly raised her to her feet and sat beside her. They told Yingchun to set a table, and they drank together.

Jinlian went to her room in a most vicious temper. She knew that Ximen Qing was with Li Ping'er and, when Qiuju was a moment slow in opening the door for her, she boxed her ears and cursed her loudly.

"You thievish slave," she cried, "why did I have to knock so long before you opened the door? What are you here for? I shall not speak to you again." She went into her room and sat down. Chunmei came and gave her some tea.

"What was that thievish slave doing?" Jinlian said. "She was sitting in the courtyard," Chunmei said. "I told her to open the door for you, but she didn't pay any attention."

"Oh, I know," Jinlian cried; "just because he and I have had words, she is like Grand Marshal Dang eating a tablet. She thinks she will put on airs and annoy me."

Jinlian would have liked to give Qiuju a beating, but she was afraid Ximen Qing might hear. She said no more for the moment, but she was angry nonetheless. Then she undressed. Chunmei prepared her bed. She got into it and went to sleep.

Next day, when Ximen Qing had gone to his office, Jinlian made Qiuju balance a piece of stone on her head and kneel down in the courtyard. When she had finished dressing her hair, she told Chunmei to take down Qiuju's trousers and beat her with a thick stick.

"I shall soil my hands if I take down your trousers," Chunmei said to her fellow maid. She went to the front court and called for Huatong. The boy took down the girl's trousers while Jinlian stood by and cursed her.

"You thievish slave," she cried, "where did you learn to give yourself such airs? Others might forgive you, but I never will. Sister, you know I understand your little ways, and you would do well to restrain yourself. Who are you to put your face forward and show what a great person you are? Sister, don't count on getting help from any other quarter. I shall keep my eyes skinned and watch you." She struck and cursed her and cursed and struck her till Qiuju squealed like a pig being killed.

Meanwhile Li Ping'er had got up. The nurse was trying to rock the baby to sleep, but he kept on waking. She could hear Jinlian cursing Qiuju, and recognized all the references to herself in what was said. But she said nothing, and only covered Guan'ge's ears with her hand.

"Go and ask the Fifth Lady not to beat Qiuju," she said to Xiuchun. "Tell her the baby has just had his milk and is going to sleep."

Xiuchun gave the message, but Jinlian beat Qiuju more severely still. "You thievish slave," she cried, "you shout as loudly as though someone were sticking ten thousand knives into you. But I am a queer person; the louder you cry, the more I shall beat you. I did not expect outsiders to interfere because you were having a beating. Why do you come to have a look? My good sister, you ought to tell our husband to get rid of her."

Li Ping'er heard all this, and knew that the curses were aimed at her. She was so angry that her hands were as cold as ice, but she swallowed her anger and did not show any temper. That morning she had no tea. She carried Guan'ge in her arms and rocked him to sleep.

When Ximen Qing came back from his office, he went to see his son. The Sixth Lady's eyes were red with weeping, and she was lying on the bed.

"Why've you not dressed your hair?" he asked her. "The one in the upper room wishes to see you. And why're your eyes red?"

Instead of telling him about her trouble with Jinlian, Li Ping'er said she was not very well. Ximen told her that the Qiaos had sent some birthday presents for her, a roll of silk, two jars of southern wine, a plate of longevity peaches, another plate of noodles, and other dishes. "They've sent something for the baby too," he said, and told her all the different things that had come. "We've done nothing for them," he added, "and now they've sent all these things for your feast day. That's why the one in the upper room wishes to talk to you. They sent old woman Kong and Qiao Tong with the presents. Aunt Wu's come back. She says Madam Qiao can't come until the day after tomorrow. She's a relative, Lady Qiao the Fifth who's related in some way to the royal family. This Lady's heard about the betrothal and is very pleased. She's coming on the fifteenth too, so we must send a card to her." Li Ping'er got up and slowly dressed her hair. Then she went to the

inner court to see Aunt Wu and old woman Kong. They were having tea in Yueniang's room. The presents were set out there. She looked at them all. The cases were returned, and old woman Kong and Qiao Tong were each given two handkerchiefs and 5 *qian* of silver. When a card of thanks had been written out, they went away.

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### A Powerful Family Blocks Its Gate in Order to Enjoy Fireworks; Distinguished Guests in a High Chamber Appreciate the Lanterns & Ximen Feasts in Lion Street

The moon and stars dominate the void as a myriad candles blaze;
In the human realm, and in Heaven above,[1] there are two Lantern Festivals.
When music is performed in the spring it sounds especially good;
As people return from the revels by night even their horses are smart.
Do not waste the fullness of your youth, so quickly does it pass;[2]
With total impartiality, white hair does not let anyone escape.[3]
Since even a thousand pieces of gold buys such a little time;
Let the security guard take his time striking the watches of the night.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off the representatives of the Ch'iao family, he came back to the master suite to talk things over with Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and Li P'ing-erh.

"Since their family has anticipated us by sending over holiday gifts for our child," said Yüeh-niang, "we can hardly avoid buying holiday presents of our own to send to their daughter, Chang-chieh. They can be regarded as being temporary equivalents of betrothal gifts. That way we won't be remiss in our social obligations."

"Our side of the family ought to select a go-between," said Sister-in-law Wu. "It would make the negotiations back and forth more convenient."

"They have chosen Auntie K'ung," said Yüeh-niang. "Who should we select for the job?"

"One guest does not trouble two hosts."

said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well give the job to Old Mother Feng."

Thereupon, eight invitation cards were hastily written out, and Old Mother Feng was sent for. She was instructed to take a letter box containing the invitations and deliver them, along with Tai-an, inviting Kinswoman Ch'iao, Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, the wife of Censor Chu, Kinswoman Ts'ui, Big Sister Tuan, and Third Sister Cheng, along with Sister-in-law Wu, to a lantern viewing party on the fifteenth in celebration of Li P'ing-erh's birthday.

At the same time, Lai-hsing was sent off to the confectioner's with the necessary silver to place an order for steamed-shortcake pastries, which were to be served on large square trays. He ordered four trays of steamed pastries: two of stuffed moon cakes, and two of rose-flavored Lantern Festival dumplings. He also bought four trays of fresh fruit: one of prunes, one of walnuts, one of longans, and one of litchis; and four trays of casseroles: one of roast goose, one of roast chicken, one of pigeon, and one of dried whitebait. In addition there were two outfits of brocaded tussore clothing, one little crimson robe, a miniature fret of crepe and gold filigree, two translucent ramshorn lanterns from Yunnan, as well as a box of trinkets containing a pair of little gold bangles, and four gold rings set with precious stones.

Ying Po-chüeh happened to show up at this juncture in order to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing about the question of when the merchant contractors Li Chih and Huang the Fourth would receive payment for the consignment of goods they had undertaken to purvey for the use of the imperial household. When he saw the flurry of activity, he asked what it was all about.

Hsi-men Ch'ing told him about the marriage alliance he had made with the household of Ch'iao Hung and went on to say, "On the fifteenth, whatever happens, I hope that your wife will be able to come and keep company with our new kinsfolk."

"If my sister-in-law so wishes," said Ying Po-chüeh, "my wife will be sure to come."

"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my wife is entertaining the wives of the various officials, so we can convene at the house on Lion Street."

That day, the fourteenth, when the presents had been packed, he had his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, accompanied by Pen the Fourth, dressed in his black livery, deliver the gifts. They were duly entertained by the Ch'iao household, who lavishly returned the compliment by sending the gift boxes back filled with numerous examples of needlework and footwear, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

To resume our story, that day Wu Yin-erh in the licensed quarter also brought gifts ahead of time in honor of Li P'ing-erh's birthday. She had purchased a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, two roast ducks, a set of pig's trotters, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a pair of women's shoes for the occasion, in order to pay obeisance to Li P'ing-erh as her godmother and get herself acknowledged as an adopted daughter. Yüeh-niang accepted the gifts on her behalf and sent the sedan chair back home.

Li Kuei-chieh did not arrive until the following day, and when she saw that Wu Yin-erh was already there, she surreptitiously asked Yüeh-niang, "How long has she been here?"

Yüeh-niang told her, thus and so, "Yesterday she brought gifts and paid obeisance to the Sixth Lady in order to be acknowledged as her adopted daughter."

When Li Kuei-chieh heard this, she hadn't a word to say, but she was huffy with Wu Yin-erh all day long, the two of them refusing to speak to each other.

To resume our story, the troupe of twenty actors that Hsi-men Ch'ing had borrowed from Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, arrived in the front reception hall, carrying their trunks. They were under the supervision of two instructors and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing on their arrival. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders that they should use an anteroom on the western side of the front compound as their green room, that they were to be provided with food and drink, and that when the female guests arrived they should welcome them in with a flourish of wind and percussion instruments.

In the main reception hall:
Tortoiseshell mats look spruce
Brocade carpets cover the floor.

The first guests to arrive were the wife of Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-chief Ching Chung's mother, Madame Ching, and the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, all of whom were in large sedan chairs, escorted by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, and attended by the wives of their household retainers. Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives, all dressed in formal gowns, came out from inside to greet them and ushered them into the rear reception hall, where, after the appropriate salutations had been exchanged, they were invited to sit down and have some tea.

They were waiting for the arrival of the wife of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling before tea was to be served, but who could have anticipated that although they waited until noon, she had not yet come. Page boys were dispatched to urge her on her way two or three times, but it was not until early afternoon that she finally arrived, with escorts shouting to clear the way, bearers carrying her dressing cases, attended by the wives of her household retainers, and surrounded by a retinue of servants. After she had been escorted to the rear reception hall to the strains of martial music and exchanged amenities with the other female guests, they all sat down in order of precedence.

First tea was served to them in the summerhouse, after which they were invited to take their seats in the main reception hall. Refreshments were served and wine was poured by Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang, all of whom were adorned with cloud-shaped chignons, pearl necklaces, gold lantern earrings, brocade vests, scarlet satin jackets, and kingfisher-blue gold lamé skirts, with the exception of Ch'un-mei, who sported pendant earrings set with precious stones and a scarlet brocade vest.

That day the private troupe of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, performed *Hsi-hsiang chi*, or *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. We will say no more for the moment about how the party progressed:

Deeply secluded within the decorated hall:[4]
Amid clustering pearls and kingfisher ornaments,[5]
Song and dance and wind and string instruments,
but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

That day, after he had seen that the female guests in his home were offered tea, he mounted his horse and proceeded to the house on Lion Street, where he had arranged to meet with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta. He directed that one of the four racks of fireworks that he had ordered should be taken there, and that two of them should be set up for the entertainment of the female guests that night. On the second floor of the house on Lion Street standing screens and a table of refreshments were set up, lanterns were hung, a chef was engaged to relight the fire in the stove, two food boxes containing meat and vegetable dishes and two jars of Chin-hua wine were dispatched from home, and two singing girls, Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan, were engaged for the occasion.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had previously sent Tai-an to hire a sedan chair and invite Wang Liu-erh to join him at the house on Lion Street.

On seeing her, he said, "Auntie Han, Father has invited you to the house over there to enjoy the fireworks this evening."

"I'd be too embarrassed," the woman laughed. "How could I do that? Wouldn't your uncle Han be upset if he found out about it?"

"Father has already spoken to Uncle Han about it," said Tai-an. He wants you to get yourself ready as quickly as possible. He would have sent Old Mother Feng for you, but they are entertaining the wives of the various officials today, and the Sixth Lady has told her to help tend Kuan-ko, so she's over there looking out for herself. Father insisted on sending me instead. He has engaged two singing girls, and there is no one to keep them company."

When the woman had heard him out, she was still unwilling to make a move, but before long, who should turn up but Han Tao-kuo himself.

"Well, if it isn't Uncle Han," said Tai-an. "Auntie Han here won't believe what I tell her."

The woman turned to her husband and said, "Do you really want me to go?"

"The master has repeatedly remarked that there is no one to keep the two singing girls company," said Han Tao-kuo. "He has invited you over there to enjoy the fireworks tonight. He's waiting for you. Haven't you gotten yourself ready yet? He also told me, just now, to close up the shop and come visit with him myself this evening. Lai-pao has also gone home for the time being. It's his turn to spend the night at the shop this evening."

"Who knows how late it will be before the party breaks up," the woman said. "When you go over there, stay a little while and then come home. There's no one to look after the place, and you don't have to spend the night at the shop."

When they had finished speaking, she dressed up for the occasion and, accompanied by Tai-an, went straight to the house on Lion Street. Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," had previously straightened up the bedroom and its k'ang frame, put out the ready-made curtains and bedding, lit some benzoin and aloeswood incense which exuded a pungent fragrance, hung up two gauze lanterns in the room, and ignited the charcoal in the brazier on the floor. The woman walked in and sat down on the k'ang. After a while, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," came in, bowed to her, saying, "Many felicitations," and served her with tea.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh, after having looked at the lanterns for a while, finally arrived at the house, where they sat down on the second floor to play backgammon together. There were six windows with suspended blinds on the second floor overlooking the Lantern Market below, where:
The merrymaking was at its height.

After they had played backgammon for a while, they put the game away and had something to eat. The two of them then proceeded to look down on the Lantern Market from inside the blinds. Behold:
The people from ten thousand households are attired in brocade;
Their perfumed carriages and fine steeds rumble like thunder.
Hills of lanterns soar into the heavens above the azure clouds;
From whence do revellers not congregate to take in the sights?[6]

Ying Po-chüeh happened to ask, "How many people from the Ch'iao household are coming to your place tomorrow?"

"Their relative Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, the distaff relative of the imperial family, is coming; but I won't be home tomorrow. In the morning I've got to go to the temple to attend the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal in celebration of the Festival of the First Prime, and after that, Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has invited me to a party."

As he was speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that, amid the throng of people below, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, and a man wearing a square-cut scholar's cap were standing beneath a lantern stall, looking at the lanterns.

Pointing them out to Ying Po-chüeh, he went on to ask, "Do you happen to recognize that man wearing the square-cut scholar's cap? What is he doing tagging along with them?"

"He has a familiar look about him," replied Ying Po-chüeh, "but I don't recognize him."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Tai-an, "You go down there and surreptitiously invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to come up here. But don't let Pockmarked Chu, or that other fellow, catch on."

Now the page boy Tai-an was the sort of knave of whom it could be said:
He doesn't miss a wink.

He went straight downstairs and insinuated himself into the midst of the crowd. Waiting until Chu Jih-nien and the other person had moved along, he stepped out from one side and gave Hsieh Hsi-ta a tug with his hand, which startled him into turning around to see who it was who had accosted him.

Tai-an said to him, "Father and Master Ying the Second are on the upper floor here and would like to have a word with you."

"You go ahead," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I understand. Wait until I've accompanied the two of them as far as the place where they're making artificial plum blossoms. I'll come to see your master after that."

Tai-an then disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Who would have thought that, no sooner did they arrive at the place where they were making artificial plum blossoms, than Hsieh Hsi-ta ducked into the crowd, leaving Chu Jih-nien and the other person to look for him in vain, and made his way upstairs to see Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh.

Upon seeing the two of them, he said, "Brother, if you were coming here to see the lanterns, why didn't you say something about it this morning to let me know your plans?"

"I didn't feel like mentioning it in front of everyone this morning," said Hsimen Ch'ing. "I did send Brother Ying the Second to your place to invite you, but you were not at home. By the way, did Pockmarked Chu see that you were coming here just now?"

"And who was that fellow wearing the square-cut scholar's cap?" he went on to ask.

"The person wearing the square-cut scholar's cap," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "is Wang the Third, the son of Imperial Commissioner Wang. Today he came to my place with Pockmarked Chu to ask for my assistance in arranging a loan of three hundred taels of silver from the moneylender Hsü Pu-yü, or Reneger Hsü. He has asked me, along with Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, to be guarantors for the loan. He wants to pursue a career by purchasing a position in the Military School, but I can't be bothered to take an interest in his private affairs. Just now I was accompanying him for a stroll in the Lantern Market, when your esteemed servant summoned me, so I simply saw them as far as the place where they're making artificial plum blossoms and then, taking advantage of the crowded situation, gave them the slip and came to join you."

Turning to Ying Po-chüeh, he then went on to ask, "How long have you been here?"

"Brother initially sent me to your place, but you weren't at home," said Ying Po-chüeh. "So I came here and have been playing backgammon with him for a while."

"Have you eaten yet?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have the page boy bring you something to eat."

"You must know," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "that after leaving your place this morning, I've spent the whole day with those two, so how could I have had anything to eat?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Tai-an, "Go down to the kitchen and prepare something for Master Hsieh to eat."

Before long, the table was wiped clean, and a platter of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres, two bowls of different kinds of soft-boiled fricassee, a bowl of blanched pork and vermicelli soup, and two bowls of white rice were placed before him. Hsieh Hsi-ta set to and polished it off all by himself, leaving the utensils spick-and-span, within and without; after which he poured the remaining gravy over his rice and gobbled it all up. When Tai-an had cleared the dishes away, Hsieh Hsi-ta sat to one side and looked on as the other two played backgammon.

What should they see at this juncture but the two singing girls who got out of their sedan chairs at the door and came in smiling, while the sedan chair bearers brought in their bundles of clothes.

Ying Po-chüeh, who had already spotted them through the window, said, "So, the two little whores are only now arriving."

He then instructed Tai-an, saying, "Don't let them go into the rear of the house. Have them come upstairs to see me first."

"Which two have been engaged for today?" Hsieh Hsi-ta asked.

"It's Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan," replied Tai-an.

Then, hastening downstairs, he said to them, "Master Ying the Second wants to have a word with you."

The two of them refused to comply but proceeded straight back to the rear, where they were greeted by "The Beanpole" and ushered into a room where they encountered Wang Liu-erh.

On her head she sported a fashionable fret with a twisted center and a gold-spangled sheepskin headband; on her torso she wore a purple jacket of Lu-chou silk, a jet cloak with a stiff-standing, tilelike collar, over a white drawnwork silk skirt; beneath which appeared the upturned tips of her two golden lotuses, enclosed in black satin, flat-heeled shoes that were chain stitched with sand-green thread. Her temples were adorned with two long spit curls, she had a rosewood complexion, and she did not use much face powder, attempting to emulate the style of a person of middling status. From her ears dangled a pair of clove-shaped pendant earrings.[7]

On coming in the door, they made her an obeisance and then sat down on the edge of the k'ang. Little Iron Rod served them with tea, and Wang Liuerh joined them in drinking it. The two singing girls could not take their eyes off her, looking her over from top to toe. After staring for a while, the two of them laughed awkwardly, not knowing who they were in the presence of.

Later on, when Tai-an came in, they surreptitiously asked him, "Who is that person in the room?"

Tai-an didn't know what to reply, merely saying, "She's the master's aunt, who's been invited here to see the lanterns."

When the two of them heard this, they returned to the room and began anew, saying, "We didn't realize, just now, that you were an aunt in the family, so we failed to show you proper respect. Please don't take it amiss."

Thereupon, as though inserting a taper in its holder, they kowtowed to her twice, which flustered Wang Liu-erh into hastily returning half a kowtow to them. Later on, refreshments were served, and they ate them together. The two of them then got out their instruments and sang for Wang Liu-erh's entertainment.

When Ying Po-chüeh had finished a game of backgammon, he came downstairs to relieve himself. Hearing the singing in the interior of the house, he beckoned to Tai-an and asked him, "Tell me. Just who are the two singing girls performing for back there?"
Tai-an merely smiled, without making a sound, and said, "You're like:
The intendant of the Ts'ao-chou Military Defense Circuit:
The area of your jurisdiction is broad.[8]
What's it to you whether they sing or not?"
"Why you lousy little oily-mouth!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you refuse to tell me, you needn't fear that I won't find out."
Tai-an laughed and said, "If you can find out, so be it. What are you asking me for?" After saying which, he headed straight into the rear of the house.
Ying Po-chüeh went back upstairs, where Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to play three more games of backgammon with Hsieh Hsi-ta.
Whom should they see at this juncture but Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two of whom suddenly came upstairs and kowtowed to them.
"Wonderful!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "The two of you have arrived in the nick of time. Where have you been, and how did you know we were here?"
Li Ming knelt down, deferentially covered his mouth with his hand, and said, "Wu Hui and I initially dropped by His Honor's residence, but the people there said that he was having a party with all of you at the house over here, so we came over to offer our services."
"That's fine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can stand up and wait in attendance."
Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "Go quickly across the street and invite your uncle Han to come join us."
Before long, Han Tao-kuo arrived, made a bow, and sat down. A table was then set up, a platter of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres suitable to accompany a drinking party was brought up from the kitchen, and Ch'in-t'ung stood at their side, decanting the wine from a brass warming pan equipped with a wire-mesh strainer.
Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta occupied the positions of honor, Hsimen Ch'ing played the role of host, and Han Tao-kuo took a seat to one side. As soon as they were seated, wine was poured, and Tai-an was dispatched to the rear of the house to invite the singing girls to join them.
After a brief interval, Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh, the two of them:
Just as slow and easy as you please,
came up the stairs, and:
Neither correctly nor precisely,
kowtowed to the company.
Ying Po-chüeh took them to task, saying, "I wondered who they were, and it turns out to be these two little whores. Just now, you knew I was here, and that I was calling for you, so why didn't you come to pay your respects to me first? What a nerve! In the future, if I don't give you both something to remember me by, you'll get completely out of hand."
"Brother here," said Tung Chiao-erh with a laugh, "has been reduced to:
Making faces at me over the wall;
He's scaring me to death!"
"As we all know," chimed in Han Yü-ch'uan:
"The little darling, in flashing his animal mask over the ramparts;
Is just a child, displaying his ugliness."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "there's a downright redundancy around here today. Since we already have Li Ming and Wu Hui to sing for us, what do we need these two little whores for? You'd better send them packing as soon as possible. On the evening of a major festival like this, they can still pick up a few coins for themselves. If you wait until it's too late, there will be no one around to want them."
"Brother," protested Han Yü-ch'uan, "how shameless can you get? It's His Honor who called for our services. We're not here to cater to you. Brother, how can you bring yourself to vent your spleen so aimlessly?"
"Why you silly little splay-legged whore!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You're here right now, and if you don't cater to me, to whom are you going to cater?"
Han Yü-ch'uan responded:
"When Fatty T'ang fell into the vinegar vat, Enough got splashed on you to turn you sour."
"Why you lousy little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's turned me sour, has it? Just you wait. When we break up and you're ready to go home, I'll have something to say to you. One way or the other, there are two different things I can do, so you needn't expect to escape."
"And what two things are those?" demanded Tung Chiao-erh. "Tell me about them."
"The first thing I can do," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is to report you to the police and have you arrested for violating the curfew. Then the next day I could send a card to Commandant Chou and have you subjected to a good finger-squeezing. Or, if you were really recalcitrant, it would only require three candareens worth of distilled spirits to get your chair bearers drunk enough to take advantage of you. Then, when you got home late, with no money to show for it, the madam would be sure to give you a beating for your pains, which would be no skin off my back."
"If it gets too late," said Han Yü-ch'uan, "we won't go home, but spend the night in His Honor's house here. Or else, we can get His Honor to send someone to escort us home.
Whether Dame Wang gets her hundred cash or not,
It's not up to you.[9]
What a rot-talking sl/imy kn/ave[10] you are!"
"If I'm a slave," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the world, nowadays, must be topsy-turvy. The time has come to:
Call a spade a spade."
When they had talked and laughed together for a while, the two singing girls stood to one side and sang a song celebrating the beauties of spring. Only after that did the company proceed to devour the refreshments that had been provided for them.
At this juncture, who should appear but Tai-an, who came in to say that Master Chu had shown up; which news failed to elicit any response from the company.
Before long, Chu Jih-nien came up the stairs and, on seeing that Ying Pochüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta were there, said, "So, the pair of you are feasting away, are you? What sort of conduct is that?"
"And as for you, Tagalong Hsieh," he went on to say. "If Brother invited you up here, you might have given me the word, instead of slipping off that way without anyone's knowing it, and leaving me to look for you in vain around the area where they make the artificial plum blossoms."
"I just happened to stray out of the way," explained Hsieh Hsi-ta, "and chanced to see Brother up here playing backgammon with Brother Ying the Second. When I came upstairs and saluted them, Brother asked me to stay."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Tai-an, "Go get a chair for Brother Chu, and give him a seat at the other end of the table."
Thereupon, Tai-an provided a place setting for him at the lower end of the table, and he sat down. Soup and rice were brought up for him from the kitchen, and he joined the others in consuming the refreshments.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had eaten only a single steamed bun, and swallowed a mouthful of soup, he noticed that Li Ming was standing beside him and gave the remainder of his food to him, to take off and eat by himself. Meanwhile, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, and Han Tao-kuo consumed a soup of eight ingredients served in a large, deep porcelain bowl decorated with a blue and white pattern and ate three large steamed buns apiece, as well as four steamed open-topped dumplings, the tops of which were adorned with peach blossoms. Only a single steamed bun was left to anchor the plate. After the servants had cleared away the soup bowls, wine was decanted and they proceeded to drink.
Hsieh Hsi-ta then asked Chu Jih-nien, "How far did you go with him before you managed to get away, and how did you know that I was here?"
Chu Jih-nien, thereupon, told him about it, thus and so, saying, "After looking around for you a while without success, I accompanied Wang the Third to Sun T'ien-hua's house, where we had agreed to meet, and then proceeded to Hsü Pu-yü's place to arrange a loan of three hundred taels of silver. But Blabbermouth Sun, the old oily-mouth, had composed a defective loan contract."
"Leave my name out of the contract," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "I don't want any part of it. One way or the other, you and Old Sun can act as guarantors, and dun him for a guarantor's fee to spend on yourselves."
"What did he get wrong on the contract, anyway?" he went on to ask.
"I had told him," replied Chu Jih-nien, "to word the contract in somewhat slippery terms, stipulating three preconditions for the repayment of the loan; but he did not follow my suggestion, so I had to rewrite the document from scratch."
"So how did you word the contract?" asked Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Read it aloud for our benefit."
"This is the way I worded it," said Chu Jih-nien.
The contracting party, Wang Ts'ai, scion of the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang, (instead of "because he wants money to spend," amended to) wanting money to spend, has arranged, through the good offices of Sun T'ien-hua and Chu Jih-nien, to borrow the sum of three hundred taels of (instead of "silver," amended to) soft currency, and agrees to remit (instead of "interest," amended to) a "plum" of five hundred cash per month, and commits himself to repay the principal (instead of "next year," amended to) when three preconditions are met. These three preconditions are: firstly:
When the windblown axle of a windlass knocks a goose out of the sky;
secondly:
When the fish underneath the surface leap onto the shore;
and thirdly:
When the rocks submerged underwater dissolve into powder.
Only when these three preconditions are met will repayment of the loan become due. (He had written "In the year when the boundary stones nod their heads repayment of the loan will become due." But I pointed out that the precondition "when the boundary stones nod their heads" might be met if there should be an earthquake some year. Where would that leave you? So I amended it to read) If the borrower should lack the funds to repay the loan, the guarantors will make themselves scarce. Lest questions should arise in the future, this written contract as set down is hereby declared invalid. (At the end I also had him append the words "null and void.")
"If you word it that way," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "it could hardly be said not to be slippery enough. By the time the rocks submerged underwater have been reduced to powder:
Who knows whether the monk will still be around or not?"[11]
"That's to put too good a construction on it," said Chu Jih-nien. "If someday there should be a drought and water levels are low, the court would order the dredging of the waterways, and the submerged rocks might be hacked to powder with two or three blows from a workman's mattock. Where would that leave you? In such a case you'd be unable to avoid paying back the loan."
As the group of them talked and laughed together for a while, it gradually became evening, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the lanterns should be lighted. Two translucent ramshorn lanterns of extraordinary intricacy were suspended under the eaves, one on either side.
Who could have anticipated that at this juncture Yüeh-niang, back at home, should have sent Ch'i-t'ung and an orderly to deliver four partitioned boxes of mouth-watering sweetmeats and fancy fruits for their delectation. There were:
Blazing yellow kumquats,
Fragrant red pomegranates,
Delectable bittersweet olives,
Verdant green apples, and
Redolently fragrant pears.
And there were also:
Honeysweet candied persimmons,
Sugar-soaked giant dates,
Butterfat pine nut pastries,
Elephant-eye-shaped sesame candy,
Domino-like deep-fried sweetmeats, and
Honey-basted chain-shaped crullers.
In addition there were:
Willow-leaf candy, and
Ox-hide taffy.
Truly, they were things:
Rarely found in this world,
Seldom seen in the universe.
Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Ch'i-t'ung to come forward and asked him, "Has the conclave of ladies at home broken up yet, or not? Are they still there drinking wine? And who sent you to deliver these treats here?"
"The First Lady sent me to deliver them," replied Ch'i-t'ung, "for you to enjoy here with your wine. The party has not broken up completely yet. After four scenes of the hsi-wen drama had been performed, the First Lady kept them for another round of drinks at the front gate, so they could enjoy the fireworks."
"Are there onlookers there?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The people who came to watch filled the street," replied Ch'i-t'ung.
"I told P'ing-an," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to retain four black-clad orderlies and station them at the gate, with staves in hand, to hold back the crowd if necessary, and not let any riffraff press too close."
"P'ing-an and I, along with the orderlies, were all there to oversee the fireworks display," said Ch'i-t'ung. "It was only after most of the company had left that the First Lady sent me here. There weren't any riffraff causing trouble."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he ordered that the leftovers remaining on the table be cleared away and replaced with the boxes of treats that had just arrived. A serving of stuffed Lantern Festival dumplings was brought up from the kitchen, and the two singing girls poured the wine.
On the one hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'i-t'ung to go home and look after things there, while, on the other hand:
More vintage wine was poured, and
Another feast of delicacies was spread.
Li Ming and Wu Hui were then asked to entertain the company with a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, to the tune "Fresh Water Song" in the *shuang-tiao* mode:
On this festive day in the metropolis we enjoy the Lantern Festival.[12]
Encompassing the hills of lanterns, auspicious clouds gather.
One gazes at the pure luster of the stars of the milky way,
And observes the moon's orb, high over the celestial moat.
The strains of a classic melody are struck up.
Tortoiseshell mats are spread,
In order to enjoy the revels.
To the tune "River-bobbed Oars":
Decorated lanterns are suspended on either side,
On top of which, a skyful of moon and stars[13] shine bright.
Everywhere we look, the pendants of embroidered sashes are flying in the wind,
Jeweled canopies sway gently,
On hills of lanterns, the lamplight is scintillating,

Paper cutouts of spring moths quiver atop chignons.
To the tune "Seven Brothers":
On the one hand, there is dancing,
There is singing,
And there is instrumental music.
The astonishing vaudeville acts are truly marvelous;
The terrifying aerial performances are utterly inimitable;
The comical yüan-pen farces are truly comical.
To the tune "Plum Blossom Wine":
Ah! On one hand, they do the dance of the old crone.
The wellborn young ladies are dolled up to look their best,
Displaying their seductiveness in a myriad ways,[14]
With a hundred allurements and a thousand coquetries.[15]
On the one hand, hoofers parade to the drum,
On the other hand, mummers parade on stilts.
It is truly a comical sight.
The fine haze is redolent of orchid and musk.
With broad smiles we drink the fragrant wine.
To the tune "Enjoying the South":
Ah! Today, in joyous abandon, we feast in order to celebrate the Lantern Festival.
Slender jade fingers gently strum the rosewood instruments.
The light of the lanterns and the bright moon illuminate each other,
Shining on towers and terraces, halls and chambers.
Today is a time to relax, become intoxicated, and devote ourselves to pleasure.[16]
When the singing was over, they ate the Lantern Festival dumplings, and then Han Tao-kuo was the first to go home. Shortly thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Lai-chao to open up the twelve-foot-wide lower room, hang up the blinds, and carry the rack of fireworks outside. Hsi-men Ch'ing and his guests looked on from the second-story, while Wang Liu-erh, along with the two singing girls and Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," were able to watch the show from the floor below.
Tai-an and Lai-chao set up the rack of fireworks in the middle of the street and, moments later, proceeded to set them off. The bystanders on either side who crowded around to see the show:
Rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows,
Were incalculable in number.[17]
They all said, "When His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing chooses to put on a fireworks display here, who wouldn't come to see it. Truly, they have been set up just right. What fine fireworks!" Behold:
The rack of fireworks soars up fifteen feet high;
On all sides hill-shaped booths bustle with activity.
On the highest point there stands an immortal's crane,
Holding a vermilion edict suspended from its mouth,
Which turns out to be a "high-rising rocket."[18]
When it first takes off,
With a sudden rush, it creates a trail of cold light,[19]
Boring its way right up beside the Herd Boy and the Dipper.
Only after that,
In the middle distance, a "watermelon bomb" explodes into sight,
Showering sparks on the spectators in all four directions,
*Pi po-po*, a myriad thunderclaps all resound at once.
"Lotus-gathering boats" and "brighter than moonlights,"[20]
One chasing after the other,
Are just like "golden lanterns"[21] dispersing the "stars in the azure sky."
"Purple grapes,"[22] by the thousands and ten thousands,
Resemble a cascade of "black dragon pearls," a "portiere of beaded crystal."
The "whips of the Hegemon-King"[23] crack everywhere;
The "earthbound rats"[24] scurry about under peoples' clothes.
"Alabaster cups" and "jade saucers,"
Whirl about in a way that is truly spectacular;
"Silver moths" and "golden cicadas,"
Display ingenuity that could scarcely be improved upon.
The "Eight Immortals bearing birthday gifts,"
Severally display their magic powers;[25]
The "Seven Sages subduing demons,"[26]
Appear completely shrouded in flames.
"Yellow sparklers"[27] and "green sparklers,"
Produce enveloping mists resembling a "myriad sunset clouds;"
"Quick- and slow-blooming lotus blossoms,"[28]
Flare resplendently, vying to display a "montage of brocades."[29]
"Ten-foot chrysanthemums"[30] and "smoky orchids"[31] confront each other;
"Big pear blossoms"[32] and "fallen peach blossoms" contest the spring.
"Towers and terraces," "halls and chambers."
In but a trice cease to exhibit their lofty eminence;
The drumming of the "parading village mummers,"
Seems to subside, its joyful hubbub no longer heard.
The "peddler's basket,"
Above and below, shines crystal clear;
The "old crone's cart,"
Both head and tail, explodes to bits.
The "Five Devils plaguing the Assessor,"[33]
With scorched heads and singed scalps[34] manifest their bellicosity;
As a result of the "tenfold ambuscade,"[35]
Horses collapse, men gallop away, and the outcome remains in doubt.
Despite the fact that infinite ingenuity may have been expended
In the end:
The fire burns out and the smoke dissolves,[36] leaving nothing but ashes.
The jade clepsydra with its bronze tanks should not hurry one along;[37]
The starry bridges and trees of lanterns[38] will scintillate until dawn.[39]
The ten thousand varieties of puppetry are nothing but illusions;
Providing an excuse for the revellers to return home with a smile.
Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ching was drunk, and when he went downstairs to relieve himself immediately after the fireworks were over, he noticed that Wang Liu-erh was there, so he took Hsieh Hsi-ta and Chu Jihnien by the hand and left without bidding his host farewell.
"Where are you off to?" asked Tai-an.
"My clever child," Ying Po-chüeh whispered into his ear, "it's that matter I asked you about before. If I were not to go, those others would stick around indefinitely, which would look as though I didn't know the score. When your master asks, just tell him that we've all left."
Later on, when Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that the fireworks were over and asked where Ying Po-chüeh and the others had gotten to, Tai-an said, "Master Ying the Second and Master Hsieh all went off together. I wasn't able to hold them back. They told me to convey their thanks."
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not inquire any further but summoned Li Ming and Wu Hui, rewarded each of them with a large bumper of wine, and said, "I won't pay you the fee for your performance right now, because I'd like the two of you to come and help out again, early on the sixteenth. I'll be entertaining those three, Master Ying the Second and the others, along with my managers and employees, for a drinking party at the front gate that evening."
Li Ming knelt down, and said, "I'm bound to report to Your Honor that on the sixteenth, I, along with the other three, Wu Hui, Tso Shun, and Cheng Feng, all have to report for duty at the installation ceremony for the newly promoted prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, His Honor Hu Shih-wen, so we couldn't show up before some time in the afternoon."
"In any case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we won't begin drinking until evening. Just be sure you don't fail to appear, that's all."
"We would never dare let you down," the two of them said.
Thereupon, they knelt down to consume the wine that was offered them and then prepared to go out the door and make their farewells.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to the two singing girls, "Tomorrow, I'm entertaining some female guests at home. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh will also be there. Be sure that the two of you come along as well."
The two boy actors and the two singing girls then went out the gate together. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, after ordering Lai-chao, Tai-an, and Ch'in-t'ung to see that everything was properly cleared away, and to put out the lamps and candles, retired to the bedroom in the rear of the house.
To resume our story, Lai-chao's son, Little Iron Rod, had been outside watching the fireworks display when he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had withdrawn to the interior. Thereupon, he went upstairs, where he found his old man putting together a platter of leftover meat and other fare, along with a goblet of wine, and a few Lantern Festival dumplings, to take into their room. When he asked his mother, "The Beanpole," for some of it, she saw that he was still holding a singed firecracker in his hand and gave him a couple of slaps for his pains, but she did not prevent him from going into the rear courtyard to play.
Upon hearing the sound of laughter coming from the main room on the courtyard, he thought, "It must be the singing girls who haven't left yet." Noticing that the door was closed, he thereupon proceeded to peer inside through a crack and saw that the interior was brightly lit by lamps and candles. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wang Liu-erh were engaged in intercourse on the edge of the bed. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already the worse for wear, had bent the woman over the edge of the bed where, by the light of the lamp, he had stripped off her drawers, fastened the clasp on his organ, and was busy plucking the flower in her rear courtyard. Once he got started, he slammed away at her, back and forth, being good for no less than several hundred thrusts at a time. As he slammed away:
The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.
The noise of their panting, and their back and forth movements, sounded, for all the world, as though they were engaged in breaking up the bed and could be heard everywhere. The little boy was too preoccupied by staring at this sight to notice when his mother, "The Beanpole," happened to come into the rear courtyard. When she saw what her child was up to, she grabbed him by the tuft of hair on top of his head, dragged him back to the front of the house, gave him a couple of sharp raps on the head with her knuckles, and scolded him, saying, "You lousy mischief-making little slave! All you need is to risk your life a second time by going and eavesdropping on him once again!"
Thereupon, she gave him several Lantern Festival dumplings to eat, refused to let him out of the room, and threatened him into getting onto the k'ang and going to sleep.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman kept at it for about the time it would take to eat two meals before finally calling it quits. Tai-an, who had taken care of providing food and wine for the chair bearers, then escorted her back to her home and returned to join Ch'in-t'ung in carrying lanterns as they accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing back to his residence. Truly:
Do not fear lest the bright moon should set,
It will be succeeded by a subtle fragrance.[40]
A poem testifies to this:

Enjoying the view from the Southern Tower, he forgets to go back;
However romantic the occasion may be, how long can it last?[41]
By his return, the bright moon will be down at the third watch;
Obsessed with pleasure, before he knows it, he is utterly sloshed.

Stars and moon make glorious the sky
Ten thousand candles burn on earth.
Heavens and Earth make festival today.
Spring is the season of harmony.

Now people wear their finest clothes and even their horses are proud.
The days pass quickly: we must not spend them idly
White hair is a judge who spares no man.
Fools spend a thousand pieces of gold to buy a moment's happiness
And bid the security guard strike the night drum softly.

When the messengers from the Qiao family had been sent away, Ximen Qing went to the upper room to discuss matters with Wu Yueniang Aunt Wu, and Li Ping'er.

"We must, of course, send them something in return for these presents," Yueniang said, "and something for the baby too, to show that we consider the betrothal definite. Besides, we do not wish to show ourselves behind them in courtesy."

"Yes." Aunt Wu said, "and we must send a marriage maker.",

"They sent old woman Kong," Yueniang said. "Whom shall we send?",

"One guest never troubles more than one host," Ximen Qing said. "Old woman Feng is good enough for us." He had eight cards of invitation written; then he sent for old woman Feng, and told Daian to take the presents and the cards.

The invitations were for the fifteenth day. All the ladies who had been present at the Qiaos' party, and Lady Qiao the Fifth, were invited to celebrate the birthday of Li Ping'er and to enjoy the Feast of Lanterns. Ximen ordered Laixing to buy cakes and buns and fruits and food, two suits of silk clothes, a little scarlet cloak, a silk hat with golden ornaments, two lanterns made like sheep's horns, that came from Yunnan, a box of ribbons, a pair of tiny gold bracelets, and four gold and jade rings. These things were all packed up on the morning of the fourteenth, and Chen Jingji and Ben the Fourth were told to put on their black clothes and take them to the Qiaos.

Master Qiao received them well, and gave them presents of some value in return, particularly little things for the baby. While they were busying themselves with the presents, Ying Bojue came to talk to Ximen Qing about the money that had been lent to Huang the Fourth and Li Zhi. Seeing them so busy, he asked what it was all about. Ximen Qing told him about the betrothal.

"On the fifteenth," he said, "you must ask your Lady to come and spend an hour or two here."

"Your lady has only to give the command," Bojue said, "and my wife will come."

"A number of ladies are coming." Ximen said, "and I think we men had better go to Lion Street to see the lanterns." Ying Bojue agreed, and went away.

The same day Wu Yin'er brought four boxes of birthday presents to Li Ping'er and asked to be adopted as her ward. Li Ping'er accepted the presents and sent away the sedan chair. When, next day, Li Guijie came and found Wu Yin'er already there, she asked Wu Yueniang why she had come. Yueniang told her what had happened. Guijie made no comment but, all that day, she was sulky and would not speak to Wu Yin'er.

From the princely family of Wang there came a troop of twenty actors with two managers to direct the performance. They brought their chests of costumes. When they came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing, he told them to use the rooms in the west wing as their dressing rooms, and there they had their meals.

Major Zhou's wife, General Jing's mother and Captain Zhang's wife came. They all had soldiers to clear the way before their sedan chairs, and a number of attendants and serving women. Yueniang and the others, dressed in their long cloaks, came out to welcome their guests, and took them to the great hall where they exchanged greetings. Then they sat down and drank some tea, but not ceremonially, for they were waiting for the wife of Magistrate Xia. They waited a long time but she did not come. Two or three times they sent boys to see if she was coming. At last she came with soldiers to clear the way for her, and a number of attendants, with a woman to carry her dressing case. When she came into the great hall, she was received with music. There she greeted the other ladies, and they took their places according to their rank. They had tea under the awning and then went to the great hall, where Chunmei, Yuxiao, Yingchun, and Lanxiang, all exquisitely dressed, served them with tea and wine. The actors performed the *Story of the Western Pavilion*. It was a most brilliant scene.

Ximen Qing waited until the ladies had had tea, then mounted his horse, and went to the house in Lion Street. He had told Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to meet him there. Some of his men had been told to take one of the four great fireworks to Lion Street and set up two for the entertainment of the ladies. The cooks were ordered to send two boxes of food and two jars of Jinhua wine. Two singing girls had been engaged, Dong Jiao'er and Han Yuchuan, and Daian had taken a sedan chair for Wang Liu'er.

"Aunt Han," Daian said when he met her, "Father has sent me to take you to see the fireworks this evening."

"But I don't know that I ought to go," Wang Liu'er said, smiling. "What do you think your Uncle Han will say about it?"

"Father has spoken to him already," Daian said. "He says you must dress and go. There are only to be two singing girls there, no one else."

Wang Liu'er did not move. Then Han Daoguo himself came in.,

"Here is Uncle Han," Daian said. "Your wife will not believe what I say.",

"Do you really wish me to go?" Wang Liu'er said to her husband.,

"Well," he said, "his Lordship said that there is no one to look after the two singing girls. That's why he wants you. And you will see the fireworks this evening. Hurry up and dress. He told me to shut the shop and go there myself. We shall have a good time. Laibao has gone home already. It is his turn to watch the shop tonight."

"I don't know how long it will last," Wang Liu'er said. "We will go and stay a while and then come home. We can't leave the house without anyone to look after it and, besides, this is your day off and you must have some sleep."

She dressed and went with Daian to the house in Lion Street. Laizhao's wife, the Beanpole, was there. She had dusted the beds, changed the bed-clothes and the curtains, burned incense to sweeten the rooms, hung up two lanterns, and put a brazier in the room. Wang Liu'er went in and sat down on the bed. The Beanpole made reverence to her and brought her tea.

When Ying Bojue and Ximen Qing had seen the lanterns, they came in and played backgammon in the upper room. Six windows were opened and the shades hung out before them. Below them they could see the lantern fair. It was a picture of gaiety and merriment. After playing a while, they had some food. Then they sat down to look at the lanterns through the blinds. While they were watching the crowd below, Ximen Qing suddenly saw Xie Xida, Zhu Shinian, and another man, who wore a scholar's hat, standing beneath the arch of lanterns. He pointed to them and said to Ying Bojue: "Do you know that fellow wearing a square hat?"

"He seems very familiar to me," Ying Bojue said, "but I don't know him.",

Then Ximen Qing said to Daian: "Go down and ask your Uncle Xie to come, but don't let Pockmarked Zhu or the other man see you."

Daian crept downstairs like a young pickpocket and went out into the crowd. He waited till Pockmarked Zhu and the stranger were out of the, way for a moment, then pulled Xie Xida by the sleeve. Xie Xida turned quickly and recognized Daian.

"Father and Uncle Ying would like to see you," the boy said.,

"Very well, I understand," said Xie Xida. "Now slip away. I will go with these two as far as the place where the Plum Flowers are, and then I'll come to see your master."

Daian made off like a streak of smoke. Xie Xida, when he came to a more crowded place, turned aside and left Zhu Shinian and the other man looking for him. He went to the room where Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue were sitting, and made a reverence to them.

"I see you have come to look at the show, Brother," he said. "Why didn't you send me a message this morning?"

"There were a number of guests at my place all the morning," Ximen said, "and I couldn't find an opportunity to send you word. I did tell Brother Ying to invite you, but you were not at home. Did Pockmarked Zhu see you come here? Who is the man with the scholar's hat?"

"The man with the square hat," Xie Xida said, "is Wang the Third, of General Wang's family. He and Zhu came to see me because Wang is trying to borrow three hundred taels. He asked me, old Sun, and Pockmarked Zhu to be his guarantors. He is going to take a course of study at the military academy, and qualify for official rank. I was not interested in his business. I simply came with him to see the lanterns. When I heard you wished to see me, I went with them as far as the place where the Plum Flowers are and gave them the slip." He asked Bojue how long he had been there.

"Brother told me to come, to your house," Bojue said, "and I did so, but you were not at home. Then I came here. We have been playing backgammon."

"Have you had anything to eat?" Ximen Qing asked Xie Xida.,

"When I left your place this morning." Xie Xida said, "I met those two, and I have had nothing to eat all day."

Ximen told Daian to go to the kitchen and ask for some food to be prepared. Before long it was brought. It was a very substantial meal, but Xie Xida soon disposed of it, cleaning up both inside and outside of all the dishes. The little soup that he had left, he put into his rice bowl, and so finished off everything. Daian cleared away, and Xie Xida went to stand beside his two friends. They were now playing backgammon again.

Meanwhile the two singing girls arrived, and the sedan chair men carried in their clothes. They came in smiling. Ying Bojue saw them through the window.

"What makes those little whores so late?" he said. Then to Daian: "Don't let them go to the inner court. Tell them to come up here and see me."

Xie Xida asked who they were. Daian told him, then ran downstairs and said to the singing girls: "Uncle Ying wants to see you." The two singing girls paid no attention, but went on to the inner court. They made a reverence the Beanpole, who took them to the inner room where Wang Liu'er was sitting, wearing a new-fashioned net upon her hair, a purple silk dress, a long black cloak, and a white ribboned skirt. Below the skirt her two tiny feet peeped out. Her hair came down rather low upon her cheeks, and her face was bright but not too highly painted. She looked like a person of the middle class. She was wearing two earrings, shaped like cloves.

They made the usual reverence to her and sat down on the bed. Little Iron Rod brought tea and Wang Liu'er drank it with them. The two girls looked at the woman from head to foot. After they had examined her well, they laughed. They had no idea who she was. Then Daian came and the girls secretly asked him. Daian did not know what story to tell. Finally he said: "The lady comes from my father's sister-in-law's. She has come to see the lanterns."

When the two girls heard this, they went back into the room.,

"We did not realize you were our aunt," they said to Wang Liu'er, "and so we did not make the correct reverence to you. Please forgive us." Then they knelt down and kowtowed to her. Wang Liu'er hastily made a half reverence in return. Soup and dishes were brought and she ate with them. Afterwards they took their instruments and sang for her."

When Ying Bojue had finished his game of backgammon, he went downstairs to wash his hands. Hearing the sound of music coming from the inner court, he called Daian and said to him: "Tell me: to whom are those girls singing?" Daian laughed but did not answer for some time. At last he said: "You might be the Captain of Caozhou, the way you poke your nose into everything. Whether there is singing or not, it is no business of yours."

"You thievish young rascal," Ying Bojue said, "whether you tell me or not, you know I shall find out."

"Then why ask me?" Daian said, laughing.

Bojue went upstairs again. By this time, Ximen Qing and Xie Xida had played three games of backgammon. Then Li Ming and Wu Hui came in and kowtowed.

"Good!" said Ying Bojue, "you have come just in time. How did you know we were here?"

Li Ming, still upon his knees, said: "We went to his Lordship's house and there they told us that he was having a party here, so we came on to await his pleasure."

"Excellent!" Bojue said. "Stand up."

Then he said to Daian: "Go and ask your Uncle Han to come." Han Daoguo came, greeted them, and sat down.

The tables were laid; dishes appropriate to the season were brought in, and Qintong served wine. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida sat in the seats of honor—Ximen Qing in the host's place, and Han Daoguo opposite. When the wine had been heated, Daian was told to bid the singing girls come. The two girls, Dong Jiao'er and Han Yuchuan, came in, slowly and gracefully. They kowtowed, but not exactly in the direction of the two guests.

"I wondered who was here," Ying Bojue said. "Now I see it is only you two little whores. Why didn't you come when I sent for you? You are getting far too independent. If I don't take you in hand, you will become quite unbearable."

Dong Jiao'er laughed. "Brother," she said, "you are like a ghost playing his ghostly tricks on the other side of a wall. But you won't frighten me to death."

Han Yuchuan said: "You know, my dear slave, that you are like an animal's head picked up by the city wall, a fine specimen of an unwanted baby."

"Brother," Ying Bojue said to Ximen, "you have done more than you need today. Li Ming and Wu Hui are here, and that ought to be enough. What need have you of these two whores? Why not send them about their business at once? Tonight is the Feast of Lanterns, and they will have plenty of opportunity to go and beg elsewhere. But don't make them too late. Nobody will have them if they are too late."

"Brother," Yuchuan said, "how can you be so shameless? It wasn't you who sent for us, but Father. What business is it of yours?"

"Foolish little bone," Bojue said. "I happen to be here and you will have to wait on me whether you like it or not."

"You are like Tang, the fat man, who fell into a jar of vinegar and was sour all over," Yuchuan said.

"It is your heart that is sour, you thievish little strumpet," Bojue said. "But wait a while. I will show you something when you go home. I have two scores against you now, and you shall not escape me."

"What do you mean?" Dong Jiao'er said. "Tell me.",

"I shall tell the policeman that you are breaking the law by night. He will arrest you and put the thumbscrews on you. And if that is not enough, I will spend a few coins on white wine and make your chair men drunk, and then you will wander all over the place, get home late, and have a beating waiting for you when you do get there."

"If we are late," Han Yuchuan said, "we shall not go. We shall stay here, or we shall ask Father to send us home and give mother a hundred cash. But it has nothing to do with you anyway. I like your impertinence!"

"Yes," Bojue said, "I suppose it is I who am the slave. Everything is topsy-turvy nowadays. I lose."

They laughed and talked. The two singing girls sang the songs of spring, and the men dined. Then Daian came and said: "Uncle Zhu is here." No one spoke. Zhu Shinian came upstairs and saw Ying Bojue and Xie Xida sitting in the places of honor.

"Ah!" said he, "a fine pair you are, stuffing yourselves with good food, but do you call yourselves men?" He turned to Xie Xida. "Brother, you are given an invitation and, without a word to us, you run away. We were looking for you everywhere, there by the Plum Flowers."

"It was quite by chance," Xie Xida said, "that I saw his Lordship and Brother Ying playing backgammon. I came up to greet them, and his Lordship made me stay."

Ximen Qing told Daian to bring a chair and invited Zhu Shinian to sit down. Cup and chopsticks were brought; Zhu sat down in the lower seat, and the cook brought something for him to eat. Ximen Qing had only one pie and a mouthful of soup. Li Ming was standing beside him, and he gave everything that was put before him to the young man to take away and eat. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Zhu Shinian and Han Daoguo each had a large bowl of soup, three large pastries, and four peach-blossom buns. They left one pie as ballast for the plate. Then all the food was cleared away and more wine was brought.

"Where did you leave him?" Xie Xida said to Zhu Shinian. "And how did you know I was here?"

"I searched everywhere for you," Zhu Shinian said, "and when I couldn't find you, I went to old Sun's place with Wang the Third. We met Master Xu Buyu. He borrowed the three hundred taels, but old Sun made a mistake in the contract."

"You must not put my name on it," Xie Xida said. "I will have nothing to do with it. You and old Sun are the guarantors and the commission will come to you. What mistake did you make?"

"I told him to write out the contract more or less indefinitely and make three conditions for repayment, but he didn't do so, and I made him write it out again."

"What were the three conditions?" Xie Xida said.,

"First, when the wind blows away the stone roller and kills a single goose in the sky. Secondly, when a fish jumps from the bottom of the river to the bank; and thirdly, when the stones in the riverbed are so water-logged that they fall to pieces. When those three things happened, he was to pay his debt."

"Well," Xie Xida said, "if he wrote that, it was indefinite enough.",

"It is not so indefinite as you think," Zhu Shinian said. "One day, if the weather is fine and the water low, and the authorities think fit to dig up the river, and the stones in the bed are broken by the workers with their tools, he will have to pay."

Everybody laughed. It was now growing dark and Ximen Qing told the boys to light the lanterns. They were sheep's horn lanterns, and very wonderfully made.

Yueniang sent Qitong and some soldiers with four boxes full of dainties. Ximen asked the boy if the ladies had finished their party, and who had told him to bring the things. "Great Mother told me to bring them for you to eat with your wine," Qitong said. "The ladies have not gone yet, and four acts of the play have been performed. My lady is entertaining her guests in the great hall. They are drinking there and watching the fireworks."

"Has anybody come to see the fireworks?" Ximen said.,

"There is a crowd at the gate," the boy told him.,

"I told four black-garbed soldiers to take their staves and keep order and not to allow the people to push one another about."

"Ping'an and the soldiers are keeping guard over the fireworks," Qitong said. "There is no disorder."

Ximen Qing gave orders that the table should be cleared and the boxes brought in. The cook brought some excellent fruit pasties. The two singing girls served wine. Ximen told Qitong to go home again. Then he and the others drank the warm wine, and enjoyed the delicacies Yueniang had sent. He told Li Ming and Wu Hui to sing the song of the lanterns. When the song was ended, they ate the pasties.

Han Daoguo was the first to go home. Ximen Qing told Laizhao to pull up the blinds downstairs and take out the fireworks. Ximen and his friends watched from the upper room, and sent word to Wang Liu'er, the singing girls, and the Beanpole to look on from below. Daian and Laizhao carried the firework to the middle of the street and there set light to it. People came crowding to see, shoulder to shoulder, for they were told that Ximen Qing was responsible for it.

Ying Bojue saw that Ximen Qing was a little tipsy. When the firework was burnt out, he went downstairs. Wang Liu'er was washing her hands. He dragged Xie Xida and Zhu Shinian away, without even waiting to say goodbye to his host.

"Where are you going, Uncles?" Daian said to him.,

"Foolish boy," Ying Bojue whispered. "I have told you before. If I don't go, they will stay and stay, and it will be awkward. If your father asks for me, say we have all gone."

When the fireworks were done, Ximen Qing asked where Bojue was. "Uncle Ying and Uncle Xie have both gone," Daian said. "I tried to stop them, but they would not stay. They told me to thank you for them."

Ximen Qing said no more. He gave a great cup of wine to Li Ming and Wu Hui. "I am not giving you money today," he told them. "Come to me on the morning of the sixteenth. I am going to ask Uncle Ying and some of my friends that day."

"I must tell you, Father," Li Ming said, kneeling down, "that on the sixteenth, Wu Hui, Zuo Shun, Zheng Feng and I are all going to his Lordship Hu's place. Hu is the newly appointed governor of Dongpingfu. I am afraid we shall not be able to come until the evening."

"That is all right," Ximen said, "we are going to have our party in the evening, anyway. But you must not be too late."
The two boys promised. Then the two singing girls came to say goodbye. Ximen Qing said to them. "Tomorrow I am giving a party at my house to some ladies. Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er will be there, and I want you too."
The two singing girls agreed, and went home. Ximen Qing told Laizhao, Daian, and Qintong to clear everything away and blow out the lanterns and the lamps. Then he went to the back court. Little Iron Rod, who had been watching the fireworks, saw him come in. He ran upstairs, where his father was putting some food on a plate, with a jar of wine, and some pasties. These he took to another room. The boy asked his mother to give him some. But she boxed his ears twice and drove him out to play in the courtyard. He heard the sound of laughter coming from one of the rooms and thought it must be the singing girls. The door was shut, but he peeped through a crack. The room was brightly lighted by lamps and candles, and he could see Ximen Qing and Wang Liu'er busily engaged upon the bed. Ximen leaned the woman over the edge of the bed, stripped off her underwear, put the clasp over his thing and began work on the flower in the back court. Back and forth, in and out—how could he stop after only a few hundred thrusts? The sounds of their banging away were clearly audible. From their rapid breathing and their behavior it looked as though they wished to break the bed in pieces. The boy was looking on, when his mother caught him. She pulled him by the hair and dragged him to the frontcourt. There she boxed his ears and cursed him. "You root of trouble, you little slave!" she cried. "Do you wish to die that you stand there and watch them?" She gave him some fruits and sweets and kept him carefully indoors. The boy was frightened, climbed into his bed, and went to sleep.
Ximen Qing and Wang Liu'er enjoyed themselves for a long time. Daian gave food and wine to the sedan chair men, and they took Wang Liu'er home. Then he and Qitong lighted their lanterns and went home with Ximen Qing.

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### Because of the Missing Gold, Hsi-men Ch'ing Curses Chin-lien; As a Result of the Betrothal, Yüeh-niang Meets Mrs. Ch'iao & the Lost Bracelet

Scrutiny of the events of past and present can only induce sorrow;
The exalted and the humble alike return to a mere mound of earth.
Where are the occupants of the Jade Hall of Emperor Wu of the Han?[1]
Within the Golden Valley of Shih Ch'ung[2] the river flows aimlessly on.
Light and darkness continue to alternate as dawn turns into dusk;
The luxurious foliage of spring inexorably gives way to that of autumn.
Since mundane affairs like time itself will never end;
One might as well become a sojourner in the Land of Drunkenness.[3]

It was already the third watch by the time Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home. When he went back to the rear compound, he found that Wu Yüeh-niang had not yet gone to bed, but was sitting up with her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, and the others, having a chat. He also noticed that Li P'ing-erh was still in attendance, helping to serve the wine. As soon as Sister-in-law Wu saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, she moved into another room. Yüeh-niang, observing that he was inebriated, helped him off with his outer clothes and merely had Li P'ing-erh kowtow to him, after which they sat down together, and he asked a few questions about how things had gone at the party that day. After Yü-hsiao had served him with tea, because Sister-in-law Wu was there, he went to Meng Yü-lou's room to spend the night.
The next day, the chef arrived early in order to take care of the arrangements for the catered banquet. It was a day on which Hsi-men Ch'ing had to go to the yamen to perform the ceremonies of bowing before the imperial tablet and presiding over the general disposition of pending cases. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling saw him, he expressed his thanks for the pains he had expended for the entertainment of his wife the previous day.
"I fear the fare was extremely meager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Forgive me. Forgive me."
When he arrived home, he found that Ch'iao Hung's household had sent Auntie K'ung to escort a servant from Madame Ch'iao the Fifth's establishment, who delivered gifts of a jug of southern wine and four kinds of delicacies for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing accepted the gifts and saw that the servant was provided with food and wine. Auntie K'ung made her way to the rear compound where she was given a seat in Yüeh-niang's room. The sedan chair of Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, was the first to arrive, and after she had paid her respects to Yüeh-niang, she joined the others in keeping Auntie K'ung company while tea was served.
Just at this juncture, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth showed up with the sum of a thousand taels of silver that they had received in payment for the consignment of incense and wax that they had purveyed for the use of the imperial household and had arranged with Pen the Fourth to convey to Hsimen Ch'ing's residence from Tung-p'ing prefecture. When Ying Po-chüeh got wind of this, he also hurried over to assist in seeing it duly transferred to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Ch'en Ching-chi was ordered to weigh it out with a steelyard in the reception hall, and when this process was completed, it was put away for safekeeping. They still owed Hsi-men Ch'ing five hundred taels of capital and a hundred and fifty taels of interest. On this occasion, Huang the Fourth brought out four gold bracelets, weighing thirty ounces altogether, as payment of the hundred and fifty taels of interest and proposed that they renegotiate the contract for the remainder of the debt.
"Wait until after the Lantern Festival is over," Hsi-men Ch'ing told the two of them. "You can come back and discuss it then. I'm tied up at home for the next few days."
At this, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth, reiterating, "Your Honor this, and Your Honor that," went out the gate with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.
Ying Po-chüeh, preoccupied with the thought that since they had promised him something in the way of a karmic encumbrance, this would be a good opportunity to ask them about it, wanted to follow after them, but Hsi-men Ch'ing called him to a halt in order to have a word with him.
"Yesterday," he proceeded to ask, "how come the three of you ran off that way, before anyone was aware of it, without telling me what you were doing? I sent a page boy after you, but he fell behind and was unable to catch up with you."
"Yesterday," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I fear we imposed upon you egregiously and consumed more than enough wine. When I saw that you were in your cups and recalled that your wife was entertaining today and must be waiting up to discuss things with you, I realized that if we didn't take ourselves off, there was no telling how late we would keep at it. As it is, my guess would be that you haven't made it to the yamen today. You've been wearing yourself out for days on end."[4]
"By the time I got home yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was already the third watch. Today I had to go to the yamen early to participate in the ceremony of bowing before the imperial tablet, take my place in court, and preside over the general disposition of pending cases, as well as spending some time on other public business. At the moment I'm preoccupied with the preparations for the party for the womenfolk here at home. And later today, after coming back from offering incense at the temple in connection with the *chiao* rites in celebration of the Festival of the First Prime, I've got to go to a party at the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu. Who knows what time it will be before I get home."
"It's a good thing you've got the temperament for it," said Ying Po-chüeh. Such great good fortune as yours, and I'm not just flattering you to your face, is something that nobody else could hope to handle."
The two of them talked for a while, and Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to keep him there to share a meal with him, but Ying Po-chüeh said, "I won't have anything to eat. I'm on my way."
"Why hasn't your wife shown up for the party?" Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask.
"The sedan chair for my wife has already been ordered," Ying Po-chüeh said. "She'll be here any minute now."
Whereupon, raising his hand in salute and saying goodbye, he went out the gate and hastened after Li Chih and Huang the Fourth. Truly:
Even if you command the art of driving the fog and mounting the clouds;[5]
You cannot hope to obtain fire by drilling ice[6] without the aid of money.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off Ying Po-chüeh, he fondled the four blazing yellow gold bracelets in his hand, which he found to be very worthy of admiration.
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"This baby boy that Sister Li has borne is certainly starting out on a firm footing. No sooner was he born than I had this official position unexpectedly conferred upon me, and now I have formed a marriage alliance with the Ch'iao family, and made all this money to boot."
Thereupon, he secreted the four gold bracelets in his sleeve and, instead of going back to the rear compound, went straight into the garden, headed for Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
Just as he passed by the postern gate of P'an Chin-lien's quarters, Chin-lien happened to come out and, catching sight of him, called him to a halt, saying, "What's that you've got in hand there? Come over and let me have a look."
"Wait until I come back," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll let you see what it is then."
Whereupon, carrying his burden as before, he continued on his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
The woman, on seeing that she had failed to call him back, was more than a little mortified and said, "What sort of rare object could it be that he should be in such a frightful hurry over, refusing to let me see it? May he break his leg, the lousy three-inch good-for-nothing of a ruffian! When he sets foot on her threshold, may he come a cropper, fracture both his legs, and thereby:
Suffer the consequences before my very eyes."
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, carrying the gold bracelets in hand, went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and saw that she had just finished combing her hair, and that the wet nurse was holding the baby and playing with him. He went straight over to them and, putting the four gold bracelets into the baby's hands, encouraged him to play with them.
"Where did those come from?" Li P'ing-erh asked. "I'm afraid they may be too cold for his hands."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her all about how Li Chih and Huang the Fourth had shown up that day in order to repay the silver they had borrowed from him, and that he had agreed to accept these gold bracelets in lieu of interest. Li P'ing-erh, fearful lest the baby's hands should be chilled, insisted on chafing the bracelets with a figured handkerchief before letting him continue to play with them.
Whom should they see at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and reported, "Manager Yün Li-shou has ridden over with two horses and is waiting outside. He'd like Father to go out and take a look at them."
"Where did Manager Yün come by these horses?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"He says that his elder brother, Assistant Regional Commander Yün, sent the horses from his post on the frontier," replied Tai-an. "He claims that they can really step along pretty well."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou, accompanying Sister-in-law Wu, and her daughter-in-law, Third Sister Cheng, who had all come from the rear compound to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see Kuan-ko.
Hsi-men Ch'ing left the four gold bracelets behind and went out to the main gate to see the horses.
On observing that a crowd of visitors had arrived, Li P'ing-erh was so preoccupied by the need to greet them and offer them seats that she forgot what the baby was doing. He continued to play with the gold bracelets, pulling them about this way and that, until one of them got lost in the process.
At this juncture, the wet nurse, Ju-i, said to Li P'ing-erh, "Mother, did you happen to pick up one of the gold bracelets the baby was playing with? There are only three of them left, so one of them is missing."
"I haven't picked any of them up," said Li P'ing-erh, "but I wrapped them in a handkerchief for him."
"The handkerchief has also fallen on the floor," said Ju-i. "I've shaken it out, but the gold bracelet is nowhere to be found."
At this, consternation broke out in the room. The wet nurse interrogated Ying-ch'un, and Ying-ch'un, in turn, interrogated Old Mother Feng.
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" Old Mother Feng exclaimed. "I'm not so blind as to be unable to see anything. In all the years I've been here, I've never presumed to pick up so much as a broken needle. As Mother knows perfectly well, even if it were made of gold, it wouldn't be anything I'm enamored of. It's you two who are in charge of looking after the baby. You'd better not try to pin any unjust accusations on me."
"Just listen to the nonsense this old crone talks," laughed Li P'ing-erh. "If the missing object weren't gold, what would all the fuss be about?"
She also took Ying-ch'un to task, saying, "You lousy little stinker! Why are you making such a to-do about it for no good reason? When your father comes in, I'll ask him about it. I imagine he may have picked it up, but I don't know why he only picked up one of them."
"Where did this gold object come from?" asked Meng Yü-lou.
"Father brought it in and gave it to the baby to play with," replied Li P'ingerh. "Who knows where it came from?"
Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing would spend some time looking over the horses in front of the main gate. His managers and servants were all gathered there. He had page boys ride the horses back and forth and put them through their paces for two trial runs.
"Although these two horses may come from the Eastern Circuit," opined Hsi-men Ch'ing, "their manes and tails are not much to look at, and they can't really step along as well as they should. When it comes to trotting, they do all right, but that's all."
Turning to Manager Yün, he asked, "How much does your elder brother want for these horses?"
"He's only asking seventy taels of silver for the two of them," replied Yün Li-shou.
"That's not a lot to ask," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but they don't seem able to really step along. You'd better take them back with you. If you happen to come up with any better horses in the future, ride them over. I won't haggle about the price."
When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing came inside.
Whom should he see at this juncture but Ch'in-t'ung, who had come looking for him, saying, "The Sixth Lady would like to see you in her quarters."
Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she asked him, "Did you, by any chance, take one of those gold bracelets with you? There are only three of them here now."
"I left them behind when I went outside to look at the horses," said Hsimen Ch'ing. "Who could have taken it?"
"If you didn't take it," said Li P'ing-erh. "Where could it have gotten to? We've been looking for it all this time, and it's nowhere to be found. The wet nurse tried to blame it on Old Mother Feng, who is so upset that:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
all she can do is cry."
"Who could actually have taken it?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let it be for now. You can search for it at your leisure."
"I was going to start looking for it just now," said Li P'ing-erh, "but because I was interrupted when the people from the rear compound, along with Sister-in-law Wu and her daughter-in-law, dropped in, I forgot all about it. I imagined that you must have taken it when you went out. Who could have known that you didn't take it after all, so the matter has been doubly delayed. When I did start to search for it, it frightened everyone off."
Thereupon, she returned the three remaining bracelets to Hsi-men Ch'ing for safe keeping.
Just at this juncture, Pen the Fourth arrived with a hundred taels of newly minted silver to turn over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who went to the rear compound to see to weighing it out and putting it away.
To resume our story, when P'an Chin-lien heard that there had been a ruckus in Li P'ing-erh's quarters over the disappearance of a gold bracelet that the baby was playing with:
Before she even got wind of anything,
She was ready for the rain,
and headed straight for the master suite to tell Yüeh-niang about it, saying, "Elder Sister, just see what that three-inch good-for-nothing has been up to! No matter how rich you may be, you ought not to give gold objects to children to play with."
"Someone just told me about it," said Yüeh-niang. "They say that her quarters have been turned upside down, and that they can't find a gold bracelet. I really don't know where this gold bracelet came from."
"Who knows where it came from?" said Chin-lien. "You didn't see it, but, a little while ago, he brought it in from outside, concealing it in the sleeve of his jacket, for all the world as if it were a case of:
The Eight Tribes coming to offer their tribute.
I asked him what it was and said, 'Bring it over here so I can have a look at it.' But, without even turning his head, he took off straight for her quarters as though his life depended on it. A little while later, pandemonium broke out, and it was claimed that a gold bracelet had disappeared. The way she explained it to that three-inch good-for-nothing, all he had to say was, 'Let it be for now. You can search for it at your leisure.'
Even if you were as rich as Moneybags Wang,
That wouldn't do.
A gold object like that must weigh some ten ounces at the least, and be worth fifty or sixty taels of silver. And you'd let it go at that, for no good reason!
If a pet turtle should escape from the jar,
It could only be with the connivance of someone at hand.
Who else would have had access to her quarters?"
As she was speaking, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who came in after weighing and putting away the newly minted silver that Pen the Fourth had brought.
Turning over the three remaining gold bracelets to Yüeh-niang to be put away, he explained to her, "These are four gold bracelets that Li Chih and Huang the Fourth paid me in lieu of interest on a loan I made to them. I gave them to the baby to play with, but one of them has disappeared."
Then he instructed Yüeh-niang, "I want you to call out the maidservants from each person's quarters and subject them to an interrogation. I've sent a page boy out on the street to buy a wolf's sinew.[7] If the missing object is promptly produced, I'll leave it at that. But if it is not, I'll start applying the wolf's sinew."
"If you consider the matter," said Yüeh-niang, "gold objects like these should not be handed over to a baby. They're heavy and might give him a chill. And what would you do if it should ever happen that his hands or feet should be crushed?"
P'an Chin-lien, from her vantage point to one side, picked up where Yüeh-niang had left off, saying, "You ought not to have given them to the baby to play with, indeed! Your only regret was that you couldn't get them into her quarters fast enough. When I called to you a while ago, you wouldn't so much as turn your head, but acted just like a red-eyed soldier protecting his loot, not wanting anyone to know what you were up to. And now that one of the gold bracelets has disappeared, it's a wonder you have the face to come and complain to Elder Sister, instructing her to interrogate the maidservants from each of our quarters. As for the maidservants from our quarters:

If they don't laugh at you with their mouths,
They'll certainly laugh through their cunts."
These few words upset Hsi-men Ch'ing so much that he strode forward, bent Chin-lien over Yüeh-niang's k'ang, and, brandishing his fist, cursed her, saying, "How hateful can you get! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, you little splay-legged whore, I'd finish you off with a few blows of my fist. You're never anything but:
Bad-mouthed and sharp-tongued,[8]
sticking your foot in where it's none of your business."
P'an Chin-lien, putting on quite a scene, began to cry, saying, "I'm well aware that:
Relying on your office to flaunt your power, and
Depending on your wealth to play the master,
you have hardened your heart against me. I seem to be the only person you take advantage of. No doubt the idea of taking a person's, or even half a person's, life doesn't carry any weight with you. Well, what's holding you back? Go ahead and beat me. I'm right here, at your disposal. No matter how badly you beat me, chances are I'll still retain a breath of life. But if I should die, never fear but that my frail old mother will demand that you pay the penalty. No matter how much money and influence your household may have, she'll lodge a complaint against you. You may think yourself immune as a judicial commissioner in the yamen, but what will that avail you? You're no more than an impoverished functionary, hiding under an empty shell of debt and the battered silk hat of an official. How many charges of murder do you think you can sustain? For that matter, even the emperor would hardly dare to murder his subordinates with impunity."
These few words, contrary to expectation, produced a guffaw of laughter from Hsi-men Ch'ing, who sputtered out, "Why you! This actually. You little splay-legged whore! What a wicked mouth you've got! You say I'm an impoverished functionary hiding under the battered silk hat of an official. Have a maidservant bring out that silk hat of mine. Just where does it show any signs of wear? You may ask around here in this district of Ch'ing-ho whether I'm indebted to anyone or not, though you say that I'm an empty shell of debt."
"How can you call me splay-legged?" Chin-lien demanded to know, lifting one of her legs into the air. "Just take a look at my leg here and tell me what's crooked about it. You may abuse me for being splay-legged, but there's nothing wrong with these legs of mine."
Yüeh-niang, from her vantage point to one side, laughed, saying, "The two of you are like:
A brass basin meeting up with a steel brush.[9]
As the saying goes:
One wicked person will be ground down upon encountering another;[10]
Upon encountering such another person he will be utterly undone.[11]
It has always been true that:
It is the strongmouthed who get ahead.
Luckily for you, Sixth Sister, you've got that mouth of yours. Otherwise, if you were slow of speech, you'd never make it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, realizing that he could not get the better of her, put on his outside clothes and started to leave, when he encountered Tai-an, who said, "Commandant Chou's household has sent someone to urge you on your way. The horse is ready for you. Let me ask, are you planning to go participate in the *chiao* ceremonies first, or are you going straight to Commandant Chou's place?"
"As for the *chiao* ceremonies," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "have my son-in-law go in my stead and then come right home after burning some incense. You can look to my horse. I might as well go straight to the party at Commandant Chou's place."
Turning to Shu-t'ung, he said, "Fetch my official cap and girdle."
As he was putting these on and fastening his girdle, what should he see but the two instructors from the dramatic troupe belonging to Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, leading the whole troupe in to kowtow to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Shu-t'ung to see that they were fed, and said to them, "All of you do your best to entertain the ladies today, and I will see that you are properly rewarded. There's no need for you to go before them and pass the collection box around."[12]
The two instructors knelt down and said, "If we don't do our best to entertain them, how could we expect a reward?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Shu-t'ung, "They will have been performing for two days. Including the gratuity, set aside five taels of silver as their remuneration."
"I understand," Shu-t'ung assented.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to mount his horse and set off to attend the party at Commandant Chou Hsiu's place.
Let us return to the story of P'an Chin-lien, who continued to sit in the master suite, keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu.
Wu Yüeh-niang then said to her, "You'd better go back to your quarters and redo your makeup, hadn't you? You've rubbed your eyes until they're all red. In a little while the guests will arrive, and you'll only make a spectacle of yourself. Whoever taught you to cross him that way? I actually broke into a sweat on your behalf. If I hadn't been there to dissuade him, even without any other funny business, you'd have suffered a few blows on your body for sure.
The male of the species has dog's hair growing on his face.[13]
But, just as though you:
Didn't know any better,[14]
you adamantly insisted on picking a quarrel with him. If a gold bracelet has disappeared, let it go at that. Whether to look for it or not is not up to you. After all, it wasn't in your quarters that it disappeared. Why should you stick your neck out and try to tough it out with him, for no good reason? You're just wasting your breath."
With these few words, she succeeded in reducing Chin-lien to silence, and she returned to her quarters to redo her makeup.
A little while later, Li P'ing-erh, along with Wu Yin-erh, both of them in formal dress, came into Yüeh-niang's room, and she asked them, "How did that gold bracelet come to disappear? Just now, it was the occasion for a real altercation between Father and Sister Six, in which they became so upset with each other they almost came to blows. I had to intervene between them, after which Father went off to attend a party at someone's place. He has ordered a page boy to buy a wolf's sinew, and when he gets home this evening, he's going to apply it to the maidservants from each of our quarters. What were the maidservants and Old Mother Feng in your quarters doing? If they were watching the baby play, how could a gold bracelet disappear just like that? After all, it's not as though it were a mere bauble, worth a candareen, or half a candareen, or anything like that"
"Father just happened, out of the blue, to come in carrying four gold bracelets," said Li P'ing-erh, "and gave them to the baby to play with. I was busy talking to Sister-in-law Wu and Third Sister Cheng, who had come for a visit along with the Second Lady. Who knows how one of the bracelets happened to disappear? Right now, the maidservants are blaming the wet nurse, and the wet nurse is blaming Old Mother Feng, who is so upset by it all that, weeping and wailing, she is threatening to commit suicide. It is one of those things that is:
Difficult to clear up without eyewitnesses.[15]
As things stand, whom would it be appropriate to blame?"
"My Heavens!" exclaimed Wu Yin-erh. I have played with the baby often enough. It's a good thing that today I was in another room of Mother's combing my hair and hadn't come over yet. Otherwise, I'd be implicated too. Even if Father and Mother were not to say anything about it, how could we help being ill at ease with each other? After all:
Who is there who doesn't care about money?
We denizens of the licensed quarter are particularly sensitive about such things. If such an imputation were to be noised abroad, it wouldn't bear listening to."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh, who came in carrying their costume bags with them.
With ingratiating smiles, they kowtowed first to Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and Li P'ing-erh, after which they stood up and made a bow to Wu Yinerh, saying, "Sister Wu, you must have come yesterday, without returning home."
"How did the two of you come to know that?" asked Wu Yin-erh.
"Yesterday," said Tung Chiao-erh, "the two of us were singing in the house on the Lantern Market, and His Honor mentioned it. He told us to come and sing today, in order to entertain the ladies."
Yüeh-niang then invited the two of them to take a seat. In a little while, Hsiao-yü brought in two cups of tea, at which Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh hastily stood up to accept the tea and responded to Hsiao-yü with a bow.
Wu Yin-erh then asked, "How late did the two of you sing yesterday before the party broke up?"
"It was already past the second watch by the time we got home," said Han Yü-ch'uan. "We came back to the quarter along with your brother and Li Ming."
After they had chatted for a bit, Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "See to it that the tea is served as soon as possible. In a little while, I fear that we will have our hands full when the guests arrive."
A table was then set up, and two square containers, each holding four boxes of delicacies, were placed upon it.
Yüeh-niang then directed Hsiao-yü, "Go to the Second Lady's quarters and invite Li Kuei-chieh to come and have tea with us."
Before long, she appeared, accompanied by her aunt, and the two of them saluted the company, sat down, and joined them for tea, after which the tea things were cleared away.
Who should suddenly appear at this point but Ying-ch'un, all dressed up and carrying Kuan-ko, whose head was adorned with a gilt-ridged satin cap decorated with the eight auspicious symbols, whose body was clad in a loosely cut crimson robe, and whose lower limbs were dressed in white damask socks and satin shoes. On his chest an amulet on its cord was displayed, and on his hands he was wearing little gold bracelets.
When Li P'ing-erh saw him, she said, "Little gentleman, no one invited you. What are you doing here?"
Then, taking him from the maidservant, she placed him on her knee, from which vantage point he surveyed the roomful of people, looking uninterruptedly, first at one of them and then at another.
Li Kuei-chieh, who was sitting on Yüeh-niang's k'ang, smiled and, playfully teasing the baby for the fun of it, said, "The child keeps looking over here. It must be that he wants me to hold him."
Thereupon, she reached out to him with her hands, and the baby fell into her arms and allowed her to hold him.
Sister-in-law Wu laughed at this, saying, "Such a wee bit of a child, but he already knows how to demonstrate his affections."
Yüeh-niang, picking up on this, said, "Who is his father, after all? In the future, when he grows up, he's sure to be a little lady-killer."
"If he turns into a little lady-killer," said Meng Yü-lou, "his First Mother will have to give him a real spanking."
"My child," said Li P'ing-erh, "while your elder sister is holding you, see that you don't go wee-wee on her clothes, or you'll get the spanking of your life, quick enough."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "What is there to worry about? If he goes wee-wee, what of it? It doesn't matter. I just love holding Little Brother and playing with him."
Whereupon, she continued to play with him, nuzzling him mouth to mouth.
Who should appear at this juncture but P'an Chin-lien,[16] who came in to join the group.
Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan got up from their seats to greet her and then sat down, saying, "The two of us have been here some time already, but we haven't sung a single song to entertain the ladies, as yet."
Then, turning to the maidservant, they said, "Sister Hsiao-yü, if you fetch our musical instruments, we can perform a song."
Hsiao-yü then fetched a psaltery and a *p'i-p'a* and handed them over to the two of them. Thereupon, with Han Yü-ch'uan[17] playing the *p'i-p'a*, Tung Chiao-erh playing the psaltery, and Wu Yin-erh chiming in from the side, they proceeded to sing the song suite, the second song of which begins with the words:
Luxuriant blossoms spread before my eyes,[18]
to the tune "A Golden Chain Hangs from the Phoenix Tree." The very first line that they sang, truly possessed:
A timbre that causes dust to fall and lingers around the rafters:
A sound that causes rocks to split and sets the clouds in motion.
Kuan-ko was so frightened by the noise that he hid his face in Li Kuei-chieh's bosom:
Not daring to raise his head,[19]
or take another breath.
When Yüeh-niang saw what was happening, she called out, "Sister Li, you'd better take the child, and have Ying-ch'un take him back to your room. What a hopeless little rascal. Just see how frightened his face looks."
Li P'ing-erh promptly took the child and said to Ying-ch'un, "Cover up his ears and take him into another room."
Thereupon, the four entertainers, singing in ensemble, proceeded with the performance of the song suite on which they had embarked.
Luxuriant blossoms spread before my eyes;
My embroidered quilt pointlessly remains.
That wretched lover of mine has treated me altogether too cruelly.
In my last incarnation I must have owed him a love debt due in this life.[20]
Neglecting to sleep, forgetting to eat;[21]
Lingering at the door I wait for him.[22]
The bedchamber is silent;[23] how am I ever to endure it?
To the tune "Cursing One's Lover":
Coldly deserted, the bedchamber is silent; how am I ever to endure it?
All by myself I lean against the screen.
Who knows what his feelings may be.
I recall how originally, we walked together, sat together,[24] and rejoiced together.
But now, left all alone, how am I to cope with the situation?
In my desolation, I am too listless to pour wine;
In my discomfiture, I am too lazy to wear flowers.
To the tune "Wen-chou Song":
I am too lazy to wear flowers;
I am too listless to pour wine.
Now, though we make a swallow's tryst or oriole's assignation, he fails to come.
It must be that he is somewhere else, somewhere else, seeking gratification.
His keepsakes are here, but where is he?[25]
In vain do I task my dreaming soul[26] to transport me to the Radiant Terrace.
All I can do is let the tears cover my cheeks.
To the tune "Moved by Imperial Favor":
Ah! All I can do is let two streams of tears cover my cheeks.[27]
It must be that it is something determined by fate.[28]
No doubt your destiny is meager, and my allotment is shallow.
It must be that our fortunes are askew and the times out of joint.[29]
How can we avoid the trouble caused by the gossip of idle folk;
Who employ artful schemes to frustrate us;

Tearing to shreds our girdle of communion;[30]
Insistently separating the phoenix hairpins;
And inundating the Radiant Terrace of Ch'u?
To the tune "Needlework Box":
The strings of my musical instruments are covered with dust.
The twin peaks of my eyebrows remain knitted.
My fragrant flesh is emaciated,[31] due to this hopeless sorrow.
Too listless for embroidery,
I sit by my dressing mirror.
Beset by old resentment and new sorrow,[32]
How am I ever to endure it?
My only fear is lest the butterfly ambassadors and bee go-betweens[33] not return.
Confronting the phoenix mirror, I ask, "If my pink cheeks were unaltered,[34]
Would he already have had a change of heart?"
To the tune "Tea-picking Song":
My pink cheeks have been altered, my body has become emaciated.
Coldly deserted, how am I ever to endure it?
My only fear is that Liang Shan-po is no longer enamored of his Chu Ying-t'ai.[35]
If he should perfidiously break faith and forget favor,[36] seeking a pretext to criticize me,
I'll bring up the oaths we swore by the hills and seas,[37] reiterating them in clear-cut terms.
To the tune "Relieving Three Hangovers":
He has utterly forgotten the oaths we swore by the hills and seas.
He has utterly forgotten the promised letters which he has not sent.
He has utterly forgotten the kindness and love shared at my pillow side.
He has utterly forgotten the intimate contact of our unclothed bodies.
He has utterly forgotten the thousands of times we bowed before the gods.
He has utterly forgotten my keepsake, a fragrant silk red embroidered shoe.
If I were to mention it, even bystanders would find their cheeks flooded with pearly tears.[38]
To the tune "Crows Cry at Night":
Right now, having been disunited for three months, it feels like a separation of years.
If we are to meet again, on what day of what year[39] will it ever take place?
As for me, I am so utterly emaciated my body is like a stick of kindling.[40]
When will I ever pay back completely the love debt I owe from my last life?
I fail to see any blue bird conveying his love letter.[41]
The dog Yellow Ear has brought no news.[42]
Every day I am sick with depression, too lazy to sit by my dressing mirror.
But if we are ever reunited, we will sacrifice a consecrated lamb.
Our affinities will be fulfilled;
Our hearts be mutually inclined.
We will soon become as inseparable as male and female phoenix mates;[43]
And thereby avoid derisive butterflies and suspicious honeybees.[44]
CODA:
The scene is assuredly set.
My lover, sooner or later,
will surely return;
And as loving husband and wife[45] we will live happily ever after.[46]
While the four singing girls were still performing, whom should they see come in but Tai-an.
Yüeh-niang asked him, "Why is it that the group of ladies you went to invite still haven't shown up?"
"When I went to Kinswoman Ch'iao's place for that purpose," said Taian, "the wives of Censor Chu and Provincial Graduate Shang had already forgathered there and were only awaiting the arrival of Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, before setting out to come here."
Yüeh-niang instructed him, "Tell the page boy P'ing-an to keep a lookout at the main gate and come in to give us advance notice as soon as the sedan chairs of the ladies arrive."
"Drum music will be struck up to welcome them, both at the front gate and in the main reception hall," said Tai-an, "so you will have ample time to prepare to receive them."
Yüeh-niang further instructed Tai-an, "See to it that brocade carpets are laid down in the parlor of the rear reception hall, that the seats are properly arranged, and that the blinds are rolled up."
Golden curtain hooks are hung in pairs;[47]
The fragrance of orchid and musk swirls.[48]
Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang were all dressed up for the occasion. The wives of the servants were all:
Studded with gold and decked with silver;
Sporting red and trailing green;
as they prepared to receive their new relatives by marriage.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh's wife, whose sedan chair was the first to arrive, escorted by Ying Pao. Yüeh-niang and the others welcomed her in, and, after the customary amenities had been exchanged, she took a seat in the parlor.
Bowing repeatedly to Yüeh-niang, she said, "My husband is constantly imposing upon you, I fear. We are grateful for your patronage."
"How can you say such a thing?" Yüeh-niang responded. "We are much indebted to the help of Master Ying the Second."
After some time, what should they hear but the approach of an escort shouting to clear the way, and as:
Drums and music began to sound,
in the front reception hall, P'ing-an came in to report that Madame Ch'iao's sedan chair had arrived. In no time at all, the whole area was rendered black by the number of servitors accompanying the five large sedan chairs as they came to rest at the front gate. The sedan chair of Madame Ch'iao, the widow of Ch'iao the Fifth, was in the van. It had a silver finial on top, from which pearls were suspended; was invested in an ultramarine, double-fringed, gold lamé, waterproof canopy; and was accompanied by an escort of retainers, armed with rattan canes, who shouted to clear the way. Behind it came the wives of her servants, ensconced in smaller sedan chairs; four commandants, bearing her dressing case and brazier; and two black-clad servants, riding on ponies. The remainder of the procession consisted of the wife of Ch'iao Hung, Censor Chu's wife, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Ts'ui Pen's wife, Big Sister Tuan, and the wife of Ch'iao T'ung, the head servant in Ch'iao Hung's household, who accompanied her mistress in a smaller sedan chair, in order to look after her clothes.
Wu Yüeh-niang was attired in a full-sleeved robe of scarlet variegated satin, decorated with a motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions[49] paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*.[50] Around her waist she wore a girdle of gold inlaid with assorted jewels. On her head:
Her chignon was of an imposing height;
Phoenix pins protruded to either side;
And pearls and trinkets rose in piles.
On her breast:
Gold pendants hung on embroidered cords;
And a profusion of amulets scintillated.
Beside her skirt were suspended:
Decorative pendants of lustrous pearls.
Along with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Sun Hsüeh-o, all of whom were dressed up to look as though they were:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,
Producing brocade effects that dazzle the eye,
Wu Yüeh-niang came out as far as the gate that led into the second courtyard to greet their guests.
What should they see but the crowd of female guests, gathered around Madame Ch'iao the Fifth as she made her entrance. She was petite in stature, more than seventy years old, wore a head-dress bedecked with kingfisher feathers, jewels, and pearls, and a scarlet robe decorated with palace-style embroidery. When looked at close up, it was apparent that her hair was all white. Truly:
Her eyebrows are two streaks of snow,
Her chignon is tied into a bag of silk;
Her eyes resemble autumn waters, somewhat disturbed,
Her hair is like the hills of Ch'u, veiled in clouds.[51]
Once she had been ushered into the rear reception hall, she first exchanged salutations with Sister-in-law Wu and after that proceeded to do the same with Yüeh-niang and the others.
Yüeh-niang reiterated, "Madame, pray accept my salutation," but her guest refused to accede, and it was only after they had dickered politely for a while that she agreed to accept a half kowtow from her.
After that, Yüeh-niang proceeded to exchange the courtesies appropriate between new relatives by marriage with Ch'iao Hung's wife, each of them in turn expressing her satisfaction with their new relationship and thanking the other for the lavish gifts they had received.
When these amenities were concluded, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth was ushered to the place of honor, where she was invited to take her seat upon a chair covered with a brocade cushion in front of a standing brocade screen.
Ch'iao Hung's wife was invited to take the seat next to hers, but she repeatedly demurred, saying, "As the wife of Madame's nephew, I could scarcely presume to take such a liberty."
She deferred to the wives of Censor Chu and Provincial Graduate Shang, but the two of them also declined, and it was only after they had dickered politely for some time that Madame Ch'iao the Fifth consented to take her place in the seat of honor, and the rest of the company sat down in two rows, with the guests on the east and the hosts on the west.
In the center of the room was a large square box stove in which a fire was blazing, so that:
The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring.[52]
The four maidservants, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, all of whom were dressed in jackets of scarlet figured satin, blue gold lamé skirts, and green brocaded vests, waited upon the company and served them with tea.
After some time, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth said to Yüeh-niang, "Why not invite His Honor Hsi-men to come out and meet us, so we can exchange the courtesies appropriate to relatives by marriage."
"My poor husband has had to go to the yamen to conduct public business today," explained Yüeh-niang, "and he hasn't come home yet."
"What office does His Honor hold?" asked Madame Ch'iao the Fifth.
"Though nothing but:
A humble villager,"
said Yüeh-niang, "thanks to our sovereign's grace, he has been granted a substantive appointment as battalion commander, and currently occupies a post in the legal system. For our humble household to aspire to a marriage alliance with these relatives of yours is truly presumptuous."
"How can you talk that way?" responded Madame Ch'iao the Fifth. "Such an exalted position as His Honor has achieved is more than sufficient. The other day when I heard that the daughter of my nephew had been betrothed to the scion of your household, my heart was filled with delight. Today I have come in order to get acquainted, so that we will be comfortable addressing each other on social occasions in the future."
"My only fear is," said Yüeh-niang, "that such an alliance can only detract from your reputation."
"What kind of talk is that?" replied Madame Ch'iao the Fifth. "Do you suppose that the sovereign himself never deigns to form marriage alliances with commoners?
It's a long story;[53]
but the honored consort, née Cheng, of the present emperor, who resides in the Eastern Palace, happens to be a niece of mine.[54] Her father and mother are both dead, so I am the only relative she has left. When my old man was still alive he held the hereditary title of commander, but, unfortunately, he died without issue at the age of forty-nine, so the title passed to a nephew of his from another branch of the family. As for this nephew of mine, although he didn't have any money to start with, he has now become a well-to-do householder. Although he may have started out as a corvée laborer, he now has enough to live on quite comfortably, so he would not detract in any way from the reputation of your family."
After they had talked for some time, Sister-in-law Wu said to Yüeh-niang, "Why don't you have the baby brought out so our venerable visitor can have a look at him and he can solicit a share of her longevity?"
Li P'ing-erh hastily went back to her room and told the wet nurse, "Bring Kuan-ko out so he can pay his respects to Madame Ch'iao."
When Madame Ch'iao saw him, she exclaimed hyperbolically, "What a perfectly formed little fellow!"
Then, calling over one of her attendants, she opened her felt bag and took out a length of purple brocade material, shot with yellow, of the kind purveyed for use in the palace, and a pair of gilded bracelets for the child to wear.
Yüeh-niang hastily got up from her place to thank her, and then invited her to retire to her boudoir in order to change her clothes.
Before long, four tables were set up in the summerhouse in the front garden, where tea was to be served. Upon each table were arrayed forty saucers of every kind of condiment and sweetmeat, mouth-watering appetizers, steamed-shortcake pastries, and the finest deep-fried patisserie, while to either side maidservants and the wives of household retainers stood by to wait upon the company. But no more of this.
After they were finished with tea, Yüeh-niang opened the gate which led into the garden behind them, with its artificial hill, and they all went in for a tour of the premises. By that time Ch'en Ching-chi had come back from the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal, where he had stayed only for the noon vegetarian repast, and, along with Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, had made all the necessary preparations for the feast in the front reception hall, where the ladies were now invited to partake of wine and inaugurate the festivities. Truly it was a fine feast. Behold:

Screens display their peacocks' tails,
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.
Platters are piled with exotic fruits and rare viands,
Vases are studded with gold flowers and emerald leaves.[55]
Braziers burn animal-shaped briquettes,
Incense diffuses the odor of ambergris.[56]
The table service is an array of exotic antiques from Hsiang-chou;[57]
The hanging blinds are adorned with shining pearls from Ho-p'u.[58]
White jade saucers are piled high with preserved *ch'i-lin* meat;[59]
Golden flagons are filled to the brim with carnelian-hued nectar.
There are stewed chimpanzee lips,
And baked leopard embryos;
Truly, one has but to use one's chopsticks to exhaust ten thousand cash.
There are deep-fried dragon livers,
And roast phoenix marrow;
Indeed, when they are all displayed, seasonal delicacies abound.
The denizens of the Pear Garden,[60]
Crowd around with their phoenix pipes and phoenix flutes.[61]
The courtesans from the inner palace,
Urgently tune their silver psalteries and ivory clappers.[62]
The beauties proffering wine are duplicates of the Goddess of the Lo River;[63]
The incense-burning serving girls are replicas of Ch'ang-o, the Goddess of the Moon.[64]
Truly:
Two ranks of pearls and trinkets[65] are arrayed beneath the steps;
The tones of pipes and voices[66] hover about the banquet hall.[67]

In due course, Wu Yüeh-niang offered Li P'ing-erh a goblet of wine, and after the players beneath the steps had concluded a flourish of the drums, Madame Ch'iao and the rest of the assembled relatives toasted Li P'ing-erh and wished her a long life in honor of her birthday. The four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Han Yü-ch'uan, and Tung Chiao-erh, took their places before the company, struck up their instruments:

Patterned cithara, silver psaltery,
Jade-surfaced *p'i-p'a*, and
Clappers inlaid with red ivory,[68]

and sang the song suite that begins with the words:

May you live as long as the Southern Hills.[69]

After which, from beneath the steps:

Drums and music began to sound,

and the players presented the accordion-bound album listing the names of the dramas they were prepared to perform. Madame Ch'iao the Fifth instructed them to put on the play entitled *Wang Yüeh-ying Leaves her Shoe Behind on the Lantern Festival*.[70] The chef then came out and presented the minor entrée of roast goose, for which Madame Ch'iao rewarded him with five mace of silver.

By the time:

Five carved entrées had been consumed,
Three courses of soup had been served,

and the four scenes of the drama were concluded, it began to grow late.

Painted candles dispersed their light,
from mountainous banks of sconces; every variety of decorative taper was lit up.
Brocade sashes fluttered.[71]
Gaudy ropes hung pendulously.
The wheel of the bright moon,[72]
Arose out of the east, and
Illuminated the chamber,
Under the flickering lamplight.

Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu and Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang attended upon the company, each of them bearing a square platter of stuffed Lantern Festival dumplings. The tea that was served in cups inlaid with silver, provided with gold teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves, was flavored with rose hips and crystallized sugar and exuded a mouth-watering fragrance. The four senior maidservants, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang, divided the task of waiting upon the company between them:

Observing the demands of propriety,
Dignified and stately in demeanor.

Meanwhile, beneath the steps, the music started up again. Playing a *p'i-p'a*, a psaltery, and a mandola, accompanied by pipes and flutes, the musicians performed a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, beginning with the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows," the first line of which is:

Blossoms and moonlight pervade the spring metropolis.[73]

When the performance was over, Madame Ch'iao the Fifth and Ch'iao Hung's wife called the players before them and rewarded them with two packages, each of which contained a tael of silver. The four singing girls were also awarded two mace of silver apiece.

Yüeh-niang had also set up many saucers full of delicacies in the parlor of the master suite in the rear compound, where the guests were invited to retire after the formal entertainment was over. The four tables were loaded with refreshments.

The singers performed,
The musicians played,
and another round of wine was served.

Madame Ch'iao the Fifth repeatedly remarked that it was getting late, and that she should be on her way. Yüeh-niang and the others were unable to persuade her to stay any longer and accompanied her to the main gate, where she was detained for a parting cup of wine and invited to view the fireworks. The onlookers on either side of the street were as closely arrayed as:

Fish scales or swarming bees.

P'ing-an, together with a contingent of orderlies with sticks in hand, tried to hold back the crowds, but they surged forward repeatedly. After a little while, when a rack of fireworks had been set off, the onlookers to either side scattered. Only then did Madame Ch'iao the Fifth and the other ladies bid farewell to Yüeh-niang, mount their sedan chairs, and make their departure. By that time, it was already the third watch. Subsequently they also had to see Ying Pochüeh's wife on her way.

When Yüeh-niang and her sister wives returned to the rear compound, they instructed Ch'en Ching-chi, Lai-hsing, Shu-t'ung, and Tai-an to put away the tableware from the reception hall, see that the players and their two instructors were provided with food and wine, pay them five taels of silver for their services, and send them on their way.

Yüeh-niang gave instructions that the remaining table's worth of leftovers and half a jug of wine, should be set aside for the delectation of Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi.

"They must be worn out," she said. "Let them all have a drink together. Set up a table for them in the main reception hall. Who knows how late it will be before your father returns home."

Thereupon, there still remaining some lamps that had not burnt out, Manager Fu, Pen the Fourth, Ch'en Ching-chi, and Lai-pao took the positions of honor, while Lai-hsing, Shu-t'ung, Tai-an, and P'ing-an ranged themselves to either side, and the wine was poured.

Lai-pao called out, "P'ing-an, you ought to depute someone to cover the main gate, lest Father should return and find no one tending the door."

"I've told Hua-t'ung to take care of it," replied P'ing-an. "That's not a problem."

Thereupon the eight of them fell to playing at guess-fingers while drinking their wine.

"Let's not play at guess-fingers," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "If we:

Create such a commotion,

we'll only disturb the people in the rear compound. Let's quietly play a game of forfeits instead. Each player must come up with a line of poetry. Those who are able to do so will escape paying a forfeit, but those who fail to do so will have to drink a large cup of wine.

Manager Fu started off with the line:

How comical are the trappings of the Lantern Festival,

Pen the Fourth continued:

The occasions for pleasure in man's life are numbered.

Ch'en Ching-chi said:

Availing ourselves of this moonshine and lantern light,

to which Lai-pao responded:

We must, on no account, allow them to go unappreciated.

Lai-hsing said:

Our trysts with our girls may have failed to come off,

To which Shu-t'ung responded:

But we have complied with the wishes of the First Lady.

Tai-an said:

Though we have only leftover wine and waning lamplight,

and P'ing-an concluded:

It may still constitute "a fling in the spring breeze."

When the group of them had finished their joint composition, they broke into loud laughter. Truly:

After finishing their drinking, when the wine is exhausted and the party is over;[74]
There is no one to notice that the moonlight is illuminating the plum branches.

Sadness fills my heart
The love that came so lately soon has gone again
The past is past and nothing can bring it back.
Yellow chrysanthemums beside the fence
I know not whom your blossoms will delight
Wine for a time can banish sorrow
But sorrow returns before the wine is done.
I have waited long beside the balustrade.
The golden moonbeams slowly pass
And pure dew falls upon the dark green moss.

It was the third night watch when Ximen Qing returned. Wu Yueniang had not gone to bed. She was talking to Aunt Wu and the other ladies. Li Ping'er was there and offered wine to him. When Aunt Wu saw that Ximen had come, she went to her own room. Yueniang realized that Ximen was a little tipsy, but she took his cloak and told Li Ping'er to kowtow to him. Then they sat together for a while. He asked about the party, and Yuxiao brought tea. Then, seeing that Aunt Wu was staying in Yueniang's room, he went to sleep with Meng Yulou.

The next morning the cooks came early to prepare for the banquet. Ximen Qing went to his office to attend to the documents that needed to be dealt with. There Magistrate Xia thanked him. "My wife," he said, "enjoyed your very kind hospitality yesterday."

"I fear, the entertainment we could offer her was very poor," Ximen said, "I really should apologize." Then he went home.

Old woman Kong came before Lady Qiao the Fifth, and brought her presents. Ximen accepted them and gave a meal to all the servants. Old woman Kong went to rest in Yueniang's room. Then Miss Zheng came. She made a reverence to all the ladies and sat down to have tea.

Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth, having secured payment for their supplies of incense and wax, together with Ben the Fourth, brought the money from Dongpingfu. Ying Bojue was told of this and came with them to be present at the repayment of the debt. Ximen Qing told Chen Jingji to take a balance to the great hall and measure the silver. This was done and Ximen took the money. Huang the Fourth produced four gold bracelets weighing about thirty taels, and these were accepted as equal to a hundred and fifty taels of silver. They still owed Ximen about five hundred taels and asked to have their contract altered. "Come back after the festival," Ximen said to them, "and we will see about it. I am busy now." Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth addressed Ximen as "Old Father", thanked him very heartily, and went away.

Ying Bojue had not forgotten that the two men had promised him something for himself, and he thought this a very suitable opportunity to remind them of the fact. He was going out after them when Ximen Qing stopped him.

"Why did you three go away last night without saying a word to me?" he said.

"You were very hospitable yesterday," Bojue said. "I had a great deal to drink, and so had you. I knew you were going to have a party here today and that you would be wanted at home to make arrangements, so I thought we had better go. Today I suppose you have not been to your office; you must be very tired after your exertions."

"It was the third night watch when I returned," Ximen said, "but this morning I did go to the office to attend to some papers. I had a good deal of business there, and now I am hard at it getting ready for the banquet. I still have to go to the temple to offer the sacrifice appropriate to the festival and, after that, I have to go to Zhou Nanxuan's place for a party. I don't know how long it will take me."

"What powers of endurance you have," Ying Bojue said. "You really are a lucky fellow. I don't wish to flatter you, but I know no one else who could get through what you do."

They talked a while, then Ximen Qing invited Bojue to have a meal with him. Bojue excused himself.
"Why has your wife not come yet?" Ximen said.
"I ordered a sedan chair for her," Bojue said. "She must be on her way now." He made a reverence and went after Huang the Fourth and Li Zhi.
Ximen Qing examined the four golden bracelets and liked them very much. He thought of the luck that had lately come to him. Li Ping'er had borne him a son; he had been given an official appointment; he had betrothed his son to the baby Qiao, and now he had done an excellent piece of business. He put the gold bracelets in his sleeve and went to see Li Ping'er. As he passed Pan Jinlian's room, she came out.
"What have you there?" she called to him. "Come here and show me." Ximen said he would be back in a moment and went on to see Li Ping'er.
Jinlian was disappointed when she found that he would not stop. "I wonder what treasure he has there to make him so excited," she said to herself. "Well, if you won't show me, all right. You little whippetysnip of a rogue, you'll break your leg if you don't look out. And if you go to her room, may you break both legs!"
When Ximen Qing came to her room, Li Ping'er had just finished dressing her hair and the nurse was playing with the baby. Ximen let the child play with the bracelets.
"Where did you get them?" the Sixth Lady said. "Take care the baby doesn't make his hands cold."
"I got them from Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth," Ximen said.
Li Ping'er was afraid they would make the baby's hands cold, so she took an embroidered handkerchief, wrapped them in it and then allowed him to play with them.
Daian came. "Yun has brought some horses for you to see," he said to his master.
"Where have they come from?" Ximen asked.
"He says his brother, Colonel Yun, has sent them."
Then Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Aunt Wu and Miss Zheng came to see Guan'ge. Ximen Qing left the four bracelets and went to look at the horses. When all the ladies came in, Li Ping'er asked them to sit down and made a reverence to them, forgetting that the baby was still playing with the bracelets. After a while she discovered that one of them was missing. The nurse, Ruyi'er, said to her: "Have you one of those ornaments? I can only find three."
"No," Li Ping'er said, "I haven't one. I wrapped them all together in the handkerchief."
"Here is the handkerchief on the floor," Ruyi'er said, "but the other bracelet is not there."
There was immediately a terrible to-do. Ruyi'er questioned Yingchun, and Yingchun questioned old woman Feng.
"Ai ya, ai ya!" old woman Feng cried. "May I lose my sight if I have ever set eyes on them. All these years I've been coming here, I have never so much as touched a broken needle or a snapped thread. Your mother knows that I have never been greedy for gold. You are in charge of the baby. Why do you try to put the blame on me?"
Li Ping'er laughed. "Don't be so silly, old lady. But we have lost some gold ornaments." She turned to Yingchun. "Why are you making so much fuss about it, you rascal? We must wait until your master comes back. Probably he took it with him. But it is strange that he should only take one."
"What are you talking about?" Yulou asked.
"Our husband brought some gold ornaments here," Li Ping'er told her, "and he gave them to the baby to play with. That is all I know."
Ximen Qing went to the gate and looked at the horses. The servants were there, and he told the boys to put them through their paces.
"They may be Eastern horses," Ximen said, "but I don't think much of their condition. Besides, their action is anything but good. They can only walk. How much does your brother want for them?"
"Only seventy taels for the pair," Yun Lishou said.
"It is not a great amount," Ximen said, "but they can't trot. Take them back and wait till you get something with more style. Then let me know. It's not a question of price."
He went back to the house. A boy asked him to go and see Li Ping'er.
"Did you take away one of those gold ornaments?" she asked him. "There are only three here."
"I went to look at the horses," Ximen said, "I didn't take anything."
"Well, if you didn't, where has one of them gone? We have been looking for it everywhere."
"It was old woman Feng who took it," the nurse said. Old woman Feng began to cry and swore she had done nothing of the sort.
"Who did take it, then?" Ximen said. "Have another look for it."
"Aunt Wu and her sister-in-law came," the Lady of the Vass said, "and I asked them to sit down, forgetting all about the ornaments. I thought you must have taken it with you. So I never found out for a long time and, when I did, the ladies were upset and went away." She gave the other three bracelets to Ximen Qing.
Ben the Fourth came and gave a hundred taels to his master and Ximen went to the inner court to put the money away.
When she heard of the trouble in Li Ping'er's room, Jinlian, who could never leave ill alone, went to Yueniang and told her what she thought about it.
"Sister," she said, "see how that foolish thing behaves. No matter how rich he is, he should not give gold bracelets to the baby to play with."
"I have heard that a bracelet has been lost," Yueniang said, "but that's all. I have no idea what happened."
"Nor has anyone else," Jinlian said. "You didn't see him. I did. He came from the front court with those gold ornaments in his sleeve, looking like the eight barbarians on their way to pay tribute. I asked him what he had got there and would have looked at them, but he did not even turn his head. He dashed off to the Sixth Lady's room. Afterwards, I heard everybody talking about one of the things being lost. He had missed one and set them all looking for it. Even if he were as rich as Wang the Millionaire, he could not afford to throw gold away like this. Why, it must weigh ten taels and be worth at least fifty or sixty taels of silver. There will be a row about it yet. It is like a turtle escaping from a jar. The people in her room were all her own people, and she must take the responsibility for them."
As they were talking, Ximen Qing came in to give to Yueniang the hundred taels that Ben the Fourth had brought and the three remaining bracelets.
"I got these," he told his wife, "from Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth. There were four of them, but I gave them to the baby to play with and one is lost. I want you to send for all the maids in the house and question them. I am going to send a boy to the street for a piece of wolf's sinew. If the missing piece of gold is produced, well and good. Otherwise, I shall make good use of the wolf sinew."
"You ought never to have given the gold to the baby," his wife said. "It is cold and heavy, and it might have hurt the baby's hands or feet."
"No, you ought not to have given it to the child," Jinlian said, "but you could think of nothing but getting it to her room. I spoke to you and you wouldn't look at me. Just like a red-eyed soldier with some loot that he didn't wish anybody to see. Now that you have lost a piece of gold, you have the nerve to come here and tell the Great Lady about it. You ask her to examine all the maids. Well, if the maids don't laugh at you with their mouths, they will laugh at you with their cunts."
This made Ximen Qing angry. He took Jinlian by the hair and threw her on Yueniang's bed. He raised his hand threateningly and said: "I hate you. If it were not for what people would say, I would beat you to death, you bad little bone. You are always trying to show off your sharp tongue and interfering in matters that do not concern you."
Jinlian made a show of tears. "Because you are powerful and rich," she sobbed, "you have become cruel. You only think about being brutal to me. Your words are brave; you don't care whether you murder anybody or not. Go on, beat me, there is no one to hinder you. So long as I don't stop breathing, it will be all right, but if I do, my old mother will certainly come and ask you a few questions. No matter how rich and powerful you are, if my mother goes to the court and accuses you, you needn't think you will escape, just because you happen to be an officer. The post you hold is nothing very glorious and your ceremonial hat is a miserable thing. You can't stand a charge of murder against you. Even the Emperor has no right to murder his subjects."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Oh, how cleverly you talk, you bad little bone. You say that my position is of no account, and that my ceremonial hat is in rags. I will tell a maid to bring my hat, and then you'll see whether it is in rags or not. Go and ask the people in Qinghe if I owe anybody any money. You say I owe money."
"Why did you call me a bad little bone?" Jinlian lifted one of her feet. "What is wrong with my feet? Why should you call me names like that?"
"You two are like a brass bowl and somebody banging it with an iron broom handle," Yueniang said. "There is a proverb that says that the devilish man has a devil of his own, and, when he meets another devil, there is nothing he can do. The stronger-mouthed always comes out on top. Sister, your mouth is all you have to count on. If it were not quite so sharp, you would be done."
Ximen Qing realized that there was nothing he could do, so he put on his clothes and went out. On the way, Daian said to him: "A messenger has come from Major Zhou asking you to go there after the sacrifice."
"Tell Jingji to take a horse and go to the sacrifice for me," Ximen said. "I will go to Major Zhou's now."
The two stage managers and the actors from the princely family of Wang came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. He told Shutong to arrange for them to have something to eat. "Amuse the ladies well," he said to them, "and I will see that you are suitably rewarded. Do not open your boxes in the upper room."
The two managers knelt down and said: "If we do not play our parts well, we shall ask for no reward."
"This will make the second day they have played for us," Ximen said to Shutong. "You may give them five taels of silver." He mounted his horse and rode away.
Jinlian was sitting in Yueniang's room. "Why don't you go to your room and powder your face?" Yueniang said to her. "Your eyes are all red, and you will not be fit to see the guests when they come. Really, you ought not to provoke him. I did the best I could for you. If I hadn't stopped him, you would certainly have had a beating. There is always dog's hair on a husband's face. He doesn't distinguish between the rights and the wrongs of a case, but is always ready to trounce somebody. Why did you make trouble with him just now? He lost his gold. Well, what if he did? It is no business of yours whether he looked for it or not. It didn't happen in your room, and there was no call for you to start arguing with him. You must learn to keep your temper."
She calmed Jinlian, who went to her room to powder her face.
Shortly afterwards, Li Ping'er and Wu Yin'er, dressed for the party, came to Yueniang's room.
"How did the gold come to be lost?" the Great Lady said. "The Fifth Lady and he quarreled about it and nearly came to blows. I stopped them, and now he has gone out to a party somewhere. But he has sent a boy to buy a wolf's sinew and when he comes back tonight the maids will all be punished. What were the maids and serving women in your room about? They were supposed to be looking after the baby and they must have lost the gold. A piece of gold is not like a penny,"
"He gave the baby the four pieces of gold to play with," Li Ping'er said, "and I was busy entertaining Aunt Wu and Miss Zheng and the two other ladies. It was then one of the ornaments was lost. The maids say it was the nurse's fault, the nurse blames old woman Feng, and old woman Feng cries and says she is going to kill herself. It really is a most mysterious business, and I don't know whom to blame."
"I often play with the baby," Wu Yin'er said, "but thanks be to Heaven, I was dressing my hair in another room and kept out of it all. Otherwise, I should have been dragged into it and, even if you had said nothing, I should have felt very uncomfortable. People often lose money, but in such a household as yours it is most regrettable for such a thing to happen. If people outside hear about it, it will bring shame upon the household."
While they were talking, Han Yuchuan and Dong Jiao'er came, bringing their dresses with them. They kowtowed to Yueniang, Aunt Wu, and Li Ping'er and, rising, made a reverence to Wu Yin'er.
"You did not go home yesterday, Sister," they said to her.
"How did you know?" said Wu Yin'er.
"We went to the house in Lion Street," Dong Jiao'er said, "where the Feast of the Lanterns was held, and Father told us to come here today."
Yueniang asked them to sit down and Xiaoyu brought them tea. The two girls stood up to take the tea and made a reverence to Xiaoyu.
"At what time did you finish singing last night?" Wu Yin'er asked them.
"It was the second night watch when we reached home. We went with your younger brother, Wu Hui."
After they had talked for a short time, Yueniang said to Yuxiao: "See that they have their tea in good time." She was afraid it would be awkward if the guests arrived before they had had it. The table was set. There were two plates of spring dishes and four boxes of cakes. "Go to the Second Lady's room," Yueniang said to Xiaoyu, "and ask your sister Li Guijie to come and have tea."
Guijie and her aunt came in together. When they had made a reverence to everybody present, they sat down and had tea, and then the things were all cleared away. Yingchun, specially dressed for the occasion, came in carrying Guan'ge. The baby was wearing a silken cap of Good Fortune, with a gold brim, a long red gown, white silk socks and shoes. On his chest hung the cords and medals and on his wrists were little golden bangles.
"Well, my young lord," Li Ping'er said, "what have you come for? Nobody invited you." She took the child and set him on her knees. The baby saw that the room was full of people and looked at them one after another. Guijie, sitting on the bed, played with him. "Brother," she said, "you look at me so hard you must wish me to carry you." She held out her arms to him and the baby nestled to her breast.
"Ah," Aunt Wu said, laughing, "even a baby of his age seems to know the meaning of love."
"Think who is his father," Yueniang said. "When he grows up, he will assuredly be a very happy young man."
"If he is anything of the sort, I shall ask you to beat him," Yulou said.
"Baby," Li Ping'er said, "Sister is carrying you, and you must not soil her clothes. If you do, I shall beat you."
"I don't mind whether he does or not," Guijie said. "I love to have him in my arms and play with him."
Dong Jiao'er said: "We have been here a long time but we have not yet sung for the ladies." Han Yuchuan took her lute and Dong Jiao'er her zither: Wu Yin'er sang. She sang the song "Splendor of Riches Like the Moon at the Full. The Golden Chain Hangs on the Wu T'ung Tree." Her voice echoed through the rafters and stirred the dust there. It seemed powerful enough to pass through rocks and mount even to the skies.
Guan'ge was frightened. He lay still against Guijie's breast and dared not lift his head. Yueniang saw this. "Take the child," she said to Li Ping'er, "and let Yingchun take him to your room. What a delicate child he is. Look at his pale face." Li Ping'er took the baby. She bade Yingchun cover his ears with her hands and take him out.
The girls were still singing when Daian came in. "I have been to Mistress Qiao's," he said. "Mistress Chu and Master Shang's wife were ready; they were only waiting for Lady Qiao the Fifth. They will be here in a few moments. The musicians are ready both at the gate and in the hall. Ladies, you will do well to expect them at any moment."
Yueniang saw that many beautiful things were set about in the back hall, and the chairs put in their proper places. The lattices were suspended by golden chains and the air was sweetly perfumed. Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang were dressed in their new clothes. All the maids and serving women wore ornaments of gold and silver, and, in their dresses of green and gold, waited to do honor to the new relative of the household.
The first person to arrive was Ying Bojue's wife. Ying Bao was in attendance upon her. Yueniang welcomed her and took her to her room. Madam Ying made reverence after reverence to Yueniang. "We are always troubling you," she said, "troubling you beyond all reason."
"Not at all," Yueniang said, "it is we who are always troubling your worthy husband."
Soon they heard the shouts of men clearing the way; then the musicians in the outer hall began to play. Ping'an came and announced Lady Qiao's sedan chair. A host of people surrounded the five sedan chairs that had stopped outside the gate. The first was that of Lady Qiao the Fifth. It was covered with a canopy of sky-blue and had a double gold fringe around it. The men who cleared the way carried rattans. Behind the large chair were smaller ones for the maidservants. Then four soldiers with dressing cases and braziers. Then two black-robed attendants riding on ponies. After Lady Qiao the Fifth came Mistress Qiao, then Mistress Zhu, Master Shang's wife and Miss Duan, a sister-in-law of an officer named Cui.
Ximen Qing's six ladies, most exquisitely dressed and looking like jade carvings, came to the second door to welcome their guests and escorted Lady Qiao the Fifth to the hall. Lady Qiao was about seventy years old. She was not very tall. She wore a headdress of pearls with many precious stones and a scarlet gown embroidered in the palace fashion. Her hair was perfectly white and her eyebrows like two strips of snow. Her eyes were like autumn water, perhaps rather dark. Hair like a bundle of silk fell, not in too great abundance, over her temples. It was like the cloud resting on the Chu Mountain.
When they came to the hall, she made a reverence first to Aunt Wu, then to Wu Yueniang and the others. Yueniang asked Lady Qiao to accept a reverence from her, but the old lady refused. Even after much discussion, she would only accept a half reverence. Then Yueniang greeted Mistress Qiao in the manner appointed for relatives. After the greetings they thanked one another for the presents that had been exchanged. Then they took their seats. Lady Qiao the Fifth sat upon a chair with an embroidered cushion in front of the screen. Yueniang asked Mistress Qiao to sit next to her, but she said: "I must not sit next to the Fifth Lady, for I am her niece." Mistress Zhu and Master Shang's wife were invited to take the next places. They made a show of hesitation and the matter was settled after much discussion, with Lady Qiao the Fifth in the most honorable place and the others according to their rank.
In the midst of the hall was a great square stove with fire burning. It made the room as warm as though it were spring. Chunmei, Yuxiao, Yingchun and Lanxiang, dressed in their best clothes, served the wine.
"Will you not introduce me to your distinguished husband?" Lady Qiao the Fifth said. "I should like to salute him in accordance with the rites between relatives."
Yueniang told her that Ximen Qing had gone to his office and had not yet returned.
"What office does he hold?" Lady Qiao asked.
"He was only a private citizen," Yueniang said, "but the Imperial Court was gracious and made him Captain of a Thousand Families, and he has duties at the law courts. I fear that this betrothal will lower the prestige of your house."
"What is that you say?" Lady Qiao the Fifth said. "We are quite content to be allied to one of such high rank as your worthy husband. My niece told me the other day about the matter and I was delighted. That is why I have come to see you today, and I trust that in future we shall see more of each other."
"My only fear," Yueniang said, "is that we shall damage your reputation."
"Do not say that," Lady Qiao replied, "even an Emperor sometimes marries the daughter of a commoner. If you do not mind my telling you rather a long story, I will explain to you that the present Empress of the Eastern Palace is a niece of mine. Her parents died and I looked after her. When my husband was alive, he succeeded to the post of High Commander. But he died, alas, when he was only fifty. I have no children and have always lived with my nephews, of whom none is wealthy but this one. Though he has no great position, he is able to live very comfortably, and I don't think your family need be ashamed of him."
After they had talked for a while, Aunt Wu said to Yueniang: "Send for the baby and let her Ladyship see him and give him her blessing." Li Ping'er at once bade the nurse take the baby and kowtow to the old lady. Lady Qiao the Fifth admired Guan'ge and said he was a very fine boy. She told her servants to open her bag, and from it took a piece of yellow silk shot with purple, such as is used at the Court, and a pair of golden armlets. These she presented to the child. Yueniang thanked her. Then she asked her to go to an inner room to change her clothes.

In the outer court four tables were laid and tea was waiting. Upon each table there were forty dishes and every kind of delicacy imaginable. After tea Yueniang took them to see the gardens.
By this time Chen Jingji had come back from the service at the temple, and, when he had taken a religious meal, he, with Shutong and Daian, arranged the tables in the outer hall. Then the ladies were invited to come to dinner, and a very magnificent banquet they had.
Musicians and singers were posted near the tables. Wu Yueniang and Li Ping'er themselves served wine, while, outside the door, the musicians played. Then Mistress Qiao and the other ladies offered wine to Li Ping'er in celebration of her birthday and, afterwards, all took their places again. Guijie, Wu Yin'er, Han Yuchuan and Dong Jiao'er stood before them and sang the song "Long Mayest Thou Live Like the Southern Mountain." The actors brought the list of their plays, and Lady Qiao the Fifth asked them to play the drama "On the Night of the Feast of Lanterns, Wang Yueying Lost a Shoe." The cooks brought in small slices of roast goose, and were rewarded with five *qian* of silver. Five courses of meat were served and three of soup. The fourth act of the play was ended, and it began to grow dark. The candles in the hall and all kinds of lanterns were lighted. They looked like embroidered ribbons floating, like strings of color waving in the air. Then the full moon rose and the moonbeams mingled with the lights within the hall. The musicians took their instruments and played the melody of the lanterns.
When the music was done, Lady Qiao the Fifth and Mistress Qiao gave two taels of silver to the actors and two *qian* to each of the four singing girls. In the hall of the inner court, Yueniang had arranged for more tables to be prepared with fruits and other things. Now she asked the ladies to go there. The four tables were piled high; the singing girls sang, and the musicians played. They drank again.
Several times Lady Qiao said, "It is late, and I must go." At last Yueniang and the others were unable to dissuade her any longer, and they escorted her as far as the great gate. There they again offered her wine and stayed to see the fireworks. On both sides of the street, people were crowding, as close together as the scales on a fish, or as bees in a swarm. Ping'an and the soldiers kept the crowd back with their sticks, but still the people pushed forward. Then one of the fireworks was burnt out, and the people began gradually to drift away.
Lady Qiao and her companions said farewell to Yueniang, got into their chairs and departed. It was about the third night watch. Ying Bojue's wife went away too.
Yueniang and the others then went to the inner court and told Chen Jingji, Laixing, Shutong and Daian to see to the clearing away of everything and to give the actors and their two leaders refreshments, pay them five taels of silver for their performance, and dismiss them.
Yueniang said that some food and half a jar of wine that was left should be given to Clerk Fu, Ben the Fourth and Chen Jingji. "They have worked very hard," she said, "and it is only right that they should have a cup of wine." A table was set in the great hall. "I do not know when the master will return," Yueniang told them, "so do not put out the lanterns."
Clerk Fu, Ben the Fourth, Chen Jingji and Laibao sat in the upper seats, Laixing, Shutong, Daian and Ping'an in the lower. The wine was poured out.
"You had better put a man at the gate," Laibao said to Ping'an. "If our master comes home, there will be no one to receive him."
"It is all right," Ping'an said. "I have already posted Huatong there."
Then they amused themselves playing Guess Fingers and drinking wine.
"Don't let's guess fingers," Jingji said, "we must choose a quieter game. We shall be heard in the inner court if we make so much noise. Let each one recite a line of poetry. If he can do so, well and good, but if not, he must drink a large cup of wine. Now, Clerk Fu, you begin."
"At the Feast of Lanterns, I laughed at the streamers," Clerk Fu said.
"Happiness in life is only for dreamers," added Ben the Fourth.
"The moonlight and the lanterns are our joy today," said Jingji.
"So we'll enjoy life as long as we may," said Laibao.
"I invited my girl, why isn't she here?" said Laixing.
"I, like the Great Lady, inspire with fear," Shutong continued.
Then Daian said, "Though the wine has been left us, the lanterns are dim."
"And the cup of enjoyment's full to the brim," Ping'an said. They all laughed very merrily.

## 065

## The Thief Is Discover & Wu Yüeh-niang Detains Li Kuei-chieh Overnight; Hsi-men Ch'ing Drunkenly Interrogates Hsia-Hua

In straitened circumstances, I continue to be mired in the muck day by day;
While the resplendence of the imperial park is perennially renewed.
Brambles do not encroach on the carriageways and riding paths;
Pipes and strings forever enhance the homes of the silk-clad.
Patrician youths roam the greensward like fluttering butterflies;
Budding damsels disport in the breeze like proliferating blossoms.
But I am reluctant to go out, let the vagrant youths scoff as they will;
For, once back inside the gate, the old life will go on just as before.[1]

While Ch'en Ching-chi, Manager Fu, and the others were drinking in the front compound, Sister-in-law Wu's sedan chair arrived, and she prepared to return home.
Wu Yüeh-niang did her best to detain her, saying repeatedly, "Stay another night, Sister-in-law, and go home tomorrow."
"Including the time I spent at Kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place," Sister-in-law Wu replied, "I've been away for three or four days already. There's no one to look after the place at home, and your brother is tied up at the yamen, so he's not there either. I'd better go home. Tomorrow all of you ladies are invited, whatever you do, to come to our place for a holiday visit. In the evening, you can walk off the hundred ailments on your way home."
"Tomorrow," said Yüeh-niang, "we won't be able to make it before evening."
"You really ought to come by sedan chair a little earlier," said Sister-in-law Wu. "That will give you time to walk back together later in the evening."
When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang had two gift boxes made up for her, one of Lantern Festival dumplings, and one of steamed dumplings, and ordered Lai-an to escort her sister-in-law on her way home.
The four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh and company, then kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and bade her farewell as they also prepared to return home.
"What's the hurry?" said Yüeh-niang. "Are you that anxious to be off? Wait till your father gets home and dismisses you. On his way out he told me to keep you here. I expect he has something else to say to you. I wouldn't presume to let you go."
"Father has gone out to a drinking party," said Li Kuei-chieh. "Who knows when he'll get home? We've been waiting for some time already. Mother, why don't you let me and Wu Yin-erh leave before the others. The two of them only came today, while we've been here for two days already. Who knows how anxious my mother back at home is to see me?"
"Is your mother really so anxious to see you," said Yüeh-niang, "that she can't bear to wait another night?"
"That's a fine thing to say," protested Li Kuei-chieh. "There's no one to look after the place at home, and moreover my elder sister's services have been engaged elsewhere. Mother, if we get out our instruments and sing another song for you, surely you'll let us go home."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to turn over the unused gratuities to Yüeh-niang.
"The one-candareen gratuities for the chair carriers of the Ch'iao family and the others came to ten packets in all, amounting to three taels," he reported. "There are still ten packets left over."
As Yüeh-niang was putting these away, Li Kuei-chieh took the opportunity to ask, "Son-in-law, when you were outside just now, did you notice whether our sedan chairs had come for us or not?"
"Only the sedan chairs for the other two are here," replied Ch'en Ching-chi. "Those for you and Wu Yin-erh have not arrived. It seems that a while ago someone sent them away."
"Son-in-law," exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh, "did you really send them away? You're fooling me."
"If you don't believe me, go see for yourself," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "As though I would try to fool you."
Before he had finished speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying his master's felt bag and announced, "Father has come home."
"It's a good thing the two of you haven't left," said Yüeh-niang. "It turns out your father has shown up after all."
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, still wearing his official hat on his head, and 70 or 80 percent inebriated. Striding into the room, he assumed his place in the seat of honor.
"Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan are still here," Yüeh-niang reported, and the two of them proceeded to step forward and kowtow.
"Everyone has left," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and it is already late at night. Do you still want me to have them sing for us?"
"They've been asking me to let them go home," said Yüeh-niang.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Li Kuei-chieh and said, "You and Yin-erh might as well wait until the festival is over before going home. It's all right to let the other two go."
"You see," said Yüeh-niang. "I told you so, but you wouldn't believe me and acted as though I were fooling you, or something."
Li Kuei-chieh merely lowered her head with a disgruntled expression and had nothing further to say.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Tai-an, "Are the sedan chairs for those two here or not?"
"Only the two sedan chairs for Tung Chiao-erh and Han Yü-ch'uan are waiting for them," Tai-an responded.
"I'll not have anything more to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can each get out your instruments and sing the medley called 'Ten Strips of Brocade' for us, after which I'll let those two go home before the others."
Thereupon, with Li Kuei-chieh playing the *p'i-p'a*, Wu Yin-erh playing the psaltery, Han Yü-ch'uan strumming the mandola, and Tung Chiao-erh beating a quick tempo on the drum, the four singing girls, performing in relay, sang the twenty halves of the ten songs that made up "Ten Strips of Brocade." Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ingerh all sat down in the room to listen to the performance.
Li Kuei-chieh started off with the first half of a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":
My handsome lover naturally stands out among his kind,[2]
But my halcyon-hued coverlet is cold and I am desolate and alone.
Since we parted, I think of him by day and yearn for him at night.[3]
I yearn for him, wondering when we will ever meet again.
When I do meet with my lover, it will be just as before,
Just as before.
It was then Wu Yin-erh's turn to sing the first half of a song to the tune "Sutra in Letters of Gold":
Where has the flower-lover gone?
The red petals have fallen, spring is over.
I have already climbed the lofty tower and leaned over all twelve balustrades,
All twelve balustrades.[4]
Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the first half of a song to the tune "Stopping the Clouds in Flight":
Depressed, I lean over the balustrade.[5]
The swallows and orioles, I am reluctant to watch.
Who has broken the commandment against adultery?
Who has grown accustomed to spectral visitations?[6]
Tung Chiao-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "River Water, with Two Variations":
My flowerlike countenance and moonlike allure[7] have faded completely away.
The double gates are always closed.
It is just the time when the east wind is chilly,[8]
Fine rain sprinkles continuously,[9] and
Fallen red petals by the thousands dot the ground.[10]
Li Kuei-chieh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows":
Since the last time I met my handsome lover,
My silver psaltery is covered with dust and I am reluctant to touch it.
Although we are only separated by a matter of feet,
It feels as though we are at opposite ends of the sky.
I remember a hundred instances of his kindness,
And cannot recall the slightest case of deceptive conduct on his part.
Wu Yin-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers":
On the surface of the water there was a pair of mandarin ducks,
Beside the bank of the river, following each other in close formation.[11]
How could they have foreseen that a fishing boat would separate them,
Making them fly off in different directions?
Han Yü-ch'uan continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Playful Children":
Ever since he left, I have become haggard and emaciated.
I have never before been sick for so long.
When my talented lover went away[12] it had just become spring;
But before I know it, the geese have flown, and it is already midautumn.[13]
Tung Chiao-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Confronting the Dressing Mirror":
At the present time,
The strings on the jasper-inlaid zither are broken,[14] there is no one to listen to them.
When the blossoms are most beautiful,
Who is there with whom to enjoy them?
Li Kuei-chieh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch":
Outside my gauze window,
The moon is setting.
I am always yearning for that man of mine,

Unable to get him out of my mind.
On my behalf, you utterly exhaust your strength and heart;
On your behalf, I secretly wipe away the pearly tears.
Wu Yin-erh continued with the first half of a song to the tune "The Cassia Sprig Is Fragrant":
His heart is like a willow catkin,[15]
Flying wherever the wind takes it.
It turns out that his intentions are false and his reputation undeserved;
But he has induced me to cater to him with sincere devotion.[16]
Han Yü-ch'uan then resumed by singing the second half of the song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":
He is solicitous of jade and considerate of fragrance.[17]
He and I lay face to face underneath the hibiscus bed curtains,[18]
Where we revealed every detail of our innermost feelings to each other.
Speaking of our emotions at separation, how could you have abandoned me?
It makes me so mad I'm half drunk and half crazy.
How could you have had such a change of heart as to pick up with another soul mate?
When will we ever be able to arrange another assignation, another assignation?
If we really meet again, it will be just like a dream.
Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Sutra in Letters of Gold":
Though I wipe them away,
Tears have stained my silk handkerchief.
On the southern bank of the river,
The setting sun reveals hills beyond the hills.[19]
Li Kuei-chieh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Stopping the Clouds in Flight":
Ch'a!
I have sent him letters two or three times,
But it has been difficult to see him.
I'd better take up my frosty brush,
And write out another dubious indictment;
But the ink is not dry on the page of loving feelings I have already expressed.[20]
Wu Yin-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "River Water, with Two Variations":
I am too indolent to burn another coil of incense,
And reluctant to pick up my needle.
My emaciated body is cadaverous,
Beset as it is by spectral visitations.[21]
When I reexamine the old feelings that we had for each other,
Sorrow weighs down the turquoise peaks of my painted eyebrows;
Which only serves to arouse the distaste of my young lover,
So that, for some time, despite the orioles and the flowers, I have not bothered to roll up my curtain.
Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows":
When I think of the affectionate words he uttered when we shared the same pillow,
I can't help feeling a shuddering of the flesh and benumbing of the body.
Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers":
One of us headed for the east,
The other flew toward the west;
Which left me languishing in the south,
While he set off for the north.
Li Kuei-chieh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Playful Children":
While you're there within the bed-curtains of gold lamé cuddling the red and hugging the turquoise,[22]
I'm here clandestinely letting the tears flow as I keep solitary vigil in my fragrant boudoir.[23]
I remember the vows of fidelity that you swore,
But they have faded from your fickle mind as quickly as the lantern gutters out.
The evidence against you is still on record in the Temple of the God of the Sea.[24]
Wu Yin-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Confronting the Dressing Mirror":
Who is there with whom to pour the vintage wine?
Our feelings have come to naught, like a pitcher that has fallen down a well.
We are as unlikely to see each other as Orion and Antares.[25]
Since we became separated years and months have gone by.
I have calculated the date of your return so often I have worn away the golden tip of my comb.
Han Yü-ch'uan then sang the second half of the song to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch":
On either side we have been disturbed at heart.
How could we have known that the wind would sweep the clouds away,
So that tonight the full moon would shine forth once more,
Permitting my lover once again to unfasten my fragrant silk raiment?
In discussing our feelings, the question of who was unfaithful to whom,
Is something I will have to demand a clarification of from you.
Tung Chiao-erh then sang the second half of the song to the tune "The Cassia Sprig Is Fragrant":
How could he ever have forgotten that time in the past when he swore to be as faithful as the hills?
He has buried me alive,
That lover of mine.
Since he has abandoned me here,
When will we be able to make love again?
Li Kuei-chieh then concluded by singing the Coda:
Embroidered silk slippers, but half a span in length;
When his eyes catch sight of them, his amorous feelings are aroused.
My delectable and talented lover, let's forgo any further recriminations.
Hurry up and embrace this shapely body of mine.
When they had finished singing, Hsi-men Ch'ing paid Han Yü-ch'uan and Tung Chiao-erh for their services, and the two of them said their farewells and departed, but he instructed Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight.
All of a sudden, a commotion became audible in the front compound and, before they knew it, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung came in, dragging Hsia-hua, the maidservant from Li Chiao-erh's quarters, along with them, and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "After escorting the two singing girls to the gate just now, we took a lantern into the stable to prepare the fodder for the horses, when what should we see but Hsia-hua hiding under the manger, which gave us quite a start. We don't know what she was doing there, and when we asked her, she refused to answer."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Where is that slave? Bring her over here."
Thereupon, he strode into the corridor outside the parlor and sat down in a chair, while the maidservant was hustled into his presence and forced to kneel down in front of him.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know why she had gone out to the front compound, she refused to answer.
Li Chiao-erh chimed in from the sidelines, saying, "I didn't send you on any errand. Whatever were you up to, going out to the stable, for no good reason?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw what a state of panic the girl was in, he assumed that she had been trying to run away and ordered the servants to search her person, but she resisted being searched. Thereupon, Ch'in-t'ung dragged her down with a tug, when what should they hear but a tinkling sound as an object that had been concealed in her waist fell to the ground. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked what it was, and when Tai-an handed it to him:
Strange as it may seem,
it turned out to be a gold bracelet.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had examined it by lamplight, he said, "It's that gold bracelet that disappeared a while ago and couldn't be found anywhere. So it turns out that this slave had stolen it."
Hsia-hua protested that she had only picked it up, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know where she had picked it up, she remained silent. This enraged Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he forthwith ordered Ch'in-t'ung to go to the front compound and fetch the finger squeezers. In no time at all, the maidservant's fingers were put in the squeezers and squeezed until she:
Howled like a stuck pig.
After she had been squeezed for a while, he ordered that the squeezers should be struck twenty times. Yüeh-niang saw that her husband was drunk and did not dare to interfere.
Unable to bear the pain any longer, the maidservant finally said, "I picked it up off the floor in the Sixth Lady's quarters."
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing order the squeezers removed, after which he instructed Li Chiao-erh, "Take her back to your room and, tomorrow, call in a go-between to take her away and sell her. What would we want to keep a slave like this around for anyway?"
Li Chiao-erh was initially at a loss for words, after which she finally said, "You lousy slave! Whoever told you to go out to the front compound? As long as I'm maintaining you, you should ask my permission before doing anything, instead of sneaking out there without anyone knowing about it. If you picked up that gold bracelet in her room, you should have told me about it."
When Hsia-hua merely continued to cry, Li Chiao-erh said to her, "Slave that you are, you might just as well have been squeezed to death, for all I care. Still crying are you?"
"That's enough of that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which he turned the gold bracelet over to Yüeh-niang to put away and went out to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound.
When the page boys had all left, Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to close the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds and then turned to Yü-hsiao and asked, "Did that maidservant actually go out to the front compound on that occasion?"
"When the Second Lady and the Third Lady," reported Yü-hsiao, "accompanied Sister-in-law Wu and her daughter-in-law, Third Sister Cheng, to the Sixth Lady's place, she went along with them. Who could have anticipated that she would steal this gold bracelet without anyone's knowing it? A while ago, when she overheard Mother saying that Father had sent a page boy out to buy a wolf's sinew, she was frightened to death. She asked me in the kitchen what a wolf's sinew was, which gave all of us a laugh, and we told her, 'A wolf's sinew, no doubt, is a sinew from the body of a wolf. If anyone has stolen something, and the wolf's sinew is applied to him, it will wrap itself around the guilty person's body and bind his hands and feet together.' I imagine that, when she heard what we said, she panicked, and took advantage of the departure of the singing girls tonight, to sneak out there in the endeavor to run away. When she saw that there were people at the front gate, she must have ducked into the stable and tried to hide under the manger, but ended up being spotted by the page boys and dragged out into the open."
Yüeh-niang said:
"How is one to judge what people are really like?[26]
Who would have thought that such a young maidservant would turn out to be:
Like a furtive thieving rat,
and not a proper person at all?"
To resume our story, Li Chiao-erh led Hsia-hua back to her quarters, and, that evening, Li Kuei-chieh took her severely to task, saying, "It turns out that you're nothing but an uncouth youngster. For someone who is fourteen or fifteen years old, and knows something about human behavior, how could you be so stupid? Even in the licensed quarter where I work, that sort of thing would never be countenanced. There's no one else here, so I can speak frankly. If you pick up something, you should bring it back to your room and turn it over inconspicuously to your mistress. Then, if the matter should come to light, she would be able to intervene on your behalf. How could you fail to say so much as a word to her about it? What did it feel like to be put in the squeezers and beaten like that just now? A fine maidservant you are! As the saying goes:
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.
If you weren't assigned to her quarters, it wouldn't matter, but when you are subjected to the third degree the way you just were, how do you suppose it reflects on your mistress's standing in the household?"
She then went on to take her aunt to task, saying, "You're really hopeless! If it had been me, I would never have let him subject a maidservant of mine to the squeezers in front of everybody that way. If she were at fault, I would drag her back to my own room and give her a caning myself. How is it that none of the maidservants from the front compound were put in the squeezers, and it was only a maidservant from your quarters that was subjected to the third degree? You allow yourself to be taken advantage of, as though:
You haven't any breath in your own nostrils.[27]
If you wait until tomorrow, are you really going to let him get rid of your maidservant that way, without saying a word about it? If you won't say anything about it, I will. Anything would be better than letting her be taken off that way, and making yourself a laughingstock to the others. Just take a look at the one named Meng and the one named P'an. The two of them are just like a pair of vixens. You're not very likely to get the better of them."
She then called Hsia-hua over and asked her, "Do you want to leave, or not to leave?"

"I don't want to leave," the maidservant replied.
"If you don't leave," said Li Kuei-chieh, "in the future, you'll have to pay closer attention to your mistress's interests. In all matters, you must strive to be:
Of one heart and one mind,
with her. No matter what you might pick up, turn it over to her, so that she will treat you with the same favor that she does Yüan-hsiao."
"Your instructions are duly noted," said Hsia-hua.
Let us put the chiding addressed to Hsia-hua aside for a moment and say no more about it.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound, what should he find but Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yin-erh sitting together on the k'ang.
All he wanted to do was to get undressed and go to bed, but Li P'ing-erh said, "Since Wu Yin-erh is here, there's no place to put you. You'd better go next door."
"What do you mean there's no place to put me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The two of you, mother and daughter, can lie down on either side, and I'll go to sleep between you."
Li P'ing-erh gave him a look, saying, "Now you're getting vulgar."
"Well, where am I to sleep then?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You can go next door to Sister Six's place to sleep tonight," said Li P'ing-erh.
After sitting with them for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, saying, "All right. All right. At least that will prevent me from disturbing the two of you any further. I might as well go over there to sleep then."
Thereupon, he went straight over to Chin-lien's quarters. When Chin-lien realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come in, she felt:
Just as though he had fallen from Heaven.
She came forward to help him off with his outer garments and girdle, provided a clean set of bedding:
Spread out the mermaid silk covers, and
Deftly positioned the coral pillow.
After a serving of tea, the two of them went to bed for the night. But no more of this.
Meanwhile, at Li P'ing-erh's place, after she had seen Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way, she and Wu Yin-erh sat down, face to face, at a k'ang table, set out the black and white pieces on the board, and proceeded to play a game of elephant chess by lamplight.
"Prepare two cups of tea," she instructed Ying-ch'un, "bring a box of assorted delicacies, and decant a flagon of that sweet Chin-hua wine for me to share with Sister Yin-erh."
"Would you like some rice, Sister Yin-erh?" she went on to ask. "I can have her bring some rice for you to eat."
"Mother, I'm not hungry," Wu Yin-erh replied. "Don't have her bring anything for me."
"All right," said Li P'ing-erh. "Since Sister Yin-erh doesn't want any rice, get four of those stuffed pastries out of my cabinet, and bring them here in a box lid for Yin-erh to eat."
In a little while, Ying-ch'un brought in four saucers of side dishes, one of the fermented brawn from a set of pig's trotters, one of salted chicken, one of poached eggs, and one of sautéed bean sprouts and jellyfish, in addition to which there were also a box of assorted fancy nuts, and a box of stuffed pastries, which were all put down beside them.
It did not take long for Li P'ing-erh and Wu Yin-erh to finish three games of elephant chess, after which the wine was poured, and the two of them proceeded to drink together from silver cups.
At this point, Wu Yin-erh said, "Sister Ying-ch'un, if you would hand me my *p'i-p'a*, I'll sing a song for your mistress's entertainment."
"Sister, I'd rather you didn't sing," said Li P'ing-erh. "The little gentleman is asleep, and if his father should happen to hear the singing from next door, he'd scold me for it. We can play at dice instead."
Thereupon, she told Ying-ch'un to fetch the dice box, and the two of them proceeded to enjoy themselves casting dice, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit.
After they had played with the dice for a while, Wu Yin-erh said, "Sister Ying-ch'un, why don't you step into the other room and invite the wet nurse to come over here and have a cup of wine."
"She's lying on the k'ang in there with the baby in her arms," said Yingch'un.
"Tell her to stay where she is with the baby in her arms," said Li P'ing-erh, "but take a cup of wine over there for her. That ought to do. You don't know about it, but this little gentleman is rather hypersensitive. If you try to leave him, he's sure to wake up. One day, when he was asleep on my side of the k'ang, and his father presumed to start something with me, he opened his eyes wide and woke up, just as if he was aware of what was going on. I had the wet nurse take him into the other room, but all he would do was cry, and insist on my holding him."
"Now that you've got this baby boy," Wu Yin-erh laughed, "it seems that Father and you can't even spend a satisfactory night together any more. How often does Father pay a visit to your room?"
"There's no telling," said Li P'ing-erh. "He doesn't always stop at one, or even two visits, but drops in to see him all the time. It ought not to matter that he comes to see the child this way, but the fact that he comes here so often has had the effect of filling certain persons to bursting with rage, and induced them to utter the direst imprecations against the child and his father behind their backs. As for me, it goes without saying that I am nothing but an object of obloquy. It's not as though he and I are up to anything in particular. I'd really rather he didn't come here so often. Whenever he does, the next day people indicate by looks and grimaces that they think I'm monopolizing their husband. Why do you suppose, when he came in here just now, I urged him to go somewhere else?
"Sister Yin-erh, you may not know it, but in this household:
When people are many, tongues are many.[28]
Take today, for instance. When that gold bracelet disappeared, fortunately you were here to see it yourself, a certain person, out of spite, went to the rear compound and did her best to incite the First Lady against me, raising suspicions about the fact that the gold was brought into my quarters, and it was in my room that the bracelet disappeared. Later on, it was only after it was disclosed that the maidservant from the Second Lady's quarters had stolen it, that the:
Blue or red, black or white,
of the situation finally became clear. Had that not been the case, even without any other funny business, things looked bad enough for the maidservants in my room and the wet nurse. And Old Mother Feng was so upset she started to cry, threatening to commit suicide, and saying, 'If the gold bracelet is not found, I'm not going to go anywhere.' And, in fact, it was not until the bracelet turned up, later on, that she consented to leave the premises, and, taking a lantern, set off for home."
"Mother," said Wu Yin-erh, "if that's the way it is, out of consideration for Father, all you can do is look after the child as best you can, and let things take their course. Whatever happens, you'll just have to:
Deal with matters as they occur.[29]
As for the First Lady in the rear compound, so long as she doesn't have anything to say against you, that's that. The problem is that the others, on seeing that you have given birth to a son, can't help being somewhat put out. As long as Father takes charge of the situation, things ought to be all right."
"If it weren't for the consideration shown by Father and the First Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "the child would not have lived to this day."
As they were talking together, what with:
First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me,
without their realizing it, it was the third watch of the night before they went to bed. Truly:
When a favored guest arrives, one's feelings can never be satiated;
When a real confidante shows up, conversation is mutually agreeable.[30]
A poem testifies to this:

Within the painted boudoir, a bright moon traverses the shutters;
As beauties, keeping each other company, spend the night together.
Who could be anything but enamored of their jade bones and icy flesh?
A sprig of plum blossoms projects its shadow through the unending night.

Chen Jingji and the others drank their wine in the outer court. Aunt Wu's sedan chair came for her. She got her things together and prepared to take her leave, but Wu Yueniang begged her not to go.
"Sister-in-law," she said, "please stay tonight. Go tomorrow instead."
"But I have stayed here and with the Qiaos for three or four days. There is no one at home, and your brother's business keeps him busy at the office. I hope you will all come to see me tomorrow, and in the evening we will walk off the hundred illnesses."
"We will gladly come," Yueniang said, "but it must be in the evening."
"No," Aunt Wu said, "come early in your sedan chairs, and you can return on foot in the evening."
Yueniang filled one box with the pasties that are made for the Feast of Lanterns and another with spiced cake, and ordered Laian to accompany Aunt Wu. Then Li Guijie and the other singing girls kowtowed to Yueniang and made ready to leave.
"Why are you in such a hurry?" Yueniang said. "You must wait for your father. He told me not to let you go before he came back. I fancy he has something to say to you, and I dare not let you go before he comes."
"But Father has gone to a party," Guijie said, "and there is no telling when he will return. I don't think we can wait for him. So please, Lady, let Wu Yin'er and me go. The others can stay. They only came today, but we have been here two days already, and I am sure my mother is anxious about me."
"I only want you to stay one night more," Yueniang said.
"Mother," Guijie said, "it is very kind of you, but there is no one at home. My sister is engaged elsewhere. I will sing a song for you, and then you will let me go, won't you?"
While they were talking, Chen Jingji came in to give an account of the money that he had spent on the servants. "I gave the sedan men one *qian* of silver apiece, so, in all, I paid out about ten packets, about three taels. Here are ten packets left." Yueniang took the silver.
"Uncle," Guijie said, "may I trouble you to go and see whether my sedan chair has come yet?"
"The chairs have come for the other girls," Jingji said, "but yours and Wu Yin'er's are not here. I don't know, but it is possible they may have been sent away again."
"Uncle," Guijie said, "either you have sent them away yourself, or you are deceiving us."
"If you don't believe me," Chen Jingji said, "go and see for yourself."
Then Qintong came with the wrapper and told them that Ximen Qing had returned. "It is a good thing you didn't go," Yueniang said. "There is your father."
Ximen Qing came in. He had drunk a great deal of wine. He sat on the upper side, and Han Yuchuan and Dong Jiao'er kowtowed to him.
"Have our guests gone?" Ximen asked his wife. "Why don't you make the girls sing?"
"They were just thinking of going home," Yueniang said.
"You and Wu Yin'er must not go away until the festival is over. The other two girls can go."
"There!" Yueniang said. "You wouldn't believe me. I might be always telling stories. You hear what he says." Guijie bent her head and said nothing.
Ximen Qing asked Daian if the sedan chairs had come for the girls. The boy told him that those for Dong Jiao'er and Yuchuan were waiting.
"I will not have any more wine," Ximen said, "but take your instruments and sing for me. Then two of you may go."
The four singers took their instruments and sang the twenty-eight verses from *Ten Bolts of Brocade.* The ladies sat and listened. Afterwards, Ximen Qing gave some silver to Yuchuan and Dong Jiao'er and let them go. The two other girls stayed.
Suddenly there was a great to-do in the outer court. Daian and Qintong, shouting, dragged in Xiahua, Li Jiao'er's maid.
"We had taken the two singing girls to the gate," they said, "and had our lanterns with us. When we passed the stable to give some hay to the horses, we found Xiahua there, hiding under the manger. We had no idea what she was doing there, and we were startled. We spoke to her, but she made no answer."
Ximen Qing went outside and sat down on a chair underneath the eaves. He summoned Qintong, and the boy brought out the girl. She knelt down.
"What were you doing in the outer court?" Ximen asked her. The maid was silent.
"I didn't send you to the stable," Li Jiao'er said. "Why did you go there?" The maid was frightened. Ximen Qing was determined to know what it was all about and told the boy to search her. Qintong pulled the girl down; there was a tinkle, and something fell to the ground. Daian picked it up. It was the gold bracelet. Ximen Qing looked at it in the light of the lantern and recognized it as the missing piece of gold.
"You slave!" he cried. "You stole it!"
"I picked it up," said the girl.
"Where did you pick it up?"
The girl made no reply. Ximen Qing was very angry. He sent Qintong for the thumbscrews. They were put on the girl's hands and turned till she screamed like a pig being killed. Again the screws were turned, and twenty times they ground her fingers. Yueniang did not dare to try to stop her husband, for she knew that he was drunk. When the girl could bear no more, she cried. "I picked it up in the Sixth Lady's room."
Ximen Qing had the thumbscrews removed, and told Li Jiao'er to take the girl away. "Tomorrow," he said, "I will send for the go-between and sell the slave. I won't have her here any more."
Li Jiao'er dared raise no objection. She said to the girl: "You thief! Who told you to go to the outer court? I know nothing of this. If you picked up the gold, why didn't you tell me at once?" Xiahua sobbed. "You may well cry," Li Jiao'er said. "You ought to be beaten to death."
"Stop!" Ximen Qing said. He gave the piece of gold to Yueniang and went to the apartments of Li Ping'er.
Yueniang told Xiaoyu to fasten the second door. "When did that maid go to the outer court?" she asked Yuxiao.
"When the Second Lady and the Third Lady went to the Sixth Lady's room," the maid answered, "Aunt Wu and our young lady went with them. That is when she went. Who would have dreamed of her stealing that piece of gold? She heard you say that Father had sent a boy to buy a piece of wolf sinew and she was frightened. In the kitchen she asked me what wolf sinew was. Everybody laughed, and we told her that wolf sinew was a part of the wolf's body. We said that when a person steals anything and won't give it up, a piece of wolf sinew is used to bind the thief's hands and feet. When she heard this, she must have become alarmed. So, when the two singers went away, she went out too. Seeing people at the gate, she must have hidden herself in the stable where the boys found her."
"It is very, very hard ever to know what people are really like," Yueniang said. "A young maid like that with such a thievish head and a rat's brain! It is disgraceful."
Li Jiao'er took Xiahua to her room. Guijie reproved her. "What a fool you must be," she said. "You are sixteen years old and you ought to know what you're about. How could you have been such an idiot? When you picked that thing up, you should have brought it here and given it to your mistress. Then, if it had been found out, she could have done something for you. Why didn't you tell her about it? Do you enjoy having thumbscrews put on you? You are an absolute fool. You know the proverb: 'A black-clothed man will stand beside a black pillar.' If it were not that you belong to these apartments, we shouldn't bother about you. But you do belong here, and now that you have been punished it brings shame upon us all."
Then she reproached her aunt. "You are no good either," she said. "If I'd been in your place, I shouldn't have allowed my maid to be punished. I should have dragged her to my room and punished her myself. Why are thumbscrews never put on other people's maids? Why is your maid picked out? You are too soft, and your nostrils have no breath in them. If they send your maid away, I suppose you will still say nothing. But if you won't say anything, I will. I am not going to have this girl turned out and everybody laughing at you. Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian are like a couple of wolves. You can never hold your own against them."
She turned to the maid. "Do you wish to be sent away?" she said.
"No," said the maid.
"Well, in the future, you must consider nobody but your mistress. You must do everything she wants you to do. Then we will do our best for you."
"I will do everything you say," Xiahua said. When Ximen Qing came to Li Ping'er's room, he found her sitting on the bed with Wu Yin'er. He was going to take his clothes off and go to bed, but Li Ping'er said: "Wu Yin'er is here, and there is no room for you. Please go somewhere else."
"Why is there no room for me?" said Ximen. "One of you can sleep on one side, and one on the other, and I'll sleep in the middle. That will be all right."
Li Ping'er looked at him. "What bright ideas you do have," she said.
"Where shall I go, then?" said Ximen.
"Go and spend the night with the Fifth Lady," Li Ping'er said. Ximen Qing did not move for some time, then he said: "Very well, I don't want to trouble you. I'll go." He went to Pan Jinlian's room.
He might have been an angel from Heaven. Jinlian took his clothes and girdle. Then she arranged the bed and put silken bedclothes on it. She made tea and afterwards they went to bed.
When Ximen Qing had left, Li Ping'e and Wu Yin'er set out chessmen to play Elephant Chess. Li Ping'er told Yingchun to bring a box of fruits and heat a jar of Jinhua wine so that she might drink it with Wu Yin'er. "If you would like some food," she said to the girl, "I will have some prepared for you."
"I am not hungry, Mother," Wu Yin'er said. "Please don't trouble my sister."

"Your sister Wu Yin'er is not hungry," Li Ping'er said to Yingchun. "Bring her some fruit cakes on a tray." After a while the tray was brought and set beside them.
Li Ping'er and Wu Yin'er played one or two games. Then the wine was heated, and they drank together in silver cups.
"Give me my lute," Wu Yin'er said. "I will sing Mother a song."
"Perhaps you had better not sing," Li Ping'er said. "The baby is asleep and, besides, Father might hear and he won't like it. Let us play dice instead." She told Yingchun to bring the dice, and they threw the dice with wine for the wager. When they had played for some time, Wu Yin'er said to Yingchun: "Go to the other room and ask the nurse to come and have some wine with us."
But Yingchun said: "She is in bed with the baby. He has gone to sleep."
"Yes, she must look after the baby," said Li Ping'er. "Take a jar of wine to her. You don't realize how knowing the baby is. If he is left, he wakes up at once. One day, we three were asleep on the bed. His father moved slightly and the baby opened his eyes at once. He might have known. The nurse came and took him away, but he cried and would insist on having me to nurse him."
Wu Yin'er smiled. "Since you have had the baby, it must be awkward for you and Father. How often does he come to you?"
"He doesn't come very often," said Li Ping'er. "Sometimes several days pass and he only comes once or twice. But he often comes to see the baby. And sometimes my belly nearly bursts with anger, for now both he and the child get nothing but secret curses from some members of the household, not to speak of the curses I get. This has made me suffer a great deal, but I can't help it. I sometimes wish he didn't come at all, because, after he has spent the night here, the next day there is much raising of eyebrows and ugly looks, as much as to say that I monopolize him. That's why I urged him to go away just now.
"You don't know how it is, my dear. There are many people in this house and that means many tongues. Look at that business of the gold today. Someone who is jealous asked the Great Lady how it could be lost in my room. Luckily it turned out that Xiahua had taken it, so there was no mistaking green for red or black for white. Otherwise they would have said that one of my maids or my nurse or old woman Feng had taken it, as if they had caught a ghost. As it was, they made old woman Feng cry and talk about killing herself. She said she would not go away if the gold wasn't found. Now that it has been found, she has just taken a lantern and gone."
"Mother," said Wu Yin'er, "you must look well after the baby for Father's sake, and let people do what they like. The Great Lady never talks in this way. It is only the others who are jealous because you have a child. I only hope that Father will do what he thinks fit."
"If it hadn't been for your father and the Great Lady," Li Ping'er said, "the child would've never lived until today." They talked and drank until the third night watch. Then they went to sleep.

## 066
### Li Kuei-chieh Requests the Retention of Hsia-hua; Wu Yüeh-niang in a Fit of Anger Curses at Tai-an; Beggar Ying & Wu Yin'er

As a fancy name, it has been designated the king of all the flowers;[1]
The miraculous appearance of its icy flesh sets it apart from its rivals.
Its seductiveness enhanced by the sunlight, it displays its pure allure;
Its cool limpidity transported by the wind diffuses a chaste fragrance.
Its jade countenance need not envy the ladies who affect teary complexions;[2]
Its snowy visage cannot help but remind one of the powder-faced gentleman.[3]
With sandalwood clappers and golden goblets[4] its qualities are celebrated;
What need is there to boast of Mr. Wei's Purples and Mr. Yao's Yellows?[5]

Because Hsi-men Ch'ing was on holiday he did not go to the yamen that day. When he got up in the morning, he went to the front reception hall to look on as Tai-an prepared two table settings of food for the Ch'iao family, one of them to be delivered to Madame Ch'iao the Fifth, and the other to the wife of Ch'iao Hung. Both of them were replete with:
High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery,
assortments of the giblets of domestic fowl, seasonal fruits, and the like. Madame Ch'iao the Fifth rewarded Tai-an with two handkerchiefs and three candareens of silver, and Ch'iao Hung's wife gave him a bolt of black silk, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh, upon taking leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing the day before, had gone straight to the home of Huang the Fourth. Huang the Fourth, for his part, had already arranged with his associates to seal up the sum of ten taels of silver to thank Ying Po-chüeh for his services.
"His Honor told us to come back after the Lantern Festival is over," said Huang the Fourth. "From what he said, it sounded as though he might be willing to renegotiate the contract for the remaining five hundred taels that we owe him. We can hardly manage without the use of that sum of money."
"How much more do you need right now?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"Brother Li the Third doesn't know any better," said Huang the Fourth, "and wants to try to borrow it from some eunuch or other. But it would still cost us 5 percent interest per month. It seems to me that it would be better if we could borrow it here, and thereby take advantage of the prestige of his yamen. Even if we have to expend something, both high and low, it would still end up costing us less. Right now, if he can be induced to put up another fifty ingots of silver, it would make it a contract for an even thousand taels, and simplify the calculation of the monthly interest payments."
When Ying Po-chüeh had heard him out, he nodded his head and said, "That's no problem. But if I succeed in persuading him to do this on your behalf, how will you and your associates, the six of you, reward me for my efforts?"
"I will take it up with Li the Third," said Huang the Fourth, "and persuade our associates to give you an additional five taels of silver."
"You can forget about any five taels," said Ying Po-chüeh. "With the skills that I possess, those five taels of yours mean nothing to me. But if you rely on my ingenuity to persuade him with a single word, I'll have to be included in the deal. Today, my wife has gone to his place to attend a party, but I won't be going there myself. Tomorrow evening, however, I've been invited to a lantern-viewing party there. The two of you, first thing tomorrow morning, should supply yourselves with four kinds of delicacies, and also a jug of Chin-hua wine. Don't bother to engage the services of any singing girls, because Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh are already there and haven't gone home yet. You can hire six players of wind and percussion instruments from the licensed quarter. If I escort you over there, he's sure to invite you to sit down for a visit. Then, by putting in no more than:
A single word or half a sentence,[6]
from the sidelines, I guarantee that I will persuade him to do as you wish. If he agrees to come up with another five hundred taels of silver and renegotiate the contract for an even thousand taels, at the very most you'll owe him fifty taels of silver per month. What does that amount to after all? It would cost you that much to keep a mistress for a month. As the saying goes:
An undissembling scholar may well exist, but there is no such thing as unadulterated varnish.[7]
When you turn over the consignment of goods you have contracted to purvey, you can mix some sawdust in with the incense and adulterate the wax with juniper oil. Who will know the difference? After all:
You're not out to catch fish,
But only to muddy the waters.[8]
The best way to proceed is to avail yourself of his reputation."
Thereupon, their plan having been decided upon, the next day, Li the Third and Huang the Fourth actually purchased the wine and gifts and turned them over to Ying Po-chüeh, who escorted their two servants on the way to deliver them to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the front reception hall taking care of the dispatch of the complimentary table settings, when Ying Po-chüeh showed up and said, "My wife put you to a lot of trouble yesterday and was late returning home."
"I went to a party at Commandant Chou Hsiu's place yesterday," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "and it was already the first watch of the night before I got home. So I didn't even have a chance to see my new relatives, who, I was told, had departed some time earlier. This morning, being on holiday, I did not have to go to the yamen, but, rather than going to see them, I have sent two table settings to the houses of my Ch'iao relatives."
When he had finished speaking, he sat down.
Ying Po-chüeh then called for Li Chin, the servant from Li the Third's household who had accompanied him, and said, "Bring in the gifts."
The two servants then carried in the gifts and put them down just inside the ceremonial gate leading into the second courtyard.
"Brothers Li the Third and Huang the Fourth," said Ying Po-chüeh, "have repeatedly told me of their sense of obligation for the great favor they have received from you. On this festive occasion, not having anything else to offer, they have purchased some insignificant gifts as a humble offering for you to give away to someone if you like."
What should they see at this juncture, but the two servants, who proceeded to come forward, prostrate themselves on the ground, and kowtow.
"What did you have to bring these gifts for?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It would not be right for me to accept them. Tell them to carry them back where they came from."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "for you to refuse to accept these gifts of theirs, and insist on having them returned to the donors, would be a very ugly gesture. They also wanted to engage the services of some singing girls to come and wait on you, but I put a stop to that. They have, however, hired six players of wind and percussion instruments, who are waiting outside at this moment."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered. "Have them called inside for me."
In no time at all, the six musicians were summoned into their presence and knelt down in front of him.
"Since their services have already been engaged," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to Ying Po-chüeh, "I can hardly send them back where they came from. The appropriate thing to do would be to invite the two of them over for a visit."
This was just the signal Ying Po-chüeh had been waiting for, and he promptly called Li Chin over and instructed him, "When you get home, tell your master that His Honor has accepted his gifts and is not going to send anyone with a formal invitation, but that he would like your master and Master Huang the Fourth to come over as soon as possible for a visit."
Li Chin assented to these instructions and withdrew. Before long, the gifts were duly put away, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to reward the two servants with a candareen of silver apiece, and they kowtowed and departed. The six players of wind and percussion instruments stood in attendance in the courtyard below.
In a little while, Ch'i-t'ung brought in a serving of tea, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Ying Po-chüeh company as they drank it.
Ch'i-t'ung then said, "The food is ready. Where would you like to eat it?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by ushering Ying Po-chüeh over to the ante-room on the west side of the courtyard, where they took their seats.
He then went on to ask Ying Po-chüeh, "You didn't happen to run into Hsieh Hsi-ta today, did you?"
"I had no sooner gotten up this morning," said Ying Po-chüeh, "than Li the Third showed up at my place and arranged with me to take care of having the gifts delivered here. How could I have had the spare time to meet with him?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Ch'i-t'ung. "Quickly go and invite Master Hsieh to come join us."
In no time at all, Shu-t'ung set up a table and prepared it for their repast, while Hua-t'ung brought in four portions of appetizers in a square box coated with translucent lacquer. These were served in dainty diminutive picnic saucers, decorated with patterns both inside and out. There was one saucer of delectably tasty squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of a sweet-flavored assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of redo-lently fragrant orange conserve, and one saucer of fragrant bamboo shoots preserved in fermented red mash. There were also four large serving bowls containing main dishes. One bowl of stewed singed sheep's head, one bowl of marinated broiled duck, one bowl of blanched celery cabbage, egg, and wonton soup, and one bowl of yams with red-cooked minced-pork meatballs. At either end of the table there were set out ivory chopsticks inlaid with gold. In front of Ying Po-chüeh there was a bowl of fresh polished white rice, and in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing there was a cup of fragrant congee made from nonglutinous rice.
After the two of them had consumed their repast, the utensils were cleared away, and the table was wiped clean, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh continued to sit where they were, playing at backgammon, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit.
Taking advantage of the fact that Hsieh Hsi-ta had not showed up yet, Ying Po-chüeh seized the occasion to ask, "Brother, how much silver do you propose to advance to Li Chih and Huang the Fourth tomorrow?"
"I plan to retrieve the old contract and renegotiate a new one for the five hundred taels of silver they still owe me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That ought to do it."
"That would be all right, I guess," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "but it would really be better if you could see your way to advance them enough additional capital to make a round thousand taels. It would make it easier to calculate the interest in the future. And I also have another suggestion. Since you really have no use for those gold bracelets they gave you, if you were to throw them in at a valuation of a hundred and fifty taels, you wouldn't have to come up with much in the way of additional cash."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard him out, he said, "What you say makes a lot of sense. I'll advance them another three hundred and fifty taels tomorrow, then, and renegotiate the contract for an even thousand taels. That way I won't be so improvident as to let the gold sit idly at home."
As the two of them were playing backgammon together, Tai-an suddenly came in and announced, "Pen the Fourth has brought in a large marble standing screen, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, together with a bronze gong, and a bronze drum, complete with their stands and knockers. He says that they belong to the household of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Hsiang the Fifth, who wants to pawn them for thirty taels of silver. Is Father willing to agree to that or not?"
"Tell Pen the Fourth to bring them in for me to see," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long, Pen the Fourth, with the aid of two assistants, carried them in and set them down in the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Pochüeh gave up their game of backgammon and came over to look at them. It so happens that the principal object was a three-foot-wide, five-foot-tall, marble standing screen, suitable for being displayed upon a table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and decorated with gold tracery, the pattern in the marble being such that:
The black and white were distinctly defined.[9]
After Ying Po-chüeh had contemplated the objects for a while, he said deliberately to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, just take a good look at these things. The pattern in the marble resembles a lion couchant, protector of the house, and the two stands for the bronze gong and the bronze drum are sumptuously decorated with varicolored designs and cloud patterns carved in relief, the workmanship of which is truly outstanding."
Doing his best to expedite things from the sidelines, he continued, "Brother, you really ought to accept these objects that he is offering to pawn with you. Even leaving out of account the bronze gong and drum with their two stands, this screen alone is something you could hardly hope to buy for fifty taels of silver."
"There is no way of knowing whether or not he is likely to redeem them in the future," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Needless to say," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "he is hardly likely to redeem them. His affairs are like a cart on the downward slope. And if he waits as long as three years, the accumulated interest would probably be equal to the capital."
"All right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have my son-in-law in the shop up front weigh out thirty taels of silver for him."
As soon as he had sent Pen the Fourth on his way, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the standing screen wiped clean, positioned it at the upper end of the large reception hall, and proceeded to examine it from left and right. Indeed, he found, the golds and greens of the varicolored clouds blended their hues harmoniously.
"Have those musicians had something to eat yet?" he then went on to ask.
"They're being fed down below right now," said Ch'in-t'ung.
"Tell them, when they're finished eating," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to come and let us hear them play."
Thereupon, a great drum was carried into the reception hall, the bronze gong and bronze drum were set up in the corridor, and the musicians commenced to play. Truly:
The sound shakes the cloudy empyrean;
The tones startle both fish and birds.[10]
As they were playing, who should appear but Ch'i-t'ung, with Hsieh Hsi-ta in his wake, who came in and bowed to the two of them.
"Hsieh Hsi-ta," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "come over here and see what you think this standing screen is worth."
Hsieh Hsi-ta stepped up and proceeded to examine it for some time, uttering no end of exaggerated praise as he did so, saying, "Brother, even if you were able to strike a bargain, you must have paid at least a hundred taels of silver for this standing screen. If you had offered any less, they would have refused to sell it."
"Would you believe it?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Even with that bronze gong and bronze drum out there thrown in, complete with their two stands and knockers, he paid only thirty taels of silver for them altogether."
Clapping his hands together, Hsieh Hsi-ta exclaimed, "Amitābha be praised! Where could one ever find such a bargain? Including capital and interest, even if you leave the standing screen out of account, thirty taels of silver would hardly suffice to purchase this bronze gong and bronze drum, together with their stands. Just look at the workmanship of these stands. The cinnabar-red painted lacquer is all done in accord with official specifications, and the instruments themselves must contain, at the very least, some forty catties of resounding bronze, which must be worth a pretty penny. No wonder they say:
Every object has its rightful owner.[11]
Who else could hope to have such great good fortune as yours, that a bargain like this should just happen to come your way?"
After they had chatted for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to have a seat in his studio, and, before long, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth also showed up.
"Why did the two of you go to the trouble of sending me gifts?" said Hsimen Ch'ing. "It would hardly be right for me to accept them."
This threw Li Chih and Huang the Fourth into such a state of consternation that they kowtowed, saying, "Pray don't embarrass us. These insignificant things are only indiscriminate tokens for you to give away to someone if you like. We could hardly presume not to respond to Your Honor's summons."
Thereupon, seats were provided for them, and they sat down to one side. Shortly thereafter, the page boy Hua-t'ung brought in five cups of tea, and, after they had drunk them, he took the cups and their raised saucers away.
A little later, Tai-an came up and asked, "Father, where would you like me to set up the table?"
"Bring the table in here," directed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well remain where we are."
Thereupon, Tai-an and Hua-t'ung between them managed to carry in an Eight Immortals table finished with agateware lacquer and set it down on the floor over a charcoal brazier. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta took the seats of honor at the head of the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the host's position opposite them, and Li Chih and Huang the Fourth sat down at either side. Shortly thereafter, a plate of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres suitable to accompany a drinking party was brought in, along with soup, rice, and other delicacies, served in:

Large platters and large bowls,
consisting of goose, duck, chicken feet, and every other kind of side dish.
The finest of Yang-kao vintages is decanted;
The soup appears afloat with peach blossoms.
The musicians continued to play outside the windows, and Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Wu Yin-erh to serve the wine. But we will say no more, for the time being, about this drinking party in the front compound.
To continue our story, the male servant from Li Kuei-chieh's establishment and the maidservant, La-mei, from Wu Yin-erh's place, having engaged sedan chairs for the purpose, came to take their mistresses back home. When Li Kuei-chieh heard that the servant had arrived, she hurried out to the front gate and engaged him in a surreptitious conversation for some time, after which she returned to the master suite to say goodbye and explain that she needed to go home.
Wu Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged her to stay, saying, "We're all about to go to the home of my sister-in-law and are prepared to take both of you with us. If it gets too late, you can set off from their place, without any need for sedan chairs, and make your way home by joining the rest of us in 'walking off the hundred ailments.'"
"Mother, you don't understand," said Li Kuei-chieh. "There's no one to be relied upon at home. My elder sister is not there, and moreover, my fifth maternal aunt has invited a lot of people for a 'hamper party.'[12] My mother is really anxious to have me there and was expecting me all day yesterday. If she weren't so concerned, she wouldn't have sent the servant to fetch me. Under ordinary circumstances, if you invited me to stay several days, I'd be happy to do so."
When Yüeh-niang realized that she would not stay, she told Yü-hsiao to take the two trays from the gift box she had originally brought with her, fill one of them with Lantern Festival dumplings, and the other with sugar crisps, and then give it to the servant from her establishment to carry. She also gave Li Kuei-chieh a tael of silver and allowed her to make an early departure. After Kuei-chieh had said goodbye to Yüeh-niang and the others, her aunt accompanied her to the front compound and told Hua-t'ung to carry her felt bag for her. When she came by the door to the studio in the front courtyard, she told Tai-an to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing to come out and speak to her.
Cautiously lifting aside the portiere, Tai-an went inside the studio and extended the invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Kuei-chieh is about to go home and would like to have a word with you."
"Do you mean to say that little whore Li Kuei-chieh hasn't left yet?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"She's not going home until today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then stepped outside, where he saw that Li Kuei-chieh was wearing a jacket that opened down the middle, made of lilac-colored Lu-chou silk with purfled edging, over a skirt of white glazed damask with a wide varicolored drawnwork border, and had a white satin kerchief shot with turquoise wrapped around her head.
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
she knelt down in front of him and kowtowed four times, saying, "I've put Father and Mother to a lot of trouble."
"Why don't you go home tomorrow?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"There's no one to look after things at home," said Kuei-chieh. "My mother has sent the servant with a sedan chair to fetch me."
"There is also another matter that I'd like to take up with you," she went on to say. "With regard to that child in my aunt's quarters, you really oughtn't to have her taken away. My aunt has already punished her last night with a few strokes of the cane. If you consider the situation, she's still young and doesn't really understand how to behave. I gave her a real talking to, and from now on her conduct will be reformed. She won't dare do anything like that again. It's not so much that I object to your getting rid of her, but if my aunt is left with no one to wait on her during a major festival like this, wouldn't you be troubled by it? It's always been the case that:
Though the wooden ladle or the fire tongs may be short,
They're still better than having to use your hands.[13]
Father, whatever you do, for my sake, allow this maidservant to remain in your household."
"Since you have spoken up for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll keep the slave after all."
Turning to Tai-an, he said, "Go to the rear compound and tell the First Lady not to send for a go-between."
Noticing that Hua-t'ung was standing by with Kuei-chieh's felt bag, Tai-an said, "Have him give me Kuei-chieh's felt bag to hold, and send him back to the rear compound to deliver the message."
Hua-t'ung assented and headed straight back to the rear compound.
When Kuei-chieh had finished speaking to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she raised her voice outside the east window and called out, "Beggar Ying, I won't bother to pay my respects to you. Your mother is on her way home."
"Drag that lousy little whore back in here," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "Don't let her go. Have her sing a song suite for my delectation."
"You'll have to wait until your mother has the leisure to sing for you," said Kuei-chieh.
"What kind of chaste schemes are the two of you hatching," asked Ying Pochüeh, "that you insist on carrying on a private conversation without letting me in on it? If you let her go home in broad daylight like this, you'll only be benefiting the lousy little whore. She'll have time to take on any number of customers before it gets dark."
"You're delirious, you beggar!" said Kuei-chieh, as she made her exit with a laugh.
Tai-an accompanied her on the way out and saw her into her sedan chair. When he had finished speaking with Kuei-chieh, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound to adjust his toilet.
During his absence, Ying Po-chüeh said to Hsieh Hsi-ta, "This little whore, Li Kuei-chieh, is carrying on just like an escaped convict. Her meretriciousness is more beguiling than ever. As though on a major festival like this she would ever consent to remain at one place if she could help it. She has arranged for the procuress of her establishment to send for her. I wonder who it might be that is waiting for her there."
"Take a guess," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, as he surreptitiously whispered no more than a few sentences:
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
into Ying Po-chüeh's ear.
"Keep your voice down," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Our brother doesn't know anything about it."
In no time at all, they heard the sound of Hsi-men Ch'ing's footsteps, and the two of them ceased speaking.
Taking Wu Yin-erh onto his lap, Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to pass the same cup of wine back and forth between them, saying as he did so, "This adopted daughter of mine is both gentle and soft, a hundred times better than that little whore from the Li Family Establishment, that not even a dog would want to mess around with."
"What a thing to say, Master Two!" laughed Wu Yin-erh.
Every single person is a unique individual,
A hundred persons are a hundred individuals.
In the space of any particular quarter,
There are both the wise and the foolish.[14]
Why insist on comparing one with another? What has Kuei-chieh ever done to annoy you?"
"There's no point in interrogating that lousy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All he utters is the same old:
Ridiculous blatherskite."
"Don't you worry yourself about anyone else," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Just let me live out my days with this adopted daughter of mine. Daughter, come over here, take up your *p'i-p'a*, and sing me a song."
Thereupon, Wu Yin-erh:
Neither hastily nor hurriedly,
Deftly extended her jade fingers,
Gently strummed the silken strings,
placed the *p'i-p'a* on her knees, and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "The Willows Dangle Their Gold":
In my heart I am preoccupied,
Unable to eat food or drink tea.[15]
It is not easy to relinquish my handsome lover.
I am desolate because I can't get him out of my mind.
I don't even know whose establishment you are visiting now.
If you want to part company with me, at least you could give me a clear statement.
You have utterly abandoned me;
You have utterly deceived me;
But you'd better not think you've heard the last of me.
After Ying Po-chüeh had downed a cup of wine, Wu Yin-erh proffered another to Hsieh Hsi-ta and then proceeded to sing, to the same tune as before:
I am constantly depressed. When will I ever achieve my heart's desire?
I am preoccupied with the thought of my tender-hearted lover.
My sisters do their best to keep me under tight control;
My old mother will not let up on me;
Which makes it look as if I am unable to keep my word.
I don't love you for your jewels or your gold.
The thing that I love, the thing that I love, is just your handsome face.
If we could only be man and wife,
I could die happy,
Because then you and I could satisfy each other's desires.
But we will say no more, for the moment, about how Wu Yin-erh served wine, played her instrument, and sang in the front compound.
To resume our story, Hua-t'ung went back to the rear compound on his errand, where he found that Wu Yüeh-niang was sitting in the master suite together with Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery.
On seeing Hua-t'ung come in, Yüeh-niang was just about to send him after Old Mother Feng in order to take Hsia-hua away, when Hua-t'ung said, "Father has sent me to tell you that he doesn't want you to have her taken away."
"Your father told me to sell her off," said Yüeh-niang. "Why should he not want to sell her now? Tell me the truth. Who was it who suggested to your father that she not be taken away?"
"Just now," said Hua-t'ung, "I was standing by, holding Kuei-chieh's felt bag for her. But when she was just about to leave, she spoke to Father, begging him to let Hsia-hua stay, to deal with her leniently, and not to allow her to be taken away. Father told Tai-an to come back and tell you about it, but Tai-an refused to come inside and, right in front of Father, sent me to come in his stead, took her felt bag away from me, and then proceeded to see Kuei-chieh on her way himself."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she was more than a little annoyed and cursed Tai-an, saying, "Why that double-dealing, ingratiating, treacherous slave! No wonder, when I was originally told to send for a go-between, he said it was Father who had ordered that she be taken away, when all along he was just up to his tricks. And now he's contrived to be the one who sees Kuei-chieh on her way. When he comes back here, I'll have something to say to him."
As she was speaking, whom should she see but Wu Yin-erh, who came in after she had finished singing in the front compound.
"La-mei, the maidservant from your place, has come to fetch you," Yüeh-niang said to her. "Li Kuei-chieh has already gone home. No doubt, you're planning to go home yourself."
"Since you have urged me to stay," said Wu Yin-erh, "if I were to go home, it would only show that:
I wouldn't know a favor if I saw one."
Then, turning to La-mei, she went on to ask, "What did you come for?"
"Mother sent me to see how you were doing," said La-mei.
"There isn't anything going on at home, is there?" Wu Yin-erh asked.
"Nothing at all," La-mei replied.
"Since there's nothing going on," said Wu Yin-erh, "what did you come to fetch me for? You might as well return home. Mother here has urged me to stay, and to join her and the other ladies this evening in visiting her sister-inlaw's place and then 'walking off the hundred ailments' together. I won't come home until getting back from that excursion."
When she had finished speaking, La-mei was about to depart, but Yüeh-niang said, "Call her back so I can see that she has something to eat."
"The First Lady is offering you something to eat," said Wu Yin-erh. If you wait a little, you can take my clothes bag home with you. Tell Mother not to send a sedan chair for me. This evening I'll make my way home on foot."
"Why didn't Wu Hui come?" she went on to ask.
"He's at home suffering from an eye ailment," La-mei said.
"Take La-mei back to the rear compound," Yüeh-niang instructed Yü-hsiao, "and see that she gets provided with two dishes of pork, a plate of steamed dumplings, and a cup of wine. And also take the gift box that she brought with her and replenish it with a tray of Lantern Festival dumplings, and a tray of tea cakes, to take back with her."
It so happens that Wu Yin-erh had left her clothes bag in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and Li P'ing-erh had already sought out a set of first-class silk brocade clothing, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a tael of silver and put them in her felt bag as a gift.
But Wu Yin-erh blithely declined them, saying, "Mother, I don't want these clothes."
"The truth of the matter is, Mother," she continued with an ingratiating smile, "that I don't have a white jacket to wear. If you would take back these silk clothes, could you possibly seek out any kind of old white satin jacket and give it to me instead?"
"My white jackets are all too big for you," said Li P'ing-erh. "You could scarcely wear any of them."
Thereupon, she said to Ying-ch'un, "Take the keys and get a whole bolt of white satin out of my large trunk to give to Yin-erh."
"Tell your mother," she said, "to have a tailor make up two dress jackets for you."
"By the way," she went on to ask, "did you want figured satin or plain?"
"Mother, I'd prefer the plain," replied Wu Yin-erh. "I want something that will go well with a vest."
Then, turning to Ying-ch'un, she said with an ingratiating smile, "I'm putting you to the trouble of going upstairs again on my behalf. In the future, though I have nothing else to offer, I can always entertain you with a song."
In a little while, Ying-ch'un brought down from upstairs a bolt of fine plain white satin, manufactured on a wide loom in Sung-chiang, the label attached to the end of which indicated that it weighed thirty-eight ounces, and handed it to Wu Yin-erh. Yin-erh hastily:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;

Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;
kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh four times. After which, she got to her feet and also bowed deeply to Ying-ch'un eight times.
"Yin-erh," said Li P'ing-erh, "Wrap up this silk clothing and take it along with you too. Sooner or later you may have occasion to wear it to a party."
Wu Yin-erh said, "Mother has not only bestowed this white satin on me to make a jacket out of, but also persuaded me to take this other clothing as well."
Thereupon, she kowtowed to her again to express her gratitude. In no time at all, when La-mei had finished her meal, the gift box and felt bag were entrusted to her, and she set off for home.
Yüeh-niang took the occasion to say, "Yin-erh, this conduct of yours is just the kind I like. See that you don't imitate those meretricious tricks of Li Kueichieh. Yesterday, and again this morning, she carried on just like:
A recalcitrant tiger that refuses to lie down,
declining our invitation to stay, and insisting on going home. What's happening at her place that requires her to be there so urgently? She didn't even want to put herself out to sing. When she saw that the servant from her place had come for her, she didn't even have anything to eat before running off, without even waiting to say goodbye to you. See that you don't imitate that conduct of hers."
"Dear Mother!" exclaimed Wu Yin-erh. "What sort of a place is this after all, the residence of Father and Mother? If she had any excess wind in her colon, she should have saved it for somewhere else, rather than presuming to let it off here. But Kuei-chieh is still young, and doesn't know what's what. Mother shouldn't allow herself to be bothered by her."
As they were talking, who should appear but the page boy Lai-ting, who had been sent by Sister-in-law Wu to urge them on their way, saying, "My mistress respectfully requests that Sister-in-law Three, and the other ladies, including Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, should come over as soon as possible, and that Sun Hsüeh-o should also come along for a visit."
"When you get home," said Yüeh-niang, "say to your mistress, 'We're in the process of getting ready right now. The Second Lady is suffering from pain in her legs, and will not be coming, but stay behind to look after the house. Your brother-in-law is entertaining some guests in the front compound today, leaving hardly anyone in the residential part of the house. The lady from the rear compound will not be coming, and Li Kuei-chieh has already gone home, so that, including Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, there will be six of us in all. You oughtn't to go to any trouble on our behalf. After visiting together a while longer, we'll come over at nightfall.'"
"Who have your master and mistress engaged to sing for us?" she went on to ask Lai-ting.
"Big Sister Yü," Lai-ting replied and, when he had finished speaking, set off ahead of them.
Wu Yüeh-niang then, along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ingerh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh, having spoken to Hsi-men Ch'ing about their arrangements, and instructed the wet nurse to stay at home and look after Kuan-ko, all dressed themselves up to befit the occasion and set off in six sedan chairs. Escorted by Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung,[16] and Lai-an, along with four orderlies, they proceeded on their way to the home of Sister-in-law Wu. Truly:
In myriads of courtyards, the spring prospects are conspicuous;
In thousands of households, the lantern lights[17] blaze all night.
In this life, nights such as this are seldom to be seen;
Next year where will we see the bright moon on this night?

The next day Ximen Qing did not go to his office. When he got up in the morning, he went to the front court and told Daian to take two presents of food to the Qiaos' house, one for Lady Qiao the Fifth and one for Mistress Qiao. Lady Qiao the Fifth gave the bearers two handkerchiefs and three *qian* of silver. Mistress Qiao gave them a roll of black cloth.
When Ying Bojue left Ximen, he hastened to Huang the Fourth's house. Huang had prepared and sealed ten taels of silver for him.
"His Lordship," he said, "told me to go and see him again after the festival. I think it will be all right about the five hundred tael contract, but what about the land tax?"
"How much will you need?" Bojue asked him.
"Brother Li," said Huang the Fourth, "does not understand. He talks about borrowing from some eunuch or other. But it seems to me that anywhere we shall have to pay five percent interest. We might as well do all our borrowing here and so save a good deal of commission. I want fifty silver ingots. In other words, I must borrow a thousand taels. I am prepared to pay interest monthly."
Ying Bojue nodded. "Don't worry," he said, "I will see about that. But there are six of you. How much do you propose to give me?"
"I will tell Brother Li that each of us must give you five taels."
"I think I can save that five taels for you by my cleverness," Bojue said. "One word from me will do all you require. My wife has gone to his Lordship's place today, so I shall not go now. But he has invited me to go tomorrow evening and see the lanterns with him. You two get up early, have some excellent dishes prepared and buy a jar of Jinhua wine. Don't engage any singing girls, because Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er will be there, but arrange for six musicians from the bawdy house. I will take everything for you. He is sure to invite you to his party. When we are all together, I shall only need to speak a sentence, or even half a sentence, and, I promise you, that will do the trick. You will get five hundred taels and make out your contract for a thousand. You pay thirty taels a month interest. It won't cost you any more than keeping a woman. The proverb says: Forgery is not one of the recognized fine arts, yet there is no genuine lacquer to be found anywhere. When you pay your tax, put plenty of wood in the incense and mix enough pine oil with the wax. Nobody is going to find out. We have no ambition to catch any fish; all we hope to do is to stir up the water a bit. A man who wants to borrow money has only to establish a reputation, and then everything is plain sailing."
They agreed upon this plan. The next day Li and Huang bought the presents and Ying Bojue got two boys to carry them to Ximen's house. When they arrived, Ximen was having the tables made ready in the outer court. Bojue made a reverence. "Yesterday," he said, "my wife must have greatly inconvenienced you. She came home quite late."
"I went to a party at Zhou Nanxuan's place," Ximen said. "It was the first night watch when I came back, so I didn't see any of my new relatives. They had left early. Today I am taking a holiday. That is why you don't find me at the office." They sat down. Bojue summoned the boys and told them to bring in the presents. The boxes were carried in and set down inside the second door.
"Brother Li and Brother Huang," said Bojue, "have repeatedly told me how grateful they are to you. They have nothing worthy to offer you, but they have bought these trifling things, and send them for you to dispose of among your servants." The two boys came forward and kowtowed.
"I have done nothing to deserve these gifts," said Ximen Qing, "and I can't possibly accept them. They must go back." "Brother," Bojue said, "if you will not accept the things, if you make the boys take them back again, my friends will die of shame. They were going to engage singing girls, but I told them not to. They have sent some musicians who are waiting outside for your orders at this moment."
"Well," said Ximen, "since they have sent the things, I can't very well send them back. I suppose we had better ask them to come and join us."
Ying Bojue immediately told Li's boy to go back to his master. "Tell him that his present has been accepted," Bojue said. "We are not sending anyone especially to invite him, but ask him and Uncle Huang to come here at once."
The boy brought in the presents. Ximen Qing told Daian to give him two *qian* of silver. Then he kowtowed and went upon his errand. The six musicians still waited for orders. Qitong brought tea, and Ximen and Ying Bojue drank it together. Then Ximen asked Bojue to go to the rooms in the eastern wing. "Have you seen Xie Xida today?" he asked.
"No," said Bojue, "I got up early this morning and went to Li's place to see about the presents, and I have been too busy to see him." Ximen Qing told Qitong to go at once and invite Xie Xida to join them.
Shutong set the table, and dinner was served. They ate it together, and afterwards everything was cleared away. They played double sixes for wine. Ying Bojue decided to speak before Xie Xida came. "How much can you give Li and Huang?" he said.
"I shall take back the old contract and give them another for five hundred taels."
"You can do that, of course," Ying Bojue said, "but it would be better to make the amount a thousand taels. It is easier to calculate the interest. Then, too, you have no use for that gold they brought you. Let them have it back, and count it as a hundred and fifty taels. If you do that, only a little more will be needed to make up the thousand."
"That is a good idea," Ximen said. "I will let them have another three hundred and fifty taels and make out the contract for a thousand. It is better than keeping gold where I have no use for it."
They were playing double sixes when Daian came in. He said: "Ben the Fourth is bringing a large marble screen with a shell base, two sets of bronze gongs, and some little bells. Their Highnesses, the Bai family, propose to pawn them with us for thirty taels, and Ben the Fourth wishes to know whether you are satisfied."
Ximen gave orders that the things should be brought in. Ben the Fourth and two other men carried them and set them down in the great hall. Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue stopped their game and went to see them. The screen was three feet wide and five feet high, made of a single piece of marble the size of a table. The frame had a pattern of conchs and was gilded, and the black and white markings in the marble were exquisitely delicate.
Bojue looked at it. After a while he said quietly to Ximen Qing: "Brother, if you look at it closely, you will see that the markings are exactly in the shape of a couching lion keeping guard over the house." They examined the bronze gongs and drums, decorated in gold and colors, and engraved with a cloud design. They were very handsome.
"I should have them if I were you, Brother," said Bojue. "You could not buy a screen like this for fifty taels, without taking the other things into account."
"But they may be redeemed," Ximen Qing said.
"Don't trouble about that," said Bojue. "It is like rattling down a steep hill in a carriage. If, after three years, they redeem them, the interest will amount to a tidy sum."
"Very well," Ximen said. "Tell Jingji to get the money ready for them."
Ximen Qing had the screen cleaned and put at the upper end of the great hall. He looked at it from all angles, and, indeed, the gold and green made a very harmonious and brilliant effect. He asked if the musicians had yet had their meal. One of the servants told him they were still eating. "When they are done, tell them to come and play for us," he said.
The big drum was taken out of the hall and a bronze gong and drums were set down under the eaves. When they were sounded, the noise went up to the skies, and the reverberations startled the birds of the air and the fishes under the water. Meanwhile, Xie Xida was announced. He came in and greeted his two friends.
"Come here, Brother Xie," Ximen Qing said, "and tell me how much you think this screen is worth." Xie Xida examined it carefully. He had nothing but good to say of it.
"Brother," he said, "you have a bargain here. It must be worth at least a hundred taels."
"Well, this," said Ying Bojue, "the two sets of drums and gongs and the bells have all been pawned together for thirty taels." Xie Xida clapped his hands.
"Buddha!" he cried. "What a bargain! Thirty taels! Why, it wouldn't buy the two sets of bronzes, not to mention the screen. Look at those two sets. How elaborately they are made. The red lacquer is all of the finest quality and there must be at least forty *jin* of musical bronze in them, and that is worth a lot of money. Really, everything comes in time to its proper owner. How lucky you are, Brother, to get these beautiful things so cheaply."
Ximen Qing asked them to go to the study. By this time Li and Huang had arrived. "Why did you trouble to give me those presents?" Ximen Qing said. "It really embarrassed me to accept them."
"We were ashamed to offer anything so trifling," said Li and Huang. "They were only intended for you to give your servants. We received your order to attend here and did not dare to disobey."
They sat down opposite. Huatong brought five cups of tea, and they drank together. Then Daian came and asked Ximen Qing where he wished to have the table placed. "Here," Ximen said. Daian and Qitong brought a square table and placed a small brazier beneath it. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida took the seats of honor. Ximen Qing took the host's seat, and Li and Huang sat opposite. There was an abundance of wine, and of food appropriate to the season, and every kind of delicacy. The musicians played outside the window. Ximen sent for Wu Yin'er to serve the wine.
Later that day there came a man from Li Guijie's house and the maid from Wu Yin'er's house, with sedan chairs to take the girls home. When Guijie heard that the man had come, she hurriedly went out and talked to him in a whisper for a long time. Then she went back to Wu Yueniang's room and said she must go home.
Yueniang objected. "We are all going to Aunt Wu's house," she said, "and I want you to come with us. You will be too late to go home today. We shall come back without our chairs, for we are going to take the walk to banish the hundred illnesses."
"Mother," Guijie said, "let me explain. There really ought to be someone at our house. My sister is away. My fifth aunt has come, and there will be several other guests. They expect me. If they were not anxious to have me back, they would not have sent the man for me. If I were not engaged, I should be only too glad to stay for several days."
When Yueniang saw that Guijie was determined to go, she told Yuxiao to fill a box with the pasties specially made for the festival and another with sweet things. These were given to the man to carry. Then she gave Guijie a tael of silver and let her go.
Guijie said good-bye to Yueniang and the others, then went to see her aunt. Li Jiao'er went with her to the outer court and told Huatong to carry her things. When they came to the study door, the girl told Daian to ask Ximen Qing to come out. Daian slowly lifted the shutter and went in. "Guijie is going home and would like to speak to you," he said to Ximen.
"Guijie, you little whore!" Ying Bojue cried. "Are you still here?"
"She is just going," Ximen Qing said. Then he went out. Guijie kowtowed four times to him and thanked him for allowing her to come. "Can't you stay until tomorrow?" Ximen asked.
"My mother has sent a man with a sedan chair for me. She really needs me. But there is one thing I want to say to you before I go. It is about my aunt's maid. You really mustn't get rid of her. Last night my aunt gave her a very severe beating. She is so young, she really does not understand what she is doing. I gave her a good talking-to and told her she must change her ways, and she promised she would never do such a thing again. It will upset my aunt terribly if you send her away during this festival. She would have no maid, and, if the only poker you have is a wooden spoon, and a short one at that, it is still better than using the fingers. For my sake, Father, don't turn the girl away."
"If you wish it so much, I will allow her to stay," Ximen Qing said. He bade Daian tell Yueniang not to send for the go-between. Daian saw Huatong carrying Guijie's things.
"Give them to me," he said to the boy, "and you go to the inner court with the message." Huatong did as he was told. When Guijie had finished speaking to Ximen Qing, she went to the window.
"Beggar Ying," she called, "I have made no reverence to you, and now I, your mother, am going home."
"Drag the little creature back," cried Bojue. "Don't let her go until she has sung a song for me."
"You must wait," Guijie said. "When your mother has nothing to do, she will sing a song for you."
"What do you mean by going home in the middle of the day?" Ying Bojue said. "You must be expecting good fortune in the shape of a lover or two this evening."
"You dirty beggar," Guijie cried. She laughed and went away.
Daian went out with her and helped her into her sedan chair.
After Ximen Qing had spoken to Guijie, he went to the inner court to change his clothes. "That little whore Guijie is just like a thief who has escaped from jail," Ying Bojue said to Xie Xida. "She is more cunning than ever. On an occasion like this, you would expect her to stay, instead of which off she goes. I wonder who is waiting for her."
"I will tell you," Xie Xida said. He whispered something to Bojue.
"Don't speak too loud," said Bojue when he had heard a sentence or two. "Our brother knows nothing of this." They heard Ximen's footsteps and the conversation ended.
Ying Bojue embraced Wu Yin'er and drank wine with her mouth to mouth. "This is the daughter for me," he said. "Soft and gentle, a hundred times nicer than that little strumpet Guijie, whom even a dog will have nothing to do with."
Wu Yin'er laughed. "When it comes to bad language, Uncle," she said, "you are a master. When you say one you mean one, and when you say a hundred you mean a hundred. There are wise and foolish people everywhere, and we do well not to make comparisons. My sister Guijie has annoyed you."
"Don't talk to him, the dog," Ximen Qing said. "He is always grumbling about something."
"Don't pay any attention to him," Bojue said. "Don't you interfere with her. She is my little daughter. Come here, daughter, take your lute and sing me a song."
Wu Yin'er slowly stretched her jade fingers, gently touched the strings, and softly sang the song "The Willows Are Like Golden Tassels." She served wine to Ying Bojue, then to Xie Xida, and sang another song.
Meanwhile Huatong had gone to the inner court. All the ladies and the nuns were there, except Pan Jinlian. When the boy came, Yueniang was just about to tell old woman Feng to sell Xiahua. "Father bade me tell you not to send the girl away," Huatong said.
"But he told me to sell her," Yueniang said. "What has made him change his mind? Tell me. Who has been talking to him to make him change his mind like that?"
"I was helping Guijie to carry her things," the boy said. "It was she who told my father to keep the maid. Father told Daian to come and tell you, but instead of coming himself he made me come, and he went to the gate with her."
Yueniang was annoyed. "Daian is one of those slaves who try to be in with both sides," she said. "When I was angry and wouldn't send for the go-between, he told me his father insisted upon it. Now he is up to some trick or other. He has gone off with the girl. When he comes back, I will have a reckoning with him."
As she spoke, Wu Yin'er, who had finished singing, came in. "Your maid has come for you," Yueniang said to her. "Guijie has gone. Are you going too?"
"Mother," Wu Yin'er said, "I will stay if you like. Otherwise, you might think I did not appreciate the claims of courtesy." She asked her maid who had sent for her.
"Your mother sent me," the maid told her.
"Is there anything at home that calls for my presence?" said Wu Yin'er.
"No," replied the girl.
"Then, if not, why did you come for me? Go back. The lady here wishes me to stay. I am going to take the walk of the hundred illnesses with her and I will come home after that."
The maid was going away when Yueniang asked Wu Yin'er to call her back, that she might have something to eat. "The Great Lady is going to give you some food," Wu Yin'er said, "so wait. I want you to take my clothes with you. When you get home, tell my mother not to send a sedan chair for me. I shall come back on foot. Where is Wu Hui?"
"He has had some trouble with his eyes," the girl told her.
Yueniang told Yuxiao to take the girl to the back court. There they gave her two bowls of meat, a plate of bread and a jar of wine. Then they filled her boxes with pasties and tea cakes.

Wu Yin'er's clothes were in the rooms of Li Ping'er. Li Ping'er had taken a dress of fine silk woven with gold, two gold-fringed kerchiefs and a tael of silver, and these were all wrapped up together and given to Wu Yin'er. She was delighted. "Mother," she said, "don't give me these clothes." She smiled. "Really, I only want a white gown, so keep these silken dresses and give me an old white gown. I don't mind how old it is."
"My white gown is very big. It won't fit you," said Li Ping'er. She said to Yingchun: "Take the key, go to my large chest, and take from it a roll of white silk for your sister Wu Yin'er." To Wu Yin'er she said: "You must ask your mother to get the tailors to make two good gowns for you. Would you rather have figured or plain silk?"
"I should prefer plain, Mother," said Wu Yin'er. "Then it will match my wrapper." She smiled and said to Yingchun: "Sister, I have troubled you to go upstairs again for me. I have nothing with which to reward you, but I will sing you a song."
After a while Yingchun came down with a roll of plain white silk made on the broad looms of Songjiang. There was a label upon it that said: "Thirty-eight taels' weight." She gave it to Wu Yin'er, who kowtowed four times to Li Ping'er. Then she stood up again and made reverence several times to Yingchun.
"Wu Yin'er," said Li Ping'er, "take the other silken clothes too. Sooner or later you will need them when you are serving wine."
"You have already given me the white silk to make a dress. How can I accept these?" She again kowtowed to Li Ping'er.
After a while her servant had finished her meal, and Wu Yin'er gave her the clothes to carry home. "Why are you so pleased?" Yueniang asked her. "Don't imitate Guijie, who is full of self-conceit. Both yesterday and this morning, that girl has been like a raging tiger. She insisted on going home, and nothing we could do would stop her. She was so anxious to get away she didn't even sing properly, and, when her people came for her, she wouldn't wait to eat anything. Sister Wu Yin'er, you must not follow her example."
"Good Lady," Wu Yin'er said, "your palace is no ordinary house. We must remember the difference and, though we may give ourselves airs elsewhere, we should not do so here. Guijie is very young. She doesn't understand the ways of the world. Please, Lady, do not be angry with her."
While they were talking, a boy came with a message from Aunt Wu. "My mother hopes," he said, "that all you ladies, and Guijie and Wu Yin'er, will come early. She would like Lady Sun Xue'e to come too."
"Go home and tell your mistress," Yueniang said, "that we are now dressing. The Second Lady has a painful leg and she will not be able to come. My husband is entertaining some friends in the outer court today, so the Lady in charge of the kitchen will not be able to come either. Guijie has gone away, so, with my stepdaughter and Wu Yin'er, there will be six of us. Tell your mother she must not make any special preparations: we shall be quite content just to spend the evening with her."
She asked the boy who was going to sing for them.
The boy, Laiding told them that it was Miss Yu.
Then he went away. Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, her stepdaughter, and Wu Yin'er then set off. Before she went, she said to Ximen Qing, "I've told the nurse to look after the baby." They went to their sedan chairs with the 3 boys, Daian, Qitong, Laian, and 4 soldiers. So they came to Aunt Wu's house.

## 067
## Rain & Snow Interrupt a Walk during the Lantern Festival; Wife & Concubines Laughingly Consult the Tortoise Oracle & Daian in Trouble

In the imperial precincts, the prospects are fine during the Lantern Festival,
Surpassing those in the immortal Isles of the Blest.
Jade dust is stirred into flight,
Escorts clamor around decorated chariot hubs,
Moonlight illuminates the towers and terraces.
In the 3 palaces[1] this night is a time for rejoicing.
A myriad golden lotus lanterns,
Are scattered about the streets of the capital.
Hoofers parade to the drum all night.
Citizens compete to put up decorated lanterns,
Which are displayed for 5 consecutive nights.[2]

THIS LYRIC was composed by a poet of former times in order to celebrate the sights of the Lantern Festival and the prosperity of the people.[3]
On that day Hsi-men Ch'ing saw Wu Yüeh-niang and the others off on their way to the party at Sister-in-law Wu's place, while asking Li Chih and Huang the Fourth to keep their seats.
Ying Po-chüeh took advantage of his host's absence while he was seeing off the ladies to address them, thus and so, saying, "I have already spoken to him on behalf of you two gentlemen, and he has positively agreed to advance you another five hundred taels of silver tomorrow."
Li Chih and Huang the Fourth bowed in gratitude to Ying Po-chüeh again and again, and, when it became dusk, said goodbye and departed. Ying Pochüeh, for his part, along with Hsieh Hsi-ta, continued to drink with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the antechamber where his studio was located. Whom should they see at this juncture but Li Ming, who lifted aside the portiere and came in.
When Ying Po-chüeh saw him, he said, "So Li Ming has come."
Li Ming knelt down on the floor and kowtowed to the company, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him, "Why has Wu Hui not come with you?"
"Today," said Li Ming, "Wu Hui was not even able to report for duty at the installation ceremony for the new prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture. He's at home suffering from an eye ailment. I've engaged Wang Chu to come in his stead."
He then called out to Wang Chu, "Come in and kowtow to His Honor."
Wang Chu then proceeded to lift aside the portiere and come into the room, where he kowtowed to the company and then stood to one side with Li Ming.
Addressing himself to the latter, Ying Po-chüeh then said, "Li Kuei-chieh from your establishment has just left to return home. Did you not know about it?"
"When I got home from my duty assignment in Tung-p'ing," said Li Ming, "I only had time to wash my face before coming over here. I don't know anything about it."
Turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I fear the two of them have probably not had a chance to eat yet. Brother, why don't you direct that the two of them be given something to eat?"
"Master Two," said Shu-t'ung, who was standing in attendance, "let them wait a little, and they can eat together with the other musicians. That will obviate the need to fetch food for them a second time."
Ying Po-chüeh told Shu-t'ung to provide him with a tray, to which he transferred two saucers of hors d'oeuvres and a plate of roast lamb from the table top and gave it to Li Ming, saying, "If you wait until they come with the rice, the two of you can take a couple of bowls worth and eat in the parlor here."
Then, turning his attention to Shu-t'ung, he said, "My good nephew! As the saying goes:
Affairs come together according to their tendencies;
Things are differentiated according to their classes.[4]
You don't understand the fact that this category of people, even though they may only be boy actors from the licensed quarter, are not the same as musicians. Although one may treat them alike, it will only serve to show that you and I do not know the score."
This disquisition caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to give Ying Po-chüeh a rap on the head as he admonished him with a laugh, saying, "Dog that you are, since:
People in that line of trade,
Always stand up for each other,
it's no wonder that you know all about the pains and pleasures of those who are subject to performance on demand."
"My good child!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "What do you know about it? You've been a devotee of the licensed quarters for nothing if you don't even understand the four characters that mean:
Solicitous of jade and considerate of fragrance.
How should they be explicated? Girls with painted faces and boy actors are just like fresh flowers. If you are solicitous and considerate of them, they will respond by being more vivacious. But if you mistreat them, it will be a case of 'Eight Beats of a Kan-chou Song':
Listlessly, listlessly withering away,[5]
and they will be hard to keep alive."
"I yield to my son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, "in his understanding of principle."
In a short time, Li Ming and Wang Chu finished eating, and Ying Po-chüeh called them over to ask, "Do the two of you know the song suite that begins with the line:
Together we used to descant upon the snow and moon, the breeze and flowers,
or not?"
"That's a suite in the Huang-chung mode,"[6] said Li Ming. "We do know it."
Thereupon, he picked up his psaltery, after which, with Wang Chu playing the *p'i-p'a* and Li Ming playing the psaltery:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
they sang the song suite that begins with the tune "Drunk in the Flowers' Shade" in the Huang-chung mode:
Together we used to descant upon the snow and moon, the breeze and flowers;[7]
In our dreams of clouds and rain, the fragrance was alluring, the jade soft.[8]
Though the blossoms are now splendid, the moon just full;
They are weighed down with snow and tossed by the wind;
While my lover is as out of reach as the horizon.
For some time I have wanted to send him a broken-hearted message,
But I find that this boundless longing of mine,
Is nearly impossible to communicate.
To the tune "Rejoicing at the Oriole's Ascent":
Choosing the blue sea as an inkwell,
And a rabbit-haired brush,[9] sturdy as a beam;
For pine soot ink,
I will grind down Mount T'ai itself;
And use the infinite expanse of azure Heaven[10] as brocade notepaper,
In order to display the art of the sage of cursive calligraphy.[11]
Though I write for a while,
I cannot write out the feelings in my heart;
Though I explain for a while,
I cannot explain the extent of my suffering.
To the tune "Dancers' Ensemble":
I remember the first time we met,
When I first caught sight of my romantic young karmic encumbrance.
In our two hearts we mutually acknowledged a life and death affinity;
For a whole year our relationship was as close as glue and lacquer.
Who could have anticipated that you would have a change of heart along the way,
Turning our case into a Heaven of Frustrated Separation?[12]
To the same tune:
When I haven't seen him for two or three days,
It feels just as though we have been separated for more than ten years.
Not a meal goes by without my feeling preoccupied with him;
Not a quarter of an hour passes without my calling him to mind;
Not a watch of the night transpires without my dreaming of him.
To the tune "Four Gates Students":[13]
There is not a traveler from whom I do not ask for news of him.
This lovesickness is really driving me crazy.
My acquaintances on seeing the state I am in urge me to desist;
But I can't help being preoccupied with him in my heart.
I long for him until he appears vividly before my eyes;[14]
I yearn for him so hard the saliva in my mouth dries up.
The fronts of my lapels,
The sides of my sleeves,
Are completely covered with tearstains.
I think of that time in the past when he and I exchanged vows.
In those days he was attractively young while I was in my prime;
As for his intelligence, who had ever seen the like?
And he seemed to exhibit an abundance of genuine sincerity.
To the tune "Ground Scouring Wind":
For my part, my feelings for him have never diminished.
My tears flow in rivers, I love him so much.
We used to sit knee to knee,
And chat shoulder to shoulder.
Amid the fragrance of the caltrops and lotuses we used to entwine our necks like mandarin ducks.

We used to walk hand in hand,
And sleep on the same pillow.
Heavens! It seems that my destiny is meager, and my allotment shallow.[15]
To the tune "The Water Nymphs":
It's not a case of my being capricious,
And merely seeking "phoenix glue with which to mend the broken string."[16]
I recall the oaths we swore upon our pillow;[17]
I think of the vows we made before the gods.
One whose heart is firm can wear through stone.[18]
Surreptitiously, I importune azure Heaven:[19]
If I am guilty of failing his expectations in a former incarnation,
So that my handsome lover cannot fulfill his desires in this life,
May we be able to be reunited in the life to come.
CODA
I enjoin you not to let your innermost feelings change.
If we are to meet again, it will not be until ages have passed and years gone by.
Though you may be distant in the flesh,
Do not allow your heart to be distant.[20]
The story goes that, when they had finished singing it was gradually growing dark. Truly:
The gold raven slowly sinks behind the western hills;
The jade rabbit gradually climbs above the painted balustrade.[21]
A beautiful lady comes gently in to report the fact that:
"The moon has moved the flower shadows[22] onto the gauze window."[23]
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that the utensils be cleared away and then sent someone to invite Manager Fu Ming, Han Tao-kuo, Manager Yün Li-shou, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join them at the front gate, where a standing screen had been erected, two tables had been set up, a pair of rams-horn lanterns were suspended, and a party spread had been laid out, replete with a plate of assorted cold hors d'oeuvres and boxes containing every kind of delicacy. Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, occupied the positions of honor at the head of the seating arrangement, while the employees and managers sat down to either side. Outside the front gate there were twelve golden lotus lanterns arrayed on either side, in addition to which there was a small stand of fireworks, which Hsi-men Ch'ing had ordered should not be set off until the womenfolk arrived home.
Before this, the six musicians had carried the bronze gong and bronze drum to the front gate, where they now started to play. After performing for a while on the bronze gong and bronze drum, they followed up with an interlude of more refined music on their wind instruments. The boy actors, Li Ming and Wang Chu, then came forward with their psaltery and *p'i-p'a* and sang a song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival, beginning with the tune "Prelude to Painted Eyebrows," the first line of which is:
Blossoms and moonlight pervade the spring metropolis,[24]
etc. etc.
The passersby in the street, who crowded around to see the show:
Scarcely dared to gaze upon them.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a "loyal and tranquil hat,"[25] a velvet robe decorated with a crane motif, and a white satin jacket. Tai-an and P'ing-an took turns setting off sparklers one at a time. A pair of orderlies, holding staves in their hands, used them to fend off the crowd and prevent any idlers from getting too close for comfort.
In no time at all, when it was observed that:
The clouds were tranquil in the azure heavens,
As the wheel of a bright moon[26] rose in the east,
crowds of sightseers congregated in the street, and:
The merrymaking was at its height.
Behold:
At every doorway, the beating of gongs and drums;[27]
In every house, the airs of woodwinds and strings.
Troupe after troupe, the sightseers tread to the sound of singing:
All of a flutter, the wellborn young ladies trail undulating sleeves.
Hills of lanterns decorated with bunting,[28]
Soar majestically to a hundred feet, piercing the clear sky;
Aromatic incense from phoenix censers,
Drifts hazily in a thousand layers, investing the silken throngs.
Empty courtyards, both inside and out,
Are awash in the brilliance of the precious moon;
Painted bowers, both above and below,
Are iridescent in the glow of decorated lanterns.[29]
In the three markets and six streets[30] the people are making merry;
On this festive day in the metropolis we enjoy the Lantern Festival.[31]
To resume our story, in the rear compound Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yühsiao, Lan-hsiang, Hsiao-yü, and company, on observing that Yüeh-niang was not at home, and hearing the sound of the bronze drum and other forms of musical performance at the front gate, as well as the fact that there were to be fireworks, all got dressed up and concealed themselves behind the standing screen to see what was going on. Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung were also behind the standing screen, heating wine over the brazier.
It so happens that Yü-hsiao and Shu-t'ung had been carrying on an affair for some time and were constantly flirting with each other. The two of them, on finding themselves together on this occasion, helped themselves to some melon seeds to crack, and in the process of doing so managed to knock over a pewter flagon of wine that was resting on the brazier. The fire in the brazier flared up conspicuously, scattering ashes all over the area, but Yü-hsiao merely continued to laugh about it.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he sent Tai-an to ask who was laughing, and why the ashes had been scattered in such a way.
That day Ch'un-mei was wearing a new white satin jacket with a brocaded scarlet vest and was sitting sedately in a chair. When she saw the two of them knock over the wine, she immediately raised her voice and berated Yü-hsiao, saying, "What a wondrously wanton whore you are! No sooner do you catch sight of a man than you start carrying on with him in an unheard of way. It's enough that the two of you knocked over the wine, but how can you continue to guffaw over it? What are you laughing at? You've not only managed to put out the fire, but covered us all with ashes to boot."
When Yü-hsiao realized that she was being taken to task, she was too frightened to say anything and headed back toward the rear compound.
Shu-t'ung was thrown into consternation and came forward to explain, saying, "I was heating some wine on the brazier and happened to knock over the pewter flagon of wine."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this explanation, he didn't pursue the matter any further and let it drop.
Before this happened, on that particular day, Pen the Fourth's wife, on learning that Yüeh-niang would not be at home, and having been aware for some time that Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang were favorite body servants of Hsi-men Ch'ing, had laid in all kinds of holiday dishes and delicacies and sent her daughter Chang-chieh to invite the four of them to her house to relax and visit together.
They took her to see Li Chiao-erh, but she said, "I'm only:
A walking stick made of rush:
Not to be relied upon.[32]
You'd better ask Father's permission."
They also went to ask Sun Hsüeh-o, but she was even less willing to take responsibility for the decision. They procrastinated until after lamplighting time, when Pen the Fourth's wife again sent Chang-chieh to invite the four of them. Lan-hsiang pressed Yü-hsiao, Yü-hsiao pressed Ying-ch'un, and Yingch'un pressed Ch'un-mei to go back to Li Chiao-erh as a group and ask her, in her turn, to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing and request permission for them to go.
But Ch'un-mei just sat there:
Without turning a hair,
and upbraided Yü-hsiao and the others, saying, "The lot of you are like a bunch of good-for-nothings who:
Have never even attended a banquet.
Though you've never been to a feast,
You can't wait to get a sniff of one.
Even if it means I don't get to go, I won't go begging someone else for the privilege. Each and every one of you is carrying on as though you were ghost-driven. What's the big hurry, anyway? I can't bring myself to countenance such things with even half an eye."
Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and Lan-hsiang had all dressed themselves up to befit the occasion, and come out to the front compound, but did not dare to depart, while Ch'un-mei refused to budge from her seat.
Shu-t'ung, on seeing that Pen the Fourth's wife had again sent Chang-chieh to invite them, said, "Even if Father takes me to task, so be it. Let me go out and petition him on your behalf."
Going straight out to Hsi-men Ch'ing's side, he covered his mouth and whispered into his ear, "Pen the Fourth's wife, on this festival occasion, has invited my sister maidservants over for a visit, and they have asked me to inquire whether they may go or not."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he instructed him, "Tell your sister maid-servants to get themselves ready and go, but to come home early. There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."
Shu-t'ung promptly went inside and said, "Thanks to my initiative in approaching him, he has consented to your request. He says that you should get yourselves ready and go, but to come home early."
Only then did Ch'un-mei nonchalantly betake herself to her room, make herself up, and prepare to depart.
Before long, the four of them passed through the gate together, after Shut'ung had adjusted the placement of the standing screen so as to partially conceal their exit, and proceeded on their way to the house of Pen the Fourth.
When Pen the Fourth's wife caught sight of them, she felt:
Just as though they had fallen from Heaven,
and invited them into an inner room, from the ceiling of which hung lighted hydrangea-shaped gauze lanterns, and which featured a table replete with a meticulously laid out and sumptuous display of comestibles, as well as platters of cold hors d'oeuvres.
Pen the Fourth's wife addressed Ch'un-mei as Elder Sister, Ying-ch'un as Second Sister, Yü-hsiao as Third Sister, and Lan-hsiang as Fourth Sister. When they had all exchanged salutations, she also invited Auntie Han, the wife of Mohammedan Han, to come over and help keep her guests company, having directed that she be provided with a separate selection of foodstuffs that would not violate her dietary restrictions.
Ch'un-mei and Ying-ch'un were seated in the positions of honor, with Yühsiao and Lan-hsiang facing them, while Pen the Fourth's wife and Auntie Han sat to either side, and Chang-chieh went back and forth to heat the wine and wait upon them. But let us put this aside for a moment and say no more about it.
Hsi-men Ch'ing meanwhile proceeded to call over the musicians and instructed them, saying, "Sing that song suite for us, the first words to the prelude of which are:
The east wind is chilly,[33]
beginning with the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent."
Just at this juncture, individual servings of rose-flavored Lantern Festival dumplings, provided with silver spoons in the shape of apricot leaves, were brought out from the rear compound, and the company proceeded to pick them up and enjoy them together. Truly, they were:
Fragrant, sweet, and delectable,
And melted on entering the mouth;
Most appropriate for the occasion.
In front of the gathering, Li Ming and Wang Chu took up their instruments and accompanied themselves as they sang the words of this song suite. Truly:
The rhythm was slow and lingering,
The beat melodious and harmonious.
They sang to the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent":
In the eastern fields the blue mist has dissipated.
We delight in this clear morning of a fragrant day.
Our disposition to love flowers,[34]
Has caused us to get up, this spring, earlier than usual.
Our curiosity aroused,
We inquire of the Lord of the East, "How much spring are you going to allow us?"
To which our maidservant responds with a smile,
"Last night the flowering crab apples have bloomed."
To the tune "May You Live a Thousand Years":
Amid sprigs of apricot blossoms,
Interspersed with snowy pear blossoms,
Tiny green plums may be seen sparsely scattered.
Beside the bridge over flowing water,[35]
Beside the bridge over flowing water,
All one can hear is the reiterated calls of the flower sellers.
Beyond the swing, along the road,
All we can hear from within the walls,

Is the happy laughter of beautiful maidens,
Joyously exclaiming, "What a wonderful spring."
Eagerly we strive to fill up our flower baskets,
While bearing our picnic hampers on high.
To the tune "Better than Ever":
Where the flowers are at their thickest,[36]
A wine flag flutters to attract our attention.
Beside the Peony Pavilion,
We seek female companions to compare botanical specimens.
From amid the lofty green willow branches,
With a flicker of wings[37] the morning oriole flies over the treetops.
The cascading red blossoms, and flittering butterflies,
Fly over the painted bridge.
Out of the whole year,
With its four seasons,
Spring alone is the most wonderful.
Amid the flowers we drink lustily;
Beneath the moon we laugh joyously.[38]
To the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers":
Listening to the strains of phoenix pipes and phoenix flutes;
We ogle the sight of kingfisher ornaments and clustering pearls.
Raising our jade goblets,
We stumble in drunkenness,
Singing "Golden Threads,"[39]
We do the "Liu-yao" dance.[40]
Let the bright moon climb the flowering branches;[41]
The moon climb the flowering branches.[42]
CODA:
Completely inebriated, let us recline amid the fragrant verdure,
Suspending our silver lanterns on high underneath the flowers.
The fullness of youth turns all too easily to age.[43]
Let us not permit the wonders of spring to escape us unappreciated.[44]
But let us say no more for the moment about the playing and singing as the party continued.
To resume our story, Tai-an and Ch'en Ching-chi, with lots of firecrackers in their sleeves, called for a pair of orderlies to carry lanterns for them and set out for Sister-in-law Wu's house to escort Wu Yüeh-niang and the others on their way home. They found them in the parlor, together with Yüeh-niang's elder sister, the wife of Mr. Shen, the wife of Yüeh-niang's second brother, Wu the Second, and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, where they were drinking wine and being entertained by the playing and singing of Big Sister Yü.
When their hostess saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had arrived, she arranged for him to be seated together with Wu the Second and her son, Wu Shun-ch'en, and said, "My husband is not at home today. He's at battalion headquarters supervising the compilation of the guard registers."
She also had a table set up for them and provided with a platter of cold hors d'oeuvres, an assortment of other dishes, and wine, so they could keep Ching-chi company.
Tai-an then came forward and said to Yüeh-niang, "Father sent me to escort you ladies on your way, and to ask you to come home early. He is worried that the crowds may get rowdy later in the evening. I came together with your son-in-law."
Because she had been annoyed with him earlier, Yüeh-niang had not a word to say to him in response.
Sister-in-law Wu then said to her page boy Lai-ting, "Get something for Tai-an to eat."
"Wine and meat, soup and rice, are all laid out up front," said Lai-ting. "He can eat with us there."
"What's the need," said Yüeh-niang, "for someone who's:
Newly come and just arrived,
to be fed right away? Tell him to go stand out front. We're about to get started."
"What's the hurry, kinswoman?" said Sister-in-law Wu. "How can you bring yourself to start:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door,
as it were? At present, with all you ladies here, and on this festival occasion, we sisters ought to be able to have a relaxed visit together. In any case, you left the Second Lady and the other lady at home; so what is there to worry about, that you should want to set off so early? If it were someone else's place, that would be another story."
She then turned to Big Sister Yü and said, "Sing a good song to entertain us. The ladies here have been critical of you."
"The Sixth Lady has really been upset with her," said Meng Yü-lou, "for not showing up to celebrate her birthday."
Big Sister Yü promptly got up from her place and kowtowed to Li P'ing-erh four times, saying, "Ever since I got home after celebrating the Fifth Lady's birthday, I haven't been feeling well. It was only yesterday, when your sister-in-law sent someone to summon me, that I've been able to pull myself together sufficiently to come out. If I'd been feeling better, how could I have failed to come pay my respects to you?"
"Big Sister Yü," said Chin-lien, "The Sixth Lady has been out of sorts. Sing a good song for her, and she won't be upset with you anymore."
Li P'ing-erh merely sat where she was and smiled, without making a sound.
"That's no problem," said Big Sister Yü. "Bring my *p'i-p'a* over here, and I'll sing something for you."
Sister-in-law Wu turned to Third Sister Cheng, the wife of Wu Shun-ch'en, saying, "Pour out some more wine for your two aunts and the other ladies. It's been a long time since their cups have been refilled."
Big Sister Yü then took her *p'i-p'a* in hand and proceeded to sing a set of songs to the tune "The Windswept River":
Midnight has come.
How is this feeling of desolation to be borne?
Within silk screens and brocaded curtains[45] I lie down in my clothes.
My naughty lover,
You promised me that you'd show up between twelve and two,
But it's already past four.
I can only await him with a painful heart, but what can I do?
He has abandoned me.
I hope the gods will see fit to visit him with an appropriate disaster.
It is already six.
I idly do up my raven locks in a chignon.
Ashamed to gaze into the caltrop-patterned mirror,[46]
I think of him.
I am unable to put on my brocade clothes;
Reluctant to don my kingfisher ornaments and pearls;
Unable to dispel my melancholy. eight o'clock has already past;
There is no sign of him at ten.
All on your account, my sorrow is making me sick.
It is noon.
I am really afflicted with lovesickness,
So afflicted that my soul has taken leave of me.
I think of my talented lover.
Do you remember how, under the moon, beneath the stars,
We swore oaths of fidelity by the hills and seas?
Who has ever taken you for granted?
If he should show up by two,
It would relieve my sorrowing breast.
If he makes it by four, I'll purchase a pig's head to sacrifice.
It's already six o'clock.
I can't help being disturbed at heart.
Who is there to share a few understanding words?
My equivocating lover,
You're probably in the houses of pleasure,[47]
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red;
Your lust as big as the sky.
At eight o'clock I light my candles,
But there is no sign of him, early or late.
At ten o'clock I must resign myself to consulting the tortoise oracle.[48]
As she was singing, Yüeh-niang remarked, "How is it that just now it's begun to get so chilly in here?"
Lai-an, who was standing in attendance at one side, reported, "The weather has turned cold outside, and it's started to snow."
"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "the clothes you're wearing are too thin. I've brought a padded cloak with me. After all, by this time of night, it's bound to be cold."
"Since it's snowing," said Yüeh-niang, "we'd better call for a page boy to go home and bring us our fur coats to wear."
Lai-an promptly left the room and said to Tai-an, "Mother has directed that someone go home and fetch the fur coats of the ladies."
Tai-an, in turn, called for Ch'in-t'ung and said, "You go get them, and let me stay here to attend upon them."
Ch'in-t'ung, without inquiring any further, headed straight off for home.
In a little while, Yüeh-niang remembered the problem about a fur coat for Chin-lien and asked Lai-an, "Who went to fetch the fur coats?"
"Ch'in-t'ung went to get them," replied Lai-an.
"He just went off without inquiring any further, did he?" said Yüeh-niang.
"Something was forgotten in his instructions, just now," said Meng Yü-lou, "when he was told to fetch our fur coats. The Fifth Lady doesn't have a fur coat. It would have sufficed if he had been told just to fetch yours, Sister."
"It isn't really the case that there aren't any at home," said Yüeh-niang. "There's a fur coat that somebody pawned, which could have been brought for Sister Six to wear."
Yüeh-niang then asked, "Why didn't that slave Tai-an go on this errand himself, rather than sending that other slave in his stead? Tell him to come here."
Tai-an was duly called into her presence, where Yüeh-niang took him severely to task, saying, "A fine slave you are! When you're told to do something, you refuse to bestir yourself, but depute another officer to act in your stead. You sent that slave off without so much as mentioning it to me, so that he was gone before anyone knew it. All you do is presume to:
Sit at the altar dispatching your generals,[49]
like a Taoist priest. No wonder that:
Having assumed the position of a high official,
You were reluctant to set the fins on your silk hat aflutter,[50]
but dispatched him on the errand instead."
"Mother is mistaken in her criticism of me," protested Tai-an. "If you had originally directed me to go, would I have dared not to go? But when you sent Lai-an out with the message, all he said was that someone should be dispatched to go home on this errand."
"How would that lowly slave Lai-an dare to order the likes of you around?" said Yüeh-niang sarcastically. "Even legitimate wives such as myself hardly dare tell you what to do. Right now all you slaves have been indulged to the point that you seem to have lost all sense of decorum. I suppose, where your masters are concerned:
If a smoke-stained Buddhist effigy,
Is displayed on your wall:

When you have such a benefactor,
You'll get a monk to match.[51]
Do you suppose that I'm unaware of the tricks you've been up to, what with your double-dealing, ingratiating, officious, two-faced, meretricious, lazy, gluttonous, and mercenary conduct:
Duping your superiors while engaging in malfeasance,[52]
behind their backs? Just a while ago, your master did not send you to escort Li Kuei-chieh on her way home, so how did you come to escort her? Someone was already there, holding her felt bag, when you unceremoniously grabbed it out of his hands. Whether to retain the maidservant, or not to retain the maidservant, was not up to you. When you were told to come in and tell me about it, why did you refuse to come in, but set off that way to escort Kueichieh to the licensed quarter, no doubt in hopes of getting something to eat for your pains, and send someone else to come inside in your stead? You must have anticipated that if I were upset about it, I would take it out on the other person instead of you. And you still deny that:
You're a practiced old hand."
"It couldn't have been anyone else," protested Tai-an. "That must have been Hua-t'ung's story. Father saw him holding her felt bag and ordered me, 'You escort your sister Kuei-chieh on her way home.' It was he who sent him inside. As Mother said, whether to retain the maidservant, or not to retain the maidservant, was not up to me; so what have I got to do with it?"
Yüeh-niang became very angry and cursed him, saying, "You lousy slave! Still shooting off your mouth, are you? I don't have the leisure to bandy words with you here. Slave that you are, you've gone altogether too far with your stiff-necked, recalcitrant ways. When I tell you to do something, you refuse to move and have the nerve to talk back to me. Believe you me, if I don't tell him about it tomorrow, so that he takes you, deceitful slave that you are, and:
Pounds you into a bloody sheep's head,
I might as well quit."
"Tai-an," interposed Sister-in-law Wu, "Why don't you get a move on, and fetch the ladies' fur coats for them. Can't you see she's upset?"
"Sister," she went on to say, "tell him where to find that other fur coat for the Fifth Lady to wear."
P'an Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "Sister, don't bother to have him fetch it for me. I don't have to wear a fur coat. Just tell him to bring that cloak of mine from home for me to wear. If it's something that's been pawned, who knows what kind of shape it's in? If it looks like a yellow dog's pelt [53] and I put it on, it will only make me a laughingstock. Besides it's not propitious, since sooner or later it will be redeemed."
"The fur coat I have in mind was not really pawned," said Yüeh-niang. "It was actually given to us in lieu of payment for a debt of sixteen taels of silver by that man Li Chih. The fur coat that was pawned with us by the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang has already been given to Li Chiao-erh to wear."
She then went on to instruct Tai-an, "The fur coat in question is in the large cabinet. Have Yü-hsiao find it for you. And bring Mistress Ch'en's cloak while you're at it."
Pouting with his lips, Tai-an went outside, where Ch'en Ching-chi asked him, "Where are you off to?"
"What a purely provoking business!" complained Tai-an.
"A single errand has to be performed twice.
At this hour of the night I've got to run home again."
He went straight home, where he found Hsi-men Ch'ing still partying at the front gate. Manager Fu Ming and Manager Yün Li-shou had already left, but Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Han Tao-kuo, and Pen the Fourth were still drinking and had not yet gone home.
They asked Tai-an, "Are the ladies coming?" and he replied, "No, they haven't started out yet. They've sent me to fetch their fur coats."
He then headed for the rear compound.
Before this, when Ch'in-t'ung had arrived home, he looked for Yü-hsiao in the master suite, to find the fur coats for him.
There he found Hsiao-yü sitting on the k'ang, not in the best of moods, who said, "Today those four whores have all gone off to Pen the Fourth's wife's place to have a party. I don't know where the fur coats are kept. You'll have to go to her place and ask them to find them for you."
Ch'in-t'ung went straight to Pen the Fourth's house, where, rather than announcing himself, he surreptitiously eavesdropped outside the windows.
What should he hear but Pen the Fourth's wife, saying, "Elder Sister and Second Sister, how is it that it's been such a long time since you've had a drink? And you haven't even been using your chopsticks to help yourselves to the dishes. Is it that you turn up your noses at the fare provided by such mean folk as ourselves, or what?"
"Sister-in-law Four," said Ch'un-mei, "we've had enough to drink."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pen the Fourth's wife. "It scarcely needs saying, but how can you start:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door,
that way?"
Then, turning to the wife of Mohammedan Han, she said, "As my next-door neighbor, you're just like an assistant host. Urge Third Sister and Fourth Sister to avail themselves of the wine in front of them on my behalf. How can you be so wooden?"
Instructing her daughter Chang-chieh to serve the wine, she went on to say, "Pour some more for Third Sister, but go a little easy in refilling Fourth Sister's cup."
"I've never been able to drink much," said Lan-hsiang.
"I fear you sisters will end up being famished today, since we've failed to provide any tasty dishes for your entertainment. Please don't make fun of us. We were going to engage a minstrel to come and sing for you ladies as you drank your wine, but we were afraid that the noise might be overheard at Father's place. Our lodgings are so inadequate. The inconveniences such mean folk as ourselves have to put up with can scarcely be described."
As she was speaking, Ch'in-t'ung gave a knock on the door, and everyone fell silent.
After a considerable pause, Chang-chieh was heard asking, "Who is it?"
"It's me," said Ch'in-t'ung. "I need to have a word with my sisters."
The door was duly opened, and Ch'in-t'ung came in, at which Yü-hsiao asked, "Have the ladies come home?"
Ch'in-t'ung looked at them and nearly burst out laughing but refrained from speaking for some time.
"What are you showing your teeth in such a crazy grin for?" demanded Yü-hsiao.
"When I ask you a question," she went on to say, "what are you grinning like that for, without deigning to reply?"
"The ladies are still at Sister-in-law Wu's place drinking wine," responded Ch'in-t'ung. "When they saw that the sky had become overcast and it had started to snow, they sent me home to fetch their fur coats. I was instructed to wrap them all up and take them back with me."
"Mother's fur coat," said Yü-hsiao, "is in that cabinet with the gold tracery in the outer room, isn't it. You can get Hsiao-yü to give it to you."
"Hsiao-yü told me I should come ask you for it," said Ch'in-t'ung.
"How could you believe that little whore?" said Yü-hsiao. "As though she didn't know where it was."
"Those of you whose mistresses have fur coats can get them for him," said Ch'un-mei. "Since my mistress doesn't have a fur coat, I'm the only one who doesn't have to bestir herself."
Lan-hsiang said to Ch'in-t'ung, "You can ask Hsiao-luan for the Third Lady's fur coat."
Ying-ch'un then reached for the keys she carried at her waist and gave them to Ch'in-t'ung, saying, "Get Hsiu-ch'un to open the door to the inner room and get her coat for you."
Ch'in-t'ung went back to the rear compound, where Hsiao-yü in the master suite, and Hsiao-luan in Meng Yü-lou's quarters, wrapped up the fur coats in question and turned them over to him.
Just as he was carrying them out to the front compound, he ran into Tai-an and asked him, "What have you come back home for?"
"You might well ask!" said Tai-an. "All on account of the fact that I sent you on this errand, I've been subjected to a real dressing down by the First Lady. On top of which, she's sent me back to fetch a fur coat for the Fifth Lady."
"Right now, I'm on my way to fetch the Sixth Lady's fur coat," said Ch'in-t'ung.
"When you've fetched it, wait for me here," said Tai-an, "so we can go back together. It shouldn't really matter if you get there ahead of me, but I don't want to give the First Lady any excuse for cursing me out again."
When he had finished speaking, he proceeded to the master suite, where he found Hsiao-yü sitting on the k'ang, warming herself over the frame of the brazier, and cracking melon seeds with her teeth.
When she caught sight of Tai-an, she asked, "So you've come too, have you?"
"You might well ask!" said Tai-an. "I'm suffering from:
A bellyful of anger."
Thereupon, he related the whole episode of how Yüeh-niang had cursed him out, from first to last, saying, "I told Ch'in-t'ung to come fetch the fur coats, and she got angry with me for not coming myself, claiming that I was deputing officers to act in my stead. Then, because the Fifth Lady doesn't have a fur coat of her own, she sent me to come after one. She said that in the large cabinet there was a fur coat that had been left in lieu of a debt by Li the Third, and that I should ask you for it to take back with me."
"Yü-hsiao has the key to the inner room with her," said Hsiao-yü, "and they're all having a party at Pen the Fourth's place. You'll have to have her come and get it for you."
"Ch'in-t'ung has gone to the Sixth Lady's quarters to fetch her fur coat but will be back directly," said Tai-an. "We can get him to go after her. That will give me a chance to give my legs a rest and warm myself at the brazier."
Hsiao-yü then made a place for him at the head of the k'ang, and they sat down next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, and warmed themselves at the brazier.
"There's some wine in the flagon," said Hsiao-yü. "Let me pour a cup for you."
"That's the spirit," said Tai-an. "I accept your largess."
Hsiao-yü got down off the k'ang, put the flagon to heat on the brazier, pulled open a drawer from which she extracted a bowl of preserved goose meat, and poured out some wine for him. There being no one else present, the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues.
As they were drinking, Ch'in-t'ung came in, and Tai-an offered him a drink, after which, he told him, "Go fetch Sister Yü-hsiao, so she can locate the fur coat for the Fifth Lady to wear."
Ch'in-t'ung put down the felt bag and went to Pen the Fourth's place to get Yü-hsiao.
Yü-hsiao cursed him, saying, "You lousy jailbird! What have you come back for?"
She refused to come herself but gave him a key and told him to get Hsiaoyü to open the door. Hsiao-yü opened the door to the inner room with it and tried the key in the lock of the cabinet, but, though she tried for some time, she was unable to get the lock to open, and Ch'in-t'ung had to go back to Pen the Fourth's place again.
"That's not the key," said Yü-hsiao. "The key to Mother's cabinet is kept under the mattress on her bed."
When Hsiao-yü heard this, she cursed Yü-hsiao, saying, "That whore! It's just as though her bottom were nailed in place over there. She refuses to budge herself and, after two trips back and forth, still continues to order me around instead."
When she finally succeeded in getting the cabinet open, it turned out not to contain any fur coats, so Ch'in-t'ung had to make yet another trip to Pen the Fourth's place to ask about it.
This constant running back and forth had aroused Ch'in-t'ung's resentment, and he muttered, "Even if I were to die, I ought to have three days and three nights without this kind of provocation. It's just my luck to run into these pestilential ghosts of small-time ladies, on the lookout for someone to plague."
Turning to Tai-an, he said, "What do you say? When we go back this time, we'll only provoke another tongue-lashing from Mother, who won't take into consideration the fact that the room was locked, but just blame us for the delay."
Returning to Pen the Fourth's place, he said to Yü-hsiao, "We looked in the cabinet in Mother's room, but it didn't contain any fur coats."
Yü-hsiao thought to herself for a while and then laughed, saying, "I forgot. It must be in the large cabinet in the outer room."
When he made his way back to the rear compound, Hsiao-yü started cursing again, saying, "That whore must have been fucked silly by her lover! So the fur coat was here all the time, while we've been looking everywhere for it."
She then proceeded to get it out and wrap it up in a package, together with Hsi-men Ta-chieh's cloak, and handed it over to Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to take back to Sister-in-law Wu's house.
When they got there, Yüeh-niang started cursing again, saying, "You lousy slaves! You've been in cahoots so that neither of you came back without the other. That's all there is to it."
Tai-an was too perturbed to answer, but Ch'in-t'ung spoke up, saying, "The fur coats for the other ladies were all there, but we had to wait while sister looked for this fur coat with the black fabric facing."
Thereupon, they opened up the package and took it out.
Sister-in-law Wu examined it under the lamp light and said, "This is also a good fur coat. Fifth Lady, why did you run it down that way, describing it as a yellow dog's pelt? Where would you find a yellow dog's pelt like that? I'd be happy to wear a coat like this myself."
"It's practically a new fur coat," said Yüeh-niang. "The only thing is that the lapels in front are a little worn. In the future if you replace them with two new brocaded panels, it will look just fine."
Meng Yü-lou picked it up and joked with Chin-lien, saying, "My child, come over here and try on this yellow dog's pelt so your mother can see how well it looks on you."
"If I'm up to snuff," said Chin-lien, "make no mistake about it, I ought to be able to ask my husband to give me one of my own in the future. Who wants to pick up someone else's used fur coat to wear, for no good reason?"
Meng Yü-lou continued to joke with her, saying, "How can you hope to repudiate your karma that way? Since this fur coat of somebody's is available, you ought to be grateful enough to put it on and recite the Buddha's name."
Thereupon, she proceeded to help her on with the coat, and when Chin-lien realized that it had an ample and substantial look to it, she had nothing more to say.
At this point, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh all donned their sable fur coats and prepared to bid farewell to Sister-in-law Wu and the wife of Wu the Second and set out for home. Yüeh-niang gave Big Sister Yü a package containing two candareens of silver.
"I, too, will bid farewell to the sisters-in-law and you other ladies," said Wu Yin-erh, and she proceeded to kowtow to them in turn.
At this point, Sister-in-law Wu presented her with a pair of silver flower ornaments, and Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh each pulled a tael of silver out of their sleeves and gave them to her, for which she kowtowed to them in thanks.
Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and Third Sister Cheng all expressed a desire to see Yüeh-niang and company on their way, but when they saw that it was snowing, Yüeh-niang insisted that they go back inside.
"It was still snow that was falling a little while ago," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "but now it's turned to drops of water that moisten the body. I'm afraid the clothing of you ladies may get wet. You'd better see if you can borrow an umbrella from Sister-in-law Wu's place, to give you some protection on the way home."
Wu the Second promptly fetched an umbrella, and Ch'in-t'ung put it up. The two orderlies that had accompanied them on their way there held lanterns, and the cluster of men and women set out in their wake. After traversing several narrow lanes, they came out on Main Street.
At this point, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been setting off numerous fire-crackers along the way, said, "Sister Yin-erh, your place is not far from here. We might as well escort you to your home."
"Just where is her place located?" Yüeh-niang then asked.
"If you go straight down this alley here," said Ching-chi, "that establishment with the imposing gateway halfway down is her place."
"I'll say goodbye to you ladies here," said Wu Yin-erh, "and go on home."
"The ground is wet," said Yüeh-niang. "Go on home. You have already performed your kowtows. I'll send a page boy to escort you the rest of the way."
She then called for Tai-an and said, "You escort Sister Yin-erh on her way home."
"Mother," said Ching-chi, "let me and Tai-an, the two of us, go with her."
"All right," said Yüeh-niang, "Sister, you can go on home with the two of them to escort you."
This was just the signal Ch'en Ching-chi had been waiting for, and he set off with Tai-an to see her to her place, while Wu Yüeh-niang and the others continued on their way home.
Along the way, P'an Chin-lien said, "Elder Sister, originally you said something about our seeing her home. How is it that we didn't end up doing it?"
"You're just like a child," Yüeh-niang laughed. "When someone jokes with you, you take it seriously. What sort of a place is the Verdant Spring Bordello, [54] that the likes of you and me should accompany her there?"
"It seems to me unlikely," said Pan Chin-lien, "if someone's husband were out whoring in the licensed quarter, that his wife would never come looking for him, or never endeavor to:
Beat him into a pot of porridge."
"There you go again!" said Yüeh-niang. "If our husband goes into the quarter some time in the future, just you go looking for him and give it a try. You might well end up being mistaken for a painted face yourself, and dragged off by someone else's husband, if he deigned to give you so much as a second look."
As they were speaking, they gradually approached the entrance to East Street, not far from the gateway of Ch'iao Hung's house, where they saw that Ch'iao Hung's wife and Big Sister Tuan, the wife of her nephew Ts'ui Pen, were standing in the doorway. When the latter two persons observed from a distance that Yüeh-niang and the cluster of men and women accompanying her were approaching, they insisted upon inviting them to come in.
Yüeh-niang declined repeatedly, saying, "Although we very much appreciate our kinswoman's lavish hospitality, it is already late, and we'd better not come in."
But Ch'iao Hung's wife refused to let them go, saying, "My good kins-woman, how can you start:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door?"

She insisted on dragging them inside, where, in the parlor, they found lanterns suspended, an array of wine and delicacies set out, and two female entertainers to play and sing for them as they enjoyed the wine. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing was still drinking with Ying Po-chüeh and company at his front gate, but the party was about to break up. Before this, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, who had been stuffing themselves all day, had long since reached the point where they couldn't have swallowed another bite. But when they noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had fallen asleep in his chair, they took advantage of the fact that he wasn't looking to dump whatever remained on the saucers and serving dishes into their sleeves, clearing them off completely, and then decamped, along with Han Tao-kuo, leaving only Pen the Fourth behind, who was afraid to return home on his own initiative. He remained to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company until he finally arranged for the musicians to have something to drink, paid them for their services, and sent them on their way, saw that the things were put away, and the lanterns and candles extinguished, and made his way back to the rear compound.

Meanwhile, at Pen the Fourth's house, P'ing-an came in and said, "Sisters, haven't you gotten a move on yet? Father's already gone inside."

When Ch'un-mei heard this, along with Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, and company, they were in such a hurry to return that they didn't even pay their proper respects to Pen the Fourth's wife, but took their leave and ran off in a cloud of dust.

Lan-hsiang, who had gotten one of her feet twisted in her shoe, was unable to keep up with them and cursed, saying, "The way the lot of you have taken off, as though you were:

Picking up your coffins and fleeing for your lives,
has made me twist my foot in its shoe, so I can't seem to get it on right."

When they arrived in the rear compound, they heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to Li Chiao-erh's quarters, and all trooped in to kowtow to him. The abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, on seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come to retire in Li Chiao-erh's quarters, had retreated to the master suite and the company of Hsiao-yü.

When Yü-hsiao came in and saluted her, Hsiao-yü took her to task, saying, "Yü-hsiao, when Mother sent the page boy back from over there to fetch that fur coat, you refused to come take care of it yourself but directed that I should do it. But I didn't know which key it was that opened the door of the cabinet. And then, when we finally got it open, the coat wasn't there. Later on, it turned out to be in the large cabinet in the outer room. You were the one who put it there in the first place, but it seems you were so confused you didn't know what was going on. The lot of you must have had more than enough to eat and drink over there. Each and every one of you looks as though she's put on an additional bulge or two."

Yü-hsiao was so affected by this tirade that the blood flew to her cheeks, and she responded, "Why you crazy little whore! Has the dog scratched your face, or what? Just because you weren't invited, are you going to take it out on those of us who were?"

"As though I cared anything about an invitation from that whore!" exclaimed Hsiao-yü.

The abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, from her position on the sidelines, remarked, "You two sisters ought to be more accommodating in the way you talk to each other, or your master in the other room will overhear you. The ladies are likely to return any minute now. You would do better to prepare some tea for them."

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying a felt bag.

"Has Mother come home?" Yü-hsiao asked.

"The ladies were almost here," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "but the wife of Kinsman Ch'iao was standing in her doorway and invited them in for a drink. They should be getting up to go by now."

Only then did the two maidservants stop bandying words.

Before long, Yüeh-niang and the others took their leave of Ch'iao Hung's wife and arrived at the front gate, where Pen the Fourth's wife came out to greet them. Ch'en Ching-chi and Pen the Fourth then got out a rack of miniature fireworks, and they all stopped to watch them being set off before coming inside. When they had bowed in salutation to Li Chiao-erh and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, Sun Hsüeh-o came out to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and exchange greetings with Meng Yü-lou and her two companions.

"Where is Father?" Yüeh-niang went on to ask.

"He came into my room just now," said Li Chiao-erh, "where I've already tucked him in for the night."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she hadn't a word to say.

Whom should they see at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yühsiao, and Lan-hsiang, who came in to kowtow.

Li Chiao-erh then explained, "Today Pen the Fourth's wife from up front invited the four of them to come visit for a while, and they've just gotten back."

When Yüeh-niang heard this, she remained silent for some time and then took them to task, saying, "The preternatural bitches! What did they go out there for, for no good reason? Who said they could go?"

"They got permission from Father before they went," replied Li Chiao-erh.

"So they asked him, did they?" said Yüeh-niang. "A fine good-for-nothing to take charge of anything he is! Your household is getting to be like:

The temple that opens its gates early on the first and fifteenth;
Only to let a bunch of insignificant ghosts expose themselves."

"Dear Lady!" exclaimed the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery. "Each of these four sisters is as pretty as a picture. How can you refer to them as insignificant ghosts?"

"If they're as pretty as pictures," said Yüeh-niang, "they must be only half-length portraits. What need is there to let them out for no good reason, only to allow outsiders to feast their eyes on them?"

Meng Yü-lou, realizing that Yüeh-niang was not in a good mood, was the first to make her departure. After that, Chin-lien, on seeing her get up to go, also went off, together with Li P'ing-erh and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, leaving only the abbess to spend the night with Yüeh-niang. The snow and sleet continued to fall until the fourth watch of the night before stopping. Truly:

It is night in the storied bowers, the incense has dissipated, the candles are cold;
It is a time for cutting vegetables by lantern light, and sweeping away the snow.
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen. Around lunch time, Yüeh-niang, along with Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh, saw the abbess off on her way to the nunnery.

As they were standing inside the front gate, they caught sight of an old country woman who made her living telling fortunes by means of the tortoise oracle. She was wearing a patchwork jacket and a blue cotton skirt, her forehead was enclosed in a black headband, and she was carrying a pouch on her back as she came along the street.

Yüeh-niang sent a page boy to invite her to come inside the second gate, where, after she had laid out her fortune-telling diagrams and put her consecrated tortoise in place, she said to her, "How about telling our fortunes?"

The old woman knelt down on the ground and kowtowed to her four times, after which she said, "May I ask how old you are, madame?"

"Tell the fortune of a woman who was born in the year of the dragon," said Yüeh-niang.

"If it's the greater dragon, you'd be forty-one," said the woman. "If it's the lesser dragon, you'd be twenty-nine."

"I'm twenty-nine," said Yüeh-niang. "I was born at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eighth month."

The old woman gave the consecrated tortoise a nudge, and after it had made a circuit of the diagrams, it came to rest on one, which, when it was picked up, turned out to depict an official and a lady formally seated and surrounded by servitors, some of them seated and some of them standing, guarding a hoard of gold and silver and other valuables.[55]

"This lady," said the old woman, "is the mistress of the household and was born in the year *wu-ch'en*.

Those born in *wu-ch'en* or *chi-ssu* are like trees from a great forest;
Throughout her life she will be characterized by humanity and righteousness.
She is magnanimous by nature;
Benevolent and given to good works;[56]
Recites scripture and bestows alms;
And distributes her favors widely.
Throughout her life she will labor to maintain the household;
Even at the cost of taking the blame for the faults of others.[57]
But it may not be said that,
Her joy and anger are constant, and She is inept in managing her servants.
Truly:
When she is happy, she is all ingratiating smiles;
When she is angry, she is all reverberating wrath.
Others may sleep till the sun is high in the sky before getting out of bed;
But you are up betimes, superintending the maids as they do the pots and pans.
Though your temper may occasionally flare up like windblown fire;[58]
In the twinkling of an eye, you'll be talking and laughing once more.
The only problem is the presence of adverse signs in your 'palace of illness and adversity,'[59]
Indicating that you are ever beset with bickering.
Though your goodness of heart will enable you to overcome it.
In the end, you will live to the ripe old age of sixty-nine."

"Can you tell whether this lady is fated to have any sons?" asked Meng Yü-lou.

"Pray don't take it amiss," said the old woman, "but there's something indistinct about her 'palace of sons and daughters.' [60] In the end she will have to depend on a son who has taken the tonsure to support her in her old age. This is not something she can do anything about, but chances are she will not be able to keep him."

Meng Yü-lou smiled at Li P'ing-erh, saying, "That must refer to your son Wu Ying-yüan who has had a religious name bestowed upon him as a Taoist priest."

Yüeh-niang then pointed to Meng Yü-lou and said, "You, too, ought to get her to tell your fortune."

"Tell the fortune," said Yü-lou, "of a thirty-three-year-old woman who was born at 4:00 AM on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month."

The old woman once again laid out her fortune-telling diagrams and put the consecrated tortoise in place, where, after making a circuit, it came to rest on a diagram designated "palace of fate." [61] When the old woman picked up this second diagram, it turned out to depict a woman, accompanied by three men, one of whom was dressed like a travelling merchant in his skullcap, the second was an official dressed in red, and the third was a scholar, who was also guarding a hoard of gold and silver. They were surrounded by servitors to wait upon them.

The old woman said, "This lady was born in the year *chia-tzu*.

Those born in *chia-tzu* or *i-ch'ou* are like gold in the sea;
But her fate is crossed by the 'three penalties' and 'six banes.'[62]
Only by gaining ascendancy over her husband will she be all right."

"I already have," said Meng Yü-lou.

The old woman continued:

"You are gentle and congenial by nature,[63]
And possess a good disposition.
When you are annoyed at anyone, they don't know it;
When you are pleased by anyone, they don't know it;
You do not display your feelings.
Throughout your life you will please your superiors, be respected by your inferiors,
And gain the love and favor of your husband.
But there is one problem.
No matter how many good turns you may do for others,
You will often fail to win their hearts.
Throughout your life you are fated to take the blame for the faults of others;
No matter how much trouble petty persons may make for you,
You will not be praised for your forbearance.
But since your heart is in the right place,
Even though petty persons should annoy you,
They will not succeed in making you give way."

"Just now," said Yü-lou with a smile, "when I took the heat for that ruckus with Father over the page boy's demand for money,[64] I guess that was an example of my:
Taking the blame for the faults of others."

"Can you tell whether or not this lady will have any sons in the future?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang.

"If she navigates her vicissitudes safely," the old woman said, "she may have a daughter, though it does not appear that she will have a son. As for longevity, that she will have."

"Now tell the fortune of this lady," said Yüeh-niang. "Sister Li, tell her the eight characters of your horoscope."

"I was born in the year of the sheep," said Li P'ing-erh with a smile.

"If it's the lesser sheep," said the old woman, "you would be twenty-six, and have been born in the year *hsin-wei*. What month were you born in?"

"I was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month," Li P'ing-erh replied.

The old woman started the tortoise on its circuit, and it came to an abrupt halt on another diagram designated "palace of fate." When the old woman picked up this diagram, it turned out to depict a woman accompanied by three officials, the first of whom was dressed in red, the second of whom was dressed in green, and the third of whom was dressed in blue. She was holding a child in her arms and was guarding a hoard of gold and silver and other valuables. Beside her there stood a demon with a blue face, protruding fangs, and red hair.[65]

The old woman said, "As for this lady:

Those born in *keng-wu* or *hsin-wei* are like earth beside the road;
Throughout her life she will enjoy glory and luxury, wealth and honor.
She will have all she wants to eat, and all she needs to wear;
The husbands whom she attracts will be persons of distinction.
Her heart will be characterized by humanity and righteousness.
Gold and silver, riches and silk,[66] will not be a matter of concern.

She is content to let herself be taken advantage of or exploited;
Indeed, she is disappointed if they do not take advantage of her.
But she will suffer from the 'matched shoulders' in her horoscope,
And find that, in everything, others will requite kindness with enmity.
Truly:
'Matched shoulders,' 'penalties,' and 'banes,' will make difficulties for her;
In the twinkling of an eye, they will exhibit a heartless knack for knavery.
It is preferable to encounter a tiger blocking the road to your 'three births,'[67]
Than to meet someone, before your very eyes, with two faces and three knives.
Pray don't take what I say amiss, lady, but you're just like a bolt of fine red silk that is, unfortunately, a little shorter than it ought to be. You should try not to let yourself get so upset over things. And, as for the prospects of your son, it's hard to say."
"He has already had a religious name bestowed upon him as a Taoist priest," said Li P'ing-erh.
"If he has already left lay life," said the old woman, "he should be safe. But there is another problem. This year the planet Ketu[68] impinges on your fate,[69] meaning that you may suffer a bloody catastrophe.[70] Only if you can avoid hearing the sound of weeping in the seventh and eighth months, will you be all right."
When she had finished speaking, Li P'ing-erh fished a five-candareen lump of silver out of her sleeve, and Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou each gave her fifty cash.
Just after they had sent the old woman who told fortunes by means of the tortoise oracle on her way, whom should they see but P'an Chin-lien, who came out from the rear compound with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said with a laugh, "I was just saying that you were not to be found in the back, and it turns out that you have all come out to the front here."
"We came out just now to see off the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery," explained Yüeh-niang. "Since then, all this while, we've been having our fortunes told by the tortoise oracle. If you had come a step earlier, we could have had her tell your fortune as well."
"Fortune-telling is not for me," said Chin-lien, with a shake of her head. "As the saying goes:
You may calculate a person's fate,
But you can't predict his conduct.
I remember that previous occasion when the Taoist practitioner was physiognomizing us and said that I would suffer a premature death. Who needs it? It only serves to make one depressed. What will be, will be.
If I die in the street, bury me in the street;
If I die on the highroad, bury me on the road;
And if I should fall into an open drain,
It will just have to serve as my coffin."
When she had finished speaking, she returned to the rear compound with Yüeh-niang and the others. Truly:
The myriad affairs are things that one cannot argue with;
One's whole life is entirely determined by one's destiny.[71]
A poem testifies to this:
Kan Lo's[72] success came early, while Chiang Tzu-ya's[73] came late;
P'eng-tsu[74] and Yen Hui[75] attained longevities of differing length.
Fan Jan[76] was impoverished, while Shih Ch'ung[77] was a rich man;
However calculated, the differences were only in the timing.

Gongs and drums beat everywhere
In every house there is the sound of pipes and strings.
People go singing through the streets in bands
Young men and women play sweet melodies of the dance.
A mount of paper with happy colored streamers
Towers into the blue sky.
Incense from the royal palace rings its way heavenward over the assembled people
The precious moon sheds its soft brilliance within the courtyard and without.
Everywhere the scene is lovely.
This is the most glorious festival of the year
When we celebrate the first full moon.

Ximen Qing sent off Wu Yueniang and the others to the party at Aunt Wu's house. About sunset, Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth stood up to take their leave. Ying Bojue went out with them. "I have managed that business for you," he said, "and tomorrow you will get your five hundred taels." Li Zhi and Huang the Fourth bowed to him repeatedly and went away. Ying Bojue went back and drank wine with Xie Xida and Ximen Qing. Then Li Ming came in. "Here is young Li," Bojue said. Li Ming knelt down and kowtowed to them.
"Why has Wu Hui not come?" Ximen Qing asked him.
"He has not been able to go even to Dongpingfu," Li Ming said. "There is something wrong with his eyes. But I have brought Wang Zhu."
Wang Zhu was called in and, after he had kowtowed to Ximen and the others, he and Li Ming stood beside them.
"Your sister Li Guijie has just gone home," Ximen said to the boy. "Did you know?"
"I have only just returned from Dongpingfu," Li Ming said. "I came here as soon as I had washed my face, so I have heard nothing about her."
"I fear that these two boys have had nothing to eat," said Bojue. "Will you give orders for them to have some food?"
"Uncle," Shutong said, "a meal is being made ready for the musicians, and if these two wait a while they can eat with them."
Bojue told Shutong to bring a tray. He picked out some of the dishes and handed the food to Li Ming, telling him to take it away and eat it with his companion. Then he said to Shutong: "You foolish boy. People, like things, all belong to some definite class or other. You do not understand that, though they may come from the bawdy house, they are not on the same footing as the musicians. We cannot treat them in the same way, or it would look as though we were lacking in a sense of the fitness of things."
Ximen Qing tapped Bojue on the head. "You dog," he said, "you always look after actors because they belong to the same class as yourself and you know what they have to put up with."
"Stupid dog yourself!" Bojue said. "What do you know about it? Have you lived so long as a happy young man and still don't know the jingle: 'Be tender with the jade and loving to the flowers'? The more you love them, the more you get out of them, but treat them harshly and they wither away and die."
"Oh yes, my son," Ximen said, laughing, "no doubt you know all about that."
When Li Ming and Wang Zhu had finished their meal, Ying Bojue called them and asked them to sing a song he named to them. Wang Zhu took his lute and Li Ming his zither: they cleared their throats and sang. When they had finished, it was nearly evening.
Ximen Qing ordered the things to be cleared away and sent for Clerk Fu, Han Daoguo, Ben the Fourth and Chen Jingji. A great screen was set at the gate; two tables were placed there, and two sheep's horn lanterns hung. Food was piled abundantly upon the tables. Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue sat in the place of honor, and the clerks and managers on either side. On each side of the door hung twelve golden lotus lanterns. There was a small set piece of firework. This, Ximen said, was to be lighted when the ladies returned. The six musicians carried the bronze gongs and drums to the great gate. There they beat them for a short time, and then played their instruments. Delicate sweet strains came from them. Li Ming and Wang Zhu, the two young actors, played and sang the songs of the lanterns. And, of the people who passed along the street, none dared to raise his head to look. Ximen Qing was wearing a *zhongjing* hat, a velvet cloak and a white silk gown.
Daian and Ping'an set off the fireworks in turn, while two soldiers with rods kept back the crowd and would not allow them to push forward. In the cloudless sky the full moon appeared. There was great excitement in the street.

* * *

The four maids, Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang, knowing that Yueniang was not at home and hearing the drums and music at the gate, and the fireworks, dressed themselves and looked out from behind the screen. Shutong and Huatong were heating wine at a brazier on the other side. Yuxiao and Shutong were old friends, and were always playing together. Now they had a struggle to see who could steal the other's melon seeds. Without caring what they were doing, they upset the wine jar on the fire. The fire sent forth a great flame, filling the whole place with smoke. Yuxiao laughed and Ximen Qing heard her. He told Daian to go and see who was laughing and what had caused the smoke.
Chunmei was wearing a new white cloak with a scarlet wrapper. When the wine jar was upset, she was sitting in a chair watching Yuxiao and Shutong playing together. Now she cursed her fellow maid. "Whenever you set eyes on a man, you lose your senses," she cried. "It was bad enough for you to upset the wine, without laughing. I don't know what there is to laugh about. You've put the fire out, and the ashes are coming down all over my head."
Yuxiao said nothing. She went to the back court. Shutong was rather anxious. He went to Ximen Qing and said: "I was warming the wine over the fire and the jar fell in." Ximen Qing asked no more questions, and that was the end of the matter.
Before the festival, Ben the Fourth's wife had learned that Yueniang would be away. She knew that the four maids, Chunmei, Yuxiao, Yingchun and Lanxiang, were all favorites of Ximen Qing, so she prepared some dainty dishes and told her daughter to go and ask the four maids to come and see her. The little girl was taken to Li Jiao'er. "I have no say in the matter," Li Jiao'er said. "I can do nothing; you must go and see what your master thinks about it." Then they went to Sun Xue'e, but she did not dare to take the responsibility. When the lanterns had been shown, Ben the Fourth's wife sent again to invite the four maids. Then Lanxiang urged Yuxiao, and Yuxiao urged Yingchun, and Yingchun urged Chunmei to go and plead with Li Jiao'er to ask Ximen Qing's permission. Chunmei refused to move. She was still angry with Yuxiao.
"You are like some poor beast who has never seen any food. You have never been to a feast and now you are anxious to have a sniff at one. It doesn't matter to me whether we go or not. I'm not going to ask anybody to help us. You are all fussing about like a lot of ghosts, and I'm sure I don't know what all the fuss is about. I have nothing but contempt for the lot of you."
Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang had all dressed in their best clothes, but they dared make no move. Chunmei sat still. Then Shutong came and said: "Ben the Fourth's wife has sent her little girl for you again. I don't mind if Father scolds me: I'll go and speak to him." He went to Ximen Qing and whispered, "Ben the Fourth's wife has sent an invitation to my four sisters, and they have sent me to ask if they may go."
"Tell them they may go," Ximen said. "But they must come back in good time, for there are not enough people to attend to the household."
Shutong hurried back. "I have managed that little business very well," he said. "One word from me, and you get permission. Father says you may dress up and go. But you must come back early."
Chunmei, at this, went slowly to her room to dress. Then, all together, the four girls came out. Shutong pulled the screen partly back for them so that they could pass. They came to Ben the Fourth's house and, to Mistress Ben, they might have been angels from Heaven. She took them to her room. Several snowball lanterns had been hung there and a table was spread with excellent food. Mistress Ben, when she spoke to them, addressed them as First Aunt, Second Aunt, and so on. They made reverences to one another. Han Huizi's wife had also been invited.
Chunmei and Yuxiao sat in the places of honor; Yingchun and Lanxiang sat opposite them. Mistress Ben and Mistress Han sat on either side. The little girl, Changjie, went backwards and forwards to heat the wine and serve the dishes.
Ximen Qing told the musicians to play the tune "The East Wind Is So Gentle That We Know Fair Weather Is Here."
Little cakes, made with roses, were brought and everybody ate some. They were sweet, fragrant and delicious, and melted as soon as they were put into the mouth.
Li Ming and Wu Hui took their instruments and sang the song. Their voices were melodious and their rhythm excellent.
Daian and Chen Jingji put some fireworks in their sleeves and called for two soldiers with lanterns to go with them to Aunt Wu's house. They were to escort Yueniang and the others on their way home. The ladies were drinking wine in the hall when Jingji arrived and, as the elder Wu was not at home, Jingji was invited to take wine with the younger brother. A table was set and the two men took cakes and wine together.
Daian went forward and said to Yueniang: "Father has sent me to escort you home. He wishes you to go home early. He thinks the streets will be crowded tonight."
Yueniang was still displeased with Daian, and would not speak to him. Aunt Wu told her servant Laiding to give the boy some food. "Wine, meat, soup and rice are all ready in the front court," Laiding said.
"Don't hurry," said Yueniang. "Why should you give him food as soon as he arrives? Let him wait in the front court until we are ready to go."
"Are you really so busy these days?" Aunt Wu said to Yueniang. "This is a great festival and it is well that we should sit together and enjoy ourselves. The Second Lady and the other lady are at home and there is nothing for you to be anxious about. Why should you think of going away so early? If we did not belong to the family, it would be another matter." Then she said to Miss Yu: "Sing a good song for the ladies." Yulou spoke. "The Sixth Lady is not at all pleased with her: she did not come to the birthday party." Miss Yu stood up and kowtowed four times to Li Ping'er.
"I have been ill," she said. "When this good lady invited me yesterday to come here, I was only just able to come. If I had not been ill I should certainly have come to kowtow to you."
"Miss Yu," Jinlian said, "since the Sixth Lady is displeased with you, you must sing a particularly good song. Then she may forgive you."
Li Ping'er laughed but said nothing. "Certainly," Miss Yu said. "Give me my lute and I will sing." Aunt Wu bade Miss Zheng pour out wine for the ladies. "They have not had any for a long time," she said.
Miss Yu took her lute and sang "There Is a Storm upon the River." While she was singing. Yueniang said: "Why do I feel so cold now?"
"It is snowing," Laian said.
"Sister," Yulou said, "you should not be wearing such thin clothes. I have brought my heavy cloak."
"It is snowing," Yueniang said, "and we had better send the boys home for our fur coats."
Laian hurried out. He said to Daian: "The mistress says you are to go home and bring furs for the ladies."
Daian said to Qintong: "You go and get them. I'll stay here." Qintong did what he was told, without a word. After a while, Yueniang remembered that Jinlian did not possess a fur coat. She said to Laian: "Who has gone to get the coats?" Laian told her that Qintong had gone. "Why did he go without coming to me first?" Yueniang said.
Yulou said: "He has slipped off without a word. The Fifth Lady has no furs. We ought to have told the boy to bring the Great Lady's and not to bother about ours."
"Oh, we have a fur that someone has pawned," Yueniang said. "We will use that, and send for furs for everybody." Then she added: "Why did Daian send Qintong instead of going himself? Send him here."
When Daian came in, Yueniang scolded him severely. "You slave," she said, "what do you mean by ordering other people to do your work for you? You sent that slave away without asking my permission. You behave just like a cabinet minister. You are afraid you might disturb the set of your hat and so you tell someone else to go."
"You have no reason to be angry with me, Mother," Daian said. "If you had sent word for me to go, of course I should not have dared to disobey. Laian simply said that one of us must go."
"How brave Laian must have been to give you orders," said Yueniang. "Why, even I, who am the First Wife, do not venture to tell you to do anything. The truth is, we are too kind to you slaves, and you give yourselves airs in consequence. Your master has a picture of Buddha that was blackened by smoke and hung upon the wall. There are monks like that and there are benefactors like that. Your game is to curry favor with both sides at once, and you are so clever at it that your tongue might have been brought to a sharp point. You keep on the right side of those in the house and ally yourself with those without. You are idle, yet you must have your food. You are up to all kinds of dirty games on the sly, but don't think you deceive me. The other day, your master never told you to take Guijie home. What right had you to do so? One of the other boys was carrying her things and you snatched them out of his hands. It was none of your business whether we kept our maid or did not keep our maid. Why should you mix yourself up in that business? It was simply because someone suggested that you should. You thought you would get something out of it. You told someone else to come to me, because you thought that, if I had anything nasty to say, the one you sent would get it and not you. Now, can you say you don't play games like this?"
"That is Huatong's story," Daian said. "Father saw Huatong carrying her things, and he told me to see her home and Huatong to come back. You say, Mother, that whether you kept the maid or not was no business of mine. That is true. Why then should I bother about it?"
Yueniang was very angry and cursed him. "You thievish slave! Are you trying to argue with me? I have too much to do to say any more to you. You go too far. I tell you to do something: you don't do it; then you try to put me off with some cock-and-bull story. Wait! You shall see if I don't tell your father to treat you like a moldy sheep's head."
"Daian," Aunt Wu said, "go at once and bring your mother's fur cloak." Then she said to Yueniang: "Sister, tell him which one you wish him to bring for the Fifth Lady."
"Don't send him," Jinlian said. "I don't want any fur coat, and, if he does go home, let him bring my cloak. The fur coat is one that someone or other has pawned and I know nothing about it. If it is yellow dog's skin, people will laugh at me for wearing it. Besides, I can't keep it long; it will be redeemed."
"The fur coat I am thinking of is not one that has been pawned," Yueniang said. "It was brought in payment of debt by Li Zhi, who owed us sixteen taels of silver. It is the one Li Jiao'er wears that was pawned by General Wang's people." To Daian she said: "The fur coat is in the large chest. Ask Yuxiao to get it for you and bring my stepdaughter's coat too."

Daian went out with a very angry face. Chen Jingji asked him where he was going. "Such nasty temper!" said Daian. "Now all the work has to be done over again. Late though it is, I must run home." He went out. When he reached the house, Ximen Qing was still drinking at the gate. Fu and Yun had gone, but Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Han Daoguo and Ben the Fourth were still there.
"Have the ladies come?" Ximen Qing asked.
"No," said Daian, "they have sent me for their fur coats." He went to the inner court.
Qintong arrived before Daian and went to the upper room for the furs. Xiaoyu was sitting sulkily upon the bed. "Those four strumpets," she told the boy, "have gone to Ben the Fourth's wife's to drink wine. I don't know where the fur coats are. You had better go there and ask them."
So Qintong went to Ben the Fourth's house. He did not knock at the door but stood quietly outside the window. Ben the Fourth's wife was saying: "My dear eldest aunt, and you, Second Aunt, is it because you despise the preparations I have made for you in this small mean hovel that you have had no wine for so long?"
"Fourth Sister," Chunmei said, "really we have had wine enough."
"Oh, how can you say that?" Mistress Ben said. "Why must you stand so much on ceremony here?" Then she said to Mistress Han: "You are my near neighbor and I look upon you as a second hostess. You must urge the Third and Fourth Aunts to drink. Don't sit there like a guest." She said to her little daughter: "Heat some wine and pour it out for your Third Aunt. But don't fill it quite full for your Fourth Aunt."
"I never drink wine," Lanxiang said.
"Ladies," said Mistress Ben, "you have gone hungry today because I have no good food to offer you. Please don't laugh at me on that account. I would have sent for some blind singers, but I was afraid the noise would disturb his Lordship. This is such a tiny place. Dear, dear! What a hard life poor people have!"
Qintong knocked at the door. The little girl went to see who was there. Qintong looked at her and smiled, but said nothing. "You funny creature," Yuxiao said, "what is it you want, standing there showing your teeth and grinning? Why don't you speak?"
"The ladies are drinking at Madam Wu's house," Qintong said. "When they saw it was snowing, they sent me for their furs. They all want them."
"They are in the gilded chest," Yuxiao said. "Ask Xiaoyu to give them to you."
"Xiaoyu told me to come here and ask you," Qintong said.
"Don't pay any attention to that little whore," said Yuxiao. "She knows well enough where they are."
"Your ladies have fur coats," Chunmei said, "and you must go and get them. My lady has none, so I can stay where I am."
"Go and ask Xiaoluan for the Third Lady's coat," Lanxiang said. Yingchun gave Qintong a key. "Ask Xiuchun," she said, "to open the door of the inner room, and give you the Sixth Lady's fur coat."
Qintong went back to the inner court. Xiaoyu and Xiaoluan wrapped up the fur coats belonging to the Great Lady and Yulou and gave them to him. As he was coming away, he met Daian and asked what he had come for. "You may well ask," Daian said. "It was all your fault that I got a scolding from the Great Lady and was told to come and bring a coat for the Fifth Lady."
"I am going for the Sixth Lady's coat," Qintong said.
"Well," said Daian, "when you have got it, wait here for me and we will go together. If you go back before I do we shall have another taste of the Great Lady's temper." Daian went to the upper room. Xiaoyu was still sitting on the bed, warming her hands at the fire and biting melon seeds.
"Ah, Daian," she said, "so you have come too?"
"Yes," said the boy, "and I have a bellyful of anger. The Great Lady complains that I order other people about too much. She has sent me for the fur coat that Li Zhi brought in payment of a debt, because the Fifth Lady has none of her own. It is in the great chest."
"Yuxiao keeps the keys of the inner room," the girl said. "She and the others have gone to drink wine at Ben the Fourth's place. You will have to go to her."
"Qintong has gone to the Sixth Lady's room to get her furs," said Daian. "He will be back soon and he can go to Yuxiao. I am going to rest and get warm."
Xiaoyu invited Daian to sit on the bed. They sat close together and warmed their hands at the fire. "There is some wine in the jar," Xiaoyu said:. "Would you like a drink?"
"You are very kind," said Daian. Xiaoyu got down from the bed, took the wine jar and set it on the fire. She opened the cupboard and took out a plate of preserved goose. There was nobody else about, and they kissed one another.
While Daian was drinking his wine, Qintong came back. Daian gave him a cup of wine and told him to go to Yuxiao to ask for a fur coat for the Fifth Lady. Qintong left the other coats behind and went again to Ben the Fourth's place. Yuxiao cursed him. "You young jailbird!" she said. "What has brought you back here?" She refused to come with him, but gave him the keys. The boy returned and asked Xiaoyu to open the door. Xiaoyu did so and picked up the bundle of keys. For a long time she tried to open the chest, but without success. Again Qintong went to Ben the Fourth's place to Yuxiao. "These are not the keys," Yuxiao said. "The key of the chest is under the bed in the Great Lady's room."
When the boy returned this time, Xiaoyu began to curse. "The whore might be nailed there," she said. "Instead of coming herself, she lets me have all the trouble." She opened the chest, but the fur coat was not inside it. Qintong had to run backwards and forwards, and he too cursed. "If I am going to die," he said, "it will take me three days and three nights to do so. These young ladies are like the ghosts of some infectious disease. I'm almost exhausted." He said to Daian: "What a fine scolding we shall get from the Great Lady when we get back. She won't have a word to say against the maids. We shall have to take the blame for being late." He went back to Yuxiao. "There is no fur coat in the chest," he told her.
Yuxiao thought for a while. Then she laughed. "I forgot. It is in the chest in the other room."
Qintong went back again. "The whore is crazy," cried Xiaoyu. "Her naughty lover has been too much for her. First she tells us it is in one place and it is not. Then she tells us to look somewhere else." However, she found the coat and wrapped it up with Ximen Dajie's. She gave them both to Daian and Qintong, and the two boys took them to Aunt Wu's house.
Yueniang scolded them again. "You two thievish slaves have been putting your heads together. You didn't want to come."
Daian did not dare to say anything, but Qintong said: "We got all the other coats, but had to wait until the maid found this one." He produced it and Aunt Wu looked at it.
"This is a splendid coat," she said. "Why did you call it a yellow dog's skin, Fifth Sister? I should be very glad to have one like it."
"It is really new," Yueniang said. "A little worn, perhaps, at the front. We will replace that part by a golden stomacher and then it will be perfect."
Yulou said jokingly to Jinlian: "Come here, my child, and put this yellow dog's skin on you. Let mother see whether it suits you or not."
"I shall have to ask my husband for one," Jinlian said. "I don't care to wear other people's old clothes."
"You are too clever," Yulou said, laughing. "You ought to thank Buddha you have a coat like this." She put it on Jinlian. It was very large and cozy. Jinlian was somewhat appeased. Yueniang, Yulou and Li Ping'er put on their fur coats, all of which were made of sable. Then they said good-bye to the Wu ladies, and Yueniang gave Miss Yu two *qian* of silver.
Wu Yin'er said she too must say farewell. She knelt down and kowtowed to all the ladies. Aunt Wu gave her a set of silver flower ornaments; Yueniang and Li Ping'er each gave her a tael of silver. She again kowtowed and thanked them.
The two aunts and Miss Zheng would have taken the ladies to the gate, but Yueniang would not let them because it was snowing.
"A little while ago it was snowing very heavily," Qintong said. "Now it is more like rain. I am afraid the ladies' clothes will get wet, and I suggest borrowing umbrellas from our aunt." The younger uncle Wu quickly found some umbrellas and Qintong took them. Two soldiers with lanterns led the way. After passing through a few lanes, they came to the main street. Chen Jingji set off fireworks all along the road. He said to Wu Yin'er: "Sister Wu Yin'er, your home is not far away. Let us take you home."
"Where does she live?" said Yueniang.
"You go down this street," Jingji said, "and halfway down you come to a house with a high gateway. That is where she lives."
"I must say good-bye to you, ladies," Wu Yin'er said.
"Go straight home," Yueniang said. "Don't stop to make reverence to us. You have done so already, and the ground is wet. I will send a boy with you to see you to your door." She told Daian to go with the girl.
Then Jingji said: "Mother, I think I ought to go with Daian."
"Very well," said Yueniang, "you can both go with her." This was what Jingji was hoping for: he and Daian went off together.
Yueniang and the others went on their way. Jinlian said to Yueniang: "Mother, you talked about our taking her home. Why didn't we?" Yueniang laughed.
"What a child you are! I was only joking, and you took every word I said seriously. What kind of a place do you imagine this 'Home of Spring's Delights' to be? We could not possibly go there with her."
"But when men go to amuse themselves at such places," said Jinlian, "I have heard of their wives going after them and making a disturbance."
"Then, next time our lord goes there," Yueniang said, "you go and look for him. The chances are you will be driven out by another man who will take you for one of the ladies there."
They came to East Street. Outside the Qiaos' house, Madam Qiao herself and Miss Duan were standing. When they saw Yueniang and the others coming, they came forward and invited them to go in. Yueniang thanked them. "It is very kind of you," she said, "but it is late and we must not stay." Madam Qiao begged them not to stand on ceremony, and insisted that they should go in for a while. In her room, lanterns were hanging, and wine and fruit were set out upon the tables. Two singing girls were there to entertain the company.
At the gateway, Ximen Qing and his friends at last had wine enough. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida had been eating all day, and now the food had reached so high a point in their throats that they could not swallow another morsel. They saw that Ximen Qing was nodding in his chair and, not to miss a chance, they emptied the plates of fruit into their sleeves and went off with Han Daoguo. Only Ben the Fourth remained. He helped Ximen Qing to pay the musicians, told the boys to clear away, saw that the lanterns and candles were blown out and assisted Ximen Qing to the inner court.
Ping'an went to Ben the Fourth's place and said to the maids there: "Father has gone to the inner court. Why don't you come?"
When they heard this, Yuxiao, Yingchun and Lanxiang hurried away as fast as they could without even saying good-bye to Mistress Ben. They were off like a streak of smoke. Chunmei alone thanked Mistress Ben, and went back in a leisurely way. She overtook Lanxiang, who had been left behind because her shoe had come off. Chunmei scolded her. "You are like someone who steals a coffin for her own funeral," she said. "What kind of manners are these, letting your shoe fall off like that?"
When they came to the back court, they found that Ximen Qing had gone to Li Jiao'er's room, and all went in to kowtow to him. When the nun saw him come in, she left that room and went to Yueniang's room where she sat with Xiaoyu. When Yuxiao came in, she made a reverence to the nun.
"Sister," Xiaoyu said to her, "when Mother sent a boy for the ladies' furs, why didn't you come and look for them yourself instead of making me do so? I didn't know which was the key of the chest, and when I opened it, there was no coat inside. In the end, I found it in the great chest in the other room. You put the fur there, and you must have known where it was. You must have been off your head. You had food enough at Mistress Ben's, and now you are fatter than ever."
In truth, Yuxiao had had a good deal to eat, and her face was red. "You little whore," she cried, "what do you mean by behaving like a mad dog? If she didn't invite you, that's no reason why you should be angry with me. Do you think I wanted the whore to invite me?"
"Sisters," said the nun, "be calm, and do not let your master hear you. The ladies will be back in a moment and you had better have tea ready for them."
Then Qintong came with the wrappers. Yuxiao asked if the ladies had returned. The boy told her that Madam Qiao had kept them, and that they had gone in to take a cup of wine with her. They would probably be back soon, he said. The two maids stopped quarreling.
Before long, Yueniang returned from Madam Qiao's. When she reached the gate, Ben the Fourth's wife came out to welcome her. Then Chen Jingji and Ben the Fourth brought a small set of fireworks and set it off outside the gate. Afterwards, Yueniang went in, and Li Jiao'er and the nun came and made reverence to her. Xue'e kowtowed.
"Where is his Lordship?" Yueniang said to Li Jiao'er.
"He came to my room," Li Jiao'er said, "and I helped him to bed." Yueniang said no more.
Yingchun, Chunmei, Yuxiao and Lanxiang came to kowtow to their mistress.
"Madam Ben the Fourth sent these four maids an invitation," Li Jiao'er said. "They stayed a while and then came back."
For some time Yueniang did not speak. Then she said: "You wonderful little bitches. What do you mean by going? Who told you you might go?"
"They asked their master's permission before they went," Li Jiao'er said.
"Asked his permission!" said Yueniang. "What is the use of asking him? This house is like a temple where the doors are opened early on the first and fifteenth days of every month so that all the little ghosts can run away."
"Lady," the nun said, "these sisters are just like pictures; how can you speak of them as little ghosts?"
"They look like half-painted pictures to me," Yueniang said. "What right have they to go out for others to feast their eyes upon?"
Yulou saw that Yueniang was not in the best of tempers, and was the first to leave. Jinlian, Li Ping'er and Ximen Dajie went after her. Only the nun remained. She went to bed with Yueniang. The snow did not stop until the first night watch.
Next day, Ximen Qing went to his office. About midday, Yueniang, Yulou and Li Ping'er said good-bye to the nun. At the gate they saw an old country woman telling fortunes. She wore a pleated gown and a blue cloth skirt; there was a piece of black cloth over her head, and on her back she carried a bundle. She was walking along the street. Yueniang told a boy to go and bring her inside the second door to consult the divining diagram.
The old woman set out the spirit tortoise, and they asked her to tell their fortunes. She knelt down and kowtowed four times. "Lady, how old are you?" she asked Yueniang.
"Tell the fortune of a woman whose animal is the dragon," Yueniang said.
"If you speak of the great dragon," the old woman said, "the age is forty-two, but if it is the lesser dragon, it must be thirty."
"I am thirty," Yueniang said, "and I was born at midnight on the thirteenth day of the eighth month."
The old woman cast the spirit tortoise. It turned once, and she took up one of the divining cards. On it was a picture of a man and a woman in the place of the master, and a number of servants, some sitting, some standing. They were all watching gold and silver and treasure being put in safety.
"Lady," the old woman said, "you were born at the lucky hour of the *Wu* period. Now *Wu* and *Ji* together are like a great forest, and your being born in their conjunction means that you are a woman of benevolence and justice. You are generous and kind-hearted. You are charitable and devout and a supporter of the religious orders. You are, in fact, given to good works of every sort. All your life you have done your duties as a housewife; you are prepared to take the blame that others should have, and keep silence. Happiness and anger are both natural to you. But you do not manage your servants with great discretion. When you are pleased, you laugh long and heartily, and, when you are angry, you make a terrible to-do. In the early morning, when others are asleep, you burn fresh incense and wash the tripods. This while others sleep till the sun is long risen. Although by nature you are very quick, like wind and fire, yet you forget about a thing in a twinkling and you are ready to talk and laugh with anybody. There is a star of ill omen in the palace of diseases. You have to suffer from the babble of others. But you have a good heart, and so can overcome this, and you will live till you are seventy."
"Tell us whether this lady will have a son," Yulou said.
"I am sorry," said the old woman, "but there is something uncertain about the sign for children. I seem to see that she will have a son in a religious order to see her soul into the next world. But I doubt whether any other children she may have will live, no matter how many they may be."
"Your Wu Yingyuan is a priest already," Yulou said to Li Ping'er, smiling.
Yueniang said to Yulou: "Let her tell your fortune."
"Tell the fortune," said Yulou, "of a woman aged thirty-four, born at the hour of the tiger on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month."
The old woman again set the cards in order and cast the spirit tortoise. It stopped at the Star of Fate. She picked up a card on which was depicted a woman and three men. The first man was dressed as a traveling merchant, the second wore a red robe of ceremony, the third was a scholar. There was a room of gold and silver, and many servants stood on either hand.
"This lady was born in the year *Jiazi*," the old woman said, "and when *Jiazi* comes into conjunction with *Yichou*, it is like gold in the ocean. But there are three deaths and six injuries indicated by Fate. All will be well when you have been a widow."
"I have already been a widow once," Yulou said.
"You are gentle, kind and good-tempered," the old woman continued. "Nobody can tell whom you like and whom you dislike, because you never show it. You are respected by those below and loved by your husband, but, in spite of your kindness to others, you never win people's hearts. You must take the blame for what others do, and backbiters will make trouble for you. Though you suffer this, no one will admit that you are kind. But you are good-hearted, and though you will have to put up with troublemakers, they will do you no real harm."
Yulou laughed. "Only a moment ago," she said, I asked for some money for the boys and there was trouble. I think that is what you must be thinking of when you talk about my being blamed for what others do."
"Can you tell us whether this lady will have a son?" Yueniang said.
"At the best, she will have a daughter," said the old woman. "Certainly not a son. But she will live long."
"Now tell this other lady's fortune," Yueniang said to the old woman. "Sixth Sister, tell her your eight words."
Li Ping'er laughed. "I am a sheep," she said.
"If you are a lamb," the old woman said, "you must be twenty-seven years old and you were born in the year *Xinwei*. What was the month?"
"Noon on the fifteenth day of the first month," Li Ping'er said.
The old woman spun the turtle. When it came to the Star of Fate, it stopped dead. She picked up a paper on which was a picture of one woman and three men. The first was wearing red, the second green and the third black. The woman was carrying a child. In a room filled with treasures of gold and silver there stood a demon with black face, long fangs, and red hair.
"This lady," the old woman said, "shows *Gengwu* in conjunction with *Xinwei*. It is as earth by the roadside. She is of high position and great wealth. She has food and clothing in plenty, and all her husbands are men of standing. There is virtue in her heart, and she does not care for money and treasure. Should she be robbed of them, she is happy nonetheless. Indeed, she will be angry if she is not. But she is plagued by people of little worth, and such people return her evil for good. Such evildoers disturb her peace, and begin their cunning tricks as soon as they have turned their eyes away from her. It is better to meet a tiger in a place where three roads meet, for then we can escape one way, than a man with a sword whose blade is double-edged.
"Lady, I hope you will forgive me. You are like a roll of fine red silk, yet one, alas, of no great length. You must exercise great self-control, and be on the lookout for danger to your child."
"My child has been enrolled at the Daoist Temple," Li Ping'er said.

"All to the good," the old woman said, "but I must warn you that this year you are under the spell of the *Jidu* star and there are signs of blood. You must be particularly careful in the seventh and eighth months. Then you must not see anything that might disturb you."
When the old woman had finished, Li Ping'er gave her five *fen*, and Yueniang and Yulou each gave her fifty coins. Then she was dismissed.
Jinlian and Ximen Dajie came. "No wonder I could not find you in the back court," Jinlian said, laughing. "You were all here."
"Yes," Yueniang said, "we came to say good-bye to the nun, and then we had our fortunes told. If you had been a little earlier, you too could have had your fortunes told."
"I don't want my fortune told," said Jinlian. "There's a proverb: 'Fortunes may be foretold but not our conduct.' You remember how, some time ago, that priest said I'd not long to live. It made me very depressed. But I don't care. If I die in the street, bury me there. If I die on the road, bury me there. If I fall into a ditch, the ditch will serve as a coffin." She went with Yueniang to the inner court.

## 068
## Wang Liu-erh Peddles Influence in Pursuit of Profit; Hsi-men Ch'ing Accepts a Bribe & Subverts the Law; The Villainy of Miao Qing

The wind agitates unruly waves, making the breakers turbulent;
Aboard a lonely craft, obliquely moored, one's sleep is anxious.
The cry of the isolated bird is shrill beyond the cold clouds;
The drum of the relay station interrupts the traveller's dreams.
Poetic fancy only enhances the greenness of the poolside grass;
The riverboats, without prearrangement, rise on the evening tide.
Gazing into the void, I enumerate those who truly understand me;
But there is only my old friend the moon up there in the sky.

THIS POEM merely reiterates the fact that on the northern frontier carts and horses are the norm whereas in the Chiang-nan region boats and oars are more convenient. Hence, it is certainly true that southerners ride boats, and northerners ride horses. [1] In the ancient city of Kuang-ling, or Yang-chou, in the Chiang-nan region, there dwelt a well-to-do commoner named Miao T'ienhsiu, who possessed property worth ten thousand strings of cash and was devoted to poetry and ritual. [2] He was thirty-nine years old and had no sons, but an only daughter, who had not yet been married. His wife, née Li, was bedridden with an intractable disease, so the affairs of the household had been entrusted to his favorite concubine, née Tiao, who was known as Tiao the Seventh. She was formerly a singing girl from a brothel on the main Yang-chou dock, whom Miao T'ien-hsiu had purchased for three hundred taels of silver and installed as a secondary wife in his household, where she reigned supreme in his affections.
Suddenly one day, an old Buddhist monk appeared at his door, claiming to be from the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, in the Eastern Capital, who stated that because his temple hall lacked a gilded bronze effigy of an arhat, he had arrived here in the course of his peregrinations, in the hope of calling on the faithful and raising a subscription. Miao T'ien-hsiu was not stingy but promptly agreed to donate fifty taels of silver to the monk for this purpose.
"It scarcely requires so much," the monk said. "Half of that amount would suffice to finish the image in question."
"Master, pray don't take offense at the meagerness of my donation," said Miao T'ien-hsiu. "If there is anything left over after the completion of the Buddhist effigy, you can expend it on the customary oblations."
The monk folded his hands in front of his chest and made him a bow in the Buddhist manner to thank him for his gift.
Before taking his leave, he said to Miao T'ien-hsiu, "Under the socket of your left eye there is a white emanation, which is a fatal sign and indicates that before this year is out you will suffer a great calamity. Because you have shown such a generous affinity for me, how could I refrain from warning you of this impending event? From now on, no matter what may come up, you should on no account venture outside of this locality. Take heed! Take heed!" [3]
Having finished speaking, he took his leave of Miao T'ien-hsiu and departed.
Less than half a month later, Miao T'ien-hsiu happened to wander into his back garden, where he caught sight of his servant Miao Ch'ing, [4] who had always been a dissolute scamp, embracing and whispering to his concubine, née Tiao, beside a pavilion. Not having anticipated Miao T'ien-hsiu's abrupt arrival, they did not have time to conceal themselves. Having caught sight of them:
Without permitting any further explanation,
Miao T'ien-hsiu proceeded to give Miao Ch'ing a severe beating and swore to expel him from the household. Miao Ch'ing was intimidated by this threat and begged the neighbors to intercede on his behalf, which they had to do more than once before he was finally allowed to remain. But he continued to harbor acute resentment in his heart.
Unexpectedly, a certain maternal cousin of Miao T'ien-hsiu's named Huang Mei, a native of Yang-chou, who had obtained office as a provincial graduate, who currently served as assistant prefect of K'ai-feng, the Eastern Capital, and who was a man possessed of:
Broad erudition and extensive knowledge,
sent a man to Yang-chou one day to deliver a letter to his cousin, inviting him to come to the Eastern Capital for a visit. On the one hand, he could enjoy the sights; and on the other, something might be done to improve his future prospects.
When Miao T'ien-hsiu received this letter, he was:
Unable to contain his delight,
and addressed his wife and concubine, saying, "The Eastern Capital is:
The purlieu of the imperial equipage,
a place where splendor and luxury are concentrated. I have long harbored the wish to see it but have lacked an opportunity. Now that my maternal cousin has sent me this invitation, it will truly serve to fulfill the wish of a lifetime." [5]
To this his wife, née Li, responded, "The other day, when that monk examined your features, he detected a portent of calamity and enjoined you not to leave the premises. Moreover, the capital is a long way from here, your property is a weighty responsibility, and if you leave your young child and sick wife at home, there is no telling whether this trip will actually improve your prospects. It would be better not to go."
Miao T'ien-hsiu did not accept her argument but instead angrily rebuked her, saying, "For a:
Man of mettle, inhabiting the space between Heaven and Earth, [6]
Whose will is symbolized by a mulberry bow and rubus arrows, [7]
to be unable to:
Journey at will about the empire, and
Appreciate the sights of the capital,
but be content merely to:
Grow old and die beneath his own windows, [8]
is to have lived in vain. Moreover, for someone like myself, who:
Harbors talent in his breast, [9]
and whose:
Purse is abundantly supplied, [10]
what reason is there to worry that success will not come my way? If I pay this visit, my maternal cousin is sure to have something good in store for me. Don't say another word about it."
Thereupon, he ordered his servant Miao Ch'ing to get together his baggage and accoutrements, provided himself with two trunks of silver, loaded a boat with merchandise, and prepared to embark for the Eastern Capital, taking a page boy and Miao Ch'ing with him. Thinking that:
Achieving success and fame would be like picking up a mustard stalk; [11]
Obtaining a desirable post would be like spitting into one's hand,
he admonished his wife and concubine to take care of the household and set off on the appointed day.
It was at the end of autumn and the beginning of winter that he boarded his boat and departed from the dock in Yang-chou. After travelling for several days, they arrived at the Hsü-chou Rapids. Behold:
The stretch of white water,
Looked extremely menacing.
For a myriad li the water of the long rapids seems to be cascading;
As it strikes the islands on its way east they resound like thunder. [12]
The endless billowing of the snowy whitecaps [13] causes people to fear;
When travelling merchants encounter it who is not affrighted? [14]
When they had proceeded to a place called Shan-wan, Miao T'ien-hsiu saw that it was getting late and ordered the boatmen to lay to for the night. It was one of those occasions on which:
His fated lot was running out;
Something was destined to happen.
Unbeknownst to him, the boat he had hired was a pirate boat, and the two boatmen were both evildoers, one of whom was named Ch'en the Third and the other Weng the Eighth. As the saying goes:
Without the help of an insider,
A household cannot be broached. [15]
Now this Miao Ch'ing held a deep grudge against his master, Miao T'ienhsiu, for the beating he had previously received at his hands. He had wanted to get revenge for some time but had not had an opportunity to do so.
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"Why don't I:
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
collaborate with these two boatmen in seizing my master, killing him, shoving his body into the water, and then dividing his property between us? If I return home and manage to plot the death of his invalid wife, his whole estate, together with his concubine, née Tiao, will all be mine."
Truly:
Flowering branches, beneath their leaves, conceal their thorns;
How can one know for sure the human heart contains no poison? [16]
This Miao Ch'ing, thereupon, proceeded to consult secretly with the two boatmen, saying, "In my master's leather trunks, in addition to a thousand taels of silver, there are two thousand taels worth of satin piece goods, and an ample quantity of clothing and so forth. If the two of you are willing to conspire with me against him, I am willing to agree to an equitable division of the spoils."
Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth laughed, saying, "Since you have spoken, we need not deceive you, but we have had the same idea for some time."
That night, the sky was overcast and dark. Miao T'ien-hsiu and the page boy, An-t'ung, were asleep in the middle cabin, and Miao Ch'ing was in the stern sheets behind the scull. When it was nearly the third watch, around midnight, Miao Ch'ing deliberately started calling out, "Thief! Thief!"
Miao T'ien-hsiu, upon being startled out of his dreams, stuck his head out of the cabin door to see what was up, and Ch'en the Third, who was holding a sharp knife in his hand, stabbed him in the throat with a single thrust, and then shoved the body into the turbulent waves of the shallow. An-t'ung tried to escape, but Weng the Eighth struck him a blow from behind, which knocked him into the water.
The three conspirators then went into the cabin, where they extracted all the victim's property and money, satin goods and clothing, and proceeded to sort things out before dividing them up among themselves.
The two boatmen then said, "Brother, if we were to keep these piece goods, we would surely be caught. But, because you are a servant in his employ, if you transport these goods to market and offer to sell them, no one will suspect anything."
On this account, the two boatmen, after dividing the thousand ounces of silver in the leather trunk, and Miao T'ien-hsiu's clothing, etc., between them, proceeded to punt their boat back in the direction they had come from. Miao Ch'ing, on the other hand, engaged another boat, on which he conveyed his booty as far as the dock at Lin-ch'ing, [17] where he saw it through the customs station, and then had it transported by land to Ch'ing-ho district, and stored in a licensed warehouse outside the city wall. When he encountered merchants from Yang-chou with whom he was familiar, he merely explained that his master was on another boat, behind his, and would soon arrive. But we will say no more for the moment about how Miao Ch'ing endeavored to dispose of his merchandise.
As the saying goes:
Though men may plan to do thus and so:
Heaven's principles may yet deny them. [18]
Alas for Miao T'ien-hsiu! Although:
He had always been a good man,
one fine day, he was done in by his own servant, and:
Failed to achieve a good death. [19]
Though it is true that he had:
Disregarded a well-meant admonishment,
it is also the case that:
One's allotted years are hard to evade. [20]
Who could have anticipated that, although An-t'ung was knocked unconscious by the boatman and fell into the water, he fortunately escaped death. After bobbing up and down for a while among the reeds in the cove, he was able to climb ashore, where he proceeded to loudly lament his fate on the embankment.
Gradually:
The dawn began to glimmer, [21]
and there suddenly appeared a fishing boat, coming downstream from the upper reaches of the river, with an old man sitting on it, dressed in a hat of woven bamboo and a short coir rain cape. Upon hearing the sound of lamentation coming from deep among the reeds along the bank, he moved his boat closer to investigate and found that it was a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old boy, whose body was completely soaked with water. When he enquired into the story behind this, from first to last, he learned that his interlocutor was a page boy from Miao T'ien-hsiu's household who had suffered a criminal assault on the rapids. The old fisherman took him aboard his boat, poled it back to his home, provided him with a change of clothing, and gave him something to eat and drink.
He then went on to ask him, "Would you prefer to go back where you came from, or would you like to stay here and live with me?"
An-t'ung wept, saying, "My master has met with a calamity, and I don't know what has become of him. [22] What home have I got to return to? I would prefer to stay here with you, sir."
"That's all right," said the old fisherman. "You can stay here with me for the time being. I'll gradually make inquiries into who your assailants might be, and we can decide what to do then." [23]
An-t'ung bowed in gratitude to the old man and resigned himself to trying to make a go of it with him henceforth.
One day, it was one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen.
On the last day of the year, the old fisherman, taking An-t'ung with him, had just come out to the port on the New Canal to sell his catch, when Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth, who had been drinking aboard their boat, happened to come ashore, dressed in Miao T'ien-hsiu's clothes, in order to buy fish.
An-t'ung recognized them and surreptitiously communicated this to the old fisherman, saying, "My master's wrong is about to be righted."

The old fisherman said, "Why don't you prepare a deposition and lodge a complaint against them with the proper authorities? That ought to settle the case."
An-t'ung then proceeded to prepare a deposition and presented it to the office of the Regional Military Command, which was responsible for security along that section of the Grand Canal, but Commandant Chou Hsiu rejected the complaint for lack of material evidence. He then presented his complaint to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and when Hsia Yenling saw that it involved accusations of armed robbery and murder on the part of criminal elements, he agreed to hear the case.
On the fourteenth day of the first month, he sent detectives, taking An-t'ung with them, to arrest the suspects. When they arrived at the port on the New Canal, they took Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth into custody and brought them before the bench. Upon interrogation, the two boatmen saw that An-t'ung was standing by to give evidence against them and, without even being subjected to torture, admitted to every particular of the charges. Their deposition stated that at the time of the crime, the victim's servant, Miao Ch'ing, was also present and had conspired with them to murder his master, after which, he had taken his share of the booty and departed. All three persons, both accused and accuser, were incarcerated pending the arrest of Miao Ch'ing, at which time the sentencing of the guilty parties would take place.
Because of the New Year's holiday, the officials and staff of the Provincial Surveillance Commission did not report to the yamen for the next two days in a row. Well before this time was up, however, a hanger-on at the gate of the yamen who specialized in leaking news had covertly tipped Miao Ch'ing off. Miao Ch'ing was panic-stricken by this news, locked the door of his room, and surreptitiously hid out in the home of the proprietor of the warehouse, a broker named Yüeh the Third.
Now this Yüeh the Third lived in a house, with a six-foot-wide frontage and three interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis, that was located right next door to that of Han Tao-kuo on the east [24] side of the stone bridge on Lion Street, and his wife was on very good terms with Wang Liu-erh. She constantly came over to Wang Liu-erh's place to visit, and when Wang Liu-erh had nothing else to do, she would visit her in return, so that the two of them had become quite intimate with each other.
When Yüeh the Third took a look at Miao Ch'ing and saw that:
His face exhibited a worried hue,
he asked what the trouble was and then said, "It's no big deal. The wife of the house next door is the mistress of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and her husband is the manager of one of his business enterprises. The wife is on such good terms with my spouse that, in all things, she is:
Obedient to her every whim.
If you want to ensure that nothing will come of this trouble of yours, as long as you're willing to spend what it takes, you should get my wife to go over and negotiate things with her counterpart next door."
When Miao Ch'ing heard this, he promptly got down on his knees and said, "If there is any way you can enable me to escape this predicament I am in:
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never dare to forget it."
Thereupon, he proceeded to write out an explanatory note and sealed up a packet of fifty taels of silver, along with two outfits of figured satin clothing, while Yüeh the Third directed his wife to go next door and explain the matter, thus and so, to Wang Liu-erh. The latter was as pleased as could be and took possession of the clothing, the silver, and the explanatory note, in order to await Hsi-men Ch'ing's next visit, but he failed to turn up.
On the seventeenth, when the sun began to set in the west, who should appear but Tai-an, riding along the middle of the street on horseback, with his master's felt bag under his arm.
Wang Liu-erh, who was standing at her front door, called him to a halt and asked, "Where are you headed?"
"I've been accompanying Father on a long trip to deliver some presents in Tung-p'ing prefecture," replied Tai-an.
"Where's your master right now?" asked Wang Liu-erh. "Has he come back already, or not?"
"Father and Pen the Fourth," said Tai-an, "have gone home ahead of me."
Wang Liu-erh then invited him inside, explained the matter to him, thus and so, and showed him the explanatory note.
"Auntie Han," said Tai-an, "don't underestimate the gravity of this case you are proposing to meddle with. Right now, the two boatmen who are in custody at the yamen have confessed, and he is the only other party implicated. If you come up with only these few taels of silver, they will not even suffice to take care of the servants in the case. Even if I were to do nothing else but broach the subject to him, Auntie Han, I would demand twenty taels of silver from you. Then, if I should manage to get Father to come over here, you can take the matter up with him however you like."
"You crazy oily mouth!" laughed Wang Liu-erh.
"If you want something to eat,
You shouldn't offend the cook.[25]
If the endeavor succeeds, taking care of you will not be a problem. Even if we were not to get anything out of it ourselves, we would see to it that you were not shortchanged."
"Auntie Han," said Tai-an, "that's not it at all. As the saying goes:
The superior man is not ashamed to speak face to face.[26]
Once the prior conditions are determined,
There may be room for further discussion."
Wang Liu-erh, thereupon, provided a selection of delicacies and invited Tai-an to have a drink.
"If I drink until my head and face are red," said Tai-an, and Father asks me about it, what am I to say?"
"What is there to be afraid of?" said Wang Liu-erh. "Just say that this is where you were."
Thereupon, Tai-an, after drinking only a single goblet of wine, prepared to depart.
"Whatever you do, I'm much indebted to you for speaking on my behalf," said Wang Liu-erh. "I'll be waiting here for the result."
Tai-an then proceeded to mount his horse and go straight home, where he handed over the felt bag he had been carrying and stood in attendance in the rear compound until Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had been taking a nap in his room, came out and sat down in an anteroom.
Tai-an casually approached him and, having nothing else to report, said, "As I was on my way home, Auntie Han called me to a halt and wanted me to ask you to go over there as soon as possible, because she has something important to say to you."
"What could that be?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll do as she suggests."
No sooner had he finished speaking than a certain school official named Liu came by to negotiate a loan for some silver. After he had taken care of this School Official Liu, Hsi-men Ch'ing mounted his horse, put on his eye shades and an informal skullcap, directed Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to accompany him, and made his way to Wang Liu-erh's house. Once there, he dismounted, went inside, and sat down in the parlor, and Wang Liu-erh came out to greet him.
That day, because it was his turn to spend the night in the shop across the street, Han Tao-kuo had not come home, but his wife had bought a lot of provisions and arranged for Old Mother Feng to prepare them in the kitchen, in anticipation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival. The maidservant, Chin-erh, brought in the tea, and the woman served it to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ch'in-t'ung to take his horse to the house across the street, and close the front door after him.
The woman, who was circumspect about plunging right into the matter at hand, merely started out by saying, "Father, you must be exhausted by the successive days of entertaining at your place. I've heard that your son has been betrothed. Congratulations."
"It all started with the proposal of my Sister-in-law Wu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as a result of which we have arranged his betrothal with the Ch'iao family. Their household also has only this single daughter. If you stop to consider it, it's not an entirely appropriate match, but we decided, for better or for worse, to:
Add another tie to the existing ties,[27]
between our families, that's all."
"It's fine enough that you should form a marriage alliance with them," said Wang Liu-erh, "the only thing is that since you now occupy such a high office, when you get together socially it could be embarrassing."
"What a suggestion!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After they had chatted for a while, the woman said, "I'm afraid you might be getting cold here. Why don't we go into my room."
On the one hand, she ushered him into her room, while on the other, she set out a chair next to the brazier for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down.
In due course, the woman took out Miao Ch'ing's explanatory note and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "He asked the wife of the broker Yüeh the Third, next door, to come over and speak to me about it. This Miao Ch'ing has been putting up at his warehouse and has been implicated, thus and so, by the two boatmen. His only hope is that his name may be eradicated from the case, so that he will not have to appear in court. He has presented me with some gifts in return for my good offices. For better or for worse, I hope that you will see fit to do what you can for him."
Hsi-men Ch'ing perused the explanatory note and then asked, "What were the gifts he offered you?"
Wang Liu-erh got the fifty taels of silver out of her trunk and showed them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "In the future, if his overture should prove successful, he has also promised me two outfits of clothing."
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the silver and laughed, saying, "Is that all? What can you hope to do with such a paltry sum? You may not know it, but this Miao Ch'ing is the servant of a wealthy commoner from Yang-chou named Miao T'ien-hsiu, who conspired with the two boatmen on their boat to murder his master and dump him in the river, a case of conspiracy to commit murder with larcenous intent. Right now they are trying to dredge up the body but have not yet recovered it. Moreover, the evidence provided by the two boatmen before the bench has led to the finding of the page boy, Ant'ung, who had originally accompanied him, who has also given testimony, so that there are three witnesses against him. If he is brought before the court, he is sure to be judged guilty of a crime for which the penalty is death by slow slicing,[28] while the other two offenders will only be subject to decapitation.[29] At present, the two boatmen have also testified that he has two thousand taels worth of merchandise in his possession. What does he expect to accomplish with this paltry amount of silver? You might just as well return it to him immediately."
Wang Liu-erh thereupon went into the kitchen and sent the maidservant, Chin-erh, to call over Yüeh the Third's wife, to whom she returned the original gifts and explained the situation, thus and so.
If Miao Ch'ing had not heard about this nothing might have happened, but having heard about it, he felt as though he had been:
Doused with a bucket of water,
All the way from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.
Truly:
The shock affected all six of his vital organs, including liver and gall;
The fright damaged the three ethereal and seven material souls in his heart.
Without more ado, he invited Yüeh the Third to a conference and said, "Even if I have to give up this two thousand taels worth of merchandise, I am willing to do that, if I can only manage to save my life and get home safely."
"If that's what His Honor has to say from his exalted vantage point," opined Yüeh the Third, "it would seem that halfway measures will simply not suffice to influence the two officials involved. You'll have to set aside a thousand taels worth of merchandise for them, and at least half of what is left over will be needed to take care of the adjutants, and the detectives who originally arrested the culprits."
"On top of everything else," said Miao Ch'ing, "I haven't yet arranged the sale of the merchandise. How am I going to come up with the requisite silver?"
He then sent Yüeh the Third's wife over to speak to Wang Liu-erh, saying, "If His Honor is willing to accept merchandise, I can deliver a thousand taels worth to him. If that does not suit him, I respectfully hope that he will allow me two or three days of grace, which will enable me to sell off the merchandise at a reduced price, after which I will come in person and present the proceeds at His Honor's residence."
Wang Liu-erh took the note containing this proposal back into her room and showed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If that's the way it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll order the original detectives involved in the case to put off arresting him for a few days. But tell him to present the list of his proposed gifts immediately."
Thereupon, the wife of Yüeh the Third, on receiving this oral instruction, went back to report to Miao Ch'ing, who was delighted by the news.
Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that there were people right next door, and thought it prudent not to extend his visit. After drinking a few goblets of wine and engaging in intercourse with the woman for a while, on seeing that his servant had come back to fetch him with his horse, he got up and returned home.
The next day, upon going to the yamen, at the early session of the court he did not bring up this case for a hearing, but instead ordered the detectives not to make any further arrests. Miao Ch'ing, on his part, sought the assistance of the broker, Yüeh the Third, in making contact with buyers that very night, in order to unload his merchandise. In less than three days he managed to dispose of it all and realized the sum of one thousand seven hundred taels of silver. Without touching his original gift to Wang Liu-erh, he augmented it with another fifty taels of silver and, in addition, presented her with four outfits of first-class clothing.
To resume our story, on the nineteenth, Miao Ch'ing counted out a thousand taels of silver, which he concealed in four wine jars, purchased a freshly butchered pig, and, waiting until after the lamps were lighted, had them carried to the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. The servants were all in on it, so Tai-an, P'ing-an, Shu-t'ung, Ch'in-t'ung, and the four prison guards who made the delivery were paid off with ten taels of silver. Tai-an also demanded another ten taels of silver for himself from Wang Liu-erh.
In a little while, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out and took a seat in the summer-house. No lamps were lit, and:
The light of the moon was dusky,[30]
for it had just arisen.
The gifts were carried into his presence, and Miao Ch'ing, wearing black clothing, proceeded to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Your humble servant has been the recipient of your life-saving grace. Though:
My body should be pulverized and my bones shattered,[31]
I can hardly hope to repay you either dead or alive."[32]
"As for this case in which you are involved," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I haven't even properly looked into it yet. Those two boatmen are adamant in implicating you. If you should appear in court, you would be charged with a very serious crime. But since people have intervened on your behalf, I'm allowing you to escape with your life. If I were not to accept this gift of yours, you would not be reassured. I intend to give half of it to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, so the two of us will both participate in doing you this favor. You cannot afford to stick around any longer, but should set out for home this very night."
"Where do you live in Yang-chou?" he went on to ask.
Miao Ch'ing kowtowed in reply, saying, "Your humble servant lives inside the city walls of Yang-chou."
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that tea should be brought from the rear compound, and Miao Ch'ing stood underneath the pine trees as he drank it and then kowtowed once again, took his leave, and departed.
But Hsi-men Ch'ing called him back, saying, "Have you spoken to the detectives involved in the original arrest, or not?"
"I have already settled things satisfactorily with all the other people involved," said Miao Ch'ing.
"In that case," Hsi-men Ch'ing directed him, "you had better set out for home immediately."
Miao Ch'ing accordingly went out the gate, returned to Yüeh the Third's house, and proceeded to get his baggage ready for the journey. He found that he still had a hundred and fifty taels of silver on hand, of which he took fifty taels, together with a few remaining bolts of satin, and gave them to Yüeh the Third and his wife out of gratitude for their help. At the fifth watch, around 4:00 AM, they hired a long-distance pack animal for him, and he set out on his way to Yang-chou. Truly, he was:
As flustered as a dog who has lost his way home;[33]
As flurried as a fish who has escaped the net.[34]
We will say no more for the moment about how Miao Ch'ing escaped with his life, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He and Hsia Yen-ling came out of the yamen together when the court session was over and rode along with their horses side by side until they arrived at the entrance to Main Street, where Hsia Yen-ling was about to take his leave as they parted company.
But Hsi-men Ch'ing, without dismounting, raised his whip and said, "If my colleague has no objections, would you condescend to drop by my place for a chat?"
Having succeeded in inviting Judicial Commissioner Hsia to his home, Hsimen Ch'ing dismounted with him outside the gate and proceeded into the reception hall, where, after they had exchanged the appropriate amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing conducted him to the summerhouse, and they loosened their clothing as the attendants served them with tea. Shu-t'ung and Tai-an then came in and set up a table for their entertainment.
"I really ought not to barge in this way and put my colleague to such trouble," said Hsia Yen-ling.
"Whoever heard of such a thing." responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long, the two page boys brought in an assortment of refreshments in square boxes and set them down to one side. They consisted of chicken feet, goose, duck, fresh fish, and other appetizers, making a total of sixteen bowls in all. After they had consumed this repast, and the utensils had been cleared away, another selection of savories suitable to accompany wine drinking was brought out, as well as little gold goblets with handles, on silver saucers, and gold-inlaid ivory chopsticks.
As they were drinking wine together, Hsi-men Ch'ing casually brought up the subject of Miao Ch'ing's case, saying, "This rascal yesterday importuned a member of the gentry to come and intercede with me insistently on his behalf, and also presented me with something in the way of an inducement. Your pupil would certainly:
Not presume to take matters into his own hands,[35]
and that is why I have invited my colleague here today, in order to consult with him about it."
Thereupon, he handed the gift card to Hsia Yen-ling, who read it and then said, "My colleague should feel free to decide the matter as he sees fit."
"As I see it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow we might as well continue proceedings against those two culprits on the basis of the actual booty in their possession. There is no need to proceed any further against this Miao Ch'ing. As for the original plaintiff, that page boy, An-t'ung, we can release him on bond until such time as the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu comes to light. It will not be too late to settle the case at that time. The gifts I propose to send over to your place."

“This last proposal of my colleague's is not right,” said Judicial Commissioner Hsia. “Your view of the case is quite appropriate, and it is you who have taken the trouble to deal with it. Why should you have to share anything with me? That will never do.”
They dickered about it, back and forth, for some time before Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing no alternative, agreed to split the gratuity evenly between them and arranged to have five hundred taels put into food boxes.
Judicial Commissioner Hsia got up from his seat and bowed in thanks, saying, “Since my colleague has chosen to favor me in this way, to refuse yet again would be to display a fastidious response to your lavish generosity.
I will never be able to thank you enough.
It is really quite embarrassing.”
Only after accepting a few more cups of wine did he say goodbye and leave. For his part, Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith ordered Tai-an to take charge of the boxes, which still appeared to contain wine, and have them carried to Hsia Yen-ling's home. When they arrived there, Judicial Commissioner Hsia came out to the door in person to receive them, produced a return note, and presented Tai-an with two taels of silver, and the two orderlies with four mace apiece. But no more of this. Truly:
When heat reaches the proper level, the pig's head is dissolved;
When money reaches the right hands, the case is resolved.[36]
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling had already colluded on a plan of action, and, the next day, when they went to the yamen and took their places on the bench, the clerks, adjutants, detectives, and inspectors, high and low, had all been taken care of by Yüeh the Third on Miao Ch'ing's behalf. The instruments of torture were conspicuously displayed, and Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth were brought out of the lockup and subjected to interrogation.
When their depositions reiterated that they had conspired with the servant of the deceased, Miao Ch'ing, Hsi-men Ch'ing became enraged, and shouted to the attendants, “Put them to the question. You two bandits have been active on the rivers and waterways for years, pretending to be engaged in riverine transportation, while actually devoting yourselves to plundering the property of your passengers, holding up merchants, and committing murder with larcenous intent.[37] Right now there is this page boy who testifies that you stabbed Miao T'ien-hsiu to death with a knife and threw him overboard, after which you wounded him by a blow with a stick that knocked him into the water as well. There is also the evidence provided by the fact that you are wearing items of his master's clothing. How can you have the nerve to try to implicate anyone else?”
He then had An-t'ung brought forward and asked him, “Who was it who stabbed your master to death and pushed him overboard?”
An-t'ung testified, “On the day in question, at the third watch of the night, Miao Ch'ing started calling out, ‘Thief!’ At which, when my master came out of the cabin to investigate, he was stabbed to death with one thrust of a knife by Ch'en the Third, and pushed overboard. I was then struck a blow with a stick by Weng the Eighth, which knocked me into the water, and barely escaped with my life. I do not know anything about the whereabouts of Miao Ch'ing.”
“The testimony of this page boy has the ring of truth,” said Hsi-men Ch'ing. “How can the two of you get around it?”
Thereupon, he had a pair of ankle-squeezers put on each of them and had them struck thirty blows with a cudgel, with the result that their shinbones were crushed, and they:
Howled and writhed like stuck pigs.
More than half of their thousand taels worth of booty had been recovered, and the remainder had all been spent.
That very day, the judicial commissioners saw to the drafting of the necessary documents, sequestered the recovered booty, and forwarded the records of the case to Tung-p'ing prefecture. The prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen,[38] who was also on good terms with Hsi-men Ch'ing, made out the formal indictment according to the terms of the documents he had received and provisionally sentenced Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth to decapitation for the crimes of armed robbery and murder, while releasing Ant'ung on bond pending further developments.
One day, An-t'ung made his way to the Eastern Capital, where he sought out the yamen of the assistant prefect, Huang Mei, and lodged a complaint accusing Miao Ch'ing of having stolen his master's property and then bribed the judicial commissioners to remove his name from the case, and asking when this miscarriage of justice at his master's expense could be righted.
When the assistant prefect, Huang Mei, had heard him out, he wrote a letter on his behalf that very night, sealed it up with his written complaint, provided him with travelling expenses, and told him to deliver it to the office of the regional investigating censor of Shantung.
As a direct result of this act, the wrongdoing of Miao Ch'ing would be reinvestigated from the beginning, and:
Though Hsi-men Ch'ing's deeds were done in the past,
Today the chickens would come home to roost.
A poem testifies to this:

Good and evil, in the end, always turn out to have their causes;
Good luck and bad, misfortune and fortune travel hand in hand.[39]
If, all your life, you have done nothing to be ashamed of;
The midnight sound of knocking at the door will not disturb you.

In the city of Guangling in Yangzhou in the province of Jiangnan, there lived a gentleman of standing in the official service whose name was Miao Tianxiu. He was extremely wealthy, a lover of poetry, and devoted to the Rites. He was now about forty years old, and his only child was a daughter, still unmarried. His wife suffered from a chronic wasting sickness, and the affairs of his household were entrusted to his favorite concubine, Diao the Seventh, who had originally been a woman of no great virtue. Master Miao had paid three hundred taels for her and was extremely fond of her.
One day, an old monk came to beg alms at the gate. He said that he came from the Temple of Thankfulness at the Eastern Capital. The monks there had determined to secure a golden Lohan, and he was traveling about begging for contributions.
Master Miao was no miser. He gave the monk fifty taels of silver.
“This is really more than I need,” the old monk said. “Half of this amount will be sufficient for me.”
But Miao said: “Don't say that, Master. If there is more money than you need for the image, let the rest be spent on sacrifices.”
The monk made reverence to him and thanked him. As he was about to go away, he said, “Sir, beneath your left eye there is the sign of death. This presages great danger for you. You have been so generous to me that I can do no less than warn you. If you have business to do, on no account leave your native place. Be on your guard, be on your guard.” He went away.
A few weeks later, Master Miao happened to go to his garden and there found his servant Miao Qing talking to his concubine Diao the Seventh beside a summerhouse. They had not expected that he would come upon them so suddenly, and so he caught them. Master Miao said nothing, but he gave his servant a tremendous thrashing and swore he would get rid of him. Miao Qing was greatly alarmed and went about asking his relatives and neighbors to intercede for him. In the end he was allowed to stay, but, ever afterwards, he hated his master.
Master Miao had a cousin named Huang Mei, a graduate from Yangzhou. This man was a secretary at Kaifengfu, the Eastern Capital. He was a man of great learning and wide reading. One day he wrote to Master Miao suggesting that he should make a journey to the Capital, both for amusement and in the interests of his future career. Miao was delighted with the idea. He said to his wife and his concubine: “The Eastern Capital is the place for people of high standing, and there are hosts of interesting and beautiful things to see there. For a long time I have wanted to go there, but there was no particular reason why I should. Now my cousin sends me an invitation, and it is exactly what I should most enjoy.”
“The other day,” his wife said to him, “the monk told you that you were in grave danger and that you must not leave this place. It is a long way from here to the Capital, and there is plenty to busy you here at home. If you go away, you leave an invalid wife and a young daughter at home, and what we shall do if you go, I can't imagine. I think you ought to stay.” But Master Miao did not agree. Indeed he almost lost his temper. “A man who lives in this world,” he said, “should carry bow and arrows. It is a disgraceful thing if a man cannot wander over the world to see the glory of his native land. I have a heart in my bosom and something in my pocket, and I am sure to acquire both renown and a position. My cousin must have something good in store for me. Please say no more about it.” He told Miao Qing to pack his clothes and get ready his baggage. So, with two chests of gold, silver, and other treasure, they had enough to load a boat. With a boy, Antong, and Miao Qing, he set off for the Eastern Capital. It was about the end of autumn and winter was near at hand, when he commended his household to the care of his wife and concubine, and chose a day to start upon his journey. Then he sailed from the wharf of Yangzhou. After a few days, they came to the lake of Xuzhou. The water was wild and the danger great.
When they had come to a place called Xiawan, Master Miao, seeing that it was late, ordered the boatman to lay up for the night. Now it was that his life was done, and the fate that he could not escape was upon him. The boatmen he had engaged, Chen the Third and Weng the Eighth, were both thieves. But, as the proverb says: ‘The Devil cannot get into a house without someone to let him in.’ Miao Qing had a burning hatred for his master and was waiting to get his revenge. He reflected that here was a chance for him. He might conspire with these two boatmen to push his master into the river, and so make an end of him, then he and the boatmen would share the plunder, and he would go home, murder his mistress, and enjoy his master's concubine and the property.
Miao Qing and the boatmen secretly made a plot. He said to them: “There are a thousand taels of silver in my master's chests. There is silk worth two thousand taels and many, many clothes. If you two will kill him, I am prepared to share with you.”
The two men laughed. “We had that same idea before you spoke to us,” they said.
That night it was very dark. Master Miao and the boy Antong were asleep in the cabin. Miao Qing was on watch. About the third night watch Miao Qing shouted: “Thief! Thief!” Master Miao woke from his dreams and pushed his head out of the cabin to look around. Chen stabbed him in the throat with a sharp knife. They threw him into the water. The boy Antong tried to escape, but Weng thrust at him with a stick, and he fell into the river.
Then the pair of ruffians went into the cabin, opened the chests and took out all that was valuable—gold and silver, silk and garments. These they counted and made ready to share. “If we keep these things,” the two men said to Miao Qing, “we shall be identified. But you were his servant. You can take them and sell them in some market and nobody will suspect you.” They shared the gold things among themselves and went home. Miao Qing boarded another boat and went to the wharf at Linqing. When the customs officers had examined him, he took all the things to an inn in the city of Qinghe. There he met some old merchants from Yangzhou. He told them that his master was coming later. Then he sold the property he had stolen.
The proverb says: Men think the world ought to be managed in such and such a way, but Providence thinks otherwise. Master Miao was a plain-living, good man, yet he was unexpectedly murdered by his own servant. Such a death was unnatural. He was to be blamed, because he did not take good advice when it was offered, but really there was no escape from the decision of Fate.
Antong was knocked senseless by the stick, but, though he fell into the water, he was not dead. He floated to a shallow place among the reeds. There came a fishing boat, and, in the boat, an old man. He wore on his head a round reed hat, and, on his body, a short coat of straw. When he heard a scream, he rowed his boat in the direction of the sound and found a boy of seventeen or eighteen years of age. He quickly pulled the boy out of the water and asked what had happened. The boy told him that he was the servant of Master Miao of Yangzhou, and that they had been robbed on the river. The old fisherman took the boy into his boat, gave him clothes and food and drink. Then he said: “Do you wish to go back or will you live here with me?”
Antong said: “My master has been murdered, and I can never see him again. What is the use of my going back? I will stay with you.”
“Very well,” said the fisherman. “Live with me, and we shall, in time, find out something about the robbers. Then we will make new arrangements.”
Antong thanked the old man and went to live with him.
One day—it was the last day of the year—it was fated that something of importance should happen. The fisherman and Antong went down the river to sell fish. They came suddenly upon Chen the Third and Weng the Eighth drinking together on their boat. They were wearing the clothes of Antong's master. When they came on shore to buy fish, the boy recognized them. He secretly told the old man. “Now,” he said, “my master's death shall be avenged.”
“Write an accusation and bring them before the judge,” the old man said.
Antong wrote down his charge and took the paper to the office of the Inspector of the River, Major Zhou. The Major saw that the boy brought no witness or evidence with him, so he would have nothing to do with the case, and the boy went to the magistrate's court. Magistrate Xia saw that the case was one of murder and robbery: he accepted the charge and, on the fourteenth day of the first month, sent the watch with Antong to arrest the murderers at Qinghe. When they were examined and saw Antong there, they did not wait to be tortured but told the truth at once. They said that Miao Qing had been concerned with them in the murder, that he had taken a share of the things and gone his own way. Magistrate Xia ordered them to be put back in prison and ordered Miao Qing's arrest. He decided to give sentence when Miao Qing had been brought before him.
It was about the time of the New Year Festival and all the officers were on holiday. For two days the public offices were closed. In the meantime somebody at the office told Miao Qing what had happened. Miao Qing was terrified. He locked up his room at the inn and hid himself in the house of a certain Yue the Third. This Yue the Third was a broker. He lived in Lion Street next door to Han Daoguo, and his wife was on very friendly terms with Wang Liu'er. She often visited Wang Liu'er, and Wang Liu'er, when she had nothing else to do, often visited her. They were on very close terms indeed.
Yue saw that Miao Qing seemed exceedingly distressed and asked him what the trouble was. Miao Qing told him. “Don't worry,” Yue said. “My neighbor Han's wife is the mistress of Master Ximen, an officer of the court. Her husband is a servant of his, and both husband and wife are our very good friends. We agree with each other on all points. If I get you out of this trouble, how much are you prepared to offer? Tell me, and I will go and discuss the matter with him.”
Miao Qing knelt down. “All I ask,” he said, “is to be saved from this trouble. I will most surely give you a great reward and I shall never dare to forget your kindness.”
They wrote out a supplication, parceled up fifty taels of silver, put them with two dresses of embroidered satin, and Yue told his wife to take them to Wang Liu'er. Wang Liu'er was delighted. She took the clothes, the silver and the paper, and waited for Ximen Qing to come.
For several days there was no sign of him but, on the evening of the seventeenth, Wang Liu'er saw Daian, with a wrapper, riding down the street. She went outside her door and called to him: “Where are you going?”
“I have been a long way with my master,” the boy said. “We have just come back from Dongpingfu, where we took some presents.”
“Has your father come back too?” Wang Liu'er asked.
“Father and Ben the Fourth have come back already,” the boy said. Wang Liu'er took the boy into her house, told him all about the case and showed him the paper.
“Aunt Han,” Daian said, “you may try to manage this affair, but you will not find it too easy. The two boatmen are already in prison and now this man is wanted. A few paltry taels are not enough for the servants. I want neither more nor less than twenty taels of silver, and then I will ask Father to come here and you can tell him all about it.”
Wang Liu'er laughed. “You little oily mouth!” she said, “you may be hungry, but you must not be too greedy. If this case is settled, of course there will be something for you. Even if I get nothing myself, I will see that you get something.”
“Aunt Han,” said Daian, “don't misunderstand me. The proverb says: ‘Honorable men are never ashamed to speak plainly.’ The best thing we can do is to agree upon terms and then talk about the matter.”
Wang Liu'er prepared some food and entertained Daian. “If I get a red face from drinking wine,” the boy said, “my master will scold me.”
“Don't trouble about that,” Wang Liu'er said. “Tell him you have been here.”
The boy drank one cup of wine and went away. As he went, the woman said to him: “Tell your father I am expecting him.”
Daian went home, handed in the wrapper and waited for Ximen Qing to have his sleep out. When Ximen came to the room in the wing, the boy went to him quietly and said: “On my way home, Aunt Han stopped me and told me to ask you to go to see her. She has a very important matter to speak to you about.”
“What is it?” Ximen said. “I will go.”
Then District Examiner Liu came to borrow some silver. Ximen gave it to him and he went away. Ximen, wearing his eyeshades and a small hat, mounted his horse and went with Daian and Qintong to see Wang Liu'er. He went into the parlor and sat down, and Wang Liu'er came and made reverence to him. It was Han Daoguo's turn to sleep at the shop that night, so he did not return. Wang Liu'er had bought many things and had sent for old woman Feng to cook them. She hastened to bring tea for Ximen Qing. Ximen told Qintong to take his horse to the house opposite and to shut the gate.
At first the woman said nothing about the case. “You must be tired after so many parties during these last few days,” she said. “I have heard about your young son's betrothal and must congratulate you.”
“It was my relative Wu who suggested the marriage,” Ximen said. “The Qiaos have only one daughter. It really is not the most suitable marriage, but I want to get the matter settled.”
“It is not a bad marriage,” Wang Liu'er said, “but you have a high position and it will be awkward, perhaps, when you meet them.”
“That was what I thought,” Ximen said.
They talked for a while and Wang Liu'er said, “It is rather cold here. Won't you come into the inner room?” They went into the inner room. There was a chair on either side and a brazier with burning coals. Hesitatingly, the woman showed him Miao Qing's paper. “This man, Miao Qing, asked Mistress Yue to come and see me about it,” she said. “Miao Qing is staying with Yue. The two boatmen have accused him falsely. All he wants is to have his name kept out of this case. He sent me a little present and you must do something for him.”
When he had read the paper, Ximen Qing said: “How much did he give you?” Wang Liu'er took the fifty taels from her box and showed them to him.
“If the case is settled, he promised to give me two dresses,” she said. Ximen Qing looked at the silver and laughed. “Why did you accept so small a sum?” he said. “You don't understand. This Miao Qing is the servant of Master Miao of Yangzhou. He and the two boatmen murdered their master and threw the body into the river. It is a case of murder and robbery. The corpse has not yet been found. The boy Antong was with them, and both the boy and the boatmen are anxious to get hold of Miao Qing. If he is arrested he will certainly get the punishment of the thousand slashes and the two boatmen will lose their heads. They say that Miao Qing has stuff worth two thousand taels. Why should he send you a paltry sum like this? Send it back to him at once.”
Wang Liu'er went into the kitchen and told her maid to go for Mistress Yue. When Mistress Yue came, Wang Liu'er gave her the silver and told her what Ximen Qing had said. When the news was brought to Miao Qing, it was as though a pail of water had been poured over him from head to feet. He was absolutely terrified. He talked over the matter with Yue and said he would give up all he had if only he could save his life.
“Since Master Ximen says this,” Yue said, “it is clear that a little more will be of no avail. It looks to me as though it will mean a thousand taels to the two officers, and another thousand taels for the underlings and the policemen.”
“But I haven't sold all my things,” Miao Qing said. “Where am I to find the ready money?” They told Mistress Yue to go back to Wang Liu'er and find out whether Ximen would accept the goods. “If so, Miao Qing will offer goods to the value of a thousand taels to him. If he will not have them, ask his Lordship to allow Miao Qing two or three days in which to sell them. Then he will go in person to his Lordship to offer the money.”
Wang Liu'er took the list of the goods and showed it to Ximen. He looked at it. “In the circumstances,” he said, “I will let him have a few days. Then he must bring the money to me himself.”
Mistress Yue went back and told Miao Qing what had happened. He was greatly relieved.
Ximen Qing noticed that there was somebody in the next house, so he did not stay long. He drank a few cups of wine, then ordered his horse and went home.
The next day the office closed early, and he did not mention the matter at all. Miao Qing desperately urged Yue to sell the stolen property for him, and, in three days, everything was disposed of for seventeen hundred taels. He gave Wang Liu'er another fifty taels and four dresses of the finest material. On the nineteenth he put a thousand taels into four wine jars, bought a pig and, when it was dark, carried them to Ximen Qing. All the servants knew about the matter, so he gave Daian, Ping'an, Shutong and Qintong ten taels of silver apiece. Daian went to Wang Liu'er and got another ten taels from her.
Ximen Qing came out and sat under the awning. There was no light but the moon was just rising. The presents were brought to him and Miao Qing, dressed in black clothes, kowtowed. “I am so grateful for your generous kindness,” he said, “that though my body were beaten to pieces, I could never repay you.”

"Your case has not yet been investigated," Ximen said, "but the two boatmen still insist on the truth of what they have said. If you are arrested, you must inevitably be severely punished. But since you have come to me, I will see that your life is saved. You would not be satisfied if I did not take your present, but a half of it I must give to Magistrate Xia, my colleague. You must stay here no longer, but get away as quickly as you can. Where do you live at Yangzhou?"
"I live within the city itself," Miao Qing said. He kowtowed again. Ximen Qing called for some tea from the back court and Miao Qing drank it, standing beneath a pine tree. Then he kowtowed and prepared to take his leave. Ximen recalled him and said: "Have you attended to the officers of lower rank?" Miao Qing told him that he had. "Then you should go home at once," Ximen said.
Miao Qing gave fifty taels and the remainder of the silk to Yue and his wife. At the fifth night watch, they saddled a horse and he started for Yangzhou.
The next day Ximen Qing and Magistrate Xia left their office together. They were riding side by side. When they came to the middle of the High Street, Magistrate Xia was about to say good-bye to Ximen, but Ximen raised his whip and said: "Will you be kind enough to come to my house for a moment?" Xia went with him. They went into the hall and exchanged the appropriate greetings. Then Xia was asked to go to the arbor, and there he took off his long cloak. The servants brought tea and Daian and Shutong prepared a table.
"Really," Xia said, "I should not put you to all this trouble." Ximen Qing asked him not to say so. Two boys brought chicken, pigs' trotters, goose, duck, fish and other dishes on a large square tray. They ate some and everything was cleared away. Then they drank wine with dessert and fruits, using small golden cups and silver trays. Ximen pressed his colleague to drink more and more, and, while they were drinking, began to talk about the matter of Miao Qing.
"Yesterday," he said, "the fellow got some scholars to come here, and sent presents. I dared not make any decision myself, so I have asked you to come and talk about it." He showed Magistrate Xia the list of presents.
"I leave the decision to you," said Xia, when he had read the list.
"Well," Ximen said, "I suggest that, tomorrow, we send on those two robbers and leave Miao alone. We will ask someone to take Antong away. The matter can be settled when Master Miao's body is found. The present, of course, is yours."
"Not at all," Magistrate Xia said. "I agree with everything you say about the case, but why should you give me the present? You have done well. Certainly I shall not take it." They disputed politely for a long time, and at last Ximen said: "Perhaps we might share it." He put five hundred taels into a food box. Magistrate Xia stood up and made a reverence to him.
"You are very kind," he said, "and if I don't accept, you will take it unkindly. Thank you very much." He had some more wine and then went away.
Ximen Qing told Daian to take the food box to Magistrate Xia's as if he were taking wine. Xia himself came to receive it. He gave the boy a card in return and two taels of silver for himself. The four bearers each received four *qian* of silver. As the proverb says: Just as a pig's head will be cooked when the fire is hot enough, so a case will be settled when money enough is forthcoming.
So Ximen Qing and Xia arranged the matter. The next day they went to the office. The jailers, policemen, and attendants had all been bribed by Yue. In the hall of audience, the instruments of torture were all set out, and Chen and Weng, the two boatmen, were brought forward. When they were questioned, they still declared that they had murdered Master Miao at the instigation of Miao Qing. Ximen Qing professed to be very angry and ordered them to be beaten. "You two thieves have worked the river for years. You have pretended to carry travelers on your boat, but actually you have robbed and murdered. This boy says you killed Master Miao with a knife and threw his body into the water. You struck the boy himself with a stick. Here are the clothes of the boy's master for witness. Why do you still accuse somebody else?"
Then he called for Antong. "Who killed your master? Who pushed you into the water?"
"About the third night watch I heard Miao Qing shout. My master came out of the cabin, then Chen killed him and threw his body into the water. Weng struck me with a stick and I was thrown in too. He did not kill me. I do not know where Miao Qing is now."
"It is clear from what the boy says," Ximen Qing said, "that there is no way out for you." He had fetters put upon their legs and each of them was given thirty blows with a club. Their bones were broken and they screamed like pigs being killed.
The two robbers gave up half of the property they had stolen. They had already spent the rest. A document was written out to be sent with the men and the property to Dongping-Fu. The magistrate at Dongpingfu, Hu Shiwen, was Ximen Qing's friend. He accepted the document without question. He sentenced Chen the Third and Weng the Eighth as thieves and murderers to have their heads cut off. Antong was allowed to go. Afterwards, the boy went to the Eastern Capital. There he accused Miao Qing of his master's murder, and of bribing the officers at Qinghe, and so escaping trial. A letter was written and joined to the lad's accusation; he was given money for his journey and sent to the supreme court of Shandong. Thus, more trouble was brewed for Miao Qing, and Ximen Qing was given considerable cause for anxiety in consequence of his action in the matter.

Evil and good meet with their due reward
Good Fortune and ill luck walk side by side
But he who never walks in the wrong path
Need have no fear when the summons comes in the night.

## 069
## The Accusation of the Investigating Censor Tseng Impeaches the Judicial Commissioners; Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Submits a Memorial Regarding 7 Matters

Some words of admonition:

Be alert to danger and recognize peril,
And you will finally avoid the meshes of the law.
Praise the good and recommend the worthy,
And you will attain a secure place for yourself.
Bestow kindness and practice virtue,[1]
And you will ensure the success of your posterity.
Harbor venom and conceal treachery,
And your whole life will be subject to catastrophe.
To injure others for your own advantage,[2]
Is not, in the final analysis, a far-reaching plan.
To hurt your fellows to achieve success,[3]
Can scarcely be considered a long-range strategy.
Use of pseudonyms and disguised appearance,
Are always necessitated by resort to specious words.
Exposure to lawsuits and loss of property,
Are the inevitable consequences of inhumane conduct.[4]

An-t'ung accepted the document and letter, took his leave of Assistant Prefect Huang Mei, and set out on the highroad to Shantung. Upon inquiry, he learned that the regional investigating censor was currently in residence at his office in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, that his name was Tseng Hsiao-hsü, [5] that he was the son of the former censor-in-chief, Tseng Pu,[6] had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1115, and that he was an official of absolute integrity and honor.
An-t'ung thought to himself, "If I say that I am delivering a letter, the gate-keepers are certain not to let me in. I had better stay here until they hang up the tablet announcing the category of cases to be heard, at which point I can make my way in on my knees and present both the letter and my complaint at the same time. When His Honor sees them, he will surely consent to adjudicate the case."
Thereupon, he put the text of the complaint, which he had long since prepared, in his breast pocket and remained outside the gate of the regional investigating censor's office. After he had waited there for some time, he heard the sounding of the cloud-shaped gong that announced the sessions of the court. The main gate and the inner gate were opened, and Investigating Censor Tseng took his place on the bench. When the first tablet was displayed, it stated, in large characters, "Accusations against imperial princes, distaff relatives of the imperial family, consorts of imperial princesses, and members of influential households." When the second tablet was displayed, it read, "Complaints against the regional military commission, the provincial administration commission, the provincial surveillance commission, and the officers and functionaries of the armies and guards." Finally, when the third tablet was displayed, it read, "Lawsuits among commoners over census registration, marriage, land ownership, and other subjects of litigation."
An-t'ung, accordingly, followed in the wake of this tablet as it was carried inside, and it was only after all the other cases had been disposed of, that he knelt down at the foot of the red steps leading up to the dais. The attendants standing to either side demanded to know what his business was, and only then did An-t'ung present his letter, holding it up with both hands as high as he could.
From his position on the bench, Investigating Censor Tseng was heard to call out, "Bring it up here."
The docket officers in attendance hurriedly came down from the dais and, taking the letter back up with them, placed it on the table before him, after which Tseng Hsiao-hsü proceeded to open and peruse it. Truly, what did the contents of the document say? The letter read:
Earnestly indited by his junior fellow graduate in the capital, Huang Mei, for the perusal of his mentor and fellow graduate the distinguished censor Tseng, courtesy name Shao-t'ing:
Since I forsook your illustrious countenance,[7] a year has abruptly elapsed.[8] Those who truly understand one are difficult to meet.[9] The most satisfying intercourse is easily interrupted. This heart of mine is ardent,[10] ever endeavoring to keep at your side. Last autumn, upon the unexpected receipt of your elegant epistle, when I opened and reverently perused it, my spirit was transported, and I felt exactly as though we were face to face in the capital as of old. Whenever I am feeling melancholy, I recite it once again, and find that it relieves my spirits. Not long after that, you returned south to visit your parents, and I heard the good news that you had been appointed regional investigating censor of Shantung. I am quite:
Unable to contain my satisfaction.[11]
Congratulations! Congratulations!
In consideration of the fact that my fellow graduate is an exemplar of the great virtues of loyalty and filiality, whose integrity is like the wind and frost, whose mind is ever subject to the grindstone of self-cultivation, who is a shining light in the imperial court, and a frequent topic of remark in the discourse of the gentry, now that you have taken up your position as an investigating censor, it is truly the season for you to expose examples of official malfeasance, with a view to the reformation of public morality. In the light of my humble admiration for you, this is something that I cannot forget.
I venture to observe that my fellow graduate, who has always possessed a capacity for significant deeds, and who finds himself at an appropriate time for action, it being an era of sage enlightenment and rectitude, and a day when his venerable father is still alive and well, should take advantage of the opportunity to greatly extend his talent and faculties in the cause of improving law and morals, so as not to allow pettifogging functionaries to manipulate the statutes, or treacherous malefactors to practice their deceits.
How is it then that in the prefecture of Tung-p'ing there should be such an egregious lawbreaker as Miao Ch'ing, and such a victim of unrequited injustice as Miao T'ien-hsiu? I would not have thought that in an era of sage enlightenment such demons could exist. Since this falls within my fellow graduate's jurisdiction, it is to be hoped that he will adjudicate this miscarriage of justice and set the record straight.
The bearer, An-t'ung, is the body servant of the victim, and the carrier of a written complaint that I hope you will condescend to consider. I am unable to express myself more fully. Composed on the sixteenth day of the middle month of spring.
When Investigating Censor Tseng Hsiao-hsü had finished reading the letter, he asked, "Does he have a written complaint or not?"
The attendants hurriedly came down from the dais and said, "His Honor wants to know whether you have a written complaint or not."
An-t'ung thereupon reached into his breast, pulled out the complaint, and formally presented it.
When Tseng Hsiao-hsü had perused it, he picked up his brush and endorsed it with the words, "The prefectural officials of Tung-p'ing prefecture are hereby adjured to conduct an honest inquiry in order to ascertain the facts of the case, examine the corpse of the deceased, and submit a report with all the relevant documents."
He then ordered that An-t'ung should proceed to Tung-p'ing prefecture in order to await the outcome of the proceedings. An-t'ung hastily kowtowed, got up from his knees, and was allowed to exit through a side door, while Tseng Hsiao-hsü, for his part, put the written complaint, along with his endorsement, in a dispatch case, sealed it with his official seal, and sent someone to deliver it to Tung-p'ing prefecture.
When the prefect, Hu Shih-wen, saw that the case had been remanded to him by a higher authority, he was thrown into such consternation that:
He did not know where to put hand or foot,[12]
and delegated the problem to the vice-magistrate of Yang-ku district, Ti Ssupin.[13] This individual was a native of Wu-yang in Honan province, was rigid and upright by nature, and did not solicit bribes, but was so muddleheaded in hearing cases that everyone called him Turbid Ti.
Sometime before this mandate came down, he had set out to reconnoiter the banks of the canal in the hope of locating the corpse of Miao T'ien-hsiu. It turned out to be one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen.
Who could have anticipated that when Vice-Magistrate Ti Ssu-pin led his entourage in reconnoitering the banks of the canal to the west of the district seat of Ch'ing-ho, as they were going about their task, a whirlwind [14] suddenly appeared in front of his mount, that refused to dissipate but kept pace with his horse as he proceeded.
"How uncanny!" remarked Ti Ssu-pin, reining in his horse, "You go follow this whirlwind wherever it goes," he ordered the runners in his entourage. "It's essential that we get to the bottom of this."
The runners did, indeed, follow in the wake of the whirlwind until it came to a halt just as they approached the port on the New Canal, and they went back to report this information to Ti Ssu-pin. The latter ordered them to take the local community elder into custody, and when they had used spades to excavate the soil of the embankment to a depth of several feet, they discovered a corpse, which actually displayed the scar of a knife wound on its throat. After ordering the coroner's assistant to complete his examination, he asked what the place that lay before them might be.
"The Tz'u-hui Ssu, or Temple of Compassionate Wisdom, is located not far from here," the runners reported.
Vice-Magistrate Ti then ordered that the resident monks of the temple be taken into custody and interrogated. They testified unanimously that during the tenth month of the preceding winter, when the temple was engaged in setting water lanterns afloat, they had found a corpse that had drifted into the inlet from upstream; that the abbot, out of compassion, had retrieved and buried it; and that they had no knowledge of the circumstances of the death.
"It is obvious," pronounced Vice-Magistrate Ti Ssu-pin, "that you monks conspired to kill this man and bury him here. No doubt he had valuables on his person, so you are unwilling to testify to the truth."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he had the abbot subjected to a session with the head-press, two applications of the finger-squeezers, and then put into ankle-squeezers which were struck a hundred blows. The remaining monks were each given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo, after which he ordered that they all be incarcerated in the lockup.
When this information was conveyed to Tseng Hsiao-hsü, he ordered that the matter be reinvestigated and reported back to him, but the monks all claimed to be victims of injustice and refused to alter their testimony.
Tseng Hsiao-hsü thought to himself, "If these monks had really conspired to do him in, they would surely have thrown the corpse into the river. Why should they have buried it on the embankment instead? Moreover, there would have been too many people involved. There is something suspicious about this."
He therefore ordered that the monks should be kept in custody, and they had already been incarcerated for nearly two months when this formal complaint of An-t'ung's unexpectedly came into the picture, as a consequence of which, officers were deputed to escort An-t'ung to the site where the body had been discovered in order to identify the corpse.
When An-t'ung saw the body, he wept grievously, saying, "It truly is my master, and the wound inflicted by the knife of those bandits is still visible."
Thereupon, once the examination was completed, the results were reported back to Tseng Hsiao-hsü, who immediately released the monks in custody, while, on the other hand, he ordered a review of the documents in the case and had Ch'en the Third and Weng the Eighth interrogated once again. When they persisted in testifying that Miao Ch'ing had been the instigator of the plot, Tseng Hsiao-hsü was greatly angered and sent someone with an arrest warrant to go to the relevant prefecture in his jurisdiction and hale Miao Ch'ing before the court. At the same time he drafted a memorial impeaching the two judicial commissioners who had heard the case for having accepted bribes and put justice up for sale. Truly:
Corrupt functionaries and venal officials subvert the nation's laws;
But Tseng Hsiao-hsü's review of this case righted an injustice.
Yet, though his orders were as stringent as the wind or thunder;
The wins and losses occurring in a dream are always unreliable.[15]
At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, no sooner had Wang Liu-erh obtained the hundred taels of silver and four outfits of clothing for intervening on Miao Ch'ing's behalf, than she consulted with her husband, Han Tao-kuo, that very night and then busied herself all day and remained sleepless the following night, planning to have head ornaments, hairpins, and bracelets fashioned for herself, calling in a tailor to design clothes for her, and ordering the manufacture of a new fret of silver filigree. She also expended sixteen taels of silver to purchase an additional maidservant, named Ch'un-hsiang, to wait upon her, and, sooner or later, also serve the sexual needs of Han Tao-kuo. But no more of this.
One day Hsi-men Ch'ing dropped by Han Tao-kuo's home and Wang Liuerh ushered him inside and served him with tea. When he had finished drinking his tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear of the house to relieve himself and happened to notice that there was a terrace on the second floor of the adjacent house.
"Who does that belong to?" he asked.
"It's the terrace on the house of Yüeh the Third next door," replied Wang Liu-erh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Wang Liu-erh, "You tell him that he'd better take it down, or else. How can you allow him to interfere with the geomantic situation of your residence that way? If you won't, I'll have the local constable order him to do it."
Wang Liu-erh consulted with Han Tao-kuo about this, saying, "They're our neighbors. How can we broach the subject with them?"

"The best thing to do," said Han Tao-kuo, "would be to keep His Honor in the dark, buy a few sticks of lumber at the temple fair, and put up a terrace behind our own place over here. We can benefit by sun-drying bean paste on top of it, and using the room below for either a stable or a privy."
"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a louse of a senseless creature you are! Rather than erecting a terrace, wouldn't it be better to lay in some bricks and tiles, and construct two upper-story sheds?"
"If we merely put up two sheds," said Han Tao-kuo, "they won't be much use to us. We'd only use them for storage purposes. We might as well put up a single story, containing two small regular rooms."
Thereupon, they proceeded to lay out thirty taels of silver and had two flat-roofed rooms added to the back of their property. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an in charge of a considerable quantity of wine, meat, and baked wheat cakes for them to use in rewarding the artisans for their efforts. Among the residents of the street there were none who were unaware of this.
Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, upon obtaining these several hundred taels of silver, used them to enroll his seventeen-year-old son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, as a degree candidate in the military school of the local guard, where he became a government student. Every day he entertained his instructors and friends, with whom he practiced archery and horsemanship. Hsi-men Ch'ing got together with Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Battalion Commander Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the entire officers corps of the guard battalion to contribute toward the cost of presenting him with a commemorative scroll in celebration of the occasion. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had recently arranged for the construction of an artificial hill, summerhouses, and additional buildings on the site of his family graveyard, but, since the birth of Kuan-ko and his appointment as a battalion commander, he had not yet visited the family graves in order to sacrifice to his ancestors. After ordering Master Hsü, the yin-yang master, to assess the geomantic configuration of the site, he had a new gateway erected, a paved causeway leading to the tombs of his ancestors built, a mausoleum constructed, willows placed about the gate, pines and cypresses planted all around, and raised embankments situated on either side.
In anticipation of his visit to the graves of his ancestors on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, he planned to install a new plaque announcing his status as a member of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, slaughter pigs and sheep, and order the appropriate table settings. Prior to the festival itself, which fell on the sixth day of the third month that year, he sent out invitations to a lot of people, arranged for the transportation of the requisite accoutrements, wine, rice, and other culinary supplies, and engaged the services of musicians and tumblers, a troupe of players, the boy actors Li Ming, Wu Hui, Wang Chu, and Cheng Feng, and the singing girls Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Han Chin-ch'uan, and Tung Chiao-erh. The male guests he invited included Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Ch'iao Hung, his brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Manager Fu, Han Tao-kuo, Yün Li-shou, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, more than twenty people in all. The females invited were Militia Commander Chang Kuan's wife, Kinswoman Chang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Censor Chu's wife, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Hua Tzu-yu's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Meng Yülou's elder sister, Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, Ts'ui Pen's wife, Big Sister Tuan, and, from his own household, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and the wet nurse, Ju-i, holding Kuan-ko in her arms. Altogether, twenty-four or twenty-five sedan chairs were required to accommodate them all.
Before the day in question, Yüeh-niang had spoken to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "There's no need to have the child taken out to the graveyard. On the one hand, he's not even a year old, and on the other hand, Dame Liu says that his parietal bones are not yet completely formed, and that he has a timorous disposition. It's a long way to the graveyard, and I fear he could become frightened. In my view, it would be better not to have him go, but to leave him here at home, where the wet nurse and Old Mother Feng can look after him, and let his mother go without him."
But Hsi-men Ch'ing would not listen to her, saying, "Really! Why shouldn't the two of them, mother and child, both go to the graveyard to kowtow to my ancestors? You put too much stock in the nonsense put out by that crone. The old whore! Even if it be true that the child's parietal bones are not yet completely formed, as long as you have the wet nurse wrap him up securely in a quilt while they are in the sedan chair, what is there to be afraid of?"
"Since you refuse to take anyone's advice," said Yüeh-niang, "you may do as you please."
Early on the morning of the day in question, the female guests all left their homes to forgather for the occasion, mounted their sedan chairs, and set off. But no more of this.
When they approached the family graveyard, five li outside the South Gate, they beheld from a distance that:
The verdant pines were luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses were dense.
The graveyard had been enhanced by the newly erected gateway, the two raised embankments on either side, and a stone wall surrounding the entire site. The paved causeway in the middle, the mausoleum, the spirit platform, the incense burners, and the candlesticks were all hewn out of white alabaster. The newly replaced plaque on the gate was inscribed in large characters, reading: The Ancestral Graveyard of Master Hsi-men, Commandant for Military Strategy of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. The main facade of the mausoleum was:
Encompassed by raised earthen embankments, and
A copse of trees with interlacing branches.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, clad in scarlet official attire, having seen to the setting out of the slaughtered pigs and sheep and other sacrificial offerings, and table settings, proceeded to pay formal homage to his ancestors. Only after the male guests had followed suit did the female guests do likewise.
As these acts of worship took place, percussion instruments, gongs, and drums were all sounded simultaneously, and the resulting din so frightened Kuan-ko that he hid himself in the wet nurse's breast, started to choke, and did not dare to move a muscle.
Yüeh-niang then called out, "Sister Li, how come you haven't had the wet nurse take the child back to the rear yet? Just see how frightened he is. I said there was no need to bring the child, but that obstinate good-for-nothing of ours insisted on having him wrapped up and brought along anyway. Just see how frightened he is."
Li P'ing-erh promptly came down from her seat, ordered Tai-an to have them stop beating the gongs and drums, and directed the wet nurse to quickly cover the baby's ears and take him back to the rear of the premises.
In a little while, after the sacrifices were finished, Master Hsü had recited the elegy to the dead, and the paper money had been burnt, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited the male guests to join him in the front reception hall, while Yüeh-niang invited the female guests to come with her to the summerhouse in the rear. They proceeded through the garden to get there.
To either side of the juniper hedges,
Were arrayed bamboo-lined walks and balustrades;
In all directions the flowering trees,
Stretched before them as far as the eye could see.
Truly:
The red peach blossoms and the green willows[16] are traversed by shuttling orioles:
All of which were brought into being by the creativity of the Lord of the East.
Thereupon, the troupe of players put on a performance for the female guests in the summerhouse, while the four boy actors sang for a time in the front reception hall for the entertainment of the male guests, and the four singing girls took turns serving the wine. The four senior maidservants, Ch'unmei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ying-ch'un, waited on the female guests, holding flagons and pouring wine, after which they stood beside Hsi-men Tachieh's table and had something to eat.
After the female guests had feasted for some time, P'an Chin-lien, along with Meng Yü-lou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Li Kuei-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh, went into the garden together, where they enjoyed themselves on the swing for a while.
It so happens that behind the summerhouse Hsi-men Ch'ing had put a structure consisting of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor, and two less well-lighted inner rooms, each provided with a k'ang frame. Inside they were furnished with bed-curtains, and supplied with tables and chairs, comb-boxes, dressing mirrors, toilet stands, and the like, in order that female visitors to the graveyard would have a place to make themselves up and rest, or that casual visitors from the demimonde could be entertained. The rooms had been plastered so that they were as spotless as snow grottoes and were embellished with calligraphy, painting, zither, and chessboard,[17] all of which were elegantly displayed.
The wet nurse Ju-i, who was looking after Kuan-ko, happened to be reclining just then on the gold-flecked k'ang frame, on which she had placed a little sleeping mat for the baby, with whom Ying-ch'un, who was standing by her side, was playing. What should they see at this juncture but P'an Chin-lien, who suddenly came in from the garden, all by herself, holding a sprig of peach blossoms in her hand.
Upon entering the room and seeing Ying-ch'un, she remarked, "So you've been here all this time, instead of waiting on us up front."
"Ch'un-mei, Lan-hsiang, and Yü-hsiao are all up front," protested Yingch'un. "Mother told me to come back here to see how the baby is doing, and to bring two saucers of delicacies for Ju-i to eat."
Chin-lien noticed that there was a saucer of goose meat, a saucer of pig's trotters, and some pieces of fruit on the table.
When the wet nurse saw Chin-lien come in, she picked up Kuan-ko, and Chin-lien proceeded to tease him, saying, "Little oily mouth! When they struck up the gongs and drums a little while ago, you were so frightened you were speechless. Are you really as timorous as all that?"
Thereupon, she opened up her jacket of pale lavender silk and her gold lamé blouse, took the baby in her arms, held him fast in her embrace, and proceeded to kiss him, mouth to mouth. All of a sudden, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, and, seeing that Chin-lien was playing with the child, proceeded to do likewise.
"Little Taoist," said Chin-lien, "give your brother-in-law a kiss."
At which:
Strange as it may seem,
Kuan-ko actually giggled at him, and Ching-chi:
Without permitting any further explanation,
took the child into his arms and proceeded to give him a series of kisses.
"You crazy short-life!" protested Chin-lien. "It's all right to show your affection to the child, but you're mussing the hair over my temples."
Ching-chi flirted with her, saying, "You don't say. It's a good thing I didn't kiss the wrong person by mistake."
When Chin-lien heard this, fearing that the maidservants would catch on, she facetiously turned over the fan in her hand and proceeded to hit him with the handle, to such effect that Ching-chi wriggled like a carp.
"You crazy short-life!" she berated him. "Who has the patience to:
Bandy words or waggle tongues,
with you?"
"That's not the problem," protested Ching-chi. "You ought to pay more attention to other peoples' feelings. I'm wearing too thin a layer of clothing for you to hit me like that."
"Why should I pay any attention to your feelings for no good reason?" vociferated Chin-lien. "If you pester me that way again, I'll hit you just as hard."
When Ju-i saw the way they were mixing it up with each other, she took Kuan-ko into her arms and let Chin-lien and Ching-chi carry on as they liked. Chin-lien bent the sprig of peach blossoms in her hand into a wreath, which she surreptitiously stuck on top of Ching-chi's cap. When they came outside, they happened to encounter Meng Yü-lou, along with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Li Kuei-chieh, the three of whom were coming toward them from the other direction.
When Hsi-men Ta-chieh caught sight of the wreath, she asked, "Who's responsible for this bit of funny business?"
Ching-chi took it off and went his way, without saying another word about it.
When four long scenes from a hsi-wen drama had been performed for the female guests, it was observed that:
The sunlight outside the window goes its way in a snap of the fingers;
The flower shadows in the banquet hall move among the revellers' seats.[18]
Evening was gradually coming on. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Pen the Fourth to provide each of the chair carriers with a bowl of wine, four baked wheat cakes, and a plate of precooked pork. Only after these viands had been properly distributed did the female guests prepare to mount their sedan chairs and set off, with the male guests following behind them on horseback, while Laihsing and the caterers, carrying their food boxes, slowly brought up the rear. Tai-an, Lai-an, Hua-t'ung, and Ch'i-t'ung accompanied the sedan chairs of Wu Yüeh-niang and company; Ch'in-t'ung and four orderlies followed after Hsi-men Ch'ing on his horse; while the wet nurse, Ju-i, all by herself in a small sedan chair, carried the baby in her arms, wrapped up tightly in a quilt.
As they entered the city, Yüeh-niang was still concerned enough about the baby to send Hua-t'ung back, instructing him, "Stick close to the wet nurse's sedan chair. I'm afraid the crowds may get rowdy as we enter the city."
When Yüeh-niang's sedan chair had entered the city, she parted ways with the sedan chairs of the female guests from the Ch'iao family and made her way home, where she descended from her chair and went inside. It was some time after that before Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi arrived home and dismounted from their horses.
Whom should they encounter there but P'ing-an, who met them at the gate and reported, "Today His Honor Judicial Commissioner Hsia came in person, dismounted, went into the reception hall, asked for you, and then left. After that, he has sent people to ask after you twice. I don't know what it's all about."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was troubled in his heart. When he arrived in the reception hall, whom should he see but Shu-t'ung, who came up to take his outer clothes.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "When His Honor Hsia came today, what message did he leave for me?"
"He didn't divulge anything," said Shu-t'ung. "He merely asked where you had gone, saying, 'Send someone after him. I've got something important to say to him.' I told him, 'Today they've all paid a visit to the family graveyard to burn paper money to the ancestors and won't return until evening.' At which, His Honor Hsia said, 'I'll come back at noontime.' After that, he sent people to ask after you twice, and I told them that you had not returned yet."
Hsi-men Ch'ing's mind was not put to rest by this information, and he wondered all the more, "What could it be about?"
Just as he was in this perplexity, whom should he see but P'ing-an, who came in to report, "His Honor Hsia is here."
It was already dusk when Judicial Commissioner Hsia appeared, wearing informal clothes and a Tung-p'o hat,[19] with two servitors in attendance.
He dismounted, came into the reception hall, exchanged the customary social amenities, and said, "So my colleague has paid a visit to his country estate today."
"Today we have been sweeping the graves and making sacrifices at my ancestral tombs," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Not knowing that my colleague would condescend to pay us a visit, I was not here to greet you myself. Forgive me. Forgive me."
"I have ventured to come," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "on account of a matter that I need to report to you."
"Let's go to the guest room over there and sit down," he went on to say.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung to open the door of the summerhouse and invited his guest to accompany him there for a chat, after which he dismissed all his attendants.
"Today," said Judicial Commissioner Hsia, "His Honor Li Ta-t'ien of the district yamen came to my place and reported, thus and so, that recently the regional investigating censor has submitted an impeachment to the Eastern Capital, in which both my colleague and myself are implicated. I ordered someone to make a copy of the draft for your perusal."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he:
Turned pale with consternation,
hastily took the copy of the draft, and proceeded to read it by lamplight. What did the text actually say?
Memorial Submitted by Tseng Hsiao-hsü, Regional Investigating Censor of Shantung
In re: An Impeachment of Venal, Refractory, and Unqualified Military Officials, Requesting that They Be Dismissed from Office with a View toward the Rectification of Law and Morals
Your servant has heard that to make a circuit of the four quarters in order to monitor the state of public morality is the responsibility of the Son of Heaven in making his tours of inspection. To impeach and repress official malfeasance in order to improve law and morals is the task of the censor in his endeavor to rectify government. In ancient times, according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, when the ruler went on his tours of inspection, the myriad states felt cherished and protected, the morals of the populace were ameliorated, the way of the ruler was made manifest, the four classes of people were rendered obedient, and the advantages of the sage king's administration were illuminated. Since the day last year that your servant accepted appointment as regional investigating censor of Shantung, the land of the ancient states of Ch'i and Lu, until the present time when my assignment is about to expire, I have successively inquired into the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the regional officials, both civil and military, who hold office in my jurisdiction, and am confident that I have succeeded in ascertaining the truth about them. Now that the end of my assignment is imminent, it is incumbent upon me to differentiate among them according to precedent, and report my conclusions to Your Majesty. In addition to the separate memoranda I have submitted regarding other regional officials from this jurisdiction, I ask that Your Majesty take cognizance of the following cases.
The judicial commissioner of the Ch'ing-ho office of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, and concurrently, battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, Hsia Yen-ling, is a man whose mediocre talents and corrupt conduct have long excited public comment and besmirched the reputation of his unit. In the past, when he was in charge of herds in the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, he created so much trouble with his flagrant depredations that his peculations were exposed by one of his own subordinates. Now that he is a judicial commissioner in Shantung, his rapacious greed is once more so blatant that it has had to be restrained by his colleagues. He allowed his son, Hsia Ch'eng-en, to assume a false district of origin when taking the military examination, and then hired a stand-in to take the qualifying test for him, with the result that:
The esprit of the officer class is debased.[20]
He permitted his servant, Hsia Shou, to appropriate funds while responsible for the payroll, thereby giving rise to the vituperation of the troops in his command, and exposing his ignorance of proper administration. In his relations with others he exhibits such a:
Servile countenance and obsequious posture,[21]
that his coevals call him "The Maidservant." In adjudicating cases he is so:
Equally indifferent to the pros and cons,[22]
that his subordinates deride him as "The Puppet."
The assistant judicial commissioner, and concurrently battalion vice-commander, Hsi-men Ch'ing, was originally no more than a "bare stick" from the marketplace, who took advantage of his connections to obtain office, and has laid false claim to military accomplishment, while being so ignorant that he is:
Incapable of telling beans from wheat, and

Unable to recognize the simplest character.[23]
He lets his wife and concubines roam the streets and alleys for their pleasure, thereby failing to maintain the purity of his household. He invites female musicians to join him for drinking bouts in the marketplace, thereby blemishing the reputation of the official class. He has even gone to the extreme of maintaining the wife of Mr. Han as his mistress, for the purpose of indulging his lusts, thus failing to regulate his conduct;[24] and taking the clandestine bribe of Miao Ch'ing, in order to cover up his crime, though the evidence of his guilt is manifest.
These two venal and incompetent officials have long been the objects of principled criticism, and should not be permitted to remain in office another hour. I respectfully hope that Your Majesty, in his sage enlightenment, will deign to take note of this matter by ordering the appropriate board to conduct a thorough reinvestigation; and, if your servant's words prove not to be unfounded, direct that Hsia Yen-ling and his associate be promptly removed from office,[25] so that the norms of official conduct may be relied upon, and Your Majesty's sage virtue may be made eternally manifest.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing this document, he was so agitated that he and his companion could only:
Gaze at each other in consternation,
Too dumbstruck to utter a single word.
"My colleague," Hsia Yen-ling finally said, "in this situation, what are we to do?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "As the saying goes:
When armies come the general confronts them;
When waters overflow earthworks arrest them.[26]
Once things have come to a head,[27]
The Way is what man makes of it.
The only thing you and I can do is to prepare gifts and send people to the Eastern Capital as soon as possible, in order to entreat His Honor to intercede on our behalf."
Thereupon, Judicial Commissioner Hsia bid him a hasty farewell and went home, where he came up with two hundred taels of silver and two silver flagons for the purpose, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, on his hand, came up with a girdle of gold, inlaid with jade and assorted jewels, and three hundred taels of silver. The Hsia household chose their servant Hsia Shou for this assignment, while Hsi-men Ch'ing entrusted the job to Lai-pao. By the time these gifts had been properly wrapped up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had written a covering letter to the majordomo Chai Ch'ien, the two deputies had hired mounts for themselves and proceeded to set off on their mission to the Eastern Capital that very night. But no more of this.
To resume our story, from the time that Kuan-ko returned home from the visit to the family graveyard, he kept crying from fright all night and would not allow himself to be breast-fed, spitting up whatever milk he swallowed. This threw Li P'ing-erh into such consternation that she came and told Yüeh-niang about it.
"It's just as I said," responded Yüeh-niang. "The child is not even a year old and should not have been taken on an excursion outside the city walls. But that obstinate good-for-nothing of ours would not agree, no matter what the consequences might be. His only response was to say, 'Really! Why shouldn't the two of them, mother and child, go to the graveyard today to sacrifice to my ancestors? If you don't allow the mother and child to go, it will look as if you're afraid she might want to replace you or something like that.' He actually opened his eyes wide and shouted at me. And now, what are we to do?"
Li P'ing-erh really didn't know what to do. Moreover, because of the impeachment lodged against him by the regional investigating censor, Hsi-men Ch'ing was busy talking to Judicial Commissioner Hsia in the front compound about sending someone to the Eastern Capital to try to fix things up and was too preoccupied to pay any attention to the fact that the child of the house was unwell again. Yüeh-niang sent a page boy after Dame Liu to come and examine him and also engaged the services of a licensed pediatrician, with the result that, what with the:
Opening of gates and closing of doors,[28]
the household was in a state of disruption all night long.
When Dame Liu had examined him, she said, "The child is suffering from the colic brought on by a fright and must have encountered the General of the Five Ways[29] along the road. It doesn't matter. Just burn some paper money on his behalf to send the General on his way and he'll be all right."
She also left behind two doses of medicine in the form of cinnabar pills. Only after he had swallowed these, together with a decoction of field mint and bog rush, did he quiet down and go to sleep, no longer crying from fright and spitting up his milk, but his fever had not yet receded. Li P'ing-erh promptly produced a tael of silver and gave it to Dame Liu with which to buy paper money. That afternoon she came back with her husband, Stargazer Liu, and a shamaness, who proceeded to burn paper money and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of Kuan-ko in the summerhouse.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was up at the fifth watch to send Lai-pao and Hsia Shou on their way, after which he and Judicial Commissioner Hsia were preoccupied with going to Tung-p'ing prefecture to get news from Prefect Hu Shihwen on whether or not Miao Ch'ing had been arrested.
When Yüeh-niang heard Dame Liu say that the child had been subjected to a fright along the road, she expressed resentment at the wet nurse, Ju-i, saying, "You didn't look after the child carefully enough, but must have allowed him to become frightened in the sedan chair along the way. Otherwise, why should he have taken ill this way?"
"I had him inside the sedan chair, wrapped up tightly in a quilt," protested Ju-i. "And he was not jounced about. When you sent Hua-t'ung back to accompany my sedan chair, he was perfectly all right, and I held him as he slept. It was only after we had entered the city, and were almost at the door of the house, that I felt a cold shiver go up his spine. Then, when we got home, he rejected his milk and started to cry."
Let us put aside for the moment the events in the household as they burnt paper money and invoked the gods on behalf of the child.
To resume our story, Lai-pao and Hsia Shou hastened on their way and in only six days found themselves in the Eastern Capital, where they went to the grand preceptor's mansion, gained access to the majordomo Chai Ch'ien, and completed the process of turning over the gifts proffered by their two households.
When Chai Ch'ien had read Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter, he said, "Censor Tseng's bill of impeachment has not yet been delivered, so you had better stick around for a few days. At present, the situation here is that His Honor has just submitted a memorial laying out proposals with regard to seven matters, but the imperial rescript in response to it has not yet come down. You might as well wait until this document comes down. After that, when Censor Tseng's memorial arrives, I'll be able to speak to him about it, and get him to issue a verbal notation in the Grand Secretariat, ordering that it be:
Directed to the attention of the appropriate board.[30]
On my part, I'll then send someone with my card, instructing the minister of war, Yü Shen,[31] to suppress the memorial so that it is not resubmitted. Your master can relax. I guarantee that nothing will ever come of it."
Thereupon, after the two men had been entertained with food and drink, they returned to their inn to rest and await further developments.
One day, the imperial rescript approving the memorial laying out proposals with regard to seven matters that had been submitted by Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching duly came down. Lai-pao prevailed upon one of the gatekeepers at the grand preceptor's mansion to copy the relevant material from the government gazette so that he could take it home and show it to Hsi-men Ch'ing. What seven matters did this memorial actually propose the implementation of?
Memorial Submitted by Ts'ai Ching, Grand Academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, Minister of Personnel, and Duke of Lu
In Re: The Exposition of His Ignorant Views, the Realization of His Modest Hopes, the Recruitment of Human Talent, the Achievement of Effective Results, the Amplification of Fiscal Resources, the Amelioration of the People's Condition, and the Strengthening of Your Majesty's Sage Administration
Proposal number one:[32] The abolition of the system of recruiting scholars by examination, replacing it by allowing local schools to recommend candidates for bureaucratic appointment.
I venture to observe that the deterioration of cultural standards and the decay of public morals[33] are all due to the failure of the existing system of recruiting scholars to select candidates of genuine talent, with the result that cultural standards lack anything on which to rely. The *Book of Documents* says, "Heaven in giving birth to the people, made for them rulers, and made for them instructors."[34] In the Han dynasty candidates were recommended for being filial and incorrupt. The T'ang dynasty established government schools. It was our dynasty that first established a system which combined examination and recommendation, but due to bias and corruption in its administration the candidates selected lack genuine talent, and the people are unable to rely upon their guidance. Your Majesty seeks after talent both awake and asleep, and strives for good government both early and late. Now, good government depends upon the cultivation of worthy men, and nothing contributes more toward the cultivation of worthy men than schools. From now on, in recruiting scholars, we should adhere to the precedents of antiquity, and allow local schools to recommend candidates for bureaucratic appointment, while abolishing the system of having prefectures and districts send candidates to the capital for examination by the Ministry of Rites. Every year an examination administrator can be designated to examine the students in the Superior College of the National University, in a fashion similar to that employed by the Ministry of Rites.[35] A system should also be established for recruiting scholars renowned for eight kinds of virtuous conduct. These eight kinds of virtuous conduct are filiality, brotherly love, cordiality with agnatic kin, good relations with affinal kin, trustworthiness with friends, kindness toward neighbors, loyalty to the ruler, and judiciousness in differentiating the right from the profitable. Scholars who possess these virtues should be admitted to the Superior College of the National University without examination.[36]
Proposal number two: The abolition of the Financial Advisory Bureau.
I venture to observe that at the inception of the present reign, when the institutional structure was being determined, a Financial Advisory Bureau was set up under the Department of State Affairs,[37] the purpose of which was, on behalf of the ruler, to limit superfluous expenditure, and conserve the wealth of the people. Now, since Your Majesty acceded to the throne, you have neither valued exotic products from afar, nor overtaxed the resources of your subjects, but have set a personal example of frugality[38] in supplying your own needs. As a result, the empire is without customs that cannot be corrected, or expenses that cannot be reduced, while those in authority devote themselves to accomplishing the reformation of morals, and establishing the inviolability of the prohibitions, being neither lax in the beginning nor negligent in the end. The government is flourishing, morals are honest, and the state of the realm is characterized by the words abundance, prosperity, contentment, and greatness.[39] That being the case, what need is there for a Financial Advisory Bureau. Let it be completely abolished.[40]
Proposal number three: The reform of the salt voucher system.
I venture to observe that the salt voucher system is a means of raising tax revenue for the state in order to supply the needs of border defense. At the present time, would it not be appropriate for Your Majesty to restore the salt administration system of your ancestors by ordering that the merchants who have received old salt vouchers in return for delivering grain and fodder to the Three Border Regions of Yün-chung, Shensi, and Shansi be required to exchange them for new salt vouchers from the southeastern Huai-Che region? The price of the new vouchers should be thirty percent of their face value in cash, with the remainder payable in old vouchers at seventy percent of their face value.[41] Now merchants should go to the salt production areas designated on the vouchers in order to take delivery of the salt, and then, as in the case of the tea voucher system, after undergoing official weighing and inspection of their consignments, pay the required duty, receive their duly authorized certificates, and then proceed, within the designated time limits, to the areas in which they trade in order to sell the salt. If they exceed the time limits, their salt should be subject to confiscation, and they should be required to purchase new certificates. If they try to sell more than their certificates entitle them to, they should be subject to the penalties for salt smugglers. If this proposal is enacted, the tax revenues of the state will be regularly enhanced, and the logistic needs of border defense will be met.[42]
Proposal number four: The standardization of the currency.
I venture to observe that currency is the blood and pulse of the state. It is essential that it circulate freely and not be subject to blockage. If it is subject to obstruction or blockage, so that it fails to circulate, how will the common people be able to cope, and on what will the tax revenues of the state depend? From the minting of "goose-eye" coins[43] in the latter days of the Chin dynasty[44] to the early years of the present reign, the coinage has been unacceptably heterogeneous, sometimes even being debased by adulteration with lead, iron, or tin. The residents along the border sell these coins to the barbarians, who melt them down in order to cast weapons, the harm resulting from which is not insignificant.[45] Would it not be appropriate to completely prohibit the circulation of these heterogeneous coins, and require them to be redeemed for the larger denomination coins that Your Majesty has minted during the Ch'ung-ning and Ta-kuan reign periods,[46] at an exchange ratio of ten to one, so that the common people will be supplied with a viable currency and the price of goods will not be subject to sudden inflation.[47]
Proposal number five: The reinstitution of the system of government sale and distributive purchase of grain in order to alleviate scarcity.[48]
I venture to observe that the government sale of grain at reduced prices is for the purpose of relieving the victims of famine. In recent years, whenever floods and droughts have succeeded each other, and the people have lacked sufficient food, Your Majesty has issued rescripts ordaining this method of relief. Recently, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, Han Lü,[49] has submitted a memorial requesting the reinstitution of this system, which has elicited imperial assent. It is recommended that each of the subprefectures and districts affected should establish community institutions to carry out this system of government sale of grain at a reduced price and purchase of grain before it is harvested. The security groups within each ward, the wards within each village, and the villages within each township should promote the establishment of these community institutions. The households of each township should be divided into three categories, upper, middle, and lower, with the upper households required to contribute a quota of grain, the middle households half as much, and the lower households entitled to receive an appropriate allotment. The amount of money advanced to farmers for specified quantities of grain prior to the harvest is what is referred to as distributive purchase. If this method is followed, a system for government acquisition and distribution of grain for the benefit of the people will be implemented, and Your Majesty will be able to augment Your benevolence at little cost. It only remains to authorize the relevant prefects and district magistrates to rigorously carry it out. The benefit to be derived from this policy is not insignificant.
Proposal number six: The promulgation of a rescript ordering the subprefectures and prefectures of the empire to exact a commutation tax in lieu of corvée labor.
I venture to observe that at the inception of the present reign, because the threat of foreign invasion had not yet been put to rest, conscript soldiers and able-bodied males were assembled in the capital in order to provide logistic transport and strengthen the defenses of the state. Now that we have enjoyed peace for an extended period,[50] and the people are content with their occupations, it would be appropriate to promulgate a rescript ordering the subprefectures and prefectures of the empire to exact an annual commutation tax in lieu of corvée labor, at the rate of thirty strings of cash per capita, and transmit the proceeds to the capital in order to defray the cost of provisioning the border regions. By so doing we would achieve two ends with a single action,[51] and thus somewhat relieve the demands on the people's strength.[52]
Proposal number seven: The establishment of a Supervisorate of Palace Transport.
I venture to observe that since Your Majesty acceded to the throne you have refused to accept the presentation of musicians, beauties, dogs, and horses. The flowers and rocks for which You have expressed appreciation are all products of the mountains and forests in which most people have no interest. It is simply due to the excessive zeal with which the authorities have sought them out for presentation to the throne that the populace has been disturbed, which has injured the reputation of Your sage administration. If Your Majesty sees fit to curtail these excesses, it is proposed that a Supervisorate of Palace Transport be established, the expenses of which would all be defrayed out of the Palace Treasury, so that designated officials could be dispatched to obtain the desired products without disturbing the people of the subprefectures and prefectures.[53]
An imperial decision with regard to these matters is hereby humbly requested.
The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read as follows:
Your proposals are highly relevant to the problems of the times, and serve both to augment Our feeling of delight, and demonstrate your penchant for loyal counsel. Let them all be enacted as proposed, and directed to the attention of the appropriate board.
Lai-pao had a copy made of the relevant material from the government gazette, after which, when Majordomo Chai Ch'ien had written a reply to Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter, and provided them with five taels of silver for their traveling expenses, he and Hsia Shou took to the road and headed back toward Ch'ing-ho district.
When they arrived there in due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing was at home, where he was:
Unable to get the matter off his mind,
while Judicial Commissioner Hsia had been sending someone over twice a day to inquire after the news. As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing learned that Lai-pao and his companion had arrived, he summoned them into the rear compound and interrogated them about the facts of the case.
Lai-pao gave him a complete report on the above-mentioned events, saying, "When we saw Master Chai Ch'ien in the ministerial mansion, after reading your letter, he said, 'This affair should not be a problem. You can tell your master to relax. Right now, the regional investigating censor's term of office has already expired, and a new investigating censor has been appointed. And moreover, his bill of impeachment has not yet arrived in the capital. When his memorial arrives, I'll mention it to His Honor, and, no matter how serious the charges it contains may be, he'll merely issue a notation directing that it be:
Directed to the attention of the appropriate board.
His Honor can then send someone with his card instructing the minister of war, Yü Shen, to file the memorial without resubmitting it. In that case, even if he should have the ability to breach the gates of Heaven, it would be to no avail.'"
Only after hearing this report was Hsi-men Ch'ing's anxiety relieved.
He then went on to ask, "How did it happen that his memorial had not yet been delivered?'"
"When we left," Lai-pao explained, "we traveled on horseback by day and night and succeeded in getting to the capital in only five days. It's not surprising that we got there first. On starting back, we encountered a group of mounted couriers, with jangling bells, one of whom was carrying a yellow dispatch case on his back, with a pair of pheasant tails stuck in it, as well as two serrated pennants. No doubt it was the sealed text of the memorial from the office of the regional investigating censor that was only then arriving."
"If his memorial was that late in getting there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "everything ought to be all right. I was afraid we might not have acted in time."
"You can relax, master," said Lai-pao. "I guarantee that nothing will ever come of it. But that is not the only thing I accomplished. I also learned of two other favorable developments that I can report to you."
"Really," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and what might they be?"
"His Honor the grand preceptor," said Lai-pao, "has recently submitted a memorial laying out proposals regarding seven matters, all of which have already been approved for enactment by imperial rescript. At present, His Honor's relative by marriage, the vice-minister of the Ministry of Revenue, Han Lü, has been authorized according to precedent to encourage salt production in the Three Border Regions of Yün-chung, Shensi, and Shansi by setting up charity granaries in every prefecture, subprefecture, commandary, and district for the government sale of grain at reduced prices. Among the common people, the top rank of the upper grade households will be required to contribute a quota of grain to these granaries for which they will receive granary vouchers that may be exchanged for salt certificates which entitle the holder to take delivery of specified quantities of salt. The old vouchers may be exchanged for new vouchers at seventy percent of their face value plus thirty percent in cash. The thirty thousand taels worth of vouchers that you formerly received, in partnership with your kinsman, Ch'iao Hung, for delivering grain to the Kao-yang customs station[54] can be exchanged for thirty thousand taels worth of salt certificates, to be allocated by the Ministry of Revenue. You might as well take advantage of the fact that His Honor Ts'ai Yün has been appointed salt-control censor there to send someone to the designated salt production area and take delivery of the specified quantity of salt. It should turn out to be a highly profitable transaction."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Is this information really true?"
"If you don't believe me," said Lai-pao, "I've got a copy of the relevant material from the government gazette right here."
Pulling it out of his letter case, he handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to read. Upon glancing over the extensive vocabulary of characters in the text, Hsimen Ch'ing called Ch'en Ching-chi in from the front compound to read it out loud to him. Ch'en Ching-chi succeeded in reading part way through it before coming to a halt, stumped by several unfamiliar characters. Consequently, Shu-t'ung was called in to read it. Now Shu-t'ung, having gotten his start in life as a "gate-boy,"[55] was able to read it through, all the way to the end, as fluently as flowing water, without making a single mistake. The seven proposals contained in the memorial were those enumerated above.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard them, he was delighted. He went on to read Majordomo Chai Ch'ien's letter, from which he learned that their gifts had all been safely delivered, and that the principal graduate Ts'ai Yün, upon an audience with the emperor, had, indeed, been appointed salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region. In his heart he felt:
Unable to contain his delight.
On the one hand, he sent Hsia Shou home with the injunction to, "Give your master the good news," while, on the other hand, he rewarded Lai-pao with five taels of silver, two bottles of wine, and a side of pork. After which, he went back to the master suite to rest. But no more of this.
Truly:
When a tree is tall it attracts the wind,[56] and the wind damages the tree;
When a man's name becomes too prominent, his prominence will do him in.[57]
A poem testifies to this:

Success and failure, flourishing and decay, are controlled by fate;

Everything is determined by the year, month, day, and hour of birth.
Those who harbor ambition in their breasts may achieve their goals;
But those whose purses are devoid of money cannot depend on talent.

Antong took the documents and the letter and set off for Shandong. He found that the Imperial Censor on circuit was at Dongchangfu. This was Ceng Xiaoxu, the son of the Censor, Ceng Bu. He had just taken a high place in the examination for the third literary degree, and was a very prudent and just official.
Antong thought that if he simply said he had come with a letter he would never be allowed to approach the Censor, and that it would be better for him to wait until the tablet was brought out. "Then," he said to himself, "I will kneel down, bring out my papers; the Censor will see them and justice will be done."
The boy put the accusation into his breast and took his stand outside the court. After a long time he heard the sound of the castanets announcing the opening of the court. The great gate was opened, Censor Ceng came to the great hall of audience, and a tablet was brought out upon which was written: "The cases of all princely families, princes and nobles." The second said: "The cases of civil and military officials," and the third: "Marriages, lands, and common cases." Then Antong followed the tablet and went in. He waited for all the cases to be decided, then knelt down in the hall before the dais. Attendants asked him what he wanted. He took the letter from his breast and held it up in both hands. The Censor said: "Bring me that letter." Then an officer quickly took the letter and set it down upon the table. The Censor opened it and read it. It said:
Huang Duan, your humble fellow student of the arts, living at the Capital, with all due respect.
To the exalted Censor Ceng. Greetings to your excellency from your younger brother. It is almost a year since your brightness illuminated me. Good friends seldom meet, and a joyful reunion is quickly ended. But the love of my heart is always with you. Last autumn your precious communication reached me. I opened it and read it, and my spirit seemed to wander till I spoke with you face to face. Some time ago you went to the South to see your honorable parents. Then I was told that you were on circuit in Shandong, and was pleased beyond all measure. I congratulate you upon your magnificent loyalty and filial piety. Uprightness as keen as the wind and the frost keeps your mind forever glorious. Your worthy ambition is known and recognized at Court. Now you are going around the provinces and it is possible for you to discover the misdeeds of officials and correct evil customs that have become established. Since I love you, I feel that I must remind you. You are a man of great capacity and at the prime of life. Our Emperor has the wisdom of a Sage, and your father enjoys splendid health. You have a magnificent opportunity to display your learning to advantage and to establish the supremacy of law. You will not permit dishonorable officials to corrupt the administration of justice. You will not allow cunning and evil men to play their scurvy tricks. At this time, there is in Dongping a certain Miao Qing who has escaped the justice of the law. So wrong has been done to Miao Tianxiu, his master. It is beyond my understanding, how in an age of such splendor, these discreditable things can happen. You will, I am sure, go to that place and make examination into the matter, and so the wrongdoing will be set right. I have directed Antong to bring his accusation to you and beg you to examine it. This the sixteenth day of the second month.
When the Censor had finished reading the letter, he asked for the boy's accusation. The attendants came down and said to Antong: "His Excellency asks if you have brought an accusation." Antong took the paper from his breast and they handed it to the Censor.
When he had read it through, Ceng took a brush and wrote upon it: "The officers at Dongpingfu will examine this case justly. They will search for the corpse and examine it, sending their report to me in detail with all the documents." To the boy he said: "Go to Dongpingfu and wait there."
Antong kowtowed, then rose and went out by a side door. Censor Ceng put the papers together with his own notes into a folder, sealed it with his official seal, and gave it to one of his officers to take to Dongpingfu.
When Hu Shiwen, the magistrate of Dongpingfu, read the document that had come from his superior, he was so frightened that he did not know where to put his hands and feet. He sent at once for the Deputy of Yanggu, a certain Di Sibin. This man was a native of Wuyang in Henan, an honest-dealing official. He was not a lover of money, but somewhat hasty and stupid in his investigations of cases. Hence men called him Stupid Di.
Some time before this, Deputy Di had gone to Qinghe. When he was on the shore of the river west of the city, a whirlwind seemed to arise in front of his horse and, as he went along, the whirlwind went with him. "This is curious," Di said to himself, and, reining in his horse, he told one of his attendants to go after the wind to see where it went. The attendant followed the wind and, when it had nearly reached the wharf, it subsided. He came back and told Di what had happened. Di sent for some of the old men of the place and dug up the bank. They found a corpse with the mark of a knife clearly discernible in the throat. Di gave instructions to the coroner to hold an inquest upon it. "What is this place in front of us?" he asked the bystanders. They told him that it was a temple and not far distant. Di sent for the monks and questioned them. The monks told him that, in the tenth month of the previous winter, they had been setting lanterns on the water's edge when they saw a corpse floating down the river. It came to the shallows and the Abbot generously buried it. But of the cause of death they knew nothing.
"It is quite obvious," said Stupid Di, "that the monks themselves murdered the man and buried him there. He must have had money on him. But you will not tell the truth." Without listening to any of the monks' explanations, he had the screws put on the Abbot and gave him a hundred strokes of the rod. The other monks were each given twenty, and they were all thrown into prison. Then he reported the case to Censor Ceng.
The monks clamored for justice, and, when Ceng thought the case over, it occurred to him that, if they had really murdered the man, they would have thrown his body into the river and not buried it on the bank. Besides, it did not seem probable that so many people would conspire to murder one man.
The monks had now been in prison for almost two months. When Antong came, he was taken to identify the corpse. As soon as he saw it, he cried bitterly and said, "This is indeed my master. The thieves murdered him and the mark in his neck can still be seen." The body was carefully examined and a report sent to the Censor. The monks were set free.
Ceng read all the documents about the case. He examined Chen the Third and Weng the Eighth and they both said that the idea of murdering Master Miao had originated with Miao Qing.
The Censor was very angry. He sent a man with a warrant bidding him travel day and night and arrest Miao Qing at Yangzhou. And he wrote a report censuring all those who had accepted bribes and sold justice.
Wang Liu'er had received a hundred taels and four dresses from Miao Qing. She and her husband did not sleep all night. They talked about the ornaments, pins and rings she would have made; how they would send for the tailor to make some clothes; how she would have a new net for her hair, and spend sixteen taels on a new maid, Chunxiang, whom sooner or later she would give to Han Daoguo.
One day Ximen Qing came to see her, Wang Liu'er welcomed him and gave him tea. After a while he went to the inner court to wash his hands and saw a building being set up on the roof of a neighboring house. When he came back, he asked Wang Liu'er whose house it was. She told him it belonged to their neighbor, Yue.
"Why should you allow them to interfere with your fengshui? "Ximen said. "Tell him to stop at once. If he refuses to pull it down, I will send the police to deal with him."
"We cannot talk to him like that," Wang Liu'er said afterwards to her husband. "He is our neighbor."
"The best thing we can do," Han Daoguo said, "is to get some wood, say nothing about it, and build another story ourselves. On the top of it we can dry our bean paste, and we can use the inside either as a stable or as a privy."
"That would be silly," Wang Liu'er said. "If we are going to build a roof, we might as well buy tiles and bricks and make two good rooms."
Han Daoguo agreed. They spent thirty taels, built their two rooms and put a flat roof over them. Ximen Qing told Daian to take wine, meat and cakes to give the workers as a reward. The matter was known to everyone who lived in the street.
Magistrate Xia, now that he had received several hundred taels, sent his son Xia Cheng'en to the military college. Every day the young man studied archery and horsemanship with his teachers and friends. Ximen Qing suggested to the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, Major Zhou, General Jing and Captain Zhang, that they should send a present to Xia in congratulation. They gave him a large scroll.
At Ximen's burying place, he had recently built a mound, an arbor, and some rooms. He had not been to worship his ancestors since he had received his official appointment. Now he sent for Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, to examine the site, built a gateway and made a path for the spirits. Around the gateway he planted peach trees, willows and pines. On either side he made a small embankment. At the Festival of the Dead he proposed to visit the grave and change the tablet. He prepared pigs and sheep and food.
The festival was on the sixth day of the third month. He sent out many invitations and arranged for a number of people to take the things out to the tomb—wine, rice, vegetables and so forth. He engaged musicians and actors, and arranged for several singing girls to be present. He invited a great number of guests, both men and women. Chunmei, Yingchun, Yuxiao and Lanxiang were to be there also. Twenty-four or more sedan chairs would be needed. But when there was question of the nurse's taking the baby Guan'ge, Wu Yueniang said to Ximen: "It will be better not to take the baby. He is not a year old yet, and old woman Liu tells me that the bones of his head have not yet grown together. He is very nervous, and, if we take him on such a long trip, I am afraid he will be frightened. We will leave him behind. The nurse and old woman Feng can stay at home and look after him so that his mother can go."
Ximen Qing would not agree. "Why are we going to the tombs of my ancestors at all?" he said. "I want both the baby and his mother to go and kowtow to my ancestors. You always believe everything that silly old woman tells you. If the baby's head is not strong enough, he must be wrapped up more carefully. He will be quite safe with his nurse in the sedan chair. There is nothing for you to worry about."
"Have it your own way," Yueniang said.
In the morning all the ladies came to Ximen Qing's house, and they started off together. They left the city by the southern gate, and, when they had gone about eight //; they could see the green pine trees that surrounded the tomb. There was the new gateway and the embankment on both sides. Stone walls encircled the tomb, and, in the middle, were the oratory and the way of the spirits. The perfume burners, candlesticks and utensils for the worship of the ancestral spirits were all of white alabaster. Over the gate was placed a new tablet that bore the inscription: "The Ancestral tombs of the valorous Commander Ximen." They went in and around beneath the interlaced branches of the trees. Ximen Qing, wearing his scarlet robes and girdle, set out the pigs, sheep, and food for the worship of his ancestors. First the gentlemen offered their worship, then the ladies. The musicians played. The baby was frightened and hid his face in his nurse's bosom. He whimpered, lying perfectly still.
"Sister," Yueniang whispered to Li Ping'er, "I should tell the nurse to take him away. Don't you see how terrified he is? I said we ought not to bring him, but his stupid father wouldn't listen to me. Now he is frightened into such a state."
Li Ping'er hurriedly told Daian to stop the beating of the drums and gongs. They covered the baby's ears and took him away.
After a time the service was ended. Master Xu read the oration and burned paper offerings. Then Ximen Qing invited the gentlemen to go to the front, and Yueniang invited the ladies to go to the back. They went through the gardens. There were pine trees and pine hedges, bamboos standing beside the paths, and many flowers and grasses.
Beneath the awning the actors played for the ladies, while four young actors entertained the gentlemen, playing instruments and singing in the great hall. Four singing girls served wine in turn for the gentlemen, and the four maids for the ladies. Then they stood at Ximen Dajie's table and had soup and cakes.
Pan Jinlian, Meng Yulou and Ximen Dajie went with Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er to the garden and played on the swings there. Behind the arbor, Ximen had arranged three rooms with furniture and beds, curtains, and things for the toilet. Here, the ladies might dress when they came to visit the tombs. The rooms were covered with paper so white that they seemed like caves of snow. Pictures and scrolls adorned the walls. To this place the nurse, Ruyi'er, brought the baby, and, on the gilded bed, the child lay upon a tiny blanket. Yingchun was there too, playing with the child. Jinlian, alone, came in from the garden, with peach flowers in her hand. When she saw Yingchun, she said: "So you are not attending to your duties in the hall."
"Chunmei, Lanxiang and Yuxiao are there," Yingchun said, "and my mistress told me to come here and look after the baby. I brought some cakes for the nurse."
The nurse welcomed Jinlian and stood up with the child. "Ah," Jinlian said, laughingly. "Ah, little oily mouth, the drums and the gongs frightened you. You're a brave young man, aren't you?" She opened her silken gown, took the child to her breast and kissed him.
Suddenly Chen Jingji pulled up the lattice and came in. When he saw Jinlian playing with the baby, he joined in the play too.
"Now, my young priest," Jinlian said, "let me see you kiss your brother-in-law."
Strangely enough, the child smiled at the young man. Jingji bent over and kissed him several times. Jinlian scolded him. Jingji smiled. "It is a good thing I didn't kiss the wrong person," he said.
Jinlian was afraid the nurse would hear him. She closed her fan and struck the young man. Jingji jumped like a fish. "I am not going to argue with you," Jinlian said.
"Very well," Jingji said, "but you ought to realize that I have feelings. I have only thin clothes on, and there was no need for you to hit me so hard."
"I have no intention of being kind to you," Jinlian said. "I shall hit you every time you offend me."
Ruyi'er saw them playing together and hastily took the child away from them. Jinlian and the young man laughed and joked together. She made the peach flowers into a garland and set it on his head without his noticing it. Jingji went out wearing it. Yulou, Ximen Dajie and Guijie met him. His wife looked at him. "Who did this?" she said. Jingji did not answer, but he took off the garland.
By this time four acts of the play had been performed, and it was beginning to grow dark. Ximen Qing told Ben the Fourth to give each of the chair men a cup of wine, four cakes, and a plate of cooked meat. When the chair men had eaten it, they took the ladies away. The servants followed on horseback. Laixing came with the cooks, bringing all the food boxes. Daian, Laian, Huatong and Qitong followed behind Yueniang's chair; Qintong, with four soldiers, followed behind Ximen Qing's horse. Ruyi'er had a small chair for herself and the baby, who was closely wrapped in bedclothes. Yueniang was still anxious about him and bade Huatong accompany the nurse's chair. She was afraid that they would find the streets very crowded when they came to the city.
When all the chairs had entered the city, those of the Qiao family went their own way. Yueniang reached home, but it was some time before Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji arrived.
When Ximen Qing dismounted, Ping'an said to him: "His Lordship Xia has been here and gone away. He sent messengers for you twice. I don't know what he wanted."
This made Ximen Qing thoughtful. He went to the great hall, where Shutong took his clothes. "What did his Lordship say when he was here?" Ximen asked the boy.
"He didn't say anything to me," Shutong said. "He only asked where you were. He suggested that I should go and ask you to come back because he had something very important to say to you. I told him that you had gone to the tombs to make offering to the dead and that you would be back this evening. He said he would come again. He has sent messengers twice, but I had to tell them you had not returned."
"What is this?" Ximen Qing said to himself.
He was thinking over the matter when Ping'an came and said Magistrate Xia had called once more. It was very dark. The magistrate was in plain clothes and had only two servants with him. When he entered the great hall, he greeted Ximen. "You have just returned from your glorious estate," he said. "Today I have been to worship at my ancestor's tombs," Ximen Qing said. "I ask your forgiveness for being absent when you called."
"I have come especially to bring you news," said Xia. "Shall we go into another room?"
Ximen Qing told Shutong to open the door, and they went in. He ordered all the servants to leave.
"This morning," Magistrate Xia said, "Li came to me and told me that the Censor has sent a report to the Eastern Capital accusing us both. I have had the document copied and here it is. Please read it."
Ximen Qing was alarmed. He paled. He took the paper to the lamp and read it. It said:
I, the Censor and Circuit Commissioner of Shandong, Ceng Xiaoxu, make accusation against certain rapacious and unworthy officials, and implore the Sacred Majesty to dismiss them that the dignity of the Law may be preserved.
I have been instructed that the duty of the Emperor is to go around the country and investigate the morals of the people. To check evil officials and enforce the law is the duty of the censors. In olden times it was written in the Book of Spring and Autumn that the Supreme Monarch went upon an inspection of the Empire and made the whole state subject to himself. So the morals of the people were improved and the exalted principle of the Ruler made manifest. The four peoples became obedient and all men recognized the rule of wisdom.
About a year ago the duty of going around all the districts of Shandong was entrusted to me. I have questioned the officials and found out the truth about the capacity of them all, whether military or civil. Now my tour of duty is almost at an end: I am continuing my investigations and would make report to Your Majesty. Especially would I, with Your Majesty's gracious permission, make the following accusations....
Xia Yanling, captain of the Royal Guard and a principal magistrate in Shandong, is a man of no merit. He is rapacious and a man of evil conduct. People talk about his behavior and he is a disgrace to his position. Formerly, when he held office at the Capital, he committed many irregularities and was discovered by his subordinates. Now that he is employed in the courts of Shandong he is more rapacious than ever. He is always associating in evil with other officials. He has entered his son at the Military College by making false statements, and procured some other person to take the examination in his son's place, thus utterly demoralizing the students. He has allowed his servant Xia Shou to take bribes. The soldiers complain bitterly and his administration is extremely disorganized. When this Xia receives officers visiting his district, his face is as that of a slave and his knees as those of a maid. For this reason the people call him "Maid." When he investigates a case, his judgment is always uncertain, and his underlings call him "Wooden Image."
His Deputy, Captain Ximen Qing, was originally a street-corner lounger. He obtained his position by bribery and has thus improperly secured military rank. He cannot even distinguish between the flail and the corn. He cannot read a single character. He allows his wife and his concubines to play in the streets, and there have been scandals in his household. He drinks with singing girls in wineshops, and has disgraced the official class to which he belongs. Recently he has been associating with the wife of a certain Han Daoguo. He gives himself up completely to a dissolute life and cares nothing about his conduct. He took bribes from a certain Miao Qing and has irregularly allowed that fellow to escape the justice of the law. So Miao Qing's crime has never been punished.
These two rapacious and unworthy officers have long been the talk of the common people and they should be immediately dismissed from their posts. I pray Your Majesty to hear me, and instruct the Boards to examine these men closely. If it is found that what I have said is true, I pray Your Majesty to dismiss these two men. The morale of the service depends upon it. May the virtue of Your Majesty be glorious for ever and ever.
When he had finished reading this, Ximen Qing could only look at Magistrate Xia. He could find no words to say. "What shall we do?" said Xia.
"There is a proverb," Ximen Qing said, "that says: When soldiers come against us, we send out a general. When the flood comes, we build a dike. So, when in trouble, we must take steps to meet the situation. We must get ready presents and send them to the Imperial Tutor in the Eastern Capital."
Magistrate Xia hurried home and got ready two hundred taels of silver and two silver vases. Ximen prepared a chest full of gold, jade, and precious things, and three hundred taels of silver. Xia ordered his servant Shou, and Ximen his man Laibao, to take charge of these gifts. He had a letter written to the comptroller Zhai. The two men hired horses and went off, traveling as fast as they were able, to the Eastern Capital.
When the baby Guan'ge returned from the tomb, he cried all night and would not take his food. Everything he swallowed he disgorged again. Li Ping'er was alarmed. She came to Yueniang and told her.
"I said that a baby not a year old should not be taken outside the city," Yueniang said, "but the foolish man would not listen to me. He said the whole purpose of going to the tombs of his ancestors was that you and the child might offer worship there. He glared and shouted at me as if he were a savage. Now, what I anticipated has happened."
Li Ping'er did not know what to do.
Ximen Qing, after talking to Xia about the Censor's report, was getting the presents ready to send off. He felt very depressed about things in general. Now the baby was ill too.
Yueniang sent a boy for old woman Liu and also for a doctor who specialized in children's ailments. The gate was opened, and there was much shouting and running about all night. Old woman Liu said that the baby had been frightened and that he must have met the General of the Road. "It is of no great importance," she told them. " Burn a few paper offerings and we shall get rid of the devil, sure enough." She gave them two red pills, peppermint and lamp wick, and, when the baby had taken them, he quietened and went to sleep. He stopped crying and did not disgorge his milk any more. But the fever did not leave him. Li Ping'er gave old woman Liu a tael of silver for some papers. The old woman returned with her husband and another witch-woman. They burned the papers and danced the spirit dance in the arbor.
At the fifth night watch, Ximen Qing got up to see Laibao and Xia Shou away on their errand. Then he went to Magistrate Xia's, and together they went to Dongpingfu to Hu's place to hear what news there was of Miao Qing.
After Yueniang had been told that the baby had been frightened on the way home, she reproached Ruyi'er for not looking after the child properly. "He was frightened while he was in the sedan chair," she said. "If not, why should he not have got better?"
"I wrapped him up very carefully in the bedclothes," Ruyi'er said, "and he was not frightened. You sent Huatong to follow my chair, and he was all right then. It was only when we came into the city that he suddenly began to shiver. We were quite close to home. It was then he began to refuse his milk and to cry."
Laibao and Xia Shou made all the haste they could and reached the capital in six days. They went at once to the Imperial Tutor's palace, saw Comptroller Zhai, and handed over the presents to him. Zhai read Ximen Qing's letter. "The Censor's report has not yet reached the Capital," he said. "You had better stay here for a few days. The Imperial Tutor has recently sent a memorial to his Majesty that contains seven suggestions. This has not yet been returned. By the time it does return, perhaps the Censor's report will have arrived. I will warn his Eminence, and suggest that he should do no more than send the report to the Board of Military Affairs. Then I will send word to the Minister of War, Yu, and ask him to suppress it. Tell your master there is nothing to worry about. I can promise that nothing serious will come of the matter."
He entertained the two men. Then they went to their inn to rest and wait for further news.

One day, the Memorial of the Imperial Tutor Cai came back from the Court. Laibao asked one of the officers of the Imperial Tutor's household to copy it that he might take back a copy to Ximen Qing. Comptroller Zhai wrote a letter of thanks and gave Laibao five taels of silver. The two men went home again.
When they reached Qinghe, Ximen was living in a state of extreme anxiety. While they were away Magistrate Xia had been calling every day in the hope of hearing some news of their mission. The two men went at once to the inner court and Laibao gave Ximen an account of everything that had happened. "Master Zhai," he said, "read your letter, but he said there would be nothing very serious and certainly no need for you to be anxious. This Censor's tour of duty is nearly at an end and he will be succeeded by somebody else. His report has not yet reached the Capital, and, when it does, Master Zhai will speak to the Imperial Tutor and see that, however serious it may be, his Eminence sends it to the Board of Military Affairs. Zhai himself will go there and persuade the Minister to register it but not to let it go any further. So, no matter how serious the report may be, you will suffer no harm from it."
This was a great relief to Ximen Qing. He asked how it was that the Censor's report had not yet reached the Court. "When we went to the Capital," Laibao said, "we traveled posthaste and got there in five days. On our way back we met the couriers with the report. At least, we saw post-horses with bells and riders with yellow wrappers. The pennants bore pheasants' feathers."
"So long as the document reached the Capital after you did," Ximen said, "all will be well, but if you had been too late..."
"There is no need to worry," Laibao said. "I have other good news for you."
"What is that?" Ximen Qing asked.
"Recently, the Imperial Tutor sent a Memorial to the Emperor with seven suggestions that his Majesty will approve. The Imperial Tutor's relative Han, the Vice President of the Board of Domestic Affairs, proposes to open the salt monopoly in Shaanxi, and, in every district, to set up official granaries for the sale of rice. Wealthy people will pay their contribution of rice to these granaries and get their official receipt from them. The government will issue salt certificates. The old grain certificates will rate at seventy percent and the new ones at thirty. Some time ago, we and your relative Qiao put in to the excise office of Gao Yang thirty thousand grain certificates and thirty thousand salt certificates. The Board of Domestic Affairs has now appointed Cai, the President of the Academy, to be Salt Commissioner for the Two Huais. He is to leave the Capital shortly. He will certainly make an excellent inspector."
Ximen asked if this was true.
"If you do not believe me," Laibao said, "here is a copy of the document." He took a paper from a letter case and handed it to Ximen Qing. Ximen looked at it, and, as there were many unusual characters, sent for Chen Jingji to read it for him. Jingji read half of it, and then stopped. So many of the characters were strange to him. Then Shutong was sent for, and he read it with perfect ease from start to finish, for he had come from a wealthy household and had been well taught. The paper said:
The humble memorial of Cai Jing, Great Scholar of the Hall of Supreme Authority, Prime Minister, and Duke of Lu Guo.
These foolish suggestions are put forward that he may expend his futile energies upon the securing of men of capacity; that an efficient administration may be secured; the financial state of the country strengthened, and the welfare of the people fostered.
Thus may the glory of the Imperial Wisdom be made manifest:
**First** : the public examinations should be abolished and men should be given appointments direct from the colleges.
**Second** : the hitherto existing Board of Finance should be abolished.
**Third** : the present trade in salt should be done away with.
**Fourth** : the promulgation of a law upon coining.
**Fifth** : the buying and selling of cereals should be placed upon a sound footing.
When Ximen Qing had heard this and had read Comptroller Zhai's letter again, he knew that his present had been safely delivered, President Cai had been appointed Salt Commissioner, and would pass through Qinghe on his way to assume office. He was delighted. He sent Xia Shou home to give the news to Magistrate Xia, and gave Laibao 5 taels of silver, 2 jars of wine and a piece of meat. Then Laibao went to his place to rest.

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### Hsi-men Ch'ing Welcomes Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien; In the Temple of Eternal Felicity He Encounters an Indian Monk

With relaxed temperament and relaxed bosom let the years go by;
People are dying and people are being born before your eyes.
Whether it be exalted or whether it be lowly,[1] submit to your fate;
Though it be long or though it be short,[2] do not repine.
Though you possess much or possess nothing, forgo your sighs;
Whether you be wealthy or whether you be poor is Heaven's decree.
Be content to accept your lifetime allotment of clothing and wages;
Even a single day of undisturbed leisure[3] is a day of immortality.[4]

when Hsia Shou returned home and reported on his mission, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling immediately came over to express his gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My colleague has done me:
The favor of saving my life.[5]
Had I not been able to rely upon the powerful influence of your diffracted radiance, how could this affair ever have been brought to an end?"
"My colleague can relax," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a smile. "I figure that you and I did not do anything inappropriate. Let the censor criticize our conduct however, he likes. His Honor will have a clear understanding of the case."
He then ordered that a table be set up in the reception hall and entertained his visitor with a meal. They chatted and laughed together until evening before Hsia Yen-ling said goodbye and went home. The next day they both went to the yamen and conducted their business as usual. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when the regional inspecting censor Tseng Hsiaohsü saw that his memorial of impeachment had been submitted without eliciting any result, he realized that the two officials had succeeded in putting in the fix, and his heart was filled with ire. Because there were so many points in the seven proposals submitted by Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching that he deemed to be:
Either illegitimate or wrongheaded;
and because all of them were:
Injurious to those below while benefiting those above;[6]
when he returned to the capital for an audience in order to report on his assignment, he submitted a memorial in which he argued forcefully as follows:
The wealth of the empire should be allowed to circulate freely. To seize the economic resources of the people and accumulate them in the capital is not, I fear, the way to obtain a just administration. [7] The proposed system of government sale and distributive purchase of the people's grain should not be instituted. The requirement that the coins currently in circulation be redeemed for larger denomination coins at an exchange ratio of ten to one should not be implemented. The salt voucher system should not be repeatedly changed. I have heard it said that if the people's resources are exhausted, who will there be to protect the country for You?[8]
Ts'ai Ching was enraged by this and submitted a memorial to Emperor Hui-tsung in which he accused Tseng Hsiao-hsü of "giving vent to slanderous words, and interfering with national affairs."
At this juncture, Tseng Hsiao-hsü was turned over to the Ministry of Personnel for investigation, and subsequently demoted to the position of prefect of Ch'ing-chou in Shensi. The regional investigating censor of Shensi at the time was Sung Sheng-ch'ung, [9] who was the elder brother of Ts'ai Yu's wife. Ts'ai Ching secretly suborned him into traducing Tseng Hsiaohsü for an alleged private transgression, as a result of which his servants were arrested and:
Tortured into giving evidence to substantiate the case.[10]
Ts'ai Ching consequently succeeded in having him removed from office and:
Banished to the southern extremity of the country,
in order to accomplish his revenge. But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, back at home, had already entrusted his granary vouchers to Han Tao-kuo, along with Ch'iao Hung's nephew, Ts'ui Pen, and sent them to report to the office of Vice-Minister Han Lü of the Ministry of Revenue at the Kao-yang customs station, in order to have them properly registered.
Meanwhile, he kept Lai-pao at home to take charge of ordering the provisions for an elaborate feast and then deputed him to ascertain when the salt-control censor Ts'ai Yün's boat would arrive in the vicinity.
One day Lai-pao learned that Ts'ai Yün's boat had left the capital at the same time as that of the new regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, [11] and that they were about to arrive in the neighborhood of Tung-ch'ang prefecture. When he sent someone home to report this news, Hsi-men Ch'ing, together with Hsia Yen-ling, set out to meet them, while keeping the magistrates of the various prefectures, subprefectures, and districts, and the officers of the various guards, who had all gotten their attendants, men and horses, together for the same purpose, as completely in the dark as if they had been:
Locked tight in an iron bucket.
Lai-pao paid an advance visit to Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün's boat when it arrived at Tung-ch'ang prefecture and delivered a gift for the road from his master. It was only after this that Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling came out some fifty li beyond the suburbs to meet them at the port on the New Canal, at a place called Pai-chia Ts'un, or Hundred Family Village. They first went aboard Ts'ai Yün's boat to pay their respects, and to communicate the fact that they wished to extend an invitation to Sung Ch'iao-nien as well.
"I understand," responded Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün. "You can be sure that he will accompany me on a visit to your mansion."
It was only then that the presiding magistrate of Tung-p'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen, together with the regional officials from all the subprefectures and districts in his jurisdiction, the officers of the various guards, the docket officers and government students, the Buddhist and Taoist authorities and Yin-yang masters, with their respective curricula vitae in hand, arrayed themselves in attendance to receive the new regional investigating censor. Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan, in command of contingents of men and horse, dressed in armor and carrying weapons, cleared the way so effectively that even chickens and dogs stayed out of sight, as they escorted Sung Ch'iao-nien, to the music of drums and wind instruments, into the office of the regional investigating censor in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. After all the attending officials had been introduced and given the chance to hand in their documents, the newly arrived censor was finally allowed to rest for the night.
The next day, who should appear but the gatekeeper, who announced that His Honor, the salt-control censor, Ts'ai Yün had come to pay him a visit. Sung Ch'iao-nien hurriedly ordered that the cases he had been examining be put away, while he straightened his headgear and came out to meet his visitor. When the two of them had finished exchanging amenities, they sat down in the positions of guest and host.
A little later, after tea had been served, Sung Ch'iao-nien asked, "Since my fellow graduate must make the deadline for reporting to his new post, when are you going to set out?"
"I plan to stay another day or two," Ts'ai Yün replied.
He then went on to say, "There is an acquaintance of mine, Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing, who resides in Ch'ing-ho district and belongs to one of the great lineages of that place. He is honest and scrupulous by nature, is one of those who are:
Wealthy yet observant of the rites,[12]
and is also a protégé of His Honor the venerable Ts'ai Ching. Since I have a nodding acquaintance with him, and he has been good enough to come out to welcome me at a distance, I would like to pay a visit to his residence in order to pay my respects."
"Just who is this Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing?" asked Sung Ch'iao-nien.
"At present he is a battalion commander in the local guard and a judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission," replied Ts'ai Yün. "He is one of those who came to pay their respects to my fellow graduate yesterday."
Sung Ch'iao-nien ordered his attendants to fetch the curricula vitae that had been submitted to him the day before and, when he had located the names of Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling, said, "This must be the person who has some relationship with Chai Ch'ien, is it not?"
"That's the one," replied Ts'ai Yün. "Right now he is waiting outside and has asked me to accompany my fellow graduate in paying a visit to his place for a meal. But I don't know how my fellow graduate feels about it."
"I have only just arrived here," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "It would hardly be appropriate for me to go."
"What is there to be afraid of?" said Ts'ai Yün. "It would be doing a favor to Chai Ch'ien for the two of us to visit him. What harm could it do?"
Thereupon, orders were given to prepare their sedan chairs, and the fact that the two of them were about to depart for this purpose was duly promulgated.
No sooner was Hsi-men Ch'ing apprised of this news than he set out for home, together with Lai-pao and Pen the Fourth, riding fast horses, in order to arrive there ahead of his guests, and have time to make the necessary preparations for the feast. A hill-shaped screen-wall and gaily decorated bowers were erected outside his front gate. Musicians from the two Music Offices were engaged to provide music, and a troupe of Hai-yen[13] actors, as well as a troupe of tumblers, were engaged to provide the entertainment.
It so happens that Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien dismissed most of the men and horse in his entourage, only retaining several squads of soldiers bearing blue flags to clear the way, along with the officials and functionaries in his suite, and set out, together with Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün, seated in two large palanquins, protected by double-tiered canopies, in order to pay a visit to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.
At the time, this had the effect of:
Dumbfounding Tung-p'ing prefecture,
While elevating Ch'ing-ho district.
Everyone said, "Even His Honor the regional investigating censor is sufficiently familiar with the Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing to attend a banquet at his residence."
Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan all felt compelled to put in an appearance by leading contingents of the men and horse under their respective commands to station themselves at the mouths of the streets to left and right of the Hsi-men residence in order to maintain order. Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in black and attired in his official cap and girdle, came out a considerable distance to welcome his guests. On either side of the street, musicians struck up their drums and stringed instruments as his visitors made their way to the main gate and dismounted from their palanquins.
As they proceeded inside, Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün were both garbed in robes of scarlet brocade, decorated with an embroidered *hsieh-chih*, a mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, black silk caps, black shoes, and official girdles featuring plaques of "crane's crest red,"[14] and were accompanied by attendants bearing two large flabella.
They saw before them a thirty-foot-wide reception hall, in which:
Speckled bamboo blinds were rolled high,[15] and
Brocaded standing screens were arrayed,
while in the place of honor there stood two fancy table settings, of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, replete with:
High-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery,
Ingot-shaped cakes, and cone-shaped piles of fruit,
all of them meticulously arranged.
The two officials, politely deferring to each other, entered the reception hall in order to exchange amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Salt-Control Censor Ts'ai Yün ordered his retainers to proffer:
The customary presentation gifts,
consisting of two bolts of Hu-chou silk, the collected literary works of a well-known author, four bags of tender leaf tea, and an inkstone from Tuan-ch'i. [16] Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien merely presented a single calling card on safflower red paper,[17] which read, "Your devoted servant Sung Ch'iao-nien pays his respects."
Addressing himself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Your pupil has long been aware of your illustrious reputation but, having just arrived in this region, has not yet had an opportunity to fully express the extent of his admiration. I really ought not to impose upon you, but had it not been for my fellow graduate, Ts'ai Yün, who invited me to join him in paying our respects, how could I have been fortunate enough to gaze upon your distinguished countenance?"
This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he knelt down to kowtow, saying, "Your servant is but an insignificant military official who is subject to your jurisdiction. The fact that, today, I have been fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of your disinterested attention, has had the effect of:
Shedding glory on my humble abode."[18]
Thereupon, he prostrated himself in order to pay his respects, exhibiting the utmost modesty in his courteous demeanor. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien returned his salutation, and they exchanged the customary amenities.
At this point, Censor Ts'ai allowed Censor Sung to take the position of honor on the left, while he took that on the right, and Hsi-men Ch'ing obsequiously kept them company with lowered head. After tea had been served:
Classical melodies saturate the ears;[19]
Drums and music resound to the heavens,
as the musicians began to play. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen to the serving of the wine, and sat down to preside over the feast, the various courses were presented from below.
Words are inadequate to describe the scene:
Only the rarest delicacies are arrayed;[20]
The soup shows off its peach-red waves;

The wine overflows with golden ripples.[21]
Truly:
The singers and dancers display voice and color;
The tables, ten-foot square, are laden with food.[22]
Hsi-men Ch'ing was aware of the large number of attendants that had accompanied his visitors, so, for the retinues of each of the two sedan chairs, he set aside fifty bottles of wine, five hundred snacks, and a hundred catties of precooked pork, which were duly accepted and taken outside. The personal servants, secretaries, "gate-boys," etc. were separately entertained in an ante-chamber, but there is no need to describe this in detail. Suffice it to say that it cost Hsi-men Ch'ing all of a thousand taels of silver to put on the banquet that day.
This Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, being a native of Nan-ch'ang in Kiangsi province, was impatient by nature. Without having stayed very long, after listening to the performance of but a single scene from a hsi-wen drama, he got up to go. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he repeatedly insisted upon his remaining a while longer.
Censor Ts'ai Yün chimed in from the side, saying, "Since my fellow graduate has nothing else to do, you might as well stay for a while. What need is there to return in such haste?"
"My fellow graduate can stay if he likes," responded Censor Sung, "but I need to get back to the Investigation Bureau in order to take care of some public business."
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ordered his servants to pack up the contents of the two table settings, including the gold and silver utensils, in food boxes, making twenty carrier loads in all, and summoned the servitors of his visitors to take charge of them. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's lavish table setting consisted of two jugs of wine, two carcasses of mutton, two pairs of ornamental flowers fashioned out of gold filigree, two bolts of red satin, a set of gold salvers, two silver flagons, ten silver wine cups, two silver ewers with hinged lids, and a pair of ivory chopsticks. That of Censor Ts'ai Yün was the same. Lists of the contents of both table settings were duly presented.
Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien repeatedly demurred, saying, "How could your pupil presume to accept these things?"
Thereupon, he directed his gaze at Censor Ts'ai Yün, who said, "This falls within my fellow graduate's distinguished jurisdiction.
It is only natural,[23]
that he should accept. But how could I be worthy of such an honor?"
"It is but a paltry gift," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "no more than something to enhance a drinking bout, that's all. Why be so standoffish?"
By the time the two officials had done with their demurrals the table settings had long since been carried out the gate. Only then did Censor Sung, seeing that there was no help for it, order his attendants to accept the list of gifts and express his thanks.
"Today," he said, "on the occasion of my first visit in order to make your acquaintance, I have not only put you to the trouble of providing a lavish entertainment, but have also accepted your magnanimous gifts.
What can I do to be worthy of such largess?[24]
It remains for me to find some way of repaying your generosity without fail."
Then, turning to Censor Ts'ai, he said, "My fellow graduate, stay a little longer if you like, but your pupil must announce his departure."
Then and there, he bade farewell and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed the wish to escort him for some distance, but Censor Sung would not allow it and, urgently pressing him to return, raised his hand in salute, got into his sedan chair, and went his way.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned inside to keep Censor Ts'ai company, he urged his visitor to join him in divesting themselves of their official caps and girdles and invited him back to the summerhouse in the interior of the garden where they could be more relaxed. He then ordered that the musicians be dismissed, and that only the actors need remain. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed his servants to provide new table settings for them, and to set out appropriate delicacies and viands so they could drink wine together.
"Today," said Censor Ts'ai, "it was presumptuous of me to join my fellow graduate Sung Ch'iao-nien in paying you a visit. On top of which, you have bestowed these wine vessels from your abundant storehouse upon me.
What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"
"The paltry nature of these gifts is embarrassing," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They are no more than tokens of my esteem."[25]
He then went on to ask, "What is His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien's courtesy name?"
"His courtesy name is Sung-yüan," replied Censor Ts'ai. "That is to say, the *sung* of the expression *sung-shu*, or 'pine tree,' and the *yüan* of the expression *yüan-ch'üan*, or 'fountainhead.'"
He then went on to say, "Originally he repeatedly refused to come. It was only after your pupil had extolled your surpassing virtue, and intimated that you were acquainted with the venerable minister, that he finally agreed. He is also aware that your household has some kind of marriage relationship with that of Chai Ch'ien."
"I think it must be true," observed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that Kinsman Chai has spoken to him about me, but it appears that this gentleman, Sung Ch'iaonien, has a somewhat strange personality."
"Although he is, to be sure, a native of Kiangsi province," said Censor Ts'ai, "there really isn't anything strange about him. It's simply that this was his first meeting with you. It's not surprising that he should want to put on something of a show."
When he had finished speaking, he laughed.
"It's getting rather late today," Hsi-men Ch'ing then said. "There's really no reason for the venerable gentleman to return to his boat."
"Early tomorrow morning," said Censor Ts'ai, "I have to set sail on a long journey."
"If you do not see fit to reject me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why don't you stay overnight in my humble abode? Tomorrow morning your pupil will undertake to see you off with an appropriate libation at the roadside pavilion ten li outside of town."
"I have already benefited excessively from your generous regard." said Censor Ts'ai.
Then, turning to his retainers, he directed them, "All of you return outside the city gate, and come back to get me first thing tomorrow morning."
The crowd of his retainers all assented and took themselves off, leaving behind only two household servants to wait on him.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that his guest's retainers had all departed, he got up from his place at the table, summoned Tai-an, and proceeded to:
Whisper into his ear in a low voice,
thus and so, "Go right away into the licensed quarter, single out Tung Chiaoerh and Han Chin-ch'uan by name, and have them delivered to the rear door of the house by sedan chair, without letting anyone know what you are doing."
Tai-an, for his part, departed on his mission, while Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to his place at the table, in order to keep Censor Ts'ai company while they drank together, and listened to the singing of the troupe of Hai-yen actors who stood to one side and performed for their entertainment.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked his visitor, "Venerable Sir, how long were you able to remain at home before returning to the capital? And is your venerable mother still able to get around, and in good health?"
"My elderly mother, as it happens, is doing all right," said Censor Ts'ai. "As for your pupil's sojourn at home, the half year passed by swiftly before I knew it. But, upon my return to the capital for an audience with the emperor, who would have thought that I would be impeached by Ts'ao Ho, [26] as a result of which your pupil, along with fourteen of his fellow graduates who were serving in the Historiography Institute, were all simultaneously demoted to provincial offices. In my case, I was appointed to the Censorate, and, most recently, selected for the post of salt-control censor of the Liang-Huai region, while my fellow graduate, Sung Ch'iao-nien, was appointed to the position of regional investigating censor in your distinguished province. He is also a protégé of the venerable minister, Ts'ai Ching."
"At the present time," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what post is the venerable gentleman, An Ch'en, occupying?"
"An Ch'en," responded Ts'ai Yün, "has already been promoted to the position of secretary in the Ministry of Works and has been sent to Ching-chou to expedite the delivery of imperial lumber. He is doing all right for himself."
When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned the troupe of Hai-yen actors to come over and serve them with wine.
Censor Ts'ai instructed them, "Sing a song suite beginning with the tune 'Fisherman's Pride' for us."
The actors, standing beside them, clapped their hands to keep time and proceeded to sing to the tune "Fisherman's Pride":
Since our parting we are distant and there are no letters.
This ailment that causes no physical hurt or pain[27] is hard to get rid of.
Alas, in this desolate inn, who is there who knows me?
The message-bearing fish are submerged and the geese bring no letters.
As for that beauty from the three Isles of the Blest, who knows where she is to be found.
I yearn for her asleep and long for her in dreams.[28]
On whose behalf do I endure these feelings?
Listlessly, listlessly wasting away,
I am just like a willow catkin tossed in the breeze.
Who knows when we will ever be able to meet again?
To the tune "Black Silk Robe"
Before my eyes the yellow chrysanthemums have just bloomed.
I wonder why that T'ao Yüan-ming[29] of mine has not returned home.
It makes me gaze into the distance until my eyes are worn out.
Lover of mine, why can't you do me a good turn?
Ever since he left,
I've been beset by lovesickness,[30]
As confused as though drunk,
My tears continually flowing.
Who knows when we will ever be able to see each other again?
To the same tune
I love the peach blossoms that make up her face;
The bamboo shoots that form her ten slender fingers;[31]
I love the faint spring peaks of her eyebrows, like willows tangled in the mist;
I love the bright clarity of her pair of eyes, that remind me of autumn ripples;
The raven locks that adorn her temples;
The black silk filaments tied in a bun;
The pendant crescents of her sickle brows;
The sunset glow suffusing her countenance.
I can't help longing for her until my liver and intestines are sundered.
To the same tune
The drum on the battlements has begun to sound the watch.
I listen to the dying notes of the bugle[32] as it plays taps on the watchtower.
Banging on my bed and pounding my pillow[33] several thousand times;
I give vent to long sighs as well as short[34] on a myriad occasions.
My spirits are distraught;
My words are inarticulate;[35]
Forgetting to eat, neglecting to sleep,[36]
I lie down in my clothes as my tears flow.
All day long I remain in a stupor, too tired to do anything.
To the same tune
Only on your account, all the livelong day I am given over to longing;
While you are there, playing and laughing in pursuit of pleasure.
Whenever I happen to call it to mind, my thoughts are suspended;
Every time the subject comes up, I am only the more resentful.
My regard for you is as deep as the sea;
My feelings are as weighty as mountains.[37]
Our assignation was scarcely accidental;[38]
Separation is the hardest thing to bear.
As the saying goes, "The lotus root may be broken, but the threads remain connected."[39]
As they were singing, who should appear but Tai-an, who asked Hsi-men Ch'ing to step aside for a word with him.
"I have summoned Tung Chiao-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan," Tai-an reported. "They came in through the back door and are sitting in Mother's room at the moment."
"You'd better give orders that their sedan chairs be carried out of the way somewhere," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They've already been carried out of the way," said Tai-an.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded back to the master suite, where the two singing girls stepped forward and kowtowed to him.
"I've invited the two of you here today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so that you'll be available to wait upon His Honor Ts'ai Yün in the grotto underneath the artificial hill this evening. At present he holds the post of regional inspector, so you can't afford to be remiss with him. If you do your best to accommodate him, I'll reward the two of you independently of whatever he may give you."
Han Chin-ch'uan laughed, saying, "There's no need for you to instruct us. We'll know what to do."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, with a wink, "He's one of those southerners, you know, who are enamored of the 'southern breeze.'[40] You mustn't be squeamish with him."
"Mother, just listen to him!" exclaimed Tung Chiao-erh. "Father, you're just like:
The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall;
The longer it stays there the hotter it gets.
Since we've already kowtowed before the prince's palace;
Would we refuse to drink the water from his well?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this as he made his way back toward the front compound. Just as he arrived at the ceremonial gate that separated the compounds, whom should he encounter but Lai-pao and Ch'en Ching-chi, who were carrying a card to show to him.
"Just now," said Lai-pao, "your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has made the suggestion that you take advantage of the fact that His Honor Ts'ai Yün is at leisure here at the moment, to broach this matter with him. I fear that tomorrow when he's getting ready to go, he'll be too busy to consider it. I've gotten your son-in-law to write our two names down on the card here."
"You come along with me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Lai-pao then followed him as far as the summerhouse, where he knelt down outside the latticework partition.
In the course of drinking with his guest, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought the subject up, saying, "There's a certain matter here that I'm reluctant to trouble you with."
"My dear Ssu-ch'üan,"[41] responded Censor Ts'ai, "what have you got in mind? Just tell me what you'd like me to do. Your pupil would not presume to reject your command."
"Last year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in partnership with my kinsman Ch'iao Hung, we delivered a consignment of grain to the border, in return for which we were issued salt certificates that entitle us to take delivery of the specified quantity of salt at the seat of your distinguished jurisdiction in Yang-chou. All we are hoping for is that when our agents show up there, you will look upon the matter favorably, and allow them to take early delivery of the salt, as a token of your generous regard."
He then proceeded to proffer the card to him, and when Censor Ts'ai looked at it, he saw that it read, "The merchants Lai-pao and Ts'ui Pen, who hold previously issued salt certificates entitling them to thirty thousand taels worth of salt from the Liang-Huai region, request that upon presentation of the said certificates, they may take early delivery."
When Censor Ts'ai had perused it, he laughed, saying, "A thing like this is no big deal."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Lai-pao to come inside and kneel down, instructing him, "Perform a kowtow to His Honor Ts'ai."
"After I get to Yang-chou," said Censor Ts'ai, "the two of you can come straight to the Investigation Bureau and ask to see me. I'll let you take delivery of your salt a month before any of the other merchants."
"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are considerate enough to let them have it ten days earlier than the rest, that will be sufficient."
Censor Ts'ai Yün proceeded to put the card in question into his sleeve, while Shu-t'ung served them with wine, and the actors continued with their song suite, to the tune "The Tiger Descends the Mountain":
As the Mid-autumn Festival draws near,
I realize that my feelings have turned sour.
All I can see is the moon in the window;
I do not see the return of my lover.
The dinning sound of pounding laundry bats resounds in my ears;
With strident cries, the northern geese return to the south.
How could these things fail to increase the sadness in my heart?
I anticipate that this lovesickness,
Will be the ruination of my youth.
After the dusk has fallen,
As the night watches recede,
Only after trimming the silver lamp am I able to sleep.
To the same tune
Originally, when we held hands together,
Standing side by side beneath the moon,
We swore to be as faithful as the hills and seas;
And made an oath before Heaven,
That whoever should break faith and forget favor[42] should revert apace to the Nine Springs.
How is it then that, all this time, news of you has been so inaccessible,
That all I can do is cast my lot in coins?
Neglecting to sleep, forgetting to eat,
Who is there to express concern for me?
After the dusk has fallen,
As the night watches recede,
Only after trimming the silver lamp am I able to sleep.
CODA
If azure Heaven is only willing to do me a good turn,
Send my lover back to my pillow side as soon as possible,[43]
So that this student will no longer have to sleep alone.
By the time they had finished singing it was lamplighting time, and Censor Ts'ai said, "I have put you to a great deal of trouble all day. I think we had better call a halt to the drinking."
Whereupon, he got up from his place at the table, and his attendants prepared to light him on his way.
"There's no need to light the lamps yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. May I invite you, Venerable Sir, to adjust your toilet in the interior."
Thereupon, he conducted his visitor on a tour of the garden. When they arrived back at the Kingfisher Pavilion, they found that:
Speckled bamboo blinds were hanging low,
Candles burned brightly in silver stands,[44]
and a complete new feast had already been laid out for them. In the interim, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for his servants to provide the troupe of Haiyen actors with food and wine, reward them for their services with two taels of silver, and send them on their way; and Shu-t'ung had cleared away the used utensils from the summerhouse and closed the postern gate.
What should they observe at this point but the two singing girls, resplendently dressed, waiting for them beneath the steps, who now came forward and;
Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
kowtowed to them. Behold:
Graceful of figure, comely of countenance, garbed in golden threads,
Without even disturbing the fragrant dust, she descends the stairs.
When her time comes, the sprinkling water will moisten her silk skirt,
Just like the Goddess of Witches' Mountain returning from her rainmaking.
When Censor Ts'ai Yün caught sight of them:
Though he wished to advance, he couldn't;
Though he wished to retire, he was unable.[45]
"Ssu-ch'üan," he protested, "how can you show me such generous regard? I fear that it will never do."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "How does this differ from the way in which, in former times, Hsieh An enjoyed himself in the Eastern Mountains?"[46]
"I fear that I do not measure up to the genius of Hsieh An," said Censor Ts'ai. "But you, Sir, do possess the discriminating taste of Wang Hsi-chih."[47]
Thereupon, he held hands with the two singing girls beneath the moon, looking for all the world like Liu Ch'en or Juan Chao upon their arrival in the T'ien-t'ai Mountains.[48] Upon entering the pavilion, and seeing that it contained all the cultural artifacts that he remembered from his previous visit, he asked for paper and writing brush that he might compose a memorial of the occasion.
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Shu-t'ung to comply with his wishes, and he promptly supplied an inkstone from Tuan-ch'i, ground the ink until it was appropriately dark, and spread out a sheet of brocade notepaper before him.
Now this Censor Ts'ai Yün possessed the talent of a principal graduate, after all, so:
Taking the writing brush in hand,[49]
Without altering a single stroke,[50]
Engendering characters like dragons and serpents,
under the lamplight, he:
Dashed off a composition with a single flourish,[51]
producing a poem, which read:
It has been more than half a year since I visited your home;
The cultured decor of your studio is just the same as before.
When the rain is over, Shu-t'ung opens up the herb garden;
As the breeze returns, immortals pace among the flower beds.
As we near a state of inebriation, how swiftly the cups fly;
When our poems are finally composed, the clepsydra urges us on.
Our impending separation only adds another source of regret;
Who knows when the day will come that I visit you again?
When he had finished his composition, he had Shu-t'ung paste it on the wall in order to commemorate the occasion.
He then asked the two singing girls, "What are your names?"
"My surname is Tung," one of them replied, "and my given name is Chiaoerh. My companion's name is Han Chin-ch'uan."
"Do the two of you have courtesy names?" Censor Ts'ai went on to ask.
"We are but unknown singing girls," replied Tung Chiao-erh. "Where would we get courtesy names from?"
"There is no call for you two to be so modest," said Censor Ts'ai.
Only after he had enquired repeatedly did Han Chin-ch'uan respond, "My courtesy name is Yü-ch'ing, or Jade Darling."
"And my humble courtesy name is Wei-hsien, or Crape Myrtle Fairy," said Tung Chiao-erh.
When Censor Ts'ai heard the words "Crape Myrtle Fairy," his heart was filled with delight, and he consequently devoted special attention to her. After Shu-t'ung had been ordered to bring in a table with an inlaid chessboard on its surface, they laid out the pieces, and Censor Ts'ai played a game with Tung Chiao-erh, while Hsi-men Ch'ing kept them company, and Han Chin-ch'uan stood to one side, holding a flagon with which to serve them with wine.
Clapping his hands to keep time, Shu-t'ung sang a song for them, to the tune "Jade Lotus Blossoms":
The east wind sends willow catkins flying;
By jade flagstones orchid shoots are small.
The resplendence of the spring scene would tax the skill of an artist to depict.
Over the top of the wall, red-rouged beauties[52] are seen to smile.
Once finished with their swinging,[53] they are drenched in perfumed sweat.
In pursuit of fragrant flowers.
One does not repine over the distance.
Behold, at last I see the banner of the wine shop fluttering beyond the apricot blossoms.
By the time he finished singing, Censor Ts'ai had won the chess game with Tung Chiao-erh. After drinking a cup of wine as a forfeit, she toasted Censor Ts'ai in turn. Han Chin-ch'uan, for her part, replenished Hsi-men Ch'ing's wine, and he drank a cup to keep them company. Shu-t'ung then continued to sing, to the same tune:
The wind turns over the trailing plantain fronds;
The rain scatters the pearls on the lotus leaves.
I see a beauty with spit curls like cicada wings adorning her temples.
Her beige silk fan coquettishly half conceals her lotus blossom cheeks;
The art with which her variegated sleeves flutter rivals that of Hsiao-man.[54]
Her eyes are autumn ripples.
It is hard for us both to cope with our emotions;
Which makes me so despondent and lonely that tears lie crisscross on my face.
When they had finished their drinks, the two of them proceeded to play another game, and this time Tung Chiao-erh was the winner, whereupon she promptly proffered a cup of wine to Censor Ts'ai. Hsi-men Ch'ing, in his position on the sidelines, again drank a cup of wine to keep him company. Shu-t'ung then continued to sing, to the same tune:
Yellow chrysanthemums are blooming everywhere;[55]
As other varieties of verdure begin to wither.
Little crickets chirrup incessantly on the empty steps.
The Herd Boy, as always, is at his post night after night;
Why is it, then, that the Weaving Maid is not to be seen?[56]

Lovesick as I am,
What am I to make of my confused dreams?
On her account, my tears have soaked the memento of her phoenix-toed shoes.
When he finished the song, Censor Ts'ai said, "Ssu-ch'üan, it's getting late, and:
I cannot handle the effects of the drink."[57]
Thereupon, he walked outside and stood under the flowering trees. At the time, it was around the middle of the fourth lunar month, and the moon had just arisen.
"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's early yet, and Han Chin-ch'uan has not yet had a chance to offer you a cup of wine."
"That's true," said Censor Ts'ai. "Call her out, and I'll drink a cup while standing under the flowers here."
Thereupon, Han Chin-ch'uan took a large gold goblet in the shape of a peach, filled it with wine, and proffered it to him with her slender hands, while Tung Chiao-erh stood by his side and offered him some fruit. Shut'ung, clapping his hands to keep time, then sang a fourth song to the same tune:
The snow falls like scattered pear blossoms;
The wings of roving bees are no longer seen.
In front of the small window, magpies perch on withered branches.
It is disheartening to learn of the advent of those who brave the snow to look for plum blossoms.
One suddenly becomes aware that the bronze tanks of the clepsydra are marking extended intervals.
These heartbreaking events,
Make me think of the sadness of separation.
On her account, I cannot set aside the writing brush with which I compose love letters.
When Censor Ts'ai had finished his drink, he poured out a cup to reward Han Chin-ch'uan and then begged off, saying, "Ssu-ch'üan, the wine is too much for me today. Have your esteemed servant take it away."
Thereupon, taking Hsi-men Ch'ing by the hand, he said, "Worthy Sir, your:
Lavish hospitality and surpassing virtue,
are:
Forever suspended in this heart of mine.[58]
If you were not:
Bone and flesh of this culture of ours,[59]
How could you ever have come thus far?[60]
As for that loan that you formerly made to me:
It is a conspicuous burden on my mind.[61]
and I have already said as much to Chai Ch'ien in the capital. If, at some future date, I should:
Advance so much as an inch in my career,
I could hardly fail to repay your surpassing virtue."
"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:
"How can you say such a thing?[62]
You need not give it a thought."
When Han Chin-ch'uan saw the way that Ts'ai Yün was holding hands with Tung Chiao-erh, she understood the situation and tactfully withdrew to the rear compound.
Upon her arrival in the master suite, Yüeh-niang asked her, "Why have you come back here instead of spending the night with him?"
"He chose to keep Tung Chiao-erh with him," Han Chin-ch'uan said with a laugh. "If I had not come back here, what would I have done with myself over there?"
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing also said good night and returned to the front compound, where he summoned Lai-hsing and instructed him, saying, "Early tomorrow morning, at the fifth watch, prepare food boxes with the requisite wine and rice, snacks and other refreshments, and hire a chef to accompany them to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate, where I plan to provide a farewell collation for His Honor Ts'ai Yün. Also engage the services of two boy actors, and see that nothing goes amiss."
"Tomorrow is the eve of the Second Lady's birthday," said Lai-hsing, "and there won't be anyone here at home to take care of things."
"Have Ch'i-t'ung stay behind to buy the necessary provisions," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "and engage a cook to prepare things on the big stove in the rear compound."
In no time at all, Shu-t'ung and Tai-an had cleared away the used utensils and procured a pot of high-grade tea, which they took into the garden for Ts'ai Yün to rinse out his mouth with. In the studio within the Kingfisher Pavilion, quilts and pillows were all properly laid out on the bed. Censor Ts'ai noticed that Tung Chiao-erh was holding a folding fan made of speckled bamboo with a gold-flecked surface, on which there was depicted in ink-wash a variety of aquatic orchid beside the flowing water of a level stream.
"Might I trouble Your Honor," said Tung Chiao-erh, "to do me the favor of writing a poem on the face of this fan for me?"
"I don't have any subject at hand," said Censor Ts'ai, "so I'll allude to your courtesy name, Crape Myrtle Fairy."
Thereupon, under the lamplight, he was inspired to take up a writing brush, with which he indited a quatrain on the fan.
The little courtyard with its empty portico[63] is silent and undisturbed;
Above the garden pool the moon has arisen, bathing the window gauze.
Having encountered each other by chance,[64] the time is not yet too late;
The Secretary of the Hall of Purple Myrtle confronts the myrtle blossom.[65]
When he had finished writing out the poem, Tung Chiao-erh hastily kowtowed to him in gratitude, and the two of them, after performing the necessary preliminaries:
Got into bed and prepared to sleep.
Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, together with Ts'ai Yün's personal servants, retired to sleep together in the parlor. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
Early the next morning, Censor Ts'ai presented Tung Chiao-erh with a single tael of silver, sealed up in an ostentatious packet of red paper.
When she returned to the rear compound and showed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he laughed, saying, "That's the typical behavior of a civil official. Where would he come up with the big money to reward you more appropriately? This is the very best you could hope for if you were to consult your fortune with the bamboo sticks."[66]
He then went on to instruct Yüeh-niang to give each of the singing girls five mace of silver, and see that they were sent on their way through the rear door.
Shu-t'ung, meanwhile, fetched some water for Ts'ai Yün to wash his face with, and helped him perform his toilet and put on his clothes, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out to the front compound to keep him company as he ate his breakfast congee in the reception hall. By this time, his subordinates were already standing by with his sedan chair and horse, ready to accompany him on his way. As he took his leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he thanked him again and again.
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "As for that matter that your pupil mentioned to you yesterday, after you arrive at your post, Venerable Sir, were I to send you a letter about it, if you should see fit to pay it some attention, I would be much indebted to you."
"Worthy Sir," said Censor Ts'ai, "even if you should not deign to honor me with an elegant epistle, if your esteemed servant were to show up with the merest note:
There is nothing I would not do on your behalf."[67]
When they had finished speaking, the two of them mounted their horses together and, followed by their attendants, proceeded to the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city, where Hsi-men Ch'ing had borrowed the abbot's quarters in which to provide a farewell libation before seeing off his visitor. Lai-hsing and the chef that he had hired for the occasion had long since made all the necessary preparations, and the two boy actors, Li Ming and Wu Hui, played and sang for their entertainment. After a few cups of wine had been consumed, without sitting very long, Censor Ts'ai got up to go. His chair-bearers, horse, and palanquin were waiting for him outside the temple gate.
As Ts'ai Yün was about to set out, Hsi-men Ch'ing brought up the matter of Miao Ch'ing, saying, "He is an acquaintance of your pupil's. Because he was falsely implicated in a case adjudicated by the former regional investigating censor, Tseng Hsiao-hsü, a warrant for his arrest has been sent to Yang-chou, and the final disposition of the litigation awaits his apprehension. Since this matter has already been adequately dealt with, if you should happen to run into His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien, I hope that you will:
Put in a word on his behalf,[68]
for which we would both be very grateful."
"That's no problem," said Censor Ts'ai. "When I see my fellow graduate Sung Ch'iao-nien, I'll mention it to him, and, even if he has been taken into custody, he'll be released. That's all there is to it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing once again expressed his gratification with a bow.
Gentle reader take note: Later on, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was on his way to Chi-nan to take up his post, he happened to be in conference with Censor Ts'ai Yün aboard his boat on the canal, when the arresting officers brought Miao Ch'ing before him. "This has to do with a case adjudicated by His Honor Tseng Hsiao-hsü," said Censor Ts'ai, "so why should you concern yourself with it?" As a result, he was released and allowed to return home. At the same time, a directive was sent down to Tung-p'ing prefecture, ordaining that the two boatmen should be:
Executed without waiting for the customary season,[69]
and that An-t'ung should be set at liberty. Truly:
Though men may plan to do thus and so:
Heaven's principles may yet deny them.
There is a poem, designed to explicate the difficulties that human feelings make for people, which goes as follows:
Justice and human feelings are frequently in conflict;
Human feelings and justice[70] are difficult to reconcile.
If one insists upon doing justice, human feelings will suffer;
If one gives way to human feelings, justice will lose out.
The prefect of Tung-P'ing prefecture, Hu Shih-wen, had already been suborned by Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling in connection with this case, so there was nothing he would not do on their behalf. I would say more about it, but this is a subsequent event.
That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to see his visitor off as far as his boat, but Censor Ts'ai would not permit it, saying, "Worthy Sir, there is no need for you to escort me for such a distance. I will simply bid you farewell here and now."
"Pray take care of yourself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and permit me to ask after you by means of my paltry servant in the future."
When they had finished speaking, Censor Ts'ai got into his sedan chair and departed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the abbot's quarters and took a seat. The abbot then came in to offer him some tea. He wore a Vairocana hat on his head and was attired in a cassock. A young novice brought in the cups of tea in their raised saucers, and after presenting them withdrew. The abbot saluted his visitor by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion. Hsi-men Ch'ing returned the compliment by saluting him in return.
Noticing that:
His snowy eyebrows were glistening white,
he asked the abbot, "How old are you?"
"This humble monk is seventy-four," the abbot replied.
"You're still looking remarkably healthy," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"And what is your religious name?" he went on to ask.
"This humble monk's religious name is Tao-chien,[71] or Stand Hard," replied the abbot.
"And how many disciples do you have?"
"I have only two young acolytes," the abbot replied. "But there are thirty-odd monks in this temple."
"This temple of yours," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is certainly capacious enough. But it is sadly in need of repair."
"There is no need for me to dissemble," said the abbot. "This temple was originally erected by His Honor Chou Hsiu. But the monastic treasury does not contain enough in the way of money or grain to maintain it. So it is in danger of falling down."
"So this is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I noticed that his country estate is not far from here. This shouldn't be a problem. If you petition His Honor for permission to prepare a subscription list, and circulate it elsewhere in the usual way, when you come to my place, I will undertake to contribute something toward its upkeep."
Tao-chien promptly pressed his palms together and expressed his gratitude by saluting him in the Buddhist manner.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to extract a single tael of silver from his letter case, with which he thanked the abbot, saying, I've put you to a good deal of trouble here today."
"This humble monk did not know that you were coming," said Tao-chien. "So I was unable to prepare a vegetarian repast."
"I would like to go inside in order to adjust my toilet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Tao-chien promptly called for a young novice to show him the way to a side door.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished adjusting his toilet, he observed that behind the abbot's quarters there was a large thirty-foot-wide meditation hall, occupied by a considerable number of itinerant monks, who were beating on wooden fish and reciting sutras. Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Without premeditation or forethought,
strolled inside to take a look and noticed a monk whose physique was out of the ordinary, and whose appearance was grotesque. His leopard-shaped head with its sunken eyes was the color of purple liver and was crowned with a cock's comb-like chaplet. He wore a long flesh-colored gown. The whiskers beneath his chin bristled unevenly, and he had a shiny annular ridge around the base of his head. Truly, he was:
An authentic arhat, of the most extraordinary aspect;[72]
A one-eyed dragon, undivested of his fiery temperament.
He had fallen into a trance on his meditation couch, so that his head was drooping, his neck had subsided into his upper trunk, and a trickle of jade-white mucus was dribbling from his nostrils.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished observing him:
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"This priest must surely be a monk of high attainments, possessed of extraordinary powers. If not, how could he exhibit such an unusual appearance? I might as well wake him up and ascertain the truth of the matter."
Thereupon, raising his voice, he called out to the monk, "Where do you come from, and what temple are you attached to, that you have arrived here in the course of your peregrinations?"
The first time he called out to him, there was no response; and the second time, he also failed to reply; but the third time, behold, that monk on his meditation couch jerked himself erect, gave his torso a stretch, opened his one good eye, sprang up from his relaxed position, nodded his head toward Hsi-men Ch'ing, and said, in a coarse voice, "Why are you interrogating me?
I neither alter my given name when abroad,

Nor change my surname when at home.
I am a foreign monk from the land of India in the Western Regions, who has descended into the mundane world from Cold Shivers Temple, beneath Navel Waist Peak, in Dense Sperm Forest. [73] Having come here in the course of my peregrinations I plan to distribute medicine in order to cure people. In calling upon me this way, sir, what have you got to say?"
"Since you plan to distribute medicine in order to cure people," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "were I to ask you for some restorative medication, might you have such a thing, or not?"
"I do! I do!" exclaimed the monk.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Were I to invite you to my home, would you come, or not?"
"I'll come! I'll come!" asseverated the monk.
"Since you say you'll come," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well start out at once."
The Indian monk straightened himself erect, picked up his iron staff from the head of the bed to support himself with, hitched the leather pouch containing his two medicine gourds onto his back, stepped down from the meditation hall, and strode outside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an, saying, "Hire two donkeys, and escort His Reverence back home right away. You can wait for me there. I'll be along directly."
"There's no need to go to all that trouble, sir," said the Indian Monk. "You can mount your horse and go right ahead. Even without the aid of a donkey, I guarantee I'll be there before you."
"He certainly must be a monk of high attainments, possessed of extraordinary powers," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to himself. "If not, how could he talk so bluntly?"
Fearing that he might get away, he ordered Tai-an, "Make sure, whatever you do, not to let him out of your sight."
Thereupon, he took his leave of the abbot, mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his retinue, headed straight into the city on his way home.
That day was the seventeenth day of the fourth month, which happened to be Wang Liu-erh's birthday. It was also the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and some female guests had been invited to the house to celebrate it. That afternoon, Wang Liu-erh, having no one else at hand to send, deputed her younger brother, Wang Ching, to come and invite Hsi-men Ch'ing to visit her. She instructed him that when he got to the gate of the house, he should seek out Tai-an, and no one else, in order to deliver her message.
When he failed to find Tai-an at the gate, he decided to stand and wait, and he remained standing there for a good two hours. At this juncture, Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh came out to see off Auntie Li the Third as she got into her sedan chair. When they noticed a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boy, with his hair done up in a topknot, standing there, they asked who he was.
The young man, unthinkingly, came up to them and kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, saying, "I'm from the Han household, looking for Brother An, to have a word with him."
"What Brother An is that?" asked Yüeh-niang.
P'ing-an, who was standing to one side, was afraid that Yüeh-niang would realize that he came with a message from Wang Liu-erh if he said anything amiss, so he stepped forward and pulled him aside, explaining to Yüeh-niang, "He's been sent from Manager Han's place to speak to Tai-an, and find out when Manager Han will be coming home."
By so doing, he managed to pull the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes, so that she said nothing more about it, and returned to the rear compound.
Not long after this, Tai-an and the Indian monk arrived at the gate before Hsi-men Ch'ing did. Tai-an had been constrained to walk so fast that his two legs ached, and:
His whole body was covered with sweat,[74]
which made him as resentful as could be; whereas, the Indian monk seemed to be completely relaxed and was not even short of breath.
P'ing-an told Tai-an all about how Wang Liu-erh had sent Wang Ching to speak to him and explained, "Who could have anticipated that the First Lady happened to come out just then in order to see off Auntie Li from the licensed quarter as she got into her sedan chair. Catching sight of her, he:
Recklessly and impulsively,[75]
came right up to the First Lady and kowtowed to her. When the First Lady asked who he was, he said he was from the Han household. Fortunately, I was standing nearby and was able to pull him aside. After that, when the First Lady asked me, I explained that he had been sent from Manager Han's place to find out when Manager Han would be coming home. At that, the First Lady had nothing further to say, so that, luckily, no horse's hoof was exposed to view. Later on, if Mother asks you anything about it, you'd better say the same thing."
Tai-an had been put through his paces until his eyes were staring out of his head, and all he could do was fan himself with his fan.
"Has this turned out to be my unlucky day, or hasn't it!" he complained. "Father insisted that I escort this lousy baldpated jailbird home, for no good reason. It's some distance, I can tell you! From that temple outside the city gate all the way here, I never once had a chance to rest my legs along the road. I've been walking so fast:
Each new breath has not had a chance to catch up with the last.
Father wanted me to hire donkeys for us, but he refused to ride one. If he preferred to walk, that's no matter, no matter at all, but it has really been hard on these two legs of mine. The soles of my shoes are worn through, and my feet are blistered. What a provoking business!"
"What has Father invited him home for, anyway?" said P'ing-an.
"Who knows?" said Tai-an. "He tells me he's hoping to obtain some kind of medicine from him."
As they were speaking, what should they hear but the sound of an escort shouting to clear the way, as Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the Indian monk was at his gate, he exclaimed, "Master, you must really be a god among men to have actually gotten here before me."
As he spoke, he ushered him inside and offered him a seat in the large reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Shu-t'ung to take his outer garments and changed into an informal skullcap, before sitting down to keep him company.
The Indian monk opened his eyes wide and observed that:
The chamber was lofty and spacious, and
The courtyard was secluded and imposing.[76]
Over the door there was suspended:
A glossy-green beaded portiere,
woven of shrimp's whiskers,
with a tortoiseshell pattern.
On the floor there was positioned:
A rug fashioned of woolen yarn,
displaying a pair of lions,
playing with a brocade ball.[77]
In the center of the room there was:
A soap-colored table in raised relief,
on bulging "mantis belly" legs,
with cabriole "dragonfly feet."[78]
On the table there was displayed:
A vertical marble monolith,
mounted on a ringlike stand,
like the base of Mount Sumeru.
All around it there were placed:
Folding armchairs of swollen shape,
with backs of nan wood,
and loach-head finials.
On the two walls were displayed:
Hanging scrolls, replete with
damask borders and agate knobs,
adorning purple bamboo rollers.
Truly:
While painted drums of alligator hide,
resound in courts and halls;
The banquet table, wrought of ebony,
is loaded with wine vessels.
When the Indian monk had seen his fill, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him, "Master, do you drink wine, or not?"
"I consume both wine and meat," proclaimed the monk.
Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly directed a page boy, "When you go back to the kitchen, don't bother to bring any vegetarian fare, but serve us with regular food and wine."
That day, being the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, there were delicacies of every kind to be had in the kitchen. Once the table was set in place, all that had to be done was to serve the feast.
To begin with, there were four saucers of nuts, and four saucers of appetizers. Then there were another four dishes to complement the wine, namely, one saucer of bullhead, one saucer of duck preserved in a fermented wine mash, one saucer of black-bone chicken, and one saucer of still wriggling male sculpin. Still another four dishes to go with the rice were then served, to wit, a saucer of walnut kernels blanched with ramshorn scallions, a saucer of finely minced goat-meat hash, a saucer of fatty stuffed sheep's-gut sausage, and a saucer of shiny smooth slippery loach. Yet another two courses were then forthcoming. One of which was a soup served in a bowl containing two meatballs straddling a gristly roulade of pork, and called "The Lone Dragon Toys with a Pair of Pearls," while the other was a large platter of overstuffed steamed pork buns, the heads of which were bursting open.
Hsi-men Ch'ing encouraged the Indian monk to eat his fill. He then ordered Ch'in-t'ung to fetch a round-handled chicken-crop flagon, open the red clay stopper, and pour gush after gush of the whitish, yin-replenishing, liquor, painstakingly distilled in the Province of the Loins, into a high-stemmed goblet in the shape of a drooping lotus seedpod, which he presented to the Indian monk. The Indian monk put it to his lips and drank it off with one gulp.
Thereupon, after the table had been cleared, another two courses were presented. One, a saucer of inch-thick horseback sausages, and the other, a saucer of salt-cured goose necks. These were supplemented by two more stimulating dishes for the enjoyment of the Indian monk as he drank his wine. One, a saucer of bitter melon, and the other, a saucer of oozing overripe red plums. After these had been consumed, a large bowl of eel noodles, along with a serving of spring rolls, was also provided for the Indian monk to dispose of.
In no time at all, the Indian monk was so stuffed that the eyes were starting out of his head, and he said, "I'm already:
Drunk on wine and satiated with food.
It's time to call a halt."
Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned his attendants and had them remove the table at which they had been drinking, after which he besought his visitor to supply him with the promised medication to enhance his performance of the arts of the bedchamber.
The Indian monk responded, "I have in my possession a remedy that was:
Perfected by the Lord Lao-tzu himself, and
Transmitted by the Queen Mother of the West.
For the wrong person it will not prove effective;
To the wrong person it must never be transmitted.
It will work only for one with the right affinity.
Since you have entertained me so lavishly, Sir, I will provide you with a few pills thereof."
Thereupon, he groped out one of the gourds in his pouch, from which he decanted some hundred or so pills, saying, "You must only take one pill at a time, not any more than that, and wash it down with a draft of distilled spirits."
Shifting then to the other gourd, he squeezed out a glob of about two-tenths of an ounce of pink ointment, saying, "Be sure to use no more than twothousandths of an ounce at a time. Don't use too much of it. If your organ becomes uncomfortably congested, use your hands to knead your thighs on either side of it, and slap them a hundred or so times. Only then will you be able to ejaculate. You must employ these medications sparingly, and not lightly let them fall into the hands of other people."
Hsi-men Ch'ing respectfully received the proffered items with both hands, saying, "Permit me to inquire, what efficacy does this medication possess?"
The Indian monk said:
"Its shape is like a hen's egg;
Its coloring is gosling yellow.
It has been thrice refined by the Lord Lao-tzu;
And transmitted by the Queen Mother of the West.
Examined externally, it is as worthless as dung;
Inspected internally, it is rarer than carnelian.
It may be compared to gold, but not acquired with gold;
It may be compared to jade, but not procured with jade.
Though you be girdled with gold and garbed in purple,[79]
Though you occupy spacious structures and high halls,[80]
Though you own the lightest furs and sleekest horses,[81]
Though you manifest the talents of a pillar of state,
Once you have this medication firmly in your grasp,
Your body will be impelled into the bridal chamber.
Within the chamber, spring reigns eternally;
Beyond the mundane, vistas are ever-fragrant.
Your jade pinnacle will never be impaired;
Your cinnabar field will glow in the dark.
After one battle, your spirits remain valiant;
As the duel continues, your vigor is enhanced.
No matter how captivating and voluptuous your favorites,

Though you possess twelve beauties in their rosy makeup;
You may engage with them however you wish,
Remaining stiff as a spear all night long.
If used for long, your appetite will be insatiable;
It will stir your testicles and stiffen your organ.
In a hundred days your hair will regain its color;
In a thousand days your stamina will be augmented.
It will strengthen your teeth and brighten your eyes;
Only when yang is in the ascendant will yin diminish.
If you are not able to believe these claims,
Mix it in with rice and feed it to your cat.
For three days it will indulge itself without restraint;
On the fourth day it will be too overheated to stand it.
A white cat will be transformed into a black one,
Its excretory functions will stop and it will die.
In the summer months you should sleep in the breeze,
In the winter you should submerge yourself in water;
But should you ever be unable to ejaculate,
Your hair will drop out and leave you bald.
If you use a thousandth or so of an ounce at a time,
Your organ will become erect and stronger than ever;
You will be able to handle ten women in one night,
And your reservoir of sperm will not be exhausted.
Older women will contract their brows in dismay;
Prostitutes will find it hard to accommodate you.
If you should ever lose interest in the battle,
Wishing to retire your warriors from the field,
Swallow a mouthful of cold water,
So as to retain your sperm intact.
Your pleasures may thus extend throughout the night,
And spring colors will pervade your nuptial chamber.
This present is offered only to the cognoscenti,
As a recipe for their lasting self-preservation."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he wanted to ask him for the prescription, saying:

"In engaging a physician you should engage only the best;
In prescribing drugs you should impart the prescription.

Master, if you do not give the prescription to me, should I happen to run out of it at a later date, where could I hope to find you? No matter how much you want for it, I will be happy to comply."

He then ordered Tai-an, "Go back to the rear compound as quick as you can and fetch me twenty taels of silver to give to this Indian monk in exchange for the prescription for this medication."

The Indian monk laughed, saying, "I am someone who has left home to become a priest, and:

Wanders like a cloud among the four quarters.

What would I want this money for? Pray take it back, Sir."

He then got up to take his leave.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that he would not give him the prescription, he said, "Master, if you won't accept money, I have a forty-foot-long bolt of muslin, which you could use to clothe yourself with."

So saying, he immediately ordered his attendants to fetch it and proffered it to the Indian monk with both hands. Only then did the monk express his thanks by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion.

As he was about to go out the gate, he enjoined him one more time, "Don't use too much of it. Take heed! Take heed!"

When he had finished speaking, he hitched his pouch onto his back, fastened his staff to it, went out the gate, and proceeded nonchalantly on his way. Truly:

Suspended from his staff he bears on high the dyad sun and moon;
In his straw sandals he traverses all nine divisions of the realm.

A poem testifies to this:

Maitreya Buddha,[82] as a mendicant monk, has appeared in China;
His calico bag is hanging from the tip of his walking staff.[83]
No matter how many myriad transformations you can perform;
Every incarnation must cope with its own burden of sorrow.

Xia Shou went home and told his master the news. Then Magistrate Xia came to Ximen Qing and thanked him. "You have saved my life," he said. "Without your influence and your authority, I should have been in a very grave position."

Ximen Qing laughed. "Do not mention it. We did nothing wrong and, though the Censor spoke harshly about us, the Imperial Tutor will arrange everything." He entertained his guest in the great hall. They laughed and talked, and it was evening before Xia went home. The next day they both went to their office and attended to their duties as before.

Censor Ceng saw that, though his report had reached the Court, nothing happened. He understood that bribery had been at work, and was very indignant. He knew, moreover, that the five suggestions of the Imperial Tutor would lead to serious trouble. They would work to the detriment of the common people and the advantage of the officials. So he went himself to the Capital to put his case before the Emperor, and presented a memorial suggesting that it was well for the country that money should circulate instead of being collected and hoarded in the Capital. The new method of dealing in foodstuffs he considered impracticable. The new coinage, in which each coin was worth ten pence, had many disadvantages, and free trade in salt ought not so frequently to be abolished. He pointed out that, when such raids are made upon the people's resources, the safety of the realm is endangered.

The Imperial Tutor was furious. He told the Emperor Huizong that the Censor was rebellious and undisciplined, that he was concerning himself unduly in matters of policy. He summoned Ceng to appear before the Board of Civil Service, which degraded him and made him Magistrate of Qingzhou in Shaanxi.

The Censor and Commissioner of Shaanxi, Song Pan, was the Imperial Tutor's brother-in-law. Cai Yu secretly ordered Song Pan to accuse Ceng. Ceng's servants were arrested and persuaded to bring false accusations against their master. His name was cut out of the roll and he was banished to the Salt Mountain. So did the Imperial Tutor get his revenge.

Ximen Qing told Han Daoguo and Cui Ben to go with Master Qiao's nephew and take the grain certificates to the officer of the Board of Domestic Affairs at Gaoyangguan and register them. Laibao stayed at home to attend to the preparations for a great banquet. He also went to find out whether there was any word of the arrival of the Salt Commissioner's boat.

One day Laibao heard that Cai and Song had started together from the Capital and had now reached Dongchangfu. He brought the news to Ximen Qing, and Ximen invited Magistrate Xia to accompany him. Laibao had already visited the Commissioner on his boat and presented some gifts. Ximen Qing and Xia journeyed for fifty *li* to receive the notables at the new wharf at Bojiacun. They went on board the boat and told Cai that they would like to invite his colleague Song. Cai agreed and said that it was their intention to visit the office of the prefecture together.

Hu, the magistrate of Dongpingfu, and all his officers, military and civil, from all the districts; the scholars, Buddhist and Daoist priests, and the Masters of the Yin Yang were present to welcome the notables. They sent in their cards. Major Zhou, General Jing, and Zhang, the Captain of Militia, with horses and men, attended in full state. People were sent in advance to spread the news, and even the chickens and ducks kept out of the way. There was music to welcome Song when he entered the prefectural office at Dongpingfu. The officers presented their credentials. Song spent the night resting and, the next day, the gatekeeper came to inform him that the Salt Commissioner had come to visit him.

Censor Song immediately came out to receive him. They greeted one another and took the places proper to host and guest.

"How long do you propose to stay here?" said Song.

"I shall probably stay a day or two," Cai said. "I have a friend at Qinghe, a certain Captain Ximen, a man of excellent character, wealthy but modest. He is under the protection of the Imperial Tutor, and that is how I know him. He was good enough to come a very long way to meet me and I am going to stay with him a while."

"What rank does this Ximen hold?" Song asked.

"He is a junior magistrate," Cai said. "One of those who came to pay their respects to you yesterday."

Song ordered a servant to bring him all the visiting cards. Among them he found the names of Ximen and Xia. "Is not this the man who is a friend of Zhai the Comptroller?" he said.

"Yes," Cai said. "As a matter of fact, he is outside now. He asked me to invite you to take dinner with him."

"As the Censor for this place," said Song, "I am afraid it would be hardly becoming for me to accept."

"Why should you be afraid?" said Cai. "Our friend Zhai would like it. What harm is there in it?"

They called for their sedan chairs and made ready to start together. As soon as their order for the sedan chairs came out, word was brought to Ximen Qing. He, Laibao and Ben the Fourth rode home in great haste to make everything ready for the banquet. Awnings had already been set up outside the gate, forming a gaily decorated reception room. Two bands of musicians had been engaged and actors and other performers were in attendance.

Censor Song did not bring all his attendants, only a few men with blue pennants to clear the way, and a few officers. He and Cai seated themselves in two large sedan chairs; attendants carrying huge umbrellas accompanied them, and so they came to Ximen Qing's house.

Everybody in Dongpingfu knew of this visit, and it was especially remarked at Qinghe. Word went from mouth to mouth that the Censor was a friend of Ximen Qing and was coming to visit him at his house. The military officers, Zhou, Jing, and Zhang, were greatly excited, and sent soldiers, both horse and foot, to take post at each end of the street. Ximen Qing dressed in black robes, wearing his ceremonial girdle, went a considerable distance to meet his guests. Then the musicians began to play, the sedan chairs reached the gate. The two officers got down from their chairs. Both wore scarlet embroidered clothes, ceremonial hats and boots, and red girdles like a stork's beak. Attendants followed them, bearing two large fans.

The bamboo lattices were rolled high, and embroidered screens were placed in the great hall where the two guests were to be received. At the upper end two tables were set with delicacies and sweetmeats of the most delectable variety. The two officers bowed one to the other before they entered, and, when they went in, they made a reverence to Ximen Qing. Cai summoned his servant to offer the presents he had brought for Ximen. There were two rolls of silk, a case of collected works of literature, four parcels of tender tea shoots, and an ink slab of Duanxi stone. Song presented a red visiting card on which was written: "The respectful compliments of Song Qiaonian."

"The Lanxiang of your name has long been known to me," Song said. "I have only just come to this place and I am ashamed to appear before you without some offering. My brother Cai urged me to come, however, and, but for him, I should not have had the pleasure of seeing your glorious countenance."

Ximen Qing fell upon his knees. "Your humble servant," he said, "is but a plain soldier, one subject to your commands. It is an honor to receive from you a visit which brings enlightenment to this poor hovel." He rose and bowed with the utmost politeness, and Censor Song returned his greeting.

Then Cai invited his companion to take the place of honor and took the seat beside him. Ximen respectfully seated himself with them. When they had drunk their tea, the musicians played and the drums were beaten. Ximen Qing offered his guests wine, and set places before the table. Servants carried in the food. The banquet surpassed all powers of description. Music, songs, dances and splendor seemed to be crowded within the confines of a tiny space, and there was a marvelous abundance of refreshment. To the servants of the two censors, Ximen gave fifty bottles of wine, five hundred cakes and a hundred measures of cooked meat, and these were taken away. The subordinate officers were entertained in other rooms. That day Ximen Qing expended a thousand taels of silver.

Censor Song was a native of Nanchang in Jiangxi, a volatile fellow. He did not stay long, and listened to but one act of the play. Then he stood up. Ximen Qing pressed him to stay, and Cai also tried to persuade him. "Brother," he said, "unless you have business to attend to, why not stay a little longer? Why go away so soon?"

"Brother," said Song, "you stay. I must go to my office and see about various matters."

Ximen Qing had bidden his servants pack two complete services of gold and silver in food boxes. There were twenty such boxes. For Song there was a whole set for the table, two jars of wine, two sheep, two pairs of golden flowers, two rolls of red silk, a set of gold dishes, two silver wine pots, ten silver wine cups, two small silver jars and a pair of ivory chopsticks. There was an exactly similar set for Cai. Ximen Qing presented his list of gifts.

"I dare not accept such a present," Song said. He looked at Cai.

"Brother," said Cai, "this is your sphere of jurisdiction, and it is right and proper that you should accept. But, for me, the case is different.'"

"They are but trifles," Ximen Qing said, "so that you may drink a cup of wine. Why treat the matter as one of ceremony?"

The two officers still hesitated, but the boxes were taken away and Song could only end by accepting them.

"I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before," he said, "yet you have entertained me nobly and given me this valuable present. I do not know how I can return such kindness, but I will endeavor to do so by degrees," He said to Cai: "Brother, I must go now, but do you stay here." Then he started. Ximen Qing would have taken him well on his way, but Song begged him not to do so, bowed, and got into his chair. Ximen Qing went back to Cai. They removed their robes of ceremony and went to sit under the arbor. The musicians were sent away and only the actors remained. Ximen called for food, and rare dishes and fruits were set before them. They settled down to enjoy their wine.

"Brother Song and I have visited you today," Cai said. "That was pleasure enough for us, but for all this excellent entertainment and the rest I don't know how to thank you."

Ximen Qing smiled. "I only fear that everything has been too poor for you. All I could do was but a slight indication of my feelings." Then he said: "What is his Lordship's honorable title?"

"His name is Songquan," Cai said. "He would not have come today, but I told him you were under the protection of the Prime Minister and he decided to come. He knows that you and Zhai are connected."

"My relative Zhai must have spoken to him," Ximen Qing said. "I must say his manner seems to me a little strange."

"He is from Jiangxi," Cai said, "but I don't think there is anything strange about him. Perhaps the first time he meets you he thinks he must stand on his dignity." He smiled.

"It is getting late," Ximen said, "and you cannot return to your boat tonight."

"The boat sails tomorrow morning," Cai said.

"Stay the night here," Ximen said, "and tomorrow I will take you to your boat."

"You are very kind indeed," Censor Cai said. He dismissed all his servants but two, bidding the others come for him the following morning.

When Ximen saw that they had gone, he whispered to Daian and told him to go to the bawdy house for Dong Jiao'er and Han Yuchuan. "Bring them in by the back door," he said, "and don't let anyone see you." The boy went away. Ximen returned to the table and drank wine with the Censor. The actors sang for them.

"How long did you stay at home?" Ximen asked, "and how is your lady mother?"

"My old mother is very well. I stayed about six months; then I went back to the Court. Unfortunately an accusation was brought against me by Cao He. I and thirteen others were brought before the Academy of History, and we were all reduced to provincial rank. That is how I came to be appointed Salt Commissioner. Song is a favorite of the Imperial Tutor."

"Where is venerable Master An now?" Ximen Qing said.

"An Fengshan has been appointed to the Board of Works," Cai said. "He has gone to Qingzhou as Superintendent of the Imperial Forests. That is quite a good post for him."
Ximen Qing called for the actors. When they had served wine, he asked them to sing "The Fisherman's Pride." While they were singing, Daian came and asked Ximen to go out and speak to him. "Dong Jiao'er and Han Yuchuan are here," he said. "They are in the Great Lady's room."
"Tell the sedan chair men to take the chairs away," said Ximen. Daian told him that he had already done this. Then Ximen went to his wife's room. The two singing girls kowtowed to him.
"Today," Ximen said to them, "I want you to wait upon his Excellency Cai. He is both Censor and Commissioner of Salt. If you are careful what you are about, he will certainly make you a handsome present."
Yuchuan laughed. "You need not be so explicit. We understand."
"He is a Southerner," Ximen Qing said, "and likes things done in the Southern style. You must not be too shy with your hands and feet."
"Mother," Dong Jiao'er said to Wu Yueniang, "do you hear that? Father is like one of those ram's-horn onions that is planted against a southern wall and grows hotter and hotter. We are to kowtow before a royal palace, but we mustn't drink the water in the well."
Ximen Qing laughed and went back to the outer court. When he came to the second door, he met Laibao and Chen Jingji with a visiting card. They gave the card to him and said: "Your relative, Master Qiao, says that if his Excellency the Censor is not engaged now will you please speak about this matter to him. He supposes that his Excellency will be going away tomorrow, and asked us to write this card." Ximen Qing told Laibao to go with him. The man waited outside the window of the arbor.
Ximen drank with Cai. After a while he said: "There is a little business I should like to mention, but I hesitate to trouble you."
"Tell me anything that is in your mind," said Cai. "Your commands shall be obeyed, whatever they may be."
"Last year," Ximen said, "one of my relatives paid the rice tribute and was given some salt certificates. He was appointed Collector at Yangzhou, within your jurisdiction. It would be very kind of you, when you take up your appointment, if you would let them have their salt a little earlier." He handed to Censor Cai the paper that Laibao had brought. It said: 'Laibao and Cui Ben are entitled to 30,000 *yin* of salt. May it be granted them as early as possible.' Censor Cai smiled.
"This is a trifle," he said, "I should like to see Laibao." Ximen Qing summoned Laibao to kowtow to the Censor. "When I get to Yangzhou," Cai said, "come to my office, and I will see that the matter is settled one month earlier for you than for anyone else."
"It is very kind of you," Ximen said, "but ten days would be quite sufficient."
Cai put the paper in his sleeve. Shutong served wine and the actors sang again. When the song was over, it was getting late. "I have burdened you for a whole day," Cai said, "and I must not drink any more." He stood up. The servants were about to light the lamps, but Ximen Qing stopped them.
"I am going to take his Excellency to the inner court to change his clothes," he said. He took Cai to the garden. They looked around it for a while, then Ximen took his guest to the Hall of the Kingfisher. The lattice was rolled down, candles were burning brightly, and wine and refreshments had been set out.
Ximen Qing dismissed the actors. Shutong saw that everything was cleared away in the arbor, and the corner gate was closed. The two singing girls, beautifully dressed, came to the steps and kowtowed four times to the Censor.
Their faces so charming, their dresses gold embroidered
They do not trouble the fragrant dust
As they come down the stairs.
With water splashes still wet upon their silken skirts
As though they were just back from Wu Mountain
Where they had brought the rain.
Cai seemed dumbfounded when he saw them. "You are too kind to me," he said. "This is indeed too much."
Ximen Qing smiled. "It is not very different," he said, "from that entertainment that once there was upon the Eastern Mountains."
"I fear I have not the learning of Wang Anshi," Cai said, "though you, Sir, have the elevated sensibilities of Wang Yuzhun." In the moonlight he took the hands of the two singing girls, feeling as excited as Liu Yuan at the Tiantai. They went into the Hall of the Kingfisher. Writing materials were lying there and, taking paper and brush, Cai prepared to write a poem to give to the girls. Ximen Qing told Shutong to take the ink slab, grind some thick ink, and arrange the flower-patterned paper. His Excellency was possessed of the accomplishments becoming his position. Taking the brush, he wrote without any hesitation, the characters springing like dragons beneath it. Under the lamplight he finished the poem without once stopping.
Six months have passed since last I visited you
But brush and paper wait for me in this room.
The rain is over. Shutong is tending the sweet-smelling herbs
The wind has changed. An angel walks among the flower beds.
When I would drink my fill, the bells ring urgently
When I have written my poem, the night watch will call me away
But when I go from you, I must expect new sorrow
I know not when I shall return.
When Cai had finished this poem, he bade Shutong put it on the wall in memory of his visit. Then he asked the names of the two girls. One said: "My name is Dong Jiao'er," and the other: "My name is Han Yuchuan." Then Cai asked them by what familiar names they were called. "We are but humble girls," Dong Jiao'er said, "it would not befit us to have familiar names." But the Censor pressed them, and at last Han Yuchuan said: "Mine is Yuqing [Treasure of Jade]." Dong Jiao'er said: "Mine is Weixian [Fairy of the Purple Flower]." The last one delighted Cai particularly, and he did not forget it. He asked Shutong to bring the chess pieces and played a game with Dong Jiao'er. Ximen Qing looked on while Yuchuan served the wine and Shutong sang. The Censor won, and Dong Jiao'er had to drink a cup of wine, but first she offered one to the victor. At the same time Han Yuchuan offered a cup to Ximen Qing. They played a second game. This time Dong Jiao'er won, and she quickly offered wine to the Censor. Ximen drank again.
Then Cai said: "It is late and I can drink no more." They went out and stood for a while amid the flowers. It was the middle of the fourth month, and the moon had just risen.
"It is still early," Ximen Qing said, "and Han Yuchuan has not offered wine to you yet."
"That is true," the Censor said. "Let her bring a cup here, and I will drink it among the flowers."
Han Yuchuan brought a large gold cup shaped like a peach blossom and offered it with her slender fingers. Dong Jiao'er stood beside her with a dish of fruit. The Censor drank his wine and offered a cup to Dong Jiao'er. Then he said to Ximen Qing: "I have indeed taken too much wine. Will you not ask your servants to clear away?" He took Ximen Qing's hand. "You show me so much kindness," he said, "that my mind is confused. If you had not been by nature a scholar, you could not have been so kind. I have not forgotten the loan you made me a few months ago. I told the Comptroller all about it, and, if it should happen that promotion comes to me, I shall never dare to forget your generosity."
"Please do not mention it," Ximen Qing said. "Think no more of it."
Han Yuchuan saw the Censor holding Dong Jiao'er 's hand. She knew what this meant and went to the inner court. When she came to the Upper Room, Yueniang said to her: "Why did you not stay?" Han Yuchuan smiled.
"He has Dong Jiao'er," she said. "I was not wanted any longer." A little later, Ximen Qing said good night to the Salt Commissioner and came in. He told Laixing to prepare food, wine, cakes and dishes, and, the next morning before dawn, to go with the cooks to the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where they would take leave of his Excellency. He must not forget the two young actors.
"But tomorrow is the Second Lady's birthday," Laixing said, "and there are not enough people to attend to things at home."
"Let Qitong buy the things," Ximen said. "The cooks must use the large oven."
Shutong and Daian cleared everything away and took a pot of excellent tea to Cai in the garden. In the Hall of the Kingfisher, the bed and furniture were arranged to perfection. Cai saw that Dong Jiao'er was carrying a speckled bamboo fan of gilded paper. On it was painted in black ink a picture of orchids growing beside a rivulet. She asked him to write a poem upon it for her. "I can't think what to write," he said. "I had better take your other name, Fairy of the Purple Flower." Taking up a brush, he wrote four columns upon the fan.
All is still and silent in the courtyard
The moonbeams cast their light upon the windows.
They meet, so chance has ordered, and the night is early
He of the purple shrub and the maid of purple blossom.
Dong Jiao'er made a reverence to the Censor and thanked him. They went to bed. Shutong, Daian and his Excellency's servants slept in a room near by.
The next morning the Censor gave Dong Jiao'er a tael of silver wrapped in red paper. She took it to the inner court and showed it to Ximen Qing. Ximen smiled. "He is a civil officer, and, of course, could not make you a very large present. This is as high a mark as you can expect." He told Yueniang to give each of the girls five *qian* of silver and let them out by the back way. Shutong brought water and aided his master to dress. Then Ximen Qing went to the great hall and ate rice gruel with Censor Cai.
Cai's servants came with horses and a sedan chair. He said good-bye to Ximen Qing and thanked him repeatedly.
"Please do not forget the matter of which I spoke to you yesterday," Ximen said. "I will write to you when you reach your post. And I am greatly obliged to you."
"There is no need to write," Cai said. "Send a servant with a blank sheet of paper and I will do anything you ask."
They mounted their horses and, followed by their attendants, went as far as the Temple of Eternal Felicity. There they lunched in the Abbot's parlor. Laixing and the cooks had made all kinds of preparations and the two young actors, Li Ming and Wu Hui, were waiting. They drank a few cups of wine together and Cai stood up. The horses and sedan chair were waiting outside the gate. Ximen Qing spoke to him about the Miao Qing affair. "Miao Qing," he said, "is a friend of mine who was falsely accused by the late censor. The papers for his arrest have been sent to Yangzhou. The case has already been settled here, so, if you should see his Excellency Song in Yangzhou, please speak in his favor. I shall be very grateful to you."
"Do not worry." Cai said. "When I see my brother Song, I will ask him to free Miao Qing if he should be arrested." Ximen Qing bowed and thanked him.
Justice and friendship lie in opposing camps
Friendship and justice cannot be reconciled.
He who deals justly, loses all his friends
He who to friendship yields, abandons justice.
(Some time later, when Censor Song was going to Jinan, he happened to be traveling on the same boat with Cai. The officers arrested Miao Qing, but Cai said to his friend: "This is an affair that goes back to Censor Ceng's administration. Why should you do anything about it?" So Miao Qing was set at liberty and orders were sent to Dongpingfu that the two boatmen were to be executed at once, and the boy Antong allowed to go.)
Ximen Qing would have gone all the way to the boat with Cai, but the Censor asked him not to do so. "Pray do not come any farther," he said. "We will part here."
"Take great care of yourself," Ximen Qing said. "I shall send my servant for news of you."
Cai got into his sedan chair and was carried away. Ximen Qing went back to the Abbot's rooms and the Abbot came to make reverence to him and offer tea. Ximen returned the greeting. He saw that the Abbot's eyebrows were white as snow. "Venerable Sir," he said, "how old are you?"
"The humble monk before you," replied the Abbot, "is seventy-four years of age."
"You seem very strong," Ximen said, and asked his name in religion. "My name is Daojian," the Abbot said. Ximen asked how many novices the Abbot had.
"No more than two now," the Abbot said, "but there are more than thirty wandering priests in my temple."
"Your temple," Ximen Qing said, "is very large and spacious, but it seems to need repair."
"The truth is," the Abbot said, "that this temple was built by the venerable Zhou Xiu, but we have no fixed endowment, and it is almost utterly ruined now."
"So your temple belongs to Major Zhou? I remember now that his estate is quite close. You ought to ask him to open a subscription. I should be glad to help."
Daojian made a reverence and thanked him. Ximen Qing told Daian to give the Abbot a tael of silver. "I have given you much trouble today," he said. The Abbot apologized for the inadequacy of his preparations. Then Ximen told the priest that he would like to go to the inner court to change his clothes. Daojian told one of his novices to open the door. Behind the Abbot's quarters, Ximen found a large hall, as large as five rooms. A number of wandering monks were chanting from their sacred books and beating their wooden fish. Ximen looked around the hall. There was one monk of very curious appearance. His head was like a leopard's and his eyes were round. His color was that of purple liver, and upon his head he wore a cock's crest. His tattered robe was flesh-colored; his shaggy beard all matted together. By all seeming he might have been a veritable Arhat, a fiery-tempered dragon. He was lying upon the bench of contemplation, his head bowed and his shoulders hunched upon his chest. The stream of matter from his nostrils looked like chopsticks of jade.
Ximen Qing thought that this must certainly be a wonder-working monk, so unusual was his appearance. "I will arouse him," he said to himself, "and question him." Then, in a loud voice, he said to the holy man: "Where do you come from? Where is your monastery?" There was no answer. He repeated his questions, but still there was no reply. He asked a third time, and now the monk came down from the bench of contemplation, stretched himself, put forth a hand and straightened his body, and opened one eye. He made a slight inclination of the head to Ximen Qing and said in a hoarse voice:
"Why do you ask me these questions? I am only a poor monk. My name is everywhere the same. I come from a foreign land, from the deep pine forests of India, from the temple of the Frozen Mansions. I roam about the world, dispensing remedies to give ease to men. What would you say to me?"
"Since you have remedies to give ease to men," Ximen Qing said, "I should be glad to have something that would inspire me with new ardor. Have you any such medicine?"
"I have," the Indian Monk said.
"I should like to ask you to come to my house," Ximen Qing said. "Will you come?"
"I will come. I will come."
"If you are willing," Ximen Qing said, "let us start at once."
The Indian Monk rose, took his iron staff and a long leathern bag in which were two gourds of medicine, and they went out of the great hall. Ximen told Daian to bring two donkeys and bade him ride together with the monk.
"Not so," said the monk. "You go first on your horse. I need no animal on which to ride, but I shall be there before you."
"This must indeed be a wonder-working monk," Ximen said to himself, "or he would not make such rash promises." He was afraid the monk might go somewhere else, and told Daian to accompany him. He took leave of the Abbot and mounted his horse, and all his servants followed him. It was the seventeenth day of the fourth month, Wang Liu'er's birthday. It was also the birthday of Li Jiao'er, and a few ladies had come to congratulate her.
In the afternoon Wang Liu'er sent her brother Wang Jing to ask Ximen Qing to go and see her. She had no one else to send. "Go and look out for Daian," she told him, "and, if you do not see him, wait outside the gate."
Wang Jing waited at the gate. When he had waited two hours or so, Wu Yueniang and Li Jiao'er came out with old woman Li. Yueniang, seeing a small boy about fifteen years old, asked him what he wanted.
"I have come from the Han household to see my brother An," he said.
"Which brother An?" Yueniang asked.
Ping'an was standing near, and, fearing lest Yueniang should discover that the boy came from Wang Liu'er, he went forward and pushed him aside.
"He has come from Han Daoguo," he said. "He wants to see Daian to find out when Han is to come."
Yueniang was deceived. She said no more and went back into the house. Then Daian and the Indian Monk came to the gate. Daian's legs were very weary and his whole body was covered with sweat. He was in a very bad way, but the Indian Monk was perfectly comfortable and did not even puff. Ping'an told Daian about the visit from Wang Jing. "The Great Lady saw him, but, fortunately, I was here, and passed the matter over. Otherwise the cat would have been out of the bag. If Mother asks you any questions tell her the same story that I did."
Daian opened his eyes wide and fanned himself. "My luck is certainly out today," he said. "Father told me to bring this bald rascal home with me and we have walked all the way from the temple without stopping. I can hardly breathe. Father said we were to take two donkeys, but the monk would not hear of it. It is all very well for him to walk that long way, but my poor legs have certainly suffered. The soles are torn off my boots and my feet are torn too. What a dirty business!" "What does Father want with him?" Ping'an said.
"Who knows?" Daian said. "Perhaps he hopes to get some medicine out of him."
As they were talking, they heard the sound of the attendants clearing the way. Ximen Qing arrived. When he found the monk already there, he said: "Master, you are indeed a wonder worker to get here before I did." He asked the monk to go into the great hall. Ximen Qing gave his clothes to Shutong and changed his hat. He sat down with the monk, and they drank tea. The Indian Monk gazed around the great hall and saw how deep and spacious it was; how large and quiet the courtyard. Over the door hung a bamboo lattice made of shrimps' feelers with a tortoiseshell design. The floor was covered with rugs, with a pattern of lions rolling balls. In the middle of the hall was a table colored black, with dragonflies on the legs and the praying mantis upon the edges. There was a marble screen upon the table, with a fretted pattern and a base shaped like a mountain. Around it were several large cedar chairs, substantial and heavy, with eels' heads for decoration. The pictures on the walls were hung on purple rods bound with silk. The ends of the rolls were of cornelian.
When the Indian Monk had looked around him, Ximen Qing said to him: "Master, do you drink wine?"
"I drink wine and eat meat," the monk said.
Ximen sent a boy to the kitchen to tell them not to prepare vegetarian dishes but to bring wine and food. As it was Li Jiao'er's birthday, all kinds of food were already prepared. A table was set and the food brought. There were three or four plates of fruits, four smaller and four larger dishes to accompany the wine. There was one dish of fish head, one of preserved duck, one of chicken and one of sea perch. Then four dishes to be eaten with rice, one of little nuts of meat roasted with ram's-horn onions, one of little pasties of finely minced meat, shaped like a periwinkle, one of plump sausages, and one of bright and slippery eels. Then soup was brought. In the soup were two balls of meat and a garnished sausage between them. This soup was known as "The Dragon playing with two pearls." Then there was a great dish of stuffed buns with little openings at the top.

Ximen Qing asked the monk to eat, and bade Qintong bring a jar of wine with a round handle, a beak-shaped mouth and a neck like that of a chicken. The boy opened a large jar that had come from Yaozhou. From it he poured a tiny stream of wine as white as snow, extremely fortifying. He poured it into a high-stemmed cup shaped like a lotus upside down. He handed the cup to the Indian Monk, who took it and emptied it at one draft. More dishes were brought, one of sausages about an inch long, one of preserved goose neck. There were fruits for the monk to eat with his wine, grapes mottled as though they had the pox and red plums juicy at the center. Finally a great bowl of noodles and eels with vegetables.

The monk gobbled everything up till his eyes almost stood out of his head. Then he said: "I have had enough." Ximen Qing told a boy to clear away the table. Then he asked the monk to give him some medicines to enhance his skill in the arts of love.

"I have one medicine made by Laozi, to whom the Queen Mother of the West gave the secret. None are able to secure this medicine but those of whom I think well. You have been kind to me and I will give you a few pills." He took a gourd from his long bag and emptied about a hundred pills. "Take one on each occasion," he said, "but no more. Take it with a drop of spirits." He opened the other gourd and took from it some red powder about two *qian*'s weight. "Every time you use it," said the monk, "take two grains and no more. Should you feel a burning sensation, take your weapon in your hand and stroke your thighs a hundred times or so. Then all will be well. Be judicious in your use of these remedies and give none to anyone else."

Ximen Qing took the medicines in both hands. "Tell me," he said, "what is the merit of this medicine?"

Shaped like an egg
Yellow like a duck
In three successive processes Laozi prepared it
At the bidding of the Queen Mother.
To him who glances at it heedlessly
It seems like earth or dung
But, when its merits are known, its worth is more than jewels.
No gold will buy it
And jade is valueless compared with it.
Though you are girt with gold and robed in purple
Though you are dressed in sable
And ride upon the plumpest chargers,
Though you uphold the pillars of the state
Take but a speck of this, set it upon you, then
Rush like a whirlwind to the bridal chamber
There you will find spring always young
All will be bright and gay.
There will be no ruins on the jade mountain
And the moonbeams will shine bright upon your window.
The first engagement will leave you full of vigor
The second, even stronger than before.
Though twelve exquisite beauties, all arrayed in scarlet, wait your onset,
You may enjoy each one, according to your fancy
And, all night through, erect your spear will stand.
Soon, new strength will be given to limbs and belly
It will refresh the testicles, invigorate the penis.
In a hundred days, hair and beard will be black once more
In a thousand days, your body will know its power.
Your teeth will be strong, your eyes more bright,
Your manhood stiffened. Then at the first planting
The seed will germinate.
I fear that this may seem beyond belief.
Pray try the medicine on the cat.
After three days he'll burn with fire
Four days will see him quite beyond control
And, if a white cat, he will soon be black
Then cease to piss and shit, and so will die.
Though in the summer you may sleep exposed
And in the winter plunge yourself in water
Yet, if you cannot keep your bowels free
Your hair you'll surely lose.
Each time, take but a grain or so.
Your weapon will be merciless.
Ten women in one night will be as one to you
You'll feel no slackening of vital power.
The old woman will knit her brows
The young one's strength will hardly stay the course.
When you are sated, and would give up the fight
Swallow a mouthful of cold water. Then withdraw your weapon
You will not be harmed.
In pleasure and enjoyment you will spend your nights
The joys of spring will fill the orchid chamber.
I make this gift only to those
Who worthily appreciate its qualities.
Take it, I pray, and may your manly vigor flourish evermore.

Ximen Qing listened. When the old monk had done, he asked for the recipe. "When I send for a doctor," he said, "I insist upon having a good one, and, when I have medicine, I like to know what it's made of. When I have finished it, and can't get any more from you, it will be most awkward. I don't mind how much you ask, you shall have it." He said to Daian: "Go to the back and bring thirty taels of white gold." He offered the gold to the monk and again asked for the recipe. The monk laughed.

"I am a poor monk," he said, "and I roam all over the world. Gold is valueless to me. Keep your money." He rose and prepared to go away.

Ximen Qing saw that he would not get the recipe from the old man. He said: "If you'll not take my gold, let me offer you a roll of cloth fifteen feet long to make a habit for yourself." He bade a servant bring a roll and presented it to the Indian Monk with both hands. The monk thanked him and made a reverence. Before he went away, he cautioned Ximen Qing, telling him not to take more than the proper dose. Then he picked up his long bag, staff, went out of the door, and mysteriously disappeared.

## 071

### Ch'in-t'ung Eavesdrops on the Joys of Lovemaking; Tai-an Enjoys a Pleasing Ramble in Butterfly Lane & the Indian Monk's Medicine

Heaven has bestowed the rouge with which to dab their ruby lips;
Their faces, blithe as the eastern breeze, are wreathed in smiles.
Their fragrant hearts, needless to say, are replete with delight;
Their inebriated faces constantly suggest new forms of satisfaction.
Kingdom-toppling beauties are oft disposed to agitate their patrons;
Inclining toward the sun, without a word, they flirt with but a smile.
How many men in the world of the Red Dust, with sorrow-laden brows,
Are wont to visit flowery groves, to seek for intimate companions?

The day in question was the eve of Li Chiao-erh's birthday, and Nun Wang from the Kuan-yin Nunnery, as she had promised, had invited Nun Hsüeh of the Lotus Blossom Nunnery and her two disciples, Miao-feng and Miao-ch'ü, to come help celebrate the occasion. Wu Yüeh-niang, on hearing that Reverend Hsüeh had arrived, and having heard her to be a nun renowned for her exemplary conduct, hastened out to welcome her.

She was attired in the headdress of an immaculate nun, was clothed in a dull brown tea-leaf-colored cassock, had been shaved so closely as to produce a bluish, finely polished pate, and presented an imposingly corpulent figure, with a pondlike mouth and piglike cheeks. As she came in, she pressed her palms together in front of her chest and saluted Yüeh-niang and the others in the Buddhist fashion.

As she did so, Nun Wang said, "This is the mistress of the household, and these are her fellow ladies."

This threw Yüeh-niang and the others into such consternation that they made haste to return her salutation. Impressed by her proclivity for:

Raising her brows and batting her eyes,[1]
Assuming attitudes and putting on airs;[2]

and observing that she was given to:

Hairsplitting and logic-chopping;

in speaking to her, the words "Reverend Hsüeh" were seldom out of their mouths; while she, in turn, addressed Yüeh-niang with the words "Lay Bodhisattva,"[3] or "My Lady." Yüeh-niang treated her with the greatest possible respect.

That day Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang were also present. Yüeh-niang had prepared tea for her guests, as well as vegetarian fare in the form of various dishes and treats, all of which were laid out on a large table, making a more than ordinarily sumptuous repast. Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples, Miaoch'ü and Miao-feng, were only thirteen or fourteen years old and were naturally very good-looking. They stood by her side and helped themselves to the refreshments on the table.

When they were finished with their tea, they all sat down in the master suite, along with Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in order to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound on the Buddhist Dharma. What should they see at this juncture but Huat'ung, who came in from the front compound carrying a load of used utensils.

Yüeh-niang took the occasion to ask him, "Has that meat- and wine-consuming Buddhist priest left yet?"

"He has just gotten up to go," reported Hua-t'ung. "Father has gone out to see him off."

"Where did he invite that priest to come here from?" asked Sister-inlaw Wu.

"He is a priest that Father brought back with him after going to a temple outside the South Gate to see off Censor Ts'ai Yün," replied Yüeh-niang. "He consumes both meat and wine. Father wanted to get the prescription for some medication from him and offered him silver for it, but he said he had no need for it and refused to take any money. Who knows what sort of business he's up to? He's been gorging himself all day, before taking himself off."

When Nun Hsüeh heard this, she said, "As for eating meat and drinking wine,[4] these two acts are hard to justify. In the final analysis, it is we Buddhist nuns who are more likely to keep our vows. What do these male monks care about such things? Is it not stated in the *Great Buddhist Canon* that for every mouthful of such substances that you consume you will be required to make recompense in a subsequent incarnation?"

When Sister-in-law Wu heard this, she said, "For people like us who eat meat all day long, there's no telling how much evil karma we will have accumulated by the time we're reincarnated."

"As for venerable bodhisattvas such as yourself," Nun Hsüeh asserted, "it's all due to the good fortune you have cultivated for yourselves in former incarnations that you are destined to bask in glory and luxury, and enjoy wealth and distinction. [5] It is just as it is with the five grains; if you do not plant them in the spring, when autumn comes, how can you hope to reap a harvest?"

We will say no more about this conversation for the moment.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came inside after seeing off the Indian monk, whom should he see but Tai-an, who quietly stepped forward and said, "A little while ago, Auntie Han sent her younger brother over here to extend you an invitation. She said that today is her birthday, and that she hoped, whatever happens, that you will be able to come over and pay her a visit."

Ever since acquiring the aphrodisiac from the Indian monk, Hsi-men Ch'ing had made up his mind to go there in order to try it out with the woman, but how could he have anticipated that she would actually send him an invitation. Since this development coincided precisely with his own wishes, he immediately ordered Tai-an to prepare his horse and sent Ch'in-t'ung ahead to deliver a jug of wine in honor of the occasion.

Thereupon, he went straight into P'an Chin-lien's quarters, picked up the bag of sexual implements, attired himself in casual clothes and an informal skullcap, put on his eye shades, and headed straight for Wang Liu-erh's house, with Tai-an in attendance.

Upon dismounting and going inside, he gave directions, saying, "I'll keep Ch'in-t'ung here to wait on me, while Tai-an can go home with the horse. If anyone at home asks, just say that I'm in the shop on Lion Street going over the accounts."

Tai-an assented with the words, "I understand," after which he mounted the horse and went home.

When Wang Liu-erh came out to greet her visitor, she was wearing her chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, held in place with gold filigree pins and combs, along with ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece. Her head was uncovered, and she was attired in a jade-colored silk vest, over a linen blouse, and a white-waisted drawnwork skirt with a single border.

After kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and sitting down beside him, she said, "Having some free time, I've invited you to come relax and visit together. Also, thank you very much for the wine you sent over."

"I had forgotten that it was your birthday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was obliged to go outside the South Gate to see someone off today and have only just gotten back."

He then pulled a pair of hairpins out of his sleeve and presented them to her, saying, "This is in honor of your birthday."

The woman, accepting them and looking them over, saw that they were a pair of gold hairpins in the shape of the character for long life, and exclaimed, "What fine workmanship!"

She then hastened to bow to him in thanks.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also gave her five mace of silver and said to her, "Weigh out five candareens, and get my page boy to buy a bottle of southern distilled spirits for me to drink."
Wang Liu-erh laughed at this, saying, "Father, you've grown tired of other wines have you? So now you've come up with the idea of trying southern distilled spirits."
Thereupon, she promptly weighed out five candareens of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung out with a bottle in hand to buy it for him.
Wang Liu-erh then helped Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his outer garments and invited him into her room to sit down, while she took the trouble to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before personally shelling some nuts for him. She had ordered her maidservant to brew some fine tea, which she brought out for Hsi-men Ch'ing to drink. A small table was set up in the room so they could play cards together. Only after they had played for a while did they put the cards away and fall to drinking. But let us put this aside for the moment and say no more about it.
Let us now return to the story of Tai-an. By the time he returned home with the horse, he had been hard at work all day and was utterly exhausted from trying to keep up with the Indian monk. He went straight to his room in the front compound and lay down for a nap. It was not until lamplighting time that he woke up, rubbed his eyes, and, seeing that it was already late in the day, went to the rear compound to fetch a lantern with which to go back for Hsi-men Ch'ing.
As he was standing there, Yüeh-niang said to him, "Earlier today, after Father had seen off the Indian monk, he didn't even come inside to change his clothes, but took off somewhere before anyone was aware of it. Really now, whose place has he gone off to drink at?"
Tai-an was at a loss for words but finally said, "Father hasn't gone to anyone else's place. He's at the shop on Lion Street going over the accounts with Lai-pao."
"Even if he were going over the accounts," said Yüeh-niang, "it wouldn't take him all day."
"After finishing the accounts," said Tai-an, "he's probably having himself a drink."
"Without anyone to keep him company?" said Yüeh-niang. "No doubt he's drinking all by himself, for no good reason! It's obvious that your story is duplicitous. What was that young man up to who came looking for you from Han Tao-kuo's household a while ago?"
"He came to ask when Uncle Han was coming home," said Tai-an.
"You lousy jailbird!" Yüeh-niang vociferated. "Who knows what kind of mischief you're up to?"
Tai-an did not dare say any more on the subject.
Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to fetch a lantern for him, saying, "You tell him that the Second Lady is waiting for him at home to celebrate the eve of her birthday."
Hsiao-yü accordingly fetched a lantern and turned it over to Tai-an, who made his way out to the shop in the front compound.
What should he see there but Shu-t'ung and Manager Fu, sitting together at the counter, on which there were laid out a bottle of wine, two sets of cups and chopsticks, several bowls and saucers, and a platter of beef tripe, while P'ing-an was on the way in from outside with two bottles of preserved fish in fermented mash.
Just as they were settling down to enjoy their wine, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in, put his lantern down, and said, "Great! I've arrived just in the nick of time."
Then, catching sight of Shu-t'ung, he said in jest, "What a fine wanton you are! What are you doing here? I've been looking all over for you, and it turns out you've been hiding in here all the time drinking wine."
"Just what did you want me for?" said Shu-t'ung. "Have you been harboring the wish to be my grandson for a spell?"
"Why you 'sweetie' of a page boy!" cursed Tai-an. "You have the nerve to talk back to me, do you? I was looking for you so I could fuck you in the ass."
Thereupon, stepping forward, he held him down on his chair and gave him a kiss.
Shu-t'ung pushed him away with both hands, complaining, "You crazy good-for-nothing! I'd just be wasting my breath on you! You've not only scraped the tartar right off my teeth, but knocked the hat off my head."
When Manager Fu saw that his hat was lying on the floor, he exclaimed, "It's a brand new lantern-shaped hat."
Then, turning to P'ing-an, he said, "Pick it up, or, I fear, it might get stepped on."
Shu-t'ung grabbed it out of his hands and threw it onto the k'ang, his face turning bright red as he did so.
"What a fine wanton you are!" said Tai-an. "I was just teasing you, and you're all hot and bothered."
Whereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he lifted him up by the legs, forced him down onto the k'ang, and spit a mouthful of saliva into his mouth, as hard as he could, knocking the wine over in the process, so that it ran all over the surface of the counter.
Manager Fu was afraid the account books would get wet, so he promptly grabbed a towel and started mopping it up, saying, "You can be sure it won't be long before the way the two of you are horsing around will turn nasty."
"A fine wanton you are!" said Tai-an. "Whose countenance have you procured that's made you so squeamish today?"
Shu-t'ung, whose hair had gotten all rumpled, complained:
"A game's a game;
A joke's a joke,
but you've spit a mouthful of filthy jizz all over me."
"Why you lousy hick of a 'sweetie'!" said Tai-an. "As though this were the first time you've ever swallowed jizz. From first to last, who knows how much jizz you may have swallowed?"
P'ing-an poured out a goblet of wine and gave it to Tai-an, saying, "You drink this off, and then go on to fetch Father. If you have anything left to say, you can say it to him when you get back."
"Just wait till I've come back from fetching Father," said Tai-an, "and I'll have something to say to him. If I don't fix it so that 'sweetie' of a page boy starts:
Seeing spirits and seeing ghosts,[6]
he won't take me seriously. As for my saliva, am I someone:
Not sired by a human being,[7]
that I must be expected to keep my mouth sucked dry?"
Thereupon, having drunk the wine, he picked up a houseboy from the duty room in the gatehouse to carry the lantern for him and rode on horseback to Wang Liu-erh's place.
After calling for someone to open the door, he asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Where's Father?"
"Father's asleep in the bedroom," replied Ch'in-t'ung.
Thereupon, the two of them closed the door and made their way back to the kitchen in the rear of the house.
Old Mother Feng said to him, "So Master Tai-an has finally shown up. Your Auntie Han has been expecting you, but you were not to be seen. She has set aside a portion of something for you."
She then opened a kitchen cabinet and pulled out a platter of donkey meat, a saucer of preserved roast chicken, two bowls of birthday noodles, and a carafe of wine for him.
Tai-an ate for a while and then offered Ch'in-t'ung some wine, saying, "Come over here. I can't manage all of this wine. The two of us might as well finish this carafe off between us."
"It was set aside for you," said Ch'in-t'ung. "Drink it yourself."
"I've just had a goblet a little while ago," said Tai-an.
Thereupon, the two of them proceeded to finish it off together.
When they were done, Tai-an said, "Old Mother Feng, I've got something to say to you. Don't be offended. It seems to me that you're supposed to be keeping house for the Sixth Lady, and yet here you are, right now, keeping house for Auntie Han. When I get home, just see if I speak to the Sixth Lady about it, or not."
Old Mother Feng gave him a playful slap, saying, "You crazy monkey! You'll drop dead in your tracks someday! Cut it out!
Those may be words but they don't make utterances.
If you go home and say that sort of thing, you'll have her upset with me for the rest of my life, and I won't dare go near her."
While Tai-an and Old Mother Feng were bandying words, who would have thought that Ch'in-t'ung had stationed himself under the window of the bedroom in order to surreptitiously eavesdrop on the events within.
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had swallowed a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, and washed it down with distilled spirits. After taking off all his clothes, he had gone to bed in order to engage in sexual intercourse with the woman. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he opened the bag of sexual implements, fastened the silver clasp around the base of his penis, fitted the sulfur-imbrued ring around his turtle head, and, pinching up one and a half thousandths of an ounce of the pink ointment the Indian monk had given him, which he kept in a little silver box, daubed it in the eye of his urethra. In no time at all, the medication began to take effect. His organ became engorged with rage,
Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
Its sunken eye grew round, and
Its distended blood vessels were all exposed.
It was the color of purple liver, was six or seven inches long, and more than ordinarily thick and large.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Secretly delighted in his heart,[8]
thinking to himself, "Sure enough, this Indian monk's medicine is something else."
The woman, who had stripped herself stark naked, sat in his lap and pumped his organ with her hand, saying, "No wonder you wanted distilled spirits to drink, since it turns out that this is what you're up to."
She then went on to ask, "Where did you get this medication?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily recounted the whole story, from the beginning, of how he had obtained the medicine from the Indian monk.
He then started out by telling the woman to recline faceup on the bed, supporting her back on a pair of pillows, while she guided his organ to its destination with her hand. His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before he was able to achieve any penetration. The woman's vaginal secretions then began to overflow, until, in a little while, it felt smoother, and the knob of his glans was completely submerged.[9] Hsi-men Ch'ing was exhilarated by the spirits he had consumed and gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts,[10] until he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.[11]
The woman, for her part, was drunk with lecherous desires. Reclining languidly on the pillows, she gave vent to incessant groans of satisfaction, protesting again and again, "My big-dicked daddy! This whore of yours is going to die at your hands today."
She then went on to say, "Whatever else you do, save some energy to play around with my backside."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, turned the woman over so she was kneeling on the edge of the bed, plunged his organ into her orifice, lifted up her haunches, and slammed away at her with all his might. As he slammed away at her:
The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.
"Daddy," the woman said to him. "Keep on slamming away at this whore of yours. Don't stop. Better yet, why don't you move the lamp over, so you can get a better view of the fun?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, moved the lamp closer, told the woman to stick her two feet straight back, and then straddled them, while he lifted up her thighs, assumed a squatting position, and proceeded to thrust away. The woman, from her position below him, stimulated her clitoris with one hand, while raising her haunches to meet him, and making quavery noises without end.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to the woman, "When your husband gets home, I'll send him to Yang-chou, along with Lai-pao and Ts'ui Pen, in order to take delivery of a consignment of salt. Then, after they have taken delivery of the salt, and sold it, I'll send him to Hu-chou to arrange a shipment of woven silk goods. How would that be?"
"My good daddy!" exclaimed the woman, "Send him wherever you want, just so he's out of the way. What's the point of keeping the cuckold idle at home?"
She then went on to ask, "As for the shop, who will you put in charge of it?"
"I'll keep Pen the Fourth at home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have him take care of the business in his stead."
"That's all right, then," said Wang Liu-erh. "Let Pen the Fourth take care of it."
While the two of them were engaging in sexual intercourse, who would have thought that Ch'in-t'ung, from his vantage point outside the window, heard everything so clearly that he might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
Tai-an, who happened to come in from the back and noticed him eavesdropping beneath the window, gave him a playful slap, saying, "What's the point of listening to them for no good reason? We'd do better to take advantage of the time before they get up to go out somewhere on our own."
Ch'in-t'ung, accordingly, accompanied him outside.
"You don't know about it," said Tai-an, "but in the little lane right behind here, two fine young girls have recently shown up. When I was riding over on horseback just now, I went by there and got a look at them. They're working at that place, the madam of which is called Lu Ch'ang-t'ui, or Longleg Lu. One of them is named Chin-erh, and the other is named Sai-erh, and they're both no more than fifteen or sixteen years old. If we get the houseboy I brought with me to act as a lookout for us here, we can go over there and have some fun for a while."
He then instructed the houseboy, saying, "You stay here and listen at the gate. We're going out onto the street to relieve ourselves. If they start looking for us inside, just step over to the mouth of the little lane there and call for us."
When he had finished giving his instructions, the two of them, traversing the moonlit ground, strode into the little lane.
It so happens that this lane was called Butterfly Lane, and there were ten or more establishments along it whose owners made their living by operating unlicensed houses of prostitution. Tai-an was already inebriated, and it seemed like half a day before his calls succeeded in getting anyone to open the gate.
It so happened that the procurer and the madam, Longleg Lu, were engaged, just then, under the lamplight, in weighing out the day's take of silver on a big scale with its yellow yard. When they saw that two intruders had barged in like avenging spirits, they promptly blew out the lamp in their inner room. The procurer, who recognized that Tai-an was a head servant in the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, came out and offered him a seat.
"Call out the two girls," demanded Tai-an, "so they can sing a song for us, and then we'll go."
"I'm afraid you've come a step too late, sir," explained the procurer. "The two of them are both engaged with customers just now."
Without permitting any further explanation,
Tai-an swept into the interior in large strides, where he found it to be as dark as a cave, since none of the lamps were lit. On the k'ang there were two senior wine-making artisans, wearing white felt caps.
One of them had already lain down on the k'ang, while the other had just finished taking off his foot-bindings and asked, "Who is that coming into the room?"
"I'll fuck your mother's hole!" exclaimed Tai-an, and, without any warning, he sent a clenched fist whistling into him, leaving the wine-maker with no alternative but to complain vociferously as he flew outside, without even putting on his foot-bindings and stockings. The other one, also, crawled up off the surface of the k'ang, and:
Stumbling at every step,
followed him outside.
"Light up the lamps!" called out Tai-an, and he cursed, saying, "Those lousy uncivilized vagrants! They actually had the nerve to ask who I am, did they! It's lucky for them I didn't choose to pluck them clean, just now, but let them get away, for no good reason. How do you suppose they would have liked it if I had them dragged into the yamen and given a taste of our new ankle-squeezers?"
Longleg Lu came forward at this point, lit the lamps, and, bowing repeatedly, said, "Temper your rage, my good brethren. They're from out of town and don't know who's who. You've got to make allowances for them."
Then she instructed Chin-erh and Sai-erh, "Come on out and sing a song for your two uncles."
Lo and behold, the two of them, with their hair done up in casual "bag of silk" spiral buns, wearing bleached white blouses, and red and green silk skirts, came forward and said, "We didn't know that our two uncles were coming today, and it's already late at night, so we have been caught unprepared."
Four saucers of pickled vegetables were then laid out, in addition to which there were saucers of duck eggs, dried shrimp, preserved fish mash, salted fish, the meat from a braised pig's head, dried sausage, and the like.
Tai-an proceeded to embrace Sai-erh where he was sitting, while Ch'int'ung, for his part, hugged Chin-erh. Tai-an noticed that Sai-erh was wearing a pink silk scent bag, so he reached into his sleeve for a handkerchief, and the two of them exchanged love tokens. In a little while, wine was decanted, and Sai-erh poured out a cup and offered it to Tai-an.
Before this, Chin-erh had already taken up a *p'i-p'a*, and, after proffering a cup of wine to Ch'in-t'ung:

Commencing to sing in full voice,
she sang a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":
The camp of mist and flowers,
Is truly difficult to endure.
One simply never has the spare time to sit down and relax.
One's days are spent welcoming visitors and treating guests.
The livelihood of the entire establishment is totally dependent on me alone.
When night falls, I am also the one under pressure from the loan sharks.
As for the old procuress,
She doesn't care whether I am dead or alive.
I have to stand outside the door until the late watches of the night;
But, when evening comes, who bothers to ask whether I am hungry or full?
If I manage to last another three to five years in the camp of mist and flowers,
The chances of my surviving are few, while the chances of my dying are many.
I can't help the fact that the tears in my eyes come and go like shuttles.[12]
Only when the iron tree shall blossom forth,[13]
Will I ever be able to harvest my garden and reap my just reward.[14]
When Chin-erh had finished singing, Sai-erh poured another cup of wine and offered it to Tai-an, after which she took over the *p'i-p'a* and sang another song to the same tune:
When I enter my room,
And look around me,
All I can see is that *p'i-p'a* hanging on the plastered wall.
I notice that the *p'i-p'a* is covered with dust.
Reaching into my sleeve and pulling out a handkerchief,
I brush away the dust.
Holding it in my arms, I tune the strings, and play a lonesome melody,
My tears gushing like a spring.
When I possessed that lover of mine, how happy we were,
But now that my lover has gone, he's abandoned me just like that neglected *p'i-p'a*.
When he was here, how we used to sing together and play together;
But at the present time, I am left all by myself.
I can't help shedding tears of desolation.
The keepsake remains, and I will hold on to it,
But I don't know where that man of mine is to be found.
Just as she was in full voice, the houseboy suddenly appeared to call them away.
The two of them hastily got up to go, and Tai-an said to Sai-erh, "We'll come to see you again another day."
When he had finished speaking, they went out the door and returned to Wang Liu-erh's place, where they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had just gotten up, and the woman was having a drink of wine with him.
The two of them went into the kitchen, and Tai-an asked, "Old Mother Feng, has Father been looking for us?"
"Father has not been looking for you," said Old Mother Feng. "He merely asked if the horse had come back, to which I replied that it had. That's all he had to say."
The two of them sat down in the kitchen and asked Old Mother Feng for some tea. After each of them had drunk a cup of tea, they had the houseboy light the lantern and lead the horse outside.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to get up and go, the woman said to him, "Father, this is nice heated wine. Have another cup. Or, perhaps, you're going to have more to drink when you get home."
"I'm not going to drink any more when I get home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, he picked up the wine and drained another cup.
"Now that you're going," the woman asked him, "when will you come by for another visit?"
"I won't come back until I've sent your husband and the others off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When he had finished speaking, a maidservant brought him a cup of tea to rinse out his mouth with, and Wang Liu-erh saw him to the door. Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing mount his horse and go home.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien and the rest had assembled in Yüeh-niang's room to listen to Nun Hsüeh's two disciples sing Buddhist songs for their entertainment, and it was only after the first watch that she returned, temporarily, to her own quarters.
Upon her arrival there, she thought to herself, "A while ago, when Yüeh-niang accused Tai-an of being duplicitous in his response to her, I wonder what he was up to."
With this in mind, she looked in the bedroom for the bag of sexual implements but couldn't find it.
She called for Ch'un-mei and interrogated her, but she said she hadn't taken it.
"A while ago, when you weren't here," she reported, "Father came into the room and fumbled about in the drawers of the cabinet on the rear wall of the bedstead, before going off somewhere. Who knows where that bag is to be found?"
"When did he come in here," Chin-lien asked, "without my knowing about it?"
"Mother had just gone back to the rear compound to see Nun Hsüeh," said Ch'un-mei, "when Father came in, wearing an informal skullcap. I asked him what he was up to, but he didn't reply."
"He must have taken those things off to the place of some whore in the licensed quarter," opined Chin-lien. "When he gets home, I'll subject him to a thorough interrogation."
Who could have anticipated that when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, seeing that it was late at night, he didn't even go back to the rear compound. Ch'in-t'ung, carrying the lantern, escorted him as far as the postern gate leading into the garden, from which point he made his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Ch'in-t'ung then took the lantern back to the rear compound and turned it over to Hsiao-yü, who put it away.
At this time, Wu Yüeh-niang, along with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and the two nuns, were sitting together in the master suite.
Yüeh-niang asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Has Father come home?"
To which Ch'in-t'ung replied, "Father is here. He's gone to the Sixth Lady's quarters in the front compound."
"Just look at him!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "How unprincipled can you get? Everyone is waiting for him here, and he doesn't even bother to come in."
Li P'ing-erh hastened out to the front compound and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The Second Lady is in the rear compound, waiting for you to come celebrate the eve of her birthday. Why have you come into my quarters for no good reason?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed, saying, "I'm drunk. Tomorrow will do just as well."
"Even if you're drunk," said Li P'ing-erh, "you could go back to the rear compound and share a cup with her. If you refuse to go, you can hardly avoid upsetting the Second Lady."
Thereupon, by means of vigorous urging, she succeeded in getting Hsimen Ch'ing to go back to the rear compound.
After Li Chiao-erh had offered him a cup of wine, Yüeh-niang said, "What were you doing today, drinking all by yourself at the house over there, until this time of night?"
"I was drinking with Brother Ying the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"There you are," said Yüeh-niang. "Just as I said, without a companion, how could anyone drink all by himself?"
Having said this, she dropped the matter and made an end of it.
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not sit around very long before picking up his feet and stealing off to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound.
It so happens that, as a result of taking the Indian monk's medicine at Wang Liu-erh's place, he was still so much in the grip of the aphrodisiac that, even after fooling around with the woman all day, although he was on the verge of ejaculation, he had been unable to get himself off. His organ was stiffer and harder than ever and resembled an iron pestle.
When he arrived in her quarters, he had Ying-ch'un help him off with his clothes and then climbed into bed, intending to sleep with Li P'ing-erh. Li P'ing-erh had not expected him to return and was already asleep on the bed with Kuan-ko.
Turning her head around, and seeing who it was, she said, "You might as well have gone to sleep in the rear compound. What are you coming back here for? The child has just dropped off and is sleeping soundly. I'm really not in the mood for it, and besides, my period has come on, and it wouldn't be convenient. Go and sleep in someone else's quarters, why don't you, instead of coming here to pester me."
Before she knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck, held her down, and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy slave! Your daddy has it in his heart to sleep with you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly exposed his organ for Li P'ing-erh to see.
Li P'ing-erh was frightened to death and exclaimed, "Ai-ya! How did you ever manage to make it that big?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and explained how he had taken the Indian monk's medicine, saying, "If you refuse to sleep with me, I'll be so randy it will be the death of me."
"What am I to do?" said Li P'ing-erh. "My period came on two days ago and isn't over yet. It would be better to wait a while until it's over, and then I'll sleep with you. Today, you might just as well spend the night at the Fifth Lady's place. It's all the same."
"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I don't know why, but the only thing I want to do is sleep with you. Right now, do I have to:
Sacrifice a chicken in order to plead with you?
On the other hand, you could get a maidservant to fetch some water, and wash yourself before sleeping with me. That ought to take care of it."
"You make me laugh," said Li P'ing-erh. "Where have you been drinking today, to make you drunk enough to come home and give me such a hard time? Even if I were to wash myself, I still wouldn't be clean. For a man's body to be contaminated by a woman's menses is not only filthy, but bad luck as well. If I should die as a result of this, you'll look for me in vain."
Thereupon, unable to resist his pressure any longer, she had Ying-ch'un fetch some water and washed her private parts clean before getting into bed in order to engage in sexual intercourse with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Strange as it may seem,
when Li P'ing-erh finally succeeded in coaxing Kuan-ko to sleep, no sooner did she crawl over to the other side of the bed, than the child woke up. After this had happened three times in a row, Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to get the child's toy clapper-drum [15] to keep him amused, and take him over to the wet nurse's room.
Only then were the two of them able to:
Enjoy themselves to their heart's content.
Hsi-men Ch'ing seated himself inside the bed curtains, while Li P'ing-erh got down on all fours beside him, allowing Hsi-men Ch'ing to insert his organ into her vagina from the rear. This position enabled him, under the lamplight, to observe his organ, as well as her snow-white bottom. Using both hands, he embraced her haunches in order to:
Observe the sight as he went in and out.
Half of his organ had already been engulfed, and he could hardly contain his excitement. Li P'ing-erh was afraid that his organ would carry blood out with it, so she continually wiped it off with a handkerchief. Hsi-men Ch'ing engaged in thrusting and retracting for a long time, gripping her around the hips with both hands, and kneading away at her. His organ penetrated her all the way to the root, without leaving even a hairsbreadth outside, while the pubic hair beneath his navel prickled her bottom, and he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.
Li P'ing-erh said, "Daddy! Slow down a bit. You're thrusting so hard it really hurts inside."
"If you're hurting," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll let go and be done with it."
Thereupon, he reached for the tea on the bedside table, and swallowed a mouthful of cold tea. Instantaneously, his semen arose and he:
Ejaculated like a geyser.
Truly:
His four limbs are suffused with pleasure;
His entire body a mass of spring feelings.
Only now did Hsi-men Ch'ing fully realize what a marvelous medicine he had obtained from the Indian monk. By the time they went to sleep, it was the third watch.
To resume our story, when P'an Chin-lien saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she merely assumed that he had taken the bag of sexual implements in order to enjoy himself with her, and failed to ascertain what he had been up to on the outside. That night she could only:
Silently gnash her silvery teeth,
close the door, and go to sleep.
Wu Yüeh-niang invited Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang to spend the night with her in the master suite. Nun Wang took the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that she had procured, along with the medication concocted by Nun Hsüeh, and surreptitiously handed them over to Yüeh-niang.
Nun Hsüeh instructed Yüeh-niang, saying, "If you select a *jen-tzu* day,[16] take these preparations with some wine, and then sleep with your husband that night, you will be sure to conceive. But you must not let even a single person know what you are doing."
Yüeh-niang promptly put the medications away and bowed in gratitude to the two nuns.
"I waited expectantly for you throughout the first month," Yüeh-niang said to Nun Wang, "but you never came."
"That's a fine thing to say!" protested Nun Wang. "I was going to come and see you, but then I said to myself, 'I might as well wait until the Second Lady's birthday in the fourth month, when I'll be able to come together with Reverend Hsüeh.' Who would have thought that, thanks to the Reverend here, I was able to procure the critical ingredient. It is the afterbirth of the firstborn child of a certain family's daughter-in-law. It just so happened that Reverend Hsüeh was there and was able to obtain it surreptitiously from the midwife, with whom she was familiar, for three mace of silver. We have brought it here after cleansing it with alum water, dehydrating it according to formula in a vessel containing a new pair of coupled male and female tiles, sifting it through a heavy gauze sieve, and then mixing it into the talismanic potion provided by Reverend Hsüeh."
"I fear I have put the two of you, Reverend Hsüeh and Reverend Wang, to a lot of trouble," said Yüeh-niang.
Thereupon, she brought out two taels of silver for each of them and said, "In the future, if I should in fact conceive, I will also provide Reverend Hsüeh with a bolt of dark brown silk with which to make a cassock."
Nun Hsüeh placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "I am most grateful for the Bodhisattva's good-heartedness."
As the saying goes:
You may peddle a load of truths for ten days without making a sale;
While, in a single day, a load of falsehoods will actually sell out.[17]
Truly:
If persons of this ilk were really capable of attaining Buddhahood;

The monks and nuns dwelling in this world would overflow like water.

Before she drew the perfumed curtains
And settled to the work of love,
Her brows were knit in sadness at the thought
The night would be so short.
She bade her lover hasten to the bed
And warm the silk-embroidered coverlets.
Then was their love as that of butterflies and bees.
They stripped themselves: their passion knew no bounds.
She left the lamp to burn beside the curtains
That he from time to time might gaze
Upon the beauty of her face.

It was the birthday of Li Jiao'er. Nun Wang came from the temple of Guanyin, bringing with her Nun Xue from the Temple of Lotus Blossoms. With them came two young novices, Miaofeng and Miaoqu. Wu Yueniang had been told that Xue was deeply versed in matters of religion and hastened to welcome her. The nun was wearing a religious hat, and a long robe the color of tea leaves. Her hair was tonsured. She was very stout and big. Her mouth was like that of a fish; her cheeks like those of a pig. When she came in, she made reverence to Yueniang and the others; and Yueniang and the others returned her greeting. The nun raised her eyebrows, closed her eyes, put on all sorts of airs, and spoke in an extremely affected voice. The ladies addressed her as "Noble Xue." She, in return, called Wu Yueniang Buddha of the Household or else My Lady. This made Yueniang think highly of her.

That day Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang had come to call and Yueniang entertained them so well that the tables overflowed. It was far beyond the ordinary range of entertainment.

The two novices, Miaofeng and Miaoqu, were no more than fourteen or fifteen years old, and they were very sedate. They were given something to eat and drink. Then everybody went to the upper room, and the ladies listened to a sermon from the nun.

Yueniang saw Shutong carrying things from the outer court and said to him: "Has that monk who eats meat and drinks wine gone yet?"

"Yes," Shutong said, "he has just gone. Father saw him to the door."

Aunt Wu asked: "Where did he meet that monk?"

"My husband went to see Censor Cai on his way," Yueniang said, "and he brought the monk back with him from the temple. He eats meat and drinks wine. My husband has been asking him for some medicine or other. The monk would take no money, and I have no idea how they got on with their business."

"The question of taking meat and wine is one of great delicacy," Nun Xue said. "Nuns generally observe the vow of abstinence, but monks do not seem to trouble much about it. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures say that, if we take but a mouthful of meat, we shall suffer for it in the next life."

"We eat meat every day," Aunt Wu said, "so we must be committing a great many sins."

"Oh, but it is different for you," the nun said. "You are able to enjoy meat as a reward for virtue in your last life. It is right and proper that you should enjoy both wealth and comfort. If plants are set in the ground in the spring, we may expect a harvest in the autumn."

Meanwhile, Ximen Qing had parted from the Indian monk and returned to his room. Daian whispered to him: "Aunt Han has sent her brother to ask you to go to her. It is her birthday today and she would very much like to see you."

Ximen Qing now had the medicine the monk had given him, and he desired nothing better than to try its effects. Wang Liu'er's invitation came at the right moment. He told Daian to prepare his horse and sent Qintong to the woman's house with a jar of wine. Then he went to Pan Jinlian's room for his case of instruments. Wearing plain clothes, with an ordinary hat and eyeshades, he rode to Wang Liu'er's house. When he got there, he told Qintong to stay and sent Daian back with the horse. "If anyone asks where I am," he told the boy, " say that I am going through the accounts at the house in Lion Street." Daian went back on his master's horse.

Wang Liu'er came out and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. Then she sat down beside him. "I only asked you to come that you might have some amusement," she said. "It was good of you to send the wine."

"I had forgotten that it is your birthday today," Ximen said. "I have been to say farewell to someone outside the city and have only this moment  come back." He took a present from his sleeve and gave it to her. "I have brought you something," he said. The woman took the gift and examined it. It was a pair of gold pins with the lucky character *shou.*

"It is very pretty," Wang Liu'er said, and made a reverence to thank him. Ximen gave her five *qian* of silver and asked her to give a boy something and send him for a jar of Southern spirits. Wang Liu'er laughed. "Are you tired of ordinary wine," she said, "that you need Southern spirits?" But she hastened to give the boy five *fen* and sent him for the spirits. Then she took Ximen's cloak and asked him to go to the inner room. She made some excellent tea for him and set out a small table. They played dominoes for a while, then she warmed some wine.

Daian went home. He was very weary after walking so far with the monk. He went to sleep and slept till evening. Then he woke up, rubbed his eyes, and saw that it was late. He went to the inner court to get a lantern and make ready to go for Ximen Qing. But he stood there for a while without doing anything. Yueniang spoke to him. "Your father saw the monk to the door, but, instead of coming to change his clothes, he suddenly went out. Where did he go?"

"Father went to Lion Street to inspect the accounts," Daian said.

"He can't be inspecting accounts all day," said Yueniang.

"No," Daian said. "When he had finished the books, he had something to drink all by himself."

"All by himself, indeed!" Yueniang said. "You are lying. A boy came from Han Daoguo after him. What did he want?"

"The boy came to find out when Uncle Han would be here."

"You young rascal!" Yueniang said. "You are up to some trick or other."

Daian dared say no more. Yueniang told Xiaoyu to give him a lantern. "Tell your father," she said, "that the Second Lady is waiting for him to come and celebrate her birthday."

Daian went to the shop. Shutong and Clerk Fu were sitting behind the counter. On it were a bottle of wine, several dishes, and a plate of tripe. Ping'an came in bringing two jars of fish paste. "Excellent!" said Daian, putting down his lantern, "I have come just in time." Then he said jokingly to Shutong: "Ah, you naughty little strumpet. I have been looking everywhere for you, and you have been hiding here all this time, drinking."

"What did you want me for?" Shutong said. "Do you wish me to adopt you as my grandson for a while?"

"Little boy," Daian said, "would you bandy words with me? I was looking for you because I want to do some business with your behind." He pushed him onto the couch and kissed him, but the boy freed himself.

"You queer creature," he said, "I find it hard to scold you as I should like. Now you've hurt my mouth and knocked my hat off."

Clerk Fu saw Shutong's hat on the ground. "Why, that's a new hat," he said, and told Ping'an to pick it up before somebody stepped on it. Shutong picked up the hat and threw it on a couch. His face was very red.

"Well, you strumpet," Daian said, "I was only playing with you. Why do you get so angry?" He dragged Shutong to the bed and spat in his mouth. They overturned the wine, and it was spilled on the counter. Clerk Fu was afraid it would stain the account books. He hastily found a cloth and dried it up.

"Don't play the fool any more," he said, "or you will get angry with one another."

"I don't know where this strumpet can have been brought up," Daian said, "to make him as stubborn as this." Shutong's hair was in disorder.

"A game is a game," he said, "but this is not a game. You have filled my mouth with your filthy spittle."

"Ah, you slave," said Daian, "this is not the first time you have swallowed such a liquid. You are always doing it, and who can tell how often?"

Ping'an heated some wine and gave it to Daian. "Drink this and go for our master. You can settle with him when you come back."

"Yes," Daian said, "wait for me. When I come back, I will have a word with you. Unless I make you see spirits and ghosts, you will think I am not to be feared. I shall spit on you again. I am the son of no human parents, so I can do whatever I like." He drank his wine, summoned two small boys to accompany him with the lantern, and himself rode on horseback. When he came to Wang Liu'er's house, he knocked at the door and asked Qintong where their master was. "He is asleep," said Qintong. They shut the gate and went to the kitchen.

There, old woman Feng said to him: "Your Aunt Han waited a long time for you, but you did not come. Here is your supper." She took from a cupboard a plate of ass's flesh, a dish of cold roast chicken, two bowls of birthday noodles, and a pot of wine.

Daian drank some wine. Then he said to Qintong: "Come here. I can't drink all this wine. You must drink some for me."

"It is yours," said Qintong. "Drink it yourself." Daian said he had already had some wine. The two boys finished it off together.

Then Daian said to old woman Feng: "If you will excuse me, there is something I should like to tell you. You are really attached to the household of our Sixth Lady and are supposed to work only for her. But I am always finding you here working for Aunt Han. I am afraid I shall have to tell the Sixth Lady."

The old woman cut him short. "Oh, you funny young monkey," she said. "You keep quiet! If you say a word to her, she will never forgive me and I shall not be able to go and see her."

While Daian and old woman Feng were talking, Qintong slyly went to the window of the inner room, listened, and peeped in to see what was going on there.

Ximen Qing took a pill with the spirit, undressed himself and sat down on the side of the bed. Then he opened the case in which he kept his instruments. First he put the silver clasp on the root of his penis, and fixed a sulfur ring on top of it. Then he took a little of the red powder from a silver box, no more than the prescribed dose, and put it into the horse's eye. The medicine worked at once. The penis's erection was amazingly aggressive; its head swelled and the single eye opened wide; the lateral sinews stood out plainly; it was as dark as liver in color, seven inches long, and much thicker than usual. Ximen Qing was highly pleased: he decided that the medicine was a very fine thing. She sat naked on his knee, took his penis in her hands and said: "So this is why you wished to drink spirits. You wished to make him like this." She asked Ximen where he had obtained the medicine, and he told her about the Indian Monk.

She laid herself upon the bed, with two pillows under her. He wanted to put his penis to work, but its head was so swollen that it was a long time before he met with any success, and even then he made very little progress. Eventually the juices of love flowed from her and the path became gradually easier; the prick advanced, but its head was hardly covered. Then the wine that he had drunk came to the rescue; he withdrew a little, then plunged in deep and enjoyed untold rapture. She also had an exquisite orgasm; she lay on the bed as if unable to move, and said tearfully, "Dearest of men, your wonderful prick has killed me." Soon she whispered, "My darling, my dearest, would you like to enjoy the flower of my bottom?" He turned her onto her stomach and his penis returned to action, so violently that it made a loud noise. "Shove, darling, shove," cried Wang Liu'er, "don't be afraid. If you like, bring a candle, and the pleasure will be greater." The candle was moved nearer, and below him she opened her legs wide. Ximen withdrew and plunged in, while she moved her thighs to meet him and titillated the flower in her womb with her trembling hand.

"I am going to send your husband to Yangzhou," Ximen Qing said. "He shall go with Laibao and Cui Ben to get the salt. When that business is done, I will send him to Huzhou to buy some silk."

"Darling," said Wang Liu'er, "send him where you like. Why should you keep him here in idleness? But who will take charge of the shop?"

"I will put Ben the Fourth to look after the shop," Ximen said.

"Yes," said Wang Liu'er, "Ben the Fourth can look after it. That is a good idea."

So these two went about the business of love and Qintong watched them through the window. Daian came along from the kitchen and tapped Qintong on the back. "You must not stand here," he said. "Come away before they get up." Qintong went with Daian, and Daian said to him: "In the lane behind here there is a bawdy house where there are two young girls who have but lately come. One day when I was riding that way, I happened to see them. It was at Long-legged Lu's place. One is called Jin'er and the other Sai'er. Neither of them is more than eighteen. We will make the other boys stay here, and we will go and have some fun with the girls."

They told the boys to watch the door, washed their hands, and said: "If we are wanted, come to the lane behind and call us." Then they went off to the lane. The moon was shining. The lane was known as Butterfly Alley. There were not more than ten houses in it and all were for the accommodation of the public.

Daian was a little drunk. He made a loud rat-tat at the door. Some time passed. The brothel keeper Wang Ba and the procuress Long-legged Lu had been weighing silver with a balance by the light of a candle when in rushed the two boys like a couple of demons. The light was blown out, but the brothel keeper recognized Daian as Ximen Qing's servant and asked them to take a seat.

"Call the two singing girls to sing us a song," said Daian.

"I am afraid you are too late, masters," Wang Ba the brothel keeper said. "They have both got visitors."

Daian wasted no words, but dashed into the inner room. There was no light but that of the moon, but he could see two men with white felt hats on the bed. One was actually lying on the bed and the other was taking off his boots. "Who is this?" one of them cried.

"My dagger to your mother's cunt," Daian said, and let fly his fist.

"Ai ya," cried the man. He ran away without troubling to put on his boots. The other got off the bed and ran away too. Daian demanded that the lamps be lit.

"The thieves, the rogues!" he cried. "How dare they ask who I am? I would have pulled out all their hair. It is lucky for them I let them get away. I ought to have sent them to the police court and let them taste the new thumbscrews there."

Long-legged Lu came and lighted the lamps. "Please do not be angry, young masters," she said. "They were strangers and did not know you. Don't treat it too seriously." She told the two girls to sing for the boys.

The two girls were wearing dresses of red and white, and their hair was done like a bundle of silk. "We did not expect you," they said. "It is late, and we have made no preparations." They brought four dishes of dried fruits, ducks' eggs, dried prawns and salt fish, besides pig's head and sausages. Daian looked closely at the girls. Sai'er had a tiny pink silk satchel for perfume, and he gave her his handkerchief in exchange for it. Then wine was brought. Sai'er took a cup and poured wine for Daian. Jin'er took up her lute, and, after offering wine to Qintong, sang this song:

In the camp of the flowers of the mist
Life is not easy.
I may not choose to sit, or yet to stand
All day I must be ready to welcome strangers.
On me the fortune of this house depends
When evening comes, the procuress
Makes me give up my earnings.
What does she care whether I live or die?
I stand beside the gate till midnight
When I come in, none asks if I am hungry.
If I must live for but a few years more
Among the flowers of the mist
My life will be a living death.
The tears drop from my cheeks like falling petals
I cannot hold them back;
Only when the iron tree comes into blossom,
Will I ever get my reward.

Jin'er finished her song, and Sai'er gave Daian a cup of wine. Then she, in turn, took the lute and was about to sing when a boy suddenly came in. Daian rose and said to Sai'er: "I will come and see you another day." Then he went back to Wang Liu'er's house, where Ximen Qing had got up and was drinking with his lover.

The two boys went to the kitchen and asked old woman Feng if their master had called for them. "No," she said, "he asked if his horse had come, and I said it had. That was all."

The boys sat down and asked old woman Feng to give them some tea. While they were drinking it, Daian told the other boys to light the lantern and bring out the horse.

Ximen Qing got up to go. "The wine is good and hot," Wang Liu'er said to him. "Won't you drink another cup, or are you going to have more when you reach home?"

"No, I'm not going to drink any more at home," Ximen Qing said. He drank the cup she offered him.

"When will you come again?" the woman asked.

"I will come when I have sent your husband on this business." The maid brought a cup of tea so that Ximen Qing might rinse his mouth. Wang Liu'er took him to the door; he mounted his horse and rode home.

* * *

Pan Jinlian was listening with the others to Nun Xue and the two young novices singing their sacred songs when she suddenly remembered that Yueniang had scolded Daian and said she did not know what tricks he was playing. She went to her room and found that the love instruments had disappeared. She asked Chunmei about them. "Yes, Father came here," the maid said. "He looked in the drawers and in the bed, but I don't know where he found them."

"When did he come?" Jinlian asked.

"You were in the inner court with Nun Xue. I asked him what he was looking for, but he would not tell me."

"He has taken them to the bawdy house," Jinlian said. "I will find out when he comes back." She went back to the inner court.

It was very late when Ximen Qing returned. He did not go to the inner court. Qintong took a lantern to light him, and they went through the garden gate to the rooms of Li Ping'er. Qintong took his master's hat and clothes and gave them to Xiaoyu. When Yueniang saw the boy, she asked if his master had returned. "Yes," the boy said. "He has gone to the Sixth Lady's room."
"The fellow hasn't the slightest regard for decent behavior," Yueniang said. "Here we have all been waiting for him and he doesn't come."
Li Ping'er went quickly to her room and said to Ximen Qing: "The Second Lady is waiting to offer you wine on her birthday. Why have you come here?"
Ximen Qing laughed. "I have had too much wine already," he said. "I will see her tomorrow."
"Even so," said Li Ping'er, "you must come with me and take a cup of wine in the inner court. If you do not, you will offend the Second Lady." She compelled him to go. Li Jiao'er offered him wine.
"Have you been alone all this time?" Yueniang asked him.
"I have been drinking wine with Brother Ying," Ximen Qing told her.
"Of course!" Yueniang said. "I knew you couldn't be drinking by yourself." She said no more.
Ximen Qing did not stay very long. He staggered over to Li Ping'er's rooms. He had not fully eased himself when he was with Wang Liu'er, because of the Indian Monk's pill that he had taken. He had worked long and lustily, yet his weapon was harder than ever, as stiff as an iron rod. He went into the room, gave his clothes to Yingchun, and asked Li Ping'er to let him go to bed. She had not expected him and was already in bed with Guan'ge. Now she said to him: "Please go somewhere else. The baby has just gone to sleep. Besides, I am not very well. Don't be silly. Go to somebody else." But Ximen embraced her and kissed her.
"I particularly want to stay here," he said. He showed her his weapon. It gave her a start.
"However did you make it so big?" she said.
Ximen Qing laughed. He told her about the Indian Monk and said: "If you won't let me sleep here, I shall die."
"But how can I?" Li Ping'er said. "I have been unwell for two days and I am not better yet. When I am better, I will certainly sleep with you, but please go to the Fifth Lady's room tonight. It is all the same to you."
"I don't know why," Ximen said, "but I feel I want you today. I am afraid I must insist. Tell the maid to bring some water, wash yourself, and we will sleep together."
"You make me laugh," Li Ping'er said. "You must be drunk or you wouldn't behave so scandalously. Even if I do wash, it won't be very pleasant. If, at a time like this, my juices meet a man, bad luck follows. If this means my death, I will certainly come and haunt you."
She could not get rid of him, and, at last, she told Yingchun to bring some water, and washed herself. They got to bed together. Strangely enough, the baby Guan'ge, who had gone to sleep, woke up the moment she turned her head. This he did three times. Li Ping'er told Yingchun to give him a comforter and take him to the nurse. Afterwards, they were able to enjoy themselves more freely.
Ximen Qing sat down inside the net, and she got onto hands and knees. He plunged in, admiring the ivory white of her legs in the candlelight. He maneuvered himself to enjoy the sight of the moving prick. He reached halfway, but could go no further; she was afraid that blood would flow, and tried to dry herself with a handkerchief. Ximen struggled for an hour, and at last he held her legs apart and achieved so clear a passage that they stroked each other with their pubic hair.
His orgasm was greater than imaginable, but she said, "Come carefully, please, that hurts."
"Now you will have all of me", he replied. On the table there was a cool potion; when he had drunk it the sperm flowed like water. His limbs relaxed comfortably, and he felt as fresh as the spring. He was beginning to appreciate the marvel of the Indian Monk's medicine. It was the third night watch when he went to sleep.
When Jinlian knew that Ximen had gone to Li Ping'er, she was quite sure that he had taken the instruments there. It never occurred to her that he might have been elsewhere too. She bit her lips with her silvery teeth and went to sleep.
That night Yueniang slept with the two nuns, Xue and Wang. Wang secretly gave her the afterbirth of a baby boy, which Nun Xue had made into a charm. Xue told Yueniang to pick out a *renzi* day, take the medicine with a little wine, and then sleep with her husband. "Do not let anyone know about this," she said, "and you will have a baby."
Yueniang took the medicine and thanked the two nuns. "I expected you in the first month," she said to Wang, "but you did not come."
"It is easy to promise," said Wang, "but not so easy to get such things as this. Fortunately, Nun Xue was equal to the occasion. She gave an old woman three *qian* of silver and got this from a young lady who had just given birth to her first baby. We got alum water and cleaned it, and cooked it on two new tiles. Everything was done in proper form. We sifted it through a very fine sieve, mingled it with drugs and charms, and here it is."
Again, Yueniang thanked them. Then she gave them two taels of silver and said, "If this is successful, Nun Xue shall have some yellow silk."
Nun Xue made a reverence to her. "Your Ladyship's very kind," she said. "Remember the proverb that says: 'Sometimes, though we try for ten days, it's impossible to sell a load of genuine stuff; yet in one day we can dispose of three loads that aren't genuine.'

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### Yüeh-niang Listens to the Exposition Of The Diamond Sutra; Li Kuei-chieh Seeks Refuge in the Hsi-men Ch'ing Household & Pan Jinlian Makes Mischief

Too ashamed to face the phoenix mirror, I grieve over my pink face;
Propping my fragrant cheek upon my hand,[1] I am too indolent to sleep.
My slender waist is so emaciated that my turquoise belt is loose;
As tears flow over my powdered face,[2] my golden hairpin falls out.
The annoying conduct of my fickle lover produces an aching sorrow;
It disturbs my fragrant heart[3] until my resentment is unending.
When will I be able to avail myself of the eastern wind;
To blow my handsome lover all the way to my pillow side?

when P'an Chin-lien realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken the bag of sexual implements and gone to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, she was so upset that she was unable to sleep all night long and secretly stored up resentment in her heart.
The next day, upon learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to the yamen, and that Li P'ing-erh was still combing her hair in her quarters, she lost no time in going back to the rear compound, where she said to Yüeh-niang, "Li P'ing-erh has been criticizing you severely behind your back. She said, 'Elder Sister puts on the airs of a grande dame, ordering people around as though she were holding court. It was someone else's birthday, but you insisted on taking charge. It was your husband who got drunk and came into my quarters when I was not there, but you shamed me before the others for no good reason, causing me to lose face. I was so upset by this that I went back up front and insisted that Father return to the rear compound, but after a while, somehow or other, he didn't remain there, but chose to come back to my quarters.' The two of them engaged in intimate conversation all night long and managed to expose everything but their hearts and entrails to me in the process."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, how could she help but be upset.
Turning to Sister-in-law Wu and Meng Yü-lou, she expostulated, "Luckily the two of you were here yesterday and saw what happened. I didn't say anything against her. When the page boy brought in the lantern, I merely asked him, 'Why hasn't Father come inside?' To which he replied, 'He's gone into the Sixth Lady's quarters.' I then said, 'The Second Lady is waiting here. How can he be so unprincipled as not to come inside?' If you stop to consider it, there was nothing intended to reflect upon her. How can she say that I put on the airs of a grande dame, or order people around as though I were holding court? She may think of me as a whorish wife, but I have always treated her as a decent person. It so happens that:
In knowing people, you can know their faces, but you can't know their hearts.[4]
How is one to judge what people are really like?
She turns out to be nothing but:
A needle in a wad of cotton;
A thorn in the flesh.
Who knows what tales she may have told our husband about me behind my back? No wonder she departed so resolutely for the front compound yesterday. My clever sister! Never fear! Even if our husband should choose to spend all his days in your quarters, without coming out, don't think that it would affect this heart of mine one way or the other. I relinquish him to the lot of you. You can do whatever you like. It's not as though I can't abide maintaining my widowhood. Remember how it was, not long after he married me, when for some time that lousy ruffian and I:
Had nothing to do with each other, either indoors or out.[5]
How do you suppose I managed to survive that?"
Sister-in-law Wu intervened from the sidelines, saying, "Sister-in-law, that's enough! Take the child into consideration. It has always been true that:
A grand councilor must have enough room in his gut to float a boat;[6]
The head of a household is a receptacle for catching dirty water.[7]
The good things that take place should be kept to yourself;
The bad things that happen should also be kept to yourself."[8]
"Sooner or later," said Yüeh-niang, "I'm going to confront her about those two charges of hers. I'll demand to know just how it is that I put on the airs of a grande dame, or order people around as though I were holding court."
This statement flustered Chin-lien so much that she blurted out, "Elder Sister! You'd better be magnanimous with her. As the saying goes:
A great person does not deign to notice the faults of petty persons;[9]
What petty person is there who has never committed some indiscretion?
As for the things she says about us to our husband behind our backs when she's got him in her room, who is there among the rest of us who hasn't been victimized by her allegations? After all, my quarters and hers are separated by only a common wall. If I didn't make allowances for her, there'd never be an end to it.
Whatever she does, she depends upon that child of hers to take advantage of the rest of us. And she has fine things to say too. For example, she says that in the future, when that child of hers grows up, he will:
Requite favor with favor, and
Requite enmity with enmity.[10]
So it looks like the rest of us are fated to die of starvation. You don't know the half of it."
"My dear lady!" said Sister-in-law Wu. "How could she have said any such thing?"
Yüeh-niang had nothing further to say about it, but, as the saying goes:
When an injustice is witnessed on the road,[11]
Someone will always try to shed light on it.[12]
Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had been, for some time, on extremely good terms with Li P'ing-erh. Whenever she was out of needles and thread, or shoe uppers, Li P'ing-erh would supply her with what she needed, giving her even the best quality satins and silks, or two or three fine handkerchiefs at a time. It goes without saying that she also surreptitiously supplied her with cash when the need arose. On that day, when she overheard these allegations about her, how could she help telling her about it.
Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters at the time, engaged in making a silk cord and amulet for her child to wear on the Dragon Boat Festival, along with different-colored little silk *tsung-tzu*, and tigers adorned with apotropaic artemisia leaves.[13] When she saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh come in, Li P'ing-erh offered her a seat, so she could look on with her as she continued with her work.
"Bring some tea for the young lady to drink," Li P'ing-erh instructed Ying-ch'un.
As they drank the tea, Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, "When you were invited back to the rear compound for tea a while ago, why didn't you come?"
"After seeing Father off," said Li P'ing-erh, "I thought I would take advantage of the morning coolness to start making up these miscellaneous things for the child to wear."
"This is not just talebearing,
mind you," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "but something has come up that I thought I should tell you about. It is reported that you said that Mother puts on the airs of a grande dame. You must have done something to annoy the Fifth Lady. In the rear compound, while speaking, thus and so, to Mother, she lodged a whole string of accusations against you. Right now, Mother wants to confront you about this. You mustn't say that I told you about it or she might take it amiss, but you ought to prepare something to say about it when you have to explain it to her."
Nothing might have happened if Li P'ing-erh had not heard about this, but having heard these words, she could not even lift the needle she was holding in her hand. Her two arms went soft on her, and she was rendered speechless for some time.
Facing Hsi-men Ta-chieh with the tears falling from her eyes, she said, "Young lady, I never said so much as a word of idle talk on this subject. Last night, while I was in the rear compound, on hearing the page boy say that Father had gone to my quarters, I came out front and urged him to go back to the master suite.
Since when did I ever say a word against anybody? Your mother has always been so kind to me, do you really think that I'm so:
Unconscious of right and wrong,[14]
as to say that sort of thing? And even if I were to have done so, to whom would I have said it? There has to be some evidence for such an allegation."
Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, "When she heard Mother say that sooner or later she was going to confront you about these charges, she became flustered. If it were up to me, the two of you ought to have it out between you, like:
The gong on the one hand,
And the drum on the other."
"As though I could hope to contend with that mouth of hers!" exclaimed Li P'ing-erh. "All I can do is leave it to Heaven. One way or the other, she is constantly plotting against me. Mother and son, it won't come to an end until she manages to underhandedly do away with one or the other of us."
When she had finished speaking, she started to cry. Hsi-men Ta-chieh sat down and endeavored to comfort her for a while.
Whom should they see at this point but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "The Sixth Lady and the young mistress are invited to come and eat."
She then returned to the rear compound. Li P'ing-erh dropped her needlework and accompanied Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to the master suite. She did not eat anything, however, but returned to her quarters and went to bed. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen, he found her asleep and asked Ying-ch'un about it.
"Mother hasn't eaten a thing all day," reported Ying-ch'un.
This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he went over to her and demanded, "Why haven't you eaten anything? Tell me what's the matter."
He also noticed that her eyes were red with weeping and asked insistently, "What's troubling you? Tell me about it."
Li P'ing-erh promptly got up, rubbed her eyes, and said, "My eyes are sore. That's all. There's nothing wrong with me. I just didn't feel like eating anything today."
She did not utter a word about what had happened. Truly:
A whole breastful of intimate concerns,
Resides in what is not expressed in words.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Do not suppose that a beautiful woman is always foolish;
No amount of brightness and cleverness[15] may do her any good.
It is only because she is so well versed in human affairs,
That she has brought a bellyful of grief upon herself.[16]
While Hsi-men Ta-chieh was in the rear compound, she said to Yüeh-niang, "I asked her about it, and she asserted, 'I never said anything of the sort. And to whom am I alleged to have said it?' Moreover:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
she turned to me and wept, repeating that, in view of the kindness that Mother has always shown her, how could she ever have brought herself to say such a thing?"
"I simply don't believe it," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Sister Li is such a good person. How could she ever have said such a thing?"
"I imagine," said Yüeh-niang, "that the two of them must have had some minor falling out over who knows what, and that, when she was unable to induce our husband to act on her behalf, she came back to the rear compound and made these groundless allegations, making me out to be an object of obloquy. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is."

"Sister-in-law," said Wu K'ai's wife, "from now on you must be on your guard lest you do her an injustice. It's not that I'm just engaging in gossip behind her back, but she's worth more than a hundred P'an Chin-liens. She's good-hearted by nature. In the two or three years since she became a member of our family she hasn't made so much as a false step."
As they were talking, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in carrying a large bag made of blue cloth on his back.
"What have you got there?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"Thirty thousand taels worth of salt certificates," said Ch'in-t'ung. "Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pen have just arrived back from registering the granary vouchers in exchange for them at the Kao-yang customs station. Father said to see they were given something to eat. Right now, they're weighing out the silver and packing things up. Day after tomorrow, on the twentieth, which is an auspicious day, the two of them, along with Lai-pao, are to set off for Yang-chou.
"I fear my brother-in-law will be coming inside," said Sister-in-law Wu. "The two nuns and I will go visit for a while in the Second Lady's quarters."
Before she had even finished speaking, who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who lifted aside the portiere and came in. This so flustered Sister-inlaw Wu, along with Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang, that they lost no time in running off to Li Chiao-erh's quarters.
But they were not quick enough to avoid being seen by Hsi-men Ch'ing, who interrogated Yüeh-niang, saying, "That was Nun Hsüeh, the lousy fat shaven-pated whore! What's she doing here?"
Yüeh-niang replied, "How can you persist in being so:
Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued?
It's really outrageous. What's she ever done to annoy you? And how do you know that her name is Hsüeh?"
"You don't know the feats she's capable of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She inveigled the daughter of Vice Commissioner Ch'en into visiting the Ksitigarbha Nunnery, of which she was the abbess, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, where she engaged in illicit intercourse with a young scamp named Juan the Third. Who could have anticipated that this Juan the Third died on top of the young woman's body. Nun Hsüeh was an accessory before the fact, having received ten taels of silver for her cooperation. When the matter came to light, and she was brought into the yamen, I saw to it that she was stripped of her clothing, given twenty strokes of the bamboo, and ordered to marry a husband and return to lay life.[17] How is it now that she has not returned to lay life? How do you suppose she would like it if I had her dragged into the yamen and given another taste of the squeezers?"
"As though you didn't know any better!"
expostulated Yüeh-niang. "You persist in:
Blaspheming gods and profaning Buddhas.
Since she is a devoted Buddhist, I imagine that:
Her good roots continue to exist.
Why should she return to lay life for no good reason? You may not be aware of it, but she is known for her exemplary conduct."
"Just ask her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if she exhibits such exemplary conduct, how many men she can take on in a single night?"
"Stop talking so deliriously," said Yüeh-niang, "or you'll provoke me into a real tirade."
She then went on to ask, "When are you sending those three off on their mission?"
"I have just now dispatched Lai-pao to confer with our kinsman Ch'iao Hung," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He's going to put up five hundred taels, and I'm going to put up five hundred taels. The twentieth is an auspicious day, so they can start off then."
"Who will you put in charge of the silk goods store?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"I'll get Pen the Fourth to substitute for him," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang opened a trunk and got out the silver, which was duly weighed out and turned over to the three servants, who were in the summerhouse at the time, looking after the packing for their trip. Five taels of silver were weighed out for each of them, and they were told to return to their homes and take care of packing their personal belongings. But no more of this.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who walked into the summerhouse and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was supervising the packing.
"What are you having packed up, Brother?" he inquired.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained to him all about how, on the twentieth, he was sending Lai-pao and the others to Yang-chou to take delivery of the salt.
Raising his hand in salute, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Congratulations, Brother. When they get back from this trip you're sure to reap a large profit."
Hsi-men Ch'ing offered him a seat, on the one hand, while calling for tea, which they proceeded to drink together.
He then went on to ask, "When are Li the Third and Huang the Fourth going to receive payment of the silver that is due them?"
"They should receive payment no later than the end of this month," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They said to me the other day that right now, in Tung-p'ing prefecture, there is another contract being let for the purveying of twenty thousand taels worth of incense, and they would like to ask if you couldn't help them out in this temporary exigency[18] with the loan of another five hundred taels of silver. When they receive the payment for their current contract, they will bring it over to you, without touching so much as a candareen of it."
"As you can see," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm in the process of preparing to send my agents off to Yang-chou, but I'm so strapped for cash that I've had to borrow five hundred taels of silver from my kinsman Ch'iao Hung. Where would I come up with any additional silver?"
"They have repeatedly urged me," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to remind you that:
One guest does not trouble two hosts.
If you refuse to help them out in this exigency, where else would you have them go?"
"The shop of Hsü the Fourth, on the east side of the street outside the city gate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "owes me some money. I could transfer five hundred taels of what he owes me to them. How would that be?"
"That's the spirit," said Ying Po-chüeh.
As they were speaking, whom should they see but P'ing-an, who came in carrying a card and said, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling has sent Hsia Shou with an invitation for Father to pay him a visit tomorrow."
Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the invitation, which read, "So and so."
"The reason I have presumed to come visit you today," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is because there is something I want to tell you about. You know about this affair concerning Li Kuei-chieh from the quarter, I suppose. Has she not come to see you?"
"She hasn't been here since she left in the first month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know about any affair concerning her."
Ying Po-chüeh then set out to explain matters, saying, "It so happens that the third son in the household of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan is married to the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en [19] in the Eastern Capital. In the first month of this year, when they went to the Eastern Capital to wish him a happy new year, the old eunuch gave the two of them a thousand taels of silver as a new year's present. You may not know it, but this niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang's is as pretty as a picture. Really, if an artist were able to depict even half of her beauty, she would still present an elegant appearance. With someone like that at home, one would expect you to stick to her, but every day he allows Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang, the three or four of them, to inveigle him into carrying on in the licensed quarter. He has deflowered Ch'i Hsiang-erh, that little slavey from the Ch'i Family Establishment on Second Street, and has also been frequenting Li Kuei-chieh's place. He has even taken to pawning his wife's head ornaments, which has angered her so much that she has tried to hang herself at home. Who would have thought that the other day, earlier this month, she went to the Eastern Capital to celebrate the old eunuch's birthday and told him all about it. The old gentleman was so angry that he sent the names of these fellows to Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and Chu Mien has issued a mandate to the authorities of Tung-p'ing prefecture ordering that they be taken into custody. Yesterday Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang were all apprehended at Li Kuei-chieh's place. Li Kuei-chieh, herself, managed to hide out at Greenhorn Chu's place next door, where she spent the night, but today, she says, she is going to come to your place to beg for your help."
"As I have said," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "during the first month they had already latched onto him and were inveigling him into trying to borrow money under false pretenses, first from this place, and then from that. Pock-marked Chu was trying out his new tricks right in front of me even then."
When he had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh said, "I'm going. In a little while, I fear, Li Kuei-chieh is likely to show up. No matter whether you agree to help her out or not, she'll accuse me of interfering with you if she knows I've been here."
"Why not stay a little longer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've got something else to say to you. As far as Li the Third is concerned, don't promise him anything until I've had a chance to collect that silver that's owed to me outside the city gate, and given you the go-ahead."
"I understand," said Ying Po-chüeh.
By the time he went out the front door, Li Kuei-chieh's sedan chair was there, and she had already gotten out of it and gone inside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the act of instructing Ch'en Ching-chi to ride a mule outside the city gate to Hsü the Fourth's place and dun him for the money, when whom should he see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came into the summerhouse to fetch him, saying, "The First Lady would like you to come back to the master suite. Li Kuei-chieh has come to pay a call."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound where whom should he see but Li Kuei-chieh, who was wearing plain tea-colored clothing, without any makeup, and had a white drawn-work kerchief fastened around her head.
With her:
Cloudy locks in disarray, and her
Flowery countenance dispirited,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and started to weep, saying, "Father, I don't know how it is that I've been implicated in this unlucky business. Truly:
Though you sit in your house behind closed doors,
Catastrophe may yet strike you out of the blue.
This Wang the Third is someone we weren't even acquainted with, but Pock-marked Chu and Blabbermouth Sun, for no good reason, brought him by our place looking for a cup of tea. My elder sister was not at home, and I figured that we'd be better off having nothing to do with them, but my mother, who is getting more demented by the day, was just setting out for your place that day to celebrate my aunt's birthday. It would have been better if she had just gotten into her sedan chair and gone her way, but when she saw the way that Pockmarked Chu was groveling about on his knees to her, she came back inside and said to me, 'Sister, wouldn't it be treating them shabbily not to go out and serve them a cup of tea?' After which she headed off for your place here. I had just locked the door and refused to come out, when who could have anticipated that a crowd of men should come bursting in from outside and:
Without permitting any further explanation,
apprehended the three of them and took them away. Wang the Third managed to bolt out the gate and escape, while I succeeded in hiding out in the house next door, so there was nobody left in the place. When I sent the male servant here to fetch my mother, she was so frightened when she got home that her soul fled, and all she wanted to do was commit suicide. And today the black-robed lictors from the district yamen, with an arrest warrant in hand, raised a hue and cry about the place all morning before finally taking off. Right now, it seems, I am wanted by name to answer to interrogation in the Eastern Capital. Father, if you refuse to take pity on me and do something to rescue me, what am I to do? Mother, for your part, won't you say something to him on my behalf?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, and said, "Get up."
He then went on to ask, "What other names are there on the arrest warrant?"
"The other name is that of Ch'i Hsiang-erh," said Li Kuei-chieh. "He has deflowered Ch'i Hsiang-erh, and spent his money at her establishment, so that is only appropriate. But if our place has ever seen so much as a candareen of his money, may the pupils of our eyes drop out. If he ever laid a hand on me, may I develop an abscess in every hair follicle."
Turning to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang said, "That's enough of that. Lest she continue making these horrific oaths, why don't you speak up on her behalf?"
"At the present time," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has Ch'i Hsiang-erh been arrested or not?"
"Ch'i Hsiang-erh is hiding out in the home of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family," said Li Kuei-chieh.
"If that's the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can stay at our place here for a few days. If anyone comes looking for you, I'll send someone to the district yamen to plead on your behalf."
Thereupon, he called for Shu-t'ung and instructed him, "Quickly, write out a calling card and deliver it to His Honor Li Ta-t'ien in the district yamen. Just say that Li Kuei-chieh's services are constantly required here, and ask him to see if there isn't some way to avoid having her haled into court."
Shu-t'ung assented and went off on his errand wearing his livery of black silk. It was not long before he returned with a reply from District Magistrate Li.
"His Honor Li," reported Shu-t'ung, "sends his greetings to you but says that, although with regard to any other matter he would not presume to reject your command, this is a case of a certified document issued by his superiors in the Eastern Capital, ordering the district authorities to take the designated persons into custody. The district is only responsible for apprehending the persons named. As a favor to you, he would be willing to relax the deadline by a couple of days, but if you want to avoid having her haled into court altogether, you will have to address yourself to his superiors in the Eastern Capital."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he thought to himself silently for a while and then said, "Right now Lai-pao is due to set out in a day or two, so there's no one available to send to the Eastern Capital."
"That's all right," said Yüeh-niang. "If you were to send the other two ahead and keep Lai-pao here, so he could go to the Eastern Capital and address himself to this matter on Kuei-chieh's behalf and then catch up with them later, it wouldn't be too late. Just look at the state this fright has put her in."
At this, Li Kuei-chieh hastened to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent someone to summon Lai-pao and told him, "You are not to go on the twentieth after all. I'm going to send the other two ahead of you. Tomorrow you can set out for the Eastern Capital instead and negotiate this matter on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh. When you see Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, make sure that whatever he does he sends someone to speak about this matter at the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard."
Kuei-chieh promptly prostrated herself before Lai-pao, which threw him into such consternation that he kowtowed in return and backed off, saying, "Sister Kuei, I'll go."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then told Shu-t'ung to write a letter for him, thanking Majordomo Chai Ch'ien for all the trouble he had been put to earlier in connection with Regional Investigating Censor Tseng Hsiao-hsü, and also sealed up twenty taels of silver in lieu of a seasonal gift and entrusted it to Laipao along with the letter.
This pleased Li Kuei-chieh so much that she took out five taels of silver and offered it to Lai-pao to defray his expenses on the road, saying, "When you come back, Brother Pao, both my mother and I will see that you are amply rewarded."
Hsi-men Ch'ing would not allow this and told Kuei-chieh to take back her money, while he directed Yüeh-niang to provide another five taels of silver for Lai-pao's expenses.
"That doesn't make any sense," said Kuei-chieh. "Since I'm the one who's begging Father to intervene on my behalf, am I to put him to extra expense?"
"Do you take me for such a laughingstock," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I can't come up with five taels of silver for his traveling expenses, but have to get the money from you?"
Only then did Li Kuei-chieh put her silver away, bowing to Lai-pao again and again, while saying, "I'm imposing on you, Brother Pao, but I hope, whatever happens, you'll be able to start out tomorrow, or it may be too late."
"I'll be on the road by the fifth watch tomorrow morning," said Lai-pao.
Thereupon, he took the letter and went off to Han Tao-kuo's home on Lion Street. Wang Liu-erh was in the house at the time, engaged in sewing up some underwear for her husband.
When she saw through the window that it was Lai-pao, she promptly said, "If you have something to say, please come inside and sit down. He's not at home right now, having gone to the tailor's to pick up some clothes, but he'll be back any moment."
She then summoned Chin-erh and said, "Why don't you go across the street to Tailor Hsü's place and fetch your master? Tell him that Mr. Lai-pao is here."
"I have presumed to come over," explained Lai-pao, "in order to tell you that it turns out I won't be able to go off with your husband tomorrow. Another karmic impediment has come up, and the master has decided to send me off to the Eastern Capital in order to intercede on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh from the licensed quarter. Just now, she kowtowed repeatedly in front of Father in an act of formal obeisance and supplication, at which Mother consulted with Father, and then said, 'That's all right. If you are willing to make a trip to the Eastern Capital to intercede in this matter on her behalf, we can let Han Taokuo and Ts'ui Pen go on ahead, and it won't be too late for you to catch up with them after you get back.' So I'll have to set out early tomorrow morning, and the letter has even been entrusted to me just now."
He then went on to ask, "Sister-in-law, what's that you're working on?"
"It's his underwear," replied Wang Liu-erh.
"You can tell him there's no need to take a lot of clothes with him," said Lai-pao. "That area is the cradle of production for silks and gauzes, satins and damasks, so he needn't worry about not having clothes to wear."
As they were speaking together, Han Tao-kuo arrived home.
After the two of them had exchanged salutations, and the above matters had been explained to him, Lai-pao went on to ask, "When the day comes, where am I to look for you two in Yang-chou?"
"The master has directed," said Han Tao-kuo, "that we should put up right on the docks at the inn of a merchant named Wang Po-ju. He says that his own late father and the father of Wang Po-ju were on good terms with each other, that the rooms in his inn are spacious and can accommodate many traders, and that it is a safe place to store merchandise without having to worry about it. The best thing to do would be to look for us there."
Lai-pao then went on to say, "Sister-in-law, when I set out for the Eastern Capital tomorrow, do you have any shoes and foot-bindings, or things like that, that I can deliver to your daughter in the minister's residence?"
"I don't have anything," said Wang Liu-erh, "except for two pairs of hairpins that her father has had made for her, and two pairs of shoes, if we could trouble you to deliver them to her."
Thereupon, she wrapped these items up in a handkerchief and handed them to Lai-pao, on the one hand, while on the other, she called for Ch'unhsiang to prepare something to eat and decant some wine. The woman then hastily set aside the needlework she had been doing and saw to the setting up of a table.
"Sister-in-law," said Lai-pao, "don't go to all that trouble. I can't stay for long. I've got to go home and pack my bag so that I'll be ready to start off tomorrow."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Wang Liu-erh with an ingratiating smile, "how can you start:
Waxing supercilious before you enter the door?
When your fellow employee's household offers you such a farewell collation, you ought to have a cup to drink."
She then went on to complain, "Han Tao-kuo, how can you be so sober-sided? The table isn't steady on its feet. See if you can't steady it, and offer Uncle Pao a seat. You're acting like a mere bystander."

Thereupon, dishes of food were brought out, and wine was poured and offered to Lai-pao. Wang Liu-erh joined them at the side of the table, and the three of them sat down to drink.
After Lai-pao had drunk a few cups, he said, "I'd better get home. If I stay any later, I'm afraid the gate back there will already be closed."
"Have you hired your mount or not?" asked Han Tao-kuo.
"I'll hire it first thing tomorrow morning," said Lai-pao.
He then went on to say, "You might as well turn over the keys to the shop, and the account books, to Pen the Fourth, so you won't have to spend the night there. A good night's rest at home will prepare you for the journey."
"What you say is true enough," said Han Tao-kuo. "I'll hand them over to him tomorrow."
Wang Liu-erh poured out another goblet of wine and said, "Uncle Pao, if you'll just finish off this cup, we won't presume to keep you any longer."
"Sister-in-law," said Lai-pao, "if you want me to drink it, could you warm it up a little?"
Wang Liu-erh promptly poured it back into the flagon and told Chin-erh to reheat it, after which she filled his cup and proffered it to Lai-pao with both hands, saying, "I'm afraid we don't have anything worth eating in order to go with Uncle Pao's wine."
"That's a fine thing to say, Sister-in-law!" protested Lai-pao. "After all:
The normal formalities do not apply in the home."[20]
So saying, he lifted up his wine in order to toast the woman, and the two of them drained their cups together, before he got up to take his leave.
Wang Liu-erh then handed the gifts for her daughter back to him, saying, "Might I trouble you, Uncle Pao, whatever happens, when you get to the minister's mansion, to ask how my daughter is getting along? I'll be relieved to know."
Thereupon, she bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations," after which she and her husband saw him to the door.
We will say no more for the moment about how Lai-pao went home, packed his baggage, and set out for the Eastern Capital the next day, but return to the story of Yüeh-niang, who was in the master suite engaged in serving tea to Li Kuei-chieh. Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the two nuns were all visiting together with her there.
At this juncture, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai showed up and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "A document has been sent down from Tung-p'ing prefecture, deputing the seal-holding officers of the Left and Right Battalions of our Ch'ingho Guard to supervise the repair of the local Charity Granary. The edict of authorization states that if the work is completed by the deadline in the sixth month, they will be promoted one grade, but that if they fail to meet the deadline, they will be subject to investigation and impeachment by the provincial regional inspector. If my brother-in-law has the silver to spare and could lend me a few taels to defray the cost of the work, I would be able to return every bit of it as soon as I receive reimbursement for these expenses."
"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "whatever you need is yours for the asking."
"If you'll deign to help me out," said Wu K'ai, "twenty taels ought to do the trick."
They then went back to the rear compound and spoke to Yüeh-niang about it. Hsi-men Ch'ing had her get out twenty taels and turn them over to Wu K'ai. After drinking a cup of tea, they came out again. Because there were female guests being entertained in the master suite and it was inconvenient to accommodate them there, Yüeh-niang had suggested that he invite her brother to stay a while and have some wine with him in the main reception hall.
As they were drinking their wine, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to report, saying, "As for that debt that you're trying to collect from Hsü the Fourth outside the city gate, he sends you his regards but asks that you give him another couple of days' grace."
"Nonsense!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I need the money here right now. Why should I give him another couple of days' grace? You go right back there and give that dog of a whore's spawn a piece of my mind."
When Ch'en Ching-chi had agreed to do so, Wu K'ai offered him a seat, and he bowed to him in response before sitting down to one side. Ch'in-t'ung promptly provided him with chopsticks and a wine cup, and they continued to drink together in the front compound.
To resume our story, in the rear compound, Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Tachieh were all keeping Li Kuei-chieh company as they drank wine in Yüeh-niang's room. To begin with, Big Sister Yü, who had been performing the story of Chang Chün-jui's sightseeing visit to the Temple of Universal Salvation[21] for a while, finally put down her *p'i-p'a*.
Meng Yü-lou, who was located at her side, poured out some wine and offered her a serving of food, saying. "What a lousy blind millstone-turning donkey you are! You've been singing for us all day, and you'll probably say we don't even take care of you."
P'an Chin-lien, for her part, picked up a piece of pork shank with her chopsticks and teased her by dangling it provocatively in front of her nose.
Li Kuei-chieh then said, "Sister Yü-hsiao, if you'll hand me Big Sister Yü's *p'i-p'a*, I'll sing a song for my aunt and Sister-in-law Wu."
"Kuei-chieh," said Yüeh-niang, "you've got enough on your mind as it is. There's no need for you to sing."
"It's no problem," said Kuei-chieh. "Let me sing. Now that Mother and Father have agreed to intervene on my behalf, I'm not anxious about things any more."
Meng Yü-lou smiled at this, saying. "Li Kuei-chieh is a true child of the quarter. She can alter her demeanor at will. When she first arrived just a little while ago, her brows were knit, and she was so anxious she couldn't even drink her tea. But now:
She talks, and she laughs."
Thereupon, Li Kuei-chieh:
Deftly extended her slender fingers,
Impulsively plucked the icy strings,
and proceeded to sing for a while. As she was still singing, who should appear but Ch'in-t'ung, who was engaged in bringing in the utensils from the front compound.
Yüeh-niang asked him, "Has Brother-in-law Wu left yet?"
"He has already left," replied Ch'in-t'ung.
"I fear Brother-in-law will soon be coming inside," said Sister-in-law Wu. "We'd better bestir ourselves."
"Father won't be coming back to the rear compound," said Ch'in-t'ung. "He's gone to the Fifth Lady's quarters."
When P'an Chin-lien heard that he had gone to her quarters, she was unable to remain in her seat and could hardly wait to take off, but she felt embarrassed to leave too precipitously.
Yüeh-niang, without even waiting for her to make a move, said, "Since he's gone to your quarters, you'd better get going, lest you end up as a kinswoman with an empty womb."
"A likely story!" protested P'an Chin-lien; but although her mouth remained adamant, her feet carried her quickly away.
When she arrived in the front compound and went into her quarters, she found that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already taken a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, gotten Ch'un-mei to help him off with his clothes, and was sitting inside the bed curtains on the bed.
On seeing this, Chin-lien laughed, saying, "My child, what a good boy you are today, going to bed without even waiting for your mother. I've been in the rear compound, just now, keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang, while listening to Li Kuei-chieh sing, and being compelled to have a few cups too many. All by myself, in the dark shadows, staggering along with:
One step high, and
One step low,[22]
I've only just managed, somehow or other, to make it home."
Then, calling to Ch'un-mei, she said, "If you've got some tea, pour out a cup for me."
Ch'un-mei proceeded to pour a cup of tea for her, and Chin-lien drank it; after which she gave her a meaningful moue, which Ch'un-mei correctly understood. She had long since heated some water for her in the adjacent room, where the woman shook some sandalwood and alum into it, washed her private parts, took down her hair under the lamplight, retaining only a single gold hairpin, took up the mirror with which to apply a new coat of rouge to her lips, and put a breath-sweetening lozenge into her mouth, before coming back into the bedroom. Ch'un-mei fetched her sleeping shoes from the head of the bed, helped her exchange them for the ones she had on, put the latch on the door, and went out.
The woman then proceeded to move the lampstand closer to the bed, where she placed it on a table, let down half of the silk bed curtain with one hand:
Took off her red drawers, and
Exposed her jadelike body.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was sitting on the pillow, with two clasps fastened around his organ, which had caused it to swell to a prodigious size, exposed it for her to see. When the woman caught sight of it under the lamplight, it gave her quite a start. It was so thick she could hardly get her hand around it, empurpled and tumid, it was more than she could encircle with her thumb and forefinger.
Casting an amorous glance at Hsi-men Ch'ing, she said, "My guess would be that you can hardly deny having already taken a dose of that monk's medicine in order to work it up to such dimensions, with the sole intention of giving me a hard time. But:
The best wine and the finest meat,
Get eaten by Community Head Wang.
Whoever it is that you've tried it on first has reduced you to no more than:
The bested general of a defeated army,[23]
by the time you bother to show up in my room here. Am I only fit to be fucked by what's left of that spent prick of yours? And you claim not to be practicing favoritism! No wonder the other day, when I wasn't in my room, you made off to her quarters with that bag of implements without anyone being the wiser. So it turns out that she was the one you were up to your business with that night. And yet she contrives to protest her own virtue in front of others. As for you, you're simply nothing but an incorrigible three-inch good-for-nothing! Come to think of it, I'd be better off if I refused to have anything to do with you though I live to be a hundred."
"You little whore," Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed with a laugh, "come over here. If you have the talent to suck it to ejaculation, I'll forfeit a tael of silver to you."
"You're delirious," the woman said. "No matter what it is that you've imbibed, you expect me to put up with it."
Thereupon, she lay down diagonally across the mat, grasped his organ with both hands, and engulfed it with her ruby lips, saying as she did so, "What a big thing it is! It stretches my mouth till it hurts."
When she had finished speaking, she either:
Sucked it audibly as it moved in and out; or
Explored the mouth of his urethra with the tip of her tongue; or
Licked the frenum underneath his turtle head; or
Held it in her mouth to nibble and toy with as it came and went; or
Brushed it back and forth against her powdered cheek;
Titillating it in a hundred different ways.
His organ was stiffer and harder than ever and stood up, tumid and perpendicular.
In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells itself erect.
Hsi-men Ch'ing bent his head in order to observe the woman's fragrant flesh by the flickering light underneath the silk bed curtains. With her slender fingers, she took hold of his limber organ with both hands and popped it into her mouth, moving back and forth as she did so under the lamplight.
Who could have anticipated that a white long-haired leonine cat[24] that was crouching by their side was attracted by the motion, and, not knowing what kind of an object it was, pounced forward and batted at it with her claws. Hsimen Ch'ing, from his superior vantage point, took to playfully teasing it with the gold-flecked black fan in his hand, at which the woman grabbed the fan away from him and hit the cat as hard as she could with the handle of the fan, driving it outside the bed curtains.
Giving Hsi-men Ch'ing an amorous glance, she said, "What a crazy excuse for a lover you are! On top of the fact that she's sticking her paws in where they don't belong in such an obnoxious[25] way, you would humor her into:
Assuming privileges above her station.
If she should happen to scratch my face, what would you do then? I might as well call this business to a halt here and now. How would that be?"
"You crazy little whore!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'll do me in yet with all your objections."
"Why don't you get Li P'ing-erh to suck it off for you then?" said the woman. "It's always my room you come to when you want someone to submit to your pestering. I don't know what it is that you've imbibed, but I've been sucking you off all day to no avail."
Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon took the little silver box out of his handkerchief, picked out some of the pink ointment it contained with a toothpick, and daubed it in the mouth of his urethra. After which, adopting a prone position, he had the woman sit astride his body.
"Let me stretch it open," the woman said, "so you can get inside more easily."
His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before the knob of his glans was completely submerged. The woman in her superior position rubbed her body back and forth against his, while seeming to be unable to overcome her distress.
"My own daddy!" she exclaimed. "I feel completely stuffed inside. It's really hard to bear."
While fondling it with her hand, she saw under the lamplight that half of his jade chowrie handle [26] had already been engulfed by her vagina, the labia of which were stretched to capacity on either side. No longer moving back and forth, the woman used her saliva to moisten her labia until it felt somewhat smoother, whereupon she resumed her motions, alternately raising and lowering herself, until his organ finally penetrated her to the root.
The woman addressed herself to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying. "That aphrodisiac you usually use, called 'The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties,' [27] induces a hot and itchy sensation inside that is hard to stand. How can it be compared to this monk's medication? When it penetrates all the way to the womb, it produces a cool shivery feeling that reaches all the way up to the heart. Right now:
My whole body, from top to bottom,[28]
is infused with a melting sensation. I foresee that today I may die at your hands, but it's a hard thing to bear."
"Fivey," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've got a joke to tell you, which I heard from Brother Ying the Second. A certain man died, and King Yama enveloped his body in a donkey's skin in order to change him into a donkey. Later, however, the Assessor consulted his ledgers and found that he still had thirteen years in the human realm allotted to him, so he was allowed to return to life. His wife noticed that although the rest of his body had reverted to human form, his male organ was still that of a donkey and had not returned to its former dimensions. 'Let me go back to the nether regions and get it changed,' the man said. But this threw his wife into consternation and she replied, 'Brother, if you undertake this journey, I fear that you may not be allowed to return, and what would we do then? Just leave it as it is, and I'll gradually learn to put up with it.'"[29]
When the woman heard this, she laughed, gave him a whack with the handle of the fan, and said, "No wonder Beggar Ying's two wives are so inured to that donkey's prick of his. You filthy-mouthed good-for-nothing! If I didn't care for the opinion of the world, I'd really let you have it!"
The two of them went at it for a full two hours, but Hsi-men Ch'ing had still not ejaculated. He merely lay underneath her with his eyes closed, and let the woman squat on top of him, thrusting and retracting for all she was worth. These efforts of hers caused his turtle head to make a weird noise, *kua-ta kua-ta*, as it went in and out. After she had been at it for a long time, she stooped forward so that she was looking right at Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing lifted up her haunches with both hands and alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, moving back and forth with abandon. [30] Although Hsi-men Ch'ing's body was in contact with hers, and he was able to observe the action with his eyes, he seemed to remain completely unaffected. After some time, the woman's feelings came to a climax, and, stooping down again, she embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing around the neck with both hands, resting her body on his, and sticking her tongue into his mouth. His organ had penetrated all the way to the interior of her vagina, as he continued kneading away at her.
"My own daddy!" she cried out inarticulately. "That's enough. Your Fivey is dying."
A moment afterwards:
She swooned completely away,[31]
The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and
She gave way to an orgasm.
Hsi-men Ch'ing became aware of a wave of warmth within her vagina that penetrated all the way to his cinnabar field, while in his heart, he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable. Meanwhile, her vaginal secretions overflowed, and the woman wiped them up with a handkerchief. The two of them continued:
Hugging and embracing each other,
With entwined necks, thigh over thigh,
Audibly sucking each other's tongues,
while his organ remained embedded in her. After napping for an hour, the woman, whose lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, climbed back on top of his body, and the two of them went at it again.
The woman had two orgasms in a row and began to feel somewhat fatigued, but Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Feigning total indifference,[32]
thought to himself, "This medication of the Indian Monk's is truly super-natural."
Before long:
The cock crowed outside the window, and
The eastern horizon began to grow light.
"Dear heart," the woman said. "You still haven't ejaculated. What should we do? This evening, if you come again, I'll be sure, whatever happens, to suck it off for you."
"Even if you suck it, I won't ejaculate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can assure you, there's only one thing that will bring about an ejaculation."
"Tell me," the woman said, "what might that be?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing said:
"The dharma must not be divulged to six ears.[33]
Wait until I come back this evening, and I'll tell you."
That morning he got up, combed his hair, and performed his ablutions, after which Ch'un-mei helped him on with his clothes. Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pen were already outside, waiting for him. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, he burnt some paper money to ensure a safe journey and prepared to send them on their way. Turning over a pair of letters to them, he said, "One of these is addressed to Wang Po-ju at his inn on the docks at Yang-chou. The other is addressed to Miao Ch'ing. You must go into the city of Yang-chou to find him, discover how his affair has turned out, and send the information back to me post haste. If your funds prove insufficient, I'll send Lai-pao with some more later on."
"Do you also have a letter for His Honor Ts'ai Yün?" asked Ts'ui Pen.
"His Honor Ts'ai Yün's letter hasn't been written yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have Lai-pao bring it with him later on."
The two men then got onto their mounts and set off on their journey. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, having donned his official cap and girdle, set out for the yamen, where he met with Judicial Commissioner Hsia and thanked him for his invitation of the day before.
"Today," said Hsia Yen-ling, "in presuming to hope that my colleague will deign to come over for a chat, I have not invited any other guests."
When they had finished disposing of the business at hand, the two of them separated and returned to their homes.
Wu Yüeh-niang had long since prepared a meal in the master suite and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to partake of some congee.
Who should appear at this juncture but a black-liveried lictor, mounted on a swift steed, and carrying a felt dispatch case, who arrived at the front gate with his face bathed in sweat and asked P'ing-an, "Is this the home of the judicial commissioner, His Honor Hsi-men?"
"Where have you come from?" asked P'ing-an.
The man hastily dismounted from his steed, made a bow, and said, "I have been sent ahead by His Honor An Ch'en, who is engaged in expediting the delivery of imperial lumber, in order to present some gifts to His Honor Hsimen Ch'ing. My master, together with His Honor Huang, who is in charge of the imperial brickyard, are on their way to attend a drinking party in Tungp'ing prefecture at the invitation of His Honor Hu Shih-wen. Taking advantage of the opportunity, they would like to stop off for a visit with His Honor on the way. So I have been sent ahead to find out if His Honor is at home or not."
"Do you have a card or not?" asked P'ing-an.
The man reached into his felt bag and pulled out a card, which he turned over to P'ing-an, along with the presents. P'ing-an took them inside and delivered them to his master.
Hsi-men Ch'ing seeing that the list of gifts read:
Two bolts of Chekiang silk,
Four catties of Hu-chou silk floss,
One girdle with a decorative plaque of aromatic wood, and
One antique mirror,
ordered that five mace of silver be wrapped up and presented to the courier, together with a reply, stating that he would respectfully await the impending visit. The lictor, then, went swiftly on his way.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had wine and food prepared in his home for the event and waited until noon, when the two officials duly arrived, preceded by escorts shouting to clear the way. On this occasion, they were riding in palanquins, protected from the sun by elaborate baldachins. Upon arrival, they sent in their calling cards, one of which read, "Your devoted servant An Ch'en pays his respects," and the other read, "Your devoted servant Huang Pao-kuang [34] pays his respects." Both of them wore robes emblazoned with mandarin squares portraying a silver pheasant against a background of azure clouds,[35] black silk caps, and black shoes. They deferred politely to each other as they came in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the main gate to welcome them. Upon arriving in the main reception hall, and exchanging the customary amenities, they each expressed:
The sentiments they had felt while apart,[36]
and then sat down in the positions appropriate for guests and host. Secretary Huang took a place on the left, Secretary An took a place on the right, while Hsi-men Ch'ing assumed the host's position in order to keep them company.
Secretary Huang initiated the proceedings by raising his hand, and saying, "Having long been an admirer of your worthy name, surpassing virtue, and illustrious reputation, I fear I have been tardy in paying my respects."
"You do me too much honor," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear I am guilty, Venerable Sir, of putting you to the trouble of paying me an initial visit. You must allow me to return the favor in the future. May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?"
"My fellow graduate Huang's courtesy name is T'ai-yü, or Vast Vision," said Secretary An. "It is derived from the line, 'He whose vision is vast and serene emits a Heavenly light.'"[37]
"May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?" said Secretary Huang.
"Your pupil's courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan, or Four Springs," replied Hsimen Ch'ing. "It was chosen because my country estate has four wells on it."
"The other day," said Secretary An, "I met with my fellow graduate Ts'ai Yün, who reported that he and Sung Ch'iao-nien had put you to the trouble of entertaining them at your distinguished mansion."
"In consideration of Chai Ch'ien's esteemed request," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and the fact that he is also the superior official in my humble jurisdiction, I could hardly fail to make him welcome. While my paltry servant was in the capital, he learned of your illustrious appointment, but I have not, heretofore, been able to congratulate you in person."
He then went on to ask, "When did you take leave of your native place?"
"After departing from your distinguished mansion last year," said Secretary An, "your pupil returned to his home in order to remarry. After the New Year's celebrations, I came back to the capital in the first month and have been appointed to the position of secretary in the Ministry of Works, where I have been put in charge of expediting the delivery of imperial lumber, a task that requires me to travel to Ching-chou. Since my route takes me by this place, I could hardly fail to pay my respects."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "As for your lavish gifts:
My gratitude knows no bounds."[38]
When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited his guests to loosen their formal clothing and relax, while ordering his attendants to set up tables for them.
Secretary Huang wished to depart immediately, and Secretary An explained, "To tell the truth, my fellow graduate Huang and I are currently on our way to attend a banquet at the invitation of Prefect Hu Shih-wen in Tungp'ing prefecture. Since our route took us past your distinguished mansion, we could hardly fail to pay our respects. On another day we will come again and impose upon your hospitality."
"If you are proceeding to Hu Shih-wen's place," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you still have some distance to go. Even if you two gentlemen are not hungry yourselves, what about your attendants? Your pupil would not presume to provide a formal libation. I have merely prepared a meal here, with which to regale your subordinates and attendants."
Thereupon, platters of viands were sent out for the chair bearers, and table settings were simultaneously arrayed in the reception hall.
The rare dainties and exotic delicacies,[39]
Were the finest the season could provide,
consisting of soup, rice, sweetmeats, and delectable fresh seafood. After Hsimen Ch'ing had toasted his visitors with but three small golden goblets of wine, these table settings were carried out for the refreshment of the personal attendants and docket officers in their entourage.
After a little while, the two officials bade farewell and got up to go, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Tomorrow your pupils will dispatch a paltry missive, presuming to hope, Worthy Sir, that you will deign to pay a visit to the estate of my fellow graduate Huang's colleague, Eunuch Director Liu, for a chat. But we don't know whether you will consent to order out your equipage or not."
"As the recipient of your magnanimous summons," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I could but hasten to comply."
When they had finished speaking, he escorted his visitors to the main gate, where they got into their sedan chairs and departed.
Whom should he encounter at this juncture, but a servant sent by Judicial Commissioner Hsia to remind him of his invitation.
"I'm leaving right away," Hsi-men Ch'ing told him.
Having ordered his horse to be prepared, he went back to the rear compound, changed his clothes, came out again, mounted his horse, and set out for the residence of Judicial Commissioner Hsia, accompanied by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, and preceded by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, holding aloft a black flabellum to shield him from the sun.
After he arrived in the reception hall, and they had greeted each other, he said, "Just now, Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works, who is expediting the delivery of imperial lumber to the capital, and Secretary Huang Paokuang, who is in charge of the imperial brickyard, paid me a visit and stayed for half a day before departing. Otherwise, I would have come over earlier."
When they had run through the customary amenities, he was helped off with his outer clothes, which Tai-an directed an orderly to fold up and put into his felt bag, together with his official girdle. There were two table settings arrayed in the reception hall. Hsi-men Ch'ing was ushered to the position of honor at the one on the left, while the position next to his was occupied by Licentiate Ni, a tutor employed in the household of Hsia Yen-ling.
In the course of the ensuing conversation, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Might I enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name, Venerable Sir?"
"Your pupil is named Ni P'eng, or Familiar Ni," replied the licentiate. "My informal name is Shih-yüan, and my courtesy name is Kuei-yen. At present I occupy a position in the prefectural school and also serve as a tutor in the residence of my venerable patron Hsia Yen-ling, where I am engaged in preparing the young gentleman, his worthy son, for the civil service examinations. I fear I have been remiss in failing to make your acquaintance."
As they were speaking, two boy actors came forward and kowtowed before the company. When they had finished their soup and rice, the chef came out and carved the entrée, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an to reward him with an appropriate gratuity.
"Bring me my informal cap to wear," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Tai-an. "Take my official cap, girdle, and robe home with you, and come back to fetch me this evening."
Tai-an assented, ate the snack that had been provided for him, and went home with the horse. But no more of this.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien, after seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing off that morning, slept until noon before crawling out of bed. And once she was up, she was too lazy to comb her hair. Fearing that this would subject her to criticism by the denizens of the rear compound, when Yüeh-niang invited her to join them for lunch, she refused on the grounds that she was not feeling well. It was late afternoon before she ventured out the door of her quarters and made her way to the rear compound.
Yüeh-niang, taking advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence, planned to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound the Buddhist dharma by performing the *Chin-kang k'o-i*, or *Liturgical Exposition of the Diamond Sutra*. With this end in view, a lectern for the sutra recitation had been set up in the parlor of the master suite, incense had been ignited, Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang sat facing each other, while Nun Hsüeh's two disciples, Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng, stood to either side, ready to chime in by reciting the Buddha's name in unison. Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Li Kuei-chieh, one and all, seated themselves around them, prepared to listen to the performance.
Nun Hsüeh began the recitation as follows:[40]
I have heard tell that:
The flash of lightning is quickly extinguished;
The spark from a flint is difficult to sustain.
Fallen blossoms are not fated to return to the tree;
Flowing water is not destined to return to its source.[41]
Though you dwell in painted hall and brocade room,[42]
When your life is over, they are like the infinite void;
Though you possess supreme rank and lofty office,
When your salary stops, they resemble nothing but dreams.
Yellow gold and white jade,[43]
Are merely prerequisites for disaster;
Red powder and light furs,
Are but the expenses of mundane labor.
Wives and children cannot ensure a lifetime of happiness;
The darkness of the grave entails a myriad forms of grief.
One fine day, while sleeping on your pillow,
You'll end up underneath the Yellow Springs.[44]
An empty epitaph will proclaim your specious fame;
The yellow earth will entomb your fragile bones.
Your hundred acres of fields and gardens,
Will only create dissension among your sons and daughters;
Your thousand trunks of satin and brocade,[45]
Will not furnish you an inch of thread after your death.[46]
Before the springtime of youth is half over,
White hair will encroach upon your head;
No sooner will your well-wishers be heard,
Than they will come to condole at your wake.[47]
It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
The breath is transformed into a clear breeze, the dust returns to earth;
The wheel of transmigration turns inexorably, it cannot be called back;
The head is altered and the face replaced[48] an infinite number of times.[49]
Homage to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, that permeate the empty void, and pervade the dharma realm, past, present, and future.[50]
The subtle and mysterious dharma of utmost profundity,
Is difficult to encounter even in myriads of kalpas.
Now that we have heard it, and are able to keep it,
We wish to understand the true meaning of the Tath[illegible]gata.[51]

Nun Wang said, "In those days of yore, how did Śākyamuni Buddha, the patriarch of all the Buddhas, and founder of the Buddhist faith, come to leave home in order to take up the religious life? We would like to hear you expound it."
Nun Hsüeh then sang, to the tune "Five Offerings":
Śākyamuni Buddha,
The Indian prince,
Relinquished his kingdom in order to meditate in the Himalayas.
Severing his flesh to feed the eagles,[52] magpies nested on his crown.[53]
He cultivated himself until,
Nine dragons sprayed him with water,[54] turning his body to gold.
Only then was he revered as the
World-honored Śākyamuni,
Lord of the Greater Vehicle and supreme enlightenment.
Nun Wang continued, "Now that we have heard you expound the story of Śākyamuni Buddha, in those days, how did the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara engage in religious practice until attaining the glorious realization of multi-form transformations and vast numinous powers? We would like to hear you explain it."
Nun Hsüeh then continued, to the same tune:
The great and glorious,
Princess Miao-shan,[55]
Forsook the imperial palace in order to dwell in Hsiang-shan.
Devas brought her offerings[56] as she sat in meditation.
She cultivated herself until,
She was able to manifest the fifty-three forms[57] of her transformation body.
Only then was she revered as Kuan-shih-yin, the bodhisattva who,
Perceives the sounds of the world and saves people from suffering and disaster.
Nun Wang said, "Now that we have heard the dharma of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, in days of yore there were the Six Patriarchs, Buddhas who transmitted the lamp. The first of them, Bodhidharma, since the Western Regions had already been converted, turned to the East, in order to transmit the ineffable teaching that does not rely on written words.[58] What arduous austerities did he undergo? We would like to hear the details."
Nun Hsüeh then continued, to the same tune:
Master Bodhidharma, from whom the Dharma passed
To the Sixth Patriarch, whose lay surname was Lu,[59]
Meditated with his face to the wall for nine years,[60] so arduous were his austerities.
He remained so still reeds grew between his knees,[61], while subduing dragons and tigers.
He cultivated himself until,
With the aid of a single shoe or a plucked reed[62] he was able to go where he willed.
Only then was he revered as the Buddha Vairocana, who, with supreme compassion,
Swore the great vow to work for the salvation of all sentient beings.
Nun Wang said, "Now that we have heard the details about how the Six Patriarchs transmitted the lamp, I venture to ask for an explanation of how, in days of yore, the layman P'ang Yün disposed of all his worldly wealth by sending it to the bottom of the sea[63] and thereby reaped the true fruit?"
Nun Hsüeh then sang, to the same tune:
The layman P'ang Yün,
An enlightened being,
Invested in his future life by coming to the aid of the impoverished and wretched,
After overhearing the complaints against him of donkeys and horses one night.[64]
He cultivated himself until,
Abandoning his wife and children,[65] he was able to embark upon the dharma boat.
Only then was he revered as the guardian of the monastic establishment,
The abode of the wonderful vehicle and its wonderful dharma.
Just as Yüeh-niang was fully absorbed in listening to the performance, whom should she see but P'ing-an, who appeared in a state of obvious agitation and said, "The household of His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien has sent two couriers and a gate-boy to deliver some presents."
Yüeh-niang was flustered and said, "Father has gone to have a drink at Judicial Commissioner Hsia's house. Whoever can we send to fetch him?"
As they were in the very midst of perturbation over this problem, who should appear but Tai-an, who had come in to put away his master's felt bag and said, "That's no problem. I'll just take his card and go explain the situation to Father. Simply have Brother-in-law invite the gate-boy in and give him something to eat and drink."
Tai-an then turned over the felt bag, took the card in hand, mounted the horse, and took off for Judicial Commissioner Hsia's house like a cloud scudding before the wind.
Upon arrival, he reported, thus and so, saying, "His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien has had some gifts delivered to you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accompanying card, on which the list of presents read, "One freshly slaughtered pig, two flagons of Chin-hua wine, four hundred sheets of official-quality stationery, and a miniature book," underneath which was written, "Your devoted servant Sung Ch'iao-nien pays his respects."
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ordered, "When you get back home, have Shut'ung send an acknowledgment in a double-folded accordion-bound album that states my official rank. Reward the gate-boy with three taels of silver and a pair of handkerchiefs, and the bearers with five mace of silver each."
When Tai-an arrived home, he looked everywhere for Shu-t'ung, but he was nowhere to be found. This made him so anxious all he could do was:
Turn round and round like a millstone.
Ch'en Ching-chi was also not at home, so he got Manager Fu to keep the messenger company while he had a drink. Tai-an then fetched the handkerchiefs and silver from the second floor room in the rear compound, but there was no one available to seal them properly, so he had to seal them up on the shop counter himself and get Manager Fu to write the superscriptions on the three large and small gift packages.
He then asked P'ing-an, "Have you no idea where they've gone?"
"Originally, before Brother-in-law had left," said P'ing-an, "he was still here; but, later on, when Brother-in-law went outside the city gate to collect a debt of silver, he disappeared."
"Don't bother to mention it!" exclaimed Tai-an. "No doubt that 'sweetie' of a page boy has gone out on the town in order to:
Careen about rather recklessly,
or even to keep a mistress."
Just as they were all in a stew about it, whom should they see but Ch'en Ching-chi and Shu-t'ung, who arrived back riding tandem on a mule. Taian gave Shu-t'ung a piece of his mind, after which he had him write the acknowledgment in the accordion-bound album that indicated Hsi-men Ch'ing's official rank and sent it off with the messenger who had delivered the gifts.
"You lousy 'sweetie' of a page boy!" railed Tai-an. "On the one hand you:
Lie down with spread legs to solicit trade,
while on the other you:
Clamber on top in order to drop your load.[66]
When Father's not at home, rather than looking after the house, you go off with someone else to service your mistress. Father never told you to accompany Brother-in-law in going outside the city gate to collect a debt. What induced you to go off with him for no good reason? Just see if I tell Father about it or not."
"Go ahead and tell him if you want," said Shu-t'ung. "Do you think I'm afraid of you? If you don't tell him, you'll only show me what a good son you are."
"Why you lousy dog-fucked 'sweetie' of a page boy!" exclaimed Tai-an. "You think you can call my bluff, do you?"
Thereupon, he actually stepped forward, tripped Shu-t'ung up with a single kick at his ankles, and the two of them ended up rolling on top of each other on the floor. Only after Tai-an had taken advantage of the upper hand to spit a mouthful of saliva into his mouth did he call it quits.
"I've got to go back after Father," he announced, "but when I get home, I'll settle accounts with the whore."
Having said which, he mounted the horse and set straight off on his errand.
Meanwhile, in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang saw to it that the two nuns were served some tea and refreshments and then continued to listen to them as they sang Buddhist songs and recited gathas. P'an Chin-lien grew restless, first tugging at Meng Yü-lou, and then, having failed to dislodge her, pulling at Li P'ing-erh, all the while afraid that Yüeh-niang would criticize her.
Yüeh-niang finally said, "Sister Li, she's trying to get your attention. You might as well go off with her, so she won't have to remain here, where she doesn't know what to do with herself."
Only then did Li P'ing-erh consent to go outside with her.
As they departed, Yüeh-niang gave Chin-lien a look, saying:
"When you weed out the turnips, there is room for other things.[67]
Now that she's gone, we won't have to put up with her hopping around the place like a rabbit any more. She's just not the sort of person to listen to the Buddhist dharma."
P'an Chin-lien, with Li P'ing-erh in tow, went out through the inner gate, saying, "Elder Sister really goes for that stuff. No one in your household is dead. So what's the point of having nuns in to recite precious scrolls, for no good reason; not to mention hovering around them like that? We might as well take a walk out to the front courtyard and see what Hsi-men Ta-chieh is up to in her quarters."
Thereupon, they went out through the main reception hall and found that lamps had been lit in the antechamber where they lived, and Hsi-men Tachieh and Ch'en Ching-chi could be heard inside bickering over the loss of a sum of silver.
Chin-lien gave a rap on the latticework of their window and said, "Not having gone back to the rear compound to listen to Buddhist songs, what are the two of you quarreling about here in your room?"
Ch'en Ching-chi came outside to see who was there and, on catching sight of the two of them, said, "It's a good thing I didn't start to swear just now. It turns out to be the Fifth Lady and the Sixth Lady. Please come in and have a seat."
"You might as well go ahead and swear if you have the nerve," said Chin-lien.
Going inside, and seeing that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was engaged in stitching the sole of a shoe by lamplight, she said, "At this hour of the day, in such hot weather, you're still stitching shoes, are you?"
She then went on to ask, "What were the two of you squabbling about?"
"You ask her," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "Father sent me outside the city gate to collect a debt, and she gave me three mace of silver and asked me to bring back some gold lamé handkerchiefs for her. But who could have anticipated that when I got there and groped in my sleeve for the silver, there was nothing there, so I was unable to bring back the handkerchiefs. Then, when I got home, she maintained that I had been carrying on with a mistress and started to rail at me. She's been abusing me all this while, which got me so agitated that I was reduced to:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths.
Who would have thought that a maidservant, in sweeping the floor, happened to pick up the missing silver, but she has confiscated it and refuses to give it to me, while still demanding that I buy the handkerchiefs for her tomorrow. Let you two ladies be the judge. Who is at fault in this matter?"
"Why you lousy jailbird, shut your mouth!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "If you haven't been carrying on with a woman, why should you have taken Shu-t'ung with you, for no good reason? Just now, Tai-an didn't mince words in giving you a piece of his mind. I imagine the two of you must have been in cahoots to make out with some woman. Otherwise you wouldn't have gotten home so late. And where is that debt of silver you were sent to collect."
"Is the missing silver in your possession or not?" asked Chin-lien.
"I've got the silver," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Just now, a maidservant was sweeping the floor and picked it up. I'm holding on to it."
"It's no problem," said Chin-lien. "If I give you the money, you can also bring me back two gold lamé handkerchiefs tomorrow."
"Brother-in-law," inquired Li P'ing-erh, "if there are gold lamé handkerchiefs for sale outside the city gate, would you bring back a few for me as well?"
"Outside the city gate, on Handkerchief Lane," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "the well-known Wang family shop specializes in:
Every color and variety,
of gold lamé, shot with turquoise, handkerchiefs and kerchiefs. No matter how many you might want, they would have them in stock. If you'll just tell me what color and pattern you want, I can bring them all back to you tomorrow."
"I'd like one gold lamé, shot with turquoise, handkerchief," said Li P'ingerh, "the color of old gold, and decorated with a motif of 'phoenixes traversing the flowers.'"
"Sixth Lady," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "gold lamé work on a ground the color of old gold will not show the gold to advantage."
"Mind your own business," said Li P'ing-erh. "I also want one pink satin handkerchief with a motif of 'waves splashing on the shore,' and decorated with the symbolic representations of the 'eight treasures,' as well as one gold lamé handkerchief with a sesame flower design in shot silk."
"Fifth Lady," Ch'en Ching-chi then asked, "what kind would you like for yourself?"
"I'm short of money," said Chin-lien, "so two handkerchiefs is all I can afford. I'd like one gold lamé handkerchief of jade-colored satin, with a diapered ground."
"You're not an elderly person yet," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "What would you want with something as white as that?"
"What's it to you?" said Chin-lien. "If I can't use it yet, I'll save it for some time in the future when I'm in mourning."
"What color do you want the other one to be?" Ch'en Ching-chi asked.
"As for the other one," said Chin-lien, "I want a gold lamé handkerchief, intermittently shot with turquoise, of delicate, purple grape-colored, Szechwanese satin, with a variegated brocade insert displaying the motif of 'joined hearts' in the form of interlocking lozenges, enclosing a roundel with a pair of magpies face to face, a rebus for the words 'happy reunion,' and with the symbolic representations of the 'eight treasures' worked into the borders on either side in beadwork."
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "That's enough of that. You're just like:
The melon seed peddler who opens his box and then sneezes into it:
What a giant hodgepodge of a mess!"
"You crazy short-life!" exclaimed Chin-lien.
"Those who have the means to purchase their hearts' desires,
Ought to feel perfectly free to buy whatever they want.
What's it to you, anyway?"
Li P'ing-erh then reached into her purse and pulled out a piece of silver, which she handed to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "You can include the cost of the Fifth Lady's purchases in this."
Chin-lien shook her head, saying, "Let me take care of it."

"We might as well have Brother-in-law make a single purchase out of it," said Li P'ing-erh. "What need is there to make a separate undertaking?"
"Even if I include the cost of the Fifth Lady's items," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "there's more than enough silver here to cover it all."
He then put it on the scales, and it turned out to weigh one tael and nine mace.
"Take whatever's left over," said Li P'ing-erh, "and bring back two handkerchiefs for Hsi-men Ta-chieh."
Hsi-men Ta-chieh hastily expressed her gratitude with a bow.
"Since the Sixth Lady is offering to buy handkerchiefs for you," said Chin-lien to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "you'd better produce those three mace of silver you're holding onto, and the two of you can play cards to see who will stand treat with it. If it isn't enough, you can ask the Sixth Lady to supplement it. Tomorrow, when Father's not at home, you can use it to buy a roast duck and some distilled spirits to entertain us with."
"Since the Fifth Lady has spoken," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you'd better come up with it."
Hsi-men Ta-chieh gave it to Chin-lien, who turned it over to Li P'ing-erh to hold while they got out a deck of cards and had Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Ch'en Ching-chi play forfeits against each other. Chin-lien stood at her side and advised Hsi-men Ta-chieh, with the result that, in no time at all, she had defeated Ching-chi in three hands.
Just at this juncture, they heard a knocking at the front gate, indicating that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home. Only then did P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ingerh return to their quarters.
Ch'en Ching-chi went out to welcome Hsi-men Ch'ing and reported on his errand, saying, "As for the debt that Hsü the Fourth owes you, he will send you a preliminary payment of two hundred fifty taels the day after tomorrow, and repay the remainder at the end of the month."
Hsi-men Ch'ing uttered a few imprecations, after which, being
Half inebriated with wine,[68]
he did not even go back to the rear compound but headed straight for the quarters of P'an Chin-lien. Truly:
Past mistress of the intimate arts, she caters to her lover's whim;
What need is there to fear that tomorrow the flower will refuse to open.

Pan Jinlian was so angry when she thought that Ximen Qing had taken the love instruments to Li Ping'er that she tossed about the whole night through. She hated Li Ping'er. The next morning, when she knew that Ximen had gone to the office, she went to the inner court to see Wu Yueniang.
"The Sixth Lady," she said, "has been saying nasty things about you behind your back. She says you take undue advantage of your position and that you are overbearing. Last night, she says, our husband came in drunk and went to her room. She was in the inner court, and you shamed her before everybody there. She was angry, went to the other court and forced him to come to your room. He didn't wish to come, and went back again to her as soon as he could. They talked all night. He has given himself to her, heart, entrails and all."
This made Yueniang very angry. Aunt Wu and Meng Yulou were present, and she said to them: "You two were here yesterday. I said nothing that anyone could take exception to. When the boy brought the lantern, I asked him why his master had not come, and he said his master had gone to the Sixth Lady's room. Then I said: 'The Second Lady is expecting him and he ought to come.' There was nothing wrong about that. What does she mean by saying that I take undue advantage of my position? I used to think she was a good woman, but, evidently, I was judging by appearances, and did not realize what her mind was like. You never can tell. Now I see that she is like a needle hidden out of sight, a thorn in the flesh. How do I know what stories she may have been telling my husband? No wonder he was so anxious to go and see her yesterday. But never mind, my foolish lady. Even if he goes to you every day, it shall not worry me. You can have him, you people who cannot bear the strain of widowhood. Think of it! But when I first came here, and that rogue treated me without due respect, I managed to survive."
"Lady," Aunt Wu said, "say no more. There is the child, you know. Those in authority always have much to put up with. You are the mistress of the house, and the mistress is like a jar that has to hold all sorts of water. Both good and bad are your portion."
"One of these days," Yueniang said, "I will certainly ask her what she meant by saying I was overbearing."
This alarmed Jinlian. "Sister," she said, "you must forgive her. There is an old saying that tells us that the truly great do not concern themselves with the doings of those who are less worthy. And what person of that baser sort is without faults? We all suffer from the way she talks to our husband, especially I, who am her nearest neighbor. If I were as bad as she, there would be desperate trouble. And things are by no means better for us now that she has had this baby. She says more. She says that when her son grows up, there will be kindness for those who have been kind to her and revenge for those who have been unkind to her. We shall all die of starvation. But, of course, you knew nothing of this."
Aunt Wu said: "Lady, how can you say such things?" Yueniang said nothing.
When people get to discussing matters in this way, there are always some who speak for fire and some who speak for candles. Ximen's daughter, Ximen Dajie, was friendly with Li Ping'er, who had always given her needles, thread and cloth when she wanted them. She had given her fine silk and other things besides, and two or three excellent handkerchiefs. She never expected any return. So, when Ximen Dajie heard this conversation, she naturally went to tell Li Ping'er.
The Sixth Lady was sitting in her room making a charm for the baby to wear at the Dragon Boat Festival. She was also making different kinds of millet dumplings and delicacies to eat. When Ximen Dajie came in, she asked her to sit down, and told Yingchun to bring some tea.
"When we asked you to come and take tea with us, why didn't you come?" Ximen Dajie said.
"When your father went away, I began to make these things for the baby, now that it is cool."
"I want to tell you something," Ximen Dajie said. "Now, please realize, I don't wish to talk scandal, but have you done anything to displease the Fifth Lady? She has been telling the Great Lady that you said she was an interfering busybody. Mother is going to ask you what you meant by it. But when she asks you, don't tell her that I spoke to you about it, or she will be angry with me. You must think out your answer beforehand."
When Li Ping'er heard this, she could hardly hold her needle; she was so paralyzed by astonishment. For a long time she could not answer and tears rolled down her cheeks. "I never said a single word," she said at last. "Last night, I was in the inner court and the boy came to tell me that your father had gone to my room. I came and asked him to go to the inner court, and that was all. The Great Lady has been very kind to me. Do you think I don't know how to distinguish good from evil? How dare Jinlian say such things? I will have this out with her, face to face."
"She did seem to be disturbed when the Great Lady said she would talk to you about it," Ximen Dajie said. "If I were you, I should certainly challenge her."
"No," Li Ping'er said, "she is too clever for me. Her mouth is sharper than mine. Day and night she schemes to kill my child and me. I can only put my trust in Heaven. But one of these days she will be the end of me." She sobbed as she spoke.
Ximen Dajie stayed for a while to comfort her, then Xiaoyu came to ask them both to go to dinner. Li Ping'er put down her sewing and went with Ximen Dajie, but she could eat nothing and went back to her room to lie down.
When Ximen Qing came back from the office and found Li Ping'er lying on the bed, he asked Yingchun what was amiss. The maid told him that she had had nothing to eat. He became excited and asked: "Why couldn't you eat anything? Tell me. I see your eyes are very red. How are you feeling?"
Li Ping'er got up quickly, rubbed her eyes and said: "My eyes have been bothering me, but it is nothing very serious. I just wasn't hungry." She did not say a word about the trouble, but she could not get it out of her mind.
In the inner court, Ximen Dajie said to Yueniang: "I have been speaking to the Sixth Lady about the things the Fifth Lady says. She swears she never said anything, and cried bitterly. She says she could not possibly say anything of the sort after you have been so kind to her."
"I don't believe a word the Fifth Lady says," Aunt Wu said. "The Sixth Lady is much too good a woman to say things like that."
"I fancy there is some trouble between Li Ping'er and Jinlian," Yueniang said. "Perhaps Jinlian could not get her husband to go and visit her, and that is why she comes and tells me such tales. I am the one who has to suffer."
"You must be fair in your judgments, Lady," Aunt Wu said. "It would take a hundred like the Fifth Lady to make one like the Sixth. She has been here three years now, and never has she done anything she should not have done."
As they were talking, Qintong came in with a large parcel wrapped up in blue cloth. Yueniang asked him what was in it. "There are thirty thousand salt certificates here," the boy said. "Clerk Han and Cui Ben have been to have them registered at the Excise office. Father is giving them something to eat, and seeing about the money. The day after tomorrow is a lucky day, and they will start for Yangzhou."
"Master Ximen will be coming now," Aunt Wu said. "I had better go with the two holy teachers to the Second Lady's room." Before she finished speaking Ximen Qing appeared.
"What is that thievish, fat, bald-headed old whore Xue doing here?" he asked his wife.
"Why do you use such unbecoming language?" Yueniang said. "Since you do not offer them charity, there is no call for you to make such rude remarks. She has done you no harm. And how did you know her name?"
"Don't you know her history?" Ximen Qing said. "She got Counselor Chen's young daughter away to her temple where she carried on with some young fellow. For that she received three taels of silver. When the business came out, I had old Xue arrested. She was given twenty strokes and ordered to return to lay life and get married. I should like to know why she hasn't got married yet. Perhaps she would like me to put the thumbscrews on her."
"You must not speak evil of the servants of Buddha," Yueniang said. "She is religious and observes her vows. Why should she return to the secular life? You don't appreciate her holiness."
"Holiness!" said Ximen Qing. "Ask her how many men she welcomes in one night."
"Don't be so vulgar," Yueniang said, "or I shall tell you what I think of you." Then she said: "When are you going to send the men to Yangzhou?"
"I have sent Laibao to see our relative Qiao," Ximen said. "I want five hundred taels from him. I myself am contributing another five hundred taels: I shall send them off the day after tomorrow."
"Who is going to take charge of the shop?" Yueniang said.
Ximen told her that he had arranged for Ben the Fourth to do so. Then Yueniang opened a chest and took out the silver. It was weighed and wrapped up. Ximen gave each man five taels of silver as journey money.
Ying Bojue came while this was being done. "What are you doing, Brother?" he asked. Ximen Qing told him. "I congratulate you, Brother," Bojue said, bowing. "You will certainly do well out of the transaction."
Ximen Qing asked him to sit down and called for tea. Then he asked when Li and Huang were going to get their money. "Within a month, I expect," Ying Bojue said. "They told me yesterday that there is another contract going in Dongpingfu for twenty thousand lots of incense. They are very eager to get your backing to the extent of five hundred taels and, as soon as they get the money, they will bring it to you without even touching it."
"As you see," Ximen said, "I am sending people to Yangzhou and I have had to borrow five hundred taels from Qiao. How can I spare money for them?"
"Well," Ying Bojue said, "they said to me with much insistence that one guest does not trouble two hosts. If you do not do them this favor, they don't know where to get the money."
"Xu the Fourth, in East Street, outside the walls, owes me five hundred taels," Ximen Qing said. "They shall have that."
"Splendid," cried Ying Bojue.
At that moment Ping'an brought a visiting card and said that Xia Shou had come to invite Ximen Qing to go and visit Magistrate Xia next day. Ximen Qing looked at the card. "Good," he said.
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "I have news for you. Have you heard about Li Guijie? Has she been here recently?"
"She has not been here since the end of the first month. I can't imagine what's been happening to her."
"General Wang's third son," Ying Bojue said, "is a nephew by marriage of Grand Marshal Huang of the Eastern Capital. In the first month, this young man went to the Capital to celebrate the New Year, and the old gentleman gave a thousand taels to the young couple as a New Year's gift. Oh, you have no idea of the beauty of Grand Marshal Huang's niece. No artist could paint more than a half of it. I have never seen so beautiful a woman. Since you have been staying at home with your own ladies, old Sun, Pockmarked Zhu, and Little Zhang have been spending all their time in the bawdy house with this young man. In Second Alley he has taken up with a girl called Qi Xiang'er, and sometimes he goes to Guijie's house. He stole his wife's ornaments and pawned them. This distressed his wife so much that she even tried to hang herself. The other day was the old gentleman's birthday. Wang's wife went to the Eastern Capital and told him all about it. The old gentleman was terribly annoyed. He had the names of all the naughty fellows set down and sent the paper to Marshal Zhu. Marshal Zhu has sent it here with orders to arrest the people named. So, yesterday, old Sun, Pockmarked Zhu and Little Zhang were arrested at Guijie's house. Guijie herself escaped to a neighbor's and spent the night there. They have asked me to come and beg you to help them."
"Only a month or two ago I said they were a pack of cadgers," Ximen Qing said. "Pockmarked Zhu even tried his tricks on me."
"I will be off," Ying Bojue said. "I expect Guijie will be coming to see you, and, whether you listen to her or not, she is sure to blame me for putting a finger in the pie."
"One moment," Ximen Qing said, "if you see Li, don't tell him I am going to let them have the money. Wait till I have got it from Xu, and then I'll talk to you again."
Bojue promised. As he went out of the gate, Guijie's sedan chair arrived. She was getting out of it, but Bojue went straight on.
Ximen Qing was telling Chen Jingji to go to Xu the Fourth's for the money when Qintong came and said: "The Great Lady would like to see you in the inner court. Guijie is here." Ximen went to the back court. Guijie was wearing a dun-colored dress. There was no powder on her face, and her head was hidden in a white kerchief. There were no ornaments in her hair and she seemed extremely miserable. She kowtowed to Ximen Qing.
"Whatever shall I do, Father?" she said, sobbing. "The fates have abandoned me. I was sitting quietly at home, when disaster seemed to drop suddenly from the skies. There is a certain young master Wang. He was a stranger to me, but, one day, old Sun and Pockmarked Zhu brought him to our house to see my sister. My sister was not at home, and I said to my mother: 'Don't let them in,' but, the older my mother grows, the bigger fool she becomes. It was the day of my aunt's birthday. I wanted to get into my sedan chair and come here, but Zhu went down on his knees and implored me not to come until I had at least given them a cup of tea. He made it impossible for me to get away. Suddenly, a number of policemen came to arrest them. Wang slipped away, and I managed to escape to a neighbor's house. When everything was quiet again, our servant came to take me home again. My mother was frightened out of her wits. She talked about killing herself. Today the runners came with a warrant from the office and spent the whole morning at our place questioning us. They mentioned my name and wanted to take me to the Eastern Capital. Father, you must take pity on me and save me. I don't know what to do. Mother, won't you say a word for me?"
Ximen Qing laughed. "Get up," he said. "What other names were there on the document?"
"Qi Xiang'er's name was there," Guijie said. "It was young Master Wang who made her a woman. But it was right for her name to be there, for she took his money. But if I ever took a penny from him, may my eyeballs fall out. And if I ever allowed him to set hands on me, may a beastly sore grow at every one of my pores."
"You really must do something for her," Yueniang said. "Don't make her take these terrible oaths."
"Has Qi Xiang'er been arrested?" Ximen Qing asked.
"Not yet," Guijie said. "She went to the Wangs' house."
"The best thing you can do," Ximen Qing said, "is to stay here for a few days, and I will see what I can do for you at the district office." He told Shutong to write a letter and go at once to the office to see Magistrate Li. He was to tell Li that Guijie was at Ximen Qing's house, and ask that she should not be arrested.
Shutong put on his black clothes and went on this errand. In a short time he was back again with a card from Li. "His Lordship told me," the boy said, "that he will gladly do anything else you wish, but he can't do this. In this case the document has come from the Eastern Capital. His Lordship must see that the people are arrested, and the best he can do for you is to allow her two days' grace. If you wish to do anything for her, you will have to send to the Capital."
When Ximen Qing heard this, he muttered a while. Then he said: "Laibao is about to go somewhere else, and I have no one to send to the Eastern Capital."
"Why not send the other two to Yangzhou, and keep Laibao?" Yueniang said. "Then he can go to the Eastern Capital for Guijie. There will still be the other two to go to Yangzhou. See how terrified the girl is."
Guijie kowtowed to Yueniang and Ximen Qing. Ximen sent for Laibao. "You will not go on the twentieth," he said. "I am going to send the others to Yangzhou, and you must set off tomorrow for the Eastern Capital to get this business of Guijie's settled. You will go and see Uncle Zhai and ask him to get the affair disposed of at the courts."
Guijie hastily made a reverence to Laibao. He made reverence in return and said: "I will start immediately."
Ximen Qing told Shutong to write a letter thanking Zhai for what he had done in the matter of Censor Ceng. He sealed up twenty taels of silver to go with the letter and gave it to Laibao. Guijie was greatly relieved. She offered five taels of silver to Laibao. "When you come back," she said, "my mother will reward you suitably." Ximen Qing took the five taels and returned them to the girl, telling Yueniang to give Laibao another five taels in place of them. "But this is quite wrong," Guijie said. "You are taking all this trouble on my account and I cannot allow you to spend your money as well."
"Do you think I don't have five taels," Ximen said, "so that I must ask you to pay him for me?"
Guijie put away her five taels and made reverence after reverence to Laibao. "Brother," she said, "please start early tomorrow. I am so afraid you may be too late."
"I will start at the fifth night watch, the break of dawn," Laibao said. He took the letter and went to Han Daoguo's house in Lion Street.
Wang Liu'er was making clothes in her room. She saw Laibao through the window and said to him: "What can we do for you? Please come in. My husband is not at home. He has gone to the tailor's for some clothes, but he will be back in a moment." She said to the maid: "Go to Xu's, the tailor's, and tell your father Uncle Bao is here."
"I have come to say that I am not going with him tomorrow. I have to go to the Eastern Capital instead. Guijie pleaded urgently with my master to do something for her, and I have been ordered to start tomorrow morning. Your husband and Cui will have to go by themselves and I shall join them later on. What are you making, Sister-in-law?"
"Underclothes for my husband," Wang Liu'er said.
"Tell him not to take much in the way of clothes," Laibao said. "The place to which we are going is the very home of silk, so why bother about clothes?"
As they were talking, Han Daoguo came in. The two men greeted one another, and Laibao told Han what he had told Wang Liu'er. "I will join you in Yangzhou," he said.
"Our master has given instructions that we are to stay at Wang Boru's inn," Han said. "Wang's father was a friend of his Lordship's father. He has a very large inn, and there are always many merchants there. Our money and our goods will be safe there. That is where you will find us."
"Sister-in-law," Laibao said to Wang Liu'er, "I am going to the Eastern Capital. Is there anything you would like me to take to your daughter?"
"Her father has had a pair of hairpins made, and I have made two pairs of shoes. Would you be so kind as to take them?" She wrapped them in a kerchief and gave them to Laibao. Then she told her maid to bring something to eat and to warm some wine. She laid down her sewing and set the table.
"Sister-in-law," Laibao said, "do not take any trouble on my account. I must not stay. I must go home and pack my luggage so as to be ready to start first thing in the morning."
Wang Liu'er smiled. "Why do you stand on ceremony with us? We are colleagues in business, and it is only right that we should entertain you and that you should drink a cup of wine with us." She said to Han Daoguo: "Now, old sobersides! Help me to get the table ready and ask Uncle Bao to sit down. Don't look as though you did not wish him to stay."
Dishes were brought, and they offered Laibao wine. Wang Liu'er sat with the two men. When Laibao had drunk a few cups, he said again that he must go. "It is late, and my house is shut up early." Han Daoguo asked what arrangements had been made about the horses, and Laibao told him that they were to be hired early the following morning. "If I were you," he said, "I should hand over the keys and the accounts to Ben the Fourth, and not go to the shop. Take a rest at home in preparation for your journey."

"I am going to give them to him tomorrow, "Han Daoguo said.
Again Wang Liu'er urged Laibao to drink. "Just this one cup, Uncle," she said, "I will not ask you to drink any more."
"If I must drink," Laibao said, "may I have a cup of very hot wine?" Wang Liu'er poured the wine into the pot and told the little maid to heat it. Then she poured it out again and offered it with both hands to Laibao. "I am sorry that I have nothing better to offer you to eat," she said.
"I thank you, Sister-in-law," Laibao said. "We do not, of course, stand on ceremony since we are all members of one household." He took the wine and drank with Wang Liu'er. Then he got up. She gave him the shoes to take to her daughter.
"Go to the palace, Uncle," she said, "and see whether my daughter is well." Then she and her husband together took him to the gate. Laibao went home, packed his baggage, and, next day, set off for the Eastern Capital.
Uncle Wu came to talk to Ximen Qing. "A document," he said, "has come from the Capital to Dongpingfu appointing me Keeper of the Seals and Controller of the Granary in this city. I am to be on six months' probation and, if my work is well done, I am to be promoted; and, if not, reported by the Censor. Brother-in-law, if you can spare the money, I should be glad if you would lend me some. I will pay you back when I get paid myself."
"How much do you need?" Ximen Qing asked. "You shall have it."
"It is very kind of you, Brother-in-law. Perhaps twenty taels." They went together to Wu Yueniang's room. Yueniang took out twenty taels and gave them to her brother. Then they had tea, but, as there were lady guests, Uncle Wu could not stay in the inner court, and Yueniang asked her husband to entertain him in the great hall.
While they were drinking, Chen Jingji came in. He made a reverence to Uncle Wu, and said to Ximen Qing: "Xu asks to be allowed a few days in which to make his payment."
"Rubbish," Ximen said, "I need the money now. You will have to speak to him severely."
Uncle Wu asked Jingji to sit down and drink with them.
In the inner court, Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang, Ximen's ladies, and Guijie were drinking wine together. Miss Yu sang to them the first act in *The Western Wing* play cycle. When she had finished and laid down her lute, Meng Yulou gave her some wine. "What a terribly long ditty," she said, "I don't like you at all." Pan Jinlian, with a pair of large chopsticks, took a piece of meat and dangled it before Miss Yu's nose, to tease her.
"Sister," Guijie said to Yuxiao, "give me the lute, and I will sing a song for the ladies."
"But you are in trouble," Yueniang said. "You can't feel like singing."
"Now that you and Father have made things all right, I have nothing to worry about," Guijie said.
"Guijie," Yulou said, "I suppose you are able to change the parts you play so quickly because of where you come from. When you first came, your brows were knit and you would not even take a drop of tea. Now you laugh and talk readily enough."
Guijie stretched her delicate fingers, plucked the strings and sang to them. While she was singing, Qintong came with the things from the outer court. Yueniang asked if Uncle Wu had gone and was told that he had. "It must be time for my brother-in-law to come here," Aunt Wu said. "We had better go elsewhere." Qintong told them that Ximen Qing had gone to the Fifth Lady's room.
When she heard this, Jinlian was on tenterhooks. She lifted first one foot and then the other in her anxiety to get away, but she felt that it would not be polite to go. At last Yueniang said to her: "Get off to your room since he is there. Don't sit there looking like a guest who can get nothing to eat."
Jinlian tried to pretend to be in no great haste, but her feet carried her quickly away. When she came to her room, Ximen Qing had already taken some of the Indian Monk's medicine. Chunmei had taken his clothes and he was sitting on the bed.
"Ah, my son," Jinlian said, "you could not wait for your mother to come, but went to bed first. I have been drinking in the inner court. Guijie was singing there, and I have had several large cups of wine. I had to find my way here alone in the dark, one foot in the air and the other on the ground. Really, I don't know how I got here." She asked Chunmei for some tea. When the maid brought it, Jinlian drank it and made a sign to her. Chunmei understood and went to heat some water for her. The woman washed herself with sandalwood water and alum and took off her headdress so that her hair was held by a single golden pin. She stood before the mirror, reddened her lips and put some fragrant tea into her mouth. Then she came back and Chunmei brought her sleeping shoes. The maid went away and made fast the door behind her.
The woman took the lamp and set it beside the bed. Then she pulled down the curtains, took off her scarlet trousers, and stripped her jade body. Ximen Qing was sitting on the bed, the silver clasp in position upon a fierce-looking weapon. Jinlian was startled when she looked at it. It was too great for one hand to grasp, full-blooded and heavy. She stared at Ximen Qing and said: "I know what you've been doing. You've been taking some of that monk's medicine to make it like that. Then you think you'll come here to show what a mighty fellow you are. Fresh wine and fresh meat for others. I have to content myself with the defeated champion. I can serve the meanest of your purposes. Then you pretend to be fair to me. Why, the other day, when I was not in my room, you came and ran off with the instruments to the Sixth Lady's room and carried on your games there. And she pretends to be one of those pure, pious people. You wretched little creature, you can be twisted around anybody's finger. When I think about it, I swear I won't have anything to do with you for a hundred days."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Come here, you little strumpet," he said, "and see if your mouth can make this smaller; if you can, I'll give you a tael of silver."
"I'm ashamed of you, you rascal," she said. "How can it get smaller when you have drunk that potion?" But she lay on the bed and put his penis between her red lips. "It's so huge," she said, "that it hurts my mouth." Then she sucked and teased the prick's head with her tongue, licking the outer skin and rubbing it up and down with her lips. But, although she stroked the giant with her cheeks and played a thousand love games with it, it merely became longer and thicker. Ximen looked at her. Her beautiful body gleamed among the silk sheets. She took his hairy monster in her delicate fingers, put it between her lips, and took it all in her mouth; when she released it, it was limp.
Beside them lay a long-haired white cat. Watching the movement of this hairy thing, the cat crouched ready to spring. Ximen had a gold speckled fan in his hand and with it he teased the cat. Jinlian seized the fan and struck a hard blow at the cat. It ran quickly away. She looked up at Ximen Qing and said: "You terrible fellow. You are amusing yourself with me, and that isn't enough for you, you must play with the cat. Suppose it claws me. What then? Do you think I shall go on playing this game?"
"You funny little whore," Ximen said, "you would talk anybody to death."
"Why don't you ask Li Ping'er to play these games with you?" Jinlian went on. "You ask me every time you come here. What that medicine you have been taking may be I don't know; I could suck it all day without success."
Ximen took from his sleeve a little silver box and from it picked out with a toothpick some of the reddish ointment. He put it upon the horse's mouth. He lay down and made her ride on top of him. "Let me get into position first," she said. "If I do, perhaps you'll be able to penetrate me." But the head of his penis was so broad that they both struggled hard and long before even a little of it would go in. She rode on top of him, up and down, hither and thither, but could not conceal her pain. "Darling," she said, "that hurts me so much that I can't bear it any longer," and feeling around with her hand she found that less than half the penis was inside her. She collected some of her spittle and moistened the inside of her cunt with it to make the path easier. Then she moved up and down and gradually the penis went the whole way into her vagina.
"Darling," the woman said, "the medicine you always used to take gave me a tremendous feeling of burning inside, but this makes me feel a coldness that reaches even to my heart. My whole body seems numb. I shall certainly die at your hands today."
Ximen Qing laughed. "I will tell you a story," he said. "I heard it from Brother Ying. Once upon a time a man died and went down to the infernal regions. The King of Hades put an ass's skin upon his body and told him that in his next life he must be a donkey. But the record keeper looked in his books and found that the man still had thirty years to live. They sent him back to earth. His wife perceived that, except for his weapon, his body was as it had been before, but he had still the donkey's weapon. 'I will go back to Hell and change it,' he said to his wife. 'No, my dear,' said the wife. 'They might not let you come back again. I will put up with it somehow.' "
Jinlian struck him with the fan. "Beggar Ying's wife is able to put up with a donkey's weapon," she said. "That is obvious. You are a foul-mouthed thing, and I ought to hit you harder."
They went on with their work, but Ximen Qing did not give forth. He closed his eyes and made the woman move. She, wriggled and writhed with terrible moans. Then they changed places. He held her legs, and thrust in his penis with all his might. He worked hard in the face-down position, but he felt very little, and she did not become wet. They changed places again; she embraced his neck and hurled herself at him, put the tongue in the mouth, and pressed the whole penis inside herself. Then she whispered gently, "Darling, finish it off or I'll die." Soon she drooped; her tongue was as ice, and the juices of love flowed from her. Ximen felt that her cunt was warm, his passions were aroused, and he felt an enormous orgasm. Both their juices flowed like rivers. She mopped them up with a handkerchief. Then they embraced and kissed each other—but the penis was still erect. They slept for an hour; after that Jinlian, still unsated, climbed on top of him and played with him again. The juices again flowed, but at last began to exhaust themselves. Ximen Qing was undaunted. He could only marvel at the medicine that the Indian Monk had given him. Then they heard the cock crow. It was just before dawn.
"If it doesn't go down, come back to me tonight and my lips will make it do so."
"You can never do so," Ximen said, "there is only one thing that will."
Jinlian asked what that was, but he said: "This is not a thing to be told to other ears. Wait till tonight and I will tell you then."
In the morning he rose and Chunmei helped him to dress. Han Daoguo and Cui Ben were waiting. Ximen went out and gave them two letters, one to introduce them to Wang Boru, who kept the inn at Yangzhou, and the other to Miao Qing to ask if his affair had been settled satisfactorily. He told them that, if they needed more money, he would send it later by Laibao. "You said you were writing to Censor Cai," Cui Ben said, but Ximen said the letter had not been written and that he would send it by Laibao. Then the two men set out upon their journey.
Ximen Qing put on his hat and robe of ceremony and went to the office. He thanked Magistrate Xia for his invitation. "It will be a great honor if you visit me today," Xia said. "There will be no other guests." They attended to their business, then each went to his own home.
An official on horseback, carrying a parcel, with sweat rolling down his cheeks, came to the gate and asked Ping'an if Ximen Qing lived there. Ping'an asked his business. The man dismounted, bowed to Ping'an, and said: "I come from An, the Warden of the Royal Forests, with presents for your master. My master and Huang, the Controller of the Brick Fields, are now at Dongpingfu, at Master Hu's place, drinking wine. My master wishes to visit his Lordship, and I have come to see if he is at home." Ping'an asked for a card, and the man took one from the wrapper and gave it with the presents to the gatekeeper. The boy took them and showed them to Ximen Qing. On the list of presents he read: "Zhejiang silk, two rolls; four measures of Hu brocade; a scented girdle; and an ancient mirror." Ximen told him to give the messenger five *qian* of silver and a card in return, and to say that Ximen would be happy to receive his master. The man went away and Ximen hastily made the necessary preparations.
The two gentlemen arrived about noon. They came in sedan chairs with a fine array of umbrellas and men to clear the way for them. They sent in visiting cards with their names An Shen and Huang Baoguang. Both were dressed in ceremonial attire, with black hats and black boots. They got down from their sedan chairs and Ximen Qing went to the gate to meet them. They went into the hall and exchanged salutations. Then they sat down, Huang on the left and An on the right.
"Your fragrant renown has long been known to me," Huang said. "I am only sorry that my visit has been so long delayed."
"The kindness is on your side," Ximen said, "it was for me to come and see you first. May I ask your illustrious name?"
An answered for his colleague. "Brother Huang's name is Taiyu. It is expressive of the principle that earth is made peaceful by the glory that comes from Heaven."
"May I ask your name?" Huang said.
"My unworthy name," Ximen said, "is Siquan. I was so called because, on my poor estate, there is a well with four openings."
"The other day," An said, "I met Brother Cai. He told me how he and Song had inflicted themselves upon you."
"Yes." Ximen Qing said, "I had orders from my friend Zhai, and besides, his Excellency Song is my superior officer. It was only fitting that I should entertain them. When my servant was at the Capital, I heard of the exalted rank you had attained and I can only apologize for not having come in person to congratulate you. When did you set out?"
"Last year, after I left you, I went home to marry again. Then, in the first month of the new year I went to the Capital and was appointed to the Board of Works. Now I have been detailed to superintend the transport of the imperial timber from Jingzhou. I had to pass this way, and, of course, felt bound to come and pay my respects to you."
"I am grateful for your precious gifts," Ximen Qing said. He asked them to change their clothes, and summoned the servants to lay a table. But Huang rose, and An said: "Indeed, we have to go to drink wine with the prefect of Dongpingfu. We only called in passing, and we will trouble you some other day."
"It is a long way from here to Dongpingfu," Ximen Qing said, "and if you are not hungry yourselves, there are still your servants to consider. I shall not offer you anything very special, merely common, everyday food, and when your servants have been refreshed by a meal, you will travel more quickly." A table was set with food of all kinds, delicious dishes, soups, and pastries. Ximen took a small golden cup and offered three cups to each of them. The servants were entertained. Then the two officers stood up and An said:
"We are giving a little party tomorrow and should be very honored if you would come. The party will be at Chamberlain Liu's place. He is a friend of my brother Huang. Will you give us the pleasure of your company?"
"Since you are good enough to invite me," said Ximen, "I dare not refuse."
He escorted them to the gate. Just as they went away in their sedan chairs, a man came from Magistrate Xia to remind Ximen Qing. "I will come at once," he said. He ordered his horse to be brought, went to the inner court to change his clothes, then came out again and mounted. Qintong and Daian followed him, and soldiers went before him to clear the way. When he reached his colleague's house, he went to the hall. The two men saluted each other. Ximen said: "Their Lordships An and Huang have just been to see me. They stayed a long time or I should have been here earlier." Two tables were set in the hall. Ximen Qing sat on the left, and, next to him, the graduate Ni. They talked to one another and Ximen asked Ni his second name. "My name is Ni Peng, and my second name Shiyuan. I am also known as Guiyan. I am on the staff of the college of this prefecture, and at present am coaching his Lordship's son for his examination. I am ashamed to say I am too ignorant to have many friends." The two young actors came up and kowtowed.
When Jinlian had said good-bye to her husband, she went to bed again and did not get up before midday. Even then, she was too languid to dress her hair. She was afraid those in the inner court would remark it, so, when Yueniang sent for her to go to dinner, she would not go but said she was unwell. Not until afternoon did she go to the inner court.
Yueniang, taking advantage of Ximen Qing's absence, decided to hear Nun Xue expounding the teachings of Buddha and interpreting the *Diamond Sutra*. An altar was prepared and incense burned. The two nuns, Wang and Xue, sat down facing each other, and the two novices, Miaoqu and Miaofeng, stood beside them. The service began. All Ximen's ladies were present, with Aunt Wu and Aunt Yang. They gathered round and listened to Xue recite.
"It has been said," Xue began, "that lightning and brightness soon pass away but that stone and fire are everlasting. The withered blossom can never return to the tree on which it grew and flowing water can never go back to the spring from which it came. In painted halls and tapestried chambers, life is but emptiness. The noblest and the greatest die, and all is but a dream. Gold and jade are no more than fountains of trouble. Silken garments are wasted labor. Wives and children can never spend a hundred years together and, in the darkness beyond, a thousandfold sufferings await.
"When you have lain upon your dying bed and your spirit has gone to the realms below, only in history will your name be recorded. It will avail you nothing, and the yellow earth will cover your corrupting bones. Your fields and gardens, though they cover ten thousand acres, will be divided and cause strife among those who come after you. Your chests of silks and satins, though they are a thousand, will give you not a moment's pleasure. Before life is half done, white hairs assail us. When we have received the congratulations of one guest, he will be followed by another who comes to condole with our children. It is bitter, bitter, bitter. Our spirit is transformed into vapor and our body goes beneath the ground. On go the transmigrations, ceaselessly, and so our heads and countenances are ever changed.
"Hail to the limitless void of the Dharma Realm, to the Three Treasures of the Buddhas of Past and Future, the Dharma, and the Holy Orders.
"Oh, highest, deepest, most admirable Law! Through a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand ages, it is difficult of attainment. Let us now behold it, hearken to it, receive it, hold fast to it. Let us vow to grasp the Buddha's great Truth."
Then Nun Wang said: "Shakyamuni Buddha was the ancestor of all the Buddhas, the Founder of our religion. Do you know how he left his home? Hear me tell of it." Then Nun Xue sang:
The Buddha Shakyamuni was a prince in India.
He left his kingdom and went forth to the Himalayas
Where he cut off his flesh to feed the eagles, magpies nested on his head.
He cultivated his purity until the nine dragons spittle made him a body of gold,
And became the Perfect One, the Buddha of the Great Vehicle.
Then Nun Wang said: "Now that you have heard of Shakyamuni, I will tell you how the Bodhisatva Guanyin strove after perfection, attained hundreds of manifestations, and attained the fullest power of the Path. Would you like to hear?"
Xue was about to sing again when Ping'an came rushing in and said: "His Excellency Song has sent two runners and a servant with a number of presents."
Yueniang was flurried. "Your father has gone to Magistrate Xia's," she said. "Who is there to accept the presents?"
Daian came in, put down his wrapper and said: "Don't worry, lady. I will take the card and go and tell my father. Meanwhile I will ask Master Chen to entertain the servants here." He took the card, mounted a horse, rode quickly to Xia's place and told his master. On the card was written: "A freshly slaughtered pig; two jars of Jinhua wine; four quires of writing paper and a miniature book." It was signed: "With the respects of the junior official Song Qiaonian." Ximen Qing told the boy to go home and ask Shutong to write a card with his full title, and give the servant three taels of silver and two handkerchiefs, and five *qian* to each of the runners.
Daian hurried home. He looked everywhere for Shutong but could not find him. This made him so excited that he ran around like an ox going around the grindstone. Nor could he find Chen Jingji. Clerk Fu had to come and entertain the men. Daian went to the inner court to get the silver and the handkerchiefs. There was nobody to wrap them up, and he had to go to the shop to have a parcel made of them. He asked Clerk Fu to write the necessary card. Then he asked Ping'an where Shutong was. "He was here when Master Chen was here," Ping'an said, "and when Master Chen went to get some money, he disappeared."
"I suppose the young rascal has gone off after some girl," Daian said.
At that moment, Chen Jingji and Shutong came riding along on the same mule. Daian scolded the boy and bade him quickly write the card. They dismissed the men who had brought the presents.
"You rascally young scamp," Daian said to Shutong. "You are too ready to roam about. When Father is not at home, you think you can go too. You have been after your girl, beyond a doubt. Father never told you to go out with Master Chen. Wait till he comes back and see what I tell him."
"Tell him what you like," Shutong said. "If you don't, I shall know you are afraid of me, and I shall consider you my boy."
"What, you dog!" Daian cried. "Do you dare me?" He went up to Shutong and kicked him. The pair rolled about on the ground struggling. Daian gained the upper hand and spat upon Shutong's face. "I am going for Father now," he said, "but when I come back I will settle my score with you."
In the inner court, Yueniang gave the two nuns some tea and refreshments, and they continued their hymns and their preachings. Jinlian grew impatient and tugged at Yulou, but Yulou would not move. Then she thought of suggesting to Li Ping'er that they might go, but she was afraid Yueniang would reprove her.
"Sixth Sister," Yueniang said, "she wants you to go with her. I think you had better go. She is so very impatient." Li Ping'er went out with Jinlian. Yueniang looked after them. "Now that the turnips are out of the way," she said, "we shall have more room. We don't want her here, jumping about like a rabbit. She is not the sort of woman to listen to religion."
Jinlian, holding Li Ping'er by the hand, came to the second door. "The Great Lady," she said, "is very fond of that sort of thing. But there isn't anybody dead in the household, and I don't see why we should have the nuns to read stuff of that sort. I have had enough of it; that's why I asked you to come out. Let us go and see what Ximen Dajie is doing." They passed through the great hall. There was a light in one of the side rooms. Ximen Dajie and Chen Jingji were quarreling over the disappearance of some money. Jinlian tapped at the window.
"So, instead of going to the inner court to hear the nuns, you are squabbling here."
Chen Jingji came out. "It is a lucky thing I didn't curse you. Fifth Mother and Sixth Mother, won't you come in?"
They found Ximen Dajie busy making shoes. "It is late and very hot," Jinlian said. "Why are you making shoes now?" She asked what they were quarreling about.

"Father told me to go outside the city walls to get some money," Chen Jingji said, "and my wife gave me three *qian* to buy her a handkerchief. Unfortunately, when I got there, I couldn't find the money. I couldn't buy it for her. When I got back, she said I had spent the money on some woman. She scolded me and made me take oath upon my body. When the maid was cleaning the floor, the money was found. She has taken it, yet still she tells me I must buy a handkerchief for her tomorrow. You two ladies can judge which of us is in the wrong."
"You thievish rascal," his wife said. "You say you don't keep a woman, but what were you doing out with Shutong? You must have heard Daian cursing him. I have no doubt that you and that boy went to some strumpet together. That's why you came back so late. Where is this money you were sent for?"
"Have you found the other money?" Jinlian asked.
"Yes, the maid picked it up when she was sweeping the floor. I have it now."
"Don't worry," Jinlian said to Jingji, "I will give you some money and you can buy two handkerchiefs for me." And Li Ping'er said:
"If there are handkerchiefs to be bought outside the city, please buy some for me."
"Outside the city," Jingji said, "there is a Kerchief Lane where some well-known merchants are having a special sale of kerchiefs of all sorts. Some are woven with gold; others have jade trimmings. They can supply as many as you like. Tell me what color you like and what kind of pattern you want and I will get them for you tomorrow."
"I will have an orange-colored one, with gold and green, and a phoenix among the flowers," Li Ping'er said.
"Mother," Jingji said, "orange and gold don't look at all well together." "Mind your own business," said Li Ping'er. "I want another of pink wavy silk, with the design of Eight Precious Treasures, and still another of shimmering silk with gold and flowers."
"What design do you want, Fifth Mother?" Jingji asked Jinlian.
"I have only a little money, so two will be enough for me. One the color of jade, with edges of lace and gold."
"You are not an old woman," Jingji said. "What do you want with white?"
"Don't think you know better than I do," Jinlian said. "I shall use it when I have to wear mourning."
"Then you will need a colored one too."
"Yes, I want one of the most delicate purple grape shade, made of Sichuan silk, gold and green, with a pattern of crossed squares, and in every square a pair of love symbols. On the lace I must have tassels and pearls and other bits of jewelry."
"Ai ya! Ai ya!" Chen Jingji cried. "You are like the melon-seed seller, who sneezed when he opened his box, and scattered the seeds all over the place."
"You horrid man," Jinlian said. "Since it is my money, I shall buy what I like. It is a question of taste and nothing to do with you."
Li Ping'er took a piece of silver from her purse and gave it to Jingji. "This will pay for the Fifth Lady's too," she said. Jinlian shook her head.
"No," she said, "I will pay for my own."
"We are asking Brother-in-law to buy them all at the same time. Why should you bother?"
"Even so," said Jingji, "it is more than enough." He took a balance and weighed the silver. It weighed a tael and nine *qian*.
"With the rest," Li Ping'er said, "buy two handkerchiefs for your wife." Ximen Dajie stood up and made a reverence to Li Ping'er. "Now the Sixth Lady has paid for your handkerchiefs," Jinlian said to her, "you ought to hand over those three *qian* of silver. You and your husband can draw lots to decide which of you shall be our host. If it is not enough, we will ask the Sixth Lady for some more. Your father will be out tomorrow; we will buy roast duck and white wine and enjoy them together."
"Yes," said Jingji, "hand over that silver." Ximen Dajie gave the silver to Jinlian, and Jinlian passed it to Li Ping'er for safe keeping. They found some cards, and Ximen Dajie and her husband played. Jinlian helped Ximen Dajie, and she won three games. Then they heard a knocking at the gate. Ximen Qing had returned. Jinlian and Li Ping'er went to their rooms and Jingji went to tell Ximen that Xu the Fourth would pay two hundred and fifty taels in a day or two, and the remainder the following month. Ximen Qing cursed, for he was drunk. He did not go to the inner court but straight to Jinlian's room.

## 073

### Ying Po-chüeh Intrudes on a Spring Beauty in the Grotto & Teases Li Guijie; P'an Chin-lien Inspects a Mushroom in the Flower Garden

On the flowering crab apples deep in the courtyard[1] the rain has just let up;
With no breeze sweeping over the mossy paths, the butterflies make free.
The hundred-budded clove blossoms blazon forth their exquisite beauty;
The thrice-dormant weeping willows[2] manipulate their supple branches.
The red of the peach blossoms, lustrous as wine, is of a lighter shade;
The green of the foliage, in the lingering chill, grows more luxuriant.
Silently making their way through beaded curtains the swallows return;
The cry of the cuckoo carries with it the sorrow of the departing spring.[3]

While Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking at the home of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling that day and received the information that the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had sent a set of gifts to him, he was as delighted as could be. Hsia Yen-ling also treated him with a degree of respect:
Different from that of former days,[4]
blocking the door and urging him to have another drink, so that it was the second watch before he permitted him to go home.
P'an Chin-lien had long since taken off her headdress under the lamplight, revealing her:
Powdered face and glossy hair,
and ordered Ch'un-mei to lay out the quilts and pillows on the bed and wipe off the cool bamboo bed mat, after which she proceeded to:
Light incense and wash her private parts,
in expectation of Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival. When he came in the door, she observed that he was:
Half inebriated with wine,
and hastened to help him off with his clothes. After drinking the tea that Ch'un-mei served them, they proceeded straight to bed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the woman, who had stripped herself stark naked, was sitting on the edge of the bed, with her head bent low, as she adjusted the foot binding on one of her fresh, white legs, which was resting horizontally over her knee, preparatory to changing into her scarlet flat-soled sleeping shoes, that were:
Barely three inches long,
But half a span in length.
Upon observing this sight, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused,
and his jade chowrie handle became conspicuously erect. He then asked the woman for the bag of sexual implements, and she promptly groped it out from underneath the mattress and handed it to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, having fastened both of the clasps in place, pulled the woman onto his lap with one hand and said, "Today your daddy would like to pluck the flower in your rear courtyard. Are you willing to agree to that?"
The woman gave him a look, saying, "What an utterly shameless lover you are! After screwing around with that page boy Shu-t'ung until you're tired of it, you've come to pester me. Just continue carrying on with that slave, why don't you?"
"What a crazy little oily-mouth!" Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed. "That's enough of that. If you'll agree to go along with me, what would I hanker after that page boy for? You may not know it, but what your daddy delights in the most is this very thing. You can be sure that if I just get it inside, I'll ejaculate."
The woman was unable to withstand his pestering and said, "My only fear is that I'll not be able to accommodate that great big thing of yours. If you'll remove the ring from your glans I'll consent to try it out with you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing actually did remove the sulfur-imbrued ring and left only one of the silver clasps around the base of his organ. He then ordered the woman to get down on all fours on the surface of the bed, with her bottom raised high, while he used saliva to moisten his turtle head, and then moved back and forth, moistening and reaming, before attempting to plunge it into her orifice. His turtle head was proud and firm, so that it was some time before he succeeded in immersing the knob of his glans. The woman, in her abject position, knit her brows and silently endured the pain, biting on a handkerchief in her mouth when it became too difficult to bear.
"Daddy!" she cried. "Slow down a bit. This is not like it is in front. You're stretching me so tightly inside that it hurts as though I'm being:
Seared with heat or scorched with fire."
"Dear heart!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Keep on calling me 'Daddy.' It's not a problem. Tomorrow I'll buy a set of patterned silk clothing for you to wear."
"The sort of clothing I want is readily available," said Chin-lien. "Yesterday I noticed that Li Kuei-chieh was dressed in a drawnwork silk skirt of glossy gosling-yellow with silver stripes, and an inset of gold-spangled sheepskin, trimmed with varicolored thread, that really looked nice. She said that it was purchased in the licensed quarter, and that they all possessed them. But I alone don't have a skirt of that kind. I don't have any idea how much they cost, but if you buy one for me to wear, I'll stop complaining."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow I'll buy one for you."
In the meantime, while this conversation was taking place, from his superior vantage point, he began to thrust and retract in earnest, alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts, as if there were no end in sight.
The woman:
Turning her head around with an amorous glance,
called out, "Daddy! It's tight in there. You're really hurting me. How can you insist on carrying on so strenuously? I beg of you, whatever else you do, ejaculate as quickly as possible, and be done with it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention, but lifted her haunches in order to:
Savor the sight as he went in and out,
while, at the same time, crying out, "P'an the Fifth, you little whore, devote yourself to wantonly calling me 'Daddy,' in order to coax out your daddy's spunk."
The woman, in fact, in her abject position:
As her starry eyes grew dim,
Her oriole's voice all a quaver,
Gently wriggled her willowy waist,[5]
Half responding with her fragrant flesh,
while:
The lascivious sounds and complaisant words,
that issued from her mouth:
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing, feeling that he was about to ejaculate, grasped her haunches with both hands and proceeded to ram away at her with all his strength, so that, as his body collided with her bottom:
The noise was incessant.
Meanwhile the woman, in her abject position below him, moaned inarticulately:
Unable to control herself.[6]
As he was on the brink of ejaculation, Hsi-men Ch'ing grasped the woman's bottom, inserted his jade chowrie-handle all the way to the root, so that it reached straight into the most deep and marvelous region, producing a pleasurable sensation that could hardly be endured. Thereupon:
Responding to her with abandon,
He ejaculated like a geyser.
The woman, for her part, received his semen, and their two bodies remained glued to each other.
After some time, when the jade chowrie-handle was withdrawn, the stalk was seen to be stained blood-red, and fluid was still oozing from the mouth of the urethra. Only after the woman had wiped it off with her handkerchief did they go to sleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home after going to the yamen in the morning, a messenger came from Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang, in order to deliver an invitation to a banquet, on the twenty-second, at the estate of Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, and to urge him to come as early as possible.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sent the messenger on his way and was just coming out of the reception hall after eating some congee in the master suite, when he encountered Little Chou, the barber, who prostrated himself before him, kowtowed, and then stood in waiting to one side.
"You've arrived in the nick of time," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was just going to look for you to do my hair."
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing led him into the garden, as far as the small summerhouse, the Kingfisher Pavilion, where he sat down on a cool chair, took off his cap and headband, and let his hair fall loose. Little Chou then laid out his combs and implements on a table behind him and proceeded to comb out his hair, examining his dandruff as he did so, as a way of assessing his prospects.
Kneeling down in expectation of a tip, he said, "Your Honor is sure to receive a major promotion in the course of the coming year. The coloration of your hair is very propitious."[7]
Hsi-men Ch'ing was greatly pleased, and, after his hair had been combed, also had him clean the wax from his ears, and give him a massage. He possessed a complete set of implements for this purpose and gave Hsi-men Ch'ing a thorough going over, in addition to which he had him engage in some of the therapeutic gymnastic techniques called *tao-yin*, or "guiding and pulling,"[8] that gave:
His entire body a feeling of well-being.[9]
He rewarded him with five mace of silver and told him to have something to eat, and then stay in attendance so that he could cut Kuan-ko's hair. Hsi-men Ch'ing then went into his studio, where he collapsed on the bed, inlaid with Yunnanese marble, and went to sleep.
On that day, Aunt Yang departed, and Nun Wang and Nun Hsüeh also prepared to go home. Wu Yüeh-niang had the gift boxes that they had brought with them filled with steamed-shortcake pastries and saw them off, presenting each of them with five mace of silver, and Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples with a narrow bolt of cotton fabric apiece.
As Yüeh-niang ushered them out the front gate, Nun Hsüeh once more enjoined her, "When the next *jen-tzu* day occurs, if you take that potion, you will be sure to conceive."
"Reverend Hsüeh," said Yüeh-niang, "after you leave today, whatever you do, come for another visit on my birthday in the eighth month. I'll be expecting you."
Nun Hsüeh placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "We have put the lay Bodhisattva to a lot of trouble already. I will be sure to come when that day arrives."
Thereupon, they took their leave of Yüeh-niang, and the rest of the women-folk, who had all come out to the main gate to see them off, and Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu then returned to the rear compound.
However, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Tachieh, along with Li Kuei-chieh, who was wearing a white silver-striped silk blouse that opened down the middle, over a gosling-yellow drawnwork silk skirt, embellished with gold thread, a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree, a hair ornament displaying a motif of turquoise water and auspicious clouds, gold filigree hairpins, pendant amethyst earrings, and scarlet shoes, and was carrying Kuan-ko in her arms, seized the occasion to take a walk in the garden.
"Kuei-chieh," said Li P'ing-erh, "hand him over. Let me carry him."
"Sixth Lady, it's no problem," responded Li Kuei-chieh. "I'm enjoying the chance to carry the youngster."
"Kuei-chieh," said Meng Yü-lou, "you haven't yet been to the new studio that Father has fixed up for himself. Come take a look at it."
As they entered the garden, Chin-lien noticed that the crape myrtle blossoms were in full flower and picked two of them for Li Kuei-chieh to stick in her hair.
Thereupon, they proceeded along the juniper hedge to the Kingfisher Pavilion, where they observed that the interior of the studio was furnished with a curtained bed and standing screens, and further embellished with calligraphy, painting, zither, and chessboard, all of which were elegantly displayed. The bed was arrayed with chiffon curtains, held in place by silver hooks, cool matting, and a coral pillow. Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying collapsed upon the bed:
In a state of slumbering oblivion.

A skein of burning ambergris incense wafted from a small gilded censer. The green gauze window was half closed, and the plantains outside the casement[11] bent to catch the light.
P'an Chin-lien picked up the incense case on the table and fiddled with it, while Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh sat down on chairs.
All of a sudden, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned over and, observing the womenfolk in the room, said, "What are you doing here?"
"Li Kuei-chieh wanted to see your studio," said Chin-lien, "so we brought her along to take a look at it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was carrying Kuan-ko with her and playfully teased him for a while, when Hua-t'ung suddenly appeared and said, "Master Ying the Second has come."
The crowd of womenfolk hastily got out of the way and headed toward Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
When Ying Po-chüeh got as far as the juniper hedge and saw Li Kuei-chieh carrying Kuan-ko, he said, "Wonderful! So Li Kuei-chieh is here."
He then went on meaningfully to ask her, "How long have you been here?"
Li Kuei-chieh continued on her way, saying, "That's enough, you crazy beggar! It's none of your business. What do you want to know for?"
"What a consummate little whore you are!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "If it's none of my business, that's that. Just give me a kiss and I'll call it quits."
Thereupon, he embraced her and endeavored to give her a kiss, but Kueichieh pushed him away with her hand and swore at him, "You lousy, obnoxious, crazy chunk of knife-bait! If I weren't afraid of frightening the baby, I'd give you a rap with the handle of my fan."
Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside at this point and, observing that Ying Pochüeh was holding on to Li Kuei-chieh, said, "You crazy dog! Be careful or you'll scare the baby."
Then he turned to Shu-t'ung and said, "You take the baby and carry him to the Sixth Lady's place."
Shu-t'ung promptly took the baby in his arms. The wet nurse, Ju-i, who was waiting by the corner of the juniper hedge, then took charge of him and bore him away.
Ying Po-chüeh, who remained standing in parley with Kuei-chieh, asked her, "How has that affair of yours turned out?"
"I am much indebted to Father here," said Kuei-chieh, "who has taken pity on me and sent Brother Lai-pao to the Eastern Capital to intervene on my behalf."
"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "That should take care of it. In that case, you ought to be able to relax a little."
When he had finished speaking, Kuei-chieh started off for the rear compound, but Ying Po-chüeh said, "Come back here, you crazy little whore! I've still got something to say to you."
"I've got to go now, but I'll be back," said Kuei-chieh.
Thereupon she went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to join the others. Only then did Ying Po-chüeh salute Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, and the two of them sat down in the studio together.
"Yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while I was having a drink at Hsia Yenling's place, His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien, the regional investigating censor, sent someone to deliver some gifts, including a freshly slaughtered pig. Fearing that it wouldn't keep, I engaged a cook, this morning, to come and dismember it, season it with pepper, and braise the whole thing, including the head. If you will stay a while, I'll invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to join us, so we can play backgammon and enjoy it together."
He then directed Ch'in-t'ung, "You go, right away, and invite Master Hsieh to join us. Tell him that Brother Ying the Second is also here."
Ch'in-t'ung assented and went straight off on his errand.
Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "With regard to that debt that Hsü the Fourth owes you, have you collected it yet?"
"That lousy unprincipled dog-bone," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "claims he won't be able to come up with the whole amount until tomorrow, but he made me an initial payment of two hundred and fifty taels. You can tell those two to come here the day after tomorrow. If I'm still short, I'll make up the amount out of my household funds, that's all."
"That will be fine," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I expect they'll buy some fresh things in season and come to pay their respects to you later today."
"There's really no need for them to go to so much trouble," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After they had chatted for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Have those two, Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, already set out for the capital, or not?"
"By this time they're on their way," replied Ying Po-chüeh. "After they were apprehended at Li Kuei-chieh's place, they were incarcerated in the lockup at the district yamen overnight. The next day, the three of them were linked together on a single length of iron chain and escorted off to the Eastern Capital. Once they get there, it's not likely that any of them will return home unscathed. You thought you could help yourselves to:
Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,
day after day, just like a bug on the pantry shelf, and now your efforts have earned you a tasty treat. This sort of suffering is only their just deserts. They're on the road in this hot weather, weighed down by iron chains, and without any traveling expenses, but what does it matter."
"You crazy dog!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If they're not up to standing guard duty when condemned to military exile, whoever was it, in the first place, who induced them to hang out and fool around all day with that youngster from the Wang household? It's really a case of their suffering the consequences of trouble they made for themselves."
"Brother, you've got a point there," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all:
Flies don't cluster on eggs unless they're cracked.
Why do you suppose they didn't come after me or Hsieh Hsi-ta, if not because:
The clear is ever clear,
The turbid ever turbid?"[11]
As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta arrived and, after bowing in greeting, sat down and devoted himself to fanning himself with his fan.
"How have you managed to work up such a faceful of sweat?" asked Hsimen Ch'ing.
"Don't even mention it, Brother," replied Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If your servant had shown up so much as a step later, I wouldn't have been at home. I had just come out the front gate when he happened to arrive at the same time. I've had:
A bellyful of anger,
out of the blue today."
"What have you had to be angry about?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"Early this morning," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "Blabbermouth Sun's wife showed up at my place, claiming that I had been responsible for getting him into such a pickle. What reason would I have had to do that? The unreasonable old whore! 'It was your husband who inveigled him into the licensed quarter day after day, scrounging:
Wine by the bowl and meat by the hunk,
and bringing home silver by the handful for you to expend on your own gratification. Everyone knows that you were getting a kickback for his pains, but since when did you ever share a candareen of it with anyone else?' I had just told her off with a sentence or two, and come outside, when I unexpectedly received a summons from Brother's place over here."
Ying Po-chüeh said, "Didn't I just say to Brother here that:
If newly fermented wine is put in separate containers,
The clear is ever clear,
The turbid ever turbid?
It could hardly avoid turning out just as we predicted. As I said, if they continued to hang out with that youngster from the Wang household, sooner or later they would come a cropper, and now see how they've managed to stumble into this net. They've no one to blame but themselves."
"What sort of great prowess does that youngster from the Wang household possess?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How old is he, after all? His parietal bones are not yet fully formed. He hardly has what it takes to satisfy the sort of women that we rejected in our early days. It's enough to embarrass a ghost."
"What's he ever seen of the great world," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that could stand comparison with your doings in those days? If he even heard tell of them, he'd be scared to death."
When they had finished speaking, a page boy served them with tea, and they proceeded to drink it.
"Why don't the two of you play a game of backgammon?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They're cooking up some noodles in the rear compound. I'll have a page boy bring some out for us to eat."
Before long, Ch'in-t'ung came in to set up a table, and Hua-t'ung brought in four square boxes, that enclosed four diminutive picnic saucers, containing four different delicacies. There was one saucer of squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of an assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of fresh fagara marinated in soy sauce, and one saucer of candied garlic. These were accompanied by three saucers of garlic extract, for dipping purposes, and a large bowl of pork pot roast, along with three pairs of ivory chopsticks, all of which were laid out in proper order. Only after Hsi-men Ch'ing had joined his guests at the table were three bowls of noodles placed before them, each person pouring onto his noodles as much of the pot roast, garlic, and vinegar as he liked.
Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta picked up their chopsticks and disposed of the contents of their bowls in:
Three mouthfuls and two swallows.
In no time at all, the two of them had wolfed down seven bowls apiece.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had not even been able to finish his second bowl, said, "My sons, the two of you certainly know how to put it away."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "which of your womenfolk is responsible for preparing these noodles today? They're both tasty and delicious."
"This pot roast has been braised to perfection," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Were it not for the fact that I had just eaten at home before coming over here, I'd be prepared to suffer another bowl."
The two of them, who had gotten overheated from eating so fast, took off their outer clothes and hung them over their chairs.
On seeing Ch'in-t'ung clearing away the utensils, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Young gentleman, when you get back to the rear compound, bring some water for us to rinse out our mouths with."
"Some warm tea would be good too," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If it's too hot, it will only bring out the smell of the garlic."
In a little while, Hua-t'ung arrived with the tea, and the three of them drank it, after which they came outside and strolled among the flower beds on the other side of the juniper hedge.
Who should appear at this point but P'ing-an, who brought in four boxes of gifts that had just been delivered from the household of Huang the Fourth for Hsi-men Ch'ing to see. One box contained fresh black caltrops, one contained fresh water chestnuts, one contained four large iced shad, and one contained loquats.
When Ying Po-chüeh saw them, he said, "What fine stuff! Who knows where he dug it up to send over here? Let me take a taste."
Snatching up a number of items with one hand, he handed two of them to Hsieh Hsi-ta, saying, "There are those who:
Live to old age and death,
without knowing that such things as this exist."
"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Even before they're offered to Buddha,
You snatch them for your own enjoyment."
"Who accuses me of failing to offer them to Buddha?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"Upon entering my mouth the evidence is destroyed."
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the gifts be taken to the rear compound and put away, adding, "Ask the Third Lady for three candareens of silver to give the messenger."
Ying Po-chüeh inquired, "Was it Li Chin who delivered them, or was it Huang Ning?"
"It was Huang Ning," replied P'ing-an.
"It must be that dog-bone's lucky day," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to be rewarded with these three candareens of silver."
Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to look on as the two of them played a game of backgammon. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Li Kuei-chieh, along with her aunt, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Li P'ing-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, had all eaten in the parlor of the master suite and were sitting in the veranda outside, when they noticed that Little Chou could be seen:
Sticking out his head and craning his neck,
on the other side of the screen-wall.
"Little Chou," said Li P'ing-erh, "you've come at a good time. Come in and cut the little master's hair, which has been allowed to grow too long."
Little Chou hastily came forward and kowtowed to all of them, saying, "Just a while ago, His Honor directed that I should come inside to cut little brother's hair."
"Sister Six," said Yüeh-niang, "take a look at the almanac and see whether this is an auspicious day or an inauspicious day to cut the child's hair."
Chin-lien told Hsiao-yü to fetch an almanac, opened it up and perused it for a while, and then said, "Today is the twenty-first day of the fourth month, a *keng-hsü* day, for which the descriptive character is *ting*, or steady. It is governed by the constellation *lou-chin-kou*, or Aries, and is an auspicious day for making sacrifices, donning official cap and girdle, setting out on a journey, having clothes made, performing ablutions, getting one's hair cut, repairing or constructing, and for breaking ground. The best time to initiate these activities is the period from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM It is an auspicious day."[12]
"Since it's an auspicious day," said Yüeh-niang, "I'll have a maidservant heat water, and you can also shampoo the child's hair."
She then admonished Little Chou to proceed cautiously and coax the child into letting him cut his hair. Hsiao-yü stood to his side in order to catch the hair in a handkerchief. But before the barber had made more than a few cuts with the scissors, Kuan-ko, with the sound of a gurgling cry, started to howl in earnest. Little Chou continued to cut away hastily even as the child cried out, but who could have anticipated that the boy would choke on himself, falling silent, as his face became swollen and red.
Li P'ing-erh, who became panic-stricken at this, hastily exclaimed, "Don't cut any more! Don't cut any more!"
Little Chou, for his part, was thrown into such consternation that he abandoned the tools of his trade and fled outside as fast as his legs would carry him.
"As I've observed before," said Yüeh-niang, "this child is rather a hopeless case, forever anxious to protect his head. We should have cut his hair ourselves instead of calling someone in to do it for no good reason. What sort of a job can he do?"
As providence would have it,
after the child had remained choked up for what seemed like half a day, he let out a cry. Only then did Li P'ing-erh feel as though:
The stone on her head had finally fallen to the ground.
Taking the child in her arms, she devoted herself to petting him, saying as she did so, "What a fine thing for Little Chou to do! What a nerve, to come in here for no good reason, and insist on cutting your hair. On top of which, he's taken advantage of you by leaving the job only half-finished. Why don't I drag him back in here and give him a drubbing, in order to vent your spleen?"
Thereupon, she carried him over to Yüeh-niang, who said, "What a hopeless little beggar! The haircut was originally intended for your benefit, but it's only resulted in a crying fit. With no more hair than this left, you're likely to be mistaken for a shaven-headed convict."
After she had playfully teased him for a while, Li P'ing-erh turned him over to the wet nurse, and Yüeh-niang instructed her, "Don't breast-feed him right away, but wait until he's had a nap before feeding him."
The wet nurse then carried him back to the front compound.
Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who came in to collect Little Chou's implements and reported, "Little Chou is at the front gate, so frightened that his face has turned a scorched shade of brown."
"Has he had anything to eat?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"He has eaten," said Lai-an, "and Father has rewarded him with five candareens of silver."
"Take a goblet of wine out and give it to him," said Yüeh-niang. "He's been so frightened that these few candareens must seem hard-earned."
Hsiao-yü promptly poured out a cup of wine, fetched a saucer of cured meat, and told Lai-an to give them to Little Chou and send him on his way.
Wu Yüeh-niang then turned to Chin-lien and said, "Take a look at the almanac and see when the next *jen-tzu* day will be."
Chin-lien examined it and said, "The twenty-third is a *jen-tzu* day. It falls within the solar term *mang-chung*, or 'Grain in Ear,'[13] which also includes the Fifth Month Festival, or Dragon Boat Festival."
She then went on to ask, "Sister, why do you ask?"
"For no particular reason," said Yüeh-niang. "I just thought I'd ask."

Li Kuei-chieh then picked up the almanac to look at and said, "The twenty-fourth, I regret to say, is my mother's birthday, and I won't be able to be at home for it."
"The tenth day of the last month," said Yüeh-niang, "was your elder sister's birthday and has already been celebrated. And now the twenty-fourth day of the current month just happens to be your mother's birthday. It would seem that you denizens of the quarter suffer from two ailments a day, while celebrating three birthdays as well. During the daylight hours, you suffer from the ailment of yearning for money, while, during the night, you suffer from the ailment of yearning for customers. In the morning it's your mother's birthday, at noon it's your elder sister's birthday, and in the evening it's your own birthday. How do they all come to occur so close together? As long as your patrons have money, you might as well contrive to make every day a birthday."
Li Kuei-chieh merely smiled at this, without making a sound.
Who should appear at this juncture but Hua-t'ung, who had been sent by Hsi-men Ch'ing to invite Li Kuei-chieh to join him. Only then did Kueichieh go into Yüeh-niang's room to put on new makeup and redo her face, after which she headed off for the summerhouse in the garden, where an Eight Immortals table had already been set up, the blinds had been lowered both in front and in back, and the table had been spread with a variety of delicacies.
There were two large platters of roast pork, two platters of roast duck, two platters of newly pan-fried fresh shad, four saucers of rose-flavored pastries, two saucers of boiled chicken and bamboo shoots, and two saucers of boiled squab. These were followed by four saucers of chitterlings, blood pudding, pork tripe, fermented sausage, and the like.
As the company proceeded to eat for a while, Kuei-chieh stood by their side, replenishing the wine cups.
"I say this in your father's hearing," Ying Po-chüeh said to her, "and I'm not just giving you a hard time, but that affair of yours has already been taken care of satisfactorily. Your father has also spoken on your behalf to the district yamen, so they're no longer looking for you. And who do you have to thank for this but yours truly? It was only after I had repeatedly begged your father to intervene that he consented to do so. Do you suppose he would ever have taken the initiative in pulling strings on your behalf for no good reason? Choose whatever you like from your repertoire of songs, and sing one for me to enjoy as I drink my wine. It would be a case of making up for my efforts with one of your own."
Kuei-chieh laughed at this and cursed him, saying, "You crazy indecent beggar!
With the bigness of a flea,
How much face have you got,
that Father would believe anything you said?"
"Why you lousy little whore!" retorted Ying Po-chüeh.
"Before the sutra has even been recited,
You start to take the stick to the monk.
If you want something to eat,
You shouldn't offend the cook.
You may think that since:
A monk has no mother-in-law,
Being but a solitary male,
I can't handle the likes of you. You little whore! You'd better not take me for a joke.
Though only half functional,[14]
I'd still be up to the job."
At this, Kuei-chieh whacked him twice, as hard as she could, with the handle of the fan in her hand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and cursed him, saying, "You dog! In the future:
Your sons will be thieves and your daughters whores,
thanks only to the example you set for them."
They laughed at this for a while before Kuei-chieh finally picked up her *p'i'p'a*, held it horizontally across her knees:
Opened her ruby lips,
Exposed her white teeth,
and proceeded to sing a song suite beginning with the tune "Three Terraces Song from I-chou":
I think of how flagrantly you have betrayed my love,
How you have forgotten our vows of devotion.
On fine occasions such as flowery mornings and moonlit evenings,[15]
You have caused me to waste the springtime of my youth.
Depressed as can be, I lean upon the balustrade,
Gazing fixedly into the distance, but there is no news of you at all.
Again and again I think to myself,
It must just be that my lot is meager and my fate fickle.

To the tune "Yellow Oriole":
Who could have anticipated such a thing?
Ying Po-chüeh interpolated, "Though a boat were to capsize in your open drain, ten years might pass without your knowing it."
My fragrant flesh has been reduced,
Distress has rendered me emaciated.
Ying Po-chüeh said, "No matter how much you love him, and yearn for him, he's left you in the gutter."
My image in the mirror is covered with dust, and I am loath to improve it.
I am sparing of rouge and powder,
And too indolent to stick flowers in my hair.
The mascara on my eyebrows vainly accentuates the resentment of spring peaks.
Ying Po-chüeh said, "You remember the sayings:
Though I've taken a thousand comers,
My feelings are concentrated on one.
Silently I face the mirror, giving vent to long sighs.
I am half enamored of you, and half resentful of you.[16]
The two of you got along well enough at the outset, but now you're anticipating surprise and suffering fear on his account. Enough of that. Give over your resentment."
"You're delirious," protested Kuei-chieh. "How can you talk such nonsense?"
The hardest thing to bear,
"If you can't bear it," interjected Ying Po-chüeh, "how could anyone else be expected to?"
Is the bugle on the watchtower,
The dying notes of which are enough to break one's heart.
"It's not your heart that's broken," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but the strings by which your puppeteer manipulates you. The two of you are no longer able to perform together."
At this, Kuei-chieh gave him a whack as hard as she could and cursed him, saying, "You lousy dog-fucked beast! You're delirious today. All you do is try to provoke people."
To the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests":
All is silent within my secluded window and the moon is bright;
In my resentment, I lean alone against the standing screen.[17]
Suddenly I hear a solitary wild goose cry outside my bower,
Which only serves to reawaken the sorrow of separation.
The watches are long and the clepsydra never-ending.[18]
Before I know it, the lamp grows dim, the incense burns out,[19] and I am unable to get to sleep,
While, wherever he may be, he is sleeping soundly.
"You silly little whore!" remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "Why shouldn't he be sleeping soundly? Not having been hustled off anywhere, he's happily asleep at home, while you've had to hide out at someone else's place, feeling as agitated as a sheepskin drum every day, awaiting the arrival of someone from the Eastern Capital before you can feel that:
The stone on your head has finally fallen to the ground."
Kuei-chieh was so disturbed by this banter that she exclaimed, "Father, just look at the way Beggar Ying here is carrying on, persisting in pestering me, I don't know why."
"It's about time you got around to acknowledging your father," said Ying Po-chüeh; but Kuei-chieh ignored him and, plucking her *p'i'-p'a*, continued to sing.
To the tune "Alliterations and Rhymes":
When I think of him,
When I think of him,
How can I help taking it to heart?
"Since he scratches you where you itch," interjected Ying Po-chüeh, "you can't help taking it to heart."
When there is no one around,
When there is no one around,
My teardrops silently cascade.
"There was once a man," said Ying Po-chüeh, "who habitually wet his bed. One day his mother died, and, as an expression of his filiality, he set up a bunk in front of her spirit tablet. Having gotten to sleep late, who could have anticipated that he would, once again, wet his bed. When someone came in and, noticing that the mattress was wet, asked how it had happened, he was at a loss for words and only replied, 'You wouldn't understand, but I consigned my tears to my stomach, and they overflowed.' Your case is analogous to his. Since you can't refer to him in the open, all you can do is cry over him in secret."
"You shameless pip-squeak!" protested Kuei-chieh. "You were an eyewitness, I suppose. You're delirious."
I blame him,
I blame him,
More than words can tell.
"As to that," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got something else to say. You might just as well blame Heaven. Who knows how much money you've made off him already? And today, now that you're reduced to hiding out at someone else's place, your business has been disrupted 'more than words can tell.' Your affectation is about as incongruous as a left-hand Gate God masquerading with a white face.[20] Who do you think you're going to fool with that rigma-role?"
Who could have known, when he was here, that he would be so elusive?
"You might have known," commented Ying Po-chüeh, "that though you thought you had him in hand, he might still fly away."
My only regret is that, to begin with, I ought not to have taken him so seriously.
"You silly little whore!" remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "Nowadays, around here, you couldn't fool a three-year-old child with that stuff, let alone a habitué of the world of breeze and moonlight. So you took him seriously, did you? Just you wait a minute, while I sing a song for you, to the tune 'A Southern Branch':
As for the realm of breeze and moonlight, let me explain it to you.
Nowadays, there is no distinguishing between true and false.
Each and every denizen of that world is a downright degenerate;
Each and every denizen of that world is a practiced old hand.
Their arts are designed only to bury you alive, making blind scapegoats of you.
The old procuress is only out to make money;
While the young whore has no choice but to stick her neck out and forge ahead.
It is bitter enough to make her jump into the river;
It is sad enough to make her want to seek out a well.
She wonders when her crock of bad karma will ever be full,
So that even if she is reborn as a donkey or horse,
She will not have to continue in this line of work."
By this time, his raillery had reduced Kuei-chieh to tears, and Hsi-men Ch'ing intervened by giving Ying Po-chüeh a whack on the head with his fan, laughing as he cursed him, saying, "You insensitive dog! You simply insist on plaguing people to death."
He then turned to Kuei-chieh and said, "Go ahead and sing. Don't pay any attention to him."
"Brother Ying," chimed in Hsieh Hsi-ta, "Don't be such a killjoy. Today:
Trying first this and then that,
you've devoted yourself exclusively to offending this goddaughter of mine. If you say another word, may you develop a huge boil on your mouth."
After some time had elapsed, Li Kuei-chieh picked up her *p'i'-p'a* and continued to sing, to the tune "Mustering the Palace Guard":
Everyone said that he was trustworthy,

Ying Po-chüeh was about to say something, but Hsieh Hsi-ta put his hand over his mouth and said, "Kuei-chieh, go ahead and sing. Don't pay any attention to him."
Li Kuei-chieh then continued to sing:
But he turns out to have been bent only on seduction.
His eyes were wide open,
But his heart and his mouth were not in agreement.[21]
Hsieh Hsi-ta having removed his hand, Ying Po-chüeh resumed his commentary, saying, "If they had been in agreement it would have been a good thing. This affair might never have occurred. Your hearts and mouths may not have been in agreement, but your tiger's mouths [22] were certainly responsive enough. Though not many, at least two or three cones of moxa were burnt there."[23]
"How can you be so:
Barefaced and red-eyed?"
protested Kuei-chieh. "You were an eyewitness, I suppose."
"I may not have seen it with my own eyes," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but it took place in the Star of Joy Bordello, did it not?"
The whole company, including Hsi-men Ch'ing, couldn't help laughing at this.
Swearing to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
He spoke falsehood while alleging truth.[24]
I nearly made the mistake of contracting a case of lovesickness on his account.
"What a silly creature!" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"People may buy things by mistake,
But nobody sells things by mistake.
You denizens of the quarter are hardly likely to contract any diseases by mistake."
That unfaithful lover;
Judging from the way he's been carrying on,
What kind of a future will he allow me to have?
"You may not be able to expect much in the way of a future," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "but someday he is bound to inherit the rank of Imperial Commissioner."
To the tune "An Amber Cat Pendant":
Every day we are estranged we grow further apart.[25]
How will we ever meet again?
It is in vain that, in my infatuation, I have been content to patiently wait.
"How long must you wait, after all?" asked Ying Po-chüeh. "In the days to come, once this affair in the Eastern Capital is taken care of, it won't be too late to relight the furnace."
My dreams of clouds and rain on Witch's Mountain[26] are unlikely to be fulfilled.
You fickle fellow,
As far as this life is concerned,
The phoenix and its mate are destined to part,[27]
The phoenix and its mate are destined to part.
CODA:
Lover of mine, you've shown yourself to be altogether too fickle.
You've found it possible to give me up, leaving me all alone.
Our love in a previous incarnation has turned into nothing but a painted pastry.[28]
When she had finished singing, Hsieh Hsi-ta said, "That's enough. That's enough. Let Hua-t'ung take away her *p'i-p'a*, so I can reward her labors by presenting her with a cup of wine."
"And I'll offer her a serving of food," said Ying Po-chüeh. "My talents may not amount to much, but at least it would be a case of making up for her efforts with one of my own."
"Get out of here, you beggar!" said Li Kuei-chieh. "Why should anyone pay attention to you?
First you beat a person with your big fists,
And then you rub the bruises with your hand."
At this juncture, Hsieh Hsi-ta proffered Kuei-chieh three cups of wine in a row and then pulled Ying Po-chüeh aside, saying, "We still have those two games of backgammon to complete."
Thereupon, the two of them resumed playing backgammon, while Hsimen Ch'ing tipped Kuei-chieh a wink and then got up to leave the room.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if you're going to the rear compound, send some breath-sweetening lozenges out to us, would you. We ate all that garlic a little while ago, and now it's paying us back by eructing in an unpleasant way."
"Where would I get any breath-sweetening lozenges from?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Brother, who do you think you're fooling?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I happen to know that school official named Liu from Hang-chou has sent you a considerable quantity of them. It would hardly be fitting for you to consume them all by yourself."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and proceeded to head for the rear compound. Li Kuei-chieh also disappeared outside, where she stood next to the T'ai-hu rockery and pretended to busy herself picking flowers to wear in her hair. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta played three games of backgammon in a row while waiting for Hsi-men Ch'ing to return, but he did not appear.
When they asked Hua-t'ung, "What is your father doing in the rear compound?" he replied, "Father went back to the rear compound but came right out again."
"If he came right out again," said Ying Po-chüeh, "where could he have gone?"
Then, turning to Hsieh Hsi-ta, he said, "You stay sitting here while I go have a look for him."
Hsieh Hsi-ta then proceeded to play a game of elephant chess with Shut'ung on the surface of the desk.
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing, after paying a visit to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, had come outside and was standing under the banksia rose arbor, when he caught sight of Li Kuei-chieh, pulled her into the "snow cave" in the Hidden Spring Grotto, and closed the door; whereupon the two of them sat down on a low couch to chat. The fact is that Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon ducking into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, had taken a dose of the aphrodisiac before coming out again. Taking Kuei-chieh onto his lap and settling her down upon his thighs, he proceeded, without more ado, to expose his organ for her to see, which gave her quite a start.
"How on earth did you make it as big as that?" she asked.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her the whole story about the Indian monk's medication and then started out by having her:
Bend low her powdered neck,
Gently part her scarlet lips,
and suck him off for a while. After that, he lightly lifted her two tiny golden lotuses, that were:
But half a span in length,
Barely three inches long,
With handsome heel lifts,
Vying with lotus buds,
Fit to tread fragrant dust, or
Pirouette upon an emerald disk,[29]
Beloved of thousands,
Craved by tens of thousands,
and hung them over his arms to either side. She had on scarlet shoes of plain silk with high white satin heels, and figured ankle leggings with gold borders, the ends of which were tied in place with lengths of sand-green cord. He then carried her over to a chair, where the two of them started to go at it.
Who would have thought that Ying Po-chüeh, having looked for Hsi-men Ch'ing in every one of the pavilions in the garden without finding him, passed through the miniature Dripping Emerald Cavern, came down to the banksia rose arbor, went around the grape arbor, and arrived at the Hidden Spring Grotto, deep among the pines and bamboos. Here he faintly overheard the sound of people laughing, though he wasn't sure where it was coming from. Ying Po-chüeh then slowly proceeded with:
Skulking step and lurking gait,[30]
to lift aside the portiere, exposing the fact that the two leaves of the door were ajar, and, taking his stand immediately outside, devoted himself to eavesdropping on the scene within.
He overheard Kuei-chieh, calling out in a quavery voice as she responded with her body to the movements of Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Daddy, finish off as quickly as you can. I'm afraid someone may come along."
At this, Ying Po-chüeh, giving vent to a loud cry, suddenly pushed open the door and burst in. Seeing that Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had Kuei-chieh's legs hoisted over his arms as she laid back on the chair, was just in the thick of things, he said, "Quickly, fetch some water to splash on them. The two rutting creatures have gotten themselves stuck together."
"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" protested Li Kuei-chieh. "Breaking in on us that way, you've given me quite a start."
"Finish off as quickly as you can, eh?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's not as easy as all that. You've got to wait until things run their course, after all. You no sooner expressed the fear that someone might catch you in the act, than I turned up. Come over here, and let me have a share of the take."
"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get out of here immediately, and stop pestering me. I fear a page boy may come by and see us."
"You little whore!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "You'd better consent to entreat me nicely, or I'll raise such a hue and cry that even the ladies in the rear compound will hear what's going on. You've already been acknowledged as an adopted daughter by the First Lady, and she's kindly agreed to let you hide out here for a day or two, and here you are carrying on an affair with her husband. If she were to find out, you'd never hear the end of it."
"Get out of here, you crazy beggar!" responded Kuei-chieh.
"I'll go," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but not before snatching a kiss."
Thereupon, holding Kuei-chieh in place, he gave her a kiss before starting outside.
"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Aren't you even going to put the latch on the door?"
Ying Po-chüeh came back to put the latch on the door and said, "My son, the two of you can just fuck away, fuck away to your heart's content. You can knock the bottom out of her for all I care. It's no concern of mine."
He had gotten no further than the pine tree outside, when he came back and said, "As for those breath-sweetening lozenges that you promised me a while ago, where are they?"
"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just wait a little while and I'll see that you get them, that's all. Why continue to pester us?"
Only then did Ying Po-chüeh take his leave, laughing as he went.
"What an obnoxious chunk of knife-bait!" exclaimed Kuei-chieh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh continued to carry on with each other in the "snow cave" for a good two hours until, by eating a red date,[31] he was finally able to finish off, with the result that:
The rain evaporated and the clouds dispersed.[32]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Among the crab apple boughs, orioles dart quickly to and fro;
In the shade of green bamboos, swallows parley incessantly.
Even if one were to entrust the scene to a skillful painter;
This picture of spring beauty could never be properly depicted.[33]
In a little while, the two of them straightened their clothing and ventured outside. Kuei-chieh reached into Hsi-men Ch'ing's sleeve and groped out a quantity of breath-sweetening lozenges, which she proceeded to secrete in her own sleeve. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had so exerted himself that:
His whole body was bathed in fragrant sweat,[34]
And he couldn't help panting and puffing,
went over under the flowering lantana to urinate, while Kuei-chieh, for her part, groped out a mirror from about her person, put it on the sill of the moon window, in order to:
Arrange her cloudy locks and adjust her tresses,
after which, she went back to the rear compound. Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to wash his hands, and when he came out to rejoin his company, Ying Po-chüeh demanded the breath-sweetening lozenges.
"You crazy beggar!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You must be splenetic! How can you persist in pestering people so?"
He then handed a few lozenges to each of them, at which Ying Po-chüeh complained, "You're only giving me these measly couple of them, are you? Never mind. Never mind. I'll just have to ask that little whore from the Li Family Establishment for some."
As they were speaking, who should they see but Li Ming, who came in and kowtowed to them.
"Li Ming," said Ying Po-chüeh, "where have you come from? You haven't heard anything about how this affair of theirs is going, have you?"
"As for this Kuei-chieh of ours," said Li Ming, "thanks to the intervention of Father here, no one has come pressing us about her for the last couple of days. They are just waiting for word from the capital of the final disposition of the case."
"Has that young woman from the Ch'i Family Establishment come out of hiding yet?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"Ch'i Hsiang-erh is still hiding out in the home of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family," said Li Ming. "It's a good thing that Kueichieh is here at Father's place. Who would dare to come looking for her here?"
"Were that not the case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "she'd be in a pretty pickle. She has only to thank myself and Master Hsieh here, who repeatedly pointed out to your patron that if he didn't consent to intervene on her behalf, where was she to go for succor?"
"If Father here had refused to intervene," said Li Ming, "there would have been no end to the matter. This Auntie Li the Third of ours conducts her business in such a haphazard way, there's no telling what the outcome might have been."
"I recollect," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that her birthday is coming up any day now. We'll get together with your patron here, and help to celebrate her birthday."
"There's no need for you gentlemen to do that," said Li Ming. "Once this affair is concluded, you can be sure that Auntie Li the Third and Kuei-chieh will ask you gentlemen over for a visit."
"When the time comes, then," said Ying Po-chüeh, "we can celebrate her birthday after the fact."
He then summoned Li Ming to come forward and said to him, "You drink this cup of wine for me. I've been drinking all day and can't handle any more."
Li Ming accepted the silver goblet with handles that was proffered to him, knelt down, and:
Drained it in one gulp.
Hsieh Hsi-ta also told Ch'in-t'ung to pour out a goblet of wine and offer it to him.
"You probably haven't had anything to eat yet," said Ying Po-chüeh. "There's still a plate of pastries left over on the table there."

Hsieh Hsi-ta also picked up two platters of braised pig's head and roast duck and handed them to him.
Li Ming accepted them with both hands and was in the process of retiring to eat them, when Ying Po-chüeh detached a half-section of shad with his chopsticks and offered it to him, saying, "It seems to me that you are unlikely to have eaten anything like this so far this year. Have a taste of something new."
"You crazy dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well let him have the whole thing to eat. What do you want to keep it around for?"
"In a little while," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if the wine should run out, I might be hungry and wouldn't be satisfied to eat rice. This fish of yours from Chiang-nan is only in season once a year. If it gets stuck in the cracks between your teeth, when you manage to extricate it, it is still fragrant. It's not easy to come by. To tell the truth, I doubt if it is available even at court. Where else are you likely to find it except at Brother's place here?"
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Hua-t'ung, who came in carrying four saucers of fresh things in season, one saucer of black caltrops, one saucer of water chestnuts, one saucer of snowy lotus root, and one saucer of loquats. Before Hsi-men Ch'ing even had a chance to put any of these in his mouth, Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to snatch away whole saucers full and dump them into his sleeve.
"You'd better leave a couple of them for me," protested Hsieh Hsi-ta, taking advantage of the opportunity to appropriate the saucer of black caltrops, leaving only the lotus root on the table.
Hsi-men Ch'ing managed to pick up a single piece and put it in his mouth, leaving the remainder for Li Ming to eat.
He then directed Hua-t'ung, "Bring another two loquats back from the rear compound and give them to Li Ming."
Li Ming put these in his sleeve, saying, "When I get home I'll share them with Auntie Li the Third."
Only after Li Ming had finished eating the fare provided for him did he rejoin the company, take up his psaltery, and prepare to sing.
"Sing us that song suite that begins with the tune" The Herbaceous Peony Enclosure," said Ying Po-chüeh.
After tuning the strings of his psaltery, Li Ming, doing his best to show off the quality of his voice, sang:
By the pond with its new verdure,
I suddenly strike the balustrade;
With whom can I discuss what's in my heart?
The flowers have nothing to say,
The butterflies have nothing to say;
The frustration of separation fills my breast,[35] entangling my feelings.
I resent the Lord of the East's unwillingness to retain the parting guest.
I sigh at the dancing red blossoms and drifting catkins,
Lightly sprinkled with the powder of butterfly wings.
The scene remains the same,
Things remain the same,
But, sadly, I no longer see my lover's face.
To the tune "Autumn Geese on the Frontier":
When we parted from each other it was early spring.
The flowering crab apples had just begun to bloom,
Their buds barely open and intermittently visible.
Imperceptibly, the pomegranate blossoms burst,
The red lotus flowers were in bloom,
Iced fruits were submerged,
And silk fans were waved to avoid the heat.
In no time at all, the chrysanthemums were yellow,
The metallic autumn wind began to blow,
The dead leaves were scattered,
And the foliage of the phoenix tree changed color.
Before long, the wintersweet was in bloom,
Frozen flakes were falling,
And people were mulling wine within heated chambers.
The scenes presented by the four seasons are multifarious,
Even to think of them is to be enraptured.
But I don't know where that handsome lover of mine,
Out in the cold,
All by himself,
Deeply depressed,
Is enduring his lonely resentment.
To the tune "Redoubled Joy in the Golden Palace":
I sigh with resentment.
It has always been true that romance leads young people astray.
How can I bear that it is late spring again?
I dread the twilight hours,
Grieve at the twilight hours;
All by myself, I am too depressed to enjoy anything.
Though I were to fumigate my bedding with rare incense, with whom would I share it?
I sigh that the night is long, my pillow is cold, and my coverlet is chill.[36]
You sleep alone,
I sleep alone,
Only in dreams can we meet.
To the tune "The Peddler":
One day, should our lifelong desires ever be fulfilled,
We will be united as husband and wife;
Heaven be thanked.
That would make a happy marriage affinity in this incarnation,
Rather than being out in the cold, suffering from loneliness,
Or being sunk deep in depression, enduring misfortune.
To the tune "Exhilarated by Peace" (Coda):[37]
Solely on account of that impassioned karmic encumbrance of mine,
I am today troubled with resentment and entangled in emotion.[38]
I think how, beneath the stars, we first swore oaths of fidelity by the hills and seas,
Which only served as an impediment during the romantic years of my youth.
If, one day, we should ever be united in wedlock like the morning clouds and evening rain,[39]
Enjoy the singing and dancing in decorated halls[40] during a joyous wedding feast,
Celebrate a perpetual reunion within silk screens and brocaded curtains,
Where our enamored branches may intertwine amidst the painted candles of the nuptial chamber,[41]
We must never forget the abundance of misfortunes that we have had to endure.[42]
That day the three of them continued to drink until the lamps were lighted and, even then, waited until some congee made with polished rice, flavored with mung beans, had been brought out from the rear compound for them to eat before preparing to depart.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "are you busy tomorrow?"
"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm going to pay a visit to the estate of Eunuch Director Liu, the manager of the Imperial Brickyard. Yesterday, Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang invited me there for a banquet, and I have to get an early start."
"With regard to that matter concerning Li the Third and Huang the Fourth," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll arrange with them to come the day after tomorrow then."
Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded his head and instructed him to have them come on the afternoon of that day, and not to show up any earlier. His two guests then made their departure, without waiting to be seen off. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Shu-t'ung to clear away the utensils and then went back to the rear compound, where he spent the night in Meng Yü-lou's quarters. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.[43]
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early and did not go to the yamen. Having eaten some congee, he donned his official cap and girdle, mounted his horse, holding a gold-flecked fan in his hand, and, followed by a retinue of servants, made his way to Eunuch Director Liu's estate thirty li outside the South Gate to attend the banquet. On this occasion, both Shu-t'ung and Tai-an accompanied him. But no more of this.
P'an Chin-lien, taking advantage of Hsi-men Ch'ing's absence from the house, made plans with Li P'ing-erh to take the three mace of silver that Ch'en Ching-chi had forfeited, together with the seven mace that Li P'ingerh had agreed to add, and get Lai-hsing to buy one roast duck, two chickens, a mace of silver's worth of other dishes to go with the rice, a jug of Chin-hua wine, a bottle of distilled spirits, and a mace of silver's worth of square, stuffed glutinous rice cakes, to be served cold. These foodstuffs were all properly prepared by Lai-hsing's wife, Hui-hsiu.
Chin-lien said to Yüeh-niang, "The other day Hsi-men Ta-chieh won three mace of silver from our son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, at a game of cards, and our sister Li P'ing-erh has augmented this with an additional seven mace of silver. Today we would like to play host, and invite our sister to enjoy a repast with us in the garden."
Wu Yüeh-niang, accordingly, along with Meng Yü-lou, Li Chiao-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Li Kuei-chieh, joined P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh and started out by feasting for a while in the summerhouse. Afterward, taking what was left of the food and wine with them, they made their way up the artificial hill to the highest point in the garden, the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where they proceeded to amuse themselves by playing board games and "pitch-pot."
Meng Yü-lou, along with Li Chiao-erh, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Sun Hsüeho, then ascended the Flower-Viewing Tower, where they leaned over the balustrade, from which they could see extending below them, in front of the artificial hill:
The tree peony grove,
The garden peony bed,
The crab apple bower,
The seven sisters trellis,
The banksia rose arbor,
And the rosa rugosa shrubs.
Truly:
All four seasons produce their never-fading flowers;
All eight festivals appear one everlasting spring.
After they had enjoyed the scene for a while, they came back down to the Cloud Repose Pavilion, where Hsiao-yü and Ying-ch'un were waiting on Yüeh-niang, pouring the wine and serving the food.
Yüeh-niang suddenly remarked, "Today I forgot to invite Master Ch'en."
"Today," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "Father has once again sent him to Hsü the Fourth's shop outside the city gate, to dun him for the silver he owes him. He should be back any time now."
It was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi presented himself:
His body clad in a gown of jet velour,
His feet shod in sandals and white socks,
His head adorned with a tasseled "tile-ridge" hat,
Held in place with a gold hairpin.
After making his bow of greeting to Yüeh-niang and the rest, he pulled Hsimen Ta-chieh aside and sat down with her.
Addressing himself to Yüeh-niang, he said, "I've brought the final payment of silver from Hsü the Fourth's place back with me. It's in five sealed packages, two hundred fifty taels in all. I delivered it to the master suite, and Yü-hsiao has put it away."
Thereupon:
With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,
Several rounds of wine were consumed, and
Their faces all took on the glint of spring.[44]
Yüeh-niang went back to playing board games with Li Chiao-erh and Li Kueichieh, while Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Ch'en Ching-chi sauntered about enjoying the flowers and verdant foliage.
Chin-lien wandered off by herself, behind the artificial hill, among a thick grove of plantains, where she amused herself by batting at the butterflies with the round white-silk fan in her hand.
Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi, who had surreptitiously crept up behind her, abruptly addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, you don't know how to go about batting a butterfly. Let me show you how it's done. These butterflies are just like you, they've got:
The mind of a ball,
Bobbing up, bobbing down,

elusive creatures that they are."
Chin-lien swiveled her powdered neck, gave him a sidelong glance, and berated him with a laugh, saying, "You dead duck of a lousy short-life! Who needs you to bat butterflies for them? If anyone should overhear you, you'd be done for: though I suppose you're too far gone to care. Having knocked back several goblets of wine, you've come here to pester me, have you?"
She then went on to ask, "What about those handkerchiefs you undertook to buy for me?"
Ch'en Ching-chi, with an ingratiating smile, reached into his sleeve, pulled them out, and handed them to her, saying, "I've got the Sixth Lady's here too."
"Now that I've delivered the handkerchiefs," he went on to say, "what are you prepared to give me in return?"
Thereupon, he put his face up to hers; to which Chin-lien responded by giving him a shove.
Though neither of them realized it, Li P'ing-erh, carrying Kuan-ko in her arms, and accompanied by the wet nurse, happened to come along from the other side of the juniper hedge and caught sight of Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi flirting together and batting butterflies.
When she saw that no one was looking, she stepped nimbly into the grotto in the artificial hill, from which she suddenly emerged, crying out, "Why don't the two of you bat a butterfly for Kuan-ko's amusement?"
This threw P'an Chin-lien into such consternation, fearing that Li P'ingerh might have caught them out, that she calculatedly inquired, "Has Son-inlaw Ch'en given you the handkerchiefs you requested from him, or not?"
"No, he hasn't given them to me yet," Li P'ing-erh replied.
"He had them in his sleeve," said Chin-lien, "but didn't feel comfortable giving them to us in front of Hsi-men Ta-chieh, so he slipped them to me unobtrusively, just now."
The two of them then sat down together on the stone border of the flower bed, opened the package, and divided the handkerchiefs between them.
Chin-lien, having noticed that Kuan-ko had a white drawnwork handkerchief fastened around his neck, while he sucked on a plum that he was holding in his hand, asked, "Is that one of your handkerchiefs?"
Li P'ing-erh said, "It's one that his senior mother put around his neck, just now, when she saw that he was sucking on a plum, the juice of which was dripping onto him."
The two of them continued to sit together beneath the grove of plantains.
"This place is really quite shady and cool," said Li P'ing-erh. "Let's sit here and enjoy it for a while."
She then directed Ju-i, "You go and get Ying-ch'un to fetch the child's little pillow from my quarters, and also bring the cool bamboo bed mat, so we can put him down here for a nap. Also tell her to bring a set of dominoes, so I can play a game of dominoes with the Fifth Lady here. You can stay there and look after the place."
Ju-i went off on this errand, and, before long, Ying-ch'un showed up with the pillow and mat, as well as the set of dominoes. Li P'ing-erh arranged the mat and laid Kuan-ko down on his little pillow, where he was left to amuse himself while she played dominoes with Chin-lien. After they had been playing for a while, she told Ying-ch'un to go back to her quarters and boil a pot of fine tea for them.
Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou, from her vantage point at the balustrade of the Cloud Repose Pavilion, caught sight of them and waved to Li P'ing-erh with her hand, saying, "Elder Sister has something to say to you. She'll be right there."
Li P'ing-erh, abandoning her child, whom she entrusted to Chin-lien's care, responded, "I'll be right there."
Chin-lien, however, who was preoccupied by the fact that Ch'en Ching-chi was still lurking in the grotto, was scarcely concerned about the welfare of the child, but seized the opportunity to step nimbly through the door of the grotto, locate Ch'en Ching-chi, and say to him, "There's no one else around. You can come out now."
Ch'en Ching-chi then called to the woman to come inside and see the mushroom, saying, "Some mushrooms with enormous heads have sprung up in here."[45]
Having thus inveigled the woman into the grotto, he bent his knees, knelt down before her, and proposed that they indulge in the play of clouds and rain together. The two of them then embraced and began to kiss each other.
It so happens that:
As providence would have it,
when Li P'ing-erh arrived at the Cloud Repose Pavilion, Wu Yüeh-niang said to her, "Sister Meng the Third has just lost a game of pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ta-chieh. Why don't you come and try your hand at a couple of pitches on her behalf?"
"There's no one down below to look after the child," said Li P'ing-erh.
"After all, Sister Six is there," said Meng Yü-lou. "What is there to be afraid of?"
"Sister Meng the Third," said Yüeh-niang, "why don't you go look after the child for her?"
"Third Lady," said Li P'ing-erh, "might I also trouble you to bring the baby back with you?"
She then turned to Hsiao-yü and said, "You go along with her, and bring the mat and his little pillow back with you."
When Hsiao-yü and Meng Yü-lou arrived beneath the grove of plantains, they found the baby lying on his back on the mat:
Gesticulating with both hands and feet,
and screaming at the top of his voice, while Chin-lien was nowhere to be found. What should they see beside him but a large black cat, which, on seeing them arrive, disappeared in a puff of smoke.
"Where has the Fifth Lady gone?" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "Ai-ya! Ai-ya! She's left the child here all alone, and he's been terrified by a cat."
Chin-lien then emerged from the grotto to one side, saying, "I've just been in here relieving myself. Who's gone off anywhere? And how could any cat have terrified him? How can you be so:
Barefaced and red-eyed?"
Meng Yü-lou did not go into the grotto for a look but merely took Kuan-ko in her arms and devoted herself to petting him, as she made her way back up to the Cloud Repose Pavilion, while Hsiao-yü followed her with the pillow and mat. Chin-lien, who was afraid she might tell tales about her, stuck right to her tail.
"Why is the child crying?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"When I got there," said Meng Yü-lou, "there was a large black cat, from who knows where, crouched right beside the child's head."
"It must clearly have terrified the child," said Yüeh-niang.
"The Fifth Lady was looking after him," said Li P'ing-erh.
"Sister Six had gone into the grotto to relieve herself," said Meng Yü-lou.
Chin-lien stepped up at this point and said, "Yü-lou, how can you be so:
Barefaced and red-eyed?
Where would I have gotten a cat from? I imagine he must have been hungry and was crying to be breast-fed. You're just trying to lay the blame on me."
Li P'ing-erh saw that Ying-ch'un had come back with the tea and said to her, "Go summon the wet nurse so she can breast-feed the child."
Meanwhile, Ch'en Ching-chi, on seeing that the coast was clear, sneaked out of the grotto, made his way along the juniper hedge, rounded the corner of the summerhouse, and headed straight out the postern gate into the front compound. Truly:
With both hands he tore open the road between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.
Yüeh-niang, on seeing that the baby would not allow himself to be breastfed but continued to cry, said to Li P'ing-erh, "You carry him back to your quarters, and do what you can to get him to go to sleep."
Thereupon, the wine drinking came to an end, and the party broke up.
It so happens that Ch'en Ching-chi had failed in his attempt to make out with P'an Chin-lien.
Though they may have wished to emulate the billing swallows and cooing orioles;
The bee's antennae had no more than grazed the corolla of the flower.
His endeavor had not turned out propitiously, and when he returned to his anteroom in the front compound, he couldn't help muttering unhappily to himself. Truly:
Unable to help themselves,[46] the blossoms fall;
Conveying a sense of deja vu,[47] the swallows return.[48]
There is a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" that testifies to this:

I saw her rakishly sporting a spray of blossoms;
Smiling as she toyed with her spray of blossoms.
On her ruby lips she wore no rouge;
But looked as though she did wear rouge.
When we met the other day,
And then met again today;
She seemed to have feelings for me,
But displayed no feelings for me.
Though she wished to consent,
She never gave her consent.
It looked as though she refused me;
But she really never did refuse me.
When can we make another assignation;
When will we ever see each other again?
If we don't meet,
She may long for me;
When we do meet,
I still long for her

That day, Ximen Qing had been entertained by Xia and presents had come to him from Censor Song. He was utterly delighted, and Xia was impressed. He shut the door and urged Ximen to drink more and more wine, refusing to let him go before midnight, the third night watch.
Pan Jinlian had taken off her headdress, prepared the bed and washed her cunt with perfumed water. She was waiting for Ximen Qing to come. When he came, he was drunk. She quickly undressed him; Chunmei brought him tea, and he went to bed. Jinlian, quite naked, sat on the side of the bed and bent over to tie the ribbons of her shoes to her white ankles. The shoes were low-heeled and scarlet. The sight aroused Ximen's passion, and his handle stood up sharply. He asked her for the love instruments, and she brought them out from beneath the bed and gave them to him. He put on two silver clasps, and then threw his arm around her. "Today," he said, "I want to play with the flower in the back court. Will you let me?"
"You shameless fellow," the woman said, "you have played that game often enough with Shutong. Why need you ask me? If that is what you want, go to the slave."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Little oily mouth," he said, "if you will let me do this, I shall want the boy no more. Don't you understand that I am particularly fond of this kind of play. I will only put it there for a little while."
Thus urged, the woman said: "I don't believe you can do it. Your thing is too big. But take the ring from its head and I will try."
Ximen Qing took off the sulfur ring and left only the clasps at the root. He told her to get onto the bed on hands and knees and raise her buttocks high. He rubbed his penis with spittle and moved in gradually. But its cruel, proud head refused to go farther than a little way. She grimaced and bit a handkerchief. "Darling," she said, "be careful not to go in too quickly; my bottom isn't like a door. I feel you inside me like a burning fire."
"Never mind," Ximen said, "tomorrow you shall have a dress of fine embroidery."
"I have clothes like that already," Jinlian said. "What I want is a dress like that of Li Guijie, a lined skirt of gold and silver with jade-colored ribbons and fur. It is very beautiful, and everybody but me has such a skirt. I don't know how much it will cost, but please buy me one."
"Don't worry," Ximen said, "I will buy one for you." He plunged violently forward.
The woman turned her head and looked at him. "Darling," she said, "it is painful enough. Why are you so violent? Won't you let yourself go now?"
But Ximen Qing would not. He held her legs while he looked at his penis going in and out, and cried, "Give me my way, you little strumpet, and call me 'darling.' Then you will have all of me."
The woman closed her eyes and said something like the whisper of a bird. She gently shook her willow-like waist and thrust her sweet body forward to meet his, her enticements and tender words beyond description. After a time, Ximen felt that the essence of his manhood was ready. He grasped her buttocks, then launched himself into her, with the sound of constant slapping against her buttocks. The woman under him could only mumble inarticulately. When the time came, he pulled her against himself and pushed it in to the root, into the final recess, enjoying exquisite pleasure. Contented, the semen flowed freely. The woman received it all, and they lay stuck together on the bed. After a long while he withdrew his penis, but it looked bloody, and liquid was oozing slowly from its mouth; she wiped it with a handkerchief, and they both slept.
The next day Ximen Qing went to his office. When he returned, invitations had come from the two dignitaries Huang and An, asking him to go early on the twenty-second to a party at Eunuch Liu's place. Ximen Qing dismissed the man who had brought the invitations, then went to the upper room and had some gruel. When he came to the great hall, he met Zhou the barber. Zhou knelt down and kowtowed. "You have come at the right moment," Ximen Qing said. "My hair needs attention."
They went to the Hall of the Kingfishers. Ximen sat down beneath an awning, took off his hat and hairnet and pulled down his hair. Barber Zhou took out his combs to dress it. He cleaned it and examined the color. When he knelt down to receive payment, he said: "There will be further promotion for you this year, my Lord, for your hair is in excellent condition." Ximen Qing was very pleased. When his hair had been combed, he told the barber to cleanse his ears and massage his body. The barber had his instruments with him and gave Ximen's body a thorough rolling. Then he exercised the muscles so that Ximen began to feel extremely fit everywhere. Ximen gave him five *qian* of silver and some food, and he was told to wait and shave the baby's head. Then Ximen Qing went to his study, lay down on a great marble bed, and fell asleep.
That day Aunt Yang went away and the two nuns Wang and Xue also made ready to go. Wu Yueniang packed their boxes with sweet things and cakes and gave each of them five *qian* of silver. To each of the novices she gave a small roll of cloth. As they were leaving, Xue told Yueniang not to fail to take the medicine on a *renzi* day and she would be sure to have a child.
"Lady Xue," Yueniang said, "my birthday comes in the eighth month. You must come to see me then. I want you especially." The nun made a reverence and promised to come. All the ladies went to see them off. Afterwards, Yueniang and Aunt Wu went back to the upper room, and the other ladies went to the garden with Guijie and the baby.
"Sister Guijie," Li Ping'er said, "won't you give me the baby?"
"No," said Guijie, "I love carrying him."
Yulou said: "Sister Guijie, you have not seen Father's new study yet." Jinlian saw how beautifully the roses were blooming, and she plucked two of them for Guijie. They went along the pine-hedged walks till they came to the Hall of the Kingfishers. Beds, curtains, screens, tables, books, pictures, musical instruments and chess, were all tastefully set out. A silken net was held in position over the bed by two silver hooks, and the light summer pillows and mattress were spread upon it.
Ximen Qing was lying fast asleep. Beside him was a small gold incense burner in which some Dragon's Spittle incense was burning. The green windows were partly open, and light was reflected through them by the palm leaves outside. Jinlian took the incense box from the table and examined it. Li Ping'er and Meng Yulou sat down on chairs. Suddenly Ximen Qing turned over and saw the ladies. "What are you doing here?" he said.
"Sister Guijie wanted to see your study," Jinlian said. "So we brought her here." Then Ximen saw his son Guan'ge with them and played with him for a while.
Unexpectedly, Huatong came and said: "Uncle Ying is here." The ladies hurried away to the rooms of Li Ping'er. When Ying Bojue came to the pines, he saw Guijie with Guan'ge in her arms, and said to her maliciously:
"Ah, Guijie! So you are here! When did you come?"
Guijie did not stop. "Beggar Ying," she said, "pray don't meddle in my affairs."
"Your affairs or not, you little strumpet," Bojue said, "I am going to kiss you." He went up to her, but she pushed him away.
"You unpleasant fellow," she said, "if I were not afraid of frightening the baby, I would use my fan on you."

Then Ximen Qing came and said to Ying Bojue: "Don't frighten my son, you funny dog." He told Shutong to take the child to the Sixth Lady's room. The boy took him and carried him to his nurse, Ruyi'er, who was watching them from the corner. Ruyi'er took him away.
"What has happened about you?" Ying Bojue said to Guijie.
"Father was very kind. He has sent Brother Laibao to the Eastern Capital."
"That is good," Bojue said, "I suppose you are satisfied now."
Guijie would have gone to the inner court, but Bojue said: "Come here, you little strumpet, I want to talk to you."
"I shall be back before long," Guijie said. She went to visit Li Ping'er.
Ying Bojue made a reverence to Ximen Qing, and they sat down together. "Yesterday," Ximen said, "I went to Magistrate Xia's place. Censor Song sent me some presents. Among them was a pig. I didn't want to keep it too long so, this morning, I told the cook to cut it up and cook the head with peppers. Don't go away. I will send for Xie Xida and we will play backgammon." He said to Qintong: "Go and ask your Uncle Xie to come. Tell him Uncle Ying is here."
Bojue asked Ximen whether he had yet received Xu's money.
"The dog has only paid two hundred and fifty taels of what he owes me. You must tell your friends to wait a few days. I will get the rest for them somehow."
"That will be all right," Bojue said. "I should not be surprised if they brought you some present today."
"Don't let them spend their money on me," Ximen said. He asked if old Sun and Pockmarked Zhu had started or not.
"After they were arrested at Guijie's place, they spent a night in jail," Bojue said. "The next day they were taken to the Eastern Capital, three of them on one chain. It doesn't seem likely that any of them will come back as comfortable as he went. Trying to earn an honest living is not a simple matter in these days. What a hard time they will have. In this roasting weather, they have to bear that big iron chain, and they haven't a penny in their pockets. I can't think what will become of them."
"You funny dog," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "if they could not bear this punishment, why did they interfere with young Wang? They deserved all they get."
"You are right, Brother," Bojue said. "Flies can never make their way into an egg unless there is a crack in it. Why didn't Wang ask me and Xie Xida to go about with him? But the good go with the good, and the bad with the bad."
While they were talking, Xie Xida came. He sat down and fanned himself busily. "What has made you so hot?" Ximen Qing said to him.
"Ah, Brother, you don't know. Today, an unexpected trouble descended upon me. Early this morning, old woman Sun came to my house and said I had taken her husband away from her. That old whore! Her husband spent all his time at the bawdy house, ate and drank a tremendous lot, and spent all his money there. 'Have you come from Hell?' I said to her. 'Everybody knows you yourself have taken money from the people in the bawdy house.' I gave her a good talking-to and she went away. Then your boy came to invite me."
"I have just been saying to our brother," Bojue said, "that if we put newly vinted wine into two bottles, we shall see which is pure and which is not. Didn't I tell you that anybody who went about with young Wang would certainly get into trouble? Now it has happened, and they have nothing to complain about."
"I can't see how young Wang dared have anything to do with the girls," Ximen Qing said. "He is not properly grown up yet. Conduct like his would be shameful even in a corpse."
"The boy hasn't seen much of the world," Bojue said. "He is not like you. If I mentioned your name to him, he would be frightened to death."
The boys brought tea. Ximen Qing said: "You two play backgammon, and I will tell a boy to buy us some noodles." Qintong set the table, and Huatong brought four small dishes on a square tray, some garlic sauce, and a large bowl of stewed pork with a silver ladle in it. He set everything upon the table with three pairs of ivory chopsticks. The three men sat down and the boys brought three bowls of noodles. Each helped himself to the stew, the garlic sauce, and the vinegar. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida took up their chopsticks. In three helpings and two gulps each finished one bowl, and so on till they had had seven. They finished the seven before Ximen Qing had finished two.
"My sons," Ximen said, "how can you eat so much?"
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "who has cooked these noodles? They are delicious."
"The stew is perfect," Xie Xida said. "It is most unfortunate that I have just had my dinner. I should have liked to eat another bowl."
The two friends felt hot and took off their coats. Qintong came to clear the table, and they asked him for water to rinse their mouths. "Cold tea will do," Xie Xida said, "but I won't have hot. It would make my breath smell of garlic." Huatong brought three cups of tea. Afterwards, they went to stroll among the flowers.
Huang the Fourth sent four boxes of presents to Ximen Qing, and Ping'an brought them in. There was a box of freshwater chestnuts, another box of a different kind of chestnut, four fine shad in ice, and a box of loquat fruits.
"What splendid delicacies!" Ying Bojue said. "I can't think how he managed to get them. Let me try one." He picked up several and handed two to Xie Xida. "There must be people who have never tasted such things in all their lives."
"You funny dog," Ximen Qing said. "I have not offered them to Buddha, yet you start tasting them."
"Why offer them to Buddha?" Bojue said. "They suit my palate admirably."
Ximen Qing told a boy to go to the inner court and get three *qian* of silver for the man who had brought the presents. "Who brought them?" Bojue said. "Was it Li Zhi or Huang Ning?"
"Huang Ning," said Ping'an.
"Lucky dog," Bojue said. "That's another three *qian* of silver for him." The two friends played backgammon, and Ximen Qing looked on.
After dinner, Yueniang and the others sat under the eaves. Little Zhou the barber peeped in from behind the screen. "Zhou," said Li Ping'er, "you have just come at the right moment. Come and shave my son's head. His hair is very long."
The barber came forward and kowtowed. "That is what Master said," he told them.
Yueniang said: "Sixth Sister, we must look at the calendar first and make sure that it is a lucky day."
Jinlian told Xiaoyu to fetch the calendar. When the maid brought it, Jinlian looked at it and said: "Today is the twenty-first day of the fourth month. It is a *gengxu* day, and under the influence of the Golden Dog. It is a good day for divine worship, for starting on a journey, making clothes, bathing, shaving and building. The afternoon is the most auspicious part of the day."
"In that case," Yueniang said, "the maid shall bring some hot water to wash the baby's head." She told the barber to amuse the baby while he was having his head shaved, and Xiaoyu to stand beside him with a kerchief to catch the hair. After a few strokes of the razor the child howled lustily. The barber was going on in spite of the crying, when, suddenly, the baby screamed and fell in a fit. No sound came from him and his face went purple. This frightened Li Ping'er. She cried: "Stop! Stop!" Zhou put his instruments together and went hastily away.
"The baby is not strong enough," Yueniang said. "We should have cut his hair ourselves instead of having him shaved. See what a state he's got into."
The baby gasped for a long time and at last began to howl again. Li Ping'er was greatly relieved. She began to play with him. "Did Little Zhou dare to come and shave my boy?" she said to him. "Did he shave half his head and treat him roughly? Let us bring him back and punish him." She took the child to Yueniang.
"You naughty little beggar," Yueniang said. "Crying like that when you are shaved. Now the part that has been left unshaven makes you look like a tonsured thief."
They played with him for a while, and Li Ping'er gave him to the nurse. "Don't give him any milk now," Yueniang said. "Let him sleep a while and then feed him." The nurse took him to the front court.
Laian came for the barber's instruments. "Zhou is so frightened that his face is as white as a sheet," he said. Yueniang asked whether the barber had been given anything to eat. "Yes," Laian said, "and my father has given him five *qian* of silver."
"Take him a pot of wine," said Yueniang. "We don't want to terrify him. He has a hard enough life." Xiaoyu heated some wine and gave it to Laian with a dish of preserved meat. The boy took it to the barber.
"Look at the calendar," Yueniang said to Jinlian," and tell me when the next *renzi* day is."
"It is the twenty-third," Jinlian said. "About the time of the day of Corn in the Ear. Why do you wish to know?"
"Oh, no particular reason," Yueniang said. "I was just wondering."
Guijie took the calendar and examined it. "The twenty-fourth is my mother's birthday. What a pity I won't be at home for it."
"The tenth of last month was your sister's birthday," Jinlian said. "Now it is your mother's. You people in the bawdy house suffer from two diseases on the same day and have three birthdays. In the daytime you have the money disease and at night the husband disease. In the morning, it is your mother's birthday; at noon, your sister's; and your own in the evening. It is very funny, all these birthdays coming in a lump. When your husband has any money, you had better make the best of the opportunity and celebrate all your birthdays together." Guijie laughed.
Ximen Qing sent Huatong to summon Guijie. She went to Yueniang's room to powder her face and then to the garden. Under the arbor a square table had been set, and on it were two large plates of roasted pork and many other dishes. The friends were eating, and Guijie served them with wine.
"Let me say this in your father's hearing," Ying Bojue said. "I am not talking for the sake of talking. I want to say that this business of yours is settled. Your father has done what was necessary at the district office, and you will not be arrested. But to whom do you owe this kindness? To me, who urged your father so strongly that he decided to intervene on your behalf. Now you must sing one of your favorite songs as a return to me, while I am drinking my wine."
Guijie laughed. "You ghostly beggar," she said. "You think too much of yourself. I don't believe Father pays the slightest attention to you."
"You little whore," Bojue said. "The sacred texts are not yet read, and already you would strike the priest. But don't go too far. Don't laugh at the priest because he hasn't got a mother-in-law. If I were a priest, I could deal with you myself, you young strumpet. And don't make fun of me. There are still some limbs that I can move."
Guijie struck him as hard as she could with the fan she held. Ximen Qing laughed. "You dog," he said, "your sons will be thieves and your daughters whores. And even that will not be as much as you deserve."
They all laughed. Guijie slowly took her lute and put it across her knees. She opened her scarlet lips and showed the whiteness of her teeth. Then she sang the song of the orioles.
Who would have dreamed that this so fragrant body
Could have been wasted and brought low by suffering?
Her mirror is tarnished and she has no heart
To polish it.
She is too languid to adorn her face with powder,
Too languid to set flowers in her hair.
Her brows are knit in bitterness.
"You used to like him," Bojue said, "and you should be tender with him now. You ought not to treat him so unkindly."
"I don't know what you're talking about," Guijie said, and went on with her song.
Most hard to bear is the sound of the horn
Which the watchman blows on his Tower of vigil.
It breaks her heart.
"Your heart is not broken yet," Bojue said, "but I warn you not to put too great a strain upon it. The string may break."
Guijie hit him hard. "You rascal," she scolded. "Are you quite mad today, that you fool with me like this?" She sang about the meeting of the virtuous guests.
The windows are calm and silent
The moon shines brightly.
Alone, she leans upon the screen.
She hears the sudden cry of a wild goose that has lost her mate,
Calling outside the hall.
It wakes her to the memory of ten thousand griefs.
The night watch passes like an age
The water clock moves slowly.
She does not see the dimness of the lamps
The burned-out ashes of the incense.
She tries to sleep, but how can sleep
Come peacefully to her?
"Oh, you foolish little whore," Bojue said, "why can't you sleep in peace? Nobody's arrested you yet. Why don't you sleep at home? You managed to escape into somebody's house, and still you are worried all day long. You won't be happy till the man comes back from the Eastern Capital."
This made Guijie angry. "Father," she said, "listen to Beggar Ying amusing himself at my expense. I don't know why he does it."
"Yes," Bojue said. "Now you realize that he is your father."
Guijie did not answer him. She took up her lute and went on with her song.
When I think of him, when I think of him
How can my heart not be troubled?
When I am alone, when I am alone
Tears fall from my cheeks like pearls.
"There was once a man," Bojue said, "who was always piddling. One day his mother died, and, in due observance of the rites, he slept before the coffin. He piddled again. Someone came and saw that the bedclothes were wet, and asked what had happened. The man didn't know what to say. 'Can't you see?' he said. 'It was the tears falling from my stomach.' It is just the same with your song. The girl could not think what to say, so she had to howl in secret."
"You shameless little boy," Guijie said. "Were you there to see? You're crazy." She continued her song.
I hate him. I hate him.
I can never tell the things he did.
To this place I have fled, hating myself
Because I dealt with him so faithfully.
"Oh, you foolish little whore," Bojue said. "In these days it is impossible to deceive even a three-year-old child. How could anyone expect you to be honest with the clients of your house of joy? Now I'll sing you one of the songs of the South."
In these days we cannot say
Who is straight and who is crooked.
The world is full of cunning spooks
And all pretend to love us dearly.
They plot to bury us alive
And put a jar upon our heads.
The old whores think of nothing but cash
And the poor little whores stretch out their necks
To make the business flourish.
Their bitterness is as great
As that of drowning in the river.
The grief we get of them
Drives us to seek a well.
When will their cup of bitterness be full?
Far better would it be to live as horse or donkey.

Than make a living by such dirty business.
Guijie began to cry. Ximen Qing slapped Ying Bojue and said, laughingly: "You will kill somebody with those silly jokes of yours." To Guijie he said: "Don't cry. Go on with your songs and don't mind him."
"Brother Ying," Xie Xida said, "why are you so rude to my daughter, treating her so unkindly? If you say another word, may you grow a big sore on your mouth."
After a while Guijie took up her lute again and sang:
Men all say that he is noble and true...
Bojue began to say something, but Xie Xida clapped a hand to his mouth. He bade Guijie continue and pay no attention to Bojue.
But the rogue is a deceiver.
His eyes are open wide, but lips and heart
Speak different stories.
Xie Xida took his hand away from Bojue's mouth. "If they did speak the same language, there would be no harm done," Bojue said. "But of course they never do. Why, the mouth might not agree even if your 'tiger's mouth' does—at least after two or three cones of moxa are burned there."
"Have you seen that done, you white-browed, red-eyed fellow?" said Guijie.
"Of course I've seen it. I saw it in the Hall of the Joy Star."
Ximen Qing and the others laughed. Guijie continued.
He swore by mountain and by ocean.
He lied as though he spoke the truth.
Nearly did I suffer from love sickness for him,
That deceiver.
Now I know his deceit, but what can I do?
"What does life hold in store for you indeed?" Bojue said. "Why, he will certainly become a general one of these days."
Guijie sang again.
Every day we are farther and farther apart.
When shall we meet again?
You have wronged me, who have waited for you
With such longing and such patience.
Even in my dreams I know
The clouds and rain upon Wu Mountain
Can never meet again.
All my life long I must be
The widowed phoenix, you my widower.
She brought the song to an end.
Your love has waned, you leave me lonely.
All that life meant is now but emptiness.
"Excellent! Excellent!" Xie Xida cried. "You take the lute," he said to Shutong," and I will offer her a cup of wine to put her in a better humor."
"Yes," said Bojue, "and I will offer her something to eat. I seem to be no use to anybody, so I'll make this offering as amends for my evil deeds."
"Go away, you beggar," Guijie said. "Who wants your attentions? First you strike a man with your fist and then pat him on the back."
Xie Xida offered Guijie three cups of wine one after the other. Then he said to Bojue: "We have still a couple of games to play." They began to play again. Ximen Qing made a sign to Guijie and went out.
"Brother," Bojue said, as Ximen was going, "if you are going to the inner court, bring me some fragrant tea leaves. The garlic I had is making my breath smell."
"Where am I to get any fragrant tea?" Ximen said.
"Now, Brother, don't try to hoodwink me. I happen to know that Liu, the educational officer at Hangzhou, sent you a lot. Surely you don't want to keep it all for yourself." Ximen Qing laughed and went away. Guijie went out too.
She plucked a few flowers and then disappeared. Bojue and Xie Xida played three games. Then, as Ximen Qing did not return, they said to Huatong: "What is your father doing in the inner court?"
"He will be back soon," the boy replied.
"Will he?" said Bojue. "There is something funny about this." He said to Xie Xida: "You wait here, and I'll go and look for him." Xie Xida and Huatong played chess together.
Ximen Qing had gone to Li Ping'er's room to get some of his medicine. Then he came to the Arbor of Wild Roses and there met Guijie. He took her to the Snow Cavern. He shut the door, sat down on a small bed, and took Guijie on his knee. He showed his weapon to her and she was startled by it. "How did you make it so huge?" she said. Ximen told her about the Indian Monk. Then he asked her to bend her white neck, open her red lips and toy with it for a while. He gently lifted her two tiny feet, raised her in his arms, set her upon a chair and got to work. Meanwhile, Ying Bojue was looking everywhere for him without success. At last, he went through a small grotto under the mound of greenery, and so came to the Arbor of Wild Roses. Then he passed the Arbor of Grapes and so came to the Snow Cavern. It was deeply hidden in the thicknesses of the bamboos and pine trees.
He could hear someone laughing softly, but could not make out where the sound was coming from. He went on tiptoe to the cavern and pulled up the lattice. But the door was fast. He could hear Guijie's trembling voice calling Ximen Qing her darling. "Oh, please be quick," he heard her say, "I am afraid of someone coming." Then Ying Bojue gave a shout and pushed open the door. Ximen Qing, with Guijie's legs around him, was doing splendid work.
"Quick," cried Bojue, "fetch some water. There is a fight going on here."
"You frightened me, you silly thing, rushing in like that," Guijie said.
"You said you wished to make an end quickly," said Bojue, "but it is not so easy as all that. Things have to reach a certain pitch first. You were afraid someone would come and catch you, and here I am. I shall have to come to an understanding with you."
"You funny dog," said Ximen, "be off at once. Don't play tricks and let all the servants know."
"You must talk to me nicely, you little whore," Bojue said, "or I shall shout at the top of my voice, and all the ladies will know. They have accepted you as a daughter, and have been good enough to let you stay here. Now, here you are stealing their man, and, if it comes out, I don't know what will happen to you."
"Go away, you beggar," Guijie said.
"I will go when you have given me a kiss," said Bojue. He kissed her and went out.
"Come back, you dog. Why don't you shut the door?"
Ying Bojue came back and shut the door. "Strike hard, my son," he said to Ximen Qing, "and if you demolish her bottom, it will not worry me."
He went as far as the pine trees and came back again. "Where are the fragrant tea leaves you promised me?"
"I will give them to you later," Ximen said. "Why do you need to come back again now?"
Bojue went off laughing. "Really," said Guijie, "the man does not know how to behave." For a full hour she sported with Ximen, and then they ate a red date that allowed them to reach a climax. They set their clothes in order and came out of the Cavern of Snow. Guijie took some fragrant tea leaves from his sleeve and put them in her own. Ximen Qing was bathed in sweat. He was puffing and blowing. He went to a blooming lantana and piddled. Guijie took a small mirror from her girdle, dressed her hair by the window and went to the inner court. Ximen Qing went to the rooms of Li Ping'er, washed his hands, and rejoined his friends. Ying Bojue again asked for the tea leaves.
"You beggar," Ximen Qing said, "you might be going to die if you didn't get it. What makes you such a nuisance?" He gave a pinch to each of them.
"Is this all?" Bojue said. "Well, never mind, I'll ask the little whore for some."
Li Ming came and kowtowed to them. "Where have you come from?" Bojue said, "and how is that business of yours going?"
"Thanks to Father's kindness," Li Ming said, "the officers have not interfered with us for the last day or two. We are waiting to hear from the Eastern Capital."
"Has that little wench Qi Xiang'er come out yet?" Bojue asked.
"No," said Li Ming, "she is still at Wang's place. Guijie is safe here. No one would dare to come to this house for her."
"It would have been very awkward," Bojue said, "but fortunately, I and Uncle Xie won over your father. We told him that if he did nothing to help your sister, no one would."
"Oh," Li Ming said, "without Father's help, it would have been hopeless. The old lady is not very bright, and, besides, what could she do?"
"If I am right, it is the old lady's birthday some time now," Bojue said. "I must persuade your father to go with me to congratulate her."
"Pray do not put yourself about," Li Ming said. "When this matter is settled, she and Guijie will invite you, of course."
"Then we will congratulate her afterwards," Bojue said. "Come and drink this cup of wine for me. I have been drinking all day and I can't drink any more." The boy took the silver cup and knelt down to drink it. Xie Xida told Qintong to give him another cup.
"I feel sure you have not had anything to eat," Bojue said to Li Ming. "Here is a plate of cakes." Xie Xida took two plates of roast pork and duck and handed them to Li Ming. With his chopsticks, Ying Bojue helped the boy to half a shad fish. "I can see you haven't tasted any of this fish this year," he said. "Here is something seasonable for you."
"You funny dog," Ximen Qing cried. "Why don't you give him all the fish and be done with it?"
"I will eat the rest myself when I feel hungry again, after I have had some more wine. Don't you realize that fish of this sort is only to be had once a year? Why! When you pick your teeth, it still tastes sweet. This is no ordinary fish. I very much doubt whether you could even find it at Court. Certainly I could not get any anywhere else but here."
Huatong brought more dishes, water chestnuts, lotus roots and loquat fruits. Before Ximen Qing had time to eat any of them, Ying Bojue had emptied the plate into his sleeve. "You must leave some for me," said Xie Xida, taking another dish and leaving only the loquats on the table. Ximen Qing took one and put it into his mouth, then gave the rest to Li Ming. He told Huatong to go to the kitchen and bring two loquat fruits for Li Ming, who, when he had eaten them, sang a song for which Ying Bojue specially asked. The three men drank until evening. Then rice gruel with dried peas was brought for them. When they had eaten it, Bojue and Xie Xida made ready to go.
"Brother," Bojue said, "I understand that you are taking wine with his Excellency An tomorrow. I will tell Li and Huang to come about their business the day after tomorrow." Ximen Qing nodded. They did not wait for him to take them to the door, but went away by themselves. Ximen Qing told Shutong to clear the table and went to Yulou's room.
The next morning he did not go to the office, but dressed immediately after breakfast and, with Shutong and Daian, rode to Eunuch Liu's place. It was distant from the city about forty *li*.
Jinlian took advantage of Ximen Qing's absence to ask Li Ping'er to spend the three *qian* of silver that Chen Jingji had lost, adding another seven *qian* to them. They asked Laixing to buy a roast duck, two chickens, a jar of Jinhua wine, a bottle of white wine, fruit pastries and other things, and arranged for his wife to prepare them. Then Jinlian said to Yueniang: "The other day, Ximen Dajie was playing cards with her husband, and won three *qian* of silver from him. The Sixth Lady has added some more to it, and we have arranged to have a little feast. We should be glad if you would come and enjoy it with us in the garden." So Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Li Jiao'er, Sun Xue'e, Ximen Dajie and Li Guijie all went to the arbor and joined in the feast. They took some of the food to the artificial mound. There, some of them played chess and some played darts.
"Why has our host not come?" Yueniang said.
"Father sent him to Xu's for some money," Ximen Dajie said, "but I don't think he will be long."
Chen Jingji soon came. He made a reverence to the ladies and sat down beside his wife. He told Yueniang that he had brought two hundred and fifty taels from Xu and given them to Yuxiao. The wine was passed around, and they all enjoyed themselves immensely. Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, and Guijie played chess, Yulou and the others strolled about the garden admiring the flowers. Jinlian, alone, fanning herself with a white silk fan, went in search of coolness to the deepest part of the banana palm glade behind the artificial mound. She saw on the grass a wild purple flower that was very delightful and went to gather it. She did not imagine that when he saw her go, Chen Jingji would quietly follow her by impulse. Suddenly he spoke from behind her. "What are you looking for, my lady? The grass is slippery, and I shouldn't like you to fall. It would hurt me if you did."
Jinlian glanced at him over her shoulder. Half smiling, half reproving, she said: "Why should it hurt you if I fell, you young scamp? I don't need you to look after me. What are you doing here? Aren't you afraid somebody will see us? What about those handkerchiefs you were to buy for me?"
"Here are the handkerchiefs," Jingji said, smiling. He took them from his sleeve. "What will you give me for them?" He drew nearer, but she pushed him away. Just then, Li Ping'er with Guan'ge in her arms came through the pine alleys with the nurse. They could see the movement of the white fan in Jinlian's hand, but not that she was pushing Jingji aside with it. They thought she was catching butterflies.
"Fifth Mother," Li Ping'er said, "catch a butterfly for my baby."
Jingji hurriedly slipped behind the artificial mound. Jinlian wondered whether Li Ping'er had seen him. She said: "Has our brother given you any handkerchiefs?"
"No, no yet," Li Ping'er said.
"He has brought them," Jinlian said, "but he did not like to give them to us in front of his wife, so he gave them to me secretly." They sat down in the shade of the plantains, opened the packet, and divided them.
After a while Li Ping'er said to Ruyi'er: "It is very cool and pleasant here. Go and tell Yingchun to bring the baby's pillow and bed, and also a set of dominoes. I will have a game with the Fifth Lady. You stay in my room."
The nurse went away, and Yingchun came with the things. Li Ping'er spread out the bed and put the baby upon it. While the baby was playing, she had a game of dominoes with Jinlian. Then she told Yingchun to bring a pot of tea. Yulou, who was in the smaller arbor, caught sight of them. She beckoned to Li Ping'er. "Come here," she said, "I have something to tell you."
Li Ping'er left the baby in Jinlian's care and went to speak to Yulou. But Jinlian was thinking about Chen Jingji who was still hiding in the grotto, and she forgot about the baby. She hurried into the cave and said to Jingji: "There is nobody about now. Come out at once." Jingji asked her to go and look at a huge mushroom that he said was there. She went in. Then Jingji knelt down and begged Jinlian to grant him her favors. They kissed.
When Li Ping'er came to the arbor, Yueniang said to her: "Yulou has been playing darts with Guijie. She was beaten. We want you to play for her."
"But there is nobody to look after my baby," Li Ping'er said.
"Jinlian is there," Yulou said. "There is no reason why you should worry." Yueniang asked Yulou to go and look after the child.
"Bring him here," Li Ping'er said. She told Xiaoyu to bring the baby's bed. Yulou and the maid went to the grove of plantains. The baby was screaming upon his bed, and there was no sign of Jinlian. A big black cat stood beside the child. It ran away when they came near.
"Where is the Fifth Lady?" Yulou said. "She has left the baby here, and the cat has terrified him."
Jinlian hurried out of the grotto. "I have just been to wash my hands, that's all. Where is this cat that is supposed to have frightened the baby? What are you so excited about?"
Yulou did not look into the grotto. She picked up the baby and went back to the arbor, trying to pacify him. Xiaoyu brought the bed, and Jinlian, afraid that they would tell the true story, went with them.
"Why is the baby crying?" Yueniang said.
"When we got there," Yulou said, "there was a big black cat standing near his head."
"He must have been frightened," Yueniang said.
"But the Fifth Lady was looking after him," said Li Ping'er.
"She had gone into the grotto to wash her hands," Yulou said.
"How can you say such a thing!" Jinlian said. "And where's this cat of yours? The baby's hungry and wants some milk. That's all." Yingchun brought tea, and Li Ping'er told the nurse to feed the child. Chen Jingji, now that there was nobody about, came out of the grotto and slipped away between the pine hedges. Yueniang, seeing that the baby refused to feed and would do nothing but cry, told Li Ping'er to take him to her room and put him to sleep. The party broke up. Chen Jingji, who had been disappointed in his hopes of enjoying Jinlian, went sadly to his own room.

## Wu Yüeh-niang Engages in Coition in Quest of Male Progeny; Li P'ing-erh Fulfils a Vow in Order to Safeguard her son

In this life, to have a son is the consummation
of a myriad desires;[2]
After death, to leave behind no male heir is to
have lived in vain.
If one should produce a dragon steed, one must
endeavor to protect it;
If one hopes to bear a unicorn, one must enact
good deeds in secret.
Praying to the gods, she is anxious to fulfill
the promise of her vow;
By imbibing a potion, she hopes to be able to
make her womb receptive.
Parents would do well to carry out their human
obligations to the full;
But the good or bad luck that may result must
be left to Azure Heaven.

Wu Yüeh-niang, having spent some time amusing herself along with Li Chiao-erh, Li Kuei-chieh, Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, Sun Hsüeh-o, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, began to feel somewhat fatigued, retired to her room, and took a nap.
When she awoke, around the first watch, she sent Hsiao-yü to say to Li P'ing-erh, "Has Kuan-ko stopped that unnatural crying of his? Have the wet nurse wrap him up carefully and coax him to sleep. Don't let anything disturb him into crying again."
The wet nurse, who was eating her supper on the k'ang, did not get down from her position but kept the child there beside her.
Li P'ing-erh said, "Thank the First Lady for me, and tell her that when we came back to my quarters, he kept on crying out loud and suffering from the cold shivers continuously, and he has only now stopped crying, cuddled up against the wet nurse's body, and fallen asleep. His forehead feels rather feverish, and the wet nurse is unwilling to move for fear of disturbing him. In a little while, I'm going to wake him, so he can have his evening feeding and relieve himself."
Hsiao-yü returned to the master suite and reported this information to Yüeh-niang.
"They're not taking things as seriously as they should," said Yüeh-niang. "How could she have left a little baby like that under the plantains, and just gone off somewhere else, so that he was scared to death by a cat? Only now are they:
Lamenting before the gods and weeping to ghosts.
At this rate, they're likely to do him some real harm before they come to their senses."
At that time, after expressing these few words of criticism, she washed her face and went to sleep for the night.
The next morning, when she got up:
Having nothing else to say,
she sent Hsiao-yü to ask if Kuan-ko had been able to get any sleep during the remainder of the night, or not?
She also reported, "As soon as the First Lady has eaten her congee, she is planning to drop by and see how Kuan-ko is doing."
Li P'ing-erh said to Ying-ch'un, "The First Lady is about to come over here. Quickly, fetch me some water, so I can wash my face."
Ying-ch'un flew off on this errand and returned with the water for her to wash her face. Li P'ing-erh hastily combed her hair and ordered Ying-ch'un to heat some water for tea as quickly as possible, and to light some benzoin incense in the room.
Before they knew it, Hsiao-yü came in and announced, "The First Lady has entered your quarters."
This had the effect of causing Li P'ing-erh to jump up in consternation to greet Yüeh-niang and lead her to the wet nurse's bed, where she caressed Kuan-ko, saying as she did so, "What a hopeless little oily mouth! You're constantly taking your own mother and:
Dunking her in a water crock,
for no good reason."
At this, Kuan-ko, with the sound of a gurgling cry, started to howl in earnest. Yüeh-niang made haste to playfully tease him for a while before he finally stopped.
Yüeh-niang then turned to Ju-i and said, "Since I haven't been able to have a child myself, this little bit of a boy is the only issue of our family. You can't afford to underestimate his importance. To get right down to it, you've simply got to look after him conscientiously."
The wet nurse Ju-i replied, "As to that, there is no need for the First Lady to instruct me any further."
Yüeh-niang was about to take her leave, when Li P'ing-erh said, "Now that the First Lady is here, I have had a cup of tea prepared. Won't you visit a while before leaving?"
Yüeh-niang then sat down and asked, "Sixth Lady, how is it that your hair is so mussed?"
Li P'ing-erh said, "It's all on account of the way this heartless enemy of mine has been:
Acting up and making trouble,
that I haven't even had a chance to comb my hair. Then, when I heard that you were coming, I hastily twisted it into a knot and fitted the fret over it, without realizing what sort of laughable shape it was in."
"Just look at you!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "How unprincipled can you get? He's your own flesh and blood, to whom you've given birth, and yet you refer to him as your heartless enemy. While, as for me, though I long for such a heartless enemy all day long, I haven't been able to have one."
"It's just a manner of speaking," said Li P'ing-erh. "If only he weren't beset by all these spectral visitations, everything would be all right. But nowadays, I hardly get two or three days of peace without the occurrence of such an outbreak. The other day, when we visited the family graveyard, he was frightened by the gongs and drums. Not long after that, he started to cry like anything when he had his hair cut. And now he's been frightened once again by a cat. Other people's babies seem easy enough to raise, but this creature of mine turns out, contrarily, to be as fragile as a rush."
After they had chatted for a while, Yüeh-niang walked out of the room, and Li P'ing-erh followed behind her to see her off.
"Don't bother to see me off," said Yüeh-niang. "Go back inside and look after Kuan-ko."
Li P'ing-erh, accordingly, returned inside, while Yüeh-niang made her way back to the master suite.
As she did so, she overheard someone talking, as furtively as a thief trying to destroy evidence, on the other side of the screen-wall.
Yüeh-niang stopped to listen and, on peeking through a crack between the boards, saw that one of them was P'an Chin-lien, who was leaning on the balustrade, together with Meng Yü-lou, while she chattered away,[3] in a subdued voice, saying, "Our elder sister really has no sense of decorum. Having no child of her own, when someone else bears a son, she insists to the point of befuddlement on claiming a specious intimacy, and sucking up to her in the most egregious way.[4] It seems to me that:
Even the indigent should maintain their indigent spirit,
Just as the eminent should display their eminent spirit.
What's the point of playing up to her that way? When the child grows up, he will only acknowledge his natural mother, why should he acknowledge you?"
Who should pass by at this point but Ying-ch'un, which caused the two of them to slip off toward the rear compound, pretending to be looking for the cat in order to feed it.
Nothing might have happened if Yüeh-niang had not overheard this conversation, but having overheard these words:
Anger arose in her heart, and
Resentment stiffened her jaw.
At the time, she would have liked to interrupt the conversation and call them to account, but since it was not something that could be solved by making a fuss, and would, instead, only have the effect of detracting from her own dignity, she chose to restrain herself. She went directly into her room and lay down on the bed, but she did not feel free to cry over the situation, lest the maidservants overhear her. All she could do was:
Complain silently to herself,[5]
giving vent to:
Long sighs as well as short.
Truly:
Even in her own home she dared not risk crying out too loudly,
Fearing lest the gibbons on hearing her should break their hearts.[6]
At that time, it was just high noon, and she had not yet gotten up.
Hsiao-yü stood beside her bed and said, "First Lady, won't you get up and have something to eat?"
"I'm not feeling well," said Yüeh-niang, "and don't want to eat anything, but you can close the door of the room, and prepare some tea for me."
Only after Hsiao-yü had brought in the tea did Yüeh-niang get up and sit disconsolately in her room, saying to herself, "Simply because I don't have a son of my own, I have to put up with all this annoyance at other people's hands. I have:
Besought Heaven and worshipped Earth,
in the hope of obtaining one, so that I can shame those lousy whores to their fucking faces."
Thereupon, she went to the comb box on the dressing table in her inner room and got out the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that Nun Wang had provided, as well as the medication that Nun Hsüeh had procured for her, and saw that the sealed container in which they were enclosed was engraved with four characters that read:
An efficacious elixir for conceiving sons.
There was also an eight-line poem, which read:
Like Ch'ang-o who mischievously fled to the moon with the elixir of immortality;
This potion has obligingly appropriated the horn on the striped dragon's crown.
It has been sanctioned by the Peach Blossom Mandate of an emperor of the Han dynasty;[7]
And has also been ordained by the Bamboo Leaf Edict of a ruler of the Liang dynasty.[8]
In no time at all, once the medication starts to act, it will produce enviable results;
Even the elderly and decrepit will be rejuvenated, such are its praiseworthy effects.
Do not take it as something to enhance the joys of snow and flowers, breeze and moon;
Even the smallest amount will enable you to conceive a handsomely black-bearded son.
After this there was an encomium, which read:
Its flaming red color sparkles,
Exactly like coral that has been ground to powder;
Its fragrant redolence is dense,
Resembling that of newly ignited sandalwood or musk.
If you hold it in your mouth,
A sweet exudation will rise up about the base of your teeth;
If you place it in your palm,
A warm sensation will suffuse the area beneath your navel.
It will enable you to retain your essence and replenish your fluid;[9]
What need is there to seek the Magic Frost Pounded with a Jade Pestle?[10]
It will allow you to change a female embryo into a male embryo;[11]
What need is there to look elsewhere for the Divine Bower Powder?[12]
Do not waste it on the chickens and dogs by your alchemical furnace;[13]
It is meant to enhance the joys of mandarin ducks beneath the quilt.
If you ingest it when the spirit moves you,
It will produce the dream of an azure dragon;[14]
If you act upon it when the time is ripe,
It will engender the omen of a flying swallow.[15]
Those who seek to bear a son may accomplish their objective with a single try;
Those who wish to achieve transcendence can become immortals in a hundred days.
After this there were some further directions, which read:
Anything damaging to the brain, or harmful to the blood stream,
Should be strictly avoided.
Radishes as well as spring onions should also be avoided.
If you engage in intercourse on an odd day you will conceive a son;
If you engage in intercourse on an even day you will conceive a daughter;
You may do as your heart desires.
If you take this medication for a year,
You may achieve everlasting life.
When Yüeh-niang had finished reading this material, she felt a sense of pleasure gradually arise in her heart. Observing that the container was tightly sealed:
With slender tapering fingers,

She delicately prized it open.
When she unfolded the packet within and took a look, she found that it consisted of three or four layers of "black gold paper,"[16] wrapped around a single bolus of medication, the exterior of which was attractively decorated with gold-flecked vermilion. Yüeh-niang placed it in the palm of her hand and, sure enough, she felt a warm sensation arise below her navel. She then held it next to her nose and, sure enough, becoming moist:
Her mouth was filled with sweet spittle.
With a smile, Yüeh-niang said to herself, "This Nun Hsüeh must really be a person of exemplary conduct. Who knows where she must have gone to locate such a:
Marvelous medicine and efficacious elixir?
It must be that I am fated to conceive, since I have come upon such a fine medication, but who knows?"
After toying with the medication for a while, fearing lest it might lose its efficacy, she hastily fetched some paste and sealed it up tightly as before, went back into her inner room, and locked it up inside her comb box.
Strolling out onto the veranda, she gazed up to Heaven and gave a long sigh, saying, "Should this woman, née Wu, tomorrow, which is a *jen-tzu* day, take this medication of Nun Hsüeh's and succeed in conceiving a son to perpetuate the ancestral rites of the Hsi-men house, so that she does not end up as a ghost with no one to sacrifice to it, my gratitude to August Heaven will know no bounds."
By that time, the day was drawing to a close, and Yüeh-niang finally had something to eat, but there is nothing more to say about this.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at Eunuch Director Liu's estate that day, he sent in his card, and the servants informed Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en, who came out together to meet him. They were both formally attired in their official caps and girdles.
When they had exchanged the customary greetings and sat down, Secretary Huang Pao-kuang opened the proceedings by saying, "The other day, motivated by admiration of your great fame, we presumed to visit you unceremoniously but did not expect to put you to such great expense."
"I fear I was guilty of treating you remissly," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"On that occasion," said Secretary An Ch'en, "we were on our way to respond to an invitation from our fellow graduate, Prefect Hu Shih-wen, and were therefore compelled to take our leave rather precipitously. But:
The profound sentiments of our host,[17]
still resonate in our hearts. Today it is only appropriate that we should enjoy ourselves fully until break of day."
"I am deeply affected by your lavish hospitality," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After a "gate boy" had announced in a low voice that the feast was fully prepared, Hsi-men Ch'ing was invited to repair to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their official caps and girdles and proceeded to take their seats. Hsi-men Ch'ing was ushered to the seat of honor where, after a pro forma demurral, he consented to sit down.
A singing boy then came forward and sang a song to the tune "Embroidered Oranges and Plums":
The fragrant redness of her face is suffused with the glow of sunset clouds;
The glossy blackness of her raven locks is heaped in piles about her temples.
I expect that she,
Must be a denizen of the quarter,
Dressed up as she is, a fit subject for an artist's brush.
Quiveringly, she is wearing a turquoise ornament in her hair;
Ostentatiously, she is clad in garments of the thinnest silk.
The stylishness she exhibits is enough to slay the beholder.
Ch'a!
Whose establishment does she hail from,
That she should secretly look me over so unceasingly with her eyes?[18]
Hsi-men Ch'ing praised this performance, and Secretary An Ch'en and Secretary Huang Pao-kuang presented him with cups of wine. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned the compliment, the singing boy once again:
Accompanying himself with a sandalwood clapper,
sang a song to the tune "Vanquishing the Yellow Dragon, Quick Tempo":
Since there is no convenient way to correspond,
I am too lazy to inscribe my brocade notepaper.
The gold bracelet about my wrist is loose;
The jade of my flesh has become emaciated;
My silken garments droop completely slack.
Tears have encroached upon,
The makeup on my two cheeks.
I am too sorrowful to look into my precious mirror,
And ashamed to wear my halcyon-feathered ornaments.
To the same tune:
I have pointlessly squandered,
The good days and fine nights.[19]
In my jade incense burner,
On the silver candlestick,
The incense has dissipated and the candle gone out.[20]
The phoenix bed curtains have been forsaken,[21]
The mandarin duck quilt is supplied in vain.
I incessantly fidget with my jade fingers,
And repeatedly stamp my embroidered shoes.[22]
On this occasion, they continued drinking until after 6:00 o'clock:
With the raising of glasses and passing of cups;
but we have already said enough about this.
To resume our story, back at home, P'an Chin-lien, having failed on the previous day in her attempt in the "snow cave" to make out with Ch'en Ching-chi, took advantage of the opportunity presented by the fact that Hsi-men Ch'ing was away at Eunuch Director Liu's estate, drinking with Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en, and that Wu Yüeh-niang was staying in her room, to:
Run in and run out,
of her quarters, just like:
An ant on a hot plate.[23]
As for Ch'en Ching-chi, after escaping from the "snow cave," he had gone to sleep in the shop, where his organ remained stiff all night long. On this occasion, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, he and P'an Chin-lien uninhibitedly:
Exchanged looks with eyes and eyebrows,
This went on until after dusk, when the lamps were about to be lighted in the various quarters. At this point Chin-lien proceeded with:
Skulking step and lurking gait,
to tiptoe out behind the summerhouse, where Ch'en Ching-chi just happened to come by. When he perceived by the dim light that it was Chin-lien, he proceeded without more ado to embrace her tightly and put his face next to hers, whereupon the two of them exchanged some ten or more kisses.
"My darling," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "yesterday when that pain in the neck, Meng the Third, interrupted us, I had such a stiff erection that it stayed up all night. And today, when I saw how:
Seductively and bewitchingly,[24]
you swayed as you strolled by, my whole body was infused with a melting sensation."
"You dead duck of a lousy short-life!" said Chin-lien. "You must be utterly devoid of principles to grab hold of your own mother-in-law and kiss her. Aren't you afraid that someone might come along and hear what you're up to?"
"If I spot a lantern light coming in this direction," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I'll have time to get out of the way."
Ch'en Ching-chi kept on uttering the word "darling" with his mouth, while beneath the single thickness of his gown, his organ, like a bar of red-hot iron, surged forward beneath the fabric. Chin-lien, for her part, couldn't help thrusting her body forward to meet the overheated organ beneath his gown. Unable to restrain herself, Chin-lien lifted Ch'en Ching-chi's gown aside with her hand and firmly gripped his male organ. Ch'en Ching-chi was so flustered that in trying to pull down Chin-lien's waistband, he only succeeded, with a rending sound, in ripping out one of the pleats in her skirt.
"You lousy slave!" expostulated Chin-lien with a laugh. "How clumsy can you get? You're still so unused to snitching your food, and so timorous in going about it, that all you've done, in your flusteration, is to rip out one of the pleats in my skirt."
So saying, she pulled down her own waistband, exposing the mouth of her vagina, lifted one of her legs onto the balustrade, and proceeded to stuff Ch'en Ching-chi's male organ into the orifice. It so happens that, because Chin-lien had been fooling around for some time, her vagina was already sopping wet, so that when Ch'en Ching-chi gave a single forceful thrust, he succeeded immediately in effecting penetration.
"My darling," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "standing up like this, it's hard to get in all the way. What should we do?"
"If you just keep on retracting and thrusting so impetuously," said Chin-lien, "we'll come up with something."
Ch'en Ching-chi was about to resume retracting and thrusting, when they suddenly heard the dogs outside start to bark noisily, and realized that Hsimen Ch'ing must have arrived home from his drinking party. This threw the two of them into such consternation that they disappeared in a puff of smoke.
It turned out to be Shu-t'ung and Tai-an, carrying Hsi-men Ch'ing's official cap and girdle, and his gold-flecked fan, who came into the compound, creating quite a stir as they exclaimed, "We've really been put through our paces today!"
Yüeh-niang sent Hsiao-yü out to investigate, and she observed that the two page boys were both befuddled with drink.
"Why has Father not returned?" Hsiao-yü asked.
"Just now," explained Tai-an, "because we were afraid we wouldn't be able to keep up with his horse on foot, we got Father's permission to start back ahead of him. His horse is fast, so he should be right behind us."
Hsiao-yü went back to the rear compound to report this, and before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the gate and dismounted.
He had originally intended to spend the night in Chin-lien's quarters, but who could have anticipated that he was so drunk that he went into Yüeh-niang's room by mistake.
Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "Tomorrow is the twenty-third, which is a *jen-tzu* day. If I keep him here tonight, it might spoil my opportunity with regard to that important matter tomorrow. Moreover, my period is coming to an end today, so tomorrow it would be more sanitary."
"You're too groggy with drink tonight," she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't want you fooling around here. My period is not quite over yet. It would be better if you slept in someone else's quarters, and came back here tomorrow night."
As she spoke, she pushed Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was smiling bemusedly, out of her room, and he headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters.
Pinching Chin-lien's cheeks, he said to her, "This is the little whore I've been looking for. Just now, I was intending to come over here, but who would have thought that, because I've had a few cups of wine, without knowing what I was doing, I went into the First Lady's room instead."
"What an inveterate oily-mouthed creature you are!" said Chin-lien. "No doubt you'll tell me some story about having originally intended to sleep in Elder Sister's room tomorrow. What a filthy braggart!
You wouldn't hesitate to tell a bold-faced lie to a Perfected Being.
And you expect me to believe you!"
"You crazy oily mouth!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is give people a hard time. That's the way it really is. What reason would I have to lie about it?"
"Just tell me, then," said Chin-lien, "why didn't Elder Sister keep you there tonight?"
"I don't know," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She kept claiming that I was drunk and pushed me out of her room, saying, 'Come back tomorrow night.' So I came over here as fast as I could."
Chin-lien was about to wash her private parts, when Hsi-men Ch'ing reached over to feel her there.
Covering herself with both hands, Chin-lien upbraided him, saying, "You short-life! Cut it out. I've had enough of your tricks around here."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, embracing her with one hand, stuck his other hand into her crotch, where, after feeling it, he said, "You crazy good-for-nothing! How does it happen that, night after night, it's perfectly dry, whereas tonight, it's sopping wet inside? No doubt you've been hankering after a man, so that your vaginal secretions have started to flow."
It so happens that Chin-lien had, in fact, been so preoccupied with Ch'en Ching-chi that she had neglected to wash her private parts. And now that Hsi-men Ch'ing had unintentionally hit upon what was on her mind, her face turned bright red in an instant, and she was reduced to covering up as best she could, half smiling and half objecting, as she bathed her private parts and washed her face before the two of them retired for the night. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Wu Yüeh-niang got up the next morning, it being a *jen-tzu* day, she thought to herself, "As Nun Hsüeh was about to take her leave, she enjoined me repeatedly, in no uncertain terms, that if I took this potion of hers on a *jen-tzu* day, I would be sure to conceive. Today is a *jen-tzu* day, so I really ought to take her medication. Moreover, it's fortunate that last night:
By a providential coincidence,[25]
Hsi-men Ch'ing came home drunk and made his way into my room, so I was able to arrange for him to return tonight."
For this reason, Yüeh-niang secretly rejoiced in her heart. Upon arising, early in the morning, after performing her ablutions and completing her toilet, she proceeded to pay obeisance to Buddha and recited the *Sutra of the White-Robed Kuan-yin*.[26] It is essential that those who wish to conceive sons should recite this sutra, and that is why Yüeh-niang recited it. Moreover, Nun Wang had also urged her to recite it. The day in question was also a *jen-tzu* day, a day of critical importance. That is why, early in the morning, she closed the door to her room;
Ignited incense and lit candles,[27]
and recited this text, before going back to her inner room to fetch the medication.
Instructing Hsiao-yü to heat some wine, she did not take any congee but prepared herself by eating some cakes, biscuits, and the like. First, after having held the nostrum up reverently with both hands, and:
Uttered a prayer to Heaven,[28]
she dissolved Nun Hsüeh's bolus of medication in the wine, producing a potion, of which:
The exotic fragrance assailed the nostrils,
and finished it off in two or three mouthfuls. When she then turned her attention to the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that Nun Wang had provided, although it had been rendered into powdered form, it nevertheless made her feel somewhat skittish. It exuded a perceptible odor of incineration and was not something easy to swallow.
"If I don't take it," Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "it won't have the desired effect. While, if I do take it, I can't overcome my misgivings. But enough of this:
Once things have come to a head,
They are out of one's control.[29]
I'll simply have to force myself to swallow it, that's all."

First taking a handful of the talismanic potion and forcing it into her mouth, she urgently swallowed half a bowl of wine and almost regurgitated it, her eyes turning red as she did so. Hastily washing this down with more wine, she still felt as though something were sticking in her throat and followed up with another few mouthfuls of wine. After which she called for some warm tea with which to rinse out her mouth and then lay down on her bed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing happened to come by her room just then and, noticing that the door was closed, called for Hsiao-yü to open it, asking, "How come everything is so quiet, and the door to the room is closed? Could it be that the First Lady is somewhat annoyed[30] with me for having left her alone last night?"
"How would I know?" responded Hsiao-yü.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the room and called to her several times, but Yüeh-niang, who had had wine to drink that morning, was fast asleep facing the interior of the bed and did not answer him.
"You lousy slave!" Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Hsiao-yü. "Just now I called to the First Lady and she refused to answer. Why should she do that unless she were annoyed with me?"
Not knowing what to do with himself, he walked out of the room, only to encounter Shu-t'ung coming in, who reported, "Master Ying the Second is outside."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Brother, when you went to Eunuch Director Liu's estate the other day to attend the party hosted by Messrs. An Ch'en and Huang Pao-kuang, were you able to enjoy yourself fully? How late did you continue to drink before the party broke up?"
"I am grateful for the lavish affection the two gentlemen have shown me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When they condescended to visit me on that former occasion, because they were on their way to a party hosted by Prefect Hu Shih-wen, they didn't stay long. But when I arrived at their place, I found that:
Our feelings were genial, our thoughts in accord.[31]
They kept me there for some time and insisted upon my having quite a few cups of wine, right up until the time the night watches began. It was a long way home, and I was so drunk I hardly knew what I was doing."
"For people from other places," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "they are gentlemen of real feeling. You ought to send them something in the way of gifts for the road."
"You've got a point there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
There and then, he summoned Shu-t'ung and told him to fill out a pair of red gift cards, and to direct the people in the rear compound to prepare two equally sumptuous sets of gifts, consisting of litchis, longans, peaches, dates, geese, ducks, legs of lamb, fresh fish, and two jugs of southern wine. He also had him write messages on two of his own calling cards, expressing his gratitude for their hospitality. When these tasks were completed, he called for Shut'ung once again and directed him to deliver the gifts himself. Shu-t'ung duly assented and went off on his errand.
At this point, Ying Po-chüeh moved closer to Hsi-men Ch'ing, sat down beside him, and asked, "Do you remember what you said to me the day before yesterday?"
"What is there to remember?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I guess you've been so busy you've forgotten all about it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's what I said to you just before we left when Hsieh Hsi-ta and I were having a drink with you here the day before yesterday."
Hsi-men Ch'ing stared vacantly into space and thought for a while before saying, "It must have been something to do with that affair of Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, wasn't it?"
Ying Po-chüeh responded, with a laugh, "Just as they say:
When the rainwater from the eaves drips down from above:
Every drop hits the mark."
Hsi-men Ch'ing knit his brows and said, "Where would you have me come up with the necessary silver? You saw how it was the other day when I was arranging to take delivery of that salt and was so strapped for cash that I had to borrow five hundred taels of silver from my kinsman Ch'iao Hung in order to complete the transaction. Where would I come up with all this additional silver to invest?"
"In any event," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it's an investment that is bound to be profitable. Why don't you see if you can dig out something from the corner of one of your trunks, or somewhere, to give to them? Brother, you said that yesterday you got an initial payment of two hundred fifty taels from Hsü the Fourth's place outside the city gate, so the remaining half of what they need should be easy enough to get together."
"That's as may be," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but where am I to scrape it up from? You'd better tell them to wait until I've received the entire sum that Hsü the Fourth owes me, and I'll turn it over to them then in a lump sum."
Ying Po-chüeh adopted a serious expression and said, "Brother:
A single word from a gentleman, is like
A single whip stroke to a fleet steed.[32]
If a man is untrustworthy,
How can that be tolerated?[33]
It would have been better if you had not made that promise to me the day before yesterday. I've already told them that it's:
As certain as certain can be,
they'll get the money today, so what am I to say to them? They have complete faith in your reputation for magnanimity. Over such a trivial matter, would you have these businessmen bad-mouthing you behind your back?"
"If Master Ying the Second says so," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I might as well give it to them, and be done with it."
He then went back to the rear compound, where he got together two hundred thirty taels of silver, and asked Yü-hsiao for the two hundred fifty taels that had been received from Hsü the Fourth's place the day before, which weighed out to a total of exactly four hundred eighty taels.
Coming outside again, he said to Ying Po-chüeh, "I have only been able to scrape together four hundred eighty taels, so I am still twenty taels short. But I can supply some satin piece goods to make up the difference. Will that do?"
"That would make things difficult," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They require ready cash in order to fulfill their part of this contract for the purveying of incense. You don't have any of the best grade of satin piece goods in stock right now, and those pieces of pink satin you do have aren't good enough to fill the bill. You might as well scrape up the ready money, and save me a lot of legwork."
"That's enough! That's enough!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
So saying, he went back inside, weighed out twenty taels of good-quality silver, and told Tai-an to take the whole amount out with him.
Li the Third and Huang the Fourth had been sitting in a neighbor's house for a long time, just waiting for a signal from Ying Po-chüeh before putting in an appearance, and Hsieh Hsi-ta happened to come in at the same time.
Having first greeted Hsieh Hsi-ta, Li the Third and Huang the Fourth saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "On a former occasion we were the recipients of your great kindness, and it is only because the silver that is due us has not yet been disbursed that we have been so dilatory in paying you back. And now, in Tung-p'ing prefecture, there is another contract being let for the purveying of twenty thousand taels worth of incense, and we have once again made bold to ask you for the loan of another five hundred taels of silver, in order to temporarily relieve this:
Eyebrow singeing exigency.[34]
When we receive the payment for our current contract, we will bring it over to you, without touching so much as a candareen of it, and repay you in full, including the interest due."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Tai-an and sent him to fetch the steelyard from the shop, and invite his son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, to join them. After which, he weighed out, first, the twenty-five packets of ten taels each that he had collected from Hsü the Fourth's place, and then, the two hundred fifty taels that he had provided himself, and turned them over to Huang the Fourth and Li the Third. The two of them, after seemingly never ending expressions of gratitude, finally took their leave.
Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to keep Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta for a further parley, but the two of them had no stomach for an extended visit, wishing, instead, to leave forthwith in order to divvy up the brokerage fee they expected to receive from Li the Third and Huang the Fourth. Claiming falsely to have other engagements, they hastily took their leave, but on their way out, Ying Po-chüeh was pestered by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, who demanded something for themselves with which to buy sweetmeats.
Ying Po-chüeh waved them off with his hand, saying, "I've got nothing for you! I've got nothing for you! This is something I undertook on my own initiative. I didn't bring anything for the likes of you. Dogs of a whore's spawn that you are!" And he and his companion took themselves off.
Who should appear at this juncture but Shu-t'ung, who came in to deliver thank-you notes from Secretary Huang Pao-kuang and Secretary An Ch'en and reported, "The two gentlemen protested that they really ought not to accept such gifts from you, but agreed to receive them for fear of offending you. They asked me to convey their gratitude to you, and each of them gave me a tip in a sealed envelope."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to keep these gratuities for himself and also weighed out some silver for the carriers who had been hired to deliver the gifts, and sent them on their way. It being lamp-lighting time already, Hsimen Ch'ing then went into Yüeh-niang's room and sat down.
Yüeh-niang said, "Hsiao-yü tells me that you came into my room earlier today and called to me, but I was asleep at the time and didn't know that you were calling me."
"There you go again," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I knew all along that you were not too pleased with me."
"Who says that I'm not pleased with you?" protested Yüeh-niang, and then she ordered Hsiao-yü to prepare some tea and fetch some supper for them to eat.
After downing several cups of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose body was affected by several successive days of heavy drinking, would have been happy enough simply to go to sleep. But since it had been some time since he spent the night in Yüeh-niang's room, he was anxious to please her, and had used some of the Indian monk's ointment, so that his male organ was swollen into the shape of an iron pestle.
When Yüeh-niang saw it, she said out loud, "That Indian monk was so unprincipled that he would spring this kind of frightening trick on someone, would he?"
But:
In her heart she thought to herself,[35]
"He may have the Indian monk's techniques on his side, but I've got the Nun's transcendent elixir on mine. Something good is bound to come out of this."
Consequently, they both got into bed and spent a pleasurable night together, and it was nearly noon before they got up the next day.
This fact did not fail to attract the attention of P'an Chin-lien, who:
Exercised her lips and waggled her tongue,
to Meng Yü-lou, saying, "The other day, Elder Sister asked me to look up when the next *jen-tzu* day would occur, and that must be why she was so anxious to sleep with our husband last night. It could hardly be a mere coincidence."
"Whoever heard of such a thing?" laughed Meng Yü-lou.
As they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing came by, at which Chin-lien grabbed hold of him with one hand and said, "Whoever heard of anyone going to bed so early and getting up so late? The sun is already well on its way toward setting. So where are you off to now?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing was subjected to her bantering for some time, which only had the effect of causing his organ to grow stiff again, so they simply abandoned Meng Yü-lou, leaving her to return to her quarters by herself.
Once Hsi-men Ch'ing had thrust Chin-lien through the portal of her bed, the two of them proceeded to dally with each other in earnest. Ch'un-mei fetched them something to eat, and they ate it together. But no more of this.
To resume our story, ever since Yüeh-niang had overheard Chin-lien criticizing her behind her back for being overprotective of Kuan-ko, she had refrained from visiting him in his room for two days.
Who should appear at this juncture but Li P'ing-erh, who came into her room and told her, "The child keeps on crying, day and night, and suffering from the cold shivers continuously. What are we to do?"
"Do whatever should occur to you," said Yüeh-niang, "and if his condition improves, it will be all right. You might try making vows to burn incense on his behalf, or even a vow to sacrifice to the gods. Such steps ought to alleviate his condition."
"The other day," said Li P'ing-erh, "he was running a fever, and I vowed to make propitiatory offerings to the God of Walls and Moats and the local Tutelary God, and those vows are now due to be fulfilled."
"That sounds all right," said Yüeh-niang. "After all, they're your vows to make. But you ought also to invite Dame Liu over for a consultation, and see what she has to suggest."
Just as Li P'ing-erh was about to take her leave, Yüeh-niang said to her, "Why do you suppose it was that all day yesterday I failed to come over to your place to see the child? It was all because the day before yesterday, after coming to see the child, as I passed by the screen-wall in front of the summer-house, I overheard P'an Chin-lien saying to Meng the Third that since I had no child of my own, I was reduced to playing up to someone else who did. It's no big deal that she should talk such rot, but I was so upset by it for half a day that I was unable to eat anything."
"What can you expect from that crazy good-for-nothing of a splay-legged whore!" said Li P'ing-erh. "How unprincipled can you get? She's been the frequent recipient of your good intentions. What have you ever done to her that she should be up to such nasty tricks as that?"
"You keep it to yourself," said Yüeh-niang. "In order to protect yourself from her, you'd better not say a word about it."
"So that's what happened," said Li P'ing-erh. "Day before yesterday Yingch'un said that when she went outside she saw her standing there talking to Meng the Third, and that when they saw her, they slipped off pretending to look for the cat."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying-ch'un, who came running in, panting for breath, and said, "Mother, you'd better come at once. For no evident reason, Kuan-ko's two eyes have started to turn up incessantly, and there is some white foam dribbling from his mouth."
Li P'ing-erh was thrown into such consternation that:
Her mouth clamped shut without a word,[36] and
She knitted her brows on the verge of tears.
On the one hand, she sent Hsiao-yü to inform Hsi-men Ch'ing, and on the other, she hastily returned to her quarters. When she arrived there, she found that the wet nurse Ju-i and the others had all turned pale.
She had barely had time to assess the situation when Hsi-men Ch'ing also came into the room and, being startled to find that Kuan-ko seemed to be:
Hovering between life and death,
exclaimed, "It looks bad! It looks bad! What are we to do? You women have not been adequately protective of him, allowing him to get to such a state before informing me about it. Now, what is to be done?"
Pointing his finger at Ju-i, he said, "Wet nurse, you've not been taking proper care of him, until, today, it's come to this. If, by any chance, something untoward should occur:
It would not be deemed outlandish,
if you were to be pounded into mincemeat."
Ju-i was thrown into such consternation by this outburst that she dared not open her mouth, while:
The tears flowed from both her eyes,
and Li P'ing-erh could only gaze at the child while crying to herself.
"Crying won't do any good," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We might as well invite Shih Cho-kuei, or Plastromancer Shih, to prognosticate on his behalf by applying heat to the plastron of a tortoise shell. Once we've determined what the prognosis for good or ill may be, we can decide what to do next."
He then asked Shu-t'ung to take out one of his calling cards and fly on his way to request the attendance of Shih Cho-kuei.
When the latter had sat down, Ch'en Ching-chi kept him company for a serving of tea, while Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an:
Lit candles and ignited incense,[37]
provided some purified water, and set up a table. Hsi-men Ch'ing then came out to greet him and, taking the plastron in his hands:
Uttered a prayer to Heaven,
saluted him, and ushered him into the reception hall, where he placed the plastron on the table. Shih Cho-kuei then took it up in both hands, applied some medication to certain spots on its surface, and applied fire to them, after which they had another cup of tea.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting there, they heard a sharp sound of crepitation as the plastron cracked. Shih Cho-kuei proceeded to examine it and then paused for a while, without saying anything.
"What does it portend for good or ill?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"What sort of problem is it that you are concerned about?" asked Shih Cho-kuei.
"My young son is ill," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How does the general configuration look? Are there sufficient indications for a prognosis or not?"
"The general configuration does not show anything much to worry about at the present time," said Shih Cho-kuei, "but there is reason to fear that later on the malady may recur and linger on, so that there will be no possibility of a complete cure. When parents divine about their children or grandchildren, the lines for their children or grandchildren should not be unfavorable. Moreover, you see that the line for the Red Bird has been markedly disturbed, which indicates that sacrifices should be offered to the Red-Robed Guardian, the God of Walls and Moats, etc. You should slaughter a pig and a sheep to sacrifice to them. In addition you should take offerings of three bowls of soup and rice, together with effigies of one prematurely deceased male and two prematurely deceased females, and dispatch them to escort the malevolent influences responsible for the malady off to the south in a straw boat."
Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him for his services with a mace of silver, at which Shih Cho-kuei, who was a past master in the arts of flattery and ingratiation, bent his body into the shape of a shrimp and departed with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand expressions of gratitude.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and said, "Just now, the plastromancer said the general configuration indicates that the malady may be protracted, and that we should be on our guard for recurrences, but that in the present exigency we should sacrifice to the Lady of the God of Walls and Moats."
"I made a vow to that effect the other day," said Li P'ing-erh, "but I haven't fulfilled it yet, because the child has been such a source of trouble."
"Can such things be?"
exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he immediately ordered Tai-an to go summon Ch'ien T'an-huo, or Phlegm-fire Ch'ien, a Taoist healer, experienced at burning petitions to the gods.
Tai-an promptly went out the gate on this errand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then joined Li P'ing-erh, who embraced Kuan-ko and said, "My child, I'm going to sacrifice to the gods on your behalf, and if you get any better, I can only:
Thank Heaven and thank Earth."[38]
No sooner had she said this, than:

Strange to relate,
the pupils of the child's eyes fell back into their normal position, as he cuddled up against his mother's body and fell asleep.
"How very strange!" said Li P'ing-erh to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No sooner did I promise to sacrifice to the gods on his behalf, than he got significantly better."
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing feel in his heart that:
The stone on his head had finally fallen to the ground.
When Yüeh-niang heard about it, she also was:
Unable to contain her pleasure,
and sent Ch'in-t'ung off to summon Dame Liu.
Dame Liu lost no time in bustling on her way, with:
One step high, and
One step low.
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not have any faith in such female practitioners but, out of his love for Kuan-ko, felt that he was compelled to give her the benefit of the doubt.
Dame Liu headed straight for the kitchen, where she proceeded to rub the door of the stove.
"This old crone must be delirious," Ying-ch'un laughed at her. "Rather than attending to Kuan-ko, what do you think you're doing heading into the kitchen instead, and rubbing the door of the stove?"
"Little slave," responded Dame Liu, "what do you know about it? That's enough of your lip. Old-timer that I am:
I've got three hundred sixty days for every year that I'm older than you.
As I came along the road, I fear I may have come in contact with some noxious influences, which I have sought to counteract by approaching the door of the stove."
Ying-ch'un made a face at her but, on hearing that Li P'ing-erh was calling for her, accompanied Dame Liu to her quarters.
When Dame Liu had kowtowed, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who needed to order Tai-an to weigh out the silver with which to purchase the necessary items for the offerings to the gods, and slaughter the pig and sheep for this purpose, strode out of the room.
"Is Kuan-ko any better?" asked Dame Liu.
"On the contrary, his condition is critical," said Li P'ing-erh. "That's why I have invited you over for a consultation."
"As I recommended on a former day," said Dame Liu, "once you made an offering to the General of the Five Ways, he was all right. On the present occasion, judging by his coloration, if you offer propitiatory rites to the Tutelary Gods of the Three Worlds, he should recover."
"Just now," said Li P'ing-erh, "Shih Cho-kuei suggested that we ought to make an offering to the Lady of the God of Walls and Moats."
"He is consistently off the mark," said Dame Liu. "What does he know about it? This is a case of convulsions brought on by a fright. The best thing to do would be for me to exorcise the fright."
"How would you exorcise the fright?" asked Li P'ing-erh.
"Sister Ying-ch'un," said Dame Liu, "if you go fetch some rice and dip out a bowl of water for me, I'll show you how it's done."
Ying-ch'un duly went to fetch the rice and water for her.
Dame Liu proceeded to take a high-stemmed earthenware goblet and fill it to capacity with grains of rice. She then groped an old green chiffon handkerchief out of her sleeve, wrapped the rice from the goblet up in it, and kneaded it with her hands, after which she proceeded to shake it in the air as she moved it back and forth over the length of Kuan-ko's body, from his face and head to his hands and feet.
Kuan-ko was asleep at the time, and the wet nurse said, "Be careful not to wake him up."
Dame Liu gave a negative wave of her hand and said in a low voice, "I know. I know."
After moving the rice-filled handkerchief back and forth for a while, she began to mutter something incomprehensible under her breath, but one or two passages were a little more audible than the rest.
Li P'ing-erh managed to catch the words, "Affrighted by Heaven, affrighted by Earth, affrighted by humans, affrighted by ghosts, affrighted by cats, affrighted by dogs," at which point she said, "It all started when the child was frightened by a cat."
When Dame Liu had finished her incantation, she shook open the handkerchief, placed the goblet on the table, and contemplated the results for a while. Then, selecting two grains of rice from the heap created by shaking it out of the handkerchief, she dropped them into the bowl of water, by doing which she was able to prognosticate that the malady would be cured by the end of the month. She likewise recommended that the effigies of one prematurely deceased male and two prematurely deceased females should be dispatched to escort the malevolent influences responsible for the malady off in a southeasterly direction. But she argued that, rather than sacrificing to the God of Walls and Moats, she should make a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God.
Li P'ing-erh was perplexed by this, but finally said, "I'll just make an additional propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God. That won't be a problem."
She then told Ying-ch'un to go outside and tell Hsi-men Ch'ing that Dame Liu, after "prognosticating with a bowl of water," had said that they ought to make an offering to the local Tutelary God; and that, since it was too late to go to the temple of the God of Walls and Moats tonight anyway, they should lay in all the proper offerings, and be prepared to hold a devout ceremony in the morning.
Hsi-men Ch'ing consequently instructed Tai-an to take care of procuring all the necessary paraphernalia for the sacrifice, as well as the pig and sheep, and be prepared to go take care of it in the morning; and that, in addition, he should purchase what was needed for an offering to the local Tutelary God, including fried rice and cocoon-shaped pastries, earthenware writing brushes and ink cakes, as well as live sparrows, loaches, eels, and the like, to be released in honor of the occasion.
No item was left unsupplied;
Each object was of the best.
Dame Liu then took leave of Li P'ing-erh's place and headed inside to Yüeh-niang's quarters in the rear compound, where Yüeh-niang kept her for supper.
To resume our story, when Ch'ien T'an-huo arrived, he sat down in the small reception hall, and Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an hastily prepared to assist him in the ceremony of making a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God. As soon as Ch'ien T'an-huo had finished his tea, he asked for the purport of the petition he was to present, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had Shu-t'ung write it out for him.
Ch'ien T'an-huo then donned his collapsible thunder cap, put on his customary vestments:
Brandished his sword with philter in hand,
started to pace the dipper, and began to recite the altar-cleansing invocation. The invocation read:
From the mysterious void of the grotto heavens,
To the refulgent realm of the great primordial,
May the prepotent gods of the eight directions,
Assure my consonance with the forces of nature.
These Numinous Treasure talismans,
Are addressed to the Nine Heavens.
The celestial net extends its awe-inspiring sway,
Over the mysterious realms of grottoes and stars,
Decapitating demons and shackling monsters,[39]
Killing devils by the myriads and thousands.
This sanctified invocation of the polestar,
This jade writ of the primordial beginning,
When duly incanted but a single time,
Dispels disease and lengthens years:
When dispatched to the Five Sacred Peaks,
And made known throughout the Eight Seas,
The demon-kings will be compelled,
To stand as bodyguards at my side;
Misfortune and pestilence will be dispelled,
And the force of the Tao remain ever present,[40]
etc., etc.
He then asked the ordainer of the ceremony to burn incense. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly washed his hands, rinsed out his mouth, donned his official cap and girdle, and put on his kneepads. Sun Hsüeh-o, Meng Yü-lou, Li Chiaoerh, and Li Kuei-chieh all helped him on with his clothes, clucking with approbation as they did so. When Hsi-men Ch'ing emerged and proceeded to burn incense and pay obeisance to Buddha, a page boy followed at his heels to straighten his garments. It was all done with conspicuous formality.
On seeing that his patron had come outside, Ch'ien T'an-huo started to declaim his texts twice as loudly as before, while the womenfolk, concealing themselves behind a standing screen, peeked at Hsi-men Ch'ing, pointed at Ch'ien T'an-huo, and fell into a heap with laughter. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the sound of their raucous laughter, kneeling as he was before the effigy of the god, he was not in a position to say anything about it but could only survey the scene with his eyes. Only after Shu-t'ung became aware of the situation and made a gesture with his mouth did the womenfolk quiet down a bit.
Meanwhile, Chin-lien, who was coming out from the rear compound by herself, upon turning a corner, suddenly ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who fell to kissing her and feeling her breasts.
Groping a handful of sweetmeats out of her sleeve, and giving them to him, she went on to ask, "Would you like to have a drink of distilled spirits?"
"I wouldn't mind having a little," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
Consequently, he allowed Chin-lien to take advantage of this interval during which the others were busy, by pulling him into her quarters, and telling Ch'un-mei to shut the door.
After sharing a couple of cups with him, she said, "You'd better get going. I'm afraid someone might turn up, which would be the death of me."
Ch'en Ching-chi wanted to kiss her again, but Chin-lien said, "You indecent short-life! Aren't you afraid that the maidservants will catch on?"
Then she facetiously gave him a resounding whack, upon which Ch'en Ching-chi prepared to make his escape. Chin-lien told Ch'un-mei to precede him outside, and she saw him safely out of the way. Truly:
With two hands he tore open the road between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through the gate to perdition.
Chin-lien also went outside at the same time to see if the coast was clear. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, in paying his respects to the local Tutelary God, had been kneeling for what seemed like half a day, before he was able to get to his feet again. Thus far, the ceremony had only progressed as far as the initial invocation, and Ch'ien T'an-huo was about to proceed to the ritual of penance.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went behind the standing screen and admonished the womenfolk there, saying, "You've got to stop giggling like that. It's so contagious that several times I've barely been able to prevent myself from following suit."
"That Ch'ien T'an-huo," said the womenfolk, "is no more than a paper-burning ghoul. He's not a proper Taoist priest. When he dons his collapsible cap and puts on his vestments, he's being both bold-faced and shameless. In the course of his babbling, who knows how many buckets of stinking spittle he's managed to expectorate."
Hsi-men Ch'ing said:
"Sacrifice to the gods as if the gods are present.[41]
You really oughtn't to bad-mouth or ridicule him so cruelly."
Ch'ien T'an-huo then requested his presence for the ritual of penance, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the carpeted altar space. Ch'ien T'an-huo, having started off with the introit, proceeded to recite the text of the ritual of penance, beginning with the statement of his sincere intentions in seeking an audience. As he did so, the spittle around the edges of his mouth:
Curled in and curled out,
while his head:
Bobbed up and bobbed down,
like that of the kowtowing bug, or click beetle, which caused the eavesdropping women to fall into a heap with laughter. Hsi-men Ch'ing was quite unable to keep up with the pace of his kowtowing. Ch'ien T'an-huo addressed himself to a different Divine Lord with each kowtow, but by the time Hsimen Ch'ing had performed one kowtow, he had already kowtowed to several additional Divine Lords. Thereupon, being unable to keep track of things, he simply fell to kowtowing at random, which caused the eavesdropping women to laugh even harder.
Just at this juncture, Hsiao-yü came out to invite Li Kuei-chieh to the rear compound for dinner, saying, "The First Lady is sitting all by herself back there, engaged in idle chatter with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Dame Liu, while out here the rest of you are having a merry time of it."
Li Chiao-erh and Li Kuei-chieh promptly went back inside, and the rest of them all wished to follow suit, with the exception of P'an Chin-lien, who wanted to continue eavesdropping, until, in the end, when she saw that they had all gone inside, she felt compelled to come inside as well.
Wu Yüeh-niang remarked to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "If you have a mind to sacrifice to the gods, you ought to be appropriately devout about it. What's the point of having all these crazy womenfolk crowding around out there? It's not as though there were any real spectacle to be seen, such as live lions devouring each other, or anything like that."
She had hardly finished speaking when Li Kuei-chieh came in to join Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ta-chieh for dinner. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had kowtowed until his entire body was bathed with sweat, when he came inside, took off his robe and cap, boots and girdle, went in to Kuan-ko's bedside, and caressed him, saying, "My son, I've made a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God on your behalf."
He then turned to Li P'ing-erh and said, "It's amazing. Come and feel his forehead. It's a lot cooler than before. Heaven be thanked! Heaven be thanked!"
Li P'ing-erh laughed, saying:
"Strange as it may seem,
ever since I promised to make a propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God, he's been getting better. Right now, his fever has receded, his eyes are no longer turning up, and his cold shivers have subsided somewhat. How can you say that Dame Liu is without merit?"
"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well follow up by completing the sacrifice at the temple of the God of Walls and Moats."
"The only problem is that his father has been wearing himself out," said Li P'ing-erh. "You'd better dry yourself off, and have some dinner before you go."
"If I stay here, I'm afraid I'll disturb the child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. I'll go somewhere else to eat."
Upon making his way to Chin-lien's place, he sat down in a chair and said, "The area around my kidneys hurts as though they were about to drop out."
Chin-lien laughed, saying, "Why should anyone with such a filial heart have to feel pain? Right now, you might as well get someone to do the kowtowing in your place."
"That makes sense. That makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then told Ch'un-mei to summon Ch'in-t'ung and instruct him, "Go invite Son-in-law Ch'en to do the kowtowing, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on Father's behalf."
Who would have thought that Ch'en Ching-chi, after having downed several cups of distilled spirits in Chin-lien's quarters, was afraid that his face was red enough for the page boys to spot, so he endeavored to account for it by buying some weak wine, and drinking several cups of it in the shop. His capacity, however, was inadequate, so that he soon became drunk and fell asleep where he was, snoring stertorously.
Ch'in-t'ung found it impossible to rouse him and flew back like an arrow to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "He's fast asleep there, and I was unable to rouse him."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was annoyed by this and exclaimed, "How unprincipled can you get? Quite aside from his neglect of the family business, what sort of a spectacle does it present to our neighbors for him to fall asleep so early in the day?"

He then told Ch'un-mei to go to the First Lady's room and say to Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "Father has developed a sore back from all the kowtowing and asked our son-in-law to continue the kowtowing, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on his behalf. He wants to know why it is that he refuses to come, but insists on remaining there asleep?"
"What a hopeless case he is!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and she started out of the room.
Yüeh-niang, however, sent Hsiao-yü to go to the shop and wake up Ch'en Ching-chi.
Still rubbing his eyes, Ch'en Ching-chi came back to the rear compound, where he saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "What's the big rush in calling for me, as though my life depended on it?"
"You've been asked to participate in the propitiatory offering to the local Tutelary God, and the seeing off of the paper effigies of the spirits on Father's behalf," explained Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "Just now, when Ch'in-t'ung went to summon you, you failed to respond, and now you're trying to give me a hard time about it. This time it was Mother who sent Hsiao-yü to summon you. In any case, you'd better start kowtowing, hadn't you?"
Thereupon:
Half pushing him and half supporting him,
she hustled Ch'en Ching-chi out to the reception hall, after which she returned to her room. Hsiao-yü first reported this development back to Yüeh-niang, and then to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to continue waiting upon Ch'ien T'an-huo until the ceremony was completed, and then went to sleep on Chin-lien's bed. But no more of this.
To resume our story, it was only when Ch'en Ching-chi arrived in the reception hall and saw that it was:
Blazing with lamps and candles,[42]
that he finally sobered up. Opening his eyes wide, he observed that Ch'ien T'an-huo was waiting to receive his "flower-scattering fee" for officiating over the ceremony. After they had exchanged the customary greetings, Ch'ien T'an-huo took the offering of soup and rice and, telling Ch'in-t'ung to light the way, proceeded to the door of Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where Ying-ch'un took it inside, along with some incense, and gave it to Ju-i, who blew on it on Kuan-ko's behalf, before handing it back out again. Ch'ien T'an-huo:
Alternately impersonating gods and ghosts,
recited a spell over it, after which he came back to the reception hall to preside over the ceremony of seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits. After Ch'en Ching-chi had kowtowed for a while, Ch'ien T'an-huo duly finished seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits and dispatched the proclamation, along with a talismanic transcription of the hexagram *ch'ien*.[43]
Having done so, he said, "Once the proclamation has been delivered to the Gate of Heaven, his condition should improve within a day or two. Even if the malady should recur, it won't amount to anything."
By the time Ch'ien T'an-huo had finished the rituals of releasing the living creatures provided for the occasion, seeing off the paper effigies of the spirits, offering a libation, and dismissing the gods:
His mouth was dry, his stomach was empty,
and he was ready to have something to eat. Tai-an cleared away the utensils, and Ch'in-t'ung set up a table so that Ch'en Ching-chi could keep him company in consuming a share of the foodstuffs that remained from the preceding ceremony. Ch'ien T'an-huo was profuse in his thanks, and, after he had departed, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to his quarters. Li P'ing-erh also sent Ying-ch'un to deliver some of the leftover fruits and other sacrificial offerings to Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room, for which she expressed her gratitude. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Dame Liu, who was being entertained in Yüeh-niang's quarters, thanked her for her hospitality and took her leave. She had just emerged from the main gate when whom should she encounter but Ch'ien T'an-huo, who staggered up behind her, holding a lantern, and reeking of alcohol.
"Master Ch'ien," said Dame Liu, "you really ought to share that 'flower-scattering fee' with me, shouldn't you?"
"What's that got to do with you?" demanded Ch'ien T'an-huo.
"It was my 'prognosticating with a bowl of water' that set up this job for you, old man," said Dame Liu. "Are you totally:
Unconscious of right and wrong?
The next time the opportunity comes my way, I won't recommend you."
Ch'ien T'an-huo adamantly refused, saying, "What an inveterate oily mouth you are, you old whore! You're shooting your mouth off without foundation. Since when did you ever recommend me? He's a longstanding client of mine. Whoever heard of sharing a 'flower-scattering fee'?"
Dame Liu pointed her finger at him and cursed, saying, "May you starve to death, you lousy paper-burning ghoul, before you ever expect another favor from me!"
The two of them mixed it up together, continuing their verbal dual for some time before finally separating. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing got up the next morning, he ordered a page boy to follow him and set out for the temple of the God of Walls and Moats. The carriers of the pig and sheep carried the pig and sheep, while the bearer of his official cap and girdle bore his official cap and girdle. He went straight into the temple, throwing the Taoist priests there into a flurry as they put down a carpet and proceeded to intone the memorial. Hsi-men Ch'ing donned his official cap and girdle and, when he had finished paying obeisance to the god, proceeded to divine about Kuan-ko's condition by means of selecting a prognosticatory bamboo stick, which he then asked a Taoist priest to interpret.[44] The priest took the bamboo stick and, after tea had been served, went on to interpret it.
The inscription on the stick in question indicated medium good luck, and the priest interpreted it by saying. "The party who is ill should recover, but, in order to guard against a recurrence, it is appropriate that you should take additional precautions."
After distributing the "incense money" for the ceremony, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home. When he dismounted and came inside, he found Ying Po-chüeh sitting in the summerhouse.
"Have a seat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll go inside and come right out."
He then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and told her about how he had consulted the bamboo sticks on behalf of Kuan-ko:
Thus and thus, and
So and so.
After doing which, he went straight back to the summerhouse and said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Was the brokerage fee you received for that transaction the other day adequate? You really ought to treat me to something or other."
Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "Hsieh Hsi-ta also made a little something out of it. Why should I alone be expected to treat you? But that's all right. I'll buy some things for Brother to eat, that's all."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Who wants to eat anything of yours? I was only testing you."
"That being the case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "inasmuch as you went to the temple today with a pig and a sheep, there must be quite a lot in the way of sacrificial offerings left over. Since your younger brother is here, why don't you share some of the bounty with me?"
"You've got a point there," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then summoned Ch'in-t'ung to go invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to come over so they could enjoy it together and, at the same time, sent directions to the kitchen to prepare the foodstuffs in question and bring them out so he could share them with Brother Ying the Second over a cup of wine.
Ying Po-chüeh seated himself to wait for the arrival of Hsieh Hsi-ta, but he failed to show up, so he finally said, "Why don't we go ahead and settle down to it? Who has the patience to wait for such a slippery operator?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to enjoy a drink together.
When Ch'in-t'ung returned, he reported, "Master Hsieh is not at home."
"What took you so long?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I went looking all over for him," said Ch'in-t'ung.
Ying Po-chüeh then initiated a game of forfeits, the import of which was the wish for Kuan-ko's recovery, which pleased Hsi-men Ch'ing so much he was:
Unable to contain his delight.
"I am so constantly imposing on your hospitality," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that I really:
Feel uneasy at heart.
Tomorrow or the next day, I would like to play a paltry role as host in inviting the members of our brotherhood to share a cup of wine with you. How would that be?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "So, having scrounged a little something in the way of a brokerage fee, you're ready to squander your silver. But there's no need for you to lay out anything. I've got this pig and sheep left over, which I'll donate to you in order to supply the necessary ingredients."
Ying Po-chüeh thanked him, saying, "I feel that you're doing more than friendship requires."
"As for the singing girls and the boy actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll leave those arrangements to you."
"That goes without saying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The only thing is, there'll be no one to wait on us. What are we to do?"
"We are all brothers, after all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The servants of any one of us will do as well as another. We might as well make use of Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an from my place."
"That'll take care of everything," said Ying Po-chüeh. After drinking a while longer, he said farewell and departed. Truly, even if you were to drink all day for a century, it would only amount to 36000 occasions.

## 075
## Ying Po-chüeh Convenes His Friends in a Suburban Garden; Jen Hou-ch'i Diagnoses an Illness for a Powerful Family

Whether the morrow will be overcast or clear is not possible to predict;[1]
As the saying goes, "The pinnacle of delight begets sorrow and distress."
While the gallivanting youth is captivated by the red thoroughfares;
The neglected damsel vents her resentment by her green gauze window.
Having just visited Apricot Blossom Village[2] to procure vintage wine;
One must now resort to the Orange Tree Well[3] to seek a rare prescription.
How many are the occasions for sorrow and joy in the life of man;
Yet routinely the spring breeze gives way to a spell of frost.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing got out of bed in Chin-lien's room the next morning, he told Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to deliver the pig's feet and mutton to Ying Po-chüeh's home. When the two page boys arrived on this errand, Ying Po-chüeh was just coming home from inviting the other guests and, upon seeing them, went into the house where he wrote a reply, couched in terms that were half demanding, half inviting, and read:
Yesterday, I imposed egregiously on your hospitality, and now I am once again the recipient of your lavish magnanimity. Thank you. Thank you. At this moment, I pray that my elder brother will deign to visit my humble abode, so that we may proceed together upon a pleasure excursion to the suburbs.
When he had finished writing it, he came outside and was about to hand it to Tai-an, when Tai-an said, "There's no need for you to write a note in reply. Father sent the two of us to wait on you here, so we're not going back."
Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "It's hardly right for me to put you two familiar oily mouths to so much trouble. You'll be the death of me yet." Upon saying which, he put the note back into his sleeve.
"Master Two," said Tai-an, "where are you going to be holding your drinking party today? Shouldn't we start setting the tables out? They're covered with dust."
"A fine one you are!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I was just going to wipe them off. We'll begin by setting things up for an ordinary repast here at my place, after which, we'll repair to a suburban garden somewhere and enjoy ourselves there."
"It makes a lot of sense to eat at home first," said Ch'in-t'ung. It will save you the trouble of having to eat again once you get there. The only things we'll have to take with us, then, are the partitioned picnic boxes, the wine, and the saucers."
"The two of you are real smart asses, aren't you," remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "What you say just happens to coincide with my own crude ideas. I imagine:
You've been bored into so often, both day and night,
That the holes in your smart asses have been reamed out."[4]
"There's no need to bandy idle words," said Tai-an. "We'll help you get things ready."
To this Ying Po-chüeh responded, "That is what could be said to describe:
Three shrines to the goddess Kuan-yin lined up in a row:
Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!"[5]
Just as the two page boys had completed 70 or 80 percent of their preparations, who should come swaggering through the gate but Pai Lai-ch'iang, or Scrounger Pai.
After saluting Ying Po-chüeh with clasped hands, he caught sight of Ch'int'ung and Tai-an and exclaimed, "These two little darlings are certainly playing up to their Master Two."
"Don't you be jealous now," responded Ying Po-chüeh, at which everyone had a good laugh.
"Who all have you invited today, Brother?" asked Scrounger Pai.
"Only the members of our brotherhood are getting together," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It will be just like a meeting of the club. No one else has been invited."
"That's great," said Scrounger Pai. "What I am most put off by is having to drink with people I don't know. If we have a little gathering of the members of our brotherhood today, it will be a perfect occasion for drinking wine and having fun together. But the party will not be complete without the company of singing girls, along with Li Ming and Wu Hui, to play and sing for us, and help us down with our wine."
"There's no need for you to instruct me on that head," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You're talking to someone who knows the score, after all. Surely you don't mean to suggest that I would arrange for us to merely share a melancholy drink together, and then call it a day. When have you ever known me to do anything like that?"
"That's fine. That's fine," said Scrounger Pai. "Leave it to you, old hand that you are. The only thing is, in a little while, if the occasion should arise, don't make me drink too many forfeits of wine. The other night I had a little too much of some fiery spirits, and my throat is still as sore as can be. I'd better confine myself to tea, and rice, and vermicelli soup."
Ying Po-chüeh said:
"The best cure for a hangover is a dose of wine.
You might as well have a little. What harm can it do? The other day I also had a rather sore throat, and, after downing a few cups of wine, it felt much better. You'd better take this prescription of mine. It's absolutely marvelous."
"Brother," said Scrounger Pai, "so far, you've only proposed a cure for my sore throat. You don't happen to have a cure for my stomach, do you?"
"I imagine," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that you haven't had any breakfast."
"That's not far off the mark," said Scrounger Pai.
"What am I to do?" said Ying Po-chüeh, and he ran inside and came out with a saucer of cakes, a saucer of sandalwood-flavored biscuits, and a pot of tea for Scrounger Pai's consumption.
Scrounger Pai polished off the sandalwood-flavored biscuits:
One per mouthful,
and praised them, saying, "These biscuits are great."
"The cakes are not bad either," said Ying Po-chüeh.
Scrounger Pai, audibly smacking his lips as he did so, went on to finish them off as well. It became apparent at this juncture that Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an had finished the task of getting the utensils together, cleaning the windows, and wiping off the tables.
"Everything is in proper order," said Scrounger Pai. "The only thing is that our brothers have not all shown up yet. The earlier we forgather the more fun we can have. Why should they insist on skulking at home this way? What are they up to?"
Just as Ying Po-chüeh was gazing outside, whom should he see but Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, who made his way into the room and was met by Ch'in-t'ung, coming out with a serving of tea.
After Cadger Ch'ang had saluted the company with clasped hands, he looked at Ch'in-t'ung and said, "So you're here, are you?"
Ch'in-t'ung:
Smiled but did not respond.[6]
After finishing their tea, the three of them had just stood up to stretch their legs when Scrounger Pai noticed that there was a go board on the cabinet and said to Cadger Ch'ang, "I'll play a game of go with you."
"I'm still overheated from walking over here just now," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I was about to loosen my clothing and fan myself, and now you want me to play a game of go. Well all right, I'll play a casual game with you if you like."
Having said which, they took down the go board and began to play a game of go.

"Is the loser going to treat the rest of us?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"We're putting our elder brother to enough trouble today," said Scrounger Pai. "Winner takes all would be a better way to do it. It's more convenient and would save us the need to pretend to be hungry when there's more than we can eat. Winner takes all is better all the way round."
"I'm the host," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so I won't participate. The two of you can surely come up with something to treat each other with, can't you?"
Everyone laughed at this.
"Now that we're agreed," said Cadger Ch'ang, "shall we play for objects, or for silver?"
"I didn't happen to bring any silver with me," said Scrounger Pai. "All I have here is a fan, which I pawned for two or three mace of silver and have only recently been able to redeem."
"I've got an embroidered velour handkerchief here that I won from somebody else," said Cadger Ch'ang. "It's worth a good deal, but I guess I'd be willing to hazard it."
The two of them together handed over their stakes to Ying Po-chüeh, who, upon examining them, saw that one of them was a gold-flecked folding fan, with plain bamboo slats, decorated with a painting and an accompanying poem, though the state of the slats indicated its age; while the other was a brand new embroidered handkerchief.
"They'll do," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Go ahead and play."
Ying Po-chüeh held onto the stakes while the two of them faced off against each other and began their game. Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an, seeing that their master was not present, went back and forth incessantly behind their chairs to look on as they played.
"Little oily mouths," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've a mind to ask if you wouldn't brew another cup of tea for me?"
Ch'in-t'ung surreptitiously made a face at Tai-an but duly headed to the back of the house to heat the tea.
To resume our story, Scrounger Pai and Cadger Ch'ang were fairly evenly matched at go, but Cadger Ch'ang had a slight edge. Scrounger Pai was an inveterate reneger. As they were playing, lo and behold, a block of Scrounger Pai's stones was on the verge of being taken, and Cadger Ch'ang anticipated that he might renege.
Sure enough, Scrounger Pai wanted to retract several of his moves, so he knocked the last few stones Cadger Ch'ang had played aside with one hand, saying, "That won't do. That won't do. I didn't mean to make that move."
"Brother, come here. This conduct is unacceptable," exclaimed Cadger Ch'ang.
Ying Po-chüeh came running out, saying, "What happened? What's the row all about?"
"The last three or four stones he played were ill-considered moves," said Cadger Ch'ang, "and now he wants to retract them. That isn't fair. Brother, you be the judge. How can one be so nonchalant about such things?"
Scrounger Pai's face turned crimson, the blue veins on his temples became distended, and saliva spurted all over his face, as he shouted, "I hadn't yet made my move when he suddenly played his stone. I was just trying to get a good view of the configuration when he began moving his hand back and forth over the board, which confused me so much that:
My eyes were playing tricks on me.[7]
I was just in the process of making a move, and my hand had not even let go of the stone, when he claimed that I was reneging. You decide. How can he claim that I was doing anything wrong?"
"As for the move in question," said Ying Po-chüeh, "we might as well compromise by letting you play it where you like, without calling it a case of reneging. But you'd better not do that kind of thing again."
"All right," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I'll let you renege on that move. But I won't let you grab any stones of mine with impunity in the future."
"You're a perennial loser yourself," said Scrounger Pai, "yet you have the nerve to criticize me."
As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta, or Tagalong Hsieh, also showed up, and Ch'in-t'ung brought him some tea.
When he had drunk it, he said, "You two go ahead and finish your game. I'll look on while you play."
As he was observing the game, Wu Tien-en, or Heartless Wu, also came into the house and, after the conventional amenities about the weather had been exchanged, asked, "What have they staked on this game?"
Ying Po-chüeh brought out the two objects in question and showed them to the assembled company, at which, they all said, "In that case, they must see the game to its conclusion."
"Brother Nine," said Scrounger Pai, "the game is as good as over. What are you pondering over?"
Cadger Ch'ang was still engaged in scrutinizing the situation, while Heartless Wu and Tagalong Hsieh made a bet with each other on the side.
Tagalong Hsieh said, "Brother Nine has won."
"He's already lost," said Heartless Wu. "How can you claim he's won? Let's bet a cup of wine on it."
"Just you watch while yours truly wraps up the victory," said Cadger Ch'ang.
Scrounger Pai's face turned crimson, and he said, "You don't mean to say that I've already ceded this fan to you, do you?"
"That's about it," responded Cadger Ch'ang.
Thereupon, the end game having been completed, they proceeded to count up the stones. Scrounger Pai had taken possession of five areas on the board, while Cadger Ch'ang had taken only two.
Scrounger Pai, however, had forfeited three stones to Cadger Ch'ang and muttered to himself, "It was those three moves that cost me the game."
When he hurriedly counted up the stones in his possession, he found that he had lost by five stones.
"Just what I predicted," said Tagalong Hsieh, and, pointing at Heartless Wu, he continued, "You owe me the consumption of a cup of wine. In a little while you'll have to pay me off by drinking it."
Heartless Wu:
Smiled but did not respond.
Ying Po-chüeh took the fan, along with the handkerchief that he had originally pledged, and turned them over to Cadger Ch'ang, who tucked the handkerchief back into his sleeve and then made a show of opening the fan and critically evaluating the poem and the painting on it. Everyone had a laugh at this.
Tai-an then came running in from outside to report some new arrivals, who turned out to be Wu Yin-erh and Han Chin-ch'uan. The two of them:
Tugging each other by the hand,
came in laughing merrily and saluted each member of the gathering with a deep bow. Scrounger Pai expressed the wish to play another game of go but only elicited the laughter of the company.
"That's enough of that," said Ying Po-chüeh. "As soon as our elder brother arrives, and we've had something to eat, we'll head for a garden in the suburbs. How long do you intend to play? Don't start another game."
Thereupon, Ch'in-t'ung cleared away the stones, and they all had a cup of tea.
"Our elder brother ought to be here by now," said Ying Po-chüeh. "We oughtn't to delay our departure too long, or we won't have time to really enjoy ourselves."
He had hardly finished speaking when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, dressed to befit the occasion, and accompanied by four page boys. The members of the company all got up from their places to welcome him and, after exchanging the customary amenities, offered him a seat, while the two singing girls kowtowed to him, and Li Ming and Wu Hui also showed up and came in to kowtow.
Ying Po-chüeh then urged Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to bring in eight diminutive picnic saucers. There was one saucer of squash julienne marinated with ten spices, one saucer of an assortment of pickled beans, one saucer of fagara marinated in soy sauce, one saucer of corydalis sprinkled with strong vinegar, one saucer of candied garlic, one saucer of bamboo shoots preserved in fermented mash, one saucer of Chinese cabbage seasoned with red pepper, one saucer of Ta-t'ung ginger in a preservative sauce, and a saucer of fragrant mushrooms. Once these appetizers had been properly laid out, the two page boys, observing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had joined the company, were more careful than ever, feeling the need, more than before, to be as attentive as a groom at the horse's head.
When Ying Po-chüeh noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was observing the way they went about setting out the utensils, he said, "I am indebted to the two of them for taking care of a host of matters, and thereby saving me a lot of trouble."
"I fear they may not be up to the task of waiting upon you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They're extremely adept at it," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"As the saying goes," remarked Tagalong Hsieh:
"Under an effective commander there are no incompetent troops.[8]
Once they've undergone the proper training, it's only natural that they should perform satisfactorily."
The two page boys, having laid out the appetizers, brought out a large flagon of wine, after which, in uninterrupted succession, they served up twenty bowls of delicacies to go with it, including diced roast rump of pork, seasoned with garlic and designed to resemble litchi nuts; braised mutton, seasoned with spring onions, pepper, and cinnamon; roast fish; roast chicken; glazed duck; pork tripe; and the like. Altogether, there were too many culinary specialties to enumerate in detail.
It so happens that Ying Po-chüeh, in the course of his sponging at other people's tables, had picked up some pointers about the art of cooking, with the result that:
Every single dish was done to perfection;
There was not one that was not marvelous.
The members of the company all picked up their chopsticks and proceeded to gorge themselves, making a gobbling sound as they did so. After several large cups of wine had been consumed, the rice was served. Han Chin-ch'uan was on a vegetarian diet that did not permit her to eat anything with meat in it, so she only picked at the appetizers.
"Today is neither the first nor the fifteenth of the month," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so what are you being so fastidious about? Once upon a time, there was a person who had been a vegetarian all his life. When he died and went before King Yama in the nether world, he said, 'I've been a vegetarian all my life, and expect to be reborn as a human being of good status.' 'How is one to know whether you confined yourself to vegetarian fare or not?' said King Yama. 'We'll have to cut open your belly to find out.' When he was cut open, all they found was a bellyful of saliva. It turns out that every time he had seen anyone else eating meat, he had started to salivate."
Everyone doubled over with laughter at this.
"Where do you come up with these annoying turns of yours?" said Han Chin-ch'uan. "Aren't you afraid of having your tongue plucked out in Hell?"[9]
"Only little whores like you have their tongues plucked out in Hell," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The charge being that when they kiss their tongues are overly active."
Everyone had a laugh at this.
"Let's set out on our excursion to the suburbs, shall we?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"That would be really great," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Everyone else agreed that it would be great.
Ying Po-chüeh then asked Tai-an and the other servants to take charge of the two picnic boxes and a jug of wine, and carry them down to the riverside, where a small boat was hired, and they were loaded aboard. He also hired another empty boat to carry the company, and, once they were all aboard, they were sculled more than thirty li outside the south gate, where they passed right in front of the estate of Eunuch Director Liu.
Ying Po-chüeh ordered the boatmen to moor the boats and then climbed ashore, after which he helped Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh to disembark.
"Whose garden do you think would be best to visit?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"We might as well avail ourselves of Eunuch Director Liu's garden," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"All right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "His place ought to do."
The group of them accordingly headed there. After entering a reception hall, they turned into a:
Secluded walk along a zigzag gallery,
leading through:
Luxuriant forests and lofty bamboos.[10]
Words are inadequate to describe the beauty of the scene. Behold:
The emerald cypresses are dense,
The lofty bamboo groves whisper.
The fragrant verdure evenly spreads its mat of green brocade;
The weeping willows delicately wave their green silk braids.
Along zigzag paving and multiple balustrades,
A myriad varieties of famous flowers exhibit a profusion of hues;
Beyond secluded windows and hidden casements,
The varied notes of frolicsome birds resound like reed instruments.
Truly it resembles the fabled Gardens of Paradise,
Nothing less than the Pure Metropolis of the gods.
Leisured gentlemen of lofty status,
Daily frequent it in search of entertainment;
Wandering ladies on vagrant outings,
Ever enjoy it enough to forget their fatigue.
Surely it belongs to the category of rare sights,
This is not an instance of inflated commendation.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, leading Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh by the hand, set out to explore the various sights, in order to enjoy them to the full. Upon arriving under a banksia rose arbor, they found a spot that was both well-shaded and cool, to either side of which there were arrayed extensive:
Stone benches and zither stands,
making it ideally suited for a casual conclave. The entire company, accordingly, sat down. Ying Po-chüeh then went back and directed Ch'in-t'ung and the two boatmen to bring the wine, picnic boxes, comestibles, portable stove, and utensils up from the boat and put them down under the green shade.
During an initial round of tea, a casual conversation started up about the predicament of Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu, which led Cadger Ch'ang to remark, "Were it not for that, they would both be here today. What can one say about it?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It's only another illustration of the fact that:
One must suffer the consequences of one's own acts."[11]
"Let's all take our seats," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"That's a good idea," chimed in Scrounger Pai.
Thereupon, they proceeded to arrange themselves in appropriate order and sit down, with Hsi-men Ch'ing in the place of honor, flanked on either side by the two singing girls, while Li Ming and Wu Hui, standing beside a T'aihu rockery:
Lightly plucking their *p'i-p'a*,[12] and
Idly raising their sandalwood clappers,
sang a song to the tune "The Water Nymphs":
My old mother's temperament being what it is,
She was only waiting for the flames from the fire in the Zoroastrian Temple to flare up:[13]
*kua-kua tsa-tsa*;[14]

Forcing the mandarin ducks floating on the water to disentangle their necks: *t'e-leng-leng-t'eng*;[15]
For the surcingle on the embossed saddle to come loose: *Shu-la-la-sha*;
For the lovers' tryst to be interrupted by the night watchman, shouting the hour and ringing his bell:[16] *Ssu-lang-lang-t'ang*;
For the string on the green jade psaltery to break, never to be mended: *chih-leng-leng-cheng*;
For the caltrop-patterned mirror to be smashed to pieces on the glazed bricks: *chi-ting-ting-tang*;
And for the silver vase to drop to the bottom of the well:[17] *p'u-t'ung-t'ung-tung*.[18]
When the two musicians had finished singing, the company moved their party to the edge of a pond, where they put down felt carpets and sat down together, after which:
With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,
they fell to:
Playing at guess-fingers and gambling with dice.
Just as the party was at its height, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Why isn't that little whore, Tung Chiao-erh, here?"
"Yesterday I went to invite her in person," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She said that she was committed to escorting a patron on his way out the city gate today and consequently would not be able to show up until just before noon. I imagine that by this time, knowing that we're here enjoying ourselves, she must surely be on her way to join us."
"It's all our second brother's fault," said Scrounger Pai. "Why didn't you make absolutely certain that she'd be here?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Scrounger Pai and whispered into his ear, saying, "Let's make a bet with this beggar. Just say that if Tung Chiao-erh hasn't shown up by noon, each of us will make our host pay a forfeit by drinking three large cups of wine."
When Scrounger Pai communicated this proposal to Ying Po-chüeh, he said, "That's all right. But if she should turn up before noon, each one of you will have to pay a forfeit by drinking three large cups of wine."
Once this bet had been made, nothing was to be seen of Tung Chiao-erh, and Ying Po-chüeh was thrown into such consternation that all he could do was to smile apprehensively. Scrounger Pai, along with Tagalong Hsieh, Hsimen Ch'ing, and the two singing girls, colluded on a plan, so and so. Hsimen Ch'ing pretended to get up in order to relieve himself and instructed Tai-an to come in and falsely proclaim that Tung Chiao-erh had arrived and was waiting outside, thus and thus.
Tai-an got the idea, and, a little while later, just as Ying Po-chüeh was beginning to get perturbed, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came rushing into their midst, saying, "Sister Tung is here. She hasn't known where to look for us."
"That thrills me to death, old matron that I am!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "I told you that she'd be here soon. Quickly, fetch the wine. I must invite each of you to down three cups."
"If we had won the bet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and demanded that you drink your forfeit, would you have consented to do so?"
"If I were to lose, and refuse to pay my forfeit," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I would not be a human being."
"That's as may be," they all said. "But you'd better go out and call her in before we'll undertake to drink our forfeits."
"All right," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"A man is as good as his word."
Having gone outside, he proceeded to scan the scene, east, west, south, and north, until his eyes grew dim, without catching so much as a glimpse of Tung Chiao-erh's soul.
Gazing into space, he cursed, saying, "You lousy whore! You've made your Master Two lose face, pulling the stepladder out from under him, while assuming the right to do as you please."
When he went back inside, his companions laughed uproariously at his discomfiture and crowded around him, saying, "It's already past noon now. You'll have to pay off each one of us by drinking three cups of wine."
"Thanks to the trickery of that little oily mouth," complained Ying Po-chüeh, "the lot of you have made sure that I'll be stuck with the wine. How am I to handle it?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Without permitting any further explanation,
filled a large cup of wine to the brim and proffered it to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "Just now you said that if you refused to drink your forfeit you would not be a human being."
Ying Po-chüeh took the cup in his hand, while Tagalong Hsieh poured another cup for him. Before he was able to finish this, Heartless Wu followed up by pouring out another large cup of wine.
This threw Ying Po-chüeh into such consternation that he called out, "It's no good. It's making me retch. You'd better get me some appetizers to help me get it down."
Scrounger Pai responded by bringing him some sweetmeats, at which Ying Po-chüeh blurted out, "You lousy short-life! Instead of bringing me something sour, you're deliberately making trouble for me by bringing me something sweet."
"You'll get something sour with the next cup of wine," said Scrounger Pai. "One way or another, you'll have a chance to savor the salty, the sour, the bitter, and the peppery before you're through. There's no need to get flustered about it."
"What an inveterate oily mouth you are," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh, "as good a filthy braggart as ever!"
Next it was the turn of Cadger Ch'ang to proffer him a cup of wine, and Ying Po-chüeh tried to run out in the hope of gaining a temporary respite, but Hsi-men Ch'ing and the two singing girls surrounded him so that he was unable to get away.
"Tung Chiao-erh, you lousy short-life, you little whore!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You've really done your old man in this time!"
This outburst only had the effect of causing the rest of the company to fall all of a heap with laughter.
Scrounger Pai once again directed Tai-an to fetch the wine flagon and fill another bumper to the brim. Tai-an accordingly stuck the spout of the flagon an inch or more inside the cup and poured away with a gurgling sound, showing no sign of restraint.
When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, he said:
"Only a demented guest would attempt to ply his host with wine.[19]
That's enough of that. The lousy little whore, confirmed bugger that he is, is sticking his spout right into the mouth of the cup. You just wait and see. Even in a thousand years, your Master Two will never urge your owner to find you a wife."
Han Chin-ch'uan and Wu Yin-erh then each poured out a cup of wine and proffered it to Ying Po-chüeh.
"I'll get down on my knees to you, like a chicken on the chopping block," pleaded Ying Po-chüeh.
"You can skip the obeisance as long as you drink the wine," said Han Chin-ch'uan.
"Why didn't you abase yourself like a chicken on the chopping block to Sister Tung, and beg her to come?" asked Wu Yin-erh.
"Don't jest with me," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got enough to contend with as it is."
The two of them held their cups of wine right up to his mouth. Ying Po-chüeh found this difficult to handle, so, on the one hand, he took one cup in each hand and gulped them down, and then hastily ate some appetizers.
In no time at all, his face turned crimson, and he called out, "I've been had by the lot of you. Wine is better consumed slowly. Why should you want to get me hopelessly befuddled?"
His companions were about to pour out more wine for him, when Ying Po-chüeh knelt down in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Elder Brother, I beg you to put in a word on my behalf and thereby save my poor life. After all, you'll need to preserve me in a fit state to entertain my guests. If I should become so drunk that I:
Don't know whether it's a fine day or an overcast one,
what fun can we have together?"
"That's all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We can postpone the payment of the additional two cups per person that you still owe until another time, and not demand that you make good on them now."
Ying Po-chüeh then got up and thanked him, saying, "If you were to exempt me from my remaining obligations altogether, it would be a manifestation of your great kindness."
"All right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we'll forgive you. The only thing is that, just now, you said that anyone who refused to pay his forfeit would not be a human being. So that, right now, it would seem that your humanity is gradually ebbing away."
"I'm the one who's ended up inebriated," said Ying Po-chüeh, "while I don't know where that whore is up to her usual tricks."
Wu Yin-erh had a laugh at Ying Po-chüeh's expense, saying, "Hey, how is it that even when His Honor is here playing the role of master of the revels, Sister Tung Chiao-erh is unwilling to put in an appearance?"
Ying Po-chüeh responded meretriciously, "As a celebrated courtesan, who is fit to appear in the best company, she's not that easy to engage."
"She's merely off pursuing her own interests somewhere," said Han Chin-ch'uan. "What kind of a creature is she to be entitled to be called a celebrated courtesan?"
"I understand," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I imagine you must be feeling a bit jealous about some event in the past."
Hsi-men Ch'ing recognized that this must refer to the night when the young gentleman Ts'ai Yün had preferred Tung Chiao-erh's company to her own, and he gave Han Chin-ch'uan a meaningful look. But no more of this.
By this time Ying Po-chüeh was already stinking drunk. The two singing girls, for their part, were not the sort to put up with the doldrums and fell to:
Moving their lips and waggling their tongues,[20]
exchanging quips at each other's expense.
When the drinking began to taper off, Scrounger Pai said to Han Chin-ch'uan, "Would the two of you consent to favor us with a song?"
"That we could," said Wu Yin-erh. "Let Han Chin-ch'uan go first."
"That fan that I won off Younger Brother Pai," said Cadger Ch'ang, "has sturdy slats that would make it a good thing to keep time with."
"Lend it to me to keep time with then," said Han Chin-ch'uan.
Having taken it and looked it over, she said, "I don't happen to possess this kind of a fan to keep time with. Why don't you pretend that it was I who won that game of go, and give it to me?"
"That's a good idea," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Cadger Ch'ang was unable to resist the pressure of his peers and felt constrained to give it to her.
"Wu Yin-erh is here too," said Han Chin-ch'uan. "It wouldn't be right for me to simply appropriate it myself. Let's cast a die for it, and whoever comes up with the higher number can have it."
"That makes sense," said Cadger Ch'ang, and when they had each cast a die, Wu Yin-erh was the winner, and Han Chin-ch'uan handed it over to her.
"That's hardly fair," said Cadger Ch'ang, with a false air of gentility. "I still have that handkerchief of mine, and I'll give it to Han Chin-ch'uan to make up for the loss of the fan."
He then proceeded to hand it over to her, and Han Chin-ch'uan accepted it, saying, "This is really extravagant of you."
"It's a pity I didn't bring one of my fine Szechwan fans with me," said Hsimen Ch'ing, "so I could also make a display of my munificence."
"I realize that's a hit at me," said Cadger Ch'ang.
Tagalong Hsieh suddenly cried out, saying, "I almost forgot about it until this mention of the fan came up."
After directing Tai-an to pour out a large cup of wine and give it to Heartless Wu, he said, "Be so kind as to pay me off for our side bet on the game of go by drinking this cup of wine."
"Well all right," said Heartless Wu, "but it sure took you a long time to remember it. Since the other two have forfeited their goods, what should I care about a cup of wine."
Unable to resist the pressure of Tagalong Hsieh, he had no alternative but to swallow it down.
At that point, Han Chin-ch'uan proceeded to entertain them with a song to the tune "Rose-leaved Raspberry Fragrance":
I remember how, when we first started going together,
More or less by chance, we achieved a casual consummation,[21]
Expecting, in our bliss, to remain inseparable.
Together we feasted and enjoyed the flowery mornings and moonlit nights,[22]
Feeling that fine festivals deserve to be celebrated;
But today, it has all come to an abrupt end.
As the saying goes: Heaven is niggardly with its blessings.[23]
Our happy marriage affinity has been damnably obstructed;
The male and female phoenix mates have been forcibly separated.
To the same tune:
I long for him as I sit and yearn for him as I walk,[24]
My breast disturbed by thoughts of our old feelings.
He has betrayed all of those heartfelt vows beneath the stars, under the moon.[25]
If he has not violated his oaths,
Or suppressed his sorrow at our parting,
Heaven and the gods may still protect him.
But if we should encounter each other unexpectedly someday,
And speak of our separation,
He is sure to see that I am wasting away.[26]
When she had finished singing, Wu Yin-erh took over from her by singing a song to the tune "The Green Apricot":
The wind and rain feel sorry for the flowers,[27]
Once the wind and rain are over, the flowers will also be finished.
I urge you, do not scruple to get drunk amid the flowers.[28]
The flowers may fade today, or
The flowers may fade tomorrow;[29]
It is enough to turn one's hair white.[30]
Whenever the spirit moves you, indulge yourself in two or three cups.
Select lovely spots amid the streams and hills for pleasure excursions.
As long as you have an adequate supply of wine, and nothing else to do;
If there are flowers, that is fine;[31]
If there are no flowers, that is fine;
Who cares whether it be spring or autumn?[32]

When she had finished singing, Li Ming and Wu Hui were standing there next in line, and Tagalong Hsieh said, "There still remain these talents that have not yet been displayed."
Lo and behold:
Strumming their strings, and
Playing their woodwinds,
they proceeded to accompany themselves:
With *p'i-p'a* and flute,
as they sang a song to the tune "Shorter Liang-chou":
The red dust outside the gates of the city[33] flies in ever-rolling clouds,
But it does not fly as far as the clear streams, where fish and birds reside.
In the green shade of the tall willows, one listens to the golden oriole.
The significance of this perching in seclusion,
Is not something that ordinary people understand.
The mountains and forests are the places to which one must finally retire,
That one may serve when required, and seclude oneself when not wanted.[34]
Grieving for posterity and emulating one's forebears,
On the fifth day of the fifth lunar month,
One sings the *Songs of Ch'u* and commiserates over the tragedy on the River Hsiang.[35]
By the time they finished singing, the company's enthusiasm for drinking had begun to wane. Scrounger Pai discovered that there was a small, two-sided, barbarian drum on a stand in the garden reception hall and took it behind the T'ai-hu rockery, where he also picked a sprig of blossoms, so they could play the game of:
Passing the Flower to the Beat of the Drum.[36]
Hsi-men Ch'ing told Li Ming and Wu Hui to beat the drum and tipped them a wink, which they understood to mean that they should peek through a hole in the rockery, and stop drumming when the flower passed into the hands of whomever he thought ought to have a drink.
Scrounger Pai objected to this, saying, "You can be sure those lousy oily mouths will be up to their usual tricks. I'll go beat the drum myself."
As a result, he was able to rig it so that Hsi-men Ch'ing had to drink several cups of wine.
Just as the drinking was at its merriest, whom should they see but Shut'ung, who came rushing in unceremoniously, approached Hsi-men Ch'ing, and proceeded to:
Whisper into his ear in a low voice,
saying, "The Sixth Lady has fallen quite ill and requests that you return home as quickly as possible. I've brought a horse with me, which is waiting for you outside the gate."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he immediately got up and prepared to take his leave. By this time, the entire company was inebriated.
Everyone stood up together, and Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, I haven't had a chance to toast you yet today. How can you simply take off? This sort of whispered communication is no good."
He was all set to detain him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing told him the truth of the situation, thanked him, and departed on horseback.
Ying Po-chüeh, who tried to prevent the party from breaking up, saw that Han Chin-ch'uan had taken advantage of the distraction to disappear and set out to look for her with:
Skulking step and lurking gait.
Lo and behold, he found her squatting under the T'ai-hu rockery, in the process of taking a piss:
Revealing a single strand of red thread,
That emitted a myriad glistening pearls.
From his vantage point on the other side of the fence, Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to stick a blade of grass through a hole, with which he tickled the mouth of her vagina. Han Chin-ch'uan was not even able to finish what she was about but jumped up in surprise, getting the waist of her drawers all wet in the process.
"You indecent short-life!" cursed Han Chin-ch'uan. "How diabolically un-principled can you get?"
Her face turned completely crimson as:
Half smiling and half cursing,
she rejoined the company. Ying Po-chüeh told everyone what had happened, and they all had another laugh over it.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had left Ch'in-t'ung to help Ying Po-chüeh take care of the impedimenta, and, once he had loaded the portable stove and picnic gear into the boat, they all returned to the city, where they thanked Ying Po-chüeh and went their separate ways. Ying Po-chüeh paid off the two boatmen, while Ch'in-tung carried the picnic things into his house, after which he invited Ch'in-t'ung to have a drink. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, he hastened:
Covering two steps with every one,
to make his way straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
"Mother is as sick as can be," reported Ying-ch'un. "You had better go see her right away."
Having arrived at her bedside, he found that Li P'ing-erh was groaning aloud with pain, and that the pain was in the area of her stomach.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard her calling out in distress, he promptly said, "We've got to send for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i immediately to come and examine you."
He then turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Summon Shu-t'ung and have him write out a card and go with it to invite the attendance of Dr. Jen."
Ying-ch'un went outside and did as she was told, whereupon Shu-t'ung wrote out a formal calling card and went off to invite the attendance of Dr. Jen.
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced Li P'ing-erh and sat down on the bed beside her, whereupon Li P'ing-erh complained, "You're reeking of alcohol."
"It's only because your stomach's empty," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you object so to the smell of wine."
He then turned to Ying-ch'un and asked, "Has she had any congee or soup to eat?"
"From this morning until now," replied Ying-ch'un, "she hasn't eaten so much as a grain of rice. All she's had is two or three cups of soup. The areas around her heart, her stomach, and her two kidneys have all been hurting to an unusual extent."
Hsi-men Ch'ing knitted his brows, screwed up his eyes, and sighed several times, after which he asked Ju-i, "Has Kuan-ko recovered?"
"Last night," said Ju-i, "he still had a feverish sensation in the head and cried a lot."
"What bad luck," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Both mother and son are sick. What can we do to restore the mother's spirits, so she will be better able to look after the child?"
Li P'ing-erh started to groan aloud with pain again, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Try to bear it as best you can. The doctor will be here soon. After he's examined your pulse, and you've had a couple of cups of medicine, you should be all right."
Ying-ch'un swept the room, dusted off the tables and chairs, lit some incense, prepared tea, and helped the wet nurse to coax Kuan-ko to sleep. By this time, the night watches had begun, and the dog outside began to bark incessantly, which turned out to be occasioned by Ch'in-t'ung's return from Ying Po-chüeh's house.
Before long, Shu-t'ung also came back, escorting Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and holding a lantern to light him on his way. The doctor, who was wearing a four-cornered square-cut scholar's cap and a wide-sleeved gown, arrived on horseback, entered the gate, and sat down under the portico.
Shu-t'ung came inside and reported, "I succeeded in inviting him, and he's sitting under the portico."
"That's good," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Quickly, take some tea out for him."
Tai-an promptly picked up the tea and accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing outside to welcome Dr. Jen.
"I don't know," the doctor said, "which resident of your distinguished mansion it is whose pulse I am to examine. I have been remiss in calling upon you, for which I am truly much at fault."
"It makes me very uncomfortable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to put you to so much trouble late at night. I very much hope that you will deign to forgive me."
The doctor bowed to the ground, saying, "I would not be so presumptuous."
After drinking a cup of tea steeped with cured beans, the doctor asked, "Whose honorable indisposition is it that I am to diagnose?"
"That of my sixth insignificant concubine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After the first cup of tea had been replaced with another, flavored with salted cherries, and the exchange of a few more sentences of small talk, Taian started to clear away the cups, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "Have things inside been straightened up? You go in to give them the word, and bring a lantern out to light us on our way."
Tai-an went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to give them the word and then came back out to report, with lantern in hand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then stood up with a bow and invited the doctor to accompany him to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. The doctor followed him there, making a half bow at every gateway, the head of every flight of stairs, and every turning point, while:
His whole body expressed the utmost deference, and
His mouth was full of conventional platitudes.
When he entered Li P'ing-erh's quarters, what should he see but:
A nimbus of incense encompassing a golden tripod,
Orchidaceous flames smoldering in a silver vessel;
Brocaded curtains surrounding the bed,
With jade hooks symmetrically suspended.
Truly, a secluded realm of splendor and luxury;
It turned out to be yet another grotto heaven.
Hsi-men Ch'ing offered the doctor a chair, to which the doctor responded, "There's no need of that," as he offered his host a chair in return.
When they had both taken their seats, Ying-ch'un propped up Li P'ingerh's hand on an embroidered cushion, wrapped her jade arm in a brocade handkerchief, and enclosed her slender fingers in her own sleeve, before exposing a segment of her powder-white arm from underneath the bed curtains, so that the doctor could examine her pulse.
The doctor, after:
Cleansing his mind and stabilizing his vital energy,
began to evaluate her pulse, finding that her stomach was depleted and her vital energy weak, that her blood was deficient while her liver conduit was hyperactive, that her heart was not clear, that an inflammation had affected her *tricalorium*, or triple burner,[37] and that it was necessary to reduce the inflammation and fortify the blood. He then proceeded:
Citing the appropriate texts and relevant principles,
to propound his diagnosis to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Doctor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it is just as though you had been observing the course of her ailment with your own eyes. You have described her symptoms exactly. This insignificant concubine of mine is possessed of an exceedingly long-suffering disposition."
"That is precisely the source of the problem," said the doctor. "That is why her liver conduit is hyperactive. People do not understand what goes on inside her. The element wood in her liver has overcome the element earth in her stomach, so that the vital energy of her stomach has been weakened. As a result, there is no way for her vital energy to be replenished, or for her blood to be regenerated. The element water in her kidneys cannot sustain the element fire in her heart, so that the fire has ascended into her upper body, and the area of her chest beneath the diaphragm feels congested and painful. She also suffers from periodic pains in the stomach. Because her blood is depleted, her two kidneys and the joints throughout her body all ache, and she has lost her appetite for food and drink. Does that describe her situation?"
"Her symptoms are just as you have described them," said Ying-ch'un.
"You may truly be described as Immortal Jen," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Where the four diagnostic methods of your noble profession are concerned, namely:
Inspection, auscultation, interrogation, and palpation,[38]
the fact that you understand the principles of pulse taking so thoroughly that you are able to describe the patient's symptoms without prior interrogation, is my insignificant concubine's good fortune."
The doctor responded with a deep bow and said, "What does your pupil know about anything? It was mostly guesswork on my part."
"You are altogether too modest," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then went on to ask, "At the present time, what medications should my insignificant concubine take?"
"It is a matter of reducing the inflammation and fortifying the blood," said the doctor. "Once the inflammation has been reduced, the area of her chest beneath the diaphragm will naturally be more comfortable, and when her blood has been regenerated, the pains in her waist and the area of her ribs should cease. Do not assume that this is an ailment of exogenous origin. It is not that at all. The symptoms are all those of deficiency."
He then went on to ask, "Have her menses been regular or not?"
"They have not been dependable," said Ying-ch'un.
"How often do they occur?" asked the doctor.
"Ever since she gave birth to Kuan-ko," said Ying-ch'un, "they have not been what they should be."
"Her original store of vital energy was weak," said the doctor, "and her postpartum conditions have not been stabilized, with the result that her blood has become depleted. It is not a case of blockage that would require purgative medications. Only if she is treated gradually with a regimen of pills can she be induced to come round and make a recovery. Otherwise, her condition will only become worse."
"You have certainly made a perspicacious assessment of the situation," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Right now, I hope that you can first provide a decoction that will alleviate her present pain, after which we can ask for whatever pills you may prescribe."
"That is only appropriate," said the doctor. "After your pupil has returned to his humble abode, he will deliver them immediately. It is not a serious case. It is only necessary to know that these are the symptoms of a deficiency. The pain in her chest beneath the diaphragm is caused by an inflammation and is not of exogenous origin. The unusual pains afflicting her waist and the area of her ribs are due to a depletion of her blood, and not to stagnation of the blood. Once she has taken the prescribed medications, these conditions should naturally be alleviated, one by one. There is no cause for alarm."
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Expressed his gratitude without ceasing,
and had just gotten up to leave the room, when Kuan-ko woke up and started to cry again.
"This young gentleman has a healthy voice," said the doctor.
"That may be so," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he is too prone to become ill, which is most unfortunate, and poses a hardship for my insignificant concubine, who is:
Unable to rest comfortably on her pillow,
both day and night."
He then proceeded to escort the doctor on his way out.

To resume our story, Shu-t'ung said to Ch'in-t'ung, "When I went to request his attendance just now, he had already gone to bed. I had to knock on the gate for what seemed like half a day before anyone came out to let me in. That oldster was still rubbing his eyes as he came outside, and when he mounted his horse, he kept dozing off so frequently that I was afraid he would fall off the saddle."
"You had a rough job of it," said Ch'in-t'ung, "while I had as good a time as could be today. On top of which, I got to drink a bellyful of wine."
As they were engaged in this idle chat, Tai-an appeared, holding a lantern to light the way for Hsi-men Ch'ing as he escorted the doctor on his way out.
When they got as far as the portico, the doctor wanted to continue on his way, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Please relax and sit down long enough for me to offer you another cup of tea. I can also provide something in the way of ordinary fare or a snack."
The doctor shook his head and said, "Many thanks for your lavish hospitality, but I cannot presume to accept any more of it," as he headed straight outside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him onto his horse and deputed Shu-t'ung to hold a lantern and light him on his way home. As soon as he had taken leave of the doctor, he flew inside and directed Tai-an to take a tael of silver and catch up with them, in order to take receipt of the prescribed medications.
They proceeded straight to Dr. Jen's house, where the doctor dismounted and said to the two of them, "Uncles, take a seat and have a cup of tea while I go inside to prepare the medications."
Tai-an took out the gift box and handed it to the doctor, saying, "Please accept this payment for the medications."
"We are friends," said the doctor. "I would not presume to accept any remuneration from your master."
"I beseech you to accept it before we can feel comfortable about taking possession of the medications," said Shu-t'ung. "Otherwise, we can hardly agree to accept them. I fear that if we go home with them, we will certainly only be required to deliver them back to you, which will mean an extra trip for nothing. It would be better all the way round if you were to make no bones about accepting the payment, so we can wait for the medications and take them home with us."
"A fortune told for nothing, is worth nothing,"[39]
said Tai-an. "I beseech you to accept it."
The doctor felt compelled to assent, and, seeing that the payment was lavish, he went inside and hastily got together the ingredients for a decoction and poured out a little less than half the pills in a bottle. By the time the two page boys had finished their tea, a reply was sent out from inside for Tai-an and Shu-t'ung to deliver, after which the gate was closed behind them.
When the two page boys arrived home, Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that the pouch containing the medicine was bulky and said, "Why should there be so much?"
When he tore it open and took a look, he found that the pills were also inside and laughed, saying:
"If you have the money you can make a ghost turn the millstone for you.[40]
Just now, he said that he would first send the ingredients for a decoction, but now he has sent everything at once. That's fine. That's fine."
Looking at the pouch containing the ingredients for the decoction, he saw that the inscription on the label read:
Decoction for reducing inflammation and fortifying the blood
Boil in two cups of water, without adding ginger, until reduced to eight parts. Take on an empty stomach. The dregs may be used a second time. Avoid eating bran or wheat flour, or anything greasy, roasted, or fried.
Affixed to the label there was also the imprint of a seal that read:
Dispensary of the hereditary physician, Dr. Jen
The crimson label on the other container read:
Pills of foxglove root to enhance appetite
Hsi-men Ch'ing turned the medications over to Ying-ch'un and directed her to start out by decocting one packet of the powdered medicine. Li P'ingerh drank some hot water, while Ying-ch'un boiled the medicine, and Hsimen Ch'ing personally oversaw its preparation.
After straining the dregs out of it, he carried it to Li P'ing-erh's bedside and said, "Sixth Lady, your medicine is here."
Li P'ing-erh turned over:
Unable to overcome a beguiling tremor,
while Hsi-men Ch'ing, holding the decoction in one hand, supported her head and neck with the other. Li P'ing-erh complained that it tasted bitter, and Ying-ch'un promptly fetched some hot water, with which she rinsed out her mouth. Hsi-men Ch'ing ate some congee and washed his feet, after which he lay down to sleep with Li P'ing-erh. Ying-ch'un heated some more water and put something over the kettle to keep it hot, after which she lay down to sleep in her clothes.
Strange to relate,
after Li P'ing-erh had taken this medication, she was able to sleep. Hsi-men Ch'ing also fell fast asleep, but Kuan-ko persisted in wanting to cry. Ju-i was afraid that he would wake Li P'ing-erh, so she gave him her breast to suck, and, before long, they were all sleeping quietly.
The next morning, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to get up, he asked Li P'ing-erh, "Are you feeling any better since last night?"
"Strange as it may seem,"
said Li P'ing-erh, "no sooner did I take that medicine than, somehow or other, I fell fast asleep. This morning, I no longer feel any particular pain in my innards. If the condition I was in late last evening had continued unabated, the pain would have been the death of me."
"Heaven be thanked! Heaven be thanked!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing, with a smile. "Right now, if we boil another two cups of water, so you can take a second dose of that decoction, you'll be all well."
Ying-ch'un, accordingly, boiled some more water for her, and she took it as directed. As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, only then did:
His affrighted soul fly off to Java.
How is one to describe such a situation? A poem testifies to this:

Hsi-shih, from time to time, may be wont to knit her turquoise brows;[41]
But, luckily, she possesses a transcendent elixir of divine efficacy.
Verily, medicine cures only those diseases that are not fatal;
Beyond a doubt, the Buddha saves only those destined to be saved.

## 076
## Pan Jinlian is Unfaithful

In the little courtyard the jade steps are deserted
At the corner of the wall a few orchids put forth new shoots.
Lilies and pomegranates blossom there
The flowers beloved by those who long for children.
Let not the wind and rain beat down those flowers
May Heaven foster them.
May they not turn into the cuckoo flowers
Whose colors quickly change
And whose fragrance fades away.

Ximen Qing went to take wine with the two dignitaries An and Huang. With the serving boys, he came to Eunuch Liu's place. The two gentlemen came out to welcome him. Eunuch Liu was acting as host, and he, too, came out to meet Ximen, taking him by the hand as soon as he dismounted. "We have been waiting for you for a long time," he said. "You are late."
"You are very kind," Ximen said, "but I had some trifling business to attend to at home and this caused me to keep you waiting. I am very, very sorry." They all bowed profoundly and went into the hall. Ximen Qing again made reverence to them. They asked him to take the seat of honor and Eunuch Liu to take the second place. Eunuch Liu declined.
"This is my house," he said, "and you are my guests."
An insisted: "It is your proper place," he said. Ximen Qing supported him.
"On the score of age alone," he said, "you should take it, most noble sir." Liu could protest no more.
"Then," he said, "I must be presumptuous enough to take the second place." Huang and An sat in the hosts' seats. Some young actors came and kowtowed. Tea was served and then wine.
When the tables had been laid, the young actors took their instruments, string and wind, tuned them and sang the song "In Springtime, the Gentle Rain Falls Softly." When the song was done, Liu raised his cup and asked the company to drink.
"What an exquisitely beautiful song that was. Quite incomparable!" An said. "It must have been written by a true scholar. And the singers' voices are so sweet. One can imagine them holding back the floating clouds. You will agree with me, I am sure, when I say that, in both respects, we have here an example of absolute beauty."
"With regard to that," Ximen Qing said, "I can express no opinion. But I certainly would call this a marvelous party, with you two gentlemen as hosts and noble Liu here as the master of the house."
"That is not quite a true statement of the case," Huang said. "This party is remarkable because of the presence at it of noble Liu, who has gone daily in and out of the purple forbidden city, and witnessed the appearance of the Dragon. Is he not an illustrious chamberlain? And here, too, is noble Ximen, whose gold is as a mountain and whose jade is beyond price. We may well compare him with Tao Zhu, a wealthy man indeed. We have here two men, one of unusually exalted rank, the other extremely rich. This is indeed cause for admiration."
They laughed heartily and drank together. One of the actors took a long flute and played a melodious tune. The others sang a new song, "Where the Peach Flowers and Willows Blossom beside the Stream." This song too, met with approval.
Chen Jingji was driven to desperation by the failing of his desire to possess Pan Jinlian. Ximen Qing did not return, and Jingji went quietly backwards and forwards, continually peeping in at the inner court. Jinlian herself, after the advances the young man had made to her, was ill at ease. There was nobody about, and she pondered the matter, resting her cheeks upon her hands. Suddenly, in the darkness, Chen Jingji came in. It seemed as though he would have devoured her. Desperately, he came up behind her and took her in his arms. "Woman mine," he said, "it nearly killed me when Meng Yulou came and disturbed us."
Jinlian was startled, for she had not noticed his coming. When she turned her head and saw who it was, she was half frightened, half pleased. "You young thief," she said, "let me go. Someone will see us." But Jingji would not let her go. He fumbled at her trousers, trying to unloose them. Jinlian half yielded, half resisted, but he had already torn the ribbon that held them. She pretended to be alarmed. "You thief," she said. "Are you so ignorant of the laws of propriety that you dare thus to approach your mother?"
"Mother," Jingji said earnestly, "should you ask for my heart and liver that you might make them into soup, I would gladly cut them out of my body for you. You must be kind to me."
As he spoke, he brought forward that which was below his waist. It was firm, and he pushed it forward against the single garment Jinlian was wearing. The touch of it made her cheeks as rosy as the peach blossom. She still made a show of refusal, but, as he persisted in his entreaties, she could not keep her hand from touching him. Jingji pulled up her skirt and shoved with all his might. At the first thrust he gained access, for she had long been aroused and was already wet, so there was nothing in their way. They stood up against the railing and sported furiously. Jingji was not satisfied. "Lie on the ground," he said, "and I will give you all you want."
Jinlian feared that her hair would be disordered or that someone might come. "Not this time," she said. "Let us be content for now. We shall meet again." They called each other many tender names and played together for a long time. Then they heard voices on the other side of the wall and were compelled to separate. They were still unsatisfied. The noise they heard was that of Shutong and Daian coming in with Ximen's hat, girdle, and boxes. The two boys were tipsy and made a great deal of noise.
Yueniang heard them and thought that Ximen had come. She sent Xiaoyu to make sure. The boys told her he was on his way, that they had come before him. When Ximen came, he was drunk. He went to Yueniang's room and carried her to her bed. But it was the next day, which happened to be a *renzi* day, on which she wished him to come to her. So she said: "I am not very well. Go somewhere else tonight."
Ximen laughed. "Oh, I know," he said, "you don't want me because I am drunk. Very well. I won't upset you. I'll go away and come tomorrow."
Yueniang smiled. "Really I am not very well," she said. "It isn't that I do not want you. Do please come tomorrow."
Ximen Qing went to Jinlian. She was resting on the bed after her bout with Chen Jingji. She rose hastily and said: "I suppose you have just come back from the party?"
Ximen did not answer. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Then he touched her cunt. "You wicked little strumpet. Of whom have you been thinking that you are as wet as this?"
Jinlian said nothing. She pushed him aside and went to wash herself. The happiness they enjoyed that night is beyond description.
The next day was the twenty-third and a *renzi* day. Yueniang got up and dressed herself. She told Xiaoyu to set out a table, and on it she placed an incense burner and burned some precious incense. Then she placed on the table a volume of the Scripture of the White-robed Guanyin. Yueniang knelt towards the west, added more incense, and opened the book. She read it once and knelt down once, and so twenty-four times, reading and kneeling time and time again. She took the medicine from a small box, put it on the table and knelt down four times. Then she made this prayer: "The woman Wu prays to Heaven most high that, by the help of this medicine, prepared by the nuns Xue and Wang she may be blessed with a male child." She took the wine that Xiaoyu had warmed and knelt towards the west again. Then she swallowed the pills and the powders. When the medicine passed her throat, it tasted very fishy, and she had to gulp it down. She made reverence four times more, then went back to her own room and remained there.
The next day, when Ximen Qing had got up in Jinlian's room, he sent Shutong with a card to thank Huang and An for the banquet they had given him. Ying Bojue came. He made a reverence to Ximen and said: "Brother, what time was it when you came back from Liu's place yesterday?"
"They were very kind and pressed me to drink a great deal of wine," Ximen said. "I had a long way to come home, and it was after the first night watch when I got here. I was drunk. That is why I am so late getting up."
Daian brought breakfast, and the two friends ate it together. A servant came and announced their Excellencies An and Huang. Ximen Qing dressed, and told the servants to make haste and clear the table. Ying Bojue disappeared into another room. An and Huang got out of their chairs and greeted Ximen Qing. They came in, and the servants brought tea.
"We were lacking in politeness last night," the two gentlemen said.
"You were most kind," Ximen said, "and I was just thinking of coming to see you when you arrived."
"You cannot possibly have been satisfied with your entertainment or you would not have left so early," said An.
"I fear I was very drunk last night," Ximen said. "When it was time for me to leave, noble Liu gave me more than ten cups of grape wine. I was almost sick as I rode home, but I managed somehow to control myself. I have only just waked up and even now I am not quite sober."
They laughed, drank three cups of wine, then talked for a while and took their leave. Ying Bojue said he had business to attend to and went home.
Ximen Qing went to the inner court and had lunch. Afterwards, he got into a sedan chair and went to pay a return call upon An and Huang. He had two red present cards written and told Daian to buy two sets of presents. These he took with him.
That evening, when he came home, Yueniang had made every preparation for him. As soon as he arrived she told Xiaoyu to bring food and heat wine. Husband and wife sat together. "Last night," he said, "I was drunk and you wouldn't let me stay. You tried to pretend you were not well, but you were only fooling me."
"No," Yueniang said, "I really was not well. Why should husband and wife not be free and open with one another?"
Ximen Qing drank ten cups of wine, ate some fish and some duck, then would not eat any more. Yueniang told her maids to clear away. Xiaoyu perfumed the bedclothes. They bathed and went to bed. That night they enjoyed delight beyond all measure. Yueniang's monthly sickness was just over, and she had every reason to hope that the joy she sought would be granted her. She was as lively as a fish in the water. So a child was conceived.
The next day, when Ximen Qing got up, Yueniang prepared for him lamb, wine, eggs and kidneys, and he went to his office. When he returned, he went to Li Ping'er's room to see Guan'ge. He found her nursing the baby.
"Some time ago," she said to him, "I vowed to make a sacrifice, but I have not done so. These last few days, every time I go for a certain purpose, I lose a little blood. I ought to carry out my vow, but, so far, I have been too busy."
"If you like," Ximen Qing said, "I will send Daian for Nun Wang and you can talk to her about it." He gave the necessary instructions to Daian, and the boy went away at once.
Shutong came and said: "Uncle Ying and Uncle Chang are here." Ximen Qing went out to see them.
"The other day, when Xie Xida and I had wine with you," Bojue said, "I told you about that matter of Huang and Li, and you promised they should have the money."
"But where am I to find the money?" Ximen said.
"The other day you promised. Why have you changed your mind? Brother, don't try to pretend. You are such a rich man that it is no use your professing not to have any money. You must give them some."
Ximen Qing did not answer. He looked at Chang Zhijie.
"It is a long time since I last saw you," Chang Zhijie said. "How is your young son?"
"Thank you," Ximen said. "My wife has just been telling me that she is anxious to have a service for him. I have sent for a nun called Wang to see about it."

"When people have money," Ying Bojue said, "children make a great difference. When a child comes into the world, he needs the utmost care. It is like planting seeds. They must be watered when they are young if they are ever to come to anything. My little brother is more valuable than ten thousand pieces of gold. He is a pearl upon your palm. You can't help taking more care of him than common people do. There is always trouble with children in their second year, the sixth, and again in the ninth. There is always danger of smallpox and scarlet fever. Forgive my plain speaking, but I feel that you should indeed offer sacrifice for your child, and so secure the happiness that you have already. If my sister-in-law wishes it, it must be done. Then your troubles will end and the rearing of the baby will be a simple matter."
Daian came and said: "Nun Wang was not at the temple. She had gone to Wang's palace. I went there to look for her. After I had waited a long time, she came out and I gave her the message. She promised to come at once."
Ximen continued his conversation with Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie. Shutong brought them tea.
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "you have been very kind to me, but I have never ventured to ask you to come and see me, because my house is so unsuited for your entertainment. But if you are free tomorrow or the day after, I hope you and Brother Chang will come and spend a day with me in the country, and so give me an opportunity to show my friendship."
"I am sure you cannot fail to appreciate the motives of my friend Ying, and I hope you will accept his invitation," said Chang.
"I am not busy tomorrow," Ximen Qing said, "but I do not like to bother you."
"I cannot remember the number of times I have bothered you," Bojue said. "Besides, I am making no very great preparations. Just a poor cup of wine."
"I will keep tomorrow free for you," Ximen said.
"I have engaged the young actors," Bojue said, "but perhaps it would be more satisfactory to have two singing girls."
"Don't let that trouble you," Ximen said. "I will arrange for Wu Yin'er and Han Jinchuan to come." He told Qintong to go at once to the two singing girls and tell them that, the next day, they must go to the park outside the city.
Before long, Nun Wang came. She made a reverence to Ximen Qing. "You sent for me," she said. "May I hear your commands? I was at his Lordship Wang's place and could not get away before."
"This is the situation," Ximen Qing said. "When Guan'ge was born, we promised to have a service of thanksgiving, but we have been so busy that we have omitted to do so. We wish to give thanks to Heaven for protecting him so far and letting him grow so big. In the first place, I wish to thank Buddha for his favor, and, secondly, to forestall any calamities and troubles that might be in store for him, and ensure his long life. So I sent for you."
"The young master's body is worth ten thousand pieces of gold," Nun Wang said, "and we must trust in Buddha's protection for him. Your Lordship may not know it, but in the Sacred Scriptures of Buddha it is written that in the world of men there prowl demons and devils whose business it is to inflict injuries upon people and destroy their children. When a child dies before its birth, or in its infancy, some demon is always responsible. The best thing we can do for your son will be to read the sacred texts and implore the assistance of Buddha. Anything else would be inappropriate."
"What is the most suitable form for our devotions to take?" Ximen Qing asked.
"First," Nun Wang said, "we will go through the scripture of the Master of Medicine. Then, I suggest that we prepare two Tuoluo charms. They cannot fail to be efficacious."
"And when will you begin reading the scriptures?"
"Tomorrow is an excellent day; I will have the service at my temple."
Ximen Qing agreed. Nun Wang went to the inner court to see Yueniang and the others. They were with Li Ping'er. She made a reverence to them all. Yueniang said: "We are anxious for you to do something for the baby. When will you do it?" Nun Wang said that she would begin at her temple the following day. Xiaoyu brought tea for her.
"Teacher," Li Ping'er said to her, "I have something to say to you." The nun begged her to speak. "Since I have had this baby," Li Ping'er said, "I have never been quite well. When you read the sacred scriptures, pray for me too. I will see that you are well paid for it."
"That'll be no trouble," Nun Wang said. "When I write out the prayers, I'll put down your name. That's all."

## 077

## Ying Bojue Gives a Party

Precious wine is worth a fortune
Let not the wine cups, then, stay idle in the hand
In the presence of the flowers.
Rise and dance and drink with the flowers.
The flowers are silent
They know men love them.
Let us not say farewell till we have drunk our fill.
Look at the flowers
Already one is faded.
Yet, though the flowers fade
Next year they will be as beautiful again.
So much cannot be said of these fair maidens.

It was arranged between Nun Wang, Li Ping'er and Wu Yueniang that the religious ceremony should be performed next day. Yueniang sent all the necessary things to the temple. She said to Chen Jingji: "Tomorrow the Sixth Lady is making intercession for a blessing on her child, and you must go to the service."
But Jingji said: "Father is going to the gardens outside the city, and I shall have to look after the shop. It would be better to ask someone else to go to the ceremony." As a matter of fact, Jingji, hearing that Ximen Qing was going to a party with Ying Bojue, thought it would be an excellent opportunity for him to amuse himself with Pan Jinlian. Yueniang believed that he really was going to look after the shop, so she did not press him any further. She told Shutong to go to the service.
While Ximen Qing, Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie were still talking, Qintong came back. "I have been for the two singing girls," he said. "Wu Yin'er is not well. She will not be able to go tomorrow, and Han Jinchuan will take her place."
"You had better go and tell Dong Jiao'er," Ximen Qing said. Chang declared that as they were going outside the city they did not need a second girl. The two men went away.
The next day, Ximen Qing got up before dawn. Yueniang had arranged breakfast for him and, as soon as he had eaten it, he got into a sedan chair and went to the temple of Guanyin for the beginning of the service. Nun Wang came to the temple gate to meet him.
The nun read the prayers, and afterwards Ximen Qing went to change his clothes. Tea, cakes and fruits were brought for him, but he took only a mouthful of tea. Then he went back to his chair, bidding Shutong stay for the remainder of the service. When he reached home, the sun had only just risen, but Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie had already arrived.
Ximen Qing laughed at them. "Who ever heard of invitations for breakfast?" he said. "It is true I am not busy today, but we can't go till afternoon."
"You don't understand, Brother," Ying Bojue said. "Twenty *li* outside the city there is a park belonging to a eunuch. It is beautiful and it is quiet. But it is so big that it would take two days at least to appreciate all its beauties. We must go early and spend all day there."
"Brother," Chang Zhijie said, "you have nothing particular to do today. That is why we came so early. Let us start at once."
"If you will have it so," said Ximen, "you go first and I will join you there."
The two men set out, but, sending the attendants in advance, they themselves went to the bawdy house and waited for Han Jinchuan to go with them. Ying Bojue had arranged for refreshments and engaged two actors.
Some time after Bojue had gone, Ximen Qing got into his sedan chair and went out of the city.
A thousand trees cast a deep shadow
And a brook meanders through them.
White walls enclose the ever-blooming flowers
And pleasant houses screen the quiet landscape.
Peach flowers blossoming at Wuling
Make the fisherman lose his way.
Plum blossoms flowering on the Yu Mountains
And the poets exchange verses in the sunshine.
It is paradise on earth.
Ximen Qing could not help exclaiming at the beauty of the scenery. He got out of his sedan chair and went into the gardens. Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie came to welcome him, and they went together to an arbor. Han Jinchuan and the actors kowtowed to him. Tea was served. Bojue would have had wine, but Ximen said: "There is no hurry. Let us take a stroll together." He took Han Jinchuan's hand and Ying Bojue led the way. They went to a verandah, then, following the vermilion railings, came to a place where there were many willow trees and an arbor of roses. They passed the Taihu stone and the Pavilion of the Pine Winds. So they came to the Pavilion of Unusual Characters. Behind this were about thirty plum trees, and among them a small high building called the Tower of the Plums. In this were many poems written by famous men. Ximen Qing studied them attentively. They went to the peony bed, where there were many different kinds of rare peonies. Then they turned to the north, and here was the bamboo grove with a small pavilion with the sign "Listen to the rustling of the bamboos," and a small arbor called the Coming of the Phœnix. The signs were all written by men of great renown for their skill with the brush. On the right was a goldfish pond and, on the bank, a small arbor with a sign: "Here you may enjoy the water." They leaned on the red railings for a while and watched the goldfish swimming about in the water. They made the pond seem like an embroidered coverlet. Ximen Qing was especially pleased with this. But Ying Bojue led him to another high building. This was the "Tower for Listening to the Moon." There were many poems by famous men here also, and panels of carved wood painted in characters of green. They went down from the building and turned towards the east. There they saw a great artificial mound with a cave in it called the Cave of the Eight Immortals. In the cave was a marble chess table. Iron flutes and brass long flutes hung upon the walls. It was a place where immortals might have dwelled. When they came out of it, they climbed the mound and from its summit could see the whole extent of the garden.
They had walked for some time, and Chang Zhijie said to Ximen Qing: "Brother, you must be tired. Let us rest in the arbor before we start out again."
"But we haven't been around one-tenth of the garden," Ximen Qing said. "How can we say that we are tired? Don't you know that sedan chair men walk a hundred *li* a day?"
They laughed but went to the arbor. Ximen Qing took the place of honor with Chang Zhijie on one side of him and Ying Bojue on the other. Han Jinchuan sat beside Ximen "I must offer you my most sincere thanks for all your trouble," Ximen said to his hosts.
"Brother, it is not worth mentioning," said Bojue. "This is but a poor cup of wine that I am able to offer you."
They drank together, then the two actors came before them. They took their instruments and sang a new song: "Every Word Is Exquisite, Like a Pattern of Flowers." They sang very sweetly, and their voices lingered. Ximen Qing praised them. "It is a pity they are boys," Chang Zhijie said. "If they were girls, no price would be too high for them."
"If they were girls," Ximen Qing said, "we should have asked them to sit down before this. We should not have allowed them to stand and sing."
"Brother," Bojue said, "you are an officer to the manner born, and what you say always bears the stamp of authority."
Everybody laughed. They drank their wine, and Bojue, taking a large cup, suggested that they should play the game of giving orders. Ximen was not anxious to begin, but Bojue pressed him, and at last he agreed. "I will take the words 'Wind,' 'Flower,' 'Snow' and 'Moon.' I will begin; Brother Chang shall be next; then our host, and, lastly, Han Jinchuan. Each must make a verse and bring into it one of my four words. When he begins, he must drink a cup; and, if he fails, he must drink a second cup and tell a story. If the story is a poor one, he must tell another. I will begin." He took his cup and drank it. "'The clouds are few, the wind gentle. It is nearly noon.' Now, Brother Chang, it is your turn."
Chang drank his cup and said: "Chasing the flowers and following the willows, I crossed the stream." Then it was the turn of the host. Ying Bojue drank his cup of wine, but he seemed dazed and could not get out a word.
"Brother Ying," Ximen Qing said, "you must pay your forfeit and drink another cup."
"Let me think a moment," Bojue said. He racked his brains, and Ximen asked him again. "Of the glory of Spring," he began, "a few degrees have been revealed."
Ximen Qing roared with laughter. "That doesn't include a single one of my words," he cried. "That verse won't do. You'll have to drink two cups."
They called for Bojue's story.
"Once there was a scholar on his way to the Capital," Bojue began. "His boat was anchored in the Yangzi. At nightfall he asked the boatman to go and anchor somewhere else, for, he said, 'There are bandits in this place.' 'Where?' said the boatman. 'Don't you see that inscription on the stone tablet there, "Bandits on the river"?' The boatman laughed and said: 'That isn't "bandits on the river." How could you make such a mistake? It is not "bandit" but "poem".' 'Well,' said the scholar, 'they both look alike to me.'"
"I don't believe any scholar would make such a mistake," Ximen Qing said, laughing.
"Brother Ying," said Chang Zhijie, "you must drink ten big cups."
"Why?" said Ying Bojue, astonished.
"Think for yourself," Chang Zhijie said.
Ximen Qing was reputed to be the wealthiest man in all Shandong, and, when Bojue had spoken in his story of the scholar's confusing the word "poem" for "bandit," he might have been taken to refer to Ximen Qing, for the word for a very wealthy man has the same sound.
Ximen Qing himself had not at once seen the point, but now he understood. Bojue realized that he had made a slip. He drank two cups of wine and asked to be forgiven.
"If you did not deserve to be punished, I would not punish you," Ximen Qing said, "but you do deserve it, and I cannot let you off."
Bojue felt uncomfortable, but he drank a few cups more. "You have too much to say," he said to Chang Zhijie.
"Now you must tell us another story," Ximen said. But Bojue was afraid to commit himself again. "Never mind," Ximen said, "it is only fun, come along." Bojue felt more at ease.
"When Confucius was traveling in the west," he began, "someone caught a unicorn. For some reason Confucius did not see it, and, day and night, he wept and cried bitterly in his house. His disciples were afraid that he would fall ill, so they got a bull, dressed it up in copper coins and tried to persuade him that this was the animal. But the moment Confucius set eyes on it, he saw through their trick. 'Obviously,' he said, 'this is a very wealthy bull, but why do you try to make out that it is a unicorn?'"
When he had finished his story, Bojue fell upon his knees before Ximen Qing. "I know I am not fit to live," he said, "but I really didn't mean any harm."
Ximen Qing laughed and told him to stand up. Han Jinchuan laughed too. "Beggar Ying," she said, "you are always trying to be smart at other people's expense. Now you've put your foot in it. Father, don't pay any heed to him."
Bojue was annoyed at this. He went to Han Jinchuan and struck her on the head. "That rascal Chang," he said, "is bad enough. There was no need for you, you little whore, to say anything more." He had hit her hard and hurt her. She dared not cry, but it was clear that she was very much put out.
"You dog," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "first you make rude jokes about me and then you begin hitting people. What punishment do you really want?"
Bojue laughed and put his arm around Han Jinchuan. "My daughter," he said, "where were you brought up with such tender care that you are ready to cry at a little tap like that? It surprises me that you are able to put up with things as big as a donkey's."
Han Jinchuan turned her head and looked scornfully at him. "Beggar," she said, "pray when were you there to see? You are talking nonsense. It is your wife who has to endure a thing as big as a donkey's."
"Why, of course I've seen," Bojue said, laughing. "The gentleman is famous for his beauty, his asininity, wealth, youth and idleness. He is just the sort of man you like. And that reminds me of another story. There was once a young lady whose thing was getting rather the worse for wear. Somebody told her that if she put a piece of alum into it, it would recover its former tightness. This the young lady did, but she found that it tightened her up so much that it hurt. This made her very sorrowful. She was standing outside her gate when a passerby said: 'That little whore is trying to look like Ba Wang.' The young lady heard him. 'What!' she said, 'Ba Wang indeed! Why, I can't even manage Fan Kuai!'"
They all laughed at this, even Han Jinchuan. Ying Bojue finished his wine and offered another cup to Ximen Qing, asking him to take the last turn in the game. "It is Han Jinchuan's turn," Ximen said. Jinchuan would not play, and Chang urged Ximen. Ximen drank a cup of wine and said: "Up the staircase of the clouds, let us go to the cavern of the immortals in the palace of the moon." So the game was finished.
Ximen Qing changed his clothes and went for a stroll. Bojue was still calling for more refreshment. Suddenly he noticed that Jinchuan had disappeared. He looked about and found that she had gone around the artificial mound and was relieving herself behind the arbor of roses. He picked a branch from a flowering shrub and quietly went over to her. Squatting down behind her, he touched the heart of her flower. Jinchuan was startled, jumped up before she had finished what she was about, and wet her drawers. At that moment Chang Zhijie crept up behind Bojue and pushed him so violently that he fell forward and caught all the piss in his face. He sprang to his feet, laughingly cursed Chang Zhijie, and ran after him to beat him. Ximen Qing stood beside a pine tree and roared with laughter. Even Han Jinchuan laughed and skipped with delight. "Beggar Ying," she said, "now you've got what you deserved." They went back to the table.
"Now, you dog," Ximen Qing said, "you have had your joke at our expense. What about telling us a story against yourself?"
"I don't mind in the least," Bojue said. "One day a rich man let out a fart. A man standing by, one who always lived by sponging on the rich man, said: 'I smell nothing.' This alarmed the rich man. 'That's bad,' he said. 'If there is no smell to my farts there must be something wrong with me. I must see a doctor.' 'Wait a moment,' said the sponger, 'I will make sure.' He put out his nose and pretended to sniff again. Then he smacked his lips. 'Ah,' said he, 'there is a splendid aftertaste. You have nothing to worry about.' "
They all laughed. Chang Zhijie said: "You have made rude remarks about our brother, but why should you draw a picture of me?" They all laughed again. Ying Bojue asked Chang Zhijie to guess fingers with Ximen Qing, and Han Jinchuan sang songs for them.
Chen Jingji, when he was sure that Ximen Qing had gone out, dressed himself and waited for an opportunity to approach Pan Jinlian. He dared not go to her openly, but went to the Snow Cavern hoping that she might be there. He waited for a long time but she did not come. At last he lost patience and went to her room. Fortunately, no one saw him. When he came to the door he could hear her singing in a low sweet voice: "Why did you love me and then forget me?" This seemed a proof that she really loved him. He rushed into the room and threw his arms about her. "How could I ever forget you?" he said. "Yesterday, my darling, the

Great Lady told me to go to the temple of Guanyin, but I would not go. I was thinking of you all the time. Today, Father has gone to drink wine, and I went to the Snow Cavern to find you, but though I waited and watched until the eyes nearly came out of my head, your dainty shadow never appeared. Now I have thrown discretion to the winds and come to you here."
"Don't speak so loud," Jinlian said, "there will be trouble if you are heard."
Suddenly, through the window, she saw Xiaoyu coming with a roll of white silk. The girl turned and went away again. "That maid must have forgotten something," Jinlian said. "Did you see how she turned and went back?" She thought it probable that the girl would return. "You must go at once," she said. "We can do nothing now." Chen Jingji was made to vanish like a whiff of smoke. Jinlian was right. Yueniang had told Xiaoyu to take the silk to her so that she could draw the pattern of a skirt, but the girl had forgotten to bring the pattern and went back for it. Luckily, the maid did not catch Jinlian with Jingji. When she returned with the pattern, he had slipped away. But when Jinlian took the silk, her hands were trembling.
Ximen Qing and his friends were becoming tipsy, and he was anxious to go home. Bojue urged him to stay. He knelt down and said: "Brother, is it because you are angry with me on account of that joke I made about you that I can't persuade you to stay?"
Ximen laughed. "You dog," he said, "nobody bothers about what you say."
Bojue took a large cup and filled it for Ximen Qing. Chang Zhijie offered him some fruits. Ximen thanked his host and prepared to leave. He gave Han Jinchuan a tael of silver and told Daian to give the young actors three *qian* each. "I am drunk," he said as he got into his sedan chair. The two boys followed him. Bojue told the servants to clear away and dismissed the young actors. He rode back to the city beside Han Jinchuan's sedan chair.
When Ximen Qing reached home, the sun had set. He went to sleep with Li Ping'er. The next day she said to him: "Ever since the baby was born, there has been something wrong with me. When I look in the mirror, I see how pale my face is. I never want to eat or drink, and, when I try to walk, my legs seem to give way beneath me. If it is anything serious, what will become of my baby?"
Ximen saw that she was crying. "I will send for Doctor Ren," he said. "I am sure you will be all right when you have had some medicine." He told Shutong to write a letter and ask Dr. Ren to come. Shutong went on the errand, and Ximen Qing went to the hall. Ying Bojue came to thank him for coming to the party the day before, and Ximen, in return, thanked him. They sat and talked. Then Shutong came and said: "Doctor Ren is here." Ximen Qing at once went to receive him, introduced him to Ying Bojue, and the three men sat down together. Shutong brought tea.
"Kindly tell me who is ill," Dr. Ren said.
"My sixth wife is not feeling very well. I shall be grateful if you will make a careful examination."
"Is that the lady who had a baby?" Dr. Ren said.
"Yes," said Ximen, "but I don't know why she should not be well."
"Let me go and see her," the doctor said. Ximen Qing took him to Li Ping'er's room. The doctor sat by the bedside, and one of the maids opened the curtains very slightly. Li Ping'er put out her right hand and rested it upon a case of books wrapped in a handkerchief.
"First, I will try the pulse," Dr. Ren said. When he had found the place, he put three fingers on the pulse. He bent his head and examined it carefully for some time. Then he removed his hand, and Li Ping'er slowly withdrew hers. She stretched out her left hand, and laid it on the books. Dr. Ren examined it. Then he said to Ximen Qing: "I have now examined the lady's pulse and—I am very sorry— I must see her face."
"We are good friends," Ximen Qing said, "there need be no difficulty about that." He told the maids to pull the curtains aside. Dr. Ren looked at his patient. Her face was like a peach blossom, her eyebrows dark like willow leaves. He looked at her for a minute, then said to Ximen Qing: "I have seen your lady's face, but I have not come upon any sign of anything serious. I must have more details about her illness. We doctors have to find things out from our patients themselves."
Ximen Qing sent for Ruyi'er. She came in, dressed in her best clothes, made a reverence to the doctor and told him about her mistress's illness: how her mouth was always parched, and how she suffered from sleeplessness. Dr.. Ren stood up and bowed. He said to Ximen Qing: "I don't believe it is anything serious. In people of the common sort, their bodies are so tough that their blood can stand anything, and we can give them almost any kind of medicine. If we make a slight mistake, no great harm is done. But a lady like yours is more delicate. We must not allow the slightest possibility of error, for, if we give her anything that is not exactly what we should give, there may be serious danger. That is why I have to ask questions and find out what she has to say. It is essential. The other day, I went to see his Lordship Wang's wife. Her illness was very similar to your lady's. I asked a few questions, investigated the symptoms and examined her, and so got an excellent idea of the trouble. I went home, read some of the prescriptions of the ancients and compared them with my own ideas upon the subject. I gave her some medicine to get rid of her fever and something to strengthen her at the source of her weakness. The treatment was most effective. The lady took only three or four doses, and then she was completely recovered. His Lordship was most grateful. He sent me silks and money, and his lady sent me something too. He also sent me a special signboard and, when he gave it to me, the musicians played so loud that the sound reached the heavens. There was inscribed upon it: 'The Learned Doctor with Miraculous Powers.' A few days ago, a friend of mine came to see me, and he says the characters are done in the *Yan* style. Every character seems to stand out. When I was young, I did a great deal of reading. It was only because my family had come down in the world that I began to practice the art of medicine. I think I can prove that the title of learned doctor was not altogether undeserved."
"I feel more satisfied now that you tell me there is nothing serious," Ximen Qing said. "I may say, Doctor, that, though I have more than one wife, this is the only one for whom I really care. She has borne me a son and I look to her to rear him. We must not have any trouble. I have confidence in your remarkable skill. She shall be carefully looked after, and, when she gets well, you shall have a handsome fee. I am only a soldier and cannot attempt to rival his Lordship, but I know what is right and proper."
"Since you are so kind," Dr. Ren said, "I will not take any payment from you. Indeed I would rather that you should not even pay for the medicine."
Ximen Qing laughed heartily. "I'm not the sort of man to take medicine for nothing," he said. "And that reminds me of a very interesting story. I once heard of a man who said that a cat with the mange can be cured by a certain black powder. Somebody asked him what would cure a mangy dog. 'Give it some white medicine-given gratis,' the other said. So, Doctor, you see white medicine's fit only for dogs."
Dr. Ren clapped his hands and laughed. "Then I don't know what you'll do to me if my prescription happens to be for white medicine." They both laughed. "In that case, you'll have to give me another sign instead of a fee," Dr. Ren said. They laughed again. The doctor got up and they came away.

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### The Imperial Tutor & Hsi-men Ch'ing Observes a Birthday in the Eastern Capital; Squire Miao from Yang-chou Sends a Present of Singing Boys

When Dr. Ren had finished his examination of Li Ping'er, they went back again to the great hall and sat down. "I want you to tell me the truth," Ximen Qing said. "What do you think of the case?"
"The lady did not take sufficient care after the birth of her child," Dr. Ren said. "Now her blood is impoverished, and her face is pale. She has no appetite, and she does not care to move about. Her pulse beats strongly enough, but it is not steady. That is a symptom that her liver is inflamed and that her blood circulates irregularly. Without the most careful attention, I fear she will not get well."
"What medicine are you thinking of giving her?" Ximen Qing asked. "The first thing to do is to break down the fever and stop the flow of blood. I shall use yellow cedar and *Jinmu* as the base and a few other things. I think she will be all right."
Ximen Qing told Shutong to seal a tael of silver and give it to the doctor for the medicine. The doctor left, and shortly afterwards the medicine arrived. It was made ready in the rooms of Li Ping'er. Ximen returned to Ying Bojue.
"Li and Huang came to me this morning," Bojue said. "They say they must have the money and asked me to plead with you to help them."
"I suppose I must do what you wish," Ximen said. "Tell them to come tomorrow." He went with Ying Bojue to another room and they had something to eat.
"Is Li Guijie still here?" Bojue asked. "It seems to me that the man who went to the Eastern Capital should be back by now."
"Yes," Ximen said, "I want him myself. I am anxious to send him to Yangzhou. I don't see how he can be much longer."
After the meal, Ying Bojue went away.
The next day when Ximen Qing returned from the office, Ying Bojue was already waiting for him with Li and Huang. When he came in, they rose. Ximen went to change his clothes. He asked Wu Yueniang for the two hundred and fifty taels that Xu had paid. He added another two hundred and fifty taels and told Chen Jingji to give the money to Li and Huang. "I am really very short of money," Ximen Qing told them, "and I am only giving you this because Brother Ying has pressed me to do so. I must have it back as soon as possible."
"You have been so kind to us," Li said, "that, of course, we shall not be slow to pay. As soon as we recover the money, we will bring it to you before we touch a penny ourselves." They checked the silver, thanked Ximen Qing repeatedly, and withdrew.
Ying Bojue was going too, but Ximen pressed him to stay. While they were talking, Ping'an came and said: "Laibao has come back from the Eastern Capital."
"There," Bojue said, "didn't I tell you yesterday that he was due back?"
Laibao came in and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. "Did you see Uncle Zhai? What happened about this business of Guijie's?" Ximen asked him.
"I saw Uncle Zhai himself," Laibao said. "As soon as he had read your letter, he sent a man to the Minister. I went with the man, and the Minister told me that he would have had all the prisoners released, seeing that we came from his Eminence's palace, but, unfortunately, the matter had been taken up by Grand Marshal Huang, and all he could do was to prevent any further pursuit of those who had escaped. He said he must keep in jail those who had already been taken. But eunuchs, he said, never carry things to a conclusion and, before long, the Grand Marshal will have forgotten all about the matter. Then it will be easy to settle the matter of the prisoners."
"In that case, Qi Xiang'er will not be arrested," Bojue said. "The little strumpet is in luck's way."
"Uncle Zhu and the others will probably receive some slight punishment," Laibao said, "but I don't think they will be sentenced." He took Zhai's letter from his pocket and gave it to his master.
"Old Sun and Pockmarked Zhu can never have dreamed that I would come to their rescue," Ximen Qing said.
"But you have such a kind heart, Brother," said Bojue.
"Uncle Zhai seemed very pleased to see me," Laibao continued. "He asked whether you were going to the Capital to congratulate the Imperial Tutor on his birthday. I did not dare to say you were not going, so I said very probably you were. Uncle Zhai said it would be very nice of you to go and see him."
"I never had any idea of going," Ximen Qing said, "but, after what you have said, I shall have to go." Then he said: "You must be tired. Go to the inner court for some refreshment and then rest. I shall want you to go to Yangzhou in a day or two."
Laibao went out. Ximen Qing went to tell Li Guijie. He said to Bojue: "You stay here. I shall be back in a moment." But Bojue was anxious to go after Li and Huang. He said: "I must go now, but I will come back." He went away.
When Ximen Qing came to Wu Yueniang's room, Guijie had already heard the news. She hastened to kowtow to Ximen Qing and Yueniang. "Father and Mother," she said, "it is only by your kindness that I have been rescued from desperate straits. I don't know what I can do for you in return."
"Since you came to us," Yueniang said, "we could do no less than get things put right for you. If we had not done our best, there would have been no point in your coming."
"Father and Mother," Guijie said, "you have saved my life, but that little whore Qi Xiang'er had no claim on you, and you have saved her too. She made a lot of money; she involved me in her own trouble, and we have treated her well. I can't help feeling she is in our debt."
"Yes, indeed," Ximen Qing said, laughing, "the little whore has come out of it very well."
They talked for a while, then Guijie prepared to go away. "My mother has not heard the news," she said. "I must go and tell her or she will go on worrying. I will come again with her to thank you."
"Very well," Ximen said. "I will not keep you. Go home and tell your mother."
"You must have something to eat before you go," Yueniang said. Guijie declined. Again she thanked Ximen Qing, Yueniang, and the others.
"You are safe now," Ximen Qing told her, "but see that in future you have nothing to do with that young man Wang."
"Father," Guijie said, "what are you talking about! How could I even let him touch me! Why! if I meet him in the street, I shall be done for. It was not I who asked him to come the other day."
"That is all right," Yueniang said. "Only don't see him any more. There is no need to be so positive about it." They sent for the sedan chair and saw the girl off.
Ximen Qing told Yueniang he was thinking of going to the Eastern Capital.
"If you make up your mind to go," said Yueniang, "we must begin to get things ready at once, or you will be rushed."
"I have already got ready the things for the Imperial Tutor's birthday, the dragon gong, the embroidered stuffs, and the golden flowers," Ximen said. "Only my personal baggage is not ready yet."
"Oh, your things will be no trouble," Yueniang told him. Ximen Qing went to see Li Ping'er.
The next day Ximen was sitting in the arbor. He told Chen Jingji to write a letter to Censor Cai. This was the letter for Laibao to take. He gave Laibao some money and told him to start for Yangzhou the following morning.
Several days passed. The Imperial Tutor's birthday was drawing near. Ximen Qing picked out an auspicious day and told Qintong, Daian, Shutong and Huatong that they were to accompany him. They were to get their things ready. Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and the others packed Ximen's clothes and the things he needed for the journey. With the presents there were more than twenty loads. On the eve of his departure, the ladies gave a feast in honor of their husband, and afterwards he went to Yueniang's room to sleep with her.
The next day he sent off in advance the loads and his baggage and procured a passport so that his things might be cleared through all the stages on the way. When he had attended to these details, he went to see Li Ping'er and his little son Guan'ge.
"Take care of yourself," he said to Li Ping'er. "Whenever you need any medicine, just send somebody to Doctor Ren. I shall be back before long."
Li Ping'er said good-bye to him with tears in her eyes. "Be careful on the way," she said to him. Then she went with him to the great hall where Yueniang, Yulou, Jinlian, and the others were waiting. All together they escorted him to the gate. Ximen got into a light sedan chair and, with the four boys on horseback, set out for the Eastern Capital. Every day they rose early to continue their journey, and every night they rested at an inn or post stage. The scenery was delightful. The travelers they met were mostly civil and military officers going with their presents to the Capital to congratulate the Imperial Tutor on his birthday.
In ten days they reached the Capital. They entered by the Gate of Ten Thousand Blessings, and, as it was late, they went straight to the Arch of Dragon Virtue to see Zhai.
When the Comptroller heard that Ximen Qing had come, he hurried out to welcome him. They greeted one another and tea was served. Ximen Qing told Daian to have the baggage brought in, but Zhai bade his own servants attend to it. A banquet was served in honor of Ximen's arrival. A table of carved horn was set and there were some very rare dishes. It would have been perfection if only there had been dragons' livers and phoenix marrow. Even the Imperial Tutor himself could not have done better. The servants brought wine. Zhai offered a cup to Heaven, then to Ximen Qing. Ximen offered a cup in return. Fruits and dishes followed one another like water flowing in a stream.
After drinking two cups of wine, Ximen Qing said: "I have come specially to celebrate his Eminence's birthday and have brought with me a few trifling gifts for him. But I am afraid he may refuse them, and, to be candid, I should like you to go to him and speak to him about me. Besides, I hope that his Eminence may take me under his guardianship. If he will do this, I shall be happy all the rest of my life. But it may be difficult to persuade him."
"There will be no difficulty," said Zhai. "Though his Eminence is the most powerful of his Majesty's subjects, he is somewhat susceptible to praise and flattery. Let him but see the value of the presents you have brought him, and not only will he accept you as his ward, he will see that you get promotion."
Ximen Qing was delighted to hear this. They went on drinking and, after some time, Ximen said he had drunk enough. Zhai pressed him to drink one more cup, but Ximen said he had serious business to attend to on the morrow and he dared not drink too much. But, being pressed, he did drink one cup more.
Zhai saw that the boys were served with refreshments and invited Ximen Qing to go and rest in a study in the inner court. A bed with silken curtains and bedclothes, exquisitely perfumed, had been made ready and there were many servants to wait upon him. Ximen Qing lay down alone upon the bed. This was something to which he was not accustomed, and he found it hard to pass the night. Before dawn he was anxious to get up, but all the doors were shut and he had to wait till sunrise. Then a man came with a key and opened the doors; boys came with water and towels, and Ximen Qing dressed. Zhai came in and sat with him. A servant brought a red box in which were thirty different kinds of delicacies and a silver wine pot. The wine was poured and they ate their breakfast.
"After breakfast," the Comptroller said, "I will go before you to the palace and speak to his Eminence about you. I will let you know when to send the presents."
Ximen thanked him. They took a few cups of wine with their breakfast and the table was cleared. "Sit here," Zhai said to Ximen Qing. "I must go, but I shall be back very soon." It was indeed only a short time before he was back again. "When I got to the palace," he said, "his Eminence was washing. There was a host of civil and military officers waiting to congratulate him on his birthday, but not one of them had seen him yet. I spoke of you to him, and you must go at once. There is a crowd at the palace. I will go first and you can join me there." He went away again.
Ximen Qing was delighted. He ordered his own servants and asked some of Zhai's servants to carry the presents to the palace. Dressed in ceremonial robes and hat, he got into his sedan chair. A host of officials, great and small, all come to congratulate the Prime Minister, were pressing shoulder to shoulder and back to back. In the distance Ximen Qing saw one officer, also sitting in a sedan chair, near the Arch of Dragon Virtue. When he looked more closely he recognized his old friend Miao of Yangzhou. At the same time Miao recognized him. They got down from their sedan chairs, bowed, and saluted one another. Miao was a rich man and now held a very comfortable position. He had attached himself to the Imperial Tutor's faction, and had come, like the rest, to congratulate his Eminence on his birthday. So they chanced to meet. They were both eager to get on to the palace and did little more than greet one another, exchange addresses, and then separate. Ximen Qing came to the palace, bowed, and entered through the Great Archway. There Zhai met him.
Ximen Qing noticed that the middle gate was shut and that the officers were all coming in by the gates at the side. He asked Zhai the meaning of this and was told that the Emperor had once passed through that door and, ever after, it must be closed to ordinary men. Ximen Qing followed the Comptroller through one door after another. Each was guarded by a military officer. There was excellent order everywhere. The military officers bowed to Zhai and asked who Ximen Qing was. Zhai told them that Ximen was his relative from Shandong, come to congratulate his Eminence. They went through more doors and down more passages. Everywhere were carven pillars and painted beams. Music could be heard faintly. It seemed to come from heaven. "The palace is far distant from any other place," Ximen said. "Where is the music coming from?"
"His Eminence," Zhai said, "has commanded the attendance of twenty-four girl dancers. They know all such dances as the Dance of the Evil One, the Rainbow Skirt Dance and the Dance of Guanyin. They play every day when my master breakfasts, dines, and sups. At present he is taking his breakfast."
Ximen Qing smelled some incense that he had never smelled before, and the music seemed nearer. "Step softly," said Zhai, "we are quite close to his Eminence's study."
They went through another passage and came to a great hall that seemed to Ximen Qing like the palace of the angels. Outside were storks and peacocks and many strange birds. There were the Hortensia flowers that confer Eternal Life, Flowers of the Sacred Cloud, and the *Fusang* Plant; flowers that never faded, blossoming so luxuriantly that the eye could scarce bear to dwell on them. Ximen Qing did not dare to press forward. He asked Zhai to go before him.
They went into the hall. In the midst of it stood a great throne with a tiger skin thrown over it, and, on the throne, sat a man robed in a gown with dragons embroidered upon it. This was his Eminence the Imperial Tutor. Behind a screen were twenty or thirty exquisite maidens in a row, all dressed after the fashion of the court. Some held kerchiefs, and some held fans with which to refresh his Eminence. The Comptroller stood beside him, and Ximen Qing kowtowed four times. His Eminence rose and, standing upon a rug, returned the salutation. It was the first time they met.
The Comptroller approached the Imperial Tutor and whispered. Ximen Qing knew that he was being spoken about, and again kowtowed four times. Now the Imperial Tutor did not rise. It was a sign that he was prepared to accept Ximen as his ward. Then Ximen spoke and called him "Father."
"Your son," he said, "has nothing to offer. I have brought no more than a few trifles in honor of your most illustrious birthday. It is as though one brought a feather for ten thousand *li*. But may your Eminence live as long as the Mountains of the South!"
"You are very kind," the Imperial Tutor said. "Please sit down."
An attendant gave Ximen Qing a chair. He bowed twice and sat down. Tea was brought. Zhai went out and ordered the presents to be brought in. There were more than twenty loads. They were brought and laid before the steps. A small box was opened and the inventory taken from it. It said: One crimson dragon robe; one green dragon robe; twenty rolls of Hanfigured satin; twenty rolls of Sichuan silk; twenty rolls of foreign cloth; other rolls, forty, both plain and figured; a girdle of a lion's head in jade; another girdle mounted in gold of tagaraka wood; of jade goblets and horn goblets, each ten pairs; four pairs of golden wine cups with flowers for decoration; ten fine pearls and two hundred taels of gold. These were the present.

The Imperial Tutor looked at the inventory and then at the twenty loads of offerings. He was pleased and thanked Ximen Qing. Then he told Zhai to have them sent to the treasury and called for wine to entertain Ximen Qing. But Ximen remarked that his Eminence was very busy. He rose and prepared to take his leave.
"Very well," said the Imperial Tutor, "but come this afternoon." Ximen Qing bowed and went out, the Imperial Tutor taking a few steps with him. Zhai went farther, but he too was busy and had to return, and Ximen Qing went back alone to the house. There he took off his hat and girdle and had dinner. After dinner, he went to the study and slept for a while. Then a man came and asked him to go and see the Imperial Tutor. Ximen gave the man some gold and put on his robes. He told Daian to make up a number of parcels of silver and put them into a box. The four boys followed him as he made his way again in a sedan chair to the Imperial Tutor's palace.
His Eminence sent invitations to all who came to congratulate him upon his birthday, but these invitations were spread out over a period of three days. The first day was reserved for members of the Royal Household and the eunuchs, the second for ministers and officials of high rank, and the third for the commoner class of officers. But Ximen Qing was a stranger and had offered so magnificent a present that his Eminence was pleased with him and gave him a special invitation. He even came to receive his guest. Ximen very politely begged the Imperial Tutor to go before him. He bent his back and walked delicately.
"It has been very kind of you to come such a long way especially on my account, and to give me such a splendid present," his Eminence said. "I trust you will take a meal with me that I may at least show my inclination for you."
"My life in this world," Ximen said, "is entirely dependent upon your Eminence's kindness. The trifles I brought are not worth mentioning."
They chatted and joked together as though they really were father and son. The twenty-four beautiful maidens played for them, and attendants brought wine. His Eminence desired to offer Ximen a cup of wine. Ximen expressed his unworthiness, but, being pressed, rose and drank a single cup. They sat down. Then Ximen Qing bade Shutong bring a peach-shaped cup of gold. He filled it to the brim and, taking it, knelt down before his Eminence and said: "Live for a thousand years." The Imperial Tutor smiled.
"Stand up, my son," he said. He drank the wine.
Ximen Qing rose and took his place again. The food served was so rare and varied that it can hardly be described. Ximen Qing stayed until sunset. Then he distributed the packets of silver among the attendants and took his leave of the Imperial Tutor. "Father," he said, "you have much to do and I must not detain you. I shall not trouble you again." Then he left the palace and returned to Zhai's house.
The next day he decided to visit Master Miao and told Daian to find out where he was staying. Daian discovered that he was at a house outside the Imperial City belonging to a eunuch named Li. Ximen Qing went there with Daian. The boy presented Ximen's card and Master Miao came out. "I was hoping that some good friend would come and have a chat with me," he said. "You have come at the right moment." He insisted that Ximen should stay for dinner. There was a magnificent spread of food of every kind. Two very handsome singing boys came and sang several songs.
"These two foolish boys," Ximen Qing said, pointing to Daian and Qintong, "can only eat and drink. They cannot compare with your two boys."
Miao smiled. "I'm afraid they will not be of much use to you, but, if you really like them, I shall be only too glad to give them to you."
Ximen Qing said: " I dare not accept anything that you must appreciate so much yourself." They did not stop drinking till very late. Then Ximen said good-bye to Miao and returned to Zhai's house.
For eight or nine days, nearly all the important officials at the palace sent invitations to Ximen Qing. Then he felt anxious to get home and ordered Daian to pack up his baggage. The Comptroller pressed him to stay one day more. This he did. The two men drank together and treated one another as though they were blood relations. Then Ximen Qing set off on his way back to Shandong.
While Ximen Qing was away, Yueniang and the others stayed in their own rooms doing needlework, and none of them went out to play. So they waited for his return, all except Jinlian, who dressed herself exquisitely and mingled with the maids, sometimes playing at guessing fingers and sometimes at dominoes. She laughed and talked merrily, not caring what anybody thought about her. She was anxious to meet Chen Jingji, and every day went to the garden and many times to the cavern, hoping to find him there. Jingji was always thinking about her, and he went there frequently. Whenever they met they would play and kiss. But they were afraid of someone seeing them and dared not fully satisfy their longing for each other.
One day Yueniang, Yulou, and Li Ping'er were sitting together when, suddenly, Daian came in and kowtowed. "Father is nearly here," he told them.
"Where is he now?" Yueniang asked.
"I came first with the passports," Daian said. "He must still be twenty *li* away."
"Have you had anything to eat?" Yueniang asked.
"I have had breakfast but not lunch."
Yueniang ordered food to be prepared, then she, with the other ladies, went to the great hall to await her husband. They waited a long time.
At last Ximen Qing arrived. The ladies went out to welcome him. He made a reverence to Yueniang, then greeted all the others. Shutong, Qintong and Huatong kowtowed and went to the kitchen for something to eat. Ximen Qing told the ladies about the hardships of his journey, how he had stayed with Zhai, how the Imperial Tutor had invited him, and how he had gone to many parties with the eunuchs and other officials. Then he asked Li Ping'er about his baby. "And how do you feel," he said, "after taking Doctor Ren's medicine? Was it any good? Though my body went to the Eastern Capital, my heart was always here with you."
"The baby is well, and I am better than I was," Li Ping'er assured him.
Yueniang saw that all the luggage was brought in and the presents that Ximen Qing had been given. She gave orders for a meal to be made ready for her husband.
That night the ladies gave a feast to celebrate his return. He went to Yueniang's room to sleep, and it seemed to them like a refreshing rain after a long period of drought, or the meeting of old friends in a strange land. They took extreme delight in one another.
The next day, Chen Jingji and his wife came to pay their respects to Ximen Qing and discussed business matters. Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie heard that Ximen had returned, and they came to call. Ximen greeted them. "So long a journey must have been very trying," they said. Ximen told them about the beauty and greatness of the Eastern Capital and how the Imperial Tutor had accepted him as a ward. They congratulated him. Ximen asked them to stay and have some wine.
When Chang Zhijie was about to leave, he said to his host: "There is something I should like to ask you, but I don't know whether I should or not." He bent his head and seemed embarrassed.
"Please tell me what it is," Ximen said.
"Well," Chang Zhijie said, "my house is not so convenient as it might be. I should like to find another, but I have no money. Perhaps you will lend me some and let me pay you back with interest."
"Why talk about interest?" Ximen Qing said. "We are too good friends for that. But, at the moment, I simply haven't any ready money. You must wait till Han comes back, and I will certainly do what you wish." Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie thanked him and went away.
Master Miao had promised to give two singing boys to Ximen Qing. But Ximen Qing had been so anxious to get home that he did not stay to say good-bye to Miao. Miao thought he was still at the Capital and sent his servants to Zhai's place to make inquiries. So he learned that Ximen Qing had gone. "A gentleman's word," he thought, "is like a whip on a mettlesome horse. I must do what I promised." He sent for the two singing boys and said to them: "I promised to give you to his Lordship Ximen Qing, and now I am going to send you to his place. You must pack your things."
The two boys knelt down. "We have been with you many years," they said. "You have done much for us and taught us to sing. Now you don't want us any longer: you are going to send us away." They wept.
Miao himself was not at all happy about it. "Don't think I wish to get rid of you," he said, "but a man must keep his word. We must observe the teaching of Confucius. He says: A man who does not keep his word is a man no longer. There is no help for it. We cannot disobey these precepts, and I must not take your point of view into account. I am going to write a letter and send you to him. I will ask him to treat you kindly."
The two boys could only submit. They stood up. Miao told his family tutor to write a letter for them to take to Ximen Qing. He also wrote a card to go with a present of silk, books and handkerchiefs. Then he ordered his servant Miao Shi to take the letter and the two boys to Ximen Qing. The boys said good-bye to their old master, shed many tears, then mounted their horses and set off for Shandong. When they reached Qinghe district, they dismounted and inquired where Ximen lived. Then they went to the house.
After Ximen's return from the Eastern Capital, he was very busy. Many people sent him presents and many sent him invitations. Every day three or four friends came to see him, and he could not even attend to his duties at the office. But this day things were easier and he had gone to the office. He went to the Great Hall and, with Magistrate Xia, examined some of the prisoners. After this, he got into his sedan chair and, with several policemen to clear his way, went home. When he reached home, Miao Shi and the two boys had been waiting for some time. They followed him into the hall. Miao Shi knelt down.
"I come from Master Miao of Yangzhou," he said. "This is his letter." He took out the letter and the list of presents.
"Please stand up," Ximen Qing said to him. He opened the letter and read it carefully, pleased that Master Miao had sent him the two boys. "It was quite by chance I met your master," he said. "We were very friendly and when we were drinking together he was good enough to promise me you two boys. Now he has sent you to me even all this long way. Your master is certainly a man whose words are worth a thousand gold pieces. It is most unusual."
The two boys came forward and kowtowed. "Our master bade us come and serve you," they said. "He asks that you will be kind to us."
Ximen Qing told them to rise. "I will see that you are given a worthy task," he said. He called for food and wine to be given them and Miao Shi, prepared some valuable presents for Master Miao, and had a letter written to accompany them. He told the two boys that they should serve him in his study.

* * *

Han Daoguo's wife, Wang Liu'er, knew that Ximen was very busy and was anxious to find someone to take a message to him. Her young brother, Wang Jing, was a fine-looking lad about sixteen years old and, that same day, she decided to send him to Ximen Qing. Ximen accepted him and sent him to work in his study.
While Ximen Qing was making arrangements about these boys, Ying Bojue came to see him. Ximen told him how Master Miao had sent the two boys. He told Daian to bring refreshments and invite Bojue to dine. Then he asked the boys to sing some songs of the South. They came in and stood side by side with castanets in their hands. They sang "Last Night the Plums in the Garden Blossomed." Their voices were sweet, and the melody they sang was exquisite. Bojue was delighted. He jumped out of his chair. "Brother," he said, "what extraordinary luck to get two boys like this. It was indeed kind of Master Miao."
"I shall have to give him something in return," Ximen Qing said. He gave the two boys new names. One he called Chunhong and the other Chunyan. He told them to sing two or three short songs. The two men drank their wine after a while, and Ying Bojue went away.

Myriad-year peaches of immortality are brought while still bedecked with dew;
Brought to the chambers of the grand councillor to wish him a hundred years of life.
It is a day for the Eight Immortals to descend in order to proffer their toasts;
A time for presentation of brocades, featuring seven phoenixes in flowered roundels.
From the six directions and the five waterways[1] come congratulatory scrolls;
From the four barbarian tribes and three isles[2] are presented exotic rarities.
Hsi-ho should not send the two orbs too swiftly along their appointed paths;[3]
To allow time to celebrate the birthday of the emperor's grand preceptor.

After Doctor Jen had palpated Li P'ing-erh's pulse, he returned to the reception hall and sat down.[4] Hsi-men Ch'ing then initiated the consultation by saying, "I do not know what your interpretation of her symptoms might be. Is it nothing to be worried about?"
"This illness of your wife's," said Doctor Jen, "is the result of inadequate care in the treatment of her postpartum conditions. That is the etiology of her ailment. At present, she is suffering from lochiorrhea, her complexion is sallow, she has an indifferent appetite, and she is easily fatigued. In your pupil's ignorant opinion, she needs to be treated with diligent care. Generally speaking, the hardest things to treat from a medical standpoint are the postpartum ailments of women and the complications of children who have contracted smallpox. If the slightest mistake is made in these circumstances, the roots of further pathology may be planted. Right now, the pulses on your wife's two wrists are feeble rather than replete. When palpated, they are both scattered and large, as well as flaccid, and unable to recuperate themselves. These symptoms are all indications of inflammation, resulting from the fact that in the liver the element earth is deficient and the element wood is in the ascendant, causing an abnormal circulation of the depleted blood. If these conditions are not treated at once, they will only grow worse in the future."
When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Under the present circumstances, what medications are called for?"
"The situation requires medications that will reduce the inflammation and arrest the lochiorrhea," said Dr. Jen. "The principal drugs should be Amur cork-tree bark and anemarrhena, which may be supplemented with foxglove root, skullcap, and the like. If the doses of these ingredients are increased or decreased as observation directs, she should recover."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he told Shu-t'ung to seal up a tael of silver and give it to Dr. Jen as a down payment for the prescribed medications. After expressing his gratitude, Dr. Jen took his leave, and, before long, the prescribed medications were duly delivered, decocted, and administered to Li P'ing-erh in her bedroom. But no more of this.
To resume our story, after seeing Dr. Jen off, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside and sat down for a chat with Ying Po-chüeh. It suddenly occurred to him that the time for the celebration of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's birthday in the Eastern Capital was fast approaching. In anticipation of this event, he had already sent Tai-an to Hang-chou to procure the dragon robes, brocades, floral ornaments of gold, and other precious objects appropriate to offer as birthday gifts, and they had all been duly assembled, so that he could proceed forthwith to the Eastern Capital in order to offer his congratulations in person. Upon calculating that the day in question was drawing near, and that it would take a good half a month's journey to get from Shantung to the Eastern Capital, he realized that he could just make it if he got his baggage together that night and set off the next morning, and that there was no room for further delay. Consequently, he went back to the master suite and explained the situation to Yüeh-niang, thus and so.
"All this time," said Yüeh-niang, "you've neglected to bring the subject up. And now you seem to be all in a rush about it. Just when do you plan to start out?"
"I'll have to start out tomorrow in order to get there in time, and leave myself a few days leeway," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, he went outside and directed Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung,[5] Shu-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung to start getting their clothes and baggage ready, so they could accompany him to the Eastern Capital the next day. Each of the four page boys proceeded to prepare his baggage without delay.
Yüeh-niang then instructed Hsiao-yü, "Go ask your various mistresses to come and help pack your father's bags."
At this juncture, only Li P'ing-erh, because she had to look after her child, on the one hand, and because she was taking medicine, on the other, was unable to leave her quarters. Among the other ladies of the household, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, showed up and set about the task of packing the python robes, dragon robes, bolts of silk, and other birthday presents into leather trunks and rattan boxes, making more than twenty carrier loads in all. They also completed the task of getting together the official caps and girdles and other articles of clothing that would be needed in the course of the trip.
That evening, the three ladies provided a feast of wine and delicacies in order to see Hsi-men Ch'ing off. During the feast, Hsi-men Ch'ing communicated several words of instruction to each of the ladies, after which he went into Yüeh-niang's room and retired for the night.
The next day, the twenty carrier loads of baggage were sent ahead, together with a waybill authorizing the shipment and an official tally entitling the bearer to the provision of carriers and horses at the relay stations along the way. Only after all the necessary arrangements had been made did Hsi-men Ch'ing go into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where he looked in on Kuan-ko and then said a few words to Li P'ing-erh.
"Be diligent in treating your illness," he said. "I'll return home to see you before long."
Li P'ing-erh, with tears in her eyes, said, "Be careful and look after yourself on the road."
Then she escorted him out to the reception hall, where she joined Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien in seeing him off at the front gate.
There Hsi-men Ch'ing got into an open sedan chair, accompanied by the four page boys on horseback, and proceeded to set off for the Eastern Capital. By the time they had wended their way for about a hundred li, evening was approaching, and Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that they should stop for the night. The station master of the relay station received him and provided for their needs.
After spending the night there, early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing urged the carriers and horses to take up their loads and proceed on their way as expeditiously as possible. Along the way they enjoyed gazing at the:
Lucent hills and limpid streams.[6]
At noon they stopped to prepare a midday meal and then continued on their journey. Those they encountered along the road consisted entirely of regional officials, both civil and military, who were on their way to the capital to congratulate the grand preceptor on his birthday. Those among them who presided over birthday gift convoys for this purpose were without number.
After traveling for another ten days or so, they calculated that there was not much farther to go, and that if they continued their current pace they should be able to arrive at their destination precisely on time. They spent the night on the road and, after another two days of travel, arrived in the Eastern Capital, which they entered through the Myriad Years Gate.
By the time they arrived:
The light was beginning to wane,[7]
and they proceeded directly to Majordomo Chai Ch'ien's quarters in Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's residence beneath the commemorative arch on Dragon's Virtue Street, where they expected to be put up for the night.
When Majordomo Chai Ch'ien learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he hastened out to welcome him. After they had exchanged the customary amenities about the weather and had a cup of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Taian to take care of the luggage and see that each and every load was carried into Chai Ch'ien's quarters, where Chai Ch'ien directed a member of the household staff to take charge of them. Chai Ch'ien then laid on a feast in order to refresh Hsi-men Ch'ing after the hardships of the road.
Before long, a carved lacquer table of the kind manufactured for official use made an appearance, laden with several tens of culinary specialties, as well as several tens of side dishes. All of them were:
Delicacies of the most delectable variety,[8]
such as swallow's nest and shark's fin, dishes of the very finest kind. The only items lacking were:
Dragon's liver and phoenix marrow.[9]
Everything displayed:
The utmost discrimination and opulence.
Even the fare provided for the enjoyment of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching himself:
Did not surpass this.[10]
The attendants on duty provided goblets made of "Heaven penetrating rhinoceros horn,"[11] which they filled with Ma-ku wine.[12] They handed one of them to Chai Ch'ien, who first poured a libation to Heaven and then refilled it and offered a toast to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who responded in kind. After the two of them had resumed their seats, a profusion of candied fruits and hot dishes to go with the wine were served to them, one after another:
Like a stream of flowing water.
After:
Two rounds of wine had been consumed,

Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Chai Ch'ien, "This visit on your pupil's part is motivated solely by the desire to offer his birthday congratulations to the venerable grand preceptor. I have seen fit to provide a few insignificant gifts to show my filial feelings for the grand preceptor, which I anticipate that he will not refuse. But it has been your pupil's wish for some time to become even more closely attached to him. If my kinsman would be so kind as to broach the matter with him in advance, so that I might become a protégé of the grand preceptor's, and be acknowledged by him as an adopted son, I would feel that:
The entire span of my natural life,[13]
will not have been lived in vain. I don't know whether you might be willing to propose this matter to him in order to accommodate your pupil, or not."
"Where's the difficulty in that?" replied Chai Ch'ien. "This patron of ours, although he may be a high official at court, is extremely susceptible to flattery. Upon seeing the lavish gifts that you have provided today, he is certain to augment your office and rank, let alone acknowledge you as an adopted son. He is sure to agree to it."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:
His delight could not be contained.[14]
After they had been drinking for some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing suggested, "Let's not drink any more."
"Have another cup," urged Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "Why should we stop?"
"Tomorrow there is serious business to attend to," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so I don't dare have too much to drink."
Only after repeated urging did he consent to have one more cup.
Majordomo Chai Ch'ien saw to it that Hsi-men Ch'ing's attendants were provided with food and wine, and he ordered that the horses should be led back to the stables in the rear. At this point the utensils were cleared away, and he invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to his studio in the back of the mansion where he was to rest for the night. There he found prepared for him an ornate gilt lacquer canopy bed with mermaid silk curtains, held open with silver hooks, revealing a fine embroidered quilt within, that was redolent of incense. After his band of page boys had helped Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his clothes and stockings, he got into bed to:
Sleep by himself in solitary slumber.[15]
This was something that Hsi-men Ch'ing had never been used to, and he found it difficult to get through the night. Waiting it out until dawn, he was prepared to get up, but since in Chai Ch'ien's quarters:
The gates and doors were all closed,
where was he to get any water with which to wash his face? It was not until 10:00 AM that someone with a key came through to unlock the doors. After this, one page boy came in with a towel, while another came into the studio with a wash basin and filled it with perfumed water. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished washing up and combing his hair, he donned his "loyal and tranquil hat," put on his formal outer garments, and sat down all by himself in the studio.
Who should appear at this juncture but Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, who came in, greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing, and sat down. An attendant then brought in a crimson box containing some thirty delectable delicacies, and a silver flagon, from which he poured out wine to go with their breakfast.
"Please go ahead and enjoy your breakfast," said Chai Ch'ien. "Your pupil is going to go into the residence beforehand, and say a word to the master, after which it will be appropriate for you to bring in your gifts."
"You are putting yourself to a lot of trouble on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After:
Several cups of wine had been consumed,
breakfast was served and eaten, and the utensils were cleared away.
"If you will just sit here for the time being," said Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, "I will go ahead into the residence and be back in no time at all."
After Majordomo Chai Ch'ien had gone on this errand, it was not long before he hurried back to his own quarters and reported to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor is still in his studio, washing up and combing his hair, while outside, the officials, both civil and military, from the entire court, are waiting in vain for the chance to congratulate him on his birthday. Your pupil has already spoken to His Honor about it. Right now, you can proceed in to offer your congratulations ahead of the rest, so as not to be lost in the crowd, while your pupil will follow right behind you."
On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Unable to contain his delight,
and ordered his attendants, along with several servants from Chai Ch'ien's household, to transport the twenty carrier loads of silver and gold, bolts of silk, etc., out to the front of the grand preceptor's residence. The entire retinue responded with one voice and set about their task without delay, while Hsimen Ch'ing donned his official cap and girdle and proceeded after them in a sedan chair.
What should he encounter but a confused hubbub created by the crowds of officials, both high and low:
Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,
as they gathered to offer their birthday congratulations. From a distance, Hsimen Ch'ing caught sight of another official, riding in a sedan chair, on his way into the Dragon's Virtue precinct, whom he recognized, after taking a closer look, to be none other than the now well-to-do gentleman and holder of a supernumerary title as squire, Miao Ch'ing. Who could have anticipated that Miao Ch'ing had also caught sight of Hsi-men Ch'ing. The two of them got out of their sedan chairs, bowed to each other, and exchanged the customary amenities about the weather.
It so happens that Miao Ch'ing was now a substantial man of property and had also acquired a prestige title for himself, in addition to which, he had earlier contrived to become a protégé of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. That is why he had come to offer his birthday congratulations and happened to run into his old friend. On this occasion, the two of them hastily exchanged a few words by the roadside before taking leave of each other.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in front of the grand preceptor's mansion, what should he see? Behold:
The hall extends like P'ei Tu's Green Wilderness Hall,[16]
Seeming to reach into the cloudy empyrean;
The pavilion rises like T'ai-tsung's Ling-yen Pavilion,[17]
As though extending right up to the stars.
The area in front of the gate is spacious enough for horses to wheel around;
The memorial posts outside the entrance are fit for the display of banners.
Throughout the forest of brocades,[18]
The wind carries the brilliance of the thrushes' cries;
Amid the piles of gold and silver.[19]
The sun enhances the fragrance of the flowering trees.
The rafters and beams are crafted out of sandalwood;
The steps and stairs are paved with "sobering stones."[20]
To either side the ladies forming "fleshly screens,"[21] are all Hsi-shihs or Red-dusters;[22]
Throughout the halls are arrayed valuable antiques, all Chou tripods or Shang vessels.
Shining ever so brightly,
There are twelve luminescent pearls suspended on high;
So that even in the dark of night no lamp oil is needed.
Prestigious in appearance,
Three thousand retainers gather in pearl-studded shoes;[23]
Those strumming their sword hilts are all eminent men.[24]
Though they hail from the Nine Provinces and Four Seas,[25]
The teeming crowds of officials, both high and low,
Have all come to proffer congratulations.
Even among the grand secretaries of the Six Ministries,
And the supreme commanders of the Three Border Regions,
There are none who do not bow their heads.
Truly:
Second only to the respect due the Son of Heaven, Lord of Ten Thousand Years,
Is the veneration extended to the chief councilor who presides over the court.
Hsi-men Ch'ing made a respectful bow as he approached the main gateway. He noticed that the door in the center was closed, and that the officials all went in through a side door.
"Why is it," Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "that on such a special day as this, the main door in not open?"
"It so happens," explained Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, "that the main door has been used by the emperor when favoring the grand preceptor with a visit. For this reason, no one else presumes to go in or out through that door."
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Majordomo Chai Ch'ien proceeded through a number of doors, all of which were guarded by military officers, who did not permit the slightest irregularity.
Upon seeing Chai Ch'ien, each of them asked, "Majordomo, where does your guest come from?"
"My kinsman is from Shantung," replied Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "He has come to congratulate His Honor on his birthday."
After this interrogation, they proceeded through several more doors and turned a number of corners. Everywhere they looked they saw nothing but:
Painted beams and carved rafters,[26]
as befitted:
The residence of a Chin or Chang.[27]
They also became aware of the faint sound of drums and music, that
Seemed to come from Heaven itself.
Once again, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked about this, saying, "Since, in this location, we are:
Isolated from the homes of the people,
where does this:
Resounding clamor of drums and music,
come from?"
"It is created by the female musicians that His Honor is training," replied Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "They form a troupe of twenty-four persons in all. They know how to perform the Dance of the Daughters of M[illegible]ra,[28] the Dance of Rainbow Skirts,[29] and the Dance of Kuan-yin.[30] They perform before His Honor during breakfast, at lunch, and at evening banquets. I imagine that at present they are entertaining him at breakfast."
Before Hsi-men Ch'ing had heard him out, his nose sensed:
The aroma of an exotic fragrance,[31]
and the sound of the music drew ever nearer.
"We are now approaching His Honor's studio," said Majordomo Chai Ch'ien. "Walk a little more softly."
After they had traversed a zigzag gallery, what should they see but a large reception chamber that resembled:
A temple hall or an immortal's palace.
In front of this chamber there were cranes such as those ridden by immortals, as well as peacocks and other varieties of rare birds. In addition:
All four seasons produced their never-fading flowers,
including alabaster blossoms, night-blooming cereus, and Chinese hibiscus. The entire scene:
Glittered and scintillated,[32]
to such effect that:
It is impossible to do it justice.[33]
Hsi-men Ch'ing was too diffident to barge in unannounced and asked Majordomo Chai Ch'ien to precede him, after which, he also made his way:
Hesitatingly and punctiliously,
to the front of the hall. In the position of honor at the upper end of the chamber, there was placed a grand preceptor's folding armchair, [34] covered with a tiger skin, on which there sat a figure, garbed in a crimson python robe. It was the grand preceptor himself. Behind a standing screen, there were arrayed thirty or forty beautiful women, all of whom were dressed in palace style, holding towels and fans, in order to minister to his needs.
Majordomo Chai Ch'ien stood to one side, while Hsi-men Ch'ing faced the upper end of the chamber and kowtowed four times. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching then stood up and, availing himself of a velvet mat, responded to the homage of his visitor with a single obeisance, in recognition of the fact that this was the first time they had met. After this, Majordomo Chai Ch'ien went up close to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, whispered a few words into his ear, and then came back down again.
Recognizing that this colloquy must have pertained to his request, Hsimen Ch'ing, once again, faced the upper end of the chamber and kowtowed four times, while, this time, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching did not reply in kind. These four kowtows signified that he recognized the recipient as his adoptive father. From that time on, the two of them addressed each other as father and son.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then initiated the conversation by saying, "Your son has no way to adequately express his filial feelings for his father. But since today is your birthday, I have brought a few insignificant gifts from home, merely to express the meaning of:
A goose feather conveyed a thousand li,[35]
and to say to Your Honor:
May you live as long as the Southern Hills."
"How could I be worthy to accept what you have to offer?" said Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. "Please have a seat."
An attendant brought in a chair for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed toward the upper end of the chamber, announced, "I am taking my seat," and then sat down on the west side of the room to have some tea.
Meanwhile, Majordomo Chai Ch'ien ran hastily out to the gate and called for the bearers of the gifts to bring their twenty-odd loads inside, where he had the lids taken off the rattan boxes, and handed up a list of the presents. These consisted of a crimson python robe, a dragon robe of statutory green, twenty bolts of brocade in Han dynasty patterns, twenty bolts of Szechwan brocade, twenty bolts of asbestos fabric, and twenty bolts of cloth imported from the Western Ocean. [36] In addition, there were forty bolts of fabrics in flowered and plain patterns, a girdle with a jade plaque depicting the king of the Lion Barbarians, [37] a girdle with a plaque of aloeswood enchased with gold, ten pairs each of jade cups and cups of rhinoceros horn, eight goblets of pure gold enchased with floral designs, ten luminescent pearls, and two hundred ounces of gold for his personal expenditures. All of these things were being offered to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching as:
The customary presentation gifts.
When Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching had finished perusing the list of presents and observed that some twenty carrier loads had been brought in, he was exceedingly pleased. On the one hand, he expressed his gratitude repeatedly, while telling Majordomo Chai Ch'ien to have them moved into the storehouse, and, on the other hand, he ordered that wine should be served for the entertainment of his guest.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, observing how busy his host was, put forward a pretext for taking leave of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai, to which the grand preceptor responded, "In that case, be sure to come back early this afternoon."

Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed to his host and got up to leave, while Grand Preceptor Ts'ai saw him off for a few steps but did not continue any further. Hsimen Ch'ing, as before, was accompanied on his way out by Majordomo Chai Ch'ien, who, because he had further business to conduct inside the mansion, then bade him farewell and went back inside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to Chai Ch'ien's quarters, where he doffed his official cap and girdle, consumed another fine repast that had been prepared for him, and then went back to the studio to take a nap.
In due course, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching sent a houseman to invite him to a party, and Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with some "fan money" and told him, "You go ahead back. I'll follow along shortly."
He then brushed off his official cap and girdle, directed Tai-an to prepare a considerable number of sealed envelopes containing tips and put them into a calling card case, and set off for the grand preceptor's residence in a sedan chair, accompanied by his four page boys. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching had invited each and every one of the officials, both civil and military, from the entire court, who had come to tender their congratulations, to attend a drinking party. Beginning with the next day, they were to come in three contingents. The first day was to be for the distaff relatives of the imperial family and palace eunuchs. The second day was to be for the grand secretaries of the Six Ministries and officials from other prestigious offices. The third day was to be for other officials, both high and low, from the Inner and Outer Courts. An exception was made in the case of Hsi-men Ch'ing alone. On the one hand, because he was a guest who had come from afar, and on the other hand, because he had presented so many gifts, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching was particularly pleased with him. For this reason, on the actual day of his birthday, he had invited only Hsi-men Ch'ing to come all by himself.
Upon hearing that his newly adopted son, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had arrived, he hastened out to the portico to welcome him in.
Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, saying, "Pray precede me, Father," before bending his back and circumspectly stepping over the threshold.
"I have put you and your entourage to the trouble of coming a great distance," said Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, "and occasioned you the expense of your magnanimous gifts. The fact that I have invited you over for a brief visit today is merely:
A paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings."[38]
"The fact that your son is still able to:
Bear Heaven above and tread the Earth below,"[39]
said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is entirely owing to his father's abundant grace. These insignificant expressions of his respect are:
Scarcely worthy of consideration."[40]
The two of them went on to engage in:
Intimate laughter and conversation,
just as though they were really father and son. Meanwhile, the twenty female musicians simultaneously struck up a tune, and the members of the household staff who were on duty served them with wine. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching wished to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a preliminary toast, which Hsi-men Ch'ing stalwartly declined, on the grounds that he was unworthy of the honor, but was finally induced to accept, remaining on his feet as he drained it to the bottom. After this, they sat down to the feast.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung to bring him a gold goblet in the shape of a peach, which he filled to the brim with wine, and then, approaching Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's seat, got down on his knees before him and said, "May my father live for a thousand years."
Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's face was suffused with joy as he said, "Get up my son," and, accepting the proffered cup, drained it to the bottom.
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing get back to his feet and then sit down in his place as before. On this occasion, it being a lavish feast in the residence of the grand councilor, a myriad varieties of exotic rarities were served up, but there is no need to describe all of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking with his host until dusk, when he distributed the sealed envelopes containing tips to the various servitors and then expressed his gratitude and took his leave, saying, "Father, I know how busy you are. Your son would like to hereby express his humble thanks. In the days to come I will not presume to seek another meeting with you."
He then proceeded out the gate of the mansion and returned to the quarters of Chai Ch'ien to rest overnight.
The next day he wanted to go pay his respects to Miao Ch'ing and sent Tai-an to find out where he was staying. After the better part of the day, Taian succeeded in tracking him down and ascertained that he was living in the residence of Eunuch Director Li Yen,[41] which was located behind the Forbidden City.
Upon making his way there, he sent Tai-an ahead with a calling card to announce his visit, and Miao Ch'ing came out to welcome him, saying, "Your pupil has been sitting here all by himself and was just thinking how nice it would be to have an intimate friend with whom to chat. Your arrival is providential."
He then insisted on entertaining his visitor with a feast, and Hsi-men Ch'ing could not refuse but consented to remain for the occasion. There and then:
Rare viands from the hills and seas,
too many to describe, were laid before them. There were also two singing boys, with:
Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes,[42]
who opened up their throats and sang several song suites for their entertainment.
During the course of their performance, Hsi-men Ch'ing pointed to Taian, Ch'in-t'ung, Shu-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung and remarked to Miao Ch'ing, "Just look at that bunch of imbeciles. All they care about is their food and drink. How can they be compared to these two of yours?"
Miao Ch'ing laughed and said, "My only fear is that they might not be able to serve you satisfactorily. But if you admire them that much, I would have no problem making you a present of them."
Hsi-men Ch'ing demurred, saying, "How could I presume to:
Appropriate the source of another's pleasure?"[43]
They continued drinking until the late watches of the night, when Hsi-men Ch'ing took leave of Miao Ch'ing and returned, as before, to Chai Ch'ien's dwelling to sleep.
During the days that followed, each and every one of the officers on the staff of the grand councilor's mansion insisted on inviting him for a drink, so that he was detained for another eight or nine days.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Anxious to return as swiftly as an arrow,[44]
so he told Tai-an to get his baggage together, but Majordomo Chai Ch'ien tried as hard as he could to get him to prolong his stay. As a result, he felt compelled to spend another evening drinking with him, during which they reiterated their gratification at the fact that they were united by the ties of marriage and felt the greatest affection for each other.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up bright and early, took leave of his host, and headed back for Shantung. Along the way they suffered the usual vicissitudes of travel:
Sleeping by the waters and dining in the wind,[45]
but no more of this.
To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had set off for the Eastern Capital to offer his birthday congratulations, the sisterhood of his wife and concubines had anxiously awaited his return, concerned as they were for his safety. For the most part they kept to their quarters, doing needlework, and not coming out to engage in idle pastimes.
Among them, only P'an Chin-lien dressed herself up to look:
As lovely as a flower or a piece of jade,[46]
Making a captivating spectacle of herself,
as she sallied forth to join the maidservants in playing at guess-fingers, or competing at dominoes.
She talked, and she laughed,
with total abandon, guffawing raucously, heedless of whether anyone saw her or not. All she could think about was how to hook up with Ch'en Ching-chi, the thought of which produced turmoil in her heart and got her all hot and bothered, so that she:
Gave vent to long sighs as well as short,
propped her cheek upon her hand, and stared vacantly into space. She kept hoping that Ch'en Ching-chi would come back inside, so they could get down to business together, but what she did not realize was that he was on duty in the shop every day and didn't have time for such things. She would have liked to go out looking for him herself, but there were so many maidservants going back and forth that it was not convenient for her to do so. During the daylight hours, just like:
An ant on a hot plate,
she constantly:
Ran in and ran out,
without being content to sit in her quarters.
One day, when:
The breeze was genial and the sun was warm,[47]
Chin-lien enhanced her person with quantities of aromatic musk and liquid-ambar, walked out behind the summerhouse, and gazed longingly in the direction of the "snow cave." But Ch'en Ching-chi was doing his daily stint in the shop up front and was unable to get away and come into the garden. After gazing for a while without seeing him, all she could do was to return to her quarters:
Take her writing brush in hand,
and incant a few lines to herself before jotting them down in the form of a letter, sealing it, and giving it to Ch'un-mei to deliver to Ch'en Ching-chi.
When Ching-chi received it, he tore open the envelope and read it over from the beginning. It turned out to be not an ordinary letter, but the words of a song. When Ching-chi finished reading it, he was so flustered he dropped his business in the shop and rushed inside to the back of the summerhouse, where he proceeded to look around. Lo and behold, when Ch'un-mei had gone back to her quarters and reported to P'an Chin-lien, she lost no time in running out to the summerhouse herself, so the two of them ran into each other there. Just like someone whose:
Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin,
she couldn't help throwing herself into Ching-chi's arms, pinching his cheeks, and giving him a succession of kisses, in the course of which they sucked each other's tongues so assiduously that the sound of the sucking was quite audible.
"You fickle short-life of a lousy jailbird!" she complained. "Ever since you had to leave after our rendezvous in my room was broken up by Hsiao-yü,[48] it's been some time since we've been able to meet. In the last few days, since your father-in-law went off to the Eastern Capital, I've been sitting on the k'ang all by myself, longing for you, with the tears streaming from my eyes. Do you mean to say that your ears haven't even gotten hot? I've been thinking things over carefully, and concluded that if you're going to be so fickle, even if you should desert me, I'd simply have to give you up. But when it comes to the crunch, I just can't let you go. It's the old story of:
The fond female and the fickle lover,
only you seem to be completely devoid of feeling."
Just as they were beginning to get into it together, who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou should catch sight of what they were up to with her sardonic eye. When Chin-lien happened to look up and see that they were being observed, she responded by giving him a shove with her free hand that nearly knocked Ching-chi head over heels, and the two of them hastily went their separate ways. But no more of this.
Later that same day, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Li P'ing-erh were sitting together, when whom should they see but Tai-an, who came agitatedly running through the door, kowtowed upon seeing Yüeh-niang, and said, "Father is about to get back. I've been riding ahead on horseback, carrying the official tally authorizing the provision of fresh mounts at the relay stations along the way, which is why I've arrived ahead of him. By this time, he must be no more than twenty li from here."
"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"I had breakfast this morning," said Tai-an, "but I haven't had any lunch."
"Go to the kitchen and get something to eat," said Yüeh-niang, "and tell them to prepare some food for when the master gets home. At that time, our entire sisterhood of wives from all six chambers will go as a group to welcome him in the reception hall."
Truly:
Though the poet may have grown old, Ying-ying remains at hand;
When the gentleman comes home again, Yen-yen will bestir herself.[49]
The four of them engaged in idle chat for some time, when, before they knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in front of the gate and dismounted from his sedan chair. The crowd of his wife and concubines welcomed him inside together. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang exchanged greetings first, after which, Meng Yü-lou, Li P'ing-erh, and P'an Chin-lien greeted him in turn. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished exchanging the customary amenities about the weather with his wife and concubines from all six chambers, Shut'ung, Ch'in-t'ung, and Hua-t'ung also came in and kowtowed to the ladies, after which, they went to the kitchen to get something to eat.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told them in detail about the hardships he had encountered on the road, about how he had put up at Chai Ch'ien's residence, about Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching's lavish kindness the next day, and about how he had been invited to drinking parties day after day by various palace eunuchs.
He then asked Li P'ing-erh, "How has the child been doing all this time? And how have you been treating your own ailments? Have the medications prescribed for you by Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i proven to be at all effective? Although I made the trip to the Eastern Capital, I haven't been able to get our household affairs off my mind. And I haven't known how business has been going in my various shops. For all these reasons, I've been anxious to get home."
"Nothing has happened so far as the child is concerned," said Li P'ing-erh, "and as for my own state, after taking the prescribed medicine, I've been feeling somewhat better."
Yüeh-niang, on the one hand, directed everyone to help stow away the luggage, in addition to the gifts for the road he had received from Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, while, on the other hand, she arranged to have a meal prepared for Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. That evening, she also saw to it that wine was served in order to welcome Hsi-men Ch'ing back home from his trip. Hsi-men Ch'ing elected to spend that night, as well as the next, making two nights in all, in Yüeh-niang's quarters. Truly, their feelings of mutual affection were like:
Encountering sweet rain after a prolonged draught, or
Meeting an old acquaintance when traveling abroad.[50]
But there is no need to describe all of this.
The next day, Ch'en Ching-chi and Hsi-men Ta-chieh came to see him and discussed the accounts for the shop. When Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Shih-chieh heard that he had returned home, they also came to see him.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out to greet them, the two of them said with one voice, "Brother, you must have had:
A hard time of it on the road."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told them in detail about the opulence of the Eastern Capital, and about the kindness with which he had been treated by the grand preceptor, to which the two of them responded by expressing no end of wonderment and admiration. That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing retained the two of them and drank with them all day.
When Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, was on the verge of getting up to go, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I have a request I'd like to make of you, Brother, but I don't know whether you will accede to it or not."
As he spoke, he lowered his face:
Half choking on his words and half spitting them out.
"Pray express yourself without constraint," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The fact is," said Cadger Ch'ang, "that the house I'm living in is not convenient, and I'd like to find another one to move into, but I don't have the necessary silver. For this reason, I'd like to ask you, Brother, if you'd be willing to help me out. At a future date, of course, Brother, I'd pay you back with interest."
"Among companions like ourselves," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need is there to speak of interest? At the moment, however, I'm rather pressed for cash and have no way to come up with the silver. You'll have to wait until my manager, Han Tao-kuo, gets back with his boatload of goods. I should be able to manage it then."
When they had finished speaking, Cadger Ch'ang and Ying Po-chüeh expressed their thanks and departed. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Miao Ch'ing met with Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the grand preceptor's mansion, he had invited him to a party, and at the party he had promised to make him a present of the two singing boys. On a later day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been:
Anxious to return as swiftly as an arrow,
and consequently had departed for home without saying goodbye to him. Thinking that Hsi-men Ch'ing was still in the capital, Miao Ch'ing sent one of his retainers to Chai Ch'ien's residence to ask after him, only to be told that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had set out for home three days before.
Only after this retainer reported back to him did Miao Ch'ing understand what had happened, and he thought to himself, "As the saying goes:
A single word from a gentleman, is like
A single whip stroke to a swift steed.
Under the circumstances, if I don't give them to him, it really wouldn't matter, but if he should hold it against me, it would be hard to remain on speaking terms with him in the future."
Consequently, he called out the two singing boys and said to them, "The other day, when I invited His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing from Shantung to come over for a drink, in the course of the party, I promised to make him a present of the two of you, but I find that he has already left the Eastern Capital to return home. It is, therefore, now my intention to send you to him there. You must pack up your things right away, so that, as soon as I've prepared a letter for him, I can send you on your way."

The two singing boys pled with him together, saying, "We have served you faithfully for some years already, so how can you now consent to get rid of us so callously? Besides, we don't know a thing about the disposition of this Honorable Hsi-men Ch'ing. We hope that you will make an appropriate decision on our behalf."
"You don't know it," said Miao Ch'ing, "but the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is possessed of:
Wealth enough to splash against the sky,
and is:
Copiously supplied with gold and silver.
The position he occupies:
Combines both civil and military duties.
And at present he has been acknowledged as an adopted son under the patronage of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. Even among the palace eunuchs and court officials there are few who are not on intimate terms with him. Out of his home he operates two shops selling silk and satin piece goods, and currently he is also thinking of opening a commercial armed escort service for the protection of goods in transit. The profits he takes in from these enterprises are truly incalculable. Moreover, he is:
Good-natured and agreeable in disposition,[51]
given to:
Saluting the breeze and invoking the moon.[52]
In his home he supports some seventy or eighty maidservants, every one of which is:
Dressed in satins and affects a jacket;
while in his inner apartments he has at his disposal some five or six wives, every one of which is:
Studded with pearls and draped in gold.
Each one of the boy actors and adult troupers that he patronizes borrows money from him and does his bidding. Virtually all of the courtesans from the different streets of the licensed quarter are also the recipients of his favor. All of this goes without saying. The problem is that at that drinking party the other day I promised to make him a present of the two of you, and now you can hardly expect me to go back on my word."
To this the singing boys responded by saying, "Master, over the last few years, who knows how much effort you have expended in training us to play music and sing; and now that we have finally begun to master our stringed instruments, rather than keeping us at home for your own enjoyment, how can you bring yourself to give us away to minister to the pleasure of someone else?"
When they had finished speaking, before they knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow from their eyes.
Miao Ch'ing, who also felt himself to be:
Wretched and unhappy,[53]
said, "My little ones, what you say is true enough. I also have wondered why I should feel compelled to do such a thing. But:
If a man is untrustworthy,
How can that be tolerated?[54]
I can scarcely disregard these words, uttered by the sage Confucius himself. Under the present circumstances, there is nothing you can do about it. I'll depute a retainer to escort you there, and write a letter enjoining him to look upon you with a favorable eye. When you get there, you'll have an even happier time of it than you've had in my service here."
He then had his private secretary draft a conventional letter inquiring about the health of the recipient on eight-columned note paper, to which he appended the fact that he was sending him the singing boys and asked him to look favorably upon them. He also had him write out a list of presents, including a bolt of silk and the customary book and kerchief, to serve as indications of his good will, and ordered his servants, Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, to take charge of these documents, and escort the two singing boys on their journey. In no time at all, their mounts were saddled, and, taking their bags of bedding and luggage with them, they set out for the home of Hsi-men Ch'ing in Shantung.
At the time of their departure, they were unable to suppress their feelings, with the result that:
The tears dripped down their cheeks.[55]
But since:
A master's order is hard to disobey,
there was no alternative, so:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
they kowtowed several times, bade Miao Ch'ing farewell:
Vaulted onto their horses,
and proceeded to wend their way forward. Behold:
Blue mountains encompass the horse's head,
Green waters surround the traveler's whip;
A wine flag is visible deep in the forest,
Before a thatched hut among sunset clouds.
Only due to the fact that,
Diverting the moving clouds,
The sound of their singing is peerless;
Before they are aware of it,
They must leave a kind master,
To brave the winds and mists of a trip.
The two of them,
Longing for home and thinking of their master,
Have taken the,
Romantic overtones of sandalwood clappers,
The classic tunes "Warm Spring" and "White Snow,"[56]
And completely forgotten them.
The two of them,
Hasting to their goal and speeding on their way,
Think only of,
The early accomplishment of their mission,
Enveloped in stars, proceeding by moonlight,[57]
Forgetting to sleep at night.
Truly:
In the morning they were gifted singing boys in Miao Ch'ing's residence;
But by evening they were merely entertainers in the Hsi-men establishment.
Gazing into the distance, they observed that there was a wine flag suspended deep in a forest of green trees before them.
One of the boy-singers said to the other, "Brother, we've been traveling all day long and are getting rather hungry. Let's stop for a cup of wine before going any further."
Lo and behold, the four of them promptly:
Rolled out of their saddles,[58]
and walked into the wine shop. On the signboard were displayed two lines that put it very well:
Spirits and immortals have deposited their jade girdles;
Ministers and councilors have pawned their golden sables.[59]
Truly, it was a fine wine shop.
The four of them sat down and called for the waiter, telling him, "Draw us two ewers of wine, pound some scallions and garlic, and serve us a large side of pork, together with a few saucers of bean curd and other side dishes."
Just as they were about to:
Unburden themselves and drink lustily,
all of a sudden they happened to look around and saw that on the whitewashed wall there were two columns of characters in "flying white"[60] calligraphy, that read:
A thousand li is not a great distance,
To return after ten years is not late.
So long as we remain in this universe,
Why need we mourn over our separation?
When the eyes of the two singing boys were confronted with these sentiments, they couldn't help feeling affected by them, like:
The apothecary who finds himself to be ill.
Before they knew it, with a gush, two rows of tears began to flow from their eyes.
One of them said to the other, "Brother, we served Squire Miao faithfully, in the expectation that we'd remain together till the end, like:
A plant-stem that reaches all the way to the ground.[61]
Who would have thought that in the course of a drinking party:
With a single word or a couple of sentences,[62]
he would casually give us away to someone else?
People away from home are at a disadvantage.[63]
Who knows what will happen to us after leaving him?"
Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih attempted to reassure them with soothing words for a while, after which, having eaten a meal, they remounted their horses and resumed their journey.
What with their:
Four horses, and
Sixteen hooves,
they made decidedly good progress. In no more than a few days, they arrived in the vicinity of Ch'ing-ho district in Tung-p'ing prefecture. The four of them, after dismounting and tethering their horse, inquired for directions and eventually found their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence on Amethyst Street.
To resume our story, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned home from the Eastern Capital, he had been kept busy every day by people sending gifts to him, or inviting him to parties, so that day after day was spent carousing with his:
Three friends and four companions.
Not only did Wu Yüeh-niang provide an entertainment to welcome him back from his trip, but he was also obliged to resume intimate relations with each of his concubines in their various quarters, so that, for days on end, he was:
Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain.
For this reason, he had not even reported to the yamen, or canceled the certificate entitling him to time off from his official duties.
On this particular day, finding himself at leisure, he went to the yamen, where he took his place on the bench, held roll call, reheard the cases of all the defendants who had been brought to court for the crimes of rape, assault, gambling, or larceny, and took the time to sign the documents that had accumulated during his absence. He then got into an open sedan chair and headed for home, escorted by a number of jailers who shouted to clear the way.
Whom should he see upon his arrival but Miao Hsiu, Miao Shih, and the two singing boys, who had been waiting at the gate for some time and now followed his sedan chair to the front reception hall, where they got down on their knees and explained, "We come from Squire Miao Ch'ing of Yang-chou and are the bearers of a letter asking after Your Honor's health."
Having kowtowed to him, they got up and stood to one side. Hsi-men Ch'ing, after acknowledging their salutation by raising his hand, and telling them to get up, spent some time running through the customary formalities of inquiring about Squire Miao's doings since they parted, and discussing the weather. He then summoned Shu-t'ung and had him cut open the protective outer envelope with a pair of silver scissors, after which he tore open the inner envelope, unfolded the enclosed note, and carefully perused it.
What should he observe at this juncture but Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, who got down on their knees as before, in order to present the numerous gifts they had brought with them, saying, "These are just a few tokens of our squire's filial sentiments, which we beg that Your Honor will deign to accept."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was:
Unable to contain his delight,
promptly told Tai-an to take charge of the gifts, while he invited Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih to get up, saying, "Who would have thought that when your master and I:
Encountered each other a thousand li from home,[64]
Our feelings were genial, our thoughts in accord,
to such an extent that the squire, in his boundless good will, promised to make me a present of these singing boys? Thinking at the time that these were merely:
Words uttered in his cups,
I had long since forgotten them. Because I was anxious to get home without delay, I failed to call upon him in order to say goodbye. And now, just as I was thinking about this, who would have thought that, for the squire:
A word of assent is worth a thousand pieces of gold,[65]
so that, even at a distance, he has remembered his promise. I recall that among famous examples of fidelity between men of yore, the pledge of friendship that led Fan Shih to honor his promise to visit Chang Shao at an appointed time though they were a thousand li apart, [66] in both ancient and modern times:
Is considered to be an exemplary tale.[67]
And nowadays, truly, men such as this squire of yours are not easily come by."

Praising his strong points and acclaiming his virtue,
he continued expressing his gratitude in fulsome detail for some time.
Lo and behold, at this juncture, the two singing boys once again approached him and kowtowed several times, saying, "The squire enjoined us to serve Your Honor faithfully and expressed the hope that you would look upon us with a favorable eye."
Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the two singing boys were clean-cut in appearance, and truly:
Both slender and seductive.
Although they may not have been females, who:
Wear their clothes in two pieces;[68]
they were superior to mere girls, whose:
Lips are red and teeth are white.[69]
Hsi-men Ch'ing felt:
As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make him happier,
and celebrated the occasion by inviting his four managers to a party in the front reception hall. On the one hand, he prepared generous gifts of silks and satins and other valuables, and wrote a letter to thank Squire Miao for his consideration, while, on the other hand, he had a room prepared for the two singing boys and told them that he would expect them to wait upon him in his studio.
Lo and behold, when Ying Po-chüeh and company:
Got wind of this affair, and
Were apprised of this event,
they all came to see for themselves. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly told Tai-an to obtain some dishes of food, appetizers, snacks, and new wine from the rear compound, and lay them out on an Eight Immortals table for the entertainment of his guests. In the course of the proceedings, he called upon the two singing boys to come out and sing for them.
Lo and behold:
Holding up their sandalwood clappers,
they started to sing, performing a song suite beginning with the tune "Fresh Water Song":
In the little garden last night the river plum blossomed,
Bringing with it an intoxicating aura of a different kind.
I welcome the smiles of the pear blossom,
But envy the lissome waist of the willow,
And inquire of the rose-leaved raspberry,
If it blooms till the crab apple flowers.
To the tune "Stopping the Horse to Listen":
Over the sparse hedge along the country road,
Gust after gust of fragrant breeze attracts the swallows.
By the secluded paving in the little garden,
Flurry after flurry of clearing rain moves past the woods.
Her fragrant heart remains undetected by the butterflies;
Her subtle fragrance has not yet been scented by the bees.
As she leans over every balustrade,
Who knows how many heartbreaking thoughts she is beset by?
To the binary tunes "Wild Geese Alight" and "Victory Song":
Lo and behold: in the azure shade, Hsi Shih knits her brows.
With red drops, petals are stained by the cuckoo's pearly tears;
Dancing about, sprigs of flowers adorn shiny silken caps;
Fluttering airily, blossoms cascade down before the belvedere.
As ever, their fragrant aura permeates one's garments;
But their alluring forms are easily soiled in the mud.
Where they fall the fish are startled;
As they flutter hither, the butterflies become confused.
She wonders to herself,
"To whom can I entrust my yearning?"
And sorrows that,
The Peach Blossom Spring remains beyond her reach.
Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded with approval and exclaimed, "Sure enough, your singing is superb."
The two singing boys made a half obeisance by falling to one knee before him and said, "We've also learned the words to a set of four lyrics, which we can perform for you while we're at it, if you like."
"That would be even better," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and directed them to proceed. To the tune "The Whole River Is Red":
Tearing off a strip of Shantung silk,
With the aid of pigments and backing,
One depicts the scene of a herd boy in the spring.
The grass is short,
Spread out evenly over the level fields.
He sits idly on his brown water buffalo calf.
With a tattered volume in one hand, perched securely on the buffalo's back,
He sounds a few notes on his short flute, while traversing the emerald mist.
Thinking to indite a verse to go with the picture, one tries to compose a new lyric,
Putting the imagination to work.
If the composition is good enough,
It may be preserved in the Palace Library.
If the tune is sufficiently catchy,
It may be set to woodwinds and strings.
If sung without accompaniment,
Though the classic tune "Warm Spring" is hard to match,
The connoisseurs of a generation may yet praise it.
It will appeal to every taste, and people may compete to transcribe it.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the writing of the "Kao-t'ang fu,"[70]
The sentiment of the lyric will suffice.
To the same tune:
One delineates a scene of summer plowing.
Beyond the suburban plain,
The paths between the fields run east and west.[71]
The village commons are irregular,
Encircled by the turquoise hues of the hills.
The embankments and dikes are interconnected.
The color green pervades the enclosed fields, teeming with millet and rice.
The ears of wheat are densely clustered; silkworms fill their frames.
And there also appears to be a stream circling the wattled gate,
By the sheer slopes of the hills.
Someone is leaning on a bamboo staff,
Skirting the hills and valleys,
Traversing the woods and marshes,
Listening to the gibbons and cranes.
His son is plowing, his wife brings a hamper,
As they cooperate in the work of cultivation.
The tall trees provide ample shade where they settle down to rest.
Stroking their bulging bellies, they relax by stretching out their feet.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the composing of the "Airs of Pin,"[72]
The pleasures of rural life will be conveyed.
To the same tune:
When one has finished applying the colors,
The new picture turns out well,
Embellished as it is with streams and hills.
Faintly discernible,
There are sand spits beyond the riverbanks,
Green clover fern and red smartweed.
A stream of autumn light seems to connect the shorelines.
A figure in a short rain cape and bamboo hat is perceptible amid misty waves,
Trying to estimate how many fresh fish he has netted by this time;
But the perch are small.
Fishermen's songs arise,
Flying geese are remote,
The river moon is white,
Returning clouds are few.
Leaning by his matted window, he looks out for,
His sworn friends, the sea gulls.
One is tempted to ask how the forgotten concerns of the past,
Can be compared with the tranquillity of his present situation.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined, the singing of the song "Blue Waters,"[73]
One will rise above the dust of the world.
To the same tune:
On all sides the clouds are lowering:
The frozen flakes scatter,
Evenly covering the thatched dwelling.
The red brazier is warm,
In which his wife is baking sweet potatoes.

Pouring out vintage wine for himself,
The cottager tasks a servant to fetch fuel from outside the gate,
And calls to his son, who is playing with a crane in the courtyard.
If one can succeed in capturing this scene, and conveying it in a picture,[74]
It will gladden the mind's eye.
Wealth and distinction,
Are bestowed by Heaven;
To keep clear of excess,
Is one's only ambition.
Giving beauty and wonder free expression,
One adorns the scroll with fine lyrics.
Fearing lest one's own talent for poetic effusions be lacking,
One gives way to one whose literary devices are up to the task.
If one can only emulate the master who imagined the joys of "mulberry and elm,"[75]
One's countenance will be like jade.[76]
Sure enough:
Their tones divert the moving clouds;[77]
Their songs create a new "White Snow."

The quality of their performance induced the women from the rear compound, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, to come and listen. They were all exceedingly delighted by it and exclaimed, "How well they sing!"

Lo and behold, from her vantage point amid the crowd, P'an Chin-lien focused her gaze directly on the 2 singing boys and quietly muttered to herself, "These two youngsters not only sing well but in appearance, they're as handsome as can be." In her heart, she had already registered something of a partiality for them.

At the time, Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for the two singing boys to stay in an anteroom on the eastern side of the front courtyard. On the one hand, he directed that a meal should be provided for Miao Hsiu and Miao Shih, while, on the other hand, he prepared appropriate presents, and a reply, expressing his gratitude to Squire Miao Ch'ing.

## 079

## Chang Zhijie Buys a New House & Hsi-men Ch'ing Assists Ch'ang Shih-chieh; Ying Po-chüeh Recommends Licentiate Shui

Ximen Qing kept the two boys. He gave a letter of thanks to Miao Shi to take to his master with some presents, and some silver to Miao Shi himself. Then Miao Shi went home. Not long afterwards Chunyan died, and Chunhong was left alone.

Though Chang Zhijie had asked for Ximen Qing's help, the days passed and he was still without money. His landlord pressed him continually. Unfortunately for him, Ximen Qing, after coming back from the Eastern Capital, was kept busy going to one party after another. Chang Zhijie could not get hold of him. The proverb says: If friends meet, they cannot fail to help each other; but, when they do not meet, nothing is done. Chang Zhijie asked Ying Bojue to go to Ximen for him. Ximen was not at home. Chang Zhijie went mournfully home and his wife told him what she thought about him. "You call yourself a man," she said, "yet you can't get a house fit to live in, and here we are in utter misery. You have always bragged about your friendship with Master Ximen, but it doesn't look as though he would do much for you."

Chang Zhijie had a mouth but, after this, he dared not open it. He seemed dazed and did not utter a single word. The next day he got up very early in the morning and went to see Ying Bojue. He took him to a wine house and invited him to drink. "I do not wish to cause you any expense," Ying Bojue said, but Chang Zhijie pushed him into a chair. He ordered wine, a plate of smoked meat and another of fish. When they had drunk a few cups, Chang Zhijie said:

"I have bothered you several times to speak to his Lordship about my affairs, but, so far, we have not been able to see him and this business of my house is getting desperate. Last night my wife kept at me all night about it. I could not bear it. That is why I am up so early this morning. Now, Brother, won't you go to his Lordship again? I don't suppose he has gone out yet."

"Since you ask me," Bojue said, "I will certainly go, and I have no doubt we shall manage it today."

They drank more wine, then Ying Bojue said he must not drink too much so early in the day. Chang Zhijie pressed him to drink still one more cup, then he paid for the wine and they came out together and went to Ximen's house.

It was the beginning of autumn, and a pleasant wind was blowing from the west. Ximen Qing had been going to one party after another and was beginning to feel the strain. This day he had been invited by Eunuch Zhou, but he excused himself and did not go. Instead, he went to the garden with Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Li Ping'er. They enjoyed the flowers and were all very happy together.

Chang Zhijie and Ying Bojue were delighted to find Ximen at home. They went to the hall and sat there for a long time, but there was no sign of Ximen Qing. Shutong and Huatong came in with a large chest filled with silken clothes. As they passed, they shouted: "We've been carrying these things half a day, and we're nowhere near finished yet." Bojue asked them where Ximen Qing was.

"He is amusing himself in the garden," Shutong said.

"Then may I trouble you to tell him we are here?"

The two boys went on with their chest. After a while Shutong came out again and said: "Father says, will you wait a moment and he will be with you." They waited and, at last, Ximen came to them. They bowed to him and sat down.

"Brother," Bojue said, "you have been drinking much wine these last few days, and you must be very busy. What are you doing at home today?"

"Since I saw you last," Ximen Qing said, "I have had invitations every day. I have been drinking too much, and I'm tired of it. Today I ought to have gone to another party, but I made some excuse for not going."

"I have just seen a chest full of clothes," Bojue said. "Where have they come from?"

"It is nearly autumn," Ximen Qing said, "and we must have autumn clothes, you know. Those you saw are my first wife's, but that was only half of them. We haven't finished them all yet."

Chang Zhijie put out his tongue. "With six wives you must have to have six chests. What a nuisance! We poor people find it bad enough even to get a roll of cloth. You must be a rich man, Brother." Ying Bojue and Ximen Qing laughed.

"How is it that the things from Yangzhou have not arrived yet?" Bojue said. "We know nothing of the way business has been going or whether Li and Huang have let you have their money yet."

"Perhaps the boat is delayed." Ximen said, "I have not heard a word, and I am rather worried. Li and Huang have told me that they will not get their money till next month."

Bojue drew nearer to Ximen Qing. "You may remember," he said, "that the other day Brother Chang asked your help. The last few days you have been very busy, and we have not had an opportunity of mentioning the matter to you. Brother Chang's landlord is being very harsh, his wife grumbles every day, and he is at his wits' end. The weather is getting colder and colder and his fur coat is still in the pawnshop. Brother, you must show your kindness to him. You can't have forgotten the proverb: If we would help a man, let it be when he most needs help. If you help him so that his wife ceases to nag at him and he can find a house to live in, all the more credit to you. Brother Chang has asked me to come and beg you to help him at once."

"I certainly did promise to help him," Ximen Qing said, "but I spent a great deal of money on my visit to the Eastern Capital and I shall have to wait until Han comes back. Why is Brother Chang in such a hurry?"

"It isn't Brother Chang: it's his wife. She is the one who grumbles. You must do something for him without delay."

Ximen Qing thought for a while. Then he said: "Well, perhaps I may just be able to manage it. How many rooms will they need?"

"They are only husband and wife," Bojue said. "They will need an outer room, a reception room, a bedroom and a kitchen. They can't do with less than four rooms. They must have three or four pieces of silver. Brother, do this for them. Help them to get a house at once."

"I can only let him have a few taels today," Ximen Qing said. "With them he can buy clothes and furniture. When he has got his house, he shall have some more."

Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie stood up together and thanked him. Ximen Qing said to Shutong: "Go and ask the Great Lady to give you the silver that I have in a leather case." The boy went away and soon returned with the silver. "This is the money—about ten taels, I think— that I had at the Eastern Capital to give to the servants at his Eminence's Palace," Ximen Qing said. "Take it and buy a few things with it." He opened one of the packets and showed it to Chang Zhijie. "The silver is in packets of three or five *qian*," he said.

Chang Zhijie took them and put them in his pocket. He thanked Ximen Qing.

"Don't think I have deliberately kept you waiting," Ximen said. "But you hadn't fixed upon your house and I didn't have the money. When I do get some, you shall have more."

Chang Zhijie thanked him. They all sat down again.

"I have heard of men of past generations who were generous and open-handed," Bojue said. "The consequence was that their sons and grandsons were an honor to their family, and improved and extended their patrimony. On the other hand, I have heard of others, mean men who hoarded away their gold and treasure, whose sons and grandsons were anything but desirable. Sometimes they failed to preserve even the tombs of their ancestors. The justice of Heaven is unfailing."

"Yes." Ximen Qing said, "money should be made to circulate. It ought not to be buried away in one place. It is given us to use. If one man keeps a huge store of it for himself, someone else must go short. It is a crime to hoard away money and treasure."

Shutong brought food for them and the three men ate it. Chang Zhijie stood up, the money in his pocket, and went away in great delight. When he got home, his wife came out shouting and scolding as usual. "Now you barren fig tree! you impecunious rascal!" she cried. "Would you go away and leave your wife to starve? You seem quite pleased with yourself, but you ought to be ashamed. Here we are with no house to live in and the landlord always badgering us. I suppose you think I like to hear the sort of thing he says."

Chang Zhijie did not open his mouth. He waited until his wife had finished, then quietly took the silver from his pocket and put it on the table. He opened the packet. "Hullo, my square-holed brother, my dear square-holed brother! How bright and good you look! You make my body tingle all over. What a pity I can't swallow you down with a drop of water. If only you'd come to me earlier, that whore would not have been so rude to me."

His wife saw him set down twelve or thirteen taels of silver. She dashed to the table and tried to grab them.

"Ah," said Chang, "you have been nagging at me all this time, yet, the moment you set eyes on the silver, you seem to have become quite friendly. Tomorrow I am going to buy some clothes and get a place to live by myself. I'm tired of putting up with your tricks."

Mistress Chang smiled sweetly at him. "Brother," she said, "where did you get this silver?"

But Chang had nothing to say to her.

"Are you angry with me, Brother? I only want us to get a home. Now the money is here we must talk the matter over. We will buy a house and settle down. Why are you so angry? I have been a good wife to you. If you are angry with me, you are unjust."

Chang did not speak.

The woman continued, but he paid not the slightest attention. She began to feel abashed and started to cry. Chang sighed.

"You woman," he said, "you do no work in the fields. You do not weave. All you do is nag at me."

Mistress Chang shed more tears. Then they both shut their mouths tight and sat there silently, for there was no one to make peace between them. But Chang began to reflect. "The woman," he said to himself, "is in a very difficult position. Perhaps I ought not to be angry with her even if she does grumble about everything. It seems hardly kind not to speak to her. If Ximen Qing got to know about it, he would undoubtedly say that I am to blame." He smiled and said to his wife: "I am joking with you. I am not angry really. But you so often talk to me in this horrible strain, and I have never complained. I have just gone out of your way. Now I'll tell you all about this money. This morning you were so cantankerous that I could stand it no longer. I went to Brother Ying, gave him a drink and then we went to see his Lordship. By a stroke of luck, his Lordship happened to be at home. He had not gone to a party. Brother Ying was most kind. He did his utmost with his Lordship, and I got this money. He has promised that, when we find a house, he will give me some more. These twelve taels are for expenses and buying the things we need immediately."

"Now that you have this money," his wife said, "we must take care not to waste it. First of all, we must buy some winter clothes so that we won't freeze."

"Yes," Chang Zhijie said, "I was just going to suggest that. Here are twelve taels. We can buy a few clothes and some furniture. When we get the new house and are ready to move in, we shall look more respectable. I don't know how to express my appreciation of his Lordship's kindness. We shall certainly have to send him an invitation when we get into our new house."

"We will see about that later," said his wife.

The woman asked him if he had had anything to eat. "Yes," Chang Zhijie said, "I had something with his Lordship. But, doubtless, you have not. I will take some money and go and buy you some rice."

"Be careful you don't lose it, and please come straight back."

Chang Zhijie took a basket and went down the street. He bought mutton at the butcher's and rice at the rice shop. He took them home. His wife came to the door to meet him.

"Why did you buy this piece of mutton?" she said.

"You said you had a hard life, and, really, I ought to have killed an ox or two for you. This is but a trifling piece of meat."

Mistress Chang shook her finger at him. "You hardhearted thief. You still hate me. But I don't believe there is anything you can do about it."

"Probably," said Chang, "I shan't forgive you though you call me Brother and Darling and ask for forgiveness a thousand times. I will show my authority."

The woman laughed and went to the well to draw some water. Then she cooked the food, set a piece of mutton on the table and asked him to have some. "I have just had something," he said. "Eat it all yourself." The woman ate the food alone. She cleared the table and told him to go and buy some clothes. Chang Zhijie took some silver and went down the street. He went to several shops before he found what he wanted. He bought a black silk gown for his wife, a green silk skirt, a blue jacket and a white silk skirt, five pieces in all. For himself he bought a goose-yellow coat and a clove-colored gown. All this, with a few other things, cost him five taels and six *qian*.

"The things are not a bargain, but they are worth the money," his wife said. She put the clothes into a chest and decided to go and buy furniture the next day. She was thoroughly delighted, and all her grumblings vanished in the Eastern Ocean.

When Chang Zhijie had gone, Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue still sat in the great hall. "Though I am only a military officer," Ximen said, "I have a fairly important position. I have made a number of friends in the Capital, and I am in close relation with the Imperial Tutor. Letters pour in upon me like a stream. I am too busy to attend to my own correspondence, and I must find a scholar who can save me the trouble. Unfortunately, I don't know any genuinely learned man. If you do, please say so."

"You have set me a very difficult problem," Bojue said. "We want a learned man, but he must be honest. He must be a man easy to get on with, yet one who does not talk too much. We must have someone who can keep his own counsel. And we don't want a man who is a profound scholar in deceit and cunning and a fool at everything else. I have a friend who is a graduate. He has, it is true, several times failed to pass the final examination, but he is a learned man and will stand comparison with Ban and Sima. [2] He is a follower of Confucius. He and I have been good friends for ages. So far as I remember, ten years ago he went in for the examination and the examiners spoke very highly of his work. Unfortunately, another man was slightly better than he was, and he failed. He has made several other attempts since then and he still reads though his hair is gray now. He owns about a hundred acres of land and three or four houses."

"If he is in comfortable circumstances, why should he take a job?" Ximen said.

"His land and his houses have been bought by wealthy families, and now his two hands are his only capital."

"Why did you tell me he had land if he has sold it?"

"Well, if that doesn't appeal to you, perhaps this will. He has a pretty young wife about twenty years old, an excellent woman. She has two three-year-old babies."

"If he has a beautiful wife, he certainly won't come," Ximen Qing said.

"Fortunately, about a couple of years ago, his wife ran off to the Eastern Capital with another man. The two babies died of smallpox, so he is all alone in the world. I'm sure he will come."

"You are talking rubbish," Ximen said, laughing. "What is his name?"

"He is called Shui. His learning is incomparable. If you engage him, I guarantee your letters will be a source of pride to you. He is a very learned man indeed."

"I don't believe a word you say," Ximen said. "It is all a pack of lies. If you can remember anything he has written, tell me, and, if I think it is any good, I'll engage him and provide him with quarters. Since he is a single man, there will be no difficulty about that."

"I remember getting a letter from him asking me to help him to find a job," Bojue said. "I will tell you what I can remember of it."

A letter this for Brother Ying.
I think of you, but cannot find
Words to express my feelings.
All here are well.
If you should hear of a job for a tutor
Pray get it for me.
I may flatter myself, but it seems to me
My brush is as great as a beam.
I do not write often, but when I do

Look out for clouds and mist.
Ximen Qing roared with laughter. "If he wanted you to get him a job, why didn't he write a letter instead of sending you doggerel like that? Horrible doggerel too! I'm sure the fellow is both an ignoramus and a rogue."
"Oh, dear me, no," said Ying Bojue. "You must not judge him by that. He and I have been friends for three generations. We used to go to school together when we were boys. I remember our teacher saying that Ying and Shui were one as clever as the other. 'They will turn out well,' he used to say. We did our exercises and our compositions together and never felt the least bit jealous. You see, we are really good friends. We are never formal with one another. That's why he wrote me that little ditty. It's quite entertaining, isn't it?"
"Perhaps you can tell me what the fifth line means?" Ximen said.
"Ah, Brother," said Bojue, "don't you see? That is a very clever piece of character analysis. When you write *she* [residence] on the left-hand side and *guan* [official] on the right, and you have the other *guan* [a mansion]. He is saying to me, perfectly obviously: 'If you hear of a *guan,* a position, recommend me for it.' Not a single unnecessary word. How could he write more plainly what he wants to say?"
Ximen Qing could think of no further objection to make. He said to Ying Bojue: "What kind of man is he?"
"His behavior is even more admirable than his scholarship," Bojue said. "Two years ago he was tutor in the household of a certain Vice President Li. There were a host of beautiful maids there and several good-looking boys. Master Shui was there for four or five years and an impure thought about them never entered his head. In course of time the maids and boys were so impressed by his wisdom that they all deliberately set to work to seduce him. Master Shui is a softhearted man and he yielded. His employer drove him out and the neighbors said he was a scamp. As a matter of fact, even if a girl sits on his knee, he remains perfectly calm. If you engage him, let your maids and boys go to him and you'll find out soon enough how he behaves."
Ximen Qing laughed. "You funny dog, you can never stop joking. The other day, my colleague Xia's tutor, Master Ni told me of a friend of his called Wen. When he's been to see me, we'll decide."

Those who endeavor to amass gold by the peck, emulating the luxury of the "untitled nobility,"[1]
Are as deluded as was Chuang Chou in the dream in which he imagined himself to be a butterfly.[2]
One has heard tell that the magnificence of the Citadel at Mei proved difficult to perpetuate;[3]
Who would have thought that the wealth extracted from the Copper Mountains could be exhausted?[4]
Nowadays Pao Shu-ya is praised for the way in which he divided the proceeds with Kuan Chung;[5]
In former times P'ang Yün was laughed at for choosing to sink his entire fortune in the sea.[6]
As one approaches the inevitable end of life's journey, who can be said to be a bosom friend?
It is only such a noble friend who can continue to pay due honor to the customs of antiquity.

The burden of the above 8 lines of regulated verses are simply that:

For humans residing in this world,[7]
Glory and luxury, wealth and honor,
cannot be retained forever. One fine day, when:
Impermanence, or death, visits you,[8]
no matter how much you may have in the way of:
Piled up gold and accumulated jade,[9]
you will wind up:
Returning to the shades empty-handed.
Because Hsi-men Ch'ing was so:
Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth,
as well as being:
Willing to lend aid to those in poverty and distress,
everyone sang his praises. But no more of this.

That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing retained the two singing boys to await his pleasure, telling them, "When I have occasion to call upon you:
You must not be disobedient."[10]
The two of them nodded their assent and withdrew.
He then saw to the preparation of a reply and return gifts to entrust to the retainers from the Miao household, and he also rewarded them with some silver. Miao Shih and Miao Hsiu kowtowed to him in gratitude and then made their departure.
Later on, because Hsi-men Ch'ing found no use for the two singing boys, he ended up making a present of them to the grand preceptor's household. Truly:
When one has spent thousands in gold[11] teaching her how to sing and dance;
One must bequeath her to someone else to provide pleasure during his youth.[12]
To resume our story, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, or Cadger Ch'ang, from the time he had asked for Hsi-men Ch'ing's assistance at the party on a previous occasion, did not yet have anything to show for it. Moreover, day and night, his landlord had been pressing him incessantly for his arrears. It so happened that, ever since Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home from the Eastern Capital, he had been invited out to parties to celebrate his return day after day, so that ten days in a row had gone by without Cadger Ch'ang's having a chance to meet with him. As the saying goes:
Even when people meet face to face, it is hard to express everything.
If one cannot even arrange a meeting, to whom is one to make an appeal? Every day, he asked Ying Po-chüeh to accompany him in going to Hsi-men Ch'ing's front gate and asking after him; only to be told that he was not at home, and having to return empty-handed.
Moreover, when he arrived home, his wife berated him, saying, "You claim to be a male of the species, a man of mettle, and yet you don't even have a house to call your own and have to put up with all this annoyance. You customarily boast of your friendship with His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, yet today, when you ask a favor of him, it's like a pitcher falling into the water."
She railed at Cadger Ch'ang so effectively that:
Though he had a mouth he was left speechless,
and could only stare vacantly into space, without daring to utter a word.
The next day, he got up early, sought out Ying Po-chüeh, and invited him to join him in a visit to a wine shop. What should they see there but a small thatched hut, situated by a bend in a flowing stream. [13] In front of the door, amid the shade of the green trees, a wine flag was visible, and five or seven workers were seen to be busily engaged in carrying in supplies of wine and meat. Across the front of the shop there was a counter, over which there were suspended fresh fish, geese, ducks, and the like. It was really a nice clean place to sit, so he invited Ying Po-chüeh to share three cups of wine with him in the shop.
"I really ought not to put you to the trouble," demurred Ying Po-chüeh, but Cadger Ch'ang dragged him into the shop, and they sat down together.
The waiter measured out some wine for them and laid out a platter of smoked pork, and a platter of fresh fish.
After:
Two rounds of wine had been consumed,
Cadger Ch'ang said, "With regard to that matter that I have asked you to speak to His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing about, for some days now we haven't been able to arrange a meeting with him. Meantime, my landlord has been pressing me hard for my arrears, and last evening my wife bickered with me about it for half the night. Not being able to put up with it anymore, I extricated myself at the fifth watch this morning, only to implore you, Brother, to join me in taking advantage of the earliness of the hour to wait patiently outside his gate and waylay him before he goes out. What do you think of this proposal, Brother?"
Ying Po-chüeh replied:
"Once one has acceded to someone's request,
It is imperative to see the job through to the end.[14]
Today, for better or for worse, I'll make sure that His Honor helps you out, that's all there is to it."
The two of them shared another few cups of wine, after which Ying Pochüeh protested, "We'd better not drink any more so early in the morning."
Cadger Ch'ang urged him to have another cup, after which he settled the score, and they left together, going straight to the residence of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
At that time, it was early in the fall, and:
The metallic autumn wind was brisk.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had gotten drunk for several days in a row and was feeling somewhat under the weather, had received yet another invitation to a drinking party from Eunuch Director Chou, which he had found some pretext for refusing. Instead, he was relaxing in the Hidden Spring Grotto in his garden.
It so happens that the Hidden Spring Grotto in the rear of Hsi-men Ch'ing's garden was surrounded by fruit-bearing trees and fresh flowers, which:
Flourished throughout the four seasons.
At this time, although it was early autumn, an incalculable number of flowers were blooming in the garden. Hsi-men Ch'ing, being at home with nothing to do, was enjoying himself in the flower garden with Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li P'ing-erh, five of them in all. On his head, Hsi-men Ch'ing wore a "loyal and tranquil hat." On his body he wore a long gown of willow-green moiré, and white-soled boots. Yüeh-niang was wearing a willow-green jacket of Hang-chou chiffon that opened down the middle, over a light blue skirt of water-patterned pongee, and gold-red phoenix-toed, high-heeled shoes. Meng Yü-lou was wearing a raven-black satin jacket, over a skirt of gosling-yellow pongee, and peach-red high-heeled shoes of plain silk with purfled gold-spangled edging. P'an Chin-lien was wearing a pink crepe blouse that opened down the middle with a white chiffon lining, and a vest of gold-red material with a bright green border, over a skirt of white Hang-chou chiffon with a decorated border, and high-heeled shoes of pink patterned silk. Only Li P'ing-erh was wearing a wide-lapelled jacket of plain blue Hang-chou chiffon, a skirt of finished pale blue moon-colored chiffon, and light blue plain silk high-heeled shoes. The four of them:
Seductively and bewitchingly,
kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company while he enjoyed himself:
Scanning the flowers and inspecting the willows.[15]
To resume our story, when Cadger Ch'ang and Ying Po-chüeh got as far as the reception hall and learned that His Honor was at home, they sat down happily and waited for what seemed like half a day, but no one appeared. What should they see at this juncture but Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung, who came in the gate from outside, panting for breath, and carrying a trunk full of satin and chiffon clothing.
Calling out agitatedly, "We waited half a day and were only able to pick up half the order," they set the trunk down in the reception hall.
"Where has your master gotten to?" Ying Po-chüeh asked them.
"Father is in the garden enjoying himself," replied Shu-t'ung.
"May I trouble you to say a word to him?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
The two of them, carrying the trunk as before, then proceeded inside.
Before long, Shu-t'ung came out and said, "Father requests Master Ying the Second and Uncle Ch'ang the Second to wait a bit. He'll be right out."
The two of them sat down and waited a while longer before Hsi-men Ch'ing finally came out. After they had saluted him with a bow, they were asked to resume their seats.
"For days on end, it seems," said Ying Po-chüeh, "Brother has been so busy attending drinking parties that he hasn't had any time to himself. How do you happen to be at home today?"
"Ever since the last time I saw you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been invited out to drinking parties every day and have been as drunk as can be, which has left me completely enervated. I was invited out to another party today, but I concocted a pretext for not going."
"Where did that trunkful of clothing that was carried in just now come from?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"At the present time, autumn has already begun," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and everyone needs to be supplied with autumn clothing. That trunkful just now was for your senior sister-in-law, but they haven't finished completing the order. That was only the first half of it."
Cadger Ch'ang stuck out his tongue in disbelief and said, "In that case the six chambers of my sisters-in-law will require six trunkloads. What a lot of expense that will entail. As for such mean folk as ourselves, we can hardly afford a single bolt of cotton. The fact that you can arrange to have so many clothes of satin and chiffon made up for you is an indication, Brother, that you have become a real plutocrat."
This remark induced a fit of laughter on the part of Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh.
"How is it," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "that during these last few days your boatload of goods from Hang-chou has not yet been seen to arrive? I wonder how the business is going. As for that money that you promised the other day to Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, you agreed that when the money owed you by Hsü the Fourth outside the gate came into your hands, you would use it to make up the sum you promised to turn over to them."
"That boatload of goods," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "seems to have been delayed somewhere or other, and they haven't even sent me a letter about it. It's a real cause for concern. As far as the money for Li the Third and Huang the Fourth is concerned, I have done as you suggested."
Ying Po-chüeh moved his seat closer to that of Hsi-men Ch'ing and took advantage of the occasion to say, "Regarding that matter that Brother Ch'ang the Second besought your help about the other day, you have been so busy since then that he hasn't had a chance to speak to you about it. Brother Ch'ang the Second's landlord has been pressing him so hard for his arrears that he is being driven to distraction. His wife, too, is berating him about it every day, so that he has been reduced to paralysis and doesn't know what to do. Right now, the autumn days are getting colder, and the fur coat he would normally wear is in hock in the pawnshop. Brother, if you are goodhearted about it, as the saying goes:
If you want to help someone, you must do it when they need it the most.[16]
That would also spare him the:
Incessant bickering,[17]
that his wife subjects him to in their room, day and night. What is more, if he can find a proper house to live in, the figure that he cuts in society will only serve to enhance your prestige. For this reason, Brother Ch'ang the Second has asked me to come here for the sole purpose of beseeching you to come to his assistance as soon as possible."
"I originally promised him that I would do so," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But, because my trip to the Eastern Capital cost me a lot of silver, I had planned to wait until Manager Han Tao-kuo returned from his excursion before taking care of it. Since he is in need of a house, I will weigh out the silver required for him to buy it if it is now such an urgent matter."
"It's not so much an urgent matter for Brother Ch'ang the Second," said Ying Po-chüeh, "as it is that he can't stand his wife's nagging. That is why he feels compelled to ask you to take care of it as soon as possible."
Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated for some time before saying, "If that's the case, it won't be all that difficult. Let me ask you, though, how much of a house will suffice for him to live in?"
"The two of them," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "will need a front room opening onto the street, a sitting room for the entertainment of guests, a bedroom, and a kitchen, those four rooms at a minimum. As for the price, it will certainly amount to more than three or four taels of silver. Brother, see if you can't, sooner or later, get together an appropriate amount, and enable him to complete this transaction."
"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll give him a few pieces of loose silver to start off with. He can use them to buy himself a coat, purchase some furniture, and take care of his current expenses. After he has located a suitable house for himself, of course I'll weigh out the required amount of silver for him, so that he can complete the transaction. How would that be?"
The two of them thanked him with one voice, saying, "Brother, such good-heartedness is a rare thing."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Shu-t'ung and told him, "Go ask the First Lady for the packet of loose silver in the leather case, and bring it back with you."
Shu-t'ung nodded assent and went off on his errand. Before long he came back out with a packet of silver and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Cadger Ch'ang, "This packet of loose silver contains twelve taels of silver left over from the sealed envelopes containing tips that I took with me on my visit to the grand preceptor's mansion in the Eastern Capital. You take them and use them for your miscellaneous expenses."
He then opened up the packet and showed the contents to Cadger Ch'ang, which consisted entirely of loose lumps of inscribed silver weighing three to five mace apiece. Cadger Ch'ang accepted them, put them in the sleeve of his gown, and bowed his thanks.
"These last few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it has not been my intention to delay the fulfillment of my promise. I have only been waiting for you to locate a suitable house, at which time I would complete the transaction with you at one stroke. And you haven't located a house yet. Right now, you should do your best to locate one as soon as possible, and then, when I have the silver in hand, I'll be prepared to weigh it out for you, that's all."
Cadger Ch'ang, once again, expressed his gratitude repeatedly. The three of them sat down as before, and Ying Po-chüeh said, "There are numerous cases among the men of old who:

Disdained wealth and practiced philanthropy,[18]
in which, later on, their descendants succeeded in:
Enhancing the height and size of their gates,[19]
significantly increasing the estates of their ancestors. Among the stingy, on the other hand, who were only interested in accumulating gold and valuables for themselves, there are many cases in which, later on, their descendants turned out badly, and not even the graves of their ancestors were preserved. From this it is clear that:
The Way of Heaven favors reversion."[20]
"Money," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is something which:
Likes movement and dislikes inertia.
It will not allow itself to be immured in any one place. And it is designed by Heaven for human use. For every person who accumulates a surplus there will be another who suffers a deficiency. It is very wrong, therefore, merely to pile up wealth and valuables."
There is a poem that testifies to this:
There are those who are not happy unless they can accumulate jade and pile up gold;[21]
They remain unaware that wealth and valuables are merely the roots of catastrophe.
They treasure every single cash as though it were a part of their flesh and blood:
While those who are chivalrous by nature can only laugh at them for their inanity.
They treat each one of their relatives and friends as if they were total strangers;
They preserve a facade, but their hearts are dead, which is certainly regrettable.
One can anticipate that one fine day impermanence, or death, will pay them a visit;
And they will proceed, empty-handed and all alone, to the abode of everlasting night.
As they were speaking, who should appear but Shu-t'ung, who brought out some refreshments for them. When they had finished eating, Cadger Ch'ang thanked his host, stood up to go, and went happily home with the silver tucked in his sleeve.
He had scarcely entered the door, when his wife came noisily out to meet him and berated him in a strident voice, saying:
"When the leaves fall off the phoenix tree,[22]
Nothing is left but a trunk of 'bare sticks.'
You good-for-nothing! You've been gone the whole day, leaving your wife to starve at home. And now you come back with:
A thousand or ten thousand signs of joy.[23]
How can you be anything but ashamed of yourself? You don't have a house to call your own, which only elicits the contumely of our neighbors, but you leave it to the ears of your wife to suffer their abuse."
Cadger Ch'ang did not even open his mouth but waited until his wife had finished her tirade before gently groping the silver out of his sleeve and placing it on the table.
Opening up the packet and gazing at it, he said, "My 'square-holed brothers'! My 'square-holed brothers'![24] You are truly:
A priceless treasure,
and when I contemplate your shining and jingling qualities:
My whole body turns numb with delight.[25]
I only wish I could swallow you whole, like a mouthful of water. If you had only come my way a little earlier, I wouldn't have had to put up with all the quarreling this whore has subjected me to."
When the woman clearly saw that there was a pile of twelve or thirteen taels of silver in the packet, she started forward in her excitement, as though she intended to seize it from the hands of her old man.
"You're congenitally given to abusing your husband," exclaimed Cadger Ch'ang, "but, no sooner do you see silver in the picture, than you want to cozy up to him. Tomorrow, I'll take this silver to buy a new outfit of clothes for myself, and go live somewhere else, so I won't have to fool around with you anymore."
Putting a smile on her face, the woman said, "My dear, where did it ever come from, all this silver?"
Cadger Ch'ang did not deign to reply.
"My dear," the woman went on to say, "no doubt you resent all I've had to say to you. But my only desire has been for your success. Now that you have the silver, we ought to discuss what to do, buy a house for ourselves, and settle down. Wouldn't that be the best thing to do, instead of carrying on like this? As your wife, I haven't been remiss in any way. You can resent me if you like, but it isn't just."
Cadger Ch'ang, again, did not deign to open his mouth.
The woman continued to chatter away, but, when she noticed that Cadger Ch'ang was not paying any attention to her, she began to feel some compunction about the situation and couldn't help giving way to tears.
When Cadger Ch'ang saw this, he sighed, saying, "For a woman, who:
Neither plows nor weaves,[26]
you certainly give your old man a hard time!"
At this, the woman wept even more copiously, and the two of them lapsed into silence. There being no one there to admonish them to make up, they simply sat there, sunk in depression.
Finally, Cadger Ch'ang thought to himself, "It is not easy to be a woman. She has had to put up with a lot of hardship and can hardly be blamed if she resents me for it. Now that I have some silver today, if I don't pay her any attention, people will say that I'm hardhearted. Even His Honor, if he finds out about it, will judge me to be in the wrong."
Turning to the woman with a smile, he said, "I was only having some fun with you. I don't hold anything against you, it's just that you're constantly nagging me. This morning, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I made a point of inviting Brother Ying the Second to join me for three cups of wine in a tavern, and then accompany me on a visit to His Honor's place. Providentially, he happened to be at home and had not gone out drinking anywhere. It was only thanks to the efforts of Brother Ying the Second, who gave his lips and tongue a real workout on my behalf, that I ended up with this silver in hand. And he also elicited a promise from His Honor that when we find a house, he will weigh out the necessary silver in order to close the deal for us. These twelve taels, he told me, were merely an advance that we can use to cover our daily expenses."
"So it turns out that this is really a gift to you from His Honor," the woman said. "We mustn't allow it to be wasted. You must find a winter coat for yourself, in order to fend off the cold."
"That's just what I wanted to discuss with you," said Cadger Ch'ang. "If we use these twelve taels of incised silver to buy a few items of clothing, and a few articles of furniture, once we have a new house to move into, we'll look a little better off. We can't thank His Honor enough for his generosity. On a later day, when we have moved into our new house, we'll have to invite him over for a visit."
"We'll have to wait until the time comes," said the woman. "We can decide what to do then."
Truly:
It has always been true that gratitude for kindness and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand or ten thousand years will never be allowed to gather dust.
After Cadger Ch'ang and his wife had talked things over for a while, the woman asked, "Did you have anything to eat while you were over there?"
"I did have something to eat at His Honor's place," said Cadger Ch'ang. "If you haven't had anything to eat, let's take some of this silver and buy some rice with it."
"Be careful how you keep that packet of silver fastened up," the woman said. "I'll wait for you. Come back right away."
Cadger Ch'ang took a wicker basket and went out onto the street. Before long, when he came back after buying the rice, there was also a large hunk of mutton lying in the basket.
When he came rushing back, laughing out loud, the woman met him in the doorway and said, "This hunk of mutton! What on earth did you buy that for?"
"Just now you were complaining about all the hardships you had suffered," said Cadger Ch'ang with a smile. "Not to mention this bit of mutton, I really ought to have had several oxen slaughtered in order to treat you."
"You heartless louse!" the woman scolded Cadger Ch'ang with a laugh. "Today I'll just store up the resentment in my heart and wait to see how you treat me in the future."
"I can foresee," said Cadger Ch'ang, "that one of these days, though you may plead with me ten thousand times, saying, 'Darling, spare this little whore of yours,' I'll refuse to spare you. Just try your luck and see."
When the woman heard this, she merely laughed while she went out to the well to draw some water.
There and then, the woman cooked up some rice, cut up a bowl of mutton, and placed them on the table, saying, "Come have something to eat, dear."
"I've already eaten at His Honor's place," said Cadger Ch'ang. "I don't want anything. You're as hungry as can be. Just help yourself."
The woman then proceeded to eat it all up by herself, and clear away the utensils, before sending Cadger Ch'ang out to buy the clothes.
Cadger Ch'ang put the silver in his sleeve and headed straight for Main Street, where he looked over the wares in several shops before finding anything that suited him. In the end, he merely bought a blue woman's jacket of Hang-chou chiffon, a green pongee skirt, a pale blue moon-colored blouse of cloud-patterned silk, a red satin jacket, and a skirt of white pongee, five items in all. To match these purchases, he bought for himself a gosling-yellow satin jacket, a long robe of lavender-colored pongee, and several items of coarse cotton clothing. Altogether, he spent six taels and five mace of silver.
Wrapping all of these items up in a single package, he came home carrying it on his back and told the woman to open it up and see what it contained.
The woman promptly opened it up to take a look and then asked, "How much did it cost?"
"I was able to get it all for six taels and five mace of silver," replied Cadger Ch'ang.
"Although they weren't cheap," the woman said, "they were good value for that amount of silver. On the one hand, we should get out a trunk and pack them safely away, while tomorrow we can go and buy some furniture."
That day the woman went about her daily tasks:
As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make her happier;
while all her customary complaints were:
Relegated to that great sea, the Eastern Ocean.
But no more of this.
To resume our story, after Ying Po-chüeh and Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Cadger Ch'ang on his way, the two of them continued to sit together in the reception hall as before.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then reopened the conversation, saying, "Though I am merely a military official and am only able to maintain the sort of front that I do, I have managed to become acquainted with quite a few officials serving both inside and outside the capital. And recently I have also been acknowledged as a protégé of the grand preceptor. As a consequence, the number of letters and cards going back and forth has become:
Like a stream of flowing water.
I don't have the spare time to devote to it, so that a good deal of it is not properly dealt with. I would very much like to find a live-in social secretary, to whom I could turn over the task of handling this correspondence for me. It would be very helpful to be spared this expenditure of effort. The only trouble is, I haven't been able to locate anyone with the requisite talent and learning. If you happen to know of such a person, let me know about it. I will undertake to find an empty room to accommodate him and will also provide him with an annual stipend of several taels of silver for the support of his family. If it should turn out to be someone with whom you are on intimate terms, so much the better."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh:
"If you had not spoken, I would not have known.[27]
If you were looking for any other sort of person, they would be readily available, but this particular sort of person is hard to find. Why is this the case? In the first place, it must be someone with the requisite talent and learning. In the second place, it must be someone of personal integrity, and also someone with whom you can get along. You're better off without anyone who:
Engages in the pros and cons of idle tattle,[28]
or:
Wiggles his lips and waggles his tongue;[29]
and, as for persons of mediocre talent and learning, who are old hands at chicanery, what use would you have for them?
"The only person I can think of is the grandson of an old friend of my grandfather's. At present he holds the rank of a licentiate in this subprefecture. He has taken the provincial examinations several times but did not succeed in passing. The talent and learning he has acquired actually make him superior to Pan Ku or Ssu-ma Ch'ien, while, as for his personal integrity, he is in a class with Confucius and Mencius. Because of the long-standing relationship between our families, he is like a brother to me. We are extremely close.
"I remember that when he took the provincial examinations ten years ago, the examining official praised his two essays on public policy to the skies. But, who could have anticipated that there was another candidate whose essays were even better, so that he did not pass. Since then, he has taken the examinations several more times but has been unsuccessful, with the inevitable result that the hair on his head and around his temples has become speckled with white. Right now, he is:
A scholar at large with his books and sword.[30]
But his family still possesses more than fifteen acres of arable land, and three or four houses, which are fit to live in."
"That ought to be more than enough to maintain his family," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why should he be willing to hire himself out as a live-in secretary in someone else's place?"
"The land and houses that he formerly possessed," said Ying Po-chüeh, "have all been purchased by more affluent families, so that, right now, he has nothing left but the skin on his two hands."
"So the land that you mentioned has already been sold off," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What does that amount to?"
"True enough, that doesn't amount to anything," said Ying Po-chüeh. "But he has a wife who is only about nineteen years old and is exceedingly attractive, as well as two children who are just two or three years old."
"If he's got an attractive wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why should he be willing to take a job away from home?"
"The good news on that front," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is that two years ago his wife, who was addicted to extramarital affairs, ran off to the Eastern Capital with someone, and his two children have died of smallpox, so he is the only member of the household left. Of course, he'd be willing to take a job away from home."
"In that case," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you're really doing a job on him. It's all folderol. Tell me, what is his surname?"
"His surname is Shui," said Ying Po-chüeh. "His talent and learning are really incomparable. If you were to employ him, Brother, I guarantee that every last one of the poems, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies that he might compose would serve to augment your stature. When people saw them, they would all say to themselves, 'His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is certainly possessed of talent and learning.'"
"The first two things you mentioned about him just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "turned out to be humbug. I don't believe this humbug of yours. If you happen to remember any compositions of his, recite them for me. If they impress me favorably, I'll invite him to become a member of my household, and set aside a room for him to live in. Since it's only a matter of a single individual, it should be easy to manage. We can just pick an auspicious day and invite him over, that's all."
"I can remember something of a letter he sent me," said Ying Po-chüeh, "asking if I could help him find an employer. I recall a few lines of it, which I'll recite for your delectation. To the tune 'Yellow Oriole':
This letter is addressed to Brother Ying.
My thoughts of you since we parted go without saying.
Thanks to your kindness, my whole family is in good health.
The character *she* and the character *kuan*,
Combine to mean the post of live-in secretary.[31]
If you hear of such an opening, I will, of course, beseech your help.
If anyone is desirous of a brush sturdy as a beam,
To compose his correspondence,
My brush is capable of engendering clouds and mist."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he started to laugh out loud, saying, "If he were wholeheartedly serious about wanting you to find him an employer, why didn't he send you a regular letter, instead of putting his request into a song, which is not even very well written? It's obvious that his talent and learning are inadequate to the task, and his personal integrity leaves something to be desired."

"You ought not to be so sure of that," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's only because our families have been close to each other for three generations. When I was one or two years old, he was no more than three or four. In those days, when we shared candy and cake, biscuits and fruit, or the like, we didn't even quarrel over them. Later on, when we had both grown up and started to school in order to learn to read and write, the teacher used to say, 'Scholar Ying and Scholar Shui are both as smart as can be and are sure to be successful in their future lives.' And later still, when we took up composition, we would compete in writing essays together, without a trace of jealousy or envy. By day, we walked together, and sat together, and at night, we sometimes even slept together. And when we reached adulthood and donned hairnets, we remained as fast friends as ever. Consequently, the two of us are almost like one person and are fond brothers to each other. For this reason, ignoring convention, he felt free to express his ideas to me in the form of a song.

"When I first saw it, I was also somewhat annoyed. But later, when I thought about it, I concluded that it was only because he was making his appeal to a friend that he presumed to do what he did, and I was no longer annoyed by it. Moreover, that song of his is actually rather cleverly done, though you may not have noticed it. The first line, where he says 'This letter is addressed to Brother Ying,' is the salutation, just like when people write, 'For the perusal of so-and-so.' Isn't that appropriate? The second line, where he says, 'My thoughts of you since we parted go without saying,' is like the conventional amenities about the weather. It is both concise and literary. Is that not appropriate also? The third line reads, 'Thanks to your kindness, my whole family is in good health.' That is simply to say that his family is all right. After that it gets even better."

"What are the fourth and fifth lines intended to convey?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Brother, you may not get it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but this is an example of the word game of breaking characters down into their component parts, which people often find difficult. 'The character *she* and the character *kuan*, combine to mean the post of live-in secretary.' That is to say, if they are written together, do they not form the character *kuan*, meaning the post of live-in secretary? If such a post becomes available, he is anxious that I should recommend him for it, which is why he says, 'If you hear of such an opening, I will, of course, beseech your help.' The line, 'If anyone is desirous of a brush sturdy as a beam,' means that his brush is as sturdy as a beam, and that in handling correspondence, he has but to put his brush to work in order to fill the paper with clouds and mist.

"Brother, if you examine this composition of his, is there so much as a single word that is wasted? With just these few lines, he has succeeded perfectly in putting the feelings in his mind on paper. Isn't that a worthy accomplishment?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing was so affected by Ying Po-chüeh's praise of Licentiate Shui's composition that he was unable to respond further.

All he could do was to say to Ying Po-chüeh, "Since you have been emphasizing all his good points, let me ask you, do you have any serious communications of his? If you can show me one, I'll consider hiring him."

"I do have some examples of lyrics and rhapsodies that he has written at my place," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but I didn't bring any with me to show you. I happen to have memorized a composition of his, however, that is very well written. Let me recite it for you.

When I first donned a scholar's cap, my heart was filled with delight;
How was I to know that today, it is this very cap that has done me in.[32]
Others generally manage to wear you for no more than three to five years;
But you have chosen to remain enamored of my head for a good thirty years.
Now that I wish to don an official black silk hat, I pray your indulgence;
I have composed these lines of verse in order to bid Your Honor farewell.
On this occasion it is not to be understood that my feelings are fickle;
It is the white hair that encroaches on my head that I find hard to bear.
This autumn if I fail to pass the examinations with the highest honors;
I will trample my enemy to pieces under my feet and take up husbandry.
It is the year for the triennial provincial examinations,
And the time has come for the results to be publicly announced.
In order to divulge the feelings in my heart,
I hereby lodge a complaint against you, my cap.
With your help I aspired to mount to the blue clouds and thereby bring glory on myself;
Who could have known that now, despite my white hair, you remain true to your old friend.
Alas!
I recall when I first donned a scholar's cap,
"Blue, blue was my student's collar."[33]
Thanks to your condescending favor,
I was proud of my newly acquired dignity.
But you did not permit me to gain early success while still a young man;
Nor allow me to remain stooped for long, only to stand upright in the end.
Above, I do not hold a position as senior official or grand master;
Below, as a citizen, I am not a farmer, an artisan, nor a merchant.
Year after year, I dwell in the house of a commoner;
Day after day, I report for duty at the local school.
Whenever the education intendant comes to inspect us,
My heart is filled with nervousness and trepidation.
Whenever it is necessary to entertain superiors,
I am compelled to run around, now east, now west.[34]
On your account, I spend my lifetime,
In anxiety and perturbation,
Suffering from a multitude of hardships.
During all four seasons of the year,[35]
In scattered bits and pieces,[36]
My teacher's salary has remained unpaid.
When I have sued for aid on the grounds of poverty,
I have been allotted five pecks of grain.
At the biannual sacrifices I have received coupons,[37]
Entitling me to obtain half a pound of meat.
When officials encounter me,
They can't help being irritated.
When yamen runners refer to me,
They designate me an instructor.
Upon the road to the Eastern Capital,
I have accompanied others several times.
Among the prefects in the schoolroom,
I, alone, am the most venerated of all.[38]
You see that my black boots are both down at the heel,
While my blue scholar's gown is completely threadbare.
Having buried my head in the books for many years,
I cannot completely describe all the hardships and vicissitudes I have suffered.
What hope is there of ever getting a start in life?
I have undergone all of this forsaken solitude and painful suffering for nothing.
Though I have approached all the established figures,
In my entire career, I have yet to gain any advantage from my compositions;
Not having known the benefit of imperial benevolence,
For years on end, I have continued to harbor the hope of conspicuous success.
Alas and alack!
I bemoan this scholar's cap.
If you only look at its shape,
It is something to be proud of.
Vertical behind and horizontal in front,
What sort of an object are you anyway?
With seven fissures and eight holes,
You are truly the root of catastrophe.
Alas!
The cloud-soaring bird has not yet folded its wings;
But the fish with dragon potential has lost its scales.
Have you not heard that:
The bird that has not flown for long,
Once it does, will soar to the clouds;
The bird that has not cried for long,
Once it cries, will startle everyone?[39]
Early on, I entreated you to help me make a new person of myself;[40]
This is not a case of my abandoning the old in favor of the new.
As a famed exemplar of this culture of ours,
I thought you possessed supernatural powers.
If only from now on we are forever separated,
Then will I be grateful for your magnanimity.
Of these few words and this meager libation,
I would prevail upon you to come and partake.
Your rationale and your destiny are exhausted;
I cannot overstate the urgency of my request.
From this point on, I would bid you farewell;[41]
Please take yourself off as soon as possible."[42]

When Ying Po-chüeh had finished his recitation, Hsi-men Ch'ing clapped his hands and laughed loudly, saying, "Well, Brother Ying the Second, so you really consider this sort of talent and learning the equivalent of that of Pan Ku or Yang Hsiung?"[43]

"His personal integrity ranks even higher than his talent and learning." said Ying Po-chüeh. "Now let me tell you something of his personal integrity."

"Go ahead and tell me about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Some years ago," said Ying Po-chüeh, "he held a position as live-in secretary in the establishment of Vice Minister Li. The Li household had several tens of maidservants, each and every one of which was attractive and clever. Moreover, there were also a number of page boys, each and every one of which was a good-looking catamite. This Licentiate Shui resided there for four or five years, without getting any improper ideas. But, later on, who would have anticipated that several mischief-making maidservants and page boys, seeing that he put on the airs of a saint, actually devoted themselves, day and night, to tempting him. This Licentiate Shui, who is extremely magnanimous by nature, eventually allowed his resistance to soften so far as to be enticed into an affair, for which his employer drove him out the door. This created quite a stir in the neighborhood, and everyone accused him of immoral conduct.

"The fact is that this Licentiate Shui is actually:
Impervious to the temptations of the flesh.
If you were to employ him in your home, Brother, no matter how many maid-servants and page boys you might have, even if they were to:
Sleep together or share the same quarters,[44]
would this Licentiate Shui resort to disorderly conduct? He would never do so."

"Since he's driven out the door by his previous employer," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there must definitely be something not quite right about him. Even though you and I are on the best of terms, I'm not prepared to accept this recommendation of yours. The other day, a friend of my colleague Hsia Yenling, the venerable gentleman Ni P'eng, mentioned that he's acquainted with a fellow licentiate surnamed Wen. I'll wait until he comes to see me before deciding what to do."

## 080

### Abbot Tao Solicits Funds to Repair the Temple of Eternal Felicity; Nun Hsüeh Enjoins Paying for the Distribution of the Dhimagesranimages Sutra & Ximen Qing Becomes a Benefactor

The temple stands bare on the mountainside
There are shrines among the towering crags
But the Buddhas of days gone by can be discerned no more.
Their stone bodies are covered with moss
The ancient sanctuary stands alone
The image of the world-honored one is shrouded in dust,
As though he heard the mourning of the dragons and the elephants
And the hearts of the faithful are filled with sadness.
If a general goes to war in vain
Let him give freely the four gifts and tarry not.
I know that the fan palm tree
Still grows beside the lotus blossom tower.
Thus will he bring joy to the gods
And the demon host will bear no grudge against him.

In Dongpingfu of the province of Shandong there was a temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity. It was built in the second year of the Putong reign of the Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. Its founder was a certain patriarch named Wanhui [Returns-from-afar]. If you ask why the patriarch was so called, I must tell you that, when he was about seven or eight years old, his brother was sent to serve as a soldier in the marches. He did not write to his family, and none knew whether he was alive or dead. So his old mother was unhappy about him and often shed tears. One day the younger boy said to his mother: "Mother, the world is at peace and our life is comfortable. What makes you weep so much? Tell me and I will share your grief."

"You are only a boy," his mother said, "and you do not know. When your father died, your elder brother went to the marches. He was an officer in the army. For four or five years no word has come from him, and I do not know whether he is alive or dead. How can I be happy?" She cried again.

"If I had known this before, I would soon have put things right. Mother, tell me where my brother is, and I will go and find him and get a letter from him."

The old woman laughed before her tears had dried. "You foolish child!" she said, "if it were only a hundred *li* or so away, we could go. But he is in Manchuria and that is more than ten thousand *li* away. It would take a strong man five months to get there. You are only a boy, and you would never get there at all."

"If he is in Manchuria," said the boy, "Manchuria is not in the skies. I will go, and you shall have me back in no time." He fastened his shoes, straightened his coat, bowed to his mother, and went off like a streak of smoke. The old woman called him back but he did not answer, and when she ran after him she could not catch him. She was more melancholy than ever. Many of her neighbors came to console her. "The boy cannot possibly go very far," they said. "He is sure to come back." The old woman dried her eyes and sat down sadly.

The sun was sinking in the west when the old lady went out to see if she could see anything of him. In the distance was a faint shadow that might have been a boy. She besought Heaven and Earth and the Three Luminosities and said: "May my little son return as a reward for my fastings and my sacrifices." And indeed, her son suddenly stood before her.

"What, Mother," he said, "have you not gone to bed yet? Here I am, back from Manchuria, and here is the letter from my brother."

The old woman laughed. "You did right not to go, but don't tell me any more lies. You couldn't possibly go more than a thousand *li* in one day."

"So you don't believe me, Mother?" the boy said. He took a packet from his sleeve. In it was a letter. It had indeed been written by his brother. And he brought a shirt to be washed that was one the old woman remembered making. Everybody heard of this, and so the boy came to be called Wanhui. Afterwards, he became a monk and was known as Abbot Wanhui. He was a man of outstanding virtue and performed a number of striking miracles. Once he swallowed two pints of needles before the stone tiger of the Emperor Zhao, and once he brought three pagodas from his head before the heir apparent of the Emperor Wu of Liang. So the Temple of Eternal Felicity was built expressly for him and immense amounts of money were spent on its construction.

Years and months flew like a weaver's shuttles. The patriarch Wanhui went back to Paradise, and, one after the other, his pious monks passed away. There were left but a handful of idle scroungers who kept women, drank wine, and did everything that is unbecoming. It was not long before they reached such a pitch that they pawned their religious habits and sold their bells. The tiles and bricks of which the temple was built were sold for wine, and the rain and wind soon affected the sacred images. A place of veneration became the prey of mists and weeds. For forty years nobody troubled to rebuild it. Then there came a monk from India who was impressed with the greatness of China. He crossed the River of Shifting Sands and the Sea of the Zodiac, and, after traveling eight or nine years, came at last to China. Then he came to Shandong and so to the ruined temple. There, for nine years he stayed with his face to the wall and did not speak a single word.

One day, an idea suddenly came into his head and he said to himself: "This temple is utterly in ruins, and these hairless asses care only for eating and drinking. It has become a waste place. This is a sad business. If I do not make up my mind to do something about it, no one else will. I must go out. I hear that his Lordship Ximen, a military officer and a very rich man, one day when he was entertaining his Excellency Cai here, saw the ruin and spoke of restoring this temple. If I can only persuade him to take the initiative, everything will be plain sailing. I must go at once." He beat the gong, assembled all the monks in the Great Hall, and told them what his purpose was. He bade one of them bring him ink and a brush. Then he wrote an appeal for funds. This veritable Buddha of a monk then left his fellows, put on sandals and a straw hat, and went to see Ximen Qing.

Now to return to Ximen Qing. When Ying Bojue had left him, he went to Wu Yueniang's room and told his wife about Bojue's recommendation of Master Shui. Then he said: "When I came back from the Eastern Capital, my friends and relations all gave parties in my honor and we must do something in return. I am not particularly busy today and I think we might do it at once." He told Daian to see to the preparations, and sent the other boys around with invitations. Then he took Yueniang's hand and went to see Guan'ge in the rooms of Li Ping'er.

The Sixth Lady welcomed them smilingly, and told the nurse to bring out the baby. He had grown very handsome. The child smiled at them and went readily to Yueniang. She took him in her arms. "My son," she said, "you are a clever boy and you will do well. When you are grown up, you will be a good son to your mother."

"When he is grown up and gets a position, the robes of ceremony will be yours," Li Ping'er said.

"My son," Ximen Qing said, "don't follow in your father's footsteps. When you are a man, be a civil officer, not a military officer like me. Mine is a good post, but it has not the dignity of a civil officer's; and, though I am rich, I do not enjoy the respect that is paid to the others."

Pan Jinlian was standing outside and heard all this. She was very angry. "You shameless, boasting, dirty strumpet!" she muttered. "Do you think you are the only woman who can bear a child? He hasn't passed three yellow plum seasons or four summers yet. He isn't through smallpox, and his schooldays are not over. He lives still with the God of Hades. What right have you to talk about his getting a government appointment and your being honored as a lady? And that rascal has no shame. Why should the child get a civil position different from his own?"

While she was muttering angrily to herself, Daian came. "Fifth Mother," he said, "where is Father?"

"You little thief!" Jinlian cried, "how do I know where your father is? Do you expect to find him in my room? Why not with the honored lady to whom he pays so many delicate attentions? Why do you come and ask me?"

Daian saw that there was no purpose in his questioning her any further, and went to Li Ping'er's room. There he coughed warningly and said: "Uncle Ying is in the great hall."

"Why! He has only just gone," Ximen Qing said. "What has brought him back so soon?"

"He will tell you when he sees you," the boy said.

Ximen Qing left Yueniang and Li Ping'er and went to the outer court. He was just about to speak to Ying Bojue when the old monk arrived. Outside the gate, he called loudly upon Buddha and asked: "Is this the noble Ximen's house? Tell him, Master Comptroller, that I am here. Tell him that I will bless his son, send him prosperity and long life. I am a monk from the Eastern Capital come to ask for alms."

Ximen Qing was a man who never troubled about money. He was delighted to have a son and was only too glad to do anything he could for the child. The servants knew this well and they came and told him without hesitation. "Bring him in," Ximen said. The old monk came in and made reverence to Ximen Qing.

"I come from India," he said. "I was at the Eastern Capital for a while, but for nine years I have remained in solemn meditation at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. I have come to know the Sacred Principle. Now the temple is in ruins, and the rooms are falling down and it seemed right to me that, as a humble disciple of Buddha, I should do something for the temple. So I determined. The other day, you, my lord, took leave of some other noble gentlemen at the temple. You were sorry to find it in such disrepair, and it was your kind intention to assist us. At that moment the host of Buddhas were your witnesses. I remember that we read in the sacred scriptures: If the pious men and women of this generation spend their wealth for the glory of the image of Buddha, reward shall come to them; their sons and grandsons shall be fair and strong; they shall pass all their examinations and their wives shall be honored. I have come especially to you. Help me to accomplish this good deed, whether you give me five hundred or a thousand." He took out a silken cloth and, from it, the subscription list, and handed it with both hands to Ximen Qing.

Ximen was moved by the monk's words and gladly took the appeal. He told a boy to bring tea for the monk and meanwhile looked at what was written.

A humble supplication [he read]. When, after the White Horse had borne the Sacred Books here, the Religion of the Buddha was made known, the glorious doctrines that had come from India were established in their various schools. Then all the monks of this great country were converted to the teaching of the Buddha. The Three Thousand Worlds were beautified. Now we have seen that this temple is in ruins and no longer worthy of its great name.

If we do not give alms, how shall we pride ourselves that we are disciples of the Buddha and men of virtue? This Temple of Eternal Felicity is a religious foundation of great antiquity, a holy place of sacrifice. It was built in the days of the Emperor Wu of Liang, and its founder was the Great Teacher Wanhui. In those days it had splendid proportions and was modeled upon the garden of the Buddha himself. The floor was paved with gold and the adornments were of exquisite delicacy so that it resembled the monastery of Qi Yuan. The staircases were of white jade. Lofty towers soared to the heavens. So the religious atmosphere was made manifest in the skies. The foundations were solid and the main sanctuary could contain a thousand monks. The wings were magnificent with beautiful buildings. The cloisters were spotless and the whole building was like the dwelling of the Immortals.

In those days bells and drums announced the sacred principle of the Buddha and all men said: "Here is the abode of the Buddha in this world." The monks were learned, and it was a paradise upon earth. But now, many years have passed and things have altered. Evil monks gave way to drink and broke their vows; so fond of sleep were they and idle that they never swept their monastery. Gradually it declined; the number of the monks decreased. It became a desert place, and few came to worship there.

Snakes and rats made their holes in the walls; wind and rain wore them away. Pillars and walls, one after another, fell. The monks did nothing to repair them, and the place crumbled into ruin. Day succeeded day, year followed year, and none thought to restore the buildings. Instead, the painted balustrades and panels were burned by the monks themselves to heat wine and tea; great pillars and beams were taken to exchange for salt and rice. The weather tarnished the gold upon the Lohan's body; the rain streamed upon the Buddhas, and their bodies crumbled into dust. Alas, thus was so gorgeous and beautiful a place, a treasure-house of gold and color, transformed into a desert of weeds and brambles. Things prosper for a while and then decay, yet prosperity will return when ill fortune has done its worst.

This monk can no longer bear to see the ruin of the House of Buddha. He has sworn a great oath that he will go to all good people for their charity and stimulate their generous feelings. Whether they give a column, a beam, or simply wood; whatever it is, their names shall be remembered forever. Whether they contribute silver or cloth, whatever we receive, their names shall be entered upon the roll of benefactors.

Trusting in the might and the wisdom of the Buddha, we call down blessings upon all good people that they may prosper forever. We have confidence in the All-knowingness that father, son and grandson shall obtain high office and that their household shall be continued forever. They shall beget wise sons who shall bring repute upon their families; their gold shall be piled as high as mountains and, whatever they ask for, it shall be granted them.

You to whom this shall come, may the spirit of parsimony depart from you.

When Ximen Qing had finished reading, he laid the writing on the table very carefully.

"Though I cannot call myself a rich man," he said to the monk, "I have a few thousands. I am a military officer, and for long no son was born to me. Last year, my sixth wife bore a child and I was content. The other day I happened to come to your monastery to take leave of some friends, and I thought then of giving money for the restoration. It is good of you to come and see me. I shall not refuse."

He took a brush and wondered how much he should put down. Ying Bojue said: "Brother, since you seem so well disposed, why not pay the whole cost? I'm sure it would not be too much for you."

Ximen Qing laughed, the brush in his hand. "No," he said, "I cannot do that."

Bojue said: "Well, at least a thousand."

Again Ximen Qing laughed. "No, that's too much."

Then the monk spoke. "Noble sir," he said, "we monks of Buddha never press people to give. We take whatever they choose to give us. Write what you can afford. I only ask that you will commend the cause to your relatives and friends."

"You speak with wisdom, Master," Ximen said, "I will not give less than five hundred." This sum he wrote down. The monk thanked him. "All the eunuchs and officers of the prefecture and the district are friends of mine. Go and see them. I am sure they will put down three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, or at least fifty, and you will certainly be able to restore your monastery." He gave the monk some vegetarian food and saw him to the door.

When he returned to the hall, he said to Ying Bojue: "I was just wishing to see you when you came. When I came back from the Eastern Capital, my friends and relatives gave parties in my honor. Today I am making a return and I should like you to stay. The monk interrupted us."

"A good monk that," Bojue said. "Certainly a very holy man. I was quite touched while he was talking to you, and even I made my little contribution."

"What did you contribute?" Ximen Qing asked. "I didn't see you write it down."

Bojue laughed. "Ah, Brother," he said, "I fear that you do not understand. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that good will is the finest form of charity; then the teaching of religion; and, last of all, the giving of alms. Did I not urge you to give him money? That was charity of the first order."

Ximen Qing laughed. "You certainly did, but I don't believe there was any particular good will about it."

They both laughed. "I will stay until your guests come," Bojue said. "If you have anything to attend to, please don't mind me, but go and discuss it with your lady." Ximen left Bojue and went to the inner court. Jinlian was grumbling there, but he paid no attention. She yawned and went to her room to sleep.

Li Ping'er, Ruyi'er, and the maids were trying to amuse Guan'ge, who was crying. Yueniang and Sun Xue'e were superintending the cooks in the kitchen. Ximen Qing went to them and told them about the monk and the contribution he had made. He also told them the joke Ying Bojue had made. They laughed.

Yueniang was a good woman. She said something to Ximen Qing that touched him deeply.

"Brother," she said, "you have been blessed by Heaven. A son has been born to you. Now you have had this generous idea of giving your money and the whole household will be the better for it. But the more good ideas the better, while evil ideas should be uprooted utterly. Brother, in days past you have not been all that you ought to have been. You have gone after whores and behaved improperly. This must stop. Then you will grow in virtue, and it will be better for your son."

Ximen Qing laughed. "That's a nice way to talk. And you're quite wrong. The world is based upon the interaction of the male and female principles, and it is natural for men and women to be drawn together. Any irregular little affair that may happen in this present life was predetermined in a former one. It is all written down in the register of marriages. One cannot say that anything we do is out of depravity and evil passion. Besides, they tell me that gold is not despised, even in Paradise, and, in the ten regions of Hell, money is at a premium. So, if we are generous in almsgiving now, it won't do us any harm if we debauch the angels and run off with the daughters of the Mother of the Gods."

Yueniang laughed. "Dogs eat filth and think it's nice. They can't change their habits, because they are made that way."

They were still laughing when the two nuns, Wang and Xue, came in with a bowl. They greeted Yueniang and Ximen Qing. Yueniang asked them to sit down.

Nun Xue was not one who had been brought up in a convent from her youth. She had been a married woman, and her husband had sold buns outside a temple. But the business did not prosper, and she started a business of greater profit with the monks of the temple. Five or six of them enjoyed her favors. They used to send her bread and other things that the faithful had given them for sacrifice. They gave her money for ornaments and cloth that pious donors had presented to the temple, and she used the cloth to make shoes for her feet. All this was without her husband's knowledge. When he died, as she had developed a keen enthusiasm for monasticism, she became a nun. She sent about conducting services in pious households and assisting wicked women in their unlawful love affairs. Seeing that Ximen Qing was a wealthy man with several wives, she favored his household with very frequent visits, hoping always to get more money.

The Buddhist nuns, of course, have not a hair
Upon their heads.
Night after night, they sport with the monks.
Three bald heads
The teacher and his two disciples.
What are the little cymbals doing on the bed?

Nun Xue sat down and opened a small box. "We have really nothing to offer you," she said, "but I have brought a few fruits that have been offered to Buddha. They are perfectly fresh."

"It is good of you to come at all," Yueniang said. "There is no reason why you should trouble to bring presents."

Jinlian woke up and heard somebody talking. She thought it must be Ximen Qing again with Li Ping'er, and she got up to peep at them. But Li Ping'er was playing with the baby. When she knew that the two nuns were there, she determined to ask their advice about the child and went to Yueniang's room. When she had come and greeted the nuns, Ximen told them about the monk who had come to ask for alms. Jinlian was annoyed and went off muttering to herself.

When Xue had listened to Ximen Qing, she rose and made a reverence to him. "With generosity such as yours," she said, "you must assuredly live a thousand years. You will have five sons and two daughters and they will live together with you. I have a suggestion to make. It will cost you very little, and it will make you even more prosperous. If you accept this suggestion, even old Gautama who lived an ascetic life upon the Mountains of Snow, or the great Kāśyapa who could sweep the ground with his beard, or the Second Great Teacher who cut himself to shreds to feed a tiger, or old Ji Gu who poured the yellow gold upon the ground, will not be able to rival you in merit."

Ximen Qing laughed. "Sit down, most worthy Sister," he said. "Tell me what I must do and I will do it."

"Our Lord Buddha," the nun began, "has given us the Dharani Sutra to teach men the way to Paradise. Because those who see with the eyes of the flesh do not truly see and cannot truly believe, the Lord Buddha gave this teaching urging men to serve him faithfully that so they may attain to Paradise and escape from the turning of the wheel. The Buddha said: He who reads this book or prints it for others to read shall receive blessings unbounded. And in that book are charms for the protection of children. If people would engender boys and girls, first they should secure this text and recite it. Then their children will be easy to rear. No calamities will fall on them and blessings will be showered upon them. I know that the type of this book still exists but no one has reprinted it. Now, my lord, if you will spend a little money and print a few thousand copies, they can be sewn and distributed and you will have done a truly meritorious work."

"I see no objection," Ximen said, "but first I must know how much the paper, the printing, and the binding will cost. Tell me that, and I will have the work done."

"My lord," Nun Xue said, "there is no need for you to be troubled with such details. Nine taels of silver will do to begin with. The printer can print a few thousand copies and, when the binding is finished, you can pay whatever else is needed."

Meanwhile Chen Jingji was looking for Ximen Qing. He came to the arbor, and there had the good fortune to find Jinlian. When she saw him, it was as though a cat suddenly espied a fish. Her melancholy disappeared at once, and the soft winds of Spring brought color to her face. They saw that no one was about, held each other's hands and kissed, but they feared lest Ximen Qing might suddenly appear and were like a couple of rats, glancing about on one side and another as though they watched for the cat. They realized that there was no possibility for them to go further. Chen Jingji ran away without telling Ximen Qing what he had come to say. After hearing what Nun Xue had to say, Ximen was once more persuaded. He told Daian to take thirty taels of silver from a box and gave them to the nuns. "I'll have five thousand copies printed," he said. "When the work's done, I'll check the accounts." Then Shutong came and said that all the guests had arrived. There were Uncle Wu, Uncle Hua, Xie Xida, Chang Zhijie and the others. Ximen hastily dressed and came out to see them. He ordered tables to be set and they took their places in due order. Then fish, meats, and fruits were brought. Those who were present were all good friends so formal politeness was dispensed with. They guessed fingers and played all sorts of games. Some of them sang songs. They all heartily enjoyed themselves.

If one's basic nature is perfected,[1] one can comprehend the Way;
Turning over a new leaf, one may jump free of the entangling net.
Disciplining oneself to achieve dhyana is not an easy thing to do;
Refining oneself in order to achieve no-birth is no ordinary task.
Let the clear and the turgid alternate as the wheel of dharma turns;
Break open the kalpas, so that one may travel either east or west.
One may wander free and easy for myriads of aeons without number;
One's single ray of divine light[2] will forever illuminate the void.[3]

In Tung-p'ing prefecture of Shantung province, there was in former times a Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity. It was erected in the second year of the P'u-t'ung reign period,[4] during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty,[5] and its founder was the venerable patriarch Wan-hui.[6]
Why do you suppose he was called the venerable patriarch Wan-hui? It was because, when the old master was only six or seven years old, he had an elder brother who had joined the army and was stationed on the frontier. Since:
The normal communication of news was difficult,[7]
They did not know whether he was alive or dead.[8]
For this reason, his aged mother could not get concern for her eldest son out of her mind and constantly wept about the house.
Suddenly one day, the child questioned his mother, saying, "Mother, at a time like this:
The world is at perfect peace,[9]
and your children are not troubling you. Though we have nothing to eat but meal after meal of millet, we are able to get by. Why is it, then, that you are constantly giving way to tears? Tell me about it Mother, and perhaps I will be able to share the burden of your sorrow with you."
"As a little child," his aged mother replied, "you do not yet comprehend the sorrows of your elders. During the four or five years since your father died, and your elder brother was dispatched to the frontier to serve as a senior officer, he has not sent a single letter home. I don't know whether he is dead or alive, or whether he exists or not. How can I ever get it off my mind?"
As she spoke, she started to cry again.
"Fortunately," the child responded, "if that's all it is, what's the difficulty about it? Mother, if you'll just tell me where my elder brother is stationed right now, I, his younger brother, will simply go there, sooner or later find my elder brother, get a letter from him, and come home to report back to you. Wouldn't that be a good idea?"
The old lady, crying on the one hand, and laughing on the other, said, "What a crazy simpleton you are! To take up the question of where your elder brother is located, if it were a trip of no more than a hundred or two hundred li, you might be able to make it. But he's somewhere in Liao-tung, more than ten thousand li from here. Even a stalwart young man, making the best possible time, would take four or five months to get there. I'm laughing because a child like you could hardly be expected to make such a trip."
"Aha!" said the child. "If it's only Liao-tung where he is, it's not as though he were up in the sky, or anything like that. I'm going to set out, find my elder brother, and come right back."
Lo and behold, he proceeded to fasten on his sandals, adjust his long gown, bow to his mother, and disappear in a cloud of dust. The old lady, finding that:
Though she might call after him, he did not respond;
Though she might pursue him, she could not catch up,
became even more depressed than before.
Among her neighbors in the locality, there were women, both old and young, who:
Rubbing shoulders and nudging backs,
Providing soup and supplying water,
Praising here and faultfinding there,[10]
came forward to comfort her in her distress.
Some among them endeavored to reassure her, saying, "How could the child have gone very far? Sooner or later, before long, he is bound to return."
As a result, the old lady allowed the tears flowing from her two eyes to dry up and sat down in a state of depression. After a while:
The red sun began to set in the west.[11]
While, as for her:
Neighbors to the east and the west,[12]
each and every one of them:
Heated her soup and cooked her rice, or
Mounted her k'ang and shut the gate.
The old lady continued to:
Stick out her head and crane her neck,[13]
while the two pupils of her eyes were habitually directed outside, as though she only wished she could follow in his footsteps. Lo and behold, at this juncture, as she gazed into the distance, she saw the figure of a youngster emerging from the darkening shadows.
At this, the old lady exclaimed:
"Thanks to Heaven and thanks to Earth,
and thanks to:
The light of the sun, moon, and stars,[14]
if this is really my youngest child coming, my resolution:
To fast and maintain a vegetarian diet,
will not have been in vain."
Lo and behold, before she knew it, the venerable patriarch Wan-hui knelt down in front of her and said, "Mother, before you have even gone to sleep on the k'ang, I have been to Liao-tung, found my elder brother, and brought back a family letter indicating that all is well with him."
At this, the old lady laughed and said, "My child, it's a good thing you haven't actually gone, leaving your old mother behind to worry about you. But you really oughtn't to indulge in such a whopper in order to fool your old mother. Since when is it possible to travel a distance of ten thousand li and back between the morning and evening of a single day?"
"Mother," the child responded, "can it really be that you don't believe me?"
He then proceeded straightaway to put down his clothes bag and take out the family letter indicating that all was well with his elder brother, and, sure enough, it turned out to be in his elder brother's handwriting. He also took out an undershirt that he was bringing back to be laundered, which had been hand-stitched by the old lady herself, so that she could identify it as authentic:
Without the slightest possibility of error.[15]
This event created quite a stir in the neighborhood, and he came to be referred to as Wan-hui, or "The one who returned from a journey of ten thousand li." Later, when he had:
Abandoned lay life to take up a religious vocation,
he became known as the Venerable Wan-hui. To be sure, it turned out that:
His prowess and virtue were lofty and marvelous,
His superhuman powers were both broad and great.[16]
On one occasion, during an audience before Shih Hu, the emperor of the Later Chao dynasty,[17] he demonstrated his prowess by swallowing two pints of iron needles.[18] On another occasion, in the audience hall of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, he extracted three relics from the crown of his head. That is why the Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity was established by imperial decree on behalf of the venerable patriarch Wan-hui, and dedicated to the perpetuation of his memory. There is no knowing how much money was expended on this project. Truly:
The divine monk was born into this world with vast supernatural powers;
He was highly regarded by the sage ruler whose generosity was profound.
Who would have thought that:
The years and months resemble shuttles;[19]
The times change and circumstances differ.[20]
Lo and behold, in due course, the venerable patriarch Wan-hui:
Returned to Heaven, having achieved parinirvana,
and those monks of superior attainments in his entourage, who:
Still retained their skin and flesh,
one by one, passed away. Eventually the temple fell into the hands of a bunch of shiftless monks who repudiated the monastic code of conduct known as *Pai-chang ch'ing-kuei*, or *Pai-chang's Rules of Purity*,[21] maintaining mistresses, drinking distilled spirits, and engaging in every kind of forbidden activity. Even going so far as incitement to homosexual venery, there was no conduct in which they refused to indulge. But they ended up falling victim to crooked swindlers and profiteers who provided them with illicit liquor at inflated prices. When they were unable to pay their debts, it was not long before they started to pawn their cassocks, and hock their bells and chimes. They tried to sell the rafters from the main hall of the temple, but nobody wanted them, so they were reduced to burning them for fuel, and even bartered the bricks and tiles of the structure for liquor. Exposed to:
The drizzling rain and blustering wind,
the Buddhist idols began to tumble down, leaving the premises in:
A state of utter bleakness and desolation,[22]
with the result that those who had been wont to burn incense there ceased to come. And, as for the former patrons and disciples, and those who had sponsored religious ceremonies or services for the salvation of the departed, it was just like:
Kuan Yü, the God of War, trying to peddle bean curd:
Not even a ghost would venture to come to the door.[23]
What had been the site of:
Sacred rites performed to bell and drum,
was suddenly transformed into a place of:
Desolate mists and withered vegetation.[24]
Before anyone knew it, thirty or forty years had elapsed, and there was no one prepared to:
Deal with the destruction or renovate the ruins.
It so happens that in this temple there was an Abbot Tao-chien. He was originally a native of western India who so admired the splendor of the Middle Kingdom that he formed the wish to make a pilgrimage to that exalted place. Traversing the River of Flowing Sands, the Sea of Stars, and the basin of the Kuan River, he traveled for eight or nine years before finally reaching Chinese territory. Wending his way forward, he finally reached the region of Shantung and chose to stick his staff into the soil on the grounds of this dilapidated temple.
He meditated for nine years with his face to the wall,[25]
Without saying anything or uttering so much as a word.[26]
Truly:
The Buddhist dharma originally dispenses with the impediment of written words;
The fruits of ritual performance are only won in the practice of meditation.
Suddenly one day, a thought occurred to him, and he said to himself, "Even a temple of these dimensions has been allowed to fall into such a state of dilapidation. If one contemplates these shaven-pated donkeys, with their:
Muddled heads and uncouth brains,
all they are capable of is:
Drinking wine and devouring food.
Is it not a pity that they have taken this sanctuary of an ancient Buddha and reduced it to the barest ruins? If only someone could be induced to come up with:
A single brick or half a tile,
in order to:
Resurrect its former grandeur.
I remember that a man of yore put it very well when he said about a certain place:
Its men are superlative and its territory is numinous.[27]
Now that things have come to the present pass:
If I don't take responsibility,
Who will take responsibility?
If I don't stick my neck out,
Who will stick his neck out?
Moreover, nowadays in this region of Shantung there is a prominent official named Hsi-men Ch'ing. who holds a post in the Embroidered-Uniform Guard.
His family property runs into the tens of thousands,[28]
His wealth is similar to that of princes and nobles.

There is scarcely anything that his household does not possess. The other day, when he was seeing off Censor Ts'ai Yün, he chose this spot at which to provide a farewell libation for him. Because he noticed that the temple was in a dilapidated state, he expressed a desire to:
Contribute some money as a charitable donation,
for the purpose of:
Rebuilding and refurbishing the original edifice.
At the time, although I didn't say anything definite, something in the way of a plan began to develop in my mind. Now today, if I should only prove able to induce that donor to:
Take responsibility for promoting the idea,
I am sure that, sooner or later, my expectations may be realized. But I will have to arrange to pay him a visit myself."
At this juncture, he proceeded to summon his:
Dharma heirs and disciples,
and had them:
Strike the bells, and
Beat the drums,
in order to convene the entire assembly, after which he ascended the hall and announced this idea of his. How was this abbot dressed? Behold:
The Ch'an cassock that envelops his body is dyed bloodred;
The two rings that dangle from his ears are made of gold.
The metal staff he holds in his hand is as bright as a mirror;
The hundred and eight pearls of his rosary shine like the sun.
He reveals the golden cords that line the way to enlightenment;
And inspires even ordinary men to awaken from their dreams.
With bushy eyebrows, jet-black hair, and eyes like bronze bells;
He is reputed to be a venerable sage monk from the Western Heaven.
When the abbot had finished his announcement, he told an acolyte to bring him:
The four treasures of the writer's studio,[29]
whereupon he ground the fragrant ink known as "ambergris balm,"[30] moistened ened his "rat's whisker brush,"[31] spread out a sheet of stationery with "black thread columns,"[32] and proceeded to draft a petition, in which he started out by explaining:
The background of the matter from beginning to end,[33]
and ended by urging the recipients to:
Donate money and create good fortune for themselves.
His calligraphy was such that:
Every line was straight, and
Every character was clear.
Truly, this worthy abbot was an avatar of an ancient Buddha or bodhisattva.
At this juncture, he took his leave of the assembly, put on his Ch'an sandals, donned a hooded cloak and bamboo hat, and betook himself straight to Hsimen Ch'ing's residence.
To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had said goodbye to Ying Pochüeh, he headed back toward the rear compound, shedding his outer garments at the summerhouse on the way, and went straight into Wu Yüeh-niang's room, where he told her about Ying Po-chüeh's recommendation of Licentiate Shui.
He then went on to say, "The other day, after my trip to the Eastern Capital, all of those relatives and friends of ours were kind enough to come and share a drink with me. Now we can hardly avoid arranging a little party for them in order to reciprocate. Since I happen to be at leisure today, with no other obligations, we might as well take care of this matter."
There and then, he instructed Tai-an to take a basket, go to the marketplace, and buy some fresh fruits in season, pork, mutton, fish, salted and preserved chicken and goose, and other foodstuffs. When he had finished with these instructions, he sent page boys off in different directions to invite the guests.
He then took Yüeh-niang by the hand, and the two of them went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters in order to see Kuan-ko. Li P'ing-erh welcomed Yüeh-niang and Hsi-men Ch'ing with an ingratiating smile.
"His mother has come to see the child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Li P'ing-erh told the wet nurse to bring Kuan-ko out, and they observed that his eyebrows were straggly, and he looked just as though he had been molded out of a lump of flour. Smiling happily, he crawled right into Yüeh-niang's arms.
Yüeh-niang took him in hand and embraced him, saying, "My child, how clever you are. When you grow up you're sure to be as smart as can be."
She then addressed him again, saying, "When you grow up, my child, how are you going to look after your old mother?"
To this Li P'ing-erh responded, "Mother, how can you say such a thing? If our son should grow up to adulthood, and succeed in obtaining:
An official post or even half of one,[34]
the honors bestowed upon his family as a consequence would start at the top. You would surely be the first person to be granted the privilege of wearing:
The phoenix cap and roseate shawl,[35]
and he would be in an excellent position to look after his old mother."
Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up on this, saying, "My son, when you grow up, you must strive to obtain a position as a celestial official in the civil bureaucracy, rather than following in the footsteps of your old man, and serving in the western ranks of the military bureaucracy, in which, though you may achieve some success, you will never be fully respected."
As they were speaking, they were unaware that P'an Chin-lien was eavesdropping outside the room. Before she knew it:
Anger flared up in her heart,
and she started to curse, saying, "Why you shameless, stinking whore, with your empty pretensions! So you think you're the only one that can raise a child successfully, do you? He hasn't even lived through three rainy seasons or four summer solstices yet, let alone survived to the age of fourteen or fifteen, passed through the gate of puberty, or started to attend school and learn to read. He's still as fragile as a bubble, subsisting here in the company of King Yama. How can anyone foresee that he will become an official, or that official honors will be bestowed on the venerable matriarch? And as for that crazy louse of a jailbird, that shameless good-for-nothing of ours, how can he expect him to become a civil official rather than following in his footsteps?"
Just as she was grumbling and muttering away, cursing on the one hand, and expressing her annoyance on the other, who should appear but Tai-an, who came waltzing in and addressed her, saying, "Fifth Lady, where is Father?"
"You crazy, sharp-beaked louse of a jailbird!" Chin-lien cursed him. "Who knows where that so-called Father of yours may be? And what would he be doing coming to my quarters anyway? He's already got a grand lady with a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, a venerable noblewoman, ready to wait upon him with:
Eight culinary delicacies in five tripods.[36]
So what are you asking me for?"
Tai-an, who realized that he was barking up the wrong tree, simply said, "You're right," and headed off in the direction of the Sixth Lady's quarters.
When he arrived in front of the door to her room, he coughed discreetly and addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Master Ying the Second is in the reception hall."
"I just saw Master Ying the Second off a little while ago," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So what's he up to now?"
"Father, you'd better go find out for yourself," said Tai-an.
Hsi-men Ch'ing felt compelled to abandon Wu Yüeh-niang and Li P'ingerh, stopped by the summerhouse to put on his outer garments, and went out to the front compound to receive Ying Po-chüeh.
Just as he was about to interrogate him, it transpired that the venerable abbot Tao-chien arrived at his gate to seek a subscription and called out in a loud voice, "Amit[illegible]bha Buddha! Is this the gate to the residence of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing? Would one of you responsible servitors announce my arrival? Just say that if you wish to:
Support your cassia-like sons, and
Protect your orchid-like grandsons,
So that:
Those for whom you seek good fortune obtain good fortune,
And those for whom you seek long life obtain long life,
the venerable abbot Tao-chien from the Eastern Capital has come to seek an interview."
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing was a man who was accustomed to squandering silver and spending money, and he had only recently acquired an heir in the person of Kuan-ko, so he was exceedingly pleased to hear this and wished to perform some charitable deeds for the benefit of his infant son. Since his servants were quite aware of this, they did not:
Respond angrily or make difficulties,
but went inside and reported the visitor's arrival to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Have him come in. I'll see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Lo and behold, the servants:
Covering three steps with every two,[37]
made haste to invite the abbot inside, as respectfully as though they were dealing with a living Buddha.
The abbot proceeded directly to the elaborately furnished reception room, where he saluted his host by pressing his hands together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "I am a native of western India who, in the course of my peregrinations, has visited the Eastern Capital, Pien-liang, and has chosen to stick my staff into the soil on the grounds of the Ch'an Buddhist temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where:
I meditated for nine years with my face to the wall,
And labored to transmit the mind-seal of the Buddha.
Because:
The halls of the sanctuary are falling down,
And the temple is in a state of dilapidation,
it has occurred to me that as a disciple of the Buddha, it is appropriate that I should:
Exert myself on the Buddha's behalf.
Were I not to do so, on whose person should the responsibility devolve? For this reason, I have formed a resolution. On a prior occasion, when my venerable benefactor chose to come there in order to provide a farewell libation for some gentlemen, you expressed regret that the temple was in such a dilapidated state, and also exhibited:
A good conscience and admirable intentions,
by volunteering to take some responsibility for its maintenance. At that time, the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas authenticated the covenant. I recollect that in the Buddhist sutras it is well said that if pious men and pious women contribute alms for the refurbishment of Buddhist effigies, it will ensure that they will be recompensed when their:
Cassia-like sons and orchid-like grandsons,[38]
are born with:
Well-proportioned and good-looking features,[39]
and in days to come:
Achieve early success in the examinations,
so that, in turn, their:
Sons are privileged and their wives ennobled.[40]
It is for this reason that I have chosen to knock at your exalted gate. It matters not whether it be five hundred or a thousand taels. I merely beseech my venerable benefactor to:
Open the subscription book and reveal your intentions,
In order to realize the ripening of these good fruits."
He then proceeded to open up an embroidered wrapper, take out the subscription book with its accompanying petition, and proffer them to Hsi-men Ch'ing with both hands. Who could have anticipated that the preceding speech had already had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that his heart was moved. Before he knew it:
As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make him happier,
he had accepted the petition and the subscription book, and told a page boy to fetch some tea.
When he opened the petition, he saw that it read as follows:
I respectfully submit that:
The white horse bearing sutras[41] introduced the religion of symbols into China;
Chu Fa-lan and M[illegible]tanga explicated the Dharma and founded the Buddhist sect.[42]
Of the living beings in the entire realm,[43]
None fail to confess their allegiance[44] to the Buddhist patriarchs.
Everywhere within the three chiliocosms,
There are found Buddhist temples that are elaborately decorated.[45]
But if one observes the dilapidated rubble of this establishment,
How can it be considered a famous temple in a scenic location?[46]
If one does not compassionately contribute alms for its restoration,
How can the votaries of Buddha be described as charitable to others?
Now with regard to this Ch'an Temple of Eternal Felicity:

It is the sanctuary of an ancient Buddha,
A blessed place dedicated to religious practice.
Erected in the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty,
It was founded by the ancestral patriarch Wan-hui.
Magnificent in scale,
It resembled the Jetavana Park,[47]
The grounds of which were paved with gold.[48]
Exquisitely sculpted,
It was like the Jetavana Vihara,
The steps of which were made of white jade.
Its lofty chambers grazed the void,
The aroma of its sandalwood extending beyond the nine heavens;
Its layered base covered the ground,
The Buddha's Hall able to accommodate a thousand Ch'an monks.
Its two wings were majestic,
Consisting entirely of resplendent halls and purple buildings.[49]
Its corridors were immaculate,
Truly, even more magnificent than those of the grotto heavens.
At that time, when the bells and drums sounded,
Everyone said it was a Buddhist kingdom within the human world;
Verily, the serried ranks of black-robed monks,
Gave the impression of a human paradise within our mundane realm.
Who could foresee that, during the passage of the everlasting years,[50]
In the blink of an eye, times would change and circumstances alter?
Uncouth monks indulged in drunkenness and wreaked havoc,
Utterly ignoring the Rules of Purity.
Empty-headed lay workers were indolent and coveted sleep,
Refusing to sweep out the premises.
Eventually the temple was deserted,
No longer attracting any disciples.
Finally it became so desolate that,
Those who looked up to it were few.
Moreover, it became infested with birds and rodents;
How could it withstand the beating of wind and rain?
The buildings were dilapidated,
One and then two, two and then three,
Until they could not be maintained.
The walls began to disintegrate,
Day after day, and year after year,
But there was nobody to rebuild them.
Vermilion latticework partitions,
Were used to heat wine or heat tea.
Armloads of rafters and railings,
Were bartered for salt or for rice.
Wind has assailed the arhats until the gold is all washed away;
Rain has fallen upon the effigy of Amitābha reducing it to dust.
Alas! The brilliance of golds and greens,
Has one day turned into overgrown jungle.
Though success may eventuate in disaster,[51]
The nadir will be followed by the zenith.[52]
Fortunately, the zealous devotion of Abbot Tao is such that,
He cannot bear to see the temple of the Brahman prince collapse.
He has sworn a noble-minded vow,
To canvass all potential donors,
In the hope that they will all exhibit benevolence,
By uniformly displaying a compassionate disposition.
Rafters and pillars, beams and columns,
Without regard to their dimensions,[53]
When they are given, will be inscribed prominently with the names of their donors;
Silver bullion, cloth or paper currency,
No matter how munificent or meager,
Once in the till, will be recorded with the donors' names in the subscription book.
Relying upon the awesome efficacy of the Buddhist patriarchs,
Fortune, emolument, and longevity,
Will be yours for ever and ever,
Even for a hundred or a thousand years.
Thanks to the clear discernment of the guardian spirits,
Your fathers, sons, and grandsons,
Each and every one of them,
Will obtain high emolument and office.
Your posterity will proliferate,[54]
Engendering three locust and five cassia trees.[55]
Your forecourts will be imposing,
Refulgent with golden walls and hills of coins.
Everything that you exert yourself to pursue,
Will turn out auspiciously just as you wish.[56]
When you are presented with the text of this petition,
May each of you overcome the parsimony in your hearts.
Respectfully petitioned.

When he had finished reading the petition, Hsi-men Ch'ing straightened up the pages of the fascicle, put them back in their brocaded case, fastened it by inserting the pins into their clasps, further secured it by wrapping the attached brocade ribbon around it, and then:

Respectfully and reverentially,[57]
placed it on the table.

Folding his hands in front of him, he addressed the abbot, saying, "There is no reason for me to deceive you. Though my family may not amount to much, I do possess property worth several tens of thousands. Although merely a military official, I am not unacquainted with men of contemporary renown. Who could have anticipated that even at my age I should remain without an heir? Though there are five or six women in my household, I had remained worried about this and had determined to perform some charitable deeds, when, last year, my sixth consort gave birth to a son, thereby consummating my myriad desires. Then, by chance, the need to see off a friend of mine brought me to your exalted quarters, where I noticed that the temple buildings were dilapidated, and I formed a resolution to donate some money for their restoration. Since my venerable preceptor has condescended to approach me on this matter, how could I presume to refuse."

Taking a fine rabbit-hair brush in hand, Hsi-men Ch'ing was just hesitating over what to contribute, when Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Brother, since you have formed this good-hearted resolution to make a pledge on my nephew's behalf, why don't you undertake to:
Accomplish the whole task singlehandedly?
It wouldn't be that much of a commitment for you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, while still holding the brush in his hand, laughed, saying, "My resources are limited! My resources are limited!"

"At the very least you ought to contribute a thousand taels," said Ying Po-chüeh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed again, saying, "My resources are limited! My resources are limited!"

At this point, the abbot spoke up, saying, "With all due respect, venerable benefactor, I don't wish to be intrusive, but it is our Buddhist practice to let people bestow alms as they see fit, rather than making demands upon them that are difficult to fulfill. Your Honor should feel free to contribute only as much as you wish. If there are relatives or friends besides yourself that might be potential contributors, I hope that you will be good enough to recommend this cause to them."

"My venerable preceptor is most understanding," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It would not do to contribute too little."

So saying, he wrote himself down for five hundred taels and then laid his rabbit-hair brush aside, while the abbot expressed his gratitude by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to him in the Buddhist fashion.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, "The palace eunuchs and eunuch directors around here, as well as the granary heads, and patrolling inspectors from the local prefectures and districts, are all on good terms with me. In the days to come, I'll take the subscription book around to them and ask them to put down their names. No matter whether they put themselves down for three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, or fifty taels, I can guarantee that this good work of my venerable preceptor will be successfully completed."

That day, he detained the abbot for a vegetarian meal, before seeing him off at the gate. Truly:
Acts of compassion and good works are the stock in trade of influential families;
Preserving good fortune and dispelling disaster are the considerations of parents.

There is a poem on this subject of charitable donations:
The Buddhist dharma is not very complicated, it merely resides in the heart;
The planting of melons or planting of fruit is what constitutes its basis.
As for pearls and jade, amber, and other such valuables and rarities;
Who is able to take them with him when he comes to confront King Yama?
Those who accumulate good deeds are content even if they live in poverty;
Powerful families that accumulate property throw their money away in vain.
If it were possible to purchase longevity by the expending of one's wealth;
The wicked dictator Tung Cho[58] might well have lived until the present day.

As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off the abbot, he returned to the reception hall, sat down with Ying Po-chüeh, and said, "Brother, I was just planning to send someone to invite you over. You've arrived in the nick of time. The other day, after my trip to the Eastern Capital, all of my relatives and friends were kind enough to come and share a drink with me. Today I have sent a servant to buy the necessary provisions, so that your sister-in-law and I may hold a little party for them in order to reciprocate. I wanted you to be here to help keep them company. I could scarcely have anticipated the arrival of this abbot, whose visit has consumed a good deal of time."

"He seems to be a very fine cleric," said Ying Po-chüeh. "No doubt he is really someone of virtuous attainments. In the course of his conversation with you, even my heart was sufficiently moved to make me a benefactor."

"Brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "since when did you become a benefactor? When did you inscribe your name in the subscription book?"

Ying Po-chüeh laughed and said, "So! Do you mean to say that my intervention was not the act of a benefactor? Brother, you are not familiar with the Buddhist sutras. In the Buddhist sutras the greatest weight is placed on giving of the heart, which is followed in importance by giving of the dharma, and then giving of property. Do you mean to say that my:
Urging from the sidelines,[59]
did not constitute a giving of the heart?"

"Brother," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in your case I fear that:

The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it."
The two of them clapped their hands and had a good laugh over this.
Ying Po-chüeh then went on to say, "I am content to wait here until the guests come. If you have anything important to take care of, Brother, you might as well go and discuss it with my sister-in-law."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, took leave of Ying Po-chüeh and returned to the inner courtyard.
It so happened that P'an Chin-lien:
Mumbling and muttering to herself,
Feeling listless and discontented,[60]
had fallen victim, before she knew it, to a compulsive desire to sleep. After sneezing a couple of times, she had gone into her room, fallen onto her ivory bedstead, and promptly fallen asleep. Li P'ing-erh, for her part, concerned as she was about her child's crying, was sitting in her quarters, together with the wet nurse and her maidservants, looking after Kuan-ko and trying to get him to laugh. Only Wu Yüeh-niang and Sun Hsüeh-o, together with two servants, were in the rear compound preparing a meal.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went up to them, sat down, and proceeded to give Yüeh-niang a detailed account of how Abbot Tao-chien had come to solicit funds for the repair of the temple, and how he had seen fit to enter his name in the subscription book. He also related how Ying Po-chüeh had made a joke out of the matter, and they all had a laugh over it:
As though nothing in Heaven or Earth could make them happier.
Now it so happened that Wu Yüeh-niang was basically a serious person, and she was moved on this occasion:
Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
Without thought or meditation,
to say a few words that affected Hsi-men Ch'ing like:
The insertion of a needle in the cranium.[61]
Truly:
A worthy wife will admonish her husband as often as the cock crows;
Her intimate words will regularly convey doses of therapeutic advice.
Just what were the words that she addressed to him?
"Brother," said Yüeh-niang, "you've had the great good luck to sire a son and have also developed the virtuous intention to:
Extensively contract good affinities.[62]
How can this be anything but an earnest of good fortune for our entire family? The only thing is, I fear that your virtuous intentions are not many, and your evil intentions have not been completely eliminated. Brother, in days to come, it would be a good idea if you would engage in fewer of these meaningless casual liaisons, and eschew the petty deeds that suggest you are:
Covetous of wealth and given to lust.[63]
If you were to do a few good deeds in secret, it would benefit the little one."
"Mother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh, "you're expressing your jealousy again. As the saying goes:
Even Heaven and Earth are characterized as yin and yang;
It is only natural that male and female should mate.
Those who engage in secret trysts and illicit affairs in this life are all persons whose:
Fates were ordained in a previous life.[64]
Their names were entered in:
The register of amorous affinities,[65]
and they are merely fulfilling their fates in this life. You don't mean to say that they are merely acting on impetuous and reckless impulse, do you? I've heard it said of the Jetavana Park, in the western realm of the Buddhist patriarch himself, that it was only acquired after:
The grounds were paved with gold;
and that even in the Ten Courts of the Underworld,[66] something in the way of paper money is required if one is to survive. As long as I expend this property of mine in the doing of extensive good works, even if I were to rape Ch'ango, fornicate with the Weaving Maid, kidnap Hsü Fei-ch'iung, [67] or abduct the daughter of the Queen Mother of the West, it would do nothing to diminish the Heaven-splashing wealth and distinction that I now possess."
Yüeh-niang laughed, saying, "Brother, you're just like:
The dog who devours hot shit;
Taking it to be fragrant and sweet.
Once you get the taste of fresh blood between your teeth;
How can your carnivorous nature ever be altered?"
Just as they were laughing over this, who should appear but Nun Wang, bringing Nun Hsüeh along with her, who barged in carrying a box, flew forward to salute Yüeh-niang, and also kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Your Honor, we're fortunate to have found you at home. Since we parted the other day, I've been preoccupied with various paltry matters that have prevented me from coming to look in on you. But I haven't been able to get you out of my mind, so today I've brought Nun Hsüeh along with me to pay you a visit."
It so happens that this Nun Hsüeh had not left home to take up a religious vocation in her early years. In her youth she had married a husband who lived across the street from the Kuang-ch'eng Monastery and peddled steamed wheat cakes for a living. Who could have anticipated that, earnings from his business being meager, Nun Hsüeh, finding herself in this:
Unsatisfactory predicament,[68]
should have resorted to:
Bandying words and wagging her tongue,[69]
with the monks and acolytes in the monastery.
Exchanging looks with eyes and eyebrows,
Approving this and disapproving that,[70]
she managed to work these monks up into such a state that each and every one of them developed a stiff erection in his groin. Taking advantage of her husband's absence from the house, while:
Anticipating tea or recovering from wine,
she contrived to seduce some four, five, or six of them. They would constantly drop by and present her with baked wheat cakes, stuffed pastries, steamed dumplings, or chestnuts. Some of them would even give her the fees they earned for their religious services to enable her to buy flowers, while others would donate the fabric they received as payment for celebrating the ritual Destruction of Hell for her to make footbindings out of. Her husband remained oblivious to all this, and when, sometime later, he contracted an illness and died, because she was so intimately acquainted with the Buddhist establishment she opted to take the tonsure and become a nun. As such, she spent her time frequenting the homes of the gentry in the endeavor to corner the market for the recitation of Buddhist sutras and litanies of repentance. There were also good-for-nothing women who hankered after illicit affairs and engaged her to smuggle monks into their homes, for whom she acted as a procuress, which turned out to be a lucrative trade.
When she learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing's household was extremely wealthy and observed that he had a plethora of concubines and serving maids at his disposal, she thought she could contrive to reap a profit from this situation and took to frequenting his house accordingly. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, was unaware that:
The three female professionals and the six dames,[71]
are persons whom people should do everything in their power to prevent from frequenting their homes. Truly:
Originally, her conduct was that of an unlicensed prostitute.
Setting up shop as a Buddhist monk or preceptor,
She dresses up accordingly, and recites the name of Amitābha.
Every time she opens her mouth, she speaks of the way to the Western Paradise.
Wrapping her head in a length of cloth,
Draping her body in a long gown,
And girdling herself with a yellow sash,
Early and late, she loiters by the gate or lingers beside the door.
She regards relieving others of their gold and silver as acceptable conduct;
While, in the final analysis, in her heart she is utterly benighted.
Any way you look at it, she is scarcely a decent nun.
How many fine reputations have been besmirched by her?[72]
There is also another song that puts it very well:
Buddhist nuns, of course, are known for their shiny bald heads.
Enticing monks into their quarters, they are busy night after night.
When three shiny knobs congregate,
They resemble a master and his two disciples.
But what are they doing rubbing their cymbals together in bed?[73]
When Nun Hsüeh had taken a seat, she opened the little box, saying, "We have no way of adequately expressing our respect for you, but we have brought some fruits that were offered to the Buddha by our benefactors, as a makeshift way of presenting you with something fresh."
"If you wish to visit us," said Yüeh-niang, "simply come and visit us. What need is there for you to go to all this trouble?"
It so happened that P'an Chin-lien had awoken from her nap and heard people talking outside. Thinking that it was merely a continuation of what had been going on before, she went outside to see what was up. She saw that Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters playing with her child. When the latter found out that Nun Wang was here, she wanted to have a talk with her about doing something for the protection of Kuan-ko, so she went back to Yüeh-niang's room together with Chin-lien. After everyone had greeted each other, they all sat down.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, realizing that Li P'ing-erh had not heard about it, repeated the story of how Abbot Tao-chien had come to solicit a subscription, and how he had signed the subscription book and agreed to make a donation, in the hope of acquiring good fortune for Kuan-ko. Who could have anticipated that this would have the effect of annoying P'an Chin-lien so much that she took herself off in a puff of smoke, muttering to herself as she went.
At this juncture, Nun Hsüeh stood up, pressed her palms together in front of her chest, and exclaimed, "Buddha be praised! As long as Your Honor has:
The benign intention of creating good fortune,
there is no doubt but that you will enjoy:
A lifetime of a thousand years,
beget:
Five sons and two daughters,[74]
and remain:
United with your seven children.[75]
But there is another opportunity I would like to recommend to you, venerable sir. This instance of karmic cause and effect costs very little to initiate, yet it will:
Procure immeasurable good fortune.[76]
So, venerable benefactor! If you were to perform this act of merit, even the deeds of the venerable Gautama Buddha when he:
Practiced austerities in the Himalayas,[77]
or of the honorable Kāśyapa when he:
Spread his hair to cover the ground,[78]
or of the second Ch'an patriarch Hui-k'o[79] when he:
Plunged from a cliff to feed a tiger,[80]
or of the venerable Anāthapindika[81] when he:
Paved the entire grounds with gold,[82]
would not equal this act of merit on your part."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and said, "Reverend Sister, pray remain seated and tell me in detail just what this meritorious deed might be, that I may accede to your suggestion."
Nun Hsüeh then said, "Our Buddhist patriarchs have bequeathed to us the text of the *Dhāraṇī Sutra* in one scroll, that is solely devoted to exhorting us to seek the way to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. The Buddha has told us that the Third Dhyāna Heaven, the Fourth Dhyāna Heaven, the Thirty-third Heaven, the Tusita Heaven, the Grand Veil Heaven, and the Imperfect Heaven are all places to which one cannot expect to gain immediate admission whenever one wants. The only such place is the Western Paradise presided over by Amitābha. There are no seasons of spring, summer, autumn, or winter there; no frigid winds or summer heat. Rather, one always enjoys:
The temperate weather,[83]
of the three months of spring. Moreover, there are no distinctions between husbands and wives, or men and women there. One is reborn:
In the Pool of the Seven Treasures,[84]
On the Terrace of the Golden Lotus."[85]
"How large is that lotus blossom?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If one were reborn on top of it and were struck by a gust of wind, would one not be in danger of tumbling off and falling into the pond?"
"My good sir," said Nun Hsüeh, "you still don't understand. Let me explain it to you on the basis of what the scripture says. The Buddhists call a distance of five hundred li a yojana.[86] That lotus blossom is really something. It is very large, very large; in fact, five hundred yojanas in diameter. When one is reborn there:
Precious garb is furnished to order;
Fine repasts are provided by Heaven;
in addition to which:

Songbirds harmonize with each other,
sounding just like the reeds of a panpipe. Truly, it is a wondrous realm. Only because:
The ordinary man with fleshly eyes,[87]
Does not realize where he is going.
And lacks both reverence and faith,
the Buddhist patriarch chose to promulgate this sutra, urging people to:
Devotedly recite the Buddha's name,[88]
And be reborn in the western realm,
that they might behold the Buddha Amitabha himself. From that time on, from one age to the next, even unto a hundred, a thousand, or a myriad ages, they will never again fall subject to the wheel of transmigration. The Buddhist patriarch put it very well when he said, 'Anyone who recites this sutra, arranges to have this sutra printed, or copies this sutra, and thus persuades a single person, or a thousand, or a myriad persons to recite this sutra, will thereby:
Procure immeasurable good fortune.'
Moreover, included in this sutra there are sacred incantations for the protection of male offspring. All families that give birth to boys and girls must devote themselves to this in order to insure that:
Their growth and upbringing will both be easy,
and that:
Mishap may be avoided and good fortune assured.
Right now, the printing blocks for this sutra already exist. All that is needed is for someone to take care of their printing and distribution. Venerable sir, all you need to do is to pay for the labor and materials required to produce a print run of several thousand copies, have them properly bound, and distributed in all ten directions. The merit accruing to such an act would be great indeed."
"That would not be difficult," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But I don't know how many sheets of paper would be required for the reproduction of this sutra, or the cost of having it bound and printed. Only on the basis of a detailed estimate would it be appropriate for me to proceed."
"Venerable sir," said Nun Hsüeh, "you're being unreasonable. How can you say such a thing, or demand a detailed estimate? All you need to do is to give the sutra printing establishment an advance of nine taels of silver; tell them to print several thousand, or several tens of thousands, of copies; and promise to settle accounts with them by paying a lump sum for the cost of labor and paper after the binding has been completed. That's all there is to it. What need is there for such a thing as a detailed estimate?"
Just as they were in the thick of their discussion, lo and behold, Ch'en Ching-chi had something to say to Hsi-men Ch'ing and had been looking for him for some time without finding him. He asked Tai-an where he was and was told that he was in Yüeh-niang's quarters. As he made his way past the summerhouse, as luck would have it, he ran into P'an Chin-lien, who had been leaning on the balustrade sniggering to herself. When she suddenly lifted her head and saw that it was Ch'en Ching-chi, she reacted just like:
A cat upon catching sight of some fresh seafood:
Her only thought was to gobble it up immediately.
Before she knew it, the depression she had been suffering from all day changed into:
The genial atmosphere of a spring breeze.[89]
The two of them, taking advantage of the fact that there was no one about, fell to holding hands and snuggling up against each other, puckering up their lips and sucking each other's tongues, carrying on in the most disgusting way for some time. Because they were afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing might come out and catch them at it, they were unable to consummate the matter that really counted. Their two pairs of eyes were like those of rats on catching sight of a cat:
Looking left and glancing right,[90]
forever on the lookout. Their tryst having proven abortive, they ended up scurrying their separate ways in a puff of smoke.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had done listening to Nun Hsüeh's spiel, his heart was moved imperceptibly to a benign intent.
Calling for Tai-an, he had him fetch his card case, opened it with the little key attached to his handkerchief, and got out a sealed packet of silver, consisting of precisely thirty taels of the highest grade of incised silver stamped with the mark of the Sung-chiang mint, which he handed over to Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang, saying, "The two of you should go together to the sutra printing establishment of your choice and have them print five thousand copies of this sutra for me. When the job is finished, I will settle accounts with them, and pay whatever remains due."
While they were still speaking, who should appear but Shu-t'ung, who came in hurriedly to report, "The guests whom you've invited have all arrived." Needless to say, this group consisted of Wu K'ai, Hua Tzu-yu, Hsieh Hsita, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, the whole bunch of them in fact, all of whom arrived together, properly attired for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing hurriedly straightened his clothing, went outside to greet them, and ushered them into the reception hall. Tables had already been set up there, with an appropriate array of appetisers. Wu K'ai was invited to assume the place of honour after which the rest of them segregating themselves by order of precedence and indicating their relative degrees of seniority, all proceeded to sit down in their places. Whereupon, whether salted, preserved, fried, or stewed, unlimited quantities of fish and meat, roast chicken, roast duck, and fresh fruits in season were all brought out together. Hsi-men Ch'ing also ordered that Ma-ku wine should be opened up and heated for their consumption. Behold, when drinking wine with one's bosom friends, [91] demeanour and deportment are often forgotten. Some play at guess-fingers; some beat the drum while others pass the flower; [92]2 out of three moves are bluffs. Ballads are performed, Dramatic arias are sung. Those telling of breeze and moonlight speak of how, Tu Fu and Ho Chih-chang[93] appreciated the spring season. [94]Those showing off their book learning also recall how, Su Shih and Huang T'ing-chien roamed below the Red Cliff. [95]Those playing pitch-pot want to make the variations known as Regular Geese in Flight, Irregular Geese in Flight, or the 8 Immortals Cross the Sea. [96]Those playing at dice want to throw the combinations known as the Regular Cavalry, The Irregular Cavalry, [97] or Loaches Entering a Clump of Caltrops.[98] Those who lose a forfeit of wine must drain their cups to the last drop even if it induces them to collapse like a jade pinnacle.[99] Those who are the winners at dice must hang up congratulatory red banners; would anyone permit them to wear their caps upside down? [100] Inexhaustible are the scenes on the Stage of Youthful Festivity; indescribable are the days and months in the Land of Drunkenness.[101] Truly, the autumn moon and the spring flowers[102] are to be found everywhere; occasions for enjoyment and happy events[103] tend to occur then as well. If one fails during one's hundred years to be drunk a thousand times; all the hustle and bustle of one's life will simply amount to nothing.

## 081
### Inspired by a Fit of Jealousy, Chin-lien Beats Ch'iu-chü; Begging Cured Meat, the Mirror Polisher Tells a Sob Story & Zheng Aiyue

All alone within the embroidered bed curtains, her thoughts are subdued;
A myriad reasons for new melancholy beset her, both by day and by night.
A solitary goose calls after its mates, as it crosses the autumn frontier;
A distracting cricket bemoans its sorrows, as the moon hovers in the eaves.
Having lost her way en route to Blue Bridge,[1] she despairs of the red cord;[2]
Without anybody to share her golden boudoir, she lets down the green blind.
Her fate can be compared to the bamboos that grow along the Hsiang River;
That are to this day speckled with the tears shed by those nymphs of old.[3]

On that day Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking wine with his friends and relatives in the front reception hall until he became stinking drunk, after which he made his way toward Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound. Sun Hsüeh-o herself was in the kitchen at the time, overseeing the cleaning up of the utensils. When she heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing was headed for her place, she hastened back to it:
Covering two steps with every one.
The blind entertainer Big Sister Yü had been sitting on the k'ang in her quarters, and she hustled her off to spend the night with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü in the room with the k'ang in Yüeh-niang's quarters.
It so happens that, like the other women in the rear compound, Sun Hsüeh-o occupied quarters consisting of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor and two less well-lighted inner rooms, one of which was furnished with a bed, and the other with a k'ang. Hsi-men Ch'ing had not ventured into her quarters for more than a year. When she realized that he had come to see her today, on the one hand, she hastened forward to help Hsimen Ch'ing off with his clothes and provided a chair in the center of the parlor for him to sit on, while on the other hand, she wiped off the cool bamboo bed mat in her room, proceeded to:
Light incense and wash her private parts,
and then went back out to serve Hsi-men Ch'ing some tea. When they were finished with the tea, she helped him into her room and onto the bed, took off his boots, unfastened his girdle, and saw to it that he was resting comfortably. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.
The next day was the twenty-eighth, the actual date of Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday. They had just finished burning some paper money in honor of the occasion when, lo and behold, who should appear but Hu Hsiu, a young man employed by Han Tao-kuo, who arrived at the front gate, dismounted, and had the attendants announce his arrival to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that he be ushered into the reception hall, where, after Hu Hsiu had kowtowed to him, he inquired about the whereabouts of the boatload of goods.
Hu Hsiu then proceeded to hand him a letter with a statement of account and told him how Uncle Han Tao-kuo had managed to purchase a cargo of ten thousand taels worth of silk goods in Hang-chou, how they had now gotten as far as the customs station in Lin-ch'ing but lacked sufficient silver to pay the customs duty, and how only after paying the duty would they be able to transship the merchandise and transport it into the city.
On the one hand, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had read the letter with the statement of account he was delighted and ordered Ch'i-t'ung, "See to it that some food is provided for Hu Hsiu to eat."
On the other hand, he directed Hu Hsiu to go over to kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place and report the news to him. It was not long before Hu Hsiu finished his meal and went off on this errand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went inside and reported to Yüeh-niang, thus and so, saying, "Manager Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods has reached Lin-ch'ing, and he has sent his young man, Hu Hsiu, to deliver a letter with a statement of account. Right now, we'll have to sweep out the place across the street, store the goods there, find a manager to take care of it, construct an underground storehouse, and open up a shop for business."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said, "You'd better start looking for someone right away. It's not exactly early days yet, that would allow you to take your time about it."
"Right now I'm just waiting for Brother Ying the Second to come by," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I plan to take up the matter with him, and get him to find someone as quickly as possible."
In due course, when Ying Po-chüeh showed up, Hsi-men Ch'ing joined him in the reception hall and said, "Manager Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods from Hang-chou has arrived, but I am in need of a manager to take charge of selling the merchandise."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you are to be congratulated. Not only is today your birthday, but your boatload of goods has arrived. You are sure to reap a tenfold profit in this enterprise, since this is a case of:
One happy event occurring on top of another.
Brother, if it's a sales manager you want, that's no problem. I know someone who is a friend of mine because:
When fathers associate, their sons are acquainted.
He was originally a salesperson in the silk trade who has been down on his luck for several years and is sitting idle at home. This year he is forty-some years old, truly, a man in the prime of life. That he has a good eye for judging the quality of silver goes without saying. He is proficient at writing and arithmetic, and a good hand at business transactions. This person's surname is Kan, his given name is Jun, and his courtesy name is Ch'u-shen. He is currently living in Stonebridge Alley and resides in a house of his own."
"If he is agreeable," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "ask him to come see me tomorrow."
As they were speaking, who should appear but Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, all three of them, who prostrated themselves on the ground and kowtowed before getting up and standing to one side. Before long the tumblers and musicians all arrived, and preparations were made to feed them in an antechamber. Tables were set up and they were fed, along with Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng.
Who should appear at this juncture but the adjutant on duty, with a summons in hand, who came back and reported, "Among the singing girls that I was sent to summon, only Cheng Ai-yüeh is not coming. The madam of her establishment said that she had made her preparations and was all set to come when she was commandeered by a servant from the household of the distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second, who carried her off to perform there. Thus, I was only able to summon Ch'i Hsiang-erh, Tung Chiaoerh, and Hung the Fourth, who have all gotten themselves ready and will be here before long."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that she was not coming, he said, "What nonsense! Why should she not come?"
He then called over Cheng Feng and asked him, "How is it that your younger sister, when I have called for her services, has refused to come? Is it really true that she has been commandeered by the household of Wang the Second?"
Cheng Feng knelt down in front of him and said, "I live apart from her and don't know anything about it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You may think that if she's gone off to Wang the Second's place to sing, that's that. No doubt you assume that, in that case, I won't be able to get hold of her."
He then called for Tai-an and, when he came forward, ordered him, "Take two orderlies with you, and one of my calling cards, and go to the residence of those distaff relatives of the imperial family surnamed Wang. When you see His Honor Wang the Second, tell him that I have invited some people for a drinking party, and that I engaged the services of Cheng Ai-yüeh for the occasion some two or three days ago and, whatever the case may be, would be obliged if he would let her come and fulfill her engagement. Should any objections be made to this, have her put in chains, along with the madam of her establishment, and lock them up in my gatehouse. How provoking can you get! Does she think that if she plays hard to get, I'll let it go at that?"
He then turned to Cheng Feng, and said, "You go along with him."
Cheng Feng did not dare to refuse and, going outside, appealed to Tai-an, saying, "Brother, when we get there you go on in, while I wait for you outside. If it is really true that His Honor Wang the Second sent for her, I imagine she may not have completed her preparations and gone over there yet. I'd be much indebted to you, Brother, if she hasn't left yet, if you'd contrive some way of persuading her to make the best of it and come along with us."
"If she's actually gone to Wang the Second's place," said Tai-an, "I'll take Father's calling card and try to get her. If she's still hiding out at home, on the other hand, you should go inside and tell her mother that she had better get herself ready and come along with us. If I put in a good word for her on your behalf, Father will let it go at that. You people don't seem to understand his temperament. He engaged her for this occasion while at His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's place the other day. If she failed to come, it's no wonder that he should be annoyed."
Cheng Feng, on the one hand, set off for the Cheng Family Establishment to investigate the situation, while Tai-an, with the two orderlies and the adjutant, followed after him.
To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Tai-an and Cheng Feng off on this errand, he turned to Ying Po-chüeh, and said, "How provoking can this little whore be? She's willing enough to sing at other people's places, but when I engage her services, she refuses to come."
"The little baggage!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "What does she understand? She doesn't yet know what you're capable of."
"I noticed at that drinking party," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that she had a way with words. I engaged her to come here and sing for a couple of days as a means of testing her. And she comes up with such a provoking response."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "these four painted faces that you've selected to perform today are conspicuous for the way in which they:
Stand out among their kind.
There are not any better to be found."
"You haven't even seen Ai-yüeh, have you?" said Li Ming.
"The last time I joined your master for a drink at her place," said Ying Pochüeh, "she was still a child. I haven't seen her for the last several years, so I don't know how she's developed."
"This little painted face," said Li Ming, "may have a good enough figure, but she's altogether too preoccupied with dolling herself up. Although she may be capable of singing a song, she can't do it even half as well as Kueichieh. What kind of a place does she think Father's is that she should be so presumptuous as not to show up? Were she to come, it could only redound to her advantage. How can she be so:
Oblivious to the true value of things?"[4]
Who should appear at this juncture but Hu Hsiu, who came back and reported, "I've been to Master Ch'iao Hung's place, and he says that he will await your instructions."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then instructed Ch'en Ching-chi, "Go back to the rear compound and get fifty taels of silver; have Shu-t'ung write a letter and stamp it with my seal; and depute an adjutant to set out early tomorrow morning together with Hu Hsiu and deliver it to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh at the Lin-ch'ing customs station, requesting that, so far as the customs duties are concerned, he should:
Look upon the matter with favorable eyes."
In no time at all Ch'en Ching-chi fetched a packet of silver and turned it over to Hu Hsiu.
"I'm going to Uncle Han Tao-kuo's house to spend the night," reported Hu Hsiu.
He then took possession of the letter and customs statement, and left with the adjutant early the next morning. But no more of this.
Suddenly the sound of orderlies shouting to clear the way became audible, and P'ing-an came in to report, "Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh have arrived."
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome them into the main reception hall. After they had exchanged the customary amenities, he invited them to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their python robes and sat down on two folding chairs that had been set out in the place of honor at the head of the chamber, while Ying Po-chüeh joined Hsi-men Ch'ing at the foot of the chamber in playing the role of hosts.
"Who is this gentleman here?" Eunuch Director Hsüeh inquired.
"You met him once before, last year," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is your pupil's old friend Ying the Second."
"So it's that Mr. Ying who is so given to making a joke out of everything, is it?" said Eunuch Director Hsüeh.

Ying Po-chüeh bowed in his direction and said, "So you still remember, do you, sir? Your humble servant is that very one."
In no time at all tea was served and duly consumed.
Who should appear at this juncture but P'ing-an, who came in and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has sent a servant with a card indicating that he has another party to attend today and will consequently arrive a bit late. He says that you should start without him. There is no need to wait."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the card, he said, "I understand."
"Your Honor Hsi-men," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "who is it that's coming late today?"
"Chou Hsiu has another party to attend," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He has sent someone to say that we should go ahead and not wait for him, since he fears he may be a little late."
"Since he's sent someone to inform you," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "we might as well leave a place for him and proceed."
At this juncture, two page boys made their way to the upper end of the chamber and stood one to either side of the guests of honor, cooling them with their fans.
As the conversation proceeded, Wang Ching came in with two calling cards and announced that the two licentiates had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon glancing at the cards and seeing that one of them read, "Your devoted servant Ni P'eng," and the other, "Wen Pi-ku," realized that Licentiate Ni had come with the friend and fellow student whom he had recommended to him, and he hastened out to welcome them.
He saw that each of them was attired in the cap and gown of a scholar. Having ushered them inside, he did not bother to inspect Licentiate Ni but, turning his attention to Wen Pi-ku, or Pedant Wen, observed that he was not more than forty years old, was possessed of:
Bright eyes and white teeth,[5]
A three-forked beard,
An uninhibited demeanor,[6] and
An elegant carriage.
If you don't know what he might be capable of,
You must observe what he does and does not do.
There are a few lines that describe him very well:
Though possessed of an unbridled talent,[7]
He is given to visiting unsavory places.
Having stumbled in his pursuit of success,
His heroic ambitions have turned to ashes.
His property having been allowed to dribble away,[8]
His spirit of nobility[9] was the first thing to go.[10]
His literary efforts and Confucian principles,
Have all been handed back to Confucius himself.
He has taken the task of supporting the ruler and benefiting the people,
As well as the desire to glorify his ancestors and elevate his relatives,
And relegated them, in their entirety, to that great sea, the Eastern Ocean.
Concealing his light and following the crowd,[11]
His only concern is for his own advantage.[12]
Conforming indifferently to square and round,[13]
He no longer takes shame to be significant.
Affecting both a high hat and a broad belt,
He acts as though no one else were present.[14]
In company his speeches are long and lofty,
But in his breast he harbors nothing at all.
For three years he has answered the roll call,
But failed to pass the entrance examination;
The cassia in the moon will forever remain beyond his reach.
Among convivial companions he enjoys his cups,
Undisturbed by his withdrawal from the world;
He is content to dwell as a recluse within his cliffside cave.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered his guests into the reception hall where they saluted each other, upon which they each presented him with the customary book and kerchief in honor of his birthday.
After they had bowed to each other and sat down in the positions of guest and host, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I have long been an admirer of the venerable Master Wen's great talents. May I venture to enquire as to your distinguished courtesy name?"
Licentiate Wen replied, "Your pupil's given name is Pi-ku, my informal name is Jih-hsin, and my courtesy name is K'uei-hsüan."
"Venerable Master K'uei-hsüan," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "may I also ask in which government school you are enrolled, and what classic you specialize in?"
"Though your pupil is deficient in talent," Licentiate Wen replied, "I am enrolled in the prefectural school and am engaged in a rudimentary study of the *I-ching*, or *Book of Changes*. I have long been an admirer of your household's great reputation but have not presumed to pay you a visit. Only because, the other day, my fellow student Ni P'eng brought up the subject of your surpassing virtue, have I ventured to ascend your hall in order to pay my respects."
"You do me too much honor," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since you have taken the initiative in calling upon me, venerable sir, your pupil will not fail to return the favor when time allows. The fact is that your pupil, being but a military official, is too uncouth to comprehend the literary niceties and stands in need of someone qualified to handle his social correspondence for him. Because, some time ago, when visiting the home of a colleague of mine, I encountered the venerable gentleman, Ni P'eng, who praised you, venerable sir, for your great talent and surpassing virtue, I resolved to pay you a visit and seek your instruction. How could I have anticipated that you would condescend to drop in on me, and present me with such a handsome gift to boot?
I will never be able to thank you enough."
"Your pupil," responded Licentiate Wen, "is possessed of but:
Paltry talent and meager virtue.
I am unworthy of such extravagant praise."
When they had finished their tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited them to the summerhouse, where Eunuch Director Hsüeh and Eunuch Director Liu were already seated.
"Pray invite the two venerable gentlemen to come in and divest themselves of their formal clothes," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly invited them to loosen their blue gowns. Once inside, they were as deferential as could be, before sitting down, one on either side, with lowered heads.
As they were chatting, Hsi-men Ch'ing's brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Battalion Commander Fan Hsün arrived, exchanged greetings with the company, and sat down.
Before long, Tai-an, along with some fellow servants and Cheng Feng, came in and reported that the four singing girls engaged for the occasion had all been summoned.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Was she at Imperial Relative Wang's place or not?"
"I had to go to Imperial Relative Wang's place to call for her," said Tai-an, "but she had not made any preparations to leave. It was only when I threatened to truss up the madam of her place and have her locked up that she became flustered and consented to get into her sedan chair and come along with the others."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went outside and stood on the stylobate of the reception hall in order to observe the four singing girls as they came in together. Thereupon, each of them:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying,
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
proceeded to kowtow to him.
Cheng Ai-yüeh was wearing a purple gauze blouse over a white gauze drawnwork skirt. On her head:
A phoenix hairpin is half askew,
The jewels in her chignon tinkle.[15]
Her slender waist is lissome,[16]
Resembling the lithe branches of the willow;
Her flowery face is pleasing,
With the voluptuousness of the lotus blossom.
Truly:
The myriad forms of her seductiveness[17] are nowhere to be bought;
Even at a thousand taels for one night[18] her like cannot be found.[19]
Hsi-men Ch'ing, addressing himself to Cheng Ai-yüeh, said, "I engaged you for this occasion, so why did you fail to come? How provoking can you get? No doubt you thought I would be unable to get hold of you."
Cheng Ai-yüeh stood up after kowtowing to him, without saying a word in response, and merely smiled as she joined her companions in trooping off toward the rear compound. Upon arriving there, and kowtowing to Yüeh-niang and the rest of the company, they noticed that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh were already in attendance.
After greeting them with a bow, they remarked, "The two of you are here early."
"We haven't been home for the last two days," Li Kuei-chieh said.
She then went on to ask, "How come the four of you are so late?"
"It was Sister Cheng Ai-yüeh who prevented us from coming any earlier," said Tung Chiao-erh. "We were all ready and waiting for her, but she refused to start out."
Cheng Ai-yüeh merely covered her face with her fan and smiled, without saying a word.
Yüeh-niang then asked, "Whose establishment does this young lady belong to?"
"You may not know her," Tung Chiao-erh explained, "but she's the younger sister of Cheng Ai-hsiang. It's not even half a year since she was deflowered."
"She does indeed have a nice figure," said Yüeh-niang.
Tea was ordered for them to drink, and a table was set up for the purpose.
Meanwhile, P'an Chin-lien amused herself by lifting up Cheng Ai-yüeh's skirt and displaying her feet, saying as she did so, "It seems that you denizens of the quarter favor straight pointed toes to your shoes, rather than the turned up tips that we outsiders prefer. The shoes we outsiders wear have level soles, while you denizens of the quarter prefer high heels."
Yüeh-niang turned to her sister-in-law, Wu K'ai's wife, and said, "Just see how she insists on playing the role of the superior know-it-all. Why should she concern herself with such things?"
A little later, Chin-lien pulled a stickpin with a dangling goldfish out of Cheng Ai-yüeh's hairdo and asked her, "Where did you have this particular piece made?"
"It was designed by one of the silversmiths in the quarter," replied Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Before long, tea was served, and Yüeh-niang suggested that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh join the other four in partaking of the tea.
In no time at all, the six singing girls finished their tea, and Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh said to Tung Chiao-erh and the others, "Why don't you come and take a stroll in the garden with us?"
"We'll come join you," said Tung Chiao-erh, "after making another visit in the rear compound."
Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh then followed P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yülou out through the ceremonial gate that separated the front and rear compounds and into the garden. Because there were people in the large summer-house, they did not go that way, but, skirting it, enjoyed the flowery vegetation for a while and then went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters to see Kuan-ko.
Kuan-ko was feeling somewhat out of sorts. He had awakened from a dream, crying from fright, and would not allow himself to be breast-fed. Li P'ing-erh was in the room, looking after him, and had not come out. When she saw that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, along with Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, had come in, she hastily invited them to sit down.
"Is little brother asleep?" Li Kuei-chieh asked.
"He's been crying for some time," said Li P'ing-erh. "Only after I put him down facing the interior of the bed just now, has he fallen asleep."
Meng Yü-lou said, "The First Lady told you to send for Dame Liu to take a look at him. Why don't you send a page boy right now to summon her?"
"Today is Father's birthday," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'll send for her tomorrow."
As they were talking, they saw the four singing-girls, along with Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Hsiao-yü, come in.
"So this is where you all are," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "We've been looking for you in the garden."
"Since there are male guests being entertained in the garden," said Meng Yü-lou, "we didn't feel it right to linger there, but just took a look, and then came over here."
Li Kuei-chieh asked Hung the Fourth, "What were the four of you doing in the rear compound that delayed you in getting here for so long?"
"We were drinking tea in the Fourth Lady's quarters in the rear compound," explained Hung the Fourth, "and have been visiting there all this time."
When P'an Chin-lien heard this, she smiled meaningfully at Meng Yü-lou and Li P'ing-erh and said to Hung the Fourth, "Who told you to call her the Fourth Lady?"
"She asked us into her quarters for some tea," said Tung Chiao-erh. "When one of us enquired of her, saying, 'We haven't previously had the opportunity to kowtow to you, so we don't know which lady you are,' she replied, 'I am your Fourth Lady.'"
"Why the shameless concubine!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "If other people choose to address you that way, it's all right, I suppose. But whoever heard of anyone referring to herself as the Fourth Lady? Who is there in this entire household who deigns to show you any favor, or considers you to count for anything? Who is there who refers to you as the Fourth Lady? Merely because our husband spent a night in your room, you think that:
Having obtained some pigments,
You're ready to start up a dyer's establishment.
If it weren't for the fact that Sister-in-law Wu was staying overnight in the First Lady's room, Li Kuei-chieh was staying in the Second Lady's room, Aunt Yang was staying in the Third Lady's room, Wu Yin-erh was staying in Li P'ingerh's room, and I had Old Mrs. P'an in my room, it never would have occurred to him to go into your room."

"You haven't even seen everything that happened," said Meng Yü-lou. "This morning, after sending Father off to the front compound, she made quite a spectacle of herself in the courtyard:
Summoning this one and calling for that."[20]
"As the saying goes," said Chin-lien:
"Slaves should never be indulged, and
Children ought not to be humored."
She then proceeded to interrogate Hsiao-yü, saying, "I hear that your master told your mistress that she really ought to find a maidservant for her. Last night when he went into her quarters and saw that she hadn't finished cleaning things up, that little whore put on quite a show, saying to your master, 'I didn't have the spare time yesterday to put the room in order, and now you've seen fit to come spend the night here at my place.' To which your master responded, 'That's not a problem. Tomorrow, I'll tell your mistress to find a maidservant for you.' Is that really what happened?"
"I don't know," said Hsiao-yü. "No doubt it was something that Yü-hsiao overheard."
Chin-lien explained to Li Kuei-chieh, "Except when there are visitors in each of our quarters, Father doesn't ordinarily go into her place in the rear compound. No doubt we may appear to be disparaging her behind her back, but the fact of the matter is that she is so:
Ignorant of the ways of the world,[21]
that she is constantly given to harming other people with that tongue of hers, so that the rest of us are not ordinarily on speaking terms with her."
As they were speaking, Hsiu-ch'un came in with some tea, and each person was served a cup of tea, flavored with fruit kernels.
While they were drinking their tea, all of a sudden, in the front compound:
Drums and music began to sound,
as Director-in-Chief Ching Chung and the other guests all arrived together. As soon as they had been seated and served with wine, Tai-an came to call for the four singing girls, and they duly trooped off to the front compound. Ch'iao Hung did not attend the party that day.
First there was a show by the tumblers, and vaudeville acts, while the musicians:
Played wind and percussion instruments and sang.
Then, after the ensemble dances were finished, a comic farce of the genre known as hsiao-lo yüan-pen was performed. The chef then came in and presented the first course, along with soup and rice.
Who should appear at this juncture but Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who came in wearing his official cap and girdle. Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to welcome him into the chamber, where, after they had exchanged the customary amenities, Dr. Jen ordered his attendants to reach into his felt bag and extract a handkerchief embroidered with the character for long life, in which were wrapped two mace of silver, as a birthday gift for Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Only yesterday," he said, "did Han Ming-ch'uan mention to me that today is your birthday. Please excuse your pupil for his tardiness."
"How could I presume to put you to the trouble of mounting your equipage on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And many thanks for your lavish gift. I am much obliged to you for the efficacious prescriptions you have provided in the past."
When they had finished saluting each other, Dr. Jen wanted to offer his host a drink, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "There is no need for that. The salutation you offered me just now is sufficient."
After Dr. Jen had divested himself of his outer garments, he was offered a seat at the fourth table setting on the left side, next to that of Wu K'ai. Soup and rice were served to him, and platters of viands were also provided for his servitors. Dr. Jen thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing for his hospitality, directed his servitors to take the food provided for them outside, and then sat down.
After the four singing girls had lined up to one side, struck up their instruments, and sung a birthday song in celebration of the occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered them to join the company and divide up the job of serving the guests with wine.
The performers at the foot of the chamber then came forward to where Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh were sitting and presented them with the program, from which they selected the tsa-chü drama entitled *Han Hsiang-tzu tu Ch'en Pan-chieh sheng-hsien hui* (Han Hsiang-tzu induces Ch'en Pan-chieh to ascend to the realm of the immortals).[22]
Only one scene of this drama had been performed when they heard the sound of orderlies shouting to clear the way gradually approach, and P'ing-an came in to announce that His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome him. Before even exchanging formal greetings with him, he suggested to his guest that he divest himself of his formal outer garments.
"I have not come for any other reason," said Chou Hsiu, "than to offer my brother Ssu-ch'üan[23] a cup of wine."
Eunuch Director Hsüeh came forward at this point and said, "Your Honor Chou, there is no need to offer him a cup of wine. It will suffice to exchange salutations with him."
The two of them bowed to each other, after which Chou Hsiu went on to say, "Your pupil has arrived late. Forgive me. Forgive me."
Only after running through the customary amenities did Chou Hsiu divest himself of his outer garments, loosen his girdle, and salute the assembled guests. A goblet and chopsticks were provided for him at the third place setting on the left, after which he was supplied with soup and rice, and a new main course was served. In the presence of the gathering, two platters of snacks, two platters of baked meats, and two bottles of wine were provided for each of the servitors who had accompanied Chou Hsiu to tend the horses.
Chou Hsiu raised his hand in acknowledgment and thanked his host, saying, "You are too generous."
Only after calling in his attendants to take the proffered viands outside did he consent to sit down in his place, whereupon Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh each toasted him with a large bumper of wine.
The festivities lasted until:
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
accompanied by:
Song and dance and wind and string instruments,
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade.
Truly:
The dancing continued till the moon in the pavilion amid the willows hung low;
The singing went on until the breeze underneath the peach-blossom fans expired.[24]
The party continued until evening, when Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, because he lived outside the city gate, was the first to leave.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off, Dr. Jen asked him, "Is your venerable consort's ailment any better?"
"My humble housemate did feel appreciably better after taking your excellent prescription," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but during the last few days, for some reason or other, she is once again somewhat indisposed. I hope that you will come by another day, venerable sir, in order to examine her."
When they had finished speaking, Dr. Jen said goodbye, mounted his horse, and went his way. Subsequently, Licentiate Ni P'eng and Licentiate Wen Pi-ku also got up to go.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing's repeated urgings that they should stay a little longer proved unsuccessful, he saw them out to the front gate, where he said to Wen Pi-ku, "On another day, I will pay you a visit to seek your instruction. Across the street from my humble abode, I have prepared a studio in which you may reside, venerable sir, along with your dependents, if that is convenient. Each month I will respectfully offer you a stipend to provide for your sustenance."
"I am much indebted to you for your gracious appreciation," said Licentiate Wen.
"I will never be able to thank you enough."
"This is an example, venerable sir," said Licentiate Ni, "of your civilized endeavor to support this culture of ours."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen the two licentiates on their way, he continued drinking with his guests until late at night before the party broke up. The four singing girls had returned to Yüeh-niang's apartment, where they sang for the entertainment of Yüeh-niang, Wu K'ai's wife, Aunt Yang, and the others. Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in the front compound, where he asked Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh to remain so they could sit down again and resume their drinking. They looked on as the musicians were supplied with food and wine, after consuming which they departed. The utensils from the party were all cleared away, and the fresh fruit and left over comestibles were divided up among the servants.
At this point, new saucers of delicacies were called for from the rear compound, and Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng played their instruments and sang for their entertainment, after which they were rewarded with large goblets of wine.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "at this feast that you put on in celebration of your illustrious birthday, everyone had a good time."
"This day," said Li Ming, "His Honor Hsüeh and His Honor Liu expended a good deal in the way of gratuities. And later, when they saw Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh come out, they provided each of them with a packet as well. The only thing is, His Honor Hsüeh, being younger than His Honor Liu, is more given to mischief."
It was not long before Hua-t'ung brought out the new saucers of delicacies. These consisted of candied deep-fried sweetmeats, hazelnut and pine nut kernels, red caltrops and snowy lotus roots, lotus seeds and water chestnuts, butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, candied plums frosted with crystallized sugar, rose-flavored pastries, and the like.
When Ying Po-chüeh set eyes on the two varieties of butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, one pure white and the other pink in color, and both of them flecked with gold, he selected one for himself and popped it into his mouth, whereupon:
Sweet dew suffused his heart, and
It melted on entering his mouth.
"These are really delicious!" he exclaimed.
"My son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's only appropriate that you should like them. Your Sixth Lady made them with her own hands."
"I see, they're a product of my daughter's filial sentiments," laughed Ying Po-chüeh.
Turning to Wu K'ai, he went on to say, "Venerable Brother-in-law, you must have one of these."
Whereupon, he selected one of them and put it into Wu K'ai's mouth. He also called Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng before him, and rewarded one to each of them.
As the drinking continued, Ying Po-chüeh turned to Tai-an, and said, "You go back to the rear compound and tell those four little whores to come out here. If they don't wish to oblige me, that's that, but they really ought to sing something for our venerable brother-in-law. If we wait any longer, they'll be ready to go home. They've scarcely earned their pay today, having sung no more than two song suites for us. We ought not to let them off so easily."
Tai-an did not stir from his place but said, "I've already called for them. They're in the rear compound, entertaining Sister-in-law Wu and the other ladies. They'll be here presently."
"You lousy little oily mouth!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Since when did you go back there. You can't fool me."
He then called up Wang Ching and said, "You go."
Wang Ching, also, refused to budge.
"Since I see that none of you are willing to go," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll go myself."
Thereupon, he started out toward the rear compound.
"You'd better not go in there," said Tai-an. "There's a dog in the rear compound who's really fierce. He's likely to bite you in the thigh."
"If I'm bitten," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll end up recuperating on your mother's k'ang."
Tai-an went back to the rear compound. After some time had elapsed, they became aware of a whiff of fragrance, accompanied by the sound of laughter, and the four painted faces came out, with their kerchiefs wrapped around their heads.
When Ying Po-chüeh saw them, he said, "My children, whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? If you've already put your headgear on, it looks as though you think you're on the way out. You're certainly bent on having an easy time of it, hoping to get away without singing a single song for us. At the very least, the charge for your services, including the fare for your sedan chair, is four candareens of silver. That would suffice to buy a picul and seven or eight pecks of unhusked red rice, enough to feed you, your madam, and the entire staff of your establishment, great and small, for a month."
"Brother," said Tung Chiao-erh, "if you think our expenses for food and clothing are so low, you might as well become a licensed entertainer yourself."
"Your Honor," said Hung the Fourth, "by this time it must be almost the second watch of the night. You ought to let us go."
"Tomorrow," said Ch'i Hsiang-erh, "we have to get up early in order to attend a funeral outside the city gate."
"Whose funeral is that?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"It's someone from that household the door of which opens practically under our eaves." said Ch'i Hsiang-erh.
"Do you mean to say that it's someone from the household of Wang the Third?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "The other day, when you got into trouble on his account, it was only thanks to His Honor's intervention on behalf of Li Kuei-chieh that you, too, were spared. This time:
The sparrow is no longer in that nest.[25]
That's all there is to it."
"Why you crazy old oily mouth!" exclaimed Ch'i Hsiang-erh. "You're delirious. What nonsense you talk."
"You may scoff at me for being old," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "but what part of me is old?
Though only half functional,
I'd have no trouble handling the likes of you four little whores."
"Brother," laughed Hung the Fourth, "as I see it, your ball-handling is not that great. All you can do is brag about it."
"My child," said Ying Po-chüeh, "when it comes to that:
I pay only what the performance is worth."
He then went on to say, "That lousy little whore from the Cheng Family Establishment seems to have gorged herself with the candied effigies of the Five Ancients, [26] thrones and all. Her mouth is so stuffed she can't get a word out. She has a distracted look about her. I dare say she's preoccupied with the thought of some customer back home."
"After listening to your braggadocio just now," said Tung Chiao-erh, "she's a little skittish about what may ensue."
"Skittish or not," said Ying Po-chüeh, "each of you must get your instruments out and sing a song suite for us. After that, you can go. I won't try to keep you."
"That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Two of you can serve us with wine, while the other two sing a song suite for him."
"Sister Cheng Ai-yüeh and I will sing for you then," said Ch'i Hsiang-erh.
At this, Cheng Ai-yüeh took up her *p'i-p'a*, and Ch'i Hsiang-erh her psaltery, as they seated themselves on a folding bench. Thereupon, the two of them:
Deftly extended their slender fingers,
Gently strummed the silken strings,
Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,
Interpreted the melodious tunes, and
Displayed their coquettish voices,
as they sang the song suite in the Yüeh-tiao mode, starting with the tune "Fighting Quails," that begins with the words:
Had you but gone by night and returned at dawn,[27]
Your affair could have been as everlasting as Heaven and as enduring as Earth.[28]
During the performance, Tung Chiao-erh served wine to Wu K'ai, and Hung the Fourth served wine to Ying Po-chüeh. As the party continued:
Exchanging cups as they drank,
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
Blue-green sleeves were raised assiduously,[29]
Golden goblets were filled to overflowing.[30]
Truly:

In the morning he attends feasts in Golden Valley,
In the evening he favors beauties in ornate houses.
But do not consider these to be occasions for joy,
Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.[31]
On this occasion, after:
Three rounds of wine had been consumed; and
Two suites of songs had been performed,
the four singing girls were allowed to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing still urged his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to stay a while and instructed Ch'un-hung to come forward and sing him a southern song. After which, he ordered Ch'i-t'ung to get a horse ready and take a lantern with which to see his brother-in-law home.
"Brother-in-law," said Wu K'ai, "there's no need for you to provide a horse. I'll just walk home together with Brother Ying the Second. It's gotten rather late."
"There's no reason for you to refuse," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "But in that case, I'll still have Ch'i-t'ung take a lantern and see you to your home."
Thereupon, after a song suite had been performed, Wu K'ai and Ying Pochüeh got up and took their leave, saying, "We've imposed egregiously on your hospitality."
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw them off as far as the front gate, where he said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Tomorrow, whatever else you do, make sure to contact that manager Kan Jun that you recommended, and have him come to see me, so we can sign a contract. I've already agreed with my kinsman Ch'iao Hung to get the house over there ready, so that we can unload the merchandise within the next couple of days."
"Brother," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "there's no need for you to instruct me. I know what to do."
So saying, he took his leave and departed together with Wu K'ai, while Ch'i-t'ung lighted them on their way with a lantern.
Along the way, Wu K'ai asked him, "What house is that which my brother-in-law spoke of getting ready just now?"
Ying Po-chüeh then told him the whole story of how Han Tao-kuo's boatload of goods had arrived, how Hsi-men Ch'ing was in need of someone to take charge of selling the merchandise, how he intended to open a silk goods shop, how he was getting the house across the street ready for that purpose, and how he had asked him to recommend a manager to whom he could entrust the enterprise.
"When do you suppose they will open for business?" asked Wu K'ai. "We relatives and friends must surely not fail to provide artificial flowers, red bunting, and boxes of candied fruit in celebration of the occasion."
Before long, they emerged onto Main Street and arrived at the mouth of the little alley on which Ying Po-chüeh lived.
Wu K'ai told Ch'i-t'ung, "Take the lantern and see your uncle Ying the Second to his home."
Ying Po-chüeh demurred, saying, "Ch'i-t'ung, you see Brother-in-law Wu to his home. I don't need a lantern. My place is just inside the alley."
So saying, they said goodbye to each other and went their separate ways, with Ch'i-t'ung escorting Wu K'ai.
Hsi-men Ch'ing took care of paying Li Ming and company the fees for their performance, locked the gate, went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound, and retired for the night.
The next day, sure enough, Ying Po-chüeh brought Kan Jun over, dressed in black livery, to meet Hsi-men Ch'ing. After discussing business with him for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for Ts'ui Pen and sent him to confer with Ch'iao Hung about getting the house ready for the unloading of the merchandise, and the construction of an underground storehouse and shop front, so that they could settle on a date for the opening of the business.
Ch'iao Hung said to Ts'ui Pen, "In the future, with regard to all things, great and small, I am content to let our kinsman decide. There is no need to consult me about it any further."
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing signed a contract with Kan Jun, which established Ying Po-chüeh as his guarantor, and determined that as far as the profits of the enterprise were concerned, Hsi-men Ch'ing was entitled to 50 percent, and Ch'iao Hung to 30 percent, with the remainder to be divided evenly among Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, and Ts'ui Pen. It was also decided that they should lay in the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone, proceed with the construction of an underground storehouse and shop front, and design a plaque for the door of the establishment, so that when the cartloads of merchandise arrived, they would be prepared to accommodate them.
Space in the rear was also set aside as a studio in which Licentiate Wen Pi-ku could reside as his private tutor, or social secretary, who would take responsibility for dealing with his employer's correspondence with his peers, in return for a stipend of three taels of silver per month, and appropriate gifts on festival occasions. It was also arranged that Hua-t'ung would wait on him for half of every evening, in order to provide for his food and drink, and fetch water for his inkstone, and, if he should go out to visit his friends, accompany him in order to carry his card case. It was also expected that when Hsi-men Ch'ing entertained guests he would be invited to help keep them company as they drank their wine, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
On the same day, Hsi-men Ch'ing's birthday being over, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i was invited to come examine Li P'ing-erh and prescribe appropriate medications for her, while Hsi-men Ch'ing dealt with the alterations being made to the house across the street. Aunt Yang was the first to go home, but Li Kueichieh and Wu Yin-erh had not yet done so. Wu Yüeh-niang purchased some crabs for three mace of silver and had them cooked at noontime, when she invited Sister-in-law Wu, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and the rest to enjoy them in the courtyard of the rear compound, where they gathered round to consume them. While they were still eating, Dame Liu, whom Yüeh-niang had engaged to come and see Kuan-ko, arrived, and, after she had been served with tea, Li P'ing-erh accompanied her to her quarters in the front compound.
"Little brother has suffered from a fright," said Dame Liu, "and is rejecting his milk."
She provided several doses of medicine, after which Yüeh-niang gave her three mace of silver and sent her on her way.
Meanwhile, Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, together with Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, set up a small table under the flower arbor, covered it with a strip of felt, and amused themselves by playing dominoes for forfeits of wine. Whoever lost a hand had to consume a large cup of wine. Sun Hsüeh-o lost seven or eight times to the others and had to down as many cups of wine. Consequently, she did not dare to continue playing and, after sitting a while longer, took herself off. Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was engaged in overseeing the preparations in the house across the street, was drinking there along with Ying Po-chüeh, Ts'ui Pen, and his new manager, Kan Jun, and sent a page boy back home to fetch some food for them. This threw Sun Hsüeh-o into such a state of consternation that she felt compelled to bustle off to the kitchen to take care of it, leaving Li Chiao-erh to take her place in the game of dominoes.
At this point, Chin-lien said to Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh, "Why don't you sing us that song suite celebrating the evening of the seventh day of the seventh month."
Thereupon, accompanying themselves on the *p'i-p'a*, they sang the song suite in the Shang mode that begins with a song to the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests":
Summer is just beginning to recede, as the star Antares gradually moves toward the west.
The handle of the Dipper is moving toward the Northern Palace.
A single leaf of the phoenix tree[32] flutters down,
And everywhere a hint of autumn can be detected.
The evening clouds float idly as the stridulation of the cicadas resounds;
The nighttime breeze is gentle as the coruscating fireflies begin to fly.
On the Celestial Stairs the coolness of the night is as clear as water;
Most appropriately, paintings of the Magpie Bridge[33] are suspended on high.
In golden basins five sprouts are planted;[34]
In alabaster towers banquets are prepared.[35]
That day the sisterhood of womenfolk continued drinking until evening, when Yüeh-niang filled their gift boxes and saw Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yinerh off on their way home.
P'an Chin-lien was completely inebriated by the time she returned to her quarters. Because she observed the frequency with which Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, and that he had once again invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine her that very morning, her heart was filled with rancor. She was also aware that her rival's child was not well.
As she entered her courtyard:
As providence would have it,
amid the dark shadows, she stepped into a pile of dog shit with one of her feet. As soon as she got inside, she had Ch'un-mei light a lamp to examine the damage and saw that the entire vamp of her brand new scarlet silk shoe had been soiled. Immediately, she:
Pricked up her willow brows,
Opened wide her starry eyes,[36]
called for Ch'un-mei to bring a lantern, locked the postern gate, picked up a big stick, and proceeded indiscriminately to beat the offending dog, beating him until he howled outlandishly.
Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, sent Ying-ch'un over to say, "My mistress says to tell you that the baby has just taken Dame Liu's medicine and fallen asleep, and asks that the Fifth Lady refrain from beating the dog any longer."
Chin-lien sat down and had nothing to say for some time, after which, she beat the dog a little more, opened the gate, and let him out. She then turned her attention to finding fault with Ch'iu-chü. When she examined her shoe, she was:
Angry on the left, and
Angry on the right.
Calling Ch'iu-chü before her, she said, "If you consider the matter, by this time of day, the dog ought to have been let out. What were you keeping him in here for, anyway? I suppose, slave that you are, he serves you as a clandestine lover. By not letting him out, you caused him to leave his shit all over the place, so that by stepping into it, this brand new pair of shoes of mine, which, including today, I haven't worn for more than three or four days, is all covered with shit. You knew I would be coming home and should have lit a lantern and come out to meet me. How can you expect to get away with:
Pretending to be both deaf and dumb,[37]
and playing the fool this way?"
"I told her some time ago," said Ch'un-mei, "you ought to take advantage of the fact that Mother isn't home yet to feed him and put him out in the back courtyard. But she pretended to be deaf and paid me no attention at all, even giving me a dirty look."
"There you are!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "The lousy, audacious, death-defying slave! How is it that she's so reluctant to get her ass in motion? I'm aware that you think you're the boss around here. As they say, you're such a hardened convict that a beating no longer means anything to you."
Thereupon, she called her up in front of her and told Ch'un-mei to bring a lamp over so she could see better, saying as she did so, "Just look at the filth on my shoe. It's a shoe that I just made, and one that I really liked, and now it's been ruined by a slave like you."
Having tricked her into lowering her head in order to see better, she took up the shoe by its heel lift and slapped her right in the face several times with the sole. She hit her so hard that Ch'iu-chü's lips were broken, and, rubbing away the blood with her hand, she stepped out of reach.
"You lousy slave!" the woman cursed at her. "Trying to get away, are you?"
"Drag her over here, and make her kneel down," she said to Ch'un-mei. "Fetch the riding crop, and strip off her clothing for me. I'll give her a good thirty strokes with the whip before I'm through. Merely grabbing hold of her and giving her a few random strokes will hardly do the job."
Ch'un-mei accordingly stripped off Ch'iu-chü's clothing. The woman then told Ch'un-mei to tie her hands, after which she swung the riding crop into the air, and the strokes of the whip began to fall on Ch'iu-chü like rain. She whipped the slave girl until she:
Howled like a stuck pig.
In the adjacent quarters, Kuan-ko had just closed his eyes in sleep when he was startled back awake, and Li P'ing-erh once again sent Hsiu-ch'un over to say, "My mistress respectfully requests that the Fifth Lady let Ch'iu-chü off for now, and stop whipping her. She's afraid that the commotion will startle the baby awake."
When Old Mrs. P'an, who was lying on the k'ang in the inner room, heard Chin-lien whipping Ch'iu-chü until she screamed, she hastily crawled to her feet and admonished her from the sidelines, but Chin-lien paid no attention.
Later, when she saw that Li P'ing-erh had sent Hsiu-ch'un over to plead with her, she stepped forward and attempted to pry the whip from her daughter's hand, saying, "My child, spare her a few strokes. You've annoyed the young lady next door into complaining. I'm afraid you may frighten the baby.
You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,
So long as you don't injure the redbud tree."[38]
When Chin-lien, who was already in a state of rage, heard her mother admonish her with these words, it was just as though a torch had been applied to her heart.
In an instant her whole face was purple.
Giving her a shove with one hand, she very nearly knocked Old Mrs. P'an down.
"You crazy old baggage!" she cried. "What do you know about it? Get out of my way and sit down somewhere. It's none of your business. What the fuck are you trying to admonish me for? What's all this about the redbud tree, and taking a switch to the donkey? Whose side are you on, anyway, with this two-faced interference of yours?"
"Why you lousy death-bound short-life!" expostulated Old Mrs. P'an. "How can you call me two-faced? I come to visit you in the hope of picking up a few morsels of cold food, and you treat me as roughly as this!"
"Tomorrow," said Chin-lien, "you can just squeeze your old cunt between your legs and take it out of here, for all I care. It's not as though any one in this house would dare to:
Stew me in a pot and eat me."
When Old Mrs. P'an heard the way in which her own daughter defied her, she went back into the inner room, and gave way to:
Sobbing and wailing.[39]
while the woman continued to whip Ch'iu-chü. She gave her a good twenty or thirty strokes with the riding crop and then finished her off with ten crisscross strokes of the cane. She beat her until:
The skin was broken and the flesh was split,
before letting her up. She also used her sharp fingernails to gouge the cheeks of her face until they were a bloody mess.
All Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, could do was to cover the baby's ears with both hands, while tears of distress rolled down her cheeks.
Though she dared to be angry,
She dared not speak.
Who could have anticipated that on that day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's drinking party in the house across the street broke up, he went straight to Meng Yü-lou's quarters and spent the night.
The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu invited him to a belated drinking party in honor of his birthday, so he was not at home.
Li P'ing-erh observed that, though Kuan-ko had taken Dame Liu's medicine, it had produced no visible effect, and that the fright he had been subjected to during the night had caused his eyeballs to roll up and remain dangling there out of sight. Because Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang were about to go home that day, she took a pair of silver lions that were used to hold her bedspread in place from her room and went to see Yüeh-niang, proposing that Nun Hsüeh be commissioned to arrange the printing of copies of the *Fo-tinghsin t'o-lo ching* (Dh[illegible]ran[illegible] sutra of the Buddha's essence),[40] in time for the Mid-Autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, so that they could be distributed at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak.
Nun Hsüeh was about to take them, and go on her way, when Meng Yülou spoke up from one side, saying, "Reverend, hold on a minute. First Lady, you ought to send a page boy to call in Pen the Fourth so he can weigh these lions and determine what they're worth, and then accompany her to the sutra printing shop and settle on the number of copies to be printed, the cost per copy, the amount we're willing to contribute, and the date by which the job will be done. That's the right way to do it. If you send Reverend Hsüeh off to do it all by herself, how can we be sure that she will be able to handle it correctly?"
"What you say is right," said Yüeh-niang.
She then dispatched Lai-an, saying, "Go see if Pen the Fourth is at home or not, and get him to come here."
Lai-an went straight off on this errand, and, before long, Pen the Fourth showed up and bowed to Yüeh-niang and the others. When he put the two silver lions on the scale, they turned out to weigh forty-one taels and five mace.
Yüeh-niang then instructed him, "Accompany Reverend Hsüeh to the sutra printing shop and request them to print the appropriate number of copies."
Chin-lien thereupon said to Meng Yü-lou, "Why don't we see the two reverends off, and, while we're at it, we can drop in on Hsi-men Ta-chieh and see if she is still in her room making shoes."
The two of them then took each other by the hand and set off for the front compound, while Pen the Fourth, along with Lai-an, accompanied Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang on their way to the sutra printing shop.
When P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou arrived in front of the main reception hall, they saw that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was sitting under the eaves at the door of her anteroom on the east side of the courtyard, with her sewing basket, engaged in stitching a shoe. Chin-lien picked it up to take a look and saw that the upper was made of sand-green Lu-chou silk.
"Young lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "you really ought not to use this red chain stitching. The fact is, it would be more dignified to use blue thread. And, when the time comes, you can attach a scarlet heel lift."
"I already have a pair with scarlet heel lifts," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "For this pair, I intend to use blue heel lifts. That's why I'm chain stitching this one with scarlet thread."
After Chin-lien had looked over her handiwork, the three of them sat down on the stylobate of the reception hall, and Meng Yü-lou asked Hsi-men Tachieh, "Is your husband in your room, or not?"
"He's had a couple of cups of wine, I don't know where," said Hsi-men Tachieh, "and he's sleeping it off in the room."

Meng Yü-lou then said to Chin-lien, "Just now, if I hadn't intervened from the sidelines, that muddleheaded baggage, Sister Li, would simply have turned her silver over to the nuns in order to get some copies of a sutra printed. The sutra might never have been printed, and, legless crab of a creature that she is, if they chose to hide out in some prominent household, where would she ever find them? Luckily, after I intervened, Pen the Fourth was summoned to accompany them."
"Look here," said Chin-lien. "If I were asked to do it, where such a wealthy sister is concerned, if I didn't make something out of it, I'd be a fool. It would be no more than:
Plucking a single hair from the body of an ox.
If your child is not fated to live, quite aside from donating sutras, if you were to donate the entire realm, with its:
Myriad leagues of rivers and mountains,[41]
it would be of no avail. Truly:
Though you may have money enough to worship the Northern Dipper,
Who is able to buy a guarantee that nothing untoward will happen?
Right now, in this room of hers, she carries on like the magistrate who:
Authorizes himself alone to ignite fires,
But won't let the rest of us light lamps.[42]
Young lady, listen to what I'm saying. You're not an outsider.
She's painted herself so white that she won't take on any other color.
You think that you alone can get away with being:
So flippant in your hundred ways.
At the crack of dawn, she inveigles our husband into calling in the doctor to examine her. Well, she can do what she wants because she knows that we won't dare to interfere.
"Whenever she's in front of other people, she is forever protesting her own virtue. 'I'm not in the mood for it,' she says. 'Father is constantly coming into my quarters, pretending that he only wants to see the baby, and then pestering me to sleep with him. Who can be bothered? I end up having to urge him to go and sleep in someone else's quarters.' In front of us, she puts on such a show of virtue, while behind our backs, she engages in bad-mouthing us. And our eldest sister insists on paying heed to her one-sided words.
"If you claim not to be competing with the rest of us for his favors, how is it that the other day, when our husband did not come into your room, you sent your maidservant out to the postern gate to waylay him, allegedly to see the baby? And then, because you were taking medicine, you actually went so far as to arrange for him to spend the night in the other room with Wu Yinerh, thereby showing just how clever you are at getting your husband to like you. And our eldest sister has nothing to say about it.
"Last night, when I came back to my room, I soiled my shoe by stepping into a pile of dog shit, and when I beat the maidservant and drove the dog out, she got upset and sent her maidservant over to complain that I was frightening her baby. My mother, the old baggage, who didn't understand the situation, having scrounged something to eat from her in the past, elected to play the role of her lackey, and admonished me by saying:
'You may break off a switch to beat the donkey,
So long as you don't injure the redbud tree.'
I was already annoyed at her:
Simpleminded officiousness,
so, when she continued to argue with me, I told her off in no uncertain terms, and, today, she has gone home in a huff.
"Her departure caused me to say to her, 'His household does not feel over-burdened by such poor relatives as yourself, and will not feel diminished without you. If you're so quick to lose your temper, in the future, you might just as well stay away. If you're afraid that someone in this house might:
Stew me in a pot and eat me,
just let me handle it for myself.'"
"What an ill-bred offspring you are!" laughed Meng Yü-lou. "How can you talk that way to your own mother?"
"That's not it at all," said Chin-lien. "What really annoys me is the fact that:
She may be a brown cat, but she's got a black tail.
She's so two-faced about things, always taking the other person's side, on the principle that:
If you've eaten a bowl and a half of someone's food,
You're obligated to do whatever they want you to do.[43]
If she manages to pick up so much as a sweet date from someone, she'll sing her praises a thousand times, if not ten thousand times. From the very outset, once she'd borne this child, she has manipulated our husband to such effect that it's just as though he's taken root in her place. He treats her the same way he would if she had been formally raised to the status of legitimate wife, while she can hardly wait for the chance to trample the rest of us into the mud.
"But today, thanks to the fact that:
Heaven also has eyes,[44]
your child has fallen ill. As I have said all along:
The sun may be at high noon,
But the time will come when it will pass its zenith."[45]
As they were speaking, who should appear but Pen the Fourth and Lai-an, who had been to the sutra printing shop to hand over the silver lions and had returned to report to Yüeh-niang. When they saw that Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh were sitting on the stylobate of the reception hall, they came to a halt outside the ceremonial gate, hesitating to come inside.
Lai-an stepped forward and said, "Ladies, get out of the way if you please. Pen the Fourth is here."
"You crazy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "Tell him to go ahead in. It's not as though we've never seen him before."
When Lai-an repeated this to him, Pen the Fourth lowered his head and went straight back to the rear compound, where he reported to Yüeh-niang and Li P'ing-erh, saying, "I took the aforementioned silver lions, weighing forty-one taels and five mace, and, in the presence of the two nuns, turned them over to Chai Ching-erh, or Sutra Chai, the proprietor of the sutra printing shop. He agreed to print five hundred copies of the *Diamond sutra* with damask bindings, for five candareens apiece, and a thousand copies with plain silk bindings, for three candareens apiece, which comes to a total of fifty-five taels of silver. In addition to the forty-one taels and five mace which he has already accepted, he is still due thirteen taels and five mace, in return for which, he promises to deliver the sutras on the morning of the fourteenth."
Li P'ing-erh promptly went back to her quarters and returned with a silver incense burner, which, when she had Pen the Fourth put it on the scale, turned out to weigh fifteen taels.
"You take it to him," said Li P'ing-erh, "and keep the surplus over what he is due in order to cover your expenses when the sutras are distributed at the temple fair on the fifteenth. That way you won't have to come and ask me for anything more."
Pen the Fourth, thereupon, took the incense burner and headed out the door, while Yüeh-niang told Lai-an to see him out.
"Brother Four," said Li P'ing-erh, "I'm much indebted to you."
Pen the Fourth bowed deferentially and said, "How could I presume?"
He then went back to the front compound, where Chin-lien and Meng Yülou once again called him to a halt and asked him, "Did you turn the silver lions over to the sutra printing shop?"
"It's all been properly settled," said Pen the Fourth. "They agreed to print one thousand five hundred copies of the sutra for a fee of fifty-five taels of silver. In addition to the forty-one taels and five mace that they have already received, the Sixth Lady, just now, has provided this silver incense burner."
Meng Yü-lou and Chin-lien looked it over but had nothing to say, after which Pen the Fourth continued on his way home.
Turning to Chin-lien, Meng Yü-lou said, "Sister Li in carrying on this way is simply wasting her money. If he is really destined to be your child, even a blow with a cudgel would not kill him. If he is not destined to be your child, no matter what you do in the way of donating sutras and creating effigies, it will not preserve him. She puts too much faith in these nuns, who are capable of anything. Just now, if I hadn't intervened, she would have simply turned these things over to them to take away. It was better to send someone from our household to accompany them, wasn't it?"
"Even if they made something out of the transaction," said Chin-lien, "it wouldn't amount to much."
The two of them chatted for a while and then stood up.
"Let's go out to the front gate," proposed Chin-lien.
She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "Will you go out with us?"
"I won't go," Hsi-men Ta-chieh replied.
P'an Chin-lien then took Meng Yü-lou by the hand, and the two of them went and stood just inside the main gate.
They then asked P'ing-an, "Have the renovations in the house across the street been completed yet?"
"By this time?" said P'ing-an. "Yesterday, Father was over there supervising the work, and the place has been properly swept out. The merchandise is going to be temporarily stored on the upper floor of the building in the rear. Yesterday he had the yin-yang master come to preside over the ceremony of breaking ground. They are constructing a three-roomed underground storehouse beneath the building in order to store the silk goods and are opening up an eighteen-foot-wide frontage of three rooms in a row, to serve as the shop front. Artisans have been engaged to repaint and varnish the interior, pave the floor, and put up shelving, so that they can open for business next month."
Meng Yü-lou went on to inquire, "Have the dependents of that secretary, Licentiate Wen, moved in yet, or not?"
"They moved in yesterday," said P'ing-an. "And this morning Father directed that the summer bedstead in storage in the rear compound should be allocated to them, and that two tables and four chairs should be moved over for them to sit on."
"Did you happen to notice what his wife looked like?" asked Chin-lien.
"She was sitting in a sedan chair in the dark shadows," said P'ing-an. "Nobody got a good look at her."
As they were speaking, what should they hear in the distance but the *ssu-lang-lang* sound made by an old gentleman as he came along shaking the distinctive mirror polisher's clapper by means of which he alerted housewives to his presence.
"The mirror polisher is coming this way," said Chin-lien.
She then said to P'ing-an, "You call him to a halt so that he can polish our mirrors for us. My mirrors, these last few days, have gotten tarnished. I told you, jailbird that you are, to be on the lookout for him, but you haven't done anything about it. And now, how does it happen that we haven't been standing out here any time at all, and the mirror polisher shows up?"
P'ing-an, accordingly, called the mirror polisher to a halt. The old man set down his load of equipment, and, seeing that there were two women standing just inside the gate, stepped forward to salute each of them with a bow and then stood to one side.
Chin-lien then asked Meng Yü-lou, "If you're planning to have your mirrors polished too, why not have the page boy bring them out as well, so we can have them all polished at the same time?"
Thereupon, she directed Lai-an, "Go to my quarters, and get your sister Ch'un-mei to find my large face mirror, my two small mirrors, and also the large rectangular dressing mirror; then bring them all out here so that he can give them a good polishing."
Meng Yü-lou instructed Lai-an, "Go to my quarters, and get Lan-hsiang to find my mirrors, so you can bring them out to me."
Lai-an had not been gone for long, when he came out, carrying eight mirrors in all, the ordinary mirrors, large and small, in his two hands, and the rectangular dressing mirror hugged against his breast.
"You lousy little piece!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You can't handle them all. You should have made two trips out of it. How can you manage to bring them all out at once this way? If you should happen to dent one of my mirrors, what then?"
"I haven't seen this large mirror of yours before," said Meng Yü-lou. "Where did it come from?"
"Someone left it at the pawnshop," said Chin-lien. "I like it because it's so bright. I've put it in my room and use it to look at myself both day and night."
She then went on to say, "Only three of these mirrors actually belong to me."
"And only two of them, one large and one small, are mine," said Meng Yü-lou.
"Then who do these other two belong to?" asked Chin-lien.
"Those two belong to sister Ch'un-mei," said Lai-an. "She sent them out in the hope that he would be able to polish them too."
"The lousy little piece!" said Chin-lien. "She leaves her own mirrors hidden away, unused, while picking up my mirrors to look at herself all the time. No wonder they've gotten so tarnished."
All eight mirrors, large and small, were turned over to the old mirror polisher, who was told to polish away. Thereupon, he fastened them to his workbench, applied mercury to their surfaces, and, in less time than it takes to eat a meal, polished them until they:
Shone brightly enough to dazzle the eyes.[46]
When Chin-lien picked one up and examined her flowery countenance, it was like gazing into:
A stretch of limpid autumn water.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
When the lotus blossom and the caltrop-patterned mirror confront each other,
The breeze blows, the countenance is disturbed, and the image becomes blurred.
Exposed to the limpid autumn water of her gaze, the lotus blossom reveals itself,
Resembling the appearance of the Goddess Ch'ang-o in the Palace of the Moon.
With turquoise sleeves she wipes away the dust, as the frosty tarnish recedes,
When she breathes upon it with her ruby lips, the azure clouds thicken.
If, in their flight, the powdered butterflies come to impinge upon it,
One will believe that the blossom's fragrance resides in the picture.
When the old mirror polisher, in no time at all, finished polishing the mirrors, he turned them over to the women to look over, and they, in turn, entrusted them to Lai-an to take back inside and put away. Meng Yü-lou told P'ing-an to ask manager Fu Ming, who was tending counter in the shop, for fifty candareens to give to the mirror polisher. That oldster took the money in one hand but remained standing where he was, without leaving.
Meng Yü-lou told P'ing-an to ask the old man, "Why aren't you going? No doubt you think the money is insufficient."
Before they knew it, with a gush, the tears began to flow from his eyes, as he started to weep.
"My mistress wants to know why you are so distressed," said P'ing-an.
"There is no reason to deceive you, Brother," said the old man. "I have led a futile existence for sixty years. Early on, I was left with a son by my first wife, who is now twenty-one years old and is not yet married. All he does is scrounge around like a dog looking for garbage, rather than trying to make a living. I have to go out every day and labor for the money with which to support him, while he, on the other hand:
Is not the sort to abide by his lot,
and is constantly gambling with the knockabouts on the street. The other day, he got himself into trouble and was trussed up with his companions and taken before the commandant's yamen, where he was arraigned for petty larceny, and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo. When he came home, he took all of his stepmother's skirts and jackets and pawned them, which upset his stepmother so much that she came down with convulsions and was confined to her bed for half a month. When I said a few words of criticism to him, he simply took off and stopped coming home, so that I now spend every day looking for him, but so far without success. I'm tempted to vent my spleen by giving up on trying to find him at all, but I'm already an old man, and he is my only son, so that, in the future, I would have no one to support me in my old age. But if he were at home, and I saw that he was not turning out to be a decent human being, that would only upset me further. The way things are, he's simply my karmic encumbrance, and all I can do about it is to:
Suffer injustice and harbor resentment,
with no place to lodge a complaint. That's why:
The tears flow from my wounded heart."[47]

Meng Yü-lou said to P'ing-an, "You ask him, 'How old is your second wife this year?'"
"This year she has led a futile existence for fifty-four years," said the old man. "She has neither a son nor daughter of her own, and, now that she has just recovered somewhat from her convulsions, I lack the means to properly nurture her. She has her heart set on a chunk of cured pork, and I have spent the last two or three days scouring through ten or more streets and alleys but have been unable to find any. It's really enough to make one sigh in despair."
"That's no problem," said Meng Yü-lou with a smile. "I've got a chunk of cured pork in a drawer in my quarters."
She then said to Lai-an, "You go speak to Lan-hsiang about it. There are also two leftover scones. Get her to give them to you as well."
Chin-lien then called to the old man, asking him, "Does your old lady eat millet gruel, or not?"
"Why wouldn't she eat it?" said the old man. "That would be just the thing for her."
Chin-lien then called over Lai-an and said, "Tell Ch'un-mei to measure out two pints of that new millet that my mother brought the other day, and also bring out two pickled cucumbers, to give to his old lady to eat."
Lai-an had not been gone for long when he brought out half a leg of cured pork, two scones, two pints of millet, and two pickled cucumbers and called out, "Come over here, old man. You're in luck. If your old lady isn't craving these things because of illness, no doubt she's recuperating from childbirth and feels the need for a 'heart stabilizing potion.'"[48]
The old man promptly received these things with both hands, stowed them in his load, bowed to Meng Yü-lou and Chin-lien, and then, shouldering his burden and shaking his clapper, proceeded nonchalantly on his way.
"You two ladies," remarked P'ing-an, "ought not to have given him all those things. The old oily mouth has contrived to cheat you out of them. His old lady is a go-between, whom I happened to notice walking by on this very street just yesterday. Since when is she convalescing at home?"
"You lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien. "Why didn't you tell us any earlier?"
"Leave it alone," said P'ing-an. "Let him have his piece of luck. It's just a coincidence that you two ladies had come out, called him to a halt, and patronised him with all those things." Truly, having nothing better to do, they came out and idled at the gateway, just as the old codger happened to come by shaking his clapper. Not only can even the most trivial things be of help to people but if you lack the affinity, a drop of water will prove hard to get.

Ximen Qing drank wine with his friends and relatives and got very drunk. When the party was over, he went to Sun Xue'e's room. She was in the kitchen watching everything being cleared away, but, when she heard that Ximen had gone to her room, she hurried away. Miss Yu was in her room. Xue'e asked her to go to Wu Yueniang's room, where she could share a bed with Yuxiao and the other maid. There were only three rooms in Xue'e's apartment. One had a couch and another a *kang* or stove bed. It was more than a year since Ximen Qing had visited her. She quickly took his clothes and put them on a chair. Then she made the bed, washed herself with perfumed water, and went to make him some tea. When he had drunk it, they took off their clothes and went to bed.
The next day was the twenty-eighth, Ximen's birthday. When he had burned some paper offerings, a boy called Hu Xiu came with a message from Han Daoguo. The servants told Ximen Qing, and Ximen gave orders that he should be brought to the hall. He asked the boy where the boat was. Hu Xiu gave him a letter with some accounts. "Uncle Han has bought silk in Hangzhou worth ten thousand taels," he said. "He has brought it as far as Linqing and there he is waiting for money to pay the duty. Without it, he can't bring the goods to the city."
When Ximen Qing had read the letter and looked at the accounts, he was delighted. He ordered Qitong to give Hu Xiu something to eat and told the boy that, when he had done, he must go and take the news to Master Qiao. He himself went to see Yueniang. "Han," he said, "has arrived at Linqing and he has sent this boy Hu Xiu with the statements. We must get busy clearing the house opposite. We can store the goods there, and I must look about for a man to take charge of the shop."
"Yes," Yueniang said, "there is no time to lose. It is late enough already."
"I will talk to Brother Ying about it when he comes," Ximen said. When Bojue came, Ximen took him to the hall and explained the situation.
"I came to congratulate you on your birthday," Bojue said. "But now that your goods have come, I have still further reason to congratulate you. Their arrival on such a day is a good omen. You say you need a man. I happen to have an old friend who is the very fellow for you. He knows the silk trade inside out, but he has had bad luck and is out of employment at the moment. He is about forty years old. He is a good judge of silver; he can write and keep accounts, and all things considered, he is an excellent business man. His name is Gan and his second name Chushen. He lives in a house of his own in Stone Bridge Alley."
"Splendid!" Ximen Qing said. "Tell him to come and see me tomorrow."
Li Ming, Wu Hui and Zheng Feng came and kowtowed. In a short time the other musicians followed them. They were entertained in one of the side rooms. Then one of the servants came and said he had been to summon the singing girls. "But I cannot get Zheng Aiyue to come," he said. "Her old woman says she was all dressed and ready to start, when somebody came from the princely family of Wang and took her away. So I only got Qi Xiang'er, Dong Jiao'er and Hong Si'er."
"What rubbish!" Ximen Qing declared. "Not come indeed! and why not?" He turned to Zheng Feng. "What does your sister mean by refusing to come? Is it true that anybody from Wang's place took her away?"
Zheng Feng knelt down. "I do not live at home," he said, "I know nothing about it."
"She thinks if she says she is going to sing at Wang's place, that will settle the matter and I shall not be able to touch her." Then he said to Daian: "Take my card and two soldiers and go to Wang's. Ask for the young lord Wang. Tell him that I am entertaining a few guests here today and that Zheng Aiyue promised to come. We should be very much obliged if he would see that she does come. If there is any demur, arrest the old woman and throw her into jail. Let her see how she likes that." He told Zheng Feng to go too. The boy dared not refuse, and went out with Daian.
"Brother," Zheng Feng said to Daian, "you go in, and I'll wait outside. I have no doubt that my lord Wang did send for her, but perhaps she has not gone yet. If she has not, tell her she really must come with us."
"If she has gone to Wang's place, I shall take my master's card there," Daian said, "but if she is still at home, you had better go and tell your mother to dress her quickly and we will all go back together. I will say what I can for you to Father, and it will be all right. You don't understand him. When he was at Master Xia's place, he arranged with her to come, and he is naturally annoyed when she does not turn up." Zheng Feng went home and Daian, with the two soldiers, followed him.
Meanwhile, Ximen Qing said to Ying Bojue: "The beastly little strumpet! She is ready enough to go and sing for others, but, when I tell her to come here, she won't come!"
"She is a little baggage," Bojue said. "But she is not very experienced, and does not realize what a great man you are.
"I met her at a party," Ximen said. "I thought she talked prettily so I told her to come and sing here, the young scamp."
"Brother," Bojue said, "the four wenches you have here today are as fine as any of their kind."
"But you haven't seen Zheng Aiyue, Uncle," Li Ming said.
"Oh, yes I have," Bojue said. "Your father and I went and drank wine at her place one day. She was very young then. But it is some years since I last saw her, and I don't know what she is like now."
"The girl is well made," Li Ming said, "but she puts on rather too much paint. She knows a few songs, but she is not half as good as Li Guijie. And what kind of a place does she imagine this house to be that she dares to refuse to come here? She ought to be grateful for the chance. She certainly does not know her luck."
While they were talking, Hu Xiu came back. "I have been to see Master Qiao," he said. "Now I await your orders."
Ximen Qing asked Chen Jingji to get fifty taels from Wu Yueniang and told Huatong to write a letter and seal it. Then he ordered a soldier to start early next morning and go with Hu Xiu to the customs office. "Go and see Master Qian," he said, "and ask him to be lenient when he looks over the goods."
Chen Jingji brought the money. It was handed to Hu Xiu, who took it with the letter and the papers connected with the payment of duty and arranged to leave the next morning.
Shortly after Hu Xiu's departure, they could hear the shouts of men clearing the way. Ping'an came and announced the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue. Ximen put on his robes and received the two eunuchs in the great hall. When they had exchanged greetings, he invited them to go to the arbor to take off their ceremonial robes. They sat down, the two eunuchs in two large chairs in the place of honor, Ying Bojue in a more lowly seat.
"Who is this gentleman?" said Xue.
"You met him last year," Ximen Qing said. "It is my old friend Ying the Second."
"Ah," said Xue, "the gentleman who made such excellent jokes!"
Bojue bowed. "Your Excellency has an excellent memory. It was I."
Tea was brought. Ping'an came and said: "Major Zhou has sent a man with a card to say that he is engaged elsewhere and will not be able to come early. He asks that you will please not wait for him."
Ximen Qing looked at the card. "Very good!" he said.
"Sir," Eunuch Xue said, "who is this who is coming late?"
"Zhou Nanxuan. He is engaged elsewhere and has sent a man to ask us not to wait for him."
"We will leave a place for him," said the eunuch.
Then Wang Jing brought two cards and said: "The two scholars have arrived." Ximen looked at the cards. On one was written Ni Peng, and, on the other, Wen Bigu. Wen was the man whom Master Ni wished to recommend to him. He hastened out to welcome them and found the two scholars in academic dress. He paid particular attention to Wen Bigu, who was a man of about forty years of age, of dignified and discreet appearance. There was hair upon his cheeks, and his manner was urbane and gentle.
Though he possessed incomparable talents
Often he went to the place where the Rites are despised.
His name and his achievements held no glory
And his ambition was, perforce, content with lowly things.
His fortunes had declined, and with them self-respect.
Philosophy and letters he left to Confucius.
The career of a public officer,
Or the desire to make a name for himself and his ancestors
Such notions as these he cast into the East River.
Now he foregathered with the scum of the earth
Only money was his goal.
Hail-fellow-well-met,
Without a care for shame or prudence.
He was tall of stature, and broad girdled
He could see no one before him.
He talked with an air and sang a pretty song
But his brain was empty.
Every three years, for the examination he would enter
But even a low degree was too much for him.
So now he has abandoned hope of climbing high
And sits with others to drink a cup of wine
To lessen melancholy.
Like a retired minister
Exiled to the mountains.
Ximen Qing took them to the hall and each of them offered him a book and a handkerchief as a birthday present. They sat down in the places appropriate to host and guests.
"I have often heard of your great learning," Ximen Qing said. "Will you tell me your honorable name?"
"My second name is Rixin," said Master Wen, "and Kuixuan is my honorific name."
"Master Kuixuan, in what department of learning do you excel?"
"I am only a mean scholar," Master Wen said, "so I have begun upon the Book of Changes. Your great renown has long been known to me, but I have never ventured to call upon you. Yesterday, my old school friend, Ni Guiyan, spoke to me of your extraordinary virtues, and I felt I must come and see you."
"It is very kind of you to pay me the first visit. I shall hope to return your call one of these days. I am a military officer and know little of literature, and I have no one able to attend properly to my correspondence. The other day when I was visiting my colleague Xia, I made the acquaintance of Master Ni, and he spoke most highly of your attainments. I intended to call upon you, but you have come to me first and been good enough to bring me these gifts. I don't know how to express my appreciation."
"You flatter me," said Wen. "I am really devoid of learning and virtue."
When they had drunk tea, Ximen asked them to go to the arbor where the two eunuchs were sitting. Xue suggested that they should take off their academic robes, and they took off their gowns and joined the party, only taking their seats after they had been pressed to do so for some time.
As they were chatting, Uncle Wu and Captain Fan arrived, and Daian and Zheng Feng came to say that the four singing girls were now all present. "Is it true," Ximen Qing asked, "that she had been sent for by the princely family of Wang?"
"Yes," Daian said, "but she had not started. I was about to arrest the old woman; that frightened them, and Zheng Aiyue decided to come with me."
Ximen Qing went out and stood on the steps to look at the four girls. They came forward together and kowtowed. Zheng Aiyue wore a long violet gown with a white-ribboned skirt beneath it. Her waist was like the willow, supple and full of the promise of delight. Her face was like a lotus blossom.
"Why did you not come when I sent for you?" Ximen Qing said to her. "Did you imagine you could escape me?"
Zheng Aiyue kowtowed without a word, then stood up and went smilingly to the inner court with the other girls. They kowtowed to Wu Yueniang and the others, and, finding Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er with the ladies, they greeted them too. "You came early," they said.
"We have been here two days," Guijie said. "What makes you so late?"
"It is all Zheng Aiyue's fault," said Dong Jiao'er. "We were ready, but she wouldn't come and we had to wait." Zheng Aiyue hid her face with her fan, laughed, but still said nothing.
"Who is this girl?" Yueniang said.
"Don't you know her, Mother?" said Dong Jiao'er. "She is Zheng Aixiang's younger sister, and her name is Zheng Aiyue. It is only six months since she was made a woman. "
"She has a very fine figure," Yueniang said.
Pan Jinlian pulled up Zheng Aiyue's skirt and looked at her tiny feet. "Your shoes are too pointed; they are not like ours," she said. "In ours the proportions are as they should be, but your heels are too large."
"How impertinent she is," Yueniang said to Aunt Wu. "Why should she interfere in matters that do not concern her?"
Jinlian took a gold pin shaped like a fish from Zheng Aiyue's head and said: "Where did you get this?"
"It was made by our own silversmith," Zheng Aiyue told her. Tea and cakes were brought, and Yueniang told Guijie and Wu Yin'er to join the others. The six singing girls sat down together.
After tea, Guijie and Wu Yin'er invited the other girls to go to the garden with them, but Dong Jiao'er said; "We must go to the outer court first." Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er went with Pan Jinlian and Meng Yulou. They kept away from the great arbor because there were many guests there, and, after looking at the flowers for a while, they went to Li Ping'er's room to see Guan'ge. The baby was ill again. He kept waking up out of a bad dream and he would not take his milk. Li Ping'er had to spend all her time in her own room looking after him. When they came, she asked them to sit down.
"Is the baby asleep?" Guijie said.
"He has been crying all day long, but he has gone to sleep now," Li Ping'er said.
"The Great Lady tells me she is going to send for old woman Liu," Yulou said. "Why don't you send a boy and ask her to come at once?"
"It is Father's birthday today," Li Ping'er said, I think I will wait until tomorrow."
Then the four singing girls came with Ximen Dajie and Xiaoyu. "So you are here," said Ximen Dajie. "We have been looking all around the garden for you."
"There were so many people about we did not stay long," Yulou said.
"What were you doing all that time in the inner court?" Guijie said to Hong Si'er.
"We were having tea in the Fourth Lady's room."
Pan Jinlian looked at Meng Yulou and Li Ping'er. Then she laughed. "Who told you she was the Fourth Lady?"
"She asked us to go and take tea in her room," Dong Jiao'er said, "and, since we had not been presented to her before, we asked her what was her position in the household and she said: 'I am the Fourth Lady.' "

"The hussy!" Jinlian cried. "It would have been more becoming if somebody else had said so for her. In this house she is of no account at all. Nobody calls her the Fourth Lady. But she has had her husband in her room for one night. Now she has managed to scrape a little color together and is all agog to start a dye works. If it hadn't been that Aunt Wu was in the Great Lady's room, Guijie in the Second Lady's room, Aunt Yang in the Third Lady's room, the Wu Yin'er in the Sixth Lady's room, and my mother in mine, he would never have dreamed of going to her."
"You ought to have seen her this morning," Yulou said. "When she had seen Father to her door, she flaunted herself about the courtyard, with a 'Here, Zhang!' and a 'Now, you Li!' making a tremendous fuss of herself."
"Well," Jinlian said, "the proverb says: Never indulge a slave, and never spoil a child." She said to Xiaoyu: "I hear your father told the Great Lady he was going to buy that woman a maid. Last night, when he was in her room, he found it a complete mess. He asked her, and the little strumpet seized the opportunity and told him she was so busy all day she had not time to clean her room. She said she only went there to sleep and that was all. So he said: 'Don't worry about that any more. I will ask the Great Lady to get you a maid.' Is this true?"
"I know nothing about it," Xiaoyu said. "Perhaps Yuxiao heard it."
"Your father would never have thought of going to her," Jinlian said to Guijie, "if all our rooms had not been occupied. I am not one to talk about people behind their backs, but she is a very undiscerning sort of woman. And she has a very nasty tongue. I never speak to her if I can avoid it."
Yingchun brought tea. While they were drinking it, sounds of music reached them from the outer court. The guests had all arrived and the banquet was ready. Daian came and called the four singing girls. Master Qiao did not come that day.
First there were some varied amusements, then music and songs and dances. After a few comic sketches, food was brought in. Cold appetizers were served, followed by a soup. Then Dr. Ren arrived, dressed in robes of ceremony. Ximen Qing took him to the great hall. Dr. Ren brought out a handkerchief with the symbol for longevity embroidered on it and offered it, with two pieces of white gold, to Ximen as a birthday present. "Yesterday," he said, "Han Mingchuan told me of your birthday. I am sorry I am so late."
"I am most grateful for your coming," Ximen Qing said. "With these delightful presents too. And I must congratulate you on the wonderful medicine you were good enough to send us."
Dr. Ren wished to offer a cup of wine to Ximen Qing as a mark of respect, but Ximen politely refused to allow it. Then Dr. Ren took off his ceremonial robes and they joined the others. He sat at the fourth seat on the left, next to Uncle Wu. When soup and rice had been served, Ximen Qing gave Dr. Ren's servant a box of food. Dr. Ren thanked him and told the servant to take it away.
Then the four singing girls sang a suite of birthday songs, accompanying themselves with stringed instruments. More food was brought and wine was passed around. The actors brought their repertory list and the eunuchs selected the play *Han Xiangzi Saves Chen Banjie*. When the first act was done, they heard the noise of men clearing the way. Ping'an came in to announce the arrival of Major Zhou. Ximen Qing hastened to welcome him and, without waiting for the usual greetings, asked him to take off his ceremonial clothes. "But let me first offer you a cup of wine," Major Zhou said.
"No," said Eunuch Xue, "do not offer him wine, noble Zhou. Greet each other with a simple reverence." This they did and Major Zhou bowed to the other guests. He sat down in the third place on the left. Food was brought for him, then soup, two types of snacks, two plates of meat, and two jars of wine. This was for Major Zhou's servants. Major Zhou thanked his host and bade his servant take the food away. They passed wine to each other. With singing, dancing and music, they had a very happy time.
They drank until sunset. Dr. Ren was the first to leave. Ximen Qing took him to the gate. "How is your lady?" the doctor said. "Is she better?"
"She was better immediately after she took your medicine," Ximen Qing said, "but for some reason or other she has been none too well these last few days. You must come and see her again." Dr. Ren mounted his horse and rode away.
The two scholars Ni and Wen rose. Ximen urged them to stay longer but they would not. Ximen went to see them off. "I will come and see you," he said to Wen. "I will have a study prepared for you to live in and you must bring your family. Every month I shall offer a small sum for your beans and water."
"You are most kind," said Master Wen.
Master Ni exclaimed: "A noble gentleman indeed, who recognizes literature so handsomely!"
When they had gone, Ximen Qing returned and drank with his guests. The party did not come to an end until the first night watch. The four singing girls went to Yueniang's room and sang a few songs for the ladies. In the front court, Ximen asked Ying Bojue and Uncle Wu to stay. He gave food to the actors and dismissed them. The servants cleared the tables and Ximen called for dessert. Then he bade Li Ming, Wu Hui and Zheng Feng come and sing, and gave them wine.
"Brother," Bojue said, "this has been a splendid entertainment and your guests have been well pleased."
Li Ming said that the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, had been very generous in their presents and they had left a packet of silver for Guijie and Wu Yin'er. "His Excellency Xue is younger than the other," the boy said, "and that makes him more lively."
Huatong brought dessert. Bojue noticed some pastries among the different dishes. He picked out one and put it in his mouth. It melted away at once. It seemed like exquisite dew falling upon his heart. "This is excellent," he said.
"Oh, when it comes to eating, you know well enough how to pick out something good," Ximen said to him. "Your sixth mother made those."
Bojue laughed. "To show her daughterly devotion to me," he said. Then he said: "Uncle, won't you try one?" picked one out and put it into Uncle Wu's mouth. He gave one to Li Ming and Zheng Feng.
While they were drinking, Bojue said to Daian: "Go to the inner court and tell the four little strumpets to come here. I can do very well without them, but I want them to sing for your uncle. He cannot stay much longer and, after all, they have only sung one or two songs all day. It won't do to let them off too lightly."
Daian did not move. He said: "I did speak to them, but they are singing for the ladies now. Doubtless they will be here in a few moments."
"When did you speak to them, you young rascal?" Ying Bojue said. He told Wang Jing to go, but Wang Jing paid no attention. "You won't go, won't you?" said Bojue. "Then I will go myself." But, as he spoke, the scent of perfume came to them and they could hear laughing voices. The four singing girls came in, dabbing their faces with handkerchiefs.
"What!" cried Bojue, "are you going without singing for us? That's too much of a good thing! Your sedan chairs alone cost four *qian* of silver, and for that money we could buy quite a lot of rice, enough to keep your whole households for a month."
"Brother," Dong Jiao'er said, "if you think we can earn a living so easily as all that, why don't you come and join us?"
"It is very late," Hong Si'er said, "almost the second night watch. We really must go."
And Qi Xiang'er said: "We have to get up very early in the morning to go to a funeral."
"Whose funeral?" said Bojue.
"At a house where the doors open underneath the eaves," Qi Xiang'er replied.
"Doubtless young Master Wang's," said Bojue. "You got into trouble over that young man before, but luckily for you this gentleman sent to the Eastern Capital and had the matter hushed up for Li Guijie's sake. You were forgiven too. Now you put on the airs of a bird that has escaped from a cage."
Qi Xiang'er laughed. "Don't talk nonsense, old oily mouth!"
"Are you making fun of me because I am old?" Bojue said. "I fancy I still have some good points. Anyhow, I can manage you four little strumpets without any difficulty."
Qi Xiang'er laughed again. "Brother," she said, "I can't see you very well but it is obvious that you are boasting."
"When I spend my money," Bojue returned, "I insist upon having something worth paying for. You young strumpets of the Zheng family appear to have eaten something that makes you talk too much. You seem lost."
"After listening to you," said Dong Jiao'er, "she dare not open her mouth."
"I don't care whether she is afraid of me or not. Bring your instruments and each of you sing a song. Then I will let you go."
"Very well," Ximen Qing said, "two of you shall serve us with wine and the other two shall sing."
Then Qi Xiang'er said: "I and my sister will sing." Zheng Aiyue took her lute and Qi Xiang'er her zither. They sat down and sang very sweetly "Darkness Has Gone, the Dawn Is Here." Dong Jiao'er offered wine to Uncle Wu, and Hong Si'er to Ying Bojue.
After they had drunk several cups of wine and the girls had finished singing, Ximen Qing still pressed Uncle Wu to stay and sent for Chunhong to sing some songs of the South. Only then did he tell Qitong to saddle a horse and take a lantern to see Uncle Wu to his home. But Wu said: "Brother, don't order a horse for me. I will go with Brother Ying." Ximen bade Qitong accompany them with a lantern. He himself went as far as the gate with them. As they were standing at the gate, Ximen said to Ying Bojue:
"Don't forget about Gan. I am going to make a contract with him. Then I will join with my kinsman Qiao, and we will get the house ready for the storage of the goods."
"I will not forget," Bojue said. He went away with Uncle Wu. Qitong, carrying a lantern, went with them.
"My brother-in-law spoke about getting the house ready. What house does he mean?" Uncle Wu said.
"Han Daoguo has arrived with the goods he has bought," Ying Bojue said, "and his Lordship is going to start a silk shop in the house facing his own."
"When is he going to open it?" Uncle Wu said. "We are his kinsmen and friends, and we ought to do something to mark the occasion."
They left the main street and came to the lane in which Ying Bojue lived. Uncle Wu said to Qitong: "Take Uncle Ying to his door."
Bojue declined. "No," he said, "go with your uncle. I don't need a light. My house is close by." They separated and Qitong went with Uncle Wu.
Ximen Qing paid and dismissed Li Ming and the others and went to sleep in Yueniang's room.
The next day Ying Bojue brought Gan Chushen to see Ximen Qing. Gan was wearing black clothes. They discussed terms, then Ximen sent for Cui Ben and told him to go and see Master Qiao and find out what Qiao thought about the arrangement of the house, and when they should open their shop. "I will do everything your master wishes," Qiao said to Cui Ben. "He need not worry about me." So Ximen Qing made a contract with Gan, with Ying Bojue as the witness. It was decided that, out of the profits, three parts of every ten should be for Ximen Qing, three for Qiao, and the remaining four should be divided equally between Han Daoguo, Gan Chushen and Cui Ben. They set to work upon the warehouse, had signs painted, and only waited for the merchandise to come so that they might start business. At home, Ximen Qing cleared one of the courts for Master Wen to occupy as his secretary. He arranged to pay his new secretary three taels of silver as salary each month, and to make him appropriate gifts at the different seasons. Huatong was instructed to wait upon the scholar. When all these arrangements were completed, Ximen gave a series of parties.
After his birthday celebrations, he sent for Dr. Ren to see Li Ping'er. Then he went to the house opposite to see how the men were getting on with their work. Aunt Yang went home, but Guijie and Wu Yin'er still remained. Yueniang took three *qian* of silver and bought some crabs. She boiled them and, when dinnertime came, invited Aunt Wu, Guijie, Wu Yin'er and the ladies to come and enjoy them.
Yueniang had sent for old woman Liu to come and see Guan'ge. After taking tea, the old woman went with Li Ping'er to her apartments. The baby, she said, had been frightened and could not digest his food. She gave Li Ping'er some medicine for him. Yueniang gave her a small fee and dismissed her.
Meanwhile, Yulou, Jinlian, Guijie, Wu Yin'er and Ximen Dajie were in one of the flower arbors. They had a small table and played dominoes. Xue'e was there too. She lost her game and was made to drink seven or eight cups of wine. Then she went away and the others asked Li Ping'er to take her place. Jinlian asked Guijie and Wu Yin'er to sing for them. They made merry all day, and, at sunset, Yueniang had the food boxes of the two singing girls filled and sent them home.
Jinlian had had too much to drink. She saw her husband going again to Li Ping'er and remembered that, the same morning, he had sent for Dr. Ren to see her. She was consumed by jealousy but she dared not go to him because she knew the baby was not well. As she was going in the dark to her own room, she trod upon some filth. When she reached her room, she asked Chunmei for a light. Her scarlet silk shoes were ruined. Her eyebrows went up and her eyes opened wide. She told Chunmei to get a stick, take a lamp, close the corner door, and give the dog a beating. The dog set up a terrible howling. Li Ping'er sent Yingchun to say that the baby had just taken old woman Liu's medicine and gone to sleep. She asked that Jinlian would stop beating the dog. But Jinlian sat and made no answer. The dog beating continued. At last she allowed the dog to run away and began to grumble at Qiuju. The more she looked at her shoes, the more her anger increased. She called Qiuju and said: "It was your business to drive the dog out. What do you mean by letting him stay there? Is that dog your lover that you can't bear to part with him? My new shoes, that I've only worn for three or four days, are completely ruined. You know you ought to have had a light showing for me when I came in. Why did you pretend not to know I was coming?"
"Before you came," Chunmei said, "I told her to feed the dog and put him out. She wouldn't listen but looked at me like a fool."
"Oh, yes, the bold slave!" Jinlian cried. "I know you must be beaten before you will do anything. Come here and look at my shoes."
Qiuju went forward and stooped to look at them. Jinlian struck her in the face with one. The girl's face was cut: she drew back and tried to stop the blood with her hand.
"You slave! You slave! Would you try to escape me?" Jinlian cried. Then to Chunmei: "Pull her here: drag her here, and go get the whip. Take off her clothes and let me give her thirty stripes. If she tries to get away, I'll give her more."
Chunmei pulled off Qiuju's clothes. Jinlian bade her hold the girl's hands, and the blows fell upon her body like raindrops. Qiuju shrieked and cried like a pig being killed.
Guan'ge had only just closed his eyes, and now he was waked up by the noise. Once more Yingchun came to Jinlian. "Mother asks you please to forgive Qiuju. She is afraid the noise will frighten the baby."
Old woman Pan was lying on the bed in the inner room. When she heard the noise, she got up. She asked her daughter to stop, but Jinlian would not listen to her. When Li Ping'er sent her maid again, old woman Pan took the whip from her daughter's hands. "Daughter," she said, "don't beat the girl any more. Your sister is afraid that the noise will upset the baby. I don't mind your beating this donkey, but we must not harm the treasure of the household."
Jinlian was already wild enough, but when she heard her mother's words she was infuriated. Her mind was so enraged that her face became purple. She pushed her mother away and the old woman all but fell down. "You old fool," she screamed. "Keep yourself in your place and don't interfere with me. What treasure indeed? What donkey? You are in league with everybody else to injure me."
"Why! nothing of the sort," the old woman said. "I only come to get a little cold food. Why do you treat me so badly?"
"Take your old cunt off tomorrow," Jinlian said. "I can tell you that nobody is going to get the better of me in this place."
The old woman went to her room and wept. Jinlian went on beating Qiuju. She beat her twenty or thirty stripes with the whip, then gave her another ten with a cane. Qiuju's skin and flesh were torn before she let the girl go. Then she drove her nails into her cheeks and scratched her face all over.
Li Ping'er covered the baby's ears with her two hands. Tears coursed down her cheeks. She was furious, but she did not dare to say anything more.
That day Ximen Qing had been taking wine in the house opposite with Ying Bojue, Cui Ben and his new manager, Gan. Afterwards he went to sleep with Yulou.
The next day Major Zhou invited him to go to a birthday party and he went. Li Ping'er saw that her child was no better, although he had taken old woman Liu's medicine, and, as a result of the noise in the night, his eyes were upturned. The two nuns, Xue and Wang, came. Li Ping'er went to Yueniang's room and said: "Here are a pair of silver lions that I have taken from the baby's bed. I am going to give them to Sister Xue so as to have some Buddhist scriptures printed and given away in the temple on the fifteenth day of the eighth month."
Nun Xue took the silver lions and was going away with them when Yulou stopped her. "Wait a moment," she said. "Sister, you must get Ben the Fourth to weigh them. When we know the weight, Ben the Fourth can go with her and we shall know how much we shall have to pay for these copies of the scriptures. Ben the Fourth had better see to it, for our teacher, Xue, is not expert in such matters."
"You are right," Yueniang said. She sent Laian to fetch Ben the Fourth. When Ben the Fourth came, he made a reverence to the ladies and weighed the silver. It came to forty-one taels and five *qian*. Yueniang told him to go with Nun Xue to the printer to arrange for the printing of the texts.
Jinlian said to Yulou: "We will take the two teachers to the gate and then go to see Ximen Dajie. She is making shoes in her room." Holding each other's hands, they went to the outer court. Ben the Fourth and the two nuns went out, and Jinlian and Yulou went to the rooms at the side of the great hall. They found Ximen's daughter making shoes under the eaves. Jinlian picked up the shoes and looked at them. They were of green Nanjing silk.
"You shouldn't have made the designs in red," Yulou said. "Blue would have been better, for you will have to have red heels."
"I have a pair with red heels," Ximen Dajie said. "That is why I am making this pair in red with blue heels."
They sat down. Yulou asked if Chen Jingji was in. "He is asleep indoors," said Ximen Dajie. "He has been drinking somewhere, I don't know where."
"If I hadn't spoken as I did," Yulou said to Jinlian, "that foolish Sixth Sister of ours would have given all that silver to the nuns. If they had once gone off with it, we should never have seen them again. That is why I suggested sending Ben the Fourth with them. They could have taken refuge with some people of importance and we should never have been able to get them out again."
"The nuns would be fools if they didn't make money out of rich ladies," Jinlian said. "To get a sum like that from her is like pulling a hair out of a cow. She wishes to save the baby's life because she knows she will never get another if this one dies, even though she gives mountains and rivers for charity. This printing of a few texts is a trifle. In our house it seems that some people are allowed to set the house on fire, but we mayn't even light our lamps. You are no stranger and this is our sister, so there is no harm in my saying that that lady indulges herself too much. She sends for the doctor even in the early morning. Of course, it is no business of ours. What annoys me is the way she says in front of others: 'Your father comes to see the baby and wants to sleep with me, but I always send him to the other ladies.' I am good-natured enough in all conscience, yet she is always complaining about me. The Great Lady always seems to take her side. Yesterday, Father did not go to her room. What does she do but send a maid to the corner door to ask him to go and look at the baby. Then she took some medicine and told her husband to sleep with Wu Yin'er. You see how clever she is. He was delighted, of course, and the Great Lady didn't seem to mind. Yesterday, when I was going to my room, I got my shoes all dirty and told my maid to drive the dog out. That displeased her, and she sent Yingchun to say the noise was frightening the baby. That old fool of a mother of mine told me to stop and said she was afraid of frightening the precious treasure. I was angry. I said something nasty to my mother, and now she has gone off in a huff. The best thing she could do, perhaps. We can manage well enough without that poor old woman."
Yulou laughed. "How badly you have been brought up," she said. "You should not talk like that about your own mother."
"Well, she annoyed me. She always was deceitful and ready to take anybody's part but mine. Anyone who will give her half a bowl of rice can always count on her support. If anyone gives her a little something she likes, she will remember it with gratitude forever. As for the other, after that baby's birth she got our husband to stay there as if he had taken root. If he were to make her his first wife, she would throw us in the mud and trample on us. But Heaven has eyes, and that accounts for the baby's illness."
Then Ben the Fourth came back. He was on his way to Yueniang's room, but, seeing the three ladies, he stopped outside the second door and did not venture to go farther. Laian came and said: "Ladies, Ben the Fourth is here."
"Well, you rascal, let him come in," Jinlian said. "We saw him only a moment or two ago."
Laian told Ben the Fourth. He put something over his head and hurried through to the inner court to see Yueniang and Li Ping'er. He explained that the two nuns had given the printer forty-one taels and five *qian*. Five hundred copies were to be printed with silk covers, each of which would cost five *fen*, and a thousand copies in thinner silk that would cost three *fen* apiece. That would be fifty-five taels all together. We still have to pay the printer thirteen taels and five *qian*," he said. "He has promised to send all the copies here on the fourteenth."
Li Ping'er went to her room and brought a silver perfume box. She gave it to Ben the Fourth, who weighed it and found it to be fifteen taels. "Take it," Li Ping'er said, "pay the printer and keep the rest for your expenses when you go to the temple to give out the texts. It will save you the trouble of coming to ask me again."
Ben the Fourth took the box. As he was going away, Li Ping'er said: "Fourth Brother, I thank you."
Ben the Fourth bowed. "You are very kind," he said. Then he went to the front court. There Jinlian and Yulou stopped him.
"Have you given the silver to the printer?" Yulou asked.
"Yes," he said. "I have arranged for the printing of fifteen hundred copies. I paid forty-one taels and five *qian*, and now the Sixth Lady has given me this silver box." Jinlian and Yulou looked at the box but said nothing. Ben the Fourth went out.
"Our Sixth Sister is wasting her money," Yulou said. "If the baby is destined to live, nothing can kill him. If he is destined to die, his life won't be saved by any distributing of texts. If she trusts the nuns, they will make a fool of her."
They got up. "Let us go and look out of the gate," Jinlian said. They asked Ximen Dajie to go with them but she declined. Pan Jinlian took Meng Yulou by the hand, and they went to the gate together. When they got there, she asked Ping'an if the house opposite had been made ready.

"Yesterday," Ping'an said, "Father made the workmen clear it out and fix up the rooms in the back court as a warehouse. The Master of the Yin Yang came and blessed the starting of operations. The ground floor is being divided into three rooms, and shelves are being set up for the silk. The rooms at the front are to be made into a shop, and the painters have been told to decorate them. Next month the shop will be opened."
Yulou asked if Master Wen's family had move in.
"Yes," Ping'an said, "they came yesterday. This morning Father gave instructions that they were to be supplied with a bed, two tables, and two chairs."
"Did you see his wife?" Jinlian said.
"She came in a sedan chair," Ping'an said, "and it was too dark for me to see her."
As they were talking, they heard 'Ting. Ting. Ting', and an old man came along shaking a brass rattle. "Here is the polisher of mirrors," Jinlian said to Ping'an. "My mirror needs polishing. It is very tarnished. I told you to look out for a polisher, and you forgot all about it. Now, the very minute we come here, one comes along."
Ping'an stopped the old man, who put down his things. "If you have any mirrors to clean," Jinlian said to Yulou, "tell the boys to bring them out." Then she said to Laian: "Go to my room and ask Chunmei for my mirrors, the large one and the two small ones and the square one I use for dressing. See that he gets a good polish on them."
Yulou said to him: "Go to my room and ask Lanxiang for my mirrors." Laian went and came back with mirrors large and small, eight altogether in his hands, and the square one pressed against his chest.
"You foolish boy," Jinlian said, "you can't carry all those mirrors. Why didn't you make two journeys? You will make dents in them, holding them all together like that."
"I have never seen that big mirror of yours," Yulou said to Jinlian. "Where did you get it?"
"It came from the pawnshop," Jinlian said. "I like its brightness. That's why I keep it in my room." She said to the boy: "Only three of those mirrors are mine."
Yulou said: "and only two are mine."
"Whose are the rest?" Jinlian said.
"The other two are Sister Chunmei's," the boy said. "She gave them to me so that they might be cleaned with yours."
"The cunning little wretch!" Jinlian said. "She never uses her own mirrors but always mine. That's why mine are so dull."
The boy gave the mirrors to the old man who sat down on a bench, brought out his quicksilver and, in a very short time, polished them all till they shone again. Jinlian took one up and looked at herself. The mirror was like pure clear water.
The lotus and the water chestnut
Cast their reflection on the water.
The breeze brings ripples to the surface
And the green shadows move darkly.
In a pool of autumn waters the lotus appears
Like Chang E in the moon.
She gave the mirrors to Laian to take back. Yulou told Ping'an to go to the shop and ask Fu for some coins for the old man. He took the money but did not move away. "Ask the old man why he doesn't go away," Yulou said to Ping'an. "Perhaps he thinks we have not paid him enough." The old man wept.
"My mistress wants to know why you are so distressed," Ping'an said to him.
"Brother," said the old man, "I am sixty-one years old, and I have a son who is twenty-one. He is unmarried but he will do nothing for a living. He gads about everywhere, and I have to come out to the street day after day to earn a little money to support him. He is such an undutiful son that he even takes my money and goes gambling with it. The other day he was mixed up in some trouble and they took him to the courts. There they dealt with him as a pickpocket and beat him twenty strokes. When he came home, he took his mother's clothes and pawned them all. That upset his mother so much she had to take to her bed and she has stayed there this last fortnight. I upbraided him and he went away. He did not come back and I have looked everywhere for him in vain. Sometimes I think I will not bother to look for him any more, but I am old and he is my only son. There is only he to take care of me in my old age. Yet when he is at home he makes me angry. Life isn't worth living. I suffer so much and have no place to complain. I would cry my heart out if I could."
"Go and ask him how old his wife is," Yulou said to Ping'an.
"She is fifty-five," the old man said. "She has no children of her own, and she has been ill ever since this trouble. She is getting better now, but I have nothing to give her to feed her. She keeps asking for dried meat. I have been begging everywhere these last few days, but nobody will give me any."
"Never mind," Yulou said, "I have some in my room." She told Laian to go and ask her maid for two pieces.
Jinlian said: "Would your wife like some millet gruel?"
"Would she not?" cried the old man. "Where is there any? If she could only have some, she would be delighted."
Jinlian told Laian to ask Chunmei for two measures of new millet from that which old woman Pan had brought her, and two dried melons. When he returned, he brought the preserved meat, two measures of millet and two pickled cucumbers. "Old man," he said, "you are in luck's way. If she doesn't feel well enough to eat this, she must be just getting over childbirth, and this millet will help settle her stomach."
The old man reached out both his hands and took what was brought for him. He put it with his tools, bowed to the ladies, slung everything over his shoulder and went off sounding his rattle.
"Mothers," said Ping'an, "you shouldn't have given him so much. He has defrauded you. His wife is a go-between. I saw her on the street only a day or two ago. She hasn't been at home at all."
"Why didn't you tell me so before, you rascal?" Jinlian said.
"I told him he's lucky to have met you two ladies," Ping'an said.

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### The Death of Guan'ge & Hsi-men Ch'ing Dashes *Snow Lion* to Death; Li P'ing-erh Cries Out in Pain for Kuan-ko

As the sun sets, the rivers flow, returning ever from west to east;
So long as the glory of spring is not over, the willows will endure.
In the temple of the Goddess of Witch's Mountain,[1] they bend to hold the rain;
Before the gate of Sung Yü's residence, they flutter in the wind.
There is no comparing the color of elm pods to their blue-green hues;
One is profoundly moved by the way they set off the red of the apricot blossoms.
On the Pa River in Han-nan there are 1000 or 10000 willow trees;[2]
How many travelers have plucked their branches as they said their farewells?[3]

Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were still standing at the front gate after sending the mirror polisher on his way, when they suddenly saw a man coming toward them from the east, wearing a large hat and eye shades, and riding a mule. He rode at a fast clip right up to the gateway and dismounted, which sent the two women scurrying inside. When he took off his eyeshades, it turned out to be Han Tao-kuo reporting back home.
"Have the cartloads of merchandise arrived, or not?" P'ing-an hastily inquired.
"They're already inside the city," replied Han Tao-kuo. "I've come to ask Father where to unload them."
"Father isn't at home," said P'ing-an. "He's attending a party at the residence of His Honor Chou Hsiu. Space has already been prepared for the merchandise to be unloaded on the second floor of the building across the street. Please go ahead inside."
Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi came out and accompanied Han Tao-kuo to the rear compound, where he reported to Yüeh-niang and then came back outside to the reception hall, brushed the dust of the journey off his clothes, and asked Wang Ching to take his baggage and wallet home for him. Yüeh-niang meanwhile sent something out for him to eat.
It was not long before the cartloads of merchandise arrived. Ch'en Ching-chi took the keys and opened the door to the building across the street, whereupon the carriers who had been hired to unload the carts took their tallies and carried the merchandise, one box at a time, to unload on the second floor of the building. There were ten large cartloads of silk goods, as well as some wine and rice for the use of the family, so the unloading process lasted right up till lamplighting time. Ts'ui Pen also assisted by supervising the completion of the unloading, checking to see that the numbers tallied, locking the door, sealing it with a strip of paper, paying off the carriers, and seeing them off the premises.
While this was going on, Tai-an had gone to Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence to report the news to Hsi-men Ch'ing. When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that the goods were being unloaded at home, he drank several more cups of wine before leaving and arrived home somewhat after lamplighting time. Han Tao-kuo was sitting in the reception hall waiting for him and gave him a complete recital of the events of the trip, from beginning to end, both going and coming.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked him, "When the letter I sent to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh was delivered, did he respond favorably to my request, or not?"
"Thanks entirely to your letter to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh," replied Han Tao-kuo, "we saved a good deal in the way of customs duties. By treating two crates as one, I got away with reporting no more than two-thirds of the merchandise, which I also passed off as consisting merely of tea leaves and mirabilite for the making of incense. As a result, when it came time to compute the charges, for all ten large cartloads of goods we were only assessed thirty taels and five mace of silver in the way of customs duties. And when His Honor accepted the affidavit, he did not send any customs officers to inspect the merchandise but merely waved the cartloads of goods on their way."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he was utterly delighted and said, "In the future we must purchase a substantial gift to thank His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh for his pains."
Thereupon, he ordered Ch'en Ching-chi to keep company with Han Taokuo and Ts'ui Pen and also had some food sent out from the rear compound, so that they could have a drink together before breaking up and going home.
When Wang Liu-erh heard that Han Tao-kuo had returned, and that Wang Ching had brought his baggage and wallet home for him, she promptly took charge of the luggage and asked, "So your brother-in-law is back, is he?"
"Brother-in-law is supervising the unloading of the goods," said Wang Ching, "and is waiting to see Father before coming home."
The woman told her maidservants Ch'un-hsiang and Chin-erh to prepare some good tea and good food for the occasion. That night, when Han Taokuo finally returned home, he paid his respects before the family shrine, took off his traveling clothes, and washed his face, before husband and wife exchanged accounts of the events that had transpired during their separation. Han Tao-kuo told his wife how pleased he was with the way his business had gone, and his wife observed how heavy and ponderous the silver in his wallet felt.
When she asked him about it, he said, "I also picked up some two or three hundred taels worth of goods, including wine and rice, for myself. I've unloaded it in the shop across the street, and we can sell it off for silver at our leisure."
His wife was utterly delighted by this and went on to say, "I've also heard Wang Ching report that His Honor has found someone named Kan Jun to act as sales manager, and that we will divide a share of the profits with him and Ts'ui Pen, which is good news. I hear that the shop is slated to open for business next month."
"He may have engaged someone to act as sales manager here," said Han Tao-kuo, "but someone will still be needed down south to set up an office and take charge of purchasing at that end. I think His Honor is almost certain to appoint me to that post."
"You've got a good eye for evaluating merchandise," said his wife. "It's always been true that:
The abler you are, the more is demanded of you.[4]
Look you, if you weren't good at this business, would His Honor entrust it to you? As the saying goes:
Unless you are prepared to exert yourself to the utmost;
You will never make any money off the men of this world.[5]
It will probably entail your being away from home for three years. But if you're reluctant to go, I'll speak to His Honor and have him send Kan Jun and Laipao to take care of the outside business, and let you stay at home as the sales manager. That ought to do it."
"I'm already habituated to being away from home," said Han Tao-kuo. "Let's leave it at that."
"There you are," said his wife. "As far as you're concerned:
When the physiognomist has lost his touch,
It's all one whether he stays home or not."
When they had finished speaking, she served some wine, and the two of them, husband and wife, drank several cups to celebrate their reunion, after which, they cleared up the utensils and went to bed. That night, they:
Indulged in pleasure without restraint,
but there is no need to describe this in detail.
The next day was the first day of the eighth month. Han Tao-kuo arrived early, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had him join Ts'ui Pen and Kan Jun in supervising the provision of the necessary bricks, tiles, lumber, and stone for the construction of the underground storehouse. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having already overseen the unloading of the merchandise, and having nothing to occupy him at home, suddenly bethought himself that he would like to pay a visit to the house of Cheng Ai-yüeh. With this end in view, he surreptitiously sent Tai-an to deliver three taels of silver and a set of silk clothing to her. When the madam of the Cheng family bordello heard that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing was coming to engage the services of one of her girls, she felt:
Just as though he had fallen from Heaven.
Making haste to take charge of the presents, she blurted out to Tai-an, "Express my utmost gratitude to His Honor, and tell him that both of my girls will await him here, and urge him to drop in as soon as possible."
Tai-an went back home and reported this to Hsi-men Ch'ing in his studio. Early that afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an to prepare a wickerwork sedan chair for him. He then donned a Tung-p'o hat on his head, a long gown of jet moiré with a muted mandarin square woven inconspicuously into the fabric, and white-soled black boots.
He first went to the house across the street and watched the progress on the construction of the underground storehouse for a while, after which he stood up, took his seat in the wickerwork sedan chair, and let down the speckled bamboo blinds. He arranged for Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an to accompany him, left Wang Ching at home, taking only Ch'un-hung to carry his dispatch case, and headed straight for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. Truly:
The Weaving Maid, positioned at her loom, adjusts the fragrant silk;
Injecting his hand, he manages to tear off a bolt of the snowy fabric.
Not satisfied to seek the ford leading to the Peach Blossom Spring;
He prefers to come to the Moon Grotto for a liaison with Ch'ang-o.[6]
To resume our story, Cheng Ai-hsiang, sporting on her head a chignon enclosed in a fret of silver filigree with plum-blossom-shaped ornaments, fastened in place all round with gold filigree pins; made up in such a way as to enhance her:
Powdered face and glossy hair,
Flowery visage and moon-like features;[7]
wearing a blouse of pale lavender silk above, and a beige skirt below; upon seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing arrive, stood just inside the open upper half of the doorway[8] with a broad smile on her face, ushered him inside to the parlor, and saluted him with a bow.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down and instructed the page boy Ch'in-t'ung, "Take the sedan chair home with you now, and come back to get me with a horse this evening."
Ch'in-t'ung accordingly went home with the sedan chair. But no more of this. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept only Tai-an and Ch'un-hung to wait upon him.
After some time, the madam came out to pay her respects and said, "The other day, at your place, my girl put you to a lot of trouble. No doubt Your Honor was bored silly at home and has simply come here in search of diversion. What need was there for you to worry about sending any gifts? But, many thanks for the clothing you have provided for my girl."
"When I engaged her services for that day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't she come? Is it that you only recognize the household of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second?"
"We are still upset," explained the madam, "that Tung Chiao-erh and Li Kuei-chieh failed to inform us that it was Your Honor's birthday that their services were being engaged for. They each had presents for the occasion, while only my girl had not prepared anything. If I had known it was your birthday, I certainly would never have agreed to let her go perform at Wang the Second's place but would have had her go to Your Honor's residence first, despite the fact that the engagement for her to sing at Your Honor's place was made later. My girl was just getting herself ready to start out when someone from Wang the Second's household showed up and proposed to make off with her costume bag. Right after that, Your Honor sent someone here, along with her elder brother Cheng Feng, who said, 'If you don't go to his place, His Honor will be moved to anger.' This threw me into such a fluster that I hustled my girl out the back door and into her sedan chair behind the back of the servant from the Wang household."
"The other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "while I was attending a party at the residence of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, I engaged her services. If she had failed to show up for the occasion, needless to say, I would have been annoyed. How is it that on that day she conducted herself:
Without saying anything or uttering so much as a word,
Conveying the clear impression that she was not happy?[9]

Really, how do you account for it?"
"The little baggage!" responded the madam. "Ever since she was deflowered, she has been reluctant to go out and perform in public. When she found herself in Your Honor's residence and saw all the people there, who knows how frightened she may have been? Ever since she was a child, she has been sparing of words and has been spoiled enough to get away with it. Look how late in the day it is already, and she has just gotten up. I pressed her several times, saying, 'His Honor is coming today, you ought to get up and get yourself ready,' but she paid me no heed and continued to lie in bed to this hour."
Before long, a maidservant brought in some tea, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came forward to serve it.
When they had finished the tea, the madam said, "Will Your Honor please come into the interior and have a seat."
It so happens that Cheng Ai-hsiang's establishment consisted of a twenty-four-foot-wide frontage opening onto the street and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. Just inside the hanging screen, there was a fence of woven bamboo splints, behind which there was an eighteen-foot-wide courtyard, with four anterooms ranged along either side. The main suite at the far end of the courtyard consisted of three compartments, one well-lighted parlor, and two less well-lighted inner rooms, and was the dwelling place of Cheng Ai-yüeh. The quarters in which her elder sister Cheng Aihsiang lived were located further back, in the fourth courtyard.
Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that:
The screens and lattices were redolent of incense.
As he entered the parlor, he saw that there was a hanging scroll depicting Kuan-yin of the Ocean Tides in the place of honor on the facing wall, while on the walls to either side there were hung four scrolls depicting beautiful women in the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, inscribed with the poetic lines:
Concerned for the flowers, one rises early in spring.
Enamored of the moon, one goes to sleep late at night.
Scooping up water, one finds the moon in one's hands.
Fondling the flowers, fragrance infuses one's clothes.[10]
Above everything was suspended a couplet that read:
Rolling up the blind, one invites the moon to look in;
Tuning the cithara, one waits for the clouds to enter.
At the head of the room there were arrayed four Tung-p'o chairs,[11] and on either side were placed two wide benches finished with translucent varnish of the kind used in the making of zithers.[12] Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down and saw that there was a plaque over the room inscribed with three characters in formal script designating it as "The Moon-loving Studio."
After he had waited for what seemed like half a day, he suddenly became aware of the rustle of the portiere as Cheng Ai-yüeh came in. She was not wearing a fret but had done up her hair in a casual "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style. Her raven locks were combed in such a way as to set off their blackness and glossiness. Two tufts of hair were allowed to escape at either temple. Her cloudy locks were piled up in disarray, suggesting a range of effects from light mist to dense fog, and were further enhanced with judiciously placed gold-flecked trinkets, and plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, fastened in place all round with gold filigree pins neatly stuck into the hair behind her temples.
A phoenix hairpin was half askew.
Her ears were adorned with pendant amethyst earrings. Above, she wore a blouse, fit for an immortal, of pale lavender silk that opened down the middle. Below, she wore a skirt of purple chiffon, decorated with turquoise figures:
Beneath which there peeked out a pair of tiny shoes,
The points of which bore the beaks of red phoenixes.
On her breast there was suspended a necklace of sculpted jade stones that tinkled when she moved. On her face she wore three turquoise beauty patches that served to enhance the lotus blossom of her painted face. All around her:
There floated a fragrant aura;[13]
serving to set off:
Her willowlike slender waist.[14]
Truly:
If she is not the image of a portrait of Kuan-yin by Wu Tao-tzu;[15]
She must be the subject of a painting of a beauty by Mao Yen-shou.[16]
After having faced in his direction and:
Neither correctly nor precisely,
made a bow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she concealed her powdered face behind a gold-flecked fan and sat down next to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Focused his eyes on her with a fixed stare,
and felt that she appeared even more stunning than when he had seen her for the first time. Involuntarily:
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,
to such an extent that:
He was unable to control himself.
Before long, a maidservant brought in another serving of tea, at which the painted face:
Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Slightly exposed her slender fingers,
brought a cup of tea over to him, brushed away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup, and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing with both hands. After this, she and Cheng Ai-hsiang each took a cup for themselves and kept him company as they drank it together. When the tea was finished, and the cups and raised saucers had been taken away, they suggested that he loosen his outer garments and take a seat in the inner room.
Hsi-men Ch'ing called Tai-an to come forward, help him off with his black silk outer garment, and put it on a chair for him; after which he entered into the painted face's bedroom. Behold:
Because the green windows were curtained with white gauze,
The pale moonlight barely invaded them;
Because the brocade hangings were exposed to the night light,
They glowed with an auspicious luster.[17]
Inside the room there was a black lacquer bedstead with incised gold ornamentation:
The curtains of which were of embroidered brocade;
The coverlet of which concealed a patterned quilt.
To one side there was a low table of carved red lacquer, and a small Po-shan incense burner,[18]
From which the aroma of aloeswood and sandalwood assailed the nostrils.[19]
On the wall there hung a brocade bag that held a "Tinkling Spring" zither;[20]
In a silver vase there were displayed blossoms of "Purple Shoots" camellia.[21]
In front of the bed there stood two low chairs with embroidered cushions;
Beside which there hung a pair of brocaded curtains of mermaid silk.
Upon a mica screen, was depicted a landscape in varying shades of ink;
On a shelf of the nuptial couch, was a pile of ancient and modern books.[22]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down, he felt that:
An exotic aroma invaded his person;[23]
As refined and elegant as could be.[24]
It was just what is conventionally described as:
A grotto palace of spirits and immortals.[25]
A destination inaccessible to human feet.[26]
As they engaged each other in conversation,
While laughing and joking with each other,
who should they see but a maidservant, who came in and set up a small table, on which she laid out four small turquoise saucers containing exquisitely prepared julienned vegetables, shredded celery, minced and marinated sturgeon, phoenix entrails and puree. After this, she brought out two servings of:
Perfectly round,
Like the bright moon,
Thin as paper,
White as snow,
Fragrant, sweet, and delectable,
Butterfat and honey,
Sesame, pepper, and salt flavored,
Thin lotus-blossom pancakes.
Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded with their own hands to make selections of the various shredded meats and vegetables, wrap them in the pancakes into spring rolls, place them in small gilded saucers, and present them to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. To one side, cups of gold-inlaid cloisonné were filled with strong cinnamon and osmanthus flavored tea.
Before long, after the two sisters had joined him in consuming the spring rolls, and the utensils had been put away, and the table wiped off, a madder red strip of felt was placed over a bed table, a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes was extracted from a sandalwood box decorated with carved lacquer, and the two of them proceeded to play dominoes with Hsi-men Ch'ing. In due course, Hsi-men Ch'ing melded the combinations known as "Heaven and Earth Separated"[27] and "Ten Pricks with a Sword,"[28] Cheng Ai-hsiang melded the combinations known as "Earth"[29] and "Flowers Blossom and Butterflies Fill the Branches,"[30] and Cheng Ai-yüeh melded the combinations known as "Man"[31] and "Mounts a Ladder to Gaze at the Moon."[32]
After a while, they put the dominoes away, and wine was served. Behold:
Platters are piled with exotic fruits,
The wine overflows with golden ripples.
The table was spread with goose, duck, chicken feet, fried dragon, and roasted phoenix.
The scarce fruits were:
Seldom seen in this world;[33]
The rare repast was:
Unmatched in Heaven itself.[34]
Truly:
Their dancing waylays the bright moon into shining on the pleasure-houses of Ch'in;
Their singing diverts the moving clouds into hovering atop the bordellos of Ch'u.[35]
In mandarin duck goblets,
And turquoise wine cups,
They drink the jade hued liquids,
And carnelian nectars of the gods.
The two sisters plied him with wine and then positioned themselves to one side, where Cheng Ai-hsiang, with:
The bridges on her psaltery ranged like wild geese,
Gently strummed the silken strings.
Thereupon, with Cheng Ai-hsiang playing the psaltery, and Cheng Ai-yüeh playing the *p'i-p'a*, they sang the song suite, beginning with the tune "A Happy Event Is Imminent," that opens with the words:
Insistently he comes into my mind.[36]
Truly:
When words emerge from the mouth of a beauty,[37]
They have a timbre that causes rocks to split and lingers around the rafters.
When they had finished singing, another twelve saucers of assorted nuts and other delicacies were served, and the two sisters:
Moving their seats closer together,[38]
got out a dicebox with twenty dice and fell to playing "Competing for the Red"[39] and guess-fingers with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After they had been drinking for some time, Cheng Ai-hsiang, alleging that she had to go to the bathroom, disappeared, leaving Cheng Ai-yüeh alone to continue drinking with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
To begin with, Hsi-men Ch'ing reached into his sleeve and pulled out a white satin handkerchief with a double-patterned border, to one end of which was attached a chatelaine with three pendant charms, including a toothpick, and, to the other end, a cylindrical gold pillbox.
Cheng Ai-yüeh assumed that it contained breath-sweetening lozenges and wanted to open it, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It doesn't contain breath-sweetening lozenges, but a restorative medication that I use every day. My breath-sweetening lozenges are not kept there but are wrapped in a paper packet."
Thereupon, he reached into his sleeve, pulled out a packet of cinnamon-flavored breath-sweetening lozenges, and handed it to her.
Cheng Ai-yüeh, who was still unsatisfied, stuck out her hand to grope inside his other sleeve and discovered a purple crepe handkerchief, with a low-grade gold toothpick attached to it, which she held in her hand to admire, saying, "I've noticed that Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh both have handkerchiefs like this. So it was you they got them from."
"They were part of my boatload of goods that just arrived from Yang-chou," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If they didn't get them from me, who else could they have gotten them from? If you like it, you can have it, and tomorrow I'll send another like it to your sister."
When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing swallowed a dose of the medication in his cylindrical pillbox, washed it down with a cupful of wine, and took the painted face onto his lap. The two of them then passed the same cup back and forth between them as they drank and sucked each other's tongues.

There was no length to which they would not go.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then stuck out his hand and proceeded to fondle her fragrant breasts, which were:
Tight and squeezy,
and as smooth as sesame seed glutinous rice dumplings. Opening up her blouse to take a look at them, he saw that they were:
Pale and fragrant,
and as lustrous as jade. After he had played with them for some time, his:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused,
and the organ that lay between his loins abruptly sprang to life. Loosening his pant strings, he suggested that she grasp it with her slender fingers.
When the painted face saw how long and thick it was, she was so perturbed she stuck her tongue out in fear and, putting her arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck, said, "My darling, since this is our first tryst, please bear with me, and only insert it halfway. If you stick it all in, it will be the death of me. That must have been an aphrodisiac you took to make it as big as this. Otherwise, how on earth could you ever have produced anything so monstrous, deep red, and purple? It's really enough to give one the creeps."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and said, "My child, get down on your knees and suck it for me."
"What's the hurry?" said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "After all:
There are as many days ahead of us as there are leaves on the trees.
This is our first tryst today.
We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.[40]
If you come again, I'll suck it for you."
When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing sought to take his pleasure with her.
"Do you not want any more wine?" asked Cheng Ai-yüeh.
"I've had enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Let's go to bed."
Cheng Ai-yüeh then called for a maidservant to move the table at which they had been drinking out of the way and help Hsi-men Ch'ing off with his boots, while she went inside to relieve herself and wash her private parts. When Hsi-men Ch'ing's boots had been removed, he rewarded the maidservant with a piece of silver, after which, he got into bed while the maidservant lit some incense and put it in the burner.
After a while, the woman came back into the room and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Would you like some tea, or not?"
To which Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "I don't want any."
She then closed the door to the room, let down the satin chiffon bed curtains, put a handkerchief under the bedding, took off her clothes, and got into bed. The two of them then proceeded to cavort like:
Mandarin ducks upon the pillow,
Water birds under the coverlet.
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that when the painted face took off her clothes, her skin was delicate and fine, and her vagina was clean and devoid of pubic hair, as soft and delectable as a white steamed bun. When he embraced her waist, it was hardly a handful. In truth, she was just like:
Soft jade and warm incense;[41]
Not to be bought for a thousand pieces of gold.[42]
Thereupon, he wrapped her two fresh, white, tender legs, like bars of silver, around his waist, fastened the clasp on his organ, and plunged it into the heart of the flower. His turtle head was proud and large, so that, even with moistening and reaming, it was some time before the knob of his glans was submerged. Cheng Ai-yüeh knitted her brows together and gripped the pillow with both hands, finding her distress hard to bear.
Her starry eyes grew dim and she pled with him, "Pray spare your Cheng Ai-yüeh today."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then hoisted her two golden lotuses over his shoulders and devoted himself to retracting and thrusting:
Unable to contain his pleasure.[43]
Truly, it is a case of:
When spring touches the apricot and peach trees, their new buds burst into red flower;
When the breeze plays among the willow fronds, they are made to bend their green waists.[44]
There is a poem about the flowering crab apple that testifies to this:
Bearing raindrops, shrouded in mist, this sapling is remarkable;
Beguiling in stance, it appears to be unable to support itself.
Its red reminds one of the matchless blooms of the West Park;[45]
In spring it wins first place among the flowers of Ho-yang.[46]
Its gaudy coloring inspires comparison with that of Master Cheng:[47]
The skill demonstrated belies analogy with the work of Wang Wei.[48]
Replete with feeling, it deliberately keeps its heart in check;
Holding onto the east wind to prevent it from returning home.[49]
On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing dallied with Cheng Ai-yüeh until the third watch before going home.
The next day, Wu Yüeh-niang, after seeing him off to the yamen, remained seated in the master suite along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Li Chiao-erh. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in to fetch a gift box for bolts of fabric and the like, in which to deliver the birthday presents for Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, consisting of four varieties of fresh delicacies, a jug of wine, and a bolt of brocade.
Yüeh-niang took advantage of the occasion to ask Tai-an, "Whose place was it that your father took a sedan chair to go drinking at yesterday and remained drinking so late before coming home? I imagine he must have gone to Han Tao-kuo's house to look in on that wife of his. You lousy jailbird! It seems that you keep me in the dark all the time, while abetting him in these tricks behind my back."
"That's not the case," said Tai-an. "After all, her husband has come home. How could Father do anything like that?"
"If he didn't go there," said Yüeh-niang, "where did he go?"
Tai-an did not reply but merely smiled, picked up the gift box, and went off to deliver the presents.
"Mother," said Chin-lien, "there's no point in your asking that lousy jailbird anything. He'll never tell you the truth. But I've heard that that southern page boy also accompanied Father on his expedition yesterday. The thing to do is to call in that southern page boy and ask him about it."
She then proceeded to summon Ch'un-hung into their presence.
"When you accompanied your father's sedan chair yesterday," said Chin-lien, "whose place did he go drinking at? If you tell the truth, we'll leave it at that. But if you fail to tell the truth, the First Lady will see that you get a beating on the spot."
Ch'un-hung knelt down and said, "Mother, don't beat me. I'll tell you all about it, that's all. Your servant, along with Tai-an and Brother Ch'in-t'ung, the three of us, accompanied Father in going through a great gateway, after which we traversed several streets and alleys and came to a house with a door, inlaid with a sawtooth pattern, only the lower half of which was closed, inside which there stood a lady who was all made up in a flashy fashion."
When Chin-lien heard this, she laughed, saying, "The jailbird! He doesn't even recognize the horizontal half-doors of the licensed quarter, and he refers to a painted face as a lady."
"And what did that lady look like?" Chin-lien went on to ask. "Did you recognize her or not?"
"I didn't recognize her," said Ch'un-hung. "She looked like a veritable Bodhisattva and was wearing a fret on her head just like the ones you ladies wear. When we went inside, an old crone with white hair came out and saluted Father with a bow, after which we were invited into the interior, which was protected by a fence of woven bamboo splints. Once inside, another young lady appeared, who was not wearing a fret, but had a silver salver face, shaped like a melon-seed, and whose lips were daubed with red. She kept Father company while he drank."
"And where were you allowed to sit all this time?" asked Chin-lien.
"Tai-an, Brother Ch'in-t'ung, and I," replied Ch'un-hung, "were entertained in the room of the old crone, who provided us with wine and pork dumplings, and kept us company as we consumed them."
This caused Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou to laugh without restraint.
They then went on to ask, "Did you recognize this lady, or not?"
"It seemed to me that she has performed at our place," replied Ch'un-hung.
"Then it must have been Li Kuei-chieh," laughed Meng Yü-lou.
"So it seems that's where he snuck off to," said Yüeh-niang.
"Our establishment doesn't have horizontal half-doors," said Li Kuei-chieh. "And it doesn't have a fence woven of bamboo splints either."
"I fear you may not know about it," said Chin-lien. "Perhaps your place has recently put in horizontal half-doors."
After they had interrogated Ch'un-hung for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home from the yamen and then set out for the residence of Hsia Yen-ling to celebrate his birthday.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien kept a white long-haired leonine cat in her quarters, whose entire body was pure white, except for a streak of tortoiseshell-patterned black fur on its forehead. It was named "Coal in the Snow" [50] and was also called "Snow Lion," and it could pick up handkerchiefs and fans in its mouth. When Hsi-men Ch'ing was not in her quarters, the woman would go to sleep with the cat cuddled in her arms underneath the quilt, and it never soiled her garments with urine or feces. When the woman ate, it would often perch on her shoulder and allow her to feed it.
When summoned, it would come;
When dismissed, it would go.[51]
The woman commonly referred to it as "Snow Bandit." Its daily diet consisted, not of calves' liver or dried fish, but of half a pound of raw meat, as a result of which, it was as fat and sturdy as could be, and its fur was so thick you could hide an egg in it. She was extremely fond of it and petted it on her lap all day long, but not with benevolent intent. Knowing that Li P'ing-erh's child, Kuan-ko, had previously shown a fondness for cats, she would frequently, when no one else was around, wrap the meat in a piece of red silk and encourage the cat to pounce on it, tear it open, and eat it.
This was one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen.
Kuan-ko had not been feeling very well. For some days he had been taking the medications prescribed by Dame Liu, and he felt a little better. Li P'ingerh had dressed him in a shirt of red chiffon and put him on a little sleeping mat on the k'ang in the outer room to play. Ying-ch'un was looking after him, while the wet nurse was holding a bowl in her hand and eating to one side. Unexpectedly, this "Snow Lion" from Chin-lien's quarters, which had been perched on the bedrail, upon seeing Kuan-ko lying on the k'ang dressed in a red shirt and fidgeting as he played, was reminded of the way in which its meat was customarily prepared for it, and suddenly pounced down onto Kuanko's body and tore at him with its claws.
All that could be heard was:
The sound of a gurgling cry,
as Kuan-ko choked up and then fell silent, while his hands and feet went into convulsions. This threw the wet nurse into such consternation that she dropped her rice bowl, picked Kuan-ko up and cuddled him on her lap, while devoting herself to prophylactic spitting, in the endeavor to exorcise the fright. Meanwhile the cat continued to claw at him until Ying-ch'un drove it out of the room. Ju-i expected that the child would merely undergo a fit of convulsions, and then be all right, but who could have anticipated that they went on continuously, one fit being succeeded by another.
Li P'ing-erh was back in the rear compound at the time, so Ju-i sent Yingch'un there to fetch her, saying, "Little brother is unwell and is suffering from convulsions. Mother had better come quickly."
Nothing might have happened if Li P'ing-erh had not heard this, but having heard it, truly:
The shock affected all six of her vital organs, including liver and lungs;
The fright damaged the three bristles and seven apertures of her heart.[52]
Yüeh-niang also was thrown into such consternation that:
Covering two steps with every one,
she too rushed straight to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. What they found when they got there was that the convulsions had caused the child's eyeballs to roll straight up so that their black pupils were completely invisible, white foam was dribbling from his mouth, he was making inarticulate sounds like the chirping of a young chick, and his hands and feet were moving spasmodically. Li P'ing-erh no sooner saw this than she felt as though her heart were being lacerated with a knife.
Hastily picking him up and holding him in her arms, she brushed her cheek against his mouth and wept loudly, saying, "My little child, you were doing fine when I went out. Why should you have gone into convulsions?"
Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse then told her all about how he had been frightened by the cat from the Fifth Lady's quarters.
Li P'ing-erh wept all the more, saying, "My little child, you have simply failed to live up to the expectations of your father and mother. And today, there's no gainsaying the fact that there's no other road for you to take."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said not a word, but sent for Chin-lien and interrogated her, saying, "They say that it was the cat from your quarters that frightened the child."
"Who says so?" demanded Chin-lien.
Yüeh-niang indicated that it was the wet nurse and Ying-ch'un who had said so.
"Just look at the goggle-eyed way the old woman is staring at me," said Chin-lien. "My cat is happily asleep in my room, isn't it. You're talking nonsense. How could it have frightened the child? You'd better not try to blame it on me:
Snitching only those melons whose stems are soft.[53]
It seems that only the inhabitants of my quarters are fit to be taken advantage of."
"What was her cat doing in this room?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"It constantly comes over here to play," said Ying-ch'un.
Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "It's a good thing you said that. If it's constantly over here, why hadn't it scratched him before, instead of picking on this particular day to start scratching him? You slavey! You're just following in her footsteps, what with your:
Knitted brows and staring eyes,
and your:
Ridiculous blatherskite.
Take it easy, will you! There's no call for you to:
Pull your bow all the way taut,[54]
like that. I guess we're just doomed to be out of favor."
Whereupon, she took herself off to her quarters in a huff.
Gentle reader take note: As the saying goes:
Flowering branches, beneath their leaves, conceal their thorns;
How can one know for sure the human heart contains no poison?[55]
This P'an Chin-lien, having been aware for some time that ever since Li P'ingerh had borne Kuan-ko, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been:
Obedient to her every whim,

that:
Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold,
and that every day she was:
Contending in beauty and competing for favor,[56]
had developed feelings of jealousy and anger in her heart over this favoritism. On this day, therefore, she had deliberately set this secret plot in motion, training her cat for the purpose, out of a desire to frighten her rival's child to death, and thereby diminish Li P'ing-erh's favor, and cause Hsi-men Ch'ing to resume his intimacy with her. It was just like the way in which, in ancient times, T'u-an Ku trained his dog, Shen-ao, with the intent to murder the grand councilor, Chao Tun.[57] Truly:
Azure Heaven, in its profundity,[58] cannot be deceived;[59]
Before intentions are even formed it is aware of them.[60]
Say not that timely retribution seems not to occur;
From ancient times until today[61] who has been spared?[62]
When Yüeh-niang and the rest of them saw that the child was continuing to suffer from convulsions, on the one hand, they decocted some ginger extract and poured it into his mouth, while, on the other hand, they sent Laian off to summon Dame Liu as quickly as possible.
Before long, Dame Liu showed up, examined his pulse, and then, stamping her feet in frustration, said, "This time the fright he has been subjected to is serious. It has resulted in a case of tetany, which is difficult to cure."
She urgently directed them to prepare a decoction of bog rush, field mint, and honeysuckle, after which she pulled out a bolus of gold foil and dissolved it in a cup of the decoction. The baby's jaws were tightly closed, but Yüeh-niang promptly extracted a gold pin from her hair and pried his mouth open with it in order to pour the decoction into his mouth.
"If this proves effective," said Dame Liu, "that will be that. But, if it does not, as I've already told you, Madame, we'll have to resort to moxabustion at several points before there will be any hope of recovery."
"Who would be willing to take responsibility for that?" said Yüeh-niang. "We'll have to wait until his father gets home, and consult with him about it. Otherwise, if we go ahead with the moxabustion on our own, he's likely to raise a hue and cry when he gets home."
"First Lady, his life is at stake," said Li P'ing-erh. "If we wait till he gets home, it may be too late. If his father should get abusive about it, I'm willing to take the heat."
"It's your child, after all" said Yüeh-niang. "Proceed with the moxabustion if you like. I won't presume to take a stand on the issue."
Thereupon, Dame Liu proceeded to apply moxabustion to the glabella between his eyebrows, the nape of his neck, the wrists of his two hands, and his precordium, five points in all, after which he was put down to sleep. The child, who was:
Both torpid and comatose,[63]
slept right up until the time when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home that evening, without waking up.
When Dame Liu saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come home, she took the five mace of silver that Yüeh-niang paid her for her services and disappeared through the enclosed passageway in a puff of smoke.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived back in the master suite, Yüeh-niang told him how the child had fallen ill and suffered from convulsions. He immediately went out to the front compound to see for himself and observed that Li P'ing-erh's eyes were red with weeping.
"What caused the child to go into convulsions?" he asked.
Li P'ing-erh's eyes brimmed over with tears, but she did not have a word to say. When he asked the maidservant and the wet nurse, they did not dare to reply. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the spots on Kuan-ko's hands where the skin had been torn off, and the scars that the moxabustion had left on the other parts of his body, he became furious and strode back to the rear compound to question Yüeh-niang about it. Yüeh-niang felt unable to conceal the facts and told him how the cat from Chin-lien's quarters had frightened the child.
"Dame Liu had no sooner examined him," she explained, "than she said that it was an extreme case of tetany, that if we did not resort to acupuncture and moxabustion it was doubtful if he would recover, and that if we waited until you got home, it might be too late. His mother decided in favor of moxabustion, and it was applied to five points on the child's body, after which he was put down to sleep. It's been half a day now, and he hasn't yet waked up."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:
The spirits of his Three Corpses became agitated;
The breaths of his Five Viscera ascended to Heaven.[64]
Anger flared up in his heart, and
Malice accrued in his gall.
Heading straight for P'an Chin-lien's quarters:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he sought out the cat and, dangling it by one foot, strode out to the veranda, took aim at the stone stylobate, swung the cat up into the air, and dashed it against it. All that could be heard was:
A single resounding report,
at which:
The contents of its brain burst into ten thousand peach blossoms;[65]
Its mouthful of teeth were reduced to scattered fragments of jade.[66]
Truly:
No longer able in the world of light to capture rats or mice,
It reverts to the abode of the dead to become a fox fairy.[67]
When P'an Chin-lien saw that he had taken her cat out and dashed it to death, she sat on her k'ang:
Without turning so much as a hair,
and waited until he had vacated her quarters, muttering to herself, as she cursed him, saying, "You lousy death-defying ruffian! If you had only dragged me out and killed me, it would have been more heroic of you. Did the cat really get in the way of your shit-eating business so much that you felt compelled to barge in here, like a madman, and dash it to death? When it comes before the authorities in the nether world, it's likely to demand your life in compensation. What are you so exercised about? You'll come to a bad end, you lousy fickle ruffian!"
Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and berated the wet nurse and Ying-ch'un, saying, "I instructed you to take special care of the child. How could you have allowed the cat to frighten it so, and even claw the skin off its hands? And how could you have had such confidence in that old whore, Dame Liu, as to allow her to subject him to such a course of moxabustion, for no good reason? If he recovers, that will be that; but if he doesn't, I'll have that old whore dragged off to the yamen and subjected to a finger-squeezing or two."
"Look you," expostulated Li P'ing-erh, "the child's life was at stake, and yet you carry on this way. After all, compassion is a prerequisite for medical practitioners. She was as concerned for his welfare as anyone."
From that time on, all Li P'ing-erh could do was to hope for the child's recovery. Unexpectedly, however, the effect of the moxabustion had been to internalize the disorder so that it became a case of chronic mild convulsions of the stomach and intestines, and the discharge of both urine and feces. The stools that he extruded were variegated in color, his eyes opened and closed irregularly, he remained torpid and comatose all day long, and he would not allow himself to be breast-fed.
Li P'ing-erh became panicked about the situation. Everywhere she could think of:
The gods were besought and diviners consulted,
but the results of these prognostications were all:
Ominous and inauspicious.[68]
Yüeh-niang, behind Hsi-men Ch'ing's back, once again invited Dame Liu to come and perform a shamanistic dance on behalf of Kuan-ko. She also invited a licensed pediatrician to come and examine him.
He recommended that they try a powdered nasal decongestant on him, saying, "If it causes him to sneeze when insufflated into his nostrils, he may recover; but if no mucus is dislodged, all you can do is keep vigil over him and hope that the good deeds you have done in secret will avail."
Thereupon, they insufflated the powder into his nostrils, but he remained:
Insensibly oblivious,[69]
without so much as a sneeze. As a result, Li P'ing-erh kept vigil over him day and night, even more assiduously than before, while:
Weeping and sniffling unceasingly,
and even reducing her food and drink to a minimum.
As the fifteenth day of the eighth month gradually approached, Yüeh-niang, on account of Kuan-ko's indisposition, decided to abandon the celebration of her own birthday. Even those relatives who had sent presents to her were not invited for the occasion. The only people in the house to keep her company were Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the abbess of Kuan-yin Nunnery.
Meanwhile, Nun Hsüeh and Nun Wang were engaged in a dispute over the division of the profits they had reaped on the money Li P'ing-erh had provided to the sutra printing shop and were hurling angry accusations at each other.
On the fourteenth, Pen the Fourth and Nun Hsüeh went to the shop to demand the promised delivery, and all fifteen hundred copies of the sutra were carried back to the house. Li P'ing-erh also donated a string of cash for the purchase of paper money, incense, and candles. Early on the morning of the fifteenth, Pen the Fourth accompanied Ch'en Ching-chi to the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak to present the incense and paper money and oversee the disposition of the sutras, all of which were duly distributed, and then came back to report to Li P'ing-erh.
The family of Ch'iao Hung sent Auntie K'ung over every day to see how Kuan-ko was doing and also recommended a pediatrician named Dr. Pao, who came to examine him and said, "This is a case in which the baleful star Tiao-k'o, or Condoler, has been offended. No cure is possible."
Li P'ing-erh gave him five mace of silver and sent him on his way. When she tried to pour the medication he had prescribed into Kuan-ko's mouth, he rejected it and spit it up. Keeping his eyes closed, he cried out in such a manner that the edges of his teeth chattered against each other. Li P'ing-erh:
Without taking the trouble to undress,[70]
held him on her lap day and night, weeping the while, so that:
Her tears never dried.
Hsi-men Ch'ing also abstained from all social engagements, coming in to see the child every day as soon as he arrived home from the yamen.
At this time, one day in the final decade of the eighth month, Li P'ing-erh was lying on her bed, holding Kuan-ko in her arms, while a silver lamp burned on the table. The maidservants and the wet nurse were all fast asleep. Observing that:
The window was illuminated by moonlight,[71]
While the clepsydra dripped interminably,
and that her child was comatose, and:
Oblivious to human affairs,[72]
she felt for some time as though:
Her sorrow-laden bowels were tied in a myriad knots,[73]
While her fears of separation took a thousand forms.
Truly:
When one confronts happy events, one's spirits are exhilarated;[74]
When melancholy invades one's bowels, one is prone to nod off.[75]
Behold:
The silver river shines resplendent;[76]
The jade clepsydra drips unendingly.[77]
The bright moon penetrates the window, blazing with cold light;
The cool breeze infiltrates the door, blowing its night breath.
The cries of the wild geese resonate,
Disturbing the dreams of men of talent who sleep alone.
The chirring of crickets is desolate,
Embittering the feelings of beauties in solitary slumber.
The watch-marking drums on the watchtower,
Before a single watch is done with, sound a new one;
The laundry bats in an adjacent courtyard,
Before a thousand blows are finished, strike up another.
Before painted eaves, the ding-donging of the wind chimes,
Causes wellborn young ladies to break their hearts;
On silver lampstands, the glimmering of the lamplight,
Succeeds merely in illuminating the beauty's sighs.
Her sole concern is with the welfare of her child;
Who could foresee that sorrow comes often in a dream.[78]
At this juncture, Li P'ing-erh was lying on her bed:
Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,[79]
when she dreamed that Hua Tzu-hsü came in the front door, dressed entirely in white, and looking just as he did while still alive.
When he caught sight of Li P'ing-erh, he condemned her in a harsh voice, saying, "You lousy wanton whore! How could you have misappropriated my property and turned it over to Hsi-men Ch'ing? Right now I'm on my way to lodge a formal complaint against you."
Li P'ing-erh grasped the sleeve of his garment with one hand and pled with him, saying, "Good Brother, pray forgive me."
But Hua Tzu-hsü broke loose, causing her to:
Wake up with a jerk,[80]
revealing it to be but:
A dream of the Southern Branch.[81]
When she woke up, what she was grasping in her hand was the sleeve of Kuan-ko's garment.
After gasping several times, she said, "How strange! How strange!"
When she listened, she heard the watchman striking the third quarter of the third watch. Li P'ing-erh was so disturbed that:
Her whole body broke into a cold sweat,[82]
and her hair stood on end.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her quarters the next day, she told him about her dream.
"Who knows where he has gone after his death," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This is just a case of your:

Remembering your former situation in a dream.
Just set your mind at rest, and pay no attention to it. There's no reason for you to be upset. Under the circumstances, I'll send a page boy with a sedan chair to fetch Wu Yin-erh, so she can keep you company at night. And I'll summon Old Mother Feng to come and wait on the two of you."
Tai-an, accordingly, went to the licensed quarter and brought Wu Yin-erh back with him. Even before the sun began to set in the west, Kuan-ko, whom the wet nurse was holding on her lap, began to breathe irregularly.
This threw the wet nurse into such consternation that she called to Li P'ingerh, saying, "You'd better come and see. The black pupils of Little Brother's eyes have rolled out of sight, and in his mouth, he is:
Only breathing out, but
Not breathing in."[83]
Li P'ing-erh came over, embraced the child in her arms, began to cry, and called out to the maidservant, saying, "Quickly, go and fetch Father. Tell him that the child is about to stop breathing."
It so happened that, just at this juncture, Ch'ang Shih-chieh had come to visit Hsi-men Ch'ing in order to tell him that he had found the house he was looking for, that it had a twelve-foot-wide frontage and a second floor, making four rooms in all, both large and small, and that the price was only thirty-five taels of silver.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the news from the interior that Kuan-ko was in serious condition, he sent Ch'ang Shih-chieh on his way, saying, "I won't bother to see you off. I'll send someone with the silver to go look at the house with you another day."
He then urgently made his way to Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Yüeh-niang and the others, including Wu Yin-erh and Sister-in-law Wu, were all in the bedroom looking at the child, who was breathing only irregularly, clasped in his mother's arms. Hsi-men Ch'ing could not bear to see it and went into the parlor, where he sat down on a chair, giving vent to:
Long sighs and short breaths.[84]
As for Kuan-ko, after less time than it would take to drink half a cup of tea:
Alas and alack;
He stopped breathing and died.
At the time it was 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the eighth month. He had lived a scant one year and two months.
All the members of the household, from top to bottom, started to cry out loud, while Li P'ing-erh:
Grasping her ears and scratching her cheeks,[85]
in consternation, threw herself on the floor and wept until she fainted away.
It was some time before she recovered consciousness, whereupon she embraced Kuan-ko and gave vent to loud weeping, saying, "My child, have you no saving star? You've broken my heart. It would have been better if I could have died with you. I also am:
Not long for this world.[86]
My darling, you're abandoning me to my fate, forsaking me only too cruelly."
The wet nurse, Ju-i, and Ying-ch'un, who were in attendance upon her, also wept until they were:
Unable to speak, and
Unable to move.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, ordered the page boys to clean out an anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard, and set up two wide benches in it, intending to have the child, along with his bedding, carried out there for his laying out. But Li P'ing-erh placed herself over the child's body, hugging it in both arms, and was unwilling to relinquish it.
She continued to protest, again and again, crying out, "My heartless enemy, who lacks a saving star! My darling son! You've ripped my innards out and taken them with you. You've forsaken me, so that all the pains I've taken on your behalf have been in vain.
I've suffered everything for nothing.[87]
I'll never be able to see you again, my darling!"
Yüeh-niang and the others wept with her for a while and tried to admonish her to look after herself without success.
Hsi-men Ch'ing came over and, seeing that she had scratched the skin open on her face and rolled on the floor until her:
Jeweled chignon had been disheveled,[88]
Leaving her raven locks in disarray,
said, "Think of him as an alien rascal. Seeing that:
He is not fated to be our child,
we have raised him in vain. Since he was fated to die an early death:
Weep for him a couple of times and forget it.[89]
Why continue crying that way?
You can't cry him back to life again.[90]
Your health is more important. I want to have him carried out now so that I can send a page boy to summon the yin-yang master to come and assess his situation. What time was it that he died?"
"It was around 4:00 o'clock," said Yüeh-niang.
"Just as I suggested before," said Meng Yü-lou, "he was sure to wait for that time before slipping away. He was born at 4:00 PM, and he died at 4:00 PM; and even the dates are the same. Both events occurred on the twenty-third. Only the months were different. He lived exactly a round one year and two months."
When Li P'ing-erh observed that the page boys were waiting on either side to take him away, she wept again, saying, "What need is there to carry him out so hastily? First Lady, reach out your hand and feel him. His body is still warm."
Then she cried out, saying, "My son! How can I bear to let you go? You're treating me too cruelly!"
She then threw herself down on the floor once again and gave vent to her tears. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:
I utter a single cry,
"Oh Azure Heaven,
How can you so ruin my life?"
I call out, "My darling boy,
If only with this one cry,
I could get you to respond.
It is all due to an earlier affinity from a previous life,[91]
In which incarnation I must have owed you a love debt that I have failed to repay.
And now it transpires that, in this life in this world,[92]
The tears I shed over you will never come to an end."
Every day I have been on tenterhooks,
Doing everything I could think of.
From the very beginning, I have never done anything to hurt or to harm anyone else.
"Azure Heaven, how can you so fail to keep your eyes open?"
"It's not that you and I had no affinity,
It must simply be that I am fated to be unlucky.
Your abandonment of me has left me on the ground on all fours;[93]
The fallen tree no longer provides shade.[94]
I am reduced to trying to dip up water with a bamboo basket;[95]
All my labors are in vain."
I call out, "My heartbreaking darling boy,
I am more than willing to travel with you along the road to the shades."
At this juncture, after Li P'ing-erh had wept for a while, Kuan-ko was carried out to the anteroom on the west side of the front courtyard for his laying out.
Yüeh-niang consulted with Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "We also ought to send word to our kinfolk, and to the abbess at the Kuan-yin Nunnery."
"We can send word to the abbess tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
On the one hand, he sent Tai-an to convey the news to the members of Ch'iao Hung's household, and, on the other, he sent someone to invite Yinyang Master Hsü to come and interpret his divinatory texts about Kuan-ko's fate. In addition, he produced ten taels of silver and gave them to Pen the Fourth, instructing him to go immediately to acquire a set of deal planks and have artisans construct a little coffin out of them as quickly as possible, so that it would be ready for the encoffining.
No sooner was the news conveyed to Ch'iao Hung's household than his wife set out in a sedan chair to offer her condolences, and she began to weep as soon as she came in the door. Yüeh-niang and the others joined her in lamenting grievously for some time and told her about the preceding events. Before long, it was announced that Yin-yang Master Hsü had arrived.
After surveying the situation, he said, "So the child passed away at exactly 4:00 PM."
Yüeh-niang instructed him to proceed with consulting the *Black Book*[96] about his fate.
Master Hsü:
Calculated on the joints of his fingers,
consulted his esoteric yin-yang texts for a while, and pronounced:
The eight characters that determine the child's horoscope indicate that he was born at 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the *ping-shen* year of the Cheng-ho reign period; and died at 4:00 PM on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the *ting-yu* year of the same reign period. The fact that his death took place during a *ting-yu* month on a *jen-tzu* day indicates a conflict between the celestial stems and earthly branches that portends a double bereavement. The members of his immediate family should abstain from crying, although relatives by marriage need not do so. On the day of the encoffining ceremony, it would be auspicious if people born in the year of the snake, the year of the dragon, the year of the rat, and the year of the hare would stay out of the way. Moreover, the *Black Book* says that those who die on a *jen-tzu* day are governed by the zodiacal palace Precious Vase[97] above, which corresponds to the area of Shantung below. In his former life, he was the scion of a family named Ts'ai in Yen-chou. Relying on his influence, he seized other people's property, drank away his inheritance, failed to revere Heaven and Earth as well as his six relations, became implicated in a criminal offense, caught a chill, was confined to his bed for some time, and died in his own filth. In this life, while still an infant, he became epileptic, and, ten days ago, he was frightened out of his wits by a domestic animal. Moreover, because the Earth Spirit and Year God [98] were offended, his soul was extracted from his body, resulting in a premature death. He will be reborn as the scion of a family named Wang in Cheng-chou, will rise to the rank of battalion commander, and will live to the age of sixty-seven before dying.
A little later, after once again consulting his *Black Book*, Master Hsü enquired, "Your Honor, do you wish to remove his body from the premises for either burial or cremation tomorrow?"
"How can we send him away tomorrow?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Sutras will need to be recited for him on the third day, and we will escort him out to the family graveyard for burial on the fifth day."
"The twenty-seventh is a *ping-ch'en* day," said Master Hsü. "The horoscopes of the entire family will not create any conflicts on that day. It would be appropriate for the interment to take place at 12:00 noon."
When Master Hsü had finished interpreting his texts, and they began to prepare for the encoffining, it was already the third watch at night. Li P'ingerh, weeping as she went, returned to her quarters to fetch his little Taoist robe, his Taoist cap, his shoes and stockings, etc., and put them into the coffin with him. The "longevity nails" were driven into the lid of the casket, and all the members of the household, from top to bottom, wept for a while, after which the yin-yang master was sent on his way.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing was too busy to go to the yamen. When Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling heard the news, he came to offer his condolences after the morning session of the court was over and presented the customary consolatory contribution to the funeral expenses. Hsi-men Ch'ing also sent someone to inform Abbot Wu of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor and arranged for eight monks from the Buddhist Temple of Kindness Requited to come and recite sutras on the third day. Abbot Wu of the Taoist temple and the household of Ch'iao Hung each contributed the cost of a table with portions of the three sacrificial animals, the cow, the sheep, and the pig, for the funeral oblation.
On the third day, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Mr. Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Mr. Han, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, from outside the city gate, and Hua the Elder all contributed offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals and came to burn paper money. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, Li Chih, and Huang the Fourth all clubbed together to make a joint contribution and came to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company during the overnight wake. When the monks had been sent on their way, a troupe of puppeteers was engaged to entertain the company. After the ritual sacrifice before Kuan-ko's spirit tablet had been performed, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over a feast for his guests in the large reception hall. On the day in question, the three houses of Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh in the licensed quarter also sent people to bring gifts and burn paper money in honor of the occasion.
Li P'ing-erh, in her grieving over Kuan-ko, grew sallower by the day and was disinclined to take either tea or nourishment. Whenever the subject came up, she gave herself over to weeping and sniffling until her voice grew hoarse. Hsi-men Ch'ing was afraid that in her grief for her child she might resort to the foolish way out of suicide, so he gave orders that during the day the wet nurse, maidservants, and Wu Yin-erh should keep her company:
Without ever leaving her side.[99]
As for the evening hours, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent three successive nights in her room, trying as best he could to comfort her in her distress.
Nun Hsüeh also kept evening vigil with her, reciting the *Śūrangama Sutra*,[100] and a spell for dispelling enmity, and urging her to cease her weeping.
"As it is well said in the sutras," she remarked:
"The head is altered and the face replaced, as the wheel of transmigration turns;
It is unavailing to consider what awaits you in the predestined life to come.[101]
In the life to come:
He is not fated to be your child.
He is your:
Enemy or creditor,[102]
from a previous existence, who has been reborn in order to seek restitution by defrauding you of your property. He may die in his first year, he may die in his second year, he may die in his third, sixth, or ninth year.
In the space of a single day and a single night,[103]
Men die and are reborn by the tens of thousands.[104]
As it is well said in the *Diamond Sutra*.
In former days there was a woman who constantly adhered to the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo ching*[105] and made offerings to the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin every day without fail, but who, three incarnations ago, had poisoned someone to death. This enemy of hers had never departed from her side but sought a means by which he might accomplish his revenge by committing matricide. Thus he was reincarnated in her body and so squeezed his mother's entrails that when the time came for her to give birth, the parturition was so difficult that her life was imperiled.[106] On emerging from the womb, he was appropriately well formed, but in less than two years he died. His mother was stricken with grief, and, giving vent to loud lamentation, threw her child into the river. Three times in a row, he was reincarnated in his mother's womb and sought a means by which he might terminate his mother's life. The third time, he was reincarnated in his mother's womb as before and did his best to squeeze his mother's entrails, in order to imperil her life,[107] causing her to faint away and cry out during childbirth, only to emerge from the womb as handsome as could be, with all his features intact. But, once again, in less than two years he died. When his mother saw this, she could not help weeping out loud, "What sort of evil karma has resulted in this?" As before, she took her child right up to the river bank but hesitated for some time, unable to bear the thought of abandoning him. Her grief so moved the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin that she transformed herself into the guise of a monk, dressed in his patched

cassock, came straight to the river bank, and addressed the woman, saying, "There is no need for you to weep. This is not your child, but your enemy from three incarnations ago. He has been reincarnated three times, seeking to gain revenge by killing his mother, but has been unable to do so. It is because you have constantly recited the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo ching*, and made offerings to the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin without fail, that he has been prevented from killing you. If you wish to see this enemy of yours, just look in the direction to which I point." When she had done speaking, she used her superhuman powers to point with her finger, at which the child was transformed into the guise of a yaksha, standing in the water, who said to her, "Because you murdered me, I have come with the intent to exact revenge. However, because your heart is set on supreme enlightenment, and you constantly adhere to the *Fo-ting-hsin t'o-lo ching*, good devas have protected you day and night, so that I have been unable to kill you. I have now been converted by the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin and, from now on, will forever cease to be your enemy." When he had finished speaking, he plunged into the water and disappeared. The woman, as two streams of tears crisscrossed her face,[108] paid obeisance to the bodhisattva, went home, and devoted herself even more fervently to good works. In the end, she lived to the age of ninety-six before dying and was transformed by reincarnation from a woman into a man.[109]

Although it may be inappropriate for me to say so, this son of yours must surely have been:

An enemy of yours from a previous existence,[110]

who was reborn in order to seek restitution and wished to do you bodily harm. It is only because of your meritorious deeds in making offerings and adhering to the doctrine, as well as donating the cost of reproducing fifteen hundred copies of this sutra, that he was unable to kill you. Now that he has left your side, it is only when you give birth to another child in the future that it will truly be your own child."

When Li P'ing-erh heard this, in the end:

Her love affinity was not broken,

so that, every time the subject came up, she wept and sniffled unceasingly.

In no time at all, five days passed by. On the morning of the twenty-seventh, eight young professional mourners were hired, who were dressed in black robes with white caps. The coffin was encased in crimson lacquer ornamented with gold tracery and was accompanied in the funeral procession by a heraldic pennant and cloud-adorned baldachin, replete with the artificial floral embellishments known as "jade plum blossoms" and "snowy willows,"[111] and preceded by a crimson banner inscribed with the words, "Casket of the Eldest Son of the Hsi-men Family." Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor also sent twelve black-robed young Taoist acolytes to recite the *Sheng-shen yü-chang* (Jade Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits)[112] during the procession, and perform sacred music on the way to the funeral.

The relatives and friends of the family, dressed in white mourning-clothes, all accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing in the funeral procession. It was only after they had walked as far as the east end of Main Street and were approaching the city gate that they got onto their mounts for the rest of the journey. Hsimen Ch'ing feared that Li P'ing-erh would be overcome by grief if she went to the grave site, so he forbade her to go. Only Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in five sedan chairs, accompanied Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu K'ai's wife, Li Kuei-chieh, Cheng Aiyüeh, and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, to the family graveyard. Sun Hsüeh-o, Wu Yin-erh, and Nun Hsüeh were left at home to keep Li P'ing-erh company.

When Li P'ing-erh realized that she would not be allowed to go and saw the coffin starting on its way, she accompanied it as far as the front gate.

Approaching the coffin, she broke into loud lamentation, crying out again and again, "My ungrateful son, who will never come home again!"

She continued crying out this way until her voice broke, upon which, without knowing what she was doing, she fell down underneath the gateway:

Breaking the skin on her powdered forehead, and

Scattering her gold hairpins on the ground.[113]

This threw Wu Yin-erh and Sun Hsüeh-o into such consternation that they came forward to help her to her feet and persuaded her to return inside. When she arrived back in her quarters and saw that the k'ang was desolately empty, and that only the toy clapper-drum decorated with the portrait of the God of Longevity that her child had been accustomed to play with was still hanging on the bedstead, she was reminded of him and couldn't help crying out again.

There is a full-length song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

When I come into the room,
Quiet reigns on all sides,
And I can't help sighing quietly.
When I think of my darling boy,
I weep until the energy in my vitals is completely exhausted.
"I remember how, in giving birth to you,
I suffered a thousand trials and a myriad tribulations.[114]
Not to mention the nights when I moved you to the dry spots while I occupied the wet,[115]
All the livelong day, I was preoccupied with looking after you.
It is aggravating enough to break my heart,
That you and I should end up as antagonists.
I really expected that as you developed you would stand up for me,
That we would remain together for a long time.
Who could have known that Heaven should be so blind,
As to bring what was left of your life to an end;
Leaving me betwixt and between,
Unable to reach the village ahead,
Or make it back to the inn behind?"[116]
I am aware that before long I am doomed,
To end up underneath the Yellow Springs.
The two of us, mother and son, are reduced to,
Reposing together in the Gateway to the Shades.[117]
I call out, "My darling sweetheart,
It is because you lacked karmic affinity in your past life, that this life of yours has been cut short."

Wu Yin-erh, who was standing by her side, took her hand and endeavored to comfort her, saying, "Mother, try not to cry. Little Brother has already forsaken you. You can hardly cry him back to life again. You must assume the responsibility for dealing with your own distress. You mustn't simply give way to your grief."

"After all, you're still:

In the springtime of your youth,"[118]

said Sun Hsüeh-o. "Surely there is no reason to fear that you won't be able to have another child in the future. But hereabouts:

Walls have cracks,
Fences have ears,

so we've got to be careful what we say. As far as she's concerned:

Those who devote their every thought to scheming,
Only end up bringing calamity on their own heads.[119]

Who doesn't know that she resented the fact that you gave birth to this child? If she really is responsible for doing him in, surely, in the life to come, since:

Every act brings its own retribution,[120]

he will demand her life in return. Who knows how many times she has done her best to bury the rest of us alive? She is never content unless she is able to monopolize the attentions of our husband. But if he chooses to spend the night in anyone else's room, she gets:

So angry she scarcely cares whether she is dead or alive.

Fortunately you are all aware that in the past our husband seldom ventured into my place in the rear compound. But when he happened to do so on one occasion recently, you all saw the way in which she was all of a heap engaging in chitter-chatter at my expense with those singing girls behind my back. Does she think she can simply:

Wrap it up in a paper bag?

I may not say anything about it, but every day, I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where she's concerned. Who knows what sort of a bad end that whore will come to in the future?"

"That's enough of that," said Li P'ing-erh. "Though I'm still here, I've contracted an ailment that is likely to kill me, if not today, then some day soon. I can't contend with her any longer. Let her do as she pleases."

As she was speaking, who should appear but the wet nurse Ju-i, who came forward and knelt down before her, saying in a tearful voice, "I have something to say that I hardly dare mention to you, Mother. The fact that Little Brother has died is also a misfortune for me. I'm afraid that in the days to come Father and the First Lady will dismiss me. My husband is dead, and I'll have nowhere to go."

When Li P'ing-erh heard what she had to say, she felt a pang of sympathy in her heart and thought to herself, "As long as I've got that dear enemy of mine around, I might as well make use of him. I can't imagine he would threaten such a thing."

"You crazy woman," she said to her, "you can relax on that score. Although the child is dead, I'm not dead yet. And even if I should die tomorrow, you've served me well, and I'll see to it that no one will show you the gate. In the future, if the First Lady should give birth to a son or a daughter, you would be able to take over the nursing of the child, just as you've been doing for me. So what are you so agitated about?"

Only then was Ju-i content to say no more about it.

After some time had elapsed, Li P'ing-erh, once again, was overcome by her grief and broke into tears. To the same tune as before:

Yearning for my darling boy,
I yearn for you until,
I am all topsy-turvy.[121]
Gazing after my darling boy,
Unless it be in dreams, you will no longer appear.
During the day, when I see your things I am distressed,[122]
As though a knife were disemboweling me;
And at night, when I awake from sleep I no longer find you,
Safely embraced in my arms.
I can't prevent the pearly tears from falling from my eyes.
No longer will you lie playing on my ornate bed with its gold tracery;
No longer will you let me lift you in my hands and induce you to smile;
No longer will you come and cuddle up against my breast.
You have managed to inflict a stab wound in my ardently beating heart.
I have suffered in vain on your behalf,
And it has all proven to be effort expended for nothing.
Though you may have satisfied the wishes of another,
You have left me with no future in sight.

Sun Hsüeh-o and Wu Yin-erh remained by her side and attempted to console her, saying, "You really ought to have something to eat, rather than merely continuing to cry this way."

Hsiu-ch'un went to the rear compound and brought some food back for her, setting it out on a table and helping her to eat. But Li P'ing-erh could hardly swallow anything and, after eating only half a bowl, put it down and refused to eat anything more.

Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing, at the family graveyard, asked Yin-yang Master Hsü to determine the proper geomantic orientation of the grave and then had Kuan-ko buried next to the grave site of his first wife, née Ch'en, so that she could hold the infant in her arms, as it were. That day Ch'iao Hung and the other relatives all assembled at the grave side and offered sacrifices, after which they were entertained in the newly erected summerhouse, where they enjoyed a libation for the rest of the day.

When the funeral party arrived home, Li P'ing-erh kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Sister-in-law Wu and, weeping as she did so, addressed herself to Ch'iao Hung's wife, saying, "My kinswoman, who could be compared to me in raising such an unlucky child, who has died before his time? Now that he has died, your daughter will be a virgin widow, and all that you have done turns out to have been:

Labor expended in vain.[123]

Please don't hold it against me."

"Kinswoman, how can you say such a thing?" protested Ch'iao Hung's wife. "Every child has a predetermined number of years to live. Who can be sure of what the future holds in store? As the saying goes, a betrothal, once made, should not be altered. [124] Moreover, Kinswoman, you aren't old. There is no reason to worry about not being able to have children and grandchildren in the future. You must take it easy, Kinswoman, and not distress yourself so."

When she had finished speaking, she took her leave and went home. Hsi-men Ch'ing, in the front reception hall, arranged for Yin-yang Master Hsü to scatter ashes around the premises to prevent the soul of the departed from coming back, and to paste pollution-dispelling spells on all the doors, which read:

The baleful spirit of the departed is thirty feet high and is headed in a northeasterly direction. If it encounters the Wandering Day Spirit, it will be forced to return and be unable to escape. If it is executed, all will be well. Relatives of the departed need not avoid the site.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then brought out a bolt of muslin and two taels of silver with which to thank Master Hsü for his services and then escorted him to the gate.

That evening, he went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and slept with her. During the night, he said everything he could think of to comfort her. He noticed that Kuan-ko's playthings were still in evidence and, fearing that Li P'ing-erh would be distressed on seeing them, ordered Ying-ch'un to take them all back to the rear compound. Truly:

Thinking of her darling boy, she weeps both by day and by night;
Her heart feels lacerated[125] so much that her life is in danger.
Of the ten thousand things that create grief in this human world;
Nothing exceeds the severance of death and separation of the living.

The maple leaves are turning red
The other leaves are already yellow.
Her hair is white as the morning frost
For he of whom she thinks
Is at the gate of the underworld
And she will see him no more.
Though she cries out her heart

There is none to carry her message to the other world.
It is far distant, and the way is covered
With the mist of sorrow.
The pearl is buried
And all earthly things are forgotten.
If her tears were drops of rain
They would fill the Eastern Ocean
With sorrow eternal.

The old mirror cleaner had just gone when suddenly a man came from the East galloping towards them on muleback. He was wearing eye-shades and a broad-brimmed hat. He pulled up at the gate and the two ladies hastily withdrew. When he took off the eyeshades, they knew it was Han Daoguo. Ping'an asked him if the merchandise had come.

"All the wagons are inside the city," Han said; "I want to know where we are to unload them."

"Our master is at Major Zhou's place," Ping'an said, "but he told me that everything has to be put into the house opposite. Please come in."

A moment later, Chen Jingji came to take Han Daoguo to see Wu Yueniang. When he came out, he brushed the dust and dirt from his clothes and told Wang Jing to take his baggage home. Yueniang ordered a meal to be served for him. Soon all the wagons arrived. Chen Jingji took the key and unlocked the doors. The porters carried in box after box of merchandise, ten great wagonloads in all, and did not finish till evening. Cui Ben was there to help, and everybody took a hand in the work. The doors were locked again and sealed. Then the porters were paid and dismissed.

Daian went to Major Zhou's house to tell Ximen Qing that the goods had come, and Ximen, after drinking a few more cups of wine, came home. Han Daoguo was waiting for him in the great hall. They sat down and Han told his master the whole story from beginning to end.

"Did you give my letter to his Lordship Qian?" Ximen asked. "Did he make things easier?"

"Oh, yes!" Han Daoguo said. "Because of that letter, though we had ten wagonloads we paid very much less than the amount due. At the customs I reckoned two boxes as one, and we made out that only two-thirds of them contained silk and that the rest held only tea and incense. So, though we had ten big wagonloads we only paid thirty taels and five *qian* duty. His Lordship accepted my list without going through the boxes, and passed everything through."

Ximen Qing was delighted to hear this. "We must send his Lordship a handsome present," he said. He told Chen Jingji to entertain Han Daoguo and Cui Ben. Afterwards, Han Daoguo went home.

When Wang Liu'er heard that her husband had returned, she bade her maid prepare an especially good meal and waited until the evening. When he came in, he made a reverence before the domestic shrine, took off his clothes, washed, and they began to talk. Han Daoguo told his wife that his mission had been very successful. Wang Liu'er remarked that there seemed to be a good deal of money in his pockets. He told her he had bought two hundred taels' worth of goods on his own account, wine and rice and so forth. These he had left outside the city and, when he came to sell them, he would certainly do well out of them. Wang Liu'er was very pleased. "Wang Jing," she said, "tells me that there is now a new manager called Gan, and it has been arranged that we and Brother Cui are to share equally with him in the profits. This will be all to our advantage. The shop is to be opened next month."

"If there is someone here to look after the shop," Han Daoguo said, "we shall need a man to go to the South to make the necessary purchases. I suppose our master will send me."

"You silly fellow," Wang Liu'er said, "a man who is really capable always gets more work than other people. If our master trusts you, it is because you are such a clever businessman. The proverb says: No man can make money without working for it. If you are sent away for a year or two, I will speak to his Lordship and have you brought back; Gan or Laibao can be sent in your place. Then you will be able to work at home."

"Oh, I don't mind," Han Daoguo said. "After all, I have a good deal of experience in this outside trade."

"You must not let it upset you," his wife said. "You will have more to do than if you were at home."

Wine was brought. Husband and wife pledged each other. Then they went to bed and enjoyed a pleasant night.

The next day was the first of the eighth month. Ximen's merchandise had come and he was free. He decided to go and visit Zheng Aiyue. He quietly gave Daian three taels of silver and a light dress and told him to take them to the girl. When the old procuress heard that Ximen Qing was coming, she was delighted. He might have been a gift from Heaven. She took the presents and said to Daian: "Tell his Lordship that both my girls are waiting anxiously for him. He must come early." Daian returned and told Ximen Qing in his study.

That afternoon, Ximen told Daian to have his sedan chair brought around. He dressed in a large hat, a black summer gown, and a pair of black shoes with white soles. Before leaving he went to the house opposite and saw how the workers were getting on. Then he got into the chair and pulled down the bamboo blind. Qintong and Daian went with him. Wang Jing was left at home and Chunhong was sent in advance with Ximen Qing's things.

Zheng Aixiang, dressed in her best clothes, stood smiling at the door to receive Ximen Qing. She led him to the reception room and made reverence to him. Ximen told Qintong to take the chair home and return that evening with a horse. Only Daian and Chunhong remained.

The old procuress came to welcome Ximen. "My daughter troubled you the other day," she said, "and now you have been kind enough to visit us. But why did you send those presents? I must thank you very much indeed for the dress you sent my daughter."

"Why didn't she come when I sent for her?" Ximen said. "Why did you say she had to go to Wang's?"

"I haven't forgiven Dong Jiao'er and Li Guijie yet," the old woman said. "They never told us it was your birthday. So, that day, they both brought you presents and my poor girl had nothing to offer. Besides, if we had known, we should have got out of that engagement at Wang's place. You would certainly have had the first claim. Then you sent your servant for her. I got into a flurry, and, without letting Wang's people know anything about it, I sent her off to you by the back door."

"I spoke to her about it when I was taking wine with Magistrate Xia," Ximen said. "If it had not been for that, I should not have minded. What made me so angry was that she never sent me word, but simply stayed away. I want to know why that was."

"Since that little baggage has become a woman," the old woman said, "she has not been at all eager to go out to sing. She knew that there would be a number of guests at your house, and she was shy. She has been brought up very tenderly. She has only just got up now, as you see, and I had to urge her several times. I said to her: 'You must get up at once because his Lordship Ximen is coming,' but she has only just done so."

The maid brought tea, and Zheng Aixiang offered a cup to Ximen Qing. Then the old procuress invited him to go to the inner court. Zheng Aixiang took him to her sister's room. He saw a scroll hanging on the wall with the words "Aiyue Hall." He sat down; the lattice was raised, and Zheng Aiyue came in. She wore no net upon her hair. It was simply dressed in the fashion of Hangzhou. It shone with a glossy blackness, coil upon coil like a black mist. Her double-breasted gown was of white silk, and her skirt was purple with green embroidery. Beneath it he could see two small red shoes. When she moved, the tinkling of the pearls and jewels made her seem still more beautiful.

Zheng Aiyue came towards him and greeted him rather carelessly. Then she sat down, hiding her pale face behind a gilded fan. Ximen Qing looked at her and thought her more desirable than ever. His eyes sparkled, his mind was troubled, and he found it hard to contain himself. The maid brought tea. Zheng Aiyue drew her sleeve back a little and, with her dainty fingers, offered him a cup. She and her sister Zheng Aixiang each took a cup and drank together with Ximen Qing. Then the cups were removed. She asked him to take off his long gown and go to her room. Ximen summoned Daian to take his cloak and the boy put it over a chair.

In Zheng Aiyue's room the hangings, curtains and bedclothes were all of silk. It was a most attractive room and exquisitely perfumed. "Indeed," Ximen said, "this is a dwelling place for the Immortals to which no mortal man should come."

They talked and laughed together for a while. Then the maid came to set the table. The food was well chosen and well prepared. First, they offered him lotus-blossom cakes. Then Zheng Aiyue picked out a mincemeat roll and offered it to him on a golden plate. When the food was done with and everything cleared away, she laid a scarlet cloth on the table and brought out thirty-two ivory pieces and they played dominoes. After the game, wine was brought and many fine fruits. The wine was poured into a golden cup, and the two sisters offered it to him. Then they took their instruments, Zheng Aixiang a zither, and Zheng Aiyue a lute, and together sang the song "Love Is in Our Hearts." So from exquisite lips came exquisite melody. Their voices would have melted a piece of marble. When the song was over, they cast dice. Then Zheng Aixiang made a show of going to change her clothes and left Zheng Aiyue alone with Ximen Qing.

Ximen took from his sleeve a white silk kerchief in which was wrapped a tiny gold box. Zheng Aiyue thought there were fragrant tea leaves in it and was going to open it, but Ximen said: "That is not for tea leaves. It holds my medicine." He took a packet from his sleeve and unfolded it, taking from it a lozenge of fragrant tea that he handed to her. She wished for more and put her hand into his sleeve. She found a purple kerchief with a pair of gold toothpicks in it. She admired it exceedingly.

"Guijie and Wu Yin'er have kerchiefs like it," she said. "You must have given them to them."

"Yes," Ximen said, "they were brought from Yangzhou. I don't suppose there is anyone else who could have given them such kerchiefs. Have it if you like it. I will send one for your sister in the morning." He took the wine cup and drank wine with his medicine. He put his arms around Zheng Aiyue and they drank mouth to mouth. He stroked her breasts. They were small and very soft. He pulled aside her shift. Beneath it her skin was as clear as the whitest jade. His passion was aroused, and his penis rose in anticipation. He pulled down his trousers and asked her to stroke it, but it was so big that she was afraid. She put her arms around his neck and said, "My sweet, this is the first time we have met. Be merciful and give me only a half. If you put in all there is, you will kill me. You've made it that size with your medicine. Nothing else would make it so red, so hot, so fearful."

Ximen laughed and said, "Get down, girl, so that you can find out what it knows."

"Another time I will do that for you," Zheng Aiyue said, "for we shall meet as often as there are leaves upon the trees, but not today, the first time we have come together."

Ximen Qing was anxious to begin. Zheng Aiyue asked if he would not have more wine. "It is not wine I want," he said, "but to lie with you."

Zheng Aiyue summoned the maid to clear away the wine table and take off Ximen's boots. Meanwhile, she went to the inner court to take off her clothes and wash herself. When the maid had taken off his boots, Ximen gave her a piece of silver, then he got into bed and she lighted some incense. Zheng Aiyue came back and asked if he would like some tea. "It is not tea I want," he said. Then she fastened the door and pulled down the curtains, put the pillow on the bed and joined him there. They were like a pair of lovebirds or the phœnix and his mate.

Ximen Qing saw that the girl's skin was smooth and fine, and her cunt dainty and without a hair upon it. It was like a piece of pastry made of the finest flour, tender and delicate and perfectly adorable. He clasped her waist with both his arms. It was as soft as jade and fragrance issued from it. Not for a thousand gold pieces could such perfection have been bought. He wrapped her white legs around his body, put on the clasp, and surged to the inmost recess of her flower of pleasure. But his penis was so stiff that it could not enter. He struggled long, with little success. She grimaced, and, gripping the pillow, begged him to stop. This only made his movements fiercer.

They sported together until the third night watch. Then Ximen Qing went home.

The next day Wu Yueniang was sitting in her room with Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Li Jiao'er. Daian came and asked for the silk that was to be sent as a present to Magistrate Xia upon his birthday.

"Yesterday your father called for his sedan chair," Yueniang said. "Where did he go? It was very late when he came back and I suspect he went to Han Daoguo's house. You young rascal, you are always trying to throw dust in my eyes when you go off with him on sly expeditions of that sort."

"No," Daian said, "it was not to Han Daoguo's house my father went, for Han has only just come home."

"Where did he go, then?"

Daian smiled. He made no answer and took away the silk.

"Great Sister," Jinlian said, "you will never get the truth out of that young scamp. But I believe the young Southerner went with him too. Send for the young Southerner. We may get the truth from him."

Chunhong was sent for, and Jinlian said to him: "Where did you go with your father yesterday? Tell us the truth or the Great Lady will have you beaten."

Chunhong knelt down. "Don't beat me, lady," he said, "I will tell you. Daian, Qintong and I went with Father through a great gateway. We went up several streets and down others, and at last we came to a house where the doors were partly open, protected by sharp-edged bars. Inside the door there stood a very beautiful young lady."

Jinlian laughed. "You rascal. Don't you know what a house like that is? Calling a singing girl a lady too!" Then she asked: "What did the girl look like? Have you ever seen her before?"

"I didn't recognize her," Chunhong said. "She wore a net upon her head just as you ladies do. When we went in, a white-haired old lady came and made reverence to Father. Then we went to the inner court. There was another young lady there, but she didn't wear a net. Her face was the shape of a melon seed and her lips were painted very red. She drank wine with Father."

"Where did you go then?" Jinlian asked.

"Daian, Qintong and I went to the old lady's room. She gave us wine and cakes."

This amused Yueniang and Yulou roared with laughter. They asked him if he knew the second of the two girls.

"She looked like one who was here the other day."

"Ha! Guijie!" Yulou said.

"So he went there, did he?" said Yueniang.

"But there is no half-finished gate at our house," Li Jiao'er said.

"Perhaps they have built one lately," Jinlian suggested.

When Ximen Qing returned, he went straight out again to congratulate Magistrate Xia upon his birthday.

Pan Jinlian had a long-haired white cat. It was white all over except for a black streak that went down from its head along its back. It was called Coal in the Snow and sometimes Snow Lion. It could pick up fans and handkerchiefs in its mouth. When Ximen Qing was away, Jinlian often took it to bed with her. It never made a mess of her clothes. When it was wanted, it would come at once, and when it was not wanted, it would go away at once. Sometimes the woman called it Snowy Bandit. It ate not ox liver or dried fish, but raw meat, and this made it fat and strong. So long was its hair that you could hide an egg in it. Jinlian was fond of this cat, and often used to wrap a piece of meat in a red handkerchief and made the cat pounce forward to snatch it.

Guan'ge had been ill, but, after taking old woman Liu's medicine, he improved considerably. Li Ping'er dressed him in a red silk shirt and put him on the bed to play. Yingchun and the nurse were there, and the nurse was having something to eat. Snow Lion was sitting on the bed. The baby was wearing a red shirt and moving about, and the cat imagined that the red shirt was the handkerchief in which Jinlian often wrapped up a piece of meat for him to play with. Suddenly, the cat pounced forward and scratched the child. The baby gave one shriek and began to choke. Then he had convulsions. The nurse was alarmed, put down the bowl she was holding, and took up the baby. She succeeded in stopping the convulsions, but the cat still came after the baby and tried to scratch him. Yingchun drove him away.

Ruyi'er thought that the baby would now be better, but he had one fit after another. She asked Yingchun to go at once to the inner court for Li Ping'er. When the maid told her mistress what had happened, Li Ping'er was terribly upset. Yueniang ran with her to her room. Guan'ge's eyes were turned so that the pupils could not be seen. There was foam on his lips and the only sound he made was like the chirping of a young chicken. His hands and feet were trembling.

Li Ping'er felt as if her heart had been cut by a knife. She rocked the child in her arms and kissed him. "Oh, my baby," she cried, "you were so well when I went to the inner court. What has made you have a fit like this?" Yingchun and Ruyi'er told her about the cat. Li Ping'er wept more bitterly than before. "Baby," she said, "nobody has loved you, and now you have fallen into this trap."

When Yueniang heard this, she said nothing, but sent for Jinlian and asked her whether it was her cat that had frightened the baby.

"Who said it was my cat?" Jinlian said.

Yueniang pointed to the nurse and Yingchun. "They said so," she said.

"Then they have too much to say," Jinlian cried. "My cat is asleep in my room. How can it have frightened the baby? What right have they to say such a thing? Just as, when they take a melon, they always pick out the soft spot, so, whenever anything goes wrong, the blame is put down to me."

"How did the cat get in here?" Yueniang said.

"It often comes," Yingchun told her.

"Then why hasn't it scratched the baby before?" Jinlian cried. "As for you, young woman, don't goggle at me like that. Don't raise your eyebrows and don't have so much to say. Oh, I never have any luck." She went angrily to her own room.

Jinlian had secretly trained her cat with intent to kill the baby. If the child died, she hoped to win back Ximen Qing. It was the same as the very old story in which Tu'an Gu trained a dog to kill Zhao Dun, the minister.

When Yueniang and the others saw the child in such a state, they poured ginger broth down his throat and sent Laian for old woman Liu. The old woman came and felt the baby's pulse. She tapped her foot upon the floor and said: "This is serious. I fear the child will die." She hastily made a decoction of peppermint and Jinlian, then she produced a ball of gold foil, pounded her decoction in a cup, and filled the gold foil with it. Yueniang took a golden pin to open the baby's mouth. It was tightly closed but they got the medicine down his throat. "If that cures him, well and good," said the old woman. "If it doesn't, I fear we shall have to burn moxa on him."

"We can't decide that," Yueniang said. "We shall have to wait until his father comes home or he will be angry."

"Mother," Li Ping'er cried, "we must save the child's life. If we wait, it may be too late. If Father scolds us, I will take all the blame."

"Well," Yueniang said, "it is your boy. I will leave it to you, for I dare not take the responsibility."

Old woman Liu burned moxa on the baby in five places, between his brows, on his neck, on both wrists and on his breast. Then he seemed to go to sleep. In the evening, when Ximen Qing arrived, he had not yet awakened. When the old woman knew that Ximen Qing had come, she took five *qian* of silver from Yueniang and slipped away by a back door. Ximen came to Yueniang's room and she told him all about the child. He hurried to Li Ping'er's room. Her eyes were very red. "What has made the boy ill?" Ximen asked her. She only wept and made no answer. Then he asked the maid and the nurse, but they dared not tell him. He noticed that the child's hands were scratched and that he was burned in several places. He rushed back to question Yueniang. She could keep silence no longer and told him about the cat. "Old woman Liu declared that the boy had been terrified," she said, "and that the only thing to do was to use the needle and burn moxa on him. She was afraid it would be too late if we waited for you. Since then the child has slept. He has not waked at all."

Ximen Qing flew into a furious rage. He dashed to Jinlian's room and, without a word, took the cat by the legs and dashed out its brains on the stone flags underneath the eaves. There was a crash. The cat's brain was scattered like ten thousand peach blossoms, and its teeth like broken jade.

When Jinlian saw her cat destroyed, she sat on her bed and did not move. "You thief," she muttered as Ximen Qing went away, "taking people's property and killing it. That's the sort of hero you are. All this fuss about a cat. Of course, the cat won't demand its life at your hands when it meets you in Hades! You treacherous villain! you changeable creature! You will come to a bad end."

Ximen Qing went back to the Sixth Lady's room. "You were looking after the baby," he said to Ruyi'er and Yingchun. "How did it happen that you allowed the cat to frighten and scratch him? Then you listened to old woman Liu and allowed her to burn the child. If he gets better, well and good. But if he doesn't, that old whore shall go to the courts and I'll have the screws on her."

"What would you have done," Li Ping'er said, "if you had thought the baby was at the point of death? Doctors only do the best they can to help people."

Li Ping'er had hoped that after the operation the child would be better, but the only result was to drive the trouble farther in. The convulsions developed into a slow fit. The child's water and motions issued freely and were strangely colored. His eyes opened and closed convulsively; he dozed, and took no food all day. In a terrible state of anxiety, Li Ping'er consulted fortune-tellers, but the omens were all unfavorable. Yueniang, without Ximen Qing's knowledge, again sent for old woman Liu to come and work a charm. Then they sent for a doctor who specialized in children's ailments. He proposed to blow some powder into the baby's nostrils. "If the child sneezes," he said, "well and good, but if he doesn't, I fear there is no hope." They blew the powder into the child's nostrils but nothing happened. Not once did he sneeze. Li Ping'er gazed and gazed at the child all day and all night. She never dried her tears and she never wished to eat or drink.

The fifteenth day of the eighth month was Yueniang's birthday, but she would not keep it. Her relatives sent presents but no invitations were sent to them. Only Aunt Wu, Aunt Yang and the two nuns came. The two nuns had not shared the money equally and they were not on the best of terms.

On the fourteenth, Ben the Fourth and Nun Xue went to the printer's and brought back with them fifteen hundred copies of the texts. Li Ping'er gave him a string of coppers to buy paper offerings, incense, and candles, and, on the fifteenth, he went with Chen Jingji to the temple, burned the paper offerings and the incense, and distributed the scriptures. Then he returned and told Li Ping'er what he had done. Every day the Qiao family sent old woman Kong to see Guan'ge. They recommended a certain Dr. Bao of the Imperial College of Medicine, who was a specialist in children's diseases. When he came, he called the illness by a long name and said that it was hopeless. They gave him five *qian* of silver and dismissed him. Then they tried to pour some medicine down the baby's throat, but he rejected it. He closed his eyes, clenched his teeth and made a gurgling noise. All night long Li Ping'er never took off her clothes. She carried the baby in her arms, crying all the time. Ximen Qing, except for his duty at the office, never went out, and, whenever he came back from the office, he went at once to see his son.

One night at the end of the eighth month Li Ping'er was lying on the bed with Guan'ge in her arms. A single lamp was burning on the table and the maids and the nurse were sound asleep. She looked at the window. The moonbeams shone through it and she could hear the mournful sound of the night watchman. To her sad heart it sounded like ten thousand knockings. Her grief was beyond expression.

The Milky Way is still, is still.
The stars are far, are far away.
The gleaming moon casts her cool beams through the window
And the cold night breeze drives through the door.
On the watchtower the drum beats quickly
One watch and then another.
In someone's house, beating laundry,
A thousand strokes, and then again a thousand strokes. The wind chimes ring under painted eaves:
It breaks the grieving woman's heart.
The lamp, burning on its silver stand,
Serves but to point out her unending sorrow.
One thought alone is in that heart
The longing for her child's recovery.

Li Ping'er lay on her bed half sleeping, half waking. She dreamed that her old husband Hua Zixu came to her door, wearing white, and looking as he had looked in life. "Strumpet," he said harshly, "what right had you to steal my wealth and give it to Ximen Qing? At this moment I go to accuse you." Li Ping'er seized him by the sleeve. "Good Brother," she pleaded, "be merciful." But Hua Zixu escaped from her. She woke to find her hand grasping Guan'ge's sleeve and knew it was a dream. "Strange! Strange!" she gasped. She heard the drum sounding the third night watch. Her hair was standing on end and her body was bathed in a cold sweat.

The next day when Ximen Qing came, she told him of her dream. "Where he is now we do not know," Ximen Qing said. "It was only your fancy. Try and be calm and do not worry so much. I will get Wu Yin'er to come and stay with you, and old woman Feng to come and wait on you." Daian was sent to bring Wu Yin'er.

That afternoon Guan'ge, lying upon his nurse's breast, seemed hardly able to breathe. Ruyi'er was frightened. She called Li Ping'er. "Mother," she cried, "look at the baby. His eyes are upturned and he seems able only to breathe out, not in." Li Ping'er took the child from her, weeping. She told the maid to go at once for Ximen Qing and tell him that the baby was dying.

Chang Zhijie was there, telling Ximen Qing how he had found a house with four rooms and needed thirty-five taels more. When Ximen heard how ill his son was, he said to Chang Zhijie: "You must go now. I cannot take you to the gate. I will send you the money and come to see you in your new house." He hurried to see Li Ping'er. Yueniang and the other ladies were already there, watching the child struggling in the last agony. Ximen Qing could not bear to look. He went into another room, sat down on a chair, and sighed deeply. Before he had time to drink half a cup of tea, Guan'ge died. It was around four in the afternoon of the twenty-third day of the eighth month. The boy had lived a mere fourteen months.

They all set up a great crying. Li Ping'er beat her ears, tore her cheeks, dashed her head upon the ground, and wept until she fell into a swoon. For a long time she stayed unconscious, then she came to herself and rocked the dead child in her arms, sobbing.

"Oh my poor unfortunate child," she cried, "my heart is broken. Why could I not die with you? I will not live long in this world. Why have you left me so cruelly?"

Ruyi'er and Yingchun cried bitterly. Ximen Qing told some of the boys to prepare a room at the side of the great hall, and was going to put the child upon his bed on two benches there, but Li Ping'er clung to him with both hands and would not let him go. "My unfortunate child, my precious baby," she cried, "you have taken my heart with you. Now all my labor is wasted. I can never see you more, my heart!"

Yueniang and the others cried with her and tried to console her. Ximen Qing, when he saw her torn face and her hair in disorder, said: "Do not take it so hard. He was not fated to be our child. We reared him for a spell but now his little life is done. Cry and be done with it. We cannot bring him back to life by weeping. Remember that you are dear to me. Now we must take him away and I must send for the Master of the Yin Yang." He asked what the time was and Yueniang told him.

"As I thought," Meng Yulou said, "he waited for this hour and then went. At this hour he was born and at this hour he has died. It was the twenty-third day too, only the month is different. He has lived one year and two months exactly."

When Li Ping'er saw the boys waiting to take the body of her child away, she began to cry again. "Oh, why must you be in such a hurry? Great Mother, put your hand upon him. He is still warm. Oh, my son! How can I give you up? You cannot leave me so cruelly." Again she threw herself upon the ground and sobbed bitterly.

The boys took Guan'ge and laid him in the room they had prepared. Yueniang said to Ximen Qing: "We must let our relatives the Qiaos know, and send for the priests."

"We will send for the priests tomorrow," Ximen said. He sent Daian to bear the news to Master Qiao. Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, was summoned to write the certificate. Ben the Fourth was given ten taels of silver and told to buy a set of fir-wood boards and get the carpenters to make a little coffin for the child.

As soon as the Qiaos got the message, Mistress Qiao came. She cried. Yueniang and the others cried with her and told her all that had happened. Then Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, came. "My young brother," he said, "departed this life exactly at the hour of the monkey." Yueniang told him to look at the black book.

Master Xu took up his black book and read:

The young master was born at the hour of the monkey on the twenty-third day of the sixth month of the *bingshen* year in the Zhenghe reign period, and died at the hour of the monkey on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the *dingyu* year of the same reign. This combination of a *renzi* day and a *dingyu* month indicates that another life and death are before him. We must have no mourners except the relatives, and, when he is put into the coffin, no one who was born under the sign of the Snake, the Dragon, the Rat or the Hare, must be present. It says in my black book that one who dies on a *renzi* day will go upwards to the Temple of the Precious Vase, or down to Qi (Shandong). In his previous existence he was a scion of the house of Cai in Yanzhou. He extorted money from people by violence and spent his substance in wild living. He paid no worship to Heaven and Earth and was lacking in due reverence for his kinsmen. He caught a chill, took to his bed, fouled his bedclothes, and died. He was born again, suffered from convulsions, and, ten days ago, some animal terrified him. On that day his evil star was in the ascendant; his spirit was taken from him. On that day, too, he was born again in a family named Wang. He will grow to be a military officer and live to be sixty-eight years old.

This was what Master Xu found in his book. He asked whether Ximen Qing intended to bury or burn the body the following day.

"I do not wish him to be taken from here tomorrow," Ximen Qing said. "I will have the appropriate ceremonies on the third day, and he shall be buried in my family sepulchre on the fifth day after his death."

"The twenty-seventh will be a *bingchen* day and not inauspicious so far as the members of your household are concerned," the Master of the Yin Yang said. "The burial should take place at noon." He wrote a certificate and the child was placed in the coffin. It was the third night watch. Li Ping'er went to her room and, weeping, gathered together some of the child's tiny religious garments and put them, with hat, shoes, and socks, into the coffin with him. It was nailed up. Everybody began to cry again. The Master of the Yin Yang went away.

The next day Ximen Qing was too busy to go to the office. Xia heard of his bereavement and came to offer his condolences. Ximen sent a man to give the news to Abbot Wu and ask him to send eight priests to sing a dirge on the third day after the decease. The Abbot and Master Qiao both offered the customary offering of three animals. The four uncles, Wu, Shen, Han, and Hua, did likewise and came to burn paper offerings. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Master Wen, Chang Zhijie, Han Daoguo, Gan, Ben the Fourth, Li and Huang, all made contributions and came in the evening to watch before the body with Ximen Qing. When the monks had performed their part and had gone away, the customary offerings were made before the baby's coffin. Ximen Qing had tables set in the great hall for the entertainment of those who had come to condole with him.

Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, and Zheng Aiyue sent offerings.

Li Ping'er, thinking always of her child, was very sad. She would take nothing to eat and cried so much that she lost her voice. Indeed Ximen Qing was afraid she might try to kill herself, and told the nurse, the maids, and Wu Yin'er to stay with her all day. He himself spent three nights with her and did all he could to console her. Nun Xue read the Lengyan Sutra to her and an exorcism for freeing the troubled spirit, and tried to persuade her to stop crying. "This was not really your child," she said. "He was one to whom you were beholden in a former existence. We read in the Dharani Sutra of a woman who bore three children, all of whom died before they were two years old. She cried as she took the last dead baby to the river's bank, and could not bear to cast it in. Then the Blessed One took the form of a monk and said to her: 'You should not so bewail. This is not your child, but one who was your enemy in your last life. Three times he has come to you to try to bring about your death. If you do not believe me, here is proof.' The Blessed One pointed at the baby and it appeared in devil's form. Standing on the water, the devil cried to the woman: 'Because you have read the Dharani Sutra with devotion, angels have watched over you day and night and I have had no chance to kill you. Now the Blessed One has changed my heart, and I will be your enemy no longer.' So saying, he sank beneath the waters and disappeared. I assure you, this baby must have been your enemy. He came to you to be an expense and a hurt to your body. The other day you gave fifteen hundred copies of the Dharani Sutra to be distributed, so establishing yourself in virtue, and, thereafter he could no longer endure to be with you and so died. Now you will have a child who will be your true child."

Li Ping'er listened but she did not forget Guan'ge. Whenever the baby's name was mentioned she wept.

Five days passed. On the morning of the twenty-seventh, eight small boys wearing black gowns and white hats carried banners, white parasols, white flowers and willows, and walked before the coffin of scarlet and gold. A great red scroll was borne beneath a canopy and on it was inscribed: "The Coffin of a son of the house of Ximen." Abbot Wu had sent twelve Daoist novices in black robes. They chanted exorcisms about the coffin. Musicians played mournful tunes. Then came all the relatives and Ximen Qing dressed in plain clothes. They went on foot to the end of the street, near the city gate, and there got into carriages and mounted horses.

Ximen Qing feared that Li Ping'er would cry if she went to the grave with them, so he would not let her go, but all the other ladies went in sedan chairs. Sun Xue'e and Wu Yin'er stayed at home to keep company with Li Ping'er. She, forbidden to go to the grave, went after the coffin to the gate. There she cried: "Oh my baby, you have broken my heart," and fell swooning. As she fell, her head struck the gate; her cheeks were bruised, and the golden pins fell out of her hair. Xue'e and Wu Yin'er went forward and lifted her up. They took her to her own room. There she saw the lonely bed with the little drum shaped like the God of Longevity lying upon it. This reminded her again of her lost child. She beat her hands upon the table and sobbed bitterly.

Wu Yin'er grasped her hands. "Mother," she said, "please don't cry any more. The baby has gone and cannot come back to you however much you cry. You must console yourself. Don't be so sad."

Xue'e said: "You are still young and you will certainly have another child. I must not say all I think, because, in this place, there are holes in the wall and eyes to look through them, but it was she who schemed for this and she will pay for it. It was she who killed the baby and the baby will demand his life from her. You and I have had much to suffer. She wants her husband all to herself and, whenever he goes to anyone else, she is very angry. You know that our husband has not been to me for a long time. Well, the other day he did come, and you saw what a fuss she made about it and what she said about me to his daughter. I say nothing, but I keep my eyes open and watch. We shall see to what sort of an end that strumpet comes."

"Yes," said Li Ping'er, "she has made me suffer. But I do not know when I shall die. It may be today or it may be tomorrow, and I cannot make trouble with her. I can only leave her to go her own way."

The nurse Ruyi'er came in. She knelt down and said: "There is something I must say to you. I have not dared to do so before. The baby is dead and that is bad luck for me. I am afraid his Lordship and the Great Lady will send me away. My husband is dead and I have nowhere to go."

Li Ping'er was distressed again. "The baby is dead," she said, "but I am still alive. And even if I should die tomorrow, you have served me well. I am sure they will not send you away. One of these day, the Great Lady may have a boy or a girl. They will let you be his nurse, and it will be all the same for you. There is no cause for you to worry."

This satisfied Ruyi'er.

Li Ping'er began to cry again. Wu Yin'er and Xue'e did their best to console her and tried to get her to eat something. They asked Yingchun to go to the inner court and bring some food. But when it was set upon the table Li Ping'er could not bring herself to eat any. She tried a few mouthfuls and then gave up the attempt.

When the funeral procession came to the grave, Ximen Qing asked Master Xu to determine the site. Guan'ge was buried beside the tomb of Ximen's first wife, the lady Chen.

Master Qiao and the other relatives made offerings at the tomb and were entertained in the new arbor. When they returned, Li Ping'er came to kowtow to Yueniang, Mistress Qiao and Uncle Wu. Again she wept. "Lady," she said to Mistress Qiao, "who could have such evil fortune as myself whose baby has died so young? Your daughter is widowed before her marriage, and all that we have done for them is thrown away. I trust you will not scorn me now."

"Lady," Mistress Qiao said, "you mustn't talk like that. We can never be sure how long anyone will live. There's an old saying that those who've arranged an alliance between their families can never cease to be friends. You aren't old. You'll very likely bear another child. We must be patient and not give way to melancholy."

Mistress Qiao went home. In the hall, Ximen Qing asked Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang to, "Purify the house." They hung yellow paper charms over all the doors to drive away evil spirits. The charms said:

The spirit of our departed one's 30 feet high. It goes towards the northeast. If it meets the god of the day, it'll return and not go forth again. Or it'll destroy it and all will be well. The relatives will have nothing to fear.

Ximen Qing gave a roll of cloth and 2 taels of silver to Master Xu and took him to the gate. That evening he went to Li Ping'er's room and tried to comfort her. He was afraid she would be sad if she saw the baby's toys so he told Yingchun to, "Put them all away."

## 083
## Li P'ing-erh Becomes Ill Because of Suppressed Anger; Hsi-men Ch'ing's New Silk Goods Store Opens for Business

The marriage affinity bound with red cord[1] is over, without hope of renewal;
When one's luck runs out for no good reason,[2] whom does one presume to blame?
Her lingering tears, alarmed at the advent of autumn, fall with the leaves;
Her alienated soul, trailing after the moon is slow to approach the window.
As the metallic autumn wind brushes her face, she yearns for her son;
When the jade candle burns itself to ashes, her doleful tears fall.
Even if her viscera should be fashioned out of iron or stone;
Though unable to engender sorrow, yet they would engender sorrow.

On that day Sun Hsüeh-o and Wu Yin-erh stayed by her side and endeavored to comfort Li P'ing-erh for some time, thus and so, before returning to the rear compound.

When P'an Chin-lien saw that the child was no more, and that Li P'ing-erh had lost her son to death, every day she plucked up her spirits and expressed her gratification in a hundred different ways.

Pointing at one of the maidservants, she railed away at Li P'ing-erh by indirection, saying, "You lousy whore! As I have said all along:

The sun may be at high noon,
But the time will come when it will pass its zenith.
When the turtledove has dropped its egg:
It has no recourse but to pout.[3]
When the bench's back is broken:
You have nothing left to lean on.
Like Dame Wang who sold her grindstone:
You've no way to grind your axe anymore.
Like the old procuress whose painted face has died:
You've nothing more to hope for.
How do you like it, now that you're no better off than I am?"

Li P'ing-erh, in her adjacent quarters, overheard all this invective but did not dare say anything in response. All she could do was to shed tears behind Chin-lien's back. Suffering from this:

Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,
on top of her accumulated vexation and sorrow; gradually:
Her heart and spirit were disoriented, and
Her dreaming soul turned topsy-turvy.[4]

With every day her intake of tea and food diminished.
The day after the funeral party returned from the graveyard after burying Kuan-ko, Wu Yin-erh went back to her establishment, and Old Mother Feng brought in a twelve-year-old maidservant, whom she sold to Sun Hsüeh-o for five taels of silver, and whose name was changed to Ts'ui-erh. But no more of this.
As for Li P'ing-erh, in the first place, because she was longing for her child, and in the second place, because she was afflicted with suppressed rage, her former ailment reappeared, and, as before, her menses flowed unceasingly from her lower body. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine her and obtained a prescription from him, but when she took it, it was about as effectual as if she had:
Attempted to irrigate a stone with water.[5]
The more of his medication she took, the worse the hemorrhaging became. In the space of less than half a month:
Her countenance lost color,
Her flesh became emaciated,[6]
and her radiant good looks were no longer what they used to be. Truly:
Her flesh and bones shrunk to no more than a handful;
How could she hope to sustain such a load of sorrow?[7]
One day, in the first decade of the ninth month, when:
The weather becomes threatening, and
The autumn wind begins to sough,
Li P'ing-erh was sleeping by herself at night.
The pillow was cold within her silver bedstead,
The moonlight flooded her gauze-covered window.
She couldn't help thinking of her child and gave herself over to prolonged sighs.
Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,
she became indistinctly aware of the noise made by someone tapping on the window frame. Li P'ing-erh called to her maidservants, but they were both fast asleep and did not respond. Consequently, she got out of bed herself:
Scuffed around with her slippers on backwards,
Tried to put her brocaded gown on upside down,
opened the door to the room, and went outside to see who was there. She seemed to see Hua Tzu-hsü, holding Kuan-ko in his arms, and calling out that he had found a new abode, and that she should join him in going there to live. Li P'ing-erh was not yet ready to relinquish Hsi-men Ch'ing and refused to go with him, but she reached out with both hands to embrace the child, at which Hua Tzu-hsü gave her a shove that knocked her to the ground, causing her to:
Wake up with a jerk,
revealing it to be but:
A dream of the Southern Branch.
She was so frightened that:
Her entire body broke into a cold sweat,[8]
and she gave way to:
Sobbing and wailing,
continuing to cry until dawn. Truly:
In possessing emotions we are surely all alike, but
To be fixated on appearances is to delude oneself.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Slender, slender, is the new moon as it shines on the silver screen;
While the woman in the secluded boudoir is about to break her heart.
Regretting ever more that romantic ardor is often not sufficient;
She is increasingly aware that affection may be the root of sorrow.[9]
At that time, Lai-pao's boatload of goods from Nanking also arrived, and he sent the young employee Wang Hsien ahead to get the silver for the cartage fee. Hsi-men Ch'ing wrote a letter and deputed his young employee Jung Hai to take it, together with a hundred taels of silver, and the customary gifts of mutton, wine, and satin brocade, to the secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of the Lin-ch'ing customs station, requesting that, so far as the customs duties were concerned, he should:
Look upon the matter with favorable eyes.
Meanwhile, at home, the preparations for the new shop were completed, and he selected the fourth day of the ninth month for the grand opening. On that very day, the goods were unloaded, consisting of twenty large cartloads, including personal baggage.
On the day in question, the relatives and friends who brought boxes of candied fruit and congratulatory red banners to celebrate the occasion numbered more than thirty persons, and Ch'iao Hung engaged twelve musicians, as well as acrobats, to perform for the company. On Hsi-men Ch'ing's part, the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Ch'un, were engaged to play their musical instruments and sing. The managers, Kan Jun and Han Tao-kuo, worked behind the counter, selling the merchandise, one of them taking charge of the cash, and the other bargaining with the customers, while Ts'ui Pen was responsible for handling the goods. Whoever showed up, whether they were businessmen or customers, were ushered inside and offered two cups of wine.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was dressed in a crimson robe and his official cap and girdle, had finished the ceremony of burning paper money, and his friends and relatives had all presented their boxes of candied fruit and toasted him with a drink, fifteen banquet tables were set up in the rear reception hall, replete with the customary:
Five appetizers, five dishes,
Three soups and five courses;
a new round of drinks was served, and, as the guests took their places:
Drums and music resounded to the heavens.
That day, the household of Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling sent someone to deliver a present and the customary red bunting in honor of the occasion, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent the messenger back with a gift in return. Among those present were Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzuyu, Brother-in-law Shen, Han Ming-ch'uan, Abbot Wu, Licentiate Ni P'eng, Licentiate Wen Pi-ku, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh.
With regard to the latter, it so happens that, in recent days, Hsi-men Ch'ing had given him fifty taels of silver, of which he had spent thirty-five taels for the mortgage on a house, while setting aside fifteen taels as the capital with which to open a small general store in his home, which enabled him to make ends meet. But no more of this.
On the present occasion, he had joined the others in making a contribution toward the cost of the celebration and had come along with them to congratulate Hsi-men Ch'ing. In addition, there were Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Fu Ming, and the other entrepreneurs and managers, along with the neighbors in the area, all of whom filled the seats at the banquet tables. The three boy actors came before the feast and performed a song suite in the Nan-lü mode, beginning with the tune "Red Jacket," the first line of which was:
When primordial chaos first engendered the supreme ultimate,[10]
etc., etc. It was not long before:
Five rounds of wine had been consumed; and
Three main courses had been served.
By the time that the musicians below the hall had done performing, and the acrobatics and vaudeville acts were concluded, atop the banquet tables:
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.
On that day, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta outdid themselves in raising large goblets, as they:
Passed their winecups back and forth.
The drinking continued until sunset before the party broke up.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Shen, Licentiate Ni, Wen Pi-ku, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta to remain, and new tables were set up for another round of drinks. On that day when the new shop opened for business, the managers did a quick job of reckoning the accounts and found that they had sold more than five hundred taels worth of goods, which delighted Hsi-men Ch'ing no end. After the shop closed that evening, he invited Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Fu Ming, Ts'ui Pen, Pen the Fourth, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join the party. After the musicians had performed for some time, they were allowed to go home, and only the three boy actors were retained to entertain the company.
Ying Po-chüeh, who had been drinking all day, was already inebriated and came out to the front compound to relieve himself. On the way, he called over Li Ming and asked him, "Whose place is that boy actor with the clear-cut appearance and his hair done up in a topknot from?"
"Do you mean to say you don't know, Master Two?" said Li Ming. Then, discreetly covering his mouth with his hand, he said, "He's Cheng Feng's younger brother. The other day, when Father was in the licensed quarter drinking at their establishment, he engaged the services of his elder sister Cheng Ai-yüeh."
"Really?" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "No wonder, the other day, she contributed toward the burning of the paper money, and attended the funeral ceremony."
Thereupon, rejoining the party, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, you are once again to be congratulated. You've managed to pick up another little brother-in-law."
"You crazy dog!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Don't talk such nonsense."
He then called over Wang Ching and said to him, "Pour Master Two another large cup of wine."
Turning to Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Venerable Brother-in-law, what do you think? I'm being fined this goblet of wine for no stated reason."
"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm fining you for:
Violating protocol by speaking out of turn."
Ying Po-chüeh lowered his head to consider this and then laughed, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll drink it. I'll drink it. After all:
It's not going to kill me."
He then went on to say, "But I've never been able to abide drinking wine without a song to accompany it. Only if you get Cheng Ch'un to come up here and sing a song for me, will I go along with it."
At this, the three boy actors all came forward and offered to play their instruments and sing.
Ying Po-chüeh dismissed Li Ming and Wu Hui, saying, "I don't want the two of you. I only want Cheng Ch'un to provide a solo accompaniment on the psaltery, and sing a short song, to help me get down the wine."
"Cheng Ch'un," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "come over here and do as Master Two says."
"I've already explained the rules to Beggar Ying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"For every song, he must down a goblet of wine."
Thereupon, Tai-an proceeded to fetch two large silver goblets and place them in front of Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ch'un:
Gently strummed the silver psaltery,
and sang in a low voice a song to the tune "Clear River Prelude":
A young lady of fifteen or sixteen,
Sees a pair of butterflies playing together.
Leaning against the wall with her fragrant shoulder,
Her slender fingers brush away her tears.
She calls out, "Maidservant,
Chase them away to fly somewhere else."[11]
When Cheng Ch'un had finished singing this song, he invited his auditor to have a drink, and no sooner did Ying Po-chüeh down it, than Tai-an poured out another cup for him. Cheng Ch'un then proceeded to sing another song to the same tune:
Skirting the carved balustrade, he catches sight of her,
Leaning against the rose-leaved raspberry trellis.
Coyly adjusting her phoenix hairpin,
She says nothing of last night's events,
But, smiling ingratiatingly,
Plucks a blossom and tosses it at him.[12]
When Ying Po-chüeh had finished drinking his cup of wine, he made haste to push the responsibility for continuing onto Hsieh Hsi-ta, saying, "That's enough. I can't handle any more. I can't handle any more. These two large goblets have done me in."
"You clever beggar!" exclaimed Hsieh Hsi-ta. "When you can't handle any more, you try to push the responsibility onto me. Do you take me to be a pushover of an encunted southerner like that wife of yours?"
"Clever beggar, is it!" responded Ying Po-chüeh. "If I become a senior official someday in the future, you'll be in line to take my place with her."
"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you ever get an official post, it will only be that of a ceremonial dancer."
"My clever child!" laughed Ying Po-chüeh. "If I ever become a ceremonial dancer, I'll cede the position of senior official to you, that's all."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and ordered Tai-an, "Give this lousy beggar a whack with the slapstick."
Hsieh Hsi-ta surreptitiously gave him a sounding rap on the head, saying, "You beggar! The venerable Licentiate Wen is here, and yet you continue to spout such rubbish."
"The venerable Mr. Wen," said Ying Po-chüeh, "is a man of culture, who doesn't concern himself with such trivial affairs."
"You two gentlemen," said Licentiate Wen, "are obviously on good terms with our venerable host. If one were really to prohibit this kind of badinage at a drinking party, it wouldn't be any fun. When pleasure resides in the heart, it is appropriate that it find external expression, and before one knows it, one finds oneself:
Miming it with one's hands, and
Dancing it with one's feet,[13]
just like this."
Among those present, Brother-in-law Shen turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Brother-in-law, this is not the way to do it. Why don't you invite your senior brother-in-law Wu K'ai to take charge of the situation by choosing a game of forfeits. The outcome could be determined by throwing dice, by playing at guess-fingers, or by playing cards; or it could be by reciting poems, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies; or playing the game of 'thimble-stitching' in which lines of verse are joined together by beginning each new line with the last word of the preceding one; [14] or even by reciting tongue twisters. Whoever fails at his task would have to drink a cup of wine as a forfeit. That would be more evenhanded, and less likely to create disputes."
"Brother-in-law, your suggestion is just the thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he proceeded to pour a cup of wine and present it to Wu K'ai to initiate the proceedings.
Wu K'ai picked up the dice box and said, "I'll start things off then, and if I get anything wrong, I'll pay the penalty by drinking a cup of wine. I'll begin with only a single die, after which I'll use a pair. If I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I'll pay the forfeit.

1: Amid the *hundred* myriads of men, the *white* flag is furled.
2: As for the heroes under *Heaven*, few *men* recognize them.
3: The Prince of *Ch'in* has executed Generalissimo Yü;
4: Having *cursed* him for not providing a *horse* for him to ride.
5: This so frightened me that /lack the *mouth* to respond.
6: The *seething* crowds on the street remove his *clothes*.
7: The black-clad *lictors* haven't any *white* hair on their heads.
8: After *splitting* up the corpse, they leave their *knives* behind.
9: There is a *bolus* of good medicine, but no one wants a *dab* of it.
10: A *thousand* years of accomplishment is negated with a single *stroke*."[15]
When Wu K'ai had finished throwing the dice, two of his throws corresponded to the numbers in the lines, and he drank the penalty cups of wine accordingly.
It was then the turn of Brother-in-law Shen to call the game, and he said, "I will throw a pair of dice six times, and if I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I'll pay the forfeit
The image of Heaven is a double six; the image of Earth is a pair of twos;
The image of Man is conveyed by the red pair of ones and the double four.
A double three suggests Witch's Mountain; a double five evokes plum blossoms;
Few indeed are those who really understand the import of these symbols."
When he played, one of his throws resulted in a red double four, and he drank his cup of wine accordingly. He then turned the dice box over to Licentiate Wen.
"Your pupil will propose a game," said Licentiate Wen. "For each of the six numbers I will name an appropriate flower, and follow it with a line from the *Four Books*,[16] that begins with the last character of the flower named above.
1: Spot of Red.[17] 'The red plum blossom confronts the white plum blossom.'[18]
2: Double-headed Lotus. 'Amid the ripples, mandarin ducks play.'[19]
3: Willow of the Three Springs. 'Under the willow one does not adjust one's hat.'[20]
4: Principal Graduate's Red.[21] 'Red and violet coloured silks were not used for informal dress.'[22]
5: Wintersweet Blossom. 'Blossoms brush against sword pendants as the stars begin to sink.'[23]
6: Sky Full of Stars.[24] 'The stars and other heavenly bodies are so distant.'"[25]
Licentiate Wen was only required to drink one cup of wine, after which it was the turn of Ying Po-chüeh to call the game.
"Your humble servant can hardly recognize a single character," said Ying Po-chüeh, "so I'll recite a tongue twister:
A hurrying-scurrying housewife,
Holding a basket of soybeans in her left hand,
And a sack of cotton in her right hand,
Was only intent upon forging ahead,
When she ran into a yellow and white spotted dog,
Which took a bite out of the sack of cotton.
At which the hurrying-scurrying housewife,
Put down the basket of soybeans in her right hand,
And tried to beat off the yellow and white spotted dog.
But I don't know whether her hand overcame the dog,
Or whether the dog overcame her hand."
"You god-damned louse!" laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing derisively. "You'll bust your gut coming up with such nonsense. Who would ever undertake to beat off a dog with his hand without getting bitten for his pains?"
"Who would have anyone take on a dog without a stick in hand?" said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'm in the same boat as:
The beggar who has misplaced his stick:
I have to confront the rancor of a dog."[26]
"Your Honor," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "Notice how the beggar has acknowledged his own downfall by describing himself as a beggar."
"He ought to be made to drink a penalty cup," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "His effort is hardly up to snuff. Hsieh Hsi-ta, it's your turn now."
"This tongue twister of mine is better than his," said Hsieh Hsi-ta. "If I don't get it right, I'll drink a penalty cup.
On top of the wall there is a broken tile.
Below the wall there is a mule.
The broken tile falls down,
And lands on the mule.
I don't know whether the broken tile wounded the mule,
Or whether the mule stamped the broken tile to pieces."
"You ridiculed my tongue twister as inferior," said Ying Po-chüeh, "as though this broken tile of yours were any better. That wife of yours, Sister Liu, may be a mule, and I may be a broken tile, but the two of us are as well matched as a broken millstone and a lame donkey."
"As for that wife of yours, née Tu," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "old whore of a southern hag that she is, she's just like a handful of black beans, fit only to feed to a pig. Even a dog would turn up his nose at her."
The two of them sparred verbally with each other for a while, after which each of them was made to drink a cup of wine.
It was then the turn of Manager Fu Ming, who said, "I'll call a game current on the rivers and lakes. If I throw a number that corresponds to those in any of the following lines, I'll pay the forfeit. I'll begin with a single die, and later switch to a pair.
Aboard a single boat with a pair of oars,
Three men row out into a waterway in the
Province of the Four Rivers.
Employing the five notes and six semitones,[27]
Seven men sing together a song about the Eight Taoist Immortals.
The nine times ten days of springtime[28] are all equally enjoyed.
During the eleventh and twelfth months we celebrate primal harmony."[29]
When he had done, none of his throws corresponded to the numbers in the lines that he recited.
"None of the other games proposed have come up to this game of Manager Fu's," opined Wu K'ai. "It's more appropriate to the occasion than any of the others."
"In that case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "he ought to drink a 'Cup of Peace,' rather than a penalty cup."
Thereupon, he got up from his place, poured out a cup, and gave it to Fu Ming to drink, after which he said, "It's now the turn of Manager Han."
"Since Your Honor is present," said Han Tao-kuo, "how could I presume to precede you?"
"After all of you have done," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll call a game of my own."
Thereupon, Han Tao-kuo said, "I propose a game in which the first line must contain the name of a flying fowl, the second line the name of a fruit, the third line the name of a domino, and the fourth line the name of an official, all of which must be strung together in such a way as to make some kind of sense. If I throw a number that corresponds to that in any of the following six quatrains, I'll drink a penalty cup in front of the company.
From up in the sky there flies down an immortal crane,
Which alights in the garden and eats a fresh peach.
But it ends up being apprehended by a solitary goose,
And then taken to be presented to an education-intendant.
From up in the sky there flies down a sparrow hawk,
Which alights in the garden and eats a red cherry.
But it ends up being apprehended by a pair of nuns,
And then taken to be presented to a senior official.
From up in the sky there flies down an aged stork,
Which alights in the garden and eats water chestnuts.
But it ends up being apprehended by 'The Three Bonds,'
And taken to be presented to an assistant prefect.
From up in the sky there flies down a turtledove,
Which alights in the garden and eats a pomegranate.
But it ends up being apprehended by a red foursome,
And taken to be presented to a noble marquis.
From up in the sky there flies down a golden pheasant,
Which alights in the garden and eats bitter bamboo.
But it ends up being apprehended by the Five Peaks,
And taken to be presented to an imperial minister.
From up in the sky there flies down a pelican,
Which alights in the garden and eats an apple.
But it ends up being apprehended by the six spots,
And taken to be presented to a record keeper."
When he had finished with his game, it was the turn of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I'll just make four throws," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and if any of them correspond to the numbers in any line of the following quatrain, I'll drink a penalty cup
All six mouths convey a single touch of glowing sunset clouds,
Not to mention the colors of spring displayed by plum blossoms.
I elect to embrace red Hung-niang and give her a kiss,
Leaving the double-named Ying-ying to grieve by herself."
When he recited the line about the red Hung-niang, sure enough he threw a red four.
When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, he said, "Brother, this coming winter you are bound to be promoted to a higher office. This throw of a lucky red four indicates an impending cause for celebration."
Thereupon, he poured out a large cup of wine and gave it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to drink, while, at the same time, summoning the three boy actors, Li Ming and company, to play and sing for their entertainment in honor of the occasion. The party continued until the late watches of the night before breaking up.
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the boy actors off and then looked on as the servants cleared things away. He gave directions that Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Ts'ui Pen, and Lai-pao should take turns staying overnight in the newly opened shop, and he admonished them to be careful who they let into the house, after which, he returned to his own residence across the street. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
To resume our story, the next day Ying Po-chüeh brought Li Chih and Huang the Fourth with him to turn over some of the silver they owed Hsimen Ch'ing.
"On this occasion," they reported, "we only received a payment from the authorities of one thousand four hundred and fifty or sixty taels, which is not enough to meet all our obligations. So we have only been able to set aside these three hundred fifty taels of silver toward the payment of our debt to Your Honor. When we receive the next payment from the authorities, we should be able to pay off what is left of our obligation to you and will not dare to be remiss."
Ying Po-chüeh, from the sidelines, also put in a good word on their behalf. Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly took the proffered silver and directed Ch'en Ching-chi to bring the steelyard and weigh it out properly, after which he sent Li Chih and Huang the Fourth on their way. The silver remained lying on the table.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Brother Ch'ang the Second tells me that he has found the house he has been looking for, consisting of four rooms in all, front and back, and that the owner is willing to sell it for only thirty-five taels of silver. [30] When he came to speak to me about it, it happened to be just the time when I learned that the illness of my little boy was at a crisis stage, and I was too flustered to deal with it and sent him away. I don't know whether he has mentioned this to you or not."
"He did speak to me about it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and I said to him, 'You approached him at a bad time. His son was in critical condition, and he was all flustered about it. How could he have spared the attention to listen to what you had to say? You ought to hold the owner off until I have a chance to speak to our elder brother about it.'"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "That's all right then. You have something to eat, and then I'll entrust you with a sealed packet of fifty taels of silver. Today is an auspicious day for an undertaking of this kind. You can take this money and go with him to close the deal on the house, and tell him to use what is left over to open a limited-capital business in the front of his new house. The income he can realize every month ought to be enough for the two of them to get by on."
"This is a case of Brother's condescending to help him out in a scrape," said Ying Po-chüeh.
Before long, a table was set up, and a meal was laid out upon it.
Hsi-men Ch'ing partook of the repast with him and then said, "I won't detain you any longer. You can take the silver, and take care of this job for me."
"You ought to depute one of your servants to accompany me in delivering this silver," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you have to do is put it in your sleeve and get on with it."

"It's not that," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's just that today I've got another little obligation to take care of. The fact of the matter is, Brother, that today is the birthday of my cousin Tu the Third, and when I sent a present to him this morning, he sent a servant back to invite me over for a visit this afternoon. So I won't be able to report back to you on the completion of my errand. If you send a servant to accompany me, after the deal on the house is closed, I can send him back to report to you."
When he had finished explaining the situation, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "In that case, I'll have Wang Ching go with you."
He then summoned Wang Ching, and he set out with Ying Po-chüeh for the home of Ch'ang Shih-chieh. Ch'ang Shih-chieh was at home, and when he saw that Ying Po-chüeh had come, he invited him to come in and have a seat.
Ying Po-chüeh accordingly brought out the silver and showed it to Ch'ang Shih-chieh, saying, "His Honor, thus and thus, asked me to go with you today in order to close the deal on your house. But I don't have much free time because I've been invited for a drink by my cousin Tu the Third. Right now, as soon as I've finished with this business of yours, I'll have to go. That's why His Honor's servant has come with me. Once the deal on the house is concluded, I won't be able to report back to His Honor, but his servant will be able to report back to him instead."
"Quick. Bring some tea," Ch'ang Shih-chieh called out to his wife, and then he remarked, "Who could there be as magnanimous as our elder brother?"
As soon as they had finished their tea, he contacted the housing agent, and they set out together for New Market Street to weigh out the silver for the seller of the house, and draw up the deed of ownership. Ying Po-chüeh then told Wang Ching to take the deed and go home and show it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he confirmed to Ch'ang Shih-chieh that he was authorized to hold on to the remaining silver. Having done so, he took leave of Ch'ang Shih-chieh and went off to his engagement at the home of Tu the Third. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had looked over the deed for the house, he sent Wang Ching to give it back to Ch'ang Shih-chieh to keep. But no more of this. Truly:
If you seek help from someone, you must do it from a man of mettle;
If you want to help someone, you must do it when he needs it the most.[31]
Everything else among the myriad possibilities must be adjudged inferior;[32]
But who is there who understands that secret acts of virtue are the best?
The three luminaries cast shadows, but who can catch them;
The ten thousand things have no roots, they just arise of themselves.

After Guan'ge's death, Pan Jinlian was as pleased as could be. She would say, pretending to scold her maids: "Ha, you strumpet! You thought you were like the sun at its zenith, but now you are brought low. Now you are like a turtle dove brought down by the bow, stretching out its tongue in vain. You are like a chair without a back and nothing to lean upon. You are another old woman Wang, who sold her corn and can never have it again to grind, or an old procuress whose singing girls are dead who has no one else to depend upon. Yes, we are now on the same footing again."
Li Ping'er in her room could hear all this. She said nothing, but her tears flowed faster. With the anger in her heart and her great grief, her spirit drooped more and more and she had no peace even in her dreams. Her appetite decreased day by day. On the second day after Guan'ge's funeral, Wu Yin'er went away.
Old woman Feng brought a maid, thirteen years old, and sold her to Sun Xue'e for five taels of silver. She was given the name Cui'er.
Li Ping'er never ceased to think of her baby, and there was a furious hatred within her for Jinlian. So her old illness returned; she had a continual issue of blood. Ximen Qing sent for Dr. Ren, but his medicine did her no good. It was like watering a rock; the more medicine she took, the worse she became. In less than a fortnight, she grew very ill and thin. All her beauty and charm left her and she looked like a handful of bones. Her sorrow was too great for her to bear.
One day, at the beginning of the ninth month, it was cold and the west wind blew chill. She was in her room alone. The bed was cold: the lonely moon cast its beams upon the window. She was thinking of her baby and sighed deeply several times. Suddenly she seemed to hear someone tapping on the window. She called her maid, but the maids were sleeping soundly and there was no reply. She rose from her bed, put on her shoes and an embroidered gown, went to the door, opened it and looked out. Hua Zixu was there with Guan'ge in his arms. He told her that he had a new house and asked her to go with him. But she would not leave Ximen Qing. She refused him and tried to take the child from him. He pushed her and made her fall upon the ground. Then she woke up and found it was a dream. Her body was bathed in sweat and she sobbed till dawn.
About this time, the merchandise that Laibao had bought in Nanjing arrived. Laibao sent Wang Xian before him to get the money to pay the duty. Ximen Qing wrote a letter and sent it to Rong Hai with a hundred taels of silver. He sent presents of wine, silk, and other things to the customs officer asking that, when the merchandise was checked, a lenient reckoning might be made. The shop was ready, and it was arranged that it should be opened on the fourth day of the ninth month. On that day the merchandise was brought, twenty large loads of it. Kinsmen and friends sent presents and scrolls to be hung up in the new shop, and there were twenty guests or more. Magistrate Xia sent a man with gifts and red favors; Master Qiao sent twelve musicians. Ximen Qing himself engaged Li Ming, Wu Hui and Zheng Chun. The two clerks, Gan and Han, were in the shop, one to check and test the silver, the other to determine the price of the goods. Cui Ben received the goods and set them in their proper place. Ximen Qing, in his ceremonial dress, burned paper offerings; then the relatives and friends offered the presents they had brought. Fifteen tables were laid in the hall. There was an abundance of food and, when all had taken their places, the musicians began to play. Everybody seemed to be present and the seats were all occupied. The three singers sang the song of the World's Beginning; the wine was passed around several times, and several courses of food were served. The musicians played and those in the company urged each other to drink. Ying Bojue and Xie Xida took the largest cups. They did not stop drinking till sunset. Then the guests departed, but Ximen Qing urged Uncle Wu, Uncle Shen, Uncle Han, Master Wen, Ying Bojue and Xie Xida to stay. The tables were relaid and they sat down again. This was the first day the shop had been open, and, when the clerks reckoned up, they found they had done business to the value of more than five hundred taels of silver. Ximen Qing was delighted. When the shop had been closed, he invited Gan, Han and Fu with Cui Ben, Ben the Fourth and Chen Jingji to join their party. When the musicians had finished playing, they were dismissed. Only the three singers remained to sing for them.
Ying Bojue was drunk. He went to the front to wash his hands. Then he said to Li Ming: "Who is that good-looking young singer with his hair in a knot?"
"Uncle," Li Ming said, "don't you know him? That is Zheng Feng's younger brother, Zheng Chun. A few days ago, his Lordship had a party with Zheng Aiyue at Zheng's house."
"Ah," Bojue said, "now I understand why she was at the funeral the other day." He went back to join Ximen Qing and the others.
"I see I have to congratulate you on a new brother-in-law," he said to Ximen Qing.
Ximen Qing laughed. "Don't talk nonsense," he said. He told Wang Jing to give Bojue a large cup of wine.
"What do you think about it, venerable Uncle?" Bojue said to Uncle Wu. "Don't you think he is punishing me without due cause?"
"I am punishing you, you dog, because of the lies you tell," Ximen Qing said.
Ying Bojue bent his head, considered for a while and said: "Very well, I will drink it. I don't suppose it will kill me. But I never drink without music. Kindly tell Zheng Chun to sing me a song."
The three boys came in together. Bojue said to Li Ming: "You and Wu Hui can go away. I only want Zheng Chun. I want him to play the zither and sing a song for me."
Xie Xida said to Zheng Chun: "Come and sing for your Uncle Ying." "Beggar Ying," said Ximen, "please understand that you will have to drink a cup of wine for every song he sings." He told Daian to set two great silver cups before Bojue. Zheng Chun took up his zither and sang.
A girl of sixteen years or so
Watching a pair of butterflies at play,
On the white wall rested her dainty shoulders
And dried her tears with tender fingers.
To her slave she said
Drive them away and make them play elsewhere.
When Zheng Chun had finished his song, he invited Ying Bojue to drink. Bojue did so. Daian quickly refilled his cup. Zheng Chun began again.
He passed beyond the sculptured screen and came to her
Leaning against the arbor of wild roses.
Shyly she pretended to put straight her phœnix pins.
She would not speak of what had passed the night before,
But smiled and gathered flowers to cast at him.
Bojue drank another cup of wine. Then he turned to Xie Xida. "This is too much for me," he said. "Two great cups of wine are more than I can manage."
"What, you foolish beggar!" Xie Xida said. "When you can't drink, you would make me drink for you? I am not your slave."
"Foolish beggar yourself," Bojue said. "When one of these days I get an official position, you certainly will be my slave."
"Oh, you dog," Ximen Qing said, "the only appointment you'll ever get will be that of musician in a brothel."
"Well, my boy," Bojue said, "if I am you shall have the hall."
Ximen Qing laughed. He said to Daian: "Go and fetch the knuckle cracker and crack this rascally beggar's knuckles."
Xie Xida went quietly over and tapped Bojue on the head. "Beggar," he said, "Master Wen is here, yet you talk all this nonsense."
"Master Wen is a man of learning," Bojue said. "He won't mind our being frivolous."
"You two gentlemen are my patron's very good friends," Master Wen said. "It is right and fitting that you should behave like this when drinking wine. Otherwise, enjoyment never could reach the pitch we desire. Happiness is in our hearts but it demands expression, and, when it is expressed, it is natural that we should let go a little."
Uncle Shen said to Ximen Qing: "Now let us try something else. Allow us to have a game of some sort—dice, or guessing fingers, or dominoes, and then a poem or a song or a tongue twister. He who fails must drink. That is fair, and there will be no disputes."
"An excellent idea!" Ximen Qing said. He poured a cup of wine, set it before Uncle Wu and asked him to begin.
Uncle Wu took up the dice box and said: "Gentlemen, I will begin, and after me, everyone in turn. I must have the name of a flower to correspond to the markings of the dice. The first word of the second sentence must be the same as the last word of the first. It must be a quotation from a song or a poem. He who fails must drink a large cup of wine. Here goes: I cast the first and get one point red. The red plum blossoms stand beside the white plum blossoms."
Uncle Wu cast the dice and got a two. He drank a cup of wine and passed the box to Uncle Shen.
"For the second cast: upon one stem I see two lotus blossoms. 'The lotus blossoms are the delight of the gaily colored mandarin ducks.' "
He threw a two, drank two cups of wine and passed the dice to Uncle Han.
"For the third cast," said Uncle Han, "I have three spring plums. 'The plums fall, but I do not put straight my hat.' "
He cast the dice but did not say what turned up. Then he drank his wine and gave the box to Master Wen.
"The fourth cast makes the *Zhuang Yuan* red," said Master Wen. " 'Red and purple are not the wear for common men.' "
Master Wen drank a cup of wine. It was Ying Bojue's turn. "I can't read a word," Bojue said. "You will get no quotation from me. I shall have to give you a tongue twister."
Flip-flop, flip-flop, a fast-footed old fellow
Bearing beans by the bushel in his right hand
And a beggar's broad begging bag firm in his left
Scuffled steadily straight to his front.
A mangy mongrel, all yellow and white
Bit the beggar's broad begging bag.
Flip-flop, flip-flop, the fast-footed old fellow
Dropped the basket with the bushel of beans
Strove stoutly to stampede the mangy mongrel all yellow and white
But who can say whether he beat the dog, or the dog beat him?
Ximen Qing laughed. "You boil-breaking, mad creature!" he said. "Have you ever seen a man drive off a dog with his fist?"
"Well, he shouldn't have gone out without a stick. Nowadays, all beggars take sticks with them. That's the only way they can deal with the dogs."
"Sir," said Xie Xida, "Beggar Ying is speaking for himself. He is the beggar here."
"We shall have to punish him," Ximen Qing said. "He hasn't played the game properly. Now, friend Xie, it is your turn."
"I will give you a better tongue twister than his," Xie Xida said.
On the wall there is a bit of broken brick.
Beside the wall there is a horse.
If the bit of broken brick falls upon the horse,
Will the bit of broken brick break the horse's back,
Or will the horse break the bit of broken brick?
"You said mine was no good," Bojue said. "Do you flatter yourself that your 'bit of broken brick' was any better? If you ask me, your wife is that horse and I the bit of broken brick. I and your wife would make a fine pair. It would be a case of a skinny donkey going around a broken millstone."
"Your wife, the old whore," said Xie Xida, "has only black beans to feed the pigs with. If she offered them to a dog, the dog would refuse them."
They joked with one another and each filled up his own cup. It was Han Daoguo's turn. "Master, you are here," Han Daoguo said. "How dare I go before you?"
"Don't stand on ceremony," Ximen Qing told him. "We must follow the order of the game." Han Daoguo said:
"The fifth cast gives the winter plums. 'Among the plums, I meet an angel.'"
Then it was Ximen's turn. "I will throw a six," he said. "The sixth cast fills the sky with stars. 'The stars are cold: the dark green waters mirror them.'"
Ximen did throw a six. Ying Bojue said: "I am sure promotion will come to you this winter. Fortune will turn your way." He filled a cup for Ximen.
Li Ming and the other singers came and sang for them. The party did not break up until the night watch had sounded. Ximen Qing dismissed the boys, watched the servants clear everything away, and told the four clerks to take charge in turn and see carefully to the doors and windows. Then he went home.
The next day, Ying Bojue came with Li and Huang to make a settlement of their debt. They said to Ximen Qing: "So far we have only got back fourteen hundred and fifty taels. That is not enough to cover the expenses; we can only offer his Lordship three hundred and fifty. When we receive the next payment from the authorities, we will pay the remainder." Bojue spoke on their behalf, and Ximen Qing told Chen Jingji to weigh the money and accept it.
Huang and Li then went away, leaving the money on the table. Ximen Qing said to Ying Bojue: "Brother Chang told me that he had got a house. He wants thirty-five taels. He came the other day, but I could not attend to him because the baby was ill. I don't know whether he mentioned the matter to you or not."
"I told him he had no business to worry you when your little son was ill," Bojue said. "I said you couldn't be expected to discuss matters of that sort when you were so terribly anxious. 'Keep the landlord quiet,' I said to him, 'and I will see our brother and get it fixed up for you.'"
"We will have something to eat and then you can take him fifty taels," Ximen said. "This is an auspicious day and he can settle the matter now. Tell him to spend anything that is left over on setting up a small shop so that he can make a little money for himself. That ought to be enough for his wife and himself."
Bojue thanked him. Food was brought, and they ate it together. Afterwards, Ximen told Bojue that he would not detain him, and asked him to go and arrange about Chang's house.
"I should like one of your servants to go with me," Ying Bojue said.
"Nonsense," said Ximen Qing. "Put the money in your sleeve and take it to him. That's all that's necessary."
"I don't mean that," Bojue said, "but I have other matters to attend to. It is my cousin Du's birthday. I sent him a present this morning and he sent a boy to ask me to go and see him this afternoon. I shan't be able to come back and report to you. If you will let one of your boys come with me, he can come and tell you when we have arranged about the house."
"Wang Jing shall go with you," Ximen said.
Wang Jing went with Bojue to see Chang Zhijie. Chang was at home and invited Bojue to go in. Bojue showed him the money. "His Lordship," he said, "told me to come and arrange with you about the house. I am very busy and have to go and see my cousin Du. Let us get the matter settled quickly. Then I must go."
Chang Zhijie hastily told his wife to make some tea. "His Lordship's really very kind," he said. "I can think of no one else who'd have done it." They drank their tea and went to New Market Street. There they signed the contract and paid the landlord. Bojue told Wang Jing to go home and report to his master; then he gave the remaining silver to Chang Zhijie and went to see his cousin. Ximen Qing looked at the contract and told Wang Jing to take it back to Chang Zhijie.

**Han Tao-kuo Prepares an Entertainment for Hsi-men Ch'ing; Li P'ing-erh Falls Ill & Painfully Observes the Double Yang Festival**

Last year on the Double Yang Festival my sorrow knew no limit;
When the memory arises in my mind I am ever more brokenhearted.
The autumn colors and the setting sun are both pallid and wan;
My tear-traces and my lonely thoughts are equally desolating.
The migrating geese fly in formation but bear me no letter;
The yellow chrysanthemums lack feeling but are still fragrant.
I am all too aware that recently I have become quite emaciated;
And often gaze into the phoenix mirror to examine my features.[1]

One day in the evening, when Han Tao-kuo's job in the silk goods store was over, he went home and slept until the middle of the night, when his wife, Wang Liu-erh, opened a discussion with him. "You and I have been patronized by him," she said. "And, on this occasion, we have made so much money out of it. Don't you think we should throw a party and invite him over for a visit? Not to mention the fact that he has just lost a child, and we ought to help him recover from his depression; it will hardly cost us a great deal to entertain him for half a day. Not only will it put us on a better footing with him, but our young employee, who will probably be headed south any day now, will observe that we are on more intimate terms with our employer than anyone else."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," said Han Tao-kuo. "Tomorrow is the fifth, which is an unlucky day.[2] But on the sixth we can hire a cook to prepare a feast, and engage the services of two singing girls. If we write out a formal invitation, I can go to his residence to deliver it in person, and invite His Honor to come for a visit and let us help him dispel his melancholy. In the evening I'll go to spend the night in the shop."

"What's the point of engaging any singing girls for no good reason?" said Wang Liu-erh. I'm afraid, after he's had something to drink, he may want to come into this room here for a visit, and they'll be in the way. There's a girl named Second Sister Shen who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. She's a young woman, dresses stylishly, and can sing the songs that are popular these days. We ought to arrange for her to come sing for us. Then, in the evening, when the drinking is over, if His Honor comes back into this room, I can simply send her next door."

"That's a good suggestion," said Han Tao-kuo.

Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, Han Tao-kuo went to the shop, where he asked Licentiate Wen Pi-ku to write out an invitation for him, and then went across the street to see Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After greeting him with a bow, he said, "If Your Honor doesn't have any other engagements tomorrow, we've prepared a cup of watery wine at our place and would like to invite Your Honor, if you have nothing else to do, to deign to visit with us for a while in the hope of dissipating your melancholy."

He then handed the invitation to him.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read it, he said, "Why should you have put yourself to so much trouble? It happens that I have no other engagements tomorrow, so, after I come back from the yamen, I'll come to your place."

Han Tao-kuo took leave of him and went out the gate and over to the shop, where he carried on his business as usual.

The next morning, he took out some silver, gave it to his young employee, Hu Hsiu, and told him to take a basket and go out onto the street to buy some chicken feet, goose and duck, fresh fish, and other comestibles appropriate for a drinking party; and engaged a cook to take care of preparing the food in his home. He also sent a page boy ahead of time to hire a sedan chair and go to fetch Second Sister Shen. Wang Liu-erh, for her part, along with her maidservants, prepared a supply of:

Fine tea and fine water,
swept out the parlor, dusted the chairs and tables, and awaited Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival.

She waited until the afternoon, when Ch'in-t'ung came to deliver a jug of grape wine. Only after that did Hsi-men Ch'ing show up, riding in an open sedan chair, accompanied by Tai-an and Wang Ching. When he arrived at the door and alighted from his sedan chair, he was wearing a "loyal and tranquil hat" [3] on his head, a long gown of jet moiré, and white-soled boots.

Han Tao-kuo ushered him into the parlor and, after exchanging the customary amenities, said, "We are most grateful to Your Honor for the wine you have bestowed upon us."

At the upper end of the room there was placed a single folding chair, upon which Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat.

Before long, Wang Liu-erh came out, dressed in formal attire. On her head she wore a fret of silver filigree and a kingfisher blue crepe headband with purfled gold-spangled edging, held in place all around with gold-encrusted cricket-shaped stickpins. She was wearing a white blouse of Hang-chou chiffon that opened down the middle, with a vest of jade-colored moiré, over a gosling-yellow drawnwork skirt. On her feet she wore shoes of raven-black iridescent silk with high heels and gold-spangled toes. From her ears dangled a pair of clove-shaped pendant earrings. It was evident that she had taken pains to adorn herself as elegantly as possible.

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times and then went back to the rear of the house to see to the tea.

Before long, Wang Ching came out carrying two teacups in raised saucers of red lacquer with gold tracery, containing tea steeped with osmanthus and cured green soybeans, further enhanced with eight precious ingredients. Han Tao-kuo first took one of the cups and, raising it up respectfully, presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which he took the other cup for himself and sat down to one side in order to keep him company. When they had finished drinking it, Wang Ching came in and took away the teacups.

Han Tao-kuo then initiated the conversation by saying, "Thanks to Your Honor's patronage:

My obligations to you are so great,
they cannot be described. I have been away from home for some time, during which you have favored my insignificant wife with your attentions and promoted Wang Ching to the position of a servant in your household.
My gratitude for your kindness is not shallow.[4]

Today, in consultation with my wife, although we have nothing adequate to express our filial respect, we have prepared a cup of watery wine and invited Your Honor for a visit. The other day, when our little brother passed away, although I was able to be there, my wife, because she was suffering from a cold, was unable to come to your residence to offer her condolences and feared that you might be annoyed with us. Today we have invited you over in the hope that we may be able to help dispel your grief, on the one hand, and that you may forgive our negligence, on the other."

"It doesn't amount to anything," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear I've put the two of you to a lot of trouble."

As he spoke, what should he see but Wang Liu-erh, who sat down on a low stool by his side and, turning to Han Tao-kuo, said, "Have you mentioned it to His Honor, or not?"

"No, I haven't mentioned it to him yet," said Han Tao-kuo.

"What is it?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"He thought that today we should engage the services of two girls from the licensed quarter to entertain Your Honor," she explained. "But we were afraid that Your Honor might not find them satisfactory, so we didn't venture to do so. However, there is a girl surnamed Shen, who goes by the name Second Sister Shen, who frequents the house of Yüeh the Third next door. Her repertory includes every kind of currently popular song, both long and short, and she can even perform *shu-lo*, or recitatives.[5] When I visited your residence on a former occasion, I had a chance to hear that performer named Big Sister Yü, but her singing was only mediocre, not as good as that of Second Sister Shen. For that reason, I've invited her to come sing for Your Honor today, but I don't know what you may think of the idea. If she meets with your approval, you can engage her to come to your residence and entertain your womenfolk. She is constantly busy performing at various houses, so if you wish to engage her services, you should do so several days in advance, and she will not presume to let you down."

"Since you've engaged the girl, that's fine," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Ask her to come out, so I can have a look at her."

At this juncture, Han Tao-kuo said to Tai-an, "Why don't you go over and help His Honor off with his formal clothes."

Meanwhile, a table was set up for their repast, and Hu Hsiu brought in the appetizers to go with their wine, which consisted of preserved duck, dried shrimp, seafood, spareribs, and the like.

Thereupon, Wang Liu-erh, who had opened the wine and heated it, stood to one side with flagon in hand, while Han Tao-kuo first proffered a cup to Hsi-men Ch'ing and then sat down to preside over the feast. Only after this was Second Sister Shen summoned into their presence.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened his eyes wide and took a good look at her.

Her cloudy locks were enclosed in a lofty chignon,[6]
Held in place with a modest selection of ornaments,
And an inconspicuous display of combs and hairpins.
Underneath her green blouse and crimson skirt,
Appeared the upturned points
of her golden lotuses;
Atop her peach-colored cheeks and painted face,
There were depicted a pair of
delicate spring peaks.
A pair of lapis lazuli pendant earrings
dangled beneath her ears;
Silver teeth, as white as glutinous rice,
gleamed between her lips.
Facing in his direction:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times.

"Please stand up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "May I ask how old you are at present?"

"I'm twenty years old," said Second Sister Shen.

"And how many songs are there in your repertory?" he went on to ask.

"I have committed to memory any number of songs and song suites," replied Second Sister Shen.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Han Tao-kuo to provide her with a seat at their side. Second Sister Shen came forward and bowed once again before venturing to sit down.

She started out by taking up her psaltery and performing the song suite that begins with the tune "Decorous and Pretty," the first line of which is:

Just now I was enjoying myself in the
Autumn Fragrance Pavilion.[7]

When she had finished, a course of soup and rice was consumed and was replaced with another course, whereupon she went on to perform the song suite that begins with the tune "Powdery Butterflies," the first line of which is:

Five thousand rebel troops.[8]

By the time she finished, the wine had run out, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed a servant to take away her psaltery and hand her the *p'i-p'a*, saying, "Have her sing a few current popular songs for me."

Second Sister Shen, who was only too happy to show off the fact that she was:

A practiced performer and an accomplished singer,
thereupon:
Lightly flaunted her silken sleeves,
Gently strummed the silken strings,
and:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
with her instrument tuned to a low pitch, performed a song to a medley version of the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":

For some time now,
I have not met my lover face-to-face.
My innermost feelings,
Are hard to deliver, hard to transmit.
But, in my heart, I sincerely yearn for you.
On my account, you are totally preoccupied.
In our relations with each other,
We make no distinctions between us.[9]
Our promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas,
Are fixed firmly in our minds.
You are just like a reincarnation
of Ts'ui Ying-ying.[10]
But, unfortunately, I am not in that
temple in P'u-tung.[11]
I could not help myself after once having caught sight
of your amorous glance.
Come!
Your jade features evoke an air of spring.
Your flowery countenance is beyond compare.
Once having heard the sound of your seductive voice,
I try to penetrate the eastern wall with my gaze,
And tire of loitering in the western bower.

To the same tune:

As for my loved one,
The two of us are totally preoccupied.
What obsesses me is that we are unable,
To exchange looks with eyes and eyebrows.
Once you departed, I have only my lonely pillow.

The pillow is cold, the coverlet remains;
Alone I confront my jasper-inlaid zither.
My sick body is like a stick of kindling;[12]
My waist has become emaciated.
I realize that it is difficult for you
to leave your mother's side,
But this waiting only makes my heart
feel the more inebriated.
I am all on tenterhooks as I keep company
with this unfeeling lamp.
Come!
On hearing the sound of the wind rustling the bamboo,
I assume that my loved one has come,
And hastily step out of my study.
But it is only the gentle swaying of the flower shadows,[13]
In the moonlight that is as limpid as water.[14]
When she had finished singing these two songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope," there was a call for something to drink, and Han Tao-kuo asked his wife to prepare some more wine.
After filling a cup to the brim and offering it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he then went on to say, "Second Sister Shen, you know some more good songs to the tune 'Shrouding the Southern Branch.' Why don't you sing a couple of them for His Honor?"
Second Sister Shen then switched modes and sang a song to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch":
When we first met,
That girl of my dreams,
Was in the springtime of her youth,
no more than twenty.
Her raven locks took shape as two black clouds;
Fragrant red defined a single daub of ruby lips.[15]
Her cheeks were like glowing peaches
or tender bamboo shoots.
If she had been born into painted bowers
or orchid-scented halls,[16]
She would surely have been fated
to be a lady.
Alas, she has ended up in the licensed quarter,
Serving in a low-grade occupation.
If she were only able to marry
out of her profession,
It would certainly be better than abandoning
the old to welcome the new.[17]
To the same tune:
When we first met,
That captivating wench,
With her moonlike face and flowerlike countenance,[18]
was a rare commodity in the demimonde.
The handful of her slender waist deserved a painting;
Her clever disposition was altogether inimitable.
My only regret is that I did not
meet her sooner.
My only wish is that at the festive board,
before the flowing cup,
We might sip wine and croon softly,[19]
locked in each others' arms;
Each glance conveying true devotion,
Every look satisfying our hunger.
Though it should provide but half a moment
of gratification,
It would suffice to dissipate melancholy
and dispel sorrow.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing listened to these two songs to the tune "Shrouding the Southern Branch," he was reminded of his first visit to Cheng Ai-yüeh, and his heart was filled with delight. He was also impressed by the fact that his hosts had engaged a performer who understood music so well.
Wang Liu-erh, standing at his side, filled another cup of wine to the brim and offered it to him with an ingratiating smile, saying, "Father, enjoy the wine at your leisure. This sample of what Second Sister Shen can do is just a drop in the bucket. She knows a great many more songs than this. In the future, when you have the time, you can send a sedan chair for her, and let her entertain your womenfolk."
She then went on to say, "As for that singer that I've run into at your residence?"
"That would be Big Sister Yü," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She has been performing at my place for quite some years now."
"I guarantee," pronounced Wang Liu-erh, "that if Second Sister Shen were to sing at your place, she would be certain to outperform her. Father, if you wish to engage her services at some future date, let me know beforehand, and I can send a servant to pick her up with a sedan chair and deliver her to your residence."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said, "Second Sister Shen, if I were to send someone for you on the Double Yang Festival, would you be able to come or not?"
"Your Honor," said Second Sister Shen, "how can you talk that way? You have but to call for me, and I would hardly dare to turn you down."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she had a way with words, he was utterly delighted.
Not long afterwards, while they were:
Exchanging cups as they drank,
Wang Liu-erh began to feel that they were not able to express themselves freely in her presence, so, after having her perform several more song suites, she quietly said to Han Tao-kuo, "Get our servant Chao-ti to escort her over to Yüeh the Third's place for the night."
As she was about to go, and respectfully took her leave of Hsi-men Ch'ing, he groped a packet containing three mace of silver out of his sleeve and gave it to her with which to buy replacement strings for her instruments. Second Sister Shen hastily responded:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
by kowtowing to him in order to express her gratitude.
Hsi-men Ch'ing reminded her of their agreement, saying, "On the eighth, I'll send someone to fetch you."
"Father," said Wang Liu-erh, "just send Wang Ching to speak to me about it, and I'll send my servant after her."
Second Sister Shen then bade farewell to Han Tao-kuo and his wife and, with Chao-ti escorting her, went next door. When Han Tao-kuo had seen Second Sister Shen on her way, and informed his wife of the fact, he went off himself to spend the night at the shop, leaving his wife to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company.
When they had played dice and continued drinking for a while, they began to hunger after each other. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on the pretext of the need to relieve himself, went into the woman's bedroom, where the two of them proceeded to lock the door and enjoy themselves. Wang Ching, thereupon, took the lamps and candles out to the side room in the front courtyard, where he fell to drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung.
Meanwhile, at some point in the evening, the young man, Hu Hsiu, had gone back to the kitchen and stolen a few cups too many of wine. After the hired cook had been dismissed, he went into the anteroom for the display of Buddhist effigies and ancestral tablets that was adjacent to Wang Liu-erh's bedroom, put a mat down on the floor, and went to sleep. After sleeping there for a while, he got back to his feet.
It so happened that there was only a board partition between the room where he was and the bedroom next door. All of a sudden, he heard the woman in the other room making a commotion. Hu Hsiu noticed that there was lamplight visible through a crack in the partition and assumed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had left, and that Han Tao-kuo was in the bedroom sleeping with his wife. Surreptitiously extracting a hairpin from his head, he used it to poke a hole in the paper that had been pasted over the crack and proceeded to peek through it. He saw that the other room was brightly lit with lamps and candles, and that, unexpectedly, it was Hsi-men Ch'ing who was there with the woman, and that they were just in the thick of things.
Clearly and distinctly,[20]
he could see that the woman's two legs were suspended by her foot bindings from the top of the bed, and that Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing only a satin jacket on the upper part of his body, while the lower part was completely exposed. The two of them were busy on the edge of the bed, where:
One comes, the other goes;
One moves, the other rests.[21]
As he slammed away at her:
The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.
Everything conceivable in the way of:
Obscene noises and lascivious words,[22]
issued from her mouth as the two of them struggled to make themselves one.
After a while, he heard the woman say, "My own daddy! If you want to burn moxa on this whore of yours, you can burn me wherever you like. This whore of yours would not presume to stop you. After all, the body of this whore of yours is yours to command. What is there to worry about?"
"My only fear is that your husband might object," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"That cuckold!" the woman said. "How could he muster the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to object to anything you did? Who does he depend on for his livelihood, after all?"
"Since you're so irrevocably committed to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "after I've made enough silver off the existing consignment of goods, I'll send him, along with Lai-pao, for a long sojourn in the south, where he can set up an office and act as my purchasing agent. I've got Manager Kan Jun here at home to take care of sales, so all I lack is a buyer to take charge of acquiring the merchandise at that end."
"After he's come back from this second trip of his," said the woman, "send him off again by all means. What's the point of keeping him idle at home? He says himself that he's habituated to being away from home and would be happy to go on the road. He's been acquainted with life on the rivers and lakes since his childhood, and there's little he doesn't know about business and merchandising. If you choose to patronize him, that would be just fine. And when he returns, I'll find another bedmate for him. I don't need him anymore now that I've committed myself completely to you. You can stick him anywhere you want as far as I'm concerned. If anything I say is false, may the worthless body of this whore of yours rot completely away!"
"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there's no need for you to swear oaths like that."
Who would have thought that every last thing that occurred between the two of them was so clearly overheard by Hu Hsiu that he might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
Earlier that evening, while Han Tao-kuo was still at home, he had been unable to find Hu Hsiu and assumed that he had gone to the shop to sleep. When he arrived at the silk goods store and asked about it, the young employees, Wang Hsien and Jung Hai, said that he had not come there. Han Tao-kuo, thereupon, returned home, called for someone to open the door, and looked everywhere for Hu Hsiu, without finding him, though he noticed that Wang Ching was drinking with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung in the front courtyard. When Hu Hsiu, recognizing his voice, realized that he had come home, he hastily lay down again on the mat and pretended to be asleep. In due course, Han Tao-kuo, having lit a lamp and made his way into the Buddhist chapel, found Hu Hsiu lying on the floor, where he was snoring loudly through his nostrils.
Kicking him awake with his foot, he cursed him, saying, "You lousy wild dog of a condemned jailbird! Why aren't you up and about? I assumed that you had already gone to the shop to sleep, but it turns out that you were here all the time, happily sacked out. Get up, and come along with me."
Hu Hsiu, thereupon, got to his feet, made a show of rubbing his eyes, and pretended to be stupefied with drink as he followed Han Tao-kuo back to the shop.
Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing's bout with the woman continued for nearly two hours before coming to a conclusion. In the process, he burnt moxa on the middle of Wang Liu-erh's chest, the top of her mons veneris, and her tail-bone, three places in all. [23] The woman finally got up, put on her clothes, called for a maidservant to dish up some water, and washed her hands. Thereupon:
More warmed wine was served, and
Further dainties were provided,
as they continued to engage each other in flirtatious conversation.
Only after drinking a few more cups of wine did Hsi-men Ch'ing mount his horse and set off for home, attended by Tai-an, Wang Ching, and Ch'in-t'ung. By the time they arrived, it was already the second watch of the night, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
Li P'ing-erh was lying in her bed, and when she saw how drunk he was when he came in, she asked him, "Whose place have you been drinking at today?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing explained at length how, "Han Tao-kuo and his wife invited me to their place out of a desire to help dispel my depression over the loss of our child. With this end in view, they engaged the services of a professional female singer named Second Sister Shen, who's still a young woman, and really knows how to sing. In fact, she's better than Big Sister Yü. Tomorrow, on the eve of the Double Yang Festival, I'm going to send a servant with a sedan chair to bring her here so she can sing for all of you for a day or two, and help relieve your depression. Even though you may remain heartsick about it, you oughtn't to let it preoccupy your attention to such an extent."
When he had finished speaking, he wanted to call for Ying-ch'un to help him off with his clothes so he could sleep with Li P'ing-erh, but she said, "Don't you suggest any such thing. I am hemorrhaging all the time down below, and my maidservant is engaged in preparing my medicine over the fire. You go and spend the night in someone else's room. Haven't you noticed what a fine state I'm in all day long? I've hardly got a breath of life left in me, and you still want to pester me this way."

"My darling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I can't do without you. What would you have me do?"
Li P'ing-erh gave him a sidelong glance and laughed, saying. "Who would believe that:
Specious mouth and throwaway tongue,
of yours? Do you expect me to believe that when I die in the near future, you won't be able to do without me?"
"In any case," she went on to say, "you can wait until I'm feeling better before coming to spend the night with me. It won't be any too late then."
After sitting with her a while longer, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "That's enough of that! Since you don't want me to stay here, I'll go over and spend the night with P'an the Sixth."
"That's right," said Li P'ing-erh, "you go ahead and do that! It will spare you the need to sacrifice your desires. After all, she's burning up waiting for you over there, like:
A fire within a fire.[24]
Why should you neglect her by insisting upon barging into my place to pester me?"
"If that's the way you're going to talk about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't go."
"I was only kidding," said Li P'ing-erh with a smile. "You go ahead and go."
With that, she succeeded in sending Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way.
Li P'ing-erh then got up and sat on the edge of the bed, while Ying-ch'un helped her to take her medicine. As she took up the medicine, she couldn't prevent a cascade of tears from pouring, with a gush, over her fragrant cheeks, and she gave vent to a long sigh before downing the cup of medicine. Truly:
The unlimited tribulations that produced
the sorrow in her heart,[25]
Were all turned over to the yellow oriole
to express in its cries.
We will say no more, at present, about how Li P'ing-erh took her medicine and lay down to sleep, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing. When he arrived at the quarters of P'an Chin-lien, she had just told Ch'un-mei to cover the lamp and had gotten into bed to go to sleep.
Unexpectedly, Hsi-men Ch'ing pushed open the door and came in, saying, "My child, I see you've already gone to bed."
"Well, what a surprise!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "What wind has blown you into this room of mine?"
"And whose place have you been drinking at today?" she went on to ask.
"Manager Han Tao-kuo," Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "upon coming back from his trip to the South, and seeing that I had lost my child, on the one hand, in order to help relieve my depression, and, on the other hand, to express his gratitude for my patronage in sending him on this expedition, invited me over to his place for a visit."
"While he was abroad," remarked Chin-lien, "you certainly took advantage of the opportunity to patronize his wife."
"You're talking about the household of my own manager," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could there be any such thing?"
"Where the household of an employee is concerned," pronounced Chin-lien, "there could well be just such a thing. I suppose you've kept a cord wrapped around your waist, lest you might be tempted to violate that boundary! You think you can be up to your tricks, while keeping me in the dark, do you? I know all about it, and I'm fed up with you, to boot. During the celebration of your birthday, that lousy whore showed up here, didn't she? You had surreptitiously slipped her one of Li P'ing-erh's pins in the shape of the character for long life.
You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail.
By so doing, you enabled her to wear it here in order to show off where she stood. The First Lady, Meng the Third, and the whole household all noticed it. And when I interrogated her about it, her face turned crimson. Didn't she tell you about it? So today you found your way over there again, did you? Lousy, shameless, good-for-nothing that you are! The painted faces available to you in your own household aren't enough for you, are they? Instead, who knows why, you're taken by that overgrown pumpkin head of a long-faced whore. What with her:
Phony eyebrows and bogus airs,[26]
her temples adorned with long spit curls, the garish red color with which she daubs her lips, so her mouth looks like nothing so much as a bloody cunt, she's a fine woman indeed, nothing but a lanky, rosewood-complexioned, swarthy whore! I can't imagine what you see in her. No wonder you've taken that cuckold's brother-in-law, Wang Ching, under your wing, so you can use him to carry messages back and forth between you, early or late."
Hsi-men Ch'ing adamantly refused to acknowledge anything, but simply laughed, saying, "You crazy little slave! All you do is talk nonsense. How could any such thing have occurred? Today it was her husband who entertained me. She didn't even put in an appearance."
"You think you can fool me with that sort of talk, do you?" the woman said. "Who doesn't know that her husband is an open cuckold:
Grazing sheep on the one hand, while
Gathering kindling on the other?
He's simply turning his wife over to you as a means of getting a hand on your business and making money for himself out of it. You simpleminded good-for-nothing! You might just as well be:
Listening for the report of a blunderbuss
being fired forty li away."
Upon noticing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken off his outer clothes and was sitting on the edge of the bed, the woman stuck her hand out, pulled open his trousers, and groped out his organ, which was limp and flaccid, and still had a clasp fastened around it.
"There you go again," she said. "You're just like:
A preserved duck that's been put into
the pot to stew:
Its body has turned soft, but its beak
is as hard as ever.
The mute testimony is there for all to see.[27]
You ruffian! You've been fooling around with that whore all day before coming home, so that your organ is:
As soft as driveling snot and thick as gravy,
yet you remain as hard-mouthed as ever. You can swear all you like. I'll get Ch'un-mei to bring a bottle of cold water, and if you dare drink it, I'll acknowledge that you've got guts. If you stop to consider it:
This salt is just as salty;
This vinegar just as sour.
When a bald man puts a hairnet on his head;
There's no need to brush it any further.
Enough is enough! If one were to believe what you say, you could seduce every woman in the world and get away with it. What a lousy shameless article you are! You're just a big good-for-nothing with too much fire in your eyes. It's a good thing you're a man. If you were a woman, you'd be:
Laid by every man in the street, and
Fucked by every guy in the alley.[28]
You're in the same class as an itinerant shoemaker;
Wherever two hides meet you'll cobble them together."[29]
These few lines of invective reduced Hsi-men Ch'ing to staring with wide-open eyes, as he made his way onto the bed. He then told Ch'un-mei to heat some distilled spirits for him, took a pill out of his cylindrical gold pillbox, put it in his mouth, and swallowed it.
Lying face up on the pillow, he then said to the woman, "My child, get down on your knees and suck your daddy off. If you can get it to stand up, it will be your good fortune."
The woman made a show of distaste, saying, "That filthy thing! You've been boring into that whore's hole with it, and now you want me to suck it off for you. That really shows how much you care for me!"
"You crazy little whore!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk nonsense. I never did any such thing."
"If you never did any such thing," the woman said, "you'll have to swear an oath on that fleshy body of yours before you can get me to believe it."
After bantering back and forth for a while, she tried to get Hsi-men Ch'ing to get out of bed and wash himself off with water, but he refused to get out of bed. The woman then pulled a figured handkerchief out of her sleeve and proceeded to wipe his organ off with it before engulfing it with her ruby lips and sucking it audibly for some time. In no time at all, she had manipulated it until:
Its protuberances swelled and its head sprang up,
as it became engorged with rage.
He then positioned himself astride the woman's body and allowed his jade chowrie handle to penetrate her vagina from the rear, while he lifted up her thighs with his two hands, assumed a squatting position, and went to work. As he gave himself over to slamming away at her:
The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly;
In the light cast by the lamp,[30]
He savored the sight as it went in and out.
The woman knelt by the pillow side and raised her hips in response to his movements for some time. Hsi-men Ch'ing's ardor was still unslaked, so he had the woman turn over and face upwards, while he applied some of the pink aphrodisiac ointment to his organ, and plunged back into her. Taking her pair of feet in his hands, he arched his back and alternately submerged and exposed the knob of his glans, lifting her body into the air as he rammed away at her two or three hundred times.
The woman, finding his assault difficult to withstand, closed her eyes and cried out inarticulately in a trembling voice, "Daddy! On this occasion you'd better take it easy with me. You had no need to use that aphrodisiac."
"You little whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing blurted out at her. "Are you afraid of me, or not? Will you ever dare to treat me so disrespectfully again?"
"My own daddy!" the woman cried out. "That's enough. If you'll only be a little easier on me, I'll never dare offend you again. Daddy, slow down a bit. You're mussing my hairdo."
The two of them:
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
for half the night before tiring out and going to sleep.
To make a long story short, it was not long before the time came for the celebration of the Double Yang Festival.
Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Wu Yüeh-niang. "When Manager Han Tao-kuo invited me to his place the other day, we were entertained by a singer named Second Sister Shen. She is attractive and knows how to sing, as well as how to perform on both the *p'i-p'a* and the psaltery. I've sent a page boy to fetch her, and when she arrives, I propose that we keep her here for two days, so she can entertain the lot of you."
Thereupon, he ordered that the kitchen staff should prepare the appropriate wine, fruit, and other delicacies, and that in the great summerhouse in the garden, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, a large Eight Immortals table should be set up, and the bamboo blinds let down, so that the entire family could enjoy a feast there, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival.
It was not long before Wang Ching arrived, escorting Second Sister Shen in a sedan chair, and she was ushered into the rear compound, where she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and the other ladies. Yüeh-niang saw that she was young, and good-looking, and, upon inquiry, was told that she was not able to perform too many song suites, but that when it came to the various kinds of independent songs, such as those to the tunes "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" and "Shrouding the Southern Branch," or recitatives, she could perform a fair number. After she had been provided with tea and something to eat, she sang two song suites for them in the rear compound, after which they adjourned to the garden, where the feast had been prepared.
That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go to the yamen but stayed at home in order to supervise the planting of chrysanthemums. Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o, as well as Hsi-men Ta-chieh, were all invited to take their places at the table, while Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Ying-ch'un, and Lan-hsiang stood in attendance at their side to serve the wine. Second Sister Shen also stood by with her *p'i-p'a* to entertain them. Li P'ing-erh was in her quarters, feeling poorly in her present condition, and had to be asked repeatedly before she made a belated appearance, looking for all the world like a tree that had been felled by the wind. It cost her a considerable effort to pull herself together sufficiently to come out and sit down by Hsi-men Ch'ing. Everyone urged her to drink, but she hardly drank anything at all.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, noticing that:
Her face exhibited a worried hue, and
Her eyebrows remained contracted,[31]
said to her, "Sister Li, see if you can't relax. We'll have Second Sister Shen sing a song for you."
"Tell her what song you'd like to hear," said Meng Yü-lou, "so she can sing it for you."
But Li P'ing-erh remained adamantly silent.
As they were drinking, Wang Ching suddenly came in, and said, "Master Ying the Second and Uncle Ch'ang the Second have come."
"Invite Ying the Second and Ch'ang the Second to have a seat in the small summerhouse," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be there directly."
"Uncle Ch'ang the Second has had a porter deliver two gift boxes, which are sitting outside," reported Wang Ching.
Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "These presents must be intended to express his gratitude for my help in closing the deal on that new house of his."
"We'll have to prepare something for their entertainment," said Yüeh-niang. "We can't let them go without an appropriate response. You go keep them company, while I arrange here to have some refreshments prepared for them."
Before leaving, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Second Sister Shen, "Whatever you do, see that you sing a good song for the benefit of the Sixth Lady."
He then went straight out toward the front compound.
"I've never seen anything like it," Chin-lien said to Li P'ing-erh. "Why don't you simply mention any song you like so Second Sister Shen can sing it for you? You're disregarding Father's intentions. He invited her here on your account, and you won't even say what you'd like to hear."
At this point, Li P'ing-erh felt pressured to such an extent that she was compelled to comply and, after considering for some time, finally said, "Why don't you sing that song suite that begins with the words:
The purple roads and red lanes,
for us."
"That's no problem," responded Second Sister Shen, "I know it."
Thereupon, picking up her psaltery, she:
Adjusted the bridges ranged like wild geese,
Retuned the icy strings,
and:
Commencing to sing in full voice,
performed the song suite that begins with the tune "A Variation on A Sprig of Flowers":
The purple roads and red lanes,
Would be hard for even an expert painter[32]
to successfully depict.
Eye-catching luxuriance is spread before me
like a brocade carpet.

It is as though spring is out of tune with me;
It is not I that am out of tune with spring.
Simply on account of that one I've set my heart on,
When I survey the scene it only augments my sorrow.
To the tune "Wen-chou Song":
The blossoms lie scattered,
The willows are umbrageous,
The butterflies are jaded, the bees bemused,
and the orioles tired of singing.
On first waking up,
I had forgotten my longing,
But the relentless twittering
of the swallows,
Has stirred up my old resentment,
And only served to reawaken it.
In an endless pitter-patter,[33]
My teardrops silently cascade.
To the tune "Spring Fills the Garden":
The tranquil courtyard is secluded;
Unspoken feelings entangle my heart.
The cool pavilions and waterside retreats,[34]
Are really suitable for feasting and drinking;
But I do not see my lover.
With whom is he sharing a flagon?
I could resume strumming the silken strings,
Or choose to pluck the *p'i-p'a*,
In order to dispel my melancholy;
But it seems I am tired of hearing them.[35]
To the tune "Wen-chou Song":
The pomegranate blossoms are ablaze,
Like clusters of scarlet brocade.
Their smokeless flames only succeed in
incinerating my heart.
Bashfully, I move forward,
Thinking to pluck a blossom,
But I shilly-shally about
wearing it,
Fearing that my flowery countenance,
Is no longer what it used to be.
When I am so lonesome and emaciated,[36]
It would not do to stick it in my hair.
To the tune "The Phoenix Tree":
The leaves of the phoenix tree are flying;
The metallic autumn wind has begun to blow.
As I gradually fall prey to lovesickness,
I feel as though I have fallen into a deep well.
Day after day, the nights grow longer,
But I find it hard to endure my lonely pillow.
Reluctantly I mount the lofty tower,[37]
In order to watch out for my lover.
It may be that the fickle fellow's heart
is out of tune with mine.
Who knows where he may be, where he may be,
Pursuing pleasure and indulging in drink?[38]
To the tune "Wen-chou Song":
The chrysanthemums have blossomed,
The cassia flowers lie scattered.
Right now, the dew is chilly, and the wind cold,[39]
as the autumnal feeling deepens.
Suddenly, outside the window, I hear,
The reiterated cries of a solitary wild goose,
As sorrowful and distressing[40]
as a human lament.
I am most disturbed by the chirping of the crickets,
Under the flowers, beside the steps.
Their constant crick-crick chirp-chirp,[41]
Has utterly destroyed my peace of mind.
To the tune "Sands of Silk-washing Creek":
The wind has grown stronger,
The cold has become frigid.
When lovesick, what one dreads
the most is dusk.
Listless and indifferent,[42] I confront
my lonely lamp:
Repeatedly scanning the apertures
in the window.
The sound of the bugle is prolonged,
penetrating my ears;
Note after note is like a sob,
difficult to hear.
In my depression, I force myself to pour
another cup of wine,
But when it affects my melancholy bosom,
the pearly tears cascade.
To the tune "Wen-chou Song":
Giving forth long sighs,
Two or three of them,
I lean against the standing screen,
longing for that man.
Single-mindedly, I hope that in my dreams,
We may see each other once again.
In an endless pitter-patter, the snowflakes
begin to fall.
The windblown chimes under the eaves,
Intrude upon my dreaming soul;
Their ding-ding dong-dong,
Shatter my peace of mind.
Coda:
On account of my loved one,
My heart is on tenterhooks.
I think of him by day and yearn for him at night,
as my teardrops cascade.
How hateful it is that my talented lover won't
even let me see his shadow.[43]

When the performance was finished, Wu Yüeh-niang said, "Sister Li, why don't you have a cup of this nice sweet wine?"

Li P'ing-erh, who was reluctant to refuse a request from Yüeh-niang, picked up her cup and swallowed a mouthful, before putting it back down again. She made an effort to continue sitting with the rest of the company, but, before long, she felt a surge of hot blood hemorrhaging from her lower body and had to return to her quarters. We will say no more, for the moment, about how the womenfolk entertained themselves, but return to the story of Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When he arrived at the small summerhouse, the Kingfisher Pavilion, he found that Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Shih-chieh were standing beneath the Juniper Hedge admiring the chrysanthemums. It so happens that, on either side of the Juniper Hedge, there were arranged a total of twenty pots containing famous varieties of chrysanthemums, each of which was more than seven feet high. These included specimens of Great Crimson Robes, Principal Graduate Reds, Purple Robes with Gold Girdles, White Powdered Hsi-shihs, [44] Yellow Powdered Hsi-shihs, Skies Full of Stars, Drunken Yang Kuei-feis,[45] Jade Peonies, Goose Feather Chrysanthemums, Mandarin Duck Chrysanthemums, and the like.[46]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came out, the two men stepped forward and bowed to him, after which Ch'ang Shih-chieh told the porter to bring in the two gift boxes.

Upon seeing them, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "What's all this?"

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "out of gratitude for your generosity in enabling him to close the deal on his new house, and having no other way to repay you, has asked his wife to prepare these fresh stuffed crabs, and these two smoked roast ducks, and invited me to join him in paying you a visit."

"Brother Ch'ang the Second," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what need was there for you to go to all this trouble? Your wife is still recuperating from her illness, and you have placed this additional burden upon her."

"That's exactly what I told him," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he said that if he presented you with anything else, he feared you might not appreciate it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing told one of his attendants to open the boxes so they could have a look. There were forty large crabs, the shells of which had been scoured out and stuffed with crab meat, coated with a mixture of pepper, ginger, minced garlic, and starch, deep-fried in sesame oil, and flavored with soy sauce and vinegar, which rendered them fragrant and delectable. In addition, there were two oven-smoked ducks from the licensed quarter that had been roasted until they were succulent.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had examined them, he told Ch'un-hung and Wang Ching to take them inside, and to reward the porter with fifty cash. He then expressed his thanks to Ch'ang Shih-chieh, at which point, Ch'in-t'ung lifted aside the portiere and invited them to come into the Kingfisher Pavilion and sit down.

Ying Po-chüeh could not stop lavishing praise upon the chrysanthemums and inquired, "Brother, where did you get them?"

"It was Eunuch Director Liu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the manager of the Imperial Brickyard, that sent me these twenty pots of chrysanthemums."
"Including the pots?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"Yes, he sent everything to me, including the pots," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The flowers are nothing out of the ordinary," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "but these pots are double-banded wide-mouthed flowerpots, manufactured from the finest clay in the imperial kilns, and are both long-lasting and water-repellent. They are made from clay that has been strained through silken sieves and kneaded under foot until it becomes a thick paste, just like that used in the firing of the finest quality of bricks in Su-chou.[47] Where could one go to find articles of this quality these days?"
After Ying Po-chüeh had fulsomely praised them for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that tea be served and, while they were drinking it, went on to ask, "When is Brother Ch'ang the Second going to move into his new house?"
"He moved in only three days after the silver was paid over," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The previous occupants had already located another place and moved out within two or three days. Yesterday being an auspicious day for such undertakings, he laid in some miscellaneous merchandise and opened his shop for business. Sister-in-law Ch'ang's younger brother is tending the store for him, and keeping track of the silver."
"We must get together soon, and purchase some congratulatory gifts," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't want too many people to be involved. We'll also invite Hsieh Hsi-ta; just the three or four of you. I'll have the refreshments prepared at my place and carried over there, so it won't cost Brother Ch'ang the Second anything at all. I'll engage the services of two singing girls so we can throw a housewarming party for him, and give ourselves over to enjoyment the whole day."
"I thought of inviting you over for a visit," said Ch'ang Shih-chieh, "but, after giving it some thought, did not presume to do so. The place is too cramped, and I feared you might feel imposed upon."
"Don't talk such rot!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "We don't intend to put you to any trouble. I'll send a page boy over right now to invite Hsieh Hsi-ta to join us, so we can tell him about it."
Then, turning to Ch'in-t'ung, he said, "Quickly, go and invite Master Hsieh over here."
"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh went on to ask, "which two singing girls do you plan to engage for this occasion?"
"I'll call upon Cheng Ai-yüeh and Hung the Fourth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing with a laugh. "Hung the Fourth can provide a drumbeat of accompaniment, while Cheng Ai-yüeh sings slow-tempoed songs to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what kind of a man are you, that you should have been patronizing Cheng Ai-yüeh without saying a word to me about it? How was I to know? As far as the breeze and the moonlight are concerned, how does she compare to Li Kuei-chieh?"
"Why:
'She's two under full four words'!"[48]
replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Then why is it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that, the other day, at your birthday party, she had hardly a word to say and pretended to be so demure? She's just a lousy, stiff-necked, sycophantic little whore!"
"When I go to see her again, sometime soon," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll take you along with me. Your mother, Ai-yüeh, can play a good game of backgammon, and you can play a couple of games with her."
"If I go with you," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll give that little whore a hard time. You mustn't spoil her."
"You perverted dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You'd better not do anything to antagonize her."
As they were speaking, Hsieh Hsi-ta arrived, bowed to the company, and sat down.
"Brother Ch'ang the Second," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "thus and so, has acquired a new house for himself and has already moved in, without letting us know anything about it. Each of us ought to contribute something, whatever we can afford, so that it won't cost him anything, and I'll have some refreshments prepared at my place and carried over to his residence by a page boy, and also engage the services of two singing girls, so we can enjoy ourselves for a day. What do you think?"
"Brother," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "just tell each of us what you think we should come up with, and we'll send it over to your place, that's all there is to it. Who else will be involved?"
"There won't be anyone else," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just the three or four of us. Two mace of silver apiece ought to suffice."
"If too many people are involved," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "he won't have room for us at his place."
As they were speaking, Ch'in-t'ung came in and reported, "Brother-in-law Wu K'ai has arrived."
"Tell Brother-in-law Wu to come in here and sit down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long Wu K'ai came into the studio, where he first bowed to the other three guests, and then sat down, after exchanging the customary amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing. A page boy provided another serving of tea, and they drank it together.
Wu K'ai then stood up and said, "May I ask my brother-in-law to accompany me back to the rear compound so I can have a word with him?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly ushered Wu K'ai back to the rear compound, and into Wu Yüeh-niang's parlor. Yüeh-niang herself was still in the summer-house drinking wine and listening to the singing with the other women of the household. When she heard a page boy say that her elder brother had come, and that her husband was chatting with him in the rear compound, she got up and went back to the master suite. Upon seeing her elder brother, she greeted him with a bow and ordered Hsiao-yü to provide a serving of tea.
Wu K'ai pulled ten taels of silver out of his sleeve and handed it to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Yesterday, I received only three ingots of silver from the prefectural office. If my brother-in-law will accept these ten taels of silver for the time being, I will pay back the remainder of what I owe him on another occasion."
"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need to worry about it. Go ahead and spend it. What's the hurry?"
"I feared I might inconvenience my brother-in-law if I delayed," said Wu K'ai.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Is the repair work on the granary nearing completion?"
"It will be another month before it is done," said Wu K'ai.
"When the work is finished," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the office of the provincial regional inspector is sure to offer you a reward of some kind."
"This year's evaluation of military personnel is impending," said Wu K'ai. "I hope that my brother-in-law will continue to support me by speaking up on my behalf to the regional inspector."
"As far as that matter is concerned," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can leave it to me."
When their conversation was over, Yüeh-niang said, "Will my elder brother not go back up front for a visit?"
"I'd better go," said Wu K'ai. "I fear those three gentlemen have some business to discuss."
"Not at all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Brother Ch'ang the Second recently borrowed several taels of silver from me with which to buy a house of modest dimensions. He has already moved into it, and today he has brought some gifts to thank me for my help. In this festival season, I have asked them to stay for a visit. I didn't know that my brother-in-law would turn up, but you've arrived in the nick of time."
Thereupon, he ushered Wu K'ai back to the front compound in order to join the party, and Yüeh-niang promptly told the staff in the kitchen to send the refreshments up front. Ch'in-t'ung and Wang Ching had already finished setting up an Eight Immortals table, and they now brought out the appetizers, nuts, and wine. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered the storehouse to be opened, and a jug of the chrysanthemum wine that had been given to him by Hsia Yen-ling brought out for them. When they opened it, it turned out to be of a clear beryl-green color and exuded a pungent fragrance. Before straining it, they mixed it with a bottle of cold water, in order to reduce the sharpness of its flavor. After doing so, they poured it through a cheesecloth sieve, and when it had been strained, it turned out to be both mellow and delicious, superior to grape wine in these respects.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had Wang Ching fill a small gold goblet with it and offer it first to Wu K'ai to taste. After this, Ying Po-chüeh and the rest all tasted it:
Expressing the most fulsome admiration.
Before long, in:
Large platters and large bowls,
the appetizers and delicacies were brought in, filling the surface of the table. First there were two platters of steamed, rose-flavored, stuffed, glutinous rice cakes, to be dipped in white granulated sugar. The company made short work of them, grabbing them up while they were still hot. Only after that were the stuffed crabs brought out, along with two platters of roast duck.
Ying Po-chüeh offered a crab to Wu K'ai, and Hsieh Hsi-ta remarked, "I don't know how these were ever done to make them so flavorful, crisp, and delicious."
"They were sent over here from Brother Ch'ang the Second's place," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I have led a futile existence for fifty-one years," said Wu K'ai, "without knowing that crabs could be prepared in such a way. They really are delicious."
"Have our sisters-in-law in the rear compound had a chance to taste them?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"They've all had some," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It's really put Sister-in-law Ch'ang to the test," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "to demonstrate such culinary skill."
Ch'ang Shih-chieh laughed at this, saying, "My humble wife was only afraid that she had not made things tasty enough, and that you gentlemen would laugh at her."
When all the crabs had been eaten, the attendants came forward to replenish the wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-hung and Shu-t'ung to come up beside them and take turns entertaining them with southern-style songs.
At this point, Ying Po-chüeh suddenly noticed the sound of singing, accompanied by a psaltery, emanating from the great summerhouse and inquired, "Brother, is Li Kuei-chieh here today? If not, who is responsible for this music?"
"You keep listening," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and see if you think it's her, or not."
"If it's not Li Kuei-chieh," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it must be Wu Yin-erh."
"You beggar!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you ever do is talk blind nonsense. It's actually a professional female singer."
"Is it Big Sister Yü, then?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"No, it's not her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "This one is called Second Sister Shen. She's young, has a good figure, and really knows how to sing."
"Really," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If she's as good as all that, why don't you drag her out here so we can have a look at her, and get her to sing something for us?"
"Today being a holiday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've engaged her to come and help the ladies of the household celebrate the Double Yang Festival. It would take the ears of a dog like you to pick her out."
"My senses are as sharp as those of Thousand Li Eyes and Wind-borne Ears,"[49] said Ying Po-chüeh.
"If a bee so much as buzzes forty li away,
I can make it out."
The two of them continued chaffing each other for a while, after which Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, whatever you do, call her out here, so we can have a look at her. The rest of us may not matter, but you really ought to have her sing a song for your senior brother-in-law here. Enough is enough. Don't be so stubborn about it."
Unable to resist these importunities any longer, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched Wang Ching to bring Second Sister Shen out so she could sing something for Brother-in-law Wu K'ai. Before long, Second Sister Shen duly appeared, kowtowed to the company, and, after standing up again, sat down to one side on a folding chair that had been provided for her.
"Second Sister Shen," said Ying Po-chüeh, "may I ask how old you are?"
"I was born in the year of the ox," said Second Sister Shen, "so I'm twenty years old."
"And how many songs are there in your repertory?" he went on to ask.
"Accompanying myself with the *p'i-p'a* or the psaltery," said Second Sister Shen, "I can perform any number of songs and song suites."
"If you know as many as all that," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it ought to suffice."
"Second Sister Shen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take your *p'i-p'a* and perform a few current popular songs for us. We don't want to burden you unduly. I hear that you can perform the piece called "The Four Dreams and Eight Nothings." Why don't you sing that for Brother-in-law Wu here?"
He then directed Wang Ching and Shu-t'ung to replenish the wine. Whereupon, Second Sister Shen:
Gently strummed the silken strings,
Lightly parted her sandalwood lips,[50]
and sang the set of songs to the tune "Lo River Lament":
Morbidly my indisposition grows worse;
When will it ever melt away?
I long for him in spring, yearn for him in summer,
and do the same in autumn and winter.
With a breastful of sorrow,[51] I complain
to the Lord of Heaven.
If Heaven possesses consciousness,
Why doesn't it show some kindness?
No matter how much kindness I show,
it comes to nothing;
No matter how much feeling I show,
it comes to nothing.
It all amounts to a Dream of the Southern Branch.[52]
He is in the East, I in the West;
When will we ever meet again?
Little by little, I fill the sheets of flowered paper,
and seal them again and again.
I entrust these missives to the fish and
wild geese as messengers,
But they are not trustworthy,
And fail to deliver my letters.
No matter how much I dote on him,
it comes to nothing;
No matter how much I resent him,
it comes to nothing.
It all amounts to a Dream of Witch's Mountain.[53]
My kindness evaporates like the morning breeze;
Leaving me languorous and depressed.
The way he carries on, he fails to finish
that which he begins.
His promises to be as faithful as the hills and seas

are no more than wind in my ears.
Does he not remember, in days of old,
How ardently he expressed his love?
No matter how much I may repine,
it comes to nothing;
No matter how infatuated I may be,
it comes to nothing.
It all amounts to only a Dream of a Butterfly.[54]
My brightness resembles stupidity;
I have fallen into his trap.[55]
In silence, all I can do is to secretly
let my pearly tears well up.
Who would have thought that his mouth and
heart were not in agreement?
My heart has been true to him,[56]
While he has played tricks on me.
No matter whether I gain the advantage,
it comes to nothing;
No matter whether I lose the advantage,
it comes to nothing.
It all amounts to a Dream of Radiant Terrace.[57]
We will say no more at present about the singing and drinking in the front compound.
To resume our story, when Li P'ing-erh got back to her room and sat down on the commode, the blood from her lower body flowed out as copiously as urine, and in no time at all, she started to black out. When she tried to get up and pull up her skirts, she suddenly suffered a spell of vertigo and fell face forward onto the ground. Luckily Ying-ch'un was at her side and was able to break her fall, but she had broken the skin on her forehead. Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse helped her onto the k'ang, but for some time she was:
Oblivious to human affairs.
This threw Ying-ch'un into a panic, and she immediately told Hsiu-ch'un, "Quickly, go tell the First Lady what has happened."
Hsiu-ch'un went to the scene of the party and reported to Yüeh-niang and the others, "My mistress has fallen down in a faint in her quarters."
Yüeh-niang abruptly left the party and, accompanied by the other womenfolk, hastened on her way to assess the situation. They found Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse holding her up in a sitting position on the k'ang, but she remained:
Oblivious to human affairs.
"She seemed all right when she came back to her quarters," said Yüeh-niang. "What actually happened to bring her to this pass?"
Ying-ch'un took the lid off the commode and showed the contents to Yüeh-niang, which gave her quite a start.
"I fear," she said, "it must be the wine she drank just now that has brought on this copious flow of blood."
"But she hardly drank anything at all," both Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien exclaimed together.
Only some time after they had administered a decoction of bog rush and ginger to her did she gradually come back to her senses and recover her ability to speak.
"Sister Li," asked Yüeh-niang, "what happened to you?"
"It wasn't anything much," said Li P'ing-erh. "I sat down on the commode, but when I got up and started to pull up my skirts, a black patch appeared before my eyes and, before I knew it:
Heaven and Earth began to spin around,[58]
and I couldn't help falling down."
Yüeh-niang said, "I think I'd better send Lai-an to invite Father to come in here so we can explain the situation to him, and get him to send for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come take a look at you."
Li P'ing-erh objected to sending for Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "What's the need for:
Such a great show of consternation?
It will only disrupt his drinking party."
"Make up her bed then," Yüeh-niang said to Ying-ch'un, "and put your mistress to sleep."
Under the circumstances, Yüeh-niang had no wish to continue drinking, so she ordered that the utensils be cleared away, and they all went back to the rear compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to entertain Brother-in-law Wu K'ai and the others until evening, before returning to the master suite, where Yüeh-niang told him about Li P'ing-erh's fainting fit. Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily made his way back up front to see how she was and found Li P'ing-erh lying on the k'ang, with her face as sallow as wax.
Tugging at Hsi-men Ch'ing's sleeve, she started to weep, and when he asked her what it was about, Li P'ing-erh said, "When I went back to my room and sat down on the commode, somehow or other, I don't know why, the blood started to flow from my lower body, just as copiously as urine, and, before I knew it, a black patch appeared before my eyes. When I got up and started to pull up my skirts:
Heaven and Earth began to spin around,
and I fell down, no longer conscious of anything."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that a strip of the cuticle on her forehead had been broken open by the fall, he said, "Where were your maidservants? Why weren't they looking after you? How did they let you fall down and wound your face that way?"
"Luckily," said Li P'ing-erh, "my senior maidservant was standing by and tried to break my fall. Together with the wet nurse, they were able to help me up. Otherwise, who knows how much worse a fall I might have taken?"
"Early tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll send a page boy to ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and have a look at you."
That night he slept in the bed across the room from where Li P'ing-erh was lying.
The next morning, he did not go to the yamen but sent Ch'in-t'ung, riding on a mule, to fetch Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who did not arrive until noontime. Hsi-men Ch'ing first shared a serving of tea with him in the main reception hall and then sent a page boy inside to announce the doctor's arrival. Li P'ing-erh spruced up her quarters, lit some incense, and then invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come in.
After palpating her pulse, he came back out to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Your venerable consort's pulse is significantly more sluggish than it was the last time I examined her.
Her seven feelings have been wounded.[59]
The inflammation created by the element fire in her liver and lungs is excessive, with the result that the element wood is in the ascendant and the element earth is deficient, causing an abnormal circulation of her overheated blood. The resultant flooding is like the collapse of a mountain and cannot be regulated. Send your servant back to inquire. If the blood she has hemorrhaged is purple in color, her condition may be treated successfully. If it is bright red in color, it is fresh blood. In that case, if the medicine I prescribe abates the bleeding somewhat, there is hope. If not, it will be difficult to treat."
"I beseech you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to take care in determining the dosage of the medications you prescribe. Your pupil will see that you are handsomely rewarded."
"What kind of talk is that?" said Dr. Jen. "You and I are on familiar terms with each other, as well as being mutual friends of Han Ming-ch'uan. Your pupil:
Will not fail to do his utmost on your behalf."[60]
After hosting another serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing saw his guest out the door, immediately after which, he prepared a bolt of Hang-chou chiffon and two taels of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung off with them to fetch the prescribed medication. It turned out to be a decoction for restoring the spleen, but when Li P'ing-erh took a dose of it after it had been heated, her hemorrhaging continued unabated.
Hsi-men Ch'ing became even more flustered than before and also invited Dr. Hu, who resided at the entrance to Main Street, to come and see her.
Dr. Hu said, "Anger has disrupted her blood vessels, causing an inflammation in her uterus."
He also prescribed a medication for her condition, but when she took it, it was no more efficacious than:
A stone sunk in the vast sea.
When Yüeh-niang realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing was preoccupied with consulting physicians in the front compound, she decided to keep Second Sister Shen for one night only, after which, she gave her five mace of silver, a vest of cloud-patterned damask, and some other trinkets, which she put into a gift box, and then sent her off in a sedan chair.
Hua Tzu-yu, who had been a guest at the party in celebration of the opening of Hsi-men Ch'ing's new silk goods store, upon hearing that Li P'ing-erh was unwell, had his wife purchase two gifts and go to pay her a visit. When she observed how emaciated and sallow she had become, and that her appearance was:
No longer what it used to be,[61]
the two of them had a good cry together in her room. After her visit, Yüeh-niang invited her to tea in the rear compound.
Han Tao-kuo, for his part, said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "There is a Dr. Chao living outside the East Gate, who specializes in female disorders. He is adept at palpating the pulse and is an excellent diagnostician. Some years ago, when my wife was suffering from irregular menstruation, it was he who treated her. If Your Honor will send someone to invite him to come and examine the Sixth Lady, I am sure her condition will improve."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, sent Ch'in-t'ung[62] and Wang Ching, the two of them riding tandem on a mule, to go outside the city gate and extend an invitation to Dr. Chao.
Hsi-men Ch'ing also invited Ying Po-chüeh to join him for a consultation in the anteroom in the front courtyard, saying, "My sixth consort has become seriously ill. What am I to do about it?"
Ying Po-chüeh expressed surprise, saying. "I understood that my sister-in-law's ailment was somewhat better. Why has it taken a turn for the worse?"
"Ever since her young son died," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has been suffering from depression, which has resulted in a recurrence of her former ailment. Yesterday, in celebration of the Double Yang Festival, I proposed to invite Second Sister Shen, so that the women of the household could dispel their melancholy and have some fun together. She hardly drank anything at all on that occasion, but who would have expected that, no sooner had she returned to her quarters than she had a relapse, began to feel faint, and fell to the ground, breaking the skin on her face? I invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to examine her, and he said that her pulse was more sluggish than before; but when she took the medication he prescribed, the flow of blood became more copious than ever."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "when you invited Dr. Hu to examine her, what did he say?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "Dr. Hu said that anger had disrupted her blood vessels, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it produced no visible effect. Today, Han Tao-kuo recommended a certain Dr. Chao Lung-kang, who resides outside the city gate and is a specialist in female disorders. I have sent two page boys after him, and they have been gone for some time already. I'm as upset as can be about it. Simply because of what happened to the child, she is so preoccupied by it, day and night, that it has given rise to this ailment. She's just a woman after all and doesn't know how to put it behind her. No matter how much you admonish her, she doesn't pay any attention. I'm:
At a loss for what to do next."
As they were speaking, P'ing-an came in and reported, "Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has come."
Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him into the reception hall, where, after exchanging the customary amenities, they sat down together.
"I have heard," said Ch'iao Hung, "that my kinswoman, your Sixth Lady, is unwell. Yesterday, when my nephew, Ts'ui Pen, came home, he suggested that my wife should come pay her a visit."
"It's true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "For some time now, ever since our young son died, she has been suffering from depression. She had a physical indisposition to begin with, and this only served to exacerbate it. I appreciate your concern."
"Have you had anyone in to examine her?" asked Ch'iao Hung.
"She has been taking the medication prescribed by Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and yesterday I also asked Dr. Hu from Main Street to examine her, but when she took the medication he prescribed, it only made her condition worse. Today, I have also sent for Dr. Chao Lung-kang, a specialist in female disorders who lives outside the city gate."
"The medical practitioner Old Man Ho," said Ch'iao Hung, "who lives outside the gate of the district yamen, is equally proficient at prescriptions, both great and small, and palpation of the pulse. His son, Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, has also recently set up practice as a licensed physician. Why don't you invite him to come and examine my kinswoman?"
"If he's as good as all that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll wait until my servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang to palpate her pulse, and see what he has to say. It won't be too late to invite Dr. Ho after that."
"Kinsman," said Ch'iao Hung, "in my ignorant view, the best thing to do would be to invite Old Man Ho to examine my kinswoman now and offer his diagnosis, after which you can have him sit in an antechamber. Then, after your servants have brought Dr. Chao Lung-kang here from outside the city gate to take her pulse, you can see what he has to say, and then get the two physicians to discuss it together, in the hope of ascertaining the origin of the ailment. If they can agree upon an appropriate prescription after that, it is unlikely to prove ineffective."
"Kinsman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "what you say makes sense."
He then turned to Tai-an and said, "Take my card and go with Ch'iao T'ung to invite the medical practitioner Old Man Ho who lives outside the gate of the district yamen to come here."
Tai-an and Ch'iao T'ung nodded in assent and departed on this errand. Hsi-men Ch'ing then invited Ying Po-chüeh to join them in the reception hall, where, after greeting Ch'iao Hung, he sat down with them for a cup of tea. It was not long before Old Man Ho arrived, came in the gate, bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, and was ushered to a seat in the place of honor.
Raising his hand in greeting, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It is some years since I have seen you, venerable sir, and your appearance is more impressive than ever, with your gray beard and white hair."
"And your distinguished son has been most successful in his career," chimed in Ch'iao Hung.
"The fact is," said Old Man Ho, "that he is so busy with his social responsibilities at the district yamen that he scarcely has time for anything else. It is my aged self who most often has to go out to examine the sick."
"For someone as old as you are, venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you seem to be in remarkably good health."
"As of now," said Old Man Ho, "I have led a futile existence for eighty years."
When they had finished running through these amenities, tea was served, after which, a page boy was dispatched to let Li P'ing-erh know that the doctor was coming. Before long, he was invited into her quarters, where he approached her bed in order to palpate her pulse. She had been propped up into a sitting position on the k'ang, with the fragrant clouds of her hair concealing her bosom, and exhibited an extremely emaciated appearance. Behold:
Her face is the hue of gilded paper;[63]
Her body is thin as a bar of silver.
By degrees her good looks have diminished;
Imperceptibly her radiance has wasted away.
Her breast is tight with anger;
For days on end, neither water nor rice
has moistened her lips.
Her five viscera are congested;
All day long, it is difficult for pills
to get down to her stomach.

With a constant din, the hollows of her ears
resound with the sound of chimes;
Nebulously, as her eyesight becomes darker,
she seems to see fireflies flying.
Her six pulses are weak and sluggish;[64]
The Assessor of the Eastern Peak has
come to take away her life.
Her numinous soul is drifting hazily;
The Buddha of the Western Realm has
called her to accompany him.
The baleful stars Death Knell and Condoler[65]
have already visited her;
Even the famous physician Pien Ch'üeh of Lu[66]
would find himself stumped.[67]

When Old Man Ho had finished palpating her pulse, he came outside to the reception hall and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung, "This lady's ailment originated from semen invading her menstrual blood vessels, after which she became afflicted with suppressed anger. When her anger and her blood came into conflict with each other, it resulted in copious hemorrhaging. Think carefully back to the time when her ailment began and see if this diagnosis is correct or not."

"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how would you suggest that it be treated?"

As they were discussing the situation, it was suddenly reported that Ch'in-t'ung and Wang Ching had arrived back from outside the city gate with Dr. Chao.

"Who might that be?" asked Old Man Ho.

"It is another doctor who was recommended to me by my manager," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you, venerable sir, will pretend to ignorance of the matter until after he comes back out from examining her pulse, the two of you can then discuss it together in the hope of agreeing upon an appropriate prescription."

Before long, he came in from outside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, after exchanging greetings with him, introduced him to the others. The two venerable gentlemen, Old Man Ho and Ch'iao Hung, were seated in the center in the position of honor, the newcomer was offered a seat on the left, Ying Po-chüeh was seated on the right, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host. Lai-an brought in a serving of tea, and, after they had drunk it, took away the teacups in their raised saucers.

The newcomer then said, "May I ask what are the names of you two venerable gentlemen?"

Ch'iao Hung replied, "One of us is surnamed Ho and the other is surnamed Ch'iao."

"And my surname is Ying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "May I venture to ask, sir, what is your distinguished name; where do you reside; and what is your profession?"

"Unworthy as I am," the newcomer replied, "the dwelling of your humble servant is located outside the East Gate, on the First Alley, beyond the Temple of the Second Scion (Erh-lang Shen), across the Three Bends Bridge, in the Quarter of the Four Wells. [68] I am none other than the celebrated Chao the Quack and have practiced medicine all my life. My paternal grandfather was an administrative assistant in the Imperial Academy of Medicine, and my father is currently serving as a medical officer in the mansion of the Prince of Ju. [69] For three successive generations we have devoted ourselves to the study of the medical arts. Every day I pore over the works of Wang Shu-ho,[70] Li Kao,[71] and Wu-t'ing-tzu,[72] as well as such texts as the *Yao-hsing fu* (Rhapsody on the properties of drugs),[73] *Huang-ti nei-ching su-wen* (Essential questions regarding the Yellow Emperor's inner classic [of medicine]),[74] *Nan-ching* (The classic of difficult issues),[75] *Huo-jen shu* (The book on preserving human life),[76] *Tan-hsi tsuan-yao* (Essential teachings of Chu Chen-heng),[77] *Tan-hsi hsin-fa* (Quintessential methods of Chu Chen-heng),[78] *Chieh-ku lao mai-chüeh* (Chang Yüan-su's [commentary on Wang Shu-ho's] secrets of pulse diagnosis),[79] *Chia-chien shih-san fang* (Thirteen alterative prescriptions),[80] *Ch'ien-chin fang* (Prescriptions worth a thousand pieces of gold),[81] *Ch'i-hsiao liang-fang* (Beneficial prescriptions of unusual efficacy),[82] *Shou-yü shen-fang* (Divine prescriptions for the realm of longevity),[83] and *Hai-shang fang* (Over-seas panaceas [from the Isles of the Blest]).[84]

There is no text I have not perused;[85]
There is not a text I have not read.
In prescribing, I use the life-giving
methods stored in my breast;
In pulse-taking, I clearly comprehend
the secrets under my fingers.
The six conditions and the four seasons,
Produce differences in the manifestations
of the Yin and the Yang.
The seven outer and eight inner pulses,
Determine whether blockage or repulsion
cause sinking or floating.
As for the symptoms of wind, vacuity,
cold, and fever,
I have mastered them all without exception.[86]
With regard to thready, swollen, hollow,
and stony pulses,
There are none I do not totally understand.
With my awkward mouth and clumsy lips,[87]
I may fail to explain myself in detail;
But I have composed a few lines of verse,
Which will lay out the general outline.
They go as follows:
I'm a doctor whose surname is Chao,
At my gate people constantly clamor.
I sport placards and rattle my bell,[88]
With no genuine article[89] to peddle.
In healing, I abjure the best nostrums,
In pulse taking, say what comes to mind.
Incompetent at pharmacology and medicine,
I'm inept even at relieving constipation.
For headaches I use tightened headbands,
For eye ailments I rely on moxabustion.
For heart trouble I recommend surgery,
For deafness I would advise acupuncture.
For money I'm prepared to do anything,
I'm out for profit rather than results.
Those who consult me are less likely to be
fortunate than unfortunate;[90]
Wherever I appear there is likely to be
weeping rather than laughter.
Truly:
Motivated only one half by benevolence
and one half by self-interest;
From of old, the pursuit of medicine is
like the pursuit of immortality."[91]

When the company had heard him out, they all laughed uproariously.

Old Man Ho then asked him, "Did you acquire your expertise professionally, or acquire your expertise extra-professionally?"

Dr. Chao said, "What do you mean by the expressions 'acquire your expertise professionally,' or 'acquire your expertise extra-professionally'?"

"If you acquired your expertise professionally," responded Old Man Ho, "you learned the proper techniques of pulse diagnosis from the example set by your father. If you acquired your expertise extra-professionally, you can do no more than:
Ascertain the symptoms and prescribe accordingly,
that's all."

"Venerable sir," said Dr. Chao, "you don't understand. As the authorities of yore have stated:
Inspection, auscultation, interrogation, and palpation,
are the techniques that show a physician to be:
Divine, sagely, craftsmanlike, or skilled.[92]

Since I have acquired my expertise professionally through three successive generations, I know that in addition to first inquiring about the symptoms and then examining the pulse, I must scrutinize the patient's coloration; just as the practitioners of the Tzu-p'ing school of fortune-telling [93] combine it with the astrological school of the Five Planets, and also resort to palmistry and physiognomy, in order to make sure that their predictions are reliable and unlikely to be incorrect."

"In that case," said Old Man Ho, "Please go inside and examine the patient."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon told Ch'in-t'ung to go back and tell them that they were coming, and that he had also arranged for a visit by Dr. Chao.

Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted Dr. Chao into Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Li P'ing-erh, who had just lain down for a rest, was propped up into a sitting position once again, supported by her pillow and bedding.

Dr. Chao first palpated the pulse on her left wrist, and then that on her right, after which he said, "Venerable lady, please lift up your head so I can examine your coloration."

Li P'ing-erh actually lifted up her head, upon which, Dr. Chao said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Your Honor, ask your venerable lady who I am."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly asked Li P'ing-erh, "Who do you thing this gentleman is?"

Li P'ing-erh raised her head to take a look at him, and then said in a low voice, "I imagine he must be a doctor."

"Your Honor," said Dr. Chao, "there is nothing to worry about. She is unlikely to die since she is able to recognize people."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, and said, "Dr. Chao, do your best to examine her, and I will see that you are amply rewarded."

After examining her for some time, Dr. Chao said, "As for this ailment of your venerable lady's, pray don't take it amiss if I say so, but, after scrutinizing her coloration and palpating her pulse, I conclude that if it is not an externally contracted intestinal fever, it is an internally contracted miscellaneous disorder, and that if it did not develop postpartum, it must have done so prior to conception."

"That's not what it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Please be good enough to make another careful appraisal."[94]

"I venture to say," said Dr. Chao, "that it is a depression brought on by a dietary disorder resulting from overindulgence in food and drink."

"For days on end," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has hardly eaten any food at all."

"Perhaps it is a case of jaundice," opined Dr. Chao.

"That's not the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If that's not the case," said Dr. Chao, "why is it that her face is so yellow?"

He then went on to say, "No doubt it is a case of spleen vacuity diarrhea."

"It is not a case of diarrhea," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If it is not diarrhea, what can it be?" said Dr. Chao. "How can it be an ailment that one is at a loss to identify?"

After sitting in thought for some time, he said, "I've finally thought of something. If it isn't a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease, it must be a case of irregular menstruation."

"Since she's a woman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's unlikely to be a case of swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin caused by venereal disease. But your suggestion that it might be a case of irregular menstruation is a little more reasonable."

"Amitābha be praised!" exclaimed Dr. Chao. "Somehow or other your humble servant has finally gotten something right."

"What kind of irregular menstruation might it be?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"If it is not due to debility arising from amenorrhea," opined Dr. Chao, "it must be a case of metrorrhagia like the collapse of a mountain."

"To tell you the truth, sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my spouse, thus and so, has been experiencing incessant hemorrhaging from her lower body, which has caused her figure to become emaciated. If you know of any fast-acting prescription that you can make up and give her to take, I will see that you are amply rewarded."

"That's no problem," said Dr. Chao. "I do possess such a prescription. After we return to the front reception hall, I will write it out, so you can have it made up."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to accompany him back to the front reception hall. Ch'iao Hung and Old Man Ho were still there and asked him what he thought the origin of the ailment was.

"As I see it," said Dr. Chao, "it is only a case of menstrual flooding."

"What medicine would you use to treat it?" asked Old Man Ho.

"I've got a marvelous prescription," said Dr. Chao, "which contains a number of different ingredients. If she takes it, I can guarantee her recovery. Let me describe it for you." To the tune "Slavey Chu":

Take Radix Glycyrrhizae, Radix Euphorbiae,
and Sal Ammoniacum,
Veratri Radix et Rhizoma, Crotonus Semen,
and Daphnes Genkwa Flos;
Emulsify Arsenicum Trioxidum with fresh
Rhizoma Pinelliae,
Use Radix Aconiti, Semen Pruni Armeniacae,
and Semen Cannabis;
Combine all of these ingredients together;
Work them into a pill using honey mixed with
Bulbus Allii Fistulosi,
And take it early in the morning with a draft
of distilled spirits.[95]

"To treat her with drugs such as these," said Old Man Ho, "would only be to medicate her to death."

Dr. Chao responded, "It has always been true that:
Toxic medications may be bitter to the taste
but beneficial for an illness.[96]
After all:
To bring the case to an early clear-cut conclusion,
Is superior to letting things drag on interminably."

"This rascal is talking nothing but nonsense!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have the servants throw him out of here."

"Since your own manager recommended and vouched for him," said Ch'iao Hung, "you can hardly send the doctor off empty-handed."

"To comply with your suggestion," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have someone in the shop up front weigh out two mace of silver for him and send him on his way."

Dr. Chao, accordingly, took the two mace of silver and headed for home:
His one mind hastening like an arrow;
His two legs racing as though flying.[97]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Dr. Chao was out of the way, he said to Ch'iao Hung, "This man turned out to be an ignoramus."

"Though I did not venture to say so just now," said Old Man Ho, "this fellow is well-known outside the East Gate as Chao the Quack. All he knows how to do is:
Sport placards and rattle his bell,
on the streets, attempting to con the passersby. What does he know about pulse diagnosis or the etiology of disorders?"

"As for this ailment of your venerable lady's," he went on to say, "when I get home, I'll make up a couple of prescriptions for her in the hope that they will do the trick. After she has taken them, if her hemorrhaging is reduced, and her chest feels more comfortable, it will be expedient to prescribe further medication. I am afraid, however, that if the hemorrhaging does not stop, and her appetite does not improve, her condition will prove difficult to treat."

When he had finished speaking, he got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed one tael of silver in a packet and sent Tai-an, with a gift box in hand, to pick up the prescribed medications. That evening they were administered to Li P'ing-erh, but they produced not the slightest change in her condition.

"You ought to be sparing in the medications you give her," said Wu Yüeh-niang. "She has already stopped eating and drinking, so what is there left in her stomach? If you insist on continuing to medicate her, it is likely to exhaust her vitality. Formerly, that Immortal Wu predicted that during her twenty-seventh year she would suffer a bloody catastrophe, and this just happens to be her twenty-seventh year. You ought to send someone to look for that Immortal Wu, and have him prognosticate on her behalf to see what the categories 'emolument' and 'horse' in her horoscope forebode for her. [98] If her fate should prove to be in conflict with some baleful star, he might be able to either avert the calamity or protect her against it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, sent a servant with his calling card in hand to the mansion of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command to inquire as to the whereabouts of Immortal Wu.

The servant was told, "Immortal Wu is an itinerant priest who wanders like a cloud. His comings and goings are uncertain. When he comes here, he generally stays in the Temple of the Tutelary God south of the city. This year, in the fourth month, he left on a pilgrimage to Mount Wu-tang. [99] If you want someone to calculate a fortune, there is a Master Huang, who resides outside the Chen-wu Temple, who is good at calculating them. He charges only three mace of silver per calculation but will not make house calls. He can interpret the events of a lifetime, from beginning to end, as clearly as though he were seeing them with his own eyes."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, consequently, sent Ch'en Ching-chi, with three mace of silver, to seek out Master Huang's dwelling outside the Chen-wu Temple in the northern quarter of the city. He found a poster pasted on Master Huang's door, that read:
Calculations concerning Anterior Heaven
based on the *Changes:*
The charge for each prognostication is
three mace of silver.

Ch'en Ching-chi went inside, bowed respectfully, proffered the stipulated fee, and said, "I have someone's fortune that I would like to trouble you to calculate, sir."

He then told him the eight characters that determined Li P'ing-erh's horoscope, as well as the facts that she was a female, that she was currently in her twenty-seventh year, and that she was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month.

Master Huang performed some calculations on his abacus and then said, "This female's horoscope indicates that she was born in a *hsin-wei* year, in a *keng-yin* month, on a *hsin-mao* day, during the hour *jen-wu,* which calls for analysis of the horoscopic category 'seal ribbon.'[100] The first of her 'decennial periods of fate' began in her fourth year and was designated by the combination *chi-wei;* the second began in her fourteenth year and was designated by the combination *wu-wu,* the third began in her twenty-fourth year and was designated by the combination *ting-ssu,* the fourth will begin in her thirty-fourth year and be designated by the combination *ping-ch'en.* This year of her horoscope is a *ting-yu* year, which means that she will suffer from 'matched shoulders,' because the stem of this year, which corresponds to the element metal, will be injured by the stem of her day of birth, which corresponds to the element fire. During this year the planet Ketu[101] impinges on her fate, and it is also in conflict with the baleful stars known as Death Knell and the Five Devils, which will make trouble for her. Now Ketu is a dark star, the image of which resembles a tangle of threads without a head, the shape of which changes incessantly. If someone's decennial period of fate collides with it, it is likely to portend something ominous,[102] such as the development of disease. It indicates that in the first, second, and third, or the seventh, or ninth months a medical calamity may occur, involving the loss of property, the untimely death of a child, the scheming of petty people, and the spreading of malicious gossip,[103] intended to inflict material damage. If it is the horoscope of a female, it is very unpropitious. The judgment reads:
During this year when the planet Ketu encroaches,
Her destiny is like propelling a boat on dry land,[104]
Causing the head of the household to knit his brows.
In quietude, hesitating over the best thing to do,
In idleness, given over to sorrow without respite;
If you want to know why his woman is so afflicted,
And as unlikely to endure as a tangle of threads:
Ponder the events before conception and postpartum.[105]
Her fortune reads:
Aside from the fact that she entered into
wedlock rather late,
It is also true that she lost her parents
early on in life.
Her fragrant features and alluring beauty
have bloomed of late,
Everything that she desired seemed to be
there for the asking.
But no sooner was she happily wed than
the dragon appeared,
And the congenial union of the sheep was
menaced by the tiger.[106]
Sadly, when emotions are at their height
feelings are lost,
When her fate enters the year of the cock[107]
the leaves will fall."

When Master Huang had copied this information out, he sealed it and entrusted it to Ch'en Ching-chi to take home with him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting together with Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen Pi-ku when Ch'en Ching-chi came back with the copied fortune, and he took it back to the rear compound to explicate for Wu Yüeh-niang's benefit. It was apparent that the fortune was:
More likely to be unfortunate than fortunate.[108]

Nothing might have happened if Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard about this, but having heard about it:
His brows became tightly knit, as though secured by a triple-spring lock;
His belly became overburdened, as though with ten thousand bushels of woe.[109]
Truly:
The lofty and eminent in their youth meet with calamity;
While the clever and the intelligent suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled by fate rather than man.

The cricket chirps mournfully in the dew
It frightens her as she lies on the autumn pillow.
Her tears moisten the embroidered coverlets.
Lonely she lies, her exquisite limbs are cold.
The night seems as unending as her sorrow.
The rain pours down. The lamp is very dim.
She cannot sleep.
Now the crow cries and the golden pit is cold.

One night, when Han Daoguo was at home from the shop, his wife Wang Liu'er said to him: "Through our master's kindness we have made a good deal of money. I think we ought to prepare some sort of a feast and invite him to come. Besides, he has just lost his son and we should do something to console him. It need not be a very expensive entertainment, but it should be well done. When the people at the shop see it, they will realize that you are on very good terms with his Lordship. Such friendships as that between our master and yourself are not by any means usual. It will help when you go to the South."

"That is just what I have been thinking," Han Daoguo said. "Tomorrow is the fifth, but that is not a favorable day. Why don't we give our party on the sixth? I will engage two singing girls and take my card around myself and ask him to come. At night, I will go and sleep at the shop."

"Why should you engage singing girls?" Wang Liu'er said. "After dinner, he may wish to stay a while, and it will be awkward if there are singing girls about. Our neighbor, Mistress Luo, knows a girl called Shen. She is young and has an excellent voice. She has the advantage of being blind. We might get her to come. We can send her away when we have done with her."

Han Daoguo agreed. The night passed. The next day he went to the shop and asked Master Wen to write an invitation card for him. Then he went himself to Ximen Qing. "Tomorrow," he said, "I am arranging to have a very small party, and I beg you to come." He handed his card to Ximen Qing. Ximen looked at it.

"You should not take so much trouble," he said. "I shall be free tomorrow, and I will come as soon as I get back from the office." Han Daoguo went away. The next morning, he sent Hu Xiu to buy food and engaged a cook. He sent a sedan chair for Miss Shen. His wife and the maids prepared some excellent tea and waited for Ximen Qing.

In the afternoon, Qintong brought a jar of grape wine and, later, Ximen Qing came in a sedan chair, followed by Daian and Wang Jing. He was wearing a *zhongjing* hat, a black silk gown, and black shoes with white soles. Han Daoguo welcomed him and thanked him for the wine. Ximen sat down on a chair that was set by itself in the place of honor. Wang Liu'er, in a dainty dress, came and kowtowed four times to him. Then she went out to see about the tea. Wang Jing brought it, and Han Daoguo offered a cup to Ximen; then he sat down and took a cup himself. When they had drunk their tea, Wang Jing took the cups away.

"Both when I have been here and when I have been away," Han Daoguo said, "you have been very kind to me and my wife. I find it hard to express my gratitude. The other day, when your son died, I was not at home, and, unfortunately, my wife had a very bad cold and could not call to offer our sympathy. We have ventured to invite you today, partly in the hope of making you merry and partly as a sign of our sincere sympathy."

"You are both very kind," Ximen Qing said.

Wang Liu'er came and sat with them. "Have you told his Lordship?" she asked her husband.

"Not yet," he said.

"What is that?" Ximen Qing said.

"He was going to ask two singing girls to come, but I thought they might be in the way and I wouldn't let him send for them. We know a young lady who often visits my neighbor Luo, a certain Miss Shen. She knows all the latest songs. The other day, when I was at your house, I saw Miss Yu. She sings well, but not so well as Miss Shen. I have asked Miss Shen to come and sing for you. If you like her singing, you may think fit to get her to sing for your ladies."

Han Daoguo told Daian to take his master's cloak, and the table was laid. Hu Xiu brought in the food. Wang Liu'er opened the jar and heated the wine. She carried the pot and her husband offered a cup of wine to Ximen Qing. Then Miss Shen came. Her hair was dressed high upon her head, and the ornaments and flowers she wore were very simple. Her gown was green, her skirt red. Her feet were very small. Her cheeks were the color of peach flowers, and her eyebrows long. She kowtowed to Ximen Qing. He bade her rise and asked how old she was.

"I am twenty-one," she said.

"How many songs do you know?" Ximen asked.

"More than a hundred; some long, some short."
Ximen asked Han Daoguo to give her a seat, and, after making a reverence, she sat down. Then she took a zither and sang "The Arbor of Fragrance in Autumn." When they had finished their soup and other dishes had been brought, she sang "The Five Thousand Rebels." They drank again, and Ximen Qing asked her to put down the zither and sing a short song to the accompaniment of the lute. Miss Shen was anxious to display her skill. Gently waving her silken sleeves, she took up the lute delicately, tuned it softly, and sang. The song she sang was "Sheep upon the Mountains." Han Daoguo asked his wife to fill up a cup of wine and offer it to Ximen Qing.
Wang Liu'er said to Miss Shen: "You know another fine song. I should like you to sing it for his Lordship."
At the first meeting with her lover
No more than twice ten springs had welcomed her.
Black is her hair like a black cloud
Her cheeks as rosy as a peach blossom
As tender as the soft shoots of the bamboo.
If she had been born of a good family
She would have been a great lady.
Alas, she has thrown away her virtue in a house of ill fame.
If she could give up that evil life and marry,
It would be better than having always to dismiss one man
To give welcome to another.
At the first meeting with her lover
She is as perfect as the moon, as graceful as a flower
A jewel amid the dust and wind
With a slim waist that a hand can encircle
And a clever mind that needs no telling.
He is full of regret that they did not meet before
Now, as they lie on the bed drinking, they repine
They pour their wine, sing softly to each other, and embrace.
One looks long and is charmed
The other gazes and is filled with delight.
They know that their joy may last for but a moment
And strive to throw foreboding to the winds.
The songs reminded Ximen Qing of his first meeting with Zheng Aiyue. He was pleased. Wang Liu'er filled his cup again and said, smiling: "My Lord, do not hurry over your wine: Miss Shen has several songs to sing yet. She has only made a beginning. You may decide to send for her to sing for your ladies. In my opinion, she is certainly cleverer than Miss Yu."
"Miss Shen," Ximen Qing said, "if I send someone for you at the Double Ninth festival, will you come?"
"Whenever you think fit to command me, I will come," Miss Shen said.
Ximen Qing was pleased with the intelligent way she spoke. They drank again. Wang Liu'er thought that the girl's presence might prove hampering to her dealings with Ximen Qing, so, after a few more songs, she told her husband to send Daian with Miss Shen back to Mistress Luo's house. Ximen Qing gave her three *qian* of silver to buy strings for her instruments. When Miss Shen had thanked him, he told her that he would send someone for her on the eighth day. "My lord," Wang Liu'er said, "you need only tell Wang Jing. I will do the rest." Miss Shen went away. Han Daoguo went to the shop and left his wife alone with Ximen Qing. Wang Liu'er threw dice and drank with him. Their hearts began to grow warm. Ximen Qing pretended that he was going to change his clothes and went to her room. She followed him; they fastened the door and set to their pleasure. Wang Jing took a lamp and went to another room where he joined Daian and Qintong and drank wine with them.
The boy Hu Xiu stole a few cups of wine in the kitchen. Then he dismissed the cook and went to the room where Wang Liu'er had her domestic shrine. There he set down a mattress and went to sleep. But the room was next to Wang Liu'er's, and soon the boy woke up. He could hear sounds coming from the next room. Through a crack in the partition he could see a light. He thought that Ximen Qing had gone and that Han Daoguo was sleeping there. He took a pin and made a hole in the paper. Through the hole he peeped. The candles were shining brightly. He was surprised to see Ximen Qing sporting vigorously with his master's wife, whose legs were plainly to be seen over the frame of the bed. Ximen Qing was wearing a short silken vest and nothing at all upon the lower part of his body. At the edge of the bed, he was coming and going, plunging and prancing, making a considerable noise. The woman was saying all kinds of endearments to him. Hu Xiu heard: "My darling, if you would like to burn your naughty sweetheart, do so. Burn me whenever and wherever you like. I shall not forbid you. My body is all yours, and whatever you like to do with it, you may do."
"But your husband may not like it," Ximen Qing said.
"Even if that turtle had eight heads and eight galls, he would not dare not to like it; it is only by your bounty that he exists."
"If you will love me only," Ximen said, "I will send him and Laibao to stay in the South. I can keep them busy there buying merchandise for me."
"Then send him," the woman said. "Why should you keep him here? Send him away by all means, and when he comes back I will find another woman for him. I belong heart and soul to you, so I want him no longer. Do with me whatever you think fit, I shall be quite content. And if I lie to you, may this unworthy body rot utterly away."
"You need take no oaths," Ximen said.
Hu Xiu heard all that they said and saw all that they did.
Han Daoguo, before he left the house, had seen no sign of the boy and supposed that he had gone to the shop. But when he got to the shop and made inquiries of Wang Xian and Rong Hai, they told him that the boy was not there. Han Daoguo went home again and looked for Hu Xiu at the front and the back, but could see him nowhere. In the front court, Wang Jing, Daian and Qintong were drinking.
When Hu Xiu heard Han Daoguo coming, he hurriedly lay down again on his mattress and pretended to be asleep. His master came into the room with a light. There the boy was, snoring. Han Daoguo kicked him. "Get up at once, you rascal," he said. "I thought you were at the shop. You have no business here. You can find a place to sleep there. Get up and come with me." Hu Xiu got up, rubbed his eyes, and went to the shop with Han Daoguo.
Ximen Qing and Wang Liu'er enjoyed the pleasures of love for a long time. He burned the woman in three places, at the pit of the stomach, on the mount of Venus, and on the tail bone. Then she got up, dressed herself, and called her maid to bring water that she might wash her hands. Fresh wine was heated; food was brought, and they talked together. After drinking a few cups of wine, Ximen Qing mounted his horse and went away with the three boys, Daian, Wang Jing and Qintong. It was the second night watch when they reached home.
He went to see Li Ping'er. She was lying on her bed. She noticed that Ximen Qing had been drinking and asked where he had been.
"Han Daoguo invited me to go to his place. He wished to express his sympathy in the loss of our child. There was a young woman named Shen there. She sings very well, certainly more sweetly than Miss Yu, and I am going to send for her at the festival. She shall sing for you. I know how melancholy you have been, but now you must not think about the baby any longer."
He was going to tell Yingchun to take his clothes and make ready to go to bed with Li Ping'er. "No," she said, "I am still unwell, and the maid is making some medicine for me at this moment. Won't you go and sleep with someone else? You must have seen how ill I have been looking lately. There is hardly any breath left in my body. You will take no more pleasure with me."
"My dearest one," Ximen said, "I love you too dearly ever to forsake you. I want to stay with you."
Li Ping'er looked at him and smiled. "Who can believe that deceitful tongue of yours?" she said. 'If I were to die tomorrow, would you not forget me? Wait till I am better and, if you still wish to sleep with me, you shall."
"Very well," Ximen said, "if you won't have me, I'll go to Pan Jinlian."
"Yes, do," Li Ping'er said. "That is exactly where you should go. She is waiting for you in a fever of anxiety. If you do not go, she will think I have prevented you.
"In that case, I will go now."
Li Ping'er smiled bitterly. "I was teasing you," she said. "But please go."
When he had gone, she got up and sat on the bed. Yingchun brought her medicine. She could not restrain her tears, and her fragrant cheeks were wet with them. She sighed as she took the medicine.
Jinlian had gone to bed when Ximen Qing came to her room. "You have gone to bed very early," he said.
"What kind of wind has blown you here?" she said. "Where have you been drinking today?"
"Han Daoguo asked me to go to his place," Ximen said. "He wished to distract me after my bereavement, and to make some return for the kindness I've shown him."
"Looking after his wife when he was away on business, I suppose!" Jinlian said.
"Oh, no," Ximen said, "between master and man, anything of that sort would be improper."
"Improper, do you say? Did you put a strap about your loins to make sure that you would not overstep the mark? It is no use trying to hoodwink me. I have known all about it for some time. On your birthday, that strumpet was here flaunting a pin with the character *shou* that you had secretly sneaked from Li Ping'er and given to her. The Great Lady and Meng Yulou both noticed it. I told her what I thought, and she flushed crimson. But I don't suppose she mentioned that to you. So that is where you have been today. Oh, you shameless fellow! A flat-footed, lanky, ugly-looking strumpet like that with the hair all over her forehead and lips as red as blood! What a woman! A great purple-faced wanton hussy. I can't imagine what you find in her. And you keep her brother here so that he can run messages between the pair of you."
Ximen Qing kept on denying. "You funny little slave," he said, laughing, "why do you talk such nonsense? There is nothing at all between us. Besides, her husband was there today, and I did not even see her."
"You are lying again," Jinlian said. "Everybody knows her husband is a barefaced pander. He is the sort of man who guards his sheep and goes picking tinder at the same time. He lets you have his wife and takes your money. You silly fellow, you can only hear guns forty *li* away."
Ximen Qing undressed and sat down on the bed. Jinlian stretched out her arm and pulled down his trousers. She touched his staff. It was soft. The clasp was still about it.
"Oh, you dried duck, boiled in a cauldron!" she cried. "Your body may be exhausted, but your mouth is never so. Look at this gentleman! Not a word to say for himself! Now, you villain. How dare you play tricks with that strumpet all this time? See the state you've brought him to! And your mouth is as assured as ever. Will you take an oath? I will tell Chunmei to bring a cup of cold water. If you dare drink it, I will believe you. Salt is salt, and vinegar is vinegar all the world over. But I need not tell you that. You are like a bald-headed man putting on a wig. If I let you do as you would like to do, there won't be a woman in the world safe from you. You shameless scoundrel! It is a good thing you are a man. If you were a woman, you would be carrying on with every man in the street."
Ximen Qing laughed. He could not think of anything to say. He got ready for bed and told Chunmei to heat some wine. Then he took a pill from the little gold box, swallowed it and lay down on the bed.
"My dear," he said, "taste it. If you bring it to life again, good for you."
Jinlian swore she would do nothing of the sort. "You filthy creature! And it has just been busy in that dirty strumpet's mill. If I did a thing as foul as that, it would kill me.
"You funny little whore," Ximen said, "don't talk nonsense. I tell you I have had nothing to do with her."
"If you have not, why won't you take an oath?"
The argument continued for some time. Finally, she invited Ximen Qing to wash. He would not. She took a handkerchief from under the pillow and wiped his penis, then took it in her mouth so that it soon regained its fire. Ximen mounted her fiercely and began; pressing her legs with his arms, he moved his penis noisily. The candle gleamed; he rejoiced at the sight. She lay on the bed and moved up to meet him, arousing his passion still more. He put some of his red powder onto his prick, which he pushed in again. Gripping her legs, he thrust three hundred times. Jinlian's eyes closed and she began to tremble. "Darling," she whispered, "you must do no more. You should not have put the powder on him."
"Now, little strumpet," Ximen Qing cried, "are you afraid of me or not? Will you ever treat me disrespectfully again?"
"Darling, forgive me," Jinlian said. "I will never dare to talk like that again. Don't thrust so roughly, you will make my hair untidy."
They played happily far into the night, till at last they were tired and went to sleep.
On the day of the Double Ninth festival, the ninth day of the ninth month, Ximen Qing said to Wu Yueniang: "A day or two ago, when I was drinking wine with Han Daoguo, I saw a certain Miss Shen. She is good-looking and she sings well. I will send a boy for her and she shall stay a few days to sing for you." He told the cooks to prepare a feast, and tables were set in the garden in the Hall of the Lovely Prospect. There Ximen and his household kept the festival. Wang Jing brought Miss Shen. She kowtowed to all the ladies. Yueniang thought her very pretty and asked how many songs she knew. Miss Shen said she knew a great many. Yueniang offered her some refreshments and asked her to sing for a while in the inner court before she went to the garden.
Ximen Qing did not go to the office that day. He superintended the planting of the Qiujus and invited the ladies to go to the garden. Chunmei, Yuxiao, Yingchun and Lanxiang were there to serve the wine. Miss Shen sang, and accompanied herself on the lute.
Li Ping'er, who was still anything but well, did not come until she had been sent for several times. She was indeed not fit to come; her body was so weak that the wind might have blown her over. Everybody asked her to drink, but she could take only a little. Ximen Qing and Yueniang, seeing her so melancholy, did their best to encourage her. "Sister," they said, "you must cheer up. We have brought Miss Shen to sing for you."
"Tell her any song you like," Meng Yulou said. But Li Ping'er did not answer them.
While they were drinking, Wang Jing came and said that Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie had come. "Tell them to wait for me in the small arbor," Ximen said, "I will be there in a minute."
"Uncle Chang has brought two boxes," Wang Jing said.
"He has brought me some presents because I have helped him to get a house," Ximen said to Yueniang.
"We must see about something for them to eat," Yueniang said. "We can't allow them to go away with empty stomachs. You go to them, and I will arrange for them to have some food."
Before Ximen left the ladies, he said to Miss Shen: "Sing the best of all your songs for the Sixth Lady." Then he went to see Bojue.
"Sister," Jinlian said to Li Ping'er, "tell Miss Shen what song you would like. Father sent for her specially on your account, and you must choose something."
Li Ping'er asked for the song "Red Dust in the Purple Street."
"Yes, I know it," Miss Shen said. She took up her lute and sang it with particular care. When the song was done, Yueniang said: "Sister, drink a cup of this wine. It is beautifully sweet." Li Ping'er could hardly refuse. She took a cup and drank a mouthful, no more. Soon she felt too ill to stay and went back to her room.
Ximen Qing went to the Hall of the Kingfisher. Ying Bojue and Chang Zhijie were standing beside a pine thicket admiring the chrysanthemums. Twenty pots of the most renowned blooms stood there, all more than seven feet high. Among them were such famous flowers as Scarlet Cloak, Doctor's Red, Purple Cloak, Golden Girdle, White *Fenshi* and Yellow *Fenshi*, and many others. Bojue and Chang Zhijie came forward and made a reverence to Ximen Qing, then Chang called the man who had come with him to bring the boxes.
"What is this?" Ximen Qing said.
Bojue answered. "Brother Chang," he said, "is eager to express his sense of your kindness in helping him to get a house. He had nothing to give you, but his wife has prepared this box of crabs and a couple of roast ducks and he asked me to come with him so that we can enjoy them together."
"Brother Chang," Ximen Qing said, "there was no need for you to trouble. Your wife is only just better. She should not have bothered to cook these things."
"I told him so," Ying Bojue said, "but he thought it would be better than anything else he could get."
Ximen Qing told a boy to open the box. There were forty large crabs, ready dressed with peppers, ginger, garlic and herbs, and prepared with oil, sauce and vinegar. They smelled very tasty and promised excellent eating. The two roast ducks were done in the most attractive style. Ximen Qing told Chunhong and Wang Jing to take them to the kitchen. He gave a small present to the porter and thanked Chang Zhijie. Qintong raised the lattice and they went into the Hall of the Kingfisher. Bojue could not find words to express his admiration of the chrysanthemums. He asked where they had come from. "Eunuch Liu, the warden of the brick kilns, sent me these twenty pots," Ximen told him. "Not only the plants but the pots as well."
"Indeed!" said Bojue. "They are the genuine official pottery too. The clay is of the highest quality: it is put through the finest of sieves and pressed by the workmen's feet. That is how such flower pots as these are made. They are made like Suzhou bricks, and they are by no means easy to get hold of these days."
Ximen Qing called for tea. "Brother Chang," he said, "when did you move into your new house?"
Bojue answered: "He moved in three days after the money was paid. Yesterday was a lucky day. He bought a number of things, and opened a small shop. Mistress Chang's younger brother keeps the books."
"We must buy presents and celebrate the occasion," Ximen said. "We don't want a crowd of people, Xie Xida perhaps, and you and I will arrange for food to be taken to Brother Chang's house, so that he may not be put to any expense. We will engage two singing girls and have a merry housewarming."
"I should have invited you myself," Chang said, "but I did not dare. The house is so small I thought you would not like it."
"Not at all!" Ximen said, "we don't wish you to spend your money. I will send word to Xie Xida myself." He said to Qintong: "Go and ask your Uncle Xie to come and see me."

"Which singing girls are you going to send for?" Ying Bojue asked.
Ximen Qing laughed. "Oh, Zheng Aiyue and Hong Si'er, I think."
"Brother," Bojue said, "you didn't wish to tell me which two girls you would have, but I guessed. Now what do you think of Zheng Aiyue? Is she more tasty than Li Guijie?"
"There is none better," Ximen said.
"Why wouldn't she talk to us on your birthday?" Bojue asked. "It seems to me she is a very cunning girl."
"Next time I go to see her," Ximen said, "I will take you with me. She and her sister play backgammon very well, and we will have a game with them."
"By all means," Bojue said. "I will certainly go and have a game with the young lady. I don't intend to let her off altogether."
"You naughty dog," said Ximen, "don't play your tricks on her."
Xie Xida came, made a reverence, and sat down. "Brother Chang has just bought a new house," Ximen said to him. "He has moved into it without a word to us. I suggest that we all contribute a small sum and I will have a feast prepared here and send it around to his house. We will engage two singing girls and have a happy time there. But he must not be put to any expense."
"Brother," Xie Xida said, "you have only to say the word and the money shall be sent to you at once. Will anyone else be at the party?"
"Nobody else," Ximen Qing said. "Each of us will give two pieces of silver."
"His place is not very big," Bojue said. "It will not hold many people."
Then Qintong came and said that Uncle Wu had come. Ximen told the boy to bring him in. Uncle Wu made reverence to the three guests, then to Ximen Qing, and sat down. A boy brought fresh tea, and they drank it together. Then Uncle Wu rose and said to Ximen Qing: "Brother, will you come with me to the inner court for a moment? I should like to speak to you." Ximen Qing got up, and they went to the inner court together. They went to Yueniang's room, but she was in the arbor with the other ladies drinking wine and listening to Miss Shen singing. When she was told that her brother had come, she went back to her room and told Xiaoyu to bring tea.
Uncle Wu took ten taels of silver from his sleeve and gave them to Yueniang. "I have only had three pieces of silver from the office," he said, "so I can only pay my brother these ten taels. I shall have to pay the remainder by degrees."
"There is no hurry about it, Brother-in-law," Ximen Qing said.
"I am afraid I am very late already," Uncle Wu said.
Ximen Qing asked him if the work upon the granary was finished. "There is still another month's work to be done," Uncle Wu told him.
"Well," said Ximen, "when it is complete, you will reap your reward."
"Brother-in-law," Uncle Wu said, "this year, I understand, a number of military officials are to be appointed. I hope you will do anything you can for me by way of recommendation."
"Certainly," Ximen Qing said, "anything I can do for you, I will."
"You will go to the outer court, Brother?" Yueniang said.
"Perhaps I had better not go," Uncle Wu said. "The other three gentlemen may have business to transact."
"No," Ximen said, "a short time ago, Brother Chang borrowed a few taels from me and took a new house. He has just moved into it, and today he brought me a present of food, and I asked them to stay and enjoy it. You will be very welcome." He took Uncle Wu to the outer court. Yueniang went and bade the cooks get food ready for them. Qintong and Wang Jing prepared the table. Ximen Qing gave orders that the cellar should be opened and a jar of chrysanthemum wine brought. It had been given to him by Magistrate Xia. The wine was brought and opened. It was pale green in color and very sweet. Before it was poured into the wine pot, a jar of cold water was mixed with it to make it milder. It had a very delicate flavor, finer than that of grape wine.
Ximen Qing told Wang Jing to give a small cup to Uncle Wu, then to Ying Bojue and the others. They sipped it and spoke of it appreciatively. Then food was brought, and after they had had some, the crabs and roast ducks were served. Ying Bojue urged Uncle Wu to eat freely. Xie Xida was astounded: he could not imagine how they could be made so tasty and tender.
"They are a present from Brother Chang," Ximen Qing said.
"I have lived to be fifty-two years old," Uncle Wu said, "and never in all my life have I known crabs cooked in this way to be so good."
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "have you given the ladies a taste?"
"I have," said Ximen.
"Mistress Chang's cooking is really marvelous," said Bojue.
Chang Zhijie smiled. "Oh," said he, "my poor wife does not really cook very well. I brought these things thinking perhaps they might afford a little pleasure."
They enjoyed their crabs with the wine while, at Ximen Qing's bidding, Chunhong and Shutong sang Southern melodies. Bojue thought he heard music. "Is Li Guijie here?" he said. "Who else can be playing like that?"
"Listen again," Ximen Qing said.
"If it is not Guijie, it must be Wu Yin'er."
"You are guessing, Beggar Ying," Ximen said. "This girl is blind."
"It must be Miss Yu, then?" Bojue said.
"No, it is a Miss Shen. She is young and pretty and an excellent singer."
"Then why not tell her to sing a song for us?"
"I brought her here to sing for the ladies," Ximen said. "Your ears are very sharp if you can hear all this way off."
"Yes, my eyes are so clear that they can see a thousand *li* and my ears can hear a bee buzzing forty *li* away."
"Beggar," Xie Xida said, "you ears are as sharp as a rabbit's. Of course you can hear."
Then Bojue said: "Brother, you really must send for her. I should like to see her. Tell her to sing just one song for Uncle Wu. You can't refuse, for his sake."
At last, Ximen Qing told Wang Jing to go and ask Miss Shen to come and sing for Uncle Wu. She came, kowtowed, and sat down. Bojue asked her age and she told him she was twenty-one. Then he asked how many songs she knew and she said she knew a number for lute accompaniment, and more than a hundred short songs. "That is not bad," Bojue said.
"Miss Shen," Ximen Qing said, "we do not wish to put you to any trouble, but will you be good enough to take your lute and sing for us 'The Four Dreams and the Eight Spaces'?" He told Wang Jing to fill up his guests' glasses. Miss Shen played and sang sweetly.
When Li Ping'er reached her apartment, she went to wash her hands. Suddenly, the blood gushed from her, and her eyes were dazzled. She got up as quickly as she could, and pulled up her skirts, then fainted and struck the ground with her head. Yingchun was there and did what she could, but Li Ping'er hurt herself. Yingchun and Ruyi'er got her to bed. She lay there unconscious. Yingchun was frightened and told her fellow maid to go for Yueniang. All the ladies hurried to see what was amiss. Yingchun and the nurse were on the bed, holding up Li Ping'er.
"She was quite well a moment ago," Wu Yueniang said. "What has happened to make her like this?" Yingchun showed her the chamber pot.
Yueniang was startled. "Perhaps," she said, "the blood has flowed more freely because of the wine she drank."
"But she only drank a little," Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian said together. They made ginger broth and poured it down her throat, but it was a long time before she came around and was able to speak to them.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "what is the matter?"
"Nothing very much," Li Ping'er said. "I got up and pulled up my skirt. Then my eyes seemed to go black. Everything whirled round and round, and I couldn't keep myself from falling."
Yueniang was going to tell Daian to go for his master and also for Dr. Ren, but Li Ping'er said: "No, don't say anything about it. I should not like to disturb their party."
Yueniang told Yingchun to straighten the coverlets and help Li Ping'er to go to bed. She and the other ladies gave up their amusements and went to their own rooms.
Uncle Wu and the others stayed until the evening, then Ximen Qing went to Yueniang's room. She told him how Li Ping'er had fainted. Ximen went at once to see her. She was lying, pale as wax, upon the bed. She held him by the sleeve and cried. He asked her what the trouble was. "As soon as I came in," she said, "the blood poured from me like water. Then I fainted."
Ximen saw that her head was slightly bruised. "What were the maids doing to let you fall and hurt your face?" he said.
"It was a very good thing for me the maid and the nurse could come to my help," Li Ping'er said. "If they hadn't, I should have been very much worse hurt."
"I will send for Doctor Ren the first thing in the morning," Ximen said. He spent the night in her room, sleeping on another bed.
The following morning, after he had been to the office, Ximen sent Qintong for the doctor. It was a little after noon when Dr. Ren arrived. Ximen Qing received him in the great hall and they had tea. Then he sent a boy to tell the ladies. They had the room cleaned and incense burned, and Dr. Ren was asked to go and see Li Ping'er. When he had examined her, he came back to the great hall.
"The lady is much worse than she was before," he told Ximen Qing. "The trouble has gone to her liver and the lungs are much inflamed. The wood element gets stronger and stronger and the earth element weaker. Her blood is overheated and circulates too violently. It comes down like a mountain torrent and nothing can hold it back. If the blood that comes from her were dark in color, she might still be saved, but it seems lighter; it is, in fact, fresh blood. I will send her some medicine and, if it does her any good, there may be some hope. If it does not, I fear there is nothing I can do for her."
"Master," Ximen said, "I beg you to make some medicine for her with all the skill at your disposal. You shall be handsomely rewarded."
"Do not speak of reward," Dr. Ren said. "You and I are good friends. I will certainly do my best for her." They took more tea, and the doctor left. Ximen Qing told Qintong to take a roll of Hangzhou silk and two taels of white gold to the doctor and bring the medicine back with him. The medicine he brought was called a tonic for the spleen. Li Ping'er took it very hot, but the blood poured from her more than ever. Then Ximen Qing, very much distressed, sent for Dr. Hu, who lived in the same street. Dr. Hu said that anger had disorganized the pulse, and that the blood had become feverish. He too sent some medicine. Li Ping'er took it, but it was like a pebble thrown into the depths of the ocean.
Now that doctors were visiting the house all the time, Yueniang decided not to keep Miss Shen for more than one night. She gave her five *qian* of silver, some clothes and some ornaments. Miss Shen went away in a sedan chair, and a box of food was sent with her.
When Hua Ziyu was at the party given to celebrate the opening of the shop, he heard that Li Ping'er was ill. He told his wife, and his wife brought a box of presents and came to see the invalid. When she saw how thin and pale Li Ping'er had become, both women cried. Yueniang ordered tea and took Mistress Hua to the inner court.
Han Daoguo suggested to Ximen Qing that Dr. Zhao, a graduate of the Imperial College of Medicine and a specialist in the diseases of women, might be called in. "He is an expert on the pulse," he said. "My wife once had trouble of much the same sort and Doctor Zhao cured her. I commend him to you for your lady."
As soon as he heard this, Ximen Qing told Qintong and Wang Jing to go at once on horseback outside the Western Gate and ask Dr. Zhao to come. Then he sent for Ying Bojue and discussed the matter with him. "My sixth wife," he said, "is very ill. What can I do about it?"
"I heard she was better," Bojue said in surprise. "Is she worse again?"
"She has been very sad ever since the baby died," Ximen said, "and now her old trouble has returned. Yesterday, on the festival day, I got Miss Shen here especially for her. But she didn't take any interest. She went back to her own room and there fainted, fell on the floor, and bruised her face. I sent for Doctor Ren. He said she was worse than she had ever been. She took his medicine, but the blood only poured from her the more."
"I hear you sent for Doctor Hu, too," Bojue said. "What did he say?"
"He said that anger had disorganized her pulse. She took his medicine, but it did her no good. Today, my clerk Han recommended Doctor Zhao. His name is Chao Longgang and he is a specialist in women's diseases. I have sent two boys to fetch him. I am very very anxious about her. It is all on account of the baby. She thinks about him day and night. Women never know where to stop. I have tried to console her but she won't listen to me and I don't know what to do."
Ping'an came and announced Master Qiao. Ximen Qing took him to the hall and there they sat for a while with Ying Bojue.
"I hear that your Sixth Lady is not well," Master Qiao said. "I have come to inquire about her."
"It is the child's death," Ximen said. "It has made her so melancholy that an old trouble has returned. It was very kind of you to come."
"Have you sent for any particular doctor?" Master Qiao asked.
"First she took Doctor Ren's medicine," Ximen said. "Then, yesterday, I sent for Doctor Hu. There was no improvement, and now I have sent for Doctor Zhao."
Then Qiao said: "Near the office there lives an old gentleman named He who has a great knowledge of medicine. His son, He Qixuan, has become a very famous doctor. Why don't you ask him to come?"
"I will send for him when Doctor Zhao has gone."
"I would suggest having them together," Qiao said. "Then they can hold a consultation about the cause of the illness. They can prescribe afterwards, and their prescription ought to be effective."
"You are right," said Ximen. He told Daian to take his card and go with Qiao Tong to ask old master He to come. When Master He came, he bowed to Ximen Qing and Qiao, and they made him take the seat of honor. "It is several years since I last saw you," Ximen said politely, "and now your hair is quite white."
"How is your son doing?" Qiao asked the old man.
"He goes to the office every day," He said, "and that does not leave him much time for anything else. I myself have to go and see those patients who are not of official rank."
"You are very old," Ying Bojue said, "yet you seem very strong."
"Yes," said the old man, "I am eighty-one years old." They had tea and a boy was sent to give warning to the ladies. Then the old gentleman went to see Li Ping'er. He came back to the hall.
"I will tell you what is the matter with the lady," he said to Ximen Qing and Master Qiao. "The seed got into her blood. Then she had a fit of anger. This intermixture of anger and blood has caused the trouble. Whether I am correct or not, I do not know."
"Yes, you are right," Ximen Qing said, "but what I want to know is, can you cure her?"
Just then, Qintong and Wang Jing came back with Dr. Zhao. Old Master He asked who he was. "This is a doctor who was recommended to me by one of my clerks," Ximen Qing said. "Don't mention the fact that you have examined her. When he has seen her, you can consult with him."
Dr. Zhao came in and made a reverence to them all. The two old men, He and Qiao, sat in the places of honor, and made room on their left for Dr. Zhao. Ying Bojue sat on the right, and Ximen Qing in the host's place. Dr. Zhao asked the names.
"This is He, and I am Qiao," said Qiao.
"My name is Ying," said Ying Bojue. "I presume you are Doctor Zhao."
"I am," said Zhao, "and my second name is Longgang. My grand father was an official in the Imperial College of Medicine; my father was a doctor of high standing, so that I have the experience of three generations behind me. Every day I work very hard upon the theories of Wang Shuhe, Dong Yuan, and Wu Tingzi. I read the poem upon the Nature of Medicine, the Su Wen of Huangdi, the Nan Jing, and, of living masters, the Secret Art of Dan Xi, the cure of heart troubles also by Dan Xi, Jie Gu's Secret of Pulse Examination, the Thirteen Prescriptions, and so forth. I have read nearly everything that is written about medicine, so that, when I have to prescribe, I have a very harmonious system at my disposal. My fingers are able to discern the most profound workings of the pulse. I can diagnose the conflict between Yin and Yang according to the seasons. I determine the sinking or the floating of the pulse according to internal and external relations. And, in cases of fever or chill, I leave no detail unconsidered. There is nothing about the pulse I do not know, but, really, I cannot attempt to explain how much I do know."
Old Master He listened attentively. "May I ask what is the first thing to be done in the consideration of a patient's case?" he said.
"According to the ancient masters," Dr. Zhao said, "when one deals with any patient, one should look at him, listen to him, question him, and examine him. Then a miraculous cure is certain. I always begin by asking my patient questions, then I feel his pulse and consider his general appearance. Unless we see a patient as Zi Ping, the reader of fortunes, sees him, it is impossible to be quite definite about the ailment."
"Please, doctor, come and see my wife," Ximen Qing said. He told Qintong to warn the ladies in the inner court, and took Dr. Zhao to see Li Ping'er. She had just gone to sleep and had to be waked up again. Then she sat up in bed propped up with pillows and bedclothes. Dr. Zhao examined first her left hand, then her right.
"Lady," he said, "please raise your head." Li Ping'er did what she was told. Then the doctor said to Ximen Qing: "Kindly ask the lady who I am."
"Who is this gentleman?" Ximen said to his wife.
Li Ping'er looked at Zhao. "A doctor, I suppose," she said.
"There!" said Dr. Zhao, "you have no need to worry, Sir. She can still distinguish between one person and another."
"Be very careful," Ximen said, "and your fee shall be correspondingly large."
Dr. Zhao studied Li Ping'er for a long time. "Judging by her general appearance and her pulse, I think she must be suffering from a fever or some wasting disease. She must have been ill either before she had a baby, or afterwards."
"You are quite wrong," Ximen Qing said. "Kindly examine her again."
Dr. Zhao gazed at Li Ping'er and murmured: "Why is her face so pale? Her stomach must be out of order— or is it her blood?"
"Let me tell you, Doctor," Ximen Qing said. "My wife suffers from an issue of blood. It is that which makes her so thin and weak. If you have any medicine that will do her any good, I will pay you well for it."
"I said it was the blood," Dr. Zhao said. "Have no fear. I have some excellent medicine."

Ximen Qing took him back to the hall. Old Master He and Master Qiao asked what the doctor thought.
"In my opinion she is discharging too much blood," Dr. Zhao said.
"And what medicine are you going to give her?" said the old gentleman.
"I have a perfectly wonderful medicine that will certainly cure the lady. It is made of these drugs—liquorice, spurge, *gangsha,* hellebore, croton, coriander flowers, a mixture of ginger juice with raw pinella, aconite and almond *tianma*. Make all these into a pill with honey and take it with spirit in the morning."
"But, it seems to me, those drugs are much too strong," the old gentleman said. "I can't believe that would do at all."
"Why not?" said Dr. Zhao. "Doctors have always agreed that strong medicine, bitter to the taste, is excellent for invalids."
Ximen Qing realized that the doctor was talking nothing but rubbish. He gave him two *qian* of silver and dismissed him. He did not go with him to the gate, but he made no complaint because Han Daoguo had recommended him.
"The man is a fool," he said to Master Qiao.
"I did not venture to say so before," old Doctor He said, "but the fellow is very well known outside the gate. People call him Zhao the Trickster. He is always defrauding people and strolling about the streets. What should he know of medicine? As for your lady's illness, I will make up some medicine for her when I get home. If, when she has taken it, the flow of blood stops and she feels more comfortable, I will continue the treatment, but, if this medicine does not help, there is nothing else I can do." Ximen Qing gave the old gentleman a tael of silver and he went away.
Daian was sent for the medicine. Li Ping'er took it that evening, but there was no improvement in her condition.
"Do not give her any more medicine," Yueniang said. "She has had nothing to eat or drink, and medicine on an empty stomach is useless. Don't you remember that Wu the Immortal said she would have a blood disorder when she was twenty-seven years old? She is twenty-seven now. You would do well to send for Wu again. He can tell us whether she will live or not. If some evil star is overshadowing her life, we will ask the Immortal to offer sacrifice for her."
Ximen Qing at once sent a boy with his card to make inquiry at Major Zhou's house. Major Zhou's people said that Wu was a man who never stayed long in the same place. "When he is here," they said, "he always lives at the Temple of the Guardian Spirits of the Soil, south of the city, but, in the fourth month of this year, he went to the Wudang Mountains. If it is a fortune you wish to have told, there is a certain Master Huang who lives at the Daoist temple. He is well skilled in the art. He will not accept more than three *qian* of silver, but he will not leave his temple." This was reported to Ximen Qing. He immediately told Chen Jingji to take 3 *qian* of silver and go to the Daoist Temple to consult Master Huang. Outside the temple hung a sign on which was written:

Here, by the divinely blessed method of the Book of Changes, the decrees of Fate are interpreted. The fee's 3 *qian*.

Jingji went in and bowed to Master Huang. He gave him the 3 *Qian*. "The fortune I'd ask you to tell," he said, "is that of a woman twenty-seven years old, born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month."
Master Huang made a calculation upon the abacus and said, "In this fate we've the year *Xinwei,* the month *Gengyin,* the day *Xinmao,* and the hour *Jiawu*. The life would appear to be one in well-to-do circumstances. The fate seems to run in the years with a four. The fourth year's *Jiwei,* the fourteenth *Wuwu,* the twenty-fourth *Dingsi,* and the thirty-fourth *Bingchen*. This year's *Dingdu* and the evil stars are all in the ascendant. The *Jidu* star commands her life and the five evil spirits are always busy making trouble for her. The *Jidu* star's the star of darkness, its form is that of a bundle of tangled silk that has neither beginning nor end. There's a great deal of unhappiness and some illness. The first month, the second, third, seventh, and ninth are all months in which illness appears. This year's, too unpropitious as regards children. There are other sources of anxiety, quarrels, losses of property, and because she is a woman, the situation is more disastrous." Master Huang wrote down what he had said and Chen Jingji went back with it. Ximen Qing was with Ying Bojue and Master Wen. When Jingji gave him the paper, he took it to the inner court and read it to Yueniang. It was obvious that what destiny had in store for Li Ping'er was more to be feared than hoped for and they were full of sorrow.

## 085
## Taoist Master P'an Performs an Exorcism on the Lantern Altar; Hsi-men Ch'ing Laments Egregiously on Behalf of Li P'ing-erh & the Death of the 6th Lady

Whether one's conduct is false or true
is known only to oneself;
The causes of disaster or good fortune
are not to be sought elsewhere.[1]
Good and evil acts inevitably bring
their appropriate results;
The only question being whether they
come early or come late.[2]
When one reexamines at one's leisure
the deeds of one's lifetime,[3]
And ruminates in quietude about what
one has done during the day;[4]
If one consistently practices rectitude
with one's whole heart,
It is natural that Heaven's principles
will not let one down.[5]

when Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the prescriptions Li P'ing-erh took, and the medical attention she received, were completely ineffectual; and that though:
The gods were besought and diviners consulted,
the results of these prognostications were all:
Ominous and inauspicious,
he was:
At a loss for what to do next.

Initially, Li P'ing-erh still endeavored as best she could to comb her hair and wash her face, and she was still able to get off the k'ang by herself in order to sit on the commode. But afterwards, gradually:
Her intake of food and drink diminished,[6]
Her figure became increasingly emaciated,[7]
and the hemorrhaging from her lower body continued unabated. It did not take long for a woman as pretty as a flower to become so weak and emaciated that she did not bear looking at. She was no longer able to get off the k'ang to perform her natural functions, but simply lay on a pad that had been covered with a layer of absorbent grass paper. Fearing that anyone coming in might be offended by the foul odor, she had her maidservants keep incense burning in the room. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on observing that her arms were as thin as bars of silver, wept as he kept watch over her in her room and only went to the yamen every other day.
"My brother," protested Li P'ing-erh, "you really ought to report to the yamen, rather than letting my situation interfere with your responsibilities. My condition doesn't really matter. The only problem is the hemorrhaging down below. If it would only stop, I could open my mouth to eat and drink again, and should be all right. You're a man and can't afford to tie yourself down keeping vigil in somebody's room like this."
"My sister," wept Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can't bear to relinquish you in my heart."
"Don't be a fool," said Li P'ing-erh. "If I don't die, that's that. But if I'm going to die, what can you do to prevent it?"
"I've been wanting to tell you, but haven't told you yet," she went on to say, "that whenever I'm alone in the room, I'm afraid. It seems, though vague and indistinct, that there is someone there in front of me. I constantly dream of him at night, looking just as he did when he was still alive:
Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,
in the attempt to pick a quarrel with me, while holding the child in his arms. When I try to take the child, he pushes me roughly away. He says that he has purchased another house where he now is and demands over and over again that I should go join him there. But I've been reluctant to tell you about it."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said:
"A person's death is like the extinction of a lamp.[8]
During these several years, who knows where he has gone? This is all due to the fact that you have been ill for so long and have lost so much blood from hemorrhaging below. I doubt the existence of any such things as evil spirits or demons, or the ghosts of kinfolk or unrelated persons, bent on troubling you. But tomorrow I will send someone to Abbot Wu's temple to get a couple of written spells, and paste them on the door of your room. That way we can determine whether there are any evil influences at work, or not."
Before he had even finished speaking, he headed toward the front of the compound and deputed Tai-an to take a mount and ride to the Temple of the Jade Emperor in order to get the spells. When Tai-an got out onto the street, he ran into Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta and dismounted to speak to them.
"Is your master at home?" they inquired.
"Father is at home," reported Tai-an
"And where are you off to?" they went on to ask.
"I'm on my way to the Temple of the Jade Emperor to pick up some written spells," said Tai-an.
Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta then proceeded to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, where Ying Po-chüeh said, "Hsieh Hsi-ta has heard that our sister-in-law is unwell, which gave him quite a start; so we have come to ask after her health."
"She's been a little better the last couple of days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I can tell you, her body has become so emaciated she is scarcely recognizable, which has left me entirely at a loss for what to do in any direction. Her child is dead, but why not leave it at that? All she does is cry all night long, and it is this excess of grief that has brought on her illness. If you try to talk her out of it, she won't pay you any attention, which leaves me completely at a loss for what to do next."
"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "what have you sent Tai-an to the temple for?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing told them all about how Li P'ing-erh was afraid whenever she was alone in her room. "She fears that there are evil influences at work, so I have sent the page boy to ask Abbot Wu for a couple of written spells which can be pasted up in her room with a view to suppressing them."
"Brother," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "this is a result of the fact that my sister-in-law's vital spirits are at a low ebb. I doubt if there are any such things as evil spirits or demons involved."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if it's evil spirits that you want to dispel, that's no problem. Taoist Master P'an from the Temple of the Five Peaks outside the city gate is trained in the Five Thunder Rites of the Celestial Heart Sect [9] and is very adept at exorcising evil influences. He is popularly known as Demon-catcher P'an and constantly relieves people with his potions. Brother, if you will invite him to come here, he can examine my sister-in-law's room to see if there are any evil spirits lurking there. If there are, he will know it. If you then ask him to treat her ailment, he will be able to do so."
"After I get the written spells from Abbot Wu," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we can ascertain where he lives, and, if necessary, you can ride on a donkey with my page boy to invite him here."
"That's no problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'm happy to go. And if Heaven takes pity on her so that my sister-in-law recovers, I'd be willing to kowtow every step of the way, if necessary."
After they had talked for a while, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, having finished their tea, stood up and went about their business.
When Tai-an returned with the written spells, they were pasted up in the sickroom, but that evening, Li P'ing-erh was still afraid and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Just now the deceased one, together with two other men, came to apprehend me, but when they saw you coming in, they hid themselves out of the way."
"You shouldn't believe in such evil spirits," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but it doesn't matter. Yesterday Brother Ying the Second remarked that these hallucinations are the result of your emaciated state. He said that outside the city gate, at the Temple of the Five Peaks, there is a Taoist Master P'an who is good at curing ailments with his potions, and also at exorcising evil spirits. Tomorrow morning I'll ask Brother Ying the Second to go invite him to come and see you. If there are any evil influences at work, we can get him to dispel them."
"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "get him to come as soon as possible. That wretch was angry when he went away just now. He's likely to come back to get me tomorrow. Send someone after the Taoist master as quickly as you can."
"If you're afraid," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send a page boy with a sedan chair to bring Wu Yin-erh here to keep you company for a few days."
Li P'ing-erh shook her head, and said, "Don't impose on her. I'm afraid it would interfere with her business at home."
"How would it be," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if I got Old Mother Feng to come and look after you for a couple of days?"
Li P'ing-erh nodded her head in assent. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Lai-an to summon Old Mother Feng from the house on Lion Street, but she wasn't there, having locked her door and gone out.
Lai-an said to Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," "As soon as she comes back, whatever you do, tell her to come over as quickly as possible. The Sixth Lady at the mansion is calling for her."
Hsi-men Ch'ing also instructed Tai-an, saying, "First thing tomorrow morning you must accompany Ying Po-chüeh to the Temple of the Five Peaks outside the city gate in order to invite Taoist Master P'an to come here." But no more of this.
The next day, who should appear but Nun Wang from the Kuan-yin Nunnery, who came to see Li P'ing-erh, carrying with her a box of nonglutinous rice, twenty large pieces of junket, and a small box of squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices. When Li P'ing-erh saw that she had come, she hastily told Ying-ch'un to help her up into a sitting position to receive her. Nun Wang placed her palms together and saluted her in the Buddhist fashion, after which Li P'ing-erh invited her to take a seat.
"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "ever since you went off to arrange for the printing of that sutra, I haven't seen so much as your shadow. I've been as ill as this, and you haven't even bothered to come and see me."
"Mistress mine," said Nun Wang, "I was completely ignorant of the fact that you were unwell. I only found out about it when the First Lady sent a servant to the Nunnery the other day. And as for the printing of that sutra, you may not know it, but that old whore Nun Hsüeh and I have been engaged in quite a quarrel about it. By arranging for the printing of that sutra on your behalf all I was doing was driving the fish into the net for Nun Hsüeh, who connived with the printer to get a kickback of five taels, while I got off with not so much as a candareen. You may be bent on creating good fortune for yourself, but that old whore, in the future, will end up in the Avici Hell.[10] She has made me so angry that I'm not myself and even forgot to come by for the First Lady's birthday."
"Everyone creates his own karma,"
said Li P'ing-erh. "Let her do as she pleases. You shouldn't make an issue out of it."
"Who's making an issue out of it?" demanded Nun Wang.
"The First Lady is really annoyed with you," said Li P'ing-erh. "She says that you have even neglected to recite the *Shou-sheng ching*, or *Scripture on Incarnation*,[11] on her behalf."
"My bodhisattva!" protested Nun Wang. "However remiss I might be, I would never dare to neglect reciting a scripture for her. I have been reciting the *Shou-sheng ching* at my place for the last month and only finished doing so yesterday. On coming here today, I went first to the rear compound in order to see her and told her about my sense of grievance. When I told her, 'I didn't know that the Sixth Lady was unwell, and don't have anything to offer but this box of nonglutinous rice, some squash and eggplant julienne marinated with ten spices, and several pieces of junket that she can eat with her congee,' the First Lady told Sister Hsiao-yü to bring me here to see you."
When Hsiao-yü had opened the boxes to show her the contents, Li P'ingerh said, "Thank you for your trouble."
"Sister Ying-ch'un," said Nun Wang, "take two pieces of this junket and steam them, so I can look on as your mistress eats them with some congee."
Ying-ch'un accordingly accepted the proffered gifts and put them away.
"Prepare some tea for Reverend Wang to drink," Li P'ing-erh instructed Ying-ch'un.
"I've just had some tea in the First Lady's room in the rear compound," said Nun Wang. "Have her boil up some congee so I can watch you eat it."
Before long, Ying-ch'un set up a table and laid out four varieties of snacks to go with the tea which she provided for Nun Wang. After this, she brought in the congee for Li P'ing-erh to eat. There were a saucer of squash and eggplant julienne served in a sweet sauce and marinated with ten spices, a saucer of junket steamed to a frosty brown, two cups of congee made from the nonglutinous rice, and a pair of miniature ivory chopsticks. Ying-ch'un deployed the chopsticks, while the wet nurse Ju-i stood to one side holding a cup, as they attempted to feed her for some time, but she was only able to swallow two or three mouthfuls of congee, and nibble on some junket, before she shook her head, stopped eating, and told them to take it away.
"For us human beings," said Nun Wang:
It is food and water that sustain our lives.[12]
This is such good congee. Won't you have a little more?"
"What am I to do," said Li P'ing-erh, "if I'm unable to swallow it?"
Ying-ch'un then moved the tea table out of the way. Nun Wang lifted the coverlet aside, and when she saw that the flesh of Li P'ing-erh's body had wasted away to practically nothing, it gave her quite a start.
"Mistress mine!" she exclaimed. "When I left you the last time, you were getting better. Why have you taken such a turn for the worse, and become emaciated to such an extent?"
"She was indeed getting better," said Ju-i. "Her ailment originally began as a result of suppressed anger, and Father invited a doctor to come and examine her. She took the medicines he prescribed every day and was 70 or 80 percent on the way to recovery. But in the eighth month, her baby boy suffered a fright that left him in a bad way. The mistress was worried about him day and night and wore herself out so that she was not even able to get any sleep. Though she hoped against hope that the boy would recover, despite her expectations, he died. She can't help crying all day long, on top of which she is suffering from:

Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,
in her heart. Even someone forged out of iron or stone could hardly be expected to bear up under all these tribulations. It's not surprising that her ailment has taken a turn for the worse. When one is suffering from suppressed anger, it helps to discuss it with someone else, but the mistress won't let anything out. No matter how hard you press her on the subject, she won't say a word about it."
"What does she have to be angry about?" asked Nun Wang. "Your master loves her. The First Lady respects her. Of the five or six other ladies around her, who would actually give her cause for anger?"
"Reverend Wang," said the wet nurse, "are you really unaware of who has upset her?"
Turning to Hsiu-ch'un, she said, "Step outside and look around to see if the gate is shut, or not.
Even if you only talk along the road,
There may be someone lurking in the grass,
if you don't watch out."
She then went on to say, "It is the Fifth Lady next door who has upset our mistress. The cat from her place scratched the hand of her baby boy so badly that it caused him to go into convulsions. When the master came home, he interrogated her about it, but she refrained from telling him who was to blame. It was only later, after the First Lady had told him what happened, that he dashed the cat to death; but she still refused to acknowledge her guilt and vented her wrath on us. In the eighth month, after the little boy died, she took to:
Pointing at the mulberry tree,
But cursing the locust tree,
from her place next door, every day, expressing her gratification in a hundred different ways. Our mistress, in her room here, could hear everything she said perfectly clearly. How could she help being upset? In any case, although she was secretly perturbed, she didn't let the tears show. It's on account of this:
Suppressed anger and suppressed resentment,
that she has developed this ailment. Heaven only knows, our mistress is possessed of an admirable disposition.
The good things that take place she keeps to herself,
The bad things that happen she also keeps to herself.
In her relations with her sister wives and concubines, she has never allowed herself to get:
Red in the face with anger.[13]
If she has attractive clothes, she refrains from appearing in them until the others have something comparable to wear. In this entire household there is not a person who has not derived some benefit from their association with her. But, just as I said, despite having benefited from her generosity, there are those who don't have a good word to say for her behind her back."
"Why should they disapprove of her?" asked Nun Wang.
"For example," said Ju-i, "one time Old Mrs. P'an, the Fifth Lady's mother, was here on a visit when it happened that the master wanted to sleep in the Fifth Lady's room, so she came over here to spend the night with our mistress. When she was about to leave, our mistress gave her some shoe uppers, a jacket, and some money, in fact, there is hardly anything she wouldn't have given her, but the Fifth Lady still didn't have a good word to say for her."
When Li P'ing-erh heard this, she was annoyed at Ju-i and said, "Don't be such an old woman. Why should you criticize her for no good reason? I'm already as good as dead. Let her do as she pleases.
Though Heaven does not speak, it is obvious
that it is high;
Though Earth does not speak, it is apparent
that it is low."[14]
"My Lord Buddha!" Nun Wang exclaimed. "Who could have known that you have such a good heart?
Heaven also has eyes, and
Looks down from above.
You are sure to accrue benefits therefrom in the future."
"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "what benefits could there be for me? I haven't even been able to save the life of my only child, and now I'm not fated to live any longer myself. Suffering as I am from this ailment in my lower body, even if I were a ghost, I wouldn't be able to take a single step comfortably. I would like to give you some silver, Reverend Wang, in the hope that in the future, after I'm dead, you can arrange to have some nuns regularly recite the *Hsüeh-p'en ching*, or *Blood Pool Sutra*,[15] on my behalf. As for this evil karma of mine, there's no telling how much of it I may have accumulated."
"My bodhisattva!" exclaimed Nun Wang. "You are worrying far too much. Just see if you don't get better in the days to come. For someone as good-hearted as you are, the dragon kings and devas are sure to extend their protection."
As they were speaking, Ch'in-t'ung came in and said to Ying-ch'un, "Father has issued instructions that you should straighten up the room. Hua the Elder is about to come in to see how your mistress is. He is sitting outside in the front compound."
Nun Wang then stood up and said, "I'll go back to the rear compound for the time being."
"Reverend Wang," said Li P'ing-erh, "don't go home, but stay and keep me company for a few days. There are other things I want to discuss with you."
"Mistress mine," replied Nun Wang, "I won't go then."
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered Hua the Elder in for a visit, but Li P'ing-erh remained lying on the k'ang and did not have anything to say.
"I didn't know anything about it," said Hua Tzu-yu, "until yesterday, when a servant from your place came to let me know. Tomorrow your sister-in-law will come to see how you are."
Li P'ing-erh merely responded by saying, "I'm putting you to a lot of trouble," and then turned over so that she was facing in the other direction.
Hua Tzu-yu sat with her for a while and then got up and returned to the front compound, where he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "When my deceased uncle, the old eunuch director, was serving as grand defender of Kuang-nan, he brought some medicinal notoginseng[16] back with him. Has she taken any of it, or not? No matter what sort of uterine bleeding a woman may suffer from, whether it be flooding or spotting, if five candareen's weight of this medication in powdered form is taken with wine, it will put a stop to it immediately. If my sister-in-law still retains any of this herbal medication, why doesn't she take some of it?"
"She has tried that medication," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day, Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing prefecture came to pay a visit, and we discussed this medical problem. He also suggested a prescription, consisting of carbonized hemp palm fibers and white cockscomb flowers, decocted with wine, but it only stanched her bleeding for one day, after which the hemorrhaging continued more copiously than ever."
"In that case," said Hua Tzu-yu, "her condition will prove difficult to treat. Brother-in-law, you ought to look into getting a set of coffin boards for her as soon as possible, so they'll be ready when needed. Tomorrow, I'll have your sister-in-law come to see her."
When he had finished speaking, he stood up to go. Despite repeated attempts, Hsi-men Ch'ing could not persuade him to stay any longer, so he said goodbye and departed.
The wet nurse and Ying-ch'un were engaged in replacing the absorbent grass paper under Li P'ing-erh's body, when who should appear but Old Mother Feng, who came forward and saluted them with a bow.
"Old Mother Feng," said Ju-i, "you've been putting on the airs of a grande dame. Why haven't you come to look in on the mistress? Yesterday, Father sent Lai-an to fetch you, but he said you had locked your door and gone off somewhere."
"I can't tell you," said Old Mother Feng, "what a difficult time I've had, what with going to the temple to attend services all day long. I go out first thing in the morning, and then, no matter whether things go well or things go badly, I often don't get home until dark. And then I have to cope with Monk Chang, Monk Li, or Monk Wang."[17]
"However do you have the stamina to take on that many monks?" asked Ju-i. "It's a good thing Reverend Wang isn't here to hear you."
When Li P'ing-erh overheard this, she laughed lightly, saying, "This Old Mother never does anything but talk nonsense."
"Old Mother Feng," said Ju-i, "just when you're needed the most, you fail to show up. For the last several days, the mistress has not even swallowed a mouthful of congee, because she's been so depressed at heart. But you no sooner arrive than you induce her to laugh. If you would only consent to look after her for a few days, I'm sure that her ailment would take a turn for the better."
"I guess I'm just the sort of magician needed to fend off disaster for the mistress," said Old Mother Feng.
Everyone had a laugh at this.
Old Mother Feng then felt for Li P'ing-erh's body under the coverlet and said, "Mistress, everything will be all right if you can only get a little better."
She then went on to ask, "Can she get down to sit on the commode by herself?"
"It would be a good thing if she could," said Ying-ch'un. "The last two times she tried it, she struggled to do it and was just able to manage it with our support. For the last two days, however, she has remained on the k'ang. We put absorbent grass paper under her, and change it two or three times a day."
"The fact is," said Ju-i, "that she doesn't have the strength to eat anything much in the way of food, so how can her system withstand the effects of this hemorrhaging?"
As they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing came in and, catching sight of Old Mother Feng, said, "Old Feng, you ought to be coming over here to see her all the time. How is it that after you leave you fail to come back?"
"Master," protested the old woman, "how could I fail to come back? The last several days have been the time of year for me to pickle vegetables in the hope of picking up a few candareens. As long as I've got some pickled vegetables in the house, when people bring their karmic encumbrances to me to find places for, I'll have something for them to eat. Otherwise, where would I find the idle money to buy vegetables for them to eat?"
"Why didn't you tell me?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day they harvested the vegetables on my country estate. If I turn over the produce from two or three vegetable beds to you, that ought to suffice."
"I'd be much obliged to you once again," said the old woman.
When she had finished speaking, Old Mother Feng went over into an adjacent room. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sat down on the edge of the k'ang, beside which Ying-ch'un was burning some rue incense.
"How are you feeling at heart today?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired.
He then went on to ask Ying-ch'un, "Did your mistress eat any congee this morning, or not?"
"She did eat a little better than before," said Ying-ch'un. "Nun Wang brought her some pieces of junket, which I steamed for her, but she only nibbled at them. She was able to swallow no more than two mouthfuls of congee and broth, before she set them aside."
"Just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother Ying the Second and my page boy went outside the city gate to invite that Taoist Master P'an to come and see you, but he wasn't there. Tomorrow, I'll send Lai-pao on a donkey to go look for him again."
"Send someone after him as soon as possible," said Li P'ing-erh. "No sooner do I close my eyes than that wretch appears to harass me."
"That is only the result of your low spirits," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just set your mind at rest, and stop imagining him. I'm sure that after we get that Taoist master here to dispel those evil influences for you, and after you've imbibed some of his medicine, you're bound to get better."
"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "since I've contracted this awkward illness, there's little chance of my recovery. The best I can hope for is that we might be together again in a life to come. Today, when there's no one else around, I can speak to you freely. I had hoped that I could remain by your side, so that we could share a life together for a number of years, after which, even if we died, we would have had the experience of living together as man and wife. Who could have known that now that I am in my twenty-seventh year, I should first lose my dear adversary of a son, and then have the bad luck to come down with this fatal disorder, and have to abandon you for good? If I am ever to run into you again, it will be in the Gateway to the Shades."
As she spoke, she grasped Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand firmly in her own, while the tears fell from her two eyes, until she choked up and could no longer utter a sound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing also was overcome by grief and wept, saying, "My sister, if you have anything to say, say it."
As the two of them were weeping together in her bedroom, Ch'in-t'ung suddenly came in and said, "An orderly has come to remind you, Master, that tomorrow is the fifteenth day of the month, when you will be expected to participate in the ceremonies of bowing before the imperial tablet, taking the formal roll call, and presiding over the general disposition of pending cases in the yamen. Will you be going, or not? The foreman needs to know so he can attend you."
"I won't be able to go tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Take one of my cards and deliver it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, so he can take care of bowing before the imperial tablet without me."
Ch'in-t'ung nodded in assent and went out.
"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "if you do as I wish, you'll go to the yamen anyway. Don't let me interfere with your official responsibilities. They're important. Who knows when I'll die? It's early days yet."
"I'm going to stay at home and keep you company for a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "How could I bear to do otherwise? You must set your mind at rest, and stop worrying so much. Just now, Hua the Elder suggested to me that I look into getting a set of coffin boards for you, with a view to shocking you out of your indisposition. In that case, you'd surely get better."
Li P'ing-erh nodded in assent and said, "So be it; but you mustn't let yourself be talked into spending a foolish amount of money. It will suffice if you spend ten taels or so of silver in order to buy me a ready-made coffin, and then bury me beside the grave of your first wife. But don't have me cremated, if you care about our feelings for each other as man and wife. In that case, both early and late, it will be more convenient for me to partake of whatever offerings are made to the deceased. The members of your household are so numerous, you need to consider what it will take to support them in the future."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he felt just as though:
A knife were slashing his liver and gall;
A sword were piercing his body and heart.
"My sister," he said with tears in his eyes, "how can you talk that way? I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, even though I were to become utterly impoverished, would never let you down."
As they were speaking, Yüeh-niang came in, with a small box of fresh apples in her hand, and said, "Sister Li, my elder brother's wife has sent these apples for you to eat."
She then instructed Ying-ch'un, saying, "Wash these clean, and then cut them into slices with a knife for your mistress to eat."
"Once again," said Li P'ing-erh, "I am indebted to your elder brother's wife for her solicitude on my behalf."
It did not take long for Ying-ch'un to peel the apples, cut them into slices, and put them in a bowl, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, standing to either side of her, selected a slice to feed to her. They put it into her mouth, but after barely chewing enough of it to get the flavor, she spit it out. Yüeh-niang was afraid that they were tiring her, so she helped her into a supine position, with her face to the wall, and let her go to sleep. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang then came outside to consult with each other about the situation.
"As for Sister Li," said Yüeh-niang, "it appears to me that her condition has reached a critical stage. You ought to look into obtaining a set of coffin boards for her as soon as possible, so that they will be available when needed. If you wait until the time for them is at hand, things will be in such an uproar that in scrambling to come up with a decent coffin, you'll be just like:
A horse trying to catch a rat.[18]
That's no way to handle the business."
"Today," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Hua the Elder suggested the same thing. When I mentioned it to her just now, she enjoined me not to spend too much money and said that she would be content with a ready-made coffin. She went on to say, 'The members of your household are so numerous, you need to consider what it will take to support them in the future.' Her words have left me sore at heart ever since."
He then went on to say, "We might as well wait until Taoist Master P'an has come to consider her case before looking out for a coffin."
"Look here," said Yüeh-niang, "you don't know what you're saying. When a person is so emaciated she hardly retains her human shape, and when her esophagus is so stopped up that she can't even swallow a spoonful of water, you are still vainly expecting her to get well. We should be prepared for any contingency:
Beating the drum to sound an advance on the one hand,
And waving the flag to signal a retreat on the other.
If she is fortunate enough to recover, we can always donate the coffin to someone else. It won't cost us anything to speak of."
"I'll do as you say," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then went back to the rear compound with Yüeh-niang and sent a page boy to summon Pen the Fourth.
When Pen the Fourth arrived in the reception hall, he asked him, "Who do you think has the best coffin boards available? I'd like you and my son-in-law to take some silver with you and see if you can find a good set."
"Battalion Commander Ch'en's place on Main Street," said Pen the Fourth, "has recently acquired several sets of good coffin boards."
"If he's got good coffin boards available," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, turning to Ch'en Ching-chi, "you go back to the rear compound and ask your mother-in-law for five large silver ingots, so the two of you can go look for a set."
Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi came back with five silver ingots of fifty taels weight each and then set off on this errand with Pen Ti-ch'uan. They did not return to report on their mission until mid-afternoon.
"What kept you so long?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"When we went to Battalion Commander Ch'en's place," the two of them replied, "we looked at several sets of coffin boards, but they were all of mediocre quality, and the price was not right. On our way home, however, we happened to run into your kinsman Ch'iao Hung in the street, who said that Provincial Graduate Shang has a fine set of coffin boards. They were originally brought back by his father from his tour of duty as prefectural judge of Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan and were intended for his wife. Initially there were two sets of coffin boards from Peach Blossom Cavern,[19] one of which has already been used, so this is the only set remaining. It is a complete set of five boards of different sizes, from which the side walls, bottom, lid, and end pieces can be fashioned,[20] and the asking price is 370 taels of silver. Ch'iao Hung went with us to look at these coffin boards, and they turned out to be of incomparably superior quality. Ch'iao Hung bargained

over the price with Provincial Graduate Shang for some time, but he was only willing to reduce it by 50 taels. If it were not for the fact that he is planning to go to the capital to participate in the metropolitan examination next year, for which he needs the money, he would not be willing to part with this set of coffin boards. He also indicated that he is taking into consideration the fact that it is our household that wants them. If it were anyone else, he would insist on 350 taels."
"Since it is Ch'iao Hung who is acting as advocate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well pay out the 320 taels and have them carried here. But see that you do it quietly, without:
Ringing bells and beating drums."
"He has already accepted our 250 taels," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so we only owe him another 70 taels of silver to close the deal."
He then went back to the rear compound and got Yüeh-niang to give him another 70 taels of "snowflake" silver, after which the two of them left to complete their errand.
At dusk that evening, who should appear but a crowd of idlers, who carried the coffin boards through the gate, wrapped in strips of red felt, put them down in the front courtyard, and unwrapped them for Hsi-men Ch'ing to look at. Sure enough, they turned out to be fine coffin boards. Artisans were promptly engaged to saw them open, and when they did, they exuded a pungent aroma. Each piece was five inches thick, two feet five inches wide, and seven feet five inches long.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart was filled with delight, and he showed them off to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "These coffin boards will pass muster."
Ying Po-chüeh praised them unstintingly, saying, "It could be said that these coffin boards are fated to be hers.
Every object has its rightful owner.
Since my sister-in-law had the good fortune to marry you, Brother, it is only appropriate that she should end up in possession of these coffin boards."
Then, turning to the artisans, he said, "If you only take the pains to do a good job, your employer will reward you with five taels of silver."
"We understand," the artisans replied, and then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to go to work in the front reception hall, working all night to construct the coffin as quickly as possible. But no more of this.
Ying Po-chüeh then enjoined Lai-pao, "Early tomorrow morning, at the fifth watch, you should go to invite Taoist Master P'an. If he is willing to come, you should accompany him back here. This matter will brook no delay."
When he had finished speaking, he continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company that evening in the front reception hall, looking on as the artisans worked on the construction of the coffin. It was not until the first watch that he got up to go home.
"Come back as soon as you can tomorrow morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm afraid that Taoist Master P'an may arrive rather early."
"I understand," responded Ying Po-chüeh, after which he said goodbye and went out the gate.
To resume our story, Old Mother Feng and Nun Wang were keeping Li P'ing-erh company in her room that night, when who should appear but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who came in to see her after the conclave in the front compound broke up and wanted to go to sleep there.
Li P'ing-erh objected to this, saying, "You mustn't think of it. This room is:
Polluted and unclean,[21]
and the two of them are also here. It wouldn't be convenient. You go sleep somewhere else."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Nun Wang and Old Mother Feng were there, he went over to Chin-lien's quarters next door.
Li P'ing-erh told Ying-ch'un to close the postern gate and secure it with the crossbar, after which she told her to light a lamp, open her trunk, and get out several items of clothing and silver ornaments, and place them beside her.
First of all, she called Nun Wang over, gave her a five-tael ingot of silver, along with a bolt of silk, and said, "After I am dead, whatever you do, you must invite some fellow nuns to join you in recitations of the *Blood Pool Sutra* on my behalf."
"Mistress mine," expostulated Nun Wang, "you are worrying yourself over much. If Heaven only takes pity on you, you are likely to recover."
"You just put these things away," said Li P'ing-erh, "and don't tell the First Lady that I gave you any silver. Just say that I gave you this bolt of silk to compensate you for arranging the recitations of the sutra."
"I understand what you're saying," said Nun Wang, and she thereupon took possession of both the silver and the silk.
Li P'ing-erh then called over Old Mother Feng, picked up four taels of silver from beside her pillow, along with a white damask jacket, a yellow damask skirt, and a silver comb, and gave them to her, saying, "Old Feng, you're a familiar companion. You have served me from the time I was a child right up until the present time. Now, after I am dead, these articles of clothing and this ornamental comb can serve you as keepsakes, and you can use this silver to defray the cost of a coffin. And don't worry about the house. I'll talk to Father about it, so that you can continue to live there and act as a caretaker on his behalf, as it were. He's not about to evict you or anything like that."
Old Mother Feng accepted the silver and the clothing with one hand and knelt down to kowtow with tears in her eyes, saying, "It seems my luck is running out. As long as you remain alive I can count on you to look out for me. But if:
Anything untoward should happen to you,[22]
what will become of me?"
Li P'ing-erh also called over the wet nurse Ju-i and gave her a purple damask jacket, a blue damask skirt, an old satin cloak, two hairpins with gold heads, and a silver cap ornament, [23] saying, "This is in recognition of the fact that you nursed my baby boy. Now, the boy has died, but, as I said, I didn't want you to bind up your breasts as though your job were over. It was my hope that as long as I remained alive, I might have further occasion to use you. Now, unexpectedly, it looks as though I am going to die, but I will talk to your master and the First Lady, and suggest that after my death, if the First Lady gives birth to a son, they should not get rid of you, but allow you to nurse her child. I am giving you these articles of clothing as a keepsake. Please don't take it amiss."
The wet nurse got down on her knees and kowtowed, saying with tears in her eyes, "I had truly hoped that I would be able to serve you to the end. You have never so much as gotten angry with me, or raised your voice to criticize me. It's just my bad luck that the boy died, and that you have contracted this fatal disorder. Please, whatever happens, do tell the First Lady that my husband is dead, and that as long as I live, I hope to be able to continue serving the master and mistress. If I were to leave, where would I go?"
When she had finished speaking, she accepted the clothes and ornaments, kowtowed, and then got up and stood to one side, while wiping the tears from her eyes.
Li P'ing-erh then called over Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, who knelt down before her while she addressed them, saying, "The two of you have also served me since you were children. Now, after I have died, I won't be able to look after you any more. You both have enough in the way of clothing, so there is no need to give you any, but I will give you these two pairs of gold-headed hairpins, and these two floral ornaments of gold as keepsakes. As my senior maidservant, Ying-ch'un, since Father has already had his way with you, there is no call for you to leave the household. I will ask the First Lady to let you serve in her quarters. As my junior maidservant, Hsiu-ch'un, I'll ask the First Lady to look out for another family for you to serve, lest you be looked askance at for remaining in my quarters, and be subject to criticism by others as a slave without a master. After I'm dead, you may let your true colors show; but if you work for anyone else and affect the:
Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,
or endeavor to:
Do whatever you like for good or for ill,
the way you have been accustomed to do while in my service, no one will tolerate it."
Hsiu-ch'un knelt down on the ground and wept, saying, "Mother, I won't leave here even to save my life."
"Don't be silly," said Li P'ing-erh. "If you remain in these quarters, who will you serve?"
"I will keep vigil over your spirit tablet," said Hsiu-ch'un.
"Even though offerings may be made to my spirit tablet for a while," said Li P'ing-erh, "eventually the day will come when it will be burnt. You'll have no alternative but to leave then."
"I could serve the First Lady along with Ying-ch'un," said Hsiu-ch'un.
"Well, let's leave it at that," said Li P'ing-erh. "I'm afraid Hsiu-ch'un is still somewhat naive in her understanding of things."
After listening to Li P'ing-erh's injunctions, Ying-ch'un took possession of the head ornaments she had been given, while weeping so hard she could not get a word out. Truly:
Tear-filled eyes gaze into
tear-filled eyes;
The brokenhearted see off
the brokenhearted.[24]
That night Li P'ing-erh managed to issue her final injunctions to everyone.
At dawn the next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room, and Li P'ingerh asked him, "Have you purchased a coffin for me, or not?"
"The coffin boards were procured yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They're being made up into a coffin in the front compound right now, with a view to shocking you out of your indisposition. If you recover, we can always donate it to someone else."
"How much silver did you spend on it?" Li P'ing-erh went on to ask. "You shouldn't spend money indiscriminately, or you'll end up with not enough to live on."
"It wasn't much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I only paid a hundred some taels of silver."
"That's still too much," said Li P'ing-erh. "See that you get it prepared in advance and lay it out for me."
After talking with her for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back out to the front compound to watch the progress of the coffin construction.
Who should appear at this juncture but Wu Yüeh-niang and Li Chiao-erh, who came into her room and, seeing that her condition was extremely serious, asked, "Sister Li, how are you feeling?"
Li P'ing-erh grasped Yüeh-niang by the hand and wept, saying, "First Lady, I am not going to recover."
Yüeh-niang wept with her, saying, "Sister Li, if you have anything you want to say, the Second Lady is here with me, you can say it to the two of us."
"What have I got to say?" said Li P'ing-erh. "During these several years that we've been sisters, you've never let me down. I had really hoped to remain together with you until our heads of hair turned white, but, contrary to my expectations, my fate has turned out to be bitter. First, I lost my darling boy, and now, I've been so unfortunate as to come down with this awkward ailment, which is going to be the death of me. After I'm dead, these two maidservants of mine will have no one to look after them. Since Father has already had his way with the senior maidservant, I suggest that she be assigned to your quarters, where she can wait on you. As for the junior maidservant, if you wish to employ her, then keep her. Otherwise, see if you can't arrange a monogamous marriage for her with some humble family, so there will be but:
One husband and a single wife.
That way she won't be subject to criticism as a slave without a master, and it would be a fitting reward for the service she has rendered me. In that case, my mouth and eyes will be content to remain closed after my death. In addition, the wet nurse Ju-i has repeatedly expressed her unwillingness to leave the household. If you consent to do me the favor of assenting to her wishes, it will be an appropriate reward for her service in nursing my child. And in the future, when your own ten months of pregnancy are up, if you bear a son, she can take over the job of breast-feeding him."
"Sister Li," said Yüeh-niang, "you can put your mind to rest about these matters. The two of us will take responsibility for taking care of them. We must:
Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.
If you should end up:
High as the hills or deep as the sea,
I will arrange to have Ying-ch'un work for me, and Hsiu-ch'un work for the Second Lady. The maidservant who is assigned to the Second Lady's quarters at present is not a reliable worker and will have to be gotten rid of sooner or later. I'll have Hsiu-ch'un wait on her instead. As for the wet nurse Ju-i, although you say that she has no place to go, there is no room for her in my quarters. No matter whether I have a child or not, in the future I'll arrange a match for her with one of the servants, so that she can remain in the household as a servant's wife. That ought to take care of it."
Li Chiao-erh then spoke up from the side, saying, "Sister Li, you should stop worrying about these matters. The two of us will take responsibility for them. In the future, after your funeral observances are over, I'll take her into my quarters to wait upon me, and see that she receives preferential treatment."
Li P'ing-erh then told the wet nurse and her two maidservants to come over and kowtow to their two benefactors. Yüeh-niang was unable to control her tears.
Before long, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o came in to see how she was, and Li P'ing-erh bestowed a few sisterly words that were both kind and just upon each of them, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
Later on, after Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and the others had left, leaving Yüeh-niang alone in the room with her, Li P'ing-erh wept quietly and said to her, "Mother, in the future, if you bear a son, be sure to raise him carefully so that he can be the root that perpetuates Father's ancestral line. Don't be as careless as I was and allow yourself to be undone by anyone else."
"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "I understand what you're saying."
Gentle reader take note: This single sentence had such an effect on Yüeh-niang that, later on, after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Chin-lien was no longer permitted to remain in the household, it was all due to her memory of this deathbed remark of Li P'ing-erh's. Truly:
It has always been true that gratitude for kindness
and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand or ten thousand years
will never be allowed to gather dust.
As they were speaking, who should appear but Ch'in-t'ung, who told them to straighten up the room and burn some incense because Taoist Master P'an from the Temple of the Five Peaks had arrived. Yüeh-niang supervised the maidservants as they cleaned up the room, prepared some clear tea brewed with purified water, and ignited some genuine "hundred-blend" incense.[25] Yüeh-niang and the other women then concealed themselves in the bedroom next door in order to eavesdrop on the proceedings.
Before long, whom should they see but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who ushered Taoist Master P'an into Li P'ing-erh's room. What did he look like? Behold:
On his head is a Taoist cap with the Five Peaks
wreathed in sunset clouds;
His body is appareled in a short robe of coarse
black cotton cloth.
His waist is bound by a girdle woven of
varicolored silken thread;
On his back he bears a sword of antique bronze
incised with a pine-grain pattern.[26]
On his two feet he wears a pair of
double-looped hemp sandals;
In his hand he holds a five-luminary
demon-dispelling fan.[27]
His eyebrows are peaked,
His two eyes are almond-shaped;
His mouth is foursquare,
Trailing a set of side whiskers.[28]
His demeanor is awe-inspiring;
His appearance is imposing.
If he is not a roving immortal wandering
beyond the clouds,
He must hail from the Isles of the Blest
or the Jade Palace.
Lo and behold, as he came in through the postern gate and made his way around the screen-wall, just as he approached Li P'ing-erh's quarters, beneath the stylobate under the veranda, the Taoist master stepped backwards two paces, seemed to be berating someone, and repeated a few occult formulas, before he stepped inside, as the servants pulled the portiere aside, and approached the sickbed. Once there:
He focused his two eyes upon her,

Exerting the wise discernment of their divine vision,
Brandished his sword in one hand,
Performed calculations on the joints of his fingers
while pacing the dipper, and
Recited an incantation,[29]
Instantly comprehending the situation.
Going out into the parlor, he proceeded to set up an incense table facing the exterior of the building, and Hsi-men Ch'ing ignited some incense.
After burning some written talismans, Taoist Master P'an cried out in a loud voice, "Divine marshal on duty this day, why have you not yet appeared?"
He then spurted a mouthful of consecrated water out of his mouth, whereupon a strong gust of wind arose, and a yellow-turbaned warrior[30] appeared before him. Behold:
His forehead is enveloped in a yellow silk turban;[31]
His body clad in a purple robe of embroidered silk.
A Lion Barbarian girdle[32] tightly binds
his wolflike waist;
Leopard-skin trousers securely enclose
his tigerlike body.
He constantly wanders the highways of the clouds;
He is accustomed to navigating the astral winds.
The grotto heavens and blessed abodes[33]
he traverses in an instant;
The sacred peaks, rivers, and Feng-tu
he visits in a snap of the fingers.
If a malevolent dragon wreaks havoc,
He can apprehend it from the bottom of the sea;
If evil sprites should make trouble,
He can smash their mountain lairs and nab them.
Within the halls of the Jade Emperor,
He is known as a talismanic functionary;
Before the carriage of the Northern Dipper,
He holds the title of celestial warrior.[34]
He is always on duty before the altar
to protect the law;
He constantly visits the mundane world
to vanquish demons.[35]
On his breast is suspended the bronze plaque
of the Board of Thunder;
In his hand he holds a brilliantly decorated
gilded battle-axe.[36]
That divine marshal stood respectfully beneath the steps and said in a loud voice, "Having summoned me, what would you command me to do?"
Taoist Master P'an said, "The woman, née Li, of the Hsi-men household is unwell, and he has lodged an appeal on her behalf before my altar. I command you to apprehend the local tutelary god, and the six household spirits, in order to ascertain whether there are any evil spirits at work, and hale them before me. This matter will brook no delay."
When he had finished speaking, the spirit disappeared.
In a little while, Taoist Master P'an closed his eyes and changed countenance, sat upright at his place, and rapped his tablet of authority on the surface of the altar table, just as if he were hearing a case in court. It was some time before he stopped and came outside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him out to the summerhouse in the front compound and asked him what he had ascertained.
"Unfortunately," said Taoist Master P'an, "this woman is being sued in the court of the underworld by someone who suffered an injustice at her hands in a former existence. It is not a case of evil spirits, so they are not subject to apprehension."
"Ritual Master," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is there anything you can do to exorcise the source of the problem?"
"In the case of an:
Enemy or creditor,
from a previous existence," said Taoist Master P'an, "it is up to the plaintiff himself. If he is willing to drop the case, it may be dropped; but even the authorities of the underworld cannot force him to do so."
Because he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was courteous and sincere, he then went on to ask, "How old is your lady?"
"She was born in the year of the sheep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and is currently in her twenty-seventh year."
"All right then," said Taoist Master P'an, "let me perform a sacrifice at the altar to the star that governs her destiny, and see what happens to the lantern that corresponds to her fate."
"When will you perform the sacrifice?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And what will you need in the way of incense, paper money, and sacrificial offerings?"
"This evening," said Taoist Master P'an, "during the third watch, at midnight, I will delineate the boundaries of the sacred area with white ash, set up a lantern altar, invest it with yellow damask, place the lantern representing the star that governs her date of birth upon it, and make sacrificial offerings of the five grains, dates, and soup, without need of wine or meat. Then I will merely set out twenty-seven lanterns of destiny, corresponding to the years of her age, and cover them with a canopy. Nothing else will be required. While I am officiating at the sacrifice, chickens and dogs must be excluded from the premises, to prevent them from coming in and interfering with the proceedings. During the ceremony, you sir, having observed the appropriate ritual abstentions, should dress yourself in black, and prostrate yourself below the altar."
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that all the suggested preparations were carried out to the letter and did not presume to enter the consecrated area, but remained in his study, where he performed his ablutions, observed the ritual abstentions, and changed into clean clothing. He also asked Ying Po-chüeh to remain with him rather than going home, in order to share a vegetarian repast with Taoist Master P'an.
During the third watch, when the setting up of the lantern altar had been completed, Taoist Master P'an took a seat in lofty isolation at the upper end of the consecrated area. The lantern altar was arrayed before him, with representations of the Green Dragon of the East, the White Tiger of the West, the Red Bird of the South, and the Dark Warrior of the North presiding over the four directions. Above it was suspended a three-tiered canopy, on which were represented the symbols of the twelve constellations correlated with the twelve earthly branches, arranged in a circle. Beneath this were arrayed the twenty-seven lanterns of destiny.
The celebrant began by declaiming the words of a petition, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in black, prostrated himself beneath the steps. The servants had all been excluded from the area, so that there was no one else present. The area was:
Ablaze with lamps and candles,
as the twenty-seven lanterns were simultaneously lighted. Taoist Master P'an, seated upon his ritual throne, let down his hair, brandished his sword, and:
Recited an incantation.
After which, he proceeded to:
Invoke the Dipper,
Imbibe the primordial breath,
Pace the void, and
Perambulate the jasper altar.
Truly:
When three sticks of incense are burnt
the Three Realms unite;
Each command that is issued results in
a clap of thunder.
Behold:
In the clear sky, the stars and moon
shine brightly,
When all of a sudden,
The earth turns black and the sky darkens.[37]
The curtains suspended on all four sides
of the summerhouse,
Are suddenly swept by a gust of eerie wind.
Truly:
It is not the roaring of tigers,
Nor is it the droning of dragons.[38]
It appears to penetrate the doors and
permeate the curtains;[39]
It certainly destroys the flowers and
scatters the leaves.
It drives the clouds out of the hills;
And sends the rain back to the rivers.
The wild geese are separated from their mates
and cry in distress;
The gulls and herons in their startled flocks
seek the treetops.
The goddess Ch'ang-o hastens to batten down
her palace in the moon;
The wind-borne Lieh-tzu, high up in space,
calls out to be rescued.[40]
In the wake of three powerful gusts of wind, a chill breeze blew in that extinguished every last one of Li P'ing-erh's twenty-seven lanterns of destiny. Only a single flame recovered, by the light of which Taoist Master P'an, seated on his ritual throne, was able to see clearly a figure clothed in white, who came in from outside, accompanied by two black-clad servitors and, holding a document in his hand, proceeded to present it before the altar. When Taoist Master P'an examined it, he saw that it was an arrest warrant issued by the court of the underworld, which bore three official seals.
Startled by this, he descended from his ritual throne and, stepping forward, urged Hsi-men Ch'ing to get to his feet, saying, thus and so, "Sir, please stand up. It seems that, in your lady's case:
One who has offended Heaven, has nowhere else to pray.[41]
Her lanterns of destiny have been extinguished. How then is she to be saved? I fear that her end is imminent."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he lowered his head without a word, and his eyes brimmed over with tears.
Weeping, he besought the exorcist, saying, "My only hope, Ritual Master, is that you can do something to save her."
"One's allotted years are hard to evade."
said Taoist Master P'an. "It will be difficult to save her."
He then expressed a desire to depart.
Hsi-men Ch'ing urged him repeatedly to stay, saying, "Wait until daybreak, and you can get an early start."
"We people who have left home to enter the priesthood," said Taoist Master P'an, "are accustomed to:
Hiking through the underbrush and sleeping in the dew;[42]
Camping in the mountains and stopping over at temples.
It is only natural."
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not press him on the subject any further but ordered his attendants to bring out a bolt of fabric and three taels of silver as compensation for his performance of the ritual.
"I am a practitioner of the ultimate way of August Heaven," said Taoist Master P'an, "and have sworn an oath to Heaven itself that I would not presume to covet worldly wealth. Were I to do so, I would:
Suffer for my culpability."[43]
Only after demurring repeatedly did he direct his acolyte to accept the fabric in order to make a Taoist robe, and then he prepared to take his leave and depart.
Before doing so, he enjoined Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "This evening, sir, you should observe the taboo against going into the sickroom, lest you bring a catastrophe upon yourself. Beware! Beware!"
Having finished speaking, he was escorted out to the front gate, where he:

Shook his sleeves in disdain and departed.[44]
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the summerhouse to oversee the clearing away of the lantern altar. When he understood that there was no saving star to be hoped for, he was profoundly saddened, and when he sat down with Ying Po-chüeh, without his realizing it, his eyes overflowed with tears.
"This is merely an instance of the fact that everyone has a predetermined number of years to live," said Ying Po-chüeh. "When things come to such a pass, no amount of effort will avail. Brother, you should try to worry yourself less about it."
Then, upon hearing the sounding of the fourth watch, he said, "Brother, you are tired. You should get yourself some rest. I will go home for the time being, and come back tomorrow."
"I'll have a page boy get a lantern and see you on your way," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then ordered Lai-an to fetch a lantern and accompanied them outside, after which he saw to the closing of the gate and came back inside. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in the study all by himself, with a candle in his hand, feeling deeply disturbed at heart.
All he could do was give vent to long sighs as he thought to himself, "The ritual master warned me not to go into her sickroom, but how can I bear not to do so? Even if it should cost me my life, what of it? I feel the need to keep vigil, and have a word with her."
Thereupon, he went into her room and saw that Li P'ing-erh was lying with her face to the wall.
When she heard Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she turned over, and said to him, "My brother, why didn't you come in before?"
She then went on to ask, "What did that Taoist master have to say about the lantern ritual?"
"You can relax on that score," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The lanterns did not indicate anything to worry about."
"My brother," said Li P'ing-erh, "you're deceiving me. Just now, that wretch, with two other people in tow, appeared before me once again and troubled me for a while. He said, 'You may have invited a ritual master to come and exorcise me, but my plaint against you has already been approved by the authorities in the underworld. You will not be allowed to escape.' He was angry when he went away and is likely to come back to get me tomorrow."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this:
Two streams of tears crisscrossed his face,
and he commenced to weep out loud, saying, "My sister, you should just set your mind at rest, and pay no attention to him. I had really hoped to be able to keep company with you throughout the days to come, but who could have anticipated that you would abandon me and go off this way? I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, would rather suffer the closing of my own mouth and eyes in death, rather than this:
Stomach-turning and gut-wrenching suspense."[45]
Li P'ing-erh put both arms around Hsi-men Ch'ing's neck and gave way to:
Sobbing and wailing.
After weeping grievously for some time, she became too hoarse to cry audibly any longer and said, "My brother, I had hoped that we could:
Share our life together like a double-headed flower.
Who could have anticipated that today I would have to leave you in death? Taking advantage of what time is left before my eyes are closed, I'd like to say a few words to you. Your household wealth is extensive, and you are without paternal relatives to rely on, or anyone to assist you in managing it. You must consider carefully whatever you do, and not give way to the impulse of the moment. And you must not do anything to the detriment of the First Lady or the others. She is feeling poorly in her present condition, and, sooner or later, she may give birth to a child that can serve as a foundation for the perpetuation of your ancestral line, and prevent the dissipation of your property. Moreover, you occupy an official post. From now on, you ought not to go out drinking so often and should endeavor to come home earlier when you do. Your household responsibilities are important. The situation will not be the same as when I was here to admonish you. If I die, who will there be to deter you with bitter-tasting but well-meant advice?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he felt just as though:
A knife were slashing his heart and liver,
and he wept, saying, "My sister, I understand what you're saying. Don't you worry yourself about me. I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, must have been:
Bereft of affinity and short on fortune,
in a former existence, to be:
Unable to remain husband and wife to the end,[46]
with you in this incarnation. It pains me to death! Heaven is destroying me!"
Li P'ing-erh went on to say, "With regard to Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, I have already spoken to the First Lady about them. In the future, when I am dead, Ying-ch'un can be reassigned to wait on the First Lady. With regard to the junior maidservant, the Second Lady has already agreed to take responsibility for her. She lacks any satisfactory maidservant in her quarters, so she can be deputed to wait on her."
"My sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you don't need to instruct me on that score. Once you are dead, who would presume to separate your maidservants? And the wet nurse, also, will not be dismissed. They will all be expected to keep vigil over your spirit tablet."
"What's so important about the spirit tablet?" said Li P'ing-erh. "Once it's been brought home after the funeral, and the fifth of the seven weekly commemorations have been held, it can simply be burned, and that will be the end of it."
"My sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't you worry about any such thing. So long as I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, am alive, offerings will continue to be made to your spirit tablet."
As their conclave continued, Li P'ing-erh urged him, saying, "You'd better go get some sleep. It's late."
"I'm not going to sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll keep you company here in your room."
"I'm not about to die just yet," said Li P'ing-erh. "This room is contaminated with foul odor, and you'll be bothered by the smoke of the incense. Moreover, it won't be convenient for them to look after me with you here."
Hsi-men Ch'ing had no alternative but to issue instructions to the maidservants to look after their mistress with care, after which, he returned to the master suite in the rear compound and told Yüeh-niang in detail about how the lantern ritual had been of no avail.
"Just now, when I went into her room," he said, "I observed that she could still talk clearly enough. If Heaven will only take pity on her, I imagine she may recover yet. Who knows?"
"The sockets of her eyes have contracted," said Yüeh-niang. "Her lips have dried up, and her ears are burning. How can she be expected to recover? It's only a question of time. This ailment of hers is one that allows her to remain clearheaded and to speak distinctly right up until she stops breathing."
"Ever since she became a member of our household," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she has never given offense to anyone, high or low. Moreover, she has a most accommodating disposition and never has a bad word to say about anybody. How can I bear to give her up?"
Having said this, he started to weep again, and Yüeh-niang also could not prevent her tears from falling, but we will say no more at present about this colloquy between Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang.
To resume our story, Li P'ing-erh called for Ying-ch'un and the wet nurse and said, "Help me turn over to face the wall, so I can take a nap."
"What time has it gotten to be?" she then went on to ask.
"The cock has not yet crowed," said the wet nurse. "It must be sometime in the fourth watch."
She then said to Ying-ch'un, "Let's replace the absorbent grass paper under her body, help her turn over to face the wall, and cover her with a quilt, so she can get some sleep."
Everybody had been staying up all night without any sleep. Old Mother Feng and Nun Wang finally went to bed behind the latched door in the adjacent room, while Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un put their bedding down on the floor in front of their mistress and lay down to sleep.
They had not been asleep for more than an hour and were still:
In a state of profound slumber,
when Ying-ch'un dreamed that Li P'ing-erh got down off the k'ang and gave her a shake, saying, "The two of you look after the house. I'm going away."
She suddenly woke up with a start and saw that the lamp on the table had not yet gone out. When she looked at the bed, her mistress was still lying with her face to the wall, but when she felt with her hand, she found that there was no longer any breath coming out of her mouth. She did not know just when it happened, but:
Alas and alack;
She had stopped breathing and died.
What a pity that the life of such a beautiful woman,
Should turn into only an instance of a spring dream.[47]
Truly:
When King Yama decrees that you will die
during the third watch;
The hour of your death cannot be delayed
until the fifth watch.[48]
Ying-ch'un hastily woke everyone up, and they lit lamps and gathered to see what had happened. Sure enough, they observed that she was no longer breathing, and that her body was lying in a pool of blood. In a state of panic, they ran back to the rear compound to inform Hsi-men Ch'ing of the situation.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that Li P'ing-erh was dead, he and Wu Yüeh-niang hastened to the front compound:
Covering two steps with every one,
and lifted the quilt off her body. Behold:
The color of her face was unchanged;
Her body still retained some warmth;
She had slipped away unobtrusively.
Her body was clothed in nothing but a bodice of red satin.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, disregarding the fact that her body was stained with coagulated blood, embraced her with both arms and kissed her fragrant cheeks, protesting again and again, "My lost sister! My kind and just sister, with your accommodating disposition! How can you abandon me this way? I would rather that I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had died in your stead. I also am:
Not long for this world.
What have I got left to live for?"
There in her bedroom, he leapt three feet off the ground and started to cry out loud in full voice. Wu Yüeh-niang also wiped away her tears while weeping incessantly. Before long, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and the members of the entire household, high and low, including the maidservants and waiting women, commenced weeping as though they were endeavoring to raise the roof, so that:
The sound of their lamentations shook the earth.[49]
Yüeh-niang said to Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, "We don't know just when she died during the night. She doesn't even have an article of clothing on her body."
"I felt her body," said Meng Yü-lou, "and it's still warm. It must not be very long since she departed. If we don't seize the opportunity to put some clothes on her while her limbs are still warm, what are we waiting for?"
Yüeh-niang observed that Hsi-men Ch'ing was reclining face-to-face on top of her body, weeping, and crying out, "Heaven is bent on destroying me, Hsi-men Ch'ing! Sister, during the three years you've been a member of my household, you haven't enjoyed a single good day. I've been the ruination of you."
When Yüeh-niang heard these words, she was somewhat perturbed at heart and said, "What ridiculous palaver!
Weep for her a couple of times and forget it.
Have you no compunction about crying that way face-to-face with a corpse? You run the risk of being contaminated by the foul emanations from her mouth. If she hasn't enjoyed a single good day, who is there who has?
A person's death is like the extinction of a lamp.
Even half a day of borrowed time is not to be had.
If you were able to keep her alive, that would be fine, but when a person's allotted years are up, who can avoid going by this path?"
She then went on to instruct Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, "The two of you take the keys and look in the other room for the burial garments that she has prepared in advance, so that we can help each other get them onto her."
She also said, "Sister Six, the two of us had better see if we can straighten up her hair."
Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Yüeh-niang, "Try to select two sets of garments that she was particularly fond of to dress her with."
Yüeh-niang accordingly instructed Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou, saying, "Look for that newly tailored jacket of scarlet satin brocade, with the willow-yellow brocade skirt; that blouse of lilac-colored, cloud-patterned, figured silk, that she wore earlier this year for our visit to kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place, with the wide trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue; and that newly made up white satin jacket, with the skirt of yellow pongee."
Thereupon, with Ying-ch'un holding a lamp, and Meng Yü-lou holding the keys, they proceeded to open the interior door to the adjacent bedroom and take down the second lacquer chest adorned with gold tracery, which was stored on top of the bedstead with retractable steps and contained newly made up clothing. After opening the lid to the chest, Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh searched through it for some time and came up with the three outfits of clothing they were looking for, as well as a short, close-fitting purple satin camisole, a petticoat of white pongee, a pair of scarlet underdrawers, a pair of white satin woman's stockings, and a pair of figured ankle leggings. Li Chiao-erh carried these things over to the adjacent room and showed them to Yüeh-niang.
Yüeh-niang was engaged, together with Chin-lien, in arranging Li P'ingerh's chignon by the light of a lamp. They coiled it securely, wrapped it in a raven-black kerchief, and used four gold hairpins to hold it in place.
Li Chiao-erh then asked, "What-colored shoes should we look for to put on her?"
"Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "the pair of shoes that she fancied the most was that one made of scarlet brocade, embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach,' with white satin high heels. She hardly wore them more than a couple of times. We might as well try to find that pair to put on her."
"That will never do," said Yüeh-niang. "If she wore those when appearing before the court of the nether world, she'd be condemned to jump into the fiery pit. Look instead for that pair that she wore the other day when she went to her sister-in-law's place outside the city gate, the pair made of purple silk brocade, with high heels, that is also embroidered with the motif of 'A Parrot Plucking a Peach.' That would be a more appropriate pair for us to put on her."
When Li Chiao-erh heard this, she went to look in the four small lacquer chests adorned with gold tracery in which Li P'ing-erh kept her hundred or more pairs of shoes, but, though she went through them all, she failed to find them.
"When Mother wore them," said Ying-ch'un, "she always put them back here. Where could they have gone?"
She then went back to the kitchen to ask Hsiu-ch'un about it.
"I saw Mother wrap them up and put them in the commode on top of which the boxes rest," said Hsiu-ch'un.
When they opened the drawers of the commode, they finally located them, inside another large package of new shoes. The group of them then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to get the corpse properly clothed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then supervised a number of page boys in taking down and rolling up the scrolls of painting and calligraphy in the main reception hall, and creating an enclosed space there with standing screens, to which Li P'ingerh's body was carried out on the leaf of a door and laid out in state. A brocade mat was placed underneath her body, and it was covered with a paper shroud. A table for her spirit tablet and an incense table were set up, and a vigil lamp was lighted. Two page boys were deputed to serve the spirit of the departed, one of them to strike the chime, and the other to burn paper money. Tai-an was dispatched to fetch Yin-yang Master Hsü as quickly as possible, so he could ascertain the time of her death and interpret his divinatory texts. Once Yüeh-niang had supervised the removal of the articles of clothing needed to dress the corpse, the door to Li P'ing-erh's bedroom was locked. Only the room with the k'ang was left open for the use of the maidservants and waiting women.
When Old Mother Feng saw that her mistress was dead, she wept as though she had:
Three noses from which to drivel,
As well as two eyes to shed tears.
Nun Wang, for her part, murmured monotonously as she recited the *Heart Sutra*,[50] the *Sutra of the Healing Buddha*,[51] the *Scripture on Delivery from Enmity*,[52] the *rangama Sutra*,[53] and the *Great Compassion Dh ran*,[54] as she besought the Bodhisattva King Who Escorts the Dead to conduct her on the road to the shades.
Meanwhile, in the front reception hall, Hsi-men Ch'ing beat his breast in sorrow, and couldn't help caressing the corpse, as he wept until his voice became hoarse, protesting again and again, without ceasing, "My kind and just sister, with your accommodating disposition."
While everyone was so preoccupied, the cock crowed, and Tai-an came back with Yin-yang Master Hsü, who saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with the words, "I can see that Your Honor is distressed. At what time was it that your lady died?"
"The precise time is not known," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At the time she went to sleep the fourth watch had already been sounded, and the people in her quarters were so fatigued that they were all fast asleep, so we don't know exactly when it was that she died."
"Which of your ladies was it?" asked Master Hsü.
"It was my sixth insignificant concubine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She had developed an awkward ailment that dragged on interminably right up to the present time."

"It doesn't matter," said Master Hsü, who then directed the attendants to light the lamps in the reception hall and lifted aside the paper shroud in order to have a look at her.
Calculating the time on his fingers, he said, "Since we are now precisely two-fifths of the way through the fifth watch, she must have expired during the previous watch, which corresponds to the earthly branch *ch'ou*, or the ox."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered that a writing brush and inkstone be provided and asked Master Hsü to interpret his divinatory texts.
Master Hsü, by the light of the lamps, opened his black bag, took out an almanac with its perpetual calendar, and consulted it. Having ascertained her maiden name and the eight characters that determined her horoscope, he proceeded to pronounce as follows:
The deceased wife, née Li, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, an officer of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the *hsin-wei* year of the Yüan-yu reign period; and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month of the *ting-yu* year of the Cheng-ho reign period. The fact that this day of her death is a *ping-tzu* day of a *wu-hsü* month indicates a conflict between the celestial stems and earthly branches, which makes it an inauspicious day for any undertaking and portends a double bereavement. The baleful spirit of the departed is ten feet high and is headed in a southwesterly direction. If it encounters the baleful spirit of the Year God,[55] it will portend a fatal situation. The members of her immediate family should abstain from crying until after they have put on their mourning clothes, when it will not matter. On the day of the encoffining ceremony, people born in the year of the dragon, the year of the tiger, the year of the cock, and the year of the snake should stay out of the way, although relatives by marriage need not do so.
At this point, Wu Yüeh-niang sent Tai-an out to instruct Master Hsü to proceed with consulting the *Black Book*[56] about what the future might hold in store for her.
Master Hsü, accordingly, consulted his esoteric yin-yang texts and pronounced:
Today is a *ping-tzu* day, and her death took place during the *chi-ch'ou* hour, so she is governed by the zodiacal palace Precious Vase[57] above, which corresponds to the area of Shantung below. In her former life, she was the son of a family named Wang in Pin-chou and was guilty of killing a pregnant ewe. Consequently, in this life she was reborn as a female in the year of the sheep, her nature was gentle and compliant, and she was given to artifice from her earliest years. Both her father and her mother died, and she had no relatives on whom she could depend. Initially, she entered someone's household as a concubine but suffered from the hostility of his legitimate wife. Later, upon acquiring a husband of her own, she found that they were incompatible, and her fate was crossed by the "three penalties" and "six banes."[58] Although she acquired a distinguished husband in her years of maturity, she suffered from continual ailments, and the "matched shoulders" in her horoscope. She gave birth to a son, but he died prematurely, and her suppressed anger brought on hemorrhaging from her lower body that resulted in her death. Earlier, on the ninth day of this month, her soul left her to be reborn as the daughter of Commander Yüan in the metropolis of Pien-liang, or K'ai-feng prefecture, in Honan province. The difficulties she encounters there imperil her survival, but she will endure to the age of nineteen, when she will marry a wealthy man of much greater age than herself. She will enjoy prosperity during her mature years, and live to the age of forty-one, when she will succumb to a fit of anger and die.
When he had finished his prognostication from the *Black Book*, the assembled womenfolk all sighed with wonder. Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Master Hsü to ascertain what would be auspicious days for breaking ground for her tomb, and for the burial ceremony.
"Permit me to ask Your Honor," said Master Hsü, "how long do you intend for her to lie in state?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing wept, saying, "She still looks so vibrantly alive. How can I bear to send her on her way? I'd like to keep her here until after the fifth weekly commemoration."
"There are no appropriate days for burying her in the fifth week," said Master Hsü, "but there are in the fourth week. I would suggest that you break ground for her tomb at noon on the eighth day of the tenth month, which is a *ting-yu* day; and that the burial ceremony should take place at 10:00 AM on the twelfth, which is a *hsin-ch'ou* day. The horoscopes of all six members of the family will not create any conflicts on that day."
"All right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the funeral procession will set out on the twelfth day of the tenth month, without fail."
Master Hsü, thereupon, wrote out the death certificate and placed it on the body of the deceased, after which, he said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The encoffining ceremony should take place at 8:00 AM on the nineteenth. Your household will be responsible for making all the necessary preparations."
By the time Master Hsü had been ushered out the gate, the day had already dawned. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ch'in-t'ung, riding on a donkey, outside the city gate to invite the attendance of Hua the Elder, after which, he deputed teams of servants to go to the homes of all the other relatives of the family and inform them of Li P'ing-erh's death. He also sent someone to the yamen to request a leave of absence, so he could remain at home to take charge of the funeral arrangements. He sent Tai-an to the shop on Lion Street to obtain twenty bolts of bleached Hsiang-yang ramie and thirty bolts of porous ramie fabric, and he arranged for Tailor Chao to engage the services of a considerable number of tailors, who were put to work in an anteroom on the western side of the front courtyard. They were hired for the purpose of making the marquees and tablecloths that would be required for the funeral, the burial clothes and waistband for the encoffining ceremony, and the blouses and skirts for the womenfolk in their respective chambers. In addition, white T'ang-style caps and long white robes were supplied for each of the page boys and other servants. He also weighed out a hundred taels of silver and entrusted them to Pen the Fourth with the mission of going to the specialty shops outside the city gate and urging them to provide thirty bolts of lustrous hemp fabric and two hundred lengths of yellow damask suitable for the mourning garments of relatives of different degrees of mourning. He then went on to arrange for carpenters to erect a large, thirty-foot-wide, covered structure in the main courtyard.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing contemplated the habits, conduct, and looks of Li P'ingerh, it suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten to have a portrait of her painted.
Calling over Lai-pao, he asked him, "Where is there a good painter to be found, who is skilled at making portraits? I'd like to find one in order to make a posthumous portrait of her. I had completely forgotten about this matter."
"That Master Han who painted some standing screens for us in the past," said Lai-pao, "was formerly a court painter attached to the Hsüan-ho Academy. He has lost his position there and returned home, but he is an excellent portraitist."[59]
"Where does he live?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go at once and invite him to come here."
Lai-pao nodded in assent and proceeded to set off on this errand.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had been up all evening without any sleep and had been busy through all five watches of the night, in addition to which, he was suffering from the sorrows of bereavement, so that his spirits were disturbed, and he was out of sorts and resorted to cursing the maidservants and kicking the page boys. As he kept vigil over the dead body of Li P'ing-erh, he couldn't help weeping and howling with grief. Tai-an, who remained at his side, also wept until he could neither weep nor utter a sound. Meanwhile, Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, were behind the curtain, sharing responsibility for directing the maidservants from the various quarters and the servant wives as they went about their tasks.
When she saw the way in which Hsi-men Ch'ing had given himself over to crying until his voice was hoarse, refused the offer of so much as a drink of tea, and was manifestly out of sorts, Wu Yüeh-niang said, "Just look at the ridiculous way he's carrying on! If she's dead, she's dead, and that's that.
You can't cry her back to life again.
Weep for her a couple of times and forget it.
All he seems bent on is stretching out the weeping as long as he can stand it. He hasn't gotten any sleep for two or three nights and hasn't even taken the time to comb his hair or wash his face. He's been busy through all five watches of the night, without so much as a taste of:
Saffron soup or flavored water.[60]
Not even an iron man could take it. If he would only comb his hair and come outside for something to eat, he might be able to keep going; but, slight as he is, if he were to collapse, what would we do?"
"Do you mean to say he hasn't even combed his hair or washed his face?" said Meng Yü-lou.
"It would have been a good start if he had washed his face," said Yüeh-niang, "but, a while ago, when I sent a page boy to ask him to return to the rear compound and wash his face, he kicked him outside. Who would venture to ask him again?"
"Whoever saw the like!" exclaimed Chin-lien, picking up where Yüeh-niang left off. "When I went into the room a while ago to look for some garments, did I not admonish him with the best of intentions, saying, 'Although you may have lost someone, you're only wearing yourself to a frazzle by carrying on this way. If you come and have something to eat in your room before you continue, it won't delay anything.' But he opened his red eyes wide, and cursed me, saying, 'You dog-fucked whore! What business is it of yours?' The fact is that, nowadays, if I'm not to be fucked by the dog, who else is there to fuck me? The unreasonable good-for-nothing! All he does is claim that everyone else is giving him a hard time."
"When she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive," said Yüeh-niang, "how could he help being pained? But even if you're pained, you ought to take it easy, rather than letting it all hang out this way. When a person is dead, to caress her lip to lip, without paying any attention to whether or not there are foul emanations from her mouth, and howl with grief that way, is no way to carry on. When I criticized him with a few words, what should he do but come out with the claim that during the last three years she hasn't enjoyed a single good day. As though, every day, she'd been required to:
Carry water and turn the millstone."
"That's not it at all," said Meng Yü-lou. "It's not that Sister Li had anything to complain about. But she has suffered from Father's propensity to sort people differentially into:
Three classes and nine categories."
"If she was able to enjoy her days," said Chin-lien, "it would appear that some people are more privileged than others, when we should all be:
Walking along the same gangplank."
As they were speaking, who should appear but Ch'en Ching-chi, holding nine lengths of watered-silk in his hand, who said, "Father has ordered that you ladies should cut handkerchiefs out of this material for the use of the women in each of your quarters, and that, if anything is left over, it can be used to make skirts for you ladies."
Yüeh-niang took the silk and then said, "Son-in-law, go and invite your father to come in here and have a bite to eat. It's already nearly noon, and he hasn't had so much as a sip of tea."
"I wouldn't dare do that," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "A while ago, when one of the page boys invited him to have something to eat, he kicked him nearly to death. Why should I risk pestering him?"
"If you won't ask him," said Yüeh-niang, "wait until I send someone else to ask him to come and eat."
In a little while, she called over Tai-an and said to him, "Your master hasn't yet had anything to eat but has been crying all day long. You take some food in to him, and take advantage of the presence of Licentiate Wen, to get him to share something with him."
"If you invite Master Ying the Second and Master Hsieh to come over," said Tai-an, "and wait until after they get here to send someone in with the food, I guarantee that it won't take more than a few words on their part to get him to eat."
"You filthy-mouthed jailbird!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "You're just like a:
Tapeworm in his belly.
We womenfolk of his are no match for you. How can you be so sure that only if those two come over will he consent to eat anything?"
"You ladies don't understand," said Tai-an. "Those two are Father's closest friends. At drinking parties, large or small, he is never without them. If Father consumes three mace worth of refreshments, they will have three mace worth, and if Father is content with two mace worth, they will settle for two. No matter how upset Father may be, they have but to say a few words before:
His eyebrows blossom and his eyes light up."[61]
They continued talking for a while, until Ch'i-t'ung showed up with Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta.
The two of them, upon their arrival, no sooner came in the door than they prostrated themselves on the ground in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and wept for some time, repeating, over and over again, the words, "My kind and just sister-in-law."
This provoked both P'an Chin-lien and Meng Yü-lou into cursing them, saying, "The lousy oily mouthed jailbirds! Do they suggest that none of the rest of us are kind or just?"
When the two of them had finished their weeping, they got to their feet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned their salutation.
The two of them commenced to weep all over again, saying, "Brother, it is most distressing, most distressing."
They were then ushered into the anteroom, where they exchanged greetings with Licentiate Wen and sat down.
Ying Po-chüeh was the first to speak, asking, "When did our sister-in-law die?"
"She stopped breathing at two o'clock in the morning," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It was already past the fourth watch when I got home," said Ying Po-chüeh. "When my wife asked how she was, I said, 'All we can do is hope that the good deeds she has done in secret will avail. Sister-in-law's illness is already in its final stages.' Who would have thought that I had no sooner fallen asleep than I had a dream in which Brother sent a servant to invite me to attend a party at your place in celebration of an official promotion and urged me to come as quickly as possible. Upon arrival, I saw that you were dressed entirely in scarlet clothing. You took two jade hairpins out of your sleeve to show me and told me that one of them was broken. After examining them for some time, I said, 'Brother, it's too bad. This one that is broken is made of jade, while the one that is intact is made of artificial crystal.' But you insisted that they were both made of jade. My wife and I were asleep together when I woke up and said to myself that this dream boded no good. My wife noticed that I was smacking my lips and asked me who I was talking to, but I said, 'It's something you don't know about. I'll tell you in the morning.' But when morning came, who should appear but your servant, dressed in white mourning garments, which led me to stamp my feet in consternation. And now, sure enough, Brother, I see that you are wearing mourning clothes."
"I had a dream just like yours last night," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I dreamed that my kinsman Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital had sent me a set of six hairpins, one of which was broken. I said it was too bad, and I was just telling my wife about it in the middle of the night when, unexpectedly, we learned that the lady in the front compound had stopped breathing. Heaven must be blind to leave me so destitute! I would rather that I, Hsi-men Ch'ing, had died in her stead, rather than having to confront this event. In the future, whenever I think of her during any:
Single hour or half a minute,
how can I help but be pained at heart? What have I ever done to anyone that Heaven should now see fit to rob me so egregiously of my beloved![62] First that child of ours died, and now she too has departed:
With her legs stretched out straight.[63]
What have I still got to live for in this world? Though in my home:
The piles of money reach higher than the dipper,
what good will it do me?"
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "these sentiments of yours are wrong. It is true that my sister-in-law has been a good wife to you, and when she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive, how could you help being pained at heart? But the fact is that you are not only the possessor of considerable wealth, but also have an official career before you. You are like the bastion of Mount T'ai, upon which the members of this entire household, both high and low, are dependent. If anything were to happen to you, what would become of them? These other ladies of yours, for example, would be left without a husband to support them. As the saying goes:
So long as one of us lives, all three will live;
Whenever one of us perishes, all three will die.[64]
Brother, you are not only intelligent, but clever. What need is there for your brothers to point these things out to you? It is no wonder that the death of our sister-in-law in the springtime of her youth is something the pain of which is hard to get over, hard to survive. But when you have put on your mourning clothes, arranged for Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to recite scriptures on her behalf, mounted an impressive funeral procession, and seen that she is properly buried in her tomb, your feelings for her will have been given full expression, as is only appropriate in commemoration of your relationship with her. What more can you do? You must set your mind at rest."
At the time, this single conversation with Ying Po-chüeh had such an effect on Hsi-men Ch'ing that:
The ground of his heart was profoundly affected;
The obstruction in his mind was abruptly removed,[65]
and he stopped weeping. Before long, when tea was served, he actually drank it.
He then called for Tai-an and said to him, "Go back to the rear compound, and tell them to prepare some food for me to share with your Second Master Ying, Licentiate Wen, and Master Hsieh."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "do you mean to say that you haven't even eaten yet?"
"Ever since you left," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been busy all night. Up until now, I haven't had so much as a taste of anything to eat."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it is foolish of you not to eat. As the saying goes:
It is preferable to forfeit your capital,
Rather than opting to suffer from hunger.[66]
Is it not said in the *Hsiao-ching*, or *Classic of Filial Piety*, 'People should be taught that the dead should not hurt the living,[67] and that disfigurement should not lead to the detriment of life'?[68] The dead are dead and the survivors must continue to get on with their lives. Brother, you must get a hold of yourself."
Truly:
A few words serve to disclose the proper path to a gentleman;
A single speech suffices to awaken the sleeper from his dream.

When Ximen Qing realized that no medicine seemed to cure Li Ping'er, and when all the fortune-tellers assured him that her case was hopeless, he did not know what to do. At first, Li Ping'er still tried to get up, dress, comb her hair, and leave her bed when she had to attend to the intimate details of her toilet, but, by degrees, she came to eat less and less and grew thinner and thinner. In a very short time, she who had been such a flower-like creature was faded and withered. She could no longer get out of bed. Papers were put on her mattress, and she told her maids to burn incense all the time so that there might not be an unpleasant odor. Ximen Qing saw that her arms were as thin as threads. He was nearly always in her room, weeping, and only went to his office every other day.
"Dear man," Li Ping'er said to him, "you must not neglect your duties. I am afraid you will get behind with your official business. Don't worry about me. I have this trouble, but if the blood will only stop, and I can manage to eat and drink a little, I shall be better. You are a man. It is not fitting that you should stay at home with me all the time."
"Sister," Ximen said, and he wept as he spoke, "how can I leave you when I see you like this?"
"Oh, you foolish man, if the Fates have decreed that I must die, who can prevent it? I only wish to say one thing to you. I don't know why, but, when I am alone, something terrible seems to overshadow me. Shadowy forms are always before my eyes and, at night, I am haunted by evil dreams. Men with swords and staves quarrel and struggle with me. They snatch my baby from my breast and make to throw me on the ground. Then my former husband comes and says that he has a new house and wants me to go with him. But I did not mean to tell you this."

"When a man dies," Ximen Qing said, "he is as a light blown out. No one can say whither he has gone. It is because you have been ill so long. You are weak. I don't believe any evil spirit really comes to trouble you. But I will get Abbot Wu to give me some charms and I will put them up at your door. Then we shall see if there are devils in this house."
He went to the outer court and told Daian to go to the Temple of the Jade King to get the charms.
On his way, Daian met Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. He hastily dismounted. "Where are you going?" Ying Bojue said to him. "Is your master at home?"
"Yes," said Daian, "and I am going to the Temple of the Jade King for some charms."
The two friends went on to see Ximen Qing.
"When Brother Xie heard how ill your lady is, he was terribly shocked," Bojue said. "We have come to ask how she is."
"These last few days," Ximen told them, "she has grown so thin that she looks like another woman. Really, I don't know what to do."
"Why did you send Daian to the temple?" Bojue said.
Ximen told them about the evil dreams Li Ping'er had. "I fear there may be devils about the house," he said, "so I have asked for some charms to drive them away."
"Oh," Xie Xida said, "I am sure it is only because she is so weak. There are no devils here."
Then Bojue said: "Brother, if you wish to get rid of devils, it is a very simple matter. Priest Pan, of the Temple of the Five Sacred Mountains outside the city gate, has power over the Five Thunders and he can exorcise devils of every sort. He is known as Pan the Expeller of Demons. With his charms and wonder-working philters he often gets people out of difficulties of this sort. Send for him, Brother, and then we shall know whether there are devils at work here or not. And indeed, if you ask him, he may be able to cure your lady."
"As soon as the boy comes back from Abbot Wu, I will send him with you to Pan," Ximen said.
"We won't wait for him," Bojue said. "I will go at once. I most sincerely hope that your lady may be cured, and, if there is anything I can do to help, I will do it, even if I have to go on my head instead of my feet." He went off with Xie Xida.
When Daian came back with the charms, they were put upon the door of Li Ping'er's rooms. But that night she was terrified once more. She said to Ximen Qing: "He has been with two other men to carry me off. They ran away as you came in."
"Don't believe it," Ximen Qing said. "Brother Ying says it is all due to your weakness. He tells me that he knows a priest called Pan who will give us some very efficacious charms and medicine, and who has the power to drive out devils. I have told Brother Ying to get him to come tomorrow morning, and I'm sure he will get rid of all the disturbing influences."
"Oh, Brother," said Li Ping'er, "send for him this very moment. The dead man has gone away in a fury, and I am afraid he will come back and take me with him. Send for him now."
"If you are afraid, I will send for Wu Yin'er to keep you company," Ximen said.
Li Ping'er shook her head. "I don't wish to trouble her," she said, "I shouldn't like her to lose business."
"What about old woman Feng, then?"
Li Ping'er nodded, and Ximen Qing sent Laian for the old woman. But the door was locked, and the old woman was not to be found. Laian told the Beanpole that, when she came back, she must be told to go at once to Ximen Qing's house because the Sixth Lady needed her. Ximen Qing told Daian that, early next morning, he must go with Ying Bojue to the Temple of the Five Sacred Mountains to bring the priest Pan.
The next day, Nun Wang came. She brought a box of specially treated rice, twenty large milk biscuits and a small box of preserved eggplants. When she arrived, Li Ping'er bade Yingchun help her to sit up in bed. Nun Wang made a reverence, and Li Ping'er asked her to sit down.
"Teacher," she said, "I have not seen you since you had those texts printed for me. Though I have been so very ill, you have never come to see me."
"I did not know about your illness, Lady," the nun said. "It was only yesterday that the Great Lady sent a servant to the convent and I heard for the first time that you were ill. And, speaking of the printing of those texts, you don't know what trouble I had with that wicked old nun Xue. You remember it was arranged that we should both make terms with the printer. I got nothing out of it, but she secretly persuaded the printer to give her five taels. She did not even let me see a penny. Lady, when that bad old woman dies, she will go to the very depths of Hell. She put me in such a state that I even forgot the Great Lady's birthday, and I did not come."
"Let her go her evil way," Li Ping'er said, "but do not quarrel with her."
"I had no intention of quarreling with her," the nun said.
"The Great Lady is annoyed with you," Li Ping'er said. "She says you have never read the scriptures for her."
"Oh, Buddha!" Nun Wang cried, "I don't profess to be a saint, but I should not dare to forget a thing like that. I have been reading them all the time. I only stopped yesterday when the month was up. I have just seen her and told her about my troubles. I told her that I had only just heard about your illness, and I have nothing to offer but this rice, the preserved fruits, and the biscuits you will perhaps make into sop. The Great Lady told Xiaoyu to bring me here to see you."
Xiaoyu opened the boxes. Li Ping'er looked at them and thanked the nun. Then the nun said: "Sister Yingchun, please go and warm two of these biscuits. I want to see your lady take something to eat."
Yingchun took away the things and Li Ping'er ordered tea to be brought for the nun.
"I have had tea in the Great Lady's room," the nun said. "I only want to see you eat some porridge."
Yingchun set the table and brought in four kinds of tea cakes for Nun Wang. For Li Ping'er she brought some porridge with a plate of preserved fruits and two steamed milk biscuits. There were two bowls of porridge and a pair of small ivory chopsticks. Yingchun and Ruyi'er held the bowls and assisted Li Ping'er. But she only took two or three mouthfuls of porridge and nibbled at the cakes. Then she shook her head and would eat no more. She told them to take the things away.
"We must eat and drink," Nun Wang said. "Do have a little more. This porridge is so good."
"I would if I could," Li Ping'er said.
Nun Wang helped to pull the bedclothes over her and, as she did so, noticed how wasted Li Ping'er had become. She was shocked. "Lady," she said, "you were fatter than this when I saw you last. What has made you so thin?"
"She was better for a while," Ruyi'er said. "Then something angered her, and her illness came back again. Father sent for the doctor and he gave her some medicine that made her very much better. But, in the eighth month, the baby took fright and was very ill. My lady watched him day and night and never slept at all. She hoped he would recover, but, alas, he died. Then she cried and sobbed all day. Then, too, she was made angry, and, all things considered, got into a state that no one could stand, even if she were strong as iron or stone. Anybody but my lady would have complained and so got rid of her trouble, but she never tells anybody, only reluctantly when she is made to do so."
"Who upset her?" the nun asked. "Your master loves her, and the Great Lady respects her. There are only the few other ladies, and I can't think any one of them would offend her."
"Ah, you don't know," Ruyi'er said. She told the younger maid to go and see if the door was fast and continued: "It was the Fifth Lady. It was her cat that scratched the baby and made him have a fit. Master came and asked my lady, but she would not tell him and, in the end, the Great Lady told him. He killed the cat. The Fifth Lady never relented. She went on making trouble with us. In the middle of the eighth month the baby died. The Fifth Lady was delighted and has insulted us every day since. We can hear clearly everything she says, and my lady cannot help being upset. She weeps nearly all the time. Anger and sorrow together have gradually brought her to this pass. Only Heaven knows what a good heart she has. She never shows an angry face to the other ladies. If she has nice clothes, she will not wear them unless the other ladies have dresses like them. There is not a single person in the house to whom my lady has not been kind at some time or another. The trouble is that, though they are ready enough to take things from her, they never have a kind word to say about her."
"What do you mean?" Nun Wang said.
"There is old lady Pan, the Fifth Lady's mother. Whenever Father stays the night in the Fifth Lady's room, the old lady comes and sleeps here. And when she goes away, my lady never lets her go without stuff for making clothes or shoes. She gives her money too. Yet the Fifth Lady never has a good word to say about it."
"Oh, woman!" cried Li Ping'er, "why do you have so much to say? Let them do what they like. Heaven is mighty, yet Heaven never boasts; and Earth is solid, yet Earth never speaks."
"Buddha!" said Nun Wang, "who would have known that you had such a sweet disposition? But Heaven has eyes. Heaven will see your good works and reward you."
"Teacher," Li Ping'er said, "what reward shall I receive? Not even my child is left to me. I suffer so much pain, and have an ailment so unpleasant that even as a spirit I shall be unclean. I am going to give you some money so that, when I am dead, you can employ a few nuns to read as many texts as you can find so that this nasty disease may not cling to me forever."
"You are looking too far ahead," Nun Wang said. "Your heart is so good that Heaven cannot fail to protect you."
While they were talking. Qintong came. "Father says this room must be cleaned," he told Yingchun. "Uncle Hua has come to see your lady. He is in the outer court now."
Nun Wang stood up. "I must go to the inner court," she said.
"Teacher," said Li Ping'er, "don't go away. I wish you to stay for a few days. There is something I should like to say to you." The nun promised to stay.
Ximen Qing brought in Uncle Hua. Li Ping'er lay still upon her bed and did not speak.
"I never knew you were ill until yesterday," Uncle Hua said. "I have come especially to see you."
"It is very good of you," Li Ping'er said. She turned her face to the wall.
Hua stayed a short time, then went back to the outer court with Ximen Qing. "Our late noble relative," he said to his host, "when he was Governor of Guangnan, had some *gynura* medicine. It is a certain cure for all those troubles from which women suffer. If she takes five *fen* of it, mixed with a little wine, it will stop that flow of blood. I know she has this medicine. Why has she not tried it?"
"She has tried it," Ximen Qing said. "Yesterday the Prefect Hu came to see me. I told him about her illness, and he, too, told me of some medicine. That was white cockscomb flowers. It is mixed with a little charcoal and taken with wine. She took it, and, for a day, the flow of blood ceased, but the next day it was worse than ever."
"It is a very difficult case," Hua Ziyu said. "I think, brother-in-law, that you would do well to look out for a coffin for her. I will send my wife to see her tomorrow." He went away.
While the nurse and Yingchun were changing the bed for Li Ping'er, old woman Feng came. She made a reverence, and Ruyi'er said to her: "You are a fine one, Mother Feng! You have never been near your mistress, and yesterday Master had to send for you. Laian said your door was locked. Where were you?"
"I can't tell you what a hard life I have," old woman Feng said. "Every day I go to the temple for my religious devotions. I set off in the morning and, for some reason or other, I never get back till night. When I get home, there is always some priest to come and see me. Father Zhang, or Father Li, or Father Wang."
"An old woman like you, and so many priests to visit you!" said Ruyi'er. "This is the first time we have heard of Father Wang."
Li Ping'er smiled. "The old woman always talks nonsense," she said.
Then Ruyi'er said: "Old woman, you refuse to come when you are sent for. For the last few days my lady has had nothing to eat, and she has been terribly depressed. You have only just come, yet you have made her laugh already. If you will only stay a few days, I'm sure she will soon be better."
"Yes," old woman Feng said, "I am a good doctor when it is a question of driving care away." She laughed. Then she looked at Li Ping'er. "Lady," she said, "I had hoped to find you better. Are you able to get out of bed when you wish to relieve nature?"
"If only she could, it would be splendid," Yingchun said. "Until a few days ago, she could just manage to get up, we helping her, of course, but lately she has not been able, and we have had to put papers in the bed."
As they were talking, Ximen Qing came in. "Old woman Feng," he said, "you ought to be here nearly all the time. Why have you been so long away?"
"My Lord," the old woman said, "you know this is the season for preserving vegetables. I have been preserving some, so that if anyone is brought to me, I shall be able to give her something to eat. I have no other way of buying them."
"Why didn't you tell me?" Ximen Qing said. "Yesterday I was having the vegetables on my farm dug up, and you might have had a bushel or two."
"I am greatly obliged to your Lordship," the old woman said. Then she went to another room. Ximen Qing sat down beside the bed and Yingchun burned incense.
"How do you feel today?" Ximen asked Li Ping'er. Then he said to Yingchun: "Has your mother had any gruel?" Yingchun told him that the nun had brought some milk biscuits but that her mistress had only tasted them and taken a tiny bit of porridge.
"Brother Ying and the boy went for Priest Pan," Ximen Qing said, "but he was not at his temple. Tomorrow I will send Laibao."
"Oh, do send for him at once," Li Ping'er said. "I see that dead man whenever I close my eyes."
"It is all because your mind is so enfeebled," Ximen said. "Try to pull yourself together and don't let such ideas get hold of you. When the priest comes he will exorcise any evil spirits there may be about. He will give you medicine too, and you will soon be well again."
"Brother," Li Ping'er said, "there is no hope for me. I had always hoped to live long years with you, and now I am dying when I am only twenty-seven. What an evil fate is mine that I must leave you! I shall go and never see you again until you come to the gate of the spirits." She held his hand in hers and cried, sobbing softly, for she was too weak to make a noise. Ximen cried with her.
"Sister," he said, "if there is anything that you would say to me, say it."
In the midst of their grief, Qintong came and said: "An officer has come from your court. He says that tomorrow is the fifteenth, and there is a great deal of important business to be done. They wish to know whether you will be there or not."
"I cannot go tomorrow," Ximen Qing said. "Give the man a card, and tell Magistrate Xia that he must do all that is necessary."
"Brother," said Li Ping'er, "you must go to your office and not neglect your duties. Though I am dying, I shall not be gone so soon."
"But I am going to stay and watch over you," Ximen said. "I want you to keep firm hold on yourself and not let your thoughts bother you so much. Uncle Hua told me that I should get the boards for your coffin and so keep the evil ones away. When I have done so, you will certainly begin to improve."
Li Ping'er nodded. "Very well," she said, "but don't let yourself be cheated. You must not spend more than ten taels on the wood. And, if you really look upon me as your wife, don't have my body burned, but lay me beside your dead wife. So, perhaps, I may benefit from some of the offerings made at her tomb. And do not spend too much money on those boards for my coffin. You have a great household, and you must think of the future."
These words pierced Ximen's heart as though they had been a sword. "Sister," he said, "why do you talk like this? Even if I were a poor man, I would not treat you so disgracefully."
Then Wu Yueniang came with a small box of apples. "My sister-in-law has sent these especially for you," she said to Li Ping'er. She told Yingchun to wash and peel them.
"It is very kind of Mistress Wu," Li Ping'er said. When Yingchun had peeled some of them, she cut them into slices, put them on a plate and tried to help Li Ping'er to eat one. But she could only suck it and spit it out. Yueniang was afraid they might be disturbing her, so she made her turn her face to the wall, and she and Ximen Qing went out to talk about her.
"I am afraid she is in a very bad way," Yueniang said. "You ought to go and buy some boards for her coffin before it is too late."
"So Brother Hua has just said, and I have spoken to her about it. She said I must not spend much money because I have so many people to provide for and I must think of the future. It went to my heart. But I think I will wait until Priest Pan has been, and then I'll see about the coffin."
"You don't realize the situation," Yueniang said. "Look how she has changed. She has lost appetite till she cannot even drink a drop of water. You still hope for her recovery. We must face the facts. If she does get better, we can give the coffin to somebody for charity. It will not cost us much."
"I will do what you say," Ximen Qing said. He went to the great hall and sent for Ben the Fourth. "You know who has good coffin boards for sale," he said. "Go with Chen Jingji, my son-in-law, and see if you can find a good set. Take the money with you."
"I believe that Captain Chen, in the Main Street, has some good boards," Ben the Fourth said.
Ximen Qing sent for Chen Jingji and said to him: "Go to the Great Lady and ask her for five pieces of silver. Then go to look at the boards with Ben the Fourth." Chen Jingji hurried away, got the money, and went out with Ben the Fourth. In the afternoon they came back.
"We went to Chen's place and looked at all the boards he has," Jingji said, "but we did not think them either particularly good or very cheap. On our way back we met Master Qiao. He told us that a scholar named Shang had a very fine set of boards. His father bought them at Chengdu in Sichuan, where he used to be a judge. He brought them for his own lady. There were two sets originally and they have used one. They are of the kind known as Peach Flower Cavern. The set is complete in five pieces—sides, cover, top and bottom. They are asking three hundred and seventy taels. We went with Master Qiao to see the set, and it certainly is a very fine one. Master Qiao bargained with Scholar Shang for a long time, and at last the scholar agreed to reduce his price by fifty taels. He would not have sold the boards at all, he said, if he had not wanted the money to pay for his expenses when he goes to the Capital next year to sit for the public examination."
"Take three hundred and twenty taels at once and secure the boards," Ximen Qing said. "There is no time to lose."
"He has taken two hundred and fifty taels as a deposit," Jingji said, "so that leaves us with seventy more to pay." They went again to the inner court and Yueniang gave them another seventy taels. Then they went to Master Shang's. That evening a number of porters brought the boards, carefully wrapped in red drugget. They set them down in the courtyard. Ximen Qing examined them and found them excellent. He sent for carpenters to saw them, and the wood gave out a delightful fragrance. The main piece was about five inches thick, two feet five inches broad and seven feet five inches long. Ximen Qing was quite satisfied. He sent for Ying Bojue to come and look at them and asked him if he had ever seen such a fine set of coffin boards in his life before. Bojue expressed his admiration.
"A perfect example of the fitness of things!" he exclaimed. "Everything in the world has its proper owner somewhere. You have bought these boards for my sister-in-law, and it is clear evidence that she did well when she married you."
Ximen said to the workmen: "Make these boards up carefully and you shall have five taels of silver." The workmen set to work with a will and soon had put the coffin together.
Ying Bojue said to Laibao: "Tomorrow morning go and see Priest Pan. If he will come, bring him with you. We must avoid all further delay." Then he stood with Ximen Qing and watched the carpenters working in the courtyard. It was the first night watch before he went away.
"Come early tomorrow," Ximen said to him. "The priest may be here early." Bojue promised and went away.
In the evening, old woman Feng and Nun Wang went to Li Ping'er's room. They had seen Ximen Qing in the front court. They proposed to stay the night with Li Ping'er, but she would not allow them. "This is a foul place," she said, "and it would be disagreeable for you. Go and sleep somewhere else." Ximen, seeing that the nun and the old woman were there, went to sleep with Pan Jinlian.
Li Ping'er told Yingchun to fasten the corner door and bolt it. Then she said: "Take a light and open my chest." Yingchun took out some dresses and ornaments. Li Ping'er asked the nun to go nearer and gave her five taels of silver and a roll of silk.
"When I am dead," she said, "read the texts for me, you and a few other nuns."
"Lady," Nun Wang said, "you are looking too far ahead. Heaven will take pity on you, and you will certainly get better."
"Keep the money," Li Ping'er said, "and say nothing about it to the Great Lady. Tell her I gave you the silk for the sacred offerings you made for me." Then she called old woman Feng. "Old Feng," she said, "you are my old nurse. You waited on me when I was a child. Now I am dying. I have nothing to give you but these old dresses and this pin. I give them to you as a keepsake. And here is some silver that you may buy yourself a coffin. You need have no anxiety. I will ask his Lordship to let you stay on in that house as caretaker. I'm sure he won't send you away."

Old woman Feng took the silver and the clothes and knelt down. Weeping, she said: "This is the end of me. As long as you have lived, I have always had someone to depend upon. If you die, I shan't know where to go."
Then Li Ping'er called the nurse and gave her a purple silk gown, a blue silk skirt, an old silk cloak, two gold-headed pins, and a silver ornament.
"You took care of my baby," she said, "and even when my baby died, I still hoped you might take care of another child of mine. I did not want you to leave me while I lived. But there is no hope for me now, and I am going to ask your master and mistress to keep you after my death, so that, if the Great Lady has a child, you may nurse it. I give you these clothes as a little token of remembrance. Do not think that I am mean."
Ruyi'er knelt down and kowtowed. She cried. "I hoped that I might serve you always," she said. "You have always been so kind to me. And it is really my fault that the little master died and you are so ill. Please speak to the Great Lady for me. My husband is dead, and, if I am sent away from here, there is nowhere for me to go." Then Ruyi'er took the clothes and the ornaments and stood, drying her tears.
Now Li Ping'er summoned Yingchun and Xiuchun. They came and knelt down beside the bed. "You two have served me since your childhood. You have served me well, but there is little I can do for you now. You have already clothes enough, and there is no need for me to give you more. Here, for each of you, are two pairs of gold pins and two gold flowers. As for you, Yingchun, your master has made a woman of you, so, of course, you will not leave here, and I will ask the Great Lady to look after you. And you, Xiuchun, I will ask the Great Lady to find a good home for you, for I would not have you stay on here to be ill used by anyone else. I don't wish my maids to suffer when I am gone, and I don't think you will find anyone else as indulgent as I have been."
Xiuchun knelt and cried. "Mother," she sobbed, "I would like to stay here forever."
"Oh, you silly maid! Whom will you serve when I have gone?"
"I will look after your tablet."
"My tablet will not be here for long. It will be burned and you will have to go away."
"Then I and Yingchun will both serve the Great Lady."
"That is one way," said Li Ping'er.
Xiuchun did not quite understand the situation. Yingchun took the ornaments and cried. She could not speak.
So Li Ping'er gave them all her last instructions. In the early morning, Ximen Qing came. She asked him about the coffin. "We bought the boards yesterday," he told her, "and the men are working on it now. Remember, it is to drive your illness away. When you get better, we shall give it away in charity."
"How much did it cost? I do not wish you to waste your money."
"Oh, not much," Ximen Qing said. "A hundred taels, or something like that."
"It is a great deal of money for so useless an end," Li Ping'er said. "Well, have it made up ready for my death."
Ximen Qing went out to see the carpenters at work. Yueniang and Li Jiao'er came to see her. It was clear that she was very ill indeed. "How do you feel today, Sister?" Yueniang asked.
Li Ping'er took her hand. "Mother," she said, "there is no hope for me."
The Great Lady wept. "Sister," she said, "is there anything you would like to say to me? Here is the Second Lady, too. Tell us both."
"I have nothing to say," Li Ping'er answered. "We have been sisters together for a few years and you have always been very kind to me. I had hoped we should grow old together, but the Fates were against me. My baby died, and now I am dying. When I am dead, my two maids will be left. The older of them has already been made a woman, and you will doubtless keep her in your apartments. As for the younger, keep her if you want her, but, otherwise, please find a young man for her and let her be free. I don't wish people to speak of her as a maid without a mistress. I say this because she has served me so long, and I shall be the easier after my death for telling you. Ruyi'er does not wish to leave, so, Mother, for the sake of the care she took of my baby and for my own sake, keep her to look after the child you will bear."
"Sister," said Yueniang, "think no more about any of these matters. I take them all upon myself. If you leave us, I will have Yingchun to live with me and Xiuchun shall wait upon the Second Lady. The maid the Second Lady has now is not as honest as she might be and she is lazy. One of these days I shall have to dismiss her. The nurse, Ruyi'er, as you have said, has nowhere else to go, and I will keep her whether I have a child or not. I will try and find a husband for her."
"Don't worry about any of these things," Li Jiao'er added. "The Great Lady and I will hold ourselves responsible. If Xiuchun comes to me, I will let her wait upon me, and treat her kindly."
Li Ping'er called the nurse and the two maids and bade them kowtow to the two ladies. Yueniang began to cry again.
Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Sun Xue'e then came to visit Li Ping'er and she said a few kind words to each of them. Then all but Yueniang went away. "Mother," Li Ping'er said to her softly, "if you bear a child, Mother, look carefully after him. Bring him up that he may continue the family after you. Do not be careless as I was, so that you suffer from the evil plottings of others."
"I understand, Sister," Yueniang said. These words made a great impression upon her, and, when Ximen Qing was dead, the remembrance of them was the reason why Jinlian was no longer allowed to live in the family.
While they were still talking, Qintong came and said they must burn incense. Priest Pan had come. Yueniang told the maids to clean the room, make tea, get pure water, and burn some precious incense. She and the other women went to the inner room to listen to what the priest should say. Ximen Qing brought him in.
The priest came in by the corner door, past the screen. Before he entered the room where Li Ping'er was, he went backward two steps before the stairs. Then he murmured something; the servants raised the lattice, and he went in. He sat down beside the sick woman's bed. It seemed as if all his strength was concentrated in his two eyes; it was a sign that he was summoning all the power of spiritual vision at his command. He held a sword in his hand, and his fingers were bent in a definite and peculiar position. He murmured again, and it seemed as though his eyes saw through everything. Then he went to the other room and set out the table for incense. Ximen Qing burned some incense and the priest set fire to a charm. Then he cried:
"Come quickly, all ye spirits that serve!"
He cast around him a mouthful of water. Immediately there seemed to be a whirlwind of furious intensity outside the room, and in the whirlwind some of the marshals of the host of angels.
"In this house of Ximen," said the priest, "a woman, Li, is ill. She has appealed to me. I bid you, bring the guardian of the soil and the six tutelaries of this household. Bring them that I may examine them and learn the reason for this illness. Go then, forthwith, and delay not."
The priest closed his eyes. His color changed, and he sat stiffly upright. He put his hands on the table and hammered with a piece of wood as a judge does when he tries a case. This he did for a long time. Then he came out. Ximen Qing invited him to go to the outer court and tell what he had seen in his vision.
"This woman," the priest said, "is suffering the punishment that has been due to her for several generations. She has been accused in Hades, and there is no devil's work here. I can do nothing."
"Master Priest," Ximen Qing said, "is there no sacrifice that you can offer?"
"Hatred and debt," said the priest, "always find their quarry. Even the officers of Hades themselves could do nothing." But when he saw how very much in earnest Ximen Qing was, he said: "How old is the lady?" Ximen told him she was twenty-seven. "Well," said the priest, "I will offer sacrifice to the star of her life, and we shall see the manner of its burning." Ximen Qing asked when he would do so and what he would need.
"Tonight, at the third night watch," the priest said. "I shall need some white powder to mark the boundary. I shall make an altar and cover it with yellow silk. Then I shall arrange the stars according to their order and make an offering of five kinds of grain and soup and dates. I shall need neither meat nor wine. I shall need a lamp to represent the light of her life, and twenty-seven lanterns. I shall require an umbrella to cover the lanterns. That is all. You must fast, put on black clothes and come here to make your obeisance. I will offer the sacrifice. See that dogs and chickens are kept away, for I do not wish to be disturbed."
Ximen went at once to get everything ready. He went to his study, bathed, and changed into clean clothes. He asked Ying Bojue to stay with him. They had a vegetarian meal with the priest and, about the third night watch, the altar and the lanterns were made ready. The priest took his seat upon a dais with the altar of the lanterns below him. They were set out according to the position of the stars. Over everything were three large umbrellas and, around the dais, the master stars, twelve in number. Below them were the lanterns representing the life of Li Ping'er. These were twenty-seven in number.
The priest recited a preamble. Then Ximen Qing, dressed in black clothes, came and knelt down. The servants all withdrew. None was allowed to remain. The lanterns were lighted. The priest sat on the seat, his head bent down, his sword in his hand. He murmured something, then gazed at the sky and set his feet in a certain position. Three times he burned incense that he might be granted knowledge of the three worlds. And every command he gave sounded like thunder. It was a bright clear night; the stars were shining in the heavens. Suddenly the whole world darkened and a mighty hurricane blew.
This is not the roaring of tigers
Or the muttering of dragons
But a wind that rushes through the doors
And around the screens
A wind that blasts the flowers, rips off the leaves
And drives the clouds to leave the mountains
And send rain to the ocean.
The wild geese have lost their mates and cry bitterly
The wild ducks and the herons are frightened
And seek trees for refuge.
The angel of the moon shuts her palace door in haste
And the immortal Liezi cries for help
Away in the sky.
Three times the wind blew. It was followed by an ice-cold blast that put out all the twenty-seven lamps. The priest saw a man in white garments and two black-robed attendants with him. They came, bringing a paper that they set down upon the table. The priest looked at it. It was the final judgment of Hades. There were three seals upon the paper. He came to Ximen Qing and said: "Your lady has sinned against Heaven. Our prayers are useless. The light of her life has gone out. There is no hope, and death is not far distant from her."
When he heard this, Ximen Qing bowed his head and was silent. He wept. At last he said: "Teacher, you must help her."
"It is the will of Heaven," said the priest. "There is nothing I can do." He asked to be allowed to go. Ximen Qing urged him to stay the night. "Being a priest, to walk through the dew and pass the night upon the mountains is nothing to me," the priest said. Ximen Qing could not persuade him to stay. He told his servants to give the priest a roll of cloth and three taels of silver. "It is God's will that I should make use of the knowledge I possess," the priest said. "I have taken an oath that I will never take anything from the world. I cannot accept your gift." But, being pressed, he told a novice to accept the roll of cloth and make a gown for him. Before he left he said to Ximen Qing: "Sir, you must not go to her room tonight. If you go, you too will have trouble. Be cautious! Be cautious!" He went out of the gate and walked swiftly away.
Ximen Qing went back to the courtyard. He saw that all the lanterns had been extinguished. This made him very sad, and he wept before Ying Bojue. "Brother, this is her destiny," Bojue said. "We cannot take her back against the will of Heaven. You must not be so sad. The fourth night watch has sounded." Then he said: "Brother, you are weary, go and rest. I will go away now and come again tomorrow morning."
"You must have a light," Ximen Qing said. He ordered Laian to take a lantern and light Ying Bojue home. Then he went back to his study. There he sat by himself with the light of a solitary candle. His heart was torn by distress, and he could only sigh. He thought how the priest had said to him that he must not go to his loved one's room. "But how can I desert her now?" he said to himself. "I will go and see her even if I die for it. She may wish to say something to me." So he went to the sickroom.
Li Ping'er was sleeping with her face to the wall, but she wakened when she heard Ximen Qing. She turned to him and said: "Brother, why have you come?" Then she asked him about the lanterns.
"Be easy in your mind," Ximen said. "There was nothing wrong with the lanterns."
"Brother," Li Ping'er said, "do not try to deceive me. I saw him who is dead come with two others and stir up trouble for me again. He told me that you had sent for a priest to get me back from death. But, he said, the accusation against me in Hades had been accepted and I could not escape him. He went off in a raging fury and said: 'Tomorrow I shall come and take you.'"
Ximen Qing sobbed aloud when he heard this. "Oh, Sister," he said, "do not worry about him. I had hoped that we should live long years together. I never thought you would go away and leave me. I would rather die myself. It would be better than this agony."
Li Ping'er put her hands upon Ximen's neck. "Brother," she said, "I had longed to live with you always, but now I am going away. Before I close my eyes I would say one thing to you. You have a great household, and you alone can control it. You must always be careful and not do things without thinking. And be kind to the Great Lady. I know that one day soon she will bear a child to you, and he will carry on your family after you are gone. You are an officer now, but you must not go drinking so much as you have been doing. You must come home early. Your household affairs are of more importance than feasting. If I could have lived, I would have given you counsel. When I am dead, I fear there will be none to advise you."
These words cut Ximen's heart like a sword. "Sister," he said, "I know it. But do not worry about me. Heaven has put an end to our happiness together. It will not permit us to be husband and wife any longer. This will kill me, even though it is the will of Heaven."
Li Ping'er spoke to him about Yingchun and Xiuchun. "I have spoken to the Great Lady," she said, "Yingchun is going to serve her, and Xiuchun the Second Lady. The Second Lady has promised me."
"Say no more of this, Sister," Ximen Qing said. "Nobody shall send your maids away when you are dead. I will not even allow the nurse to go. I mean them all to guard your tablet."
"What tablet?" said Li Ping'er. "There will be nothing but a wooden board, and it will be burned thirty-five days after my death."
"Oh, no!" Ximen said. "I shall keep it as long as I live and make offerings before it."
Then Li Ping'er said: "It is late now. Go and sleep."
"I don't wish to sleep," Ximen answered her. "I am going to stay and look after you."
"I am not likely to die yet," Li Ping'er said, "and there is such a nasty mess here, it will make you sick. Besides, you will be in the way when the maids have to attend to me."
So Ximen Qing told the maids to look well after their mistress and went to Yueniang's room. He told Yueniang about the sacrifice, and said: "I have been to her room. She is still able to speak quite well. Perhaps Heaven will, even yet, allow her to get better."
"Her eyes are sunken, her lips are parched, and her ears burn," Yueniang said. "I fear there is no hope. She has the kind of illness in which she is able to talk up to the last moment."
"She has been in this house only a few years," Ximen Qing said, "and she has never harmed anyone, whether of high or low degree. And so sweet is her nature that she has never spoken an unkind word about anyone. I cannot bear to lose her." He cried, and Yueniang cried with him.

* * *

Li Ping'er asked Yingchun and the nurse to place her so that she faced the wall. Then she said: "What is the time?" The nurse told her:
"The cock has not yet crowed: it is the fourth night watch."
Yingchun put some new paper beneath her, and they helped her over till she faced the wall. Then they pulled the bedclothes over her. Everybody had been up all night. Old woman Feng and Nun Wang at last went to sleep. Yingchun and Xiuchun put something on the floor and slept there. In less than an hour, Yingchun dreamed that Li Ping'er got out of bed and touched her. "Look after my room," she said, "I am going now." Yingchun woke up with a start. The lamp was still burning on the table. She looked at the bed. Li Ping'er was there, facing the wall, but, when Yingchun put her hand over her mistress's mouth, she could feel no breath. She could not say when her lady had died.
So this beautiful and charming lady became a dream of the Spring.
Yingchun quickly woke the others. They saw that Li Ping'er was dead. She was lying in a pool of blood. They were greatly excited and ran to the inner court to tell Ximen Qing. He and Yueniang hurried to the room as fast as they could. They lifted the bedclothes. The Sixth Lady's face had not changed and there was still a little warmth in her body. There was a red stomacher about her. Ximen Qing did not trouble about the blood. He gathered her in his arms and kissed her.
"Oh, my ill-fated sister, my dear sweet sister! How could you leave me like this? I will die too. I know I have not long to live." He cried and threw himself into the air in his grief. Wu Yueniang cried; Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Sun Xue'e, and the household, maids and nurse and all cried, so that the sound of their crying shook the earth.
"We did not know when she was going to die," Yueniang said, "so we never dressed her properly."
"Her body is warm," Yulou said, "I think she must have just gone. We must wait no longer but dress her now, while her body is limp."
Ximen Qing still held Li Ping'er in his arms. "Heaven wills my death," he was crying. "You have been in this house three years and not a single day's real pleasure have you had. It is all my fault."
This made Yueniang a little impatient with him. "Cry if you will, but put her down," she said. "You must not cry face to face with her like that. If the foul air from her mouth comes to you, it will make you ill. And what do you mean by saying that she never had a single happy day? If she did not, who did? We ourselves cannot decide how long we shall live. We shall all have to go the same way." She bade Yulou and Li Jiao'er take the key and get some clothes so that they might dress her. She told Jinlian to help dress her hair.
"Get the clothes she used to like best," Ximen Qing said.
Yueniang said to Li Jiao'er and Yulou: "Get that new scarlet silk gown, and the satin skirt of willow yellow, the clove-colored silk dress and the light blue skirt she used to wear when she went to visit Mistress Qiao, and the dresses that were made for her lately."
Yingchun took a light and Yulou the key, and they went to the room and opened a chest. After searching a long time, they found the three dresses, a purple silk vest, a white silk underskirt and a scarlet undergarment, with white silk socks and a pair of drawers. Li Jiao'er carried them to Yueniang who, with Jinlian, was dressing the dead woman's hair. They used four gold pins to keep in place a green kerchief.
"What kind of shoes must she have?" Li Jiao'er asked.
"She used to like that scarlet pair with high heels," Jinlian said. "She did not wear them more than twice. Let us have those."
"No," said Yueniang, "I will not have red shoes put on her. It would look as though we wished her to jump into the fire of Hell. Bring the violet shoes with high heels that she wore when she went to her sister-in-law's place." Li Jiao'er told Yingchun to bring those shoes. They all worked together dressing Li Ping'er.
Meanwhile, Ximen Qing sent the boys to the great hall. They took down the pictures and covered the screens. They got a large piece of board and carried it to the hall, then put a silken coverlet on the board and a paper cover over that. Then they prepared a table for incense and a lamp to be kept lighted continually. Ximen Qing appointed two boys to be with the body all the time, one to beat the gong, the other to keep paper offerings burning. Then he sent Daian for Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang.
Yueniang took all the clothes that were to go with the dead woman into the coffin, and locked up the rooms that had belonged to her. Only the bedroom was left unlocked. The maids and the nurse were placed in charge of it.

When old woman Feng saw that her mistress was dead, tears rolled down her nose like a river. Nun Wang muttered texts for the soul of Li Ping'er. There was the *Duoxinjing*, the *Yaoshijing*, the *Jieyuanjing*, the *Lengyanjing* and incantations to invoke the compassion of the Blessed One, that he might receive the dead lady's soul and set her on the right way in the realm of the dead.
In the great hall, Ximen Qing was beating his breast. He cried so much that he had no voice left, saying: "My kind, sweet sister!" It was nearly dawn.
Then the Master of the Yin Yang came. "I am sorry to hear of your lady's death," he said. "At what hour did she die?"
"We cannot say exactly," Ximen Qing told him. "I only know that she went to sleep about the beginning of the fourth night watch. Everybody was tired. There was no one awake when she died."
"It does not matter," the Master of the Yin Yang said. He asked a servant to give him a light. Then he lifted the paper coverlet. The fingers of Li Ping'er indicated the hour of the Ox between 1 and 3 AM. "She died," he said, "two degrees after the fifth night watch. We may say that she died at the hour of the Ox." Ximen called for ink and brushes and asked Master Xu to write the certificate. Xu asked for the dead lady's name and her eight characters. Then he wrote:
The deceased lady Li, the wife of Ximen, was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *Xinwei* of the reign *Yuanyu*, and died at midnight on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the year *Dingyu* of the reign *Zhenghe*. This was a *Bingzi* day, and the order of the month *Wuzu*. Her spirit is ten feet high. It will be useless to wail for her until the mourning dress has been worn. And, when she is put into her coffin, none should be present whose animal is the Dragon, the Tiger, the Cock, or the Snake, unless he is a kinsman.
Yueniang told Daian to ask Master Xu to look into his black book and tell them the destiny of Li Ping'er. The Master of the Yin Yang opened his secret book and said: "This was the hour of the Ox on a *Bingzi* day. If the departed goes to Heaven, she will go to the Palace of the Precious Vase, but if to the world again, then to the land of Qi. In a former existence she was born as a man named Wang in Binzhou. As this man she killed a ewe with child, and, for that reason, her animal was the sheep. Though she married a rich man, she suffered much from illness and the backbitings of others. Her child lived for a very short time, and she has died from a combination of disease and anger. Nine days ago her soul went to a family named Yuan in Kaifengfu to be reborn as a girl. There she will suffer poverty, but, when she is twenty years old, she will marry a rich man, much older than herself. She will have an easy life and die when she is forty-two, again as the result of anger." He ended his reading of the black book. The ladies all sighed.
Yueniang inquired what would be a suitable day for the funeral. Xu asked how long they wished to keep the body at the house.
"I cannot let her go yet," Ximen Qing said, crying. "She must not be buried for thirty-five days, at least."
"If you keep her thirty-five days," Xu said, "there will be no day suitable. But after twenty-eight days there is one. I suggest that you have her grave dug about noon on the eighth day of the tenth month and bury her on the twelfth, about the hour of two. Both those days are suitable from every point of view."
"Very well," Ximen said, "we will have the funeral on the twelfth day of the tenth month."
The Master of the Yin Yang wrote out his certificate and placed it on the dead woman's body. Then he said to Ximen Qing: "About the hour of the Dragon (eight AM) on the nineteenth, we will put her in her coffin. Please have everything ready." Then he went away. It was now broad daylight.
Ximen Qing told Qitong to get a horse and ride to tell Uncle Hua. Then he sent servants in all directions to give the news to his relatives, and a man to the office to ask for leave of absence. He sent Daian to Lion Street for twenty rolls of thin white cloth and thirty rolls of coarser material. He told Tailor Zhao to bring a number of assistant tailors and set to work in the rooms beside the hall to make hangings and curtains and tablecloths for the funeral, skirts and gowns for all the ladies, and a long gown of white cloth for every servant. He gave Ben the Fourth a hundred taels of silver and sent him to buy thirty rolls of linen and two hundred rolls of yellow funeral silk. He sent for the arbor builders to make a great arbor in the courtyard.
Ximen never ceased thinking of Li Ping'er, her appearance and her actions. Suddenly he thought of having a portrait of her painted. He summoned Laibao and said to him: "Where can we find a good artist to paint her portrait?"
Laibao said: "Once a man named Han painted some screens for us. He used to be employed in the Imperial Household. He was dismissed but he paints excellent portraits."
"If you know where he lives," Ximen said, "bring him here at once." Laibao went away.
Ximen Qing had not slept all night. What with his grief and what with the strain he had had, he became very irritable about the fifth night watch. He cursed the maids and kicked the boys. Still he remained in the great hall watching his wife's body. From time to time he sobbed aloud. Daian was there too, and he cried bitterly. Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, Yulou, and Jinlian busied themselves distributing mourning to the maids and serving women behind the curtain. They could hear Ximen Qing still crying though he had no voice left. They asked him if he would take some tea, but he would not answer.
"She is dead," Yueniang said to him, "and you will not bring her back to life by crying. You have not slept properly for several nights; you have not combed your hair or washed your face. This morning you have worked very hard and have had nothing at all to eat. It would be more than anybody could stand even if he were made of iron. Go and do your hair, and have something to eat. We will attend to things. You are not very strong, and if you have to take to your bed, I don't know what we shall do."
"He has not dressed his hair or washed his face," Yulou said.
"A moment ago," Yueniang told her, "I sent a boy to ask him to do so, but he kicked the boy out, and I dare not ask him again."
Then Jinlian spoke. "You may not know it, but a short time ago, I spoke to him quite kindly. I said, 'If you cry like this, you will lose your flesh and your bones too. You must eat something. You can see about things afterwards.' He opened his red eyes wide and called me a swine of a woman. I won't bother about him any more. The unreasonable fellow! There's nothing swinish about me. And he always talks about others upsetting him!"
"She died so suddenly that he is naturally rather upset," Yueniang said, "but he should keep the sorrow in his heart and not make such a fuss about it. You saw, dead though she was, he didn't care. He kissed her and cried so loud. Really, it is not good breeding. She had been here for three years, he said, and had never had a single day's happiness. I have no recollection of her ever having had to draw water or do any other hard work day by day."
"He loved her more than any of us," Yulou said, "but he was right. Such a woman as our Sixth Sister was!"
As they were talking, Chen Jingji came with nine rolls of white silk. "This silk," he said, "Father tells me, is for kerchiefs and skirts."
"Ask your father to come and have some food," Yueniang said to him as she took the silk. "He has had nothing to eat."
"I dare not," Jingji said. "When a boy went to ask him, he nearly killed him. I dare not go near him."
"If you won't go, I shall have to send somebody else."
After a while she called Daian and said to him: "Your father has not had anything to eat, and he has been crying so long. Take him some food. Master Wen is there now; try and get your father to have something to eat with him."
"We have been for Uncle Ying and Uncle Xie," the boy said. "As soon as they come, we will take some food in. They need only say a word or two, and I promise you, Father will eat something."
"You cunning young rogue," Yueniang said. "You are the worm in your father's stomach. It looks as though we poor old women are not as good as you are. How do you know he will eat when they come?"
"You don't realize, Mother, what good friends they are with Father. Whenever he gives a party, no matter who else is there, they are sure to be invited. If Father has three *qian* worth of food to eat, so have they; if he has only two *qian* worth, they have it just the same. However bad a temper he may be in, they have only to speak a few words, and he is laughing and smiling again."
Qitong brought Ying Bojue and Xie Xida. They went in, knelt down before the body, and wept for a long time. They bewailed their kind sister-in-law. Jinlian said: "The rascally oily-mouthed rogues! So we are not kind!" Then they stood up. Ximen Qing made a reverence to them and they cried again.
"How unhappy you must be, Brother," they said. They were asked to go to a room in the wing. There they greeted Master Wen and sat down.
"When did my sister-in-law die?" Bojue asked.
"It was sometime about the hour of the Ox," Ximen told them.
"It was after the fourth night watch when I got home," Bojue said. "My wife asked after her, and I said: 'By Heaven's will, the poor lady is at the point of death.' As soon as I went to sleep, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed you sent a boy to fetch me. He said you were giving a feast in your house to celebrate your promotion. I came at once. You were wearing scarlet robes. You took two jade pins from your sleeve and showed them to me. 'One is broken,' you said. I looked at them for a long time and then I said: 'It is a pity the broken one is made of jade, while the other is only crystal.' But you said: 'No, they are both made of jade.' I woke up feeling that the dream boded no good. My wife saw me sucking my lips and asked me whom I thought I was talking to. I said: 'You don't understand. Wait, and, when the dawn comes, I'll tell you.' Then the day broke, and I saw your boy coming dressed in white. It was a shock, but here you are wearing mourning dress."
"I too had a dream," Ximen Qing said, "it was rather like yours. I dreamed that my kinsman Zhai of the Eastern Capital sent me six pins. One of them was broken, and I said: 'What a pity!' Then I woke up. I was just telling my wife about the dream when she in the front court died. What an unkind Heaven to bring such a calamity upon me. I would rather have died myself. I only lost sight of her for a moment, and at that moment she died. Even in years to come, how shall I think of her without my heart breaking? I have never wronged anyone, why should Heaven snatch my loved ones from me? First my child is taken, now she lies here, dead. What have I to live for in this world? Even if my money reached to the North Star, what use is it to me?"
"Brother," Bojue said, "it is no use talking like this. You and she were such a perfect couple that, of course, you cannot help feeling miserable now that she has died so suddenly. But you have a fine home; you have an official appointment, and you have a houseful of people dependent upon you. If anything should happen to you, what would become of them? Remember the old saying: If one lives, three live; but if one dies, three die. Brother, you are an intelligent man and I do not need to tell you this. If you loved your wife dearly and you wish to do justice to that love, send for the Buddhist and the Daoist priests to read their dirges, and give her a splendid funeral. Then you will be easy in your mind because you will know that you have done well by my sister-in-law. I don't believe that there is anything else you can usefully do. You must see this, Brother."
Then Ximen Qing realized the situation and stopped crying. The servants brought tea and they drank it. Ximen told Daian to go to the inner court. "Bring some food," he said, "and I will eat it with your uncles and Master Wen."
"Haven't you had anything to eat yet?" Bojue asked.
"I have been busy all the time since you went away, and I haven't had a bite of anything."
"It's foolish of you," Bojue said. The proverb says: 'It's better to lose money than to be starved.' The dead are dead; the living must go on living. You must think of yourself."

## 086
## The Friends and Relatives Offer Funeral Oblations at a Memorial Feast of the 6TH Lady; Hsi-men Ch'ing Is Reminded of Li P'ing-erh While Watching a Drama

Even among the twelve jasper terraces[1] and jeweled
balustrades of paradise,
Once the alabaster blossoms have fallen, they are
unlikely to bloom again.
Even medications concocted out of dragon's beard[2]
have not been efficacious;
Though pills were being made up from bear's gall,
they weren't ready in time.
Behind hibiscus curtains the night brings sorrow,
the red candles have expired;
Within paper windows, as autumn comes to an end,
the kingfisher quilt is cold.
One feels empathy with the goose that has lost
it's fellows and flies alone;
As frost falls and the wind rises, it's image
appears in forlorn isolation.

On that day as a result of Ying Po-chüeh's persuasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing wiped away his tears, ceased his weeping, and ordered a page boy to go back to the rear compound and bring them some food. Before long, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second arrived, performed their obeisances before the spirit tablet of the deceased, saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, and communicated their distress at his bereavement. They were invited into the anteroom, where they sat down with the others. Meanwhile, Tai-an went back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "How come you ladies did not believe me? Master Ying the Second had no sooner arrived than, with a single conversation, he succeeded in persuading Father to have something to eat."
"You lousy inveterate jailbird!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Since you spend all day outside the house playing the role of pander for him, it's scarcely surprising that you understand his character."
"I've attended the master since my childhood," said Tai-an. "How could I fail to be familiar with his innermost feelings?"
"Just who are the people sitting in the anteroom who will be sharing a meal with him?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"Your elder brother and your second brother have just showed up," said Tai-an. "Along with Licentiate Wen, Second Master Ying, Master Hsieh, Manager Han, your son-in-law, and Father, there are eight in all."
"Ask our son-in-law to come back here and eat in the rear compound," said Yüeh-niang. "Why should he insist on joining the party?"
"He has already sat down with them," said Tai-an.
"You and the other page boys go to the kitchen and take the food out to them," said Yüeh-niang. "And take an extra bowl of congee for Father to eat. He hasn't had any breakfast this morning."
"What other page boys are there?" said Tai-an. "I'm the only one left at home. All the rest have been deputed to announce the death to friends and relatives, to burn paper money, or to buy things. And Wang Ching has been sent to Kinsman Chang Kuan's place to borrow a cloud-shaped gong for the occasion."
"Why don't you get that slave Shu-t'ung to help you out?" said Yüeh-niang. "Though I suppose he's:
Reluctant to set the fins on his
silk hat aflutter."[3]
"Shu-t'ung and Hua-t'ung have been assigned to serve before her spirit tablet," said Tai-an, "one of them to strike the chime, and the other to burn paper money. And as for Ch'un-hung, Father has sent him to go with Pen the Fourth to exchange the damask that he bought earlier today. He doesn't think it's good enough and wants to exchange it for a grade of damask that costs six mace per length, in order to make mourning garments for the visitors."
"If you stop to consider it," said Yüeh-niang, "that damask that cost five mace per length would have been good enough, but he would insist on exchanging it."
She then went on to say, "You call that little slave Hua-t'ung off his post and get him to help you take the food out. What are you waiting around for?"
Thereupon, Tai-an, together with Hua-t'ung, proceeded to carry the food out to the front compound, in:
Large platters and large bowls,
and set up an Eight Immortals Table on which to serve it.

While the company were eating their meal, who should appear but P'ing-an, carrying in his hand an accordion-bound calling card, who reported, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling from the yamen has sent along a professional scribe, and three members of the guard unit, for your benefit and would like a note of acknowledgment."
After reading the card, Hsi-men Ch'ing issued instructions, saying, "Get three mace of silver to reward the messenger, and write out an accordion-bound thank-you note, indicating that the sender is in one-year mourning, in reply to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."
When the company had finished their meal, the utensils were cleared away.
Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-pao, who brought with him the painter Master Han.
After saluting him, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I would trouble you, sir, to paint a portrait of my deceased consort."
"I understand," said Master Han.
"If there is any further delay," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I fear that the appearance of her countenance will have changed."
"It doesn't matter," said Master Han. "I can capture her likeness even after death."
Just as they were finishing their tea, P'ing-an suddenly came in and announced that Hua the Elder from outside the city gate had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing accompanied Hua Tzu-yu as he wept in front of the spirit tablet for a while, after which, salutations were exchanged as he joined the rest of the company.
He then went on to ask, "At what time did she die?"
"She stopped breathing at 2:00 AM," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was still speaking:
Clearly and distinctly,
shortly before her death. She had not been asleep for long when her maidservant got up to see how she was and found that she had stopped breathing."
Hua Tzu-yu, upon noticing that the young attendant standing beside Master Han was holding an easel, and that he had pulled a painting brush and some pigments out of his sleeve, said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother-in-law, are you planning to have her portrait painted?"
"I am so heartsick over her death," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I can't bear not to have an image of her likeness that I can look at from time to time to remind me of her."
He then issued instructions that the womenfolk from the rear compound should stay out of the way and then lifted aside the curtain and led Master Han, along with Hua the Elder and the rest of the company, into the partitioned area in which Li P'ing-erh was lying in state.
Master Han then proceeded to lift the funeral banderole aside with his hand and concentrated the gaze of those vigilant organs of his, with their:
Five concentric rings,

Eight precious attributes, and
Two spots of magic liquid,[4]
upon the sight revealed below. He saw that her hair was done up in a raven-black kerchief, and that, although she had been ill for a long time:
Her coloration was still lifelike,[5] and
Her countenance remained unaltered.
Although she appeared sallower than before, her lips were still adorably red and moist. Hsi-men Ch'ing could not help wiping the tears from his eyes as he wept at the sight.
Thereupon, Lai-pao and Ch'in-t'ung set up the easel at her side and laid out the pigments. Master Han took in her appearance at a glance, and the company crowded around him, urging him to begin to paint.
Ying Po-chüeh ventured to address him, saying, "Sir, you must realize that this is the visage of an invalid. In the past, when she was well:
Her face was fuller than this, and
Her countenance was enchanting."[6]
"There is no need for the venerable gentleman to instruct me," said Master Han. "I understand the situation. May I venture to ask Your Honor, is this, by any chance, the same person that I caught a glimpse of formerly, on the first day of the fifth month, when she was paying a visit to the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak?"
"She is that very one," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She was still herself at the time. If you will endeavor to remember what she looked like, sir, and paint one full-length portrait, as well as a half-length one to be worshipped beside her spirit tablet, I will present you with a bolt of satin, and ten taels of silver to boot."
"With regard to Your Honor's instructions," said Master Han, "I will, of course, do my best."
In hardly any time at all, he succeeded in producing a half-length portrait. Truly:
Her jade face exhibits the rare beauty
of a secluded flower;
Her full flesh is a delicate jade that
exudes its own bouquet.
When he showed it to the assembled company, they saw that it was, indeed, a portrait of a beauty.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had looked at it, he said to Tai-an, "Take it back to the rear compound and show it to the ladies, to see what they think. If they find anything wrong with it, come tell us, so that it can be corrected."
Tai-an, accordingly, took it back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "Father says that you ladies should examine this portrait of the Sixth Lady to see how well it is done. If you find any feature that is not true to life, say what it is, so that Master Han can correct it."
"Why that:
Inveterate mischief-maker!"
exclaimed Yüeh-niang.
"Nobody knows where the dead end up going to.
And yet he insists on having her portrait painted. It doesn't even resemble her all that much."
P'an Chin-lien picked up where she left off, saying, "And where are her children, if her likeness is to be perpetuated in the form of a portrait so they can:
Kowtow and perform obeisances,
before it? In the future, when all six of his womenfolk have died, he'd better have portraits painted of all six of us."
Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh took the portrait in hand and examined it, saying, "First Lady, come and see. This painting depicts her the way she looked when she was well. She's dolled up very vividly, but her lips look a little flat."
"The left side of her forehead is a bit too low," said Yüeh-niang. "And her eyebrows were more curved than those depicted here. But it's amazing that this gentleman could capture such a likeness from her dead body."
"He caught a glimpse of the Sixth Lady at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak," explained Tai-an. "Just now, he was able to produce this likeness from memory."
In a little while, who should appear but Wang Ching, who came in and said, "If you ladies have had a chance to examine it, I've been instructed to have it taken back outside. Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has arrived and is anxious to have a look at it."
Tai-an, accordingly, took it back to the front compound and said to Master Han, "The ladies in the rear compound say that her lips are a bit flat, the left corner of her forehead is a bit too low, and her eyebrows should be made to curve a little more."
"That's no problem," said Master Han, and he took up his brush forthwith, made the desired corrections, and then presented it to Ch'iao Hung for his approval.
"This portrait of my kinswoman is masterfully done," announced Ch'iao Hung.
"It lacks only the breath of life."[7]
Hsi-men Ch'ing was delighted by this response and proceeded to toast Master Han with three cups of wine. After he had been wined and dined, he rewarded him with a bolt of silk and ten taels of silver, presented to him upon a red lacquer tray.
He then told him, "Finish the half-length portrait first, as I want to hang it up immediately. As for the full-length portrait, it will be all right as long as it's ready in time for the funeral procession. She must be depicted in bright blue and green style, with pearls and trinkets adorning her chignon, wearing a scarlet full-sleeved variegated brocade robe, over a flower-sprigged skirt. And it should be mounted on patterned damask, with ivory knobs on the ends of the roller."
"There is no need for you to instruct me any further," said Master Han. "I understand what is wanted."
He then accepted the silver, told his young attendant to carry the easel, bowed in farewell, and went out the gate.
Ch'iao Hung and the others spent some time looking over the newly constructed coffin, after which, he said, "I suppose the preliminary laying out ceremony for my kinswoman will be performed today."
"Right now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "as soon as the coroner's assistant and his workers arrive, we will carry out the preliminary laying out. The encoffining ceremony will take place on the third day."
After finishing his tea, Ch'iao Hung said his farewells, stood up, and departed.
Before long, the coroner's assistant and his workers arrived to perform their functions. The papier-mâché funerary objects were made up, and the burial clothes laid out. Hsi-men Ch'ing himself performed the ceremony of swabbing the eyes of the deceased with a ball of damp cotton, so she could see her way more clearly in the underworld, and had Ch'en Ching-chi play the role of a filial son by closing her eyelids. Hsi-men Ch'ing then came up with an imported pearl, which he inserted into her mouth. In no time at all, the preliminary laying out was completed satisfactorily, she was left to lie in state as before, the curtains were let down, and the entire household, high and low, wept to mark the occasion.
Lai-hsing had already obtained from a shop that specialized in burial objects for the dead gold-flecked effigies of four maidens to wait on her, bearing a chamber pot, a towel, a washbasin, and a comb, respectively. They wore pearl necklaces and enchased silver pendant earrings that looked just like the real thing, and they were dressed in clothes of variegated satin. Two of them were placed to each side of the body. Before her spirit tablet there were arrayed antique bronze incense burners and vases from the Shang and Chou dynasties, as well as candlesticks and incense cases, made to order by pewterers, that graced the table on which they were placed:
With a glitter that rivals the sun's.
Ten taels of silver were also weighed out for a silversmith to be made into three sets of silver ceremonial goblets.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the anteroom in the front courtyard, deciding, with the help of Ying Po-chüeh, how to handle the record books for the expenses of the funeral proceedings. To begin with, he weighed out five hundred taels of silver and a hundred strings of cash and entrusted them to Han Tao-kuo to keep account of. Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing were put in charge of making the necessary purchases, both large and small, and were also made responsible for the outside kitchen. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, and Manager Kan Jun, the four of them, were to take turns keeping company with the guests who came and went to offer condolences. Ts'ui Pen was placed in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear. Lai-pao was put in charge of the outer storeroom. Wang Ching was given responsibility for the wine cellar. Ch'un-hung and Hua-t'ung were deputed to be in attendance before the spirit tablet. P'ing-an was responsible every day, with the help of four orderlies, for striking the cloud-shaped gong, and presenting incense sticks and paper money to the guests whenever they arrived. The professional scribe, along with another four orderlies, were stationed at the main gate to record the names of the visitors, hold the baldachin on the days when scriptures were being recited, be available to carry the heraldic pennants, and, when they had nothing else to do, help guard the gate. Once these duties had all been assigned, they were written down and posted on a screen wall, for the benefit of the parties concerned as they went about their respective tasks.
Lo and behold, at this juncture, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, the supervisor of the local imperial estates, sent people to deliver sixty pine planks, thirty stems of sturdy bamboo, three hundred reed mats, and a hundred lengths of hemp cord, together with his calling card, which they showed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who rewarded the head messenger with five mace of silver and sent him back with a card indicating that he was in one-year mourning.
He then directed the carpenters to raise the main beam of the temporary covered structure they were erecting in order to enlarge it further, so that it would accommodate two portals, with a screen wall in between. He also told them to erect an eighteen-foot-wide covered structure in front of the kitchen in the front compound, and a forty-two-foot-wide structure outside the main gate for the display of placards detailing the particulars of the funereal arrangements.
Twelve Buddhist monks from the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, were engaged to come and recite sutras for the salvation of the deceased. Two waiters were hired to be on duty every day in order to provide a regular supply of tea from a local tea house, and two cooks were engaged to work in the outer kitchen and produce whatever foods might be called for.
That day, Hua Tzu-yu and Wu the Second visited for a while and then got up and left.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Licentiate Wen to draft the text of an obituary notice that he intended to have printed and told him to include the words, "My poor wife has unexpectedly died."
When Licentiate Wen surreptitiously showed this to Ying Po-chüeh for his advice, Ying Po-chüeh said, "You cannot logically say such a thing as long as my sister-in-law Wu occupies the position of his legitimate wife. How can he disseminate such a statement without arousing criticism? Even Brother Wu K'ai is certain to be distressed at heart. Let me take the subject up with him at my leisure. You had better not put it that way."
They continued to keep Hsi-men Ch'ing company until evening arrived, at which they separated and returned home.
That evening Hsi-men Ch'ing did not go back to the rear compound but had a summer bedstead set up beside Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, surrounded by standing screens and provided with the necessary bedding, so that he could sleep there by himself, with Ch'un-hung and Shu-t'ung close by to wait upon him. At dawn the next morning he went back to the master suite to perform his ablutions and put on the white T'ang-style mourning cap, mourning robe, white velveteen socks, white shoes, and mourning girdle that the tailor had made for him.
On this second day after Li P'ing-erh's death, early in the morning, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling came to visit the bereaved, offer his condolences, and urge his host to moderate his grief. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned his salutation, Licentiate Wen joined them for a cup of tea, after which Hsia Yen-ling got up to go.
On his way out the gate, he admonished the scribe that he had sent over, saying, "Be sure to do a conscientious job while you're here. If any of the orderlies fail to show up for duty, report it to the yamen so that they can be disciplined."
When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and headed back to the yamen.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Licentiate Wen to send out the obituary notices and sent servants to invite the relatives of the family to come early on the third day after Li P'ing-erh's death to attend a service for her benefit and the recitation of sutras on her behalf. That afternoon vergers from the temple arrived, whose job it was to prepare the consecrated space in which the ceremony would be held and hang up Buddhist effigies, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
That same day, Wu Yin-erh in the licensed quarter heard the news of Li P'ing-erh's death and came in a sedan chair to weep in front of her spirit tablet and burn paper money on her behalf. Upon her arrival in the rear compound, Wu Yüeh-niang led her back out front, where she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang and wept, saying, "When the Sixth Lady died I didn't know a thing about it. No one came to say so much as a word to me. It's really distressing."
"You are her adopted daughter, after all," said Meng Yü-lou. "She has been unwell for some time, and you didn't even come to see her."
"My good Third Lady!" protested Wu Yin-erh. "If I had only known, how could I have failed to come? May I die if I'm not telling the truth. The fact is, I didn't know anything about it."
"You may not have come to see your mother," said Yüeh-niang, "but she still bore you in mind and set aside something to give you as a keepsake. I've been keeping it for you."
She then instructed Hsiao-yü, "You go get it and show it to Sister Yin."
Hsiao-yü, accordingly, went into the inside room and brought out a bundle containing a set of satin clothing, two gold-headed hairpins, and a floral ornament of gold. This had the effect of causing Wu Yin-erh to:
Weep so copiously she seemed to be made of tears.
"If I had only known that she was so unwell," she exclaimed, "I would have come and waited on her for a couple of days."
As she spoke, she bowed to Yüeh-niang in gratitude. Yüeh-niang entertained her with tea and asked her to stay until the third day ceremonies were completed before going home.
On the third day after Li P'ing-erh's death, the monks began to strike their chimes, conducted the flag-raising ceremony to invite the presence of the gods, and proceeded to recite their sutras. Paper money was carried outside to be burned, and the members of the entire household, high and low:
Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel.[8]
Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in heavy mourning and a hempen headband, prostrated himself before the effigies of the Buddhas. The neighbors in the area, friends and relatives, and senior officials who came to extend their condolences, burn paper money, and offer oblations on behalf of the deceased could not be numbered.
Yin-yang Master Hsü put in an early appearance in order to preside over the encoffining ceremony, and when the sacrificial announcements had been completed, the body was carried over to be placed inside the coffin.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had Yüeh-niang search out four outfits of Li P'ing-erh's first-class clothing and fit them into her coffin, in addition to which, he placed four small ingots of silver in the four corners of the coffin.
At this, Hua Tzu-yu remarked, "Brother-in-law, there is no need to put those in there. Gold and silver are sure to reemerge in the world at some time in the future. That is not:
A good long-term plan."[9]
Hsi-men Ch'ing refused this advice and proceeded to put them where he had intended. A "seven star board"[10] had been placed inside the coffin for the corpse to rest on, the purple interior cover was put in place, and the coroner's assistants, standing on all four sides, then simultaneously drove "longevity nails" into the four sides of the lid of the casket. At this point, the members of the entire household, high and low, commenced weeping and wailing out loud.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, wept himself into a stupor, protesting again and again, without ceasing, "My tender-aged sister! I'll never be able to see you again."
After some time, once the formal wailing was over, he treated Yin-yang Master Hsü to a vegetarian repast and saw him on his way.
When the officiating monks had done with the ceremony of scattering paper flowers and rice on the bier, a placard on which there were pasted four large characters reading "May the votive lamps ensure her peace" was set up before the spirit tablet. The friends and relatives, managers, and others were all dressed in mourning garments for the occasion, so that when the ritual of circumambulation while burning incense was performed, the area in front of the gate was turned into a patch of white.
Licentiate Wen had recommended that Privy Councilor Tu, who resided in the northern quarter of the city, should be invited to inscribe the funeral banner. His given name was Tzu-ch'un, [11] his courtesy name was Yün-yeh, and he had served in the Hsüan-ho[12] Palace Hall during the reign of Emperor Chen-tsung[13] but was now living in retirement at home. Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, provided him with a gift of gold currency and a box of candied fruit and entertained him in the summerhouse, where he personally toasted him with three cups of wine in the presence of Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen. The funeral banner of scarlet government-quality linen was laid out for him to inscribe.
Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted him to write the words "Coffin of the Respected Lady of the Imperially Commissioned Commandant Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard," but Ying Po-chüeh repeatedly objected, saying, "Your legitimate wife is alive and well. How can you say such a thing?"
"I understand that the deceased had borne him a son," said Privy Councilor Tu Tzu-ch'un. "Under the circumstances, that way of putting it would not offend against propriety."
They argued about it for some time before substituting the term "consort" for the term "respected lady."
"The term 'respected lady,'" said Licentiate Wen, "is a title bestowed by an imperial patent of nobility, whereas the term 'consort' simply means 'the person who shares the bedroom with you.' It is a term of much wider application."
Thereupon, Tu Tzu-ch'un inscribed the banner, as directed, in white pigment and also applied gold leaf to the words "Imperially Commissioned." The banner was then suspended before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. He was also invited to inscribe the name of the deceased on her spirit tablet. When these tasks were completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed his gratitude with a bow and entertained him with a collation, after which he took his leave and departed.
That day, Ch'iao Hung, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Hua the Elder, as well as Mr. Han, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, and Mr. Shen, the husband of Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister from outside the city gate, all contributed offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals and came to burn paper money. Ch'iao Hung's wife, Wu K'ai's wife, Wu the Second's wife, and Hua the Elder's wife all came to offer their condolences, make sacrifices, and weep over the bier. Yüeh-niang and the others, all wearing white hempen covers over their chignons, held in place with hempen headbands, with hempen girdles around their waists and hempen skirts, came out to return their salutations and join in the wailing, after which they ushered them into the rear compound to entertain them with tea and a vegetarian repast. Only Hua the Elder's wife and Hua the Elder himself wore heavy mourning, being dressed in long robes cut like those of a Taoist priest. The rest of the guests all wore light mourning.
That day, Li Kuei-chieh in the licensed quarter learned of Li P'ing-erh's death and came in a sedan chair to burn paper money on her behalf.
When she saw that Wu Yin-erh was already there, she asked, "When did you get here? And why didn't you let me know about it? Some friend you are! All you ever think about is yourself."
"I also hadn't known about Mother's death," said Wu Yin-erh. "Had I known about it, I would have come sooner."
Yüeh-niang entertained them in the rear compound, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Time passed quickly, and it was not long before the day came for the first of the seven weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. For this occasion, Buddhist Superior Lang,[14] the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, led a contingent of sixteen senior monks in coming to perform a "land and water" mass for the salvation of the deceased. The liturgy included excerpts from the *Lotus Sutra*[15] and the *Litany of the Compassionate Water of Samā dhi*.[16] Among the household's relatives, friends, and managers there was not one who did not attend.

On the day in question, Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor also came to burn paper money and offer his condolences, with a view to securing the job of presiding over the services for the second weekly commemoration. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse to join the rest of the guests in a vegetarian repast.

At this juncture, a page boy suddenly appeared to announce that Master Han had come to deliver the half-length portrait, and everyone was invited to have a look at it. Behold:

The chignon on her head was adorned with gold
and turquoise ornaments,
With two phoenixes, from whose beaks dangled
bangles on ropes of pearls.[17]
She was dressed in a gown of figured
scarlet material,
And her countenance was pale and fragrant,
Looking exactly as it did when she was alive.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw it, he was utterly delighted and had it suspended above the head of the coffin. Among those present there were none who did not praise it extravagantly, saying:

"It lacks only the breath of life."[18]

Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Master Han into the summerhouse to share in the vegetarian repast and enjoined him, saying, "With regard to the full-length portrait, you must lavish even greater attention than usual upon it."

"Your humble servant," said Master Han, "will expend his utmost skill with the brush upon it. How could he presume to be inattentive?"

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had rewarded him generously, he made his departure.

At noon, Ch'iao Hung came to present the offerings of his household. These included pigs and sheep and other sacrificial offerings; fancy table settings of a kind intended as much for display as for eating; high-stacked pyramids of cone-shaped fruit; candied effigies of the Five Ancients and ingot shaped cakes; square-shaped confectionery and trees of wheat-gluten candy; soup and rice in gold saucers; ornate bowls containing the flesh of the five sacrificial animals; mountain-shaped stacks of imitation gold and silver ingots; satins, silks, and variegated fabrics; paper money for the use of the dead and offertory incense; more than fifty carrier-loads in all. Local mummers on stilts, performing to the beat of gongs and drums, and musicians playing more refined music on percussion and wind instruments, along with hired mourners carrying tasseled banners, all arrived, filling the air with noise, along with innumerable male and female guests.

Yin-yang Master Hsü was engaged to declaim the funeral eulogy, while Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in mourning garments, positioned themselves in front of the spirit tablet to return the salutations of the visitors, and Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta, together with Licentiate Wen Pi-ku and Manager Kan Jun, devoted themselves to entertaining the guests.

That day, Ch'iao Hung had invited Provincial Graduate Shang, Censor Chu, Wu K'ai, School Official Liu, Battalion Commander Fan, and Kinsman Tuan, the father of Big Sister Tuan, some seven or eight relatives and friends in all, to come with him in order to burn incense in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. After the three sacrificial libations had been offered, they knelt down to hear the recitation of his funeral eulogy, which read as follows:

On this, the twenty-second day *hsin-ssu*, of the ninth month, the first day of which was *keng-shen*, in the year *ting-yu*, the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period, her kinsman Ch'iao Hung and others respectfully offer a stiff-bristled pig and a soft-haired sheep,[19] along with other offertory foods,[20] in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of our late kinswoman, née Li, the consort of Hsi-men Ch'ing. Alas! The lady was, by nature, magnanimous and kindhearted. In regulating her household she was diligent and thrifty.[21] In governing her inferiors she was compassionate and good-natured. Her total exemplification of the female virtues aroused the admiration of the neighborhood. As the flower of the women's quarters, she exuded the fragrance of orchids. In her marriage with her husband she did her best to simulate the relations of the male and female phoenix. In nurturing her offspring she exhibited judgment and talent. In emulation of the paragons of female conduct she was submissive and virtuous. In setting a moral example for the women of the household she displayed harmony and purity in her relations with her in-laws. The jade was planted in Indigo Field[22] and the pearl from Ho-p'u had begun to shine.[23] Everyone expected her to live forever in marital harmony with her husband like that between zither and cithara, enjoying an extended longevity without limit. Who could have anticipated that as the result of a single illness the Yellow Millet Dream[24] should have ended? At the death of a good person, who is not grief-stricken? Our infant daughter, while still in her diapers, rejoiced in the love of our kinswoman. Who could have anticipated that before the union between our families could be consummated, Heaven should fail to comply with our wishes,[25] and the phoenix should have lost its mate? We are doomed to endure the separation between the living and the dead, there being nothing that can be done about it. May our ties of friendship remain long-lasting, and find expression in this proffered libation. Should the spirit of the deceased be cognizant of our actions,[26] may it deign to come and enjoy our offering.[27] Pray come and partake thereof.[28]

When the male guests had finished with their offerings and had received a salutation in return, they were ushered into the summerhouse, where a collation had been prepared for them. But no more of this.

Afterwards, Ch'iao Hung's wife, her sister-in-law Mrs. Ts'ui, the wife of Censor Chu, the wife of Provincial Graduate Shang, Big Sister Tuan, and the other female guests and relatives presented their offerings. Meanwhile, local mummers, to the accompaniment of gongs and drums, performed an ensemble dance depicting the Assessor of the underworld, which created quite a din. Wu Yüeh-niang joined her guests in ceremonial wailing before the spirit tablet, after which, she invited them into the rear compound, where they were served tea, and then an ample repast, complete with the usual:

Three soups and five courses,
but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the summerhouse entertaining his guests with wine, when they suddenly heard the sound of the cloud-shaped gong in the front compound being struck, and a servant appeared in a state of obvious agitation, to report, "His Honor Prefect Hu Shih-wen has come to burn paper money. He is descending from his sedan chair at the front gate."

This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into a state of consternation, as he hastened to don his formal mourning garments and await the arrival of his guest in front of the spirit tablet. He also had Licentiate Wen, dressed in the cap and gown of a licentiate, but in mourning white, go out to greet the visitor and assist him in changing out of his outer garments in the front reception hall.

Only after his attendants had entered bearing the offertory incense and paper money did Prefect Hu Shih-wen, dressed in white mourning-clothes with a gold girdle, come in himself, surrounded by a retinue of officials and functionaries who:

Smoothed his garments and adjusted his girdle,
Dancing attendance upon him without cessation.[29]

Thereupon, Ch'un-hung, who was kneeling before the spirit tablet, held the incense up high for him while he prostrated himself twice.

"Venerable sir, please stand up. We have put you to a great deal of trouble," Hsi-men Ch'ing protested, as he hastily came forward to return his salutation.

"I fear I have been remiss in offering my condolences," said Prefect Hu Shih-wen. "When did your honorable spouse die? Your pupil only found out about it yesterday."

"Who could have foreseen," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that my humble spouse should come down with an incurable ailment? I am the undeserving recipient of the concern you have deigned to express."

When Licentiate Wen had saluted him, he and Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down to either side of their visitor to offer him a cup of tea, after which Prefect Hu got up to go, while Licentiate Wen saw him to the gate and into his sedan chair. The guests who had come to offer sacrifices were entertained until the afternoon, before the party broke up and they went their separate ways.

The next day, Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter came to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. When she descended from her sedan chair, she was dressed in a jacket of white cloud-patterned damask that opened down the middle, over a skirt of blue silk, while her chignon was wrapped in a white drawnwork kerchief, held in place with a pearl headband. When she came inside and burnt an offering of paper money before the spirit tablet, Yüeh-niang observed that she had brought with her eight platters of patisserie, meat of the three sacrificial animals, soup and rice, to offer in sacrifice to the deceased, and hastened to provide her with a mourning skirt of plain damask. Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh also came and offered three mace apiece as sacrificial gifts.

When Yüeh-niang told Hsi-men Ch'ing about it, he said, "What does it matter? Provide each of them with a plain damask mourning headband and girdle, and invite them into the rear compound, where they can be served with tea and stay overnight."

That evening, the relatives, friends, and employees of the family all gathered to participate in an all-night wake. A troupe of Hai-yen[30] actors was engaged to perform southern-style plays of the genre known as hsi-wen.[31] Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un were also in attendance.

For this evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing had set up fifteen banquet tables in the large temporary structure in the main courtyard. Among the more prominent guests were Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han, Licentiate Ni, Licentiate Wen, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T'ien-hua, Pai Lai-ch'iang, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Fu Ming, Han Tao-kuo, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, the two nephews Wu Shun-ch'en and Ts'ui Pen, in addition to which there were seven or eight neighbors. Each of the banquet tables was replete with the customary:

Ten dishes and five appetizers,
and ten or more great candles on raised candlesticks were lighted. In the adjacent reception hall, blinds were let down, and banquet tables were set out for the female guests, surrounded by standing screens, so arranged that they were able to look outside in order to watch the dramatic performance.

On this occasion, after the guests had finished making their sacrificial offerings, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi had saluted them in return, they sat down in their designated places, while the actors struck up their gongs and drums before them. The play they performed was *Yü-huan chi*, or *The Story of the Jade Ring*, the tale of the two lives of love between Wei Kao and the courtesan Yü-hsiao.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had deputed four orderlies to be in charge of carrying the platters of food, while Ch'in-t'ung, Ch'i-t'ung, Hua-t'ung, and Lai-an were responsible for serving the individual dishes, and the four boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un, poured the wine at the banquet tables.

Before long, after the prelude to the drama, the *sheng* (young male lead), playing the part of Wei Kao, sang for a while and then went offstage, followed by the *t'ieh-tan* (supporting female role), playing the part of Yü-hsiao, who also sang for a while before exiting the stage. At this point, the chef arrived from the kitchen to supervise the serving of the soup and rice and carve the goose.

Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "I hear that the three singing girls from the quarter are here. Why not have them come out to serve a cup of wine to your venerable kinsman Ch'iao Hung and your elder brother-in-law Wu K'ai? They would then be better situated to watch the play, so you'd actually be doing them a favor."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly told Tai-an to go inside and invite the attendance of the three singing girls.

"That really isn't appropriate," remarked Ch'iao Hung. "They are here to offer their condolences. How can you call on them to serve the wine?"

"Venerable kinsman," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you don't understand the situation. Little whores like this should not be allowed to cool their heels. Have them dragged out for me immediately. Tell them that Master Ying the Second says that since the Sixth Lady has died, they ought to demonstrate their filiality by serving each of us a cup of wine."

Tai-an went inside on this errand and was gone for some time before coming back to report, "When they heard that Master Ying the Second was present, they all refused to come out."

"In that case," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I'll have to go myself."

After taking a few steps, however, he came back and sat down.

"Why have you come back?" Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at him.

"I really intend to drag those three little whores out here," said Ying Pochüeh, "but I need to utter a few words of abuse in order to vent my spleen before I'll be prepared to go."

After this, Tai-an was sent inside to summon them once again before the three of them finally came out, as nonchalantly as could be. All of them were dressed in white satin jackets that opened down the middle, over blue silk skirts. After facing the company and:

Neither correctly nor precisely,
bowing in greeting, they stood by to one side with ingratiating smiles.

"Since you knew that we were all here," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how could you bring yourselves to:

Adduce three excuses or four pretexts,[32]
for refusing to appear?"

The three of them did not respond to this sally but stepped up to serve a round of wine and then sat down at a table that had been set up for them.

Below them:

Drums and music began to sound,
as the players came on to perform another scene in which the *sheng*, playing the part of Wei Kao, and the *ching* (comic-villain role), playing the part of Pao Chih-shui, pay a visit together to the bordello in which the singing girl Yühsiao is employed.

When the madam came out to receive them, Pao Chih-shui said, "You go and call out that girl for me."

"Master Pao," responded the madam, "you don't know how to treat people properly. My daughter is not accustomed to come out for just anybody. Are you incapable of uttering the word 'please'? How can you speak of simply calling her out?"[33]

At this, Li Kuei-chieh turned to the company and laughed, saying, "This character named Pao is just like Beggar Ying, a lame donkey who doesn't know the score."

"If I don't know the score," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how is it that the madam of your establishment likes me so much?"

"What she likes is for you to keep out of the way," responded Li Kueichieh.

"Let's watch the play," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What are you dithering about anyway? If you say another word, you'll have to drink a large bumper of wine as a forfeit."

Only then did Ying Po-chüeh consent to remain silent, while the players finished the scene they were performing and went offstage.

Meanwhile, Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, Wu Shun-ch'en's wife Third Sister Cheng, Big Sister Tuan, together with Yüeh-niang and her sister-wives from the Hsi-men household, were all watching the play through the suspended blinds on the left side of the reception hall, while Ch'un-mei, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Hsiao-yü were all crowded together watching the play through the suspended blinds on the right side.

The servant Cheng Chi, in charge of serving the tea to the ladies on the other side, happened to pass underneath the blinds where the maidservants were gathered carrying a serving of tea flavored with fruit kernels, when Ch'unmei called him to a halt, asking, "Who are you serving this tea to?"

"It's for Sister-in-law Wu and the ladies on the other side," responded Cheng Chi.

Ch'un-mei appropriated a cup for herself and was holding it in her hand, when, unexpectedly, Hsiao-yü, on hearing that down below the actor playing the female role was performing the part of a character named Yü-hsiao, grabbed hold of Yü-hsiao, saying, "Whore, your patron has shown up, and the madam is calling for you to receive the customer. Why haven't you gone out?"

As she spoke, she gave her a vigorous shove, which pushed her outside the suspended blinds and splashed the tea in Ch'un-mei's hand all over her person.

Ch'un-mei cursed Yü-hsiao, saying, "You crazy whore! What do you think you're doing? By horsing around this way you've splashed my tea all over. You're lucky you didn't break the teacup."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing overheard this altercation, he sent Lai-an over to inquire who was responsible for the commotion.

Ch'un-mei remained seated on her chair, saying, "Go tell him that Yühsiao, the wanton whore, couldn't help responding wantonly on catching sight of her lover."

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had made this inquiry, he was busy seeing to the wine service at the banquet and let the matter drop.

Yüeh-niang came over to the other side of the reception hall and scolded Hsiao-yü, saying, "You've been out here for some time. You ought to go back and see to things in the master suite. When all of you are out here, who is there to look after the place?"

"Your step-daughter Hsi-men Ta-chieh just went back there," said Hsiao-yü. "The two nuns are also sitting in your room."

"Whenever we let you lousy dog-begotten creatures come out here to watch the show," expostulated Yüeh-niang, "you end up:

Provoking an altercation."[34]

When Ch'un-mei saw that Yüeh-niang had come over, she stood up and said, "Mother, you ought to interrogate them. The whole lot of them have been carrying on crazily, with total abandon, guffawing raucously, heedless of whether anyone sees them or not."

After Yüeh-niang had given them a scolding, she returned to the other side of the reception hall.

By this point, Ch'iao Hung and Licentiate Ni had gotten up and departed.

Brother-in-law Shen, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and Brother-in-law Han were also about to go, but Ying Po-chüeh stopped them, appealing to Hsi-men Ch'ing with the words, "Our host. You, too, say something. Some of us are your friends, after all, and ought not to leave you in the lurch, but even your relatives are threatening to leave. Brother-in-law Shen does not reside outside the city gate, and though Brother-in-law Han, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, and Hua the Elder live outside the wall, it's only the third watch, and the gates aren't even open yet. What's the hurry? We should all sit down together for a while longer. After all, the performance isn't over yet."

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by ordering a page boy to bring out four jugs of Ma-ku wine[35] and put them down in front of him, saying, "If you gentlemen will only finish off these four jugs of wine, I won't insist on detaining you any longer."

He then took a large loving cup and put it down in front of Wu K'ai, saying, "Whoever elects to:

Leave the feast and break up the party,
by threatening to get up and go, will have to drink a penalty cup of wine enforced by this gentleman."

Thereupon, the company all sat down again, while Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Shu-t'ung, "Urge the players to lose no time in putting on another scene, and to choose one that is lively."

In no time at all, the drums and clappers began to sound, and the *mo* (supporting male role) came out and addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "May I ask, would the scene entitled 'Bequeathing the Self-Portrait' be appropriate?"

"I don't care," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just so it's lively."
The *t'ieh-tan*, playing the part of Yü-hsiao, then proceeded to sing for a while.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard the player sing the words:
In this life we are unlikely to meet again.
For this reason, I bequeath this self-portrait to you.[36]
it suddenly brought to mind the image of Li P'ing-erh on her sickbed, and his heart was so moved that he couldn't help starting to shed tears, which he wiped away constantly with a handkerchief.
This was spotted at once by P'an Chin-lien, who was gazing with a sardonic eye through the lowered blinds and pointed it out to Yüeh-niang, saying, "First Lady, just look at that feckless good-for-nothing! Why on earth should he have started to cry while drinking wine and watching the performance of a play?"
"Smart as you are," said Meng Yü-lou, "it's a wonder you don't understand such things.
Music expresses man's sorrows and joys,
partings and reunions.[37]
I imagine that on seeing this episode of the drama, his heart was moved.
Upon seeing an object one remembers its owner;[38]
Upon seeing a saddle one thinks of one's horse.[39]
That is why he started to shed tears."
"I, for one," said Chin-lien, "do not believe that:
The storyteller, when he lets his tears fall,
Empathizes with the sorrows of the ancients.
It is all nothing but an act. Only if he could reduce *me* to tears by his singing would I rate him a good actor."
"Sister Six, quiet down," said Yüeh-niang. "We're listening to the performance."
Meng Yü-lou then turned to Wu K'ai's wife and explained, "Our Sister Six here, for some reason or other, is given to shooting off her mouth."
The players continued to perform for a while until, during the fifth watch, everyone got up to go. Though Hsi-men Ch'ing, holding a large goblet of wine in his hand, blocked the door and urged them to have another drink, he was unable to detain them any longer, and finally saw them out to the front gate.
After overseeing the clearing away of the utensils, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed the players to leave their costume trunk behind, saying, "Tomorrow, Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh are coming to offer a sacrifice and spend the day, so I'll expect you to put on another day's performance."
The players assented to this and, after having been treated to food and wine, returned to their lodgings to rest. The four young musicians, Li Ming and company, also returned home. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing that the day was about to dawn, also returned to the rear compound to get some rest. Truly, it is a case of:
As the red sun illuminates the windows the night chill diminishes;
As the thin mist envelopes the bamboos the dawn light is exiguous.

His loved one is gone
Darkly, darkly.
He thinks of her so far away
Bitterly, bitterly.
The realms of light and darkness are ten thousand miles apart
Each has its own sun, its own moon.
He seems to see her in the play
But the day is late.
So long have they been parted, he cannot tell
Whether his dream is true
When he dreams of her.

Ximen Qing dried his tears and sent a boy to the inner court to ask for food. The two brothers Wu came. They made obeisance before the body, then greeted Ximen Qing, and expressed their sympathy. Ximen took them to the room in the wing, and they sat down with the others.
Daian, when he came to the inner court, said to Wu Yueniang: "Mother, you ladies would not believe me. Now that Uncle Ying has come, a few words from him have made Father ask for something to eat."
"Oh, yes, you cunning little rogue," Pan Jinlian said, "you are always acting as a go-between for him, so of course you know him well."
"I have served my master ever since I was a child," Daian said. "I can't help knowing what is in his mind."
"Who is with him now?" Yueniang asked.
"The two uncles have just come," the boy said. "Master Wen is there, Uncle Ying, Uncle Xie, Clerk Han and brother-in-law. There are eight of them altogether."
"Ask your brother-in-law to come here to have something to eat," Yueniang said. "Why should he have to join that crowd?"
"He has already sat down," Daian said.
Yueniang told him to take some other boys and go to the kitchen for food. "Take some porridge for him," she said, "I don't suppose he had any rice this morning."
"But who is there to go with me?" Daian said. "I am the only one at home. Some of the boys have gone shopping, and others have gone with messages about our lady's death. Wang Jing has gone to Zhang's place to borrow a funeral gong."
"What about Shutong? Are you afraid of upsetting his dignity?"
"Shutong and Huatong are both in the death chamber. One is beating the gong, the other attending to the burning of incense and paper offerings. Father sent Chunhong with Ben the Fourth to change some silk. He didn't like the silk they brought. He is going to pay six *qian* a roll."
"I should have thought five *qian* a roll was quite enough," Yueniang said. "Why should he change it? Go and get Huatong and take the food to them at once. Don't waste time like this."
Daian and Huatong carried large plates and large bowls to the outer court and set them out on a square table. While the men were eating, Ping'an came with a large card. "His Lordship Xia has sent his secretary and a guard of honor to do your bidding," he said. Ximen Qing went to inspect them and gave orders that the man should be given three *qian* of silver and a card of thanks with the name in mourning. He asked the man to express his thanks to Xia.
They had finished their meal and everything was cleared away when the artist Han, whom Ximen Qing had sent for, came. Ximen greeted him and said: "May I trouble you to paint a portrait for me?" Han said he would do his best.
"You must not be too long setting to work," Uncle Wu said. "Her appearance may change."
"That does not matter in the least," Han said, "I can paint it without seeing her if necessary."
When they had finished their tea, Ping'an said that Uncle Hua had come. Ximen Qing and Hua Ziyu went together before the body and cried there. Then they greeted each other and sat down with the rest. Uncle Hua asked when Li Ping'er had died.
"It was about the hour of the Ox when she breathed her last," Ximen said. "She spoke quite sensibly up to the last. She went quietly to sleep, and when the maid got up to look at her, she was dead."
Uncle Hua saw the artist and a boy carrying a palette. He was taking brushes and colors from his sleeve. "I see you are having her portrait painted," Hua Ziyu said.
"I loved her so much that I must have one," Ximen Qing said. "It will remind me of her whenever I look at it."
He warned all the womenfolk to withdraw. Then the curtain was raised, and Ximen Qing took the artist, Uncle Hua and the others to the death chamber. The artist put aside the coverings and looked at Li Ping'er. A green handkerchief was bound about her head. Though she had been ill so long, her face still seemed as beautiful as when she was alive. Her pale yellow cheeks and her scarlet lips were as delightful as ever. Ximen Qing could not help weeping again. Laibao and Qintong stood beside the artist with his brushes and colors. Han looked once only, but that was enough for him. Those who were standing around asked him to begin his painting. "Sir," Ying Bojue said, "you will bear in mind that this is the face of an invalid. When she was in health, the lady's face was rounder. She was very beautiful."
"I need not trouble you for instructions," the artist said, "I think I know. May I ask if this is not the lady who went to the temple on the first day of the fifth month? I saw her then."
"Yes," Ximen said, "at that time she was still quite well. If you can remember her, paint two portraits, one full-length and one half-length. Then we can make our offerings before her picture. I will give you a roll of silk and ten taels of silver."
"I will do my best," the artist said. He sketched out a half-length figure, and it looked very handsome, the flesh like jade and almost fragrant. He showed them the sketch and they thought it very good indeed.
When Ximen Qing had examined it he told Daian to take it and show it to the ladies. "Let them see whether they think it good or not," he said. "If there is any little point they don't like about it, they have only to say so and it shall be put right."
Daian took the sketch to the inner court. "Father told me to bring this to you," he said. "He says if there is anything about it that seems to you not exactly like the Sixth Lady, you must say so, and he will get the artist to correct it."
"This seems to me very unnecessary," Yueniang said. "We do not know where the dead woman has gone. What need was there to have a portrait painted?"
"And where are the children to kowtow before it?" Jinlian said. "I suppose, when all six of us are dead, he will have six portraits made."
Meng Yulou and Li Jiao'er examined the picture. "Mother," they said, "it looks bright and lifelike, but the lips seem rather flat."
"Yes," said Yueniang, looking at it, "and the left side of her brow is not quite high enough. Her eyebrows were more curved. But how could the man draw such a picture when he had only glanced at her dead body?"
"He saw the Sixth Lady at the temple once and he has drawn her chiefly from memory," Daian told them.
Then Wang Jing came and asked the ladies if they had done with the portrait: his master wished to have it back. "Master Qiao has come," the boy said, "and he is anxious to see it."
Daian took the picture back to the outer court and told the artist that the ladies thought the lips too flat and the eyebrows not sufficiently arched. They thought, too, that the left side of the forehead was not high enough. Han said: "I can easily put that right." He took his brush and corrected the sketch. Then he showed it to Master Qiao.
"A fine portrait!" Qiao said. "It only lacks breath."
Ximen Qing was perfectly satisfied. He offered the artist three cups of wine, and entertained him. Then he gave him a roll of silk and ten taels of silver, telling him to finish the half-length portrait first, because he wished to put that up at once, and to complete the larger one in time for the funeral. Both were to be painted in green with ceremonial headdress and robes. They were to be on silk, and the rollers were to have ivory ends. The artist took the silver and told his boy to bring his things. Then he went away.
Master Qiao and the others went to look at the coffin. It was now finished. "I suppose that the informal ceremony of encoffining will take place today?" he said.
"Yes," said Ximen, "the undertakers are coming and we shall have the informal ceremony today. The formal ceremony will take place three days hence."
Qiao finished his tea and went away. Then the undertakers came. They rolled up the papers and set out the clothes. Ximen Qing himself performed the rite of "lighting the eyes" for Li Ping'er, and appointed Chen Jingji to take the part of her son and dry them for her. He took a bright pearl and put it into her mouth. So the informal ceremony was performed. The body was set up again, and the whole household bewailed the dead woman. Laixing had ordered various things to be made at the paper shop, four sets of gilt paper offerings, a washing basin, towels, combs, and figurines. These were set on either side of the body. Before it were incense burners, vases, candlesticks and incense boxes that the metal smiths had made. They were placed upon a table and looked very fine and bright. Ten taels of silver were given to the silversmith to make three sets of silver goblets.
Ximen Qing asked Ying Bojue to look after the account books and records for the funeral. He gave out five hundred taels of silver and a hundred strings of coppers. Clerk Gan was detailed to keep the accounts; Ben the Fourth and Laixing to buy what was necessary and keep in touch with the kitchen. Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Master Wen and Clerk Gan were to act in turn as ushers. Cui Ben's duty was to attend to the accounts for the purchase of mourning. Laibao was to have charge of the temporary stores, Wang Jing to attend to the cellar, and Chunhong and Huatong were to be in attendance at the coffin. Ping'an and the soldiers of the guard were to sound the funeral gong, and bring incense and paper offerings for the guests who came. A writer and four soldiers were detailed to keep the visitors' book at the gateway, to see that the dates were correctly given when the religious ceremonies took place, and to hold the canopies and banners.
These orders were written on a sheet of paper and posted upon a screen, and all the different members of the household went about the duties that were appointed them.
Eunuch Xue sent men with sixty long poles, thirty bamboos, three hundred pieces of matting, and a hundred hempen ropes. Ximen Qing gave the man who brought them five *qian* of silver and a card of thanks for his master. He gave orders that a great shelter should be set up, which was to have a lofty center ridge and an entrance on either side. In the middle was to be a screen: in front of it a kitchen, and behind, a smaller shelter about the size of three rooms. Outside the great gateway was to be another temporary building, seven rooms wide.
Twelve priests from the Temple of Thanksgiving were summoned to sing the dirge. Two servants each day were to be employed doing nothing else but serve tea and water.
Uncle Hua and the younger Wu went away. Ximen Qing asked Master Wen to compose an obituary notice to be printed. Ximen Qing told him to write: "My humble wife has died." Master Wen wrote it without comment, then showed it to Ying Bojue.
"This will not do at all," Ying Bojue said. "It is contrary to polite usage. His wife is still alive and, if this is sent out in the way he wishes, people will talk. Uncle Wu, especially, will be offended. Don't do anything about it for the moment. I will speak to him later." They sat down again with Ximen Qing and, after a while, Ying Bojue went away.
That evening, Ximen Qing did not go to the inner court. He had a bed set up beside the body of Li Ping'er, put a screen around the bed, and so passed the night alone. The two boys Chunhong and Shutong attended him. The next morning he got up and went to Yueniang's room to wash. He dressed in a white hat and gown, with white shoes, white socks, and a white girdle.
Magistrate Xia came to offer his condolences. When Ximen Qing had greeted him, Master Wen came and they had tea together. When the magistrate went out and passed through the gate, he bade the writer do his work well and keep an eye on the soldiers of the guard. If any of them should absent himself, word must be brought him and he would have the man punished. When he had given these instructions, he mounted his horse and rode home.
Ximen Qing asked Master Wen to send out invitations for the funeral and sent servants around to ask the relatives to come on the third day after the death.
In the afternoon, the temple servants came and set out the place for the ceremony. They hung up pictures of Buddha and made other preparations.
When the news was brought to Wu Yin'er, she got into a sedan chair and came to bewail and burn paper offerings. She kowtowed to Yueniang and said, weeping: "How sorry I am that nobody told me sooner. I never knew my Sixth Mother was dead. It has upset me terribly."
"You were her ward," Yulou said, "and you ought to have come as soon as you knew that she was ill."
"Good Lady," Wu Yin'er said, "I swear I had no idea. If I had known, I should certainly have come."
"Well," said Yueniang, "whether you came or whether you did not, she did not forget you. She left a keepsake for you and I have put it aside." She told Xiaoyu to get the things that Li Ping'er had left for Wu Yin'er. Xiaoyu went to the inner room. When the parcel was opened, it was found to contain silken dresses, two gold pins, and a golden flower. Wu Yin'er looked at them and cried so bitterly that her tears fell like drops of rain.
"If I had only known that she was ill," she cried, "I would have come to wait on her." She thanked Yueniang. Yueniang gave her tea and asked her to stay until the third day after the death.
On the third day the priests beat their gongs and chanted a dirge. Paper money was hung up and everyone in the household put on mourning clothes. Chen Jingji, dressed in the deepest mourning, made obeisance before the pictures of Buddha. Neighbors, friends, kinsmen and the gentlemen from the office came to offer their sympathy and to make paper offerings. Not a few indeed made special offerings. Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, was there early. When the great offering was over, the body was lifted into the coffin. Ximen Qing asked Yueniang for four more complete dresses to put into the coffin. In each corner of it was placed a piece of silver.
"Brother-in-law," Hua Ziyu said, "I should leave the silver out. Neither gold nor silver will stay there long."
But Ximen Qing would not listen. He insisted on placing the silver in the coffin. Then the board of the seven stars was placed in position and the lid of the coffin put in its place. The undertakers nailed it down with longevity nails on every side, and all the people cried aloud. Ximen Qing cried so much that he seemed demented. "Oh, my sweet sister," he sobbed repeatedly, "I shall never see you again." It was long before they finished their lamentations. They entertained Master Xu with vegetarian dishes, and he went away.
All the people belonging to the household and all who served in the shop wore mourning, and the incense wafted from the gate seemed like a white cloud. Master Wen acted as Master of the Ceremonies, and Du, a writer of the Great Secretariate, came to write the Sixth Lady's name upon the banner. Du's name was Zichun. In the reign of Zhenzong he had been an official at the Ninghe palace, but now he was living in retirement. Ximen Qing had sent a present of gold and silk and asked him to come. Special delicacies were prepared for his refreshment. When he arrived, Ximen offered him three cups of wine, and Ying Bojue and Master Wen sat down to keep him company. A piece of red silk was set before him, and upon this he was to write the obituary title for the dead lady.
Ximen Qing wished him to write: "The coffin of the Lady of Ximen, Captain of the Royal Guard."
"But we can't say that," Bojue objected. "The 'lady' is still alive."
"This lady bore a son," Master Du said. "It is perfectly in order. There can be no possible objection to the title."
They discussed the matter for some time and finally decided to write "wife" instead of "lady."
"'Lady' is the word used to designate one of official rank," Master Wen said, "and 'wife' one who lives in your apartments. Both are commonly used in a very wide sense."

Master Du wrote the inscription in white, except for the word "Royal," which he wrote in gold. Then the silken banner was hung before the coffin, and Du was asked to write the tablet. Afterwards, Ximen Qing thanked him very heartily, entertained him with food and wine, and he went away.

The same day, Master Qiao and the three uncles, Wu, Hua and Shen, came to make their offering of the three carcasses. Mistress Qiao, Aunt Hua, and the two ladies Wu came in sedan chairs to express their condolences. They wailed before the coffin, and Wu Yueniang and the others cried with them. Then they were asked to go to the inner court and there given tea and something to eat. They were all dressed in mourning, Uncle Hua and his wife in very deep mourning. Li Guijie had been sent word, and she came in a sedan chair to make paper offerings. When she found Wu Yin'er there, she said: "When did you come? Why didn't you tell me? You are a fine one, always looking out for yourself."

"I did not know my mother was dead," Wu Yin'er said. "If I had known, I should have been here before this." Yueniang took them to the inner court and entertained them there.

The seventh day came. Sixteen priests came from the Temple of Thanksgiving. Priest Lang was in charge of them and presided over the ceremony. They recited the Lotus Sutra and performed the ritual for the dead. The relatives, friends, and those who served in the shops attended again. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade King came to make an offering, and also to secure an invitation for the second week's mind. Ximen Qing asked him to stay and gave him vegetarian food.

A boy came and said: "The artist has brought the portrait." Everybody examined it. The painting showed Li Ping'er in a golden ceremonial head-dress, wearing pearl ornaments and a scarlet embroidered gown. Her face was as fair as though she lived. Ximen Qing was delighted. He set the picture up beside the coffin, and everybody said that the only thing it lacked was breath. Ximen entertained the artist and asked him to take even more pains with the large portrait.

"Be assured that I will take the utmost care over it," said the artist. Ximen gave him a handsome present, and he went away.

About noon, Master Qiao came to make his offering. He brought a pig, a sheep, and other things for sacrifice, gold and silver mountains, and paper offerings of all sorts, paper money and incense. There were fifty loads in all, and they created a great impression as they were brought with carriages and music. Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji, standing before the body, made reverence in return. Then Master Qiao invited Scholar Shang, President Zhu, Uncle Wu, Scholar Liu, Captain Hua, and his relative Duan, one after the other to offer incense. When the three offerings had been made, they all knelt down on the floor to hear the Master of the Yin Yang read the panegyric:

On the twenty-second day of the ninth month of the seventh year of the reign Zhenghe, Qiao Hong and the other relatives, with all due reverence, offer the stiff-bristled and the soft-haired animals and other sacrifice of food before the coffin of the deceased lady, the wife of Ximen, and there bewail her loss.

The deceased lady was generous and kind. She managed her household prudently. She governed those in subjection to her with sympathy and goodwill. She was, in truth, the very acme of perfection in womanhood and her good fame was on the lips of all who lived about her. Most glorious of women, most fragrant of blossoms!

When she married, she lived in absolute harmony with her lord. To him she bore a son with the brightness of a river pearl. We trusted that they might live together in married blessedness until a ripe old age, but, suddenly, she fell ill and vanished like a dream.

How shall we restrain our grief when we realize the departure of a lady so estimable? My little daughter is still in her mother's arms, yet she is the bond between this departed lady and ourselves. It was the will of heaven that the marriage should never be consummated. We must live in different worlds, and we shall never meet again.

With this cup I would express all my love and sincerity. May she who is gone know this, come, and enjoy it!

After this offering, the gentlemen were taken to the temporary building and entertained. Then the ladies came. Mistress Qiao, Mistress Cui, President Zhu's wife, Scholar Shang's wife and Miss Duan came to make their offering to the dead. Drums and gongs were beaten, and a number of dancers dressed as spirits performed before the coffin. Yueniang accompanied the ladies and afterwards took them to the inner court and gave them tea. Then they were entertained.

While Ximen Qing was drinking with the others, he suddenly heard the funeral gong being sounded, and a servant hurried in to say that the prefect Hu had come and his sedan chair was waiting at the gate. Ximen Qing, wearing his mourning robes, went to the coffin to await his guest, and asked Master Wen to dress and go to receive the prefect. Servants came in with incense and paper offerings, and, behind them, the prefect in plain dress and gold-buckled girdle. A number of officials followed him, some to hold his robes, others to adjust his girdle, and so on. When the prefect came to the coffin, Chunhong knelt and offered him incense. The prefect took it and burned it before the body, twice making a reverence.

"I pray your Excellency to rise," Ximen Qing said. "I am very grateful to you." He made reverence in return.

"I only heard yesterday that your lady had died," the prefect said. "I am sorry I come so late."

"My wife's illness was incurable," Ximen said. "It is very good of you to come."

Master Wen was with them. They went to the hall and offered the prefect a cup of tea. Then he went away, Master Wen accompanying him to the gate.

That day the people who came to make offerings to the dead did not leave until the evening. The next day Zheng Aiyue came and burned paper offerings before the coffin. Yueniang saw that the girl made an offering of eight plates of cakes and three of other refreshments, and she called for a white silk skirt for the girl. Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er each made an offering of three *qian*. Yueniang told Ximen Qing, and he said: "Give each of them a silk skirt, no matter what they offer." Yueniang took them to the inner court, and there they had tea. In the evening, a number of friends and kinsmen came to spend the night. A troop of actors had been engaged and were waiting to perform their plays. Li Ming, Wu Hui, Zheng Feng and Zheng Chun were with them. Ximen Qing had fifteen tables arranged for his guests in the temporary building. Master Qiao was there, the two uncles Wu, Uncle Hua, Uncle Shen, Uncle Han, the two scholars Ni and Wen, Dr. Ren, Li and Huang, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Zhu Shinian, Sun Guozui, Bai Laiguang, Chang Zhijie, the clerks Fu, Han, and Gan, Ben the Fourth, the two nephews of Wu Shun, and six or seven others. The tables were all large, and more than ten great candles were lighted. The ladies were near the coffin, hidden from the view of the guests by screens and hangings, but so that they could watch the play.

All the guests made reverence to the dead, and Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji made reverence in return. Then everybody sat down and the actors and musicians began to play. The first play was the *Romance of Wei Gao and Yuxiao*, and their betrothal in two generations. First upon the stage came the hero Wei Gao and sang, then the heroine, Yuxiao, and she sang, too. The cooks brought soup and rice and meat and goose. Ying Bojue said to Ximen Qing: "I hear that the three young ladies from the bawdy-house are here. Why not ask them to come and offer a cup of wine to Master Qiao and the two Masters Wu? It is too great an indulgence to let them simply stay and listen to the play."

Ximen Qing would have told Daian to bring the girls, but Qiao said: "We can't do that. They have come to make offering to the dead, and we can't ask them to serve wine."

"Sir," Bojue said, "you are mistaken. Little whores of their sort must not be allowed to be idle." He turned to Daian. "Go at once and drag them out. Tell them: Uncle Ying says that, although you have come to pay your due respects to the Sixth Lady, you must come and do something for us as well."

Daian went, but he soon came back. "They say they will not come if Uncle Ying is here."

"In that case I must go myself," Bojue said. He stood up, walked two steps and sat down again.

Ximen Qing laughed. "Why have you come back?" he said.

"I had it in mind to go myself and fetch those little whores," Bojue said. "But wait till I think what I'm going to say, and then I'll go and let them have a piece of my mind." After a while, he told Daian to go again and ask them.

The three girls came slowly. They were all wearing white silk gowns and blue skirts. They greeted the company, then stood smiling.

"Since we are here, why didn't you come at once?" Bojue asked them. They did not answer. They served all the gentlemen with wine and then sat down together at one table. The music began again. Wei Gao and Bao Zhiben had come together to Yuxiao's house, and her mother had come out to welcome them.

Bao Zhiben said: "Go and fetch the girl out," and the old woman replied:

"Master Bao, you are lacking in courtesy. My daughter is not at every man's disposal. You should say, not: 'Fetch her out,' but, 'Please ask her if she will be so good as to come out.'"

This made Li Guijie laugh. "Master Bao," she said, "was like Beggar Ying. He did not know how to behave."

"You little whore," Bojue said, "if I don't know how to behave, why is your mother so much attached to me?"

"She is attached to you the other way around," said Guijie.

"Attend to the play," Ximen Qing said to them. "If you talk any more, you will have to be fined." Bojue kept silence.

The play went on. In the great hall, on one side of the large screen, sat the two aunts Wu, Aunt Yang, old woman Pan, another Aunt Wu, Aunt Meng, Miss Zheng and Miss Duan, with the ladies of Ximen's household. On the other side were Chunmei, Yuxiao, Lanxiang, Yingchun and Xiaoyu. They stood in a group and watched the play. A maid passed with a plate of fruits and a pot of tea. Chunmei stopped her and said: "For whom are you taking the tea?"

"The ladies on the other side want some," the maid replied.

Chunmei took a cup for herself. Xiaoyu had observed that the girl in the play was called Yuxiao. She took hold of her fellow maid and said to her: "You little whore! See, two men have come to visit you, and your wicked old woman wishes you to welcome them. Why don't you go?" She pushed Yuxiao, and she stumbled over Chunmei. Chunmei was holding the cup of tea in her hands and she spilled it over her clothes.

"What are you doing, spilling the tea all over me!" Chunmei cried. "It is only a matter of luck that you didn't make me break the teacup."

Ximen Qing heard the noise and sent Daian to see who was making it. The boy saw Chunmei sitting on a chair. "Go and tell our master," she said, "that that whore Yuxiao got quite out of control when she saw the man on the stage."

Ximen Qing heard what was said, but he was too much occupied to think about it. Yueniang came and scolded Yuxiao. "What have you been doing here all this time?" she said. "You ought to have gone to see who is in my room. Do you know who is there?"

"Yes," Yuxiao said, "your daughter has gone to the inner court, and the two nuns are in our room."

"There is always trouble if I let you stay and watch the plays," Yueniang said.

Then Chunmei, seeing Yueniang, rose and said: "Mother, you might think they were crazy. They seem to have forgotten both their senses and their manners. They laugh and talk and never trouble in the least whether the guests see them or not."

Yueniang scolded them again and went back to her place.

Master Qiao and Scholar Ni were the first to go away. Uncle Shen, Uncle Han and Dr. Ren were about to follow their example, but Ying Bojue stopped them. "Host," he said to Ximen Qing, "you must speak to them. I am only a friend, but I am not going yet. They are your relatives and they ought to stay. Uncle Shen lives within the walls. Even if Uncles Han and Hua and Doctor Ren live outside the city, it is so late now that they can't get out, so what's the use of their hurrying? Come back all of you and sit down. Besides, the play is not finished."

Ximen Qing told the boys to get four jars of Magu wine. When it was brought, he said: "We won't keep this any longer." He took a large cup, set it before Uncle Wu and said: "He who tries to break up this party shall be punished by Uncle Wu." So they all sat down again, and Ximen Qing bade Shutong tell the actors to perform the most lively part of their play. The music began, and one of the actors came to ask whether they should play the scene in which the portrait is painted. "I don't care what it is," Ximen Qing said, "but let it be something lively."

The girl, Yuxiao, again appeared upon the stage. While she was singing "Never more shall I see you in this world, so I make this portrait of you," Ximen suddenly thought of all the suffering through which Li Ping'er had gone, and he was moved to tears. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and dried his eyes. Pan Jinlian saw him with her cold eyes. "Look at that rascal," she said to Yueniang, and pointed to him, "he even sheds tears when he hears something on the stage."

"In spite of all your cleverness," Meng Yulou said, "you don't appear to understand. Plays are intended to express sorrow, joy, separations and meetings. He saw something that touched his heart. He is not the first to weep when he sees a play. It is like thinking about a dead horse when we see a saddle."

"Oh, I don't believe a word of it," Jinlian said. "People who cry when they hear a tale or see a play are all pretending. If the actors can make people shed real tears, they must be very fine actors."

"Be quiet, ladies," Yueniang said. "Listen to the play."

"I can't think what makes this sister of ours so self-opinionated," Yulou said to Aunt Wu. The play went on until the 5th night watch, then the party began to break up. Ximen Qing took a large cup, and standing by the door, stopped his guests and pressed them to drink again. But when he found he could keep them no longer, he allowed them to go. The servants cleared away and Ximen told the actors to leave their boxes because he wished them to perform another day when the 2 eunuchs, Liu and Xue were coming. The actors agreed and after being entertained with food and drinks went away. Li Ming and his 3 companions went home. It was nearly dawn and Ximen Qing went to the inner court to rest.

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### Yü-hsiao Kneels in Making an Appeal to P'an Chin-lien; the Officers of the Guard Sacrifice to a Rich Man's Spouse & Shutong Runs Away

Infatuated by love, on awakening to find
the night almost over;
He tentatively examines the handkerchief
woven of mermaid silk.
Only when dead does the spring silkworm's
thread come to an end;
Not until burnt to ashes do the tears of
the wax candle dry up.[1]
The male and female phoenix mates have been
blown apart by the wind;
Her soft jade and captivating fragrance[2] are
no longer of this world.
Before he has finished boasting of the two
words that spell "romance";
The cock has crowed beneath the waning moon
and the fifth watch is chill.[3]

By the time the company had dispersed, the cocks were already crowing and Hsi-men Ch'ing retired to rest. Tai-an took a large jug of wine and several saucers of food out to the shop in the front compound, intending to share them with Manager Fu and Ch'en Ching-chi. Manager Fu was getting along in years and had stayed up all night, so he didn't feel like sitting around any longer but proceeded to spread out a mat and lay down on the k'ang to go to sleep. "You and P'ing-an help yourselves," he said to Tai-an. "I doubt if Son-in-law Ch'en will show up."

Tai-an lit a candle on the counter and invited P'ing-an to come inside where the two of them proceeded to share the wine:

First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me,

until it was all gone, after which, they put the utensils away and P'ing-an went back to the gatehouse to sleep. Tai-an then secured the gate to the shop and lay down foot-to-foot on the k'ang next to Manager Fu.

Manager Fu, idly responding to something in the preceding conversation, said to Tai-an, "Now that the Sixth Lady is dead, the quality of the coffin, the sacrifices, the sutra recitations, and the funeral arrangements are certainly more than sufficient, are they not?"

"On the one hand," responded Tai-an, "she was blessed with good fortune, but not with longevity. Although Father has spent all this money on her, he has not had to dip into his own pocket. When the Sixth Lady married Father, there is no disguising the fact, as you well know, that she brought with her a considerable dowry. Others may not know the extent of it, but I do. Without even taking into account the amount of silver specie, the gold and pearl jewelry, objets d'art, jade-ornamented girdles, chatelaines, pendants, silver frets, and valuable gemstones were too numerous to count. Why do you suppose Father was so enamored of her? He was not enamored of her person, but enamored of her money.

"Even though that was the case, if one were to bring up the subject of the late Sixth Lady's disposition, no one in this whole household was her equal. She was self-deprecating and congenial, and greeted everyone with a smile. As far as we servants were concerned, she never once raised her voice in criticism, made the mistake of reviling us as slaves, or threatened us with dire consequences.

"When commissioning us to buy anything for her, she would simply hand us a nugget of silver. And when we suggested, 'Mother, why don't you put it on the scale and weigh it, so we'll know what we're spending,' she would laugh, saying, 'Just take it. What's the point of weighing it? If you don't expect to make a little something out of the transaction, what are you hoping for? Just see that I get my money's worth.'

"Who is there in this entire household who hasn't borrowed silver from her? And though she lent it out, no one ever returned it. She didn't seem to care whether she got it back or not. The First Lady and the Third Lady are also liberal as far as money is concerned, but the Fifth Lady and the Second Lady are a bit tight. When it is their turn to be in charge of the household finances, we feel plague-stricken. They are more than willing to grind our legs down to the bone. At best, they simply will not give full value. Even without any other funny business, for an expense of a mace of silver, they will weigh out only nine and a half candareens worth, or, when you get right down to it, no more than nine candareens, apparently expecting us to make up the difference."

"Well, at least the First Lady is better than that," said Manager Fu.

"Although the First Lady is all right," said Tai-an, "she's got a hair-trigger temper. One minute, she'll be in a good mood, talking away as pleasantly as can be, but the next minute, should anyone offend her, no matter who it might be, she'll let you have it in no uncertain terms. In the final analysis, she's no match for the Sixth Lady, who aroused resentment in nobody and was often willing to put in a good word with Father on our behalf. Even in the weightiest matters of a kind that would not brook appeal, if we appealed to her, she would speak to Father on our behalf, and he would never fail to comply. The Fifth Lady, on the other hand, is quick to make groundless allegations, is forever saying, 'Just you see if I don't tell Father about this,' and constantly threatens people with a beating. And now, this sister of ours, Ch'un-mei, is another star of contention, and, as fate would have it, they are both to be found in the same quarters."

"The Fifth Lady has been here for some years now," averred Manager Fu.

"You know what kind of a person she is," said Tai-an, "and can remember back to the time when she first arrived. She doesn't even show any respect to her own mother. On more than one occasion when the old lady has visited, she has treated her so badly she has gone home in tears. And now that the Sixth Lady has died, she is able to preside over the world of the front compound. She feels free to abuse whoever is in charge of sweeping the flower garden for not getting it clean enough, so that, early in the morning, he ends up looking as though:

His head has been sprayed with dog's blood."

The two of them talked for a while until Manager Fu started to snore stertorously as he fell asleep on his pillow. Tai-an also had had more than enough to drink and no sooner closed his eyes than he became oblivious to:

Heaven above and earth below.
By the time:
The red sun was three rods high in the sky,[4]
they had still not gotten up.
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing often chose to sleep in front of Li P'ingerh's spirit tablet in the front compound. In the morning, when Yü-hsiao came out to dispose of the bedding, Hsi-men Ch'ing would go back to the rear compound to comb his hair, while Shu-t'ung, with his own hair still undressed, would take advantage of the opportunity for the two of them to:
Engage in badinage and repartee,
joking and contending with each other for some time before she returned to the rear compound.
Who could have anticipated that, on this particular day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone back to the master suite to get some rest, Yü-hsiao availed herself of the fact that people weren't up yet, to surreptitiously come out to the front compound and give Shu-t'ung a wink, upon which the two of them snuck out to the studio in the garden and proceeded to get down to business together.
They could hardly have foreseen that P'an Chin-lien would arise early that morning and abruptly make her way to the reception hall, where she found that the lamp in front of the spirit tablet had gone out, while the tables and chairs in the large temporary structure were lying around:
Higgledy-piggledy,[5]
with no one in attendance but Hua-t'ung, who was busily engaged in sweeping the grounds.
"You lousy jailbird!" Chin-lien said to him. "Do you mean to say that you are the only one here sweeping the grounds? Where have all the others gone?"
"They haven't gotten up yet," replied Hua-t'ung.
"Drop your broom for the time being," said Chin-lien, "and go up front to ask our son-in-law for a length of white damask for my mother, Old Mrs. P'an, who doesn't have a mourning skirt. You can also pick up a mourning headband and girdle for her. She's going home later today."
"I fear your son-in-law may still be asleep," said Hua-t'ung, "but I'll go ask him for you."
After some time, he returned and reported, "Your son-in-law says that it's not part of his responsibility, since it is Shu-t'ung and Ts'ui Pen who are in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear. The thing for you to do is to ask Shu-t'ung for what you want."
"Who knows where that slave has gone off to?" said Chin-lien. "You go see if you can find him."
Hua-t'ung looked into the studio in the front courtyard and reported back, saying, "He was there a minute ago. He must have gone to the studio in the garden to do his hair."
"You can finish your sweeping," said Chin-lien. "I'll go ask that jailbird for what I need myself."
Thereupon, she:
Lightly moved her lotus feet,
Gently lifted her beige skirt,
and headed toward the studio in the garden. Upon chancing to hear the sound of laughter within, she pushed open the door, only to find Shu-t'ung and Yühsiao just in the thick of things on the bed inside.
"A dandy jailbird you are!" she exclaimed. "A fine thing the two of you are up to in here!"
The two of them, who were still entwined with each other, were thrown into such consternation by her appearance that they were barely able to extricate themselves in time to kneel down on the ground before her and plead for mercy.
"You lousy jailbird!" said Chin-lien to Shu-t'ung. "Just go fetch me a bolt of mourning damask and a bolt of cotton cloth, so I can send my mother home with them."
Shu-t'ung lost no time in fetching the wanted articles and proffering them to her, whereupon, Chin-lien went straight back to her quarters, with Yü-hsiao following in her wake.
Upon their arrival there, Yü-hsiao knelt down on the floor and groveled around on her knees, appealing to Chin-lien with the plea, "Fifth Lady, whatever happens, don't tell Father about this."
"You lousy little bitch!" Chin-lien demanded. "Tell me the truth. All this while, how many times has that slave made out with you? You'd better not try to deceive me by so much as a single word."
Yü-hsiao then confessed the whole story of how the two of them had been carrying on an affair.
"If you want me to let you off," said Chin-lien, "you'll have to agree to three conditions."
"If you consent to spare me," said Yü-hsiao, "no matter how many conditions you impose, I'll agree to them all."
"The first condition," Chin-lien said, "is that you will tell me everything that happens in your mistress's quarters, no matter how trivial. If you fail to tell me anything, and I hear about it, I will definitely not let you off the hook. The second condition is that if I ask you for anything, you'll find a way to see that I get it. The third condition is that you tell me how it is that your mistress, who has not been pregnant before, should now have managed to conceive."
"I will not deceive you, Fifth Lady," said Yü-hsiao. "The fact of the matter is that my mistress, thus and so, conceived after taking a fertility potion, provided by Nun Hsüeh, containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child."
Chin-lien made a mental note of everything she had said and only then consented not to report anything to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When Shu-t'ung saw the sardonic smile on the face of P'an Chin-lien as she led Yü-hsiao off to her quarters, he realized that this was an affair that was not likely to end propitiously for him. He therefore availed himself of the opportunity to help himself to the considerable number of handkerchiefs, scarves, ornamental toothpicks, hairpins, toggles, and other gifts from visitors that were stored in a cabinet in the studio. He had managed to scrounge something over ten taels of silver for himself, and he also went to the counter of the shop out front and finagled Manager Fu into giving him another twenty taels by saying they were needed to buy additional supplies of mourning damask. He then went straightaway outside the city gate and hired a long-distance mount to take him to the nearest embarkation point, where he boarded a boat from his hometown and embarked for his place of origin in Su-chou. Truly:
Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.[6]
It so happened that on that day Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Aiyüeh all returned to their respective establishments. In the morning, Eunuch Director Hsüeh and Eunuch Director Liu sent men to deliver offertory tables of the three sacrificial animals, so that they would be able to offer oblations and burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. Each of them also donated a tael of silver as their contributions toward the expenses of an all-night wake and engaged the services of two professional performers of the genre known as Tao-ch'ing, or Taoist songs, proposing to come visit with Hsi-men Ch'ing during the day.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was anxious to be able to supply his visitors with mourning damask and started looking for Shu-t'ung in order to get the necessary key but couldn't find him anywhere.
"This morning," reported Manager Fu, "he came to the counter in the shop and asked me for twenty taels of silver to buy mourning damask with. He said that you had told him the existing supply of mourning damask was inadequate. No doubt he has gone outside the city gate to purchase some more."
"I didn't tell him any such thing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So why should he be asking you for silver?"
He then sent someone outside the city gate to the shops that sold mourning damask to look for him, but he was nowhere to be found.
"I suspect this slave has been up to some funny business," said Yüeh-niang to Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who knows what sort of scurvy tricks he's capable of? And now it looks like he's appropriated several taels of silver and made off with them. You had better open up those studios of yours and give them a good going over. It's not a job for a legless crab like myself. I fear he may have absconded with other things as well."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, went to inspect his two studios and found that the keys to the storeroom were still hanging on the wall, but that a considerable number of handkerchiefs, scarves, gifts of books and silver, ornamental toothpicks, toggles, and the like, were missing from the large cabinet.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was enraged and called in the neighborhood authorities, telling them to seek out and apprehend the fugitive throughout the:
Three quarters and two alleys,
of the pleasure precincts, but he was nowhere to be found. Truly:
Not only was he impatient to return to
his native place;
But the misty waters of the Five Lakes[7]
were impenetrable.
By this time, at about noon that afternoon, Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived in his sedan chair, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Wu K'ai, Ying Pochüeh, and Licentiate Wen to help entertain him.
Before doing anything else, Eunuch Director Hsüeh went up to Li P'ingerh's spirit tablet to burn incense and perform an obeisance, after which, he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "How sad! How sad! What ailment was it that your lady died of?"
"Unfortunately," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she suffered from a severe case of hemorrhaging, which was not looked after properly, and resulted in her death. I am grateful to you, venerable sir, for your expression of concern."
"I haven't much to offer," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh. "It is but a paltry expression of my feelings."
Then, catching sight of the portrait of Li P'ing-erh that was hanging nearby, he said, "What a beautiful lady. She looks just as though she were:
Enjoying prosperity in the springtime of her youth.
What a pity that she has departed this world so early."
"That things are unequal is part of their nature,"[8]
opined Licentiate Wen, who was standing to one side. "After all:
Failure or success, long life or short,[9]
are things that are predetermined. Even a sage can do nothing to alter them."
Eunuch Director Hsüeh turned his head to look at Licentiate Wen and, noticing that he was dressed in the cap and gown of a licentiate, but in mourning white, asked, "What school is this venerable gentleman enrolled in?"
Licentiate Wen responded with a bow, saying, "Your unworthy pupil is enrolled in the Prefectural School."
Changing the subject, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "I'd like to see the lady's coffin, if I may."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered his attendants to lift aside the curtains suspended to either side, so that Eunuch Director Hsüeh could go inside and take a look.
Expressing the most fulsome admiration,
Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "What a fine coffin. May I ask how much you paid for it?"
"I got it through a relative," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and compensated him appropriately."
"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "why don't you hazard a guess. Where did the wood come from, and what is it called?"
After carefully examining it, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "If it didn't come from Chien-ch'ang,[10] it must have come from Chen-yüan."[11]
"Even if it came from Chen-yüan," said Ying Po-chüeh, "it wouldn't be worth all that much."
"The best coffin wood," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "is surely Yang-hsüan Elm."[12]
"Boards cut from the Yang-hsüan Elm are comparatively thin and short," said Ying Po-chüeh. "How could they pass muster? These coffin boards are superior to those made from the Yang-hsüan Elm. They come from a place called Peach Blossom Cavern, located on the Wu-ling River in Hu-kuang province. In former days, during the T'ang dynasty, a fisherman entered this cavern where he encountered the Hairy Woman, a refugee from the Ch'in dynasty, who had sought shelter there from the military conflicts of the time. [13] It is a secluded place where people seldom come. These boards were all more than seven feet long, four inches thick, and two feet five inches wide. As a special favor to a kinsman the owner gave him a substantial discount, so the asking price was only 370 taels of silver. You have never seen the like, sir. When they were sawed open, they exuded a pungent aroma and had flowerlike patterns on both sides."
"The lady is fortunate indeed," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "to be able to enjoy a coffin of this quality. We eunuchs, when we pass away, cannot expect such elaborate funeral arrangements."
"Venerable sir," said Wu K'ai, "that's a fine way to talk! People like you have direct access to the imperial court and enjoy great rank and emolument. We outer officials can hardly hope to compete with the likes of you, venerable sir, who are daily exposed to the pure radiance of the sovereign and transmit the words of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years. At present, His Honor T'ung Kuan has been promoted to the rank of Commandery Prince,[14] and his sons and grandsons are all entitled to:
Wear python robes and girdles of jade.
What limit is there to your prospects?"[15]
"Might I ask," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "what is the name of this glib-tongued gentleman?"
"This is my wife's elder brother, Wu K'ai," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "At present he holds the position of battalion commander in the local guard."
"Is he the elder brother of this deceased lady?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.
"No," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is the elder brother of my humble spouse."
Eunuch Director Hsüeh then saluted Wu K'ai with a bow, saying, "Pray forgive my unmindfulness."
After he had inspected the coffin for a while, Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him to the summerhouse, where a folding armchair had been placed in the position of honor, upon which Eunuch Director Hsüeh sat down.
After a servant had served them with tea, Eunuch Director Hsüeh said, "How is it that Eunuch Director Liu is not here yet? I'll have one of my retainers go out to meet him."
At this, a black-clad retainer knelt down and reported, "When Your Honor left home, you sent your humble servant to invite His Honor Liu to start out, and his sedan chair was already in waiting. He should be here any minute."
Eunuch Director Hsüeh then went on to ask, "Have those two performers of Tao-ch'ing arrived, or not?"
"They arrived this morning," reported Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll have them called in."
It was not long before they appeared before the company and kowtowed.
"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.
"We have been given something to eat," they replied.
"Since you've already been fed," said Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "I want you to do the best you can today. I'll see that you are amply rewarded."
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your pupil also has a troupe of players here, who are prepared to perform for you."
"Where are these players from?" asked Eunuch Director Hsüeh.
"It is a troupe of Hai-yen actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"What with that barbarous accent of theirs," pronounced Eunuch Director Hsüeh, "who knows what they are singing about? Their plots are only concerned with those poor discontented scholars who endure hardship for three years within their unheated chambers and then wander abroad for nine years, carrying their:
Zithers, swords, and book boxes,[16]
on their backs, making their way to the capital in order to compete in the examinations, in the hope of obtaining an office. They don't even have the consolation of wives or children by their sides. What do the vicissitudes of such people mean to celibate old eunuchs like ourselves? We can do without them."
Licentiate Wen, who was seated beside him, laughed at this diatribe, saying, "Venerable sir, what you have just said is quite unreasonable.
Those who reside in Ch'i speak with a Ch'i accent;
Those who reside in Ch'u speak with a Ch'u accent.
Though you may reside in your:
High halls and spacious structures,[17]
how can your heart fail to be moved by such things?"
At this rejoinder, Eunuch Director Hsüeh clapped his hands and laughed, saying, "I had forgotten that Licentiate Wen was present. You outer officials always come to the defense of each other."
"After all," said Licentiate Wen, "it is from us licentiates that members of the official class are recruited. Venerable sir:
For every branch you chop down,

A hundred trees are threatened.[18]
When the hare dies, the fox is sad;
Creatures grieve for their fellows."[19]
"That is not so," responded Eunuch Director Hsüeh:
"In the space of any particular quarter,
There are both the wise and the foolish."
As they were talking, an attendant suddenly came in and reported that Eunuch Director Liu was getting out of his sedan chair, at which, Wu K'ai and the others went out to greet him. Upon coming inside, Eunuch Director Liu bowed in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet.
When they had finished with the customary amenities, Eunuch Director Hsüeh addressed his fellow eunuch, saying, "Why is it, venerable sir, that you have not arrived until now?"
"Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter dropped by for a visit," Eunuch Director Liu explained, "and I had to entertain him for a while before sending him off."
The company thereupon sat down in their respective places, while attendants served them with tea.
Eunuch Director Liu then asked one of his servitors, "Have our offertory tables been set up yet, or not?"
"They have all been properly set up," the servant replied.
"We might as well proceed to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased, then," said Eunuch Director Liu.
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need for any further ritual observances. You have already demonstrated your respect for the deceased."
"Why else did we come?" said Eunuch Director Liu. "We ought to present our offerings in person."
At this juncture, the attendants provided them with incense sticks, and the two eunuchs proceeded to light them before the spirit tablet, offer the customary three libations, and then perform an obeisance.
"Venerable sirs, please get up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, after performing two kowtows, they stood up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kowtowed to them in return.
The company then returned to the summerhouse and sat down, while the preparations for the feast were completed, and wine was served. The two eunuchs were seated in the places of honor to left and right, with Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh placed below them, while Hsi-men Ch'ing occupied the position of host at the lower end of the seating arrangement. As their:
Drums and gongs began to sound,
the players came on and presented the program of pieces they were prepared to perform. The two eunuch directors examined it for a while and chose a selection from the play entitled *Liu Chih-yüan hung-p'ao chi*, or *Liu Chih-yüan and the Crimson Robe*.[20]
Before many scenes had been played, however, they grew tired of it and called in the performers of Tao-ch'ing, saying, "It would be more fun if they were to sing a Tao-ch'ing for us."
Thereupon, the two of them began to tap their "fisherman's drums,"[21] as they stood shoulder to shoulder, facing their audience, and sang in high-pitched voices the story entitled *Han Wen-kung hsüeh-yung Lan-kuan*, or *Han Yü Is Impeded by Snow at Lan-kuan*.[22]
At this juncture, the chef came out and kowtowed before the company, and the two eunuch directors rewarded him with appropriate gratuities. Hsi-men Ch'ing had also prepared meat and wine to serve to their attendants, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
During the course of the banquet, Eunuch Director Hsüeh began a conversation with Eunuch Director Liu, saying, "Brother Liu, you may not have heard about it yet, but, the other day, on the tenth day of the eighth month, during:
A great downpour of rain,[23]
the thunder and lightning destroyed the owl-tail-shaped ornaments at the ends of the roof beam of the Ning-shen Hall in the grounds of the Imperial Palace, frightening any number of palace women to death. The Emperor himself was greatly alarmed and ordered that all his officials should engage in self-examination, [24] that daily petitions should be presented to the spirits during propitiatory services in the Temple of Highest Clarity, that the butchering of animals should be prohibited for ten days, that the judicial offices should suspend punishments, and that no officials should be permitted to present memorials to the throne.
"Recently, an envoy from the Jurchen regime of the Great Chin has presented a memorial demanding that we cede them the territory of our three frontier defense commands,[25] and that old villain Ts'ai Ching proposed that we should agree to this, and that the troops and horses under the command of T'ung Kuan should be turned over to Censor-in-Chief T'an Chen,[26] along with Huang Yu[27] and the other ten commissioners in charge of the Three Border Regions, but the troops refused to return, and the matter has been turned over to the court officials for deliberation.
"The other day, at the solar term 'Beginning of Winter,' the Lord of Ten Thousand Years was scheduled to come out to sacrifice at the Imperial Ancestral Temple. That morning, an erudite of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices named Fang Chen, [28] who was supervising the sweeping of the premises, observed that a brick in the wall of the temple was oozing blood,[29] and that there was a declivity in the northeastern corner of the floor of the hall. He reported these observations in a memorial to the throne. In response to this, a supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny sent up a memorial stating in the strongest possible terms that T'ung Kuan had been given too much authority, and that eunuchs ought not to be granted the rank of commandery prince. At present, an imperial mandate written in letters of gold has been dispatched by express courier, ordering Commander T'ung Kuan to return to the capital."
"Now that you and I have been sent out to be local officials," responded Eunuch Director Liu, "such affairs at court are no longer any business of ours. As the saying goes:
Each day you live is merely another day.[30]
Even if the sky should be about to fall,
There are the four giants to hold it up.[31]
Sooner or later this realm of the Great Sung dynasty is sure to come to grief at the hands of this bunch of discontented scholars.
Wang Ten-plus-nine,
Let's sip our wine!"[32]
He then called for the two performers of Tao-ch'ing to come forward and instructed them, saying, "Sing us the story of *Li Po hao t'an-pei*, or *Li Po's Addiction to the Cup*."[33]
The two performers then began to tap their "fisherman's drums" and sang to them for a while.
The feasting continued until evening, when the two eunuchs ordered their servants to prepare their sedan chairs and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to detain them any longer and saw them out to the front gate, where they departed, with their escorts shouting to clear the way.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside, he ordered that candles should be lit and the tables left in place, instructed the caterers to set things back in order, and urged Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen to keep their seats. In addition, he sent a page boy to invite Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, Ts'ui Pen, and Ch'en Ching-chi to join them.
When they had all been seated, he called for the players and instructed them, saying, "Continue to perform the *Yü-huan chi* from where you left off yesterday."
He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and remarked, "These eunuchs have no taste for the flavor of southern-style drama. If I had known they didn't like it, I would not have urged them to stay."
"They failed to appreciate your intentions," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Eunuchs, with their perverted tastes, only go for pieces like *Lan-kuan chi*,[34] and the:
Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,
performed by their boy actors. What do they know of major works that treat of:
Sorrows and joys, partings and reunions?"
Thereupon, the drums and clappers began to sound, and the players proceeded to present:
With lively action and slow singing,
the remaining scenes from *Yü-huan chi* that they had not finished performing the day before. Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the page boys to serve the company by:
Promptly pouring the fine wine.[35]
Ying Po-chüeh, who was sitting at the same table with Hsi-men Ch'ing, asked him, "Have the three singing girls gone home yet? If not, why don't you have them come out and serve us a cup of wine?"
"You're still dreaming of them, are you?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "They've long since had enough of it and gone home."
"They must have stayed over here for two or three days," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"Wu Yin-erh stayed the longest time of all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
That day, the company remained seated at their places until the third watch after the performance of the play was over, before the party finally broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, to come a little early the next morning in order to help entertain the official visitors who were coming to offer a sacrifice to the deceased, after which, he rewarded the players with four taels of silver and sent them on their way.
The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yenling, and a sizable contingent of officials from the local guard all clubbed together to provide a pig and a sheep, and a fancy table setting of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, as their sacrificial offerings. A ritual specialist had been engaged to declaim the funeral eulogy. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a banquet for the occasion, and the three boy actors, Li Ming and company, were also in attendance.
At noon, the sound of drums was heard, indicating that the offertory gifts had arrived. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen went out to the gate to welcome the visitors and looked on as the group of officials, with their attendants:
Crowding behind and clamoring in front,[36]
dismounted and were ushered into the front reception hall to change their clothes.
Before long, the sacrificial offerings were duly displayed, the group of officials gathered in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi returned their salutations. The ritual specialist, whose job it was to act as master of ceremonies, then called out his instructions, presented the three sacrificial libations, knelt down to one side, and proceeded to declaim the funeral eulogy, which read as follows:
On this, the twenty-fifth day *chia-shen*, of the ninth month, the first day of which was *keng-shen*, in the year *ting-yu*, the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period, his devoted colleagues Chou Hsiu, Ching Chung, Hsia Yen-ling, Chang Kuan, along with their fellow officials Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, Hsü Feng-hsiang, P'an Chi, and others, respectfully offer a stiff-bristled pig and a soft-haired sheep, along with other offertory foods, in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of the late consort, née Li, of Hsi-men Ch'ing, an officer of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. We address the spirit of the departed. Delicately raised in the women's quarters, she was chaste and adept at female occupations. Her virtue was that of gold or jade, her appearance that of fragrant orchids. In regulating her household she exhibited judgment, in managing her domestic tasks she left nothing to be desired. She showed respect for learning and was on good terms with her in-laws. Revering her husband as her Heaven, she paid him respect by raising the serving tray as high as her eyebrows.[37] Though she hoped to live to a ripe age, Heaven chose to curtail her remaining years. She and her husband should have enjoyed the harmony of phoenix mates or musical instruments, but, alas, Heaven begrudged her her remaining years and chose to hurry them to an abrupt end. Alas! The length or brevity of life are predetermined.[38] Heaven seems to reject persons of worth. Pearls sink below the waves and jade disks are shattered. Clouds can be threatening and winds bring sorrow in their wake. Though we knock at the door of the grave, it will not open. We may sigh for the dew on the shallot, but it will soon evaporate.[39] I, Chou Hsiu, and the others, occupying the position of colleagues, and mindful of the obligations of friendship, hereby offer up meat in sacrificial vessels, and decant wine into offertory goblets, in the hope that the spirit of the departed will deign to enjoy them. Should she be mindful of our eulogy on this sad occasion, may she come and partake thereof.
When the sacrificial ceremony was finished, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had thanked the participants, Wu K'ai and company led the group of officials to the summerhouse, where they divested themselves of their mourning garments and were served with tea. The boy actors started to play their instruments and sing for their entertainment as they sat down at their places to enjoy the collation that had been prepared for them. Their servants and attendants were also properly attended to. The chef then came out to supervise the presentation of the:
Three soups and five courses,
which were even more lavish than those served on the preceding two days, and kowtowed before the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, occupied the position of hosts, plying their guests with wine until:
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
while the three boy actors, Li Ming and company, with their:
Silver psalteries and ivory clappers,
played and sang to entertain the company. Meanwhile, outside, Hsi-men Ch'ing's managers and storekeepers saw to it that the carriers who had accompanied the official guests all received appropriate gratuities of silver according to precedent.
The officials remained in their places until mid-afternoon before getting up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not hear of it and, together with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and company, with large goblets in hand, endeavored to detain them, while telling Li Ming and the other boy actors to strike up their instruments and sing songs to them. They continued drinking and enjoying themselves until evening before the party broke up.
Hsi-men Ch'ing tried to persuade Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh to stay a little longer, but Wu K'ai said, "We've all been imposing on you for days on end, and you must be tired out yourself, Brother-in-law. We'd better go our respective ways and get some rest."
Thereupon, they bade him farewell, and went home. Truly:
The verdant peaches in the celestial realm
are saturated with dew;
The red apricots that grow beside the sun
are enveloped in clouds.[40]
If your family possesses immoderate wealth[41]
people will toady to you;
When you have ample means at your disposal
price is no consideration.

The jade is perished and the pearls are lost
Sadly he thinks of it.
In public he sheds tears, and in secret mourns.
Often he painted butterflies playing on the wall
And remembered the joy of the love birds
In the green curtains.
Now, only in dreams may he enjoy her.
She may not hope to emulate Fei Yin
Red lips and pearly teeth have joined the yellow dust.
Mournfully he longs to meet her
In the world to come.

It was almost dawn when all the guests went home and Ximen Qing went to rest. Daian took a large pot of wine and several dishes and went to the shop to enjoy them with Clerk Fu and Chen Jingji. Clerk Fu was getting old. He did not feel like sitting up any longer. He made his bed and lay down, saying to Daian: "You and Ping'an had better have these things. I don't believe Brother-in-law Chen is coming." Daian went to fetch Ping'an. They encouraged one another to drink and finished everything off. Then they cleared away the dishes and plates, and Ping'an went to his own place. Daian shut up the shop and went and lay on Clerk Fu's bed, feet against feet.
"Well," Clerk Fu said, "the Sixth Lady is no more, but she has had a good send-off. Her coffin and the funeral are as fine as anyone could desire."
"Yes," said Daian, "if she had lived longer, she might have been accounted a very fortunate woman. Father has been to all this expense, but, after all, it was not his own money. She was very well off when she married him. I happen to be one of the few who know this. She had not only money but gold, pearls, jade, embroideries and valuable ornaments of all sorts. They were the attraction. It wasn't the lady, but her money that our master wanted. But there wasn't a more agreeable lady in the whole household. She was unassuming and pleasant always. She had a smile and a kind word for everybody she met, even the slaves. When she sent us out to buy anything, she would pick up a piece of silver and hand it to us. And if we said, as we sometimes did: 'Mother, won't you please weigh the silver?' she would smile and say: 'Take it away. Why should I weigh it? You wouldn't be working here if you didn't hope to make a little for yourselves now and again. So long as you bring me something good I won't worry.' Everybody in the place borrowed money from her, and nobody ever paid her back. She never troubled whether they did or not. The Great Lady and the Third Lady are generous too, but the Fifth Lady and the Second are as mean as mean can be. If it ever falls to them to run the household, we shall have a very bad time. The sort of thing they do is to give us short money when they send us out to buy things, nine *fen* or something like that when the thing they want costs a *qian*. I suppose we are expected to make up the difference ourselves."
"The Great Lady is not so bad as that," Clerk Fu said.

"She is not so bad as that, certainly," Daian said, "but she loses her temper very easily. When she is in a good mood, one can talk to her and find her very agreeable, but when she is displeased, she scolds everybody without exception. The dead lady was far better than she is, for she never did harm to anyone and often spoke kindly for us to our master. If we got into scrapes, no matter how awkward, we used to go to her, and she would speak to our master. He never refused anything she asked. But the Fifth Lady always has words upon her lips like 'Wait and see if I don't tell your father' or 'You shall have a beating.' Her maid Chunmei is another evil star. My word! They are a fine pair!"
"She has been here several years," Clerk Fu said.
"Yes, and you know what she was like when she came. She does not even treat her own mother decently. The poor old lady often goes away in tears. Now that the Sixth Lady is dead, I can see the Fifth Lady ruling the roost completely. Anyone who goes to clean up the garden will get a good cursing from her if he doesn't do it as she would have it."
Clerk Fu was soon fast asleep and snoring. Daian had had some wine. He, too, was not long before he closed his eyes and was dead to the world. The sun was high in the heavens before they woke.
Ximen Qing often slept beside the coffin. Every morning, Yuxiao came and took away the bedclothes, and Ximen Qing went to the inner court to dress. Then Shutong, his hair undressed, would come to play and joke with the maid, and Yuxiao would dally there a long time. But today, Ximen Qing did not sleep there but in Yueniang's room. Yuxiao got up before the others and slipped out quietly. She went with Shutong to the study in the garden and there they had a merry time together.
Pan Jinlian also got up early that day. She went to the hall and saw that the light before the coffin had gone out. The tables and chairs were in disorder. Nobody was to be seen but Huatong, who was busy sweeping.
"What are you doing here alone?" Jinlian said to him. "Where are the others?"
"They are not up yet," Huatong told her.
"Put down your broom," Jinlian said, "and go and ask Brother-in-law for a roll of white silk. I want it for my mother. I want a girdle for her too. She is probably going away today."
"I think Brother-in-law is still in bed, but I will go and see," Huatong said.
When he came back, he said: "Brother-in-law says it isn't his business. Shutong and Cui Ben are responsible for the mourning. You must ask Shutong."
"How do I know where he is?" Jinlian said. "Go and look for him."
Huatong looked into the room beside the hall and said: "He was in here a few moments ago. Perhaps he has gone to the garden to dress his hair."
"Go on with your work, and I'll go and look for him myself," Jinlian said. She went to the garden. When she came to the study, she heard the sound of somebody laughing. She pushed the door open, Shutong and Yuxiao were enjoying a full measure of delight.
"Ah, you slaves!" Jinlian said, "excellent work you're doing there!"
Shutong and Yuxiao were scared. They plumped down on their knees and begged to be forgiven.
"You slave," Jinlian said to Shutong, "go and get me a roll of white silk and another of cloth. I am going to give them to my mother when she goes away."
Shutong hastened to bring them for her, and she went to her own room. Yuxiao went with her, knelt down, and said: "Fifth Mother, please say nothing to my Father about this."
"Tell me," Jinlian said, "how often have you played this game with him? If you tell me the truth, I will say nothing."
Yuxiao told her the whole story.
"I will forgive you," Jinlian said, "on condition that you promise me three things."
"If you will only forgive me, I will do anything you wish," Yuxiao said.
"First, whatever happens in your mistress's room, whether important or unimportant, you must tell me all about it. If I hear it from anybody else, and you have not told me, I will never forgive you. Secondly, you must get anything I want. Thirdly, I wish to know how it is that your mistress, who was never with child before, is now going to have a baby."
"The truth is," Yuxiao told her, "that my mother took some medicine made out of an afterbirth that Nun Xue brought for her."
Jinlian did not forget this, but she did not say anything to Ximen Qing.
When Shutong saw that Jinlian took Yuxiao away with her, smiling in a manner that boded ill, he decided that the matter was going to have unpleasant consequences. He went to the study, opened the cabinet, and took a number of handkerchiefs, kerchiefs and pins, together with some of the presents that had come from relatives. He had about ten taels of silver of his own and he went to the shop and got another twenty by deceiving Clerk Fu, telling him that he had to buy some silk. He went outside the city, hired a mule for a long journey, and went to the river. There he took boat and went to Suzhou, his native place.
This day Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, and Zheng Aiyue went away. The two eunuchs, Xue and Liu, sent food and paper offerings as offerings for the dead, and a tael of silver. They also sent two storytellers to discourse upon a religious theme, and announced that they would come in person to visit Ximen Qing. Ximen wished to send some silk to the eunuchs and looked about for Shutong who kept the keys. He could not find the boy. Clerk Fu told him: "This morning he asked me for twenty taels and said you had given him orders to buy some silk. He may have gone outside the city for it."
"I never gave him any such orders," Ximen Qing said. "How dared he ask you for the money?" He sent people to look for the boy in all the silk shops, but in vain.
"I always believed there was something crooked about that slave," Wu Yueniang said to Ximen. "He has got into a scrape of some sort, stolen the money and made off. Go and look around your study. Then we shall know if he has taken anything else."
Ximen Qing went to the study. The key was hanging on the wall. Handkerchiefs, presents, and pins had disappeared from the great cabinet. He was very angry and gave orders to the police to arrest the boy wherever they found him. But they never found him.
About noon, Eunuch Xue came in his sedan chair. Ximen Qing had invited Uncle Wu, Ying Bojueand Master Wen to meet him. The eunuch came to the coffin and made reverence. "I deeply sympathize with you," he said to Ximen Qing. "What was the cause of your lady's death?"
"She suffered, unfortunately, from an issue of blood," Ximen Qing said. "It is good of you to come."
"I had nothing worthy to offer," Xue said, "and such things as I have sent are merely to indicate something of what is in my mind." He looked at the portrait that hung before the coffin. "How beautiful she was. And how sad that, when she was still so young and seemed to have such a happy life before her, she should have died."
"Such are the changes and chances of life," said Master Wen, who was standing beside them. "Such is the inevitability of fate. Some are poor, others rich. Some live long; others only for a short while. Yet all are governed by their destiny. Even the sages must submit to fate."
Eunuch Xue turned and looked at the speaker. He noticed that Master Wen was wearing academic robes and said: "Brother, may I ask to which academy you belong?"
Master Wen bowed low. "I am a man of very small learning," he said, "and my name is inscribed only in the records of the academy of our prefecture."
Xue asked if he might look at the coffin. Ximen bade a servant draw back the curtains and the eunuch examined the coffin closely. "What a magnificent coffin!" he said. "How much did it cost?"
"I bought it from a relative," Ximen Qing said.
"Venerable Sir," Ying Bojue said, "guess how much it cost, and tell us where it came from and what the wood is called."
Xue again examined it very carefully. "I should say it came from Jian-chang or, if not, from Zhenyuan," he said.
"If it had come from Zhenyuan," Bojue said, "it would not be so fine."
"I believe the best elm comes from Yangxuan," the eunuch said.
"The Yangxuan elm is short and thin. It is not to be compared with this. This is made of much finer wood called Peach Flower Cavern. The tree grows in Wuling in Huguang. Long, long ago an old fisherman came to that cavern and saw some maidens of the Qin dynasty who had gone there to escape the soldiery. It is a place to which travelers seldom go. The boards of which this coffin is made were seven feet long, four inches thick, and two feet five inches broad. His Lordship paid three hundred and seventy taels for them, although he is a kinsman of the owner. Ah, Venerable Sir, you should have seen it before it was made up. Such fragrance! Such exquisite markings on both sides of the wood!"
"Fate was generous in allowing this lady to enjoy so wonderful a coffin," the eunuch said. "We court chamberlains can hardly hope for such a funeral when our time comes."
"It is very kind of you to say so," Uncle Wu said, "but, Sir, you are in the closest relations with the Imperial Court, and we, who are merely officers of the external administration, can in no way approach you. You, Sir, were but lately basking in the favor of the Son of Heaven. To us, you represent His Majesty's precious words. His Excellency Tong has been given the title of Duke, and those who follow after him will wear ceremonial dress. There is, I am sure, a glorious future before you."
"May I ask your name?" the eunuch said, "you speak with great discretion."
"This is Wu, my wife's brother," Ximen said. "He is a captain in our district."
"Is he the dead lady's brother?" Xue asked.
Ximen Qing explained that Uncle Wu was his first wife's eldest brother.
"You must please excuse me, worthy Sir," Eunuch Xue said to Uncle Wu, bowing. Ximen Qing then took them all to the temporary hall. He offered a chair to the eunuch and the servants brought tea.
"I wonder why Liu has not come yet," Xue said. "I must send one of my servants for him." One of the eunuch's servants knelt down.
"I did go to bring His Worship," he said, "and his sedan chair was waiting for him. I am sure he will be here soon." Xue asked if the two storytellers had come. Ximen Qing told him that they had. They were summoned, and came to kowtow. Xue asked them if they had had anything to eat, and, when they told him that they had, bade them do what they had been sent to do with all due care, promising them a good reward.
"Venerable Sir," Ximen Qing said, "I have engaged some actors. Perhaps you would like to hear them."
"Where are they from?" the eunuch asked.
"They are a company from Haiyan," Ximen told him.
"These barbarous dialects sound so impossible," Xue said, "I can't understand a word they say. Poor devils of students, who put their noses to the grindstone for three years, and then wander all over the place for another nine, carrying a zither, a sword, and a box of books, then come to the capital for the examination, and, when they have got a job, have to leave their wife and children behind—they are the people to enjoy actors of this sort. I'm just a single old chamberlain. Why should I bother about them?"
Master Wen smiled. "Venerable Sir," he said, "I am afraid I cannot agree with you. When in Qi, do as the Qi people do. Even though you occupy such an exalted position, there is a possibility that these actors may amuse you."
Xue laughed and clapped his hands. "Ah," he said, "I had forgotten Master Wen. Of course he takes the part of the officers who serve away from the court."
"Scholars and officers stand or fall together," Master Wen said. "If you cut down a branch, you injure a hundred forests. When anything happens to the hare, the fox grieves. If you disapprove of one, you disapprove of all."
"Not at all," Xue said. "In the same place you find both fools and wise men."
At that moment a servant came and told them that Liu had come. Uncle Wu went out to welcome him. After making a reverence before the coffin, he greeted the others.
"What has made you so late?" Xue asked.
"Xu came to call on me. I could not get away without sitting down with him for a while."
They sat down, and the servants brought tea. Liu asked his attendants if the food to be offered to the dead was ready. The servant told him that everything was arranged. "Let us go and burn some paper offerings," Liu said.
"Venerable Sir," Ximen said, "do not disturb yourself to such an extent. You have already made reverence to her."
"I came for that purpose," Liu said. "I must offer something to her with my own hands."
A servant brought incense. The two eunuchs together offered it and three cups of wine to Li Ping'er. They made reverence again to the dead lady. Then Ximen prayed them to stand up. They made only two reverences, and Ximen Qing made reverence to them in return. Then they went back to the arbor. A table was set. When the two eunuchs had taken their places, Master Wen, Uncle Wu and Ying Bojue sat down, Ximen Qing sat in the seat of the host. The music began and the actors brought out their list of plays. The two eunuchs went through the list and bade them play the *Story of the White Rabbit*. But before the play had proceeded very far, the two eunuchs were tired of it. They sent for the two storytellers, who played and told the story of how the snow stopped Han Wengong in Languan.
Eunuch Xue began to talk to his colleague. "Brother Liu," he said, "I don't suppose you have heard, but the other day, the tenth day of the eighth month, there was a terrible rainstorm, and the roof figures at the palace were struck by lightning. A number of people at the court died of fright. Even His Majesty was alarmed. He admonished all the officials to take the greatest care in the performance of their duties, ordered the *Lingshujing* to be read every day in Shangqing Palace, and forbade the killing of animals for sacrificial purposes for ten days. For the same space of time, the courts were not permitted to give sentence and no reports might be made to the Emperor.
"Then an ambassador came from the people of Jin and demanded the surrender of three of our towns. The old villain Cai Jing suggested that this should be agreed to. As for the troops that had been under Tong's command, the Censor Tan Ji, Huang An and others were to take them over. Tong was to withdraw from the three districts in question, but he refused to come back and the case has been referred to a council of ministers.
"The other day was the Winter Festival, and his Majesty went to the Temple of His Ancestors to offer sacrifice. There is a certain doctor in the Department of Imperial Ceremonies called Fang Zhen, and, in the morning, when he went to inspect the temple, he discovered blood issuing from the courses between the bricks. At the northeastern corner, the floor had given way. He told the Emperor about this, and one of the censors told His Majesty that this was a sign that Tong had assumed a power beyond his due, there being no justification for the appointment of a eunuch as a duke. After this, the Emperor at once sent an envoy with his Golden Decree summoning Tong to return."
"Well," Liu said, "you and I do our duty here. What happens at the Court is no concern of ours. Let us enjoy whatever the day brings forth. Even if the sky seems about to fall, still, as the proverb says, there are four giants to hold it up. It looks to me as if this Empire of Song would be ruined by busybody ministers. Let us drink."
He told the storytellers to sing the story of Li Bo and his fondness for wine. This they did. About sunset, the two eunuchs called for their sedan chairs. Ximen Qing could not persuade them to stay longer and went with them to the gate. When he returned, he gave orders for the candles to be lighted and sat down again with Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue and Master Wen. He sent boys to bring Clerk Fu, Clerk Gan, Han Daoguo, Ben the Fourth, Cui Ben and Chen Jingji. Then he bade the actors perform the play of the Jade Ring that they had played the day before.
"The eunuchs do not understand these Southern plays," he said to Ying Bojue. "If I had realized that, I would not have asked them to stay."
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "they did not appreciate the compliment you were paying them. Eunuchs are very ignorant. They like such things as the story of Languan, simple tales, folk songs and all that sort of thing, but the higher forms of art, compositions of a really great order, are completely beyond them."
The music began, and the actors played that part of the Jade Ring that had not been finished the day before. Ximen Qing called for good wine to be brought.
Ying Bojue, sitting at Ximen's table, asked if the three singing girls were still there. "Why don't you send for them and make them serve the wine?" he said. But Ximen said: "You must be dreaming. They have been gone a long time."
"Then they only stayed a day or two," Bojue said.
"Wu Yin'er's here longest," Ximen Qing told him.
It was the third night watch before the party broke up. The play was finished. Ximen asked Uncle Wu to come early the following day to welcome the guests for him. Then he gave the actors four taels of silver and dismissed them. The next day, Major Zhou, General Jing, Captain Zhang of the militia, and Magistrate Xia came with other officers to make their offering to the dead lady. They made a reverence before the coffin, and someone was appointed to read their panegyric. Ximen Qing offered them refreshment. Li Ming and the other 3 young actors attended. It was about noon when the offerings were brought. Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue and Master Wen stood at the gate to welcome the officers. They came in and changed their clothes in the great hall. Then the offerings of food were set out, and they came together to make reverence before the coffin. Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji were there to return their salutation. The Master of Ceremonies conducted the appropriate ceremonies and when the triple offering had been made, knelt down to read the panegyric. When it was done, Ximen Qing thanked his visitors, and the officers were taken to the temporary hall. They took off their robes and had tea. Tables were set, and they sat down to enjoy themselves. The young actors played and sang to them. About sunset, they went away. Ximen Qing would have liked Uncle Wu and the others to stay but Uncle Wu said, "It seems to me that we're all rather tired, especially you and we must've a rest." He went away with the rest.

## 088
### Abbot Wu Meets the Funeral Procession and Eulogises the Portrait & the Burial of Li Ping'er; Censor Sung Imposes on a Local Magnate to Entertain Eunuch Huang

Moved by the respect she always showed him, he admired her gentleness;
Not having expected to be parted forever, he can sing only sad songs.
The waning moon, hovering beside the clouds, suspends its broken mirror;
Time's flowing light flies past as swiftly as the shuttle on a loom.
Sorrow, like the color of verdant foliage, fades by the end of spring;
Bitterness, suffusing the yearning heart, serves to prolong the night.
If you should inquire how many tears have fallen, only to evaporate;
They are as numerous as the autumn colors in a grove of maple trees.

The 28th day of the ninth month was the time for the 2nd of the 7 weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade Emperor, who had secured the job of presiding over the services on that day, brought sixteen Taoist priests to come to Hsi-men Ch'ing's home to conduct the flag-raising ceremony inviting the presence of the gods, and erect the ritual altar for the performance of the "Litany Addressed to the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East"[1] for the second weekly commemoration.
While they were setting up the altar that morning, a messenger came to deliver a letter from Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works, and Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was properly entertained before going on his way.

Abbot Wu had brought with him from the temple vessels for the meat of the three sacrificial animals, offerings of soup and rice, patisserie, vegetarian fare, imitation gold and silver ingots, paper money, and the like, along with a bolt of fabric, to serve as his sacrificial gifts. When the Taoist priests had circumambulated the coffin reciting their spells, Abbot Wu prostrated himself in front of the spirit tablet.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him in return, saying, "Your Reverence has put himself to considerable expense.
What can we do to be worthy of such largess?"
"I am most embarrassed," responded Abbot Wu. "I really should have provided for the recitation of an additional scripture to pray for the salvation of your lady, but my means would not permit me to do so. As for these coarse offerings of tea and rice that I have presented:
They are no more than tokens of my esteem.
I hope that Your Honor will see fit to accept them with a smile."
When the presentation of the sacrificial offerings had been completed, Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to accept them and saw to the dismissal of the carriers who had brought them.
That day the sacred texts recited at the three morning, noon, and evening audiences included the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, or *Scripture of the Stanzas of the Vitalizing Spirits of the Nine Heavens*,[2] a litany designed to destroy the Hells of the Nine Realms of Darkness,[3] a ritual for attracting and summoning the soul of the deceased, a memorial written in red characters addressed to the above-mentioned Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, and the talismans notifying the various Perfected Beings of the rites that were being celebrated. These rituals were all performed in their entirety, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
The next day, the first person who came to offer a sacrifice to the deceased was Han Ming-ch'uan, the husband of Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, who lived outside the city gate. At the time, Meng Yü-lou's younger brother, Meng Jui, who had been away from home as a traveling merchant for five or six years, had happened to arrive home the day before and, learning from his elder sister that there was to be a funeral observance at Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, chose to accompany his brother-in-law Han Ming-ch'uan in coming to offer a sacrifice to the deceased and acquire the appropriate mourning garment. He also brought with him something considerable in the way of gifts. After exchanging the customary amenities with Hsi-men Ch'ing, he proceeded to Meng Yü-lou's quarters to pay his respects. By this time, there were some ten or more female guests on the premises, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had also provided a collation for their entertainment. But no more of this.
At noon on the same day, the district magistrate of Ch'ing-ho, Li Ta-t'ien, the vice magistrate, Ch'ien Ch'eng, the assistant magistrate, Jen T'ing-kuei, the docket officer, Hsia Kung-chi, and the magistrate of Yang-ku district, Ti Ssu-pin, five officials in all, who had clubbed together to provide the necessary funds, came, attired in appropriate mourning garb, to burn paper money and offer their condolences. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a collation for them and saw that they were accommodated in the summerhouse. He had asked his brother-in-law, Wu K'ai, along with Licentiate Wen, to help keep them company, and also engaged the services of the three boy actors to play their musical instruments and sing for their entertainment. The grooms that had accompanied them to tend their horses were also provided with platters of assorted snacks, which they carried to the place that had been set aside for them so they could sit down and eat.
Just as the guests at the party were devoting themselves to their cups and having a high time of it, as luck would have it:
Without coincidences there would be no stories.
It was unexpectedly announced that the secretary of the Ministry of Works, Huang Pao-kuang, who was the superintendent of the Imperial Brickyard, had come to offer his condolences. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hastily changed into his mourning clothes and went before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet to await his guest. Licentiate Wen, who had gone outside the front gate to welcome him, ushered him into the front reception hall, where he changed his clothes, and then led him inside. The servants who accompanied him, bearing incense sticks and candles, paper money, and bolts of satin brocade, arrayed on red lacquer trays, knelt down, holding up the incense in their hands.
After Huang Pao-kuang had offered up the incense and kowtowed before the spirit tablet, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi had stepped forward to return his salutation, Huang Pao-kuang said, "Your pupil did not know of the death of your respected spouse. I have been remiss in offering my condolences. Forgive me. Forgive me."
"Your pupil has hitherto neglected to pay you his respects," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And now, venerable sir, you have not only condescended to express your condolences, but have deigned to bestow these lavish gifts upon me.
My gratitude will be impossible to contain."
When they had finished exchanging these amenities, Huang Pao-kuang was conducted to the summerhouse, where he was invited to sit down in the place of honor at the head of the table, while Hsi-men Ch'ing and Licentiate Wen sat down in the position of hosts to keep him company, and the attendants served them with tea.
Upon finishing his tea, Huang Pao-kuang said, "Yesterday Sung Ch'iao-nien asked me to convey his greetings to you. He has also learned of the demise of your respected lady and would like to have been able to offer his condolences in person. Unfortunately, however, he has a plethora of pressing matters on his hands. At present he is stationed in Chi-chou.
"You may not have heard about it yet, sir, but the Emperor is currently engaged in constructing the Mount Ken Imperial Park[4] and has issued an edict ordering Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, to proceed to the Hu-Hsiang region of Chiang-nan to take charge of the Flower and Rock Convoys[5] that will transport the rare flowers and rocks required for the embellishment of the park. The boats in these convoys are proceeding, one after the other, along the waterways, and the first contingent is about to arrive in the Huai River region.
"Moreover, the eunuch Huang Ching-ch'en, the defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, has been put in charge of the safe delivery of the rock formation known as 'The Fabulous Peak of Auspicious Clouds and a Myriad Shapes.'[6] This object is twenty feet long and several feet thick and has been wrapped in yellow felt. A number of boats are involved in its transport, all flying yellow flags, and the convoy is proceeding through Shantung on the canal. But the water in the canal is low, and corvée laborers from eight prefectures have been requisitioned to tow the boats, with the result that:
The officials are in dire straits, and
The people are reduced to destitution.[7]
"His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien has been put in charge of the functionaries from the prefectures and districts and is personally involved in everything that happens.
The quantity of paperwork is mountainous, and
He is obliged to work both day and night,
without any respite whatever. On top of which, Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en is about to show up from the capital, and His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien is expected to lead the officials of the Two Provincial Offices in receiving him.
"Not being on familiar terms with anyone else in the area, he has deputed your pupil to respectfully ask if you would consent to allow your distinguished mansion to be used for his reception, and to host a banquet in honor of Defender-in-chief Huang. But I don't know if you will assent to this or not."
He then instructed an attendant to summon the servitors of His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien, whereupon two functionaries, dressed in black livery, knelt down in front of them, reached into a felt bag, and presented two bolts of satin brocade, a stick of aloeswood incense, two sticks of white wax, and a quire of "cotton paper," made from the bark of the paper-mulberry.[8]
"Those are the consolatory contributions offered by His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien," said Huang Pao-kuang. "These other two packets are the joint donations toward the banquet expenses presented by the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and eight prefectures. The twelve officials from the Two Provincial Offices have donated three taels apiece, and the eight prefectural officials have given five taels apiece, making twenty-two contributions, amounting to 106 taels in all."[9]
He handed these over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying. "May I trouble your worthy staff to take care of this, or not?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated to assent, saying, "Your pupil is currently in mourning. What am I to do? What am I to do?"
He then went on to inquire, "When is this reception to take place?"
"It's early yet," said Huang Pao-kuang. "It will not be until the middle of next month. Eunuch Director Huang Ching-ch'en has not even left the capital yet."
"The funeral procession for my late consort will not take place until the twelfth day of the tenth month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. But if I am directed to undertake this at the behest of the venerable Sung Ch'iao-nien, how could I refuse? And please extend my thanks for his generous consolatory offerings. With regard to these other contributions, however, you must take them back.
I absolutely refuse to accept them.
You have but to let me know the number of table settings needed. Your pupil will not fail to provide everything that is required."
"Ssu-ch'üan," said Huang Pao-kuang, "this proposal of yours is mistaken. Sung Ch'iao-nien entrusted me with the task of asking you to undertake this burdensome responsibility. These are the joint contributions of the officials from the entire province of Shantung and are not proffered by Sung Ch'iao-nien himself. How can you refuse them? If you should not accept them, your pupil would be constrained to report the fact back to Sung Ch'iao-nien, and he would not presume to trouble you any further."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he said, "In that case, your pupil will accept them for the time being."
He then directed Tai-an and Wang Ching to take possession of the contributions and put them away.
"How many table settings should be prepared?" he then went on to ask.
"For Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en," replied Huang Pao-kuang, "there should be a large table setting of the kind intended as much for display as for eating. For His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien and the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, individual table settings of the ordinary sort will do. And for the prefectural officials who rank below them, communal seating will suffice. The musicians required for their entertainment will be provided. There is no need for your household to engage any."
When he had finished speaking, after the tea had been twice replenished, he got up to leave.
Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to detain him, but Huang Pao-kuang said, "Your pupil must pay another call on the venerable gentleman Shang Liu-t'ang, who formerly served as district magistrate in my native place before being promoted to the post of prefectural judge in Ch'eng-tu. His son, Shang Hsiao-t'ang, is also a fellow student of mine, having passed the provincial civil service examinations the same year that I did."
"Your pupil was unaware, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you were on intimate terms with Shang Hsiao-t'ang. Your pupil and he are also acquainted."
When Huang Pao-kuang stood up to go, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Venerable sir, pray convey my sentiments to Sung Ch'iao-nien, and assure him that, when the time comes, he will find my humble abode respectfully at his disposal."
"Shortly beforehand," said Huang Pao-kuang, "Sung Ch'iao-nien will send someone to let you know. There is no need to be overly extravagant."
"Your pupil understands," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he escorted him to the front gate, where he mounted his horse and departed.
When the officials from the district yamen learned that the secretary of the Ministry of Works, Huang Pao-kuang, with other high-ranking officers from the regional inspector's office, had visited the premises, they were thrown into such consternation that they secreted themselves in the small summerhouse beneath the artificial hill as they drank their wine and ordered their subordinates to get their sedan chairs and horses out of the way.
On this occasion, when Hsi-men Ch'ing rejoined his guests in the summer-house, he told the assembled officials all about how the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was planning to lead the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and eight prefectures in welcoming Defender-in-chief Huang Ching-ch'en next month and had asked him to provide a reception in his honor.
On hearing this, the assembled officials, with one voice, said, "This visit will entail insuperable tribulation for the prefectures and districts involved. When such imperial emissaries come, all of the expenses for the attending personnel, provisions, public banquets, utensils, and corvée laborers are borne by the prefectures and districts, which, in turn, must extract them from the people. As a way of bringing about the utter depletion of both public and private resources:
Nothing could surpass this.[10]
We all hope, Ssu-ch'üan, that you will put in a good word with your superiors on our behalf in order to alleviate our plight. That would constitute a signal demonstration of our mutual esteem."
When they had finished speaking, they chose not to remain any longer, but got up, mounted their horses, and departed.
To make a long story short, when the time came for the third weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, Abbot Tao-chien of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city wall led sixteen Buddhist monks of high attainments to come and recite scriptures on her behalf. Wearing their cassocks of cloud-patterned brocade and their Vairocana hats, and accompanied by the music of large cymbals and large drums, in the morning they performed the ceremonies of "obtaining sacred water," "paying homage to the five directions," "invoking the Three Treasures," and "bathing the Buddha." At noon, they went on to perform the ceremonies of "soliciting the aid of the Tathāgata," "summoning the soul," "breaking out of Hell," reciting the *Litanies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty*,[11] and declaiming the dhāranīs of the *Sutra of the Peacock King*.[12] Everything was done with appropriate solemnity.
That evening, Ch'iao Hung's wife, and the wives of Hsi-men Ch'ing's employees, joined Yüeh-niang and company in participating in an all-night wake, during which they were entertained with puppet shows in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh, Wu K'ai, and Licentiate Wen, drank wine behind a screen at the eastern end of the temporary structure that had been erected in the courtyard.
The eighth day of the tenth month was the date for the fourth of the weekly commemorations of Li P'ing-erh's death. For this occasion, Lama Chao, the head priest of the Pao-ch'ing Lamasery outside the west gate of the city, was engaged to bring sixteen monks and recite their foreign scriptures. They set up an altar, performed a shamanistic dance, scattered paper flowers and rice on the bier, and circumambulated it while burning incense and reciting dhāranīs. The oblations consisted of cow's milk, tea, cheese, and the like. The suspended effigies were in the form of *pien-hsiang*, or transformation tableaux, representing nine horrific aspects of Māra, in which he was depicted wearing a chaplet of glass beads, with a necklace of skulls around his neck, in the act of devouring an infant, while seated astride an evil sprite, with serpents and hornless dragons encircling his waist. He was portrayed with four heads and eight arms, brandishing dagger-axes and halberds in his hands, with red hair and a blue face, presenting an incomparably ugly appearance.[13] Once the noon vegetarian repast was over, the celebrants fell to consuming meat and wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home that day. Together with Yin-yang Master Hsü, he had gone to the family graveyard outside the city gate in order to break ground for the excavation of the tomb and did not return until the afternoon. That evening the rites were concluded and the lamas were dismissed.
The next day, he made arrangements for the transportation of the requisite accoutrements, wine, rice, table settings, and other culinary supplies to the grave site. He also deputed his managers and employees to go to his country estate and see to the erection of temporary structures at both the front and rear of the grounds, including four or five rooms to serve as wine depositories and kitchens, and also put up an eighteen-foot-wide covered structure by the graveside. The local residents and the neighbors who had previously been invited were entertained to a feast there with:
Unlimited quantities of meat and wine,
after which, when the party broke up, they returned home with their:
Shoulders and backs loaded with gifts,
but there is no need to describe this in detail.
On the eleventh, during the day, professional boy singers of funeral dirges and actors who performed exorcistic skits to the accompaniment of gongs and drums came to put on a farewell show before the spirit tablet of the deceased. The skits they played were entitled "The Five Devils Plague the Assessor," [14] "Celestial Master Chang Tao-ling[15] Is Befuddled by Devils," "Chung K'uei[16] Hoodwinks the Little Devils," "Lao-tzu Traverses the Han-ku Pass,"[17] "The Six Traitors Plague Maitreya,"[18] "The Plum Blossom in the Snow,"[19] "Chuang Chou Dreams That He Is a Butterfly,"[20] "The Four Heavenly Kings Subdue Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind,"[21] "Lü Tung-pin Beheads Huang-lung with His Flying Sword,"[22] and "Emperor T'ai-tsu Escorts Ching-niang on a Thousand-Li Journey."[23]
When this medley of vaudeville acts had been performed, the female guests, who had been looking on through a hanging screen, paid their farewell respects to Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and then went inside, after which the male relatives came in to bid farewell to the spirit tablet and burn paper money before it. Copious tears were shed.
The next day was the date for the funeral procession. Early in the morning, the funeral banner and all the various banderoles, portable pavilions, and pa-pier-mâché funerary objects were carried outside, and the Buddhist and Taoist monks, drummers, musicians, and carriers all assembled. In preparation for this event, Hsi-men Ch'ing had solicited the services of fifty military patrolmen from Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, all of whom came with their archery gear and horses, and were:
Attired in full-dress uniforms.[24]
He left ten of them to guard his residence, while directing the remaining forty to divide themselves into two contingents and march in front of the casket on either side of the road. In addition, there were twenty orderlies from his yamen to clear the road ahead of the procession and look after the burial objects, while yet another twenty had been sent ahead to guard the gate to the family graveyard and receive whatever sacrificial offerings might be delivered there.
That day, the officials and gentry, relatives and friends, who came to take part in the funeral procession:
Created a hubbub with their horses and carriages,
Overflowing the streets and blocking the alleys.[25]
The sedan chairs of the members of the Hsi-men family and their male and female relatives and guests alone numbered more than a hundred, in addition to which, there were several tens of smaller sedan chairs for the madams and painted faces from the licensed quarter.
Yin-yang Master Hsü had determined that 8:00 AM would be the right time for the ceremony of raising the coffin. Hsi-men Ch'ing left Sun Hsüeh-o and the two nuns to look after the house and ordered P'ing-an together with two orderlies to guard the front gate. His son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi performed the role of filial son by kneeling in front of the casket and smashing an earthenware crock to signal that the procession was about to begin. Sixty-four professional coffin bearers fastened the main carrying poles to the catafalque, [26] while an assistant coroner stood on a platform attached to one end of this structure, from which vantage point he beat a wooden clapper to provide a cadence as they hoisted it onto their shoulders and proceeded along the route of the procession. Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged beforehand for Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Temple of Kindness Requited, to preside over the coffin-raising ceremony. The procession had no sooner turned onto Main Street and headed toward the south than:
Mountains and seas of people,[27]
lined up to watch on either side. It happened to be a fine, clear day, and it was truly a spectacular funeral procession. Behold:
A genial breeze livens the handsome streets;
A tenuous drizzle moistens the fragrant dust.
In the eastern quarter the morning sun has just arisen;
In the northern sector the lingering mists clear away.[28]
Tung-tung lung-lung,
The decorated funeral drums maintain

a constant din;
Ting-ting tang-tang.
The exorcistic players' gongs resound
night after night.
The funeral banner sways in the breeze,
Inscribed with large characters on
nine feet of red silk;
High-rising rockets soar into the sky,
Bursting asunder the yellow clouds
suspended in midair.
Fiercely and ferociously,
The Road-clearing Demon[28] nonchalantly
holds his golden battle-axe;
Prancing and swaggering,
The Spirit of the Perilous Paths[30] grimly
grips his silver dagger-axe.
Wandering freely and easily,[31]
The Eight Taoist Immortals appear surrounded
by tortoises and cranes;
Gracefully and seductively,
The four handmaidens come into sight followed
by tigers and by deer.
The exorcistic devils,
Flash by to a crashing of gongs;
The rack of fireworks,
Explodes into a myriad crackers.
Creating quite a stir,
A float of a lotus-gathering boat comes by,
Presenting skits of slapstick humor;[32]
Lanky and large-sized,[33]
Local mummers performing on lofty stilts,
Are dressed in armor, wearing helmets.
Clean-cut and good-looking,[34]
A company of sixteen young Taoist acolytes,
Each attired in a roseate robe and Taoist cap,
Sound the bells from the court of Mt. K'un-lun,
And play eight gong-chimes hanging in a frame,[35]
Producing strains of immortal music;
Big-bellied and overweight,[36]
A band of twenty-four aged Buddhist monks,
Each one garbed in a cloud-patterned cassock,
Beat their large cymbals, and
Strike their great drums,
Paying homage to the five directions.
There are twelve large damask portable pavilions,
Each of which is conspicuous for its
dancing greens and flying reds;[37]
And twenty-four little damask portable pavilions,
Every one of which exhibits clustering
pearls and kingfisher ornaments.
On the left,
Counterfeit open-air storehouses and underground
vaults follow one after another;
On the right,
Papier-mâché mountains of gold and mountains of
silver sweep past in formation.
Portable kitchens display containers of the
eight culinary delicacies;
Pavilions for incense and candles convey the
three sacrificial libations.
Six pavilions of artificial flowers,
Parade their thousand spheres of brocade;
The solitary soul-bearing palanquin,
Exhibits a hundred knots of yellow ribbon.
On the one hand,
Artificial lotus blossoms and snowy willows
vie with each other in brilliance;
On the other hand,
Jeweled canopies and silver-hued banderoles
march with each other in formation.
Banners inscribed in gold, and
Banners inscribed in silver,
Securely protect the catafalque;
Canopies of white damask, and
Canopies of green damask,
Hover about the attached platform.
Talismanic axes enveloped in clouds,
Three on either perimeter,
Are all depicted in vibrant colors;
Presenting jugs and offering towels,
Maidservants on both sides,
Are made up so as to look lifelike.
As directed by the mourning banner,[38]
The filial relatives set up a wail.
Preceded by five pacesetters and
six singing boys,
The pyramidal pedestal, shaped like Mt. Sumeru,
to which the soul banner is affixed,
Sways up and down as it proceeds.
The sixty-four pallbearers,
Wearing black livery and white caps,
Steadfastly support the bier
and its baldachin,
With its crimson, gold lamé floral designs,
Decorated with images of the Five Ancients
on their cloud-scaling cranes,
And with tassels dangling from its four corners,
That surmounts the brocaded catafalque,
Majestic and unmoved.[39]
Behold:
To either side, the orderlies who protect
the procession and clear the road,
All wear mourning caps on their heads,
Black jackets on their bodies,
Mourning girdles about their waists,
Puttees on their legs,
Long-legged boots on their feet,
And hold staves in their hands,
Clamoring in front and crowding behind.
To either side, the equestrian acrobats
who perform their stunts,
Are attired in sesame-patterned flat-topped caps,[40]
Held in place with hammered gold rings that
float at the back of their heads,
And two or three layers of satin jackets,
The waists of which are enclosed in purple belts,
While their feet are shod in four-seamed
dark-tan eagle-talon boots,[41]
Set off by variegated embroidered stockings
depicting frolicking sea creatures.

The acrobats resemble eagles or falcons,
The horsemen are like gibbons or monkeys.
Some brandish a gleaming spear in one hand,
While flourishing a blue standard mounted on
a vermilion staff with the other,
Some do headstands or execute somersaults,
Some perform feats of archery under the
bellies of their mounts,
Some assume the pose of "The Golden Cock
Standing on a Single Foot,"[42]
Some adopt the posture of "The Immortal
Crossing the Bridge,"
While some do the trick of "Hiding Their
Bodies in the Stirrups."[43]
Everyone expresses his admiration,[44]
One and all vying in their approval.
Shoving shoulders and bumping backs,
In their confusion, no distinction is made
between the wise and the foolish;[45]
Pressing to see and crowding to watch,
Amid the chaos, none discriminate between
the distinguished and the humble.
Chang the Third, who is clumsy and fat,
Can only pant for breath;
Li the Fourth, who is short of stature,
Repeatedly stamps his feet.
White-haired old gentlemen,
Prop their beards upon their walking sticks;[46]
Black-haired young beauties,[47]
Bring their children to watch the procession.
Truly:
The thunder of gongs and drums mingles with
the dust of the streets;
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade
a myriad people look on.
The sound of lamentation begins to fade away
as the catafalque departs;
This funeral procession can truly be said to
outdo any in the capital.

Wu Yüeh-niang in a large sedan chair, headed up the ten or more chairs of Li Chiao-erh and the other members of the household in following, single file, in the wake of the casket. Hsi-men Ch'ing, attired in a palmetto hat and mourning clothes, led the assembled relatives and friends after them, while Ch'en Ching-chi accompanied the catafalque, keeping one hand upon it, until the procession arrived at the entrance to East Street.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had previously provided an honorarium and invited Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor to preside over the ceremony of displaying and dedicating the full-length portrait of Li P'ing-erh. His body was clothed in a Taoist vestment emblazoned with twenty-four cranes on a crimson background flying amidst variegated sunset clouds. On his head he wore a ninefold-yang thunder cap[48] adorned with a jade ring. His feet were shod in red shoes, he held an ivory tablet in his hands, and he was seated in an open sedan chair, borne by four bearers, as he came to meet the procession. When he held up the full-length portrait of Li P'ing-erh in both hands, Ch'en Ching-chi knelt down in front of it, and the procession came to a halt. The crowd of spectators listened attentively as, from his elevated position, and in a loud voice, he intoned a eulogy to the portrait.

The hare scampers and the raven flies[49]
west and then east;
The hundred years of a man's life are
like a windblown lamp.
The people of today do not understand[50]
the meaning of no-birth;
Only at this time do they realize that
phenomena are ephemeral.

In solemn commemoration of the spirit of the late respected lady of Commandant Hsi-men Ch'ing of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, whose life in this world extended into her twenty-seventh year. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei*, and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period. We respectfully submit that: as the genteel daughter of a prominent family, and a winsome occupant of ornate chambers, she possessed a countenance reminiscent of blossoms and moonlight and was naturally endowed with an orchid-like fragrance. It was her salient virtue to be gentle and compliant, and she was by nature both temperate and mild. In her match with the gentleman Hsi-men Ch'ing, she demonstrated her fitness for wedded bliss. As a dweller in the women's quarters she was both worthy and chaste, exhibiting marital harmony like that between zither and cithara. Jade was planted in Indigo Field,[51] only to perish like the orchids of Ch'u.[52] Though she might have looked forward to a lifetime of prosperity, unfortunately the springtime of her life lasted only twenty-seven years. Alas! The bright moon wanes all too soon, the finest objects are difficult to preserve.[53] Persons of worth suffer unexpected calamities, the length or brevity of life are predetermined. At present, the catafalque occupies the highway, and red pennants flutter in the breeze. Her husband stamps his feet in grief before the casket, while her relatives wail in lamentation along the alleys. The feelings engendered by separation are deep and difficult to dispel, but the longer we are deprived of her voice and appearance the easier they become to forget. Unworthy though we be to wear these caps and pins, we are ordained devotees of the Taoist religion. Though we unhappily lack the divine arts of a Hsin-yüan P'ing, [54] we faithfully adhere to the tradition bequeathed by Lao-tzu, the founder of the school of the Mysterious Origin. All we can do is display this mirrorlike portrait of Ts'ui Hui, [55] being unable to bring back the butterfly of Chuang Chou's dream. May she be enabled to imbibe sweet dew and bathe in the carnelian nectar of the gods, transcend her position as an immortal, and ascend to the Purple Elysium.[56] May she bedeck herself with a hundred jewels and be presented before the Seven Perfected Ones,[57] that they may enable her purified soul to escape from the road to the shades. Her one mind will then be without impediments, in realizing that the four elements are all illusory.

It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
The breath is transformed into a clear breeze,
the form returns to earth;
The numinous soul's true nature, once lost,
will never be recovered;
The head is altered and the face replaced
an infinite number of times.
Harken now to the final words. So:
Nobody knows to what place her vital essences
may have returned;[58]
Only her portrait remains to be passed on to
later generations.

When Abbot Wu had finished intoning the eulogy, he sat upright in his sedan chair and it backed out of the way of the procession. Thereupon:

Drums and music resounded to the heavens, and
The sounds of lamentation shook the earth,

as the funeral procession started up again and wended its way toward the South Gate of the city. The friends and relatives kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company in walking as far as the gate before they mounted their horses. Ch'en Ching-chi accompanied the casket on foot, keeping one hand upon it, all the way to the family graveyard at Wu-li Yüan.

It so happens that Chang Kuan, the militia commander of Ch'ing-ho, at the head of two hundred troops, along with Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh, had already set up a tent on the high ground in front of the grave site, where wind and percussion instruments started to play, and the bronze gong and bronze drum were beaten, to welcome the funeral procession. As the mourners looked on, the papier-mâché burial objects were set up and burned:

The smoke and flames flaring up to the sky.[59]

Within the graveyard there were arrayed ten or more sacrificial offerings for the wake, which had been provided by the courtesans of the two Music Offices. Marquees had also been put up for the accommodation of the female guests and relatives.

When the catafalque arrived and had been set down by the bearers, Yin-yang Master Hsü, leading several coroner's assistants, consulted his geomancer's compass [60] in order to assure the correct alignment of the casket in the grave. After sacrificing to the Earth God and the tutelary gods of the locality at 10:00 AM, the casket was duly interred, and covered with soil. When Hsi-men Ch'ing had changed his clothes, he presented a gift of two bolts of silk to Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command and asked him to perform the ceremony of dotting the spirit tablet.[61]

After the sacrificial rites were completed, the officials of the Ch'ing-ho Guard and the assembled relatives, friends, and employees competed with one another in offering wine to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Drums and music resounded to the heavens, and
The remnants of fireworks littered the ground.

The servitors responsible for the disposal of the sacrificial oblations did as they were directed, and the workers did not indulge in disorderly conduct. Refreshments for the mourners were provided in four or five places, the female guests were seated in the rear summerhouse, and each location had a set number of servants assigned to it. Everything was done on a festive and lavish scale, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

When the formal collation was finished, the owners of the adjacent estates had also set up tables at which they invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to partake of wine in celebration of the wake, which involved a considerable expenditure in the way of gratuities.

That afternoon, when it was time for the return of the spirit tablet, Wu Yüeh-niang sat in the sedan chair designated for the conveyance of the soul of the departed, holding the spirit tablet and the soul banner, while Ch'en Ching-chi walked alongside the bier that held the spirit bed, keeping one hand upon it. It was draped with a spirit shroud of jet satin and was invested in a jade-colored, gold lamé, waterproof canopy, with tassels dangling from its four corners. The procession also included the portable pavilion in which the full-length portrait of Li P'ing-erh was suspended, the large damask pavilions, the little damask pavilions, and the pavilions for incense and candles, and was accompanied on either side by sixteen drummers and musicians, and the young Taoist acolytes, all performing on their instruments.

Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Meng the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, as well as all the managers and employees of the household kept company with Hsi-men Ch'ing as he reentered the city, while the sedan chairs of the female guests brought up the rear.

When they arrived at the gate of the residence they observed the custom of leaping over a fire before entering. [62] After the spirit tablet had been set up in Li P'ing-erh's quarters, Yin-yang Master Hsü offered a sacrifice to the gods and performed a ritual purification in the front reception hall and then proceeded to paste pollution-dispelling spells on all the doors. Hsi-men Ch'ing brought out a bolt of silk and five taels of silver to thank Master Hsü for his services and then escorted him to the gate. The hired personnel were then dispatched, and twenty strings of cash were distributed between them, five strings for the military patrolmen from the Regional Military Command, five strings for the orderlies from the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and ten strings for the militiamen. Hsi-men Ch'ing also sent cards to express his gratitude to Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling. But no more of this.

Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to set up tables and urged Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, and the rest of his guests to sit down and stay a little longer, but they all refused, said goodbye, and departed. Lai-pao came in and reported that the carpenters who had set up the temporary structures for the funeral observances were waiting outside and proposed to come back the next day to take down the structures.

"There's no need to take down the structures quite yet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Have them come back to take them down the day after the banquet ordained by His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is over."

The carpenters were consequently sent on their way.

Meanwhile, in the rear compound, the wife of Hua the Elder, along with Ch'iao Hung's wife and the other female guests, had waited until after Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet was set up to engage in a round of wailing, after which they, too, made their departure.

As for Hsi-men Ch'ing:
He could not bear to part with her so precipitously.[63]

That evening he went back to Li P'ing-erh's quarters with the intention of spending the night by her spirit tablet. Once there, he saw that her spirit bed had been set up in the position of honor, with her full-length portrait hanging to one side, and her half-length portrait placed inside it, along with a little brocade quilt, a bed table, some clothing, a dressing case, and the like.

There was nothing that had not been provided.

There was even a pair of her tiny golden lotuses resting below it. On the table in front of it there were:
Incense, flowers, lamps, and candles,[64]
Golden saucers, goblets, and vessels,
replete with every kind of offering.

Hsi-men Ch'ing wept incessantly and directed Ying-ch'un to make up his bed on the k'ang across from it. In the middle of the night, confronted with a lonely lamp and:
The slanting moon in the half-open window,[65]
he tossed and turned, unable to sleep:
Giving vent to long sighs as well as short,
as he yearned for his vanished beauty. There is a poem that testifies to this:
Giving vent to long sighs as well as short,
he contemplates the window;
The solitary image of the dancing phoenix[66]

is enough to break his heart.[67]
The orchids have withered like those of Ch'u[68]
during the rains of autumn;
The maple leaves have fallen on the Wu River,[69]
succumbing to the night frost.
In our former lives we had already expressed
the wish to twine our branches;
But in this lifetime it is difficult to find
a soul-resuscitating incense.
If her pure spirit continues its existence
beneath the Nine Springs,
In the nether world as in this human realm
two hearts will be broken.
During the daylight hours, when the offerings of tea and rice were made to Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, Hsi-men Ch'ing came into her room to supervise the maidservants as they laid them out and then seated himself at a table facing the tablet and proceeded to eat with her, raising his chopsticks and asking her to partake with him as he did so. Thus he carried out the principle of:
Sacrificing to the spirits as if they were present.[70]
When they saw this, the maidservants and waiting women could not help wiping the tears from their eyes.
The wet nurse, Ju-i, when no one else was about, constantly appeared before him:
Serving tea or serving water,
Touching him or bumping him,
Pinching him or teasing him,
interrupting him or engaging him in repartee. It did not take more than two or three nights of this before Hsi-men Ch'ing, having had too much to drink while entertaining someone one day, returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where Ying-ch'un helped him into bed. During the night, he wanted some tea to drink and called for Ying-ch'un, but she did not respond. Ju-i got up and brought him some tea, after which she noticed that his quilt was falling off the k'ang and, having collected the teacup, reached down with her hand to put it back in place. Hsi-men Ch'ing, seized by a momentary impulse, embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, sticking his tongue into her mouth, to which the woman responded by sucking his tongue, without saying so much as a word. Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to take off her clothes and get onto the k'ang with him, where the two of them proceeded to embrace under the quilt, where:
Unable to contain their pleasure,
they engaged in the sport of clouds and rain together.
"Since you have seen fit to favor me, Father," said Ju-i, "now that my mistress is dead, I am more than willing to remain in your household, and let you do with me as you will."
"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are content to cater to my desires with all your heart, you need not worry about my willingness to support you."
At this juncture, as far as the woman was concerned:
Upon the pillow and the mat,[71]
there was nothing she refused to do in order to please him. The two of them:
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
as she bent herself to his will, which delighted Hsi-men Ch'ing no end.
The next day, the woman got up early in the morning, fetched Hsi-men Ch'ing's footwear for him, and folded his bedding, so that Ying-ch'un's services were no longer required.
Catering to him with the utmost assiduity,[72]
There was no length to which she would not go.
Hsi-men Ch'ing unlocked the door to the inner room and sought out four of Li P'ing-erh's ornamental hairpins with which to reward her, and the woman kowtowed to him in thanks. Ying-ch'un realized that he had been intimate with her, and the two of them decided to ally themselves with each other. The woman, for her part, relying upon the favor that had been shown her, felt that she was on a firm footing and no longer sought help in any other quarter.
3 days after Li P'ing-erh's burial, when Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from the ceremony of revisiting the grave, to which he had invited a host of officials, female guests, the singing girls Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter, along with the four boy actors Li Ming, Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un, it was observed that Ju-i had assumed a demeanor:
Different from that of former days.
What with her:
Phony eyebrows and bogus airs.
she made herself conspicuous among her fellow maidservants by the way in which:
She talked, and she laughed;
a fact which immediately caught the attention of P'an Chin-lien.
The next morning, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting with Ying Po-chüeh, it was suddenly announced that His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had sent someone to deliver a consignment of complimentary gifts for Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. These consisted of a table setting of gold and silver wine vessels, including two gold flagons, a pair of gold goblets on raised stands, ten little silver cups, two silver ewers with hinged lids, four silver loving cups, two crimson variegated python robes, two bolts of satin brocade, ten jugs of wine, and two carcasses of mutton.
The messenger also stated, "The defender-in-chief's boat has already arrived in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, and my master would impose upon Your Honor to make the necessary arrangements for the banquet in good time, so that the welcoming ceremony can definitely take place on the eighteenth."
Hsi-men Ch'ing took careful possession of the gifts, rewarded the messenger with two taels of silver, and sent him back with a written reply. He then proceeded to weigh out the necessary silver to Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing, so that they could order the table settings, see to the preparation of the sweetmeats, and contract for all the other needed supplies, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "From the time that she first became ill, right up until the present moment, I haven't been able to relax for even a single day. I have barely been able to finish off the business of the funeral, when this kind of thing comes up, leaving me with:
Groping hands and floundering feet."[73]
"There is no need for you to complain, Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, you did not solicit this obligation. He sought you out and imposed it upon you. Even though this banquet stands to cost you a good deal of money, in the future, the fact that you have entertained the presiding officials from the whole province of Shantung, including the grand coordinator, the regional inspector, and miscellaneous military officers, not to mention the imperially commissioned defender-in-chief of the Palace Command, will only serve to shed glory on this household of yours, and further enhance your prestige."
"That's not the point," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I had hoped that it would be scheduled for some time after the twentieth, but now, contrary to my expectation, the welcoming event is to be held on the eighteenth. I'm feeling altogether too:
Pressured and pushed.
Moreover, the eighteenth falls within the fifth week after her death, and I've already paid Abbot Wu Tsung-che to draft the petitions for the observance scheduled for that day. How can I change it? But if I don't:
The ends of the fire tongs will get
entangled with each other.
How will I ever manage it?"
"That's no problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "As I calculate it, since Sister-in-law died on the seventeenth day of the ninth month, the twenty-first day of this month marks the end of the fifth week after her death. If you hold your banquet on the eighteenth, you can still schedule a scripture recitation on the twentieth without its being too late."
"You're right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send a page boy to tell Abbot Wu to reschedule the date."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've got another suggestion to make. You should take advantage of the fact that at the present time Perfect Man Huang Yüan-pai from the Eastern Capital is in temporary residence at his temple. The Emperor dispatched him to the subprefecture of T'ai-an in order to present a hanging censer decorated with golden bells for the burning of imperial incense,[74] and officiate at a seven-day rite of cosmic renewal[75] on the sacred peak of Mount T'ai. This presents you with the opportunity, before he returns to the capital, to ask Abbot Wu to invite him to preside as the high priest at your ceremony on the twentieth. Thus you can avail yourself of his name to add luster to the occasion."
"To be sure," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I, too, have heard that this Perfect Man Huang is a very charismatic prelate. In that case I would have to make arrangements for a plenary service, with an additional twenty-four Taoist priests, in order to make a day and night ceremony out of it. The only problem is that Abbot Wu has already presented a sacrificial offering during the second weekly commemoration, and I also prevailed upon him to preside over the ceremony of displaying the portrait during the funeral procession, and to supply the Taoist acolytes who accompanied the catafalque. Not having any other way to compensate him, I engaged his services to officiate at this scripture recitation, meaning it to be:
No more than a token of my esteem.
Now if I should invite this Perfect Man Huang to act as the chief celebrant, is he not likely to be offended?"
"The responsibility for the ceremony as a whole," said Ying Po-chüeh, "will remain in the hands of Abbot Wu. He will only be inviting Perfect Man Huang to officiate, that's all. It will cost you a few more taels of silver, Brother, but, after all, it is for my sister-in-law that you are doing it, not for anyone else."
Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith instructed Ch'en Ching-chi to write out a card on his behalf addressed to Abbot Wu, enclosing another five taels of silver for the drafting of the ceremonial petitions, and requesting him to extend the invitation to Perfect Man Huang, reschedule the scripture recitation for the twentieth, supply an additional twenty-four Taoist priests, and expand the ceremony into a Water and Fire sublimation ritual extending over a day and a night. As soon as this was completed, he ordered Tai-an to go on horseback to deliver it.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen off Ying Po-chüeh, he went back to the rear compound where Wu Yüeh-niang greeted him by saying, "Pen the Fourth's wife has purchased two gift boxes for us. She has come to kowtow and inform us that their daughter, Chang-chieh, has become engaged to someone."
"To whom has she become engaged?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Pen the Fourth's wife, who was wearing a blue damask jacket, a white damask skirt, and a black satin cloak, and her daughter, who was dressed in a jacket of crimson satin over a skirt of yellow damask, and whose hairdo was adorned with trinkets, kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing four times as formally as though inserting a taper in its holder.
"I didn't know about it either," said Yüeh-niang, who was standing to one side. "It turns out that this child is to be elevated to the position of a concubine in the household of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling. The engagement was only formalized yesterday, and she is to be carried across his threshold on the twenty-fourth. They have obtained a mere thirty taels of silver for her. If you stop to consider it, the child has already developed a good figure. She doesn't look like a fourteen-year-old, but more like a girl of fifteen or sixteen. It's been some time since we've seen her, and she's grown up to such an extent in the interim."
"The other day, at a drinking party," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he mentioned that he was planning to secure a couple of girls in order to have them trained as musicians, but I didn't know that you had offered your daughter to him."
Thereupon, he suggested to Yüeh-niang that she usher them into her parlor and invite them to stay for a cup of tea. Later on, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all came in to greet them and help keep them company. As they were about to leave, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang gave them a set of heavy silk brocade clothing and a tael of silver, while Li Chiao-erh and the others each gave them trinkets, handkerchiefs, cosmetics and the like.
That evening. Tai-an came back and reported that Abbot Wu had accepted the silver and understood what was wanted, that Perfect Man Huang was still in residence at the temple and would not return to the Eastern Capital until after the twentieth, and that he would come a day early, on the nineteenth, in order to set up the altar.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing remained at home to supervise the chefs in making advance preparations for the banquet, and see that everything was in proper order. Outside the main gate he erected a seven-story-high tower of variegated bunting in the shape of a mountain, and in front of the reception hall another one of five stories.
On the seventeenth, the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien sent two district officials to inspect the preparations for the banquet. They found that at the head of the reception hall:
The screens displayed their peacocks' tails, and
The floor was covered with woolen carpets:
The tablecloths were fabricated of brocade, and
The seat cushions flaunted floral designs.
The place of honor for Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en, from which he would be in a position to survey the feast, featured a large portable table with a setting of a kind intended as much for display as for eating, to be supplied with seasonal delicacies and other culinary specialties, cone-shaped piles of fruit and ingot-shaped cakes, as well as high-stacked pyramids of square-shaped confectionery stamped with the images of the Five Ancients and richly decorated with brocade. There were two smaller portable tables beside it so that the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor could keep him company. Ranged along either side were the tables for the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, while the communal seating for the officials of the eight prefectures was in a temporary structure outside the reception hall. The arrangements for the officials seated on either side of the hall were to be individual table settings of the ordinary kind, provided with five appetizers and five dishes. When the district officials had finished their inspection of the arrangements they were entertained to tea by Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they got up and returned to report on their findings.
The next day, the grand coordinator Hou Meng and the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, at the head of an entourage of mounted men, proceeded early in the morning to meet the boat of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. The resulting procession was preceded by a large yellow banner emblazoned with the two words "Imperially Commissioned" in the Emperor's own hand. The local military officials, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the seal-holding officers of the left and right battalions of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, all attired in their martial uniforms and armor, at the head of their mounted subordinates, followed in its wake. Accompanied by an honor guard of soldiers bearing blue flags, tasseled spears, and tridents, the procession extended over several li in length.
Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en was dressed in a crimson robe emblazoned with the images of two pythons, one on the front and one on the back, done in variegated embroidery. He rode in a curtained sedan chair with a silver finial on top, carried by eight bearers, accompanied by eight outriders, and shielded by a tea-leaf-colored canopy above. The staff officers who followed in his entourage were without number, all of them mounted on mettlesome steeds that neighed as they proceeded. All in all, the procession resembled a glittering tapestry of a myriad figures, as it wended its way along the road, to the music of drums and wind instruments.
Clouds of yellow dust enveloped the highway;
Sounds of chickens and dogs were not heard;[76] and
Woodcutters and gatherers stayed out of sight.
As the cavalcade of men and horses passed through Tung-p'ing prefecture and entered Ch'ing-ho district, the area by the roadside was rendered black by the number of district officials kneeling there to welcome the procession. The attendants of the defender-in-chief ordered them to rise and assist in clearing the streets all the way to the main gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, where:
The beat of the Music Office drums,
Reverberated to the cloudy empyrean,
and the officers and functionaries, attired in black livery, were drawn up in order like the wings of a formation of wild geese.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal black attire, stood there waiting respectfully as he gazed at the approaching dust. It took some time for the escorting cavalcade to pass by, after which, the defender-in-chief finally alighted from his sedan chair and came inside, while the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor, at the head of the other officials, both high and low:
Swarmed inside as a single throng,[77]
and entered the reception hall. Within the reception hall, the refined music of psaltery and mandola, metallophone and gong-chimes, dragon flutes and phoenix pipes,[78] was heard to resonate.
The first persons to formally present themselves to the visitor were the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, and the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, and the defender-in-chief responded to them with appropriate protocol.
Next came left provincial administration commissioner of Shantung, Kung Kuai,[79] left administration vice commissioner, Ho Ch'i-kao,[80] right provincial administration commissioner, Ch'en Ssu-chen,[81] right administration vice commissioner, Chi K'an, left assistant administration commissioner, Feng T'ing-hu, right assistant administration commissioner, Wang Po-yen,[82] investigation commissioner, Chao No,[83] investigation commissioner, Han Wenkuang, surveillance vice-commissioner of education, Ch'en Cheng-hui,[84] assistant commissioner of the Military Defense Circuit, Lei Ch'i-yüan, and so forth. When the personnel of the Two Provincial Offices had finished presenting themselves, the defender-in-chief responded to them with somewhat less elaborate protocol.

When it came to Prefect Hsü Sung of Tung-ch'ang, Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing, Prefect Ling Yün-i [85] of Yen-chou, Prefect Han Pang-ch'i[86] of Hsü-chou, Prefect Chang Shu-yeh[87] of Chi-nan, Prefect Wang Shih-ch'i[88] of Ch'ing-chou, Prefect Huang Chia[89] of Teng-chou, and Prefect Yeh Ch'ien[90] of Lai-chou, the presiding officials of these eight prefectures presented themselves as a group, and the defender-in-chief merely responded to them with a low bow.

When the local military officials, including Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and so forth, presented themselves, the defender-in-chief simply remained sitting upright in his place, allowing them to dispose themselves as they would, standing in attendance outside the reception hall.

Finally, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling stepped up to pay their respects and offer their visitor tea, after the consumption of which, the grand coordinator, Hou Meng, and the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, came forward with cups in hand to offer toasts to the defender-in-chief. At this, the drums struck up beneath the dais, as the defender-in-chief was presented with floral ornaments of gold and toasted in jade goblets. Only after toasts had been exchanged and the wine replenished did the defender-in-chief take his seat in the place of honor, while the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor sat down in their positions below him to preside over the feast. The rest of the officials, including Hsi-men Ch'ing, then proceeded to sit down in their respective places.

When a director from the Music Office had presented an album listing the program of pieces they were prepared to perform, the music commenced. Every one of the performances, including both instrumental and vocal music, and ensemble dance pieces, was presented in appropriate order, displaying to maximum advantage the beauties of sound and color. During the feast, after a scene from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *P'ei Chin-kung huan-tai chi* (The story of P'ei Tu's return of the belts)[91] had been performed, the chef came out to preside over the carving of the entrées of roast venison and pork, served with a soup of a hundred ingredients, other culinary specialties, and steamed open-topped dumplings. After this, four of the musicians, playing the psaltery, mandola, *p'i-p'a*, and harp, without any percussion instruments, sang a song suite in the Nan-lü mode, beginning with the tune "A Sprig of Flowers":

Holding office as one of the Eight Bulwarks of the state,
Drawing a salary of a thousand bushels,[92] or thereabouts,
His deeds will be remembered for a hundred generations.
His name will be renowned for a myriad years of spring.
His strict propriety ensures his success and honesty.
Governing the realm and stabilizing the country[93]
are his only considerations;
His mode of presiding over the vessels of state[94]
is innovative.[95]
In his adherence to protocol and leadership of
the loyal and true,
His only concern is to requite his ruler and
display magnanimity.
In relying upon the worthy and upright while
adhering to justice,
His sole endeavor is to clarify the laws and
transform the people.[96]

By the time the singing was over, the second soup course had not yet been served, although three musical performances had been presented.

Meanwhile, the regional investigating censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, deputed two district officials to take care of the various servitors and attendants in the visitor's entourage in Hsi-men Ch'ing's summerhouse, where tables had been set up for their entertainment. As for Commandant Chou Hsiu, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the other local officials, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for them to be entertained in a guest room in the front compound, where seats had been provided for them.

At this point, Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en ordered his attendants to reward the serving staff with ten taels of silver, after which, he called for his sedan chair and prepared to make his departure. The various officials present, after having repeatedly endeavored to detain him without success, proceeded to see him out to the front gate.

The music of drums and pipes resounded once more, as
The clamor of his escort filled the adjacent streets.
Outriders prepared to clear the way, as
Men and horses lined up in formation.

The officials mounted their horses and proposed to escort him for some distance, but the defender-in-chief ordered them to desist, raised his hand in salute, got into his sedan chair, and proceeded on his way. Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Grand Coordinator Hou Meng ordered the guards officers serving under Militia Commander Chang Kuan to escort him all the way to the imperial vessel in which he had come, and then come back and report to them. The table settings and utensils that had been prepared for the visitor, along with the congratulatory offerings of mutton and wine, were turned over to Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-P'ing and Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command, together with an accordion-bound album listing the perquisites involved, for them to deliver to the imperial vessel and hand over in person.

When Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien returned to the reception hall, together with Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, he thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Today we have imposed egregiously upon your illustrious household. We are profoundly grateful, profoundly grateful. If our contribution to the expenses proves to have been inadequate, we will endeavor to make up the difference."

Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily:
Bent his body to perform an obeisance,
saying, "Your pupil has repeatedly benefited from your instruction and consideration, and has often been the recipient of your lavish presents, not to mention the consolatory gifts you bestowed upon me the other day. As for these:
Paltry and insignificant expenses,
They are:
Hardly worth hanging on the teeth.[97]
My snail-like abode is so inadequate I fear it may not have lived up to your expectations. My only hope is that Your Excellency will excuse my remissness. That would be fortunate indeed."

No sooner had Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien finished expressing his thanks than he ordered his attendants to call for his sedan chair and departed, along with Grand Coordinator Hou Meng. The officials of the Two Provincial Offices and the eight prefectures, having said their farewells, followed suit, after which the various members of the serving staff that had been hired for the occasion:
Dispersed in a single tumult.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the reception hall, he arranged for the directors and musicians from the Music Office to be rewarded with food and drink, after which they, too, were allowed to depart. He retained only the services of the four boy actors that were on duty for the occasion. Whatever was left of the table settings that had been provided for the various officials both inside and outside the reception hall was carried off by their servants. But no more of this.

Observing that it was still relatively early in the day, Hsi-men Ch'ing had the utensils cleared away and found that there was enough left over to supply four tables with a sumptuous repast. He then sent servants to invite his brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen the Fourth, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been up since the fifth watch that morning and was exhausted by all the matters he had been made responsible for, to join him for a drink.

It did not take long for the group of them to arrive. Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh, and Hsieh Hsi-ta were seated at the head table, Hsi-men Ch'ing presided over the proceedings as host, and the various managers were arrayed to either side, while the servants brought out the wine to be served at the party.

"Brother, you've certainly had a busy day of it," opined Ying Po-chüeh. "How long did Defender-in-Chief Huang stay, and was he pleased by the occasion, or not?"

"Today," remarked Han Tao-kuo, "the venerable eunuch Huang, on seeing what a splendid banquet had been provided for him, could not have been anything but pleased. The grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor certainly felt that:
Their gratitude knew no bounds,
and expressed their gratitude again and again."

"If any other household had attempted to put on a banquet of this kind, they could never have pulled it off," stated Ying Po-chüeh. "They would not have the space available in this household of yours and would lack the number of hands that you have at your disposal. At a conservative estimate, you must have had more than a thousand people on your premises today, and they all had to be provided for. Even though it must have cost you a good deal of silver, Brother, it will have the effect of spreading your fame throughout the entire province of Shantung."

"Even your pupil's mentor," chimed in Licentiate Wen, "the venerable vice-commissioner of education, was present at the feast today."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked him to explain, Licentiate Wen said, "His name is Ch'en Cheng-hui. He is the son of the venerable Ch'en Kuan [98] of the Remonstrance Bureau. His native place is Chüan-ch'eng district in Honan province. He began to compete in the examination system at the age of seventeen and became a metropolitan graduate in the year *jen-ch'en*.[99] At present he holds the local office of surveillance vice-commissioner of education and is renowned for his erudition."

"This year then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he is no more than twenty-three years old."

As they were chatting, soup and rice were served. After they had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing called up the four boy actors and asked them their names.

"Your servants are called Chou Ts'ai, Liang To, Ma Chen, and Han Pi," they replied.

"You must be from Han Chin-ch'uan's place, aren't you?" said Ying Pochüeh.

Han Pi knelt down and replied, "Han Chin-ch'uan and Han Yü-ch'uan are both my younger sisters."

"Have you had anything to eat and drink?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"Your servants have just finished our food and wine," replied Chou Ts'ai.

Because the memory of Li P'ing-erh had come into his mind, and he had been disappointed at not being able to see her during the banquet that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing said to the boy actors, "Fetch your instruments and come over here. Can you perform the song that begins with the words:
The flowers of Lo-yang,
The moon of Liang-yüan,[100]
or not? I'd like you to sing it for me."

Han Pi knelt down before him and said, "Your servant and Chou Ts'ai do know it."

Thereupon:
Strumming the psaltery and plucking the mandola,[101]
To the beat of the clappers inlaid with red ivory,
they sang the song to the tune "The Whole Realm Rejoices":
The flowers of Lo-yang,
The moon of Liang-yüan;[102]
Fine flowers must be purchased;
The bright moon is only on loan.
Leaning on the balustrade, we viewed the flowers
as their blossoms proliferated;
With wine cups in hand, we interrogated the moon
on the nights we were together.
The moon waxes only to wane;[103]
Flowers blossom only to wilt.
It seems that in this life the hardest thing
to bear is separation.[104]
The wilting of the flowers means that
the end of Spring is near;
The waning of the moon indicates that
Mid-Autumn will soon come;
But once one's loved one has departed
when will she ever reappear?[105]

When they had finished singing this song, Ying Po-chüeh, who noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing's eyes were feeling sour and were on the brink of tears, said, "Brother, other people may not understand what is on your mind, but I know a thing or two about it. You asked them to sing this particular song because its words related to something in your heart. It must be because you were thinking of my late sister-in-law, and how the two of you used to be like intertwined branches, or the fish that swim in pairs, having only one eye apiece. Now that you are separated, how can you help longing for her?"

Observing that saucersful of sweetmeats were being brought out for them from the rear compound, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Brother Ying the Second, you may take exception to what I say, but when she was here she would have prepared these things with her own hands. Ever since she died, it's been left to the maidservants to concoct them, with the result that they're hardly worth looking at. There isn't so much as a single tasty morsel for me to enjoy."

"Confronted with such a lavish spread as this," Licentiate Wen objected, "the venerable gentleman can hardly be said to lack a competent domestic staff. It is more than sufficient."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you really oughtn't to talk that way. It may well be only because you can't get over your heartache that you say such things, but they are likely to have a chilling effect on the feelings of my other sisters-in-law."

As they continued to converse over their drinks, they were not aware that P'an Chin-lien was standing behind the hanging screen in order to listen to the singing. When she overheard what Hsi-men Ch'ing said, she went back to the rear compound and repeated it, word for word, to Yüeh-niang.

"You might as well let him say whatever he likes," said Yüeh-niang. "After all, what can you do about it? Remember how, the other day, when she was still alive, I promised her that I would arrange to have Hsiu-ch'un work for the Second Lady. But when I tried to do so, he opened his eyes wide and shouted at me, saying, 'How long has she been dead, after all, that you would presume to separate the maidservants from her quarters?' I was reduced to having nothing further to say about it. And you, too, must have noticed, the last few days, how that wet nurse and her two maids have been carrying on. And if I so much as open my mouth about it, he accuses me of trying to get rid of them."

"Mother," said Chin-lien, "I also have noticed how that woman has altered her demeanor the last few days. I fear that that lousy shameless good-for-nothing of ours, who has been spending all day in her quarters, is making out with that woman. It would hardly surprise me. I've heard that, the other day, he gave her two pairs of ornamental hairpins, and that the woman has had the effrontery to wear them on her head, showing them off, first to this one, and then to that one."

"Bean sprouts don't lend themselves to being bundled,"
said Yüeh-niang.

Thus it was that, behind their backs, everyone:
Conveyed the clear impression that they were not happy.

Truly:
If one's real work had ever found favor in the eyes
of one's contemporaries;
One would not have had to spend money on rouge
in order to paint peonies.[106]

A poem testifies to this:
Beneath the terrace of King Hsiang of Ch'u[107]
the water flows on unhurried;
A single case of heartsickness[108] is able to
produce sorrow in two places.[109]
The moon itself is completely oblivious of
the changes in human affairs;
As, late at night, it continues to shine on
the crest of the plastered wall.

The twenty-eighth day of the tenth month was the fourteenth day after the death of Li Ping'er. This was the second week's mind, and Abbot Wu with sixteen monks from the Daoist Temple of the Jade King came to make sacrifice. They brought banners and set up an altar in the house. A letter came from Secretary An. Ximen Qing entertained the messenger and dismissed him.
Abbot Wu brought a table of food and a roll of silk as his personal offering. The monks sang dirges, and the abbot solemnly made reverence before the coffin. Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji returned the reverence.
"Teacher," Ximen said, "you should not have done so much. We really do not know how we can accept this offering."
"I am ashamed of my unworthiness to offer sacrifice for your lady," Abbot Wu said. "These little things are no more than a trifling indication of my regard for her." Ximen Qing accepted the offerings and the men who had brought the boxes were sent away. The monks busied themselves most diligently with their ceremonies. They sought the dead lady in the nine dungeons of Hell; they summoned her spirit; they prayed for her relief.
The next day, the first to arrive was Uncle Han, who lived outside the city gates. With him came Meng Yulou's brother, Meng Rui, who had returned from his business abroad. Hearing that there was a bereavement in Ximen Qing's household, he came with Uncle Han, brought an offering of his own, and asked to be permitted to wear mourning. After paying his respects to Ximen Qing, he went to see his sister. Later, Ximen Qing entertained him.
About noon, a number of civil officers came. There were Li Gongji, the District Magistrate; Qian Sicheng, the Assistant Magistrate; Ren Lianggui, the Deputy Assistant Magistrate; and the Jail Warden, Xia Gongji. The District Magistrate of Yanggu, Di Sixiu, came with them. The five gentlemen were all wearing mourning and brought with them presents and paper offerings. Ximen Qing, with Uncle Wu and Scholar Wen, entertained them, and three young actors sang for them.
While they were drinking, Ximen Qing was told that his Excellency, Huang, the Controller of the Brickfields, had come to offer his condolences. He hastily put on his mourning robes again and went to the coffin. Master Wen went out to the gate to welcome his Excellency. Servants came bringing incense, paper offerings, and silk, and they walked in procession to the coffin. Huang burned incense and made a reverence to the dead. Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji returned the reverence.
"I did not know that your lady was dead," Huang said, "or I should have been here sooner. I am sorry to be so late."
"It is a long time since I have been to see your Excellency," Ximen Qing said, "and now you come to me with such gifts. I don't know how to thank you." He took Huang to the hall. There Ximen Qing and Master Wen sat down with him, and the servants brought tea.
"Song Songyuan sends his love to you," Huang said. "He has heard of your lady's death and would have liked to come and see you, but he is very busy at the moment and has had to go to Jizhou. You may not have heard that His Majesty is going to set up an artificial mountain on the north of the imperial city. He has appointed Grand Marshal Zhu Mian to proceed south of the Yangzi River to collect the Taihu stones. The boats have been coming down one after another, and the first of them has now reached the Huai and will come down the river into Shandong. The stones are beautifully marked and in pieces about twenty feet long and several feet wide. Each piece is covered in yellow wrappings, and the boats, which are very many, all carry yellow flags. The river is shallow just now and people have been brought together from all around to tow the boats. It has been a most unpleasant time for officials and people alike, and the people, especially, are finding life very hard. Our friend Song has to see to everything himself and direct all the underlings in his district. There are so many orders and instructions that they would make a mountain. Song is busy all day and all night, and never has a moment to himself.
"Now, Grand Marshal Huang is coming from the Capital, and friend Song, with all his staff, is going to receive him. He has asked me to say that, as he has no other friend here to whom he is able to appeal, he hopes you will entertain the Grand Marshal."
He bade his servants summon the messengers whom Song had sent. Two officials in black robes came and knelt down. They brought presents of gold silk, incense, candles and paper. "These are the things Song has sent on his own account. The other parcels contain the presents from his staff. From the Provincial Treasurer and the Provincial Judge, twelve; and from the officers of the Prefecture, eight. In all there are twenty-two presents, a hundred and six taels."
He offered the gifts to Ximen Qing and again asked if he would entertain the Grand Marshal.
Ximen Qing hesitated. "I am in mourning, and I do not know what I ought to do. When is His Grace coming?"
"There is plenty of time," Huang said, "he won't be here for another six weeks. He has not left the Capital yet."
"My wife is to be buried on the twelfth day of the tenth month," Ximen Qing said. "Since you and his Lordship are good enough to give me such a proof of your confidence, I will do what you wish. But I cannot accept these presents. Say what you would have me do and I will make the necessary preparations."
"Nothing of the sort," Huang said. "Song asked me to approach you on the matter, and these presents have been sent by all the officers of the province. They are not from Song alone. You can't possibly refuse them. If you insist, I shall take them back and we will not ask you to do anything for us."
"In that case," Ximen Qing said, "I have no option in the matter." He told Daian and Wang Jing to remove the presents. Then he asked what preparations it would be necessary to make.
"For his Grace," said Huang, "a long state table. For Song, the Provincial Treasurer and the Provincial Judge, a table on the floor level, and, for the lower officers, tables of the common sort. We ourselves will provide for the servants and musicians. You need not trouble about them."
Tea was brought a second time and Huang stood up to take leave. Ximen Qing asked him to stay, but the Controller said: "I am on my way to see Shang Liutang. He used to hold the post I have now, and afterwards he was made a judge at Chengdu. His son, Liangquan, passed the examination when I did."
"I did not know you were a friend of Liangquan," Ximen Qing said. "He is a good friend of mine too."
Huang made ready to go. "Please give my respects to his Excellency Song," Ximen said, "and tell him I await his pleasure."
"When the time comes, he will send word," Huang said. "Do not be too extravagant in your preparations."
Ximen Qing escorted Huang to the gate. He mounted his horse and rode away.
When the magistrate and the officers heard that Huang had come with officials from the provincial government, they were tremendously alarmed, and ran away to hide in the small arbor near the artificial mound. They told their servants to take their horses and sedan chairs away. When Ximen Qing rejoined them, he told them that Song had asked him to entertain Grand Marshal Huang the following month. With one voice they made complaint: "Our district is poor enough already. If the Grand Marshal comes, we shall have to provide all kinds of things, banquets, materials and servants, and we shall have to extract the money from the people. What more dreadful calamity could have overtaken us? We only hope you will speak to his Excellency on our behalf, for we are all friends of yours." They went away.
The days passed until it was the twenty-first day after the death of Li Ping'er. The abbot Daojian of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the gates came with sixteen monks to perform the appropriate rites. They wore embroidered vestments and large hats, and, with their drums and great gongs, performed a very imposing ceremony.
On the twenty-eighth day the priests of Baoqing Temple came to sing the Buddhist liturgy for the dead. Ximen Qing was not at home. He had gone to the grave with Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, to watch the pit being dug. He came back in the afternoon, and, in the evening, all the monks departed. The next day, he sent wine, food, and other things to the grave, and instructed his servants to put up a temporary building, the size of three rooms, near the site of the grave. The neighbors were entertained and, afterwards, everybody was given a present.
On the eleventh day, very early, a troop of singing boys came with their gongs and instruments to perform some farewell plays before the coffin. They played *The Five Demons Playing Pranks on Ban Guan; Zhang Tianshi Being Led Astray by Devils; Zhong Kui and the Little Ghosts; Laozi Passing over Han Guan; The Six Thieves Deceiving Amida; Plums in the Snow; Zhuangzi Dreaming of the Butterflies; The Heavenly Prince Sending Down Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind;* and many another. The ladies watched the plays from the other side of the screen. When they were over, all the relatives came and burned paper offerings before the coffin. They made loud lamentation.
The next day was the funeral. At a very early hour the obituary banner was brought out, together with a host of other banners and objects made of paper. Musicians and Buddhist and Daoist clergy came. Ximen Qing had arranged with Major Zhou for fifty soldiers, all fully equipped with arms and horses. Ten of them were on duty at the house; the other forty marched on either side of the coffin. Another twenty men from his own department marched in front and attended to the paper objects. Still another twenty had gone before to the funeral ground to guard the gate and receive the offerings that might be sent there.
Officers, scholars, relatives, friends and neighbors assembled for the funeral. There was a great din of horses and carriages arriving, and the street was full of people. Many more than a hundred sedan chairs brought ladies. Even the smaller sedan chairs of the singing girls might have been counted in scores.
Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, selected the moment for the procession to start.
Ximen Qing gave directions for Sun Xue'e to stay at home with the two nuns.
Ping'an and two soldiers stood at the gate.
Chen Jingji, on his knees before the coffin, broke a cup into many pieces. Then sixty-four undertakers lifted the coffin upon their shoulders, their directors standing upon a raised platform and signaling instructions by striking a wooden gong. The priests of the Temple of Eternal Felicity chanted a dirge and the procession started down the main street and turned to the south. The masses of people on either side of the street seemed like a sea of men, a human mountain. The weather was fine, and it was a magnificently imposing funeral.
Banners bearing characters of gold; banners with characters of silver Following close behind the coffin.
Parasols of white silk and parasols of green silk
Carried by those who walk before it.
Banners for worthiness fluttering in the breeze.
Cries and groans of lamentation all the way.
Soldiers marching to clear the road
Brandish staves of olive wood.
Acrobats coming to meet the god, trying to display their skill
Tumble and twist to left and right
With bodies lithe as falcons
Clambering like monkeys over their horses
Standing on their heads
Turning somersaults
Passing coins through their bellies
And standing on one leg like golden cockerels.
The people applaud
Each trying to praise more loudly than his neighbor.
Shoulder to shoulder and back to back
Wise and foolish undistinguishable
Nobles and commonalty, all are there to see.
Zhang the Fifth, the big blockhead
Puffing and blowing.
Li the Fourth, the dwarf
On his toes all the time.
White-haired old gentlemen
Propping their beards on their sticks.
Dark-haired beauties
With babes in their arms
All come to look at the funeral procession.
There were more than ten sedan chairs for Wu Yueniang, Li Jiao'er and the other ladies. They followed the coffin one behind the other. Ximen Qing, wearing a hempen hat and mourning dress, walked with the others immediately after it. Chen Jingji placed his hand upon the coffin, and so they came to the beginning of East Street. There Ximen Qing, in accordance with the Rites, called upon Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade King to set up the portrait. The Abbot wore a gown embroidered with a scarlet stork, a hat of the Nine Thunders, and a pair of orange-colored shoes. In his hand was an ivory tablet. He rode in a sedan chair carried by four men. He advanced towards the coffin, bearing the large portrait of Li Ping'er. Chen Jingji knelt down, and the procession halted. Then, while all listened attentively, the Abbot began to read.
"This is the dead lady of Ximen, officer of the Royal Guard. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year *Xinwei;* and departed this life very early in the morning of the seventeenth day of the ninth month of the seventh year of the reign Zhenghe. She lived for twenty-seven years. The glorious dead was an excellent lady of high degree, most beautiful of wives. Nature endowed her with a loveliness like that of flowers and the moon. Her disposition was as fragrant as the orchid. In temper and behavior, she was gentle and sweet; in character, agreeable and harmonious. And as she was wise and gentle when in her own family, so, after her marriage, she lived most perfectly with her husband. A child she bore, like the jade of Lantian, but he drooped as the blossom of an orchid. We hoped that a hundred years of happy life might be before her, but, alas, she lived but twenty-seven. As the bright moon always fades, so the treasures of this world easily elude us. She, this excellent lady, died suddenly, for whether we die young or live to old age is for the Fates to decide.
"Now we bear her coffin through the streets, and mourning banners wave in the breeze. Her worthy husband laments before her bier, and her household, here in the street, are broken-hearted. So deep is their affection that they can never forget her. But lest, being dead, the remembrance of her appearance should be dimmed, we, who unworthily assume this hat and these ornaments of the Daoist faith, unworthily because we failed to restore her to health, can only, with all due reverence, follow the traditions of our ancestors and set forth her portrait for exhibition.
"We cannot bring back the butterfly of Zhuangzi's dream, but we hope that in Paradise she may partake of sweet dew and precious refreshment. When she comes face to face with the True God, she will be adorned with a hundred jewels and her pure spirit will not long remain in Hades. Then will her mind forget all things, for all things, in very truth, are but illusion.
"So, as her body is buried, may her spirit become a pure breeze. This true spirit will go away and return no more, and she will enter into eternal life. Hearken now, while we bid her a last farewell. We know not whither her spirit goeth, but her portrait will remain for people of future generations to gaze upon."
The sedan chair, with the Abbot sitting upright within it, slowly withdrew. The music played and there was a great lamentation. The funeral procession moved forward. When it came to the East Gate, the relatives and Ximen Qing mounted horses, but Chen Jingji continued on foot behind the coffin all the way to the grave.
Captain Zhang and two hundred soldiers, and the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, were at the burying place, stationed on the hillock. There they received the coffin with music. Paper offerings were burned, and the smoke reached the skies. When the body was brought to the hill, the undertakers set it down while Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, went with them to examine the grave with a compass. When everything was ready, sacrifice was made to the god of the place; the coffin was lowered into the grave, and earth cast upon it.
Then Ximen Qing changed his clothes, and, taking two rolls of silk to Major Zhou, asked him to put the final dot upon the tablet. After this, the officials of Ximen's office, and his relatives and friends, offered wine to him. The music thundered and fireworks blazed everywhere. It was a magnificent scene.
After taking some refreshment, they prepared for the return journey. Yueniang sat in the Spirit's sedan chair, with the tablet and the banner. Chen Jingji went back with the Spirit's bed, the fourteen Daoist novices accompanying him, playing music all the way. Both uncles Wu, Master Qiao, uncles Hua, Shen and Meng, Ying Bojue and Xie Xida, Master Wen and the clerks, came back with Ximen Qing. The ladies' chairs followed. When they reached the gate, a fire was lighted. Then they went in, and set up the tablet in the room of Li Ping'er. Master Xu performed various ceremonies, purified the whole house, and set yellow charms upon all the doors to keep away evil spirits. He was given a roll of silk and five taels of silver, and went away. The other guests went too. Ximen Qing took twenty strings of small money, five for the policemen, five for the soldiers of his own department, and ten for those of Major Zhou. He sent a servant with his card to thank Major Zhou, Captain Zhang and Magistrate Xia. He urged Master Qiao and the others to remain, but they declined and went away.
Laibao came. "The men who set up the temporary buildings await your orders," he said. "They propose to remove everything tomorrow."
"I do not wish them taken down yet," Ximen said. "Tell the men to come after I have entertained Censor Song."
In the inner court, Mistress Hua and Mistress Qiao waited to see the tablet set up, then they made a last lamentation and went away.
That evening, Ximen Qing, still thinking of Li Ping'er, went to her room. The tablet was placed in the position of honor, facing her portrait. The smaller portrait was next to the tablet. There was a small silver bed and silver coverlets in a shrine, complete in every way with ornaments, and, beneath it, a pair of tiny shoes. On a table were incense, flowers, candles, plates, bowls and all kinds of things offered to the dead. Ximen Qing cried again. He bade Yingchun make a bed for him opposite the tablet. In the middle of the night he watched the lonely lamp and the moon shining through the window. He tossed about on his bed and sighed. All the time, he thought of the beauty he had lost.
Mournfully he sighed before her shuttered window
Lonely and broken-hearted, like the phœnix
That has lost his mate.
The orchids are withered, and the rain of autumn falls

The maple leaves drop into the river
In the frosty night.
Their longing to be together was in vain
In this life he will never more behold her.
If the dead know what passes in the world
Then there must be two heartbroken lovers
One still on earth, the other in the underworld.

When day came, Ximen Qing watched the maids offer food and tea to their dead mistress, and he took his own meals there. When he took up his chopsticks, he looked towards the tablet and invited his dead lady to eat with him. Seeing this, the maids and the nurse shed tears. When he was alone, Ruyi'er used to come and give him tea and things to eat. She would find means to touch him, and an excuse for saying something or other, and soon they were on very good terms with one another.

One day, Ximen Qing invited a number of ladies and gentlemen to a service at the grave, and, when he came back, he was drunk. Yingchun helped him to bed. In the middle of the night he wished for some tea, but Yingchun was not there and Ruyi'er brought it for him. She noticed that his bedclothes had almost fallen on the floor, so, when she had given him the teacup, she gathered them up for him. This touched him; he put his arms around her neck and kissed her. Then he slipped his tongue between her lips. She let it pass, but did not speak. Ximen told her to undress, and they got into bed together and played with great delight.

"Now my mistress is dead," Ruyi'er said, "I will stay here and serve you, if you love me."

"If you serve me well," said Ximen Qing, "you need not worry."

After this, the woman did all she could to give him satisfaction, and was ready to do everything he wished. This pleased him.

The next day she got up and brought his shoes and socks, made the bed, and would not allow Yingchun to do anything for him. Ximen took four pins that had belonged to Li Ping'er and gave them to her. She kowtowed and thanked him. Yingchun knew this and joined forces with her. Ruyi'er, realizing that her position was now secure, and that she no longer needed help from anyone else, became quite different in manner. Every day she dressed beautifully and mingled with the other maids. She talked and joked so much that Pan Jinlian remarked it.

One morning, Ximen Qing was sitting with Ying Bojue, when one of the servants told him that a man had come from Song the Censor. He had brought a set of gold and silver wine cups, a pair of gold wine pots, two pairs of gold goblets, ten pairs of small silver cups, two pairs of silver jars, four pairs of large silver cups, two rolls of scarlet silk, two rolls of gold silk, ten jars of wine, and two sheep. He said that the Grand Marshal's boat had now arrived at Dongchang, and brought a message asking Ximen Qing to prepare for his entertainment on the eighteenth. Ximen accepted all these things, and gave the man a tael of silver and his card. He ordered Ben the Fourth and Laixing to buy whatever might be necessary.

"Ever since my sixth wife's illness," Ximen said to Ying Bojue, "I have never had a moment to myself. Now the funeral is over, there comes this business, and I shall be more occupied than ever."

"You must not complain, Brother," Bojue said, "it is not of your seeking. They came to you. You will certainly have to spend a little money, but the presence of the high officers of the province will make your house glorious."

"That is not what is troubling me," Ximen said, "but I expected they would come sometime after the twentieth. If they come on the eighteenth, things will have to be done in a hurry. It will be the thirty-fifth day after her death, too. I have made arrangements for a service with Abbot Wu, and I cannot alter the date. Even if I could alter it, I couldn't manage with these two things coming on the same day."

"I don't see any difficulty about it," Bojue said. "My sister-in-law died on the seventeenth day of the ninth month, and the fifth week's mind will be on the twenty-first. You have this reception on the eighteenth and the service on the twentieth. That does not seem too late to me."

"Very well," Ximen said, "I will send a boy to explain matters to the Abbot."

"There is another matter," Bojue said. "His Holiness, Huang, who has been deputed by his Majesty to go to Taian to offer incense, and also to accomplish the solemn sacrifice to Heaven that lasts for seven days and seven nights, is staying at present at our temple here. Before he goes away, you might get Abbot Wu to invite His Holiness to come and hold a service here. We should be only too glad to have a cleric of such great renown."

"Yes," said Ximen, "everybody says that Huang is a real saint. I would ask him to come, but Abbot Wu, you know, sent me a number of presents the other day; he displayed the portrait of my dead wife, and his priests came to the funeral. There was nothing I could do in return for all these attentions except to ask him to come and perform the sacrifice. If I now invite Huang, I don't know how I can make things right with Wu."

"Ask Wu to arrange the whole affair," Ying Bojue said, "and suggest that he invites Huang for the final ceremony only. If you spend a few more taels, there need be no difficulty. And, after all, you are spending money for your wife and not for anybody else."

So Ximen Qing told Chen Jingji to write a letter to the Abbot, requesting him to invite Huang, and saying that the day for the service would be the twentieth. Twenty-four monks would be wanted and the service should last for a day and a night. Five taels more were sent with the letter, which Daian was ordered to deliver on horseback immediately. Ying Bojue went away and Ximen Qing joined Wu Yueniang in the inner court.

Yueniang told him that Ben the Fourth's wife had brought her daughter Changjie to present her on the occasion of her engagement. They had brought two boxes of presents with them. Ximen Qing asked to whom the girl was engaged.

Mistress Ben the Fourth and her daughter, who was wearing a red silken gown, a yellow skirt, and many ornaments upon her hair, came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. Yueniang stood beside them. "I hear," she said, "that Magistrate Xia has made choice of this young lady. The arrangement was yesterday, and the wedding is to be upon the twenty-fourth. He gave only thirty taels of silver for her. She is good to look upon, and no one would think she was only fifteen. She seems more like sixteen or seventeen. She has grown so much in the short time since I saw her last."

"He told me the other day," Ximen Qing said, "that he was thinking of securing two young ladies and having them taught music, but I never thought of asking who they were."

Wu Yueniang entertained Mistress Ben the Fourth and her daughter, and Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, Sun Xue'e and Ximen Dajie came and joined them. When Mistress Ben went away, Yueniang gave her a complete outfit of heavy silk and a tael of silver. Li Jiao'er and the other ladies all gave her something: flowers, ornaments, kerchiefs, powder, or something of the sort.

In the evening, Daian returned and said that Abbot Wu had accepted the silver. "His Holiness Huang," he said, "is still here and will remain until after the twentieth. They will come on the morning of the nineteenth and prepare the altar and the dais."

The next day, Ximen Qing gave instructions to the cooks, insisting that everything should be of the very best. At the great gate he set up a seven-storied pagoda, and, before the great hall, one of five stories.

On the seventeenth, there came two officers from Song to see what preparations had been made. At the upper part of the hall they saw a peacock screen. The floor was covered with colored rugs. The chair cushions and tablecloths were all embroidered. The food that had been prepared for the Grand Marshal was the finest imaginable and the delicacies were delightful to eat as well as to look at. Two smaller tables were set for the two provincial officers, and there were a few other tables for provincial officers of rank. Outside the hall, in the temporary building that had been put up, were a number of tables for five courses of food and five of dessert for the officials of the eight districts. When the officers had finished their inspection, Ximen Qing gave them tea, and they went back to report to their superiors.

The next day the provincial dignitaries came with a host of officers to await the arrival of the Grand Marshal's boat. They had with them a yellow banner with the words imperial commissioner, and before them was carried the imperial decree. The officers, guards and soldiers of every kind were in full dress, marching behind their banners. The procession stretched for miles.

Then came Grand Marshal Huang. He wore a robe with the scarlet dragon embroidered upon it and rode in a sedan chair carried by eight men. Another eight men marched beside it. This chair had a silver top and the canopy above it was tea-colored. A host of officers and attendants followed, all mounted upon splendid horses. The procession was as fine as a bouquet of ten thousand flowers. They marched along to the strains of martial music. The road was strewn with yellow sand. As the procession advanced, there was such a silence that even the dogs did not bark or the cocks crow. Not a soul dared step forward.

They passed through Dongpingfu and arrived at Qinghe. The officials of the district knelt on either side of the road, till the Grand Marshal's guard called out: "Stand up, stand up!" Messenger after messenger was dispatched to Ximen's house.

At last they arrived, and the noise of the music was great enough to reach the skies. Beside the gate, in double ranks on either side, stood officers robed in black. Ximen Qing himself, also in black robes and hat, bowed low to the dust. The soldiers marched past, and the Grand Marshal's chair appeared. The Grand Marshal came in, followed by a crowd of people of high and low degree. He entered the great hall and the music played again, stringed and wind instruments together.

First, the Governor of Shandong, Hou Meng, and the Censor, Song Qiaonian, came to greet the Grand Marshal, and he returned their salutations. Then the Provincial Treasurer of Shandong, Gong Qi; State Counselor He Qigao; Provincial Treasurer Chen Sizhen; State Counselor Li Kanting; Counselor Feng Tinggu; Counselor Wang Boyan and a number of other provincial officers came to salute his Excellency, and he received them with pleasant affability. They were followed by the Prefects of the eight Prefectures. These made reverence from the courtyard, and the Grand Marshal bowed low to them in return. The captains and military officers came then, but the Grand Marshal sat still and took no notice of them. All the officers went back to remain in waiting outside.

Ximen Qing and Xia came to offer tea to the Grand Marshal. The two officers of highest rank present, Hou and Song, themselves handed the cup to His Grace. The music played. Then they offered a golden flower, and wine in a goblet of jade. The Grand Marshal moved towards his table, and, when he had seated himself, the Governor, the Censor and the other officers sat down in due order. Ximen Qing sat down too. The manager of the company of actors brought his repertory and the dance began. Both dancing and music were extremely well performed. They played the first act of *Pei Jingong returns the Girdle*. When this was over, cooks brought meat, venison and pork, with all manner of sauces and dressings, soup, a hundred kinds of the richest and rarest of viands, with rice and *shaomai*. Then four actors, with zithers, flute, lute and cittern, sang songs unaccompanied by dancing. While two courses of soup were being served, the music played three times. Song appointed two officers to entertain the Grand Marshal's attendants in the temporary rooms, while Ximen Qing had arranged for the entertainment of the military officers in the outer court.

The Grand Marshal bade his attendant to distribute ten taels of silver among the servants. Then he called for his sedan chair and prepared to leave. He could not be persuaded to remain longer, and the officers escorted him to the gate. Then the music played again; banners and insignia were ranged in order on either side of the street. Officials went forward to clear the way, and the soldiers set out with a fine martial step. A number of officers prepared to mount their horses to accompany His Grace, but this he would not allow. He stepped into his sedan chair and was carried away, and all the soldiers were ordered to escort him to his boat. The two senior officers, Hou and Song, had arranged for supplies of food, and these, with their cards, they entrusted to Hu Shiwen, the Prefect of Dongpingfu, and the Captain of the Bodyguard, Zhou Xiu, to take to the boat.

The Governor and the Censor returned to the hall and thanked Ximen Qing. "This has really put you to grave inconvenience," they said, "and we do not know how to thank you. You must tell us whether the money we sent was adequate, so that we may make up any deficiency."

Ximen Qing bowed. "I am grateful to you," he said, "for entrusting to me so pleasant a duty, and making so magnificent a present. I only fear that, in my poor house, the entertainment has been unworthy of the occasion. Will you forgive me if there has been anything amiss?"

Song thanked him again, then called for his sedan chair and went away with the Governor. All the other officers hastened after them. Ximen Qing went back to the hall and gave food to the musicians and actors and they, too, went away. Four young actors alone were bidden to stay. Then all that belonged to the officers was taken away by their servants.

Seeing that it was still early, Ximen Qing had the tables cleared, and the food collected upon four of them. Then he sent boys to invite Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Scholar Wen, the clerks, and his son-in-law, Chen Jingji. Many of them had risen before dawn that day and had been busy all the time, and he wished to offer them a feast in return. Before long, they all arrived and sat down to drink.

"Brother," said Ying Bojue, "how long did the Grand Marshal stay? Was he pleased with his entertainment?"

"I am sure His Grace must have been pleased when he saw such a splendid feast," Han Daoguo said. "The Governor and the Censor were perfectly satisfied. They thanked his Lordship repeatedly."

"I can think of no other house that could offer so magnificent a reception," Bojue said. "In the first place, no other house here is so spacious, and, secondly, no other house could welcome so many official people. You must have entertained at least a thousand today. Well, it may have been rather expensive, but your fame will spread throughout the province."

"My old teacher Chen was here too," Scholar Wen said.

"Who was your teacher?" Ximen Qing asked him.

"Chen Zhenghui," Scholar Wen said. "He is the son of the censor, Chen Liaoweng, a native of Zhengcheng in Henan. When he was only eighteen years old, he passed the senior examination. Now he is President of the Board of Education and a very learned man."

"He is about twenty-four years old now," Ximen Qing said.

Food was brought in. While they were eating it, Ximen Qing sent for the four young actors and asked their names. They were Zhou Cai, Liang Duo, Ma Zhen and Han Bi. Ximen Qing said to the last of them: "Are you any relation of Han Jinchuan?"

Han Bi knelt down and said: "Han Jinchuan and Han Yuchuan are my younger sisters."

The mention of the girls' names reminded Ximen of Li Ping'er. It made him sad to think that on such a glorious occasion as this she was no longer with him. "Take your instruments," he said to the boys, and sing 'The Flowers of Luo-ang and the Moon of Liangyuan.'" Han Bi and Zhou Cai tuned their instruments and sang.

Flowers of Luoyang
Moon of Liangyuan.
Perfect blossoms we may buy and keep a little while
Bright moon, which, for a moment, we may borrow.
The flowers on the trellis seem so beautiful
We stretch out our wine cups to the full moon.
The moon is full, and then it wanes
The flowers blossom and then fade.
Parting is the bitterest thing in life.
The flowers fade, but Spring has still her beauty.
The moon wanes slowly, but the Autumn Festival will come again.
Only we mortals die and never return.

When the song was over, Bojue saw tears in Ximen Qing's eyes. "Brother," he said "you told them to sing that song. Are you still thinking about your dead lady?"

Ximen noticed the plates of dessert at the other side of the table. "Brother Ying," he said, "you think my mind is always upon her. Look at those dishes. When she was alive, she used to arrange them with her own hands. Now she is dead, the maids do it. You can see for yourself whether the dishes are properly set out or even fit to eat."

"Judging by this meal," Scholar Wen said, "I do not see that you have any reason to complain of your ladies."

"Brother," said Ying Bojue, "you cannot get over your grief at her loss, but to talk in this way is hardly fair to the other ladies."

As they talked and drank together, Pan Jinlian was listening to them behind a curtain, secretly. When she had heard what Ximen Qing said, she went straight to the inner court and told Wu Yueniang all about it.

"Let him say what he likes," said Yueniang, "it's no use your imagining you can do anything to stop him. While she was still living, she promised Xiuchun to the second lady. Now he says she has only been dead a little while and we must not give her maids to anybody yet. I said nothing, but you have seen for yourself what airs the nurse and those two maids have been giving themselves lately. If I begin to say a word to them, he says I am too rough with them."

"Ruyi'er has certainly been different the last few days," Jinlian said. "I'm very much afraid she'll turn out to be a troublesome baggage. He spends all his time with her. I hear, too, that he gave her two sets of pins and she put them in her hair so that everybody could see them."

"They're a rubbishy lot," Yueniang said, "and none of them seems to have any morals."

## 089

### Majordomo Chai Sends a Letter with a Consolatory Contribution; Perfect Man Huang Conducts a Rite for the Salvation of the Dead & the Solemn Sacrifice

The translucent windows on all eight sides
open one after the other;
Yielding a view of her girdle pendants as she
descends the jasper terrace.
Outside the boudoir door the Spring colors
blend with the new willows;
On the mountain ridges the cold plum blossoms
bedeck the verdant slopes.
The shadows of the plum branches begin to stir
as the bright moon ascends;
A breeze agitates the bamboos along the path,
auguring a friend's arrival.
The beauty, having left behind a specimen of
her mandarin duck brocade;
It is up to the Lord of the East to decide
what should be done with it.[1]

On that day as Hsi-men Ch'ing continued drinking with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and company, he asked Han Tao-kuo, "When is the convoy of merchant vessels with its armed escort scheduled to start out, so we can get things packed up in advance?"

"Yesterday someone came to inform me about it," said Han Tao-kuo. "The boats will start out on the twenty-fourth."

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we can wait until after the scripture service on the twentieth to pack up."
"Which two people are you sending on this expedition?" asked Ying Pochüeh.
"I'm sending three people in all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I plan to have Ts'ui Pen return first next year with a boatload of merchandise from Hang-chou, while Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao go on to the five entrepots below Sung-chiang to acquire cotton goods for sale. I have enough in the way of satin and silk fabrics already in stock."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what you propose is right on the mark. As the saying goes:
You've got to have everything in stock
in order to do good business."
By the time this conversation was finished it was already the first watch and Wu K'ai got up to go, saying, "Brother-in-law, you've been wearing yourself out for days on end, and we've already had enough to drink. We had better take our leave so you can get yourself some rest."
Hsi-men Ch'ing objected to this and endeavored to retain them a little longer, ordering the boy actors to serve them with wine and sing a few more songs for their entertainment. Only after each of his guests had downed another three goblets of wine did he allow them to leave the premises.
Hsi-men Ch'ing proposed to reward the four boy actors with six mace of silver, but they repeatedly refused to accept the gratuity, saying, "His Excellency Sung Ch'iao-nien issued summonses mandating our attendance. How could we accept Your Honor's generous reward?"
"Even though you were here on official orders," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "this is my personal expression of appreciation. What are you afraid of?"
Only then did the four of them kowtow in gratitude, accept the gratuity, and depart. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to go back to the rear compound and go to bed.
The next day, he got up early and went off to the yamen.
Early that morning, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor sent a disciple of his, along with two vergers, to take charge of setting up the altar space in the large reception hall. At the upper end of the altar space were placed images of the Three Pure Ones and the Four August Ones. [2] In the middle was placed an image of the Grand Monad Heavenly Worthy Who Saves from Distress,[3] with images of the Gods of the Eastern Peak and Fengtu[4] to either side of it. At the lower end of the altar space were placed images of the Ten Kings[5] who rule over the Nine Realms of Darkness that constitute the underworld; the two marshals with their Divine Tiger talismans that guard the altar; the Four Great Celestial Lords Huan,[6] Liu,[7] Wu,[8] and Lu;[9] the Divine Empress of the Moon; the Seven Perfected Jade Maidens who govern the fates of deceased women; and the seventeen divine marshals of the Tribunal for Suspended Lives whose job it is to summon up the souls of the dead.[10]
Both within and without the altar space,
Everything is arranged in perfect order;
The incense, flowers, lamps, and candles,
Are arrayed in glittering resplendence.
Censers are supplied with the famous
"hundred-blend" incense;[11]
Hanging lamps are suspended loftily
around the sacred area.
The scripture lecterns are in place,
Curtained off by drapes of gold lamé;
Ritual drums are situated on high stands,
Surrounded by cranes in variegated clouds.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home and saw the preparations that had been made, he was utterly delighted. After seeing to it that the disciple and the two vergers had been supplied with a vegetarian meal before returning to their temple, he immediately told Licentiate Wen to write out cards inviting Ch'iao Hung, Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Meng Jui, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Wu Shun-ch'en, and all the other relatives and female guests to attend the scripture reading on the following day. He also directed the chefs that had been hired for the occasion to make the advance preparations for the oblations that would be required. But no more of this.
The next day, at the fifth watch, the cohort of Taoist priests that had been engaged for the occasion waited for the opening of the gate in the city wall before being allowed to enter and proceed to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Once there, after calling for the opening of the front door, they went directly to the altar space that had been set up for the scripture reading, where they lit the lamps and candles, washed their hands and ignited the incense, struck up their musical instruments, and began the recitation of the sacred texts, beginning with the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*.[12]
Meanwhile, outside the main gate, the vergers suspended a long banner announcing the rites to be performed, hung up a placard with an inscription describing the nature and purpose of the ceremony, and pasted parallel statements, written on yellow paper in large characters, to either side of the doorway. The parallel statements read:
The Sovereign of the East displays benevolence,
Enabling the souls of the dead to transcend
the position of immortals and
ascend to the Purple Elysium.
The Celestial Lord of the South forgives sins,
Enabling purified souls, after undergoing
the refining of sublimation, to
mount to the Vermilion Height.
The inscription on the placard read as follows:
In order to uphold the Way and save the soul of the departed, her devoted husband, the faithful office holder Hsi-men Ch'ing, resident of such and such a precinct of the Ch'ing-ho district of Tung-p'ing prefecture in Shantung province of the Great Sung Empire, together with his entire household and the assembled relatives and guests, wish on this day to express their sincere devotion, and appeal to your powers of compassionate magnanimity on behalf of the spirit of his consort, née Li, whose life in this world extended into her twenty-seventh year. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *hsin-wei* and died at 2:00 AM on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the seventh year of the Cheng-ho reign period. I respectfully submit that: As our connubial feelings were profound, I cannot but sigh over the untimely parting of the male and female phoenixes; since the moon shines coldly on her boudoir, I deplore the fact that we can no longer harmonize like zither and cithara. Merely grieving over her memory is unbearable, yet I cannot but think longingly of her voice and appearance. Light and darkness alternate all too swiftly,[13] and it is already time for the fifth weekly commemoration of her death. Wishing to rescue her incarcerated soul, I respectfully tender my ardent expectations. On this twentieth day of the present month I have reverently engaged the services of these duly ordained Taoist officiants to come to my house of mourning and erect an altar for the performance of a sublimation ritual of the sworn alliance with the perfected, including the promulgation of the talismanic texts inscribed on jade tablets; and the nine recitations according to hallowed precedent of the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, and invocations from the sacred texts contained in the precious storehouse of the Taoist Canon. We solicit the attendance of the deities riding on their lion steeds to bestow the light of their beneficence, so that their golden lamps can dispel the darkness; and the conferment of their talismans in dragon script that abolish guilt, so that its pain may be as surely impeded as by iron pillars. In the deep of night, may the souls of the departed be enabled to cross the variegated bridge to the tinkle of their jade pendants; and may they be able to dine on the evening mist, ascend to the azure empyrean and meet with the Golden Perfected. It is our humble desire that the Supreme Deity may confer his benevolence from the jade steps of his palace, and that the Lord of the East may vouchsafe his attention from the vantage point of his Verdant Abode. May they broadly extend the benevolence of their compassion, and greatly display their powers of salvation, so that the souls of the departed may soon mount to the realm of freedom and ease, and the incarcerated spirits may all be able to ascend to the Celestial Paradise. May the relatives of the household, both living and dead, enjoy propitious auspices, and may their kindred be able to attain the Taoist shore. It is to be hoped that all those who participate in this rite of redemption shall be enabled to achieve salvation. Such is the purpose of this placard.
The placard is dated such and such a day, in such and such a month, of such and such a year of the Cheng-ho reign period.
The officiant is the Savant of the Highest Purity Great Cavern Scriptures and Registers, the Grand Master of the Golden Gates of the Nine Heavens, the Assessor of the Jade Palace of the Divine Empyrean, the Superintendent of the Various Thunder Bureaus, the Prelate of Lofty Attainments Who Elucidates Tenuity, Amplifies the Way, Embodies the Mystery, Cultivates Simplicity, and Upholds the Doctrine, the Superintendent of the Temple of the Supreme Unity, the Precentor of the Imperial Altar, and Director of Taoist Affairs throughout the Empire, the High Priest Huang Yüan-pai.[14]
Over the altar space that had been set up for the scripture reading in the main reception hall there was suspended a twenty-character announcement of the rite to be performed, written in a large script, which read:
Litany to be addressed to the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, including the dispatch of talismanic announcements, on the occasion of the scripture recitation on the fifth weekly commemoration of the decease of the departed, on the ritual altar for the performance of a Water and Fire sublimation rite of salvation.
That day, Perfect Man Huang, dressed in a crimson robe, riding in an ivory sedan chair, girt with a golden girdle, surrounded by his attendants, with his outriders shouting to clear the way, did not arrive until the sun was already high in the sky. Abbot Wu, at the head of his cohort of Taoist priests, ushered him up to the altar space and went through the ceremonies of greeting, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing, dressed in white clothing and a mourning cap, paid his respects. After tea had been served, a lectern for the scripture reading was set up beside the altar table, supplied with a crimson gold lamé altar cloth and a figured seat cushion. Two Taoist acolytes stood in waiting to either side of him. Perfect Man Huang had a distinguished demeanor, wore a cap of black satin with a jade ornament in front, and was dressed in a robe of crimson silk that featured a *tou-niu* design,[15] and a pair of black shoes. Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared a bolt of satin brocade to present to him when he was ready to dispatch the documents.
When the documents had been signed and he was ready to ascend the altar, Perfect Man Huang changed into a ninefold-yang thunder cap, a crimson Taoist robe embroidered with golden clouds and white cranes, the pattern of which extended to its flying sleeves,[16] soft white satin socks, and vermilion cloud-scaling ceremonial slippers. An outward-facing Pavilion of Heaven and Earth was set up, covered by two gilded flabella, where Golden Lads presented incense, and Jade Maidens scattered flowers, while holding aloft pennants and standards. As for the divine marshals who guard the altar, the talismanic functionaries of the Three Worlds, the four duty officers in charge of the year, the month, the day, and the hour,[17] the God of Walls and Moats, the divinity of the soil, the local tutelary god, and his attendants, there were none whose presence was not invoked. On the high priest's incense table were arrayed five talismanic writs for summoning the celestial sovereigns, a black pennant for evoking thunder deities, the jade ruler of the celestial general T'ien-p'eng,[18] a sword incised with a diagram of the seven stars of the Dipper, and a ritual ewer of purified water.
Only when the lector had finished declaiming the text of the announcement, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, as the ordainer of the rites, had washed his hands and presented incense, did two thurifers, swinging their hand-held censers and facing outwards, perform the ceremony of presenting incense three times in order to invite the presence of the various deities invoked. At this point, the high priest rapped his tablet of authority on the table and burnt incense in order to dispel pollution and cleanse the altar space, sent flying talismans in order to summon the generals, dispatched all the relevant documents and talismans, [19] petitioned the Three Heavens, and enunciated the covenant to the Ten Courts of the Underworld. After the three sacrificial libations had been offered, music was struck up, paper money was burned, and the rite of circumambulation while burning incense was performed. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'en Ching-chi, carrying hand-held censers, followed in the wake of the procession, while orderlies shouted to clear the way. In front and behind there were four gold lamé flabella, as well as three pairs of tasseled standards.
The relatives of the family were all lined up outside the front gate, where a temporary structure housing the spirit tablet of the deceased was erected in the street, and orderlies were deputed to look after the soup, rice, and other purified offerings that were presented before it. When the circumambulatory parade returned, and the consecration of the ritual altar was complete, a vegetarian repast was provided in the summerhouse. That day, the relatives and friends, neighbors, and employees of the household who came to make sacrificial contributions:
Arrived in an unbroken stream.[20]
Hsi-men Ch'ing had Tai-an and Wang Ching accept these gifts, make a record of them, and bestow gratuities on the servants who took back the boxes in which they were contained.
After the morning invocation the Three Treasures were invited to authenticate the covenant, the various talismans and texts were promulgated, and the ceremonies of "breaking out of Hell" and "summoning the soul" were performed. Music was struck up again, and a ritual for attracting and summoning the soul of the deceased was performed in front of Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet. During the morning audience, the table that held her spirit tablet was placed at the foot of the altar so that while paying court before the jade steps [21] she might hear the scriptures and achieve enlightenment. The high priest, seated on his elevated throne, recited the *Chiu-t'ien sheng-shen chang ching*, and burnt petitions addressed to the Grand Monad, the Gods of Feng-tu and the Eastern Peak, and the Ten Kings of the courts of the underworld, dressed in their caps and capes, and riding in their cloud chariots.
At the noon audience, the high priest, attired in his formal headgear and vestments, proceeded to:
Pace the stars and tread the Dipper,[22]
respectfully presented a memorial written in red characters to the Verdant Abode of the Heavenly Savior from Distress Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East, requesting him to dispatch the divine marshals to fly down to Mount Lo-feng.[23]
It so happens that Perfect Man Huang was about thirty years old, and:
His demeanor was out of the ordinary.
When he was garbed in his formal regalia in order to preside over the noon audience, he looked just like a living god or immortal. Truly, what did he look like? Behold:
His star-embellished cap is enhanced with leaves of jade;
His crane-decorated robe is embroidered with gold clouds.
His spirit is as pure as the hoary moon
over the Yangtze River;
His visage is as ancient as a tall pine
on the summit of Mount Hua.
When treading the stars, his red shoes
traverse the glowing clouds;
When pacing the void, his sacred texts
float amid auspicious vapors.
With his long beard and broad cheeks,
He has practiced austerities until attaining
the Heaven of No Imperfection;
With his white teeth and bright eyes,[24]
He has mastered the registers that give him
command over the Five Thunders.
The Three Isles and the Ten Continents,[25]
he visits by conserving his nature;
The grotto heavens and blessed abodes,
he explores by self-induced trance.
Loftily he dines upon the evening mist;
Quietly he attends upon the Primordial.
When he traverses the moon at the third watch
the cries of the phoenix are distant;
When he mounts the clouds for ten thousand li
his seat on the crane's back is high.[26]
It is as if the Grand Master of the Immortals
has come to visit the mundane realm;
Or just as though the Perfect Man Kuang-hui[27]
has chosen to visit the world below.[28]
Once the memorials had been presented, Abbot Wu presided over the altar, where he dispatched the *Sheng-t'ien pao-lu*, or *Precious Registers for Rebirth in Heaven*, and the *Shen-hu yü-cha*, or *Jade Talismans of the Divine Tigers*. After the rite of circumambulation while burning incense had been performed at noon, the celebrants returned to the summerhouse where a vegetarian repast had been prepared for them. Perfect Man Huang was placed before a large table setting, replete with ingot-shaped cakes, Abbot Wu and the other Taoist officiants were provided with somewhat smaller-scale table settings, and the rest of the Taoist

company had individual table settings of the ordinary kind. Perfect Man Huang and Abbot Wu were each given a bolt of satin, the four officiants who were entitled to wear figured vestments each received a bolt of woven silk, and each of the remaining Taoist priests was rewarded with a bolt of cotton fabric. The table settings were turned over to servants to take back to the temple, and the Taoist priests had their disciples put the bolts of fabric they had received into their trunks, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

After the midday vegetarian repast was over, the Taoist celebrants thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing for his hospitality and then proceeded to wander through the various pavilions, terraces, and grottoes in the garden as they digested their meals. Meanwhile, the utensils were cleared away, and new table settings of greater and lesser elaborateness were provided with vegetarian fare, of which Wu K'ai and the other relatives and friends of the household were invited to partake.

As they were eating, it was suddenly announced that Majordomo Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital had sent a courier to deliver a letter. Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went out to the reception hall and invited the messenger to come in. It turned out to be one of the factotums on the staff of the grand councilor's establishment, dressed in black livery, with tight-fitting trousers, wearing a flat-topped cap and dark-tan boots, and equipped with a complete set of bow and arrows. After he had come forward and bowed in greeting, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned the compliment, he pulled out a letter and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who found that the outer envelope contained a packet of ten taels of silver as a consolatory contribution.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked the courier his name, he replied, "Your humble servant's surname is Wang, and his given name is Yü. I have been commissioned by His Honor Chai Ch'ien to deliver this letter to you. He didn't know about your bereavement. It wasn't until a letter from His Honor An Ch'en arrived in the capital that he learned about it."

"When did His Honor An Ch'en's letter arrive?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"His Honor An Ch'en's letter did not reach the capital until sometime in the tenth month," replied the courier. "Because his one-year appointment to be in charge of expediting the delivery of imperial lumber has expired, he has been promoted to the position of secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works. Right now, he has been imperially commissioned to take charge of the repair work on the Grand Canal and will not return to the capital until that task is completed."

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had questioned him for a while, he told Lai-pao to provide him with a vegetarian meal in one of the side rooms in the front courtyard and directed him to return the next day to pick up his reply.

"Where does Han Tao-kuo reside?" the courier asked. "I have a letter for him here from his daughter in Chai Ch'ien's household. After seeing him, I have to go on to deliver a letter in Tung-p'ing prefecture."

Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately summoned Han Tao-kuo, and, after keeping the courier company as he ate his vegetarian meal, the two of them went off to Han Tao-kuo's house together.

Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the letter to see what it was about and then happily took it to the summerhouse to show to Licentiate Wen, saying, "You can draft a letter in reply to this one, and I'll also send him ten crepe handkerchiefs, ten satin handkerchiefs, ten low-grade gold toothpicks, and ten black gold wine cups as a return gift. The courier is coming back tomorrow to pick up the reply."

Licentiate Wen took the letter and proceeded to peruse its contents, which read as follows:

Respectfully indited by his devoted servant in the capital, Chai Ch'ien, for the perusal of the newly promoted officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, his distinguished kinsman Hsi-men Ssu-ch'üan:

Since the day when we shook hands and bade each other farewell at my residence in the capital, I have not had the opportunity for a leisurely chat with you, which I profoundly regret. As for those matters which you entrusted to me, I have already laid them out before His Honor the grand councilor.

It is only recently, in a letter received from An Ch'en, that I learned that my venerable kinsman was drumming on a basin and sighing[29] over the death of his wife, but the fact that I have not been able to express my condolences in person is an occasion for sorrow. What is one to do? What is one to do? I respectfully hope that the observance of the rites will serve to moderate your grief. In addition, I offer a consolatory contribution, as a paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings, in the hope that you will deign to accept it with a smile.

I have long admired the way in which, in your distinguished post, you have conspicuously devoted yourself to the promotion of virtuous government, with the result that the populace sing of their five pairs of trousers, [30] and you are renowned for their having tried three times to prevent you from relinquishing your position. At this year's merit rating you are certain to receive a promotion. The other day, the officers in charge of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys reported on their last two missions, and I have already spoken to His Honor the grand councilor about adding my kinsman's name to the list of deserving officials. When the memorial on the completion of the Mount Ken Imperial Park is submitted, you are sure to be the beneficiary of imperial largess. My kinsman will have the pleasure of being promoted to the office of judicial commissioner, while Hsia Yen-ling, on the basis of the annual end-of-year evaluation, will be transferred to the position of commander of the escort for imperial processions in the capital. I respectfully provide advance notice of this in the humble expectation that you will give it your highest attention. I am unable to express myself more fully. [31]

PS. This letter is for your perusal alone. No word of it should be allowed to reach his ears. It is strictly confidential. Strictly confidential.

PPS. His Honor Yang Chien died in prison on the twenty-ninth day of last month.

Indited during the first decade of the first month of winter.

To resume our story, when Licentiate Wen had finished reading the letter, he was about to put it in his sleeve when Ying Po-chüeh snatched it away from him, read it over, and then handed it back to him, saying, "Venerable sir, whatever happens, do your very best to compose a well-written reply. In Master Chai Ch'ien's household there are many men of talent, and we wouldn't want to give them any occasion for mirth at our expense."

Licentiate Wen replied:

"When sable-tailed cap ornaments run out,
They can only be supplanted by dog tails.[32]
Your pupil is lacking in talent. How could I:
Show off my skill with an axe before the gate
of Lu Pan, the master carpenter?[33]
All I can do is endeavor to fulfill my responsibilities."

"The venerable gentleman will have his own ideas about how to go about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What does a dog like you know about such things?"

Before long, when they had finished with the midday vegetarian repast, Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Lai-hsing to see to the delivery of the leftover delicacies to the homes of the various relatives and neighbors. But no more of this.

Tai-an went to deliver return gifts to the six establishments in the licensed quarter that had sent contributions toward the cost of the ceremony, namely, those of Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, Han Chin-ch'uan, Hung the Fourth, and Ch'i Hsiang-erh. Each of them received a bolt of muslin and a tael of silver.

During the course of the afternoon, the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, were called upon to entertain the company.

After some time, the group of Taoist celebrants once again ascended to the altar space, where they proceeded to beat their drums, pay reverence to the celestial court, perform the ritual of penance, conduct the lamp-lighting ritual, [34] take temporary leave of the altar, and then perform the rite of seeing off the celestial worthies.

In the waning light, by the time the preparations for the *chiao* ritual had been completed, it was already the first watch. Hua Tzu-yu, who resided outside the city gate, was invited to stay overnight by Hsi-men Ch'ing and so did not take his leave. Ch'iao Hung, Brother-in-law Shen, and Meng the Second said farewell and went home before the others. This meant that only Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Licentiate Wen, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, and the group of employees remained behind to observe the Water and Fire sublimation rite of salvation that was to take place that evening.

In the temporary structure outside the large reception hall, an elevated throne had been set up, a variegated bridge of papier-mâché had been constructed, a basin containing water and a basin containing fire were put in place, and food for the souls of the dead was provided. Offerings were neatly arrayed before the table that held Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet, under its own marquee. Her soul banner was placed beside it, together with a red banner and a yellow banner, and above it was suspended an inscription that read:

Overcome demons and guarantee the opportunity,[35]
To undergo sublimation in the Southern Palace.

The cohort of Taoist priests and musicians were already arrayed on either side, while four Taoist acolytes stood in waiting to either side of the ritual throne, grasping tallies, and holding a ritual ewer and a sword. Perfect Man Huang, wearing a yellow gold demon-subduing cap and a crimson silk robe embroidered with variegated sunset clouds, ascended to the elevated throne, and:

Recited an incantation.

At this point, the music stopped, and two thurifers, swinging their hand-held censers, declaimed a gatha:

May the benevolent worthy, the Grand Monad,
order his carriage to descend,
And the somber gates of the valley of night
to open one after the other;
In order to let the acolytes, pair by pair,
go in front and lead the way,
That the dead souls may undergo sublimation[36]
and mount the cloudy stairs.

Perfect Man Huang, having fumigated his vestments, performed his ablutions, and burned incense, went on to chant an invocation, as follows:

We humbly submit that: The Mysterious Sovereign, in founding our religion, opened up a way of salvation from the road to the shades: the sect of Orthodox Unity, in transmitting its rites, has enabled us to refine the bodies of the dead so they may achieve transcendence. These mercies extend to incarcerated souls; these benefits ameliorate the fate of hungry spirits. Diligently dispersing genuine incense, we sincerely invoke the attendance at this sacred rite of the Great Compassionate and Merciful Occupant of the Palace of the Eastern Apogee Who Listens to the Voices of the Distressed and Is Moved to Respond to Their Needs, the Grand Monad Heavenly Worthy Who Saves from Distress, i.e., the Sovereign Deity Who Dwells in the Blue Heaven of the East and Presides over the Nine Yang, his avatars, the Great Perfect Men Who Save from Distress of the Ten Directions, the celestial and terrestrial transcendents, the officers of the Three Worlds, the deities of the Five Peaks, the Ten Kings of the Underworld, and the worthies of the Water Bureau and Mount Lo-feng. We respectfully hope that your lion throne will float through the void, [37] and your dragon pennant sparkle in the sunlight, that you may dispense the malachite elixir that dispels distress, and the sweet dew and ambrosia that generously alleviate the hunger of bereaved souls. Today, we dedicate a provisional offering upon the table holding the spirit tablet of the deceased and transmit the talismans that will abolish the guilt of those incarcerated in the Nine Realms of Darkness, so that their interrogations may be ended and their punishments cease. We humbly observe that the human beings who dwell in this world of dust are daily entangled in mundane affairs. Oblivious of their impending death, they merely seek to covet life. Few are able to plant the roots of goodness; most, consequently, fall into evil ways. Too befuddled to achieve enlightenment, they give free rein to their desires, resorting to covetousness and anger. In the expectation that they will live forever, they do not believe how easily death may come. When the day arrives and they suddenly pass away, everything reverts to nothingness. [38] Karmic encumbrances beset their bodies, as they suffer torments in the court of the underworld. At present, in accordance with the Way, we humbly observe that because the spirit of Hsi-men Ch'ing's deceased consort, née Li, has relinquished its worldly ties and been engulfed for some time in the eternal night, if it is not rescued from the impediment of its sins, it is sure to find it hard to avoid a painful retribution. We respectfully hope that the Heavenly Worthy, whose name has been renowned for untold kalpas, and whose pneuma coordinates the Nine Yang, will exercise his benevolent nurture of life by rescuing those souls that cry out in pain; asperse his sweet dew so as to nourish the diverse species; shed his auspicious light in order to illuminate the paths of darkness; order the Three Officers to relax the protocols of interrogation; command the Kings of the Ten Courts of the Underworld to set aside their adjudicatory brushes; liberate the incarcerated and set free the imprisoned; forgive their transgressions and dispel their enmities; allowing each one of them to follow the talismanic functionaries in escaping completely from the somber gates. May they all experience the purgation of the basins of water and fire in order to bathe the yellow efflorescence of their refined bodies, so that they may all be reborn, and hope to regain the Taoist shore.

The high priest then recited the *Wu-ch'u ching*, or *Scripture of the Five Feasts*,[39] and the sacred spell that transmutes the food offerings, thereby distributing the ritual foodstuff to the hungry spirits. The high priest then continued to declaim, as follows:

As I have heard: the Nine Pneumas float in Heaven, though the Nine Pneumas came into existence before the Great Void;[40] the Nine Realms of Darkness lie clustered beneath the Earth, and the Nine Realms of Darkness are concealed beneath stacks of layered Yin. When the Nine Pneumas are properly arrayed, [41] the myriad beings are all brought to life,[42] which is why they are the root of Heaven and Earth. Each being is conceived in the womb[43] and depends for its nurture on the Three Origins.[44] The reason why human beings suffer from death and decay is that they are unable to cherish their forms, preserve their spirits, value their pneumas, and solidify their roots,[45] thus forsaking their true natures.[46] In order to be reborn, their forms must be bathed in the Great Yin, and their substance refined by the Great Yang, so that the Nine Pneumas may cause them to coalesce, and the Three Origins re-create them in the womb, thereby giving renewed shape to their forms. Were they not able to rely upon the immutable laws of the Most High, and the esoteric commands of Lao-tzu, the founder of the school of the Mysterious Origin, how could they hope to find a way of salvation for their incarcerated souls, or expect the restoration of their original bodies, enabling them to mount the auspicious clouds and attend upon the Primordial,[47] while overcoming demons and being guaranteed redemption? To this end, we shall reverently present the true talisman of the Numinous Treasure for the refinement of the bodies of the dead.

The Lord of Grand Tenuity summons
with his yellow pennant,
The deity of Florescent Nonbeing
directs the soul banners.[48]
Attracting and summoning the dead
from their eternal night,
They provide a way of salvation for
their resurrected souls.[49]

The Taoist celebrants first took Li P'ing-erh's soul banner, immersed it in the basin of water, and burnt a talisman addressed to Chieh-lin, or the Ladies of the Moon, after which they exchanged it for the red banner. They then put this in the basin of fire and burnt a talisman addressed to Yü-i, the Emperors of the Sun, after which they replaced it with the yellow banner.[50] The high priest then declaimed the words:

The Heavenly number one begets water,
The Earthly number two begets fire;
When water and fire are refined together,
They give birth to the true form.[51]

Once the sublimation ceremony was completed, the soul of the deceased, attired in its formal cap and cape, was invited to cross the golden bridge, pay court before the jade steps, and confess her allegiance to the Three Treasures. [52]

The assembled celebrants then intoned the three refuges and presented the "Five Offerings"[53] before each of them:

HOMAGE TO JADE CLARITY
In the Taoist school we honor,
The Lord of Jade Clarity.
The primordial chaos, devoid of light,
harbored the Brahma pneumas;
The myriad phenomena in their diversity
were in a grain-sized pearl.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.

HOMAGE TO UPPER CLARITY
In the Taoist school we honor,
The Lord of Upper Clarity.
In the Ch'ih-ming era the graphs appeared,[54]
disclosing the end of days;
The primordial net flowed out,[55] penetrating
the mysterious illimitable.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.

HOMAGE TO GRAND CLARITY
In the Taoist School we honor,
The Lord of Grand Clarity.
The Way embraced Heaven and Earth from the
outset of the Mysterious Origin;

For countless kalpas it has provided a way
of salvation for befuddled souls.
When the souls of the dead undergo sublimation,
They are able to ascend to the immortal realm.
The high priest then said, "Having acknowledged the three refuges, we should proclaim the nine precepts:
1st precept: Be respectful and courteous; filially
nourish your father and mother.
2nd precept: Be diligent and industrious; exhibit
loyalty toward your rulers.
3rd precept: Do not kill; compassionately preserve
all living creatures.
4th precept: Do not engage in venery; be upright in
your approach to others.
5th precept: Do not steal; promote justice even at
your own expense.
6th precept: Do not give way to anger; abusing others
in the heat of wrath.
7th precept: Do not be dishonest; practicing deception
and harming the good.
8th precept: Do not be arrogant; proudly indifferent to
the truly virtuous.
9th precept: Do not be duplicitous; obey these precepts
with a single mind.[56]
You must listen attentively. Take heed! Take heed!"
When he had finished enunciating the nine precepts, the Taoist priests performed an interlude of music, after which Perfect Man Huang intoned the appropriate talismanic commands, followed by an incantation addressed to the ten classes of homeless souls,[57] to the tune "Hanging Chains of Gold":

May the Great Compassionate and Merciful,
Imperial Savior of the Blue Heaven of the East,
Whose lion throne floats through the void,
Who is able to miraculously transform departed spirits,
Purify this offering of food for the dead,
And appear before the scorched demons of Hell,
So that the homeless souls that crowd the underworld,
Can come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who campaign to north and south,
The soldiers who don armor and wear uniforms,[58]
Who risk death and forget life,
In order to repay their debt to their country,
Who after a single burst of cannon fire,
Are left to lie upon the battlefield;
The homeless souls who perish in battle,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those good boys and good girls,[59]
Serving others as their slaves or servants,
Who are cursed at night and beaten in the morning,
Whose clothes do not cover their bodies,
Who are driven out of their masters' gates,
To lie helplessly in the long streets;
The homeless souls who starve to death,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May sedentary traders and traveling merchants,[60]
As well as itinerant Buddhist and Taoist priests,
Who are compelled year in and year out,[61]
To seek their sustenance away from home,
Who find themselves afflicted with illness,
And with no one to rely on in their wayside inns;
The homeless souls who die upon the road,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May criminals guilty of assault and battery,
Who must wear the cangue and chains in prison,
And are beheaded, strangled, or sliced to death,
Thus forfeiting their lives in the long streets,
According to the clear articles of the statutes,[62]
For the crime of violating the law of the land;
The homeless souls who suffer capital punishment,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May enemies from a previous incarnation,[63]
Who encounter each other in this life,
And resort to secret schemes or covert plots,
To disrupt each other's bowels with poison,
So that vapors arise from their nine apertures,
With the result that they lose their lives;
The homeless souls who die of poisoning,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who breast-feed infants for three years,[64]
Demonstrating the illimitable kindness of parents,
Who bear the fetus in their wombs for ten months,[65]
Enduring the rigors of accouchement and parturition,
While their lives are hanging by a thread,
The babies and mothers who return to the shades;
The homeless souls who die in childbirth,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those endangered by grave misfortunes,
The threats of which are difficult to avoid,
Those burdened by private debts and tax arrears,
For which they are dunned day after day,
Who slit their own throats or hang themselves,
Thereby severing their three inches of breath;
The homeless souls who are driven to suicide,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those who suffer from prolonged illness,
Abdominal distension, paralysis, or consumption,
Scabrous suppurations, or flesh wounds,
Whose entire bodies reek of purulent discharges,
With no relatives to proffer them beans or water,
For whom prescribed medications offer no cure;
The homeless souls who perish of disease,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those beset by huge waves, windblown breakers,
Or spreading floods that surge up to the heavens,[66]
Whose hawsers break and whose vessels sink,
So that their bodies are lost in the long river,
Who are homesick for their native places,[67]
But have no one to send them even a letter;
The homeless souls who go to watery graves,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May those encountering fire, with wind and smoke,
Who are caught by surprise and unable to escape,
From the fierce conflagration that knows no mercy,
Whose entire bodies are subjected to the flames,
Leaving them with singed scalps and scorched heads,[68]
So that even in death they are smoke-cured ghosts;
The homeless souls who perish in the flames,
Come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.

May the sprites and goblins who inhabit the trees,
As well as other varieties of ungovernable demons,
And the fish, crustaceans, and feathered creatures,
None of whom would not like to be reborn as humans,
Look up to the Most High and compassionate one,
To widely extend the scope of his benevolence;

So that the ten classes of homeless souls,
Can come to savor the taste of this sweet dew.
Once the sublimation ritual was completed, Perfect Man Huang came down from his elevated throne, and the Taoist priests struck up their music as they escorted him outside the front gate where paper money was burnt and a coffer of papier-mâché goods for the dead was incinerated. Once they came back inside, the ceremony was officially over, and the Taoist celebrants changed their clothes while the vergers proceeded to take down the scrolls depicting the Taoist deities.
Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing had already ordered that:
Painted candles be set alight, and
An array of banquet tables set out,
in the large reception hall, where the three boy actors were on hand to play their musical instruments and sing for the assembled relatives and friends.
Hsi-men Ch'ing started out by offering a toast to Perfect Man Huang, while his attendants proffered him a bolt of ultramarine cloud-crane brocade, a bolt of variegated satin, and ten taels of silver.
After kowtowing to him four times, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My deceased consort has this day, as a result of the efficacy of the scripture recitation conducted by my reverend teacher, been enabled to gain salvation and attain reincarnation. For all of which my gratitude is profound. These insignificant gifts are no more than an expression of my heartfelt feelings."
Perfect Man Huang replied, "Unworthy though I am to wear this cap and vestment and claim to be a devotee of the Taoist religion, what virtue could I possess that would enable me to affect mankind or Heaven? It is only owing to the effect of Your Honor's sincere devotion that your revered lady has been enabled to mount the auspicious clouds and attend upon the Primordial. Were I to accept these gifts, it would truly be a cause of embarrassment."
"These gifts are paltry in the extreme," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I humbly beseech you to accept them with a smile."[69]
Only then did Perfect Man Huang direct a young acolyte to take charge of them.
After toasting Perfect Man Huang, Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to offer a toast to Abbot Wu and presented him with a bolt of satin brocade and five taels of silver, in addition to the fee of ten taels of silver as payment for arranging the scripture reading.
Abbot Wu would only accept the fee for the scripture reading, and refused the other gifts, saying, "Whatever efforts I may have expended in arranging for the scripture recitation designed for the salvation of your lady, so that she could be reborn in the immortal realm, were no more than the fulfillment of my responsibilities. I ought not even to accept this fee, let alone these other lavish gifts."
"Your Reverence is wrong," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Although Perfect Man Huang may have presided over the ceremony, all of the documents and protocols for the ritual were arranged for by you. These gifts are merely intended to compensate you for your efforts. How can it be right for you to refuse them?"
Only then did Abbot Wu feel that he had no alternative but to accept them, and he thanked him profusely.
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had presented a toast to the entire group of Taoist priests, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and the others came up to assist Hsi-men Ch'ing in enjoying the food and drink that had been offered in sacrifice.
Wu K'ai presented the toast, Ying Po-chüeh held the flagon, Hsieh Hsi-ta proffered some viands, and they all knelt down in front of him, while Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, you have held this ceremony today, invited Perfect Man Huang to preside over it, and availed yourself of the efforts of Abbot Wu. Just now, as the paper money was being burnt at the conclusion of the ritual, I saw a vision of my sister-in-law, wearing a phoenix cap on her head, dressed in white clothing, with a feather fan in her hand, mounting into the clouds on the back of a white crane. This is all due to the efficacy of Perfect Man Huang's rites of salvation, your own sincere heart, and my sister-in-law's good fortune, and it is a source of delight to me as well."
Thereupon, he filled a cup of wine and handed it to Hsi-men Ching.
"I am indebted to all of you gentlemen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "for all you have done during the last few days. I cannot thank you enough. I am scarcely worthy of your surpassing generosity."
When he had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Drained it in one gulp.
Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to fill another cup of wine, saying, "Brother, in drinking wine, you should make a twosome out of it, rather than confining yourself to a single cup."
Hsieh Hsi-ta hastened to proffer him a chopstick-serving of viands, which he promptly consumed.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished toasting the company, they all sat down at their places, while the boy actors entertained them by playing their musical instruments and singing, and the chef came out to present the first serving. That night, during the course of the banquet, what with:
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits, and
Performing on woodwind and string instruments,
the party continued until the second watch and Hsi-men Ch'ing was half inebriated before the company said farewell, got up to go, and went their ways.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then came inside, rewarded the boy actors with three mace of silver, and returned to the rear compound. Truly:
During this life, if wine is on hand,
you might as well get drunk;
Not a single drop has ever been known
to reach the Nine Springs.[70]
A poem testifies to this:
One day, you may swear to live your lives together,
But, one night, your oath will vanish like a cloud.
Her flying phoenix golden hairpin will tumble out,
The soaring phoenix precious mirror will fracture.
Your delight in her salvation will prove ephemeral,
While your lasting mortification will not diminish.
Only by frequent resort to the contents of the cup,
Can you gain temporary relief from your affliction.

His breast is filled with a thousand griefs.
The sun seems to hang over the treetops
Green leaves give shade and Spring has come
The grass grows thick and the oriole sings.
He cannot hear her dainty footsteps
The music of her voice comes to him only in dream
The mountain masses beyond the gate
Cannot bar the way to sorrow.
Ximen Qing was drinking wine with Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue and the others. He said to Han Daoguo: "When will the boats be ready to start? We must see about getting the goods packed up."
"Yesterday," Han Daoguo said, "I had word to say that the boats will sail on the twenty-fourth."
"After the twentieth we will have everything made ready," Ximen Qing said.
"Who is going this time?" Bojue asked.
"Three in all," Ximen told him. "I propose that Cui shall come back first next year with a cargo of merchandise from Hangzhou. Han Daoguo and Laibao are going on to Songjiang and elsewhere to buy cloth. We have silk enough already in store."
"Really, you are a wonderful manager," Bojue said. "The proverb says: A good businessman must think of everything."
It was now the first night watch. Uncle Wu rose. "Brother-in-law," he said, "you have been working very hard lately and we have all had quite enough to drink. I think we ought to leave you to rest."
Ximen Qing would not hear of their going. He ordered the young actors to pour out wine and sing more songs. But after three more cups of wine or so, they went away.
Ximen Qing offered six *qian* of silver to the four young actors, but they declined the money. "We came on the instructions of his Excellency," they said. "We have done no more than our duty. How can we accept a present from you?"
"It is true you have been on duty," Ximen said, "but I see no reason why you should not take the silver." The four actors took it, kowtowed and went away. Ximen Qing went to bed in the inner court.
The next day when he returned from the office, he found that Abbot Wu had sent one of his novices and two men to make preparations for the ceremony. Ximen Qing had monastic fare served to the novice, who afterwards went away. Ximen asked Scholar Wen to send invitations to kinsmen, friends and neighbors, both men and women. The cooks were instructed to make the necessary preparations and especially to prepare vegetarian food to be offered to the dead lady.
Before dawn next day the priests arrived. They went upon the dais, lighted candles and burned incense. Then they began to play their instruments and recite the appropriate prayers. Outside the gate hung a long banner with an inscription, and, on either side of the gateway, a scroll of yellow paper. Upon one was written: "By the gracious mercy of the Ruler of the East may the soul of this lady, in the light of dawn, ascend to the mansions of the blessed," and on the other: "By the efficacy of the *Nandan* may she be granted forgiveness of her offenses, that her spirit, strengthened and purified, may mount to the Heavens."
Over the dais on which the altar stood hung a scroll that announced that thirty-five texts, charms and spells were to be read to relieve from travail the soul of the dead lady, and that sacrifice would be made to bring her safely through the perils of Hades.
His Holiness Huang, wearing a scarlet robe with a gold girdle, and with many attendants following, arrived in a sedan chair shortly after sunrise. Abbot Wu and the other clergy went to receive him. They led him to the altar. Ximen Qing, in black robes, came to welcome him and offered him tea. The priests were given monastic fare beside the altar. The table on which the food was set was made of red lacquer and the table covers were all embroidered. Two boys waited beside the table. While the attendants were preparing the texts, Ximen Qing made his offering of a roll of gold silk.
Before he went up to the altar, his Holiness put on a Hat of the Nine Thunders and a scarlet vestment with golden clouds and the hundred cranes embroidered upon it. He recited the prologue; the priests washed their hands and offered incense. Then his Holiness incensed the altar. He burned spells to summon the angelic host, and with invocations and charms made announcement to the three Heavens and the ten Earths. They presented the three offerings. The music began, and incense was burned processionally. Ximen Qing and Chen Jingji both had censers, and soldiers marched before them. Before them and behind were borne four parasols of gold embroidery, and banners adorned with pearls. When the procession returned, they took their places, and the music struck up again. Then they went to the tablet of Li Ping'er and summoned her spirit to appear that they might assist her on her way to Paradise. A small table was set apart especially so that the dead lady's spirit might come there, listen to the reading of the scriptures, and hear the teaching of the true faith.
At noon, his Holiness, still wearing his hat and vestments, offered sacrifice to the stars and burned charms to dispatch angelic messengers to the underworld.
This holy man, Huang, was not more than thirty years old. His appearance was most remarkable. Vested in his robes and engaged in the execution of these ceremonies he looked almost divine.
After this, Abbot Wu read before the altar from the Heavenly Treasures from the Jade Book with the Tiger Seal. Then incense was burned again, and everyone went to the temporary hall for refreshment. The most imposing table was that of his Holiness; the Abbot's was slightly smaller. The others had ordinary tables.
Ximen Qing offered his Holiness and the Abbot each a roll of satin, four pairs of flowers and four rolls of silk. The other priests each received a roll of cloth. Food for his Holiness and the Abbot was sent to the temple, and the priests bade their servers put their food into a large box. After the meal, they all went to take the air in the garden. The tables were cleared and fresh ones set for the entertainment of the kinsmen and friends who had come to the ceremony.
Meanwhile, a messenger arrived from the Eastern Capital with a letter from Zhai. Ximen Qing received him in the hall. He was an official of the Imperial Tutor's household, wearing a black gown, tight-fitting trousers, with a swastika hat and yellow boots. He was fully armed. He made a reverence to Ximen Qing, and Ximen returned his greeting. Then he produced a letter and ten taels of silver. Ximen Qing asked his name.
"My name is Wang Yu, and his Lordship Zhai has bidden me bring this letter to you. Until he heard the sad news of your lady's death from his Excellency An, he knew nothing about it."
"When did his Excellency's letter reach the Capital?" Ximen Qing asked.
"In the tenth month," the messenger said. "His Excellency completed his work as Warden of the Royal Forests within the year, and he has now been made Senior Secretary of the Board of Waterways. He will return to the Capital when he has finished his present work."
Ximen Qing told Laibao to entertain the messenger and said that he would give him a letter to take back the following day. The messenger asked where Han Daoguo lived, saying that he had a letter to deliver to him, and that he would like to see him at once because he had to return to the Capital with the least possible delay. Ximen sent for Han Daoguo and the two men had a meal together, after which the messenger went with Han Daoguo to his house.
Ximen was greatly pleased to receive this letter and showed it to Scholar Wen. "When you write the answer for me," he said, "the style must be as good as this. I am sending him ten kerchiefs, ten kerchiefs of silk, ten pairs of gold toothpicks and ten gold wine cups. The messenger will come tomorrow for my letter."
Scholar Wen read the letter:
Zhai Qian, your kinsman in the Capital, presents his most humble salutations. At the onset of winter he sends this letter to his Lordship Ximen Siquan, officer of the Imperial Guard.
Since we last parted at the Capital, there has been no opportunity for us to meet, and this is a matter of great regret to me. I have told my master how much I long to see you.
The first sad news of your lady's death came to me from An Fengshan. It distresses me beyond measure that I cannot come in person to offer my sympathy. It is most unfortunate, most unfortunate! I can only hope that you will not allow yourself to give way utterly to your grief. As a slight token of my feeling for you, I send a small present, which I trust you will accept.
I am informed that your activities in the public service are so meritorious that the people of Qinghe cannot too loudly sing your praises. There can be no doubt that after the general inspection this year, you will receive promotion. The other day report was made of those officers whose work merited the highest approbation, and I asked my master to place your name in the list. When the work is completed, his Majesty will distribute awards and you will be given the post of Senior Magistrate. His Lordship Xia's period of office will shortly expire, and he will receive a higher appointment. I tell you this before the matter is made public.
I trust this letter will give you pleasure, but pray keep its contents to yourself and do not say anything to his Lordship. Keep the matter a complete secret.
The noble Yang died in prison on the twenty-ninth day of last month.
Scholar Wen finished reading this letter and was putting it into his sleeve when Ying Bojue took it from him and read it again. When he gave it back to the scholar, he said: "Sir, you must take great pains over the answer. There are many men of learning at the capital, and we mustn't have them laughing at us."
"I," said Scholar Wen, "am like a dog's tail. It can be used instead of ermine when there is no ermine to be had. There is little depth to my learning, and who am I to wield a battle ax among the military gentlemen? I can only do what my duty requires of me."
"Scholar Wen will do admirably anything he is asked to do," Ximen Qing said. "What do you understand about matters of this sort, you dog?"
When they had finished their meal, he told Laixing to give food to the kinsmen, friends and neighbors who had come. He bade Daian take return gifts to the singing girls who had sent presents. To each of them he gave a roll of cloth and a tael of silver. In the afternoon, he sent for Li Ming, Wu Hui and Zheng Feng.
The priests returned to the altar. They beat their drums, made obeisance to the gods, and chanted their texts. Then they set up lanterns, burned paper offerings, and so went on until it was dark. By the time they were done, it was already the first night watch. Uncle Hua decided to remain, Ximen Qing having detained him, but Master Qiao and Uncles Shen and Meng went away. The two uncles Wu, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Scholar Wen and Chang Zhijie stayed with the clerks to watch the ceremonies during the night.
In the great court, a high dais had been erected with a decorated arch. A tank of water and a pool of fire had been prepared with offerings of food for the spirits. The tablet of Li Ping'er was placed upon a table, and offerings of every sort were set out before it. Beside the tablet were three banners, one for her spirit, one red one, and one yellow one. There was an inscription that read: "Away, ye evil spirits! This is holy ground. The purification of the Southern Palace has here been made."
The priests played their instruments, sitting in two ranks. Beside them stood four young novices, one bearing a wand, another a basin, another a double-edged sword. His Holiness put on a golden miter for the banishment of demons, and an embroidered vestment. Then going up to the highest point, he chanted the following verses:
May the mercy of the ineffable one descend
And the gates to the passes of the underworld
Shall open one by one.
Novices, walking two by two, lead the way
And the soul of the departed, purified and cleansed,
Shall reach the abode of the blessed.
Then he burned incense again and sang: "The Mighty One hath revealed the way of truth and shown mercy to them that dwell in darkness. He hath said that all who mortify the flesh shall come to immortality. He bestoweth blessings upon the people, both of this world and of the world to come. His mercy is outpoured over all in danger, famine or distress. We burn incense, and implore the Most High, the Most Gracious, the Ineffable One, and all the Immortals in all the Worlds, to come to our aid this day. All we who live in this world of dust are fettered by the things of this world. Death is a mystery to us; we long for life. Few there are who plant good seed, and many are they who go on the wrong path. We are foolish and do not understand; we yield ourselves to greed and passion. We believe that we shall live forever and forget the death that cometh so easily. One day we die and all is over. Yet our sin remaineth, and we suffer punishment in Hell.

"Therefore, as Thou hast taught us, we make sacrifice for this dead woman. She departed and went to the world of darkness, and, if we offer not sacrifice for the remission of her sins, she must suffer the most dreadful torments. We implore Thee, O Most High, grant Thy mercy and save us who cry to Thee. Let Thy most gracious light shine upon us that we may be enlightened. Bid Thine angels be merciful unto us, and send forth Thy decree to the Powers of Hell that they cease their examination of her who is dead. Bid them open the prison gates and set the prisoner free. Pardon her sins and let hatred be stilled.
"Let all obey Thy commands and come forth from the gates of Hell.
"Let her pass over this fire that her weakness may become strength, and that she be not as a. faded flower.
"Grant unto her another life, and bring her safely to the shores of Truth.
"To this end we burn these sacred spells, beseeching Thee to hear our prayer."
The priests dipped the spirit's banner into the pool of water and burned charms. They took the red banner, put it into the pit of fire and burned charms again. Then they took the yellow banner. His Holiness said: "From Heaven cometh the water and from Earth the fire. From their meeting cometh life itself." So the ceremony came to an end. The tablet was carried over the decorated bridge to pay respect to the God and to take refuge with the Three Divinities of the Daoist Faith. Then five sets of offerings were made.
"Now," said his Holiness, "she has found the three refuges. We will pronounce the nine commandments." The nine commandments were read. The priests played their instruments and recited many charms. Then they implored a blessing upon the soul of the dead woman and all other souls.
His Holiness came down from the dais. The others, still playing their music, followed him and went out of the gate to burn paper money, treasure chests and other things. This was the end. The priests returned and took off their vestments. People from the temple rolled up the pictures.
In the great hall, Ximen Qing had ordered many tables to be prepared. The lights shone very brightly. The three young actors sang, and all the relatives and friends sat there. Ximen Qing offered his Holiness a cup of wine, with two rolls of silk and ten taels of silver. Upon his knees, he said: "Now that my dead wife has had the benefit of your blessing, she will be able to enter paradise. I am most grateful to you, and this offering is a token of my gratitude."
"I am ashamed," said his Holiness, "that my priest's robe should cover one so unworthy to profess Holy Religion. Not any virtue of mine but your own sincerity will send your wife to paradise. I feel that I ought not to accept your gift."
"It is but a trifle," Ximen Qing said, "and really utterly unworthy of you. I can only pray that you will smile and accept it."
His Holiness then bade his novices remove the gifts.
Ximen Qing offered a cup of wine to Abbot Wu, with a roll of silk and five taels of silver. Ten taels more were for the expenses of the ceremony.
"I will accept the fee and no more," said the Abbot. "You have always been extremely generous to me, and I could do no less than perform this ceremony for your lady. Indeed I ought not even to take the fee, so how dare I accept the rest?"
"Teacher," Ximen said, "though his Holiness performed the actual ceremony, you'd all the trouble of the preparations. I must insist."
The Abbot was obliged to accept. He thanked Ximen Qing. Then Ximen offered wine to all the other priests, spreading the blessing, as it is said. Uncle Wu and Ying Bojue helped him, Uncle Wu passing the cups, and Bojue pouring out the wine. Xie Xida took around the food. They knelt down. "Today," Bojue said, "we've done excellent work. We're delighted to have his Holiness with us and we're greatly obliged to Abbot Wu for the trouble he's taken. I've no doubt that all that's been done will greatly benefit my dead sister-in-law. Though this is largely due to the supreme powers of his Holiness, yet, Brother, your earnest sincerity must've had its part."
He offered a cup of wine to Ximen Qing. "Gentlemen," Ximen said, "I've troubled you greatly these last few days and I don't know how to thank you."
With these words, he drained the cup. Ying Bojue filled another cup. "Drink this, Brother, and make it a pair. I'd not have you drink a single one." Xie Xida helped Ximen to some food. In return, Ximen Qing offered wine to them and they sat down. The actors sang and the cooks brought even more food. They guessed fingers, played games, with music and singing, drank until the 2nd night watch. Then Ximen Qing was drunk, and everybody went away. He gave 3 *qian* of silver to the actors and went to the inner court.

## 090
## Hsi-men Ch'ing Appreciates the Snow While in his Studio; Li P'ing-erh Describes her Intimate Feelings in a Dream

Throughout the livelong day I think of you,
but I cannot see you;[1]
The sounds of the drum and the cold bugle
are difficult to bear.
The ruptured mirror in your dressing case only
reflects the waning moon;
The remaining clothes in your chest are but
clusters of broken clouds.
The shivering sparrow finds it hard to perch
upon the sparse branches;
The migrating goose breaks formation and cries
as it deserts the flock.
The jade hairpin may be smashed to pieces, but
emotion is hard to shatter;
When I envisage you, it is heartbreaking that
my recollections are unreal.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the rear compound he was so exhausted that he slept until the sun was high in the sky without getting up.
Lai-hsing came in at this point and reported, "The carpenters are waiting outside and want to know if they are to dismantle the temporary structures that they put up for the funeral rites."
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded irritably to Lai-hsing, saying, "As for the dismantling, just go ahead and have them do it. What need is there to bother me about it?"
The carpenters outside then proceeded, hugger-mugger, to take down the matting, cordage, and pine planks of the structures in question and transport them to the building across the street for storage. But no more of this.
Yü-hsiao came into the room and reported, "The weather outside is really threatening."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to fetch his clothes from on top of the heated k'ang and prepared to get up and put them on.
"You were tired out last night," said Wu Yüeh-niang, "and the weather looks threatening. Why don't you get a good sleep before getting up. Why should you feel compelled to crawl out of bed so soon? You might just as well not go to the yamen today."
"I'm not planning to go to the yamen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm afraid that messenger from our kinsman Chai Ch'ien will come by looking for a reply, and I'll need to be here to send him off with it."
"In that case," said Yüeh-niang, "you might as well get up. I'll have a maidservant heat some congee for you to eat."
Without even performing his morning ablutions, and leaving his hair in disarray, Hsi-men Ch'ing threw on a woolen robe, donned a felt cap, and headed straight for his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto in the front garden.
It so happens that, ever since Shu-t'ung had absconded, Hsi-men Ch'ing had arranged for Wang Ching to look after the garden and the keys to the two doors on either side of his studio there, and deputed Ch'un-hung to take care of cleaning up and sweeping his other studio in front of the large reception hall. During the winter months, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent his leisure time in the studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. On the surface of the bed frame over the k'ang, which was heated by an underground firebox, there was also a brazier of yellow brass. Warmth was retained in the room by a hanging portiere of thin oiled silk, decorated with a motif of the moon amid the plum branches. The outer parlor was embellished with an oleander, a variety of chrysanthemums;
Cool slender bamboos, and
Turquoise-hued orchids.
The studio itself was furnished with:
Brushes, inkstones, and a plum in a vase;
Zither and books were elegantly displayed.
On the bed frame over the k'ang there were:
A madder red strip of felt lying on top of,
A brocade mat figured with silver flowers.
The pillow was decorated with water birds;
The hanging curtains were of mermaid silk.
Hsi-men Ch'ing lay down casually on the bed frame, while Wang Ching hastened to retrieve some ambergris incense from an ivory box on the table and ignited it in a small gilded censer.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Wang Ching, "Go find Lai-an, and tell him to go invite Master Ying the Second to come join me."
Wang Ching accordingly went out and sent Lai-an off on this errand.
Whom should Wang Ching run into at this juncture but P'ing-an, who came up to him and said, "Little Chou, the barber, is waiting outside."
Wang Ching went back into the studio and told this to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who had him call Little Chou inside.
When Little Chou had kowtowed to him, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "You've come at just the right moment to comb my hair and give me a massage."
He then went on to ask, "Why is it that you haven't shown up for such a long time?"
"On hearing that your Sixth Lady had died," said Little Chou, "I imagined that you were probably preoccupied, so I didn't come."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, seated himself on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair, let down his hair, and told him to trim and comb it for him.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who had been summoned by Lai-an. He was wearing a felt hat on his head, a green woolen jacket on his torso, a pair of old black boots on his feet, and a palmetto cloak, as he lifted aside the portiere, came in, and bowed in greeting.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose hair was in the process of being combed, said, "There's no need for you to perform an obeisance. Pray sit down."
Ying Po-chüeh pulled a chair over and sat down next to the brazier.
"How come you're dressed that way today?" enquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You may not be aware of it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but snow is falling outside, and it's extremely cold. Yesterday, it was so late when I went home that the rooster had already crowed. You sent a servant to see us on our way, but we could hardly walk by that point. When I saw how overcast it was, I asked for a lantern and made my way home together with your brother-in-law, Wu K'ai. Today, I could hardly crawl out of bed. If Lai-an hadn't come to call for me, I'd be asleep yet. Brother, you're quite a stout fellow to be able to get up this early. If it were me, I couldn't manage it."
"Luckily, you've been a witness to it all," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I haven't had a moment's peace. Ever since the day of her burial, I've been preoccupied with entertaining Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en and arranging for the scripture reading ceremonies, so that, from that time to this, my mind has been perturbed. This morning, my wife said, 'You're tired out. Why don't you get a good sleep before getting up?' But I was worried that the messenger from my kinsman, Chai Ch'ien, would come by for a reply to his letter, and I also had to see to the dismantling of the temporary structures that were erected for the funeral rites. On the twenty-fourth, I'm sending off Manager Han Tao-kuo and some other employees on a trip and need to see that everything is packed up, and the statement of account written out. The various funeral arrangements have also put people to a lot of trouble. As far as the relatives and friends are concerned, it might be all right, but when it comes to the gentry and officials, if you fail to pay them a personal visit to thank them for their generosity, it will constitute a breach of propriety."
"That's so," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I, too, have been concerned about your need to pay these personal visits to thank people for their generosity. You'll have to do it, I guess, but you might as well select only the most important households, and let it go at that. As for the rest, since you're on good terms with them, if you run into each other, all you need to do is apologize, that's all. Who doesn't know how busy you've been? You can rely on their mutual understanding."
As they were speaking, what should they see but Wang Ching, who lifted aside the portiere to allow Hua-t'ung to bring in a square box of painted lacquer, with two teacups of carved lacquer inlaid with silver, containing boiled cow's milk flavored with butterfat and crystallized sugar.
Ying Po-chüeh picked up a cup and cradled it in his hand, admiring the way in which the glistening white goose-fat-like butterfat floated on the surface, and said, "What a wonderful treat. It's boiling hot, and if you hold it in your mouth, it's:
Fragrant, sweet, and delectable."
Without any trouble at all, he managed to finish it off with a few swallows. Hsi-men Ch'ing, on the other hand, waited until Little Chou had finished with his hair and then told him to clean the wax out of his ears, setting the milk aside on a table, without drinking any of it.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "why don't you drink some of it? It would be a pity to let it get cold. If you drink a cup of this first thing every morning, it's sure to have a restorative effect on your constitution."
"I'm not going to drink it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can have it. In a little while I'm going to eat some congee."
This was just the signal Ying Po-chüeh had been waiting for, and, picking it up in his hand, he:
Finished it off with a single gulp.[2]
after which Hua-t'ung took the cups away.
When the wax had been cleaned out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ears, he told Little Chou to take the wooden roller and go over his body with it, employing the art of massage and the therapeutic gymnastic techniques called "guiding and pulling."[3]
"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "now that your body has been gone over with the roller, do you feel any improvement in your sense of well-being?"
"There is no reason for me to deceive you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The fact is that in the evening my body regularly starts to hurt, and I feel pain in my lower back. If I didn't get this kind of going over, I don't know how I'd stand it."
"For someone with such a corpulent figure as yours," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "and one who eats such rich food every day, it is hardly surprising that you should suffer from phlegm-fire."
"The other day," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Jen Hou-ch'i said to me, 'Venerable sir, although you possess an imposing stature, you suffer from an excess of vacuity.' He gave me a jar of life-prolonging restorative pills and said that they were concocted from a prescription made up for the use of His Majesty the Emperor by Perfect Man Lin Ling-su, and that I should take one every morning, and wash it down with human milk. I've been so distracted the last few days, however, that I haven't taken any of them yet. You all say that I've got a plethora of bedmates at my disposal, and indulge in this business every day, but ever since she died, I haven't been in the mood to consider such matters."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Han Tao-kuo, who came in, bowed in greeting, and sat down, saying, "Just now, all the parties concerned have come to terms about our expedition. The boats have been chartered and we are all set to embark on the twenty-fourth."
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave instructions that Manager Kan Jun should prepare the accounts and weigh out the silver so that they could wrap things up the next day.
He then went on to ask, "How much silver in the way of profits from the two shops is available?"
"It comes to something over six thousand taels altogether," said Han Tao-kuo.
"I'll weigh out an allotment of two thousand taels," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and turn it over to Ts'ui Pen so he can go to Hu-chou to buy silk. As for the other four thousand taels, you and Lai-pao can proceed to Sung-chiang to purchase piece goods. You must try to be on time to join the first fleet of boats that returns north in the new year. Each of you can take an advance of five taels of silver to cover the expenses of packing up for the trip at home."
"I've got another problem," said Han Tao-kuo. "As the holder of a hereditary corvée labor obligation on the staff of the Prince of Yün, I have to report for duty in person at periodic intervals and am not permitted to pay a fee for hiring a substitute. What am I to do about it?"
"Why can't you pay a fee to hire a substitute?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Lai-pao also holds a nominal appointment on the staff of the Prince of Yün, and he merely pays three mace of silver a month to avoid having to report for duty."
"As for Brother Pao's case," said Han Tao-kuo, "his right to do so was stipulated in the document of appointment from the grand preceptor so no one dares to interfere with him. In my case, it's a hereditary position which mandates the drafting of another able-bodied adult male from my clan if I am unable to serve."
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you draft a memo about it, and I'll ask Jen Hou-ch'i to speak to Attendant Wang on the prince's staff, and have your name removed from the roster of those whose corvée service is mandated, so that you can commute your obligation to regular payments in money. Every month all you'll have to do is depute a reliable person from your household to go make the necessary payment for you."
Han Tao-kuo bowed to him to express his gratitude.
"Brother," chimed in Ying Po-chüeh, "once you've taken care of this problem for him, he'll have an easier mind while out on the road."
Before long, after Little Chou had finished massaging him with the roller, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the rear compound to comb his hair and directed that Little Chou should be given something to eat.
After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back out wearing a white velveteen "loyal and tranquil hat" on his head and a fine woolen robe on his body. He rewarded Little Chou for his services with three mace of silver and then sent Wang Ching to summon Licentiate Wen.
Before long, Licentiate Wen came in, formally attired in the typical garb of a scholar:

A high hat and a wide girdle.[4]
When they had finished exchanging greetings, the servants set out a table and brought in the congee. This repast included four side dishes, namely, a bowl of slow-boiled ham hocks, a bowl of blanched donkey meat flavored with chives, a bowl of blanched chicken wonton flavored with pickled fish, and a bowl of slow-boiled squab, along with four bowls of congee made from nonglutinous rice. Four pairs of ivory chopsticks were also provided. Ying Pochüeh together with Licentiate Wen were seated at the head of the table, Hsi-men Ch'ing played the role of host, and Han Tao-kuo was seated to one side.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Lai-an, saying, "Fetch another bowl of congee and a pair of chopsticks, and ask our son-in-law to come have some congee with us."
Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi arrived, wearing a mourning cap on his head, an outer robe of white pongee cut like that of a Taoist priest, over a loose undergown of pale green satin, and rush sandals with velvet socks. After bowing to Ying Po-chüeh and the others, he also sat down to one side. In a little while, when they had finished the congee and the utensils had been cleared away, he departed, and Han Tao-kuo also got up to go, leaving only Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen sitting in the studio.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Licentiate Wen and asked, "Have you finished writing the reply, or not?"
"Your pupil has already prepared a draft, which I have brought with me," said Licentiate Wen. "I won't copy out the final version until you have had a chance to peruse it, venerable sir."
He then pulled it out of his sleeve and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to look over. The letter read as follows:
Earnestly indited by his devoted servant in Ch'ing-ho, Hsi-men Ch'ing, in response to His Eminence of surpassing virtue, the pillar of state Chai Ch'ien, his venerable kinsman:
Since I forsook your illustrious countenance after exchanging views during our meeting at your residence in the capital, without my being aware of it, half a year has abruptly elapsed. Your pupil having been so unfortunate as to suffer the loss of his consort, is especially grateful for the receipt of his kinsman's consolatory contribution, conveyed from a distance, as well as his admonitory advice, which suffices to demonstrate the profundity and generosity of his efforts on my behalf. I am both moved and impressed more than words can tell, and shall not forget my debt of gratitude as long as I shall live. [5] My only fear is that if I should ever be remiss in the performance of my official duties, since I depend upon your influence, I should fail to live up to your expectations. The fact that I can rely upon you to protect my interests before the venerable minister is something for which your pupil will remain forever grateful, since it is entirely due to his kinsman's largess. At present, taking advantage of a convenient messenger, I wish to respectfully enquire after your well-being, and to convey my unsurpassable regard. I humbly expect that you will comprehend my sentiments, and am not able to express myself more fully.
In addition, I am sending ten handkerchiefs of Yang-chou crepe, ten handkerchiefs of variegated satin, twenty low-grade gold toothpicks, and ten black gold wine cups, as a paltry expression of my sentiments from afar, in the hope that you will accept them with a smile.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading the draft, he told Ch'en Ching-chi to get out the presents there in the studio and assist Licentiate Wen in wrapping them up. The letter was then copied out on brocade notepaper, after which the envelope was securely closed, and a seal affixed to it. A packet containing five taels of silver was also sealed up as a gratuity for the courier, Wang Yü. But no more of this.
After a while, they noticed that the snow was falling more heavily, and Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Licentiate Wen in the studio so they could appreciate the snow together. The table was wiped off, and some appetizers were provided to go with their wine. What should they see at this juncture but someone lifting aside the portiere and peeking inside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who it was, and Wang Ching replied, "Cheng Ch'un is here."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to come in. Holding a pair of boxes up high in his hands, Cheng Ch'un came in and knelt down in front of the company. There was also a little square box adorned with gold tracery balanced on top of the other two.
"What's in the boxes?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"My elder sister, Ai-yüeh," Cheng Ch'un replied, "knowing that Your Honor is tired out from the scripture-reading ceremony for the Sixth Lady yesterday, and having nothing better to offer, has sent these two boxes of tea pastries for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like."
When he proceeded to open them, one box turned out to contain stuffed cream puff pastries, while the other one turned out to hold butterfat "abalone shell" sweets.
"These were made by my sister Ai-yüeh with her own hands," said Cheng Ch'un. "She knows that Your Honor is fond of these sweets and has sent them as a sign of her filial respect."
"I am already beholden to your establishment for the gifts you provided yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and today your sister Ai-yüeh has taken the trouble to send these things as well."
"Wonderful!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "Bring them over here so I can taste them. Having lost one daughter who was adept at making these things, another daughter who is good at the same task has appeared."
Picking one up and sticking it in his mouth, Ying Po-chüeh also chose another one and handed it to Licentiate Wen, saying, "Venerable sir, have a taste of this. Once you have eaten it:
Your loose teeth will grow again;[6]
You'll feel like a new individual.[7]
Even to gaze upon such an exotic object,
Is superior to gaining ten years of life."[8]
When Licentiate Wen proceeded to savor it, he found that:
It melted on entering the mouth,
and said, "This delicacy must come from the Western Regions. It is not something known to the human world.
It irrigates the lungs and transfuses the heart.
Surely it is a rare specialty from the Realms Above."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask, "And what's in the little box?"
Cheng Ch'un calmly knelt down in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing and opened the box, saying, "This is a personal gift from my sister Ai-yüeh to Your Honor."
Hsi-men Ch'ing put the box on his knee and was about to take a look at the contents, when Ying Po-chüeh snatched it away with one hand and opened it up himself. Inside there was a tasseled peach-red satin handkerchief with a diapered, double-patterned, border and a meticulously worked motif of overlapping antique cash coins and joined hearts in the shape of interlocking lozenges, containing a package of melon seeds which the donor had cracked with her own teeth. Ying Po-chüeh tossed the handkerchief back to Hsi-men Ch'ing but proceeded to cram the melon seeds into his mouth in two handfuls and gobble them up.
By the time Hsi-men Ch'ing endeavored to grab them back, there were hardly any left, and he expostulated, "You crazy dog! Are you suffering from such:
Acute consumption or avid craving?
If you leave me so much as a glimpse of them, it will show that you have a human heart after all."
"They were a gift from my daughter," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If she didn't intend to show her filial feelings toward me, to whom should she display them? As I see it, you ordinarily have more than enough to eat."
"Since Licentiate Wen is here," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can hardly give you the cursing you deserve. You dog! That's hardly acceptable conduct."
With that, he tucked the handkerchief into his sleeve and told Wang Ching to take the boxes back to the rear compound. Before long:
The cups and plates were duly arrayed,[9]
and the wine was served.
They had only finished one round of wine when Tai-an came in and reported, "Li Chih and Huang the Fourth have finally received payment and have come to deliver the silver they owe you."
"How much does it come to?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They say they've brought a thousand taels," said Tai-an, "and that they'll deliver the remainder at a later date."
"Just take a gander at those two goddamned characters," said Ying Po-chüeh. "They've been keeping me, too, in the dark, without telling me what they're up to. It's no wonder they never showed up for that scripture-reading ceremony of yours yesterday. They must have gone to Tung-p'ing prefecture to collect their silver. Now that you've received this repayment, you'd better not let them have any more silver in the future. These two "bare sticks" owe money to so many people that I fear, in the future:
Their reserves will prove to be inadequate.[10]
The other day, Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter was so upset at this prospect that he said he planned to go to Tung-p'ing prefecture himself, and bring back the silver he was due in person. I fear that if that:
Old ox with his rapacious snout,[11]
makes off with the whole bundle, you may have difficulty recovering the remainder of your investment."
"I'm not afraid of the likes of him," stated Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It doesn't matter to me whether it's Eunuch Director Hsü or Eunuch Director Li. How do you suppose he would like it if I were to have his servant detained in the lockup? There's no reason to fear that he would fail to cough up the silver."
Turning to Ch'en Ching-chi, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Take the steelyard out with you, and take care of weighing his silver and putting it away. That should settle the terms of the contract. There's no need for me to go out."
After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi came back and reported, "I've weighed out the silver, which comes to exactly a thousand taels, and taken it back to the rear compound for the First Lady to put away. Huang the Fourth says that he'd like you to go outside and have a few words with him."
"Tell him I'm busy entertaining someone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "After all, the only thing he wants to discuss is the renegotiation of the contract. Tell him to come back after the twenty-fourth."
"It's not that," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "There's a different matter that he'd like to solicit your help with. He's asking you to go outside so he can explain it to you in person."
"I wonder what it could be," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'd better go out and see."
When he got to the reception hall, Huang the Fourth kowtowed to him and then stood up and said, "The thousand taels of silver that I brought with me has already been accepted by your son-in-law and I am prepared to write a promissory note for the remainder. But there is another matter that I would like to solicit Your Honor's assistance with today."
As he spoke he knocked his head on the floor and wept.
Hsi-men Ch'ing helped him to his feet and said, "What is it, actually. Tell me about it."
"My father-in-law Sun Ch'ing," said Huang the Fourth, "employs a manager named Feng the Second to handle his cotton business in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. Who could have anticipated that this Feng the Second had a son named Feng Huai who:
Was not the sort to abide by his lot,
but was in the habit of locking the door of the shop at night and going out to patronize prostitutes. One day, two large bales of cotton were found to be missing, and when my father-in-law, Sun Ch'ing, complained about it, Feng the Second punished his son with a few strokes of the cane. His son, consequently, engaged in an affray with my brother-in-law, Sun Ch'ing's son, Sun Wenhsiang, in which he managed to knock out one of his antagonist's teeth and also suffered a head injury himself, before the other employees were able to break it up. Who could have anticipated that his son would develop a case of tetanus and die in his home half a month later? His father-in-law, who is a notorious local tyrant named Pai the Fifth, nicknamed Moneybags Pai, who operates as a fence for stolen goods in the area west of the Grand Canal, incited Feng the Second into preparing a deposition and lodging a complaint at the yamen of the regional investigating censor, who has muddle-headedly deputed Lei Ch'i-yüan, the assistant commissioner of the military defense circuit, to hear the case. But His Honor Lei Ch'i-yüan is so busy facilitating the Imperial Flower and Rock Convoys that he has assigned the case to Prefectural Judge T'ung. The Pai family has bought off Prefectural Judge T'ung and suborned the neighbors into falsely testifying that my father-in-law, Sun Ch'ing, egged on his son from the sidelines during the affray, so that, at present, a warrant has been issued for my father-in-law's arrest. My only hope is that, whatever happens, Your Honor will deign to take pity on me by writing a letter to Lei Ch'i-yüan requesting him to hold my father-in-law in custody for a few days before submitting a final decision. Only if His Honor Lei Ch'i-yüan has the time to hear the case is there any chance that my father-in-law may escape with his life. The fact that the two of them engaged in an affray had nothing to do with my father-in-law, and moreover, the death of Feng Huai did not take place until after the event, when the period of responsibility for the crime had elapsed. After all, Feng Huai had already been beaten by his father, Feng the Second, so why should Sun Wen-hsiang alone be held responsible for his death?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing glanced over his explanatory note and saw that it said, "Please look with favorable eyes on the two prisoners, Sun Ch'ing and Sun Wen-hsiang, who are currently being detained in Tung-ch'ang prefecture."
He then went on to say, "Although it is true that Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan did attend a banquet here some days ago, I have only met him that once and am not well acquainted with him. Under the circumstances, it would hardly be appropriate for me to address a letter to him."
At this, Huang the Fourth knelt down, weeping and wailing, and appealed to him, saying, "If Your Honor does not take pity on them, my father-in-law and his son will both, most likely, be fated to die. As things now stand, if Sun Wen-hsiang must lose his head, so be it, but if you could only contrive to have my father-in-law removed from the case:
My obligation to you could not be greater.
My father-in-law is fifty-nine years old this year and has no one at home to tend to his needs. If he remains incarcerated during the cold winter months, he will be as good as dead."
Hsi-men Ch'ing pondered this for some time and then said, "All right then, I'll ask His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house to intervene on his behalf. He and Lei Ch'i-yüan are fellow graduates, both having obtained the *chin-shih* degree in the year *jen-ch'en*."[12]
Huang the Fourth then proceeded to kowtow once again, after which he pulled a promissory note for "one hundred piculs of white rice"[13] out of his sleeve and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, at the same time also extracting two packets of silver from the wallet at his waist.
Hsi-men Ch'ing refused to accept these offerings, saying, "What would I want with these monetary inducements of yours?"
"If Your Honor sets no store by them," said Huang the Fourth, "they may just as well be used to thank Ch'ien Lung-yeh."
"That's not a problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If the request is successful, I'll buy an appropriate gift to thank him."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying Po-chüeh, who emerged from the postern gate to the garden, saying, "Brother, you ought not to intervene on Huang the Fourth's behalf. This is a case of someone who:
At leisure, doesn't bother to burn incense, but
When in a jam, embraces the legs of the Buddha.[14]
Yesterday, when you were holding the scripture-reading ceremony, he didn't even bother to send a gift, or come to pay a visit. Yet today, he shows up and asks you to do him a favor."
Huang the Fourth responded by bowing to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "My good Uncle Two, you're killing me. I've been running myself ragged over this matter for the last half month. Since when have I had any leisure? Yesterday I had to go to the prefectural yamen to collect this silver due to His Honor. This morning Brother Li the Third got up early to report for duty, and I came straight to His Honor's place here to turn over the silver and solicit his intervention in this affair in the hope of saving my father-in-law. If His Honor persists in his refusal to accept these presents, it will indicate that he no longer intends to patronize me."
When Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was being offered a hundred taels of "snowflake" government silver, he went on to ask, "Brother, are you going to speak up on his behalf, or not?"
"I am not on familiar terms with Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "so, at present, I plan to ask Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house to say a word on his behalf. In the future, I can buy a gift to thank the venerable Ch'ien Lung-yeh. That ought to suffice. So why should I accept these presents from him?"
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "what you propose to do is not appropriate. Do you mean to say that when someone comes to solicit a favor from you, you should be put to the expense of having to buy a thank-you gift on his behalf? That doesn't make any sense. If you refuse to accept what he is offering, it looks as though you disdain it as being insufficient, which leaves him in an awkward position. You ought to take my advice and accept these presents of his. Although you may not set much store by them yourself, they may be drawn upon just as well in thanking Ch'ien Lung-yeh."
"And as for you, Brother Huang the Fourth," he went on to say, "listen to what I have to say. The fate of your father-in-law and brother-in-law hangs in the balance, and if it should happen that, as a result of the letter you have solicited, they are fortunate enough to escape unscathed, His Honor here has clearly not been swayed by your money, and it would be only appropriate for you to lay on a feast in the licensed quarter to provide us all with a day's entertainment."
"Uncle Two," said Huang the Fourth, "in view of your efforts, it goes without saying that your humble servant will host a party, and I'll have my father-in-law buy a present and come to kowtow to you in gratitude. There is no reason for me to deceive you, but on account of this affair of the two of them, father and son, I have been running around, day and night, high and low, without being able to find any way out of their predicament. If His Honor will not take pity on them, I will be at my wit's end."
"Don't be silly," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Since you embrace his daughter as your wife, if you were not really concerned about him, who would be?"
"My wife does nothing but cry at home," said Huang the Fourth. "Even if my father-in-law had been able to hide out somewhere, there would have been no one at home to deliver food to him."
At this juncture, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having allowed himself to be persuaded by Ying Po-chüeh, agreed to accept the promissory note for a hundred taels but told Huang the Fourth to take back his additional gifts.
"Venerable sir," said Huang The Fourth, "you don't seem to realize what a momentous matter this is, that you should quibble so about it."
Upon saying which, he started to go outside.
"Come over here," said Ying Po-chüeh. "Let me have a word with you. When do you need this letter by?"
"Life and death are hanging in the balance at this moment," said Huang the Fourth. "If His Honor will deign to produce a letter today, and depute someone to deliver it, I'll send my son to accompany him first thing in the morning."
He then proceeded to implore him again and again, saying, "Which of your honorable servants do you intend to send, so I can have a chance to get together with him?"
"I'll write the letter for you right away," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then called over Tai-an and told him, "You go to deliver it tomorrow, along with Young Master Huang."
When Huang the Fourth saw Tai-an, he said goodbye to Hsi-men Ch'ing and went out the door. When he got to the front gate, he asked Tai-an for the return of the bag in which he had brought the silver. Tai-an went back to the master suite in the rear compound, where he found Yüeh-niang, together with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü, engaged in tailoring some clothes.
When she saw Tai-an standing there waiting for the bag, Yü-hsiao said, "We're busy and don't have the leisure to empty it right now. You might as well have him come back for it tomorrow."
"Huang the Fourth is anxiously waiting for it right now," said Tai-an. "Tomorrow morning he has to get up early and go to Tung-ch'ang prefecture, so he can't come back then. Why don't you just empty it for him?"
"You had better go get it for him," said Yüeh-niang, "rather than keeping him waiting."
"The silver is still lying where we left it on the surface of the bed, isn't it?" said Yü-hsiao.
Going into the inner room she proceeded to dump the silver out of the bag onto the bed, after which, she brought the bag out with her, saying, "You crazy jailbird! Did you think someone had eaten this bag of his, that you should be as persistent as a leech in sucking it out of us?"

"If someone had not wanted it," said Tai-an, "what reason would I have had to come back to the rear compound for it?"
Thereupon, he took it out with him, and, when he got as far as the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds, gave it a shake, when what should fall out but a mushroom-shaped lump of silver, worth about three taels. It so happens that the paper packet in which it was wrapped had broken when Yü-hsiao dumped the silver carelessly out in her fit of pique, so that this lump had fallen out and remained in the bottom of the bag.
"What a stroke of luck," said Tai-an to himself. "I've managed to pick up something for nothing."
Thereupon, tucking it into his sleeve, he went out to the front compound, where he turned the bag over to Huang the Fourth and arranged to set out with him first thing in the morning.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to his studio, where he proceeded right away to instruct Licentiate Wen to compose the letter and turn it over to Tai-an. But no more of this.
Having noticed that outside the door:
Fluttering and swirling,
the snow was coming down just like:
Windblown willow catkins,[15] or
Wildly dancing pear blossoms,
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered the opening of a jug of high-quality Ma-ku wine and told Ch'un-hung to strain it through a cheesecloth sieve and serve it. Meanwhile, Cheng Ch'un was standing to one side, strumming his psaltery and singing in a low voice. Hsi-men Ch'ing told him to sing the song suite that begins with the words:
Beneath the willows the breeze is gentle.[16]
As he was singing, whom should they see but Ch'in-t'ung, who came in and said, "Uncle Han Tao-kuo asked me to show you this note."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read it, he said, "You deliver it to the residence of Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i outside the city gate and get him to speak up on his behalf. Ask him to go tomorrow and speak to Attendant Wang on the staff of the Prince of Yün about it, in order to have Han Tao-kuo's name removed from the roster of those whose corvée labor is mandated."
"It's late today," said Ch'in-t'ung. "I'll go early tomorrow morning."
"That will be all right," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Not long afterwards, Lai-an came in bearing a square box that contained eight bowls of delicacies. These included one bowl of braised yams with chicken, one bowl of minced pork with leeks, one bowl of yams with pork meatballs, one bowl of slow-boiled sheep's head, one bowl of roast pork, one bowl of soup flavored with tripe and lungs, one bowl of broth flavored with blood and intestines, one bowl of beef tripe, and one bowl of quick-fried pork kidneys, as well as two large plates of steamed pastries with rose-flavored stuffings, made of dough kneaded with hot water, and basted with rendered goose fat. When the four of them, including Ch'en Ching-chi, had eaten their fill, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Wang Ching to take a tray with two bowls of delicacies and a plate of pastry and give them to Cheng Ch'un to eat. He also awarded him two large goblets of wine.
Cheng Ch'un knelt down and said, "I can't drink the wine."
"My good child!" said Ying Po-chüeh. "It's ice-cold outside. How can you refuse it when it's awarded to you by your master? How is it that your elder brother drinks what he is provided?"
"My elder brother may drink wine," said Cheng Ch'un, "but I don't drink it."
"Just drink one goblet," said Ying Po-chüeh, "and I'll get Wang Ching to drink the other one for you."
"Master Two," said Wang Ching, "I can't drink it either."
"My child," insisted Ying Po-chüeh, "just drink some of it in his stead. It's not as though you'd be doing him a big favor, or anything like that. It has always been true that:
When an elder bestows something, a junior
does not presume to refuse it."[17]
Standing up, he then went on to say, "No matter what happens, I'm going to see to it that you drink this cup."
Wang Ching, while holding his nose with one hand, managed to drink it off in one gulp.
"You crazy dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If the young good-for-nothing doesn't drink, why should you force him to do so? There's still half a cup left over. Let Ch'un-hung drink it for him, after which he can clap his hands to keep time and sing some southern songs for us."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to say, "Let's play a game of forfeits with Licentiate Wen. Whenever, in the course of the game, anyone has to pay a forfeit by drinking a cup of wine, he can sing to accompany it. That should make it more interesting."
Thereupon, he directed Wang Ching to fetch the dicebox and suggested that Licentiate Wen should start the game off.
"How could your pupil be so presumptuous?" said Licentiate Wen. "It would be more appropriate for the venerable Master Ying to do so."
He then went on to say, "May I enquire, venerable sir, what is your courtesy name?"
"My courtesy name is Nan-p'o, or Southern Slope," replied Ying Pochüeh.
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, with tongue in cheek, "let me explain it to you. His wife takes on such a large number of customers that, at night, when it is time to empty the commode, there is so much shit in it that he is embarrassed to empty it anywhere close by and has a maidservant lug it all the way to the southern edge of the city and dump it underneath the wall of the district granary. That is the origin of his courtesy name, Nan-p'o, or Southern Slop."
Licentiate Wen laughed, saying, "That is a different character pronounced *p'o*, which is composed of the water radical on the left and the character *fa*, or 'to transmit,' on the right. The *p'o* character he means is composed of the earth radical on the left and the character *p'i*, or 'skin,' on the right."
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you've deciphered it correctly. His wife is besieged by skinheads all day long."
"How can you bring yourself to say such a thing?" laughed Licentiate Wen.
"You may not be aware of it, sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he has forever been adept at offending other people."
"It has always been true," opined Licentiate Wen, "that:
Language which is not off-color fails to amuse."
"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're interrupting our game of forfeits. What's the point of arguing with him? He's forever given to:
Hurting other people with his shitty mouth,[18]
so why pay any attention? There's no need to make excuses for him."
"Well then," said Licentiate Wen, "whatever number comes up when you throw the die, you must quote a line, whether it be from a poem, a lyric, a song, or a rhapsody, in which the word 'snow' occurs in the position corresponding to the number you have thrown. If you come up with an appropriate quote, you must drink a small cup of wine. If you fail to come up with one, you must drink a large cup of wine."
Thereupon, Licentiate Wen threw a one-spot and said, "I've got a line:
Snow has melted off the water birds
for some time now."[19]
He then passed the dicebox to Ying Po-chüeh, who threw a five-spot.
Ying Po-chüeh, after pondering for what seemed like half a day and coming up blank, said, "I can't think of anything for the life of me."
After a further interval, he said, "I've finally managed to dredge something up:
Snow-clad plum blossoms[20] in snow
are blooming.[21]
How will that do?"
"Venerable sir," said Licentiate Wen, "you've committed an error by introducing the word 'snow' twice. There's a redundant occurrence of the word 'snow' at the head of your line."
"The initial instance refers only to light snow," explained Ying Po-chüeh, "whereas the second instance denotes a heavy snow."
"You dog!" Hsi-men Ch'ing exclaimed. "All you ever do is talk nonsense."
He then told Wang Ching to pour him a large goblet of wine, while Ch'un-hung, clapping his hands to keep time, sang a southern song to the tune "Stopping the Horse to Listen":
On this cold night, needing some tea,
I plod toward the village ahead
in search of an inn.
This snow lightly sprinkles the monks' quarters,
While densely bespattering the sing-song houses,[22]
And distantly delaying the homebound watercraft.
Along the riverbank people seize the chance
to admire the plum blossoms;
Within their courtyards they enjoy the scene
while burning silver candles.
As far as the eye can see,[23]
As far as the eye can see,
Like the willow catkins at the Pa River Bridge,[24]
It fills the sky as it flutters down.[25]
Ying Po-chüeh was about to take up his forfeit of wine to drink when whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in from the rear compound carrying several saucers of snacks for them to eat. These included a saucer of stuffed pastries, a saucer of cream puff pastries, a saucer of baked chestnuts, a saucer of sun-dried dates, a saucer of hazelnut kernels, a saucer of melon seeds, a saucer of snow pears, a saucer of apples, a saucer of dried caltrops, a saucer of water chestnuts, a saucer of butterfat "abalone shell" sweets, and a saucer of black spherical dumplings wrapped in orange leaves. When Ying Po-chüeh picked one of these up and smelled it, he found that it exuded a pungent fragrance, and when he put it in his mouth, it tasted like a mixture of malt sugar and honey, being fine-textured, sweet, and delicious, but he couldn't identify it.
"Why don't you take a guess?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They must be sugared torreya nuts?" Ying Po-chüeh ventured.
"Sugared torreya nuts don't taste nearly as good as that," declared Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I would have said they were sugared plum bonbons," said Ying Po-chüeh, "were it not that they have kernels."
"You dog!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Come over here and let me tell you. You wouldn't arrive at the right answer even in your wildest dreams. These were brought to me the other day by one of my employees on the boat from Hang-chou. They are called 'coated plums.' They consist of red bayberries, covered with a paste of distilled medicinal spices and honey, with an outer coating of peppermint, and wrapped in orange leaves. That's why they have such a pleasing flavor. If you let one dissolve in your mouth first thing in the morning every day, it will engender saliva, strengthen the lungs, eliminate bad breath, reduce phlegm, relieve hangovers, and control the appetite. They are much superior to sugared plum bonbons."
"If you hadn't told me," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how could I have known?"
He then turned to Licentiate Wen and said, "Venerable sir, let's each have another one, shall we?"
After which, he said to Wang Ching, "Fetch a sheet of paper, so I can wrap up two of them to take home for my wife."
He also picked up one of the "abalone shell" sweets and said to Cheng Ch'un, "Were these 'abalone shell' sweets really prepared personally by your sister Ai-yüeh?"
Cheng Ch'un knelt down and said, "You don't mean to suggest that I would dare tell a lie do you? I don't know how much care my sister Ai-yüeh devoted to preparing these few samples in order to show her filial respect for His Honor."
"Thanks to her skill," said Ying Po-chüeh, "she's twisted each of their surfaces into the spiral shape of a snail shell, and made two kinds, one pink, and one white."
"When I see these things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I can't help feeling sore at heart. The late Sixth Lady was the only member of my household that could make these sweets, and now that she's dead there's no one left who knows how to make them."
"Did I not say earlier," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "that I have no cause for regret? Having lost one daughter who was adept at making these 'abalone shell' sweets in order to show her filial respect for me, another daughter who knows how to make them has turned up. You're amazingly gifted at finding such people, and they all turn out to be real stunners, to boot."
This caused Hsi-men Ch'ing to:
Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,
and he went after Ying Po-chüeh and gave him a playful slap, saying, "You Dog! All you ever do is talk nonsense."
"You two venerable gentlemen," remarked Licentiate Wen, "are certainly on as intimate terms as you can get."
"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you may not know it, but he's just like a member of your humble nephew's family."
"In fact," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've been a regular customer of his establishment for twenty years."
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the two of them were getting increasingly indecent with each other, he got up and went away, while Licentiate Wen merely covered his mouth with his hand and laughed.
Before long, Ying Po-chüeh finished off the large goblet of wine, and it was Hsi-men Ch'ing's turn to throw the dice.
Thereupon, when his throw ended up with seven spots, after pondering for what seemed like half a day, he said, "I've come up with a quote from a song to the tune 'A Girdle of Fragrant Silk,'" and proceeded to sing it:
Spring is taking flight;
Pear blossoms are like snow.[26]
"You've committed an error," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The word 'snow' is in the ninth position rather than the seventh. You'll have to drink a large goblet of wine."
Thereupon, he filled a chased silver goblet to overflowing and placed it in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing, telling Ch'un-hung to sing, and challenging him by asking, "My child:
If you saw that date pit in your stomach to pieces,
How many pieces can you ever hope to come up with?"[27]
Ch'un-hung responded by clapping his hands to keep time and singing to the same tune:
On all sides dark clouds are hovering,
When I look around me, the rivers and mountains
stretch to the horizon.
This snow is as light as willow catkins,[28]
As fine as goose down,
And whiter than plum blossoms.
The twisting paths on the hillside
become even muddier;

The insipid wine in the villages
becomes more costly.
Heavenly flowers flutter down in profusion,
Heavenly flowers flutter down in profusion.
The moats are leveled, the ditches are full;
It is enough to make one sigh in amazement.[29]

As they were enjoying their drinking bout, evening arrived, and candles were lighted.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished drinking his penalty cup, Ying Pochüeh said, "Since your son-in-law is no longer here, it is the turn of the venerable gentleman Licentiate Wen to finish the game."

Licentiate Wen, accordingly, took up the dicebox and threw a one-spot. After thinking for a while, he noticed that there was a pair of framed hanging scrolls on the wall of the studio, on which a couplet was inscribed in gold-flecked characters, that read:

Wind ruffles the flaccid willows beside the
level bridge at eventide;
Snow sprinkles the cold plum blossoms in the
small court at springtime.[30]

So he quoted the second line of the couplet.

"That doesn't count. That doesn't count," objected Ying Po-chüeh. "It's not something you came up with out of your own mind. You'll have to drink a large goblet of wine."

Ch'un-hung, accordingly, proceeded to fill the goblet for him. Licentiate Wen:

Could not handle the effects of the drink,
but found himself dozing off on his chair, and asked to be excused. Ying Pochüeh was unable to persuade him to stay.

"That's enough. That's enough," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The venerable gentleman is a man of culture and is not accustomed to carousing."

He then turned to Hua-t'ung and said, "You take good care of Master Wen, and escort him across the street to get some rest."

This was just the signal Licentiate Wen had been waiting for, and he said goodbye and departed.

"It seems that Wen Pi-ku is not up to it today," opined Ying Po-chüeh. "How much wine did he have, after all, before getting drunk like that?"

Thereupon, after drinking together for some time more, Ying Po-chüeh got up to go, saying, "It's dark underfoot, and I've had enough to drink."

He then went on to say, "Brother, be sure to have Tai-an deliver that letter on his behalf first thing tomorrow morning."

"Weren't you aware of it?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already given him the letter and told him to deliver it tomorrow morning."

When Ying Po-chüeh lifted aside the portiere and saw that the sky was dark and the ground was slippery, he asked for a lantern and set off together with Cheng Ch'un. Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Cheng Ch'un five mace of silver for himself and also put a canister of "coated plums" in the box that he had brought with him, for him to take back and present to his elder sister Cheng Ai-yüeh.

As they were on their way out the door, Hsi-men Ch'ing joked with Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "See that you two brethren take good care of each other."

"You're wasting your breath," responded Ying Po-chüeh.

"When a father and son hike together,
It's a case of each man for himself.[31]

I might just as well go now and have a word with that little whore, Cheng Aiyüeh."

As he finished speaking, Ch'in-t'ung escorted them out the gate.

Hsi-men Ch'ing, having watched while the utensils were cleared away, leaned for support on Lai-an, who held a lantern for him as they went through the postern gate. As they passed by the door of P'an Chin-lien's quarters, he saw that the side gate was closed and silently made his way past it to the gate of Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where he proceeded to rap gently at the door. Hsiu-ch'un opened the door to let him in, and Lai-an then went back out of the garden.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing entered the parlor, he saw Li P'ing-erh's portrait and asked if the daily offering of soup and rice had been presented before it, or not.

Ju-i then came out and replied to his question, saying, "The maidservants and I just finished presenting it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing then went into the bedroom and sat down on a chair, while Ying-ch'un served him with tea, after which, he asked her to help him undress. Ju-i, realizing that he intended to spend the night there, hastily proceeded to spread out the bedding and heat the quilt by inserting a hot-water bottle until it was good and warm, whereupon, she helped him into bed. Hsiu-ch'un locked the postern gate, and the three of them then laid out their bedding on wooden benches in the parlor and prepared to go to sleep.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing called for another serving of tea, the two maidservants, who understood the state of affairs, encouraged the wet nurse to go inside and sleep with him. The woman, accordingly, took off her clothes and burrowed her way under his quilt. Hsi-men Ch'ing, exhilarated by the wine he had drunk, took a dose of the aphrodisiac and fastened the clasp on his member. The woman then lay faceup on the k'ang, raised her legs, and allowed him to peg away at her for all he was worth. Slamming away at her recklessly, he kept it up until:

The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and
Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,[32]
while she called out "Daddy" incessantly. In the quiet of the night the noise that they made could be heard several houses away.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the woman's flesh was as soft as cotton wadding, he embraced her with both arms and then directed her to squat down under the quilt and suck his cock. There was nothing the woman would not debase herself to do in ministering to his pleasure.

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it turns out that the flesh of your body is every bit as fair as that of your late mistress. When I embrace you, it feels just the way it did when I slept with her. If you try your best to cater to me, I will look after you."

"It hardly needs saying, Father," the woman replied, "but, how can you compare Heaven to Earth? You'll be the death of me yet. How can I be compared to my mistress in any way? Seeing that your servant's husband is already dead, whenever the spirit moves you, early or late, if you don't reject me for my homeliness, all you have to do is tip me a wink, and I'll be at your service."

"How old are you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask.

"Since I was born in the year of the hare," the woman replied, "this year I'm thirty years old."

"It turns out then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that you're a year younger than I am."

He was impressed by the fact that she was both glib with her tongue and fond of the pillow-top game of breeze and moonlight.

The next morning, when it was time to get up, the woman got out of bed first in order to minister to him by fetching his shoes and socks, and helping with his morning ablutions.

Catering to him with the utmost assiduity,
she succeeded in putting Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un in the shade.

She also made a request of Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I'd like to have a piece of pale green pongee to make into a jacket so that I can wear mourning for my mistress."

Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to everything she asked, sending a servant to get three lengths of pale green pongee from the shop, and saying, "Each of the three of you can make a mourning garment for yourselves."

As a result of this night together, having had two or three encounters with her, Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart was moved, and, behind Yüeh-niang's back, he began to supply her with silver, clothing, and jewelry, in fact, there was nothing he refused her.

The next day, when P'an Chin-lien learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had spent the night in Li P'ing-erh's quarters sleeping with the wet nurse, Ju-i, she went straight to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "Elder Sister, you'd better have something to say to that lousy shameless good-for-nothing of ours. Yesterday, he made his way surreptitiously into her quarters next door and spent the night with that woman, the wet nurse. He is just like someone whose:

Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin.

What kind of a good-for-nothing is he, to pick up whatever comes his way, no matter whether it be good or bad:

Neither light nor dark?[33]

In the future, if she should produce a child, whose would it be? She'll be just like Lai-wang's wife was:

Assuming privileges above her station.

What kind of a spectacle would that create?"

"All you seem bent on doing," said Yüeh-niang, "is to get me to do the dirty work of accusing him of having an affair with the servant woman of his deceased lady, while you play the role of an innocent bystander behind my back. Do you think you can simply:

Put a water crock over my head?

What sort of a fool do you take me for? If you want to take him to task, go ahead and do it. I'm not going to get myself involved in your idle undertakings."

When Chin-lien heard Yüeh-niang's response, she did not have another word to say, but simply went back to her quarters.

Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early that morning and, seeing that the weather was clear, proceeded to dispatch Tai-an on his errand to deliver the letter to Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh's office. After he had gone to the yamen and returned home, P'ing-an came inside and reported that the messenger from Chai Ch'ien's place had come back to pick up his reply.

After giving him the letter, Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask, "How come you didn't come back to pick it up yesterday?"

"Your humble servant," the messenger replied, "had to deliver another letter to His Honor Hou Meng, the grand coordinator of Shantung province, and was held up for two days."

When he finished speaking, he took the letter and went out the gate.

After eating a meal, Hsi-men Ch'ing went over to the house across the street to supervise the weighing out of the silver, the packing up, and the writing out of the statement of account, so that on the twenty-fourth he could burn propitiatory paper money and send off the managers, Han Tao-kuo, Ts'ui Pen, and Lai-pao, along with the young men, Jung Hai and Hu Hsiu, the five of them, on their expedition to the South. He also saw to the writing of a letter to be delivered by them to Miao Ch'ing, thanking him for his lavish presents.

By the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth day of the month, Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished paying the personal visits to relatives and friends to thank them for their condolences during the funerary rites for Li P'ing-erh.

One morning, as he was sitting in the master suite after eating his breakfast, Yüeh-niang said to him, "The first day of the coming month is the birthday of our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's daughter Chang-chieh. We really ought to buy something in the way of a gift and have it sent over there. As the saying goes:

A betrothal, once made, should not be altered.

We ought not to cease extending these courtesies merely because our son in dead."

"Of course we should send something," agreed Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Thereupon, he told Lai-hsing to buy two roast geese, a set of pig's trotters, four fresh chickens, two smoked ducks, a platter of birthday noodles, an outfit of figured satin clothing, two gold lamé handkerchiefs, and a box of costume jewelry. When this had been done, he wrote a note to accompany them and had Wang Ching deliver them.

When he had finished taking care of this, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the garden in the front compound and sat down in his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who had come back after delivering the letter to report on his errand.

"His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh," he said, "on seeing your note, immediately wrote a letter and sent one of his functionaries to accompany me and Huang the Fourth's son to deliver it to Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan at the office of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit in Tung-ch'ang prefecture. His Honor, in turn, dispatched an order requesting Prefectural Judge T'ung to forward to him the documents in the case, along with the defendants, so that he could conduct a new hearing of the case. As a result, Sun Ch'ing, as well as his son Sun Wen-hsiang, have been exonerated. The latter has been assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to pay for the burial expenses of the deceased and has only been charged with the crime of manslaughter, for which the penalty of seventy strokes with the heavy bamboo is redeemable for a cash payment. I then had to return to the customs house in order to report back to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh, and obtain a reply from him, before I could come home."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw how competently Tai-an had performed his task, he was delighted. When he opened the reply, he found that Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan's note in reply to Ch'ien Lung-yeh was also included, and read as follows:

Your behest has already been fully complied with. In view of the fact that Feng the Second had previously beaten his son, and that, moreover, both his son and Sun Wen-hsiang had sustained injuries as a result of their affray, and that the ensuing death of his son took place after the period of responsibility for the crime had already expired, to sentence Sun Wen-hsiang to the death penalty would hardly be equitable. It has therefore been adjudged that the defendant shall be assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to compensate Feng the Second for his burial expenses, and the appropriate measures have already been carried out.

Respectfully indited in reply.

Your devoted fellow graduate Lei Ch'i-yüan humbly salutes you.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading this document he was very pleased and went on to ask, "Where is Huang the Fourth's father-in-law now?"

"Upon being released, they have both gone home," replied Tai-an. "Tomorrow, he will come with Huang the Fourth in order to kowtow in gratitude to you. Huang the Fourth's father-in-law also gave me a tael of silver."

"You can keep it to buy shoes for yourself," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Upon this, Tai-an kowtowed and went out.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then sprawled out on the k'ang frame and went to sleep, while Wang Ching lit some incense in a small burner on the table and then quietly made his way out of the room.

After some time, Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly heard the sound of someone lifting aside the portiere, when whom should he see but Li P'ing-erh abruptly entering the room. She was dressed in a violet blouse over a white damask skirt:

Her raven locks were carelessly coiled,
and her complexion was sallow.

Advancing up to the bed, she cried out, "My Brother, you're asleep here, are you? I've come to pay you a visit. That wretch has lodged a formal complaint against me, as a result of which I have been locked up in prison, where:

I am dripping with blood,[34]
befouled by my own filth, and have been suffering torments all this time. But the other day, as a result of the appeal you lodged with the court on my behalf, the charges against me have been reduced by three degrees. That wretch, however, adamantly refuses to accept this verdict and is angrily determined to file a complaint against you, and have you taken into custody. I wouldn't have come to tell you about this, but I feared that, sooner or later, you might find yourself the unexpected victim of his venomous skullduggery. Right now, I am going to look for a place of refuge for myself. You had better be on your guard. If you are not obliged to, try to avoid going out drinking at night, and, wherever you do go, come home early. Whatever happens, keep my words firmly in mind, and don't forget them."

When she had finished speaking, the two of them embraced each other and then burst out crying.

"Sister," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Tell me where it is that you are going."

But, suddenly, she broke away from him with a jerk, revealing it to be but:

A dream of the Southern Branch,[35]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing awoke from his dream, he found himself to be weeping. Upon seeing the shadows of the blind that pervaded the studio, he realized that it was already noon. When he recollected the dream, he couldn't help feeling sorely distressed at heart. Truly:

When the blossoms fall and are buried in the earth
their fragrance is not perceptible;
The mirror is void of the image of the phoenix mate[36]
when he first awakes from his dream.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

The dwindling snow, having just cleared,
illuminates the paper window;
The embers in the brazier have burnt out,

and cold penetrates the couch.
The lovers, having chanced to encounter
each other in a lovelorn dream;
Wind wafts the fragrance of plum blossoms
inside the drapery of the bed.[37]
Who could have anticipated that, in response to the presents that had been sent to the Ch'iao household that morning, Ch'iao Hung's wife sent Ch'iao T'ung to deliver a card inviting Yüeh-niang and her sister wives to a party? When the page boy told them that Hsi-men Ch'ing was asleep in his studio, no one dared to disturb him, and Yüeh-niang merely decided to entertain Ch'iao T'ung, for the time being, in the rear compound.
"Give me that card," said P'an Chin-lien. "Let me go ask him what to do about it."
Thereupon, she abruptly proceeded out to his studio. She was wearing a blouse of jet satin that opened down the middle, had a diapered border with purfled gold lamé edging, and was adorned with a row of five gold buttons decorated with a three rivers pattern. Underneath this she wore an overskirt of light silk, above an underskirt of Lu-chou silk with a gold-spangled border, fastened in front with a girdle of communion,[38] braided out of mermaid silk, and displaying the motif of a pair of amorous water birds. On her feet, the upturned points of her golden lotuses peeked out beneath her red brocade ankle leggings. On her head, her cloudy locks were enclosed in a chignon. Altogether, she was made up as if:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,
while from her ears there dangled a pair of pendant onyx earrings.
Pushing open the door of his studio and finding Hsi-men Ch'ing sprawled on the k'ang frame, she proceeded to park her posterior on a chair, saying, "My child, what are you doing here, talking to yourself all by your lonesome? No wonder you were nowhere to be seen. It turns out you've been here all the time, catching up on your sleep."
As she spoke, she cracked melon seeds with her teeth.
She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How come you've been rubbing your eyes until they're all red?"
"I must have fallen asleep on my face," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Actually," said the woman, "it looks more as if you've been crying."
"You crazy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why should I have been crying for no good reason?"
"It seems more likely to me," said Chin-lien, "that you've happened to remember something about someone who is uppermost in your mind."
"Don't talk such nonsense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who could there be who is either uppermost or undermost in my mind?"
"Li P'ing-erh is uppermost in your mind," said Chin-lien, "and her wet nurse is undermost in your mind, while the rest of us are completely outside your mind, not even worth taking into account."
"You crazy little whore!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're indulging once again in your:
Ridiculous blatherskite."
He then went on to inquire, "What I say to you now is serious. On that earlier occasion, when you were dressing your sister Li in her burial clothes, what kind of garments did you put on the lower part of her body?"
"Why do you ask?" responded Chin-lien.
"For no particular reason," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I just thought I'd ask."
"There must be a reason behind your asking," said Chin-lien. "On the outside, she was dressed in two outfits of satin brocade, underneath which she wore a white satin jacket and a skirt of yellow pongee, over a purple satin camisole, a petticoat of white pongee, and a pair of scarlet underdrawers."
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by nodding his head in recognition.
"Do you suppose," Chin-lien remarked, "that:
After practicing veterinary medicine for twenty years,
I would fail to diagnose the stomach ailment of an ass?
If you weren't thinking of her, why should you ask?"
"I had just seen her in a dream," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Chin-lien said:
"Dreams are produced by what is on your mind;[39]
Sneezes are induced by a tickle in your nose.[40]
Even though she's dead, you're still so preoccupied with her, it would seem that the rest of us no longer tickle your fancy. In the future, when we die, I fear, there will be no one to commemorate us. You're so preoccupied with her that your mind is in a daze."
Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up, reached out with one hand, embraced her by the neck, and gave her a kiss, saying as he did so, "You crazy little oily mouth! You've certainly got:
A sharp mouth and a sharp tongue,
don't you?"
"My son," responded Chin-lien, "do you really think this old mother of yours is oblivious to the fact that:
You may be a brown cat, but you've got a black tail?"
As she spoke, she transferred the mouthful of melon seeds she had been cracking from her mouth into his. The two of them then fell to sucking each other's tongues for a while, until he became aware that:
Her sweet spittle transfused his heart,[41]
Her scented lips were imbued with rouge, and
The odor of orchid and musk from her body
assailed his senses.
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing's:
Lecherous desires were suddenly aroused.
Pulling her onto the bed where he was sitting, he leaned against the comb-back-shaped back rest, exposed his organ, and told the woman to indulge him by "toying with the flute." The woman then actually proceeded to:
Bend low her powdered neck, and
Engulf and release it with her mouth.
As she moved back and forth:
The sound of her sucking was audible.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that her head was adorned with a gold tiger-shaped tiara, her fragrant tresses were studded all round with plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays, and the hair behind her temples was embellished with a profusion of pearl headgear, he could hardly contain his excitement.
Just as they were approaching their climax, they suddenly heard Lai-an, from outside the portiere, saying, "Master Ying the Second is here."
"Invite him to come in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
This threw the woman into such consternation that she called out inarticulately, "Lai-an, you louse! Don't you let him come in until I've had a chance to get out of the way."
"He's already come in," said Lai-an, "and is waiting in the little courtyard."
"Why don't you go tell him to stay out of the way?" said the woman.
Lai-an, accordingly, went out and said to him, "Master Two, you'd better get out of the way for the time being. There's someone in the room with him."
Ying Po-chüeh then went out beside the juniper hedge, where he could contemplate the sight of the bamboos, embellished as they were with snow. Wang Ching lifted aside the portiere, and all that could be heard was a swish of her skirts as Chin-lien disappeared in a puff of smoke on her way back to the rear compound.
Truly:
Concealed by the snow, the presence of the egrets
is not seen until they fly;
Hidden by the willows, the existence of the parrots
is not known until they speak.
Ying Po-chüeh then went inside, greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, and sat down.
"How come you haven't been around the last few days?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I've been stuck at home, where things have been as aggravating as can be."
"What's been aggravating you?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tell me about it."
"It's embarrassing to have to explain it," said Ying Po-chüeh. "The fact is, I'm short of money at home right now. Yesterday, that concubine of mine went and produced another child for no good reason. It's possible for a person to cope with such contingencies by daylight, but it happened during the third watch in the middle of the night. My wife is incapacitated, suffering from:
Seven pains and eight ailments,
so I had to crawl out of bed, collect the necessary absorbent grass paper and bedding, check on how the mother was doing, and then go out to find the midwife. On top of everything else, Ying Pao was not at home, my elder brother having sent him out to his country estate to bring back some fodder. Not having anyone else at hand in this emergency, I had to take a lantern and go off myself to engage Midwife Teng, who lives at the mouth of the alley. By the time she came through the door, the baby was already born."
"What was the sex of the child?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"She gave birth to a baby boy," replied Ying Po-chüeh.
"You silly dog!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If she's produced a son for you, isn't that a good thing? What have you got to be annoyed about? Was it that slave of yours, Ch'un-hua, who gave birth to him?"
"It was, indeed, your sister-in-law Ch'un-hua," Ying Po-chüeh responded with a laugh.
"That lousy bitch of a leg-waggling slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever recommended that you take her on in the first place? And now you're complaining simply because you had to go looking for the midwife."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you don't understand the situation. During these cold winter months, our situation is not to be compared with that of well-to-do households like yours. You not only have plenty of money, but also hold an official position with prospects of future advancement, so that, if a son is born to you, it is just like:
Adding a flower to a piece of brocade.[42]
No wonder you are happy. Whereas, right now, I've got one shadow too many as it is. And I've got to provide food and clothing for that nestful of people in my household. On top of which, for the last several days, I've been driven out of my mind by matchmaking problems. Ying Pao is tied up every day with his corvée labor obligations, and my elder brother, for his part, doesn't pay any attention to my problems. Although my eldest daughter has been married off, thanks to Heaven above, as well as the assistance you rendered, Brother, as you have seen with your own eyes, my second daughter is growing up and will be twelve years old next year. Yesterday, a matchmaker came and asked for a card giving the year, month, day, and hour of her birth. I said it was early days yet and told her to hold off for the time being. It was really driving me to distraction, and then, all of a sudden, in the middle of the night, this new karmic encumbrance turned up.
When one has to:
Grope one's way in the dark of night,[43]
where can one go to convert anything into ready cash? When my wife saw the state of perturbation I was in:
For lack of any alternative option,[44]
she took one of her silver stick-pins and gave it to the midwife in order to settle the matter. Tomorrow is the time for the third day lustration ceremony, [45] so everyone in the neighborhood will find out about it. When it comes time for the full-month celebration, [46] where am I going to find the wherewithal to pay for it.
When the day comes, I guess I'll have to vacate the house, make myself:
As free as you please,
and go off to stay at some Buddhist monastery for a few days."
"If you do make yourself scarce," laughed Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you'll only open the way for one of the monks to take your place in the warm bedding. You dog! When you get right down to it, all you ever care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself."
He continued to laugh at his expense, but Ying Po-chüeh only made a deliberate pout with his lips, and remained silent.
"My son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't be so annoyed. How much silver do you need? If you just tell me, I'll take care of it for you."
"Who knows how much it will take?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"You'll need enough to take care of things satisfactorily," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "And if you find yourself short in the midst of things, you can always go pawn some of your clothes, after all."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if you deign to help me out, twenty taels of silver ought to suffice. I'll write a promissory note for you on the spot. I'm putting you to so much trouble and expense that I've found it difficult to broach the subject. I wouldn't presume to quibble over the amount. Whatever you decide, Brother, will be fine by me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing refused to accept his promissory note, saying, "Don't talk such rot! Among friends, who needs a promissory note?"
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in with a serving of tea.
"Put down those teacups," said Hsi-men Ch'ing to the servant, "and go tell Wang Ching to come here."
Before long, Wang Ching came in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to him, "You go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady to look on top of the cabinet on the rear wall of the bedstead in the inner room for the two packets of silver that were provided by His Honor the regional investigating censor Sung Ch'iao-nien on the occasion of the banquet we put on for him the other day, and bring one of them back to me."
Wang Ching nodded his assent and was not gone for long before coming back with the silver.
Hsi-men Ch'ing handed it over to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "This packet contains fifty taels of silver. You can take all of it and use whatever you need, thus sparing me the trouble of opening it, since:
The original seals have not been tampered with.[47]
You can open it and see for yourself, if you want."
"It's too much," said Ying Po-chüeh.
"If it's more than you need at the moment," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can keep the remainder on hand. At present, seeing that your second daughter has reached marriageable age, you can use it to pay for the making of some shoes, footbindings, and clothing for her, so that she'll appear to advantage during the full-month celebration."
"Brother, what you say makes sense," said Ying Po-chüeh.
When he opened the packet of silver and saw that it did, indeed, contain the joint contributions made by the officials of the Two Provincial Offices and the eight prefectures, in ingots of three taels apiece of the highest grade of incised silver stamped with the mark of the Sung-chiang mint, he was utterly delighted.
Hastily bowing in thanks, he said, "Who could match Brother's magnanimous feelings? Are you really unwilling to accept my promissory note?"

"You silly child!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Why should I treat you the way I would anyone else? After all, I'm in the position of your parent. Were that not the case, would you presume to come pester me over every problem that comes up? This child is not even your own child but may be considered the product of our joint efforts. The truth of the matter is that at the time of the full-month ceremony, if you should make that slave Ch'un-hua of yours available to serve me for a while in lieu of interest, it would not be asking too much of you."
"Your sister-in-law Ch'un-hua, these last few days," responded Ying Pochüeh, "has become just as emaciated by the demands made upon her as your wife."
We will say no more at this point about the banter between the two of them in the studio.
Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, "What has happened with regard to that predicament of Huang the Fourth's father-in-law?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing, in giving him a complete account of Tai-an's mission, said, "Upon receiving Ch'ien Lung-yeh's letter, Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan dispatched an order requiring that the defendants in the case be sent back to his jurisdiction so that he could conduct a new hearing of the case, as a result of which he exonerated both Sun Wen-hsiang and his father Sun Ch'ing. Sun Wen-hsiang has been assessed the sum of ten taels of silver to cover the burial expenses of the deceased and has only been charged with the offense of manslaughter, for which the penalty of seventy strokes with the heavy bamboo is redeemable for a cash payment. Thus the matter has been brought to a successful conclusion."
"What a stroke of luck for him!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "If he had lit a lantern to look for help, where else could he have found anyone capable of doing him such a favor? If you persist in refusing to accept what he is offering you, that's up to you; but though you may not set much store by it yourself, it would be a good idea to keep it in order to compensate Ch'ien Lung-yeh. Don't let him off the hook. Whatever happens, you should get him to lay on a lavish drinking party somewhere in the licensed quarter and invite us to partake thereof. If you don't want to suggest it to him, I'll be happy to do so. You've prevented his brother-in-law from being charged with a capital offense, after all, which is not an inconsequential matter."
To resume our story, while they were talking in the studio, after Yüeh-niang in the master suite had located the silver and given it to Wang Ching to deliver, whom should she see but Meng Yü-lou, who came into the room and said that her younger brother, Meng Jui, was at her brother-in-law Han Ming-ch'uan's place.
"Right now," she went on to say, "he is planning to set out before long on an expedition to buy miscellaneous merchandise in Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region and has come today to say goodbye to Father. He's sitting in my quarters. Wherever Father happens to be. Sister, could you send a page boy to let him know about it?"
He's in his studio in the garden, visiting with Ying Po-chüeh," said Yüeh-niang.
"As to inviting Father to come inside," she went on to say, "a while ago, Sister P'an the Sixth did a fine job on her mission of inviting him back here. Ch'iao T'ung had delivered an invitation card and was waiting for a chance to speak to Father in order to get a verbal reply, so that we would know whether or not to prepare to go out tomorrow. I kept him here in the expectation of getting a response and served him with tea, but despite:
Waiting for long periods as well as short,
Father never showed up, and when Ch'iao T'ung could endure it no longer, he got up and left. After what seemed like half a day, lo and behold, Sister Six came back from the front compound, and when I asked her if she had fulfilled her mission or not, she was at a loss for words, merely saying, 'Oops! I completely forgot to mention it to him, and, in a little while, Ying the Second came in and I had to leave. Who has the patience to:
Stick around and wait forever,[48]
just for the chance to say a word to him? The card is still in my sleeve.' This caused me to say to her:
'When biting the stalk of a crisp vegetable,
start with the root end.
Luckily it wasn't a matter of critical importance, but you've kept everybody waiting. You're just a good-for-nothing creature who lacks the tail to follow up with.' Who knows what she was up to out there that kept her from coming back inside for half a day, only to report that she hadn't remembered to say what she went for? After I had given her a piece of my mind, she took herself off to the front compound."
A little while later, Lai-an came in, and Yüeh-niang sent him to summon Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Tell him that Brother-in-law Meng the Second is here."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then got up, but told Ying Po-chüeh to stay where he was, saying, "Don't you go anywhere. I'll be right back."
When he arrived in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang first told him that Ch'iao Hung's household had sent them an invitation.
"On the day in question," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "You ought to go by yourself. While we are still in mourning, it would hardly be appropriate for the whole family to go."
"Brother-in-law Meng the Second has come to say goodbye to you," said Yüeh-niang. "He's planning to set out in the next day or two on an expedition to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region. He's sitting in his sister's quarters over there waiting to see you."
She then went on to ask, "A while ago, when you asked for that packet of silver, who did you want to give it to?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing explained the whole situation to her, saying, "Last night Brother Ying the Second's concubine Ch'un-hua gave birth to a son, and he asked me to loan him a few taels of silver. He also said that his second daughter had reached marriageable age and he was feeling as hard up as could be about the situation. So I decided to help out by lending him a few taels of silver."
"He's lucky enough, at his age, to finally beget a son," said Yüeh-niang. "His wife must be very happy about it. Tomorrow, we'll have to send them some rice for making congee."
"That goes without saying," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When the time comes for the full-month celebration, I'm not going to let that beggar off the hook, but put him to the trouble, no matter what, of issuing invitations to the lot of you to visit his home, where you can take a look at what sort of a woman Ch'un-hua is."
"In any case," laughed Yüeh-niang, "she's bound to resemble those in your own household in having a nose, and having eyes. How could she be any different?"
She then sent Lai-an to invite Brother-in-law Meng the Second to join them. It was not long before Meng Yü-lou and her younger brother came in to pay their respects. When they had done with the customary amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing chatted with him for a while and then invited him to accompany him to his studio in the front compound, where he introduced him to Ying Po-chüeh. He also told a servant to fetch something to eat from the rear compound.
Thereupon, a table was set up, and wine and delicacies were laid out so that the three of them could have a drink together.
Hsi-men Ch'ing further instructed the servant, saying, "Fetch another wine goblet and pair of chopsticks, and go invite Master Wen from across the street to come and help keep Brother-in-law Meng the Second company.
Lai-an came back in a little while and reported, "Master Wen is not at home but has gone to visit Master Ni P'eng."
"Ask our son-in-law to join us then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, saluted Meng the Second with a bow, and sat down to one side.
Hsi-men Ch'ing questioned Meng Jui, saying, "Brother-in-law, when are you setting out on your expedition, and how long will you be gone?"
"I'm scheduled to set out on the second day of next month," replied Meng Jui, "but how long I'll be gone is impossible to say. I've got to go to Ching-chou to buy paper, and to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region to purchase incense and wax. When you get right down to it, it's likely to take no less than a year or two before I'll be able to purchase everything I need and return home. On this expedition I will take the overland route by way of Honan, Shensi, and Han-chou on the way out, and return on the water route by way of the Yangtze Gorges and Ching-chou. The round-trip will amount to seven or eight thousand li."
"How old are you, Mr. Meng?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"I'm twenty-five," replied Meng Jui.
"It's remarkable that someone as young as you are should be so familiar with the various routes on the rivers and lakes," said Ying Po-chüeh, "while people like myself have grown old in vain, sitting around at home."
Before long, a new serving of delicacies was brought in, and:
The cups and plates were duly arrayed.
Meng the Second remained drinking with them until the sun began to set in the West before he said goodbye and took his leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off and then came back to rejoin Ying Po-chüeh and drink a while longer.
Lo and behold, at this point, two coffers for burnt offerings to the dead were brought in, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'en Ching-chi to take charge of preparing them, and to ask Yüeh-niang for two outfits of Li P'ing-erh's brocade clothing, along with imitation gold and silver paper money, to put into the coffers.
He then said to Ying Po-chüeh, "Today is the date for the sixth weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, and, rather than holding a scripture-reading ceremony, we are going to burn these two coffers for her."
"How swiftly time flies," said Ying Po-chüeh. "My sister-in-law has already been dead for a month and a half."
"The fifth day of the coming month," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the time for the final weekly commemoration of her death. We will have to have a sutra reading for her then."
"So, on that occasion," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the recitation of a Buddhist sutra will suffice."
"My wife," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has reminded me that, while she was still alive, after the birth of her son, she promised two of the Buddhist nuns that frequent our household that they could preside, together with some other nuns that will be engaged for the purpose, over a recitation of the *Hsüeh-p'en ching*, or *Blood Pool Sutra*, and other litanies of repentance, on her behalf."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, Ying Po-chüeh, observing that it was getting late, said, "I'd better be off, so that you can proceed with the ceremony of burning paper money for my sister-in-law."
He then made a deep bow and said, "As the unworthy recipient of Brother's profound generosity:
I will find it hard to forget either dead or alive."[49]
"My son," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "whether you find it hard to forget or not, you'd better not pretend to be:
Still asleep in dreamland.
When it comes time for the full-month ceremony, your whole bevy of mothers will buy presents and show up at your place."
"What need is there for them to purchase gifts," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If I have to kowtow to each one of them, whatever happens, I would like to invite the entire group of my sisters-in-law to condescend to visit my humble household."
"When the day comes," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "whatever happens, I hope you will get that slave of yours, Ch'un-hua, to doll herself up, and trot her out so I can take a look at her."
"Your sister-in-law Ch'un-hua," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "has remarked that now she has a son, she has no further use for you."
"That's enough of your lies," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "When I see that slave, I'll know what to say to her."
Ying Po-chüeh, thereupon, nonchalantly took himself off with a laugh, while Hsi-men Ch'ing told the page boys to clear away the utensils and then went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters.
Ch'en Ching-chi and Tai-an had already completed the task of preparing the coffers. That day, the Temple of the Jade Emperor, the Temple of Eternal Felicity, and the Temple of Kindness Requited had all sent over effigies to be burned at the ceremony. That from the Taoist temple was an effigy of the Perfected Lord of Precious Solemnity and Manifest Accomplishment,[50] while those from the two Buddhist temples were effigies of the Great King of Transformation who sits in judgment over the Sixth Court of the Tribunal of the Underworld. [51] The household of Brother-in-law Hua Tzu-yu outside the city gate sent a box of steamed dumplings and ten quires of paper money for the use of the dead, and the household of Wu K'ai did likewise.
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked on as Ying-ch'un put the offerings of soup and rice in place, with the steamed dumplings below them, and lit the incense and candles. He then sent Hsiu-ch'un back to the rear compound to invite Wu Yüeh-niang and the other ladies to join him. After Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished burning the offering of paper money to Li P'ing-erh, he had the coffers carried out and deputed Ch'en Ching-chi to supervise their incineration outside the front gate. But no more of this. Truly:
Her fragrant soul has probably not perished along with the dying ashes;
But has gone to perpetuate its old affinity in the incarnation to come.

The wind blows from the north
And the ground is covered with flakes of jade.
The white earth and the river are made one.
A cold mist rises above the waves; it is like a screen.
The mountains are covered with gray cloud
And the cloud links them with the water.
The withered grass seems to be dead.
His thoughts were far as the red cloud
The gentle spirit was sad, and the memory bitter
Night after night, only a kind dream
Could give him sleep.
Do not stand alone on the high building
When the moon is waning.
The wine descending to a sorrowing breast
Turns to tears of love.

Ximen Qing was very tired when he went to the inner court to sleep. He did not rise next day until the sun was high in the heavens. Laixing came and said to him: "The builders are here. They wish to know if they shall pull down the temporary buildings."
"Yes, tell them to demolish everything." Ximen answered angrily. "Why do you come and bother me?"
The builders unfastened the mats and ropes and took down the pine- wood posts. They carried them to the house on the other side of the road and there stored them.
Yuxiao came and said to Ximen: "The weather is very threatening." He told her to bring his clothes so that he might get up.
"You are very tired, and the weather looks bad," Wu Yueniang said. "Stay in bed. What is there for you to do if you get up so early? Don't go to the office today."
"I am not going to the office," Ximen said, "but Zhai's messenger is coming for my answer."
"Then you had better get up," Yueniang said, "and I will tell them to make some gruel for you."
Ximen Qing got up but did not wash. He put on a velvet gown and a felt hat and went to his study in the garden. Now that Shutong had gone, Ximen Qing had told Wang Jing to wait upon him in this study and Chunhong to look after the study in the outer court. In winter Ximen usually came to this garden study. There was a fire beneath the floor and a large bronze brazier. The winter blinds were drawn. In the middle room were some *jiazhi* peaches, chrysanthemums of many different kinds, a few slender bamboos of great delicacy, and orchids. Writing materials and vases with the plum-blossom pattern books, and musical instruments were set out with great care.
When Ximen Qing came in, Wang Jing hastened to burn incense in a small gold burner. Ximen bade him tell Laian to go for Ying Bojue. Then Ping'an came and told Wang Jing that Little Zhou, the barber, had come. Ximen Qing gave orders that he should be sent in. The barber came and kowtowed.
"You have come at the right moment," Ximen said to him. "Now comb my hair and massage my body." He asked the barber why it was so long since he had last been there.
"I heard that the Sixth Lady had died and that you were very busy."
Ximen Qing sat down on a comfortable chair, and Little Zhou dressed his hair. Laian came with Ying Bojue. Bojue was wearing a felt hat, a green velvet gown, and a pair of old black boots with palm-leaf galoshes over them. He made a reverence to Ximen Qing. Ximen, who was still having his hair dressed, told him not to stand on ceremony but to sit down. Ying Bojue pulled out a chair and sat down beside the brazier.
"Why are you dressed like this?" Ximen said.
"Don't you know?" said Bojue. "It is snowing and very cold. I did not get home before cockcrow, and this morning I did not feel at all anxious to get up. If you hadn't sent your boy, I should have been asleep still. You must be strong, or you wouldn't be able to get up so early. If I were in your place, I should never get up at all."
"No," said Ximen, "I don't suppose you would. You know all I have had to do of late. First the funeral, then Grand Marshal Huang to entertain, and now this last ceremony. I have had no rest at all. This morning, my wife said to me: 'You must be tired; stay in bed for a while,' but I remembered that Zhai's messenger was coming for an answer to the letter he brought, and I wanted to see the temporary buildings pulled down. On the twenty-fourth, Clerk Han and the others are to start for the South. Then, during the funeral ceremonies, my kinsmen and friends have been very kind. I ought to go and visit them but, in the circumstances, perhaps I may be excused. But at least I must go and see the officers of rank who came to the funeral."
"I am afraid you can't escape that," Bojue said, "but, as for the others, if I were you, I should get somebody to go and call on them on your behalf. You can thank them when you see them. They all know how busy you are, and they will understand."
As they were talking, Huatong brought two cups of milk with sugar and cream. Bojue took one. The milk was so white that it looked like goose fat with the cream floating on the top. "This is a great treat," he said. "Nice and hot too!" He drank the milk, and found it so sweet that he had no difficulty in finishing it. Little Zhou finished Ximen Qing's hair and began to clean his ears. Ximen set down his cup of milk.
"Drink your milk, Brother," Bojue said. "Don't let it get cold. A man like you ought to drink milk. It is so nourishing."
"I don't want it," Ximen Qing said. "You drink it. My gruel will be coming shortly."

Ying Bojue liked it very much. He picked up the cup and drank it straight off.
The barber finished cleaning Ximen's ears and took a roller to massage his body.
"Do you enjoy being rolled like this?" Bojue said.
"I have a good deal of pain in the back," Ximen said. "I need the massage."
"Well, you are very stout, and you have such rich food every day you must have a good deal of heat inside you."
"Doctor Ren has said to me more than once: 'Sir, though you seem so stout, you are really not very strong,' " Ximen Qing said. "He gave me a box of tonic, reinvigorating pills. He told me that these pills had originally been made for his Majesty by his Holiness Lin, and recommended me to take one every morning with human milk. But the last few days I have had so much to do I forgot all about the pills. You are always saying that I have too many ladies and that I see too much of them, but since the Sixth Lady died, I have had so much on my mind I have never thought about such things."
Then Han Daoguo came in. "I have just heard that our boat has been chartered," he said. "We shall be able to start on the twenty-fourth as we proposed."
Ximen Qing told Clerk Gan to go into the accounts, get the silver ready, and see that everything was packed up the following day. He said to Han Daoguo: "How much money have we made in our two shops?"
"About six thousand taels all together," Han Daoguo said.
Ximen told him to give two thousand taels to Cui Ben so that he could go and buy goods at Huzhou, and to take the remaining four thousand to buy cloth at Songjiang with Laibao. "You will come back by one of the first boats next year," he said. He told each of them to take five taels and go home to get ready.
"There is one matter I must mention," Han Daoguo said. "I am detailed to a tour of duty in Duke Yun's palace. They say I must go in person and will not accept substitute money. What shall I do?"
"You are in the same position as Laibao," Ximen said. "He gets out of it by simply paying three *qian* of silver every month."
"Brother Laibao was appointed by his Eminence the Imperial Tutor," Han Daoguo said. "The papers came, and the authorities at the palace dare not say a word. But I have to serve because my ancestors have always served. I can't do what he does."
"Go and write out a statement of your case and I will ask Doctor Ren to go to the palace and arrange matters with Master Wang. I am sure they will take your name off the register and allow you to give money in place of service. After that, you will only need to send a man there once a month."
Han Daoguo bowed and thanked him.
"Brother," Ying Bojue said, "if you can arrange this matter for him, he will be much easier in mind when he starts for the South."
By this time the massage was finished, and Ximen Qing went to the inner court to dress. He told a servant to give Little Zhou something to eat. Sometime later he returned, wearing a white velvet hat and a velvet cloak, and gave the barber three *qian* of silver. He told Wang Jing to go for Scholar Wen. The scholar came, wearing a tall hat and a broad girdle. They greeted one another, and a servant laid the table and brought in gruel. Ying Bojue and Scholar Wen sat in the places of honor, Ximen Qing in the host's seat, and Han Daoguo in the lower place. Ximen called for another bowl of gruel and a pair of chopsticks for Chen Jingji. Jingji, wearing a white hat and white gown, bowed to Bojue and the others and sat down beside Han Daoguo. They soon finished the gruel, and the things were cleared away. Han Daoguo left them.
Ximen Qing asked Scholar Wen whether he had written the letter. "I have a rough draft here," Scholar Wen said, "and when you have approved it, I will write it again." He took the draft from his sleeve and gave it to Ximen Qing. It read:
To the great and virtuous statesman, my worthy kinsman Yun Feng.
The time has flown since we parted at the Capital, and already half a year has passed. Sorrow has come upon me and I have lost my wife. You, from so great a distance, have been gracious enough to send an offering. And you have sent a letter that I value highly, an earnest of your kind feeling and generous actions. I am greatly indebted to you and shall never forget your kindness. My only fear is that my delinquencies in the office may bring disgrace upon you, since my position there is due to you. I trust that you will speak kindly for me to his Eminence. All that I have is of your giving.
I take this opportunity of asking after your well-being. I have thought of you continually.
With this letter I send ten silken Yangzhou handkerchiefs, ten of colored silk, twenty gold toothpicks and ten gold cups. These are but a slight token of my regard, and I trust you will accept them with indulgence.
Your kinsman Ximen Qing of Qinghe.
When Ximen Qing had read the letter, he told Jingji to pack up the presents. He asked Scholar Wen to copy the letter upon fine paper and seal it with his seal. Then he gave five taels of silver to the messenger Wang Yu.
The snow was heavier than before. Ximen invited Scholar Wen to stay with him in the study and admire the beauty of the landscape. The servants cleared the tables and brought wine. Then Ximen Qing saw someone peeping through the blind and asked who was there. Wang Jing told him it was Zheng Chun. Ximen called the boy in, and he came, carrying two boxes. He lifted them high before him, then knelt down before Ximen Qing. A small golden square box was opened and Ximen asked what was in it. "My sister Zheng Aiyue," said the boy, "knows how busy and tired you have been, and she sends you these two boxes of cakes." One of the two boxes contained pastries filled with fruits, and the other, pastries shaped like a spiral shell. "My sister prepared them with her own hands," Zheng Chun said. "She knows you like them and made them especially for you."
"It is only a day or two since you brought me some tea," Ximen said, "and now your sister has sent me these delightful pastries. I am very grateful to her."
"Splendid!" Ying Bojue said. "Hand them to me. I'll see what they're like. My daughter, who used to make these pastries so well, is dead, but now, I see, I have another daughter who knows how to make them." He picked up one and put it in his mouth. Then he took another and gave it to Scholar Wen, saying: "Here, old gentleman, try this. You will find it will make your teeth grow again and give new life to your flesh and bones. I give you my word: to have rare things like this is better than ten years added to one's life."
Scholar Wen put the pastry into his mouth. It seemed to melt at once. "Cakes like this," he said, "come from the West. They are not the kind of thing one sees every day. They ease the lungs and bring a feeling of genuine delight. A rarity indeed!"
"What is in the little box?" Ximen Qing asked Zheng Chun.
The boy knelt down again and handed the box to Ximen. "My sister has sent this for you alone," he said, softly.
Ximen Qing put the box on his knee, but, before he could open it, Ying Bojue snatched it away from him and opened it. There was a red silk handkerchief inside, embroidered with a pattern of entwined hearts, and in the handkerchief were melon seeds that Zheng Aiyue had cracked with her own teeth. Bojue tossed the handkerchief to Ximen Qing, grabbed two handfuls of melon seeds and crammed them into his mouth. Ximen Qing tried to stop him, but by this time there were only a few seeds left.
"You dog," cried Ximen, "are you starving? She sent them for me. Give them to me at once."
"It was my daughter who sent them," Bojue said, "so it is right and proper that I should have them. You, my son, have too many good things already."
"If Scholar Wen were not here," Ximen said, "I would tell you what I think about you. You dog, you really go beyond all bounds." He put the handkerchief in his sleeve and told Wang Jing to take the boxes to the inner court. Food and wine were brought. When they had drunk a cup of wine, Daian came and said that Li and Huang had come to pay their debt.
"How much have they brought?" Ximen Qing asked.
"They have brought a thousand taels," Daian said, "and they say they will pay more later."
"The ungodly scoundrels," Bojue cried, "they have deceived me. They never said a word to me about it. No wonder they did not put in an appearance during the ceremony. They must have been to Dongpingfu for the money. Take it, Brother, and have done with them. They have had credit enough. I shouldn't be surprised if, later, they weren't able to pay. I knew that Eunuch Xue was going to Dongpingfu to get some money for himself yesterday. I hoped that all the money would not go to that old ox, because I knew there wasn't any hope that you would get your money back if he got hold of it."
"I am not worrying about him," Ximen Qing said. "If they don't pay, I shall clap them into jail." He told Chen Jingji to get the scales and weigh the silver. "Then I will go and see them," he said.
Jingji came back. "I have weighed the silver," he said, "and there are exactly a thousand taels. I gave it to the Great Lady. Huang the Fourth says he would like to speak to you."
"Go and tell him I am entertaining some guests," Ximen Qing said. "He must come back after the twenty-fourth. I know he wants to get out of his contract."
"No," said Jingji. "He says it is another matter about which he would like to speak to you. It is a favor he wishes to ask."
"Then I will go and see him," Ximen said.
When he came to the hall, Huang the Fourth kowtowed and said: "I have now paid a thousand taels to your son-in-law, and I will pay shortly the remainder. There is another matter about which I should like to ask your help." He knelt down and burst into tears.
Ximen Qing raised him and asked what was the matter.
"My wife's father, Sun Qing, and his partner, Feng the Second, are in the cotton business at Dongchang. Feng the Second has a son, Feng Huai, a very unfilial fellow, who spends all his time at bawdy houses. One day he stole two bales of cotton. My father-in-law remonstrated with his partner, and Feng the Second gave his son a beating. Then the young man made trouble with my wife's brother, Sun Wen, and there was a fight. He knocked out one of my brother-in-law's teeth, but not before he had taken a hard knock on the head. Bystanders stopped the fight, and Feng's son went home, but something went wrong, and he died about a fortnight later. The dead young man's father-in-law is a notorious scamp of Hexi. His name is Bai the Fifth, but he is nicknamed Profiteer Bai and is a harborer of rogues and villains. He put up Feng the Second to bring an accusation, and Feng went to the court to accuse the Suns. The magistrate appointed Captain Li to investigate the case, but his Lordship was then awaiting the arrival of the Imperial barge and the matter was delegated to Tong, one of the magistrates of the Prefecture. Bai bribed the magistrate and persuaded some of the neighbors to give false evidence. They swore that, when the two young men were fighting, my father-in-law encouraged them. Tong has sent to arrest my father-in-law. I have come to you to beg you to have pity and write a letter to Captain Li on his behalf. What I suggest is that, when my father-in-law has been in prison for a few days, Captain Li should be approached again. In the first place, my father-in-law had nothing whatever to do with the fighting, and secondly, the young man died so long after the actual fight that it was beyond the recognized limit. Besides, his own father had punished him first, so that it cannot be definitely said that Sun Wen was the cause of his death."
Ximen Qing looked at the paper Huang the Fourth had brought. It said: 'Sun Qing and Sun Wen, now held in prison at Dongchang, implore your favor and your gracious help.'
"Captain Li was here only the other day," Ximen said. "It was the first time we had met, so we can hardly be called intimate friends. How can I approach him in this matter?"
Huang the Fourth knelt down again. He cried and said: "You must have compassion on them, or both father and son will perish. If Sun Wen cannot be saved, at least let us save my father-in-law. It will be a noble act on your part. My father-in-law is sixty years old. If he is kept in prison during the wintry weather, it will certainly kill him."
Ximen Qing thought for a long time. Then he said: "I will write to his Lordship Qian of the Customs. He will speak to Captain Li. They passed their examination in the same year."
Once more Huang the Fourth knelt down. He took from his sleeve a card that said: "A hundred sacks of finest rice." He handed this to Ximen Qing and then brought out two parcels of silver. Ximen said he wanted none of his money.
"If it is no use to you," Huang the Fourth said, "you might perhaps pass it on to his Lordship Qian."
"Don't trouble about that," Ximen said. "If the matter is settled, I will send him some presents."
Ying Bojue came through the corner door.
"Brother," he said, "do nothing for this fellow Huang the Fourth. He is the sort of man who never burns incense to Buddha yet comes to fall before the knees of Buddha when he is in difficulties. Remember that, when you had the service for your dead lady, he never even sent you tea. Nor did he come himself. Why should you trouble about him?"
Huang the Fourth bowed to Ying Bojue. "Good uncle!" he said, "this is a serious matter and you are sentencing men to death. For the last month this business has kept me on the run, and I couldn't find a moment to come here. Yesterday I went to the office for the money, and today I have come to pay my debt and to ask his Lordship's aid to save my father-in-law. His Lordship refuses to take my offering, and I fear he is not willing to help me."
Bojue saw a hundred taels of snow-white silver. "Brother," he said, "are you going to do anything for him?"
"I don't know Captain Li well enough," Ximen said, "but I will buy a present of some sort and ask Qian to do what he can. I don't think I can take this money from Huang the Fourth."
"Then you make a mistake," Bojue said. "He comes and asks you for help, and it is not right that you should be put to expense in the matter. If you refuse to accept it, it will look as though you thought the gift too small. Take my advice and accept the money. If you don't need it yourself, pass it on to his Lordship Qian. Now, in Brother Huang's presence, I say that the fate of his father- and brother-in-law is entirely a question of luck. There is no knowing whether, even if the letter is delivered, they will get off scot-free. His Lordship here is no money-grubber. I think you ought to offer us a feast at the bawdy house."
"Uncle," Huang the Fourth said, "if you do this for me, you may be sure I shall offer you wine. Indeed, I shall make my brother-in-law come and kowtow to you. I may tell you that I have busied myself day and night over this affair and, hitherto, I have failed to get anyone to help me. If you refuse, I shall not know where to turn."
"You silly thing!" Bojue said, "of course it is a serious matter for you. You sleep with his daughter."
"Yes, indeed," Huang the Fourth said, "and she cries all the time."
Ximen Qing yielded to Bojue's persuasion and took the card, but he still refused the silver. Huang the Fourth implored him to take it, and went out, leaving it behind. Ying Bojue called him back and asked when he wanted the letter.
"It is very urgent," Huang the Fourth said, "and I should like it at once. Tomorrow morning I will send my son with your servant to deliver it. I should like to speak to the servant you decide to send."
"I will write the letter now," Ximen said. He sent for Daian and said to him: "Tomorrow morning you will have to take a letter." Then Huang the Fourth spoke to the boy, and they went out. When he came to the gate, he asked Daian to get for him the purse in which he had brought the silver. The boy went to the inner court to ask Wu Yueniang for it. She was making clothes with her two maids. Daian waited, but Yueniang said to him:
"We are too busy. We can't give it you now. Tell him he shall have it tomorrow."
"But he wants it very urgently," Daian said. "He has to go to Dongchang tomorrow, and he won't be able to come back. Please take the silver out of it and let me have the purse."
"Go and give him the thing and get rid of him," Yueniang said to Yuxiao.
Yuxiao went to the inner room and emptied the silver on to the bed. She brought the purse to Daian. "Take it away, you rascal," she said to him. "Nobody is going to eat it. What a nuisance you are!"
"If it hadn't been wanted, I shouldn't have troubled you," the boy said. He went out with the purse. When he reached the second door, a piece of silver, about three taels in weight, dropped out. One of the wrappers had been torn, and, when Yuxiao had emptied the silver in such a hurry, she did not notice that this piece had been left in the bottom of the bag. "What a stroke of luck," Daian said to himself. "Money for nothing!" He put it in his sleeve. He gave the purse to Huang the Fourth and promised to bring the letter the next morning.
Ximen Qing went back to the study and asked Scholar Wen to write the letter. Then he gave it to Daian.
They looked out over the snow. It seemed like willow fluff blowing in the wind, or withered pear blossoms dancing. Ximen Qing had a jar of doubly strong Magu wine opened, and told Chunhong to warm some. Meanwhile Zheng Chun played for them. Ximen Qing bade him play "The Wind Blows Softly through the Willows."
Qintong came and said that Han Daoguo had given him a paper to show his master. Ximen read it and said to the boy: "Take this to Doctor Ren's house and ask him to go to the palace and have Han's name taken off the list."
"It is too late now to go outside the city," Qintong said. "Shall I go tomorrow morning?"
Ximen Qing agreed. Then Laian brought a square box with several dishes and two large plates of pastries made of goose fat and rose flowers. Chen Jingji shared their meal. Ximen Qing told Wang Jing to give three dishes and some pastries to Zheng Chun and two large cups of wine. Zheng Chun knelt down and said: "I never drink wine."
"You foolish boy," Ying Bojue said, "it is very, very cold, and, besides, it is your father who offers it to you. You know your brother always has some."
"My brother may drink wine, but it is not for me," said the boy.
"Drink one cup," Bojue said, "and I will ask Wang Jing to drink the other for you."
But Wang Jing said he never touched wine.
"Foolish boy," Bojue said, "I am asking you to drink one for Zheng Chun. You ought to know by now that young people should not refuse anything their eiders give them. You must drink it." He stood up. Wang Jing held his nose and swallowed the wine.
"Dog!" Ximen Qing said. "What right have you to force him to drink?"
The boy drank only half a cup. Ying Bojue told Chunhong to drink the rest and asked him to sing some Southern songs.
"Wait a moment," Ximen Qing said, "I am going to have a game with Scholar Wen, and he can sing while we drink. That will be fun." He told Wang Jing to get the dice box and asked Scholar Wen to throw the dice first.
"I dare not," said Wen. "I ought to ask Master Ying to begin. What is your honorable name, worthy Sir?"
"My poor name is Nanpo (pouring at the south)," Bojue said.
"I will explain it to you, Master," Ximen Qing said jokingly. "So many gentlemen come to his place that there is no chance for him to get at the thing he keeps under the bed. In the evening, when he can get at it, he dare not pour it out in the street for fear his neighbors will curse him, so he tells his maid to take it to the south and empty it against the granary wall. That's why his second name is Nanpo."
Scholar Wen laughed. "But that is a different *po*. The character for 'pouring' has the water radical on one side and the word *fa* on the other. This *po* has the earth radical and the word *pi*."
"*Pi* is the very word, Master," Ximen said. "There are always *pizi* (Southerners) with his wife."
"I did not mean that," Scholar Wen said, laughing.
"Master," Bojue said, "you don't know him. He is always making nasty jokes about people."
"A little joking serves to liven things up," the scholar said.
"Let us begin our game," Bojue said. "Don't bother about him. His mouth is always dribbling. Please begin. Don't stand on ceremony."
"When I throw the dice," Scholar Wen said, "we will have a quotation from some poem, or song, or some classical work, which must have the word 'snow' in it. If we can think of one, we drink a small cup; if not, a large one." He threw a one. "I know," he said, "it is long since snow fell on the wild bird's island." He passed the dice box to Ying Bojue, who threw a five.
Bojue thought for a long time but could not think what to say. "This is really terrible," he muttered. Finally he cried: 'I've got it! The plum flowers in the snow open their snow-white blossoms. What do you think of that?"
"That won't do," Scholar Wen said. "You said 'snow' twice."
"That's all right," Bojue said, "big snow and little snow!"

"What nonsense you always talk, you dog," Ximen said. He told Wang Jing to give Bojue a large cup of wine, and bade Chunhong sing a Southern song.

The night was chill and the traveler hungry
He went to the village to seek an inn.
Snow hovers gently over the temples
And drops thickly on the places for dancing.
Now he must stay awhile.
On the bank of the river he goes cheerfully
To see the plum blossoms.
In the courtyard, people with silver candles
Go to appreciate the snow
White snow, falling endlessly
Dancing in the air like willow fluff.

Bojue was enjoying his wine when Laian brought fresh pastries and dessert. There were conch-shaped light pastries and things that looked like small black balls, wrapped in orange leaves. Bojue picked one up and put it to his nose. It smelled very sweet. He put it into his mouth. It tasted like honey, and he thought it most delicious. He could not imagine what it was. Ximen Qing told him to guess.

"Sugar-coated soap," Bojue said.

Ximen Qing laughed. "Sugar-coated soap would hardly be so pleasant," he said.

"I would say 'Plum pastry balls,' but there is a kernel."

"Come here, you dog, and I'll tell you," Ximen said, "for I don't suppose you will ever guess. They were brought for me from Hangzhou by one of my people, and are called coated plums. There are various kinds of medicine inside. The medicine is mixed with honey, and the plums are steeped in the mixture. Finally, they are covered with peppermint and orange leaves. That is why they taste so pleasant. Taken every morning, they are excellent for the chest. They get rid of foul breath, are useful against phlegm, tone down the effects of wine, and are splendid for the digestion. They are much better than plum pastry balls."

"How should I ever have thought of that if you hadn't told me?" Bojue said. "Master Wen, I think I'll have another." He said to Wang Jing: "Bring me some paper, I'm going to take a couple home to my wife." He picked up one of the shell-shaped pastries. "Is it true," he asked Zheng Chun, "that your sister made these herself?"

Zheng Chun knelt down and said: "Do you think I would lie to you? Zheng Aiyue spent hours over these few pastries."

"She did good work." Bojue said. "Look! They are marked exactly like real shells. The colors, red and white, stand out ever so clearly."

"My son," Ximen Qing said, "when you talk like this you make me think of her who is gone. She was the only one in my house who could make them, and, now she is no more, there is no one here to take her place."

"I told you sometime ago that that does not trouble me," Bojue said. "One of my daughters is dead, but there is still another to make such pastries for me. I must say you are a wonderful man to discover such wonderful people."

Ximen Qing laughed until his eyes were no more than a narrow slit. He slapped Ying Bojue and told him not to talk such nonsense. Scholar Wen said: "Gentlemen, no one can help seeing what good friends you are."

"Don't say that," Bojue said, "he is your nephew, you know."

"For twenty years, Master," Ximen Qing said, "I have been his step-father."

Seeing them making fun with one another, Chen Jingji stood up and went away. Scholar Wen put his hand before his mouth and laughed. Ying Bojue drank his wine. It was Ximen Qing's turn to throw the dice. He threw a seven. For a long time he racked his brains for a verse. Then he said: "I will give you a quotation from the 'Perfumed Girdle': 'The Lord of the East will go away, for the pear flowers look like snow.'"

"No," Ying Bojue said, "that won't do. The word 'snow' must be the ninth. You must drink a large cup." He filled a cup of wine to the brim, gave it to Ximen Qing, and told Chunhong to sing. "My child," he said to him, "if one may judge by the number of date stones in your belly, you must know more than a song or two." Chunhong sang another song.

It was getting dark and lights were brought. When Ximen Qing had finished his wine, Bojue said: "Your son-in-law has gone, so Scholar Wen will have to finish the game." Scholar Wen again threw a one. As he was thinking what to say, his eyes caught sight of a pair of scrolls hanging on the wall. On them was written, "The wind rustles the tender willows. It is night upon the bridge. The snowflakes gently touch the frozen plums. There is Spring in the tiny courtyard." He took the line beginning "Snow-flakes" for his quotation.

"We can't have that," Ying Bojue said. "That doesn't come from your memory. You must drink a large cup." Chunhong offered wine to Scholar Wen. He drank it, and it made him drowsy. He nodded his head. Then he got up and excused himself. Bojue would have kept him, but Ximen Qing said:

"No, a scholar is a man of education and cannot drink much wine." He told Huatong to take Master Wen home. This was what Scholar Wen desired. He got up and took leave of them.

Bojue said to Ximen Qing: "Scholar Wen is really a poor creature. He has had very little to drink, yet he is drunk already." He and Ximen Qing went on with their drinking.

At last Bojue himself stood up. "The ground is slippery, and I must go now," he said. "Don't forget, Brother, to see that Daian takes the letter tomorrow."

"Didn't you see me give it to him?" Ximen said. "He will go in the morning."

Ying Bojue pulled aside the lattice. The sky was full of clouds, and the ground was like ice. He asked for a lantern and for Zheng Chun to go with him. Ximen Qing gave the boy five *qian* of silver, and filled a jar with the coated plums and put them in a box for Zheng Aiyue. As they were going away, Ximen said to Bojue: "Be good with your younger brother."

"That is enough!" Bojue replied. "We are father and son and shall behave as such. But I may go and have a chat with that little whore Zheng Aiyue."

Qintong took them to the gate. Ximen Qing saw that the tables were cleared, then, supported by Laian, who carried a lantern, he went to the corner door. He passed by Jinlian's door, which was closed, and quietly went on to the rooms of Li Ping'er. He knocked gently and Yingchun opened the door. Laian went back. Ximen entered the room and looked at the portrait of his dead wife. He asked whether they had offered food before it. "We have just made an offering," Ruyi'er told him.

Ximen sat down on a chair and Yingchun brought him tea. He told her to help him undress. Ruyi'er, finding that he was going to spend the night, quickly made the bed and warmed it with a hot-water bottle. Then she helped him to bed, and Xiuchun went out to shut the corner door. The two maids went to sleep in the other room.

When he asked for more tea, the maids were too sleepy to wish to get it. They told Ruyi'er to hurry. She took off her clothes and got into bed with him. The wine he had drunk had aroused Ximen's passions. He took some of the secret medicine and put the clasp on his penis. She lay on her back, he parted her legs and pushed hard until her tongue froze and her cunt ran with abundant stream. She called him all the tender names she could think of. It was the middle of the night and so silent that the noise they made might have been heard far away. Ximen Qing found the woman's body as yielding as down. He put his arms around her and kissed her, then told her to squat upon the bed and suck. She did so, to his great satisfaction.

"My child," Ximen said to her, "your skin is as white as the Sixth Lady's was. Being with you is like being with her. Treat me well and faithfully, and I will be kind to you."

"You must not say that," Ruyi'er said. "Comparing me with her is like comparing Earth with Heaven. But my husband is dead, and, if you do not hate a creature so ugly as I am, look at me sometimes and I shall be more than content."

Ximen Qing asked how old she was.

"My animal is the Hare, and I am thirty-one."

"You are a year younger than I am," he said. He was delighted to find that not only did she talk sensibly, but she was no mean performer on the bed. Next morning she waited upon him hand and foot, put on his shoes and socks, and helped him to dress his hair. The two maids, Yingchun and Xiuchun, could not get near him.

Ruyi'er asked him to give her some white silk to make a mourning gown for her dead mistress. Ximen Qing sent a boy to the shop to get three rolls of white silk so that both she and the maids might have white gowns. He gave them money and clothes and ornaments, and Wu Yueniang knew nothing about it.

But Pan Jinlian knew, and she went to see Yueniang. "You really must speak to him," she said. "The shameless fellow went and slept with that woman yesterday. The wretch might be starved. He is ready to carry on with anybody he can get. We can't let him go on like this. What shall we do if she has a baby? She would play the same game as Laiwang's wife did. We ought not to allow her such liberties."

"You always try to get me to do things of this sort," Yueniang said. "He is carrying on with this woman. You all want to keep in his good graces and let me bear the brunt. Why should I be such a fool? You tell me to talk to him about it. Well, I'm not going to do anything of the sort."

Jinlian went back to her room without another word.

The snow had stopped, and Ximen Qing told Daian to set out with the letter for Qian. When he returned from the office, Ping'an told him that Zhai's messenger had come for his answer. Ximen Qing gave it to him and asked why he had not come the day before. The messenger told him that he had been delayed because he had had to go to Governor Hou. He took Ximen's letter and went away.

When he had had his dinner, Ximen went to the shop and watched his men weighing out silver and packing up. On the twenty-fourth, they burned paper offerings and started for the South. Han Daoguo and Cui Ben took with them the two boys Rong Hai and Hu Xiu. Ximen gave them a letter and some presents for Miao Xiaohu.

By the twenty-sixth, Ximen had finished paying his visits of thanks to relatives and friends. One morning he was sitting in Yueniang's room, having his breakfast. His wife said to him: "The first day of next month is Zhangjie's birthday. We ought to send some sort of present to the Qiaos. The proverb says: 'Once a relative, always a relative,' and we ought not to cease these courtesies now that our baby is dead."

"I see no reason why we should," Ximen said. He told Laixing to buy enough presents to fill four boxes, silken clothes, two kerchiefs and a box of ornaments. Then he wrote a card and told Wang Jing to take the things to Master Qiao's house. After this he went to his study in the garden.

Daian came back. "His Lordship Qian," he said, "received your letter. He wrote a letter to Captain Li and gave it to the officer with whom Huang the Fourth's son-in-law went to Dongchangfu. Captain Li asked the magistrate Tong to send the prisoners and all the documents to him, so that he could go into the case himself. Old Sun was discharged and all that happened was that they had to give ten taels of silver to pay for the other man's funeral expenses. Sun Wen was sentenced for some trivial offense, given seventy stripes, and made to pay a small fine. The officer came back to tell his Lordship Qian, and now we have Captain Li's letter."

Ximen Qing was very pleased with Daian for handling the matter so adroitly. He opened the letter and read it. It was from Li to Qian and explained the situation.

I have received your letter [it read] and the matter is now quite clear. Feng the Second beat his son and, when his son fought with Sun Wen, both parties received injuries. The man's death took place after the statutory limit. It would be unjust to condemn the other man to death, and I have adjudged that he shall pay Feng ten taels of silver towards the funeral expenses. So there is an end to the case.

The letter was signed Li Jiyuan.

Ximen Qing asked where Sun Wen was now.

"He went home as soon as he came out of prison," Daian said. "Tomorrow he is coming with Huang the Fourth to kowtow to you. Huang gave me a tael of silver."

Ximen Qing told the boy to spend the money on shoes and socks and anything else he needed; Daian made a reverence to his master and went away. Ximen Qing lay down on the bed and went to sleep. Wang Jing burned some incense in a small burner and went out quietly.

Suddenly, Ximen Qing heard someone pushing aside the lattice. Li Ping'er came in. She was wearing a violet coat and a white silk skirt. Her hair was disordered and her face very pale. She came forward and, standing beside the bed, said to him: Brother, you are sleeping here. I have come to see you. You know I was accused by that fellow, and I have been in prison. I still suffer from an issue of blood and I have suffered greatly, for I have been unable to escape from the unpleasantness. The other day you were kind enough to pray for mercy for me, and my sentence was reduced by three parts. Still that fellow insists that I must be punished severely. He demanded your arrest. I have come to warn you lest, sooner or later, you should fall into his hands. Now I am going to find a place for myself. Take care of yourself. Do not go to too many parties, and, when you go, come back early. Remember what I say." She threw her arms around him and sobbed.

"Sister," Ximen Qing cried, "tell me where you are going." But she pulled her hands away from him. He woke up and found it was a dream. And, when he woke, his eyes were filled with tears. From the shadow of the blind upon the floor, he knew that it was about noon. He was very sad.

The snow has settled
Its brightness shines upon the window.
The fire is nearly out and the bed is cold.
They meet again in a dream of love
And the breeze sends the fragrance of plum blossom
Through the curtains.

That morning they had sent presents to the Qiaos. Now Mistress Qiao sent Qiao Tong with an invitation to Yueniang and the other ladies. Yueniang was told that Ximen Qing was asleep in his study, so she did not wish to disturb him. She entertained Qiao Tong in the inner court. But Jinlian said: "Give me the card. I will go and see what he says." She came to the study and found Ximen lying on the bed. She sat down on the bed. "My son," she said, "you are talking to yourself. What is the matter with you? No wonder nobody ever sees you nowadays. You are too comfortable here."

As she talked, she looked more closely at him and saw that he had been crying. "What makes your eyes sore?" she said.

"Perhaps because I fell off the pillow," Ximen said.

"No, you have been crying."

"You silly slave," Ximen said. "Why should I cry?"

"You have been thinking of someone who is still dear to you."

"Don't talk nonsense about people dear to me or not dear to me," Ximen Qing said.

"You were thinking about Li Ping'er." Jinlian said. "And the nurse, Ruyi'er, is in your mind too. As for us, we find no place there. We don't count at all."

"Don't be so silly, you little strumpet," Ximen said. "I want to ask you something. That day when the Sixth Lady was put into her coffin, what clothes did you wear?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"No particular reason," said Ximen, "I just wish to know."

"There must be some reason," Jinlian said. "Well, I wore silk, a white silk coat and a yellow silk skirt. And underneath, I wore a purple jacket, a white skirt and red vests." Ximen Qing nodded. "I have been an animal's doctor for twenty years," Jinlian continued, "but what is the matter with your donkey's stomach, I can't for the life of me make out. If you are not thinking about Li Ping'er, of whom are you thinking?"

"I have seen her in a dream," Ximen Qing said.

"Yes," Jinlian said, "that's just what you would do. When my nose tickles, it is a sign that I am going to sneeze. Now, even though she is dead, you still think of her warmly. It is a clear sign that you care nothing for the rest of us. When we die, nobody will bother about us."

Ximen Qing put his arms around her and kissed her. "Little oily mouth," he said, "you always think of something nasty to say."

"My son," Jinlian said, "I can see through you as clearly as I can see a cat with a black tail."

Their tongues met, and soon the sweetness softened their hearts. There was fragrance upon her lips, and the room in which they were was exquisitely perfumed. Ximen Qing was stirred. He kissed her. Then, lying on the bed, he displayed his penis and asked her to play with it. She bent her head and fondled it with her lips. She was wearing a gold tiger-headed pin. There were many pearls and plum flowers in her hair, and jewels and ornaments of all kinds on her head.

Suddenly, as they were sporting very pleasantly together, they heard Laian's voice saying that Ying Bojue had come. Ximen Qing told him to bring Bojue in, but Jinlian, greatly excited, cursed Laian. "Don't let him come until I am up," she cried.

"He is already in the courtyard," Laian said.

"Then tell him to keep out of the way."

Laian went to Ying Bojue. "Please wait outside a moment," he said. "There is someone in the study." Bojue went towards the pine hedges and looked at the bamboos, some of which were still covered with snow. Wang Jing pulled aside the lattice, and there was a rustle of skirts as Jinlian ran away like a wisp of mist. Bojue came in and made a reverence to Ximen Qing. Then he sat down.

"It is several days since you were here," Ximen said. "Why is that?"

"Brother," Bojue said, "I am absolutely tired of life."

"Why?" Ximen asked.

"Lately," said Bojue, "I have been hard pressed for money, and, yesterday, without the slightest excuse, Chunhua went and had a baby. It would not have been so bad if it had been in the daytime, but it was in the middle of the night. She was in a bad way and I had to jump out of bed, get ready papers and bedclothes, and go out for the midwife. Ying Bao had gone with my brother to get some fodder, and there was I, as busy as could be, and not a soul to help me. I got a lantern and went down the street for old woman Feng. When she got there, the baby was born."

"A boy or a girl?" Ximen asked.

"A boy," Ying Bojue said.

"Well, you silly fellow, are you sorry to have a son? So that slave Chunhua has presented you with a son."

"Aunt Chun to you," said Bojue, laughing.
"Why did you marry her, you dog, if it is too much trouble for you to go for the midwife?"
"You don't seem to understand," Bojue said. "I am not like you, and, in this cold weather, I know it only too well. You are a rich man and a person of importance. When one of your ladies has a baby, it is as though fresh flowers were added to a piece of embroidered satin. Of course you are pleased. But poor people like us can't even bear the sight of our own shadows. What point is there in adding to our number? Each member of the household has to be fed and clothed. No! I feel as hard as hard can be. There's Ying Bao goes out to work every day. My brother never gives a thought to me. My eldest daughter has gone and got married, and now, Heaven be my witness! the second one is all ready to be. She will be thirteen years old at the end of this year. The other day some old woman came to ask about her. I said: 'There is no hurry. She is young enough yet. Don't worry me any more.' Then, if you please, this disgusting creature must choose to be born in the middle of the night. Heaven and earth seem dark to me. Where am I to turn for money? My wife saw me worrying, gave the old woman a silver pin, and sent her off. Tomorrow will be the baby's third day. A host of people know this and they are sure to come. And what about the ceremony when the child is a month old? When that day comes, the best thing I can do is to disappear and spend a few days at a temple."
Ximen Qing laughed. "If you do go," he said, "one of the priests will come and take your place in the bed. You seem to have some sense, you dog." He laughed again, but Bojue looked sulky and would not speak.
"Cheer up, my son," Ximen Qing said. "How much money do you need? You have only to say and you shall have it."
"Not very much," Bojue said.
"You must have enough to cover the expenses, or you will have to pawn your clothes again."
"Since you are so kind, Brother," Bojue said, "I think twenty taels will be sufficient. I did, in fact, write out a note, but I was ashamed to mention the matter, for I have troubled you so many times. I did not fill in the amount. Give me what you think fit, Brother."
"What are you talking about?" Ximen said. "We are friends, and I don't require any note from you."
As they were talking, Laian came in with tea. Ximen Qing told him to put down the cups and go for Wang Jing. When Wang Jing came, Ximen said to him: "Go to the inner court, and tell your mistress that, in the cabinet behind the bed, there are two packets of silver that came to me from his Excellency Song. Ask her to give you one of them."
The boy went away. He was soon back with the silver.
"Here are fifty taels," Ximen said, handing the packet to Ying Bojue. "Take them. I haven't opened the packet. You'd better open it yourself and see what is in it."
"But this is too much," Bojue said.
"You say your second daughter is growing up," said Ximen; "buy her some new clothes, and, later on, she will be glad of them."
"That is a good idea, Brother," Bojue said. He opened the packet. It was some of the silver that the officers had sent, divided into pieces of three taels each, of very fine quality. He was delighted and bowed to Ximen Qing. "Brother," he said, "how generous you are. No one else would help me as you do. But you will take this note, won't you?"
"You foolish lad," Ximen said, "why should I trouble about that? This is your parents' house or you would not come here to ask help so often. The baby does not belong only to you, he belongs to me too. It is my duty to help you rear him. When the ceremony of the first month is over, I will send for your wife. She will do for the interest on the money I have just given you."
"These last few days," Bojue said, "your aunt has been as thin as your mother."
They laughed and joked together. Then Bojue asked what had happened to Huang's relations.
"Qian wrote to Li," Ximen told him, "and Li sent for the accused and examined them himself. Both Sun Wen and his father were set free, with only ten taels to pay towards the funeral expenses."
"What luck for them!" Bojue exclaimed. "They would never find anybody else like you. No, not even if they took a lantern to look. And you wouldn't take anything from them, either dry or wet. But though you would not accept a present from them, you must take the money you had to spend on Qian. And don't forget to tell Huang he must give us a feast. If you won't tell him, I will. We have saved his brother-in-law's life, and that is no small matter."
Wu Yueniang was sitting in her room when Meng Yulou came. "My brother, Meng Rui, will soon be leaving for Sichuan and Guangtong," Yulou said. "He is going to buy stock. He has come to say good-bye and would like to see his Lordship. My brother is in my room. I don't know where his Lordship is. Will you send a boy for him?"
"He is with Ying the Second, in the garden," Yueniang said. "But, talking about asking him to come, Jinlian went to speak to him about the invitation Mistress Qiao sent us. Qiao Tong was here, waiting for the answer. I gave him tea, and we waited and waited, but she never came back. Qiao Tong lost patience and went off. A long time afterwards, I saw her and asked her if she had spoken to him about it. It was hard to get an answer out of her, but at last she said she had forgotten all about it. The card was still in her sleeve. She is like a donkey that has lost its tail. I don't know what she was doing with him, but she was there a very long time. She would tell me nothing, and I gave her a scolding. Then she went away."
After a while, Laian came in. Yueniang said to him: "Go and tell your father Uncle Meng is here."
When he heard this, Ximen Qing got up. He asked Bojue not to go away, saying he would be back in a moment. Then he went to the inner court. Yueniang told him about the invitation.
"Yes," Ximen Qing said, "but you must go alone. We are still in mourning, and it would not look well for a crowd to go."
Yueniang told him that Meng Rui was waiting to see him in Yulou's room. "He has come to say goodbye before he sets out to Sichuan and Guangtong," she said. She asked why he had sent for the silver.
"Last night Brother Ying's wife had a baby," Ximen said. "He needs some money. And he says that his second daughter is coming to a marriageable age. He is anxious about it."
"Brother Ying is getting on in years," Yueniang said. "Now that he has this child, his wife will be pleased. We must send her some rice to make gruel."
"Yes, indeed," Ximen said, "and we will ask Beggar Ying to send us an invitation to the ceremony of the first month. Then we shall see what Chunhua looks like."
"I don't suppose she's any different from any other woman," Yueniang said, laughing. "She has eyes and a nose, just like everybody else."
They sent Laian to ask Meng Rui to come. Meng Yulou came with her brother. When they had greeted one another and talked for a while, Ximen Qing took Uncle Meng to the study where Ying Bojue was. He told the boys to bring something to eat. The table was set and they sat down to drink. Ximen Qing told them to set an extra cover and sent Laian for Master Wen. But the boy came back and said the scholar had gone to call on Scholar Ni. Then Ximen said: "Go and fetch your brother-in-law." After a little while, Chen Jingji came. He greeted Meng Rui and sat down on the other side of the table.
"When are you starting?" Ximen Qing asked Meng Rui, "and how long do you expect to be away?"
"I am leaving on the second of next month," Meng Rui said, "but how long I shall be away I cannot tell. I am going to Jingzhou to buy paper, then to Sichuan and Guangtong for incense and wax. That will take me a year or two. When I have finished buying, I shall come back. I propose to go through Henan and Shaanxi by land but, when I come back, I shall come by water. That means taking the river to Jingzhou. I suppose, all together, it will be a journey of seven or eight thousand li."
Bojue asked how old he was. "I am twenty-six," the young man told him.
"You are a young man," Bojue said, "but you seem to know all there is to know about traveling and business. I myself have wasted my life at home."
More food was brought. Plates and dishes filled up the whole table. It was evening when Meng Rui went away. Ximen Qing took him to the gate and returned to Bojue. He happened to see two paper chests and told Jingji to fill them up. He asked Yueniang to get some of the clothes that had belonged to Li Ping'er and put them into the chests with some paper money. He said to Ying Bojue: "It is forty-two days now since she died. We haven't sent for any priests, but we are going to burn these chests."
"How quickly time passes," Bojue said. "It is more than a month since my sister-in-law died."
"Yes," Ximen Qing said, "the fifth of next month will be her last week's mind, and I must ask some priests to come and hold a service for her."
"This time, you ought to have the Buddhist priests," Bojue said.
"My wife tells me," Ximen said, "that when the sixth lady was alive, when her child was born and she suffered from continually flowing blood, she promised that our two nuns and some others should come and read prayers for her."
Bojue saw that it was getting late. "I must go," he said, "and you will have to be burning these papers for my sister-in-law." He bowed low and added: "Brother, you have been very kind to me and I will never forget it."
"Forget it or not," Ximen said, "don't try and make out that you are dreaming. When the time comes for the ceremony of the first month, all my ladies are going to take presents and congratulate you."
"There is no need for them to bring presents," Bojue said. "It will be good enough of them to come to my poor house."
"I tell you what." Ximen said; "you must dress up old Chunhua and fetch her along here for me to see."
"Your aunt tells me that, now she has a son, she won't require your services any more," Bojue said.
"Wait!" Ximen said. "I'll know how to deal with her when I see her." Bojue laughed and went away. Ximen Qing told the boys to clear away. Then he went to the room of Li Ping'er. Chen Jingji and Laian had packed the paper chests. That day, offerings of paper things had been sent from all the neighboring temples. Ximen Qing watched Yingchun prepare the table and offer cakes, food, and soup to the dead lady. Incense was burned and candles lighted. Then he told Xiuchun to bid the ladies come and he, with them, burned paper offerings before the tablet. Chen Jingji took out the paper chests and burned them out of doors.

## 091
### The Party at the House of Cheng Ai-yüeh Who Flaunts her Beauty and Discloses a Secret; Tai-an Perseveres Assiduously in Seeking Out Auntie Wen

Snow buries the scattered red blossoms
that have fallen overnight;
As day dawns, beyond the window blinds,
it continues to blow about.
The numerous branches of emerald leaves
vainly confront each other;
The myriad remnants of fragrant souls
cannot be recalled to life.
Only the dream in the Ch'ang-lo Palace[1]
relieves his spring sadness;
Once the fisherman of Wu-ling has left[2]
even the waters are remote.
The sound of a jade flute perpetuates
his lingering remorsefulness;
As it penetrates the window casement,
propelled by the east wind.[3]

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished the ceremony of burning paper money on Li P'ing-erh's behalf, he went to P'an Chin-lien's quarters, where he spent the night.
The next day, first, Ying Po-chüeh's household sent over a box of noodles in celebration of their birth of a son, and then, Huang the Fourth, along with his young brother-in-law, Sun Wen-hsiang, came to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, bringing with them offerings of a newly slaughtered pig, a jug of wine, two roast geese, four roast chickens, and two boxes of fruit.
Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly refused to accept these things, until Huang the Fourth knelt down and groveled around on his knees, saying, "Your Honor has done Sun Wen-hsiang:
The favor of saving his life.
My entire family:
Feels profoundly grateful to you.[4]
Now, we have nothing with which to express our filial respects but these few paltry gifts for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like. How can you refuse to accept them?"
After persisting in his refusal to accept the proffered gifts for what seemed like half a day, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally consented to accept only the pig and the wine, saying, "They will serve as well as anything else to send to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh to thank him for his intervention on your behalf."
"In that case," said Huang the Fourth, "I will have no way of fully expressing what I only intended to be:
A token of my gratitude."
After reluctantly agreeing to take back the other proffered comestibles, he went on to ask, "When does Your Honor have any free time available? I have already consulted Uncle Ying the Second and would like to invite you to a party in the licensed quarter."
"You shouldn't pay any attention to his foolery," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It is only putting you to further expense. But the best time would be sometime during the New Year's celebrations."
At this juncture, Huang the Fourth and his young brother-in-law took their leave with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,
while Hsi-men Ch'ing tipped the bearers that had brought the gifts and sent them on their way.
On the first day of the eleventh month, Hsi-men Ch'ing, after coming home from the office, went to attend a party hosted by the magistrate, Li Ta-t'ien, in the district yamen, while Yüeh-niang:
All by her solitary self,[5]
dressed herself in white mourning, got into a sedan chair, and went to celebrate Chang-chieh's birthday in the home of Ch'iao Hung. As a consequence, neither of them was at home.
That afternoon, Nun Hsüeh from the Lotus Blossom Nunnery, who had learned of Yüeh-niang's plan to arrange for her to engage the services of eight other nuns and come to the house on the fifth in order to preside over the final weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, recite scriptures, and perform the litany of the *Blood Pool Sutra*, proceeded, while keeping Nun Wang in the dark, to buy two boxes of presents, and come to pay a call on Yüeh-niang.
Since Yüeh-niang was not at home, Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou invited her to stay for a cup of tea and said, "The First Lady is not here but has gone to the home of our kinsman Ch'iao Hung in order to celebrate their daughter Chang-chieh's birthday. You'd better stay until she comes home in order to see her. She wants to talk to you, and to pay you for the drafting of the petitions that will be needed for the observance in question."
Nun Hsüeh, consequently, continued to sit and wait.
P'an Chin-lien, meanwhile, happened to remember having been told by Yü-hsiao that Yüeh-niang had only been able to conceive after taking a fertility potion provided by Nun Hsüeh. Moreover, ever since the death of Li P'ingerh, Hsi-men Ch'ing had continued to frequent her quarters, where he had established a liaison with the wet nurse. She was afraid that if the wet nurse should produce a child, she might succeed in usurping her favored position. As a result, she took the opportunity to invite Nun Hsüeh to accompany her to her quarters in the front compound, where there was no one else about, and surreptitiously appealed to her, offering her the inducement of a tael of silver, to concoct a fertility potion for her that would enable her to conceive, and, with this end in mind, to acquire for her the afterbirth of a firstborn male child. But no more of this.
That evening, when Yüeh-niang returned home, she invited Nun Hsüeh to stay overnight, and the next day she asked Hsi-men Ch'ing for five taels of silver and gave them to her to contract for the drafting of the ceremonial petitions. Nun Hsüeh, for her part, kept Nun Wang and the abbess of the Kuanyin Nunnery in the dark, without saying a word to them about it.
On the fifth day of the month, together with the eight nuns she had engaged for the occasion, she proceeded to set up an altar in the summerhouse in the garden, post announcements on hanging scrolls at each of the doorways, preside over the recitation of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*,[6] the *Diamond Sutra*, and the litany of the *Blood Pool Sutra*; the scattering of paper flowers and rice, and the recitation of the *Sutra of the Names of the Thirty-five Buddhas*.[7] That evening, the ritual of distributing food in order to save the hungry ghosts with their burning mouths was performed.[8]
On this occasion, Wu K'ai's wife and Hua Tzu-yu's wife, along with the male guests Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, were invited to partake of the vegetarian repast. The nuns did not make an elaborate performance out of the rites, choosing merely to accompany themselves by striking the wooden fish and the hand chime as they recited the sutras.
That day, Ying Po-chüeh brought with him a servant from Huang the Fourth's household with an invitation for Hsi-men Ch'ing to attend a party at Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter on the seventh day of the month, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the invitation, he laughed and said, "I'm not free on the seventh since I have an engagement to attend a birthday party at the home of Chang Hsi-ts'un that day. But I am free tomorrow."
He then went on to ask, "Who else will be there?"
"He's not inviting anyone else," said Ying Po-chüeh, "other than myself and Brother Li the Third to keep you company. But he has gone to the trouble of engaging four girls to sing scenes from the *Hsi-hsiang chi*."
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to it that Huang the Fourth's servant was given some vegetarian fare to eat and then sent him on his way.

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask, "That day, when Huang the Fourth came to thank you, what had he purchased in the way of presents?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, thus and so, "I didn't accept all that he brought. He kowtowed to me repeatedly, but I only consented to accept the pig and the wine. After adding to these two bolts of silk decorated with a silver pheasant motif, two bolts of capital brocade, and fifty taels of silver, I sent them off to thank Ch'ien Lung-yeh for his intervention in the case."
"It would have been more than sufficient if you had refused to accept his silver," said Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, you certainly deserved it. Those four bolts of fabric must be worth thirty taels of silver, at the very least. Where could he have hoped to obtain such a favor for a mere twenty taels of silver? You're letting him off easy. After all, you saved his father-in-law's and brother-in-law's lives."
That day, they continued to chat together until evening before breaking up.
"You'll come by again tomorrow, won't you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Ying Po-chüeh.
"I understand," replied Ying Po-chüeh as he took his leave.
The eight Buddhist nuns prolonged the fuss of their ritual performance until the middle of the first watch before concluding the ceremony, burning the coffers, and going on their way.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went off to the yamen in the morning.
To resume our story, when Nun Wang got wind of these events, she made her way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's house first thing in the morning, complained that Nun Hsüeh had usurped the privilege of putting on the ritual performance, and demanded her share of the fee.
Yüeh-niang took exception to this, saying, "Why didn't you show up yesterday? Nun Hsüeh said that you had gone to the home of that distaff relative of the imperial family, Wang the Second, to celebrate a birthday."
"That was just a trick on the part of that old whore of the Hsüeh family," said Nun Wang. "She told me that your household had changed the date and were not going to hold the scripture reading until the sixth. So she made off with the entire fee, leaving me with nothing at all."
"But, at this late date, you failed to take part in the rite," said Yüeh-niang, "and the fee for the performance and the drafting of the petitions has already been paid to her in full. Luckily, I still have a bolt of fabric on hand to compensate you with."
She then instructed Hsiao-yü, saying, "Quickly, serve up some of the vegetarian fare left over from yesterday for her to eat, and give her that bolt of blue cloth."
Nun Wang muttered to herself as she cursed, saying, "The old whore made off with a tidy amount of the Sixth Lady's silver behind my back while negotiating for the printing of those sutras. And it was originally agreed that the two of us should share the fee for this sutra-reading rite, but you've made off with the whole thing for yourself."
"Nun Hsüeh," remarked Yüeh-niang, "claims that you received five taels of silver from the Sixth Lady as compensation for the recitation of the *Blood Pool Sutra* on her behalf. How is it that you have failed to recite it for her?"
"On the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of her death," responded Nun Wang, "I arranged for four nuns to recite it, and they kept at it for half a month."
"If you did recite it," said Yüeh-niang, "why did you keep it to yourself, without mentioning it to me? If you had told me about it, I might have given you something more for your pains."
Nun Wang did not have another word to say but sat there in embarrassed silence for a while, before going off to Nun Hsüeh's place to have it out with her.
Gentle reader take note: black-clad Buddhist nuns of this ilk ought never to be patronized under any circumstances.
Their faces may be like the faces of nuns.
But their hearts are the hearts of whores.[9] It is simply the case that:
Their six senses are unpurified,
Their basic natures are unclear,
Their vows are entirely ignored,
Their sense of shame is effaced.
Though falsely boasting of their compassion,
They are driven entirely by profit and lust.
Ignoring karma and the wheel of transmigration,
They think solely of the pleasure of the moment.
Having inveigled the frustrated young maidens
of humbler households,[10]
They set their sights on the susceptible wives
of prominent families.[11]
At their front doors they welcome
benefactors and donors,
At the back doors they dispose of
their unwanted fetuses.[12]
When not promoting illicit liaisons,
They are devising adulterous trysts.[13]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
At Buddhist gatherings, monks and nuns
are the members of one family;[14]
The wheel of the law turns unceasingly[15]
at the Dragon Flower Assembly.[16]
Yet creatures of this ilk are either
preoccupied with procreation;[17]
Or the wrongful use of metal implements
in order to effect abortions.[18]
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned from the yamen, before he had even finished his meal, Ying Po-chüeh showed up.
Attired in a newly blocked satin cap, an aloeswood-colored tunic, and white-soled black boots, he bowed in greeting to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "It's already approaching noon, so we'd better be off. They have already sent a servant to urge us on our way more than once. We oughtn't to make things difficult for them."
"I think I'll invite Licentiate Wen to go with us," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and, turning to Wang Ching, he said, "Go across the street and ask Master Wen to join us."
Wang Ching went off on this errand and returned before long, saying, "Master Wen is not at home but has gone out to visit a friend. Hua-t'ung has gone after him to extend the invitation."
"We ought not to wait for him," said Ying Po-chüeh. "These scholarly types carry on:
As though they don't know any better.
If he's gone out to visit a friend, who knows when he'll show up? We ought not to let him spoil the occasion."
Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly turned to Ch'in-t'ung and said, "Saddle up that sorrel horse for Master Ying the Second to ride."
"I don't wish to ride a horse," said Ying Po-chüeh. "It would be a good idea to keep a low profile, without:
Ringing bells and beating drums.
I'll just go a step ahead of you, and you can come along at your leisure in a sedan chair."
"What you say makes sense," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You go on ahead of me."
Ying Po-chüeh then proceeded to raise his hand in farewell and set off first, while Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung, and four orderlies to get ready a closed sedan chair and prepare to accompany him.
Just as he was about to go out the door, P'ing-an suddenly came in from outside in a state of obvious agitation, holding in his hand an accordion-bound calling card, and reported, "His Honor An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works is on his way to pay you a visit and has sent a functionary ahead to deliver a calling card. His Honor is right behind him and will be here any minute."
This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such a state of consternation that he ordered the servants to have some food prepared and sent Lai-hsing out to purchase platters of ready-made snacks for the occasion. After some time, Secretary An Ch'en duly arrived, along with a sizable entourage, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, in formal attire, came out to receive him. The secretary was dressed in a figured round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square featuring an egret in the clouds, [19] and a girdle with a decorative plaque that was both embossed and gilded. When he had entered the gate, and the customary exchange of salutations had taken place, they sat down in the positions of guest and host, while attendants served them with tea. Having finished their tea, they proceeded to a discussion of:
What had occurred since their last meeting.[20]
"Venerable Sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I very much regret to say that I have not yet had the chance to congratulate you on your illustrious promotion. The other day, when I received the elegant epistle and lavish gifts that you bestowed upon me, I was so busy with the funeral arrangements that I was unable to wait upon you in person, for which I can only apologize."
"Your pupil," said An Ch'en, "is guilty of failing to offer his condolences in person. Upon my arrival in the capital, I spoke to Chai Ch'ien about it, but I don't know whether you have received a gift from him, or not."
"It is the case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that I have occasioned my kinsman Chai Ch'ien the trouble of sending a consolatory gift from a great distance."
"Ssu-ch'üan," said An Ch'en, "this year you yourself are sure to have an occasion for congratulation before long."
"Your humble servant," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the possessor of slight ability and an insignificant office. How could I presume to hope for more than I deserve?"
"Venerable Sir," he continued, "this illustrious promotion to an important office that you have just received will provide you with the opportunity to further develop your:
Outstanding talent and bold vision.[21]
The success of your repair work on the Grand Canal is something:
The entire empire looks forward to."[22]
"Ssu-ch'üan," responded An Ch'en, "You do me too much honor. I am nothing but:
An insignificant Confucian scholar,[23]
who has been fortunate enough, by means of the examination system, to qualify for a humble post in the bureaucracy. It is thanks to the support of the venerable gentleman Ts'ai Ching that I occupy a position in the Ministry of Works and have undeservedly been made responsible for the irrigation and transportation system. For the past year I have been so busy traveling back and forth in the Hu-Hsiang region that:
Engaged upon the ruler's business,[24]
I have not had a minute's respite.
At present, I have also been ordered to take charge of the repair work on the Grand Canal, at a time, moreover, when:
The people are impoverished and finances are depleted.[25]
Recently, when the imperial vessels were engaged in the Flower and Rock Convoys, they:
Demolished the dikes and destroyed the embankments,
Leaving nothing but a trail of havoc in their wake,
so that:
Public and private resources are totally exhausted.[26]
At present, all along its route, in Kua-chou, Nan-wang, Ku-t'ou, Yü-t'ai, Hsü-p'ei, Lü-liang, An-ling, Chi-ning, Su-ch'ien, and Lin-ch'ing, the Grand Canal is in a state of disrepair. The southern branch of the Yellow River has overflowed its banks and moved further south, silting up the canal to such an extent that its bed is dry in places, leaving the populace of the eight prefectures in dire straits. Moreover:
Bandits interfere with the repair work, and
Fiscal resources are utterly deficient,[27]
so that even if we were able to deploy:
The power of gods or the art of ghosts,
It would not avail to execute the task."[28]
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you but exert the talent and faculties that you possess, you will have everything in good order before long and are certain to be rewarded with a substantial promotion."
He then went on to ask, "Venerable sir, does your imperial commission have a time limit, or not?"
"The imperial commission is for a period of three years," said An Ch'en. "When the repair work on the Grand Canal is completed, His Majesty will depute an official to come and offer sacrifices to the God of the River."
While they were speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered that a table should be set up, but An Ch'en said, "The truth of the matter is that your pupil still intends to pay a visit to Huang Pao-kuang's place."
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "stay a little longer, and I will arrange for your attendants to have something to eat."
Before long, a table was set up and provided with a platter of cold hors d'oeuvres and an assortment of other delicacies to go with the wine, served in a set of sixteen matched bowls, containing slow-boiled appetizers such as chicken feet, goose and duck, fresh fish, sheep's head, tripe and lungs, blood and intestines, soup flavored with pickled fish, and so forth, along with congee made from pure white, fresh, nonglutinous rice, served in silver-mounted bowls, and flavored with granulated sugar, hazelnuts, and pine and melon seeds. These were accompanied by small gold cups of heated vintage wine. The attendants, for their part, were provided with platters of assorted snacks as well as meat and wine.
At this repast, Secretary An Ch'en, after downing only three cups of wine, took his leave and got up to go, saying, "Your pupil will return to seek your instruction another day."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was unable to detain him any longer and saw him to the gate, where he got into his sedan chair and departed.
On returning to the reception hall, Hsi-men Ch'ing divested himself of his official hat and girdle, replacing them with a cap and headband, dressed himself in a long gown of purple velvet featuring only a mandarin square with an embroidered lion, and sent to ask if Licentiate Wen had come home, or not.
Upon coming back, Tai-an reported, "Master Wen has not yet returned home, but Cheng Ch'un, along with Lai-ting from Huang the Fourth's place, have been here to urge you on your way for half a day already."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, went out the gate, got into his sedan chair, and, accompanied by his attendants, set out directly for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. When he arrived at the gate of the quarter, the "cribbers" and the "ball clubbers" [29] stayed out of his way, and only the file leaders from the Music Office on duty that day stood to attention on either side, not presuming to kneel down and receive him, while Cheng Ch'un and Lai-ting went ahead to announce his coming.
Ying Po-chüeh was engaged in playing backgammon with Li the Third, and when they heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived they barely had time to put the game pieces away. Cheng Ai-yüeh and Cheng Ai-hsiang, wearing sealskin toques over their "bag of silk" chignons in the Hang-chou style, held in place by plum-blossom-shaped ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays that enhanced their:
Glossy hair and powdered faces,[30]
and made up to resemble flower fairies, came out to the door to meet him.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing got out of his sedan chair and came into the parlor he directed them to refrain from the customary welcoming flourish of wind and percussion instruments and suspend any drum music. After Li the Third and Huang the Fourth had saluted him, and the madam of the Cheng Family Establishment had come out to welcome him, Cheng Ai-yüeh and her sister kowtowed to him:

Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.
Two folding chairs were placed at the upper end of the room, upon which Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh took their seats, while Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, and the two Cheng sisters took their places to either side.
Tai-an, who was standing in attendance, asked, "Should we keep the sedan chair here, or send it back home?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that the orderlies and the sedan chair should be sent home and instructed Ch'in-t'ung, saying, "When you get home, see if Master Wen has come back, and, if he has, prepare the sorrel horse for him and escort him here."
Ch'in-t'ung nodded in assent, and departed on his errand.
Ying Po-chüeh then asked, "Brother, how come you delayed half a day before getting here?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then told him all about how Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works had showed up for a visit, and he had felt compelled to detain him for a bite to eat.
Before long, Cheng Ch'un came in with some tea, and Cheng Ai-hsiang served a cup to Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ai-yüeh presented one to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ying Po-chüeh hastily intervened by reaching out his hand for this cup as well, saying, "Oh, I guess I'm mistaken. I thought you intended it for me."
"I should grant precedence to you?" exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. "You haven't earned the right to it."
"Just look at this little whore," said Ying Po-chüeh. "She only has eyes for her patron and gives no heed to her guests."
"It's not your turn to be a guest today," laughed Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but there may be other guests in the offing."
When they had finished their tea, the cups and their raised saucers were taken away.
Before long, the four singing girls who had been engaged to perform scenes from the *Hsi-hsiang chi* came out and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,
and he asked each of them her name.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Huang the Fourth and said, "When they come out to sing for us later on, see that they perform only to the beat of a drum, without any other wind or percussion instruments."
"I understand," replied Huang the Fourth.
Who should appear at this juncture but the madam, who came out and said, "I fear that Your Honor may be cold."
She then told Cheng Ch'un to let down the portiere to keep the heat in. Animal-shaped briquettes were constantly added to the brazier, and the fragrance of orchid and musk pervaded the air.
Just at this juncture, what should they see but several black-clad "ball-clubbers," who, having heard that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had come into the quarter and was drinking at the Cheng Family Establishment, came to loiter at the door:
Sticking out their heads and craning their necks,
but not daring to proceed inside. One of them, who was acquainted with Taian, bowed to him and asked him to help them out. Tai-an quietly came inside and asked if they could come in, but Hsi-men Ch'ing merely responded with a shout, which so disconcerted them that they disappeared in a puff of smoke.
It was not long before the fruits and appetizers suitable to accompany a drinking party were served. Two tables were set out at the upper end of the room, one for Hsi-men Ch'ing alone, and the other to be shared by Ying Po-chüeh and Licentiate Wen, with the empty place reserved for Licentiate Wen on the left end. On that side of the room there was a table for Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, while on the right side there was one for the two sisters. Truly:
Platters are piled with exotic viands,
Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.
Cheng Feng and Cheng Ch'un provided musical entertainment on the sidelines.
Just as the wine was being poured and they were about to take their seats, Licentiate Wen appeared, wearing a raised, bridge-shaped scholar's cap, [31] a jacket decorated with a motif of green clouds, a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes, and velvet socks. As he entered the door, he merely made a ceremonial bow to the company.
"Venerable sir," said Ying Po-chüeh, "why have you arrived so late? A place has been saved for you for some time already."
"Your pupil is at fault," replied Licentiate Wen. "I did not know that the venerable gentleman had called for me. I happened to have gone to my fellow student's place for a literary gathering and am consequently a step too late."
This flustered Huang the Fourth into hastily seeing that he was provided with a cup and chopsticks, and directing him to sit down next to Ying Po-chüeh.
Before long, soup and rice were served, together with steamed open-topped dumplings flavored with hotbed leeks, a soup of eight ingredients, and saucers of ginger and vinegar. The two boy actors entertained them by singing for a while and then retired. Truly:
Wine is poured, gleaming with glaucous foam,[32]
Lyrics are sung to the tune "Golden Threads."[33]
Only then did the four singing girls come out and perform the two opening scenes of the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, starting with the aria to the tune "Dabbing the Lips Red" that begins with the words:
I travel far study through the Central Plain.[34]
Who should appear at this point but Tai-an, who came in and reported that Wu Yin-erh from the alley behind theirs had sent Wu Hui and La-mei to deliver a gift of tea. It so happens that Wu Yin-erh's establishment was located on the alley behind the Cheng Family place, and, when she heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had come for a drinking party there, she made a point of sending a gift of tea.
Hsi-men Ch'ing called them inside, and when Wu Hui and La-mei had kowtowed to him, they said, "Sister Wu Yin-erh sent us over to deliver a gift of tea to Your Honor."
When they opened the gift box and poured out the tea, there was a cup of the fragrant beverage, flavored with melon seeds, shredded chestnuts, marinated bamboo shoots, sesame seeds, and attar of roses, for each member of the company.
"What is Wu Yin-erh doing at her place?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"She's at home today and hasn't gone out," replied La-mei.
When they had drunk the tea, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had rewarded the two of them with three mace of silver, he turned to Tai-an and Wu Hui and instructed them, saying, "Go and invite Wu Yin-erh to come join us."
Cheng Ai-yüeh, who was quick on the uptake, said to Cheng Ch'un, "You go along with them, and make sure, whatever happens, that you persuade Wu Yin-erh to come. If she refuses to do so, tell her that in the future I won't treat her as a colleague any longer."
"You make me laugh," exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "After all, the two of you are only colleagues in the cunt-peddling trade."
"My dear sir," said Licentiate Wen. "How can you be so:
Out of touch with human nature?[35]
It has always been true that:
Notes of the same key resonate with each other;
Beings of the same nature seek one another out.[36]
What is rooted in Heaven inclines to what is above;
What is rooted in Earth inclines toward that below.[37]
Their feelings for each other as colleagues are governed by the same principle."
"Beggar Ying," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you, also, are a colleague of Cheng Ch'un and the others, in that, like them, you are here in order to provide entertainment."
"Silly child!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "I'm an old hand in the procuring trade. Back in the days when I was making out with your mother, you were still in her belly."
As they were talking and laughing together, the chef came out to preside over the carving of a set of pig's trotters, which were served together with four bowls of other culinary items, including dock and celery cabbage, minced pork with leeks, soup flavored with tripe and lungs, broth flavored with blood and intestines, and the like.
The singing girls then came out and sang the song suite from the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, starting with the aria to the tune "Powdery Butterflies" that begins with the words:
Five thousand rebellious troops.[38]
When they were finished, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for the girl surnamed Han who had performed the part of Ts'ui Ying-ying and asked her, "Are you from the Han Family Establishment?"
"Father," responded Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you don't recognize her, but she is a niece of Han Chin-ch'uan, and her given name is Hsiao-ch'ou. This year she is just twelve years old."
"This youngster," opined Hsi-men Ch'ing, "will grow up to be a fine woman. Her demeanor is sprightly, and she sings very well."
He consequently told her to join the company and serve them with wine. Huang the Fourth, for his part, in presiding over the repast:
Catered to his guests with the utmost assiduity.
It was not long before Wu Yin-erh arrived. Her chignon was enclosed in a fret of white crepe, held in place with a pearl headband, ornaments with cloud-shaped kingfisher feather inlays, and an array of little pins all around the edge. From her ears dangled a pair of gold, clove-shaped pendant earrings. On her upper body, she wore a jacket of white satin with purfled edging that opened down the middle; while below, she wore a skirt of sand-green Lu-chou silk, trimmed with purfled gold-spangled edging, and shoes of plain ink-black satin. After coming in the door with an ingratiating smile and kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, she proceeded to bow in greeting to Licentiate Wen and each of the other members of the company.
"What a laugh!" exclaimed Ying Po-chüeh. "You have only to appear in order to rub me the wrong way. The rest of us are no more than stepchildren I suppose. You recognize only your father with a kowtow, while sparing merely a nod for the rest of us. You denizens of the Verdant Spring Bordello [39] treat your customers too rudely. If I presided over a yamen, I would certainly not spare you the squeezing you deserve."
"Beggar Ying," exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you shameless pip-squeak! As I see it, your ball-handling is not that great. All you can do is brag about it."
A place was then arranged for Wu Yin-erh, and she sat down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing's table, while a cup and chopsticks were hastily provided for her.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that she was wearing a white fret over her chignon, he asked, "who are you wearing mourning for?"
"Father, what a question to ask!" replied Wu Yin-erh. "I've been wearing mourning for Mother ever since she died."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard that she was wearing mourning for Li P'ing-erh, his heart was filled with delight, and he moved his seat closer to hers so they could converse more readily.
In a little while, soup and rice were served, and Cheng Ai-yüeh got up from her place to serve the wine.
Wu Yin-erh also stood up, saying, "I haven't yet had a chance to pay my respects to Auntie Cheng," as she went into the madam's room to exchange greetings and then came out again.
"Ai-yüeh," said the madam, "give Sister Yin-erh a seat. I'm afraid she may be cold. And have the maidservant heat a hand warmer so she can warm up her hands."
Immediately afterwards, a new course of hot dishes was served. Wu Yin-erh, in her place at Hsi-men Ch'ing's side, ate only half of one of the delicacies supplied, and drank two mouthfuls of soup, before putting down her chopsticks and engaging Hsi-men Ch'ing in conversation.
Subsequently, she picked up her wine cup and said, "Father, this wine is cold and needs to be replaced with some warmed wine."
Cheng Ch'un then stepped up and served new wine to Ying Po-chüeh and the rest of the company.
After they had drunk one round, Wu Yin-erh asked, "Did you have a sutra reading service on the occasion of the final weekly commemoration of Mother's death?"
"I would like to thank you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "for the offering of tea that you sent on the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of her death."
"That's a fine way to talk," said Wu Yin-erh. "That coarse tea that we sent induced you to send us a gift in return. We are grateful for your return present, the lavishness of which caused my mother no little perturbation. On the occasion of Mother's final weekly commemoration yesterday, I consulted with Cheng Ai-yüeh and Li Kuei-chieh about sending you another offering of tea, but we didn't know whether you were holding a sutra reading in your home, or not."
"For the final weekly commemoration," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we merely engaged the services of several Buddhist nuns to perform a ritual of penance and did not even invite a single relative to attend, lest we put them to further expense."
As they drank wine and chatted together, Wu Yin-erh went on to ask, "Are the First Lady, and the other ladies in your household, doing all right?"
"They're all fine," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Father," continued Wu Yin-erh, "after having lost Mother unexpectedly this way, when you go into her quarters and find yourself all alone, you must long for her in your heart."
"It goes without saying that I long for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day, while I was in my studio, she appeared to me in a dream in broad daylight, which caused me no end of grief."
"When she died so suddenly, while still seeming vibrantly alive," said Wu Yin-erh, "you could hardly help longing for her."
"The two of you are so wrapped up in your conversation," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that you are completely ignoring the rest of us. If you don't order another round of drinks and provide some songs for our entertainment, we might as well get up and go."
This remark threw Li the Third and Huang the Fourth into such consternation that they hurriedly urged the two Cheng sisters to serve a round of wine and prepare their musical instruments. Wu Yin-erh also got up to join them. The three painted faces, sitting in a row to one side of the company, with their feet propped on the brazier, joining their voices together:
Opened their ruby lips,
Exposed their white teeth,
and sang the song suite in the Chung-lü mode the first number of which, to the tune "Powdery Butterflies," begins with the words:
"Three Variations on the Plum Blossom."[40]
Truly:
When words emerge from the mouth of a beauty,
They have a sound that causes rocks to split
and sets the clouds in motion.
When they had finished singing this song suite, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "You are the one who harassed the three girls into singing for us; so you ought to get up and offer them something in return."
"That's no problem," responded Ying Po-chüeh,
"It's not going to kill me.
Let me consider how I might disport myself with them. I could do it lying on my back, standing straight up, or reclining on my side. I could take my pleasure by adopting the position of 'The Golden Cock Standing on a Single Foot.' [41] Then again, I might avail myself of the positions known as 'The Wild Stallion Stamping the Turf,' 'The Feral Fox Pulling Threads,' [42] 'The Gibbon Offering Fruit,' [43] 'The Yellow Dog Spraying Urine,' 'The Immortal Pointing the Way,' [44] 'The Culprit with His Back to the Post,' or 'Embracing the Wooden Doll at Night.' [45] Let them choose whatever posture they prefer."
"I'd just be wasting my breath on you," said Cheng Ai-hsiang. "You're delirious, you lousy beggar. You're just:
Talking nonsense and uttering rubbish."[46]
Ying Po-chüeh arranged three wine cups on a saucer and said, "My children, down two cups of wine at my behest. If you don't do so, I'll splash it all over you."
"I'm not drinking any wine today," pronounced Cheng Ai-hsiang.
"Only if you genuflect to your Auntie Ai-yüeh," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "and allow me to give you a slap on the face, will I consent to drink any wine."
"Sister Yin-erh," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "what do you say?"
"Master Two," responded Wu Yin-erh, "I'm feeling distressed at heart today. I'll drink half a cup. That's all."
"You beggar," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "if you don't kneel down for me, I won't drink anything at your behest for a hundred years."
"Master Two," intervened Huang the Fourth, "if you refuse to kneel, it will show that you don't know how to take a joke. Just kneel down, and she may dispense with the slap."
"Nothing doing," declared Cheng Ai-yüeh. "Only if he accepts two slaps on the face from me will I consent to drink this cup of wine."
"I call upon the venerable Licentiate Wen to witness," said Ying Po-chüeh, "the extent to which this crazy little whore is prepared to carry things to extremes."

Thereupon, seeing that he was up against it, he actually got down on his knees, so his torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post, while Cheng Ai-yüeh:
Lightly rolled up her variegated sleeves,
Fastidiously exposed her slender fingers,
and took him to task, saying, "You lousy beggar. Will you ever dare to offend your Auntie Ai-yüeh so discourteously again? If not, answer me out loud. If you fail to respond, I will refuse to drink any wine."
Ying Po-chüeh, finding himself:
At a loss for what to do next,
could only respond by promising, "I will never dare to offend my Auntie Ai-yüeh again."
Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded to slap him across the face twice in a row before drinking the cup of wine.
Ying Po-chüeh got back on his feet and said, "What an unkind and unjust little whore you are! You might, at least, have saved a mouthful for me, instead of draining the entire cup yourself."
"If you kneel down again," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "I'll reward you with a cup of wine."
Thereupon, she filled a cup to the brim and laughed as she proceeded to pour it down Ying Po-chüeh's throat.
"You crazy little whore!" Ying Po-chüeh expostulated. "In the course of your mischievous tricks you've splashed the wine all over me. Old fogy that I am, all I've got is this one outfit of formal clothes, and you've managed to soil it the very first day I've worn it. I'll have to ask that man of yours to replace it for me."
After trifling with each other for a while, they returned to their places.
As the day began to grow dark, candles were lit, and the final complement of dishes was served. Meanwhile, a table was set up in the madam's quarters, on which soup and rice, food and wine, were provided for the entertainment of Tai-an, Ch'in-t'ung, Hua-t'ung, and Ying Pao.
Before long, additional saucers of assorted delicacies were served, and Ying Po-chüeh, while urging Licentiate Wen to try them, proceeded to uninterruptedly stuff them into his own mouth and fill his sleeves with them. Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for a dicebox and suggested that Licentiate Wen initiate the game.
"Whoever heard of such a thing," responded Licentiate Wen. "It is you who ought to begin, venerable sir."
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Wu Yin-erh commenced playing "Competing for the Red"[47] with twelve dice, while the four singing girls below took up their instruments and proceeded to play and sing, calling for the participants to drink a cup of wine at appropriate intervals. After one round had been consumed, Wu Yin-erh changed places in order to play "Competing for the Red" with Licentiate Wen and Ying Po-chüeh, while Cheng Ai-hsiang came over to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a cup of wine and play guess-fingers with him. Before long, Cheng Ai-yüeh moved over to play "Competing for the Red" with Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Wu Yin-erh left her place in order to offer wine to Li the Third and Huang the Fourth.
It so happens that Cheng Ai-yüeh then withdrew to her room and came out again after dressing herself anew. She was wearing a jacket of iridescent satin that opened down the middle and had a diapered border, over a gosling-yellow skirt of Hang-chou silk, shot with turquoise and embellished with gold thread, as well as figured ankle leggings, and shoes the points of which were adorned with red phoenixes. Under the lamplight, her sealskin toque served to enhance the quality of her thickly powdered snow-white face, rendering her a fit contender for a beauty contest. Behold:
Her fragrant features and lovely person are
more alluring than ever;
The sparkle of her limpid gaze[48] sets off the
beauty of her snowy face.
The semicircular curves of her phoenix eyes
conceal her amber pupils;
The seamless protuberance of her ruby lips[49]
is like a painted cherry.
When exposed, the jade shoots of her fingers
are slender and delicate;
When walking, the golden lotuses of her feet
captivate with every step.
She is white jade that exudes its own bouquet,
a flower that can also speak;
Even at a thousand taels for one night
her like cannot be found.[50]
How could Hsi-men Ch'ing have been anything but captivated? After having drunk several cups of wine, he was half intoxicated. Remembering that Li P'ing-erh had admonished him in a dream not to stay out drinking late at night, he got up and headed toward the rear of the establishment to relieve himself. This flustered the madam into calling for a maidservant to light a lantern and lead him back to perform his ablutions. Cheng Ai-yüeh made haste to follow in their wake and, after he had finished relieving himself, took him by the hand and drew him into her room.
This chamber had been prepared in advance, so that:
The moon-shaped window was half open,
Candles in silver sconces burned high,
The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring,
Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk;
while at her bedside:
Clouds of vapor hovered athwart the drapery,[51] and
Haze enveloped the curtains of mermaid silk.
Thereupon, Hsi-men Ch'ing took off his outer garments, leaving only his white satin tunic, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest, and the two of them cuddled up to each other on the bed, thigh over thigh.
To start off with, Cheng Ai-yüeh asked, "Father, why don't you plan not to return home tonight?"
"I'll have to go home," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In the first place, Wu Yin-erh is here, so it could be embarrassing for me to stay. In the second place, I occupy an official position and am subject to an impending merit evaluation, so I fear it might get me in trouble. I had better only come to visit you by daylight."
He then went on to say, "I am profoundly grateful for those butterfat 'abalone shell' sweets that you sent me the other day, though your gift caused me half a day of heartache. Originally, my late Sixth Lady was adept at making them, but since she died, there has not been anyone in my household who knows how to do so."
"They're not hard to make," said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "You've just got to get the knack of it. On that occasion I casually made a few up, not very many of them, and, knowing that you liked them, sent Cheng Ch'un to deliver them to you. The melon seeds that I sent with them were all cracked by my own teeth, one at a time, and the handkerchief that they came in was one that I took the trouble to add the tassels to in my spare time. With regard to the melon seeds, I hear that Beggar Ying helped himself to most of them."
"As for that shameless beggar-in-chief you speak of," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I watched him cram the melon seeds into his mouth in two handfuls and gobble most of them up, without leaving many of them for me."
"So it turns out I was only benefiting that lousy beggar," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "as though I meant to show my filial respects to the likes of him."
She then went on to say, "Thank you, Father, for the 'coated plums' you sent me. When my mother saw them, she ate one and found it very much to her taste. She often suffers from buildups of phlegm that cause her to cough in the evenings and keep the rest of us awake half the night. As a result, her mouth is always dry, but when she lets one of these 'coated plums' dissolve in her mouth, it produces a good deal of saliva. My elder sister and I had only eaten a few of them before the old lady took them away and secreted them in her room, where she helps herself to them early and late, and no one else dares to disturb them."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow I'll send a page boy to deliver another canister of them for you to enjoy."
Cheng Ai-yüeh then went on to inquire, "Father, have you seen anything of Li Kuei-chieh recently?"
"From the time of the funeral until now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I haven't seen anything of her."
"At the time of the fifth weekly commemoration of the Sixth Lady's death," asked Cheng Ai-yüeh, "did she send a gift of tea?"
"Her establishment sent Li Ming to deliver a gift of tea," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I have something to say to you," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but you must keep it to yourself."
"What do you have to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Cheng Ai-yüeh thought to herself for a while and then said, "I'd better not say it. If I do, it will only look as though I'm telling stories about one of my sisters behind her back, which would be embarrassing."
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck, saying as he did so, "You crazy little oily mouth! Whatever you have to say, say it to me. You can rest assured I'll not give you away."
Just as the conversation between the two of them started to warm up, Ying Po-chüeh suddenly strode in and cried out in a loud voice, "A fine couple of people you are; abandoning the rest of us and coming in here to engage in a private conversation."
"Eeyuck!" exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. "What an obnoxious, crazy, shameless beggar you are, to break in on us that way, and give us such a start!"
"You crazy dog!" swore Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Get back to the front of the place immediately, where you've left Licentiate Wen and Wu Yin-erh, or they might choose to follow you back here."
But Ying Po-chüeh proceeded to park his posterior on the bed beside them, saying, "Give me your arm, so I can take a bite out of it before I go, and leave the two of you to screw around together."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he reached into Cheng Ai-yüeh's sleeve and dragged out her snow-white arm, as smooth as goose fat, adorned with a silver bracelet, and the unblemished jade of her ten slender fingers, ensheathed in gold rings.
"My child!" he exclaimed in admiration. "These two hands of yours are made to order for the task of inducing an ejaculation."
"You crazy chunk of knife-bait!" protested Cheng Ai-yüeh. "I'd only be wasting my breath on you."
But Ying Po-chüeh took up her arm and took a nip at it before consenting to go, causing the woman to revile him in a loud voice, saying, "You crazy beggar, to barge in here for no good reason only to drive people to distraction."
She then called in the maidservant T'ao-hua and said to her, "You escort him back out, and see that the door to the covered passageway is closed."
When the door was closed, Cheng Ai-yüeh told Hsi-men Ch'ing the whole story of how Li Kuei-chieh had recently resumed her indulgence in "the play of boys and girls"[52] with Wang the Third.
"Once again," she reported, "he is frequenting her place day after day, in the company of the touts Blabbermouth Sun, Pockmarked Chu, and Trifler Chang, the 'cribbers' Stupid Yü and Tiptoe Nieh, and the 'ball-clubbers' Mohammedan Pai and Yokel Sha. He is no longer involved with Ch'i Hsiang-erh but is carrying on with Ch'in Yü-chih. Since he is spending his money at both places, he has run out of funds and has had to pawn his fur coat for thirty taels of silver. He has also turned over a set of his wife's gold bracelets to the Li Family Establishment in lieu of the monthly charge for his liaison with Li Kuei-chieh."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he swore, saying, "That little whore! I told her she ought not to carry on with that youngster, but she disregarded my advice and even resorted to:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
while choosing to deceive me all the while."
"Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you needn't get upset about it. I'll tell you a scheme by which you can arrange for Wang the Third to get a slap in the face, and thereby vent your spleen."
Taking Cheng Ai-yüeh onto his lap, Hsi-men Ch'ing wrapped his white satin sleeve around her powdered neck and kissed her fragrant cheek, while she put the opening of her sleeve over a warmer with a cover of brass wire, in which there were smoldering pellets of aromatic incense, in order to fumigate her person.
"Father," she then went on to say, "you must not let a single person know what I am going to tell you. Even Beggar Ying should be kept in the dark, lest any inkling of it should leak out."
"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tell me what you have to say. I am not such a fool as to let anyone else know about it. Really, what is this scheme of yours?"
Cheng Ai-yüeh then proceeded to lay it out in detail, saying, "Wang the Third's mother, Lady Lin, is currently no more than thirty-nine years old and is still a spectacle to behold.
Painting her brows and making up her eyes,
she dolls herself up in such a way as to:
Appear the veritable simulacrum of a vixen.
While her son spends his days in the licensed quarter, she is left to her own devices at home and does not scruple to peddle her wares on the side. Pretending to attend services at a nunnery, she actually drops in on the go-between Auntie Wen, who functions as her procuress. She is reputed to be an old hand at the game of breeze and moonlight. I can assure you, Father, that if you should wish to arrange an assignation with her sometime in the future, it would not be difficult. But there is another fortuitous benefit to this scheme. Wang the Third's wife is now just eighteen years old and is the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en of the Eastern Capital. She is as pretty as a picture, and proficient at backgammon and chess. Since Wang the Third chooses to spend so much of his time out of the house, she might as well be observing her widowhood. As a result, she is:
So angry she scarcely cares whether she is
dead or alive,
and has had to be rescued after trying to hang herself two or three times. Father, such an opportunity is not to be missed. If you succeed in initiating an affair with the mother, there is no reason to fear that the daughter-in-law will not fall into your hands."
This single conversation had the immediate effect of arousing:
Depraved intentions and excited anticipation,
in the mind of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who embraced the painted face, saying, "My darling, let me ask you, how did you ever come by all this inside information?"
Cheng Ai-yüeh withheld the fact that she often performed in the Wang mansion herself but merely said, "An old client of mine, thus and so, once had a rendezvous with Lady Lin at her place, which was arranged for him by Auntie Wen."
"Who was that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No doubt it was Chang the Second, the nephew of Mr. Chang, the well-to-do merchant, who lives on Main Street."
"Why that fucking Chang Mao-te!" exclaimed Cheng Ai-yüeh. "His cheeks are all covered with pockmarks, and his two eyes are mere slits. He'd only give me the creeps. No one but the likes of Fan Pai-chia-nu, or Hundred Customers Fan, would take him on. His affair with Tung Chin-erh has been 'a-nail-eighted' [53] for some time now."
"I'm at a loss then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Just who was it?"
"I might as well tell you," replied Cheng Ai-yüeh. "It was that southerner who originally deflowered me. He comes here on business twice a year, and, after spending a night or two in the quarter, he customarily ventures outside and indulges himself in the furtive pleasures of:
Snitching cats and filching dogs."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this and realized that everything the painted face proposed resonated with his own feelings, he was more pleased than ever and said, "My child, if you are willing to cater to my tastes, I'll undertake to pay your mother thirty taels of silver a month for your keep, and you won't have to take on any other customers. I'll visit you whenever I have the free time."
"Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "if you have taken a liking to me, what difference does the sum of thirty taels or twenty taels make? You can just fork out a few taels to my mother every month or two. Since I am personally disinclined to take on any other customers anyway, I'll just put myself at your disposal."
"What a thing to say!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be sure to come up with thirty taels of silver."
When they had finished speaking, the two of them:
Got into bed and engaged each other in amorous sport.
The comforters on the bed were nearly a foot thick.
"Father," Cheng Ai-yüeh asked, "are you going to take off your clothes, or not?"
"We might as well indulge ourselves with our clothes on," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear they're waiting for us to come back, up front."
He then repositioned a pillow, and the painted face unfastened her lower garments and draped herself face up over its surface. She was wearing under-drawers of red Lu-chou silk and pulled down one of her ankle leggings. Hsi-men Ch'ing hoisted her two tiny golden lotuses onto his shoulders, opened up his blue satin drawers, and fastened the clasp around his organ. Behold:
The flower's heart is lightly exposed, as

She gently wriggles her willowy waist.[54]
Truly:
The blossom is too tender to be disturbed,
But the spring breeze refuses to spare it.[55]
The flower's heart does not feel satiated,
Its prodigal feelings are yet unsatisfied.
In a low voice she intimates to her lover,
"The spring night's pleasure is not over."[56]
By the time the two of them reached the point at which he was about to ejaculate,[57] Hsi-men Ch'ing had exerted himself to such an extent that he was:
Panting and puffing,
while the painted face gave voice to lascivious sounds without end.
As her cloudy locks tumbled over the pillow, all she could manage to say was, "My own daddy, slow down a bit."
Sometime later, as the saying goes:
When pleasure reaches its height passions are intense,
and he:
Ejaculated like a geyser.
After:
The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,[58]
they proceeded to readjust their clothing, and, by the light of the lamp:
Straighten themselves up before the mirror.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had washed his hands in the basin in front of the bed, and put all his clothes on, the two of them held hands as they went back to rejoin the rest of the company.
Wu Yin-erh was looking after Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-hsiang was snuggled up to Licentiate Wen as they engaged in:
Casting dice and playing at guess-fingers,[59]
while:
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.
The merrymaking was at its height. When the company saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come back in, they all stood up and offered him a seat.
"Since you have seen fit," said Ying Po-chüeh, "to abandon the rest of us here, all this time, before deigning to rejoin us, you'd better have a pick-me-up to restore your energy after your recent exertions."
"We were just having a chat together," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What other silly business would we have been up to?"
"That's a fine way of putting it!" responded Ying Po-chüeh. "I suppose you would have us believe that the two of you were merely engaged in a private conversation."
Thereupon, Ying Po-chüeh handed him a large goblet filled with warm wine, and the rest of them kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company as he drank it. Meanwhile, the four singing girls picked up their instruments and played and sang for their entertainment.
At this point, Tai-an, who was standing at his side, covered his mouth with his hand and whispered, "Your sedan chair is here."
In response, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a meaningful moue, and Tai-an, accordingly, hastened out to tell the orderlies to light their lanterns and stand by outside.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing indicated that he would not stay any longer, the company all:
Stood up to toast him with drinks in hand,
while he turned to the four singing girls and asked, "Can you sing for me the set of songs that starts off with the words:
On first seeing that bashful beauty?"
"We do know it," responded Han Hsiao-ch'ou.
Thereupon, taking up her *p'i-p'a*, she:
Gently displayed her coquettish voice,
doing her best to show off her talent, as she sang:
On first glimpsing that bashful beauty,
The passions evoked by clouds and rain
brought us together.
I saw that she had a thousand coquetries
and a hundred allurements,[60]
Displaying her seductiveness in a myriad ways;
A veritable handful of warmth and softness.
In corresponding with me, she selected
her words carefully;
In revealing her feelings, she secretly
let her glances flow.
I kept her message in my heart,[61]
In my heart;
But did not know when our desires
would be fulfilled.
When the first song in the set was finished, Wu Yin-erh served Hsi-men Ch'ing with wine, Cheng Ai-hsiang served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh served Licentiate Wen. Li Chih and Huang the Fourth were also supplied with wine. Han Hsiao-ch'ou then continued by singing the second song:
I speak to the maidservant, saying,
I wish to build a golden altar, on which to
appoint my commander.
Before the morrow dawns, tell that young
scholar to prepare for,
The clouds and rain on Witch's Mountain.[62]
This night my double doors have
not even been locked;
In my secluded boudoir, I await
the advent of my lover.
The night is quiet, the watches nearly over,[63]
The watches nearly over.
This time, that master of seduction will be
hard to resist.
When the song was finished, Hsi-men Ch'ing called for more wine, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came forward to serve him, while Wu Yin-erh served Licentiate Wen, Cheng Ai-yüeh served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ch'un stood by to proffer refreshments. Han Hsiao-ch'ou then continued by singing the third song:
I dream of that tryst at Kao-t'ang,
Upon my assignation with that romantic
and enticing maiden.
She and I grasp each other by
our white hands,[64]
As we enter the silken bed curtains together,[65]
To make a lasting pact between the phoenixes.
The transfusing touch of the magic rhinoceros horn
penetrates her innermost regions.
Beneath the mermaid silk bed curtains[66] the coverlet
is disturbed by crimson waves.
Her powdered sweat becomes congealed fragrance,[67]
Congealed fragrance.
A mere quarter hour of this evening[68]
is like Heaven on Earth.
When the song was finished, another round of wine was called for. Cheng Ai-yüeh then moved over to wait on Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Wu Yin-erh served Ying Po-chüeh, and Cheng Ai-hsiang served Licentiate Wen, as well as Li the Third and Huang the Fourth. More wine was poured, after which Han Hsiao-ch'ou continued by singing the fourth song:
In the spring warmth under the hibiscus curtains,
My coiffure is in disarray, my hairpins askew,
and my chignon disheveled.
All on his account, my fragrance is alluring,
and my jade is soft.
As we emulate billing swallows and cooing orioles,
Our feelings are ardent, our passions are intense.[69]
My waist has become languorous,
and my eyes are bleary,
But in the depths of our passion
my eyebrows are wanton.
The two of us share an affinity,
An affinity:
Desirous of enjoying a lifetime of love,[70]
in harmony like phoenix mates.
When the song was finished, and they had all enjoyed another round of drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing stood up and ordered Tai-an to take eleven packets of gratuities, of differing quantities, out of his letter case. There were three mace of silver for each of the four singing girls, five mace of silver for the chef, who was called out to receive them, three mace of silver each for Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, and Cheng Ch'un, two mace of silver each for the servant and the boy who served the tea, as well as three mace of silver for the maidservant T'ao-hua. All of them kowtowed to him in gratitude.
Huang the Fourth did his best to prevent him from leaving, saying, "Uncle Ying the Second, won't you say a word to dissuade him? It's early yet, and if His Honor will consent to stay a little longer, it will enable me to convey the full extent of my feelings. Why should he insist upon leaving right away? Auntie Ai-yüeh, won't you also endeavor to detain him?"
"I have tried to detain him," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "but he simply won't stay."
"You don't know about it," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but there are things I have to do tomorrow."
Then, bowing to Huang the Fourth and Li the Third, he said, "Thank you for all the trouble you have taken on my behalf."
"I fear," responded Huang the Fourth, "that since we have only invited Your Honor to partake of meager fare, and you are unwilling to stay any longer, you will conclude that we have been lacking in respect."
As they spoke, the four singing girls kowtowed together, saying, "When Father gets home, please convey our regards to your First Lady, and the other ladies. When we have some free time, we'll get together with Wu Yin-erh and come to your place to visit the First Lady."
"When you have the time," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "do come and spend the day with us."
By this time, the lanterns had been lit, and, when Hsi-men Ch'ing descended the stairs, he was met by the madam of the Cheng Family Establishment, who bowed to him, saying, "Won't Your Honor consent to stay a while longer? The fact that you are so anxious to leave must show that you do not find our fare to your taste. There is another course remaining that has not yet been served."
"I've eaten my fill," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and would stay a little longer, were it not that I have a lot of business to take care of. I have to get up early tomorrow morning in order to deal with matters pending at the yamen. Since Brother Ying the Second has no such responsibilities, I'm sure that he can be persuaded to stay a while longer."
Ying Po-chüeh was going to get up and follow him out, but he was forcefully detained by Huang the Fourth, who said, "Master Two, if you insist on leaving, it will certainly spoil the fun."
"That's not the case," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "and there's no need for you to try to retain me. But if you have the prowess to detain the venerable Licentiate Wen, I'll consider you a stout fellow."
Licentiate Wen actually did try to bolt out the gate but was prevented from doing so by Huang the Fourth's page boy, Lai-ting, who held him back by embracing him around the waist.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the main gate, he asked Ch'in-t'ung, "Does Master Wen have a mount here, or not?"
"His donkey is here ready for him," replied Ch'in-t'ung. "Hua-t'ung is looking after it."
"Since you have a mount here, venerable sir," Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Licentiate Wen, "you might as well keep Brother Ying the Second company and stay a while longer. I am compelled to leave before you."
Thereupon, they all escorted him outside the gate to see him off.
Cheng Ai-yüeh took Hsi-men Ch'ing's hand and surreptitiously gave it a pinch, while simultaneously turning to face him and saying in a loud voice, "Father, make sure you keep what I told you just now to yourself. As you know:
The dharma must not be divulged to six ears."
"I understand," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
She then turned to Cheng Ch'un and said, "You escort His Honor on his way home, and give our regards to his ladies when you get there."
Wu Yin-erh also chimed in, saying, "Give my regards to the First Lady."
"I really oughtn't to mention it," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but these lousy little whores are all attempting to:
Monopolize the trade and compete for business,
in conveying their regards, while I'm left without anyone to convey my regards to."
"You beggar!" retorted Cheng Ai-yüeh. "Get out of the way."
Wu Yin-erh then said goodbye to the group of guests, and the two Cheng sisters, and set out for home, accompanied by Wu Hui, who held a lantern to light her on her way.
"Sister Yin-erh," Cheng Ai-yüeh called after her, "if you run into that wastrel, whatever you do, don't mention this occasion to him."
"I understand," replied Wu Yin-erh.
The remaining company then returned to the scene of their party, where:
Animal-shaped briquettes were replenished, and
New servings of "sunset clouds" were decanted;
as amid:
Song and dance and wind and string instruments,
They enjoyed the pleasure of drinking together.
The party continued until the third watch before breaking up. Huang the Fourth, who hosted this drinking party, paid out ten taels of silver for it, and Hsi-men Ch'ing also contributed three or four taels. But no more of this.
That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing sat in his sedan chair as the two orderlies, holding lanterns, escorted him out through the gate of the licensed quarter, after which he sent Cheng Ch'un back home.
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling sent someone to summon him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early in order to participate in the adjudication of some criminal cases and related matters. The hearings continued until noon, after which he came home and ate his midday meal.
Before this, Brother-in-law Shen had sent his servant Shen Ting with a calling card to recommend a young man named Liu Pao to serve as a cook in the silk goods store, and Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to employ him. He was in his studio, in the process of providing Shen Ting with a reply to take home with him, when he noticed that Tai-an was standing at his side.
Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to him and asked, "What time did Master Wen come home last night?"
"I had been asleep in the shop for quite a while," replied Tai-an, "when I heard Hua-t'ung knocking on the gate across the street. It was sometime in the third watch before he got home. When I asked about it this morning, I learned that although Master Wen was not in his cups, Master Ying the Second was so drunk he spit up all over the street. Auntie Ai-yüeh was concerned that it was so late at night and sent Cheng Ch'un to escort him home."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he guffawed with laughter.
He then called Tai-an over to him and said, "Do you know the address of that Auntie Wen who acted as go-between at the time of our son-in-law's marriage some time ago? If you can locate her, I'd like to have a word with her in the house across the street."
"I don't know Auntie Wen's address," replied Tai-an. "I'll go ask your son-in-law about it."
"As soon as you've finished eating," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "go ask about it, and then set out immediately."
Tai-an, accordingly, went back to the rear compound for his noonday meal and then went out to the shop to ask Ch'en Ching-chi about it.
"What are you looking for her for?" asked Ch'en Ching-chi.
"Who knows what he wants with her?" said Tai-an. "Without any warning, he just asked me to go find her."
"After emerging on East Main Street," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "head straight south until you get to the memorial arch on the other side of the T'ung-jen Bridge, at which point you turn east on Wang Family Lane, halfway down which there is an administrative police station, across from a stone bridge. On the other side of the bridge there is a Buddhist nunnery, next to which there is a small alley. If you head west on the small alley, the third house you come to will be a bean curd shop, right next to which, on the upper side, you will see the double leaves of a red outer door with latticework on the top to let in the light. That is her place. If you just call, 'Auntie Wen,' she will come outside in response."
When Tai-an had heard him out, he exclaimed, "Enough already!
When an itinerant tinker follows behind a parade
of incense-burning pilgrims:
The tinkling of his implements seems interminable.
You'll have to go over all that again for me. It's more than I can remember."
Ch'en Ching-chi, accordingly, ran over the directions for him a second time.
"It's not exactly a short jaunt," remarked Tai-an. "I'd better ride a horse."
Thereupon, he led out a large white horse, equipped it with a saddlecloth, fitted on a bit, stood up on the mounting platform, vaulted into the saddle, and gave it a stroke with his riding crop. The horse responded by neighing and prancing as it took off on its way.
Having emerged on East Main Street, Tai-an headed due south to the memorial arch on the other side of the T'ung-jen Bridge and entered Wang Family Lane, halfway down which, sure enough, he found a police station across the street from a dilapidated stone bridge, on the other side of which was a segment of red wall belonging to the Ta-pei An, or Nunnery of Great Compassion. There he found the small alley leading to the west, on the northern, or upper, side of which there was suspended a signboard advertising bean curd. In front of the door of this shop there was an old woman engaged in spreading horse dung out to dry.
While still mounted on his horse, Tai-an asked her, "Old mother, is there a go-between named Auntie Wen around here?"
"The house with the latticed outer door right next door is her place," the old woman replied.
Tai-an proceeded in front of it and, sure enough, found the double leaves of a red outer door, just as he had been told.
Hastily leaping off his horse, he knocked on the door with his riding crop and called out, "Is Auntie Wen at home, or not?"
Lo and behold, it was her son, Wen T'ang, who opened the door and inquired, "Where have you come from?"
"I've come with an invitation for your mother from His Honor Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing who resides in front of the district yamen," replied Tai-an. "Ask Auntie Wen to come out immediately."
When Wen T'ang heard that it was someone from the home of the influential official, Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing, he invited him to come inside and take a seat. Tai-an, accordingly, tethered his horse and went into the parlor inside, where he saw that a paper print of the auspicious God of the Marketplace [71] was displayed. In the inner part of the house, a number of persons had just finished holding a conclave and were still engaged in burning incense and settling accounts.
After what seemed like half a day, Wen T'ang came back out and offered him a cup of tea, saying, "My mother is not at home. When she returns, I'll tell her about it, and she can go to your place tomorrow morning."
"Her donkey is still here," objected Tai-an. "How can you pretend that she's not at home?"
So saying, he slipped past his interlocutor and headed toward the back of the house. Who could have known that Auntie Wen and her daughter-in-law were engaged in entertaining a number of devout Taoist women to tea and were unable to avoid being seen by him?
Whereupon, he said, "Is this not Auntie Wen? You told me just now that she was not at home. If I were to go back and tell such a story to my master, how could he avoid being annoyed with me?"
Auntie Wen laughed out loud at this, bowed in greeting to Tai-an, and said, "May I trouble you, Brother, to go home and tell your master that I am engaged in presiding over a tea meeting today. I don't know what His Honor wants to see me about, but I'll pay a visit to his residence tomorrow morning."
"He only told me to come looking for you," said Tai-an. "Who knows what he wants you for? Not knowing that you lived in this out-of-the-way corner, finding you has really put me out."
"For these last few years," said Auntie Wen, "the venerable gentleman has depended on Old Mother Feng and Auntie Hsüeh to buy maidservants, act as go-betweens, and supply artificial flowers for his household. What use has he had for me? But today, all of a sudden, it would seem:
The beans are popping in this cold pot.[72]
My guess is that since his Sixth Lady has passed away, he must want me to seek another match for him in order to take her place."
"I don't know about that," said Tai-an. "But when you get there and see my master, of course, he'll explain things to you."
"Brother," said Auntie Wen, "just sit down for a bit while I see off the guests at my tea meeting, and then I'll go with you."
"While I wait till you're finished with your tea meeting," said Tai-an, "there's nobody to look after my horse outside. My master is at home, meanwhile, burning with anxiety, like:
A fire within a fire.
He instructed me over and over again to have you come as quickly as possible, so he could have a word with you. Right now he also has another engagement to attend a party with Lo Wan-hsiang, [73] the vice prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture."
"All right," said Auntie Wen, "wait until I get you a snack to eat, and I'll go with you."
"Don't bother," said Tai-an.
She then went on to ask, "Has Hsi-men Ta-chieh given birth to a child, or not?"
"Not as far as I can tell," responded Tai-an.
Auntie Wen proceeded to provide Tai-an with a snack while she changed her clothes and then said, "You go ahead on your horse, and I'll follow behind you more slowly on foot."
"Old mother," said Tai-an, "since you've got a donkey at your disposal, why don't you saddle it up for yourself?"
"Where would I get a donkey from?" said Auntie Wen. "That donkey belongs to the bean curd shop next door. I have merely loaned them the use of my courtyard to graze it in, and you have mistaken it for my donkey."
"I remember seeing you riding a donkey here and there in the past," said Tai-an. "What has become of it?"
"It so happens," said Auntie Wen, "that one year, some time ago, one of the maidservants whose sale I had negotiated hanged herself, and the resulting lawsuit forced me to dispose of my old house, not to mention my donkey."
"The loss of your house doesn't amount to much," said Tai-an, "but you ought to have held on to that donkey in order to keep you company early and late. Aside from anything else, I noticed that he always had quite a whip of an organ dangling beneath him."
Auntie Wen laughed out loud at this, saying, "You crazy monkey of a short-life! I thought you were saying something serious, so I made the mistake of bending my ear to listen to you. A fine creature you've turned out to be! In the few years since I saw you last, you've developed quite an:
Oily mouth and a slippery tongue,[74]
and in the future you'll still expect me to find a match for you."
"My horse goes at a good clip," said Tai-an, "and if you walk, who knows how long it will take you to get there, which will only have the effect of irritating Father. You get on the horse, and the two of us can ride tandem."
"You crazy little short-life!" exclaimed Auntie Wen. "I'm not the one you're after. The people on the street are bound to look askance at us when they see what we're doing."
"If not that," said Tai-an, "saddle up the donkey from the bean curd shop and ride it instead. When we get there, I'll see that they're properly compensated."
"That's more like it," said Auntie Wen.
She then told Wen T'ang to prepare the donkey, put on her eye shades, and proceeded to mount it, after which, she set out with Tai-an for Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. Truly:
If you want to seek an alluring beauty
from a secluded boudoir,
You must rely entirely upon a red leaf
to be a good go-between.[75]
A poem testifies to this:
Who believes that there is a road leading to the Peach Blossom Spring?
Yet the peach blossoms, drenched with dew, smile in the spring breeze.[76]
The Peach Blossom Spring is to be found among the hills and streams;
Even today, the young angler is still trying to find his way there.

So deep is her passion, even when she is old
She cannot restrain it.
The moon, the dew, the mist, the cloud,
In all of them is something to incite her love.
When a real man stands before her
How shall she control her yearning?
They whisper softly, one to the other,
Then love weaves its chains about them.
Even if their bowels were made of iron
They must melt.
It is time to say farewell
The water runs onward, but the flowers are faded.
When Ximen Qing had burned the paper offerings for Li Ping'er, he went to spend the night with Pan Jinlian. The next day, Ying Bojue sent him a present of lucky noodles. Then Huang the Fourth came with his brother-in-law, Sun Wenxiang. They kowtowed to Ximen Qing and offered a pig, a jar of wine, two roast geese, and two boxes of fruits. Ximen showed great reluctance to accept them, but Huang the Fourth fell on his knees and begged him to do so. "My Lord," he said, "you have saved our lives, and we and all our households feel that we must do something to show our gratitude. We can't think what to do. These are only trifles that you may care to give your servants." After much argument, Ximen Qing agreed to accept the pig and the wine, though only on the understanding that he would send them on to Qian.
"Well," Huang the Fourth said, "it would seem that since I cannot make you accept them, we shall have to take the rest away." Then he said: "When you are at liberty, we should very much like to give a little entertainment to Brother Ying and yourself."
"Oh, you mustn't pay attention to anything he suggests," Ximen Qing said. "He plays the fool too much. You have been good enough to offer me these presents, and there is no reason why you should go to all the trouble of entertaining me." Huang the Fourth and his brother-in-law thanked him repeatedly and went away.

On the first day of the eleventh month, when Ximen Qing had returned from the office, he set out again to take wine with Magistrate Li. Wu Yueniang, dressed in white, went alone to the Qiaos' to celebrate the birthday of Zhangjie. The same afternoon, Nun Xue came with two boxes of presents. She had heard that Yueniang wished to have a service on the fifth, and she slipped out quietly, without any of the other nuns knowing what she was about. As Yueniang was not at home, Li Jiao'er and Meng Yulou took tea with her. "The Great Lady," they said, "has gone to a birthday party at the Qiaos', but you must not go away, for she has something to say to you." The nun stayed.

Jinlian had not forgotten what Yuxiao had told her. She had said that Yueniang had conceived after taking some medicine the nuns had brought her. Ximen Qing had taken a fancy to the nurse, Ruyi'er, and Jinlian feared that the nurse might have a child, and win Ximen's favor for herself. So, secretly, she invited Nun Xue to go to her room, and gave her a tael of silver to get some medicine for her.

In the evening Yueniang returned and invited Xue to stay. The next day she asked Ximen Qing to give the nun five taels of silver. Xue, ignoring her sister in religion, Wang, arranged with eight other nuns to come to Ximen's house on the morning of the fifth. An altar was set up in the garden house. There they recited Dhāraṇī-s from the Avatamsaka and Diamond Sutras and fulfilled the ceremonies of the Blood Vessel Sutra In the evening there was the ceremony of feeding the Hungry Ghosts. Aunt Wu, Aunt Hua, Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue and Scholar Wen were invited to eat monastic fare. The nuns chanted their liturgy, but used no musical instruments except the wooden fish and the sounding stone.

With Ying Bojue there came a servant from Huang the Fourth bringing a card of invitation. They were asked to go on the seventh to Zheng Aiyue's house. Ximen looked at the card and smiled. "I cannot go on the seventh," he said, "because I have an engagement at a birthday party on that day. But I shall be free tomorrow, if that will do. Will anybody else be there?"

"Only Li the Third and myself," Bojue said, "and four singing girls who will play selections from the *Story of the Western Pavilion*."

Ximen Qing gave orders that Huang the Fourth's messenger should be entertained, and then dismissed him. It was settled that the party should be held the following day.

"Huang the Fourth sent out some presents today, I believe," Bojue said.

"Yes," Ximen Qing said. "I didn't want to take anything, but he pressed me so hard that, in the end, I accepted a pig and some wine. I sent them with two rolls of white silk, two rolls of cloth made at the Eastern Capital, and fifty taels of silver to his Excellency Qian."

"Brother," Bojue said, "you wouldn't take their money in the first instance, and now you have given these four rolls of material to Qian. It will cost you at least thirty taels, all out of your own pocket. You treat them far too generously. Besides, you saved the lives of both father and son."

At sunset Ying Bojue went away. Ximen Qing asked him to come again the next day.

The nuns did not finish their service until the first night watch. Then they burned paper treasure chests and went away. Early next morning, Nun Wang, who had found out about the service that had been held the day before, came to complain. Xue, she said, had taken everything for herself, and she wanted her fee. Yueniang was surprised. "Why didn't you come yesterday?" she said. "I understood from Nun Xue that you had gone to a birthday party at Wang's place."

"That old whore Xue played a dirty trick on me," Nun Wang said. "She told me that the service was put off until today. Surely she hasn't taken all the money and not left me a penny?"

"I'm afraid you are too late," Yueniang said. "She had the money before the service, so that is all over and done with. But perhaps I can find a roll of cloth for you." She told Xiaoyu to give the nun a meal and to get the cloth for her.

Wang cursed and cursed. "The wicked old whore!" she cried. "She got the poor dead lady to have some scriptures printed and made a lot of money. She promised to share it with me, but every last bit of it went into her own pocket."

"That may be," said Yueniang, "but she told me that you had five taels for chanting texts to free the poor lady from her blood trouble. Why didn't you do it?"

"On the thirty-fifth day after the lady died," the nun said, "I and a number of other nuns kept chanting those texts for hour after hour in our temple."

"Why didn't you tell me so before?" Yueniang said. "I might have given you something for your pains."

Nun Wang said no more. She sat down, but could not keep still and, before very long, she went away to find Nun Xue and tell her exactly what she thought about her.

Ximen Qing came home from the office. He had hardly finished his meal when Ying Bojue arrived. Bojue was wearing a new silk hat, a gown the color of incense, and black boots with white soles. "It is past noon already," he said to Ximen Qing, "and time we were off. Huang has sent several times to summon us."

"We will take Master Wen with us," Ximen said. He told Wang Jing to go and summon the scholar, but, when the boy came back, he said Master Wen was not at home. He had gone to visit a friend.

"Don't let us wait for him," Bojue said. "These scholars are always running about visiting their friends. There is no telling when he will be back. We mustn't waste time."

Ximen Qing told Qintong to bring the yellow horse for Ying Bojue. "No," said Bojue. "None of your horses for me! When I go riding, I wobble about like the clapper of a bell. I'll go first, and you can come in a sedan chair at your leisure."

"Well, well," Ximen said, "do as you please."

Bojue went away and Ximen Qing called for his sedan chair. He ordered Qintong, Daian and four soldiers to attend him. Just as he was about to set out, Ping'an hurried in with a card. "The honorable gentleman from the Office of Works is on his way to see you," he said. "This is his card. His sedan chair will be here in a moment."

Ximen Qing ordered food to be prepared, and sent Laixing out to buy some special delicacies. An arrived, and Ximen Qing, wearing his ceremonial robes, went to meet him. An was wearing an embroidered ceremonial gown with a round collar, and a girdle with carved gold buckle. They sat down and the servants brought tea. The two men talked politely to one another.

"Sir," Ximen Qing said, "it was a great disappointment to me that I could not come in person to congratulate you upon your appointment. The other day you were good enough to write to me and send me presents on the occasion of my bereavement. I am very sorry indeed that I have not had any opportunity to show my appreciation of your kindness."

"I cannot say how much I regret that I could not come to the funeral," An said. "When I was at the Capital, I told the sad news to Zhai Yunfeng. Possibly he sent something to mark the occasion?"

"He did indeed," Ximen Qing said. "Even all that long way."

"I imagine that promotion is in store for you this year," An said.

"I am so unlettered and incompetent that I dare not hope for anything," Ximen said. "You, Sir, have been promoted, and at last you have an opportunity to display your talents. The splendid work you have done upon the river is well known."

"You flatter me," said An. "I am but a poor scholar, and, had it not been for his Eminence's kindness, I should never have been given that appointment. You can imagine what terribly hard work it has been in these days when people are so desperately poor. Then, a little while ago, his Majesty required marble. A great many of the bridges over the river had to be pulled down so that the boats could pass under them, and everywhere the Imperial vessels passed, officials and people had a very bad time. Again, the country is overrun by thieves and bandits, and things are at such a pass that even the most efficient administrator would find it impossible to do anything very much."

"Sir," said Ximen Qing, "a man of your undoubted gifts will certainly make short work of difficulties and obtain still further promotion. Does his Majesty's decree specify any particular time limit?"

"The work must be completed within three years," An said, "and the Emperor is going to appoint an envoy to make sacrifice to the God of the River."

While they were talking, Ximen Qing had ordered a table to be prepared, but An said: "It is very kind of you, but I am on my way to see Huang Taiyu."

Ximen Qing said: "You must stay long enough to take some light refreshment." A great number of delightful dainties were brought in, and wine was poured into golden cups. Meanwhile, An's attendants were entertained elsewhere. An drank three cups of wine and got up to go, promising to come again. Ximen Qing escorted him to the gate; he got into his sedan chair and was carried away.

Ximen Qing went back to the hall, took off his robes of ceremony, and put on a plain hat and a purple gown. He asked if Scholar Wen had returned. Daian said: "No, but Zheng Chun and Huang's boy, Laiding, have come for you. They have been waiting a long time." Ximen Qing went out, got into his sedan chair, and set off with his attendants for Zheng Aiyue's house.

When he arrived, the people of the house withdrew respectfully, one servant stood on either side of the door. Zheng Chun and Laiding went in to announce his coming. Ying Bojue was playing double-sixes with Li the Third, but, when they heard that Ximen Qing had come, they put aside their game. Zheng Aiyue and her sister Zheng Aixiang wore sealskin caps upon their hair, which was dressed in the style of Hangzhou. They looked as dainty as flowers. They both came out to welcome Ximen Qing and he got out of his sedan chair and went with them to the guest room. He had given orders that there should be no music upon his arrival, so the musicians did not play.

Li the Third and Huang the Fourth were the first to make reverence to him. Then came the old procuress, and lastly the two sisters. Two large chairs had been set in the place of honor and Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue sat down in them. Li, Huang, and the two girls sat opposite. When Daian asked if the sedan chair should be dismissed, Ximen said that the soldiers and the chair men might go away. He sent Qintong to see whether Master Wen had come home yet, saying that he was to be given the yellow horse to bring him more quickly.

Bojue asked what had kept Ximen so long. Ximen Qing told him about An's unexpected visit. Zheng Chun brought tea. Aixiang took a cup and offered it to Ying Bojue and Zheng Aiyue offered one to Ximen Qing. Bojue held out his hand for this one too. Then he said: "Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought it was meant for me."

"I would not pay you so much honor," said Aiyue.

"You never bother about anybody but this naughty husband of yours," Bojue said. "You ought to treat his friends as well as you treat him."

"I don't consider you are one of his friends," Aiyue said, laughing.

After tea, the four players kowtowed to Ximen Qing, and he asked their names. "When it is time for them to play," he said, "please tell them to use their drums only, no other instruments."

"Just as you wish," Huang the Fourth replied.

Thinking that Ximen might feel cold, the old procuress told Zheng Chun to pull down the blinds and put more coal upon the fire. Some of the band of ne'er-do-wells heard that Ximen Qing was at a party at Zheng Aiyue's house. They came to the door and poked their noses around the corner, but did not dare to go any farther. One of them, who knew Daian, asked the boy to speak to his master on their behalf. Daian went softly and told Ximen Qing, but the only response was a growl, and the men went off as fast as their legs would carry them.

Two tables were laid in the place of honor, one for Ximen Qing by himself, the other for Ying Bojue and Master Wen. The scholar had not yet come, but a place was left for him. Two other tables were set opposite, one for Li and Huang, the other for Zheng Aiyue and Aixiang. An excellent meal was served, and the tables were decorated with flowers in golden vases. Zheng Chun and Zheng Feng sang.

The party had just settled down when Scholar Wen arrived. He was wearing a tall hat, and a green gown. When he came in, he bowed to the company. "What makes you so late, Scholar?" Bojue said. "We have been waiting for you a long time."

"I am very sorry," Scholar Wen said, "I did not know you wanted me. I have been to see a poor old schoolfellow of mine. We talked about books and that made me late."

Huang the Fourth hastened to set a cup and chopsticks at Wen's place and the scholar sat down with Ying Bojue. Fresh dishes were brought for him. The two boys sang again. Afterwards the four singers began to play one of the acts of the *Story of the Western Pavilion*.

Then Daian came and said that Wu Yin'er had sent Wu Hui and another boy with some tea.

Zheng Aiyue's house and that of Wu Yin'er were in the same lane, only a short distance from one another. Wu Yin'er heard that Ximen Qing was taking wine at Zheng Aiyue's, and decided to send him some tea. Ximen called for the boys. They came and kowtowed. They told him their errand, then opened their tea baskets and each of them offered a cup of fragrant tea with melon seeds.

"What is Wu Yin'er doing today?" Ximen asked them.

"She is at home," the boy said.

Ximen Qing drank the tea and gave each of the boys three *qian* of silver. Then he told Daian and Wu Hui to go and fetch Wu Yin'er.

Zheng Aiyue was quick-witted enough to send Zheng Chun with them. "You go too," she told him, "and if she shows any signs of not wanting to come, tell her I won't love her any more."

"It makes me laugh," Ying Bojue said, "to think of you as partners in your particular trade."

"My good friend," Master Wen said, "you don't seem to understand. It is well known that people of the same profession and the same disposition are fondest of one another. He who finds he has more to hope from Heaven looks always Heavenward, and he whose help comes from the Earth, looks towards the Earth. It is perfectly natural that this young lady should invite another young lady to come and join her."

"Beggar Ying," said Zheng Aiyue, "you and Zheng Chun are just as much partners. You both are always to be found wherever there is anything to be had for the asking."

"My poor foolish child," Bojue said, "I was a rascal long before you were born. I was making love to your mother while you were still in her belly."

They laughed and joked till the players returned to play another act. Ximen Qing called the girl who played the part of Ying Ying and asked who she was. "Don't you recognize her, Father?" Aixiang said. "She is a niece of Han Jinchuan, and her name is Xiaochou. She is thirteen years old."

"She will turn out very well," Ximen said. "Even now, she has a most fascinating manner and she sings delightfully." He bade her serve wine to them. Huang the Fourth pressed everybody to eat and made himself most agreeable.

After a while, Wu Yin'er came. Upon her head was a white headdress with a band of pearls around it. She wore a white double-breasted silk coat with an embroidered hem. Beneath it, a light green silk skirt with a golden fringe. Her shoes were made of dark green silk. She smiled as she came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. She made a reverence to the others. "You make me wild the very moment you come in," Ying Bojue said. "Am I the son of a concubine that you kowtow to his Lordship and only make a reverence to the rest of us? Really, you little strumpets give yourselves too many airs. If ever I am called upon to go to the court, I shan't forget this."

"Beggar Ying," Zheng Aiyue shouted at him, "you are nothing but an unmannerly scamp. In your slovenly rags, how can you expect to be taken for anyone of consequence?"

Once again the tables were set. Wu Yin'er sat down beside Ximen Qing. He noticed that she was wearing a white headdress and asked her for whom she was wearing mourning.

"Why, you must know," Wu Yin'er said, "it is for the Sixth Lady, of course."

This pleased Ximen Qing, and they talked together very fondly. Food was brought and Aiyue came to offer wine to Ximen. Wu Yin'er rose. "I must go and see my Aunt Zheng," she said. She went to the old procuress's room and made reverence to her. The old woman invited her to sit down and told a maid to bring a brazier, for she was afraid the girl might feel cold. After a while, Wu Yin'er went back to the others. Fresh courses were brought, but she took no more than a mouthful or two of soup and a piece of cake. Then she put down her chopsticks. "I understand you had a special service for my lady's last week's mind," she said to Ximen Qing.

"Yes," he said, "I must thank you for sending the tea."

"It was very poor tea I sent," Wu Yin'er said, "yet you thank me even for that. Rather should I thank you for the splendid presents you sent in return. They set my mother all in a flutter. I suggested to Zheng Aiyue and Li Guijie that they should send tea to you for my lady's last week's mind, but we did not know you were having any service."

"There were only a few nuns to chant a dirge," Ximen Qing said. "We did not invite any of our relatives and friends. I was overtired."

They drank their wine and talked. Wu Yin'er asked after Ximen's ladies. He told her they were all well.

"Father," Wu Yin'er said. "My lady died so suddenly, you must feel lonely when you go to her room. Do you still think about her?"

"Indeed I do," Ximen said. "The other day I was in my study, and, though it was broad daylight, I dreamed of her and found myself sobbing."

"I can quite understand," Wu Yin'er said. "You see, she died so suddenly."

"Now then!" Ying Bojue cried. "You two are talking about your loves while the rest of us are as dry as dry can be. If somebody doesn't come and offer me a cup of wine and sing a song, I shall go."

Li the Third and Huang the Fourth were greatly put out and hurriedly asked Aiyue and Aixiang to serve the wine. They sent for the musicians, and the two sisters, with Wu Yin'er, sat together near the fire and sang "Dallying with the Plum Blossoms." The sound of their voices was enough to break the rocks and make the clouds course more quickly. When they had finished their song, Ximen Qing said to Bojue: "You made them sing, now you must offer them wine."

"Oh, that's all right," Ying Bojue said. "They shall have all they want from me before they die. How would they like it? Shall I lie on my back with my limbs outstretched, or on my side, or shall I stand on one leg like a golden cockerel? I can do any of those things. Or perhaps they would like me to imitate a wild horse stampeding around the courtyard, a monkey offering nuts, a yellow dog piddling, or an angel pointing the way? Tell me, Brother, which way shall I deal with them?"

"I can't find words bad enough to curse you with, you dirty scoundrel!" Aixiang cried. "You are always talking nonsense."

Bojue put three cups on a plate. "Daughters," he said, "drink this from my hand. If you don't take it, I'll throw it all over you."

"I am not drinking any wine today," Aixiang said.

"Get down on your knees before my sister Aixiang and let me box your ears," Aiyue said. "Then I'll drink."

"And what do you say, Sister Wu Yin'er?" Bojue said.

"I am not very well today. I will only drink half a cup."

"If you don't go on your knees," Aiyue said, "you can implore me for a hundred days, but you won't get me to drink any."

"Uncle," Huang the Fourth said, "if you refuse to kneel down, it will show you don't know how to take a joke. Kneel down. I will ask them not to box your ears."

"I won't box his ears more than twice," Aiyue said, "that is, provided he kneels down."

"Master," Bojue said to Scholar Wen, "you see how these little strumpets carry things to extremes." There was no escape. He knelt down. Zheng Aiyue pulled up her sleeves and held out her slender hands.

"Now, you rascally beggar, will you ever be rude to me again? You must promise out loud, if you wish me to drink the wine." Bojue could not help himself. He promised that he would never be rude to her again. Zheng Aiyue slapped him twice, then drank the wine.

Bojue got up. "Well, most excellent little strumpet," he said, "are you going to drink all the wine and leave none for me?"

"Kneel down again," Aiyue said, "and I will give you another cup." She filled one and poured it down Bojue's mouth.

"Oh, you little whore," he cried, "you've spilled it all over my clothes. Let me tell you this is the very first time I've worn this suit. If you make a mess of it, I shall have to ask your sweetheart to buy me another one."

They laughed and went back to their places.

It was getting late, and lights were brought. Ximen Qing called for the dice box. He asked Scholar Wen to throw first, but Wen declined, saying it was not fitting that he should throw before his master. So Ximen Qing and Wu Yin'er played. They used twelve dice and played Catch the Red. Meanwhile, the four players sang and played. The wine was passed around again. Wu Yin'er went to Scholar Wen and played dice with him and Ying Bojue, while Aixiang went to Ximen Qing and guessed fingers with him. Then Aiyue went back to Ximen and played dice again. Wu Yin'er devoted herself to Li the Third and Huang the Fourth and offered wine to them.

Zheng Aiyue went to her room and dressed again. She put on a double-breasted coat of figured satin, a skirt of the color of the finest down, with blue spots and golden fringe. Her trousers were embroidered; her shoes scarlet, designed like a phoenix's bill. Upon her head she wore a small white sealskin cap. In the candlelight she looked more beautiful than ever. The sight of her aroused Ximen Qing's desire. He had drunk deeply, but he remembered what Li Ping'er had said to him in his dream: "When you are away from home, never drink too much." He got up and went to the inner court to wash his hands. The old procuress sent a maid with a lantern to light him, and Aiyue followed him. When he had done what he went to do, she held his hand, and they went together to her room. Moonlight was pouring through the windows, and the candles were burning brightly. The air was as warm as Spring, and sweetly perfumed. Ximen Qing took off his outer clothes and sat with her upon the bed, his legs intertwined with hers.

"Will you stay the night?" Aiyue asked.

"No, I must go home," Ximen said. "Wu Yin'er is here, and that makes me a little uncomfortable. Then I have to remember my official position. The Inspector is coming this year, and I must not run the risk of any scandal. I can only come to you in the daytime." He thanked her for the cakes she had sent. "But when I saw them," he said, "I could not help feeling sad. The Sixth Lady, when she was alive, was the only person who ever made them for me. Now she is dead, there is no one in my house who can do it."

"They are not hard to make, if you are careful about the right proportions," Aiyue said. "The melon seeds I sent you, I cracked with my own teeth. But I hear Beggar Ying ate them all."

"He did. The rascal took two handfuls and left me hardly any."

"Lucky for him," Aiyue said. "I might have sent them especially for him! Thank you very much for the coated plums. My mother took some and found them very good indeed. When she has a coughing fit, she coughs all through the night and upsets everybody in the house. But one of those coated plums in the mouth keeps her throat moist. My sister and I did not take many of them. We gave the jar to my mother because we thought it was good for her to take them morning and night."

"Tomorrow, I will send another jar for yourselves," Ximen promised.

"Have you been to see Li Guijie lately?" the girl asked.

"I have not seen her since the funeral."

"Did she send any tea for the fifth week's mind?"

"Yes, Li Ming brought it for her."

"I will tell you something," Aiyue said, "if you promise to keep it secret."

Ximen Qing asked what it was, but Aiyue thought for a while and then said she would not tell him. "If I do," she said, "it will look as though I talk about the other girls behind their backs."

Ximen put his arms around her. "Little oily mouth, tell me what you were going to say. I won't say a word to anybody."

They were talking when Ying Bojue burst into the room. "Ah, you good people! So you leave us behind and come here to talk secrets to one another?"

"Why do you always poke your nose into other people's business?" Aiyue said. "How dare you rush in here and frighten me like that?"

"You dog!" Ximen said. "Go back to the front court at once. What do you mean by leaving Master Wen and Wu Yin'er to come and see what we're about?"

Bojue sat down on the bed. "Let me kiss your arm," he said to Aiyue, "then I'll go away and leave you to amuse yourselves." He drew the girl's arm from her sleeve and praised it. "My child," he said, "one has only to see these hands of yours to realize that Heaven intended you for the life you lead."

"Oh, you rascal," Aiyue cried, "no words are bad enough for you."

Bojue took her hand and bit it. She cried out and cursed him. "Oh, vile Beggar Ying, you never stop playing these horrible tricks of yours." Then she said to Taohua, her maid: "Go after him and, when he is once outside the door, bolt it."

Then Aiyue told Ximen Qing all about Li Guijie and young master Wang. "Sun Guazui," she said, "Pockmarked Zhu, Little Zhang and some others went with young Master Wang to Guijie's place. He had given up Qi Xiang'er and taken on with Yuzhi, at the Qin's place. At both places, he has spent a great deal of money and, recently, he had to pawn his fur coat for thirty taels. He stole a pair of his mother's gold bracelets and gave them to Guijie for a month's enjoyment of her favors."

"The wicked little whore!" Ximen Qing said. "I told her to have nothing to do with that young scamp. She promised me faithfully she would give him up, and swore she would never see him again. She has deceived me."

"Father, don't be annoyed," Aiyue said. "I will tell you a way to get even with young master Wang. You will have no more reason to be angry."

Ximen Qing took her on his knees. "What is your idea?" he said. "Tell me."

"I will tell you if you promise not to say a word to anybody else, not even Beggar Ying. I don't want it to get about."

"I am not a fool," Ximen said. "Why should I mention it to anyone?"

"Master Wang's mother, Lady Lin, is not yet forty years old," Aiyue said. "She is a very fascinating woman. She pencils her eyebrows, paints her face, and gets herself up as cleverly as a fox. Her son spends all his time at the bawdy house and she receives gentlemen at home. She pretends to go to the nunnery, but, as a matter of fact, it is old woman Wen she really goes to see. That old woman arranges everything for her. I understand she is very expert in the arts of love. Now this is what I have to say. If you would like to make her acquaintance, it ought not to be very difficult. Then there is the young man's wife. She is about nineteen years old, and a niece of Grand Marshal Huang of the Eastern Capital. She is as pretty as a picture. She can play backgammon and chess, but she might as well be a widow, for her husband, young Wang, never spends any time with her. She is a very disappointed woman and more than twice has tried to hang herself. Somebody cut her down. If you can only get hold of the mother, you will not have much difficulty in making sure of the daughter."

Ximen Qing was delighted with the idea. He put his arms around Aiyue's neck. "How do you come to know all this, my child?" he said.

Aiyue often went to Wang's house herself, but she did not think fit to say so to Ximen Qing. "One of my friends told me," she said, "and once old woman Wen introduced me to her."

"Who was the man who visited her?" Ximen asked. "Was it Zhang the Second, the nephew of that wealthy Master Zhang of the High Street?"

"No," Aiyue said, "not that ugly fellow. His face is covered with pock-marks, and his eyes are all screwed up. He is not good-looking enough for an adventure of this sort. Nobody but the Jiang girls would take him on."

"Well, I can't guess who the man is," Ximen Qing said.

"I will tell you," Aiyue said. "He is a Southerner, the man who made a woman of me. He comes here on business twice a year, but he only stays here one or two nights. He is too fond of poaching."

Ximen was thrilled. "My child," he said, "you seem to be very fond of me, and I am going to give you thirty taels of silver every month. You can give the money to your mother and then it will not be necessary for you to have any other visitors. I will come and see you whenever I am free."

"Why so much as thirty or twenty taels, Father? A few taels for my mother will be enough. I shall be glad not to have to receive everybody who comes, and to belong to you alone."

"Most certainly I shall give you thirty taels," Ximen said. "Say no more about it."

They began to sport upon the bed. It was piled deep with coverlets. "Won't you take off your clothes, Father?" Aiyue asked.

"I am afraid I must keep my clothes on," Ximen Qing said. "They will be out of patience waiting for us." He pulled up the pillow for her. She took down her trousers and stretched herself upon her back. Ximen Qing lifted her dainty feet over his shoulders, then unloosed his blue silk trousers and put the clasp on his penis. The heart of the flower lay sweetly folded before him; the tender willow-like waist quivered.

This is a flower so delicate
It cannot endure violence.
The wind of Spring blows over it unceasingly
And when it reaches the flower's heart
Still seems unsatisfied.
There are no limits to their love.
Softly she calls him her precious boy.
There are no words can tell
The happiness of this night of Spring.

For a long time their love followed its course to their great delight. Ximen Qing breathed heavily, and she made strange little noises without ceasing, her hair spread out over the pillow. "My love," she murmured, "do not be so furious." Then their satisfaction reached its height, and sperm flowed from him in a stream. The rain ceased, and the clouds dispersed. They rose, dressed themselves, and washed their hands. Then, hand in hand, they went back to the hall.

Wu Yin'er, Aixiang, Scholar Wen and Ying Bojue were throwing dice and guessing fingers, all the time encouraging one another to drink, and being very merry together. When Ximen Qing came in, they rose and begged him to sit down. "A nice thing!" Bojue said. "You leave us here all this time and then come to have some wine. To steady your head, I suppose."

"We have been talking," Ximen Qing said.

"Talking indeed!" Bojue said. "I know the sort of secrets you have to tell one another." He took a large cup of wine already warmed, and they invited Ximen to drink. The four players sang.

Then Daian came and said: "The sedan chair is here." Ximen Qing pursed his lips as a sign that he was ready and Daian went out to bid the soldiers light their lanterns. As Ximen had made clear his intention not to stay any longer, everyone stood up and drank with him. He ordered the four players to sing "When First We Met, Shyness Restrained Us." Then Xiaochou took her lute and sang.

When the song was done, Wu Yin'er offered Ximen Qing a cup of wine while Aixiang and Aiyue offered wine to Ying Bojue and Scholar Wen. Li and Huang drank too. The four players sang again. When the cup had been emptied, they urged each other to drink again and the wine passed around twice more. The singers sang two more songs, and the wine and the music were finished at the same time.

Then Ximen Qing made ready to go. He told Daian to give packets of silver, some large, some small, to all who had waited on him. There were three *qian* of silver for each of the four players, five for the cook, and three for Wu Hui, Zheng Chun, and Zheng Feng. There were two *qian* for all the other servants, except Zheng Aiyue's maid, Taohua, who was given three. They kowtowed to express their thanks. Huang the Fourth did not wish them to accept these presents yet. "Uncle Ying," he said to Bojue, "won't you say something to his Lordship? It is still early, and he must sit down, just to show that he enjoys our entertainment." He turned to Aiyue. "Sister, you must help me to persuade him to stay."

"I have tried already," Aiyue said, "but he will not."

"I shall be very busy tomorrow, and I must go," Ximen Qing said. He bowed to Huang the Fourth. "I have had a very pleasant time," he said.

"Indeed I fear you have been starved," Huang the Fourth said, "and that is why you won't stay. It seems obvious that we have entertained you very poorly."

The three girls kowtowed. "When you get home," they said, "please give our humble duty to the Great Lady and the others. When we are free, we will come to see them."

"Yes, do," Ximen said. "Come any time and spend the day."

Lanterns were brought, and Ximen Qing went down the steps. Old woman Zheng came to make a reverence to him. "My lord," she said, "why must you go in such a hurry? I fear our cooking cannot have pleased you. There is another course to come yet."

"I have had everything I wanted," Ximen said. "Unfortunately, I have to get up very early in the morning to go and attend to some important business at the office. Brother Ying has nothing to do: ask him to stay."

Ying Bojue was going away with Ximen Qing, but Huang the Fourth stopped him. "If you go too, Uncle," he said, "it will be the last straw."

"Don't keep me," Bojue said. "Try Scholar Wen. If you can persuade him to stay, I shall believe you are a hero."

Scholar Wen tried to slip away, but Huang the Fourth's boy and Laian caught him by the waist and held him. Ximen Qing reached the gate. He asked Qintong whether he had brought anything for Scholar Wen to ride. "There's a donkey here," Qintong said. "Huatong is in charge of it."

Ximen called out to Scholar Wen: "There is an animal here for you to ride. You and Brother Ying stay. I must go now." They all went with him to the gate. Zheng Aiyue was holding his hand. She gave it a squeeze.

"Remember what I have told you," she said, "but keep it to yourself." She bade Zheng Chun go with Ximen to his house. Ximen got into his sedan chair and went away.

Outside the gate, Wu Yin'er said good-bye to everybody, and was going home with Wu Hui when Zheng Aiyue said: "If you see Guijie, don't say a word about this." Then they went back to their tables; the fire was replenished, and more wine poured out. With music, songs and wine, they passed the time very pleasantly, and the party did not break up until the third night watch. The entertainment cost Huang the Fourth about ten taels of silver.

Ximen Qing, with two soldiers carrying lanterns, reached home in his sedan chair, dismissed Zheng Chun, and went to bed.

The next day, Magistrate Xia sent a servant to ask Ximen Qing to go early to the office. There was a thief to be tried. He went, heard the case and did not return until midday. When he had finished dinner, Shen Ding came with a young man named Liu Bao, whom Uncle Shen introduced as a cook for the silk shop. Ximen Qing agreed to engage him and went to the study to get a return card to give to Shen Ding. There he found Daian and asked him what time Scholar Wen had come back the night before.

"I was in the shop," Daian said, "and had been in bed a long time before I heard Qintong knocking at the door of the house opposite. I think it must have been the third night watch. This morning, I asked him if he had been drunk. 'No,' he said, 'but Uncle Ying was, and he was sick all over the floor. Then Zheng Aiyue thought it was getting very late, and she sent Zheng Chun home with him.'" This made Ximen Qing laugh. He called the boy closer to him.

"You remember old woman Wen, who arranged my daughter's marriage. If you know where she lives, go and tell her I want her to come and see me at the house across the road."

"I don't know where she lives," Daian said, "but I will ask Brother-in-law."

"Yes, make sure, and then go right away," Ximen said.

Daian went to the shop and asked Chen Jingji where the old woman lived.

"What do you want with her?" Jingji said. "Go along East Street towards the south. Turn to the left when you have passed the bridge. You will find yourself on the Wangs' estate. In the middle of it is a guardhouse, and, close by, a small stone bridge. Cross the bridge and you will come to a lane that passes a nunnery. Go up there and the third house you come to will be a bean curd shop. A little farther along is a house with red doors. That is the place. Shout: 'Old Mother Wen,' and she will come out to you."

"It sounds like a witch directing a tinker," Daian said. "What a rigma-role! Tell me again. I shall never remember all that."

Jingji told him again.

"A fine walk!" Daian said. "I must have a horse." He went and got the big white horse, mounted it , whipped it up, and went off at a gallop. He followed all his instructions until he came to the guardhouse near the ruined stone bridge, and saw the red walls of the nunnery. He went up the lane until he reached a house with a sign to show that bean curd was sold there. Outside was an old woman drying horse dung.

"Does an old woman named Wen live about here?" Daian asked her.

"Yes," the old woman said. "The next house on the other side."

Daian went on and came to a house with red doors. He jumped down from his horse and knocked at the door with his whip. "Is Sister Wen at home?"

Wen Tang, the old woman's son, opened the door and asked Daian what he wanted.

"I have come from his Lordship Ximen to ask Madam Wen to go and see him at once," Daian said.

As soon as Wen Tang heard this, he asked Daian to go in. The boy tied up his horse and went into the house. Lucky papers were hanging up, and a number of people were engaged in reckoning up the amount of offerings. He waited some time, then a cup of tea was brought to him. "My mother is not at home, "Wen Tang said, "but as soon as she comes back I will tell her, and she will come to see his Lordship tomorrow morning."

"If she is not at home," Daian said, "what is her donkey doing here?" He stood up and went to the inner court. Old Woman Wen was drinking tea with several other old women. She had no time to hide.

"Surely this is Sister Wen," Daian said. "Why was I told you were not at home?"

The old woman laughed and made a reverence. "Brother," she said, "would you mind going back and telling his Lordship that I have a party? I don't know what he wants, but I will come to see him tomorrow morning."

"I don't know what he wants you for," Daian said. "I only know he does want you. What an out-of-the-way hole of a place you live in. Getting here has made me quite exhausted."

"For the last few years," old woman Wen said, "when your master has bought any maids or arranged any marriages, he has always gone to Feng or Xue or Wang. He has ignored me completely. Why does he suddenly want me now? It is as though one saw beans burst before the pan is put on the fire. Perhaps, now that his Sixth Lady is dead, he wishes me to find him another lady to take her place?"

"I know nothing about that," Daian said. "You will find out when you see him."

"Well, Brother, sit down for a while and, when my guests go away, I'll go with you."

"My master wishes you to go at once," Daian said. "He told me so repeatedly. He is waiting to talk to you before he goes out."

"Stay until I've given you something to eat, then we'll start together."

"I don't want anything to eat."

Old woman Wen asked if Ximen's daughter had any children. Daian told her she had not. Then the old woman gave him some cakes and went to change her clothes. "You go first on your horse," she said, "and I'll follow on foot."
"Your donkey is here," Daian said. "Why don't you ride it?"
"My donkey?" said the old woman. "That donkey belongs to my neighbors of the bean curd shop. They leave it here to graze, and you think it is mine."
"But you used to have a donkey," the boy said.
"Yes, but sometime ago one of my young women hanged herself. I had to sell my old house to pay off her people, so you can hardly expect me to have kept the donkey."
"The house didn't matter very much," Daian said, "but I'm surprised you parted with the donkey. I should have thought you would have kept him with you day and night. If I'm not mistaken, that donkey was splendidly finished."
Old woman Wen laughed merrily. "Oh, you young monkey!" she cried, "I'm afraid you'll come to a bad end. I was taking you seriously. Well. it's some years since I saw you last and a fine clever-spoken lad you've become. You'll have to come to me when you think of finding a wife."
"My horse goes at a good pace, and you walk slowly. If you don't come soon, my master will be in a fine temper. Come on, up you get behind me."
"You young rascal," the old woman said, "I'm not your shadow. What do you think people in the street will say if they see me riding behind you?"
"Then hire this donkey. We will pay them when you get there."
"That sounds better," said the old woman. She told her son Wen Tang to saddle the donkey and put a pair of blinkers on him. Then she climbed on to his back and went with Daian to Ximen Qing.

## 092
## Auntie Wen Communicates Hsi-men Ch'ing's Wishes to Lady Lin; Wang Ts'ai Falls for a Trick & Invites his own Humiliation

Casually he cooks a fish in the hope of finding a message on a square of silk;[1]
If a road exists to the realm of the immortals, he is ready to embark upon it.
While sweeping the steps he happens upon a leaf inscribed with amorous desires;[2]
In strumming a tune beneath the moon he deploys the zither of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju.[3]
Seeking an assignation beneath the mulberry trees, Ch'iu Hu has lascivious intent;[4]
Though finding the opportunity sitting in his lap, Liu-hsia Hui is not so inclined.[5]
Having strayed inside the gold lamé bed curtains in the darkening twilight;
He seems only desirous of pouring the vintage wine for his solitary amusement.[6]

When Auntie Wen arrived at the Hsi-men residence, P'ing-an told her, "Father is in the house across the street."
Tai-an went inside to announce her arrival and found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in the study with Licentiate Wen. Upon seeing Tai-an, he immediately came out and sat down in a small reception room, while Tai-an told him all about his vicissitudes in locating Auntie Wen.
"I've succeeded in bringing her here," he said, "and she's waiting outside."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, told him to call her inside; and Auntie Wen proceeded to cautiously lift aside the portiere that was hanging over the door to keep in the heat and come into the room, where she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Auntie Wen," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's been a long time since I saw you last."
"Well, here I am," responded Auntie Wen.
"Where are you living now, since you moved?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Because I was so unfortunate as to be involved in a lawsuit," said Auntie Wen, "I was forced to get rid of my old house. At present, I have moved to the southern edge of the city and am living on Wang Family Lane."
"You can get up in order to talk to me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Auntie Wen, thereupon, got to her feet and stood beside him, while Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants out of their presence. P'ing-an and Hua-t'ung waited for him on the other side of the postern gate, but Tai-an concealed himself outside the portiere so he could eavesdrop on what they had to say.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to ask, "What households of prominent families do you frequent?"
"Well," replied Auntie Wen, "I am on familiar terms with the household of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, who resides on Main Street; the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command; the household of the distaff relative of the imperial family named Ch'iao; that of His Honor Chang the Second; and that of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."
"Are you familiar with the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, or not?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They are old patrons of mine," replied Auntie Wen. "Lady Lin and her daughter-in-law, the wife of Wang the Third, frequently buy costume jewelry from me."
"If you are on familiar terms with them," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is a mission I would like to entrust to you. You mustn't refuse me."
Reaching into his sleeve, he proceeded to pull out a five-tael ingot of silver and hand it to her, saying. thus and so, "See if you can find some way or other of inveigling Lady Lin into visiting your place, so I can have a meeting with her. If you succeed in doing so, I will see that you are further rewarded."
On hearing this, Auntie Wen laughed out loud, saying, "Whoever told you about her? Venerable sir, how did you happen to find out about this?"
"As the saying goes," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:
"Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow.
How could I help hearing about it?"
"Well, if you want me to describe this lady," said Auntie Wen, "she was born in the year of the pig, so, this year, she would be thirty-four years old. She is really a first-class lady, is as clever as can be, and could pass for being no more than twenty-nine. Although she does engage in this sort of business, she does so with the greatest discretion. When she goes out, she rides in a large sedan chair, accompanied by attendants who shout to clear the way, and proceeds directly to her destination before coming straight home. Since her son, the venerable Wang the Third, has a position in society to maintain, she would scarcely agree to an assignation at someone else's place. Whoever suggested to you that she might was mistaken. It is only within the:
Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
of her own place that, occasionally, when the venerable Wang the Third is not at home, she may surreptitiously consent to secrete a lover:
Unbeknownst to humans,
Unperceived by ghosts.
But this must be arranged in advance. As for the narrow confines of a place like mine, I would scarcely take the risk of attempting to get her to come there. This silver that you have offered me, I cannot agree to accept. I had better simply tell the lady what you have proposed, and leave it at that."
"If you refuse to accept it, and continue to make excuses," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will be annoyed. If the affair should be successful, I will reward you with some additional pieces of silk fabric for you to wear. If you persist in refusing what I have offered, you will be standing in my way."
"I am scarcely worried about your lack of largess," responded Auntie Wen. "As they say:
When a superior deigns to patronize you,
It spells the advent of your lucky star."[7]
Kowtowing to him, and accepting the proffered silver, she went on to say, "If you wait until I have had a chance to speak to the lady, venerable sir, I will get back in touch with you."
"You must treat this as a serious undertaking," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I will be waiting to hear from you here. When you return, be sure to come to this location. I won't send a page boy to summon you."
"I understand," responded Auntie Wen. "If not tomorrow, then the next day, early or late, as soon as I get the word from her, I'll come back to see you."
As she made her way out, Tai-an said to her, "Auntie Wen, it's up to you, but I would like to have at least a tael of silver for my pains in taking the trouble to find you. You oughtn't to keep everything for yourself."
"You monkey!" exclaimed Auntie Wen.
"If you throw a winnowing sieve over the wall,
Who knows whether it will land right side up
or upside down?"
Thereupon, she proceeded out the gate, mounted the donkey, and went straight off, with her son holding the bridle, while Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to visit for a while longer with Licentiate Wen.
Sometime later, Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling showed up, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to the house in order to offer him some tea and change into more formal attire, after which they set out together for the prefectural office in order to attend a party for Vice Prefect Lo Wan-hsiang. It was not until after the lamps had been lighted that he returned home.
To resume our story, when Auntie Wen arrived home with Hsi-men Ch'ing's five taels of silver in hand:
Her delight knew no bounds.
After the people attending her tea meeting had departed, late in the day, she went over to Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan's mansion, where she greeted Lady Lin with a bow.
"How is it," asked Lady Lin, "that you haven't come by to visit me the last few days?"
Auntie Wen then proceeded to explain to Lady Lin how she had been busy presiding over a conclave and tea meeting at her place in order to plan for a pilgrimage to offer incense at the temple on the summit of Mount T'ai during the twelfth month.
"Why don't you let your son take care of it?" said Lady Lin. "There's no need for you to go."
"I'm not able to go myself," replied Auntie Wen. "I plan to let Wen T'ang take charge of the incense offering pilgrimage."
"When the time comes," said Lady Lin, "I'll donate something toward the traveling expenses."
"Many thanks for your generosity," responded Auntie Wen.
When they had finished this preliminary exchange, Lady Lin urged her to move closer in order to warm herself at the brazier, and a maidservant served them with tea.
While Auntie Wen was drinking her tea, she inquired, "Is the Third Master not at home?"
"He hasn't come home for two nights in a row," said Lady Lin. "He spends his nights in the licensed quarter. He goes there every day with that crowd of sharpers:
Sleeping among the flowers and lolling
beneath the willows,
and leaving his blossoming young wife to vegetate in her room, without paying her the slightest attention. What is one to do? What is one to do?"
"Why is the Third Master's wife not to be seen?" Auntie Wen went on to ask.
"She's still in her room," explained Lady Lin, "and hasn't even come out yet."
When Auntie Wen saw that there was no one else about, she said, "That needn't be a problem, Madame, you can relax about it. I have a scheme by means of which you can be sure of dispersing that crowd of hangers-on, and bringing about a change of heart on the part of the Third Master, so that he will not venture into the licensed quarter again. If madame will permit me to explicate it, I will do so: but, should you object, I will not presume to do so."
"When have I ever refused to go along with anything you have to say?" protested Lady Lin. "If you have anything to suggest, go right ahead and say it. I won't object."
Only then did Auntie Wen go on to say, "His Honor, Hsi-men Ch'ing, whose residence is located in front of the district yamen, currently occupies the post of assistant judicial commissioner of the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. His household not only engages in money lending to both officials and functionaries, but also operates four or five businesses, including a satin piece goods store, a pharmaceutical shop, a silk goods store, and a knitting and sewing supplies store. In addition, he operates fleets of merchant vessels with armed escorts on the rivers and lakes, trades salt vouchers in Yang-chou, and purveys incense and wax in Tung-p'ing prefecture for use by the imperial household. He has several tens of assistants and managers in his employ. Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital is his adoptive father. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien of the Embroidered Uniform Guard is his superior. And Majordomo Chai Ch'ien of the grand preceptor's household is his relative by marriage. The grand coordinator and the regional inspector of Shantung are on familiar terms with him, not to mention the local prefects and district magistrates. The wealth of his household is such that:
The paths run crisscross between the fields;[8]
The stores of rotting rice suggest a granary.
What glitters is gold,
What is white is silver,
What are round are pearls,
What sparkle are jewels.
"In addition to his First Lady, who is the daughter of Battalion Commander Wu of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard, and is his legitimate wife by a second marriage, he has five or six other ladies who preside over quarters of their own and are entitled to wear formal gowns. And, below these, there are several tens of:
Singing boys and dancing girls,[9]
as well as favored maidservants, at his disposal. Truly, for him:
Every day is a Cold Food Festival;
Every night is a Lantern Festival.[10]
"At the present time, His Honor is no more than thirty-three or thirty-four years old; truly, a man in the prime of life, who has an imposing physique and is good-looking. He also resorts to aphrodisiacs to nurture his 'turtle' [11] and is an old hand at initiating romantic affairs. When it comes to backgammon and elephant chess, there is:
Nothing he has not mastered;
and as for playing at kickball or suchlike sports, there is:
Little he is not proficient at.
With regard to the works of the hundred schools, and the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts, he has but to be exposed to them in order to demonstrate his mastery. Truly, his voice is like:
Tinkling jade or plangent bronze,[12]
and he is as clever as can be.
"Upon hearing that this family of yours has:
Worn the regalia of officials for generations,[13]
and that your:
Financial foundation is anything but shallow,
as well as the fact that the Third Master is enrolled in the Military School, he has expressed a desire to become acquainted with you. The only problem is that, since he has never met you, he is uncertain how to proceed.
"The other day, upon hearing that your birthday is near at hand, and that you are accustomed to accepting worthy gentlemen from anywhere within the four seas, he is single-mindedly desirous of the chance to come and offer you his birthday congratulations. I told him that it would be awkward for him to seek an audience with you precipitously, and that he should wait until I had a chance to approach you on the subject, and obtain your consent. If you should now invite him to come make your acquaintance, not only could you establish a meaningful relationship, but you could also ask his aid in getting rid of this band of rascals that are preying on your son. Such a request would surely do nothing to injure the reputation of your household."
Gentle reader take note: To seek the lower depths, like water, is the nature of women.

On that day, as Lady Lin listened to the encomium on Hsi-men Ch'ing delivered by Auntie Wen, her heart was:
Thrown into a state of confusion,[14] and
Her lustful feelings were aroused.
In the course of considering what to do, she turned to Auntie Wen with a smile and said, "Since he and I:
Are newly acquainted and hardly know each other,
how can we suddenly arrange to meet?"
"That's no problem," responded Auntie Wen. "In speaking to His Honor, I'll just say that you initiated matters by asking me to approach him with a request that he file a complaint on your behalf in the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission against that gang of hangers-on that are inveigling the Third Master into the licensed quarter; and that you also hope that he will favor you with a private visit beforehand. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."
This suggestion produced a feeling of delight in Lady Lin's heart, and she agreed to await his visit on the evening of the day after next. Having obtained the consent of Lady Lin, Auntie Wen went home.
The next day, around dinnertime, Auntie Wen returned to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. That day, after coming home from the yamen, Hsi-men Ch'ing had nothing to do and was sitting in the studio in the house across the street when Tai-an suddenly came in and announced that Auntie Wen had arrived. Upon hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went into the small reception room and told his attendants to let down the blinds. In due course, Auntie Wen came in and kowtowed to him. Tai-an, who understood the situation, tactfully withdrew, so that the two of them could speak freely to each other.
Auntie Wen then explained how she had exercised her powers of persuasion on Lady Lin, telling him, "I gave an extravagant account of your personal character and wealth, your fashionable standing, and your familiarity with the members of the local bureaucracy; how you are:
Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with your wealth;
as well as being:
Romantic and dashing as can be;
with the result that she expressed herself to be:
Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times.[15]
She agreed that tomorrow evening, while the Third Master is not there, she will prepare a repast in her home and await your visit, so that, on the pretext of asking you for a favor, the two of you can indulge in a secret rendezvous."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this he was utterly delighted and ordered Tai-an to reward her with two pieces of silk fabric.
"If Your Honor plans to go tomorrow," said Auntie Wen, "don't go early, but wait until after the lamps are lit and there are fewer people in the streets. Make your way to the rear gate of her residence by way of Dumpling Alley. There is a certain Old Mother Tuan in her employ, who lives right next door to the rear gate of her residence. I'll wait for Your Honor there. Just have your servant tap on the door and I'll come out and conduct you into the inner sanctum, without letting any of the neighbors know about it."
"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Be sure to get there before me tomorrow, and don't budge by so much as an inch. I'll be there right on time."
When they had finished speaking, Auntie Wen respectfully bade him farewell and returned to report to Lady Lin, while Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Li Chiao-erh's quarters to spend the night. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.
Hardly able to wait for the day to come, that night Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to conserve his energy. At noontime, he put on a white "loyal and tranquil hat" and joined Ying Po-chüeh in riding on horseback to Hsieh Hsi-ta's place to attend a birthday party in his honor. Two singing girls had been hired for the occasion.
After drinking no more than a few cups of wine, around lamp-lighting time, Hsi-men Ch'ing left the party and mounted his horse, with the two page boys, Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, to accompany him. It was the ninth day of the month, and:
The light of the moon was dusky.
Putting on his eye shades, after traversing Main Street, he made his way along Dumpling Alley, until he arrived at the rear gate of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan's residence. The lamps had already been lighted, and the streets were relatively deserted. When Hsi-men Ch'ing was half a house away from the rear gate, he reined in his horse and told Tai-an to tap on Old Mother Tuan's door.
It so happens that this Old Mother Tuan occupied quarters in the rear of Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence and had been recommended for her position by Auntie Wen. It was her job to look after the rear entrance, early and late, in order to:
Open the gates and close the doors,
and to act as a lookout, enabling anyone bent on an assignation to penetrate the inner sanctum.
When Auntie Wen, who was inside her quarters, heard the tap on the door, she promptly opened it and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived. She waited inside the rear gate until Hsi-men Ch'ing had dismounted and then led him inside, still wearing his eye shades, while telling Ch'in-t'ung to take the horse and wait with it under the eaves of the house on the west side across the street. Tai-an, for his part, concealed himself in Old Mother Tuan's quarters.
Auntie Wen then invited Hsi-men Ch'ing inside, closed the rear gate, and secured it with the crossbar, after which she led him into the interior through an enclosed passageway that skirted a tier of auxiliary rooms, before arriving at the main suite of five compartments in which Lady Lin resided. There was a closed postern gate to one side, on which Auntie Wen lightly tapped with the door knocker. It so happens that this was a prearranged signal, so that, in no time, a maidservant came out to open the double-leaved door, and Auntie Wen led Hsi-men Ch'ing into the rear reception room.
As they lifted aside the portiere over the latticework of the door and went in, Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the interior was:
Ablaze with lamps and candles.
In the place of honor at the head of the room there hung a full-length portrait of the military commissioner of T'ai-yüan and Commandery Prince of Pin-yang, Wang Ching-ch'ung,[16] the founding ancestor of the house of Wang I-hsüan. He was wearing a crimson python robe decorated with roundels of entwined dragons, and a jade-ornamented girdle, and was seated on a folding armchair, covered with a tiger skin, reading a book on military strategy. He resembled Kuan Yü, the God of War, except that his beard was a little shorter, and his spear, sword, and bow and arrows were arrayed by his side. The cinnabar-red plaque over the door was inscribed with three characters meaning Hall of Integrity and Righteousness. The two sidewalls of the room were adorned with works of calligraphy and painting, and:
Zither and books were elegantly displayed.
To the left and right of the portrait there hung a pair of scrolls, on which a couplet was inscribed in gold-flecked characters that were written in the archaic clerkly script of the Han dynasty and read:
The integrity he bequeathed to the family endures
like pine trees and bamboos;
His services to the country are as conspicuous as
the Dipper or a mountain peak.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing was engaged in surveying this scene, he heard the tinkling of a bell on the portiere, and Auntie Wen came in from the interior to serve him with a cup of tea.
"Invite the venerable Lady to come out so that I can pay my respects," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"She will appear by the time Your Honor finishes your tea," said Auntie Wen. "I have just informed the Lady of your arrival."
Who could have anticipated that Lady Lin was surreptitiously engaged in scrutinizing Hsi-men Ch'ing from the other side of the portiere? She saw that:
His physique was awe-inspiring,
His speech out of the ordinary;
He displayed a splendid figure,
Both dignified and outstanding.
On his head, he wore a white satin "loyal and tranquil hat," with sable ear-muffs. On his body, he wore a crane-decorated robe of purple cashmere. On his feet, he wore white-soled black boots. On his upper torso, he wore a riding jacket, emblazoned with a green cut-velvet mandarin square that featured an embroidered lion and was fastened with a row of five gold buttons. Manifestly, he was:
A wealthy but untrustworthy, crafty
and treacherous person;
An abuser of the innocent and good,
addicted to wine and sex.
Upon seeing him, Lady Lin was utterly delighted and quietly called over Auntie Wen to ask her who he was wearing mourning for.
"He is wearing mourning for his Sixth Lady," explained Auntie Wen, "who passed away not long ago in the ninth month. At the very least, he still has at his disposal as many more ladies as the fingers on your hand. You may not be able to tell by looking at him, but he is like:
A fighting quail, just released from his cage:
Ever ready to engage."
When the woman heard this:
Her delight knew no bounds,
and Auntie Wen urged her to go out and meet Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I'd be too embarrassed,"[17] the woman said. "How can I put myself forward like that? Just ask him to come inside."
Auntie Wen, accordingly, went out and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The Lady invites Your Honor to come into her room in order to meet her."
Thereupon, she hastened to lift aside the portiere, and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded into the inner room, where he observed that:
The drapery consisted of hanging red curtains,[18]
The floor was completely covered with carpets.
Amid the fragrance of orchid and musk,
The atmosphere was as genial as that of spring.
The embroidered bed was enhanced by clouds of vapor
hovering athwart the curtains;
The brocaded screen showed the radiance of the moon
invading the asterism Hsüan-yüan.[19]
On the woman's head, she wore a headdress of gold filigree enhanced with emerald leaves. On her body, she wore a wide-sleeved jacket of white satin, over a brocaded, aloeswood-colored, crane-decorated robe of figured satin, and a wide-bordered skirt of palace-style crimson brocade. On her feet, she wore shoes of raven-hued fabric with embroidered patterns, and high white satin heels. Manifestly, she was:
An alluring and lascivious female inhabitant
of ostentatious chambers;
A veritable bodhisattva of coition, dwelling
in her sequestered bower.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Her face is glossy, her locks are thick,
and her brows curvaceous;
When her lotus feet are lightly animated,[20]
she is remarkable indeed.
When intoxicated, her lusts are aroused
within the bed curtains;
Only then does one come to see just how
extraordinary the lady is.
Upon seeing her, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Bent his body to perform an obeisance,
saying, "Will Your Ladyship please assume the position of honor so that your pupil may pay his respects to you."
"Your Honor," said Lady Lin, "you can skip the obeisance."
But Hsi-men Ch'ing was unwilling to do so and, bending his body, proceeded to kowtow to her twice. The woman, for her part, responded in kind. When they had finished with these amenities, Hsi-men Ch'ing took his seat on a chair in the position of honor, while Lady Lin kept him company by sitting at an angle on the edge of the k'ang next to him, and leaning against a comb-back-shaped back rest. Auntie Wen had long since secured the ceremonial gate leading into the front courtyard, so that there was not a single male servant left in the rear compound. The postern gate leading into the Third Master's quarters had also been locked. A young maidservant, named Fu-jung, brought in a serving of tea on a red lacquer tray, and Lady Lin kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company while he drank it, after which the maidservant took the tea cups and their raised saucers away.
Auntie Wen then initiated the conversation, saying, "The Lady has long known that Your Honor holds a judicial appointment in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and has presumed to send me to invite you here in order to ask a favor of you. But she doesn't know whether Your Honor will agree to her request, or not."
"I don't know what it is that her venerable Ladyship would have me do for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I would not deceive you, sir," said Lady Lin, "but the fact is that, although my husband's family has held the hereditary post of Imperial Commissioner for generations, it is some years now since he passed away, and he had not accumulated much in the way of savings. My son is still young, and has been delicately nurtured, but has not yet qualified to succeed to his father's position. Although he is currently enrolled in the Military School, he is still immature and uneducated and is given to entertaining a number of crafty and uncouth [21] characters who daily entice him into going out whoring and drinking with them, to the complete neglect of his family responsibilities. On several occasions I have been on the verge of reporting them to the authorities, but since I am unaccustomed to venturing outside my private quarters, I am afraid that by:
Exposing my face to the public gaze,[22]
I might damage the reputation of my late husband. That is why, today, I have ventured to invite Your Honor to my humble abode in order to confide my innermost thoughts to you, which will serve as an equivalent of my lodging a formal complaint against them. It is my earnest hope that Your Honor will consent to sympathize with my feelings, and find a way of preventing this bunch of characters from continuing to prey on my son, so that he will be able to:
Correct his faults and renew himself,[23]
devoting himself to mastering the requirements for public office, so that he can perpetuate the inheritance of his ancestors. If Your Honor is able to do this, you will have given him:
The favor of a new lease on life,[24]
and I will not only:
Feel profoundly grateful to you,
but will see that you are handsomely rewarded."
"How can your venerable Ladyship bring yourself to utter the word 'reward'?" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The members of your distinguished family have:
Worn the regalia of officials for generations,
serving the court as generals and ministers. Your household is no ordinary one. Since your noble son has twice been enrolled in the Military School, he certainly ought to strive to achieve success, in order to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, rather than succumbing to the wiles of such parasites, and allowing himself to become besotted with women and wine as so many young men do. At Your Ladyship's behest, as soon as your pupil returns to the yamen, he will see to it that this bunch of characters is appropriately disciplined. Your son will not be implicated in any way, but this may serve as a warning to him not to continue walking in the same rut and may, I hope, prevent him from doing so in the future."

When the woman heard this, she hastily got to her feet and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "On a future occasion, I will express my gratitude to Your Honor."
"You and I are like members of the same family," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"How can you say such a thing?"
As the two of them were:
Talking back and forth,
they exchanged meaningful glances with each other. Before long, Auntie Wen set up a table and brought in a serving of wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing intentionally refused, saying, "Your pupil has come for the first time, with a view to making your acquaintance, but has not brought a gift with him. How can he consent to accept your venerable Ladyship's magnanimous hospitality?"
"I did not anticipate that Your Honor would deign to pay me a visit," said Lady Lin, "so I was unable to make the appropriate preparations. The weather is cold, and I have supplied a meager cup of watery wine.
It is no more than a token of my esteem."
The maidservant then proceeded to pour the wine. Truly:
Golden flagons decant the rarest vintage;
Jade goblets overflow with Yang-kao wine.
Lady Lin stood up and proffered him a cup of wine, but Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, also got up from his seat and said, "I ought to first offer Your Ladyship a cup."
Auntie Wen, who was standing to one side, interrupted him, saying, "There is no need for Your Honor to offer Her Ladyship any wine today. The fifteenth day of the eleventh month is the Lady's birthday. Why don't you plan to deliver a present to her on that day, and wish her a happy birthday?"
"Ai-ya," exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It's a good thing you mentioned it. Today is the ninth, so it is only six days away. I will be sure to ascend her hall and wish her a happy birthday when the time comes."
"How could I be so presumptuous," responded Lady Lin with a smile, "as to put Your Honor's generosity to such a test?"
Before long, in:
Large platters and large bowls,
an assortment of delicacies was put before them in a set of sixteen matched bowls. These dishes, with their:
Enticing flavors and rare ingredients,[25]
were steaming hot, and cooked to perfection. They included sautéed chicken and fish, fried and roasted goose and duck, fastidiously prepared vegetable dishes, and rare fruits in season. Beside them:
Crimson candles blazed on high,[26]
at their feet:
Fuel was replenished in golden braziers.
Exchanging cups as they drank,
Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,[27]
They joked suggestively about clouds and rain,
As the wine enhanced their lustful daring.
They continued drinking until the time when:
The lotus-shaped clepsydra dripped its last, and
The moonbeams in the window reached their height.
They both felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine,[28]
And their amorous feelings were already stimulated.
Auntie Wen had disappeared, and when they called for more wine, no one responded. Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon seeing that:
There was nobody about,
gradually:
Moved his seat closer to her,
and:
Their conversation became rather risqué.
It was not long before they reached the stage of:
Holding hands and squeezing wrists,[29]
Rubbing shoulders and nudging elbows.
Initially, when he:
Playfully embraced her powdered neck,
the woman merely:
Smiled but did not choose to respond.[30]
Eventually, however, the woman:
Gently parted her scarlet lips,
and Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Shot his tongue into her mouth, so that
The sound of their sucking was audible,
And their pleasantries became intimate.
Thereupon, the woman got up and closed the door to the room, after which, she:
Removed her clothes, undid her girdle, and
Slightly parted the brocade bed curtains.
Across the bed there lay:
An embroidered quilt and mandarin duck pillow.[31]
The bedding was fumigated with phoenix incense.
Their jade bodies in intimate contact,
He began to fondle her creamy breasts.
It so happens that, because Hsi-men Ch'ing knew that the woman was fond of the game of breeze and moonlight, before leaving home he had picked up his bag of sexual implements and taken a dose of the Indian monk's medication. The woman discovered, by both visual and tactile means, that his male organ was extremely large, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, also, proceeded to manually stimulate her clitoris.
Devoting themselves to each other's pleasure,
Their lascivious excitement burned like fire.[32]
The woman placed an absorbent mermaid silk handkerchief within reach beside the bed, while Hsi-men Ch'ing, underneath the quilt, rendered his chowrie handle rampant. Thereupon:
As he extended his apelike arms,
The butterflies were driven to madness
and the bees to wantonness;
As she raised up her jade legs,
She was scarcely bashful at the clouds
or embarrassed by the rain.
Truly:
Back and forth, they are both practiced hands
at amorous engagement;
What matter if her jade hairpin should happen
to fall by the bedside?[33]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The tunes performed in the nuptial chamber
are low-pitched and secretive;
As incense burns in the duck-shaped censer[34]
the lucent vapor spirals upward.
Their dreams are rehearsed amid the pale
liquescence of the moonlit night;
As they toss and turn on the ivory bedstead
the spring colors are marvelous.
Unexpectedly, on this occasion, she has found
herself with a young lothario;
When she is accustomed only to playing games
with the wealthiest merchants.
Overcome with desire, she yearns for union,
but is so languid and enervated;
She has to urge her Sung Yü to embark upon
his own expedition to Kao-t'ang.[35]
As he pushes his way through the double gates
that have never been locked;
Dew comes to inundate the blossoming branch of
crimson herbaceous peonies.[36]
Hsi-men Ch'ing, on this occasion, exerted to the full the skills he had acquired during a lifetime as he dallied with the woman, and a watch and a half elapsed before he ejaculated. As for the woman:
Her hair is in disarray, her hairpins askew,
Her blossoms withered, and her willows tired.
The oriole's cries and swallow's twittering.
Still continue to resonate within their ears.
After lying together:
Head to head and thigh over thigh,
And embracing one another a while,
they got up and put their clothes back on. Upon getting down from the bed, the woman:
Deftly trimmed the silver lamp's wick,
opened the door of the room, and:
Gazing at the mirror, made herself up.
After calling for the maidservant to bring in some water so they could wash their hands, they:
Resumed drinking the fragrant wine,
Trading toasts in the fine vintage.
After they had exchanged three cups with each other, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go, and the woman was unable to detain him any longer, though she urged him repeatedly to return. Hsi-men Ch'ing bowed in consent and apologized politely for the trouble he had put her to, after which he took his leave and departed, while the woman saw him out as far as the postern gate. Auntie Wen had already opened the rear gate and called Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung to bring the horse over for him to mount for the return journey. Out on the street, the night watchman was already:
Shouting the hour and ringing his bell;
The time was late, the night was still.[37]
Behold:
The atmosphere was pervaded with frost;
The myriad pipes of Heaven were silent.[38]
Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded on his way home. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.

The next day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had disposed of his routine business at the yamen, he retired to the rear chamber and summoned the adjutant and detectives assigned to the area in question and ordered them:
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
saying, "Go and find out who it is that is inveigling the third son of Imperial Commissioner Wang into the licensed quarter, and what establishments he is frequenting. Ascertain their names, and come back to report to me."
He then turned to Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling and said, "Master Wang the Third is allowing himself to be led astray. The other day, his mother importuned someone to come and tell me about it. It's not really her son's fault, but he is being led into temptation's way by this bunch of 'bare sticks.' If steps are not taken now to see that they are severely disciplined, in days to come, they are likely to end up leading the heir of this family badly astray."
"What my colleague says is true enough," responded Hsia Yen-ling. "They ought, certainly, to be apprehended."
The adjutant and detectives, upon receiving Hsi-men Ch'ing's instructions, set to work that very day and actually succeeded in ascertaining the names of the persons in question. Having made out a report on the matter, they came to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence that afternoon and presented their findings. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the names in the document were those of Blabbermouth Sun, Sticky Chu, Trifler Chang, Tiptoe Nieh, Yokel Sha, Stupid Yü, and Mohammedan Pai; and that the singing girls in question were Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih. Picking up his writing brush, he crossed out the names of Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih, as well as those of Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu.
He then instructed the officers, saying, "You need only take action against Trifler Chang and the rest of those five 'bare sticks.' Arrest them for me, and deliver them to the yamen first thing in the morning."
The functionaries assented and set off on their mission. That evening, having learned that Wang the Third and the others were all drinking and playing kickball at Li Kuei-chieh's place, they concealed themselves behind the rear gate. Late at night, when the party dispersed, they arrested Trifler Chang, Tiptoe Nieh, Stupid Yü, Mohammedan Pai, and Yokel Sha, all five of them. While Blabbermouth Sun and Sticky Chu managed to hide out in one of the back rooms of the establishment, Wang the Third concealed himself under the frame of Li Kuei-chieh's bed and dared not come out. The personnel of the Li Family Establishment were thrown into such consternation that they broke into a sweat. Not knowing who was behind the proceedings, all they could do was to seek information from anyone who could learn the truth of the matter. Wang the Third spent the whole night under the bed, not daring to come out. The madam of the Li Family Establishment feared that the officers involved had been sent all the way from the Eastern Capital to make the arrests. When the fifth watch came around, she persuaded Li Ming to change into different clothes and escort Wang the Third home. The adjutant and detectives involved took Trifler Chang and the rest of them to their orderly room where they hung them up for the night.
Early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen and took his place on the bench together with Hsia Yen-ling. The instruments of punishment were arrayed to either side. When the prisoners were led in, each of them was subjected to a squeezing and given twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo. They were beaten until:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood spurted out.
The sound of their cries shook the heavens;
Their howls of distress disturbed the earth.
Hsi-men Ch'ing exhorted them, saying. "As for the bunch of you 'bare sticks,' who devote yourselves to inveigling young men into:
Toying with the breeze in the licensed quarter,
Instead of being content to abide by their lots,
you deserve to be punished severely; but, today, I am letting you off lightly with no more than these few strokes of the bamboo. If you should happen to fall into my hands again, however, you can count on being sentenced to public exposure in the cangue outside the gate of the yamen."
He then shouted an order that the attendants should drive them out of the courtroom. As they were forced outside, they felt as though:
Whether their fates were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for them to hide.
After having disposed of this case, the two officials retired from the bench and were enjoying a cup of tea in their private quarters, when Hsia Yen-ling said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The other day, I received a letter from my relative, Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, saying that the report on the merit evaluation for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard has been submitted, but that the results have not yet been promulgated. Having met with my colleague here today, I propose that we should send a messenger to our colleague Lin Ch'eng-hsün, the judicial commissioner in the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, since that is closer to the capital, to find out if there is any further news on this head."
"My colleague's proposal is most perspicacious," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
They then summoned one of the couriers on duty, who knelt down before them, and instructed him, saying, "We will provide you with five mace of silver for your traveling expenses. You are to set out immediately, with calling cards from each of the two of us, travel by way of the southern branch of the Yellow River to Huai-ch'ing prefecture, and present them to Battalion Commander Lin Ch'eng-hsün of the Provincial Surveillance Commission there. We want you to find out for us whether the results of the recent merit evaluations for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard have come down from the capital yet. That is to say, whether the formal notification from the Registry Office has been promulgated or not. It is essential that you ascertain the true facts of the matter, and return to report them to us."
The courier in question took possession of the silver and the calling cards, returned to his office, put on his broad-brimmed hat of Fan-yang felt, accoutered himself for the trip, procured a horse from the stable, and set out on his long journey, while the two officials got up and went home.
To resume our story, when Trifler Chang and the rest of them were expelled from the yamen of the Surveillance Commission and found themselves wandering along the street, they were in a state of trepidation. Completely in the dark as to what had ignited the fuse that resulted in their predicament, they resorted to mutual recriminations.
"No doubt," ventured Trifler Chang, "it must, once again, be something instigated by Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en in the Eastern Capital."
"That's not likely," pronounced Mohammedan Pai. "If that were the case, how would he be willing to:
Let anyone lightly out of his clutches?
As the saying goes:
No one is more perverse than a singing girl;
No one is more dishonest than a silversmith;
No one is more accomplished than a 'cribber.'"
Tiptoe Nieh then chimed in, saying. "None of you seem to get it. I'm the only one who has guessed the truth. This must surely be the result of Hsi-men Ch'ing's harboring a grudge against Wang the Third for patronizing his mistress, and choosing to vent his spleen at our expense. Truly:
When the dragon battles the tiger,
The one hurt is the innocent fawn."[39]
"Gentlemen, that may well be the case," opined Trifler Chang, "it is certainly we who are enduring the pain. Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu were just as involved as we were, but it is we alone who are being made to take the blame."
"How can you talk so naively?" said Stupid Yü. "The two of them are friends of his. How could he bring himself to hale them into court to kneel down before him and sentence them to punishment from on high?"
"I wonder why he didn't arrest the women involved?" ventured Trifler Chang.
"The two women are both sweethearts of his," explained Tiptoe Nieh, "and Li Kuei-chieh is his mistress. He could hardly have consented to have her arrested. There's no point in trying to blame anybody. It's just our bad luck to have stumbled into this dragnet. Why do you suppose His Honor Hsia Yen-ling had nothing to say just now? It was only Hsi-men Ch'ing who did the talking. That in itself makes it clear that the fix was in. Right now, we ought to go to Li Kuei-chieh's place and try to get hold of Wang the Third. After all, it's only thanks to him that our buttocks are covered with welts and our thighs beaten to a pulp. If we can get a few taels of silver out of him as compensation, we can avoid being laughed at by our wives."
Thereupon:
Coming this way and going that way,
Rounding bends and turning corners,[40]
they made their way straight to Li Kuei-chieh's establishment in the licensed quarter, where they found that the gate was:
Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that
Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.[41]
They shouted out loud for what seemed like half a day before a maidservant finally responded from the other side of the door, asking who was there.
"It's us," said Trifler Chang. "We're looking to have a word with Master Wang the Third."
"He went home in the middle of the night that day," responded the maidservant. "He's not here, and there's no one else at home either, so I don't dare open the gate."
The bunch of them could think of no alternative but to go back to the residence of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan, where they barged right into the reception room and sat down. When Wang the Third heard that they had come looking for him, he was so perturbed that he hid out in his own quarters, not daring to emerge.
After what seemed like half a day, he sent his page boy, Yung-ting, out to say to them, "My master is not at home."
They responded by saying, "He's certainly bent on having an easy time of it. If he's not at home, just where has he gone to that he can't be called back from?"
"Let me remind you of the facts of the case," said Stupid Yü. "There's no use pretending that you're:
Still asleep in dreamland.
We've just been beaten in the yamen of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and then thrown out into the street. Right now, they're demanding that the Third Master make a personal appearance before the bench."
They then pulled up their clothes, exposing their thighs for Yung-ting to see, and told him to go back inside and report on the situation.
"After all," they went on to say, "the fact that we've been subjected to a beating on his account is no trivial matter."
Each and every one of them then proceeded to recline on the benches and give vent to moans and cries of pain.
As a result, Wang the Third became even more fearful of coming out and pleaded with his mother, saying, "Can't you, somehow or other, find a way of rescuing me from this situation?"
"I'm only a woman," responded Lady Lin. "How should I know how to go about persuading anyone to pull strings on your behalf?"
After he had pleaded with her for what seemed like half a day, they learned that the gang out in the reception room were getting restive and were demanding to speak with the venerable lady of the house.
Lady Lin did not go out but spoke to them from the other side of the standing screen, saying, "You will have to be patient. The fact of the matter is that he is out on our country estate and is not at home; but I will send a servant to go and summon him."
"Venerable Lady," said Trifler Chang, "you'd do well to send someone after him as soon as possible. If this boil is not lanced it will ooze pus, and letting it fester is not the thing to do. It is on his account that we have suffered this beating. When His Honor dismissed us just now, he insisted that he be turned over to the court. If he does not appear:
There can be no hope of peace,[42]
for anyone involved, and matters can only go from bad to worse."
Upon hearing this, Lady Lin lost no time in sending a page boy out to serve them with tea. Wang the Third, for his part, was as scared as the devil and pressed his mother, once again, to find someone to pull strings on his behalf.
Only after he became frantic did Lady Lin say to him, "Auntie Wen just happens to be acquainted with the household of Judicial Commissioner Hsi-men Ch'ing. Years ago, she was the go-between who proposed the betrothal of his daughter, so she is familiar with their household."
"If she is acquainted with the judicial commissioner," said Wang the Third, "send a page boy to invite her here as quickly as possible."
"Ever since you criticized her on a former occasion," said Lady Lin, "she's been miffed and has stopped coming over here. Under the circumstances, how can we invite her? She's unlikely to come."
"My good mother," said Wang the Third, "things have reached the crisis stage. Invite her here, and I will humble myself so far as to beg her pardon."
Lady Lin then agreed to send Yung-ting on this errand, saying, "Go out the rear gate as quietly as possible, and invite Auntie Wen to come over here."
Wang the Third implored her, again and again, saying, "Auntie Wen, if you are acquainted with the judicial commissioner, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, pray use whatever influence you can to rescue me from this predicament."
Auntie Wen deliberately made a specious show of emphasizing the difficulties involved, saying, "Although it is true that, in the past, it was I who proposed the betrothal of his daughter, it has been some years now since I have had any occasion to cross his threshold. When it comes to such prominent families, with their:
Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
I don't venture to trouble them."
Wang the Third hastily knelt down in front of her and said, "Auntie Wen:
You shall have an ample reward;[43]
I will never dare to forget it.
That bunch of people up front are insisting that I appear in court. How can I afford to do that?"
Auntie Wen kept her eyes fixed on his mother, who eventually said, "You might as well see if you can intervene on his behalf."
"There's no point in my going by myself," said Auntie Wen. "Third Master, you must put on formal attire and let me take you to visit His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing's house in person. If you will pay your respects to him and plead with him, while I speak up from the sidelines on your behalf, I guarantee that this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion."
"Right now," said Wang the Third, "that bunch of characters up front are pressing their demands most vociferously. If they should happen to catch sight of me, what would I do?"
"As for that problem," said Auntie Wen:
"What's the difficulty there?[44]
Let me go out and see what I can do to placate them. If you will provide wine and meat, refreshments and tea, they can be beguiled into partaking of them, while I surreptitiously sneak you out by the rear gate, fulfill our mission, and return, without their having so much as an inkling of what we are about."
Auntie Wen, thereupon, went out to the front reception room, bowed twice to the assembled group, and said, "The lady of the house has asked me to come out and respectfully explain to you gentlemen that the Third Master has really gone to their country estate and is not at home. She has sent someone to ask him to come back, and he should be here sometime soon if you will only consent to remain sitting here a little while longer. It's a pity that your implication in this affair has resulted in your suffering such punishment and vituperation; and your feelings are just as understandable as the fact that:
We are all dependent on salt and rice.
When the Third Master returns, he will surely treat you with the consideration you deserve.
No matter how egregiously wrong a verdict may be,
The men deputed to carry it out are not to blame.[45]
After all, the only thing everybody wants is to settle the matter amicably.
Since you are here under official orders,
You have no choice but to do as directed.[46]
Once the Third Master appears, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion."
At this, the group of them responded as with a single voice, saying, "It is Auntie Wen who truly understands the situation. If you had only come out earlier and spoken to us in such a reasonable way, we would not have become as agitated as all this. Instead, we were told, in the most obdurate terms, that he was not at home, as though they believed that this was merely a pickle that we had gotten ourselves into, when, in fact, it was he who was actually responsible for the fact that we were subjected to a judicial beating. Do you really think that when the authorities demand your appearance, you can merely pretend not to be at home, and continue:
Drinking wine or eating meat,
while getting others to suffer in your stead? Auntie Wen, you are amenable to reason. Since you've come out to speak to us, we can suggest a way of coping with the situation. All they need to do is spend some money to purchase a little favorable influence, and the matter can be settled to everyone's satisfaction. If you had not come out to parley with us, the matter would certainly have had to be adjudicated. A yamen charged with penal investigations is not likely to drop the case for nothing."
"What you gentlemen say makes sense," responded Auntie Wen. "If you will remain sitting here a while longer, I'll speak to the lady, and also have her provide some wine and refreshments for you. You've already been here for half a day and must be hungry."

"It is only our Auntie Wen," they said with one voice, "who really:
Understands man's vicissitudes.[47]
The truth of the matter is that ever since we were driven out of the yamen, we haven't had so much as a taste of yellow soup."
Auntie Wen then returned to the rear of the compound and saw to the purchase of two mace of silver's worth of wine, and a mace of silver's worth of other refreshments, including pork, lamb, and beef, which were duly chopped up to fill several large platters, and taken out to serve to them. Thus she succeeded in inveigling them into turning their attention to feasting upon these:
Unlimited quantities of meat and wine,
in the front reception room.
Meanwhile, Wang the Third put on his scholar's cap and robe, wrote out a message on a calling card, and, with Auntie Wen leading the way, donned his eye-shades, sneaked inconspicuously out the rear gate, and set out to walk to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.
When they arrived at the front gate, P'ing-an, who recognized Auntie Wen, said, "Father has been in the front reception hall, but has just gone inside. What does Auntie Wen wish to speak to him about?"
Auntie Wen handed him Wang the Third's calling card and said, "Brother, may I trouble you to report this gentleman's arrival."
Hastily turning to Wang the Third, she asked him for two mace of silver and handed it to P'ing-an. Only then did he consent to go inside and report the situation to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accordion-bound calling card, he saw that it read, "Your humble pupil Wang Ts'ai:
Presents his compliments with a hundred salutations."[48]
He first called in Auntie Wen to interrogate her about the situation and then opened the latticed door to the great reception hall and sent a page boy to invite Wang the Third to come in. When the attendants in the great reception hall hastily lifted aside the portiere that was hanging over the door to keep in the heat, they revealed that Hsi-men Ch'ing, with a "loyal and tranquil hat" on his head, and dressed in informal garb, was coming out to receive him.
Upon seeing that Wang the Third was formally attired, Hsi-men Ch'ing made a point of saying, "Auntie Wen, why didn't you tell me beforehand? I'm here in my informal clothes."
He then turned to his attendants, saying, "Bring me my formal clothing."
This threw Wang the Third into such consternation that he stepped forward to stop him, exclaiming, "Distinguished elder, make yourself easy. Your humble junior has made bold to come and impose upon you. How could I presume to put you to any inconvenience?"
Upon entering the reception hall, Wang the Third made a point of asking Hsi-men Ch'ing to assume the position of honor so that he could kowtow to him, but Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, saying with a smile, "This is my humble abode, after all."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then seized the initiative by paying the first reverence to his visitor.
"Your humble junior," said Wang the Third, "is guilty of a transgression. I have long been an admirer of yours but have failed to pay you my respects."
"Let us both dispense with further formalities," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Wang the Third, however, persisted in begging Hsi-men Ch'ing to accept his obeisance, saying, "As your humble junior, it is only appropriate that my venerable elder should accept my obeisance in order to atone for my failure to pay you my respects any earlier."
After an exchange of polite demurrals, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally permitted him to kowtow to him twice, after which he was offered a seat and sat down respectfully on the edge of his chair.
After a little while, tea was served, and Wang the Third saw that in Hsi-men Ch'ing's reception hall:
Brocaded standing screens were arrayed;
on the four walls were suspended scrolls depicting landscapes in golds and greens; the chairs were adorned with inlaid patterns and draped with green brocaded silk; while their seats were provided with sable cushions; and beneath them:
The entire floor was covered with rugs.[49]
In the middle of the room there stood a four-cornered brazier of yellow brass, polished:
With a glitter that rivaled the sun's.
Under the plaque over the door was an inscription reading "Bestowed by Imperial Favor" in the distinctive calligraphy of Mi Fu.[50]
Upon surveying these surroundings, Wang the Third appeared somewhat more composed, as he addressed Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Your humble junior has a matter that he is reluctant to trouble Your Eminence with."
So saying, he reached into his sleeve to extract his written statement of the case and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, getting up from his seat in order to do so, and kneeling down in front of him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing reached out a hand to help him up, saying, "My worthy acquaintance, if you have something to say to me, there is no reason not to say it."
Wang the Third then said, "Your humble junior is devoid of talent and is genuinely guilty of an offense. It is my earnest hope that my venerable elder, out of consideration for the position of my late father as a high-ranking military official, will consent to be lenient toward your humble junior's ignorant offense. If you will but allow him to preserve his sense of shame by relieving him of the necessity to appear in court, you will spare your humble junior from imminent death and confer upon him the good fortune of a return to life. He will:
Carry rings and knot grass in order to repay you,[51]
And awaits your decision in fear and trepidation."[52]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the document and observed that it contained the names of the five "cribbers," Trifler Chang and the rest, he said, "As for this bunch of 'bare sticks,' I have already dealt with them in the yamen today by punishing them severely and then letting them go. What business do they have trying to put the bite on you?"
"They are demanding that I do thus and so," said Wang the Third. "They claim that my venerable elder, after presiding over their punishment in the yamen, drove them out with the promise that your humble junior would also be required to appear in court. They have chosen to camp out in my home, where they are swearing oaths and raising a ruckus, and demanding monetary compensation, so that:
Peaceful existence is utterly impossible.[53]
Having no other recourse, I have come to my venerable elder's home to acknowledge my guilt."
So saying, he also handed over his list of proposed gifts.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw it, he said, "Whoever heard of such a thing?"
He then went on to say, "This bunch of 'bare sticks' are truly detestable. I actually let them off, so what business do they have going anywhere else to make trouble?"
Giving the list of proposed gifts back to Wang the Third, he continued, "My worthy acquaintance, please return home. I won't keep you any longer. Right now, I will dispatch people forthwith to arrest this bunch of 'bare sticks,' and, in days to come, I am prepared to put myself at your disposal."
"How could I presume upon such a thing?" responded Wang the Third. "Since my venerable elder has seen fit not to reject my request, I will be sure to return to your door in the future in order to express my humble thanks."
So saying, with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,
he started out the door.
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw him off as far as the second gate before saying, "Since I am wearing my informal clothes, it would not be appropriate for me to escort you any further."
Wang the Third continued out through the main gate, put his eye-shades back on, and went his way, accompanied by a page boy, while Auntie Wen requested a further word with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Don't do anything to alarm them," Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed her. "I will dispatch people to arrest them right away."
Auntie Wen caught up with Wang the Third, and the two of them made their way surreptitiously back into the house.
Unbeknownst to them, Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly dispatched an adjutant and four orderlies, who marched straight into Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence, where they found the bunch of 'bare sticks' drinking wine and raising a ruckus as before. When these functionaries barged in and:
Without permitting any further explanation,
proceeded to arrest them, and put them in handcuffs, they were so frightened:
Their complexions turned the color of dirt.[54]
"Wang the Third has played a nice trick on us," they objected. "He induced us to stay put in his house, while reversing the angle of the hoe and turning us over like the clods that we are."
The orderlies and the adjutant took them to task, saying, "You characters had better stop talking such nonsense. What good will it do you? Each of you should be preparing to plead for his life in front of His Honor. That would be more like it."
"What you gentlemen suggest is correct," responded Trifler Chang.
Before long, they were all escorted under guard to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, where the orderlies at the gate, and P'ing-an as well, all stuck out their hands and demanded a bribe before they would go inside and announce their arrival. The bunch of them had no recourse but to divest themselves of their jackets, or take the hairnet rings off their heads, to comply with these demands, before they were directed to proceed inside. After what seemed like half a day, Hsi-men Ch'ing came out and seated himself in the reception hall as though he were presiding over a court of law, while the adjutant ushered the culprits in and directed them to kneel at the foot of the hall.
Hsi-men Ch'ing upbraided them, saying, "What am I to do with you bunch of 'bare sticks'? I treated you leniently, after all, so what business did you have claiming to speak for my yamen, and going to his home in the attempt to extort money from him? Tell me the truth. Just how much money did you manage to extort? If you don't tell me, I'll order my attendants to put the squeezers on you and give you a real squeezing."
He had no sooner uttered these words than the orderlies in attendance promptly brought out five or six sets of brand new squeezers and stood ready to apply them.
Trifler Chang and the rest of them had no recourse but to kowtow to him in their abased position and plead with him, saying, "Your humble servants did not extort so much as a candareen in the way of compensation from anybody. All we did was to relate the fact that we had been driven out of the yamen, and request the opportunity to explain the situation to him. His household even provided wine and food for our entertainment. We never attempted to extort anything from him."
"You never should have gone to his home in the first place," pronounced Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You bunch of 'bare sticks' make it your business to take advantage of young men of good family and always have your hands out for whatever you can get out of them. Such conduct is truly reprehensible. As long as you won't confess the truth, I'll have you taken to the yamen and incarcerated there. Tomorrow, I'll subject you to a severe interrogation, obtain your confessions, and sentence you to public exposure in the cangue."
The group of them, as one man, pled for mercy as they wept, saying, "Your Heavenly Honor, save our lives, we pray. Your humble servants will never presume to approach his door again in order to make trouble for him. Not to mention public exposure, to imprison us in these cold winter months is tantamount to a death sentence."
"What am I to do with you 'bare sticks'?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I tell you that if I let you go, I expect you to:
Cleanse your hearts and correct your faults,
devoting yourselves to making an honest living. You must cease:
Colluding with the bordellos in the quarter,
to lead young men astray and cheat them out of their possessions. If you are ever haled before my yamen again, I will have you all beaten to death."
He then shouted, "Get out of here," and the bunch of them, feeling lucky to have escaped with their lives, flew outside as fast as they could go. Truly:
Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, having thus disposed of the bunch of them, returned to the rear compound, where Yüeh-niang asked him, "Was this something to do with Wang the Third?"
"It does indeed have to do with the third son of Imperial Commissioner Wang," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the same one who was responsible for that fix that Li Kuei-chieh got herself into some time ago. And today, that lousy little whore has not changed her ways but has taken up with him again. He has been maintaining her as his mistress for a fee of thirty taels of silver a month. No wonder she has been hoodwinking me all this time. But what she did not anticipate was that there was an insider involved who explained the situation to me, so that, yesterday, I dispatched some minions to apprehend this bunch of scamps and bring them before me in the yamen, where I had them put in the squeezers and subjected to a beating. But who could have anticipated that this bunch of scamps would go to his home and kick up a fuss in the hope of shaking him down for a few taels of silver? Fearing that his presence would be demanded in the yamen, and never having appeared in court before, he was thrown into such consternation that he importuned Auntie Wen into coming with a written offer of fifty taels of silver if I would intervene on his behalf. Just now, I had these characters brought back before me here and bombarded them with enough in the way of empty threats to keep them from bothering him anymore.
"His family is unfortunate to have spawned such an unworthy young man. Your ancestors established a firm foundation for the household, serving as imperial commissioners, and you are currently enrolled in the Military School, but you have chosen not to pursue the opportunities for success that are yours for the asking. You deliberately neglect the wife you have at home, though she is as pretty as a sprig of blossoms, the niece of Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en in the Eastern Capital, paying her no heed, while, day and night, you choose instead to tag along after this bunch of 'bare sticks,' giving yourself over to debauchery in the licensed quarter. He has even gone so far as to pawn his wife's jewelry when in need of spending money. This year, he is no more than twenty years old, still only a youngster, but he will never amount to anything."
Yüeh-niang responded, "Why don't you:
Piddle a bladderful of piss, and
Take a look at your own reflection?
You're like:
A raven scoffing at the blackness of a pig.[55]
Truly:
The lampstand casts no light upon itself.[56]
You may well think you have the capacity to amount to something yourself, but:
You too have drunk water from that well.
There's nothing you won't do.
What's so pure about your own conduct that you should have the right to criticize the conduct of others?"
With these few words she managed to reduce Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence.
Just as their meal was being served to them, the page boy Lai-an came in and reported, "Master Ying the Second is here."
"Ask him to have a seat in the studio," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll be right there."
Wang Ching promptly proceeded to open the door to the studio by the front reception hall, and Ying Po-chüeh went inside and sat down on a chair beside the heated k'ang. Sometime later, Hsi-men Ch'ing came outside, exchanged salutations with him, and then sat down on the k'ang so the two of them could have a chat together.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how is it that, the day before yesterday, when we were at Hsieh Hsi-ta's place, you got up to go so early?"
"I had to get an early start the following day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've been busy at the yamen for days on end. Moreover, since I am subject to an impending merit evaluation, I have had to send someone to the Eastern Capital to see if he could pick up any news of the outcome. I am scarcely to be compared with the likes of you who have nothing else to do."
"Brother," continued Ying Po-chüeh, "have you really been tied up at the yamen for days on end?"
"Not a day goes by without something to keep me busy," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Wang the Third tells me," went on Ying Po-chüeh, "that you dispatched people from the yamen on the evening of the tenth and arrested Trifler Chang and company, all five of them, at Li Kuei-chieh's place, allowing only Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu to escape. This morning, moreover, you had them brought before you at the yamen and subjected them to a beating before throwing them out. The bunch of them have all subsequently gone to the residence of Imperial Commissioner Wang. Why have you kept me in the dark and failed to tell me about it?"
"You silly dog!" expostulated Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever told you such a thing? You must have heard incorrectly. It wasn't my yamen, but it may have been the office of Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command."
"The office of the Regional Military Command," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "would hardly concern itself with such trivial matters."

"I fear then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it must have been someone from the district yamen who arrested them."
"That's not the case," said Ying Po-chüeh. "This morning, Li Ming told me that the members of their whole establishment were scared out of their wits, and that Li Kuei-chieh was so frightened that she took to her bed and hasn't gotten up and about for the last two days, simply keeping to her k'ang. They feared that, once again, it was men who had been sent down from the Eastern Capital to make the arrests. Only this morning, upon making inquiries, did they discover that it was the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission that had ordered the arrests."
"I haven't really been to the yamen the last few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and don't know anything about it. I've sworn an oath not to have anything further to do with Li Kuei-chieh, so what do I care if she has chosen to get herself into a predicament that scares her into taking to her bed?"
Ying Po-chüeh saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing's face was puffed out as though he were trying to contain a laugh and said, "Brother, what sort of a person are you, that you should even try to pull the wool over my eyes, and keep me in the dark? Since Li Ming told me about things today, I understand what you're up to in letting Pockmarked Chu and Blabbermouth Sun off the hook. After all, a judicial yamen like yours is unlikely to let people escape so easily. This is a case of your contriving things so that:
When the sheep is beaten, the colt and donkey tremble.
You just wanted to put the fear of God into Li Kuei-chieh's outfit so they would be reminded of what you're capable of. If you had dragged everyone involved into the yamen, you would have ruptured your relationships with them and created a lot of bad feelings.
Although you have taken the first step,
You are not obliged to take the second,
and, as a result, right now, when Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu run into you, they are bound to feel somewhat discomfited. This scheme of yours is an instance of:
Conspicuously repairing the cliffside roadways,
While surreptitiously emerging at Ch'en-ts'ang.[57]
I trust you will not take offense, Brother, if I say that this is a brilliant ploy on your part. As the saying goes:
A Perfected Being does not reveal himself as such;
Were he to do so, he would not be a Perfected Being.[58]
If you were openly to play a trick of this kind, you would reveal your true colors and not be the clever character that you are. Brother, you are truly a master strategist and a man of capacious vision."
On hearing these few words, Hsi-men Ch'ing broke out laughing and said, "Since when am I any master strategist?"
"My guess would be," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that there certainly must have been some insider who told you the whole story. If not, how could you ever have ascertained the facts so accurately, or been able to employ such:
Devices beyond the ken of ghosts or spirits?"[59]
"You silly dog!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The best way to avoid being found out,
Is not to do it in the first place."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "at present, you would be well advised not to demand Wang the Third's appearance in court, that's all."
"Who is demanding that he do any such thing?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Originally, when the functionaries presented the bill of particulars about the case, I personally struck out the names of Wang the Third, Pockmarked Chu, and Blabbermouth Sun, as well as those of Li Kuei-chieh and Ch'in Yü-chih, ordering them only to arrest that bunch of 'bare sticks.'"
"So why are they still bothering him right now?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"The truth of the matter is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that they expected to be able to extort a few taels of silver out of him. How could they have anticipated that, just now, he would personally come to pay me a visit, kowtow to me, and offer an apology for his misbehavior? I consequently sent people to round up those 'bare sticks' and threatened to sentence them to public exposure in the cangue, whereupon they all pled for mercy and repeatedly promised that they would never dare make demands upon him again. Wang the Third, for his part, addressing me again and again as his venerable elder, presented me with a gift card offering me fifty taels of silver. I refused to accept anything from him, but he promised that he would invite me to his place sometime soon in order to express his gratitude."
"Really, he actually came to your place to apologize for his misbehavior?" asked Ying Po-chüeh in astonishment.
"Surely you don't suggest that I would deceive you," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, who then called for Wang Ching and told him, "Go fetch that calling card from Wang the Third and show it to Master Ying the Second."
Wang Ching went back to the master suite and brought out the calling card, which read, "Your humble pupil Wang Ts'ai:
Presents his compliments with a hundred salutations."
When Ying Po-chüeh saw this, all he could do was to exclaim:
Expressing the most fulsome admiration,
"Brother, your schemes are:
Both marvelous and inscrutable."
"If you run into any of them," Hsi-men Ch'ing admonished Ying Po-chüeh, "don't reveal the fact that I had any prior knowledge of the situation."
"I understand," said Ying Po-chüeh:
"The secret must not be disclosed.
How could I presume to say anything about it?"
After they had visited together for a while, and consumed a serving of tea, Ying Po-chüeh said, "Brother, I'd better be on my way. If, by any chance, Blabbermouth Sun and Pockmarked Chu should find their way here, don't tell them that I've been to see you."
"If they should come here," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't even receive them, but have the servants report that I'm not at home."
He then called in the people responsible for the front gate and told them, "If either of those persons should show up, simply report that I am not at home."
From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing refused to have anything more to do with Li Kuei-chieh and, when entertaining at home, no longer engaged Li Ming to sing for the company, so his relations with the Li Family Establishment became cool. Truly:
After last night's rainfall along the
Flower-washing Stream;[60]
The green willows and fragrant verdure[61]
remain for whom to see?[62]
A poem testifies to this:
Who is able to visit the T'ien-t'ai Mountains in pursuit of immortal maidens?[63]
The Three Isles of the Blest remain invisible, hidden amid the waves of the sea.[64]
To vanish inside a nobleman's gates is to be as unreachable as the ocean depths;
From this point on, one's lover might as well be a stranger along the highway.

When Daian and old woman Wen reached the house, Ping'an told them that Ximen Qing was at the shop across the road. Daian went to see him. He was in the study with Scholar Wen but, as soon as Daian came in, he went into another small room.
"Old woman Wen awaits your pleasure," Daian said to him. Ximen Qing bade the boy bring her in. The old woman raised the lattice quietly and came in. She kowtowed to him.
"Sister Wen," Ximen said, "it is a very long time since I saw you last."
"Yes," the old woman said. "I have been very busy."
"Where are you living now?" Ximen asked her.
"Unfortunately," the old woman said, "I had a lawsuit and was compelled to sell my old house. I am living now on the Wangs' estate, at the south end of the street."
"Stand up," Ximen said, "I have something to say to you." The old woman got up, and Ximen sent the boys out. Ping'an and Huatong went to the corner door, but Daian hid himself behind a curtain to listen.
"You frequently call to see ladies of quality," Ximen said. "Tell me, who are they?"
"The Princely family in the High Street, Major Zhou's, Master Qiao's, Master Chang's and Magistrate Xia's. I see them constantly."
"Do you happen to know the lady at General Wang's place?"
"She is one of my most regular patrons. The lady herself and her daughter-in-law are always buying flowers from me."
"If you know them well, I should like you to do something for me," Ximen said. He took up a piece of silver weighing five taels and gave it to her. "If you devise a scheme for getting the lady to your place, so that I can meet her only once, there will be more for you."
Old woman Wen laughed. "Who told you about her?" she said. "How did you come to hear of them?"
"There is a common saying," Ximen answered, "that as trees have their shadows, so people have their names. Why shouldn't I know of them?"
"The Lady is thirty-five years old," old woman Wen said, "and she is all you could desire. She is charming and intelligent, and she looks not a day over thirty. If she does carry on like this occasionally, she does so only in the strictest secrecy. Generally, when she goes out, she is accompanied by a train of servants. She goes wherever she has to go and comes straight back. Her son is now grown up, so, of course, she does not wish people to talk about her. Probably the stories you have heard are untrue. She has, indeed, a great big house and, when her son is not at home, it is possible a gentleman may sometimes come to visit her, but nobody ever hears about it. It would be quite impossible for her to come to my place. There are no conveniences there. Even if you offered me more money, I dare not take it. I would rather go and tell her what you have said to me."
"If you will not take my money, it means you will do nothing for me, and I shall be very much offended. Take it, and if this little business comes off, you shall have some silken clothes. "
"You are so wealthy that that side of the affair does not trouble me," the old woman said. "I shall consider myself lucky if you so much as look my way." She knelt down and took the money. "I will go and speak to the lady. When I come back, I will tell you what she says."
"You must take every pains," Ximen said. "I shall expect you here. I won't send a boy for you."
"Very well," the old woman said. "Tomorrow perhaps, or maybe the day after. As soon as I am in a position to say anything, I will come and see you."
She went out. Daian came up and spoke to her. "Sister Wen," he said, "one tael is all I ask from you. It was I who told you to come, and you mustn't keep everything for yourself."
"You little monkey," old woman Wen said. "When we hear someone sifting grain on the other side of a wall, we have no means of telling whether the results are good or bad. It is just the same with this business." She went out, mounted the donkey, and her son led it away.
Ximen Qing and Scholar Wen chatted together for a while, then Magistrate Xia came. Ximen put on his hat and robes and went with Xia to see the Sub-Prefect Luo, whose name was Luo Wanxiang. It was late when he returned.
Old woman Wen was very pleased with the five taels she had received from Ximen Qing. In the afternoon when the tea party at her house was over, she went to call upon Lady Lin. She made a reverence to the lady, who asked why it was so long since she had called. Old woman Wen said she had been having a tea party and that she had been busy making preparations to go on a pilgrimage in the twelfth month.
"Why not send your son instead?" Lady Lin said.
"If I find I can't go, I shall have to send Wen Tang," the old woman said.
"When the time comes, I will give you some money for him."
The old woman thanked her. Lady Lin invited her to sit near the fire. The maid brought tea.
"Is the young master in?" old woman Wen asked, while she was drinking her tea.
"No," Lady Lin said, "he has not been home for two nights. He is always going with some villain or other to spend his nights in the haunts of vice. He seems to care nothing for his wife, who is an exquisite creature, and I don't know what can be done about it."
"Where is the young mistress?" the old woman said.
"She is in her room," Lady Lin said.
When the old woman was sure they were alone, she said: "I don't think you need worry any longer, Lady. I think I know a way to dispose of these bad companions, and get the young master back to his home, so that he never sets foot in a brothel again. But I dare not suggest it to you without your leave."
"I always listen to any suggestions you make," Lady Lin said. "If you have anything to say, speak out."
"His Lordship Ximen, who lives near the Town Hall," the old woman began, "is now an assistant magistrate and a military officer. He lends money to all the officials, and has four or five shops where he sells silks and medicines, cloth and thread. He has boats upon the river going up and down for his purchases. He buys salt from Yangzhou and incense and candles from Dongpingfu. Dozens of clerks are employed in his service. He is a ward of the Imperial Tutor Cai in the Eastern Capital, and a subordinate of Grand Marshal Zhu. He and Zhai, the Comptroller of the Imperial Tutor's household, are upon a footing of kinship. He is on friendly terms with the highest officers of the Province, not to mention their underlings. He has acre upon acre of property and so much rice that it rots in his barns. His wife, by his second marriage, is a daughter of Captain Wu. He has five or six ladies and scores of singing boys and dancing girls. There is continual feasting in his house. He is about thirty-one or thirty-two, in the very prime of life. He is tall and handsome, and he takes medicine to strengthen his weapon. In matters of love, none is more skilled than he. He plays backgammon and chess, and is an expert ballplayer. He is well up in the philosophers and every kind of amusement. He profits by everything he sees. Indeed, so clever a man can only be compared to a fine piece of jade or a lump of pure gold.
"Now, Lady, he has heard that your family has held high rank for generations, and he knows that the young master has been in the military academy. He would very much like to make your acquaintance. Of course, he cannot do that without a preliminary meeting. The other day he was given to understand that your birthday is not far distant. He would like to be allowed to come in a friendly way to celebrate the occasion. He spoke to me about the matter. I said to him: 'I can quite see that you don't feel you can call without an introduction of some sort. Let me go and speak to the lady and ask her leave.' Lady, I don't regard this simply as a question of becoming friendly with him. You will be able to ask him to help you to get rid of the young master's bad companions. I do not think a man of his sort will be in any way damaging to the good fame of your house."
Lady Lin was already persuaded, but she said to the old woman: "We have never met. How can we suddenly pick up an acquaintance?"
"That need not trouble you," the old woman said. "I will go to him and say that you would be glad of his help about an accusation you propose to send to the courts against these rascals, and that you would be very much obliged if he would come and talk the matter over with you."
Lady Lin was satisfied, and it was arranged that she should expect him two days later, in the evening.
At dinnertime next day, the old woman came to see Ximen Qing. He was in his study when Daian came to tell him that she had come. He went to the inner room and pulled down the lattice. The old woman came and kowtowed to him. Daian, who knew well enough what was afoot, went out. Old woman Wen told Ximen she had succeeded in persuading Lady Lin. She had spoken highly of him, she said, explained his position, praised his generosity and amiability, spoken of his happy and lively nature. "She believed what I told her," the old woman said, "and she is willing to meet you tomorrow night. Her son will not be at home. She will offer you a meal and make a show of discussing legal matters with you."
Ximen Qing was delighted. He told Daian to get two rolls of fine silk for the old woman.
"When you go tomorrow," the old woman said, "don't be too early. Go at night, when it is quiet in the streets, and enter the house by the back door. Close to the back door is a house belonging to a woman called Duan. I shall be waiting there for you. Knock at the door, and I will come out and take you to Lady Lin's house. We shall have to be careful that none of the neighbors see us."
"I understand," Ximen Qing said. "Go to Madam Duan's and wait there for me. Don't go away. I shall certainly not be late."
Old woman Wen went back to tell Lady Lin the result of her conversation with Ximen.
That night, Ximen Qing went to Li Jiao'er's room. He was impatient for the next day and was sparing in his attentions. When the day came, he put on a white hat and went with Ying Bojue to Xie Xida's place to celebrate his birthday. Two singing girls were there. He drank only a few cups of wine and, as soon as it was dark, escaped from the party and mounted his horse. Daian and Qintong followed him. It was the nineteenth day of the month, and the moon was full. He set eyeshades on his eyes and turned into the road that led from the main street to Lady Lin's backdoor. It was late, and the street was quiet. Before he came to the door, he pulled up his horse and bade Daian knock at Madam Duan's door. This house belonged to Lady Lin. Old woman Wen had introduced Madam Duan to Lady Lin as a kind of guard for the back door and, whenever any business of this sort was to be done, the back door was always the place chosen as the rendezvous.
Old woman Wen heard the knocking and came to the door at once. She waited until Ximen Qing had dismounted and taken off his eyeshades. She told Qintong to wait with the horse beneath the eaves of a house close by. Daian went to wait in Madam Duan's house. Then the old woman took Ximen through the back door and fastened it securely behind them. They went through a passage that led to a courtyard. On one side were the five rooms that formed Lady Lin's apartments. The small door that led to them was closed. Old women Wen knocked softly. The sound was delightful to Ximen's ears. A maid came and opened the door. The old woman took Ximen Qing to the hall. When the screen was pulled aside, he saw that the place was brightly lit up by lamps and candles. In the place of honor was a portrait of Wang Jingchong, Commander-in-Chief of Taiyuan, and Duke of Fenyang. He wore a red dragon embroidered gown, with a jade girdle, and sat upon a great chair covered with a tiger skin, reading a book upon the art of war. Had his beard been longer, he would have looked like the God of War himself. Above the portrait was an inscription: "The Hall of Virtue and Righteousness." There were two scrolls written in the Li style, of which one read: "The Tradition of Integrity in this House stands ever firm as the pine tree and the bamboo." The other bore the legend: "His services to his country were many as the stars and glorious as the mountains."
Ximen Qing was looking at them when he heard a tinkling of the bells upon the door. Old woman Wen brought him a cup of tea. "Please ask the lady to come and see me," he said.

"Pray, Sir," the old woman said, "drink your tea. I have told her lady-ship that you are here."
Lady Lin had hidden herself behind the door and was secretly taking stock of him. She found him tall and good-looking. He was wearing a white silk hat with sable ear covers, a purple woolen gown, and a pair of black shoes with white soles. She liked the looks of him. She quietly summoned old woman Wen and asked for whom he was wearing the white hat.
"His Sixth Lady died in the ninth month," the old woman said, "but though she is no more, he has still as many ladies as there are fingers on his hand. He is like a quail just let out from his cage, smart at the attack."
Lady Lin was more pleased than ever. Old woman Wen urged her to come and see Ximen, but she said it would embarrass her and she would rather he came to her room. The old woman went back to Ximen Qing and said: "The Lady would like you to go to her." She pulled aside the screen and he went in.
There were red hangings about Lady Lin's room and the floor was covered with carpets and rugs. There was a delightful odor of orchids and perfume, and the atmosphere was as balmy as that of Spring. The bed had embroidered curtains. The screens shone like the moon. Lady Lin wore a headdress of gold thread and jade, a full gown of white silk, and a coat of figured satin, with a gold design upon an incense-colored background. Her skirt was of the scarlet satin worn by ladies of the court, and her white silk shoes were high heeled. She was, indeed, an exquisite woman of the embroidered chamber, a goddess who, as it were, made sacrifice of her body for the love of men.
Ximen Qing bowed. "Lady," he said, "will you not sit in the place that is your due, that I may make reverence to you?"
"My lord," she said, "I pray you, do not."
Ximen Qing kowtowed to her twice, and she returned his greeting. Then he sat down on a chair and she sat on the edge of a small couch shaped like a comb. She was on the other side from him, but not immediately facing him.
Old woman Wen saw that the door to the courtyard was safely fastened. The servants withdrew. The door that led to young master Wang's apartments was secured. A maid brought tea.
"The lady," old woman Wen said, "has heard of your name and your position as an officer of the law. She would be very glad to know if you are disposed to help her."
"Pray tell me what I can do," Ximen said.
Lady Lin spoke for herself. "In truth," she said, "though we have inherited a title, I have not been well off since my husband's death. My son was brought up without the discipline that would have been good for him, and even now he has not passed his examination. He has studied at the military academy, but I fear his education has been neglected. Then, too, he has fallen into the clutches of some very objectionable fellows. They have carried him off to places of ill-fame, and, over and over again, he has brought my family to the verge of ruin. There are times when I think of going to the courts to make accusation against him, but I feel I cannot bring shame upon my dead husband. I have asked you to come, and, since I am telling you the truth, it is the same as though I actually went to the court. I shall esteem it a great favor if you will rid my son of these evil companions and so enable him to make a fresh start. If he will only change his present mood and attend to his studies, he will become a worthy successor to a worthy family. If you can bring this about, I shall be eternally grateful and try to make you a suitable return."
"Most estimable lady," Ximen Qing said, "please do not speak of reward. For generations your family has been one of exalted rank. Your son is at the military academy now, and, of course, he ought to think of his future and the title that will come down to him. Unfortunately, he has got mixed up with a pack of rascals and is giving himself up to wine and undesirable young women. It is only because he is young. Now that you have issued your commands, I will go to the office and have the rascals punished. You shall have no further trouble."
Lady Lin stood up and made a reverence. "I hope to be allowed to make you a present," she said.
"Please don't mention it," Ximen said. "We are such good friends."
As they talked, they exchanged glances that were more than affectionate. Old woman Wen set the table and put wine upon it. Ximen Qing made a show of reluctance to accept such an honor. "This is my first visit," he said. "I have come empty-handed. How can I accept such kindness at your hands?"
"Indeed," Lady Lin said, "it is I who should apologize for being taken unawares and having nothing more than this poor wine to offer you. I can only hope that it will serve to keep out the cold."
The maid poured out the wine. Lady Lin rose to offer him a cup. He stood up too and said: "I should be the first to offer wine."
"Today, perhaps," old woman Wen said, "you may be dispensed from offering wine to her Ladyship. The fifteenth day of the eleventh month is her birthday and, I suppose, you will come to congratulate her."
"Why didn't you tell me so before?" Ximen said. "Why, this is the ninth. There are only six days left. Of course I shall come to pay my respects."
Lady Lin smiled. "You are too kind," she said.
Sixteen bowls of delightful food were brought. Candles in silver candlesticks burned brightly on the table; a golden brazier on the floor gave forth splendid heat. They offered wine to one another, played games, and guessed fingers. Their smiles and merriment were an omen of clouds and rain, and, as we know, wine never fails to arouse the passions. The water clock dripped and dripped; the moon cast its beams upon the window. Their minds were obsessed by the same idea. Old woman Wen had withdrawn, and, though they called her several times, she made no answer. Seeing that they were alone, Ximen Qing gradually moved his chair nearer and nearer to her; his words became more and more affectionate. He pressed her hands, touched her arm, drew closer. Then he put his arms about her neck. She smiled but did not repulse him. She opened her red lips and he slipped his tongue into her mouth. They kissed, and smiled still more lovingly.
Lady Lin got up and fastened the door. She took off her long gown and some of her ornaments. Gently, she pulled aside the bed curtains and spread the embroidered coverlets. The pillows were set at one end of the bed. There was a delightful odor of perfume. Their perfect bodies met in an embrace; he felt the sweetness of her breasts.
Ximen Qing had been warned of the woman's skill in matters of love, and had brought his instruments with him. With the secret drug to encourage him, his passion blazed like fire. Their outstretched limbs quivered with a madness like that of butterflies and bees.
Ximen spent himself to the utmost to satisfy the woman, and they went on till it was very late. Lady Lin's hair was disordered; her pins had fallen out of place. She seemed like a weary flower, a tired willow. They lay down quietly together.
When they were up again and had put on their clothes, Lady Lin snuffed the candles and unlocked the door. She dressed herself before a mirror and told a maid to bring water for them to wash their hands. Again they pressed each other to drink. Ximen Qing drank three cups and got up to leave. Lady Lin could not persuade him to stay. She asked him to visit her again. Ximen Qing bowed and promised to come. She went with him as far as the door into the courtyard. Old woman Wen opened the back door and told Daian and Qintong to bring their master's horse.
The watchman was already beating his rounds from street to street. It was very still and the sky was white with frost. Ximen Qing went home.
The next day, when he had gone through his ordinary business at the office, he summoned two police runners and ordered them to find out who had been going about with Wang the Third, and the places to which they resorted. "Report to me," he said, "when you have made inquiries." He explained this to his colleague Xia by saying that "Young Wang the Third appears to be neglecting his studies. Yesterday his mother sent a man to me to say that it is not really his fault, but that he has got into the clutches of a pack of rascals. Unless we make an example of them, I'm afraid they will be the ruin of this scion of a famous house."
"You are right. We will deal with them as they deserve," said Xia.
The runners, armed with Ximen Qing's order, went around to find out the names and, in the afternoon, they came to his house and made their report. Ximen Qing examined their list. Upon it were the names of Sun Guazui, Zhu Shinian, Little Zhang, Nie Yue, Xiang the Third, Yu Kuan and Mohammedan Bai. The girls were Li Guijie and Qin Yuzhi.
Ximen Qing took up a brush and crossed out the names of the two girls and of Sun Guazui and Zhu Shinian. Then he gave orders that all the others should be arrested and brought before him the following day.
In the evening, the runners discovered Wang the Third and the others drinking and playing ball at Li Guijie's house. They surrounded the house, and, in the middle of the night, raided it. They arrested Little Zhang, Nie Yue, Yu Kuan, Mohammedan Bai and Xiang the Third. Sun Guazui and Zhu Shinian crawled away to the back of the house, and Wang the Third crept beneath Guijie's bed. Guijie and the others were terrified and did not know what to do. They came out to ask what the raid meant, but Wang the Third, in his hiding place, dared not move an inch. The old procuress imagined that the runners must have come again at the orders of some authority in the Capital. Before dawn, she made Li Ming dress and take Wang the Third home.
The police took Little Zhang and the others and threw them into jail for the night. The next day, when Ximen Qing arrived at the office, he went with Magistrate Xia to the hall of audience. The underlings were all in attendance. The prisoners were dragged forward. Each of them was placed in the screws and then beaten twenty times. Their skin was torn, their flesh bruised, and blood streamed from them. There was such a sound of beating that it reached the skies, and the noise of their groanings shook the earth.
"You outrageous scoundrels!" Ximen Qing cried. "You are always leading astray young men of good family and taking them to the bawdy house. I ought to give you most severe punishment, but, for this once, I am being kind to you and letting you off with a few stripes. If ever you come into my hands again, I will have you put in the cangue and make a show of you outside the Town Hall." He bade the officials kick them out, and they ran for their lives.
Having settled this matter, Ximen Qing and Xia retired to a room to drink tea.
"Yesterday," Xia said, "I had a letter from my kinsman, Grand Secretary Cui, in which he says that a report upon our work has reached the capital, but, as yet, its consequences are unknown. I think we might send a man to Huaiqingfu to see whether any news is to be had from Lin Cangfeng, our colleague there."
Ximen Qing agreed. They summoned a man and said to him: "Here are five *qian* of silver. Take them and go to Huaiqingfu and call upon Captain Lin. Take our cards and find out what you can about the report and when we are going to know what has happened in regard to it." The man took the silver and the cards, went to his room to get his things ready, called for a horse, and started on his journey. Ximen Qing and Magistrate Xia went home.
When Little Zhang and his friends escaped from the court, they could not imagine why they had, so unexpectedly, got into trouble. One blamed another, but they found it impossible to decide who had given them away.
"I think somebody in the Eastern Capital is responsible," Little Zhang said.
"No," said Mohammedan Bai, "if it had been that, we should not have got off so easily."
There is an old saying: Goldsmiths are the greatest thieves, and singing girls can never be outdone in cunning. So it was with these rascals. They were as artful as could be. Nie Yue hit upon the solution.
"I know what it is," he said. "Ximen Qing is anxious to put young Master Wang in his place. You see, he was playing with Ximen's own girl. When there is a fight between a dragon and a tiger, the little wolves come off badly."
"It sounds likely," Little Zhang said, "and we come off the worst. Sun Guazui and Zhu Shinian were there with us, but we were the only ones who got into trouble."
"Don't be silly!" Yu Kuan said, "you know they are friends of Ximen. If he had arrested them, they would have been on their knees and he would have been sitting there, and it would not have been very pleasant for him."
"Why weren't the girls taken?" Little Zhang said.
"He is very fond of both of them," Nie Yue said. "Guijie is his own girl, and he would never think of arresting her. It's no use complaining. Put the blame on our bad luck. It's that which has brought us to this pass. By the way, I noticed that Magistrate Xia never spoke a word. That is how I know this is one of Ximen's tricks, and his alone. Let us go to Guijie's house and see what Wang the Third has to say. We can't have our backs broken for nothing. If we don't get some money out of him, the girls will think we're fools."
They went to Guijie's house. The door was closed as though it were of iron. They knocked for a long time, and, at last, a maid came and asked who was there. She did not open the door.
"We have come to see Master Wang," Little Zhang said.
"He is not here," the maid said. "He went home last night. There is nobody here. I can't let you in."
They went to Wang's house and marched into the parlor. Wang the Third heard that they had come and hid himself in his own room, terrified. After a long delay, he sent a boy to say he was not at home.
"Ah," they cried in chorus, "if he is not at home, where is he? Send for him."
Yu Kuan said: "Look here! It's no use his pretending to be half asleep. We have been hauled before the courts, beaten and kicked. Now they want him there." He pulled up his gown and showed the boy his legs. "Go and tell your master that we have been beaten on his account," he roared.
One after the other, they lay down on the benches and groaned and yelled. Wang the Third was less inclined than ever to come out. He said to his mother: "Mother, you must save me."
"What can I do?" his mother said, "I am only a woman."
The men began to lose patience and demanded that Lady Lin should speak to them. She did not go to them, but spoke from behind a screen.
"Wait a while," she said. "Really, he is not at home. I know, for a fact, that he is at my estate outside the city. I will send for him."
"Do, Lady," Little Zhang said, "and please be quick about it. This business must be settled, and the only thing to do with a wart is to cut it. Your son is the cause of this trouble, and we have had to bear the brunt of it. We have been dismissed now, but the court has still to deal with him. Until he comes, there will be no end to the trouble."
Lady Lin bade her servants take them some tea. Wang the Third was as frightened as a ghost. He implored his mother to find someone to get him out of the difficulty. At last, Lady Lin said: "I believe old woman Wen knows his Lordship Ximen. Some years ago, she acted as intermediary in his daughter's marriage. She must know him well."
"If she does, send for her," Wang the Third said.
"But a few days ago," his mother said, "you insulted her and she has not been here since. You offended her. I don't see how I can ask her now, and I don't suppose she would come if I did."
"Good Mother," Wang the Third said, "this matter is extremely serious. Send for her, and I will beg her pardon."
Lady Lin sent Yong Ding, the boy, to fetch the old woman. Yong Ding went quietly out by the back gate and brought her.
"Old mother Wen," Wang the Third said, "you know his Lordship Ximen and you must save my life."
The old woman pretended she could do nothing. "I arranged his daughter's wedding some years ago, but I have hardly been to his house since. It is a very big establishment. I can hardly expect to go there very often."
Wang the Third knelt down. "Old mother Wen," he said, "if you will only help me, I will see you do not lose by it. I will remember your kindness as long as I live. These fellows are trying to get me to go to the court, and I don't want to go."
Old woman Wen looked at Lady Lin. "Yes," the young man's mother said, "help him if you can."
"I am not going alone," the old woman said. "Put on your hat and clothes, Sir. I will take you to see his Lordship, and you can settle the business for yourself. I will say what I can on your behalf and, doubtless, everything will soon be all right."
"These fellows are very anxious to find me," Wang the Third said. "I am afraid they will see us as we go out."
"Don't worry about that," old woman Wen said. "I will go and pacify them. I'll arrange for them to have something to eat and drink and, while they are eating, I'll get you out by the back door. They won't see us."
She went to the outer hall and made a reverence to Little Zhang and the others. "I have come on behalf of her Ladyship," she said to them, "to assure you that the young gentleman is not at home. She has sent for him, and he will be here shortly. Sit down a while. We know you have suffered, but, when the young master comes back, he will certainly make it up to you. We don't blame you for coming since you have been mixed up in this affair. Besides, you came by order of the court and not of your own accord. I'm sure that, when the young master comes back, it will all end happily."
When they heard this, they cried, with one accord: "Old woman, you are talking sense. If you had come before and spoken to us in this strain, we should not have been so impatient and ill-mannered. But, you see, we could get nothing out of them but: 'He is not at home.' Nothing else. And it looked as if we were held responsible for all the trouble. He was the cause of our being beaten, and now the police are after him. What's the use his trying to get out of it with a 'not at home'? Does he get someone else to take his place when he is eating meat or drinking wine? Old woman, you seem to see things in the proper light. Here is a hint for you. If he likes to spend a little money and get the matter settled, well and good. It might even be managed without his seeing us, if he doesn't wish to do so. This is a military court, and things are more easily settled in it."
"Brothers," the old woman said, "there is much wisdom in what you say. I will ask the lady to have food and wine served for your entertainment. You must be hungry."
"Old mother," they said, "you seem to be sympathetic. To tell the truth, not a drop of water has passed our lips since we left the court."
Old woman Wen went back to the inner court, and foraged about till she got two *qian* worth of wine, one *qian* worth of cakes, and several large plates of pork, mutton, and beef. These were taken to the men, and she encouraged them to set to. Meanwhile, Wang the Third dressed himself in academic robes and wrote a petition. Old woman Wen smuggled him through the inner court. He put on a pair of eyeshades and they walked to Ximen's house.
When they reached the gateway, Ping'an, who knew old woman Wen, said: "My master is in the great hall. What do you want with him?"
The old woman handed him a visiting card and said: "Brother, kindly take this to your master." She asked Wang the Third to give two *qian* of silver to the boy. Ping'an took the card to Ximen Qing. Ximen looked at it. It bore the inscription: 'The young student, Wang Cai.'
He sent for old woman Wen, and she told him what had happened. He went into the hall and sent the boy to ask Wang the Third to go in. He did not change his clothes before going to receive the visitor. When he saw Wang the Third dressed in full ceremonial attire, he said to the old woman: "Sister Wen, why didn't you tell me? I am not suitably dressed." He said to the servants: "Bring my clothes at once." Wang the Third hastily stopped them.
"Uncle," he said, "pray don't trouble. I have come to see you, but I beg you not to put yourself to any inconvenience."
When they were in the great hall, Wang the Third insisted upon making a most profound reverence to Ximen Qing. Ximen smiled. "This is my house," he said, "I can't possibly allow it." He made the first reverence himself.
"How sorry I am that I have never called on you before," Wang the Third began.
"I hardly feel that we are strangers," Ximen said.
Again, Wang the Third pressed Ximen Qing to accept the honor. "I am your nephew," he said, "and you must accept it. It will show that you forgive me for having troubled you."
They compromised. Ximen Qing asked the young man to sit down. Wang the Third sat politely upon the edge of his chair. Tea was brought.
"I am very anxious for your assistance," Wang the Third said, taking a paper from his sleeve. He handed it to Ximen Qing and knelt down.
Ximen pulled him up again. "Tell me what I can do for you," he said.
"I am utterly ashamed of myself," Wang the Third said. "Only for the sake of my ancestors and their good fame do I venture to ask your forgiveness. Save me from the courts, and I will remember your kindness forever. I am afraid, afraid."
Ximen Qing unrolled the paper and looked at it. The five names were written on it.
"What?" he said. "These rogues again? I have given them one beating today. Why have they come to you?"
"They said that, when you had done with them, you ordered them to come for me. They are at my house now, roaring and shrieking insults. They demand money. There was nothing I could do but come and implore your help." He brought out a list of presents and gave it to Ximen Qing.
"Why do you offer me this?" Ximen said. "When I threw out those rogues, I had no idea they would come and make trouble with you." He returned the list of presents to the young man. "Go home," he said, "I will send and have the scoundrels arrested at once. I hope I may see you again soon."
"Since you have been so kind," the young man said, "I will certainly come to offer my thanks." He went out uttering innumerable protestations of gratitude.
Ximen Qing went with him as far as the second door. "I will not go farther with you," he said, "since I am not wearing my ceremonial dress." Wang the Third put on his eyeshades and went away with a boy. Old woman Wen waited to see Ximen Qing. "Not a word to those fellows," he said to her, "I am sending men to arrest them at once." Old woman Wen rejoined Wang the Third.
Ximen Qing sent four soldiers and a sergeant to the young man's house. The rascals were drinking and making a terrible din. The soldiers went in and arrested them. So frightened were they when the chains were put on them that they became as pale as death.

"Wang the Third has deceived us finely," they said. "He got us to stay here and then played this trick upon us."
"No nonsense now!" said the soldiers, "you had better beg for mercy from his Lordship Ximen."
"You are right," Little Zhang said.
They came to Ximen's house. The soldiers and Ping'an held out their hands for money, saying if they did not get it, they would not take them in. The men could not help themselves. Some took off their cloaks, others gave their pins, and, at last, word was taken to Ximen Qing. There was a long delay, then Ximen Qing came to the hall and they were taken in. They fell upon their knees.
"Now, you rogues," Ximen said, "I sent you about your business, and you went and pretended you had come from me, in an attempt to get money from these people. How much did you get? If you don't tell me, it will mean the screws again."
At this, the soldiers got busy with the thumbscrews, new and strong ones. Little Zhang and his companions kowtowed and begged for mercy. "We didn't get a penny," they said. "It is true we told them the court had ordered us to go there, but they only gave us something to eat. We never asked for anything else."
"You had no business there at all," Ximen Qing said. "You scoundrelly fellows are always leading honest young men astray. I loathe the very sight of you. If you do not confess, you shall be thrown into jail and, tomorrow, I will try you and have cangues put about your necks."
They all cried: "Heaven have mercy on us! Be merciful, and we will never go and cause them trouble again. Even if we don't get the cangue, to have to go to jail at a cold season like this will certainly be the death of us."
"Once again I forgive you," Ximen Qing said, "but you must repent and give up your evil ways. Henceforth, devote yourselves to steady honest work and don't go leading young men into evil courses. If you come before me again, I will have you beaten to death." He told the soldiers to kick them out. They ran for their lives.
Ximen Qing went to the inner court.
"Who was your young visitor?" Wu Yueniang asked him.
"It was Wang the Third, the heir to General Wang. You remember the trouble there was sometime ago at Li Guijie's house? It was the same young man. He has been keeping that little strumpet and giving her thirty taels a month. No wonder she has been behaving so strangely. She had this young fellow completely at her feet. I found out about it and sent to arrest the rogues and have them brought before me. I had them beaten. Then they went to the Wangs' place and created a disturbance in the hope of getting money out of the young man. They told him I wanted him. He has never been before the court, and he was frightened and came with old woman Wen to ask me to help him. He brought fifty taels. I had the fellows re-arrested and put a stop to their games. They will make no more trouble. But what an unfortunate thing for that family to have such a bad young man. His grandfather was a man of great eminence, a general, in fact. This young man is at the military academy, but he never gives a thought to his career, neglects his flower-like young wife, and goes with these rascals to the bawdy house every night. All these bad habits before he is twenty."
"You seem to me like a young blackbird making disparaging remarks about a black pig," Yueniang said. "You only see things from your own point of view. You fancy yourself an angel, but, to me, you and he appear to have drunk from the same well. Are you a better man than he is that you should find fault with his goings on?"
Ximen Qing made no reply to this. Food was brought. Then Laian came and said Ying Bojue had come. "Take him to the study. I will be there in a few minutes," Ximen said to the boy. Wang Jing opened the study and showed in Bojue. Sometime later, Ximen Qing joined him. The two men sat down to talk.
"Why did you leave Brother Xie's place so early the other day?" Bojue asked.
"I have been very busy, and it is almost time for the inspection. I have sent people to the Capital to see what they can find out. You mustn't compare me with yourself, you, who never have anything to do."
"Has there been anything of interest at the office lately?" Ying Bojue said.
"There is always something." Ximen Qing said.
"I hear you had Little Zhang and some others arrested at Guijie's place the other evening. Old Sun and Zhu escaped, but the others got a beating at the office. When they had left there, they went and made trouble at Wang's place. Why wouldn't you tell me?"
"You dog!" Ximen said, "where did you hear all this? You have got hold of the wrong story, It was not my court, but Major Zhou's."
"Nothing of the sort," Bojue said, "Major Zhou had nothing to do with it."
"Perhaps somebody came from the Eastern Capital."
"Li Ming told me all about it this morning," Bojue said. "He said his people were in a terrible state, and Guijie, who was almost frightened to death, is still in bed. They thought the runners had come from the Eastern Capital but, this morning, they found it was your office."
"I haven't been to the office for several days." Ximen Qing said. "I know nothing about it. As for Guijie, she swore an oath that she would never have anything more to do with Wang the Third. I don't believe she is so frightened that she is still in bed."
Ying Bojue caught the flicker of a smile about Ximen's lips. "Brother," he said, "you almost took me in. Do tell me. How did old Sun and Zhu manage to escape? I can't believe the runners are so careless when they arrest people. You had a finger in the pie somewhere. You evidently determined to punish the sheep so as to teach the young horses a lesson. I suppose you meant to frighten Guijie, and let her realize what a powerful man you are. You wouldn't go so far as to arrest her—that would have been too hard, so you treat one set of people in one way and another set in another way. If old Sun and Zhu meet you, they wont know what to say for themselves. It was a very clever move on your part, making a show of repairing the bridge in one place and secretly posting your soldiers in another. Without flattering you, Brother, I must say it was a very clever scheme. A brilliant man never gives himself away. If you had done this openly, there would be nothing very remarkable about it. How deep you are, and how you understand human nature!"
Ximen Qing laughed softly. "There is nothing in that," he said.
"Surely someone gave you a hint?" Bojue said. "You would never have known so much about it otherwise. Why, neither ghosts nor gods could ever have found it out."
"You dog," Ximen said, "if people don't wish things of this sort to come out, they had better refrain from doing them."
"Aren't you going to have Wang the Third before the court?"
"Why should I?" Ximen said. "When the case was first brought to my notice, I crossed out the names of Wang the Third, Zhu, old Sun, Li Guijie and Qin Yuzhi. I only had those few scamps arrested."
"Why did they make trouble with Wang the Third?"
"They hoped to get money out of him. But Wang the Third came to see me. He kowtowed and begged my pardon, so I had the rogues arrested once more and told them I would have cangues put about their necks. They begged for mercy and swore they would never go near him again. As for Wang the Third, he addressed me as 'Uncle' before he said a word. He brought me a present list representing about fifty taels, but I told him to take it away. He has promised to ask me to go to his place so that he may thank me."
Bojue was surprised. "Did he really and truly apologize to you?" he said.
"Do you think I'm lying to you?" Ximen Qing said. He told Wang Jing to go and get Wang the Third's card. Wang Jing came back with the card. Bojue examined it. "The young student, Wang Cai," it said.
"Really, it was a brilliant scheme," he said.
"If you see any of them," Ximen Qing said, "don't tell them I know all that is to be known."
"I understand," Bojue said. "You don't wish them to realise it was all your idea. Of course, I won't say a word."
They had tea. Then Bojue said, "I must go. Old Sun and Zhu might come to see you. If they do, don't tell them I have been here."
"I'll not see them, if they do come," Ximen said. He sent a boy to tell the doorkeeper that if the 2 men came, they were to be told he was not at home. After this, Ximen Qing did not go near Li Guijie. When he had a party at his house, he did not engage Li Ming. Relations between them were completely broken off.

## 093
## Hsi-men Ch'ing's Successful Efforts Procure Him a Promotion in the Capital; Assembled Officials Report before Defender-in-chief Chu Mien

Last night, carried by the west wind,
drums and bugles resounded;
At daybreak, in the bitter chill, one
shivers under the cold felt.
Wrapped in impenetrable mist, the ground
appears entirely invisible;
Spreading vastly in all four directions,
all one can see is the sky.
Fancy accommodations, under such desolate
conditions, are not available;
Even the hero Li Kuang was forced to tarry
at the Pa-ling relay station.[1]
My patron, a virtual embodiment of Spring,[2]
dispenses oceanlike favors;
May he set aside some of his residual warmth
to bestow upon this sojourner.

From this time on, Hsi-men Ch'ing broke off relations with Li Kuei-chieh. But no more of this. To resume our story, when the courier arrived at Judicial Commissioner Lin Ch'eng-hsün's place in Huai-ch'ing prefecture to inquire about the news, the commissioner gave him a sealed copy of the announcement of official promotions in the government gazette and rewarded him with five taels of silver. The courier set out on his return journey that very night and, upon arriving home, turned over the sealed material to the two judicial commissioners.
In the reception hall of the yamen, Hsia Yen-ling opened the envelope and, together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, perused the formal notification of the results of the merit evaluation for the members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the relevant parts of which read as follows:
Memorial from the Ministry of War
In re: The Strict Merit Evaluation of the Members of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, as Ordained by Explicit Imperial Command, in Order to Clarify the Grounds of Motivation and Discipline, and Glorify Your Majesty's Sage Administration
Submitted by Chu Mien, Defender-in-Chief in Charge of all the Officers and Staff of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, and Concurrently Grand Guardian, and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent
With regard to the above-mentioned evaluation of the officers of the Imperial Guard, this senior official will submit a report on his own conduct. As for the remainder, including the two divisions of detectives attached to the Imperial Prison under the jurisdiction of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and the investigators, inspectors, and surveillance commissioners attached thereto, the director of the horse pasturages of the imperial domain and the inner and outer Capital Surveillance Commissions, as well as the battalion and company commanders serving under them, and the judges of the military guards, etc., they have all been classified on the basis of the dossiers that indicate whether their posts are hereditary, due to routine promotion, promotion for merit, privilege, or purchase. On the basis of their seniority and qualifications, they have all been fairly evaluated as to their worthiness, or lack thereof, and the results are hereby reported to Your Majesty with the request that they be sent to the appropriate board for further discussion as to the appropriate promotions, demotions, transfers, or dismissals.
This memorial elicited an imperial rescript that read as follows:
Upon being returned to the Ministry of War, let this memorial be:
Respectfully received and respectfully acted upon.
A copy of this edict was duly received by the Office of Scrutiny, and transmitted to the above ministry. Upon its perusal by the Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, in accordance with established precedent, the said official proceeded to do everything in his power to demonstrate his loyalty by conducting an impartial evaluation. It is his responsibility to determine the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the military officials subordinate to him, whether serving in or outside the capital, on the basis of their dossiers and public opinion, while ensuring that the reports he has received on them are both honest and without prejudice. By so doing, the said official exhibits his awareness of his proximity to the imperial presence, on the one hand, and his loyal concern for the welfare of the state, on the other. It goes without saying that differentiating into categories those who deserve encouragement, while distinguishing between the worthy and the unworthy in an orderly manner,[3] provides motivation for human ambition and accords with the public's sense of justice. But magnanimity and severity, rewards and punishments, are the prerogative of Your Majesty and, upon receipt of Your mandate, will be meted out in accordance with precedent. It is to be hoped that, if the evaluations are cogent, they will command general assent, and if redundant posts are eliminated, bureaucratic discipline will be enhanced.
The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read:
Let this memorial be respectfully received and the recommendations therein be enacted as proposed.
The relevant parts of the evaluation read as follows:
As for the judicial commissioner of the Shantung Provincial Surveillance Commission, and concurrently battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Hsia Yen-ling, his qualifications and reputation are long-standing, and his talent and experience are well established. In the past, when in charge of herds in the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, the area of his jurisdiction was tranquil; and now that he presides over judicial matters in Shantung, his reputation for effective government is outstanding. It is appropriate that his ambitions should be encouraged by promotion to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions.
As for the assistant judicial commissioner, and concurrently battalion vice-commander, Hsi-men Ch'ing, his abilities and initiative have long been acknowledged to be exceptional. Since his family is affluent, he has not been acquisitive in office. He is diligent and industrious in his support of the national interest, and his censorial work has been meritorious. In facilitating the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys he has scrupulously avoided any peculation. For his administration of the laws he is universally admired by the people of Shantung. It is appropriate that he be promoted to the post of full commissioner in order to preside over the judicial system.
As for the commissioner of the Huai-ch'ing office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, and battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Lin Ch'eng-hsün, having been an assiduous student in his youth, he has won a place in the military recruitment examinations, entitling him to succeed to a hereditary office. He is a man of no ordinary ambition, who is meticulous in performing his judicial functions. It is appropriate that he be encouraged by selection for a higher position.
As for the assistant judicial commissioner and battalion vice commander Hsieh En, he exhibits the effects of old age and is inconsistent in the way he dispenses lenience and severity. Previously, when he served in the ranks, his performance was respectable enough, but since he has occupied a judicial office, his incapacity for the position has become increasingly evident. It is appropriate that he be cashiered and dismissed from office.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that he was to be promoted to the post of full judicial commissioner:
His heart was filled with great joy;[4]
but when Hsia Yen-ling saw that he was to be promoted to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions, he had nothing to say for what seemed like half a day, and:
The color drained out of his visage.[5]
They then opened and read the enclosed copy of a memorial from the Ministry of Works, submitted upon the completion of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys, that read as follows:
Memorial from the Ministry of Works
In re: The Arrival in the Capital of the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys Is an Occasion for Celestial and Human Celebration. We Urgently Request a Demonstration of Your Majesty's Benevolence in Deigning to Bestow the Appropriate Rewards, in Order to Relieve the Distress of the Masses, [6] While Broadening the Scope of Your Sage Magnanimity
The imperial rescript elicited by this memorial read:
These Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys, which are intended to supply the needs of the Forbidden City, and facilitate the completion of the Mount Ken Imperial Park, have been carried out at Our behest, and enhanced Our gratification. You have exerted your efforts to assist Us in Our pursuit of the ultimate goal of serving the school of the Mysterious Origin.
In the localities through which the Flower and Rock Convoys passed, it is acknowledged that the common people have been made to suffer privation. It is hereby ordered that the offices of the grand coordinators and regional investigating censors should clearly investigate the facts [7] and remit one-half of the annual land taxes due this year from the affected regions. As for the embankments and dikes that have been destroyed, your ministry must send officials to join with the grand coordinators and censors in having them repaired forthwith. When this work is completed, we will depute the palace attendant Meng Ch'ang-ling [8] to go to the areas in question and offer a sacrifice on Our behalf.
Ts'ai Ching, Li Pang-yen, Wang Wei,[9] Cheng Chü-chung,[10] and Kao Ch'iu, who lend their support to Our Person by serving in the Inner Court, have all been distinguished for their meritorious efforts in facilitating this undertaking. Let Ts'ai Ching be granted the title of grand preceptor, Li Pang-yen be granted the titles of pillar of state and grand preceptor of the heir apparent, Wang Wei be granted the title of grand mentor, and Cheng Chü-chung and Kao Ch'iu be granted the title of grand guardian; and let each of them be rewarded with fifty taels of silver and enough fabric to supply both exterior and lining for four sets of clothing. Let Ts'ai Yu also be granted the privilege of having his son, Ts'ai Hsing,[11] appointed as director of the Palace Administration.
The preceptor of state, Lin Ling-su,[12] clearly understands what We are hoping to accomplish by protecting the realm, proclaiming the means of transformation, conveying the Divine Shipments from a distance, and launching a northern expedition against the barbarian invaders, all of which things are truly undertaken with divine sanction. Let him be awarded the additional rank of Earl of Loyalty and Filiality, with an annual stipend of a thousand piculs of grain, be presented with a dragon robe featuring a roundel with the motif of a full-face coiled dragon, [13] be granted the privilege of riding into the palace in a sedan chair, and be rewarded further with the titles the Supreme Patriarch of the Jade Perfected,[14] the Perfect Man of Profound Lucidity, Mysterious Subtlety, and Broad Virtue, the Feathered Sojourner from the Golden Portal,[15] and the Master of Penetrating Perfection, Realized Numinousness, and Mysterious Subtlety.[16]

Chu Mien and Huang Ching-ch'en have shown commendable loyalty and diligence in supervising the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys. Let Chu Mien be granted the additional titles of grand mentor and grand mentor of the heir apparent, and Huang Ching-ch'en be granted the title of defender-in-chief of the Palace Command and put in charge of the Supervisorate of Palace Transport. Let each of them also be granted the privilege of having one son appointed battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard.
Let the palace attendants Li Yen, Meng Ch'ang-ling, Chia Hsiang, Ho Hsin, and Lan Ts'ung-hsi[17] be granted the title of the Five Court Attendants of the Yen-fu Palace.[18] Let them each be presented with a python robe and a jade girdle, and be granted the privilege of having one younger brother or nephew appointed to the substantive post of battalion vice commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard.
Let the minister of rites Chang Pang-ch'ang,[19] the left vice minister of rites and academician Ts'ai Yu, the right vice minister of rites Pai Shih-chung,[20] the minister of war Yü Shen, and the minister of works Lin Shu[21] all be granted the title of grand guardian of the heir apparent, and let each of them be further rewarded with forty taels of silver and enough variegated satin to supply both exterior and lining for two sets of clothing.
Let the grand coordinator of Liang-Che, and concurrently assistant censor-in-chief, Chang Ko,[22] be promoted to the post of right vice minister of the Ministry of Works. Let the grand coordinator of Shantung, and concurrently censor-in-chief, Hou Meng be promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Let the regional investigating censors of Liang-Che and Shantung, Yin Taliang[23] and Sung Ch'iao-nien, as well as the secretaries of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, An Ch'en and Wu Hsün, each be promoted one class in rank, and be rewarded with twenty taels of silver.
Let the battalion commanders who facilitated the Divine Shipments of the Flower and Rock Convoys Wei Ch'eng-hsün, Hsü Hsiang, Yang T'ing-p'ei, Ssu Feng-i, Chao Yu-lan, Fu T'ien-tse, Hsi-men Ch'ing, T'ien Chiu-kao, etc., each be promoted one class in rank.
Let the palace attendants Sung T'ui, etc., and the commanders of training divisions Wang Yu, etc., be rewarded with ten taels of silver; the battalion officers Hsüeh Hsien-chung, etc., be rewarded with five taels of silver; and the commandants Ch'ang Yü, etc., be rewarded with two lengths of silk.
Let these orders be directed to the attention of the appropriate offices.
When Hsia Yen-ling and Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading these documents, they left the yamen and returned home.
That afternoon, Wang the Third sent Yung-ting and Auntie Wen to deliver a letter box containing a gold-flecked accordion-bound invitation to Hsi-men Ch'ing, inviting him to a dinner party in his mansion on the eleventh day of the month as a meager expression of gratitude for the favor he had shown him. Upon receiving this missive, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Unable to contain his delight,
and assumed that it would not be long before Wang the Third's wife fell into his hands.
Who could have anticipated, however, that on the evening of the tenth a formal notification arrived from the Registry Office of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital, that read:
For the information of the judicial officers of all the provinces.
You must proceed to the capital as quickly as possible in order to arrive in time to present your memorials of gratitude to the throne at an audience on the Winter Solstice.
This order is not to be disobeyed, or
You will suffer for your culpability.[24]
After having read this, the next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen and, together with Hsia Yen-ling, wrote acknowledgments in accordion-bound albums and sent them off with the courier. But no more of this.
Each of them then returned to their homes, got together their luggage, prepared the customary presentation gifts, and arranged with each other to set out without delay.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to summon Auntie Wen and told her to inform Wang the Third that he would be unable to make it to the dinner party to which he had been invited on the eleventh, because, thus and so, he had to go to the capital to attend an audience and express his gratitude to the throne.
Upon hearing this, Wang the Third said, "If my venerable elder has business to attend to, I will be happy to wait until his return before extending another invitation with the utmost sincerity."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then summoned Pen the Fourth, told him that he wanted him to accompany him on the trip, and gave him five taels of silver to cover his household expenses while he was away. He left Ch'un-hung behind to look after the household but took Tai-an and Wang Ching with him to attend to his needs on the road. He also borrowed four police officers and four ponies from Commandant Chou Hsiu, saw that the luggage was properly packed up, and arranged for a closed sedan chair, a horse, and orderlies to carry the sedan chair. Hsia Yen-ling, for his part, was accompanied by his servant Hsia Shou. The two officials, between them, had an entourage of more than twenty persons.
They set out from Ch'ing-ho district on the twelfth day of the month.
It was winter when the days are short, and
They traveled both by day and by night.
When they reached Huai-ch'ing prefecture in Huai-hsi and called upon Battalion Commander Lin Ch'eng-hsün, they found that he had already departed for the Eastern Capital. Along the way:
When cold, they sat in their sedan chairs;
When warm, they made their way on horseback.
Each morning they tramped the purple road and red dust;[25]
Every evening they stayed in relay stations or in inns.
Truly:
When thoughts are pressing one wants to wave
the blue-felt banner;
When the mind is eager one beats to tatters
the purple-cord whip.
To make a long story short, when they arrived in the Eastern Capital and entered by way of the Myriad Years Gate, Hsi-men Ch'ing wanted to separate, intending to go stay at the Hsiang-kuo Temple, or Temple of the Protector of the State,[26] but Hsia Yen-ling would not agree, insisting that he come and stay with his relative, Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü. Hsi-men Ch'ing thus felt constrained to prepare a calling card and send it ahead for presentation to his prospective host.
When they arrived, Privy Councilor Ts'ui was at home and came out to greet them. After they had entered the reception hall and exchanged the customary amenities of introduction, commented on the weather, and expressed:
The sentiments they had felt while apart,
they dusted themselves off and sat down for a serving of tea, whereupon their host saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with clasped hands and asked him for his distinguished courtesy name.
"My courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then went on to inquire, "May I ask your distinguished courtesy name, venerable sir?"
Privy Councilor Ts'ui replied, "Your pupil is unsophisticated by nature and lives in idle seclusion. My humble name is Shou-yü, and my courtesy name is Hsün-chai, or Unassuming Studio."
He then went on to say, "My relative, Hsia Yen-ling, has long sung the praises of your surpassing virtue and acknowledged his dependence on your support. Your single-minded cooperation could not have been more generous."
"I am hardly deserving of such praise," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I have constantly benefitted from his instruction. And now that he has been elevated to a senior position in the capital, his opportunities for further advancement can only be enhanced. He is to be congratulated! He is to be congratulated!"
"How can you say such a thing?" exclaimed Hsia Yen-ling.
"Though one may possess the tools for the task,
It is better to wait for the times to be right."[27]
"What Ssu-ch'üan says is quite right," opined Privy Councilor Ts'ui. "Your status being what it is, it cannot be otherwise."
At the conclusion of this conversational exchange they all laughed. It was not long before their luggage was stored away, and as evening fell, Privy Councilor Ts'ui ordered his servants to set up a table and provide them with something to eat. Needless to say, the fare consisted of fruits, wine, seasonal delicacies, and the like, but there is no need to describe this in detail. That night, the two of them slept in Privy Councilor Ts'ui's home. But no more of this.
Early the next morning, they each got ready their gifts and calling cards and set off, accompanied by their attendants, to pay their respects at the mansion of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching. That day the grand preceptor had not yet returned from the Secretariat. The officials and functionaries who had assembled in front of the mansion were like:
Swarming bees and gathering ants,[28]
Jammed together into an indivisible mass.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Hsia Yen-ling persuaded the functionaries in charge of the gate to take their calling cards inside by presenting them with two packets of silver.
When Majordomo Chai Ch'ien saw their cards, he came out to greet them and invited them into his private residence at the front of the mansion. Hsia Yen-ling began by introducing himself, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chai Ch'ien exchanged the customary amenities and alluded to the correspondence between them that had occurred since their last meeting. Only then did they sit down in the positions appropriate for host and guests.
Hsia Yen-ling was the first to present his list of gifts, which consisted of two bolts of cloud-crane brocade and two bolts of variegated satin for the grand preceptor, along with ten taels of silver for Chai Ch'ien. Hsi-men Ch'ing's list of presents for the grand preceptor consisted of a crimson variegated python robe, a jet, figured, round-collared robe emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured a *tou-niu*[29] design, and two bolts of capital brocade. His personal gifts to Chai Ch'ien consisted of a bolt of black velvet decorated with a cloud pattern in green thread, and thirty taels of silver. Chai Ch'ien ordered his attendants to take the gifts for the grand preceptor into the mansion and see that they were properly registered. The only item that he agreed to accept for himself was the bolt of cloud-patterned velvet presented by Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He refused to accept the thirty taels of silver from Hsi-men Ch'ing and the ten taels of silver from Hsia Yen-ling, saying, "Whoever heard of such a thing? Were I to do so, it would violate the feeling of intimacy between us."
He then ordered his attendants to set up a table and serve them a meal, saying, "Today His Majesty is dedicating the plaques to be installed in the newly completed Mount Ken Imperial Park, and His Honor has gone out to the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity [30] in order to preside over the sacrifices. The ceremony will not be over until this afternoon, and, when he gets home, he plans to go with His Honor Li Pang-yen to attend a party at the home of the distaff relative of the imperial family, Cheng Chü-chung. I fear that if my kinsman and Judicial Commissioner Hsia wait for him, it will only interfere with your other activities. Whenever His Honor happens to be free, I will undertake to inform him of your presence. It's all the same, one way or the other."
"We are grateful for my kinsman's efforts on our behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you do that, it will be fine by us."
Chai Ch'ien went on to ask, "Where is my kinsman staying?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing then explained that they were staying in the home of Hsia Yen-ling's relative, Ts'ui Shou-yü.
It was not long before a table was formally set up, and soup, rice, and assorted delicacies were simultaneously served up in:
Large platters and large bowls.
These were all delicious fried and roasted specialties prepared by the Court of Imperial Entertainments:
Than which there were no finer.
After they had each consumed three cups of wine, served in golden goblets, they were prepared to say their farewells and get up to go, but Chai Ch'ien endeavored to retain them a little longer and ordered his attendants to pour another serving of wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then inquired, "Kinsman, when are we scheduled to appear at the imperial audience?"
"Kinsman," replied Chai Ch'ien, "your case differs from that of His Honor Hsia. His Honor is now a senior official serving in the capital, and his case falls into a different category. You will appear at the audience together with the newly appointed assistant battalion commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the nephew of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, Ho Yung-shou. He will take your place as assistant judicial commissioner, since you are now the chief commissioner, so the two of you will be colleagues. He has already presented his memorial of gratitude, so, as soon as you have appeared at an audience and presented your memorial, the two of you can go together to receive your orders of appointment. You might as well arrange to do everything in concert with him."
When Hsia Yen-ling heard this, he did not have a single word to say.
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Kinsman, let me ask you, since you are knowledgeable about such things, how would it be if I were to wait until after the Emperor has returned from performing the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice to attend an audience?"
"Kinsman," responded Chai Ch'ien, "you ought not to wait that long. On the day of the winter solstice, when His Majesty has returned from performing the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, and the officials from the entire empire have offered their congratulatory memorials, a banquet will be held to celebrate the completion of the ceremony. Are you willing to wait until after that? The best thing for you to do is to go and report your name to the Court of State Ceremonial today, and then submit your individual memorial of gratitude to the throne at the early audience tomorrow morning. Then, on the day of the winter solstice, after Chu Mien, the senior official of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, has led the officials under his jurisdiction in submitting a joint memorial of gratitude to the throne, you can collect your orders of appointment and set out for home."
Hsi-men Ch'ing expressed his gratitude, saying, "I thank my kinsman for his advice.
What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"
When they were on the verge of departure, Chai Ch'ien took Hsi-men Ch'ing aside to have a word with him in private and reproached him severely, saying, "In the letter that I sent you a while ago, I insisted that the matter of your impending promotion should be kept strictly confidential and not be divulged to any of your colleagues. How is it then that my kinsman spoke of it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling, with the result that he solicited a note from Perfect Man Lin Ling-su, bringing pressure to bear on Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien? The defender-in-chief then took the matter up with His Honor the grand preceptor, telling him that Hsia Yen-ling did not wish to be transferred to the capital as commander of the escort for imperial processions and preferred to remain in his current post as judicial commissioner for another three years. Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, who also serves in the Inner Court, in his turn, sought the aid of Consort An, née Liu, [31] the favorite of the Emperor, in seeing that an order was issued appointing his nephew, Ho Yung-shou, to replace you as assistant judicial commissioner in Shantung, and personally spoke to the grand preceptor and Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien about it. Thus, the favors sought on the two sides were in direct conflict with each other, and His Honor was put in an extremely difficult position. If I had not been able to insistently maintain your interest before His Honor, so that he ended by turning down Perfect Man Lin Ling-su's request, my kinsman might well have been pushed aside."
This speech had the effect of throwing Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hastily performed an obeisance to Chai Ch'ien, saying, "I am profoundly indebted to my kinsman for his magnanimity. But I didn't speak to anyone about this matter. As for the gentleman in question, how could he ever have learned of it?"
Chai Ch'ien responded, "It has always been true that:
If critical matters are not kept secret
harm will result.[32]
In the future, I trust that my kinsman will be more discreet about things. That's all."
At this point, Hsi-men Ch'ing, with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,
rejoined Hsia Yen-ling, and, after saying farewell, they made their departure. Upon arriving back at the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Pen the Fourth to report his name to the Court of State Ceremonial.
The next day, he and Hsia Yen-ling both went into the palace to attend the audience, dressed in their black gowns and official caps and girdles. Who could have anticipated that as they were coming out through the main gate to the palace after submitting their memorials of gratitude to the throne and were walking past the gate tower on the west, what should they see but a black-clad lictor who came forward and asked, "Which of you is His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, the judicial commissioner of Shantung?"
Pen the Fourth asked him, "Who have you come from?"
"I come from Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury," he replied, "who would like to have a word with His Honor."
Before he had even finished speaking, what should they see but a eunuch director, dressed in a crimson python robe, with a "three mountain hat" [33] on his head, and white-soled black boots on his feet, who approached them from the imperial roadway, and called out in an assertive voice, saying, "I would like to issue an invitation to His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, parted company with Hsia Yen-ling and allowed himself to be conducted into an orderly room for the use of officers on duty that was located nearby. It was fitted with clear windows and translucent latticework, the fire in the brazier inside made it comfortably warm, and the table was laden with partitioned boxes for the serving of assorted delicacies. When they confronted each other inside, the eunuch saluted him with a bow, and Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to bend his back and return the compliment.
The eunuch then said, "Your Honor doesn't know me, but I am Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury and serve as an attendant in the fourth building of the Yen-ning Palace, the residence of Consort Tuan, née Feng.[34] The other day, when the palace construction was completed, the Lord of Ten Thousand Years rewarded me by appointing my nephew, Ho Yung-shou, to the position of battalion vice-commander in the Left Guard of the Embroidered Uniform Guard unit of the Imperial Insignia Guard, so he will serve as assistant judicial commissioner in your jurisdiction and will be a colleague of yours."
"So you are the venerable Eunuch Director Ho Hsin," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I did not recognize you. Forgive me. Forgive me."
He then bowed to him again and said, "In these precincts of the Forbidden City I cannot presume to make a proper obeisance to you. Permit me to call upon you in your private residence someday soon and pay my respects."
Thereupon, the customary amenities having been performed, his host offered him a seat, and a servant presented them with tea, served with raised saucers on a platter of cinnabar-red lacquer decorated with gold tracery. When they had finished their tea, the lids were removed from the partitioned boxes on the table, exposing a rich supply of soup and rice and other delicacies, and they were provided with cups and chopsticks.
"There is no need for small cups," said Eunuch Director Ho Hsin. "I am aware that Your Honor has just come from an audience, and the weather is cold. Were I to entertain you with small cups, while offering you no more than this meager fare, it would be an affront to Your Honor. What you need is a pick-me-up." [35]

"I ought not to impose upon you to such an extent," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Eunuch Director Ho thereupon filled a large cup to the brim and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I am much obliged to you, venerable sir," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and your pupil will be happy to accept what you proffer. The only thing is that, upon leaving your presence, I must meet with other officials and pay my respects at the ministry. If my face is flushed from drinking:
It would hardly be appropriate."[36]
"Drink two cups to ward off the cold," said Eunuch Director Ho. "What harm can it do?"
He then went on to say, "My nephew is young, and unfamiliar with judicial matters. I hope that, for my sake, Your Honor will agree to afford him guidance in all things when he takes his place among your colleagues."
"How could I be so presumptuous?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There is no need for such modesty on your part, venerable sir. My new colleague, your distinguished nephew, may be young, but:
Status affects character as nurture affects health.[37]
It is only natural that:
Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence."[38]
"That's a fine way to talk!" said Eunuch Director Ho. "As the sayings go:
Even if one studies for a lifetime, areas
of ignorance will remain.[39]
The affairs of this world are as profuse
as the hairs of an ox;
Even Confucius himself could not master
more than a leg's worth.
I fear there are things he didn't know.
At all events, Your Honor must try to explain matters to him."
"Your pupil will endeavor to obey your instructions," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then went on to ask, "Venerable sir, where is your private residence located? Your pupil would like to come there to pay his respects."
Eunuch Director Ho replied, "My humble abode is located in the Wen-hua fang, or Cultural Florescence precinct, to the east of the Heavenly River Bridge. It can be identified by the two stone lions that serve as a mounting platform outside the gate."
He then went on to ask, "Where is Your Honor staying? I would like to send the new official in my household over to pay you his respects."
"Your pupil," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "is lodging temporarily in the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü."
After they had exchanged addresses, Hsi-men Ch'ing consumed a large cup of the proffered pick-me-up and then got up to go.
Eunuch Director Ho Hsin saw him to the door and saluted him with clasped hands, saying, "With regard to what I spoke of to you just now, I hope that Your Honor will consent to look out for my nephew in all things. He is waiting to accompany you when you submit your memorial of gratitude and go to proffer the customary gifts to Chu Mien, the senior official of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, after which you can go together to collect your orders of appointment."
"Venerable sir," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "there is no need for you to instruct me any further. Your pupil understands the situation."
Thereupon, he exited the gate of the Forbidden City and went to report to the Ministry of War, where he ran into Hsia Yen-ling and joined him in going to pay his respects to the appropriate officials. By the time he had gone to formally present himself to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, handed in his curriculum vitae, applied for his order of appointment, and reported to the Registry Office and the other appropriate officials, it was already late in the afternoon. Judicial Commissioner Hsia Yen-ling, for his part, had changed into the uniform of his new position as commander of the escort for imperial processions, prepared his own curriculum vitae, formally presented himself to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, where he was excused from having to kowtow, and selected a date for his assumption of office in the Southern Yamen, the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard.
When Hsia Yen-ling came out the door of the ministry, he found that Hsi-men Ch'ing was there waiting for him, though he hesitated to ride alongside him, and suggested that he be the first to mount. Hsia Yen-ling protested at this and insisted that they ride side by side.
Hsi-men Ch'ing addressed him as his superior in rank, but Hsia Yen-ling objected, saying, "Ssu-ch'üan, the two of us are former colleagues, after all. How can you start addressing me that way?"
"Our differences in status have been determined," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It is only natural.
There is no need for such modesty on your part."
He then went on to ask, "Since Your Honor has been raised to such an exalted position and will not be returning to Shantung, when are you going to send for your esteemed dependents?"
"I would like to move them here as soon as possible," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but were I to do so, there would be no one to look after my property there. Right now, I plan to stay temporarily at my relative's place until after the New Year's celebrations, and send someone to fetch the members of my household then. Meanwhile, I hope that my colleague will consent to look after them, early and late. If anyone is interested in purchasing my property, I hope that my colleague will take care of it on my behalf. I should be very grateful were you to do so."
"Your pupil will endeavor to obey your instructions," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "May I ask what your property is worth?"
"That house of mine," replied Hsia Yen-ling, "was originally purchased from Eunuch Director Hsü for 1,200 taels. I subsequently had an extra story built in the rear, and the cost of the improvements came to 200 taels. Right now, I would be willing to let it go for the original purchase price."
"Since my distinguished colleague has confided in me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if anyone should ask me about it, I will be able to answer without letting you down."
"The only thing is, I fear I am putting my colleague to a lot of trouble," responded Hsia Yen-ling.
When the two of them arrived back at the home of Ts'ui Shou-yü, Wang Ching approached them and reported, "His Honor, the newly appointed official Ho Yung-shou, came to pay you a visit. When he had dismounted and come into the reception hall, I told him that you had not yet returned from the Ministry of War. His Honor Ho said to give you his best regards. He also left calling cards for His Honor Hsia, and His Honor Ts'ui, and, at noon, he sent someone to deliver two pieces of satin brocade together with a calling card of safflower red paper."
He then showed these to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who saw that the card read, "The enclosed two satin kerchiefs are deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your humble colleague and student, Ho Yung-shou."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had read this message, he promptly told Wang Ching to wrap up and seal two round-collared robes made in Nanking, featuring mandarin squares with variegated embroidered lions. After writing out a gift card, and having something to eat, he set off immediately for Eunuch Director Ho's home in order to pay a return visit.
Upon Hsi-men Ch'ing's arrival at the reception hall, Ho Yung-shou hurriedly straightened his clothing and came out to welcome him. He was wearing a variegated, figured, round-collared robe of jet cloud-patterned velvet, featuring a mandarin square with an embroidered lion; black shoes with black silk uppers; and a girdle with a decorative plaque of gilded tortoiseshell around his waist. He was not more than nineteen years old.
His face looked as though it were powdered;
He was bright-eyed and clean-cut; and
His lips looked as though they were rouged.[40]
Hastening down the steps to greet his visitor, he proceeded to bow and scrape in the most deferential manner, exhibiting the utmost in the way of modesty and respect. As Hsi-men Ch'ing ascended the steps, the household servants hurried to lift aside the portiere, giving a welcoming shout as they waited upon him, fore and aft.
When the two of them had entered the reception hall and exchanged formal greetings, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Tai-an to open the box containing the robes he had prepared; proceeded to proffer:
The customary presentation gifts;
and kowtowed, saying, "When you deigned to pay me a visit a while ago and bestowed such lavish gifts upon me, I fear I was not there to welcome you. And, this morning, the venerable gentleman, your uncle, treated me to a repast in his orderly room, for which consideration I could not be more grateful."
Ho Yung-shou hastened to kowtow in return, saying, "Having received this trifling appointment, which entitles me to become a colleague of yours, I look forward to being the beneficiary of your instruction.
Such good fortune would suffice for three lives.
I went to pay you my respects a while ago but failed to see you, and now you have deigned to demonstrate your good will by:
Shedding glory on my humble abode."
He then ordered his attendants to put away the gifts. In the meantime, he pulled up some formal seats, upholstered in deerskin, and the two of them sat down in the positions of host and guest. His attendants served them with tea, and Ho Yung-shou bowed deeply as he presented a cup to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who got up from his seat and returned his salutation. As they were drinking their tea, they asked after each other's courtesy names.
"Your pupil's courtesy name is Ssu-ch'üan," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
To which Ho Yung-shou responded, "Your pupil's courtesy name is T'iench'üan, or Heavenly Spring."
He then went on to ask, "Has my colleague already paid his respects to the officials at the Ministry of War today?"
"Upon coming out of the Forbidden City after being entertained by your venerable uncle," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I reported to the Ministry of War, paid my formal respects to the commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, applied for my order of appointment, and reported to the other appropriate officials. When I returned, I saw your calling card and learned that you had condescended to pay me a visit. The fact that I was not there to welcome you has left me feeling:
Scarcely able to conquer my fear and trepidation."[41]
"Not knowing that my colleague had arrived," said Ho Yung-shou, "your pupil was tardy in paying his respects."
He then went on to ask, "Did my colleague and His Honor Hsia Yen-ling attend the audience this morning?"
"Hsia Yen-ling has now been promoted to the post of commander of the escort for imperial processions," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He and I attended the audience together this morning and expressed our gratitude for our new appointments. But when we reported to the Ministry of War to pay our respects to our superiors, he handed in his own documents and was interviewed separately."
When he had finished questioning him, Ho Yung-shou went on to say, "Since we have had a chance to consult together today, when do you think we should go to present our customary gifts to His Honor the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, preparatory to receiving our orders of appointment?"
"According to my kinsman Chai Ch'ien," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we should go first to the home of the defender-in-chief to present our gifts, before presenting our memorials of gratitude at the great audience. After that, we should proceed to report to the office of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, where we will receive our orders of appointment together with the rest."
"Since that is what my colleague suggests," said Ho Yung-shou, "let us prepare our gifts and go to present them early tomorrow morning."
Thereupon, the two of them went over their respective gifts together. Ho Yung-shou's consisted of two python robes and a jade girdle. Hsi-men Ch'ing's consisted of a length of scarlet satin brocade, emblazoned with a mandarin square that featured an embroidered *ch'i-lin*,[42] a python robe of blue silk, as well as a chatelaine of gold-embossed jade. Each of them also agreed to present four jugs of Chin-hua wine, and they arranged to go together to assemble in front of Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien's residence the following morning. Once these arrangements had been agreed upon, and they had consumed two servings of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing took his leave and returned to Ts'ui Shou-yü's dwelling. He did not confide anything about these plans to Hsia Yen-ling. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
Early the next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to Ho Yung-shou's place, where he found that his host had already prepared a small repast, along with a pick-me-up, which was duly served in:
Large platters and large bowls,
as neatly as could be. Even their servants were enabled to eat their fill. After finishing their meal, they went together to assemble before the front gate of Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien's residence, where they found that Pen the Fourth and a servant from the Ho household, who had gone ahead with the gifts, had already been waiting for them for some time.
At this time, Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien had recently been promoted to the rank of grand guardian, and Emperor Hui-tsung had deputed him to go to the Southern Altar, the site of the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, in order to preside over the inspection of the sacrificial animals, preparatory to the ceremony on the day of the winter solstice. He had not yet returned from this mission, and the area outside the gate of his residence was rendered black by the number of officials and functionaries who were gathered there in order to present him with congratulatory gifts, who were so closely packed together that it felt as though they were:
Locked tight in an iron bucket.
Ho Yung-shou, together with Hsi-men Ch'ing, dismounted and sat down to wait in the home of an acquaintance of his that was located nearby, while sending a servant to listen for the sound of the criers that would precede the entourage of the defender-in-chief, so that he could come back and report on his impending arrival.
Their wait extended until the early afternoon, at which time they suddenly saw a man flying along on horseback, who announced, "His Honor is on his way back from inspecting the sacrificial animals. He has already entered the city through the Southern Breeze Gate[43] and has ordered that casual onlookers should be cleared out of the way."
Not long afterwards, another mounted courier appeared and reported, "His Honor has already crossed the Heavenly River Bridge."
At this juncture, the first contingent of chefs, together with their tea boxes and partitioned food boxes, passed by. It was only after what seemed like another half day had elapsed that a squad of cavalry, with their identifying insignia, appeared in the distance.
These officers all wore iron helmets on their heads,
Decorated with chain patterns and emblazoned with
the character for courage;
Their torsos were clad in hauberks of nankeen,
stiffened with carved lacquer;
Over which they wore jackets of blue satin with
narrow sleeves and flowered roundels,
Held in place with red chiffon cummerbunds,
On top of battle skirts of green deerskin adorned
with drawnwork aquatic creatures;
While their feet were shod with four-seamed
tight-fitting black boots.
Their bows were adorned with painted magpies;
Their arrows were fitted with eagle feathers;[44]
And in brocade bags across their shoulders they bore
blue command standards in gilt lettering.
Truly:
The men look like fierce tigers;
The horses rival flying dragons.[45]
Before long, a squad of soldiers bearing blue flags passed by, enclosing between them a squad of adjutants, dressed in black. Each and every one of them was:
Lanky and large-sized,
Ruthless and menacing.
On their heads they sported jet-black caps,
On their bodies they wore long black gowns,
Their feet were clad in dark brown

leather-soled boots,
At their waists there were hanging
tiger-head tallies.[46]
Mounted on their horses, truly:
Their air was awe-inspiring.[47]
Their appearance was imposing.
Before long, when these three squads of cavalry, with their identifying insignia, had passed by, what should they hear but the approaching sound of shouting to clear the way. The outriders who were creating this din were all:
Officers of the Imperial Insignia Guard,
Orderlies on assignment for the occasion,
More than six feet in stature, and
Broad-shouldered as they come.
Each of them wore a tall black cylindrical hat,
All were togged out in puttees and black boots.
In their left hands they wielded rattan canes,
While their right hands hiked up their clothes.
As these outriders advanced, continuously shouting to clear the way, the people in the roadway ahead of them were:
Truly frightened out of their wits;
Suddenly the streets were deserted.
After the squad of outriders had passed, they were followed by two additional contingents of guardsmen, who were succeeded in turn by a squad of twenty detectives in black livery, spread out on either side of the street like the wings of a formation of wild geese, all of whom were tall and sturdy in stature. They were uniformly:
Stout-waisted thick-stomached types;
Golden-eyed brown-bearded specimens.
Each of them was as rapacious and cruel as a tiger;
None of them was capable of showing the least pity.
In the wake of these ten pairs of black-liveried guardsmen appeared an open sedan chair, carried by eight bearers, accompanied by eight outriders, in which Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien was seated.
Wearing on his head the black silk hat of an official,
His body was clad in a robe of crimson velvet
with a *tou-niu* mandarin square;
His waist was enclosed in a four-finger-wide girdle
with an openwork plaque of white jade
from the Ch'u Mountains,[48]
His feet were shod in black boots;
At his midriff there hung the ivory insignia
of a grand guardian and a fish-shaped
key of yellow gold,
Affixed to his hat were a dangling sable tail
and a golden cicada;[49]
His feet were firmly planted on a footrest
draped in tiger skin.
The bearers bore his sedan chair so high that
it was three feet off the ground.
It was preceded by two household servants, one on
either side, clad in blue satin, and
girdles with rhinoceros horn plaques,
And was followed by yet another squad of cavalry,
carrying six identifying insignia,
and six more blue command standards,
Who kept close at hand in order to receive orders.
Behind these there came several tens of others,
riding fine steeds with jeweled saddles,
jade bridles, and golden stirrups,
All of whom were majordomos, factotums, file clerks,
clerical subofficials, or scribes;
One and all of whom were gilded and pampered youths
from influential households,
Who were motivated only by lust and avarice,
Utterly indifferent to regulations and laws.
In rapid succession, one squad after another arrived in front of the defender-in-chief's residence, where they arrayed themselves in a straight line. The onlookers fell silent and stayed out of the way, not one of them daring to cough. The assembled officials and functionaries who had come to offer their gifts rendered the area black as they knelt down by the side of the road.
After some time, when the sedan chair of the defender-in-chief arrived before them, his attendants shouted, "Stand up, and remain at attention!" To which the assembled crowd assented with a single shout. Truly:
The sound shook the cloudy empyrean.
To the east, all that could be heard was a steady beat as:
Drums and music began to sound.
It so happens that the six senior officers in his yamen, on learning that the defender-in-chief had been elevated to the rank of grand master of the imperial household, and grand guardian, and been granted the privilege of having a son appointed battalion commander in the Imperial Insignia Guard, had all prepared lavish gifts, including wine and ingredients for a feast, and assembled in order to proffer their congratulations. For this reason, there were quite a few officials from the Music Office in attendance, who had begun to strike up their music. No sooner did the defender-in-chief descend from his sedan chair than the music came to a halt, and the various officials and functionaries made ready to present themselves.
All of a sudden, shouting to clear the way was heard, and a servitor in black livery, holding two red calling cards in his hand, came flying up on horseback and handed them to the guards at the gate, saying, "The minister of rites Chang Pang-ch'ang, and His Honor the academician Ts'ai Yu, are coming to pay their respects."
This information was promptly conveyed inside. Before long, their sedan chairs showed up at the gate, and the minister Chang Pang-ch'ang and vice minister Ts'ai Yu, wearing scarlet ceremonial robes with mandarin squares featuring embroidered peacocks, one of them sporting a girdle with a plaque of rhinoceros horn, and the other a girdle with a plaque of gold, went inside to pay their respects.
After they had been entertained with tea and seen on their way, the minister of personnel Wang Tsu-tao,[50] the left vice minister Han Lü, and the right vice minister Yin Ching[51] also came to pay their respects to Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien.
After they had been entertained with tea and seen on their way, the imperial relative and Duke of Chia, Chao I, the military affairs commissioner Cheng Chü-chung, and the commandant-escort and director of the Court of the Imperial Clan, Wang Shen, clad in nankeen robes with jade girdles, also came to pay their respects. Of the three, Cheng Chü-chung alone rode in a sedan chair, the other two being mounted on horseback.
After they had been seen off, the six senior officers in the defender-in-chief's yamen arrived, surrounded by criers proclaiming the protocol, and drawn up in appropriate order. The first of these was the superintendent of justice for the two townships of the Eastern Capital, Sun Jung; [52] the second was the chief inspector, Liang Ying-lung; the third was the director of the Office of Herds in the Inner and Outer Demesnes of the Court of the Imperial Stud, the nephew of Defender-in-Chief T'ung Kuan, T'ung T'ien-yin; the fourth was the surveillance commissioner of the thirteen gates of the capital city, Huang Ching-ch'en; the fifth was the commander of the Capital Training Divisions and capital security commissioner, Tou Chien;[53] and the sixth was the ward-inspecting commandant of the inner and outer precincts of the Eastern Capital, Ch'en Tsung-shan. All of them were garbed in crimson robes and wore hats adorned with dangling sable tails and golden cicadas. Only Sun Jung, who held the rank of grand guardian of the heir apparent, wore a jade girdle, while the rest of them wore girdles of gold. When they dismounted and went inside, each of them took with him gifts of gold currency and bolts of fabric.
After a little while, the sound of music was heard, as the group of senior officers, wearing floral ornaments of gold, and jade girdles, exchanged toasts with Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien. Beneath the steps:
Strains of classic melodies saturate the ears;
Tones of woodwinds and strings are harmonious.
Truly:
The tables, ten-foot square, are laden with food;
Served amid clustering flowers upon brocade mats.
What did this conspicuous display of the defender-in-chief's wealth and distinction look like? Behold:
He holds a position of the first rank;[54]
His office is one of the three highest.[55]
In his majestic reception hall,
The days are long and the bell-cords are silent;
In the vast minister's mansion,[56]
The clepsydras are mute and the halberds arrayed.
The forest flowers of colored paper
rival those of spring;
The pearls hanging from the drapery
light the evening hours.[57]
Fragrant and aromatic,
Otter's marrow has been newly compounded
with "hundred-blend" incense;[58]
In serried profusion,
Tripods with dragon motifs and seal script
are worth thousands in gold.
The bedclothes are half embroidered
with kingfisher feathers;
The pillows are emblazoned with the
"eight treasures" in coral.
From time to time, one hears the tinkling
of jade girdle pendants;
One's vision is focused on the glittering
of the moving lanterns.
With their tiger-head tallies and jade insignia,
The armored ranks in the forecourt are formidable;
With their ivory clappers and silver psalteries,[59]
The production of the puppet show is entertaining,[60]
All day long, those who come to pay their regards,
Consist only of noble scions or royal princelings;
Year after year, those who cultivate his company,
Are noblemen or relatives of the imperial family.
When singing girls perform their songs,[61]
One is amazed at the repertory of three thousand pieces;
When the mica screens are pulled aside,[62]
There suddenly appear twelve girls with gold hairpins.[63]

Where the lotus blossoms are in bloom,
The frolicking fish in the pond do not
startle the beholder;
Where birdcages are suspended on high,
The coquettish fowl beneath the eaves
engage in conversation.
What do such persons know of the arts of
compromise or reconciliation?
All they are familiar with are the ways
of toadying and sycophancy.
Truly:
In humorous conversation they initiate hostilities;
With idle boasts they disturb the national safety.
When they issue spurious decrees,
The eight chief officials in the realm
bow in acquiescence;
When they employ clever arguments,
The Emperor in his nine-gated palace[64]
nods his head in consent.
By initiating the Flower and Rock Convoys,
He has inflicted calamity upon the Chiang-nan
and the Huai-pei regions;
By seizing boxwood to offer to the throne,
He has exhausted both the national treasury
and the people's resources.
Among those who serve at court there are none
whose hearts have not been chilled;
Among the ranks of men of integrity there are
none who are not holding their breath.
Truly:
In the capital precincts he ranks first among
the wielders of power;
Among the wealthy and prominent of this world[65]
he is without an equal.[66]

In a little while, when the toasting was over, they all sat down in their places, and a troupe of five actors came forward. To the accompaniment of psaltery, mandola, *p'i-p'a*, metallophone, harp, and clappers inlaid with red ivory, they proceeded to perform the song suite in the Cheng-kung mode that begins with the tune "Decorous and Pretty." Truly:

The enduring tones linger around the rafters;
To a surge of pure melody and lovely harmony.
Enjoying wealth and distinction,
The recipient of imperial favor;[67]
Having risen from bleak poverty,
You occupy an exalted position.
Wielding the scales of power, your authority
dominates the capital;
Relying on imperial favor, you endeavor to
deceive our sovereign,
In total disregard of benevolence or righteousness.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
You employ corvée labor to construct ponds,
You buy landed estates for your descendants.
In your every endeavor, you explore only the
means of insuring your own benefit;
In your treacherous greed, what do you care
if Yüeh suffers while Ch'in prospers?[68]
Those who curry favor with you reach instant distinction;
Those who offend you find that their lives are endangered.
Envious of the worthy and talented,
You prefer the intimacy of the petty minded.
Motivated only by personal grudges, you show total
disregard for the public interest.
You keep the Emperor in his nine-gated palace
entirely in the dark,
While allowing the people within the four seas
to descend into chaos.
But, as the saying goes, Heaven's net
only seems to be loose.[69]
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"
With your clever words, you seek to elicit the
transient amusement of the ruler;
But do not exert loyal effort toward achieving
harmony among the myriad states.
You only try to subvert the work of real heroes
in order to deceive the world.
Vainly scratching an itch through the hide of your boot;[70]
Exhibiting the same symptoms that you pretend to cure;[71]
You show no concern whatever for Heavenly principle.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
You have the intent of Chao Kao of the Ch'in
dynasty in pointing to a deer,[72]
And the design of T'u-an Ku in loosing his dog.[73]
You would emulate Wang Mang of the Han dynasty
in your disloyal objectives,[74]
And deserve the same fate as the traitor Tung Cho
whose navel was set on fire.[75]
Wherever you move, you are accompanied by pipes and strings;
When you go out the gate, you are protected by armed guards.
When you enter the court, the hundred officials
are rigid with apprehension;
Relying on the ruler, you usurp the tiger's might
in flaunting your authority.[76]
There are no few clients who abase themselves to
cater to your perfidious cabal;
But who is there willing to wield his sword to
execute the toadying villains,
Rather than letting them do as they please?
CODA
Your designation as a minister is not found
beneath the golden goblet;[77]
But in the works of historians your faults
will be duly enumerated.
What do you know of reconciling yin and yang[78]
or nurturing the vital energy?
All you can do is betray the country and make
pacts with foreign barbarians.
You have no right to the jade girdle and gold fish[79]
suspended from your python robe;
Accepting emolument without achievement, you should
be ashamed to sleep and to eat.
As long as power remains in your hands,
people will be afraid of you;
But when catastrophe descends upon you,
it will be too late to repent.[80]
All the bamboo on the southern hills would not suffice
on which to enumerate your crimes;
When the waves on the eastern ocean are completely dry
your stench of infamy will remain.[81]
It will be perpetuated for a myriad years,[82]
Forevermore inducing people to revile you.[83]

On this occasion, after:
Three rounds of wine had been offered, and

One suite of songs had been performed,
the six senior officers got up to go, and Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien escorted them on their way out.
When he returned to the reception hall, the sound of music was temporarily suspended, and the majordomo prepared to announce the names of the officials from their various jurisdictions as they came in to pay their respects to him. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien ordered his attendants to bring in his desk and then took his seat on a folding chair upholstered in tiger skin.
He first ordered that the contingent of meritorious imperial relatives, prominent eunuchs, and high officials, together with their servitors and clerks, who had come to present their gifts, should be admitted.
It was not long before they were sent on their way and were succeeded by the contingent of secretaries attached to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, the officers from the Southern and Northern Yamens of that organization, the two detective bureaus with their five offices and seven departments, the investigators, inspectors, surveillance commissioners, and supervisors, the director of the horse pasturages of the imperial domain, the commander of the escort for imperial processions, the prison warden, the battalion and company commanders, and so forth. The leaders at the head of each of these categories were supplied with accordion-bound albums containing the credentials of their subordinates, which they duly handed up before being dismissed.
Only then were the judicial commissioners of the Two-Huai regions, the Two-Che regions, Shantung, Shansi, Kuan-tung, Kuan-hsi, Ho-tung, Hopei, Fukien, Kuang-nan, Szechwan, all thirteen provinces, ordered to present themselves in turn. [84] Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou were in the fifth group, and when their presents were carried in, the majordomo saw to it that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin's calling card was placed conspicuously on the defender-in-chief's desk.
As the two of them stood beneath the steps, waiting for their names to be called, Hsi-men Ch'ing lifted up his head to look around and saw that in front of him was a spacious thirty-foot-wide structure, with a double-eaved, sloping, gable and hip roof, and exposed supporting beams beneath the corners. [85] Its beaded blinds were rolled high, [86] and it was surrounded on all sides by a green balustrade. [87] A vermilion plaque was suspended over the lintel that had been presented by Emperor Hui-tsung himself and was inscribed in the imperial hand with four gold characters as large as dippers, which read "Hall of the Commander of the Imperial Insignia Guard." This was the home of the Emperor's eyes and ears, teeth and claws; the headquarters of his secret police. Any commoner who found himself there could expect to be executed. Six anterooms were arrayed on either side of the interior.
The steps were wide and spacious, and
The courtyard was secluded and imposing.
Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, attired in his crimson robe, was seated at the head of the steps, and, before long, he summoned them before him. The two of them obediently ascended the steps until they stood under the eaves, where they bent their bodies to pay their respects, kneeling down and kowtowing four times, as they awaited their instructions.
Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien remarked, "As for you two battalion commanders, what need was there for you to have your kinsman Eunuch Director Ho Hsin present me with these gifts?"
After ordering his attendants to put them away, he went on to say, "As long as you conscientiously carry out your official duties in the area of your jurisdiction, I, for my part, will see that you are treated fairly. After you have attended the great audience and submitted your memorials of gratitude, you can come back to the office to receive your orders of appointment, and proceed to your posts."
The two of them assented with one voice, after which the attendants called out, "You are dismissed," and they made their way out through the postern gate on the left.
As they exited the main gate and waited for Pen the Fourth and the others to come out with the empty gift boxes so they could be on their way, they suddenly noticed a messenger, who flew up on horseback, carrying a calling card of safflower red paper, and reported, "His Honor Wang and His Honor Kao are about to arrive."
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou then ducked inside someone's gateway so they could observe what took place. It was not long before the soldiers preceding them shouted to clear the way, and the two dignitaries appeared:
Accompanied by a contingent of mounted horsemen,
Overflowing the streets and blocking the alleys.
Whom should they see, garbed in crimson robes with jade girdles, and riding in sedan chairs, but Wang Wei, the supreme commander of the 800,000 imperial guards in the Capital Training Divisions and Duke of Lung-hsi, and Kao Ch'iu, the defender-in-chief of the Inspired Strategy Corps of the Imperial Bodyguard. Upon their arrival, the officials from the various provinces who had come to pay their respects all surged outside, and the newcomers were lost to sight.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou waited for some time until Pen the Fourth came out with the empty gift boxes. Only then did the two of them withdraw to a secluded spot, order their attendants to bring up their horses, mount their steeds, and go back to their lodgings.
Truly:
Solely because the wicked and sycophantic
occupied positions of power,
It was only appropriate that the Central Plain
should become soaked in blood. [88]
Gentle reader take note:
Just as womenfolk may ruin a household,
Petty men may reduce the realm to chaos;
It is only natural.
The perspicacious already foresaw that this bunch of traitors were bound to overturn the empire, and, sure enough, at the expiration of the Hsüan-ho reign period, Emperor Hui-tsung and Emperor Ch'in-tsung were taken north in captivity, Emperor Kao-tsung fled south, and the empire fell into the hands of the barbarians. Surely, this outcome is to be profoundly lamented. The reflections that arise in the mind of the historian cannot be exhausted. A poem testifies to this:
Calamitous are the deeds of those who abuse their
power and betray the national interest; [89]
When founding a dynasty or inheriting a household,
one must strive to keep petty men at bay.
Though the "six traitors" may all have been executed,
that is hardly worthy of consideration; [90]
It did not mitigate the plight of the two emperors
as they suffered exile and confinement

The Emperor said
That he would choose strong men and scholars,
That the wise should be as his arms and legs.
Now the art of letters is purified,
Rites and Music have regained their influence.
Men of nobility go to the palace
And the gate of guests is entered by men of worth.
The royal bounty is bestowed upon the people
Beyond all expectation.
The benevolence of the Ruler is above all things.
Ximen Qing had sent a man to Huaiqing to get news from Captain Lin. The captain gave him a copy of the Imperial Gazette and five *qian* of silver, and the man traveled back post-haste to Qinghe. Xia and Ximen Qing were waiting for him at the office. They opened the envelope. First they read the document that dealt with the inspection of the officials in their district. It related his Majesty's approval of the project to investigate the conduct of the officers, and spoke of Xia and Ximen Qing in these terms:
Xia Yanling, Captain and Magistrate in the Province of Shandong. An officer of excellent reputation and considerable experience. In a former appointment he kept his district in admirable order, and, in the position he now holds, has done even better. He deserves promotion as a thoroughly capable official and one worthy of high rank in the service.
Ximen Qing, Vice Captain and Deputy Magistrate, is also an efficient officer. He is renowned for the subtlety of his judgments, and, being a wealthy man, he does not accept bribes. He is attentive to his duties and carries them out satisfactorily. He has never received a penny that is not justly his due. He maintains the dignity of the law and the people respect him. His promotion to the full rank of Captain is suggested, and he should be confirmed in his appointment as Magistrate.
Ximen Qing was delighted with his promotion. But Magistrate Xia, when he learned that he had been appointed to the Imperial Escort, changed color and could not speak for several minutes.
The other document was from the Office of Works. It related his Majesty's satisfaction with the work that had been done in the transport of materials for the North Mount, ordered that half the taxes should be remitted in districts that had suffered from the work of transport, and that the dikes and weirs that had been destroyed should be replaced by officers of the Office of Works and the Provincial Authorities. Among the rewards granted in this document was a step in rank to Ximen Qing.
When Xia and Ximen had finished reading it, they went home. That afternoon, Wang the Third sent old woman Wen and a boy to invite Ximen Qing to go and see him on the eleventh of the month. He wished, he said, to express his gratitude for the favor Ximen Qing had done him. Ximen accepted the invitation with considerable pleasure, thinking that, in good time, Wang the Third's wife would fall into his hands.
On the evening of the tenth, orders came from Headquarters in the Eastern Capital summoning all the military officers of the Province to the Capital. They were to arrive before the day of the Winter Festival, and to attend at Court to express their gratitude to the Emperor. The order declared that anyone who arrived late would be punished.
The next day Ximen Qing went to discuss the matter with Magistrate Xia, then both men went home and set about the preparation of their luggage. They made ready presents and prepared to start in good time.
Ximen Qing sent Daian for old woman Wen and asked her to tell Wang the Third that he would be unable to keep his engagement because he had to go to the Eastern Capital to see the Emperor. The old woman hurried to Wang the Third and told him. Wang the Third said he would renew his invitation when Ximen came back.
Ximen Qing summoned Ben the Fourth and told him he was going to take him to the Eastern Capital. He gave him five taels of silver for household expenses. Daian and Wang Jing were also detailed to go, but Chunhong was left behind. Ximen asked Major Zhou for an escort of four horse soldiers. Sedan chairs and horses were made ready.
Magistrate Xia took with him only Xia Shou, but, in all, there were more than twenty attendants.
They started from Qinghe on the twelfth. It was winter and the days were short, but they traveled night and day. At Huaiqing they hoped to join Captain Lin, but he had started before them. They went on. When it was particularly cold, they stayed in their sedan chairs, but, on the warmer days, they rode on horseback.
At last they reached the Eastern Capital and entered the city by the gate of Ten Thousand Blessings. Ximen Qing proposed to stay at a temple, but Xia insisted that they should go together to his kinsman, Secretary Cui. Ximen, who did not know Cui, sent his card before him. When they reached the house, the Secretary was at home. He came out to welcome them and led them to the hall. They exchanged greetings. Cui said how delighted he was to see Magistrate Xia; they sat down, and tea was brought.
"May I know your honorable name?" Cui said, bowing to Ximen Qing.
"My humble name is Siquan," Ximen said. He asked Cui's name.
"I am a very insignificant fellow," Cui said, "and I am living in retirement. My humble name is Shouyu, and I am also called Xunzhai. My kinsman, Xia, has often told me of your preeminent virtue. I trust your favor may always uphold and support him."
"He has taught me all I know," Ximen Qing said. "Now that he has been promoted, I shall be dependent upon him in many ways. I owe him much."
"Why do you flatter me?" Xia said. "It would seem as though we were strangers."
"Siquan is right," Cui said, "you are his senior in rank."
They laughed. Their luggage was carried into the house. It was growing late. Secretary Cui ordered a meal to be prepared for them and they spent the night in his house.
The next morning they set off very early with their presents and visiting cards to the palace of the Imperial Tutor. His Eminence was still at the Court, but officers and people flocked like bees outside his palace. Xia and Ximen Qing had great difficulty in forcing their way through the crowd. They made a present to the gatekeeper, and their cards were taken in.
Zhai came out to greet them and took them to his own house. Magistrate Xia saluted him and Ximen Qing greeted him. They sat down. Xia presented his list of gifts. He offered two rolls of golden satin, two rolls of figured satin to the Imperial Tutor and ten taels of silver to Zhai. Ximen Qing had brought a roll of scarlet silk with embroidered dragons, a roll of black silk, also embroidered, and two rolls of official silk for the Imperial Tutor. To Zhai he offered a roll of dark green velvet and thirty taels of silver.
Zhai told the servants to take the presents for the Imperial Tutor to his palace, and to inscribe their names in the visitors' book. He accepted the velvet that Ximen Qing had brought for him, but would not take the silver from either of them.
"It would not be right," he said. "If I took money from you, it would look as though we were not good friends."
He told a servant to prepare a meal for them. "Today," he said, "his Majesty has set the finishing touch to the building he began at the behest of Heaven, and the title is being set up. His Eminence is presiding over the sacrifice. He will not be able to get away before the afternoon. When he comes back, he is going with Li Bangyan to a party at the palace of the Zhengs, who are connected with the Imperial Household. I doubt whether you will care to wait so long, and your other business may be delayed. Do not wait. When his Eminence is at liberty, I will speak to him for you. That will be just as good as if you saw him yourselves."
"It is extremely kind of you, kinsman," Ximen Qing said.
Zhai asked Ximen where he was staying. Ximen told him he was with Xia at Secretary Cui's house.
The meal was now ready. There were a great many dishes, prepared in the manner of the court and served in huge plates and dishes. The food was delicious. When Ximen and his colleague had drunk three cups of wine, they rose and prepared to leave, but Zhai begged them to stay and pressed them to drink again.
"Kinsman," Ximen Qing said, "when shall I be able to see his Majesty?"
"You will not be so fortunate as his Lordship Xia," the Comptroller said. "He is now one of the officers of the Capital. You and the newly appointed Vice Captain, He Yongshou, Chamberlain He's nephew, who are law officers —he is to be your assistant—will have to wait until his Lordship Xia has seen his Majesty. He will wait for you and, after your audience, you will get your commissions together. Whatever you wish to do after that, you will have to consult his Lordship."
Xia listened but said nothing.
"Kinsman," Ximen Qing said, "will it be possible for me to see his Majesty when he has returned from the worship of Heaven on the day of the Winter Festival?"
"Can you wait all that time?" Zhai said. "When he comes back, all the officials of the Empire will offer their congratulations and there will probably be a royal banquet. I don't see how you can wait till then. You had better go to the Registry today, and tomorrow go to Court and see his Majesty. Then you will be able to go home as soon as you have secured your papers."
"Thank you," Ximen said, "I will do as you command. I don't know how I can ever repay your kindness."
As they were going away, the Comptroller took Ximen Qing aside. "When I sent you that letter," he said reproachfully, "didn't I tell you to be most careful and not let your colleague know what should have been a secret between ourselves? What made you tell Xia? He wrote to his Holiness Lin, and Lin persuaded Marshal Zhu to come to his Eminence and say that Xia did not wish to come to the Capital to take a post in the Imperial Escort. He wished to remain another three years at Qinghe. Chamberlain He brought the matter before his Majesty's favorite concubine, and she herself approached both Marshal Zhu and his Eminence and urged the appointment of He Yongshou as the deputy. This produced a most awkward situation. His Eminence was placed in a very difficult position. If I had not spoken to his Eminence on your behalf, and persuaded him to refuse Lin's petition, you would have found yourself without any appointment at all, my dear kinsman."
Ximen Qing was greatly disturbed. "I am most grateful to you," he said, "but, really, I never mentioned the matter to anyone. I can't imagine how it came out."
"If a man doesn't keep things like that secret, so much the worse for him," Zhai said. "You must be more careful in the future."
Ximen Qing thanked him again and went away with Xia. They returned to Cui's house. Ximen sent Ben the Fourth to the Registry to put down their names, and the next day, he and Xia, dressed in black robes and hats of ceremony, went to the Imperial Palace to express their gratitude for his Majesty's favor.
As they were coming out by the West Gate, a man in plain clothes came up and said: "Which of you gentlemen is Master Ximen, the law officer from Shandong?"
Ben the Fourth asked the man who he was.
"I am from Chamberlain He, the Bailiff of the Imperial Palace. He would like to speak to Master Ximen."
The words were hardly out of his mouth before a eunuch, wearing a scarlet robe embroidered with dragons, a ceremonial hat, and black boots, came out upon the Imperial roadway and said: "Greetings, my lord Ximen."
Ximen Qing left Magistrate Xia. The eunuch took him by the hand and led him to a place apart. The eunuch bowed and Ximen knelt down to make a reverence in return.

"You do not know me, my Lord," the eunuch said, "I am He, the Bailiff of the Imperial Palace, and the Chamberlain of his Majesty's fourth lady. Recently, when I had completed my service, his Majesty was graciously pleased to appoint my nephew, He Yongshou, Vice Captain and Deputy Magistrate in your district of Qinghe. He will be your colleague."
"I must apologize for not recognizing your Excellency," Ximen Qing said. He bowed again. "This is a prohibited place and I cannot salute you here in a manner befitting your dignity. I trust you will allow me to visit you in your own palace."
They sat down and a servant brought tea. A food box was opened and many delicacies were set upon a table. Cups and chopsticks were brought.
"We will not use the small cups," the eunuch said, "I know you have just come from the Court, and you must be feeling cold. Besides, I have made such meager preparation for you, that it would not be right. Such food as this will only give you an appetite."
"I must not put you to any trouble," Ximen said.
Eunuch He filled a large cup and offered it to Ximen Qing.
"Since you are so gracious," Ximen said, "I must accept it, but I have to call upon a number of other officers, and I fear my face will be unbecomingly red."
"Oh, a cup or two to keep out the cold will not do you any harm. My nephew is very young," the eunuch continued, "He knows nothing of the law. I shall consider it a favor to myself if you will teach him whatever is necessary for him to know."
"Your Excellency," Ximen said, "pray do not be formal with me. Your nephew may be young, but I have no doubt that, having been brought up in so exalted a household, he is extremely intelligent."
"That is very kind of you. But the proverb says: Though we keep learning to the end of our days, we still know very little. The things one should know are as many as the hairs on an ox. Even Confucius was only able to acquire a legful. I am afraid he is sure to make mistakes, and I hope you will correct him."
"At your Excellency's service," Ximen Qing said. "Will you be good enough to tell me where your palace is situated, that I may come and call upon you?"
"My humble dwelling is in the Wenhuafang, east of the Bridge of the Heavenly River. There are two lions outside the door. We use them as mounting blocks. Tell me where you are staying, and I will send someone to call on you."
"Secretary Cui has been good enough to give me a room," Ximen Qing told him.
He drank a large cup of wine and rose. Eunuch He took him to the gate. "Do not forget what I have said," the eunuch said. "Perhaps you will wait for my nephew and get your commissions together."
"Certainly," Ximen said.
He left the palace and went to the Ministry of War, where he found Xia. They went together to pay their respects to the officials of the Ministry. When they came to the office of their own regiment, they went to call upon Grand Marshal Zhu. They handed in their records of service and then visited the Military Secretary and other officials.
It was now late in the afternoon. Xia changed his clothes, put on the robes of his new office, and sent in his card to the Grand Marshal. Zhu would not allow him to kowtow. Xia reported the date upon which he would enter upon his duties and came away. Ximen Qing was waiting for him. Ximen hesitated to ride side by side with Xia any longer. He asked him to mount his horse first, but Xia insisted that they should go together as before. Ximen kept addressing him as 'Sir' and 'My Lord' till Xia said: "Siquan, you and I have always been colleagues. Why do you speak to me in this formal way?"
"You are of higher rank now, and it is right that I should. Now that your Lordship has attained this high position, you will not be returning to Shandong, I suppose. When will you bring your family here?"
"I would have brought them with me, but there is nobody to look after my house," Xia said. "I think I shall stay with relatives here and send for my family next year. Perhaps you will be good enough to keep an eye on them. If you can find anyone who will buy my house, I hope you will sell it for me. I shall be glad to make it worth your while."
"How much is your house worth?" Ximen asked.
"I paid one thousand three hundred taels for it," Xia said. "Then I built another wing, and that cost me two hundred taels more. I am prepared to sell it for what it cost."
They went back to Secretary Cui's house. Wang Jing reported that Master He had been to call upon Ximen. "I told him," the boy said, "that you were not yet back from the Ministry. He asked me to present his compliments to his Lordship Xia, and left two cards. A man came and brought two rolls of silk from him."
Ximen Qing told Wang Jing to get two rolls of Nanjing five-colored silk, and wrote a card to go with them. He had something to eat as quickly as possible and hastened to the eunuch's house. When he entered the great hall, Captain He came out to greet him. The young man was dressed in black ceremonial hat and boots. He seemed not more than twenty years old and looked so handsome that one might have thought his face was powdered and his lips rouged. He saluted Ximen Qing modestly yet with the utmost grace.
Ximen told Daian to bring in the presents. "I hear that you have been good enough to call upon me and to bring me most precious gifts," he said. "I am sorry I was not there to receive you. This morning, his Excellency your uncle was kind enough to entertain me at the palace. I am grateful to him."
Captain He made a reverence. "I have been made an officer of the lowest grade," he said, "and count myself supremely fortunate to have been appointed to your office. I hope to benefit by your instruction."
They continued to exchange compliments.
"My lord," Captain He said, "have you called upon the Grand Marshal?"
"Yes," Ximen Qing said. "I went to the Ministry immediately after leaving his Excellency, your uncle. I went to our headquarters, handed in my record of service and called on the officers there. When I came away, it was my intention to call upon you. I never dreamed you would call on me first."
"Did you go to the Palace with his Lordship Xia?"
"Yes," Ximen Qing said. "We went together to the court, but as he has been appointed to the Imperial Escort, when we called at the Ministry, we handed in our papers and sent in our cards separately."
"Do we send presents to the Minister, or wait till we receive our commissions?" Captain He said.
"My kinsman tells me," Ximen Qing said, "that we should send our presents first. Then the Marshal will present us at court, and afterwards we shall get out commissions."
"In that case," He said, "we had better send our presents tomorrow morning."
They discussed the question of a suitable present. Captain He decided to offer two rolls of silk and a jade buckle. Ximen Qing would offer a roll of scarlet satin, a roll of black silk and a gold ring inlaid with jade. Each would offer four jars of Jinhua wine in addition. They arranged to meet outside the Marshal's house. They had tea, and Ximen Qing took leave of his new colleague and went home. He said nothing to Xia of the arrangements he had made.
The next morning, Ximen Qing went to Captain He's place. He had prepared an excellent meal, and Ximen Qing and his servants were admirably provided for. Ben the Fourth and He's servants were given charge of the presents, and Ximen Qing and He Yongshou went together to the Marshal's house.
Marshal Zhu was not at home. Officials of every grade were waiting with their presents in a crowd outside the gate. Captain He and Ximen Qing dismounted and went into a nearby house, whose master they knew. They sent a man to watch for the Minister's return. They waited until the afternoon. Then the man came running to say that the Marshal was coming back from the sacrifice by the South Gate. Already, he said, orders were being given to clear the way for him.
Soon afterwards, the man came again. "The Marshal has reached the Bridge of the Heavenly River," he said. There came an escort of officials and soldiers, with banners and weapons. They marched in pairs, shouting. Then, still a long way off, Ximen and his companion could see Marshal Zhu. He was sitting in a sedan chair carried by eight footmen; another eight footmen followed. He was wearing a ceremonial hat and a scarlet gown; a piece of white jade formed the clasp of his girdle. He wore a golden fish, the insignia of his office, and looked extremely dignified.
The escort reached the gate and halted. Then they turned inwards to form a guard. There was perfect silence among the onlookers. No one dared even to cough. The officers came forward to greet the Grand Marshal and knelt on the ground before him. As the sedan chair approached, the command was given to stand up, and the officers immediately obeyed. The sound of their acclamations reached the skies.
Suddenly there came from the east the strains of music. The principal officers in the Minister's department had arranged for this in honor of the exalted rank that had been conferred upon him by the Emperor's recent decree, and also to celebrate his son's entry into official life.
When the Minister got down from his sedan chair, the music stopped. The officers were preparing to present themselves to him when, suddenly, a messenger in black clothes, carrying two red cards, rushed forward and handed the cards to another official. "Their Excellencies, Chang of the Board of Rites and Vice Chancellor Cai, are here." The man went into the house to give warning to his master. Then, in two sedan chairs, came Zhang Bangchang and Cai Yu. They were both wearing scarlet ceremonial robes with peacocks embroidered upon them. One had a buckle of rhinoceros horn upon his girdle, the other, one of gold.
Following them came Wang Zudao, President of the Board of Civil Service, with Han Lü the Minister of the Left, and Yin Jing, the Minister of the Right. Marshal Zhu offered them tea, and they came away at once.
Then came the Duke of Xiguo, a kinsman of the Imperial House, the President of the Privy Council, Zheng Juzhong, and the Master of the Household, the Imperial Son-in-law, Wang Jinqing. They all wore girdles with jade buckles. Zheng rode in a sedan chair, but the others were on horseback.
When they had gone, the six officers of the Marshal's own department paid their respects to him. First came the Commander-in-chief of the troops at the Capital, Sun Rong; then, in order, Liang Yinglong, Commissioner of Police; and the others, all wearing red cloaks and fur hats. Sun Rong had a jade buckle to his girdle by virtue of his rank, but the rest wore gold buckles. They all brought presents.
There was music within the palace as the generals, wearing golden flowers, offered wine to the Grand Marshal. There was music in the courtyard while the banquet proceeded within. When they had offered wine, the generals sat down. Five singers came in, and to the accompaniment of lute and zither, sang a song in celebration of the occasion, beating time with ivory castanets.
When the wine had been passed three times, the song ended. The six generals rose and the Grand Marshal went with them as far as the gate. Then he returned to the hall, and the music died away. A servant told him that many officers wished to see him. He ordered a great table to be brought and set in the middle of the hall.
"Let the noblemen of the Court and those of high family be first admitted," he commanded.
They came in, and retired again immediately. Then all the officers of his own department were introduced. They came with their cards, and these were handed to him. Then came the law officers of the thirteen provinces in relays. Ximen Qing and Captain He were in the fifth party. Their presents were brought in, and an attendant took the list and placed it on the table. They came in and stood at the foot of the steps waiting for their names to be announced. While they waited, Ximen looked up and admired the magnificent proportions of the great hall and the great red sign with four characters upon it that had been written by the Emperor's own hand. Their names were called and the two men went forward, bowed, knelt down and waited.
"Why have you two gentlemen troubled the venerable chamberlain to send me a present?" the Grand Marshal said. He told his servants to take their gifts. "Do your duty and I will treat you justly," he told them. "Stay until you have been to the Court and, afterwards, come to my Ministry for your papers."
The 2 men acknowledged the command the Marshal gave them. Then the attendants warned them to withdraw and they went out by a door on the left. As they passed through the gateway, Ben the 4 th and the other servants were carrying out the empty boxes. They were about to go away when a man carrying a red card, galloped towards them. "Their Excellencies Wang and Gao are coming," he cried as he passed. Ximen Qing and Captain He went into a house to watch the 2 noblemen pass. Soldiers cleared the way. Then came Wang Hua, Duke of Longxi, Commander of the Royal Guard, and Marshal Gao Qiu. They rode in sedan chairs and wore red jade buckles on their girdles. The officers rushed out of the palace in a crowd and Ximen Qing and Captain He lost sight of the 2 dignitaries. They went to a quiet place, took their horses from the servants, and rode home.

## 094

### Li P'ing-erh Appears in a Dream in Battalion Commander Ho's House; The Judicial Commissioners Present their Memorials at the Audience & the Son of Heaven

Let me temporarily cease strumming the zither
that rests upon my knee;
In order to idly rehearse the past events that
are recorded in history.
One cannot but admire the worthy rulers who are
both diligent and thrifty;
While deeply sorrowing at the mediocre monarchs
who indulge in debauchery.
Those who maintain peace and stability seek out
men of worth and wisdom;
While those who only engender chaos fraternize
with sycophantic ministers.
If one exposes the many factors that result in
either success or failure;
As with "lofty mountains and flowing waters,"[1]
the attuned will understand.[2]

when Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou arrived back on the main thoroughfare, Ho Yung-shou first sent someone to report to Eunuch Director Ho Hsin and then invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to come back to their home for a meal. Hsi-men Ch'ing repeatedly demurred, but Ho Yung-shou had one of his attendants take hold of his horse's bit with his hand, while he said to him, "Your pupil has another matter which he needs to discuss with you."
Thereupon, they proceeded to ride side by side until they dismounted in front of Ho Hsin's house, while Pen the Fourth and the carriers of the empty gift boxes went straight back to the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü.
It so happens that Ho Yung-shou had made prior arrangements for a lavish feast that was awaiting them at his home. When they entered the reception hall, behold:
Screens display their peacock's tails,
Cushions conceal their hibiscus blossoms.
Animal-shaped briquettes are smoldering,
Amid the fragrance from a golden brazier.
In the middle of the hall, at the upper end of the room, there was a single table setting, with another one facing it below, and yet another set up on the eastern side.
Platters are piled with exotic fruits,
Blossoms are displayed in golden vases.
The tables and chairs are spic-and-span,[3]
The standing screens are neatly arrayed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired, "Who is my colleague entertaining today?"
"My uncle, the eunuch director, has taken the day off," Ho Yung-shou replied, "and would like to entertain my colleague with a meal."
"For you to put yourself to such trouble on my behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is scarcely fitting among colleagues."
Ho Yung-shou laughed, saying, "It was my uncle's idea to prepare this meager repast, in the hope that you would condescend to offer me the benefit of your instruction."
After they had consumed a serving of tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked when he could pay his respects to the old gentleman.
"My uncle will be here any minute now," replied Ho Yung-shou.
It was not long before Eunuch Director Ho Hsin came out from the rear of the residence. He was wearing a python robe of green velvet, an official hat, black boots, and a jeweled chatelaine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing prostrated himself preparatory to kowtowing four times as a sign of respect, saying as he did so, "Pray accept my obeisance," but Eunuch Director Ho Hsin demurred, saying, "That will never do."
"Your pupil and your nephew Ho Yung-shou are colleagues of a younger generation," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whereas you, venerable sir:
Are exalted in both age and virtue,
and serve as a prominent eunuch. It is only appropriate that you should accept my obeisance."
They dickered politely for a while before Ho Hsin agreed to accept a half kowtow from him, after which, he ushered Hsi-men Ch'ing to the seat of honor, while he prepared to take the position of host, and indicated to Ho Yung-shou that he should occupy the place on the side.
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that will never do. Since your nephew and I are colleagues, how can he be relegated to the side? If it were just a case of you and your nephew, it might be all right, but for your pupil to occupy such a preferential position would never do."
Ho Hsin was greatly pleased by this and said, "Your Honor is well-versed in etiquette. In that case, I'll presume to take the grand secretary's position adjacent to the throne and allow my nephew, the new official, to play the role of host vis-à-vis Your Honor."
"Such an arrangement," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "would be more comfortable for your pupil."
Thereupon, they all exchanged the customary amenities and sat down.
Ho Hsin ordered, "Attendants, add some new charcoal to the brazier. The weather's rather cold today."
Before long, the servants brought in a package of finely polished charcoal for interior heating purposes and dumped it into the four-cornered brazier of yellow brass that stood in the center of the room. They also let down the translucent, oilpaper, heat-holding drapes at the door of the room, which let in the flickering sunlight so that everything was brightly illuminated.
"Your Honor," said Ho Hsin, "pray divest yourself of your formal outer garments."
"Your pupil doesn't have anything appropriate on underneath," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send a servant to fetch something from my lodgings."

"There's no need for you to send for anything," said Ho Hsin.
Then, turning to his attendants, he told them to take Hsi-men Ch'ing's outer garments and said, "Fetch that green velvet flying fish python robe[4] that I've been wearing for His Honor to put on."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "That is part of your official regalia, venerable sir. How could your pupil presume to wear it?"
"Go ahead and put it on, Your Honor," said Ho Hsin. "What is there to be afraid of? The other day the Lord of Ten Thousand Years bestowed a regular python robe on me, so I will no longer be wearing it. In fact, I will donate it to Your Honor to wear over your other clothes."
It was not long before the attendants came out with it. Hsi-men Ch'ing unfastened his girdle and took off his round-collared gown, handing it over to Tai-an. He then put on the flying fish python robe and bowed to Ho Hsin in order to express his thanks. He went on to ask Ho Yung-shou to take off his outer clothing in order to keep him company. At this point, another serving of tea was brought out, and they drank it together.
Ho Hsin then said, "Have the household musicians come out."
It so happens that he maintained a troupe of twelve household musicians who had been taught to perform on musical instruments. Led by their two instructors, they duly came out and kowtowed to the company. Ho Hsin ordered that the bronze gong and bronze drum be brought out and set up at the lower end of the hall, and the musical performance began. Truly:
The sound shakes the cloudy empyrean;
The tones startle both fish and birds.
After this prelude, the attendants served the feast and they were invited to take their places.
Eunuch Director Ho Hsin prepared to offer a drink to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he hastily protested, saying, "Venerable sir, please make yourself easy. My colleague can do the honors on your behalf. It will suffice merely to provide the goblet and chopsticks at my place."
"I insist on offering Your Honor a drink," said Ho Hsin. "This newly appointed official from my household:
Upon first entering the bulrushes,
Has no way of gauging their depth.[5]
It is my fervent hope that, in all things, Your Honor will do what you can to uphold his interests. That would be most gratifying."
"Venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how can you talk that way? As the saying goes:
The fellow feeling between colleagues endures
for three generations.
Your pupil is also much indebted to your diffracted radiance. How could we not:
Do our best to help each other out?"[6]
"Well said! Well said!" responded Ho Hsin. "It is, indeed, our duty to:
Cooperate in the ruler's service,
By coming to each other's support."
Hsi-men Ch'ing did not wait for Ho Hsin to hand him the cup but went forward to accept it and put it down at his place. He then responded by offering two cups in return, which he put down at the places of Ho Yung-shou and Ho Hsin. After they had all bowed to each other, they sat down.
When the musical prelude was completed, three of the household musicians, together with their two instructors, came forward with their:
Silver psaltery, ivory clappers,
Three-string guitar, and *p'i-p'a*,
and performed the song suite in the Cheng-kung mode that begins with the tune "Decorous and Pretty."[7]
The Crystal Palace,
Mermaid silk drapes;
Moonlight illumines the Crystal Palace,
Cold penetrates the mermaid silk drapes.
It is late at night, and We are unable to sleep
upon Our dragon couch.
Leaving the palace gate, We venture out onto the
streets of the capital,
Upon which windblown snow is falling.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
It is like the flitter of fluttering butterfly wings;
It resembles the tumbling of carefree willow catkins.
Frozen flakes dance, as the swirling wind
blows them about;
Treading fragments of alabaster, Our steps
are impulsive.
Snow covers the sleeves of Our white scholar's gown;
The wind rumples Our commoner's black silk skullcap.
Suddenly looking back, We gaze fixedly on the phoenix
towers of the palace;
Utterly unable to discern the mandarin ducks of azure
vitreous tile on the eaves.
In no time at all, the nine-gated palace halls appear
to be paved with silver;
In half an instant, the infinite expanse of the world[8]
seems mantled in jade;
It looks just as though the entire realm is completely
enveloped in powder.
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"
We see that the double doors of the minister's mansion
are locked tight as an iron bucket.
And proceed to give a resounding blow to the rings of
the two animal-head-shaped knockers.
The person knocking at your gate is Chao the Elder, who
resides in front of the Myriad Years Mount.[9]
Is your master entertaining anyone in his chamber?
So, he's reading works of literature by lamplight.
We have come expressly to hear him explicate them.
TO THE TUNE "LAZYBONES"
Braving the cold wind and enduring the frozen snow,
We have come to pay him a visit.
There are some confidential matters that We urgently
feel the need to discuss with him.
What are you so flustered about, being as you are
a sophisticated public servant?
You can skip the obeisance, Our grand councilor, who
has attracted so many worthies.
This is the residence of one of the Three Dukes, who
presides over the vessels of state;
Not the abode of one who has taken the tonsure, such
as Tripitaka[10] of the T'ang dynasty.
We will take this proffered seat in order to listen
to your expounding of the classics.
But, as for your servant, We don't wish to have him
about our ears offering more tea.
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"
We will not emulate Emperor Kao-tsu of the Han dynasty
who resided in the Wei-yang Palace;[11]
Nor the T'ang dynasty Son of Heaven who spent the night
sleeping in the Chin-yang Palace,[12]
Merely anxious to share the gilded phoenix pillow, when
the kingfisher-hued quilt felt chilly.[13]
We are only interested in learning about Fu Yüeh;[14]
Rather than dreaming of the meeting at Kao-t'ang.
This is the proper business of anyone who aspires to
the position of a ruler.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
Since We occupy the unique position of the ruler
over all within the Four Seas,
We must devote Ourself to upholding the Three Bonds
and observing the Five Constants.[15]
In the years of Our youth, We dedicated Ourself to
mastering the spear and quarterstaff;
But Our only regret is that We failed to penetrate
the gates of the school of Confucius.
How many chapters are there in the *Book of Documents*?
How many poems in all are there in the *Book of Songs*?
Through the explication of the *Book of Rites*, one
can learn modesty and accommodation;
By discussion of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one
can discern the lessons of the past.
We would learn from the examples of the rulers Yü, T'ang,
Wen, and Wu;[16] in emulating Yao and Shun;[17]
You live up to Fang Hsüan-ling, Tu Ju-hui, Hsiao Ho, and
Ts'ao Shen,[18] who helped found the Han and T'ang.
We depend upon you to undertake responsibility for the
ministerial task of reconciling yin and yang.
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"
You maintain that by relying on *The Analects of Confucius*
one may establish one's authority at court;

And that even half of that text may suffice to gain control
over the mountains and rivers of the realm.[19]
The way of the Sage is comparable to that of Heaven itself,
in that it is immeasurable in extent.
To listen to your explication of the classics
in front of the crimson curtain,[20]
Is certainly superior to a banquet at which the
host provides singing girls in red.[21]
By the time your discourse is over, Our spirit is
purified and Our energy enhanced.[22]
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
On silver candlesticks the painted candles are bright;
From golden censers waft calligraphic fumes of incense.
We ought not to put Our elder brother to the trouble
of pouring the vintage wine himself;
And it is hardly necessary for Our sister-in-law to
offer Us a goblet of "sunset clouds."
You say that "A wife who has shared one's poverty-
stricken fare must never be abandoned";
We too remember that "The friends one makes while
poor and mean must never be forgotten."[23]
As the sayings go, "Outer strength is no match for
inner strength";[24]
"If a wife is worthy, her husband will be able to
avoid calamity."[25]
Our relationship with you resembles that between
T'ai-chia and I Yin;[26]
Your union with your wife is like that of Liang
Hung and Meng Kuang.[27]
We only hope that your good fortune and longevity
will be prolonged.[28]
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"
Whenever We try to sleep, We cannot avoid thinking of
early rulers and later rulers;
No sooner do Our eyes close than we are obsessed with
why states rise and states fall.
For this reason, by day and by night We cannot sleep,[29]
pondering a myriad courses of action.
It is not a case of "When happy one dislikes
the shortness of the night";
Nor an instance of "When lonely one hates it
that the watches are so long."[30]
There are so many things to feel worried about.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
We worry about soldiers at their posts who
lack adequate clothing;
We worry about families that lack sufficient
grain for the next day;[31]
We worry about the poor who sleep by day in
their secluded alleys;
We worry about the students who doze at night
before unheated windows;
We worry about resentful wives and husbands
complaining of the cold;
We worry about the carters forced to drive
a myriad li in search of trade;
We worry about the boatmen on the rivers,
threatened by wind and waves;
We worry about the starving children who
cry out for their mothers;
We worry about the worthy commoners who
lack a means of livelihood;
We worry about those who hasten to the
battle in their coats of mail.
The mention of these things cannot but
cause Us to sigh with sorrow.
TO THE TUNE "THE LUCKY GRADUATE"?
Worry about the hardships of the people disrupts
Our rest and racks Our brains;[32]
Concern for the size of the empire occupies Our
thoughts in sleep and in dreams.
At present, T'ai-yüan prefecture to the north is
still ruled by the House of Liu.[33]
We intend to temporarily abandon the vermilion
phoenix gates of Our palace;
Personally take Our place within the blue-green
oiled curtains of Our carriage;
And initiate Our campaign by taking the city of
Shang-tang in Ho-tung province.
TO THE TUNE "PLAYING WITH A BROCADE BALL"
You speak of the rulers Ch'ien Ch'u of Wu-Yüeh[34]
and Li Yü of the Southern T'ang;[35]
As well as Liu Ch'ang of the Southern Han[36]
and Meng Ch'ang of the Later Shu.[37]
None of them exercises benevolent rule, causing
their citizenry to lose hope;[38]
When they practice tyranny, they bring calamity
down upon their populations.
Whom should We depute to pacify Szechwan
in the West;
Whom should we direct to restore order to
the Two-Kuang?
The conquest of the kingdom of Wu-yüeh will
require a general of renown;
The subjugation of Chiang-nan will call for
someone who is loyal and true.
Extending the borders of the realm will require someone
like a pillar of white jade holding up the sky;[39]
Setting the universe to rights will demand an individual
like a bridge of yellow gold spanning the sea.[40]
Pray give it your most careful consideration.
TO THE TUNE "TAKING OFF THE COTTON GOWN"[41]
In order to take Chin-ling you must speedily
cross the Yangtze River.[42]
When you get to Ch'ien-t'ang you must pacify
that area of the country.[43]
In Szechwan to the west you must not be daunted by
the state of the cliffside roadways;[44]
In the territories of the southern barbarians you
must confront the poisonous miasmas.[45]
TO THE TUNE "EXHILARATED BY PEACE"
In battle you must disperse the tiger-and-wolf-like foe;
Personally experiencing the hardships of wind and frost.
You must use *The Six Tactics* and *The Three Strategies*[46]
in order to stabilize the frontiers,
While holding the seals of supreme military commanders.
We hope that when you don your coats of mail, thus
enhancing your prowess;
Your horses, flaunting their jade bridles, will be
impossible to obstruct;

And the drumbeat of whips on your golden stirrups[47]
will proclaim victory,
As you lead your armies in triumph back to Pien-liang.
PARACODA[48]
Anyone who complies with Heaven's will; understands
Heaven's principles; and is prepared to
forsake evil and return to the true,[49]
should be spared.
Anyone who imposes a tyrannical regime; opposes the
imperial forces; and tries to show off
his prowess and demonstrate his might,[50]
must be destroyed.
Do not rob the people of their wealth;[51]
Do not exterminate the people's lives;[52]
Do not debauch the people's womenfolk;
Do not set fire to the people's homes.
Treat your men and horses with consideration,
combining mercy and justice;
See that they are properly paid and fed, with
clear rewards and punishments.
Protect the city walls and moats, pursue the
rebels, and grant them amnesty.
Along the highways, put up posters in order
to help pacify the populace;
Initiate welfare programs where needed, and
open up the public granaries.
CODA
We await the day when, in formal attire and with respectful
mien, We may proceed to the Ling-yen Pavilion[53]
and have the portraits of you meritorious
officials publicly displayed.
You must not fail to be worthy of having your names engraved
on metal and stone, and inscribed on bells and
tripods, so that the fragrance of your fame
may be perpetuated in history.
Your use of your forces displays good generalship;
You possess strategic ability and possess courage.
By gazing upward to contemplate astronomical phenomena[54]
you may predict events from the stars;
By gazing downward to examine the mountains and rivers
you may evaluate the lay of the land.
In proceeding to battle you must first ascertain
which of the nine terrains is relevant;[55]
In determining the outcome of a conflict you must
rely on the five types of secret agents.[56]
In daylight battles you must employ
flags and pennants;
In nighttime battles you must deploy
fires and drums.[57]
In infantry battles you must use smoke screens
to disguise your deployments;
In naval conflicts you must adjust to the wind
in using your sails and oars.
When irregular and regular tactics abet each other,[58]
your military strength is enhanced;
When benevolence and wisdom are practiced together,
no amount of valor can resist them.
We delegate Our authority to you generals, so that
you may pacify the four quarters;
To second-guess our supreme commanders while seated
on the throne would invite chaos.
We hope you will send urgent memorials announcing
your achievements on the frontier;
So we may all rejoice at the attainment of peace
as you head back for the capital.
Before We begin to allot land and bestow fiefdoms[59]
in granting you titles of nobility,
We will first see to it that the troops under your
various commands are amply rewarded.[60]
When the household musicians had finished performing the song suite, they withdrew. After:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Two main courses had been served,
it gradually grew toward evening, and the lamps were lighted.
Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned Tai-an and instructed him to offer gratuities to the chef and the various musicians who had performed for them and then got up to go, saying, "Your pupil has imposed upon your hospitality all day long. It is time for me to take my leave."
But the venerable eunuch was unwilling to let him go, saying, "The reason I took the day off, today, was that I wanted to benefit from Your Honor's instruction. I haven't provided anything special in the way of entertainment, but only an opportunity for us to talk together. I fear Your Honor may still be hungry."
"Having just enjoyed the luxurious repast that you provided, venerable sir," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how can you possibly suggest that I should still be hungry? Your pupil merely needs to return to his lodgings to get some rest. Tomorrow morning, I must join your nephew in reporting to the Ministry of War in order to receive our orders of appointment and register our names."
"In that case," responded Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, "there is no need for Your Honor to return to your lodgings. You can spend the night here at my place, which will make it more convenient for you and the newly appointed official from my household to go take care of your business in the morning. May I venture to ask, where are you staying at present?"
"Your pupil," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is lodging for the time being in the home of my colleague Hsia Yen-ling's relative Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, and all of my luggage is there."
"That's no problem," said Ho Hsin. "You Honor might just as well send someone to go fetch your luggage and bring it here, where I can put you up for a few days. How would that be? In my back garden there are several small rooms that are pleasantly secluded. If you agree to this proposal, it will make it more convenient for you and my nephew to conduct your business. That would be a better arrangement than if you stay somewhere else, since you'll both be in the same place."
"To stay here would be fine by me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "My only fear is that Hsia Yen-ling might take it amiss and think that your pupil is slighting him."
"In this day and age," responded Ho Hsin, "as the saying goes:
If one's colleague forfeits his office in the morning,
One is no longer obliged to bow to him in the evening.[61]
The yamen is just like a puppet theater. Though you were initially a colleague of his, now that the previous official has left, his replacement is ready to:
Assume his position and carry out his duties.[62]
He no longer has anything to do with it. If he were to interpret it that way, it would only show how little he understands the way of the world. Today, I am determined to spend the evening with Your Honor and simply won't let you go."
He then called for his attendants and ordered them, "Have some tables set up forthwith in the room below, and see to it that the servants of His Honor Hsi-men are provided with food and wine. Afterwards, send some people from our household to accompany them in going to bring his luggage back here. Also, issue instructions to have the chamber in the west courtyard in the back garden swept clean and provided with bedding. And light some charcoal under the k'ang."
From in the hall a single call;
Below the steps a hundred yeps.
The attendants assented obsequiously and set out about their tasks.
"That is extremely kind of you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but your pupil is still concerned lest he offend Hsia Yen-ling."
"Don't talk such rot!" said Ho Hsin. "He no longer serves in your yamen.
He who occupies no post in an office,
Has no right to discuss its policies.[63]
He is now responsible for the depot in which the imperial equipage is stored and no longer has any say with regard to the provincial judicial commissions. He is in no position to feel offended by you."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he ordered that, after Tai-an and the grooms tending the horses had been provided with food and wine, several soldiers should also be dispatched, equipped with ropes and carrying poles, to proceed to the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü and bring back Hsi-men Ch'ing's luggage.
Ho Hsin then went on to say, "There is another favor I would like to ask of Your Honor. When my nephew, the newly appointed official, arrives at his place of office, I hope that Your Honor will consent to help him find a house to live in, so that it will be convenient for him to send for his dependents later on. I'll have him accompany Your Honor on your way back, and then, after he has found a home, I'll arrange to send his dependents off to join him. There are not a lot of them, but, including several families of servants, there will be twenty or thirty persons, in all."
"When your nephew is gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will there be to look after this house of yours, venerable sir?"
"There are two adopted nephews in my household," said Ho Hsin. "The second one, whose name is Ho Yung-fu, is currently residing on my country estate. I'll ask him to come and reside here."
"Venerable sir," asked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how much silver are you willing to spend on a place for your nephew?"
"It will probably require a place costing more than a thousand taels of silver to accommodate them all," responded Ho Hsin.
"My colleague Hsia Yen-ling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "now that he has a capital appointment, will not be going back to Ch'ing-ho and will have to dispose of the house he owns there. Venerable sir, why don't you purchase that place of his in order to provide a house for your nephew? That would be a good move, since it would:
Accomplish two objectives with a single act.
His house has a fifty-four-foot-wide frontage and five interior courtyards, receding along a vertical axis. Inside the ceremonial gate there is a large reception hall with vaulted stag's head roofs over the galleries connecting it to the anterooms on either side of the courtyard. In the rear there are located residential quarters, ornamental pavilions, and a host of other rooms on all sides, with passageways leading between them. It is more than spacious enough to accommodate your nephew."
"What price does he expect to get for it?" asked Ho Hsin.
"He has told me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that he originally paid twelve hundred taels for it, and that he has since added two flat-roofed rooms to the rear, and erected an ornamental pavilion. However, if you would like to acquire it, venerable sir, he would probably let you have it for whatever you are prepared to offer."
"I'm putting the matter in Your Honor's hands," said Ho Hsin. "Whatever Your Honor proposes will be all right with me. Since I am at home today, why don't you send someone to speak to him and ask for the loan of the original deed of sale, so that I can take a look at it? It would be a rare stroke of luck to succeed in locating a house so that my nephew will have a place to stay when he assumes his new office."
Before long, whom should they see but Tai-an and the other servants who came back to report that they had fetched the luggage.
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Did Pen the Fourth and Wang Ching come back with you or not?"
"Wang Ching is already here, having overseen the transport of the trunks of clothing and other luggage," reported Tai-an. "The sedan chair is still there, and Pen the Fourth remained to look after it."

Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon:
Whispered into his ear in a low voice,
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
saying, "Take my calling card and request that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling loan me the original deed of sale for that place of his, so that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin can examine it; and bring Pen the Fourth back with you."
Tai-an assented and set off on this errand.
It was not long before Pen the Fourth, wearing black livery and a commoner's informal skullcap, came back with Tai-an, who handed the deed of sale to Hsi-men Ch'ing and reported, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling responded to your request by saying, 'Since it is the venerable eunuch Ho Hsin who is interested in my place, how can I put a price on it?' This is the original deed of sale that I have brought back with me. He also said that he had spent a good deal of money on making improvements to the property, but that he would go along with whatever Your Honor proposes."
Hsi-men Ch'ing handed the original deed of sale to Ho Hsin, who read it over and saw that the purchase price was stated to be twelve hundred taels.
"I imagine he must have resided in this house for some years by now," he said, "so the interior can hardly help showing some signs of wear and tear, which would offset whatever he may have spent on improvements. Out of respect for Your Honor, however, I am willing to invest in the property on my nephew's behalf and am prepared to pay the original purchase price."
On hearing this, Pen the Fourth hastily knelt down in front of him and said, "What Your Honor proposes is appropriate. It has always been true that:
You must be ready to spend lavishly,
In order to acquire a good property.
In a thousand years a dwelling may have
a hundred owners;[64]
But each time it is refurbished it will
be as good as new."[65]
When Eunuch Director Ho Hsin heard these words, he was utterly captivated and exclaimed, "Where do you come from? This character certainly has a way with words. As the saying goes:
Those who would accomplish great things,
do not balk at petty outlays.[66]
What he says is right enough. What is his name?"
"He is one of my managers," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and he is called Pen the Fourth."
"Well then," Ho Hsin said to him, "since we don't yet have an intermediary, you can serve as our middleman, and go request a deed of sale on my behalf. Since today is a propitious day for such a transaction, I might as well proceed to weigh out the silver for him forthwith."
"It's already late right now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well wait until tomorrow."
"At the fifth watch I have to report for early duty in the palace," explained Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, "and tomorrow is the day of the great audience. I might as well wrap the matter up by turning the silver over to him today and thereby conclude the matter."
"At what time will the imperial equipage leave the palace tomorrow?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"The imperial equipage will leave the palace in order to proceed to the Altar of Heaven at 11:00 tonight," said Ho Hsin. "The Suburban Sacrifice should be over by 1:00 AM at the end of the third watch. By 4:30 AM the imperial equipage will have returned to the palace for the serving of a morning meal, after which the Emperor will emerge to preside over the audience in the main hall of the palace, and receive the congratulations of the assembled officials. The various bureaucratic offices of the entire empire will all submit memorials in celebration of the winter solstice. On the following day, a banquet will be held for the principal civil and military officials of the capital to celebrate the completion of the ceremony. Since the two of you are outer officials, serving in the provinces, once you have submitted your memorials at the great audience, there will be nothing more for you to do."
When he had finished speaking, Ho Hsin instructed his nephew Ho Yung-shou, the newly appointed battalion commander, to go back to the interior of the residence and bring out twenty-four large silver ingots weighing fifty taels apiece, and put them in food boxes for carrying. He then deputed two household servants to accompany Pen the Fourth and Tai-an in escorting them to Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü's house and delivering them to Hsia Yen-ling.
When Hsia Yen-ling saw that they had brought the silver for him, he was utterly delighted and immediately wrote out a deed of sale in his own hand and turned it over to Pen the Fourth and his companions. When they took this back and delivered it to Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, he was:
Unable to contain his delight,
and rewarded Pen the Fourth with ten taels of silver, and Tai-an and Wang Ching with three taels each.
"They're only youngsters," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You ought not to reward them so lavishly."
"I'm just offhandedly giving them enough with which to buy something to eat," responded Ho Hsin.
The three recipients kowtowed to him in gratitude, and Ho Hsin ordered that they also be provided with food and wine.
He then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and bowed twice, saying, "This outcome is entirely due to Your Honor's diffracted radiance."
"Whoever heard of such a thing?" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It is really owing to your golden reputation."
Ho Hsin went on to say, "I hope that Your Honor will speak to Hsia Yen-ling and urge him to vacate that place of his as soon as convenient, so that my nephew's dependents can prepare for their departure."
"Your pupil will certainly speak to him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and urge him to vacate the premises as soon as possible. My new colleague, your nephew, when he first arrives, can stay temporarily in the residential quarters of the yamen for a few days, until Hsia Yen-ling's dependents have moved to the capital, and the place has been put in order. It will not be too late if my colleague's dependents delay their departure until then."
"It should be possible to carry out whatever renovations are necessary by the end of the New Year's celebrations," said Ho Hsin. "It would be best for my nephew's dependents to make their move at that time. It will not be convenient if they have to stay in the yamen for too long."
As their conversation continued, it was already the second watch of the night, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Venerable sir, let us say good night. Your pupil:
Cannot handle the effects of the drink."
Only then did Eunuch Director Ho Hsin consent to call it a night and retreat to his heated chamber in the rear of the house.
Meanwhile, Ho Yung-shou called for the household musicians to perform for them again and proceeded to play a game of pitch-pot with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Only after they had continued drinking for a while longer did they get up and go back to the rear garden.
The accommodation provided for Hsi-men Ch'ing consisted of a three-room studio ranged along the northern end of the garden, which was surrounded on all four sides by a whitewashed wall, and enhanced with terraces and kiosks, ornamental rock formations, potted miniature plants, flowers and trees. Inside the studio:
Crimson candles blazed on high;
Drapes enclosed layered quilts.
Brocaded curtains set off Japanese screens
decorated with gold tracery;
Zithers, books, tables, and mats enhanced
the air of elegant seclusion.
The kingfisher blinds hung low;
The furnishings were faultless.
On the stove, tea was steeping in a precious pot;
Within the censer, cakes of musk were smoldering.
Ho Yung-shou continued to make small talk with Hsi-men Ch'ing, and, sometime later, a servant lad served them with tea. Only then did Ho Yung-shou say good night and go back to his own quarters in the rear of the house. Hsi-men Ch'ing warmed himself at the stove for a while before he finally disposed of his headgear:
Took off his clothes and went to bed.[67]
Wang Ching and Tai-an helped him off with his boots and stockings, put out the lamps and candles, and prepared to sleep after laying out their bedding on a heated k'ang at the lower end of the room.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was somewhat inebriated. As he lay on the pillow, he observed that his quilts and mattresses were of satin and brocade, his bed curtains were of embroidered sable, and the bed itself was like a heated alcove decorated with gold tracery. As he lay under his quilt, he saw that:
The window was illuminated by moonlight,
and:
He tossed first this way and then that,
unable to get to sleep. After a while, as he listened to the steady dripping of the clepsydra and watched the quiet movements of the flower shadows, he became aware that the cold wind was rattling the papered window panes. His feeling of loneliness was exacerbated by the fact that he had been away from home for some time, and he was on the verge of inviting Wang Ching to come sleep with him.
All of a sudden, he heard the faint sound of a woman's voice outside the window and, hastily donning a robe and getting out of bed, slipped on his shoes and stockings and cautiously opened the door to see who it was. Lo and behold, it was Li P'ing-erh:
With misty locks and cloudy tresses,
Faintly made up, lovely and elegant.
A well-worn plain white gown veiled
her snow-white body;
Soft light-yellow stockings set off
her upturned shoe-tips.[68]
Lightly moving her lotus feet,
She appeared beneath the moon.
As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing saw her, he:
Took her into the room,[69]
Embraced her, and wept,[70]
saying, "Darling, what are you doing here?"
"I've come looking for you," said Li P'ing-erh, "in order to tell you that I've found a new home. I especially wanted to see you tonight because I'll be moving in before long."
"Where is this home of yours located?" Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired anxiously.
"It's not far away at all," replied Li P'ing-erh. "If you go out from here, it's located on Potter's Alley, off the east side of the main thoroughfare."
When they had finished speaking, she and Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Enfolded each other in a mutual embrace,[71]
Got into bed to play at clouds and rain,[72]
and experienced scarcely endurable transports of delight. Once it was over, she:
Adjusted her attire, redid her chignon, but
Hesitated reluctantly to part from him.[73]
Li P'ing-erh repeatedly enjoined Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "My Brother, be sure you remember to abstain from late night drinking parties, and return home as early as possible. That wretch of mine is forever on the lookout for a means of bringing you to grief. Whatever you do, don't forget these words of mine. You must keep them constantly in mind."
When she had finished speaking, she took Hsi-men Ch'ing by the hand and urged him to see her on her way home. When they arrived out on the main thoroughfare, he saw that:
The moonlight was as bright as day.[74]
Sure enough, when they headed east past the memorial arch, they arrived at a small alley and, almost immediately thereafter, came to a double-leaved gate of white planks.
Li P'ing-erh pointed it out, saying, "This is my home."
No sooner had she finished speaking, than she:
Shook herself loose and went inside.
Hsi-men Ch'ing hastily stepped forward to stop her but suddenly awoke with a start to find that it was but:
A dream of the Southern Branch.
All he could see was:
The moonbeams slanting across the window, and
The rising shadows of the flowering branches.
Feeling the bedding beneath him, Hsi-men Ching found that:
His flow of semen covered the mat,
Her fragrance saturated the quilt,
The taste of her saliva was sweet.
Grieving over her was of no avail,
His anguish could not be overcome.[75]
Truly:
The good things of this world are
none too enduring;
Colored clouds are prone to scatter
and glass is brittle.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The jade firmament is somewhat nebulous,
pervaded as it is by frost;
Faint moonlight penetrates the casement,
as his dreaming soul awakes.

In desolation, he tries to go to sleep
until he can try no longer;
How he hates it that the torpid rooster
refuses to announce the dawn.[76]
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Tossed first this way and then that,
waiting for the rooster to crow, and longing for the break of day. But, when the day finally broke, he had dozed off.
Early in the morning, the page boys in Ho Yung-shou's house got up and waited on Hsi-men Ch'ing with hot water and towels so he could wash his face. After Wang Ching and Tai-an had helped Hsi-men Ch'ing to comb his hair and perform his ablutions, Ho Yung-shou came out to keep him company. When they had drunk a serving of ginger-flavored tea, he had a table set up and invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to have some congee.
"Why has the old gentleman not appeared?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"My venerable uncle had to report for duty in the palace at the fifth watch," Ho Yung-shou replied.
In no time at all, the congee was served as they sat around the brazier, accompanied by four saucers of tastefully presented appetizers, and four large bowls of stewed meats. When they had finished eating the congee, a wine-laced pick-me-up containing pork meatballs, eggs, and wonton was served, with gold spoons and carved lacquer cups enchased with silver. As they ate, they ordered their servants to go outside and prepare their horses.
Ho Yung-shou and Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded, dressed in formal attire and attended by their servitors, to go into the Forbidden City and report to the Ministry of War. When they came out, they separated, as Ho Yung-shou headed for home, while Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the Hsiang-kuo Temple to pay a call on Abbot Chih-yün. The abbot retained him for a vegetarian repast, but Hsi-men Ch'ing ate only a single delicacy himself, conferring the remainder on his attendants.
When they left the temple, Tai-an was carrying some satins and brocades in a felt bag as they went along East Street, intending to go to Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü's residence in order to pay a congratulatory visit to Hsia Yen-ling. On their way there, halfway through Potter's Alley, Hsi-men Ch'ing actually saw a double-leaved gate of white planks, exactly like the one he had seen in his dream.
Hsi-men Ch'ing unobtrusively sent Tai-an to ask the old woman who sold bean curd next-door who the house belonged to, and the old woman replied, "It is the home of Commander Yüan."
On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Could not suppress a sigh of astonishment.
When they arrived at the residence of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, Hsia Yen-ling was in the process of leading out his horse in order to go pay a social call. When he saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he told his attendants to take the horse aside and invited him into the reception hall, where they bowed to each other and exchanged the customary amenities. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Tai-an to bring out his congratulatory gifts, consisting of a length of brocaded damask on a blue ground and a length of variegated satin.
"Your pupil has not yet had the chance to congratulate his colleague," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but has allowed you to anticipate me. And yesterday, you also went to a good deal of trouble on my behalf with regard to the disposition of my humble abode.
My gratitude knows no bounds."
"Eunuch Director Ho Hsin asked your pupil to assist him in finding a house for his nephew," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and since Your Honor had asked me to help with the disposition of your property, I mentioned it's availability to him. Ho Hsin having expressed an interest in purchasing it, your pupil could scarcely have refrained from helping to complete the transaction, and when I sent for the original deed of sale, and he had perused it, he readily consented to pay the original purchase price. It is the nature of eunuchs to be impulsive, expecting:
Bridges to be built while they wait on horseback,
that accounts for this successful conclusion. It is a stroke of good luck for Your Honor."
When he had finished speaking, they had a laugh together.
"I haven't yet had a chance to repay Ho Yung-shou's visit," said Hsia Yen-ling.
He then went on to ask, "Is he going to accompany my colleague on his return trip?"
"He has already agreed to travel with your pupil," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He will send for his dependents later. Last night the venerable eunuch made a point of asking me to urge Your Honor to vacate the premises as soon as possible, so that his nephew can arrange for his dependents to join him. At present, he is planning to stay temporarily in the yamen for a few days."
"Your pupil will not procrastinate about it," Hsia Yen-ling assured him. "As soon as I succeed in finding a place here, I will send someone to fetch my dependents. I should be able to manage it by early next month."
When they had finished speaking, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to go and left a calling card for Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü.
"I would like to retain my colleague for a longer visit," said Hsia Yen-ling, "but we are both only sojourners here. You know how it is."
He then escorted Hsi-men Ch'ing outside, where he mounted his horse and returned to the home of Ho Yung-shou.
Ho Yung-shou had already seen to the preparation of a noon repast and was waiting for him there.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told him everything that Hsia Yen-ling had said, explaining that he would undertake to have his property in Ch'ing-ho vacated by early next month, so that Ho Yung-shou could arrange to have his dependents move in at that time.
Ho Yung-shou was delighted to hear this and thanked him, saying, "This is but a further demonstration of my colleague's concern for my welfare."
After their meal, the two of them were in the reception hall playing a board game together, when an attendant suddenly came in and announced, "His Honor Chai Ch'ien from the grand preceptor's mansion has sent people to deliver a gift for the road to you. They went looking for you at the home of Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü, but he sent them on here to find you."
Thereupon, he handed over a calling card of safflower red paper, with a list of presents that read, "The enclosed one length of satin brocade, one length of cloud-patterned linen, one freshly slaughtered pig, one northern sheep, two jars of wine from the imperial palace, and two boxes of sweetmeats are deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your kinsman Chai Ch'ien."
Upon speaking to the messenger, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I am once again the recipient of His Honor Chai Ch'ien's generosity."
He then accepted the presents, wrote a card in reply, rewarded the messenger with two taels of silver, and the bearers of the gift boxes with five mace of silver each; saying to the messenger as he did so, "I am inconvenienced by being away from home and fear that this paltry compensation may be regarded as a slight."
The messenger promptly took the gratuity, though protesting the while, "Your servant dares not presume to accept it."
"Inadequate as it is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it should suffice to buy you a cup of wine."
Only then did the messenger kowtow in gratitude and formally accept it.
At this point, Wang Ching, who was standing beside Hsi-men Ch'ing, interjected in a low voice, "My elder sister enjoined me to go to the grand preceptor's residence in order to visit Ai-chieh and entrusted me with some things for her."
"What things are those?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"They are two pairs of shoes and foot bindings made for her by my sister at home," replied Wang Ching.
"If that's all, it will hardly be adequate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Then, turning to Tai-an, he said, "In my leather trunk, there are some rose hip–flavored pastries that I brought with me. Take two containers of them and put them into a small gift box decorated with gold tracery."
He then wrote out a card to go with them and handed it to Wang Ching, who had put on his black livery, telling him to go back to Chai Ch'ien's residence with the messenger and pay a visit to Ai-chieh. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to write out a card and sent the sheep and one of the jars of wine to Privy Councilor Ts'ui Shou-yü to thank him for his hospitality, while arranging to have the pig, the other jar of wine, and the two boxes of sweetmeats taken back to the rear of the residence for the delectation of the venerable Eunuch Director Ho Hsin; saying as he did so, "I have put you here to quite a lot of trouble."
This threw Ho Yung-shou into such consternation that he hastily bowed in thanks, saying, "My colleague, you and I are like members of the same family. What need is there for you to do all this?"
To resume our story, when Wang Ching arrived at the grand preceptor's mansion, he invited Han Ai-chieh to come out and paid his respects to her in the outer reception hall. She was adorned as resplendently as:
A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster,[77]
quite unlike the appearance she had presented in her old home, and had also increased considerably in stature. She arranged for him to be entertained with food and wine and, having noticed that he seemed to be rather thinly clad, presented him with a sable cloak lined with ultramarine satin, and five taels of silver.
When he returned to report on his trip, he showed these gifts to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who expressed his gratification.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou continued playing their board game, they suddenly heard the sound of outriders clearing the road, and a gatekeeper came in to report that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling had come to pay his respects and presented two calling cards from him. The two of them hastily adjusted their attire and welcomed him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities, and Ho Yung-shou thanked him for his agreement to sell his property the day before. Hsia Yen-ling had brought with him a pair of satin kerchiefs to present to the two of them as congratulatory gifts, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou thanked him repeatedly and turned them over to their servants to put away. He also presented Pen the Fourth, Tai-an, and Wang Ching with a gratuity of ten taels of silver. As they sat down in the positions appropriate for guests and host, and tea was served, they chatted about the weather.
Hsia Yen-ling then asked, "Might I invite the venerable eunuch to come out so that I can pay him my respects?"
"My uncle is on duty in the palace at present," responded Ho Yung-shou.
Hsia Yen-ling left behind a red accordion-bound calling card, saying, "Please convey my regards to the venerable eunuch. I have been tardy in paying my respects. Pray forgive me."
When he had finished speaking, he said goodbye, got up, and departed.
Ho Yung-shou, for his part, promptly prepared a bolt of satin brocade as a congratulatory gift for Hsia Yen-ling and dispatched someone to deliver it. But no more of this.
That evening, Ho Yung-shou also entertained Hsi-men Ch'ing to a late-night drinking party in his heated chamber in the rear garden. The household musicians sang for them until the second watch before they went to bed.
Concerned about the wet dream he had had the night before, Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered Wang Ching to bring his bedding inside that evening and sleep on the floor of the studio. When the night was half over, he called him onto his own bed and proceeded to embrace his naked body under the bedclothes:
Stuck out his clove-shaped tongue, and
Mingled his sweet spittle with his.
Truly:
Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying;
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.[78]
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next morning, he arose at the fifth watch and set out with Ho Yung-shou, accompanied by their servants, to attend the audience in the palace. They first proceeded to the Tai-lou Yüan, or Clepsydra Waiting-Hall, where they waited until the Tung-hua Men, or Eastern Floriate Gate, of the Forbidden City opened, when they proceeded to enter the imperial precincts. Behold:
The stars are still visible in the sky, as
the palace clepsydra runs out;[79]
The jade girdle ornaments of the courtiers
sound a tinkling *shan-shan*.
Blossoms brush against swords and halberds
as the stars begin to sink;
Pennants sweep away the willows, on which
the dew is not yet dry.[80]
Amid the glow of an auspicious nimbus, they
gaze upon the Emperor;
An exhalation of propitious vapor envelops
the thousand officials.
If you wish to foresee the sentiments of the
Son of Heaven this day;
Gaze afar at the purple vapor emanating from
the Isles of the Blest.
In a little while, behold:
The portals of the Forbidden City are opened,
To the harmonious clanging of phoenix
girdle pendants;
The doors of the celestial palace are parted,
Making visible the majestic regalia of
the dragon robe.
On this day of prolonged prosperity
and extended peace,[81]
We celebrate the dawning of an era
of auspicious joy.[82]
At that time, the Son of Heaven had already returned from presiding over the Southern Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven, and the civil and military officials had all assembled at court to await his appearance at the great audience. [83] Before long, after the tolling of a bell, the equipage of the Son of Heaven emerged from the palace, and he ascended to the Great Hall for Veneration of Governance to accept the congratulations of the hundred officials. Shortly thereafter:
The incense burners commenced their revolution;
The drapes were raised and the flabella parted.[84]
What did the imposing ceremonial of the imperial audience that day look like? Behold:
The imperial aura is clear and peaceful,
Genial and agreeable, like an
enveloping mist;
The resplendent sun dominates the void,
Voluminous and rising, clouds

of vapor linger.
Nebulous and indistinct,
The dragon towers and phoenix pavilions,[85]
Are enveloped with a fragrant haze;
Pervading and spreading,[86]
The pearly palaces and jeweled halls,[87]
Reflect the glow of morning clouds.
The Ta-ch'ing Hall,
The Ch'ung-ch'ing Hall,
The Wen-te Hall, and
The Chi-hsien Hall,
Sparkle and glisten;[88]
Their golds and greens blending their hues.
The Ch'ien-ming Palace,
The K'un-ning Palace,
The Chao-yang Palace,
The Ho-pi Palace, and
The Ch'ing-ning Palace,
Shimmer and shine;
Their reds and greens glowing brilliantly.
Bleakly and coldly,[89]
The sun illumines the jade flagstones
and carved balustrades;[90]
Drifting and floating,
The mist enshrouds the gilded rafters
and the painted beams.
Within purple portals and yellow chambers,
In precious tripods, billowing and streaming,
Aloeswood incense smolders;
Along crimson steps and maroon stairways,
On jade terraces, brightly and resplendently,[91]
Painted candles burn high.
Lung-lung tung-tung,
The Heaven-shaking drums beat out
a triple paradiddle;
K'eng-k'eng hung-hung,
The Ch'ang-lo Palace bell tolls
a hundred eight times.
Entangled and confused,[92]
Sword-bearing guardsmen bump
into each other;
Thronging and swarming,
Dragon and tiger flags swirl
about in disorder.
Soldiers with brocade robes and floriate caps,[93]
Bearing round baldachins and square baldachins,
Array themselves both in front and behind;
Officers with jade tallies and dragon banners,
Driving in gilded carriages and jade carriages,
Deploy themselves both to left and to right.
Also to be seen are:
Vertically held maces, and
Horizontally held maces,
By threes and by twos;[94]
Paired dragon flabella, and
Single dragon flabella,
Doubled and redoubled.[95]
Squad by squad and troop by troop,[96]
Horses with gold saddles, and
Horses with jade bridles,
Display their discipline;
Brace by brace and pair by pair,[97]
Cabin-bearing elephants, and
Cart-pulling elephants,
Show their prodigiousness.
The elite guardsmen protecting the hall,[98]
Each and every one of them lanky and large-sized,
comparable to celestial deities,
Are clothed in plates of gilded armor;
The palace wardens securing the audience,
Every single one of them rigorously disciplined,
resembling terrestrial spirits,
Are armed with florally incised swords.
Rigid and ordered,[99]
Within the gate of the hall are arrayed
the ceremonial supervisors,
Each of them wearing a high judicial cap,
Holding his tablet in front of his chest;[100]
Straight and proper,
Beside the inclined stairway are standing
the assembled officials,
Each of them in a brightly brocaded robe,
Ready to receive announcements and edicts.
Within the golden hall, in plenteous profusion,[101]
Ornamented flabella open simultaneously;
Before the decorated rafters, deftly and gently,[102]
The beaded blinds have been rolled high.[103]
Atop the bell tower, chiao-chiao yüeh-yüeh,
Heralds proclaim the dawn three times;
In front of the jade stairs, la-la kua-kua,
Silence-commanding whips crack thrice.
Rigorously disciplined,
Beside the sculpted dragons,
Arrayed in official regalia,
There stand holders of the five noble ranks;
Majestic and inspiring,[104]
Seated on his dragon throne,
Resting on a brocade cushion,
They look upon the Lord of a Myriad Chariots.[105]
Gazing at him from a distance:[106]
On his head he wears the flat-topped crown
with twelve tassels,[107]
His body is clad in a yellow ocher imperial
dragon robe,
His waist is bound by a girdle adorned with
Indigo Field jade,[108]
On his feet he wears thick-soled, polished,
black leather boots,
In his hands he grasps a tablet of white jade
inlaid with gold,
At his back stands a nine thunder cloud, dragon
and phoenix screen.
Truly:
On a clear day the green latticed doors
of the palace open wide;
A celestial breeze broadcasts the aroma
of the imperial incense.[109]
A thousand strands of auspicious vapor[110]
float by the golden gates;
While a solitary crimson-colored cloud[111]

envelops the Jade Emperor.[112]
This emperor was born with:
The eyebrows of Yao and the eyes of Shun,
The back of Yü and the shoulders of T'ang.[113]
If one were to describe this emperor:
His talents were superior to those of other men,
He was skilled at extemporaneous poetic rhyming,
He was able to tally herds of sheep at a glance.[114]
He was as good as Wen T'ung at painting
inkwash bamboos,[115]
And as skillful as Hsüeh Chi at dashing
off calligraphy.[116]
He was versed in the books of the three religions,
And acquainted with the texts of the Nine Schools.
Indulgent in pleasure, by day and by night,
He was just like the ruler of Chien-ko, Meng Ch'ang of
the Later Shu dynasty;[117]
In love of beauty and addiction to the cup,
He was much like the ruler of Chin-ling, Ch'en Shu-pao
of the Ch'en dynasty.[118]
During the twenty-six years after he ascended the throne at the age of seventeen, he changed the titles of his reign periods six times, starting with Chien-chung ching-kuo, and continuing with Ch'ung-ning, Ta-kuan, Cheng-ho, Ch'ung-ho, and Hsüan-ho.[119]
That day, when the Emperor had ascended the throne, and the silence-commanding whips had cracked, the civil and military officials in the wake of the nine ministers and four directors,[120] holding their tablets in front of their chests, mounted the red steps leading up to the dais, performed the ceremony of five obeisances and three kowtows,[121] and presented their memorials.
When they had finished doing so, the eunuch who held the post of palace foreman, with his body clad in a close-fitting purple gown, and his waist encircled with a gold-embossed girdle, strode out to the head of the golden stairs and orally proclaimed an imperial edict, [122] saying, "It is now twenty years since We acceded to the throne.[123] The Mount Ken Imperial Park has been completed, and Heaven has vouchsafed propitious omens. This day inaugurates the dawn of an auspicious era, the benefits of which We intend to share with all of you gentlemen."
Before he had even finished speaking, a great minister at the head of the gathered ranks stepped forward:
His court boots resound upon the ground,
The sleeves of his robe stir the breeze.
If you do not know his official rank,
His jade girdle proclaims his status.
When the assembled officials looked at him, it turned out to be the left grand councilor, grand academician of the Hall for Veneration of Governance, minister of personnel, grand preceptor, and Duke of Lu, Ts'ai Ching.
Wearing his official headgear and holding his ivory tablet,[124] he prostrated himself upon the golden stairs[125] and kowtowed, saying, "May Your Majesty live ten thousand years, ten thousand years, ten thousand times ten thousand years![126] Your minister and his cohorts, in sincere fear and trepidation, kowtow and render their obeisance.[127] We respectfully observe that during the twenty years since Your Majesty acceded to the throne:
The sea-girt realm has been at peace,[128]
The whole empire has been prosperous.
Exalted Heaven, having observed this,[129]
Has produced untold auspicious omens:
The sun has radiated double coronas,
The stars have shone notably bright.
The seas have expanded their extent.
Your Sage Majesty holds the celestial mandate,
Ensuring You of a reign of ten thousand years.
Heaven will be stable,
Earth will be pacific,
People will be serene.
The size of the realm and solidity of the dynasty,
Only enhance the probability of a perpetual reign.
The Three Border Regions have benefited
from a cessation of warfare;
The myriad states have come to pay court[130]
before the celestial portals.
Mount Ken towers athwart the empyrean,[131]
The Jade Capital flaunts its elegance.
The Precious Registers conferring the mandate are
exhibited before the palace gates;
The Scarlet Empyrean Tower soars loftily into the
sky above the celestial structures.[132]
How fortunate Your minister and his cohorts are,
To have the joy of living in this exalted reign,
And associating with such brilliant compatriots.
May Your Majesty profit eternally from the three
wishes of the border guard at Hua;[133]
And reap the constant benefits of the light shed
upon You by the sun and the moon.
Unable to overcome our extreme trepidation
on gazing upward at the celestial
and sage presence of Your Majesty,[134]
We humbly submit this eulogy for Your attention."
After some time, an imperial rescript was proclaimed, saying, "The eulogy submitted by Our worthy minister only accentuates his loyalty and sincerity, while serving to enhance Our gratification. We hereby decree that the coming year will be the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period. On the first day of the first month, We shall formally accept the newly created seal of state known as the Mandate Determining Seal,[135] declare a general amnesty, and issue rewards to Our ministers in accordance with their ranks."
When Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching had descended the steps after receiving the rescript in response to his eulogy, the eunuch who held the post of palace foreman proclaimed the Emperor's command, saying:
"If you have a report to make, proceed forthwith;
If not, roll up the blinds and depart the court."[136]
Before he had finished speaking, what should they see but a man who:
Stepped forward out of the ranks,
His tablet lowered and body bent,[137]
Garbed in red, with an ivory tablet,
Wearing a jade girdle and gold fish,
and proceeded to prostrate himself on the golden stairs, stating, "Your minister, Grand Master of the Imperial Household, Defender-in-Chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Grand Guardian, and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent, Chu Mien, hereby presents before Your Majesty the twenty-six judicial commissioners kneeling behind me, Chang Lung and company, from the thirteen provinces of the empire, the Two-Huai regions, the Two-Che regions, Shantung, Shansi, Honan, Hopei, Kuan-tung, Kuan-hsi, Fukien, Kuang-nan, and Szechwan. They have been evaluated according to precedent, and recommended for either promotion or reassignment, and are here waiting to receive their credentials. Since it is mandated that these recommendations be presented before Your Majesty, and I lack the presumption to act on my own,[138] I request the issuance of a rescript to decide the matter."[139]
In response to this request, an imperial rescript approving the recommendations according to precedent was duly proclaimed. After Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien had descended the steps upon receiving the rescript, the Son of Heaven, with one flip of his sleeves, dismissed the assembled ministers, got into his carriage, and returned to the palace, while the officials, divided into their civil and military ranks, exited the Forbidden City through the Tuan-li Gate, or Gate of Correct Protocol. The twelve trained elephants from the imperial entourage preceded them without the help of their attendants, and the elite guardsmen followed in their wake as they went their separate ways.
All that can be heard is the clinking of armor,
As the sword-bearing guardsmen,
And the red-clad palace guards,
Emerge simultaneously.
All that can be seen is the glint of poleaxes,
Where outside of the palace gate,
Carriages and horses are arrayed,
And guardsmen lined up.
The shouting of men resembles,
The turmoil of oceans and crashing of breakers;
The neighing of horses is like,
The collapse of mountains and cracking of earth.[140]
The crowd of judicial commissioners all emerged from the palace grounds, mounted their horses, and proceeded to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, where they congregated as closely as though they were:
Locked tight in an iron bucket.
Before long, whom should they see but a seal-keeper, who came out with his badge of office in hand and announced, "His Honor the defender-in-chief will not return to the yamen today. His sedan chair is already waiting for him just inside the Hsi-hua Men, or Western Floriate Gate, and he is about to set out for the mansions of His Honor Ts'ai Ching and His Honor Li Pang-yen in order to join them in celebrating the winter solstice."
As a result, the assembled officials all scattered, and Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou returned to the residence of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin, where they spent the night.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing reported back to the Ministry of War to receive his orders of appointment and register his name with the appropriate offices, along with the other expectant officials, after which, he collected what was left of his belongings, packed his luggage, and prepared to set out together with Ho Yung-shou.
That evening, Eunuch Director Ho Hsin put on a farewell party for them, during which he said to Ho Yung-shou, "See that you seek the advice of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing in everything, lest, by acting on your own, you should fail in your social obligations."
On the twenty-first day of the eleventh month, they started off from the Eastern Capital, with some twenty attendants between them in their entourage, and set out on the high road to Shantung.
They had already embarked upon:
The ninety coldest days of the winter season,
A time when drops of water turn into icicles.
Along the way, they encountered nothing but:
Empty suburbs and deserted roads,
Desiccated trees and cold ravens.[141]
In the sparse woods the pale sun
sheds a slanting glow;
The evening snow and cold clouds
obscure the dusky ford.
Before one mountain is surmounted
another comes in view;[142]
By the time one village is passed
another comes in sight.
When they had crossed the Yellow River and reached the customs station at Pa-chiao Chen, all of a sudden, they were confronted with a violent windstorm. Behold:

It is not the roaring of tigers,
Nor is it the droning of dragons.
With a sudden rush, a frigid blast
strikes the face;
With a violent sough, a cold wind
beleaguers them.
Still too weak to strip the willows
or bring blossoms out;
Concealed within it are water sprites
and mountain goblins.[143]
At the outset, it is utterly devoid of
either trace or shadow;[144]
But afterwards, it rolls away the mists
and effaces the clouds.
It is so alarming that:
Along willow-lined embankments, the seagulls
fly away in pairs;
On banks of red smartweed, the mandarin ducks
take off together.
Just see the way it:
Penetrates gauze windows,
Extinguishes silver lamps,
Permeates painted bowers,
Pervades silken garments.
In its frenzied dancing, it blows down the
blossoms and bends the willows;
In its somber ferocity, it sets stones in
motion and raises clouds of sand.[145]
In its boundless obscurity,
It blows the great trees into sounding
with repeated blasts;
In its whistling cacophony,
It startles a solitary wild goose into
sheltering in a ditch.
In no time at all:
The sand and the rocks strike the ground,
And clouds of dirt obscure the heavens;[146]
When the sand and rocks strike the ground,
It is just like the unexpected arrival of
a skyful of opportune rain;
When clouds of dirt obscure the heavens,
It is like the dust raised by the approach
of a million fierce troops.[147]
It has the effect of:
Driving the old village fisherman into
ceasing his angling,
Packing up his gear, and racing toward home;
And causing the mountain woodcutter to
lose his composure,
Put away his tools, and head for his cottage.
It is so frightening that:
The tigers and leopards in the hills,
Pull in their heads,
Conceal their tracks,
And hide themselves in the ravines.
It blows so hard that:
The horned dragons deep in the oceans,
Clench their claws,
Curl up their tails,
And fail to flaunt their ferocity.
After blowing for some time,
One notices that the rooftop tiles
fly off like sparrows;
After blustering for a while,
It appears that the hillside stones
have taken to flight.
The rooftop tiles fly off like sparrows,
Assaulting the traveling merchants into missing
the track and losing their way;[148]
The hillside stones have taken to flight,
Scaring the merchant ships into securing their
hawsers and trimming their sails.
Tall trees are blown down and uprooted;[149]
Short trees are divested of branch tips.
Just how strong is this wind? Truly:
It overturns the trees that protect
the gates of Hell;
It raises the dust on the summit of
Feng-tu Mountain.[150]
Ch'ang-o hastily shuts the gates of
the moon palace;
Airborne Lieh-tzu, high in the void,
appeals for help.
It imperils the Jade Emperor's residence
on the peak of Mount K'un-lun;
It blows both the world and the universe[151]
into violent motion up and down.

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou, riding in two closed sedan chairs with felt curtains, were so buffeted by the wind that they found it:

Difficult to proceed a step further.[152]

They also observed that in the waning light they were in danger of being assaulted by criminal elements hiding in the woods. Ho Yung-shou, therefore, suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that they head for the next village to seek lodging for the night and proceed the next day when the wind had abated. After searching for what seemed like half a day, they saw in the distance an old monastery by the side of the road, located in a grove of bare willow trees, behind what remained of a crumbling wall. Behold:

By the stone steps the steles have toppled
over and are covered by creepers;
The zigzag galleries and the ancient halls
have half fallen into decrepitude.
Late at night the sojourners are devoid of
either lamplight or braziers;
As the moon sets they can only sigh at the
monks engaged in meditation.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou went into the monastery to seek lodging for the night, they noticed a placard indicating that it was named the Yellow Dragon Monastery. On looking into the abbot's quarters, they saw that several monks were sitting there, engaged in meditation. There were no lamps or braziers to be seen, and the living quarters were in a state of dilapidation, some of the gaps in which were patched with woven bamboo. The abbot came out and greeted them with a Buddhist salutation, after which, he lighted a fire to heat some tea and cut some stalks of hay with which to feed their horses. In his luggage, Hsi-men Ching had brought some dried chicken, cured pork, biscuits, hardtack, and the like, which he and Ho Yung-shou managed to make a meal out of that night, while the abbot supplemented it by cooking up a potful of lentil-flavored congee for them, after eating which, they went to bed for the night.

The next day, when the wind had stopped and the weather had cleared, they rewarded the old monk with a tael of silver for his hospitality, took their leave, and continued on their journey to Shantung. Truly:

Galloping abroad upon the ruler's business,
they are undeterred by the effort;[153]
Mountains and passes prolong the distance,[154]
as they travel toward the capital.
Spending the night in an ancient monastery,
they lack fire for heat or meals;
It is quite enough to cause the wayfarers
to be acutely perturbed at heart.

The flowers droop and the sweet grass is faded
He is a stranger in a strange place.
In the little courtyard
He thinks of her whom he has lost.
It is evening, and his tears
Drop red as blood.
Mountain and river are parted
His eyes are dim, his spirit ill at ease.

It seems that her sweet spirit has vanished utterly.
When, at the fifth night watch, he woke from his dream
His heart was broken.
The wind brought the sound of horns
And swept away the moon and the plum blossom.

Ximen Qing and Captain He came to the principal street. He asked Ximen to take wine with him at his house, but Ximen Qing very politely declined. Then He bade his servant take Ximen's bridle. "You must come," he said, "I am anxious to talk to you." So they went to He's place, and Ben the Fourth took the empty present boxes back to Secretary Cui's house.

Captain He had made special preparations for his guest. In the great hall, animal charcoal was burning in the braziers, and the smoke of incense went curling upwards from golden burners. There was a table in the middle of the hall, and beside it two other tables, one nearer the door and the other at one side. Bowls piled with rare fruits stood on the tables and flowers in golden vases.

"Are you entertaining any other guests?" Ximen Qing asked Captain He.

"No," He said. "My old uncle will dine with us when he comes back."

"Since we are to be colleagues," Ximen Qing said, "you should not have gone to all this trouble on my account."

"I beg your pardon," He said, "but, as a matter of fact, my venerable uncle has done this."

When they had drunk tea, Ximen asked if he might pay his respects to the eunuch. He said he would not be long and, in a short time, Eunuch He came from the back of the house. He was wearing a green dragon gown, ceremonial hat and boots, and a jewel at his girdle. Ximen Qing bowed to him and asked leave to kowtow, but the eunuch would not allow him to do so.

"Your Excellency is distinguished both by age and virtue," Ximen Qing said. "You are a nobleman of the Court and, as your nephew and I are colleagues, you must permit me to do so."

They wrangled for some time, and, at last, the old eunuch accepted a compromise. He asked Ximen Qing to take the place of honor, seated himself in the host's chair, and put his nephew on one side. Ximen Qing protested. "We are fellow officers," he said. "I cannot allow him to take a lower position than myself. It would be seemly so far as your Excellency and he are concerned, for you are uncle and nephew, but it is not right for me."

The eunuch smiled. "Sir," he said, "you seem to understand the Rites very well. I am an old fellow. I will take the lower place and let the officer take mine."

"That would be even more insupportable," Ximen said. They finally sat down as they had before.

"It is cold," the eunuch said to the servants, "put more coal on the fire."

The servants brought fine water-polished charcoal and put it in the brazier. They pulled down the oiled-paper blind outside the hall. It was so arranged that, when the sun shone, it shone through the paper and gave light to the hall.

"Sir," the eunuch said, "will you take off your ceremonial clothes?"

"I have nothing underneath," Ximen said, "I must send my servant for something."

"Don't trouble to do that," the eunuch said. He bade one of his servants bring his green gown.

Ximen Qing smiled. "How dare I put on the robes of your Excellency's rank?"

"Don't let that worry you," the eunuch said. "Put it on by all means. His Majesty gave me this new robe yesterday. I shall have no further use for the old one, and I should be glad if you would accept it and use it as a cloak."

When the servant brought it, Ximen Qing took off his ceremonial clothes and gave them to Daian. He put on the green robe, bowed to express his thanks to the eunuch and asked him, in turn, to take off his robes of ceremony. Tea was brought again.

"Let the boys come in," the eunuch commanded.

He had twelve boys being trained as singers. They were brought in by their instructors. They kowtowed. The eunuch bade them begin, and they went to their places. The eunuch himself prepared to offer wine to Ximen Qing, but Ximen hastily begged him not to do so.

"Your Excellency, pray do not offer me wine yourself," he said. "The Captain will do it for you. I shall be more than happy if you set the cup on the table before me."

"I must do so," the eunuch said. "My nephew has now secured his first appointment. He is quite ignorant. I am placing my confidence in your kind assistance. With it, I am sure, all will be well."

"Your Excellency," Ximen said, "the old proverb says: When men become fellow officers, there will be friendship between them and their descendants for three generations. I am in your hands. How can I fail to do my utmost for your nephew?"

"You are both in the service of his Majesty," the eunuch said. "For that reason, you must help one another."

Ximen Qing did not wait for the eunuch to pour the wine for him. He took the cup from his hands and set it down on the table. In his turn, he offered a cup to the eunuch and to Captain He. They bowed to each other and sat down.

After a prelude, three boys and their instructors played the banjo and the lute and sang the songs "Visiting Zhao Pu" and "The Silken Hangings in the Palace of Crystal." When they had finished their songs they withdrew.

The wine was passed several times and the second course brought. It was growing dark, and the lamps were lighted. Ximen Qing told Daian to give some money to the cooks and the musicians. He rose and said: "I have troubled you sufficiently. I must go now."

The old eunuch would not hear of this. "I happen to be free today," he said, "and I wish you to stay. I have not made any special preparations for you. This is very ordinary food, and I fear you must be starved."

"Starved!" Ximen cried, "starved, with all this delightful food. I only wish to go back and rest because, tomorrow morning, I have to go with your nephew to pay a round of visits, have our names registered, and get the necessary documents."

"If you are going to be occupied with my nephew," the eunuch said, "why not send for your luggage and spend a few days here? There is a small apartment in my garden that you would find very quiet. You could discuss everything you have to discuss with my nephew, and you would find it most convenient."

"I should very much like to come," Ximen Qing said, "but I must not offend his Lordship Xia. If I come here, he may regard it as a sign that I am no longer anxious to be on good terms with him."

"Oh, you mustn't bother about that," the eunuch said. "Men who have been together in the same office are separated one morning, and, the same evening, do not even bow to one another. Officers come and go. You have served with him; he is now promoted and you succeed him. That's all there is to it. If he thinks otherwise, he is not a reasonable man. No, we must have the pleasure of your company for the night. I shall not allow you to go."

He said to his attendants: "Give something to eat to his Lordship's servants, and send somebody for his luggage. Get the apartment ready in the courtyard of the western garden, make up beds there, and get a fire going."

One word from his Excellency was sufficient. A hundred eyes were on the watch. Servants hurried to do his bidding.

"Your Excellency," Ximen Qing said, "this is very kind of you, but I am sure Xia will be displeased."

"He has nothing more to do with your office," the eunuch said. "It doesn't matter what he thinks. He is now officer of the Imperial Escort, and has no more to do with affairs of the law. I don't believe he will mind in the least."

The eunuch said no more, but sent Daian and the other servant to have their evening meal. A number of other servants took poles and ropes and went to Cui's place for Ximen Qing's things.

"There is one point I wish especially to mention to you," the eunuch said. "When my nephew assumes office, he will need a house. I hope you will help him to find one. I am anxious that his family should join him at Qinghe as soon as possible. I think he had better go with you, and I will arrange for his family to follow when you have secured a house for them. It is not a very large household, only about thirty people, including all the servants."

"How much is your Excellency prepared to spend?" Ximen said.

"I suppose something more than a thousand."

"Now that Xia is going to remain in the Capital," Ximen said, "he will be getting rid of his house. You might buy that. It would be to the advantage of both parties. It is a good-sized house, seven rooms wide and five deep. When you go in by the second door, there is a large hall with side rooms. The living rooms branch out in different directions behind that, and there are quite a number of other rooms. The house is in a good broad street. It ought to suit Captain He very well."

"How much does Xia want for it?" the eunuch said.

"He told me he paid thirteen hundred for it," Ximen said, "and later, he built an extra wing and made a garden. If your Excellency cares for the idea, I should offer any sum you consider suitable."

"I will leave the matter to you," the eunuch said. "You shall arrange it for me. I am at home now, so why not send someone to tell Xia we think of buying his house and ask him for the title deeds? We shall be lucky if we get it. My nephew will have somewhere to live as soon as he gets to Qinghe."

Daian and a host of servants came with Ximen's luggage. Ximen Qing asked him if Ben the Fourth and Wang Jing had come.

"Wang Jing is here," Daian said, "but Ben the Fourth is still at Secretary Cui's house, making arrangements about the sedan chair."

Ximen Qing said softly to Daian: "Go and see his Lordship Xia, and ask him for the title deeds of his house. His Excellency here would like to see them. Bring Ben the Fourth back with you."

Daian went. Ben the Fourth, wearing black clothes and a small hat, soon came back with him. He brought the document.

"His Lordship Xia," Ben the Fourth said, "told us to say that, since his Excellency would like to have the house, there will be no difficulty about the price. Here are the title deeds. He says that, though he built the wings and spent a great deal of money on the place, he will leave the price to you."

Ximen Qing handed the papers to the eunuch. The sum mentioned was twelve hundred taels.

"Xia has lived in the house a good many years," the eunuch said, "and I expect it needs doing up. But since you, Sir, are seeing the business through for me, I will give him the price he paid for it."

Ben the Fourth knelt down. "Your Excellency does well," he said. "The proverb says: The establishment of an estate is an expensive business, and though in a thousand years, a house may change hands a hundred times, each new master will have it redone his own way from top to bottom."

"Who are you?" said the eunuch. "You talk like a man of sense. You are right when you say that a man who is setting up an establishment mustn't mind how much he spends. What is your name?"

"He is called Ben the Fourth," Ximen Qing said.

"Well, I don't see that we need look any further," the eunuch said. "You shall act as our representative, and get the thing fixed up for us. This is an auspicious day, and I will pay Xia his money."

"It is late now," Ximen said, "why not pay him tomorrow?"

"No," the eunuch said, "I have to be at the Palace before dawn tomorrow. It is the day when all the officers come to pay their duty to his Majesty. We will settle with him today."

"At what time will the Emperor come out tomorrow?" Ximen Qing asked.

"His Majesty will go to make sacrifice about midnight," the eunuch said. "An hour or two before dawn he will return and breakfast at the Palace. Then he will hold his court. All the officers of the Empire come at the Winter Festival to offer their congratulations. All the Ministers and some of the higher officials will remain for a banquet. You gentlemen simply attend the court."

The eunuch told Captain He to put twenty-four large bars of silver into a box, and ordered two servants to go with Ben the Fourth and Daian and take the money to Xia at Secretary Cui's house.

Xia was pleased. He signed the document and gave it to Ben the Fourth to take back to the eunuch. The eunuch, too, was satisfied. He gave ten taels of silver to Ben the Fourth and three taels each to Daian and Wang Jing.

"They are only boys," Ximen Qing said, "your Excellency should not have troubled to give them anything."

"It is only something to buy food with," the eunuch said.

The three kowtowed and thanked him.

Then the eunuch bowed to Ximen Qing. "I am placing all my confidence in your kindness," he said.

"I am entirely at your Excellency's service," Ximen Qing said.

"Now, Sir," the eunuch said, "please ask Xia to have his place made free as soon as possible so that I can make arrangements for my nephew's family to take possession."

"I will certainly tell him," Ximen Qing said. "Perhaps, when Captain He arrives at Qinghe, he will stay a few days at the office while Xia's family make their preparations to leave for the Capital. Then we will have the place put in order, and you will send your nephew's family."

"No," the eunuch said, "I think we will leave the question of repairs until next year. I will send his family before then. He will not be comfortable if he has to live so long alone at the office."

It was now the first night watch. Ximen Qing said: "Will not your Excellency retire and take some rest? I have had wine enough."

The eunuch went to bed, but Captain He bade the musicians play, and went on drinking with Ximen Qing. When it was time to go to bed, Ximen Qing went to the garden. There was a small three-roomed apartment used as a study. The garden was very delightful with its buildings, arbors, lake, hillocks, flowers, and woods. Candles burned brightly in the study, and fragrant incense burned. It was quiet and delightful. Captain He chatted for a while with Ximen Qing, and they took tea together. Then he said good night and went to his own rooms to sleep.

Ximen Qing took off his hat, girdle and clothes and went to bed. Wang Jing and Daian waited on him, then went to their own place.

Ximen Qing, lying on the bed, watched the moonbeams playing on the windows. He tossed about but could not sleep. He heard the drip, drip, drip of the water clock. He saw the tall shadows of the plants upon the casement. The cold wind rattled the windowpanes. He had now been away from home for some time and was thinking of calling Wang Jing to sleep with him. Suddenly, he heard a woman speaking very softly outside the window. He wrapped his cloak around him, put on his slippers, and quietly opened the door. He looked out. Li Ping'er stood there, her hair like mist. She was dressed in simple, beautiful clothes, and a white coat covered her snow-white body. She wore soft slippers, yellow in color, upon her dainty feet. She stood there in the moonlight.

Ximen Qing went forward, took her into the study and kissed her. "My darling!" he cried, "what has brought you here?"

"I have sought you," she said, "because I wanted to tell you that I have a new home now. I was anxious to let you know, because, sooner or later, I must go to it."

"Where is this house?" Ximen asked her.

"Not far from here. It is in the middle of the Zaofu Lane, east of the main street."

Ximen Qing put his arms about her, and they went to bed that they might enjoy each other the more fully. When they had taken their pleasure, she made her clothes tidy and dressed her hair, but she was loath to go away.

"Brother," she said to Ximen Qing, "don't forget what I said to you. Do not drink wine late at night. Go home early. That fellow is only waiting his chance to destroy you. Remember."

Holding each other by the hand, they went to the main street. The moon shone so brightly that it might have been day. They came to a lane leading eastwards from the street. In the middle of it was a house with white double doors. Li Ping'er pointed to it. "That is the house," she said. She loosed her hand from his, and ran in. Ximen dashed forward to stop her.

Then he awoke. It was a dream. The moon was still shining upon the window; the flowers cast a deeper shadow than before. He passed his hand over the bedclothes. There was a pool upon them that seemed to show that all had not been in his imagination. He could still smell the delicate scent of her body upon the bed, and the lips which she had kissed were still sweet. He was very sad, but restrained his sobs.

There was no sleep for Ximen Qing. He longed for the day to break. At last, when dawn was near, he began to doze.

The next morning, Captain He sent his own servants to help Ximen to dress, and himself came early to call upon him. They drank tea and breakfasted together.

"Why does his Excellency not come?" Ximen asked.

"He went to the court before it was light," Captain He said.

They were served with gruel; then with buns stuffed with forcemeat, and soup of chickens' brains. They called for their horses, put on their ceremonial dress and went to the Ministry with their servants following. When they came out, Captain He went home, but Ximen went to the Xiang Guo Temple to visit the Abbot, Zhi Yun. The Abbot entertained him with monastic fare, but Ximen Qing would only eat one cake and gave the rest to his servants. Then he went away, passing through the main street on his way to Secretary Cui's house to see Xia. They went through the Zaofu Lane. Halfway down it, he saw a house with white double doors exactly like the one he had seen in his dream. An old woman was selling bean curd nearby, and Ximen told Daian to ask her who lived in that house. "It is General Yuan's house," the old woman said.

Ximen Qing sighed with curiosity and amazement. He came to Secretary Cui's house. Xia was setting out to pay a call. He immediately ordered his servant to take the horses away, and took Ximen Qing to the great hall. Ximen told Daian to bring the presents that he wished to offer to Xia upon his appointment. There was one roll of black silk and another of figured silk.

"I have not congratulated you," Xia said to him, "yet you do so much for me. Yesterday you took a great deal of trouble over my house."

"Chamberlain He asked me about a house," Ximen said, "and I told him about yours. He asked for the title deeds, and agreed to the price without the slightest ado. That is just like a eunuch. They think they can build a bridge in a couple of seconds. But, after all, it was to your advantage."

They laughed. "I have not yet called on Captain He," Xia said. "Is he going back with you?"

"Yes," Ximen said. "And his family will follow later. His Excellency told me to ask you to be so good as to vacate the place as soon as you can so that he can send the Captain's family. Until you have done so he will have to stay at the office."

"That will not be very long," Xia said. "I am looking for a house here and, as soon as I find one, I will send for my family. I don't see why the house should not be ready for him next month."

Ximen Qing rose. He left a card for Cui. Xia took him to the gate and waited till he had mounted his horse. Ximen Qing went back to Captain He's house. He was waiting to entertain him. Ximen told him that Xia had promised that his house should be free the following month. The Captain was delighted. "It is all due to your good offices," he said.

After dinner, while they were playing chess in the great hall, a servant came and said that a number of presents had come from the Imperial Tutor's comptroller Zhai. They had been taken to Cui's house, and the Secretary had sent them on. Ximen Qing looked at the list. A roll of gold silk, a roll of patterned hempen material, a pig, a sheep, a jar of palace wine, and two boxes of cakes. All these were set down upon the card, and at the end of the list was written: "Your kinsman Zhai Qian makes most humble salutation."

"Your master has troubled himself once again on my account," Ximen Qing said to the servants who brought the things. He accepted the gifts, wrote a return card, and gave two taels to the servant and five *qian* to each of the porters. To the servant he said: "You will understand that, as I am a stranger here and not versed in the usual customs, I am ashamed to offer such a reward." The man kowtowed and accepted the money.

Wang Jing, who was standing beside his master, whispered: "I was told to go to the palace to see Han Aijie. I have brought something for her."
"What have you brought?" Ximen asked him.
"Two pairs of home-made shoes," Wang Jing said.
"That is not enough," Ximen said. He told Daian to look in his chest and take out two jars of rose-flower biscuits. He gave them to Wang Jing, with a card of thanks for the presents, and the boy put on black robes and went to the Imperial Tutor's palace with the servant.
Ximen wrote a card and sent it, with the sheep and a jar of wine, to Secretary Cui. He told a servant to offer the pig, a jar of wine, and the boxes of cakes to the eunuch. "We are such good friends," Captain He said to him, "that really there is no need for you to do anything of the sort."
Wang Jing came to the palace, and was received by Han Aijie in the great hall. She was dressed so exquisitely that she looked like a tree of jade, not at all like the girl who had lived with her mother at Qinghe. She had grown taller. She asked the boy many questions about her family, and gave him some food. She thought Wang Jing's clothes were very thin. She brought a blue silk gown, lined with fur, and gave it to him with five taels of silver. When the boy got back, he showed the cloak to Ximen Qing.
Captain He and Ximen were playing chess, when, suddenly, there was shouting outside. The doorkeeper came in and said: "His Lordship Xia has come to call." He handed one card to Ximen Qing and another to Captain He. They hurried to the great hall to meet Xia. He thanked him for the expedition with which he had settled the question of the house. Xia presented gifts to each of them, and they thanked him cordially. Then he gave ten taels of silver to Ben the Fourth, Daian, and Wang Jing. They had tea, and Xia asked if he might see the old eunuch, but He said:
"His Excellency is at the Palace now." Then Xia presented a red card.
"Please give my humble respects to his Excellency," he said. "I am sorry I am too late to see him." He took leave of them.
Captain He immediately sent him a present in return. It was getting late. Captain He entertained Ximen Qing in one of the small rooms in the garden. During the meal, the boys sang for them, and it was the second night watch before they went to bed.
Ximen Qing had not forgotten what had happened the night before. He told Wang Jing to bring his bedclothes to the study and sleep there. In the middle of the night the boy went to him. They kissed each other and he found the boy's lips very fragrant.
The next morning, Ximen was up before dawn and joined Captain He. They went together to the Palace to wait for the opening of the East Gate. After a while the gates of the Throne Hall were swung open, and they heard the sound of gongs and cymbals. Then the Gate of Heaven was opened, and they caught a glimpse of the most glorious and august diadem. The Son of Heaven was returning from the altar of the south, and all his officers, civil and military, waited to receive him. Gongs were beaten and bells rung, as the Emperor came back to his palace to receive the homage of his officers. Clouds of incense streamed towards the skies. The great ceremonial fans waved to and fro.
His Majesty ascended the throne, and the cracking of whips gave the signal for silence. The officers, holding their tablets of office before their breasts, made five salutations and kowtowed three times before the throne, doing homage to the Sacred Majesty.
Then, from the palace, came an officer and spoke the words of the Emperor that all might hear them.
"We have reigned for twenty years," he said, "and at last We have completed the building of the *Genjue*. Heaven has been Our helper. Now as We enter upon another new year, We pray that the good fortune Heaven has bestowed Upon Us, may be shared by you."
There came out from among a group of high officials, one whose ceremonial boots trod proudly, whose sleeves waved in the breeze. This was Cai Jing, the Chancellor, Minister of the Left, President of the Board of Civil Service, Imperial Tutor and Duke of Lu. Carrying his ivory tablet low before him, he knelt down upon the golden steps.
"May Your Majesty live forever! In awe and humility, we kowtow before the Son of Heaven. As Your Majesty has said, you have governed this Empire for twenty years. During those years the Empire has enjoyed peace and prosperity, and the harvests have been plentiful. Heaven has observed Your Majesty's conduct, appreciated Your Majesty's labors, and given many signs of favor. There has been no war or disturbance upon the frontier, and people from all lands have come to pay tribute before Your Heavenly Throne. Your Majesty's palace is as a mountain of silver towering in the sky, and Your Majesty's capital of jade is unique in all the world.
"The Most Precious and Sacred Will is expressed in Your Majesty's exalted palace; purple candles have been burned in the palace of Heaven. How fortunate are we, that we should live in a world so blessed.
"The relations between Your Majesty and the people are perfect. We pray that You may be spared to live as the mountains, that the light of the sun and the moon may always shine upon us. Your Majesty's graciousness is beyond our power to express: we can only enjoy the blessings that come to us through it. We offer Your Majesty our most humble congratulations and praise."
There was a long delay. Then the Emperor's word was announced to them again.
"You, Our worthy officers, have offered Us your praises. Once again, We appreciate your loyalty and fidelity. We are content. It is Our purpose upon the first day of the New Year to change the title of Our reign to the first year of Chonghe. This We shall duly make known to Heaven. There shall be a general amnesty throughout the Empire, and reward for all those who serve Us."
After listening to this, the Chancellor withdrew.
"It is his Majesty's command," the herald said, "that if anyone has any business to bring forward, he shall do so now. Otherwise his Majesty will retire."
A man stepped out of the crowd, wearing a scarlet gown, with a jade clasp to his girdle, and a golden fish as his badge of office. He lowered his ivory tablet and bowed towards the Emperor, then knelt upon the golden steps.
"Zhu Mian, Grand Marshal, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Guard, presents twenty-six magistrates to Your Majesty. Inspection has been made of their work, and the question of their promotion or dismissal determined. They have come to the Capital to obtain their new commissions, and since I dare not myself make the decision, I bring them before Your Majesty and await Your Majesty's command.
The twenty-six magistrates knelt down behind the Grand Marshal.
After a while, the Imperial Decree issued. "Let them be given their commissions in accordance with precedent."
Marshal Zhu retired.
The Emperor waved his arms, and the officers withdrew. His Majesty went into the palace.
The officers poured out of the two gates, headed by twelve elephants that marched unattended. The grooms and servants of the Ministers hurried to the service of their masters. There was a crowd of carriages outside the palace gates, and the shouting of the people made a noise like a storm at sea, while the neighing of their horses seemed like an earthquake. The magistrates came out and mounted their horses, and all rode together to their headquarters to wait for orders. A messenger came out to them. "The Grand Marshal," he told them, "will not be here. He is going to celebrate the Winter Festival at the Imperial Tutor's palace."
The magistrates dispersed.
Ximen Qing returned to Captain He's place and spent another day there. The next day, they went together to their headquarters and secured their documents. Ximen went to say good-bye to Zhai, then went back to pack up his luggage, so that he would be ready to return to Qinghe with Captain He.
That evening, the old eunuch entertained them to dinner. He bade his nephew consult Ximen Qing in all things, and not make any decisions for himself.
On the twentieth day of the eleventh month, they set out for Qinghe, with more than twenty servants following them. They traveled upon the high road to Shandong. It was the season of greatest cold and every drop of water was frozen. They saw nothing but barren hills and deserted paths. Upon the withered trees only the blackbirds sat in the feeble sunshine. Snow and frozen clouds hung above the river. Over one hill they went, and found another one before them. They passed one village, and came to another. When they had crossed the Yellow River and had come to a town on the other side, they were suddenly overtaken by a violent windstorm.
Not this the roaring of the tiger
Or the muttering of the dragon.
The cold air stung their faces; the sharp wind
Pierced their very hearts.
There was at first no sign of its coming
But soon the mist and cloud were swept away.
It rocked the trees and made mad the sea
It hustled the pebbles and urged the stones
And the skies were dark.
The high trees moaned without ceasing
And the lonely goose lay broken in the ditch.
The sand drove across the ground
The dust screened the sky.
The small stones were flung about as in a whirlwind
And the dust was as the dust set up
By millions of soldiers on the march.
This tempest was so violent
It smashed the trees on the frontier of hell
And carried away the dust from the palace
Of the god of the underworld.
Chang E, the angel of the moon,
Shut the doors of her palace in haste.
Liezi, walking in the skies,
Called out for help.
The Jade Monarch could hardly stay
On the summit of the Koulkun Mountains.
Heaven and Earth alike
Were in a mad confusion.
Ximen Qing and Captain He were in sedan chairs, wrapped in rugs and blankets. The wind was so fearful that they could not advance even a single step. It was late, and they feared that highwaymen might come out from the woods and attack them. Ximen Qing sent some of his men forward to try to find a shelter for the night, saying that they would go on again when the wind abated. It was some time before a place was found. Then they discovered an old monastery with a few bare willow trees outside it. The walls were half in ruins.
The walls and the memorials were covered with rank grass
The corridors and the ancient sanctuaries were on the point of falling.
The monks at midnight had no light.
When the moon had set, it made the heart grieve
To see the monks at meditation.
The 2 officers hastened there. It was called the Temple of the Yellow Dragon. There were only a few monks engaged in meditation without fire and light. The rooms were nearly all in ruins and many of them were patched with boards. The abbot came to welcome them and made a fire to make them some tea. Hay was brought for their horses. When the tea was ready, Ximen Qing took from his bag preserved chicken, meat, cakes and fruit, and Captain He and he made their supper on this food, together with some porridge that the abbot prepared for them. They stayed the night in this place. The next day, the wind had stopped and the skies were clear. They gave the monks a tael of silver, and set out again.

## 095

## Wang the 3RD Kowtows to Hsi-men Ch'ing as his Adopted Father; Ying Po-chüeh Intercedes to Alleviate the Grievance of Li Ming & Pan Jinlian Quarrels with Ruyi'er

The cold and the heat impel each other forward[1]
as spring gives place to autumn;
Both for those abroad, and those remaining home,[2]
their feelings remain persistent.
In the cold season, the traveler is plagued by
the hardships of wind and frost;
Beset by obstacles, the ruler's loyal servant[3]
allows his teardrops to overflow.
Endangered by the wind and the waves, he knows
not whether he will float or sink;
But meeting with a beauty or enjoying a drink[4]
may serve to alleviate his sorrow.
A snail's-horn of fame, a fly's-head of profit,[5]
have never ceased to be alluring;
How often have they led the black-haired youth
to scoff at the white-haired elder.[6]

Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou continued on their journey. But no more of this. We return instead to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang back at home. It happened that during Hsi-men Ch'ing's former trip to the Eastern Capital, Ch'en Ching-chi was spotted by the wet nurse Ju-i having a drink with P'an Chin-lien in her room, and when Hsi-men Ch'ing came home, Yüeh-niang had borne the brunt of his anger, and they had had a falling out about it.[7] For that reason, on this occasion when Hsi-men Ch'ing was away from home, Yüeh-niang refrained from doing any entertaining. Even when her brother and sister-in-law came to visit, she would not allow them to stay but sent them abruptly on their way. She instructed P'ing-an to keep the main gate closed unless there were some reason to open it, and she had the ceremonial gate that led into the second courtyard locked up every night. The members of her sorority of wives and concubines did not venture outside but remained in their quarters doing needlework. If Ch'en Ching-chi needed to fetch pawned garments from the storage loft in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang saw to it that either Ch'un-hung or Lai-an accompanied him both on his way in and on his way out. She constantly checked to see if the doors were properly secured and in everything presided over the household more strictly than had been her wont. For this reason, P'an Chin-lien was unable to carry on with Ch'en Ching-chi, and, because it had been the wet nurse Ju-i who had reported her former indiscretion to Yüeh-niang, she was constantly on bad terms with her.
One day, Yüeh-niang got out a considerable number of Hsi-men Ch'ing's undershirts and underpants and handed them over to Ju-i, suggesting that she get Auntie Han to help her in seeing that they were properly washed and starched, and then hung outside to dry in Li P'ing-erh's quarters. Who could have anticipated that in Chin-lien's quarters next door Ch'un-mei was also engaged in laundering her mistress's clothing and was about to begin the process of beating her skirts in order to get them clean, so she sent Ch'iu-chü over to ask if she could borrow a laundry bat for the purpose.
Since Ju-i, along with Ying-ch'un, was engaged in beating Hsi-men Ch'ing's underwear at the time, she refused to give it to her, saying, "You borrowed a laundry bat for your own use just the other day, and here you are asking for it again. Auntie Han, here, is using it right now to beat Father's underpants and undershirts."
Ch'iu-chü, in a fit of temper, angrily marched next door and said to Ch'un-mei, "You insisted on sending me over to borrow it for no good reason, and now they won't let me have it. Ying-ch'un actually said, 'Take it then,' but Ju-i stopped her and refused to let me have it."
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" Ch'un-mei exclaimed. "How can she be so uncooperative? It seems as though:
Even in broad daylight, one can't borrow
an empty oil lamp from her.
Who knows but what Mother may also expect me to launder her foot bindings after I get through starching this yellow damask skirt of hers. If I ask that woman to lend us a laundry bat but she refuses to let me have it, when I've done washing Mother's things, what am I going to beat them with?"
She then said to Ch'iu-chü, "You'd better go back to the rear compound and see if they have a laundry bat we could use."
When P'an Chin-lien, who was sitting on the k'ang in her room, engaged in putting on her foot bindings, happened to overhear this, she asked, "What's going on?"

Ch'un-mei then told her the whole story of how she had tried to borrow a laundry bat, but Ju-i had refused to give it to her.
Because Chin-lien harbored a long-standing grudge against her, this was just the pretext she had been looking for, and she reviled her, saying, "That lousy whore! How could she refuse to give it to you? You'd better go yourself to demand it of her. And if she refuses, it will be all right to give that whore a piece of your mind."
Ch'un-mei, who was in the prime of youth and needed no urging, set off in a fit of rage for Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where she arrived like a gust of wind, saying, "Just who do you take to be an outsider in this household, anyway, that you should refuse to let her have a laundry bat when she asks for it? It would seem that yet another mistress has emerged out of nowhere in these quarters."
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ju-i. "The laundry bat is right here. Go ahead and take it if you need to. Who do you think is monopolizing it here, anyway, that you should feel justified in getting so angry about it? The First Lady has instructed me that when Auntie Han, here, has finished starching these undershirts and cotton briefs of Father's they should be taken out and beaten with the laundry bat. When Ch'iu-chü came and asked for it, I said to her, 'Wait until I've finished giving these clothes of Father's a couple of strokes with the bat, after which you can take it for your own use.' She has grossly misrepresented the case in claiming that I refused to give it to her. Fortunately, Sister Ying-ch'un is here and can be my witness."
Who could have anticipated that Chin-lien had followed right behind Ch'un-mei and started to curse Ju-i, saying, "That's enough of your lip, woman! Since your mistress died, you act as though you have taken over her place in these quarters, and that Father won't be satisfied to have anyone but you take care of his intimate clothing for him. The rest of us wives might just as well be dead, since only you are fit to launder and starch his clothes for him. You think that by adopting this strategy you can lord it over the rest of us, do you? Well, I'm:
Quite inured to such alarms."
"Fifth Lady, how can you say such a thing?" protested Ju-i. "If the First Lady had not instructed us to do so, do you really think we would have had the nerve to insist on being the only ones to take care of Father's things for him?"
"Why you lousy splay-legged, man-hunting whore!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "You still insist on defending yourself, do you? Who is it that served Father with tea and adjusted his bedding for him in the middle of the night? And who talked him into having a jacket made for her? You think the things you're up to behind our backs are unknown to me, do you? Even if your furtive shenanigans should result in a pregnancy, I won't be intimidated by you."
"His legitimate consort and her son both came to grief," said Ju-i.
"Where can I hope to get to?"
If Chin-lien had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:
A fire blazed up in her heart, and
Her powdered face became suffused with red.
Striding forward, she grabbed hold of the woman's hair with one hand and proceeded to thump her in the belly with the other until Auntie Han intervened and succeeded in separating them.
"You shameless whore! You man-baiting whore!" Chin-lien cursed. "Here we all are, bored enough to scream as it is, and you come along trying to seduce our husband. What role do you think you play in these quarters anyway? You're simply a reincarnation of Lai-wang's wife; but I'm not afraid of you."
Ju-i, weeping on the one hand, and trying to straighten her hair on the other, responded by saying, "I'm a latecomer here and know nothing of any Lai-wang's wife. All I know is that I serve as a wet nurse in Father's household."
"If you're a wet nurse," said Chin-lien, "you ought to confine yourself to being a wet nurse, instead of preening yourself on your ability to play the preternatural role of:
The fox who flaunted the tiger's might,[8]
in these quarters.
As an old hand at snaring wild geese,[9]
I'll hardly let you get away with any
of your devilish tricks."
As she continued to curse away, who should appear but Meng Yü-lou, who came strolling out from the rear compound and intervened, saying, "Sister Six, I invited you to come back to my place for a board game. Why haven't you come, instead of getting into a brawl over something here?"
She then grabbed hold of Chin-lien with one hand, dragged her back to her quarters, and sat her down, saying, "Tell me, what's it all about?"
Chin-lien allowed her anger to gradually subside, and Ch'un-mei served them with tea, while drinking which she said, "Just look. That lousy whore has made me so angry my hands are cold, and I can hardly lift my tea cup."
She then went on to say, "I was in my quarters, engaged in sketching a design to be embroidered on a pair of shoes, when you sent Hsiao-luan to invite me over. I told her I'd come after lying down for a while, and I was reclining on the bed without having yet fallen asleep, when I became aware that this little piece of mine was anxious to beat the skirts she had been laundering for me. I told her, 'Why don't you beat these foot bindings of mine while you're at it?' After what seemed like half a day, I heard the sound of a dispute. She had sent Ch'iu-chü next door to borrow a laundry bat for this purpose, and Ju-i had refused to give it to her, grabbing it back out of her hands and saying, 'You borrowed a laundry bat for your own use just the other day, and now that you can't find it, you're here asking for it again. We're just about to use it to beat some clothes of Father's.' Upon hearing this, I became annoyed, and said to Ch'un-mei, 'You go there yourself and give that lousy whore a piece of your mind.' Since when has she found the nerve to lord it over other people this way? As though we would ever let her get away with it. Who does she think she is, putting on such airs in those quarters of hers? Just as though she had been weighty enough to risk breaking the carrying poles of the bridal palanquin on being brought into the household. Why you're not even a match for that wife of Lai-wang's. I chose to follow right behind Ch'un-mei, and when we got there, Ju-i was still spouting off, yakkety-yak, with that mouth of hers. I gave her a severe tongue-lashing, and if it hadn't been for Auntie Han, who stepped between us and obstinately insisted[10] on dragging me away, I'd have hooked the guts of that lousy, shameless, man-baiting whore right out through her mouth. Does she really think she can pull the wool over our eyes in those quarters of hers by selling scallions for leeks and suchlike mischief? Have you ever seen the likes of our elder sister's irresponsibility? It's reminiscent of the way she indulged that lousy slave of a whore, Lai-wang's wife, to the point where she lost all sense of decorum, with the result that the two of us ended up:
Feeling resentment and harboring hostility,
toward each other. And after that, she had the nerve to besmirch me with the gross allegation that I was responsible for driving that slave out of the household. Now, once again, she's indulging this woman to the point that:
All the rules of propriety are turned upside down.[11]
If you're a wet nurse, you ought to confine yourself to being a wet nurse, rather than being allowed to flaunt your:
Showy glamour and gaudy airs.
I'm really:
Not the sort of person to let dust
be thrown in her eyes.
And as for that shameless good-for-nothing:
Nobody knows where the dead end up going to,
but he persists in frequenting her quarters. No matter where he's been, on coming home, he makes a point of going in there, bowing before her portrait, and muttering some mumbo jumbo of who knows what significance. During the night, if he happens to want some tea to drink, that whore gets up and bestirs herself to serve the tea to him, and even goes so far as to adjust his bedding for him. And, the next thing you know, the two of them are going at it together. She's nothing but an inveterate whore. When he calls for the maidservant to bring him some tea, who authorized you to insist upon:
Sticking your neck out and horning in,[12]
that way, in your craving for a man? And how is it that, when she asked him for a jacket, that shameless good-for-nothing lost no time in going out to the shop, getting some silk fabric, and having it made into a jacket for her? And there's something else you don't know about. On the day of the final weekly commemoration of Li P'ing-erh's death, Father was persuaded to go into her quarters to burn some paper money and caught the maidservant and that woman sitting on the k'ang engaged in playing a game of jacks, which they hadn't had time to clear away before he came in. But, rather than raising any objection, he said, 'Go on playing if you like, and you needn't bother to send the offerings of dumplings and wine back to the rear compound. You can enjoy them yourselves.' For him to indulge her to such an extent was in recompense for what do you suppose? That whore responded by saying, 'Father, you can come and join us or not, as you see fit. We won't wait up for you.' What she could not have anticipated was that I chose to:
Take two or three strides,
and walk right in on her, which startled her to such an extent that she was rendered:
Wide-eyed and speechless,
whereupon she had nothing more to say. In the eyes of that good-for-nothing of ours, what kind of a decent woman is she, anyway? She's nothing but a lousy whore, and with a living husband to boot. And yet, you respond to her just like someone whose:
Hungry eyes have alighted on a melon skin;
and insist on sheltering her:
Regardless of the outcome for good or ill.[13]
The fact of the matter is, she's a good-for-nothing overripe peach with too much fire in her eyes. How could she be expected to pay any attention to the proprieties? That whore may allege that her husband is dead, but the other day, was that not her husband, with a baby boy in his arms, inquiring after her at the front gate? She's utterly:
Open-eyed and brazen-faced,[14]
in the way she tries to deceive people with her tricks. Just look at the way she persists in putting on the gaudy airs that she's so good at right in front of people's eyes, constantly altering her demeanor to suit the circumstances. You can tell from the way she carries on that she regards herself as a reincarnation of Li P'ing-erh. And meanwhile, our elder sister keeps to the rear compound:
Pretending to be both deaf and dumb,
and criticizing anyone who opens her mouth about it."
When Meng Yü-lou had heard her out, she merely smiled.
Chin-lien said:
"Just as Nanking has its Shen Wan-san,[15]
Peking has its withered willows;
Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow.
How can she fail to be aware that:
If one buries a body in the snow,
It will be exposed when it melts."[16]
"It was originally claimed that this woman had no husband," said Meng Yü-lou. "Where did this husband of hers appear from?"
Chin-lien responded, saying:
"If the day lacks wind, it will not be clear;
If people don't lie, they will never succeed.
If she had not resorted to deception, how could she have hoped to find employment? Remember what she looked like when she first came here. She had a ravenous-looking face, her yellow skin was sallow and withered, and she appeared to be:
Both impoverished and emaciated;[17]
but after two years of eating her fill, the lousy whore is robust enough to resort to her man-baiting tricks. If you don't attempt to restrain her, before you know it, she'll start:
Assuming privileges above her station;
and if, in due course, she should happen to produce a child, whose would it be?"
Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "Slavey Six, you surely don't lack the cunning to deal with it."
After sitting a while longer, the two of them went back to the rear compound to play a board game together. Truly:
The three luminaries cast shadows, but
who can catch them;
The ten thousand things have no roots, they
just arise of themselves.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
A mere handful of spring warmth suffices
to stir nature into glory,
Bright crimsons and light greens[18] begin
to be engendered everywhere.
Even the wild plum blossom provides ample
stimulation for enjoyment,
What need is there to insist upon having
a tree of purple magnolias?[19]
To make a long story short, one day, in the afternoon, Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived back in Ch'ing-ho district and told Pen the Fourth and Wang Ching to take the luggage and go to the house before him, while he accompanied Ho Yung-shou to the yamen. After seeing that the residential quarters there were properly prepared and swept out in order to provide him with a place to stay, he mounted his horse and returned home.
Wu Yüeh-niang received him in the rear reception hall and proceeded to dust the dirt from the journey off his clothes and ladle out some water so he could wash his face. No sooner was he done with his ablutions than he ordered a maidservant to set up a table in the courtyard, where he:
Lit a full burner of incense,
and proceeded to make a vow before the tablets representing Heaven and Earth.
"Why are you making such a vow?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"Not to mention anything else," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'm lucky to be alive."
He then proceeded to tell her about the events on the road during their return trip, saying, "Just yesterday, on the twenty-second day of the eleventh month, we had barely crossed the Yellow River and arrived at Pa-chiao Chen in I-shui district when we ran into a violent windstorm, so nasty that we were blinded by the blowing sand and quite unable to proceed any further. It was late in the day already, and we hadn't seen a soul for the last hundred li of our journey, which threw us all into consternation. On top of which, we had numerous saddlebags and trunks full of valuables and didn't know what to do if we were confronted by robbers. As we proceeded, we came upon an old monastery. Though it was already night, the monks there were so impoverished they didn't even have a lamp lighted. Each of us had some dry rations and hardtack with us, and the abbot not only lent us a light and cooked up a pot of lentil-flavored congee, which we shared between us, but also cut some fodder with which to feed our horses. I then spent the night, foot to foot, on a meditation platform with Ho Yung-shou. The next day, it was only after the wind had died down that we were able to set out again. These hardships were ten times more severe than those I encountered on my last trip to the capital. That time, although the weather was hot, it was not too bad; but this time, not only was the weather bitterly cold, but we had to put up with some fearful conditions. Fortunately, we were on level ground at the time. If we had encountered such a tempest on the Yellow River, who knows what we would have done. While I was still on the road, I made a vow that on the first day of the twelfth month I would sacrifice a pig and a sheep to Heaven and Earth."
"Why didn't you come straight home, just now," asked Yüeh-niang, "instead of going first to the yamen?"
"Hsia Yen-ling," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing, "has recently been promoted to the position of commander of the escort for imperial processions and will consequently no longer be returning here. Ho Yung-shou, the nephew of Eunuch Director Ho Hsin of the Directorate for Buildings in the Palace Treasury, has just been promoted to my former post as assistant judicial commissioner in the Ch'ing-ho office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. He is not more than nineteen years old, just a little squirt of a youngster, and quite ignorant of the bureaucratic world. His uncle, the eunuch director, repeatedly urged me to look after him in all things and offer him the benefit of my experience. If I had not accompanied him to the yamen and arranged a place for him to stay, he wouldn't have known what to do. I have also made a deal for him to buy that house of Hsia Yen-ling's for twelve hundred taels of silver, but, for the time being, he will have to put up in the yamen until Hsia Yen-ling has vacated the premises, so he can arrange for his own dependents to move in.

“The other day, before we even left town, Hsia Yen-ling was unhappy about the prospect of being transferred to a position in the capital. Some unknown person must have leaked the news of our impending appointments to him. When we arrived in the capital, it turned out that he had previously spent who knows how much silver to solicit the intervention of Perfect Man Lin Ling-su at court, who informed Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien that Hsia Yen-ling wished to retain his rank of battalion commander and preferred to remain in his current post as judicial commissioner for another three years. Defender-in-Chief Chu Mien, accordingly, took the matter up with His Honor the grand preceptor, which put him in an extremely awkward position. If Kinsman Chai Ch’ien had not done everything in his power to maintain my interest, I would have been shunted aside. When I arrived there, Kinsman Chai Ch’ien was extremely annoyed with me and reproached me for not being able to keep a secret. I don’t know who it could have been that leaked the information to him.”

“You don’t believe what I say,” responded Yüeh-niang, “but you’re altogether too impulsive in the way you carry on, just as if your legs were on fire. You can’t keep anything to yourself but are always telling specious stories, first to this one, and then to that, giving people the impression that you’re only:

Peddling your influence and parading your wealth.

Truly:

When the mindful plot against the unmindful,

How can the unprepared cope with the prepared?

Having already seen the way you carry on, people think they know what you’re up to and can’t be bothered to take you seriously. They are able to pursue their own interests on the quiet:

Just as easy as you please,

without your knowing anything about it.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing went on to say, “When I was about to depart from the capital, Hsia Yen-ling repeatedly requested that I look after the welfare of his family, early and late. Someday soon, you ought to buy an appropriate gift and go pay a call on them.”

“Since his wife’s birthday is on the second day of the coming month,” said Yüeh-niang, “I can accomplish both purposes by paying a call on her then. As I was saying, in the future, you ought to amend the reckless way you go about your business. As the sayings go:

On first meeting one should express no more than

three-tenths of one’s thoughts;

Never under any circumstances should one disclose

the whole content of one’s heart.

Even one’s wife may harbor duplicitous intent,

Not to mention people in the world at large.”

As they were talking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and reported, “Pen the Fourth would like to know whether Father is ready to have him go to the home of His Honor Hsia in order to let them know what has happened, or not?”

“Tell him to go after he has had something to eat,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“He says he doesn’t need to eat anything,” replied Tai-an.

At this point, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P’an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all trooped in to pay their respects, ask about his trip, and keep him company. Hsi-men Ch’ing happened to remember that when he had returned from his former trip to the Eastern Capital, Li P’ing-erh had also been among them, but today she was no longer there. Without more ado, he went out to her quarters in the front compound, bowed before her spirit tablet, and shed a few tears, after which Ju-i, Ying-ch’un, and Hsiu-ch’un all came forward and kowtowed to him.

Yüeh-niang lost no time in sending Hsiao-yü out to invite him back to the rear compound for a meal. When he had finished eating, he ordered that four taels of silver should be provided to reward the officers who had looked after the ponies on his trip, and he also wrote a calling card thanking Commandant Chou Hsiu for their loan. In addition, he told Lai-hsing to procure a half-carcass of pork, a half-carcass of mutton, forty catties of white flour, a package of white rice, a jar of wine, two legs of smoked pork, two geese, ten chickens, kindling and charcoal, and appropriate amounts of cooking oil, salt, vinegar, and the like, to be delivered to Ho Yung-shou as a welcome gift to provide for his needs. He also engaged the services of a chef to cater to him there.

Just as these provisions were being collected in the reception hall, preparatory to Tai-an’s delivering them, Ch’in-t’ung suddenly came in and said, “Master Wen and Ying the Second have come to pay you a visit.”

“Invite them to come in,” Hsi-men Ch’ing promptly responded.

Licentiate Wen, wearing a gown of green satin, cut like the robe of a Taoist priest, and Ying Po-chüeh, in a jacket of purple velvet, came in from the front compound to pay their respects to Hsi-men Ch’ing. Bowing repeatedly in greeting, they asked him about the hardships of wind and frost he had been exposed to on his journey.

Hsi-men Ch’ing, for his part, said, “I am grateful to you two gentlemen for keeping an eye on my home, early and late.”

“Not only did I keep an eye on your home,” said Ying Po-chüeh, “but this morning, when I was about to get up, I suddenly heard the chattering of auspicious magpies on the roof of the house. My wife anticipated me by saying, ‘I imagine it’s an indication that His Honor has returned home. Why don’t you go take a look?’ To which I replied, ‘Brother departed on the twelfth, and it’s only been half a month or so since then. How could he get back so quickly? Every third day I go by there to ask after him, but I haven’t heard any news as yet.’ ‘No matter whether he’s come back or not,’ said my wife, ‘why don’t you go take a look?’ And she urged me to get dressed. When I arrived at your place, I was surprised to hear that Brother had actually returned, and when I ventured across the street to call on the venerable Master Wen, I found that he, too, was just putting on his clothes. ‘Why don’t I go over there with you, venerable sir?’ he said.”

Ying Po-chüeh then went on to ask whom he had encountered on the road to the Eastern Capital. He also noticed that there were quantities of foodstuffs, wine, rice, and so forth, packed up and resting on the stylobate outside the reception hall, and asked, “Who are these for?”

“They are for my new colleague, His Honor Ho Yung-shou,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “He accompanied me on my return trip, but his dependents have not arrived yet, so he is staying temporarily in the yamen. I am sending these things to him as a gift to provide for his needs while he is there. I am also sending him a card inviting him to come over tomorrow for a welcoming party after the hardships of the road. I’m not planning to invite anyone else, but I hope that you two gentlemen and my brother-in-law Wu K’ai will be able to come and keep him company.”

“There is one problem,” said Ying Po-chüeh. “Your brother-in-law Wu K’ai, like you, Brother, are both officials, and Master Wen, here, wears a square-cut scholar’s cap, while I am only entitled to wear a commoner’s skullcap. How can I be comfortable socializing with him? Who knows what he will make of me? Will I not be merely an object of amusement in his eyes?”

Hsi-men Ch’ing laughed, saying, “In that case, I’ll lend you my newly purchased silk ‘loyal and tranquil hat’ to wear, and if he should ask you about it, you can say that you are my eldest son. How would that be?”

They all had a laugh at this.

“To get serious about it,” continued Ying Po-chüeh, “my head size is eight and three-tenths inches, so I couldn’t wear any hat of yours.”

Licentiate Wen chimed in, saying, “Your pupil’s head size is also eight and three-tenths inches; so how would it be if I lent you my square-cut scholar’s cap to wear?”

“Venerable sir,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “you mustn’t lend it to him. If he gets used to borrowing it, he might violate protocol by forgetfully showing up with it when reporting for duty at the local office of the Board of Rites, and you would be implicated.”

“What a thing to say, venerable sir!” laughed Licentiate Wen. “What a thing to say! No doubt I’d end up being dragged into the soup with him.”

At this point, a servant served them with tea, and after they had drunk it, Licentiate Wen inquired, “So His Honor Hsia Yen-ling has received a capital appointment and will not be coming back here anymore?”

“He has been elevated to the position of a senior official,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “As the commander of the escort for imperial processions, he is entitled to wear a mandarin square featuring a *ch’i-lin*,[20] and wield a rattan cane. As the holder of such an illustrious position in the capital, why should he return here?”

Before long, after the invitation had been written, the gifts had been carried outside, and Hsi-men Ch’ing had deputed Tai-an to take charge of their delivery, he conducted Licentiate Wen and Ying Po-chüeh into an anteroom where they could sit down on a heated k’ang, and warm themselves at a brazier. He also dispatched Ch’in-t’ung to the licensed quarter to engage the services of the four boy actors, Wu Hui, Cheng Ch’un, Cheng Feng, and Tso Shun, who were to report for duty early the next day. He then arranged to have a table set up so he could keep his two guests company for a drink of wine.

When Lai-an had brought the table in and set it up, Hsi-men Ch’ing said to him, “Bring another place setting of goblet and chopsticks, and invite my son-in-law to join us.”

In due course, Ch’en Ching-chi came in, bowed to the company, and took a seat to one side. The four of them sat down together around the brazier and proceeded to pour the wine, after which, they fell to talking about Hsi-men Ch’ing’s adventures on the road.

“Brother,” opined Ying Po-chüeh, “you must have a good heart. Since:

One case of good fortune can override

a hundred calamities,[21]

even if there had been highwaymen about at the time, the threat they posed would naturally have been dissipated.”

Licentiate Wen chimed in, saying:

“If good men were to rule a state for a hundred years,

they could put an end to violence and killing.[22]

Quite aside from the fact, venerable sir, that you are forever galloping abroad upon the ruler’s business, High Heaven will not permit good people to suffer injury.”

Hsi-men Ch’ing then asked, “Did anything of importance happen at home during my absence?”

“After Father’s departure,” replied Ch’en Ching-chi, “nothing particular happened at home. The only thing is that His Honor An Ch’en of the Ministry of Works sent people to ask after you twice. Yesterday they came again to ask me, and I told them that you had not returned yet.”

As they were talking, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came in carrying a large platter of stuffed, chive-flavored, pork dumplings. Hsi-men Ch’ing kept them company as they ate but had only had time to eat one dumpling for himself, when P’ing-an came in and announced that two clerks from the yamen office and a group of adjutants had come to report on something. Hsi-men Ch’ing went out to the reception hall, where he remained standing, and ordered them to come in.

The two clerks knelt down in front of him and asked, “If it please Your Honor, on what day do you intend to assume your new office? And how much in the way of public funds should be drawn upon for the occasion?”

“Just do as you have been accustomed to do in the past,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing.

“Last year,” said the clerks, “Your Honor was the only one to assume office. But now, not only has Your Honor been promoted to the post of judicial commissioner, but His Honor Ho Yung-shou is also assuming office as assistant judicial commissioner. Since these two events are occurring together, the normal precedents do not apply.”

“In that case,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing, “you can spend another ten taels of silver for the occasion, making a total of thirty taels in all.”

The two clerks assented and were on their way out when Hsi-men Ch’ing called them back and said, “As for the day on which to schedule our formal assumption of office, you can ask His Honor Ho Yung-shou when he would like it to be.”

“His Honor Ho Yung-shou has already determined that he would like it to be on the twenty-fifth,”[23] the two clerks reported.

“In that case,” responded Hsi-men Ch’ing, “you can go ahead and prepare for it then.”

The two of them then proceeded to draw the specified amount of silver and expend it on arranging the necessary table settings, and purchasing provisions for the occasion.

Sometime later, Ch’iao Hung also came by to pay his respects and proffer his congratulations. Hsi-men Ch’ing invited him to stay for a visit, but he declined and, after drinking a serving of tea, got up and departed. Hsi-men Ch’ing continued to keep his two guests company until lamplighting time before the party broke up, after which, he went back to Yüeh-niang’s quarters, where he spent the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next day, preparations were set in order for the party to welcome Ho Yung-shou after the hardships of his trip.

Auntie Wen had also learned of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s homecoming by this time and mentioned it to Wang the Third, who immediately prepared a calling card inviting him to come over for a visit. Hsi-men Ch’ing responded by arranging for the purchase of two sets of pig’s trotters, two fresh fish, two roast ducks, and a jar of southern wine, and sending Tai-an to deliver them as a belated birthday present for Lady Lin. Tai-an was rewarded for his efforts with a gratuity of three mace of silver. But no more of this.

In the main reception hall the preparations for the party were complete.

The brocade screens dazzled the eyes,

The tables and chairs were spic-and-span,

The floor was covered with brocade carpets,

Landscapes by famous artists adorned the walls.

Brother-in-law Wu K’ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen all came ahead of time. Hsi-men Ch’ing joined them while tea was served and sent someone to remind Ho Yung-shou of his invitation. In a little while, the boy actors appeared and kowtowed to the company.

“Brother,” inquired Ying Po-chüeh, “why did you not engage the services of Li Ming for this occasion?”

“He no longer frequents my household,” replied Hsi-men Ch’ing, “so I no longer employ him.”

“I guess you’re still angry with them,” said Ying Po-chüeh, but he did not pursue the matter further.

As they were talking, whom should they see but P’ing-an, who hastily came in with a calling card and reported, “His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has come to pay his respects and has already dismounted.”

At this, Brother-in-law Wu K’ai, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh all retired to an anteroom on the west side of the courtyard, while Hsi-men Ch’ing donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome his guest into the reception hall. After exchanging the customary amenities, Chou Hsiu spoke of Hsi-men Ch’ing’s recent promotion and extended his congratulations, and Hsi-men Ch’ing thanked him for the loan of the officers and horses for his trip. Thereupon, the two of them sat down in the positions of guest and host, while Chou Hsiu asked him to describe his experience of the imperial audience in the capital. Hsi-men Ch’ing responded by telling him about it in some detail.

“Since Hsia Yen-ling is not coming back,” said Chou Hsiu, “he surely must be planning to send someone to conduct his dependents to the capital.”

“He is not going to send for them until sometime next month,” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “In the interim, my colleague Ho Yung-shou is staying at the yamen. In response to my advocacy, Hsia Yen-ling has also agreed to sell his house to him.”

“That sounds like an ideal solution,” said Chou Hsiu.

Upon noticing the preparations for a party in the reception hall, he then went on to ask, “Who are you entertaining today?”

“I’m merely providing a libation to welcome His Honor Ho Yung-shou after the hardships of his journey,” explained Hsi-men Ch’ing. “Since we are now colleagues, it’s the least I can do for him.”

When the two of them had finished their tea, Chou Hsiu got up to go, saying, “Someday soon, the officers of the guard will get together to offer their congratulations to you two gentlemen.”

“How could I presume to put you to such trouble?” said Hsi-men Ch’ing. “I am grateful for your offer.”

After bowing to his host, Chou Hsiu went out the gate, mounted his horse, and departed.

Hsi-men Ch’ing then came back inside, divested himself of his formal attire, and rejoined his three visitors, after which, a meal was served for them in the studio.

It was already afternoon by the time Ho Yung-shou arrived. Wu K’ai and the others were all introduced to him, and, when they had finished with the customary amenities, they proceeded to chat about the weather. When the first serving of tea had been replaced, they all relaxed by loosening their clothing.

Ho Yung-shou perceived that Hsi-men Ch’ing’s household was appropriately prosperous, and that the preparations for the party were lavishly complete. The four boy musicians, with their:

Silver psalteries, ivory clappers,

Jade mandolas, and balloon guitars,

joined the company to serve the wine. Within the hall:

Animal-shaped briquettes burn in golden braziers;

Jade goblets are overflowing with Yang-kao wine.

The blinds are all suspended, so that:

The whole area is suffused with spring warmth;

The entire hall is filled with genial feeling.[24]

Truly, it is a case of:

Golden goblets are brimming with vintage wine;

Jade candles are trimmed amid sounds of spring.

The party continued until the first watch, when Ho Yung-shou got up and returned to the yamen, while Wu K’ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen also took their leave and returned home. After Hsi-men Ch’ing had seen the boy actors off, he ordered the utensils to be cleared away and made his way to P’an Chin-lien’s quarters in the front compound.

The woman, for her part, was waiting in her room, where she had proceeded to:

Apply generous coats of rouge and powder,

Deck herself out in a new set of apparel,

Light incense and wash her private parts,

in the hope that Hsi-men Ch'ing would visit her quarters.
Her face was wreathed in smiles,[25]
as she went forward to help him off with his clothes and promptly ordered Ch'un-mei to pour out a serving of tea for him. After he had drunk the tea, the two of them went to bed for the night. Truly:
Under heated bedding and heated quilts,
Brocade curtains hold an air of spring.
And the fragrance of musk is luxuriant.
Beneath the quilt, their white bodies
are in intimate contact;
Upon the pillow, their smooth breasts
press against each other.
Above, they project their clove-shaped tongues;
Below, the pearl is imbedded inside the oyster.
As for the woman:
Throughout the game of clouds and rain,[26]
Her hundred allurements are on display;[27]
As for Hsi-men Ch'ing:
When through thrusting and retracting,
His "magic rhinoceros horn" is erect.[28]
Unable to go to sleep, they spent some time discussing events during their period of separation. Even after intercourse, their lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, and Hsi-men Ch'ing obliged her to get down and play his phoenix flute. As for the woman, her sole desire was to strengthen her hold upon Hsi-men Ch'ing's heart. Moreover, having been neglected for half a month:
Her innermost feelings were starved;[29]
Her libidinous desires were on fire.
Now that his body was again at her disposal, her only regret was that she couldn't:
Bore her way into his belly,
and she was prepared to toy with his organ all night without its ever leaving her mouth.
Hsi-men Ch'ing needed to get out of bed in order to urinate, but the woman wouldn't let him go, saying, "My darling, no matter how much urine you may have, go ahead and piss it into my mouth, and I'll swallow it for you. It's ice-cold, and it would be better not to have to expose your warm body to the frigid temperature."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard these words, he was more gratified than ever and exclaimed, "My precious child, no one else cares for me as much as you do."
Thereupon, he actually pissed into the woman's mouth, while she allowed the urine to collect there, and then slowly swallowed it in one mouthful.
"How do you like the taste?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"It has a somewhat salty flavor," responded Chin-lien. "If you have any breath-sweetening lozenges handy, give me some of them to suppress the odor."
"The breath-sweetening lozenges are in my white satin jacket," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You can help yourself to them."
The woman put an end to the episode by tugging at the sleeve of his jacket, which was lying over the headboard, groping out a few lozenges, and popping them into her mouth. Truly:
The minister in waiting is not as thirsty
as the diabetic Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju;[30]
But is willing to accept the gift of a cup
of dew from atop a brazen pillar.[31]
Gentle reader take note: It is all too often the way of wives or concubines to set out deliberately to bewitch their husbands:
There is no length to which they will not go,
Humbling themselves to the most shameful acts,
Without showing even a trace of embarrassment.
Legitimate wives, on the other hand, are:
Straightforward and honorable,[32]
and could never bring themselves to resort to such practices.
That night, Hsi-men Ch'ing and the woman continued to dally with each other without restraint.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing reported to the yamen early in order to participate, together with Ho Yung-shou, in the ceremony marking their formal assumption of office, and to attend the public banquet arranged to celebrate the occasion. Musicians from the two Music Offices were enlisted to provide for their entertainment. It was already afternoon by the time he returned home, and orderlies from the yamen also delivered to his residence what remained from his table setting at the banquet.
Wang the Third also sent someone to extend an invitation to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by sending Tai-an to the silk goods store to pick up an outfit of clothing as a gift, and arrange to have it wrapped up in a felt bag.
Just as he was completing his preparations for departure, an attendant came in and announced that His Honor An Ch'en had come to pay him a visit, which threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he hardly had time to straighten his clothing before going out to welcome him.
An Ch'en, who was benefiting from his newly enhanced rank as secretary of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works, was wearing a girdle with a decorative plaque enchased with gold, and a mandarin square emblazoned with a silver pheasant, and was followed by a retinue of lesser officials.
His face was wreathed in smiles,
as he was conducted into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities and congratulated each other on their recent promotions.
When they had seated themselves in the positions of guest and host, Secretary An Ch'en said, "Your pupil has sent people to ask after you several times, but they were told that you had not yet returned."
"That was the case," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I had to remain in the capital until I could attend the great audience at the time of the winter solstice, and submit my congratulatory memorial, before I was able to set out for home."
In a little while, after they had consumed a serving of tea, An Ch'en said, "Your pupil has respectfully come to ask a favor that it is probably inappropriate to trouble you with. At present, the prefect of Chiu-chiang, Ts'ai Hsiu, who is the ninth son of the venerable Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, [33] is en route to the capital for his triennial audience with the Emperor. The other day, I received a letter from him, stating that he would be arriving here very soon. Your pupil, along with Sung Ch'iao-nien, Ch'ien Lung-yeh, and Huang Pao-kuang, the four of us in all, intend to play host to him and would like to borrow the use of your mansion for the purpose, and invite him to a feast. But we don't know whether you will consent to this or not."
"If that is your esteemed behest, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing:
"I could hardly presume to disobey it.[34]
Just let me know when it will be needed."
"It will be on the twenty-seventh," responded An Ch'en. "Your pupil will send over our joint contributions toward the cost of the event tomorrow. If your exemplary staff is able to manage it for us, it would be an ample demonstration of your consideration."
Having finished speaking, and having consumed another serving of tea, he took his leave, mounted his horse, and went his way, accompanied by outriders shouting to clear the way.
Immediately thereafter, Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to go out the gate and make his way to the mansion of Imperial Commissioner Wang I-hsüan in order to attend the party to which he had been invited. Upon arriving at the gate, he sent in his calling card, and when Wang the Third heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had arrived, he hastened out to welcome him and escorted him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities.
It so happens that this hall was a spacious thirty-foot-wide structure, with a rounded goalpost-shaped main door; topped with a double-eaved, five-ridged, gable and hip roof, decorated with animal figures; and enhanced with doors and windows of caltrop-patterned latticework. Over the lintel a plaque was suspended that had been presented by the Emperor and was inscribed in the imperial hand with three gold characters that read "Hall of Ancestral Loyalty." To either side of the door were suspended tablets inscribed with the parallel statements:
Mansion of a pillar of the state;
Home of a protector of the realm.[35]
In the place of honor in the middle of the hall was positioned a formal chair, upholstered in tiger skin, with a closely clipped woolen rug on the floor in front of it.
After Wang the Third had greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with the appropriate amenities, he ushered him to the seat of honor, while he drew up a chair for himself and sat down to one side. Before long, a serving of tea was brought out on a red lacquer tray. When they had politely offered cups to each other and consumed the tea, the attendants took the utensils away, and they fell into casual conversation. It was only after this that the drinking vessels were laid out and the wine poured. It so happens that Wang the Third had engaged the services of two boy actors to entertain them by singing and playing their musical instruments.
Hsi-men Ch'ing interrupted the proceedings by saying, "Why don't you invite the venerable lady of the house to come out so that I can pay her my respects?"
This elicited such consternation on the part of Wang the Third that he promptly told an attendant to go back to the interior of the residence and convey the request.
In a little while, the attendant came out again and said, "Her Ladyship invites His Honor to come visit her inside."
Wang the Third, accordingly, prepared to usher him inside, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My worthy acquaintance, pray precede me."
Thereupon, they went straight back to the main room in the interior of the residence.
Lady Lin was already fully decked out for the occasion.
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets;[36]
her torso was garbed in a scarlet full-sleeved robe; her waist was encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold, beneath which she wore a flower-sprigged skirt of jet brocade; her face was so heavily daubed with makeup that she resembled a silver figurine; her hair was done up in a raised coiffure; her lips were red with rouge; her earlobes were adorned with a pair of pearl earrings; and from the upper border of her skirt were suspended two strings of:
Jade pendants that tinkled when she moved.[37]
Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Bent his body to perform an obeisance,
saying, "Will Your Ladyship please assume the position of honor."
"Your Honor is our guest," responded Lady Lin. "Will you please assume the position of honor."
After dickering for what seemed like half a day, the two of them ended up kowtowing to each other.
"I fear," said Lady Lin, "that my young son, who is as yet:
Unconscious of right and wrong,
imposed upon Your Honor the other day but was fortunate enough to receive your forgiveness. And you also undertook to settle matters with that bunch of characters on his behalf, for which:
My gratitude knows no bounds.
Today I have prepared a meager cup of watery wine and invited you here, with the intention of kowtowing to you in order to express my gratitude. How is it that, instead, I have been the recipient of Your Honor's gifts, putting me in a position in which it would be:
Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept?"
"How could I be so presumptuous?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It was only because your pupil had to go to the Eastern Capital on business and was therefore unable to proffer my congratulations on the occasion of Your Ladyship's birthday that I have offered this:
Insignificant lot of paltry gifts,[38]
to Your Ladyship to give away to someone if you like."
Upon noticing that Auntie Wen was also present, Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to her, saying, "Auntie Wen, would you fetch me a set of goblets on raised stands so I can proffer a drink of birthday wine to Her Ladyship."
He also hastily called for Tai-an to come forward. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had prepared an outfit of fashionable brocaded clothing as a birthday present for Lady Lin, which Tai-an was carrying in his felt bag. It consisted of a lilac-colored, wide-sleeved, satin jacket, and a kingfisher-blue, long trailing skirt, and was presented to her upon a tray. When Lady Lin saw it, with its:
Golden tints that caught the eye,
she was more than a little delighted.
Auntie Wen forthwith presented a set of:
Golden goblets on silver stands,[39]
and Wang the Third also ordered the two boy actors to bring their musical instruments and come in to help celebrate the occasion.
But Lady Lin protested, saying, "See here, what's the point of calling them in here? Let them wait outside for now."
Accordingly, they were sent outside again.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then toasted her with a goblet of wine, and Lady Lin expressed her gratitude by returning the compliment.
After this, Wang the Third proffered Hsi-men Ch'ing a goblet of wine, and Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to kowtow to him in return, but Lady Lin intervened, saying, "Your Honor, please get up, and permit him to kowtow to you."
"How could I do that?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Whoever heard of such a thing?"
"My good sir," said Lady Lin, "how can you talk that way? Do you mean to suggest that someone with such a high-ranking office as yours is not fit to be his adopted father? My son has been undereducated since his childhood and has not had the opportunity to associate with the right sort of people. If Your Honor will only deign to demonstrate your good will by teaching him how to become a better person in all respects, I will have him, today, in my presence, kowtow to Your Honor as his adopted father. If you should detect any faults in his conduct, Your Honor should feel free to admonish him. I will certainly not endeavor to defend his shortcomings."
"Although there is something to what Your Ladyship suggests," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your noble son, my worthy acquaintance, is naturally endowed with intelligence. At present, he is young and is still feeling his way with regard to the rules of proper conduct. In the future:
When the scope of his perceptions has become broader,
He will correct his faults and change for the better.[40]
Your Ladyship need not be concerned about it."
Thereupon, Lady Lin had Hsi-men Ch'ing assume the position of honor, while Wang the Third poured out three goblets of wine and performed the ceremony of kowtowing to him four times. When these acts of homage had been performed, Hsi-men Ch'ing moved to a lesser position and bowed to Lady Lin to express his gratification, in response to which, she smiled broadly and made him a deep obeisance in return. From this time on, whenever Wang the Third encountered Hsi-men Ch'ing, he addressed him as Father. Can such things be? As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, truly:
He was ever prepared to enjoy the pleasure of
"abusing the innocent and good";
As a makeshift substitute for the delight of

"addiction to clouds and rain."
The poet, on observing this conduct, must have felt a sense of outrage, which inspired him to compose a poem lamenting it.
Since men and women are forbidden to exchange
drinks with each other;
Flaunting one's beauty and inviting seduction[41]
are really shameful acts.
But Wang the Third, who was in the dark about
the significance of it all;
Not only contributed to his mother's adultery
but kowtowed to her lover.
There is also another poem inspired by this event:
The women's quarters of great households
should be strictly guarded;
For the hen to announce the break of dawn[42]
is extremely inauspicious.
Not only does it forebode the destruction
of the family's reputation;
But it desecrates the name of the Hall of
Integrity and Righteousness.
After they had consumed the wine, Lady Lin directed Wang the Third to invite Hsi-men Ch'ing back to the reception hall in the front of the residence, where the two of them sat down and loosened their clothing. Tai-an brought out Hsi-men Ch'ing's "loyal and tranquil hat," and he changed into it.
It was not long before the table settings were arranged and they sat down in their places, while the boy actors struck up their musical instruments and prepared to sing for their entertainment. The chef came out and carved the entrée, while Tai-an stood by to offer him an appropriate gratuity. Standing in front of the company, the boy actors then proceeded to sing the song suite that begins with the tune "Fresh Water Song":
Kingfisher blinds closely enclose
the small chamber;
The jade hook of the moon dangles
low in the heavens.
Within the suspended felt drapery,
And tortoiseshell brocade screens,
An amorous atmosphere is suffused.
Branches of plum blossoms exude a subtle fragrance.
TO THE TUNE "A TRICKY PLAY"
Their slender shadows cross the window lattices;[43]
Green parakeets are hanging on them upside down.
Snow, like a cloud of pear blossoms, re-creates
the dream on Mount Lo-fu.[44]
It is deep at night and the dripping of the cold
clepsydra seems endless.
TO THE TUNE "SWEET WATER SONG"
The alabaster trees have borne blossoms;
The jade dragons have lost their scales;
Bits of hail cascade from the Milky Way;
Auspicious snow dances in the swirling wind.
The azure empyrean is immaculate;
Pale moonlight browses the eaves;
Dark clouds invade the ridgepole;
The iridescent gates and pearly palaces[45]
present a blinding whiteness.
TO THE TUNE "PLUCKING THE CASSIA"
The brocade setting enhances his delight
in the creative work of spring.
The pubescent maidservants,
And teenaged singing boys.
He plays "Hiding the Tally" under the flowers,[46]
Gaming at forfeits during a drinking bout,
Or throwing the dice at the banquet table.
Alluringly, she contends in beauty
and competes for favor;
Jubilantly, he hugs the turquoise
and cuddles the red.
She serves cups and offers goblets;[47]
Alters the pitch or switches modes;[48]
Dances seductively and sings songs;[49]
Gently strums or lightly melodizes.[50]
TO THE TUNE "THE WATER NYMPHS"
The fragrant fumes of musk-scented charcoal
form ornate lotus blossoms;
The wavery light of phoenix-painted candles[51]
engenders aureate rainbows;
Ivory bedsteads provide a springtime warmth
in the lanes of the quarter.
The rouge and powder exude fragrance where
pearls and trinkets cluster;
Like strata of colored clouds, the layers
of silken fabrics are thick.
The scent of ambergris in jeweled censers
is diaphanous;
Animal-shaped briquettes in gold braziers
glow fire-red;
A warm aura creates the genial atmosphere
of the spring breeze.
TO THE BINARY TUNES "WILD GEESE ALIGHT" AND "VICTORY SONG"
On the silver psaltery the bridges are
ranged like wild geese;
The sound of the jade flute is like the
warble of a baby oriole;
The flowers are as brightly colored as
a kingfisher's wings;
A plenitude of wine fills to the brim
the vitreous decanter.
Variegated sleeves proffer golden goblets;
Slender fingers handle silk handkerchiefs;
The frosty rinds of fresh oranges are peeled;
Melted snow is used to boil the fragrant tea.
Pleasure abounds,
Inebriated feelings are profoundly stimulated;
The feast is over,
The night is late but desire is not yet sated.
TO THE TUNE "PROCURING GOOD WINE"
By means of only a single glance and a smile,
Their mutual feelings are fully communicated.
Under the lamplight, he scrutinizes
the object of his desire;
She is like Ch'ang-o emerging from
her palace in the moon;
Or the Goddess of Witches' Mountain
descending from her peak.
TO THE TUNE "SONG OF GREAT PEACE"
From the sloping hair at her temples the flying
phoenix hairpin has fallen;
The kingfisher-hued motif of a coiled dragon on
her dancing skirt is loose;
Her powdered sweat moistens the white cosmetics
on her bewitching features;
Sticking out its tip, she tentatively lets her
clove-shaped tongue protrude.
Her arm is encircled with a bracelet, and the
red mark of a chastity charm.[52]
Truly, they make a pair of fledgling male and
captivating female phoenixes.[53]
TO THE TUNE "RIVER-BOBBED OARS"

It is a happy reunion,
A reunion with the object of his desire.
Her willows are fatigued, her blossoms languid;[54]
Her jadelike body is warm, her breast melting;
As they savor to the full the romance
of their rendezvous.
Quiveringly, her chignon becomes disheveled;
Lazily, the autumn ripples of her eyes stir;
Archly, the mascara of her eyebrows gathers.
TO THE TUNE "SEVEN BROTHERS"
Intoxication ignites,
Her jade countenance,
Into a delicate red glow.
Addicted to flowers and lusting for jade,
they indulge their desires.
He actually believes he is participating,
while in a somnolent trance,
In a dream visit to the goddess who lives
in the Floriate Pearl Palace.[55]
TO THE TUNE "PLUM BLOSSOM WINE"
As they reach the climax of their game
of clouds and rain,
They are in a dither, though the event
is ordinary enough.[56]
The watch drums sound incessantly,
The chimes under the eaves tinkle;
The neighboring cock crows,
The trumpet plays reveille;
The jade clepsydra drips,
Resounding reiteratively;
The silver lamp burns out,
Casting its golden sparks;
Beyond the silken windows,
The light of dawn impends;
At the azure Heaven's rim,
The sun begins to radiate.
TO THE TUNE "CONQUERING THE SOUTHLAND"
Ah! What does he hear but the sound of the well-pulley
beyond the whitewashed wall;[57]
And the early cawing of the ravens in the phoenix trees
beside the gilded wellhead?
Spring beauty still fills his eyes, but
he is not yet fully awake.
Alas, this vision of surreptitious joy
and secret infatuation,[58]
Has been idly interrupted for no good
reason, which is a pity.[59]
Before long, after:
Five main courses had been served, and
Two suites of songs had been performed,
the candles were lit, and Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to change his clothes and take his leave. Wang the Third, however, insisted upon retaining him a little longer and invited him into his private studio, which was located at the side of the courtyard. It was a small, freestanding structure, only eighteen feet wide, but inside:
Flowers and trees cast intersecting shadows, and
The cultural artifacts were elegantly displayed.
A plaque emblazoned with four powdered-gold characters read "San-ch'üan's Poetic Skiff." On the four walls there hung antique paintings depicting the following subjects:
The Yellow Emperor Asks about the Way,[60]
Fu Sheng Conceals the Forbidden Books,[61]
Ping Chi Makes Inquiries about the Ox,[62]
Sung Ching Examines the History Books.[63]
Upon seeing the plaque, Hsi-men Ch'ing asked, "Who might San-ch'üan, or Three Springs, be?"
Wang the Third endeavored to avoid the question and did not wish to reply, but finally, after what seemed like half a day, he said, "It is your son's insignificant courtesy name."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon hearing this, did not have another word to say on the subject.
At this point, a tall narrow-necked vessel was brought in, and they proceeded to play pitch-pot and drink wine together, while the two boy actors stood to one side, struck up their instruments, and sang for their entertainment. Meanwhile, Lady Lin, in the rear of the residence, supervised her maidservants and waiting women in replenishing their refreshments, and supplying them with saucers of seasonal delicacies. They continued drinking until the second watch, when Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was already half inebriated, took his leave and got up to go. He gave each of the boy actors a tip of three mace of silver, and Wang the Third escorted him to the front gate and saw him into his sedan chair. The two orderlies who had accompanied him lit their lanterns, while Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his earmuffs, donned his sable cloak, said goodbye to his host, and set out for home.
When he arrived there, he remembered something Chin-lien had said to him earlier in the day and made his way straight into her quarters. It so happens that the woman had not yet gone to bed but had just taken off her headdress and was engaged in doing up her cloud-shaped chignon. Still:
Delicately made up and heavily powdered,[64]
she was in her room, leaning on the base of her makeup stand, with her feet propped on the rim of the brazier, cracking melon seeds in her mouth as she waited for him. Beside the brazier:
A kettle of hydrangea-flavored tea was brewing;[65]
upon the table:
Incense curled from a golden lion-shaped censer.[66]
As soon as she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she:
Lightly moved her lotus feet,
Gently lifted her beige skirt,
and hastened forward to take his outer garments and put them away. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on her bed, while Ch'un-mei brought out a clean cup for him, and the woman, after brushing away a few drops of water from the rim of the cup with her slender fingers, poured out a cupful of dense and full-bodied tender-leaved Sparrow Tongue Liu-an tea,[67] steeped with sesame seeds, marinated bamboo shoots, shredded chestnuts, melon seeds, a blend of walnut kernels and potherb mustard greens called "The Sea Eagle Attacks the Swan," osmanthus, and attar of roses. Upon swallowing no more than a mouthful and savoring its delectable fragrance and sweetness, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted. He then had Ch'un-mei:
Take off his boots, unfasten his girdle,[68]
and help him into bed. Meanwhile the woman, under the lamplight, removed her head ornaments and changed into her sleeping shoes, after which the two of them lay down:
Head to head and thigh over thigh, while
The coverlet was disturbed by crimson waves,
And they reposed upon their phoenix pillows.
Ch'un-mei extinguished the silver lamp on the table, closed the two leaves of the door, and went into the adjacent room.
Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to pillow the woman's head on his arm and embrace her naked body, which was just like:
Soft jade and warm incense.
The two of them fell to it, with their:
Creamy breasts squeezed together,
Their jadelike legs intertwined;
Their two faces nuzzling each other,[69]
Audibly sucking each other's tongues.
The woman picked up a handful of melon seed kernels that were in a saucer beside her pillow, popped them into her mouth, and transmitted them into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth with the tip of her tongue. It was not long before:
Her sweet spittle transfused his heart, and
His magic rhinoceros horn was awakened.
The woman reached down and manipulated his organ persistently with one hand, while she opened the bag of sexual implements with the other and proceeded to fasten the silver clasp in place.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "My child, while I was away from home, did you think of me, or not?"
"During the half-month or so that you were away," the woman said, "I couldn't get you out of my mind for so much as a quarter of an hour. When evening came, the nights were long, and, all by myself, I was unable to sleep. No matter what lengths I went to in order to:
Warm the bed and warm the bedding,
I continued to feel cold. When I extended my legs and encountered a cold spot, I had to retract them, and my hands became so cracked that they hurt. I would count the days till your return, but you failed to appear. There is no telling how many tears I shed upon my pillow. After a while, that little piece Ch'un-mei noticed the extent to which I was giving vent to:
Long sighs as well as short,
and persuaded me to kill time by playing board games with her in the evening. After sitting together till the first watch, the two of us would lie down foot-to-foot on the same k'ang and go to sleep together. My brother, that's what my feelings were for you. But I don't know what your feelings were for me."
"You crazy oily mouth!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Although there are those others in the household, who is not aware that I prefer to spend my time with you?"
"That's enough of that," the woman responded. "Who do you think you're kidding? You tend to:
Wolf down the rice in your bowl,
While keeping an eye on the pot.
It's the same way you carried on with that wife of Lai-wang's:
Mixing oil in with the honey,
while ignoring me completely. And afterwards, when Li P'ing-erh produced a son, you treated me just like an angry fighting cock. Now that the two of them have gone to their fates, whatever they may be, I'm the only one left at your disposal. You're just like:
A willow catkin in the wind,[70]
Bobbing up and bobbing down.[71]
And now you've started to bestow your favor on Ju-i, that lousy splay-legged creature. No matter how you look at it, she's only a wet nurse, and since she manifestly already has a husband of her own, she's the wife of a flesh-and-blood person. If you insist on taking her for yourself, in the future, her husband is likely to:
Come grazing his sheep in front of your gate,
The better to befoul it with their droppings.
Since you are:
An incumbent, office-holding official,
if word of this should get out, it will hardly redound to your credit. Just look at the way that lousy whore carried on the other day while you were away. In the course of a dispute with Ch'un-mei over a laundry bat, the two of them got into:
A vituperative altercation,
and she wouldn't allow me to get a word in edgewise."
"My child," admonished Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No matter how you look at it, she's only a servant. How could she have the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to challenge you?

If you raise your hand,
She will be able to get by;
If you lower your hand,
She'll be unable to get by."
"Ai-ya!" the woman exclaimed. "You may say that I have the power to either raise my hand or prevent her from getting by, but after the death of Li P'ingerh, she took over her place in the nest. I've heard tell that you said to her, 'If you do your best to cater to me, I'll turn over your mistress's property to you.' Did you ever really say that to her?"
"Don't be so foolishly suspicious," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since when did I say any such thing? If you are so magnanimous as to forgive her, I'll tell her to come kowtow to you and apologize tomorrow."
"There's no need for her to come and apologize to me," the woman said, "but I won't permit you to go on sleeping in her room."
"The only reason I sleep in her place," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is that I can't get over my feelings for Li P'ing-erh if I have to spend so much as a night or two away from her quarters. As for Ju-i, she's only there to keep vigil over her spirit tablet. Since when have I been indulging in any:
Illicit salt or illicit vinegar,
with her."
"I don't believe those excuses of yours," declared the woman. "She's already been dead for more than a hundred days, so what need is there for anyone to keep vigil over her spirit tablet? She's not there to keep vigil over any spirit tablet. She's more like:
The watchman at a rice warehouse, who spends
The first half of the night ringing his bell,
And the second half, like a voyeuristic maid,
Listening to the sound of the pounding inside.
With these few words she managed to get under Hsi-men Ch'ing's skin, with the result that he embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy little whore! You're up to your usual tricks."
Thereupon, he had her turn over so he could:
Poke up the fire on the other side of the mountains,
inserted his organ into her vagina, embraced her legs under the quilt, and proceeded to slam away at her with all his might until:
The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly,
causing the woman to cry out, "What an enormous thing!"
"Do you fear me, or not?" he demanded. "Will you dare to keep on trying to manage me in the future?"
"You crazy knave!" the woman exclaimed. "If there were no one to manage you, you would fly straight up to Heaven, I suppose. I'm well aware that you can't bring yourself to shake off that whore. In the future, however, you'd better get my permission before going over to her place. And if she asks you for anything, you'd better tell me about it, rather than giving it to her surreptitiously. If you violate this compact, and I find out about it, just see whether I kick up a real rumpus about it, or not. I'll put my life up against that whore's any day; what's it to me? It's just like the situation when Li P'ing-erh first entered the household and she cast such a spell on you that the rest of us very nearly ended up being:
Relegated to the realm of the superfluous.
She's nothing but a good-for-nothing, rotten, overripe peach; and it's true, I guess, that:
Bean sprouts don't lend themselves to
being neatly bundled.
But, right now, I've got the upper hand over you both."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this outburst, saying, "You little whore! You're a fine one to play the role of a moralist, enforcing the observance of ritual prescriptions."
Thereupon, the two of them:
Entranced by the clouds and intoxicated by the rain,
continued to go at it until the third watch before falling asleep. Truly:
If there is an open window and a bird
to seize the occasion;
It will hold spring in its mouth as it
warbles upon a branch.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Bearing raindrops, shrouded in mist,
she is rarely to be seen;
Beguiling in stance, she appears to be
unable to support herself.
Throughout the night, she deliberately
unloads her fragrant heart;
Holding onto the east wind to prevent
it from returning home.[72]
The two of them:
Head to head and thigh over thigh,
slept together until the morrow dawned, but the woman's lascivious feelings were still unsatisfied, and she proceeded to relentlessly manipulate Hsi-men Ch'ing's organ with her hand.
While she manipulated his chowrie handle, she exclaimed, "My own daddy! The one thing I want is to lie on top of you."
So saying, she prostrated herself on Hsi-men Ch'ing's body, proceeded to "dip the candle upside down," embraced him by the neck, and fell to kneading away at him. She directed Hsi-men Ch'ing to grasp her waist with both hands, as tightly as possible, while she lay on top of him, thrusting and retracting for all she was worth. As she rubbed against him while lying prostrate on top of his body, his organ finally penetrated her to the root, but the clasp prevented it from entering quite all the way.
The woman then said, "My own daddy! During the day tomorrow, I'll make you a band of white satin. If you will put some of that aphrodisiac powder the Indian monk gave you inside it, I'll attach two long ribbons to it, and then, when we're ready to go to bed, you can fasten the band around the root of your organ, and tie the two ribbons securely behind your back. Not only will it be warm, but it will allow you to insert your organ all the way. It will be an improvement over that silver clasp, which not only chafes your partner till it hurts, but also prevents us from achieving complete satisfaction."
"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you might as well do as you say. The aphrodisiac powder is in that porcelain container on the table. You can go ahead and apply it yourself."
"No matter what," the woman said, "be sure to come back here tonight so we can try it out. How would that be?"
Thereupon, the two of them proceeded to play with each other yet another time.
Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and asked Ch'un-mei, "Has Father gotten up yet? His Honor An Ch'en has sent someone to deliver the joint contributions toward the cost of the forthcoming event. He has also brought two jugs of Chin-hua wine, and four bonsai."
"Father isn't up yet," said Ch'un-mei. "Tell him he'll have to wait a while."
"It's not as though he's on a short mission," said Tai-an. "He still has to report back to the customs station at the port on the New Canal."
Who could have anticipated that Hsi-men Ch'ing overheard this exchange from the interior of the room and proceeded to question Tai-an through the window. On opening the accompanying document when it had been brought inside, he found that it read as follows:
Four sealed joint contributions are hereby respectfully offered, making a total of eight taels in all. Only for Ts'ai Hsiu do you need to provide an individual table setting. For the rest, communal seating will suffice. I trust that your servants will be fastidious in their preparations, which would be a more than ample demonstration of your consideration. In addition, I am providing four seasonally appropriate bonsai for your delectation, along with two jugs of Chekiang wine, in order to make a paltry contribution toward the provisions required for the occasion. I hope that you will deign to accept them with a smile. That would be fortunate indeed.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the document, he got up and, without bothering to comb his hair, donned a felt cap, put on a loosely cut woolen robe, and went out to the reception hall, where he ordered the messenger from His Honor An Ch'en into his presence, and the latter handed over the joint contributions. Upon observing that the additional gifts consisted of four bonsai, one of red plum, one of white plum, one of jasmine, and one of purple magnolia, along with two jugs of southern wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted.
He promptly arranged for them to be put away, wrote a card in reply, rewarded the messenger with five mace of silver, and asked him, "At what time will the gentlemen be arriving tomorrow, and will they expect actors to be engaged for the occasion, or not?"
"They will probably be arriving early," replied the messenger. "As for the actors, you should engage those from Hai-yen, rather than local ones."
The messenger was then sent on his way.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to take the miniature flowering plants and put them in his studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. He also engaged a mason to erect two heated k'angs there, with a firebox outside the retaining wall, so that the fumes from the burning charcoal would not affect the plants, and assigned Ch'un-hung and Lai-an the task of seeing that they were regularly watered, without fail. Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent Tai-an off to engage the services of the actors and weighed out an appropriate amount of silver for Lai-an so that he could purchase the necessary provisions. That day was also the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday, so arrangements were made to hire some boy musicians from the licensed quarter to play and sing in celebration of the occasion that evening. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.
To resume our story, while still at home, Ying Po-chüeh took five blank calling cards, had Ying Pao put them in a box, and set out for the house across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's place, in order to ask Licentiate Wen to inscribe them with invitations to the five ladies of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, asking them to come to his home for the full-month celebration of the birth of his son on the twenty-eighth.
He had just gone out the door and turned onto the main street when someone behind him called out in a loud voice, "Master Two, please come back here for a minute."
Ying Po-chüeh turned around to look back and, seeing that it was Li Ming, came to a standstill.
Li Ming walked up to him and asked, "Master Two, where are you going?"
"I'm on my way to Licentiate Wen's place," responded Ying Po-chüeh. "I've got something to ask of him."
"If you'll just return home for a minute," said Li Ming, "I've got something to say to you."
Noticing that he had an idler following closely behind him who was carrying a gift box, Ying Po-chüeh determined that he might do well to invite him back into the parlor of his residence. Upon arriving there, Li Ming promptly kowtowed to him and, getting up, directed that the gift box be brought inside and put down. When it was opened, it turned out to contain two roast ducks and two jars of vintage wine.
"Having nothing better to offer," said Li Ming, "these paltry gifts are merely an expression of my filial regard, for you to give away to someone if you like. I have made bold to come here, Master Two, in order to make a request of you."
So saying, he knelt down on the floor and refused to get up.
Ying Po-chüeh pulled him to his feet with one hand, saying, "You silly child! If you have something to say, just say it to me. What need was there for you to purchase any gifts for me?"
"Ever since I was a youngster," said Li Ming, "I have served in Father's household for lo these many years. But now, Father is patronizing others and is no longer calling upon me. No doubt, it is on account of that affair of Li Kuei-chieh's. But the two of us:
Maintain independent establishments,
and the members of my household do not even know what she is up to. Since Father is upset with her, he is giving me a hard time, and as a result, I have:
Suffered injustice and harbor resentment,
but I have no place to seek redress. That is why I have sought you out, Master Two. If you happen to visit his residence and run into Father, perhaps you could put in a good word on my behalf and explain the situation to him. Kueichieh may well be guilty of:
Some kind of misdeed or indiscretion,
but that has nothing to do with me. The mere fact that Father has chosen to be irritated with me is neither here nor there, but my colleagues have also taken to treating me disdainfully."
"Do you mean to say that you actually haven't been performing in his household for all this time?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"I haven't been called upon to do so," replied Li Ming.
"No wonder, then," said Ying Po-chüeh, "that the other day, after your Father returned from the Eastern Capital, on the occasion when he hosted a welcoming party for Ho Yung-shou, to which I, along with his brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Licentiate Wen, were invited, he only engaged the services of Wu Hui, Cheng Ch'un, Cheng Feng, and Tso Shun. When I wondered why I didn't see you there and asked him about it, he said, 'If he doesn't show up, do you expect me to send for him?' You silly child! You would do well to bestir yourself. Who have you got to blame but yourself?"
"If someone from Father's household doesn't send for me," said Li Ming, "how can I simply go there on my own? The other day, he called on those four to perform for him, and since today is the eve of the Third Lady's birthday, early this morning, he sent Tai-an into the quarter to engage the services of another two musicians for the occasion. Tomorrow, Father is putting on another party, for which he has once again engaged the services of those four. But I am being left out in the cold. How could I not be upset about it? My only hope, Master Two, is that you will put in a word on my behalf, and if you are successful, I will come and kowtow to you tomorrow."
"I will not fail to speak up for you," said Ying Po-chüeh. "All this while, I don't know how many times I've intervened to help people out with their problems. How could I fail to speak up on your behalf about such a paltry matter as that you're asking me about? Do as I say, and take these gifts of yours back. What would I want with that hard-earned money of yours, anyway? Just come along with me now, and I'll find a way of gently approaching your Father on the subject."
"Master Two," objected Li Ming, "if you refuse to accept these gifts, I won't presume to accompany you. Though they may not mean much to you, they are merely intended to be:
A token of my gratitude."
So saying, with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude,
he implored his assistance again and again.
Ying Po-chüeh finally agreed to accept the gifts and came up with a gratuity of thirty candareens for the man who had carried the box before sending him on his way.
"Permit me to leave the box here at your place for the time being," said Li Ming. "I'll come back and get it after visiting the mansion."
Thereupon, he accompanied Ying Po-chüeh out the gate as they wended their way:
Rounding bends and turning corners,
to the house across the street from Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.
Upon reaching the gate to the studio therein, and rapping the door knocker, Ying Po-chüeh inquired, "Is the venerable gentleman Wen Pi-ku at home?"
Licentiate Wen, who was engaged at the time in writing a note under the studio window, promptly responded, "Please come in and have a seat."
Hua-t'ung opened the door for them, and Ying Po-chüeh took a seat in the well-lighted parlor within. At the upper end of the room four Tung-p'o chairs[73] were formally arrayed to either side of a hanging scroll depicting the philosopher Chuang-tzu regretting the evanescence of time. On the two side walls were displayed ink rubbings of the parallel statements:
The aroma of the plum blossoms in the vase
invades the brush and inkstone;
The coldness of the snow outside the window

permeates the zither and books.
The door of the room was protected by a cloth portiere.
When Licentiate Wen saw that they had arrived, he came out from inside to greet them and, after exchanging the customary amenities and asking them to be seated, said, "Venerable sir, you are up early today. What are you about?"
"I make so bold," said Ying Po-chüeh, "as to avail myself of your great literary talent to compose a few invitations for me. It so happens that the full-month celebration of the birth of my son falls on the twenty-eighth of the month, and I would like to invite the ladies of the Hsi-men household to come visit for the event."
"Where are the cards?" said Licentiate Wen. "Give them to me and your pupil will write them out for you."
Ying Po-chüeh told Ying Pao to take out the five cards and hand them over, after which, Licentiate Wen took them into his inner room and ground some new ink for the purpose.
He had only finished writing two of them when whom should they see but Ch'i-t'ung, who came inside in a state of obvious agitation and said, "Master Wen, write out another two cards in the First Lady's name. She also wants to invite Kinswoman Ch'iao from the eastern quarter, and Sister-in-law Wu. Have the two cards that Ch'in-t'ung came for a while ago, addressed to Mrs. Han, the Third Lady's elder sister from outside the city gate, and her second brother's wife Mrs. Meng, been sent off yet, or not?"
"Your brother-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, took care of sending them off some time ago," responded Licentiate Wen.
"Master Wen," said Ch'i-t'ung, "after you have done writing out these two invitations, you are requested to compose four more, for the wife of Pen the Fourth, the wife of Fu Ming, the wife of Han Tao-kuo, and the wife of Kan Jun. I'll have Lai-an come to pick them up."
After he had gone, when Lai-an came by to pick up the four additional invitations, Ying Po-chüeh asked him, "Is your Father at home, or has he gone to the yamen?"
"Father has not gone to the yamen today," said Lai-an. "He is in the reception hall, overseeing the reception of some presents sent by the household of his kinsman Ch'iao Hung. Master Two, you might as well go over there for a visit."
"As soon as these invitation cards have been written out I'll come over," responded Ying Po-chüeh.
"Last night," Licentiate Wen said, "the venerable gentleman arrived home rather late after attending a party at the Wang residence."
"Which Wang residence was that?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"It was the residence of the late Imperial Commissioner Wang," said Licentiate Wen.
The implications of this fact were not lost on Ying Po-chüeh.
It was sometime later, after Lai-an had waited for his cards and gone his way, before the remaining invitations for Ying Po-chüeh were completed, and he took Li Ming with him across the street. He found Hsi-men Ch'ing, with his hair still in disarray, supervising the reception of presents in the reception hall, and preparing the replies for them. The table settings he had ordered were arrayed to one side. When he saw Ying Po-chüeh come in, he greeted him with a bow and offered him a seat. A brazier was burning to heat the room.
Ying Po-chüeh thanked him for his hospitality the other day and then went on to ask, "Brother, who are these table settings provided for?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing explained that Secretary An Ch'en had shown up and asked him to host a party the following day for Ts'ai Hsiu, the prefect of Chiu-chiang.
"Will you be engaging the services of an acting troupe or boy musicians on that occasion?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.
"I have already hired a troupe of Hai-yen actors," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and have also engaged the services of four boy musicians to entertain the company."
"Which four boy musicians might they be, Brother?" asked Ying Pochüeh.
"Wu Hui, Cheng Feng, Cheng Ch'un, and Tso Shun," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "why don't you employ Li Ming?"
"He's already flown to a higher branch," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What interest would he have in a place like mine?"
"Brother, how can you say such a thing?" expostulated Ying Po-chüeh. "Only if you summon him would he presume to come. I also was unaware that you have been annoyed with him all this while. The two of them operate independently of each other, and the cause of your displeasure has nothing to do with him. He is hardly privy to the doings of Auntie Li the Third and her establishment. You ought not to do him the injustice of presuming such a thing. Early this morning, he showed up at my place, weeping and wailing, and said to me, 'Quite aside from the fact that my elder sister is one of the ladies in Father's household, I, too, have been accustomed to serve there for lo these many years. But now, he is employing others, and there is no longer any place there for me.'
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
he assured me again and again that he didn't know a word about the goings on of Auntie Li the Third and her establishment. The fact that you have made him a target of your annoyance has made life very difficult for him. After all, for a person of such inferior status, what sort of standing does he possess? If you take it into your head to turn against him, how could he hope to withstand you?"
He then proceeded to summon Li Ming, saying, "Come over here and explain things to your Father in person. What are you keeping out of sight for? You're acting like the proverbial:
Ugly daughter-in-law who is fearful of
seeing her parents-in-law."[74]
Li Ming had moved closer and was standing by the latticework partition:
With lowered head and dragging feet,
Like a ghost trying to abide unseen,
as he observed the two of them discussing his case, without daring to utter a word.
Upon hearing Ying Po-chüeh call for him, he went inside, knelt stiff-leggedly down on the floor, and kowtowed, saying, "Father, you really ought to look more closely into what they've been up to over there. If I knew so much as a single word about it, I would deserve to be run over by a chariot, trampled by horses, subjected to judicial punishment, and put to death by dismemberment. The kindness you have shown me and my entire family all this while is:
As high as Heaven and as thick as Earth.[75]
Though:
My body should be pulverized and my bones shattered,
I could hardly hope to repay you. But now that you have chosen to show your displeasure toward me, I have been subjected to ridicule by the colleagues in my profession, and taken advantage of by them. Under the circumstances, where am I to turn in order to discover a patron?"
When he had finished speaking, he gave vent to loud sobs and cried out in pain as he knelt on the ground and refused to get up.
"That's enough! That's enough!" interjected Ying Po-chüeh from the sidelines. "Brother, you really ought to give him another chance. After all:
A great person does not deign to notice
the faults of petty persons.
Quite aside from the fact that he is not at fault, even if he had actually done something to offend you, his willingness to appeal to you in this way should lead you to make amends by forgiving him."
"As for you," he continued, addressing himself to Li Ming, "come over here. It has always been the case that:
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.
Now that I have explained the situation to your Father, he should no longer hold anything against you."
"What you say is true, Master Two," responded Li Ming.
"If one is aware of a fault one must correct it.[76]
I will act accordingly in the future."
Ying Po-chüeh said:
"You've only endured a slap with a flour sack,
but you've done a complete about-face."
Hsi-men Ch'ing thought to himself in silence for some time before saying, "Since Master Two has repeatedly interceded on your behalf, I will no longer harbor any resentment toward you. You can get up now, and remain in attendance."
"You had better kowtow, and be quick about it," chimed in Ying Po-chüeh.
Li Ming hastily performed a kowtow and then proceeded to stand in attendance to one side.
Only after this did Ying Po-chüeh tell Ying Pao to take out the five invitation cards and give them to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying as he did so, "The twenty-eighth is the day for the full-month celebration of the birth of my baby son. I am inviting the entire group of my sisters-in-law to be so good as to pay a visit to my humble household in honor of the occasion."
Hsi-men Ch'ing opened one of the invitations and saw that the text read as follows:
The twenty-eighth is the date for the full-month ceremony to celebrate the birth of our baby son. Our humble household has prepared a meager potation as a deferential compensation for your generous largess. It is our ardent wish that you will deign to mount your elegant equipages and condescend to attend. Our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.
Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Tu, of the Ying family.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished perusing the text, he ordered Lai-an to take the invitations, together with the box that they came in, to show to the First Lady and then said to Ying Po-chüeh, "You can be certain that they won't be able to go to your place the day after tomorrow. The truth of the matter is that tomorrow is the Third Lady's birthday, and moreover, I will also be hosting a party for Secretary An Ch'en at my place. And on the twenty-eighth the First Lady is planning to pay a call on the wife of His Honor Hsia Yen-ling. So they will hardly be able to go to your place."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you're killing me. If they refuse to go:
Though one's orchard may contain
a variety of fruits:
On which can one rely?
I guess I'll just have to go back to their quarters and invite them myself."
In a little while, whom should they see but Lai-an, who came out carrying the empty box and reported, "The First Lady says to thank you for the invitation, which is gratefully accepted."
Ying Po-chüeh turned the box over to Ying Pao and laughed, saying, "Brother, you were kidding me just now. If my sisters-in-law had refused the invitation I would have kowtowed to them until my head was bloody in order to induce them to attend, no matter what."
To this Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "Don't you go off now, but have a seat in the studio while I go inside to comb my hair, after which we can have something to eat together."
When he had finished speaking, he headed back into the rear compound.
Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Li Ming and said, "How do you like that? If I hadn't spoken to him the way I did just now, he would have continued to harbor his resentment against you. It's the nature of those possessed of money to insist on having their say, and you just have to put up with it. As the saying goes:
An angry fist does not strike a smiling face.[77]
In this day and age, if you wish to play the role of a sycophant, whatever capital you may have for your undertaking, you must be prepared to sacrifice 30 percent of it in order to maintain goodwill. If you insist on propelling your craft against the current, who will pay any attention to you? Quite aside from the fact that you must be ready to:
Adjust yourself to circumstances as they arise,[78]
only if you are prepared to move in any direction, as the flow of the current allows, will you be capable of making any money. If you insist on butting your head against the wall, others will be able to eat their fill while you suffer from starvation. You have been dancing attendance on him for all these years, but you still don't seem to understand his temperament. Tomorrow, if you get that Kuei-chieh of yours to follow hot on your heels in coming to celebrate the Third Lady's birthday, you can kill two birds with one stone. If she will only consent to make him a propitiatory obeisance, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to a successful conclusion."
"Master Two," responded Li Ming, "what you say makes sense. As soon as I get home, I'll go over and speak to Auntie Li the Third about it."
Whom should they see at this point but Lai-an, who came in to set the table and said, "Master Ying the Second, please have a seat. Father will be out in a minute."
Before long, Hsi-men Ch'ing, having performed his ablutions, came out and sat down to keep Ying Po-chüeh company, asking him as he did so, "Have you seen anything of Sun T'ien-hua or Chu Jih-nien recently?"
"I have run into them," replied Ying Po-chüeh, "but they are apprehensive lest you are still ill-disposed toward them. I said to them, 'Brother is a man of magnanimous feelings, who:
Looks up to those above and regards those below.[79]
It is true that on that occasion:
The locust and the grasshopper,
Were swatted in the same breath,
but what are you prepared to do about it?' They swore an oath that in the future they would not run around with that young rascal Wang the Third any more. I have heard that yesterday you attended a party at his place, but they didn't know anything about it."
"Yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "thus and so, he laid on quite a spread on my behalf and acknowledged me as his adopted father. I didn't get home afterwards until the second watch. As for their not associating with him any longer, so long as their actions don't interfere with mine, let them do as they please. What do I care? After all, I am not Wang the Third's real father, so I am not in a position to control his conduct."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "if that is the position you have decided to take, the two of them will seek you out in a day or two and offer you a propitiatory gift in order to ameliorate the rift between you."
"You can simply tell them to come by," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need is there for any propitiatory gift?"
At this juncture, Lai-an brought in a repast, consisting of various tasty delicacies, both roasted and boiled, which Hsi-men Ch'ing partook of with his congee, while Ying Po-chüeh ate rice.
When they had finished eating, Hsi-men Ch'ing inquired, "Have those two boy actors shown up, or not?"
"They've already been here for some time," said Lai-an.
Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that they should be given something to eat, along with Li Ming. The two of them, whose names were Han Tso and Shao Ch'ien, came forward and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, after which they withdrew in order to eat.
After a while, Ying Po-chüeh stood up, and said, "I've got to go. The members of my household are, no doubt, anxiously awaiting me. People of humble status such as myself find it very hard to keep up appearances. Whenever we entertain, everything has to be newly purchased, from the base underneath the frame of the brazier to the door of the parlor."
"You go and take care of things," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and when you're done, come back for a visit this evening in order to offer your birthday greetings and kowtow to the Third Lady on the eve of her birthday, thereby demonstrating your filial respect."
"I'll be certain to come," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "and I'll have my wife send her a birthday present to boot."
When he had finished speaking, he took himself off without more ado.
Truly:
When a favored friend arrives, one's feelings
can never be satiated;
When a real confidant shows up, conversation
is mutually agreeable.
A poem testifies to this:

If you wish to get along, say what people want to hear;
If you try to be honest, you'll only arouse antagonism.
In the affairs of this world, it is best to be lukewarm;

People's true sentiments become apparent only with time.

They flourish their arms and shrug their shoulders
Sometimes warm and sometimes cold.
Even a eunuch may raise a family
And a stone virgin bring forth a child.
Loss of power is the one thing to escape.
To some, their own children are not so much to be loved
As other people's children.
Father and Mother are not of great account
At any moment their own children
May pass them by.

While Ximen Qing was away, Wu Yueniang was a little anxious. There were so many ladies in the household, and she was afraid there might be trouble. She exhorted them all to keep the peace, and made sure that the main gate was closed and the back door locked, every night. The ladies stayed at home, doing needlework. Whenever Chen Jingji had to go to the inner court for clothes or anything, Yueniang took care that either Chunhong or Laian went with him. She was particularly careful about the closing of doors and windows and made quite sure that everything was safe.

Pan Jinlian could see nothing of Jingji.

One day, the nurse, Ruyi'er, gave her an opportunity to make trouble. Yueniang took some of Ximen Qing's clothes, shirts, and underclothes to Ruyi'er, and told her and Madam Han to wash and iron them. Chunmei was washing at the same time, and she sent Qiuju to borrow the dolly pin. Ruyi'er and Yingchun were using it, and they would not give it up. "You borrowed it only the other day," Ruyi'er said, "and here you are, after it again. We have all these shirts and clothes of our master's to do while Madam Han is here."

Qiuju, in a very ill humor, went back and said to Chunmei: "You are always sending me there to borrow things, and now they won't lend me the dolly pin. Yingchun was willing enough. It was Ruyi'er who wouldn't do it."

"What's that?" Chunmei cried. "Why shouldn't we borrow a lamp in the daytime? She won't lend us a dolly pin, won't she? Here I am with Mother's foot binders to wash. What am I going to beat them with? Go to the inner court and borrow one from somebody else."

Jinlian was washing her feet in her room. She overheard this. She hated Ruyi'er and was glad of the opportunity to make trouble. "How dare that strumpet refuse to lend us the dolly pin?" she cried. "Go yourself. And, if she makes any bones about it, curse her well. That ought to settle her."

Chunmei dashed away like a whirlwind. "Who is the stranger in this house?" she said, "are you or are we? You refuse to lend me this dolly pin. That means, I suppose, that there is a new mistress here now."

"If I hadn't been using it," Ruyi'er said, "I shouldn't have kept it."

She got angry in her turn. "The Great Lady," she said, "thought that, with Sister Han here, it was a splendid opportunity to get these shirts and trousers washed. I told Qiuju she could have the dolly pin as soon as I had finished with it. Then she went and told you I wouldn't lend it to her. It was a lie. Yingchun heard what I said."

Jinlian came along. "Now, woman," she said, "don't try any tricks on me. Since your mistress died, you have been taking her place in this apartment. You are washing his Lordship's clothes. I suppose you are trying to make out that, if you didn't, nobody else would. We might all be dead, and you the only one to attend to his clothes. I know. You think you will be able to score over the rest of us. But you needn't think you're going to frighten me by games of this sort."

"Fifth Lady," Ruyi'er said, "it is really nothing of the sort. If the Great Lady had not given me orders, you don't think I should have taken it upon myself?"

"You wicked bone," Jinlian cried, "you have far too much to say. I ask you: who was it served his Lordship with tea in the middle of the night? Who made his bed for him? Who asked him for a new dress? You think I don't know the games you play with him on the sly. But I do know, and I'm not afraid to say so."

"My mistress died, even though she had borne a son," Ruyi'er said. "What chance have I against you?"

This made Jinlian wild. Her face, which was already red, became redder. She ran forward, caught Ruyi'er by the hair, and thumped her in the belly. Fortunately, Madam Han was there to separate them. Jinlian went on cursing. "You shameless strumpet! You husband-stealer! We have been neglected long enough, and now you try to get our husband away from us. What are you doing here at all? Even if you are Laiwang's wife come to life again, I'm not afraid of you."

Ruyi'er cried. She put her hair straight. "I have not been long in this household," she said. "I don't know anything about Laiwang's wife. I only know I came here as a nurse."

"If you are a nurse, you should behave as a nurse," Jinlian said. "Why do you set the whole place on its head like a disturbing spirit? I know what I'm about, and I'll see you don't get away with it."

Meng Yulou came from the inner court. "Sister," she said, "I asked you to play chess with me. Why didn't you come? What is the matter?" She pulled Jinlian away to her own room.

When they had sat down, she asked Jinlian what was wrong. The woman was now calmer. Chunmei brought them tea.

"See!" Jinlian said. "That strumpet has made my hands quite cold. I can't lift my cup. I was in my room, making a pattern for my shoes, when your maid came for me. I told her I was going to lie down and rest a while before I came. I lay on the bed, but did not go to sleep. Chunmei was washing my skirt, and I told her she might as well wash my foot binders too. A few moments later, I heard a great to-do, and found that Qiuju had gone to borrow a dolly pin, and the woman wouldn't lend it to her. She said we had had it the other day, and she wasn't going to lend it to us again because she was washing his Lordship's clothes. That annoyed me, and I told Chunmei to go and curse her. You see, she has been misbehaving herself for some time, and I was determined to teach her a lesson. What sort of a woman does she think she is? His Lordship never married her. She is worse than Laiwang's wife, and I wasn't going to forgive her. She wouldn't give way, and I gave her a real good cursing. If Madam Han hadn't been there to stop me, I would have pulled the strumpet's guts out. The Great Lady is very much to blame. You remember how she spoiled Laiwang's wife by being too indulgent. When I had a row with her, all the blame fell upon me. The Great Lady even went so far as to say I was responsible for Laiwang being kicked out. Now she is dealing with this woman as she dealt with Laiwang's wife. If the woman is a nurse, let her mind her own business. We are not going to let her carry on before our very eyes. We are not going to have dust thrown in our eyes. The shameless hussy! Her mistress is dead, but she still stays on in that apartment. Every time he comes home, he goes and bows to the portrait and mumbles something or other. Nobody knows what he says. During the night he asks for tea and this strumpet ups and gets it for him. Then she pulls the bedclothes over him, and they start their tricks. It is the maids' business to serve tea. Why should she take it upon herself? Why did she ask him for a new dress? The shameless fellow went to the shop immediately and got a roll of silk for her. You remember the last week's mind for Li Ping'er. He went there to burn some paper things for her. The maid and this strumpet were lying on the same bed, playing knuckle-bones. Did he say a word to stop them? Not he! He said: 'You can have the food and wine that have been offered to the dead lady.' That's how he treats them. One day I overheard the strumpet saying: 'I wonder what is keeping his Lordship so long. We must be ready for him.' I went in, and she was alarmed and didn't say any more. What a woman! The rascally strumpet! But he is so anxious for fresh meat he will take anything that comes along. He never troubles whether it is good or bad. The lustful fellow! The strumpet says her husband is dead; but who was that fellow with a baby in his arms looking around the gate the other day? She is deceiving us. She is like Li Ping'er come to life again, quite a changed woman. And the Great Lady spends all her time in her own room and acts as though she were deaf and dumb. Whenever we go and say anything to her, she says: 'You are mistaken.' "

Yulou could not help laughing. "How do you manage to get all this information?" she said.

"It's common gossip," Jinlian said. "Everybody knows it. If you bury a body in the snow, it always turns up again when the snow melts."

"She said her husband was dead," Yulou said. "Who is this husband, then?"

"The clouds never disperse unless there is wind," Jinlian said, "and business is never done without telling a lot of lies. She would never have got the job if she hadn't deceived us. You remember what she looked like when she first came. Half starved, yellow-faced, as thin as a lath, and her limbs shaking. Now she has enjoyed good food for a couple of years, she starts stealing our husband. If we don't put a stop to it, she will have a baby one of these days, and, if that happens, where shall we be? And whose baby would it be?"

"There is something in what you say," Yulou said, laughing. They stayed talking for a while and then went to the inner court to play chess.

One afternoon, Ximen Qing reached Qinghe. He told Ben the Fourth and Wang Jing to take the luggage home, and went with Captain He to the office. He helped to make the necessary arrangements there, then mounted his horse and rode home.

Wu Yueniang received him in the hall and gave him water to wash his face. He ordered a maid to set up a table in the courtyard that he might offer incense to Heaven and Earth in thanksgiving for his safe return. Yueniang asked him why he did this.

"Oh, it was terrible," Ximen Qing said, "I very nearly lost my life. On the twenty-third, when we had crossed the Yellow River and come to the place called the Town of the Eight Corners, there was a frightful storm. Dust and sand filled our eyes and we could make no progress at all. It was late and for a hundred miles we had not seen a soul. We were alarmed because we had so much luggage and we were afraid highwaymen might suddenly attack us. Then we came to an old monastery. The monks were so poor that they were going without light. The only thing they could give us was porridge. We spent the night there and started off again the next morning. The wind had stopped. It was a much worse journey than the last one. The last was during the hot season, but it was more agreeable than this, because, not only was the weather terribly cold this time, but we always felt so insecure. It was a good thing for us we were on the plain when the storm arose. If it had come on while we were crossing the Yellow River, I don't know what might have happened. I vowed to offer a pig and a sheep to Heaven and Earth on the first day of the twelfth month."

"Why did you go to the office before you came home?" Yueniang asked.

"Magistrate Xia has been promoted to be an officer of the Imperial Escort," Ximen said. "That is an appointment in the Capital and he is not coming back here. The new captain is He Yingshou, a nephew of Eunuch He. He is a boy of about twenty. He is quite ignorant and the old eunuch begged me to look after him. I couldn't leave him to find his own way to the office. He knows nothing about the place. He has bought Xia's house for twelve hundred taels. I arranged it all for him. He is going to send for his family as soon as Xia's people have left.

"I can't imagine who told Xia about these promotions. He sent a large sum of money to his Holiness Lin, and his Holiness told Marshal Zhu that he would like to retain his present position for another three years instead of going to the Capital. The Marshal spoke to his Eminence about the matter and it made matters most awkward. If it hadn't been for our kinsman Zhai speaking on my behalf, I might have lost my position. Our kinsman was very much annoyed. He said I had been very careless. I can't think who told Magistrate Xia."

"If you will forgive my saying so," his wife said, "you are indeed careless. Whenever you hear anything, you tell it first to one person and then to another. You like to show people how rich and powerful you are. You carelessly let things slip, and those who hear do not lose the opportunity. Then there is trouble. People worm secrets out of you and go off and use the information to their own advantage. You never hear about it till they have done all they wish to do."

"When I left Magistrate Xia," Ximen said, "he begged me repeatedly to do anything I could for his family. We must send them a present and call."

"It will be Mistress Xia's birthday on the second of next month," Yueniang said. "We will go then. As for you, you must be careful. Remember the saying: Never let people know more than a quarter of what you know yourself. Even your own wife may take advantage of you, not to mention other people."

As they were talking, Daian came and said: "Ben the Fourth would like to know if you are going to his Lordship Xia's place."

"Tell him to go when he has had something to eat," Ximen said.

Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Dajie came to welcome him home. They sat down together and talked.

Ximen Qing remembered that the last time he had returned from the Eastern Capital, Li Ping'er was still alive. He went to her room, bowed before her tablet and wept. Ruyi'er, Yingchun, and Xiuchun came to kowtow to him. Then Yueniang sent Xiaoyu to ask him to go to dinner in the inner court. He gave orders that those who had accompanied him on his journey should be given five taels of silver.

He sent a card to Major Zhou, and told Laixing to get half a pig, half a sheep, forty measures of fine flour, a sack of white rice, ajar of wine, two hams, two geese, ten chickens, and take them, with a supply of condiments, to Captain He. He also sent a cook.

He was in the hall when Qintong came and said that Scholar Wen and Ying Bojue had come to see him. Ximen Qing ordered the boy to bring them in. They bowed several times and said: "What a rough journey you must have had." Ximen thanked them for looking after his house in his absence.

"This morning, when I awoke," Bojue said, "I heard the crying of the magpies on the roof, and my wife said to me: 'I expect that means his Lordship Ximen is back. Why don't you go and see?' I said: 'Brother started on the twelfth and he hasn't been away a fortnight yet. How can he be back already?' 'Well,' my wife said, 'whether he is back or not, you must go.' She told me to dress and come, and here you are. I congratulate you."

He saw the wine and rice and other things collected outside the hall. "To whom are you sending these things?" he said.

"I came back with Captain He, the new magistrate," Ximen said. "His family has not come yet and he is staying at the office for the time being. I am sending him some provisions. I have invited him to dinner tomorrow, and I am going to ask you and Uncle Wu to come too."

"I must remind you," Bojue said, "that Uncle Wu and you are officers. Master Wen wears a scholar's hat. I am only a private person, and it seems hardly fitting that I should join you. I don't know what he may think. He may laugh at me."

"If that's all that is worrying you," Ximen said, laughing, "I will lend you my silk hat, and, when Captain He asks who you are, I'll tell him you're my eldest son. Will that suit you?"

They laughed. "I am serious," Bojue said. "My size in hats is eight and three-tenths. Yours won't fit me."

"I take a hat eight and three-tenths too," Scholar Wen said. "Perhaps you would like my scholar's hat!"

"No," Ximen Qing said. "Don't let him have it. When he goes to pawn himself, he might wear it."

"Well said, Sir," Scholar Wen said, "the joke is on both of us."

Tea was brought. "I suppose his Lordship Xia will stay at the Capital," Scholar Wen said, "or is he coming back

"He is now an officer of the Imperial Escort," Ximen said. "He wears embroidered robes and carries a wand. It is an exalted position and he will not come back."

He looked at the card that was to go with the provisions for Captain He, and bade Daian take them. Then he went with Ying Bojue and Scholar Wen to the side room and sat down on the stove bed. He sent Qintong to tell Wu Hui, Zheng Chun, Zheng Feng and Zuo Shun that they would be wanted the following day. The table was set and they began to drink. Ximen told a servant to get another pair of chopsticks and invite his son-in-law.

Chen Jingji came and sat down with them. They sat near the fire and, while the wine went around, Ximen Qing told them of the dangers he had passed through.

"Brother," Bojue said, "you have a heart stout enough to carry you through a hundred dangers. Even if there had been ruffians about, they could not have harmed you."

"'If a good man were to govern the country for a hundred years,'" Scholar Wen said, "'he would be able to make evil men into peaceful citizens, and could do away with the punishment of death.'[1] You are doing the Emperor's service, and Heaven will not let you come to harm."

Ximen Qing asked how things had been in the household.

"There was nothing of any consequence," Jingji said. "His Excellency An of the Office of Works sent twice to ask if you had returned. Only yesterday a man came from him, and I told him you were not back."

Then Ping'an came and said that the junior officers and their men were outside. Ximen Qing went to the hall and gave orders that the two officers should be admitted. They came and knelt down. "When will you assume your office?" they asked, "and what money will you require?"

"Let everything be as before," Ximen told them.

"Last year, you were alone," they said, "but now you are promoted to a higher office, and Captain He comes to the office also. It is not the same. There are two officers instead of one."

"Take ten taels more, then," Ximen Qing said.

As the two men were going away, Ximen stopped them. "You had better ask Captain He when he wishes to assume office."

"Captain He says on the twenty-sixth," they said.

"Very well. See that everything is ready on that day." When the two junior officers had gone, Master Qiao came. Ximen Qing asked him to stay, but he went away as soon as he had taken tea. Ximen Qing went back to Ying Bojue and Scholar Wen, and they drank together until evening. That night, Ximen slept with Yueniang

Old woman Wen heard that Ximen had returned. She told Wang the Third, and he sent a card of invitation to Ximen Qing. In return, Ximen sent Daian with a pair of pig's trotters, two live fish, two roast ducks and a jar of wine as a belated birthday present to Lady Lin. Lady Lin gave Daian three *qian* of silver.

The next day Ximen Qing entertained Captain He to dinner. It was laid in the great hall. Very careful preparations had been made. Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue, and Scholar Wen came early and took tea with Ximen Qing. He sent a man to remind Captain He. Then the singing boys came and kowtowed to Ximen.

"Why haven't you engaged Li Ming today?" Bojue asked.

"If he doesn't come of his own accord, I shall not send for him," Ximen said.

Ping'an brought a card and announced Major Zhou. Uncle Wu, Scholar Wen, and Ying Bojue withdrew to a side room while Ximen Qing put on his ceremonial clothes and went to receive Major Zhou in the great hall. The Major congratulated Ximen on his promotion, and Ximen thanked him for the men who had acted as his escort on the journey to the Capital. They sat down and Zhou asked what he had seen at the Capital and in the Court. When Ximen had told him, he said: "I suppose Xia will be taking his family to the Capital?"

"Yes," Ximen said, "but not before next month. For the time being, Captain He is living at the office, but he has bought Xia's house. I made the arrangement myself."

"Excellent!" Major Zhou said. Seeing the tables all set out, he asked what guests Ximen was expecting.

"It is only a very plain meal in honor of Captain He," Ximen said. "It is the least I can do seeing that we are both in the same office."

When Major Zhou had drunk his tea, he stood up. "One of these days," he said, "I shall bring the officers of my command to offer you two gentlemen our congratulations."

"You are too kind," Ximen said. Thank you for troubling to come and see me."

They bowed to each other. Major Zhou went away and Ximen Qing rejoined his three friends.

It was late in the afternoon when Captain He came. Ximen Qing introduced Uncle Wu and the others and they exchanged greetings. After tea, they took off their ceremonial clothes. Captain He soon realized that Ximen Qing was a very rich man, so splendid was the repast served to him. There were four singing boys playing different instruments. They drank together till the first night watch, then Captain He went back to the office. Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue, and Scholar Wen went away at the same time. Ximen Qing dismissed the singing boys, told the servants to clear everything away, and went to Pan Jinlian's room.

Jinlian had taken particular pains to make herself look pretty and she had washed her body with perfumed water. She was expecting him and, when he came, she smiled sweetly. She took his clothes and told Chunmei to make tea. They went to bed, and, under the coverlets, embraced and pressed their tender bodies closely together. She used every one of her hundred charms to give him pleasure. They enjoyed each other for a while, then Ximen Qing found that he could not sleep. He told her how he had longed for her while he had been away. Then, as he was still unsatisfied, he asked her to play the flute for him. She was ready to do anything he asked, so that she might the more firmly establish her hold over him. They had been separated for a long time. She had been starved for love so long that passion set her afire. She would have made herself a part of him. She grasped his penis and wanted to suck it almost all night. He wished to make water, but she would not let him go. "Darling," she said, "never mind how much there is; my mouth can take it all. It is chilly tonight and you might take cold if you got out of bed. It would be more trouble."

Ximen Qing was delighted. "Dearest," he said, "I don't believe anyone else would love me as you do." He made water into her mouth and she drank it gradually. "Do you like it?" said Ximen.

"It is a little bitter," she replied. "Give me some fragrant tea leaves to take the taste away."

"The tea leaves are in my white silk coat," Ximen said. "Get them for yourself." Jinlian pulled the coat to her, took the tea leaves, and put them into her mouth.

Readers, concubines are always ready to lead their husbands on and to bewitch them. To this end, they will go to any length of shamelessness and endure any shameful thing. Such practices would be abhorrent to a real wife who had married her husband in the proper way.
Ximen Qing and Jinlian enjoyed ecstasies of pleasure that night.
The next day, Ximen Qing went to the office with Captain He. It was their first appearance in their new posts. There was a banquet, and musicians played for them. In the afternoon Ximen went home and the soldiers of his office sent a present of food. Wang the Third sent a man to ask him to dinner. Ximen was about to leave for Wang's house, when a servant came and announced the arrival of An, of the Office of Works. Ximen Qing hurriedly put on his robes and went to welcome him.
An, who now held the rank of a Vice President, wore a girdle with a golden clasp, and a silver pheasant as the badge of his office. He was followed by a host of officers. They entered the hall, smiling, and congratulating one another.
"I have asked several times when you were expected to return," An said, when they had sat down, "but I was told you were not yet back."
"I could not leave the Capital until I had been presented at Court," Ximen said.
"I wanted to ask a favor of you," An said. "Cai Xiaotang, his Eminence's ninth son, is governor of Jiujiang. He is on his way to the Capital and I have had a letter from him to say he will be here very shortly. Song Songquan, Qian Yunye, Huang Taiyu and I would like to entertain him. But, for that, we should need your house, and I don't know whether you would be willing to lend it to us or not."
"Certainly you may have it," Ximen said. "When is he coming?"
"On the twenty-seventh," An said. "I will send the necessary money tomorrow. It is extremely kind of you."
They drank tea, and Vice President An went away.
Ximen Qing went to Lady Lin's house and sent in his card. Wang the Third came out to receive him and took him to the great hall. Above the place of honor hung a golden scroll with the words: "The Hall of Loyalty Continuing." There were other scrolls on either side. One said, "The Wind and Frost wear down the mighty Trees," and the other, "Mountains and Rivers, Girdles and Whetstones are always new."
Wang the Third made a reverence to Ximen Qing and asked him to take the place of honor. Tea was brought, and he himself handed it. After tea they talked for a while until dinner was served. Two boys sang to them.
"Will you not ask her Ladyship to come?" Ximen Qing said.
Wang the Third sent a servant to invite his mother to join them.
Very soon the servant returned. "Her Ladyship asks that you will go to the inner court to see her," he said.
Wang the Third asked Ximen Qing to go, and Ximen asked Wang the Third to lead the way. So they went to the hall.
Lady Lin was wearing pearls and ornaments on her head, a scarlet, straight-sleeved gown, and a girdle decorated with gold and green jade. She wore a silken skirt embroidered with the design of the hundred flowers. Her face was powdered till it was as white as silver. Ximen Qing prepared to make a reverence to her and asked her to take the place of honor. "You are my guest," she said. "The place of honor is due to you." Finally, they made equal reverences, and sat down.
"My young son," Lady Lin said, "is very inexperienced. He was unfortunate enough to incur your displeasure, but you were generous and punished the fellows who led him astray. I don't know how to thank you. I have prepared this very simple entertainment for you, but I feel that really I should kowtow. Why have you sent me presents? I shall feel embarrassed if I accept them, and lacking in courtesy if I decline them."
"I had to go to the Eastern Capital on duty," Ximen Qing said, "I could not come to congratulate you on your birthday. These trifling presents you speak of are really intended for your servants."
Old woman Wen was standing beside Lady Lin. Ximen said to her: "Madam Wen, please give me a cup that I may offer her Ladyship some wine." He called Daian, who brought a dress of very fashionable style, embroidered with gold. This was put on a tray, and offered to Lady Lin. The dress was so bright that it was dazzling to the eyes. Lady Lin was delighted. Old woman Wen brought gold and silver cups. Wang the Third was going to send for the boys to sing, but Lady Lin said it would be better if they played outside. When Ximen had offered wine to her, she offered it to him in return. Then Wang the Third offered wine to him. Ximen would have made a reverence to the young man in return, but Lady Lin said:
"My lord, you must stand and allow him to pay you the respect that is your due."
"I dare not," Ximen Qing said, "the Rites do not allow it."
"My lord," Lady Lin said, "surely you are wrong. Your rank is now such that you might be his father. My son, in his earlier youth, was very poorly educated. He never associated with gentlemen. If you are well disposed to him, you may, perhaps, be willing to teach him something of the ways of the world. I would even venture to suggest that you might take him under your guardianship and treat him as your son. If he gets into trouble, correct him. I will not stand in your way."
"Lady," Ximen Qing said, "you speak wisely, but your son is really both intelligent and amiable. He is still young and only on the threshold of life. As he acquires more experience, he will amend his ways. You must not worry about him."
Ximen Qing was persuaded to take the place of honor. Wang the Third offered him three cups of wine and made reverence to him four times. Then Ximen Qing made a reverence to Lady Lin, and she, smilingly, returned it. After this, whenever Wang the Third was in the presence of Ximen Qing, he called him Father.
After this simple ceremony, Lady Lin bade her son take Ximen Qing to the outer court to take off his ceremonial clothes. Daian brought a hat and he changed. The two men sat down, and the singing boys played and sang for them. When the cooks brought in food, Daian gave them a small present of money. When five courses had been served, and the singers had sung two songs, lights were brought. Ximen Qing stood up to take leave, but Wang the Third begged him not to go so pressingly that he remained. The young man took him to a small courtyard attached to the study. There were only three rooms, but there were delightful flowers and trees about, and the furniture was very handsome. A golden sign bore the words: "Sanquan's Ship of Poesy." There were five old pictures on the walls.
Ximen Qing asked who Sanquan was. Wang the Third was reluctant to tell him, but at last he said: "It is your son's name." Ximen Qing said nothing.
Tall jars were brought. They played darts and drank, and the singing boys sang for them again. Lady Lin, in the inner court, looked after the cooks and servants, sending them with dishes and fruits.
It was the second night watch before Ximen Qing went away. He was almost tipsy. He distributed money to the cooks and singers, and went home.
When he reached home, he went at once to Jinlian's room. She had not gone to bed, but had taken off her headdress and painted her face very delicately. She had made tea and burned incense in a golden burner. Now she was waiting for him, and when he came, she was delighted. She took his clothes and told Chunmei to make him a special cup of Sparrow-Tongue Tea. Chunmei helped him to take off his clothes and girdle. He went to bed. Jinlian took off her ornaments, put on a pair of bed shoes, and went to bed too. They lay down together and entwined their legs. Ximen Qing made a pillow of one arm and pressed her close to him with the other. Her body seemed to him as smooth as a piece of soft jade. His breast touched hers; their cheeks were close together. They kissed; their hearts seemed to melt away within them, and they were thrilled to the very center of their beings.
"My child," Ximen said, "did you ever think of me when I was away?"
"I never forgot you for a single second. The nights seemed so long. When I lay down, I could not sleep. I heated my bed and made it as warm as I could, but I still felt cold, so cold, indeed, that I could not stretch my legs out. I had to suffer and keep them drawn up. I kept thinking you would come, but you never came. Oh, many tears fell upon this pillow. Then dear little Chunmei saw how melancholy I was and sighing, and she cheered me as best she could. She used to play chess with me in the evenings. We stayed up till the first night watch, then went to bed and slept together. That was how I felt, Brother. I wonder how it was with you.
"Little oily mouth," Ximen said, "I have several wives, but, as everyone knows, I love you best."
"No, you are deceiving me," Jinlian said. "You are like a boy who takes rice from the bowl but keeps his eyes on the jar all the time. You think I don't know it. Do you remember how you and Laiwang's wife were as close together as honey and oil mingled? You never thought about me then. Li Ping'er had a baby, and you treated me like a black-eyed hen. Now they are gone, and I am still strong and well. You are like a willow catkin blown about by the wind. You have been secretly carrying on with Ruyi'er. You don't seem to care what sort of creature she is. After all, she is only a nurse, and, besides, she has a husband. If you take her on, one of these days her husband will bring all his sheep outside your door. You are an officer now. What are you going to do when the scandalmongers begin to talk about it? When you were away, that woman quarreled with me, screamed at me, and wouldn't give way an inch. That was when I sent Chunmei to borrow a dolly pin from her."
"Dear, dear!" Ximen Qing said. "It doesn't matter who she is, she must not forget that she is a servant here. I am surprised she had the audacity to quarrel with you. If you raise your hand, it should be a sign to her to pass, and if you lower it, she should know that she is barred from going any farther."
"Oh, you can always talk!" Jinlian said. "Now that Li Ping'er is dead, Ruyi'er has taken her mistress's place. I suppose you said to her: 'Serve me well, and you shall have everything that belonged to your mistress.' Did you say that?"
"Don't be so silly. I said nothing of the sort. If you will forgive her, I will make her come and kowtow to you tomorrow."
"I don't want her apologies. I forbid you to go to her."
"When I go there to sleep," Ximen Qing said, "I have no other purpose than to remember your dead sister. I go to look at her tablet, and I have nothing whatever to do with the woman."
"You are such a liar, I don't believe you," Jinlian said. "It is more than a hundred days since Li Ping'er died. Why should you go to gaze upon her tablet? You don't go to watch before the tablet, you go to make the place like a miller's grinding place. Before midnight we hear the sound of the bell and, after midnight, the sound of the winnowing."
Ximen Qing pulled her to him and kissed her. "You funny little strumpet," he said "where did you get such sharp ears?"
He told her to turn over, and inserted his penis from behind. He held her legs and moved in and out noisily. "Do you fear me or not?" he cried. "Will you try to control my actions any more?"
"If I didn't," Jinlian said, "you would fly off in the air. I know you can't give the woman up, but, if you wish to have her, you must ask my permission, and, if she asks you for anything, you must tell me before you give it to her. I won't have you giving her things without my knowledge. If you do, and I find out, you shall see whether I make trouble or not. I and that strumpet will die together. It is the story of Li Ping'er over again. You could think of no one but her, and I was as little to you as the lowest of your women. You rotten peach! You are like bean sprouts that haven't been tied with proper string. But your old mother is too clever for you."
Ximen Qing laughed. It was the third night watch before they were content to put their arms around one another and go to sleep. They slept till nearly dawn.
Before it was light, Jinlian, still hungry for more, fondled his weapon with her slender fingers till it was ready once more for action.
"Darling," she said, "I want to lie on you." She climbed on to him, and played the game of making a candle upside down. She put her arms around his neck and wriggled about. She asked him to grip her firmly by the waist. Then she lifted herself up and dropped herself again; soon his penis entered her up to its very root, and the only part that stayed outside was that bound by the clasp.
"Darling," she said, "I will make a red silk belt for you, and you can keep in it the medicine the monk gave you. And I will make two supports that you can tie at the root of it and fasten around your waist. When they are tightly tied, it will be soft and go in all the way. Don't you think that better than this clasp, which is so hard and such a nuisance?"
"Yes, my child, make it by all means. The medicine is in my little box. Put it in for yourself."
"Come back tonight," Jinlian said, "and we will see what it is like."
Daian came with a card and asked Chunmei if his master was out of bed. "His Excellency An," he said, "has sent money, two jars of wine, and four pots of flowers."
"Father is not up yet," Chunmei told him. "Ask the man to wait."
"He has a long way to go," Daian said. "He is on his way to the new wharf."
Ximen Qing overheard this. He asked what was the matter, and the card was brought to him. Upon it was written: 'I send you eight taels for the refreshment of Xiaotang. The food for the others may be what is customary. I trust you will instruct your servants to make careful preparations, and thank you for your kindness. I send you also four pots with seasonable flowers in the hope that you will like them. The two jars of wine may, perhaps, serve for the entertainment of the guests. Please accept them indulgently.
Ximen Qing got up. He did not dress his hair but, putting on a felt hat and a gown, went to the hall. He sent for his Excellency's messenger. The man presented the silver and the pots of flowers. One contained red plum, another white plum, the third jasmine and the fourth, magnolia. And there were two jars of Southern wine. Ximen was very pleased. He gave the man a card in return and five *qian* of silver for himself.
"When will the gentlemen arrive?" he asked. "Will it be necessary to engage actors?"
"Their Excellencies will be early," the man said. "They would like to have the Haiyan company." He went away.
Ximen Qing told the servants to take the flowers to his study and sent Daian to engage the actors. As it was Meng Yulou's birthday, he arranged for them to come in the evening also. Laian was sent to buy provisions.
We now return to Ying Bojue. On the twenty-eighth day of the month, his baby would be one month old, and there was to be a celebration. He took five cards and sent Ying Bao with a box to the house opposite Ximen Qing's. He was going to ask Scholar Wen to write invitations to Ximen's five ladies.
He had left his own house and turned into the street when he heard a voice behind him calling: "Uncle! Uncle!" It was Li Ming. Bojue stopped, and Li Ming asked where he was going.
"I am going to see Scholar Wen on business," Bojue said.
"I was just coming to see you," Li Ming said. "There is something I want to tell you."
Ying Bojue saw a porter carrying a box behind Li Ming, and he took Li Ming to his house. The boy kowtowed to him and presented the box. There were two roast ducks and two bottles of spirits in it.
"I have nothing but these trifles to offer you," Li Ming said, "but I should like to ask your help." He knelt down and could not be persuaded to rise. Bojue finally pulled him up.
"You silly boy. If you have anything to say, say it. There was no need for you to bring these presents."
"I have served his Lordship Ximen ever since I was a little boy," Li Ming said. "Now he is giving his patronage to others and leaving me out in the cold. I have nothing to do with Li Guijie's affairs. We are not in the same boat. His Lordship is angry with her, and he seems to be angry with me too. I have had no opportunity to explain matters. So I have come to you. I beg you to go and speak for me. Tell him that I had nothing to do with Guijie's naughty behavior. Since I have incurred his displeasure, all the boys in my business make fun of me."
"You haven't been to his place for a long time," Bojue said.
"No," the boy said.
"That explains why, the other day, when Captain He was at his place, I only saw Wu Hui, Zheng Chun, Zheng Feng and Zuo Shun. You were not there, and I asked why. His Lordship told me that you never came near the place and he wasn't going to send for you. Now, you silly boy, pull yourself together and don't be such a blockhead."
"When he didn't send for me," Li Ming said, "I felt too shy to go of my own accord. The other four were there two or three days ago and, today, I find Laian is engaging two of them for the Third Lady's birthday. There is a party tomorrow, and the four boys will be there again without me. I am very miserable about it. Uncle, I want you to explain matters for me. I will come and kowtow to you again."
"I spend all my time helping others," Bojue said, "and I will do the best I can for you. I have done many, many things for people, and this trifling business of yours is nothing at all. Take these presents away. I know how you get your money, and I won't take them. Come with me, and let me make everything all right."
"I will not go unless you accept my present," Li Ming said. "You do not need the things, of course, but I am anxious to show my humble respect for you."
He implored Ying Bojue to take them, and, at last, Bojue did so. He gave thirty coppers to the porter who had carried the box. Then they set out together. They went first to the house opposite Ximen Qing's. They went into the courtyard. Bojue knocked at the door and asked if Scholar Wen was at home. The scholar was in the study, writing a card. "Please come in," he cried. Huatong opened the door, and Bojue went into the study. Scholar Wen greeted him. They sat down, and the scholar said: "You are early today. What have you been doing?"
"I have come to ask you to write a few invitations with your masterly brush. It will be the end of my little son's first month of life on the twenty-eighth, and I am inviting his Lordship's ladies."
"Give me the cards," Scholar Wen said, "I will write them for you with pleasure."
Bojue told Ying Bao to take out the cards and give them to Scholar Wen. The scholar took them to the inner room and had written two when Qitong came hurrying in and said: "Master, please write another two cards for my lady. She wishes to invite Mistress Qiao and Mistress Wu. Did you give Qintong the cards for Mistress Han and Mistress Meng?"
"Yes," Scholar Wen said, "they were sent off sometime ago."
"Master," Qitong said, "when you have finished those two cards, please write another four. They are for Mistress Huang the Fourth, Mistress Fu, Mistress Han, and Mistress Gan. Laian will come for them."
Qitong went away and Laian came for the four cards. Bojue said to him: "Is your master at home or at the office?"
"He has not been to the office today," Laian said. "He is in the hall receiving presents."
"It was very late when his Lordship came back from Wang's place last night," Scholar Wen said.
"Which Wang's?" Bojue asked.
"The general's," Scholar Wen told him.
This was the first Ying Bojue had heard of this business.
When Scholar Wen had finished the cards for Laian, he began again on those for Ying Bojue. When they were done, Bojue went across the road to Ximen's house with Li Ming.
Ximen Qing's hair was still undressed. He was in the hall, accepting presents and sending cards in return. Tables were being set out for the reception. He asked Bojue to sit down. Bojue thanked him for the gifts he had sent some days before and asked why the tables were being arranged. Ximen told him that his Excellency An was making use of the house for a reception to the Imperial Tutor's son.
"Are you having actors or singing boys?" Bojue asked.
"We are having the Haiyan company of actors," Ximen Qing said, "but I have engaged four singing boys as well."
"Who are they, Brother?" Bojue asked.
"Wu Hui, Zheng Feng, Zheng Chun and Zuo Shun," Ximen said.
"Why not Li Ming?"
"He has climbed too high to care about my patronage any more," Ximen said.

"Why should you say that, Brother?" Bojue said. "He can hardly come if you don't send for him. I didn't know you were angry with him. And the business for which you are angry with him is really not his concern at all. He can't help what happens at the bawdy house. We must not be unfair to him. This morning he called at my house and said, with tears in his eyes, that, apart from the relations that have existed between you and his sister, he has served you himself for several years. Now, he says, you send for the others and will have nothing to do with him. He swore on his oath that he had nothing to do with that business at the house. If you are angry with him, it will be very awkward indeed for him. He is only a boy. He can't earn a great amount of money and, if you stop sending for him, his position will be impossible."
"Li Ming, come here!" he called. "Tell your father all about it. Why are you hiding there? Come here, I tell you. Even an ugly bride must meet her father-in-law sometime."
Li Ming was standing outside the hall. He bowed and then stood upright, like the image of a little devil. He had been listening to what they were saying and, when Bojue called him, he came in quickly and knelt down. He kowtowed repeatedly.
"Father," he said, "you must think about this again. If I had anything to do with that business, may my bones be broken to pieces by horses or carts, and may I die at the hand of the executioner. Your kindness to me in the past has always been so splendid. My people and I can never repay you. If you are angry with me, the others in my profession will laugh at me and look down on me. I can never find another master like you."
He cried aloud, knelt on the floor, and would not get up.
"We must settle this," Bojue said. "A gentleman never holds a lesser man's faults against him. Besides, it wasn't his fault and, even if it had been, you would have to forgive him now that he comes to apologize." He said to Li Ming: "I am wearing black clothes so I have to stand near a black pillar. Now you have spoken to your father, I am sure he won't be angry with you any more. But, in future, you must take care."
"Yes, Uncle," Li Ming said, "I will amend my ways."
"Since your uncle asks me to forgive you, I will do so," Ximen said slowly. "Stand up."
"Kowtow," Bojue said.
Li Ming kowtowed and rose to his feet.
Ying Bojue asked Ying Bao for the cards of invitation and gave them to Ximen Qing. "It will be my baby's month-day on the twenty-eighth," he said. "I am inviting my sisters-in-law to my humble dwelling."
Ximen Qing looked at the cards, and told Laian to take them with the box to Wu Yueniang. "I don't think they will be able to come that day," he said. "Tomorrow is the Third Lady's birthday, and there is this reception as well. On the twenty-eighth, my wife is going to call on Mistress Xia. I don't see how she can manage to come to your place."
"Brother," Bojue said, "would you seek my death? If my sister-in-law won't go, whom else can I count upon? Since the fruits are in the garden, I will go myself and ask them."
But Laian came in with the box empty. "The Great Lady says I am to tell Uncle Ying she accepts his kind invitation."
Bojue gave the empty box to Ying Bao. "Brother," he said, laughing, "you are always making game of me. If my sister-in-law had really refused to come, I would have bashed my head against the wall, and she would have been compelled to give way."
"Stay till I have done my hair," Ximen Qing said to Bojue, "and we will have something to eat." He went to the inner court.
"Now what?" Bojue said to Li Ming. "If it hadn't been for me, he would not have forgiven you. Don't mind what he says. Wealthy people are always bad-tempered, but you mustn't forget the proverb: An angry fist will never smite a smiling face. In these days, people like to be flattered. Even if you have money and set yourself up in business, you have always to be agreeable to your customers. If you pull a long face, nobody will bother about you. What you have to do is to fit yourself to circumstances and make yourself as adaptable as running water. Then you will make money. If you always try to ride the high horse, others will get good food but you will starve. You have served his Lordship for a long time, but you don't understand him yet. Tell Li Guijie to come tomorrow. If she is hot upon your heels, she will kill two birds with one stone. It is the Third Lady's birthday. She can come to congratulate her and apologize to him at the same time. Then everything will be well."
"Uncle," Li Ming said, "you are right. I will go home at once and tell my aunt."
Laian came in to set the table. "Uncle Ying," he said, "if you will wait a few moments, Father will be here."
Soon Ximen came in, properly dressed. They sat down.
"I haven't seen old Sun and Pockmarked Zhu for a long time," Ximen said.
"I told them to come," Bojue said, "but they declared you were offended with them. I told them that, thanks to your generosity, when the mosquitoes and grasshoppers were brought before the court, they were allowed to escape. They swore to me they would never have anything to do with young master Wang again. I hear you were at Wang's place yesterday. I hadn't known of it before."
"Yes," Ximen said. "There was a little party, and I was invited. I was asked if I would take the young man under my protection and treat him as a son. I didn't get back until the second night watch. Why shouldn't they go there any more? They can go if they like. It won't worry me. Why should I bother about the young man? I'm not really his father."
"If you mean what you say, Brother," Bojue said, "I am sure they will come to apologize and explain the whole business."
"There is nothing for them to apologize about," Ximen said. "Tell them to come, that's all."
Daian brought the food. There were all sorts of delicious things. Ximen Qing had porridge, and Bojue, rice.
"Why haven't the two singing boys come yet?" Ximen asked.
"They are here," Laian said.
"Go and have something to eat with them," Ximen said to Li Ming. One was Han Zuo, the other Shao Qian. They came and kowtowed before Ximen Qing, then went to have their dinner. Before long, Ying Bojue stood up. "I must be going now," he said, "I expect my people are waiting anxiously for me. In humble families like ours, it is very hard to get anything done. We have to buy everything. Buy, buy, buy from the bottom of the cooking stove to the sitting-room door."
"Go and do what you have to do," Ximen said, "and come back this evening to kowtow to the Third Lady and show what a good son you are."
"I'll certainly come," Bojue said, "and my wife will send some presents." He went away.

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### P'an Chin-lien Is Irked by the Song: *I Remember Her Flute-playing*; Big Sister Yü Sings: *Getting through the 5 Watches of the Night* & Qiuju in Trouble

If you're clever, you'll be considered labored,
if you're awkward, idle;
If you're good, you'll be disdained as weak,
if you're bad, callous.
If you're rich, you'll meet with envy,
if you're poor, disgrace;
If you're diligent, you'll be thought grasping,
if you're economical, stingy.
If you deal with things consistently,
you'll be scorned as simple;
If you adapt yourself to circumstances,
you'll be suspected of deceit.
If you think about it, it is hardly possible
to satisfy anyone;
The role of human being is an arduous one,
to be a man is hard.[1]

After Ying Po-chüeh went home, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the Hidden Spring Grotto in his garden and sat down to watch the mason working on the two heated k'angs, with a firebox outside the retaining wall, so that the floor of the interior would be as warm as spring, and the fumes from the burning charcoal would not affect the plants that had been placed there. Who should suddenly appear at this point but P'ing-an, who brought in a calling card and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command has sent a courier to deliver some joint contributions."
The box they came in contained five packets, enclosing five mace of silver and two ordinary handkerchiefs each, from Commandant Chou Hsiu, Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and the two eunuch directors Liu and Hsüeh, and were said to be deferentially presented as tokens of their respect. Hsi-men Ch'ing told his attendants to take them back to the rear compound and sent the courier off with a calling card in reply.
To resume our story, that day Aunt Yang, along with Sister-in-law Wu and old Mrs. P'an, arrived early in their sedan chairs and were followed by Nun Hsüeh, the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, Nun Wang, Nun Hsüeh's two young disciples Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng, and Big Sister Yü, all of whom had purchased gift boxes and had come to celebrate the eve of Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Wu Yüeh-niang served them with tea in the master suite, and the whole sorority of wives and concubines were also there to keep them company. Before long, they finished their tea and then proceeded to visit together at leisure.
Before anyone knew it, P'an Chin-lien, who remembered that she had promised to make a band of white satin in order to enhance Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual performance, took herself off to her room, got out her sewing box, selected a strip of white satin, and employed backstitching in order to crimp it. She then reached into the porcelain container in her cabinet with her slender fingers, poured out some of the aphrodisiac powder called "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties,"[2] and backstitched it securely inside the band with her deft technique, so that it would be ready that evening when she indulged with Hsi-men Ch'ing in:
The pleasures of clouds and rain.[3]
Who could have anticipated that at this juncture Nun Hsüeh suddenly came into the room in order to bring her the fertility potion containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that would enable her to conceive. The woman hurriedly put aside what she was doing and sat down to consult with her.
Nun Hsüeh, upon seeing that:
There was nobody about,
furtively handed the potion to her, saying, "It's all been properly prepared. If you select a *jen-tzu* day and imbibe it on an empty stomach before sleeping with your husband that night, you will be sure to conceive. For corroboration, you can look to the case of the First Bodhisattva in the rear compound. It was I who enabled her to conceive, and she's already got half a bulge in her belly to show for it. I've also got another trick to share with you. If you make a brocade scent bag, I'll slip you a charm inscribed with cinnabar and realgar. If you put it inside the scent bag and wear it next to your body, you are sure to give birth to a male child. It's guaranteed to be effective."
Upon hearing this, the woman was utterly delighted. On the one hand, she took the fertility potion and concealed it in a trunk, while on the other, she consulted a calendar and saw that the twenty-ninth was a *jen-tzu* day.
Thereupon, she weighed out three mace of silver and gave it to Nun Hsüeh, saying, "This doesn't amount to anything. Just take it home and use it to buy yourself a vegetable to eat. But should I really conceive, and you bring me the charm inscribed in cinnabar, I'll give you a bolt of silk to make a garment out of."
"Bodhisattva," said Nun Hsüeh, "there's no need for you to engage in such calculations. I'm not avaricious in the way that Nun Wang is. In the past, when I undertook to recite scriptures on behalf of that deceased Bodhisattva, she claimed that I was trying to do her out of a piece of patronage. The two of us had quite a quarrel over it, and she has been slandering me wherever she goes. My God! Let her suffer the consequences of her evil karma. I'm not going to waste my time contending with her, but devote myself instead to doing good deeds for others, and rescuing people from their calamities."
"Mistress Hsüeh," the woman said, "you can do as you like. It's just a case of:
Different people having different intentions.
But you mustn't mention a word of this business of mine to her."
Nun Hsüeh responded:
"The dharma must not be divulged to six ears.
How could I ever mention it to her? Last year, in connection with the pregnancy of the First Bodhisattva in the rear compound, she accused me of making a considerable profit behind her back, and I had to split the proceeds with her before she was willing to call it quits. Though she may be a member of the Buddhist sangha, she ignores her vows, and her avariciousness is notorious. Though she accepts alms from:
The patrons in the ten directions,[4]
she does not perform meritorious works on their behalf. When she dies in the future, she won't even deserve to be reborn:
With hair on her body and horns on her head."[5]
After they had talked for a while, the woman ordered Ch'un-mei to provide a serving of tea for Nun Hsüeh. When she had finished the tea, the two of them went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and paid their respects to her spirit tablet, after which they went back to join the others in the rear compound.
That afternoon, Wu Yüeh-niang had two tables put up in the room with the k'ang in her quarters and invited her guests to be seated there. She also saw to the setting up of:
Brocaded curtains and standing screens,[6]
in the parlor, along with an Eight Immortals table, replete with appetizers to go with the drinks.
That evening, when the time came for Meng Yü-lou to offer Hsi-men Ch'ing a drink, he wore the variegated flying fish python robe that Eunuch Director Ho Hsin had bestowed upon him, over a tunic of white satin, and occupied the position of honor together with Yüeh-niang, while the four other ladies of the household were arranged to either side of them. Before long, within the chamber:
Painted candles burned high,[7]
while in the flagons:
Yang-kao wine brimmed over.
The two boy actors, Shao Ch'ien and Han Tso, with their:
Silver psaltery, ivory clappers,
And moon-shaped balloon guitar,
proceeded to accompany themselves as they sang the birthday song suite that begins with the tune "A Sprig of Flowers," the opening lines of which are:
Swirling around, the auspicious vapors blow;
One by one, the propitious clouds come down.[8]
Meng Yü-lou was made up so that she looked to be:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade; and
Her lotus face evoked an air of spring,[9]
as she offered a drink to Hsi-men Ch'ing and kowtowed to him four times:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying.
Only after this did she pay obeisance to Yüeh-niang and her fellow ladies and take her place at the table. Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'en Ching-chi, accompanied by Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who held the flagon as he offered drinks to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, before wishing Meng Yü-lou a happy birthday.
When they had finished their obeisances, they sat down to one side. Meanwhile, birthday noodles and dessert treats were brought in together from the kitchen.
Who should appear at this point but Lai-an, who came in with a gift box, saying, "Ying Pao has come to deliver some presents."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told Yüeh-niang to accept them and then said to Lai-an, "Take a card in reply to Brother Ying's wife, and invite Ying the Second, along with Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, to come visit with us. I know that his wife will probably not consent to join us tomorrow, but ask Brother Ying the Second to come see us today. We'll take care of sending return gifts to them another day."
Lai-an, accordingly, took the return card and went off along with Ying Pao.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing sat at the head of the table, it occurred to him unconsciously that, on the occasion of Meng Yü-lou's birthday the previous year, Li P'ing-erh had been there with them; but that today, among the sorority of five ladies, only she was absent. As a result, he couldn't help being pained at heart, and tears began to drop from his eyes.
Sometime later, after the musicians had consumed their soup and rice below, Li Ming poured a round of drinks for the company, and the two boy actors came before them.

Wu Yüeh-niang asked them, "Do you know the song suite that begins with the tune 'Four Pieces of Jade,' the opening lines of which are:
Like lovebirds, flying wing to wing:
Or trees with intertwining branches?"[10]
"Yes we do," replied Han Tso.
They were just about to pick up their instruments and start to sing, when Hsi-men Ch'ing called them before him and ordered, "You perform the song suite that begins with the words:
I remember her flute-playing."
The two boy actors hastily switched modes and proceeded to perform the song suite in question, beginning with the tune "A Gathering of Worthy Guests":
I remember her flute-playing, but where is
the jade damsel now?[11]
Tonight, my lovesickness grows more intense.
The white dew is cold, and the scent of the
autumn lotus blossoms is fading;
Beneath the whitewashed wall the bright moon
insists on sinking out of sight.
Though merely a case of temporary separation, the mirror
is fractured and the hairpin divided;[12]
Which is much better than a period of ten years in which
news is interrupted and word cut off.
Facing the west wind, all I can do is lean against the
belvedere and sigh to myself in vain.
The tiers upon tiers of trees upon the mountain ridge
stretch as far as the eye can see.
What I fear is that time flows away like
a galloping steed,
Or like a long snakelike formation of
migrating geese.
TO THE TUNE "FREE AND EASY WANDERING"
The pleasure we shared on that previous evening,
Was presaged by the popping of the lantern-wick.
A fragrance wafted from the clasp of her girdle.
But no sooner had we discovered our mutual affinity,
Than, unexpectedly, we were obliged to be separated.
I constantly remember the way we laughed and joked
as we snuggled up against each other.
Within the decorated hall everything that day was
done with extravagant pretentiousness.
We enjoyed the wine, gleaming with glaucous foam,
The music of red ivory clappers under dancing fans,[13]
And the frolicking of butterflies upon the pillow.
TO THE TUNE "GOURD OF VINEGAR"
On the day that she and I first met, my visage
revealed my embarrassment.
When we first engaged in amorous sport together
I was apprehensive at heart;
Half feigning to be drunk, half feigning to be
sober, half feigning to be silly.
Our feelings for each other were so intense
that I have yet to get over them.
No sooner were we warm inside the brocade curtains,
beneath the mandarin duck bedding,
Than her phoenix hairpin ended up getting broken
into some two or three pieces.
TO THE SAME TUNE
On her account, I struggled to compose good lines
of poetry by lamplight,
The better to express my heartfelt feelings behind
other people's backs,
Until the shadow of the phoenix tree outside the
window began to sink.
Loving flowers as I do, I fear to reveal the ardor
of my spring feelings.
Treading the green moss, I step lightly
on the tips of my shoes;
The pearls of dew constantly wetting my
meadow-tripping boots.
TO THE SAME TUNE
On her account, I went so far as to tell lies
even among my friends;
On my account, she engaged in deceptive conduct
even before her mother.
On her account, I exhausted my artful tongue in
order to deceive the family;
On my account, she doffed her skirt and accepted
the bloodstains on the azalea.[14]
It so happens that when P'an Chin-lien heard the performance of this song suite, she was fully aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing had called for it because he was thinking of Li P'ing-erh.
Upon the singing of the last line, she deliberately began to stroke her cheek with her finger, first this way and then that, in order to embarrass Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the company, saying, "My child, you're just like:
Chu Pa-chieh, sitting in a homeless shelter:[15]
How much more ugly can you get?
For someone who had been previously married and was certainly no virgin, how could she have come up with any 'bloodstains on the azalea'? What a shameless good-for-nothing you are."
"You crazy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I understand the situation, but what do you know about it?"
The two boy actors continued to sing:
On her account, my ears were forever burning;
On my account, she hid her blushes with a fan.
TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE PHOENIX TREE"
One of us was an amorous maiden from
a minister's mansion,
One of us was a sword-strumming client
from before his gate,[16]
Who happened to encounter each other
in the course of our lives.
After only a few nights worth a
thousand pieces of gold,
We were, all of a sudden, forced to
abandon each other.
How could I ever consent to be
so depraved as to,
Go and pick another flower from
atop a garden wall?
TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD"
Upon my pillow, fluttering airily,
I dream of a butterfly;
As I hear the ding-donging of the
chimes under the eaves.
No sooner did I have the temerity to tender
Wen Ch'iao's mirror stand,[17]
Than the vehicle of Cho Wen-chün's intended
elopement was intercepted,[18]
Leaving me here, unable to do anything
but sigh in distress.
The phoenix bed curtains are cold, the fragrance
of orchid and musk has dissipated.[19]
Beset by fatigue, I have just fallen asleep,
But the road to the Radiant Terrace is long.
How can I ever overcome this sorrow of mine?
I am doomed to suffer from this lovesickness.
Gazing at the Milky Way, it seems straight and then bent;
Facing the lonely lamp, it lights up and then fades away.
TO THE TUNE "THE GREENHORN"
Ah! The wind wildly scatters the yellow leaves
on the stairways, on the stairways;

The clouds half conceal the waning moon amid the
willow branches, the willow branches.
This sorrow at separation has become even harder
to endure than it seemed last spring.
I am so affected that things are all a blur;[20]
I am so emaciated that I can hardly bear it.[21]
Even when the mulberry fields are resubmerged
and the sea has once again dried up,
This karmic debt of love can never be fully repaid.[22]
TO THE TUNE "BORNE ON THE WAVES"
No sooner had this sorrow ceased to hover
about the corners of my eyes,
Than it came back to haunt me above the eyebrows,
Wishing to engrave itself upon the spirits of the
Three Corpses in my innermost heart.
If the day comes when, within the brocade curtains,
our jade bodies should touch again,
I will take the tips of her fingers in my hand
and gently squeeze them,
As I talk to her until the handle of the Northern
Dipper sets above our abode.[23]
When they had finished singing, P'an Chin-lien was still upset at the fact that he had called for them to perform this particular song suite, and the two of them continued to bandy words about it in front of the company.
When Yüeh-niang could abide it no longer, she said, "Sister Six, show a little patience. What are the two of you squabbling about, anyway? Aunt Yang and Sister-in-law Wu have been left to themselves in the other room, without anyone to keep them company. Two of you ought to go there to visit with them, and I'll join you in a minute."
Thereupon, P'an Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh proceeded to go into the other room to keep Aunt Yang, Old Mrs. P'an, and Sister-in-law Wu company.
Before long, who should appear but Lai-an, who came in and reported, "The card for Ying the Second's wife has been delivered, and Master Ying the Second himself has arrived. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai will be here shortly."
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "Go across the street and invite Master Wen to come join us."
Turning to Yüeh-niang, he said, "Tell the kitchen to send the refreshments out to us. I'm going to the front compound to keep them company."
He then called up Li Ming and said, "You go up to the front compound too, in order to sing for us."
Li Ming, accordingly, accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing out to the front compound, where they joined Ying Po-chüeh in the studio on the west side of the courtyard.
Hsi-men Ch'ing thanked Ying Po-chüeh for his gifts and said, "Whatever happens, be sure to invite your wife to come visit us tomorrow."
"I'm afraid she won't be able to come," said Ying Po-chüeh. "There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."
After some time, Licentiate Wen arrived, bowed to the company, and sat down.
Ying Po-chüeh raised his hand in greeting and said, "I really put you to a lot of trouble this morning, venerable sir."
"It was nothing worth mentioning," responded Licentiate Wen.
Brother-in-law Wu also arrived, and after he had exchanged greetings with the company and been offered a seat, Ch'in-t'ung came in with some candles, and the four of them sat down together around the brazier, while Lai-an brought in a platter of appetizers to go with the wine and placed it on the table.
Under the lamplight, Ying Po-chüeh observed that, over his white satin tunic, Hsi-men Ch'ing was wearing a green velvet variegated flying fish python robe, the coiled image on which was:
Showing its claws and brandishing its fangs,[24]
The horns on its head projecting formidably;[25]
Flaunting its whiskers and shaking its mane,
Its golds and greens setting each other off.
It gave him quite a start, and he asked, "Brother, where did that garment of yours come from?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by standing up and saying, "Take a good look at it, all of you, and then guess where it came from."
"How could we hope to guess correctly?" said Ying Po-chüeh.
"It was given to me by Eunuch Director Ho Hsin in the Eastern Capital," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I was having a drink at his place and was feeling cold, so he brought out this garment and gave it to me to put on. This is the flying fish version of the python robe. Since the Emperor had recently bestowed a regular python robe and a jade girdle upon him, he no longer planned to wear this one, so he gave it to me, which was a considerable favor."
Ying Po-chüeh, expressing himself in exaggerated terms, said, "Such an ornately decorated garment must, at the very least, be worth a good deal of money. This is a propitious omen for you, Brother. In the future, when you are promoted to the position of commander-in-chief, you need not worry about wearing a regular python robe and a jade girdle yourself, not to mention a flying fish robe, for your rank will entitle you to more than that."
As they talked together, Ch'in-t'ung set out the goblets and chopsticks, soup and rice, appetizers and wine, while Li Ming prepared to sing for their entertainment.
"I really ought to go inside and offer a cup of wine to my third sister-in-law," said Ying Po-chüeh, "before commencing to drink out here."
"My son," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you really have such filial intentions, you might as well go back to the rear compound and kowtow to her. What need is there to ask?"
"It doesn't matter," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I'll go and kowtow to her. And, if there's any problem with that, and I don't succeed in kowtowing to her, I'll simply come back out after giving her a taste of my prowess on the edge of the k'ang."
At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave him a sharp rap on the top of his head and cursed, saying, "You dog! As ever, you choose to ignore distinctions of status."
"Even if we children of yours wished to," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "which of us would feel it right to assume the superior position?"
The two of them continued to bandy words with each other for a while.
Before long, the birthday noodles were served, and Hsi-men Ch'ing offered portions of them to Brother-in-law Wu, Licentiate Wen, and Ying Po-chüeh. Because he had already eaten in the rear compound, he gave his own portion to Li Ming. When Li Ming had finished eating his noodles, he came before them once again to sing for their entertainment. Ying Po-chüeh urged Brother-in-law Wu to select a song suite for him to sing, but he demurred, saying, "I don't want to put him to any trouble. Just let him sing one that he's familiar with."
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My brother-in-law is fond of the suite that begins with the tune "The Earthenware Crock."
He then told Ch'in-t'ung to pour another round of wine, while Li Ming, with:
The bridges on his psaltery ranged like wild geese,
Gently adjusted the icy strings,
and proceeded to sing the song suite in question, the opening lines of which were:
It's enough to cause one to stare at
the scenery in silence;
As one's fragrant countenance grows
more emaciated by the day.[26]
When he had finished singing, he retired.
Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who came in and reported, "The chef is about to go home and wants to know how many people you will need for tomorrow."
Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Tell him that I will need six cooks and two waiters for the banquet tomorrow. There will be five table settings, and I want them all to be properly prepared."
Lai-an assented and went out.
At this point, Wu K'ai asked, "Brother-in-law, who are you entertaining tomorrow?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing explained about how Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works was hosting a party for Ts'ai Hsiu, the prefect of Chiu-chiang.
"If the secretary is going to be at the party tomorrow," said Wu K'ai, "that's very fortunate."
"Why so?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It's on account of my part in supervising the repair of the local Charity Granary," said Wu K'ai. "Since it is the secretary's responsibility to submit a report on the project, I hope that you will speak to him about it tomorrow, and urge him to look upon my efforts favorably, in the hope that when his term of office expires at the end of the year he may be willing to put in a good word on my behalf. It would be a great favor to me, Brother-in-law, if you were to do so."
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you will write out a card with your curriculum vitae and get it to me by tomorrow, I'll speak to him about it when a convenient opportunity arises."
Wu K'ai promptly got up and bowed to him in gratitude.
"Venerable Brother-in-law," interjected Ying Po-chüeh, "you can relax about that. After all, you are a mainstay of the family. If he were unwilling to speak up on your behalf, on whose behalf would he consent to do so? You can rest assured that it will take but little in the way of a recommendation from him to insure that he will:
Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow."
They continued drinking in the front compound until the second watch before the party broke up.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing was seeing Li Ming and the boy actors out the gate, he said, "See to it that you all report early tomorrow."
When Li Ming and the others had left, the servants cleared up the utensils and took them back to the rear compound.
The master suite was still crowded with people, but when they heard that the party in the front compound had broken up, they went back to their various quarters.
To resume our story, P'an Chin-lien was expecting that Hsi-men Ch'ing would go straight to her own quarters, so she hastily headed out in that direction, but, contrary to her expectations, he made his way past the ceremonial gate into the rear compound. Chin-lien concealed herself in the black shadow behind the spirit screen to keep track of him, and when she saw that he went into the master suite, she surreptitiously crept under the window to eavesdrop on him.
Whom should she see at this juncture but Yü-hsiao, who was standing in the doorway of the parlor and said, "Fifth Lady, why don't you go inside? Father is there, keeping company with the Third Lady, is he not?"
She also went on to ask, "And where is Old Mrs. P'an?"
"The old good-for-nothing," responded Chin-lien, "is suffering from some bodily discomfort, so she has gone back to her room to sleep."
Before long, she overheard Yüeh-niang saying, "Why ever did you engage the services of those two little bastards today? They hardly know how to sing. All they can sing is that song suite the first number of which, to the tune "Powdery Butterflies," begins with the words:
Three Variations on the Plum Blossom."[27]
"It was only toward the end," said Meng Yü-lou, "when you asked them to sing that song suite the first number of which, to the tune "Drunk in the Flowers' Shade," begins with the words:
By the Phoenix Bank, the lotus blooms,[28]
that they acceded to your request and sang the suite in question. What slippery little bastards they are. We don't even know their names. All they did for the whole day they were here was to enjoy themselves."
"One of them is called Han Tso," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and the other one is called Shao Ch'ien."
"Who cares whether they are called this or that?" said Yüeh-niang.
Before they knew it, P'an Chin-lien, who had slowly proceeded with:
Skulking step and lurking gait,
to lift aside the portiere, sneak in, and position herself behind the heated k'ang, spoke up, saying, "What you should be asking him is why he didn't let them sing the song suite that his legitimate wife had called for, but instead, for no good reason, proceeded to:
Fool with the branches and tug at the leaves,
telling them to sing:
I remember her flute-playing,
that is to say, Li P'ing-erh's flute-playing; thereby throwing the two little bastards into such consternation that they didn't know who they were supposed to take their orders from?"
When Meng Yü-lou turned her head around and saw that it was Chin-lien who had spoken, she said, "So it's Slavey Six, is it? Where did you appear from? When you suddenly intervened with that speech of yours, you gave me quite a start. You're always up to mischief of some kind. How long have you been standing behind me there? How is it that I didn't see you come in, or hear the sound of your footsteps?"
"The Fifth Lady has been there behind the Third Lady for some time already," said Hsiao-yü.
Chin-lien nodded her head and then said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, you'd do well to slack off a bit. Do you really think that no one else is onto those little tricks of yours? What kind of an 'amorous maiden from a minister's mansion' was she, anyway? She was like me in that we had both been previously married. How can you pretend that on your account 'she doffed her skirt and accepted the bloodstains on the azalea?' It's like:
Three officials, only two of whom bother
to bow to each other:
Whoever saw such a thing?[29]
My response is the one received by that oaf, Squire Sun, when he questioned his clever servant, Chu Chi,[30] that is to say, 'I may be willing to overlook everything else; but this I will never accept.' You actually went so far as to complain to someone, 'Ever since she died, I haven't been served so much as a single saucer of food that appeals to my taste.' As the saying goes:
Since Butcher Wang is dead and gone,
One must eat pork with the bristles.[31]
The implication is that your bevy of womenfolk merely stand by with their eyes open as you are constrained to stuff yourself with shit every day. You may retain some respect for our elder sister as your legitimate wife, but the rest of us don't count for anything, since none of us appeals to your taste. And even though our elder sister may be able to take charge of the household, she doesn't seem to be able to satisfy your needs. Since only the Sixth Lady was good enough for you, it would seem, why didn't you hold on to her and prevent her from dying? Originally, before she entered the household, you managed to get on all right, but now, no matter what the rest of us do, it fails to meet with your approval. Whenever the thought of her comes up, it causes your heart to start thumping away. But now that you've found someone else as a stand-in for her, it's like:
Trying a new sauce with your noodles,

and you're as pleased as can be. Can it be that only the water from her quarters appeals to your taste?"
"Good Sister Six," interjected Yüeh-niang, "as the saying puts it all too well:
Good people do not live for long,[32]
The wicked live a thousand years.
It has always been true that:
What you can't round on the lathe,
You can round with an axe.
You and I are only pieces of inferior merchandise, incapable of appealing to his taste. Let him say what he likes, and let it go at that."
"It's not that," said Chin-lien. "It's just that if I don't call him to account, the things he says are too depressing. I'm merely pointing out that people can't get over their resentment at the things he says."
Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed at this and chided her, saying, "You crazy little whore! You're talking nonsense. When did I ever say anything like that?"
"It was on that day when you were entertaining Eunuch Director Huang Ching-ch'en," said Chin-lien. "While you were talking with Ying the Second and that southerner Licentiate Wen, did you not say to them, 'Ever since she died, I haven't been provided with so much as a single saucer's worth of decent food'? It's no wonder you feel that way, since you act as though the rest of your womenfolk have all died off. Even when she was still alive, you didn't pay much attention to the rest of us. No doubt, in the future, you'll raise up someone else to be a match for her, won't you? You lousy, shameless, profligate good-for-nothing!"
This speech of hers got under Hsi-men Ch'ing's skin to such an extent that he jumped up and chased after her in the endeavor to give her a kick with his booted foot, but the woman had already made it out the door and disappeared in a puff of smoke. Hsi-men Ch'ing chased outside after her, but she was nowhere to be seen. The only thing he saw was Ch'un-mei, who was standing outside the door of the master suite, so he proceeded to grab her with one hand and set out for the front compound, supporting himself on the back of her shoulder.
Yüeh-niang, who had observed that he was drunk, had only been waiting for an opportunity to bundle him off to the front compound to sleep it off, because she wanted to spend the evening listening to the three nuns recite a precious scroll. Thereupon, she told Hsiao-yü to take a lantern and escort him to the front compound. Chin-lien and Yü-hsiao were standing concealed in the black shadow underneath the veranda, so Hsi-men Ch'ing did not see them.
Yü-hsiao said to Chin-lien, "My guess would be that Father is surely headed for your quarters."
"He's drunk enough to start acting up," responded Chin-lien. "Let him go to sleep first, and I'll join him a little later."
"If you'll wait for me," said Yü-hsiao, "I'll get you some fruit for your mother to eat."
Thereupon, she went into the bedroom, hid two tangerines, two apples, a package of candied sweetmeats, and three pomegranates in her sleeve and brought them out to give to the woman, who put them in her own sleeve, and then headed straight back toward the front compound.
Whom should she run into at this point but Hsiao-yü, who was on her way back after escorting Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "Fifth Lady, where have you been? Father has been looking all over for you."
When Chin-lien arrived at the door of her quarters, she didn't go inside but peeked through an aperture in the window lattice and saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was sitting on the bed, embracing Ch'un-mei and amusing himself with her.
Not wishing to disturb them, she hastily slipped into the other room, turned the fruit over to Ch'iu-chü, and asked her, "Has my mother gone to sleep yet, or not?"
"She's been asleep for some time already," replied Ch'iu-chü.
After enjoining her to be sure to put the fruit safely away in the cabinet, Chin-lien went back to the rear compound.
What should she find upon her arrival in the master suite but a whole roomful of people sitting together, including Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yülou, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, Sister-in-law Wu, Aunt Yang, and the three nuns, along with their two teenage disciples Miao-ch'ü and Miao-feng. The nuns were seated on Yüeh-niang's k'ang, with their legs folded in the lotus position, and Nun Hsüeh in the center. A bed table had been placed in front of her, on which incense was burning, and the rest of the company were crowded around them, waiting to hear the exposition of the Buddhist dharma.
Whom should they see at this point but Chin-lien, who lifted the portiere aside with a smile and came in, causing Yüeh-niang to say, "You've brought a calamity down on your own head. He's gone to your quarters looking for you. If you haven't been able to get him to bed, what have you come back here for? Did he beat you when he got to your place?"
Chin-lien laughed at this, saying, "Just ask him whether he dares to beat me, or not."
"If he doesn't beat you," said Yüeh-niang, "it must be because he's afraid of the stink it would cause. It seems to me that you took him to task somewhat too severely just now. As the saying goes:
The male of the species has dog's hair
growing on his face;[33]
The woman of the species has the fleece
of a female phoenix.
He was drunk, after all. My fear is that if you irritate him to the point where he loses his temper:
If he doesn't beat you,
Should he beat the dog instead?
I actually broke into a sweat on your behalf, but it turns out you're enough of a minx to tough it out."
"Even if he loses his temper with me," said Chin-lien, "I'm not afraid of him. But I can't put up with his sorting people differentially into:
Three classes and nine categories.
He didn't let them sing the song suite that his legitimate wife had called for but instead cast about:
Plowing the eastern ditch, and
Harrowing the western ditch;[34]
thereby throwing the two little bastards into such confusion that they didn't know who they were supposed to take their orders from. Since this is our third sister Meng Yü-lou's birthday, it was inappropriate to sing a song suite like the one beginning with the words:
I remember her flute-playing,
which deals with the sorrows of separation. After all:
Nobody knows where the dead end up going to,
but he insists on exhibiting this counterfeit compassion and fake filiality. I can't stomach it."
"You sisters have been quarreling with each other all this time," interjected Sister-in-law Wu, "and I don't even know what it's about. My brother-in-law came in and sat down politely, so why was he driven out again?"
"Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "you don't understand what happened. That husband of mine recalled the fact that Sister Li was still with us on the occasion of Sister Meng Yü-lou's birthday last year, but that she is no longer with us this year, which caused him to shed a few tears. So he told the boy actors to sing the song suite that begins with the words:
I remember her flute-playing, but where is
the jade damsel now?
This sister here was angry at the fact that he called for this song suite and told him off so effectively that she got under his skin and caused him to chase after her with the intent of giving her a drubbing. That's why the rascal ran out on us."
"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "you ought to let your husband call for whatever song suite he likes. What's the point of taking him to task over it. I imagine that he's accustomed to seeing all you sisters together but noticed that Li P'ing-erh was not here today. How could his heart not be stricken under the circumstances?"
"My good lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "they've been singing what they were asked to sing for what seems like half a day already, and who among the rest of us objected to what they sang? But Sister Six here has always had a better understanding of the significance of the songs than the rest of us. This song suite suggests that Li P'ing-erh was superior to any of the female paragons of old, extols the closeness of their relationship, and how they swore to be as faithful as the hills and seas, you to me, and I to you, as though she were utterly incomparable. So this inveterate nitpicker of ours couldn't help taking him verbally to task for it and has been giving him a hard time ever since."
"So this sister of ours is as sharp as all that," remarked Aunt Yang.
"What songs are there that she doesn't know?" said Yüeh-niang.
"If you quote the first line,
She'll come up with the last.[35]
As for the likes of me, if we engage the services of professional female singers or boy actors, all we can do is let them sing and leave it at that. She is the only one among us who can say, 'That segment wasn't performed correctly; that line wasn't sung right; or that section was left out.' Whenever our husband proposes a song, she starts to carry on with him, giving him tit for tat, until he really becomes annoyed, before laying off, while the rest of us merely let them go at it."
"Aunt Yang," Meng Yü-lou interjected humorously, "you may not be aware of it, but I've had three or four children, of whom this slavey is the only one who survived. She has always been clever but unmannerly, and now that she has grown up and become a woman, she no longer allows herself to be governed by me."
Chin-lien responded by giving her a playful slap and laughed, saying, "So you're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"
"You see," said Meng Yü-lou, "she's been spoiled to the point that she's so:
Discourteous and ill-bred,
as to strike a member of the older generation."
"Sister," said Aunt Yang, "you'd do well in the future to let that husband of yours have his say. As the sayings go:
One night as man and wife gives rise to
a hundred nights of love.
To walk a hundred steps with one another,
Is enough to develop a lingering affinity.
She still seems vibrantly alive to him. You womenfolk of his are like his fingers. If he should lose one of them, how could he fail to think of it, to yearn for it, and to commemorate it?"
"Whether he thinks of her or not," responded Chin-lien, "there ought to be an appropriate time for it. We are all spouses of his after all. What does he mean by:
Raising one person up, and
Putting another down?
Are we all nothing but:
The ghosts of Liu Chan's daughters,
Who don't amount to anything?[36]
Our elder sister resides in the rear compound and may not be aware of it, or have seen what he's up to. Every day, when he comes home after drinking somewhere, he makes his way first to her quarters, where he bows deeply before her portrait, mutters some mumbo jumbo on her behalf, makes her an offering of soup and rice, and proffers her something with his chopsticks just as though she were alive. Who knows what all he's up to? And he criticizes the rest of us for not wearing mourning on her behalf. As we have pointed out to him, none of us stands to her in the position of a mother. We all wore mourning for her through the final weekly commemoration of her death. How much longer are we supposed to do so? But he continues to quarrel with us about it."
"Sisters," responded Aunt Yang, "you ought to:
Take notice of half of what he does,
And take no notice of the other half."
"How time flies," said Sister-in-law Wu. "The seventh weekly commemoration occurred some time ago, and now the hundredth-day anniversary of her death is about to come up."
"When will the hundredth-day anniversary occur?" asked Aunt Yang.
"It's early yet," said Yüeh-niang. "It will not be until the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month."
"You'll have to have a scripture-reading ceremony to mark the occasion," said Nun Wang.
"It will fall too close to the New Year's celebrations," said Yüeh-niang, "for us to have any scripture-reading then. Father will probably put the scripture-reading off until after the New Year's festival."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Hsiao-yü, who brought in a serving of tea flavored with taro, a cup of which was provided for each of them.
Shortly thereafter, when they had drunk their tea, Yüeh-niang washed her hands, lit some incense in the burner, and prepared to listen to Nun Hsüeh expound the Buddhist dharma.[37]
Nun Hsüeh began by reciting a gatha, which went as follows:
The Ch'an school of the Buddhist teaching
is really quite extraordinary;
It has been transmitted by the Buddhas and
patriarchs to the human world.
It is easy enough for a wind-blown leaf to
fall tumbling to the ground;
But for it ever to be reattached to its
original branch is difficult.[38]
These four lines of verse refer to the fact that for monks to adhere faithfully to their vows is difficult. It points out that man's life is like a leaf on an iron tree, which may fall off easily, but will find it hard to ever be reattached to its original branch. It is easy enough to suffer the consequences of one's evil karma, but difficult to become a Buddha or a patriarch.[39]
To resume our story, originally, during the Chih-p'ing reign period (1064–67), in the ancient Ching-tz'u Hsiao-kuang Monastery on the Southern Mountain outside the Ch'ien-t'ang Gate of Ning-hai military prefecture in Chekiang province, there were two dedicated monks who had attained to an understanding of the Way. One of them was called Ch'an Master Wu-chieh (Five Precepts), and the other Ch'an Master Ming-wu (Clear Enlightenment). To what does the term Five Precepts refer? The first is to abstain from killing; the second is to abstain from stealing; the third is to abstain from lascivious music and alluring beauty; [40] the fourth is to abstain from drinking wine or eating meat;[41] and the fifth is to abstain from uttering untrue or misleading statements.[42] To what does the term Clear Enlightenment refer? It means to illuminate one's mind and perceive one's nature,[43] thereby achieving an understanding of one's true self. Now this Ch'an Master Wu-chieh was just thirty years old in terms of lay reckoning, was not quite three feet tall, and presented an altogether most extraordinary aspect. He had been intelligent ever since his youth but was blind in one eye. His lay surname was Chin, and he was thoroughly versed in the Ch'an School and Buddhist doctrine. He and Ming-wu were like elder and younger brothers in the dharma. One day they visited the monastery together to call on the Ch'an Master Ta-hsing, and when the Master realized that Wu-chieh was so well versed in Buddhist doctrine, he retained him in the monastery in the post of rector. Some years later, when Ta-hsing passed away, the monks of the monastery made him the abbot, and henceforth he spent his days in meditation. The other one, Ming-wu, was twenty-eight years old and was born with a round head and large ears, [44] a broad face and a square mouth.[45] He was tall of stature,[46] and his appearance resembled that of an arhat. His lay surname was Wang, and the two of them were as close as though they were born of the same mother. When the time came to explicate the dharma, the two of them would mount the rostrum together.
One day, at the end of winter and the onset of spring, the weather was extremely cold. Snow had been falling for two days but had finally ended, and the sky was clear. Ch'an Master Wu-chieh was sitting on his meditation chair early that morning when his ears caught the sound of an infant crying in the distance. Turning to the trusted lay worker at his side, whose name was Ch'ing-i, he said to him, "Go out in front of the monastery gate to see what is going on, and report back to me." The lay worker opened the gate of the monastery and saw a baby lying on a tattered mat on the snowy ground under a pine tree. "I wonder who could have left the child here?" he thought to himself. When he went closer to take a look, he found that it was a five- or six-month-old baby girl, wrapped in ragged clothing, who had a strip of paper on her breast inscribed with the eight characters indicating the year, month, date, and hour of her birth. Ch'ing-i thought to himself, "To save a single human life is better than building a seven-story pagoda."[47]
Hastening back to the abbot's quarters, he told him what he had found. "Good!" said the abbot. "Someone with a heart as good as yours is hard to find. Take her back to your quarters and see that she is properly nourished. To have saved her life is a good deed." When she had lived through her first year, the abbot gave her the name Hung-lien, or Red Lotus.
As the days went and the months came,[48] the lay worker Ch'ing-i raised her in his quarters in the monastery, without anyone being the wiser,[49] and in a while the abbot himself forgot all about it.

Before anyone knew it, Hung-lien grew to the age of fifteen. The lay worker Ch'ing-i kept her secluded in his own quarters, locking the door every day, each time he went out or came in, just as though she were his own daughter. The girl's clothing, shoes, and socks were all those of a male novice, and she was favored with a naturally clear-cut appearance. When she had nothing else to do, she devoted herself to needlework in her room. The only hope of Ch'ing-i was that he might find her a husband so that the two of them could support him in his old age and arrange for his funeral. [50]

One day, during the hot weather of the sixth month, Ch'an Master Wu-chieh happened to remember the events that had occurred more than ten years before and went directly back to the lay worker Ch'ing-i's quarters behind the Hall of a Thousand Buddhas. "You seldom venture here," said Ch'ing-i. "What brings you here today?" "Where is that girl Hung-lien?" asked Ch'an Master Wu-chieh. Ch'ing-i did not dare to conceal the truth of the matter[51] and led the abbot into his quarters.

No sooner did he catch sight of Hung-lien than his thoughts were led astray,[52] and lustful desires were suddenly aroused. "Tonight you must bring her to my quarters," he instructed Ch'ing-i. "You must do so without fail. [53] If you consent to do as I say, I will see to it that your lot is improved in the future, but you must not let anyone else into the secret." Ch'ing-i did not dare not to comply, but thought to himself, "Tonight this girl of mine is sure to lose her virginity." When the abbot saw that his response was somewhat reluctant, he called him into his own quarters and gave him ten taels of silver, along with an ordination certificate that would entitle him to become a monk himself. Ch'ing-i felt that he had no alternative but to accept the silver.

That evening, he took Hung-lien to the abbot's quarters, and the abbot accordingly deflowered her. After this, the abbot kept her hidden out of sight in a paper-curtained cabinet behind his bed and personally provided her with enough food to eat.

To resume our story, that very night, when the abbot's brother-monk Ch'an Master Ming-wu emerged from a trance while sitting on his meditation couch, he was already aware that Wu-chieh had allowed his thoughts to stray and had broken his vow to abstain from sexual activity by violating the girl Hung-lien, thereby allowing his virtuous conduct of many years to be cast aside on a single day. "I had better go and admonish him to mend his ways," he thought to himself.

The next day, the lotus flowers were in bloom in front of the monastery gate. Ming-wu ordered an acolyte to pluck a white lotus for him, put it in a gallbladder-shaped vase, and then invite Wu-chieh to come join him in enjoying the lotus blossoms, and composing verses, while chatting and laughing together. Before long, Wu-chieh arrived, and the two Ch'an Masters sat down beside each other. "My Brother," said Ming-wu, "I noticed today that these flowers were in full bloom and invited you to come enjoy them with me, and each compose a verse on the subject."

When the acolyte had served them with tea, and they had finished drinking it, they were provided with the four treasures of the writer's studio.[54]

"Let's choose the lotus root as our topic," said Wu-chieh, but Ming-wu said, "No, let's choose the lotus flowers as our topic instead." Wu-chieh took up his brush and composed a quatrain, as follows:

The petals of the stalk of lotus flowers
are in full bloom;
Accompanied by the hollyhocks, exuding
their rich fragrance.
The fiery red pomegranates are ablaze
like rolls of brocade;
But their scent is no match for that of
the green-coated caltrops.

"Since my elder brother has composed a poem," said Ming-wu, "how could I fail to do so?" Whereupon, he also picked up his brush and composed a quatrain, as follows:

In spring, the peach trees, apricots, and
willows begin to flourish;
Their thousand blossoms and myriad blooms
contending in fragrance.
In summer, one enjoys the caltrop and the
lotus, in all their glory;
But the red lotus is no match for the white
lotus in its fragrance.[55]

When he had finished writing it out, he laughed out loud.

Upon hearing the words of this poem, Wu-chieh realized their significance, and his embarrassment showed in his face. [56] Turning around and excusing himself, he returned to the abbot's quarters, where he told an acolyte to heat some bath water. After bathing himself, and changing into a new set of clothing, he took paper and brush and hastily wrote a farewell elegy of eight lines, as follows:

Now I have existed forty-seven years,
The myriad phenomena revert to unity.
Only because my thoughts went astray,
I must now suddenly depart this life.
My message to my fellow monk Ming-wu,
Is, "There is no need to pressure me."
My ephemeral body is like lightning,
That leaves the sky azure as before.

When he had finished writing it, he placed it in front of an image of the Buddha, returned to his meditation couch, and passed away in the lotus position.

An acolyte hastened to report this event to Ming-wu, who was greatly surprised to hear it. Upon going in front of the Buddha's image and reading the farewell elegy, he said, "You were not a bad monk, after all, but it's too bad that you made this one false move. And now, although you may be reborn as a man, you will grow up not believing in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha; and are sure to disparage the Buddha and slander the clergy, bringing bitter consequences on yourself in future lives, and preventing yourself from reverting to the true path. [57] It is greatly to be regretted. Do you really think that you have gotten away, and that I will not be able to catch up with you?"

Thereupon, he returned to his quarters, told an acolyte to heat bath water for him, bathed, and sat down on his meditation couch. Turning to the acolyte, he said, "I am going to pursue my fellow monk Wu-chieh. You can place our bodies in two caskets, and see that they are properly cremated together, after lying in state for three days." When he had finished speaking, he also passed away while sitting in the lotus position.

His fellow monks were all astonished at this extraordinary event, and word that two monks at the monastery had passed away sitting in the lotus position on successive days quickly spread to the four quarters. As a result, when their caskets were carried out in front of the monastery and cremated, mountains and seas of people came to burn incense, pay their respects, and offer donations. The lay worker Ch'ing-i subsequently married Hung-lien to a commoner so that they could support him in his old age. But no more of this.

In later days, Wu-chieh was reborn as the son of the layman Su Hsün of Mei prefecture in western Szechwan, who was given the name Su Shih, [58] and is also known by the courtesy name Tzu-chan, and the cognomen Tung-p'o. Ming-wu was reborn as the son of one Hsieh Tao-ch'ing from the same prefecture, who was given the name Tuan-ch'ing, and later left home to become a monk,[59] who took the name Fo-yin. The two of them continued to confront each other in their new incarnations, and their relationship remained extremely close. Truly:

Since he arrived in Szechwan several
decades have gone by;
During which he has devoted himself
to the Buddha Vairocana.[60]
Although he apprehended the crux of
Chao-chou's[61] sayings;
His good affinity has turned out to
be a bad affinity.
The red peach blossoms and the green
willows remain the same;
The water flowing over the boulders
makes a gurgling sound.
Today, the road to enlightenment has
been pointed out to you;
Never again allow your thoughts to
stray for love of Hung-lien.[62]

When Nun Hsüeh finished her recitation, whom should they see but Lan-hsiang, from Meng Yü-lou's quarters, who brought in two square boxes of fastidiously prepared vegetarian fare, saucers of fruit, tea pastries, and sweetmeats, which were placed on the table after the incense burner had been removed. A kettle of tea was also provided, and the audience joined the three nuns in enjoying the repast. After this, some meat dishes were served, a jug of Ma-ku wine was opened, and the company gathered around the brazier to enjoy the wine.

Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu began to throw dice as they played "Competing for the Red," while Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh played guess-fingers with each other. Yü-hsiao stood beside them to pour the wine and at the same time passed information to Chin-lien underneath the table, which enabled her to win round after round, forcing Li Chiao-erh to down several cups of wine.

"Let me play with you," said Meng Yü-lou. "You seem bent only on beating her."

She then went on to say, "Chin-lien, expose your hands. You mustn't conceal them in your sleeves that way. And Yü-hsiao must not be allowed to stay so close to you."

As a result, that evening, she succeeded in overcoming Chin-lien, who was forced to down several cups of wine.

They also asked Big Sister Yü to play and sing for them, Yüeh-niang telling her, "Sing a version of 'Getting through the Five Watches of the Night' for us."

Big Sister Yü, thereupon, tuned the strings of her instrument and sang in a loud voice the song suite that begins with the tune "Interlaced Jade Branches":

Amid dense masses of dark clouds,
Like bits of goose down, the snowflakes
are dancing wildly.
The north wind is piercingly cold,[63] as it
penetrates the windows.
Your heart is hard, and I have been
the victim of it.
The abuse I have suffered at the hands of
my parents is too cruel.
The promises you made me have been
utterly ignored.
All I can do is count the watches
of the night.

TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":

The night is long, and I have been
left all alone.
It is desolate in the quiet of
the early watches.
You have not sent me a single sheet
of news about yourself.
My cheeks are streaked with pearly tears.
Our good times together are nothing to you.
During the first watch, my suffering
is unbounded.

TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES":

The first watch is finally over;
But I have been left all alone here
amid the bed curtains.
I toss first this way and then that,
but how am I to sleep?
During the second watch my
pearly tears fall.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

The second watch is hard to endure.
In trying to go to sleep, I do
periodically nod off,
Hoping that this night, this night, he will
appear to me in my dreams.
I long for him; he longs for me.
When he first left, the flowering crab apple
had just begun to bloom;
But by this time, the leaves of the tree
have all fallen;

Leaving me with no recourse but to
foolishly wait in vain.
TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":
I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will you ever consent to come?
We spend less time together than apart;[64]
it's just my bad luck, bad luck.
I have been left all alone, but
what can I do about it?
It makes it really hard to keep going.
During the third watch, my dreams
are recurrent.
TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES":
By the third watch the moon has risen.
How hard it is to bear this
interminable night.
The candle in its silver stand
is sputtering out.
My pearly tears fall in two
or three streaks.
Under my red satin comforter, half
the bed is empty.
Where has he bestowed the handkerchief that
I recently stitched for him?
My waist has become emaciated, as emaciated
as that of Shen Yüeh.[65]
TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":
My waist has become as emaciated
as that of Shen Yüeh.
Every day I am more brokenhearted
than ever with sorrow.
Yearning for my lover,[66] I shed tears
in two streams, two streams.
Facing the caltrop-patterned mirror, I am
reluctant to make myself up.
My alluring figure has become emaciated.[67]
During the fourth watch, the night seems
longer than ever.
TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES":
The fourth watch is as long as the day.
As I think of him on my pillow, before I
know it, my tears begin to flow.
In the numinous god's temple, we swore
fealty to each other.
We exchanged snippets of black hair
as tokens of our love.
But the promises he made to me
have not been kept.
By now, he has abandoned me just like
that "willow" in the quarter;[68]
And I am left foolishly waiting
for him in vain.
TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":
I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will this ever cease?
Longing for my lover, in vain do I lean on the
belvedere, lean on the belvedere.
I fear my lover has wiped the slate clean
with a single stroke.
I can't help knitting my brows.
During the fifth watch my
pearly tears flow.
TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES":
At the fifth watch the cock crows.[69]
Gradually I perceive that the day
is beginning to dawn.
Breaking into tears, I am about to
break into tears,
But I fear that other people will
only laugh at me.
For a time my heart is on fire;
Burning incense, I seek my fortune
before the gods.
The intentions of my fickle lover
are known only to Heaven;
And I am left foolishly waiting
for him in vain.
TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":
I have been foolishly waiting
for you all day long;
When will this ever end?
Beyond the eaves, ding-dong the wind chimes
sound, the wind chimes sound;
Making it impossible for me to sleep.
While, at the same time, the
cold ravens caw;
Desolately and disconsolately,[70]
right up till dawn.
TO THE TUNE "INTERLACED JADE BRANCHES":
At dawn I do my hair and wash my face;
But, confronting my dressing mirror, I am
reluctant to paint my eyebrows.
Then, on the eaves of my room, auspicious
magpies begin to chatter;
And my maidservant comes to report the good news,
Saying, "Your lover has actually
chosen to return."
As the two of us enter the silken
bed curtains together,
I tell him, "You come closer. "I've
got something to ask you."
TO THE TUNE "THE FLOWER IN THE REAR COURTYARD":
"I've got something to ask you, you
unfaithful scoundrel.
As you well know, you've been away
for half a year now;
So why didn't you send me so much
as a single letter?
I believed that you had gone to take the examinations
in order to become an official;
How could I know you were bewitched by 'misty willows'
and addicted to the wine cup?
On your account, I had no choice but
to endure loneliness;
While you were there, cuddling the red
and hugging the turquoise.
On your account, I am sick with depression
and unable to eat,

So that my jade body has become
utterly emaciated.
I can endure the clear mornings, but
fear the evenings.
During the first watch, I heard the cry of the
solitary wild goose at the sky's edge;
During the second watch, I suffered my dreaming
soul to yearn after my absent lover;
But, during the fifth watch, upon my awakening,
I was unable to see any trace of you."
TO THE TUNE "THE LEAVES OF THE WILLOW TREE":
"Ah! I found myself all alone beneath my
mandarin duck brocade quilt;
Deserted for my swallows' tryst, swallows'
tryst or orioles' assignation.
In the Temple of the God of the Sea[71] may
be found an analogous case.[72]
I could hardly help being angry at heart.
As you well know, the intentions of my fickle
lover are known only to Heaven."
CODA:
Within the tasseled brocade curtains,[73]
the lovers are entwined;
Beneath the brocade quilt, the mandarin
ducks proceed to pair.
They will remain forever reunited,[74] till
the end of their lives.[75]
By this time, Chin-lien had lost a series of rounds as she played at guess-fingers with Meng Yü-lou and had been forced to down ten or twenty cups of wine. No longer able to sit at her place, she set off for her quarters in the front compound, where she had to call out for what seemed like half a day before the postern gate was opened for her by Ch'iu-chü, who was still rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.
"So, you lousy slave, you've been asleep have you?" the woman said to her accusingly.
"I haven't been to sleep," protested Ch'iu-chü.
"It's obvious that you've just gotten up," the woman said. "You're just trying to deceive me. You've been taking it easy, rather than thinking of coming back to the rear compound to get me."
She then went on to ask, "Has Father gone to bed yet?"
"Father's been asleep for some time already," responded Ch'iu-chü.
The woman then went into the room that was furnished with a k'ang, where she pulled up her skirt and sat down on the k'ang to warm herself, while calling for some tea.
Ch'iu-chü hastily poured out a cup of tea for her, but the woman said, "You lousy slave! You'd pour tea for me to drink with those dirty hands of yours, would you? I won't drink any of that stale tea that has been steeped for so long it smells of the pot. Go call Ch'un-mei, and tell her to fill a little kettle with sweet water, put in an abundance of tea leaves, and boil it until it is good and strong, for me to drink."
"She's asleep in the other room with the bed in it," said Ch'iu-chü. "Wait till I call her to bring it for you."
"Don't call her, but let her sleep," the woman said.
Ch'iu-chü did not obey her but went into the other room, where she found Ch'un-mei lying fast asleep at Hsi-men Ch'ing's feet.
Shaking her awake, she said, "Mother has come back and wants some tea to drink. Haven't you even gotten up yet?"
Ch'un-mei spat at her, and cursed, saying. "You slave! You've been seeing things! So Mother has come back. So what? Why should you be in such a frightful stew over it, for no good reason?"
She then proceeded to get up:
Just as slow and easy as you please,
stretched her waist, pulled on her trousers, and came to see the woman, still rubbing her eyes as she approached the k'ang.
The woman, for her part, chose to criticize Ch'iu-chü, saying, "That slave! You were fast asleep, and she woke you up."
"The kerchief on your head has jumped out of place," she then remarked to Ch'un-mei. "Why don't you pull it back down where it belongs?"
She went on to ask, "How is it that you're only wearing one pendant earring? Where did the other one go?"
When Ch'un-mei felt her ears, she found that she was, indeed, wearing only one gold openwork pendant earring. Lighting a lamp, she went to take a look at the bed in the other room but failed to find the missing object. After some time, unexpectedly, she found that it had fallen onto the footboard of the bed and picked it up.
"Where did you find it?" the woman asked her.
"It was all her fault," said Ch'un-mei, "when she insisted on:
Making such an unnecessary fuss,[76]
over waking me up. It got caught on a curtain hook and fell onto the footboard, where I was able to recover it."
"I told her not to disturb you," the woman explained, "but she insisted on waking you up anyway."
"She said that you wanted some tea to drink," said Ch'un-mei.
"I do want a drink of tea," the woman said, "but I fear that her hands are not clean."
Ch'un-mei then dipped up a little kettleful of water, placed it on the brazier, and raked some charcoal around it. Before long it was hot enough to brew tea, and after rinsing out a cup, she poured out a strong serving of tea and handed it to the woman.
The woman then asked Ch'un-mei, "How long has Father been asleep?"
"I helped him to bed some time ago," responded Ch'un-mei. "He asked where you were, and I told him that you had not yet returned from the rear compound."
When the woman had finished her tea, she said to Ch'un-mei, "A while ago, I brought back some fruit and candied sweetmeats in my sleeve, that had been given to me by Yü-hsiao for my mother to eat. I turned them over to this slave here to take inside for you to put away."
"I haven't seen anything of them," said Ch'un-mei. "Who knows where she put them?"
The woman then called in Ch'iu-chü and asked her, "Where did you put that fruit?"
"It's here," responded Ch'iu-chü. "I put it in the cabinet."
So saying, she went and brought the things over to her.
The woman counted them over and, finding that a tangerine was missing, asked her what had happened to it.
"When Mother gave them to me," said Ch'iu-chü, "I brought them inside and put them in the cabinet. Surely you don't imagine I was suffering from such an avid craving as to blight my own mouth with it, do you?"
"You lousy slave!" the woman responded. "You still insist on talking back, do you? If you didn't snitch it, where did it go? I counted them with my own hand before turning them over to you. You lousy slave! You've simply been picking them up and secreting them for yourself, until only these measly:
Odds and ends,[77]
are left. You've already consumed more than half of them. Under the circumstances, I'll have to teach you a lesson."
Then, turning to Ch'un-mei, she said, "You give that slave ten slaps on each side of her face."
"Those dirty cheeks of hers," responded Ch'un-mei. "I'd only be dirtying this hand of mine."
"You drag her over to me, then," the woman said.
Ch'un-mei pushed her over in front of the woman with both hands, and the woman pinched her cheeks, while taking her to task, saying, "You lousy slave! It was you who snitched this tangerine to eat, wasn't it? If you tell me the truth, I won't beat you. But if you don't, I'll get the riding crop, strip you naked, and whip you until I lose track of the strokes. No doubt, you thought I was drunk enough so that you could snitch it for yourself, while pulling the wool over my eyes, didn't you?"
She then turned to Ch'un-mei and asked her, "Am I drunk, or not?"
"Mother is perfectly sober," replied Ch'un-mei. "What does wine have to do with it? If you believe her, then she didn't eat it. But if you don't believe her, try groping inside her sleeve. I wouldn't be surprised if there were still tangerine peels in her sleeve."
The woman, then, pulled the sleeve over and started to grope inside it, but Ch'iu-chü tried to brush her aside with one hand, in order to prevent her from doing so. Ch'un-mei, then, intervened by pulling her hand away and, sure enough, was able to grope out some remnants of tangerine peel.
The woman responded by pinching her cheeks twice, as hard as she could, and giving her two full-handed slaps on the face, as she reviled her, saying, "You lousy slave! You hopeless scamp of a slave! You're hardly good at anything else, but it seems you're proficient at telling tales and snitching food to eat. These tangerine peels in your sleeve constitute:
Irrefutable proof of your guilt,[78]
so you can hardly try to blame anyone else. I would give you a whipping right now, but Father is asleep here, and it's not an appropriate time to whip you while;
Anticipating tea or recovering from wine.
Tomorrow, when I'm completely myself, I'll settle accounts with you."
"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you ought not to be perfunctory about it tomorrow, but have her stripped completely naked, and get someone to give her a real shellacking, administering several tens of strokes with the bamboo. If she is made to suffer some real pain, it might throw some fear into her. If you merely touch her up with a few strokes of the rod, as if you were playing with a monkey, she won't take it to heart."
Ch'iu-chü's face was swollen from the pinches she had received at the woman's hands, and she took herself off to the kitchen with a pout on her lips.
The woman divided the other tangerine in two and also took an apple, and a pomegranate, and offered them to Ch'un-mei, saying, "I'm giving you these things to eat, while the rest should be kept for my mother."
Ch'un-mei did not evince any interest in these offerings but accepted them as indifferently as though she were:
Uncertain whether they were there or not,
and tossed them into a drawer.
The woman was also about to divide up the candied sweetmeats, but Ch'un-mei said, "There is no need for you to divide them. I am disinclined to eat such sweet things. Save them for your mother."
For this reason, the woman did not divide them and set them aside for her mother. But no more of this.
The woman sat down on the commode and urinated, after which she told Ch'un-mei to bring in the portable bidet and washed her private parts.
She then went on to ask Ch'un-mei, "What time is it by now?"
"The moon is sinking in the West," said Ch'un-mei, "so it must be sometime in the third watch."
The woman took off her jewelry and went into the bedroom, where she saw that the silver lamp on the table was guttering out, and proceeded to trim the wick. When she looked at the bed, she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying there fast asleep and snoring loudly. Unfastening her silken girdle and doffing her skirt, she sat down to change into her sleeping shoes, took off her drawers, climbed into bed, and bored her way under the covers, where she:
Lay down head to head on the same pillow,[79]
with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After lying there for a little while, she reached between his loins and felt for his organ. Although she manipulated it for a while, it refused to stand up. It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had engaged in sexual intercourse with Ch'un-mei not long before, so that his organ was as flaccid as cotton and could not be made to rise immediately. The woman, who had a bellyful of wine, and whose:
Lecherous desires were on fire,[80]
squatted down underneath the bedding and began to suck his organ. Titillating the mouth of his urethra with her tongue, she engulfed his turtle head with her mouth and proceeded to move it:
Back and forth without ceasing.[81]
Hsi-men Ch'ing abruptly woke up and, seeing what she was up to under the covers, said, "You crazy little whore! Why did you not come back until now?"
"We have been drinking wine in the rear compound," explained the woman, "where Meng the Third had provided two square boxes of delicacies to go with the wine, and Big Sister Yü was singing to entertain us. We were keeping company with Sister-in-law Wu and Aunt Yang and have been enjoying ourselves all this time playing at guess-fingers and throwing dice. I defeated Li Chiao-erh and made her drunk in the process, but afterwards, Meng the Third out-played me at guess-fingers, and I had to drink several goblets of wine. You're lucky to have had some sleep, but if you think you can hold out on me, just see if I put up with it, or not."
"Have you got that band you were going to make?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"It's right here under the mattress," the woman said, pulling it out and showing it to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
She then proceeded to fasten it around the root of his chowrie handle, and then tie the two ribbons attached to it securely behind his back.
"Have you taken anything?" she went on to ask; to which Hsi-men Ch'ing replied, "Yes I have."
Before long, thanks to the woman's manipulation of his organ, behold:
Its protuberances swelled, its head sprang up, and
Its body swelled itself erect,
until it reached the exceptional length of more than seven inches. The woman crawled on top of him and, finding that his turtle head was proud and large, stretched her labia apart with both hands and abruptly inserted it into her vagina. The woman embraced Hsi-men Ch'ing around the neck with both hands and told him to clasp her waist, while she continued to knead away at him in her superior position until his organ finally penetrated her to the root.
"Daddy," the woman cried out to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "take my bodice and put it under your waist to prop it up."
Hsi-men Ch'ing picked up her bodice of crimson satin from the head of the bed, folded it over itself four times, and used it to prop up his waist, while the woman straddled his body on all fours. After no more than a few thrusts, his organ penetrated her to the hilt.
"Daddy," the woman said, "you can feel it with your own hand. It's gone all the way in and has stretched me to capacity on the inside. In case you're not satisfied yet, you can try to thrust it in further."

Hsi-men Ch'ing investigated with his hand and found that it had penetrated all the way to the root:
Without leaving a gap of even a hairsbreadth,[82]
while only his two testicles remained outside,[83] and inside he felt a melting sensation the pleasure of which was indescribable.
"You certainly were in a hurry," the woman said. "The problem is that it's so cold we can't light a lamp and enjoy the sight of what we're doing. It's not as nice as it is in the summer. During these winter months, it's altogether too cold."
She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "How do you find this band compares with that silver clasp? It certainly seems superior to me, in that it doesn't hurt when it rubs against my labia. This band makes your organ grow even larger and increases its length significantly. If you don't believe me, try feeling my lower abdomen. It has penetrated almost as far as my heart."
She then went on to say, "You hold me. Today, I'd like to go to sleep on top of you."
"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "go ahead and sleep. Daddy will hold you."
The woman stuck her tongue into his mouth and had him hold it there, while her starry eyes grew dim, as he embraced her fragrant shoulders.
After sleeping for a brief period, she could not prevent the flames of desire from enveloping her body, as her fragrant heart became disturbed.
Thereupon, supporting herself with her hands on his shoulders, she alternately raised and lowered herself, while he retracted his organ as far as the knob of the glans, and then plunged it in all the way up to the root, as she called out, "My own darling! That's enough. Your Fivey is dying."
But he continued coming and going, thrusting and retracting another three hundred times, until she finally came.
"My own daddy!" the woman cried out. "Squeeze me tightly around the waist."
At the same time, she offered Hsi-men Ch'ing a nipple to suck, and then, before she knew it:
She swooned completely away, and
Her vaginal fluids overflowed.
Before long, as the two of them lay in a mutual embrace, the woman became aware that:
Her heart was hopping like a little fawn.[84]
In no time at all:
Her four limbs had become limp, and
Her cloudy locks were in disarray.
But, when Hsi-men Ch'ing's organ was withdrawn, it was still as stiff and hard as ever.
The woman wiped it off with a handkerchief, saying, "My own daddy! How is it that you haven't ejaculated?"
"Wait until we've had some sleep," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "after which, we can start to play again."
"I'm not sure I'll be up to it," the woman said, "my body's feeling so flaccid and feverish."
Afterwards, once:
The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,
the two of them:
Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,
went to sleep on the bed:
Unaware that the sun had already risen in the East.[85]
Truly:
If one were to casually shine the light of a silver lamp upon them;
They would appear to be a natural-born pair of interlocking branches.

I was called a great lover
I remembered my love.
He who called me a great lover and accepted my love
That man despised me.
Because I am a great lover
My love grows ever deeper and stronger
If I die of love I shall not complain
My love shall be ever steadfast.

When Ying Bojue had gone, Ximen Qing went to the Cave of Spring to watch the masons putting in a warm bed. It was heated by a furnace outside the wall, so that the flowers should not be spoiled by the smoke.
Ping'an brought him a card and told him that Major Zhou had sent a present. There was a box with five separate contributions from Major Zhou himself, General Jing, Captain Zhang, and the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue. Each of them sent five *xing* and two handkerchiefs. Ximen told a servant to accept the things, and gave a card to the man who had brought them.
Aunt Yang, Aunt Wu and old woman Pan came early. Nun Xue, Nun Wang, the two novices, Miao Qu and Miao Feng, and Miss Yu came with gifts for Meng Yulou. Wu Yueniang gave them tea in her own room. The ladies were all there to welcome the guests, but after tea they went to their own rooms.
Pan Jinlian was eager to make the red silk belt she had promised Ximen Qing. She went to her room and brought out her sewing box. From it she took a piece of red sarcenet. Then, from a porcelain box, she took some of the aphrodisiac drug and sewed it, with fine delicate stitches, into the material. Everything was now ready for the work of darkness. Suddenly, Nun Xue came to the door. She had brought Jinlian the potion she was to take to make her conceive. They sat down to talk. Nun Xue saw that nobody was about.
"Wait until a *Renzi* day," she whispered. "Then take it before you have anything to eat. That night, sleep with your husband and you will conceive without fail. The Great Lady has a big belly. It was I who gave her the medicine. And I will tell you something else. Make yourself a little bag, and I will give you a spell written in red ink to put in it. Carry it on your body, and you will bear a son. You have my word for that. It has never been known to fail."
Jinlian was delighted. She put the medicine and the charm into a box. Then she consulted a calendar. The next *Renzi* day was the twenty-ninth. She gave the nun three *qian* of silver. "This is very little," she said. "It will buy you some vegetarian food. But when I have a baby, I will give you some silk to make clothes with."
"Don't trouble about that," the nun said, "I am not so greedy as Nun Wang. You remember when I held that service for the dead lady. She said I had done her out of it, and quarreled with me. Now, she never meets me without saying something horrid. But she can go to Hell. I am not going to argue with her. My only aim in life is to do all the good I can and save people from misfortune."
"Do the best you can," Jinlian said. "We can't expect everybody to be as kind as we are. Don't mention this business to her."
"Oh, I shall say nothing about it," Xue said. "It shall be a secret between ourselves. Last year, when I did this for the Great Lady, Wang said I had been too well paid, and nagged at me until I gave her half of what I got. A fine god-fearing creature she is! She never fasts, and she is far too fond of money. She takes alms from everybody and never does anything in return. When she dies and is born again, she will be something worse than a horned animal. I'm sure of it."
Jinlian told Chunmei to give the nun some tea. When she had drunk it, she went to Li Ping'er's room to pay her respects to the tablet. Then she went back to the inner court.
In the afternoon, Yueniang had tables laid in her room and invited all the ladies and the nuns. She also had a table set in the middle room and a fire lit, so that they could drink wine there in honor of Yulou's birthday.
The wine was poured into jade cups. Yulou, herself like a jade statue, raised a cup aloft. She offered it to Ximen Qing. Then she made a reverence to each of the other ladies in turn. Jingji and his wife were there. They greeted her. They all sat down, and special birthday dishes were brought in. While they were drinking, Laian came in with a box and said Ying Bao had brought presents. Ximen Qing asked Yueniang to accept them. He told Laian to get an invitation card written for Mistress Ying, and to invite Ying Bojue and Uncle Wu to come also.
"I know Mistress Ying will not come," he said, "so we had better ask Uncle Ying. We will send presents in return another day." Laian gave Ying Bao a card, and the boy went home.
Ximen Qing remembered Yulou's last birthday, when Li Ping'er was still alive. Now, all the other ladies were there, but she was gone. The thought grieved him and he shed tears.
Li Ming and the other two boys came in. "Can you sing the song of the lovebirds?" Yueniang asked them. Han Zuo said he knew it, took up his instrument and was going to sing, but Ximen Qing stopped him.
"No," he said. "Sing 'I Remember the Flute Playing.'" The boys changed the tune and sang: "I remember the flute playing. Where is that exquisite creature now?" They went on till they came to the line: "For me she took off her silken skirt. There was blood on the red azalea flower."
Jinlian knew that Ximen Qing was thinking about Li Ping'er. and when this line was sung she deliberately teased him.
"My son," she said, "you are like Zhu Bajie sitting in a butcher's shop without a fire. No one could look as sour as you do. She wasn't a virgin: she was a married woman. Why do you think of the blood on the red azalea in connection with her? That is going too far. You are a shameless piece of goods."
"Listen to the song, you slave. I wasn't thinking anything of the sort."
The two boys sang: "The lovesick maiden in the palace made up her mind to run away. But how shall I do so? I must gather the flowers upon the walls."
Ximen Qing listened with bowed head. When the song was over, Jinlian was so jealous she could not leave him alone. They began to bicker. Yueniang would not have this. "Sister," she said, "be silent. What are you squabbling about? Aunt Yang and my sister-in-law are in the other room with nobody to keep them company. Perhaps two of you will go and join them. I will come myself in a few moments."
Jinlian and Li Jiao'er went to the inner room.
Laian came back. "I took the card to Mistress Ying," he said. "Uncle Ying and Uncle Wu are coming."
"Go and fetch Master Wen," Ximen Qing said to him. He said to Yueniang: "Tell the cooks to bring food to the outer court. I will take my friends there."
Then, with Li Ming, he went to the room in the eastern wing. Bojue was waiting for him. Ximen thanked him for his presents and told him he must let Mistress Ying come the following day.
"I'm afraid she won't be able to come," Bojue said. "There is nobody she can leave behind to look after the house."
Master Wen came in. Bojue bowed to him and said: "I am afraid I was a great trouble to you this morning."
"Not at all," Master Wen said. "It was a pleasure."
Uncle Wu came and sat down. Qintong brought lights, and they all sat around the fire. Laian brought wine and cups and set them on the table.
Ying Bojue noticed that Ximen Qing was wearing a dark green silken gown with a dragon in five colors embroidered upon it, over his white jacket. The dragon's claws were outstretched, and it showed its teeth. The head and horns were noble and impressive. The whiskers were bristling and the hair stood on end. The gold and green seemed alive and the dragon was coiled around Ximen Qing's body. Bojue was almost startled.
"Where did you get that gown?" he said.
Ximen Qing stood up. "Look at it," he said. "Can you guess where it came from?"
"I have no idea," Bojue said.
"Eunuch He of the Eastern Capital gave it to me," Ximen said. "I was drinking with him one very cold day, and he gave it to me then. It is, as you see, a flying dragon. The Emperor had given him another, and he had no further use for this. But it was a great honor to me."
"It must be worth some money," Bojue said. "Brother, it is a good omen. One of these days, you will become governor of a province and wear a dragon robe and a jade girdle. You will go a long way yet."
Qintong warmed wine and set the cups before them. Li Ming sang.
"I must go and offer a cup of wine to your Third Lady," Ying Bojue said. "Then I'll come back and join you."
"My son," Ximen said to him, "if you have such a sense of filial devotion, go, and don't talk so much about it."
"I wouldn't mind going and kowtowing to her," Bojue said, "if the others wouldn't be jealous. But, as a matter of fact, it wouldn't do for me to kowtow to her, because I am the one in authority here. You must go and do it for me."
Ximen Qing tapped him on the head. "You dog," he said, "what do you care about authority?"
"I care a great deal," Bojue said. "Haven't you just hit me on the head?"
They laughed and joked together. Qintong brought them some birthday noodles. Ximen Qing pressed them to set to, and went to eat his own with the ladies in the inner court. Li Ming had something to eat too, then came back to sing for them again. Ying Bojue asked Uncle Wu to tell him what to sing.
"I will be kind to him," Uncle Wu said. "He may sing anything he knows."
"Uncle Wu is very fond of 'The Earthen Jar,'" Ximen Qing said. He told Qintong to fill up the cups. Li Ming tuned his instrument and sang: "She looked out over the countryside, and spoke no word. All day she stood there, and her lovely face grew sad." Then Li Ming withdrew.
Laian came and said: "In the kitchen they want to know how many cooks you will need tomorrow."
"Six cooks and two scullions," Ximen said. "We must have five especially good courses."
Laian went away.
"Who will be your guests tomorrow?" Uncle Wu said.
Ximen Qing told him that Vice President An had invited the Imperial Tutor's ninth son.
"I am glad his Excellency will be taking wine here," Uncle Wu said.
"Why?"
"Because of that old business of the granary," Wu said. "My work is controlled by his Excellency's department. I should be glad if you would ask him to look indulgently on me, and tell him that I hope he will speak well of my work when the inspection is over. I shall be very much obliged to you."
"Let me have your record of service," Ximen Qing said. "I will speak to him for you."
Uncle Wu rose and bowed to Ximen.
"You ought to be satisfied," Bojue said to him. "His Lordship wouldn't do it for anybody but you. But, after all, if he doesn't look after your interests, whom will he bother about? A little effort on his part and, I'm sure, everything will turn out well."
They went on drinking until the second night watch. When Li Ming was about to go away, Ximen told him to come the following day. Li Ming went out. The boys cleared everything away. When the ladies in Yueniang's room heard that the guests in the outer court had gone, they went to their own apartments.
Pan Jinlian expected Ximen Qing to go to her room and hurried there but, as she reached the second door, she saw Ximen Qing going towards Wu Yueniang's room. She hid herself behind the shadow wall and watched him pass. Then she went quietly after him. Yuxiao was standing at the door.
"Why haven't you gone to your room, Fifth Mother?" she said. "Where is Grandmother?"
"Oh, that old thing has a pain," Jinlian said, "she has gone to bed."
She heard Yueniang say: "What made you send for those two new boys? They are no use at all. They sing the same old tune over and over again."
"When you told them to sing 'The Lotus Pool,' they were not so bad," Meng Yulou said. What are the little turtles called? They did nothing but play about all the time they were here."
"One is Han Zuo, and the other Shao Qian," Ximen Qing said.
"They might call themselves by any name," Yueniang said. "We know nothing whatever about them."
Jinlian tiptoed into the room, and stood behind the bed. Suddenly she said: "Sister, you told them to sing a song. He stopped them and told them to sing 'I Remember the Flute Playing.' That confused the little turtles. They didn't know whom to obey."
Yulou turned around quickly. "Where have you come from?" she said. "You gave me a fright, speaking suddenly like that. You might have been a ghost. How long have you been there?"
"The Fifth Lady has been standing behind you a long time," Xiaoyu said.
Jinlian nodded her head. "My son," she said, "don't think yourself so clever. You always flatter yourself that nobody sees through your little tricks. What right had you to compare her to a virgin in the palace? She and I were both in the same boat; we had both been married before. How could she take off her skirt for you, so that you saw the blood upon the red azalea? I should like to know how you would prove that. I can put up with a good deal, but this is too much. You told your friends that, since she died, you have never been able to enjoy your favorite dishes. Now that Butcher Wang is dead, you have to eat your pork with the hair

on. Have you had nothing but dung to eat? You regard us as beneath contempt. We don't mind that. But the Great Lady manages the household for you, and you pay no heed to her. She who is dead is the only one worth thinking about. Why didn't you save her when she was dying? How did you live before you met her? Now everything is wrong. Whenever her name is mentioned, you are upset. But you have taken someone to fill her place and, what's more, you seem very glad of the chance. It looks as though the only water fit to be drunk in this house comes from her room."
"Sister," Yueniang said, "the good are short-lived; the wicked live a thousand years. If you have not a lathe to turn a ball, you must shape it with a chisel. Since we are dull and don't suit him, he must do as he pleases."
"I don't want to be nasty," Jinlian said, "but the things he says are so hurtful. I can't let them go by."
"When did I say anything of the sort, you little strumpet?" Ximen Qing said, laughing.
"The day you entertained his Grace Huang," Jinlian answered, "you were talking to Ying the Second and Scholar Wen. If she were here, you wouldn't care if the rest of us died tomorrow. You had better marry somebody to take her place, you rascally scamp."
Ximen Qing jumped up and kicked her. She ran away as quickly as she could. Ximen followed her, but when he reached the door she had disappeared. Chunmei was there. He put his hand on the maid's shoulder and went back to the inner court.
Yueniang saw that he was drunk and was anxious to get rid of him because she wished to listen to the nuns. She told Xiaoyu to take a light and take him away. Jinlian and Yuxiao were standing in a dark passage, and Ximen Qing passed them without seeing them.
"Father seems to be going to your room," Yuxiao said.
"Yes, he is drunk. He can go to bed. I am in no hurry."
"Mother, wait here a moment for me," Yuxiao said, "I am going to get some fruit for you to give the old lady." She brought the fruit. Jinlian put it in her sleeve, and went to her room. On the way, she met Xiaoyu, coming back.
"Father is looking for you," the maid said.
Jinlian came to her door but did not go in. She peeped through the window. Ximen Qing was on the bed amusing himself with Chunmei. She did not wish to disturb them, so she went around to the other room and gave the fruit to Qiuju. She asked whether old woman Pan was in bed, and the maid told her she had been asleep for a long time. Jinlian bade her put the fruit away and went back to the inner court. The ladies were all assembled, Nun Xue was sitting on the bed, and incense was burning on a small table. They were listening with great attention to the nun's words.
Jinlian came in suddenly, smiling. "You have had trouble already," Yueniang said to her. "He has gone to your room. Why have you come back here instead of seeing that he gets to sleep? I am very much afraid he will beat you."
"Do you think he'd dare?" Jinlian said, smiling.
"You talked to him too roughly," Yueniang said. "He was drunk and, if he had got into a rage, he would certainly have beaten you. We were all very anxious. You really are naughty."
"I am not afraid of him, even when he is in a temper," Jinlian said. "And what a performance! You told the boys to sing one song. He stopped them and told them to sing another to suit himself. It is the Third Lady's birthday and not the time for songs of that sort. The dead are dead. He is always trying to show how much he thought about her, and I don't like it."
"What is the matter, ladies?" Aunt Wu said. "I don't understand. His Lordship came in and suddenly went out again."
"Sister," Yueniang said, "you don't understand. He remembered that, on the Third Lady's last birthday, Li Ping'er was still alive. He cried because she was not here today. He told the boys to sing 'I Remember the Flute Playing.' The Fifth Lady didn't like it and began an argument with him. He flew into a temper and kicked her. Then she ran away."
"Lady," Aunt Yang said, "you should let your husband do what he pleases. What is the use of arguing with him? I can understand how sad he must have felt at the Sixth Lady's death, after you had all been so long together."
"We should never have thought of complaining about the song," Yulou said, "but Jinlian knows all the allusions. She realized that, when he picked out that particular one, he wished to praise her who is dead, and even went so far as to compare her with an historical personage. The song describes their loves, and tells how they lived for one another. It was too much for the Fifth Lady, and she quarreled with him. That caused all the trouble."
"How clever you are, Sister," Aunt Yang said to Jinlian.
"There are no songs she doesn't know," Yueniang said. "Give her the first line and she can always tell you the last. Whenever my husband calls for a song, there is always trouble. She knows what is in his mind. She often makes him angry."
"Of all my children," Yulou said, jokingly, "this is the only one who has any brains."
"I make trouble for everybody," Jinlian said, laughing, "and now you laugh at me."
"Sister," Aunt Yang said, "you must let your husband have his own way. The proverb says: One night of married bliss, and love stays for a hundred nights. Even if husband and wife live together only a short time, they must love one another. When the Sixth Lady died so suddenly, it must have seemed to him as though he had lost one of his fingers. It is only natural that he should grieve when he thinks about her."
"Let him think about her, by all means," Jinlian said, "but with moderation. We are all his ladies. He ought not to exalt one and treat the rest of us like dirt. He was angry because we didn't wear mourning for her long enough. We did so for fifty days. Why shouldn't that have been enough?"
"You must not be too hard on him," Aunt Yang said.
"How quickly time flies," Aunt Wu said. "It must be nearly a hundred days since she died."
"When is the hundredth day?" Aunt Yang said.
"The twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month," Yueniang said.
"We ought to have a service for her," Nun Wang said.
"We can't have a service every time," Yueniang said. "Perhaps we will have one on New Year's Day."
Xiaoyu brought tea and gave each of them a cup. When they had drunk it, Yueniang washed her hands and burned incense. Nun Xue preached to them again. After some opening verses, she told them how the holy man, Wu Jie, broke his vows and fell in love with Hong Lian, and how, in a later life, he became Dong Po. She went on for a long time.
Lanxiang brought two boxes of vegetarian food and cakes. She took the incense burner from the table and put down the food and a pot of tea. The nuns had this, then the maid brought food and a jar of wine for the other ladies as they sat around the fire.
Yueniang cast dice with her sister-in-law, and Jinlian guessed fingers with Li Jiao'er. Yuxiao stood behind Jinlian's chair to serve the wine and, at the same time, suggested how she should play. Li Jiao'er was beaten.
"I will guess fingers with her now," Yulou said. "She seems to win all the time. But I won't have her putting her fingers in her sleeves, or Yuxiao standing behind her, either."
Jinlian was beaten and was made to drink several cups of wine. She went to her room. She had to knock at the corner gate for a long time before Qiuju, rubbing her eyes, came to open it.
"You have been to bed, you slave," Jinlian said.
"No," said Qiuju.
"You are lying, you have only just this moment got up. What an idle good-for-nothing you are! You didn't even come to meet me. Has your father gone to bed?"
"He has been in bed a long time," Qiuju said.
Jinlian went to the inner room, pulled up her skirts, and warmed herself at the fire. Then she demanded tea. Qiuju hastily poured out a cup for her.
"Your hands are dirty, and I don't want stewed tea. Go and tell Chunmei to get the small kettle and boil some fresh water. Put some more tea leaves in the pot and make it strong."
"Chunmei has gone to bed. Shall I wake her?"
"No, don't disturb her. Let her sleep."
Qiuju went in. Chunmei was sleeping at Ximen Qing's feet. Qiuju woke her up. "Mother has come," she said. "She wants some tea. Get up at once."
Chunmei spat at her and cursed her.
"You slave! What do you mean by coming here and startling me like that? 'Mother has come,' indeed! Well, what about it?"
She got up, however, and slowly dressed herself. Then she went to Jinlian and stood, rubbing her eyes. Jinlian scolded Qiuju.
"You saw she was asleep, you slave. Why did you wake her?" Then she said to Chunmei: "The kerchief on your head is rumpled. Pull it down a little. And what have you done with the other earring?"
Chunmei looked at herself and saw that one of her earrings had gone. She took a light and went into the other room to look for it. After searching a long time, she found it on the footstool.
"Where did you find it?" Jinlian asked.
"It was Qiuju's fault," Chunmei said. "She woke me up suddenly and my earring caught in the curtain hook. I found it on the footstool."
"I told her not to wake you," Jinlian said, "but she didn't pay any attention."
"She said you wanted some tea."
"I wouldn't let her make it. She has such dirty hands."
Chunmei filled the small kettle and put it on the fire. She put coal on the brazier, and the water was soon boiling. She washed a cup, made some very strong tea, and gave it to her mistress.
"Has your father been in bed long?" Jinlian asked.
"Yes, I helped him to bed a long time ago. He asked where you were, and I told him you were still in the inner court."
Jinlian drank her tea. "Yuxiao gave me some fruits and things for my mother. I gave them to this slave. Did she hand them over to you?"
"No, I haven't seen them. I have no idea what she's done with them."
"Where are the fruits?" Jinlian said to Qiuju.
"I put them in the cabinet," the maid said. She went and brought them. Jinlian counted them and found that an orange was missing. She asked what had become of it.
"I took them and put them in the cabinet just as you gave them to me," Qiuju said. "Surely you don't think I was so near starvation I had to go and eat it."
"You thief!" Jinlian cried. "You are far too cheeky. If you haven't stolen it, where is it? When I gave them to you, I counted them. Why is there one short? Did you think I brought them for you?"
She turned to Chunmei. "Give her ten slaps on each side of her face."
"I should soil my hands if I touched those dirty cheeks," Chunmei said.
"Send her to me, then," Jinlian said.
Chunmei pushed the girl to her mistress and Jinlian pinched her cheeks.
"Did you eat that orange, you thief? Tell me the truth, and I will let you off. Otherwise, I will get the whip and beat you without mercy. Don't think I'm drunk. You deliberately stole that orange, and now you are trying to deceive me."
"Am I drunk?" she asked Chunmei.
"Certainly not," Chunmei said. "You are perfectly sober. It might be well to look in her sleeves. We might find some orange peel there."
Jinlian took Qiuju's sleeves and began to feel in them. Qiuju, in a great flurry, struggled to prevent her. Chunmei caught her hand. They found some orange peel.
Jinlian pinched the girl's face as hard as she could, and boxed her ears. "You thievish slave!" she cried. "You are as ignorant as can be, yet you are cunning enough when it comes to cheating and stealing. I catch you red-handed, and you still try to make excuses. I am going to have my tea, so I shall not punish you now. I'll deal with you tomorrow."
"Mother," Chunmei said, "don't let her escape you. The best thing we can do is to take off all her clothes and get one of the men to give her a good thrashing. If we do that, she may learn to have some respect for us. If we use a stick as though we were prodding a monkey, she won't take it seriously."
Qiuju's face was swollen. She went to the kitchen, sulking. Jinlian divided an orange into two parts and gave one to Chunmei. She gave her half the apples and pomegranates, saying: "These are for you. My mother can have the rest." Chunmei put them into her sleeve without looking at them, as though they were of no consequence at all. Jinlian was going to give her some of the other things, but Chunmei asked her not to.
"I don't care much for sweet things," she said. "Please give them to Grandmother."
Then Jinlian went to the chamber and made water. She asked Chunmei to get a tub of water so that she could wash. Then she asked what the time was.
"I have been asleep some time," the maid said, "it must be about the third night watch."
Jinlian took down her hair, and went to the inner room. The lamp was nearly out. She pulled up the wick. Then she went to the bed. Ximen Qing was snoring. She undressed and lay down beside him. After a while, she began to toy with his weapon. But Ximen had been playing with Chunmei; she could not excite it, for it was too soft. She was fiery with wine, and squatting on her heels on the bed she put the prick in her mouth. She titillated the hole, moved the head backwards and forwards, and sucked it inside and outside without ceasing. Ximen Qing woke up.
"Now, you funny little strumpet, where have you been all this time?"
"We were drinking in the inner court," Jinlian said. "The Third Lady gave us a feast and Miss Yu sang. We guessed fingers, threw dice, and played for a long time. I beat Li Jiao'er, but Yulou beat me. I had to drink a few cups of wine. Lucky for you that you got away and came here to sleep in peace, but don't think I will let you escape."
"Have you made the belt of ribbon?" Ximen said.
"Yes, it is here." She took it from underneath the bedclothes, showed it to him, then tied it about his prick and around his waist. She tied it very tightly.
"Have you taken anything?" she asked him.
He told her that he had, and she continued her attentions until the sinews of the prick stiffened and it surged erect, a fingerbreadth longer than usual. She lay on his body, but the penis was so big that she had to stretch her cunt with both hands before it would fit. But when it entered she embraced his neck and asked him to hold her around the waist; and gradually the prick, pressing on one side, pressed from the other, buried itself completely. "Darling," she said, "put a silk cloak below yourself." Ximen folded a red gown twice and put it beneath his thighs. She started again, and absorbed the whole prick. "Delight of my heart," she said, "feel. It's gone right in. It has filled me completely. Are you satisfied?"
Ximen felt with his hand and found that the penis had entered so far that nothing, not even a hair's breadth, remained outside. Only the testicles were left, and he was suffused with deepest pleasure.
"I'm cold," she said. "Let us move the candle. It was nicer in summer." And again, "Don't you think this ribbon is better than the clasp? It doesn't hurt me, and makes your prick longer. If you don't believe me, put your hand on my belly. I can feel it touching my bowels. Embrace me and let me sleep on top of you."
"Sleep, girl," said Ximen. "I'll hold you."
She put her tongue in his mouth, closed her eyes, put her arms around him, and slept. But soon desire woke her. She pressed his shoulders, sat up, and bounced up and down so fast that his penis went right in and out. "I am dying, my dearest," she cried. Man and woman enjoyed three hundred thrusts, and Ximen was the first to withdraw from the struggle. "Embrace me," she said, and gave him a breast to suck. Then she relaxed, and the juices of love flowed from her. A stag seemed to leap within her. Her arms and legs were limp; her hair covered her body. The penis, although it had withdrawn, was still erect, and she wiped it with a handkerchief. "What shall we do, darling?" she said. "It is not enough for you even yet."
"Let us go to sleep now," Ximen said. "We will settle that question afterwards."
"I feel as though I were paralysed," Jinlian said. So the mystery of clouds and rain was performed once more. They lay down to sleep and did not wake again till dawn.

## 097
## Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien Solicits the Eight Immortals Tripod; Wu Yüeh-niang Listens to the Precious Scroll on Woman Huang & Li Guijie Is Forgiven

Years ago, when I was traveling in the South,
you entertained me as a guest;
Provided with cups of Tun-hsün wine,[1] together
we enjoyed the verdant spring.
Foaming over from its sparrow-shaped vessels,
the barbarian wine was smooth;
As you remind me with the jeweled words of your
message on new Szechwan paper.
The flowers were allured by our passing steeds,

their reds following the bridles;
The grass was attracted by our moving vehicles,
its green surrounding the wheels.
Since we parted amid the flourishing foliage
on the road south of Cheng-chou,
Who knows who has been heir to those beauties
of the breeze and the moonlight?[2]

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced P'an Chin-lien and slept until the dawn of the following day.

When the woman saw that his organ was still standing straight up as though it were a stick, she said, "Daddy, you'd better make the best of it by letting me off for now. I can't handle any more. Let me suck you off instead."

"You crazy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well give it a suck. If you succeed in sucking it off, it will be your good fortune."

The woman actually squatted down between his loins and, pillowing her head on one of his thighs, proceeded to manipulate his organ with her mouth, sucking away at it for a good hour, without getting it to ejaculate. Hsi-men Ch'ing held onto her powdered neck with one hand while alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, and wobbling his organ back and forth. She pumped it in and out of her mouth unceasingly, until white saliva overflowed from her lips, and rouge stains appeared on the stem of his organ.

Just as he was about to ejaculate, the woman questioned Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Ying the Second has sent invitations inviting us to his place on the twenty-eighth. Are we going to go, or not?"

"Why shouldn't you go?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You should all get yourselves ready and go."

"There is something I'd like to ask of you," the woman said. "Will you agree to it, or not?"

"You crazy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What have you got to ask? Why not just come out with it?"

"I'd like you to get out that fur coat of Sister Li's and let me wear it," the woman said. "Tomorrow, when we come back from the party, the others will all be wearing their fur coats, but I alone will be without one to wear."

"There is that fur coat that was pawned with us last year by the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You might as well wear that."

"I don't want to wear something that's been pawned," the woman said. "Besides, you've already turned it over to Li Chiao-erh to wear, and given Li Chiao-erh's fur coat to Sun Hsüeh-o. I'd like to wear that fur coat of Sister Li's. If you get it out and give it to me today, I'll attach two crimson brocaded sleeve linings and wear it with my white satin jacket. If you let me have it, rather than giving it to anyone else, it will be an acknowledgment that I've been a good wife to you all this time."

"You lousy little whore!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "All you care about is gaining petty advantages for yourself. That fur coat of hers is worth sixty taels of silver, with its glossy, jet black fur trimming. If you wear it, you will only make an ostentatious show of yourself."

"You crazy slave!" the woman retorted. "It's not as though you were giving it away to the wife of some nobody. After all, it's your own spouse you're giving it to, and it will only serve to enhance your prestige. What's the point of making such a fuss about it? How would you like it if I refused to comply with your wishes in the future?"

"You're:
Asking a favor on the one hand, and
Being hard-boiled on the other,"
said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"You crazy indecent good-for-nothing!" the woman said. "Am I no more than a maidservant in your room, who must give in to your every demand?"

As she spoke, she laid his organ against her powdered cheek and brushed it back and forth for some time before, once again, inserting it into her mouth, [3] and titillating the orifice of his urethra with her tongue. After a while, she fell to licking his frenum with the tip of her tongue and toying with the knob of his glans and then, engulfing it with her ruby lips, devoted herself to moving it back and forth.

The extremity of Hsi-men Ch'ing's magic rhinoceros horn felt anointed, his brain was flooded with a range of lustful feelings,[4] and in a little while, as his semen began to rise, he called out repeatedly, "You little whore! Squeeze it tightly. I'm about to come."

Before he had finished speaking, his semen ejaculated all over the woman's mouth and face, and she dutifully swallowed it down, mouthful after mouthful. Truly:
Past mistress of the intimate arts,
she caters to his every whim;
How quick she is, and diligent,
to "play the purple flute."

That day was the one on which Secretary An Ch'en had arranged to host a party on his premises, so Hsi-men Ch'ing got up to comb his hair and wash his face and had started to go outside when the woman, who was still lying under the covers, said, "You'd better take this opportunity to find that fur coat for me. If you put it off, you won't have any time to spare."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, made his way over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, where the wet nurse and maidservant had already arisen, straightened things up, and prepared a kettle of tea water in anticipation of his arrival.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in and sat down, he asked, "Have you presented an offering to your mistress, or not?"

"By now," said Ju-i, "it is already quite a while since the offering was presented."

Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that Ju-i was wearing a jade-colored jacket that opened down the middle, over a white cotton skirt, and pale green satin shoes with high sand-green heels. Her face was lightly daubed with rouge and powder, [5] her mothlike eyebrows were painted long, her lips were tinted bright red with shiny rouge, from her ears were suspended two gold clove-shaped ear pendants, and on her hands she sported four black gold rings that had been bestowed upon her by Li P'ing-erh. With an ingratiating smile, she presented him with tea and then sat down to one side in order to chat with him.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Ying-ch'un back to the rear compound to get the keys to the bedroom, and Ju-i asked him, "Father, what are you getting them for?"

"I am looking for her fur coat," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "in order to let the Fifth Lady wear it."

"Do you mean that sable coat of Mother's?" asked Ju-i.

"Yes," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She would like to wear it, so I am going to give it to her now."

When Ying-ch'un had departed on her errand, Hsi-men Ch'ing took the woman onto his lap, cupped her breasts with his two hands in order to stimulate her nipples, and remarked, "My child, though you have borne a child, your nipples are still tight."

The two of them then fell to kissing each other face to face, and sucking each other's tongues.

"I have noticed, Father," said Ju-i, "that you are constantly choosing to spend your time with the Fifth Lady. I haven't seen you frequenting the quarters of any of the other ladies. Whatever her other characteristics may be, she is altogether too touchy and unable to make allowances for others. Some time ago, while you were still away from home, she got into a big row with me over the laundry bat, but fortunately Auntie Han and the Third Lady were able to intervene and separate us. Later on, when you returned home, I did not venture to mention it to you; but some talkative person, I don't know who, not only mentioned it to you, but also told her that you had been making out with me. Did she also tell you about our quarrel?"

"Yes, she did tell me about it." said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In the future, you would do well to offer her an apology. If she manages to pick up so much as a sweet date from someone, she's as pleased as can be. Although she may be sharp-tongued, she doesn't really mean what she says."

"When you came home, the day after we had our quarrel," said Ju-i, "she made a point of speaking nicely to me, saying that since you chose to spend much of your time with her, the other ladies of the household were prone to cut her some slack. 'But if you are careful not to keep me in the dark about anything,' she went on to say:
'There's water enough in the channel
for all the boats,
why should I go out of my way to make trouble for you?'"

"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "the two of you ought to be reconciled to each other."

He then went on to promise the woman, "If you wait up for me, I'll come to this room to sleep tonight."

"Are you really going to come?" asked Ju-i. "Don't try to deceive me."

"Who's trying to deceive you?" Hsi-men Ch'ing protested.

As they were speaking, whom should they see but Ying-ch'un, who came back with the keys. Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to unlock the bedroom door and then open the cabinet and get out the fur coat. After giving it a good shaking and wrapping it up in a package, he told Ying-ch'un to take it over to the adjacent room.

Ju-i then said to Hsi-men Ch'ing in a low voice, "I don't have a good fur coat myself. How about taking advantage of the occasion to find another one for me? And if any of Mother's undergarments are available, you might also provide me with a set of them."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly told her to open the trunk and came up with a set of clothes consisting of a kingfisher-blue satin jacket, a yellow cotton skirt, a pair of blue Lu-chou silk drawers, and a pair of figured ankle leggings. He turned them over to her, and the woman kowtowed to him in thanks, after which Hsi-men Ch'ing locked the bedroom door and went out, telling her to take the fur coat and deliver it to Chin-lien's quarters next door.

Chin-lien had just gotten up, and was still sitting on her bed engaged in putting on her foot bindings, when Ch'un-mei announced, "Ju-i has come to deliver the fur coat."

The woman, who understood the significance of the fact that she had been sent on this errand, said, "Tell her to come in," and, when she had done so, asked her, "Was it Father that sent you?"

"It was Father who told me to bring it for you to wear," Ju-i replied.

"And did he also present you with anything, or not?" Chin-lien inquired.

"Father did provide me with two items of silk clothing to wear during the New Year's celebrations," said Ju-i. "And he also told me to come and kowtow to you."

So saying, she came forward and kowtowed to her four times.

"That is not appropriate among sisters," the woman said. "If your master has taken a fancy to you, as the saying goes:
A multitude of boats need not clog the channel,
A multitude of carts need not block the road.
Why should I go out of my way to make trouble for you? So long as you do nothing to offend me, I'll have no reason to interfere with you. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is."

"Ever since my mistress died," said Ju-i, "although the First Lady in the rear compound has taken her place, you are still the presiding mistress of the front compound, and the one I look to for support, early and late. If I presumed to take any liberties with you, where would I be when:
The fallen leaves return to the root?"[6]

"As for those items of clothing that you have received," the woman said, "you had better mention the matter to the First Lady, hadn't you?"

"I asked the First Lady for them a while ago," said Ju-i, "and she said, 'Wait until Father opens her bedroom someday, and he'll give you an item or two.'"

"So long as you have spoken to her about it, it should be all right," the woman said.

Ju-i thereupon took her leave and returned to Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door, where she found that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already gone out to the front reception hall.

Ju-i then asked Ying-ch'un, "When you went to get the keys, just now, did the First Lady have anything to say about it?"

"The First Lady asked me, 'What does Father want the keys for?'" replied Ying-ch'un. "But I didn't tell her that he wanted to give her fur coat to the Fifth Lady, but merely said, 'I don't know.' The First Lady didn't have anything further to say."

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the reception hall, he saw that the preparations for the banquet were under way. The troupe of Hai-yen actors, including Chang Mei, Hsü Shun, and Kou Tzu-hsiao, performers of the leading male and female roles, arrived, bearing their costume trunk, and, along with the four boy musicians, Li Ming and company, who had come earlier, they all proceeded to kowtow to him. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed that food should be provided for all of them and then ordered that Li Ming and two of the other boy musicians should perform in the front reception hall, while Tso Shun should entertain the female guests in the rear compound.

That day, Han Tao-kuo's wife Wang Liu-erh did not attend but sent Second Sister Shen in a sedan chair, with two boxes of gifts, accompanied by their servant Chin-ts'ai, in order to help celebrate Meng Yü-lou's birthday. Wang Ching escorted them back to the rear compound and sent the sedan chair on its way. That day, Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, the wife of Han Ming-ch'uan, and her sister-in-law, Meng the Elder's wife, from outside the city gate, also came, as well as the wives of Fu Ming and Kan Jun, Big Sister Tuan, the wife of Ts'ui Pen, and Pen the Fourth's wife.

Hsi-men Ch'ing was in the reception hall when he saw Tai-an escorting a woman through the enclosed passageway who was petite in stature and was attired in a green satin jacket over a red skirt and a blue gold lamé headband, whose face was devoid of rouge and powder, [7] and whose two eyes were mere slits, reminding him of the appearance of Cheng Ai-yüeh. When Hsi-men Ch'ing asked who it was, Tai-an replied that it was the wife of Pen the Fourth. On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing had nothing further to say but went back to the rear compound to see Yüeh-niang.

Yüeh-niang was serving tea to her guests when Hsi-men Ch'ing came in to eat some congee and handed the keys back to her.

"What did you open her bedroom door for?" asked Yüeh-niang.

Hsi-men Ch'ing explained, "P'an the Sixth said that when you all go to attend the party at Ying the Second's place tomorrow she will be the only one without a fur coat and would like to have Li P'ing-erh's fur coat to wear."

Yüeh-niang gave him a look and said, "You don't seem able to control your own mouth. When she died, you were angry that anyone would even suggest reassigning the maidservants in her quarters, but in the present case, you haven't a word to say about disposing of her property. There is a fur coat available for her, but she refuses to wear it and adamantly insists on having this particular coat to wear. It's lucky for you that Li P'ing-erh is dead, so you can hanker after this fur coat of hers. If she weren't dead, you wouldn't be entitled to do anything more than take a look at it."

With these few words, she succeeded in reducing Hsi-men Ch'ing to silence.

Suddenly, it was reported that School Official Liu had come to return the silver he had borrowed, and Hsi-men Ch'ing went out to the reception hall to receive him.

Who should appear at this point but Tai-an, who came in with a calling card and said, "The household of Imperial Commissioner Wang has delivered some presents."

"What sort of presents are they?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"They are congratulatory gifts," said Tai-an, "consisting of a bolt of fabric, a jar of southern wine, and four delicacies to go with the wine."

Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the calling card read, "Deferentially presented as a token of his respect by your kinsman and pupil Wang Ts'ai."

Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly summoned Wang Ching and told him to prepare a thank-you note in reply, award the messenger with five mace of silver, and send him on his way.

Who should appear at this point but Li Kuei-chieh, who got out of her sedan chair at the front gate, accompanied by a male servant from her establishment bearing four square boxes of gifts.

This threw Tai-an into such consternation that he offered to carry her felt bag for her, saying, "Kuei-chieh, let me escort you inside through the enclosed passageway. School Official Liu is being entertained in the reception hall."

Li Kuei-chieh, accordingly, made her way back into the rear compound through the enclosed passageway, while Lai-an carried the gift boxes into Yüeh-niang's room.

"Has Father seen these gifts, or not?" asked Yüeh-niang.

"Father is entertaining a guest and hasn't seen them yet," explained Tai-an.

"Leave the gifts in their boxes and put them in the parlor for the time being," directed Yüeh-niang.

After a while, when School Official Liu had left, Hsi-men Ch'ing came back to the master suite to have something to eat, and Yüeh-niang told him, "Li Kuei-chieh has brought some gifts for us here."

"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When Yüeh-niang told Hsiao-yü to open up the boxes, they saw that one contained molded cakes of glutinous rice flour, with a sweet stuffing, and the character for long life embossed on their surfaces; one contained molded cakes embossed with the images of the Eight Immortals and flavored with attar of roses; one contained two roast ducks; and one contained a pair of pig's trotters.

Whom should they see at this point but Li Kuei-chieh, who came out from one of the inner rooms.

Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,
further enhanced with a white drawnwork kerchief, and she wore a crimson jacket that opened down the middle, over a blue satin skirt. Facing Hsi-men Ch'ing, she proceeded to kowtow to him four times.

"That's enough of that," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What did you go to the trouble of buying these presents for?"

"Just now," said Yüeh-niang, "Kuei-chieh told me that she was afraid you were annoyed with her, but that she was not responsible for what happened. If you consider the matter, it was all her mother's fault. On the day in question, Kuei-chieh was suffering from a headache, when Wang the Third, with a bunch of followers, who was on his way to Ch'in Yü-chih's place to engage her services, happened to pass by the door of her establishment and dropped in for a cup of tea. That was when the authorities stormed in and broke up the party, but Kuei-chieh never even came out to see him."

"On that occasion you never came out to see him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and on this occasion you never came out to see him. Your story simply doesn't hold water. But, on due consideration, I'm hardly in a position to control you. It's not as though the door of your Verdant Spring Bordello were piled high with baked wheat cakes, or anything like that.

The hole in the cash has much the same shape
wherever you find it.

I'm really not annoyed with you."

Li Kuei-chieh remained kneeling on the floor and refused to get up, saying, "Father is right to be annoyed. But if he ever laid a hand on me, may my body rot completely away, and develop an abscess in every hair follicle. It was all the fault of my senile old dotard of a mother, who doesn't know what she's doing. She indiscriminately welcomes both the good and the bad into our place and only ends up annoying Father for no good reason."

"Well, since you're here," interjected Yüeh-niang, "you might as well make it up between you. What's the point of continuing to be annoyed?"

"You can get up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm no longer annoyed with you, that's all."

Li Kuei-chieh, putting on a deliberate act, said, "Father, you'll have to give me a smile before I'll get up. If you refuse to give me a smile, I'll remain kneeling here for a year without getting up."

Without any warning, P'an Chin-lien interrupted from the sidelines, saying, "Kuei-chieh, you should stand up for yourself. As long as you continue to kneel there, beseeching the favor of that pip-squeak, you're only encouraging him to put on airs. At present, you may be kneeling to him here, but in the future, when he visits your establishment, he will have to kneel to you. When that happens, you should pay no attention to him."

This speech caused both Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang to laugh, and it was only then that Li Kuei-chieh stood up.

Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came inside in a state of obvious agitation and announced that His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien and His Honor An Ch'en had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent for his formal clothes, put them on, and went out to welcome them.

Li Kuei-chieh then said to Yüeh-niang, "Ai-ya-ya! From now on, I'll have nothing to do with Father but will continue to be a daughter to you, Mother."

"As for those empty oaths of yours," said Yüeh-niang, "I've already heard enough of them. On two earlier occasions when he went into the quarter to visit you, you were nowhere to be found."

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Li Kuei-chieh. "You're killing me. Father never came to my place. If he ever paid a visit to my place and I allowed him to lay a hand on me, may I die an early death, and my whole body break out in abscesses. Mother, you've been taken in by a false report. It wasn't my place he visited on those two occasions but was probably that of Cheng Ai-yüeh, where he's been patronizing that young powdered face. This accusation must have been fabricated by her and been motivated by jealousy. Why else should Father be annoyed with me?"

"Each of us has her own life to live,"
interjected Chin-lien. "Why should she make such an accusation against you?"

"Fifth Lady," said Kuei-chieh, "you don't understand the nature of people in our profession, who are given to taking out their anger on one another."

Yüeh-niang picked up where she left off, saying, "What is the difference between you denizens of the quarter and the rest of us? We are all alike in that when we get angry with each other, the one with the most favor will trample the other underfoot."

Yüeh-niang then proceeded to provide her with a serving of tea. But no more of this.

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing had welcomed Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and Secretary An Ch'en into the reception hall, they exchanged greetings, and each of them affirmed his esteem by presenting him with the customary gifts of a piece of fabric and a book. Upon seeing the meticulous preparations that had been made for the banquet, they:

Expressed their gratitude without end.[8]

After the three had taken their seats in the positions appropriate for guests and host, the actors were summoned into their presence and instructed that when His Honor Ts'ai Hsiu arrived they should do their utmost to put on a good performance.

Before long, after they had consumed a serving of tea, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien said, "Your pupil has a request that he would like to trouble you with, Ssu-ch'üan. At present, the Grand Coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, has just been promoted to the post of chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Your pupil, along with the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, would like to host a party in his honor on the thirtieth, if we could borrow your distinguished premises in order to proffer him a farewell cup of wine, since he is scheduled to leave for the capital on the second day of the coming month. But we don't know if you are willing to consent to this, or not."

"Whatever you propose, venerable sir," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will not fail to comply with your command. But I do not know how many table settings will be required."

"Your pupil has some joint contributions here," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien."

He then summoned an attendant and took out of his felt bag contributions from the officers of the Provincial Administration Commission and Provincial Surveillance Commission, including one from himself, making a total of twelve in all. Each person having contributed one tael, this amounted to a sum of twelve taels of silver.

"We will need," he went on to say, "one table setting of the kind intended as much for display as for eating, while, for the rest, communal seating will suffice. And you will also need to engage a troupe of actors for the occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing consented to the proposal and accepted the contributions, whereupon Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien got up from his place and bowed in gratitude.

In a little while, they were invited to take their seats in the great summer-house in the garden, the Hall of Assembled Vistas, where they were joined before long by the secretary of the Ministry of Revenue in charge of the Lin-ch'ing customs station, Ch'ien Lung-yeh. After greeting each other, and consuming another serving of tea, the three officials proceeded to set out the pieces and play a board game with each other.

Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien observed that in Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence:

The buildings were spacious,
The courtyards were secluded, and
The books, paintings, and other cultural objects,
Were among the finest of the day.

He noticed that suspended in the chamber there was an antique horizontal scroll depicting four male figures holding aloft the character for long life. At the upper end of the room there was also a standing screen inlaid with mother-of-pearl, in front of which there stood an incense burner in the shape of a gilded tripod depicting the Eight Immortals bearing birthday gifts, which was several feet high and of exquisite craftsmanship. On seeing that the smoke of aloeswood incense was emerging from the mouths of the auspicious tortoise, crane, and deer depicted thereon, he went up to examine it, praising it unceasingly.

"This incense burning tripod is beautifully made, is it not?" he remarked to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Then, turning to the other two officials, he said, "Your pupil has written to his fellow graduate Mr. Liu in Huai-an, asking him to send such a vessel to me for presentation to the venerable Ts'ai Hsiu, but it has not yet arrived. Where did you ever get such a piece, Ssu-ch'üan?"

"It was also presented to your pupil by someone from the Huai region," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

When this conversation ended, they continued to play at their board game. Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered his servants to bring in two partitioned tabletop boxes of assorted delicacies and stuffed pastries, and he also called for the actors who played the male and female leads to entertain them with some southern-style songs.

"The guest of honor has not yet arrived," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien. "It would hardly do for him to find the faces of his hosts already flushed from drinking."

"In this cold weather," opined Secretary An Ch'en, "it will do no harm to have a cup."

It so happens that Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had already deputed a functionary to go and extend their invitation to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu aboard the boat he was traveling on. Around noontime, this messenger reported back that he had conveyed the invitation, and that Ts'ai Hsiu was currently playing a game of chess at the home of Minister Huang Pao-kuang of the Imperial Brickyard but would arrive shortly. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien accordingly dismissed him but told him to remain in waiting.

As they continued to play at their board game and drink wine, Secretary An Ch'en called for the players and said to them, "Sing that song suite that begins with the tune 'A Song of Spring' to go with our wine."

Thereupon, the actor who played the *t'ieh-tan* (supporting female role) began to sing to the tune "A Song of Spring":[9]

*T'ieh-tan* (playing the part of Hung-niang):

First, in order to allay your anxiety,
Second, to thank you for your efforts,
She has slain a sheep and provided refreshments.
By the time you show up, everything
will have been prepared.
Uninvolved persons have not been invited;
It is no party for kinfolk and neighbors;
It is to celebrate your betrothal with Ying-ying.
I can see that nothing in Heaven or Earth
could make him happier,
As he says, "I respectfully accept the invitation."[10]

TO THE TUNE "FIVE OFFERINGS":

Back and forth, he regards his image in the mirror.
What a pedantic scholar he seems to be;
what a foppish fellow!
He devotes all this attention to
slicking his hair;
Sooner or later, a fly will lose
his footing on it.
It is so shiny that it bids fair
to blind one's eyes.
His affectedness is enough to set
one's teeth on edge.
What a born young gallant;
What a congenital prodigy!

TO THE TUNE "AN ORIOLE AS ALLURING AS JADE":

During your happy engagement tonight,
Remember that Ying-ying has scarcely
had any experience.[11]
You must do everything you can to be
tender and gentle.[12]
When entwining your necks like mandarin
ducks under the lamplight,
Give your inamorata a real looking over.
Whether or not you are equally devoted,
The two of you can demonstrate to
each other tonight.

*Sheng* (male lead):

Thank you sweetheart.
I am touched, Hung-niang, by your misplaced affection,
And your help in consummating this match.

TO THE TUNE "RELIEVING THREE HANGOVERS":

*T'ieh-tan:*

Tortoiseshell mats are spread; incense
smolders in precious tripods;
Beyond the brocade curtains, the breeze
sweeps the deserted courtyard.
Fallen red petals cover the ground,
their rouge now cold;
On the green jade balustrade,[13] flowers
cast their shadows.
Awaiting you are gold lamé bed curtains depicting
mandarin ducks in the moonlight;
And folding jade screens adorned with kingfishers
enjoying the breezes of spring.
The music of wedding bells,
Will be accompanied with phoenix flutes
and ivory clappers,[14]
Patterned cithara and phoenix pipes.

TO THE SAME TUNE:

*Sheng:*

Alas, I am a wayfarer with only my books and sword,[15]
and can offer little as a betrothal gift.

If this match should actually be consummated,
I cannot thank you enough.
If preparations have really been made for me to
enjoy a wedding celebration,[16]
I cannot but respond by plucking the cassia[17]
in order to ensure our future.
If we are fortunate enough to ride off together
astride a pair of phoenixes,[18]
Tonight you can recline while contemplating
the Herd Boy and the Weaving Maid.[19]
It is not mere luck that I may revel amid clustering
pearls and kingfisher ornaments;
And thus conclude my former routine of devotion to
yellow scrolls under a blue lamp.[20]
CODA:
*T'ieh-tan:*
My venerable mistress is anxiously awaiting you.
*Sheng:*
As the saying goes, a respectful demeanor is not
as good as obedient compliance.[21]
*T'ieh-tan:*
Don't make Hung-niang come to summon you again.[22]
When they had finished singing, a docket officer suddenly came in and announced that His Honor Ts'ai Hsiu and His Honor Huang Pao-kuang had arrived. Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien promptly ordered that the table should be cleared, and, after adjusting their attire, they went out to receive their guests.
Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu was wearing a plain gown and a girdle with a plaque of gold and was accompanied by a considerable number of functionaries. He presented his calling card, which read, "Your devoted servant Ts'ai Hsiu," to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and then proceeded into the reception hall.
"This is our host, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing," Secretary An Ch'en said by way of introduction. "He is currently serving as a battalion commander here and is also a protégé of your venerable father in the capital."
Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu bowed to him once again, saying politely, "I have long been an admirer of yours."
"I shall owe you a return visit," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
When they had finished with the customary amenities, they all loosened their clothing before sitting down, while the attendants served them with tea. After chatting for some time, they took their places at the table, and Hsi-men Ch'ing directed the boy actors to stand by in order to play and sing for them. Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu occupied the seat of honor, while the other four took their places as hosts. The chef came out and carved the entrée, which was accompanied by soup and rice, and the Hai-yen actors presented the list of pieces they were prepared to perform, from which Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu selected the drama *Shuang-chung chi*, or *The Loyal Pair*:[23]
After two scenes had been performed, and:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed,
Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien called for the players of the leading male and female roles to serve them with drinks and then perform the song suite that begins with the tune "Fresh Water Song," the first line of which is:
On my proud piebald steed I depart
the imperial capital.[24]
Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu laughed, saying, "What an appropriate choice of a piece for performance, sir. You can be said to be:
The censor on a new piebald steed;
while these three gentlemen are like:
The purple-bearded adjutant of old."[25]
"Today," said Secretary An Ch'en, "one can hardly say:
The marshall of Chiang-chou's blue gown
is wet with tears."[26]
When he finished speaking, they all broke out laughing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ch'un-hung to sing the song suite the first line of which is:
At the palace gate he has presented a memorial
about pacifying the barbarians,[27]
which made Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien as pleased as could be.
He then turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "This lad is quite adorable."
"He is one of my servants," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and is a native of Yang-chou."
Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took him by the hand, asked him to pour a cup of wine for him, and rewarded him with three mace of silver, for which Ch'un-hung kowtowed to him in thanks. Truly:
The sunlight outside the window goes its way
in a snap of the fingers;
The flower shadows in the banquet hall move
among the revelers' seats.
No cup is drained but to the accompaniment of
the music of pipes and song;
As, from below the steps, one hears the news
that it is already 4:00PM.[28]
Before anyone knew it:
The sun began to sink in the West.[29]
When Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu became aware that it was getting late, he ordered his attendants to fetch his outer garments, put them on, and announced his departure. The other members of the company were unable to detain him any longer and escorted him to the front gate to see him off. Two docket officers were immediately dispatched to deliver his table setting of mutton and wine and a complimentary bolt of fabric to the port on the New Canal where he was staying overnight. But no more of this.
Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien also bade Hsi-men Ch'ing farewell, saying, "I will not bother to express my gratitude today, since we will be troubling you again in a few days."
He and his fellow officials then got into their sedan chairs and departed.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back inside after seeing them off, he dismissed the actors and enjoined them, saying, "You are engaged to come back and perform again two days from tomorrow. Be sure to bring some of your best singers with you. His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is entertaining Grand Coordinator Hou Meng that day."
"We understand," the actors replied.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered that another table for a drinking party be set up and sent Tai-an to invite Licentiate Wen to join him, and Lai-an to go and invite Ying Po-chüeh. It was not long before they arrived, one after the other, bowed in greeting, and took their seats, while three boy musicians stood by to entertain them and pour the wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then turned to Ying Po-chüeh and said, "When your sisters-in-law attend your celebration tomorrow, have you engaged singing girls, or vaudeville performers, for the occasion?"
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you have a nice way of putting it. How could a poor household like mine accommodate such numbers? I've merely engaged two singing girls, that's all. I hope that my sisters-in-law will deign to come by early tomorrow."
To resume our story, the two boy musicians, Cheng Ch'un and Tso Shun, had been singing all day to entertain the ladies in the rear compound, when Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, and her sister-in-law, Meng the Elder's wife, were the first to get up and go.
Later on, Aunt Yang also prepared to leave, but Yüeh-niang said, "Auntie, why don't you stay another day before going home? Nun Hsüeh has instructed her disciples to bring a precious scroll with them, and they are going to recite it for us tonight."
"To tell you the truth," said Aunt Yang, "I would prefer to stay, were it not for the fact that my second nephew, Yang Tsung-pao, from outside the city gate, has sent someone to invite me to his betrothal party, which is taking place tomorrow, and I would like to attend."
Thereupon, she said her farewells and departed.
Yüeh-niang kept the wives of Fu Ming and Kan Jun, along with Pen the Fourth's wife, and Big Sister Tuan, in the master suite to keep company with Sister-in-law Wu, Old Mrs. P'an, and Li Kuei-chieh, while Second Sister Shen and Big Sister Yü took turns singing song suites to entertain them, the two boy musicians having been sent off to the reception hall in the front compound. The party continued until after the lamps had been lighted, when the wives of Hsi-men Ch'ing's three employees said goodbye and left. Only Big Sister Tuan remained, and she went off to spend the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound, while Old Mrs. P'an made her way to P'an Chin-lien's quarters. The only people left sitting in Yüeh-niang's room were Sister-in-law Wu, Li Kuei-chieh, Second Sister Shen, and the three nuns, along with Big Sister Yü, and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien.
Suddenly, they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing's drinking party had broken up, and the page boys began to bring back the utensils, at which Chin-lien hastily withdrew and set out toward the front compound. When she arrived there, she stood silently in the dark shadows beside the postern gate, where she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing, being supported by Lai-an, as he staggered in the direction of Li P'ing-erh's quarters. When he caught sight of Chin-lien standing by the gate, he took her by the hand and accompanied her into her quarters, while Lai-an proceeded back to the master suite to turn over the goblets and chopsticks he was carrying.
Yüeh-niang, assuming that Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his way back, sent Second Sister Shen, Li Kuei-chieh, and Big Sister Yü off to Li Chiao-erh's quarters and asked Lai-an, "Has Father come with you? What's he doing in the front compound?"
"Father has retired to the Fifth Lady's quarters," replied Lai-an. "He's had enough of it for this evening."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she became annoyed at heart and said to Meng Yü-lou, "Just look at that feckless good-for-nothing! I assumed that tonight, of all nights, when he came back inside, he would plan to go into your quarters, but instead, without anyone's knowing it, he has groped his way into that place of hers. These last few days, he has been so driven by his lecherous desires that all he wants to do is fool around with her in the front compound."
"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "let him fool around if he likes. If we object, it makes it look as though we give this one thing priority over everything else and are merely competing with each other for his favors. It reminds me of the punchline in that joke of Nun Wang's. After all, he has the run of all six chambers, does he not?[30] What Father lusts after in his heart is not something that you or I can control."
"It must surely have been prearranged," remarked Yüeh-niang. "Just now, upon hearing that the party up front had broken up, she took off for the front compound as though her life depended on it."
She then turned to Hsiao-yü and said, "If there is no longer anyone working in the kitchen, you can lock the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds for me, and then invite the three nuns to come back here, so we can listen to them recite a precious scroll for us."
She also invited Li Kuei-chieh, Second Sister Shen, Big Sister Tuan, and Big Sister Yü to rejoin them, after which, she turned to Sister-in-law Wu and explained, "I have already asked the nuns to send one of their disciples to fetch a copy of *Huang-shih nü chüan*, or *The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang*, to recite for us. It's too bad that Aunt Yang has already left today."
She then ordered Yü-hsiao to brew some good tea, but Meng Yü-lou addressed Li Chiao-erh, saying, "Let the two of us take turns providing the tea. It's not appropriate to impose a further burden on Elder Sister's staff."
Thereupon, they each went back to their own quarters and told their maidservants to take care of the tea.
Before long, when the three nuns had come in, and a bed table had been placed on the k'ang, they seated themselves behind it, in the lotus position, while the rest of the company crowded into the room and took their seats in order to hear the recitation of the precious scroll. Yüeh-niang washed her hands and lit some incense, while Nun Hsüeh opened *The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang* and proceeded to declaim it in a loud voice as follows.[31]
I have heard tell that, although the Dharma is not subject to annihilation, it is through extinction that we achieve nirvana; although the Way is not created, it is through creation that it is negated. The dharmak āya gave rise to the eight phases of the Buddha's life; the eight phases were manifestations of the dharmak āya. The lamp of wisdom is burning brightly,[32] the better to open the doorways of this world; the mirror of the Buddha is shining clearly, in order to illuminate the paths of darkness. [33] The events of our hundred years of life elapse in an instant; the four elements that form our bodies [34] are as ephemeral as bubbles or shadows. Every day we exhaust ourselves in mundane labor; all day long we are obsessed by karmic consciousness. How can we comprehend perfect enlightenment[35] when our six senses are devoted to greed and lust? World-famous achievements[36] are merely grandiose dreams;[37] the most amazing wealth and distinction will not enable us to evade the word impermanence.[38] When we expire like wind or fire, neither the old nor the young are spared; [39] when the hills and streams are eroded away, what heroes will there be?[40] What I propose to do is: broadcast a gatha to the ten directions, summoning all eight classes of supernatural beings to the altar;[41] to save them from incineration in the burning house,[42] and give them a key to nirvana.
Gatha:
Wealth and distinction, poverty and want,[43]
each have their causes;
Since they are predetermined, there is no
reason to question them.
If you have neglected to plant your seeds
during the springtime;
It is vain to expect your barren fields to
produce an autumn harvest.[44]
If you assembled bodhisattvas will listen to my exposition of the Buddhist dharma, this gatha of four lines that I have just recited was bequeathed to us by a patriarch of old. How should we explain the line:
Wealth and distinction, poverty and want,
each have their causes?
In the case of you bodhisattvas, you are married to a husband who is possessed of high office and ample emolument,[45] and you reside in vast courtyards and secluded mansions. You have slaves and maidservants at your beck and call and are studded with gold and decked with silver. You grew up amid nests of satin and brocade and were born amid piles of silk and gauze.[46] When you desire clothing, you have a thousand trunks of satin and brocade; when you want food, you have delicacies of every variety. [47] You are fated to bask in glory and luxury, and enjoy wealth and distinction. These are all the results of the karma accumulated in your prior lives, which has bequeathed you a solid foundation, to which you are entitled without having to ask for it. For the same reason, I am fortunate to be here promulgating the scriptures and reciting Buddha's name, as well as enjoying such delicious refreshments, thanks to your benevolent hospitality. That I am fated to fare so well is no inconsequential matter.[48] We are all predestined to be present at the Dragon Flower Assembly, [49] thanks to the good karma that we have earned during our previous lives. Had we failed to do so, it would be like neglecting to plant seeds in the springtime, only to face barren fields at the time of the autumn harvest. In such a case, where would the ripened seed-bearing fruit come from? Truly:
Sweep clear the spirit tower of your mind,
the better to begin to work;
However happy and gratified you may become,

do not relax your efforts.
Struggle to wash clean the five impurities
along with the six senses;
Only then will you apprehend the mysterious
doctrine[50] and find the truth.
The hundred years of one's human existence[51]
vanish in the blink of an eye;
This body of ours is fated to be transformed
into nothing but flying ashes.
Who is able during this present incarnation
to attain true enlightenment;
To arrive at total comprehension of the need
to revert to the noncreated?[52]
Human existence is absolutely impermanent,[53]
gone in the space of a breath;
It resembles the sight of the red sun as it
sinks behind the western hills.
Just like returning empty-handed after one
traverses a hill of treasures;
Once your human life is lost,[54] it may be hard
to recover in a myriad kalpas.[55]
When one comes to think about it, wealth and honor, glory and luxury,[56] are like snow when sprinkled with scalding water.[57] Upon careful consideration, not one of them amounts to anything; but will prove to be as evanescent as an interrupted dream. Though you may, at present, have achieved incarnation as a human being, in your heart you are distressed[58] and troubled lest, upon your death, the four elements of which you are constituted may be transformed to dust, [59] and you do not even know where what is left of your soul will be sent to suffer. If you are fearful of the revolving wheel of life and death, [60] you must resolve to take a step in order to move forward.[61]
TO THE TUNE "A SINGLE MISSIVE":
Confronted with the alternatives
of life and death,
One's days are spent sighing over
this floating life.
Though one may have rooms full of
boys and girls,
When death comes, one is forced to
face it oneself.
One's life is like a spring dream,[62]
certain to be short;
One's fate is but a wind-blown lamp[63]
that cannot last long.[64]
When one thinks about it,
One can only be saddened;
To bring it up is enough to cause
one's heart to break.[65]
The prolegomenon of the precious scroll says: The Buddha who reveals himself in response to cries of distress, who neither comes nor goes,[66] the supreme patriarch Amitābha, whose great vows are so vast and profound, has sworn his forty-eight vows[67] to work for the salvation of all living beings, until each and every one of them is enabled to achieve the realization of his true nature. The mind of Amitābha is ever pure, enabling him to ferry all living beings across the sea of bitterness, the great waves of the sea of bitterness, so they may attain the wonderful fruits of enlightenment. The recitation of this text will serve to alleviate sins as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; the invocation of this text will serve to augment good fortune without limit. Those who copy this text or recite it will be reborn in the Heaven of the Lotus Treasury; [68] those who either read it or hear it, upon their deaths will proceed to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. All those who recite Buddha's name will achieve unlimited merit. Relying on his compassion, his compassion, his great compassion, commit yourselves to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha in all ten directions, sincerely paying homage to the eternal nature of the Three Jewels, for the wheel of the law turns unceasingly, to save all living beings.[69]
Gatha:
The subtle and mysterious dharma
of utmost profundity,
Is difficult to encounter even
in myriads of kalpas.
Now that we have heard it, and
are able to keep it,
We wish to understand the true
meaning of the Tathāgata.[70]
*The Precious Scroll on Woman Huang*
has just been opened;
May all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas[71]
come down to hear it.[72]
The incense in the burner permeates
the world of vacuity;
The sound of Buddha's names shakes
the nine directions.
In former days, when the Han emperor governed the world, the rains were seasonable, the winds were favorable,[73] the country prospered, and the people were content,[74] which elicited the birth of a good-hearted woman, the daughter of a householder named Huang, who resided in Nan-hua district of Ts'ao-chou prefecture. She possessed well-proportioned and good-looking features and was only six years old when she determined to restrict herself to vegetarian fare, [75] and recite the Diamond Sutra, in order to repay the profound kindness of her father and mother.[76] She did this every day without fail, which moved the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin to manifest herself to her in midair. When her parents saw that she devoted herself all day long to the recitation of the sutra, they did their best to dissuade her, but she refused to comply. One day, they sought out a go-between, selected a propitious day and hour, [77] and married her off to a son-in-law, whose name was Chao Ling-fang, and who was a butcher by vocation. They remained married for twelve years, during which they gave birth to one son and two daughters. One day, Woman Huang said to her husband, "You and I have been married for twelve years and have given birth to these attractive children, but to devote ourselves solely to our mutual affection is to be eternally immersed in samsara.[78] I happen to know a little lyric, which I would persuade you to listen to, my husband. It goes as follows:
Our fates determined that we should become
a couple as husband and wife.
Although we have a son and daughters,
Who can enable us to stave off death?
I humbly hope that you as my husband,
Will reach a determination like mine,
To practice religious cultivation,
For the rest of our natural lives.
Our fondness for wealth and honor,
Should be given a diminished role.
Ceasing to long for fame and fortune,
We should live out our allotted days.
When Chao Ling-fang had assimilated the content of the lyric, he did not feel that he could accept it. One day, he said farewell and set out for Shantung in order to purchase some pigs. Woman Huang, seeing that her husband was not at home, took her rest in a purified chamber every day, faithfully performed her ablutions, lit incense, and devoted herself to the reverent recitation of the *Diamond Sutra*.
Chao Ling-fang, at the time, had already
departed for Shantung;
While their three boys and girls were to
be found in the parlor.
Gatha in decasyllabic verse:
The Woman Huang, in her western chamber,
bathed in perfumed water;[79]
Changed her clothes, removed her earrings,
and made herself up lightly.
Every single day, she faced toward the west,
burnt incense, and worshipped;
Confronted her rosary, and precious scroll,
and recited the *Diamond Sutra*.
While perusing the text, before she had done,
the incense smoke dispersed;
Reciting Buddha's name, her voice resounded,
pervading the empty firmament.
At the gates of Hell, and the halls of Heaven,
rays of light became manifest;
When King Yama himself, became aware of this,
his face was suffused with joy.
"It must be that, in the realm of the living,
a Buddhist patriarch has appeared."
Hastily calling his two underworld Assessors,
he bade them ascertain the details.
The Assessors reported back, "Your Majesty,
the testimony heard affirms that,
In Nan-hua district, of Ts'ao-chou prefecture,
there is a virtuous believer;
The Woman Huang, who studies the sacred texts,
and eats only vegetarian fare;
Whose good deeds, and meritorious austerities,
have startled the halls of Heaven."
TO THE TUNE "SUTRA IN LETTERS OF GOLD":
On hearing these words, King Yama's heart
was moved to respond,
And he hastily called before him a pair of

messengers of death.
The pair of messengers speedily hastened to
the Chao family's home.
The Woman Huang was at the time engaged in
reading the sacred texts,
When she suddenly observed that there were
two immortal lads before her.
RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:
Virtuous persons are summoned to the shades
by immortal lads;
Whereas evil persons must have yakshas sent
to summon them.
Woman Huang, while perusing her sacred text,
quickly enquired,
"Whose young lads are you that have chosen
to come visit me?"
The immortal lads responded to Woman Huang
with the words,
"Good-hearted woman that you are, you need
not be concerned.
We do not belong among the mortal denizens
of the mundane world,
But are, rather, immortal lads who come from
the world of shades.
At present, because you so assiduously study
the sacred texts,
King Yama himself has sent you an invitation,
good-hearted lady."
Upon hearing these words, Woman Huang became
disturbed at heart,
Proceeding, one point at a time, to plead with
the immortal lads,
"You must be looking for someone of the same
name and surname.
Why should you be so insistent on summoning me
before King Yama?
I am not unwilling to suffer a thousand or ten
thousand deaths,[80]
But how can I abandon my precious boy and my
two daughters?
My eldest daughter, Chiao-ku, is only eight
years of age.
Pan-chiao is only five. How could she manage
without her mother?
My precious son, Ch'ang-shou, is merely two
years of age.
I constantly cradle him in my arms and could
never forget him.
If you can, somehow, find a way to spare this
soul of mine,
I undertake to perform more meritorious deeds
on your behalf."
The immortal lads only replied to Woman Huang
by reiterating,
"Who is there as assiduous as you in reciting
the *Diamond Sutra?*"
PROSE:
The two lads responsible for recording good and evil deeds[81] were piteously pleaded with by Woman Huang, who repeatedly expressed her reluctance[82] to proceed to the Underworld because of her love for her three children, whom she could bear neither to leave nor to abandon. The immortal lads urged her, saying,
"Good-hearted woman:
If the Underworld decides to summon you
during the third watch;
The hour of your death cannot be delayed
until the fourth watch.[83]
The situation is not like that in the world of the living, where deadlines can be evaded. When you are summoned by the Underworld, if the deadline is not met, we are held strictly accountable, with no room for allowances."
RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:
Woman Huang, after considering the situation
in her heart,
Proceeded to order a maidservant to heat hot
water for her.
No sooner did she finish bathing herself in
perfumed water,
Than she proceeded to make her way into the
Buddhist chapel,
Where she sat down in the lotus position and
remained silent,
While her numinous soul's true being appeared
before King Yama.[84]
TO THE TUNE "AUTUMN ON THE CH'U RIVER":
During the dream of mankind's life,[85]
One's allotted time is not enduring.
When faced with danger, each of us is
but a wind-blown lamp;
In no time at all, we must return once
more to face King Yama.
One must hastily prepare for the journey,
And gaze upon one's home from the Terrace
of Homeward Gazing Spirits.[86]
As one's sons cry and one's daughters weep,[87]
it is a scene of desolation.
To the tune of clanging cymbals and beating
drums, the funeral is held;
Donning hempen garments and mourning apparel,
one's family lays one to rest.
RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:
Rather than speaking of Chao Ling-fang's
sense of desolation,
Let us tell of the trip of Woman Huang's
soul to the underworld.
As she gradually approached the bank of
the River of No Recourse,
She came to a Golden Bridge that enabled
her to cross unharmed.
Should you enquire what the function of
this bridge might be,
It is only for those who read sutras and
recite Buddha's name.[88]
By the banks of the River of No Recourse
flow waves of blood,
In which are seen the numerous drowning
souls of sinful beings.
The sorrowful sound of their weeping and
wailing is ever present,
As, on all sides, poisonous serpents bite
into their exposed sinews.
As she continued, she came to the Mountain
of Damaged Paper Money.
Woman Huang then stepped forward and asked
to have it explained to her.
"When you inhabitants of the world of the
living burn paper money,

And neglectfully discard it before it has
been completely incinerated.
The remains of it are blown about, reduced
to tattered fragments,
And are collected here to form the Mountain
of Damaged Paper Money."
Her route then took her by the base of the
City of the Unjustly Dead,[88]
Where there were innumerable homeless souls
who had not yet been reborn.
When Woman Huang learned of this, her heart
was filled with compassion,
And, lifting up her voice, she proceeded to
recite the *Diamond Sutra*.
At this, the sinful beings in the River of No
Recourse opened their eyes;
Lunar woods became perceptible to the corpses
of the burned and flayed;
Lotus blossoms appeared to those in boiling
cauldrons and lakes of fire;
And auspicious clouds, forthwith, descended
to envelop the Avici Hell.
Thereupon, the immortal lads could not help
feeling the pressing need,
To hasten as quickly as possible in order to
make a report to King Yama.
TO THE TUNE "SHEEP ON THE MOUNTAIN SLOPE":
When Woman Huang found herself in the
Sen-lo Palace of King Yama,
A lad reported that they had brought the
scripture-reading person.
King Yama decreed that she be invited
into his presence,
And Woman Huang kowtowed to him beneath
the golden steps,
Unable to do anything other than to
genuflect before him.
King Yama asked, "How many years ago did you
start to recite the *Diamond Sutra*?
And on what day, month, and year did you move
Kuan-yin to appear before you?"
Woman Huang folded her hands in front of her
and related the preceding events.
"Ever since I was six, I have eaten vegetarian
fare and worshipped Her Holiness.
I hope that Your Highness will consent to
believe me when I state that,
Since becoming married, my zeal for reciting
the sutra has not diminished."
RECITATION IN HEPTASYLLABIC VERSE:
King Yama, upon hearing this, hastened to
transmit an injunction,
Saying, "Good-hearted woman, pay heed to
what I have to ask you.
How many characters are contained in the
text of the *Diamond Sutra*?
And how many strokes are required to render
its esoteric profundities?
With what character does it begin, and with
what character does it end?
And what two characters are found to be
situated at its midpoint?
If you prove capable of reciting the sutra
without making any errors,
Your soul will be released in order to return
to the world of the living."
Woman Huang, at this juncture, stood beneath
the steps and replied, saying,
"I hope that Your Majesty will listen to my
report on the *Diamond Sutra*.
The text consists of exactly five thousand
and forty-nine characters,
Which are written with eighty-four thousand
dots and strokes of the brush.
It commences with the character *ju*, and it
ends with the character *hsing*.
The two characters *ho-tan* are found to be
situated at its midpoint."
Before Woman Huang had even finished her
explication of the sutra,
In his palace, King Yama emitted rays of
light between his eyebrows.
Raising his hand, and evincing pleasure
on his dragon countenance,
He stated, "Your soul is hereby released
to return to the human world."
Upon taking in these words, Woman Huang
hastened to respond, saying,
"I hope that Your Majesty will condescend
to pay heed to my requests.
Firstly, I do not wish to be reincarnated
in the home of a butcher.
Secondly, I do not wish to be reincarnated
in the household of a dyer.
My only desire is to be reincarnated into
the home of a good family,
Where I can spend my time reading sutras
and reciting Buddha's name."
King Yama thereupon took up his brush and
promptly issued a decision,
"You will be reborn as a male child in the
Chang family of Ts'ao-chou.
That household has accumulated a fortune
of considerable proportions,
But lacks a filial son to offer sacrifices
at the family burial ground.
The householder and his spouse are equally
devoted to cultivating virtue,
And their reputation for so doing is widely
known within the four seas."
No sooner did Woman Huang swallow a cup of
a soul-disorienting drug,[89]
Than the wife of householder Chang conceived
a male child in her belly.
Once the ten months of her pregnancy were
fulfilled, she bore a son,
On whose left rib cage were inscribed two
lines of characters in red,
Reading, "This is a reincarnation of Woman
Huang who recited the sutras,

And was formerly married to Chao Ling-fang,
who is a native of Kuan-shui.
This reincarnation is the karmic result of
her dedication to the sutras,
Which has enabled her to become a man who
is fated to live a long life."
When householder Chang had finished reading
this text with his own eyes,
He cherished his child as a precious jewel,[91]
showing his joy on his face.
TO THE TUNE "BLACK SILK ROBE":
Woman Huang was reincarnated in the home
of householder Chang,
Her transformation into a male having
occurred without a hitch.
When householder Chang beheld his son,
his pleasure was enhanced.
After his first three years, it became
clear he would grow up.
By the time he was six years old, his
intelligence was obvious.
He assiduously studied his lessons and
practiced his characters,
And took the name Chün-ta, or "Clever One."
At the age of seventeen, he earned first
place in the examinations.
PROSE:
To resume our story, when Chang Chün-ta was in his seventeenth year, he was successful in passing the examinations and was appointed magistrate of Nan-hua district in Ts'ao-chou prefecture. Suddenly, he recalled that this had been his native place during his former incarnation. After going to the district to take up his office, he first saw to the payment of the taxes owed to the government and then took his place in the courtroom in order to preside over his jurisdiction. As his first order of business, he dispatched two runners to summon Chao Ling-fang on the grounds that he had something to say to him. The two runners did not dare to be remiss but went immediately to the home of Chao Ling-fang in order to summon him to court.
RECITATION IN DECASYLLABIC VERSE:
Chao Ling-fang, in his home, was reading
sutras and reciting Buddha's name.
The two runners, greeting him with a bow,
hastened to explain their mission.
In no time at all, he adjusted his attire,
and accompanied them to the yamen.
Once in the courtroom, he performed a bow,
and proceeded to identify himself.
Magistrate Chang rose and returned his bow,
directing him to take a seat.
Exchanging amenities, they sat down as guest
and host, while tea was served.
"You really are," he declared, "my husband,
whose name is Chao Ling-fang;
While I am none other than your former wife,
known by the name Woman Huang.
If you doubt me, in a quiet room, I'll undress
so you can see for yourself.
On my left rib cage, in cinnabar characters,
is an explanatory inscription.
Our eldest daughter, whose name is Chiao-ku,
has already found a married home.
Our second daughter, whose name is Pan-chiao,
is wed to a man called Ts'ao Chen.
Our son Ch'ang-shou was so concerned for me,
that he kept vigil by my grave.
Let the two of us ride our horses together,
to visit our ancestral tombs."
PROSE:
Magistrate Chang, together with Chao Ling-fang and their children, five persons in all, proceeded to the grave of Woman Huang, where, upon opening her coffin and examining her corpse, they found that her countenance remained unaltered. After going home, they conducted a religious service for seven days, and Chao Ling-fang declaimed the *Diamond Sutra*, whereupon, in a flutter of propitious snow,[92] all five of them, men and women, ascended to Heaven on an auspicious cloud. There is a lyric to the tune "Immortal at the River" that testifies to this:
Woman Huang read the *Diamond Sutra* and
reaped the true fruit.
That same day, mounting to paradise,
All five of them ascended to Heaven.
Good people, pray to Kuan-yin,
"Bodhisattva come and save us."
PROSE:
Now that the recitation of the precious scroll is finished, the Buddhas and holy saints are aware of it. Since the dharma realm is responsive,[93] may it enable us all to ascend to the celestial assembly. Homage to the infinite significance of the Mahāyāna school of the One Vehicle, as embodied in the truly empty yet marvelously existing truth of the *Diamond Sutra*.[94] May the Buddhas in their vast assembly heed our invocation from afar, that they may enable all of us, in our multitudes as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, to proceed to the Pure Land of the Western Paradise. It is our humble wish that the sound of the recitation of the sutra and the names of the Buddhas should penetrate the halls of Heaven above and the courts of the Underworld below, with the result that those who recite the Buddha's name may be delivered from the Sea of Bitterness; [95] those who commit evil deeds may be eternally immersed in samsara; those who achieve enlightenment may be conducted on the way toward salvation by the host of Buddhas, whose rays of glory illuminate the ten directions, [96] so that, to both east and west, the fading light may return to illuminate their path, [97] to both north and south, they may be able to find their way to their true home, and attain nirvana, as their drifting boats reach the shore.[98] Like little children, they may be reunited with their mother. Upon reentering their mother's womb, they will no longer have to fear the three calamities.[99] For a myriad kalpas, they may attain eternal peace.[100]
Gatha:
The karmic encumbrances that have been
produced by living beings,
From their very nonbeginning, on down
until the present time,
Have isolated them from the Sacred Peak,[101]
obscuring their true natures,[102]
But, a single ray of numinous light[103] can
deliver all forms of life.
Firstly, we must repay the kindness of Heaven
and Earth for supporting us;
Secondly, we must repay the kindness of the
sun and moon for shining on us;
Thirdly, we must repay the kindness of our
ruler for governing our land;
Fourthly, we must repay the kindness of our
parents for nurturing us;
Fifthly, we must repay the kindness of our
mentors for teaching the dharma;
Sixthly, we must pray that the ten classes of
homeless souls may all be reborn,
And attain the perfection of wisdom, enabling
them to reach the other shore.[104]
By the time Nun Hsüeh finished reciting the precious scroll, it was already the second watch. Even before she was done, Yüan-hsiao from Li Chiao-erh's quarters had brought out some tea and served it to the company. After it was over, Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters brought out a selection of exquisitely prepared appetizers, a jug of wine, and a large container of fine tea and served them to Sister-in-law Wu, Big Sister Tuan, Li Kuei-chieh, and the rest of the company. Yüeh-niang also directed Yü-hsiao to bring out four boxes of fine pastries and sweets to go with the tea for the three nuns.
Li Kuei-chieh ventured to say, "Since our three preceptors have entertained us by reciting a precious scroll, I ought to show my gratitude by singing a song for you."
"Kuei-chieh," said Yüeh-niang, "it would be an imposition to ask you to sing once again."
Big Sister Yü said, "Let me sing something for you first."
"All right," said Yüeh-niang, "let Big Sister Yü be the first to sing."
Second Sister Shen said, "After my elder sister has sung her piece, I will also sing a song for you."
Li Kuei-chieh, however, insisted on being the first to sing and asked Yüeh-niang, "What would you like to hear?"
Yüeh-niang responded, "Sing us that set of songs that begins with the words:
Late at night, all is silent."
Thereupon, Li Kuei-chieh, after serving the company with wine, took up her balloon guitar:
Deftly extended her slender fingers,
Gently strummed the silken strings,
Opened her ruby lips,
Exposed her white teeth,
and proceeded to sing to the tune "Flowers in the Moonlight":
Late at night, all is silent.
I have fumigated my bedclothes,
And waited until the moon has risen above
the flowering branches.
It is as quiet as can be, and I have not
heard any news at all.

Only after the watch-drums have finished
beating does he appear.
Upon seeing this face of mine, he pays it
no attention whatever,
But kneels down at my side to make his plea.
I deliberately pretend to be angry;
He surreptitiously gives me a look;
But before I can even clench my teeth,
I simply can't help starting to smile.
TO THE SAME TUNE:
That profligate is hard at work,
Like a moth darting into the flame.
He does his best to keep me in the dark
about his intentions,
But, for my part, it costs me no effort
to figure them out.
Recently, however, I've had some trouble
holding onto the rudder.
He's gone to such pains to manipulate me
that my heart is touched,
Turning it into a honey-filled pastry.
Whoever it might be,
To say nothing of me,
Though I were made out of iron,
I might find it hard to resist.
TO THE SAME TUNE:
He is altogether too untrustworthy,
My fickle lover leaves me helpless.
For two or three nights, he has failed
to come back to me;
Yet, when questioned, he makes excuses
and pays no attention.
I can't help thinking that, maybe, I should
simply put up with it.
With an ingratiating smile, he proceeds to
turn down the bedclothes,
Waiting for me, half-exposed under the covers.
I pretend to be sewing a shoe, and ignore him.
That he is so exasperated with me,
Only causes me to be angry at him.
TO THE SAME TUNE:
He visits the flower lanes and willow markets,[105]
The bee go-betweens and butterfly ambassadors.[106]
While I remain here, as pure as jade and
immaculate as ice,[107]
He is there, enjoying the sweet melons
and honeyed apricots.
Upon returning, though sober, he pretends
to be under the influence,
And devotes himself to beating the bushes
to scare off the snakes.[108]
He engages in such egregious nitpicking,
That I am tempted to scratch his cheeks,
But I fear it might destroy our intimacy.
Though I may want to let him have his way,
I'm too angry to let him get away with it.[109]

When Li Kuei-chieh had finished singing, Big Sister Yü was about to take over the balloon guitar, but Second Sister Shen grabbed it away from her, hung it over her arm, and said, "I'll entertain Sister-in-law Wu and the rest of you by singing a song from a sequence on the twelve monthly festivals, to the tune "The Hanging Portrait." She then proceeded to sing the song suite that begins with the lines:

On the fifteenth day of the first month we
celebrate the Lantern Festival,[110]
Burning so much incense that both Heaven
and Earth seem to be on fire.

When she had finished singing, Yüeh-niang smiled and said, "We can continue to chat at our leisure. After all, the night is long enough for us to go on as long as we like."

At the time, Sister-in-law Wu was feeling fatigued by the lateness of the hour and retired without waiting to hear Big Sister Yü's performance. At this, after drinking a round of tea, the party broke up, and they all went back to their rooms to sleep. Li Kuei-chieh went back to Li Chiao-erh's quarters, Big Sister Tuan went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and the three nuns went to Sun Hsüeho's quarters in the rear compound to spend the night. Big Sister Yü and Second Sister Shen went to bed with Yü-hsiao and Hsiao-yü in the room with the k'ang, while Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu spent the night in the bedroom of the master suite. But no more of this. Truly:

Orion is sinking, the Dipper is turning,[111]
it is after the third watch;
The solitary hook of the waning moon[112]
appears in the gauze window.

Wealth and dignity are as the dew of morning
Friends and companions as the gathering of sand.
It is better to sit before a bamboo window
And meditate upon some sacred book.
Contemplation benefits the soul as truly
As any listening to sermons.
When the soul is purified, you may make a cup of tea.
The crowing of the cock is all you fear
For in the morning the entanglement of earthly things
Is as a bundle of hemp.

At dawn, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing awoke. Jinlian saw that his weapon was still upright like a ramrod. "Darling," she said, "you must forgive me, but I can stand no more. I shall suck your prick."

"Suck it," said Ximen. "If you can soften it, all will be well." She squatted on her buttocks, put her hand between his legs, and took his prick in her mouth. She played with it for a whole hour, but it did not flag. Ximen held her white neck and dragged his prick this way and that inside her mouth with all his might. Soon her lips were wet with white spittle, and the prick was as red as they.

"Ying the Second has invited us to go and see his wife," Jinlian said. "Are we going?"

"Why not?" Ximen Qing said.

"I have a favor to ask of you," Jinlian said. "I wonder whether you will grant it me."

"What is it, you little strumpet?"

"Will you give me the Sixth Lady's fur coat? If we go, they will all be wearing fur coats, and I have none."

"We have the coat that General Wang's people pawned. Won't that do?"

"I don't want that. Li Jiao'er can have it. Let Sun Xue'e have the one Li Jiao'er had and give me the one that belonged to the Sixth Lady. I will make a pair of scarlet sleeves, with golden storks to go with it, and wear a white silk skirt. If you give it to me, it will be a proof that it has been worthwhile being your wife all this long time."

"You little strumpet, you never lose a chance of doing well for yourself. That fur coat is worth at least sixty taels of silver. If you put it on, will you look well in it?"

"You rascal," Jinlian said, "you would give things to any other woman. I am your wife and, if I wear it, so much the more credit to you. If you talk like this, I shall be angry with you."

"One moment you ask for something, and the next you are riding the high horse."

"I am not a maid. There is no reason why you shouldn't do something when I ask you."

She softened the penis with her cheeks and put it in her mouth. She teased the hole and titillated the sensitive spot with her tongue. She held it firmly between her lips and moved it gently. Ximen was delighted; his pleasure mounted, and he prepared to give way.

"Hold tight and let the sperm come out," he cried, and at once the sperm flowed into her mouth. After a while she swallowed it.

It was the day of the reception. Ximen Qing dressed and went out. Jinlian stayed in bed.

"Bring me the coat now," she said. "If you put it off, you will be too busy."

Ximen went to the room of Li Ping'er. The nurse and the maids were up, making tea to set before their mistress's tablet. Ruyi'er was dressed and her face and eyebrows painted. She smiled and offered him a cup of tea, and talked to him as he drank it. Ximen Qing told Yingchun to get the key. Ruyi'er asked him why he wanted it.

"I am going to give the Fifth Lady the fur coat," he said.

"The sable coat?" Ruyi'er asked.

"Yes," Ximen Qing said, "I am giving it her because she wants it."

Yingchun went to do his bidding. He took Ruyi'er on his knee and touched her breast. "My child," he said, "though you have had a baby, your breasts are still small." They kissed each other.

"I have noticed that you often go to her and seldom to the other ladies," Ruyi'er said. "She would be very pleasant if she were not so suspicious and touchy. The other day, when you were away, she quarreled with me about the dolly pin. Fortunately, Sister Han and the Third Lady were there to separate us. I did not mention the matter to you when you came back. I can't imagine who told her that you care for me, or when she found out. Has she spoken to you about it?"

"Yes, she has," Ximen Qing said. "I think the best thing you can do is to go to her and say you're sorry. She can never resist flattery, and she is very easily pleased. Her mouth may be sharp, but her heart is in the right place."

"That is so," Ruyi'er said. "We had that quarrel, but the next day, when you came home, she was quite pleasant. She said you were very fond of her, but that the other ladies were not able to rival me. I was to tell her everything, she said, and she would be my friend."

"In that case, there is nothing to bother about," Ximen Qing said. "I will come to you tonight."

"Are you sure?" Ruyi'er said. "Don't tease me."

"Why should I tease you?" Ximen said.

Yingchun brought the key. Ximen Qing told her to open the cabinet door and take out the fur coat. The maid shook it, then wrapped it up again.

"I badly need a good skirt and coat," Ruyi'er said softly. "Will you get one for me while there is a chance? And I should like a short coat, if there is one, belonging to my mistress."

Ximen Qing brought out a light blue silk coat, a yellow skirt of soft silk, a pair of embroidered drawers and some blue trousers. He gave them to Ruyi'er. She kowtowed and thanked him. He locked up the cabinet.

Ruyi'er took the fur coat to Jinlian. She was getting up, dressing her feet as she sat on the bed. When Chunmei told her Ruyi'er had come with a fur coat, she understood. Ruyi'er went in.

"Did your father send you?" Jinlian said.

"Yes, he told me to bring you this fur coat."

"Did he give you anything?"

"He gave me a dress for the new year, and told me to come and kowtow to you."
"There is no need for that," Jinlian said. "Your master has taken a fancy to you. Well, there is an old saying that, though there are many boats on the river, they do not block it; and though there are many carriages upon a road, there is still room for traffic. If it amuses you to go in for this kind of thing, do so, but you must do nothing that will injure me. I shall not bother about you any more, and I shall do nothing to interfere with you."
"My mistress is dead," Ruyi'er said, "and though the Great Lady still keeps me here, you are the one on whom I really depend. If you help me, I shall never dare to be ungracious in return. Falling leaves always come back to the root again."
"Perhaps you had better tell the Great Lady about the clothes he gave you," Jinlian said.
"I asked her to give me some clothes, and she said Father would give me some when he was free."
"That is all right, then," Jinlian said. Ruyi'er went back to her room. Ximen Qing had gone to the great hall.
"When you went for the key," Ruyi'er said to Yingchun, "did the Great Lady say anything?"
"She asked what he wanted it for. I didn't tell her about the coat. I said I didn't know. She said no more."
Ximen Qing, in the great hall, watched the preparations for the banquet. The actors of the Haiyan company, Zhang Mei, Zhou Shun, Gou Zixiao, came with their properties, and Li Ming and the other boys also came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. He ordered food to be given to all of them, then told Li Ming and three others to perform in the outer hall, and Zuo Shun to entertain the ladies at the back.
Han Daoguo's wife, Wang Liu'er, could not come that day. She bought two boxes of presents and sent Miss Shen, in a sedan chair, with her boy Jin Cai, to congratulate Meng Yulou on her birthday. Wang Jing took them in and dismissed the chair men. Aunt Han and Aunt Meng came, then Mistress Fu, Mistress Gan, Cui Ben's wife, Miss Duan, and Mistress Ben the Fourth.
Ximen Qing, who was in the great hall, saw Daian taking in a short lady who wore a silver-gray coat and a red skirt. Her face was not powdered and her eyes were very narrow. She looked rather like Zheng Aixiang. As she was in the passage, Ximen Qing asked who the lady was. Daian told him it was Ben the Fourth's wife. Ximen said no more. They went on to the inner court to see Wu Yueniang, in whose room all the ladies were having tea. Ximen Qing himself came for porridge. He gave Yueniang the key.
"Why did you wish to open the cabinet?" his wife asked.
"Pan Jinlian told me she was going to Brother Ying's place. She wanted the Sixth Lady's fur coat."
Yueniang looked at him sharply. "You don't keep your word," she said. "When she died, you were very angry if anyone suggested getting rid of her maids, but now it seems all right for you to give her clothes away. Why doesn't the Fifth Lady wear her own fur coat? It is a good thing the owner of the coat is dead. If she were alive, I don't know what Jinlian would do."
Ximen Qing could not think of any answer to make to this.
Then a servant came to say that Liu, the Provincial Director of Studies, had come to pay back some money, and Ximen went to the great hall to receive him. Daian brought a card and said that people had come from General Wang's place with presents. Ximen asked what the presents were. The boy said: a roll of silk, a jar of wine, and food. Ximen told Wang Jing to give the messenger a card in return and five *qian* of silver for himself. Then Li Guijie came, with the house porter, bringing four boxes of presents. Daian took the wrapper. "Please step into the passage, Aunt Guijie," he said hastily. "There is a gentleman in the hall." Guijie went into the passage and Daian carried the boxes to Yueniang's room.
"Has your father seen them?" Yueniang asked.
"No," Daian said, "he has a gentleman with him."
Yueniang told him to put the boxes in an adjoining room.
When his visitor had gone, Ximen Qing came to have something to eat.
"Guijie has come and brought some presents," Yueniang told him.
"This is the first I have heard of it," Ximen Qing said.
Yueniang told Xiaoyu to open the boxes. There were buns with mincemeat, a special birthday gift; crystallized roses; two roast ducks, and a pair of pig's trotters. Guijie came in from the other room, pearls and jewels all over her head. She was wearing a scarlet double-breasted coat and a blue silk skirt. She kowtowed four times to Ximen Qing.
"That will do," Ximen said. "Why did you go to all this expense?" "Guijie has just told me she is afraid you are still angry with her," Yueniang said. "It was really not her fault at all, but her mother's. Guijie had a headache and, that day, Wang the Third and his friends were on their way to Sesame's place, and called in to have some tea as they were passing. Then the trouble began, but she never saw him."
"She didn't see him this time, and she didn't see him that time!" Ximen Qing said. "I don't know how she has the face to say so. I'm not interested any more. In a place like yours, everything is all right so long as the money comes in. I'm not angry with you in the least."
Guijie knelt on the ground and refused to get up. "Father," she said, "you are right. But may I rot to pieces if I ever let that fellow touch me! May every pore of my skin come out in boils! It is all that old whore's doing. She has no sense at all. She would let anybody in, no matter whether he is handsome or hideous. That is what has made you so angry."
"Now she is here," Yueniang said, "let us consider the matter ended. Don't be angry with her any more."
"Stand up, and I'll forgive you," Ximen Qing said.
But Guijie, with her most winning manner, said: "You must smile at me, Father. Then I'll get up. If you won't, I shall stay here for a year."
Jinlian joined them.
"Guijie," she said, "stand up. If you kneel there, and use pretty words to him, he will make all the more fuss. Now you are kneeling before him, but, I tell you, in future when he comes to you, make him kneel down before you and keep him there."
Ximen Qing and Yueniang laughed. Guijie rose to her feet.
Daian came. He was greatly excited. "Their Excellencies have arrived," he said. Ximen Qing put on his robes and went to meet them.
"From today," Guijie said to Yueniang, "I will give up my father if I may be your daughter."
"I don't believe in your oaths," Yueniang said. "You forget them as soon as you have taken them. He went to see you twice, and you were not there."
"Heavens!" Guijie cried, "when did he come to my place and find me not there? If he did, may I die this very moment. Somebody has been telling lies. He must have gone to some other place. I know he went to Zheng Aiyue's house and played with the girls there. They are jealous, Probably they are responsible for the whole affair. I don't see how Father could be angry with me otherwise."
"Why don't you girls attend to your business, instead of talking scandal about one another?" Jinlian said.
"Mother, you don't know. There is always jealousy among people of our profession. Each one is anxious to get the better of the others. Whenever one seems to be securing a little favor, the others conspire to cast her down."
Yueniang gave her tea.
Ximen Qing took Censor Song and Vice President An to the great hall. After the usual greetings, each of them presented him with a roll of silk and a case of books. They saw that the tables were very well set out, and thanked him repeatedly. Then they sat down to tea.
"I have still another favor to ask you," Song said. "Hou Shiquan has just been appointed Master of the Court of Sacrificial Worship. I and those under me would like to entertain him, if possible, here at your house, on the thirtieth. He is to leave for the Eastern Capital on the second of next month. Will you do this for us?"
"Your Excellency has only to command, and I obey," Ximen Qing said.
"The money is here," Song said. He summoned an attendant, who brought twelve taels of silver, which the officers had contributed. "We should like one large table and six small tables. Perhaps a few actors."
Ximen Qing promised to make the necessary arrangements. He took his guests to the arbor. Before long, Assistant Secretary Qian arrived. The three gentlemen played chess together.
Song was impressed by the magnificence and convenience of Ximen Qing's house. The books, pictures and furniture were all the best of their kind. In front of the screen stood a gilded tripod with the figures of the Eight Immortals. It was of very fine workmanship and several feet high. Incense was burning in it, and the smoke came out through the mouths of deer and storks. He went and examined it more closely.
"This tripod is beautifully made," he said to Ximen Qing. He turned to the others. "I wrote some time ago to Brother Liu to ask him to get me a pair of tripods like this. I am going to present them to Cai, but they haven't come yet. Siquan, where did you get yours?"
"It came from a man in Huai," Ximen Qing said.
They went on with their game. Ximen Qing ordered some dainty cakes and other refreshments to be brought, and bade the actors sing songs of the South.
"Our guest has not come yet," Song said. "It won't look right if we meet him with red faces."
"I don't believe a cup will do us any harm," An said. "It is terribly cold."
Song was about to send someone to hasten his guest, but one of his attendants said: "We have been already. Their Excellencies are playing chess, but they will be here soon." An told the actors to sing the Spring Song. Before it was over, Cai and Huang were announced. Song ordered everything to be cleared away. They put their robes straight and went out to welcome their guest.
Cai was wearing a plain gown and a gold-buckled girdle. He presented a card to Ximen Qing. An said: "This is his Lordship Ximen. He holds the office of Captain and is one of his Eminence's wards." Cai bowed to Ximen.
"I have long wished to meet you," he said.
Ximen Qing replied: "I shall do myself the honor of paying you a visit." After these greetings, they took off their ceremonial clothes, tea was brought, and they sat down to talk. Sometime afterwards, the tables were laid, and Cai took the place of honor. Cooks brought soup and cutlets and rice. The actors came with their list of plays, and Cai bade them play the story of the two faithful lovers. They played two acts, and the wine went around several times. Then the singers came and sang "With a Whip of Jade and a Prancing Steed, He Leaves the Imperial City." Cai laughed.
"Songyuan," he said, "this promises well for you. The black horse is a censor's horse, and the third noble seems like Liu of the long beard."
An said: "But we can't say that this is the day on which the Magistrate of Jiangzhou made his black gown wet with tears."
Everybody laughed. Ximen Qing told Chunhong to sing "We Have Made Report to the Golden Gate of Peace upon the Frontier."
Song was delighted. He said to Ximen Qing: "What a charming boy!"
"Ximen said: "He is one of my household, and comes from Yangzhou." Song took the boy's hand, and asked him to pour wine for him. Then he gave him three *qian* of silver, and the boy kowtowed to thank him.
The sun was going down. Cai saw that it was getting late, and told his servant to bring his clothes. He made ready to go. The others tried to persuade him to stay, but in vain. They went with him to the gate. Two officials were bidden to take presents to the wharf. As Song was going, he said to Ximen Qing: "I will not thank you today, since I am putting you to still further trouble." Then they all went away.
Ximen Qing went back and dismissed the actors. "I shall want you again the day after tomorrow," he said to them. "Be sure to bring some especially good singers. His Excellency is going to invite Governor Hou."
He called for wine and sent Daian for Scholar Wen. He sent Laian for Ying Bojue. The two men came almost at the same moment, made a reverence to their host, and sat down. The three boys sang and wine was served.
"The ladies are all coming to see you tomorrow," Ximen Qing said to Ying Bojue. "Have you engaged any singers or entertainers for them?"
"That's a nice thing to ask!" Bojue said. "How can you expect me to do all that, when I'm so poor? I've engaged a couple of singers, and I hope my sisters-in-law will come early."
In the inner court, the two Mistresses Meng were the first to go away. Aunt Yang was about to follow them, but Wu Yueniang asked her to stay longer. "Nun Xue has sent her novices to fetch the sacred texts," she said, "and you might as well stay and hear them read this evening."
"I should very much like to stay," Aunt Yang said, "but I have been asked to go to my nephew's betrothal party tomorrow. I cannot very well fail to go."
When she had gone, the ladies drank together. When the lamps were brought, the wives of the three clerks went away. Miss Duan stayed, and old woman Pan went to Jinlian's room. Aunt Wu, L Guijie, Miss Shen, Miss Yu, the nuns, Meng Yulou, Li Jiao'er, and Pan Jinlian, were left in Wu Yueniang's room.
When the boys began to bring in the things, they knew that the party in the outer court had broken up. Jinlian hurriedly went out and stood silently at the corner door. Ximen Qing, supported by Laian with a lantern, came rolling by. He had meant to go and see Ruyi'er, but, seeing Jinlian, he took her hand and went to her room. Laian went on to Yueniang's room to give her the cups and chopsticks.
Yueniang thought Ximen Qing was coming to her room, and she had sent Miss Shen, Miss Yu, and Guijie to stay with Li Jiao'er. "Is your father coming?" she said to Laian.
"He has gone to the Fifth Lady's room," Laian told her. Yueniang was annoyed.
"The fellow doesn't know what he's doing," she said to Yulou. "I was sure he would come here and go with you. I can't imagine why he has gone to her again. But, now I come to think of it, she has been looking lovesick these last few days. She doesn't seem able to leave him for a moment."
"Oh, never mind, Sister," Yulou said, "if we talk like this, it will look as though we wished to beat her at her own game. Didn't you notice how the nun poked fun at us, saying that, no matter where he went, he could not go beyond these six rooms? Let him do what he likes. We cannot control him."
"They must have arranged it beforehand," Yueniang said. "When she heard that the party in the outer court was over, she dashed out as though her life depended on it." She said to Xiaoyu: "There is no one in the kitchen. Shut the second door and tell the nuns to come. We will listen to their preaching." She asked Li Jiao'er, Miss Shen, Miss Duan, and Miss Yu to come back again.
"I have sent one of the young nuns to fetch the *True History of the Lady Huang*," she said. "Unfortunately, Aunt Yang has left us."
She told Yuxiao to make some good tea.
"You and I will take our turn with the tea," Yulou said to Li Jiao'er. "We must not trouble the Great Lady all the time." So they gave orders for tea. The table was set. The three nuns came and sat on the bed with their legs crossed, and the other ladies sat down and disposed themselves to listen. Yueniang washed her hands and burned incense. Then Nun Xue opened the text of the *True Story of the Lady Huang* and read:
We know that the Law never perisheth. It proceedeth into the void. The DAO is without life, and, when it giveth life, it advantageth us in no way. From the Holy Body are manifested the Eight Incarnations, and from the Eight Incarnations is manifested the Holy Body. Such is the brightness of the Lamp of Wisdom that it openeth a window to the world: so clear is the Mirror of Buddha that it shineth to the bottom of the dark way.
A hundred years is as the twinkling of an eye.
The four bodies of illusion are but shadows.
Yet, every day, people busy themselves in the dust; they make haste all day to compass their own ends. They know not what they do.
Only Nature is glorious and perfect.
As for them, they pursue the six roots of vanity and concupiscence. Though their achievements and their renown are known to all the world, yet they are but a dream. Though their dignity and their wealth make men amazed, they cannot escape a sudden end. As wind and fire they die away, and there is no exception either for old or young. The water wears away many a mountain.
After this, the nun read some short homilies and sang hymns. Then she began to tell the story of the Lady Huang, whence she sprang, how she read the sacred books and gave alms. How she died and was born again as a man, and how five men and women went up to Heaven at the same moment. She did not end her story before the second night watch.
Li Jiao'er's maid brought tea for the ladies, and Yulou's maid brought fruit and food, a large jar of wine, and a big pot of tea. Yueniang told Yuxiao to give the nuns cakes and dainties to eat with the tea.
"Now that the teachers have done," Guijie said, "it is my turn to offer you a song."
"You are very kind," Yueniang said.
"I will sing first," Miss Yu said.
"Very well," said Yueniang.
Then Miss Shen said: "When she has finished, I will sing."
Guijie would not have this. "What song would you like, Mother?" she asked. Yueniang asked her to sing "The Stillness of the Late Night Watch."
Guijie offered wine to all the ladies, then took her lute and sang to them. When she had finished, Miss Yu was about to take the lute, but Miss Shen took it from her. "I'll sing 'The Hanging of the Portraits in the Twelfth Month.' She began: The fifteenth day of the first month's the merry Feast of Lanterns. We take handfuls of incense and do homage to Heaven and Earth." Aunt Wu was sleepy. Before Miss Shen had finished, she drank her tea and went to Yueniang's bedroom to sleep. Afterwards, Guijie went to sleep with Li Jiao'er, Miss Duan with Yulou. The nuns went to Xue'e and Miss Yu and Miss Shen to Yuxiao. Yueniang herself slept with her sister-in-law. There is an ancient tradition that when a woman is with child she should never sit down on one side, or lie on one side. She should never listen to exciting music or look upon any immodest color. She should occupy all her time with poetry and books, with gold and jade. If she does this, she will give birth to a boy or a girl who will be intelligent and good. This we call the education of the child in the womb. Now that Yueniang was with child, she should not have allowed the nuns to tell these stories of life, death and reincarnation. In consequence of this, one of the Holy Ones came to her and, afterwards, her son mysteriously disappeared, so that the family of Ximen came to an end. It was very sad.

## 098

## Ch'un-mei Vilely Abuses Second Sister Shen; Yü-hsiao Spills the Beans to P'an Chin-lien & Pan Jinlian Quarrels with Wu Yueniang

The newly dug graves throughout the realm

are all those of the young;
One should start to cultivate one's virtue
before one's hair turns gray.
The fact that death and life are important
matters[1] must be understood;
The length of time one may suffer in Hell
is no trivial consideration.
If one's good karma has not been built up,
on what can one hope to rely?
Once one loses the status of a human being,[2]
when can it ever be recovered?
The path ahead of one is cloaked in darkness,
the thoroughfare is dangerous;
Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day
one should bear this in mind.[3]
THESE EIGHT LINES of verse merely reiterate the message that:
Good will be rewarded with good,
Evil will be rewarded with evil;[4]
Just as shadow follows shape,[5]
Or as valleys return an echo.
You may think that only those who:
Assume the lotus position to practice meditation,[6]
Will all be successful in reaping the true fruit.[7]
But even:
Simple men and simple women,[8]
Who cultivate piety at home,
are not precluded from achieving the Way.
Those who worship the Buddha,
Will benefit from his virtue;
Those who recite Buddha's name,
Will benefit from his kindness;
Those who consider the sutras,
Will grasp the Buddha's truth;
Those who practice meditation,
Will tread the Buddha's realm;
Those who achieve enlightenment,
Will exhibit the Buddha's truth.[9]
But:
There is nothing easy about it.[10]
There are many who:
Commit sin first and practice austerity later,
Or practice austerity first only to sin again.[11]
To take the case of Wu Yüeh-niang, although she received her just reward for daily:
Honoring goodness and reciting scriptures,
Worshipping Buddha and dispensing charity,
she ought not, on the present occasion, while:
She was pregnant with a child in her womb,[12]
to have listened to the recitation of such a piece of religious literature. Although whether one is fated to be rich or poor, to enjoy a long life or a short, or to be wise or foolish, may all be determined by the endowment one receives from one's parents at the time of conception; nevertheless, these things may also be affected by the environmental influences to which one is exposed during pregnancy.
In olden times, when mothers were pregnant, they did not sit in awkward positions, or lie upon their sides, and did not listen to lascivious sounds, or gaze upon suggestive sights.[13] They would amuse themselves with the practice of poetry and calligraphy, or the appreciation of exotic objects of gold or jade, and would engage blind musicians to entertain them with ancient lyrics. As a result, when they subsequently gave birth to children of either sex, they would be well-formed and attractive and would grow up to be clever and intelligent. This is the mode of prenatal education prescribed by King Wen of the Chou dynasty.[14]
On this occasion, when Wu Yüeh-niang was pregnant, she ought not to have ordered Buddhist nuns to recite precious scrolls that dealt with the revolving wheel of life and death. Later on, this inspired an ancient Buddha to manifest himself by:
Entering her womb and taking an abode,
only to subsequently vanish into thin air, so that she was left without an heir to carry on the family line, which was very much to be regretted. Truly:
The path ahead of one is clothed in darkness,
the thoroughfare is dangerous;
Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day
one should bear this in mind.
But this is a subsequent event; having mentioned it, we will say no more about it.
At this point, in the rear compound, once the recitation of the *Precious Scroll on Woman Huang* was finished, everyone went back to their rooms for the night.
Let us now return to the story of P'an Chin-lien, who had been standing for some time beside the postern gate when she saw Hsi-men Ch'ing coming by and, taking him by the hand, conducted him into her quarters.
When she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing simply sat down on her bed, she asked him, "Why aren't you taking your clothes off?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced the woman and proceeded to say with an ingratiating smile, "I came expressly to tell you that I would like to spend the night next door, and to ask you to get out the bag of sexual implements for me."
"You lousy jailbird!" the woman swore at him. "You think you can fool me with your tricks by putting such a good face on things, do you? If I hadn't been standing by the postern gate just now, you'd have been over there already and would hardly have had the patience to come ask me for anything. This is something that you and that splay-legged creature must have agreed on between you this morning, so that the two of you could go at it together. You're merely trying to fool me with a trumped up excuse for coming over here. It's not surprising that, a while ago, rather than sending a maidservant, you sent her to deliver that fur coat to me, and kowtow to me into the bargain. That lousy little splay-legged creature! Who do you take me for, that you should try to play such tricks on me? Back when Li P'ing-erh was still alive, you may have thought you could bury me alive, but:
The sparrow is no longer in that nest.
I'm not jealous of the likes of her."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Nothing of the kind ever happened. If she had not kowtowed to you, you would have been just as critical of her."
The woman thought to herself in silence for some time before saying, "I'll let you go then, but I won't let you take that bag of sexual implements with you. If you go at it with that splay-legged creature they'll get:
Polluted and unclean,
and are likely to remain contaminated when you come to sleep with me in the future."
"If you won't give them to me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I've come to depend on them. What am I to do?"
After they had disputed about it for what seemed like half a day, the woman tossed the silver clasp to him, saying, "If you insist, you can take this gadget with you."
"I guess that will have to do," said Hsi-men Ch'ing as he tucked it into his sleeve and started to stagger outside.
"Come back here," the woman said. "I've got something to ask you. No doubt you intend to:
Sleep together all night long,
staying on the same bed the whole time, which would cause even the two maidservants to feel embarrassed. It would be better if you were to sleep together for a while, and then get her to go sleep somewhere else."
"Who intends to sleep with her all that long?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing as he started outside.
The woman called him back again, saying, "Come over here. I've got something else to say to you. What are you in such a hurry about?"
"What else have you got to say?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Since I'm permitting you to sleep with her," the woman said, "go ahead and sleep with her. But I won't permit you to exchange any idle gossip with her:
Emboldening her to take liberties with me.
If I ever hear anything of that kind, you had better stay away from my place, or I'll bite your balls off."
"You crazy little whore!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You're nit-picking me to death."
So saying, he headed straight for Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door.
Ch'un-mei admonished the woman, saying, "Let him go. What's the point of trying to control him that way?
The more loquacious a mother-in-law gets,
The less her daughter-in-law will listen.
After all, you don't want to end up:
Feeling resentment and harboring hostility,
toward each other. And besides, it gets in the way of our enjoying a board game together."
On the one hand, she then proceeded to tell Ch'iu-chü to lock the postern gate, while on the other, she set up a table and laid out the pieces for a board game.
"Is my mother asleep yet?" the woman asked.
"No sooner did the party break up in the rear compound," said Ch'un-mei, "than she came back to her room and went to sleep."
There in their room Ch'un-mei and her mistress sat down to their board game. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in Li P'ing-erh's quarters and lifted aside the portiere, he found that Ju-i, together with Ying-ch'un and Hsiu-ch'un, were sitting on the k'ang eating their supper. On seeing Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, they jumped to their feet in consternation.
"Go ahead and finish your supper," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, he went into the parlor and sat down on a folding chair in front of Li P'ing-erh's portrait.
Before long, whom should he see but Ju-i, who came into the parlor with an ingratiating smile and said, "Father, it's cold in here. Why don't you go into the bedroom?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled her onto his lap with one hand, embraced her, and gave her a kiss; after which, he went into the bedroom and sat down on the front of the bed. A pot of tea was brewing on the brazier, and Ying-ch'un promptly poured out a cup for him.
Ju-i stood beside the k'ang warming herself at the brazier, as she said, "Father, you don't seem to have had much wine today. The party in the front compound must have broken up early."
"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I have to get an early start in order to go and pay my respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu on his boat. Were that not the case, I might well have stayed a little longer."
"Father," said Ju-i, "if you'd like some more wine, I can pour some for you. The table of dishes sent out from the rear compound as an offering for my mistress, together with a flask of Chin-hua wine, are still here. We have eaten the soup and rice but did not presume to touch the wine and the other dishes, leaving them for you to enjoy."
"What you've eaten is no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As far as something to eat for me is concerned, I don't need anything else. Just a few saucers of delicacies will do. But I don't want any of the Chin-hua wine."
He then turned to Hsiu-ch'un and said, "You take a lantern and go into the garden, to my studio in the Hidden Spring Grotto. There is a jug of grape wine there. Ask Wang Ching to get it out for you. That's the wine I'd like to drink."
Hsiu-ch'un assented, took the lantern, and set out on her errand, while Ying-ch'un hastily set up a table and got out the delicacies he had requested.
"Sister," said Ju-i, "open up the containers and let me select a delicacy or two for Father to consume with his wine."
Thereupon, under the lamplight, she chose a saucer of duck meat, a saucer of squab, a saucer of pickled herring, a saucer of lotus root and bean sprouts, a saucer of jellyfish flavored with chives, a saucer of roast chitterlings and fermented sausage, a saucer of sautéed whitebait, and a saucer of sautéed bamboo shoots flavored with potherb mustard greens. The two square containers, each holding four boxes of delicacies, were laid out on the table, and a goblet and pair of chopsticks that had been wiped clean were placed before Hsi-men Ch'ing. Before long, Hsiu-ch'un came back with the wine. After it had been opened up and heated, Ju-i poured some into a goblet and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to taste. It turned out to be an incomparably fine wine of a dark red color.
Ju-i moved closer and remained standing next to the table in order to pour wine for Hsi-men Ch'ing and also personally peeled roasted chestnuts for him, to go with the wine. Ying-ch'un, who understood the situation, tactfully withdrew and went back to the kitchen, where she sat down with Hsiu-ch'un.
As soon as Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that they were alone, he had the woman sit on his knee and embraced her, as the two of them drank wine together, passing the same goblet back and forth between them.
The woman continued to peel chestnuts and put them into his mouth, while Hsi-men Ch'ing unfastened her jade-colored silk jacket that opened down the middle by undoing the buttons, removed her bodice, revealing the creamy texture of her pale and fragrant breasts, and proceeded to fondle her nipples with his hand, as he exclaimed, "My child, the one thing your daddy loves more than anything else about you is the pure whiteness of your flesh, which is just like your mistress's. When I embrace you, it feels just as though I were embracing her."
"Needless to say," Ju-i responded with a laugh, "my mistress's body was whiter than mine. It seems to me that although the Fifth Lady looks good enough, her appearance is only mediocre, her flesh displaying tints of both red and white. The color of her flesh is not as white as that of the First Lady or the Third Lady in the rear compound, though the Third Lady's skin is marred by a few pockmarks. Sun Hsüeh-o, on the other hand, is not only naturally attractive but has pure white skin and is petite in stature."
She then went on to say, "There's something else I want to bring up with you. Sister Ying-ch'un has a pin for the front of the coiffure in the shape of a Taoist goddess that she is prepared to give to me, but she would like to ask you for the gold tiger-shaped tiara that our mistress used to wear, so that she can wear it during the New Year's celebrations next month. Are you willing to let her have it?"

"If you don't have anything for the front of your coiffure," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have a silversmith make something out of gold for you. Your mistress's jewelry box has been taken back to the master suite by the First Lady, and I would hardly feel comfortable asking for it."
"All right," the woman said, "have another tiger-shaped tiara made for me then."
So saying, she moved in front of him and kowtowed in thanks.
After the two of them had been drinking for what seemed like half a day, Ju-i said, "Father, why not ask my sister to come share a cup of wine with us, lest she feel resentful at being left out."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then called for Ying-ch'un, but there was no response.
The woman then went back to the kitchen herself and said, "Sister, Father is calling for you."
Ying-ch'un, accordingly, went back into his presence, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ju-i, "Pour her a cup of wine, and pick out a few chopsticks' worth of delicacies and put them on a tray for her."
Ying-ch'un stood beside them while she consumed what had been offered to her.
"Why don't you call Sister Hsiu-ch'un to come in and have something as well," the woman said.
Ying-ch'un went off on this errand but came back and said, "She doesn't want anything to eat."
After some time, she picked up her bedding from the k'ang and headed to the kitchen to sleep, saying, "If I don't go back there, but try to sleep on the bench in the parlor, I'll freeze to death. I'm going to the kitchen to sleep on the k'ang with Hsiu-ch'un. Father's tea is on the brazier. You can pour it for him yourself."
"Sister," said Ju-i, "close the back door on your way out, so I can put the latch on it."
Ying-ch'un, carrying her bundle of bedding, then went straight back to the rear.
Meanwhile, the woman, after continuing to drink wine with Hsi-men Ch'ing for a while, put the utensils away, poured out some tea for Hsi-men Ch'ing, and put the latch on the back door.
It so happens that she had prepared a separate set of bedding for Hsi-men Ch'ing to sleep on, replete with satin and chiffon, and a pillow with an embroidered pattern, all of which had been heating on the k'ang until it was nice and warm.
The woman then asked him, "Father, do you want to sleep on the k'ang, or on the bed?"
"I'd prefer to sleep on the bed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ju-i then proceeded to bundle up the bedding and take it over to put in place on the bed. Telling Hsi-men Ch'ing that he should get into bed and take off his clothes, she helped him off with his boots. She then fetched some water, took it into the parlor, and washed her private parts, closed the door to the bedroom, and put the lampstand on a small table beside the bed, after which she took off her drawers, climbed onto the bed, and bored her way under the covers, where she and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to hug and embrace each other, as they:
Lay down head to head on the same pillow.
When the woman manipulated his organ with her hand, she found that the clasp was already in place:
It was aroused and its head sprang up:
So that she was both happy and fearful.
The two of them:
Stuck out their clove-shaped tongues,
and proceeded to engage each other. When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was reclining face-up on the bedding:
Without a stitch of clothing on her,[15]
he was afraid that she would be cold and, reaching for her bodice, placed it over her chest, after which, he took her pair of feet in his two hands and started thrusting and retracting for all he was worth.
The woman was reduced to:
Panting and puffing,
as he plunged away at her until:
Her face was fiery red.
"This bodice was given to me by my mistress while she was still alive," she explained.
"My own darling!" exclaimed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That's not a problem. Tomorrow, I'll get half a bolt of red chiffon from the shop, which you can use to make underwear for yourself. You can also make a pair of red chiffon sleeping shoes to wear on your feet when you're indulging me."
"That would be fine," the woman said. "After you've given it to me, I'll make them up as soon as I have the time to do so."
"I happen to have forgotten," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, " how old you are this year, as well as your maiden name, and your position among your siblings. All I can remember is that your husband is surnamed Hsiung."
"His surname is Hsiung, and his full name is Hsiung Wang," the woman said. "My maiden name is Chang, and I am the fourth sibling in my generation. This year I am thirty-one years old."
"It turns out then that I am one year older than you," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
On the one hand, he continued to couple with her, while on the other, he called out to her, "Chang the Fourth, my child, if you will devote yourself wholeheartedly to serving me, when the First Lady gives birth to her child, you can be responsible for breast-feeding it. And if you are fortunate enough yourself to come up with so much as:
A single boy or half a girl,
I'll raise your status to that of one of my concubines, so you can take over your mistress's place in the nest. What do you think of that?"
"My husband is already dead," the woman said, "and I have no relatives left on my side of the family. I will be more than happy to devote myself single-mindedly to you, Father. I am not of two minds about it, having no wish to leave your home before I die. If you deign to take pity on me, that would be wonderful."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that her response was just what he fancied, he was more delighted than ever. Grasping her two snow-white legs, which were adorned with a pair of green silk shoes with an embroidered pattern, he continued to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans. The two of them rammed away at each other, thrusting and retracting, to such effect that the woman, in her abject position, left nothing unsaid as she gave vent to her feelings:
Groaning in a quavery voice,
As her starry eyes grew dim.
After some time, he told her to get down on all fours and stick her two feet straight back, while he put the red satin bedspread over him and proceeded to straddle her body, as he stuck his organ into her orifice.
Under the lamplight, he took hold of her snow-white bottom and began banging away at it, as he called out, "Chang the Fourth, if you keep on crying, 'My own daddy,' without stopping, I'll come for you."
The woman, in her abject position, proceeded to raise her haunches in response to him, while:
In a trembling voice and faint tones,
She called out, "Daddy!" unceasingly.
They continued to play with each other for a full two-hour period before Hsi-men Ch'ing finally ejaculated. Sometime later, he pulled out his chowrie handle, and the woman took a handkerchief and wiped it off for him, after which they fell asleep in each other's arms and did not wake up until the cock crowed during the fifth watch.
The woman then began to suck him off, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said to her, "The Fifth Lady once sucked away at me for half the night, and, fearing lest I get cold, wouldn't even let me get out of bed to urinate, but swallowed it for me."
"That's no problem," the woman said. "I'll swallow it for you too, if you like."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then actually pissed a whole bladderful of his urine into the woman's mouth. The two of them continued their:
Impassioned love-making.
In all its myriad forms,
as they went at it together all night long.
The next day, the woman got up first, opened the door, and fetched a basin and towel for him, as Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his clothes and performed his ablutions. Upon leaving, he headed for the front compound, where he told Tai-an to dispatch two orderlies to take the gilded Eight Immortals tripod from its place of honor in the summerhouse, have a note written to accompany it, and carry it to Sung Ch'iao-nien at the office of the regional investigating censor of Shantung, where, after it had been duly delivered, he was to solicit a written reply. He also told Ch'en Ching-chi to seal up a bolt of satin brocade, and a bolt of variegated satin, and have Ch'in-t'ung stow them in a felt bag and saddle his horse for him, so he could make an early departure to go pay his respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu at the port on the New Canal.
He was engaged in eating his breakfast congee in Yüeh-niang's room, when she asked him, "Are all of us expected to go to Brother Ying the Second's place today? We had better leave someone behind to look after the place. One of us sisters should remain at home to keep company with Sister-in-law Wu."
"I've already prepared five sets of presents for the occasion," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Yours includes a waistband, a gold pendant, and five mace of silver; while those for the other four of you consist of two mace of silver and a handkerchief apiece. All of you ought to go together. After all, my daughter Ta-chieh will be here to keep Sister-in-law Wu company. That will do just as well. I have already promised Ying the Second that all of you would come to his place for the occasion."
Yüeh-niang, upon hearing this, did not have another word to say on the subject.
Li Kuei-chieh, then, proposed to take her leave, saying, "Mother, I'm going to go home today."
"What's your hurry?" responded Yüeh-niang. "Why don't you stay over another day?"
"I have no reason to deceive you, Mother," said Li Kuei-chieh, "but my mother is not feeling well, and my elder sister is not at home, so there's no one to look after the place. Someday soon, during the first month of the coming year, I'll come and stay for a couple of days."
She then said her farewells to Hsi-men Ch'ing, while Yüeh-niang filled two food boxes with delicacies for her and presented her with a tael of silver, after which, having drunk a serving of tea, she was sent on her way.
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing put on his formal clothes and go out to the front compound.
Unexpectedly, P'ing-an came in and reported, "His Honor, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, has come to pay you his respects."
Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately went out to welcome him into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities.
Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, who was attired in a round-collared robe with a mandarin square, a pair of earmuffs, and a girdle with a plaque of gold around his waist, after making his obeisance in the reception hall, said, "Not having seen you for a long time, I have been negligent in paying my respects. I have failed, thus far, to congratulate you on your lofty promotion."
"I am much obliged for your magnanimity," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I, too, have not yet been able to offer you my congratulations."
When they had finished expressing:
The sentiments they had felt while apart,
they sat down in the positions of guest and host, and an attendant provided a serving of tea.
Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung then said, "I see your fine steed is waiting for you. Where are you going?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing explained, "The prefect of Chiu-chiang, Ts'ai Hsiu, who is the ninth son of His Honor Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the capital, is passing by on his way to court. Yesterday, the regional investigating censor of Shantung, Sung Ch'iao-nien, along with Secretary An Ch'en of the Ministry of Works, Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Ministry of Revenue, and Huang Pao-kuang from the Imperial Brickyard, borrowed my place in order to host a banquet in his honor. Since he took the trouble to present me with a calling card upon his arrival yesterday, I could hardly fail to return the courtesy by paying a call upon him. I am concerned lest he depart before I am able to do so."
"There is a request that I have come to trouble you with," said Ching Chung. "Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's term of office will expire at the end of the year next month, and he will submit a report evaluating the performance of the local officials in his jurisdiction. I hope that I can prevail upon you to put in a good word with him on my behalf. Upon learning that he was entertained at your place yesterday, I have screwed up the courage to presume on your goodwill in this matter.
Should I advance but an inch in my career,
I will never dare to forget it."
"This is a good deed," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Since you and I are on the best of terms, how could I fail to comply with your command? You should write out an explanatory note for me. Fortunately, he will be attending another banquet at my place the day after tomorrow, so I can speak to him in person. That would be even better."
Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung promptly got up from his place and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I am deeply moved by your lavish generosity, I will:
Carry rings and knot grass,[16] and never forget it."
He then went on to say, "I have already prepared a copy of my curriculum vitae for you."
So saying, he called in his clerk to get it out and presented it for Hsi-men Ch'ing's perusal with his own hands. It read as follows:
The military director-in-chief from Shantung, and assistant commander of the left battalion of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, Ching Chung, who is thirty-one years of age, is a native of the ultramontane prefecture of T'an-chou. Owing to the military accomplishments of his ancestors, he was promoted to the post of commander of the left battalion of the said guard. Having passed the military examinations in such-and such a year, he was successively promoted to his present post as military director-in-chief of Chi-chou.
The years in which these successive promotions took place were duly enumerated.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading this document, Ching Chung also pulled out of his sleeve a card describing the gift he proposed to give him and presented it to him, saying, "This meager gift is offered in the hope that you will consent to accept it with a smile."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the words "Two hundred piculs of white rice"[17] were written on it, he said, "Whoever heard of such a thing? This is something that I absolutely cannot accept. To do so would make a mockery of the relationship between friends."
"That is not so," responded Ching Chung. "If you refuse to accept it, Ssu-ch'üan, you can pass it on to Sung Ch'iao-nien if you like. It amounts to the same thing. How can you be so adamant in refusing to take it? If you won't accept it, I will not presume to trouble you any further."
After objecting repeatedly, Hsi-men Ch'ing finally consented to take it, saying as he did so, "I will accept it provisionally. When I have spoken to him day after tomorrow, I'll send someone to report back to you."
After the tea had been twice replenished, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung expressed his gratitude with a bow, got up, and departed.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen him off, he instructed P'ing-an, saying, "If anyone comes to see me, simply accept their calling cards, and if you have to vacate your post at the gate for any reason, depute four orderlies to guard the gate on your behalf."
When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and, accompanied by Ch'in-t'ung, set off to pay his respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu.
To resume our story, after Yü-hsiao had seen Hsi-men Ch'ing on his way that morning, she went over to P'an Chin-lien's quarters and said, "Fifth Lady, why did you not remain in the rear compound yesterday? Last night, the ladies all gathered there to hear Nun Hsüeh recite the *Precious Scroll on Woman Huang*, which went on until late in the evening. After it was over, the Second Lady provided the company with tea, and a maidservant from the Third Lady's quarters also served wine and appetizers, after which they listened to Li Kuei-chieh and Second Sister Shen compete in singing songs for them. It was the third watch before we were able to go to sleep.
"My mistress was really critical of you, Fifth Lady. She said that when you heard that Father's party in the front compound had broken up, you couldn't wait to head off to your own quarters; that yesterday was the eve of the Third Lady's birthday, but that you wouldn't even let him visit her quarters, you were so anxious to monopolize his favors. The Third Lady responded by saying, 'How embarrassing can you get? Who has the patience to contend for him? After all, since he has all these quarters to choose from, let him go wherever he chooses.' "
"I can hardly respond to that without resorting to obscenity!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "Has she been fucked so blind she doesn't have an aperture left to see out of? Does she really suppose that it was my quarters he slept in last night?"
"He generally does choose to frequent your quarters in the front compound," said Yü-hsiao. "Since the death of the Sixth Lady, who else's quarters should Father prefer to frequent?"
Chin-lien said:
"Though chickens may not piddle,
People all have to go somewhere.
When somebody dies, there's always someone to take their place."
Yü-hsiao went on to say, "My mistress is really annoyed at you for asking Father for that fur coat without consulting her. Later on, when Father went back to the master suite in order to return the keys, my mistress really gave him a hard time about it. She said, 'When Li P'ing-erh died, you were angry that anyone would even consider reassigning the maidservants in her quarters, but now, you're taking the fur coat she was so fond of, and giving it away to someone else to wear, without saying so much as a word about it.' Father protested, 'But she doesn't have a fur coat of her own to wear right now.' To which my mistress responded, 'How can you say she doesn't have a fur coat to wear? There is a fur coat available for her, but she refuses to wear it and adamantly insists on having this particular fur coat to wear. It's lucky for her that Li P'ing-erh is dead, so she can hanker after her things. If she were not dead, she could hardly presume to covet them.' "

"She should stop talking through her cunt!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "A husband has the right to do as he sees fit. Are you my mother-in-law, seeking to exert control over me? I'm monopolizing him, am I? No doubt I've managed to tie him up by the legs with a length of rope, the better to monopolize him for a while. You're just shooting off your cunt as usual."
"What I'm here to tell you," said Yü-hsiao, "you must keep to yourself. Don't let anyone else know I told you about it. Today, Li Kuei-chieh has already left for home, and my mistress is putting on her jewelry. She wanted to leave Sun Hsüeh-o at home today, to keep Sister-in-law Wu company, but Father wouldn't agree to it. He has already prepared gifts to present for the occasion and wants all five of you to go together. You ought to start getting ready to go yourself."
When she had finished speaking, Yü-hsiao headed back to the rear compound.
Chin-lien, accordingly, sat down before the mirror:
Putting on makeup and applying powder,[18]
Sticking flowery trinkets in her hair,
while sending Ch'un-mei to ask Meng Yü-lou, "What color of clothing are you planning to wear today?"
"Father will be annoyed if we change out of mourning garb," said Meng Yü-lou. "He wants us all to wear pale-colored clothing."
The five ladies agreed that they would wear white frets over their chignons, with pearl headbands, covered with kingfisher-blue kerchiefs of gold lamé damask. On their heads:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles,
while below, they wore pink silk brocade jackets that opened down the middle, over blue silk skirts. Wu Yüeh-niang alone donned a white crepe gilt-ridged cap under a sealskin toque, with a pearl headband and pearl earrings, while below, she wore an aloeswood-colored jacket of figured silk brocade emblazoned with a mandarin square, over a sand-green brocade skirt. When they were ready to set out in one large sedan chair and four small sedan chairs, which had been furnished with brass foot-warmers, accompanied by Wang Ching, Ch'i-t'ung, and Lai-an, and with orderlies shouting to clear the way, they said goodbye to Sister-in-law Wu, the three nuns, and Old Mrs. P'an and headed for Ying Po-chüeh's house to attend the full-month celebration for the birth of his son. But no more of this.
To resume our story, in Li P'ing-erh's quarters in the front compound, Ju-i and Ying-ch'un refurbished the table of delicacies that had been left over from Hsi-men Ch'ing's wine drinking the night before. They had the flask of Chin-hua wine and poured out a flask of the grape wine as well. That noon, they invited Old Mrs. P'an and Ch'un-mei to join them, as well as Big Sister Yü in order to play and sing for their entertainment. The four or five of them had forgathered there and were in the midst of enjoying their repast, but this was one of those occasions on which:
Something was bound to happen.
Ch'un-mei happened to remark, "Second Sister Shen is said to be adept at singing songs to the tune 'The Hanging Portrait.' Why don't we send someone to the rear compound and get her to come here so we can induce her to sing a song to that tune for us?"
Ying-ch'un was about to send Hsiu-ch'un on this errand, when who should appear but Ch'un-hung, who came in and started to warm himself at the brazier.
"You lousy little jailbird of a southerner!" Ch'un-mei said to him. "How come you didn't go to accompany the sedan chairs today?"
"Father deputed Wang Ching to accompany them," said Ch'un-hung, "and told me to stay home and look after the house."
"You lousy little jailbird of a southerner!" resumed Ch'un-mei. "You must be frozen, or you wouldn't have barged in here to warm yourself at the fire."
She then said to Ying-ch'un, "Pour out half a cup of wine for him to drink."
Turning back to Ch'un-hung, she went on, "When you've finished drinking it, go back to the rear compound on my behalf, and ask Second Sister Shen to come here. Tell her that I want her to sing a song for Old Mrs. P'an."
Ch'un-hung promptly finished off the wine and headed back to the rear compound. Who could have anticipated that Second Sister Shen was sitting in the master suite, together with Sister-in-law Wu, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, the three nuns, and Yü-hsiao, engaged in drinking a serving of tea flavored with coriander and sesame seeds?
Unexpectedly, they saw Ch'un-hung lift aside the portiere and come in, saying, "Second Sister Shen, the young lady in the front compound wants you to come sing a song for their entertainment."
"The young lady of the household is right here," responded Second Sister Shen. "Do you mean to say that another young lady has appeared?"
"It is Ch'un-mei from the front compound who is calling for you," said Ch'un-hung.
"What's so special about Ch'un-mei," responded Second Sister Shen, "that gives her the right to order me about? Big Sister Yü is there, who can do just as well as I can. I am singing here in order to entertain Sister-in-law Wu."
"That's all right," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Second Sister Shen, you might as well go ahead, and come back later."
Second Sister Shen simply remained sitting where she was, without making a move.
Ch'un-hung went straight back to the front compound and said to Ch'un-mei, "I summoned her, but she wouldn't come. They are all sitting there together in the master suite."
"Tell her that I'm the one calling for her," said Ch'un-mei, "then she'll come."
"I told her that it was you," said Ch'un-hung. "I said, 'It is the young lady in the front compound who is calling for you.' But she was not affected by that, saying, 'The young lady of the household is right here. Do you mean to say that another young lady has emerged out of nowhere?' I said, 'It is Ch'un-mei,' and she said, 'Since when has Ch'un-mei had the status to order me around? I'm too busy right now, singing for Sister-in-law Wu.' Sister-in-law Wu actually said, 'You might as well go ahead, and come back later,' but she refused to come."
If Ch'un-mei had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them:
The spirits of her Three Corpses became agitated;
The breaths of her Five Viscera ascended to Heaven.[19]
A spot of red appeared beside each ear, and
In an instant her cheeks turned purple.
Before anyone could stop her, like a whirlwind, she swept into the master suite, pointed her finger at Second Sister Shen, and began a tirade against her, saying, "How dare you say of me to a page boy that 'another young lady has emerged out of nowhere,' or express amazement that I should have the nerve to order you around? Are you the wife of some regional commander, that I would not dare send for? Whose cunt do you suppose I was squeezed out of, only to be sized up by the likes of you, who pronounce that I've emerged out of nowhere? As for you, you're nothing but a lousy dog-fucked blind whore, who frequents:
The doors of a thousand households,
The gates of ten thousand families.
How long have you been coming to this household, that you have the audacity to evaluate its members? And what kind of presentable song suites are you able to perform? You merely cast about with your:
Oily mouth and canine tongue,
Plowing the eastern ditch, and
Harrowing the western ditch,
in search of:
Suggestive songs and lewd tunes,
Not worth committing to writing,
and then start:
Assuming attitudes and putting on airs.
I don't know how many professional singing girls from the licensed quarter have performed here. What makes you so special? That whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo, may hold you in high regard, but we here do nothing of the kind. You can repeat what I say to that whore if you like. I'm not afraid of you. You would do well to get out of here as quick as you can. Or else, like a dishonest nanny, I'll have you:
Driven away from this door for good."
Sister-in-law Wu tried to intervene, saying, "You should stop bandying words that way immediately."
Second Sister Shen was reduced by this tirade to staring with wide-open eyes, but:
Though she dared to be angry,
She dared not speak.
"Ai-ya-ya!" she exclaimed in due course. "How can this young lady be so crude? I didn't say anything wrong to the servant just now that would justify such a spate of uninhibited abuse.
If there is no room for me here,
There are other places I can go."[20]
This only made Ch'un-mei angrier than ever, and she continued to curse her, saying, "You lousy blind whore! You're ready to be:
Laid by every man in the street, and
Fucked by every guy in the alley.
Since your family has been blessed with such a fine young lady as yourself, who is possessed of such a temperament, you ought hardly to spend your time begging for food and clothing in other peoples' homes, and singing for their amusement. You'd better get out of here immediately, and never come back again."
"I'm no dependent of your household," protested Second Sister Shen.
"If you were a dependent of this household," responded Ch'un-mei, "I'd have the page boys pluck the hair off your head."
Sister-in-law Wu intervened, saying, "My child. Why are you acting up this way today? You had better go back to the front compound."
Ch'un-mei simply remained where she was, without making a move.
Second Sister Shen then got down off the k'ang, weeping and wailing, said goodbye to Sister-in-law Wu, and collected her bag of clothing. She was unwilling to wait for a sedan chair, but asked Sister-in-law Wu to send P'ing-an across the street to summon Hua-t'ung, so he could escort her back to the home of Han Tao-kuo.
Ch'un-mei, having vented her spleen, then made her way back to the front compound.
After she had left, Sister-in-law Wu turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yü-hsiao and said, "She must have been drinking wine up front before coming back here. Otherwise, how could she have resorted to such offensive language? It was an embarrassment to me the way she carried on. She could just as well have allowed her to take her time in getting her things together, rather than driving her out so precipitously, and without even arranging for a page boy to escort her.
If the water is too deep, no one can cross it.
What did she expect her to do? It is really upsetting."
"They probably had been drinking up front," agreed Yü-hsiao.
To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei returned to the front compound, she was still in a fit of high dudgeon and, turning to the company assembled there, said, "I gave that lousy blind whore a piece of my mind and saw to it that she was driven out of the house forthwith. If it hadn't been for the intervention of Sister-in-law Wu, I would have given that lousy blind whore a couple of good slaps in the face. She still doesn't seem to know who I am. When I called for her, she had the nerve to put on quite a scene:
Assuming attitudes and putting on airs."
Ying-ch'un admonished her, saying:
"For every branch you chop down,
A hundred trees are threatened.
You ought to be a little more tactful. Big Sister Yü is here, and you keep ranting about blind whores."
"That's not it at all," said Ch'un-mei. "Big Sister Yü has been performing in this household for lo these many years, and all that time she has never spoken ill of anyone of whatever status, high or low. When called upon to sing, she has sung. Since when has she exhibited the nerve of this lousy blind whore, who can only perform such a limited selection of tunes? What presentable song suites does that whore know? And yet she continues to put on such outlandish airs.
Trying first this and then that,
all she can come up with are the vulgar suggestive words of tunes such as 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope' and 'Shrouding the Southern Branch,' that are scarcely fit to be performed in the best company. I no sooner heard her propose to sing such songs here than I sensed that she was trying to push Big Sister Yü aside so she could take her place."
"Something like that did happen," said Big Sister Yü. "Last night, the First Lady asked me to sing some songs, but she promptly grabbed the balloon guitar away from me and said that she would sing first. After which, the First Lady said, 'Big Sister Yü, let her sing first, and you can sing afterwards.' "
Big Sister Yü then went on to say, "Young lady, you ought not to hold it against her. After all, she was not familiar with the relative standings of the people in this household and didn't know how it was appropriate to respond to you. Such things are not easy to understand."
"I pointed that out to her just now," said Ch'un-mei. "I told her she could report back to that lousy whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo. 'You can repeat my words to her if you like,' I said. 'I'm not afraid of her.' "
"My child," protested Old Mrs. P'an, "you have no reason to get so worked up about it."
"Let me pour out a cup of wine for my elder sister, in order to assuage her anger," said Ju-i.
"This daughter of mine," joshed Ying-ch'un, "is prone to vent her anger whenever she is annoyed."
She then went on to say, "Big Sister Yü, why don't you choose a set of good songs and perform them in order to propitiate her?"
Big Sister Yü, accordingly, picked up the balloon guitar and said, "Let me sing a set of songs for Old Mrs. P'an and the young lady to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope' on the topic 'Ts'ui Ying-ying Makes a Fuss in Her Boudoir.' "[21]
"You concentrate on your singing," said Ju-i, "while I pour out some wine."
Ying-ch'un then picked up the cup of wine and offered it to Ch'un-mei, saying, "Enough! Enough! My elder sister, although you've been angered and annoyed, be good enough to down this cup of wine offered you by your mother."
Ch'un-mei couldn't help laughing, as she chided Ying-ch'un, saying, "You crazy little whore! You're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"
"Big Sister Yü," she went on to say, "don't sing those songs to the tune 'Sheep on the Mountain Slope.' Sing that set of songs to the tune 'River Water, with Two Variations' for us."
Big Sister Yü stood up beside them and strummed her balloon guitar, as she sang:
My flowerlike countenance and moonlike allure
have faded completely away.
The double gates are always closed.
It is just the time when the east wind is chilly,
Fine rain sprinkles continuously, and
Fallen red petals by the thousands dot the ground.
I am too indolent to burn another coil of incense,
And reluctant to pick up my needle.
My emaciated body is cadaverous,
Beset as it is by spectral visitations.
When I reexamine the old feelings that
we had for each other,
Sorrow weighs down the turquoise peaks
of my painted eyebrows;

Which only serves to arouse the distaste
of my young lover,
So that, for some time, despite the orioles and the flowers,
I have not bothered to roll up my curtain.[22]
TO THE SAME TUNE:
The courtyard, shaded by its locust trees,[23]
is as tranquil as can be.
The plantain flowers have just opened.
I can see the orioles flying in pairs,
And the fluttering of the butterflies,
But my lover is as distant as the heavens.
Atop the tall willows cicadas are murmuring.[24]
In the limpid waves the mandarin ducks play.
As I pass before the railing,
And sit down by the poolside,
All I can hear is someone singing a
lotus-gathering song,
Which so affects me that a myriad
sorrows invade my breast.[25]
I pick up the handle of my delicate fan
fashioned of fragrant silk,
On which is written half a lyric to the
tune "The Lover's Return."
TO THE SAME TUNE:
As for the steaming hot weather of the summer,
I have managed to endure it.
A new coolness has invaded my brocade curtains.
Though lighted by flaring lantern-wicks,
And followed by the glimmer of the moon,
My shadow is all alone, with no one to address.
The migrating geese are flying toward the South;
The geese return, but my lover has not returned.[26]
Envisioning the girth of his waist, I have
made up his winter clothing;
But I don't know where he is dallying, and
have no reliable news of him.
I've entrusted his garments to a traveler
to deliver to him;
But the distance is great, and the clothes
may arrive too late.
TO THE SAME TUNE:
More than once, I have ventured to ask
the plum blossoms,
"How emaciated have I recently become?"
They say my face has lost its fragrance,
And my emotions their jadelike quality.
I have withered before the flowering branches.
Reluctantly, I heat the kingfisher-hued quilt,
And light the incense burner night after night,
In the expectation of finding loving comfort;[27]
But my dreams are broken and my spirits upset.[28]
All night long, I am unable to sleep,
and can find no rest;
My pillow is cold, and on top of that,
my lamp sputters out.
All by myself, there is no one with whom
to discuss my plight;
No matter how I try, I can't ever forget
the love of my heart.[29]
The singing continued for the entertainment of the company. But no more of this.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had paid his respects to Prefect Ts'ai Hsiu at the port on the New Canal, he returned home.
No sooner did he dismount at the gate than P'ing-an reported, "Today, His Honor Ho Yung-shou from the yamen sent a retainer to ask you to come there first thing in the morning. Some robbers have been arrested, and the case is scheduled for trial. Also, His Honor Hu Shih-wen, the prefect of Tung-p'ing, has sent you the gift of a hundred copies of the calendar for the coming year, and His Honor, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, has sent you the gift of a freshly slaughtered pig, a jug of mung bean wine, and four packets of silver. Your son-in-law has taken charge of these things but has not ventured to write a thank-you note for them, since he is waiting for a decision from you. The messenger who brought the latter gifts is going to return this evening in order to speak to you. A return note was written for His Honor Hu Shih-wen, however, and the messenger was rewarded with a mace of silver. In addition, your kinsman Ch'iao Hung has sent you a card inviting you for a drink at his place tomorrow."
Tai-an also brought him the reply he had received from Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, saying, "I delivered the tripod to the office of the regional investigating censor, and His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien said that he would come to repay you for it tomorrow. He rewarded me and the two orderlies who carried it with five mace of silver and also sent you a hundred copies of the new calendar."
Hsi-men Ch'ing summoned Ch'en Ching-chi to ask what had been done with the four packets of silver and was told that they had already been delivered to the master suite.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded into the reception hall, and Ch'un-hung promptly reported his return to Ch'un-mei and company, saying, "Father has arrived home. Are you going to continue your drinking here?"
"You crazy little jailbird of a southerner!" responded Ch'un-mei. "So Father has come home. Let him do as he pleases. What's it got to do with us? Since the ladies of the household are not at home, there's no reason for him to come here."
The group of them, consequently, continued drinking and joking with each other, without venturing to make a move.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived in the master suite, Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns all got out of the way and went to sit down in another room. Yü-hsiao came forward to relieve him of his outer garments and, after he had taken a seat, set up a table in order to feed him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then summoned Lai-hsing and told him to order table settings, saying, "On the thirtieth, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is going to host a party here to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng. On the first, we will need to sacrifice a pig and a sheep here at home in order to fulfill the vow I made after encountering the storm on my way back from the capital. And on the third, I have invited the two eunuch directors Liu and Hsüeh, along with Chou Hsiu and the others from the Regional Military Command, to attend a party in celebration of my official promotion."
When he had finished issuing these instructions, Yü-hsiao, who was standing beside him, asked, "Father, when I have set up the table for you, what kind of wine should I pour for you to drink?"
"You can serve whatever dishes you have at hand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "There is that mung bean wine that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung sent me just now. Why don't you bring it here and open it so I can see what it tastes like."
Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-an, who had come back from escorting the ladies to Ying Po-chüeh's place.
Yü-hsiao promptly brought in the wine, broke open the clay stopper, poured some of it into a goblet, and handed it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to taste. After swallowing a mouthful, he found that it was pure green in color and possessed a:
Robust and lingering flavor.[30]
"Pour some more of it for me to drink," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
In no time at all, a repast was set out for him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to consume it there in the master suite.
To resume our story, Lai-an, together with an orderly, took two lanterns with them and set out that evening to escort Yüeh-niang and the other ladies back home. Yüeh-niang was wearing a fur coat of white ermine over a lavender silk jacket and a kingfisher-blue skirt. Li Chiao-erh and the others wore sable coats over white satin jackets and lilac-colored brocaded skirts. It happens that when Yüeh-niang saw that Chin-lien was wearing Li P'ing-erh's fur coat, she had given Chin-lien's old coat to Sun Hsüeh-o to wear.
Upon arriving in the master suite, they all bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing. Sun Hsüeh-o, alone, kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and, after getting to her feet, also kowtowed to Yüeh-niang. They then went into the adjacent room and paid their respects to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns.
Yüeh-niang then went back and sat down to chat with Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "When Ying the Second's wife saw that all of us had come for the occasion, she was as happy as can be. Their next-door neighbor Mrs. Ma was there, together with Ying the Elder's wife, his cousin Tu the Third's wife, and ten or so other female guests. They had engaged two singing girls for our entertainment. The baby whose birth was being celebrated has a flat head and a chubby face. The mother of the child, his concubine Ch'un-hua, looks somewhat darker and thinner than she did before. She wore a long face, like a donkey's, indicating that she is not very happy. The tension between his wife and concubine has disturbed the household, and there are not enough people to take care of it. When we were on the point of leaving, Ying the Second kowtowed to us and expressed his gratitude again and again, asking us to convey his thanks to you for your lavish gifts."
"Ch'un-hua, that preternatural slave!" scoffed Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So she actually got dressed up and came out to meet the company, did she?"
"She's got a nose and eyes like everyone else," responded Yüeh-niang. "She's not a ghost. Why shouldn't she come out to meet people?"
"As for that slave," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "she's just like a handful of black beans, fit only to feed to a pig."
"I've had enough of that bad-mouthing of yours," said Yüeh-niang. "You act as though only concubines of yours are presentable enough to be seen in public."
Wang Ching, who was standing to one side, said, "When Master Ying the Second saw that the ladies from our household had arrived, he did not initially venture to come out and meet them but hid himself in an adjacent room and spied on them through an aperture in the window. I happened to catch him in the act and taunted him, saying, 'How shameless can you get? What are you spying at, for no good reason?' At which he chased me out, threatening me with his fist."
This induced Hsi-men Ch'ing to:
Laugh until the slits of his eyes disappeared,
saying, "That lousy beggar! The next time he shows up, I'll really powder his face white for him."[31]
"I'll be looking out for it," laughed Wang Ching.
Yüeh-niang reprimanded him, saying, "This page boy is talking nonsense. Since when did he ever spy on us? This servant is just indulging his penchant for being:
Bad-mouthed and evil-tongued,
for no good reason. Throughout the day, none of us saw so much as his shadow. It was only when we were about to leave that he came out and kowtowed to us."
After having stood around for a while, Wang Ching finally took himself off. Yüeh-niang then went over to the adjacent room in order to pay her respects to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, along with Yü-hsiao and the other maids and servants' wives, proceeded to kowtow to her.
Yüeh-niang then asked, "How is it that I don't see Second Sister Shen?"
The company remained silent until Yü-hsiao spoke up, saying, "Second Sister Shen has gone home."
"Why is it," asked Yüeh-niang, "that she failed to wait for my return, but went home before I arrived?"
Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, Sister-in-law Wu told her about the episode in which Ch'un-mei had so abused her that she felt compelled to leave.
Yüeh-niang was annoyed at this and said, "What did it matter that she refused to sing? That maidservant has been indulged to the point that:
All the rules of propriety are turned upside down.
Why did she feel justified in abusing her, for no good reason? No wonder that in this household of ours:
When the master is not a proper master,
The slaves ignore the rules of conduct.
What kind of sense does that make?"
Turning to Chin-lien, she went on to say, "You really ought to exercise some control over her. You've indulged her to the point that she's lost all sense of decorum."
Chin-lien, who was standing by her side, laughed at this and said, "Whoever saw such a blind millstone-turning donkey?
If the wind does not blow,
The tree will not tremble.[32]
Since you frequent:
The doors of a thousand households,
The gates of ten thousand families,
the only reason you are privileged to be there is to sing. For someone to ask you to sing is no breach of etiquette. Who entitled her to start:
Assuming attitudes and putting on airs?

Not to have taken her to task would only have enhanced the stink of her pretensions."
"You certainly can talk a good line," said Yüeh-niang. "But, according to your logic, she should be allowed to abuse both the good and the bad at will, and drive them out of the household, since you choose not to exercise any control over her."
"No doubt you would have me give her a few strokes of the cane on behalf of that blind whore," retorted Chin-lien.
When Yüeh-niang heard these words, her face turned bright red with anger, and she said, "If you continue to indulge her this way, in the future she'll end up alienating every one of our neighbors and relatives."
Thereupon, she got up and went to join Hsi-men Ch'ing in the other room.
"What's going on?" Hsi-men Ch'ing asked.
"You know perfectly well who it's about," replied Yüeh-niang, "since you insist on retaining such an unmannerly young lady in your household."
And she went on, thus and so, to tell Hsi-men Ch'ing all about how Ch'un-mei had abused Second Sister Shen and driven her out of the house.
Hsi-men Ch'ing merely laughed at this, saying, "Whoever told her not to sing for her? It doesn't matter though. Tomorrow, I'll just send a page boy to give her two taels of silver. That ought to placate her."
"Second Sister Shen's box is still here," said Yü-hsiao. "She didn't take it with her."
When Yüeh-niang saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing only laughed at the matter, she said, "So, you're not even going to call her on the carpet and give her a talking to, are you? It's just like you to moon around with your mouth open that way. I don't know what you find so funny about it."
When Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh saw how angry Yüeh-niang had become, they took themselves off to their own quarters, but Hsi-men Ch'ing merely continued to drink his wine.
After some time, when Yüeh-niang had gone into the inner room to change her clothes and take down her hair, she asked Yü-hsiao, "Where did these four packets of silver on top of the trunk come from?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded, saying, "They are the two hundred taels of silver that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung gave me to conduct some business for him. He wants me to employ them in approaching Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien day after tomorrow, in the hope of securing a promotion for him."
"Your son-in-law brought them in a while ago," explained Yü-hsiao, "and I put them on top of the trunk but forgot to tell you about them."
"Since they belong to someone else," said Yüeh-niang, "they should have been put away in the cabinet immediately."
Yü-hsiao, accordingly, proceeded to put them safely away in the cabinet. But no more of this.
Meanwhile, Chin-lien remained sitting in the other room, in the expectation that Hsi-men Ch'ing would rejoin her so they could go back to the front compound together. That evening, she intended to take the fertility potion that Nun Hsüeh had provided her with, and engage in intercourse with Hsi-men Ch'ing, since it was a *jen-tzu* day, which would be conducive to the conception of a male child.
When she saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing showed no sign of moving, she lifted aside the portiere and called to him, saying, "Aren't you going out to the front compound? I can't wait for you any longer, so I'll go back before you."
"My child," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can go a step ahead of me. I'll come as soon as I've finished this wine."
Chin-lien then went straight back to the front compound.
"I really don't want you to go there," said Yüeh-niang. "I've got something to say to you on the subject. The two of you seem to be as close as though you were:
Both wearing the same pair of pants.[33]
She must think she's entitled to:
Lord it over the world,[34]
the way she insisted on barging into my room and calling for you, the shameless good-for-nothing. As though you were his only wife, and the rest of us were not wives of his."
She then went on to rebuke Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "You lousy thick-skinned good-for-nothing! No wonder people find fault with you. You ought to:
Treat everyone with the same regard.[35]
We are all your wives, after all. You ought not to favor any one of us over the others. Yet you have allowed her to monopolize you there in the front compound. Ever since you returned from the Eastern Capital, not even your shadow has chosen to spend the night with anyone in the rear compound. How can any of us help being annoyed with you? It's always wise to:
Add a stick of fuel to the cold stove,
As well as a stick of fuel to the hot;
but you've allowed her to completely monopolize you. As far as I'm concerned, I can make allowances for you; but it's doubtful if the others are ready to let you off the hook. Though they may not give voice to their feelings, no matter how well disposed they may seem to be, they will harbor resentment in their hearts.
Today, while we were at Sister-in-law Ying the Second's place, Sister Meng the Third was unable to eat anything at all. I don't know whether she has caught a chill of some kind, or what, but she is suffering from depression and nausea. When we were about to come home, Sister-in-law Ying the Second offered her two cups of wine, but they only caused her to vomit. You really ought to go pay a visit to her quarters and see how she is."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he remarked, "Can she really be so unhappy at heart?"
He then ordered that the utensils be cleared away and said, "I won't drink any more wine."
Thereupon, he went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, where he found that she had already shed her outer garments and taken off her head ornaments and was lying with her clothes on sprawled over the side of the k'ang, in the process of vomiting, while Lan-hsiang was lighting the charcoal brazier on the floor.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that she was groaning incessantly, he said, "My child, how are you feeling inside? Tell me all about it, and, tomorrow, I'll send for someone to examine you."
The woman said not a word in response but merely continued to vomit; at which, Hsi-men Ch'ing helped her into an upright position and sat down beside her.
Upon seeing that she was massaging her breast with both hands, he said, "My own darling, what's going on in your heart? Tell me about it."
"I'm as depressed as can be," said the woman. "Why do you bother to ask? You might as well go on about your business."
"I didn't know anything about it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The First Lady told me about it just now, which was the first I knew of it."
"No wonder you didn't know about it," the woman said. "You hardly treat me as a wife of yours, after all. Why don't you go make love to the one you care about?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, putting an arm around her powdered neck, gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! You're just making fun of me."
He then called to Lan-hsiang, saying, "Quickly, boil up some extra strong tea for your mistress to drink."
"I've already prepared tea for her," responded Lan-hsiang, and she proceeded to bring it in.
Hsi-men Ch'ing personally held a cup of it up to her mouth for her to drink, but she responded, "Let me drink it myself. There's no need for you to put yourself out that way:
Reheating your cakes and selling them hot.
There's no one competing for your services here.
The sun must have risen in the West today,
it's such a rare event for you to visit these quarters of mine. The First Lady must have put you up to it, for no good reason, and you've forced yourself to comply, no matter how bilious it makes you feel."
"You don't know," protested Hsi-men Ch'ing, "how busy I've been the last few days. What with:
Seven of this and eight of that,
I haven't had a moment of free time."
"No wonder you haven't had a moment of free time," the woman responded. "It's obvious that the one you care about has got such a hold on you that such outmoded goods as the rest of us have all been:
Relegated to the realm of the superfluous,
merely waiting to be called up. Perhaps ten years from now you may recollect something about us."
Upon becoming aware that Hsi-men Ch'ing had started to nuzzle her fragrant cheek, she protested, "You're simply reeking of stale wine. Keep your distance from me. For someone who hasn't been able to keep down so much as a taste of:
Saffron soup or flavored water,
all day long, you can hardly expect me to be in the mood to fool around with you."
"If you haven't had anything to eat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why don't you get your maidservant to bring us something to eat. I haven't had anything to eat either."
"Needless to say," the woman responded, "while I'm here in such pain that I can hardly stand it, you propose that we have something to eat. If you want something to eat, you can go eat it somewhere else."
"Since you don't want to eat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I won't venture to eat anything either. The two of us might as well get ready to go to bed together. Early tomorrow morning, I'll send a page boy to ask Dr. Jen to come and examine you."
"You can forget about summoning any Dr. Jen, or Dr. Li," the woman said. "If I send for Dame Liu and take whatever medicine she prescribes, I'll be all right."
"If you lie down," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and let me massage your chest for you, I'm sure you'll feel better. You may not know it, but I'm rather good at diagnosing ailments by feel and can:
Dispel an illness with a touch of the hand."[36]
"I'd just be wasting my breath on you!" exclaimed the woman. "Since when could you diagnose anything?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly remembered something and explained, "Yesterday, School Official Liu gave me a gift of ten wax-encased bovine bezoar heart-clearing pills from Kuang-tung. If you take one of them, and wash it down with some medicinal wine, you should feel better."
He then said to Lan-hsiang, "Go ask the First Lady for some of them. They're in a porcelain jar in the master suite. And bring a flagon of wine as well."
"There's no need to bring any wine," said Meng Yü-lou. "I have wine here in my quarters."
Before long, Lan-hsiang came back from the master suite with two of the pills. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw to the heating of the wine, broke off the wax coating, revealing the gold leaf on the pills inside, and looked on as Meng Yü-lou swallowed them.
He then said to Lan-hsiang, "Pour out a goblet of wine for me, and I'll take some medicine of my own."
Meng Yü-lou gave him a look, saying, "Don't be so delirious! If you want to use that medicine of yours, go to someone else's quarters to take it. What do you think you're doing here, acting up that way? No doubt, on observing that I'm not dead yet, you're bent on helping me onto the road to that destination. Despite the fact that I'm in enough pain to drive me out of my mind, you want to pester me that way. It's just like you to see fit to do so, but who has the patience to carry on with you that way?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "Enough! Enough! My child, I won't take any medicine then. But let the two of us go to bed together."
The woman, on the one hand, finished taking her medicine and then took off her clothes and got into bed in order to sleep with Hsi-men Ch'ing. Hsi-men Ch'ing, for his part, once underneath the quilt, proceeded to massage her creamy breasts with his hand and fondle her fragrant nipples.
Putting an arm around her powdered neck, he said, "My darling, are you feeling any better inside since taking the medicine?"
"The pain has stopped," said the woman, "but my stomach is still somewhat unsettled."
"That doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If you give it a little while to digest, it should get better."
He then went on to say, "While you were not at home today, I weighed out fifty taels of silver and gave them to Lai-hsing. Day after tomorrow, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is hosting a banquet here. On the first, we will need to burn paper money in order to fulfill the vow I made after encountering the storm on my way back from the capital. And on the third, we must dedicate a couple of days to entertaining people. We have received an abundance of good wishes and presents, and it would not do were we to fail to reciprocate."
"Whether you invite people or not," the woman said, "is not up to me. Day after tomorrow, on the thirtieth, I'll reckon up the accounts and have a page boy present them to you. You can then turn them over to Sister Six to take care of, if you like. It's high time for her to take a turn being responsible for them. As she herself said just the other day, 'What's the big deal? If I had to:
Carve the eyes of a Buddhist idol,
that would be difficult. Just leave it to me.' "
"Do you actually take that little whore seriously?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She may assume that she can handle it, but when she gets right down to it, she's likely to become flustered. It would be better if you waited until after these events are over, before turning the accounts over to her."
"Brother," responded Meng Yü-lou, "whoever taught you to be so disingenuous? And you claim not to be favoring her. This proposal of yours merely shows where your heart really lies. Waiting until these coming affairs are finished with before turning things over to her would be the death of me. I'd hardly have time to comb my hair first thing in the morning before the page boys would begin:
Coming and going, one after the other,[37]
requiring me to weigh out silver and make change for them, wearing me out completely in the process. And no matter how much trouble I took, who would even bother to commend me for it?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her, saying, "As the saying goes:
If you manage a household for three years,
even the dog will resent you."
As he spoke, he lifted up one of her legs and hung it over his arm, cuddling her against his breast, while he grasped the calf of her fresh, white leg, which was enhanced with an embroidered shoe of scarlet damask.
"My child," he said, "your daddy doesn't love anything else about you as much as your white legs. There isn't another woman in the entire world with such a soft, lovable pair of legs."
"What a glib-tongued good-for-nothing you are!" exclaimed the woman. "Who can take seriously that cottony mouth of yours? You claim that there isn't another woman in the entire world with legs like mine, do you? I don't doubt that there are thousands, if not ten thousands, of them. Rather than complaining that my flesh is coarse, you resort to:
Misstating wrong as right."
"My darling," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if I have said anything untrue, may I die for it."
"You crazy good-for-nothing!" responded the woman. "Why swear oaths over such a trivial matter?"
As Hsi-men Ch'ing talked with her, he proceeded to fasten the silver clasp on his organ and insert it into her vagina.
"Just as I thought!" remarked the woman. "Your every move is directed toward this unseemly end."
She then went on to say, "Hold on a minute. I don't know if that lousy little piece of mine took care of things, or not."
So saying, she reached under the mattress with one hand and groped out a handkerchief with which to wipe herself.
In the process of doing so, she felt the silver clasp and said, "Whenever did you fasten on this thing of yours, without anyone being aware of it? Take it off immediately."
Hsi-men Ch'ing not only refused to comply but, embracing her leg, proceeded to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts. It was not long before her vaginal secretions began to flow, [38] and his movements back and forth produced a sound like that of a dog slurping up slops.
The woman, for her part, wiped herself with the handkerchief, though her secretions flowed again after every wipe, while in her mouth she gave vent to incessant mutterings in a trembling voice, saying, "Daddy, don't try to penetrate any further. These last few days, the lumbar region of my lower back has been aching, and I've been producing a white discharge below."
"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to prescribe a dose of a warming medication for you. You should feel better after taking it."
We will say no more for the moment about how the two of them indulged in amorous sport together, but return to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang, who continued to chat with Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns in the master suite that evening.
The subject of how Ch'un-mei had abused Second Sister Shen came up, and Yüeh-niang was told how she had been reduced to tears, how Ch'un-mei had refused to let her wait for a sedan chair, and how she had been forced to ask Sister-in-law Wu to summon Hua-t'ung from the house across the street in order to escort her back to Han Tao-kuo's place.
"The fact is," reported Sister-in-law Wu, "that the language Ch'un-mei came out with was coarse. No matter what I said to deter her, she insisted on continuing to revile her in the most abusive language. Under the circumstances, how could she help being upset? I had not previously known that Ch'un-mei was capable of resorting to such uninhibited abuse. As I said at the time, she must have been drinking."
"The five of them had been drinking wine together in the front compound," reported Hsiao-yü.
"What an unreasonable good-for-nothing!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "She has clearly indulged that maidservant of hers until she is:
Oblivious to distinctions of status,

Assuming privileges above her station.
And yet she objects if anyone criticizes her for it. In the days to come:
Regardless of the outcome for good or ill,
she'll end up driving everyone out of our household. What will anyone want to do with the likes of us in that case? That female singer frequents:
The doors of a thousand households,
The gates of ten thousand families.
The stories she has to tell about us will hardly redound to our credit. People will say that the legitimate wife in that household of Hsi-men Ch'ing's presides over a chaotic world, in which no one knows who is a master, and who is a slave. They won't assume that it's our servants who have been indulged till they lack all sense of decorum, but that it is we ourselves who are hopelessly at sea. What sort of sense does that make?"
"Let it go," suggested Sister-in-law Wu. "If my brother-in-law has nothing to say about it, what's the point of stirring up any further trouble?"
Of the events of that night there is no more to tell, as they all proceeded to return to their quarters.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early in the morning and went to the yamen.
P'an Chin-lien, on seeing that Yüeh-niang had prevented Hsi-men Ch'ing from spending the night with her, and that she had been unable to have intercourse with him on a *jen-tzu* day, was extremely unhappy about it. Early the next day, she had Lai-an go summon a sedan chair for her and sent Old Mrs. P'an home in it.
When Wu Yüeh-niang got up the next morning, the three nuns expressed a wish to go home, and Yüeh-niang presented each of them with a box of delicacies and five mace of silver. In addition, she promised Nun Hsüeh that she would commission her to preside over a service at her nunnery during the first month of the coming year and gave her a tael of silver in advance, asking her to purchase incense, candles, and paper money for the occasion. She also said that during the twelfth month she would send her sesame oil, white flour, polished rice, and vegetarian fare with which to feed the nuns and make offerings to Buddha.
She then served tea to them in the master suite, together with Sister-in-law Wu, and Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, whom she had previously invited.
When they were all seated, she asked Meng Yü-lou, "After you took those wax-encased pills, did your heartburn get any better?"
"This morning," replied Meng Yü-lou, "it was only after I spit up a few mouthfuls of sour-tasting fluid that I felt better."
Yüeh-niang then called for Hsiao-yü, saying that she would send her to the front compound to invite Old Mrs. P'an and the Fifth Lady to come share some pastries with them.
"Hsiao-yü is back in the kitchen, seeing to the steaming of the pastries," reported Yü-hsiao. "I'll go and invite them."
Thereupon, she went straight to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound, where she inquired, "Why do I not see Old Mrs. P'an? The two of you are invited back to the rear compound for tea."
"I sent her home early this morning," replied Chin-lien.
"Why didn't you say anything," asked Yü-hsiao, "rather than sending her off that way without anyone being aware of it?"
"She has overstayed her welcome," said Chin-lien. "Why should she have remained any longer? She has already been here for some days, leaving that adopted niece of hers at home, without anyone to look after her. It was my idea to send her home."
"I brought a chunk of cured pork and some eggplant julienne in a sweet sauce to give her," said Yü-hsiao, "not knowing that she had already left. Fifth Lady, you can keep them for her."
So saying, she handed them over to Ch'iu-chü, who put them away in a drawer.
Yü-hsiao then went on to say to Chin-lien, "Yesterday evening, after you came back to your quarters, my mistress spoke to Father, accusing you, thus and so, of trying to:
Lord it over the world,
and saying that you and he were as close as though you were:
Both wearing the same pair of pants;
and that the way in which you monopolized Father by keeping him in the front compound, and not letting him spend any time in the rear compound, was utterly shameless. Afterwards, she sent Father to the Third Lady's quarters to spend the night. On top of that, she accused you to Sister-in-law Wu and the three nuns, of indulging Ch'un-mei to the point where she was unmannerly enough to vilely abuse Second Sister Shen. Father said that tomorrow he would send a tael of silver to Second Sister Shen to compensate her for her embarrassment."
Word for word, she recounted the entire episode to Chin-lien, and, when Chin-lien heard it, she took it to heart.
Yü-hsiao then went back to report to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Old Mrs. P'an got up early this morning and went home, but the Fifth Lady will be here shortly."
Yüeh-niang then said to Sister-in-law Wu, "You see, yesterday I directed a few words of criticism to her, and today, in a fit of temper, without saying a word to me, she has responded by sending her mother packing. My guess would be that this sister of mine is surely harboring the intention of stirring up some kind of waves over it."
At the time, Yüeh-niang thought that she was speaking in the privacy of her room, not realizing that Chin-lien had silently made her way up to the portiere leading into the parlor and had been eavesdropping there for some time.
All of a sudden, she opened her mouth and spoke, saying, "First Lady, are you saying that I sent my mother packing, and that I have been monopolizing our husband?"
"That's right," replied Yüeh-niang. "I have said that. Now, what are you going to do about it? The fact is that ever since our husband returned from the Eastern Capital, you've been monopolizing him all day long up there in the front compound, so that here in the rear compound we haven't been given so much as a glimpse of his shadow. As though you were his only wife, and the rest of us were not wives of his. When anything he does comes up for discussion, you claim that nobody else knows about it, but that you do. When Li Kuei-chieh went home yesterday, for example, Sister-in-law Wu asked, 'Why has Li Kuei-chieh left for home after staying here for only one day? Why is my brother-in-law upset with her?' To which I responded, 'Who knows what he's upset with her about?' You then stuck your neck out and insisted on saying, 'Nobody else knows about it. I'm the only one who does.' Since you attach yourself to him all day long, how could you help being better informed than the rest of us?"
"If he didn't come to my quarters of his own volition," said Chin-lien, "are you suggesting that I keep him tied up there all day long with a length of hog-bristle rope? As though I were as wanton as all that."
"If you're not as wanton as all that," said Yüeh-niang, "how is it that yesterday, when he was sitting quietly in my room, you had the nerve to lift aside the portiere and barge into the room, telling him to accompany you to your place in the front compound, just as though you had the right to:
Lord it over the world?
How can you justify that? Our husband is the sort of man who:
Stands erect between Heaven and Earth,
Bearing hardship and enduring travail.[39]
What crime has he committed that entitles you to tie him up with a length of hog-bristle rope? You don't know your place, you lousy baggage, but at least I keep quiet about it; while you don't seem to know that:
In pressing people you should not press them too far.[40]
You surreptitiously asked our husband for Li P'ing-erh's fur coat to wear but kept it to yourself, without even coming back to the rear compound and mentioning it to me. If everyone were to treat me that way, I might as well be raising ducks in this position of mine. After all:
Even in an old-folks' home,
There is someone in charge.
But you are so close to that maidservant of yours that it is like:
A cat and a mouse sleeping together.[41]
You've indulged her to the point where she has lost all sense of decorum and continues to abuse people:
Regardless of the outcome for good or ill;
while you insist on shooting your mouth off:
Refusing to acknowledge any responsibility."[42]
"So she is a maidservant of mine," said Chin-lien. "What of it? You can beat her if you like. I've got one shadow too many around here as it is. I did ask him for that fur coat; but it wasn't because I wanted the fur coat that he unlocked the door and took a number of articles of clothing to give to someone else. Why are you not criticizing her? So you would accuse me of indulging a maidservant and being wanton, would you? But, since you have gone to such lengths to please our husband, which of us is the more wanton?"
These few words struck Yüeh-niang where it hurt, and her two cheeks turned purple, as she retorted, "So I am the one who is wanton, am I? But, no matter how you put it, I was originally a virgin when I was formally married to him and was not just some woman that he had picked up. It is the shameless man-hunter who is wanton. I am the genuine article, and not the wanton one."
Sister-in-law Wu attempted to intervene, saying, "Sister-in law, what's going on with you? There's no need for you to bandy words that way."
But no matter how hard she tried to dissuade her, the words continued to pour out of Yüeh-niang's mouth, as she said, "You've already done away with one of us, and I guess I'm next."
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "First Lady, how is it that you're getting so carried away with your annoyance today? You're implicating the rest of us in what you say:
Hitting a number of us with one swipe of the stick.
And whoever saw the likes of you, Sister Six? You really ought to show a little deference to the First Lady, rather than bandying words with her that way."
"As the saying goes," said Sister-in-law Wu:
"No good blows are struck when people fight;
No good words are spoken when people quarrel.[43]
When you sisters engage in these altercations, we relatives who stay with you are embarrassed. Sister-in-law, if you don't agree to desist, I will leave. If my presence means so little to you, I'll call for my sedan chair and go home."
At this, Li Chiao-erh took hold of Sister-in-law Wu in order to prevent her from leaving.
When P'an Chin-lien heard the words with which Yüeh-niang berated her, she sat down on the floor and started to roll around, giving herself a series of slaps on the face, and knocking off the fret on her head, which fell to one side.
Commencing to weep out loud, she cried, "I'm as good as dead. What good is this life of mine? Our husband may have legally:
Named articles and cited clauses,
in marrying you; but if, as you claim, I was just some woman he picked up, it would have been an easy enough matter to settle at the time. If you had waited until your husband came home and persuaded him to give me a writ of divorce, I would have had to leave, and that would have been the end of it.
In pressing people you should not press them too far."
"Just look at this trashy creature," exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "Before anyone else can even get a word out:
Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate.
And she rolls around on the floor, trying to shift the blame onto someone else. No doubt you'll wait until our husband comes home, good wife that you are, and get him to give me a hard time. You've got just such a knack for knavery, but who's afraid of you?"
"Since you claim to be the genuine article," retorted Chin-lien, "who would dare give you a hard time?"
Yüeh-niang became even more enraged at this and said, "If you would have it that I'm not the genuine article, are you suggesting that I've been harboring a lover in this room of mine?"
"If you haven't been harboring a lover," Chin-lien retorted, "who has been harboring a lover? You'd better produce him for me."
When Meng Yü-lou saw that the altercation between them was going from bad to worse, she endeavored to pull Chin-lien to her feet, saying, "You'd better get back to the front compound."
She then continued, "Things have gotten out of hand. The two of you had better both curtail your tongues. When you wrangle with each other this way, engaging in such mutual vituperation, you make yourselves a laughingstock in the eyes of these three nuns here."
Turning to Chin-lien, she went on to say, "You get up, and I'll escort you back to the front compound."
Chin-lien, however, refused to get up until Meng Yü-lou and Yü-hsiao joined forces in dragging her to her feet and escorting her to the front compound.
Sister-in-law Wu then admonished Yüeh-niang, saying, "Sister-in-law, while you're feeling poorly in your present condition, you ought not to let yourself get so upset over things like this that are clearly of no importance. When you and your sister wives are getting along with each other:
Happily and cheerfully,[44]
those of us who are staying over with you are able to share in your pleasure. But when you get into altercations like this and ignore our admonishments, what are we to do?"
The three nuns, seeing that things were getting out of hand, told their young disciples to finish what they were eating, wrapped up their boxes, and took their leave of Yüeh-niang, placing their palms together and saluting the company in the Buddhist fashion.
"I hope," said Yüeh-niang, "that you three reverends will not laugh at us."
"Bodhisattva," responded Nun Hsüeh, "needless to say:
Who is there without smoke in his stove?[45]
The fire of ignorance that resides
in one's heart,[46]
Has only to be touched in order to
give off smoke.
It would be better if everyone were a little more accommodating. As the Buddhist Dharma expresses it:
You must strive to maintain a cool heart,
like a solitary boat;
Sweep clear the spirit tower of your mind,
and control yourself.
If you allow the ropes to slacken and the
knots to grow loose;
Even a myriad guardian deities could not
reduce you to order.[47]
If you can only:
Keep the monkey of your mind and the horse
of your will under control,[48]
it is possible to become a Buddha or a patriarch. In taking leave of you, Bodhisattva, I would like to thank you for all the trouble I have put you to. It is time for me to return home."
So saying, she put her palms together and saluted her twice in the Buddhist fashion.
Yüeh-niang hurriedly bowed in return, saying, "I fear you have fared none too well. I have been rather remiss in entertaining you. On another day, I will send someone to deliver the supplies for the religious observances I have commissioned."
She then turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "Would you and the Second Lady escort our three preceptors to the gate, and look out for the dog?"
Thereupon, the three nuns were sent on their way.
Yüeh-niang then sat down to keep Sister-in-law Wu and the rest company, saying, "This has gotten me so angry that my two arms have gone soft on me, and my hands have turned ice-cold. All I've had to drink this morning is a mouthful of plain tea, but it's still troubling my stomach."
"Sister-in-law," said Sister-in-law Wu, "I tried to dissuade you from letting yourself get so worked up, but you rejected my advice. For someone in the final month of her pregnancy, what's the point of getting so upset over a trivial matter?"
"Sister-in-law," responded Yüeh-niang, "fortunately you have been staying here and have seen for yourself what's been going on. Since when have I picked a quarrel with her? This is a case of:
The curfew violator arresting the watchman.[49]
I have been all too willing to accommodate her, but she has refused to accommodate me. There is only one husband for all of us, but she has attempted to completely monopolize him for herself, while:

Colluding in chicanery,[50]
with that maidservant of hers. As for her doings up front there:
There's nothing she won't do.
Things no one else would do,
She can bring herself to do.
Her conduct as a wife is utterly shameless. Though:
Her lampstand casts no light upon herself,
she's always opening her mouth to accuse others of wantonness. It seems that whatever rival may be in her way, she will pick quarrels with all day long, accusing her to me of being at fault, thousands of times, if not more, while acting as though she herself is:
An immaculate nun.
She is a double-dealing:
Crooked-hearted false-bellied,[51]
person, with a:
Human face but a bestial heart,[52]
who refuses to accept responsibility for what she says and does. The oaths that she takes are truly frightful. I'm going to keep my eyes peeled where she's concerned. Who knows what sort of a bad end she'll come to in the future? Fortunately, all of you here saw what she did just now with your own eyes. I had prepared to serve tea and was waiting with the best of intentions for her mother to come share it with us, when she sent her packing, without anybody being aware of it, and then, with quarrelsome intent, snuck in here to eavesdrop on me. What did she need to eavesdrop for? Does she think I'm afraid of her, or what? No doubt she'll just wait until she sees that husband of ours and then engage in:
Telling tales and embroidering on the facts,
in order to persuade him to divorce me."
"We were all in your room together," said Hsiao-yü, "standing around the brazier. "Who knows when the Fifth Lady came into the parlor and sat down to eavesdrop on us? None of us even heard the sound of her footsteps."
"She's always up to mischief of some kind," said Sun Hsüeh-o. "She wears shoes with felt soles, in order to make sure that the sound of her footsteps will not be heard. I remember, when she first entered the household, how frequently she picked quarrels with me, and bad-mouthed me to others behind my back, inciting Father to beat me those two times. And you even criticized me at the time, Mother, for being too disputatious."
"She's a past master at burying people alive," said Yüeh-niang, "and today she's doing her best to bury me alive. Didn't you see, just now, how she threw a tantrum:
Banging her head on the floor and rolling around?
Her one hope is that when Father comes back and hears about it, he'll debase me beneath her."
Li Chiao-erh laughed at this, saying, "First Lady, needless to say, that would be to turn the world upside down."
"You don't understand," said Yüeh-niang. "She is an avatar of the nine-tailed fox fairy,[53] who has already done innocent people to death. Why should she balk at doing the same to me? Do I have the physical stamina to withstand her? You have been a member of this household for all these years, but despite the fact that you were once a denizen of the licensed quarter, you have never conducted yourself like the hardened offender that she is. Just look at the way she insisted on barging into my room yesterday and calling for our husband, saying, 'Aren't you going out to the front compound? I can't wait for you any longer, so I'll go back before you.' She acted just as though our husband belonged to her alone, and that she had the right to monopolize him. I wouldn't be so upset were it not for the fact that ever since he returned from the Eastern Capital she wouldn't let him spend even a single night in the rear compound. And even when it was someone's birthday, she didn't want to let him visit her quarters. She wants to put all ten fingers into her own mouth, that's all."
"Sister-in-law," admonished Sister-in-law Wu, "try to be more patient. Since you are so frequently indisposed or in pain, this matter is not so important for you. Let him do as he pleases. It would be better for all of us if you would refrain from:
Feeling resentment and harboring hostility."
She continued admonishing her for a while, and Yü-hsiao set out some food for her, but Yüeh-niang refused to eat, saying, "I've had a headache for some time, and my stomach is feeling queasy."
She then said to Yü-hsiao, "Put out a pillow on the k'ang over there, and let me lie down for a bit."
Addressing herself to Li Chiao-erh, she went on to say, "The rest of you can keep Sister-in-law Wu company in having something to eat."
That day, Big Sister Yü also expressed a desire to go home, and Yüeh-niang directed that a gift box be filled with delicacies for her, and that she be given five mace of silver, and sent on her way.
To resume our story, Hsi-men Ch'ing had gone to the yamen that morning to preside over the trial of a criminal case, and it was not until noon that he returned home. His arrival coincided with that of the retainer from Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, who had come to solicit a reply for the gifts he had sent.
"Tell your master that I appreciate his lavish gifts," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but there is no need for him to trouble himself about it. I would like you to carry the gifts back to him until after I have succeeded in doing what he asks of me tomorrow, after which you can deliver them again."
"As long as my master has not directed me to do so," said the retainer, "I can hardly presume to take them back. If they are left here at Your Honor's place until then, it will do just as well."
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "express my thanks to him, and tell him that I understand the situation."
He then provided him with a reply and proposed to reward the retainer with a tael of silver.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing, subsequently, made his way back to the master suite, he found Yüeh-niang lying on the k'ang, and though he called to her for what seemed like half a day, she did not respond. When he asked the maidservants what was going on, they did not dare to tell him. He then went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound, where he found the woman, with her hairdo in disarray, lying down and hugging a pillow. When he asked her what was the matter, she also refused to reply.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up the silver he had promised to the retainer from Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung's place and sent him on his way, after which he went to Meng Yü-lou's quarters and asked her what had happened.
Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, Meng Yü-lou told him all about the angry altercation between Yüeh-niang and Chin-lien that had occurred earlier that morning.
This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he went straight back to the master suite, pulled Yüeh-niang up from her reclining position with one hand, and said to her, "At a time like this, while you're feeling poorly in your present condition, why should you pay any attention to that little whore? What's the idea of quarreling with her for no good reason?"
"Whose words have you been listening to?" demanded Yüeh-niang. "Do you believe that it was I who picked a quarrel with her, or that I am the one who is disputatious and sought her out to pick a fight with? It was she who chose to pick a fight with me. You can ask the others if you don't believe me. This morning, with the best of intentions, I had prepared tea, and invited her mother to come share it with us; only to have her send her mother packing in a fit of temper and come barging in here, sticking her neck out in order to quarrel with me:
Rolling around and banging her head on the floor,
knocking the fret on her head to one side, and screaming like the crowd at an emperor's coronation ceremony. She did everything short of striking me in the face. If the others present had not intervened to restrain her, we might well have ended up:
Beating each other into an undifferentiated lump.[54]
She is so accustomed to taking advantage of other people for no good reason, that she expects to be able to force me to submit to her. She constantly says, 'Since you claim that your husband legally:
Named articles and cited clauses,
in marrying you, while I am just some woman he picked up, you might as well just get rid of me, so I won't be in your way any longer.' For every sentence I get out, she comes back with ten. There's no way of stopping her.
Her mouth is like the Huai River in spate.
I hardly have the physical stamina to bandy words with her. In no time at all, that:
Rascally double-crossing creature,[55]
made me so angry that my body became flaccid and feverish. As for the fetus I am carrying, whether it be a child, or a plum, or even a crown prince, it will never survive. At present, it's been so affected that it's:
Neither dead nor alive.[56]
My abdomen feels distended, and the downward pressure in my stomach is painful. My head aches, and my two arms have turned numb. I sat down on the commode for quite a while just now, but the fetus did not come out. If it had, it would have been a good thing, as I might have avoided dying with a spectral fetus in me. Tonight, I'll take a length of rope and hang myself, so you can carry on with her as you like. That way, in the future, I'll avoid the fate of Li P'ing-erh, who was done to death by her. I'm well aware that if you don't lose a wife every three years, you consider it a great misfortune."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, the more he listened the more perturbed he became.
Cuddling Yüeh-niang against his breast, he said to her, "My good sister! You've got to make allowances for that little whore. She doesn't even know the rudiments about keeping to her place. Allowing yourself to become so incensed about her isn't worth the risk. I'll go out to the front compound and give the lousy little whore a piece of my mind."
"You wouldn't dare give her a hard time," retorted Yüeh-niang, "or she'll tie you up with a length of hog-bristle rope."
"You can tell her from me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that if she provokes me, I'll give her a good kicking."
He then went on to ask Yüeh-niang, "How are you feeling inside right now? Have you had anything to eat, or not?"
"Who's had anything to eat?" replied Yüeh-niang. "Early this morning, I had just prepared tea and was waiting for her mother to come share it with us, when she barged in here and started a fight with me. Right now, my abdomen feels distended. I'm suffering from downward pressure in my stomach, my head aches, and my two arms are numb. If you don't believe me, just feel my hands. I haven't even been able to flex them for what seems like half a day."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, all he could do was stamp his feet in consternation, saying, "What are we to do? I'd better send a page boy immediately to summon Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i and have him examine you and prescribe the necessary medication. But it's late, and he won't be able to get inside the city gate before it's closed for the night."
"What's the point of summoning the likes of Dr. Jen for no good reason?" said Yüeh-niang. "Let matters take their course. If the fetus is fated to live, so be it. If it is not fated to live, let it die, which will satisfy her wishes. What good is a wife after all? She's no more than:
A layer of plaster on a wall.[57]
If you peel off one layer, there will be
another beneath it.
Once I am dead, you can raise her to the status of your legitimate wife. She's certainly intelligent enough to manage the household."
"You must be more forbearing," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "That little whore is as expendable as a piece of stinking shit.[58] What can she do to you? Right now, if we don't invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to examine you, your anger will continue to envelop the fetus, without being able to escape, either above or below. What then?"
"In that case," said Yüeh-niang, "I'll call in Dame Liu, have her examine me, and take whatever medication she prescribes. Or else, I'll get her to probe my head with two acupuncture needles, and see if that will take care of things."
"That's ridiculous," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What does that old whore Dame Liu know about obstetrics? I'll send a servant right away to go on horseback and invite Dr. Jen to come examine you."
"You may insist on inviting him," said Yüeh-niang. "But, even if you get him to come, I won't allow him to examine me."
Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to disregard this statement and went out to the front compound, where he summoned Ch'in-t'ung and told him, "Take a horse and proceed immediately to the home of His Honor Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i outside the city gate; and wait for him, if necessary, so that you can accompany him on the way back."
Ch'in-t'ung assented to this and, mounting a horse, took off on his errand like a cloud scudding before the wind.
Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to her room in order to look after Yüeh-niang and directed the maidservants to quickly heat some congee and serve it to her, but, though he urged her to eat the congee, she refused to eat it.
He waited there until the afternoon, when Ch'in-t'ung finally came back empty-handed and said, "His Honor Dr. Jen is currently on duty in the prefectural yamen and has not come home yet. His household is informed that we have called for him, so there is no need for us to send anyone after him tomorrow. His Honor Dr. Jen will come on his own in the morning."
Yüeh-niang, on observing that Ch'iao Hung had sent someone again and again to remind Hsi-men Ch'ing of his invitation, said to him, "Since the doctor is coming tomorrow, you might as well go ahead over to our kinsman Ch'iao Hung's place. It's late in the day already, and if you refuse to go, you can't help annoying our kinsman."
"If I go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who will look after you?"
Yüeh-niang laughed at this, saying, "Just look at the state you're in! If you go, I'll be all right. In a little while, I'll pull myself together and sit down to a meal with Sister-in-law Wu. What are you so concerned about?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Yü-hsiao, "Quickly, go and invite Sister-in-law Wu to come and sit down with your mistress."
He then went on to ask, "Where is Big Sister Yü? You can get her to sing something for your mistress."
"Big Sister Yü has gone home," responded Yü-hsiao. "She ran out of patience some time ago."
"Who told her to go home?" demanded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It would have been better for her to stick around for another day or two."
So saying, he chased after Yü-hsiao and gave her a couple of kicks.
"When she saw the way you have managed to:
Turn the whole household upside down,"
pronounced Yüeh-niang, "she wanted to go. What's that got to do with her?"
"The one who actually abused Second Sister Shen," complained Yü-hsiao, "is not the one you've chosen to kick."
Hsi-men Ch'ing pretended not to hear this and proceeded to get dressed and set out to attend the drinking party he had been invited to at Ch'iao Hung's place.
Before the first watch had begun, he returned home and went into the master suite, where he found Yüeh-niang, together with Sister-in-law Wu, Meng Yü-lou, and Li Chiao-erh, the four of them, sitting together. When Sister-in-law Wu saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she promptly took herself elsewhere in the rear compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yüeh-niang, "Are you feeling any better by now?"
"Sister-in-law Wu," said Yüeh-niang, "joined me for a couple of mouthfuls of congee, and my abdomen is not feeling as distended as it was before. But I still have a lingering headache, and the lumbar region of my lower back is still aching."
"It doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Tomorrow, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i will come to examine you, and if you take a couple of doses of the medication he prescribes, it should dissipate your pent-up anger and tranquilize the fetus in your womb. Then you'll be all right."
"I told you in no uncertain terms not to send for him," said Yüeh-niang, "but you went ahead and sent for him anyway. How can you be so:
Bare-faced and red-eyed,
as to invite a male physician to examine me? Just wait and see whether I'll come out to be examined tomorrow, or not."
She then went on to ask, "What did our kinsman Ch'iao Hung invite you over for anyway?"
"He indicated," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that ever since I came back from the Eastern Capital, he has wanted to have a chance to sit down with me; and today he went out of his way to prepare a variety of delicacies and engaged two singing girls as well. He didn't ask me over to discuss anything in particular. Later on, he also invited Censor Chu from next door to come over and help keep me company. But I was so concerned about you that I was uneasy at heart, so, after downing a few goblets of wine, I came home early."
"What a glib-tongued good-for-nothing you are!" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "I've had enough of your:
Clever words and deceptive phrases.
You would have it that you were concerned for me, would you? Even if I were:
A manifestation of a living Buddha,[59]
I would hardly occupy a place in your heart. I can foresee that once I am dead, I will mean no more to you than a shard of broken crockery."
She then went on to ask, "Did our kinsman Ch'iao Hung really have nothing more to say to you?"
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing acknowledge the truth, saying, "At present, our kinsman Ch'iao Hung wishes to take advantage of the new regulations to purchase a position as an honorary official, for which he is prepared to pay thirty taels of silver. The money is already sealed up, and he wants me to speak to Prefect Hu Shih-wen about it. I said to him, 'That's not a problem. Yesterday, Prefect Hu Shih-wen sent me a hundred copies of the calendar for the coming year, and I have not yet sent him a return gift. When I send the gift, I'll send a card with it, requesting an order of appointment as an honorary official, and then turn it over to you.' He objected to this, saying that payment in silver was the standard procedure, and that if I consented to intervene on his behalf, it would spare him the need to spend additional money high and low, and thus save him ten taels of silver or more."
"Since he has requested you to do so," said Yüeh-niang, "you might as well intervene on his behalf. Have you already accepted his silver?"

"He is going to send the silver over tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He wanted to buy an additional gift for me, but I told him to forget about it. Tomorrow, I'll prepare the carcass of a pig, and a jug of wine, and send them to Prefect Hu Shih-wen. That ought to take care of it."
Once this conversation was concluded, Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night in the master suite.
The next day was the date on which Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had arranged to host a party to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng at Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence. The provision of appropriate wines and comestibles for the banquet had already been completed in the rear reception hall. The prefectural yamen had issued summonses for thirty musicians from the two Music Offices, together with two directors and four file leaders, to report for duty at Hsi-men Ch'ing's house early that morning. Hsi-men Ch'ing told them to stand by in an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard inside the ceremonial gate leading to the front reception hall. The troupe of Hai-yen actors were directed to use an anteroom on the western side of the courtyard as their green room.
Who should appear at this juncture but Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, who had gotten up early that morning and come on horseback. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly invited him into the reception hall and sat down with him, exchanging remarks on the events that had occurred since they last met.
"Yesterday," said Dr. Jen, "when your esteemed servant came for me, I was on duty at the prefectural yamen. It was only when I arrived home last evening that I was able to read your respected summons. Today, I have made haste to come, without waiting for my carriage. May I presume to ask who it is that is not well?"
"It is my humble principal wife who is unexpectedly feeling somewhat indisposed," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I hope that you will be able to diagnose the problem."
In a little while, after tea had been served and they were in the process of drinking it, Dr. Jen said, "The other day, I heard about your promotion from Han Ming-ch'uan. Permit me to proffer my congratulations."
"With my meager talent, I merely occupy the position," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What is there to congratulate me for?"
When they had done with their tea, and Ch'in-t'ung had cleared away the cups with their raised saucers, Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed him, "Go back to the rear compound and tell the First Lady that His Honor Dr. Jen is here, and that she should prepare to receive him in the parlor."
Ch'in-t'ung assented and headed back to the rear compound, where he found Sister-in-law Wu, Li Chiao-erh, and Meng Yü-lou in the room with Yüeh-niang.
"Dr. Jen is about to come in," reported Ch'in-t'ung, "and Father has instructed me to tell you to prepare to receive him in the parlor."
Yüeh-niang sat where she was, without making a move, and said, "I told him not to summon the doctor, but he has insisted on asking this male figure to open wide his fervid eyes, and proceed to:
Holding hands and squeezing wrists,
with me, for no good reason. Who knows what else he will do. If he had invited Dame Liu instead, and I had taken a dose or two of her medicine, I would have been fine. But by insisting on:
Ringing bells and beating drums,
to expose me in this way, he's merely giving someone else's husband an opportunity to feast his eyes on me."
"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "the doctor he engaged is here already. If you don't go out and see him, what do you propose to do? You can hardly just send him away."
Sister-in-law Wu also admonished her from the side, saying, "Sister-in-law, if you let him take your pulse, he may be able to ascertain the cause of your indisposition, whence it arose, and which conduits may have been affected by your anger. And if you take the medication he prescribes, it may serve to rectify the flow of your vital energy and blood, and tranquilize the fetus in your womb. If you won't let him examine you, and your husband allows you to call in Dame Liu instead, what does she know of pathology or the principles of pulse taking? And who knows what such a delay might portend?"
Only then did Yüeh-niang consent to begin combing her hair and putting on her headgear. Yü-hsiao brought over her mirror, Meng Yü-lou jumped onto the k'ang and proceeded to use a small brush to smooth the hair behind her temples, Li Chiao-erh helped attach her hair ornaments, and Sun Hsüeh-o stood by to fetch her garments. Yüeh-niang's head was adorned with six gold-headed pins and a toque. Without formally making up her face, she:
Scantily applied rouge and powder, and
Lightly painted her moth eyebrows.
From her ears were suspended two gold clove-shaped ear pendants; in front of her coiffure she wore a gold tiara representing the toad in the moon; her body was clad in a white satin jacket that opened down the middle, over a willow-yellow wide-cut drawnwork skirt that served to set off her wave-tripping silk stockings, and the upturned points of her pair of golden lotuses; while beside her skirt there hung a cachet of purple brocade, a yellow brass key, and a pair of embroidered sashes. Truly:
The immortal of Mount Lo-fu has appeared in the mundane world; [80]
The beauty of the moon palace has emerged from her painted hall.

Butterflies hover in couples among the flowers beside the stream
South of the hills and west of the river.
The wind and the moon are distraught with love.
In the ancient palace
The beautiful woman is filled with discontent
Clouds and rain are in wild confusion.
She opens her fragrant mouth, and the words flow from her lips
She presses her delicate cheeks in wild abandon.
Say not that the life of love is without substance
When one oriole has finished its song,
Another takes up the melody.

Pan Jinlian met Ximen at the corner door and went with him to her room. He sat down on the bed. "Why don't you undress?" she said to him.
He smiled and kissed her. "I came to tell you I am going somewhere else tonight. Please give me my love instruments."
"You rascal," Jinlian said, "do you think you can get around me with soft words like these? If I had not been standing at the door, you would have been with her already. You would never have come near me. I know. This morning you arranged everything with that evil slut. That was why she brought me the fur coat and kowtowed to me. What do you take me for? You won't get over me in that sort of way. When Li Ping'er was alive, I counted for nothing. But that bird is no longer in the nest. I'm not going to make the same mistake a second time."
"Rubbish!" Ximen Qing said, laughing. "If she hadn't come and kowtowed to you, you would have had just as much to say."
Jinlian was silent for a long time. "I will let you go, but you shall not have the instruments," she said at last. "You want to use them for your dirty work with that bad bone. When you come back to me, they will be filthy."
"But I am so accustomed to them I don't know what to do without them."
He badgered her for a long time, and she gave him the silver clasp. "Take it, if you must have it," she said. Ximen Qing put it into his sleeve and went out staggering.
Jinlian called him back. "Tell me. Are you going to spend all night with her? If you do, you'll have all the maids laughing at you. You'd better stay a little while and then send her packing."
"I shall not stay very long," Ximen Qing said. He went out again.
Again Jinlian called him back. "Come here," she said, "I am talking to you. Why are you in such a hurry?"
"What do you want now?" Ximen Qing said.
"I am allowing you to go and sleep with her, but I forbid you to talk a lot of nonsense. If you do, she will give herself airs in front of me again. If I find out you have done anything of the sort, I will bite off your weapon the next time you come to me."
"Oh, you funny little whore," Ximen Qing said, "you talk enough to kill anybody." He went out.
"Let him go, "Chunmei said. "Why do you try to keep him in order? You know the old saying: if a mother-in-law has too much to say, the daughter-in-law will become deaf. If you go on like that, people will only hate you more. Let us have a game of chess."
She told Qiuju to shut the corner door. Then they sat at the table and played chess.
Ximen Qing went to Li Ping'er's room and pulled aside the shutter. Ruyi'er, Yingchun, and Xiuchun were having supper on the bed. When Ximen came in, they all got up.
"Don't mind me," Ximen Qing said. He went to the inner room and sat down in a chair before the tablet of his dead wife. After a while, Ruyi'er came out to him.
"It is cold here, Father," she said, smiling, "come into the other room."
Ximen Qing put his arms around her and kissed her. They went into the other room together. Tea was boiling on the fire and Yingchun offered him some. Ruyi'er stood before the bed, near the fire.
"You have had no wine," she said. "We have had a pot of Jinhua wine and some food for my dead lady and we kept some for you."
"You take the food and give me some of the fruit," Ximen Qing said. "I don't want any Jinhua wine." Then he said to Xiuchun: "Take a lantern and go to my study. There is a jar of grape wine there. Ask Wang Jing for it and warm some for me."
Yingchun set the table. "Sister," Ruyi'er said to her, "open the boxes and let me find something for Father to eat with his wine." She picked out some special dainties and fruits and put them on the table. Then Xiuchun came with the wine, opened the jar and warmed some. Ruyi'er poured out a cup and offered it to Ximen Qing. He tasted it and found it very good. Ruyi'er stood beside the table to wait on him. She gave him some chestnuts.
Yingchun knew why he had come and went to spend the night with Xiuchun. When she had gone away and there was no one else in the room, he made the woman sit on his knee and they drank wine from mouth to mouth. He unfastened her dress and uncovered her tender white bosom. He touched her nipples. "My child," he said, "I know nothing so sweet as your lovely white skin. It is as beautiful as your lady's, and when I hold you in my arms I feel as if I held her."
Ruyi'er smiled. "No, Father, hers was whiter than mine. The Fifth Lady is beautiful, but her skin is not so pure. It is not so white as the Third Lady's. But the Third Lady, unfortunately, has a few pock marks on her face. Sun Xue'e is white and pretty." Then she said: "Yingchun is going to give me one of her ornaments. I wish you would give me the golden tiger that belonged to my dead lady. It is something to be worn in the new year, and I would like her to have it."
"If you have nothing to wear, I will give the silversmith some gold and get him to make something for you. The Great Lady has all your lady's ornaments. I can hardly ask her for them."
"I should like a gold tiger," Ruyi'er said. She stood up and kowtowed to him.
When they had been drinking for some time, she said: "Father, will you ask my sisters to come and have some wine with us? They will be unhappy if you don't."
Ximen Qing called Yingchun, but there was no answer. Ruyi'er went to the kitchen and told the two girls that their master wanted them. Yingchun came. Ximen Qing asked Ruyi'er to give her some wine and a plate of food. Yingchun took them, standing. "Please make Xiuchun come," Ruyi'er said, "I should like to offer her something." The maid went away but returned and said Xiuchun would not come. Then she took her bed-clothes and went to the kitchen to sleep with Xiuchun.
Ximen Qing drank more wine. Then Ruyi'er cleared everything away and gave him some tea. She found fresh silken bedclothes, and an embroidered pillow. She warmed them and asked him whether he would rather sleep on the large bed or the small one. "I prefer the small one," he said. Ruyi'er put the bedclothes on the small bed and helped him to undress. She went to the other room to wash, came back, and fastened the door. When she had put the lamp beside the bed, she undressed and got into bed with him.
The woman touched the warrior. The clasp was already in position. It was very hard and frisky and she felt pleased and terrified at the same time. They kissed each other and set to. Ximen, seeing her lying on the bed without any clothes on, was afraid she might catch cold. He picked up her vest and covered her breast with it. Then he took her by the legs and thrust forward violently. Ruyi'er gasped for breath and her face became very red.
"Mother gave me that vest," she said.
"My dear," said Ximen, "never mind about that. Tomorrow, I will give you half a roll of red silk to make underwear, and you shall wear that when you wait on me."
"Thank you," Ruyi'er said.
"I have forgotten how old you are," Ximen Qing said. "What is your surname, and your place in the family? I only remember that your husband's name was Xiong."
"Yes," Ruyi'er said, "his name was Xiong Wang'er. My own name is Zhang, and I am the fourth child. I am thirty-two years old."
"A year older than I am," he said.
They went on with their lovemaking, and he called her Zhang the Fourth. "My daughter," he said, "serve me well, and, when the Great Lady's baby is born, you shall have charge of it. And, if you yourself bear a son to me, I will make you one of my ladies and you shall take the dead lady's place."
"My husband is dead, and I have no relatives of my own," Ruyi'er said. "I have no other wish than to serve you, and I never want to leave you. If you take pity on me, I shall always be grateful."
Ximen Qing was very pleased with the way she spoke. He grasped her white legs firmly and plunged forward violently again. She murmured softly and her starry eyes grew dim. Soon he asked her to lie down with legs spread-eagled like a mare's, and, covered with a red blanket, he rode her. He thrust with his prick, pressing on as he fondled her white buttocks in the candlelight. "Call me your darling without stopping," he said. "Let me bury myself in you." She rose to receive him, and called him her darling in a trembling voice. They played for a whole hour before Ximen wished to yield. At last he withdrew his prick, and she wiped it with a handkerchief. They slept in each other's arms. Before dawn she woke up excited and put his prick in her mouth. "Your Fifth Mother," said Ximen, "sucks all night. She does not let me get up if I want to piss because she is afraid that I'll catch cold, and she drinks my water."
"What does that matter?" she cried. "I'm also thirsty"; and Ximen made water in her mouth. They made love in every possible way.
The next day, she rose first, opened the door and lit a fire. Then she helped Ximen Qing to dress. He went to the front court and told Daian to send Ben the Fourth with two soldiers to take the golden tripod with his card to Censor Song's place. "When they have delivered it," he said, "they must wait for a return card." He told Chen Jingji to pack up a roll of gold silk and a roll of colored satin. He bade Qintong get a horse ready and take them to his Excellency Cai. Then he took breakfast in Yueniang's room.
"I don't see how we can all go to see Mistress Ying," Yueniang said, "Somebody must stay at home to keep Aunt Wu company."
"But I have got five presents ready," Ximen Qing said. "Of course, you must all go. My daughter is here. She can stay with Aunt Wu. I have promised Brother Ying." Yueniang said no more.
Guijie came and kowtowed to them. "I am going home today, Mother," she said.
"There is no hurry," Yueniang said. "Stay another day."
"My mother is not well," Guijie said, "and there is no one to look after her. I will come and see you again in the fifth month."
She kowtowed to Ximen Qing. Yueniang gave her some cakes and a tael of silver. When she had had some tea, she went away.
Ximen Qing had put on his ceremonial clothes and was on his way to the outer court when Ping'an came and said that General Jing had come. Ximen Qing went to greet him, and they made reverences to one another in the great hall.
"I haven't been to see you, and I have not yet congratulated you upon your promotion," General Jing said.
"And I have not called to thank you for sending me such a splendid present," Ximen Qing replied.
When they had exchanged greetings and taken tea, General Jing said: "I see your horse is waiting for you. Where are you going?"
"Yesterday," Ximen said, "Censor Song and their Excellencies An, Qian, and Huang, used my house for a reception to Cai the new Governor. Cai is the Imperial Tutor's ninth son. He gave me a card, and I am going to call upon him. I must go now because he may be leaving at any moment."
"I have come to ask a favor of you," General Jing said. "You know that Song's term of office will expire early in the new year. I expect there will be an inspection of all the officers, and I have come to you in the hope that you will mention my name to him. I discovered that he was here yesterday, and that is why I have called. If any promotion comes to me, I shall owe it to you."
"We are good friends," Ximen Qing said, "I shall be glad to do anything I can. Give me your record of service. He will be coming here for another party the day after tomorrow and I will speak to him then."
Jing rose and bowed. "I am very much obliged to you. Here is my record of service." He took it from an attendant and handed it to Ximen Qing. It said:
Jing Zhong, Garrison Commander of Qinghe, and officer in command of troops in various districts of Shandong. Thirty-two years of age. Born at Tanzhou. In consequence of the exploits of his ancestors, he was given the rank of captain. He passed through the military academy and has been promoted by degrees to his present post in command of troops in Jizhou, etc.
When Ximen Qing had read this, Jing brought out a list of presents and asked him to accept them. Ximen saw: "Two hundred measures of fine rice."
"What is this?" he said, "I cannot possibly accept it. If I did, there would be no point whatever in our friendship."
"Siquan," Jing said, "if you do not want it, you can give it to his Excellency. You must not refuse. If you do, I will never trouble you again."
After much demur, Ximen accepted. "When I have spoken to him, I will let you know," he said.
They drank tea again, and Jing went away. Ximen Qing mounted his horse and, with Qintong in attendance, went to see Governor Cai.
When Ximen had gone, Yuxiao, who had helped him to dress, went to see Jinlian.
"Mother," she said, "why didn't you stay longer in the inner court last night? Mother said several nasty things about you. She said that, as soon as you heard Father coming from the other court, you dashed after him. She said you got hold of him so tightly that you wouldn't let him go, even to the Third Lady, whose birthday it was. And the Third Lady said she wasn't going to enter into a competition with you; he might go to any room he liked."
"What can I do to clear myself?" Jinlian said. "They are not blind. Why couldn't they see that he never came here at all?"
"He comes to you so often," Yuxiao said. "And now the Sixth Lady is dead, they don't see where else he can go."

"Chickens cannot piddle, but they have to get rid of their water somehow," Jinlian said. "One woman has died, but there is another to take her place."
"Mother was angry with you because you asked for the fur coat without speaking to her about it first. She scolded Father when he gave back the key. She said it was lucky for you the Sixth Lady was dead or you wouldn't have had a chance to get the things. If she had been alive, you would only have been able to look at them."
"How absurd!" Jinlian said. "He is at liberty to do what he thinks fit. She is not my mother-in-law. It is not for her to control me. So she said I wouldn't let him go, did she? Well, I didn't put a cord about him. What nonsense!"
"I have come to tell you this so that you will know how matters stand. You mustn't mention it to anybody else. Guijie has gone, and the Great Lady is getting ready to go out. You will have to get ready too."
Yuxiao went away again. Jinlian decked herself with flowers and ornaments and powdered her face before the mirror. She told Chunmei to go and ask Yulou what color she was going to wear.
"Since we are still in mourning, Father wishes us all to wear plain clothes," Yulou said.
The ladies decided to wear white hairnets with pearl bandeaux, and plain-colored clothes. Yueniang alone wore a white headdress with a gold top, an embroidered coat, and a green skirt. One large sedan chair and four small ones were waiting for them. They took leave of Aunt Wu, the nuns, and old woman Pan, and set out to Ying Bojue's house to celebrate his baby's first month.
Ruyi'er and Yingchun had the food that Ximen Qing had left and a jar of Jinhua wine. They set out these things, took another pot of grape wine from the jar, and, at midday, invited old woman Pan, Chunmei, and Miss Yu to come and enjoy them. Miss Yu played and sang for them.
"I understand that Miss Shen sings that song about hanging up the portraits very well," Chunmei said, as they were enjoying their meal. "Why shouldn't we send for her and get her to sing to us?"
Yingchun was going to send Xiuchun but, at that moment, Chunhong came in to warm his hands at the fire.
"Now, you thievish little Southerner," Chunmei said to him, "didn't you go with the ladies?"
"No," Chunhong said, "Father told Wang Jing to go and said I was to stay here."
"You must be frozen, you little Southerner, or you wouldn't have come to warm your hands." She asked Yingchun to give him some wine. "When he has had it," she said, "we will get him to go for Miss Shen, and she shall come to sing for Grandmother."
When Chunhong had drunk his wine, he went to the inner court. Miss Shen was drinking tea with Aunt Wu, Ximen Dajie, Yuxiao, and the nuns.
"Sister Shen," Chunhong said, "my aunt wants you to go and sing for her."
"Your aunt is here," Miss Shen said. "What are you talking about?"
"I mean Aunt Chunmei," the boy said.
"Why does she want me?" Miss Shen said. "Miss Yu is there."
"Go, Miss Shen," Aunt Wu said, "and come back to us later." But Miss Shen would not go.
Chunhong went back and told Chunmei that he could not persuade her to come.
"Tell her I want her. Then she will come," Chunmei said.
"I did tell her, but she wouldn't pay any attention. When I said my aunt wanted her, she cried: 'What aunt are you talking about?' I said: 'Aunt Chunmei.' Then she said: 'Why should I bother about her? Miss Yu is there, and that's enough. Who is she to have the audacity to send for me? I am busy. I'm singing for Aunt Wu.' Aunt Wu told her to come, but she wouldn't."
Chunmei flew into a temper. Her ears grew red, and her face became purple. Nobody could stop her. She rushed to Yueniang's room, shook her finger at Miss Shen, and upbraided her.
"How dare you say to the boy: 'What aunt are you talking about?' and: 'How has she the audacity to send for me?' Who are you? Are you a general's wife that I have no right to send for you? You are just a thievish strumpet who runs around from one family to another. Before you have been here any time at all, you begin trying to give yourself airs. What songs do you think you know? You know about a couple of lines, one here and one there. The sort of stuff you sing is the veriest doggerel, never written down on paper. You know a few heathenish songs and a few crazy tunes, and you make all this fuss. I have heard some of the finest singers there are. You simply don't count. That whore, Wang Liu'er, may think a lot about you, but, I assure you, I don't. I don't care how much you try to follow in her footsteps, I'm not afraid of you. Get out of here at once."
Aunt Wu checked her. "You must not be so uncivil," she said.
Miss Shen, surprised at being scolded in this way, could only blink. She was angry but she dared not speak. At last she said: "Sister seems to be very annoyed, but I didn't say anything wrong to the boy. Why does she come and insult me like this? If this is no place for me, there are plenty of other places I can go to."
This made Chunmei more angry still. "You wandering vagabond of a strumpet! If you are such a high-principled woman, why do you go begging clothes and food outside your own family? Get out of here and never come back again."
"I don't depend upon this place for my living," Miss Shen said.
"If you did, I should tell the boys to pull your hair out."
"You maid," Aunt Wu said, "what makes you so uncivil today? Go to the other court."
Chunmei did not move. Miss Shen cried and got down from the bed. She said good-bye to Aunt Wu, packed her clothes, and went away without waiting for a sedan chair. Aunt Wu told Ping'an to send Huatong with her to Han Daoguo's house.
Chunmei, still fuming, went back to the outer court. Aunt Wu looked at Ximen Dajie and Yuxiao. "Chunmei must have been drinking," she said. "She would not have been so unmannerly if she hadn't. It made me very uncomfortable. She ought to have let Miss Shen go in her own good time. Why should she tell her to get out at once? She wouldn't even let a boy take her away. It is too bad."
"I imagine they have been drinking," Yuxiao said.
When Chunmei got back to her party, she said: "I wish I had boxed her ears. Then she would have known what sort of woman I am. I wasn't going to let her get away with behavior like that."
"You must remember that, when you cut one branch of a tree, you hurt the other branches," Yingchun said. "Don't forget Miss Yu is here."
Miss Yu is a very different sort," Chunmei said. "She has been coming here for years and everybody likes her. She never refuses to sing if she is asked. She is not in the least like that strumpet. What songs does she know? Always the same few lines from the same few ditties, extremely vulgar, and not at all the sort of thing to be Song in a decent house like this. I don't want to hear her sing. I believe she is trying to put herself in Miss Yu's place."
"That is true enough," Miss Yu said. "Last night, when the Great Lady asked me to sing, she took the lute away from me. But don't be angry with her. She has no idea how she ought to behave here, and she doesn't know the respect that is due to you."
"That's what I told her," Chunmei said. "I said: 'Go and tell Han Daoguo's wife. I don't care.'"
"Sister," old woman Pan said, "why let yourself be so upset?"
"Let me give you a cup of wine to make you calmer," said Ruyi'er.
"This daughter of mine always flies into a temper when she is provoked," Yingchun said. "Now, Miss Yu, pick out one of your best songs and sing it for her."
Miss Yu took up her lute. "I will sing 'Ying Ying Made Trouble in the Bedchamber' for Grandmother and Sister Chunmei."
"Sing it well and you shall have some wine," Ruyi'er told her.
Yingchun took a cup of wine and said to Chunmei: "Now, Sister, no more tempers. Drink this cup of wine from your mother's hand."
This made Chunmei laugh. "You little strumpet!" she said, "how dare you call yourself my mother? Miss Yu, don't sing that song. Sing 'The River Is in Flood, and the Water Has Reached My Door.'"
Miss Yu took her lute and sang the first line: 'The flowers are dainty and the moon delightful.' They enjoyed their wine.
When Ximen Qing returned from the wharf where he had visited Cai, Ping'an said: "A messenger has been from Captain He to ask you to go early to the office tomorrow. Some robbers have been arrested, and they are to be tried. Prefect Hu has sent a hundred copies of the new calendar; and General Jing, a pig, a jar of wine, and four packets of silver. I gave them to brother-in-law, and he took them to the inner court. We did not send a card in return because the servant said he would call again this evening. I gave a return card and a *qian* of silver to his Lordship Hu's servant. Your kinsman, Master Qiao, has sent a card asking you to take wine with him tomorrow."
Then Daian came, bringing a return card from Song. "I took the things to his office," the boy said. "His Excellency said he would settle up with you tomorrow, and he gave me and the men five *qian* of silver and a hundred copies of the new calendar."
Ximen Qing went into the great hall. Chunhong hurried to warn Chunmei and the others.
"Are you still drinking?" he said. "Father has come back."
"What if he has, you little Southerner?" Chunmei said. "He won't interfere with us. The ladies are not at home, and he won't come here."
They went on drinking and joking, and nobody left the party. Ximen Qing went to Yueniang's room. Aunt Wu and the nuns went to the adjoining room. Yuxiao took his clothes and got something ready for him to eat.
Ximen Qing summoned Laixing and said to him: "You must see about preparing another feast. On the thirtieth, Censor Song is going to have a party here, and, on the first, the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, Major Zhou and the others, are coming."
When Laixing had gone, Yuxiao asked Ximen what kind of wine he would like.
"Open the jar that General Jing has just sent," he told her. "I would like to taste it and see if it is any good."
Then Laian came and said he was going to take a man to meet Yueniang and the other ladies. Yuxiao asked him to unseal the jar. Then she poured out some wine and handed it to her master. It was a beautiful shade of green, and rather pungent. Ximen Qing asked for more. Food was brought, and he had his meal. Laian took some soldiers with lanterns to escort the ladies home.
They came in, wearing their fur coats. Sun Xue'e was the only one to kowtow to Ximen and Wu Yueniang. Then she went to the other room to see Aunt Wu and the nuns. Yueniang sat down and said: "Mistress Ying seemed very glad to see us. Her neighbor, Madam Ma, and Brother Ying's sister-in-law, Miss Du, and several other ladies were there, perhaps ten in all. There were two singing girls. The baby is big and chubby, but Chunhua seems thinner and darker than she used to be. Her long face is not very beautiful. It looks just like a donkey's. She is not at all well, and the household is in a mess, for there are not enough people to look after it. When we came away, Brother Ying kowtowed and thanked us most effusively. He asked us to thank you for the presents you had sent."
"Did Chunhua dress and come out to see you?" Ximen Qing asked.
"Of course, she did. She has eyes and a nose like everybody else. She is not a spirit. Why shouldn't she come out to see us?"
"Oh, the poor maid!" Ximen said. "If I put a few black beans on her, I'm sure some pig would run off with her."
"You shouldn't talk like that," Yueniang said. "You always try to make it appear that nobody is worth looking at except your own wives."
Wang Jing, who was standing beside them, said: "When Uncle Ying saw the ladies coming, he didn't come out to welcome them. He ran to a little room and peeped through the window. I caught him there, and I said: 'Old gentleman, you are lacking in propriety. 'What are you looking for?' He kicked me out."
"The rascal!" Ximen Qing said, laughing. "When he comes tomorrow, I will cover his face with dust."
"Yes," Wang Jing said, and laughed too.
Yueniang shouted at him. "Don't tell such lies, you young rascal. He didn't look at us at all. You are telling stories. We never saw him all day long, except when we were leaving and he came to kowtow to us."
Wang Jing went away. Yueniang got up and went to see her sister-in-law and the nuns in the next room. Ximen Dajie, Yuxiao, and the maids and serving women came to kowtow to her.
"Where is Miss Shen?" Yueniang said.
Nobody answered. At last Yuxiao said: "Miss Shen has gone."
"Why didn't she wait for me?" Yueniang asked.
Aunt Wu saw that the business could not be kept hidden. She told Yueniang of the quarrel between Chunmei and Miss Shen. Yueniang was angry. "If she didn't wish to sing, why should she?" she said. "The maid has no business to be so conceited and undisciplined as to curse her. The master of this house does not behave properly himself, and the maids do what they like. The whole household is topsy-turvy." She turned to Jinlian: "You ought to keep her in order instead of letting her behave so outrageously."
"I have never seen such a blind mule as Miss Shen," Jinlian said, laughing. "If the wind didn't blow, the trees wouldn't shake. She goes from one person's door to another, and singing is her business. When she is asked to sing, she should do so with a good grace. If she made a fuss and gave herself airs, Chunmei was right to tell her what she thought about her."
"All very well," Yueniang said, "but if she goes on like this, people, whether good or bad, simply won't stand it. They'll go away. You will do nothing to keep her in order."
"I don't see why I should punish my maid because she put this blind strumpet in her place."
Yueniang grew angry. Her face flushed.
"Very well, spoil your maid, and she will drive all our relatives and neighbors away."
She went to Ximen Qing, and he asked her what was the matter.
"I expect you know," Yueniang said. "You have such polite young ladies for your maids. Now, one of them has been cursing Miss Shen and making her go away."
"But why wouldn't she sing for her?" Ximen said, smiling. "Don't worry. Tomorrow, I'll send her two taels of silver, and that will put matters right."
"Miss Shen's box is still here. She didn't take it away," Yueniang said. She saw that Ximen Qing was laughing. "There you are, laughing, instead of sending for the maid and giving her a scolding. I don't see anything to laugh at."
Li Jiao'er and Yulou were there but, seeing how angry Yueniang was, they went to their own rooms. Ximen Qing went on drinking wine. Yueniang went to the inner room to take off her ornaments and ceremonial dress.
"Where have those four packets of silver on the chest come from?" she said to Yuxiao.
Ximen Qing answered her. "General Jing sent them. He wants me to speak to Song for him."
"Brother-in-law brought them. I forgot to tell you," Yuxiao said.
"Silver belonging to other people should always be put in the chest at once," Yueniang said.
Yuxiao put it in the chest.
Jinlian was still sitting there, waiting for Ximen Qing to go to the outer court. It was a *Renzi* day. She was going to take the medicine Nun Xue had given her and hoped that, after she had slept with him, she would conceive.
Ximen Qing showed no sign of moving. At last, she pulled aside the lattice. "If you are not coming, I shall go," she said. "I haven't patience to wait any longer."
"You go first," Ximen Qing said. "I will come when I've finished my wine."
Jinlian went away. Then Yueniang said: "I don't wish you to go to her. I have something to say to you. The pair of you wear the same pair of trousers, and you are making my life unbearable. She even has the audacity to come to my room and call you away. The shameless hussy! She might be your only wife and the rest of us nobodies. You are a foolish scamp. No wonder people talk about you behind your back. We are all your wives and you ought to treat us decently. You needn't make everybody aware of the fact that she has got you body and soul. Since you came back from the Eastern Capital, you haven't spent a single night in the inner court. Naturally people are annoyed. You should put fire into the cold stove before you begin on the hot one. You have no right to allow one woman to monopolize you. So far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter. I don't care for games of this sort, but the others will not stand it. They don't say anything, but they think a great deal. Yulou didn't eat a thing all the time we were at Brother Ying's place. She has probably caught a chill on the stomach. Mistress Ying gave her two cups of wine, but she couldn't keep it down. Will you go and see her?"
"Is that true?" Ximen Qing said. "Have these things taken away. I won't drink any more." He went at once to Yulou's room. She was undressed and lying on the bed, sick. She was retching painfully. "My child, how do you feel?" Ximen said. "I will send for a doctor for you." Yulou was vomiting. She did not answer. He helped her to lie down, but she pressed her hands to her breast.
"My dear, how are you? Tell me."
"I have a good deal of pain. Why do you ask? Go and attend to your own affairs."
"I didn't know," Ximen said. "The Great Lady has only just told me."
"Of course you didn't know," Yulou said. "I am not your wife. You only love the one who has established herself in your heart."
Ximen Qing took her in his arms and kissed her. "Don't tease me," he said. "Lanxiang, make some strong tea for your mother at once."
"I have some already made," Lanxiang said. She brought a cup. Ximen took it and held it to Yulou's lips.
"Give it to me," she said, "I will drink it by myself. Don't try to be pleasant. Go and sell your hot buns where they are wanted. I am not jealous. The sun must have risen in the west today, since you come to see me. I can't imagine why the Great Lady said anything to you about it."
"You don't understand," Ximen Qing said. "The last few days, I have really been too busy to come."
"Yes," Yulou said, "you have too much to think about; you can't think about anyone but your sweetheart. We are stale. We're only fit to be thrown into the dustbin. Perhaps in ten years' time you will remember us."
Ximen Qing still went on kissing her. "Go away," she said, "I can't bear the smell of the wine you've been drinking. I have had nothing to eat all day and I haven't strength enough to play with you."
"If you have had nothing to eat, let me tell the maid to bring something. I haven't had my supper yet. I will have it with you."
"No," Yulou said. "I feel too ill. If you want anything to eat, go and have it elsewhere."

"If you won't eat," Ximen said, "neither will I. Let us go to bed. Tomorrow I will send for Doctor Ren."
"Doctor Ren or Doctor Li, it's all the same to me. I shall send for old woman Liu. She'll give me medicine that will cure me."
"Lie down," Ximen said, "and let me stroke your stomach. That will make you better. You know I am an expert at massage." Then he suddenly remembered. "The other day," he said, "Liu, the Director of Studies, gave me ten cow-bezoar pills from Guangdong. If you take one with some wine, you will be all right in no time." He said to Lanxiang: "Go to the Great Lady and ask her for the medicine in the porcelain jar. And bring some wine with you."
"I'm sure you will be well as soon as you have taken it," he said to Yulou.
"I can't think of anything horrid enough to say to you," Yulou said. "What do you know about medicine? And, if you want wine, there is some here."
Lanxiang came back with two pills. Ximen Qing made her heat the wine. He took off the outer wax. There was a golden pill inside it. He gave it to Yulou.
"Now heat another cup of wine for me," he said to Lanxiang. "I am going to take some medicine myself."
Yulou looked at him. "You dirty creature! If you are going to take medicine, go somewhere else to do it. What do you think you're going to do here? You've decided I'm not going to die just yet, so you think you'll begin your tricks. In spite of all the pain I've had, you are ready to begin. No, I'll have none of it."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Very well, my dear. I won't take any medicine. We'll go to bed."
When she had taken the pill, they went to bed. Ximen Qing fondled her soft breasts. With one hand he pressed her sweet nipples, and, with the other, drew her white neck closer.
"How do you feel now that you've taken the pill?" he said.
"Not so bad as I did, but still bad enough."
"Don't worry," Ximen said, "you'll soon be better. Today, while you were out, I gave Laixing fifty taels of silver. We are going to give a banquet for Song the day after tomorrow. On the first of next month we must burn paper offerings, and, on the third, we must devote a couple of days to entertaining people. We can't accept presents and give nothing in return."
"What do I care whether you have people coming or not?" Yulou said. "On the twentieth, I am going to get the boys to settle up the accounts, and I shall give up this housekeeping business. You will probably hand it over to Jinlian. It is time she did some work. Only yesterday she was saying there was nothing very hard about it, and there is no reason why I should always be bothered with it."
"You shouldn't pay any attention to that little whore," Ximen said. "She is always bragging, but, if she is given anything of importance to do, she can't do it. If you really mean to hand it over to her, wait until these parties are over."
"Oh, you are very clever, Brother," Yulou said. "You pretend you don't love her more than the rest of us, but now you are giving yourself away. You say I am to hand the accounts over to her when the parties are over. Why should I have all the hard work? In the morning, when I am dressing my hair, the boys come in and out, measuring silver and getting change. It takes my breath away and uses me up. And nobody even says: 'Well done!'"
"My child," Ximen said, "don't you know the saying: 'When anyone has managed the house for three years, even the dog hates him'?"
He slowly lifted up one of her legs and put it over his arm. He embraced her, still holding it. He saw that she was wearing a pair of red silk slippers. "My child," he said, "what could be more delightful to me than this white leg? If I had all the women in the world to choose from, I could never find one so tender and so lovable as you."
"Oh, chatterbox!" Yulou said. "Do you imagine anybody believes that wooly mouth of yours? Other women have legs just as white. You really mean that my skin is rough, and you are calling black white."
"My dear, if I am lying to you, may I die this minute!"
"Don't take any oaths," Yulou said.
Ximen Qing put on the clasp and slipped his staff into her.
"I know the fellow you are," Yulou cried. "You always come to this." Then she saw the clasp. "When did you put that thing on? Take it off at once." But Ximen ignored her words, grasped her legs, and strove with all his might. Soon her juices of love flowed with a sound like that of a dog eating a fowl. She wiped her cunt with a handkerchief. She trembled and could not speak.
"Don't go any further, darling," she said. "My back has recently been hurting and some white fluid has been escaping."
"We will get some medicine from Doctor Ren tomorrow. That will cure it."
Yueniang was talking to Aunt Wu and the nuns. By degrees they came to the subject of Chunmei and Miss Shen, and the whole story came out.
"Chunmei was really very rude," Aunt Wu said. "She insulted Miss Shen in words that cut like knives. I was obliged to interfere. It was not surprising that Miss Shen was angry. I would never have believed that Chunmei could curse people like that. I'm sure she must have been drinking."
"Yes," Xiaoyu said, "she and four others were drinking."
"It is all that unreasonable fellow's fault," Yueniang said. "He has encouraged her to give herself such airs. She doesn't care who it is. She won't suffer anybody to speak to her. I shouldn't be surprised if, in the future, all sorts of people don't get driven away, and nobody will have anything to do with us. Miss Shen is a girl who goes from one house to another. It won't be very pleasant for us if this story gets about. People will say Ximen Qing's wife must be a dreadful creature. In this household, it is impossible to say who is master and who the slave. People will not say she is an undutiful slave, but that we are a bad bunch. And what will that mean?"
"Never mind," Aunt Wu said, "since your husband says nothing about it, why should we bother?"
The ladies went to their own rooms to sleep.
When Jinlian realized that Yueniang had prevented Ximen Qing from going to her, so that she missed the *Renzi* day, she was very angry. Very early the next morning, she told Laian to fetch a sedan chair for old woman Pan.
When Yueniang got up, the nuns were ready to go away. She gave each of them some cakes and five *qian* of silver, and promised that Nun Xue should hold a service in her own temple in the first month. She gave her another tael of silver to buy incense, candles and paper things, and said she would send oil, wheat flour, rice, and vegetarian food as an offering.
The nuns had tea with Aunt Wu in the upper room, and Yueniang sent for Li Jiao'er, Yulou, and Ximen's daughter, Ximen Dajie.
"How do you feel after taking the pill?" she asked Yulou. "Is your stomach still painful?"
"I brought up a little water this morning," Yulou said, "but I feel better now."
Yueniang told Yuxiao to go for Jinlian and old woman Pan. Yuxiao said: "Xiaoyu is seeing about the buns. I will go myself." She went to Jinlian's room.
"Where is Grandmother?" she said. "They want you to go and have tea with them."
"I sent her away this morning," Jinlian said.
"Why did you send her away without telling anybody?" Yuxiao said.
"Why should she stay any longer? She seems to have made herself a nuisance."
"But I have a piece of dried meat and four preserved melons for her. I never dreamed she would go. You keep them for her." The maid gave the food to Jinlian, who put it in a drawer.
"Last night, when you had gone away," Yuxiao said, "the Great Lady told Father you were the one who governed this household, and that you and he wore the same pair of trousers. She said you were a shameless thing, monopolizing him as you did, so that he was afraid to go to the inner court. She persuaded him to go and sleep in the Third Lady's room. Then she told Aunt Wu and the nuns that you spoiled Chunmei so much that she even dared to insult Miss Shen. Father is going to send a tael of silver to Miss Shen to make things all right."
Yuxiao went back to Yueniang and said that the Fifth Lady was coming, but that her mother had gone home.
Yueniang looked at Aunt Wu. "You see! I said something to her yesterday, and now she flies into a temper and sends her mother away without a word to me. She must be up to something, but what form the storm will take I can't think."
Yueniang did not know it, but Jinlian was already in the room on the other side of the lattice. She came in suddenly.
"Great Sister," she said, "I have sent my mother home. Did you say that I monopolize our husband? I wish to know."
"Yes, I did say so," Yueniang said. "What about it? Ever since he came back from the Eastern Capital, he has spent all his time in your room. He never comes near the inner court. Do you flatter yourself that you are his only wife, and the rest of us nothing? Whether the others realize what you are about, I don't know, but I do. A few days ago, when Guijie went away, my sister-in-law asked me why she was in such a hurry and why our husband was angry with her. I told her I didn't know. You pushed yourself forward and said you were the only one who knew all about it. Of course you know. You never lose hold of him for a moment."
"If he didn't wish to come to my room," Jinlian said, "do you imagine I should keep him there with a pig's-hair cord? Do you suggest that I am a whore?"
"Aren't you?" Yueniang said. "Yesterday, when he was here, you pulled the lattice aside and dashed in to take him away. What do you mean by it? Our husband is a man. He does a man's work. What crime has he committed that you should tie him with a cord of pig's hair? You foolish creature! I said nothing about it until you made me do so. On the sly, you asked him for a fur coat. You didn't say a word to me about it, even when you put it on. If everybody behaved like that, my function here might as well be to look after the ducks. It is time you realized that, even in a poor house, there must be someone in authority. You allowed your maid to sleep with him. It was like cat and rat sleeping together. You indulge her in every possible way, and now she has the audacity to insult people. Yet you still stick up for her and won't be contradicted."
"What about my maid?" Jinlian cried. "You think she is bad, and you would like to get rid of me. As for that fur coat, I did ask him for it, but it wasn't only to get that for me that he opened the door. He got clothes for other people too. Why don't you mention that fact? I spoil my maid. I am a whore. And I make my husband happy. Why don't you say that woman is a whore too?"
Yueniang became more and more angry. Her cheeks became crimson. "No," she said, "not you, but I am the whore! But when I married him, I was a virgin, not a married woman who got him into her clutches. I am no whorish husband-stealer. It is clear enough which of us is a whore and which is virtuous."
"Sister, don't lose control of yourself," Aunt Wu said.
But Yueniang went on. "You have killed one husband already, and now you are trying to kill another."
"Mother," Yulou said, "why are you so angry today, beating us all with the same stick? You, Fifth Lady, must give way to the Great Lady. You must not quarrel with her."
"The proverb says: When there is fighting, no hand is gentle: when there is quarreling, no words are soft," Aunt Wu said. "When you quarrel like this, it makes your relatives ashamed. If you won't pay any attention to me, I shall take it that you are angry with me and call for my sedan chair and go home."
Li Jiao'er hastily begged her not to do so.
Jinlian sat down on the floor and rolled about. She banged her face on the ground and knocked the hairnet from her head. She cried aloud.
"Let me die!" she shouted. "Why should I go on living a miserable life like this? You were married in due and proper manner: I only followed him to the house. Very well! There need be no more difficulty. I will ask him to set me free. I will go, but I fear that, if you imagine you will capture a husband thereby, you are mistaken."
"Now, you disturber of the peace," Yueniang said, "before one can get a word out, you pour forth a stream of words. You roll about on the floor. You put all the blame on us. Will you ask my husband to divorce me? Don't think anybody is afraid of you, even if you are so clever."
"No, indeed!" Jinlian cried, "you are the only good and virtuous woman here. Who would dare to quarrel with you?"
"Am I not good and virtuous? Do you suggest that I have had a lover in this house?" Yueniang was growing still more angry.
"If you haven't, has anybody else? Let me see you point to any lover I have had."
When the quarrel had reached this pitch, Yulou went forward and tried to pull Jinlian away. "Don't behave like this," she said. "These holy nuns will be ashamed of you. Stand up, and I will go with you to your room."
Jinlian would not get up. Yulou and Yuxiao pulled her up. They took her to her own room.
"Sister," Aunt Wu said to Yueniang, "you ought not to get into a state like this when you are in such delicate health. There is really nothing very much the matter. When you sisters are happy, I am content; but, if you spend all the time quarreling and will not listen to what I say, I shall not be able to come any more."
The nuns gave their novices something to eat. Then they took their boxes and came to say good-bye to Yueniang. "Teachers," Yueniang said, "you must not scorn me."
"There is some smoke to every fire," Nun Xue said. "A tiny flame in our mind can give rise to much smoke. My advice is: give way to each other. As Buddha says: Our minds should be as calm as a ship at anchor. We must cleanse our hearts and make them pure. If we leave the lock open and loose the chain, ten thousand diamond clubs can not control us. The first step towards Buddhahood is self-control. Thank you for all your kindness to us. We hope you will be very well."
They made reverence to Yueniang, and she returned it. "I feel that, this time, I have entertained you very poorly," she said, "but I will send you something later." She asked Li Jiao'er and Ximen Dajie to see the nuns to the gate. "Mind the dog," she said.
When the nuns had gone, she sat down again with Aunt Wu. "This business has made my arms numb and my fingers as cold as ice," she said. "I only had a mouthful of tea this morning, and there is nothing but that in my stomach."
"Over and over again, I have advised you not to quarrel," Aunt Wu said. "You never listen to me. Now you are getting near your time. Why do you make this trouble?"
"You saw the whole affair," Yueniang said. "Am I the one who causes the trouble? You might as well talk about a thief arresting a policeman. I can give way to everybody but nobody will give way to me. There is only one husband here, and she wants him all for herself. She schemes and plots with that maid of hers. They do things that no other person would ever dream of doing. Though they are women, they have no idea of decency. She never looks at herself, but opens her mouth and pours forth insults. When Li Ping'er was alive, she was constantly having rows with her. She was always coming and telling me one thing and another that Li Ping'er had done wrong. She is the kind of woman who is always causing trouble. She has an animal's heart and a human face. She never admits saying anything. She takes such dreadful oaths they would frighten anybody. But I will keep my eyes open and watch her. I will see what sort of an end she comes to. When we had tea, I sent for her mother. How could I have dreamed she would send her away? She was all ready to make trouble with me. She sneaked up here determined to do so. Well! I am not afraid of her. Let her tell my husband, and he can divorce me."
"We were all in the room," Yuxiao said. "I was standing near the fire, but I did not hear the Fifth Lady come in. I never heard a sound."
"She walks like a spirit," Xue'e said. "She always wears felt shoes, so she doesn't make any sound. Don't you remember the trouble she used to make for me when she first came here? She said all sorts of things about me behind my back, and my husband beat me twice in consequence. At that time, Sister, you said it was my fault."
"She is accustomed to burying people alive," Yueniang said. "Today she thought she would try her hand on me. You saw her beating her head on the ground and rolling about. When he comes back and finds out about it, I shall come off worst."
"You mustn't say that, Mother," Li Jiao'er said, "the world cannot be turned upside down."
"You don't know," Yueniang said. "She is one of those nine-tailed foxes. Better people than I have died at her hands. How shall I escape? What flesh and bones have I that they can withstand her? You have been here several years, and you came from the bawdy house, but you are worth a dozen of her. See how desperate she was yesterday. She dashed into my room and called him. She said: 'I'm not going to wait for you if you don't come.' It looked as though he belonged to her, and she had the right to have him. I shouldn't care if he hadn't gone to her room every night since he came back from the Eastern Capital. Even when it was somebody's birthday, she wouldn't let him go. She wants all ten fingers to put into her own mouth."
"Why do you worry about it so much?" Aunt Wu said. "You are nearly always ill. Let him do what he likes. If you are trying to fight other people's battles, you will be the one to suffer."
Yuxiao brought some food, but Yueniang would not touch it. "My head aches, and my heart feels very queer," she said. She told Yuxiao to put a pillow on the bed so that she might lie down, and asked Li Jiao'er to keep Aunt Wu company. Miss Yu was going, so Yueniang gave orders that a box of cakes and five *qian* of silver should be given to her. Then the girl went away.
It was about noon when Ximen Qing came home after trying the case at his office. General Jing's man came to ask for his return card. Ximen Qing said to him: "Thank your master for these valuable presents, but they are really too much. I should like you to take them back now, and I will accept them when I have been able to do what he wishes."
"My master gave me no orders," the man said, "and I dare not take them back. It will be just as well if they are kept here."
"In that case," Ximen Qing said, "thank your master for me. Here is a card to take back to him." He gave the man a tael of silver.
Then he went to Yueniang's room. She was lying on the bed. He spoke to her several times, but she would not answer. He asked the maids what was wrong, but none dared to tell him. Then he went to Jinlian's room. She, too, was lying on the bed, and her hair was in disorder. He asked her what the trouble was, and again he got no answer. Then he went to pack up some silver, and, when General Jing's man had gone, he went to Yulou's room. Yulou knew that the secret could not be kept so she told him about the quarrel between Yueniang and Jinlian.
In a great state of excitement, Ximen Qing went to Yueniang's room again. He held her up in his arms. "Why did you have this quarrel?" he said. "You know you are not in a fit state of health. Why do you take that little strumpet seriously? Why did you have a row with her?"
"I did not quarrel with her," Yueniang said. "It was she who started the trouble, I didn't go to her: she came to me. If you wish to prove it, ask the others. This morning, out of kindness, I got tea ready and asked her mother to come and join us, but, in a temper, she had sent her mother away. Then she came herself, tossing her head and shouting. She rolled about on the floor and beat her head on the ground. She got her hairnet in a mess. It was a marvel she didn't strike me, and, if it hadn't been for the others keeping us apart, we might have rolled about together. She is so used to bullying people that she thinks she can bully me. She said several times that you married her irregularly and that she would ask you to divorce her and she would go away. For one word I said, she said ten. Her mouth was like the Huai River in flood. How could a weak person like me withstand her? She knows how to put the blame on others. She made me so angry I didn't know where I was. As for this baby, he will never be born, not even if he is a prince. She made me so ill my belly feels ready to burst, and my guts hurt as though they were dropping out of me. My head aches and my arms are numb. I have just come back from the closet, but the child didn't come away. It would have been better if it had come, then I shouldn't have been troubled any longer with it. Tonight I will get a cord and hang myself. Then you will be free to go to her. If I don't hang myself, I shall surely be murdered as Li Ping'er was. I know you will think things very unfortunate if you can't get rid of more than one wife in three years."
Ximen Qing was terribly excited. He put his arms around Yueniang. "Good Sister," he said, "don't worry about that little whore. She doesn't know the difference between high and low, what is sweet and what is sour. Don't be angry. You are worth more to me than all the others put together. I will go and beat her."
"Dare you?" Yueniang said. "She will tie you with a pig's-hair cord."
"Let her say so to me," Ximen said. "If I get angry with her, I will kick her till she doesn't know where she is. How do you feel now? Have you had anything to eat?"
"I haven't tasted a thing," Yueniang said. "This morning, I got the tea ready and waited for her mother. Then she came and screamed at me. Now I feel very ill. My belly hurts and my head aches. My arms are all numb. If you don't believe me, come here and feel my hands. They are still cold."
Ximen Qing stamped his feet on the ground. "What shall I do?" he cried. "I know. I'll send the boys for Doctor Ren."

"What is the use of sending for Doctor Ren? He can do nothing. If it is to live, it will live, and, if not, it will die. If it dies, so much the better for everybody. A wife is like the paint on the walls. When it is faded, another coat is put on. If I die, you will make her your first wife. She is clever enough to manage this household."
"I'm surprised you have patience even to quarrel with her," Ximen Qing said. "You ought to treat her as dung and leave her alone. If we don't send for Doctor Ren, the anger will get into your system and we shan't be able to get it out again. Then it will be too late to do anything."
"Send for old woman Liu, and I will take her medicine," Yueniang said. "I will ask her to use a needle on my head and get rid of the headache."
"That's absurd," Ximen Qing said. "What does that old whore know about women's ailments? I shall send a boy with a horse for Doctor Ren at once."
"You can do so if you like, but I won't see him."
Ximen Qing paid no attention. He went to the outer court and said to Qintong: "Get a horse at once and go for Doctor Ren. Be quick. Bring him back with you." Qintong got a horse and was away like a cloud of smoke. Ximen Qing went back to Yueniang's room and told the maids to make some gruel. But when the gruel was brought, Yueniang would not eat it.
Qintong came back and said Doctor Ren was at the palace and his people said he would come the next morning.
Yueniang saw that messengers had come several times from Master Qiao to invite Ximen Qing. "The doctor will be here tomorrow," she said. "You had better go or our kinsman Qiao will be angry."
"If I go, who will see to you?"
Yueniang laughed. "You silly fellow," she said. "None of this. Off you go. There is nothing seriously wrong with me. Leave me alone. Perhaps I shall feel better. If I do, I'll get up and have something to eat with my sister-in-law. Don't be so excited."
Ximen Qing said to Yuxiao: "Go for Aunt Wu at once, and ask her to stay with your mother. Where is Miss Yu? Tell her to come and sing for your mother."
"Miss Yu has been gone a long time," Yuxiao said.
"Who told her to go?" Ximen said, "I wanted her here for another two days." He kicked Yuxiao.
"She saw this was no place to be at, so she went away," Yueniang said. "Yuxiao is not to blame."
"You wouldn't kick the one who insulted Miss Shen," Yuxiao murmured.
Ximen Qing pretended not to hear this. He dressed and went to Master Qiao's house. Before the first night watch, he returned and went to Yueniang's room. Yueniang was sitting with Aunt Wu, Yulou and Li Jiao'er. Aunt Wu hurriedly went away as soon as he came in.
"How do you feel now?" Ximen Qing said.
"I have had two mouthfuls of gruel with my sister-in-law," Yueniang said, "and my stomach feels rather easier. But I still have the headache and backache."
"That is all right," Ximen said, "Doctor Ren will be here tomorrow and he will give you some medicine to expel the anger and strengthen your womb. You will soon be well again."
"I told you I didn't want the doctor, but you would send for him. This is nothing serious, and I don't want any man to come and fiddle with me. You will see whether I am able to go out or not tomorrow. What did kinsman Qiao want with you?"
"Oh, it was only an entertainment to celebrate my coming back from the Eastern Capital. He was very kind, and had made a lot of preparations. There were two singing girls, and his Honor Zhu was there. But I was so anxious about you, I couldn't eat a thing. I had a few cups of wine and came back as soon as I could."
"You smooth-tongued rascal," Yueniang said. "These flowery phrases and flattering expressions are too much for me. What is making you so extraordinarily pleasant? Even if I were one of Buddha's incarnations, you would give me no place in your heart. If I died, you wouldn't think me worth a jar of earthenware. What did Qiao say to you?"
"He is thinking of applying for honorary rank, and he has prepared thirty taels of silver. He wants me to speak to Prefect Hu about it. I told him there would be no trouble about that because, yesterday, Hu sent me a hundred copies of the new calendar, and I hadn't sent him anything in return yet. When I did, I said, I would send a card and ask him for a nomination. Qiao wouldn't agree. He said he must offer his thirty taels. If I help him, he said, it would be very much to his advantage."
"Did you take his money?" Yueniang said. "You ought to do something for him if he asks you."
"He is going to send the money tomorrow. He was going to send presents too, but I stopped him. I think if I send Hu a pig and a jar of wine, that ought to be enough."
That night, Ximen Qing stayed with Yueniang.
The next day was Censor Song's party. Tables were arranged in the great hall, and everything was made ready. Thirty musicians from the Prefecture came early in the morning, with four conductors and four soldiers. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Ren came on horseback. Ximen Qing took him to the hall, and they greeted one another.
"Your servant called for me yesterday," Dr. Ren said, "but I was on duty. When I came home last night, I found your card, and I have come this morning without waiting for my carriage. May I ask who is ill?"
"My first wife has suddenly become disturbed in health, and I should be glad if you would examine her," Ximen said.
They drank tea. Then Dr. Ren said: "Yesterday, Mingchuan told me you had been promoted. I must congratulate you now and send my presents later."
"It is really not an occasion for celebration," Ximen said, "I am so illfitted for the office I hold."
He said to Qintong: "Go to the inner court and tell the Great Lady that Doctor Ren has come. Ask them to get the room ready." Qintong went. Aunt Wu, Li Jiao'er and Meng Yulou were with Wu Yueniang. He gave them Ximen's message. Yueniang did not move.
"I told him not to send for the doctor," she said. "I don't want any man here, staring at me and putting his fingers on my hand. I want some medicine from old woman Liu, nothing more. Why should he make a fuss like this to satisfy that man's curiosity?"
"But he is here now, Mother," Yulou said, "we can't tell him to go away without your seeing him."
Aunt Wu also insisted. "He's a physician to the royal family," she said. "You must let him feel your pulse. We don't know what's wrong or where the trouble lies. This is the only way we can find out. It'll be good for you to take his medicine, put your blood, and air in order. You mustn't let the thing go too far. Old woman Liu knows nothing about medicine." Yueniang went to dress her hair and put on her headdress. Yuxiao held the mirror for her; Yulou climbed on the bed, and brushed her back hair. Li Jiao'er arranged her ornaments and Xue'e put her clothes straight. In a very short time, she looked like a carving in jade.

## 099
## Meng Yu-lou Assuages Yüeh-niang's Wrath; Hsi-men Ch'ing Repudiates Licentiate Master Wen who Falls into Disgrace

Before deciding upon appropriate action,
one must think thrice;
So as to avoid being the author of one's
own dissatisfactions.
For humans residing in this world the wind
and waves are dangerous;
Wind and waves arise throughout the twenty-four
hours of the day.[1]

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Yüeh-niang had not come out for what seemed like half a day, he went into her bedroom himself and urged her to do so. Upon seeing that she was in the process of getting dressed, he went back out and invited Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come in and take a seat in the parlor of the master suite. Once there, Dr. Jen observed that the upper end of the room was concealed by a gold-flecked hanging screen, beside which there were arrayed wide benches provided with cushions, while the floor was covered with carpets, and there was a brazier in place.
Before long, Yüeh-niang emerged from her bedroom. Behold:

She is petite in stature,
With a round visage, and
A clear off-white complexion.
Her figure is neither plump nor thin,
Her stature is neither short nor tall.
Her eyebrows are like crescent moons;
Her phoenix eyes are slender and long.
Her graceful fingers reveal the jade of
Consort Chen of the Wei;[2]
Her ruby lips display the cloves of the
Han dynasty Secretariat.[3]

When she approached him and bowed in greeting, Dr. Jen was thrown into such consternation that he stepped deferentially aside and bent low in response to her salutation. Yüeh-niang then sat down facing him, while Ch'in-t'ung placed a table with a brocade cushion in front of her, and she:

Stretched out her jade wrist,
Revealed her slender fingers,

and directed Dr. Jen to take her pulse. After an appropriate time, Yüeh-niang withdrew and returned to her room, from which she sent a page boy out with a serving of tea.
When he had finished his tea, Dr. Jen said, "Your venerable lady's symptoms reveal that her vital energy and blood circulation are weak, and the pulse at her wrist is floating and rough. Though she possesses fetal energy, its constructive and defensive elements are imbalanced, which is conducive to anger, and has stirred up the fire in her liver. At present, her head and eyes are unclear, and her abdominal duct is somewhat obstructed, resulting in a state of depression. In her four limbs, there is a deficiency of blood and an excess of energy."
Yüeh-niang sent Ch'in-t'ung out to report, "Right now, Mother is suffering from headache and heart distention. Her arms feel numb, the downward pressure in her abdomen is painful, the lumbar region of her lower back is aching, and:

She cannot taste what she eats and drinks."[4]

"I am already aware of these symptoms," said Dr. Jen, "and have clearly described them."
"I will not conceal from you, Hou-ch'i," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that my wife is currently in the last month of her pregnancy, but because she has gotten so upset, her vital energy has difficulty circulating, being trapped below her diaphragm. I beseech you, venerable sir, to take care in determining whether to increase or decrease the dosage of the medications you prescribe. To do so would be a manifestation of your magnanimity."
"There is no need for you to instruct me," responded Dr. Jen. "I will, of course, do my best. Once I get home, I will prepare medications for her that should protect her fetus, repair her vital energy, settle her stomach, improve her resilience, and alleviate her pain. Once your venerable lady has taken them, she would do well to avoid occasions for anger, and reduce her consumption of rich foods."
"I beseech you, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "to do whatever you can to tranquilize her fetus."
"Of course," responded Dr. Jen, "I will endeavor as best I can to tranquilize her fetus, repair her vital energy, and nourish the constructive and defensive elements in her constitution. There is no need for you to enjoin me any further. I will give it my most careful consideration."
"My Third Lady," Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "is suffering from a chill in the stomach. I hope that you will be able to come up with some womb-warming pills to alleviate her condition."
"Your pupil will respectfully comply with your command," said Dr. Jen. "I will seal them up for you immediately."
So saying, he got up and went out to the front reception hall, where he noticed that there were a considerable number of musicians from the Music Office waiting in the courtyard.
"Venerable sir," he asked, "what sort of event are you putting on in your residence today?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by explaining, "His Honor Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, together with the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, have invited the grand coordinator of Shantung, Hou Meng, to a banquet to be held here today."
Upon hearing this, Dr. Jen was astonished at heart and felt more respect than ever for Hsi-men Ch'ing. He bowed and scraped before mounting his horse outside the front gate, showing greater deference than ever before, and double his previous regard. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came back from seeing him off, he immediately sealed up a tael of silver and two handkerchiefs and sent Ch'in-t'ung off with them in a gift box, to go on horseback in order to pick up the medicines.
Meanwhile, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and the rest were all in Yüeh-niang's room, engaged in preparing boxes of candied fruit, and polishing the silver utensils.
"First Lady," they asked, "how is it that, though you hadn't originally wanted to go out and be seen, no sooner did the doctor examine you than he was able to tell, thus and so, exactly what you were suffering from?"
"What sort of a wife does he take me for?" said Yüeh-niang. "Let me die if I must, for all he cares. Who knows what that whore is up to? She constantly tries to exert control over me, while claiming that I treat her as though I were her mother-in-law. The only difference between us is one of relative age, and I happen to be eight months older than she is. She maintains that since our husband loves her, it is only appropriate that he should treat us as equals. If she had not made sure of his backing, how would she have dared engage me in such:

A vituperative altercation?

If the rest of you had not urged me so strongly to go out and see the doctor, I wouldn't have gone out for ten years. Let me die if I must. As the saying goes:

If one cock dies, another will crow in its stead.[5]

Is not the crowing of the new cock great to hear?
Once I'm dead, he can raise her to my position, and thus eliminate all this quarreling and wrangling.

When you weed out the turnips, there is
room for other things."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Meng Yü-lou. "First Lady, how can you say such things? I am prepared to swear an oath on her behalf. This Sister Six, and I don't say this judgmentally, is indeed prone to act as though she:

Didn't know any better,

and is given to throwing her weight around, engaging in backbiting, and acting officiously. She's just a baggage, for whom, all too often:

The words are mouthed but the heart isn't in it.

First Lady, to allow yourself to get so worked up over her is a mistake."
"Do you really think that she is more thoughtless than you?" responded Yüeh-niang. "On the contrary, she knows exactly what she's doing. How is it that she is so prone to surreptitiously eavesdropping on people, and then using their words to reflect satirically on them?"
"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou:

"The head of a household is a receptacle
for catching dirty water.
If you lack the capacity to take it, what are you to do? As the saying goes:
A single gentleman can accommodate
ten petty persons.
If you raise your hand,
She will venture to get by,
but if you refuse to make allowances for her,
She'll be unable to get by."

"The fact is," said Yüeh-niang, "that, as long as our husband stands up for her this way, his legitimate wife will be relegated to the rear."
"Who are you fooling?" said Meng Yü-lou. "Right now, while you are in the unhealthy condition that you are, would Father have the gall to visit her quarters?"
"Why wouldn't he?" said Yüeh-niang. "Didn't she suggest that she could keep him tied up there with a length of hog-bristle rope? A man's heart is just like a horse without a bridle. Whomever he chooses to favor, he will favor. And anyone who presumes to try and restrain him, she will accuse of being wanton."
"That's enough, First Lady," objected Meng Yü-lou. "You've already had your say. Try to restrain your anger somewhat. Let me go get her to come and kowtow to you, and offer an apology for her misconduct. If we avail ourselves of the presence of Sister-in-law Wu, maybe the two of you can be induced to make it up somehow. If not, Father will be left in a very awkward position:

Damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't,
so that his every move will be problematical. If he wants to go to her quarters, he'll be afraid of your anger; and if he fails to do so, she won't venture to come out. Today, a banquet is being held in the front compound, and we are here, busy as can be, preparing boxes of candied fruit. If she is allowed to skulk by herself in her own quarters, the rest of us will find it hard to forgive her. Sister-in-law Wu, is what I say right, or isn't it?"
"Sister-in-law," responded Sister-in-law Wu, "what the Third Lady says is right. If the two of you continue to be at odds, and persist in refusing to see each other, it will make things hard for my brother-in-law, who will find it awkward to approach either of you."
Yüeh-niang did not say so much as a word in response to this, and Meng Yü-lou started to leave, and go toward the front compound.
"Meng the Third," objected Yüeh-niang, "don't you go after her. Let her come, or not, as she pleases."
"She won't dare not to come," said Meng Yü-lou. "If she won't come, I'll simply tie her up with a length of hog-bristle rope and drag her here."
With that, she made her way straight to Chin-lien's quarters, where she found her, with disheveled hair and a sallow complexion, sitting on the k'ang.
"Sister Six," said Meng Yü-lou, "why are you playing the fool? Do up your hair. Today, a banquet is being held up front, and we are as busy as can be preparing for it in the rear compound. You ought to come back and join us. What's the point of merely venting your spleen this way? Just now, thus and so, I've been arguing with the First Lady, urging her to relent, for quite a while. You ought to come back to the rear compound, keep your bad temper to yourself, while displaying your good temper, and see if you can't bring yourself to kowtow to her, and offer her an apology for your misconduct. Both you and I are in a position in which:
When confronted with low eaves,
How can we not lower our heads?[6]
As the saying goes:
Honeyed words and plausible speeches
can make the twelfth month warm;
Cruel words that are hurtful to others
can turn the sixth month cold.
The two of you have already had your exchange of words. How long are you going to persist in venting your spleen?
Men are as fond of expressing their anger,
As Buddhas are of receiving burnt incense.
If you will only go and offer her an apology for your misconduct, this problem, great as it is, can be brought to an end. If you refuse, however, you will put Father in an awkward position with regard to both of you, and if he wants to come to your place, she is certain to be annoyed."
"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" exclaimed Chin-lien. "There's no comparison between us. As she has declared, she is the genuine article, the legitimate wife, while you and I are merely women he has picked up after cohabiting with us amid the dewdrops.[7] What sort of standing do we possess? We're not to be compared to the toes on her feet."
"Let her say what she likes," responded Meng Yü-lou. "As I said to her yesterday, 'You're:
Hitting three or four of us with one swipe of the stick.
When I married your husband, I was not just someone he picked up along the way but was duly married, with the help of the standard:
Three matchmakers and six witnesses,[8]
before consenting to enter your household.
For every branch you chop down,
A hundred trees are threatened.
When the hare dies, the fox is sad;
Creatures grieve for their fellows.
Even if Sister Six has exasperated you, there are others of us who have not.
Though one may possess the authority, one
should not use it completely;
Though one may have something to say, one
should not say it completely.[9]
In all things, it is best to:
Look up to those above and regard those below,
in order to provide against future developments. How can you ignore the fact that:
The locust and the grasshopper,
Are maligned in the same breath,
here in the presence of the three nuns and Big Sister Yü?
Every person has a face;
Every tree has its bark,[10]
but our faces are being drained of blood, and our intercourse will come to an end.'
"Now, if you refuse to go see her, what do you propose to do? There is no avoiding the fact that, day after day, the two of you will be in close proximity to each other:
As inseparable as the lip and the cheek.
You ought to fix your hair right away, so the two of us can go back to the rear compound together."
When P'an Chin-lien heard what she had to say, she could only ponder it for what seemed like half a day;
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,
before picking up the dressing mirror in front of her mirror stand, brushing her hair, putting on her fret, getting into appropriate clothes, and accompanying Meng Yü-lou back to the master suite in the rear compound.
Meng Yü-lou lifted aside the portiere and went inside before her, saying, "First Lady, I went there as I said I would do and have managed to drag her back with me. She dared not refuse to come."
Then, turning to Chin-lien, she said, "My child, why haven't you come over and kowtowed to your mother?"
Standing to one side, she continued, "Kinswoman, my child is young, and is still so:
Unconscious of right and wrong,
that she has offended you. If you will only:
Lift high your gracious hand,
make allowances for her, and forgive her this once; should she ever be rude to you again in the future, you may punish her as you see fit. I will not have a word to say about it."
Then P'an Chin-lien:
Just as if inserting a taper in its holder,
proceeded to kowtow four times to Yüeh-niang.
After which, she jumped up and hit Meng Yü-lou a blow, saying, "You're delirious, you insensate whore! You're playing the role of my mother again, are you?"
Everyone laughed at this, and even Yüeh-niang herself couldn't help laughing.
Meng Yü-lou carried on, saying, "You lousy slave! On seeing your mistress show you a favorable countenance, you ruffle up your feathers and strike your own mother."
"It is such a relief to see you sisters making it up with each other so light-heartedly," said Sister-in-law Wu. "Even though this sister-in-law of mine may sometimes be guilty of saying:
A word or half a word,[11]
that grates on your ears, if you will only agree to:
Support and respect each other.[12]
and be sparing in your responses, all will be well. As the saying goes:
Although the peony blossom may be lovely,
It requires verdant leaves to set it off."[13]
"If she had not said what she did," responded Yüeh-niang, "who would have chosen to criticize her?"
"You are Heaven, while we are the Earth," said Chin-lien. "If you see fit to grant us your accommodation, we will venerate it as though it were engraved in our minds."
At this, Meng Yü-lou gave her a smack on the shoulder, saying, "My child:
You've only endured a slap with a flour sack."[14]
She then continued, "Don't you say anything more. We've been working away here all day long. It's high time for you to lend us a hand."
Chin-lien, thereupon, proceeded to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
before getting onto the k'ang and joining Meng Yü-lou in preparing boxes of candied fruit. But no more of this.
Sun Hsüeh-o was engaged in directing the group of servants' wives in preparing dishes at the stove in the kitchen. The hired chefs were also working in the large kitchen in the front compound, frying and roasting, steaming and boiling, as they roasted brocade-wrapped mutton and carved flowered pork.
When Ch'in-t'ung returned with the medicines he had been sent to fetch, Hsi-men Ch'ing read the labels and had the pills sent to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, and the ingredients for a decoction turned over to Yüeh-niang.
Yüeh-niang then said to Meng Yü-lou, "So you've sent for a prescription too, have you?"
"It's for that problem I had the other day," said Meng Yü-lou. "I was feeling considerable pain in my lower regions, and I asked Father to tell Dr. Jen about it, and get him to prescribe a couple of doses of pills for me."
"It was because you hadn't been able to eat anything that day that you caught a chill," said Yüeh-niang. "It's only right that you should take a chill in the abdomen seriously."
But let us put aside the events in the rear compound for the moment.
To resume our story, in the front reception hall Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien was the first to arrive, in order to look over the arrangements for the banquet. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into the summerhouse, where they sat down together.
Sung Ch'iao-nien thanked him profoundly for his gift of the incense-burning tripod, saying, "Your pupil really ought to repay you for it."
"The fact is," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "that, from the beginning, I would have liked to present it to Your Excellency but feared that you might not accept it. How can you speak of repayment?"
"In that case," said Sung Ch'iao-nien:
"What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"
So saying, he made a bow in order to express his gratitude.
When they had finished their tea, he started to interrogate Hsi-men Ch'ing about his assessment of the condition of the people and public morality in the district, and Hsi-men Ch'ing responded to his questions with perfunctory affirmatives and negatives.
He then went on to ask his opinion of the local officials, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Your humble subordinate is only aware that, as for Prefect Hu Shih-wen of Tung-p'ing prefecture:
His repute among the people is long established;[15]
and the magistrate of Ch'ing-ho district, Li Ta-t'ien, is:
Conscientious in performing his official duties.
As for the rest:
I am not familiar with all the relevant details;[16]
and would not presume to speak irresponsibly."
Sung Ch'iao-nien went on to ask, "Commandant Chou Hsiu is an associate of yours. How would you assess his character?"
"Although Commandant Chou is:
Both experienced and reliable,"[17]
replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is not a match for Military Director-in-Chief Ching of Chi-chou, who passed the military examinations in his youth and is:
Both talented and courageous.
Your Excellency ought to take him into consideration."
"You must be referring to Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "How do you happen to be familiar with him?"
"He and I have a nodding acquaintance with each other," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day he presented me with a copy of his curriculum vitae and asked me to show it to you, in the hope that you might be induced to:
Look favorably upon it."
"I have also heard long since that he is an excellent military officer," said Sung Ch'iao-nien. "Is there anyone else whom you would recommend?"
"There is one Wu K'ai," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who is the elder brother of your humble subordinate's wife. He currently holds the position of battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard and has recently been deputed to repair the local Charity Granary. According to precedent, he is eligible to be promoted to the rank of a commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard. If Your Excellency should see fit to put in a good word on his behalf, your humble subordinate would feel much indebted to your kindness."
"Since he is a relative of yours," said Sung Ch'iao-nien, "in the future, when I submit my report, I will not only recommend him for promotion, but also guarantee that he will continue to hold his current substantive position."
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly bowed to him as an expression of his gratitude and presented him with the curricula vitae of Ching Chung and Wu K'ai.
After Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien had finished perusing them, he turned them over to his clerical docket officer, saying, "When the time comes for me to draft my report, show them to me again."
The docket officer, accordingly, took charge of them, and Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for one of his attendants to surreptitiously present him with three taels of silver, in return for which the docket officer assured him that the charge would be engraved upon his heart. But no more of this.
As they were speaking, they heard the sound of drum music from the front reception hall, and an attendant came in to announce that the officials from the Two Provincial Offices had arrived. This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he immediately went out to the reception hall to receive them and exchange formal greetings, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took his time as he slowly made his way out the postern gate from the garden.
When the crowd of officials had finished with the customary exchange of greetings and observed that in the center of the room there stood a large portable table, on which were displayed candied effigies of the Five Ancients, ingot-shaped cakes, square-shaped confectionery, a high-stacked pyramid of fruits, the flesh of the five sacrificial animals, and an array of other comestibles fit for a major banquet, all of which were neatly arranged and surrounded by a cluster of lavishly furnished table settings:

Their hearts were filled with great joy,
and they all thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "We have put you to a lot of trouble. Allow us to supplement our prior contributions to the expenses."
"It is true that our contributions have been inadequate," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, "but, if you will do so for my sake, Ssu-ch'üan, let us spare these gentlemen the need to make any further contributions."
"Whoever heard of such a thing," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
They all then proceeded to sit down in order of precedence, while the attendants served them with tea.
The group of officials then explained, "As for the venerable gentleman Hou Meng, all of us have sent subordinates to remind him of the invitation, but he is still at the yamen of the Regional Military Command and has not set out yet."
The file leaders and musicians lined up to either side inside the second gate, as closely as though they were:
Locked tight in an iron bucket,
with their drums, flutes, pipes, and metallophones, in expectation of his arrival. They remained on the lookout for him until the early afternoon, when a messenger on horseback arrived and reported that His Honor Hou Meng was on his way. The musicians to either side began to play their instruments, and the crowd of officials all went outside the main gate to receive him, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien stood in waiting inside the second gate.
Before long, after a squad of soldiers bearing blue flags had preceded him to clear the way, Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, wearing a gown emblazoned with a scarlet peacock, sable earmuffs, and a gold-buckled girdle, and riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, arrived at the gate and descended from his sedan chair. The crowd of officials welcomed him inside, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, who had changed into a round-collared scarlet robe, emblazoned with a motif of golden clouds and a white *hsieh-chih*, a mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, and a girdle with a plaque of rhinoceros horn, ushered him deferentially into the great reception hall. Only after the two of them had exchanged the customary greetings, and the various officials had individually paid their respects, did the time come for him to be presented to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"This is our host, Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing," said Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien. "He is currently serving as judicial commissioner in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and is also a protégé of the venerable Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching."
Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, thereupon, directed one of his clerical attendants to present Hsi-men Ch'ing with a red accordion-bound calling card, which read, "Your devoted friend Hou Meng pays his respects."
Hsi-men Ch'ing respectfully received it with both hands and turned it over to a servant for safekeeping.
When they had finished paying their mutual respects, they all loosened their clothing and assumed their seats. The various officials were seated to either side, while Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien occupied the position of host. After tea had been served, the musicians struck up their music beneath the steps, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien took up a cup and proffered wine to Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, stuck flower ornaments in his cap, and presented him with a bolt of fabric. Immediately afterwards, the guest of honor's table setting was carried downstairs, the comestibles displayed thereon were packed in boxes, and personnel were dispatched to deliver them to his official residence. After this, they resumed their seats, a repast with soup and rice was duly presented, and the chef came out to carve the entrée of flowered pork, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
By this time, the musicians from the Music Offices had put on a number of ensemble dance pieces in which the performers were all clad in officially supplied brand new embroidered costumes, and a medley of vaudeville acts had been performed, all of which were superbly presented. Only after that did the troupe of Hai-yen actors come forward, kowtow to the company, and present the program of pieces they were prepared to perform. His Honor Hou Meng told them to perform something from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *P'ei Chin-kung huan-tai chi*.[18] When they had finished performing one scene, they withdrew, and the chef proceeded to carve the entrée of brocade-wrapped mutton. Truly:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Wind and string instruments, song, and dance,
Classical melodies saturate the ears, and
Gold and sable finery fill the banquet chamber.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The auspicious aura filling the ornate hall
is neither fog, nor is it mist;
The singing diverts the moving clouds, and
the tables are laden with wine.
Not only are the beauties, like red moths,
dangling their jade pendants;
But the black locks at their temples are
studded with golden cicadas.
Grand Coordinator Hou Meng remained in his place only until the sun began to sink in the West. After:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Two dramatic episodes had been performed,
he got up to go and directed his attendants to take five taels of silver and distribute it among the cooks, waiters, musicians, and servants. He then put on his outdoor clothes and took his leave, while the assembled officials escorted him to the front gate and looked on as he got into his sedan chair and departed. When they came back inside, Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien and the other officials also thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, took their leave, and departed.
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen them off and come back inside, he dismissed the musicians and, seeing that it was still rather early, directed that the tables should be left in place, and that the caterers should set what remained of the various dishes and delicacies in order. He then sent page boys to go and invite Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh, his managers, Fu Ming and Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ch'en Ching-chi to come join him and enjoy a dramatic performance. He also had two table settings of wine and savories provided for the troupe of Hai-yen actors to eat while he waited for the guests to arrive, after which, he told them to be ready to perform the winter scene entitled *Han Hsi-tsai yeh-yen* (Han Hsi-tsai's nocturnal banquet), from the ch'uan-ch'i drama *Ssu-chieh chi* (The four seasons).[19] In addition, he had pots of plum blossoms brought out and displayed on the tables to either side, so they could enjoy the plum blossoms while consuming their wine.
It so happens that, on that day, Pen the Fourth and Lai-hsing had been in charge of the kitchen, Ch'en Ching-chi had been in charge of the wine, and the managers Fu Ming and Kan Jun had been in charge of the utensils for the banquet. When they learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing had invited them to join him, they all came and sat down in his presence. Before long, Licentiate Wen came from across the street, made a bow, and sat down, after which Wu K'ai, Wu the Second, and Ying Po-chüeh also arrived.
Ying Po-chüeh greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, saying, "I fear I provided but scant entertainment for my sisters-in-law the other day, and I am grateful for your lavish gifts."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed and upbraided him, saying, "Why you lousy god-damned dog! You got a real eyeful spying on your mothers through an aperture in the window, didn't you?"
"You shouldn't believe the nonsense people talk," protested Ying Po-chüeh. "Whoever heard of such a thing. It can't be anyone else, now I think about it."
Pointing at Wang Ching, he then accused him, saying, "So it was you, you lousy dog-bone! You actually came home and told him such a tale, did you? When I get the chance, I'll take a bite out of your flesh, you little dog-bone!"
After this exchange of words was over, and they had consumed their tea, Wu K'ai expressed a wish to go back to the rear compound, and Hsi-men Ch'ing agreed to accompany him.
As they went along, Hsi-men Ch'ing explained to his brother-in-law, thus and so, "I spoke to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien about that matter of yours, and he looked over your curriculum vitae and then entrusted it to a clerk, to whom I also gave three taels of silver. He accepted it along with the curriculum vitae of His Honor Ching Chung and promised that when the time came for him to draft his report, he would give it his special attention."
Upon hearing this, Wu K'ai was utterly delighted and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I am much beholden to you, Brother-in-law, for your efforts on my behalf."
"I just told him that you were my wife's elder brother," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and he replied, saying, 'Since he is a relative of yours, I will be sure to take care of it for your sake.' "
Thereupon, they went into the master suite together in order to see Yüeh-niang.
After Yüeh-niang had greeted her elder brother with a bow, Wu K'ai turned to his wife and said, "Hadn't you better go home? There's no one there to look after the house. Why are you so reluctant to leave?"
"My sister-in-law wanted me to stay," said Sister-in-law Wu. "She has invited me to remain through the third day of the coming month, and return home on the fourth."
"Since it is my sister who is keeping you," said Wu K'ai, "you might just as well come home on the fourth, then,"
When they had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang suggested that he stay for a visit, but he chose not to sit down and went back to the front compound, where the wine had already been provided, and he could have a drink.
At this juncture, Wu K'ai, together with Wu the Second, Ying Po-chüeh, and Licentiate Wen, took their places as guests, while Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the host's position, and managers Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ch'en Ching-chi took their places to either side, making a total of five tables in all; while below, the troupe of actors began to play their gongs and drums and then proceeded to perform the scene from the *Ssu-chieh chi* entitled *Han Hsi-tsai yeh-yen yu-t'ing chia-yü* (Han Hsi-tsai's nocturnal banquet exposes the tryst in the relay station).
Just as the merrymaking was at its height, Tai-an suddenly came in and said, "Your kinsman Ch'iao Hung's household has sent Ch'iao T'ung here, and he is waiting down below to have a word with Father."
Hsi-men Ch'ing immediately got up from his place and went to the postern gate on the east to see Ch'iao T'ung, who had been sent by his kinsman Ch'iao Hung.
"Father says to apologize to you for the scant entertainment he provided the other day," said Ch'iao T'ung. "He has sent me today to deliver the customary fee of thirty taels of silver for the purchase of a position as an honorary official, which he has sealed up here, together with an additional sum of five taels, to be distributed to the staff of the personnel office."
"I will turn it over to Prefect Hu Shih-wen tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and he will supply the order of appointment in return. "What need is there to spend any silver on the staff of the personnel office? You can take it back with you."
He then directed Tai-an to tell the kitchen to take care of providing wine and something to eat for Ch'iao T'ung in the studio in the summerhouse, and then send him on his way.
To make a long story short, that day, by the time the actors had performed two scenes from the play about the tryst in the relay station, it was already the first watch, and the party for Hsi-men Ch'ing and his guests in the front compound broke up.
Once the utensils had been cleared away, Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room, where she was sitting on the k'ang with Sister-in-law Wu. When Sister-in-law Wu saw Hsi-men Ch'ing come in, she promptly got up and moved into an adjacent room.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Yüeh-niang, "Today, I spoke, thus and so, on behalf of your elder brother, to Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and he promised not only to see that he is promoted one class in rank, but also that he will continue to hold his current substantive position, so he will become the assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard. I told your elder brother about it just now, and he is as pleased as can be. After the censor's report is submitted at the end of the year, the imperial rescript confirming his appointment will come down."
"Needless to say," responded Yüeh-niang, "as a poor officer of the guard, he can hardly come up with the two or three hundred taels of silver he will need to expend."
"Who is asking him for even so much as a hundred cash?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I simply said to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien that he was my wife's elder brother, and he personally promised that he would not fail to take care of it as a favor to me."
"You can do as you like in dealing with him," said Yüeh-niang. "I won't interfere with you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Yü-hsiao, "Have you decocted that medicine for your mistress? Bring it here so I can see that your mistress takes it."
"You can go about your business," said Yüeh-niang. "Don't worry about it. I'll take it when I'm ready to go to bed."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was about to go outside, but Yüeh-niang called him back, saying, "Just where are you headed? If you are headed for the front compound, you'd better not go there. She came back here and apologized to me for her misconduct a while ago. All that she needs is for you to go and apologize to her."
"I'm not going to her quarters," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If you're not going to her quarters," responded Yüeh-niang, "whose quarters are you going to? You ought not to have anything to do with that wet nurse in the front compound either. The other day, in front of Sister-in-law Wu, the Fifth Lady belittled me by saying that I allowed you to carry on with her in order to curry favor with you. But you continue to be as shameless as ever."
"Why do you pay any attention to that little whore?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Just do as I say," responded Yüeh-niang. "I don't want you to go to the front compound today. And I don't want you to stay here either. Why don't you go and spend the night in Li Chiao-erh's quarters? You can go wherever you want tomorrow, and I won't interfere with you."
On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing, finding himself:
At a loss for what to do next,
felt compelled to go spend the night in Li Chiao-erh's quarters.
The next day was the first day of the twelfth month. Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early in the morning and joined Ho Yung-shou in issuing directives; after which, he took his place on the bench, held roll call, and dealt with the accumulated paperwork. The morning was over by the time he returned home.
He then took care of preparing gifts of a newly slaughtered pig and a jug of wine, along with the thirty taels of silver, and sent Tai-an to deliver them to Hu Shih-wen, the prefect of Tung-p'ing prefecture. Prefect Hu Shih-wen accepted the gifts and immediately proceeded to seal up the order of appointment for Ch'iao Hung.
Meanwhile, at home, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Yin-yang Master Hsü to set up an altar in the reception hall and make an offering of a pig and a sheep, wine and fruit, and burn paper money, in order to fulfill the vow he had made after encountering the storm on his way back from the capital. When the ceremony was finished, he sent Yin-yang Master Hsü on his way.
Thereupon, seeing that Tai-an had returned, he examined the reply from Prefect Hu Shih-wen and saw that he had provided the order of appointment, that it was duly stamped with numerous seals, and that it read: "Ch'iao Hung is hereby appointed as an honorary official of this prefecture." He then sent Tai-an to deliver two boxes of the meat from the foregoing sacrificial offering to the household of Ch'iao Hung, and invite him to come over for a drink, so he could show him the order of appointment. He also had boxes of the sacrificial meat delivered to Wu K'ai, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and his managers, Fu Ming, Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ts'ui Pen, one box for each of them. But no more of this.
In addition, he sent invitations for a party on the third day of the month to Commandant Chou Hsiu, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Eunuch Directors Liu and Hsüeh, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, and Wang the Third, ten persons in all. He also engaged troupes of vaudeville performers and musicians, as well as four singing girls, for the occasion.
On that day, Meng Yü-lou went to Yüeh-niang's room to hand over the household accounts, which she had finished reckoning, to Hsi-men Ch'ing, in the expectation that he would turn them over to Chin-lien, so that she would no longer be responsible for handling the household expenses.
While there, she enquired of Yüeh-niang, "First Lady, after taking that medicine yesterday, are you feeling any better?"
"No wonder people say that all a wanton woman needs is to have a man fondle her wrist," remarked Yüeh-niang. "Today I'm feeling fine. I no longer have a headache, and my abdomen no longer feels distended."
Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "First Lady, it would seem that all you needed was that touch."
Sister-in-law Wu also laughed at this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing came in at this juncture to ask Yüeh-niang's opinion on the managing of the accounts, and Yüeh-niang said, "Hand them over to whoever's turn it is, that's all. Why are you asking me about it? Who cares who they are turned over to?"
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing weigh out thirty taels of silver and thirty strings of cash and turn them over to Chin-lien to manage. But no more of this.
After some time, Ch'iao Hung arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him in the reception hall and explained, thus and so, what had happened, showing him the order of appointment he had obtained from Prefect Hu Shih-wen, which confirmed that he had been appointed as an honorary prefectural official, in return for the customary donation of "thirty piculs of white rice," to be used for the logistic needs of border defense.
He was utterly delighted by this and promptly bowed in thanks to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "I am much beholden to you, Kinsman, for your efforts on my behalf.
Permit me to offer you an obeisance in gratitude."[20]
He then called in Ch'iao T'ung and told him to take the order of appointment home for him, after which, he turned to Hsi-men Ch'ing and said, "In the future, should you invite me to a formal engagement, I will be entitled to wear the cap and girdle of an official and can thus presume to keep your other guests company."
"On the third, Kinsman" said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I hope that, whatever you do, you will deign to come by early."
When they had finished their tea, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'in-t'ung to set up a table in his studio in the anteroom on the west side of the courtyard and invited Ch'iao Hung to accompany him there, where it was somewhat warmer, and they could also take advantage of a recessed brazier.
Once Hsi-men Ch'ing and Ch'iao Hung were seated there, face to face, Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, "Yesterday, Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and the officials of the Two Provincial Offices, hosted a banquet here, to which they invited His Honor Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, who turned out to be highly gratified. Tomorrow, he is leaving for the capital, and my colleagues and I will have to go out to the suburbs to see him off before returning home."
The table had just been wiped off, and an assortment of dishes was about to be served, when who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, who had collected some contributions and had Ying Pao bring them in a box to present to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"These are the congratulatory contributions from the gentlemen concerned," he explained.
Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the box to have a look and saw that the first name was that of the Taoist Abbot Wu Tsung-che, followed by the names of Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T'ien-hua, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Pai Lai-ch'iang, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, and Tu the Third, ten contributors in all.
"For my part," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I am also inviting my kinsmen Wu the Second, and Brother-in-law Shen, as well as Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i and Hua Tzu-yu, who live outside the city gate, my three managers, and Licentiate Wen. There will be twenty or more of us altogether, and you are all invited to come here on the fourth."
He then directed an attendant to take the contributions back to the rear compound and sent Ch'in-t'ung to take a horse and go invite Wu K'ai to join them in order to keep Ch'iao Hung company.
He went on to ask, "Is Master Wen Pi-ku at home or not?"
"Master Wen is not at home," responded Lai-an. "Early this morning, he went out to visit a friend."

Before long, Wu K'ai arrived, and they were joined by Ch'en Ching-chi, so there were five of them sitting down together to have a drink. A variety of hot dishes to go with the wine, and bowls of soup, were arrayed upon the table, including, as might be expected, pig's feet and sheep's head; roasted, stewed, boiled, and sautéed chicken, fish, goose, and duck; and other supplementary dishes.
While they were enjoying their drinks, Hsi-men Ch'ing told Wu K'ai about Ch'iao Hung's occasion for congratulation, saying, "Today, he has received his order of appointment as an honorary prefectural official. Someday soon, we should prepare gifts, and inscribe a scroll, in order to express our felicitations over his ascension to the prefectural bureaucracy."
"You embarrass me," protested Ch'iao Hung. "What sort of appointment is this, that I should presume to put you gentlemen to so much trouble?"
At this juncture, there suddenly arrived a messenger from the district yamen, who had been deputed to deliver copies of the new calendar for the coming year, a total of 250 copies in all. Hsi-men Ch'ing sent a note in reply, tipped the messenger, and sent him on his way.
"We haven't yet seen the new calendar," said Ying Po-chüeh.
Hsi-men Ch'ing broke open a package of fifty calendars and divided them up between Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, and Ch'iao Hung. Ying Po-chüeh, on taking a look at one of them, saw that the new year had been designated as the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period, and that the first month was to be an intercalary month. But we will say no more about how they enjoyed themselves at the party that day:
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits.
They continued drinking until the evening, when Ch'iao Hung was the first to get up and go home. Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Wu K'ai company until the first watch before the party broke up.
Hsi-men Ch'ing issued orders to his attendants, saying, "Stand by with my horse early in the morning, and go and invite His Honor Ho Yung-shou to join me here, so we can proceed together to the suburbs to see off His Excellency Hou Meng. Also, designate four orderlies, along with Lai-an and Ch'un Hung, to accompany the sedan chair of the First Lady on her visit to the Hsia household."
When he had finished speaking, he went to the quarters of P'an Chin-lien. Before he entered her room, the woman had:
Removed her headdress,
Carelessly coiled her raven locks,
Left her flowery countenance in disarray,
And neglected to apply rouge and powder.
She was lying with her clothes on, sprawled on the surface of the bed, and had not lit any lamps in the room, so everything was very still. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came into the room, he first called for Ch'un-mei, but there was no response. Upon seeing the woman lying on the bed, he called to her, but she did not make a sound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down on the bed and said, "You crazy oily mouth! Why are you carrying on this way, refusing to answer?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled her up from her reclining position with one hand and said, "What are you so resentful about?"
The woman, putting on a succession of deliberate acts, twisted her face into a grimace and allowed an endless cascade of tears to roll down her fragrant cheeks.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, even though he had been forged out of iron or stone, could not help feeling his heart soften.
Embracing her by the neck with one hand, he enquired of her, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! You're perfectly fine. Why did the two of you get into such an altercation for no good reason?"
The woman refused to reply for what seemed like half a day before saying, "Who began any altercation with her? It was she who came up with an excuse for finding fault with me, accusing me, in front of other people, of being an inveterate husband-monopolizer and man-hunter, whom you had picked up somewhere; whereas she is the genuine article, and your legitimate wife. Who told you to come to my room, and for what purpose? You should stick to her, that's all. That way, I won't be able to monopolize you. She claims that whenever you come home, you insist on coming to pester me in this room of mine. Luckily, I heard her say that with my own ears. Have you really been spending the last few nights in this room of mine? How can anyone be so:
Barefaced and red-eyed,
as to engage in such backbiting? And as for that fur coat, she is critical of me for asking you for it on my own initiative, without mentioning it to her beforehand. Am I a slave or a maidservant of yours, that I should have to go to your room and kowtow to you when I want something? And as for that little piece of mine, who abused that lousy blind whore, she criticizes me for not disciplining her. Why should she insist on making such a fuss about it? If you were a real man, and wanted to do so, you could settle the matter with a single blow of your fist, and thereby dispense with all this:
Idle chatter and superfluous talk.[21]
No doubt I ought to be:
Content to abide by my humble lot.
As the saying goes:
What is cheaply purchased
is cheap when sold;
What is easily acquired is
easily relinquished.
Since I was taken into your household merely to be your concubine, my status is unpropitious. It has always been true that:
Good people are subject to being gulled;[22]
Good horses are subject to being ridden.[23]
That's just the way it is. If you take a look at the facts of the situation, who was it who, for fear of offending her, spent the night in someone else's quarters? Who was it who, on her behalf, sent for Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i? Who was it who allowed himself to be persuaded to do everything she asked? Meanwhile, it was I who was left to suffer in my room here:
On the far side of the mountains of Hell,
where I might just as well have died, for all anyone else cared. All this simply reveals what kind of a heart she possesses. On top of which, I was forced to hold back my tears, go back to the rear compound, and offer her an apology for my misconduct."
As she spoke, an incessant flow of pearly tears rolled down her peach-flower cheeks, and she fell into Hsi-men Ch'ing's arms:
Sobbing and wailing,
as she wiped the mucus from her nose and tried to dry her tears.
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her on the one hand, and admonished her on the other, saying, "That's enough, my child. I've had too many things on my mind the last few days. The two of you ought to be more circumspect in what you say to each other. You can hardly expect me to say which of you is in the right. Last night I wanted to come see you, but she said I was going to apologize to you and wouldn't let me come, so I spent the night in Li Chiao-erh's place. Although I was sleeping with somebody else, I was only thinking of you."
"That's enough," the woman said. "I can see into that heart of yours. You consistently lavish your:
False affection and phony consideration,[24]
on me; while, all the time, it is really that legitimate wife of yours whom you love. And right now, she is bearing your child. I'm nothing but a stalk of straw. There's no comparison between us."
Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her by the neck and gave her a kiss, saying, "You crazy oily mouth! Don't talk such nonsense."
Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'iu-chü, who brought in a serving of tea.
"That lousy slave!" protested Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She's hardly sanitary. How come you have her serving the tea?"
He then went on to ask, "Why is Ch'un-mei nowhere to be seen?"
"You still want to ask after Ch'un-mei, do you?" the woman replied. "She's so starved she hardly has a breath of life left in her. She's lying prostrate in the other room. Including today, she's gone three or four days without so much as a sip of soup or water. All she wants to do in there is to die. She says that the way the First Lady abused her as a slave in front of other people has made her:
So angry she scarcely cares whether she is
dead or alive.
She has done nothing but cry for the last three or four days."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he asked, "Is that true?"
"Do you think I'm trying to fool you?" the woman said. "Why don't you go see for yourself?"
Hsi-men Ch'ing, in a state of consternation, went into the adjacent room, where he found Ch'un-mei lying on the k'ang with:
Her fair countenance in disarray, and
Her cloud-shaped chignon all awry.
"You crazy little oily mouth!" Hsi-men Ch'ing called to her. "Why don't you get up?"
Though he called out to her, she did not make a sound and pretended to be asleep. Hsi-men Ch'ing then embraced her with both arms and lifted her up; but Ch'un-mei, stretching her torso while still in a seeming stupor, like:
A carp flexing its tail,
nearly swept Hsi-men Ch'ing off his feet. Fortunately, he had embraced her firmly and was able to prevent himself from falling by leaning against the bedrail.
"Daddy, take your hands off me," responded Ch'un-mei. "What do you think you're doing coming here to bother with a slave like myself? You'll only soil those two hands of yours."
"You little oily mouth!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "So what if the First Lady told you off with a word or two. It's hardly worth your getting so worked up about. I'm told that you haven't had a thing to eat for the last few days."
"What's it to you whether I eat or not?" retorted Ch'un-mei. "After all, I'm no more than a good-for-nothing slave, whom you might as well let die if she chooses to. Ever since I've been a slave in your household, what business of yours have I ever ruined? I've never given my mistress any reason to rebuke me with so much as a word, or to give me so much as a slap. Merely on behalf of that lousy blind whore, who has been:
Laid by every man in the street, and
Fucked by every guy in the alley,
why should I deserve to be so reviled by the First Lady? She is critical of my mistress for failing to discipline me. No doubt she would have me dragged down and given five strokes with the bamboo on behalf of that blind whore. In the future, if that wife of Han Tao-kuo's fails to come here, so be it. But if she should come, just see what sort of a talking to I'll give her. It was she who sent that blind whore here, so she is the root of the problem."
"Even if it was she who sent her here," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it was with the best of intentions. Who could have known that she would be the cause of such a quarrel?"
"If she had only been a little more accommodating," said Ch'un-mei. "I rebuked her with the best of intentions, but she was too narrow-minded to take it."
"When I came in, just now," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "why didn't you pour out a cup of tea for me? That slave's hands are unclean. I wouldn't drink any tea that she poured."
Ch'un-mei responded by saying:
"Since Butcher Wang is dead and gone,
One must eat pork with the bristles.
Right now, while I am in here, so weak I can hardly walk, you would have me pour your tea, would you?"
"You crazy little oily mouth!" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Who told you not to eat anything anyway?"
He then went on to say, "Let's move into the other room. I haven't had anything to eat yet either. I'll have Ch'iu-chü go back to the kitchen in the rear compound and bring us some food. They can pour us some wine, bake some stuffed pastries, and heat some soup flavored with pickled fish for us to eat." Thereupon:
Without permitting any further argument,[25]
he took hold of Ch'un-mei's hand and dragged her into Chin-lien's room next door, where he ordered Ch'iu-chü to take a box back to the rear compound and bring them some dishes of food to go with their rice.
Before long, she came back with a square box of delicacies, containing a bowl of braised pig's head, a bowl of slow-boiled mutton, a bowl of blanched chicken, and a bowl of sautéed fresh fish, along with a supply of white rice. There were also four bowls of side dishes to go with the wine, consisting of jellyfish, bean sprouts, potted pork, dried shrimp, and the like. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'un-mei to sprinkle some euryale seeds[26] over the potted pork, add some marinated bamboo shoots and leeks, and mix these ingredients into a large bowl of savory wonton soup. A table was set up, the dishes were placed upon it, the bowls were filled with rice, and a box of baked stuffed pastries was provided.
Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chin-lien:
Sat down shoulder to shoulder,
while Ch'un-mei placed herself to one side and proceeded to share their repast. The three of them fell to drinking together:
First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me,
until the first watch, before the party broke up and they went to bed.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early. As prearranged, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came to join him, and they enjoyed a pick-me-up, before setting out for the suburbs together in order to see off Grand Coordinator Hou Meng.
Back at home, Wu Yüeh-niang first sent a present ahead and then dressed herself up, seated herself in a large sedan chair, and set out, with orderlies shouting to clear the way, and accompanied by Lai-an and Ch'un-hung, for the home of Hsia Yen-ling, in order to attend a party, and pay a visit to his wife. But no more of this.
Tai-an and Wang Ching were left at home to look after the place. Whom should they see that afternoon but Dame Wang, the proprietress of the teahouse in front of the district yamen, who brought with her Ho the Ninth.
When they arrived at the front gate, she asked Tai-an, "Is His Honor at home or not?"
"Dame Wang and the venerable Ho the Ninth, what a surprise!" exclaimed Tai-an. "What wind has blown you this way today?"
"Without a reason for doing so," responded Dame Wang, "we would scarcely have ventured to:
Dawdle at your door or loiter at your gate.
I would not have come today were it not for a problem that has arisen for Ho the Ninth's younger brother, for whose sake I have ventured to seek a favor from His Honor."
"His Honor has gone to see off His Excellency Hou Meng today," explained Tai-an, "and the First Lady is also not at home. If you will wait here a minute, I will go inside and speak to the Fifth Lady about it."
It was not long after he went inside before he came out again and said, "The Fifth Lady invites you to come in."
"How would I dare go in by myself?" said Dame Wang. "You had better escort me. I am afraid of the dog."
Tai-an escorted her into the garden and right up to the door of Chin-lien's quarters, where he lifted aside the portiere for her. When Dame Wang went inside, she found the woman wearing her usual toque on her head, and dressed in clothing of brocaded silk. She was made up so that she looked to be:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade,
and was in her room, sitting on the k'ang, with her feet propped on the rim of the brazier, cracking melon seeds in her mouth. Within the room:
The drapes are made of embroidered brocade,
The bed is incised with gold ornamentation,
Rare antiques vie with each other in beauty,
Vanity cases gleam brightly in the sunlight.
Upon entering the room, Dame Wang felt obliged to make an obeisance to her, which threw the woman into such consternation that she returned the salutation, saying, "My venerable friend, there is no need for that."

When Dame Wang had performed her obeisance, she sat down on the edge of the k'ang, and the woman asked, "How is it that it has been such a long time since I saw you last?"
"I have thought about you, my lady," responded Dame Wang, "but I have not presumed to intrude upon you."
She then went on to ask, "Have you borne a son, or not?"
"It would have been great if I had," the woman said. "I have had two miscarriages, but neither of them survived."
She then went on to ask, "Has your son gotten married?"
"I haven't started looking for a wife for him yet," said Dame Wang. "He was working for a merchant from the Huai River region but has been home now for more than a year. He has, somehow or other, accumulated enough capital for a small business and has bought a donkey, which he uses to grind flour, the sale of which gives him enough to get by on. I'll find a wife for him sooner or later."
She then went on to ask, "Is His Honor not at home?"
"Father has gone outside the city gate today," the woman said, "in order to join his fellow officials in seeing someone off. The First Lady is also not at home. What did you want to talk to him about?"
"The venerable Ho the Ninth has a matter that he asked me to come and speak to His Honor about," said Dame Wang. "His younger brother, Ho the Tenth, has been implicated in a case of thievery and is currently under arrest in the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission, where his case is due to be tried by the commissioner. He is accused of acting as a fence for stolen goods, but he has nothing to do with the matter. He hopes that His Honor will let him off the hook when the matter comes before the bench. If the thieves try to implicate him again, and His Honor rejects the accusation, that will take care of it. If Ho the Tenth is set free, he will purchase gifts and see that His Honor is handsomely rewarded. I have his explanatory note here."
When the woman had read the explanatory note, she said, "Leave it with me. When Father comes home, I'll show it to him."
"The venerable Ho the Ninth is waiting out front," said Dame Wang. "Tomorrow, I'll have him come to seek an answer."
The woman told Ch'iu-chü to bring some tea, and before long she brought in a cup of tea and gave it to Dame Wang to drink.
As Dame Wang sat there, she said, "My lady, you're certainly enjoying an ample degree of prosperity."
"What's so ample about it?" the woman responded. "It would be all right if it weren't for all the resentment; but the squabbling goes on all day around here, without ever coming to an end."
"My lady," objected Dame Wang, "you have only to:
Open your mouth when the food is served,[27] and
Rinse your hands when the water arrives.
Since you:
Are studded with gold and decked with silver,
and have:
Slaves and maidservants at your beck and call,
what reason do you have to be resentful?"
"As the sayings aptly put it," the woman said, "if there are:
Three nests where there's only room for two,
and they contain:
Both legitimate wives and lowly concubines,[28]
A pair of serving spoons in the same crock,
Will either bump or rub against each other.
How can there fail to be some friction?"
"My good lady," said Dame Wang, "no one else is as smart as you are. So long as His Honor continues to enjoy such prosperous times, where your personal consumption is concerned, you need only:
Deal with matters as they occur."
She then went on to say, "Tomorrow, I'll have him come to seek an answer."
Thereupon, she said farewell and got up to go.
"My venerable friend," said the woman, "why don't you stay a little longer before you go?"
"That would be an imposition on Ho the Ninth, who is waiting for me," said Dame Wang. "I won't stay any longer but will come and see you another day."
The woman did not endeavor to detain her any further, but let her go.
When she got to the gate, she also reminded Tai-an why she had come, and he reassured her, saying, "You can go on home, venerable dame. When Father comes home, I'll speak to him about it."
"Brother Tai-an," said Ho the Ninth, "I'll come early tomorrow morning to seek an answer."
Thereupon, he went off together with Dame Wang.
That evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, Tai-an told him about the matter.
Upon going to Chin-lien's quarters, he read the explanatory note and turned it over to an attendant, saying, "Remind me about this when I get to the yamen tomorrow."
He then instructed Ch'en Ching-chi to take care of sending out the invitations for the following day, the third of the month; and also, without informing Ch'un-mei, sent Ch'in-t'ung to deliver a tael of silver and a box of delicacies to the home of Han Tao-kuo, and explain that they were intended to mollify Second Sister Shen's resentment.
Wang Liu-erh received them with an ingratiating smile and said, "She would not dare to harbor resentment. Tell your master and mistress that she is sorry to have offended the young lady, Ch'un-mei."
But no more of this.
That evening, when Yüeh-niang arrived home, she was wearing a fur coat of white ermine, over a brocaded jacket, and a skirt of blue brocade; and riding in a large sedan chair, accompanied by four orderlies bearing lanterns. Upon arriving home, she first greeted Sister-in-law Wu and the others and then went to salute Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was in the master suite drinking wine.
"When Hsia Yen-ling's wife saw that I had come," she reported, "she was as pleased as could be and expressed her thanks for our lavish gifts. There were many female guests, both relatives and neighbors, there today. It so happens that she has received a letter from Hsia Yen-ling, along with a letter for you, which she will have delivered to you tomorrow. They are scheduled to depart on the sixth or seventh of the month and have already hired carts in which to transport the entire household to the capital. She repeatedly requested that we allow Pen the Fourth to escort them to the capital, from which he would return immediately. Pen the Fourth's daughter, Chang-chieh, kowtowed to me today. She has grown up, and developed quite an attractive figure. It was no wonder that she kept stealing glances at me as she stood to my side to serve the tea. I did not recognize her. It was only when Hsia Yen-ling's wife, who has renamed her as Jui-yün, said to her, 'Come over and kowtow to the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing,' that she put down the tea tray and proceeded to kowtow to me four times. I presented her with two floral ornaments of gold. By this time Hsia Yen-ling's wife has developed a real fondness for her and has raised her status above that of a mere concubine, treating her as though she were her own daughter."
"That child is certainly lucky," Hsi-men Ch'ing remarked sardonically. "She could scarcely have expected to be treated so indulgently at anyone else's hands. Who else would not only have refrained from cursing her as a slave, and peppering her with abuse, but also have been willing to elevate her status?"
Yüeh-niang gave him a look and said, "Why you filthy-mouthed good-for-nothing! No doubt you refer to the fact that I have been known to castigate your favorite concubine."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this and then went on to ask, "If she borrows Pen the Fourth to escort the family to the capital, who will take charge of my silk goods store?"
"You might as well close the shop for a few days," said Yüeh-niang.
"Closing the shop for a few days would be bad for business," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "As we approach the New Year's festival, silk goods and sewing supplies are selling fast. How can we afford to close the shop? I'll have to decide about it another day."
When they had finished their conversation, Yüeh-niang went into her boudoir, where she doffed her outer clothes and removed her headgear. She then entered the parlor next door and sat down to visit with Sister-in-law Wu and the others, while the members of the household, high and low, all came in to pay their respects and kowtow to her. That evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing spent the night in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound.
Early the next morning, he went off to the yamen. Who should appear at this juncture but Ho the Ninth, who came to ask Tai-an about the answer to his request and presented him with a tael of silver.
Tai-an explained the situation to him, thus and so, saying, "Yesterday, when Father came home, I told him about your request; and today he has gone to the yamen, where he will exonerate your brother and set him free. You can go to the gate of the yamen and wait for him there."
Upon hearing this, Ho the Ninth was as pleased as could be and set off immediately for the yamen.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived at the yamen, he took his place on the bench, ordered the thieves in the case to be haled before him, and had each of them put in the ankle-squeezers and given twenty strokes of the bamboo, so severely that:
Fresh blood flowed down their legs.
After dismissing the accusation against Ho the Tenth and setting him free, he proceeded to arrest a monk from the Hung-hua Temple to take his place, on the trumped up charge that he had sheltered the thieves in his temple overnight. Can there actually be such cases of injustice in this world? Truly:
Mr. Chang drinks wine, but Mr. Li
gets drunk;
The mulberry branch is cut with a knife,
but the willow bark is scarred.[29]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The destiny of the Sung dynasty was
coming to an end;
The holders of judicial appointments
were so dishonest.
Since the scrutiny of the cosmos can
not to be evaded;
It will ultimately dispel the turbid
and exalt the pure.
For the party that day, Hsi-men Ch'ing engaged the services of four singing girls, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, Hung the Fourth, and Ch'i Hsiang-erh. They arrived before noon, with their costume bags in hand, and trooped into the master suite, where they kowtowed to Yüeh-niang, Sister-in-law Wu, and the others. Yüeh-niang saw that they were provided with a serving of tea, after which, they began to play their instruments and sing for the entertainment of Sister-in-law Wu, Yüeh-niang, and the others. Whom should they see at this juncture but Hsi-men Ch'ing, who suddenly came into the room after returning from the yamen. The four singing girls all put down their instruments, came forward with ingratiating smiles, and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.
After he had sat down, Yüeh-niang asked, "Why is it that you have only now returned from the yamen?"
"I had to preside over quite a few cases today," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then turned to Chin-lien and said, "With regard to that matter of the younger brother of Ho the Ninth that Dame Wang came to intercede for yesterday; I have already exonerated him and set him free today. Those two thieves continued to implicate him, but I had them each given twenty strokes with the bamboo and subjected to the squeezers, and then arrested a monk from a temple outside the city walls to take his place. Tomorrow, I'll fill out the documents in the case, and have them sent to Tung-p'ing prefecture.
"I also had to deal with a case of illicit fornication between a mother-in-law and her son-in-law. The son-in-law is still young, not more than thirty-odd years of age, and is named Sung Te. He married into his wife's family in order to care for her parents and will not return to his own. Subsequently, his mother-in-law died, and his father-in-law remarried a Ms. Chou, who so exhausted him that he died less than a year later. This Ms. Chou is still young and, finding it difficult to maintain her chastity, resorted to constantly carrying on with her son-in-law so outrageously that the members of the household became aware of it, and she found herself in an untenable position.
"One day, while Sung Te was escorting his mother-in-law into the country to pay a visit to her natal family, Ms. Chou said to him, 'Although you and I are not guilty of any transgression:
We have an unearned repute for doing so.[30]
Since we are passing through these deserted hills, why don't the two of us take advantage of the opportunity to:
Consummate a conjugal relationship?'[31]
Sung Te thereupon proceeded to fornicate with her. After returning from this visit to her natal family, the two of them continued to commit fornication with each other on a regular basis. Later on, after she had punished one of her maidservants, the maid told her neighbors what was going on, and they lodged an accusation against them. Today, after obtaining their depositions, I have had them remanded to Tung-p'ing prefecture. Once they get there, since they are guilty of the crime of fornication between a son-in-law and mother-in-law, thus falling within the fifth degree of mourning relationships, [32] the penalty for both parties is strangulation."
"If it were up to me," said P'an Chin-lien, "I would not think it excessive to have that tale-bearing maidservant beaten to a pulp and sentenced to death.
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.
With a single sentence, she brought ruin upon her employers."
"I did submit that slave to some severe treatment with the squeezers," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Merely on account of a temporary peccadillo on their part, that slave will be responsible for the death of the two of them."
Yüeh-niang responded to this by saying:
"If superiors act improperly, their subordinates
will fail to respect them.[33]
If the bitch does not wag her tail,
Dogs will not attempt to mount her.[34]
Generally speaking, it is the depravity of the woman that is at fault. If they are chaste, who would dare to molest them?"
The four singing girls all laughed at this, saying, "What Mother says is right enough. Even we singing girls inside the quarter must avoid taking on the friends of our patrons. How much the more should this be true for women on the outside."
After this conversational exchange was completed, a meal was provided for Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat.
Suddenly, they heard the sound of drums and music coming from the reception hall in the front compound, indicating that Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung had arrived. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly donned his official cap and girdle and went out to welcome him into the reception hall. After exchanging the conventional amenities, he thanked his visitor for his lavish gifts, and they sat down in the positions of guest and host.
After tea had been served, Hsi-men Ch'ing told him, thus and so, "Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien received your explanatory note and immediately agreed to your request. You are to be congratulated, and your promotion should occur in the near future."
Upon hearing this, Ching Chung turned around, got up from his seat, and bowed to express his thanks, saying, "I have put you to a lot of trouble venerable sir. Your efforts on my behalf will be:
Imprinted in my heart, never to be forgotten."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "I also put in a word or two on behalf of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien is sure to take appropriate action."
As they were talking, it was suddenly announced that Eunuch Director Liu and Eunuch Director Hsüeh had arrived, and they were conducted inside to the accompaniment of drums and music. Hsi-men Ch'ing descended the steps to welcome them into the reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities. The two eunuchs were both dressed in python robes of blue silk with a raised pattern, wore jeweled chatelaines, and proceeded to take their places at the center of the seating arrangement.

After this, Commandant Chou Hsiu arrived and sat down to join in the conversation.
Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung addressed Commandant Chou Hsiu, saying, "Ssu-ch'üan is really magnanimous. The other day, when Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien hosted a farewell banquet for His Excellency Hou Meng at his place here, he took advantage of the occasion to sing your praises to Censor Sung, and he promised to keep you in mind. A lofty promotion for you is imminent."
Commandant Chou also bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing and expressed no end of gratitude.
Later on, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou, Wang the Third, Battalion Commander Fan Hsün, Wu K'ai, and Ch'iao Hung all arrived, one after the other.
On coming in the gate, Ch'iao Hung wore his newly acquired official cap and girdle and was accompanied by four attendants in black livery. After greeting the assembled company, he proceeded to bow four times to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was sitting in an oversize chair.
The assembled guests asked about the occasion for celebration, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "In return for the customary donation, my kinsman has just received the gracious distinction of appointment as an honorary prefectural official."
"Since he is a relative of Ssu-ch'üan's," said Commandant Chou Hsiu, "the rest of us should all tender our congratulations."
"I appreciate the good will of you venerable gentlemen," said Ch'iao Hung, "but I can hardly presume to put you to any trouble."
When this exchange was completed, they all took their seats in order of precedence, while a round of tea was served, after which, they prepared to take their places at the banquet table.
Before the brocade screens, tortoiseshell
mats are spread;
In the painted chamber, valuable antiques
vie in splendor.
Beneath the steps, the tones of pipes and
voices resound;
Upon the table, platters of exotic fruits
are displayed.
In a while, when the wine was served and everyone had been assigned a seat, the servants of the various households came forward to take charge of the outer garments of their masters, and the guests sat down in their places.
Wang the Third repeatedly expressed his diffidence over taking a seat among them, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "It's just an informal get-together here in my humble abode. It is appropriate for you to keep the other gentlemen company on this occasion."
Wang the Third felt that he had no alternative but to hang his head and sit down to one side.
Before long, after soup and rice had been served, the chef came out to carve the entrée of roast goose and offer a selection of side dishes. Meanwhile, below the steps, the musicians from the Music Offices presented a number of ensemble dance pieces, followed by tumbling performances, vaudeville acts, and a comic farce, after which the four singing girls sedately appeared and proceeded to pay their respects to the company.
Every one of them is made up to present
a flowery countenance;
Each one sports an immortal's raiment,
pearls, and trinkets.
With silver psalteries and jade mandolas,
they sing voluptuously;
In their hugging turquoise and clinging red,
they laugh incessantly.
Truly:
Amid dancers' skirts and singers' clappers
one is forever seeking novelty;
But when all one's yellow gold is spent
nothing but one's body remains.
A word of advice to wealthy young men:
"Don't spend it all too fast;
The practice of economy is like good medicine,
for it can cure poverty."[35]
We will say no more about how, that day, Eunuch Director Liu occupied the seat of honor and distributed extravagant amounts of silver. They continued drinking wine and enjoying themselves until the first watch before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing provided gratuities for the musicians and sent them on their way, while the four singing girls went back to the master suite to play and sing for Yüeh-niang and her female companions. Yüeh-niang invited Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight and sent the other three singing girls home. On their way out, they ran into Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was still in the reception hall, and paid their respects to him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing said to Cheng Ai-yüeh, "Tomorrow, bring Li Kuei-chieh with you, so the two of you can sing for us."
Cheng Ai-yüeh realized that because Wang the Third had been there that day, Li Kuei-chieh had not been invited to sing, and laughed, saying, "Father, it's rather late in the game:
The wall of the Warden's Office[36] having collapsed:
the miscreant has escaped."[37]
She then went on to ask, "Who have you invited to your party tomorrow?"
"They're all relatives and friends," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"If that beggar Ying the Second is here," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "I won't come. I have no wish to set eyes on that ugly monstrosity of an adversary."
"He won't be here tomorrow," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"As long as he isn't here, it will be all right," said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "But if that crazy chunk of knife-bait is here, I won't come."
Having spoken, she kowtowed to him and went nonchalantly off without more ado.
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had seen to the clearing away of the utensils, he went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and went to bed with Ju-i. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
Early the next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen and had the culprits in the two criminal cases he had dealt with the day before remanded to Tung-p'ing prefecture to stand trial. He then went home to host his party.
Those who were invited included Abbot Wu Tsung-che, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Hua Tzu-yu, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han Ming-ch'uan, Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i, Licentiate Wen, Ying Po-chüeh and the other members of the brotherhood of ten, Li Chih, Huang the Fourth, Tu the Third, and Hsi-men Ch'ing's three business managers. Twelve tables were set up for the guests, while the three powdered-faces, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh, served the wine, and the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, played and sang for their entertainment.
Just as the wine was being poured, P'ing-an suddenly came in and reported, "Uncle Yün the Second has just succeeded to his elder brother's official position and has come to pay his respects to Father and deliver some gifts."
Upon hearing this news, Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly said, "Invite him to come in."
When Yün Li-shou appeared, he was formally attired in a round-collared robe of black satin with a mandarin square, and a girdle with a plaque of gold around his waist. He was followed by his attendants, bearing the gifts. The first thing he did was to give Hsi-men Ch'ing a card to read, on which was written:
Your protégé Yün Li-shou, who has just succeeded to the post of vice commander of the Left Guard in Ch'ing-ho district of Shantung province, presents his compliments with a hundred salutations, while deferentially proffering the local products, ten sable skins, one saltwater fish, one packet of dried shrimp, four preserved geese, ten preserved ducks, and two sets of oil-paper drapes, as a meager expression of his respect.
Hsi-men Ch'ing ordered his attendants to accept the gifts and hastened to express his thanks.
"I only arrived home yesterday," said Yün Li-shou, "and today, I have come especially to pay my respects to Your Honor."
Thereupon, he proceeded to perform:
Four brace makes eight kowtows,
saying:
"My obligation to you could not be greater.
As for these paltry local products:
They are no more than tokens of my esteem."
After this, he proceeded to exchange the customary amenities and pay his respects to the rest of the company. When Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that he now held office as an official, he treated him differently from before, seating him at the same table with Brother-in-law Wu the Second, promptly seeing to it that he was provided with a wine goblet, chopsticks, and servings of soup and rice, and that his attendants were also provided with platters of assorted snacks as well as meat and wine. He then went on to ask him about the funeral arrangements for his elder brother, and his inheritance of his official post.
Yün Li-shou then explained in detail how the minister of war, Yü Shen, had been so affected by the fact that his elder brother had died of illness at his post on the frontier that he had mandated not only that his right to succeed to his elder brother's hereditary post should be honored, but that he also be appointed to the position of vice commander of the local guard.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was pleased at this, saying, "Congratulations! Congratulations! On a day to come, I will be sure to come and offer my felicitations."
That day, each member of the company toasted him with a cup of wine, and the three singing girls kept refilling his goblet, so that it was not long before Yün Li-shou was drunk. Ying Po-chüeh too, at his place at the table, appeared just like a puppet on its strings, constantly jumping up and sitting down, while teasing Li Kuei-chieh and Cheng Ai-yüeh so that their mutual badinage seemed as though it would never come to an end.
One of them ridiculed him, saying, "Your affectation is about as incongruous as a left-hand Gate God masquerading with a white face,[38] you profligate good-for-nothing."
While the other one taunted him as an ugly monstrosity of an adversary, as unsightly as:
Chu Pa-chieh, sitting in a homeless shelter.[39]
To which Ying Po-chüeh retorted in kind, saying, "As for you two sl/imy kn/aves,[40] your grimy features are utterly repulsive."[41]
We will say no more about the fun and laughter at the party that day as they enjoyed themselves:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade, until
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter.
It was the second watch that night before the party broke up, the three singing girls went their way, and Hsi-men Ch'ing returned to the master suite to spend the night.
The next day, he got up late, ate some congee in the master suite, got dressed, and prepared to go pay a visit to Yün Li-shou.
Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who came in and said, "Pen the Fourth is in the front compound and would like to discuss something with you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that it must be about escorting Hsia Yen-ling's dependents to the capital and went out to meet him in the reception hall.
Pen the Fourth pulled a letter from Commander Hsia Yen-ling out of his sleeve and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling would like to have me escort his dependents to the capital, after which, I could return without delay. I have come to ask Your Honor whether I should go or not."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had glanced at the language in the letter and saw that it merely expressed regret over their separation, thanked him for looking after his dependents, early and late, and asked if he could avail himself of Pen the Fourth's services to escort them to the capital, he said, "Since he has asked you to do so, there is no reason for you not to go."
He then went on to ask, "When do they plan to start out?"
"This morning," responded Pen the Fourth, "a servant from His Honor's household summoned me, and I was told that they had made definite plans to get into their vehicles and start out on the sixth, which means that I should be able to return by mid-month."
When he had finished speaking, he turned over the keys to the shop on Lion Street to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"While you are gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I'll have Brother-in-law Wu the Second take your place in the shop for a couple of days."
Only then did Pen the Fourth bid him farewell, walk out the gate, and go home to pack his luggage.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then donned his formal attire, went out the gate, and set out to call on Commander Yün Li-shou, with a retinue of servants following his horse.
That day it was time for Sister-in-law Wu to return home, and a sedan chair had been engaged to wait for her outside the gate, but this was one of those occasions when:
Something was bound to happen.
Yüeh-niang had filled two gift boxes with a variety of delicacies and was in the master suite preparing to see off Sister-in-law Wu. When she escorted her out the gate to get into her sedan chair, whom should they see but the page boy Hua-t'ung, who was lurking in the saddle room beside the gate, crying his head off. P'ing-an was doing his best to restrain him, but the harder he pulled at the youngster, the louder he cried, and the disturbance was overheard by Yüeh-niang and the others.
After seeing Sister-in-law Wu into her sedan chair and sending her off, Yüeh-niang turned to P'ing-an and demanded, "You lousy jailbird! Why are you pulling at him that way for no good reason? It's only causing him to cry more dementedly than ever."
"Licentiate Wen from across the street has called for him," said P'ing-an, "but he simply refuses to go and is reviling me instead."
"Tell him he must resign himself to going," said Yüeh-niang.
Then, turning to Hua-t'ung, she said, "My child, when Master Wen summons you over there, you simply ought to go. What are you crying about?"
Hua-t'ung continued to protest to P'ing-an, saying, "It's none of your business. I won't go, that's all. What are you tugging me about for?"
"Why won't you go?" asked Yüeh-niang, but the page boy refused to answer.
"This little jailbird," declared Chin-lien, "is nothing but a stiff-necked, sycophantic rascal. When Mother asks you a question, how can you refuse to answer?"
P'ing-an stepped forward at this point and gave him a slap on the face, but the page boy only cried the louder.
"You crazy jailbird!" interjected Yüeh-niang. "Why did you slap him for no good reason? Give him a chance to explain himself. Why do you refuse to go?"
Just as they were interrogating him, who should appear but Tai-an, who came in the gate on horseback.
"Has Father come home?" Yüeh-niang asked him.
"Uncle Yün Li-shou has kept him there for a drink," replied Tai-an. "He sent me home with his formal clothes and wants me to take his felt cap back to him."
When he saw the way that Hua-t'ung was crying, he asked him, "Little gentleman, how can you carry on so frantically, as though your tears would suffice to tear down a wall or fill in a pit?"
"Licentiate Wen from across the street has called for him," explained P'ing-an, "but he refuses to go and has chosen to cry and rail at me instead."
"Brother," said Tai-an, "if Master Wen is calling for you, you'd better be on your guard. His name puns with the words 'warm buttocks,' and he can hardly last a day without enjoying a pair of warm buttocks. But since you've put up with his attentions so far, why are you trying to avoid him today?"
"You crazy jailbird!" protested Yüeh-niang. "What do you mean by all this about warm buttocks?"
"You'd better ask him, Mother," responded Tai-an.
As for P'an Chin-lien:
Before she even got wind of anything,

She was ready for the rain.
Calling Hua-t'ung over to her, she said to him, "Little slave, tell us the truth about it. What does he want with you? If you refuse to tell us, I'll have Mother give you a beating."
She pressed the page boy so hard that he became agitated and said, "All he ever wants from me is to insert that thing of his into my asshole. It's gotten so swollen that it hurts. When I ask him to pull it out as quickly as possible, he refuses to retract it and insists on moving it back and forth. I finally pulled it out myself and ran over here to escape him, but he insists on calling me back."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she shouted at him, "You crazy little louse of a slave! You'd better get out of here. And as for you, Sister Six, your insistence on interrogating him has solicited this unspeakably obscene talk. Not knowing what was coming, and assuming that it would be in acceptable language, I bent my ear to listen to it. This gentleman is really a good-for-nothing, unfit for decent company. When we lend him the services of a page boy, he has the gall to commit such offenses behind our backs."
"First Lady," said Chin-lien, "not only do persons fit for decent company commit such deeds; even beggars in their homeless shelters are known to do such things."
"That southerner has a wife," remarked Meng Yü-lou. "How can he conduct himself so shamelessly?"
"The whole time he's been here," said Chin-lien, "we haven't caught so much as a glimpse of his wife. How can that be?"
"How can that be?" responded Tai-an. "You ladies are unlikely to see her at best. Whenever he goes out, he locks the door behind him. In the last half year, the only time I've seen her is the one time she took a sedan chair to go pay a visit to her mother; and on that occasion, she came back before evening. She practically never ventures outside the gate. At night, she goes out to the gate to empty the commode, that's all."
"That wife of his must be a hopeless wretch," said Chin-lien. "Having married a man like that, I doubt if she ever sees the light of day. I venture to say that, confined to her room that way, it must feel as though she's serving a sentence in the penitentiary."
After discussing it for a while, Yüeh-niang and the rest of them went back to the rear compound.
Upon arriving home around sunset, Hsi-men Ch'ing went into the master suite and sat down.
"Did manager Yün Li-shou keep you for a visit?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"When he saw that I had come to call on him," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "he was so pleased that:
There was nothing he was not prepared to do.[42]
He set up a table, opened a jug of wine, and invited me to sit down and join him for a drink. At present, since Commander Ching Chung of the local guard has been promoted, he is in line to succeed him as the seal-holding officer. Tomorrow, I am planning to prepare congratulatory gifts for him and Kinsman Ch'iao Hung, and our colleagues have agreed to present them with commemorative scrolls. I'll have to prevail upon Licentiate Wen to draft two appropriate inscriptions and purchase scrolls right away, so he can inscribe them for us."
"How can you bring yourself to employ any such Licentiate Wen or Licentiate Wu?" exclaimed Yüeh-niang. "If you make use of that kind of shameless good-for-nothing, and the word gets out, it will have the effect of showing us in the ugliest possible light."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, it gave him quite a start, and he asked, "What do you mean?"
"There's no need for you to ask me," said Yüeh-niang. "Ask your page boy."
"Which page boy is that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You know perfectly well who it is," said Chin-lien. "It's Hua-t'ung, that lousy little slave. When we went out to see off Sister-in-law Wu, he was crying by the gate and complained, thus and so, about how that southerner, Wen Pi-ku, was abusing him."
On hearing this, Hsi-men Ch'ing remained somewhat incredulous and said, "Call that little slave here so I can interrogate him."
He then sent Tai-an to the front compound to summon Hua-t'ung, who came back to the master suite and knelt down before him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing threatened to subject him to the squeezers and said, "You lousy slave! Tell me the truth. What does he do when he calls for you?"
"He calls for me," said Hua-t'ung, "in order to get me drunk, so he can get down to his dirty business with me. Today, he hurt me so badly that I got away and refused to go back, but he kept sending P'ing-an after me, and P'ing-an was hitting me when Mother came out and saw what was going on. He constantly questions me about the intimate details of what goes on in the private quarters of the ladies of the household, but I refuse to say anything. And yesterday, while Father was hosting a party here, he even tried to induce me to snitch a few silver utensils and give them to him. On another occasion, he went to visit Master Ni P'eng and showed him the text of a letter he had drafted for Father; and Master Ni also showed it to His Honor Hsia Yen-ling."
If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not heard these words nothing might have happened, but having heard them, he exclaimed:
"In painting a tiger, you can paint the skin,
but you can't paint the bones;
In knowing people, you can know their faces,
but you can't know their hearts.[43]
I took him to be a decent human being. Who could have known that he was nothing but:
The skeleton of a dog wrapped in human skin.[44]
What further use do I have for the likes of him?"
He then ordered Hua-t'ung to get up and go, saying, "You don't need to go over there anymore."
Hua-t'ung, accordingly, kowtowed to him and went out to the front compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing turned to Yüeh-niang and said, "It's no wonder that, the other day, our kinsman Chai Ch'ien chided me, saying:
If critical matters are not kept secret
harm will result.
I couldn't think who could have done it at the time, but now it turns out that he was the person guilty of leaking my information to an outsider. How could I have known? What point is there in continuing to keep such a worthless dog-bone of a creature around for no good reason?"
"Who do you think you're telling about it?" said Yüeh-niang. "We don't have any child who requires schooling, so what need is there to maintain someone in the household merely to handle our social correspondence? After all, how much do we have in the way of social correspondence to justify maintaining such a person, only to have him carry on so egregiously, while peddling our secrets to others?"
"Needless to say," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "tomorrow I'll simply send him packing, that's all."
He then summoned P'ing-an and told him, "Tell the gentleman across the street that your master needs the space he is living in for the storage of merchandise, and that he will have to look for accommodations elsewhere. And if he should come over to see me, stop him at the gate and tell him that I am not at home."
P'ing-an nodded in assent and went back to his post.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said to Yüeh-niang, "Today, Pen the Fourth came to say goodbye. He is going to leave on the sixth, in order to escort Hsia Yenling's dependents on their way to the Eastern Capital. It occurs to me that, since there won't be anyone in charge of the silk goods store, I might as well ask Brother-in-law Wu the Second to take charge of the store for a few days. One way or the other, he and Lai-chao can take turns, three days at a time, spending the night at the shop, and they can eat together. What do you think?"
"I won't express an opinion," said Yüeh-niang. "It's up to you. You can call on him if you like. I won't interfere, but people may say that I've intervened in favor of my brother."
Hsi-men Ch'ing paid no attention to this but immediately dispatched Ch'it'ung, telling him, "Go and invite Brother-in-law Wu the Second to come here."
It was not long before Brother-in-law Wu the Second showed up. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him to share a drink in the front reception hall and turned the keys to the shop over to him. The next day, he and Lai-chao proceeded to Lion Street together to open the shop. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Licentiate Wen saw that Hua-t'ung refused all night long to come back and sleep with him, he became apprehensive about the situation.
The next day, P'ing-an came over and said to him, "My master sends his regards to you, but sooner or later he is going to need the space you are occupying to store merchandise and would like you to find accommodations elsewhere."
When Licentiate Wen heard this, he:
Turned pale with consternation,
and realized that Hua-t'ung must have let the cat out of the bag.
Putting on his formal attire, he expressed a desire to speak to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but P'ing-an said, "Father is at the yamen and hasn't come home yet."
When the time he normally came home arrived, Licentiate Wen, garbed in formal attire, came across the street to wait for him and handed a long letter that he had prepared to Ch'in-t'ung, but Ch'in-t'ung refused to accept it, saying, "Father has just returned from the yamen and is tired out. He has gone back to the rear compound to rest, and I would not presume to disturb him."
Only then did Licentiate Wen fully realize that he was being deliberately kept at a distance, and he went to Licentiate Ni P'eng's place to consult about it, after which, he moved his dependents back to his original dwelling place. Truly:
Even if one could draw off all the water
of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away
this day's shame.
No one lacks a beginning, but few
come to a good end;[45]
Friendship as insipid as water is
most likely to last.[46]
From of old, humans do not have a
thousand good days;
Just as flowers do not remain red
after being plucked.

The golden cups are always in their hands
They pledge each other without ceasing.
No thought of earthly things disturbs their quiet hearts.
Year after year, men are the same
In every place, the same flowers bloom.
Let us sing and recite poems
To increase the joy that comes from this inspired wine
And when we have drunk our fill,
Call for the flute and strings.
When we are in our cups, things are today
As they were yesterday,
Only the scholar Wen is here no more.
When Ximen Qing found that Wu Yueniang was not yet ready, he came himself to hurry her. When she was dressed, he asked Dr. Ren to come. Yueniang came from her bedroom and made a reverence towards the visitor. Dr. Ren turned and bowed. Yueniang sat down on a chair facing the doctor, and Qintong put an embroidered cushion on the table. She held out her arm, and Dr. Ren felt her pulse. After this, she made a reverence and went back to her room. One of the boys brought the doctor tea.
"Your lady," said Dr. Ren, "appears to be suffering from disorder both of air and blood. Her pulse is feeble and sluggish. As regards the air, it is partly because she is with child, but also because she has not been taking sufficient nourishment. Then, too, she has been angry and so stirred up the fire in her liver. This makes her head and eyes ache. She takes things too seriously, and the result of this is a certain melancholy in the abdominal region. The blood and air in her body are not evenly matched."
Yueniang sent Qintong to tell the doctor that her head ached, her arms were numb, and her belly very painful. She had backache and no appetite.
"This is evident," the doctor said. "I have already said as much."
"As you say, she is with child," Ximen Qing said. "Indeed, she is near her time. She has had occasion to be angry, and her anger has been unable to find a satisfactory outlet. She feels depressed in consequence. I hope, Doctor, you will give her the best medicine you can think of. I shall be more than grateful."
"I will do what I can," the doctor said. "I will send her something to make her stomach easier, to set the air in the right channels and, generally, to strengthen her internally. But when the lady has taken the medicine, she must avoid all further occasion of anger, and she must be careful what she eats,"
"You will remember the baby, Doctor?" Ximen said.
"My medicine will nourish and soothe it."
"My third wife, too, has pains in the stomach," Ximen Qing said. "If you have anything likely to do her good, will you be so kind as to prescribe for her?"
"Certainly. I will send her some pills," Dr.. Ren said.
He went to the outer court. On the way, he saw the company of musicians and asked Ximen Qing whom he was entertaining.
"His Excellency Song and his officers are entertaining Governor Hou here today," Ximen told him.
The doctor was astonished. His respect for Ximen Qing increased accordingly. Indeed, when he was taken to the gate, he bowed so often that he paid twice the usual degree of honor to his patron.
Ximen Qing went back, packed up a tael of silver and two handkerchiefs, and told Qintong to take them on horseback to the doctor's house and bring back the medicine.
Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou and the other ladies were busy in Yueniang's room, getting the fruit ready and cleaning the silver.
"You didn't want to come out to see the doctor," Yulou said to Yueniang, "but, you see, he knew exactly what was wrong the moment he looked at you."
"I am not a good respectable wife," Yueniang said, "and, if I am going to die, why don't you let me die in peace? That woman said I was not her mother-in-law. The only difference between us, I suppose, is that I am eight months older than she is. If she hadn't made sure of our husband, do you think she would have dared to shout and rave at me as she did? If you hadn't taken her away, I should not have escaped in ten years. If I am to die, let me die. As the proverb says: when one cock dies, there is always another to take his place, and the new cock's crowing is sweeter than the last. When I am dead and she has taken my place, all will be peace and quietness. When the turnips are pulled up, there will be more room in the field."
"Oh, Great Sister, you mustn't talk like that," Yulou said. "I will answer for her. I admit she often behaves badly, and she is always trying to score over people, but she isn't so bad as she sounds. You mustn't fall out with her completely."
"Isn't she as clever as you are? I tell you she is cunning personified. If she were not, she wouldn't always be sneaking up to listen to other people's conversation. And why should she say such horrid things?"
"Mother, you are the mistress here. You are the source from which we draw our water, and you must not be ungenerous. A gentleman can afford to be indulgent to ten commoner folk. If you raise your hand, she may pass, but if you are as obstinate as she is, she can never get by."
"No, our husband is behind her," Yueniang said, "I, the first wife, must stand aside."
"That is not true," Yulou persisted. "Now that you are not very well, he does not even venture to go near her."
"Why?" Yueniang said. "She talked about binding him with a pig's-hair cord. He is a wild horse. When he loves a woman he must have her, and no power on earth can stop him. If we try to do anything about it, we are called whores for our pains."
"Mother," Yulou said, "you have got this off your chest, and now the anger must be out of your system. I will go and fetch her. She shall kowtow and say she's sorry. Aunt Wu is here, and I want you both to smile at each other in her presence. If you refuse to make up this quarrel, you will put our husband in a very awkward position. He won't know what to do. When he wants to go to her, he will be afraid of your displeasure, and, if he doesn't go, she won't have anything to do with him. Here we are, all busy getting things ready for the party, and she is in her room, doing nothing. We can't have her staying there any longer. Am I not right, Aunt Wu?"
"Sister," Aunt Wu said to Yueniang, "the Third Lady is right. It isn't simply a misunderstanding between you two ladies. It puts your husband in a hole, and makes it very embarrassing for him whichever of you he goes to see."
Yueniang did not speak until Yulou was on the point of going for Pan Jinlian. Then she said: "Don't go. It is of no consequence whether she comes or not."

"She will not dare refuse to come," Yulou said. "If she does, I'll drag her here with a pig's-hair cord."
She went straight to Jinlian's room. Jinlian had not dressed her hair. There was no powder on her face, and she was sitting on the bed, alone.
"Fifth Sister," Yulou said, "why are you making such a fool of yourself? Get your hair done. There is to be a party in the outer court, and we are all very busy, yet you stay here, nursing your temper, instead of coming to help us. I have spoken to the Great Lady, and now you must come with me and see her. Keep your temper and try to look pleasant. Don't forget: Pleasant words and pretty phrases make the coldest day warm; but unkind hurtful words make it cold even in the sixth month. You have quarreled, but if you insist on being obstinate, where is it all going to end? People enjoy flattery, just as Buddha enjoys incense. Come and say you're sorry, and let us have an end to the business. It will be very awkward for our husband if you don't. He will not come to see you if he is afraid she will be angry."
"I can't make any show against her," Jinlian said. "She says she is the only duly married wife here. You and I are dewdrops. We are nobodies, not worthy to lick her boots."
"I told her she was killing several birds with one stone," Yulou said. "His Lordship is my second husband, I admit, but it wasn't I who made the advances. When we were married, I had a proper witness and a go-between. I did not come into the family by the back door. But don't cut off one branch and damage the whole tree. The Great Lady is angry with you, but some of us are not. And don't carry things to extremes. We have to keep our eyes open and see what we're about. We must make sure of our ground. It was a mistake to quarrel before the nuns and Miss Yu. Each of us has his reputation to think about, as every tree has its own bark. The Great Lady is not very well, and, if you don't go and see her, I can't tell what the consequences may be. We have to be together, like the lips on one's mouth. Dress your hair. We will go and see her."
Jinlian sat and thought for a long time. Then she swallowed her anger, went to her dressing table to brush her hair, and put on her net. She dressed and went to the upper room with Yulou. The Third Lady pulled aside the lattice.
"I have brought her," she said. "She did not dare refuse to come. Come, my child, and kowtow to your mother." Then she said to Yueniang: "My daughter is young. She hardly knows the difference between right and wrong. Otherwise she would not have offended you. Won't you forgive her this time? If she is ever rude to you again, you may punish her as much as you please. I will not raise a finger to stop you."
Jinlian kowtowed four times to Yueniang. Then she jumped up and slapped Yulou. "You little strumpet!" she cried, "do you think I would have you for a mother?"
The ladies laughed. Even Yueniang could not help smiling.
"You slave!" Yulou said, "your mistress gives you back her favor, then you jump up and beat your mother."
"It is splendid to see you sisters all merry together," Aunt Wu said. "The Great Lady sometimes says more than she means, but you must make allowances for her, and give way a little. Then everything will be well. The proverb says: The peony is beautiful, but it must have leaves for its beauty to appear."
"If she had not said anything, I should not have quarreled with her," Yueniang said.
"Mother," Jinlian said, "you are the Heaven and I the Earth. Forgive me. I am just a stupid creature."
Yulou patted her on the back. "Now you speak like my daughter. But we have no time to talk. We have been working a long time, and it is your turn to help us."
Jinlian climbed on to the bed beside Yulou and helped her to arrange the fruit in the boxes.
When Qintong came back with the medicine, Ximen looked at the note that came with it, and told the boy to take it to Yueniang.
"So there is some for you, too?" Yueniang said to Yulou.
"Yes," Yulou said, "I have my old trouble again, and I asked Father to get me some pills from Doctor Ren.
"It is because you didn't eat anything the other day," Yueniang said. "You must have caught a chill."
Song was the first to arrive. Ximen Qing took him to the arbor, and they sat down.
"Thank you for sending the tripod," Song said, "I must pay you for it."
"How can I accept money for it?" Ximen said. "I was afraid you would refuse it, even as a gift."
"You are really too kind," Song said. He bowed and thanked Ximen Qing.
When they had had tea, they talked about the official affairs of the district and the condition of the people. Song asked about the local dignitaries. "Prefect Hu is very well liked," Ximen Qing said, "and District Magistrate Li is most conscientious in his work. I have not had much to do with the others."
"You know Major Zhou," Censor Song said. "What do you think of him?"
"He is an experienced soldier," Ximen Qing said, "but I should hardly say that he is so efficient as Jing of Jizhou. Jing passed the military examination when he was still quite young, and he is as capable as he is brave. Perhaps your Excellency will keep an eye on him."
"Are you speaking of Jing Zhong? Do you know him?"
"He is a friend of mine," Ximen said. "Yesterday he brought a card and asked me to speak to your Excellency on his behalf."
"I have heard that he is a good officer," the Censor said. "Is there anyone else?"
"There is my wife's brother, Wu Kai. He is a Captain here and in charge of the alterations to the granary. He is due for promotion, and, if your Excellency helps him, I shall be involved in his honor."
"As he is your kinsman," Song said, "I will not only recommend him for promotion, but see that he gets an appointment worth having."
Ximen Qing bowed and thanked him. He gave the Censor the two men's records of service. Song handed them to one of his officers and said they were to be brought before him when he prepared his report. Ximen Qing quietly told a servant to give that officer three taels of silver.
Then they heard music, and a servant came to tell them that the Provincial Officers had arrived. Ximen Qing went to receive them while Song went to the garden gate to look on. When the officers had exchanged greetings, they looked around the great hall. There was a large table in the middle magnificently set out, and a smaller table only a little less splendid. They were very pleased. They thanked Ximen Qing and said that they must send him more money.
"We certainly have not sent him sufficient for all this," Censor Song said, "but, for my sake, Siquan, do not ask them for any more."
"I should not dream of accepting any more," Ximen Qing said.
They sat down in places according to their rank and tea was brought. A man was sent to invite Governor Hou. After some delay the messenger came riding on horseback and told them that the Governor was on his way. The musicians played together and all the officers went out to the gate to wait for him. Censor Song stood alone at the second door.
Cavalry with blue pennons trotted by. Then Governor Hou came wearing a scarlet robe with a peacock embroidered upon it, sable ear covers, and a girdle with a buckle of pure gold. He was in a sedan chair borne by four men. When he had got down from his carriage, the officers escorted him to the great hall. Censor Song was wearing a scarlet robe embroidered with gold clouds. The buckle on his girdle was of rhinoceros horn. Each invited the other to precede him, and at last they entered the hall together. When the two high officers had greeted one another, the others came to make their reverences. Ximen Qing was the last. The Governor remembered him from the day of the reception to Huang, and he told one of his officers to give Ximen a card, on which was written: "Your friend, Hou Meng." Ximen took the card with both hands and gave it to a servant.
They all took off their ceremonial robes, and the Governor sat down in the place of honor. The other officers ranged themselves on either hand. Censor Song took the place of the host. After tea had been served the musicians played and Song offered his guest wine, flowers and silk. He ordered food to be sent to the Governor's office. Then the banquet was served. The dishes were all garnished with flowers.
The dancers performed exceedingly well. Then the Haiyan actors came and kowtowed and presented their list. The Governor told them to play *The Duke of Jin Returned the Girdle*. The banquet proceeded. When two acts had been performed, Governor Hou ordered five taels of silver to be distributed among the cooks, waiters, musicians, and servants. Then he put on his ceremonial robes again and took leave of the company. All the officers went with him to the gate. When he had gone, Song and the rest thanked Ximen Qing again and went away.
Ximen Qing returned to the great hall and dismissed the musicians. It was still early and he said: "Don't take any of the things away." He sent boys for Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue, Fu, Gan, Ben the Fourth, and his son-in-law, Chen Jingji. He told the actors to have something to eat, and bade them, when his guests arrived, play *Han Xizai Entertained Scholar Tao by Night*. Then he sent for Chunmei to decorate the hall, that he might enjoy the beauty of the flowers while he was drinking.
The three clerks came first, then Scholar Wen, the two Wu brothers, and Ying Bojue made a reverence to Ximen and said: "I am sorry I was only able to offer your ladies such poor entertainment the other day. Thank you for the splendid presents you sent."
Ximen Qing laughed. "You dog!" he said. "What did you mean by peeping at my ladies through the window?"
"You don't believe that!" Bojue said. "I know who told you." He pointed to Wang Jing. "It was that dog. You wait and, one of these days, I'll bite you."
They sat down and had tea. Uncle Wu wished to go and see his sister in the inner court, and Ximen Qing took him there. On the way he told him what he had said to Censor Song. "His Excellency took your record of service," he said, "and I gave three taels of silver to the officer in whose charge he left it. He has your papers and Jing's. The Censor promised that there shall be something for you when he sends his report."
Uncle Wu was delighted. He bowed to Ximen and said: "This is very kind of you."
"I only had to say: 'This is my wife's brother,' and he said at once: 'Since he is a kinsman of yours, I must certainly do something for him.'"
They came to the upper room, and Wu Yueniang made a reverence to her brother.
"It is time you went home," Uncle Wu said to his wife. "There is nobody to see after the house, and you have been here too long already."
"She won't let me go away," Aunt Wu said. "She says I must stay until the third."
"Then you must be sure to come home on the fourth," Uncle Wu said.
He went back to the outer court and drank with the others. The actors played and then performed as Ximen had told them. When the excitement of the play was at its height, Daian came in. "Qiao Tong has come from Master Qiao and would like to speak to you," he said. Ximen Qing left his friends and went to see the boy.
"My father says he did not give you the money yesterday," Qiao Tong said, "so he has sent me with it now. There are thirty taels here and five more for the less important officers."
"I am going to see Prefect Hu about it tomorrow morning," Ximen said. "I think he will do what we wish, and there will be no need to give any money to anyone else. Take these five taels back." He told Daian to give food and wine to Qiao Tong.
Two acts of the play had now been performed, and it was about the first night watch. The guests took their leave, and Ximen Qing ordered everything to be cleared away. Then he went to Yueniang. She was sitting with her sister-in-law, but Aunt Wu withdrew at once.
"I have managed that business of your brother's with Censor Song," Ximen said to his wife. "His Excellency said that not only would he see that he got promotion, but that he would appoint him to some post worth having. So now he is sure of a military appointment. I have told your brother about it, and he is delighted."
"But he has no money," Yueniang said. "Where is he going to find two or three hundred taels?"
"There is no need for him to spend any money," Ximen Qing said. "I told the Censor that he was your brother, and his Excellency promised me that he would attend to the matter himself."
"Do what you think best," Yueniang said, "it is not my business."
"Yuxiao," Ximen said, "get that medicine ready for your mother. I want to see her take it."
"Go away and don't make a fuss," Yueniang said, "I will take the medicine when I go to bed."
Ximen Qing was on the point of going when Yueniang called him back.
"Where are you going?" she said. "If you are going to her, you had better think twice about it. She has just apologized to me, and if you go to her, it will look as if you go to make things right with her."
"I am not going to her," Ximen said.
"Where are you going, then?" Yueniang said. "I don't want you to go to that woman Ruyi'er either. Yesterday, in my sister-in-law's presence, the Fifth Lady said some very horrid things to me. She said I allowed Ruyi'er to take liberties, to please you."
"Surely you don't take seriously the things that little strumpet says?"
"Do what I tell you," Yueniang said. "I won't have you going to the front court, and I don't want you here. You must spend the night with Li Jiao'er. You may do what you like after that." Ximen was obliged to go and sleep with Li Jiao'er.
The next day was the eleventh of the twelfth month. Ximen Qing went early to the office and, with Captain He, busied himself with official papers. He was there all morning. When he came back, he got ready the presents, a pig, wine, and thirty taels of silver, and told Daian to take them to Hu, the Prefect of Dongpingfu. Hu accepted the presents and immediately sent the necessary papers.
Meanwhile, Ximen Qing sent for Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, and set out pigs, lamb, wine and fruits in the great hall, and burned paper offerings as a sacrifice. When the ceremony was over, Xu went away.
The document that Daian brought back with him bore several seals. It referred to Qiao Hong as an officer in the District administration. Ximen told Daian to take two boxes of the food that had been offered at the sacrifice, to Qiao and to ask him to come and see the document. He also told a servant to take a box of food to Uncle Wu, Scholar Wen, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and the clerks. Then he sent invitation cards to Major Zhou, General Jing, Captain Zhang, Eunuchs Liu and Xue, Captain He and Captain Fan, Uncle Wu, Kinsman Qiao, and Wang the Third asking them to a celebration on the third of the month. He engaged musicians and four singers.
This day, Meng Yulou gave up the housekeeping accounts. She handed them over to Ximen Qing and told him to give them to Pan Jinlian. Then she went to see Wu Yueniang.
"Do you feel better, Mother, now you have taken the medicine?" she said.
"Yes," Yueniang said, "people say that women always get better when they have a man doctor to attend them, and it seems to be true. I am certainly better. My headache has gone, and my stomach feels much easier."
"Ah!" Yulou said, "it looks to me as if all you wanted was a man to hold your hand."
Even Aunt Wu laughed at this.
Then Ximen Qing came with the accounts. "You must attend to the matter yourself," Yueniang told him. "I don't know whose turn it is, and I can't imagine whom to give the accounts to. Nobody wants to be bothered with them."
Ximen took thirty taels of silver and thirty strings of coppers and gave them to Jinlian.
When Qiao came, Ximen took him to the great hall and showed him the document that Prefect Hu had sent. It said: "Honorary Lieutenant Qiao Hong has made a contribution of thirty measures of fine rice to the quartermaster's department, in accordance with regulations." Qiao was very pleased and bowed his thanks to Ximen Qing. He told Qiao Tong to take the paper home with the greatest care. "Now I can wear ceremonial dress," he said to Ximen, "and, when you have a party here, I shall be able to come."
"You must come early on the third," Ximen said to him.
When they had had tea, Ximen Qing told Qintong to set a table in the side room. "Kinsman," he said to Qiao, "let us go to the west room. It is warmer there." They went together to the study.
Then Ying Bojue came with a few presents. "The brothers have sent them," he said. Ximen looked at them. Abbot Wu's name was the first on the list: then came Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Zhu Shinian, Sun Guazui, Chang Zhijie, Bai Laiguang, Li the Third, Huang the Fourth and Du the Third.
"I still have some more people to invite," Ximen said. "There are the younger Uncle Wu, Uncle Shen, Doctor Ren, Hua, Scholar Wen and the three clerks, more than twenty altogether. I must ask them all on the fourth." He gave the presents to a servant and told Qintong to go to Uncle Wu and tell him that Master Qiao was there. Then he asked if Scholar Wen was at home.
"No," Laian said, "he has gone out to see a friend.
After a while, Uncle Wu arrived and, with Chen Jingji they sat down to drink. While they were drinking. Ximen said to Uncle Wu: "We have to congratulate Kinsman Qiao here. He has got his papers today. We must buy some presents and give a party for him."
"It is a very insignificant matter," Qiao said. "You must not trouble to do anything of the sort."
Then a man came from the Town Hall with two hundred and fifty copies of the new calendar. Ximen gave the man a return card and sent him away.
"We haven't seen the new calendar yet," Ying Bojue said.
Ximen gave fifty copies to Uncle Wu, Qiao, and Ying Bojue. Bojue noticed that the new year was described as the first year of the reign of Chonghe, and that it would have an intercalary month.
They went on playing games, guessing fingers, and drinking until it was late. Qiao went away first, but Uncle Wu and Ying Bojue did not go until the first night watch. Ximen Qing told a servant to get a horse ready early the next morning and ask Captain He to come that they might go together to take leave of Governor Hou. Then he told Laian and Chunhong that they must accompany Yueniang when she went to Mistress Xia. Four soldiers were to go with them.
He went to Jinlian's room. She had taken off her headdress; her hair was disarranged; there was no powder on her face, and she was lying, with all her clothes on, on the bed. There was no light in the room and everything was very still. Ximen called Chunmei, but there was no answer. Then he saw Jinlian on the bed and spoke to her. There was no answer. He sat down on the bed.
"Little oily mouth, why are you treating me like this? Why don't you answer me?"
He lifted her in his arms and asked what was the matter. Jinlian turned her face away. Fragrant tears rolled down her cheeks, one after another. If Ximen Qing had been made of iron or stone, he would have melted. He put his arms around her neck.
"Funny little oily mouth. Why did you quarrel with her?"
For a long time, Jinlian did not answer. Then she said: "Who says I quarreled with her? It was she who began by finding fault with me, insulting me before a host of people. She said I was one of the husband-hunting devils, and that was how I got you. She said she was a real wife, properly married to you. Who told you to come here again? Go to her. If you go to her, perhaps I shall not be accused of monopolizing you. She said you always came to me. You know quite well you haven't been near the place these last few nights. And she tells lies. She said I asked you for the fur coat and never said anything to her about it. I am not her slave. Why should I go and kowtow to her and ask her to give me a fur coat? Chunmei scolded that scamp of a blind woman, and she said I didn't train her properly. She talked a lot of nonsense. If you were a real man, you would settle this sort of thing with your fist, and there wouldn't be all these rows and troubles. I suppose we must keep ourselves in our proper places. The proverb says: Things that are bought cheap are sold cheap; and things that are easily come by are easily forgotten. I came here as a second wife and now I am not to be allowed to breathe. Yesterday, she flew into a temper. Who was in her room all the time? Who sent for Doctor Ren? Who offered to do everything she wanted? Poor me! I was left in this miserable hole and nobody cared what happened to me. Oh, I know you! Then people come and ask me to go and apologize to her!"
Tears rolled down her flower-like face. She lay on Ximen Qing's breast and sobbed. She wiped her nose and dried her tears continually. Ximen kept his arms about her and comforted her.
"It is all right, my child," he said, "I have been very busy. You must forgive one another. I'm not going to say who is to blame. I was coming to see you yesterday but she said I was coming to apologize to you and would not let me come. So I went to Li Jiao'er, but all the time I was there, I was thinking of you."
"I know you now," the woman said. "You pretend to love me but, really, you love her. She is going to have a baby, and I am only a straw and cannot compare with her in any sort of way."

Ximen Qing hugged her. "Don't talk such nonsense, little oily mouth," he said.
Qiuju brought tea. "Ha!" said Ximen "here's a nice clean little slave! Who told her to bring the tea? Where is Chunmei?"
"You do well to ask for Chunmei?" Jinlian said "I shouldn't be surprised if she were dying by now. She has had nothing to eat for three or four days. She is in bed in the other room. She only wants to die. She thinks that's the best thing she can do now that your first wife has insulted her before everybody. She has done nothing but cry ever since."
"Is that true?" Ximen Qing said.
"Go and see for yourself."
Ximen got up and went to the other room. Chunmei was lying on the bed, her face unpowdered and her hair falling down.
"Get up, little oily mouth," he said. He called her by name, but she did not answer and pretended to be asleep. He tried to lift her in his arms but she struggled and stiffened herself till her back was like the backbone of a carp. She nearly knocked Ximen Qing onto the floor. Fortunately, he had firm hold of her and the bed prevented him from falling.
"Let me go," Chunmei cried. "Why do you come here to see a slave? You will soil your hands."
"Because the Great Lady scolded you a little," Ximen Qing said, "that's no reason why you should be so angry and refuse to eat anything."
"It doesn't matter to you whether I eat or not, Chunmei said. "I am a slave, and if I die, I die. But slave though I may be, I have done nothing wrong. Why should I be insulted because I told that blind vagabond what I thought about her? And the Great Lady found fault with my mother too, and said that she didn't keep me in order. Is it right that I should be punished because I cursed that blind scamp? Wait and see whether I don't point my finger at Han Daoguo's wife and insult her, when she comes here. She is responsible for all this trouble. It was she who introduced that blind creature."
"Yes, she introduced Miss Shen, it is true," Ximen said, "but there was no harm in that. How was she going to know that you would quarrel?"
"I should not have insulted her if she had been reasonable," Chunmei said, "but she was so obstinate."
"Well," Ximen said, "now that I'm here, won't you give me a cup of tea? I can't drink the tea Qiuju brought. Her hands are too dirty."
"You will have to drink it. When the butcher is dead, you must eat your pork with the bristles on it. I can't get up. How can I make tea for you?"
"Who told you to stop eating?" Ximen Qing said. "Come into the other room and let us eat and drink. Qiuju shall go for dishes and wine and cakes and fruit and soup."
He did not wait for further argument but took Chunmei's hand and went with her to Jinlian. He told Qiuju to take a box and go to the kitchen. When she came back, he bade Chunmei put slices of chicken with meat and fish, together with pickled bamboo shoots and radishes, and make a large bowl of soup. The dishes were set on the table with rice and warm buns.
Ximen Qing sat down beside Jinlian, and Chunmei sat facing them. They encouraged one another to drink and did not make an end for a long time. Then they went to bed.
Ximen rose early next morning. Captain He came in good time, and, after drinking a cup of wine, they set out beyond the walls to pay their respects to Governor Hou. Yueniang sent presents to Mistress Xia, then dressed and went in a large sedan chair to see her. Laian and Chunhong went with her, and four soldiers cleared the way. Daian and Wang Jing were left at home. About midday, old woman Wang, the tea seller, came with He the Ninth, and asked if Ximen Qing was at home.
"What wind has blown you here?" Daian said to them. "We don't see you very often."
"Old He wishes to see your master about a matter concerning his younger brother," old woman Wang said. "We should not have come otherwise."
"His Lordship has gone to say good-bye to Governor Hou," Daian said, "and the Great Lady has gone out too. But wait a moment, and I will tell the Fifth Lady."
When he came back, he said: "The Fifth Lady would like to see you."
"I will go and see her," old woman Wang said, "but you must take me in. I am afraid of the dogs."
Daian took the old woman to the garden, pulled aside the lattice and showed her into Jinlian's room. Jinlian was wearing a fur cap and silken clothes and looked very pretty. She was sitting on the bed with her feet on a footstool. Old woman Wang knelt down before her. Jinlian returned her greeting, and old woman Wang sat down beside her on the bed.
"It is a very long time since I saw you last," Jinlian said.
"I have wished to see you for a long time," the old woman said, "but I didn't venture to come. Have you any children?"
"I wish I had," Jinlian said, "but I have only had two miscarriages. Is your son married?"
"No," the old woman said, "I have not arranged a marriage for him yet. He has just come back from Huai. He made some money, and now he has bought a donkey and started a flour mill. I understand his Lordship is not at home."
"No, he has had to go outside the city today. The Great Lady is out, too. What did you want with him?"
"He the Ninth asked me to come and see his Lordship," old woman Wang said. "His brother, He the Tenth, has got mixed up in a case of theft. He has been taken to the courts and charged with being a receiver of stolen property. But he had nothing whatever to do with the matter, and we have come to ask his Lordship to get him off. He must not believe what the thieves say. When He the Tenth gets out of prison, he will come, with presents, to kowtow to his Lordship. Here is the paper."
Jinlian looked at it. "Give it to me," she said, "I will give it to my husband, with my own hands."
"He the Ninth is waiting outside," old woman Wang said. "I will tell him to come again tomorrow."
Qiuju brought the old woman a cup of tea. "Are you happy here, lady?" old woman Wang said. "Happy!" Jinlian said. "If there were not so many squabbles, I should be happy enough. But I have trouble of some sort every day."
"You have only to open your mouth when the food is brought to you, and to dip your hand when water is poured out for you. You have ornaments of gold and silver, and maids to wait upon you. What possible trouble can you have?"
"The proverb says, that where there is more than one wife, the first wife is the only one who counts for anything. The others do not matter. When you have more than one spoon in a bowl, they are bound to clash. What can one expect but difficulties of one sort or another?"
"My good Lady," old woman Wang said, "you are cleverer than anyone I know. Your husband is prosperous, and you must have a splendid life. Well, I will tell He the Ninth to come again tomorrow." She got up to go away.
"Don't be in such a hurry," Jinlian said. "Stay a while."
"I mustn't keep old He waiting too long," the old woman said, "I will come and see you some other day."
She went out. When she came to the gate, she spoke to Daian. The boy promised to speak to his master as soon as he came in. "Brother An," old He said, "I will come back tomorrow morning." Then he went off with old woman Wang.
In the evening, Ximen Qing returned. He went to Jinlian's room, and she gave him the paper. He handed it to a servant and said that it was to be given to him next day at the office.
When he had told Chen Jingji to send out the invitations, he gave Qintong a tael of silver and a box of cakes to take to Han Daoguo's house for Miss Shen. He was careful not to let Chunmei know what he was doing.
Wang Liu'er smiled and accepted the things. "Miss Shen will not be angry any more now," she said. "Tell your father and mother she is sorry if she annoyed Chunmei."
When Yueniang came back, she greeted Aunt Wu and the other ladies. Then Ximen Qing came and she made a reverence to him.
"Mistress Xia was very cordial indeed," she said. "There were a number of neighbors and relatives there, all ladies. Magistrate Xia has written to them and enclosed a letter for you that they are going to send tomorrow. They propose to start for the capital on the sixth or seventh of this month. Mistress Xia is very anxious that Ben the Fourth should go to the Capital with them. She will send him back immediately. By the way, Ben the Fourth's daughter is quite grown up now. I didn't know her. I thought she looked at me peculiarly when she gave me tea. Mistress Xia calls her Happy Cloud. She bade her kowtow to me, and the girl set down her tray and kowtowed four times. I gave her two gold flowers. Mistress Xia was pleased that I treated her maid so kindly. She is very fond of the girl and has regarded her rather as a daughter than as a maid."
"She is a lucky girl to have found such a comfortable place," Ximen Qing said. "In some places, she would have been more likely to be scolded."
Yueniang looked at him. "You mean I scold that beloved maid of yours, I suppose?"
Ximen Qing laughed. "If she takes Ben the Fourth, who is going to look after the shop?"
"Oh, close it for a few days," Yueniang said.
"No, I won't close it. This is the New Year season and there is a good deal of trade about. But we'll talk about that tomorrow."
Yueniang went to change her dress and then sat down with Aunt Wu. Her maids and women came to kowtow to her. That night, Ximen Qing slept with Sun Xue'e.
The next morning he went to the office. He the Ninth came again to the house and gave Daian a tael of silver. "I told my master about the matter," Daian said, "and I think there is no doubt your brother will be set free. You had better go to the office and see." He the Ninth went away at once.
When Ximen Qing reached his office, he had the thieves brought before him, put their legs in the press, and ordered each of them to be given twenty severe blows. He let He the Tenth go free and put a monk of the Temple of the Mighty Blossom in his place, on the score that the thieves had passed a night in that temple. It was as though Master Zhang drank the wine and Master Li got tipsy, and like people complaining of the willow, when the branches fall from the mulberry tree.
That day, when Ximen Qing was home again, he sent for the four singing girls, Wu Yin'er, Zheng Aiyue, Hong Si'er and Qi Xiang'er. They came about midday, and went at once to kowtow to Yueniang and Aunt Wu. Yueniang gave them tea, and they played and sang for the ladies. Then Ximen Qing came, and the four girls put down their instruments and kowtowed to him.
"You are late today," Yueniang said.
"Yes, I had several cases to deal with. There was the one old woman Wang came about yesterday. I let He the Ninth's brother go, though the thieves insisted that what they had said was true. Anyhow, I put them on the rack and ordered them twenty blows. I put a monk in He the Tenth's place, and, tomorrow, I shall send the documents in the case to Dongpingfu. Then there was another bad case, one of a woman carrying on with her daughter's husband. The man is only just over twenty and his name is Zong Deyuan. He was living with his wife's people. The mother died, and the father married again, a woman called Zhou. A year after this marriage, the father died too. Zhou was young and could not control herself and she began to carry on with the young man. They punished one of their maids, and the maid told everybody what was going on. The neighbors accused them and, today, I have extracted a confession from them and sent them to Dongpingfu. It is a very near relationship, and I'm afraid they will both be hanged."
"In my opinion," Jinlian said, "the maid who spread the scandal ought to be beaten to death. It was her duty as a maid to be loyal to her employers. Instead, her chattering will have caused the death of two human beings."
"I don't agree," Yueniang said, "the lower classes will never respect their betters when these do not behave properly. If a bitch will not have it, the dog cannot get his way. It was the woman's fault. If she had behaved with decorum, no one would have dared approach her."
"You are right, Mother," one of the singing girls said, smiling. "Even we singing girls do not receive our patrons' friends. And, in the family, one should be still more careful."
Ximen Qing had something to eat. Then music was heard in the front court. General Jing had arrived. Ximen hastily dressed and went out to welcome him. When they had drunk their tea, he said to Jing: "Censor Song accepted your record of service and promised to do what we asked. You will undoubtedly be promoted very soon."
"I am very grateful to you," Jing said. "I shall never forget how kind you have been in this matter."
"I mentioned Zhou to his Excellency," Ximen said. "It may be that something will come to him too."
The two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, came then. As they were escorted to the great hall, the musicians played. They both wore dark dragon gowns and gemmed girdles. When they had taken their places, Major Zhou arrived. They chatted together. "Yesterday," Jing said to Major Zhou, "Siquan was good enough to speak highly of you to Censor Song, who had a party here. Now Song will certainly remember you, and you cannot fail to receive promotion."
Major Zhou bowed and thanked Ximen Qing. Then Captain Zhang. Captain He, Captain Fan, Wang the Third, Uncle Wu and Kinsman Qiao came, one after the other. Qiao was wearing ceremonial dress, and four servants attended him. When he had greeted the others, he made a special reverence to Ximen Qing. People asked what appointment he held, and Ximen said: "My kinsman has just had honorary rank conferred upon him."
"Since he is your kinsman, we must congratulate him," Major Zhou said.
"I appreciate your kindness immensely," Qiao said, "but please do not trouble."
They all sat down according to their rank. After they had taken tea, wine was brought. The host offered it to his guests, and they all sat down again. Wang the Third refused to sit with them.
"You must sit down," Ximen said to him. "This is not a formal party and I wish you to help me to entertain my guests."
Then Wang the Third was compelled to sit down with them. When the soup course was finished, the musicians played different tunes and the four singing girls sang for them. Eunuch Liu, who sat in the place of honor, distributed money to the musicians and singers. It was a merry party and the guests did not leave until the first night watch. Then Ximen Qing paid the musicians and dismissed them, and the four singing girls went and played for a while to entertain the ladies. Yueniang asked Wu Yin'er to stay but let the others go. On their way, they went to the hall to say good-bye to Ximen Qing.
"I want you to come again tomorrow," Ximen said to Zheng Aiyue. "Bring Li Guijie with you."
"I know why you didn't send for Guijie today," the girl said. "It was because Wang the Third was here. It is rather late in the day for you to be taking precautions. What guests are you expecting tomorrow?"
"Nobody but relatives and friends," Ximen Qing said.
"I suppose Beggar Ying will be here," Zheng Aiyue said. "I won't come if that hateful fellow is here."
"No, he won't be here tomorrow."
"If I thought he was going to be here, I wouldn't come," Zheng Aiyue said. She kowtowed to Ximen and went away. He ordered the things to be cleared away, then went to Li Ping'er's room and slept with Ruyi'er.
The next day he went early to the office and sent the prisoners to Dongpingfu. Then he went home to the party. All the guests arrived. There were twelve tables. Three singing girls came, Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, and Zheng Aiyue, and three boys, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Zheng Feng.
While they were drinking, Ping'an came and said: "Uncle Yun has come to see you. He has inherited a title and has brought presents with him."
Ximen Qing told the boy to bring him in.
Yun Lishou was wearing a black silk ceremonial gown and a girdle with a gold buckle. Servants with presents followed him, and he handed the list to Ximen Qing. Upon it was written: 'Yun Lishou, who has recently inherited the rank of officer of the royal guard and subprefect of Qinghe in Shandong, presents his humble compliments and offers ten sable skins, a sea fish, a parcel of dried shrimps, four preserved geese, ten preserved ducks, and two blinds of oiled paper.'
Ximen Qing told his servants to take the gifts and thanked Yun Lishou.
"I only came back yesterday," Yun said, "and I have come at once to see you." He made a reverence to Ximen Qing. Then he said: "You have been very kind to me, and these things are intended as a slight token of my gratitude." He greeted the others.
Now that Yun Lishou had succeeded to a title, Ximen Qing treated him with more respect. He asked him to sit at the same table with the younger Uncle Wu. A cup and chopsticks were at once brought in for him, and Ximen Qing ordered food to be given to his servants. Then Ximen asked how he had come into the title.
"I am indebted to the kindness of his Excellency Yu of the Ministry of War," Yun Lishou said. "My elder brother, who was in his department, died, and his Excellency appointed me to carry on the ancestral title and take up his appointment. Now I am in the office of the writer to the signet."
Ximen Qing was pleased. "I congratulate you," he said, "and I must give a special party in your honor."
All the guests invited him to drink with them and the singers were bidden to offer him wine. Before long, Yun Lishou was tipsy. Ying Bojue might have been on the end of a string. He stood up and sat down again and joked and swore at the singing girls all the time. It was a very merry party; they all drank a great deal of wine, and nobody went away before the second night watch. Ximen Qing sent away the three singers and went to sleep in Yueniang's room.
The next day he was up late. He had his breakfast and was going to call on Yun Lishou when Daian came and told him that Ben the Fourth wished to speak to him. Ximen knew that he wished to speak about acting as an escort to Mistress Xia. He went to the great hall. Ben the Fourth gave Xia's letter to Ximen Qing. "His Lordship would like me to escort his family to the Eastern Capital, if you have no objection," he said.
Ximen Qing read the letter. It thanked him for looking after Xia's family and asked that Ben the Fourth might be allowed to take them to the Capital.
"Since he asks for you, I suppose you must go," Ximen Qing said. "When do they propose to start?"
"They sent for me this morning," Ben the Fourth said, "and told me they proposed to leave on the sixth. I hope to get back in about a fortnight." He gave the keys of the shop to Ximen Qing.
"Very well," Ximen said, "I will ask the younger Uncle Wu to look after the shop."
Ben the Fourth went home to see about his luggage, and Ximen Qing, in his ceremonial robes, went to call on Yun Lishou.
That day, Aunt Wu was going home, and a sedan chair came to fetch her. Yueniang filled two boxes with delicacies, and went with her sister-in-law to the gate. Huatong was standing there, sobbing bitterly. Ping'an was pulling him and shaking him, but the boy only cried the louder. When Aunt Wu had gone, Yueniang came back and said to Ping'an: "What is the matter? Why are you pulling him about like that? You have made him cry."
"Scholar Wen wants him, and he won't go," Ping'an said. "He stays here and answers me back all the time."
"Leave him alone," Yueniang said to Ping'an. She turned to the boy and asked him: "Why do you stand here crying? If Master Wen sends for you, you must go."
"It is not your business," Huatong cried to Ping'an, "and I won't go. Why do you keep bullying me?"
"Why won't you go?" Yueniang said.
The boy would not answer.
Then Jinlian came along. "You sly young rascal!" she said. "Why don't you answer the Great Lady?"
Ping'an boxed his ears, and the boy cried louder than ever.

"Don't hit him," Yueniang said, "let him explain himself quietly. Tell me, why won't you go?"
Then Daian came back with Ximen's horse.
"Is your father back?" Yueniang asked him.
"No," Daian said, "he is taking wine with Uncle Yun. I have brought back his ceremonial clothes and am going to take him his soft hat."
Then he saw the boy crying. "Hullo, my boy," he said, "what are you crying for? Is something hurting you?"
"Master Wen has called for him and he won't go," Ping'an said. "He stays there and is rude to me."
"Brother," Daian said, "when Master Wen sends for you, you must be on your guard. Scholar Wen is renowned for his fondness for hole-and-corner work. He can't live without it. But you have put up with it before, why can't you do so today?"
"You rascal!" Yueniang said to Daian. "What do you mean?"
"Ask him, Mother," Daian said.
Jinlian, who was one of those people who always want to know everything, drew the boy aside and said to him: "Boy, tell me the truth. What does he want you for? If you won't tell me, I shall ask the Great Lady to have you beaten."
"He keeps on coming up to me," said the boy, "and wants me to submit to him. He shoves his penis up my ass so roughly that today it's swollen and hurts. When I ask him to take it out, he refuses and presses it up and down."
"You thievish slave," Yueniang said, when she heard this. "Get away from me. I'm surprised at you, Sister, wanting to know things like that. I am ashamed of you. I was so ignorant I didn't realize what you were talking about and listened to every word you said. A splendid fellow that Scholar Wen must be. We let him have this boy, and this is the sort of thing he does."
"Oh, Mother," Jinlian said, "they all go in for this sort of thing. Even the beggars in their hovels."
"But this Southerner is a married man," Yulou said. "Why should he do it?"
"He has been here a long time, but we have never seen his wife," Jinlian said.
"No, ladies," Ping'an said, "and you are not likely to see her. He locks the door every time he goes out. I have only seen her once. She was going in a sedan chair to see her mother. She came back before the evening. She never goes out, but I have sometimes seen her in the evening emptying the chamber pots outside the door."
"She can't be a very respectable woman," Jinlian said, 'if she would marry a man like that. Why, she can never see the light of day. Her room must be as bad as a prison."
The ladies went back to the inner court.
It was sunset when Ximen Qing came back.
"Have you been all this time at Yun's place?" Yueniang asked him.
"Yes," Ximen said. "He opened a jar of wine and insisted on my having something to eat. Now that Jing has been promoted, Yun will have charge of the seals. I and Qiao will get some presents ready and I will arrange for the officers to present him with a congratulatory scroll. I must ask Wen Guixuan to write it."
"Wen Guixuan or Wu Guixuan," Yueniang said. "The fellow is an atrocious scoundrel. If people get to hear of his goings on, we shall all be disgraced."
"What are you talking about?" Ximen Qing said, alarmed.
"Don't ask me. Ask the boy."
"What boy?" Ximen said.
Jinlian explained. "What boy!" she said. "Why! Huatong, of course. When we took Aunt Wu to the gate, we found him there, crying, and he told us what that Southerner had done to him."
Ximen Qing found it hard to believe. "Let us have the boy here," he said, "and I'll talk to him." He sent Daian for Huatong and threatened to put on the thumbscrews.
"What have you been doing with that man?" he said. "Tell me the truth."
"He gave me wine to drink and then misused me," Huatong said. "Today, he tried to do it again, but I got away and would not go back. He told Ping'an to make me go back, and Ping'an hit me. The ladies saw him. And he kept on asking me things about your ladies, but I wouldn't tell him. Yesterday, when you had a party, he told me to steal some of the silver for him. A short time ago, he went to see Scholar Ni and showed him your letters, and Scholar Ni told Magistrate Xia what was in them."
Ah!" Ximen Qing said. "It is easy enough to paint the tiger's skin, but who can paint the bones inside that skin? We may know people's faces but never their minds. I treated him as a man. How could I tell that he was a dog in human form? I won't have him here a moment longer."
"Get up!" he shouted to Huatong. "And never go near him again."
The boy kowtowed and went out.
"No wonder, the other day, when Kinsman Zhai scolded me for not being discreet, I couldn't imagine who had given away my secrets," Ximen said to Yueniang. "It was this dog bone. Why should I keep him here?"
"What is the use of asking me that?" Yueniang said. "You have no son for him to teach; why should you keep that fellow here to write your present lists for you? He lives at your expense and plays dirty tricks of this sort."
"Say no more about it," Ximen said. "Tomorrow he shall go."
He sent for Ping'an. "Go and tell Scholar Wen," he said, "that I need his house as a storehouse and he must go elsewhere. If he comes to see me, tell him I am out."
Ximen Qing told his wife that Ben the Fourth had called to see him and said that he was going to the Capital with the Xia family on the sixth. "I think I will ask your younger brother to look after the shop," he said. "What do you think?"
"I shall not express any opinion," Yueniang said. "If you want him, send for him. He is my brother, and somebody is sure to say I favor him."
Ximen Qing told Qitong to go and ask Uncle Wu the Second to come and see him. When the young man came, Ximen went with him to the great hall and took wine with him. Then he gave him the keys and asked him to go to the shop in Lion Street next morning.
Scholar Wen was very much upset, especially when he found that Huatong did not go near him. Then the next day, Ping'an came and said, "His Lordship says he is going to use this house as a storehouse, and I am to tell you to find somewhere else to live."
The scholar was greatly disturbed and changed color. He realized that Huatong must be the cause. He put on his scholar's gown and hat and went to see Ximen Qing. "My master's at the office," Qintong told him. When Ximen Qing came back from the office, Scholar Wen again dressed up and went across, with a long letter. He gave the letter to Qintong but Qintong would not take it. "My master's just come back from the office," he said. "He's very tired and I daren't disturb him." Scholar Wen understood what this meant. He went to Scholar Ni to ask his advice, and then went back to the house he had lived in before.

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### Hsi-men Ch'ing Slogs through the Snow to Visit Cheng Ai-yüeh; Pen the 4TH's Wife Sits by the Window Waiting for a Tryst

Flying oars in their commotion disturb
the early plum blossoms;
Which defy the frigid weather as they
undulate back and forth.
The wind savors their fragile charm,
wafting their fragrance;
The moon enjoys their subtle allure,
enhancing their beauty.
At the Liang court they were portentous
omens for Emperor Hsiao;[1]
In the Ch'i palace they were matchmakers
for Consort P'an Yü-nu.[2]
Unaware of the gut-wrenching heartache
caused by separation;
They only augment one's grief as they
hover above the water.[3]

When Licentiate Wen realized that Hsi-men Ch'ing would not grant him an interview, he felt ashamed at his own guilt and proceeded forthwith to move his dependents back to his old dwelling place. Hsi-men Ch'ing subsequently arranged to have the studio that he had occupied cleaned up and made into a guest room. But no more of this.
One day, Provincial Graduate Shang Hsiao-t'ang came to take his leave before setting out for the capital in order to compete in the *chin-shih* examinations and asked Hsi-men Ch'ing if he could borrow a leather trunk and a felt jacket for the trip. Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down with him while they shared a serving of tea and also presented him with a farewell gift.
He then went on to say, "My kinsman Ch'iao Hung has recently received an appointment as an honorary official, and my associate Yün Li-shou has succeeded to a hereditary post while continuing to hold his current substantive position, and I would like to present them with a pair of commemorative scrolls in celebration of these events. I wonder, venerable sir, if you have any acquaintances whom you might prevail upon to lend a hand for this purpose. Your pupil would see to it that they were appropriately compensated for their efforts."
Shang Hsiao-t'ang laughed, saying, "Venerable sir, what need is there for any compensation? Your pupil's former schoolmate Nieh Liang-hu, who is a degree candidate in the local Military School, is currently living in my humble abode, where he is acting as tutor to my son. He has a knack for literary composition in a variety of modes. Your pupil will speak to him about your request. All you have to do, venerable sir, is to send your esteemed servant to my place with the scrolls."
Hsi-men Ch'ing hastened to express his gratitude, and after drinking his tea, Shang Hsiao-t'ang took his leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith sealed up two handkerchiefs and five mace of silver and sent Ch'in-t'ung to deliver them, along with the scrolls, the felt jacket, and the leather trunk, to Shang Hsiaot'ang's place, where they were duly accepted.
In less than two days, the scrolls were inscribed, and when they were delivered, Hsi-men Ch'ing hung them up on the wall of the reception hall. Behold, they were:
Brocade scrolls of green velvet,
With characters of blazing gold,
which had been dashed off:
Without altering a single stroke.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by them.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who came in and asked, "When are you planning to hold the celebrations in honor of Ch'iao Hung and Yün Li-shou; have the inscriptions on the scrolls been completed or not; and why is it that the venerable Licentiate Wen has been nowhere to be seen the last few days?"
"Why refer to the venerable Licentiate Wen?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He is nothing but a canine excuse for a human being."
He then proceeded, thus and so, to tell Ying Po-chüeh what had happened.
"Brother," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "I have always said of that person that:
His words overstate the facts,
and:
He is as superficial as can be.
It's a good thing you had the foresight to get rid of him, or he might well have corrupted the other page boys in the household."
He then went on to ask, "As for the commemorative scrolls for the two gentlemen, who did you get to inscribe them?"
"Yesterday, Shang Hsiao-t'ang came to call on me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and mentioned that his friend Nieh Liang-hu was good at literary composition. So I urged him to get Nieh Liang-hu to inscribe them, and the completed scrolls are already here. Let me show them to you."
Thereupon, he led Ying Po-chüeh into the reception hall to take a look at them, and he expressed no end of admiration, saying, "Brother, you have fulfilled our social obligations. You ought to send them off to their recipients as soon as possible, so they can make the necessary preparations."
"Tomorrow is an auspicious day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I've already prepared the congratulatory gifts of mutton and wine, red banners, and boxes of candied fruit and will have them delivered as early as possible."
As they were speaking, a servant suddenly reported, "His Honor Hsia Yen-ling's son has come to bid you farewell. Early tomorrow morning, the eighth, he is planning to set out for the capital. When I told him that you were not at home, he said that you ought to let His Honor Ho Yung-shou know, so that he can send someone over to look after the place first thing tomorrow morning."
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the accordion-bound six-leaved card and saw that the message on it read, "The junior member of your colleague's family. Hsia Ch'eng-en, presents his compliments in order to thank you for your assistance and bid you farewell."
He then remarked, "The departures of Shang Hsiao-t'ang and the dependents of the Hsia household will require the presentation of two lengths of fragrant silk fabric as parting gifts."
Turning to Ch'in-t'ung, he instructed him, "Go quickly to buy these gifts, and then get my son-in-law to seal them up and write cards to deliver with them."
Just as he was settling down in his studio together with Ying Po-chüeh, whom he had invited to share a meal with him, P'ing-an suddenly appeared, in a state of obvious agitation, and presented three calling cards, reporting, "Administration Commissioner Wang, Assistant Commissioner Lei, and Secretary An have come to pay their respects."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, upon looking at the cards and seeing that they were from Wang Po-yen, Lei Ch'i-yüan, and An Ch'en, hurriedly proceeded to don his formal garb and buckle his girdle.
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "I can see that you are busy. As soon as I have finished eating, I'd better go."
"I'll get together with you again tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he straightened his clothes and went out to greet his visitors.
The three officials politely deferred to each other as they came in. They wore mandarin squares, one of which was emblazoned with a silver pheasant, one of them with an egret in the clouds, and one of them with a *hsieh-chih*, the mythical one-horned goat that was said to gore wrongdoers, and they were attended by a host of subordinate officials. Upon entering the large reception hall, they exchanged the customary amenities and referred gratefully to the trouble they had put him to in the past.
In a little while, after they had consumed a serving of tea and were sitting together in conversation, An Ch'en said, "Lei Ch'i-yüan, Wang Po-yen, and I have come to impose upon you once again. Chao T'ing, the prefect of Hang-chou in Chekiang, has recently been promoted to the post of minister of the Court of Judicial Review, and the three of us would like to borrow the use of your distinguished premises in order to invite him to a party in his honor. We have already sent him an invitation to attend the party on the ninth. Including you as our host, five tables will be required, and your pupil will take care of providing actors for the occasion, but I don't know whether you will consent to this or not."
"In response to your command, venerable sir," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "your pupil cannot but:
Sweep the doorway in respectful anticipation."[4]
Secretary An Ch'en ordered one of his clerks to hand over a joint contribution of three taels of silver, and Hsi-men Ch'ing had one of his attendants put it away.
As he was escorting them to the gate, Lei Ch'i-yüan said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "The other day, in response to a letter from Ch'ien Lung-yeh stating that Sun Wen-hsiang was one of your employees, your pupil saw to it that both he and his father were released. Have they come to tell you about it or not?"
"Yes they have," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and I am much obliged to you for your efforts on my behalf.
Permit me to offer you an obeisance in return."
"You and I are good friends," responded Lei Ch'i-yüan. "There is no need to concern yourself further about it."
When they had finished speaking and bowing in farewell to each other, his guests got into their sedan chairs and departed.
It so happens that, from the time that P'an Chin-lien took over responsibility for the household expenses, she had supplied herself with a new set of scales. Every day, when the page boys came home with the groceries they had bought, she insisted that they bring in their purchases for her to evaluate before she would pay out the money to reimburse them. She had Ch'un-mei pay out the money and take charge of the scales. The page boys were frequently cursed by Ch'un-mei till they looked as though:
Their heads had been sprayed with dog's blood,

and they felt as though they were:
Braving the danger of extinction.[6]
On the slightest pretext, she would tell them off and threaten to have Hsi-men Ch'ing beat them.
For this reason, the page boys all harbored resentment against her and said to each other, "It was much better when the Third Lady was handling the money. As for the Fifth Lady, whatever we do, she:
Rarely says a word without threatening a beating."[6]
To resume our story, that day Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the yamen early, and when the session was over, he said to Ho Yung-shou, "Hsia Yen-ling's dependents have left by now. Have you delegated someone to go look after the place, and see that the doors are locked or not?"
"Yes I have," responded Ho Yung-shou. "Yesterday, they sent someone over to speak to me about it, and your pupil has already sent a servant to take care of it."
"Today," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I would like to accompany my colleague over there to take a look at the place."
Thereupon, the two of them left the yamen and rode their horses, side by side, to Hsia Yen-ling's former residence. His dependents had already vacated the premises, and Ho Yung-shou's servant was standing by at the gate. The two officials dismounted and went inside to the reception hall, after which, Hsi-men Ch'ing led Ho Yung-shou on a tour of inspection, both front and rear. When they came back to the ornamental pavilion in the front garden, they saw that it was surrounded by a stretch of vacant ground, without anything in the way of grass or vegetation growing on it.
"When my colleague moves in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you ought to make a pleasure ground out of this area. You can plant it with ornamental flowers, and make some repairs to this pavilion."
"I will do that for sure," said Ho Yung-shou. "This coming spring, I plan to refurbish the place, procure bricks and tiles, lumber and stone, with which to construct three summerhouses, and invite my colleague over to:
Alleviate his ennui and dispel his melancholy."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "How many dependents from your household will come to reside here?"
"There are only a few members of your pupil's own household," said Ho Yung-shou, "but there will also be several families of servants and other attendants, something over ten persons in all."
"In that case," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you will hardly fill the place. The front and rear compounds of this residence contain more than fifty rooms."
After they had finished inspecting the place, Ho Yung-shou told his servants to clean it up, sweep it out, and take care of locking the doors.
He then went on to say, "In a few days, I will write to my venerable uncle in the Eastern Capital, and arrange to have my dependents transported here by the year's end."
That day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had said farewell and returned home, Ho Yung-shou took another look around and then went back to his quarters in the yamen. It was not until the next day that he collected his luggage and moved into his new residence. But no more of this.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had no sooner arrived home and dismounted from his horse than he found that Ho the Ninth had purchased a bolt of fabric, a selection of four delicacies, a chicken and a goose, and a jar of wine and brought them to thank him for his intervention on behalf of his younger brother. In addition, Eunuch Director Liu had sent a servant to deliver a box of delicacies, a selection of large and small pure-red candles decorated with yellow tracery, twenty tablecloths, eighty sticks of government-grade incense, a box of aloeswood incense, a jar of wine he had brewed himself according to a palace recipe, and a freshly slaughtered pig.
As Hsi-men Ch'ing came in the gate, Eunuch Director Liu's servant kowtowed to him and said, "My master wishes to convey his compliments, along with these paltry gifts, for Your Honor to give away to someone if you like."
"I provided your venerable master with but scant entertainment the other day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "yet still he sends me these lavish presents."
He then ordered an attendant to take charge of the gifts and invited the messenger to wait a minute. Before long, Hua-t'ung came in with a cup of tea for him, while Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver as a gratuity and sent him off with a written reply.
When Ho the Ninth was invited to come in, he found Hsi-men Ch'ing standing in the reception hall, having removed his official cap and exchanged it for a "loyal and tranquil hat" of white felt. Upon seeing Ho the Ninth, he took him by the hand and led him into the reception hall.
Ho the Ninth hastened to bend his back and kowtow to him, saying, "In the past, thanks to the way in which Your Honor's:
Celestial grace permitted him to be reborn,
my younger brother's:
Gratitude for your kindness is not shallow."
He begged Hsi-men Ch'ing to accept his obeisance, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not allow him to kowtow and dragged him to his feet, saying, "Old Ninth, you and I are long-standing friends. There is no need for that sort of thing."
"Your Honor," responded Ho the Ninth:
"The present cannot be compared to the past.[7]
Insignificant as I am, I could hardly presume to sit down in your presence."
He insisted on standing to one side while Hsi-men Ch'ing kept him company for a serving of tea.
"Old Ninth," Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "what need was there for you to go to the trouble of presenting these gifts to me? I absolutely refuse to accept them. If anyone should try to take advantage of you, just come tell me about it, and I will see to it that your indignation is assuaged. If the district yamen should assign some onerous task to you, I can intervene on your behalf by sending a card to His Honor Li Ta-t'ien."
"I am cognizant of Your Honor's consideration," said Ho the Ninth, "but I am old now, and have already arranged for my son, Ho Ch'in, to take over my duties."
"That's all right then," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "You should be able to enjoy your greater leisure."
He then went on to say, "Since you refuse to take them back, I will agree to accept your gifts of food and drink, but you must consent to take that bolt of fabric home with you. I won't retain you any longer."
Ho the Ninth then proceeded to bid him farewell with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude.
Hsi-men Ch'ing remained sitting in the reception hall, where he supervised the packing of the congratulatory gifts: the boxes of candied fruit, red banners, mutton and wine, inscribed scrolls, and so forth, including the individual contributions of his colleagues. When this was completed, he dispatched Tai-an to deliver the first consignment to the home of Ch'iao Hung and then sent Wang Ching to take the other consignment to the home of Yün Li-shou.
Upon Tai-an's return, he reported that he had been given a gratuity of five mace of silver by the Ch'iao household. When Wang Ching arrived at the home of Yün Li-shou, he was served food and wine and rewarded with a length of pure-black muslin and a pair of loafers. He returned with an accordion-bound thank-you note that read, "Your protégé presents his compliments, and will extend an invitation on another day." Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by this and went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound to have something to eat.
While there, he said to Yüeh-niang, "Since the departure of Pen the Fourth, Brother-in-law Wu the Second has been handling the business at the store on Lion Street. Since I have some free time today, I propose to go there and see how things are going."
"You might as well go ahead," said Yüeh-niang. "If any food and wine is required, send a page boy back here for it."
"I understand," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Having issued orders that his horse be prepared, he donned his felt "loyal and tranquil cap," his sable earmuffs, a green woolen tunic emblazoned with a mandarin square, and a pair of white-soled black boots and set out for Lion Street, accompanied by Ch'in-t'ung and Tai-an.
When he arrived at the store he found that Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Lai-chao had hung out the flowery braided basket that served as a shop sign and were busily engaged in selling the stock of piece goods, sewing supplies, and silk floss. The store was so crowded with customers that they could hardly handle them all. Hsi-men Ch'ing dismounted, took a look at the situation, and then went back to a heated inner room and sat down.
Brother-in-law Wu the Second came in, bowed to him, and said, "We are currently making a profit of twenty taels of silver a day."
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," saying, "Make sure that Brother-in-law Wu the Second is supplied with tea and food every day, as usual. Don't be remiss about it."
"I personally prepare wine and food for him every day," said Lai-chao's wife.
Hsi-men Ch'ing observed that the sky was overcast. Behold:
Amid dense masses of dark clouds,
Gusts of cold wind beleaguer one.
It looked as though it were going to snow. Hsi-men Ch'ing suddenly thought that he would like to visit Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter.
Thereupon, he ordered Ch'in-t'ung, "Ride my horse back to the house and bring me my fur coat. And tell the First Lady that if she has a serving of wine and food available, to send it in a box for Brother-in-law Wu the Second to consume."
Ch'in-t'ung assented, set off on his errand, and returned before long with Hsi-men Ch'ing's full-length sable coat, followed by an orderly bearing a box of wine and food, which contained four saucers of marinated chicken appetizers and sautéed pigeon, four saucers of seafood to go with the wine, a plate of leek stalks, and a pewter flagon of wine.
Hsi-men Ch'ing remained in the room with Brother-in-law Wu the Second and drank three cups of wine, after which he said to him, "Since you are going to remain here overnight, you can enjoy these things at your leisure. I am going to go home."
Thereupon, he put on his eye shades, mounted his horse, and, with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung attending him, headed straight for Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment in the licensed quarter. As he passed the corner of East Street, lo and behold:
Fluttering and swirling from on high,
A skyful of auspicious snow came flying down.
Truly:
Large snowflakes, the size of a fist,
danced in the void;
The pedestrians on the road could do
nothing but complain.[8]
Behold:
Silently, a severe cold envelops the ground;
The snowfall creating a truly awesome scene.
Just like tattered floss or shredded cotton,[9]
Each flake seems as large as a flower basket.
In the woods, bamboo huts and thatched sheds,
Are faced with the risk of imminent collapse.
Members of rich houses and powerful families,
Claim that snow purges pestilence, and
say there is not enough.
Huddled beside red braziers with their
animal-shaped briquettes;[10]
Accoutered in their sable cloaks and
their embroidered gowns;
While fingering plum blossoms in their hands,[11]
They proclaim it to be an auspicious
portent for the nation;[12]
Without caring for the destitution it
inflicts upon the poor.
There are even men, living in lofty seclusion,
Who produce a plethora of poems in its praise.[13]
Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way along the street:
Trampling the scattered fragments of alabaster and jade;
His sable coat infested with powdery butterflies;
His horses hoofs disturbing the silvery blossoms;
until he entered the licensed quarter and dismounted at the gate of Cheng Ai-yüeh's establishment.
Upon seeing him, a maidservant flew inside and announced, "His Honor has arrived."
Auntie Cheng came outside to receive him, conducted him into the reception hall, and greeted him, saying, "We are most grateful for the lavish gifts you bestowed upon us the other day. Not only did Ai-chieh impose upon your hospitality, but the First Lady and the Third Lady also rewarded her with a gift of costume jewelry and a handkerchief."
"I fear she received but scant entertainment that day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, as he proceeded to take a seat.
He then instructed Tai-an, saying, "Bring my horse inside. They have a courtyard in which it can be accommodated."
"Would Your Honor please come back into the parlor and take a seat there?" said Auntie Cheng. "Ai-yüeh has just gotten up and is still combing her hair. She thought that Your Honor was going to pay her a visit yesterday and waited for you all day long. As a result, she is somewhat out of sorts today and got up later than usual."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, consequently, went back to the parlor of her living quarters in the rear of the establishment, where he saw that:
The green gauze window was half open,[14] and
The felt curtains were suspended low,
while in the middle of the floor there stood a brazier of yellow brass, filled with burning charcoal.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sat down in the place of honor, and Cheng Ai-hsiang came out first to greet him, and offer him a serving of tea. Only after that did Cheng Ai-yüeh appear. She wore a "bag of silk" chignon in the Hang-chou style, held in place by a plum-blossom-shaped ornament, and studded with combs and hairpins of incised gold, under a sealskin toque. She was made up so that her cloudy locks resembled swirling mist, enhanced with fragrant powder and incised blossoms. Her torso was clad in a white satin jacket and green brocaded vest, beneath which she wore a six-pleated beige skirt, under which there peeked out the high pointed tips of her tiny golden lotuses:
Resembling crescent moons,
Shaped like moth eyebrows.
Truly:
The immortal of Mount Lo-fu has appeared
in the mundane world;[15]
The Goddess of Witches' Mountain has come
into the human realm.[16]

The painted face came out with an ingratiating smile, bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, and said, "Father, I didn't get home until late the other day. Not only did the party in the front compound break up late, but when we returned to the rear compound, the First Lady refused to let us go until we had had something to eat. It was the third watch by the time I got home."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, and said, "Little oily mouth! You and Li Kueichieh, between you, really managed to land a few resounding hits on Beggar Ying."
"Who was it," responded Cheng Ai-yüeh, "who allowed that ugly monstrosity to join the party, only to attack us with his shitty mouth? On that day, Pockmarked Chu also got drunk and speciously offered to escort us home, but I said to him, 'Isn't Father going to send us home with a lantern escort?'
When Fatty Chiang falls into the sewer,
The muck may splash on you."
"That day," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I heard Hung the Fourth say that Pockmarked Chu has once again conspired with Wang the Third to patronize Jung Chiao-erh on Main Street."
"He only spent one night at Jung Chiao-erh's place," said Cheng Ai-yüeh. "He burnt moxa on her that once[17] but never went back. At present, he's still patronizing Ch'in Yü-chih."
After they had talked for a while, she said, "Father, I fear you may be cold. Why don't you come into my room and sit there."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to move into her room, where he took off his sable cloak and sat down by the painted face next to the brazier. In the room:
A fragrant aroma assailed the senses.[18]
What should he see but a maidservant who came in to set up a table, on which she placed four saucers of assorted delicacies, and three dishes of ginger sauce; shortly after which, she came in with three bowls of steamed pork dumplings flavored with celery cabbage and chives, and inch-long boiled dumplings. The two sisters kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company as they each consumed one of the bowls.
Cheng Ai-yüeh even offered to give half the contents of her bowl to Hsi-men Ch'ing, but he said, "I've had enough. Just now, in that silk goods store of mine, I was sharing a bite to eat with my brother-in-law Wu the Second when it occurred to me that I would like to come pay you a visit. Unexpectedly, it started to snow, and I sent a page boy home to fetch my fur coat and then proceeded to come over here."
"The other day," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "didn't you agree to come see me yesterday? I waited for you all day, but you never showed up. How could I have known that you would show up today?"
"Yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "a couple of gentlemen came to see me, and I was too busy to come."
"I'd like to ask you, Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "if you happen to have a sable skin you could give to me, so I can make a muffler out of it to wear?"
"That's no problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The other day, one of my managers came back from Liao-tung and presented me with ten fine sable skins. None of the ladies of my household have mufflers for themselves, so when I have them made up, I'll have one made for you as well."
"Father," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "you only care for my sister, without bothering to give me one too."
"I'll provide one for each of you sisters," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Thereupon, Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh hastily got to their feet and bowed to him in gratitude.
"If you see Li Kuei-chieh or Wu Yin-erh," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "don't tell them about it."
"I understand," responded Cheng Ai-yüeh.
"The other day," she went on to say, "when Li Kuei-chieh saw that Wu Yin-erh had been invited to stay overnight, she asked me how long she had been there, and I did not deceive her but said, 'Yesterday, when His Honor Chou Hsiu was here, the four of us were all present and sang for their entertainment all day. Father said that because Wang the Third was present, he had not invited you. But since today's party was for his relatives and friends and the members of his brotherhood of ten, he had invited you to come and sing for them.' She had nothing further to say about it."
"Your response to her was quite correct," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Previously, I had also ceased to engage the services of Li Ming, but he repeatedly asked Ying the Second to intervene on his behalf; and later, on the occasion of the Third Lady's birthday, Li Kuei-chieh herself bought presents and came to apologize to me for her misconduct. The ladies of my household spoke up on her behalf, but I did not pay any attention. The other day, I arranged to invite Wu Yin-erh to stay overnight just to show her where things stood."
"I didn't know about the Third Lady's birthday," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "so I failed to help celebrate it."
"Tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor Yün Li-shou is giving a party, and I told him, the other day, that you and Wu Yin-erh might be willing to sing for us on that occasion."
"If that is Father's wish, I will do so," responded Cheng Ai-yüeh.
Before long, a maidservant came in and took away the dinner table; after which, the painted face fetched a catalpa-wood box, from which she dumped out a set of thirty-two ivory dominoes and proceeded to play a game of dominoes with Hsi-men Ch'ing upon a felt strip laid over the k'ang, while Cheng Ai-hsiang sat beside them and looked on.
Meanwhile, within the courtyard, the snow continued to come fluttering and swirling down:
Like wind-blown pear blossoms.
Behold:
Dimly it obscures the ornate well curbs;
At every other moment,
One must brush away the bee's whiskers.
Jade dragon's-scales appear to
pervade the firmament;
White crane's-feathers seem to
settle gently to earth.
It reminds one of crabs moving
across the sand;
It is like shattered alabaster
piled on the pavement.
Truly:
Though everyone calls it an omen of a good harvest,
As an omen of a good harvest, what are its effects?
There are indigent people in the city of Ch'ang-an,
Who think it is propitious, but only in moderation.[19]
The three of them continued playing dominoes for some time, without anyone being established as the winner. In a little while, wine was served, and they proceeded to drink it. On the tabletop:
Platters are piled with exotic fruits;
Only the rarest delicacies are arrayed.
Tea is brewed from dragon tablets;
Wine is poured of amber coloration.[20]
Lyrics are sung to the tune "Golden Threads."
As, with a smile, they part their ruby lips.
Cheng Ai-hsiang and Cheng Ai-yüeh proffered wine to their guest as they stood to either side. Then, with:
The bridges on their psalteries ranged like wild geese,
As they gently strummed the silken strings,
the two sisters entertained him with the song suite that begins with the tune "Green Jacket":
I think of that captivating beauty, with her
striking personality;
I think of that captivating beauty, who was
so indulgent with me.
I recall how we walked together hand in hand,[21]
laughing as we went;
Saluting the breeze and apostrophizing the moon,[22]
in lines of poetry.
She was warm and soft; I was handsome and clever;
Both in the springtime of our youth.
Who could have anticipated that these fish who
swim as a pair should be separated?
The vase has fallen, the hairpin is broken;[23]
And at this time, the fish are submerged,
the geese are distant.[24]
TO THE TUNE "CURSING ONE'S LOVER":
Once that captivating beauty was gone,
I have had no further news of her.
In thinking of her, my feelings are like lacquer,
my sentiments like glue.
I constantly remember how we enjoyed each other
on the same pillow.
I think of her flowery loveliness, and
her willowy sinuosity;
A face that could topple kingdoms and cities.[25]
TO THE TUNE "BEATING THE FESTIVAL DRUM":
She exhibits a thousand graceful charms;[26]
Romantic and quick-witted;
Her demeanor is alluring,
Her every move marvelous.
Strumming the psaltery, plucking the mandola,
Singing and dancing, or playing on the flute,
Even an expert painter would find
her hard to depict.
TO THE TUNE "MOVED BY IMPERIAL FAVOR":
Ah! It is more than enough to make me
both bored and depressed,[27]
It racks my brains and disrupts my rest;[28]
Leaving me too languid to review
Tu Fu's poetry,
Construe Han Yü's compositions,
Or study Liu Tsung-yüan's prose.[29]
In this state, my sorrowful heart is
only more agitated;
As time goes on, my countenance is
ever more emaciated.
Unable to share our pleasures,
or to become mates,
All we are fated to do is to
suffer in torment.
TO THE TUNE "WEN-CHOU SONG":
As prematurely gray as P'an Yüeh,
As sorely emaciated as Shen Yüeh,[30]
I regret that, though we met, we did
not follow through.
My heart is distressed, my feelings
are lacerated.

Roaring flames consume the Zoroastrian Temple:[31]
Turbulent waves have engulfed the Blue Bridge.[32]
How will I ever escape my lovesickness?
TO THE TUNE "TEA-PICKING SONG":
How will I ever escape my lovesickness?
The sorrow of separation is as difficult to
overcome as a battle formation.
Even someone forged out of iron or stone
would find his spirit disturbed.
His sorrow would rise, layer upon layer, like
the hills of the Southern Mountain;
His despair would swell, wave upon wave, like
the waters of the Eastern Ocean.
TO THE TUNE "TRANSITION":
Who could have anticipated this day?
From of old, students are destined
to be unfortunate.
My feelings are lacerated.
My foolish heart merely evokes the
laughter of others.[33]
To whom can I complain?
TO THE TUNE "CROWS CRY AT NIGHT":
I remember the times when I enjoyed cuddling
the red and hugging the turquoise,
Tripping the grass and comparing botanical specimens.[34]
Upon meeting each other and gazing at the scenery,
we enjoyed it together.
In the springtime, twittering swallows
sought out their nests;
In summertime, the fragrance of lotus
blossoms filled the ponds;
In the autumn, chrysanthemum blossoms
pervaded the empty suburbs;
And in the winter, the auspicious snow
fluttered everywhere.[35]
I recall those painted chambers, replete with
song and dance, and rare repasts;
But now, I am at loose ends, sleeping upon
a lonely pillow in a wayside inn.
I am beset by spectral visitations,
That are not susceptible to remedy;
Which causes my feelings to be agitated
and my thoughts disturbed.[36]
The pain of heartache is difficult to dispel.[37]
TO THE TUNE "HIGHER EVER HIGHER":
I am too depressed to sleep.
I think of that captivating beauty,
Who is conversant with the laws of music
and its various modes.
Everything about her is superb;
Her countenance outshines the moon,
Her face puts the flowers to shame.
Her words are captivating, and
her mind is sharp.
She is like an immortal maiden
come down to earth.
Her golden lotuses traipse gently[38]
with high phoenix toes;
Her ruby lips and her white teeth
smile enigmatically.
TO THE TUNE "THE QUAILS":
Just look at the daintiness of
her demeanor;[39]
Enhanced by an outfit of plain
white silk.
Her cosmetics are evenly applied;
Her moth eyebrows lightly painted.[40]
The myriad ways in which she displays
her seductiveness,
Are hard to depict, hard to depict.
The finest Yang-kao vintage is decanted;
Incense burns in the duck-shaped censer;
Candles in silver sconces burn brightly.
Now that we may finally become a loving
husband and wife;
Surely, our hearts will be one till the
end of our lives.[41]
CODA:
There is a pathway to the azure clouds
that ensures one's arrival.[42]
If it is not one's fate to succeed, it
will be difficult to do so.
I admonish you, never fail to recall the
date of this happy event.[43]

When they had finished singing the song suite, the two sisters brought out a dicebox and proceeded to amuse themselves by playing "Competing for the Red" with Hsi-men Ch'ing. As they:

Passed their wine cups back and forth,
Their faces took on the glint of spring.

Hsi-men Ch'ing noticed that beside the bed in Cheng Ai-yüeh's room there was a brocaded screen, on which there hung a scroll entitled "Picture of a Moon-loving Beauty," on which there was inscribed a poem that read:

There is a lovely woman,[44] who stands
out above the crowd.
A gentle breeze obliquely flutters her
pomegranate skirt.
Blossoms open in Golden Valley in the
third month of spring;
The moon moves the flower shadows in
the depth of the night.
Her jade or snowlike spirit reminds
one of Ts'ai Yen;[45]
Her alabaster features surpass those
of Cho Wen-chün.[46]
One's youthful dreams are inevitably
attracted to her;
Hoping she will not be as indifferent
as a white cloud.[47]

The signature at the end of the poem read, "Drunkenly inscribed by The Master of the Three Springs."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw this, he asked, "Isn't The Master of the Three Springs the courtesy name of Wang the Third?"

This threw Cheng Ai-yüeh into such consternation that she hastened to cover up by saying, "This is something that he wrote some time ago. At present, he no longer uses the courtesy name Three Springs but is using the name Hsiao-hsüan, or Little Studio, instead. He says that ever since you told him your courtesy name was Four Springs, he felt he could no longer use the name Three Springs without offending you. That's why he has changed to using the name Little Studio."

So saying, she stepped forward, picked up a brush, and crossed out the character for "Three."

Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by this and said, "I didn't know he had changed his courtesy name."

"I overheard him explaining it to someone else," responded the painted face, "or I wouldn't have known about it either. It seems that his deceased father used the name I-hsüan, or Leisure Studio, so he deferentially switched to using the courtesy name Hsiao-hsüan, or Little Studio, for himself."

When this exchange was over, Cheng Ai-hsiang went outside, leaving Cheng Ai-yüeh alone to entertain Hsi-men Ch'ing in her room. The two of them continued "Competing for the Red" and drinking wine, while sitting:

Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then brought up the subject of Lady Lin, about whom he said, "She has a great capacity for wine and is devoted to love-making. That day, when I was being entertained by Wang the Third, I was invited into the interior of the residence to pay my respects to her, and she took the initiative in telling Wang the Third to kowtow to me as his adoptive father, and telling me to accept his obeisance, and undertake the task of teaching him how to become a better person."

Upon hearing this, the painted face clapped her hands and laughed, saying, "You have me to thank for suggesting this scheme to you in the first place. In the future, I have no doubt, even Wang the Third's wife will fall into your hands."

"I'll start out by burning some moxa on Lady Lin," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Then, I'll invite her to come to my place, and bring Wang the Third's wife with her, for a lantern-viewing party at New Year's, and see if she'll consent to come or not."

"Father," said the painted face, "you don't even comprehend yet what a beauty Wang the Third's wife is. Not even a figure on a decorative lantern is as romantic and bewitching as she is. She is just eighteen years old this year, but she might as well be observing her widowhood since Wang the Third spends so little time at home. If you are willing to make a play for her, there is no reason to doubt that she will end up in your hands."

As they were talking, they moved closer to each other. Who should appear at this juncture but a maidservant who brought in several saucers of delicacies, including baked nut kernels, dried caltrops, fresh tangerines, betel nuts, snow pears, apples, "abalone shell" sweets, candied orange pieces frosted with crystallized sugar, and so forth. The painted face, with her own hand, fed the delicacies to Hsi-men Ch'ing to go with his wine and also employed her tongue to transfer a phoenix-embossed breath-sweetening lozenge from her mouth to his. At the same time, she used her slender hand to lift aside Hsi-men Ch'ing's lavender silk tunic and expose his white satin trousers. Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by undoing his belt and exposing his organ for her to manipulate. The painted face saw that the silver clasp was already fastened around its root.
It was aroused and its head sprang up,
Becoming both empurpled and shiny.
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to suck it off for him, and the painted face actually:
Bent low her powdered neck,
Gently parted her ruby lips,
Half swallowing, half disgorging it,[48]
So it moved alternately in and out.
The sound of her sucking was audible.
When she had toyed with it a while:
His "magic rhinoceros horn" was erect,
His libidinous fantasies were on fire,[49]
and he was ready to engage in intercourse. The painted face then went back to the interior, while Hsi-men Ch'ing also left the room to go to the bathroom, where he noticed that the snow was falling thicker than ever.
When he returned to the room, a maidservant was engaged in:
Suspending the brocaded curtains,
Placing the mandarin duck pillow,
Spreading the mermaid silk covers,
Lighting the oval incense burners,
and arranging a thick layer of comforters on the bed. After she had helped him to:
Take off his boots and unfasten his girdle,
he got into the ivory bedstead. When the painted face returned after washing her private parts, she closed the double-leaved door and joined him inside the mandarin duck bed curtains. Truly, it is a case of:
The spring beauty arouses the beholder,
complaisantly alluring;
The fragrant corolla attracts the butterfly,
in redolent surrender.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Meetings and partings are undependable
when they occur in dreams;
When one gets up, the sputtering candle
turns the window gauze red.
Real infatuation, from of old, produces
a communion between spirits;
Who says that the road to the Radiant
Terrace is not approachable?[50]
The two of them enjoyed:
The raptures of clouds and rain,
until the first watch before getting up, upon which a maidservant brought a lamp into the room, enabling them to straighten their clothes and tidy up their hair. They then:
Resumed decanting vintage wine,
Reordered the sumptuous repast,
and shared a few more drinks. Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked Tai-an if he had brought a lantern and an umbrella.
"Ch'in-t'ung went home," replied Tai-an, "and brought back a lantern and an umbrella."
Only then did Hsi-men Ch'ing prepare to leave. The procuress and the painted face accompanied him out the gate and looked on as he mounted his horse.
Cheng Ai-yüeh raised her voice, saying, "Father, whenever you want me, let me know in good time."
"I understand," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Having mounted his horse, with his umbrella in hand, he rode out the gate of the licensed quarter and slogged through the snow as he made his way home. When he got there, he merely told Yüeh-niang that he had been drinking at the store on Lion Street with Brother-in-law Wu the Second. But no more of this. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, the eighth, knowing that Ho Yung-shou had moved his belongings into the former home of Hsia Yen-ling, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent him four boxes of fancy tea and assorted delicacies, along with five mace of silver in lieu of the customary kerchief, as a housewarming gift.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ying Po-chüeh, who came in unexpectedly. Hsi-men Ch'ing, seeing that the snow had cleared, but that there was a cold wind blowing, invited him into his studio in the front compound to warm himself at the brazier and directed a page boy to set up a table, and fetch some viands, so he could share a serving of congee with him.
He then went on to say, "Yesterday, I took care of sending the appropriate congratulatory presents to my kinsman Ch'iao Hung, and Brother Yün the Second. As for the gifts from the rest of you, I have already provided two mace of silver for each of you, so there is no need to give them anything. All you need to do is wait until they issue their invitations."
Ying Po-chüeh raised his hand in acknowledgment and thanked him.
Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to say, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou has already moved into Hsia Yen-ling's place. Today, I have sent him a present of tea and a housewarming gift. Shouldn't you also send him a gift of tea?"
"Only if he invites me over," said Ying Po-chüeh.
He then went on to ask, "Yesterday, what did His Honor An Ch'en and the other two come to visit you for? And who were those two who came with him?"
"One of them was Lei Ch'i-yüan, the assistant commissioner of the Shantung Military Defense Circuit," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and the other one was Administration Commissioner Wang Po-yen. Both of them are natives of Chekiang province. They plan to host a party here tomorrow in honor of Chao T'ing, the prefect of Hang-chou, who has recently been promoted to a position in the capital as minister of the Court of Judicial Review and has been the presiding officer of their native prefecture. There is no reason I should refuse to honor him with a table setting on their behalf, along with communal seating for the rest of us. They have undertaken to provide actors for the occasion, and I also feel obliged to engage the services of two boy actors to entertain the company. They saw fit to give me a joint contribution of a mere three taels of silver."
"Generally speaking," opined Ying Po-chüeh, "civil officials tend to be closefisted with their money. What is three taels of silver good for, after all. You will be obliged to supplement it, Brother."
"This Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "is the one who presided over the trial of Sun Wen-hsiang, the son of Huang the Fourth's brother-in-law. Yesterday, he chose to remind me that it was he who had undertaken to exonerate him."
"You may say he is not closefisted," said Ying Po-chüeh, "but he reminded you of this as a means of settling accounts with you. He will not feel adequately repaid unless you take on the costs of putting on the party."
In the course of their conversation, Ying Po-chüeh summoned Ying Pao and said to him, "Call in that person to meet His Honor."
"Who might that be?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"There is a young man who resides in my neighborhood," replied Ying Po-chüeh, "who comes from an established family, but whose father and mother are both deceased. From his youth he has worked for Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, for quite a few years by now, and has already taken a wife. But, because he did not get along with the other servants on the estate, he has left that position and is currently out of work, not having the wherewithal to go into business on his own. He is a friend of Ying Pao's and has requested him to help him find employment as a servant somewhere. This morning, Ying Pao said to me, 'Father, you're in a good position to recommend him for a job in His Honor's household. I imagine that His Honor could use some additional help.' To which I replied that I didn't know whether you could use him or not."
He then said to Ying Pao, "What name does he go by? Have him come in."
"His name is Lai-yu," said Ying Pao.
Who should appear at this juncture but Lai-yu, who wore an outfit of blue cloth, a four-piece tile-shaped hat,[51] cotton socks, and sandals and proceeded to prostrate himself on the floor and kowtow, after which he stood up outside the screen.
"If you consider this creature's physique," remarked Ying Po-chüeh, "he is more than strong enough to:
Sustain the light and bear the heavy."
He then went on to ask him, "How old are you?"
"I am nineteen," the young man responded.
"Has your wife borne any sons or daughters?" he continued.
"There are only the two of us," he replied.
"Your Honor," said Ying Pao, "the truth of the matter is that his wife is only eighteen. She is adept at cooking and needlework and can create articles of clothing, both large and small."
Hsi-men Ch'ing saw the way the young man stood deferentially with his head lowered and his feet together, exhibiting an artless nature, and said, "Since Ying the Second has seen fit to recommend you, I will give you the opportunity to render me your faithful service. If you will select an auspicious day for the event and produce a written contract, the two of you can move in."
The young man kowtowed in response, and Hsi-men Ch'ing told Ch'in-t'ung to take him back to the rear compound in order to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and the others, and explain his decision to them. Yüeh-niang decided to let him reside in the quarters that had previously been occupied by Lai-wang.
After Ying Po-chüeh had remained sitting there a while longer, he went home, and Ying Pao helped Lai-yu to draft a contract of indenture and turn it over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who changed his name to Lai-chüeh. But no more of this.
To resume our story, ever since Pen the Fourth's wife, Yeh the Fifth, had given her daughter Pen Chang-chieh to Hsia Yen-ling as a concubine, she had fallen into the daily habit of:
Buying this and buying that,
and inviting P'ing-an, Lai-an, Hua-t'ung, or Han Hsiao-yü, the son of her next-door neighbor Auntie Han, all of them young servants in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, to come and share drinks together at her place on a dutch treat basis. Pen the Fourth's wife was of an accommodating nature and would promptly come up with whatever they requested in the way of snacks or tea. Even when Pen the Fourth happened to come home from the shop and run into them, he did not object. For this reason, when he was not at home, and she needed something done, none of them was averse to acting on her behalf. Tai-an and P'ing-an were the two who frequented her place most often.
The ninth of the month was the day on which Hsi-men Ch'ing had agreed to put on a party in honor of Prefect Chao T'ing, on behalf of Secretary An Ch'en, Administration Commissioner Wang Po-yen, and Assistant Commissioner Lei Ch'i-yüan. On the morning of that day, Lai-chüeh and his spouse moved in, and his wife went back to the rear compound to kowtow to Yüeh-niang and the rest. Yüeh-niang saw that she was wearing a purple damask jacket, a cape of blue cotton, and a green cotton skirt.
She was petite in stature, with
A face shaped like a melon seed,
Decorated with rouge and powder,
That embellished her ruby lips,
and her two bound feet displayed their upturned tips. When asked, she responded that she was adept at all forms of needlework. She was given the new name of Hui-yüan and was assigned, together with Hui-hsiu and Hui-hsiang, to take turns working in the kitchen every third day. But no more of this.
One day, Aunt Yang, who lived outside the city gate, died, and her page boy came to report her demise. Hsi-men Ch'ing's household prepared a portable table, along with meat of the three sacrificial animals, soup, and rice; and also sealed up five taels of silver as a contribution toward the cost of the obsequies. Wu Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, riding in four sedan chairs, set out for the northern quarter to burn paper money and offer their condolences. Ch'in-t'ung, Ch'i-t'ung, Lai-chüeh, and Lai-an also left home to accompany the sedan chairs.
During their absence, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to the studio in the silk goods store across the street and looked on while a furrier prepared to make a sable muffler for Yüeh-niang. Before he did so, he had him make another muffler out of the same sable skin and gave it to Tai-an to take to Cheng Ai-yüeh in the licensed quarter, as he had promised. In addition, he sealed up ten taels of silver, to present to her as a New Year's gift. The Cheng Establishment treated Tai-an to food and drink and gave him three mace of silver with which to buy melon seeds for himself.
When Tai-an returned to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he said, "Cheng Ai-yüeh presents her compliments and thanks. She said that she had offered you but scant entertainment the other day, and she also rewarded me with three mace of silver."
"Keep it for yourself," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
He then went on to say, "Pen the Fourth is not at home, so what were you doing when I saw you come out of his place a while ago?"
"Pen the Fourth's wife," responded Tai-an, "ever since her daughter was married off, has had no one to run errands for her, so she often calls on us servants to purchase things on her behalf."
"As long as she has no one to run errands for her," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you might as well do your best to help out."
He then whispered to Tai-an, saying, "I'd like you to feel her out, thus and so, saying, 'Father would like to come to your place for a visit. What would you think of that?' Then see how she responds. If she reacts favorably, ask her for a handkerchief to give to me as a token."
"I understand," replied Tai-an, who accepted Hsi-men Ch'ing's directive, nodded in assent, and set out on his mission.
Hsi-men Ch'ing arranged for Ch'en Ching-chi to supervise the furrier's tailoring of the sable in his stead and then prepared to go back to the house.
Who should appear at this juncture but Wang Ching, who came back from Silversmith Ku's shop with the gold tiger-shaped tiara he had ordered, along with four pairs of gold-headed silver pins, and turned them over to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who stashed two pairs of pins in the studio before hiding the other articles in his sleeve and proceeding to Li P'ing-erh's quarters and sitting down. He gave the tiger-shaped tiara and one pair of pins to Ju-i, and the other pair of pins to Ying-Ch'un. The two of them accepted these gifts and immediately:
Just as if inserting a taper in its holder,
kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then ordered Ying-ch'un to bring him something to eat, and she returned with it in no time at all. After he had eaten, he went to his studio and sat down. Who should appear at this juncture but Tai-an, who approached him hesitantly but, on seeing that Wang Ching was present, did not say anything.
Only after Hsi-men Ch'ing had sent Wang Ching back to the rear compound to fetch some tea did Tai-an say, "I communicated your message to her, and she responded with a smile. She agreed, later this evening, to expect a visit from you and told me to bring you this handkerchief."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the packet of red "cotton paper," made from the bark of the paper-mulberry, contained a handkerchief of red satin brocade with a diapered border, and that when smelled it exuded a pungent fragrance, he was absolutely delighted and promptly secreted it in his sleeve. When Wang Ching returned with the tea, he drank it and then went back across the street to watch the furrier at his work.
Suddenly it was reported that Hua Tzu-yu had come to pay him a visit, and Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Ask him to join me over here."
Hua Tzu-yu made his way to the heated chamber in the studio across the street, where he saluted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow and sat down, thanking him for the trouble he had put him to the other day. While they were conversing, Hua-t'ung brought over a serving of tea from across the street.
While he was drinking it, Hua Tzu-yu explained, "There is a merchant outside the city gate who has five hundred bags of Wu-hsi rice on his hands, which he is anxious to dispose of because the river is frozen, and he would like to return home. It occurred to me that you might be interested in buying it, and waiting for the price to go up."
"What would I want with that?" responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "No one wants it while the river is frozen, and when the ice breaks up and the boats can come through, the price will drop even further. And besides, at the present time, I don't have any silver on hand."
He then instructed Tai-an, "See to the setting up of a table, and then go back to the house to order some food."

He also told Hua-t'ung, "Go invite Ying the Second to come and provide company for Hua Tzu-yu."
When they had sat there for a while, Ying Po-chüeh showed up, and the three of them arranged themselves around the brazier and fell to enjoying the wine. The table was set with four platters and four saucers of viands, including sautéed chicken and fish, and roasted and stewed dishes to go with the wine. Sun Hsüeh-o had also been ordered to bake two batches of pastries, and to provide four bowls of soup flavored with tripe, lungs, and curds.
Sometime later, who should appear but Abbot Wu's disciple Ying-ch'un, who came to deliver New Year's gifts, and the customary memorials and writs for the occasion. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him to sit down with them to have some wine and also engaged him to take care of the scripture recitation on the "hundredth day" after Li P'ing-erh's death, and paid him the silver for it in advance. They continued drinking until sunset, at which time Ying-ch'un and Hua Tzu-yu left.
Afterwards, Manager Kan Jun closed the shop and was invited to join them, whereupon he fell to throwing dice and playing at guess-fingers with Ying Po-chüeh. As they talked together, before they knew it, it was already past lamp-lighting time, and Wu Yüeh-niang and the other ladies arrived home in their sedan chairs. When Lai-an came in to report their return, Ying Po-chüeh asked, "Where did my sisters-in-law go today?"
"Aunt Yang from the northern quarter of the city has died," explained Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Today, they are holding the "third day" scripture recitation in her honor. We have prepared a portable table, and appropriate sacrificial offerings for the occasion, and have also sent a contribution toward the cost of the obsequies. They went to offer their condolences."
"The venerable lady must have reached an advanced age," opined Ying Po-chüeh.
"She was probably seventy-four or seventy-five," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She didn't have any children of either sex and depended on her nephew who resides outside the city gate for support. It is also some years now since I undertook to provide a coffin for her."
"She was a lucky old lady," remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "To have a coffin at hand prepares one for the day when your:
Yellow gold is stored in the coffer.[52]
That was really a good deed on your part, Brother."
When this conversational exchange was finished, and:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed,
Ying Po-chüeh and Kan Jun said farewell and departed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then said, "It's the eleventh, so it's the turn of my son-in-law to spend the night here."
"In the shop over there," said Tai-an, "Uncle Fu the Second has also gone home, so I will be spending the night in the shop by myself."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then got up and went across the street, where he told his young servant Wang Hsien, "Be careful with the braziers and candles."
"I understand," responded Wang Hsien.
Hsi-men Ch'ing looked on while he locked the gate and then, observing that there was no one around, proceeded to step nimbly into Pen the Fourth's quarters, where, whom should he see but Pen the Fourth's wife, who had been standing there all by herself for some time.
When she heard the sound made by the locking of the gate and saw Hsi-men Ch'ing approaching her in the dark, she promptly opened the outer door for him and then closed it, saying, "Father, come inside the sliding paper door and sit down."
It so happens that the inner room was divided by a papered latticework partition, behind which there was a small k'ang with a smoldering brazier, a table with a lighted lamp, and two bedrails. The room had been newly plastered so that it looked as white as snow and was decorated with four framed hanging scrolls. On her head she wore a kingfisher-blue gold lamé headband, her fret was adorned with four gold pins, and a pair of clove-shaped earrings dangled from her ears. Her body was clad in a purple damask jacket and a black chiffon cape, over a jade-colored silk chiffon skirt. She stepped forward and greeted Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow, after which, she promptly served him a cup of tea to drink.
Speaking in a whisper, she said, "I'm afraid that Auntie Han next door may become aware of us."
"Never fear," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I kept in the dark, so she couldn't have seen me."
Thereupon:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he proceeded to embrace the woman and give her a kiss. Pulling over a pillow, he undressed her, laid her down on the edge of the k'ang, lifted up her legs, and started to thrust away. The clasp was already fastened on his organ. No sooner had he inserted it into her vagina and withdrawn it several times than, down below:
Her vaginal fluids began to overflow,
leaving her blue cotton drawers soaking wet. Hsi-men Ch'ing then withdrew his organ, groped a packet of the aphrodisiac powder known as "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties" out of his wallet, rubbed some of it on his turtle head, and thrust it back inside. Only then did he stem the flow of her vaginal fluids. While he gave himself over to thrusting and retracting, the woman clasped Hsi-men Ch'ing around the shoulders with both hands. As they responded to each other, the woman from underneath him raised her quavery voice and gave vent to unending groans of satisfaction. Hsi-men Ch'ing, exhilarated by the wine, lifted her two legs over his shoulders and proceeded to alternately submerge and expose the knob of his glans:
Advancing with alacrity and galloping forward,
as he slammed away at her no less than two or three hundred times. In no time at all:
Her cloud-shaped chignon became disheveled,[53]
The tip of her tongue became ice-cold, and
Her voice became completely inarticulate;[54]
while Hsi-men Ch'ing was:
Reduced to panting and puffing,
as the melting sensation in his "divine turtle" was such that he:
Ejaculated like a geyser.
After some time, he retracted his organ, releasing her vaginal secretions, which she proceeded to wipe up with a handkerchief.
After the two of them had readjusted their clothing, fastened their girdles, and put themselves to rights, Hsi-men Ch'ing groped five or six taels worth of loose silver out of his sleeve, together with two pairs of gold-headed hairpins, and presented them to the woman with which to buy costume jewelry for the New Year's season. The woman bowed to him in gratitude and surreptitiously let him out the door. Tai-an was waiting in the shop, listening intently for the sound of the door knocker, and promptly opened the main gate to let Hsi-men Ch'ing in. He was confident that no one was aware of his actions, and afterwards, as the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he made out with her several times.
Truly:
The best way to avoid being found out,
Is not to do it in the first place.
Who could have known that Auntie Han would perceive the situation with her sardonic eye and pass the information on to Chin-lien in the rear compound, who opted not to expose the state of affairs for the time being.
One day, on the fifteenth of the twelfth month, the household of Ch'iao Hung hosted a party, and Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Ying Po-chüeh and Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, set out to attend it together. There were many relatives and friends there that day, and they enjoyed the performance of theatrical selections and drinking wine until the second watch before the party broke up. The next day, each of them also received the gift of a table setting of food, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
Let us return to the story of Ts'ui Pen, who had purchased two thousand taels worth of silk piece goods in Hu-chou, hired a boat to transport them, and set out for home early in the twelfth month. Upon arriving at the dock in Lin-ch'ing, he left the young employee Jung Hai to look after the goods, hired a donkey on which to ride, and headed for home in order to get the silver for the cartage fee.
When he arrived at the gate of the shop and dismounted, Ch'in-t'ung said, "So Brother Ts'ui has come home. Take a seat in the reception hall. Father is in the house across the street. I'll go fetch him."
Upon going across the street, he did not see Hsi-men Ch'ing and asked P'ing-an where he was.
"Father has probably gone back to the rear compound," said P'ing-an.
Ch'in-t'ung, accordingly, went back to the master suite and asked Yüeh-niang where he was.
"You lousy jailbird. You've been seeing things," said Yüeh-niang. "Father went out early this morning and hasn't been back inside since."
Ch'in-t'ung proceeded to look for him in the quarters of all the residents, as well as the garden and the studio, but failed to find him.
On coming back to the main gate, he raised his voice, saying, "How utterly frustrating! Who knows where Father has gotten to that he is nowhere to be found? Even in broad daylight, he is nowhere to be seen. Brother Ts'ui Pen has been here all this time and has been forced to wait in vain."
Tai-an was well aware of the situation but did not utter a word. Unexpectedly, Hsi-men Ch'ing emerged from the front compound to the utter befuddlement of the page boys. It so happens that he had been in Pen the Fourth's quarters making out with his wife and had only just come out. P'ing-an directed Hsi-men Ch'ing to the shop across the street and then stuck out the tip of his tongue at Ch'in-t'ung.
They all broke into a sweat on his behalf, saying, "No doubt, once Brother Ts'ui Pen has gone, you'll be in for a few strokes of the cane."
Who could have anticipated the fact that when Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way into the reception hall, Ts'ui Pen kowtowed to him and turned over his account books, saying, "When the boat arrived at the dock I found that I lacked sufficient silver for the cartage fee. We set out together on the first day of the twelfth month, but on arriving in Yang-chou I separated from the other two while they went on to Hang-chou. We all stayed for two days at the home of your kinsman Miao Ch'ing."
He then went on to say, "Miao Ch'ing has expended ten taels of silver to purchase the daughter of a battalion commander of the Yang-chou Guard as a present for you. She is only fifteen years old and is named Ch'u-yün. Words are inadequate to describe her.
Her face is like a flower,
Her flesh is like jade,
Her eyes are like stars,
Her eyebrows are like crescent moons,
Her waist is like a willow,
Her stockings are like hooks, and
Her two feet are barely three inches long.
Truly:
She has a face that induces fish to
dive and geese to plunge;
Her visage outshines the moon while
putting flowers to shame.[55]
She has a repertory of three thousand short songs and eight hundred long songs. Truly:
If one were to describe her glamour:
It is like a shining pearl
rolling on a crystal plate.
If one were to speak of her demeanor:
It is like a red apricot on a branch tip
caught in the morning sun.
Miao Ch'ing is maintaining her in his home for the time being, so he can have a vanity case made for her and provide her with an appropriate wardrobe. This coming spring, Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao will bring her on their boat so she can wait upon Your Honor and serve to:
Dissipate your melancholy and dispel your gloom."[56]
When he heard this, Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted and remarked, "You could just as well have brought her on your boat. What need is there for him to provide her with a wardrobe, or to have a dressing case made for her? As though my household were unable to supply such things."
Thereupon, his only regret was that he could not:
Mount the clouds and spread his wings,
in order to fly to Yang-chou, take possession of this voluptuous beauty, and enjoy the happy event to his heart's content. Truly:
The case of the deer was one that the minister
of Cheng was unable to solve;[57]
Whether the butterfly was Chuang Chou, or vice
versa, cannot be determined.[58]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
He has heard tell that in Yang-chou
there is one Ch'u-yün;
But the word of such an obscure bird
may not be reliable.
He does not realize that good things
are often evanescent;
Just ask their owner about the fate
of his plum blossoms.[59]
Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Ts'ui Pen company while he had something to eat and then weighed out fifty taels of silver to cover the cartage fee. He also wrote a letter to Secretary Ch'ien Lung-yeh of the Lin-ch'ing customs house, requesting that he be granted favorable treatment. When they had finished talking together, Ts'ui Pen took his leave and went to Ch'iao Hung's household to report his return.
When P'ing-an saw that Hsi-men Ch'ing did not bother to find fault with Ch'in-t'ung, he remarked, "You don't know how lucky you are. Were it not so, when Father came inside, at the very least, you would have been in for several strokes of the cane."
Ch'in-t'ung laughed at this, saying, "I guess you're the only one who truly understands Father's nature."
By the time the cargo of silk piece goods had been transported from Lin-ch'ing and unloaded at the shop on Lion Street, it was the last decade of the month. Hsi-men Ch'ing was at home at the time, supervising the delivery of New Year's gifts, when a messenger from Director-in-Chief Ching Chung arrived unexpectedly with a calling card that read: "Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's report should have arrived in the capital some days ago, but I don't know whether the imperial rescript in response to it has come down yet or not. I humbly submit, venerable sir, that if you could send someone to the censor's yamen to inquire about it, it would be most gratifying."
Hsi-men Ch'ing forthwith sent an adjutant with five mace of silver to inquire about it from a clerical subofficial in the provincial censor's yamen, and, sure enough, the government gazette had come down the previous day, and the clerk agreed to make a copy of the relevant material for Hsi-men Ch'ing's perusal. It read as follows:
Memorial submitted by Sung Ch'iao-nien, Regional Investigating Censor of Shantung
In re: The Evaluation, According to Precedent, of the Local Civil and Military Officials, with a View toward Inspiring the Feelings of the Populace, and Enhancing Your Majesty's Sage Administration

I venture to observe that civil officials exist to nurture the people, and military officials exist to prevent disorder, so as to protect the territory,[60] and ensure the people's livelihood. Should the wrong men hold office,[61] their actions will be illegitimate, the people will suffer, and the state will have no one on whom to rely. No institution is more important than the censorial evaluations for the inspiration and motivation of the civil and military officials, and they cannot but be undertaken with due diligence. Your servant has been delegated to survey the situation in the territory of Shantung, and to personally monitor the state of public morality. With regard to the effectiveness of the administration, the hardships of the people, and the qualifications of the civil and military officials, he has scrupulously looked into all of them, has sought the assessments of the highest authorities regarding the worthiness, or lack thereof, of all the relevant officials, and is confident that he has succeeded in ascertaining the truth about them. Now that the end of my assignment is imminent, it is incumbent upon me to present in detail the results of my investigation.
The provincial administration commissioner of Shantung, Ch'en Ssu-chen, is loyal and honest in his personal conduct, and proficient at nurturing the people.
The investigation commissioner for Shantung, Chao No, upholds the legal standards with clarity, so that both gentry and commoners submit to them.
The vice-commissioner of education, Ch'en Cheng-hui, exemplifies motivational conduct and adheres strictly to the principles of leadership.
I have also ascertained that the assistant commissioner of the Military Defense Circuit, Lei Ch'i-yüan, has earned the respect of both soldiers and civilians for his judicious exercise of mercy and severity, and won the praise of both colleagues and subordinates for his experienced direction.
The prefect of Chi-nan, Chang Shu-yeh, is respected for his thrifty administration and has demonstrated a talent for governing.
The prefect of Tung-p'ing, Hu Shih-wen, is honest and scrupulous in the exercise of his office and is as solicitous of the populace as though they were invalids.[62]
The prefect of Hsü-chou, Han Pang-ch'i, is sedulous in his devotion to his duties, and worthy of a position in the imperial court.
The prefect of Lai-chou, Yeh Ch'ien, has repulsed the maritime pirates and governed so effectively that people do not pick up articles dropped by the wayside.[63] He has also served the agricultural needs of the populace by preventing their land from becoming too saline.
These several officials are all worthy of being rewarded with promotion to higher positions.
I have also learned that the left assistant administration commissioner, Feng T'ing-hu, has a humpbacked physique and is in the sunset of his life.[64] Though he has no more vitality than a wooden puppet, he remains as rapacious as ever.
The prefect of Tung-ch'ang, Hsü Sung, allows the father of his concubine to engage in bribery, so that the court is swamped with accusations. He is so extortionate in assessing taxes that censure is rampant in his jurisdiction.
These two officials deserve to be promptly removed from office.
In addition, I have ascertained that the commandant of the Left Army and notary of the Bureau of Military Affairs, Chou Hsiu, is imposing in stature, and skilled at maintaining discipline, having mastered the qualifications of a military commander. He has won the allegiance of the troops in his command, and quelled the banditry in his jurisdiction.
The military director-in-chief of Chi-chou, Ching Chung, is both young and energetic, and his talent and faculties are fully developed. He won first place in the military examinations and is renowned as an erudite officer whose masterful tactics enhance his ability to engage in combat. His commands are uniform and strictly enforced, and his strategies enable him to resist aggression.
The military director-in-chief of Yen-chou, Wen Hsi, is proficient at military strategy, and practiced at archery and horsemanship. He maintains a contingent of cavalry in order to prepare for the unexpected[65] and labors to erect fortifications as a defense against the unforeseen.[66]
These three officials deserve to be promptly promoted to higher office.
The battalion commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, Wu K'ai, possesses fully developed talent and understands the responsibilities of a guard commander. In commanding his forces to attack the most hardened opponents, he never fails to win every engagement. By stocking provisions with which to feed his men, not one of them is forced to go unfed. His ability to express empathy for others[67] inspires his troops to put their lives at risk. He is truly a bastion in defense of the region and a bulwark ensuring the safety of the state. He ought to be specially promoted in order to motivate his fellow officials.
If Your Majesty sincerely believes that your servant's suggestions are worthy of consideration and chooses to implement them, it is to be hoped that the ranks of officialdom may be cleansed of superfluity, the resolution of the people may be inspired, [68] the right men may be appointed to office, and Your sage administration will have a foundation on which to rely.
The rescript elicited by this memorial read:
These proposals have met with imperial approval and should be directed to the attention of the appropriate boards.
There followed a response from the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of War which read as follows:
Having perused the contents of the memorial submitted by Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, we find that his evaluation of the civil and military officials in his jurisdiction is an expression of his loyalty to the state. It incorporates public opinion and is based on honest investigation, with the intent of bolstering Your Majesty's sage administration. We humbly submit that if Your Majesty's sage wisdom sees fit to enact these proposals, the empire would then be fortunate indeed, and the people would then be fortunate indeed.[69]
The rescript elicited by this memorial read:
These recommendations are imperially approved. Let them be enacted as proposed.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished reading this material he was utterly delighted and, taking the government gazette with him, made his way back to the rear compound, where he said to Yüeh-niang, "The response to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's evaluation has already come down. Your elder brother has been promoted to the position of assistant commander of the Ch'ing-ho Guard, with the substantive position of supervisor of the State Farm Battalion. Commandant Chou Hsiu and His Honor Ching Chung have also been promoted to the rank of assistant commander-generals. Right now, we ought to promptly send a page boy to invite your elder brother over so we can tell him about it."
"You go ahead and send someone to invite him," responded Yüeh-niang. "I'll get a maidservant to fetch wine and refreshments for him. My only worry is that he will be short of silver to spend on the ceremony of assuming office."
"That doesn't matter," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'm prepared to lend him a few taels of silver to take care of it."
It was not long before Brother-in-law Wu K'ai arrived, and Hsi-men Ch'ing showed him the texts of the relevant memorials and rescripts.
Wu K'ai promptly bowed in gratitude to Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang, saying, "I am greatly indebted to the support of my brother-in-law and my sister.
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never dare to forget it."
"Brother-in-law," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you are short of money with which to put on a party to celebrate your assumption of office, I am willing to weigh out a thousand taels of silver for you to use for the purpose."
Wu K'ai, once again, bowed in gratitude, after which, wine was served in Yüeh-niang's room, and Yüeh-niang herself sat down to keep them company. Hsi-men Ch'ing then directed Ch'en Ching-chi to make a copy of the relevant data from the government gazette and give it to Wu K'ai, and he also sent Tai-an to deliver copies of the gazette to the homes of Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung and Commandant Chou Hsiu in order to convey the good news. Truly:
You are urged not to waste your means on engraving adamantine rock;
The mouths of the pedestrians on the road are like memorial tablets.

At the end of the year
The plums and the snow match themselves in beauty.
Under the moon they are white with the same whiteness.
When the wind blows, the tender petals half emerge
They have not the wildness of the willow catkins.
The shadow of a pair of sparrows
Seems like a snow-white parrot.
The snowflakes in the moonbeams
Glitter like a mass of crystal.
Above the flowers they know how to find sweetness
Like a pair of mandarin ducks.
Scholar Wen was not permitted to see Ximen Qing, so, greatly ashamed, he had to go back to live in his old house. Ximen turned the rooms he had left into additional reception rooms for his own use.
One day, Scholar Shang came to see him. He was going to the Eastern Capital to enter for an examination, and he wanted Ximen to lend him a leather trunk and a warm cloak. Ximen asked him to sit down, and they had tea.
"I am anxious to have two appropriate compositions written to congratulate my kinsman Qiao and my friend Yun Lishou," Ximen said. "Qiao has recently been granted honorary rank, and Yun has come into the family title. Perhaps one of your friends would not mind doing this for me. I should be glad to make it worth his while."
Shang smiled. "You need not speak of reward," he said. "My schoolfellow, Nie Lianghu, who is a graduate of the military academy and tutor to my son, is very learned. I will speak to him about it, and all you need do is to send the materials to him."
Ximen Qing thanked him and he went away. Then Ximen sent Qintong with the scrolls, enclosing two handkerchiefs and five *qian* of silver, and, at the same time, sent the leather trunk and the coat to Scholar Shang. Two days later the scrolls were returned. Ximen Qing hung them on the wall and was very well satisfied with the composition and the writing of the golden characters.
Ying Bojue came to see him. "When are we going to have the feast in congratulation of Master Qiao and Brother Yun?" he said. "Are the scrolls ready? Why haven't I seen Scholar Wen lately?"
"Don't mention Scholar Wen to me," Ximen said. "He is a dirty dog." He told Bojue the whole story.
"Brother," Bojue said, "I told you the fellow could not be trusted. He is very sly. It is a good thing you have such sharp eyes, or he would certainly have ruined your boys. But who will write the scrolls for you?"
"Scholar Shang was here yesterday," Ximen told him. "He told me his friend Nie Lianghu was very well educated, and I asked him to write the scrolls. He has now finished them. Come and have a look." He took Bojue to the hall. Bojue thought they were admirable.
"Everything seems to be ready," he said. "Don't wait too long before you send them. We must let our friends have plenty of time to make preparations."
"Tomorrow is a good day," Ximen said. "I will send them then."
As they were talking, a servant came in to say that Xia's son had called to say good-bye. "He said," the man told them, "that they proposed to leave for the Capital on the sixth. I told him you were not at home, and he said, would you be good enough to ask Captain He to send someone to take charge of the house."
Ximen Qing looked at the card and said: "Now I must get ready two sets of presents, one for Xia and one for Shang." He told Qintong to go out and buy them and to tell Chen Jingji to send them with his compliments. Then he went to the study to have something to eat with Ying Bojue.
Ping'an came hurrying in with three cards. "Counselor Wang, General Li and Vice president An have come to see you," he said. Ximen Qing looked at the cards. They bore the names of Wang Boyan, Li Qiyuan, and An Shen. He hastily put on his ceremonial dress.
"Brother," Bojue said. "You seem to be very busy. I had better go."
"I will see you tomorrow," Ximen said, and went to receive his three visitors. He took them to the great hall. There they thanked Ximen Qing for the trouble he had taken, drank tea, and sat down to talk.
"Li, Wang, and I have come to trouble you again," An said. "Magistrate Zhao has been appointed to the Lord Chamberlain's office, and we should like to use your house for a reception. We have invited him on the ninth. Five tables will be needed and we will provide the actors. Will you be so kind as to allow us to do this?"
"The house shall be put in order for you, and I await your instructions," Ximen said.
An told his attendants to present three taels of silver, and Ximen Qing accepted them. Then the three officers went away. When they came to the gate, Li said to Ximen Qing: "The other day I had a letter from Qian Longye. He told me that a certain Sun Wenxiang was one of your underlings. I set him free. Did he tell you?"
"Yes, indeed," Ximen Qing said. "And I am very much obliged to you. One of these days I will come especially to thank you."
"You must not trouble," Li said, "we are very good friends." They got into their sedan chairs and were carried away.
Pan Jinlian had now taken charge of the housekeeping accounts. She began by buying a new pair of scales. Every day, when the boys brought vegetables, or things for the house, she insisted on having them shown to her, and would not hand over the money until she was satisfied. She did not count the money herself but made Chunmei do so. The maid measured the silver. Curses rained upon the boys' heads, and she was always saying she would tell Ximen Qing to beat them. The boys grumbled a great deal. "It was very much better in the Third Lady's time," they said.
The next day, when Ximen Qing had finished his work at the office, he said to Captain He: "Xia's family are now ready to start, and you should send somebody to take over their house."
"I have already sent one of my servants," Captain He said. "They sent word to me yesterday."
"Shall we go and look at it?" Ximen Qing said.
They left the office together and went on horseback to Xia's house. It was empty except for a few servants, and Ximen Qing showed Captain He how it was arranged. They went to the garden. It seemed very bare.
"When you move in," Ximen Qing said, "you will have to plant some flowers and trees here, and make a place where you can really enjoy yourself. These arbors need to be repaired."
"Yes," He said, "I shall set to work as soon as the Spring comes. I shall build a pavilion in the hope that you will often come and spend your leisure with me."
When they had finished their inspection of the house, He bade his servants clean the place and keep all the doors and windows shut. He made up his mind to write to his uncle and ask him to send his family before the New Year. He himself proposed to take up his quarters there the next day. The two officers took leave of one another. Ximen Qing went home and Captain He went back to the office.
When Ximen reached home, He the Ninth had come to thank him with a roll of silk, four dishes of food and a jar of wine. Eunuch Liu's servant had brought a box of candles, twenty tablecloths, eighty packets of official incense, a box of precious incense, a jar of homemade wine, and a pig. When Ximen Qing came in, Eunuch Liu's servant kowtowed and said: "My master presents his compliments and sends these trifles for you to give to your servants."
"The other day," Ximen said, "I allowed your master to leave my table hungry, yet still he sends me these delightful presents."
He told his servants to take the things and asked Liu's man to wait a moment. Huatong brought the man a cup of tea and Ximen Qing gave him a return card and five *qian* of silver. Then he ordered He the Ninth to be shown in. When old He came, Ximen took his hand and went with him to the hall. Old He knelt down. "Your Lordship," he said, "has shown the generosity of Heaven in saving my younger brother's life. I shall never forget your kindness."
He begged Ximen Qing to allow him to express his gratitude in the humblest manner, but Ximen would not have this and dragged He the Ninth to his feet. "Old Ninth," he said, "we are very good friends, and you must not think of it. Please sit down."
"I am so contemptible a creature," He the Ninth said. "How shall I sit in your presence?"
He remained on his feet, so Ximen Qing remained standing also and drank a cup of tea with him. "Why did you bring me these presents?" he said. "I will not take them. If anyone interferes with you in any way, let me know, and I will see that you are protected. And, if you have any business at the Town Hall, send me word, and I will write to Li on your behalf."
"It is very kind of you," He the Ninth said, "but I am an old man now and I have handed over my office to my son He Qin."
"That was wise," Ximen Qing said, "you did well to retire. Since you will not take all the presents away, I will accept the jar of wine, but you must take away the rest. I won't detain you any longer."
He the Ninth thanked him repeatedly and went away. Ximen Qing sat in the great hall watching his servants packing up presents, fruit boxes, flowers, sheep, wine, scrolls, and money. He told Daian to take one set to Qiao's place, and sent Wang Jing with the other to Yun Lishou. Daian returned with five *qian* of silver that Qiao had given him, and then Wang Jing came. Yun Lishou had given him tea, a roll of black cloth, and a pair of shoes. He brought a return card. "Master Yun," he said, "sends his love. He is going to send you an invitation later."
Ximen Qing was pleased. He went to the inner court for dinner.
"Ben the Fourth has gone," he said to Yueniang, "and Uncle Wu the Second is at the shop. I have nothing else to do today, so I will go and see him."
"Very well," Yueniang said, "tell him that, if he wants anything to eat or drink, he need only tell one of the boys to ask me for it."
Ximen Qing called for his horse, put on a felt hat, sable ear covers, a dark gown, and black boots with white soles, and went to Lion Street. Qintong and Daian followed him.
Uncle Wu and Laizhao were there. A sign was hanging outside the shop, and people came to buy silk, thread, and cotton wool. Trade was so flourishing that there were almost too many people to be served.
Ximen Qing dismounted, watched the people for a while, then went and sat down at the back of the shop. Uncle Wu the Second came to him. "We are doing twenty to thirty taels' worth of business a day," he said.
"I hope you are taking the greatest pains over Uncle Wu's food," Ximen Qing said to Laizhao's wife.
It was very cloudy, bitterly cold, and almost snowing. Ximen Qing decided to go and see Zheng Aiyue. "Go back and get my fur rug," he said to Qintong, "and ask the Great Lady to give you something for Uncle Wu to eat." Qintong went home. He was soon back with the fur rug, and a box of food and wine for Uncle Wu.
Ximen Qing drank a few cups with his brother-in-law. "I suppose you will spend the night here," he said. "See that you enjoy yourself. I must be off now." He put on his eyeshades, mounted his horse, and, still followed by Daian and Qintong, went to Zheng Aiyue's house. When he came to East Street, it was already snowing.
Far and wide the bitter frost
Encompasses the earth.
The snow falls exquisitely
A flake and then another flake
Like the willow catkin and the cotton fluff
Each flake as big as a pussy willow.

The bamboos, the trees, the cottages
Slowly succumb beneath the weight of snow.
The rich say it will drive away calamity
And grumble that there is no more of it
Sit by their stoves with choice charcoal to warm them
Wearing coats of sable and embroidered mantles
Twirling a sprig of plum blossom
Between their fingers
And singing of good omen of prosperity
Heedless of the poor.
And poets lie at ease
And make a lot of verses.

The snow seemed like a mass of tiny fragments of jade. Ximen Qing walked over it and went into Zheng Aiyue's house. As soon as he had dismounted, a maid had rushed in and told her mistress that he was there. The old procuress came out to welcome him and took him to the hall. There she greeted him and thanked him for the presents he had sent and for his kindness to Zheng Aiyue. "Your Great Lady and the Third Lady gave her flowers," she said.

Ximen Qing answered politely and sat down. He told Daian to take the horse to the inner court.

"Please come to the upper room," the old woman said. "Zheng Aiyue has just got up. She is dressing her hair. We expected you yesterday, and she waited for you all day. Today she did not feel very well, so she did not get up till late."

Ximen Qing went in. The windows were partly open, and all the blinds were drawn. There was a bronze brazier on the floor with charcoal burning in it. He took the place of honor. Zheng Aixiang came in and offered him some tea. Then Zheng Aiyue, very daintily dressed, with plum-flower ornaments, gold pins, and a sealskin cap. Her hair seemed like the mist; her form as though it were carved from a block of jade. She smiled and made a reverence to Ximen Qing.

"Father," she said, "I was late the other day. Your party went on so long and, when I went to the ladies' court, the Great Lady kept me and insisted that I should have something to eat. I did not get home until the third night watch."

"Little oily mouth," Ximen said, "you and Li Guijie boxed Beggar Ying's ears very soundly."

"Yes," Zheng Aiyue said. "He is always saying such nasty things. Pock-marked Zhu was drunk too. He said he was going to see us safely home. I told him we had people with lanterns to take us home, and we didn't need him."

"Yesterday, I heard he had gone with Wang the Third to the house in the main street to see one of the girls," Ximen said.

"He only stayed one night and then he was done with her. Now he has taken up with Sesame."

They talked for a while, then Zheng Aiyue said: "Father, you must be cold here. Come into the inner room."

Ximen Qing went in. He took off his fur coat and sat down beside the fire with Zheng Aiyue. The air was deliciously scented. After a while, a maid brought food, and the two sisters and Ximen Qing ate it together. Zheng Aiyue offered him another half-bowlful, but he told her that he had had some cakes before he came out.

"I meant to come and see you before," he said, "but the weather was so bad."

"You never sent me word, Father," Aiyue said, "and I waited for you all day. Today, when I didn't expect you, you came."

"Two friends came to see me yesterday, and I couldn't get away."

"I am going to ask a favor of you," Aiyue said. "Will you give me a sable fur? I want one to wear about my neck."

"That is easily done," Ximen said. "My friend Yun, who has just come back from the north, brought me some excellent specimens the other day. The ladies want some and, when they make up their own, I will ask them to make one for you."

"You don't say you will give me one," Aixiang said, "but I suppose you only think about Aiyue."

"You shall each have one," Ximen said.

The two girls stood up and made reverence to him.

"Don't tell Guijie or Wu Yin'er," Ximen said to them.

"The other day, when Guijie saw that Wu Yin'er was staying at your house," Aiyue said, "she asked me how long I thought she would stay. I told her. I told her, too, that when you invited Major Zhou, we four singing girls were there, but you didn't send for her because Wang the Third was there. Yesterday, when there were only relatives and friends, you did send for her. She didn't know what to say."

"You said exactly the right thing," Ximen Qing said. "I gave up sending for her brother Li Ming, but he persuaded Uncle Ying to come and speak for him. Then, on my third lady's birthday, Guijie herself came with presents and begged to be forgiven. The ladies pleaded for her. I didn't say anything but I deliberately asked Wu Yin'er to stay, just to show Guijie what I thought about things."

"I forgot the Third Lady's birthday," Zheng Aiyue said. "I didn't send her anything."

"Tomorrow my friend Yun will be giving a party," Ximen said. "Perhaps you and Wu Yin'er will come and sing for us."

"I shall be there," Aiyue said.

She got thirty-two ivory tablets and played with Ximen Qing. Aixiang sat with them and joined in the game. Wine was brought and the two girls offered it to him. Then they tuned their lutes and sang. When the song was done, they brought the dice box and threw dice with him. They drank together and grew more and more gay. Suddenly, Ximen Qing saw a picture of the Moon Maiden over the bed and, underneath it, a poem.

Here is a beauty, fair beyond all others
The gentle breeze blows aside her crimson skirt.
It is the third month of Spring and the flowers bloom
In the golden valley.
The moon shines and the shadows of the flowers move
The night is at its best.
The essences of jade and snow are combined in her
Her learning and her beauty surpass those of Wen Jun.
Love in youth should be kept as a precious thing
And the lover should not wander with the white cloud.

Beneath the poem was written: "Sanquan, after drinking, wrote these words."

"I suppose Sanquan is Wang the Third," Ximen Qing said.

"Yes, but he wrote this a long time ago," Zheng Aiyue said, hastily. "He calls himself Xiaoxuan now. He has explained to everybody that your honorific name is Siquan and he has given up his old name to save you annoyance." She took a brush and crossed out the word "San."

Ximen Qing was pleased. "I didn't know he had changed his name," he said.

"I shouldn't have known if somebody or other hadn't told me," Zheng Aiyue said. "I understand his father's name was Yixuan, and that is why he calls himself Xiaoxuan."

By this time Aixiang had left them and Aiyue was alone with Ximen Qing. They sat side-by-side, drinking and throwing dice.

"Lady Lin is very fond of lovemaking," Ximen said. "The other day, I went and took wine with Wang the Third, and she invited me to go to the inner court to see her. She asked me to take the young man under my protection, and made him do reverence to me as to a father. She said I was to give him instruction and advice."

Zheng Aiyue clapped her hands in delight. "You have me to thank for that," she said, smiling. "One of these days you will have his wife."

"Yes, but I must burn a stick of incense to her first," Ximen said. "When the New Year comes, I am going to invite her to my house to see the lanterns and to drink wine with my ladies. Then we shall see what happens."

"Father," Aiyue said, "you have no idea how beautiful that young lady is. She is more exquisite and dainty than any figures painted on a lantern. She is only nineteen, yet she has to live like a widow. Wang the Third never spends a night at home. If you devote a little time and attention to her, she will certainly be yours."

They drew closer and closer together. A maid brought fruit. Aiyue offered some to him. She passed honey lozenges from her own tongue to his. She unloosed his trousers with delicate fingers, took out his penis, and stroked it gently until it stood erect, proud and purple. He asked her to suck it; she bent her head, opened her red lips and took in half the penis, which moved this way and that with a pleasant sound. Before long, Ximen's passion was fully roused and he was ready for more serious things. Aiyue went to the back, and Ximen Qing also went out to change his clothes. It was snowing harder than ever.

When they were both back, Aiyue helped him to undress and he got into bed. Aiyue, when she had washed her cunt, closed the door and got into bed too.

It was the first night watch before they had done. Then they got up and put on their clothes, and Aiyue dressed her hair again. The maid came in and gave them something to eat. Ximen Qing drank some wine and asked Daian if umbrellas and lanterns were there. Daian told him that Qintong had just brought them. The old procuress and Zheng Aiyue went with Ximen to the gate and watched him mount his horse.

"Father," Aiyue said, "whenever you want me, let me know in good time."

Ximen Qing promised, then, holding an umbrella over his head, rode away over the snow. When he got home, he told Yueniang he had been drinking with Wu the Second.

The next day was the eighth. Ximen was told that Captain He had transferred his things to Xia's house, and sent him some presents. Then Ying Bojue came. It was very cold, and Ximen asked him to come to the study and sit by the fire. He told the boys to bring breakfast.

"I have sent all the things to my kinsman Qiao and Brother Yun," he said. "I gave them two *qian* of silver as a contribution from you, so you need not trouble to send them anything. Now you have only to wait until they send you an invitation."

Bojue thanked him. "What did his Excellency An want with you yesterday?" he said. "And who were the other visitors?"

"The others were General Li and Counselor Wang. They are both Zhejiiang men. They want me to give a party for a certain magistrate Zhao who has been appointed to the Lord Chamberlain's office. He was a prefect in their native place. I could not very well refuse them. They gave me three taels of silver towards the expenses."

"Civil officers are always stingy," Bojue said. "Their three taels will go no way at all. You will have to spend your own money."

"This Li," Ximen Qing said, "is the man who tried Sun Wenxiang, Huang the Fourth's brother-in-law. He reminded me that he had set the young man free."

"I see," Bojue said. "So naturally, he is careful not to forget it. You will have to give them the party if only for that reason." Then he said to Ying Bao: "Show the man in."

"Who is this?" Ximen asked.

"A young man," Bojue said. "He comes of a very decent family. His parents are dead, and he has been with the princely family of Wang since he was a child. He is married. He could not get on with the others and now he is out of work and finds it hard to get a job. He is a friend of Ying Bao, and asked Ying Bao to find him one. This morning Ying Bao asked me to recommend him to you, but I told him I didn't know whether you were in need of anybody."

"What is his name?" he said to Ying Bao. "Bring him in."

"His name is Laiyu," Ying Bao said.

Laiyu knelt down outside the lattice and kowtowed to Ximen Qing.

"He is a strong lad," Bojue said. "He looks as if he could carry a heavy load. How old are you?"

"I am twenty," Laiyu said.

"Have you any children?" Bojue asked him.

"No, I have only my wife."

"His wife is nineteen," Ying Bao said, "she is a good cook and she sews well."

Ximen Qing was impressed by Laiyu's appearance; he liked the way the young man bowed and stood upright again. He seemed an honest fellow.

"Since Uncle Ying has brought you to me, I will engage you," he said. "Mind that you serve me faithfully. Choose an auspicious day, then have the hiring contract made out and come with your wife."

Laiyu kowtowed. Ximen Qing sent him with Qintong to the inner court to kowtow to Wu Yueniang and the others. Yueniang gave him the apartment that Laiwang had had. Ying Bojue went away, and Laiyu and Ying Bao got the hiring contract written and gave it to Ximen Qing. Ximen called the young man Laijue.

We have now to speak of Mistress Ben the Fourth. After her young daughter had taken service with the Xia family, she had to depend upon Ping'an, Laian, or Huatong to run errands for her. Indeed, at one time or another, nearly all Ximen Qing's boys might have been found drinking wine in her place. She was a good-natured woman and used to cook food for them and give them tea or water whenever they asked for it. When Ben the Fourth came back from the shop, he often saw the boys about but did not give the matter a moment's thought. Now he was away, they all came to see what they could do for her. Daian and Ping'an, especially, were frequently about the place.

On the ninth, there was the reception that An, Li and Wang had asked Ximen Qing to give for Magistrate Zhao. Laijue and his wife came early in the morning. The wife went to the inner court to kowtow to Yueniang and the other ladies. She was wearing a purple coat, a black cape, and a green skirt. She was short and her face was shaped like a melon seed. She was carefully powdered, and her feet were very small. Yueniang inquired whether she could sew and asked a number of questions about housework. Her answers were perfectly satisfactory. Yueniang gave her the name Huiyuan and bade her take her turn in the kitchen every third day.

About this time, Aunt Yang died. Antong brought them the news. Ximen Qing sent an offering of food and five taels of silver, and Wu Yueniang, Li Jiao'er, Meng Yulou, and Pan Jinlian went to the funeral. Qintong, Qitong, Laijue and Laian went with them.

Ximen Qing, in the silk shop, watched the tailors making fur necklets for Yueniang. The first one they made he gave to Daian and told him to take it, with ten taels of silver, as a New Year gift to Zheng Aiyue. The people at the bawdy house made much of Daian and gave him five *qian* of silver. When he came back, he said to Ximen Qing: "Sister Zheng Aiyue is very grateful to you. She told me to say she was sorry she had entertained you so poorly the other day. She gave me three *qian* of silver."

"Keep it," Ximen Qing said. "By the way, now that Ben the Fourth is not at home, what are you doing at his house all the time?"

"When Mistress Ben's daughter went away," Daian said, "there was no one she could ask to do anything for her. So we are always ready to run an errand when it is necessary."

"That is right," Ximen said. "You must do all you can to help her now she has nobody else to do things for her."

He whispered to the boy: "Go and talk to her and say I should like to go and see her. See how she takes it. If she is well disposed, ask her to give you a handkerchief for me."

Daian went to see Mistress Ben the Fourth, and Ximen Qing went home.

Wang Jing had brought from the silversmith's a golden tiger and four pairs of pins with gold heads and silver stems. He gave them to Ximen Qing. Ximen put two pairs of pins away in his study and went with the others to Li Ping'er's room. He gave the tiger and one pair of pins to Ruyi'er and the other pair of pins to Yingchun. They kowtowed and thanked him. Ximen asked Yingchun to give him something to eat and afterwards went to the study and sat down. Daian came in quietly, but he said nothing, because Wang Jing was there. Ximen Qing told Wang Jing to go to the inner court for some tea.

"I told her what you said," Daian said. "She smiled. She said she would expect you this evening and gave me this handkerchief."

He handed to Ximen Qing a red embroidered silk handkerchief, wrapped in red paper. Ximen Qing put it to his nose and found it fragrant. He was delighted and put it into his sleeve. Wang Jing brought tea, and he drank it. Then he went back to the shop to watch the tailors at work.

He was told that Uncle Hua had come to see him, and gave orders that he should be brought in. They went into a small room and Huatong brought them tea.

"I have heard of a merchant with five hundred sacks of Wuxi rice," Hua Ziyu said. "Now that the river is frozen, he is anxious to sell it as soon as he can and get home again. I thought you might like to buy it, since it is so cheap."

"I don't need any rice now," Ximen said. "When the river is frozen, nobody buys rice. The price will go down again as soon as the ice melts. And, besides, I have no spare cash at the moment."

He told Daian to set a table and go for some food, and sent Huatong for Ying Bojue. When Ying Bojue came, the three men sat around the fire drinking. Ximen Qing called for some wheaten cakes. After a while, a novice from Abbot Wu's temple, Yingchun, came with presents and charms for the New Year. Ximen Qing asked him to sit down with them and have some wine. Then he asked him to arrange for a memorial service on the hundredth day after Li Ping'er's death, and gave him the necessary money.

At sunset, Hua Ziyu and Yingchun went away. Clerk Gan shut up the shop and joined Ximen and Bojue. They threw dice and guessed fingers. Lights were brought. Then Laian came and said that Yueniang and the other ladies had come back.

"Where have they been?" Ying Bojue asked.

"Aunt Yang is dead," Ximen said. "This is her third day. I sent an offering of food and money, and the ladies have been to offer their sympathy."

"How old was she?" Bojue asked.

"Seventy-five or seventy-six," Ximen said. "She had no children of her own and lived with her nephew. I gave her a coffin. I had it made for her several years ago."
"For an old lady to have a coffin is like having treasure in a chest," Bojue said. "It was very kind of you."
They drank more wine, and at last Ying Bojue and Clerk Gan went away. When Ximen himself left the shop, he told Wang Xian to be very careful about the fire and the candles. Wang Xian bolted the door after him.
Ximen Qing could see nobody about, and he went hurriedly to Ben the Fourth's place. The woman was standing at the door when she heard the door of the shop close and saw Ximen Qing coming out of the dark. She hastily opened her door and Ximen went quickly in. She shut the door again and said: "Please come in."
A door led to an inner room in which were a small bed and a bright fire. There was a lamp on the table. Mistress Ben was wearing a golden band about her hair, a purple silk coat, and a jade-colored skirt. She made reverence to Ximen Qing and offered him a cup of tea. "I hope my neighbor, Mistress Han, will not know anything about this," she said.
"You need not be afraid," Ximen Qing said. "It was quite dark when I came across. Nobody could have seen me." He kissed her and embraced her. Then he pulled aside the coverlet, laid her on the bed, twined her legs around his shoulders and went to work; for the clasp was already on. It was not long before the juices of love flowed from her so freely that they wet his trousers. Ximen extracted his penis and took some powder from his box; putting it in the usual place he returned to the attack. The powder held the fluid back, so things went more easily. She held his penis in her cunt and whispered words of endearment. Ximen, excited by the wine he had drunk, held her legs and pushed forward vigorously. He thrust with all his might almost three hundred times, until her disheveled hair covered his shoulders and her tongue was too cold to speak. Ximen was hardly breathing, but suddenly the sperm flowed forth and gave him an exquisite orgasm. After a long pause, he took out his penis and the juices of love flowed, but she wiped them away with her handkerchief. They both dressed, and she dried her face with balsam.
Ximen Qing gave her a few taels of silver and two pairs of gold-headed pins, and told her to buy flowers and ornaments for the New Year. She thanked him and quietly let him out. Daian was waiting for him in the shop. As soon as the boy heard Ben the Fourth's door open, he opened the gate and let Ximen Qing in. Ximen was sure that nobody had seen him, and afterwards went several times to see Mistress Ben and sported with her more than once. But, as the proverb says: If you would have no one discover your secret, never do anything that you do not wish to have known. Mistress Han found out what was going on, and she told Pan Jinlian. Jinlian did not say a word to Ximen Qing.
On the fifteenth, Qiao sent an invitation to Ximen, and he went with Ying Bojue and Uncle Wu. It was a large party and there were many people drinking and listening to the plays. The guests did not leave until the second night watch. The next day Qiao sent each of them a present of food.
At the beginning of this month, Cui Ben, who had bought silk and other merchandise to the value of two thousand taels of silver, loaded them upon a boat and started back. When the boat reached Linqiing, he left the boy Rong Hai in charge of the merchandise, hired a horse, and came to ask for money to pay the duty. When he came to the gate, Qintong cried: "What, are you back, Brother Cui? Come in. I will go and tell the master. He is in the shop."
But when Qintong came to the shop, Ximen Qing was not there. He asked Ping'an, and Ping'an said his master had gone to the inner court. Then Qintong went to Yueniang, but she said: "Your Father went out this morning and has not come back yet." The boy went to all the rooms, the garden, and the studies, but he could not find Ximen Qing. He went back to the gate.
"I'll be killed if I can tell you where he is," he said. "I can't find him anywhere. How he has managed to vanish in broad daylight is more than I can understand. And here is Brother Cui waiting for him."
Daian knew where his master was, but he said nothing.
Then Ximen appeared suddenly, and the boys were astonished. He had been amusing himself with Mistress Ben the Fourth. Ping'an made a face at Qintong. He and the other boys were worried for Qintong's sake. If Cui Ben, they thought, had gone away, there would be punishment in store for Qintong. Fortunately, Cui Ben had not gone away. He kowtowed to Ximen Qing and handed him the accounts.
"The boats are at the wharf," he said, "and I need money to pay both freight and duty. We set off together on the first day of the month and separated at Yangzhou. The others went on to Hangzhou. I stayed a couple of days at Miao Qing's. He has spent ten taels of silver on a Yangzhou girl for you. She is sixteen years old, the daughter of a captain there, and her name is Chuyun. I can't tell you how beautiful she is. I can only say that her face is like a flower, her skin like jade, her eyes like stars, her eyebrows like the new moon, her waist like the willow, and her feet hardly three inches long. She is so beautiful that the fish when they see her sink to the depths of the river, and geese fall stricken to the ground. She is pretty enough to make the moon retire in shame and the flowers hang their heads. She knows three thousand short songs and eight hundred long ones. At the moment she is at Miao Qing's house, and he is getting ready ornaments and clothes to send with her. He is going to send her with Laibao in the spring, in the hope that she will amuse you when you feel the need of amusement."
Ximen Qing was delighted. "You should have brought her with you," he said, "and there was no need for him to bother to buy clothes and ornaments for her. Do you think I couldn't provide her with things of that sort, myself?"
Ximen Qing loathed himself because he had no wings to fly to Yangzhou, to bring back the girl and amuse himself with her.
He gave Cui Ben something to eat and five taels of silver to pay the duty and freight. He also gave him a letter to the officer at the wharf, asking him to be lenient. Cui Ben took it to Assistant Secretary Qian.
Ping'an noticed that Ximen Qing did not call for Qintong. "My boy," he said, "I could never have believed you'd be so lucky. His Lordship must be in a good temper today or you would have been tied up and beaten."
Qintong laughed. "You know his Lordship too well," he said.
It was the twentieth of the month when the merchandise arrived. It was stored in the house in Lion Street. Ximen Qing was busy preparing presents for the New Year, when a man came from General Jing. He was anxious to know whether the Imperial Rescript had come in response to the report that Censor Song had made. "My master says, perhaps you will send someone to the provincial office to find out." Ximen Qing sent a man with five *qian* of silver to the provincial office, and he found that the Imperial Rescript had arrived the day before. He made a copy and brought it back. It was a very long document, and, in the course of it, reference was made to Major Zhou, General Jing and Uncle Wu. They were all spoken of in terms of high praise and recommended for promotion.
Ximen Qing read the document with great satisfaction. He went to the inner court and said to Wu Yueniang: "Censor Song's recommendations have come. He has suggested your brother for promotion, and that he be given charge of the commissariat in this district. Zhou and Jing are commended too, and they will both be promoted. I am going to send a boy for your brother so that I can tell him."
"Yes, do," Yueniang said, "I will get the maids to prepare wine and food for you. But, if he takes up this new office, won't he need money?"
"Don't worry about that," Ximen said, "I will lend him anything he needs."
After a while, Uncle Wu came, and Ximen Qing showed him the Imperial Rescript. Uncle Wu thanked Ximen and Wu Yueniang. "I shall never be able to forget your kindness," he told them both.
"If there's anything you need, let me know," Ximen Qing said.
Uncle Wu thanked him again.
They sat down with Yueniang in her room and had a meal there. Ximen asked Chen Jingji to make a copy of the document for Uncle Wu and then sent it to Major Zhou and General Jing.

## 101

### Hsi-men Ch'ing Ventures upon a 2ND Engagement with Lady Lin; Wu Yüeh-niang Invites Ho Yung-shou's Wife to View the Lanterns & Pan Jinlian & her Mother

The pitch changes in the lowest pitch-pipe as a propitious breath blows;
When the yin retreats and the yang ascends the temperate ether returns.[1]
The sunflower's shadow begins to shift on the day of the winter solstice;
The plum blossom begins to bloom at the time of the solar term Little Cold.
The day of the sacrifice to the Eight Spirits[2] portends an auspicious year;
As the ether blows into the pitch pipes, the ash of the pith is disturbed.
The willows on the riverbanks are all ready for the change of season;
In their profusion, they are more than happy to usher in the Spring.[3]

On that day Hsi-men Ch'ing kept Brother-in-law Wu K'ai company as they drank together until he went home that evening.
Early the next morning, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung came on horseback to thank him, saying, "When I read the rescript that you sent me yesterday, I was:
Unable to contain my satisfaction.
It is more than sufficient to show the extent of your generous regard. I will certainly:
Carry rings and knot grass, and never forget it.
Battalion Commander Fan Hsün is getting old, and Militia Commander Chang Kuan had hoped for a promotion, but they have been left where they were and may feel somewhat disappointed."
After they had finished speaking, and the tea had been twice replenished, Ching Chung got up to go and asked, "When is His Honor Yün Li-shou going to invite us over for a drink to celebrate his promotion?"
"He won't be able to invite us during these few days before New Year's," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "It will have to wait until sometime next month."
He then escorted him to the gate, where he mounted his horse and departed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then supervised the preparation of a freshly slaughtered pig, two jars of Chekiang wine, a round-collared scarlet robe of velvet embroidered with gold thread and emblazoned with a *hsieh-chih*, the mythical one-horned goat who was said to gore wrongdoers, a round-collared robe of black figured satin, and a hundred stuffed gold-colored pastries, as an expression of his gratitude to Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, and sent Ch'un-hung, with a calling card, to deliver them to the provincial censor's yamen. The gatekeeper went inside to report his arrival, and Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien called him into a heated chamber in the rear reception hall, where he was provided with tea while he waited for him to write an answer. When he had done so, he put it into an envelope, sealed it, and rewarded Ch'un-hung with three mace of silver.
When Ch'un-hung arrived home and presented it to Hsi-men Ch'ing, he tore it open and saw that it read as follows:
Having twice imposed upon your illustrious household, I am profoundly embarrassed. And now, I am once again the undeserving recipient of your magnanimity. What can I do to be worthy of such largess? I have already memorialized on behalf of your kinsman, Wu K'ai, and your colleague, Ching Chung, as I expect you know. For days on end I have longed for a glimpse of your radiant countenance, so that we may discuss things in person, and I may have an opportunity to express my gratitude.
The signature at the end read: "Respectfully indited by his devoted servant, Sung Ch'iao-nien, for the perusal of the distinguished officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, His Honor the gentleman Hsi-men Ch'ing."
Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien, soon thereafter, sent someone to deliver a hundred copies of the official calendar for the coming year, four hundred sheets of stationery, and a pig as a return gift to Hsi-men Ch'ing.
One day, a document came down from the higher authorities confirming that Brother-in-law Wu K'ai should report to the yamen of the local guard and assume the duties of his new office. Hsi-men Ch'ing visited him in order to offer his congratulations and gave him thirty taels of silver, and four bolts of capital brocade, to expend, both high and low.
On the twenty-fourth, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who was entitled to a recess for the holiday season, put away his seal of office and came home, where he had prepared mutton and wine, red banners, and an inscribed scroll, and invited his relatives and friends for a party to celebrate Wu K'ai's accession to office. Upon returning from the guard yamen after assuming office, Wu K'ai was welcomed to the home of Hsi-men Ch'ing, where a sumptuous feast was provided in his honor.
Around the same time, the dependents of Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou arrived from the Eastern Capital, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent a welcoming gift of tea to them in Wu Yüeh-niang's name.
On the twenty-sixth, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor, along with twelve of his acolytes, came to the Hsi-men Ch'ing residence to perform the scripture recitation on the "hundredth day" after Li P'ing-erh's death. The appropriate texts for the salvation of the departed were recited ten times over, the ritual was performed with due solemnity, and there was:
Loud playing on wind and percussion instruments,[4]
to further enhance the incense-burning procession. A large number of relatives and friends came to offer gifts of tea and were duly invited to partake of the sacrificial oblations. The party did not break up until the evening. But no more of this.
On the twenty-seventh, Hsi-men Ch'ing supervised the sending out of New Year's gifts. The households of Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Han Tao-kuo, Pen Ti-ch'uan, and Ts'ui Pen were each given half a pig, half a sheep, a jar of wine, a sack of rice, and a tael of silver. Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, and Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter were each given an outfit of Hang-chou silk clothing and three taels of silver. Wu Yüeh-niang had also commissioned Nun Hsüeh to preside over a service at her nunnery and ordered Lai-an to deliver incense, lamp-oil, rice, flour, and silver for the occasion. But no more of this.
Before long, it was the last day of the year.
The moon shines on the plum trees in the window;
The wind disturbs the snow lying upon the eaves.[5]
Firecrackers explode before a thousand doors;
Lanterns burn in front of ten thousand gates.[6]
Every home displays lucky interlocking lozenges;
Everywhere hang couplets inscribed on peachwood.
Hsi-men Ch'ing burned paper money and then went to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to make a sacrificial offering before her spirit tablet, after which wine was served in the rear reception hall. When the whole household, high and low, including Yüeh-niang, Li Chiao-erh, Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and his son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, had saluted him with a drink, they sat down arrayed to either side. Then Ch'un-mei, Ying-ch'un, Yü-hsiao, Lan-hsiang, and Ju-i, the five of them, kowtowed to him, followed by Hsiao-yü, Hsiu-ch'un, Hsiao-luan, Yüan-hsiao, Chung-ch'iu, and Ch'iu-chü. After this, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," Hui-ch'ing, Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang, Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu, and Lai-chüeh's wife Hui-yüan, the spouses of the four principal servants, kowtowed. Only after this did Wang Ching, Ch'un-hung, Tai-an, P'ing-an, Lai-an, Ch'i-t'ung, Ch'in-t'ung, Hua-t'ung, Lai-chao's son Little Iron Rod, Lai-pao's son Seng-pao, and Lai-hsing's daughter Nien-erh kowtow to him in turn. Hsi-men Ch'ing and Yüeh-niang presented each of them with handkerchiefs, kerchiefs, and silver.
The next day was New Year's Day, the first day of the first month of the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period.[7] Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early, donned his formal cap and crimson robe, lit incense dedicated to Heaven and Earth, burned paper money, had something to eat, called for his horse, and set out to proffer his New Year's greetings to Regional Investigating Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien.
Yüeh-niang and the other ladies of the household also got up early:
Daubed on makeup and applied powder,
Stuck floral trinkets in their hair;
Donned brocade skirts, embroidered jackets,[8]
Silken hose, and shoes with upturned tips;
Dressed themselves up to look captivating.
Decorated themselves to appear enchanting;
and forgathered in Yüeh-niang's room to exchange greetings.
P'ing-an and the orderly on duty that day stationed themselves at the front gate to accept the calling cards and record the names of the officials and gentlemen who came to call.
Tai-an and Wang Ching, wearing new clothes, new boots, and new caps, went outside the gate, where they played at shuttlecock, let off firecrackers, cracked melon seeds with their teeth, concealed sachets of pomander in their sleeves, and sported quivering paper cutouts of spring moths on their heads.
The vast number of Hsi-men Ch'ing's employees, managers, and protégés who gathered to extend their New Year's greetings was so great they could hardly be counted. Ch'en Ching-chi was assigned the task of single-handedly entertaining them in the front guest room.
The furnishings for an elaborate feast were laid out in the large reception hall in the rear compound for the entertainment of the friends and relatives of the family.
In the summerhouse in the garden, felt curtains and heat-holding drapes were suspended, brocade carpets and embroidered rugs were arrayed, along with braziers burning animal-shaped briquettes, and ten tables replete with gold lamé tablecloths and figured seat cushions.
Platters were piled high with rare fruits,
Vases were embellished with gold blossoms,
The feast was spread on tortoiseshell mats,[9]
all reserved for the entertainment of the visiting gentlemen and officials.
Around noontime, Hsi-men Ch'ing came home after making his formal calls at the prefectural and district yamens. He had just dismounted from his horse when Wang the Third from the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang, garbed in formal attire and followed by four or five attendants, showed up to proffer his greetings. On arriving in the reception hall, he proceeded to perform:
Four brace makes eight kowtows,
after which he asked if Wu Yüeh-niang could come out so he could meet her. Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, invited him into the rear compound to meet Yüeh-niang and then ushered him back to the front reception hall and offered him a seat. They had just saluted each other with a cup of wine when Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came by to proffer his greetings. Hsi-men Ch'ing directed Ch'en Ching-chi to entertain Wang the Third, while he went to the summerhouse to receive Ho Yung-shou. Upon drinking a little while longer, Wang the Third said goodbye, and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted him to the front gate, where he mounted his horse and departed. After this, Military Director-in-Chief Ching Chung, Commander Yün Li-shou, and Ch'iao Hung also showed up one after the other.
By this time, as a consequence of entertaining visitors all day long, Hsi-men Ch'ing was:

Half inebriated with wine.
That evening, after seeing everyone off, he returned to the master suite and went to sleep for the night.
The next morning, Hsi-men Ch'ing went out again to make New Year's calls and did not return until evening. In his absence, Han Ming-ch'uan, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, and Hua Tzu-yu had all come to call, and Ch'en Ching-chi had the task of entertaining them in the reception hall, where they had been waiting for some time. When Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived, a new serving of wine and accompanying delicacies was provided, and they fell to drinking again. Since Han Ming-ch'uan and Hua Tzu-yu lived outside the city wall, they were the first to get up and go, but Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh continued to sit there until they were so drunk they bobbed about like the float valve in an oil jar, without venturing to leave. Brother-in-law Wu the Second also showed up. After expressing his greetings, he went back to the rear compound to pay a visit to Yüeh-niang and then came out again to join them. They continued drinking until after the lamps were lit before the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing was already stinking drunk by the time he saw off Ying Po-chüeh and the others at the front gate.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that Tai-an was standing beside him, he squeezed his hand, and Tai-an, who understood what this meant, said, "No one else is in her place."
Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, made his way toward Pen Ti-ch'uan's quarters. The woman, who was already standing inside the outer door, welcomed him inside, and the two of them, without wasting any words, went into the inner room, where the woman:
Took off her clothes, undid her girdle, and
Lay down on the k'ang with her legs spread.
Hsi-men Ch'ing let down his trousers and lifted up her legs. The silver clasp was already fastened on his organ, and he proceeded to set to work with it. It so happens that the woman liked to keep her thighs together during intercourse, but she used her two hands to separate them so that Hsi-men Ch'ing could better stimulate her clitoris. In consequence, her vaginal secretions flowed out in a warm flood, soaking the mattress. Hsi-men Ch'ing had applied an aphrodisiac to his turtle head, and he plunged it inside her, clasping her around the waist with both hands, while the two of them proceeded to knead away at each other until his chowrie handle penetrated her to the root:
Without leaving a hairsbreadth outside.[10]
The woman opened her eyes wide, while calling out, "My own daddy!"
Hsi-men Ch'ing asked her, "What is your given name? Tell me."
"My maiden name is Yeh," she responded, "and I am the fifth sibling in my family."
Hsi-men Ch'ing muttered to himself, saying, "Yeh the Fifth, I don't know whether you are familiar with oral intercourse, or not."
This woman had originally been employed as a wet nurse and had engaged in an affair with Pen the Fourth, who absconded with her and took her as his wife. She was petite in stature, with a sultry, treacle-sweet gaze, and was born in the year of the hare, so that she was just thirty-one years old, and there wasn't much she didn't know about anything.
Repetitions of the words "My own daddy" poured out of her mouth in an endless stream until Hsi-men Ch'ing's feelings came to a climax, and he:
Ejaculated like a geyser.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing retracted his chowrie handle and wanted to wipe it off, the woman prevented him from doing so, saying, "Don't wipe it off. Let this whore of yours get down and suck it clean for you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted by this proposal.
The woman then actually squatted down on her haunches, took hold of his organ with both hands, and sucked it completely clean, before allowing him to refasten his trousers.
She then went on to ask Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Why is it that my husband has been gone all this time without coming home?"
"I've also been expecting him," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I fear that His Honor Hsia Yen-ling in the capital may be keeping him there for some reason."
He then proceeded to reward the woman with two or three taels of silver as pin money, saying, "I would give you an outfit of clothes, but I fear that if Pen the Fourth were to find out about it, it would prove embarrassing. It's better to give you this silver, so you can buy what you want for yourself."
The woman then opened the door and let him out. Tai-an was alone in the shop, where he waited behind the closed door for Hsi-men Ch'ing to come in, before securing it for the night, while Hsi-men Ch'ing made his way back to the rear compound.
Gentle reader take note: It has always been true that:
If the ridgepole is not straight,
The rafters will be crooked.
This is a natural principle.[11]
If the head of a household commits morally questionable acts, the servants in his home will follow his example. It so happens that this wife of Pen the Fourth was not the sort to abide by her lot. She had already been carrying on an affair with Tai-an, and now she had succeeded in enticing Hsi-men Ch'ing as well.
No sooner had Tai-an seen Hsi-men Ch'ing into the house than he took advantage of the fact that Manager Fu Ming was not spending the night in the shop to join P'ing-an in filling two large vessels of wine and visiting Pen the Fourth's wife in her quarters, where they drank together until the second watch. When P'ing-an returned to the shop to sleep, Tai-an proceeded to spend the night with Pen the Fourth's wife. Can such things be? Truly:
There is no need for the people of today to
practice threading needles;
How could the Weaving Maid have the leisure
to confer such dexterity?[12]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Romantic feelings bedazzle the eyes, causing
one's vision to blur;
Why is it that the scattered blossoms end up
trampled into the mud?
Laying aside his zither, he ceases to perform
Shang-ling's sad lament;[13]
Which is making the mountain fowl chatter as
they fly among the trees.[14]
To resume our story, that evening Pen the Fourth's wife said to Tai-an, "The only thing I'm afraid of is that Auntie Han next door may leak information about what's going on to the ladies in the rear compound. As in the case of Manager Han Tao-kuo's wife, if they have anything to say about it, I'll be utterly mortified [15] to be seen by them."
"Aside from the First Lady and the Fifth Lady," said Tai-an, "the others don't matter. The First Lady is all right, but the Fifth Lady is prone to be officious. If you take my advice, buy something as a New Year's gift and go inside to offer it to the First Lady as a demonstration of your filial respect. She may not care that much about anything else, but she has always had a liking for steamed shortcake. You ought to buy a mace worth of stuffed steamed-short-cake pastries and a box of large melon seeds to present to her. The ninth day of the month is the Fifth Lady's birthday. You ought to give her a gift as well, and go in person to present her with a box of melon seeds. If you go inside and kowtow to them tomorrow, I guarantee it will have the effect of stopping their mouths."
Pen the Fourth's wife chose to act on Tai-an's advice, and the next day, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was not at home, Tai-an bought the gift boxes for her and took them back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound.
"Where do these come from?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"Pen the Fourth's wife is presenting these boxes of delicacies and melon seeds for Mother to eat," responded Tai-an.
"When her husband is not even at home," remarked Yüeh-niang, "how did she come up with the money to go to such trouble on my behalf?"
She promptly accepted them and sent her a box of steamed dumplings and a box of fruit in return, saying, "Present her with my respects, and thank her for me."
That day, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home from paying New Year's visits, Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor came to extend his compliments. Hsi-men Ch'ing entertained him for a drink in the reception hall before seeing him off.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then took off his formal clothes and said to Tai-an, "You take the horse and go pay a visit to Auntie Wen. Say to her, 'Father would like to come pay his respects to Lady Lin today,' and see what she says."
"There is no need for me to go, Father," responded Tai-an. A while ago, I ran into Auntie Wen, who was riding her donkey past the front gate. Tomorrow, on the fourth, Wang the Third is going to depart for the Eastern Capital to pay his respects to his wife's uncle, the eunuch Huang Ching-ch'en. Lady Lin says she would like Father to pay her a New Year's visit on the sixth. She will be expecting you then."
"Did she really say that?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"You don't mean to suggest that I would dare tell a lie, do you?" protested Tai-an.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then proceeded to go back to the rear compound. He had hardly arrived in the master suite and sat down before Lai-an suddenly appeared and reported that Brother-in-law Wu had come.
Wu K'ai, accordingly, came into the rear parlor, dressed in formal attire, including a girdle with a gold plaque, and bowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying:
"It's a long story,
but I, Wu K'ai, am greatly indebted to you, Brother-in-law, for promoting my interests and looking after me the way you have. It has cost you something to do so, and I am extremely grateful for your lavish gifts. The other day when you condescended to pay me a visit, I was not at home. The fact that I was not there to welcome you has left me feeling as though I let you down. Today, I have come to respectfully kowtow to you in the hope that you will forgive my remissness."
So saying, he offered him a kowtow.
Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly kowtowed to him in return, saying, "Brother-in-law, congratulations on your promotion.
It is only a natural development;
as a close relative of mine:
What need is there to discuss it?"
When Wu K'ai had finished paying obeisance to Hsi-men Ch'ing, Yüeh-niang came out and kowtowed to her elder brother. She was decked out in a gilt-ridged cap of pale lavender crepe under a sealskin toque, a white satin jacket that opened down the middle, an aloeswood-colored brocaded vest, and a wide-cut skirt of jade-colored satin. On her ears she wore a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece, her chignon was studded with combs and hairpins in the shape of gold phoenixes, and on her breast there hung a gold chatelaine with its three pendant charms that served as a clasp for her collar. Beside her skirt was suspended a purple brocaded purse with eight tassels, and a key chain of variegated cord. On her feet she wore a pair of high-heeled shoes of white satin brocade with an embroidered pattern. In short, she was dolled up very vividly. Coming forward:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze:
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;
Just as if inserting a taper in its holder;
she kowtowed to her brother four times.
This threw Wu K'ai into such consternation that he promptly performed a half kowtow in return, saying, "Sister, two kowtows are enough."
He then continued, "Your elder brother and his wife are so:
Unconscious of right and wrong,
that we are constantly coming and imposing on the two of you. Your elder brother is aging, and we are increasingly dependent on you."
"If we ever let you down," responded Yüeh-niang, "I hope that you will forgive us."
"Sister," said Wu K'ai, "it goes without saying that we have put the two of you to no small trouble on our behalf."
When this exchange of courtesies was over, Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Wu K'ai to sit down, saying, "By this time of day, I assume that my brother-in-law will not be visiting anyone else to extend his New Year's greetings. Why don't you loosen your clothes and sit down in the room here for a visit."
Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien, who were both in an adjacent room, upon hearing the stir that Brother-in-law Wu's arrival had created, would promptly proceed to come in and kowtow to him. They both wore sealskin toques, white satin jackets, and jade-colored drawnwork skirts. One of them wore a green brocaded vest, and the other a purple brocaded vest. On their heads, they both sported frets, but Meng Yü-lou's was set off with pearl circlets, while P'an Chin-lien's was enhanced by pendant onyx earrings, and below they revealed the upturned points of their golden lotuses. After kowtowing to Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, they retreated to their own quarters.
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had ushered his brother-in-law to a seat in the room, a table was placed over the brazier, and platters of appetizers, boxes of candied fruit, assorted bowls of hot viands, large steamed dumplings, and a soup of eight ingredients were brought in and placed upon it. Hsiao-yü and Yü-hsiao also came in and kowtowed to Brother-in-law Wu. In a little while, after they had finished with the soup and rice, Yüeh-niang took up a small gold goblet, inlaid with tortoiseshell, filled it with wine, and offered it to Wu K'ai, while Hsi-men Ch'ing continued to play the role of host.
Brother-in-law Wu demurred, saying, "Sister, why don't you come and sit down with us?"
"I'll be there in a moment," responded Yüeh-niang, as she went into the inner room and came out with an assortment of delicacies to go with the wine, consisting of bamboo shoots, whitebait, ground squirrel, minced sturgeon, jellyfish, edible fungus, apples, betel nuts, fresh tangerines, pomegranates, dried caltrops, snow pears, and the like.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then asked, "Has my brother-in-law's recent promotion gone through satisfactorily?"
"Thanks to my brother-in-law's support," responded Wu K'ai, "my new appointment came through at New Year's. I have already distributed 70 or 80 percent of the customary gratuities, both above and below, but have not yet visited the site of the State Farm Battalion. Tomorrow is an auspicious day for me to go and assume my new office. The Ch'ing-ho Guard has already issued my official seal of office. When I return home, I will have to prepare some gift boxes and have them carried to the yamen of the State Farm Battalion in time for my assumption of office, and also dispatch an order for the heads of the State Farms to assemble so I can issue their instructions. My predecessor, Director Ting, having mismanaged affairs, has already been impeached by Grand Coordinator Hou Meng, and been removed from office. Now that I have been appointed to:
Assume his position and carry out his duties,
I will have to examine closely the lists of registered tenants, and motivate the heads of the State Farms to go over them with a fine-tooth comb and clearly report any additions or subtractions, in order to facilitate the collection of the autumn and summer tax assessments."
"How extensive, altogether, are the State Farms that will be under your jurisdiction?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"As for these State Farms," replied Wu K'ai, "I will be candid with you, Brother-in-law. According to the precedent promulgated by Emperor T'ai-tsu,[16] units of the Military Guard were assigned to work on State Farms, which were established in order to save the transportation costs of logistical support. Later on, the grand councilor Wang An-shih introduced the Green Sprouts system,[17] which involved the additional assessment of this summer tax. Prior to that time, the State Farms were only required to submit the autumn tax assessment, and this summer tax was not applied to land owned by the civilian population. At present, within the jurisdiction of Chi-chou, leaving aside uncultivated land, the Imperial Reed Beds, harbors, and narrows, the total area of the State Farms is twenty-seven thousand mou. The total value of the produce collected by the autumn and summer tax assessments is one tael and eight mace per ch'ing of land, which amounts to no more than five hundred taels of silver. At the end of the year, when the taxed produce has been collected, it is turned over to the authorities in Tung-p'ing prefecture, who in turn engage merchants to transport it, in order to provide logistical support and fodder for the army."
"Is there anything left over to profit from?" asked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Although there are always some unregistered tenants," replied Wu K'ai, "these rural villagers are a wily lot. If you try too hard to extort anything out of them by using weighted scales or oversize containers, you run the risk of arousing adverse public opinion."
"As long as there is something left over," opined Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it should be all right. The government can hardly be expected to extract everything. If something can be retained through the manipulation of containers and scales, it should be sufficient to take care of your necessary expenditures, both high and low."
"To be candid with you, Brother-in-law," said Wu K'ai, "if I am adroit in managing these State Farms, in the space of no more than a year, I should be able to realize as much as a hundred or more taels of silver. In addition to which, at the end of the year, there will be tenants who choose to present me in person with chickens, geese, pigs, or rice. These gifts are not demanded of them and fall outside what can be expected in the way of income. I am greatly indebted to you, Brother-in-law, for the strength of your support."
"As long as it suffices for your needs," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "I will do what little I can on your behalf."
As they were talking, Yüeh-niang came in and sat down at their side. The three of them continued drinking together until after the lamps were lit before Brother-in-law Wu K'ai got up and took his leave. That day, Hsi-men Ch'ing went to Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound to spend the night.
The next day, Hsi-men Ch'ing reported to the yamen, where he resumed the use of his seal of office, taking his place on the bench, calling the roll, and dispatching official business.
Before this, the household of Yün Li-shou had sent out cards inviting Hsi-men Ch'ing and the officers of the Guard to attend a party on the fifth in celebration of his official appointment, and Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, had sent a card inviting Yüeh-niang and her sister wives for a get-together on the sixth.
On the fifth, Hsi-men Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh, and Brother-in-law Wu, the three of them, set out together to attend the party at Yün Li-shou's place. It so happens that Yün Li-shou had rented the house next door for the occasion and used the eighteen-foot-wide parlor there to entertain his guests. He had engaged musicians playing wind and percussion instruments to welcome his visitors, each of whom was provided with an individual table setting. They enjoyed themselves there until the evening before returning home.

Hsi-men Ch'ing could hardly wait until Yüeh-niang had departed to attend the party at the home of Ho Yung-shou the next day. He then proceeded to dress himself up to befit the occasion, stuffed packets of gratuities into his sleeve, mounted his horse, put on his eye shades, and, attended by Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, set out in the early afternoon for the mansion of Imperial Commissioner Wang in order to extend his New Year's greetings. Wang the Third was away from home at the time, but he left a calling card for him. Auntie Wen was already there and, taking possession of his calling card, promptly went inside to report his arrival to Lady Lin.

Upon coming out, she said, "Your Honor is invited to come back to the rear of the residence and take a seat."

Making his way past the large reception hall, he headed toward the rear of the establishment, passed through the ceremonial gate, lifted aside the translucent portiere, and entered the thirty-foot-wide parlor in the residential quarter. In the place of honor at the head of the room there was suspended a full-length portrait of the family patriarch Wang Ching-ch'ung, before which there stood two tables with sacrificial offerings of food and wine. He was depicted seated on a crimson dais in a folding armchair, covered with a tiger skin. Before the portrait:

The entire floor was covered with rugs, and
The drapery consisted of hanging red curtains.

Before long, Lady Lin appeared, wearing a full-sleeved jacket of scarlet material:

Her head was covered with pearls and trinkets, and
Her face was glossy with powder and cosmetics.

After exchanging the customary courtesies with Hsi-men Ch'ing, she invited him to sit down and share a serving of tea, and ordered a servant to lead his horse back to the stables in the rear and take care of feeding it. When they had finished drinking their tea, she suggested that Hsi-men Ch'ing should loosen his outer clothing and sit down with her in her own room.

"My son set out for the Eastern Capital on the fourth," she explained, "in order to kowtow to his wife's uncle, Defender-in-Chief Huang Ching-ch'en. He will not come back until after the Lantern Festival."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, accordingly, took off his outer garments, under which he wore a white satin jacket, an ultramarine flying fish python robe, and white-soled black boots, presenting a really natty appearance. In the woman's room a table was set up beside a square brazier of yellow brass with animal heads protruding from its four sides, filled with smoldering charcoal. The chamber was facing the sun, which shone through the windows, so that it was brightly illuminated.

In a little while, maidservants brought in the wine.

The cups and plates were duly arranged,
Filled to the brim with rare delicacies.
The wine overflowed with golden ripples, and
A kettle of hydrangea-flavored tea was brewing.

The woman, garbed in:

A brocade skirt and embroidered jacket,
With her white teeth and bright eyes,
Passed the cup with her jadelike hands,
Conveying ardent feelings in her glance.

The two of them engaged in:

Playing at guess-fingers and throwing dice,
As their laughing banter became suggestive.
Chatting for some time,
Their thoughts were genial and their feelings warm;
Drinking quite a while,
Their gazing became risqué and their hearts stirred.
By degrees,
The sun set and dusk descended,
Before long,
Silver candles burned brightly.[18]

Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung were provided with wine and food at a table set up in a side chamber under the supervision of Auntie Wen. Wang the Third's wife resided in a room on the other side of the postern gate and was waited on by her own maidservants and waiting women, so that she did not ordinarily intrude on Lady Lin's living quarters. The woman had also seen to it that the postern gate was locked from the inside, so that none of the male servants would venture to barge in upon her.

When the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, they went into the woman's boudoir together, where they:

Raised the brocade curtains, and
Closed the window casements.
A maidservant deftly trimmed the silver lamp;
The beauty hastily closed the vermilion door.
The gentleman took off his clothes and went to bed;
The lady washed her feet and climbed in beside him.
The pillows were decorated with peonies;
The coverlet disturbed by crimson waves.

It so happens that before leaving home Hsi-men Ch'ing, had:

Made ready his arsenal of weapons,[19]

and brought his bag of sexual implements with him, intending to engage the woman in a furious battle. He had already taken a dose of the Indian monk's medicine, washing it down with wine, and had attached a pair of clasps to his organ. Under the coverlet, he lifted up the woman's two legs, inserted his chowrie handle into her vagina, arched his back and set vigorously to work. In the ensuing bout, as he lifted her body into the air and pegged away at it, the sound resembled that made by a throng of coolies plunging through the mud.[20]

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly.

The woman, in her abject position, called out "Daddy!" unceasingly. Truly:

Amid autumn colors, the battle flags and banners
are reflected in the sea;
By the light of the moon, the Heaven-smiting beat
of military drums resounds.

There is a long set-piece of parallel prose that describes this engagement. Behold:

Before the brocade screen,
A soul-disorienting formation[21] is arrayed;
Under embroidered curtains,
A spirit-conjuring banderole is unfurled.
From the soul-disorienting formation,
There emerges a guardian deity of wine,
a demon king of sex.
On his head is a flesh-colored helmet,
with a brocade visor;
On his body is a suit of glossy armor,
and a vermilion gown,
With protuberant bands, a fish skin belt,
and seamless boots.
He flaunts a black-tasseled spear,
A tiger-eyed whip,
A shooting star double-balled mace,
And featherless arrows.
Astride his curly-haired sunken-eyed roan,
He waves a rain-flipping cloud-flapping[22]
commander's flag.
Beneath the spirit-conjuring banderole,
There appears a powdered skeleton,[23]
a flamboyant vixen.
On her head is a two-phoenix ornament,
with hanging ropes of pearls;
On her body is a blouse of white silk,
a kingfisher skirt waist,
A crotch of white treated silk, with
wave-tripping stockings,
A waistband of mermaid silk, replete
with phoenix-toed shoes.
She wields dismissive lashes,
A garrulous tongue,
Invisible arrows,
A blubbering bludgeon,
An emaciated mace,
And silk-curtained scutcheon.
Astride her coquettish jade-surfaced cunt,
She sports a tossing and tumbling mating
phoenixes[24] parasol.
Before long, on one side, with a *p'u tung-tung*,
drums resound like spring thunder;
While on the other side, in wild profusion, the
scent of orchid and musk disperses.
On one side, amid a warm aura, the coverlet
is disturbed by crimson waves;
On the other side, with a rustle, curtains
are suspended on silver hooks.
As the coverlet is disturbed by crimson waves,
his passions are demanding;
Beneath the curtains suspended on silver hooks,
her sentiments are bizarre.
One of them, urgently, tries to run the gamut
of all twenty-four positions;[25]
The other, abruptly, finds it hard to manage
eighteen rolling responses.
One of them is used to wielding a red floss
noose[26] and tying a lovers' knot;
The other is adept at using the kidnapper's
shooting star date-shaped mace.
One of them, wielding his flaring

cylindrical spear,
Looks forward to jabbing her three
thousand times;
The other, deploying her quivering
labia bucklers,
Expects to be surmounted at least
fifty times.
This one is accustomed to don his armor and
wear a uniform when he fights;
That one is deft at purloining the semen and
sucking the marrow of her foe.
One of them, riding his fighting steed,
with a *p'a t'a-t'a*,
Tramples the realm of song and dance;
The other, like a cunning foot soldier,
surreptitiously,
Hides in the densely wooded gorge.
One of them presents an ugly, belligerent,
and unbending physique;
The other reveals a seductive apricot face
and peach-colored cheeks.
One of them flaunts his ability to maintain
even a prolonged conflict;
The other her skill at giving forth oriole's
notes and swallow's cries.[27]
One of them, after undergoing a
protracted engagement,
Drips with sweat, her hairpins askew, her
coiffure in disarray;[28]
The other, after maintaining a
relentless assault,
Pants and puffs, his pillow dislodged, his
mattress displaced.
Before long, behold, the ballista attacks have
reduced Crotch County to rubble,
Leaving each of them with bulging brows
and swollen eyes;
In no time, one perceives, the sparsely wooded
field is so gored with the spear,
That they are each left with split flesh
and broken skin.[29]
Truly:
The thundering clouds rise up as high as
the nine-layered heavens,
While down below the defeated combatants
lie tumbled on the field.[30]
Although he had often engaged lascivious
women in furious battles,
None of them had ever risen to the level
of this one's intensity.[31]

On this occasion, Hsi-men Ch'ing burned two pellets of moxa on the middle of the woman's chest and her mons veneris and promised that he would put on a party at his residence in the near future, and invite her and Wang the Third's wife to come and enjoy viewing the lanterns. The woman's body and mind had already been so tightly entrammeled by Hsi-men Ch'ing that she:

Effusively voiced her acceptance,[32]

promising that they would both go. Hsi-men Ch'ing was utterly delighted to hear this. On getting up, they resumed drinking heartily and enjoying each other's company until the second watch, when the horse was led out to the back gate, and Hsi-men Ch'ing took his leave and returned home. Truly:

Do not fear lest the bright moon should set,
It will be succeeded by a subtle fragrance.

There is a poem that testifies to this:

All day long I yearn for you, within
my painted boudoir;
Having met, I cannot give you up, but
press you to remain.
Master Liu[33] is undeterred by the age
of the peach blossoms;
Wantonly scattering the pink petals
into the flowing stream.[34]

To resume our story, when Hsi-men Ch'ing arrived home, he was met at the gate by P'ing-an, who reported, "Today, Eunuch Director Hsüeh sent someone to deliver a written invitation for you to pay a visit to the imperial estates outside the city wall tomorrow morning, in order to enjoy the advent of spring. In addition, Yün Li-shou has sent someone to deliver five calling cards inviting the ladies of your household to a New Year's party. I have already sent the cards inside."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he had nothing to say, but proceeded to make his way back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound. Meng Yü-lou and P'an Chin-lien were already sitting there. Yüeh-niang, who had just returned from the party at Ho Yung-shou's place, had already removed her head ornaments and was only wearing a fret, held in place with six gold pins, and a pearl headband. Attired above in a blue satin jacket, and below a skirt of soft yellow cotton material, she had sat down to chat with them. When Hsi-men Ch'ing came in, she hastily stood up and greeted him with a bow.

After Hsi-men Ch'ing had taken a seat at the head of the room, she asked him, "Where have you been today that you have come home so late?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing hesitated before replying, "I was at Brother Ying the Second's place, where he retained me until now."

Yüeh-niang then told him about the party at Ho Yung-shou's place that day, saying, "It so happens that Battalion Commander Ho's wife is still young, being only seventeen-years-old this year. She is as pretty as a figure on a decorative lantern, possesses an impressive demeanor:

Is well-informed about the present and the past,[35]

and is as vivacious as can be. She treated me as intimately as though we had already met more than once and showed herself to be extremely congenial. She has been married to Ho Yung-shou for only two years or so, but she already has four maidservants, two waiting women, and two servants' wives at her disposal."

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "She is the niece of Eunuch Director Lan Ts'ung-hsi, who is in charge of the Daily Provisions Office of the Imperial Household Department and provided her with a substantial dowry when she was married."

Yüeh-niang went on to say, "As the page boy has probably told you, the household of Yün Li-shou has also invited us womenfolk to a New Year's party, sending five individual invitations, which are lying there on top of the cabinet, along with the invitation from Eunuch Director Hsüeh."

She then turned to Yü-hsiao and said, "Bring them over for Father to take a look at."

Hsi-men Ch'ing looked over the invitation from Eunuch Director Hsüeh and those from Yün Li-shou's household and noticed that the latter were signed below by his wife with the words, "Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née Su, of the Yün family."

"Tomorrow, all of you might as well get your things together and go," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

"We should leave Sister Sun Hsüeh-o at home," said Yüeh-niang, "I fear that during this major festival season, if someone were to pay us a call, there would be no one to cope with the situation."

"All right, then," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you can leave Sun Hsüeh-o at home while the other four of you go. I won't be going anywhere tomorrow either. Eunuch Director Hsüeh has invited me to come to his place outside the city wall to enjoy the advent of spring with him, but I'm reluctant to go. The last few days, I don't know whether it is due to the advent of spring, or what, but I've developed a pain on one side of my waist and my thigh."

"If you are feeling pain in your waist and thigh," opined Yüeh-niang, "I fear it must be an outbreak of phlegm-fire. You ought to get Doctor Jen Hou-ch'i to prescribe a couple of doses of medicine to treat it. What's the point of merely putting up with it?"

"It doesn't matter," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "If I wait a few days before seeking any medication, things will calm down."

He then went on to discuss his plans with Yüeh-niang, saying, "On the occasion of the Lantern Festival a few days from now, we'll have to throw a party and invite Ho Yung-shou's wife, Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife, Ching Chung's wife, Chang Kuan's wife, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Yün Li-shou's wife, Wang the Third's mother, Sister-in-law Wu, and Ts'ui Pen's mother for a get-together. On the twelfth or thirteenth, we'll have to hang up the lanterns, and engage the services of the troupe of actors maintained by Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, to entertain us for the day. Unfortunately, however, last year Pen the Fourth was here and took care of the erection of stands for the fireworks display, but this year he has gone off to the Eastern Capital and hasn't come back yet, so who are we to get to take care of the fireworks?"

Chin-lien interrupted him from the sidelines, saying, "Since Pen the Fourth is not here, his wife is equally adept at dealing with erections."

At this, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave Chin-lien a look, saying, "Why you little whore! You can't utter three sentences without getting vulgar."

Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou chose to ignore this exchange, and Yüeh-niang went on to say, "As for the mother of Wang the Third, none of us has formally met her.

We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.

What's the point of inviting her? I fear she is unlikely to come."

"Since she has acknowledged me as a kinsman," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "we might as well send her an invitation. Whether she chooses to come or not is up to her."

Yüeh-niang then went on to say, "I don't think I'll go to Yün Li-shou's place tomorrow. I'm in the last month of my pregnancy, and if I continue to run around this way it will only cause tongues to wag."

"Sister," remarked Meng Yü-lou, "there's really nothing to be afraid of. The fact that you are pregnant is not conspicuous, and I doubt if your child will actually be born within the month. It doesn't matter. You might as well relax and enjoy yourself during such a major festival."

When they had done discussing it, Hsi-men Ch'ing finished his tea and headed for Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters in the rear compound. When P'an Chin-lien saw that he had chosen to go to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters, she spoke to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and accompanied her out to the front compound. Upon arriving in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters that evening, Hsi-men Ch'ing had her pummel his legs and massage his body for half the night. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.

The next morning, who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, who came to borrow some clothes and head ornaments, saying to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Yesterday, the wife of Yün Li-shou sent a card inviting my wife to join my sisters-in-law at her party. Although she has some old clothes at home, they are all in bad shape. During the first month of the new year:

Venturing out and returning home,[36]

without decent clothes to wear can only give rise to ridicule. For this reason, I have made bold to come pay my respects to my sister-in-law, in the hope that if she has any sets of clothing and head ornaments, hairpins, or bracelets to spare, I might borrow a few of them so she can be appropriately garbed for the occasion."

Hsi-men Ch'ing accordingly turned to Wang Ching and said, "Go inside and convey the message to the First Lady."

Ying Po-chüeh also addressed Wang Ching, saying, "Ying Pao is waiting outside with a felt bag and a box. May I impose on you to take them inside and bring them back out when the borrowed things have been packed in them?"

Wang Ching, thereupon, collected the felt bag and went back to the rear compound.

After some time, he came back out with the parcel and handed it to Ying Pao, saying. "There are two outfits of first-class satin brocaded garments, five head ornaments, large and small, and a pair of earrings adorned with two pearls apiece inside."

Ying Pao took the package and set out for home, while Hsi-men Ch'ing drank tea with Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "Yesterday, my wife attended a party at Ho Yung-shou's place and did not return home until late. And today, unexpectedly, Yün Li-shou's wife has sent five cards inviting my spouses to a get-together. My First Lady is in the last month of her pregnancy and was reluctant to go, but I said to her, 'Since they have taken the trouble to invite you on the occasion of a major festival like this, all of you might as well go.' I also haven't had any free time the last few days. It was only yesterday that I finished paying my New Year's courtesy calls. The other day, we all went to that party at Yün Li-shou's place, and yesterday, I had to go out again to fulfill a minor obligation and didn't arrive home until late. On top of which, today, Eunuch Director Hsüeh has invited me to visit his place outside the city wall in order to enjoy the advent of spring. How can I find the time to go? Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Temple of the Jade Emperor has also sent a card reminding me that he is going to perform the annual *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal on the ninth. I won't be able to go myself but will send my son-in-law instead. The last few days, I don't know whether it's because I've had too much to drink, or what, but I've been suffering from pain in my lower back and haven't felt like doing anything."

"Brother," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "it probably is a case of excessive drinking causing damp phlegm to accumulate in the lower body."

"During this festival season," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing, "who is going to let you off lightly? One can scarcely avoid drinking."

"How many of my sisters-in-law are going to attend the party today?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"The First Lady, the Second and Third Ladies, and the Fifth Lady, the four of them, are going," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing. As for me, I'm going to stay home and rest for a few days."

As they were speaking, who should appear but Tai-an, carrying a card box in his hand, who announced, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou's household has sent someone to deliver an invitation to a New Year's party on the ninth."

"You see what I mean," Hsi-men Ch'ing remarked to Ying Po-chüeh. "When people take the trouble to invite you, one can hardly refuse."

Thereupon, he looked in the card box and saw that it contained three invitations. One of them, inscribed on safflower red paper, was addressed, "To My Superior the Venerable Gentleman Ssu-ch'üan," one of them, "To the Assistant Commander of the Guard the Venerable Gentleman Wu K'ai," and another, "To the Respected Member of the Community the Venerable Gentleman Ying Po-chüeh." All of them were signed, "Respectfully indited with his compliments by your devoted servant, Ho Yung-shou."

Tai-an explained, "The sender said that since he was not yet acquainted with the other two gentlemen, he hoped that we would forward their invitations on his behalf."

On taking this in, Ying Po-chüeh said, "What am I to do about this? Before I have sent anything to him, he has seen fit to send an invitation to me. How can I go under the circumstances?"
"I can seal up the customary gift of a handkerchief on your behalf," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and you can have Ying Pao deliver it to him. That ought to take care of it."
So saying, he said to Wang Ching, "Go seal up two mace of silver and a handkerchief, write Ying Po-chüeh's name on the package, and give it to him."
He then turned to Ying Po-chüeh, and said, "If you put this invitation of yours in your sleeve you can save me the trouble of having it forwarded to you. I'll have Lai-an deliver Wu K'ai's invitation to him."
Before long, Wang Ching sealed up the gift of the handkerchief and handed it to Ying Po-chüeh, who thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "Brother, you've made it a lot easier for me. I'll come over early the day after tomorrow, and we can set off together."
When he had finished speaking, he took his leave and departed.
To resume our story, that noon, Wu Yüeh-niang and the others, having dressed themselves appropriately, set out in one large sedan chair and three smaller sedan chairs, followed by Hui-yüan, the wife of Lai Chüeh, who accompanied them in a small sedan chair in order to look after their clothes. With four orderlies preceding them to clear the way, and attended by Ch'in-t'ung, Ch'un-hung, Ch'i-t'ung, and Lai-an, they proceeded to the residence of Yün Li-shou to attend the party. Truly:
With blackened eyebrows and cloudy locks,
they are pretty as pictures;
Displaying slender and lithesome waists,
they are out of this world.
Veritable models of the Goddess of the
Moon, up in the heavens;
In their seductive beauty they generate
fervent spring feelings.[37]
We will say no more about how Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Li Chiaoerh, Meng Yü-lou, and P'an Chin-lien, set out to attend the party at Yün Lishou's residence.
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave orders to P'ing-an, the keeper of the main gate, saying, "No matter who may come, simply tell them that I am not at home. If they have cards to leave, just accept them, that's all."
P'ing-an, having already suffered the consequences of failing to strictly obey such orders in the past, did not dare to stray from his post but remained seated at the gate. No matter who showed up, he simply told them that the master was not at home.
As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, that day he went into Li P'ing-erh's quarters and sat down to warm himself at the stove.
Ever since Li P'ing-erh had died, Yüeh-niang had instructed Ju-i not to bind up her breasts in order to prevent lactation, but to breast-feed Lai-hsing's baby daughter Ch'eng-erh every day. For several days in a row, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been suffering from pain in his legs. Suddenly he recalled that Dr. Jen Houch'i had given him a prescription for life-prolonging pills that were to be taken with human milk. For this reason, on coming into Li P'ing-erh's quarters, he asked Ju-i to squeeze out some of her milk for him.
Ju-i, in celebration of the New Year's festival, had studded her chignon with frosty gold-colored pins and rings, so that:
Her head was covered with costume jewelry,
set-off with a kingfisher-blue gold lamé headband. She wore a jacket of blue pongee, and a cloak of jade-white cloud-patterned satin, over a yellow cotton skirt, and a pair of sand-green Lu-chou silk shoes with high white-satin heels. She was dressed up quite differently from the way she had been in the past and was also wearing four silver-coated pewter rings on her hands.
She sat down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing in order to assist him in taking his medication and then proceeded to pour wine for him and urge him to have something to eat. After Ying-ch'un had seen to providing a meal for him, she withdrew into the next room, where she sat down to play at a board game with Ch'un-mei. If tea or water were required, Hsiu-ch'un was available to fetch them from the kitchen.
When Hsi-men Ch'ing saw that the maidservants had vacated the room, he leaned nonchalantly against the back of the k'ang, undid the white satin cord of his woolen trousers, exposed his organ, which was already fitted with a silver clasp, and told her to suck it for him. As she did so, he was able to help himself to the wine and delicacies that were conveniently arrayed at his side.
Calling out, "Chang the Fourth, my child," he went on to say, "if you do your best to suck it off for me, tomorrow, I'll find a patterned satin vest for you to wear for the Lantern Festival that begins on the twelfth."
"I appreciate your concern," the woman responded.
After she had played with his organ for the time it would take to eat a meal, Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "My child, I'd like to burn some moxa on your body."
"Do as you please," the woman replied. "You can burn moxa on me wherever you like."
Hsi-men Ch'ing told her to close the door to the room, take off her skirt, climb onto the k'ang, and recline face-up on the pillow. On her lower body, she was wearing a pair of newly made scarlet drawers of Lu-chou silk, one leg of which she proceeded to pull down. In his sleeve, Hsi-men Ch'ing still retained three pellets of the moxa steeped in distilled spirits that he had burnt on Lady Lin. Removing her bodice, he placed one of them on the middle of her chest, one on her lower abdomen, and one on her mons veneris. Igniting them with a stick of benzoin incense, he thrust his organ into her vagina and lowered his head in order to observe its movements. Alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, he proceeded to move it in and out without ceasing. He also moved a mirror stand over beside him so he could better observe the action. In a little while, as the moxa burnt its way down to the skin, the woman:
Knit her brows and clenched her teeth,[38]
in order to endure the pain.
In a trembling voice and faint tones,
While groaning for all she was worth,
she cried out inarticulately, "Daddy! Father! You'll be the end of me yet. It's really hard to take."
"Chang the Fourth, whore that you are," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "whose wife are you?"
"I'm Father's wife," the woman responded.
Hsi-men Ch'ing instructed her, "Say to me, 'I was once Hsiung Wang's wife, but today I belong to my own daddy.' "
The woman did as she was told, saying, "Whore that I am, I was originally Hsiung Wang's wife, but today I belong to my own daddy."
Hsi-men Ch'ing went on to ask, "Do I know how to fuck or not?"
"Daddy really knows how to fuck a cunt," the woman replied.
What with their:
Obscene noises and lascivious words,
there was nothing the two of them left unsaid. Hsi-men Ch'ing's organ was thick and large, stretching the woman's vagina to the limits. As it went back and forth and in and out, it agitated her clitoris:
As red as a parrot's tongue,
And as dark as a bat's wing,
in a pleasurable way. Hsi-men Ch'ing thereupon placed her two legs around his waist, so that their four limbs were intertwined as they responded to each other. His organ penetrated her all the way to the root:
Without leaving a hairsbreadth outside.
The woman opened her eyes wide and cried out involuntarily as her vaginal fluids flowed out below. When Hsi-men Ch'ing's passion became intense and his pleasure reached its height, his semen spurted out like a gushing spring. Truly:
Not yet apprised that the tidings of spring
had already arrived;
They knew only that their bodies and joints
were melting away.[39]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Letting him have his way in proffering his
cups of "sunset clouds,"[40]
Her brain is flooded with lustful feelings,
vast and without limit.
Her whole body is at the disposal of The
Lord of the East's whim;
What does she care if her jeweled hairpin
should fall by the bedside?[41]
On that day, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished burning three pellets of moxa on the woman's body, he opened the door, searched out a patterned vest of jet-colored satin, and presented it to her.
That evening, when Yüeh-niang and the others returned home, she said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "It turns out that Yün Li-shou's wife is also in a late state of pregnancy. At the party today, the two of us toasted each other and agreed that when the time comes for us to give birth, if one of the babies is a boy and the other a girl, our two households will betroth them to each other, and thus become related. If they are both boys, we will arrange for them to study together, and if they are both girls, we will have them treat each other as sisters, do their needlework together, and play with each other as if they were related. Ying Po-chüeh's wife undertook to act as a witness to the agreement."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he merely smiled.
To make a long story short, the next day was the eve of P'an Chin-lien's birthday. Hsi-men Ch'ing got up early that morning to go to the yamen. Before doing so, he ordered the page boys to get out the lanterns, clean them up, take care of suspending them in the large reception hall, the summerhouse, and elsewhere, and set out brocade hangings and standing screens for the occasion. He also told Lai-hsing to buy fresh fruits and so forth, and engage the services of boy musicians, for the celebration that evening.
That morning, P'an Chin-lien dressed herself up and came out:
Richly adorned and daubed with powder,
In turquoise sleeves with rouged lips,
and ventured into the large reception hall, where she saw Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, standing on high stools, in order to suspend the three beaded hanging lanterns with their large bowls.
With an ingratiating smile, she said, "I wondered who I would find here, and it turns out to be the two of you, hanging up the lanterns."
"Today is the eve of your birthday," said Ch'in-t'ung, "and Father ordered us to hang up the lanterns so they will be in place for your birthday party tomorrow. This evening, we will all come and kowtow to you, and expect to be rewarded appropriately."
"If it's a beating you want, I will be happy to oblige," the woman responded. "But as for rewards, there won't be any."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'in-t'ung. "You:
Rarely say a word without threatening a beating.
Whatever we do, you respond by proposing to beat us. We are all like your children, after all. It would be better if you were to care for us instead of constantly threatening us with punishment."
"You lousy jailbird!" the woman responded. "You had better stop shooting off your mouth and get back to the task of carefully hanging up the lanterns. If you don't watch what you're doing, you're likely to lose your grip, and let one of them fall to the ground. The other day, before New Year's, when Ts'ui Pen arrived home, you were heard to say, 'Even in broad daylight, Father is nowhere to be seen.' On that occasion, despite the risk you ran, you were lucky enough to escape a beating. But, on this occasion, you may be in for one."
"Mother," protested Ch'in-t'ung, "how can you persist in using such disparaging language? My existence is precarious enough as it is without your continuing to frighten me."
"Mother was not there to hear that remark of his," interjected Tai-an. "How did you know about it?"
The woman responded:
"Outside the palace is a pine tree,
Inside the palace there is a bell;
Just as a bell has its sound,
A tree has its shadow.
How could I not know about it? The other day, Father said to the First Lady, 'Last year Pen the Fourth was here and took care of the erection of stands for the fireworks display, but this year he is not here, so there is no one to take care of the fireworks.' This prompted me to remark, 'Although he is not here, his wife is equally adept at handling erections. You might as well let her take care of it.' "
"Mother," protested Tai-an, "how can you bring yourself to utter such an allegation? You're talking about the household of his own manager. How could there be any such thing?"
The woman responded:
"What kind of talk is that?
It's got a sandalwood haft.
Such things do indeed occur. Though you may draw a line against such conduct, people will be tempted to violate the boundary."
"Mother," said Ch'in-t'ung, "you ought not to believe what people accuse her of. I fear that when Pen the Fourth arrives home, he will find out about it."
"You may succeed in deceiving a thousand gullible cuckolds," the woman responded, "but I pronounce this cuckold to be an open cuckold. It is not surprising that he should be willing to go off to the Eastern Capital while leaving his wife behind, knowing full well that she would be unwilling to let her cunt lie idle. You lousy jailbirds should keep your mouths shut. You band together to act as procurers for your master and make it possible for him to have his way, while hoping to be able to follow in his footsteps. Am I right, or am I not? And yet you dare to suggest that I don't know what I'm talking about. No wonder that lousy whore bought me a birthday gift, made a present of steamed shortcake to the First Lady, and even had a large box of melon seeds delivered to me in order to buy my silence. She's an old hand at taking on lovers, and my guess is that one of them is none other than Tai-an. It's that lousy jailbird that has:
Laid plans and hatched a scheme,
on her behalf."
"Mother," protested Tai-an, "you do me a mortal injustice. Why should I concern myself with her doings, for no good reason? I don't ordinarily frequent her quarters. You really ought not to listen to what that wife of Mohammedan Han has to say. The two of them have been quarreling vociferously over their children. As the sayings go:
It is hard to keep on good terms,
But it is easy to pick a quarrel.
The collapse of a house may not be deadly,
But an evil tongue can lead to your death.
If you believe something, it will be true,
If you disbelieve in it, it will be false.
If you stop to consider it, Pen the Fourth's wife possesses an accommodating nature. Dwelling as she does by the gate of the residence, she has not antagonized even a single member of the household, great or small. Who is there who has not procured a serving of tea from her? Do you mean to suggest that she has taken them all on as lovers? There would hardly be room for them all."
"I know that watery-eyed whore for what she is," responded Chin-lien. "What with her short stature, she's no bigger than half a brick, and when she squeezes those eyes of hers, you could almost scoop the liquid out of them with a spoon. She's nothing but a crazy whore, just like that overgrown pumpkin head of a whore, the wife of Han Tao-kuo. I don't know but what I'd rather scratch my eyes out than have to contemplate the likes of her."

As they were speaking, who should appear but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "My mistress is calling for you, Fifth Lady. Your mother, Old Mrs. P'an, has arrived and needs you to pay the cost of her sedan chair."
"I've been standing here all this time," responded Chin-lien. "When did she come in?"
"The old lady entered through the enclosed passageway," said Ch'in-t'ung, "and I escorted her inside. The bearers who brought her want six candareens of silver."
"Where would I get the silver from?" said Chin-lien. "Whoever heard of anyone coming by sedan chair without bringing the money to pay the fare?"
She then went back to the rear compound to see her mother but did not give her the money for the fare, saying, "I don't have it."
"You can give your mother a mace of silver," said Yüeh-niang, "and enter it in your account book for the household expenses."
"I can't touch that money," said Chin-lien. "It is provided by our husband in definite amounts to purchase provisions for the household. He wouldn't want me to spend it on sedan chair fares."
They sat there for a while, merely staring at each other with wide-open eyes, while the sedan chair bearers outside pressed for the fare so they could leave. Finally, Meng Yü-lou, seeing that they had reached an impasse, groped a mace of silver out of her sleeve and took care of sending the sedan chair on its way.
Before long, Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery arrived, and Yüeh-niang provided them with a serving of tea.
Old Mrs. P'an then set out for her daughter's quarters in the front compound, and Chin-lien proceeded to upbraid her severely, saying, "Who asked you to come if you didn't even have enough money to pay for the sedan chair? If you make such a shameful spectacle of yourself, you will only cause people to look down on you."
"My daughter," protested Old Mrs. P'an, "if you refuse me the money to pay for a visit, where am I to get it? It was hard enough for me to come up with the cost of a gift for you."
"You may have expected to get the money from me," said Chin-lien, "but where am I to get it from? If you will only open your eyes, you will see that for every seven outlays, there are eight people waiting to be paid. In the future, if you have the money to pay for a sedan chair, come here to visit; but if you don't have enough money to pay for a sedan chair, don't bother to come. I doubt if his household will feel diminished by the lack of such poor relatives as yourself. Don't risk the retribution of having your face slapped. You've got to be tough like:
Kuan Yü, the God of War, peddling
his bean curd:
The man is hard, even though his
goods are not.[42]
I'm sick and tired of having to listen to people shooting off their cunts about me behind my back. The other day, merely because you went home earlier than she expected, I ended up getting into:
A vituperative altercation,
with the First Lady. If you knew how it is for me, you'd shut up.
The droppings of a donkey may be shiny
enough on the outside;[43]
But you are quite unaware of how messy
they are on the inside."
With these few remarks she managed to reduce Old Mrs. P'an to a state of:
Sobbing and wailing,
as she broke out in tears.
"Mother," Ch'un-mei protested, "whatever has induced you to find fault with your old lady this way today?"
So saying, she helped the old woman onto the k'ang in the inner room and hastened to pour her a serving of tea. Old Mrs. P'an was so exasperated that all she could do was lie down on the k'ang and go to sleep. Only when someone from the rear compound came to invite her to join Sister-in-law Wu for a meal did she get up and go back to the rear compound.
Hsi-men Ch'ing had returned home from the yamen and was about to sit down for a meal in the master suite, when Tai-an suddenly came in with a calling card and said, "His Honor Ching Chung has been promoted to the post of commander-general of the Southeast and has come to pay his respects."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing looked at the card he saw that it read, "Respectfully indited with his compliments by the newly promoted commander-general of the Southeast, and concurrently grain transport commander, Regional Commander Ching Chung."
This threw Hsi-men Ch'ing into such consternation that he ordered the dining table to be removed, hastened to don his formal garments, including his official cap and girdle, and went out to welcome his guest. What should he see but Commander-General Ching Chung, wearing a crimson robe emblazoned with a mandarin square featuring a *ch'i-lin*, and a gold-buckled girdle, followed by a retinue of subordinates and soldiers. Hsi-men Ch'ing ushered him into the large reception hall, where they exchanged the customary amenities and then sat down in the positions of guest and host.
Tea was served, and after it was finished, Ching Chung said, "The rescript confirming my promotion only arrived the other day, and before even formally assuming office, I have come to express my gratitude to you, venerable sir."
"Venerable commander," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you are to be congratulated on your illustrious promotion. Talents as great as yours are sure to be put to significant use.
It is only natural,
and redounds to the credit of the rest of us. It is appropriate that we should offer our congratulations."
Going on to say, "Please loosen your respected garments, and sit down for something to eat," he ordered his attendants to set up a table.
Ching Chung repeatedly expressed his thanks, saying, "Your pupil must inform you, venerable sir, that I have not yet gone to pay my respects anywhere else and have a great many insignificant tasks to attend to. Allow me to come seek your instruction another day."
So saying, he got up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing would not have it and proceeded to order his attendants to come forward and take his outer garments, wipe off the table, and provide it with wine and food.
Animal-shaped briquettes smolder,
Heat-holding drapes are suspended.
Golden flagons decant jade hued liquids,
Turquoise goblets contain Yang-kao wine.
Just as the wine was being poured, who should appear but Cheng Ch'un and Wang Hsiang, the two boy actors, who came in, knelt down before them, and kowtowed.
"Why are the two of you so late?" inquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"And what is the name of this other fellow?" he asked Cheng Ch'un.
"His name is Wang Hsiang," said Cheng Ch'un, "and he is the younger brother of Wang Chu."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then told them, "Get out your instruments and come play and sing for the entertainment of His Honor Ching Chung."
In no time at all, when the two boy actors had readied their instruments, they proceeded to perform the song suite the first number of which, to the tune "Flowers in Brocade," begins with the words:
The fair weather is balmy.[44]
As they did so, the attendants brought out two partitioned food boxes filled with pastries and refreshments, and two bottles of wine, for the people that had come with Ching Chung.
"This will never do," said Ching Chung. "Your pupil is the recipient of your magnanimity, and my servants are also to enjoy the bestowal of refreshments.
What can I do to be worthy of such largess?"
So saying, he ordered his servants to come forward and kowtow.
"In a few days," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "my wife plans, with the utmost sincerity, to invite your honorable spouse to attend a party in order to enjoy the lanterns. It is our humble hope that she will condescend to come. Those she plans to invite include your venerable lady, my kinsman Chang Kuan's wife, my colleague Ho Yung-shou's wife, and two other female relatives of ours. No one else has been invited."
"Upon receipt of your venerable lady's invitation," said Ching Chung, "my humble spouse will be sure to attend."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then inquired, "How is it that the venerable Commandant Chou Hsiu has not yet received a promotion?"
"I have heard," replied Ching Chung, "that in the third month Chou Hsiu will be promoted to a position in the Capital Training Divisions."
"That seems appropriate," remarked Hsi-men Ch'ing.
After sitting for a while, Ching Chung said goodbye and got up to go. Hsi-men Ch'ing escorted him to the gate and looked on as he mounted his horse and departed, with his attendants shouting to clear the way.
That evening, they celebrated the eve of P'an Chin-lien's birthday. The boy actors played their instruments and sang to entertain the company in the rear reception hall. When everyone had been provided with wine, Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and went out to Chin-lien's quarters, while Yüeh-niang, along with Sister-in-law Wu, Old Mrs. P'an, the professional singer Big Sister Yü, and the two nuns sat down in the master suite to enjoy their wine.
P'an Chin-lien accompanied Hsi-men Ch'ing to her quarters, where she set out more wine and personally proffered him a drink and kowtowed to him. After a while, Old Mrs. P'an came in, and Chin-lien packed her off to Li P'ing-erh's quarters to spend the night, while she kept Hsi-men Ch'ing company, drinking wine and enjoying themselves, as they went on to play with each other.
To resume our story, when Old Mrs. P'an arrived in Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door, Ju-i and Ying-ch'un invited her to sit down on the heated k'ang. On her way in, Old Mrs. P'an noticed that before Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet in the parlor there were arrayed candied effigies of Buddhist lions, immortals, and the Five Ancients; tree-borne fresh fruits such as tangerines, pomegranates, apples, and snow pears; steamed-shortcake pastries, crullers, and fried dough twists. A brazier was burning powdered incense, and a candle was lit in the long-lasting vigil lamp. The table was shrouded in a gold lamé tablecloth, and beside it there hung her half-length portrait, dressed in a crimson brocaded gown, a brocade skirt and embroidered jacket, and a chignon decorated with two phoenixes, from whose beaks dangled bangles on ropes of pearls.
Stepping forward, she saluted the portrait in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "Sister, you are blessed in having ascended to Heaven."
Then, after sitting down on the k'ang, she said to Ju-i and Ying-ch'un, "Your mistress is lucky to have a husband who has gone to such lengths to insure her salvation, and in being the recipient of such lavish offerings. It is more than ample. She is fortunate indeed."
"Recently," said Ju-i, "on the occasion of the 'hundredth-day' ceremony after our mistress's death, though you were invited to attend, you failed to come. Hua Tzu-yu's wife from outside the city wall and Sister-in-law Wu were both here. Twelve Taoist acolytes came to perform the scripture recitation, and there was:
Loud playing on wind and percussion instruments.
What with the flag-raising ceremony to invite the presence of the gods, and the Water and Fire sublimation ritual, night had fallen before they left."
"With the New Year's festivities so close at hand," explained Old Mrs. P'an, "and the child I am taking care of at home, if I had come, there would have been no one to look after the place. So I chose not to come. Why have I not seen Aunt Yang here today?"
"You must not have heard about it yet," said Ju-i, "but Aunt Yang finally died of sickness and old age so she also was unable to come for our mistress's 'hundredth-day' scripture-reading ceremony. The ladies of our household all went to the northern quarter of the city to offer their sacrifices to the deceased."
"How sad," exclaimed Old Mrs. P'an. "She was older than I am, but I didn't know that she had died. No wonder I didn't see her today."
After they had talked about Aunt Yang for a while, Ju-i said, "We have some sweet wine on hand. Why don't you try some of it?"
She then turned to Ying-ch'un and said, "Sister, set up a bed table on the k'ang, and pour out some sweet wine so Old Mrs. P'an can have a cup of it."
In no time at all, the wine was provided, and as they were drinking it, Old Mrs. P'an brought up the subject of Li P'ing-erh again, saying, "Your mistress was a good person. She was both kind and just, and she had a warm disposition. Whenever I came here, she never treated me as a stranger, but always provided me with hot tea and hot water, and only objected if I didn't drink them. At night she would sit up and talk to me, and when I was ready to go home, she would always wrap something up to take with me. I swear, she never let me depart empty-handed. Not to deceive the two of you, this cape I am wearing right now is something your mistress gave me. This perverse daughter of mine, on the other hand, has never come up with so much as half a broken needle for me.[45] I am not lying when I state before Amitābha Buddha himself that even if:
I had neither water nor rice to eat,[46]
if she were willing to cough up so much as a mace of silver for me, my eyeballs would drop onto the ground. When your mistress gave me anything, she would accuse me of being:
Mean-spirited and covetous,
hankering after other people's possessions. Today, for example, with regard to the fare for the sedan chair I came in, though you have a large amount of silver at your disposal, were you willing to cough up a few candareens on my behalf, or what? Instead, you just clenched your teeth and denied that you had any money to spare, so that, in the end, the Lady from the west side of the rear compound had to come up with a mace of silver to take care of the bearers of the sedan chair, and send them on their way. And when we returned to her quarters, she upbraided me severely, saying, 'In the future, if you have the money to pay for a sedan chair, go ahead and come; but if you don't have enough money to pay for a sedan chair, you had better not cross my doorstep.' When I leave this time, I won't come back. Who wants to come here only to become a target for her anger? Let her do as she pleases. No doubt there are many hard-hearted people in this world, but none of them is a match for this death-bound short-life of a daughter of mine. You two pay heed to what I say. Should I die, in the future, what with her refusal to take anyone's advice, who knows what sort of a harvest she will reap for herself. You ought to remember how, after your father died when you were only six years old, I have continued to care for you right up to the present. How I taught you to do needlework while you were still a child. How I sent you to a girls' school in the home of Licentiate Yü. How I made sure that you had:
Compressed hands and bound feet.[47]
You have always been just as smart as can be, which has made it possible for you to arrive at your present state. But now, she orders her mother around, this way and that, without giving her so much as a glance."
"So the Fifth Lady went to school as a child, did she?" said Ju-i. "No wonder, now that you mention it, she is as literate as she is."
"She started to a girls' school when she was six years old," said Old Mrs. P'an, "and attended it for three years. While there, she learned to trace characters from books of sample calligraphy, so there are hardly any characters in the printed copies of poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies that she doesn't know."
As they were speaking, they heard the sound of knocking at the postern gate, and Ju-i said, "I wonder who it could be knocking at the gate?"
She then turned to Hsiu-ch'un and said, "Second Sister, go see who it is."
Hsiu-ch'un came back and reported, "It's Sister Ch'un-mei who has come."
At this, Ju-i hastily squeezed the hand of Old Mrs. P'an and said, "You'd better watch what you say. Ch'un-mei is here."
"I understand," said Old Mrs. P'an. "She could be said to share a leg with that perverse daughter of mine."
What should they see at this juncture but Ch'un-mei, who came in sporting a cloud-shaped chignon with turquoise ornaments on her head, a gold-spangled pearl headband, a blue satin jacket that opened down the middle, over a yellow cotton skirt, gold lantern earrings, and a sable muffler.
Upon coming in and seeing that they were drinking wine with Old Mrs. P'an, she said, "I see that Granny hasn't gone to bed yet. I've come to visit with her."
Ju-i offered her a seat, and Ch'un-mei hoisted up her skirt and proceeded to park her posterior on the k'ang. Ying-ch'un sat down next to her on one side, while Ju-i sat to her right by the head of the k'ang, and Old Mrs. P'an sat in the middle.
"Have your master and mistress gone to bed yet, or not?" asked Old Mrs. P'an.
"They finished drinking just now," said Ch'un-mei, "and I have sent the two of them off to bed. I have come over here to visit with you, Granny, and have several delicacies and a flagon of wine to share with you."
She then asked Hsiu-ch'un, "Would you go next door and tell Ch'iu-chü to bring them over here? I have already prepared them."
Hsiu-ch'un, accordingly, went next door to fetch them and came back in no time at all, with Ch'iu-chü carrying a square box containing the delicacies, while she brought a pewter pitcher of Chin-hua wine.
Ch'un-mei then ordered Ch'iu-chü, "You go back to our place and keep your ears open. If they should call for me, come back here and let me know."
Ch'iu-chü went back as she was told, but with a pout on her lips.
The repast was duly laid out on the bed table that had been placed on the k'ang. It consisted of roast duck, ham, smoked goose, marinated fish in a fine mash, nut kernels, savory preserved fruits, seafood, and so forth, covering the entire table surface. Hsiu-ch'un closed the postern gate and then came in and sat down beside them. Thereupon, when the wine had been poured, Ch'unmei first offered a cup to Old Mrs. P'an, and then a cup to Ju-i, and a cup to Ying-ch'un. Hsiu-ch'un sat down on the edge of the k'ang, and the five of them proceeded to enjoy their drinks.
Ch'un-mei, protecting her clothes with a napkin, selected morsels from each of the dishes and offered them to Old Mrs. P'an and the rest, saying, "Granny, these are all special delicacies. Feel free to sample them."
"Sister," the old woman responded, "I'll help myself."
She then went on to say, "Even your mistress has never gone to the trouble to entertain me in the way you are doing. Sister, you possess a heart that is:
Concerned for the bereft and kind to the aged.
In the future, you will surely be able:
Step by step,[48]

to better your condition. That perverse daughter of mine, on the other hand, is utterly lacking in humanity and righteousness. On more than one occasion, when she has been acting outrageously, and I have attempted to remonstrate with her, she has turned her wrath against me and caused me to lose face. This morning, as you saw for yourself, Sister, I came to visit in the hope of picking up a few morsels of cold food, and she once again treated me as badly as she did."
"Granny," said Ch'un-mei:
"You only see one side of it,
Without perceiving the other.[49]
It is the disposition of my mistress to:
Contend for supremacy without conceding defeat.[50]
She cannot be compared to the Sixth Lady, who had a fortune at her disposal, while she has no money of her own. You allege that she refuses to give you anything. Others may not know the true story, but I do. Although Father has entrusted her with the silver for household expenses, which is stored in her quarters, my mistress does not presume to regard it as her own. When she needs to buy costume jewelry or things like that for herself, she is meticulous about asking him for them up front, rather than:
Surreptitiously acquiring things on the sly,[51]
thereby causing people to look down on her, and making it hard for her to open her mouth and accuse anyone else of anything. Since she really has no money of her own, for you to hold it against her, Granny, is unjust. You may accuse me of endeavoring to excuse her conduct, but one must be just about it."
"You are wrong to hold it against the Fifth Lady," said Ju-i. "It has always been true that:
Relatives are one's own flesh and blood.
If the Fifth Lady had any money of her own, were she not to show her filiality by sharing it with you, Granny, whom should she lavish it upon? As the sayings have it:
Before beating a child one should regard
it's mother's face.
Even a thousand peach blossoms may stem
from a single tree.[52]
In the future, when the day comes when your:
Yellow gold is stored in the coffer,
the Fifth Lady will be bereft of any close relatives, like the rest of us whose mothers have died."
The old woman responded, "As for me:
I've lived to this year, but not the next.
Who knows whether:
I'll succumb today, or succumb tomorrow?
I won't hold it against her any longer."
Ch'un-mei, upon seeing that the old woman, after consuming two goblets of wine, was becoming more loquacious, said to Ying-ch'un, "Go get the dice-box. Let's throw the dice and amuse ourselves by playing at 'Competing for the Red.' "
In no time at all, a dicebox with forty dice in it was brought out, and Ch'unmei proceeded to play a game with Ju-i. After they had played for a while, she went on to play with Ying-ch'un. The losers of each round had to down large goblets of wine.
What with:
First a cup for you,
Then a goblet for me,
it was not long before they:
Felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine, and
Peach blossoms bloomed upon their cheeks,[53]
as they polished off the entire pewter pitcher of wine. Ying-ch'un then produced half a jar of Ma-ku wine, and they managed to finish it as well. As the time approached the second watch, Old Mrs. P'an could not hold out any longer and took to:
Swaying forwards and backwards,
as she started to doze off. Only then did the party break up.
Ch'un-mei headed back next door and gave the postern gate a push. When it opened, she proceeded through the courtyard and found that Ch'iu-chü was situated on a wide bench in the parlor, next to a crack in the wooden partition, eavesdropping on Hsi-men Ch'ing and Chin-lien as they engaged in sexual intercourse in the bedroom in order to hear what noises they produced and what exclamations they uttered.
She was so preoccupied that she failed to prevent Ch'un-mei from coming right up to her and giving her a slap on the cheek with all her strength, saying as she did so, "You lousy dead duck of a slave! Just what are you listening to, for no good reason?"
She hit Ch'iu-chü so hard that she opened her eyes wide and protested, "I was only dozing here. What was I listening to that would justify your slapping me that way?"
Who could have anticipated that this exchange was overheard by the woman in the bedroom, who asked Ch'un-mei who she was talking to.
"There's nobody here," replied Ch'un-mei. "I told Ch'iu-chü to close the door, and she failed to respond. That's all."
In this way she covered up for Ch'iu-chü, who rubbed her eyes and went to close the door of the room. Ch'un-mei then got onto the k'ang, removed her headdress, and went to sleep. But no more of this. Truly:
Though the oriole wishes to retain
the evanescent day;
The unfeeling cuckoo relishes the
luster of the night.[54]
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day was P'an Chin-lien's birthday, and those who were present to celebrate it included the wife of Manager Fu Ming, the wife of Manager Kan Jun, Pen the Fourth's wife, Ts'ui Pen's wife Big Sister Tuan, Wu Shun-ch'en's wife Third Sister Cheng, and Wu the Second's wife.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, along with Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh:
Straightened his robe and cap;
Assumed a dignified demeanor,[55]
and set out on horseback, with attendants shouting to clear the way, to attend the party at the home of Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou. There were many other officials there that day, and they were entertained by four singing girls and a vaudeville troupe. Commandant Chou Hsiu was also among those present. They continued drinking until evening, when Hsi-men Ch'ing returned home and spent the night with Ju-i in the front compound.
On the tenth, invitations were sent out inviting the wives of the various officials to a party, and Yüeh-niang said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "For this lantern-viewing party on the twelfth, I suggest that we also invite Meng Yü-lou's elder sister from outside the city gate and my elder sister to attend, lest they find out about it and resent the fact that they were not invited."
"It's a good thing you mentioned it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, and he told Ch'en Ching-chi to write out two additional invitations and send Ch'in-t'ung to deliver them.
P'an Chin-lien, who was standing nearby, overheard this and was disturbed by it. Going back to her quarters, she pressed Old Mrs. P'an to depart immediately.
When Yüeh-niang learned of this, she said, "Granny, what are you in such a hurry to leave for? Why not stay over another day?"
"Sister," said Chin-lien, "it's the New Year's season, and she has left a child at home with no one to look after her. You had better let her go."
This threw Yüeh-niang into such consternation that she hastily prepared two boxes of delicacies for her, provided her with a mace of silver with which to pay her sedan chair fare, and sent her on her way.
Chin-lien subsequently explained this to Li Chiao-erh, saying, "She's invited her well-to-do elder sister to come to the lantern-viewing party, and that old baggage of mine is only likely to be looked askance at. If I hadn't sent her away, what would be the point of keeping her around here? If she were taken to be a guest, she would not be appropriately dressed. If she were taken to be a charwoman, she doesn't really look the part. It could only have the effect of driving me to my wit's end."
Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Tai-an to deliver another two invitations to Imperial Commissioner Wang's residence, one to invite Lady Lin, and one to invite Wang the Third's wife, née Huang. He also sent to the licensed quarter to engage the services of the four singing girls, Li Kuei-chieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Hung the Fourth, as well as the three young actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng.
Who could have anticipated that Pen the Fourth should arrive back from the Eastern Capital that day. After washing his face and combing his hair, he dressed himself appropriately and came to kowtow to Hsi-men Ch'ing, presenting him with a letter of reply from Hsia Yen-ling.
"How come you stayed as long as this before returning?" Hsi-men Ch'ing demanded to know.
Pen the Fourth explained that he had been stricken with a severe cold in the capital, saying, "It was not until the second day of the first month that I was able to get my things together and set out for home. His Honor Hsia Yen-ling sends you his compliments and wishes to thank you for all you have done on his behalf."
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave him the keys as before and put him back in charge of his knitting and sewing supplies store. He also opened an adjacent shop in which Wu the Second could continue to sell silk goods. In the future, when the boatload of goods from Sung-chiang arrived, he planned to have it all stored in the house on Lion Street, where Lai-pao could cooperate with the others in selling it. He also told Pen the Fourth to hire a fireworks specialist to come and prepare two racks of fireworks, ready to be set off on the twelfth for the entertainment of their female guests. He had already invited Ying Pochüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Wu K'ai, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh to convene with him in an anteroom during the daylight hours on that occasion.
That evening, who should appear but Ying Po-chüeh, bringing Li the Third with him to see Hsi-men Ch'ing. After first thanking him for the help he had received the other day, and then sitting down to drink his tea, he initiated the conversation by saying, "Brother Li the Third is here because there is a piece of business he would like to propose to you, if you are willing to participate in it."
"Really?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What piece of business is that? Tell me about it."
"At present," responded Li the Third, "a document has come down from the court in the Eastern Capital requiring each of the thirteen provinces in the realm to submit to it several tens of thousands of taels worth of antiquarian relics. This Tung-p'ing prefecture of ours has been allotted a quota of ten thousand taels worth of these antique artifacts. The rescript authorizing this behest is still in the hands of the grand coordinator and has not yet come down to the lower levels of the bureaucracy. At present, Chang the Second of Main Street has put up two hundred taels of silver in a bid to secure this contract, but it will require a total of ten thousand taels in all. I have come, together with Uncle Ying the Second, to broach the subject with Your Honor. If Your Honor is willing to participate, Chang the Second will put up five thousand taels, Your Honor will put up the other five thousand taels, and the two of you can close the deal between you. No one else will be involved but Uncle Ying the Second, myself, and Huang the Fourth on your side, and two of Chang the Second's managers on the other, and the profits will be shared on a ratio of eight to two between the principals and their backers. But I don't know what Your Honor thinks about it."
"What sort of antiquarian relics are involved?" inquired Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"Your Honor may not know about it yet," said Li the Third, "but at present the Emperor has changed the name of the recently completed Mount Ken Imperial Park in the Forbidden City to the Mount Longevity Imperial Park. Within it he has erected numerous pavilions, terraces, halls, and chambers, including the Precious Tablet Temple of Highest Clarity,[56] the Chamber of the Assembled Perfected, the Hall of Meditative Concentration,[57] and even the dressing chamber of his favorite, Consort An, née Liu.[58] He has stocked them with:
Rare birds and unusual animals,[59]
Chou vessels and Shang tripods,[60]
Han censers and Ch'in burners,
The stone drums of King Hsüan,[61]
Bronze ladles of various eras,
Immortals' palms,
Dew-catching pans,[62]
and rare antiques and relics of all kinds.[63] He has initiated lavish building projects and expended no insignificant amount in the way of resources."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he said, "Rather than going into partnership with anyone else, why shouldn't I undertake to do it on my own? No doubt you assume that I would be unable to come up with ten or twenty thousand taels of silver."
"If Your Honor wants to take it all on yourself, that would be fine," said Li the Third. "We can keep the other side in the dark about it, and on our side, no one will be involved other than Uncle Ying the Second, Huang the Fourth, and myself."
"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "do you plan to bring in anyone from your household, or not?"
"When he shows up, I'll have Pen the Fourth participate," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He can do some of the legwork for us."
Hsi-men Ch'ing then went on to ask, "Where is the document authorizing this transaction at present?"
"It is still in the hands of the grand coordinator," said Li the Third, "and has not yet come down to the lower levels of the bureaucracy."
"That shouldn't be a problem," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I'll send someone with a letter, and an appropriate gift, to ask Sung Ch'iao-nien to obtain it for us."
"If Your Honor is going to try to get hold of it," said Li the Third, "the matter will brook no delay. It has always been the case that:
In warfare, speediness of execution is fundamental.[64]
The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat.
I fear that by the time you get to the prefectural yamen, someone else may have gotten hold of it before you."
Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed at this, saying, "I'm not afraid of that. Even if someone should get to the prefectural yamen before me, I would still be able to induce Sung Ch'iao-nien to recover it. The prefect of Tung-p'ing, Hu Shihwen, is also an acquaintance of mine."
Thereupon, he invited Li the Third and Ying Po-chüeh to share a meal with him and promised them, saying, "I will have a letter written now and will send off a servant with it tomorrow."
"There is another problem," said Li the Third. "His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is making his investigative rounds and is not in Tung-p'ing at present. The day before yesterday, he set out for Yen-chou prefecture to conduct his investigations there."
"You could make the trip to Yen-chou prefecture tomorrow, together with my servant," suggested Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"That would not be a problem," responded Li the Third. "I'll go then. The round trip won't take more than five or six days. Which of your servants does Your Honor intend to send? When we have concluded our plans, and the letter is written, send him over to my place to spend the night, so we can set out early tomorrow morning."
"His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien is not familiar with any of my other servants," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but he has always been fond of Ch'un-hung. I'll have Ch'un-hung and Lai-chüeh, the two of them, go together."
Thereupon, he called the two servants into his presence to meet with Li the Third and instructed them to go spend the night at his place.
"That's the way to do it," remarked Ying Po-chüeh. "This is something that needs to be acted upon as quickly as possible.
Only he with the most talent and swiftest
feet can accomplish it."[65]
Thereupon, when he and Li the Third had finished their meal, they took their leave and departed.
Hsi-men Ch'ing, after getting Ch'en Ching-chi to write the letter, also sealed up ten ounces of gold leaf in the packet and entrusted it to Ch'un-hung and Lai-chüeh, saying, "Be careful on the road, and if you succeed in obtaining the document, return immediately. When you get to Yen-chou prefecture, ask His Honor Sung Ch'iao-nien for a note entitling you to pick it up in Tung-p'ing."
"Father, you need not instruct us any further," said Lai-chüeh. "I once worked for Assistant Administration Commissioner Hsü of Yen-chou and will know what to do."
Thereupon, he took the packet containing the letter, secreted it upon his person, and set out with his companion for the house of Li the Third. We will say no more at present about how Lai-chüeh, Ch'un-hung, and Li the Third hired long-distance mounts early on the morning of the eleventh and set out for Yen-chou prefecture.

To resume our story, on the twelfth, Hsi-men Ch'ing's family had invited the wives of the various officials to a party, and he chose to remain at home without going out. He had already invited Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, the four of them, to join him in the summerhouse that evening to enjoy the lanterns and drink wine together. The troupe of actors that he had arranged to engage from Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, showed up that morning, carrying their box of costumes, and set up an anteroom in the front compound as their green room. When the female guests arrived, they beat on bronze gongs and bronze drums to welcome them.

Commandant Chou Hsiu's wife was suffering from an eye ailment and was thus unable to come, though she sent someone to explain the situation. The wife of Commander-General Ching Chung, the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, the wife of Commander Yün Li-shou, along with Ch'iao Hung's wife, Ts'ui Pen's mother, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, and Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, were the first to arrive. Only Ho Yung-shou's wife, Wang the Third's mother Lady Lin, and Wang the Third's wife had not yet come, and Hsi-men Ch'ing sent an orderly, along with Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung, back and forth two or three times, urging them to come. He also sent Auntie Wen to the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang for the same end.

At noontime, Lady Lin arrived in a large sedan chair, followed by a smaller one, and asked to pay her respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing, who inquired, "Why has Wang the Third's wife not come?"

"My son is not at home," replied Lady Lin, "so there is no one to look after the place."

After paying her respects, she withdrew to the rear compound.

It was well after noon before Ho Yung-shou's wife finally arrived, riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, with a servant's wife riding in a smaller sedan chair behind her, and accompanied by orderlies carrying her dressing case, as well as two servants in black livery, trotting close beside the carrying poles. Only after being borne past the second gate did she deign to get out of her sedan chair, to the welcoming music of drums, and wind and percussion instruments, as Wu Yüeh-niang and her sister wives came out to the ceremonial gate to receive her.

Hsi-men Ch'ing had concealed himself in the anteroom on the western side of the courtyard and let down the blinds, so that he could gaze at her surreptitiously. Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, was no more than nineteen years old. She was:

Tall and slender in stature,
and was made up so that she looked to be:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.
On her head:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles,
Phoenix feathers emerged in pairs.

She was wearing a full-sleeved crimson jacket, adorned with a variegated motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*, her waist was encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold, beneath which she wore a skirt of blue brocade, hanging from which decorative pendants tinkled, exuding the scent of musk and orchid. Behold:

Her image is captivating;[66]
Her demeanor is delicate.[67]
By nature, she is as clever
as can be;
Her height is neither short
nor tall.
Delicately curved, her two
moth eyebrows,[68]
Extend to her temples;
With a flutter, her pair of
phoenix eyes,
Glance back and forth.
Her captivating voice is like that of an
oriole singing in the sun;
Her lissome waist reminds one of willow
fronds tossed in the wind.
Truly:
Although born amid quantities of silk and gauze,
She opts to avoid the trappings of luxury;
Though raised amid piles of pearls and trinkets,
She adorns herself with elegant simplicity.
The flowering crab apples are in full bloom,
But she does not ask how many blossomed overnight;
The willow catkins are scattered everywhere,
But she is unaware of the spring season's advance.
The only one who knows anything of her true feelings,
Is the bright moon that penetrates her gauze windows;
The only thing that affects the content of her heart,
Is the clear breeze that flutters her brocade drapes.[69]
Lightly moving her lotus feet,
She is alluring as an immortal from the
Palace of Clustered Pearls;
Gently lifting her beige skirt,
She has the bearing of the Bodhisattva
Kuan-yin of the Water Moon.[70]
Truly:
She is like a bloom that can converse;
She is like jade that emits fragrance.[71]

If Hsi-men Ch'ing had not seen her, that would have been that; but having seen her:

His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and
His material souls fled to the Nine Heavens.
Even without any physical contact,
He had already forfeited his soul.

It did not take long for Yüeh-niang and the others to usher her into the parlor in the rear compound where, after they had exchanged the customary amenities, she asked to be introduced to Hsi-men Ch'ing. This was just the signal he had been waiting for, and he hastily adjusted his formal attire and came in to present himself to her. It seemed to him just as though:

A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster had
descended into the world;
The Goddess of Witches' Mountain had emerged
in the subcelestial realm.

Hsi-men Ch'ing:

Bent his body to perform an obeisance.
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed,
to such an extent that:
He was unable to control himself.

When they had finished paying their respects to each other, Yüeh-niang invited her guests into the summerhouse where tables had been set up for tea, and an assortment of exotic viands had been provided; after which they took their places in the large reception hall, where:

Rare delicacies from land and sea,
were already arrayed.
Behold:
At the head of the room,
There stand Shih Ch'ung's brocade windbreak[72]
and folding screens;
On all four sides,
There are tortoiseshell mats and capacious
table settings.
Decorated lanterns are raised on high;
Colorful ropes are suspended in midair.
From the carved rafters brocaded
bands droop low;
Painted candles throw light upon
jeweled canopies.
Lanterns depicting fish and dragons
sporting in the mountains,
Scintillate like a cluster of pearls;
Others depicting halls and chambers,
towers and terraces,
Gather like a thousand balls of jade.
On the left,
The nine older and ten younger sisters,
Are depicted as portraits of beauties[73]
in red and green;
On the right,
The nine stars and eight grotto heavens,
Are seen with their gods and immortals
in gold and azure.
The food provided consists of,
Dragons' livers and phoenix marrow,
Bears' paws and dromedaries' humps;
The music performed is that of,
Patterned cithara, silver psaltery,
Phoenix flute, and ivory clarinet.
The resounding beat of alligator drums
startles the flying birds;
The melodious sound of singing voices
diverts the moving clouds.
The alluring beauties at the feast,
Are like clustering pearls and kingfisher ornaments;
The entertainers beneath the steps,
Enact life's partings and reunions, sorrows and joys.[74]
Truly, it is the case that:
The maidservants proffering wine are duplicates of

the Goddess of the Lo River;[75]
The serving girls presenting soup are replicas of
Ch'ang-o, the Goddess of the Moon.[76]
On this occasion, when Lady Lin had taken her seat at the feast, the hsi-wen drama *Hsiao T'ien-hsiang pan-yeh ch'ao-yüan*, or *Little Heavenly Fragrance Ascends to Paradise at Midnight*,[77] was performed. After the first two scenes had been acted, the players withdrew, and the four singing girls, Li Kueichieh, Wu Yin-erh, Cheng Ai-yüeh, and Hung the Fourth, came out to play their musical instruments and sing for the entertainment of the company. Because Meng Yü-lou's elder sister resided outside the city gate, she was the first to get up to go, and in order to see her off they sang the song suite in celebration of the Lantern Festival that begins with the tune "Drunk in the Flowers' Shade," the first line of which is:
Decorative embroidered lanterns are
suspended in midair.[78]
Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing was drinking in the summerhouse with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, while the three boy actors, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Cheng Feng, played their instruments and sang for their entertainment. From time to time, he left the others and peered into the large reception hall through the latticework. The servants and attendants who had accompanied the sedan chairs of the female guests were supplied with food and wine in the front reception hall, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
Gentle reader take note:
Only at intervals is the bright moon full;
The variegated clouds are easily dispersed.
When joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow;
The nadir will be followed by the zenith.
This is a self-evident principle.
Hsi-men Ch'ing was only bent on:
Competing for prestige and usurping profit;[79]
Indulging his desires and slaking his lust.
He was utterly oblivious to the fact that, since:
The Way of Heaven is inimical to excess;[80]
The recorders of Hell were on his heels,
And the hour of his death was impending.[81]
That evening, as the lanterns in the chamber were lit, and the boy actors sang songs in celebration of the Lantern Festival, even before the first watch began, Hsi-men Ch'ing, while sitting in the presence of his guests, began to snore loudly as he dozed off.
Ying Po-chüeh continued:
Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,
and pestered him, saying, "Brother, you don't seem to be in high spirits today. How is it that you keep dozing off this way?"
"I didn't get enough sleep yesterday," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know why, but today I don't seem to have any energy, and keep dozing off."
When the four singing girls came in from entertaining the ladies, Ying Pochüeh told two of them to sing Lantern Festival songs, and the other two to serve the wine. Thereupon, Hung the Fourth and Cheng Ai-yüeh accompanied themselves on the psaltery and the balloon guitar as they sang for them, while Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh served the wine.
Just as they were enjoying themselves to the full, Tai-an suddenly came in and announced that Lady Lin and Ho Yung-shou's wife were preparing to leave. Hsi-men Ch'ing promptly withdrew from the gathering and, concealing himself in the dark shadows, made his way to the second gate in order to catch a surreptitious view of them as they got into their sedan chairs.
Yüeh-niang and the others escorted them as far as the front courtyard to watch the setting off of the fireworks. Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, had on a jacket of crimson brocade, a sable cloak, and a skirt of kingfisher-blue brocade. Lady Lin wore a white satin jacket, a sable cloak, and a crimson skirt, with gold bracelets and jade bangles. Their attendants, carrying lanterns, clustered around them as they got into their sedan chairs and made their departure.
As for Hsi-men Ch'ing, truly:
Though his hungry eyes were about to burst,[82]
He could only swallow his thirsting saliva,[83]
and could hardly wait to begin an affair with her. Having watched Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan, depart, he was quietly making his way inside through the enclosed passageway when:
Without coincidences there would be no stories;
Predestined unions have a way of happening;
Strange as it may seem,
he could not have anticipated that Lai-chüeh's wife, Hui-yüan, on seeing that the female guests had left, was coming back up front in order to open the door to her quarters, when she happened to run right into Hsi-men Ch'ing and had no way of avoiding him.
It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing had already observed the natural seductiveness of Lai-chüeh's wife and had long since set his sights on her. Although she was not quite as attractive as Lai-wang's wife, Sung Hui-lien, she was more than adequate as a substitute. Thereupon, exhilarated by the wine he had consumed, he embraced her with both arms, stepped into her quarters with her, and proceeded to kiss her. Originally, this woman had worked for Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, but she had engaged in hanky-panky with her master, which caused such an uproar in his household that she was driven out. On this day, confronted with an opportunity to pursue the same path, she saw no reason to refuse. There and then, she responded by sticking her tongue into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth, and the two of them proceeded to unfasten their clothing and let down their pants. Lying down on the edge of the k'ang and raising her legs, she allowed Hsi-men Ch'ing to thrust away at her until he might well have ejaculated:
Is it not delightful?
Truly:
Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying;
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.
A poem testifies to this:

The competing lustre of lanterns and moon[84] bathe the jade flagon;
Their clear rays of light serve separately to illuminate Lü-chu.[85]
Protest not that the gentleman already has a wife of his own;
He is tempted beneath the mulberry trees to seek out Lo-fu.

Uncle Wu went away in the evening. The next day, Jing came to thank Ximen Qing. "I read the Imperial Rescript yesterday," he said, "and was greatly pleased. It is all due to your kindness, and I can never forget the fact." He drank some tea and rose. "When is Master Yun going to invite us to take wine with him?" he asked.
"It is so close to the New Year that we are all busy," Ximen Qing said. "He will probably put it off until afterwards." Jing went away.
Ximen Qing killed a pig and sent it with two jars of wine, a roll of red silk, a roll of black silk, and a hundred fruit pastries to Censor Song. Chunhong took them with Ximen's card to the Censor's office. The officers took the boy in, and Song saw him in the hall at the back. While he was writing a note in return, he gave the boy some tea and three *qian* of silver. Then Chunhong came back and gave Ximen Qing the card. It said:
To the most exalted and noble Ximen. Twice already I have enjoyed your magnificent hospitality, and I do not know how to thank you. Now, you send me presents that I feel I have no right to accept. You may, perhaps, have learned that I have recommended your kinsman and Jing. I am anxious to see you that we may talk about the matter. With most cordial thanks I now send back to you your servant. Your friend, Song Qiaonian.
The Censor sent a man with a hundred copies of the new calendar, forty thousand sheets of paper, and a pig.
One day a document arrived, confirming Uncle Wu in his new appointment. Ximen Qing went to call upon him, taking thirty taels of silver and four rolls of silk. On the twenty-fourth, Ximen Qing set seals upon his office and prepared a feast for his kinsmen and friends. When Uncle Wu returned from assuming office, Ximen invited him, and there was another celebration.
Now Captain He's family arrived. Ximen Qing sent tea to them in Wu Yueniang's name. On the twenty-sixth, Abbot Wu and twelve priests came to read the office for the hundredth day after the death of Li Ping'er. A host of relatives and friends came that day to offer tea to Ximen Qing. They, in turn, were asked to eat vegetarian food, and all went away the same evening. On the twenty-seventh, Ximen sent presents to his relatives and friends. He sent half a pig, half a sheep, a jar of wine, a sack of rice and a tael of silver to Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Chang Zhijie, Clerk Fu, Clerk Gan, Han Daoguo, Ben the Fourth and Cui Ben. To Li Gujie, Wu Yin'er, and Zheng Aiyue, he sent a dress and three taels of silver each.
Yueniang wished Nun Xue to hold a service in her temple and sent Laian to her with oil, rice, flour and money.
The end of the year was drawing near. The moon lit up the plum blossom by the windows, and the wind howled through the snow-covered eaves. There was the noise of fireworks everywhere, and every household set up charms and spells for the Spring.
Ximen Qing burned paper offerings and went to Li Ping'er's room to make an offering to his dead wife. Then he assembled the whole household in the inner hall. The servants, boys, maids, and serving women came to kowtow to Ximen Qing and Wu Yueniang. Then husband and wife distributed kerchiefs, handkerchiefs, and money to all their household.
The next day was the first of the first month of the first year of the reign period Chonghe. Ximen Qing rose very early, dressed himself in his robes, and made sacrifice to Heaven and Earth. After breakfast, he got on his horse and went to the Censor's office to wish Song a happy New Year. The ladies rose early too. They dressed up and put on flowers and ornaments. They wore silken skirts and embroidered gowns, and looked very beautiful and charming. They came to kowtow to Yueniang.
Ping'an and one of the men from the office were at the gate to receive the New Year cards and write the names of the callers in a book. They were also ready to receive the officers and others who came to congratulate Ximen Qing at the New Year.
Daian and Wang Jing, wearing new clothes, new hats, and new boots, were outside the gate, playing shuttlecock, lighting bonfires, and chewing melon seeds. The clerks came and everybody connected with the houses. They were received by Chen Jingji.
About noon Ximen Qing returned from his calls upon the Censor and other officers. As soon as he had dismounted, Wang the Third came to offer his good wishes. Ximen Qing took him to the great hall, and there the young man kowtowed to him. Then Wang the Third asked to be allowed to see Yueniang, and Ximen took him to the inner court. When they returned to the hall, Ximen gave him wine.
They had drunk only one cup when Captain He was announced. Ximen Qing told Chen Jingji to entertain Wang the Third, while he himself went to receive Captain He. Wang the Third went away when he had drunk a little more wine. Then Jing and Yun and Qiao came, one after the other. Ximen Qing was kept busy entertaining them until evening, and, by that time, he was almost tipsy. He spent the night with Yueniang.
The next day, he went out again making New Year calls and did not return until late. When he reached home, Uncle Han, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Chang Zhijie, and Hua Ziyu were there, and Jingji was talking to them. When Ximen came in, they greeted one another, and wine was brought. Uncle Han and Hua Ziyu lived outside the city gates and they left early. But Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and Chang Zhijie lingered. Uncle Wu the Second came. He went to the inner court to greet his sister, then joined the others. After a while he went away.
By the time Ximen Qing took Bojue and the others to the gate, he was drunk. Daian was there, and Ximen squeezed his hand. The boy knew what this meant and said: "There is nobody there."
Ximen went at once to Mistress Ben the Fourth. She was waiting for him. Neither of them wasted any words: they undressed and set to work immediately. She was full of lust; she spread-eagled her thighs, opened her cunt with both hands, and let him reach her inmost recesses. Warm liquid oozed from her and wet the sheet. He put some powder on the head of his penis, gripped her body with both arms, and thrust so hard that the whole penis went in; not a hair's breadth stayed outside. The woman opened her eyes wide and called him Darling. Ximen asked her what her maiden name had been. "My mothers name was Ye," she said, "I was fifth child."
After that, Ximen Qing kept murmuring: "Ye the Fifth, Ye the Fifth."
Once, this woman had been a nurse. She had misbehaved with Ben the Fourth; then they had run away, and he had taken her to live with him as his wife. She was now thirty-two years old, and very well skilled in the arts of love. She called Ximen Qing by the sweetest names. He was delighted and yielded. He took his penis out of his trousers and was about to wipe it clean, but she interrupted him and said, "Don't wipe it; I'll suck it for you." Ximen wished for nothing more, so she bent down, took the penis with both hands and sucked it until it was quite clean. Then he pulled up his trousers.
"Why has my husband not come back yet?" Mistress Ben said.
"I expected him before this," Ximen said. "Possibly his Lordship Xia has kept him."
He gave her two or three taels of silver. "I should have liked to give you some clothes," he said, "but Ben the Fourth might find out, so I am giving you this money to buy some for yourself."
She opened the door for him and he went away. Daian was waiting in the shop and took his master into the house.
If the upper beams lean to one side, the lower ones also will give way. Mistress Ben the Fourth had misconducted herself with Daian even before she had dealings with Ximen Qing. Now, as soon as Daian had taken his master into the house, seeing that Clerk Fu was not in the shop, he took two jars of wine and went with Ping'an to see her. They drank until the second night watch. Ping'an went to the shop to sleep and Daian stayed with the woman.
"I have allowed your master to come to me," she said to him, "but I am very much afraid my neighbor, Mistress Han, will tell the ladies. Then they will treat me as they treat Clerk Han's wife, and I shall never be able to hold up my head again."
"The only two who count are the Great Lady and the Fifth Lady," Daian said. "There is nothing wrong with the Great Lady, but the Fifth is very sly. This is what I should do. Now that it is the New Year, buy something for the Great Lady. She is very fond of fruit pastries. Spend a *qian* or so on them and some fine melon seeds and take them to her. On the ninth, it will be the Fifth Lady's birthday. Take her some little presents and I will give her a box of melon seeds for you. That will stop their mouths."
The woman approved this plan, and the next day, when Ximen Qing was out, Daian took the boxes to Yueniang. When she asked where they came from, he told her Mistress Ben the Fourth had sent them.
"Why should she spend her money buying things for me?" Yueniang said, "especially when her husband is not at home." She accepted the presents and gave Daian two boxes of fruit and other things to take back, telling him to thank Mistress Ben the Fourth.
When Ximen Qing returned from his round of visits, Abbot Wu called to wish him the compliments of the season. They took wine in the hall and Abbot Wu went away. Ximen Qing told Daian to take a horse and go to see old woman Wen. "Tell her I want to go and see Lady Lin," he said. "What shall I do about it?"
"You need not bother, Father," the boy said, "I met old woman Wen riding past here on a donkey. She told me that Wang the Third is setting off tomorrow for the Eastern Capital to pay a visit to Marshal Huang. Lady Lin would like you to go and see her on the sixth. Old woman Wen will be there herself."
"Is this true?" Ximen Qing said.
"Should I dare to lie to you?" Daian replied.
Ximen Qing went to the inner court, but he had hardly reached his wife's room before Daian came to tell him that Uncle Wu had come. Wu was dressed in ceremonial robes, wearing a girdle with a gold buckle. He made reverence to Ximen Qing and said: "It is entirely due to your kindness that I find myself in this position today. Thank you for the presents you sent me. I am sorry I was not at home yesterday when you called. Today, I have come especially to pay my respects. Forgive me for being late." He knelt down and kowtowed.
Ximen Qing knelt down too. "Uncle," he said, "you have my heartiest congratulations. You must not worry about the question of money."
Wu Yueniang kowtowed to her brother. Uncle Wu hastily made a half-return to her, and asked her not to pay him the full honor. "That is quite enough for me," he said. "Your brother and sister-in-law are always coming here and troubling you. Now I am old, I depend upon your generosity."
Yueniang said: "Brother, I only trust you will forgive me when I fail to do things to your liking."
"Sister," Uncle Wu said, "you must not talk like that. Have we not troubled you enough already?"
"It is rather late, Uncle," Ximen Qing said. "You can't go anywhere else now. Take off your ceremonial clothes and come and sit down for a while."
They did not know that Meng Yulou and Pan Jinlian were there. When these two ladies found that Uncle Wu was going into the inner room, they came out hastily, kowtowed to Uncle Wu, and went away.
Ximen Qing and Uncle Wu went in and sat by the fire. The table was set, and the two maids, Yuxiao and Xiaoyu, came and kowtowed to Uncle Wu. Yueniang offered her brother a small gold cup of wine. Ximen Qing took the host's place, and Uncle Wu invited his sister to sit down. Yueniang asked to be excused for a moment and went into the other room for some fruit.
"Everything seems to be going well," Ximen Qing said to his brother-in-law as they drank their wine.

"It is all due to you," Uncle Wu said. "I have been to headquarters and I find that things are practically settled at the Capital. I haven't yet been to my own office of the commissariat. Tomorrow is an auspicious day, and I propose to break the seals and then go home to prepare some boxes and send them to the granary. Then I will see all the keepers of the granary and give them their orders. Ding, who used to be in charge, was reported upon adversely by Governor Hou and dismissed. I have taken his place. I have to go through all the books and give instructions to the keepers. I am making a thorough clearance of old records and reports so as to be ready for the new harvest when autumn comes.

"How many acres have you under your control?" Ximen Qing asked.

"The system of local supplies for the troops to avoid the trouble and expense of transport was established in the most remote times," Uncle Wu said. "Originally, contributions of grain were only made in autumn. Wang Anshi, when he was Minister, introduced the early grain system, which calculated for another contribution in the summer. In Jizhou, not counting barren land and marshes, we have twenty-seven thousand acres, and each acre must make a contribution of one tael and eight *qian*, so all together we have more than five hundred taels. At the end of the year we send the contribution to Dongpingfu. There, arrangements are made for buying grain and hay for the horses."

"Is there anything left over?" Ximen asked.

"There are some people not on the register," Uncle Wu said, "and people in general are very sly. If you treat them firmly and insist upon good measure, there is likely to be trouble."

"But I suppose there will be something to make it worth your while."

"To tell you the truth," Uncle Wu said, "if things are properly managed, I think I ought to make more than a hundred taels every year, besides chickens, pigs, geese and wine. Those things are presents, of course, and do not count. But I shall have to rely upon your assistance.

"I shall be very glad to do anything I can, if you can only make something out of it," Ximen said.

They drank until lights were brought, and then Uncle Wu went away. Ximen Qing went to Jinlian.

The next day he went to the office, removed the seals, and set to work again upon official business. An invitation came from Yun Lishou asking him to take wine with the other officers on the fifth. Captain He's wife invited Yueniang and the other ladies to visit her on the sixth.

Ximen Qing went with Ying Bojue and Uncle Wu to take wine with Yun Lishou. Yun had borrowed a house and engaged musicians to entertain his guests. The party did not break up until late. All the time, Ximen Qing was longing for the morrow.

The next day, Yueniang went to see Captain He's wife. Ximen Qing, dressed in his finest clothes, mounted a horse, put on his eyeshades, and went to Lady Lin's house. Daian and Qintong attended him. Wang the Third was not at home. Ximen sent in his card. Old woman Wen took it to Lady Lin. He was asked to go in, and taken through the great hall to the inner court, and into a room the floor of which was covered by rugs. The hangings and curtains were red. Lady Lin was wearing a scarlet straight-sleeved gown and her hair was piled up with pearls and ornaments. They greeted one another, then sat down and drank tea. The boys took the horse to the stable. After tea, Lady Lin begged Ximen to take off his ceremonial clothes and go to her room.

"My son," she said, "has gone to the Eastern Capital to wish his father-in-law the compliments of the season. He will be back after the festival."

Ximen Qing called Daian to take his long cloak. Beneath it he was wearing a white silk coat and a sky-blue gown embroidered with flying fish. It was very handsome.

The table was set and maids brought wine and dishes. Lady Lin offered him wine with her delicate hands; passionate glances flashed from her eyes. They guessed fingers, threw dice, and talked sweetly to one another. Spring was in the air. Then they began to glance sideways at one another and their heads whirled.

It was almost sunset. Silver candlesticks were brought. Daian and Qintong were being looked after by old woman Wen. Wang the Third's wife was in another apartment. She was served by her own maids and women and did not come to them. Lady Lin closed the door. After that, no servant would dare to come in. Then, stirred by the wine, they went to the inner room, pulled aside the embroidered curtains, and shut the windows. They turned up the lamps and closed the doors. Ximen Qing took off his clothes and got on to the bed; Lady Lin washed herself carefully, and then joined him. Ximen had come for this purpose; he had brought his instruments with him. He had taken some of his secret medicine, and the silver clasp was ready for action. He pulled up her legs and put his strong prick before her cunt, then reared up and thrust it in noisily. The woman called him her darling without ceasing.

Ximen burned grains of incense on her belly and by the hole of her cunt. He told her he was going to give a party and that he would like to invite her son's wife and herself to come and see the lanterns. The woman was so enraptured that she promised they would both go. Ximen Qing got up, drank with her until the second night watch, then mounted his horse and rode home. He went out by the back way.

When he got home, Ping'an said: "Eunuch Xue has sent a card to ask you to go to his country place to enjoy the signs of the approach of Spring. And Uncle Yun has sent five cards of invitation asking the ladies to a party."

Ximen went to Yueniang's room. Yulou and Jinlian were there. Yueniang had returned from Captain He's place and was talking to them. When Ximen came in, she rose and made a reverence to him.

"Where have you been all this time?" she said.

Ximen could think of no better excuse than that he had been drinking at Ying Bojue's house.

Yueniang told him about the party at Captain He's. "Mistress He," she said, "is very young. I don't believe she is more than eighteen. She is as beautiful and charming as a painted figure. She is well up in affairs of the day as well as those of the past. She was so sweet and pleasant to me she might have known me for a long time. It is two years since she married Captain He. She has four maids, two nurses, and two serving women."

"She is a niece of Eunuch Lan," Ximen Qing said. "When she married He, the eunuch gave her a very considerable dowry."

"Tomorrow," Yueniang said, "your friend Yun's wife has asked us to go and see her. There are five cards. Shall we go?"

"Yes, indeed," Ximen said. "All of you, if you are invited."

"I think Sun Xue'e ought to stay at home," Yueniang said. "It is the New Year, and, if anybody should call, there would be no one here."

"Very well. Xue'e shall stay at home and the rest of you can go. Eunuch Xue has asked me to go and see him, but I don't feel much like going. I don't know whether it is the Spring air or not, but the last few days I have had a good deal of pain in my legs and loins."

"There may be something wrong with your lungs," Yueniang said. "Don't waste any time but get Doctor Ren to give you some medicine."

"Oh, I don't think it is anything serious. If I leave it alone, it will get better of itself. If it doesn't, I will ask him for something later on. I think we might give a party for the Feast of Lanterns and invite some ladies, Mistress Ho, Mistress Zhou, Mistress Jing, Mistress Zhang, Mistress Yun, Lady Lin, Aunt Wu and Mistress Cui. What about the twelfth or the thirteenth? We can make a show of lanterns and have some of the actors from the royal household. Last year, we had a few large set pieces, and Ben the Fourth looked after them. This year he is at the Eastern Capital, and we shall have to find someone else."

"Since Ben the Fourth is not here, why not ask his wife?" Jinlian said. "She would do as well."

Ximen Qing looked at her. "You little strumpet!" he said. "You can't speak three sentences without making yourself objectionable."

Yueniang did not seem to be very interested, and the matter dropped.

"We have never seen Wang the Third's mother," Yueniang said. "What is the idea of asking her? I don't suppose she will come."

"Since Wang the Third is now my ward, we may as well send her an invitation," Ximen Qing said. "Whether she comes or not is her affair."

"I don't think I shall go to Yun's place tomorrow," Yueniang said. "I am getting near my time. If I get into a crowd, people may talk."

"You need not worry," Yulou said. "You are not very big. The baby is not due this month, and it is the New Year. Why not be merry and go?"

Ximen Qing drank a cup of tea and went to sleep with Xue'e. When Jinlian saw this, she went away with Ximen Dajie. Ximen asked Xue'e to pinch and rub his body for a long time.

The next day Ying Bojue came. "Mistress Yun," he said, "has sent a card to my wife to ask her to go and help her entertain your ladies. But my wife has only a few old dresses, and this is not a very suitable time to wear them. People would laugh at her. I have come to see if you would mind lending her some of your ladies' clothes and a few ornaments and things. Then she can wear them."

Ximen Qing said to Wang Jing: "Go and ask the Great Lady."

"Ying Bao is here with a box," Bojue said. "Take it, Brother, and bring something back in it."

Wang Jing took the box and went to the inner court. After a while he returned and handed the box to Ying Bao. "There are some silken clothes and a set of ornaments inside," he said. Ying Bao took them away and Bojue sat down to have tea with Ximen Qing.

"Eunuch Xue has asked me to go to his place outside the city to enjoy the coming of Spring," Ximen Qing said, "but I have too much to do. My kinsman, Wu, has invited me to go and take part in a service at his place on the ninth, but I can't go to that either. I must send my son-in-law instead. I don't know whether I have been drinking too much, but my back aches very badly and I feel too lazy to move."

"You have been drinking too much, Brother," Bojue said. "You must drink less."

"It is the New Year and I can't help myself," Ximen said. "Wherever I go, drink is pressed upon me."

Then Daian came in with a box. "Captain He," he said, "has sent you an invitation to a party on the ninth."

"There you are!" Ximen said. "Another invitation. And I can't refuse."

He opened the case. There were three cards inside it. One, a large red one, said: "To his Lordship, my colleague Siquan"; another: "To his Worship, Wu"; and the third, "To my good friend, the worthy Ying." They all ended with the words "your friend He Yingshou kowtows."

Daian said: "The messenger said he did not know the other addresses, so he brought all the cards here. He said he would be much obliged if we would forward them."

"What shall I do?" Ying Bojue said. "I have never sent the Captain any present. How can I accept his invitation?"

"I will give you something for Ying Bao to take to him. That will be all right."

Ximen told Wang Jing to wrap up two *qian* of silver and a handkerchief, and to write Bojue's name on a card. "Perhaps you will take this card with you. I will not send it," he said to Ying Bojue. He told Daian to take the other card to Uncle Wu. Wang Jing gave the packet to Ying Bojue. Bojue bowed to Ximen Qing and thanked him. Then he went away.

"I will come early, and we will start together," he said as he was leaving.

In the afternoon Yueniang and the others dressed and set out. They had one large sedan chair and three small ones. They took Laijue's wife to act as their maid, and she, too, had a small sedan chair. Four soldiers went before them to clear the way, and Qintong, Chunhong, Qitong, and Laian followed them. So they came to Yun Lishou's house.

When they had gone, Ximen Qing said to Ping'an, the gatekeeper: "No matter who comes to see me, you must say that I am not at home. Just accept any cards that may be brought."

Ping'an had had such instructions before, and he had learned his lesson. He did not dare to leave the gate. He sat down and, whenever a visitor came, said his master was not at home.

Ximen Qing's legs were still painful. He remembered that he had some long-lasting medicine that a doctor had once given him, to be taken with the milk of a woman. He went to Li Ping'er's room and asked Ruyi'er to give him some of hers. Ruyi'er was dressed in her holiday clothes. She at once gave him some milk and gave him what he needed for the medicine. Ximen sat by the fire and told Yingchun to bring him something to eat. Yingchun did so, then went to play chess with Chunmei. She knew that Ruyi'er would give him any water or tea he might want. When the maid had gone, Ximen lay down on the bed, pulled down his trousers, took out his prick, and asked her to take it in her mouth while he took some wine in his. "Suck it for me thoroughly," he said, "and I'll give you a decorated cloak to wear on holiday." "Certainly," she replied. "I want to suck it again and again." "My child," Ximen Qing said, "I should like to burn some incense on your body." "Do what you like," the woman said.

Ximen Qing made fast the door, then took off his cloak and trousers. She lay on the bed, and Ximen took from his pocket three grains of incense, soaked in wine, which were left over from the time when he had his pleasure with Mistress Lin. He took off her clothes and put one grain of incense on her bosom, another on her belly, and the third in her cunt; then he burned them all. He put his prick in her cunt, bent down to look, and thrust vigorously; then he took a mirror to see better, and it was not long before the incense had burned down to her skin; she grimaced and ground her teeth in pain, and at last she said in a trembling voice, "Stop, I can't stand it any longer."

"Zhang the Fourth, you strumpet, whose woman are you?" Ximen Qing cried.

"I am yours."

"Say that you once belonged to Xiong Wang, but now you belong to me."

"This strumpet once was Xiong Wang's wife, but now she belongs to this darling."

"Do I know how to deal with a woman?"

"Yes, my darling, you know well how to treat a woman's cunt."

So they talked, in a manner we cannot describe. His penis was so long and thick that it filled her whole cunt. He traveled up and down, making the heart of her flower now red as a parrot's tongue, now black as a bat's wing. It was a delightful and wonderful sight. He held her legs; bodies squeezed together, and his prick went in right to its root. Her eyes opened wide, and love juices flowed from her. Ximen reached his orgasm, and his sperm flowed like a river.

After he had burned her in this way, he opened the cabinet and gave her a silk embroidered cape.

In the evening, Yueniang and the others came back. "Mistress Yun is going to have a baby," Yueniang told her husband. "Today, when we offered wine to one another, we agreed that, when the babies arrive, if one is a boy and the other a girl, we will arrange a marriage between them. If they are both boys, they shall go to the same school, and if girls, they shall be like sisters, do their needlework, and play together. Mistress Ying was our witness."

Ximen Qing smiled.

The next day was the day before Jinlian's birthday. Ximen Qing went to the office in the morning and told the boys to get out and clean all the lanterns and put them up. He told Laixing to buy fruits and to arrange with the singing boys to come in the evening.

Early that morning, Jinlian got up and dressed, putting on flowers and powdering her face till it was very white. Her lips were red; the sleeves of her coat green. She came to the great hall to watch Daian and Qintong putting up the lanterns. She smiled and said: "I see you are getting ready for the Feast of Lanterns."

"Yes," Qintong said, "today is the eve of your birthday, and Father said we were to get out the lanterns and have them up ready for your party tomorrow. This evening I am coming to kowtow to you. I'm sure you will have something for me."

"If it is a beating you want, yes, indeed; but if money, it is no use coming to me," Jinlian said.

"Mother," Qintong said, "you never speak without using the word 'beating.' We are your children and you ought to be kind to us instead of talking to us about beatings."

"Shut your mouth and get on with your lanterns," Jinlian said. "And don't set about your work in that offhand way. The lanterns will not stay up. The other day, when Cui Ben came and you said: 'How can the master have vanished in broad daylight?' you very nearly got a thrashing. If you don't put up these lanterns properly, you won't escape a thrashing this time."

"Mother," Qintong said, "you always use ill-omened words. My life is precarious enough as it is, and your words make it seem still less secure."

"You have a wonderful way of finding out things, Mother," Daian said. "How did you come to hear that?"

"Outside the palace there is a pine tree, and inside it, a great bell," Jinlian said. "The pine tree's shadow is easy to recognize, and the sound of the bell, easy to hear. So it is with things in this house. Yesterday, your master said to the Great Lady: 'Last year, Ben the Fourth was here to see about the big fireworks. Now he is away and there is nobody to see to them.' I said: 'Even if Ben the Fourth is not at home, his wife will do as well. Why don't you send for her?'"

"What are you suggesting now, Mother?" Daian said. "You surely can't think of such a thing. Ben the Fourth is one of our clerks."

"What am I suggesting now, indeed?" Jinlian said. "It is true, isn't it? A lovely state of affairs! He goes beyond all limits."

"Mother," Qintong said, "don't believe everything you hear. We must not let this reach Ben the Fourth's ears."

"That silly turtle!" Jinlian said. "What's the harm if that fellow does get to know? I say he is a turtle, and everybody knows that that is exactly what he is. He doesn't worry when he goes to the Eastern Capital. He knows that, when he leaves his wife behind, her cunt will not be unemployed. Don't argue with me, you scamp. You all help your father in these games. And when you arrange things of this sort for him, you get your own fingers in the pie. Isn't that so? You say I know too much. It is perfectly clear why that woman sent presents to the Great Lady the other day. I understand she is sending me some melon seeds to keep my mouth shut. She is very clever at these underhand games, but my first guess is that Daian devised the whole scheme."

"You must be fair, Mother," Daian said. "Why should I do anything of the sort? I have never been to her place unless there was something important to be done. Don't believe everything Mohammedan Han's wife tells you. She and Mistress Ben the Fourth have had quarrels over their children. As the proverb says: It is easy for people to pick a quarrel, but hard to keep on good terms. If the roof falls, it does not necessarily follow that somebody must be hurt; but an evil tongue, incessantly wagging, will be the death of anyone in time. In cases like this, if you believe a thing, it is true; if you do not believe it, it is false. Mistress Ben the Fourth is a very pleasant woman. She has been here some time and she is always kind. We all go to her for tea and things, and I can't believe we all have improper dealings with her. She hasn't a house big enough to hold us all."

"Oh, I know the bleary-eyed strumpet," Jinlian said. "She is no bigger than half a brick, but she blinks her watery eyes and seems to make people do what she wishes. She and that hashed-up, melon-faced Han Daoguo's wife! I know their tricks. I keep my eyes open. How can I fail to see?"

At that moment, Xiaoyu came up and said: "The Great Lady is asking for you. Grandmother Pan has come, and she wants to pay the sedan chair men."

"I have been standing here all this time," Jinlian said. "How was it I didn't see her?"

"She went in by the passage," Qintong said. "She needs six *fen* of silver for the sedan chair."

"Where does she expect me to get the money?" Jinlian cried. "Why doesn't she bring her own money when she goes out to visit people?"

She went to the inner court to see her mother, but she would not give her any money.

"Give the old lady a *qian* of silver and put it down in the accounts," Yueniang said.

"No, I'm not going to upset our husband," Jinlian said. "He knows exactly how much money he gives me. He gave it to me to buy things with, not to pay for sedan chairs."

They all sat down and looked at one another. The sedan chair men kept pressing for their money. They wanted to go away. At last, Yulou could bear it no longer. She took a *qian* of silver from her sleeve and dismissed the men.

After a while, the two aunts Wu and the nun came. Yueniang gave them tea. Old woman Pan went to her daughter's room. Jinlian upbraided her harshly.

"Who told you to come, if you haven't money enough to pay for your chair? You come here, and people laugh at you. You have no shame at all."

"Daughter," old woman Pan said, "you never give me any money. Where am I to get it? Indeed, I found it very hard even to get presents to bring with me."
"It's no use looking to me for money," Jinlian said. "Money doesn't come my way. There are seven holes here and eight eyes trying to find them. In the future, come when you know you have money to pay for your chair and, if you haven't any, stay away. I'm sure nobody in this house is dying to see you, so you needn't make an exhibition of yourself. Though the god of war may have sold bean curd, it was the man himself who counted, not the stuff he sold. I can't put up with the insulting things people say. There was trouble the other day, after you had gone away. Did you know that? I am like the droppings that fall from a donkey. They look very fine and large, but there's nothing inside."
The old woman began to cry. "Mother," Chunmei said to Jinlian, "what is the matter with you today? Why are you scolding Grandmother so?" She did her best to console the old lady, took her to the inner room, and made her sit down on the bed. Then she gave her a cup of tea. The old woman was so upset that she went to sleep and did not wake up till she was called to dinner. Then she went to the inner court.
When Ximen Qing came back from the office, he had his meal in Yueniang's room. Daian brought him a card and said that Jing had called to see him. Upon the card was written: "The recently promoted Commander of the troops in the southeast and Superintendent of Communications, Jing Zhong, presents his humble respects." Ximen hastily put on his ceremonial clothes and went to welcome him. Jing was wearing a scarlet gown, with a unicorn embroidered upon it, and a girdle with a gold buckle. He was accompanied by a host of officials and soldiers. They greeted each other in the hall, then sat down, and tea was brought.
"The documents reached me the day before yesterday," Jing said. "I have not yet been to my new office, but I felt I must come especially to thank you."
"I must congratulate you, General," Ximen said. "It is only right and fitting that a man so capable as yourself should be appointed to a more responsible post. Your appointment sheds glory even upon myself. I must give a party in your honor."
He asked Jing to take off his ceremonial clothes and stay to dinner. At the same time he ordered a servant to set the table. Jing would not stay. "I came to thank you," he said, "before I went to anyone else, but I have a great deal to attend to. I will come and see you another day." He prepared to say good-bye, but Ximen Qing would not have it. He told a servant to take his guest's ceremonial robes and set the table at once. Charcoal was put into the brazier; the blinds were drawn. Jade-like wine was poured from a golden jar and food brought in a precious dish.
The wine had just been served when the two boys, Zheng Chun and Wang Xiang, came in and kowtowed. "What makes you so late?" Ximen Qing asked Zheng Chun. "And who is this other boy?"
"He is Wang Xiang, a brother of Wang Gui," Zheng Chun said.
Ximen told them to bring their instruments and sing, and the two boys sang the song "This Delightful Weather." Servants brought two trays of food and two jars of wine for the people who had come with General Jing.
"This is really too much," Jing said. "I have troubled you enough. Why should you give food to all my people?" He ordered them to come and kowtow to Ximen Qing.
"Tomorrow or the day after," Ximen said, "my wife is going to invite your lady to come and enjoy the Feast of Lanterns. I hope you will persuade her to come. There will be your lady, Mistress Zhang, Captain He's wife, and the two ladies of my kinsman Wu, nobody else."
"If any invitation comes from your lady, my humble wife will be sure to come," Jing said.
"Why has Zhou not been given an appointment yet?" Ximen Qing asked.
"I am told he is to receive an appointment in the Capital in three months' time," Jing said.
"I am glad to hear it," Ximen said.
Jing stood up and said good-bye. Ximen Qing took him to the gate. Then, with the soldiers clearing the way for him, he went away.
That evening, they kept the eve of Jinlian's birthday. The two boys sang in the inner court. When the wine had been passed around, Ximen Qing went to her room. Aunt Wu, old woman Pan, Ximen Dajie, Miss Yu, and the two nuns stayed in Yueniang's room while Jinlian went to her own room to drink with Ximen Qing. She offered him wine and kowtowed to him. After a while old woman Pan came, and Jinlian sent her to sleep in the Sixth Lady's room, so that she herself could drink and sport with Ximen.
The old woman went to the Sixth Lady's room, and Ruyi'er and Yingchun helped her to get into the warm bed. But, before she did so, she looked at Li Ping'er's tablet in the outer room with many offerings set out before it. The portrait was hanging there. The old woman made a reverence to it. "Sister," she said, "you are safe in paradise now." Then she came and sat on the bed and said to Ruyi'er and Yingchun: "Your mistress is a happy woman. She is dead, but her husband has many prayers said for her and makes offerings to show he still remembers her."
"The other day we observed my mistress's hundredth day," Ruyi'er said. "Why didn't you come? Aunt Hua and Aunt Wu were here; there were twelve priests to read the prayers. They played instruments and waved banners about. It was really a splendid ceremony, and didn't come to an end before the evening."
"It was the New Year season," old woman Pan said. "I couldn't leave the boy at home alone. That is why I didn't come. But where is Aunt Yang today?"
"Didn't you hear that Aunt Yang had died?" Ruyi'er said. "On my mistress's hundredth day she didn't come, and, only a few days ago, all our ladies went to her funeral."
"What a sad thing!" old woman Pan said. "I believe she was even older than I am. I never knew she was dead. No wonder I missed her today."
"Grandmother," Ruyi'er said, "we have some sweet wine. Would you like some?" Then she said to Yingchun: "Sister, will you put a small table on the bed and warm some sweet wine for Grandmother?"
The wine was brought, and, while she was drinking it, the old woman said: "Your mistress was a very good woman. She was kind and sweet. When I came here, she never treated me as a stranger. She used to give me hot tea and hot water, and she would be angry if I wouldn't take them. And at night she would stay awake and talk to me. When I was going away she always gave me something. Why, Sisters, even this gown I am wearing now, she gave me. My own daughter never gives me so much as the half of a broken needle. That is the truth. If I were starving, she wouldn't give me a penny. She would see my eyes drop out on the ground first. When your lady was alive, my daughter used to scold me for a miser and say I was always trying to get things out of her. I know she has a lot of money, but, in spite of it, she would not give me even the few *fen* I needed to pay for my sedan chair. She bit her lips and said she had no money. In the end, the lady in the east room gave me a *qian* and paid off the chair men.
"When I went to her room, she gave me a fine dressing down. She said I was to come if I had money and to stay away if I hadn't. Let me tell you this: when I go away this time, I shall never come back. I won't come here to be insulted. I give her up entirely. There are many cruel people in the world but none so cruel as she is. Sisters, I tell you: if I die tomorrow, I don't know what the end of her will be. She will never take advice from anybody. You know, her father died when she was seven years old, and, from that day to this, I've never thought about anybody but her. When she was young, I taught her needlework and sent her to school. I dressed her carefully and took care that her hands and feet were well kept. She has been clever enough to rise to the position she holds now, and see how she treats her poor mother. Her eyes are never kind when they look on me."
"Did your daughter go to school?" Ruyi'er said."Now I understand why she is able to read all the characters."
"Yes, she went to school when she was seven years old, and she spent three years there. She learned composition and how to read poems and songs and literature of all sorts."
As they were talking, there came a knock at the door. "Who is there?" Ruyi'er said. "Go and see, Xiuchun."
Xiuchun went to the door. When she came back, she said: "Sister Chunmei is here." Ruyi'er squeezed the old woman's hand.
"Don't say anything," she whispered. "Chunmei is here."
"She and my daughter walk with the same leg," the old woman said.
When Chunmei came in, she found them drinking wine with the old woman. "I have come to see how Grandmother is," she said. Ruyi'er asked her to sit down. Chunmei arranged her skirt and sat down on the bed, with an air of great self-importance.
Yingchun sat next to Chunmei, Ruyi'er on the left-hand side, and the old woman in the middle.
"Have your father and mother gone to bed?" the old woman said.
"Yes," Chunmei said, "I waited on them till they were in bed and then I came to see you. I have got some dishes and a cup of wine ready for you." She said to Xiuchun: "The dishes are all ready. Go and ask Qiuju for them." Xiuchun went out. She soon returned carrying a jar of wine. Qiuju brought a food box.
"Go back now," Chunmei said to Qiuju, "and, if they want me, come and tell me."
Qiuju went back. The dishes were put on the table. Xiuchun went to fasten the door, then came and joined them. When the wine was heated, Chunmei offered a cup to old woman Pan, then to Ruyi'er, Yingchun, and Xiuchun. She picked out all the tasty bits from the dishes and offered them to the old woman and the others.
"Grandmother, do have some," she said. "I assure you it has been prepared especially for you."
"Sister," the old woman said, "your mistress never bothers about what I eat, but you take pity on a poor old widow. I foresee that you will make progress day by day. My daughter has not a human heart. I have always been miserable on her account. Whenever I offer her advice, she storms at me. Sister, you know I came today to see her, not to cadge a few bits of cold food. And you see how she has treated me."
"Grandmother," Chunmei said, "you don't understand. You only see one side: the other is hidden from you. My mistress is one of those people who are never satisfied so long as they are in a subordinate position. Compared with the Great Lady, who has money in plenty, she is in a most unfortunate position. My mistress is really poor, though you think she has a good deal and will not give you any. I know her better than anyone else does. My father leaves a great deal of money in her hands, but she will not touch a penny of it for her own purposes. If she wishes to buy flowers and things of that sort, she asks him straight out, instead of using his money and saying nothing about it. She will not allow the servants any handle against her. Grandmother, if you are angry with her, you are unjust. I am not standing up for her. I only want you to realize what the position is."
"Perhaps the old lady did not quite understand her daughter," Ruyi'er said. "After all, you are mother and daughter. If she had money, she would surely give it to you before anybody else. When you, old lady, come to your end, the Fifth Lady will have no one of her own to come and see her. She will be like the rest of us who have lost our mothers."
"I am old," the old woman said, "and I don't know whether I shall die today or tomorrow. I am not angry with her."
Chunmei saw that the old woman was becoming maudlin after her few cups of wine. She said to Yingchun: "Get the dice box and let us throw dice." They got a box with forty dice. Chunmei played with Ruyi'er, then with Yingchun. They drank great cups of wine, and, before long, their peach-flower cheeks were flushed. They finished the jar. Yingchun brought half a jar of Magu wine, and they finished that too. By the second night watch, old woman Pan could not stay awake any longer. Her body swayed backwards and forwards; her head began to nod. The party broke up.
When Chunmei went home, she opened the corner door and went through the courtyard. Qiuju was in the middle room, standing on a small bench and peeping through the partition. She was spying on the pair in the other room, and was very interested in the remarks they made to one another and the different sounds she heard. Just when she was most delighted, Chunmei came up and slapped her face. "You young rascal!" she said. "What do you mean by listening there?"
Qiuju was taken by surprise. She stared at Chunmei and said: "I was dozing. I wasn't listening at all. Why do you come and hit me?"
Jinlian overheard this. She called out to Chunmei: "Who is talking there?"
"I have told Qiuju to shut the door, but she won't move," Chunmei said.
Qiuju glared and went to shut the door. Chunmei took off the ornaments in her hair and went to bed.
The next day was Jinlian's birthday. Mistress Fu, Mistress Gan, Ben the Fourth's wife, Cui Ben's wife, Miss Duan, Miss Zheng, and the younger Wu's wife, came to congratulate her. Ximen Qing, with Uncle Wu and Ying Bojue, dressed in their best clothes, went on horseback to Captain He's place. There were a great many guests, and four singing girls were there to entertain them. Major Zhou was present. In the evening, when the party broke up, Ximen Qing came back and spent the night with Ruyi'er.
On the tenth he sent out cards to invite the ladies.
"Why should we not invite Aunt Meng?" Yueniang said, "and my sister-in-law too? They will be very upset if they find we've left them out."
"You are quite right," Ximen said. He asked Jingji to write two more invitations and Qintong took them.
Jinlian overheard this and was annoyed. She went to her own room and urged old woman Pan to go away at once. As the old woman was leaving, Yueniang said to her: "Grandmother, why are you going away in such a hurry? You must stay another day at least."
"Great Sister," Jinlian said, "It is the New Year, and there is nobody to look after her boy. Please don't keep her."
Yueniang gave the old woman two boxes of cakes and a *qian* of silver for her sedan chair, and took her to the gate.
When the old woman had gone away, Jinlian said to Li Jiao'er: "The Great Lady is inviting her rich relations for the Feast of Lanterns, and my old mother would be out of place. I couldn't let her stay. When the guests come, I can't say she is a guest too, because her clothes make it quite obvious that she isn't. And I can't tell them she is one of the women from the kitchen, because she isn't that. It puts me in a very awkward position."
Ximen Qing told Daian to take two cards to Wang the Third's place, one for Lady Lin and one for the younger lady, whose family name was Huang. He also told Daian to go to the bawdy house to tell Li Guijie, Wu Yin'er, Zheng Aiyue, and another girl to come, as well as the three boys, Li Ming, Wu Hui and Zheng Chun.
That day, Ben the Fourth came back from the Eastern Capital. In his best clothes, he came to kowtow to Ximen Qing and gave him a letter from Xia.
"What has kept you so long at the Capital?" Ximen asked him.
"I caught a very bad cold," Ben the Fourth said, "and I wasn't well enough to leave before the second of this month. His Lordship Xia sends you his best wishes and thanks you for looking after his house."
Ximen Qing gave Ben the Fourth the keys of the thread shop again, but he set apart another room so that Uncle Wu the Second could sell silk there. He was going to let Uncle Wu the Second do business with Laibao when Laibao came back with merchandise from the South. He asked Ben the Fourth to get the firework makers to put up two set pieces ready for the party on the twelfth.
Then Ying Bojue came with Li the Third, who thanked Ximen Qing for all he had done for him in the past. They sat down and had tea. Ying Bojue began: "Brother Li knows of a piece of business, and he is anxious to find out if you would be interested in it."
"What is the business?" Ximen Qing said.
"A document has come from the Eastern Capital," Li the Third said "requiring the Thirteen Provinces each to send to the capital historic works of art to the value of tens of thousands of taels. Our Prefecture of Dongpingfu is to provide twenty thousand taels' worth. The order is still in the governor's hands and has not been sent down to the lower authorities. Zhang the Second, in the High Street, proposes to expend a hundred taels in getting the contract. There is about ten thousand taels profit to be made. I thought I would come with Uncle Ying to let you know about this so that, if you feel inclined, we can go into the business with Zhang the Second. It would mean five thousand taels from each of you. Brother Ying, Huang the Fourth, and I myself, would be your associates, and Zhang the Second would have two men in with him. We should share the profits in the proportion of two and eight. What do you think about it?"
"What kind of works of art do they want?" Ximen Qing said.
"Perhaps your Lordship has not heard," Li the Third said. "The work on North Mount has just been finished at the Imperial City, and its name has been changed to the 'Mountain of Long Life.' A number of buildings are to be constructed there, the Palace of the Pure and Precious Secret, the Hall of the Immortals, and the Sanctuary of the Jade Spirit. There is also to be a dressing chamber for the Lady An. All these buildings are to be adorned with rare beasts and birds, Zhou bronzes, and Shang tripods, Han seals, and Qin incense burners, stone drums of the Xuanwang period, bronzes and copper of the successive dynasties—antiquities, in fact, of every sort. It is a very great undertaking, and his Majesty is going to spend a great deal of money."
"I think it would be better if I managed the whole business myself," Ximen said. "I might as well provide the ten or twenty thousand taels and go in for the thing with my own people."
"It certainly would be better," Li the Third said. "We need say nothing about it, and Brother Ying, Brother Huang and I will give you our assistance. Then there will be no outsiders."
"Will you bring in one of your own people?" Bojue asked.
"When we have made all the arrangements, we will have Ben the Fourth to help us," Ximen said. He asked where the orders were.
"They are still at the Censor's office," Li the Third said. "They have not been sent on yet."
"That doesn't matter," Ximen said. "I will write to Song and send him some presents. That will be all right."
"But you must act at once," Li the Third said. "As the proverb says: Soldiers must always be on the alert, and he who cooks his rice first will be the first to eat. If we don't look out, somebody may get the job before us."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Don't worry about that," he said. "Even if the orders had been sent to the office of the Prefecture, Song would recall them for me. Besides, Hu, the Prefect, is a friend of mine."
He asked Li the Third and Ying Bojue to stay for a meal, and it was settled that Ximen Qing should send his letter the following day.
"I must tell you one thing," Li the Third said, "His Excellency is not at his office now. The day before yesterday, he set out for an inspection at Yanzhou."
"You shall go yourself with one of my boys tomorrow," Ximen said.
"Very well," Li the Third said, "I expect we shall manage it in five or six days. Whom will you send with me? Give him the letter and let him come and spend the night at my house so that we can start early in the morning."
"The only one of my servants whom his Excellency knows is Chunhong, and he likes him. I will send him and Laijue with you."
Ximen summoned the two boys and told them that they were to go on a journey with Li the Third and that they must spend the night at his house.
"You do well," Bojue said. "We must waste no time, for, in matters like this, the man with the fastest legs has the advantage."
When they had had something to eat, Ying Bojue and Li the Third went away. Ximen Qing told his son-in-law to write the letter, then measured about ten taels of gold leaf and gave it with the letter to Chunhong and Laijue.
"See that you go quickly and warily," he said to them, "and come back as soon as you have got the document. If it has been sent to the Prefecture before you get there, ask his Excellency to give you a letter to the Prefect, instructing him to let us have it."
"I understand," Laijue said, "I have been to Yanzhou before, on an errand for Counselor Xu."
They went to Li the Third's house and, the next day, hired horses and set out.
On the twelfth, Ximen Qing gave a party and did not go to the office. He invited Uncle Wu, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and Chang Zhijie to come in the evening. Early in the morning, the musicians of the princely household of Wang came and, when the ladies arrived, they sounded the bronze drums and gongs in their honor. A servant came from Major Zhou to say that Mistress Zhou had trouble with her eyes and would not be able to come. But Mistress Jing, Mistress Zhang, Mistress Yun, Mistress Qiao, Mistress Cui and Aunts Wu and Meng came early. Captain He's wife, Lady Lin, and Wang the Third's wife did not arrive so early, so Ximen Qing sent soldiers several times to urge them to come, and dispatched old woman Wen to Lady Lin.
About noon, Lady Lin came in a large sedan chair, with a smaller chair following. After he had greeted her, Ximen Qing asked why her daughter-in-law had not come.
"My son is not at home and she is obliged to stay there," Lady Lin said.
Sometime afterwards, Captain He's wife came. She was in a sedan chair carried by four men. Behind her came a smaller one with a serving woman. A number of soldiers followed with her dressing case, and servants walked beside the chair. The chair was brought to the second door; the lady got out, and the musicians played. Wu Yueniang and the others went to the second door to welcome her. Ximen Qing stood quietly in one of the side rooms, and looked at the young lady through the blind. She was not more than twenty years old, tall and slender, and she looked as pretty as a jade carving. There were masses of pearls and ornaments on her hair. She wore a red gown with long sleeves embroidered in five colors. Her girdle was set with gold and jade, and below it was a blue skirt. As she moved, the tinkle of jade could be heard, and she brought with her the fragrance of orchid and musk.
Gracious and charming

Dainty and alert
Of manner fascinating
And of figure perfect
With eyebrows long and delicate, arching on the temples
Eyes, like a phoenix's, delicately sloping.
Her voice was as sweet
As that of an oriole flying in the sunshine.
Her tender waist like the willow
Playing in the wind.
From the host of the most elegant she came
Without a trace of arrogance or common breeding
As though one bred in a thicket of pearls.
Her dress was chaste and dignified.
She was like a cherry tree in full bloom
Of whom no one knows how many flowers
Blossom in one night.
Like a willow slow in budding
So that no one can tell how far advanced
Is Spring.
Her lotus feet moved lightly
Gaily as the fairies.
With skirt raised just a little
Like the "Water-Moon" Guanyin.
A flower among flowers
But what the flowers do not know, she knows.
A precious jade among jades
But with a fragrance that no jade possesses.

Ximen Qing was entranced. Although he had not touched her, his heart was hers. Yueniang and the others took her to the inner hall and there they greeted one another. Then Ximen Qing was sent for. He hastily put straight his hat and clothes and rushed in. To him the young lady seemed like a tree of jade come to this world from paradise, an angel from the Wu Mountain. He bowed very low. His heart was beating fast and his eyes were dazzled. It was all he could do to control himself. When he had greeted her, he withdrew.

Yueniang entertained her guests in the arbor. They had tea. Then the musicians played and the guests took their places in the great hall. Lady Lin sat in the place of honor. The actors played two acts of *Little T'ien Hsiang Worshipping the Stars at Midnight*. Then the four singing girls came to sing the song of the lanterns. Meanwhile, Ximen Qing and his friends were drinking wine elsewhere, and the three boys, Li Ming, Wu Hui, and Zheng Chun, sang for them. But, all the time, Ximen Qing was peeping through the window into the great hall.

Readers, the moon cannot always be at the full, and the most glorious clouds are soon dispersed. Happiness reaches its height, but sorrow follows after. So, too, when ill fortune reaches its climax, consolation is at hand. This is the will of Heaven. Ximen Qing thought of nothing but of gaining renown and increasing his riches: he spent himself in luxurious living and the pursuit of women, and never checked himself. He did not realize that Heaven abhors extremes. But the officers of Hell were coming to summon him. His days were nearly done.

That evening, the lanterns were lighted and the boys sang. Even before the first night watch, Ximen Qing was snoring as he sat with the others. Bojue, trying to rouse him, asked him to play games and guess fingers.

"What makes you so sleepy, Brother?" he said. "Are you not happy today?"

"I did not sleep very well last night," Ximen said. "Today, I don't seem to have any energy."

The 4 singing girls came to them. Bojue bade 2 of them sing and the other 2 serve the wine. They were drinking happily when Daian came and said, "Lady Lin and Mistress He are going." Ximen Qing hastily left the table and stood in the shadow beside the second door to watch them go. Yueniang and the others came with them and, when they reached the courtyard, they waited for a while to look at the fireworks. Mistress He had changed her clothes. She was wearing a scarlet cloak with sables. Lady Lin wore a white silk coat with sable cape, gold pins, and jade ornaments. Servants, with lanterns, took the ladies to their chairs. Ximen Qing looked at them with starving eyes; his mouth watered so that he could hardly swallow. But they were beyond his reach. At that moment—it might have happened in a fairy tale—Laijue's wife, seeing that the ladies had gone, came from the inner court. So she met Ximen Qing and could not get away. She was a pretty young woman and Ximen had long desired to possess her. She was not so sprightly as Laiwang's wife had been, but she was not far behind her. Ximen was stirred by the wine he had drunk. He took the woman in his arms, carried her into her room, and kissed her. This woman had once been a maid in a princely household, but she had carried on with her master and had been sent away through the jealousy of the other servants. Today the same fate overtook her, and she had to yield. She slipped her tongue into his mouth. They both undressed. Ximen put her on the edge of the bed and raised her legs. Then he took his pleasure of her.

## 102

### The End of Hsi-men Ch'ing in his Sexual Indulgence Incurs an Illness; Wu Yüeh-niang Bears a Child upon the Death of her Husband

Even the kindest of men are seldom able to maintain consistency;
Be careful, whatever you do, never to say, "It doesn't matter."
Those who always strive for precedence resort to evil devices;
Words that are uttered in due turn have a more enduring savor.
A surfeit of tasty foodstuffs will end up making you sick;
Pleasurable events, once over, are sure to result in disaster.
Rather than having to seek for medicine after you are sick;
It would be better to take preventive steps before falling ill.[1]

THESE 8 LINES of poetry are by Shao Yung. Their message is that:
The Way of Heaven ensures fortune for the good;[2]
Both ghosts and spirits are inimical to excess.
Those whose conduct is good will be rewarded with 100 blessings;
Those whose conduct is evil will be rewarded with 100 disasters.[3]
Hsi-men Ch'ing only knew how to:
Defile the wife and children of another,[4]
but remained:
Unaware that his own death was imminent.

That day, after encountering Lai-chüeh's wife in the enclosed passageway and committing adultery with her, he went back to the summerhouse and continued drinking with Wu K'ai, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh.

The wife of Commander-General Ching Chung, the wife of Militia Commander Chang Kuan, Ch'iao Hung's wife, Ts'ui Pen's mother, Wu Yüeh-niang's elder sister, Wu K'ai's wife, and Big Sister Tuan remained for some time. It was only after the Lantern Festival dumplings had been served that they prepared to go, said their farewells, got into their sedan chairs, and departed. Wu K'ai's wife and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third Sister Cheng, accompanied each other on the way home. Ch'en Ching-chi sent off the troupe of actors from the household of Wang the Second, the distaff relative of the imperial family, with two taels of silver as remuneration for their performance, after seeing that they were provided with food and wine. The four singing girls, and the boy actors, were still in the summerhouse meanwhile, where they continued to play their musical instruments, sing, and pour wine for the company.

Ying Po-chüeh said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Brother, tomorrow is Hua Tzu-yu's birthday. Have you sent a present to him, or not?"

"I sent something to him this morning," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Tai-an said, "Hua Tzu-yu's household has already sent Lai-ting to us with an invitation for the occasion."

"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "are you going to go tomorrow, or not? I can come over and go with you."

"I'll have to see how I feel tomorrow," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Actually, you'd better go ahead on your own, and I'll follow when I feel up to it."

After serving a round of wine, the four singing girls went back to the rear compound, and Li Ming and the other boy actors came forward to play their instruments and sing for the company. Hsi-men Ch'ing, meanwhile, was constantly dozing off on his chair.

Observing this, Wu K'ai said, "Brother-in-law, you have been wearing yourself out for days on end. Enough is enough. We had better bid you farewell."

Thereupon, they got up to go, but Hsi-men Ch'ing held them back and insisted on their resuming their seats. It was not until the second watch that the party broke up. Hsi-men Ch'ing saw off the four singing girls in their sedan chairs and then rewarded Li Ming and the other two boy actors with two large goblets of wine apiece and gave them six mace of silver for their performance.

As they were about to go out the gate, he called Li Ming back and said to him, "On the fifteenth, I'm going to invite His Honor Chou Hsiu, His Honor Ching Chung, and His Honor Ho Yung-shou to a party. Would you, as soon as possible, engage the services of four singing girls for the occasion on my behalf? It is important that you not be remiss about it."

Li Ming knelt down before him and inquired, "Father, which four do you want?"

Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "Fan Pai-chia-nu, Ch'in Yü-chih, that Feng Chin-pao who sang the other day at His Honor Ho Yung-shou's place, and Lü Sai-erh. Do your best to engage them for me."

Li Ming assented, saying, "I understand," and then kowtowed and departed.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing went back to Yüeh-niang's room in the rear compound, she said to him, "Today, at the party, Lady Lin and Ching Chung's wife really enjoyed each others' company and stayed quite late before going home. Ching Chung's wife also expressed to me her thanks for the support you have rendered her husband, saying:

'Whatever benefit he may obtain,
He will never dare to forget it.'

Next month he is going to report to the Huai River region to take charge of speeding up the grain transport system."

She then went on to say, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou's wife also had a lot to drink today. She took a liking to Sister Six, who took her into the garden to see the artificial hill. All of the guests today gave generous gifts to the singing girls."

When they had finished talking, Hsi-men Ch'ing chose to spend the night there in the master suite.

In the middle of the night, Yüeh-niang had a dream which she described to Hsi-men Ch'ing the next morning, saying, "No doubt it was because I had noticed the robe of crimson velvet that Lady Lin was wearing at the party, but during the night I dreamed that you had taken a robe of crimson velvet out of Li P'ing-erh's trunk and given it to me to wear, when Sister P'an the Sixth grabbed it away from me and put it on herself. This really annoyed me, and I said to her, 'You have already demanded her fur coat for yourself, and now you are taking this robe as well.' At which, in a fit of temper, she tore a large hole in the robe, which caused me to get into a shouting match with her that woke me up. To my surprise, it turned out to be nothing but:
A dream of the Southern Branch."

"When you woke up," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "you were cursing angrily. It's not important. I'll find one like it for you to wear in the future, that's all. It has always been true that:
Dreams are produced by what is on your mind."

When Hsi-men Ch'ing got up the next day, his head felt heavy, and he did not feel well enough to go to the yamen. After combing his hair and washing his face, he put on his clothes and went out to his studio in the front compound, where he sat down and warmed himself at the brazier. Who should appear at this juncture but Yü-hsiao, who had gone over to Ju-i's room that morning and had her squeeze out half a cup of milk, which she brought to the studio for Hsi-men Ch'ing to take with his medicine. She found Hsi-men Ch'ing reclining on the bed while Wang Ching pummeled his thighs for him. On seeing Yü-hsiao come in, Wang Ching withdrew. After she had helped him to take his medicine, Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a pair of gold-plated hairpins and four silver-coated pewter rings and told her to deliver them to the quarters of Lai-chüeh's wife. When Yü-hsiao heard her master send her on this mission, it reminded her of the affair of Lai-wang's wife, and being quick to:
Stick her head into any cranny,
she tucked them into her sleeve and went off on her errand.

Having delivered the objects, she came back to report to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying, "She accepted them and said that she would kowtow to you on another day."

Taking the empty cup with her, she went back to the master suite, where Yüeh-niang asked her, "If Father has already taken his medicine, what is he doing in his studio?"

"He didn't say," responded Yü-hsiao.

"You should heat up some congee for him," Yüeh-niang told her, but when breakfast time had come and gone, he had not yet returned.

It so happens that Wang Ching had delivered a package of gifts from his sister Wang Liu-erh, which he handed to Hsi-men Ch'ing to look at, and extended her invitation for him to visit her at home. When Hsi-men Ch'ing opened the paper wrapping, he found a lock of her dark-black glossy hair, bound into a circlet with variegated satin displaying the motif of "joined hearts," and with two brocade straps attached to it, so that it could be fastened around the root of his chowrie handle. It was a work of exquisite craftsmanship. In addition, there was a wallet with two pockets, decorated with a pair of mandarin ducks, with a diapered border of close-stitched embroidered brocade, and filled with melon seeds. Hsi-men Ch'ing admired them for some time and was utterly delighted. Eventually, he put the wallet in the bookcase and tucked the brocade circlet into his sleeve.

Just as he was lost in thought, Wu Yüeh-niang suddenly came in. Lifting aside the portiere, she saw that he was lying on the bed, while Wang Ching knelt beside him, pummeling his thighs.

"Why do you insist on staying here in the front compound," she said, "instead of coming back to our quarters, where your congee is waiting for you? Tell me what's going on. How are you feeling, that you seem to be so lethargic?"

"I don't know why," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I'm feeling out of sorts, and I'm suffering from pain in the thighs."

"I imagine it must be due to the advent of spring," said Yüeh-niang. "Take your medicine, and go easy on your way back."

Having induced him to return to the master suite, and fed him his congee, she said, "During a major festival like this, you had better pluck up your spirits. Today is the birthday of Hua Tzu-yu, who resides outside the city wall, and he has invited you to pay him a visit. You can summon Ying the Second to go with you."

"He's not at home," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "He's already left to attend Hua Tzu-yu's birthday party. If you would have some wine and food prepared for me, I could go pay a visit to the house by the Lantern Market and share a drink with Brother-in-law Wu the Second."

"You might as well saddle up your horse and go," said Yüeh-niang. "I'll have the maidservants prepare the food and wine for you."

Hsi-men Ch'ing, thereupon, told Tai-an to prepare his horse, asked Wang Ching to accompany him, put on his clothes, and headed straight for the Lantern Market on Lion Street. What did the Lantern Market look like? Behold:
Carriages and horses rumble like thunder;
The round lanterns are ablaze with color.
The revelers swarm like ants;
The merrymaking is at its height.
In this era of great peace,[5] beneficent
breezes enhance the scene;

Beauties in gauze and silk return after
showing off their finery.
Hills of lanterns soar into the heights[6]
above the azure clouds;
From whence do revelers not congregate
to take in the sights?[7]

After pausing to admire the lanterns, Hsi-men Ch'ing proceeded to the door of the house on Lion Street, where he dismounted, went inside, and sat down. This threw Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth into such consternation that they both hastened to come forward and welcome him with a bow, reporting that the shop was doing a thriving business. Laichao's wife, "The Beanpole," quickly lit a brazier in the studio and provided a serving of tea. It was not long before Wu Yüeh-niang sent Ch'in-t'ung and Lai-an to deliver two square boxes of appetizers and other dishes to go with the drinks. There was a supply of mung bean wine in the shop that had been brought back from the South, a jug of which was opened and taken upstairs to be heated on the brazier in the studio. Hsi-men Ch'ing invited Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth to join him in toasting each other as they drank, and they enjoyed the spectacle of the Lantern Market right outside the window, where crowds of people moved back and forth incessantly, and the goods purveyed by the various guilds were piled up like mountains.

When they had indulged themselves until after the normal lunch hour, Hsi-men Ch'ing sent Wang Ching to inform Wang Liu-erh of his visit. Upon hearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing was coming, Wang Liu-erh prepared a table replete with boxes of candied fruit, wine, and other delicacies and awaited his arrival. Hsi-men Ch'ing told Lai-chao to keep what was left of the table setting of food and wine for Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth to enjoy that evening while on night duty, rather than sending it home. He also directed Ch'in-t'ung to deliver a jug of wine to Wang Liu-erh's place, after which he mounted his horse and made his way directly to her home.

The woman had dressed herself up to welcome him and conducted him into the parlor, where she kowtowed to him four times:

Just as if inserting a taper in its holder.

Hsi-men Ch'ing responded by saying, "I am grateful for your lavish gifts on more than one occasion, but why is it that the last two times we invited you to our home you failed to come?"

"Father, that's a fine way to talk," she said. "Who else is there to look after the place? I don't know why it is, but the last few days I've been feeling out of sorts, and haven't even felt like eating or drinking. I've hardly been able to get started on anything."

"No doubt," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "it's because you've been longing for your old man."

"Since when have I been longing for him?" the woman responded. "It's rather because you have neglected me for such a long time. I don't know how I have been remiss toward you that you should put me in the position of:

The rings that hold your hairnet in place, always
at the back of your head.

I fear you must have found someone else who is uppermost in your mind."

Hsi-men Ch'ing laughed, saying, "Where did you get any such idea? It's simply because during this festival season I've been busy entertaining people at our place the last few days."

"I have heard that yesterday you entertained a bunch of female guests," said the woman.

"That is true," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "The First Lady had been entertained at two New Year's parties and felt obliged to put on a party in return."

"What female guests were invited?" the woman asked.

"So-and-so and so-and-so," Hsi-men Ch'ing responded, and went on to run through the list from beginning to end.

"So," the woman responded, "for your lantern-viewing party you only invited important guests, but not the likes of me."

"Don't make such a thing out of it," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "In days to come, on the sixteenth of the first month, we're going to have a party for the wives of my managers and employees, to which you had better come, and not make any excuses for not doing so."

"If Mother deigns to send me an invitation," the woman said, "how would I dare not to come? However, the other day, that young lady from your household reviled Second Sister Shen so severely that she was filled with resentment and took it out on me. That day, she had not wanted to go, and it was I who persuaded her to do so. Afterwards, when she came back after suffering such abuse, she broke down and cried like anything, to my extreme mortification; and it was only after you and Mother sent a box of delicacies and a tael of silver to mollify her, that she stopped complaining. I was unaware that the young lady in question had such an explosive temper. After all:

Before beating a dog, you ought to consider
the face of its owner."[8]

"You don't know that little oily mouth," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "She's got an extremely gutsy personality and has even been known to brazen it out with me. But if she asked Second Sister Shen to sing a song for her, why should she have refused to do so? Whoever told her not only to refuse to sing, but to criticize her into the bargain?"

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" the woman protested. "She assured me that she had never criticized the young lady, but that she came barging in, pointed a finger at her, and began to abuse her, telling her to get out. By the time she got back here, she was in terrible shape and broke out crying:

Sniveling three ribbons of snot, and
Dribbling two rivulets of tears.

I kept her here overnight before sending her home the next day."

After they had talked for a while, a maidservant brought in a serving of tea. The page boy Chin-ts'ai had gone out to purchase appetizers, fresh fish, and other viands, which Old Mother Feng was preparing in the kitchen. She also came out and kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave her a lump of silver worth three or four mace and said, "Since your mistress died, you have not visited my place very often."

Wang Liu-erh said, "Since her mistress died, what reason would she have to do that? Instead, she frequently comes here to keep me company."

In a little while, when her room had been straightened up, the woman invited Hsi-men Ch'ing to come inside and sit down, asking him, "Father, have you eaten lunch, or not?"

"I had a little congee at home this morning," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and just now I shared a snack with Brother-in-law Wu the Second, but I haven't had a real meal."

A table was, accordingly, set up and a spread laid out to go with the wine, consisting of festival foods, and fine delicacies of all kinds. The woman told Wang Ching to open the jug of mung bean wine, and fill their cups so she could have a drink with Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The woman then said, "Father, I assume that you have looked over the gift that I sent you. I coiled up and cut off a lock of hair from the crown of my head and fashioned it with my own hands. I'm sure that it must have tickled your fancy."

"I'm grateful for your consideration," said Hsi-men Ch'ing.

After they had:

Drunk until they were half inebriated,[9]

observing that they were alone in the room, Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled it out of his sleeve, placed it around the base of his organ, and tied the two brocaded straps around his waist. He also attached a "Yunnanese tickler"[10] to his turtle head and washed down a dose of the Indian monk's medicine with his wine. The woman started to manipulate his organ with her hand, and in no time at all:

Its protuberances swelled, its head sprang up,
Its distended blood vessels were all exposed,

and it was the color of purple liver. The device proved to be more than a match for the silver clasp or the white satin band. Hsi-men Ch'ing pulled the woman onto his lap and inserted his organ into her vagina, while up above, the two of them passed the same goblet back and forth between them as they drank wine and sucked each other's tongues. The woman also used the tip of her tongue to pass nut kernels into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth.

They continued to play with each other as they ate and drank until lamplighting time, when Old Mother Feng came in from the kitchen with some pork and leek pastries that she had made. The woman and Hsi-men Ch'ing ate two of them apiece, after which a maidservant took the leftovers away. The two of them then made their way to the heated k'ang in the inner room where they:

Lifted aside the brocade curtains,
Took off their clothes, and went to bed.

The woman knew that Hsi-men Ch'ing liked to engage in intercourse by lamplight, so she moved a lampstand from the parlor and placed it on a table beside the k'ang. She then proceeded to close the sliding paper door, wash her private parts, and put on a pair of slippers made of crimson Lu-chou silk with flat white satin soles; after which, she took off her drawers, burrowed her way under the bedclothes, and snuggled up to Hsi-men Ch'ing. As they hugged and embraced each other, they dozed off for a while.

It so happens that Hsi-men Ch'ing's mind was totally obsessed with Ho Yung-shou's wife, née Lan; and, as a result, his
Lecherous desires were on fire,
and his organ became stiff and hard. He started out by telling the woman to get down on all fours in front of him and then inserted his organ into the flower in her rear courtyard and proceeded to slam away at her as hard as he could two or three hundred times; slamming into her bottom so hard that:

The reiterated sounds reverberated loudly,

while the woman beneath him stimulated her clitoris with her hand and called out "Daddy" unceasingly.

Thereupon, still not completely satisfied, he got up and put on a short jacket of white satin, sat down on a pillow, and had the woman recline face up, while he sought out two of her foot bindings and used them to suspend her feet from the bed posts on either side so that she appeared like "A Golden Dragon Extending Its Claws." Upon inserting his organ into her vagina, he began alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans, as he gave himself over to a series of shallow retractions and deep thrusts. As his organ continued to be half exposed and half submerged, he finally started:

Advancing with alacrity and galloping forward.

Fearing that the woman might be cold, he also covered her body with a short jacket of red satin. Exhilarated by the wine he had consumed, Hsi-men Ch'ing moved the lampstand closer and:

Bent his head in order the better to savor,
The marvelous sight as it went in and out,

while he retracted his organ as far as the knob of the glans, and then plunged it in all the way up to the root another several hundred times. Meanwhile the woman gave vent to her feelings in a hundred ways:

In a faint voice and trembling tones.

Hsi-men Ch'ing also took some of the pink ointment the Indian monk had given him and daubed it on his turtle head before plunging it back in. The woman's vagina was so intensely stimulated that she could hardly bear it, and she begged him to penetrate more deeply as they responded to each other. But Hsi-men Ch'ing deliberately lingered, playfully dallying around the mouth of her vagina and titillating her clitoris, while refusing to penetrate more deeply, which aroused the woman to the point that her vaginal fluids began to flow, like a snail secreting its slime. As he moved back and forth, it agitated her clitoris in a pleasurable way. By the light of the lamp, Hsi-men Ch'ing contemplated her two fresh white legs, clad in crimson shoes, as they were suspended high on either side. As they moved back and forth, lunging and butting at each other, he could hardly contain his excitement.

Thereupon, he called out, "Whore that you are, do you care for me, or not?"

"How could I not care for my daddy?" the woman responded. "So long as you remain constant like:

The pine and the cypress that are evergreen
through both winter and summer,

everything will be fine; but you must not:

Grow distant and aloof as the days go by,[11]

and choose to ignore me once you've had your fill of fun. Though I should long to death for you, who could I tell about it, and who would care? When that cuckold of mine comes home, there would be no point in my telling him about it. I hardly think that while he is away from home on business and has money in hand, he chooses to remain chaste for love of me."

"My child," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "if you can dedicate yourself exclusively to me, when he comes home I'll simply find another wife for him, and you can devote yourself to me on a long-term basis."

"My own daddy," the woman responded, "when he comes home, go ahead, whatever happens, and find him another wife. You can either maintain me outside, or take me into your household, whichever you like. This whore of yours will simply abandon her worthless body to you, that's all. There is no wish of yours that I will refuse to comply with."

"I understand," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.

While they talked together, they had been going at it for the time it would take to eat two meals before Hsi-men Ch'ing finally ejaculated. He then unfastened the woman's foot bindings and proceeded to embrace her under the bedclothes. The two of them:

Head to head and thigh over thigh,
As their drunken eyes grew bleary,[12]

slept until the third watch before waking up.

Hsi-men Ch'ing got out of bed, put on his clothes, and washed his hands, while the woman opened the door of the room and called in a maidservant.

Thereupon, they:

Replenished the special delicacies,
Resumed drinking the fragrant wine,
Decanting the warmed-over beverage,

and drank another ten cups or more together. Only after they began to feel intoxicated did they proceed to pour some tea and rinse out their mouths with it.

Hsi-men Ch'ing then groped a card out of his sleeve and handed it to the woman, saying, "Show this to Kan Jun, the manager of my silk goods store, and have him give you an outfit of clothes to wear, of any pattern you choose."

The woman thanked Hsi-men Ch'ing with a bow and saw him to the door. Wang Ching was there to hold the lantern for him, and Tai-an and Ch'int'ung stood by with his horse. Only after she had seen him into the saddle did the woman return inside and shut the door.

Hsi-men Ch'ing sat on his horse wearing a purple sheep's wool coat and a scarf wrapped around his neck. It was already the third watch of the night and dark clouds in the sky:

Darkened and obscured,[13]

the light of the moon. Silence had descended over the marketplace, the nine thoroughfares were empty, and the only sound to be heard in the streets was the rattle of the night watchman:

Shouting the hour and ringing his bell.

Hsi-men Ch'ing gave his horse a touch with the whip and started on his way. Just as he arrived in front of the stone bridge at the western end of the street, a dark shadow swirled up from under the bridge and lunged at him. At the sight of the shadow his horse shied and Hsi-men Ch'ing felt a cold shiver go up his spine. [14] Drunkenly he struck his horse with his whip and it shook its mane. Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung pulled on the bridle with all their might but were unable to hold the beast in check. Like a cloud scudding before the wind, the horse bolted for home and only slowed to a halt when it reached the front gate. Wang Ching, who had charge of the lantern, was unable to catch up with them.

When Hsi-men Ch'ing dismounted, he was unsteady on his legs and had to be helped inside by the servants, whereupon he went straight to P'an Chin-lien's quarters in the front garden. Nothing might have happened if he had not gone there, but since he did go, truly, it was a case of:

A sleepy slugabed encountering the General
of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into
Chung K'uei.[15]

It so happens that P'an Chin-lien had returned to her quarters from the rear compound but had not yet gone to sleep. Without bothering to undress she had stretched out on the k'ang to wait for Hsi-men Ch'ing. When she heard him come in, she hastily crawled to her feet and came forward to take his clothes from him. He was obviously stinking drunk, and she didn't dare ask him where he had been.

Hsi-men Ch'ing embraced her as best he could with one hand resting on her shoulder and mumbled, "You little whore! Your Daddy's drunk tonight. Get the bed ready so I can go to sleep."

The woman helped him onto the k'ang and got him bedded down for the night. No sooner did Hsi-men Ch'ing's head hit the pillow than he began:

Snoring thunderously,

and could not be shaken awake. The woman then removed her own clothes, burrowed her way under the bedclothes, and began lazily to grope around his loins for his organ. It was as soft as cotton and as lifeless as could be.

"Wherever has he come from?" she wondered as she:
Tossed first this way and then that,
unable to withstand:
The flames of desire that consumed her body;
The lustful visions that disturbed her mind.
For some time she devoted herself to manipulating his organ with her hand. Then she crouched down under the covers and teased it with her lips a hundred ways, but it refused to rise.
Frustrated beyond endurance, she asked Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Where have you put the monk's medicine?"
She had to shake him for what seemed like half a day before he woke up.
"You crazy little whore!" Hsi-men Ch'ing protested. "What makes you so demanding? You want your daddy to take care of you, but today your daddy's just not up to it. The medicine's in the cylindrical gold pillbox in the sleeve of my jacket. Go ahead and take some. If you can suck the thing till it stands up, more power to you."
The woman groped in the sleeve of his jacket until she found the pillbox. When she opened it she saw that there were only three or four pills left.[16] She picked up a flask of distilled spirits, poured some into a cup, and took one of the pills. She feared that the normal dosage would not be enough to do the trick so although:
She never, ever, should have done it,
she put all three pills into his mouth and washed them down with a draught of distilled spirits. Too drunk to know what he was doing, Hsi-men Ch'ing closed his eyes and swallowed the whole dose.
In less time than it takes to drink a cup of hot tea, the medicine began to take effect. The moment the woman tied the white satin band around the root of his organ:
It sprang lustily to life.[17]
Behold:
In the bursting melon-head the sunken eye
grows round;
Trailing its side whiskers the body swells
itself erect.
Although she realized full well that all her partner wanted to do was go back to sleep, the woman sat astride his body,[18] put a glob of aphrodisiac ointment in the mouth of his urethra, and plunged the object into her vagina. Thus impaled, she gave herself over to wriggling until the tip of his organ penetrated all the way to her cervix. She felt a melting sensation as though her whole body were turning numb,[19] the pleasure of which was indescribable. Then, supporting herself on the pillow with both hands, she raised and lowered her hips, alternately submerging and exposing the knob of his glans one or two hundred times. At first it felt uncomfortably tight, but once her vaginal secretions began to flow it grew more slippery.
Hsi-men Ch'ing let her disport herself as she pleased without paying any attention.[20] The woman could control herself no longer. Sticking her tongue into Hsi-men Ch'ing's mouth, she put her arms around his neck and wriggled for all she was worth, rubbing up against him this way and that. His chowrie handle was totally submerged inside her, all the way up to the root, while only his two testicles remained outside. Meanwhile she stimulated herself with her hand until she began to feel inexpressible delight. [21] She wiped away her vaginal secretions but they continued to flow. By the time the third watch was over she had used up five napkins for this purpose[22] and had two orgasms in rapid succession.[23]
But Hsi-men Ch'ing did not ejaculate. His turtle head had swollen larger than ever and turned the color of purple liver.[24]
Its distended blood vessels were all exposed,
and it was as hot as fire to the touch. It was gorged with blood, and though he told the woman to remove the band that was tied around its root, it continued to swell without ceasing. He told her to suck it, and so she crouched over his body, engulfed his turtle head with her ruby lips, and proceeded to move it:
Back and forth without stopping.
She continued for as much time as it would take to eat a meal, until the semen in his urethra spurted out en masse like mercury pouring into a bucket. She tried to catch it in her mouth and swallow it but she wasn't quick enough.
The emission went on and on. At first it was semen but it soon changed to blood. There was no stopping it. Hsi-men Ch'ing had fainted and his four limbs lay inert. In a state of panic the woman put a red date into his mouth and he swallowed it. [25] When the flow of semen ceased, it was followed by blood;[26] when the flow of blood stopped, nothing came out but a discharge of cold air. It was some time before this came to an end.
The woman was beside herself. Embracing Hsi-men Ch'ing, she asked, "My darling, what do you feel like inside?"
When Hsi-men Ch'ing finally came to, he said:
"My head feels so dizzy,
I hardly know where I am."[27]
"Why did you have such a big discharge today?" she asked, but said nothing of the overdose of aphrodisiac she had given him.
Gentle reader take note:
The vitality of the individual is finite, but
The prurience in this world is unlimited.
It has also been said that:
Where desires and cravings are deep,
The Heavenly impulse is shallow.[28]
Hsi-men Ch'ing sought only his own sexual gratification but did not realize that:
When its oil is used up the lamp goes out;
When his marrow is drained a man will die.
It so happens that the allure of feminine beauty ensnares men in such a way that:
Where there is initial success,
There will be ultimate disaster.[29]
A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that put this very well:
A flower-faced guardian god,
A jade-fleshed demon king,[30]
She is a ravenous beast attired
in silk and satin.
Her bed is an execution ground,
Her ivory couch a penitentiary.
Her willowy brows are blades,
Her starry eyes are swords,
Her ruby lips are spears.
Her sweet mouth and her fragrant tongue,
Mask the designs of a snake or scorpion;[31]
No one who succumbs to her is able
to avoid disaster.
They are but fine dust in fluid,
Or snowflakes in scalding water.
The states of Ch'in and Ch'u were hardy,
The states of Wu and Yüeh were powerful,
But they perished on her account.
You may be warned that beauty is
a deadly sword,
That slays us all; but few defend
themselves.[32]
The beauty of sixteen[33] has a body
as smooth as cream,
Her loins are a sword[34] with which
to slay the unwary.
Though no one may see your head
fall from your neck,
Before you know it, the marrow
of your bones is sapped.[35]
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
Early the next morning Hsi-men Ch'ing got up and started to comb his hair when he was suddenly overcome by a spell of dizziness, which caused him to pitch forward in his chair. Fortunately Ch'un-mei caught him in her arms and prevented him from falling to the floor and hurting his head or face. She sat him back in his chair, and it was some time before he recovered.
Chin-lien was alarmed and blurted out, "You must be feeling debilitated from lack of food. You had better just sit where you are and have something to eat before going anywhere."
She told Ch'iu-chü, "Go back to the kitchen and fetch some congee for Father to eat."
Ch'iu-chü went back to the kitchen in the rear compound and said to Sun Hsüeh-o, "Is the congee ready yet? This morning, thus and so, when Father got up he had a spell of vertigo that nearly caused him to collapse. He needs some congee to eat right away."
Wu Yüeh-niang happened to overhear what Ch'iu-chü said and called her into her presence to ask what had happened. Ch'iu-chü told her the whole story of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had felt so light-headed that morning that he had nearly fallen over while combing his hair.
If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it:
Her ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and
Her material souls fled to the Nine Heavens.
After telling Sun Hsüeh-o to prepare the congee right away, she headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters to see for herself what condition her husband was in.
She found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting in a chair and asked him, "What brought about this attack of giddiness today?"
"I don't know what's the matter with me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "A little while ago I just started feeling woozy."
"It's lucky Ch'un-mei and I were here to catch him," said Chin-lien. "Otherwise, light-headed as he was, he might have had a really nasty fall."
"You must have stayed out late last night," said Yüeh-niang, "and had more to drink than was good for you. It's still affecting your head."
"Whose place were you drinking at anyway," demanded Chin-lien, "that you didn't get back until such an hour?"
"He was drinking with my second brother in the shop on Lion Street," said Yüeh-niang.
Before long, Sun Hsüeh-o finished boiling the congee and told Ch'iu-chü to take it to Hsi-men Ch'ing to eat. Hsi-men Ch'ing took up the congee but lost interest after eating only half a bowl and put it down again.
"What are you feeling inside?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"Nothing in particular," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "just empty and queasy, and not much like doing anything."
"You really shouldn't go to the yamen today," said Yüeh-niang.
"I'm not going to," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied. "In a while I'll go out to the front compound and get Ch'en Ching-chi to write out the invitations and send them off. I'm inviting Chou Hsiu, Ching Chung, Ho Yung-shou, and some other officials to come over for a drink on the fifteenth."
"You haven't taken your medicine yet today," said Yüeh-niang. "Get your milk and take another dose with it. You've been overextending yourself for days on end and have let yourself get run down."
She had Ch'un-mei ask Ju-i to squeeze a little of her milk into a cup for him and watched Hsi-men Ch'ing take his medicine before getting up and going to the front compound. Ch'un-mei helped him along, but before he had gotten as far as the postern gate into the garden he started to black out. Unable to stand on his tottering legs, he would have fallen down if Ch'un-mei had not been there to help him back inside.
"If I were you," said Yüeh-niang, "I'd take it easy for a couple of days and forget about inviting all those people. Who cares about things like that at a time like this? Stay at home and rest for a few days, and forget about going out."
"And if there's anything you'd specially like to eat," she added. "I'll go back to the kitchen and get the maidservants to prepare it for you."
"I don't feel like eating anything," Hsi-men Ch'ing replied.
When Yüeh-niang returned to the rear compound, she questioned Chin-lien again, saying, "If he wasn't already drunk when he came home last night, and he didn't have anything more to drink, what sort of shenanigans was he up to with you?"
When Chin-lien heard this, she:
Wished she had more mouths than nature had provided,
so that she could issue a thousand denials.
"Sister," she protested, "needless to say, by the time he got home he was so drunk he didn't even bother to greet me. On top of which, he demanded that I bring him distilled spirits so he could continue drinking. I gave him tea instead, telling him I didn't have any spirits, and then put him right to bed. Ever since you spoke to me about it, who would have dared to have anything to do with him in that way? How embarrassing can you get? It may well be that he had been up to something outside. Of course, I wouldn't know about that. But I can assure you that absolutely nothing of the kind occurred after he got home."
Yüeh-niang, who was sitting there along with Meng Yü-lou, called Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung before her and interrogated them, saying, "Where was Father out drinking yesterday? If you tell the truth, I'll let it go at that. But if you engage in:
The slightest deceit or prevarication,
you two jailbirds will be held to account.
Tai-an clenched his teeth and insisted, "He was drinking with Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth in the shop on Lion Street and didn't venture anywhere else."
Later, she called Brother-in-law Wu in to ask him about it, and he said, "Brother-in-law drank with us for only a short time, and then got up and went somewhere else."

When Yüeh-niang heard this she became enraged. As soon as Brother-in-law Wu the Second left, she gave Tai-an and Ch'in-t'ung a real dressing down and threatened them with a beating. The two of them panicked and finally admitted, "Yesterday he went to have a drink with Han Tao-kuo's wife."
This was just the signal that P'an Chin-lien had been waiting for, and she came forward, saying, "Sister, when you showed your resentment against me just now, it was a case of:
Taking things out on an innocent bystander,
while giving the culprit a laugh.
After all:
Every person has a face;
Every tree has its bark.
When you talk about me that way, it makes it look as though, all day long, I give this one thing priority over everything else."
She then went on to say, "Sister, you ought to further ask those two jailbirds why it was that he arrived home so late the other day when you went to the party at Ho Yung-shou's place. Who knows where he had been? It's hardly likely that anyone would stay out that late making a New Year's courtesy call."
Tai-an, who was afraid that Ch'in-t'ung would spill the beans, decided not to conceal the truth any longer and told her all about Hsi-men Ch'ing's surreptitious affair with Lady Lin.
Only then did Yüeh-niang believe him and remark, "No wonder he had me send an invitation to her. I said to him:
'We are newly acquainted and hardly know each other.
I fear she is unlikely to come.' Who could have known that he was having an affair with her? It seems to me that, for someone of her age to:
Paint her eyebrows and dye her hair,
powdering her face till it looks as though it's been plastered with putty, only shows her to be nothing but an aging strumpet."
"Sister," remarked Meng Yü-lou, "who ever heard of anyone with a grown-up son, who has already taken a wife, still carrying on that way? If she can't bear her widowhood, she should take another husband."
"That old whore," pronounced Chin-lien, "shameless as she is, could not accept the disgrace that would entail."
"I said that I feared she would refuse to come," said Yüeh-niang. "Who could have anticipated that she would be wanton enough to exhibit herself that way?"
"As far as she is concerned, Sister," said Chin-lien, "you have finally perceived the difference between black and white. But with regard to that whore of Han Tao-kuo's, you have been critical of me for condemning her. The fact is that their whole household collaborates in affairs like this. Her mate is an open cuckold, and yet our husband continues to support that beggar of a cuckold. In the future he may well prove to be as fatal as a ghost-snatching demon."
"You call Wang the Third's mother an old whore," said Yüeh-niang. "But she says that when you were young you were employed as a servant in their household."
If Chin-lien had not heard this, nothing might have happened, but having heard it, her face turned crimson from her ears to her neck and she started to swear, saying, "That lousy old whore is delirious. What would I be doing in her household for no good reason? The fact is that my maternal aunt lived next door to her.
They had a garden, and when I was staying with my aunt as a child, I used to go over to their place to play with their maidservants. She may claim that I worked for her family, but I don't acknowledge anything of the sort. She's nothing but an:
Open-eyed and brazen-faced,
old whore."
"You'd better watch that mouth of yours," said Yüeh-niang. "I merely told you what she said, and you start cursing her."
Chin-lien did not have another word to say on the subject.
Yüeh-niang then told Sun Hsüeh-o to make some boiled dumplings for Hsi-men Ch'ing, and she set out for the front compound in order to feed them to him.
Just as she got to the ceremonial gate, she saw P'ing-an going into the garden and called him to a halt, saying, "What are you up to?"
"Li Ming has engaged the services of four singing girls to entertain the company at the party on the fifteenth," P'ing-an explained. "He has come to report this and wants to know whether it will take place as planned, or not. I told him the invitations had not yet been sent out, but he didn't believe me and asked me to come in and tell Father about it."
"You crazy louse of a slave!" Yüeh-niang exclaimed. "How can we have a party under the circumstances? What need is there for you to ask about it? Why didn't you simply send that cuckold away, instead of coming to report anything to your master or mistress?"
She railed at P'ing-an until he fled, as though:
Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for him to hide.
Yüeh-niang proceeded on her way to Chin-lien's quarters, where she looked on as Hsi-men Ch'ing ate three or four boiled dumplings before stopping and refusing to eat any more.
She then reported to him, "Li Ming came to report that he had engaged the singing girls, but I sent him away, telling him to cancel the engagement, because the party would have to be called off and rescheduled for another day."
Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded in agreement, assuming that he would probably feel somewhat better in a few days.
Who could have anticipated that, after getting through the night, the next day his depleted organ swelled up, his genitalia became inflamed, and his testicles became so swollen they looked like shiny eggplants. When he urinated, his urethra felt as though it were being scraped with a knife; and every time he did so, it hurt the same way.
His orderlies and attendants had saddled his horse and were waiting outside for Hsi-men Ch'ing, in order to escort him to the yamen to preside over the general disposition of impending cases scheduled for the fifteenth of the month. Who could have foreseen that he would be afflicted with these symptoms?
Yüeh-niang said to him, "If you will do as I suggest, send a note to His Honor Ho Yung-shou, telling him that you are staying at home undergoing treatment for the next few days and can't go to the yamen. If you are feeling so debilitated, you ought to send a page boy, as soon as possible, to ask Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine you, and then take whatever medications he prescribes. You ought not to delay this way. That's no solution. For someone of your constitution not to eat anything to speak of for two days is hardly sustainable."
But Hsi-men Ch'ing would not give his consent to summoning the doctor, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll be all right in a couple of days and should be able to go out by then."
He thereupon sent someone off to the yamen with an explanatory note and a tally entitling him to a leave of absence and then lay down on the bed, but he felt restless and out of sorts.
When Ying Po-chüeh heard about his condition, he came to see him, and Hsi-men Ch'ing invited him into Chin-lien's quarters and offered him a seat.
Ying Po-chüeh bowed to him in greeting and said, "I imposed on your hospitality the other day Brother, but I did not know that you were feeling unwell. It is not surprising that you did not go to Hua Tzu-yu's birthday party."
"If I had felt any better, I would have gone," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I don't know why, but I just didn't feel up to doing anything."
"Brother," asked Ying Po-chüeh, "how are you feeling right now?"
"It doesn't amount to much," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I've had spells of vertigo, and when I stand up, I'm unsteady on my feet and find it difficult to walk."
"I notice that your face is red," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You must be running a fever. Have you sent for someone to examine you, or not?"
"My wife said I ought to invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come and examine me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but I told her that I wasn't suffering from any ailment serious enough to justify calling for him."
"Brother, you are mistaken there," pronounced Ying Po-chüeh. "You ought to invite him to come examine you, and see what he has to say. If you take several doses of whatever he prescribes, it should dissipate your fever, and facilitate your recovery. With the advent of spring, people often suffer this way from outbreaks of phlegm-fire. Yesterday, I ran into Li Ming, who told me that you had asked him to engage the services of some singing girls for a party you were going to hold today, but that you were not feeling well and had postponed the date. This news gave me quite a start, and he suggested that I should come to see you first thing today."
"I wasn't even able to go to the yamen today to preside over the ceremony of bowing before the imperial tablet," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but had to send in the tally that entitles me to a leave of absence."
"It's obvious that you couldn't go," said Ying Po-chüeh. "If you undergo the appropriate medical treatment for a few days, you should be able to go out again."
When he had finished drinking his tea, he said, "I'll go now, and come back to see you later. I should also let you know that Li Kuei-chieh has arranged with Wu Yin-erh to come see how you are."
"Why don't you stay for a meal before you go?" said Hsi-men Ch'ing.
"I don't want anything to eat," said Ying Po-chüeh, as he went nonchalantly off without more ado.
Hsi-men Ch'ing then sent Ch'in-t'ung outside the city gate to invite Dr. Jen Hou-ch'i to come examine him.
When he came into the room and took his pulse, he said, "This ailment of yours, venerable sir, is a case of vacuity fire flaming upward, and the depletion of semen in your testicles. This lack of equilibrium in your system is symptomatic of a loss of yang energy. Your yin vacuity must be replenished before you can recover."
When he had finished pronouncing his diagnosis, he took his leave, got up, and left.
Hsi-men Ch'ing sealed up five mace of silver in order to pay for the medication he prescribed and took it; but although it put a stop to his bouts of vertigo, his body remained as weak as ever, and he could not stand up. Down below, his scrotum continued to swell painfully, and he found it extremely difficult to urinate.
That afternoon, Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh came to see him in their sedan chairs, bringing with them two gift boxes apiece, containing stuffed pastries, rose-flavored gold-colored tarts, a set of pig's feet, and two roast ducks.
Upon entering the room, and kowtowing to Hsi-men Ch'ing, they said, "Father, what is it that's troubling you?"
"It is enough that you two sisters should come to see me," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "What need was there for you to take the trouble to purchase gifts for me?"
He then went on to say, "I don't know why, but this year I am afflicted with unusually severe phlegm-fire."
"Father," said Li Kuei-chieh, "you must have been drinking too heavily during this festival season. If you will only abstain for a few days, you should recover."
After sitting with him for a while, they went over to Li P'ing-erh's quarters, to convey their holiday greetings to Yüeh-niang and the others. They were invited back to the rear compound and served tea, after which, they returned to the front compound, intending to sit down and visit with Hsi-men Ch'ing.
In the interim, Ying Po-chüeh, accompanied by Hsieh Hsi-ta and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, had come to see him. Hsi-men Ch'ing asked Yü-hsiao to help him up to a sitting position and retained his three visitors, calling for a table to be set up, so they could drink together.
"Has Brother had any congee to eat, or not?" inquired Hsieh Hsi-ta.
Yü-hsiao turned her head away and did not respond, but Hsi-men Ch'ing said, "I haven't had any congee. I don't seem to be able to swallow it."
"Go get some congee," suggested Hsieh Hsi-ta. "We'll keep Brother company as he eats it. That ought to help."
Before long, she came back with some congee and stood by him with a cup of it in hand, while his guests kept him company by eating snacks and other refreshments. Hsi-men Ch'ing took up the congee but only managed to scoop down half a cup of it before he stopped eating. Meanwhile, Yüeh-niang was entertaining Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh in Li P'ing-erh's quarters next door.
Ying Po-chüeh asked, "Why are Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh not to be seen?"
"They are sitting right next door," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Ying Po-chüeh then turned to Lai-an and said, "You go over there and invite them to come here and sing a song suite for your master's entertainment."
Wu Yüeh-niang was afraid that Hsi-men Ch'ing was in no shape to be thus entertained and refused to let them go on the grounds that they were having a drink together.
After his guests had drunk together for a time, they said, "Brother, we fear that if you continue to sit up with us, you may wear yourself out. We'd better go, so you can lie back down for a while."
"I appreciate your concern for me," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing.
The three of them then said goodbye and proceeded to leave.
When Ying Po-chüeh had gone through the little gate to the courtyard, he called Tai-an over and said to him, "Tell the First Lady that Ying the Second reported that your Father's face has changed color, a sign of stagnant circulation, and that she ought to have someone come and examine him as soon as possible. Dr. Hu, who resides on Main Street, is especially proficient at treating phlegm-fire. Why don't you have someone go and invite him to come and examine him? There is no time to be wasted."
Tai-an did not dare to be remiss and promptly went to report this to Yüeh-niang.
Yüeh-niang hastily went into the room he was in and said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "Ying the Second, just now, told Tai-an that Dr. Hu, who resides on Main Street, is good at treating phlegm-fire. Why don't you invite him to come examine you?"
"That Dr. Hu," replied Hsi-men Ch'ing, "formerly came to treat Li P'ing-erh, but to no effect. Why should I invite him?"
Yüeh-niang responded:
"Medicine cures only those diseases
which are not fatal;
The Buddha saves only those destined
to be saved.[36]
Though he may not have treated her effectively, it could be your destiny to recover after taking his medication."
"All right," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Go ahead and invite him."
Before long, Ch'i-t'ung was sent on this errand and brought Dr. Hu back with him. He arrived just as Brother-in-law Wu K'ai came by to see Hsi-men Ch'ing, and they entered his room together.
After taking his pulse, he said to Wu K'ai and Ch'en Ching-chi, "His Honor is suffering from accumulated toxicity in his genitalia. Unless this is treated in a timely manner, it will produce a leakage of blood in his urine. This condition is the result of engaging in sexual intercourse while suppressing the urge to urinate."
Once again, five mace of silver was sealed up to pay for the medication he prescribed, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing took it, it was no more efficacious than:
A stone sunk in the vast sea,
and he found himself unable to urinate at all.
Yüeh-niang was so alarmed by this that she sent Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh away and then invited Dr. Ho Ch'un-ch'üan, the son of Old Man Ho, to come and examine him.
He said, "This is a urinary blockage due to the inflammatory swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin, caused by the descent of pathogenic fire from the bladder. The accumulation of damp phlegm in the circulatory channels of the four limbs has interrupted the communication between the heart and the kidneys."
Once again, five mace of silver was sealed up to pay for the medication he prescribed, but when Hsi-men Ch'ing took it, his depleted organ rose up until his chowrie handle was as hard as iron and would not relax by day or by night. That night, P'an Chin-lien, as though she:
Didn't know any better,
sat astride Hsi-men Ch'ing's body and amused herself by "dipping the candle upside down" until he:
Passed out and then came to again,[37]
a number of times in succession.
The next day, Ho Yung-shou came to see him and sent someone ahead to announce his coming.
On hearing this, Yüeh-niang said to Hsi-men Ch'ing, "His Honor Ho Yung-shou is about to come visit you. Let me help you move back to the rear compound. This out-of-the-way location is not a fit place to receive guests."
Hsi-men Ch'ing nodded in assent, and Yüeh-niang, thereupon, helped him into some warm clothes; after which, she and Chin-lien supported him on either side as he made his way out of Chin-lien's quarters and back to the master suite in the rear compound. Once there, they put down a mattress and bedding, propped him up on a high pillow on the k'ang in the master bedroom, straightened up the room, and lit some incense.
Before long, Ho Yung-shou arrived, and Ch'en Ching-chi invited him into the bedroom in the rear compound, where he found Hsi-men Ch'ing sitting up in his sickbed, and said, "My colleague, I will not bother with a formal obeisance."
He then went on to ask, "Do you feel that your ailment is getting any better?"
"The fever in my upper body has receded somewhat," said Hsi-men Ch'ing, "but the toxicity in my swollen scrotum down below is more than I can take."
"That sounds like a case of swollen lymph nodes in the groin," said Ho Yung-shou. "Your pupil has an acquaintance who has been visiting his relatives in Tung-ch'ang prefecture but just arrived back yesterday. I have a note to that effect at home. He is a native of Fen-chou in Shansi province, and his name is Liu Chü-chai. He is some fifty years old and is extremely proficient at treating infectious disorders. I could send someone to invite him to come and diagnose my colleague's disorder."
"I deeply appreciate my colleague's concern," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I will send someone myself to invite him."
When Ho Yung-shou had finished his tea, he said, "You must take it easy and look after yourself, my colleague. With regard to business at the yamen, I will send someone to inform you of what is going on every day. There is no need for you to worry about it."
Hsi-men Ch'ing raised his hand in a gesture of gratitude and said, "I fear I am putting my colleague to a lot of trouble."

When Ho Yung-shou had taken his leave and gone out the door, Hsi-men Ch'ing dispatched Tai-an with a note, accompanied by one of Ho's servants, to go and invite Liu Chü-chai to come examine him.
After taking his pulse and scrutinizing his genitalia, Liu Chü-chai applied a medication to the area and also sealed up a decoction for him to take orally. Hsi-men Ch'ing rewarded him with a bolt of Hang-chou silk, and a tael of silver; but when he took the first cup of the decoction, it produced no visible effect.
That same day, unexpectedly, Cheng Ai-yüeh came to see Hsi-men Ch'ing in her sedan chair, bringing a box of squabs, and a box of stuffed pastries and cream puff pastries for him.
Upon coming in the door:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of her embroidered sash flying;
she kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing, saying. "I didn't know that you had fallen ill. Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh, fine pair that they are, didn't tell me about it and came ahead of me, so that I have been remiss in coming to see you. Please don't hold it against me."
"You're not remiss," responded Hsi-men Ch'ing, "and your mother has also gone to the trouble of purchasing gifts for me."
Cheng Ai-yüeh laughed, saying, "What do these paltry gifts amount to? You embarrass me no end."
She then went on to say, "Father, since you have lost weight to such an extent, you can supplement your daily diet with these things."
"It would be a good thing if he eats them," said Yüeh-niang. "He hasn't been eating much of anything. This morning, he only consumed a little congee and hasn't had anything else to eat. The doctor was just here to examine him."
"Mother," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "get a maidservant to boil one of these squabs until it is tender, and I will urge Father to eat some more congee with it. Venerable sir, it won't do for someone of your hefty build not to eat. The whole household depends on you for their support like a mountain of gold. What would they do without you?"
"He's suffering from a feeling of abdominal obstruction," said Yüeh-niang, "and can't get anything down."
"Father," said Cheng Ai-yüeh, "you should do as I say. Though you may not feel like eating or drinking anything from day to day, you've got to force yourself to consume something. What are you afraid of?
Human beings have no roots to nourish them;
It is food and water that sustain our lives.
The fact is you've got to eat enough to maintain your stamina, or else your vitality will become even more exhausted."
Before long, the squab was boiled until it was tender, and Hsiao-yü brought it in together with some congee. The congee was made with polished nonglutinous rice flavored with sweet squash and eggplant julienne and marinated with ten spices. Cheng Ai-yüeh then jumped onto the k'ang holding the bowl of congee in her hand and knelt down beside Hsi-men Ch'ing, feeding him one mouthful at a time. Although he did the best he could, he was only able to get down half a bowl of congee and two chopstick's worth of squab, before he shook his head and refused to eat any more.
Cheng Ai-yüeh said, "On the one hand, because he knows it's therapeutic, and on the other hand, because I urged him to do so, he has had a little something to eat."
"Father has not been eating that much," said Yü-hsiao, "but today, thanks to your urging, he has eaten more than usual."
Yüeh-niang treated Cheng Ai-yüeh to a serving of tea. That evening she also entertained her with food and wine and rewarded her with five mace of silver before sending her home.
As she was about to leave, Cheng Ai-yüeh kowtowed to Hsi-men Ch'ing once again, saying, "Father, be patient and do your best to recuperate for a few days. I will come back to see you again."
That night, Hsi-men Ch'ing took a second dose of the medicine prescribed by Liu Chü-chai, but his whole body started to ache and he could not help groaning with pain all night long. During the fifth watch, his swollen scrotum burst open, releasing a pool of fresh blood, and chancres appeared on his turtle head that exuded a yellow fluid incessantly. Before he knew it, Hsi-men Ch'ing fell into a faint and blacked out.
Yüeh-niang and the other members of the household were thrown into a panic and came to keep vigil over him. When they saw that the medication was not having the desired effect, they decided to send for Dame Liu to come to the summerhouse in the front compound to light candles in the shape of human figurines, and perform a shamanistic dance on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf. They also intended to send a page boy to the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu to inquire if Immortal Wu was there, and to invite him to come and assess Hsi-men Ch'ing's situation, since he had predicted, when he told his fortune, that during this year he would suffer from:
The calamity of spitting blood, and discharging pus, and
The affliction of desiccated bones and emaciated frame.[38]
Pen the Fourth said, "There is no need to ask after him at the home of His Honor Chou Hsiu. At present, he has set up a fortune-telling shop in front of the Temple of the Tutelary God outside the city gate, where he dispenses medical advice and sells fortunes. When people come to him for help, he is not out to make a profit but goes forthwith to diagnose their troubles."
Upon hearing this, Yüeh-niang immediately sent Ch'in-t'ung to summon Immortal Wu.
When he came into the room and looked at Hsi-men Ch'ing, he saw that:
He no longer resembled his former self.
His frame was cadaverous and emaciated;
His diseased body was utterly enervated;[39]
and a kerchief was tied around his head as he lay there on his sickbed.
After first taking his pulse, he said, "Sir, you are suffering from the results of:
Excessive indulgence in drunkenness and lust;[40]
Your reserve of semen is completely depleted.
The pathogenic fire of your generative organ,
Is choking the conduit leading to your heart.
The disease has penetrated your vital organs,[41]
And is no longer possible to treat medically.
There is a poem of eight lines that is relevant to your case, which I will recite for you.
When you engage in sex while drunk and sated,[42]
lusting after female beauty,
Your vital energy and your blood vessels will
imperceptibly be worn away.
Your semen will leak, your urine contain blood,
and you will emit milky muck;
Just as a lamp goes out when its oil is spent,
your store of semen will dry up.
In the past your only regret was that occasions
for gratification were too few;
But now, on the contrary, it has come to pass
that your maladies are too many.
The jade pinnacle will collapse all by itself,[43]
without anyone else's help;
Even the famous physician, Pien Ch'üeh of Lu,[44]
would be unable to save you.
When Yüeh-niang realized that Immortal Wu would not be able to cure him, she said, "Since you cannot prescribe any medication to improve his condition, would you be willing to predict his fate?"
Immortal Wu then:
Calculated on the joints of his fingers,
in order to ascertain the eight characters that determined Hsi-men Ch'ing's horoscope, and said, "He was born in the year of the tiger, in a *ping-yin* year, during a *wu-shen* month, on a *jen-wu* day, during the *ping-ch'en* time period. In this *wu-hsü* year of his horoscope he should be thirty-two years old. He is currently in the third of his 'decennial periods of fate' that is designated by the combination *kuei-hai*. The elements fire and earth in his horoscope constitute his 'injurer of the official,' and the element earth that corresponds to the stem *wu* in the combination for the current year will overcome the element water that corresponds to the stem *jen*, so that the combination for the current year will be in conflict with that for the day of his birth. The first month of this year is also a *wu-yin* month. Thus the three occurrences of the stem *wu* in the combinations for the month of his birth, the current year, and the current month, will conflict with the branch *ch'en* in the combination for the time period of his birth. How can he hope to withstand this? Though he has enjoyed both wealth and good fortune thus far, his longevity cannot be preserved. I will render a judgment in four lines of verse, though it may be hard to take.
When one's fate is crossed by an unlucky star
it is sure to be unpropitious;
The body is feeble, the baleful spirit strong,
and sure to portend catastrophe.
If the time and day indicate an encounter with
the genuine ill-boding Year God;
Even should one be a god or an immortal, one
would have to knit one's brows."[45]
Yüeh-niang said, "If the prospects for him do not look good, could you calculate the correlations between the five phases, the twenty-eight lunar mansions, and their corresponding animals that govern his fate to see what they portend?
Immortal Wu proceeded to chart the implications of the animals associated with the stem-branch combinations in his horoscope and said:
The heart-moon-fox mansion and the
horn-wood-flood dragon,
Deep under the crimson bed-curtains[46]
cannot be reconciled.
One constantly sends jade dew flying
from the moon palace;
The other, beneath the moon, tries to
seize the golden trophy.
When excited, he is transformed into
a real fighting cock;
Even on the brink of death, he longs
for an overripe peach.
Neither celestial deities nor earthly
spirits can save him;
The Master of the Demon Gorge[47] himself
would labor in vain."
Yüeh-niang said, "If the prognostication from his horoscopic animals is not propitious, would you interpret a dream for me?"
"Describe it to me," said Immortal Wu, "and I will interpret it for you."
Yüeh-niang said, "I dreamt of a spacious structure on the verge of collapse, of a body covered with a red garment, of the breaking of a green jade hairpin, and the smashing of a caltrop-patterned mirror."
"Pray do not take offense at what I have to say," responded Immortal Wu, "but the spacious structure on the verge of collapse portends a calamity for your husband. The body covered with a red garment portends that you will be wearing mourning clothes. The breaking of the green jade hairpin portends a splitting up of you and your sister wives. The smashing of the caltrop-patterned mirror portends the immanent separation of you and your husband. This dream is also not propitious, not propitious."
"Is there anything you can do to alleviate the situation, sir?" asked Yüeh-niang.
Immortal Wu responded:
"The White Tiger is blocking the road ahead,
Death Knell and Condoler are wreaking havoc,[48]
Gods and immortals are not able to cure him,
The ill-boding Year God cannot be withstood.
The Creator has determined the outcome;
Neither gods nor spirits can modify it."[49]
When Yüeh-niang realized that there was no saving star in his horoscope, she presented Immortal Wu with a bolt of fabric to thank him for his services and sent him on his way. But no more of this. Truly:
In consulting the yin and yang forces
in the hexagrams,
One should neglect mere trivialities,
paying them no heed.
If you devote your life to good works,
Heaven will reward you;
If you refrain from deceiving Heaven,
mishaps will not occur.[50]
When Yüeh-niang saw that though:
The gods were besought and diviners consulted,

the results of these prognostications were all:
Ominous and inauspicious,
her heart was filled with consternation. That evening, she burnt incense in the courtyard and swore an oath before Heaven that if her husband should recover, she would make three annual pilgrimages to the peak of Mount T'ai in T'ai-an subprefecture, in order to burn incense and present a robe to Pi-hsia Yüan-chün, the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds.[51] Meng Yü-lou also promised that she would pay obeisance to the dipper on the seventh, seventeenth, and twenty-seventh of each month. Only P'an Chin-lien and Li Chiao-erh failed to make any vows on his behalf.
Meanwhile, Hsi-men Ch'ing felt that his body was becoming more and more torpid, and he intermittently lost consciousness. During these episodes, he saw Hua Tzu-hsü and Wu the Elder standing in front of him, demanding retribution for the harm he had done them. He was reluctant to tell anyone about this but merely saw to it that he was not left alone.
On one occasion, observing that Yüeh-niang was not present, he took hold of P'an Chin-lien with one hand, feeling that he could not bear to relinquish her, and, letting his eyes brim over with tears, said to her, "My darling, after I die, I hope that you and your sister wives will keep vigil over my spirit tablet, and not go your separate ways."
Chin-lien also, feeling that:
Her anguish could not be overcome,
said, "Brother, my only fear is that I will not be tolerated."
"Wait until the First Lady comes in," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "I will speak to her about it."
Before long, Wu Yüeh-niang came in, and seeing that the eyes of the two of them were red with weeping, said, "Brother, if you have something to say, tell me about it, as befits the fact that you and I have shared the experience of:
Being husband and wife all this time."[52]
When Hsi-men Ch'ing heard this, he became so choked up he had difficulty uttering a sound, but finally said, "I realize that I am unlikely to recover, but there are a few words that I would like to bequeath to you. After I die, if you give birth to:
A single boy or half a girl,
you and your sister wives ought to devote yourselves to raising it, and continue to live together, rather than going your separate ways and thereby incurring the contempt of the community."
Pointing to Chin-lien, he went on to say, "As for Sister Six here, you should make allowances for what she did in the past."
When he had finished speaking, the pearly tears rolled down Yüeh-niang's peach-colored face, as she commenced to cry out loud, giving herself over to boundless sorrow.
"Don't cry," said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "Listen to my injunction."
There is a song to the tune "Stopping the Horse to Listen" that expresses what he had to say:
"My worthy wife,
I have a heartfelt wish to
impart to you:
Wife,
Whether the child you are carrying
is male or female,
After it is born, raise it
to adulthood,
So it can take charge of my estate.
Follow the example of the former martyrs
by remaining chaste,
One wife and four concubines looking out
for each other;
Thus being able to maintain each others'
reputations.
Though I am dead beneath the Nine Springs,[53]
I will be able to close my mouth and eyes."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she replied to the same tune:
"Thank you my husband,
For sharing your dying wishes
with me.
Husband,
Though I fall into the category
of womenfolk,
I adhere to the four virtues and
three obediences,[54]
Appropriate to husband and wife.
Throughout my life I have chosen not
to act ambiguously.[55]
I will remain chaste, and refuse to
sully my husband's name.
We will tread the same road in life
and in death.[56]
Only a single saddle for a single horse;[57]
There is no need for you to admonish me."[58]
When he had finished exhorting Wu Yüeh-niang, Hsi-men Ch'ing also summoned Ch'en Ching-chi into his presence and said, "Son-in-law, as the saying goes:
If you have raised a son, rely on your son;
If you lack a son, rely on your son-in-law.
As my son-in-law you are the equivalent of a son to me. If I should end up:
High as the hills or deep as the sea,
after escorting me to my grave, whatever you do, endeavor to:
Keep the whole household of one mind,[59]
and support your mother-in-law and her sister wives as they live out their lives, without doing anything to arouse the derision of others."
He then went on to instruct him, saying, "The satin piece goods store has a capital worth 50,000 taels of silver, but part of the capital and interest belongs to our kinsman Ch'iao Hung and should be returned to him. Have Manager Fu Ming sell off the stock, one batch at a time, and then close the shop. The knitting and sewing supplies store being managed by Pen the Fourth has a capital worth 6,500 taels of silver, and the silk goods store being managed by Brother-in-law Wu the Second a capital worth 5,000 taels. After selling off the stock, the proceeds should be brought home. As for that contract to supply antiquarian relics to the court that Li the Third has been pursuing, there is no need for us to participate any further. Have Ying the Second find someone else to invest in the scheme. Li the Third and Huang the Fourth still owe us the 500 taels of capital that they borrowed, not to mention the 150 taels of interest that they owe us. If you succeed in collecting these debts, you can use the money to pay for my funeral expenses. You and Manager Fu Ming can continue to operate the two shops in the front of our property. The pawnshop has an operating capital of 20,000 taels, and the pharmaceutical shop one of 5,000 taels. Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao have 4,000 taels worth of merchandise on their boat in Sung-chiang. As soon as the waterways are open to navigation again, you should go down to meet their boat and bring the cargo back home to be sold. The silver realized by the sale can be used to provide the living expenses for your mother-in-law and the rest of the family. School Official Liu still owes me 340 taels; Assistant Magistrate Hua Ho-lu owes me 50 taels; and Hsü the Fourth's shop outside the city gate still owes me 340 taels of capital and interest. The contracts for these debts are all in my possession, and someone should be sent as soon as possible to press for their collection. In the future, you might as well sell the property across the street and the house on Lion Street as well, since I fear that your mother-in-law and company will be unable to manage them."
When Hsi-men Ch'ing had finished speaking, he broke into tears, accompanied by loud weeping and wailing.
"Father," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I understand all of your injunctions."
In a little while, Manager Fu Ming, Manager Kan Jun, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Pen the Fourth, and Ts'ui Pen all came in together to see him, and to ask after his health.
Hsi-men Ch'ing gave each of them his instructions, and they said to him, "Venerable sir, you should relax. Everything will be all right."
Many other people came to ask after his health that day, and upon seeing how serious his condition was, they all departed with a sigh.
Two days passed by, during which Yüeh-niang naively hoped that Hsi-men Ch'ing would recover. Who could have known that:
His fate had already been determined,
and he was destined to die in the thirty-third year of his life. On the twenty-first day of the first month, during the fifth watch:
His ministerial fire inflamed his body;[60]
Transforming itself into interior wind.
After panting like an ox for some time, during the period from 9:00 to 11:00 that morning:
Alas and alack,
He stopped breathing and died.
Truly:
So long as one has three inches of breath,
one uses it a thousand ways;
But when the messenger of death shows up,
everything comes to an end.[61]
A poet of yore has left us some words of admonition that put this very well:
Humans should try to accumulate good deeds,
Rather than striving to accumulate wealth.
Accumulating good makes one a better person,
Accumulating money only invites catastrophe.
Though Shih Ch'ung was wealthy in his time,
It did not save him from being put to death.
Teng T'ung died suffering from starvation,
What good did the Copper Mountains do him?[62]
Today is not to be compared to the past,
Peoples' minds are completely befuddled.
They say that accumulating wealth is right,
And deride the idiocy of accumulating good.
How many of those who possess great wealth,
Confront death without so much as a coffin?
It so happens that when Hsi-men Ch'ing died a coffin had not yet been prepared for him. This threw Wu Yüeh-niang into such consternation that she called her brother Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth into her presence, opened a trunk from which she extracted four silver ingots weighing fifty taels apiece, and directed the two of them to see to purchasing a set of coffin boards.
She had hardly sent them on their way when Yüeh-niang was suddenly beset with a pain in her belly, staggered into her room, fell down on the bed, and lost consciousness, becoming:
Oblivious to human affairs.
Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, and Sun Hsüeh-o were all in the next room engaged, hugger-mugger, in putting a T'ang-style cap on Hsi-men Ch'ing's head, and getting him properly dressed in his burial clothes.
All of a sudden, they heard Hsiao-yü come in, and say, "Mother has fallen down onto her bed."
This threw them into such consternation that Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh went over immediately to see what was happening. They found Yüeh-niang holding her hand on the pain in her belly and realized that she was about to give birth.
Meng Yü-lou told Li Chiao-erh to tend to Yüeh-niang while she went out and dispatched a page boy to go as quickly as possible to summon Midwife Ts'ai. Li Chiao-erh also sent Yü-hsiao to the front compound to summon Ju-i. By the time Meng Yü-lou returned to Yüeh-niang's room, Li Chiao-erh had disappeared. It so happens that Li Chiao-erh, taking advantage of Yüeh-niang's unconscious state, had noticed that the trunk was open and had surreptitiously taken out five silver ingots worth fifty taels apiece and carried them off to her quarters.
Returning with a bunch of absorbent grass paper in her hand, she ran into Meng Yü-lou and said, "I didn't find any grass paper in her room, so I went to my quarters to fetch some."
Meng Yü-lou did not pay much attention to this but devoted herself to tending to Yüeh-niang, and preparing the commode for her. She saw that Yüeh-niang's pain was gradually becoming more intense. No sooner did Midwife Ts'ai arrive than Yüeh-niang gave birth to a child, while in the other room, it was only after they had finished dressing Hsi-men Ch'ing in his burial clothes that he breathed his last breath. At this, the members of the entire household, high and low, started to cry out loud in full voice.
Meanwhile Midwife Ts'ai wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes, cut the umbilical cord, decocted a "heart stabilizing potion," fed it to Yüeh-niang, and then helped her into a sitting position on the heated k'ang.
Yüeh-niang gave Midwife Ts'ai three taels of silver, but she complained that it was too little, saying, "When that other boy was born I received more than this. You could, at the very least, give me the same amount as before, especially since this boy was born to you as the First Lady of the household."
"The situations are not comparable," said Yüeh-niang. "At that time, Father was still here presiding over the household, but now Father has passed away. You had better make the best of it, and take what you are offered. If you come back for the third-day lustration ceremony, I will give you another tael of silver then."
"I would rather have an outfit of clothing," said Midwife Ts'ai, before expressing her thanks and taking her leave.

When Yüeh-niang became more aware of her surroundings, she noticed that the trunk was wide open and took Yü-hsiao to task, saying, "You lousy little stinker! I may have been unconscious, but you seem to have been unconscious too. The trunk has been lying wide open with all these people about. Why didn't you remind me to lock it?"
"I thought that you had locked the trunk," said Yü-hsiao, "so I didn't bother to check it."
So saying, she got the lock and proceeded to snap it in place.
When Meng Yü-lou saw how suspicious Yüeh-niang seemed to be, she chose not to stay in the room but went outside and remarked to Chin-lien, "What a character our elder sister turns out to be. On the very day of her husband's death, she starts acting defensively toward the rest of us."
She did not realize that Li Chiao-erh had already stolen five silver ingots worth fifty taels apiece and carted them off to her quarters.
That day, Brother-in-law Wu the Second and Pen the Fourth went to the home of Prefectural Judge Shang Liu-t'ang, from whom they purchased a set of coffin boards, and hired carpenters to fit them together to form a coffin. The page boys carried Hsi-men Ch'ing's body out to the large reception hall and proceeded to lay him out appropriately. Yin-yang Master Hsü was also invited to come and interpret his divinatory texts.
Before long, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai also came. Wu the Second and the other managers were all in the front reception hall, where they were busy taking down the lanterns, rolling up the picture scrolls, covering the body with a paper shroud, and putting votive incense lamps, tables, and mats in place, while Lai-an was deputed to strike the chime.
After calculating the time on his fingers, Yin-yang Master Hsü said, "He expired at 8:00 in the morning, and no member of the household will be adversely affected by his baleful spirit."
He then consulted with Yüeh-niang and said, "The encoffining ceremony should take place on the third day after his death, the ground breaking for his tomb should take place on the sixteenth of the second month, and the burial ceremony on the twentieth, a day or so after the fourth weekly commemoration."
After Yin-yang Master Hsü had been entertained and seen on his way, servants were dispatched to various places to inform people of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, and to hand over his seal of office to Ho Yung-shou, while the members of the household devoted themselves to preparing mourning garments for visitors and putting up temporary structures for the funeral observances, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
On the third day, Buddhist monks were engaged to recite sutras for the salvation of the deceased and carry paper money outside to be burned, while the members of the entire household, high and low:
Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel.
Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, garbed in untrimmed sackcloth and leaning on a mourning staff, as prescribed for the son of the deceased, bowed to the guests in front of the spirit tablet. Yüeh-niang was not yet able to emerge from her lying-in room, but Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou entertained the female visitors, while P'an Chin-lien took charge of the storeroom and accepted the offertory tables that people presented. Sun Hsüeh-o superintended the servants' wives in the kitchen as they prepared tea and refreshments for the visitors; Manager Fu Ming together with Brother-in-law Wu the Second took charge of the accounts; Ts'ui Pen was placed in charge of monitoring the expenses incurred by providing the guests with mourning wear; Lai-hsing was made responsible for supplying the kitchen; and Brother-in-law Wu K'ai and Manager Kan Jun entertained the male guests.
Midwife Ts'ai came back to conduct the third-day lustration ceremony, and Yüeh-niang presented her with an outfit of silk clothing before sending her on her way. She decided to name her newborn child Hsiao-ko, or Filial Son, and, as custom demanded, sent celebratory noodles to their relatives and neighbors in honor of the occasion.
The neighbors who lived in the vicinity all remarked, "His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing's principal wife has borne him a posthumous son, and this son was delivered on the same day and at the same time that he breathed his last. Such a thing is:
Rarely to be seen in this world.[53]
It is as weird and strange as can be."
We will say no more at this juncture about how bewildered they all were by this event.
To resume our story, when Ying Po-chüeh heard that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died, he came to offer his condolences and wept tears over it for some time.
The brothers-in-law Wu K'ai and Wu the Second were in the summerhouse, looking on as an artist painted a portrait of Hsi-men Ch'ing, when Ying Po-chüeh came in, greeted them with a bow, and said, "How regrettable! I never dreamed that Brother would pass away this way."
He then asked if Yüeh-niang could come out so that he could pay her his respects, but Wu K'ai replied, "My younger sister is unable to leave her lying-in room for the present. It so happens, thus and so, that she has given birth to a boy on the very day of her husband's death."
Ying Po-chüeh expressed astonishment, saying:
"Can such things be?
Oh well. Oh well. At least Brother will have a male heir, so there will be someone to take charge of the property."
Later on, Ch'en Ching-chi came in, attired in heavy mourning, and kowtowed to Ying Po-chüeh.
Ying Po-chüeh said to him, "Son-in-law! Son-in-law! You are certainly being put to the test. Your father-in-law has died, and your mothers-in-law will be like stagnant water, without any source of livelihood. You must be careful how you deal with the affairs of the household. If problems arise, you must not act on your own, but seek the advice of the two brothers-in-law here. Though it may be impolitic for me to say so, you are still quite young, and not too experienced in handling affairs."
"Brother Ying the Second," said Wu K'ai, "you shouldn't say such things. I have public responsibilities to attend to and have little free time. After all, his mother-in-law is here."
"Brother-in-law," responded Ying Po-chüeh, "though my sister-in-law is here, how can she be expected to take care of external affairs? It would be better if you could lend him your advice. It has always been the case that:
Without distaff relatives one cannot survive;
Without distaff relatives one cannot flourish.
One's mother's brothers are not to be compared with other people. You are a mainstay of the family, venerable sir. Who is there more important than you?"
He then went on to ask, "Has a date been set for the funeral procession?"
"The ground breaking for his tomb," said Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, "will take place on the sixteenth day of the second month, and the burial ceremony on the twentieth, shortly after the fourth weekly commemoration."
Not long afterwards, Yin-yang Master Hsü arrived to perform the sacrificial announcements and preside over the encoffining ceremony. Hsi-men Ch'ing's body was then laid inside the coffin, the "longevity nails" were driven into the lid, and it was placed in position, with an inscribed funeral banner that read: Casket of Master Hsi-men, Imperially Commissioned Commandant for Military Strategy.
That day, Battalion Commander Ho Yung-shou came to convey his condolences. After he had finished bowing before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, Wu K'ai and Ying Po-chüeh kept him company as he drank a serving of tea. Ho Yung-shou asked what date had been set for the funeral procession and then gave orders that the entire contingent of orderlies and attendants that had been assigned to Hsi-men Ch'ing should remain on duty there, without exception. Only after the date of the funeral procession were they to return to their service at the yamen. He even appointed two underlings to take charge of them and promised that should any instances of disobedience be reported to him, he would see that the culprits were severely punished.
He also said to Wu K'ai, "Venerable brother-in-law, if any outsiders should delay paying their debts to the Hsi-men household, simply report it to me, and your pupil will see that the sums in question are recovered."
After paying his condolences, he went to the yamen, prepared a report on the vacancy created by Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, and submitted it to the headquarters of the Embroidered Uniform Guard in the Eastern Capital.
At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, one day, Lai-chüeh, Ch'un-hung, and Li the Third arrived at the provincial censor's yamen in Yen-chou prefecture and delivered the letter and the accompanying gift they had been entrusted with.
When Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien read Hsi-men Ch'ing's letter and realized that he was seeking to obtain the document authorizing the procurement of antiquarian relics, he said, "If you had only come a step earlier everything would have been all right, but yesterday I sent the authorization for this procurement down to the various prefectures."
As he thought about it, and noticed that Hsi-men Ch'ing had sealed up ten ounces of gold leaf in the packet, he decided that it would be a pity to refuse and arranged to put up Ch'un-hung, Lai-chüeh, and Li the Third in the yamen, while he dispatched a courier with a validating tally to make haste to Tung-p'ing prefecture and bring back the authorization. When it arrived, he sealed it inside a letter which he entrusted to Ch'un-hung, together with a tael of silver to cover their traveling expenses, and they then set out to return to Ch'ing-ho district. The round trip took them ten days.
As they made their way into the city, they overheard people talking in the street and learned that His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had died, that this was the third day after his death, and that a sutra recitation and commemorative rites were being conducted in his household.
When Li the Third heard this:
A crafty scheme arose in his mind,[54]
and as they walked along the street, he suggested to Lai-chüeh and Ch'un-hung, "Let's hold back this authorization, saying that Sung Ch'iao-nien refused to give it to us, and go instead to offer it to Chang the Second on Main Street. If you refuse to go along with me, I'll give you ten taels of silver apiece as long as you promise to keep quiet about it when you get home, and not reveal anything."
Lai-chüeh was tempted by the prospect of this windfall and agreed to the proposition, but Ch'un-hung was reluctant to go along with it and gave only an ambiguous answer.
When they arrived at the gate, they saw that paper money had been brought out to be burnt, that Buddhist monks were performing a ceremony, and that the number of relatives and friends who had come to express their condolences was so great they could hardly be counted. At this prospect, Li the Third parted company with the other two and went to his own home, while Lai-chüeh and Ch'un-hung sought out Wu K'ai and Ch'en Ching-chi and kowtowed to them.
When they were asked if they had succeeded in obtaining the authorization, and why Li the Third was not with them, Lai-chüeh said nothing, but Ch'un-hung took out Censor Sung Ch'iao-nien's letter and the enclosed authorization and handed them to Wu K'ai.
He then proceeded to explain how Li the Third had given each of them ten taels of silver on the road and proposed, thus and so, that they should conceal this fact, hold back the authorization, and join him in going to offer it to Chang the Second.
"How could I be so ungrateful as to:
Forget favor and break faith?"[55]
exclaimed Ch'un-hung. "So I have respectfully made my way home."
Wu K'ai went back to the rear compound and told Yüeh-niang what had happened, saying, "This youngster really possesses a sense of obligation. How could that rascal of a short-life Li the Third harbor such evil ideas immediately upon learning that my brother-in-law had died a few days ago?"
He then went on to explain the situation to Ying Po-chüeh, saying, "Li Chih and Huang the Fourth signed a loan contract with Hsi-men Ch'ing on which they are obligated to pay back 650 taels of silver in the way of principal and interest. We have been instructed by His Honor Ho Yung-shou to submit this loan contract to the yamen so he can proceed to recover the sum that is owed, and it can be used to cover my brother-in-law's funeral expenses. As a colleague of the deceased, he feels obliged to do him this favor."
Ying Po-chüeh was thrown into consternation by this and said, "Li the Third certainly ought never to have done such a thing, but before you decide on anything, venerable brother-in-law, let me go and speak to him about it."
Thereupon, he went straight to Li the Third's place and sent for Huang the Fourth so they could confer about it together.
"You should never have proffered silver to that page boy," he said. "By so doing you have given him a handle to use against you.
Having failed to snare the fox,
You have only defiled yourself.
They now propose, thus and so, to submit your loan contract to the local office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission and sue you for the return of the money that you owe. As the saying goes:
Officials shield one another.[56]
On top of which, as colleagues in the same office, they will have no reason not to pursue the matter. What likelihood is there that you could resist them? If you will take my advice, you should:
Thus and thus, and
So and so,
surreptitiously present twenty taels of silver to Wu K'ai. You can write it off as something you might have had to expend in Yen-chou prefecture. I have heard that their household is not interested any longer in pursuing this venture. If you can manage somehow to get them to relinquish this authorization, we can go and negotiate a deal with Chang the Second. The two of you should scrape up the sum of two hundred taels, less than that will not do, and also prepare an offertory table. On the one hand, you can present the latter as a sacrificial offering in memory of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, and on the other hand, you can offer the money to them as a partial payment of your debt, and negotiate a new contract for the remainder, allowing you to repay it in installments out of whatever profits you accrue in the future. That way you can:
Kill two birds with one stone,
and smooth things over without rupturing your relationship."
"What you say makes sense," said Huang the Fourth. "Brother Li the Third, you acted too precipitously."
Sure enough, that evening, Huang the Fourth and Ying Po-chüeh took twenty taels of silver and went to Wu K'ai's home, where they proceeded, thus and so, to negotiate for the authorization, saying, "Venerable brother-in-law, we rely on your support."
Wu K'ai had already heard his younger sister say that she was no longer interested in pursuing this venture. Moreover, when his black eyes caught sight of the shiny white silver, how could he bring himself to refuse? Therewith, he agreed to their proposition and accepted the silver.
The next day, Li Chih and Huang the Fourth prepared a portable table, replete with a pig's head and the three sacrificial animals, and two hundred taels of silver, and went to offer a sacrifice in Hsi-men Ch'ing's honor. Brother-in-law Wu K'ai had spoken to Yüeh-niang, who agreed to return the original loan contract and make out a new one for the sum of four hundred taels, forgiving them fifty taels of the original amount they owed, and allowing them to return the remainder in installments out of the proceeds of their business transactions. The document authorizing the local procurement of antiquarian relics for the court was also handed over to Ying Po-chüeh, who went with them to collaborate with Chang the Second in bidding for the contract. But no more of this. Truly:
Only when gold is subjected to smelting is its quality assessed;
Only when humans are tempted by riches are their hearts exposed.[57]
A poem testifies to this:

The Creator does not demand too much from human beings;
Only urging them, in all things, to rein in their hearts.
Though you may wish to appropriate the property of another,
There will be someone in your wake to do the same to you.

Men born in the south and the north
Travel different roads.
There is no certainty in the life of man
Creation disposes of us as it chooses
Lifts us up and sets us down,
Makes us lie outstretched or stand upright.
It is the same wherever we go.
We sigh in vain, thinking of what is past,
For fame and wealth and dignity
Are not things to be sought.
Whatever the course of our life may be, whether misery or joy
We must follow it.
Whether we live in splendid palaces
Or ride on steeds caparisoned with gold
Or inhabit humble dwellings
Or live in small thatched cottages
All will still shed tears.
When Ximen Qing had finished with the woman, he went back to drink with Uncle Wu and the others. The ladies stayed for a while, ate some dumplings in celebration of the Lunar Festival, and then went away. Chen Jingji saw that the actors were given a meal, and dismissed them with two taels of silver. The four singing girls and the three men stayed on, singing and serving wine for the men.
"Tomorrow is Brother Hua's birthday," Bojue said to Ximen Qing. "Have you sent him a present?"
"Yes, I sent him something this morning."
"Uncle Hua has sent you a card of invitation," Daian said.

"Are you going, Brother?" Bojue said. "If so, I will come for you and we will go together."
"I can't tell you now," Ximen said. "I advise you to go alone."
After a while the four singing girls went to the inner court, leaving only the three boys to entertain the men. Ximen Qing was very sleepy and nodded all the time.
"Brother-in-law," Uncle Wu said, "you are tired. We had better go." Ximen Qing would not let them go before the second night watch. Then he sent away the singing girls and gave the boys two large cups of wine each and six *qian* of silver. As they were going away, he said to Li Ming: "I shall want you here on the fifteenth. I am going to invite their Lordships Zhou, Jing, He, and some others on that day. Don't forget. And I want you to engage four singing girls for me."
Li Ming knelt down and asked whom he would like to have. "There is that girl from the Fans' house," Ximen said, "and Qin Yuzhi, and, at Captain He's the other day, I saw a girl called Feng Jinbao. Then there is Lü Sai'er. They will do."
When Li Ming had gone, Ximen Qing went to Wu Yueniang's room.
"Lady Lin and Mistress Jing seemed to enjoy themselves," Yueniang said to him. "They did not go until very late, and Mistress Jing thanked me repeatedly. She said you had been extraordinarily helpful to her husband, and they would never forget your kindness. General Jing is going next month to the Huai country to see about the transport of the grain. Mistress He drank plenty of wine. She seems to have taken a fancy to the Fifth Lady. I took her to the garden and showed her the artificial mound. She gave some very generous gifts to the servants."
Ximen Qing spent the night with Yueniang. During the night she dreamed, and when daybreak came, she told her dream to her husband. "It may have been because Lady Lin was wearing a red cloak," she said, "but I dreamed that Li Ping'er took a red cloak from her box and dressed me in it. Pan Jinlian snatched it away from me and put it on herself. That made me angry, and I said to her: 'You have her fur coat already. Why should you want this too?' Then Jinlian grew angry and tore the cloak. I began to shout. Then I woke and found it was a dream."
"Don't let the dream worry you," Ximen said. "I will give you a coat. When people dream about a thing, it is always because they would like to possess it."
He got up, but his head was heavy, and he did not feel like going to the office. When he had dressed, he went to the study and sat down. Yuxiao brought him some of Ruyi'er's milk in a little jar, and Ximen took it with his medicine. Then he lay on the bed, and Wang Jing softly tapped his master's legs. When Yuxiao came, the boy withdrew. Ximen Qing gave her a pair of gold pins and four silver rings, and asked her to take them to Laijue's wife. Yuxiao realized that he was again repeating the experience he had had with Laiwang's wife. When she came back, she said: "She has accepted your gifts and is coming to kowtow to you." Then she took the empty jar and went away.
Yueniang had ordered Xiaoyu to cook some gruel for Ximen Qing, but he would not come and take it. Wang Jing had brought a packet from his sister, Wang Liu'er, and told his master she was anxious to see him. Ximen Qing opened the packet. In it was a tress of glossy dark hair, tied with five-colored silk, with a lovers' knot of silken ribbon. There was also an embroidered purple bag with two openings, filled with melon seeds. Ximen Qing examined everything very carefully. He was pleased. He put the bag on the shelf and the hair in his sleeve.
Suddenly Yueniang came into the room. Ximen was still lying on the bed, with Wang Jing working on his legs. "Why don't you come to breakfast instead of staying here?" she said. "What is it that makes you so languid?"
"I don't know. But I feel wretched and my legs hurt."
"Perhaps it is the weather," Yueniang said. "But now you are taking the medicine, you will soon be well again." She took him to her room and they had breakfast there.
"It is the New Year," Yueniang said, "and you ought to be merry. Why don't you go and see Uncle Hua? It is his birthday today. Or send for Brother Ying to come and have a chat."
"Ying is not at home today," Ximen said. "He has gone to Hua's place. Make something for me to eat, and I will go to the shop and see Uncle Wu the Second."
"Very well," Yueniang said, "order your horse. I will tell the maids to prepare something."
Ximen Qing told Daian to saddle his horse, then he dressed and went to Lion Street. The Feast of Lanterns was in full swing, and the street was very busy. The sound of horses and carriages was like thunder, and the lanterns were as beautiful as embroidered silk. People swarmed like ants.
Ximen looked at the lanterns, then went to the shop. Uncle Wu and Ben the Fourth were doing a very brisk trade. Laizhao's wife made a fire in the parlor and brought tea. After a while, Yueniang sent Qintong and Laian with two boxes of food. There was some Southern bean wine in the shop, and they opened a jar of this and went upstairs. Ximen Qing drank with Uncle Wu and Ben the Fourth and looked out at the lanterns. People were pressing up and down the street below.
Ximen Qing sent Wang Jing with a message to Wang Liu'er. When she heard, he was coming she hastily made preparations. Ximen told Laizhao to let Uncle Wu and Ben the Fourth have the rest of the food, and bade Qintong take a jar of wine to Han Daoguo's house. Then he mounted his horse and rode there. Wang Liu'er, all dressed up, welcomed him and kowtowed four times.
"Thank you for your presents," Ximen Qing said. "But why haven't you been to my house? I have twice sent you an invitation."
"Though I didn't go, no one came to urge me," Wang Liu'er said. "And I have not been very well these last few days. I have no appetite and I don't feel able to do anything that requires the slightest exertion."
"You must be thinking of your husband," Ximen said.
"Thinking of my husband!" Wang Liu'er cried. "It is because you have not been to see me. I thought I must have done something to annoy you. You have been treating me like the ring on a hairnet, which is always put out of sight. But perhaps you have another woman now."
Ximen Qing laughed. "Another woman?" he said. "No, all through this festival there have been so many parties that I have been too busy to come."
"You had a number of ladies yesterday, I hear," the woman said.
"Yes, my wife has been visiting them, and we had to do something in return."
"How many ladies were there?"
Ximen told her about the party.
"So, when you have a party for the Feast of Lanterns, you invite everybody of any importance, but you don't ask me."
"Oh, you mustn't let that upset you," Ximen said. "There will be another party on the sixteenth, and the wives of those who work with me will all be invited. I shall not allow you to refuse."
"If your lady sends me a card, how dare I refuse?" Wang Liu'er said. "By the way, the other day, one of your maids insulted Miss Shen, and she complained to me most bitterly about it. As a matter of fact, she did not wish to go that day, and I persuaded her. After the trouble she came here and cried till I didn't know what to do. Then you were kind enough to send a box and a tael of silver, and that put matters right. Your maid seems to have been in a very bad temper. She ought to know that, before she beats a dog, it is well to look and see what the master thinks about the matter."
"That little oily mouth has a very sharp tongue." Ximen Qing said. "She even treats me like that sometimes. But Miss Shen herself was in the wrong. She was asked to sing and she should have sung. When she refused, of course people got angry. She said a few things to the maid, too."
"She told me she never opened her mouth," Wang Liu'er said. "She said the maid came and insulted her and shook her fist at her. When she came here, tears were rolling down her cheeks and she never stopped blowing her nose. I kept her here for the night and then took her home."
The maid brought tea and old woman Feng came and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. He gave her a piece of silver worth about three or four *qian*. "You have not been to my place since your mistress died," he said.
"Where should I go now that she is dead?" the old woman said. "But I often come here to talk to this lady."
They took Ximen Qing into the inner room and asked whether he had had anything to eat.
"I had some gruel this morning," he said, "and, just before I came here, I had some cakes with Uncle Wu the Second. I am not particularly hungry."
Still, the table was set. The woman asked Wang Jing to open the jar of bean wine, and heated some. They sat down to drink.
"Did you get the things I sent you?" Wang Liu'er said. "I cut off a lock of my own hair and arranged it with my own hands. I thought you would like it."
"It was very kind of you," Ximen said.
When they had drunk wine enough, and there was nobody in the room, Ximen Qing took the ribbon from his sleeve, put it around his penis and tied it around his waist. Then he drank some medicine mixed with wine. Wang Liu'er stroked the prick, which quickly became proud and erect. The veins stood out; it looked like a piece of purple liver. The silk ribbon had far more effect than the clasp. Ximen Qing lifted her onto his lap and pressed his prick into her cunt. They drank wine, each from the other's mouth, and their tongues played together.
In the evening, old woman Feng made some dumplings with pork and radishes for them. Wang Liu'er ate some with him and, when the maid had cleared away, they went to the bed. They pulled aside the silken curtains and took off their clothes. The woman knew that Ximen Qing liked to do things in the light, and she set the lamp on a small table near the bed. Then she made fast the door and went to wash her cunt. When she came back, she took off her trousers and went to bed. They lay down together and put their arms around one another. Ximen Qing was still thinking of Captain He's wife and his passion blazed like fire. His penis was very hard. He told her to get onto hands and knees like a horse, and he plunged to the flower in her bottom. He did this six hundred times, while her behind showed its noisy approbation. She felt down her body, played with the flower in her belly, and called him endearing names unceasingly.
Still Ximen was not content. He sat up, put on a white short coat and set a pillow beneath him. Then he bade the woman turn over and tied her feet with two ribbons to the bedposts. He began by playing the game of the golden dragon stretching its claws, and thrust this way and that, sometimes plunging deep, sometimes just a little way. He was afraid she might catch cold and wrapped a red silk coat about her body. He brought the light nearer and bent his head to watch the movements. Whenever he took out his penis, he put it in again right up to the hilt; he did this six hundred times. The woman, her voice trembling, called him every endearing word she could think of. Soon he withdrew completely and put some of the red powder on the tip of his penis; when it was set in motion again it so stimulated her cunt that she could hardly bear it. She climbed on top of him and begged him to go in deeper; but he deliberately played about the opening, touching the treasure inside only lightly and refusing to go in further. Love juices flowed from her like slime from a snail. In the candlelight Ximen beheld her white legs raised about his body on either side. He saw them quivering in response to his movements, which became still more violent.
"Do you love me, you strumpet?" he asked her.
"I have been thinking about you all the time," she said. "I can only hope that you will be like the pine tree and the cypress, evergreen. Do not weary of me and give me up. If you should do that, it would kill me. I dare not tell this to anyone else, and nobody knows it. And I shall not tell that turtle of mine. He is away and he has money. He has other women and need not bother about me."
"My child," Ximen said, "if you will give yourself entirely to me, I will find another wife for him when he comes back and then you can belong to me always."
"Darling," Wang Liu'er said, "do get him another wife. Whether you take me into your household or leave me outside does not matter. Do as you please. I give my worthless body to you utterly and entirely and I will do anything you wish."
"I know you," Ximen Qing said.
They went on for a very long time. Then Ximen unloosed the ribbons that tied her feet, and they went to sleep together. About the third night watch he got up, put on his clothes, and washed his hands. Wang Liu'er opened the door and bade the maid bring them wine and food. They drank again. After more than ten cups of wine, Ximen began to feel tipsy and asked for tea to rinse his mouth. He took a paper from his sleeve and gave it to Wang Liu'er. "Take this to clerk Gan, and ask him for a dress," he said. "You can choose your own pattern and design." She thanked him, and he went away. Wang Jing carried a lantern and Daian and Qintong led his horse, one on either side.
It was the third night watch. Dark clouds covered the sky, and the light of the moon could hardly pierce them. The street was deserted; only the barking of dogs could be heard in the distance. Ximen Qing went westwards. Suddenly, as he came near the stone bridge, a whirlwind swept before his horse. It was like a dark form advancing from the bridge to attack him. His horse was startled and reared. Ximen shuddered. He whipped his horse. It shook its mane. Daian and Qintong clung to the bridle with all their strength, but they could not hold it, and the horse galloped wildly till it came to Ximen's gateway. Then it stopped. Wang Jing, with the lantern, was left far behind. When Ximen Qing dismounted, his legs were almost useless, and servants came out to help him in. He went to Pan Jinlian's room.
Jinlian had come back from the inner court, but she had not gone to bed. She was lying upon her bed, dressed, waiting for Ximen Qing. When he came, she got up at once. She took his clothes and saw that he was drunk, but she asked no questions. Ximen put his hands on her shoulders and drew her towards him.
"You little strumpet!" he murmured, "your darling is drunk. Get the bed ready: I want to go to sleep."
She helped him to bed, and, as soon as he was on it, he began to snore like thunder. She could do nothing to wake him, so she took off her clothes and went to bed too. She played delicately with his weapon, but it was as limp as cotton wool and had not the slightest spirit. She tossed about on the bed, consumed with passionate desire, almost beside herself. She pressed his prick, rubbed it up and down, bent her head to suck it; it was in vain. This made her wild beyond description. She shook him for a long time and at last he awoke. She asked him where his medicine was. Ximen, still very drunk, cursed her.
"You little strumpet!" he cried, "what do you want that for? You would like me to play with you, I suppose, but today your darling is far too tired for anything of that sort. The medicine is in the little gold box in my sleeve. Give it to me. You will be in luck if you make my prick stand up."
Jinlian looked for the little gold box and, when she found it, opened it. There were only three or four pills left. She took a wine pot and poured out two cups of wine. She took one pill herself, leaving three. Then she made the terrible mistake of giving him all three. She was afraid anything less would have no effect. Ximen shut his eyes and swallowed them. Before he could have drunk a cup of tea, the medicine began to take effect. Jinlian tied the silken ribbon for him and his staff stood up. He was still asleep. She mounted upon his body, put some powder on the top of his penis, and put that in her cunt; immediately it penetrated right to the heart of her. Her body seemed to melt away with delight. Then, with her two hands grasping his legs, she moved up and down about two hundred times. First it was difficult, because she was dry, but soon the juices of love flowed and moistened her cunt. Ximen Qing let her do everything she wished, but he himself was perfectly inert. She could bear it no longer. She put her tongue into his mouth. She held his neck and shook it. She writhed on his penis, which was entirely inside her cunt; only the two testicles remained outside. She caressed it with her hand, and it looked remarkably fine. The juices flowed; in no time she had used up five handkerchiefs. Still Ximen persevered, although the head of his prick was swollen and hotter than burning coal. The ribbon felt so tight that he asked her to remove it, but the penis stayed erect, and he asked her to suck it. She bent down and, taking it in her lips, sucked it and moved up and down. Suddenly the white sperm squirted out like living silver; she took it in her mouth and could not swallow it fast enough. At first it was sperm, and then it became an unceasing flow of blood. Ximen Qing had fainted and his limbs were stiff outstretched.
Jinlian was frightened. She hastily gave him some red dates. Blood followed sperm, cold air followed blood. Jinlian was terrified. She threw her arms around him and cried: "Darling, how do you feel?"
It was some time before Ximen came to himself. He said: "My head and eyes spin. I wonder what is the matter."
"What makes you yield so much today?" Jinlian said. "You must have taken too much medicine."
Readers, there is a limit to our energy, but none to our desires. A man who sets no bounds to his passion cannot live more than a short time. Ximen had given himself to the enjoyment of women, and he did not realize that he was like a lantern whose oil is exhausted and whose light is failing. Now his seed was used up, there was nothing in store for him but death. As we said at the beginning of this book:
Beautiful is this maiden; her tender form gives promise of sweet womanhood,
But a two-edged sword lurks between her thighs, whereby destruction comes to foolish men.
No head falls to that sword: its work is done in secret,
Yet it drains the very marrow from men's bones.
The next morning, when Ximen Qing got up and went to dress, he suddenly felt dizzy and almost fell forward. Fortunately, Chunmei caught him and he did not actually fall. He sat down on a chair, and it was some time before he recovered. Jinlian was again frightened.
"You must be hungry," she said. "Stay here, and tell me what you would like to eat. I will not let you go until you have had something."
She told Qiuju to go to the kitchen for gruel.
"I want some gruel," Qiuju said to Sun Xue'e. "Father fainted and now he has asked for gruel."
Wu Yueniang heard this and came at once to ask Qiuju what was the matter. The maid told her how Ximen had nearly fallen when he was doing his hair. Yueniang was greatly upset. She urged Xue'e to hurry with the gruel and went at once to see her husband in Jinlian's room. He was still sitting on the chair.
"What is the matter?" Yueniang said.
"I don't know," Ximen said, "but my head feels very bad."
"It was fortunate Chunmei and I were there to catch him, or he would have hurt himself badly," Jinlian said. "He is so heavy."
"Perhaps his head is dizzy from drinking too much wine last night," Yueniang said.
"Yes," Jinlian said. "Where did you go drinking yesterday, that you came in so late?"
"He had something to eat in the shop with my brother," Yueniang said.
Chunmei brought the gruel. She gave some to Ximen Qing, but he ate only half a bowl and then set it aside.
"How does your head feel?" Yueniang asked him.
"It is not so bad now," he said, "but I don't seem to have any strength or energy at all."
"Don't go to the office today," Yueniang said.
"No, I won't. I'll go to the outer court and get Jingji to write some invitations. I am going to ask Zhou and Jing and Captain He to come on the fifteenth."
"You haven't had your medicine," Yueniang said. "Get some milk. You must take that. I think you must have been overdoing things the last few days."
She told Chunmei to get some milk from Ruyi'er, and the maid brought it in a bowl. Ximen took it with his medicine and went to the outer court. Chunmei helped him. When they came to the corner gate that led to the garden, his eyes clouded over; his body seemed to collapse, and he could not hold himself up. Chunmei took him back again.
"Listen to me," Yueniang said. "You must have a rest. We will postpone these invitations. There is no real need to write them now. Do absolutely nothing, and don't go out. And tell me anything you would like to eat. I'll make it for you."
"I don't want anything," Ximen said.
Yueniang went to the inner court and questioned Jinlian. She asked whether Ximen Qing had been drunk when he came in the previous night, whether he had had any more to drink, and if he had busied himself with her.
Jinlian was so full of denials that she hated herself because she had only one mouth to express them.
"Oh, no, Sister," she said. "He came back so late and he was so drunk that he never thought of such a thing. He asked me for more wine, but I gave him tea instead. I told him there was no wine and he must go to sleep. I have had nothing to do with him since you spoke to me the other day. I don't like to say anything, but I fancy he had been somewhere before he came home. But I'm not at all sure. I can only tell you that I had nothing to do with him in that way."
Wu Yueniang and Meng Yulou sent for Daian and Qintong and questioned them closely.
"Where did your father go drinking yesterday?" the Great Lady asked. "Tell me the truth. If you don't, and anything happens, I shall hold you two responsible."
Daian refused to say anything except that his master had gone to Lion Street and had taken wine there with Uncle Wu the Second and Ben the Fourth. Yueniang sent for her brother. "Do you know," she asked him, "if your brother-in-law went anywhere else after he took wine with you?"
"He stayed only a short time with us," Uncle Wu said. "Then he went away again."

This made Yueniang very angry. As soon as her brother had gone, she sent for the two boys again. She scolded them severely and threatened them with a beating. This frightened them, and they confessed that Ximen had been to see Han Daoguo's wife. Jinlian was waiting for this.
"Now, Sister," she said, "you see you have been blaming me, and I am innocent. The one who is really guilty is laughing at us. Just as every tree has its own bark, so each one of us has his own face to consider. How can you think that I exist only for things of that sort? You might perhaps ask these two slaves where our husband was the other day when you went to see Mistress He. It was very late when he came back and I don't believe he had been paying New Year calls."
Before Qintong had time to speak, Daian told them how his master had been carrying on with Lady Lin.
"No wonder he was so anxious we should send her an invitation," Yueniang said. "I said to him: 'We have never met her, and she certainly won't come.' Of course, we never dreamed of what was going on. No wonder that, in spite of her age, she paints her eyebrows and powders her face till it looks like the plaster on the wall. The old strumpet!"
"I have never heard of anybody like her," Yulou said, "and with a grown-up son too! It would be better for her to marry again than to carry on in this shameless way."
"The old whore doesn't know what shame is," Jinlian said.
"I didn't think she would come," Yueniang said, "yet she had the audacity to do so."
"Sister," Jinlian said, "now you see who is black and who is white. You scolded me when it was Han Daoguo's wife who was really to blame. It looks as though, in this household, almost everybody has a lover in secret. They are turtles openly and even send their young turtles here so that those young turtles can help them in their evil games."
"It is not for you to call Wang the Third's mother a whore," Yueniang said. "She told me that, when you were young, you were a maid at her place."
Jinlian's face became scarlet. "The old whore is mad," she said. "When was I ever at her place? My aunt was a neighbor of hers, and when I used to go and stay with my aunt, I occasionally went to the Lin woman's garden to play with other little girls. I come from her place, do I? Why, I know nothing whatever about her. She is just a blind old strumpet."
"You have too much to say," Yueniang said. "I only told you what she said, and there is no need for you to make such a fuss about it."
Jinlian was silent.
Yueniang told Xue'e to make some meat-stuffed dumplings for Ximen Qing. As she passed the second door, she saw Ping'an going to the garden. She stopped him and asked what he was about.
"Li Ming has engaged four singing girls for the party on the fifteenth and has come to know if everything is all right," Ping'an told her. "I told him the invitations had not been sent out yet, but he wouldn't be satisfied with that and asked me to go and see Father."
"Party?" Yueniang said. "What party, you rascal? What are you going to ask? Go and tell that young turtle to be off about his business? What is all the excitement about?"
Ping'an ran away in bewilderment.
Yueniang went back to Jinlian's room. She told Ximen Qing that Li Ming had come to inquire about the singing girls. "I told him we shouldn't need any as the party had been postponed," she said.
Ximen Qing nodded. He expected to be better in a day or two, but when one day had passed his warrior swelled up and there were red scrofulous spots on it. The testicles were swollen too, and as bright-colored as a tomato. When he pissed, it hurt like the cutting of a knife, and this pain he felt every time. The soldiers came to take him to the office, and were grieved to hear of his illness.
"You must do what I tell you," Yueniang said to him. "Send a card to Captain He and tell him that you must rest at home until you are stronger. And we must send at once for Doctor Ren, and get him to give you some medicine. This is serious, and we must not put off any longer. You can't go on in this state. You haven't had a proper meal for two or three days. Besides, you really are very much swollen."
But Ximen would not send for the doctor. He said: "Oh, it is nothing very serious. I shall be better in a few days and ready to go out."
He sent a card to the office excusing himself. He was very irritable and impatient at being in bed.
Ying Bojue heard he was not well and came to see him. Ximen asked him to come in. Bojue bowed and said: "I didn't know you were not well. So that is why you didn't go to Uncle Hua's place the other day."
"I should certainly have gone if I had been well," Ximen Qing said. "I don't know why, but I have not had energy enough even to move."
"What is the trouble, Brother?" Bojue asked him.
"Nothing very particular?" Ximen said. "My head feels heavy; my limbs seem to give way under me, and I can't seem to walk."
"Your face is flushed," Bojue said, "and judging by that, I think you must have some fever. Have you sent for a doctor?"
"No," Ximen said, "my wife talked about sending for Doctor Ren, but I told her not to bother because it wasn't serious enough."
"You are wrong, Brother," Bojue said. "You must send for him at once and let him have a look at you and give you some medicine to get rid of this fever. It is Spring now and a dangerous season for the lungs. I met Li Ming yesterday. He told me he had been bidden to engage some singing girls for a party you were giving today, but that you were not well and the party had been put off. That gave me quite a shock, and I came to see you at once."
"I haven't been to the office," Ximen said. "I sent a card of excuse."
"You certainly must not go out," Bojue said. "You need a rest."
After drinking tea, Bojue said he must go and that he would come again. "Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er will come and see you, I'm sure," he said. Ximen Qing asked him to stay and have something to eat, but he said he would rather not, and went away.
Then Ximen told Qintong to go for Dr. Ren. The doctor came and felt his pulse. "The fever is mounting," the doctor said, "and there is exhaustion of the fluid in your testicles. It is clearly a case of sexual exhaustion. I will give you something to supply the missing element."
He went away. Ximen Qing sent him five *qian* of silver, and a boy brought back the medicine. After taking it his head felt better, but his body was so weak that he could not get up. His prick swelled more and more and it was increasingly difficult for him to make water.
In the afternoon Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er came with presents. When they had kowtowed to Ximen Qing, they asked how he was.
"It is very good of you, Sisters, to come and see me, but why did you bother to buy presents?" he said. "For some reason I seem to have a little fever."
"Perhaps you have been drinking too much wine during the New Year celebrations," Guijie said. "You will be all right if you don't drink any more for a few days."
They went to the Sixth Lady's room. There they found Yueniang and the others, and were asked to go and take tea in the inner court. Afterwards they went back to Ximen Qing.
Then Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, and Chang Zhijie came. Ximen Qing told Yuxiao to prop him up in bed and asked the three men to stay for wine.
"Brother," Xie Xida said, "have you had any rice gruel?"
Yuxiao turned her head away and did not answer. Ximen Qing said: "No, I have not had any. I couldn't eat it."
"Well, send for some," Xie Xida said. "We will have some with you."
After a while, the rice gruel was brought. Ximen ate half a bowl and set it down again.
Guijie and Wu Yin'er had gone to join Yueniang in the Sixth Lady's room. Bojue asked where they were. Ximen Qing told him.
"Go and tell them to come and sing a song for your father," Bojue said to Laian.
But Yueniang would not let the girls go. She thought that Ximen Qing was in no condition to listen to songs, and told Laian to say to Ying Bojue that the girls were having something to eat with her.
When the three friends had drunk some wine, one of them said: "Brother, you will be tired if we keep you sitting up. We will go now and you must lie down for a while." Ximen thanked them for coming, and they went away.
When Ying Bojue came to the door of the smaller courtyard, he called Daian and said to him: "I don't like the look of your father's face at all. Go and tell the Great Lady she ought to send for a doctor at once. Hu, in the High Street, is very good in fever cases. I suggest you send for him, but you mustn't waste any time."
Daian went at once and told his mistress. She went to Ximen Qing. "Brother Ying says that Doctor Hu is very good in fever cases," she said to him. "Why shouldn't we send for him?"
"Why should we?" Ximen Qing replied. "He didn't do Li Ping'er the slightest good."
"Medicine will only cure cases that can be cured," Yueniang said, "and Buddha saves only those who merit salvation. You do not think he is any good, but, if he cures you, that is all we care about."
"Very well, send for him," Ximen Qing said.
In a short time, Qitong brought the doctor. Uncle Wu was there, and he was present while the doctor examined Ximen's pulse.
"The poison is concentrated in the lower parts," Dr. Hu said to Uncle Wu and Chen Jingji. "Something must be done at once, or he will begin to make blood all the time instead of water. This has been caused by his indulging in sexual intercourse without first making water."
They gave him five *qian* of silver for medicine and made Ximen Qing take it. But it was like throwing a piece of stone into the sea. He could not make water at all. Yueniang was very much alarmed. She sent away the two singing girls and sent a messenger for He Qixuan, the son of old He. He told them that there was an accumulation of poison in the male organ and that the bladder was very much inflamed. The fever was driving the poison downwards. Ximen's veins, the doctor said, were filled with poisonous matter, and his heart and kidneys were completely out of harmony.
They gave the doctor five *qian* of silver. Ximen drank the prescribed medicine, but the penis stayed erect, as if made of imperishable iron. Throughout the night, in her ignorance of the harm she was doing, she played with him, mounted his body, and put his candle into herself. He fainted several times.
The next day, Captain He came to see him. When a boy came in to announce him, Yueniang said: "Captain He has come to see you. This is not a fit place to receive anybody. Shall I take you to the inner court?"
Ximen Qing nodded. Yueniang put some clothes on him and she and Pan Jinlian helped him to go to the upper room. There they made a bed, cleaned out the place, and burned incense. Chen Jingji took in Captain He.
"Sir," the Captain said, "I will not exchange formal greetings with you today. How do you feel?"
"My head is better," Ximen said, "but I have still a great deal of pain down below."
"It looks like a case of poisoned urine," Captain He said. "Now it so happens that, yesterday, a friend of mine called to see me on his way to Dongchangfu to visit his people. He comes from Fenzhou in Shaanxi and his name is Liu Juzhai. He is very well versed in troubles of this kind. May I send him to see you?"
"It is very good of you," Ximen Qing said. "I will send someone to ask him to come."
Captain He drank his tea. "Sir," he said, "you must take great care of yourself. Don't bother about things at the office. I can manage quite well."
Ximen Qing raised his hand. "You are very kind," he said.
When Captain He had gone, Ximen told Daian to take a card and go with one of Ho's servants for Liu Juzhai. Liu felt his pulse, put some medicine upon the affected part, and gave him a dose of something to be taken with water. Ximen Qing gave him a roll of Hangzhou silk and a tael of silver. He took the first dose, but there was no improvement.
That day, Zheng Aiyue brought him a pair of young pigeons and a box of fruit pastries. She came in a sedan chair. When she had kowtowed to him, she said: "I did not know you were ill. That excellent pair, Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er, came before me, yet they never said a word to me about it. That is why I did not come before."
"Why have you troubled to bring these things for me?" Ximen said.
"They are not intended as proper presents," Zheng Aiyue said, smiling. "They are only something for you to taste."
"We are very anxious for him to take something, but he doesn't seem able to do so," Yueniang said. "This morning he has only had a mouthful of rice gruel. The doctor has just gone."
"Mother, will you ask one of your maids to cook these young pigeons? They are very tender, and perhaps he will try one of them with his gruel. You must eat something," she said to Ximen Qing. "You are a big man, like a mountain of gold, and you have a whole household dependent on you."
"He has no appetite," Yueniang said.
"Father," Zheng Aiyue said, "listen to me. You must eat something even if you don't feel like it. We are human beings. We have no roots such as plants have, and we must eat and drink to live. If you don't eat anything, you will waste away."
Before long, one of the young pigeons was cooked. Xiaoyu brought it with the rice gruel and some preserved fruits. Zheng Aiyue jumped on to the bed and sat down on her heels before Ximen Qing. She took the bowl in her hand and tried to make him eat. He did his best, but could only swallow a few spoonfuls of gruel and a little pigeon. Then he shook his head and would try no more.
"You need two things to make you better," Zheng Aiyue said, "medicine and food. I am glad to see you take even a little."
"He would not have eaten anything at all if you had not come," Yuxiao said.
Zheng Aiyue had some tea, then Yueniang entertained her and sent her away with five *qian* of silver. Before she left, the girl went and kowtowed to Ximen Qing. "Be patient," she said, "I will come again soon."
That evening, Ximen Qing took a second dose of Dr.. Liu's medicine. But his body began to ache all over and he groaned the whole night through. In the fifth night watch, his testicles swelled up and burst and blood poured upon the bedclothes. Sores came out on the end of his penis, and a yellow liquid came from them.
The whole household rushed in a turmoil to his bedside. They realized that the medicine had done him no good and sent for old woman Liu to light a spirit lamp that they might know whether he would live or die. Then they sent a boy to Major Zhou's house to find out where the Immortal Wu was. They remembered how he had told them long ago that Ximen Qing would suffer as he was doing, and now his prophecy was fulfilled. Ben the Fourth told them that there was no need to send the boy to Major Zhou's place. The holy man was staying at the temple of the local god outside the walls. "He is spending his time there," Ben the Fourth said, "telling fortunes, curing the sick, and practicing divination. He never cares what people pay him, but goes wherever he is wanted."
Yueniang sent Qintong to ask him to come.
When the Immortal came, he looked at Ximen Qing and found him entirely changed. His face was worn and thin, and his spirits low. He was lying on the bed with a kerchief tied about his head. The Immortal felt his pulse.
"Sir," he said, "you are ill because you have taken too much wine and had too much to do with women. Now your vital fluid is exhausted and a furious fever has taken hold upon the instrument of your passion. I fear I can do nothing for you. Your case is hopeless."
"If you can give him no medicine to make him well," Yueniang said, "perhaps you will tell us what the Fates say of him."
The Immortal made calculations upon his fingers and reckoned Ximen's eight characters. "His animal is the Tiger," he said, "he was born on the *renwu* day of the *wushen* month, of the *bingyin* year, and at the *bingchen* hour. The present year is *wuxu,* and he is thirty-three years old. But for calculating his fate we must take the year as *guihai,* and this is unfavorable, viewed in regard to the position of fire and earth. In this year, the *wu* earth is in conflict with the *ren* water. And this month happens to be *wuyin,* so that there are three *wus,* all against him. He cannot withstand them."
Now he comes into conflict with the star of evil omen
His body is light and yet heavy. He is in desperate straits.
Beware the day and the hour of the planet Jupiter
For then the gods will knit their brows.
"Since the Fates are of such evil omen, is there nothing you can do for him?" Yueniang asked.
"The White Tiger is standing before him at this moment, and the Angel of Death is presiding over his destiny. Heaven itself can do nothing now, and even the Year Star Jupiter could not avert calamity. It is the will of Heaven, and neither god nor spirit can alter it."
Yueniang gave the Immortal a roll of cloth, and he went away. She sought diviners and soothsayers, but everywhere she was told that the omens were against her husband's life. That night, she burned incense in the courtyard and took an oath before Heaven. "If my husband recovers," she swore, "I will go every year for three years to the peak in Tai'an District to offer incense and a robe to the Goddess there." And Yulou took an oath to offer sacrifice to the stars every seventh day. Only Jinlian and Li Jiao'er did not take any oaths.
At one time, when Ximen was in a half-fainting state, he thought he saw Hua Zixu and Wu Da standing before him, come to demand payment of the debt he owed them. He would not speak of this but asked that he should not be left alone.
Once, when Yueniang was out of the room, he took Jinlian's hand, and cried. "My love," he said, "when I am dead, you sisters must keep my tablet and stay together."
Jinlian was very sorrowful. "I am afraid I shall not be wanted here any longer," she said.
"When the Great Lady comes, I will speak to her," Ximen said.
When Yueniang came back, she found them both with eyes red with crying. "Tell me what you want," she said. "We have been together as husband and wife so long now."
Ximen sobbed quietly. "I know I am going to die," he said, "and I want to say this. When your baby is born, I should like you all to stay here and bring him up together. You must not let the household go to pieces so that the neighbors come to look down upon it." He pointed to Jinlian. "Forgive her for all the things she has done wrong."
Yueniang could restrain herself no longer. Tears rolled down her cheeks like pearls. She sobbed aloud. Ximen asked her to summon Chen Jingji. When the young man came, Ximen said: "My son, if I had a son of my own, I could count on him. But, as yet, I have no son, and I must put all my trust in you. I look upon you as my own son and, if anything should happen to me, it will be for you to bury me. Afterwards, stay here and help your mother and keep up the good renown of this house. The silk shop is worth fifty thousand taels, but part of that belongs to our kinsman Qiao. Tell Fu to dispose of as much stock as is necessary, pay off our kinsman, then close the shop. The thread shop of which Ben the Fourth is in charge is worth six thousand five hundred taels, and the silk shop that Uncle Wu the Second looks after, five thousand taels. Both those shops should be closed as soon as the stuff can be sold. If Li the Third gets the contract we have spoken about, it will be better not to go further in the matter. Ask Uncle Ying to get somebody else to take it up. Li the Third and Huang the Fourth still owe me five hundred taels with interest amounting to another hundred and fifty. Ask them for payment. You and Clerk Fu can look after the household and the two shops that are here. The pawnshop is worth about twenty thousand taels and the medicine shop five thousand. Clerk Han and Laibao are still in Songjiang. When the river is free from ice, fetch them home again. They have about four thousand taels' worth of merchandise. Sell it and give the money to your mother. Liu, the Director of Studies, owes me three hundred taels. Hua owes me fifty. Xu the Fourth, outside the city, owes me, including interest due, about three hundred and forty. We have all the necessary documents, and you can ask them for payment at once. It will be best to sell the two houses, the one in Lion Street and the one opposite, because they will be too much for your mother to control."
Then he began to cry. Jingji promised to do all that Ximen had said. Clerk Fu, Clerk Gan, Uncle Wu the Second, Ben the Fourth and Cui Ben came to see him. He gave each of them his instructions, and each one in turn told him not to be alarmed because he was not really very ill. A great many people came to visit him and, when they saw how ill he was, went away sighing.

Yueniang still hoped that Ximen might get better, but Heaven had destined him for no more than thirty-three years of life. In the fifth night watch on the twenty-first day of the first month, the fever consumed him. He panted like an ox and so continued for a long time. He lingered on until mid morning, and then, alas and alack, his breathing ceased and he passed away.

Ximen Qing died before a coffin had been made ready for him. Yueniang hurriedly sent for Wu the Second and Ben the Fourth, opened a chest, and took out four bars of silver. These she gave to the two men and told them to buy a set of coffin boards. They had hardly left her when she felt a severe pain in her belly. She hurried to her room, lay down on the bed, and lost consciousness. Yulou, Jinlian and Xue'e were in the other room, dressing Ximen Qing in his robes. When Xiaoyu told them that the Great Lady was lying on the bed, Yulou and Li Jiao'er hurriedly went to her. They saw her with her hand pressed to her stomach, and knew that her time had come. Yulou left Li Jiao'er to look after Yueniang while she went to send a boy for old woman Cai. Li Jiao'er sent Yuxiao for Ruyi'er and, when Yulou returned, she had disappeared.

Yueniang was unconscious; the chest was lying open, and there was nobody about. Li Jiao'er took five bars of silver and went off with them to her own room. She came back with some paper.

"I could not find any paper here, so I went to my own room to get some," she said to Yulou.

Yulou suspected nothing. She looked after Yueniang and made everything ready. Yueniang's pains increased and the baby was born almost as soon as old woman Cai came.

Ximen Qing was laid out, stiff and cold, in the other room, and the whole household began to bemoan him.

Old woman Cai attended to the baby, cut the navel string, and they made a soothing drink for Yueniang and helped her to bed. Yueniang gave the old woman three taels of silver, but this did not satisfy her.

"When the other lady had a baby, you gave me more than this," she said. "I want now what I had then. Besides, this is your own baby."

"Things are different now," Yueniang said. "My husband is dead. Take this, and, when you come on the third day, I will give you another tael, no more."

"I would rather have a dress," the old woman said. She thanked the ladies and went away.

When Yueniang was a little better, she noticed that the chest was open. She scolded Yuxiao. "You should not have left the chest open with so many people about when I was unconscious. Hadn't you sense enough to lock it up?"

"I was sure you had locked it," Yuxiao said, "and I didn't give it a thought." She took the key and locked it.

When Yulou saw that Yueniang was in a suspicious mood, she did not stay very long. She said to Jinlian: "You see the sort of woman the Great Lady is. The moment her husband is dead, she begins to suspect people." She had no idea that Li Jiao'er had stolen five bars of silver.

Uncle Wu the Second and Ben the Fourth went to see Shang and bought from him a set of coffin boards. They engaged carpenters to make them up, and the boys carried Ximen Qing to the great hall. Then they sent for Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, to write his certificate. Uncle Wu came too, and he, his brother, and the clerks were all very busy in the outer hall. They took down the lanterns, rolled up the pictures, placed a sheet of paper over Ximen's body, and set lamps and incense on a table before it. Laian was left to strike the bell.

The Master of the Yin Yang looked at Ximen's hands and declared that he had died exactly at the hour of the Dragon, and that no harm would come to anyone in the household. After consulting Yueniang, he decided that Ximen should be put in his coffin on the third day. The grave was to be dug on the sixteenth of the second month, and the funeral held on the thirtieth. There would thus be more than four complete weeks between Ximen's death and his burial.

When Xu had gone away, they began to send out the sad news to all their friends and acquaintances. They sent the seal of his office to Captain He. Everyone in the household dressed in mourning, and a temporary building was set up.

On the third day Buddhist monks came to hold the first service and to burn paper money. Chen Jingji was dressed as Ximen's son, and stood before the body to receive those who came. Yueniang was not able to appear but was in a small room near by. Li Jiao'er and Yulou entertained the ladies. Jinlian, who was now in charge of the household funds, took in all the offerings that people sent. Xue'e stayed in the kitchen and superintended the preparation of tea and food for the visitors. Clerk Fu and Uncle Wu the Second kept the accounts. Ben the Fourth saw that mourning was distributed to the proper people. Laixing was responsible for the supply of provisions. Uncle Wu and Clerk Gan entertained the men who came.

When old woman Cai came to wash the baby, Yueniang gave her a silken dress and dismissed her. She called the baby Xiaoge (Filial Devotion). The neighbors sent noodles as a token of congratulation. The news that Ximen Qing's first wife had borne a child immediately after his death had quickly spread. People said it was a very strange thing that a child should be born almost at the very moment of his father's death.

When Ying Bojue heard of Ximen's death, he came to bemoan his friend. The two uncles Wu were watching an artist paint a portrait of Ximen Qing.

"What a sad business!" Bojue said to them. "Even in my dreams I cannot bring myself to believe that our brother has gone." He asked to be allowed to pay his respects to Yueniang.

"My sister cannot appear," Uncle Wu said. "She gave birth to a son the very day of her husband's death."

This was a surprise to Bojue. "Really?" he said. "That means that our brother has an heir to all his property."

Chen Jingji, in the deepest mourning, came and kowtowed to Ying Bojue.

"You have all my sympathy," Bojue said to him. "Your father is dead and your ladies are like stagnant water. You must be very careful. Do not do things as you yourself think they ought to be done. Consult your two uncles here. If you will forgive me for saying so, you are still very young and have hardly sufficient experience in business and affairs."

"No, Brother," Uncle Wu said, "I have too much other business to attend to. His mother is here."

"The Great Lady is here, it is true," Bojue said, "but she cannot attend to affairs outside the house. You will have to do what you can for her and you will remember the maxim that the uncle on the mother's side must always take a great part in the control of the family. You are not a stranger: you are the child's own uncle and the most important person in the household. Nobody here stands higher than you do." He asked when the funeral was to be.

"The grave will be dug on the sixteenth and the funeral will be on the thirtieth," he was told.

When the Master of the Yin Yang came again, Ximen Qing was put into his coffin and it was nailed up with longevity nails. The coffin was set in position, with a tablet bearing the words "General Ximen."

Captain He came and made reverence to the body. Uncle Wu and Ying Bojue gave him tea. Captain He asked about the funeral and gave orders that the soldiers who had been on duty at Ximen's house should remain there. Nobody was to go away before the day of the funeral. He appointed two sergeants to command the soldiers and declared that he would punish anyone who should dare to misbehave.

"If there is anyone who owes money, let me know," he said to Uncle Wu. "I will see what I can do to secure payment."

He went back to the office and sent a report of Ximen's death to the Eastern Capital.

When Laijue, Chunhong and Li the Third came to Yanzhou, they gave their letter and the present to the Censor. Song read it. It was a request that Ximen Qing might have the commission for the purchase of antiquities. "It is too late," he said to himself, "I have already given instructions about the matter to the Prefect." Then he saw that there were ten taels of gold leaf, and decided that it would be a pity to refuse. He told Chunhong, Laijue and Li the Third to wait and sent one of his officers in all haste to bring back the document from Dongpingfu. When it arrived, he gave it with a letter to Chunhong, together with a tael of silver for traveling money. The journey between the two places took about ten days, and when they reached Qinghe again they learned that Ximen Qing was dead. He had been dead three days, and, at that moment, service was being held for him.

Li the Third had an idea. He said to Laijue and Chunhong: "Let us keep this document and say his Excellency would not let us have it. Then we can take it to Chang. If you two don't care to come with me, I will give each of you ten taels and you can go home and keep your mouths shut."

Laijue did not object, but Chunhong would have nothing to do with the scheme. He would not promise anything.

When they came to the gate, paper money was hanging up and the monks were busy at their prayers. There were many people present. Li the Third went home, but Laijue and Chunhong came in and kowtowed to Uncle Wu and Chen Jingji. They were asked about the document and where Li the Third was, and, before Laijue could say anything, Chunhong handed the letter and the document to Uncle Wu. He told him that Li the Third had offered him ten taels to keep the letter and go to Chang's place with him. "I told him I would not do anything so shameful," the boy said, "and came straight to you.

Uncle Wu went to the inner court. "This young lad is really extraordinarily honest," he said to Yueniang, "but what a dirty trick of that wicked fellow Li the Third, as soon as he heard of your husband's death!"

He went to Ying Bojue. "We have a note," he said, "showing that Li the Third and Huang the Fourth still owe us six hundred and fifty taels. As Captain He has advised, we will send the note to his office and ask him to make them pay. He will certainly not refuse, seeing that he was the dead man's colleague."

"Li the Third certainly ought not to have done such a thing, but do not make too much of it, Uncle," Bojue said. "I will go and speak to him about it."

He went to Li the Third's house, and they sent for Huang the Fourth. "You should not have offered the boys money," Bojue said. "That gave them a hold over you. Now you are like the man who was too slow to catch the fox and only came in for the smell. They are talking about going to the courts, and you know how those officials look after one another. These were in the same office, and you would have no chance at all. Listen to me. Send twenty taels quietly to Uncle Wu. Consider it as money you might have had to spend at Yanzhou. I understand that Ximen's people are not going on with the business, and all we have to do is to get the document and go and see Chang. You must scrape together two hundred taels and take some food to offer to the dead. Give them the two hundred taels and ask them to make a new arrangement with regard to the rest, telling them that you will pay the balance by degrees as your business progresses. That seems to me to be the best thing you can do and you will save your face at the same time."

"You are right, Brother," Huang the Fourth said. "Brother Li, you were in too much of a hurry."

That evening. Huang the Fourth and Ying Bojue went to see Uncle Wu, taking with them twenty taels of silver. They told him they wanted the document and asked his help. Uncle Wu knew that Yueniang did not propose to go any further in the matter, and, when he saw the silver before him, he promised to help them, and accepted it. Next day, Li the Third and Huang the Fourth came to Ximen's house with two hundred taels of silver and an offering of food. Uncle Wu told Yueniang. The old contract was torn up and a new one made in which it was stated that they owed four hundred taels, which they were to pay in installments. Yueniang forgave them the remaining fifty. The document was given to Ying Bojue and he went with Li the Third and Huang the Fourth to make a bargain with Chang.

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## Ch'en Ching-chi Resorts to Pilfering Jade & Purloining Perfume; Li Chiao-erh Makes Off with the Silver & Returns to the Brothel

A poem reads:

When temples collapse the resident monks are few;
When bridges fall down the crossers are not many.
When households are poor their servants are lazy;
When officials retire their inferiors scorn them.
When waters are shallow the fish will not remain;
When forests are scanty the birds will not roost.
The way of the world responds to cold and warmth;
Human prestige is thereby enhanced or diminished.[2]
These 8 lines of verse refer to the fact that:
Warmth and coldness convey the way of the world;[3]
Human sentiments respond to failure and success.
This phenomenon is much to be regretted.

On the first of the 7 weekly commemorations of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, or Temple of Kindness Requited, led a contingent of sixteen monks to come and perform a "land and water" mass for the salvation of the deceased. Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor came to attend the ceremony and secured the job of presiding over the services for the second weekly commemoration. The household of Ch'iao Hung also made a sacrificial contribution for the occasion. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh got together with several friends who were present for the ceremony. The first of these was Ying Po-chüeh himself; the second was Hsieh Hsi-ta; the third was Hua Tzu-yu; the fourth was Chu Jih-nien; the fifth was Sun T'ien-hua; the sixth was Ch'ang Shih-chieh; and the seventh was Pai Lai-ch'iang.

When the seven of them had sat down together, Ying Po-chüeh addressed them, saying, "His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing is dead, and the second of the seven weekly commemorations of his death is at hand. In the course of our relationship with him, we have eaten off of him, made use of him, spent money of his, borrowed things from him, and sponged off him. Now that he is dead, we can hardly pretend not to acknowledge all this, or get away with:

Scattering sand in order to blind the eyes

of those behind us.

When he comes before King Yama in the fifth court of the underworld he is unlikely to exonerate us. The best thing to do is for each of us to come up with one mace of silver, making seven mace in all. We can spend one mace and six candareens to purchase a portable table replete with flowers, five bowls of viands, and five saucers of fruits; one mace to purchase a portion of the three sacrificial animals; one mace and five candareens to purchase a flagon of wine; five candareens to purchase paper money for the use of the dead, incense, and candles; two mace to purchase a commemorative scroll and engage Licentiate Shui to compose a funeral eulogy; and one mace and two candareens to hire bearers to convey these purchases before His Honor's spirit tablet where we can present them as a sacrificial offering. We will actually come out ahead, since they will provide each of us with a length of mourning damask worth seven candareens, which we can take home and use to make skirt waists out of. Moreover, they are hardly likely to let us go home without feeding us a meal, and on the day of the burial ceremony we can not only eat our fill at the graveyard but also take home half a table's worth of food from the graveside tables to feed to our wives and children, thus saving them two or three day's worth of money for snacks. What do you think of this proposal?"

They responded with one voice, saying, "Brother, what you say makes sense."

Thereupon, they each contributed the proposed amount of silver and turned it over to Ying Po-chüeh to take care of procuring the sacrificial offerings, purchasing the commemorative scroll, and engaging Licentiate Shui, who resided outside the city wall, to compose a funeral eulogy for the occasion.

Licentiate Shui was well aware that Ying Po-chüeh and his cronies had chosen to ingratiate themselves with Hsi-men Ch'ing, with whom they had formed:

A cabal of petty men.[4]

He therefore chose to refer suggestively to this fact in the eulogy that he composed. This was duly inscribed on the commemorative scroll, which was taken by the seven of them, together with their sacrificial offerings, and displayed before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet. Ch'en Ching-chi, clad in his mourning garments, returned their salutations. With Ying Po-chüeh taking the lead, each of them proceeded to show their respects with an offering of incense. They were all too unsophisticated to grasp the hidden significance of the eulogy. After a libation of wine had been poured, the text of the eulogy was intoned out loud, and read as follows:

On this, the third day *keng-yin*, of the second month, the first day of which was *wu-tzu*, in the year *wu-hsü*, the first year of the Ch'ung-ho reign period, his devoted servants Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Hua Tzu-yu, Chu Jih-nien, Sun T'ien-hua, Ch'ang Shih-chieh, and Pai Lai-ch'iang respectfully offer a pure libation along with other offertory foods in sacrifice before the spirit tablet of His Honor the late officer of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hsi-men Ch'ing. During his life, the deceased was upright and unbending, possessed of a rigid and ramrodlike nature. He neither feared the weak nor succumbed to the hard. He was ever ready to share his water with those in need, or moisten them with his dew. In succoring those who were stripped bare, his purse was plentifully supplied. His bearing was manly, ever prepared to respond to stimulation, or succumb to temptation. He lived in the company of brocade trousers, and hid himself amid encircling waistbands. Though his body had eight bulges, he did not bother to scratch them; but when assailed by lice, it itched unbearably. We recipients of his largess have been content to hang around between his legs, joining him to sleep amid the "willows" in the quarter, [5] and keeping him company during sprees in the bordellos. Ever engaged in sticking his neck out and horning in, he took pride in his ability to maintain even a prolonged conflict. Who could have foreseen that he would come down with an ailment from which he would never rise again? [6] Now he has died with his legs stretched out straight, leaving behind a son like a turtledove dropping its egg. On whom are we to rely? We can no longer visit the camps of mist and flowers, or sponge off the bordellos with their peaked red walls. [7] We can no longer feast with him while embracing soft jade, or ride with him to enjoy warm fragrance. We are left with nothing to do but hang our heads and stamp our feet, abandoned to dangle around lackadaisically. Now we present an oblation of milky muck, followed by a meager libation. Should the spirit of the deceased not be incognizant of our actions, [8] may it deign to come and enjoy our offering. Pray come and partake thereof. [9]

When they had finished offering their sacrifice, Ch'en Ching-chi expressed his gratitude with an obeisance and invited them into the summerhouse for an ample repast, complete with the usual:

Three soups and five courses,
after which, he saw them to the door.

That day, Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the Verdant Spring Bordello, upon hearing that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died:

Laid plans and hatched a scheme,
according to which she prepared an offertory table and dispatched Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh in their sedan chairs to offer paper money and express their condolences. Yüeh-niang did not come out to welcome them, but Li Chiao-erh and Meng Yü-lou entertained them in the master suite.

Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh took the opportunity to speak to Li Chiao-erh surreptitiously, saying, "Our mother says that the man is dead, and we denizens of the licensed quarter are not able to maintain our chastity. It has always been the case that:

Though you erect a thousand li marquee,
There is no party that does not come to an end.[10]

If you have any valuables in your hands, you should let Li Ming surreptitiously smuggle them back home for your future use. You mustn't be foolish. As the saying goes:

Though Yang-chou may be wonderful,
It's not a place you would choose to make your home.[11]

No matter how long it may be, sooner or later you will have to leave this place."

Li Chiao-erh made a mental note of everything they said.

Who could have anticipated that on that day Han Tao-kuo's wife, Wang Liu-erh, also prepared an offertory table, dressed up in attractive mourning garments, took a sedan chair, and came to burn paper money to Hsi-men Ch'ing. After presenting her offerings before his spirit tablet, she stood there for what seemed like half a day, but nobody came out to welcome her. It so happens that during the first week after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Wang Ching had been dismissed and sent back home. When the page boys saw that Wang Liu-erh had arrived, none of them dared to go inside and report it.

Lai-an, however:

Not understanding the true state of affairs,
went back to Yüeh-niang's room and said to her, "Han Tao-kuo's wife Auntie Han has come to offer paper money in Father's honor, and she has been left standing there in the front compound for a long time. Your elder brother Wu K'ai sent me to tell you about it."
Wu Yüeh-niang, who still couldn't get over her resentment at what had happened, railed at him, saying, "You crazy louse of a slave! Get out of here. So that Auntie Han, or Auntie Cunt, has shown up, has she? That lousy dog-fucked man-baiting whore! Her shenanigans end up:
Destroying families and killing people;[12]
Impelling fathers south and sons north;[13]
Making husbands abscond and wives flee.[14]
How can she have the nerve to come offer her cunt's-worth of paper money?"
This tirade left Lai-an feeling that:
He hardly knew what to do.[15]
When he went back before the spirit tablet, and Brother-in-law Wu asked him if he had reported the situation in the rear compound or not, Lai-an merely pouted, without saying anything.
Only after being interrogated for what seemed like half a day did he respond, "Mother really cursed me out."[16]
Brother-in-law Wu promptly went back to the rear compound and said to Yüeh-niang, "Sister, how can you act that way? You should stop bandying words that way immediately. It has always been the case that:
People may be bad but civility is not bad.[17]
Her husband has a considerable amount of our capital in hand. How can you treat her that way?
A good reputation is not easily obtained.
You must stop carrying on this way. Even if you choose not to go out yourself, you could send the Second Lady or the Third Lady out to greet her, and see her off. That would do just as well. Why should you open yourself to criticism by acting this way?"
It was only when Yüeh-niang realized how censorious her brother was that she had nothing further to say on the subject.
Shortly thereafter, Meng Yü-lou went to welcome Wang Liu-erh with a bow and sat down with her in front of the spirit tablet. After drinking only one cup of tea, the woman felt uncomfortable about remaining any longer, said goodbye, got up, and departed. Truly:
Even if one could draw off all the water
of the West River,
It would hardly suffice to wash away
this day's shame.
Li Kuei-ch'ing, Li Kuei-chieh, and Wu Yin-erh were all sitting in the master suite at the time. Upon hearing Yüeh-niang abuse Han Tao-kuo's wife as every kind of whore, they couldn't help feeling implicated, since:
For every branch you chop down,
A hundred trees are threatened.
The two sisters did not feel comfortable remaining any longer and expressed a wish to go home before the sun set.
Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged the two of them to stay, saying, "This evening, our managers can keep you company while watching the puppet show. You can go home tomorrow."
She continued to urge them to stay for what seemed like half a day, but only Li Kuei-chieh and Wu Yin-erh agreed to remain after seeing off Li Kuei-ch'ing on her way home.
That evening, after the monks had left, sure enough, a good many neighbors, servants, and managers, including Ch'iao Hung, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, Brother-in-law Shen, Hua Tzu-yu, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, and Ch'ang Shih-chieh, some twenty people or more, were assembled. A troupe of puppeteers had been hired for the occasion, and they put on their performance in the large temporary structure, where a feast had been prepared for the overnight wake. The piece they performed was the hsi-wen drama about the brothers Sun Jung and Sun Hua, entitled *Sha-kou ch'üan-fu* (The stratagem of killing a dog to admonish a husband).[18]
The female guests were gathered behind standing screens in the reception hall where Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet was located, in front of which a see-through blind had been suspended, and tables had been set up so they could enjoy the show. Li Ming and Wu Hui were engaged to wait upon them and stayed overnight in order to do so. Before long, after everybody had arrived, and the sacrifices had been completed, the candles in the temporary structure were lit, the guests took their seats, the overture of drum music began, and the performance of the hsi-wen drama commenced. It was the third watch before the performance was finished.
It so happens that since the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing not a day passed during which Ch'en Ching-chi failed to flirt with P'an Chin-lien. They either made eyes at each other in front of his spirit tablet, or joked with each other behind the screens.
At this point, taking advantage of the disorder as the guests were leaving, the women were returning to the rear compound, and the servants were clearing away the utensils, Chin-lien gave Ch'en Ching-chi's hand a squeeze while nobody was looking and said, "My son, today your mother will give you what you want. While Hsi-men Ta-chieh is in the rear compound, we can make use of your quarters for the purpose."
This was just what Ch'en Ching-chi had been waiting for, and he promptly went ahead of her to open the door to his quarters. The woman, concealing herself in the shadows, slipped inside behind him, and:
Without saying another word,[19]
unfastened her skirt, reclined face up on the k'ang, let:
Her pair of wild ducks fly to his shoulders,
and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to commit adultery with her. Truly:
With lustful daring as big as the sky,
what is there to fear?
Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:
a lifetime of passion.
Having been acquainted for two years,
They have succeeded in becoming mates.
After having been infatuated so long,
This fine day they have come together.
One of them gently wriggles her willowy waist;
The other makes haste to extend his jade stalk.
Into each other's ears they pour the passions
evoked by clouds and rain;
On their pillows they swear to be as faithful
as the hills and seas.
What with the oriole's abandon and the
butterfly's pursuit,
Their turbulent love-making takes a myriad forms;
What with the tempestuous rainfall and
the skittish clouds,
Her captivating maneuvers are infinite in number.
One of them, in a lowered voice,
Calls out "darling" incessantly;
The other, locked in an embrace,
Cannot help calling out "daddy."
Truly, it is the case that:
The hue of the willow has abruptly turned
a bright new green;
The complexion of the blossom has not lost
its previous red.[20]
Before long, as soon as their bout of clouds and rain was over, the woman, fearing that someone might come in, hastily left the room and went back to the rear compound.
The next day, the young scamp, still savoring the sweet taste of his conquest, went to Chin-lien's quarters early in the morning and found that she was still in bed, not having gotten up yet.
Peeking through the latticework he saw the woman lying there with:
Her rosy countenance wrapped in the quilt;
Her powdered cheeks like fluted jadestone;
and said to her, "What a fine keeper of the storeroom you are, not to be up yet at this hour. Today, Kinsman Ch'iao Hung has come to make a sacrificial offering, and the First Lady has directed that the offertory tables presented yesterday by Li the Third and Huang the Fourth should be taken inside. You should get up immediately, and get the key for me."
The woman promptly told Ch'un-mei to fetch the key for him, and Ch'en Ching-chi sent Ch'un-mei to precede him upstairs and open the door. Meanwhile, the woman stuck her tongue out through the latticework, and the two of them sucked away at each other for a while. Truly, it is the case that:
The aroma of rouge pervades his mouth,
as he swallows her saliva;
Her sweet spittle transfuses his heart,
drenching lungs and liver.
There is a song to the tune "Plucking the Cassia" that testifies to this:
It was annoying that the cries of the cuckoo
penetrated the beaded blind.
Our hearts seemed stitched together;
Our mutual feelings were like glue.
But all I saw was her smiling face on which,
The hollow cheeks were sad,
The powdered eyebrows thin.
Her fingers were emaciated.
Her chignon was disheveled, hanging loose
from its turquoise pins;
Her sleepy face was flushed, its jadelike
pallor daubed with red.
Having tasted her sandalwood mouth,
The aroma still lingers on my lips.
I cannot help recalling the sweet taste.[21]
In a little while, after Ch'un-mei had opened the door to the storeroom on the second floor, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to the front compound to take care of moving the offertory tables.
Before long, the sacrificial offering presented by the Ch'iao Hung household was duly put in place. After Ch'iao Hung's wife, and Ch'iao Hung himself, along with a number of their relations, had finished presenting their sacrificial offering in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Brother-in-law Wu the Second, and Manager Kan Jun invited them into the temporary structure, where Li Ming and Wu Hui stood ready to play and sing for their entertainment.
That day, Cheng Ai-yüeh from the licensed quarter also came to offer paper money and express her condolences, and Yüeh-niang told Meng Yü-lou to provide her with a mourning skirt and girdle, and invite her to join the other female guests who were gathered in the rear compound.
When Cheng Ai-yüeh saw that Wu Yin-erh and Li Kuei-chieh were already there, she was annoyed at the two of them for not keeping her informed and said, "If I had known about Father's death, I would hardly have failed to come before this. A fine pair you are, not to have gotten together with me about it."
When she found that Yüeh-niang had given birth to a son, she said, "Mother, you have:
One cause for joy and one cause for sorrow.[22]
It is too bad that Father passed away before his time, but now that you have an heir, you need not worry about the future."
Yüeh-niang saw that everyone was provided with mourning garb and kept them there until the evening, when the party broke up.
The third day of the second month was the time for Hsi-men Ch'ing's second weekly commemoration, and on that occasion Abbot Wu Tsung-che of the Taoist Temple of the Jade Emperor led a contingent of sixteen Taoist priests to recite scriptures and perform rites at his residence. On that day, Ho Yung-shou took the initiative in inviting Eunuch Director Liu, Eunuch Director Hsüeh, Commandant Chou Hsiu, Commander-General Ching Chung, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, and Commander Yün Li-shou, his fellow military officers, to join with him in offering a sacrifice in Hsi-men Ch'ing's honor. Yüeh-niang invited Ch'iao Hung, her elder brother Wu K'ai, and Ying Po-chüeh to keep them company and arranged for Li Ming and Wu Hui, the two boy musicians, to play and sing for them in the temporary structure, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
That evening, after the scripture recitations were concluded, and the spirit of the deceased had been bidden farewell, Yüeh-niang gave orders that Li P'ing-erh's spirit tablet and portrait should be taken outside and burned, and that her trunks of possessions should be carried into the master suite and stored there. She also decided that the wet nurse Ju-i and Ying-ch'un should be kept in the rear compound to work there, gave Hsiu-ch'un to Li Chiao-erh to serve in her quarters, and locked the door of Li P'ing-erh's former quarters. Alas! Truly:
The painted beams and carved rafters
are not yet dry;
But the doting occupant is no longer
to be seen inside.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Beneath the terrace of King Hsiang of Ch'u
the water flows on unhurried;

A single case of heartsickness is able to
produce sorrow in two places.
The moon itself is completely oblivious of
the changes in human affairs;
As, late at night, it continues to shine on
the crest of the plastered wall.[23]

At this time, every day, Li Ming, on the pretext of helping out in the coffin chamber, surreptitiously urged Li Chiao-erh to secretly hand over her valuables to him so he could smuggle them out and take them back to the brothel. After each trip, he would return in order to continue helping out, staying away from home for two or three nights. He succeeded thereby in pulling the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes, and no one dared to put a stop to it because her brother, Wu the Second, had been engaging in hanky-panky with Li Chiao-erh.

On the ninth day of the second month, the scripture recitation for the third weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death was performed, and Yüeh-niang emerged from her lying-in room. No monks came to recite scriptures for the fourth weekly commemoration, and on the twenty-sixth day of the month, Ch'en Ching-chi went to take care of the ground breaking for the tomb and then returned home. The funeral procession took place on the twentieth day of the month and involved a considerable number of burial objects and papier-mâché funerary fabrications, as well as people who came to escort the casket, but the crowd was not nearly as large as it had been for Li P'ing-erh's funeral procession.

When the coffin was ready to be carried outside, Ch'en Ching-chi prepared to perform the role of filial son by smashing an earthenware crock to signal that the procession was about to begin, and accompanying the casket on foot, keeping one hand upon it. Buddhist Superior Lang, the abbot of the Pao-en Temple, was invited to preside over the ceremony of raising the coffin. Sitting in his sedan chair, in an elevated position, he recited a few lines of eulogy about Hsi-men Ch'ing's life that put it very well.

In solemn commemoration of the spirit of the late Commandant for Military Strategy in the Embroidered Uniform Guard, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing. For humans living in this world,
The flash of lightning is quickly extinguished;
The spark from a flint is difficult to sustain.
Fallen blossoms are not fated to
return to the tree;
Flowing water is not destined to
return to its source.
Though living in painted hall and brocade room,
When your life is over, it is like
a windblown lamp;
Though you enjoy supreme rank and lofty office,
When your time is up, they resemble
nothing but dreams.
Yellow gold and white jade,
Are merely prerequisites for disaster;
Red powder and light furs,
Are but the expenses of mundane labor.
Wives and children cannot ensure
a lifetime of happiness;
The darkness of the grave entails
a myriad forms of grief.
One fine day, while sleeping on your pillow,
You'll end up underneath the Yellow Springs.
An empty epitaph will proclaim
your specious fame;
The yellow earth will entomb
your fragile bones.
Your hundred acres of fields and gardens,
Will only create dissension among your
sons and daughters;
Your thousand trunks of satin and brocade,
Will not furnish you an inch of thread
after your death.[24]
When we expire like wind or fire, neither
the old nor the young are spared;
When the hills and streams are eroded away,
what heroes will there be?[25]
It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter!
The breath is transformed into a clear breeze,
the dust returns to earth;
Once your three inches of breath are finished,[26]
they will go and not return;
The head is altered and the face replaced
an infinite number of times.
As the poem says:
In this life the hardest thing to bear
is the coming of death;
Every one of us, on approaching the end,
is frantically disturbed.
The elements earth, water, fire, and wind[27]
mutually assail us:
Our spirits and our ethereal and material
souls all fly away.
While still alive, we do not know how to
seek the road to life;
After our death, who knows what will be
our final destination?
Every last thing that we possess, we are
unable to take with us;
Without so much as a stitch of clothing[28]
we must face King Yama.

When Buddhist Superior Lang had finished reciting the eulogy, Ch'en Ching-chi smashed the earthenware crock in which the paper money had been burned, and the casket was raised and carried on its way. The members of the household, both high and low, as well as the relatives, dressed in mourning garb, all wept until:
Their cries shook the heavens.

Wu Yüeh-niang sat in the sedan chair designated for the conveyance of the soul of the departed right behind the casket, while the female guests followed in the wake of the procession as it made its way to the family graveyard five li outside the South Gate for the interment. Ch'en Ching-chi had prepared a gift of a bolt of silk for Commander Yün Li-shou and asked him to perform the ceremony of dotting the spirit tablet. Yin-yang Master Hsü presided over the interment, and the relatives in their mourning garb participated by each throwing a spadeful of earth into the tomb. Unfortunately, the offertory tables produced at the graveside were not many in number, consisting only of those presented by Brother-in-law Wu K'ai, Ch'iao Hung, Ho Yung-shou, Brother-in-law Shen, Brother-in-law Han, and the five or six managers of Hsi-men Ch'ing's business enterprises. Abbot Wu Tsung-che also left twelve Taoist acolytes behind to preside over the return of the spirit tablet, which was placed in a position of honor in the parlor of the master suite. After the tablet had been set in place, and Yin-yang Master Hsü had performed a ritual purification, the crowd of relatives departed, and Wu Yüeh-niang and her fellow wives kept vigil beside his spirit tablet as an expression of their filiality.

A day or so later, after they had returned from the ceremony of revisiting the grave, Wu Yüeh-niang sent all the orderlies and adjutants who had been assigned to serve Hsi-men Ch'ing back to the yamen.

On the occasion of the fifth weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, Yüeh-niang invited Nun Hsüeh, Nun Wang, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery, along with twelve nuns, to recite sutras, and perform a litany of repentance, in order to release Hsi-men Ch'ing's soul from purgatory and allow it to be reborn in Heaven. Sister-in-law Wu and Wu Shun-ch'en's wife, Third sister Cheng, both came to keep her company.

It so happens that on the day of the burial ceremony, Li Kuei-ch'ing and Li Kuei-chieh, while at the graveside, had secretively spoken to Li Chiao-erh, thus and so, saying, "Mother says that you ought to consider the fact that since you no longer have anything of value in your hands, there is no reason for you to remain any longer in his household. You have no sons or daughters, so what is there to keep you there? She suggests that you initiate a quarrel that will give you an excuse for breaking clear of the place. The other day, Brother Ying the Second came and reported that His Honor Chang the Second who lives on Main Street is willing to spend five hundred taels of silver to acquire you as his Second Lady and let you take charge of his household. If you go there, you can get a new start in life, whereas if you remain faithful to his memory until you grow old and die, what will you gain by that? After all, as denizens of the licensed quarter we are accustomed to:
Abandoning the old to welcome the new,
and seeking advantage by:
Playing up to the rich and successful.[29]
We can hardly afford to waste our time."

Li Chiao-erh made a mental note of everything they said and resolved that after the fifth weekly commemoration of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, she would:
Let the wind fan the flames,
And take the easiest course.[30]

Who could have anticipated that P'an Chin-lien would tell Sun Hsüeh-o, "On the day of the burial ceremony, while we were at the graveside, I saw Li Chiao-erh engaged in private conversation with Brother-in-law Wu the Second in one of the small chambers in the garden. And Ch'un-mei, with her own eyes, also saw Li Chiao-erh, behind the screen in the coffin chamber, hand over a package of goods to Li Ming, who stuffed it into his waist and took it home with him."

When Yüeh-niang got word of this, she called her brother, Wu the Second, onto the carpet and told him off, sending him back to the shop to take care of the business, and refusing him permission to enter the rear compound in the future. She also ordered P'ing-an, who was in charge of the gate, not to let Li Ming in anymore. At this, the former prostitute, Li Chiao-erh:
Her discomfiture turning into anger,
felt that she had found just the pretext she was looking for. One day, because Yüeh-niang was drinking tea with Sister-in-law Wu in the master suite and had invited Meng Yü-lou but not invited her, she got into:
A vituperative altercation,
with Yüeh-niang, pounding on the base of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, weeping and wailing, and yelling and screaming. While in her quarters, at the third watch in the middle of the night, she threatened to hang herself, and when her maidservant reported this to Yüeh-niang, she panicked. After consulting with Sister-in-law Wu, Yüeh-niang summoned Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the Li Family Establishment, to negotiate about sending her back to the bordello.

Auntie Li the Third, who was apprehensive that she might be forced to leave all her clothes and jewelry behind, interjected a few words, saying, "This kinswoman of mine, while here, has been forced to:
Humble herself and experience humiliation,[31]
Taking the blame for the faults of others.
If you insist on severing the relationship, hard as it may be for her, you ought to offer her the sum of several tens of taels of silver to compensate her for her embarrassment."

Wu K'ai, as the occupant of an official post, was reluctant to express an opinion on the matter, one way or the other, but after negotiating for what seemed like half a day, he suggested that Yüeh-niang should let her keep all the clothing, jewelry, luggage, bedding, and other accessories from her quarters, and send her on her way, but not permit her to take the maidservants Yüan-hsiao and Hsiu-ch'un with her.

Li Chiao-erh really wanted to retain the two maidservants, but Yüeh-niang adamantly refused to allow this, saying, "You must only want to procure them in order to make prostitutes out of them."

This accusation threw the procuress into such consternation that she did not dare utter another word on the subject, but put on an ingratiating smile and said farewell to Yüeh-niang, while Li Chiao-erh got into a sedan chair and was borne off to the bordello.

Gentle reader take note: The singing girls in the licensed quarter make their living by flaunting their beauty, and depend for their livelihood on rouge and powder. In the morning, they take on Dashing Chang, and in the evening they engage Wastrel Li. They let fathers in the front door, while opening the rear door for their sons.
Abandoning the old to welcome the new,
Their eyes open at the sight of money.[32]
This is a self-evident principle.

Before they are taken into your home, they pester you incessantly, allowing you to burn incense upon them and cutting off locks of hair, threatening to commit suicide and pleading for wedlock. But once they are taken into your home and allowed to marry out of their profession, no matter what efforts you may make to:
Play up to them a thousand ways, or

Ensnare them with a myriad wiles,
You cannot control the monkeys of their minds
or the horses of their wills.
If they do not choose to fatten themselves at your expense while you are still alive, they will find a pretext for deserting your household once you are dead. Sooner or later, they will revert to:
Eating congee out of their old pot.[33]
Truly:
If a serpent is confined in a tube,
its sinuosity will remain;[34]
If a bird is released from its cage,
it will resume its flight.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
It is regrettable that the "misty willows"
are so very inconstant;
In their nuptial chambers they entertain
new grooms every night.
Their jadelike wrists pillow the heads
of thousands of patrons;
Their single daubs of ruby lips are tasted
by a myriad customers.
Though they are given to assuming a host of
voluptuous attitudes;
Their congenital hearts and feelings are
utterly untrustworthy.
No matter how adept you may think yourself
to be at controlling them;
There is no way of guaranteeing they won't
long for their former ways.[35]
After sending Li Chiao-erh on her way, Yüeh-niang couldn't help weeping, and the others present did their best to comfort her.
"Sister," said P'an Chin-lien, "forget it. Don't let it disturb you so. As the saying goes:
When a man marries a whore it is like
keeping a sea eagle:
Without access to the water, it longs
for the Eastern Sea.
She is merely returning to her former profession. There is no reason for you to be so disturbed by it today."
Just as the household was in a state of perturbation, P'ing-an suddenly came in and announced, "His Honor the salt-control censor Ts'ai Yün is here, sitting in the reception hall. I told him that Father had died, and he asked how long ago it happened. I told him that he had died of an illness on the twenty-first day of the first month, and that the seventh weekly commemoration of his death had already taken place. He asked whether there was a spirit tablet, or not, and I told him there was one, and that it was set up in the rear compound. He asked if he could pay his respects to it, and I have come to tell you about it."
"Get our son-in-law to go out and welcome him," directed Yüeh-niang.
Before long, Ch'en Ching-chi, attired in his mourning clothes, went out to welcome Censor Ts'ai Yün, and sometime later, after the appropriate preparations had been made, invited him back to the rear compound where he paid his respects to Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet.
Yüeh-niang, attired in heavy mourning, came out to bow to him in return, but without exchanging so much as a word with her, he merely said, "Lady, pray return to your chamber."
He then went on to say to Ch'en Ching-chi, "In the past I have often put your household to the trouble of entertaining me, and now that my tour of duty has expired and I am about to return to the capital, I have come to express my gratitude to him. Who could have anticipated that he would already have passed away?"
He then went on to ask, "What illness did he die of?"
"It was an ailment produced by phlegm-fire," replied Ch'en Ching-chi.
"How regrettable! How regrettable!" said Censor Ts'ai Yün.
He then summoned his attendants to bring out two bolts of Hang-chou silk, a pair of velvet socks, four preserved whitefish, and four jars of candied sweetmeats, saying, "May these paltry gifts serve, for lack of anything better, as sacrificial offerings for the dead."
He also brought out a packet containing fifty taels of silver, saying, "This is a sum that His Honor was generous enough to lend me in the past. Now that I have been able to draw upon my official salary, I am returning it as a mark of our abiding friendship. Tell your servant to take it inside."
"Your Honor is being overly conscientious," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, and Yüeh-niang said, "Will Your Honor please take a seat in the front reception hall?"
"There is no need for me to stay any longer," replied Censor Ts'ai Yün. "But if you will offer me some tea, I will drink a cup, that's all."
The attendants promptly brought in a serving of tea, and after drinking it, Censor Ts'ai Yün nonchalantly stood up, got into his sedan chair, and went his way.
Upon receiving these fifty taels of silver, Yüeh-niang felt happy at heart on the one hand, but somewhat stricken on the other. She remembered how, on former occasions, when high officials of this kind visited they would never have been allowed to leave after such scanty entertainment but would have been invited to stay and drink for who knows how long. But now that Hsi-men Ch'ing had died:
With his legs stretched out straight,
though she still possessed his property, it was obvious that there was no one left to properly entertain visitors. Truly:
When men form friendships, it is like enjoying
the breeze and the moonlight;
When Heaven unfurls a landscape,[36] it exposes one
to its rivers and mountains.[37]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Behind gently closed double doors, the
spring days seem long;
For whom does she toss and turn as she
resents time's passing?
How winsome are her incomparable glances
like autumn ripples;
As she yearns in silence for her lover,
shedding lines of tears.[38]
As soon as Ying Po-chüeh learned that Li Chiao-erh had returned to the bordello, he reported the fact to Chang the Second, who went and spent five taels of silver to spend the night with her. It so happens that Chang the Second was one year younger than Hsi-men Ch'ing, was born in the year of the hare, and was thirty-one years old. Li Chiao-erh was thirty-three years old, but Auntie Li the Third, the madam of the bordello, reduced her age by six years, claiming that she was only twenty-seven, and induced Ying Po-chüeh to conceal the truth about it. Chang the Second consequently paid three hundred taels of silver to acquire her and took her home to be his Second Lady. Meanwhile, Sticky Chu and Blabbermouth Sun continued, as before, to inveigle Wang the Third into patronizing the Li Family Establishment and carrying on with Li Kuei-chieh. But no more of this.
Ying Po-chüeh, along with Li the Third and Huang the Fourth, borrowed five thousand taels of silver from Eunuch Director Hsü, while Chang the Second put up another five thousand taels, which enabled them to secure the contract from Tung-p'ing prefecture for the procurement of antiquarian relics. Every day, on their:
Large horses with jeweled saddles,
they paraded through the licensed quarter. Upon the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, Chang the Second spent another thousand taels of silver to bribe the imperial relative, Military Affairs Commissioner Cheng Chü-chung, in the Eastern Capital to intervene with Chu Mien, the defender-in-chief of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and have him appointed to the position of judicial commissioner left vacant by the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing. He also improved his property by purchasing a garden and putting up some new structures. Ying Po-chüeh did not let a day go by without frequenting his place and toadying up to him, and told him every last thing he knew about the affairs of the Hsi-men household, both great and small.
He said to him, "In his household there is the Fifth Lady, P'an Chin-lien, the sixth child in her generation, who is extremely attractive and as pretty as a picture. When it comes to poetry, lyrics, songs or rhapsodies; the works of the hundred schools; the various word games played by breaking characters down into their component parts; or backgammon and elephant chess; there is little she has not mastered. Moreover, she knows how to read, writes a good hand, and is adept at playing the balloon guitar. This year she is not more than twenty-nine years old and is cleverer than any singing girl."
His speech had the effect of lighting a fire in Chang the Second's heart, and he could hardly wait to get his hands on her.
"Was she not the wife of that Wu the Elder who made his living peddling steamed wheat cakes?" he asked.
"That's the one," replied Ying Po-chüeh. "It has been five or six years by now since Hsi-men Ch'ing took her into his household, but I don't know whether she is thinking of remarrying, or not."
"Could I trouble you to inquire on my behalf?" said Chang the Second. "If she is willing to remarry, come tell me about it, and I will arrange to marry her."
"There is someone beholden to me who is working as a servant in that household," said Ying Po-chüeh. "His name is Lai-chüeh, and I will speak to him about it. If there is any indication that she is thinking of remarrying, I will let you know. If you are lucky enough to succeed in marrying her and taking her into your household, she would be superior to any singing girl. Originally, while Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive, he went to great lengths in order to acquire her. As a general rule:
Everything has its rightful owner,[39]
so there is no telling how it will turn out, but it would be a most propitious union. Now that you are possessed of such influence and prestige, if you should fail to obtain this beautiful mate, to:
Share in your glory and luxury,[40]
all your wealth and distinction would be in vain. I will get Lai-chüeh to surreptitiously inquire on your behalf. If there should be the slightest indication of her willingness to remarry, I will employ my:
Honeyed words and plausible speeches,
To awaken her libidinal propensities.
If you are willing to spend several hundred taels of silver, you can bring her into your household and enjoy her to your heart's content."
Gentle reader take note: Such profligate hangers-on are nothing but:
Petty people seeking personal advantage.[41]
On seeing other persons to be influential and wealthy, in order to secure food and clothing for themselves they will do everything in their power to play up to them, praising their merit and eulogizing their virtue. If they should be spendthrifts, they will extol them for being:
Open-handed with their wealth and chivalrous by nature,[42]
Heroic exemplars of magnanimity.[43]
Shrugging their shoulders and smiling ingratiatingly,[44]
Offering their children and surrendering their wives,[45]
There is no length to which they will not go.
But, no sooner do they see that:
Their forecourts have become deserted,[46]
than they start to:
Belittle them both openly and covertly,
Accusing them of dealing irresponsibly;
saying that they are unwilling to:
Found families and establish livelihoods;[47]
That their ancestors must have been evil,
To have produced such unworthy offspring.
Despite the profound kindness they have received in the past, they treat them as though they were strangers on the road. Originally, Hsi-men Ch'ing had been so close to Ying Po-chüeh that they were:
Like glue and like lacquer,
more intimate with each other than brothers. Hardly a day passed during which he failed to sponge off him, wear something of his, or benefit from his largess; but soon after his death, while his body was still warm, he committed a series of unrightful acts. Truly:
In painting a tiger, you can paint the skin but you can't paint the bones;
In knowing people, you can know their faces but you can't know their hearts.
A poem testifies to this:

In former years their friendship for each other was like gold or orchids;
He did everything he could to toady up to him, leaving no stone unturned.
But today, no sooner is Hsi-men Ch'ing's body safely buried in the grave,
Than he does his best to induce his concubines to sleep with someone else.

Like a woman in wine she swayed
And thought of the joys of past days.
The memory of them was beyond endurance.
There was silence in the high buildings

The Spring rain was falling.
At midnight, through the distant window, a dim light flickered.
She leaned against the pillar, and the breeze blew softly
She wandered through the passages, and her thoughts were troubled.
Through the window she could hear the sound of the snuffers,
But, when she beat upon the railing, no answer came.

One the seventh day after Ximen Qing's death, sixteen Buddhist monks came to hold a service. Ying Bojue brought together Xie Xida, Hua Tzu-yu, Zhu Shinian, Sun Tianhua, Chang Zhijie, and Bai Laiguang, and they all sat down. Bojue said to them: "His Lordship is dead, and this is his first week's mind. We were his friends. He gave us food, money, things for our use, and now and again he lent us money. Now he is dead, and it is impossible for us to ignore the fact. If we throw a little dust, it will get into people's eyes. If we do nothing, he will certainly want to know why, when we come to meet him before the face of the god of Hell. I suggest that we all contribute one *qian* of silver. There are seven of us and that will make seven *qian*. With that, we can buy presents and a scroll and get Master Shui to write something appropriate upon it. Then we will go and make our offering to the dead and, in return, we shall get a mourning handkerchief that will cost them at least seven *fen*. What do you think?"

"It is an excellent idea, Brother," they all agreed. They gave their money to Ying Bojue to buy the things that had been agreed upon and left it to him to make the necessary arrangements. Shui was quite well aware that Ying Bojue had been one of Ximen's companions in evil doing, and the panegyric he composed was full of satire. In due course Bojue and the rest brought their presents and set them out before the body. Chen Jingji, in mourning robes, received them. Bojue, as the leader, was the first to offer incense, and the others followed him. As none of them knew how to read, they had no idea what the panegyric said. So, when they made the offering of wine, they produced it and handed it over to someone else to read.

In the first year of the reign of Chonghe [it said], being the year *Wuxu*, in the second month, *Wuzi*, and the third day, *Gengyin*, we, Ying Bojue, Xie Xida, Hua Ziyu, Zhu Shinian, Sun Tianhua, Chang Zhijie, and Bai Laiguang reverently lay our offering of wine and food before the coffin of his Lordship Ximen, officer of the Royal Guard, and say:

He who is dead was a man of unimpeachable honor all his days. He never sacrificed the weak, nor did he surrender to the strong. He was a man of firmness and determination. He gave water to those who thirsted and distributed the essence of his glorious being to those in need of it. His chests and boxes were mighty: his appearance was elevated and proud. Whenever he came upon pleasant things, he rose to meet them; and when he came upon things that were dark, he withdrew. He lived in the company of silken trousers, and stored his wealth in the treasury of the loins. He had eight horns and needed not to scratch or dig; and when he came upon a flea or a louse, the itching was more than he could stand.

Now we humble fellows received many kindnesses at his hands. We were forever going with him to the chamber under the loins; we slept with him among the willows, and joyed with him among the flowers. We hoped that he might long lift his crest and fight valiantly. How could we foretell that he would suffer from this fatal sickness? Now his limbs are outstretched and he is gone; we are left behind trembling like doves upon our feet. We have no place to go; the camp of mist and flowers seems remote from us. No longer can we draw near to the red walls of the bawdy house. No longer can we go to battle with the tender jade. We cannot go hand in hand to warm and fragrant places. For him our heads are bent and our limbs weakened; he has made us lonely beyond all power to tell.

Now we have come to offer wine as milk and food. His spirit knows what we do, so we invite it to come here and partake of these our offerings.

After this, Chen Jingji came and made a reverence to express his thanks. Then he took them to the temporary building and entertained them to a substantial meal.

This day, the old procuress Li heard of Ximen's death and sent Li Guijie and Li Guiqing with offerings to lay before his body. Wu Yueniang could not come out, and they were entertained by Li Jiao'er and Meng Yulou.

"Mother says," the two girls told Li Jiao'er, "that now his Lordship is dead there is no sense in your staying here any longer. You are one of us. The proverb says: However large the arbor, no party can last forever. Mother says: Give your things to Li Ming and don't be silly about it. Yangzhou is a pleasant place, but one can't live there forever. Sooner or later, you will have to leave here." Li Jiao'er considered the matter.

The same day, Han Daoguo's wife, Wang Liu'er, came to burn some paper offerings for Ximen Qing. She was dressed in mourning. She set the things upon the table and stood waiting for a long time, but nobody came to greet her. The fact was that Wang Jing had already been dismissed, and the boys were all unwilling to tell their mistress that Wang Liu'er had come. Only Laian did not know this, and he went to Yueniang's room and said: "Aunt Han has come to burn paper offerings for my father. She has been standing there a long time, and Uncle Wu said I was to come and tell you."

Yueniang was still very angry with Wang Liu'er. She said to the boy: "Go away, slave! What do you mean by talking to me about Aunt Cunt or Aunt Devil? She is a husband-stealing whore, one of those creatures who bring families to destruction. She separates father from son, husband from wife, and then has the audacity to come here and offer her cuntish paper offerings!"

Laian did not know what to do. He went back to Uncle Wu, who asked him if he had spoken to the ladies. Laian made a face, and waited for a moment before he replied. Then he said: "All I got from the Great Lady was curses." Then Uncle Wu himself went to see his sister.

"What is this?" he said. "You ought not to use such language. It has always been conceded that though a man may himself be bad, the ceremonies he performs are none the worse for that. This woman's husband has a lot of your money and, if you behave like this to her, your good name will suffer. You must not do it. If you don't feel like going out to her yourself, tell the Second Lady or the Third to entertain her. Why make such a fuss about it? It may make people think very badly of you."

Wu Yueniang said nothing, but sometime later Meng Yulou went out to receive Wang Liu'er. They sat down and drank tea, but Wang Liu'er realized what was intended, and went away as soon as she could.

Guijie, Guiqing, and Wu Yin'er were in the upper room while Yueniang was calling Han Daoguo's wife every possible kind of whore, and they thought it likely that her remarks might be intended to apply to them also. Before sunset the two sisters prepared to go home, but Yueniang said: "There will be many people here tonight. Stay and watch the puppet plays and go home tomorrow."

Guijie and Wu Yin'er decided to stay, but Guiqing went home. In the evening, when the monks had done, more than twenty of Ximen's relatives and friends assembled. The puppet players came, and, while the party was proceeding in the temporary building, they played *How a Dog Was Killed to Teach a Lesson to the Husband*. The ladies sat in the hall in which the coffin lay. The lattice was drawn across, and their tables were placed near the screen.

Li Ming and Wu Hui were there, and did not go away that night. The guests, when they arrived, first made an offering to the dead. Then they sat around the tables, and candles were brought. It was the third night watch before the play was finished.

After Ximen Qing's death, Chen Jingji joked and trifled with Pan Jinlian every day. Sometimes, even before the coffin, they exchanged meaningful glances. Sometimes they made merry behind the screen. Now, when the guests were going away, and the ladies withdrawing to the inner court, Jinlian came close to Jingji and pinched him. "My son," she said, "tonight your mother will give you what you want. Your wife is here, so you must come to my place."

Jingji was delighted. He went to open the gate, and Jinlian ran through the darkness to her room. They did not utter a word, but undressed and lay down on the bed. Jingji did everything to her perfect satisfaction.

For two years they had known each other
And now today they come together
And their eager love is satisfied at last.
She gently moves her slender hips
He hastens to extend the precious scepter.
Then, ears pressed close to listen, they speak their love
Pledging their troth eternally upon the pillow.
She lets the butterfly possess her
Most exquisitely giving proof of her delight.
The rain is furious, the clouds submissive.
She plays a thousand, nay ten thousand, loving tricks.
"Darling," he whispers once and once again,
"My own heart," she answers, with a warm embrace.
The willow now puts forth new foliage
And the blossom retains its brilliant redness.

When they had done, Jinlian was afraid someone might come, and hurried again to the inner court. Next morning, the young man came very early to her room. She was still in bed and he peeped through the window. The red bedclothes covered her like a crimson cloud, and her cheeks were like jade.

"Oh, what a splendid housekeeper you are," he cried. "Not out of bed yet! And today our kinsman Qiao is coming to make his reverence to the dead, and the Great Lady says we are to get rid of the food that Li the Third and Huang the Fourth offered yesterday. Get up and let me have the key."

Jinlian told Chunmei to go and open the door upstairs; she put her lips to the window and the young man kissed her.

They hate to hear the cuckoo through the lattice of pearl
For their hearts are sewn together as by a needle
And their love bound as things are bound by glue.
He looks upon her smiling face
Its dimples rival the dainty eyebrows.
How delicate those tender fingers.
The ornaments of jade release their hold
And the dark hair falls tumbling.
The languid air gives place to passion
And the paleness changes to a rosy flush.
He touches her sweet lips
And the fragrance of them stays upon his own.
Even the memory of that touch
Brings sweetness to his mouth.

Chunmei opened the door and Jingji went to the outer court to watch the table being properly cleared. Then the food came from Qiao. Both Qiao himself and his wife offered it to the dead man. The two uncles Wu and Clerk Gan took the guests to the temporary building and there entertained them. Li Ming and Wu Hui played and sang.

This day, Zheng Aiyue came to make her offering. Yueniang asked Yulou to give the girl a mourning dress. Then she went to join the ladies. When she saw Guijie and Wu Yin'er already there, she said: "Why didn't you tell me? If I had known, I should have been here before. A nice pair you are, not to say a word to me about it!"

When she found that Yueniang had a baby, she said: "Now, mother, you have both joy and pain together. It is indeed sad that my father should die so young, but at least you now have a son to support you, and you need not worry any more."

Yueniang gave the girls mourning, and kept them until the evening.

The next day was the third of the second month, the second week's mind for Ximen Qing. Sixteen monks came from the Temple of the Jade King. Captain He invited the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, Major Zhou, General Jing, Captain Zhang, Yun Lishou, and other military officers, to go with him and offer food and a panegyric to their dead colleague. There was nobody to stop them and, dressed up like a lot of monkeys, they burned incense and kowtowed. Chen Jingji made a reverence to them in return. They were entertained and then went away.

Yueniang knew only too well that, of all the people who knew Ximen Qing, officers, friends, and servants alike, there were very few who were not seeking their own ends. She could trust none of them. But she believed Shutong to be honest and reliable, and appointed him to attend upon Li Jiao'er, giving him the keys of the Sixth Lady's rooms.

The water flows peacefully below the Xiang Wang Tai.
From the same love there spring two kinds of sadness.
The moon knows not the changes of mortal life
And in the depth of night
Still casts her beams upon the whitewashed walls.

Li Ming pretended to be helping Ximen's people, but secretly told Li Jiao'er to give him the things she was going to take away with her. He stayed for two or three days and did not go home. Yueniang knew nothing of this. The others were unwilling to mention the matter to her, for Li Jiao'er had not been guiltless in her dealings with the younger of Yueniang's brothers.

The ninth day of the month was the third week's mind, and again there was a religious service. There was none for the fourth week. On the sixteenth, Chen Jingji went to attend the digging of the grave. On the thirtieth, Ximen Qing was buried. There were many paper offerings, and a good number of people attended, but it was not such a magnificent occasion as when Li Ping'er was taken out to be buried. The Abbot of the Temple of Eternal Felicity officiated. He sat in a sedan chair and recited the scriptures in a loud voice. Then Chen Jingji broke a paper bowl and the coffin was taken out. The members of the household set up a wailing, and Yueniang, in her sedan chair, followed close behind the coffin. Then came the chairs of the other ladies. The body was taken straight outside the city and buried. Chen Jingji offered a roll of silk to Yun Lishou and asked him to complete the tablet. Xu, the Master of the Yin Yang, directed the funeral. It was sad to see how few people made offerings at the graveside. Uncle Wu, Qiao, Captain He, Uncle Shen and Uncle Han were the only ones to do so, except for Ximen's clerks. Abbot Wu left twelve young monks to perform the ceremony of the return; the tablet was set up in the upper room, and Master Xu purified the house. Then the relatives and friends went away.

Every day Yueniang and the others, dressed in their mourning, made offerings before the tablet. After the first visit to the grave, the soldiers went back to the office. For the fifth week's mind, Yueniang sent for the nuns Xue and Wang, and the Abbess and twelve nuns came to speed Ximen Qing on his way to paradise.

While the funeral party was being held, Guiqing and Guijie secretly said to Li Jiao'er: "Mother says you have nothing much of great value, and there is no reason why you should remain any longer in Ximen's house. Think what it means. You have no child, and there is no sense in staying on as a widow. Mother thinks the easiest plan is to start a quarrel and just break with them. Yesterday, Ying Bojue came and said that Zhang who lives in the High Street was minded to spend five hundred taels on getting you for his second wife. He will give you control of his household. Mother thinks you would do well there. There is no point in staying at Ximen's house all your life. We who come from the bawdy house have always to work on the principle. Welcome the new and give up the old. We must make up to those who are rich and powerful: we can't afford to waste our time."

After Ximen Qing's fifth week's mind, Li Jiao'er remembered this. She did not bother about the household but let things go as they would.

"The other day," Pan Jinlian said to Sun Xue'e, "I saw Li Jiao'er talking to Uncle Wu the Second in the small room at our family grave."

Chunmei saw her handing Li Ming a parcel behind the screen in the great hall. He tucked it away underneath his clothes and went off with it.

Yueniang was told of these things. She scolded Uncle Wu the Second, and would not let him have any more to do with the shop. She told Ping'an that Li Ming was not to be allowed to enter the house again. Li Jiao'er was first ashamed and then angry. She had been waiting for an opportunity to make trouble, and now she had it.

One day, when Yueniang was having tea with Aunt Wu, she asked Yulou to join them, but did not ask Li Jiao'er. This made the woman very angry. She shouted at Yueniang and thumped the table upon which Ximen's tablet rested. At the third night watch, she said she was going to hang herself. Her maid went to tell Yueniang, who was very much upset. She consulted her brother, and they sent for old woman Li and told her to take Li Jiao'er away. The old woman feared that Yueniang would not allow her to take her clothes and ornaments.

"My girl has been here and suffered from ill usage and backbiting, and you are not going to get rid of her so easily. She must have some money to wash away her shame."

Uncle Wu, in view of his official standing, would not say anything either way, and, after much haggling, Yueniang let Li Jiao'er go with clothes, ornaments, boxes, bed, and furniture. She would not let the two maids go, though Li Jiao'er tried to insist.

"No," she said, "certainly not. If you do take them, I shall bring an accusation against you for procuring young maids to be whores."

This frightened the old procuress. She said no more, but smiled and thanked Yueniang. Li Jiao'er got into a sedan chair and was carried to her old home.

Readers, singing girls make their living by selling their charms. With them it is purely a business. In the morning, they receive Chang the dissolute, and in the evening Li the ne'er-do-well. At the front door they welcome the father, and by the back door they let in the son. They forget their old clients and love the new. It is their nature to keep their eyes open when there is any money about. Even if a man loves them with his whole heart and does everything in his power to make them true, their hearts can never be secured. They steal the very food from a man's mouth, and as soon as he is dead, they quarrel and go away, back to their old business.

I laugh at the flowers of the mist
Which no one can keep for long.
Every night they find a new bridegroom.
Their jade-like arms are the pillow for a thousand men
Their ruby lips are enjoyed by ten thousand guests.
Their seductions are many

And their hearts are false.
You may devise a host of schemes to hold them
But you can never keep them
From longing for their old haunts.
When Li Jiao'er had gone, Yueniang sobbed aloud and the other ladies tried to console her. "Sister," Jinlian said, "don't let it upset you so much. The proverb says that when a man marries a whore, it is like trying to keep a seagull away from the water. When it cannot get to the water, it still thinks about the eastern ocean. All this was his fault."
While they were busied over this, Ping'an came and announced that his Excellency Cai, the Salt Commissioner, had come. "He is in the great hall," the boy said. "I told him that master had died. He asked when, and I said on the twenty-first day of the first month, and that we were now in the fifth week after his death. He asked me if the tablet had been set up, and I told him it was in the inner court. He wishes to pay reverence to it."
"Go and tell your brother-in-law to see him," Yueniang said.
Jingji put on mourning clothes and went to receive Cai. After a while, the inner court was made ready and Cai was invited to go there. He kowtowed before the tablet. Yueniang in return made reverence to him. He did not speak to her, except to invite her to retire. Then he said to Jingji: "Your father was very kind to me, and today, on my way to the Eastern Capital, I stayed especially to thank him. I never dreamed that I should find him dead. What was the cause of his death?"
"Inflammation of the lungs," Jingji told him.
"How very sad!" said Commissioner Cai.
He called his servants, and they brought him two rolls of Hangzhou silk, a pair of woolen socks, four fish, and four jars of preserved food. "These trifles," he said, "I offer to him who is dead." Then he gave Jingji fifty taels of silver. "Your father," he said, "was good enough to lend me this, and now that I have been paid myself, I return the money to set the seal upon our friendship." He asked Ping'an to take the money.
"Your Excellency is over-conscientious," Jingji said.
Yueniang told him to take Cai to the outer court, but the Commissioner said that he could not stay and would only drink a cup of tea. The servant brought the tea, and Cai went away.
Yueniang was half pleased, half sad when she received these fifty taels of silver. She reflected that if Ximen Qing had been alive he would never have allowed such a nobleman to go away without staying for something to eat. He would have remained, she thought, and enjoyed the pleasures of the table for many an hour. Now, he had stood up and gone. Though she still was rich, there was no man to entertain such guests.
When Ying Bojue heard that Li Jiao'er had gone back to the bawdy house, he went to tell Zhang the Second. Zhang took five taels of silver and went to spend the night with her. He was one year younger than Ximen Qing. His animal was the Hare, and he was thirty-two. Li Jiao'er was thirty-four, but the old procuress told him she was twenty-eight and warned Ying Bojue not to let him know the truth. So Zhang the Second paid three hundred taels and took Li Jiao'er for his second wife.
Zhu Shinian and Sun Guazui took Wang the Third to Li Guijie's house, and he attached himself to her again.
Then Ying Bojue, Li the Third, and Huang the Fourth borrowed five thousand taels from Eunuch Xu, and another five thousand from Zhang the Second, and began the business of purchasing antiquities for the authorities. Every day they went riding about on magnificent horses and calling at one bawdy house after another. Zhang the Second, now that Ximen Qing was dead, spent five thousand taels in bribing Zheng, one of the royal family in the Eastern Capital, so as to secure the appointment that Ximen Qing had held. He did much work upon his garden and rebuilt his house, and Bojue was there nearly every day. Bojue told him everything he knew about Ximen's household.
"His Fifth Lady," he said, "is as beautiful as a painting. She knows poems, songs, literature, philosophy, games, backgammon and chess. She can write very beautifully and play the lute exquisitely. She is not more than thirty years old and much more charming than any singing girl."
Zhang the Second was greatly impressed and wondered what he could do to get her for himself.
"Is that the woman who was once the wife of Wu Da the cake seller?" he asked.
"Yes." Bojue said. "She has been in Ximen's household for five or six years. I don't know whether she would be inclined to consider another marriage."
"Please find out for me," Zhang the Second said. "If she has any such idea, let me know at once, and I will marry her."
"I've a man still in that household," Ying Bojue said. "His name is Laijue. I'll tell him. And if he can do anything in the matter, I'll certainly let you know. It'd be much better for you to marry her than some singing girl. When Ximen Qing married her, he'd considerable trouble but things are never the same twice and what'll happen on this occasion, I can't say. But anyone who gets hold of a beauty like this will be a lucky fellow. You're a man of position and certainly ought to have someone like her to enhance its splendour. Otherwise, all your wealth's wasted. I'll tell Laijue to find out what he can for us. If there's the slightest whisper of the word marriage, I'll see what my sweet words and honeyed phrases can do to inflame that amorous heart. It may cost you a few hundred taels but it'll be worth it." All those who live upon others are men who seek for power and money. In their time, Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue had been like blood brothers. They might have been glued together, so close was their affection. Day after day, Bojue took his meals with Ximen and was given clothes. Now when his friend had only just died almost before his body was cold, Bojue was planning to bring disgrace upon him. With friends, it is only too possible to know the face and to know nothing about the heart just as an artist may paint the outside of a tiger but must leave the bones unseen.

## 104

### Han Tao-kuo Takes Advantage of a Chance to Appropriate the Goods & Defrauds Wu Yueniang; T'ang Lai-pao Defrauds his Master & Disregards his Benevolence

All things are determined by Heaven,[1] there is no point in seeking to alter them;[2]
The Lord of Heaven's control of just retribution is both clear and inescapable.
Those who give rein to their lascivious thoughts and defile the wives of others;
Will suffer the ingratitude of subordinates who betray them and steal their goods.
Not to mention the fact that after one is dead others will be up to their tricks;
It has ever been true that when one loses power one's servants will be ungrateful.
It is deplorable that Hsi-men Ch'ing should have accumulated such unfavorable karma;
That he enabled unscrupulous scoundrels to enjoy his wealth for half their lifetimes.
After Hsi-men Ch'ing had entrusted Han Tao-kuo and Lai-pao with four thousand taels of silver and sent them to the Chiang-nan region to purchase goods, they proceeded along the way:
Imbibing the wind and resting by water.[3]
Stopping by night and traveling by day,
until they arrived in Yang-chou, where they sought out the home of Miao Ch'ing in order to secure accommodations. When Miao Ch'ing read Hsi-men Ch'ing's handwritten note and remembered how he had done him:
The favor of saving his life,
he did everything in his power to entertain the two of them, enabling them to spend their days:
Scanning the flowers and inspecting the willows,
Drinking wine and seeking to gratify themselves.[4]
One day, early in the winter:
The frigid clouds were austere,
The crying geese were desolate,
The trees were shedding leaves,[5]
The landscape had turned bleak,
Homesickness was insurmountable.[6]
Thereupon, the two of them exerted themselves to visit one place after another, spending their remaining resources to purchase piece goods, and storing them in Miao Ch'ing's home preparatory to their departure.
Prior to this, Han Tao-kuo engaged the services of a singing girl named Wang Yü-chih from the Old Quarter in Yang-chou, whom he had patronized in the past, and Lai-pao engaged the services of the younger sister of Lin Ts'ai-hung, named Lin Hsiao-hung, to help them entertain the Yang-chou salt merchant Wang Ssu-feng and Miao Ch'ing on a daylong excursion to Pao-ying Lake, which was some distance from Yang-chou.
When they arrived back in the licensed quarter, it turned out to be the birthday of the madam of Wang Yü-chih's establishment, and Han Tao-kuo invited them all to a party to celebrate Auntie Wang the First's birthday. For this purpose, he sent his young employee Hu Hsiu to purchase wine and comestibles for the occasion, and also to invite the traveling merchants Wang Tung-ch'iao and Ch'ien Ch'ing-ch'uan to join them. Who could have anticipated that the two of them, along with Wang Ssu-feng, duly showed up, but Hu Hsiu did not return until sunset.
Han Tao-kuo, who was already somewhat inebriated, took him to task, saying, "Who knows where this rascal has been guzzling wine, only to show up now? He is reeking with alcohol, and our guests have already been here for what seems like half a day. Who knows where you have come from, but you can be sure I'll reckon with you tomorrow."
Hu Hsiu looked askance at him and left the room, muttering as he went, "You have some nerve to take me to task when at home your wife is:
Lying down with spread legs to solicit trade,
and you are here:
Clambering on top in order to drop your load.
Your master back at home is patronizing your wife and fucking the life out of her, which is the only reason he has entrusted capital to you to do business out of town. Meanwhile, you are enjoying yourself here while your wife is suffering who knows what at home. It's only because no one has exposed your true state of affairs that you are still able to play the role of a decent human being."
He said all this in the presence of Wang Yü-chih's madam, who took him outside and admonished him, saying, "Master Hu, you are drunk. You'd better go into your room and sleep it off."
Hu Hsiu, however:
Making all kinds of threatening noises,
refused to go into his room.
Who could have anticipated that Han Tao-kuo, who was engaged in entertaining his guests, formally garbed in a white satin robe cut like that of a Taoist priest, over an undergown of green wool, felt shoes, and woolen socks, should have overheard the way in which Hu Hsiu was:
Letting off his hot stinking farts of protest,[7]
and become enraged.
Striding outside, he gave him two swift kicks and cursed him, saying, "You lousy uncouth slave! As long as I can afford to pay you five cash a day, I will have no trouble finding a replacement. You can get out of here immediately."
But Hu Hsiu refused to leave; standing in the courtyard and raising his voice, he said, "What right have you to drive me out? I haven't been remiss in handling the accounts, while you are patronizing whores, yet you want to get rid of me. Just see if I don't report what you've been up to when I get home."
Lai-pao endeavored to pacify Han Tao-kuo and pulled Hu Hsiu aside, saying to him, "Dog bone that you are, you're altogether too hard-nosed when you're drunk."
"Uncle Pao," Hu Hsiu responded, "Don't you interfere. What have I had to drink? Let me have it out with him."
But Lai-pao persisted in pushing him into his room and putting him to bed. Truly:
Wine does not befuddle people, they
befuddle themselves.
Beauty does not delude people, they
delude themselves.[8]
Lai-pao succeeded in getting Hu Hsiu back to his room and putting him to sleep. But no more of this.
Han Tao-kuo was apprehensive lest the traveling merchants he was entertaining would laugh at him, so he and Lai-pao returned to the party where:
Drinking vessels and game tallies lay helter-skelter,
and proceeded to offer wine to his guests and help them to amuse themselves. The three singing girls, the two sisters Lin Ts'ai-hung and Lin Hsiao-hung, along with Wang Yü-chih:
Played their instruments and sang and danced,
as the company enjoyed themselves:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade,
Gaming at forfeits and playing at guess-fingers,
until the third watch before the party broke up.
The next day, Han Tao-kuo wanted to give Hu Hsiu a beating, but Hu Hsiu protested, saying, "I don't remember a thing about it."
Lai-pao and Miao Ch'ing:
Resorting to both appeals and threats,[9]
succeeded in persuading him to desist.
To make a long story short, one day, when they had finished making their purchases of piece goods and had packed them up and loaded them onto their boat, Miao Ch'ing presented them with some parting gifts, and a copy of their accounts, and saw the two of them off, together with Hu Hsiu. Wang Yü-chih, along with Lin Ts'ai-hung and her sister, also saw fit to serve them with drinks at a farewell party on the dock. They set out on the tenth day of the first month, but of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell.[10]
One day, as they approached the Lin-ch'ing customs station, Han Tao-kuo was standing on the prow of the boat when he happened to see a neighbor of his named Yen the Fourth sitting on the deck of a boat that was coming downstream toward him on the way to pick up an official in Lin-ch'ing.
Upon catching sight of Han Tao-kuo, he raised his hand in greeting and shouted to him, "Han Tao-kuo, your master passed away during the first month."
By the time he finished speaking, his boat, which was moving fast, had shot past him.
When Han Tao-kuo heard these words, he kept the information to himself, keeping Lai-pao in the dark by not telling him about it.
It so happened that at that time the provinces of Honan and Shantung were suffering from a severe drought. The land was scorched for thousands of li, the cultivated fields and mulberry groves were unproductive, and the price of cotton goods had become temporarily inflated to the point that a bolt of cotton fabric cost a third more than its normal price. The local merchants from the countryside were compelled to take their money with them and travel as far as the docks at Lin-ch'ing in order to buy directly from the itinerant merchants.
Han Tao-kuo consulted with Lai-pao, saying, "The piece goods on our boat are worth something over four thousand taels. At present, since the going price for such merchandise has gone up by one-third, we might as well sell off half our cargo. That would facilitate our payment of the duty at the customs station, and were we to wait until we get home to sell the goods, we would not do any better. Not to sell when the market is favorable would really be deplorable."
"Although what you say may be true enough," said Lai-pao, "I fear that if we proceed with the sale, when we arrive home it may elicit the disapproval of our master who is the owner of the goods. What would we do then?"
"If the master should object," responded Han Tao-kuo, "I will take responsibility for it."
Since Lai-pao was unable to dissuade him, they proceeded to sell off a thousand taels worth of piece goods on the dock.
At this point, Han Tao-kuo said, "Lai-pao, why don't you and Hu Hsiu remain on the boat to take care of paying the duty, while I and my young servant Wang Han pack the thousand taels into saddlebags and go home by the overland route in order to tell our master about the situation."
"When you get home," said Lai-pao, "whatever you do, get our master to send a letter to His Honor Ch'ien Lung-yeh at the customs house asking him to reduce the transit duty on our cargo and let our boat through before the others."
Han Tao-kuo nodded in assent and, together with his young servant Wang Han, proceeded to pack their saddlebags and set out for Ch'ing-ho district. But no more of this.
One day, they entered the city through the protective wall outside the South Gate just as:
The sun was beginning its gradual descent.

Who could have anticipated that on the street they happened to encounter Chang An, the caretaker of Hsi-men Ch'ing's ancestral graveyard, who was propelling a pushcart full of wine, rice, and food boxes on his way out the South Gate.
When he caught sight of Han Tao-kuo, he called out, "Uncle Han, you have returned home."
Han Tao-kuo noticed that he was wearing mourning and asked him the reason for it, to which he replied, "His Honor has passed away, and tomorrow, the ninth day of the third month, is the day of the seventh weekly commemoration of his death. The First Lady has asked me to transport this load of wine, rice, and food boxes to the graveyard in preparation for the ceremony of burning paper money there tomorrow."
When Han Tao-kuo heard this, he remarked, "How regrettable! How regrettable! To be sure:
The mouths of the pedestrians on the road
are like memorial tablets.
The story is not untrue."[11]
As he whipped up his donkey and proceeded into the city, it was already getting dark. Behold:
The teeming crossroads are all ablaze with
the light of burning lanterns;
The Temple of the Nine Stars is enhanced by
fragrant mist and tolling bells.
The wheel of the bright moon is suspended
above the sparse woodlands;
A handful of scattered stars[12] serves to
light up the azure firmament.
Within the camps of the Six Imperial Armies,
The wailing of painted bugles frequently resounds;
On the upper floors of the five drum towers,
Water drips in the bronze tanks of the clepsydras.
On all four sides the evening fog,
Darkly encompasses the dancing pavilions
and singing platforms;[13]
In the three markets a cloak of mist,
Faintly enshrouds the green gauze windows
and vermilion gates.[14]
Pair by pair, the strolling beauties
return to their boudoirs;
One by one, the young scholars close
the blinds in their studies.[15]
As Han Tao-kuo entered the crossroads of the city he debated with himself whether or not to go, as he had originally intended, straight to the house of Hsi-men Ch'ing. But since he had learned that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already dead, and it was also late in the day, he decided, instead, to go to his own home to spend the night and consult with his wife before going to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place the next day. Thereupon, he and Wang Han, whipped up their donkeys and proceeded straight to their house on Lion Street. The two of them dismounted their donkeys, dismissed the bearers that had come with them, and called for the door to be opened, after which Wang Han proceeded to carry their luggage and saddlebags inside.
When the maidservant caught sight of them, she reported to Wang Liu-erh, saying, "Father has come home."
The woman welcomed him inside, where he paid obeisance to the Buddha and the spirit tablets of his ancestors, brushed the dust from the journey off his clothes, and saw to the disposition of the saddlebags and luggage in the parlor. Wang Liu-erh helped him off with his outer garments, and saw him into a seat, while the maid provided him with a serving of tea.
Han Tao-kuo first told her about the events of his journey and then went on to say, "I ran into Brother Yen the Fourth along the way, who told me that the master has died; and just now, as I arrived at the city wall, I also ran into Chang An, the caretaker of the master's ancestral graveyard, who was propelling a pushcart loaded with wine and rice on his way to the graveyard. He told me that tomorrow is the day for the seventh weekly commemoration of his death. So the report turns out to be true. He seemed well enough when I left, so tell me, how did he happen to die?"
Wang Liu-erh said:
"Weather is characterized by unexpected storms;
Man is subject to unpredictable vicissitudes.
Who can be sure that nothing will happen to him?"
Han Tao-kuo then proceeded to open up the saddlebags, which contained clothing and other valuables that he had purchased while in Chiang-nan, and emptied the two pouches containing the thousand taels of silver. One sealed packet at a time, he dumped them on the surface of the k'ang, and when he opened them, they were seen to contain nothing but glistening "snowflake" silver.
Turning to his wife, he said, "These are the thousand taels of silver that I realized by selling off part of the cargo on the road. In addition to which, there are two packets containing a hundred taels that I made for myself on the side. It's already late today, but I can deliver them to his place tomorrow morning."
He then went on to ask his wife, "After I had left, did he continue to patronize you or not?"
"While he was still alive," she said, "everything was all right. But are you really planning to deliver this silver to his place?"
"That's just what I want to discuss with you," Han Tao-kuo responded. "How would it be if we kept some of it for ourselves, and sent the other half to his place?"
"Phooey!" his wife exclaimed. "What a simpleton you are! It's time to stop being so foolish. Now that he's already dead, and no one from here is still over there, what further connection do we have with him? Rather than delivering half of the silver to his place and running the risk of their raising a ruckus over the whereabouts of the rest, it would be better to be:
Once ruthless, ruthless to the end,
and use this thousand taels of silver to hire mules for ourselves and abscond to our daughter's place in the Eastern Capital with it. There's no reason to worry that our kinsman's place in the grand preceptor's mansion will be unable to accommodate us."
"That would require us to abandon this house of ours," said Han Tao-kuo. "It won't be possible to dispose of it on such short notice. How about that?"
"What a feckless creature you are!" retorted his wife. "Why don't we get your younger brother Han the Second to move in, and leave him with some silver to look after the place? Then, if anyone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household comes looking for you, he can tell them that our daughter in the Eastern Capital has sent for the two of us. They would hardly have the:
Seven heads and eight galls,
to come looking for us in the grand preceptor's mansion. And even if they did, we would have no reason to be afraid of them."
"But I have always been favorably treated by His Honor," said Han Tao-kuo. "To exhibit such a change of heart would constitute a violation of Heavenly principle."
"It has always been the case that:
To abide by Heavenly principle is
to face starvation,"
responded his wife. "Given the way he has taken advantage of me in the past, for us to make use of these few taels of his silver is hardly wrong. I remember how, when his body was lying in state in the coffin chamber, I prepared an offertory table, replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals, and went with the best of intentions to burn paper money on his behalf. But his principal wife, that undutiful whore, refused to come out and greet me for what seemed like half a day, while she kept to her room insulting me egregiously, and putting me in a predicament in which I could neither leave, on the one hand, nor sit down, on the other. Later his third wife came out and offered to sit down with me, but I refused to stay and came home in my sedan chair. When I think of that situation, it seems only right that I should spend a few taels of his silver."
This single conversation had the effect of reducing Han Tao-kuo to silence. That evening the two of them settled on their plan. The next day, at the fifth watch, they summoned Han Tao-kuo's younger brother, Han the Second, arranged with him, thus and so, to look after their house, and provided him with ten or twenty taels of silver to cover his expenses.
This Trickster Han expressed himself to be:
Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times,
saying, "Elder brother and sister-in-law, go your way. You can leave everything to me."
Han Tao-kuo decided to take his young servant Wang Han and the two maidservants with them to the Eastern Capital and proceeded to hire two large carts, onto which they loaded their trunks and other valuables. After waiting until daybreak, they went out the West Gate of the city and headed for the Eastern Capital.
Truly:
Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.
We will say no more at this point about how Han Tao-kuo and his wife set out for the Eastern Capital, but return to the story of Wu Yüeh-niang.
The next day, she took her son, Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, along with Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, the wet nurse Ju-i, and her son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, and set out for their ancestral graveyard to burn paper money on behalf of Hsi-men Ch'ing. While they were there, the caretaker Chang An told Yüeh-niang how he had run into Han Tao-kuo the day before.
On hearing this, Yüeh-niang remarked, "If he is back, why hasn't he reported in at our place? No doubt he will do so today."
After burning the paper money at his grave site, and sitting there for a short time, they headed back home, and she sent Ch'en Ching-chi to Han Tao-kuo's house to ask him where he had left the boat.
The first time he knocked at the gate there was no response, but the second time, Han the Second came out and said, "My niece in the Eastern Capital has summoned my elder brother and my sister-in-law to come visit her. I don't know where the boat is located."
When Ch'en Ching-chi reported this to Yüeh-niang, she was not able to let it go at that and sent Ch'en Ching-chi on a donkey to ride along the side of the canal and try to locate the boat. Three days later, he arrived at the dock in Lin-ch'ing and found Lai-pao on the boat.
Lai-pao asked, "Hasn't Han Tao-kuo arrived yet? He set out for home ahead of me with a thousand taels of silver."
"Who has seen anything of him?" responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "Chang An encountered him on his way into the city, and the next day, after leaving the graveyard, the First Lady sent me to ask after him. It seems that the two of them have absconded to the Eastern Capital, taking their possessions and the silver with them. At present, Father is dead, and the seventh weekly commemoration of his death has been concluded, but the First Lady is unable to let it go at that and sent me out to look for the boat."
As for Lai-pao, though:
From his mouth no word was uttered,
In his heart he thought to himself,
"That god-damned creature! It turns out he was deceiving me into the bargain. No wonder he sold off a thousand taels worth of goods along the way. He was up to his nefarious schemes. Truly:
Though our faces may be only inches apart,
Our hearts are separated by a thousand li."
At this juncture, Lai-pao, on learning that Hsi-men Ch'ing was already dead, decided to take the same course as Han Tao-kuo. He therefore proceeded to entice the young scamp Ch'en Ching-chi into drinking with him in the various entertainment places on the dock and enjoying himself with the courtesans there. Meanwhile, he surreptitiously removed eight hundred taels worth of merchandise from the boat and arranged to store it under seal in a local inn.
One day, after the customs duty had been paid and the boat had been allowed to proceed through the barrier to the port on the New Canal, the remainder of the cargo was transhipped and loaded into carts to be transported to Ch'ing-ho district, where it was duly unloaded into an anteroom on the eastern side of the courtyard. At that time, after Hsi-men Ch'ing's death, the silk floss store on Lion Street had been closed, and Kan Jun and Ts'ui Pen had sold off the remaining merchandise in the silk goods store across the street from the Hsi-men residence, turned the proceeds over to Yüeh-niang, and returned to their homes. The house there was also sold, and only the pawnshop and the pharmaceutical shop at the front of the Hsi-men residence remained open, under the management of Ch'en Ching-chi and Fu Ming.
Lai-pao's wife Hui-hsiang had a four-year-old son named Seng-pao, and Han Tao-kuo's wife Wang Liu-erh had a niece who was three years old. The two families had betrothed them to each other by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses[16] without Yüeh-niang knowing anything about it.
When Lai-pao had finished unloading the merchandise, he put the blame for the missing silver entirely on Han Tao-kuo, saying, "He first sold off two thousand taels worth of goods and then set out ahead of me to take them home."
Yüeh-niang repeatedly urged him to go to the Eastern Capital and question Han Tao-kuo about the whereabouts of the silver, but he adamantly refused, saying, "I can't do something like that. Who could presume to force his way into the grand preceptor's mansion, and:
Devote himself to stirring up trouble,
without running the risk of retaliation? You would do better to recite the Buddha's name, rather than:
Inviting lice onto your own head to scratch."
"But kinsman Chai Ch'ien is beholden to us for arranging his match with Han Tao-kuo's daughter," protested Yüeh-niang. "Surely he would be inclined to respond favorably to us."
"His daughter is now the favorite in his household," said Lai-pao, "and she is far more likely to side with her own parents than with us. We would do well to keep this matter to ourselves. If word of it should leak out, it would not redound to our credit. As for these few taels of silver, the best thing to do would be simply to write them off and forget about it."
Yüeh-niang, consequently, urged him to get together with the potential purchasers and dispose of the remaining piece goods to them. When he did so, Yüeh-niang had Ch'en Ching-chi take charge of the scales and bargaining, but the buyers rejected the proposed prices, took their money, and left.
Lai-pao then said to Ch'en Ching-chi, "Son-in-law, you don't yet understand the vicissitudes of trade, but I have considerable experience traveling on the rivers and lakes and understand how the markets work.
It is better to sell at a loss,
Than it is to forfeit the sale.
Now that these goods are here, we might as well settle for whatever price we can get for them. If you insist on:
Pulling your bow all the way taut,
You risk the loss of your customer,
and only show that you don't know how to conduct business. I'm not being pretentious, but you're still young, and:
Don't perceive the way things work.[17]
I'm not sticking my elbow into other people's business, but it seems to me that the best we can do is to sell off the goods and make an end of it."
Upon hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi, in a fit of pique, simply decided to wash his hands of the matter. Lai-pao, accordingly, without waiting for instructions from Yüeh-niang, reached over and grabbed the abacus out of his hands, called back the customers, and sold off the remaining goods for something over two thousand taels of silver. He then handed the proceeds, one packet at a time, to Ch'en Ching-chi to turn over to Yüeh-niang and saw to the removal of the merchandise from the premises.
Yüeh-niang offered to reward him with twenty or thirty taels of silver for his household expenses, but he ostentatiously refused to accept it, saying, "You had better keep it for yourself ma'am. Now that your husband is dead, you are like stagnant water, without any source of livelihood. What reason is there to dispose of your property this way? Keep it for yourself. I really don't need it."

One night, when Lai-pao had been outside drinking himself into a stupor, he walked into Yüeh-niang's room, leaned on the bedrail of the k'ang, and addressed her, saying, "Ma'am, you have lost your husband while still in the springtime of your youth and are left alone with no one to care for but your infant son. Do you not feel lonely?"
Yüeh-niang said not a word in response to this overture.
One day, a letter arrived from Majordomo Chai Ch'ien in the Eastern Capital, indicating that he had learned of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death. He also said that Han Tao-kuo had informed him that there were four attractive young women left in the household who were adept at playing musical instruments and singing, and he offered to purchase them for whatever price might be asked so they could be transported to the Eastern Capital to wait upon the grand preceptor's elderly wife.
This letter reduced Yüeh-niang to a state of panic, and she summoned Lai-pao to consult with him about whether he thought it would be better to comply with this request or not.
When Lai-pao came into her room, he did not address her with appropriate respect but said, "You are only a woman, and don't understand how things stand. To fail to comply with this request would be to invite disaster. This is all due to the heedlessness of your dead husband, who was given to showing off his munificence. Whenever he invited people over for a drink he would call out the household musicians to entertain them, a fact that could not but become widely known. It is hardly surprising that Han Tao-kuo's daughter, in the course of waiting upon the elderly wife of the grand preceptor in her mansion, should mention it to her. The situation is just as I said it was the other day. And now, sure enough, this problem has come up. If you don't agree to his request, he'll have the prefectural or district yamen send people to demand them by name. By that time it will be too late for you to do anything but hand them over to him with both hands. The best thing to do at present, without having to surrender all four of them, is to compromise by sending off two of them, as a means of saving your face."
Yüeh-niang pondered this suggestion for some time and decided that Lan-hsiang from Meng Yü-lou's quarters and Ch'un-mei from P'an Chin-lien's quarters could not be spared, and that Hsiu-ch'un, who was looking after Hsiao-ko, also could not be dispensed with. But when she asked Yü-hsiao and Ying-ch'un from her own quarters, they expressed a willingness to go. Consequently, she had Lai-pao hire a pair of vehicles to accommodate the two maidservants and accompany them to the grand preceptor's mansion in the Eastern Capital. What she could not have anticipated was that the rascal Lai-pao would seize the opportunity to rape the two girls en route.
One day, when they arrived in the Eastern Capital and met with Han Tao-kuo and his wife, Lai-pao filled them in on everything that had happened first and last.
Han Tao-kuo thanked Lai-pao, saying, "If my kinsman had not looked after our interests by dissuading them from pursuing us, even though we have nothing to fear, they might well have sent someone to the Eastern Capital to seek us out."
When Chai Ch'ien saw that the two girls, Ying-ch'un and Yü-hsiao, were both attractive young women, one of whom was adept at playing the psaltery, and the other at playing the samisen, and that they were only sixteen or seventeen years old, he had them move into the mansion in order to wait on the grand preceptor's elderly wife and agreed to pay for them with two ingots of silver worth fifty taels apiece. Lai-pao pocketed one of these ingots for himself and turned only one of them over to Yüeh-niang when he arrived home.
He also endeavored to intimidate Yüeh-niang, saying, "If I had not agreed to accompany them, not even this ingot of silver would have been forthcoming. You don't have any idea of what wealth and distinction Han Tao-kuo and his wife are enjoying in the grand preceptor's mansion. They are housed in a dwelling of their own where they have:
Slaves and maidservants at their beck and call, and
Are always waited on by five or three servants.
Majordomo Chai Ch'ien addresses Han Tao-kuo as Your Honor, and their daughter, Han Ai-chieh, goes into the mansion every day to wait on the grand preceptor's elderly wife:
Not straying by so much as an inch from her side.[18]
Whatever she asks for, she receives tenfold;
She is free to eat anything that she chooses,
And dress in whatever outfits she may prefer.[19]
At present, she has also learned how to write characters and do arithmetic, demonstrating that:
Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence.
She has grown up to be:
Large and tall in stature,[20]
With an alluring demeanor.
When she came out to see me the other day, she was adorned as resplendently as:
A tree of jade in a forest of alabaster.
She is as clever as can be and insisted on addressing me as Uncle Pao. Now that these two household musicians of ours are there, they will be dependent on her for their needles and thread."
When he had finished speaking, Yüeh-niang felt as though:
Her gratitude knew no bounds,
and provided wine and delicacies for his consumption. She also offered him some silver, but he refused it as before, and she ended up rewarding him with a bolt of satin fabric for his wife, Hui-hsiang, to make a dress out of. But no more of this.
One day, Lai-pao, together with his wife's younger brother, Liu Ts'ang, went to the dock at Lin-ch'ing and sold off the piece goods that he had stored there in the inn for the sum of eight hundred taels of silver. With these proceeds he secretly bought a house for himself, some distance from the Hsi-men home, to the right side of Liu Ts'ang's residence, where he opened a general store and also used the premises to convene conclaves and tea gatherings every day. His wife Hui-hsiang, whenever she felt so inclined, took to asking Yüeh-niang for time off in order to visit her mother's family and would then go to their new house, where she would change her head ornaments and clothing, put on a pearl headband, and thus:
Studded with gold and decked with silver,
proceed to the home of Wang Liu-erh's sister-in-law, Sow Wang, to discuss the marriage alliance between the children in their families and exchange favors. After going to see Sow Wang's daughter, she would ride back to their new home in a sedan chair, change back into her everyday clothes, and return to the Hsi-men residence, without Yüeh-niang's knowing anything about it.
The rascal Lai-pao would often get himself drunk and then go right into Yüeh-niang's room, where he would engage her in:
Suggestive and flirtatious conversation.
This happened at least two or three times. If Yüeh-niang had not been the virtuous and honorable person that she was, she might well have succumbed to temptation and allowed herself to be seduced by his overtures.
Some of the household servants and gardeners also mentioned in Yüeh-niang's presence the fact that Lai-pao's wife, Hui-hsiang, had been seen to venture abroad in order to arrange the betrothal of her son, Seng-pao, to Sow Wang's daughter, Wang Liu-erh's niece, and had been:
Studded with gold and decked with silver,
While attended by three or five servants,
for the occasion. P'an Chin-lien also reported this to Yüeh-niang a number of times, but Yüeh-niang did not believe it. When Hui-hsiang heard about this, she proceeded to kick up a storm in the kitchen:
Cursing the high and the low alike.
Lai-pao, thereupon:
Puffing himself up and playing the fool,
resorted to boasting about himself to the other servants, saying, "The rest of you can stay at home and engage in your bedtime gossip if you like. But it was I who took the trouble to brave the waters and bring all this silver and merchandise safely home. Had it not been for me, Han Tao-kuo, that:
Old ox with his rapacious snout,
would have made off to the Eastern Capital with the whole bundle.
With no more than a squeak,
it might well have:
Sunk softly into the water.
But so far, I have not received so much as a word of gratitude and have even been falsely accused of purloining the master's money. Truly:
He who donates his flesh is not acknowledged,
He who furnishes incense is not acknowledged.
It has always been the case that:
To defer when you differ,
Is to give up the dipper."
His wife, Hui-hsiang, continued the diatribe, saying, "That lousy backbiting whore! She may claim that the two of us have purloined a large sum of money, and that I've been running around:
While attended by three or five servants,
attempting to arrange the betrothal of our son. The fact is that I merely went out to borrow some clothes and a few hair ornaments from my elder sister, but she alleges that I used money purloined from the master to buy them. She's just trying to get rid of the two of us, but it doesn't matter. Even if we are forced to leave:
Heaven will hardly prohibit a starving
crow from eating grass.
I'm going to rinse my eyes, the better to keep track of the lot of you whorish slaves, incarcerated as you are in the Hsi-men Ch'ing household."
When Yüeh-niang saw the way in which she was:
Cursing the high and the low alike,
seeking pretexts for quarreling with people, and threatening to hang herself, as well as the way in which her husband had, at least two or three times, approached her indecorously when no one else was about, she became so angry she scarcely knew what to do with herself and felt compelled to expel the two of them from the household. Consequently, Lai-pao, as cool as you please, proceeded to open up a piece goods store together with his brother-in-law and offer a variety of fine fabrics for sale, convening conclaves and forging connections on a daily basis. But no more of this. Truly:
When prestige is lost, slaves abuse their master,
When the times are bad, ghosts manipulate people.[21]
A poem testifies to this:

I would implore the people of this world,[22]
Never to conduct yourselves dishonorably.
To act dishonorably is to deceive Heaven,
Don't assume that Heaven will not see it.[23]
Heaven is situated right above your head,
It sees precisely and cannot be deceived.

Han Daoguo and Laibao had taken four thousand taels of Ximen Qing's money and gone south of the river to buy goods. When they came to Yangzhou, they went at once to see Miao Qing, proposing to stay with him. Miao Qing remembered how Ximen had saved his life, and treated the two men with very great kindness. He bought a girl called Chuyun and took her to his house, intending to make a present of her to Ximen Qing in return for the favors he had received from him.
Han Daoguo and Laibao neglected their business and amused themselves with the young ladies of the town. But when winter came, they grew homesick and got busy buying silk and cloth, which they brought back to Miao Qing's place, proposing to start home again when they had bought enough.
Han Daoguo grew very attached to a girl called Wang Yuzhi, who lived at an old established bawdy house of Yangzhou, and Laibao to Xiaohong, the younger sister of a girl called Lin Caihong. One day, they asked Miao Qing and a salt merchant named Wang Haifeng, to go for a day's amusement on the Baoying lake. When they came back, they went to the bawdy house. It happened to be the birthday of Wang Yuzhi's mother, and Han Daoguo decided to invite a number of other men and have a party to celebrate the occasion. So he sent his boy Hu Xiu to ask two merchants, Wang Dongqiao and Qian Qingchuan, but before the boy himself came back, the two merchants arrived with Wang Haifeng. It was nearly sunset when the boy came.
"What has made you so late?" Han Daoguo, who had had a good deal of wine, said to him. "Where have you been drinking? I can smell the wine in your breath. My guests have been here some time already: they came long before you showed any signs of turning up. I will deal with you tomorrow."
Hu Xiu looked at Han Daoguo out of the corners of his eyes and went out. "It's all very well for you to scold me," he muttered, "when your own wife is in bed with another man. Here you are enjoying yourself, while in your house at home, your master is enjoying your wife. He only sent you here because he wanted her. You are happy here and you never think of the burden she has to bear."
The old procuress heard this and dragged the boy to the courtyard. "Master Hu," she said, "you are drunk. Go and sleep." But Hu Xiu shouted and struggled and would not go. Han Daoguo, who was entertaining his friends, heard the noise, and it made him very angry. He came out and kicked the boy.
"You slave," he cried, "I can hire anybody to take your place for five *fen* of silver a day. I don't need to keep you. Get out of here!"
Hu Xiu would not go. "You would dare to send me away, would you?" he shouted. "Have you found anything wrong in the way I've handled the money? Here you are, spending money on women, and you dare to drive me away. You will see whether I tell our master or not."
Laibao came out and took Han Daoguo away. Then he came back and said to Hu Xiu: "You rascal, this is just drunken brawling."
"Uncle," said Hu Xiu, "don't you meddle in this. I am not drunk, but I'll show him what I think of him."
Laibao hustled him into the house and made him lie down and go to sleep. Han Daoguo was very anxious that his friends should not lose their respect for him. He and Laibao entertained them: the three singing girls sang and danced for them, and they played all kinds of games. At the third night watch, the party broke up.
The next day, Han Daoguo would have punished Hu Xiu, but the boy swore he did not remember a word of what he had said, and Miao Qing intervened on his behalf. In due course, they finished their purchases. The goods were packed up and loaded upon the boat. But Chuyun, whom Miao Qing had bought to present to Ximen Qing, suddenly fell ill and could not go with them. "When she is better," Miao Qing said, "I will send her to your master."
He wrote a letter and prepared some presents, then saw the two men and Hu Xiu start back to Qinghe. The three singing girls also went to see them off.
It was the tenth day of the first month when they left Yangzhou. One day, they came to Linjiang lock. Han Daoguo was standing in the bows of the boat, when he saw his neighbor Yan the Fourth on a boat coming towards them. This Yan was coming to meet some official, and when he saw Han Daoguo, he bowed and shouted: "Han, your master died in the first month." The two boats passed so quickly that there was no chance for any further conversation. Han did not say a word to Laibao.
This was a very dry year in Henan and Shandong. There were no crops on the land; the cotton was a failure, and the fields were bare. The price of material went up and every roll of cloth fetched three-tenths more than its regular price. Merchants took their money with them and set out to buy goods even many miles away.
"We have four thousand taels' worth of goods," Han Daoguo said to Laibao. "Here we can get three-tenths more than the regular price and I think we should do well to sell half of what we have. We shall have less duty to pay and I don't believe we are at all likely to do any better at home. It would be a pity to let this opportunity slip."
"You are quite right," Laibao said, "but our master may be annoyed when we get home."
"If he is," Han Daoguo said, "I will take the blame."
Laibao said no more, and they sold a thousand taels' worth of cloth in that place.
"You and Hu Xiu stay here until the duty is paid," Han Daoguo said then, "and I will take the boy Wang Han, together with the thousand taels we have just got, overland to our master."
"When you get there," Laibao said, "ask him for a letter to Officer Qian so that we have not to pay so much duty and can get our boats through before the others."
Han Daoguo promised, and he and the boy packed some of their things, loaded them upon a mule, and started overland for Qinghe. At last, they reached the southern gate of the city about sunset and met Ximen's grave keeper, Zhang An, pushing a wheelbarrow in which were rice, wine, and boxes of food. He was taking them outside the city.
"What! Are you back, Uncle Han?" the grave keeper cried, when he saw Han Daoguo.
Han noted that the man was wearing mourning and asked the reason.
"Our master is dead," Zhang An said, "and tomorrow, the ninth day of the third month, will be his last week's mind. The Great Lady has sent me with these things to the grave because they are coming tomorrow to burn paper offerings for him."

"What a terrible business! What a terrible business!" Han Daoguo said.
He found, as he went home down the street, that everybody was talking about Ximen Qing's death. When he came to the crossroads, he thought for a while. "If I go to Ximen's place," he said to himself, "he is dead. Besides, it is very late and I had better go home and see what my wife has to say. It won't be too late if I go to my master's place tomorrow." So he and Wang Han drove the mules to Lion Street to his own house. When they reached there, they dismounted, knocked until the door was opened, then dismissed the porters, and Wang Han carried in the luggage. Han's wife welcomed him. He made reverence to the family god, then Wang Liu'er helped him to take off his outer clothes, and the maid brought tea. He told his wife all about his journey.
"I met Brother Yan and Zhang An," he said, "and so learned of our master's death. What did he die of? He was quite well when I went away."
"Heaven sends unexpected weather," Wang Liu'er said, "and human beings have many changes of fortune. Nobody dare prophesy about his own end."
Han Daoguo opened his luggage and brought out clothes and silk. He took out the thousand taels, one packet after another, and put them on the bed. His wife opened them and saw the shining silver.
"What is this?" she said.
"As soon as I heard of our master's death, I sold part of the merchandise for a thousand taels," Han Daoguo told her. He put down another hundred taels of his own.
"When I was away," he continued, "did he come to see how you were getting on?"
"Everything was all right so long as he was alive," the woman said. "Do you intend to give them all that silver?"
"I was going to see what you thought about it. I think if I gave them half, that would be quite enough."
"You silly fellow," Wang Liu'er said, "don't be such a fool. The master is dead now and we have really no more obligation to them. If you give them half, you may get into trouble because they may want to know where the rest is. Let us make up our minds, take the thousand taels, hire a mule or two, and go to the Eastern Capital. We will go to our daughter's place, and I don't imagine our own kinsfolk will turn us away."
"But we can't dispose of this house in such a short time," Han Daoguo said.
"What's to prevent us sending for your brother, you silly fellow?" Wang Liu'er said. "We can leave a few taels with him and he can look after the house. That's quite simple. If anybody from Ximen's family makes inquiries, they can be told we have gone to the Eastern Capital because our daughter was anxious to see us. We have no cause to be afraid."
"But I owe a great deal to my master's kindness," Han Daoguo said. "I don't like the idea of turning around on him and acting so deceitfully."
"If you are going to think about principles, you will starve," Wang Liu'er said. "He amused himself with your wife, and now you take his money. So you are quits. The other day, I bought presents and paper offerings and went to offer my sympathy. That whore, his first wife, kept me waiting for hours and insulted me most disagreeably. I did not know what to do with myself. At last, the Third Lady came out and sat down with me, but I came home as soon as I could. If that counts for anything, you certainly ought to take this money."
Han Daoguo said no more. They made their decision that very night. Before it was light, they sent for Han the Second, gave him twenty taels of silver to carry on with, and gave the house into his charge. Han the Second was quite agreeable. He told them to go their way and he would see after everything. So Han Daoguo and his wife, with the boy Wang Han and the two maids, set off for the Eastern Capital. They hired two large carts to carry their trunks and boxes, and left the city at daybreak.
That day, Wu Yueniang with her little son, Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, Ximen Dajie, and Ruyi'er, went with Chen Jingji to burn paper offerings at Ximen Qing's grave. While they were there, Zhang An told Yueniang that he had met Han Daoguo the night before.
"If he is back," Yueniang said, "why hasn't he been to see me? Perhaps he will come during the day."
She burned the paper offerings but did not stay very long at the grave. When she got home, she told Chen Jingji to go and see Han Daoguo and find out where the boats were. Jingji went and knocked at the door, but for a long time no one answered. At last Han the Second opened the door.
"My brother and his wife," he said, "have gone to the Eastern Capital to see their daughter. I know nothing at all about the boats."
Jingji went back and told Yueniang. She was greatly worried and told Chen Jingji to take a horse and go to the river to find out whether the boats had arrived. As soon as he came to the wharf, Jingji found Laibao and the boat there.
"Brother Han has already taken a thousand taels to you," Laibao said.
"We haven't seen anything of him," Jingji said. "Zhang An, the grave keeper, saw him and, when we went to the grave, we heard he had come back. The Great Lady sent me to his house, but they had taken all their belongings and gone to the Eastern Capital with the silver. Father is dead, and this is his last week's mind. The Great Lady was worried and sent me to see if the boats had arrived."
Laibao said nothing. He thought: "The fellow deceived me. Now I see why he suggested selling a thousand taels' worth of goods. He made up his mind that very moment. Really, even though men meet face to face, their minds might be a thousand miles apart."
So Laibao heard of his master's death. He decided to take Chen Jingji to the wine house and the bawdy house. Secretly, he removed eight hundred taels' worth of merchandise, sealed it up, and stored it at an inn. Then they went to the customs office, paid the duty, and their boat was allowed to proceed. They loaded their merchandise upon carts and so brought it to the city. The stuff was stored in one of the rooms in the eastern wing of Ximen's house.
After Ximen's death, the shop in Lion Street had been closed. Clerk Gan and Cui Ben got rid of all the goods in the other silk shop, paid over the money fairly, then gave up their jobs and went home. The house was sold. The medicine shop was still kept open, and Chen Jingji and Clerk Fu looked after it.
Laibao's wife had a son called Sengbao, now five years old. Han Daoguo's wife had a niece who was four years old. Their parents had arranged that these two children should some day marry. Yueniang did not know this.
When Laibao handed over the merchandise, he put all the blame on Han Daoguo. "He sold two thousand taels' worth of goods," he told Yueniang. She repeatedly urged him to go to the Eastern Capital to get the money out of Han Daoguo.
"It is better for me to keep away," Laibao said. "Their kinsman is a member of the Imperial Tutor's household, and nobody dare touch them. If I were to go, it would look as though I wished to make trouble. We have every reason to be satisfied that they don't come to us for something, and we must not stir up trouble."
"But it was my husband who arranged this marriage for Zhai," Yueniang said. "Surely he would remember that."
"Han's daughter is a favorite there," Laibao said, "and she would certainly take her parents' side. She will do nothing to help us. The best thing you can do is to keep quiet about the matter. Regard it as a dead loss, and say no more about it."
Yueniang could not think of anything else to say, so she said no more. She told him to try to find some customers to buy the merchandise he had brought. A number of people came, and Yueniang told Chen Jingji to deal with them. There was a long discussion, and in the end, they all said they did not want the stuff and took their money away.
"Your son-in-law is not sufficiently experienced," Laibao said to Yueniang. "I have been doing this sort of thing for years, and I know all there is to know about it. In business, the principle is: sell first and be sorry later. Don't let us be sorry first, and sell afterwards. The stuff is here, and if we can do even moderately well out of it, we ought to be content. If the price is set too high, so that customers won't make a deal, that is not good business. You must forgive me, but you are young and don't understand business. Don't think for a moment that I am ready to yield the advantage to others. I'm not; I simply want to sell the stuff and get it out of the way."
After this, Chen Jingji did no more in the matter. Laibao did not wait for Yueniang's instructions, but took over the abacus and brought the customers back again. They measured out two thousand taels, Jingji counted it, it was given to Yueniang, and they went off with the goods.
Yueniang offered Laibao twenty-three taels, but he put on an air of great dignity and refused to take it. "No, Lady," he said, "my master is dead, and your property is like stagnant water. Don't give me the money. You need it; I do not."
One evening, Laibao came in, very drunk. He went to Yueniang's room and put his hand on the bed. "Lady," he said, "you are very young. Your husband is dead, and you have only the baby. Don't you ever feel lonely?" Yueniang did not answer.
A letter came from Zhai at the Eastern Capital. It said that he had heard of Ximen Qing's death, and that Han Daoguo had told him there were still some very beautiful girls in the household. He would like to know the price put upon them, said that he would pay it, and asked for the girls to be sent to the Eastern Capital to amuse the old lady. Yueniang did not know what to do. She sent for Laibao. This time the man did not even address her as Lady. "Woman," he said, "if you do not send the girls, there will be serious trouble. It is all the fault of the dead old man. He was always trying to show off. Whenever he invited anyone here, he always had his own musicians. Everybody knew it. Now Han's daughter is at the palace; it is quite natural that she should tell the old lady. Now, perhaps, you realize the truth of what I was saying the other day. Here they are coming to ask us for something. If you don't do what he says, he will get someone from the local office to come and demand the girls. Then it will be too late, even if you give them up. I don't suggest you should send them all; a couple will probably satisfy him."
Yueniang wondered. She could not well spare Lanxiang, who was the Third Lady's maid, or Chunmei, who waited on the Fifth Lady. She wanted Xiuchun to look after the baby. She asked her own maid, Yuxiao, and Yingchun if they would go, and they both agreed. Then Yueniang told Laibao to hire suitable conveyances and take the two girls to the Eastern Capital. This he did and, on the way, enjoyed them both.
They reached the Capital, and Laibao went to see Han Daoguo and his wife. They talked over what had happened.
"If you hadn't prevented them," Han Daoguo said, "something disagreeable might have happened. Of course, I'm not in the least afraid of them."
Zhai was delighted with the two girls, both of whom were very beautiful. One could play the zither and the other the banjo. Neither was more than eighteen years old. He took them to the palace to wait upon the old lady, and she gave two bars of silver for them. Laibao took the silver home, but he only gave one of the bars to Yueniang. He tried to frighten her by saying: "If I hadn't gone, you would never have had this silver. The Hans are very rich and comfortable there. They have a house all to themselves and a host of maids and servants to wait on them. Master Zhai calls them Father and Mother. Their daughter goes to the palace to see the old lady every day. They are on such good terms that she is always going about with the old lady. When she asks for one thing, they give her ten. She chooses the kinds of food she likes best and clothes in the latest style. She has learned how to write and do sums. When luck is on one's side, cleverness always follows. She is tall and very pretty. When I saw her the other day, she was just as beautiful to look at as a tree of jade, and so charming and pleasant. She called me Uncle Bao. Those two girls of ours will have to ask her for their needles and thread."
Yueniang thanked him and gave him food and wine. When he refused to take her money, she gave him a roll of silk for his wife to make into clothes.
One day, Laibao and Liu Cang, his wife's brother, went to the river and brought away all the merchandise that had been left at the inn, and sold it for eight hundred taels of silver. Then he secretly bought a house, opened a store near Liu Cang's house, and gave parties to his friends every day. His wife used to tell Yueniang that she was going to see her mother, but really she went to the new house. There, she changed her ornaments, dressed up in pearls and gold and silver, and went to see Wang Liu'er's mother. This old lady was known as Old Sow Wang. They discussed the marriage between the young children. Whenever she went there, she went in a sedan chair and, when she came back, she dressed again in her ordinary clothes and returned to Ximen's house. Yueniang knew nothing of all this.
Laibao himself was always getting drunk and, on several occasions, came to Yueniang's room and made improper overtures to her. If Yueniang had not been a virtuous woman, she would have been caught by his bait and would assuredly have been seduced.
Then some of the other women told Wu Yueniang how Laibao's wife had arranged this marriage for her child, and how she was going about in gold and silver, showing every sign of great wealth. Pan Jinlian also told her several times, but she would not believe a word of it. Laibao's wife heard of this, and made a terrible to-do in the kitchen, abusing high and low alike.
Laibao himself began to swagger. He went about bragging. "You people are all very well at talking in bed, but that's about all you can do. I went on the water and come back with the cash. If it hadn't been for me, Clerk Han would have walked off with all of it. His mouth was as wide open as a pair of the largest pincers. He would have gone off with all of it to the Eastern Capital, and it would have been just as if the whole lot had fallen into the water without so much as a splash. Yet nobody has a kind word for me. You talk about my getting money by robbing my master, and things of that sort. The one who cuts off the leg doesn't know, and the one whose leg is cut off doesn't know either. The proverb says: Don't believe scandalmongers or you will lose your calabash. Don't believe lies, or you will lose your net. Some backbiting women have been saying that we have suddenly got very rich and been fixing up a marriage. Why, she goes and borrows, as any poor priest might do, clothes and ornaments from her sister. People talk about our using our master's money because they want to get us kicked out. But don't worry. If we do leave here, Heaven will give no grass to the waterfowl. I shall wash my eyes and keep an eye on those strumpets who are shut up here."
Yueniang came to hear of this kind of talk and was anxious to find out what it meant. Laibao's wife quarreled with everybody and talked about killing herself. And the man treated her without any respect when he found her by herself. Yueniang was very angry, but she did not know what to do. Finally, she decided to send Laibao and his wife away. Then the man openly carried on business with his brother-in-law, and they did a roaring trade during the shortage of cloth.

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### P'an Chin-lien Makes an Assignation on a Moonlit Night & makes Love with Ch'en Ching-chi who Enjoys 2 Beauties in a Painted Bower

To the tune *Partridge Sky*

She remembers that time in the studio when they had just met;
The clouds and rain they enjoyed together were known to only a few.
When evening came, the phoenix and his mate alighted on adjacent pillows;
Left untrimmed, the silver lamp shed only a half light.
Thinking of the past, her fragrant soul deluded;
Tonight she is all too happy to enjoy the pleasures of connubial bliss.
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes, their pleasure knows no bounds.
From this time on, surely, the pair of them will never be separated.[1]

Ever since P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi had made out in his antechamber while Hsi-men Ch'ing was lying in state nearby, the two of them, on a daily basis, still savoring the sweet taste of their encounter:
Felt the chill of love by day and the heat of ardor at dusk.
Either:
Leaning on shoulders and engaging in badinage,
Or:
Sitting together and delighting in flirtation,
they pestered each other incessantly and carried on without any restraint whatever. If there were other people about so they could not communicate verbally, they would write their thoughts on strips of paper and drop them on the floor for each other to pick up.
When you have a message, transmit it to me; if I have a message, I'll impart it to you.
One day, during the fourth month, P'an Chin-lien took out a handkerchief shot with silver thread that she customarily held in her sleeve and wrapped it around a jade-colored gauze drawn-work sachet in which she had placed benzoin, lysimachia, rose petals, and a lock of her hair, as well as some pine and cypress cones, and on the two sides of which she had stitched an inscription of eight characters that read:
The pine and the cypress are evergreen,[2] Her human countenance is like a flower.
When she had finished preparing this keepsake, she intended to give it to Ch'en Ching-chi, but he did not happen to be in the anteroom where he lived just then, so she dropped it inside through the window. Later on, when Ch'en Ching-chi opened the door and went in, he saw the bulging sealed packet and opened it to find the handkerchief and the sachet, as well as a piece of paper on which there was inscribed a lyric to the tune "Mistletoe," which read as follows:
I'm making you a gift of this silver-threaded
handkerchief and this sachet.
In so doing, I have also cut off a lock of
my black tresses for you.
I hope you will carry these pine and cypress
cones with you at all times.
As my tears drip, I am putting in writing
my loving thoughts for you.
Late this evening, when the lantern light shines
on my lonely shadow,
Don't let me down as I wait for you under the
rose-leaved raspberry trellis.
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the lyric was proposing a secret assignation under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis, he immediately sealed up a gold-flecked fan of speckled bamboo,[3] on which he had also written a lyric in reply to hers, tucked it into his sleeve, and headed into the garden. Who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang happened to be visiting in Chin-lien's quarters at the time.
No sooner did Ch'en Ching-chi, who was quite unaware of the situation, enter the postern gate than he called out, "Is my beloved at home, or not?"
Chin-lien recognized the sound of his voice and, fearing lest Yüeh-niang might also have heard it, and the cat be let out of the bag, hastily strode out, lifting the portiere aside, and seeing that it was he, waved him away with her hand, saying, "I wondered who it was, and it turns out to be our son-in-law, looking for his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh. She was here a little while ago, but she has gone into the garden with the others to pick flowers."
When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that Yüeh-niang was there, he surreptitiously handed his package to her to put in her sleeve and went away.
Yüeh-niang asked, "What did our son-in-law come here for?"
To which Chin-lien replied, "He came looking for his wife, and I told him that she had gone into the garden."
She thereby managed to pull the wool over Yüeh-niang's eyes. Not long after this, Yüeh-niang got up and went back to the rear compound.
When Chin-lien pulled the package out of her sleeve and opened it, she saw that it contained a fan made of speckled bamboo and white gauze, on which was depicted a scene of green cattails beside a flowing stream, and that it was inscribed with a lyric to the tune "The Water Nymphs" that read as follows:
The speckled bamboo and white gauze create

a free and easy feeling;
The green cattails are skillfully depicted.
The gold sequins and silver threads
are truly enchanting,
Making it fit only for an enchanting person.
To fend off the heat of summer it will
create a gentle breeze;
But when people are about, it should ever
be kept in your sleeve.
When no one else is there, you can idly
wave it to and fro;
But don't ever let it fall into the hands
of any vulgar person.
Once the woman had perused this lyric, that evening, when the moon began to rise, she provided wine for her maidservants Ch'un-mei and Ch'iu-chü to drink and shut them into the side room with the k'ang to spend the night. She then saw to it that in her own room:
The green gauze window was half open,
While crimson candles blazed on high.
After preparing the bedding and pillows, she proceeded to:
Light incense and wash her private parts,
after which, she went outside to stand by herself under the banksia rose arbor and wait for Ch'en Ching-chi to appear for their evening assignation.
To resume our story, that night Yüeh-niang had invited Hsi-men Ta-chieh to go back to the rear compound in order to listen to Nun Wang recite a precious scroll, so the only other person in the room was the maidservant Yüan-hsiao.
Ch'en Ching-chi confidentially offered her a handkerchief and enjoined her to look after the place, saying, "I am going to the quarters of the Fifth Lady, who has asked me to play a board game with her. If your mistress should come in while I am gone, come and get me immediately."
Yüan-hsiao assented to this, thus enabling Ch'en Ching-chi to venture into the garden, where:
The moonglow was filtered by the flowers,[4]
Producing contrasting lights and shadows.
When he arrived under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis, gazing into the distance, he caught sight of the woman, who had:
Removed her headdress, and
Half-coiled her raven locks.
Above, she wore a blouse of pale lavender silk; below, she wore a skirt decorated with turquoise figures; and her feet were adorned with wave-tripping silk stockings, as she approached him from under the banksia rose arbor. Ch'en Ching-chi suddenly jumped out from his position under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis and embraced the woman with both arms, which gave her quite a start.
"Phooey!" the woman exclaimed. "You little short-life! You gave me quite a start by suddenly jumping out that way. Luckily, it may be all right for you to embrace me; but would you have the nerve to embrace anyone else that way?"
Ch'en Ching-chi, who was half inebriated, laughed and said, "Of course, I knew it was you. But even if I had embraced Hung-niang by mistake,[5] what difference would it make?"
The two of them, thereupon:
Hugging and embracing each other,
held hands as they went into her room, which was ablaze with lamps and candles and contained a table laden with wine and appetizers. After seeing that the postern gate was securely locked, they:
Sat down shoulder to shoulder,
and fell to drinking together.
The woman then asked, "When you came out, did Hsi-men Ta-chieh know anything about it?"
"She is back in the rear compound listening to the recitation of a precious scroll," explained Ch'en Ching-chi. "I arranged for Yüan-hsiao to come get me if anything should come up, and I told her I would be here playing a board game with you."
The two of them indulged in amusing themselves and drinking together for some time. As the saying goes:
Romantic affairs are consummated over tea, and
Wine is the go-between of lust.
Before they knew it, they:
Felt the effects of the Bamboo Leaf wine, and
Peach blossoms bloomed upon their cheeks.
As one set about kissing with his lips,
The other rubbed her cheek against his.
After snuffing out the lamps, they:
Got into bed and engaged with each other.
The woman embraced Ch'en Ching-chi, and Ch'en Ching-chi fondled the woman, upon which she sang a song to the tune "The Sixth Lady from West of the River":
Upon coming in the door, he begins to
cuddle me on his lap,
And I respond by turning down
the brocaded coverlet.
My handsome lover makes love to me
in the strangest ways.
Ch'a!
He lifts my legs on high,
Legs on high.
And knocks the fret over my raven locks
completely awry.[6]
Ch'en Ching-chi responded by singing a song to the same tune:
The two of us feel an affinity that
binds us together.
Don't abandon me so that I will have
to sleep by myself.
We have sworn a thousand times to be as
faithful as the hills and seas.
Ch'a!
If we are inconstant, Heaven will observe it,
Heaven will observe it.
You're in the springtime of your life,
and I'm a youth.[7]
The two of them had barely finished their game of clouds and rain when they heard Yüan-hsiao calling to them from outside the gate, "Hsi-men Ta-chieh has come back to her quarters."
This threw Ch'en Ching-chi into such consternation that he hastily pulled on his clothes and went out the door. Truly:
Though distracted bees and wanton butterflies
are sometimes to be seen;
Once they fly into the pear blossoms
they disappear from view.
It so happens that of the three rooms on the upper floor of Chin-lien's quarters, the middle room was dedicated to the worship of Buddhist images, while the rooms to either side were used for the storage of pharmaceutical supplies and spices. From this time on, the two of them were inseparable.
Passion pervaded their breasts;
Their mutual love was like glue.
Not a day passed without their getting together.
One day turned out to be one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen.
That morning, P'an Chin-lien, after performing her toilet and getting dressed, went upstairs to burn incense before the image of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin. Unexpectedly, Ch'en Ching-chi happened to come upstairs at the same time, with keys in hand, to open the storerooms and get some pharmaceutical supplies and spices. When the two of them ran into each other, the woman desisted from the burning of incense, and, seeing that there was no one else about, the two of them embraced and fell to kissing and sucking each other's tongues.
One of them said, "You're my darling, Fifth Lady."
The other exclaimed, "You're the love of my life."
She then went on to say, "Since there is no one else about, we might as well get down to business right here."
So saying, she proceeded to strip off her clothing, lay down on a broad bench, and let:
Her pair of wild ducks fly to his shoulders.
As the root of his organ half penetrated her,
They felt inseparably attached to each other.
There is a song that puns on the names of drugs to the tune "The Water Nymphs" that testifies to this:
Angelica, pinellia, and arnebia roots enhance
the pleasures of intercourse;
Finding him as tasty as betel nuts, she engages
in incest with her son-in-law.
His dangling member, sunk in her vagina, is as
potent as henbane or castor bean.
As his clove-shaped spike massages the two
sides of her receptacle,
She feels benumbed as though with cannabis,
and swoons completely away.
As her silvery vaginal secretions pour out,
like a gush of liquid mercury,
With the shrill stridulation of a red cicada,
she expresses the excitement,
She feels in her two labia, as rubicund
as mandarin orange peels.[8]
As always:
Without coincidences there would be no stories.
While the two of them were just in the thick of things, Ch'un-mei unexpectedly came upstairs with a box in hand to get some tea leaves. When she came into view, they were taken by surprise and became so flustered they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Ch'un-mei, not wishing to embarrass them, hastily turned around and started down the stairs. Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation that he could hardly get into his underwear, while Chin-lien was putting on her skirt.
The woman then called after Ch'un-mei, saying, "My good sister, come back upstairs. I have something to say to you."
Ch'un-mei, thereupon, reascended the stairs.
"My good sister," Chin-lien said to her, "our son-in-law is not an outsider. Let me explain the situation to you. As for the two of us:
Our feelings and thoughts are one,
We can never agree to be separated.
But, whatever you do, you must not reveal this to anyone, but keep it to yourself."

"Mother," responded Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? Having served you for all these years, how could I be unaware of your feelings, or reveal them to anyone else?"
"If you are actually willing to cover up for us," the woman said, "while our son-in-law is still here, you will have to come over and go to bed with him before I'll believe you. If you should refuse, it will show that you have no regard for us."
Ch'un-mei was so embarrassed by this proposal that her face turned alternately red and white, but she felt compelled to agree. Unfastening her beige skirt and loosening her pant strings, she lay down faceup on the bench and let the young scamp have his way with her. Can such things be? Truly:
Both of these two iridescent pearls
are without price;
Yet one lover gets to drill his way
into each of them.
There is a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers" that testifies to this:
Guilefully admitting her intimacy
with her son-in-law,
She lets him engage in intercourse
with his mother-in-law.
The affectation of human feelings
entails devilish deceit.
Feigning to heed the ritual proper
to brothers and sisters,
They secretly engage in the doings
of swallows and orioles.
The two of them can only serve as
blatant examples of this.[9]
On this occasion, as soon as Ch'en Ching-chi had finished his performance, Ch'un-mei collected the tea leaves and departed. From this time on, P'an Chin-lien and Ch'un-mei forged an alliance with each other and arranged secret assignations with the young scamp on more than one occasion, while keeping Ch'iu-chü in the dark. The woman listened to whatever Ch'un-mei had to say and presented her with some of her favorite articles of clothing and jewelry in order to secure her loyalty.
On the first day of the sixth month, Chin-lien's mother, Old Mrs. P'an, died of sickness and old age. When someone came to report this, Wu Yüeh-niang purchased an offertory table, replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals and paper money for the use of the dead and sent Chin-lien to go outside the city gate with them, riding in a sedan chair, to participate in the obsequies and present the sacrificial offerings.
The day after she returned, which was the third day of the sixth month, Chin-lien got up early and went to Yüeh-niang's room, where she spent what seemed like half a day telling her about it. After taking her leave, as she skirted the wall of the courtyard in which the large reception hall was located, upon feeling an urgent need to urinate, she hitched up her skirt and squatted down to relieve herself.
It so happens that after the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing there were few visitors any longer, so the ceremonial gate behind the large reception hall was normally kept closed. Ch'en Ching-chi, who resided in the anteroom on the east side of the courtyard, had just gotten up, when he suddenly heard the rustling noise made by someone urinating under the pomegranate tree on the other side of the wall.
Upon peeking surreptitiously out the window and realizing, to his surprise, who it was, he exclaimed, "Who is it that is uncouth enough to relieve herself here? You'd better hitch up your clothes or you'll get your skirt wet."
The woman promptly fastened up her skirt, moved over beside the window, and remarked, "So you're still at home and haven't even gotten up yet, have you? You're certainly taking it easy. Is Hsi-men Ta-chieh here too?"
"She's still in the rear compound," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "We didn't get to sleep until the third watch last night. The First Lady dragged us back there to listen to a recitation of the *Hung-lo pao-chüan*, or *The Precious Scroll on the Red Silk Curtain*,[10] and I had to sit up listening to it so late that I very nearly:
Came down with a crick in the back.
It was all I could do to crawl out of bed this morning."
"You inveterate louse!" Chin-lien responded. "Don't try to fool me with those lies of yours. Since when did you go back to the master suite to listen to the recitation of a precious scroll while I was away from home yesterday? The maidservants tell me that you went to eat in Meng Yü-lou's quarters yesterday."
"Luckily Hsi-men Ta-chieh can bear witness on my behalf," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "We were both there in the master suite. Since when did I venture into anyone else's quarters?"
As they bandied words with each other, the young scamp stood on the k'ang, manipulated his organ until it rose up as hard and straight as a stick, and stuck it out through the window.
When the woman saw what he was up to, she laughed heartily and affected to take him to task, saying, "You crazy louse of an incorrigible short-life! By suddenly letting your old fellow out that way, you've given me quite a start. You'd better pull it back inside at once, before I'm tempted, for better or for worse, to jab it with a needle and give you the shock of pain that you deserve."
"Venerable lady," Ching-chi responded with a laugh, "if you don't like the looks of it, you might as well stick it into a safe place, which would also be doing me a favor."
The woman continued to rail at him, saying:
"You're such a practiced old hand,
aren't you, you crazy jailbird!"
So saying, she groped out a miniature brass mirror that she carried at her waist, set it on the windowsill, and pretended to look into the mirror in order to redo her makeup, while actually engulfing his organ with her ruby lips and sucking away at it. She continued to suck at it until the young man felt that:
The tip of his magic rhinoceros horn[11]
was being anointed;
While his heart melted with a panoply
of lustful feelings.
Truly:
Past mistress of the intimate arts,
she caters to her lover's whim;
How quick she is, and diligent,
to "play the purple flute."
It so happens that the woman resorted to this subterfuge so that if anyone caught sight of her, they would think that she was looking into the mirror while redoing her makeup and would not realize what she was really up to.
Her depravity was manifest,
Completely devoid of shame.
Just as she was engaged in sucking away for all she was worth, the sound of someone's footsteps was heard, and the woman promptly put the mirror away and stepped to one side, while Ch'en Ching-chi withdrew his organ.
It turned out to be the servant Lai-an, who walked over and said, "Manager Fu Ming out front is inviting you to go join him for lunch."
"Tell him to go ahead and eat," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I'll come as soon as I've finished combing my hair."
As soon as Lai-an had left the scene, the woman whispered to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "Don't go out anywhere tonight, but stay in your quarters and wait till I send Ch'un-mei after you. There's something I want to say to you."
Ch'en Ching-chi replied:
"I respectfully accept the invitation."
When she had finished speaking, the woman returned to her quarters.
When Ch'en Ching-chi had finished his morning ablutions, he went out to the shop to take care of business, as usual. But no more of this.
It was not too long after this that the daylight began to fade. That night:
The moon was dark, the stars barely visible,
and the weather was extremely hot. The woman told Ch'un-mei to heat water so she could bathe in her room and trim her toenails, after which she should prepare her bedding, drive away the mosquitoes, let down the gauze mosquito netting, and light some incense in a little burner.
"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you may not be aware of it, but today marks the beginning of the three ten-day periods of the hot season. Wouldn't you like to have some impatiens blossoms with which to dye your fingernails? I can go find some for you."
"Go ahead and look for some then," the woman said.
"The only place there are any," said Ch'un-mei, "is in the large courtyard. I'll go pick a few for you. You should tell Ch'iu-chü to get out the mortar and pestle and pulverize some garlic cloves for the purpose."[12]
The woman proceeded to:
Whisper into her ear in a low voice,
as she instructed Ch'un-mei, saying, "You must go by the anteroom where he lives and invite him to come visit me tonight. I have something to say to him."
When Ch'un-mei departed on her errand, the woman remained in her room where, by the time she had finished bathing her fragrant flesh and trimming her toenails, some time had passed. Ch'un-mei finally showed up with several impatiens blossoms, and Ch'iu-chü was put to work pulverizing them with the garlic cloves until it was nearly midnight. The woman also gave her several goblets of wine to drink and then sent her off to sleep in the kitchen. When the woman had dyed the nails of her ten slender fingers under the lamplight, she told Ch'un-mei to take a wide bench out into the courtyard and supply it with a cool bamboo bed mat along with a pillow and bedding, so she could cool herself off.
By this time, the night watches were nearly over. Behold:
Within red gates there is no sound;
The asterism "Jade Rope" hangs low.[13]
The stars of the Herd Boy and the Weaving Maid,
Are isolated on the two banks of the milky way.
Suddenly, one becomes aware of:
A whiff of floral fragrance, and
The glow of a few fireflies.
The woman, while:
Wielding a silken fan in her hand,
was:
Lying on her pillow as she waited.
Ch'un-mei had left the postern gate closed but unlocked. Truly:
Waiting by moonlight in the western chamber,
Welcoming the breeze, the door is half ajar.
As the flower shadows move outside the wall,
She anticipates the appearance of her lover.[14]
It so happens that Ch'en Ching-chi had agreed in advance that he would shake the branches of the woody hibiscus tree as a signal of his arrival, so when the woman saw the wavering of the flowery branches, she knew that he had come. When she had signaled her presence in the courtyard with a cough, he pushed open the gate and came in.
The two of them:
Sat down shoulder to shoulder,
and the woman asked, "Who was in your quarters when you left?"
"Hsi-men Ta-chieh has not come out from the rear compound today," Ch'en Ching-chi replied. "I have already arranged for Yüan-hsiao to keep watch in our quarters and come to get me if anything should happen."
He then went on to ask, "Has Ch'iu-chü gone to sleep yet?"
"She is already fast asleep," the woman replied.
When they had finished speaking:
Hugging and embracing each other,
the two of them proceeded to:
Strip their bodies completely naked,[15] and
Engage each other on pillow and mat;
Unable to overcome their excitement.
Behold, to the tune "Song of the South":
In lascivious excitement the two are united.
Embracing each other's fragrant shoulders,
they rub their cheeks together.
With his hand he fondles her fragrant breasts,
as soft as cotton.
How truly amazing it is!
Lifting up her feet, she takes off
her embroidered slippers,
And snuggles her jade body into her lover's bosom.
As she sticks out her clove-shaped tongue,[16]
he opens his mouth.
When the tossing and tumbling mating phoenixes
finish with the clouds and rain,

She enjoins her talented lover,
"Tomorrow, whatever you do, try to
come a little earlier."[17]
When they had finished their game of clouds and rain, the woman got out five taels worth of loose silver and gave it to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "My mother, Old Mrs. P'an from outside the city gate, has died. A coffin was provided for her by your father-in-law while he was still alive. The First Lady sent me to take part in the third-day encoffining ceremony and burn paper money on her behalf. Tomorrow is the date for her burial ceremony, but the First Lady won't let me go, on the grounds that while we are still in mourning for Father it is not right for us to appear at public gatherings. I'm giving these five taels of silver to you in the hope that early tomorrow morning you will agree to go outside the city gate and help with the funeral arrangements for my mother, Old Mrs. P'an, reward her coffin bearers, and see that she is properly buried. If you consent to do so, it will be just as though I were doing it myself."
Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the silver with one hand and said, "That's no problem. If you assign such a task to me:
Once one has acceded to someone's request,
It is imperative to see the job through to the end.
I'll go out the gate as early as possible tomorrow morning, and when my mission is accomplished I'll come back and report to you."
When he had finished speaking, fearing that Hsi-men Ta-chieh might come home during his absence, he promptly returned to the antechamber in which they lived. Of the events of that evening there is nothing more to relate.
The next day, he returned from his mission around lunchtime and found that Chin-lien had just gotten up and was still in her room combing her hair. Ch'en Ching-chi came inside to report to her and gave her two sprigs of jasmine blossoms that he had plucked on the grounds of the Chao-hua ssu, or Temple of Glorious Transformation, outside the gate for her to wear.
"Has the coffin been duly buried?" the woman asked.
"How could I have failed to see that the venerable lady's:
Yellow gold is stored in the coffer?"
replied Ch'en Ching-chi. "Before coming home to report to you, I still had two taels and six or seven mace of silver in hand, which I gave to your adopted sister to take care of her daily expenses. She asked me to extend her greetings to you with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of gratitude."
When the woman learned that her mother had been buried in her grave, she shed a few tears and then instructed Ch'un-mei, saying, "Put the jasmine blossoms in a bowl of water, and bring some tea for our brother-in-law to drink."
Before long, two boxes of steamed-shortcake pastries and four saucers of appetizers were brought out. When Ch'en Ching-chi had enjoyed these refreshments, he went back out to the front compound. From that time on, the woman and the young scamp:
Became closer by the day.[18]
One morning. during the seventh month, the woman said to him, "Don't go out anywhere today, but stay in your quarters, so I can come to you there and we can have some fun together."
Ch'en Ching-chi assented to this. Unexpectedly, however, he was invited by Ts'ui Pen and a number of his friends to join them in an all-day excursion outside the city walls. When he came home, he was quite drunk, and no sooner did he collapse onto his bed than he fell fast asleep and became oblivious to:
Heaven above and earth below.
At dusk, Chin-lien suddenly appeared in his quarters and saw that he was stretched out asleep on the bed. Forgoing any attempt at a greeting, she tried unsuccessfully to shake him awake and realized that he must have been out drinking somewhere. Who could have anticipated that:
Strange as it may seem,
when the woman groped into his sleeve, she hooked out a gold-plated hairpin in the shape of a lotus petal with two rows of characters engraved on it that said:
The horse with the golden bridle neighs
amidst the fragrant verdure;
The visitor to the jade tower is drunk
at apricot blossom time.
When she held it up to the light to examine it, she realized that it belonged to Meng Yü-lou and thought to herself, "How did this happen to end up in his sleeve? He must have been engaged in hanky-panky with Meng Yü-lou. Otherwise, how could her hairpin have ended up in his sleeve? No wonder that short-life has treated me at times as though he were:
Bereft of thought or feeling.
If I don't leave a few words for him, he won't even know that I've been here. I'll inscribe a quatrain on the wall as a message to him and interrogate him about it the next time I see him."
Thereupon, she took up a brush and wrote out a quatrain on the wall that read:
On her solitary excursion to his studio, she
is unable to awaken him;
Which means the Goddess has descended from
Witch's Mountain in vain.
It would appear that King Hsiang of Ch'u has
become devoid of feelings;[19]
To so betray their morning after morning and
evening after evening love.
After inscribing her composition, the woman returned to her quarters.
To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi had slept for some time, the effects of the wine wore off, and he woke up.
As he got up and lit a lamp, he suddenly recalled, "The woman was going to come meet me here for a tryst, but I have let her down by getting drunk."
On turning around, he caught sight of the four lines of poetry on the wall and noticed that the ink with which they were written was still wet. Upon reading the poem, he realized that the woman had come as promised but had been obliged to return empty-handed; and that he had allowed the gift of a romantic assignation to slip through his fingers. The thought of this filled him with no end of remorse.
"The night watches are just beginning by now," he thought to himself. "Moreover, Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yüan-hsiao are still in the rear compound and haven't come out yet. If I go over to her place, the postern gate is likely to be locked."
He headed there and shook the branches of the woody hibiscus tree to signal his arrival but heard no response from within. By mounting onto the T'ai-hu rockery, he succeeded in climbing over the whitewashed wall.
The woman, upon finding her lover to be drunk and fast asleep, had returned to her quarters in a fit of high dudgeon, feeling deeply depressed, and gone to sleep herself, after sprawling across her bed without bothering to undress. She did not anticipate that, in the middle of the night, he would come climbing over the wall. On seeing that the courtyard was deserted, and assuming that the maidservants must be asleep, he proceeded with:
Skulking step and lurking gait,
to make his way to the door of her room, which he found to be closed but unlocked. When he slipped inside, he observed by the light of the moon shining through the window that the woman was lying sprawled on the bed, all by herself, with her face to the wall.
He whispered "My darling" to her several times, but she did not respond.
"Don't hold it against me," he went on to say, "but today Ts'ui Pen and a bunch of his friends invited me to join them in an excursion to the estate at Wu-li Yüan outside the city gate to enjoy practicing archery together. By the time I got home, I was drunk and was unaware that you had visited me. I am guilty of failing to keep our agreed upon assignation. Forgive me. Forgive me."
The woman still failed to respond to his plea.
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that she would not respond, he fell to his knees in a state of panic and pled with her, over and over again.
At this, the woman suddenly turned over and slapped his face with the back of her hand, as she railed at him, saying, "You lousy incorrigible fickle short-life! Keep it quiet or the maidservants will hear you. I know that you have someone else in your sights and no longer have a place for me in your heart. But where did you actually go off to today?"
"I was really dragged off by Ts'ui Pen to practice archery outside the city gate," replied Ch'en Ching-chi. "He managed to get me so drunk that I fell asleep on my return and failed to keep my date with you. Don't hold it against me. I saw the poem that you left on the wall and understand that you are annoyed with me."
"You crazy incorrigible trickster!" the woman retorted. "Stop shooting your mouth off that way, and shut up. Your tricks are as slippery as balls of mud. I won't let you get away with it. If it was really Ts'ui Pen who gave you too much to drink today, so that you came home drunk, how did this hairpin happen to end up in your sleeve?"
"That's something I picked up the other day in the garden," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "It was only two or three days ago."
"You're still ready to:
Outwit the spirits and confound the ghosts,
are you?" the woman exclaimed. "What garden did you pick it up in? You'd have to pick up another one just like it for me to take you seriously. This pin is one that Meng the Third, that pockmarked whore, wears in her hair. My identification of it is:
As certain as certain can be.
It even has her name engraved on it, yet you think you can pull the wool over my eyes. No wonder, the other day when I was away from home, she is said to have invited you into her quarters for a meal. The truth is you've been:
Playing at sevens and eights,
with her. When I taxed you with it, you refused to acknowledge anything. But if you haven't been engaged in hanky-panky with her, how did this pin of hers end up in your hands? You must have been revealing things about me to her. No wonder she smiled at me the way she did the other day. What you told her about me must have lain behind it. From now on:
You be yourself, and
I'll be myself.
Just as the mung bean loses its color when peeled:
You can get lost."
Thereupon, Ch'en Ching-chi became so disturbed that he began:
Swearing by the gods and uttering oaths,
as he wept, saying, "If I've had:
So much as a thread's worth of commerce,
with her, I hereby invoke the numinous powers of the God of the Eastern Peak and the God of Walls and Moats, who will see that I do not live to the age of thirty; that I am afflicted with:
Boils as big as bowls, and
Three to five years of jaundice;
and such thirst that:
When I want soup, there will be none to be had;
When I want water, there will be none to be had."
The woman still refused to believe him and said, "You lousy nincompoop! Swearing such oaths, as though you were suffering from a toothache! It's a wonder you're not ashamed of yourself."
The two of them continued to go at it for some time until, observing that it was late at night, they saw no alternative but to divest themselves of their clothes and lie down next to each other on the bed. The woman made a point of turning over with her back to him and venting her spite by refusing to pay him any attention. Allowing him to plead, "Sister this, and sister that," her only response was to reach back and scratch his face with her hand, which so unnerved Ch'en Ching-chi that he felt he had to suppress his anger without uttering a sound. They squandered the remainder of the night without his being able even to blunder his way into her cunt. When the day dawned, fearing that the maidservants would get up, he felt compelled to climb over the wall as before and return to his quarters in the front compound. There is a song to the tune "Helping the Drunkard Back Home" that testifies to this:
My mouth rubs against the oily fret
on the top of her head;
Her back is pressed against the skin
of my chest and belly.
I am not able to nuzzle her fragrant cheeks
to left and right;[20]
But can only breath into the hollows in the
back of her neck.
All night long I cannot catch even a
glimpse of her face,
But can only contemplate the back of
her ivory comb.[21]
Gentle reader take note: Subsequently, Chin-lien returned this hairpin to Ch'en Ching-chi; and later still, after Meng Yü-lou had married Li Kung-pi and moved to Yen-chou prefecture, Ch'en Ching-chi produced this pin as evidence for the claim that Meng Yü-lou was his elder sister, in the endeavor to consummate a surreptitious affair with her. Who could have anticipated that Meng Yü-lou would not only evade this trick of his but coerce Ch'en Ching-chi into suffering the calamity of incarceration. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it. Truly:
The 3 luminaries cast shadows, but who can catch them:
The 10000 things have no roots, they just arise of themselves.

Now that Pan Jinlian had tasted the joys of love with Chen Jingji, never a day passed that did not witness some new proof of the passion that united them. Sometimes they would stand, close pressed together, and gaze into each other's laughing eyes; sometimes they sat, and so made love, giving each other gentle slaps and pinchings, with occasional ticklings, feeling themselves free of all restraint. If others were present and they could not speak the words they longed to speak, they would write short notes of love, and drop them on the floor, each picking up the other's. One day—it was about the fourth month—Jinlian took a silk handkerchief, and in it wrapped a powder satchel, in which she had placed a lock of hair and some fragrant pine leaves. She intended to give this to Jingji with her own hands, but, finding he was not in his room, she threw it through the window. When the young man returned, it lay there in its paper wrappings, and, when he opened it, he found the satchel and the handkerchief. There was a short poem with the gifts.
This kerchief of silver silk and this perfume satchel
Are for you.
The lock of hair is a memory of our first mating.
The pine leaves mark my trust
That you will remember forever.
I write my love with my tears.

In the deep night I am alone with my shadow.
Do not let the night pass in vain,
But come quickly to the arbor of roses.
To the young man this seemed a clear sign that she wished him to go to the arbor. He took a piece of fancy paper and wrote a poem in reply. Then he went to the garden but found that Wu Yueniang was paying a visit to his loved one. At first, indeed, he did not know this, and when he reached the garden gate called: "Darling, are you there?" Fortunately, only Jinlian heard him and, hurriedly lifting the lattice, she came out and made a warning sign to him with her hands.
"Oh, it is you!" she said. "I suppose you are looking for your wife. She was here a moment ago, but now she has gone to the garden to pick some flowers." The young man silently handed his poem to her, and she put it in her sleeve.
"What did he want?" Yueniang said. Jinlian said he was looking for his wife, and that she had told him he would find her in the garden. So Yueniang was deceived. Soon she went away, and Jinlian took from her sleeve the packet Chen Jingji had given her. It was a golden fan, with green rushes beside a flowing stream painted upon it. Accompanying it was a poem.
On this white silk are painted dark bamboos
And green rushes that seem to be alive
With gold and silver to enhance their brightness.
Will you not use this, darling, when the day is hot
Not to bring cooling breezes, but to give you shade?
When people throng around you, put it in your sleeve
Let it refresh you when you are alone.
I could not bear to think
That vulgar hands might snatch it from your own.
When she had read this poem, Jinlian plied her maids, Chunmei and Qiuju, with wine, and when it grew late, sent them to another room to sleep. Then alone, she opened wide the green windows and lighted long tapering candles. She made ready the bed and perfumed it, then bathed and went out to stand beside the flower pleasance to await a fitting moment.
That night, Ximen's daughter had gone to Yueniang's room to hear the exhortations of Sister Wang, the nun. Only the maid, Yuanxiao, was left with Chen Jingji. He gave her a kerchief and said: "You stay where you are, I am going to play chess with the Fifth Lady. If your mistress should return, come and tell me at once." Then he went to the garden. The flowers in the moonlight cast their shadows, some long, some short. He found his way to the Rose Arbor but, long before he reached it, could see Jinlian, uncovered, standing there, her glorious tresses waving in the gentle breeze. He approached quietly, then suddenly dashed forward and took her in his arms. Jinlian was taken by surprise.
"Oh," she cried, "you young villain, what do you mean by rushing out and frightening me like that? It is a good thing it is I, with whom you know you can do what you like, but would you have dared to do it with anybody else?"
Jingji had taken more wine than usual that evening. "I don't think it would have mattered very much if it had been somebody else," he laughed. Then, hand in hand, they walked towards her room. It was brightly lighted by the candles on the table, and refreshments lay ready before them. They made fast the corner gate; then sat side by side and began to drink.
"Where is your wife?" Jinlian said.
"She has gone to hear the reading of the sacred texts," Jingji answered. "I told Yuanxiao that she must come and warn me at once if it became necessary. She thinks I have come to play chess with you."
They drank wine together in great content, for, as the proverb says: If the drinking of tea leads to frivolity, wine opens wide the floodgates of passion. As the olive-colored wine coursed through their veins, the ruddy hue of the peach flower mounted to their cheeks. One would seek a kiss; the other would not seem too shy. At last they snuffed out the candles and went to bed.
When he came in,
He took me in his arms and carried me
And set me down upon his knee.
I spread the silken coverlets, and that happy lover
Well proved his valiance in the bed.
He lifted up my feet, yes, lifted up my feet,
Disordering my hair and putting out of place
The knot that bound it.
Their passage at arms over, Yuanxiao came and knocked at the door, telling them that Jingji's wife had returned. He dressed hastily and went away.
The bees that buzz so wildly and the merry butterflies
We often see
But, sometimes, they are hidden from our eyes
When they plunge deep within the pear blossom.
The three rooms on the upper floor of Jinlian's apartments were arranged, with the middle one as the place for family worship, and the others as storerooms for drugs and incense.
One day the Fates decided that something should happen. Jinlian and Chen Jingji were so much in love with one another that nothing could keep them long apart. Every day they met at her place. One morning Jinlian dressed and went upstairs to offer incense before the image of Guanyin. At the same time, Chen Jingji came to take some of the stores. So they met. There was nobody in sight, so Jinlian decided that she had burned incense enough. Instead, she threw her arms around her lover and kissed him, calling him her precious sweetheart, while he called her his own true darling. After a while they said to one another: "There seems to be no one here," took off their clothes, and found a convenient bench. Then they began a merry game. Over his shoulders two small feet were raised and all was going well. But were it not for the unexpected, there would never be any story to tell. Just at the moment when their happiness seemed about to reach its height, Chunmei came with a box to get some tea. The couple were disturbed, but it was too late for them to do anything. Chunmei discreetly but hastily withdrew. Jingji put on his clothes again, and Jinlian did likewise. It was she who took the situation in hand.
"Chunmei, my dear girl," she called, "come here a moment. I have something to say to you."
Chunmei came back. "My dear good sister," Jinlian said, "this gentleman, as you know, is not a stranger. I must tell you the plain truth. We are lovers, and we cannot do without each other. You must keep this to yourself and not breathe a word to a soul."
"Mother," Chunmei said, "why need you say that? I have served you all these years. Do you think I do not know you well enough? Of course, I shall tell no one."
"If you really mean to keep our secret," Jinlian said, "you must prove it to me. Here is the man, lie with him and I will believe you."
Chunmei flushed till her face was now pale, now red, but she could not refuse. Indeed she made the necessary preparations herself, lay down on the bench and yielded before the young man's impetuosity. So that day, Chen Jingji came into full possession of two priceless pearls. What could he do but thread them?
Afterwards, they went their ways. In the days that followed, the two women often brought the young man there, but they hid the matter from the maid Qiuju.
On the first day of the sixth month, old woman Pan died, and the news was brought to Ximen's household. Wu Yueniang prepared the prescribed offerings for the dead and told Pan Jinlian to take a sedan chair and attend the funeral outside the city. Two days later she came back and went to Yueniang's room, and talked there for a long time. Then she left Yueniang, but when she had passed through the great hall, she felt sorely pressed by Nature, pulled up her skirts and gave herself relief beside the wall. After Ximen Qing's death, few people came to see them, and the gate of honor and the doors that led to the great hall were kept shut. Chen Jingji lived in the rooms in the Eastern wing. He had just got up when suddenly he heard the sound of rushing water. Putting his head quietly out of the window, he saw that Jinlian was responsible for it. "What is this wild beast I see?" he laughed. "Mind you pull your skirts high enough. They might get wet."
Jinlian hastily arranged her clothes and went over to the window.
"What!" she cried. "You still here! You are just getting up. I suppose. A nice life you lead. Is your wife about?"
"Yes," Jingji said. "It was very late when we came back from the Great Lady's rooms last night. I had to go too, for the Great Lady asked me to go and hear the Hong Luo Sutra read by the nuns. I stayed so long, I was ready to drop, and this morning I did not feel like getting up."
"What a liar you are, you rogue," Jinlian said. "I was not at home yesterday, but I swear you never went to hear any sutras read. The maids tell me you went to dine with Meng Yulou."
"Nothing of the sort," the young man retorted. "My wife will tell you that I went to see the Lady of the House. I never went near the Third Lady's room."
As he talked, he climbed onto the bed. His weapon was at the ready, and he thrust it through the window.
"Oh, you, who will meet an early end," Jinlian cried, "what do you mean by bringing out that old fellow. You gave me quite a fright. Take it back at once, or I will put a needle through it and hurt you."
Jingji laughed. "You don't seem very fond of him today, but you must be generous and treat him kindly."
"Jailbird!" Jinlian cried. She took a small brass mirror from her sleeve, and set it on the windowsill, pretending to powder her face, but in reality doing something quite different. The young man found her attentions most pleasurable, and they were feeling very pleased with one another when they heard footsteps. Jinlian hurriedly took up her mirror and the young man withdrew. It was Laian.
"Fu would like you to take a meal with him," the boy said.
"I am dressing my hair now," Jingji said." Tell him not to wait. I will be with him in a moment." The boy went away and Jinlian cautiously returned. "Tonight," she said, "don't go out. I want you, and will send Chunmei to give you warning. There is something I wish to say to you." Jingji promised to come and, when he had finished combing his hair, went off to attend to some business at the shop. Jinlian went to her own room.
That night was very dark, and the weather very sultry. Jinlian told Chunmei to heat some water for a bath, and dressed her nails. Then she had a light mattress set upon her bed, drove off the mosquitoes, and pulled down the net. She placed some incense in the small burner.
"Mother," Chunmei said, "do you know that this is the first day of the hottest season of the year? Would you like some 'Touch-me-not' to stain your fingers? If you would, I'll get some for you."
"Where?" Jinlian said.
"There is some in the great courtyard. I will get it for you at once."
"Tell Qiuju to get the pestle and mortar ready to pound some garlic," Jinlian said, adding softly: "Go to the East wing and tell your brother to come. I have something to say to him." Chunmei went out to do her bidding and, while she was away, the woman bathed her fragrant body. At last the maid returned with the flowers and told Qiuju what to do with them. Jinlian gave Chunmei a few cups of wine and told her to sleep that night in the kitchen. Then, by the light of the candles, she stained her delicate fingers, while the maid, at her direction, took a bench into the courtyard, with a mattress and some pillows. It was now the first night watch, and everything was silent as the stars moved slowly across the heavens. On either side of the Milky Way the stars of the Heavenly Lovers took up their station. The fragrance of flowers came over the wall, and a little band of glowworms gave their dainty light. Jinlian threw herself upon the mattress, fanned herself and waited. The maid closed the corner gate, but did not bolt it.
Beneath the moon she stood and waited.
The wind came and opened the gate
And, on the walls, the shadows of the flowers moved.
She thought her precious lover was come.
Chen Jingji had told her he would give warning of his coming by shaking the branches of a flowering shrub. So, when at last Jinlian saw them move, she knew he was there. She coughed gently, and the young man came in and sat beside her. She asked whom he had left at home. "My wife is not there," Jingji said, "but I told Yuanxiao that if anything should happen she must come and tell me at once." He asked if Qiuju had gone to bed, and the woman told him she was already fast asleep. They kissed each other and, there in the courtyard, enjoyed the pleasures of love without so much as a single garment to hinder them.
Their two hearts beat as one
They pressed together fragrant shoulders
And touched each other's cheeks.
He grasped that perfumed breast, smooth as the softest down, And found it perfect.
He raised those tiny feet, took off the embroidered shoes,
And jade met jade as precious as itself.
Each burning tongue sought sweetness from its mate.
Then like mad phoenixes they took their fill of love
And, when the storm was past,
She whispered to her lover, bidding him
To come again and not delay.
When they were done, Jinlian brought five taels of silver in small pieces and gave them to Chen Jingji.
"My mother has just died," she said. "My husband, when he was alive, provided a coffin for her. She was placed in it the third day after her death and, by our mistress's orders, I was present. I have only returned today. Tomorrow she is to be buried, but the Great Lady says that as we are still in mourning for your father, she cannot let me go. So here are five taels. I want you to go and see about things tomorrow. Pay the undertakers with this money and see the matter through. If you go, I shall be as satisfied as if I went myself."
"It will be no trouble," Jingji said, taking the money. "I will go early and, when all is over, I will come and tell you about it." Then it suddenly occurred to him that his wife might be returning, so he went away.
The next day, it was still morning when he came back. Indeed so early was it that Jinlian had not finished dressing. The young man gave her two branches of jasmine that he had plucked at the temple. "Did you actually see the coffin put in the earth?"
"That is what I went for," Jingji returned. "If I hadn't seen the old lady buried, should I have dared to come and tell you so? I did not spend all the money. There is still about a tael left, and I gave it to your sister. She told me to thank you."
Jinlian, now that her mother was buried, shed a few tears. Then she told Chunmei to put the flowers into a vase and bring the young man some tea. Jingji took some refreshment and then went away.
From that day, the pair seemed more closely drawn together than ever. One day—it was in the seventh month—Jinlian sent the young man a message asking him on no account to fail to visit her that evening. He promised, but unfortunately Cui Ben and a few other friends carried him off for a day in the country and, when he came back, he was so drunk that he could only throw himself on the bed and fall into a sound sleep. When night fell, Jinlian came to see where he was and found him lying on the bed in such a drunken sleep she could not waken him. By chance she thought to see what might be in his sleeve and there discovered a pin with a gold head shaped like a lotus. On it was engraved this legend:
Horses with golden bridles neigh on the tender grass.
The season of apricot blossom brings great joy
To those who live in towers of jade.
She took the pin to the light and examined it. It belonged to Yulou. "Where has he got this?" she wondered. There must, she decided, be something between them or it could not have found its way into Jingji's hands. "No wonder that he has seemed somewhat lacking in manly vigor lately," she said to herself. "I must leave a few words behind me to show I have been here. I think I'll write a line or two on the wall and, next time I see him, I'll drag the truth out of him." Then with a brush she wrote:
I came alone to visit you, and found you sleeping.
Came like an angel from the skies.
It was in vain. You are like Xiang Wang
There is no spirit to you.
Day and night I offer you my love
And you reject it.
She went back to her room. Not long afterwards Jingji woke up, considerably more sober. He lighted a candle, suddenly remembering his tryst with Jinlian. Then he saw the poem written on the wall, the ink still wet, and knew she had been there. The young man felt extremely annoyed with himself. "It is about the first night watch," he said, remembering that his wife and the maid were still with Yueniang. "If I go, I shall find the corner gate closed." He went to the garden and shook the flowering shrub, but there was no response. Taking a large stone to step on, he climbed over the white wall. Jinlian, finding him drunk, had been very disappointed. She had gone back sadly and thrown herself on the bed fully dressed.

Jingji climbed over the wall. Nobody was to be seen in the courtyard: the two maids had gone to bed. He walked on tiptoe and found that the door had not been bolted, so he pushed it open and, by the moonlight that streamed upon the bed, saw Jinlian lying there. "Darling," he cried several times, but there was no reply. "Don't be angry with me," the young man went on. "Cui Ben asked me to go and practice archery outside the city, and I had too much to drink. I am very sorry I didn't come when I should have, and as for your visiting my room, I never knew it." There was still no answer. The young man was greatly upset. He knelt on the floor and kept repeating the same words over and over again.

"You deceitful scamp," Jinlian cried at last, slapping him in the face with the back of her hand, "be quiet. I don't want the maids to hear all about it. There is someone else now, and you care for me no longer. Where have you been today?"

"Really," Jingji assured her, "Cui Ben did take me outside the city. They gave me a lot of wine, and I got drunk and went to sleep. I beg your pardon for not coming. As soon as I saw the poem on the wall, I knew you were annoyed."

"Oh, you deceitful rascal!" Jinlian cried. "Be quiet and don't argue. Slippery as you are, you shan't escape me this time. If, as you say, you were drinking with those fellows and nowhere else, where did you get the pin in your sleeve?"

"I picked it up in the garden two or three days ago."

"In the garden, did you? Well, go to the garden and pick up another one like it and bring it to me. Then I may believe you. This belongs to Yulou, the little strumpet. It's hers beyond a doubt. Why, her name is on it, so what is the use of trying to deceive me? Of course, you and she are carrying on together. Once before I had to speak to you about her, and you swore you had never touched her. But, if that is so, how does this pin come into your possession? I suppose you've told her everything about me. That's why she was laughing at me the other day. Henceforth, my dear Sir, you are you and I am I. Kindly relieve me of your presence."

Jingji swore by all the gods and began to cry. "If I, Chen Jingji, have had the least little thing to do with her, may I die before my thirtieth year; may I have boils the size of bowls; when I want soup, may it turn to water, and when I want water, may there be no water."

Still Jinlian refused to believe him. "You deceitful rubbish," she scolded. "Oaths like that are the kind people take when they want to get rid of the toothache. I wonder you're not ashamed to say such things." They went on squabbling till it was very late. The young man undressed and lay down beside her, but she turned away and would not answer him, though he kept repeating Lady this and Lady that. Indeed, she slapped his face. After that he did not dare to speak or even to move. When daybreak came, he feared the maids might be getting up, so he climbed over the wall and went back to his own place.

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### Ch'iu-chü, Harboring Resentment, Reveals a Clandestine Affair & Spies on Pan Jinlian; Ch'un-mei Transmits a Note to Facilitate a Lovers' Rendezvous

It is laughable, but Hsi-men Ch'ing's perception
leaves much to be desired;
This fact encourages his peach and plum blossoms
to smile in the spring breeze.
Under his layers of embroidered quilts
there sleeps a rogue;
With three meals of delicacies a day
he nurtures a tiger.
Enamored of her person, his son-in-law
covets his concubine;
Attracted by his wealth, he is prepared
to do his father-in-law in.
And there is yet another privilege
worthy of consideration;
Traversing rooms and entering chambers
he can dally as he likes.[1]

When P'an Chin-lien saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had climbed over the wall and departed at the crack of dawn, she felt regret over the way she had treated him. The next day was the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and Wu Yüeh-niang rode in her sedan chair to the Ksitigarbha Nunnery where Nun Hsüeh resided in order to burn a coffer of paper money on Hsi-men Ch'ing's behalf in celebration of the Ullambana Festival.[2] Chin-lien and the others escorted Yüeh-niang to the front gate and then returned inside. Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all went back to the rear compound, but Chin-lien lagged behind and, on reaching the ceremonial gate to the front courtyard, ran into Ch'en Ching-chi, who had gone up to the second floor of Li P'ing-erh's quarters to fetch some articles of clothing that had been pawned and was on his way out with the package in hand.

Chin-lien called him to a halt and questioned him, saying, "Although I criticized you with a few words last night, how come you jumped up and left in such a huff this morning? Are you really trying to break off your relationship with me?"

"How can you say such things?" retorted Ch'en Ching-chi. "Who got any sleep last night anyway? You gave me such a hard time all night as to nearly do me in. Just take a look at the scratch marks you left on my face."

"You lousy short-life!" the woman swore back at him. "If you haven't been engaged in hanky-panky with her:
The thief suffers from a sense of guilt.
Why did you run out on me that way for no good reason?"

Ch'en Ching-chi reached into his sleeve and pulled out a slip of paper. When the woman unfolded it and took a look, it turned out to be inscribed with a song to the tune "Mistletoe" that read as follows:

On the slightest pretext, she starts
to abuse me;
Even going so far as to scratch
at my face.
I humble myself and experience humiliation
in a thousand ways,
But whatever I say, she wants to call it
quits with me.
The word "quit" is enough to make me feel
consternation at heart.
"My cunning loved one, you are being both
ungrateful and unjust.[3]
When your eyebrows have lost their color,
who will repaint them for you?"[4]

When Chin-lien had finished reading this, she laughed, saying, "If you are really innocent, come to my place tonight and I will interrogate you further."

"You gave me such a hard time," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "that I didn't get a wink of sleep all night. I will have to catch up on my sleep during the daylight hours."

"If you fail to show up," said Chin-lien, "I'll hold you to account."

When she had finished speaking, the woman returned to her room while Ch'en Ching-chi took the pawned articles of clothing back to the shop and continued to conduct business for a while, after which he returned to his quarters, sprawled out on the bed, and went to sleep. He could hardly wait for night to fall so he could go over to Chin-lien's quarters. Unexpectedly, however, by twilight the sky grew dark, and outside the window the pitter-patter of falling raindrops became audible. Truly:
The rustling sound in the courtyard[5]
is made by evening rain;
The drip of raindrops upon plantain
leaves seems never-ending.

When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the rain was falling heavily, he said to himself, "What unobliging weather. Just when she has asked me to come resolve things with her today, it has unexpectedly begun to rain. How depressing and debilitating."

Thereupon, he commenced:
Waiting for long periods as well as short,
for the rain to end, but it did not stop and continued to fall with a swishing sound until the night watches began, so copiously that the water poured off the eaves. The young man could not wait any longer for the rain to stop, so he wrapped himself in a madder red blanket. Wu Yüeh-niang was at home at the time, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh and Yüan-hsiao were in the rear compound and had not come back out yet. Thereupon, he locked the door to his quarters, went into the garden in the pouring rain through the postern gate on the west side of the front courtyard, and gave a push to the gate into Chin-lien's quarters.

The woman, who was certain that he would show up that evening, had already instructed Ch'un-mei to befuddle Ch'iu-chü with several goblets of wine and go sleep with her in the room with the k'ang. For this reason, she had left the gate closed but unlocked. When Ch'en Ching-chi pushed at the gate and saw that it was ajar, he slipped inside and went straight into the woman's bedroom, where he saw that:
The gauze window was half open,
Silver candles were burning high,
while the table was spread with wine and delicacies, and
Golden goblets were filled to the brim.
When the two of them had sat down:
Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh,
the woman asked him, "If you have not been carrying on with Meng Yü-lou, how did this hairpin fall into your hands?"

"It was something that I picked up in the garden under the rose-leaved raspberry trellis the other day," Ch'en Ching-chi replied. "If I am not telling the truth:
May I suffer death and annihilation."

"As long as you are innocent," the woman said, "I'll give this pin back to you to put in your hair. I don't want to confiscate anything of yours. But you must be sure to keep whatever pins, sachets, handkerchiefs, and keepsakes that I have given you safe and sound. If you lose track of a single one of them I'll take you to task."

The two of them drank wine and played board games together until the first watch before they:
Got into bed and prepared to sleep.
They then:
Tumbled and tossed like male and female phoenixes,
and kept at it for fully half the night. The woman took all of the arts of the bedchamber that she had formerly practiced with Hsi-men Ch'ing and tried them out on her lover during a single night.

To resume our story, during the night, from her position in the adjacent room, Ch'iu-chü overheard what sounded like a male voice speaking but did not know who it was. When the cock crowed at dawn the next morning, she got up to urinate and suddenly heard the sound of the door being opened in the adjoining room. In the hazy moonlight, it had not yet stopped raining. On looking through the window, she saw someone draped in a red blanket on his way out the door.

"That looks like Ch'en Ching-chi," she said to herself. "So it turns out that he's been sleeping with my mistress, night after night. She is forever protesting her own virtue in front of other people, while all the time she's been carrying on an affair with her son-in-law."

That day, she went straight back to the kitchen in the rear compound and told Hsiao-yü, thus and so, all about what she had seen.

She did not anticipate that Hsiao-yü, who was on friendly terms with Ch'un-mei, would go tell her about it, saying, "That Ch'iu-chü from your place says that your mistress is carrying on an affair with her son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi. Yesterday, he spent the whole night in her room, and he only left this morning. His wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Yüan-hsiao did not spend the night in the front compound."

When Ch'un-mei returned to Chin-lien's quarters, she told her all about it, word for word, and concluded, "If you don't give that slave a few strokes of the rod, but allow her to carry on this way with her:
Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue,
you might as well be giving her the license to do you in."

On hearing this, Chin-lien became enraged, summoned Ch'iu-chü into her presence, and made her kneel down before her, saying, "I told you to boil up some congee, but you only managed to break the pot. I dare say:
The hole in your bottom's so big:
Your mind has dropped out,
or something of the sort. Since I haven't beaten this slave for several days, her bones have begun to itch."

Thereupon, taking up a rod, she gave her thirty cruel strokes on the back with all her strength until she:
Howled like a stuck pig,
and the skin on her body was broken.

At this point, Ch'un-mei came over and said, "Mother, these few strokes that you've given her will do no more than scratch her where she itches. You ought to strip her naked, call in a page boy to give her twenty or thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo, and see if that will induce any fear in her. To merely touch her up with these few strokes, as if you were playing with a monkey, is:
Hardly enough to discolor the water.
Brazen as she is, do you really think she's afraid of you? As a slave, it is her duty to see that:
Words spoken inside do not get out, and
Words spoken outside do not get in.
To let her get away with such things is to nurture a talebearer in your own household."

"Who said anything anyway?" Ch'iu-chü protested.

"Still shooting off your mouth are you?" the woman said. "You home-breaking master-betraying slave! Don't you say another word."

With these imprecations she impelled Ch'iu-chü to flee back to the kitchen. Truly:
When a mosquito gets slapped with a fan,
It is for hurting people with its mouth.[6]

One day, on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Chin-lien secretly invited Ch'en Ching-chi to enjoy the moon and drink wine with her that evening, and join with Ch'un-mei in playing the board game called Turtle Pachisi with each other. That night, in the desire to get more rest, they overslept and had not yet gotten up by the time for their morning repast, thereby opening themselves to the risk of exposure. They did not anticipate that Ch'iu-chü would see what they were up to and promptly go back to the door of the master suite in the rear compound to tell Yüeh-niang about it. It so happened that she was engaged in combing her hair at the moment, and Hsiao-yü was standing in attendance by the door.

Ch'iu-chü drew her aside and told her, "Last night, our son-in-law, thus and so, once again spent the night in my mistress's room, and right now he hasn't even gotten up yet. The other day, when I informed you what they were up to, my mistress gave me a beating; but today I saw the evidence clearly with my own eyes. I am not traducing her. Ask your mistress to go over there quickly and see the situation for herself."

Hsiao-yü reviled her in response, saying, "You:
Open-eyed and brazen-faced,
slave! You're just trying to do your mistress in once again. My mistress is combing her hair. You'd better get out of here."
Yüeh-niang overheard them and asked, "What are you talking about?"
Hsiao-yü:
Could not conceal the situation,
but only said, "The Fifth Lady has sent Ch'iu-chü to ask you to go have a word with her," without mentioning anything else.
When Yüeh-niang had finished combing her hair, she:
Lightly moved her lotus feet,
and showed up all of a sudden at the door of Chin-lien's quarters in the front compound. No sooner did Ch'un-mei catch sight of her than she rushed inside to inform Chin-lien of her arrival. Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi were still ensconced under the bedclothes and had not yet arisen. On hearing that Yüeh-niang had shown up, the two of them suffered quite a start and were thrown into such consternation that they were barely able to extricate themselves in time for Ch'en Ching-chi to conceal himself behind the frame of the bedstead, in the hope of hiding the situation by:
Drawing an embroidered quilt over it.
Chin-lien had Ch'un-mei place a low table on the bed and bring her a beaded floral ornament which she could pretend to be working on.
In no time at all, Yüeh-niang came into the room and sat down, saying, "Sister Six, since you still hadn't ventured out the door, I wondered what you were up to, but it turns out that you've been in your bedroom working on a beaded floral ornament."
Picking it up in her hand and examining it, she complimented her, saying, "Your handiwork is really skillful. You've created a sesame flower design in the center, and a pattern of lattice-shaped interlocking lozenges on either side, surrounded with a motif of 'honeybees rifling chrysanthemum blossoms.' You've also fitted the beads neatly together, one after the other, to create the motif of 'joined hearts.' It really looks attractive. In the future, I hope you'll make a similar piece for me to wear as a headband."
Only after the woman saw that the words Yüeh-niang addressed to her were friendly, did:
The little fawn in her heart cease its hopping,
and she was able to order Ch'un-mei to pour some tea for her.
Soon afterwards, when Yüeh-niang had finished her tea and chatted for a while, she got up to go, saying, "Sister Six, as soon as you finish combing your hair, come back to the rear compound for a visit."
Chin-lien promised to come and saw Yüeh-niang out the door, after which she hurriedly urged Ch'en Ching-chi to get on his way and return to the front compound. Ch'un-mei and her mistress had both broken into a sweat over the situation.
"The First Lady doesn't ordinarily come to my quarters without any reason," the woman said to Ch'un-mei. "If she didn't have any pretext for doing so, why should she have come here so early in the morning today?"
"In all probability it was because of something this slave of ours said to her," replied Ch'un-mei.
In a little while, who should turn up but Hsiao-yü, who told them, thus and so, "Ch'iu-chü came back to the rear compound and claimed that our son-in-law has been here in your room:
Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning.
I gave her a piece of my mind, but she wouldn't budge. When my mistress asked what was going on, I didn't reveal anything but said that the Fifth Lady had sent Ch'iu-chü to invite her to come have a word with her. That's why she came, but you must keep this to yourself.
A great person does not deign to notice
the faults of petty persons.
But you had better be on your guard against that slave of yours."
Gentle reader take note: Although Yüeh-niang did not believe the tales that Ch'iu-chü had told, she was apprehensive lest Chin-lien, who was still:
A young and delicate lass,
and who no longer had a husband, as time went on, might someday succumb to a momentary temptation. She feared that if word of this got out, it would lead gossipers to say, "Although Hsi-men Ch'ing was a person to be reckoned with during his lifetime, it did not take long after his death for the women in his household to end up:
All at sevens and eights."
"They may even suggest that this child of mine is:
Of questionable origin;[7]
with the result that, though:
Everything may remain sweet-smelling at home,
Our reputation will become malodorous abroad."[8]
In addition, out of affection for her stepdaughter, she told Hsi-men Tachieh not to venture outside the premises and had her move into Li Chiao-erh's vacant quarters, so that she and Ch'en Ching-chi could reside inside the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds. When it was the turn of Manager Fu Ming to go home, she arranged for Ch'en Ching-chi to take turns with him in staying overnight in the shop. She also ordained that when he had to come inside or go out in order to fetch articles of clothing or pharmaceutical supplies, he should be accompanied by Tai-an. All the doors were to be kept locked, and the maids and servants' wives were all prohibited from leaving the premises except on specific errands. Everything was to be strictly enforced.
As a result, the vibrant feelings that existed between P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi were frustrated. Truly:
Pleasing relationships in this world
are often interrupted;
The finest of prospects fail to last
as long as people like.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
How can he ever visit the T'ien-t'ai Mountains
in pursuit of immortal maidens?
The Three Isles of the Blest remain invisible,
hidden amid the waves of the sea.
To vanish inside a nobleman's gates is to be
as unreachable as the ocean depths;
From this point on, one's lover might as well
be a stranger along the highway.[9]
After P'an Chin-lien's clandestine affair had been exposed by Ch'iu-chü, although Yüeh-niang did not quite believe it, she saw to it that all the doors in the household were locked at night; that Hsi-men Ta-chieh moved into Li Chiao-erh's vacated quarters; and that whenever Ch'en Ching-chi had occasion to fetch pharmaceutical supplies or articles of clothing he would be accompanied by Tai-an or P'ing-an on the way in or out. As a result, the ardent feelings between the two of them were frustrated, and they were not able to get together for a month or more. Chin-lien found:
Each and every day increasingly insufferable,
Amid embroidered drapes upon a lonely pillow.
She could hardly endure:
The desolation of her painted chambers.
She couldn't help feeling affected by:
The eye alongside the wood, and
The heart beneath the field.[10]
She became:
Too indolent to rearrange her makeup;[11]
Her intake of tea and food diminished;
The belt around her waist grew loose;[12] and
She started listlessly to wither away.
Every day:
All she wanted to do was to sleep, and
She could hardly keep her head up.[13]
Ch'un-mei approached her and said, "Mother, why is it that for the last few days you haven't gone back to the rear compound for a visit, or taken a stroll in the garden to relax yourself? Every day, you merely give vent to:
Long sighs as well as short.
Really, what's it all about?"
"You don't understand the intensity of the feelings between myself and our son-in-law," the woman replied.
There is a song to the tune "Wild Geese Alight" that testifies to this:
He and I are like a double-headed lotus blossom
growing on the same stem,
Or the inseparable fish that swim in pairs,
having only one eye apiece.
On first meeting, we became as ardent
as though glued together.
To be suddenly separated in this way
is difficult to endure.
How strange can things get?
For the last couple of days, he has
not come in to see me;
And the First Lady has taken to
locking the gate.
Even the dog in the garden is
acting queerly.
It's hard to guess why.
The maidservants are looking
askance at me.
It is hard to bear.
This yearning for him is hard
to eradicate.
"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "you can relax. It's not a problem.
Even if the sky should be about to fall,
There are the four giants to hold it up.
Yesterday, the First Lady arranged to have the two nuns recite a precious scroll here this evening, so the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds will be locked early. Tonight, I'll claim that I have to go to the stable out front to get some straw with which to stuff a pillow, which will give me an opportunity to go summon him from the shop. If you will write a note to him and give it to me, whatever happens, I'll contrive to make it possible for our son-in-law to have a rendezvous with you. What do you think about it?"
"My good sister," the woman said, "if you are willing to take pity on me, and arrange for him to show up:
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never be able to forget it.[14]
When I recover from my indisposition, I'll make you a pair of shoes fully decorated with floral patterns."
"Mother," said Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? You and I are like one person. Moreover, Father is dead. In the days to come, no matter whether your circumstances improve or decline, I would like to share them with you, so that we can stay together."
"If you really feel that way," the woman said, "I could hardly ask for anything better."
The woman thereupon:
Lightly grasping the ivory tube, and
Gently spreading the flowered paper,[15]
proceeded to write out a note and seal it securely.
That evening, the woman was initially in the rear compound with Yüeh-niang, when she pretended not to be feeling well as an excuse for disappearing like:
A golden cicada molting its skin.
Upon returning to the front compound, she remained idly in her quarters with nothing to do. Early in the evening, Yüeh-niang saw to it that the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds was closed, after the maids and servant wives had been allowed out, and then settled down to listen to the nuns recite their precious scroll.
Meanwhile, Chin-lien enjoined Ch'un-mei to deliver her note, saying, "My good sister, go and invite him to come here as soon as possible."

There is a song to the tune "The Sixth Lady from West of the River" that testifies to this:
Enjoining Ch'un-mei, she says,
"My good sister,
Be so good as to release your
oceanic generosity.
This night is our only chance
to get together.
Ch'a!
Step along as fast as you can,
As fast as you can.
Under my piles of embroidered quilts,
I await him here."[16]
Ch'un-mei said, "Wait until I get that slave Ch'iu-chü drunk with a few goblets of wine and lock her into the kitchen; after which, I'll make the excuse that I'm taking a basket to the stable out front in order to fetch some straw for stuffing a pillow, which will give me an opportunity to summon him."
Thereupon, she poured out two large bowls of wine, saw to it that Ch'iu-chü drank them, locked her in the kitchen, and went out the door with the woman's note in hand. There is a song to the tune "Wild Geese Alight" that testifies to this:
"I'm off to the stable on the pretext
of fetching straw.
Once I get out front, I'll be able
to summon him.
On my way back, I'll get the dog
out of the way,
And see that the lock is left
hanging on the door.
The goblets will be filled with wine;
The lamps by the bed will be covered.
The bed curtains will be warm in the spring night;
Ready for the mating of male and female phoenixes.
I will not let anybody know about it;
And will see that Ch'iu-chü is drunk.
When you see the waving of the flower shadows,
you'll know that he has come.
This evening, I guarantee that the two of you
will have a successful tryst."
Ch'un-mei went out to the front of the residence, filled a basket with straw, and then proceeded to the door of the pawnshop and called to be let in. At the time, Manager Fu Ming was not in the shop, having gone home for the night. Only Ch'en Ching-chi was there, having just sprawled out on the k'ang. On suddenly hearing that someone was calling at the door, he asked who it was.
Ch'un-mei responded by saying, "It's your mother from a former incarnation, the one of the Five Plague Spirits whose job it is to dispel lovesickness."[17]
When Ch'en Ching-chi opened the door and saw who it was, his face broke into a smile, and he laughed, saying, "So it's you, young lady. There's no one else here. Come inside and sit down."
On coming into the room, she noticed a candle burning on the table, and asked, "Where are the page boys?"
"Tai-an and P'ing-an are sleeping in the pharmaceutical shop," Ch'en Ching-chi replied. "I'm here all by myself. The one who is:
Enduring loneliness, and
Suffering desolation,
is none other than your humble servant."
"My mistress wishes me to convey her greetings to you," said Ch'un-mei, "saying, what a fine person you are, not to have come near her door for all these days, or paid a visit to our quarters. She claims you must have set your eyes on another target, and no longer care for the likes of us."
"How can she say such a thing?" Ch'en Ching-chi protested. "Ever since she was exposed to that idle gossip the other day, the First Lady has seen fit to:
Secure the doors and secure the gates,
so that my movements have been restricted."
"All on your account," said Ch'un-mei, "during these last few days, my mistress has been as unhappy as can be. Every day she is:
Disconsolate and inconsolable,[18]
doesn't feel like eating or drinking, and is far too distracted to work. Today, the First Lady asked her to stay in the rear compound and listen to the recitation of a precious scroll, but she refused and came back to her quarters. She is wholeheartedly obsessed with longing and begged me to deliver this note to you, in the hope that, whatever happens, you will come to her as soon as possible."
Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the note and noticed that it was carefully sealed. When he opened and read it, it turned out to be a song to the tune "Mistletoe" that read as follows:
This peach blossom face of mine,
All on your account, has become emaciated.
It is not because, pitying the flowers and loving
the moon,[19] I suffer from spring ennui;
But rather because, this spring's regrets are no
less than those of earlier springs.[20]
It is merely a case of my pearly tears having run
dry,[21] on account of my lovesickness.
What I regret is that, as the lamp shines on my
embroidered bed curtains, I am alone.
Though I long to have him in my studio,
He is so far away the horizon is closer.[22]
When Ch'en Ching-chi had read the text of this song, he bent his body and made a deep obeisance to Ch'un-mei, saying, "I have put you to a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble. I didn't know that she was suffering so. It is true that I have failed to visit the two of you. Pray, don't take it amiss. Don't take it amiss. You can go ahead. As soon as I get myself together, I'll come after you."
He then opened the door of the wardrobe and took out a white satin handkerchief, and a silver chatelaine with three pendant toothpicks, and gave them to her as a reward for her efforts. Thereupon, he embraced Ch'un-mei and laid her on the k'ang, after which the two of them fell to kissing and sucking each others' tongues, unable to contain their delight. Truly:
Failing to consummate his assignation
with Ts'ui Ying-ying:
He settled for a tryst with Hung-niang
to relieve his lust.
There is a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that testifies to this:
Her eyebrows lightly penciled,
her comb stuck askew;
She has no heart to continue
doing her embroidery.
Deep within cloudy windows,
in misty chambers;
Quietly seated in her study she
practices calligraphy.
Beautiful as can be,
Ever more lovely;
She is a goddess incarnate,
unknown to this world.
At first glance, one might say she
resembles a plum blossom;
But on closer examination, the plum
blossom is not her equal.[23]
At the time, after the two of them had played with each other for a while, Ch'un-mei took the straw and returned to Chin-lien's quarters, where she told the woman, word for word, about what had happened, saying, "I summoned him, and he will be here momentarily. Upon reading that note of yours, he was as pleased as could be and bowed deeply to me, rewarding me with a handkerchief and a set of silver toothpicks."
"You go outside and take a look," the woman said. "He may be on his way in. Don't let the dog bite him."
"I've already put the dog out of the way," said Ch'un-mei.
It so happens that it was the sixteenth or seventeenth day of the eighth month at the time, just after the Mid-Autumn Festival, so the moon was shining brightly.
To resume our story, after Ch'en Ching-chi had gone over to the pharmaceutical shop next door and called on P'ing-an to come take his place, he took off for the garden so fast that his feet:
Beat out a festive paradiddle as he went.
Finding the front gate to the garden locked, he made his way in through the postern gate, headed straight for Chin-lien's quarters, and shook the branches of the woody hibiscus tree as a signal of his arrival. When Ch'un-mei saw the flowery branches moving on the other side of the wall, she promptly responded with a cough and told the woman he had come. Ch'en Ching-chi pushed open the gate, slipped inside, and proceeded straight to her room.
The woman greeted him at the door with a smile, saying, "A fine person you are, not to have visited me for so long!"
"I was concerned not to make trouble for either of us," he said, "so I chose to stay away for a few days. I didn't know that you were so unhappy about it.
I have been remiss about keeping in touch with you."[24]
The woman said, "There is a song to the tune 'Four Variations' that testifies to this:
Simply because of some idle gossip,
You have let our love, as deep as the sea,
suddenly go awry.
For these several days, you have not even
approached my door;
Keeping my heart on tenterhooks.
My tenderhearted lover,
How can you thus forsake me?"[25]
The two of them sat down together, while Ch'un-mei secured the postern gate, set up a table in the room, and laid out an array of wine and delicacies on it. The woman and Ch'en Ching-chi sat down:
Shoulder to shoulder and thigh over thigh.
Ch'un-mei seated herself to one side and poured the wine.
With the raising of glasses and passing of cups,
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
they drank for a time, while the three of them set out the pieces for the game of Turtle Pachisi and proceeded to play it together. As they began to become inebriated, the woman, with:
Her captivating eyes all a blur,
Her raven locks somewhat askew,
got out Hsi-men Ch'ing's bag of sexual implements, including the "Ladies Delight," the aphrodisiac called "The Quavery Voices of Amorous Beauties," the silver clasp, and the "Titillating Bell," a full complement of sexual aids, and instructed Ch'en Ching-chi in how to use them.
Under the gleam of lamplight, the woman then:
Stripped her body completely naked,

and reclined faceup on a "Drunken Old Gentleman's" lounge chair. Ch'en Ching-chi also stripped himself so that not a stitch of silk remained on his body, above or below, sat down on a chair facing her, took up an album illustrating the twenty-four positions [26] for sexual intercourse, and set out to emulate the behaviors depicted.
The woman then said to Ch'un-mei, "You get behind our son-in-law and give him a push when he needs it. I'm afraid he's worn himself out."
Ch'un-mei actually went behind him and proceeded to push as Ch'en Ching-chi's organ penetrated the woman's vagina and he:
Moved back and forth, retracting and thrusting.[27]
Producing a pleasurable sensation,
That was completely indescribable.[28]
To resume our story, Ch'iu-chü slept in the kitchen at the rear of the premises until the middle of the night, when she got up to relieve herself. Finding herself unable to open the door into the courtyard because it was latched shut on the other side, she managed to reach around with her hand and detach the latch. Under the brightly shining moon, she proceeded with:
Skulking step and lurking gait,
to make her way up to the front window, where:
Moistening a hole in the paper,[29]
with her saliva, she was able to look inside.
Within the room, illuminated by lamps and candles shining ever so brightly, she saw the three persons, all quite drunk and stark naked, carrying on for all they were worth. The three of them were clustered together, two of them going at it while seated on facing chairs, while Ch'un-mei stood behind Ch'en Ching-chi propelling him forward like a cart. Behold:
One of them shows total disregard
for the status of her husband;
The other does not discriminate between
above and below, exalted or humble.
One of them, panting for all he is worth,
Sounds like an ox snoring in the willow's shade.
The other, as her coy cries reverberate,
Resembles an oriole warbling among the flowers.
One of them, seated on his chair, shows off
the passions evoked by clouds and rain;
The other swears into her partner's ears
to be as faithful as the hills and seas.
One of them, in her widow's chamber,
transforms it into a pleasure ground;
The other, before his mother-in-law,
turns things into a realm of lechery.
One of them takes all Hsi-men Ch'ing's sexual aids
and bestows them on her son-in-law;
The other, emulating Han Shou's stealing of perfume,[30]
conveys it all to his light of love.[31]
Truly:
Signing a compact never to be separated
during this lifetime;
They agree to be happily bound together
in the life to come.[32]
At the time, all of this was clearly observed by Ch'iu-chü.
From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,
"She still persists in protesting her own virtue in front of other people and intends to beat me, but today I have seen the truth of the matter with my own eyes. Tomorrow, I'll report it to the First Lady, and she can hardly claim that I am falsely accusing them with my:
Deceitful mouth and duplicitous tongue."
Thereupon, after spying on them until she might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
she returned to the kitchen and went to sleep.
The three of them kept at it until the third watch before finally going to sleep.
The next morning, before dawn, Ch'un-mei got up before the others and went to the kitchen, where she found the door to be ajar, and interrogated Ch'iu-chü about it.
"You might well ask," responded Ch'iu-chü. "I had an urgent need to urinate and went outside to piss. I had to unlatch the door in order to get into the courtyard to relieve myself."
"You preternatural slave!" said Ch'un-mei. "Why didn't you use the chamber pot in the room?"
"I didn't know there was a chamber pot in the room," responded Ch'iu-chü.
The two of them continued to bicker there at the rear of the premises, while Ch'en Ching-chi got up at dawn and vanished into the front compound. Truly:
With two hands he tore open the road
between life and death;
Flopping over and leaping out through
the gate to perdition.
Chin-lien subsequently asked Ch'un-mei, "What was that fuss out back about?"
Upon Ch'un-mei telling her, thus and so, how Ch'iu-chü had managed to open the door during the night, the woman was enraged and planned to give Ch'iu-chü a beating.
Ch'iu-chü, meanwhile, had gone back to the rear compound once again to report to Yüeh-niang about what she had seen, but Yüeh-niang responded with a shout and cursed her, saying, "You lousy slave, you're just trying to do your mistress in!. The other day, you came back here for no good reason and started:
Talebearing and embroidering on the facts,
saying that your mistress was hiding our son-in-law, Ch'en Ching-chi, in her room, where they were:
Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning.
You urged me to go see for myself, but when I arrived your mistress was sitting in front of a bed table, stringing beads for a floral ornament, and Son-in-law Ch'en was nowhere to be seen. Later on, he came in from the front compound. You're nothing but a slave who is bent on destroying her mistress. How could she have hidden a full-grown man in her room? Even a sugar figurine or a wooden doll would turn up, no matter where you concealed them. You can hardly suggest that she managed to secrete him in her cunt. If word of this should get out, those who know the truth of the matter will say that it was you slaves who did in your mistress; but those who don't will say that in the past Hsi-men Ch'ing managed to subdue any number of women, but it did not take long after his death for the women of his household to end up:
All at sevens and eights.
They may even go so far as to question the paternity of this child of mine."
Thereupon, she threatened Ch'iu-chü with a beating, but she was so intimidated that she fled back to the front compound:
Running as fast as though she had wings,[33]
and no longer dared to report anything to the rear compound.
When Chin-lien heard that Yüeh-niang had expelled Ch'iu-chü from her presence, and refused to believe her allegations, she became even bolder than before and amused herself by composing a song for Ch'en Ching-chi's benefit, to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers," that testified to her feelings:
When we meet to enjoy the clouds and rain,
don't let any word leak out.
As for idle gossip, it's not worth paying
more attention to than a fart.
What reason is there to be deterred by the
securest lock or tightest knot?
Those who wield spades to unearth the facts
will only hurt their wrists;
Those who seek to expose what we are up to
will wear out their throats.
The ardor of our feelings for each other will
only end up being enhanced.[34]
When Hsi-men Ta-chieh heard about this episode, she privately interrogated Ch'en Ching-chi about it.
"How can you believe that delirious slave?" Ch'en Ching-chi responded. "Yesterday it was my turn to sleep overnight in the shop, so how could I have gone into the garden? Besides, the gate to the garden is kept locked all the time."
"You lousy jailbird!" retorted Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "You had better stop shooting off your mouth. As for your doings:
If the wind so much as stirs a blade of grass,
and word of it comes to my ears, or causes Mother to criticize me, while you continue to carry on:
As free as you please,
you can give up any idea of continuing to share these quarters with me."
Ch'en Ching-chi replied:
"Gossip about pros and cons goes on all day;
If you pay no heed to it, it will disappear.[35]
No wonder talebearing slaves like her never come to a good end. It is clear that the First Lady doesn't take her seriously."
"That's enough of that!" responded Hsi-men Ta-chieh. "As long as you're telling the truth, everything will be all right."
Truly:
Who could know that the heart of the young man
is as flighty as a willow catkin,
Or anticipate that the mind of his mistress is
as capricious as tangled silk?

Such love as this the world has seldom known
Alas, when things we treasure seem to be in our hands
We lose them.
Tears flow and the west wind carries them away
Like raindrops falling on Yangtai.
The moon has its mountains, its fullness, its waning
Mankind has happiness, sorrow, and parting.
When they whisper to each other before the fire
The gods know.
Do not say, then, this is the best time of all.
When, at dawn, Pan Jinlian saw Chen Jingji climb over the wall and go away, her heart relented. It was the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the Festival of All Souls, and Wu Yueniang went in her sedan chair to the temple where Nun Xue lived, to burn some paper treasure chests for Ximen Qing. Jinlian and the others went to the outer gate to see Yueniang start, but when Meng Yulou, Sun Xue'e, and Ximen Dajie came back, Pan Jinlian waited. At the second door, she met Chen Jingji. He had been to the apartments that once belonged to Li Ping'er to get some clothes that were needed in the pawnshop.
"Yesterday I said a few words to you," she said, "and you flew into a rage, and dashed away ever so early. Does that mean you have finished with me?"
"Dear Lady," Jingji said, "how can you say such things? Last night, I never had a wink of sleep. You were so cruel that I nearly died. Look at the marks of your slaps on my face still."
"Scamp," Jinlian said, "if it is true that there is nothing between you, what gave you such a hangdog expression, and why did you run away?"
"The sun was rising," Jingji said, "and if I had not gone then, somebody might have seen me. I assure you, I have never even touched her."

"Then come and see me this evening, and you shall give an account of yourself again."
"You plagued me so much all night," Jingji said, "I never closed my eyes. Now, I shall have to try to get a little sleep in broad daylight."
"Come and see me again," Jinlian said, "and we will clear up this business."
She went to her room, and Jingji took the clothes to the pawnshop. He was busy for a long time, but at last was able to return to his own room. There he threw himself on the bed and went to sleep. It was almost sunset when he woke up. He was anxious to go to Jinlian when, suddenly, dark clouds gathered in the sky and it began to rain.
Jingji looked at the pouring rain. "Oh, what vile weather!" he said to himself. "She was all ready and waiting for me to go and explain things, and now it is raining. What wretched luck I have." He waited and waited, but the rain did not stop. At the first night watch, it was still coming down in torrents, and water was streaming from the roof. At last he could wait no longer. He took a red rug and wrapped it around himself. By this time Yueniang had come home and Jingji's wife and maid were both with her in the inner court. He locked the door, and went to the garden by the gate in the western corner. Still the drenching rain poured down. He pushed open the gate leading to Jinlian's rooms. She knew that he would come, and had told Chunmei to give Qiuju plenty of wine and send her to bed. None of the doors was locked, and Jingji was able to walk straight in.
The windows were partly open and candles were burning brightly. Fruits and refreshments were set out on a table, and golden cups for the wine. Jinlian and Jingji sat down side by side.
"Tell me," she said to him, "if you have had nothing to do with Yulou, how do you come to have her pin?"
"I picked it up by the white rose arbor in the garden. I swear it. May I die this very moment if I lie to you."
"If that is true," Jinlian said, "keep the thing. I don't want it. But remember this: whatever happens, you must not lose the little perfume satchel I gave you to keep your pins in. If anything happens to that, you will know what to expect."
They drank together and played chess. Before the first night watch was over they went to bed and there sported very merrily, spending half the night in transports of delight. In days gone by, Jinlian, by constant diligent practice, had acquired a most marvelous skill in all the arts of love, and this night it was made manifest to her young lover.
Qiuju woke. She could hear a man's voice in the other room, but could not be quite sure whose it was. Before dawn, she got up to make water, and heard the door of her mistress's room being softly opened. The rain had not stopped, but there was a glimmer of moonlight, and through the window she caught a glimpse of a figure wrapped in a red rug. It seemed very like Chen Jingji.
"So it is he who comes night after night to sleep with my lady," she said to herself. "She is always boasting about her virtue, yet here she is carrying on with her son-in-law."
The next morning she went to the kitchen and told her story to Xiaoyu. Xiaoyu was very friendly with Chunmei, and repeated the story to her. "Qiuju," she said, "says that your lady is carrying on with young master Chen. He spent last night with her and did not go away till this morning. You know his wife and her maid were not in their rooms last night."
Chunmei went back and told Jinlian what she had heard. "Mother," she said, "you will have to beat that slave. She can't be allowed to spread this tale all around the place. It might be disastrous for you."
Jinlian, furiously angry, summoned Qiuju. The girl knelt down. "I told you to go and make some gruel," the woman said, "and you have broken the pot. What is the matter with you? Is the hole in your bottom so large that all your brains have fallen out? I fancy your hide is beginning to tickle because it hasn't had a good drubbing for so long." She found a rod and with it gave Qiuju thirty hard blows. The maid squealed like a pig being killed, and her body was bruised.
"Mother," Chunmei said, "if you don't beat her harder than this, it will only allay that tickling. Why not take her clothes off and get one of the boys to give her twenty or thirty strokes with a good thick stick? Then she will begin to know what's what. If you give her gentle taps like this, you'll never make the water muddy. This is nothing more than play. Bold as she is, she seems to have no fear of you." Then she turned to Qiuju. "You are a slave," she said to Qiuju, "and you ought to know that you should never talk to outsiders about anything that happens in your own house. Why, if all maids were like you, people might as well keep a whistle."
"I never said anything," Qiuju cried.
"Still obstinate!" Jinlian said, "you master-murdering slave! Let's have no more from you."
Qiuju went to the kitchen.
One day, about the time of the Autumn Festival, Jinlian secretly arranged with Jingji to come and drink wine with her and enjoy the moonlight. They played Turtle Chess with Chunmei. It was very late when they went to bed, and they did not get up until it was time for morning tea. This was only asking for trouble. Again Qiuju discovered them, and she went at once to Yueniang's room to tell her. But Yueniang was dressing her hair and Xiaoyu was standing at the door. Qiuju took Xiaoyu aside and said: "Brother-in-law has spent the night with my lady again, and they have not got up even yet. It is just as I told you the other day, yet I was beaten for my pains. Today I can prove what I say. This is no lie. I want the Great Lady to go and see for herself."
"Oh, you goggle-eyed slave!" Xiaoyu cried. "Here you are again with scandalous tales about your mistress. The Great Lady is doing her hair. Get off with you."
"What is she talking about?" Yueniang asked.
Xiaoyu was obliged to make some answer, so she said: "The Fifth Lady sent Qiuju to ask you to go and see her." Yueniang finished dressing and then hurried to the outer court to see what Jinlian wanted. Chunmei fortunately happened to see her coming. She rushed in and told Jinlian. The woman was still in bed with Jingji, and they were greatly alarmed when they heard that Yueniang was on her way. Jingji, rolled himself up in the coverlets and hid himself completely, and Jinlian made Chunmei set a table on the bed. She herself pretended to be making a pearl ornament.
Yueniang came in and sat down. "You are very late this morning," she said. "I wondered what you were doing. I see you are making an ornament." She took the work in her hands and examined it. "It is really very well made," she said. "There is the sesame flower in the middle, borders of squares on either side and, all around, bees resting on chrysanthemum flowers, and hearts interlaced. It is very pretty indeed. You must make one for me."
When Jinlian realized that Yueniang was speaking pleasantly, her heart began to beat more quietly. She told Chunmei to bring some tea. Yueniang drank it and shortly afterwards went away. "Sister," she said as she was going, "when you have dressed your hair, come and see me." Jinlian promised, and as soon as Yueniang had gone, she made Jingji get up and slip away. Both she and Chunmei had had such a terrible fright that they were bathed in sweat.
"The Great Lady has never been to see me before unless she had something definite to say. I wonder what made her come so early today."
"That slave has been at her tricks again," Chunmei said.
Before long, Xiaoyu came and told them what had happened. "Qiuju came," she said, "and talked about brother-in-law being here all day and all night. I scolded her for saying such things, but she still went on. Then the Great Lady asked what it was all about, and the only thing I could say was that you had sent to ask her to come and see you. Lady, you must be on your guard against such backbitings. And you must watch that slave."
Though Yueniang did not believe Qiuju, she was not quite easy in her mind because she realized that Jinlian was a young woman and easily carried away. Her husband was dead. If anything of the sort should happen, she was afraid the story would get out and there would be a scandal. Besides, she thought about Ximen Dajie. She would not allow her to go far away, and she gave the young couple the room that Li Jiao'er once had, so that henceforth they should live in the inner part of the house. Only when Clerk Fu went home did she allow Jingji to sleep at the shop. When the young man had to come for clothes or medicines or anything, Daian always came with him. The windows and doors were all securely fastened, and the maids and serving women were not permitted to go out without very good cause. The household, in fact, was governed much more strictly, and this made it practically impossible for Jinlian and Jingji to indulge their very warm affection for each other. They found, as we so often find, that the joys of this life seldom attain their fullest realization, and that fine weather never lasts very long.
For a month after Qiuju had told of the secret attachment between Jinlian and Chen Jingji, they never had an opportunity of meeting. At last Jinlian could bear the separation no longer. She was lonely behind her embroidered curtains and desolate in her painted chamber. She was afflicted by lovesickness, and became too languid to powder her face. She ate less food and drank less tea than was her custom. She grew thinner and thinner, and the girdle around her waist grew looser and looser. So languid was she that she would lie down on her bed and stay there for hours at a time.
"Mother," Chunmei said, "nothing can be done by worrying. The Great Lady has sent for the two nuns and I hear that tonight they are to stay and read the scriptures. This means that the door to the inner court will be closed early. I will pretend to go to the stable to get some straw to fill a mattress, but really I will go to the shop and ask young master Chen to come and see you. What do you think?"
"Good sister," Jinlian said, "do, for pity's sake, tell him to come. I will never forget how well and kindly you have served me."
"There is no need to say that, Mother." Chunmei said. "You and I are really but one. Father is dead, and whether you go up or down in the world, I shall always be ready to go with you and to stay wherever you may stay."
"If you feel like that, what more could I desire?" Jinlian said.
That evening, she went to Yueniang's room, but soon she excused herself, saying that she did not feel very well and went to her own place. She was like a cicada escaping from its chrysalis. Yueniang closed the door of the inner court very early and dismissed the maids and serving women. Then she settled down to listen to the nuns.
"Good sister," Jinlian said to Chunmei, "go at once and bring him to me."
"First I must give Qiuju some wine and get her comfortably out of the way. Then I will go." She heated two large cups of wine, gave them to Qiuju, and hustled her into the kitchen. Then she took a basket and went to the outer court. She filled the basket with straw and went stealthily to the pawnshop. She knocked softly at the door. Clerk Fu was not there and Jingji was alone. He had just gone to bed when he heard the knock. He recognized Chunmei's voice and, when he opened the door, found that it was indeed she.
"Come in," he said, smiling, "there is no one here but myself."
Chunmei went in. She asked where the boys were.
"Daian and Ping'an are both at the medicine shop," Jingji told her, "and I am left here to bear my loneliness as best I can."
"My mistress sends her love to you," Chunmei said, "and says what a fine person you must be to let all these days pass without coming near her. She says she supposes that, now you have Yulou, you don't care about her any more."
"Oh, what a thing to say!" Jingji said. "Ever since that last time I have been afraid, and the Great Lady keeps the doors and windows so tightly shut that I dare not move."
"For some days," Chunmei said, "my mistress has been miserable. She is restless all the time and never eats a thing. And when she has anything to do, she doesn't seem to know how to set about it. Today the Great Lady is busy listening to the nuns, but my mistress has gone back to her room and wants to see you there. She has sent me especially to ask you to go to her."
"I am grateful for her love," Jingji said. "You go first and I will follow in a few moments."
He opened the cabinet and took out a white silk kerchief and a pair of silver toothpicks. He gave these to Chunmei and embraced her. Then he lifted her on to the bed and kissed her. They were very well pleased with one another.
When they had amused themselves for a while, Chunmei went back with the straw. "Brother-in-law," she said to Jinlian, "was delighted to see me. He says he will come, and gave me this kerchief and these toothpicks."
"Keep a good lookout," Jinlian said. "He may come any moment."
It was the twelfth day of the ninth month, and the moon was very bright. Jingji went first to the medicine shop and ordered Ping'an to take his place at the pawnshop. He told the boy that the Great Lady had sent for him to listen to the exhortations of the two nuns. Then he went to Jinlian. He knew that the main garden gate would be shut, so he went in by the other and, when he came to Jinlian's apartments, shook the hibiscus tree as a signal. Chunmei came out to welcome him and took him into the room. Jinlian was standing at the door. "Oh, villain," she said to him with a smile, "how kind you are to stay away from me for so long."
"I wished to come ever so much," Jingji said, "but I was afraid I should get you into trouble." They held each other's hands and went into the room together. Chunmei closed the door in the corner and set food and wine on the table. Jinlian and Jingji sat down side by side and Chunmei opposite. They poured the wine and passed the cups to one another. When they had had wine enough, a sidelong look came into the woman's eyes and her cloudlike hair seemed to lose its tidiness. She brought out the love instruments that had once belonged to Ximen Qing. The Case for Mutual Enjoyment was there, the Trembling Voice and Lovely Eyes, the silver clasp and the Bell of Excitement. In the candlelight, Jinlian stripped herself of all her clothes and lay naked upon a "drunken old gentleman's chair." Jingji, too, took off his clothes. They found a set of twenty-four pictures representing the pleasures of love, and endeavored to reproduce in real life the joys depicted in the paintings.
"Go behind him and push," Jinlian said to Chunmei. "I'm afraid he must be exhausted."
Chunmei, indeed, gave the young man a push forward. So the warrior stood inside her cunt; he plunged up and down, and gave both of them a most delightful orgasm.
Qiuju, who was in the kitchen at the back, suddenly wished to make water and got up, but she found the door closed on the outer side, and could not open it at first. Finally, she put her hand around and succeeded in working back the bolt. It was quite light in the courtyard, and she went across on tiptoe to the other room. Peeping through the window, she could see candles shining brightly and three people in the room, all merrily drunk, and not a stitch of clothing on them. They seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely. Jinlian and Chen Jingji were plunging and rearing, and Chunmei, behind the young man, was rendering every assistance in her power, and in this way the three worked together.
"These are the people who make themselves out to be so good, while I am beaten," Qiuju said to herself. "But this time I have caught them in the act and tomorrow morning I will go and tell the Great Lady. She won't say I'm lying now."
She watched them until she was quite satisfied, and then went back to the kitchen and to bed.
The three others went merrily on until the third night watch. In the morning, Chunmei was the first to get out of bed. When she came to the kitchen, she found the door open. She questioned Qiuju, and the girl said: "Oh, yes! I had to get up in the night, and I pushed it open and went into the yard."
"You slave!" Chunmei said, "couldn't you see the chamber pot in the room here?"
"I didn't know it was there," Qiuju declared, and they squabbled for a long time. Jingji went away.
Then Jinlian asked Chunmei what all the noise was about, and Chunmei told her how Qiuju had opened the door. Jinlian was greatly annoyed and determined to beat the girl again, but Qiuju went to the inner court and told the whole story to Yueniang.
"You slave who would be the death of your mistress," Yueniang said. "Only the other day you came to me with a long cock-and-bull story. You said your mistress was carrying on with my son-in-law, and that he was with her all night and all day. So I went there: your mistress was in bed busy making an ornament, and my son-in-law was nowhere to be seen. When he did appear, he came from another part of the house altogether. You deceitful slave! My son-in-law is not a sugar figure that can be hidden away anywhere. Are you trying to throw dust in my eyes? If people knew the truth of this, they would know that you are a traitor to your mistress. But if they did not know, they would say: 'When Ximen Qing was alive, he had dealings with many women. And now, though he has been dead only a short time, his own wives are behaving in a most disorderly fashion.' They would even cast doubts upon my own child."
She was going to punish Qiuju, but the girl ran away in alarm and never dared to go to the Great Lady again. When Jinlian heard that Yueniang had refused to believe what Qiuju told her, she was even bolder than before. But Jingji's wife heard whispers, and asked her husband questions.
"Surely, you don't believe that story!" he said. "Why, I spent the whole time at the shop. How could I go to the garden? Besides, you know the garden door has been shut all the time."
"I won't argue with you," his wife said. "If I hear anything more and find that the Great Lady will not believe you, you can keep away from me."
"If I have done anything wrong," Jingji said, "sooner or later it will come out. You ought to refuse to listen to such scandal. You know the Great Lady doesn't believe it."
"I only hope you're telling the truth," his wife said.

## 107
## The Pilgrimage of Wu Yüeh-niang Creates a Stir in the Temple of Iridescent Clouds; Sung Chiang Uprightly Frees Her from the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold

Winter and summer forever green, such phenomena
are seldom seen in this world;
The marvelous transformations wrought by Heaven
and Earth have created them.
Her virtuous example is not besmirched by the
grime of the mundane world;
She is chastely resolved to abide by her oath to
be united in the world below.
Her conspicuous rectitude has a numinous quality
that is utterly incomparable;
The patience with which she bears her widowhood
generates a lingering fragrance.
If the people of this world are curious about the
secret of everlasting life;
The truth of the matter is that virtuous behavior
is conducive to longevity.

One day, Wu Yüeh-niang invited her elder brother Wu K'ai to come and consult with her about her wish to make a pilgrimage to the summit of Mount T'ai in T'ai-an prefecture in order to burn incense in the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds. [1] When Hsi-men Ch'ing was on his last legs, she had sworn an oath to do so. Wu K'ai agreed to escort her on this mission and took care of procuring the incense, candles, paper money, and sacrificial offerings that she would need. Tai-an and Lai-an were also to accompany her, and donkeys were hired for them to ride.
Before taking her seat in her curtained sedan chair, she enjoined Meng Yü-lou, P'an Chin-lien, Sun Hsüeh-o, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh to look after the house and instructed the wet nurse Ju-i, and the maidservants, to look after Hsiao-ko.
She went on to say, "The ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds is to be locked early if there is no reason to do otherwise, and you are not to venture outside the premises. Ch'en Ching-chi also must be instructed not to go out, and to look after the front gate along with Manager Fu Ming. I will probably be able to return home by the end of the month."

On the morning of the fifteenth day of the ninth month, she burned paper money to convey her intentions to the gods, and that evening, after announcing her departure before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, shared a farewell drink with her fellow wives. She also turned the keys to the master suite and the storerooms over to Hsiao-yü and enjoined her to look after the premises carefully.
The next morning, she got up at the fifth watch and prepared to depart. The whole entourage led out the mounts they had hired, and her sister wives came out to the front gate to see her off.
It was late autumn, and the weather was cold and the days short. They traveled two stages each day, covering sixty or seventy li, and sought out village inns before dusk in order to spend the night, resuming their journey early the next morning. On their way:
The autumn clouds were austere,
The frigid geese were desolate,
The trees were shedding leaves,
The landscape had turned bleak,[2]
Their gloom was insurmountable.[3]
There is a poem that testifies to the way Yüeh-niang traversed the distant mountains and passes in order to fulfill the vow she had made on her husband's behalf:
For her entire life her determined fidelity
will rival ice or frost;
Her little specimen of an immaculate heart[4]
is able to move Azure Heaven.[5]
For her husband's sake she promised to go as
far as the sacred mountain;
Along the thousand li of mountains and passes
her name exudes fragrance.
To make a long story short, of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell. After traveling for several days, they arrived at T'ai-an prefecture and were able to contemplate Mount T'ai. In truth, it is:
The number one famous mountain under Heaven.[6]
Its coiling base is rooted in the earth;
Its peak rises into the heart of Heaven.[7]
It lies between the ancient states of Ch'i and Lu;
And emanates an atmosphere of precipitous majesty.
When Wu K'ai saw that it was getting late, he conducted them into an inn to spend the night.
The next morning, they got up early in order to begin their ascent and headed toward the Tai-yüeh Temple, or Temple of the Eastern Peak, which is located at the foot of the mountain.
Sacred rites were observed here dynasty after dynasty;
Feng and Shan Sacrifices were held here age after age.[8]
It was the premier temple in the realm. Behold:
The temple is located at the Eastern Peak,
The mountain that rules over the universe.
It is the most venerable of all mountains,
The presiding director of the myriad gods.
If you lean on a balustrade at the summit,
You can see as far as the River of Weak Water
or the Isles of the Blest;[9]
If you climb the evergreens on the crest,
You will find yourself to be enveloped by the
thick clouds and thin fog.
Towers and terraces soar aloft,[10]
As though ready for the gold raven to spread
its wings and fly there;
Halls and galleries rise steeply,
As if prepared for the jade rabbit to leap
aloft and come to visit.[11]
The temple features carved rafters and painted beams,[12]
And is enhanced with azure tiles and vermilion eaves.[13]
The translucent latticework on phoenix gates
brightens the yellow silk;
From the tortoiseshell-patterned embroidered
drapes hang brocade tassels.
Gazed at from afar, the sacred images,
With their nine-tasseled crowns, show the eyes
of Shun and the eyebrows of Yao;[14]
Seen close up, the aspects of the gods,
Dressed in dragon robes, display the shoulders
of T'ang and the back of Yü.
The Lord of Destiny of the Nine Heavens,[15]
Is adorned with a hibiscus cap, enhancing his
robe of crimson silk;
Ping-ling, Duke of Awesome Transcendence,[16]
Is clad in a yellow robe, set off by a girdle
of Indigo Field jade.
To their left are arrayed officers wearing
jade pins and pearl-studded shoes;[17]
To their right stand officials with purple
sashes and golden seals of office.[18]
The whole edifice exhibits an air of gravity,
Defended by three thousand armor-bearing generals;
The two corridors exude a martial atmosphere,
Protected by a hundred thousand ironclad soldiers.
Underneath the Hao-li Hill,[19]
The Assessor presides over the seventy-two
bureaus of the underworld;
Within the White Mule Shrine,[20]
The tutelary god regulates the twenty-four
terms of the solar year.
The iron-faced Defender-in-chief of the
lakes of fire,
Day after day, shows off his powers;
The General of the Five Ways who rules
life and death,
Year after year, reveals his potency.
The burning of sacred incense never ceases,
As the celestial spirits on their flying steeds
convey their vermilion texts;
The sacrifices are celebrated on schedule,
As both old and young express their hopes for
the granting of good fortune.
Within the Chia-ning Hall,
Propitious clouds hover densely;
Outside the Southern Gate,
Auspicious vapors swirl around.[21]
Truly:
A myriad citizens come to worship in the
Temple of Iridescent Clouds;
Within the four seas, all pay homage to
the God of the Eastern Peak.[22]
Wu K'ai conducted Yüeh-niang to the Tai-yüeh Temple, where she proffered incense in the main hall and paid obeisance before the sacred image of the God of the Eastern Peak. A Taoist head priest stood beside her and intoned the text of her declaration. She then went on to burn paper money before the images in the two corridors and eat a vegetarian meal, after which, they embarked on the climb to the summit, ascending the forty-nine switchbacks, and:
Grabbing the vines and grasping the creepers,[23] to help them on their way up. The golden edifice of the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds seemed to be suspended in space, shrouded in clouds and mist, forty-five li above the foot of the mountain. From its vantage point, one could look down upon the wind-blown clouds and thunderstorms below. Yüeh-niang and her entourage had set out from the Tai-yüeh Temple at 8:00 that morning, and after climbing the switchbacks and reaching the summit it was after 4:00 P.M. before they arrived at the Golden Edifice of the Goddess, which was adorned with a vermilion plaque, with the three characters Temple of Iridescent Clouds inscribed in gold. They entered the temple and paid obeisance to the gilded image of the goddess. What did it look like? Behold:
On her head is coiled a nine-dragon
flying-phoenix coiffure;
Her body is clad in a gown of red silk
enhanced with golden threads.
From her girdle of Indigo Field jade
is suspended a lengthy flap;
She lifts a white jade scepter between
her variegated sleeves.
Her face resembles a lotus blossom,[24]
Her natural-looking eyes and brows
enhance her cloudy locks;
Her lips are like gilded vermilion,
Her euphoric demeanor embellishes
her snow-white physique.
She looks like the Queen Mother of the West
feasting at the Jasper Pool;
It is just as though Ch'ang-o has come down

from her palace in the moon.
The majestic quality of her immortal demeanor
is impossible to depict;
The dignified bearing of her figure would be
difficult to delineate.[25]
When Yüeh-niang had finished paying her obeisance to the image of the goddess, she noticed that the head priest of the temple was standing beside her. He looked to be about forty years old, was short in stature, and sported a three-forked beard, bright eyes, and white teeth. On his head he wore a Taoist cap, held in place with a pin, his body was clad in a crimson robe, and on his feet he wore a pair of shoes with cloud-patterned toes. Stepping forward, he proceeded, on her behalf, to intone the text of the declaration she had prepared in fulfillment of her vow, ignite the incense in a gilded brazier, and burn the paper money and imitation gold and silver ingots, after which, he told a young acolyte to accept the sacrificial offerings she had brought.
It so happens that this Taoist head priest was not the sort to abide by his lot. He was the principal disciple of Abbot Chin of the Tai-yüeh Temple at the foot of the mountain, and his name was Shih Po-ts'ai. He was an extreme example of:
The sort who are covetous of wealth
and given to lust;
The kind who pander to the powerful
and broker events.
In this area there was a character known as Year Star Yin, whose real name was Yin T'ien-hsi, who was the younger brother of the wife of Kao Lien, the prefect of T'ai-an. He was accustomed to leading a bunch of vagrants:
Sporting bows and flaunting arrows,
Along with their falcons and hounds,
to engage in scrutinizing the hordes of female pilgrims from all quarters who were visiting the two temples, above and below. His reputation was such that no one dared to cross him. The Taoist priest Shih Po-ts'ai endeavored to curry favor with him by:
Disguising his iniquitous intent,
and luring females into his abbot's quarters, where Yin T'ien-hsi was free to slake his lust on them in whatever way he liked.
When Shih Po-ts'ai saw that Yüeh-niang possessed:
An unusually attractive countenance,
and was wearing a mourning cap, indicating that she must either be a woman from an official's family or a female member of a powerful household, and that she was accompanied by an elderly man with a gray beard, and two domestic page boys, he came forward and saluted them in the Taoist manner by touching one hand to his forehead, expressed his thanks for their offerings, and said, "Will you two benefactors not come into my abbot's quarters for a cup of tea?"
"Don't bother to trouble yourself," responded Wu K'ai. "We are about to go down the mountain."
"Even though you plan to descend the mountain," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "there is time enough yet."
In no time at all, he succeeded in persuading them to come into his abbot's quarters. The walls of the chamber were covered with snow-white plaster. At the head of the room stood a couch with a sesame flower design and willow-yellow brocaded curtains. Above an incense stand in a position of honor there was suspended a scroll painting that depicted the scene of Lü Tung-pin flirting with the courtesan White Peony.[26] To either side of it there hung scrolls with the two lines of a parallel couplet written in large characters of varying vividness that read:
Raising two sleeves swelled by a clear breeze
we posture like cranes;
Facing a chamber suffused with bright moonlight
we expound the scriptures.
When Shih Po-ts'ai asked Wu K'ai his name, he replied, "My surname is Wu, and my given name is K'ai. This is my younger sister, née Wu, who has come to fulfill a vow that she made on behalf of her deceased husband. But we should not impose on your exalted establishment."
"Since the two of you are related," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "be good enough to sit down together in the seats of honor."
He then sat down himself in the position of host and directed his disciples Shou-ch'ing and Shou-li to serve the tea.
It so happens that he had two disciples, one of them named Kuo Shou-ch'ing and the other Kuo Shou-li, both of whom were fifteen years old and naturally endowed with good looks. They wore black satin Taoist caps on their heads, their topknots were held in place by red cords with two floating ribbons dangling behind, on their bodies they wore black silk Taoist robes, and their feet were clad in sandals and white socks. From their bodies:
A fragrant aroma assailed the senses.
When guests arrived, they were there to:
Serve tea or serve water,
Pour wine and serve food;
while at night, they were available for Shih Po-ts'ai to hump from behind like a carrier hugging a trunk, using them to:
Assuage his lust and gratify his hunger.
Although ostensibly they were the disciples of the head priest, in actuality they were nothing more than the master's concubines. And there is yet another feature that is hardly mentionable, which is that each of them, when they took down their trousers, had a large sanitary napkin strapped over his crotch to prevent the leakage of urine.
Gentle reader take note: All families with good boys and good girls should be sure never to deliver them to Buddhist monasteries or Taoist temples to leave the family and become monks or priests, Buddhist nuns or Taoist priestesses. Once exposed to those:
Male thieves and female whores,
nine out of ten of them are likely to be victimized. There is a poem that testifies to this.
For what purpose are Taoist sanctuaries and
Buddhist temples established?
The Taoists worship their Heavenly Worthies,
the Buddhists worship Buddha.
They are beautifully landscaped in order to
give a false sense of purity;
Providing for visitors and welcoming guests
they engage in perverse doings.
Accoutering their disciples with attractive
clothes and handsome outfits;
They make use of wanton wine and leisured tea
in ravishing female beauties.
How sad that the tenderly nurtured offspring
of respectable families;
Should be entrusted to such monastics only to
serve as their concubines.
Before long, the two disciples, Shou-ch'ing and Shou-li, set up a table in the room and laid out a vegetarian repast including mouth-watering sweetmeats, pastries, steamed and fried vegetarian dishes, and an assortment of other delicacies that filled the entire surface of the table. The first-class Sparrow Tongue tea, brewed with sweet water, was served in cups of white Ting-chou porcelain, with silver teaspoons in the shape of apricot leaves. When they finished their tea and the utensils had been cleared away, a selection of delicacies to go with the wine was served in:
Large platters and large bowls,
consisting of chicken, goose, fish, duck, and other such nonvegetarian fare.
Pouring amber-colored wine,
Into chased silver goblets.
The wine flowed in golden ripples.[27]
When the wine was served, Yüeh-niang wished to take her leave and called for Tai-an to come forward with a bolt of muslin and two taels of silver on a red lacquer tray and present them to Shih Po-ts'ai as an expression of their gratitude.
"We ought not to put your esteemed temple to so much trouble," said Wu K'ai. "These paltry gifts are merely an expression of our gratitude to Your Reverence. There is no need for you to offer us wine and food. It is growing late, and we must set out to descend the mountain."
This threw Shih Po-ts'ai into such consternation that he expressed no end of thanks, saying, "Untalented as I am, it is only thanks to the generous patronage of the Goddess that I am serving as the head priest of the Temple of the Iridescent Clouds here on the sacred peak, where I am dependent on the contributions received from the four quarters. Were I not to use these funds to entertain the donors from the four quarters, what should I use them for? And now, having offered merely these meager refreshments, I have put you to the trouble of presenting me with these generous gifts. You put me in a position in which it would be:
Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept."
Only after repeatedly refusing to accept the proffered gifts did he finally direct his disciples to put them away.
Endeavoring to detain Yüeh-niang and Wu K'ai, he said, "Be so kind, whatever else you do, as to return to your seats for a little while, and imbibe three cups of wine. By so doing you would allow me to fully express my humble feelings."
When Wu K'ai saw how assiduously they were being pressed to stay, he felt obliged to sit down again with Yüeh-niang.
In no time at all, some heated delicacies were served, and Shih Po-ts'ai said to his disciples, "This wine is hardly worth drinking. Go and open that jug of lotus blossom wine with its penetrating fragrance that His Honor Prefect Hsü gave me the other day so we can share it with His Honor Wu."
Before long, his disciples brought in another heated flagon and poured out the warm wine, the first cup of which Shih Po-ts'ai offered to Yüeh-niang with both hands, but she refused to accept it.
"My younger sister is not accustomed to drinking wine," said Wu K'ai.
"My lady," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "You may encounter wind and frost along the way. Have a little. What harm can it do. Just drink a moderate amount."
So saying, he poured out half a cup for Yüeh-niang and another cup for Wu K'ai, saying, "Your Honor Wu, take a taste of this wine to see how you like it."
Wu K'ai drank a mouthful, and finding it to be:
Fragrant, sweet, and delicious,
With a robust and lingering flavor,
said, "This is indeed a fine wine."
"I would not deceive you, venerable sir," said Shih Po-ts'ai, "but this wine was given to me by His Honor Prefect Hsü of Ch'ing-chou. His elderly lady, his daughter, and his son come to the Temple of the Eastern Peak every year to burn incense and sponsor a performance of the *chiao* rites of cosmic renewal.
Their relationship with me is extremely close.
Both his daughter and his son were brought here to undergo the ceremony of having religious names bestowed upon them under the aegis of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds. On seeing that I:
Possessed a placid disposition,
Was devoted to burning incense,
And was invariably trustworthy,
they have shown me both respect and affection. In the past, half the resources of these two temples at the foot and the summit of the mountain have been subject to taxation, but in recent years, thanks to the benevolent patronage of His Honor Prefect Hsü, who has memorialized the throne to suspend these exactions, these resources are no longer taxed but are allowed to remain in the possession of the temples to be expended first of all on the worship of the goddess and secondly on the entertainment of incense-burning pilgrims from the four quarters."
While this parley was taking place in the abbot's quarters, down below, Tai-an, Lai-an, and the chair bearers who had brought them were provided with a place to sit down and were served soup, rice, and other snacks along with wine and meat in:
Large platters and large bowls,
until they had eaten their fill.
Gentle readers take note: Since Shih Po-ts'ai had concealed Yin T'ien-hsi on his premises and inveigled Yüeh-niang into his quarters with a view to giving him an opportunity to consummate a secret liaison with her, he could hardly fail to do whatever he could to play up to her.
After drinking several cups of wine, Wu K'ai saw that it was getting late and wanted to get up and go, but Shih Po-ts'ai said, "The sun is about to set, and it is already too late for you to make your descent of the mountain. If you are not unwilling to stay overnight in my quarters, it would be easier for you to go down the mountain tomorrow morning."
"It so happens that we have left some luggage in the inn," said Wu K'ai, "and I fear that our absence might give petty people an opportunity for mischief."
Shih Po-ts'ai laughed at this, saying, "There is no reason to worry about that. If anything untoward should occur, and it became known that you were on a pilgrimage to our temple, the inhabitants of the villages and inns would be scared to death. How do you suppose they would like it if the innkeepers were dragged into the prefectural yamen and given a taste of the squeezers to induce them to uncover the whereabouts of the culprits?"
Upon hearing this, Wu K'ai continued to sit in his place while Shih Po-ts'ai poured him another large goblet of wine. When Wu K'ai became aware how potent the wine was, he concealed it under his clothing, pretended to be drunk, and asked to be escorted to a bathroom, after which he expressed a desire to be given a tour of the temple sanctuary. Shih Po-ts'ai, accordingly, directed his disciple Kuo Shou-ch'ing to accompany him, gave him the keys needed to open the doors, and sent Wu K'ai off to explore the premises. Wu Yüeh-niang was physically exhausted and wanted to lie down on the bed for a nap. Shih Po-ts'ai responded by going outside to sit down and locking the door behind him.
This turned out to be one of those occasions on which,
Something was destined to happen.
No sooner had Yüeh-niang sprawled out on the bed than she suddenly heard the sound of a clatter as a man jumped out from inside the paper partition behind the bed. He had a pink complexion with a three-forked beard, was about thirty years old, wore a dark black hat on his head, and was dressed in a blouse and trousers of purple brocade.
Embracing Yüeh-niang with both arms, he said, "My name is Yin T'ien-hsi, and I am the younger brother of Prefect Kao Lien's wife. I have long heard that you are the spouse of a prominent official and are endowed with looks that entitle you to be called a national beauty. I have:
Thought about you for a long time,
And thirsted for a glimpse of you,
But have lacked a way to meet you.[28]
Now that I have encountered your memorable person:
Such good fortune would suffice for three lives;
I will find it hard to forget either dead or alive."
So saying, he forced Yüeh-niang back down on the bed and proposed to take his pleasure with her.

Yüeh-niang was panic-stricken at this and called out in a loud voice:
"The world is at perfect peace;
The universe is shining bright.[29]
How can you bring yourself to manhandle a decent person's wife this way?"
She attempted to make her escape, but Yin T'ien-hsi would not let her go and knelt down before her, saying, "My lady, pray be quiet, and favor me by complying with my urgent request."
Yüeh-niang responded to this by calling out for help, again and again, in an even more strident voice than before.
When Lai-an and Tai-an heard this, and recognized it to be Yüeh-niang's voice, they ran back to the sanctuary in a state of obvious agitation to look for Wu K'ai, calling out, "Brother-in-law, bestir yourself. Our mistress is in the abbot's quarters engaged in an altercation with someone."
Wu K'ai promptly made his way:
Covering two steps with every one,
back to the abbot's quarters and tried to push open the door but was unable to do so.
He heard Yüeh-niang shout out in a loud voice:
"The world is at perfect peace,
what do you think you're doing trying to imprison a female pilgrim here?"
At this, Wu K'ai called out, "Sister, don't panic. I'm here."
So saying, he picked up a piece of rock and used it to smash open the door. When Yin T'ien-hsi realized that someone was on his way in, he promptly let go of Yüeh-niang and disappeared in a cloud of dust behind the bed. It so happens that Shih Po-ts'ai had set things up so that there were escape routes behind all the beds on the premises.
When Wu K'ai managed to smash open the door to the abbot's quarters, he asked Yüeh-niang, "Sister, did that rascal succeed in defiling you, or not?"
"He did not manage to defile me," said Yüeh-niang, "but the rascal got away from behind the bed."
Wu K'ai went out to look for Shih Po-ts'ai, but he had hidden himself away, merely sending his disciples out to deal with the situation. Wu K'ai was infuriated by these developments and ordered the servants who had accompanied him, including Tai-an and Lai-an, to smash up the doors, windows, and walls of the abbot's quarters. He then escorted Yüeh-niang outside the Temple of the Goddess of Iridescent Clouds, where they got into their sedan chairs and set off to descend the mountain.
It was dusk when they started out, and it took half the night before they reached their inn at the foot of the mountain before dawn and told the innkeeper, thus and so, what had happened.
The innkeeper:
Repeatedly expressed his dismay,[30]
saying, "You ought not to have done anything to disturb that Yin T'ien-hsi. He is the younger brother of the wife of the prefect of T'ai-an and is known as Year Star Yin. After you have gone, he will take out his resentment by making trouble for us innkeepers. He will never be willing to call it quits."
Wu K'ai responded by giving him a tael more than the charge for their lodgings, collected their luggage, and, escorting Yüeh-niang's sedan chair, set off as fast as they could go. Behind them, Yin T'ien-hsi, who was reluctant to let them get away, came down the mountain in hot pursuit, at the head of a bunch of twenty or thirty idlers, armed with broadswords and short sticks.
Meanwhile, Wu K'ai and his entourage:
Covering two stages in the time for one,[31]
arrived during the fourth watch at a hollow in the hills, where they saw a light glimmering in the distance. When they approached closer, they found that it was a cavern in the rock in which an old monk was reading a sutra by candlelight.
Wu K'ai addressed him, saying, "Master, we had gone to the summit to burn incense when we were driven away by some ruffians and forced to flee down the mountain.
In the murky darkness of the night,[32]
we have arrived here after having:
Missed the track and lost our way.[33]
Permit me to ask you, Master, what is the name of this place, and how can we get home from here?"
"You are on the eastern spur of Mount T'ai," the elderly monk responded, "and this cave is known as the Snow Stream Cave. I am called Ch'an Master Snow Cave, and my religious name is P'u-ching. [34] I have been engaged in religious practice here for twenty or thirty years. You have been fated to encounter me here, and you ought not to proceed any further tonight. There are innumerable:
Wild animals, tigers, and leopards,[35]
on the lower slopes of the mountain. If you continue on your way early tomorrow morning, there is a highway leading straight to your home in Ch'ing-ho district."
"I fear those ruffians may still be pursuing us," said Wu K'ai.
P'u-ching took a look outside and said, "There is nothing to fear. Those ruffians, after coming halfway down the mountain, have already gone back where they came from."
He then asked Yüeh-niang her name, and Wu K'ai said, "This is my younger sister, the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing. We came here in order to present incense on behalf of her deceased husband and have been fortunate enough to be rescued by you.
Your kindness will be amply rewarded.
We will never dare to forget it."
Thereupon, they proceeded to spend the rest of the night in the cavern.
The next day, during the fifth watch, Yüeh-niang got out a bolt of muslin and offered it to the priest, but P'u-ching refused to accept it and said, "Instead of that, why don't you allow me to induct a son of yours into the religious life so he can serve me as a disciple. How would you feel about that?"
"My younger sister," said Wu K'ai, "has only a single son and expects him to succeed to the family inheritance. If she should bear another son, she might be willing to let him leave the family and become a disciple of yours."
"My son is still an infant," said Yüeh-niang, "and is less than a year old. He is scarcely ready for anything like that."
"All you need to do is promise him to me," said P'u-ching. "I have no need for him at present, but ten years from now I may ask you for him."
As for Yüeh-niang:
From her mouth no word was uttered,
but she thought to herself, "Ten years from now, I can decide what to do then."
Consequently, she agreed to promise her son to P'u-ching.
Gentle reader take note: She should never have promised to let her son leave the family and enter the religious life as a disciple of the priest. Ten years later, when:
The empire was in a state of disorder,[36]
Yüeh-niang took Hsiao-ko and fled to Honan province to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou, but she lost her way and encountered P'u-ching in the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where he spirited her son away into a life of Buddhist celibacy:
Taking the tonsure and becoming a priest.[37]
Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.
That day, Yüeh-niang and her entourage said good-bye to P'u-ching and proceeded on their way. After traveling all day, they came to a mountain that obstructed their path. This mountain was called Ch'ing-feng Mountain and presented a formidable appearance. Behold:
From all eight sides it appears towering;
From all four angles it looks precipitous.
Curious-looking pines adorn its summit
with their coiled greens;
Branches of ancient trees are tangled
amid their hanging vines.
Waterfalls fly through the air,
Assailing the senses with their chill[38] and
causing hairs to stand on end;
Cliffs descend straight down,
Reflecting bright light into the eyes and
awakening the dreaming soul.
The gurgling of the streams is audible;
The sound of the woodman's axe is heard.
Peaks and summits rise up in profusion;
The cries of the mountain birds are sad.
Deer congregate in their swarming herds,[39]
Foxes connive together in their cliques;
Traversing the brambles as they leap
their way back and forth,
Seeking their prey with howls as they
run forward and backward.
Standing on the grassy slopes,
As far as the eye can see there are
no travelers' inns;
Traversing the mountain paths,
On every side there are merely the
graves of the dead.
If this is not a place where Buddhist
monks practice religion,
It must be a lair from which outlaws
commit their atrocities.[40]
It so happens that this Ch'ing-feng Mountain had a stronghold called the Ch'ing-feng Stronghold located on it that housed three outlaw chieftains, one of whom was called the Brocade Tiger, Yen Shun; one of whom was called the Short-legged Tiger, Wang Ying; and one of whom was called the Palefaced Gentleman, Cheng T'ien-shou.[41] They had a troop of five hundred followers serving under them who devoted themselves solely to:
Housebreaking and highway robbery,[42]
Setting fires and killing people,
so that no one dared to interfere with them.
On this occasion, as Wu K'ai and his entourage, riding their donkeys and escorting Yüeh-niang's sedan chair, proceeded to make their way into the mountain, the sun had already set, and:
In the darkness of the night,
there were no villages or roadside inns to be seen. Just as they were becoming apprehensive about the dangers of their situation, a horse-tripping rope was thrown out that snagged Wu K'ai's mount and tumbled him into a pit.
It so happens that the brigands at the foot of the mountain had seen Yüeh-niang's sedan chair and Wu K'ai's entourage coming up the mountain slope and reported it to the three outlaw chieftains, who dispatched a bunch of brigands to seize their luggage and escort them all up to their stronghold. At the time, the three outlaw chieftains were having a drink with Sung Chiang, the hero from Shantung whose cognomen was Opportune Rain, and who had taken refuge there after slaying the singing girl Yen P'o-hsi.[43] The three outlaw chieftains had invited him to stay at their stronghold for a few days.
When Sung Chiang saw that Yüeh-niang wore a mourning cap over her chignon, was clad in plain white mourning garments, and that:
Her deportment was upright and correct,
And her countenance exquisitely shaped,[44]
he concluded that:
She was surely not the spouse of an ordinary person,
But must be the dependent of a well-to-do household.
He therefore proceeded to ask for her name.
At this, Yüeh-niang stepped forward, bowed to him, saying, "Many felicitations," and then addressed him with the words, "Your Highness, my maiden name is Wu, and I am the wife of the deceased Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing, for whom I am maintaining a chaste widowhood. When my husband became seriously ill, I swore an oath to come offer incense on his behalf at Mount T'ai; but when I was on the summit just a while ago I was assaulted by Yin T'ien-hsi, and we have been fleeing from him, all day and all night, in the attempt to make it safely home. How could we have anticipated that in the dark of night we would make the error of traversing the foot of this mountain of yours? We dare not expect to retrieve the saddlebags containing our luggage, but would plead with you to spare our lives. If we should succeed in returning safely home we will feel fortunate indeed."
When Sung Chiang observed the sad and moving tone of Yüeh-niang's words, he felt a degree of compassion for her and, bowing to Yen Shun, said, "This lady is the wife of an official who once presided over some colleagues of mine, and:
With whom I was slightly acquainted.[45]
She came here in order to offer incense on behalf of her husband and, because she was pursued by Yin T'ien-hsi, made the mistake of trespassing on the precincts of this mountain of yours. She is a woman of courageous virtue. If you will only consent to let her go for my sake, it will allow her to preserve her integrity."
To this plea Wang Ying responded, saying, "Brother, since I am so unfortunate as not to have a wife of my own, you should let me take her to serve as the matron of the stronghold."[46]
So saying, he directed his subordinates to seize Yüeh-niang and escorted her back to the interior of the stronghold.
At this, Sung Chiang turned to Yen Shun and Cheng T'ien-shou, saying, "Despite what I said, Brother Wang Ying is refusing to let me perform a good deed."
"This brother of ours," said Yen Shun, "is fine enough in most respects, but he is guilty of this one fault. Whenever he sees a woman possessed of feminine beauty, he lusts after her with fire in his eyes."
Sung Chiang refused to drink any more wine and accompanied the other two to the interior of the stronghold, where they found Wang Ying in the act of embracing Yüeh-niang and attempting to take his pleasure with her.
Sung Chiang strode right up to Wang Ying and, seizing him with one hand, dragged him back to the front of the stronghold, saying, "Worthy Brother, if you wish to play the role of a hero, to exhaust the very marrow of your bones [47] in sexual indulgence is not the way to enhance your stature. If you wish to seek a wife, let me act as a go-between on your behalf, and I'll secure a virtuous virgin for you, observing all the standard ritual practices, who will come and be your wife. What reason is there for you to lust after remarried goods?"

"Brother," responded Wang Ying, "why not let me have my way, for better or for worse, in this matter?"
"That won't do," said Sung Chiang. "I, Sung Chiang, will certainly undertake to provide my worthy brother with a suitable bride in the future. The fact is that if you insist on taking this woman today, you will become a laughingstock to the denizens of the rivers and lakes. As for that rascal Yin T'ien-hsi, should I fail to be accepted by the bandit lair in Liang-shan Marsh, that will be that; but should I be accepted at Liang-shan, I will see to it that his treatment of this woman is avenged."
Gentle reader take note: In later days, when Sung Chiang had arrived at Liang-shan and been chosen as the chieftain of the outlaw band there, because Yin T'ien-hsi tried to appropriate the garden of Ch'ai Huang-ch'eng, the Black Whirlwind Li K'uei was dispatched to deal with the situation and not only killed Yin T'ien-hsi but went on to wreak havoc at Kao-t'ang prefecture.[48] Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.
On that day, when Yen Shun heard what Sung Chiang had to say, he did not even ask for Wang Ying's consent but ordered the chair bearers to approach and carry Yüeh-niang down the mountain.
When Yüeh-niang saw that she was being set free, she stepped up to Sung Chiang and bowed in appreciation, saying, "Your Highness has done me:
The favor of saving my life."
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Sung Chiang. "I am not the ruler of this mountain stronghold but am merely a sojourner from Yün-ch'eng district. It is these three chieftains to whom you should pay your respects."
When Yüeh-niang had finished paying her respects, with Wu K'ai escorting her, she left the mountain stronghold, got into her sedan chair, and proceeded past Ch'ing-feng Mountain along the highway to Ch'ing-ho district. Truly:
Breaking to pieces the jade cage,
the phoenix flies away;
Smashing apart the metal padlock,
the dragon breaks free.
A poem testifies to this:

In this world, the heart of man alone remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven show him favor.[49]
If the square inch of one's heart is devoid of evil;
Even amid wolves and tigers, [50]one can achieve success.

One day, Wu Yueniang sent for Uncle Wu and told him she wished to go and offer incense at the temple at Taianzhou. When Ximen Qing was desperately ill, she had promised to make sacrifice there.
"If you go, I must go with you," Uncle Wu said. They got ready offerings, incense, candles, and paper things, and decided that Daian and Laian should go with them. They hired three horses, and a sedan chair for Yueniang. Before they left, Yueniang told Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Sun Xue'e to look well after the house, and Ruyi'er and the maids to take care of Xiaoge. They were to fasten the doors early and not to leave the house.
"You must stay at home," she said to Chen Jingji, "and keep the gate with Clerk Fu. I shall make my offerings on the morning of the fifteenth, which means that I shall be back here at the end of the month."
On the eve of her departure, she took leave of Ximen Qing's tablet, and drank wine with the ladies. She gave all the keys to Xiaoyu. They started before dawn and, leaving the city, set out on the high road. It was the end of autumn: the days were short and the weather cold. Though they only halted once during the day, they could not cover more than sixty or seventy *li*; and, when the sun set, they went to an inn or the house of some villager to spend the night and started again early the next day. It was almost wintry weather, and the wild geese seemed chill and full of sadness. The leaves had withered on the trees; the countryside was bare and melancholy, and there was a great air of mourning everywhere.
After some days, they reached Taianzhou. From there they could see Taishan, the most renowned of all the mountains in the world. It stood deep-rooted in the earth, and its summit pierced the heart of the sky. It is between the states of Qi and Lu, and the very air about it is holy. Uncle Wu saw that it was late, and they went to an inn. The next day they rose very early and went up the mountain to the Daiyo Temple built upon the mountainside. Dynasty after dynasty had venerated this temple, and generation after generation had worshipped there.
Uncle Wu took Yueniang there. She offered incense before the principal shrine and visited all the sacred images. A priest read her declaration. She burned paper money in all the chapels and partook of monastic food. Then she went with Uncle Wu to climb to the highest peak of the mountain. They went up the forty-nine winding paths, clinging to the ivy and scrambling past the vines, and at last caught sight of the Palace of Niangniang far above them in the sky. They had still forty or fifty *li* to go. Wind and cloud, thunder and rain, were all beneath them now. It had been the hour of the Dragon[2] when they left the Daiyo Temple. It was the hour of the Monkey[3] when they came to the Golden Palace of Niangniang. There was a red sign over the entrance with these words emblazoned in gold upon it: "The Palace of Radiant Sunset." They went inside and gazed upon the figure of Niangniang.
Wu Yueniang made obeisance. A Daoist priest came and stood beside her. He was a short man, about forty years of age, with three wisps of beard. His eyes were very light and his teeth white. He wore a hat with a pin, and a purple gown. His shoes were embroidered in a cloud design. He read Yueniang's declaration; then they burned incense in a golden burner, and gold and silver papers, and a boy was told to take away the offering.
This priest was really a very bad man. He was the principal disciple of the Abbot of the Daiyo Temple, and his name was Shi Bocai. He was immoderately fond of women and money, and a fellow completely absorbed in the affairs of this world and the pursuit of power. In this district there was an outrageous scoundrel called Yin Tianxi, a brother-in-law of Gao Lien, the local magistrate. This scoundrel was the leader of a band of villains who haunted the neighborhood of the two temples, armed with bows and arrows, and accompanied by hawks and dogs. They preyed especially on women pilgrims, and nobody had the courage to complain about them. The priest, Shi Bocai, allowed them to use his place for their evil purposes. He devised all manner of schemes for getting women to his rooms, and then handed them over to the scoundrel Yin to do what he liked with. He saw that Yueniang was beautiful and that she was in mourning. She must be, he decided, a lady of good family and wealthy. She had only a white-haired old gentleman and two boys to protect her. So he went up, made a reverence to her, thanked her for her offering, and asked her to take tea in his room.
Uncle Wu thanked him. "It is very kind of you," he said, "but we must go down at once."
"There is still plenty of time," the priest said, and took them to his apartments.
The room he led them into was very white and clean. In the place of honor was a couch with embroidery of sesame flowers upon it, and yellow hangings. Over a small table was a picture of Dongbin playing with white peony flowers. On either side was a scroll. One bore the words: "The Pure Wind made his sleeves dance like storks," and the other "In the Moonlight, he discussed the Holy Scriptures." The priest asked their names.
"My name is Wu," Uncle Wu said, "and this is my sister who has come to make sacrifice for her late husband. But we must not impose upon your kindness."
"Since you are so closely related," the priest said, "perhaps you would not mind both taking the place of honor." He himself sat down in the host's place and told one of the novices to bring tea. There were two novices, one called Guo Shouqing and the other Guo Shouli. They were about sixteen years old and very handsome. They wore black silk hats and long gowns, light shoes, and white socks, and used a great deal of perfume. They served the visitors who came to the temple with tea, water, and wine, and the guests who stayed the night there were accustomed to employ them for the basest uses. These two boys closed the door and brought in a number of delightful vegetarian dishes. They offered Uncle Wu and Yueniang excellent tea made of spring water. When the tea had been cleared away, they at once brought wine and a host of dishes, chicken, goose, duck, and fish. They poured the golden wine into amber cups.
When the wine appeared, Yueniang decided that it was time to go. She called Daian, and upon a red lacquer tray the boy offered the priest a roll of cloth and two taels of silver. Uncle Wu begged him to accept them. "Do not trouble to offer us wine and food," he said. "It is late and we must go back."
The priest thanked them. "Only by the grace of Niangniang," he said, "am I in charge of this temple. I live upon the charity of others and, if I may not spend what comes to me upon entertainment, upon what shall I spend it? I have offered you the very simplest of fare, yet you give me valuable presents. I really don't know whether I can accept them or not."
When they urged him to do so, he told the boys to take the presents. "But you must sit down," he said, "and have some wine, so that I may show how kindly I feel towards you."
Uncle Wu could not refuse, and they sat down again. Hot dishes were brought. The priest said to the boys: "This wine is not good enough. Go and open that jar of lotus wine that his Lordship Xu sent me, and offer some to this gentleman."
The boys brought another jar and warmed some of the wine. The priest filled a cup and offered it with both hands to Yueniang. She was unwilling to take it, and Uncle Wu explained that she never drank wine.
"Lady," the priest said, "after so trying a journey you must take some." He then offered half a cup and Yueniang took it. He filled another and offered it to Uncle Wu, saying: "My lord, try this wine and tell me what you think of it."
Uncle Wu tasted it. It was very sweet and well bodied. "It is excellent," he said.
"It was given to me by Xu, the Prefect of Qingzhou," the priest said. "His lady, and his son and daughter, come to offer sacrifice here every year, and he is one of my most intimate friends. His daughter's baby has been placed under the protection of Niangniang. They regard me as a hardworking, plain fellow, but they appreciate my sincerity and love and respect me. You see the government has cut down the revenue of these two temples by half, but, fortunately, this excellent prefect wrote and arranged that the whole of it should be left to us. So we have money enough to burn incense to Niangniang, and what is left we spend upon the entertainment of pilgrims."
While they were talking, the two boys and the porters were entertained elsewhere. There was as much as they could eat. Uncle Wu drank a few cups of wine and then again prepared to take his leave. It was getting late.
"The sun has gone down," the priest said. "It is too late for you to go down the mountain now. Will you not spend the night here and start tomorrow morning? That will be much pleasanter for you."
"I have left some luggage at the inn," Uncle Wu said, "and I am rather anxious about it."
The priest smiled. "Don't worry about that," he said. "I give you my word that it will be perfectly safe. When the people in the villages know you are at my place, they will be afraid of me. I could very quickly get hold of anybody who might steal your property and bring them before the local courts."
Uncle Wu said no more. The priest offered him another large cup of wine, but, realizing that it was very potent, he excused himself, saying he was tipsy enough already and that he must go and change his clothes. He went to the back part of the building and looked around. Yueniang was very tired. She went to lie down on the couch and the priest closed the door and went away.
Suddenly Yueniang heard a noise. It was a man creeping through a little door behind the bed. His face was red and bearded. He was about thirty years old, and wore a black hat and a purple gown. He took Yueniang in his two hands.
"I am Yin Tianxi, at your service," he said, "the brother-in-law of Magistrate Gao. I heard that you were a lady of good birth and very beautiful, and I was anxious to make your acquaintance. Now I have seen you, I realize my good fortune. If you are kind to me, I shall never forget it."
He pressed her down on the couch and would have forced her. Yueniang was frightened and cried aloud. "In this world of peace and brightness, would you dare to assault a woman of good birth?" she cried. She tried to escape, but the man prevented her. He knelt down.
"Lady," he said, "do not make such a noise. Take pity on me, and listen to my urging."
Yueniang only cried the louder: "Help! Help!" Laian and Daian recognized their mistress's voice and dashed to the back to call Uncle Wu. "Uncle," they cried, "come at once. Our lady is fighting with someone in the priest's room."
Uncle Wu hurried as fast as he could. He pushed the door but could not open it. He could hear Yueniang crying: "Why are you trying to keep me here?"
"Sister, don't be afraid," Uncle Wu shouted. "I am here." He picked up a piece of rock and forced open the door. When Yin Tianxi saw that someone was coming, he released Yueniang and slipped quickly away through the back. There were many ways of escape. Uncle Wu came in. "Sister," he cried, "has he done you any harm?"
"No," Yueniang said, "but he has got away."
Then Uncle Wu tried to find the priest, but the priest eluded him and sent his young novices to face the trouble. Uncle Wu was terribly angry. He bade Laian and Daian break all the windows and doors in the temple, and then took Yueniang away. She got into her sedan chair and they went down the mountain as fast as they could. It was about sunset when they left the temple and midnight when they came to their inn. Uncle Wu told the people of the inn what had happened. They were greatly disturbed. "You should not have challenged that evil star, Yin," they said. "He is the magistrate's brother-in-law, and everybody knows his goings-on. When you have gone, we shall suffer. He will not let you go for nothing."
Uncle Wu paid the reckoning and gave the innkeeper an extra tael. Then all the luggage was packed up; Yueniang got into her sedan chair, and they set off posthaste.
Yin Tianxi was angry. He gathered twenty or thirty of his men, all armed with swords and clubs, and they raced down the mountainside. Meanwhile, Uncle Wu and his people went straight on. About the fourth night watch, they came to a clearing and saw, afar off, a light shining through the forest. They went towards the light and came to a cave in which an old monk was reading the sacred scriptures by candlelight.
"Venerable Teacher," they said to him, "we have been to offer sacrifice at the temple, and now evil men are pursuing us. We have lost our way in the darkness. Will you tell us where we are, and how we can get from here to Qinghe?"
"You are on the eastern spur of Taishan," the old monk told them. "This cave is known as the Xuejian Cave, and I am called the Holy Man of Xuejian, though my real name is Pujing. I have been here for thirty years, mortifying the flesh. It is good fortune that has brought you to me. Do not go farther. There are many wild beasts on these mountain slopes, and it will be better for you to start tomorrow. The high road to Qinghe is not far from here."
"But I am afraid those evil men may find us," Uncle Wu said.
The old man looked about him. "Do not let that trouble you," he said. "The scoundrels have gone home already." He asked Yueniang's name.
"She is my sister," Uncle Wu said, "the widow of Ximen Qing. She came to offer sacrifice for her husband. Venerable Teacher, you have saved our lives, and we can never cease to be grateful to you."
They spent the night in the cave. Before dawn, Yueniang offered the old monk a roll of cloth. He would not accept it.
"I want one of your sons to be my disciple," he said.
"My sister has only one child," Uncle Wu said, "and she hopes to bring him up to continue the family. If she had another son, she would certainly give him to you."
"My baby is still very young," Yueniang said. "He is not a year old yet. He cannot come to you."
"I don't want him now," the old monk said, "I only ask for your promise that I'll have him in fifteen years' time."
Yueniang decided that she would settle that when the 15 years were over. She made an indefinite kind of promise. Then they said goodbye to the old monk and set out along the high road to Qinghe.

## 108
## Wu Yüeh-niang Surprises Chin-lien in the Act of Adultery; Auntie Hsüeh Agrees to Sell & Dismiss Ch'un-mei on a Moonlit Night

The trouble of bringing up daughters is
bound to be disillusioning:[1]
To admit their husbands into the family
is even more inappropriate.
They may address their in-laws as parents,
but without genuine feeling;
They may choose to play the part of sons,
but their acting is specious.
On entering your home they will complain
of receiving inadequate love;
On leaving your household they are more
likely than not to hate you.
If they feel that they are not receiving
the treatment they deserve;
They can be counted upon to abuse their
spouses at least once a day.
Wu K'ai escorted Yüeh-niang on her way back until the day that she arrived home. But no more of this.
To return to our story, ever since Yüeh-niang had left home, P'an Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi:
In both the front and rear compounds,
carried on with each other at home as though engaged in:
The mating dance of a cock and a hen.
Not a single day elapsed without their getting together.
One day, Chin-lien noticed that:
Her eyebrows were drooping, and
Her waistline was expanding;
all day long she suffered from:
Lassitude and drowsiness, and

Had no desire to eat anything.
Calling Ch'en Ching-chi into her room, she said to him, "I've got something I need to tell you. For the last several days:
My eyelids are reluctant to open,
My midriff is gradually expanding,
My belly feels quivering motions,
I don't feel like eating anything, and
My body feels extremely lethargic.
While your father-in-law was still alive I asked Nun Hsüeh for a fertility potion containing the afterbirth of a firstborn male child that would enable me to conceive, but nothing ever came of it. Now that he is dead, even though I haven't been involved with you for very long, I am already pregnant. It was in the third month that I last menstruated, and it has been only six months since then, but I already have half a bulge in my belly. In the past I have been quick to criticize the faults of others, but now it looks as though I am likely to become a target of criticism. You'd better not remain:
Still asleep in dreamland, but take advantage of the fact that the First Lady is away from home to go procure an abortifacient of some kind for me so that I can dispose of this fetus and be able to appear in public without embarrassment. Otherwise, if I have no alternative but to give birth to some benighted creature, I might as well commit suicide, for I won't be able to:
Raise my head and look people in the eye."
On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi said, "We have all kinds of pharmaceutical ingredients in our shop, but I don't know which of them might serve as abortifacients, and I lack any recipe for their concoction. But you can relax. It's not a problem. That Dr. Hu who lives on Main Street is proficient at prescriptions, both great and small, palpation of the pulse, and the treatment of female disorders and has been called upon by our household in the past. I'll go and obtain a couple of prescriptions from him which you can take in order to abort the fetus."
"My good brother," the woman responded, "you'd better get a move on if you want to save my life."
Ch'en Ching-chi, thereupon, wrapped up three mace of silver and went straight to the gate of Dr. Hu's house and called to be let in. Dr. Hu was at home and came outside, where he greeted him with a bow.
Recognizing Ch'en Ching-chi as the son-in-law of the prominent official Hsi-men Ch'ing, he offered him a seat, saying, "I haven't seen you for some time. May I ask what brings you to my humble abode, and:
What it is you would have me do for you?"[2]
"There is nothing else I would trouble you with," said Ch'en Ching-chi as he withdrew the packet of silver from his sleeve and offered it to him. "This is to defray the cost of the drugs. If I might prevail upon you to prepare a prescription or two for me:
It would serve to affirm your goodwill."
"In my family's practice of medicine," responded Dr. Hu, "with regard to the preparation of complex prescriptions, palpation of the pulse, gynecology, pediatrics, internal or external medicine, the *Chia-chien shih-san fang* (Thirteen alterative prescriptions), the *Shou-yü shen-fang*, (Divine prescriptions for the realm of longevity), the *Hai-shang fang* (Overseas panaceas [from the Isles of the Blest]),[3] and the various prescriptions for miscellaneous disorders, there is little that I have not mastered. I am also a specialist in the treatment of women both:
Before conception and postpartum.
Now blood is the fundamental element in female physiology. It is stored in the liver and flows out of the viscera, moving upward to form breast milk and moving downward to form menstrual emissions. It combines with semen to create the fetus. When a woman reaches her fourteenth year menstruation begins,[4] her conception vessel begins to flow, and her menses start to occur at their monthly intervals, which are normally thirty days apart. If her blood and vital energy are out of harmony, there will be an imbalance between her yin and yang. If there is an excess of yang, her menses will occur earlier than usual. If there is an excess of yin, her menses will occur later than usual. It is the nature of blood that if it is hot it will flow, while if it is cold it will stagnate. Either an excess or a deficiency may induce disorder. Cold tends to produce white, and heat tends to produce red. When cold and heat are out of harmony, it is likely to result in red and white vaginal discharge. Generally speaking, when the blood and vital energy are appropriately balanced, the yin and the yang will be in harmonious accord; the semen and blood will converge with each other; and the fetus will be conceived in the uterus. The two pulses emanating from the heart and the kidneys can be palpated to monitor this development. Should the semen predominate, the fetus will be male. Should the blood predominate, the fetus will be female.
This is a self-evident principle.
In the early stages of pregnancy the most important thing is to tranquilize the fetus. Unless suffering from some other ailment, the pregnant mother should avoid taking any drugs or medications. After the ten months of pregnancy, when the time for parturition approaches, special care should be taken lest postpartum problems should develop. Beware! Beware!"
Ch'en Ching-chi laughed at this disquisition, saying, "I am not looking for a prescription to tranquilize the fetus, but for an abortifacient."
"Between Heaven and Earth,
Love of life is paramount,"
opined Dr. Hu. "Nine out of ten people only seek prescriptions that facilitate conception. How can you be looking for an abortifacient instead? I don't have any. I don't have any."
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that he was objecting to his request, he added another two mace of silver to the sum he was offering and said, "There is no reason for you to concern yourself about it. Individuals have their individual needs. The woman in question does not expect to have a safe delivery and consequently wishes to abort her fetus."
Dr. Hu accepted the silver, saying, "It doesn't matter. I'll give you the prescription for a potion known as the Safflower Clean-Sweeper. If she takes it, in the time it would take her to walk five li the fetus will be discharged."
There is a lyric to the tune "Moon on the West River" that testifies to this:
Take Radix Achyranthis, Eriocheir Sinensis,
and Radix Euphorbiae,
As well as Magnetite, Radix Knoxiae, and
Daphnes Genkwa Flos,
Together with Cantharides, Hematite, and
Sal Ammoniacum,
And dissolve them in a mixture of mercury
and saltpeter.
Also add Semen Persicae, and Tetrapanax
Papyriferus,
Secretio Moschi, Adenophora Tetraphylla,
and Campsis Grandiflora,
And decoct them all in strong vinegar to
make the Safflower Potion.
You can be certain that the fetus of the
child will be discharged.
Ch'en Ching-chi, accordingly, purchased two doses of the Safflower Clean-Sweeper, bade farewell to Dr. Hu, and turned them over to the woman on returning home, explaining to her, word for word, what the doctor had said. That evening, she decocted the Safflower Potion and proceeded to swallow it. Almost immediately her entire abdomen became filled with pain and, lying down on the k'ang, she had Ch'un-mei press and massage her belly. Who could have anticipated that:
Strange as it may seem,
in no time at all, when she sat down on the commode, the fetus was excreted. Claiming it to be only a menstrual discharge, she had Ch'iu-chü wrap it up in grass paper and discard it in the privy. The next day, when the workman came to empty the contents of the privy, he observed that it contained the plump white remains of a little male fetus.
As the saying goes:
Good deeds seldom become known beyond the gate;
Bad deeds are quickly transmitted a thousand li.
Before many days had passed, the members of the entire household, both high and low, were all aware that Chin-lien had been carrying on an incestuous affair with her son-in-law and had aborted her illegitimate fetus.
One day, Wu Yüeh-niang arrived home after having been away for half a month on her journey to and from T'ai-an prefecture. It was already the tenth month when she came home, and the members of the entire household, high and low, came out to greet her, feeling:
Just as though she had fallen from Heaven.
Upon arriving home, Yüeh-niang first burned incense to the gods of Heaven and Earth and the Buddha and then paid obeisance before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, after which, she told Meng Yü-lou and her other sister wives, as well as the members of the household, high and low, all about what had happened to her at the temple on the summit of Mount T'ai and in the mountain stronghold. When she had finished, she couldn't help weeping profusely. When the members of the household, high and low, had finished paying their respects to her, Yüeh-niang saw that the wet nurse Ju-i had brought Hsiao-ko with her so that mother and son were reunited. After she had finished burning paper money and serving wine to entertain Wu K'ai before he left, that evening her sister wives provided a feast in Yüeh-niang's honor to welcome her home. But no more of this.
The next day, Yüeh-niang, having braved:
The wind and the frost on her journey,
and been exposed to hardship and frightening events, found herself to be suffering from feelings of pain and lethargy throughout her body and continued to be indisposed for two or three days.
Meanwhile, Ch'iu-chü, having been exposed to:
An earful and a bellyful,
of gossip about what Chin-lien and Ch'en Ching-chi had been up to, decided to go to the master suite and tell Yüeh-niang how the two of them had conspired to abort an illegitimate fetus and dispose of it in the privy, and how it had been discovered by the workman who came to empty the privy and consequently become public knowledge.
Because of the way her mistress had beaten and abused her, she could not contain her resentment, but when she went to the door of the master suite, Hsiao-yü, once again, spat in her face, boxed her ears, and cursed her, saying, "You lousy tale-telling slave! Get out of here. My mistress has just returned from a long journey and is feeling so unwell that she has not even gotten up yet. Get out of here at once. The last thing she needs is to hear something to upset her."
This abusive reception caused Ch'iu-chü to:
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,
Nodding in assent and choosing to withdraw.[5]
One day it was one of those occasions on which:
Something is destined to happen.
Ch'en Ching-chi came into Chin-lien's quarters to pick up some clothes that had been stored there by the pawnshop, and he and the woman proceeded to fall to it together in the Flower-viewing Tower on the second floor.
Ch'iu-chü took the opportunity to go back to the rear compound and summon Yüeh-niang to come see for herself what was going on, saying, "I have told you what they are up to at least two or three times, but you have not believed me. While you have been away the two of them have been getting together here at home:
Sleeping from morning to night,
And then from night to morning,
and now they have actually smuggled out an illegitimate fetus. She and Ch'un-mei have forged an alliance with each other, and today he and she are up to their evil shenanigans once again on the second floor. I have not been telling lies to you. You should come see for yourself as quickly as possible."
Yüeh-niang promptly set out for the front compound. The two of them were just in the thick of things and had not yet come downstairs.
Who could have anticipated that the parrot in a cage hanging under the eaves in Chin-lien's room was capable of speech and called out in a loud voice, "The First Lady is here."
Ch'un-mei, who was in the room at the time, heard this and came outside where she saw that it was Yüeh-niang. Before she could call the woman down from the upper floor, Ch'en Ching-chi, with the clothes he had come to fetch in hand, came downstairs and headed for the door.
Yüeh-niang took him strongly to task, saying, "My child, have you lost your memory? What have you come barging in here for:
As if you didn't know any better?"
"A customer is waiting in the shop," explained Ch'en Ching-chi, "and there was no one else available to come get his clothes for him."
"I left clear instructions," said Yüeh-niang, "that in that case you should send a page boy in to fetch things. What excuse could you have to invade a widow's quarters for no good reason:
As if you didn't know any better?
Such conduct is utterly shameless."
These accusations caused Ch'en Ching-chi to flee outside, as though:
Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for him to hide.
Meanwhile, the woman was so embarrassed that she did not venture to come downstairs for what seemed like half a day.
When she finally did come down, Yüeh-niang gave her a real dressing down, saying, "Sister Six, from now on you had better not continue to carry on so shamelessly. You and I are now widows, and our status is not what it was when we had a husband. Though:
Everything may remain sweet smelling at home,
Our reputation will become malodorous abroad.
Even basins and jugs have ears.
What sort of shenanigans have you been up to with this youngster:
As if you didn't know any better?
You have given our servants reason to make unspeakably obscene allegations about you behind your back. As the sayings go:
If a man is untrustworthy,
He's as weak as untempered steel;
If a woman is unfaithful,
She's as pliable as sesame candy.
If one is upright,
One will achieve one's aims without giving orders;
If one is not upright,
Though one may give orders they will not be obeyed.[6]
If you were resolute and straightforward in your conduct, you would not give the servants any reason to criticize you behind your back. They have complained to me about you several times in the past, and I did not believe them. But today, I have seen what you are up to with my own eyes, and it is unspeakable. As I have admonished you today, you must form a resolution to protect our husband's good name in the future. Take my own case; while I was away on my incense-burning pilgrimage I was threatened with violence and coercion by those ruffians two or three times. If I had not been rigorous in protecting my honor, I might never have been able to make my way home."

When Chin-lien was subjected to this tirade of criticism from Yüeh-niang, she was so embarrassed that her face became a patchwork of red and white blotches, and she denied the charges a thousand times over, saying, "I was on the second floor burning incense, while our son-in-law Ch'en was in the storeroom nearby collecting his clothes. Whoever said so much as a word to him?"
At this juncture, Yüeh-niang, after disputing with her for some time, returned to the rear compound.
That evening in their quarters, Hsi-men Ta-chieh also took Ch'en Ching-chi to task, saying, "You lousy jailbird! You can hardly deny that you were caught red-handed with:
Irrefutable proof of your guilt,
yet you continue to babble on about it. What sort of shenanigans were the two of you up to on the second floor? It goes without saying that the two of you have been up to mischief together while keeping me in the dark just as though you had:
Put a water crock over my head.
That whore has stolen my husband while still trying to keep me entrammeled with her specious words.
Like the bricks in the privy:
She is both hard and smelly,
and seems to think she can still continue to ride herd on me. She's just like:
The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall:
The longer it stays there the hotter it gets.
And you seem to think that you can still go on scrounging for food in this household."
"You whore!" retorted Ch'en Ching-chi. "While your family has hold of my money, you have the nerve to accuse me of scrounging for food off them."
So saying, he headed off for the front compound in a fit of pique.
From this time on, Ch'en Ching-chi kept to the front compound, no longer daring to enter the rear compound without some legitimate excuse. When it was necessary to get anything from the storeroom, either Tai-an or P'ing-an would come inside and go up to the second floor to fetch it. Food for the midday meal was no longer brought out to the shop from the rear compound, leaving Manager Fu Ming in his hunger no recourse but to take money and go out on the street and purchase ready-made noodles to eat. Truly:
When the dragon battles the tiger,
The one hurt is the innocent fawn.
All the doors and gates were closed while the sun was still high in the sky. As a result, the amorous relations between Ch'en Ching-chi and Chin-lien were interrupted once again. Ch'en Ching-chi's original family home had been looked after and occupied for some time by his maternal uncle, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, who had forfeited his office and was residing there in retirement. Ch'en Ching-chi resorted to going there for his meals, both early and late, and Yüeh-niang did not even bother to inquire about it.
The two of them were separated for as much as a month without even seeing each other. For the woman, all by herself:
Each day was like three months of autumn;
Each night seemed like half a summer.
How could she endure:
The seclusion of her deserted chamber,
Or the scorching flames of her desire?
To even catch a glimpse of him was:
As difficult as difficult could be,
and between the two of them:
All communication had been cut off.
As for Ch'en Ching-chi:
There was no way he could gain access to her.[7]
Suddenly one day, he caught sight of Auntie Hsüeh as she passed by outside the gate, and it occurred to him that he might be able to prevail upon her to deliver a note to Chin-lien on his behalf that would:
Express his concern about their separation,
And serve to reveal his innermost feelings.
One day, on the pretext of going to settle accounts with a creditor outside the city gate, he rode his mount straight to the home of Auntie Hsüeh, tied up his mule, raised the hanging screen, and asked, "Is Auntie Hsüeh at home?"
Her son Hsüeh Chi's wife, Chin Ta-chieh, was sitting on the k'ang with her baby son in her arms, in the company of two girls that people had entrusted to Auntie Hsüeh to offer for sale as maidservants. When she heard someone calling for Auntie Hsüeh, she came out and asked who it was.
"It's only me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, and asked, "Is Auntie Hsüeh at home, or not?"
"Uncle, please come inside and have a seat," responded Chin Ta-chieh. "My mother-in-law has gone to someone's place to collect payment on a few items of costume jewelry that she is offering for sale. What have you got to say to her? I'll send someone to call for her."
So saying, she hastened to pour out a serving of tea for Ch'en Ching-chi.
After he had sat there for a little while, who should appear but Auntie Hsüeh, who came in and greeted Ch'en Ching-chi with a bow, saying, "Uncle, what wind has blown you to my home here?"
Turning to Chin Ta-chieh, she said, "Pour out some tea for Uncle to drink."
"He has just finished a serving of tea," said Chin Ta-chieh.
"I would not have bothered to come for no reason," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but I have been entangled, thus and so, with the Fifth Lady for some time, and now, thanks to the wagging tongue of that maidservant Ch'iu-chü, our liaison has been disrupted, and both the First Lady and my wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, have decided to turn a cold shoulder to me. My relationship with Sister Six is such that:
We can never agree to be separated,
but the two of us have been kept apart for some time now, and:
All communication has been cut off.
I would like to send a few words to her, but there is no one able to get inside for this purpose. That is why I have felt compelled to appeal to you in the hope that you might find some way, thus and so, to transmit a message on my behalf."
Reaching inside his sleeve, he brought out a tael of silver, and said, "This paltry gift is merely offered in the hope that you can use it to purchase some tea for yourself."
No sooner did Auntie Hsüeh hear him out than she fell to:
Clapping her hands and beating her palms,
as she laughed out loud, saying, "Whoever heard of a son-in-law making out with his mother-in-law? Such conduct is unheard of in this world. Uncle, tell me the truth. Really, how did you ever accomplish such a thing?"
"Auntie Hsüeh," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "pray keep your voice down, and stop scoffing at me. I have brought a sealed note here with me, and I hope that, for better or for worse, you will be good enough to deliver it to her for me tomorrow."
Auntie Hsüeh took the note with one hand, saying, "Ever since your First Lady returned from her pilgrimage I haven't gone to pay a call on her, so if I go do so now I can kill two birds with one stone."
"Where can I expect to hear back from you," asked Ch'en Ching-chi.
"I'll go look for you in the shop and report to you there," replied Auntie Hsüeh.
When they had finished their conversation, Ch'en Ching-chi mounted his mule and returned home.
To resume our story, the next day, Auntie Hsüeh took her box of trinkets and made her way first to the master suite in Hsi-men Ch'ing's house to pay a call on Yüeh-niang. After sitting with her for a while, she also went to visit Meng Yü-lou, and only then went to Chin-lien's quarters.
Chin-lien, at the time, had set up a table and was eating her congee.
When Ch'un-mei saw that the woman was:
Feeling depressed and unhappy,
she said, "Mother, you ought not to be so upset. Even the immortal maiden Ho Hsien-ku[8] was falsely accused of having daily trysts with a lover.
When gossip over pros and cons is overheard,[9]
If you pay no heed to it, it will disappear.
But even the immortals of ancient times were sometimes guilty of:
The moral deficiencies of petty persons,[10]
not to mention the likes of you and me. Moreover, at present, Father is dead, and the First Lady has given birth to a posthumous son, who may also be said to be:
Of questionable origin.
Consequently, she is in no position to exert control over our private affairs. You might as well relax.
Even if the sky should be about to fall,
There are the four giants to hold it up.
For humans living in this world:
Every day that you enjoy is another day."
Thereupon, she poured out some wine and handed a goblet of it to the woman, saying, "Mother, drink a cup of this warmed wine in order to dissipate your depression."
Then, happening to notice that there were two dogs engaged in copulation beneath the steps, she said, "Since even animals enjoy this kind of pleasure, how can humans be expected to do otherwise?"
As they were drinking their wine, who should appear but Auntie Hsüeh, who came in, bowed in greeting, and said, "The two of you, mother and daughter, are certainly having an easy time of it."
Then, catching sight of the two copulating dogs, she laughed, saying, "What an auspicious omen for your house. As the two of you enjoy the sight, how could it help but relieve your depression?"
So saying, she proceeded to bow to them once again.
"What wind has blown you here today?" the woman asked. "And why has it been so long since you paid us a visit?"
So saying, she offered Auntie Hsüeh a seat.
"I don't know what has kept me so busy all day long," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but I just haven't had any spare time. When the First Lady returned from her pilgrimage to the summit of Mount T'ai I failed to visit her, and she expressed her disappointment to me just now. I also visited the Third Lady on the west side of the rear compound and she decided to purchase two pairs of turquoise ornaments and a pair of decorative pins to hold her chignon in place. She is inclined to handle things promptly and weighed out eight mace of silver for me on the spot. Unlike that Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound, who bought two pairs of velvet artificial flowers from me in the eighth month, which were worth two mace of silver, but claims that she is short of cash and refuses to pay me. She is really a stingy sort. But may I venture to ask, why were you not anywhere to be seen?"
"I have not been feeling too well the last few days," the woman replied, "and have not been up and about."
Ch'un-mei proceeded to pour out a goblet of wine and offer it to Auntie Hsüeh, who promptly bowed in response, saying:
"If one drinks a cup of wine on entering the door."
At which, the woman interrupted her, saying:
"You'll bear a bonny baby someday."
"I'm no longer able to do so," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "but my daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, gave birth to a son only two months ago."
She then went on to say, "Since the death of your husband, you must have been feeling lonely for some time now."
"Needless to say," the woman responded, "if he were only here everything would be fine. But at present, the two of us are being:
Alternately broken up and ground down.[11]
I won't deceive you, Auntie Hsüeh, but right now in this household:
When people are many, tongues are many.
Ever since the First Lady produced that son of hers, her attitude has changed, and our sisterly feelings are no longer as warm as they used to be. For the last few days, both because I have been feeling depressed and because I have been the target of malicious gossip, I have not gone back to the rear compound."
"It's all due to that slave of ours, Ch'iu-chü," explained Ch'un-mei. "While the First Lady was away from home, she made up an invidious story about my mistress out of thin air and dragged me into it as well, creating quite a disruption."
"So it was all the doing of that maidservant of hers," said Auntie Hsüeh. "How could she bring herself to betray her mistress that way? It goes without saying that:
If you don the black livery of a servant,
You must cling to even the blackest post.
That kind of conduct will never do."
At this, the woman turned to Ch'un-mei and said, "Go see what that slave is up to. I fear she may be eavesdropping on us."
"She's back in the kitchen picking up some rice," said Ch'un-mei. "That ruptured vessel of a slave serves in these quarters as:
Nothing but a leaky trough.
She habitually takes our private affairs and peddles them abroad."
"Since no one else is present," said Auntie Hsüeh, "we can hold a frank conversation. Yesterday, your son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi came to my place and told me, thus and so, what has been going on. So it turns out that she was the one responsible for exposing your affair. Ch'en Ching-chi told me that the First Lady has taken him severely to task, seen to it that all the doors are tightly secured, and prohibited him from coming inside to fetch clothes or pharmaceutical supplies. And that she has even gone so far as to move his wife Hsi-men Ta-chieh into the rear compound to reside in Li Chiao-erh's former quarters on the east side of the courtyard, and stopped sending food out to the shop for his lunch, so that he has been compelled to go to the home of his maternal uncle Chang Kuan for his meals. What sense does it make for her to refuse to trust her own son-in-law, but to put her trust in those page boys instead? He said that it has been some time since he has seen you and pleaded with me to deliver a note to you. He sends you his ardent regards and suggests that you should not allow yourself to be upset. After all, since your husband is dead, you might as well determine to go flat out and do what you want, no matter how much of a commotion it may cause.
What is there to be afraid of?
Rather than fearing that a stick of incense
may produce smoke,
You might as well simply set it on fire and
let it go at that."
Thereupon, she took out the sealed note that Ch'en Ching-chi had entrusted to her and handed it to the woman. When she opened it and took a look she found that it contained nothing but a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers" that read as follows:
The fire in the Zoroastrian Temple[12]
burns my skin and flesh;
The Blue Bridge is flooded with water[13]

right up to my throat.
Though we try to repress it, the word
has been spread abroad.
Even if we should call it off, the
damage is already done.
If we should consummate the affair
it would be romantic;
But if we should not, they will still
contend that we did.[14]
After the words to the song, it read: "Addressed to the dressing table of Sister Six," followed by the inscription, "Presented with a hundred salutations by Ch'en Ching-chi."
When the woman had finished reading it, she tucked the note into her sleeve.
Auntie Hsüeh said, "He wants you to send a token of some kind back to him, along with a few words, so that he will know that I actually delivered his message."
The woman told Ch'un-mei to share a drink of wine with Auntie Hsüeh while she retired into her room. After some time, she came out with a white satin handkerchief along with a gold ring. She had inscribed a song to the tune "Red Embroidered Slippers" on the handkerchief that read as follows:
On your account, I have had to anticipate
surprise and suffer fear;
On my account, you have gone so far as
to neglect your spouse.
On your account, I have stopped putting
on my rouge and powder;
On your account, I have had to disguise
my intentions before others;
On your account, I have had to resort to
deception with my servants.
As a consequence, the pair of us have both
become utterly distraught.[15]
When the woman had sealed these things up securely and handed them to Auntie Hsüeh, she said, "Convey my regards to him, and tell him that he ought not to let his temper get the better of him and persist in going to eat his meals at the home of his maternal uncle Chang Kuan. By so doing, he runs the risk of annoying his uncle to the point that he may complain, saying, 'You conduct your business at the home of your father-in-law but come to my place to eat your meals, thereby giving people the impression that both households are hard up.' If he doesn't have anything to eat, tell him to take some money from the shop and use it to buy snacks for himself and Manager Fu Ming. If you continue to let your temper get the better of you and refuse to come inside, who have you got to blame but yourself? It seems he is just an example of the adage that:
The thief suffers from a sense of guilt."
Auntie Hsüeh said, "I'll convey your message to him."
After the woman had also given her five mace of silver, Auntie Hsüeh said farewell, went out the door, and headed for the shop at the front of the compound to look for Ch'en Ching-chi.
The two of them went to a secluded spot where they could talk in private, and Auntie Hsüeh handed the sealed package to him and told him that the Fifth Lady had enjoined him not to let his temper get the better of him or express his resentment, but find a way to come inside when he wanted to; and to refrain from going to eat his meals at his uncle Chang Kuan's place, lest he give him cause for annoyance.
She then showed him the five mace of silver, saying, "This is the reward given me by the lady inside.
The holes in the water clock let it all spill out.[16]
There is no reason to doubt that the two of you will get together again in the future, and if she were to mention it to you without my having revealed it, I would be embarrassed."
"Auntie Hsüeh," said Ch'en Ching-chi, bowing deeply to her, "I am greatly indebted to you."
Auntie Hsüeh took a few steps on her way but then came back and said, "I almost forgot something. Just now, as I was leaving, the First Lady sent the maidservant Hsiu-ch'un to intercept me and invite me back to the rear compound. She asked me to return this evening and take Ch'un-mei away with me because she intends to sell her. She said that she had acted as a go-between for the two of you and colluded with her mistress in facilitating your adulterous affair. That is the reason she wants to get rid of her."
"Auntie Hsüeh," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "go ahead and take her to your place. I'll come pay you a visit someday soon, because there is something I want to ask her."
When their conversation was concluded, Auntie Hsüeh returned home.
Sure enough, that same evening, as the moon was rising, she came back to take Ch'un-mei away but went first into Yüeh-niang's quarters.
"Originally," said Yüeh-niang, "I purchased her from you for sixteen taels of silver, and now you can have her back for the same sum of sixteen taels of silver."
She then turned to Hsiao-yü, and said, "You go out front with her to take care of things, and see that she leaves empty-handed. Don't let her take any clothing with her other than what she has on."
Auntie Hsüeh then proceeded out front and told the woman, thus and so, "The First Lady has sent me to take Sister Ch'un-mei away. She told me that you and she had been:
Colluding in chicanery,
in order to facilitate your clandestine adultery, and that she:
Didn't care about the rights and wrongs,
of the situation, but only wanted to recover the original price she had paid for Ch'un-mei."
When the woman heard that she was going to take Ch'un-mei away in order to be sold, she opened her eyes wide and was unable to say a word for what seemed like half a day.
Before she knew it, her eyes brimmed over with tears, and she said, "Auntie Hsüeh, you can see how hard it has been on the two of us to be without a man in our lives. And now, when our husband has been dead for such a short space of time, she wants to get rid of his former bedmates. How can the First Lady be so bereft of human-heartedness, benevolence, and righteousness? Only because she has given birth to this piddling bladder's spawn of hers, she feels she can ignore the rest of us, and:
Trample us into the mud.
That child of Li P'ing-erh's lived for less than a year and a half and had not even come down with smallpox, measles, chicken pox, or rubella yet. Who knows what Heaven may have in store for her, yet her self-confidence is great enough to block out the sun."
"Has her son developed smallpox, or not?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.
"No he hasn't," the woman responded. "After all, he's not even a year old yet."
"Ch'un-mei tells me," said Auntie Hsüeh, "that when Father was alive he took his pleasure with her."
"Took his pleasure with her indeed!" responded the woman. "That dead devil treated her as though she were as important to him as his vital organs.
She had but to say one thing,
And he would comply with ten.
Whatever she asked for, she received tenfold.
As a result, his legitimate wife who was in charge of the household had to take a back seat. If she wanted him to give a page boy ten strokes with the cane, Father would not venture to give him even as many as five."
"It's outrageous!" exclaimed Auntie Hsüeh. "The First Lady is making a mistake to act this way. To send off an attractive young woman who has been favored by her husband without allowing her to take a trunkful of her belongings with her, or even an outfit of clothing, but requiring her to leave empty-handed, will not seem right in the eyes of the neighbors."
"Did she actually tell you not to let her take even an outfit of clothing with her?" the woman asked.
"The First Lady," replied Auntie Hsüeh, "told Hsiao-yü to come with me and see to it that she does not take any clothes with her, other than those she has on."
When Ch'un-mei, who was standing to one side, heard that she was being sold, she did not shed a single tear; but when she saw that her mistress was weeping, she said, "Mother, what are you crying about? Once I am gone, try to get on as patiently as you can. Don't injure yourself by worrying too much. If you worry yourself to the point of falling ill, there will be no one to sympathize with you. Let me go if I must. If I am not permitted to take any extra clothes with me, so be it. It has always been true that:
A decent man does not consume
his inheritance;
A decent woman does not wear
her bridal clothes."[17]
As they were speaking, who should appear but Hsiao-yü, who came in and said, "Fifth Lady, you need not comply with the topsy-turvy instructions of my mistress. After all, the young lady has served you faithfully for all this time. I am prepared to:
Deceive my superiors but not my inferiors.
You ought to select two of the best outfits from her trunk, wrap them up, and entrust them to Auntie Hsüeh to take along for her, both as a memento of her years with you, and to assist her as she embarks on her new life."
"My good sister," exclaimed the woman, "you are actually exhibiting a trace of benevolence and righteousness."
"After all," responded Hsiao-yü:
"Who can be sure that nothing will ever happen to them?
Both the toad and the cricket,
Inhabit the same spadeful of earth.
When the hare dies, the fox is sad;
Creatures grieve for their fellows."
They then brought out Ch'un-mei's trunk and told her to pick out the kerchiefs and turquoise hairpins that she was accustomed to wear and take them with her. The woman selected two outfits of top-grade silk and satin garments, together with shoes and foot-bindings, and wrapped them up in a large package for her. She also gave her several of her own hairpins, combs, clasps, pendants, and rings. Hsiao-yü, too, pulled two pins out of her hair and gave them to Ch'un-mei. The remaining pearl necklaces, frets of silver filigree, and skirts and blouses of variegated and figured brocade, were all left undisturbed and carried back to the rear compound. Ch'un-mei then bowed good-bye, and the woman and Hsiao-yü bade her farewell with tears in their eyes. As she was about to go out the gate, the woman wanted her to go pay a farewell obeisance to Yüeh-niang and the others, but Hsiao-yü stopped her with a negative wave of her hand. Ch'un-mei then proceeded to follow Auntie Hsüeh, without even turning her head, as she nonchalantly and resolutely marched out the main gate. After the woman and Hsiao-yü had returned from seeing her out the gate, Hsiao-yü went back to the master suite to report to the First Lady, saying, "She left empty-handed, and her wardrobe has been retained, so she was not allowed to take anything with her."
Chin-lien made her way back to her quarters, where she was used to having Ch'un-mei's company. The 2 of them had been on intimate terms and were accustomed to sharing their innermost feelings with each other. But now that she had gone, her quarters seemed cold and desolate, and she felt so lonely that she commenced to weep aloud. A poem testifies to this:

Her intimate words remain,
But now their love is severed;
In her room she is not seen,
In silence her soul melts.

The wheel of passion turns and never stops
And those who watch are oft bewildered.
The fortune of a man is subject to many vicissitudes
And when it is all but attained
It comes to naught.
Man finds it hard to hold his head aloft
While strangers look on coldly
And there is none to sympathize.
All through the day
Her brows were knit in sorrow.
She leaned on all the railings
Knowing not what to do.
She can only hope that the moon still shines
Over the five lakes
She must have patience, the time will come
When she will realize the debt of love.
Pan Jinlian and Chen Jingji followed one another about like a cock and a hen. One day, Jinlian felt a sudden pain and realized that her belly was growing bigger. She felt languid and tired and disinclined to eat anything. She sent for Chen Jingji.
"These last few days," she said, "I have been hardly able to keep my eyes open. My belly is getting big, and I can feel something moving inside it. I have no appetite and my body feels very heavy. When your father was alive, I got some medicine from Nun Xue to make me have a child, and nothing happened. Now he is dead, and I have been carrying on with you only a short time, yet I am with child. It was the third month, I think, when I was last unwell, and that would make the child about six months on the way. Now I, who have always laughed at other people, look like being laughed at myself. Pull yourself together. The Great Lady has not come back yet. Go and get some medicine to get rid of it. If I have the child, it will be the end of me, and I shall never be able to lift my head and look people in the face again."
"We have all sorts of medicines in the shop," Jingji said, "but I don't know which is the right one. And I haven't any sort of prescription for that purpose. Doctor Hu, in the High Street, is a specialist in women's troubles. I will go to him and ask him for something to put you right. He knows us quite well."
"Well, be quick about it, Brother," Jinlian said. "You must do something to save my life."
Jingji took three *qian* of silver and went at once to see Dr. Hu. The doctor was at home. He knew that Chen Jingji was Ximen Qing's son-in-law and took the young man in.
"It is a long time since I last saw you," he said. "What can I do for you?"
"I have come to trouble you for an abortive," Jingji said. "Here is the money. Thank you very much."
"The people of this world," Dr. Hu said, "regard the saving of life as a very noble thing. Everybody comes to ask for medicine to help them to get babies. Why do you come and ask for the very opposite? I have none."

Jingji gave the doctor another two *qian*. "Don't let us talk about nobility," he said. "If I am asking for it, it is because I want it. A young woman I know would find it very awkward if she should have a baby, and she wishes to make sure that she does not."
"I will give you some of the medicine that people call 'Clear all out,'" Dr. Hu said, taking the money. "Let her take it and, in the time it would take her to walk five *li*, the child will come away."
He gave Jingji two doses. The young man said goodbye and hurried back to give the medicine to Jinlian. In the evening she took it with some hot water. Immediately she began to feel pain. She lay down on the bed, and Chunmei pressed her belly. In a very short time, she called for the pail, and the child came away. She told Qiuju that she had been unwell and bade her throw everything into the privy. The next day, when the privy cleaners came, they found a white, well-nourished infant. As the proverb says: Good news is never heard outside the door, but bad news travels a thousand miles. In a very few days, nearly everyone in the household knew that Jinlian had been carrying on with Chen Jingji and had had a baby.
When Wu Yueniang came back, it was the tenth month and she had been absent for a fortnight. She was welcomed as though she had fallen from the skies. She made obeisance to the gods and burned incense, then went to visit Ximen Qing's tablet. Afterwards, she told Meng Yulou and the others of her adventures at the temple. She sobbed as she did so. Then the people of the house came to see her, and Ruyi'er brought Xiaoge. Mother and child came together again.
When she had burned some paper offerings, she gave her brother food and wine and he went home. In the evening, the ladies entertained Yueniang. She was weary after her long journey and the fright she had had, and for two or three days was not at all well. Qiuju, who had heard about the relations between her mistress and Chen Jingji, was very anxious to tell Yueniang all about them. She came to Yueniang's door, but Xiaoyu spat in her face and boxed her ears.
"Get off at once, you scandalmongering slave!" she cried. "My mistress is not well after her long journey, and she is still in bed. If you make her angry, it will be the worse for you."
Qiuju swallowed her anger and went away.
One day, Chen Jingji came for some clothes, and Jinlian and he again amused themselves upstairs. While they were enjoying themselves to the utmost, Qiuju again went to the inner court, and asked Yueniang to come and see for herself.
"Lady," she said, "I have warned you several times, but you would not listen. When you were away, they used to sleep together from morning till night and from night till morning. She even got in the family way. She and Chunmei have both been at the same tricks. Now they are upstairs doing wicked things together. If you do not believe me, come and see for yourself."
Yueniang hurried to the outer court. The couple upstairs were busily engaged, but Chunmei happened to see Yueniang coming and rushed upstairs to warn them. They were greatly alarmed and could think of no place in which to hide. Jingji could only pick up some clothes and run downstairs.
"My son," Yueniang said, "what are you doing here? You seem to have a very poor memory."
"Someone is waiting in the shop and there was no one else to come and get the clothes," Jingji said.
"Didn't I give definite orders always to send a boy for the clothes?" Yueniang said. "What right have you in the room of this woman who has lost her husband? You are utterly shameless."
Chen Jingji ran away as fast as his legs would carry him, and Jinlian stayed upstairs, not daring to come down. At last, however, she did come down, and Yueniang scolded her severely.
"Sister," she said, "you must give up this shameless way of behaving. You and I are widows, and things are very different now from when our husband was alive. Even vases and jars have ears. Why do you associate with this young man? The servants are all saying the most terrible things about you. The proverb says that a man without character is like iron without any strength, and that a woman without character is as soft as honey. When we behave with proper decorum, people will do what they are told without our having to go to extremes, but, if we do not so behave, they will not obey, however severe our orders. If you were straightforward and conducted yourself decently, nobody would dare to say a word about you. I have been told this several times before, but I would never believe it. Now I have seen with my own eyes, and there is no choice left to me. Make up your mind that you will so live as to maintain our dead husband's good name. Take my own case. If I had been a wicked woman, I should never have come back here when that bad man assaulted me."
Jinlian flushed and paled in turns. She was full of denials. "I was burning incense upstairs when he came for some clothes, and I had no conversation at all with him."
There was a good deal of argument, and then Yueniang went away.
In the evening, when Ximen Dajie and Jingji were in their own apartment together, Ximen Dajie said to him: "You villain! Will you still dare to say that I have no proofs? Will you argue with me now? What were you doing upstairs with her today? I can't find words bad enough for you. The best thing would be to put you and her together in a big jar. And that whore, who has stolen my husband, swaggers about in my presence! She is like a tile out of the privy, hard and stinking. She always thinks she is better than anybody else. Do you think you will continue to have your meals here with me?"
"You whore!" Jingji said, in a fury, "isn't my money kept here? I'm not begging for food in this place." He went away in a very bad temper.
After that time, he always stayed at the shop and never came to get anything. Daian and Ping'an were sent to bring anything that was needed. Even the midday meal was served at the shop. Clerk Fu used to take some money and go to the street for noodles, then take them back with him. It was one of those cases where, as when there is a fight between a dragon and a tiger, the little wolf suffers. All the doors and windows were kept shut, even before the sun went down. And so the lovemaking between Chen Jingji and Jinlian was interrupted again.
There was a house belonging to Chen Jingji, which was lived in by his mother's brother. This was a man named Chang, who had no work to do and spent all his time at home. To him Jingji went night and morning for his meals. Wu Yueniang asked no questions. Pan Jinlian and the young man were separated for about a month. She was desperately lonely. Each day seemed like a whole season, and each night was like half a summer. She could not bear the loneliness, and passion raged within her. There was no way she could see him. She could not send out a message, and he could not come near her.
One day, the young man saw old woman Xue going past the door and it occurred to him that she might be able to take a letter to tell Jinlian how much he loved her and how greatly he was distressed by their separation. As soon as he had an opportunity, he pretended to be going out to collect some money, but actually he took a donkey and went to see the old woman. When he came to her door, he tied up the donkey and asked if the old woman was at home. Her son, Xue Ji, and his wife were sitting on the bed nursing their baby. There were two girls in the room, waiting to be sold. When the young woman heard somebody asking for old woman Xue, she went out to see who it was.
"I should like to know if Madam Xue is at home," Jingji said.
The young woman asked him to go in. "Mother has gone to change some ornaments and to collect some money," she said. "If there is anything we can do for you, I will send for her." She made tea for Chen Jingji.
After a while, old woman Xue came back. She made a reverence to Jingji and said: "What wind has blown you here?" She bade her daughter-in-law make him a cup of tea, but the young woman told her she had already done so.
"I would not trouble you," Jingji said, "except on a matter of some importance. You know I have been on very close terms with the Fifth Lady for a long time. Now Qiuju has been blabbing, and we cannot get a chance to meet. The Great Lady and my wife, too, are treating me very badly. I can't live without that woman, yet we have been parted all this time and have no way even of sending a message one to the other. I have thought of sending a letter, but there is no one I can trust it with. So I have come to you. I am sure you can help me."
He took a tael of silver from his sleeve. "This," he said, "may serve to buy you a cup of tea."
The old woman laughed and clapped her hands. "I never heard of such a thing," she said, "a son-in-law carrying on with his mother. Tell me, however did you manage to get her?"
"Sister Xue," Jingji said, "this is not a joke. Here is my letter. You must take it to her for me."
The old woman took the note. "I have not been to see the Great Lady since she returned. I will go to pay her my respects."
"When shall I expect the answer?" Jingji said.
"I will come to your shop and tell you there," the old woman said.
Jingji mounted his donkey and went back to the shop. The next day, old woman Xue took her box and went to Ximen's house. First she went to see Yueniang, then Yulou, and finally Jinlian.
Jinlian was eating some rice gruel and talking to Chunmei, who was trying to make her more cheerful. "Mother," she said, "don't let yourself be so upset. Right or wrong, let people talk if they feel like it. After Father died, the Great Lady had a baby. Did anybody suggest there was anything wrong about that? She cannot control the things we do in secret. Cheer up. If the skies fall, there is always one who upholds them to put them back again. So long as we're alive let us be as merry as we can."
She heated some wine and gave a cup to her mistress. "Drink this," she said, "and drown your sorrow."
Then she looked out into the courtyard. Two small dogs were there, seemingly glued together.
"There!" she said, "even animals must have their enjoyment. Why not we human beings?"
Then old woman Xue came. She made a reverence to Jinlian and again to Chunmei. "I see you are having some fun," she said. Then she saw the two dogs.
"A good omen for this house," she said. "When one sees a thing like that, one ceases to feel lonely."
"You have not been here for a long time," Jinlian said. "What has brought you today?" She asked old woman Xue to sit down.
"I don't know what I have been doing all the time," old woman Xue said, "but I am never idle. I wasn't able to come and see your Great Lady when she came back from her pilgrimage. I have just come from her, and she was quite annoyed with me. The Third Lady was there too. She bought a pair of ornaments and some ribbon from me. She is a good lady, that. She just handed me eight *qian* of silver. But the lady Sun Xue'e, who bought two pairs of flowers in the eighth month and still owes me two *qian* for them, doesn't want to pay me. So mean she is! But why were you not in the inner court?"
"I have not been very well lately," Jinlian said. "I didn't feel like leaving my room."
Chunmei heated a cup of wine and gave it to the old woman. Old Xue made a reverence and thanked her. "Ought I to take it, when I have only just come in?" she said.
"It will bring you a good baby," Jinlian said.
"No more babies for me," old woman Xue said, "but my daughter-in-law had one a little while ago. He is two months old. I expect you have been very lonely since your husband's death, Lady?"
"Naturally," Jinlian said. "We have to suffer now in all kinds of ways. There are too many talkers in this household. The Great Lady herself, since her child has been born, has been quite a different woman. We are not so friendly as we used to be. As I told you, I have not been well lately, but we had a quarrel and that is one reason why I have not been near her."
"It was all Qiuju's fault," Chunmei said. "When the Great Lady was away, that slave told a pack of lies about my mistress, and even dragged me into it. It is most provoking."
"She is your maid," old woman Xue said. "How dare she say things about her mistress? One who wears a black gown should stand by a black pillar. She ought not to do things like that."
"Go and have a look," Jinlian said to Chunmei. "She may be listening to us again."
"No," Chunmei said, "she is in the kitchen, picking rice. She is like a torn sack or a leaking manger, going about and telling everybody our business."
"Since there is nobody here, I have something to tell you," the old woman said. "Yesterday, Master Chen came to my house. He told me your maid Qiuju had got you into this pickle. He said that the Great Lady had scolded him, and that she kept the doors and windows tightly closed. He said he was no longer allowed to come here for clothes and medicine, and that his wife had gone to live in a room in the east wing. Nobody sends him anything to eat, and he has to go to his Uncle Zhang's for his meals. It is not right that the Great Lady should not trust her own son-in-law but put all her confidence in the boys. He told me it was ever so long since he had seen you, and that he is dying to do so. He sends this letter and his love. Don't worry, he says. Now that the master is dead, you would perhaps be wise to come out into the open. There is nothing to fear. Sometimes, we are afraid of the incense making too much smoke, but now there is no reason why it should not."
She took Jingji's letter from her sleeve and gave it to Jinlian. It was in the form of a poem written to the meter of "The Embroidered Scarlet Shoe."
The fires of hell consume me
The waters beneath the dark blue bridge are almost to my neck.
What we have to do, let us do quickly
For scandal spreads over the districts of the south
And there is no avoiding it.
Let us then complete the work of joy
For if we do it not, it is as though we did.
When Jinlian read this, she put it into her sleeve.
"He would like you to give him some token, or write a few words to him," the old woman said. "Otherwise, he will not believe that I have given you the message."
Jinlian told Chunmei to drink with old woman Xue and herself went to the inner room. She came back with a white silk handkerchief and a gold ring. On the handkerchief, she wrote a poem to express her love. When she had finished, she wrapped the handkerchief and the ring up together and gave them to the old woman.
"Give him my love," she said, "and bid him be patient. Tell him if he keeps going to his uncle's for his meals, his uncle may get tired of him and say: 'You are doing your father-in-law's business, why do you come here to eat?' It looks as though our people have not food enough to feed themselves. So tell him not to go to his uncle, but to take some money from the shop and spend it on food and cakes and things to eat with Clerk Fu. And tell him to come to the house as usual. If he does not come, it will look as though he were afraid of somebody here."
The old woman promised to tell him all these things. Then Jinlian gave her five *qian* of silver, and she went to the shop to make her report to Chen Jingji.
They found a quiet place, and old woman Xue gave him the things that Jinlian had sent. "The Fifth Lady says you must be patient," she told him. "Don't allow yourself to be drawn into a quarrel. Come to the house as usual and don't go to your uncle's for your meals. It may displease him."
She showed him the five *qian* of silver Jinlian had given her. "You see there are no secrets between us," she said. "I am sure things will go well with you, and I tell you about this money because, if she told you about it herself sometime, it would look bad for me."
"I am very grateful to you, old lady," Jingji said, and bowed low to old woman Xue.
She had hardly taken two steps away from him when she came back. "I nearly forgot one very important thing," she said. "When I came away, the Great Lady sent Xiuchun after me. She told me to sell Chunmei. She said that the maid, as well as the mistress, had been carrying on with you."
"Take her to your house," Jingji said, "and I will come and see her there."
The old woman went home.
That evening, when the moon was shining, old woman Xue came to take Chunmei away. First she went to Yueniang's room.
"We paid sixteen taels of silver for her," Yueniang said, "and I will take sixteen taels now."
Then she said to Xiaoyu: "Go and tell Chunmei. She is to go without her clothes."
Old woman Xue went to Jinlian and broke the news to her. "The Great Lady," she said, "has told me to take Chunmei away because she helped you to receive your lover secretly. She is only asking the price for which she bought her."
Jinlian opened her eyes very wide, but she could not speak. Then she began to cry. "Oh, Sister Xue," she said, "you see the kind of treatment we receive now that my husband is dead. It is only a few months since he died, yet now they mean to rob me of my maid. How utterly heartless the Great Lady is. She thinks that, now she has a child of her own, she can drag us all through the mud. But Li Ping'er's child died when it was only eighteen months old. Children have been known to die of smallpox, and we never know what Heaven may have in store for us. She will do well not to raise her hopes too high."
"I suppose his Lordship, when he was alive, took his pleasure with Sister Chunmei," the old woman said.
"'Took his pleasure' indeed!" Jinlian cried. "He treated her like part of himself. She had only to say one word and he believed ten. When she asked for one thing, he gave her a dozen. Even his wives were less considered than she was. If she suggested that he should give one of the boys ten strokes of the rod, he would not dare to give them five."
"The Great Lady is in the wrong, then," old woman Xue said. "You say his Lordship had taken his pleasure of her, yet the Great Lady is sending her away without boxes and without any clothes. She is to go just as she came. The neighbors will think that very strange, I'm sure."
"Did she tell you Chunmei was not to be allowed to take away her clothes?" Jinlian cried.
"Yes, that was her order. Xiaoyu is coming to see about it."
Chunmei heard the whole of this conversation, but she did not shed a single tear. When she saw how her mistress was crying, she said: "Mother, why do you cry? You must not worry about me when I have gone away. It would make you ill and, if you are ill, there will be no one to look after you. Let me go. I don't want any clothes. A good man will not eat food that other people throw to him, and a good girl does not wear her wedding dress."
Then Xiaoyu came. "Mother," she said, "surely you are not going to pay any attention to what the Great Lady says now. She is obstinate at the moment. Sister Chunmei has served you well. Take some of the best clothes, and let Madam Xue take them away for Chunmei as a parting gift from you. She is going away now, and there is no reason why we should say anything to the Great Lady about it."
"You are very kind," Jinlian said.
"Lady," Xiaoyu said, "we never know what is coming to us. We are like frogs and crickets living here. A fox is sorrowful when it sees a dead rabbit; creatures are always sympathetic with their own kind."
They filled Chunmei's box with the things like kerchiefs and ornaments that had belonged to her. Jinlian gave her 2 of her own best dresses and some socks, making a large parcel of them. She gave her pins, rings, and earrings. Xiaoyu took 2 pins from her hair and gave them to the girl. The pearls, headdresses, and embroidered clothes she took back to Yueniang. Chunmei said goodbye to Jinlian.
Xiaoyu cried. When they were on their way to the gate, Jinlian wanted her to go and say goodbye to Yueniang and the others but Xiaoyu advised them not to do so. Chunmei walked proudly behind old woman Xue and never turned her head. Jinlian and Xiaoyu went with her to the gate. Then Xiaoyu went back to Yueniang.
"She's gone now," she said, "and left all her clothes behind." Jinlian returned to her room. She had been accustomed to talking to Chunmei and now Chunmei was taken away from her. She was very lonely and cried bitterly.

## 109

### Sun Hsüeh-o Instigates the Beating of Ch'en Ching-chi; Dame Wang Marries Off Chin-lien to the Highest Bidder & Pan Leaves the House of Ximen

Since there's no such thing in this life
as complete satisfaction;
In one's way of coping with the world

do not be too demanding.
It's a good thing always to pay heed
only to the words of superior men;
When disputes arise never listen
to the words of petty persons.
Only regard the customs of the age
as illusory performances;
While respecting the intentions of others
by keeping them at a distance.
If one were to address perceptive women with
a word to the wise;
It would be, "Don't ever confide your troubles
to your sweetheart."[1]

From the time that Ch'un-mei left the household, P'an Chin-lien suffered from depression in her quarters. But no more of this.

To resume our story, after breakfast the next day, Ch'en Ching-chi went out on the pretext of settling accounts with a creditor and rode his mount to Auntie Hsüeh's house, where she happened to be at home. She invited him in, and Ch'en Ching-chi tied up his mule, came inside, and sat down. Tea was served to him, and he drank it, but Ch'un-mei, who was in an inner room, did not come out.

Auntie Hsüeh knowingly questioned him, saying, "Son-in-law, what have you come here to talk about?"

"I am on my way to settle accounts with a creditor up the street," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and just happened to pass by here. "Is the young lady that you came to take away last night here with you?"

"Yes, she is here," replied Auntie Hsüeh, "but I haven't found a purchaser for her yet."

"If she's here," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I would like to be able to see her, and say a few words to her."

Auntie Hsüeh deliberately put on a meretricious act, saying, "My dear son-in-law, yesterday your mother-in-law was insistent in telling me that because the two of you had been:
Colluding in chicanery,
and produced this ugly scandal, as soon as I have taken her away, I must take precautions to prevent the two of you from meeting or speaking to each other. You had better leave at once. I'm afraid that she might send a page boy here who, on seeing you, would go home and tell her about it, with the result that I would no longer have access to the household."

Ch'en Ching-chi merely responded with an ingratiating smile as he groped a tael of silver out of his sleeve, and said, "You can buy yourself some tea with this for the time being. If you accept it, I will reward you further on another day."

As for Auntie Hsüeh:
Her eyes opened at the sight of money,
and she said, "My good son-in-law, short of money as you are, you are willing to spare some for me, are you? The fact is, though, that during the twelfth month of last year I pawned someone's two pairs of embroidered pillow ends in your shop. It has been almost a year since then and, including interest, it would probably cost me some eight mace of silver to redeem them. Could you retrieve them for me by any chance?"

"That's not a problem," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "I'll retrieve them for you tomorrow morning."

Auntie Hsüeh, on the one hand, invited Ch'en Ching-chi into the inner room to get together with Ch'un-mei and, on the other hand, told her daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, to prepare a meal, saying, "I'll go buy some tea things and snacks, and pick up a jug of wine, some potted meat, and the like, for the two of them to eat."

When Ch'un-mei caught sight of Ch'en Ching-chi, she exclaimed, "Son-in-law, a fine man you are! You're just:
An executioner who likes to play with his victims,
leaving my mistress and me in such a predicament that we are at a loss for what to do in any direction. You have been responsible for putting us in this situation in which:
The exposure of misbehavior arouses disapproval."[2]

"My sister," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "you have already been expelled from their household, and I do not intend to remain there much longer myself.
He and his wife, Chao Ying-ch'un,
Will each go their separate ways.[3]
You must urge Auntie Hsüeh to find a good place for you. As far as I'm concerned:
Marinated leeks cannot be replanted
in the vegetable bed.
I plan to go to the Eastern Capital to consult with my father, and when I come back I'll not only divorce that daughter of theirs, but also demand the return of those boxes of valuables that my family entrusted to them."

Not long after he had finished speaking, Auntie Hsüeh came back with the tea things, wine, and other foodstuff that she had purchased, set up a bed-table on the k'ang, and laid out a repast so the two of them could drink wine and chat with each other. She also joined them for a cup or two. They carried on an animated dialogue for some time about Yüeh-niang's hard-heartedness.

Auntie Hsüeh said, "For her to expel such an attractive young lady as she is from the household without even allowing her to take any clothing or jewelry with her will not serve to enhance her value in the eyes of a future purchaser. And she asked for no more than the return of her original purchase price. Even when you pour clean water from one bowl into another, some of it is likely to be spilled. How mean-spirited can you get? When Ch'un-mei was about to leave, the maidservant Hsiao-yü did her a favor by inducing the Fifth Lady to provide her with two outfits of clothing. If she had not done so, what would she have had to wear when being looked over by a prospective purchaser?"

By the time they began to feel the effects of the wine, Auntie Hsüeh told her daughter-in-law, Chin Ta-chieh, to take her baby with her and go visit for a while with a neighbor so that the two of them would be at liberty to enjoy themselves in the inner room. Truly:
Just like male and female phoenixes amid
the misty clouds,
Or like sporting mandarin ducks, diving
beneath the waves;[4]
Signing a compact never to be separated
during this lifetime;
They agree to be happily bound together
in the life to come.[5]

When the two of them had finished their encounter, they prepared to part but found it:
Difficult to separate and difficult to split.[6]

Auntie Hsüeh was afraid that Yüeh-niang might send someone to spy on them and hurriedly urged Ch'en Ching-chi to get on his way, so he proceeded to mount his mule and return home.

Less than two days later, Ch'en Ching-chi came to present two gold lamé handkerchiefs and two pairs of ankle leggings to Ch'un-mei and also returned the pawned pillow ends to Auntie Hsüeh. He then spent some silver to purchase wine and proceeded to share a drink with Ch'un-mei in Auntie Hsüeh's quarters.

Unbeknownst to them, while they were drinking together, Yüeh-niang sent the page boy Lai-an to find out why Auntie Hsüeh had not yet found a buyer for Ch'un-mei, and he happened to notice the mule tethered outside the gate.

When he got home, he reported this to Yüeh-niang, saying, "Your son-in-law is also there."

Upon hearing this, Yüeh-niang became enraged, sent people to summon Auntie Hsüeh again and again, and criticized her severely when she showed up, saying, "You took that slave away with you:
Promising today that you would do it tomorrow,
And tomorrow that you would do it the next day,
while refusing to do your best to dispose of her as I commissioned you to do. It would seem that you are harboring her in order to exploit her propensity to engage in sexual affairs and thereby make some money for yourself. If you refuse to dispose of her, bring her back here. I'll get Old Mother Feng to sell her for me and will no longer patronize you in the future."

When Auntie Hsüeh heard this, with the loquaciousness of a go-between:
Wishing she had seven or eight more mouths
than nature had provided,
she exclaimed, "My Heavens! Venerable lady, you are mistaken in blaming me that way. Would you have me go after the God of Wealth with a stick? Under your patronage, venerable lady, how could I fail to do my best to dispose of her for you? Just yesterday, I took her to visit two or three potential purchasers, but none of them was willing to come up with the requisite sum. You asked me for the return of the original purchase price of sixteen taels of silver. But, as a mere go-between, how could I come up with such a sum out of my own pocket?"

"My page boy tells me," said Yüeh-niang. "that that seedling of the Ch'en family was drinking wine with her at your place today."

"Ai-ya! Ai-ya!" protested Auntie Hsüeh in consternation. "Here we go again. During the twelfth month of last year, I pawned someone's two pairs of pillow ends at your shop on Lion Street, which they have now paid to redeem. Today, your son-in-law brought the pillow ends back to me, and I offered him a drink of tea, but without even drinking it, he hurriedly mounted his mule and went his way. Since when did he come into my place to drink wine with anybody? It seems that this servant of yours is prone to:
Making up lies and telling tales."

This speech reduced Yüeh-niang to silence for a time, after which she said, "I am merely concerned that that seedling of the Ch'en family may have:
Developed ideas that induce depravity, and
Allowed his thoughts to be led astray."

"Do you take me to be a three-year-old child?" expostulated Auntie Hsüeh. "If any such thing were taking place, how could I have been unaware of it? In view of your instructions to me, do you think that I am indifferent to the relative merits of:
Long-term profits, and
Short-term gains?
When he came to my place he did not:
Stick around or sit down for any time,
but simply handed me the pillow ends and then departed without even drinking his tea. Since when did he have a chance to see the young lady from your household?
The only thing that ought to matter is the truth,
yet you have seen fit to subject me to these accusations. The fact of the matter is that, at present, Commandant Chou Hsiu would like to purchase her in the hope of obtaining a son but is only willing to offer twelve taels of silver for her. If I can get him to come up with thirteen taels, I could then weigh out the silver and turn it over to you. It is said that His Honor Chou Hsiu, on previous occasions, when attending parties at your place, has seen the young lady and been impressed by the repertoire of songs she could sing, as well as her demeanor, and that is why he is willing to spend these few taels of silver for her, despite the fact that she is not a virgin. As for the other potential purchasers, none of them will offer to put up that much."

Auntie Hsüeh thus succeeded in hammering out an agreement with Yüeh-niang on the purchase price.

Early the next day, she got Ch'un-mei's things together and saw to it that she was properly dressed and made up. She sported a cloud-shaped chignon to hold her hair in place;
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets;
she wore a blouse of red chiffon over a skirt of blue chiffon; and her feet were clad in a pair of shoes with upturned toes. Auntie Hsüeh then hired a sedan chair and escorted her to the home of Commandant Chou Hsiu. When Chou Hsiu observed that Ch'un-mei's countenance was:
Both redder and whiter,
than it was before; that her stature was:
Neither short nor tall;
and that she had a pair of tiny bound feet; he was as delighted as could be and weighed out an ingot of fifty taels of silver as her purchase price. Auntie Hsüeh took this home with her, where she chiseled off a piece worth thirteen taels, took it to the Hsi-men residence, and gave it to Yüeh-niang.

She also brought out an additional tael of silver to show her, saying, "This was given to me by His Honor Chou Hsiu as a reward for my efforts. Venerable lady, will you not also give me a little something?"

Wu Yüeh-niang felt compelled to accede to this request and weighed out five mace of silver for her. As a result, Auntie Hsüeh made a profit of thirty-seven taels and five mace of silver out of the transaction. The fact is that nine out of ten go-betweens make the money to support their households this way.

To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi now found himself in a situation in which Ch'un-mei had been sold, he no longer had access to Chin-lien, and Yüeh-niang refused to pay any attention to him. She saw to it that the doors were tightly locked, personally came out every evening to check them by lantern light, and closed and locked the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds before going to bed at night. Because of this, he felt himself to be helpless and was extremely frustrated.

This led him to quarrel with Hsi-men Ta-chieh more than once, calling her a whore time after time, and saying, "Since I married into your family as a son-in-law I have scarcely been guilty of eating you out of house and home, and your family has possession of trunkloads of my family's gold and silver. You are my wife after all, but you not only fail to look after my interests but accuse me of scrounging for food off your family. Since when have I been eating off your family for nothing?"

He attacked Hsi-men Ta-chieh so severely that he reduced her to tears.

The twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month was Meng Yü-lou's birthday, and she prepared several saucers worth of hors d'oeuvres and snacks to go with the wine and told Ch'un-hung. with the best of intentions, to take them out to the shop on the street front of the residence for Ch'en Ching-chi and Manager Fu Ming to enjoy.

Yüeh-niang objected to this, saying, "There's no need to cater to that worthless creature. If you want to provide something for Manager Fu Ming, go ahead and provide something for him to enjoy, but there is no need to cater to that creature."

But Meng Yü-lou rejected this advice, and Ch'un-hung took what she had prepared out and set it down on the counter in the shop. The jar of wine she had provided was large but was soon emptied, and Ch'en Ching-chi told Lai-an to go back and ask for more.

Manager Fu Ming objected to this, saying, "Son-in-law, there is no need to ask for more wine. This amount is adequate, and I am not going to drink any more."

But Ch'en Ching-chi rejected this advice and insisted on sending Lai-an back to get some more.

They had to wait for quite a while, before Lai-an came back and reported, "There is no more wine to be had."

Ch'en Ching-chi was already half drunk on the wine he had consumed and tried to send him back again, but when Lai-an refused to budge, he went out and bought some wine with his own money.

He then berated Lai-an, saying, "You lousy little slave, you just wait. Since your mistress is unwilling to countenance me, you slaves have also started to defy me, refusing to so much as move when I tell you to do something. Since I entered your household as a son-in-law, it can hardly be said that I have eaten enough to deplete your supply of wine or meat. When your master was alive, how did you treat me? But now that your master is dead, you've had a change of heart and begun to ignore me, doing whatever you can to get rid of me. My mother-in-law has paid heed to the slanders of you slaves and started to act defensively toward me, entrusting everything to you slaves, and nothing to me. But let her do as she pleases. I'm:
Quite inured to such alarms."

"My good son-in-law," expostulated Manager Fu Ming, "don't continue to talk that way. If they don't respect you, who do they respect? I imagine they must be too busy in the rear compound, or they would scarcely have refused to supply you with wine. It's no big deal that you should scold them that way, but:
Walls have cracks,
Fences have ears,

and someone is likely to say that you have been drinking too much."
"Venerable manager," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "you don't know what's going on. As for me:
Though wine is in my belly,
My concerns are on my mind.[7]
My mother-in-law is credulous enough to believe the slanders that petty persons have lodged against me and treats me as though I have been guilty of intercourse with someone who is not guilty of intercourse with me. What if I were to have carried on affairs with every woman in the household? If I were taken to court, it would only be a case of intercourse with my stepmothers-in-law, which would result in no more than a charge of misconduct.[8] At present, I might as well divorce that daughter of yours and then draft a complaint and take you to court. Or else, I may go to the Eastern Capital and submit a memorial to the throne inside the Myriad Years Gate. Your family has possession of trunkloads of my family's gold and silver, all of which were originally ill-gotten gains accumulated by Yang Chien and are subject to confiscation by the state. How would you like it if I were to succeed in getting these several damned houses of yours confiscated, and the women of the household all sold into servitude by the judiciary? It's not as though:
I were not out to catch fish,
But only to muddy the waters,
for the fun of it. If she had any sense, she'd acknowledge me once again as her son-in-law and treat me as she did before, which would be for the benefit of all those concerned."
When Manager Fu Ming heard these threatening words, he said, "Son-in-law, you're drunk.
Wang Ten-plus-nine,
Let's sip our wine,
and set these wanton allegations aside."
At this, Ch'en Ching-chi opened his eyes wide and glared at Manager Fu Ming, saying, "You lousy old dog! How can you accuse me of making wanton allegations, or allege that I am drunk? It's not as though I've been drinking any wine of yours. Unworthy though I may be, I am the favored son-in-law in her family, and you are no more than a cashier employed by her household. Are you also trying to get rid of me? Don't worry, you old dog. You have made more than enough money off my father-in-law over the years, and have had more than enough to eat, and yet you want to join the cabal that is seeking to drive me out, do you? No doubt, you hope to be given sole charge of the business so you can skim off the cash to support your family. In the future when I lodge a complaint and take her to court I'll be sure to include your name in the indictment."
Manager Fu Ming was not a courageous man. When he saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, he put on his outer garments and, surreptitiously heading for home, disappeared in a cloud of dust. A page boy came out to collect the utensils and take them back to the rear compound, after which Ch'en Ching-chi collapsed onto the k'ang and fell asleep. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, early in the morning, Manager Fu Ming went into the rear compound to see Yüeh-niang and told her everything that had happened the night before. Weeping and wailing, he said that he wanted to quit his job and return to his original home, turn over his account books, and engage in trade no longer.
Yüeh-niang endeavored to dissuade him, saying, "Manager Fu, just relax and carry on your business as before. Don't pay any attention to that worthless piece of goods. He is as expendable as a piece of stinking shit. Originally, on account of the fact that his family was implicated in a legal proceeding, he was sent to seek temporary refuge in our household. There were no such things as gold and silver or other valuables involved. There were only several items from Hsi-men Ta-chieh's dowry, and the luggage that they brought with them. Meanwhile, his old man went into hiding in the Eastern Capital, while the members of our household were left in fear, day and night, that some petty person might inform on him and get us into trouble. When he came here he was no more than fifteen or sixteen years old, a mere fledgling, and he has had the good fortune to be supported by his father-in-law's family for all these years, and trained to be proficient in various enterprises. But now that:
His wing feathers are dry enough for flight,
he is:
Requiting kindness with enmity,
and:
Trying to sweep it all under the rug with a
single stroke of the broom.
He's just a youngster whose words cannot be trusted. What does he understand of Heavenly principle? But, in the future, Heaven will not fail to observe his conduct. Manager Fu, just relax and carry on your business as before. Don't pay any attention to him. He will surely come to feel ashamed of himself."
In this way, Yüeh-niang succeeded in placating Manager Fu Ming. But no more of this.
One day it was one of those occasions on which:
Something is destined to happen.
The pawnshop was crowded with customers who had come to redeem their belongings, when who should appear but the wet nurse Ju-i, carrying Hsiao-ko, who had come to deliver a kettle of tea for Manager Fu Ming to drink. As she set it down on the table Hsiao-ko, in the wet nurse's arms, began to cry for all he was worth.
On seeing this, Ch'en Ching-chi, in front of the crowd of customers, addressed himself to the baby, saying:
Half facetiously but in earnest,[9]
"Little brother, my precious child, you stop that crying."
He then turned to the customers, and said, "This child behaves just as though I were his father, in that he does what I tell him to do. When I tell him to stop crying, he stops crying."
This remark stunned the customers, and Ju-i admonished him, saying, "Son-in-law, what kind of talk is that? You even went so far as to address him as your son. Just see if I don't report this to the First Lady when I go back inside."
At this, Ch'en Ching-chi ran up to her and gave the wet nurse a couple of kicks, saying in a jocular but abusive manner, "Why you crazy louse of a stinker! Go ahead and report it; but if you do, I'll kick your ass hard enough to produce a sounding fart."
The wet nurse, with the baby in her arms, promptly went back to the rear compound and wept as she told Yüeh-niang, thus and so, what Ch'en Ching-chi had said about the child in front of the crowd of customers.
If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it, while she was combing her hair in front of her mirror stand, she was rendered speechless for what seemed like half a day, and then:
Fell to the floor in a faint,[10]
Oblivious to human affairs.
Behold:
The jade from the Ch'u mountains is damaged;
Much to be lamented is Hsi-men Ch'ing's
lawfully wedded wife.
The bloom in the jeweled mirror is withered;
Despite the ninety days of spring given
by the Lord of the East.
Her flowery countenance looks dispirited;
Like the herbaceous peony in the West Garden
clinging to the red railing.[11]
Her sandalwood mouth remains speechless;
Like the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of the South
Seas engaging in meditation.
In the little garden last night the spring
wind was disastrous;
Scattering the blossoms of the river plums
all over the ground.[12]
This threw Hsiao-yü into such consternation that she called together the members of the household, high and low, to help Yüeh-niang up into a sitting position on the k'ang. Sun Hsüeh-o then jumped onto the k'ang, administered artificial respiration for some time, and poured a dose of ginger extract into her throat, but it seemed like half a day before she regained consciousness. Yüeh-niang's breathing was obstructed at first, so that all she could do was choke, without being able even to sob out a sound.
The wet nurse Ju-i told Meng Yü-lou and Sun Hsüeh-o about the facetious remarks Ch'en Ching-chi had made about Hsiao-ko in front of the customers in the pawnshop and went on to say, "I endeavored to admonish him with the best of intentions, but he chased after me and kicked me a couple of times, nearly causing me to faint with anger on the spot."
Sun Hsüeh-o continued to support Yüeh-niang in an upright position until the others had left and then, while they were alone together in the room, quietly said to her, "Mother, there is no need to get angry. If you allow yourself to get so upset that:
Anything untoward should happen to you,
that would be an even greater calamity. That youngster, because Ch'un-mei has been sold, and he can no longer have his way with that whore from the P'an household, has been frustrated enough to give vent to such allegations. Right now, one must either:
Refuse to do something;
Or not stop at anything.
Since Hsi-men Ta-chieh has already been married off, she is like a plot of land that has been sold, and there is not much we can do for her. As the saying goes:
All you get for raising toads is dropsy.
What's the point of keeping that youngster around the house anyway? Tomorrow, we ought to inveigle him into coming back to the rear compound, give him a real beating, and then drive him out the door to return to his own family. After that, we ought to summon Dame Wang. Since:
She is the one who produced this problem,
She should be the one who eliminates it.
We should get her to take that whore away from here and sell her off, just as one would dispose of dog shit or stinking piss. In this way the whole problem could be solved in a single day. What's the point of letting them continue to reside here, and thereby run the risk of their dragging us into the soup in the future?"
"What you say makes sense," responded Yüeh-niang.
They decided upon their plan there and then.
The next day, after the morning meal, Yüeh-niang arranged to have seven or eight maids and servants' wives lie in wait, armed with sticks and cudgels, and then sent the page boy Lai-an to trick Ch'en Ching-chi into coming into the rear compound for a talk.
Once he was inside, and the ceremonial gate had been closed behind him, she ordered him to kneel down in front of her and demanded, "Do you acknowledge your crime?"
Ch'en Ching-chi refused to kneel and exhibited as haughty an air as ever, while Yüeh-niang proceeded to interrogate him. There is a long set piece of parallel prose that testifies to this.
At the outset, Yüeh-niang did not offend him,
but now her countenance altered.
After this, Ch'en Ching-chi, responding to her
dressing down, raised his head,
Saying, "You need not waste your breath
with this incessant bickering.
I've got to arrive at some sort of an
understanding with you."
Yüeh-niang said, "This is your father-in-law's
private dwelling place;
It is not a Verdant Spring Bordello, or a Nest
of Orioles and Swallows.
How can you have the effrontery to flirt with
one of his womenfolk?
As your father-in-law's beloved concubine, she
is living as a widow.
How can you feel yourself entitled to engage in
flirtation with her?
And there is also that shamelessly wanton slave
who has ensnared you.
From of old, if the bitch does not wag her tail,
dogs will not engage her.
These are all offenses that besmirch the family,
and are hard to forgive."
Ch'en Ching-chi cried, "By unleashing a horde of
witches to bind Chung K'uei,[13]
You have sprung a trap so you could beat this
culprit to your heart's content.
The cheeks of my bottom find this flagellation
almost impossible to endure.
You maidservants, cease your agitation; First
Lady, forgo your perturbation.
If you don't watch out, these pitiless sticks
will end up breaking my back."
Yüeh-niang retorted, "You lousy nincompoop! Do
you dare to give me your lip?

As they say, when the ice is three feet thick,
it is not due to one day of cold.[14]
You are guilty of such unpardonable acts that
they are difficult to forgive.
You are lucky to be subjected merely to this
flailing with stalks of reed.
But if you should have the temerity to think
of doing any such thing again,
I'll cut off this perishable prick of yours
and leave you celibate for life."

Yüeh-niang, at this juncture, directed the squad of women, including Sun Hsüeh-o, Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu, Lai-chao's wife "The Beanpole," Chung-ch'iu, Hsiao-yü, and Hsiu-ch'un, to proceed, hugger-mugger, to hold Ch'en Ching-chi down on the floor and give him a drubbing with their sticks and cudgels. Hsi-men Ta-chieh saw what was going on but merely withdrew and did nothing to save her husband.

They beat the young scamp until, in desperation, he tore off his pants and exposed his organ, which was standing up as straight as a stick. This so startled the women that they dropped their sticks and cudgels and fled in all directions.

Yüeh-niang, for her part, was both annoyed and amused by this display and berated him, saying, "What a fine phony of a cuckold's spawn you are!"

As for Ch'en Ching-chi:

From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"Had it not been for this ploy of mine, how could I have escaped?"

Thereupon, he crawled to his feet, pulled up his pants with one hand, and fled out to the front compound. Yüeh-niang deputed a page boy to follow him and tell him to settle his accounts and turn them over to Manager Fu Ming. Ch'en Ching-chi realized that, under the circumstances, he could no longer remain there. After gathering up his clothes and bedding, without even saying good-bye, he proceeded to walk out of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in a huff, and head for his family's old home, now occupied by his maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, to find a place to stay. Truly:

It has always been true that gratitude for kindness
and festering resentment;
Even in a thousand years or ten thousand years
will never be allowed to gather dust.

When P'an Chin-lien heard that Ch'en Ching-chi had been beaten and expelled from the household, she felt:

Worry piled upon worry, and
Depression augmented by depression.

One day, Yüeh-niang, inspired by Sun Hsüeh-o's suggestion, sent Tai-an to summon Dame Wang. Ever since Dame Wang's son Wang Ch'ao returned home from his apprenticeship to a merchant in the Huai River region, from whom he had purloined a hundred taels of silver entrusted to him for the purchase of stock, she had felt affluent enough to give up her business of selling tea. Her son had purchased two donkeys, a set of millstones, and a sieve frame, and set himself up as a miller. When she heard that she was being summoned to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, she promptly donned her outer garments and started off.

Along the way, she said to Tai-an, "Brother, I haven't set eyes on you for a long time, but I see that you're old enough to have started wearing your hair in a bun. Have you taken a wife already?"

"No I haven't," replied Tai-an.

"Since your master is dead," said Dame Wang, "which member of your household is it who is calling for me, and what am I wanted for? No doubt the Fifth Lady is about to bear a son and would like me to help with the delivery."

"The Fifth Lady is not bearing a son," responded Tai-an, "but she has been caught carrying on an affair with her son-in-law. The First Lady would like you to take her away and marry her off to someone."

"My Heavens!" exclaimed Dame Wang. "You see, it is just as I thought, that whore, on losing her husband, could not be expected to maintain her chastity. Just as:

Dogs cannot be trained not to eat shit,

she's reverted to practicing her dirty tricks again. So it was with that son-in-law of yours, was it? What's his name?"

"His surname is Ch'en and his given name is Ching-chi," said Tai-an.

"I remember the occasion last year," said Dame Wang, "when I came to ask your master's help in that affair involving the younger brother of Ho the Ninth. Your master was not at home at the time, and that lousy whore not only failed to invite me to stay for a chat in her quarters but refused to come up with so much as a broken needle for me. All she did was to tell a maidservant to pour me a cup of plain tea, after drinking which, I left. I had thought that she would remain a member of his household for:

A thousand if not ten thousand years.[15]

Who could have anticipated that she is now going to be sent away. What a home-breaker of a whore she is. Quite aside from the fact that it was I had who arranged her marriage into such a prestigious household; even if it had been any ordinary person, she should not have been treated so skimpily."

"Because of the chaos she and our son-in-law have created," said Tai-an, "the First Lady almost died of anger yesterday and has already expelled him from the household. And now, she wants you to take her away as well."

"When she entered the household, she came in a sedan chair," said Dame Wang. "And she should be allowed to leave in one as well. She brought a trunkful of belongings with her when she came, and she should also be allowed to take one with her now."

"That goes without saying," said Tai-an. "The First Lady will decide what is appropriate."

As they engaged in this discussion, they arrived at the door of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, and Dame Wang went back to Yüeh-niang's quarters, where she bowed in greeting and sat down.

After they had finished the tea served by a maidservant, Yüeh-niang said, "Dame Wang, I would not have invited you here for no reason."

She then proceeded to spell out, thus and so, all of the preceding events involving P'an Chin-lien and concluded by saying, "Since:

You are the one who produced this problem,
You should be the one who eliminates it.
One guest does not trouble two hosts.

I would, therefore, prevail upon you to take her away again and either marry her off to someone else, or dispose of her in a way that allows her to continue:

Eating the bread of idleness.

Now that my husband is dead, I can no longer afford to maintain such people as this. Needless to say, that dead devil of mine spent vast sums of money on her; enough to cast a silver figurine to match her dimensions. If you give me back whatever you manage to marry her off for, I can use it to hold a sutra recitation for my husband, so some good may come of it."

"Venerable lady," said Dame Wang, "I understand that it is not the money that you are really concerned about, but the need to rid yourself of this troublemaker. I will not let you down."

She then went on to say, "Today is a propitious day for such an undertaking. I might as well take her away forthwith. But there is another issue. She brought a trunkful of her belongings with her and arrived in a sedan chair. She ought to be provided with a sedan chair for her departure."

"I'll let her take a trunk of her belongings with her," said Yüeh-niang, "but I won't allow her to go in a sedan chair."

"My mistress talks that way at the height of her rage," said Hsiao-yü. "But she will not fail to provide a sedan chair when the time comes for her to leave since:

Exposing her face to the public gaze,
would only cause our neighbors to laugh at us."

Yüeh-niang did not say anything in response to this but sent the maidservant Hsiu-ch'un to the front compound to summon Chin-lien. When Chin-lien saw that Dame Wang was there in the room, her eyes opened wide with surprise, and she bowed in greeting before sitting down.

Dame Wang opened the conversation, saying, "You had better get your things together right away. The First Lady has instructed me just now to take you away with me today."

"How long has it been since my husband died?" said Chin-lien. "As for me:

What fault have I committed;
What offense am I guilty of?
Why should I be driven away for no good reason?"

Yüeh-niang[16] responded, "Don't you:

Feign being more silly than you are,[17]
Pretending to be both dumb and deaf.[18]

It has always been true that:

When a snake makes a hole for itself
it knows where it is.[19]

Whatever a person sees fit to do,
Is clear in the mind of the doer.

Chin-lien, you had better not:

Disguise your perfidy by playing dumb,[20]
Showing an innocent face to both sides.[21]
Praising here and faultfinding there.

In my hands you can dispense with your:

Clever words and deceptive phrases,
Apple polishing and favor currying.[22]

It has always been true that:

There is no party that does not come to an end.
The beam that projects is the first one to rot.[23]
Just as a man has his reputation,
A tree has its shadow.
Flies don't cluster on eggs
unless they're cracked.

You had better not assume that you can continue to support yourself by committing adultery. And right now, I'm going to send you off to oblivion."

Chin-lien responded:

"If you hit someone, avoid hitting his face,
If you berate him, don't expose his faults.[24]

As the sayings go:

If one cock dies, another will crow in its stead.
He who works a sieve will have some grain to eat.[25]
Who can ever defend his head with an iron helmet?
Who can ever shield his eyes with bamboo matting?
Human beings are likely to meet each other again,
Just as fallen tree leaves return to their roots.

You ought not to:

Drive people out with bare hands and naked fists.[26]
In arguing don't heed the words of petty persons.

Truly:

A decent woman does not wear
her bridal clothes;
A decent man does not consume
his inheritance.
It is useless to complain that
the weather is cold."

There and then, after Chin-lien and Yüeh-niang had wrangled for a while, Yüeh-niang accompanied her to her quarters and agreed to let her take with her two trunks worth of belongings, a table with drawers in it, four outfits of clothing, a number of clasps, combs, hairpins, and rings, and a set of bedding. She also stuffed the shoes and foot-bindings she was accustomed to wear into one of the trunks. She then ordered Ch'iu-chü to move back into the rear compound and put a lock on the door to Chin-lien's quarters.

Chin-lien proceeded to don her outer garments, bade farewell to Yüeh-niang, and wept profusely in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet. She also paid a visit to Meng Yü-lou's quarters. The two of them had been like sisters to each other, but now:

One fine day they were fated to part,[27]
and they could not help shedding tears together.

Meng Yü-lou also gave her a pair of gold hairpins with bowl-shaped ends, a jacket of kingfisher-blue satin, and a red skirt, without Yüeh-niang's knowledge, saying, "Sister Six, from now on, you and I must:

Spend more time apart than together.

I hope you can find a good home, and go on to enjoy a good life. It has always been true that:

Though you erect a thousand li marquee,
There is no party that does not come to an end.

If you find a home, send someone to tell me, so when I go out I may be able to come see you, and thus fulfill our sisterly feelings."

Thereupon, they bade each other farewell with tears in their eyes.
As Chin-lien was about to go out the gate, Hsiao-yü escorted her and surreptitiously presented her with two gold-headed pins.
"Sister," Chin-lien responded, "it would seem you actually have some human feelings for me."
By the time Chin-lien got into the sedan chair at the gate, Dame Wang had already hired workers to carry off her trunks and the table that Yüeh-niang had allowed her to take. Only Meng Yü-lou and Hsiao-yü saw Chin-lien off in her sedan chair, after which they went back inside. Truly:
Of the ten thousand things that create
grief in this human world;
Nothing exceeds the severance of death
and separation of the living.
To resume our story, when Chin-lien arrived at Dame Wang's home, Dame Wang put her into her inner chamber, where she slept together with her at night. Dame Wang's son, Wang Ch'ao, had grown up to be a tall young man and had started to wear his hair in a bun, although he had not yet taken a wife. A bed had been provided in the outer room for him to sleep on.
The next day, P'an Chin-lien made herself up as usual with:
Exaggeratedly painted eyebrows and eyes,
and stood behind the hanging door-blind gawking at the passersby. When she had nothing else to do, she sat on the k'ang, either:
Painting her brows and making up her eyes,
Or idly strumming her *p'i-p'a*.
When Dame Wang was not at home, she spent her time playing at cards or board games with Wang Ch'ao. Dame Wang, for her part, went about her business as usual, sweeping up the flour from the mill, or feeding the donkeys, without paying any attention to them. It was not long before, as:
The mornings and evenings came and went,[28]
she succeeded in seducing Wang Ch'ao. At night, after waiting till Dame Wang had fallen asleep, the woman would get off the k'ang, on the pretext of needing to urinate, go into the outer room, and get into bed with Wang Ch'ao.
As the two of them went at it together one night, they shook the bed until the creaking became audible enough to wake up Dame Wang, who asked, "Where is that noise coming from?"
"It's only the cat chasing a rat under the counter," replied Wang Ch'ao.
In her half dreaming state, Dame Wang muttered, "It must be because there is some bran and flour lying about the room that this annoying creature is keeping us awake during:
The third watch in the middle of the night."
Later, on hearing the sounds of movement as the bed continued to creak, Dame Wang asked again, "Where is that noise coming from?"
Wang Ch'ao replied, "The cat has caught the rat and is making a noise as he chews at it in the hole under the k'ang."
Dame Wang bent her ear to listen and, sure enough, it sounded like a cat worrying its prey in the hole under the k'ang. Only then did she cease asking about it. As soon as the woman and the young scamp had finished their business, she quietly climbed back onto the k'ang and went to sleep as before.
There are several lines of double entendre that describe this rat very well:
Your body is small, but your daring
is great;
Your muzzle is pointed, and prone to
mischief.
On seeing anyone, you hide yourself
away;
But the squeaks you create can still
be heard.
You disturb one's sleep in the middle
of the night.
Unwilling to follow the rules of good
behavior;
You are given to boring your way into
cracks.
And there is another symptom of your
knavery:
You can never abandon your taste for
stolen sweets.
One day, Ch'en Ching-chi, upon learning that Chin-lien had been expelled from the household and was temporarily lodged in Dame Wang's home while being offered in marriage, took two strings of copper cash, along with some silver, and made his way to Dame Wang's home. When he arrived there, Dame Wang was engaged in sweeping up the donkey droppings in front of her door.
Ch'en Ching-chi stepped forward and greeted her with a deep bow, upon which Dame Wang inquired, "Brother, what do you want?"
"Would you please allow me to speak to you inside?" said Ch'en Ching-chi.
Dame Wang, accordingly, ushered him inside, whereupon Ch'en Ching-chi took off his eye shades and asked, "Is not the woman named P'an the Sixth from the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing lodging here while being offered in marriage?"
"What is your relationship to her?" asked Dame Wang.
Ch'en Ching-chi replied with an ingratiating smile, "I would not deceive you ma'am. I am her younger brother, and she is my elder sister."
Dame Wang appraised him by:
Looking him over from top to bottom,[29]
for a while and then said, "Since when does she have any younger brother? I know nothing of such a one. Don't try to deceive me. I imagine you must be the son-in-law of the household, surnamed Ch'en, who has come here in the hope of pulling the wool over my eyes; but I won't let you get away with it."
Ch'en Ching-chi laughed at this and then pulled the two strings of copper cash out from his waist and laid them before her, saying, "These two strings of cash can serve you temporarily to defray the cost of a cup of tea. If you will only consent to let me see her, I will reward you more generously on another day."
When Dame Wang saw the money, she reacted more meretriciously than ever, saying, "Don't talk about rewarding me. The First Lady of the household ordered me not to let any riffraff look her over. But I'll demean myself so far as to make you a proposition. If you want to have a single interview with this woman, give me five taels of silver. If you want to see her a second time, give me ten taels of silver. If you decide to marry her, it will cost you a hundred taels of silver, in addition to which there will be a go-between's fee of ten taels of silver. I don't go in for idle negotiations. What's the point of offering me these two strings of cash that are:
Hardly enough to discolor the water?"
When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that the procuress was adamant in refusing the little he had offered, he plucked a pair of gold-headed, silver-shafted, pins out of his hair that were worth five mace of silver, knelt down on the ground:
Dragging his legs like a chicken
on the chopping block,
and said, "Dame Wang, pray accept what I am offering. I will bring you another tael of silver another day, without fail. Let me meet with her, and allow us to exchange a few words, that's all."
Dame Wang, thereupon, after accepting his hairpins and silver, said, "You go inside and see her, say what you have to say, and then come out again. I won't allow you to just sit there:
Ogling her with your hungry eyes.
And you must be sure to bring me the extra tael of silver you have promised tomorrow."
Thereupon, she lifted aside the portiere and let Ch'en Ching-chi into the inner room, where the woman was sitting on the k'ang engaged in stitching a shoe.
When she saw Ch'en Ching-chi, she put down the shoe vamp she was working on and complained to him, saying, "A fine man you are! Leaving me betwixt and between:
Unable to reach the village ahead,
Or make it back to the inn behind.
You may have what it takes to get started,
but you don't carry through.
You put me in a predicament in which:
The exposure of misbehavior arouses disapproval,
while you disappeared without leaving a shadow behind and didn't even come back to see how I was doing. Ch'un-mei and I have been forcibly separated:
You to the east and I to the west.[30]
And whose fault was that?"
As she spoke, she clutched at Ch'en Ching-chi and began to weep bitterly. Dame Wang objected to her weeping, fearing that it would be overheard.
"My sister," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "on your account, I have been:
Skinned alive and cut to the quick;
while, on my account, you have:
Endured anger and suffered disgrace.
It is not that I have refused to come see you. Yesterday, I went to Auntie Hsüeh's place, where I learned that Ch'un-mei has already been sold to the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu. I also learned that you had been expelled from the household and were staying at Dame Wang's place, waiting to be married off. Today, I made a point of coming to see you in order to discuss matters together.
Our feelings are hard to disregard;[31]
We can never agree to be separated.
So what are we to do about it? At present, I have made up my mind to divorce my wife, the daughter of that household, and demand that the trunks of gold and silver that my family entrusted to them in the past be returned to me. If they refuse to do so, I will go to the Eastern Capital and submit a memorial, together with a legal complaint, to the Emperor inside the Myriad Years Gate. If they propose to return them to me after that, it will be too late. I can then, surreptitiously, using:
An assumed name and appropriated identity,
pop you into a sedan chair and take you into my household, so that:
We can remain forever reunited,
as husband and wife. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."
"Right now," said the woman, "my godmother Dame Wang is asking a hundred taels of silver for me. Do you have such a sum of silver to give her?"
"Why is she demanding so much?" asked Ch'en Ching-chi.
"Your mother-in-law," said Dame Wang, "says that your father-in-law, in the past, expended more than enough money on her to cast a silver figurine to match her dimensions. She insists upon the price of a hundred taels of silver. Not a bit less will do."
"I will not deceive you," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but the warm feelings between myself and Sister Six are such that:
We can never agree to be separated.
Will you not consent to lower the price by half, to something like fifty or sixty taels of silver? I can go to my maternal uncle Chang Kuan's place and rent two or three rooms from him, so I would have a home into which to take Sister Six as my wife.
That would constitute 'a fling in the spring breeze,'
even though you would make a little less off the transaction."
"Quite aside from fifty taels of silver," said Dame Wang, "I would not let you have her even for eighty taels of silver. Just yesterday, Magnate Ho, the silk merchant from Hu-chou, offered me seventy taels of silver for her. And Chang the Second from Main Street, who is currently serving as judicial commissioner, sent two adjutants offering eighty taels of silver, duly weighed out in two packets, but it was not enough, and they had to take it back with them. You're just a youngster with:
An empty mouth uttering empty words.
And yet you have the nerve to try to take advantage of me. But I'm not about to let myself be fleeced."
There and then, she strode out into the street and called out in a loud voice, saying, "Just whose son-in-law is it who is brazen enough to propose to marry his mother-in-law, and has the nerve to come farting around my place in order to do it?"
Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation by this that he pulled the old woman inside with one hand, got down on his knees before her, and pleaded, "Dame Wang, pray be quiet. I'll accept the price of a hundred taels of silver that you demand. The only problem is that my father is in the Eastern Capital. I'll set out for the Eastern Capital tomorrow in order to get the money from him."
"Since you are doing this for me," the woman said, "don't you quibble over the price with my godmother, but go get the money as fast as you can. My only fear is that if you are too late, I may be married off to someone else and won't end up belonging to you after all."
"I'll hire a horse and travel by double stages, both day and night," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I should be back in half a month, at most, or as little as ten days."
Dame Wang said, "As the saying goes: the first one to cook the rice is the first to eat. In addition, there is my go-between's fee of ten taels of silver. You must not come up short. I want to make that absolutely clear."
"There's no need to remind me," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "Your kindness will be amply rewarded; I'll never dare to forget it." As soon as they finished their discussion, Ch'en Ching-chi said goodbye, went out the door, returned home, and packed his bags for the trip. Early the next morning, he hired a horse and set out for the Eastern Capital to get the money he needed. The trip of his was truly a case of the Green Dragon and the White Tiger accompany each other; good fortune and bad fortune cannot be safely predicted.

Chen Jingji, one morning after breakfast, pretended that he had money to collect, took a horse, and went to old woman Xue's house. The old woman was at home and asked him to come in. Jingji tethered his horse outside and went in. After he had taken tea, the old woman said: "What can I do for you, Brother-in-law?"
"I was out collecting some money," Jingji said, "and thought I would call to see you. I hear the maid came to you yesterday. Is she still here?"
"Yes. I have not found a master for her yet."
"I should like to see her. May I have a word with her?"
The old woman pretended to hesitate. "Good Brother-in-law," she said, "the Great Lady gave me very strict instructions. She said that this maid was being sent away because she and you had been misbehaving yourselves. I wasn't to let you see her. So go away, please. She might be sending some of her boys here. If they came and saw you, there would be trouble for me when they went back and told the Great Lady. I should never be able to go there again."
The young man smiled and took a tael of silver from his sleeve. "Buy yourself a cup of tea with this," he said, "I will give you more, later."

Then the old woman agreed. "I am not in any need of money at the moment," she said. "Perhaps you will keep it for me and give it me some other time. But one thing I do want. At the end of last year, I pawned two pairs of embroidered pillow ends at your pawnshop. That is about twelve months ago and, including the interest, I should probably have to pay eight *qian* of silver. Will you get them for me?"
"You shall have them tomorrow," Jingji said.
The old woman asked him to go to the inner room, and there he found Chunmei. She told her daughter-in-law to cook something for them, and went off herself to buy cakes, wine, and meat for Chen Jingji and Chunmei.
"Brother," Chunmei said, when she saw Jingji, "a fine fellow you are! Nobody but a murderer would have brought my mistress and me to such a pass that we can neither rise nor fall. Now the secret is out, and you see how people hate us."
"Sister, you have finished with that household now, and I don't see why I should bother about it any more. In this world, we have to go our own ways. See that Madam Xue finds a good home for you. When the fruit of the fields has been dug up and taken away, it can never return whence it came. That is how it is with me. I shall go to the Eastern Capital to see what my father has to say. Then I shall come back and divorce my wife, and claim the boxes and things that those people have of mine."
Old woman Xue soon came back with the refreshments. A table was set and the pair sat down and drank together. Old woman Xue joined them, and they chatted together.
"The Great Lady is very unfeeling," the old woman said. "To a beautiful girl like you, she might at least have given ornaments and clothes. It will be very awkward when you have to go to a new master's house. And she asked the same money for you as she paid. It is like pouring clean water from one cup to another. Some is bound to be spilled on the way. Yes, indeed, she is very, very mean. When you came away with me, Xiaoyu asked your mistress to give you two dresses. Without them, you wouldn't have had a rag to put on when you go to your new home."
When they had had wine enough, old woman Xue told her daughter-in-law to take the baby away, and left them alone to amuse themselves.
She was afraid that Yueniang might send someone to see what was happening, so she would not let Jingji stay very long. He mounted his horse and went home. In a day or two he gave Chunmei two kerchiefs and two pairs of drawers, and got the pillow ends for old woman Xue. He gave the old woman some money to buy wine for him to drink with Chunmei. Unfortunately, Yueniang sent Laian to the house to find out why the old woman had not found a master for Chunmei. Laian saw Jingji's horse outside, and went back at once and told his mistress.
Yueniang was very angry, and sent one boy after another to fetch the old woman. When she came, Yueniang scolded her severely.
"You have the maid, yet you keep putting off finding a master for her. You think you'll make a little extra money for yourself by keeping her to carry on with some young rascal. If you can't attend to this business, let me have the maid back again and I'll give the job to old woman Feng. You'll never be allowed near the place again."
Then old woman Xue plied her go-between's mouth. "Heaven! Heaven!" she cried. "Your ladyship really must not blame me. Do you think I would chase the god of wealth away with a stick? You were kind enough to give me this job, and I should never have the boldness not to get on with it. Yesterday, I took the maid to several places, but I didn't succeed in selling her. You ask sixteen taels for her, but I haven't got money enough to pay for her before I sell her."
"The boys tell me," Yueniang said, "that young Chen has been hanging about your place drinking with the maid."
"Ai ya!" the old woman cried. "What a lie! He certainly called to see me because he had to bring me two pillow ends that I left at your pawnshop twelve months ago. Since he had done me that favor, I asked him to have a cup of tea, but he would not and rode away on his horse at once. He did not drink wine at my place. What stories your boys have been telling you!"
Yueniang did not say anything for a long time. At last she said slowly: "I should not be surprised if that young man's passion put wrong ideas into his head."
"I am not a three-year-old child," old woman Xue said, "and it was easy to see what the position was. You gave me your orders, and I had to carry them out. He didn't stay a single minute at my house, just handed me the pillow ends, and went away without even a cup of tea. He hadn't time to see the maid. Really, Lady, you must make sure of the facts before you blame me. Now, his Lordship Zhou wants a girl to ensure the continuance of his family, but he does not want to pay more than twelve taels. I might get thirteen taels out of him. His Lordship has been here to parties and seen her. He liked her appearance; she is beautiful and can sing sweetly, or he would not have offered so much. You must remember that she is not a virgin, and we can hardly expect so high a price from anybody else."
Yueniang agreed to accept this sum and, the next day, old woman Xue took Chunmei to Major Zhou's house. The girl was beautifully painted and wore a headdress of pearls and ornaments. She was dressed in a red silk coat and blue silk skirt. Her shoes were small and pointed. Major Zhou thought her more beautiful than ever. He gave the old woman a piece of silver worth about fifty taels.
Old woman Xue took the silver back to her own place, cut off a piece amounting to thirteen taels, and gave it to Yueniang. She brought another tael with her, and told Yueniang that Major Zhou had given it to her as a reward for her services. She asked Yueniang for something more, and was given five *qian* of silver. So, all together, she made thirty-seven taels and five *qian* from this deal. Such is the way of go-betweens, nine out of ten of whom make their living in this way.
Chunmei was lost to Chen Jingji, and Jinlian was out of his reach. Yueniang was very careful about doors and windows. Every evening she took a lantern, went around the whole house, and made sure that all the doors were bolted before she went to bed. Jingji was powerless, and it made him very impatient. He quarreled with his wife.
"Strumpet!" he shouted. "Let me tell you straight out that I am the son-in-law in this family. I'm not a beggar. I'm sick of the place, and your people are keeping all my chests full of gold and silver. You are my wife, but do you take my part? No, you talk about my begging my food here. Do I ever eat a thing without rendering service in return?"
His wife cried.
It was the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, Meng Yulou's birthday. She got ready some dishes and wine and, out of the kindness of her heart, told Chunhong to take it to the shop for Clerk Fu and Chen Jingji. Yueniang tried to stop her. "That young man is a scoundrel," she said. "Don't have any dealings with him. If you would like to send something to Clerk Fu, well and good, but don't give that young man anything."
Yulou did not pay any heed. She told Chunhong to take the things to them. The boy put down the food on the counter of the shop. When Jingji had finished the jar of wine, he was still not satisfied and told the boy to go back and ask for more.
"I have had enough," Clerk Fu said. "I don't think we need ask for any more."
But Jingji insisted, and Laian was sent to ask for more wine. Sometime later he came back. "There is no more wine in the inner court," he told them. Jingji was already half tipsy. He again told the boy to go and fetch more wine, but the boy did not move. Then Jingji took some of his own money and bought wine. As he drank it, he cursed Laian.
"You wait, you thievish slave! Your mistress treats me badly, and you, you slave, think you can look down on me too. You won't go and do what I ask you. You know I am the son-in-law in this family. I am tired of eating and drinking in this haphazard way. You know how they treated me when my father-in-law was alive. Now he is dead, they sing a very different tune. Nobody bothers about me any more, and all they want is to get rid of me. My mother-in-law believes every little story the slaves carry to her. She entrusts her business to slaves and has no confidence in me. Let her do as she likes: I have patience enough to endure this injustice."
Clerk Fu tried to cheer the young man. "You mustn't talk like that," he said. "If they don't respect you, whom do they respect? I am sure they must be busy now. It is not that they don't want to give you the wine. Your scolding the boy doesn't matter, but the walls have ears. If anybody hears you, they will say: "That young man is drunk again.' "
"Old friend," Jingji said, "you don't understand. I may have wine in my belly but I know what I'm talking about. My mother-in-law listens to every bit of tittle-tattle, and believes that everything about me is bad. She thinks that it is I who have made a fool of other people and not others who have made a fool of me. But if I amuse myself with every woman in that household, and she brings a case against me in the courts, it is no more than a case of carrying on with one's late father-in-law's women, and that is only a matter of imprudence. First, I shall divorce her daughter. Then I shall go to the courts myself, or else to the Eastern Capital, and I shall accuse her of detaining many chests full of gold and silver that ought either to belong to me or be given to the authorities, since they came from Yang Jian. If I do that, her house will be confiscated, and all the women will be sold. I am not hoping to catch any fish: all I wish is to stir up the mud. If she had any sense, she would treat me as her son-in-law as she used to do, then everything would be all right."
Clerk Fu did not care for the tone the young man was taking. "Brother-in-law," he said, "you are certainly drunk, and you are talking without thinking."
Chen Jingji opened his eyes wide and glared at Clerk Fu. "You thievish old dog!" he said haughtily. "Do you suggest that I am drunk, and don't know what I'm talking about? Well, it is not any wine of yours I'm drinking. Even if I am a scoundrel, I am still the honorable son-in-law of this household and you are a paid hireling. Will you dare to treat me badly too? You old dog! Wait! During the last few years, you have made money enough out of my father-in-law, and you have eaten his food. Now you have evil ideas in your head and you think, if you get rid of me as soon as you can, you will be able to make yourself the only man who can transact business here. If I send an accusation to the courts, you may be sure your name will be on it."
Clerk Fu was not a very brave man and, seeing that things did not seem to be taking a good turn, he put on his clothes and went home as fast as he could. The boy cleared the things away and took them to the inner court. Jingji lay down on the bed and went to sleep.
The next day, very early, Clerk Fu went to Yueniang and told her what had happened. There were tears in his eyes when he suggested that he should go away, give up the business, and hand over the accounts to her.
"Go on as usual," Yueniang said to him gently. "Treat that rogue as though he were some stinking offal, and don't pay the slightest attention to him. He came here because he was in trouble with the authorities, and only intended to spend a short time here. I should like to know where are all these treasures he spoke to you about. All I know of are my daughter's furniture and a few trunks. I remember how his father got away. We were terrified lest somebody should find out and spread the news about him. We were worried day and night. When he came here, he was only sixteen or seventeen years old and like a hunted animal. He has lived on my husband's kindness ever since, and everything he knows about business he has learned here. Now that his wings have grown, he means to repay our kindness by hatred, and to pay no account to all the things we have done for him. What a young man! He seems to have no conscience and to disregard the principle of Heaven utterly. I am watching, and I shall see whether Heaven prospers him or not. My friend, go on as you always have done, and pay no heed to him. The time will come when that young man will feel ashamed of himself."
One day, something seemed destined to happen. There were a number of people in the pawnshop redeeming their things. Ruyi'er came with a pot of tea for Clerk Fu, carrying the baby Xiaoge in her arms. The baby howled, and she put the pot down on the table.
"Baby," Chen Jingji said, "don't cry." Then he turned to the people who were there and said, with a half-serious air: "Doesn't it seem clear that he is my own child? When I tell him to stop crying, he stops."
Nobody made any answer.
"Brother-in-law," Ruyi'er said, "I suppose you think that is a clever thing to say. You don't know your place. I shall tell my mistress about this."
Jingji went over and kicked her twice. He laughed and said: "You thievish creature! So I had no right to talk in that way, hadn't I? Well, now I am kicking your backside so as to make a sound that people should listen to."
The nurse picked up the baby and went to the inner court and told Yueniang all about it. She cried. "That is how he talked about the baby before all those people," she said.
Yueniang was dressing her hair before a mirror. When she heard this, she could not speak. Suddenly she fell forward on the floor in a faint. Xiaoyu was greatly alarmed. She called for nearly everybody in the house, and they picked up Yueniang and put her on the bed. Sun Xue'e jumped on the bed and lifted her up and down. After a while they were able to pour some ginger water down her throat. At last Yueniang came around, but her breath came with difficulty. She sobbed, but could not cry out. Ruyi'er repeated Jingji's remarks to Yulou and Xue'e. "I reproved him," she said, "and he came and kicked me. I nearly fainted on the spot."
When the others had gone away, Xue'e stayed to look after Yueniang. "Lady, it is no use being angry with him," she said. "It would be most serious if you fell ill of anger. That fellow is annoyed because you sold Chunmei and because he cannot get here to see that strumpet Jinlian. That is why he says things of this sort. Now let us make an end of this business once and for all. Your stepdaughter is married to him. We have to regard her as a piece of land that has been sold, and we cannot help her very much. As the proverb says: when once the frog gets into the water, it must take the consequences. But why should we keep that young man here any longer? Send for him. Let us give him a sound drubbing and drive him away. Then send for old woman Wang to take that strumpet away and sell her to anybody who will buy her. When we have got rid of these evil elements, we may have peace. I see no reason why we should deliberately keep them there. If we do, we may all suffer in the future."
"You are right," Yueniang said.
They decided upon a plan. The next day, Yueniang gave her maids and women clubs, seven or eight of them altogether, and hid them about the place. Then she sent Laian to summon Chen Jingji. The second door was closed when the young man went in.
"Kneel down," Yueniang said.
The young man refused, and turned his head impudently away, without speaking.
"You know what you have done?" Yueniang said.
Jingji paid no heed.
Yueniang was furious. With Xue'e, Laixing's wife, Laizhao's wife, Xiaoyu, Xiuchun and some others, she caught hold of him and threw him to the ground. Clubs, long and short, descended furiously upon him. Ximen Dajie went away and never spoke a word to save her husband.
In desperation, the young man pulled down his trousers and displayed his manhood. This startled the women; they all threw down their clubs and ran in every direction. Yueniang was annoyed, but she could not help being amused. She called him a turtle with nothing to boast of, but Jingji was pleased with himself. "If I had not thought of that," he said to himself, "I should never have got away alive." He got up and ran away, holding his trousers up with one hand. Yueniang told some of the boys to go after him and see that he cleared his accounts and handed them over to Clerk Fu.
It was now clear to Chen Jingji that he could stay there no longer. He packed his clothes and his belongings and, without saying good-bye to anyone, left Ximen Qing's house in a very bad temper. He went to stay at his Uncle Zhang's.
When Jinlian heard this, she was more melancholy and depressed than ever. Yueniang did what Xue'e had suggested, and sent Daian for old woman Wang.
The old woman had given up her tea business since she had come into some money. Her son, Wang Chao, who had been to the Huai country with some merchants, had come back with a hundred taels that he had stolen. Old woman Wang bought two donkeys, millstones and sieves, and had set herself up as a miller. When she heard that Ximen's people wished to see her, she hurriedly dressed and went with Daian.
"Brother," she said, as they went along, "it can't be very long since I saw you last, but I see, from your hair, that you have now reached man's estate. Are you married yet?"
"No," Daian said.
"Why have they sent for me?" the old woman said. "Your father is dead. Is the Fifth Lady going to have a baby and wants me to be the midwife?"
"The Fifth Lady is not going to have a son," Daian said. "She has had rather too much of a son-in-law. The Great Lady is going to ask you to take her away."
"Heavens!" old woman Wang cried. "I was sure she would not be able to hold herself in check after your master died. Dogs can never get out of their habit of sniffing about the filth. So she has been misbehaving herself. I know the young man. What is his name?"
"Chen Jingji," Daian said.
"Oh yes, now I remember. Last year I went to see your master with old He the Ninth. Your master was not at home, and that strumpet took me to her room. She didn't give me a thing, not even a needle. All she gave me was a cup of tea. I came away. I thought she was settled there for a thousand years, and now she is to be sent away. Oh, what a splendid whore! It was I who arranged her marriage, and really she ought not to have treated me like that, even if I had been somebody else."
"She and the young man made such a scandal they nearly killed the Great Lady," Daian said. "Now he has been kicked out, and my mistress wants you to take this one away."
"When she came, she came in a sedan chair," the old woman said, "and she will have to leave in one. And she will have some things to take. I suppose they will give her some boxes?"
"Of course," Daian said, "but the Great Lady will tell you all about that."
So they came to the house. The old woman went to see Yueniang, made a reverence, and sat down. The maid brought tea.
"Old woman Wang," Yueniang said, "I should not have asked you to come except for a matter of some importance." She told her all about the business of Jinlian. "When she came here," she said, "you brought her. I didn't wish to bring anyone else into the matter, so I sent for you to take her away. I don't care whether she marries again or not, I only wish to see the last of her. My husband is dead, and I can't control so many people. I don't care how much my husband spent on her, but I think he must have spent enough to make a woman of silver. I leave the matter entirely in your hands. Give me whatever you get for her and I will spend the money on services for my dead husband. So perhaps some good will come of it."
"I see, Lady," the old woman said, "it isn't that you want the money. You are just anxious to get rid of the cause of so much trouble. I understand, and I will do what you desire. This is a good day, and I may as well take her with me now. But when she came, she had some property of her own and she came in a sedan chair. She must have a chair now."
"She may have her boxes, but she will get no sedan chair from me," Yueniang said.
"You say this because you are angry," old woman Wang said, "but you must let her have a chair, or, when the neighbors see it, they will laugh at you."
Yueniang said nothing. After a while she sent Xiuchun to fetch Jinlian.
When the woman saw old woman Wang there, she was excited. She made a reverence to Yueniang and sat down.
"Lady," old woman Wang said, "you must get your things together. The Great Lady has told me to take you away with me."
"My husband died only a short time ago," Jinlian said, "and I have done nothing wrong. Why should I be driven away like this without the slightest cause?"
"There is no use pretending you do not know what it is for," the old woman said. "When a snake goes through a hole in the wall, it knows what it's about. You know what you have done."
"Don't talk such nonsense," Jinlian said. "It is no use your using high-flown language with me. You are the very one who is always helping people to do things they should not."
There has never been a time when a feast did not come to an end. The beams that stand out are those that decay first. Trees cast their shadow, and each one of us has his own reputation to save. Flies cannot get into an egg if there is no crack in it.
Jinlian saw that things were in a bad way for her. She realized that now she must leave this house. "If you must beat a man," she said, "do not strike him on the face; and if you quarrel with anyone, do not talk about his faults. You have the upper hand now, but do not abuse your power. I have been here many years. Why should you drive me away without mercy, because you listen to the tittle-tattle of slaves and serving women? I will go. It is all the same to me. I warn you, though, that you and others will have to stay here to the ends of your lives. See that you don't bring scandal upon yourselves."
Yueniang went to her room. She got out two boxes, a small table, four dresses, a few ornaments, earrings and pins and a set of bedclothes. She filled up the boxes with shoes and socks. She told Qiuju to come to her, and Jinlian's room was locked up.
Jinlian dressed and said good-bye to Yueniang. Then she went to Ximen Qing's tablet and sobbed. Afterwards, she went to see Yulou. They had been sisters for a long time, and now, when they had to part, they both shed tears. Without saying anything to Yueniang, Yulou gave her a pair of gold pins, a light blue silk dress, and a red skirt.
"Sister," she said, "we shall have few chances to see each other in the future. Look for a good home and go forward. The proverb says: every banquet must come to an end, and now we must say good-bye. When you find a home, ask someone to let me know. When I go out, I may be able to come and see you. We love one another as sisters."
They left one another in tears. Xiaoyu went with Jinlian to the gate and quietly gave her two gold hairpins. "Sister," Jinlian said to her, "you are very kind." Old woman Wang had already found somebody to carry the things. Only Yulou and Xiaoyu saw Jinlian get into her sedan chair.
When the woman came to old woman Wang's house, she was taken to the inner room and they slept together during the night.

Wang Chao was now grown up and his hair was dressed as a man's. But he was not yet married, and slept in the other room. The day after her arrival, Jinlian dressed very daintily and stood looking out from behind the lattice. She had nothing to do and spent her time painting her eyebrows or playing the lute. When old woman Wang was not at home, she would play chess or dominoes with Wang Chao. The old woman busied herself feeding the donkeys and sifting the flour and did not pay much attention. So, in a few days, Jinlian was engaged in a love affair with Wang Chao. At night, when old woman Wang was asleep, Jinlian would pretend to get out of bed to make water, but really she went to the other room and sported with Wang Chao. Once the bed made such a noise that old woman Wang woke up.

"What is that noise?" she cried.

"The cat is catching a rat underneath the cabinet," Wang Chao answered.

Old woman Wang, half asleep, murmured: "Ever since I have had that wheat flour there, I have been worried about it. I can't even sleep at nights now."

After a while, the noise began once more, and the old woman again called out to know what was the matter.

"The cat has caught the rat and taken it under the bed."

The old woman listened attentively, and indeed the sound was like that of a cat worrying a rat. She said no more. Jinlian finished what she had begun, crept quietly into bed and went to sleep.

The rat is small
But bolder than it looks,
Hungry and eager, ready for any prank. When anyone appears,
It beats retreat and hides.
Its scufflings in the depth of night
Disturb good honest slumberers.
Oblivious of the rules of good behavior
It loves to find a hole in which to hide
And always takes the most delight
In stolen sweets.

When Chen Jingji heard that Jinlian had left Ximen's household and was now at old woman Wang's, he took two strings of coppers and went to call there. Old woman Wang was at the door sweeping up the donkey's droppings. Jingji bowed low.

"Brother, what can I do for you?" the old woman said.

"I should like a word with you," Jingji said.

The old woman took him into the house.

"I understand," Jingji said, "that the Fifth Lady of his late Lordship Ximen is here, looking for a husband. Is that so?"

"What is your relationship to her?" the old woman asked.

"I am her younger brother," Jingji said, smiling.

The old woman looked at him from head to foot. "I never knew she had a brother," she said. "Don't try to hoodwink me. Are you not Ximen's son-in-law? Your name is Chen, and you have come here to get her for yourself. You can't deceive me like that."

Jingji, still smiling, brought out the two strings of coppers and held them out to the old woman. "This may serve to buy you some tea," he said. "I only wish to see her for a moment. Later on, I will reward you more suitably."

When the old woman saw the money, she protested more strongly. "Don't talk about rewards to me," she said. "The Great Lady told me that nobody must be allowed to see her. If you really wish to speak to her, give me five taels of silver, and if you wish to speak to her a second time, that will be another five taels. If you wish to marry her, it will cost you a hundred taels with ten for myself. I shall not do this business for nothing. These two strings of coppers won't even make a splash if you throw them into the water."

Jingji saw that the old woman had a good deal to say, and that she would not accept what he had brought. He took from his hair a pair of silver pins with gold heads, worth five *qian*. He knelt down.

"Old Mother Wang," he said, "take this. I will give you another tael another day. Just let me see her for a moment. There is something I must say to her."

The old woman took the pins and the money. "Go in," she said. "Speak to her and then come out again. I can't have you sitting there making faces at her. And I must have the other money tomorrow." She pulled aside the lattice and allowed Jingji to go in.

Jinlian was sitting on the bed. "You splendid fellow!" she said to Chen Jingji, "you have brought me to such a pass that, if I go forward, there is no village ahead of me, and, if I go back, no inn where I can rest. I don't know what to do, and everybody has heard this scandal about us. You never came to see me. I am a poor, helpless woman with nowhere to go. Whose fault is it?" She clung to Jingji and sobbed. This annoyed old woman Wang very much. She was afraid someone might hear.

"Sister," Jingji said, "I have sacrificed my skin and flesh and suffered from anger and shame on your account. I would have come to see you if I could. Yesterday, I went to old woman Xue's place, and they told me that Chunmei had been sold to some military gentleman. It was there I heard that you had left Ximen's house and were staying here to find a husband. I came at once to see you. I want to discuss matters with you. We love one another and we cannot bear to be parted. Now, I propose to divorce Ximen's daughter, and then I shall go to them for the money and things they have of mine. If they refuse, I will go to the Eastern Capital and accuse them before the courts. If that business is ever taken to law, they will be done for, even if they give up the stuff. When I get the money, I will marry you. I see no reason why we should not be happy together for ever and ever."

"Old woman Wang wants a hundred taels," Jinlian said. "Have you got so much?"

"Why does she ask so much?" Jingji said.

"Your mother-in-law told me," the old woman said, "that when Master Ximen got this woman, he spent more money than would have built a woman of silver. She insists upon a hundred taels and not a penny less."

"Old Mother," Jingji said, "I am crazy about this lady. We cannot live without one another. I see we are at your mercy. I will give you half the money, fifty or sixty taels. Then I will go to my uncle and arrange to have a small house and marry the lady. It is a beautiful idea, and you must soften your heart a little."

"Fifty or sixty taels, did you say?" the old woman cried. "Even if you offered eighty, you would not get her. Yesterday, a silk merchant from Huzhou, a man called He, offered seventy for her. Then Zhang the Second of the High Street, who is an officer, sent two of his men and offered eighty. They brought the money with them, but I would not take it and they had to go away. You are only a boy. You don't know what you're talking about. You come here and think you'll make a fool of me. You know I am not likely to be hard."

She set out for the street. "Whenever did anybody hear of a son-in-law wanting his mother-in-law?" she said loudly. "He thinks he'll come farting here, does he?"

Jingji was alarmed and dragged the old woman back. He knelt down before her. "Old Mother," he said, "don't say another word. You shall have your hundred taels. You know my father is at the Eastern Capital. I will go to him tomorrow and get the money."

"You must be quick or you'll be too late," Jinlian said. "Someone else will get me, and I can never belong to you."

"I will get a horse and start at once," Jingji promised.

"I shall be back in less than a fortnight."

"Let me tell you this," old woman Wang said. "If you are the first to cook the rice, you will be the first to eat it. Remember, that doesn't include the ten taels for myself."

"Don't mention it again," Jingji said. "If you'll only help me, I'll never forget your kindness." Jingji went away. He went home, packed his luggage, and the next day hired a horse and set off for the Eastern Capital to get the money.

## 110

### Dame Wang Hungers after Wealth & Receives her Just Reward; Wu Sung Kills his Sister-in-law & Propitiates/Avenges his Brother

If you devote your life to good works, Heaven will reward you;
If you insist on being tough, you will surely elicit disaster.
If you are gracious with your tongue, you will suffer no harm;
It is because your teeth are so hard that they suffer damage.
When autumn comes, the apricots and peaches have all fallen;
In the depth of winter, the pines and cypresses stay green.
Good and evil acts inevitably bring their appropriate results;
Though you fly high or travel far, [1]you cannot escape them.[2]

Ch'en Ching-chi hired a horse for himself, called for a servitor of Militia Commander Chang Kuan to accompany him, and set out early in the morning for the Eastern Capital. But no more of this.

To resume our story, the day after Wu Yüeh-niang had expelled P'an Chin-lien from the household, she sent Ch'un-hung to summon Auntie Hsüeh because she also wished to sell Ch'iu-chü.

While Ch'un Hung was walking along Main Street on this errand, he happened to run into Ying Po-chüeh, who called him to a halt and inquired, "Ch'un-hung, where are you headed?"

"The First Lady has sent me to summon the go-between Auntie Hsüeh," replied Ch'un-hung.

"What does she want with that go-between?" asked Ying Po-chüeh.

"She plans to sell the maidservant Ch'iu-chü from the Fifth Lady's quarters," explained Ch'un-hung.

"Why was the Fifth Lady expelled from the household?" Ying Po-chüeh went on to ask. "She is now at Dame Wang's place, and I hear that Dame Wang is looking for someone to marry her off to. Is all this really true?"

Ch'un-hung then proceeded to tell him, thus and so, "She was said to be having an affair with her son-in-law, and, when the First Lady found out about it, she first expelled the young lady Ch'un-mei from the household, after which she subjected her son-in-law to a beating and forced him to flee to his family home. It was only yesterday that she expelled the Fifth Lady from the household."

When Ying Po-chüeh heard this, he nodded his head and said, "So it turns out that your Fifth Lady was up to something with that son-in-law of yours. It's not easy to tell what people are capable of."

He then addressed Ch'un-hung again, saying, "My child, since your master is already dead, why should you want to remain in his household? There's no profit to be obtained by doing so. If you would like to go back to the south where you came from, why not look for someone here that might take you back there with him? What do you think?"

"It is just as you say," responded Ch'un-hung. "My master is already dead, and the First Lady has become extremely strict with us. She has closed up most of the businesses the master formerly engaged in, and sold off the premises where they were conducted. Ch'in-t'ung and Hua-t'ung have already left, and she is no longer able to support such a large number of people. I would like to be able to return to the south, but I don't know of anyone who would find it convenient to take me, and I don't know how to find anyone here in the city who would be willing to employ me."

"You silly child!" said Ying Po-chüeh.

"If one is not farsighted,[3]
One will never be secure.
To return to the south, you would have to traverse:
A thousand mountains and a myriad streams.[4]

What would be the point of that, and who would take you there? You are able to perform quite a few songs, and consequently you should have no trouble finding someone here in town to employ you. Let me recommend a possibility to you, namely, the household of His Honor Chang the Second on Main Street. He disposes of property worth tens of thousands of strings of cash, owns buildings with a hundred rooms, and has been appointed to replace your former master in his posts as judicial commissioner and battalion commander. And at present, he has acquired the Second Lady from your household as a concubine also. If I should take you to his place in order to seek employment, when he sees that you are adept at performing southern songs, I guarantee you'll:

Hit the bull's-eye with the first arrow.

If he retains you as a personal servant to wait on him, you'll be better off than you are in your current situation. He has a good disposition, is still quite young, is unrestrained in his behavior, and is attracted by good looks. You would be a lucky fellow to obtain such a position."

Ch'un-hung then proceeded to prostrate himself before him and said, "I would be indebted to you for your help. If I meet with His Honor Chang the Second and succeed in:

Advancing by so much as a single step,
I will purchase a present and come kowtow to you."

Ying Po-chüeh pulled Ch'un-hung to his feet with one hand and said, "Silly child, stand up. I always do whatever I can to help people succeed. I don't require any expressions of gratitude from you. Where would you get the money for such a thing?"

"If I should go with you," said Ch'un-hung, "I fear that the First Lady back at home will wonder where I have gone. What should I do about that?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I will ask His Honor Chang the Second to write a note to her and enclose a tael of silver. She probably won't dare to accept the silver but, no doubt, will end up by handing you over to him with both hands."

When they had finished their conversation, Ch'un-hung went on to Auntie Hsüeh's place and told her that she was wanted by his mistress. Upon meeting with her, Auntie Hsüeh led Ch'iu-chü away, after paying Yüeh-niang her asking price of a mere five taels of silver. But no more of this.

To resume our story, Ying Po-chüeh took Ch'un-hung with him to pay a visit to Chang the Second and, on seeing how good-looking he was, and hearing that he could perform southern songs, Chang the Second agreed to retain him as a personal servant. He then wrote out a note, sealed it up with one tael of silver, and sent someone to the Hsi-men household to collect his trunk of belongings.

That day, Wu Yüeh-niang was at home, entertaining Yün Li-shou's wife, née Su,[5] with a cup of wine. Some time before this, Yün Li-shou had succeeded to his elder brother's hereditary post as vice commander of the Ch'ing-ho Left Guard. Upon witnessing the death of Hsi-men Ch'ing, and the fact that Yüeh-niang was set on maintaining her widowhood and still had substantial means at her disposal, he could not help salivating with excitement at the prospect of profiting from the situation. That day, his wife had purchased eight trays of preserved fruit and come to call on Yüeh-niang. Knowing that Yüeh-niang had given birth to a son named Hsiao-ko, and having a daughter of her own who was only two months old, she intended to form a marriage alliance with Yüeh-niang by betrothing the two children to each other and formalizing the pact by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of their blouses.[6] She had also presented a gold ring as a betrothal gift.

At this point, Tai-an came in with the note from His Honor Chang the Second and the tael of silver and explained that Ch'un-hung had accepted a job as a personal servant in his household, and that he had sent someone to collect his trunk of personal effects and his clothes. Yüeh-niang felt that since Chang the Second now held the post of judicial commissioner she could hardly object to this arrangement, but she refused to accept the proffered silver and duly turned over Ch'un Hung's trunk of belongings.

Before this, Ying Po-chüeh had said to Chang the Second, "P'an Chin-lien, the Fifth Lady in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, is really attractive, is adept at playing the balloon guitar, and, when it comes to the standard repertory of popular songs, backgammon and elephant chess, there is little she has not mastered. In addition, she is literate and knows how to read and write. Because she is still young, she is unable to maintain a chaste widowhood, and she has been so at odds with the First Lady that she has been expelled from the household and is currently residing at Dame Wang's place waiting to be married off."

In response to this, Chang the Second had sent a servant with money in hand to Dame Wang's place, again and again, to size up the situation; but Dame Wang had insisted that, pursuant to the orders of the First Lady, she would refuse to accept anything less than a hundred taels for her. The servant had gone back and forth several times to bargain with her and had raised the offered sum to more than eighty taels, but Dame Wang still refused to give her assent.

Afterwards, when Ch'un-hung entered his household, and Chang the Second learned from him that the woman had engaged in adultery with her son-in-law, and that that was the reason why she had been expelled, he decided that he didn't want her.

"I have a fourteen-year-old son in my household," he told Ying Po-chüeh, "who has not yet reached puberty but is going to school and studying his books. What would I want with a woman like that in my home?"

Li Chiao-erh also told him, "Chin-lien originally poisoned her husband to death so that she could be taken into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. She later had an affair with a page boy and was also responsible for doing to death both the Sixth Lady and her baby son."

As a result, Chang the Second no longer wanted anything to do with her.

At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei was sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and the commandant saw that she was naturally:

Both beautiful and clever, and
Her deportment was enticing,

he was utterly delighted and not only supplied her with a suite of three rooms to live in but also arranged for a young maidservant to wait upon her.

He slept in her room for three nights in a row. At the third day celebration after her marriage into the household, he had two outfits of clothing tailored for her, rewarded Auntie Hsüeh with five mace of silver on her departure, and purchased another female servant to serve Ch'un-mei. In addition, he formally designated her as the Second Lady in his household. His first wife was blind in one eye, restricted herself to vegetarian fare, devoted herself to reciting the Buddha's name, and:

Did not concern herself with ordinary affairs.[7]

Chou Hsiu also had a concubine named Sun Erh-niang, who had borne him a daughter and resided in quarters on the eastern side of the courtyard, while Ch'un-mei's quarters were on the western side of the courtyard. He entrusted the keys to all the doors in the house to Ch'un-mei and conspicuously bestowed his favor upon her.

One day, she heard from Auntie Hsüeh that P'an Chin-lien had also been expelled from the household and was residing at Dame Wang's place, waiting to be married off.

That evening, Ch'un-mei, wailing and weeping, addressed Chou Hsiu, saying, "My mistress and I kept each other company for many years, and she never so much as raised her voice in anger against me but treated me as though I were her own daughter. I knew that we had to separate but failed to anticipate that she, too, would now be expelled from the household. If you are willing to take her in marriage, the two of us could enjoy happy days together again."
She then went on to elaborate on her attractiveness, saying, "She can perform the lyrics and songs of a multitude of authors and is adept at playing the balloon guitar. She is:
Both quick-witted and elegant,[8]
just as clever as can be. She was born in the year of the dragon and is now only thirty-one years old. If she were to enter your household, I would be happy to cede my place to her and settle for the position of your Third Lady."
By so saying, she succeeded in arousing Chou Hsiu's interest, and he proceeded to dispatch his servants Chang Sheng and Li An to Dame Wang's place with two handkerchiefs and two mace of silver to look her over. Sure enough, they found her to be an exceptionally attractive woman. Dame Wang informed them at the outset that the First Lady from her former household demanded the sum of a hundred taels of silver for her. Chang Sheng and Li An bargained with her for what seemed like half a day and raised their offer to as much as eighty taels, but Dame Wang still refused to accept it. When they reported this to Chou Hsiu, he agreed to put up an additional five taels and sent the two of them back with the silver in hand to continue their bargaining with Dame Wang. Dame Wang, however, persisted in alleging that the First Lady would not settle for anything less than a hundred taels for herself, and that although her fee as the go-between might be negotiable:
Heaven would hardly condone letting her go
unrewarded for her pains.
Chang Sheng and Li An had no alternative but to take the silver back with them and report the situation to Chou Hsiu.
He let the matter drop for two days but could not withstand the weeping and wailing of Ch'un-mei, who said to him at night, "If you would only offer a few more taels of silver, for better or for worse, and contrive to marry her so that we can be together again:
I'd be prepared to die if I must."
When Chou Hsiu saw that Ch'un-mei continued to do nothing but weep bitterly, he felt compelled, once again, to direct his senior servant Chou Chung, along with Chang Sheng and Li An, to take the silver in a felt bag and open it up for Dame Wang to see. The sum offered had been increased to a full ninety taels.
But Dame Wang responded more meretriciously than ever, saying, "If I had been willing to let her go for ninety taels, she wouldn't be here now, for Judicial Commissioner Chang the Second would have carried her off in a sedan chair."
This response annoyed Chou Chung, who told Li An to put the silver back in the bag and said, "Though a three-legged toad may be nowhere to be found, a two-legged woman can be found anywhere. This inveterate whore doesn't know who she's dealing with. What reason do you have to mention that official Chang the Second? Do you think my master the commandant is incapable of dealing with you? It is only because that newly married secondary wife of his is constantly pressing him to do so that he wants to marry this woman. What need does he have for her that he should put up all this money?"
"She has forced us to come back and forth two or three times," said Li An. "The lousy old whore! She is repeating herself more and more like a parrot."
So saying, he took hold of Chou Chung and said, "Brother, let's go home and report the situation to His Honor. How do you suppose she would like it if we had a jailer drag her into the yamen and give her a good taste of the squeezers?"
Dame Wang, however, was still looking forward to the profit she expected to make off Ch'en Ching-chi and let them threaten her without saying a word in reply.
Upon returning to his residence, they reported to Commandant Chou Hsiu, saying, "Even though we have raised our offer to ninety taels, she still refuses to accept it."
"In that case," said Chou Hsiu, "tomorrow, we might as well weigh out the sum of a hundred taels and go bring her back here in a sedan chair."
"Master," said Chou Chung, "even if you increase your offer to a hundred taels, Dame Wang will still demand a go-between's fee of an additional five taels. It would be better to drop the matter for a couple of days and then, if she still raises any objections, have her arrested and given a taste of the squeezers. Only then will she be appropriately fearful."
Gentle reader take note: For P'an Chin-lien, as for all of us:
Her place of birth and place of death
were predetermined.[9]
As a direct result of these few words uttered by Chou Chung, Chin-lien would find that:
Though her deeds were done in the past,
Today the chickens would come home to roost.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
In this life, although we are not
endowed with foreknowledge;
The causes of disaster or good fortune
are not to be sought elsewhere.
Good and evil acts inevitably bring
their appropriate results;
The only question being whether they
come early or come late.
Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment in order to speak of another person.
To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ch'ing had managed to have Wu Sung sentenced to military exile in Meng-chou, he was befriended by Shih En, the son of the warden of the prison camp. Later, when Shih En was engaged in a struggle with Chiang Men-shen for control of the Happy Forest Tavern, he was wounded by Chiang Men-shen and called on Wu Sung for help, upon which Wu Sung gave Chiang Men-shen a beating. Who could have anticipated that Chiang Men-shen's younger sister Chiang Yü-lan, who was a concubine of Military Director-in-chief Chang of Meng-chou, should collaborate with her husband in framing Wu Sung, subjecting him to a beating, and sentencing him to military exile in the An-p'ing Stockade. Upon reaching Fei-yün P'u, Wu Sung murdered the two guards who were escorting him and then returned to slaughter the entire households, old and young alike, of Military Director-in-chief Chang and Chiang Men-shen.[10]
After this, he escaped to the home of Shih En, who gave him a letter of recommendation and a leather case containing a hundred taels of silver and directed him to go to the An-p'ing Stockade and seek the patronage of his friend Liu Kao, the commander of the stockade. Who could have anticipated that, while on his way, he heard that an heir apparent had been designated to reside in the Eastern Palace, and that at the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice, a general amnesty had been issued to celebrate the occasion. Thus, on receipt of the amnesty, Wu Sung was able to return home to Ch'ing-ho district, where, on submitting his papers at the district yamen, he was allowed to resume his post as police captain.
On returning to his brother's home, he looked up his neighbor Yao the Second, who turned his orphaned niece Ying-erh back over to him. At this time Ying-erh was already eighteen years old, and he took her in to live with him.
Upon making inquiry, he was told, "Hsi-men Ch'ing is already dead, and your sister-in-law has been expelled from his household and is currently residing at Dame Wang's place where she is waiting to be married off."
When Wu Sung heard this:
His old resentment awoke in his heart.
Truly:
Though you wear out shoes of iron without
finding what you seek;
In the end you may find it without making
any effort whatsoever.[11]
The next day, he put on his turban, donned his clothes, went straight out the door, and headed to Dame Wang's place. Chin-lien was standing behind the blind that hung over the front door at the time, and when she saw Wu Sung coming, she promptly disappeared into the inner room.
Wu Sung lifted aside the blind and asked, "Is Dame Wang at home?"
Dame Wang, who was engaged in sweeping up the flour by the millstone at the time, promptly came out and asked, "Who is it that is calling for me?"
When she saw that it was Wu Sung, she greeted him with a bow, saying, "Many felicitations," and Wu Sung bowed deferentially in return.
Dame Wang said, "Brother Wu the Second, congratulations! How long have you been home?"
"On being granted an amnesty I have been able to return home," said Wu Sung. "But I only arrived yesterday. I am much indebted to you for looking after my brother's home all this time. I will demonstrate my gratitude to you on another day."
Dame Wang gave him an ingratiating smile, saying, "Brother Wu the Second, you look more impressive than before and have even begun to grow a stubble of beard. Your figure has also filled out attractively, and you have picked up a knowledge of etiquette while away from home."
She then offered him a seat, poured out a serving of tea, and shared it with him.
"There is something I would like to talk to you about," said Wu Sung.
"What might that be, Brother Wu the Second?" asked Dame Wang. "Go ahead and tell me what it is."
"I have heard," responded Wu Sung, "that Hsi-men Ch'ing is already dead, and that my sister-in-law has been expelled from the household and is currently residing here with you. I would venture to ask you to tell my sister-in-law that if she does not intend to remarry, so be it; but that if she does intend to remarry, now that Ying-erh has grown up, I would like to take her as my wife, so she could look after Ying-erh and, early or late, find someone to marry into our family as a son-in-law, so that we can:
Keep the whole household together,
and live out our lives, without arousing the derision of others."
Initially, Dame Wang was reluctant to give her assent to this proposal and said, "It is true that she is living here with me, but I don't know whether she plans to remarry or not."
Afterwards, however, on hearing that Wu Sung intended to see that she was amply rewarded, she said, "Permit me to feel her out on the subject."
The woman, who was eavesdropping behind the portiere, heard Wu Sung say that he would like to marry her so she could help him look after Ying-erh. She also noticed that while away from home Wu Sung had grown bigger and taller than ever, had put on weight, and had learned to speak even more effectively than before.
Her former feelings had not altered, and
In her heart she thought to herself,
"This marriage affinity will enable me to end up in his hands after all."
Thereupon, without waiting for Dame Wang to call for her, she came out herself, greeted Wu Sung with a bow, and said, "If you would really like to marry me so I can help you look after Ying-erh, and find a husband for her, that would be splendid."
"But there is another issue," said Dame Wang. "The First Lady of her household is demanding a bride price of a hundred taels of 'snowflake' silver for her."
"Why is she demanding so much?" asked Wu Sung.
"His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing," said Dame Wang, "originally spent enormous sums of money on her; enough to cast a silver figurine of similar dimensions."
"It doesn't matter," said Wu Sung. "Since I would like to take my sister-in-law home with me as my wife, if it costs me as much as a hundred taels, so be it. In addition, I am willing to offer you five taels of silver as a reward for your efforts."
Upon hearing these words, Dame Wang was pleased enough to:
Fart ferociously and pee in her pants,
and blurted out the words, "Brother Wu the Second, you have really acquired a knowledge of etiquette from your experiences out on the rivers and lakes the last few years. You've really turned out to be a fine man."
Upon hearing these words, the woman went into the inner room, poured a cup of strong tea flavored with melon seeds, and proffered it to Wu Sung with both hands.
"At present," Dame Wang went on to say, "the mistress of her household is anxious to have her disposed of as soon as possible; and there are also three or four persons of official status who are competing with each other to marry her. But I have refused their offers as insufficient. You had better come up with this money as fast as you can. As the sayings go:
The first one to cook the rice is the first to eat.
A marriage affinity between people a thousand li apart
connects them by a single thread.
You wouldn't want her to end up in someone else's hands."
"If you really want to marry me," the woman said, "you must show some urgency about it."
"I'll come to weigh out the silver tomorrow," said Wu Sung, "and invite you to come home with me that evening."
Dame Wang was still somewhat incredulous that Wu Sung had the stipulated amount of money at his disposal but tentatively gave her consent and allowed him to go.
The next day, Wu Sung opened the leather case, took out the hundred taels of silver that Shih En had given him for Stockade Commander Liu Kao, wrapped up an additional five taels worth of loose silver, and went to Dame Wang's place, where he proceeded to weigh it out with a steelyard.
When Dame Wang saw the shiny display of silver that covered the entire tabletop:
From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,
"Although Ch'en Ching-chi promised me a hundred taels of silver and has gone off to the Eastern Capital to get it, there is no way of knowing when he will return. No matter whether:
Things land right side up or upside down,
it would make no sense to:
Refrain from ringing the bell at hand,
In order to wait for one to be forged."[12]
When she realized that he was also offering her an additional gratuity of five taels, she promptly accepted the money and bowed to him repeatedly, saying, "Brother Wu the Second, you have really acquired a knowledge of etiquette, and:
Understand one's vicissitudes."
"Since you have accepted my silver," said Wu Sung, "I would like to invite my sister-in-law to come and cross my threshold today."
"Brother Wu the Second," expostulated Dame Wang, "you're in too much of a hurry. You're the type who:
Lets off fireworks behind the gate:
Unable to wait for evening.
You'll have to wait until I've gone to the First Lady's place and turned over the money before I'll relinquish her to you."
She then went on to say, "Today:
You'd better don shiny new headgear, for
Tonight you're going to be a bridegroom."[13]
Wu Sung was unhappy about this, but Dame Wang, just as though she:
Didn't know any better,
continued to banter with him and sent him on his way.
"The First Lady from her household," she thought to herself, "merely told me to dispose of her without settling on a particular amount. Today, I might as well simply give her ten or twenty taels of silver. At the very least, barring any monkey business, I ought to be able to make off with more than half of the asking price for the support of my family."
She consequently chiseled off a piece of silver worth twenty taels and went to Yüeh-niang's place to settle accounts with her.

"Who has agreed to take her in marriage?" asked Yüeh-niang.
Dame Wang responded by saying:
"When the rabbit has done exploring the hill,
It will finally go back to its original hole.
She is being taken in marriage by her former husband's brother, so she will end up by:
Eating congee out of her old pot."
Upon hearing this, all Yüeh-niang could do was stamp her feet in resignation.
As the saying goes:
When two enemies meet each other,
Their eyes are clearer than ever.[14]
Later on, Yüeh-niang spoke to Meng Yü-lou about it, saying, "In the future, she is likely to die at the hands of her brother-in-law. He is the sort of man who:
Kills people without batting an eye,[15]
and is hardly likely to spare her."
We will say no more for the moment about the way Yüeh-niang gave vent to her concerns back at home.
To resume our story, in the afternoon, after Dame Wang had returned home from turning over the silver, she sent Wang Ch'ao ahead to deliver the woman's trunks and her table to Wu Sung's place. Wu Sung, meanwhile, had already completed his preparations, buying wine and meat and appropriate foodstuffs for the occasion.
That evening, Dame Wang led the woman over to Wu Sung's place. She had abandoned her mourning garments, put a new fret on her hair, dressed herself in red clothing, and wore a veil over her head. As she entered the door, she observed that the parlor was brightly illuminated with lanterns and candles, and that Wu the Elder's spirit tablet was set up in a position of honor at the head of the room. This made her somewhat apprehensive, and she couldn't help feeling as if:
Her hair was being pulled, or
Her flesh was being hooked.[16]
When they had come through the door and entered the room, Wu Sung ordered Ying-erh to lock both the front and the back doors.
Upon seeing this, Dame Wang said, "Brother Wu the Second, I've got to go. There isn't anyone to be relied on at home."
"Venerable dame," said Wu Sung. "Please come inside and have a cup of wine."
Wu Sung then told Ying-erh to bring in the food and set it out on the table. In no time at all, the wine was duly heated, and he invited the woman and Dame Wang to help themselves to the wine. Wu Sung himself, however, did not proffer any wine to his two guests, but proceeded to pour himself four or five bowls of wine and drink them down one after the other.
When Dame Wang saw that he was getting himself nastily drunk, she said, "Brother Wu the Second, I've had enough wine. Permit me to go. The two of you can continue to enjoy drinking together."
"Dame Wang," responded Wu Sung, "you can cut out the nonsense. I, Wu the Second, have a score to settle with you."
All they could hear was a swishing sound as he proceeded to whip out from beneath his clothes a two-foot long, fine-edged, thick-bladed dagger, which he gripped firmly by the hilt with one hand, while holding it to her breast with the other.
As he:
Opened wide his weird eyes, and
Caused his beard to bristle,
he said, "Dame Wang, there is no reason for you to be surprised. It has always been true that:
For every injustice there is a perpetrator;
For every debt there is a creditor.
You had better not pretend to be:
Still asleep in dreamland.
It is you who are responsible for the death of my elder brother."
"Brother Wu the Second," exclaimed Dame Wang, "it's late at night, and you're drunk. This business of:
Brandishing knives and flourishing weapons,
Is not a laughing matter."
"Dame Wang," responded Wu Sung, "you can cut out the nonsense.
Even death itself does not frighten me.[17]
Wait until I have finished interrogating this whore, and I will then proceed to question you. Old pig and dog that you are, if you stir by so much as a step, I'll give you five or seven slashes with this blade."
So saying, he turned around to face the woman and reviled her, saying, "Listen to me you whore. Just how did you plot to do my elder brother in? If you:
Report the facts truthfully,[18]
I may forgive you."
"Brother-in-law," the woman responded, "why is it that:
The beans are popping in this cold pot?
It doesn't make any sense. The fact is your elder brother died of heart trouble. What does it have to do with me?"
Before she had even finished speaking, Wu Sung drove the point of his dagger into the tabletop with a chopping sound, gripped the woman's hair with his left hand, grabbed her bodice with his right hand, lifted her off the ground, and kicked over the table with one leg, knocking the cups and saucers to the floor, and smashing them to smithereens. The woman did not have the stamina to resist as her assailant lifted her lightly over the table and dragged her into the adjacent room to confront the stand on which his brother's spirit tablet was placed.
When Dame Wang saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, she fled toward the front door but found it to be locked. Wu Sung caught up with her in large strides, doubled her over on the floor, took off the belt around his waist, and tied her four limbs together in front of her in the position known as "The Gibbon Offering Fruit,"[19] so that she was completely immobilized.
"Captain," she called out, "there is no reason for you to get incensed at me. It is the lady herself who is responsible. I had nothing to do with it."
"Old pig and dog that you are!" ejaculated Wu Sung, "I know all about it. Who else are you trying to shift the blame onto? It was you who suggested to Hsi-men Ch'ing that he get me out of the way by contriving to have me sentenced to military exile. But today, it is I who have managed to return home, while that rascal Hsi-men Ch'ing is nowhere to be seen. If you refuse to speak up, I will first carve up this whore and then proceed to kill you, old pig and dog that you are."
So saying, he picked up his dagger and waved it a couple of times in front of Chin-lien's face.
The woman hastily called out, "Brother-in-law, forgive me. If you will only let me up, I'll tell you what really happened."
Wu Sung responded by jerking the woman to her feet, stripping her stark naked, and then forcing her into a kneeling position in front of the stand that held his brother's spirit tablet.
"You whore!" Wu Sung shouted at her, "You'd better start to talk immediately."
The woman was so frightened it seemed as though:
Her soul was no longer attached to her body,[20]
and she felt compelled to confess the truth. She told him how, in taking down the bamboo blind over the front door, the forked stick in her hand had fallen onto the head of Hsi-men Ch'ing; how she had made up the burial garments for Dame Wang as part of the scheme to initiate their illicit affair; how Hsi-men Ch'ing had kicked Wu the Elder in the solar plexus and injured his heart; how Dame Wang had persuaded her to obtain arsenic from Hsi-men Ch'ing and administer it to her husband; how she had arranged for him to be cremated; and how she had been taken into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household. She gave a full account of what had happened, word for word, from beginning to end.
When Dame Wang heard this, all she could do was to complain bitterly to herself, saying, "What a simpleton you are! Now that you've told him the truth, how will I ever be able to cover up my own complicity?"
Wu Sung, for his part, held the woman down in front of the spirit tablet with one hand, while pouring a libation with the other, and burning some paper money.
"Elder Brother," he said, "hear me, if your departed soul be not too far away. I, Wu the Second, will now undertake to:
Avenge your wrong and assuage your resentment."[21]
When the woman saw that the situation had taken a turn for the worse, she was about to cry out loudly, but Wu Sung plucked up a handful of ashes from the incense burner and stuffed it into her mouth, so that she was unable to utter a sound, and then roughly doubled her over on the floor. The woman struggled so violently that the fret on her hair, and her pins and earrings, rolled off onto the ground.
Wu Sung was afraid that she might succeed in struggling free, so he kicked her in the ribs with his waxed boots and then stamped on her two arms, saying, "You whore! It is said that you're really intelligent, but I don't know what sort of a heart you have, so I'm going to take a look at it."
So saying, he pulled open her bodice with one hand, and then:
The telling is slow, but
What happened was quick;
he took the dagger and cut open her pale and fragrant breast with a single slash, producing a blood-filled cavity from which fresh blood gushed out. As for the woman:
Her starry eyes blinked half open,
and her two feet kicked spasmodically. Holding the dagger in his teeth, Wu Sung then pulled open her breast with his two hands and, with a popping sound, tore her living heart and entrails, dripping with blood, out of the cavity, and laid them as a sacrifice before the spirit tablet. After which, with a single swipe of the dagger, he cut off her head, as a result of which:
The flow of blood inundated the ground.[22]
On seeing this from one side, Ying-erh, who was still only a young girl, was so frightened all she could do was to cover her face with her hands. It is clear that Wu Sung was truly a ruthless man, and that the woman had suffered a pitiable fate. Truly:
So long as one has three inches of breath,
one uses it a thousand ways;
But when the messenger of death shows up,
everything comes to an end.
She was thirty-one years old at the time of her death. Behold:
On falling into his hands, the springtime
of her youth came to an end;
When his dagger fell, the pink-powdered
beauty's life was terminated.
Her seven material souls have floated
into the distance,
And have arrived at the Sen-lo Palace
in the underworld.
Her three ethereal souls have vanished
into invisibility,
And have doubtless reached the City of
the Unjustly Dead.
Her starry eyes are tightly closed;
Stretched out straight, her body lies
on the bare ground.
Her silver teeth are half-clenched;
Dripping with blood, her head lies
fallen to one side.
It is just like:
The heavy snowfall of early spring,
Which breaks the golden threads of
the willow branches;
Or the wild wind of the twelfth month,
That blows off the jade blossoms of
the flowering plum.
As for this woman:
Who knows where her alluring beauty
has vanished to;
Or whose home her fragrant soul has
been reborn in?[23]
A poet of yore has left us a poem lamenting the gruesome nature of Chin-lien's death:
The grievous destiny suffered by Chin-lien
was certainly pitiable;
As, stripped of her clothes, she knelt down

before the spirit tablet.
How could she have known that Wu Sung would
slay her with his dagger,
When she expected him to tie her up as Hsi-
men did in the Grape Arbor?
Past events tend to inspire sighs of regret,[24]
though ephemeral as a dream;
The present life is not even worth so much
as half of a copper cash.[25]
In this world, every single life must be
repaid with another life;[26]
Just retribution is clear and inescapable,[27]
and occurs for all to see.

When Dame Wang saw that Wu Sung had killed the woman, she called out in a loud voice, "A murder has been committed!"

Upon hearing this, Wu Sung stepped forward and cut off her head as well with a single swipe of his dagger, after which he dragged her corpse to one side. He then took Chin-lien's heart and entrails and pinned them up with his dagger under the eaves at the back of the house. By then, it was the first watch of the night, and he proceeded to lock Ying-erh into the room.

"Uncle," complained Ying-erh, "I'm frightened."

"My child," Wu Sung responded, "there is nothing I can do for you under the circumstances."

Wu Sung then vaulted over the wall into Dame Wang's house next door, intending to kill her son Wang Ch'ao; but it turned out that Wang Ch'ao was not fated to die at this juncture. Upon hearing his mother's cry, he realized that Wu Sung was bent on wreaking havoc and tried unsuccessfully to open both the front and back doors. In a state of consternation, he ran out onto the street to find the head of the local mutual security unit. The neighbors to either side knew full well how violent and ruthless Wu Sung was, and none of them ventured to come forward.

When Wu Sung had vaulted over the wall and entered Dame Wang's house, he saw that though the lanterns were lighted, nobody was present. He then proceeded to open Dame Wang's trunks and scatter her clothing all over the floor. Of the hundred taels of silver he had paid her, she had turned over only twenty taels to Yüeh-niang, so there were eighty-five taels left over, together with a number of hairpins, earrings, and other head ornaments. Wu Sung wrapped all these things up into a bundle, picked up his sword, vaulted over the back wall, and waited until the fifth watch, when he was able to slip out through the city gate and head toward Shih-tzu P'o, where he hid out in the inn operated by Chang Ch'ing and his wife. He subsequently disguised himself as a Buddhist ascetic and went to join the band of outlaws in Mount Liang Marsh.[28] Truly:

If you do nothing in your lifetime to make people raise their eyebrows;
There should be no one in the world prepared to gnash his teeth at you.

My home is far away. In this harassed world
We are dispersed, some to the east some to the west.
They who still live seek to have news of one another
But the dead are become dust,
And the poor are ruined.
At last the hero returns
He has walked for long.
The road was deserted and at sunset
The air was full of sadness.
Foxes he met, both large and small, which glared at him,
Their hair on end.
But a good sword have I, and I can deal with them.

Chen Jingji took a horse and set out with one of his uncle's servants. The day after Wu Yueniang had sent Pan Jinlian away, she sent Chunhong for old woman Xue. She had decided to sell Qiuju. When Chunhong came to the High Street, he met Ying Bojue. The man stopped him and asked him where he was going.

"The Great Lady has told me to go for old woman Xue," the boy said. "Why?" Bojue asked.

"She is going to sell the Fifth Lady's maid Qiuju."

"Why did they send the Fifth Lady away?" Bojue said.

"She and my brother-in-law carried on together secretly, but the Great Lady found out about it," Chunhong said. "First, she dealt with Chunmei. Then, she gave the young man a beating and drove him away. And finally, she got rid of the Fifth Lady."

Ying Bojue nodded his head. "So there was something between the Fifth Lady and Master Chen," he said. "Really, there is no telling what people will do." Then he said to Chunhong: "My boy, now that your master is dead, why do you stay there? You will never do any good. I know you would prefer to be in the South. Why don't you go to your native place and get a job there?"

"You are right," Chunhong said. "Now that my master is dead, the Great Lady is very severe with us. Nearly all the businesses have been closed down, and several houses have been sold. Qintong and Huatong have gone, and, indeed, they don't need so many people about the place. I should have liked to go to the South, but I couldn't think of anyone who would take me there. And I don't know the people here very well, which makes it difficult for me to get a job in these parts."

"You silly boy!" Bojue said. "One who does not keep his eyes open will always be in difficulties. If you go to the South, you will have to cross ten thousand rivers and climb a thousand mountains. Why go there? You can sing, and there will be no difficulty in finding another master for you. I can tell you of one, straight off. There is his Lordship Zhang the Second of the High Street. He is very rich and now holds the office your master used to hold. Your Second Lady married him as his second wife. Let me introduce you to him. When he finds that you can sing the Southern tunes, I guarantee that he will take you on at once, and keep you as one of his most favored boys. He is very different from your old master, good-tempered and young. He is very generous and agreeable. You will certainly be in luck's way if you get him for a master."

Chunhong knelt down and kowtowed to Ying Bojue. "Uncle," he said, "I shall count upon your help. If I find a place with Master Zhang, I will buy you a present."

Bojue pulled the boy up. "Stand up, you silly boy," he said. "I am only too glad to be able to help people. I don't want any presents from you, for I know you haven't any money."

"If I go away, I expect the Great Lady will find out a number of things I have done wrong," the boy said.

"Don't worry about that," Bojue said. "I will go and see Master Zhang, and get a tael of silver and a card from him. If he sends them to your mistress, she will not dare to take any money. She will give you up for nothing."

The boy went on to old woman Xue's house. The old woman went to see Yueniang and took Qiuju away. She sold the girl for five taels of silver and paid the money to Yueniang.

Then Ying Bojue took Chunhong to Zhang the Second's house. When Zhang the Second found that the boy was intelligent and could sing the songs of the South, he told him to stay. He sent a tael and a card to Ximen's place and asked for the boy's luggage.

Yueniang was entertaining Yun Lishou's wife. Yun Lishou was now an assistant magistrate at Qinghe. After Ximen's death, knowing that Yueniang was a very rich widow, he struck up a friendship with her. That was why his wife had come to see Yueniang that day with eight presents. She wished to arrange a marriage between Yueniang's son and her own child who was two months old. They settled the matter as they were drinking together, and Mistress Yun gave Yueniang two gold rings as an engagement token.

Daian brought in Zhang the Second's card and the tael of silver. "Chunhong has gone to Zhang's place, and they have come to ask for his clothes."

Yueniang knew that Zhang the Second was now an officer, and she did not dare refuse to give up the boy. She would not take the money, and gave the boy's things to the messenger.

Sometime before all this, Ying Bojue had told Zhang the Second about Jinlian. "She is very beautiful," he said. "She plays the lute excellently, and she knows all about such things as poetry and games, and she can write. She is quite young and she won't like being a widow. Now I hear she has come out, after a quarrel with Ximen's first wife. She is at old woman Wang's place now."

One after another, Zhang the Second sent men to old woman Wang with money in their hands, but old woman Wang told them that Mistress Ximen would not take less than a hundred taels. They came again and offered eighty taels. Still old woman Wang would not agree. Then Chunhong came to Zhang's house and told his new master that Jinlian had been sent away because she had been carrying on an intrigue with her son-in-law. Zhang the Second gave up the idea of marrying Jinlian.

"I have a fifteen-year-old son," he said to Ying Bojue. "He is at school now. I couldn't do with a woman like that in the house."

Then Li Jiao'er told him that Jinlian had poisoned her first husband before she went to Ximen Qing, that she had misconducted herself with the boys, and murdered another lady and her child. Zhang the Second was even more determined not to marry Jinlian.

Major Zhou was delighted with Chunmei. He found her pretty, intelligent, and attractive. He gave her three rooms and a young maid, and stayed with her for three whole days. He had two dresses made for her. When old woman Xue went to see him, he gave her five *qian* of silver. He bought a maid for Chunmei and established her as his third wife. His first wife was blind. She ate vegetarian food, devoted herself to religion, and did not concern herself with household affairs at all. Chunmei lived in the western wing and Major Zhou, who was very fond of her, gave her all the keys.

One day, old woman Xue came and told Chunmei that Jinlian had left Ximen's house and was at old woman Wang's place. That night, Chunmei wept and said to Major Zhou: "My old mistress and I were together all those years and she never spoke a harsh word to me. I might have been her daughter. I believed that she and I would never see one another again, but now she too has left Ximen's house. If you marry her, we can live together most happily. She is very beautiful. She knows all about poetry and music, and she is clever and charming in every way. Her animal is the Dragon, so she is now thirty-two years old. If she comes, I will gladly take rank below her."

Major Zhou was impressed. He sent his servants, Zhang Sheng and Li An, with two handkerchiefs and two *qian* of silver, to old woman Wang's house to see Jinlian. They told him that she really was extraordinarily beautiful. The old woman still demanded a hundred taels, and Zhang Sheng and Li An discussed the matter with her for a long time. They offered eighty taels, but old woman Wang would not accept it. She declared that Mistress Ximen insisted upon a hundred taels. "You will have to pay the hundred," she said, "but you need not bother about my fee. Heaven will not allow me to go unrewarded for my pains."

Zhang Sheng and Li An took back the money to the Major, and he decided to let the matter rest for a day or two. But Chunmei cried every evening. "You must give a few more taels," she said. "If she comes here to live with me, I shall die happy."

So this time the Major sent his bailiff, Zhou Zhong, with Zhang Sheng and Li An. They offered the old woman ninety taels. This made her still more grasping.

"If ninety taels would have done, I could have sold her long ago," she said. "His Lordship Chang would have paid that."

This made Zhou Zhong angry. He told Li An to wrap up the money again. "Do you think that I, a three-legged frog, am not able to find a two-legged woman?" he said. "You old whore! You don't seem to realize whom you are dealing with. Would you talk about Zhang the Second to me? Do you imagine that my master cannot do what he likes with you? It is simply because his new wife has asked him to do this. He doesn't want the woman so much as all that."

"We have been here several times," Li An said, "and that seems to have made you get rather above yourself, you old whore."

He took Zhou Zhong's hand. "Come, let us go and tell our master," he said. "Let him get this old whore to his office and give her a beating."

But the old woman was still thinking of what Chen Jingji had promised and, in spite of all their abuse, she would not budge. The men went back to Major Zhou. "We offered her ninety taels," they said, "but she would not agree."

"Take a hundred taels and a sedan chair tomorrow," Major Zhou said, "and bring the woman here."

"Master," Zhou Chung said, "if you give her a hundred taels, she will certainly demand another five for herself. Leave her alone for a few days and we shall see if she is still so stupid. If she is, have her brought to your office and try the effect of the thumbscrews. Then she will be afraid of you."

We know not what life has in store for us
No one can tell what brings good fortune
And what brings evil.
But at last comes the reward alike of good and evil
Sometimes at once and sometimes long delayed.

We have now to speak again of Wu Song. When he reached Mengzhou, the place to which he had been banished, he was fortunate enough to come under the charge of Shi En, the son of the Chief Jailer. On a certain occasion this Shi En and a man called Jiang Menshen had trouble at a drinking house. Shi En was hurt, but Wu Song came to his aid and Jiang Menshen was beaten. Later, Jiang's sister became a concubine of General Zhang, and, when Wu Song was working for the general, he was accused of stealing and sentenced to serve as a soldier. On his way into this further banishment, Wu Song killed two officials at Feiyunpu. Then he went back and killed all General Zhang's and Jiang Menshen's people, and afterwards took refuge at Shi En's house. Shi En gave him a letter and a leather trunk containing a hundred taels of silver and told him to go to Anping fortress, and see the officer in command there, a certain Liu Gao. On his way, he heard that the Emperor's successor had been proclaimed at the Imperial Palace, and that the Emperor, besides making sacrifice to Heaven, had declared a general amnesty. So Wu Song came home.

When he came to Qinghe, he gave the officers his papers and was reinstated in his old position at the Town Hall. He went to see his neighbor Yao, who had been looking after Ying'er. The girl was now about nineteen years old. Wu Song took her and settled down. He heard that Ximen Qing was dead and that Jinlian was no longer living in that household, but had gone to old woman Wang's house, and was trying to find a new husband. Then Wu Song determined upon revenge.

He put on a hat, and dressed himself well, and went to see what he could see at old woman Wang's house. Jinlian was standing behind the lattice and, when she saw Wu Song, went at once to the inner room. Wu Song pulled aside the lattice and said: "Is old woman Wang at home?"

The old woman was busy preparing dinner. "Who is there?" she said. But, as soon as she had spoken, she recognized Wu Song and made a reverence to him. Wu Song bowed low in return.

"Brother Wu, when did you get back?" the old woman said. "I am delighted to see you."

"My offense has been pardoned," Wu Song said, "so I was able to come home again. I got here yesterday. Thank you for having looked after my brother's house. I will reward you later."

The old woman smiled. "Brother," she said, "you are even better looking than you used to be. There is hair on your lip; you have become quite stout, and you have acquired most elegant manners." She took him into the house and offered him tea.

"There is something I want to talk to you about," Wu Song said.

"What is it?"

"I hear that Ximen Qing is dead and that my sister-in-law is back with you again. Will you let her know that I should like to marry her? Ying'er is grown up now and needs somebody to look after her and find her a husband. So we shall avoid people's rude remarks."

At first, old woman Wang decided she would not tell Wu Song the true story. "She is here," she said, "but I am not at all sure that she feels inclined to marry again." But when she found that Wu Song was ready enough to pay, she said: "I will broach the matter to her gradually."

On the other side of the lattice, Jinlian heard all that was said. She heard Wu Song say that he wanted to marry her in order to have someone to look after Ying'er. She noticed that, after these years of absence, Wu Song seemed a more powerful man than ever. He spoke very agreeably. He seems to have given up his old ideas, she thought, and now is ready for marriage. So she did not wait for old woman Wang to call her, but came out of her own accord. She made a reverence to Wu Song.

"Am I right, Uncle, in understanding that you wish to take me to look after Ying'er and see about her marriage?"

"You must know," old woman Wang interrupted, "that Mistress Ximen wants a hundred taels."

"That seems a great deal," Wu Song suggested.

"Ximen spent so much money on her that he could have made a woman of silver with it," old woman Wang said.

"Well, we won't haggle," Wu Song said. "I want my sister-in-law, and I don't mind spending the money. And you shall have five taels for yourself."

This made the old woman so pleased that she farted and piddled with delight. "Brother Wu," she said, "I know no other man who has such intelligence as yours. You are a man, and you have been abroad a few years and seen the world."

Jinlian went to the inner room, made some strong tea, and offered it to Wu Song with both hands.

"Ximen's people are anxious to have the matter settled as soon as possible," the old woman said, "and there are four or five people falling over themselves to marry her. I refused them all because they would not pay the price. If you want her, you must let me have your money at once. As you know, the first man to cook the rice is the first to eat it. Heaven brings you together, so don't let anybody else do you out of such a good match."

"Yes," Jinlian said, "if you want me, you must not waste any time."

"I will bring the money tomorrow and take you away tomorrow night," Wu Song said.

Old woman Wang could not believe Wu Song had so much money. The next day he opened the leather trunk and took out the hundred taels that Shi En had given him. He added to it another five taels of his own and went to see old woman Wang. He asked for scales to measure the silver. When the old woman saw the table piled up with white silver, she said to herself: "That Chen Jingji promised me a hundred taels. But he has had to go to the Eastern Capital for it, and there is no telling when he will be back. Why should I not take the chance while I have it?" When the five taels for herself was produced, she accepted it and thanked Wu Song most profusely.

"Brother Wu," she said, "you know how to deal with me."

"Mother," Wu Song said, "take the money. I will take my sister-in-law today."
"Don't be in too much of a hurry, Brother," the old woman said. "You are like a man who lets off fireworks in some dark corner because he hasn't patience enough to wait for the evening. You must wait until I have paid the money to Ximen's people. Then you may take her. And what a fine bridegroom you are, with that smart hat!"
Wu Song grew impatient. Jinlian joked with him. When he had gone away, the old woman thought: "Mistress Ximen said I was to get rid of this woman and never said a word about the price. Now is my chance. I will give her twenty taels and keep the rest for myself."
She took twenty taels to Yueniang, who asked the name of the purchaser.
"Lady," old woman Wang said, "the hares scamper about over the hills but in the end they go back to their own holes. She is going back to the old food she used to eat: she is going to marry her husband's brother."
When Wu Yueniang heard this, she was sorry. She knew that when an enemy meets an enemy, they look closely one at the other. Afterwards, she said to Meng Yulou: "Jinlian will die at this man's hands. He is a man ready to kill for no reason whatever, and he will not spare her."
Old woman Wang went home and told her son Wang Chao to take Jinlian's belongings to Wu Song. The bridegroom had prepared a feast for them. In the evening, the old woman took Jinlian to him. She was no longer in mourning. She wore a new headdress, red clothes, and there was a veil on her head. When they came into the middle room, the candles were burning brightly.
Then they saw Wu Da's tablet on the table. This made them wonder. They felt as though someone were pulling out their hair and sticking knives into their flesh. When they had gone to the inner room, Wu Song told Ying'er to fasten all the doors.
"I must be going now," the old woman said. "There is nobody to look after my house."
"Stay and have something to drink, old Mother," Wu Song said. He told Ying'er to set the dishes on the table and heat some wine. Yet, when the wine was brought, he did not ask them to drink, but poured himself cup after cup and drank them all down.
"I have had quite enough to eat, Brother Wu," the old woman said, "I must go now and leave you two to enjoy yourselves."
"Old woman," Wu Song said, "don't be a fool. I, Wu the Second, have something to say to you." With a crash Wu Song drew out a knife, two feet long, with a very sharp blade. Grasping the knife in one hand, he seized the old woman with the other. His eyes were wide open and his hair stood on end.
"Old woman," he said, "you need not be surprised. Just as a debt finds out those who owe it, so hatred never fails to meet its object. Don't pretend to be a fool. It was your hand that ended my brother's life."
"Brother Wu," the old woman said, "it is getting late, and you are drunk. You shouldn't play with knives. It isn't funny."
"Be silent, old woman," Wu Song said. "I, Wu the Second, am not afraid of death. I will deal with that creature first, and with you, you old sow, later. Move a single inch, and you shall feel my knife."
Then he turned to Jinlian. "Listen, you whore," he said. "How did you murder my brother? Tell me the truth and I will forgive you."
"Uncle, don't be silly," Jinlian said. "How can you fry beans in a cold pan? Your brother died from heart trouble. I had nothing to do with it."
Almost before the words were out of her mouth, there was a crash. Wu Song banged the knife upon the table, seized the woman by her hair with his left hand, and grasped her breasts with his right. Then he kicked over the table. Dishes and cups crashed to the ground. Jinlian was not very strong. He lifted her like a feather from the other side of the table. Then he dragged her to the middle room, before the table on which Wu Da's tablet stood. Old woman Wang saw that he was in a mad rage and would have run away, but the door had been locked and Wu Song, striding after her, caught her. He threw her to the floor and, with his girdle, tied her up till she looked like a monkey offering a fruit. She could not get away.
"Oh, Sir," she cried, "don't be angry with me. This lady is responsible for the murder. It was all her doing. My hands are clean."
"You old bitch," Wu Song cried. "I know everything, and it is no use your lying to me. It was you who told Ximen Qing to have me banished. But I am here, and where is Ximen Qing?"
"I will kill you first," he said to Jinlian, "and then this old bitch."
He picked up the knife and brandished it twice before her face.
"Uncle, forgive me, and let me get up," she cried. "I promise I will tell you."
Wu Song picked her up. He stripped her of her clothes and made her kneel down before the tablet.
"Speak quickly, whore!" he shouted at her.
Now her spirit had left her. She told Wu Song everything; how, when she had been pulling up the lattice, the pole had struck Ximen Qing, how she had made clothes, and how the intrigue between them had begun. Then she said how Ximen Qing had kicked Wu Da in the chest, and old woman Wang had shown her how to poison him. Then, how they had burned his body, and Ximen Qing had married her. Meanwhile old woman Wang was sobbing. "Oh, you fool," she cried, "you have told him the truth. What can I do now?"
Wu Song, before the tablet, grasped the woman by the hair. With his other hand, he sprinkled wine upon the ground and set fire to some paper money.
"Brother," he said, "your spirit cannot be far away. This day Wu Song avenges you."
When Jinlian heard this, she was desperate and began to shriek. Wu Song took a handful of dust from the incense burner and threw it into her mouth so that she could not make any more noise. He tugged at her hair and threw her down upon the ground again. As she struggled with him, her hair was disordered and the pins and earrings fell out. Wu Song thought it possible that she might try to run away, and kicked her in the ribs. Then he stamped upon her arms with both his feet.
"You whore," he cried, "you make yourself out to be a very clever woman. I would like to know what sort of heart you have, and I will see."
He tore her arms apart, and thrust the knife deep into her soft white bosom. One slash, and there was a bleeding hole in her breast. Blood gushed forth. Now the woman's starry eyes were almost closed and her feet seemed to tremble. Wu Song took the knife in his teeth, tore open her breast with both hands, and dragged the heart and entrails from her body. The blood streamed from them as he set them on the table before the tablet. Then, with a single stroke, he cut off her head. The blood flowed over the floor.
Ying'er looked in, terrified, and covered her face with her hands.
A violent man, this Wu Song. And how sad, the case of this woman who, when the breath was still in her body, could use it in a thousand ways. Now she was powerless. She was only thirty-two years old. When his hand fell, her young life ended. The knife struck, and she was no more. Her spirit fled to the palace of the King of Hell, and her spirit vanished to the city of the dead. It was like the breaking of the golden branches of the willow by the snow in springtime, or the jade-like blossom rent and torn by the wild wind as the year goes out. We know not where her loveliness vanished that night, or where her sweet spirit went.
When Wu Song killed Jinlian, old woman Wang shouted, "Murder." Then he went to her, and struck off her head. He dragged away the body, then thrust his knife through the woman's heart, and pinned it to the eaves at the back of the house. It was the first night watch. He took Ying'er into the other room. "I am frightened, Uncle," she said. "My child," Wu Song said, "I can do nothing for you."
Then he jumped over the wall and went into old woman Wang's house. He wished to kill Wang Chao. But it seemed that Wang Chao's end was not to be yet. When he heard his mother's shrieks, he knew that Wu Song was killing her. He came to the front door but would not open it. He knocked at the back, but there was no answer. Then he rushed to the street to find a policeman. Meanwhile, the neighbors on either side knew that Wu Song was killing somebody, but none of them dared to interfere.
When Wu Song reached old woman Wang's room, he found a light burning, but there was nobody there. He opened her chest, took out the clothes and strewed them on the floor. Then he found the silver, about eighty-five taels, for the old woman had only given Yueniang twenty. But he took ornaments, pins and earrings. Then, taking his knife, he jumped over the wall at the back. About the fifth night watch, he left the city, and went to Shizipo, where Zhang Qing and his wife lived. Then he became a monk. Afterwards, he went to Liangshan and joined the bandits.

## III

### P'an Chin-lien Appears in a Dream in Commandant Chou Hsiu's Home; Wu Yüeh-niang Contributes a Gift to a Subscription-Seeking Monk & Chunmei Mourns for Pan Jinlian

Above, one is exposed to the scrutiny
of Heaven;
Below, one is watched by the spirits
of the Earth.
In the world of light there is imperial law[1]
to restrain one;
In the darkness there are ghosts and spirits
to follow one.[2]
Loyalty and uprightness should be embedded
in one's heart;
Joy and anger should be governed by one's
vital spirits.
It is lack of integrity that causes one
to lose one's home;
It is dishonesty that results in losing
one's position.
You are urged to be vigilant about this
throughout your life;
Lest you have cause to sigh, be alarmed,
or become afraid.[3]

After Wu Sung had killed the woman and Dame Wang and taken their valuables, he went to join the band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh.
After Wang Ch'ao ran out onto the street to look for the head of the local mutual security unit, he noticed that both the front and rear doors to Wu Sung's house were locked, and that the valuables had been taken from Dame Wang's house and the clothing scattered:
Higgledy-piggledy,
all over the floor. Upon realizing that Wu Sung had killed both women and made off with their valuables, he felt compelled to break open both the front and rear doors, only to find their two corpses dripping with blood where they lay on the floor, Chin-lien's heart and entrails pinned up with a dagger under the eaves at the back of the house, and Ying-erh locked up inside the room. When he asked her what had happened, all she could do was to weep bitterly.
The next day, at the early session of the court, he submitted a report to the district magistrate and laid the dagger that had been used as the murder weapon before him. The newly appointed district magistrate was named Li Ch'ang-ch'i and was a native of Tsao-ch'iang district in Chen-ting prefecture of Hopei province. On hearing that it was a case of homicide, he promptly deputed the docket officer on duty to round up the neighbors, the head of the local mutual security unit, and the family members of the victims, Wang Ch'ao and Ying-erh, so that the corpses could be carried out into the street for all to see while a formal inquest was performed as the law required. It was determined that the two victims, P'an Chin-lien and Dame Wang, had been murdered by Wu Sung in a fit of drunken rage, and this tentative conclusion was:
Duly drawn up as a file on the case.[4]
The local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit were ordered to arrange for the temporary interment of the two bodies and to keep watch over them. Public placards describing the fugitive were hung up announcing that officers were being deputed to pursue the culprit Wu Sung in all directions, and that a reward of fifty taels of silver was being offered by the authorities for anyone who could provide evidence of his whereabouts.
Meanwhile, Chang Sheng and Li An from Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence showed up at Dame Wang's place with a hundred taels of silver, only to find that Dame Wang and the woman had both been murdered by Wu Sung, and that the district yamen had sent people to perform an inquest on the corpses and apprehend the murderer. The two of them then returned and reported this at the commandant's residence. When Ch'un-mei learned that Chin-lien was dead, she did nothing but weep for two or three days and refused to partake of either tea or food. This threw Commandant Chou Hsiu into such a state of consternation that he sent someone out onto the street to hire an itinerant acrobat to come in and entertain her, but her sorrow was not assuaged. He also dispatched Chang Sheng and Li An every day to find out if the culprit Wu Sung had been apprehended and report back to him. But no more of this. Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment.
To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi had started out for the Eastern Capital in order to get the money needed to ransom Chin-lien, with whom he had set his heart on becoming man and wife. Who could have anticipated that when he was halfway there, he should run into his family's servant Ch'en Ting, who had set out from the Eastern Capital to tell him that his father was in a parlous state of health.
"My mistress sent me to ask you to come home," he said, "so she can turn over to you the responsibility for the future of the household."
No sooner did Ch'en Ching-chi hear these words than he set out faster than ever:
Covering two stages in the time for one,
and duly arrived, one day, at the house of his father's brother-in-law, Chang Shih-lien, in the Eastern Capital.
Chang Shih-lien had already died, so only his aunt was there, and he learned that his father, Ch'en Hung, had passed away about three days earlier, so the whole household was wearing mourning garb. Ch'en Ching-chi paid his respects before his father's spirit tablet and kowtowed to his mother, née Chang, and his aunt, née Ch'en, the elder sister of Ch'en Hung. His mother saw that he had already reached manhood, and the two of them, mother and son, wept together and then consulted with each other about the situation.
"Right now," his mother said:
"On the one hand, there is reason to be happy,
While on the other, there is reason to be sad."[5]
Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "What reason is there to be happy, and what reason is there to be sad?"
"The reason to be happy," his mother responded, "is that the Emperor has designated an heir apparent to reside in the Eastern Palace, and that at the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven on the day of the winter solstice a general amnesty has been issued to celebrate the occasion. The reason to be sad is that your father has taken ill and died unexpectedly, your uncle has also died, and your aunt is maintaining her widowhood. Under the circumstances, for us to remain living here:
Is not a long-term solution.
That is why I sent Ch'en Ting to summon you. If we can arrange together to take your father's coffin back to his native place for burial, it would be a good thing."
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard these words:
In his heart he thought to himself,
"If I should have to be responsible for preparing the coffin, and loading the bulky belongings of our family and its dependents into carts for the journey, it is bound, at the very least, to hold me up for a considerable period of time and cause me to miss out on this opportunity to marry Sister Six. It would be better for me, thus and so, to propose setting out for home immediately with two carts loaded with trunks of valuables. It would not be too late for me then to come back and take care of my father's coffin after marrying Sister Six."
He then said to his mother, "At present, the roads are beset with bandits and are hazardous to travel. If we were all to set out together, with my father's coffin and our trunkloads of bulky household belongings loaded onto any number of carts and beasts of burden, it would be difficult to avoid arousing attention; and if we were to encounter a bunch of brigands along the way, what would we do?
It is better to be late than to be sorry.
I ought to set out for home right now with two carts loaded with trunks of valuables, and take care of getting the house in shape. You and Ch'en Ting, along with the other household dependents, can then accompany father's coffin, and return home during the first month, after the New Year's Festival is over. It will not be too late then to deposit the coffin in a temple outside the city walls, arrange a funeral ceremony and scripture recitation, and see that it is properly entombed."
His mother, being the woman that she was, though she ought not to have done so, allowed herself to be persuaded by Ch'en Ching-chi's artful arguments; set out to pack two trunks with valuables; and loaded them onto two large carts that bore banners identifying them as pilgrimage vehicles. He departed from the Eastern Capital on the tenth day of the twelfth month and arrived not many days later at the gate of the family home in the Ch'ing-ho district of Shantung province.
Upon his arrival, he told his maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, "My father is already dead, and my mother is going to accompany the cart with his bier and should arrive sometime in the near future. I have brought two cartloads of belongings with me and have come ahead to take care of getting the house in shape and sweeping it out prior to her arrival."
When his maternal uncle heard this, he said, "In that case, I had better move out and return to my own home."
He then, forthwith, told his servants to move his belongings and vacated the premises.
Upon seeing his maternal uncle move out, Ch'en Ching-chi was utterly delighted and said to himself:
"At long last my enemy has been removed from my sight,

which will enable me to marry Sister Six and enjoy her here at home to my heart's content. Since my father is already dead, and my mother dotes on me, I can first divorce that whore of mine, and then lodge a formal complaint against my mother-in-law and have her haled into court in order to recover the things that my family originally entrusted to her. Under the circumstances, she is no longer in a position to say no to this demand, since the members of my family are no longer threatened with military exile."
Truly:
Though men may plan to do thus and so:
Heaven's principles may yet deny them.
Ch'en Ching-chi, as soon as he had succeeded in getting his maternal uncle to move out, put a hundred taels of silver into the wallet at his waist, and another ten taels into his sleeve as a gratuity for Dame Wang, and proceeded to make his way to the door of her house on Amethyst Street.
Strange as it may seem,
what should he see but the temporary tombs of two corpses buried on the side of the street in front of her door, with a pair of spears crisscrossed above them, and a lantern suspended from them. On the door there hung a handwritten placard that read as follows:
Notice concerning a case of murder posted by the district yamen. The culprit, Wu Sung, has murdered the woman née P'an and Dame Wang. Anyone who is able to apprehend him, or provide information to the authorities, will be rewarded with fifty taels of silver.
Ch'en Ching-chi raised his head and gazed at it for some time.
What should he see at this juncture but two men who emerged from a temporary shelter and shouted at him, "Who are you? And why are you gazing at that placard? At present, the real culprit has not been apprehended. Who are you anyway?"
The two of them advanced toward him in large strides as though they wished to take him into custody. Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into such consternation by this that he fled from the scene as fast as he could go.
As he was passing by the tavern below the stone bridge on Lion Street, he ran into someone wearing a flat-topped cap and a black jacket, who came up behind him from under the bridge and said, "Brother, you're really foolhardy. What were you staring at back there for no good reason?"
When Ch'en Ching-chi turned his head to look at him, he saw that it was an old friend of his named Yang the Elder, nicknamed the Iron Fingernail.
After the two of them had exchanged greetings, Yang the Elder said, "Brother, I haven't seen you for some time. Where have you been?"
Ch'en Ching-chi told him all about his trip to the Eastern Capital and his father's death and then said, "That woman who was slain recently was a concubine of my father-in-law's, whose maiden name was P'an. I didn't know that she had been murdered. It was only on reading that placard just now that I found out about it."
"It was her brother-in-law Wu Sung who did it," explained Yang the Elder. "He had been serving a term in military exile but was able to return home as the result of a general amnesty. I don't know why he murdered the woman and also refused to let Dame Wang off. He has a young niece who was supported for the last three or four years by my maternal Uncle Yao the Second. The other day, when her uncle committed those murders and disappeared, who knows where, my uncle recovered the girl from the district yamen, and he is planning to look for someone he can marry her to. Right now, those two corpses have been buried in their temporary graves for some time and are a source of distress to the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, who don't know on what day, month, and year the culprit Wu Sung will be arrested."
When he had finished speaking, Yang the Elder invited Ch'en Ching-chi to join him for a drink in the tavern, saying, "It will serve to brush off the dust from your journey."
Ch'en Ching-chi was so distressed at heart by the death of the woman that he was unable to enjoy the wine, and after drinking a mere three cups or so, he got up, went downstairs, said good-bye, and returned home.
That evening, he bought a hundred sheets of paper money and made his way to a spot by the stone bridge, some distance from Dame Wang's house on Amethyst Street, and addressed the woman, saying, "Sister Six, née P'an, I, your younger brother Ch'en Ching-chi, am burning a hundred sheets of paper money on your behalf today. It is all because I arrived back a step too late that you forfeited your life.
While alive you were a human being;
Once dead you have become a spirit.[6]
Allow me to assure you that I will apprehend your enemy Wu Sung in order to:
Avenge your wrong and assuage your resentment.
Only when I see him dismembered on the execution ground will my aspirations of a lifetime be fulfilled."
When he had finished speaking, he wept and then burned the paper money on her behalf.
Upon returning home, Ch'en Ching-chi shut the door, entered his bedroom, and went to bed, whereupon:
Seemingly asleep yet not asleep,
Chin-lien appeared to him in a dream, dressed all in white, with her entire body covered with blood, and wept before him, saying, "My brother, I died a gruesome death. I had hoped that I would be able to spend the rest of my life with you, but unexpectedly you failed to show up, and I was murdered by that rascal Wu Sung. At present, the Underworld will not admit me, so that, by day, I can only:
Drift aimlessly about;[7]
and, by night, I have to scrounge around everywhere in search of offerings made to the deceased. Just now, I received the hundred sheets of paper money that you burned for me, but that enemy of mine has not yet been apprehended, and my corpse is lying in a temporary grave on the street. If you are still moved by our old feelings for each other, you might buy a coffin, put my corpse into it, and see that I am properly buried, so that I will not have to lie there exposed for days on end."
Ch'en Ching-chi wept on hearing this and said, "My sister, needless to say, I would like to see you properly buried. But I am afraid that my mother-in-law, that bitch who is utterly devoid of benevolence or righteousness from the Hsi-men Ch'ing household, who has it in for me, would seize upon this pretext to do me harm. Sister, what you ought to do is go to the residence of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and ask Ch'un-mei to see if she can take care of having you properly buried."
"I have just been to the commandant's residence," the woman said, "but:
The Gate God and the Portal Sentinel,[8]
blocked my way and would not let me in. I will have to go back and plead with them again however long it may take."
Ch'en Ching-chi wept on hearing this and reached out to take hold of her and discuss the problem further when he was assailed by the stench of blood from her body as she extricated herself from his grasp and disappeared. It turned out to be but:
A dream of the Southern Branch.
As he lay awake on his pillow he heard the watchman's drum sound the second period of the third watch and said to himself, "How uncanny! Just now, I clearly saw Sister Six in a dream. She shared her innermost feelings with me and asked me to take care of giving her a proper burial; but we don't know:
On what day of what year,[9]
Wu Sung will be apprehended. It's really distressing."
Truly:
Beset by limitless sorrow, communicated
in a dream;
He sits alone in an empty room, weeping
until dawn.
We will say no more for the moment about how Ch'en Ching-chi sought for information about the whereabouts of Wu Sung.
To resume our story, the authorities in the district yamen spent more than two months trying to locate and arrest Wu Sung but failed to apprehend him. Only then did they learn that he had fled to join the band of outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh. When the local constable, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, and the neighbors reported this to the authorities, it was decided that it would be appropriate to empower the relatives of the deceased to remove their bodies for burial. Dame Wang's corpse was duly taken away and buried by her son Wang Ch'ao; but there was no one to take charge of P'an Chin-lien's cadaver.
To resume our story, in the meantime, Ch'un-mei in Commandant Chou Hsiu's residence had been sending Chang Sheng and Li An to the district yamen every two or three days to find out if there was any news about the situation; and they had been reporting back that the culprit had not yet been apprehended, that the bodies of the victims were still temporarily interred under the surveillance of the local constable, and that under the circumstances no one would dare to remove them. This situation continued until some time in the first ten days of the first month of the following year.
Unexpectedly, one evening, Ch'un-mei had a dream in which Chin-lien appeared to her:
In an illusory and hallucinatory manner;[10]
With her cloud-shaped chignon disheveled,
And her entire figure covered with blood;
and called out to her, saying, "Young lady P'ang, my good sister, I died a gruesome death. I have been unable to come and see you, having been prevented by the Gate Gods who shouted so fiercely at me that I did not dare try to come in. At present, my nemesis Wu Sung has managed to escape, and my corpse has been exposed in the street for a long time:
Blown by the wind, drenched by the rain,[11]
And stepped on by the chickens and dogs,
with no one to bury it. Since I am without any relatives to look to, if you can remember our former feelings for each other, like those between mother and daughter, bring yourself to purchase a coffin for me, and see to my burial:
Although I will be dead in the Underworld,
I will be able to close my mouth and eyes."
When she had finished speaking, she wept unceasingly. Ch'un-mei attempted to take hold of her, wishing to question her further, but she extricated herself from her grasp and disappeared, leaving Ch'un-mei to wake up and find that it was merely:
A dream of the Southern Branch.
Upon wakening from her dream in tears, she was:
Hesitant and uncertain what to do.[12]
The next day, she called in Chang Sheng and Li An and directed them, saying, "The two of you go to the front of the district yamen and see whether the corpses of that woman and Dame Wang are still buried there, or not."
Chang Sheng and Li An accepted her instructions and set off on their errand.
Before long, they returned and reported, "The perpetrator of their murders is still at large. It is not convenient for the local officials to continue keeping watch over the corpses any longer, so they have empowered the relatives of the victims to remove their corpses and bury them. The corpse of Dame Wang has been removed by her son, but no one has come forward to take charge of the other woman's corpse, which is still buried there on the street."
Ch'un-mei said to them, "In that case, there is something I would like to ask the two of you to do for me, for which I will see that you are amply rewarded."
The two of them knelt down and said, "Mistress, how can you say such a thing? If you are willing to put in a good word for us with the master, that will be more than sufficient.
Though we should have to go through fire and water,
we would not refuse your request."
Ch'un-mei went into her room and came out with ten taels of silver and two bolts of muslin, which she turned over to the two of them, saying, "This murdered woman is actually a sister of mine, who married into Hsi-men Ch'ing's household but has been murdered upon leaving it. I would like the two of you, without informing the master, to take this silver, purchase a coffin with it, see that her corpse is encoffined, and then carry it outside the city and take care of burying it properly in some convenient spot. If you do so, I will see that you are amply rewarded."
The two of them responded, "That's no problem. We will do what you ask."
But Li An said, "I'm only afraid that the authorities in the district yamen will not let the two of us remove the corpse. It would be preferable if we could give them a note from the master authorizing our request."
Chang Sheng responded, "If we simply tell them that our mistress is a younger sister of the deceased who married into the Hsi-men household, the authorities in the yamen will not dare not to comply with our request. What need is there for a note?"
Thereupon, they took the silver and retired to the duty room, where Chang Sheng said to Li An, "I imagine that this murdered woman and our mistress must have lived together in the Hsi-men household and become intimate with one another. Otherwise, why should our mistress go to such pains on her behalf? I remember that when our mistress heard that this woman was dead, she did nothing but weep for two or three days and refused to eat, which disturbed our master to such an extent that he sent someone out onto the street to hire an itinerant acrobat to come in and try to entertain her, but her sorrow remained unassuaged. So, today, when there are no relatives to take possession of her corpse, how could our mistress fail to take care of having it decently buried? If we are able to carry this task out successfully, she is bound, sooner or later, to speak to the master on our behalf. Which means she will turn out to be our lucky star. At present, the master pays heed to everything she says and is:
Obedient to her every whim,
while our First Mistress and Second Mistress have had to take a back seat."
When they had finished speaking, the two of them took the silver they had been provided with, went to the district yamen, and submitted a formal request that they be authorized to remove the corpse, explaining that their mistress, a member of His Honor Chou Hsiu's household, was the younger sister of the deceased and had entrusted them with this task. They then spent six taels of silver on the construction of a coffin, disinterred the woman's cadaver, replaced her heart and entrails in her abdominal cavity, employed thread to reattach her head to her body, wrapped the corpse in a shroud, and placed it in the coffin.
Chang Sheng then said, "We might as well take her out to be buried at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, our master's family temple outside the South Gate, where there are empty grounds available, and then report back to our mistress."
They then hired two men to carry the coffin out to the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where they explained to the abbot, Tao-chien, that the corpse was that of a relative of their mistress. The abbot, who did not dare to be remiss, chose a spot for the burial behind the temple, under a hollow-trunked white poplar tree.
Once the burial was completed, they returned home and reported to Ch'un-mei, saying, "There are still four taels of silver left over after buying a coffin and placing her corpse in the casket, which we hereby return to you."
"I have put the two of you to a lot of trouble," responded Ch'un-mei. "You should give two of the four remaining taels to Abbot Tao-chien, and ask him to arrange for the recitation of Buddhist sutras and litanies of repentance in order to ensure her rebirth in Heaven."
She then presented them with a large flagon of wine, a leg of pork, and a leg of lamb and said, "As for these two remaining taels of silver, each of you should take one of them home with you to help with your household expenses."
The two of them knelt down before her and refused to accept what she had offered, saying, "Mistress, if you will only put in a good word for us with the master, we will be more than adequately compensated. How could we accept payment in silver for such a meager accomplishment?"
"If I offer you a reward and you refuse to accept it," said Ch'un-mei, "you will only make me angry."
The two of them, consequently, felt obliged to kowtow to her and accept what she had offered before leaving her presence. As they drank the wine they had been given in the duty room, they expressed great appreciation for their young mistress.
The next day, Chang Sheng went to deliver the silver to Abbot Tao-chien and arrange for the scripture recitations. Ch'un-mei also spent five mace of silver to purchase paper money to burn on Chin-lien's behalf. But no more of this.
To resume our story, Ch'en Ting had conducted the coffin of Ch'en Ching-chi's deceased father, Ch'en Hung, and his dependents from the Eastern Capital to the outskirts of Ch'ing-ho district, where they proceeded to store the coffin temporarily in the Temple of Eternal Felicity until they could make the arrangements for scripture recitations, funeral rites, and the burial ceremony.
When Ch'en Ching-chi, who was living in the family home, heard that his mother, née Chang, their servants, and the carts with their belongings had arrived, and that his father's coffin had been placed in storage at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city, he proceeded to bring in the luggage, before kowtowing to his mother.
His mother was annoyed and asked him, "Why did you not come to meet me?"
Ch'en Ching-chi merely replied that he was depressed, on the one hand, and that there was no one to look after the place.
His mother then asked, "Why is your uncle not to be seen?"
To which he replied, "On hearing that you were coming home, he promptly moved out and returned to his own place."
"You should have told your uncle to stay a while," his mother said. "What need was there for him to move out so fast?"
Soon thereafter, his uncle, Militia Commander Chang Kuan, came to see his elder sister, and the two of them:
Embraced each other by the neck and wept.[13]
Wine was served and they proceeded to chat together, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
The next day, his mother sent Ch'en Ching-chi to deliver five taels of silver and several packets of paper money to Abbot Tao-chien at the temple outside the city gate, so he could arrange a scripture recitation on behalf of his deceased father. As he was riding his donkey along the street, he ran into two friends of his named Lu the Second and Yang the Elder and dismounted in order to greet them.
"Brother, where are you going?" the two of them asked.
Ch'en Ching-chi explained his errand, saying, "My deceased father's coffin is in temporary storage at a temple outside the city gate. Tomorrow, the twentieth, is the time for the final weekly commemoration of his death, and my mother has sent me to deliver some silver to the abbot so he can arrange for a funeral ceremony and scripture recitation on his behalf."
"The two of us did not know that your father's coffin had arrived," they responded. "We have been remiss in offering our condolences."
They then went on to ask, "When will the funeral procession and the burial ceremony take place?"

"They will take place in another day or two," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "After the scripture recitation has been held, he will be put to rest in the grave."
When they had finished their conversation, the two of them raised their hands in a gesture of farewell and started to leave, but Ch'en Ching-chi called them back and asked Yang the Elder, "How is it that the cadaver of my father-in-law's concubine, née P'an, that was temporarily interred in front of the district yamen is no longer to be seen? Who has taken it away?"
"About a fortnight ago," said Yang the Elder, "because the local authorities had not been able to apprehend Wu Sung, they petitioned the district magistrate to allow the relatives of the deceased to take their corpses away for burial. Dame Wang's cadaver was taken away by her son, but the body of the other woman was left where it was for another three or four days. In the end, someone from the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command purchased a coffin and sent people to carry the bier outside the city and bury it on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity."
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he realized that it must have been Ch'un-mei, who was now a member of the commandant's household, who had arranged for the burial of the body.
He then turned to Lu the Second and asked, "How many Temples of Eternal Felicity are there outside the city wall?"
"There is only the one Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate," replied Lu the Second. "It is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu. How could there be more than one temple of that name?"
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he was secretly pleased and thought to himself, "So it's the same Temple of Eternal Felicity after all.
This coincidence was fated to occur.
It is fantastic that Sister Six is also buried there."
He then took leave of his two friends, whipped up his donkey, and made his way outside the city straight to the Temple of Eternal Felicity.
On meeting Abbot Tao-chien, he did not mention the scripture recitation for his father but asked the abbot, "Where is the grave of the woman from Commandant Chou Hsiu's household that was buried here recently?"
"It is underneath the white poplar tree behind the temple," the abbot replied. "They said that it was the body of the elder sister of the young mistress from the commandant's household."
Ch'en Ching-chi did not even bother to go look at his father's coffin but went first to P'an Chin-lien's grave with his paper money and sacrificial offerings.
After presenting the offerings and burning the paper money, he wept, saying, "Sister Six, your younger brother Ch'en Ching-chi has respectfully burned a packet of paper money on your behalf. May you:
Find an appropriate place in which to live;
And use the cash to cope with any problems."[14]
Only after he had finished sacrificing to her did he proceed to the abbot's quarters in order to burn paper money before his father's coffin and offer a sacrifice to him. He then presented the abbot with the money to pay for a scripture recitation and asked him to arrange for eight Buddhist monks to hold a scripture reading on the twentieth to mark the final weekly commemoration of his father's death. The abbot accepted the money offered for the scripture recitation and provided him with a vegetarian repast, after which Ch'en Ching-chi returned home to report to his mother.
On the twentieth, they all went to the temple to burn incense and select an auspicious day for the funeral procession. Later on, after his father's coffin had been transported to their ancestral graveyard and properly buried, they returned home, where mother and son continued to live together. But no more of this.
To resume our story, one day during the first ten days of the second month, when the weather was mild, Wu Yüeh-niang, together with Meng Yü-lou, Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and Hsiao-yü, made their way out to the front gate in order to observe the coming and going of the carts and horses, and enjoy:
The liveliness of the teeming crowds.[15]
While there, they happened to observe a throng of men and women following in the wake of a Buddhist monk, who had an imposingly corpulent figure, wore bronze effigies of three Buddhas on his head, and bore a number of lantern trees on his body.
The sleeves of his apricot-yellow gown
ruffled in the wind;
While the ankles of his naked feet were
immersed in the mire.
He claimed to be an itinerant monk who had been ordained at Mount Wu-t'ai[16] and had arrived here in the course of his wanderings in the endeavor to raise money and supplies for the erection of a Buddhist sanctuary there. An author of olden times has bequeathed us a few lines describing the virtues of such itinerant monks.
Assuming the lotus position to practice meditation,
Explaining the scriptures and expounding the Dharma,[17]
Raising their brows and blinking their eyes,
They struggle to attain the truth of the patriarchs.[18]
Relying on their religion to seek sustenance,
They propound the regulations of the Buddhist faith.
By day, they only sport their placards
and rattle their bells;
At night, they manipulate their spears
and flaunt their clubs.
Sometimes, they kowtow with their bald
heads outside the gate;
When hungry, they give themselves loud
slaps along the street.
Reality is vacuity, vacuity is reality;
But who has ever seen living beings
escape the mundane world?
They may go and come, and come and go;[19]
But who have they managed to escort
to the Western Paradise?
When the monk saw Wu Yüeh-niang and the other women gathered at the gate, he came forward and saluted them in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "You venerable lay bodhisattva-like benefactors, though you may inhabit:
Vast courtyards and secluded mansions,
are all predestined to be present at the Dragon Flower Assembly.[20] I have come down from Mount Wu-t'ai in the hope of cementing our virtuous affinity by soliciting the funds to erect a temple to the Ten Kings of the Underworld and a sanctuary dedicated to the Three Jewels, The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The success of this effort is dependent upon the willingness of you bodhisattvas, and others of:
The patrons in the ten directions,
to:
Widely sow your fields of fortune,[21]
so that by disbursing your wealth you can:
Together achieve a major endeavor,
and thus ensure:
A just reward in the life to come.
This humble monk is merely an intermediary."
Upon listening to his appeal, Yüeh-niang turned to Hsiao-yü and directed her to fetch a monk's hat, a pair of monk's sandals, a string of copper cash, and a peck of white rice from her room. It so happens that Yüeh-niang had always been given to:
Almsgiving, or providing vegetarian
meals for monks,
so that during her leisure hours she devoted herself to making monk's hats and monk's sandals in order to give to them.
When Hsiao-yü brought these things out, Yüeh-niang said to her, "You go ask His Reverence to come forward, and bestow these things upon him."
Hsiao-yü, thereupon:
Deliberately adopting an arrogant air,[22]
called out in a loud voice, saying, "You shaven-pated donkey of a monk, why haven't you come over here? My mistress is bestowing all these things on you, and you haven't even kowtowed in response."
Yüeh-niang rebuked her, saying, "You crazy, depraved little stinker! He is a monk, and a devoted Buddhist.
As though you didn't know any better,
how can you bring yourself to abuse him that way? It's really outrageous. Little whore that you are, there's no telling how much evil karma you will have accumulated before you're through."
Hsiao-yü laughed at this and responded, "Mistress, as for this lousy monk, why is it that when I called him over, he devoted himself to:
Looking me over from top to bottom,
with those furtive eyes of his?"
The monk, for his part, accepted the sandals, hat, cash, and rice with both hands, saluted Yüeh-niang in the Buddhist fashion, and said, "Many thanks for your largess, you venerable bodhisattva of a benefactor."
"This shaven-pated rascal is really discourteous?" remarked Hsiao-yü. "All of us are standing here, but he has only offered us two salutations. Why has he not offered one to me?"
"You little piece," said Yüeh-niang. "How can you:
Scramble black and white,
so blatantly? He is a son of the Buddha, and you are not worthy of receiving his salutation."
"Mistress," responded Hsiao-yü, "if he is a son of the Buddha, who are the Buddha's daughters?"
"I imagine," said Yüeh-niang, "that it is ordained nuns who are the daughters of the Buddha."
"If you say that people like Nun Hsüeh, Nun Wang, and the abbess of the Kuan-yin Nunnery are all daughters of the Buddha," continued Hsiao-yü, "who are the sons-in-law of the Buddha?"
Yüeh-niang could not help laughing at this and reproved her, saying, "You lousy little whore! You've developed such an:
Oily mouth and a slippery tongue,
that you constantly resort to vulgarity."
"Mistress," responded Hsiao-yü, "you're only directing your criticism at me, but this shaven-pated monk, with his:
Thievish looks and prying eyes,
has been constantly ogling me."
"The fact that he looks at you that way," said Meng Yü-lou, "must be because he recognizes you as a candidate for salvation."
"If he really wants to save me," responded Hsiao-yü, "I'm willing to go along with him."
The gathering of womenfolk couldn't help laughing over this, but Yüeh-niang reproved her in a loud voice, saying, "You little whore! It seems that all you can do is persist in:
Blaspheming monks and profaning Buddhas."[23]
Meanwhile, the monk in question accepted the donations and proceeded nonchalantly on his way with the bronze effigies of three Buddhas on his head.
"Mistress," complained Hsiao-yü, "though you rebuked me for cursing him, as you saw yourself, that lousy shaven-pated rascal gave me another indecent look as he departed."
There is a poem that describes Yüeh-niang's proclivity to:
Cultivate her virtue by charity to monks.
Maintaining my widowhood and reading the sutras
the years and months flow by;
Private dissipation and meaningless indulgence
have long been anathema to me.
My person is just like the moon near the edge
of the horizon;
That will not let itself be intruded upon by
floating clouds.
As Yüeh-niang and the others continued their conversation by the gate, they suddenly observed that Auntie Hsüeh was passing by on the street with her box of trinkets in hand.
When she saw Yüeh-niang and the others she bowed to them, and Yüeh-niang asked, "Where are you headed? And why have we not seen so much as your shadow around here recently?"
"I hardly know what it is that keeps me so busy all day," said Auntie Hsüeh. During the last few days, the family of His Honor Judicial Commissioner Chang Mao-te who lives on Main Street has contracted a marriage between his son and the niece of Eunuch Director Hsü from the northern quarter, a match that was proposed by myself and Auntie Wen. Yesterday, as part of the 'third-day celebration,' they put on a lavish party, which kept me so busy that even though the young lady from your place who is now the mistress of Commandant Chou Hsiu's household sent for me, I was unable to go. Who knows how irritated with me she may be?"
"So where are you headed right now?" Yüeh-niang asked.
"There is something that I have respectfully come to tell you about," said Auntie Hsüeh.
"If there is something you want to communicate," said Yüeh-niang, "come inside and tell me about it."
So saying, she ushered Auntie Hsüeh back to the master suite in the rear compound and offered her a seat.
When they had consumed a serving of tea, Auntie Hsüeh said, "Venerable lady, you may not know about it, but last year in the Eastern Capital your son-in-law's father Ch'en Hung fell ill and died, and his wife called upon your son-in-law to come and help bring their dependents and his coffin home. They arrived here during the first month, and the scripture recitation, funeral procession, and burial ceremony have already taken place. I had assumed that you knew about all this, but if so, why did you not go burn some paper money on his behalf, or visit with your relatives?"
"If you had not come to tell us about it, how could we have known?" said Yüeh-niang. No one bothered to inform us. All we heard was that P'an Chin-lien had been murdered by her brother-in-law and was buried, along with Dame Wang, in a temporary grave. And we don't even know what her situation may be at present."
Auntie Hsüeh opined, "It has always been true that for P'an Chin-lien, as for all of us:
Her place of birth and place of death

were predetermined.
If the Fifth Lady's conduct had not caused her to be expelled from the household, everything would have been all right. But, for no good reason, since she:
Was not the sort to abide by her lot,
she chose to engage in an ugly affair, and got herself expelled. If she had remained in the household, how would her brother-in-law have been able to murder her? After all:
For every injustice there is a perpetrator;
For every debt there is a creditor.
It is thanks to the young lady from your household, Ch'un-mei, who couldn't get over her intimate feelings for her former mistress, that someone was sent to purchase a coffin, take possession of her corpse, and give it a proper burial. Otherwise, it would still be exposed to the public gaze in the street. Her brother-in-law has not been apprehended, and there was nobody else concerned about her fate."
Sun Hsüeh-o interrupted from the sidelines, saying, "It hasn't been long since Ch'un-mei was sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu. How could her status have risen so quickly to the point that she was able to dispense the silver needed to buy a coffin for her? How could the commandant help being annoyed with her? Who does she think she is, anyway?"
"Ai-ya!" responded Auntie Hsüeh. "You may not know it, but the commandant has really become attached to her. He spends every night in her quarters.
She has but to say one thing,
And he will comply with ten.
No sooner did he take her into his household than he noticed how attractive and intelligent she was, provided her with a suite of three rooms on the western side of the courtyard, assigned a maid to wait upon her, and spent three successive nights in her room. He had outfits of clothing for the four seasons tailored for her and allowed her to put her hair up like a regular lady. At the party on the 'third-day celebration' he rewarded me with a tael of silver and a bolt of satin. His first wife is forty-nine years old, is blind in both eyes, restricts herself to vegetarian fare, and does not concern herself with household affairs. His concubine Sun Erh-niang resides on the eastern side of the courtyard and has borne him a daughter. Although she is theoretically in charge of the household, she has her hands full looking after her daughter. As a result, the keys to all the storerooms in the house, both large and small, have been entrusted to Ch'un-mei. The commandant responds favorably to every request she has to make. So how can you say that she would be unable to disburse such a sum of silver?"
With these few words she managed to reduce both Yüeh-niang and Sun Hsüeh-o to silence.
After sitting a while longer, Auntie Hsüeh got up to go, and Yüeh-niang said to her, "If you are willing to come back tomorrow, I will prepare an offertory table, a bolt of fabric, and a packet of paper money for the use of the dead, and impose upon you to escort Hsi-men Ta-chieh to her father-in-law's tomb in order to burn the paper money on his behalf."
"Are you not going to go yourself?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.
"Just tell them I have been feeling out of sorts," said Yüeh-niang, "and that I will pay a visit to them on another day."
Auntie Hsüeh agreed to these arrangements, saying. "Tell the young lady to get everything ready and wait for me. I will come by after lunch."
"Where are you off to now?" inquired Yüeh-niang. "If it is the commandant's place, forget it."
"If I don't go, they will be annoyed to death with me," said Auntie Hsüeh. "They have sent a young servant to summon me several times already."
"What are they summoning you for," asked Yüeh-niang.
"Mistress," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "you may not know it, but she is already four or five months pregnant. His Honor is utterly delighted and has probably summoned me in order to reward me."
So saying, she picked up her box of trinkets, said farewell, and proceeded on her way.
"What that old whore says is completely without any basis," remarked Sun Hsüeh-o. "How long has it been since she was sold into the commandant's household? Scarcely long enough to have developed half a wombful of child. That commandant, at the very least, has a number of concubines at his disposal. So why should he insist on favoring her? How can she overstate things so?"
"He already has a legitimate wife," said Yüeh-niang, "as well as a concubine who has borne him a daughter."
"It's outrageous!" pronounced Sun Hsüeh-o. "Just an example of the loquaciousness of a go-between.
Producing hundred-foot waves out of a
foot's worth of water."
What Sun Hsüeh-o said that day was not without consequences. Truly:
Heaven has seen fit to bestow both
the needle and thread;
That bring out discordant patterns
from the fabric's ground.[24]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
One recalls the time when she was a servant
at her mistress's beck and call;
Who could have anticipated that today her
prospects would be so different?
In this world, the infinite possibilities
are all predetermined;[25]
Scoff not that, in this floating life one's
efforts may prove vain.

For a moment he beheld her in a dream
But, when he woke, he knew that there was no one.
He turned and tossed and could not sleep
Then threw his clothes about him and paced the floor.
The morning breeze is sharp
The moonbeams dim.
He lies alone, wakeful, till morning breaks
But she of whom he dreamed
Does not return.
When Wang Chao and the police came to Wu Song's place, the doors were still fastened. In old woman Wang's house, money and things were missing and clothes were strewn over the floor. They realized that Wu Song had murdered the woman and gone off with the money. They forced the door and found the two bodies on the floor, covered with blood. The entrails of Pan Jinlian were pinned to the eaves at the back of the house, and Ying'er was still shut up in the room. She could only cry when they questioned her. The next morning they brought the matter before the notice of the magistrate and produced such evidence as they could get.
This magistrate had been recently appointed, and his name was Li Changqi. He was a native of Zaoqiang in the prefecture of Chending. When he heard of the murder, he sent his runners to summon the neighbors and the members of both families. So Wang Chao and Ying'er came before the magistrate. The house and the bodies were examined. The magistrate declared that Wu Song, when drunk, had killed the women Pan and Wang. He ordered the bodies to be buried temporarily, and issued a warrant for Wu Song's arrest, offering a reward of fifty taels of silver for his apprehension.
Zhang Sheng and Li An took a hundred taels with them and went to old woman Wang's house again. But when they got there, they found that the two women had been killed and that the local officials were examining the bodies and taking steps to arrest the murderer. They went back and told their master. When Chunmei heard the news, she wept for three days and would neither eat nor drink. Major Zhou was much disturbed and sent for all kinds of different entertainers to amuse her, but they could not assuage her grief. Every day she sent Zhang Sheng and Li An to see if Wu Song had been arrested.
Meanwhile, Chen Jingji had gone to the Eastern Capital to get some money so that he could marry Jinlian. On the way, he met Chen Ding, a servant of his family, who was coming to tell him that his father was very ill and that his mother wanted him to take up the responsibilities of the household. Then Jingji traveled with even more haste than before. At last he came to the Eastern Capital and hurried to the house of his uncle, Zhang Shilian. But his uncle was dead, and his aunt told him that his father had died three days before. They were all wearing mourning clothes.
Jingji made a reverence before his father's tablet, and kowtowed to his mother and his aunt. His mother realized that he was now a grown man, cried with him, and talked about the matters that needed to be decided. "I am happy and sad at the same time," she said. When Jingji asked her what she meant, she said she was happy because the announcement of the Emperor's successor meant a general amnesty for all prisoners, and sad because of the death of Jingji's father and uncle. "Your aunt is now a widow," she said, "and we shall not be able to stay here any longer. You must take your father's body and bury it at our old home."
If I take the coffin and all the other things, Jingji thought, it will mean a long and slow journey, and I shall be too late to marry. I had better take the chests and valuables and go and marry Jinlian at once. Then I can come back for the coffin, and I shall not be too late.
When he had thought the matter over, he said to his mother: "The country is overridden by bandits and thieves and it is not at all safe to travel. If I take both the coffin and the boxes at the same time, they are likely to attract attention, and what can I do if anything happens? I suggest we do things more gradually. To begin with, I will get two carts and take all these trunks and things and go and see about a house for you. Then I will come back and take you, Chen Ding, and the coffin, at the beginning of next year. When we are settled, we will put the coffin into a monastery and offer sacrifice, then build a tomb and bury it."
His mother, being a woman, was deceived by these smooth-sounding words. She let him take everything away, two cartloads in all. They put banners on the carts to make it seem as though they were pilgrims and, on the first day of the twelfth month, Chen Jingji left the Capital.
When he reached Qinghe, he went to tell his Uncle Zhang that his father was dead, and that his mother and his father's body were coming shortly. "I have brought these things," he said, "so as to make everything ready for my mother."
"In that case," his uncle said, "I must go back to my own house." He bade his servants make preparations at once for the removal.
When his uncle had gone, Jingji was delighted. "Now I have got rid of that old fellow," he said to himself, "I can marry Jinlian straightaway and have a good time. My father is dead and my mother treats me with every indulgence. I will begin by divorcing my wife, and then send an accusation against my mother-in-law. She has no hold on me now since my family is no longer under the ban."
People decide upon courses of action like this, but Heaven often thinks otherwise. Jingji took a hundred taels for old woman Wang, and went to Amethyst Street. But when he got there, there were two rough graves outside the door, each with a spear and a large lantern upon it. On the door itself was pasted a notice that said: "Murder! The murderer Wu Song has killed Pan and Wang. Anyone who arrests him, or gives notice of his whereabouts, will receive a reward of fifty taels of silver."
Jingji looked at the notice. He was as if rooted to the ground. Two men came out of a tent.
"Who are you?" they cried. "Why are you looking at the notice? We haven't arrested anybody yet. Who are you?" They looked as though they would lay hands on Jingji. He ran away. When he came to a wine house, not far from the stone bridge, he saw a man dressed in black coming towards him.
"What are you doing here, Brother?" the man said. "You seem very brave."
Jingji saw that it was a great friend of his, a man called Yang the Second, who was nicknamed Iron Claw. They greeted one another, and Yang the Second asked Jingji where he had been. Jingji told him that he had been to the Eastern Capital, and that his father had died. Then he said: "This woman who has been killed was my father-in-law's wife. This is the first I have heard of it. I have only just read the notice."
"It was her brother, Wu Song, who came back from banishment and murdered her," Yang the Second said. "I don't know why he did it. He even killed old woman Wang. I know Wu Song had a niece, for she has been living with my uncle, Yao the Second, for the last three or four years. Wu Song ran away as soon as he had murdered the two women, and my aunt got the girl away from the authorities and found a husband for her. The two bodies, as you see, are still here. The police will have a very difficult task looking out for Wu Song all the time, and I doubt whether he will ever be caught."
Yang the Second asked Jingji to go and drink with him in the wine house. Now that the young man knew his lover was dead, he was very much upset and could not drink much. He drank three cups or so and then left Yang the Second and went home. That evening he bought some paper money. Then he went to the stone bridge not far from old woman Wang's door. "Sister Pan," he said, "your young brother, Chen Jingji, comes to offer you this paper money. It was because my coming back was so delayed that you met your death. Now you are dead, you will become a goddess. Use your spiritual power to help those who seek to arrest Wu Song. When he is found, I will go to the place of execution to see him cut to pieces. Only then shall I be satisfied."
He sobbed and set fire to the paper money. Then he went home, shut the gate, and went to his own room. He went to sleep. Jinlian appeared to him, wearing a simple dress, and covered with blood. She said to him, with tears: "Brother, I died such a bitter death. I longed to live with you, but, alas, before you came back, that fellow Wu Song murdered me. The underworld will not take me in, so all day I must wander about, and all night I seek for shelter everywhere and try to beg a little water to drink. I thank you for burning paper money for me. My murderer has not been found, and still my body lies in the street. If you think of our past love, buy a coffin and bury me properly, that I may not lie there exposed any longer."
"Sister," Jingji said, "you know that I would gladly bury you, but I am afraid of my mother-in-law, that cruel, heartless woman. If she hears of it, she will seek to do me some evil, and this would be an opportunity. Sister, go to Major Zhou's place. See Chunmei and ask her to have your body buried."
"I have been there," Jinlian cried, "and I could not get in. The god of the gate stopped me. But I will go again."
Jingji still cried and tried to hold her hand and talk to her, but the smell of the blood on her body came to him, and she escaped from him. He woke up and found it was a dream. The night watchman's drum was sounding the third night watch.
"How strange!" he said to himself. "Did I not see my sister? Did she not tell me all about this tragedy and ask me to bury her? But I do not know when Wu Song will be arrested. It is a sad business."
Search was kept up for Wu Song, but two months passed and there was no sign of him. At last there came news that he had gone to Liangshan and joined the bandits, and the policemen told the magistrate. Then the magistrate gave orders that the bodies might now be taken away and buried by their families. Wang Chao took away his mother's body, but there was no one to bury Jinlian.
Chunmei had been sending Zhang Sheng and Li An nearly every day to the Town Hall for news. Each time they could only report that the murderer had not been caught and that the bodies were still there. The police were keeping watch over them and nobody dared move them. At the beginning of the first month, Chunmei had a dream. Pan Jinlian came to her, covered with blood and her hair in disorder. "Sister," the woman said, "I had such a sad death. It was hard for me to come and see you because the god of the gate would not let me in. Now my enemy, Wu Song, has escaped. My body still lies in the street, blown by the wind and drenched by the rain. Dogs and fowls come and stand over me. I have no near relations, and there is no one to take me away. If you still remember the friendship there used to be between us, buy a coffin and bury me somewhere. Then, in Hades, I can close my eyes and mouth in peace." As she said this, she cried bitterly.
Chunmei wished to take her hand and ask her many things, but Jinlian slipped away from her. She woke up and knew it was a dream. She was still crying.
She did not know what the dream meant until the next day. Then she said to Zhang Sheng and Li An: "Go and see whether the bodies of those two women are still there."
When they came back, the men told her: "The murderer has escaped and the two bodies could not lie there forever with the police keeping watch over them, so the magistrate has ordered the relatives to take them away. The old woman's son has taken away his mother's body, but the other woman is still there."
"Now," Chunmei said, "I am going to ask you two to do something for me. If you do it, I will see you are well paid for it."
The two men knelt down. "Lady," they said, "you need not talk of payment. If you will speak kindly of us to our master, we shall be grateful and, if you tell us to go through fire or water, we are ready to do it."
Chunmei went into her room and got ten taels of silver and two rolls of cloth.
"The dead woman was really my sister," she said to them. "She married Ximen Qing and, after his death, left his household. Then she was murdered. Don't say anything to your master, but go and buy a coffin with this money, put her body into it, and take her outside the city. Find a suitable place and bury her there. I will pay you well."
"We will go and do so at once," the men said.
"I am afraid the magistrate will not let us take the body away," Li An said. "We ought to have a card from our master to give him."
"Oh, we will tell him that the dead woman is our lady's sister," Zhang Sheng said. "I don't believe the magistrate will make any objection. We shan't need a card."
They took the money and went to the Town Hall.
"It is my belief that the dead woman must have been a friend of the master's young lady," Zhang Sheng said to Li An. "They probably lived together. That is why she is so concerned about this dead woman. Perhaps you remember that when the woman was killed, our lady cried for three or four days and wouldn't eat anything. The master sent for all sorts of people to come and amuse her, but they couldn't do anything. Now there is nobody to bury the woman and she wants to do it. If we manage this business, she will certainly say a kind word for us to our master. It is a stroke of luck for us, because he never refuses her anything. He considers her more than the other ladies."
They came to the Town Hall and sent in their petition. "The dead woman's sister is the Major's wife," they said. "It is by her orders that we have come to ask for leave to remove the body."
They paid six taels for a coffin. Then they dug up the body, put the woman's entrails back into it, and sewed up the gash with thread. Finally they wrapped her in a shroud and put her into the coffin.
"Our best plan," Zhang Sheng said, "will be to bury her at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where our master worships. There is room there."

They hired two men to carry the coffin to the temple and said to the Abbot that they would like to bury the body there, since it was that of their young mistress's sister. The Abbot pointed out a place behind the temple, near a poplar tree, and there they buried her. Then they went back and told Chunmei all they had done.
"We bought a coffin and buried her," they said, "and we have still four taels left."
"It is very kind of you," Chunmei said. "Will you take the four taels and give two to the Abbot and ask him to read a dirge to help her on her way to paradise?" She gave the two men each a tael and a present of food besides.
The two men knelt down. "We have done nothing," they said, "and we dare not take these gifts. We only ask that you should speak well of us to our master."
"I shall be angry if you do not." Chunmei said.
So the two men kowtowed and took the money. Then they went to drink, and said how kind their mistress was. The next day, Zhang Sheng took the silver and asked the Abbot to hold a service for the dead woman. Chunmei gave them five *qian* of silver to get paper money to burn for her.

* * *

Chen Ding reached Qinghe about this time. He brought with him Chen Jingji's family and his father's coffin. He set down the coffin at this same Temple of Eternal Felicity where, after a funeral service had been held, they proposed to bury it. When Jingji heard of their arrival, he brought in the luggage and kowtowed to his mother.
"Why did you not come to meet me?" she asked.
"I haven't been well, and there is no one to look after the house," he said.
"Where is your uncle?"
"When he found you were coming, he went back to his old house."
"You should not have allowed him to do so," Mistress Chen said. "He might just as well have stayed."
Then Zhang came to see his sister; they embraced each other and wept. Then they sat down together to talk.
The next day, Jingji's mother told him to take five taels of silver and some paper money and give them to the Abbot to hold a service for his father. Jingji set out on horseback. On the way, he met two of his friends, Lu and Yang. He dismounted, and greeted them. They asked him where he was going.
"My father's body is at the temple outside the city," Jingji told them. "Tomorrow will be the twentieth, and my father's last week's mind, so my mother has asked me to take some money to the Abbot for the ceremony."
"We are very sorry," the two men said. "We had no idea your father's coffin had arrived. When will the funeral be?"
"Not for a few days yet," Jingji said. "We shall not bury him until after this ceremony."
The two men bowed to him and were going on, but he called them back. "Yang," he said, "do you know who has taken away the body of that woman Pan?"
"About a fortnight ago," Yang said, "when it was clear that the police would not be able to lay hands on Wu Song, I told the magistrate, and the magistrate told the relatives they might remove the bodies. Old woman Wang's body was taken by her son, but the other remained for several days. Then somebody from Major Zhou's place brought a coffin and buried it at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city."
Then Jingji guessed that Chunmei had taken it. "Are there many Temples of Eternal Felicity outside the city?" he asked.
"There is only one," Yang told him, "the one where Major Zhou worships. How many would you like?"
Jingji was delighted. It seemed to him that it was by a special dispensation of providence that Jinlian should be buried there. They went their ways. Jingji mounted his horse and rode on to the temple. Before he mentioned the service for his father, he said to the Abbot: "I hear that Major Zhou's people have buried a woman here recently. Can you tell me where the grave is?"
"Behind the temple, under the poplar tree," the Abbot told him. "The dead woman was the young lady's sister."
Jingji did not go to his father's coffin, but took the paper money and other offerings to Jinlian's grave. There he burned the paper money for her. "Sister," he cried, "this is your young brother, Chen Jingji, come to make an offering to you. Find a pleasant place in which to live, and spend the money when you are in need of it."
Then he went to the place where his father's coffin rested and burned paper money there. He gave the money to the monks and said: "May we have eight monks on the twentieth, to perform the service for the last week's mind?" The Abbot took the money and went to see about preparing the necessary things. Jingji went home and told his mother.
On the twentieth day, they all went to the temple for the service. When it was over, they selected a day of good omen and buried the dead gentleman in his ancestral tomb. After this they went home and mother and son settled down in their house.
At the beginning of the second month it was very warm. Wu Yueniang, Meng Yulou, Sun Xue'e, and Ximen Dajie, with Xiaoyu, went and stood at the gate to look down the street. Everything seemed lively and busy. They suddenly caught sight of a crowd of people following a monk. He was very fat and tall; there were three bronze figures on his head, and lamps all over his body. His robes were apricot colored and had broad sleeves. His feet were bare, and his ankles splashed with mud.
He sits and gives himself to meditation
Expounds the sacred scriptures, preaches the gospel.
Broad shoulders, sunken eyes
Themselves exemplify the manner of the Buddha.
He begs his food and preaches
According to the rule of his religion.
By day he goes with staff and tinkling bell
At night brings out the spear and club.
Outside the door he beats his bald head to the ground
On the street he strikes his lips.
Reality is emptiness
And emptiness reality.
Who shall say what happens to this earthly life?
Some go, some come
Some come, some go.
But who has found a welcome
In the paradise of the west?
When he saw Yueniang and the other women standing at the gate, he came over to them and saluted them.
"Most charitable ladies," he said. "I see that you belong to an exalted family. This is a most opportune meeting. I have come from Mount Wu begging for alms, because I seek to build a temple for the ten Lords of Virtue and the Three Precious Ones. I rely entirely upon the charitable, who cultivate the field of generosity and give me alms. So this admirable work will be brought to a happy end, and a reward in the next life assured. I am but a wandering monk."
Yueniang told Xiaoyu to go and get a hat, a pair of shoes, a string of coppers, and a measure of white rice. She was always inclined to be generous to monks, and this one attracted her. She kept a store of hats and shoes especially for them. When Xiaoyu brought the things, Yueniang said: "Ask his Reverence to come and take them."
"You, monk, who will become a donkey in your next life," Xiaoyu said in her sweetest voice, "come here. My lady offers you these things. Why don't you kowtow to her?"
Yueniang scolded her. "You little scamp," she said. "He is a monk, a disciple of Buddha. You mustn't talk to him like that. It is his duty to ask for alms. You little strumpet, you will certainly be punished sooner or later."
Xiaoyu laughed. "That thievish monk!" she said. "What does he mean by letting his eyes roam over my body from head to feet?"
The monk accepted the gifts in both hands, made a reverence, and thanked them.
"Shaven rogue!" Xiaoyu said to him. "Where are your manners? There are several ladies here, as you see. Why do you content yourself with bowing twice to us, and why don't you make a reverence to me?"
"Do be quiet, you little rascal," Yueniang said. "He is a son of Buddha, and you have no right to expect a reverence from him."
"Lady," Xiaoyu said, "if he is a son of Buddha, who are Buddha's daughters?"
"The nuns are Buddha's daughters," Yueniang said.
"Oh, now I understand," Xiaoyu said. "Nun Xue and Nun Wang and the Abbess are all Buddha's daughters, are they? Well, I wonder who are Buddha's sons-in-law?"
Yueniang could not help laughing. "You little strumpet!" she said, "It is only lately you have learned to talk such nonsense. You are always being rude nowadays."
"You mustn't scold me only, Lady," Xiaoyu said. "That monk, with his thievish eyes, is looking at me all the time."
"If he looks at you," Yulou said, "I suppose it is because he wishes to make you give up the things of this world."
"Then I will go with him," Xiaoyu said.
They all laughed, but Yueniang said. "You are a little strumpet. You are always insulting monks and saying wicked things about Buddha."
The monk took the things and went away haughtily, the three images on his head. "Lady," Xiaoyu said, "that thievish monk had another look at me before he went away. Really, you shouldn't scold me."
As they were standing there, old woman Xue came to them, carrying her box of artificial flowers. She made a reverence to them.
"What have you been doing?" Yueniang asked. "It is a long time since I even saw your shadow."
"I hardly know myself what I have been doing," the old woman said. "A few days ago, his Lordship Zhang the Second, the new magistrate, was arranging a marriage with the Xu family. Xu's niece is going to marry Zhang's son. Old woman Wen arranged that. Yesterday was the third day and they had a splendid banquet. The young lady at the Major's place sent for me, but I was too busy to go."
"Where are you going now?" Yueniang said.
"I have come especially to see you," old woman Xue said. "There is something I want to talk to you about."
"Come in, then," Yueniang said, and took the old woman to her room. When she had had tea, the old woman said: "Lady, there is something you don't know. Last year, your kinsman Chen, at the Eastern Capital, died. His wife sent for your son-in-law to bring his father's body and the whole household here. They reached here in the first month, held a service, and buried the old gentleman. I thought that, if you had known, you would certainly have gone to burn some paper offerings for the old gentleman."
"But I would never have known, if you hadn't come to tell me," Yueniang said. "How was I to hear of it? I heard that Pan Jinlian had been killed by her first husband's brother, and that she and old woman Wang had been buried, but I have heard nothing of what happened since."
"If the Fifth Lady had not misbehaved herself and had stayed here, it would have been much better for her," the old woman said. "But she forgot her womanly virtue and behaved so badly that you had to send her away. If she had still been living with you, her brother-in-law would not have had a chance to kill her. Indeed, debts always demand that they who owe shall pay, and hatred never fails to find its victim. But Chunmei did not forget how she had loved that lady in the past. She bought a coffin and buried Jinlian, or the body would be lying there still. Wu Song has not been caught, and there was nobody else to care about her."
"Chunmei has only been at Major Zhou's house a short time," Xue'e said. "How comes she to be in such a position that she can afford to buy a coffin and bury the woman? Didn't the Major have anything to say in the matter? How does he treat her?"
"Ah! You can't imagine how fond he is of her," the old woman said. "He spends every night with her and obeys her slightest wish. As soon as she went there and he found how beautiful she was, he gave her three rooms and a maid. He spent three nights with her and had all the clothes she needed for a year made for her. On the third day he gave a feast and presented me with a tael of silver and a roll of silk. His first wife is now about fifty. She is blind, eats vegetarian food, and does not take any part in the management of the house. His second wife, Sun, has a little daughter and spends all her time looking after the child. Chunmei has all the keys. The Major does everything she suggests, and she never has any difficulty in getting money out of him."
Yueniang and Xue'e said nothing. When the old woman was preparing to go away, Yueniang said: "Come again tomorrow. I will get a food offering ready, a roll of silk, and some paper money, and you must go with my daughter to offer them to her dead father-in-law."
"Won't you go yourself, Lady?" the old woman said.
"Tell them I am not very well," Yueniang said. "I will go and see them another day."
"Then tell your daughter to have everything ready. I will be here about dinnertime."
"Where are you going now?" Yueniang asked. "Must you always be going to the Major's place?"
"If I don't go, they will be angry with me. They have sent for me several times."
"Why do they send for you?" Yueniang said.
"Lady, Chunmei is now four or five months gone with child and the Major is delighted. I shall certainly get a present when I get there."
The old woman went off with her box. "What a liar that old strumpet is!" Xue'e said. "Chunmei has only been there a short time. How can she be so far gone with child? The Captain has more than one wife already. Is it likely that he devotes himself entirely to her?"
"He has a first wife, and another lady who has a little girl," Yueniang said.
"These go-betweens," Xue'e said, "always talk about water a foot deep having waves ten feet high."

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## On the Ch'ing-ming Festival, the Widow Visits the New Grave; Wu Yüeh-niang Blunders into the Temple of Eternal Felicity & Meets Chunmei Again

Tossed by the wind, enshrouded in mist,
the brocade banner flutters;
During this era of great peace[1] the days
are beginning to grow longer.
Wine is capable of enhancing the courage
of even a stouthearted hero;[2]
And is equally effective at alleviating
the depression of a beauty.
Deep within the three-foot-long branches
on the willow-lined bank;
The tavern's signpost rises at an angle
beside the apricot trees.
The stalwart who has yet to accomplish
his lifelong ambition;[3]
Is prone to sing haughtily as he enters
the Land of Drunkenness.[4]

THE STORY GOES that the next day Wu Yüeh-niang saw to the preparation of an offertory table, replete with a pig's head and the three sacrificial animals, soup and rice, paper money for the dead, and the like, wrapped up a bolt of fabric, and directed Hsi-men Ta-chieh to get herself ready by donning plain white mourning garments, and taking her seat in a sedan chair. Auntie Hsüeh then took charge of the sacrificial offerings and preceded her along the way to the door of the Ch'en residence. What should she see when she arrived there but Ch'en Ching-chi himself, who happened to be standing in the doorway.
Auntie Hsüeh started to turn the sacrificial offerings over to a servant to take inside when Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "Where do they come from?"
Auntie Hsüeh greeted him with a bow and said, "Son-in-law, don't pretend that you don't know. Your mother-in-law has sent me to present these things as an offering to your deceased father, and also to return your wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to you."

"Some fucking excuse for a mother-in-law!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi.
"To paste up the effigies of the Gate Gods on
the sixteenth of the first month,
Is to be half a month too late.[5]
Only after the corpse of the deceased has been buried in the grave does she bother to offer a sacrifice on his behalf."
"My good son-in-law," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "your mother-in-law points out that a widow is as helpless as a legless crab. It is only because she did not know that the coffin of her kinsman had been brought home that she has been late in her response. Don't hold it against her."
While they were speaking to each other, what should they see but Hsi-men Ta-chieh's sedan chair, which was being set down at the door.
"Who is that?" Ch'en Ching-chi demanded to know.
"Who else would it be?" responded Auntie Hsüeh. "Your mother-in-law is not feeling well. On the one hand, she is returning Hsi-men Ta-chieh to you, and on the other hand, she is respectfully offering to burn paper money on behalf of your father."
"Take that whore back where she came from forthwith!" Ch'en Ching-chi exclaimed abusively. "Better persons than she have died:
By the ten thousands and the thousands.[6]
What would I want with the likes of her?"
"As the saying goes," responded Auntie Hsüeh,
"To marry a husband is to accept a master.
How can you talk that way about her?"
"I won't have anything more to do with that whore!" said Ch'en Ching-chi. "Why aren't you taking her away?"
Seeing that the bearers of the sedan chair were just standing there without making a move, Ch'en Ching-chi stepped out and gave them a couple of kicks, saying, "If you refuse to take her away, I'll break the legs of you beggars and pluck out the hair on her temples."
When the bearers of the sedan chair saw that he was bent on kicking them, they felt compelled to pick up the sedan chair and head for home without delay.
By the time Auntie Hsüeh succeeded in calling out Ch'en Ching-chi's mother, née Chang, the sedan chair had already been carried away, and she had no alternative but to take up the sacrificial offerings and return to report the situation to Wu Yüeh-niang.
Yüeh-niang nearly fainted with rage on hearing about it and said, "What an unprincipled short-life of a jailbird! Originally, your family, because of its legal troubles, sent you here to hide out in your father-in-law's household, which has maintained you for all these years. And now you are:
Requiting kindness with enmity,
and have the nerve to maintain that my dead husband was only bent on sequestering your valuable property. Having first created a scandal, you are now trying to:
Cast me in the role of a stinking rat,
while you persist in:
Letting off your hot stinking farts of protest."
She then turned to Hsi-men Ta-chieh and said, "My child, you have seen with your own eyes that neither his father-in-law nor his mother-in-law have shortchanged him in any way. But the fact is that:
While you live you are a member of his family;
If you die you will become his family's ghost.[7]
There is no way I can continue to keep you here. You must go back to him tomorrow. There is no reason to be afraid of him. He will hardly thrust you down a well. No matter how foolhardy he may be, he is not likely to kill you. One can scarcely allege that there is no imperial law to be applied to him in this world."
We will say no more of the events of that evening.
The next day, Yüeh-niang had Hsi-men Ta-chieh put into a sedan chair and told Tai-an to escort her to Ch'en Ching-chi's residence. Who could have anticipated that Ch'en Ching-chi was not at home at the time but had gone to the cemetery to add earth to his father's tomb in order to make a higher grave mound.
His mother, née Chang, was a woman of breeding and agreed to receive Hsi-men Ta-chieh, saying to Tai-an, "When you return home, convey my gratitude to our kinswoman for her sacrificial offerings, and ask her to make allowances for my son, who had too much to drink yesterday, which accounts for his rude conduct. I will do what I can, little by little, to admonish him."
So saying, she offered Tai-an some refreshments before gently inducing him to return home.
That evening, when Ch'en Ching-chi returned from the graveyard and saw Hsi-men Ta-chieh, he fell to kicking and beating her as he cursed her, saying, "You whore! What are you doing back here? Do you still have the nerve to accuse me of scrounging for food off your family? Your family still has possession of the trunks of valuables that we entrusted to you, and which enabled your family to achieve its considerable wealth, so how can they claim to have been supporting their son-in-law for nothing? Better persons than you have died by the thousands. So what would I want with a whore like you?"
Hsi-men Ta-chieh responded in kind, saying, "You shameless jailbird! You unprincipled jailbird! When that whore was expelled from the household and got herself murdered, you felt helpless to do anything about it and have been taking it out on me."
Ch'en Ching-chi reacted by grabbing hold of the hair on top of her head and beating her as hard as he could with his fists. When his mother came over and tried to intervene, he gave her a shove that knocked her onto the floor.
His mother, screaming with rage, shouted, "What a jailbird you are! Your eyes are so red you don't even recognize your mother."
That evening, Ch'en Ching-chi once again sent Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to the Hsi-men household, saying, "If you fail to recover your dowry and the trunks of valuables that my family entrusted to them, whore that you are, I will see that your life is put to an end."
Hsi-men Ta-chieh was so intimidated by this threat that she stayed at home and did not venture out again. There is a poem that testifies to this:
On first acquaintance, their mutual trust
was not unmingled with doubt;
Though their feeling for each other seemed
to be utterly without limit.
Who could have known that even the best of
things are subject to change;
Even a single thought may turn out to be
the harbinger of resentment.[8]
Hsi-men Ta-chieh remained so intimidated that she stayed at home, without daring to go out.
One day during the third month, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, Wu Yüeh-niang prepared incense and candles, imitation gold and silver paper money for the dead, offerings, including the three sacrificial animals, wine and delicacies, and the like, and had them put into two large food boxes to be carried to the family graveyard five li outside the city wall and presented at Hsi-men Ch'ing's recently created tomb. She left Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, and the maidservants behind to look after the house, while taking with her Meng Yü-lou, Hsiao-yü, and the wet nurse Ju-i, who was carrying the infant Hsiao-ko, as they proceeded in their sedan chairs to the site of the family graveyard. She also invited the venerable couple, her brother Wu K'ai and his wife, to accompany them.
As they emerged from the city gate, behold:
The suburban fields stretch into the distance;
A landscape replete with blossoming fragrance.[9]
The flowers are red and the willows are green;
Wellborn young ladies and wandering gentlemen,
Pass hither and yon in their unbroken streams.
Among the four seasons of the year,
None of them is superior to spring,
With its all-surpassing loveliness.
Its days are designated glorious days,
Its breezes are called genial breezes,
Expanding the willow buds,
Opening the flower hearts,
Blowing the fragrant dust.
When the weather is warm it is called genial;
When the weather is cool it is called chilly.
The horses ridden then are called rare steeds;
The sedan chairs are called fragrant vehicles;
The roads walked on are called fragrant paths.
The dust that ascends is called fragrant dust.
The thousands of flowers that begin to bloom,
And the myriad grasses that engender sprouts,
Are called the harbingers of spring.
The spring splendor shimmers,
Its pure vistas are pleasing.
The tiny peaches cluster,
Their visages decorated voluptuously;
The slender willows sway,
Their waists supple as palace ladies.
The warbling of the orioles,[10]
Breaks off one's midday dreams;
The chirping of the swallows,
Betokens their spring sadness.
As the days begin to lengthen,
Yellow goslings bathe in the warm streams;
As the waters start to spread,
Green ducklings cavort amid the fragrance.
Across the water one glimpses an estate
of someone unknown;
Where a swing is suspended on high amid
misty green willows.
Indeed, the springtime scene is truly marvelous. When the spring season arrives, the prefectures, subprefectures, districts, and circuits all see to it that every village, garrison, township, and market within their jurisdictions is provided with areas that are worth visiting.[11] There is a poem that testifies to this:
During the Ch'ing-ming Festival mists
hover everywhere;
In the suburbs the breezes waft shreds
of paper money aloft.
People laugh and people sing amidst
the fragrant meadows;
Sudden clearing and sudden showers[12]
beset the apricot blossoms.
Amid the flowering crab apples the
songbirds give voice;
Beside the willow-lined embankment
the drunkards snooze.
Red-rouged beauties compete for places
on the painted boards;
Tugging the gaudy ropes they resemble
immortals in flight.[13]
To resume our story, by the time the sedan chairs of Wu Yüeh-niang and the others arrived at the family graveyard at Wu-li Yüan, Tai-an, who had gone ahead of them with the food boxes, had already made his way to the kitchen and arranged for the fire in the stove to be lighted, and for the chef who had been hired for the occasion to prepare the foodstuffs. But no more of this.
When Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, Hsiao-yü, and the wet nurse Ju-i, who was holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, arrived at the country estate, they sat down in the parlor and consumed a serving of tea while they waited for Sister-in-law Wu to arrive, but she failed to show up. Meanwhile, Tai-an went to the sacrificial platform in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's tomb and set up the offertory tables replete with the meat of the three sacrificial animals, the soup and rice, and other ceremonial offerings and also laid out the paper money to be burned to the dead.
All they could do was to wait, but it turned out that Sister-in-law Wu had been unable to hire a sedan chair. It was not until around ten o'clock in the morning that she and her husband Wu K'ai, who had succeeded in hiring a couple of donkeys, finally arrived.
"If you were unable to hire a sedan chair, Sister-in-law," said Yüeh-niang, "there really must not have been enough of them available on this festival occasion."
After consuming a serving of tea, and changing their clothes, they proceeded to the front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's tomb to present their sacrificial offerings and sweep the grave. Yüeh-niang was holding five sticks of incense in her hand, one of which she kept for herself, one of which she handed to Meng Yü-lou, and one of which she gave to the wet nurse Ju-i, who was carrying Hsiao-ko in her arms. The other two she handed to her elder brother Wu K'ai and his wife.
After placing her stick of incense in the burner, Yüeh-niang bowed deeply before the tomb and said, "Brother:

While alive you were a human being; once dead you have become a spirit.
Today, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival during the third month, your devoted wife Wu the Third, your Third Lady Meng Yü-lou, and your infant son Hsiao-ko have respectfully come to burn paper money before your grave, in the hope that you will assure him a long life of a hundred years, so that he will be able to offer sacrifices and sweep your grave in the future. Brother, you and I were man and wife for all that time, and when I recall your looks, and the way you used to talk to me, I am overcome with sorrow."
Tai-an then set the paper money on fire. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:
As the paper money burns out,
I can't help stamping my little feet.
During the whole period I was your wife,
We never exchanged hostile words with each other.[14]
I really looked forward to living in harmony
with you until our old age.[15]
Who could have anticipated that you would
abandon me halfway?
Originally, the sentimental hopes for
the future were mine,
But though you bequeathed us a fortune
as solid as a brass ladle,[16]
Our child is still young,
And mother and son have been left
a widow and orphan.
How will we manage to get by?
It is just like running into a rainstorm
during a journey,
Or encountering a windstorm halfway to
one's destination.
The male and female mandarin ducks have
been forced to part;
The exotic fruits have been plucked
before they were ripe.
I cry out to my good-natured brother,
"On recalling your carriage and deportment,
How can I help sighing in distress?"
Continued to the tune "Every Step Is Captivating":
The ashes of the paper money I have
burned swirl about,
But I do not see the face of my husband.
I cry out, "My young husband,
You have abandoned our delicate son,
And left me all alone.
If the two of us have no marital affinity,
How will we ever be able to see
each other again?"
Meng Yü-lou then stepped forward, stuck her stick of incense in the burner, bowed deeply, and wept to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope":
As the paper money burns out,
My eyes are filled with tears.
I cry out to mankind and to Heaven,
You have abandoned me with no place to go.
I really looked forward to remaining with you
until our hair turned white.
Who could foresee that en route the flowers
would wither and the moon fade?[17]
The First Lady has a male child, so her
future prospects are good;
But I have been abandoned so that the fallen
tree no longer provides shade.
With whom am I to carry on?
To keep lonely vigil amid empty bed curtains,[18]
Is more than I can stand.
I'm unable to reach the inn ahead, or make it
back to the village behind.
I suppose my fallen leaves have returned to the root,
And I must harvest my garden and reap my just reward.
I cry out to my youthful brother,
"If I ever see you again, it can only be
an encounter in a dream.[19]
It's enough to grieve me to death."
Continued to the tune "Every Step Is Captivating":
I can only weep and wail until I am
stupefied with grief.
Once gone there are no tidings of you.
You have left me with no future in sight,
no future in sight.
You were in the springtime of your youth,
And I was still captivating to behold;
How upsetting it is.
It has wasted my flowery visage
and moonlike features.
After Meng Yü-lou had finished burning her incense, the wet nurse Ju-i, holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, also knelt down to present her incense and kowtowed; after which Wu K'ai and his wife proceeded to burn their incense in turn. When these formalities were concluded, they were ushered into the summerhouse on the country estate, where a table and mats had been set up, and food and wine prepared. Yüeh-niang arranged for Wu K'ai and his wife to occupy the positions of honor, while she and Meng Yü-lou sat along one side, and Hsiao-yü, the wet nurse Ju-i, and Lan-hua, the senior maidservant in the Wu household, sat on the other. The wine was then poured, but we will say no more, for the moment, about how they proceeded to drink it.
To resume our story, that day Commandant Chou Hsiu also went to visit his ancestral tombs. Before this, during the preceding night, Ch'un-mei had slept with the commandant and pretended to have had a dream from which she awakened in tears.
The commandant asked in consternation, "What are you crying about?"
Ch'un-mei replied, saying, "I dreamt that my former mistress came to me in tears and wanted to know why, since she had nurtured me so generously over the years, I was not planning to go and burn paper money on her behalf at the time of the Ch'ing-ming Festival and the Cold Food Festival. [20] That is why I wept on waking up."
"This is an example of your filial feelings of gratitude for the nurture you received from her," said the commandant. "Do you know where your former mistress's grave is located?"
"It is located behind the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the South Gate," responded Ch'un-mei.
"That's not a problem," said the commandant. "The Temple of Eternal Felicity is my family temple. Tomorrow, when we go to visit our ancestral graves, you can have the servants carry some sacrificial offerings to present to her, and burn some paper money on your mistress's behalf. That would be the right thing to do."
The next day, Commandant Chou Hsiu had his servants prepare food boxes, wine and appetizers, and sacrificial offerings and set out for his ancestral graveyard outside the South Gate. His estate was replete with a mansion, halls, and gardens, as well as a chapel and a sacrificial platform. His first wife, his concubine Sun Erh-niang, and Ch'un-mei all rode in sedan chairs borne by four bearers each, and preceded by orderlies who shouted to clear the way, as they set out on their excursion to the family graveyard.
To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang, with her older brother Wu K'ai and his wife, enjoyed their wine for a while, after which, fearing that it was getting late, she directed Tai-an and Lai-an to collect the food boxes and the remaining wine and appetizers and precede them along the Ten-li-long Embankment to find an elevated spot before the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village,[21] where they could set up a picnic table and await them, so they could enjoy:
The liveliness of the teeming crowds.
When they saw that Sister-in-law Wu did not have a sedan chair, they decided to walk and let the bearers carry their sedan chairs behind them. The group of men and women then set out on their way, tripping over the grass and enjoying the scenery, while Wu K'ai led the donkeys to bring up the rear.
After three li they walked past Peach Blossom Inn;
After five li they beheld Apricot Blossom Village.
Behold: Swarming along the roads to visit their ancestral graves:
The patrician youths and wellborn ladies,[22]
Amidst the red flowers and green willows,
Producing a tumultuous hubbub as they go,
Pass hither and yon in their unbroken streams.
On top of which:
The sun is warm and the breeze is gentle,[23]
so that those who:
Pursue fragrance and savor the landscape,
Are so multitudinous they cannot be numbered.
As they walked along, it turned out to be one of those occasions on which:
Something is destined to happen.
As they gazed into the distance, in the shade of the green locust trees, they perceived a temple of impressively fine construction. Behold:
The gate of the temple soars aloft;
The Buddhist sanctuary is secluded.
The characters on the imperial plaque
are clearly inscribed;
The bearing of the guardian deities on
either side is fierce.
The thirty-foot-wide front of the main hall,
Is roofed with serried rows of azure
dragon-scale tiles;
The monk's quarters along the two corridors,
Are made of shiny tortoiseshell bricks
inlaid with flowers.
In the front hall are graven gods that bring,

Favorable winds and seasonable rains;[24]
In the rear hall stand venerated effigies of,
The Buddhas of the past and the future.[25]
The bell and drum towers rise close together;
The sutra storage chamber is located on high.
The flagstaff soars aloft impinging upon
the bluish clouds;
The sacred pagoda likewise encroaches on
the azure heavens.
Wooden fish are horizontally suspended;
Cloud-shaped gongs are hanging on high.
The space before the Buddha is ablaze
with lamps and candles;
Emerging from the burner the smoke of
incense swirls about.[26]
Pennants are arrayed in endless numbers;
The hall of the goddess Kuan-yin is next to
the chapel of the patriarchs.
Jeweled canopies are clustered together;
The effigy of Hārītī[27] is situated next to
the gallery of the Arhats.
From time to time the Dharma-protecting
gods descend;
Year in and year out the demon-quelling
deities appear.[28]

"What is the name of this temple?" asked Wu Yüeh-niang.

"This is the family temple of His Honor Chou Hsiu," responded Wu K'ai. "It is called the Ch'an Temple of Eternal Felicity. In former days, when my brother-in-law was still alive, he donated a considerable sum of silver for the restoration of the sanctuary, which is why it is in such good shape today."

Yüeh-niang then turned to Sister-in-law Wu and said, "Let's go into the temple and see what it looks like."

Thereupon she led her group of men and women into the temple. It was not long before a young novice spotted them and reported their arrival to the abbot.

When he saw that there were a number of men and women, he came out of his quarters to welcome them, saying, "My bodhisattva and my benefactor, pray feel free to explore the premises."

What did this abbot look like? Behold:

His bluish, finely polished, pate
is newly shaven,
And is evenly anointed with musk
and pine seed oil.
His long blazing-yellow gown is
newly tailored,
And is saturated with aloeswood
and sandalwood.
His high-ridged sandals,
Have been dyed a deep black
in Fu-chou;
His belt of silk braid,
Is of deep purple, imported
from the West.
The slippery and furtive eyes
of this monk,
Are solely devoted to ogling
alluring donors;
The sweet-sounding words of
this bald rascal,
Are merely designed to tempt
bereft young widows.
When his voluptuous feelings
are stirred,
He proceeds to seek out nuns in
their convents;
Whenever his lustful daring
is turbulent,
He entices novices into his
abbot's quarters.
When he observes immortal ladies
he seeks to bed them;
Upon beholding the Moon Goddess
he longs to seduce her.[29]

When the abbot saw Wu K'ai and Wu Yüeh-niang, he came forward and saluted them by pressing his palms together in front of his chest and bowing to them in the Buddhist fashion, after which, he promptly summoned a young novice and said to him, "You open up the Buddhist sanctuary and invite our benefactor and the bodhisattva to explore the premises. Meanwhile, this humble monk will see to providing a serving of tea."

The young novice, thereupon, opened up the sanctuary and conducted Yüeh-niang and the group of men and women accompanying her on a tour of the two corridors, front and rear. After paying their respects and looking around for a while, they returned to the abbot's quarters, where he hastened to pour out a serving of fine tea, brewed with sweet water, and served in snow-white cups.

Wu K'ai then asked the abbot for his religious name, and the abbot responded, with an ingratiating smile, saying, "This humble monk's religious name is Tao-chien, and this edifice is the family temple of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu. This humble monk serves as the abbot of the temple, and there are some hundred or more monks under my jurisdiction. The meditation hall located behind the sanctuary also houses a considerable number of itinerant monks who engage in continual meditation in order to requite the good deeds of the benefactors from the four directions."

He then proposed to provide a vegetarian repast in the abbot's quarters and invited Yüeh-niang to partake thereof, saying, "Will you bodhisattvas please be seated. This humble monk is unable to provide any more than this meager collation."

"We ought not to impose upon your sacred institution in this way," responded Yüeh-niang.

She then took out five mace of silver and handed them to Wu K'ai so he could offer them to the abbot, saying, "This is to compensate you for burning some incense before the Buddha."

The abbot, with an ingratiating smile, bowed in gratitude, saying, "This humble monk is not able to offer you any more than this scant refreshment. It is my hope that you benefactors and bodhisattvas will condescend to sit down for a while and partake of this meager collation, which is all that I can offer. What need is there for you to present me with a donation?"

In no time at all, a young novice set up a table and brought in a vegetarian repast and some pastries, while the abbot sat down beside them and raised his chopsticks in order to proffer Yüeh-niang and the others samples of the various dishes.

All of a sudden, they were interrupted by the appearance of two black-clad servants, panting and puffing, who broke in upon them like a clap of thunder and addressed the abbot, saying, "Abbot, why haven't you come out to welcome her? The young mistress from the commandant's household is on her way here to make a sacrificial offering."

This threw the abbot into such consternation that he hastily threw on his cassock, donned his Vairocana hat, ordered a young novice to clear away the utensils, and said to his guests, "Will you bodhisattvas please retire into a side chamber for the time being. It will not be too late to sit down together again after the young lady has burned some paper money, offered her sacrifice, and gone on her way."

Wu K'ai wanted to refuse, but the abbot insisted upon their staying, as though it were a matter of life or death, and would not let them go.

He then hastily ordered the striking up of bells and drums and went out the gate of the temple to receive his visitor, going as far as the turnoff where the entranceway to the temple met the highway to wait. What should he see then but a crowd of black-clad servants escorting a large sedan chair as it came flying toward him from the east. The chair bearers had been traveling so fast that:

Their faces were bathed in sweat,
And their clothes soaked through.

The abbot bent his body and saluted his guest in the Buddhist fashion, saying, "This humble monk did not know of your coming, young lady. I fear I have been remiss in not coming further to meet you. Pray forgive me."

Ch'un-mei, from inside the curtain of the sedan chair, merely said, "I am imposing upon Your Reverence."

Meanwhile, her servants had taken the offertory table to the back of the temple, where they placed it in front of Chin-lien's grave and set out the offerings and paper money upon it. When Ch'un-mei's sedan chair arrived, she did not go into the temple but proceeded straight to the site of Chin-lien's grave under the white poplar tree behind the temple, where she got out of her sedan chair, and her black-clad servants lined themselves up to either side.

Ch'un-mei then:

Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
made her way in front of the grave, stuck her stick of incense in the burner, kowtowed four times, and said, "My mistress, today your servant P'ang Ch'un-mei has come to burn a packet of paper money on your behalf.
May you find a pleasurable place in Heaven;
And use the cash to cope with any problems.
If I had only anticipated that you might suffer death at the hands of your enemy, I would have found a way, somehow or other, to have you enter the commandant's household, so that we could be together. It is I who have let you down, but my repentance is too late to be of any use."

When she had finished speaking, she ordered her attendants to burn the paper money. Ch'un-mei then stepped forward and commenced to weep out loud. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

As the paper money burns out,
I stamp my phoenix-toed shoes to pieces.
I call out to you, "Mother,
My liver and intestines feel ruptured.
Merely because you were so captivating,
people turned against you,
And lost no time in seeing you expelled
from the household;
Thereby opening the way for your enemy
to ensnare you.
Situated as I was in a secluded mansion,
I was not free to act;
And you had no relatives, so there was
no one to care about you.
I had hoped that we could share the same
bed and a single pillow.
Who could have known that death would
cut short your life,
And in such a pitiable fashion?"
I cry out to Azure Heaven, "How blind
can you be?"
As the sayings go, the finest objects

are difficult to preserve,
And the bolt of red silk is shorter
than it ought to be.
We will say no more, for the moment, about how Ch'un-mei made sacrifices and wept before Chin-lien's grave.
To resume our story, Wu Yüeh-niang, in the side chamber of the monk's quarters, knew only that a young lady from the commandant's quarters had come, and that the abbot had gone out to receive her, though she had not been seen to come in.
She asked a young novice about this, and he explained, "An elder sister of the young lady was recently buried in a grave behind the temple. Because today is the Ch'ing-ming Festival, she has come to make a sacrifice, sweep the grave, and burn paper money on her behalf."
"I wonder if it might not be Ch'un-mei who has come?" remarked Meng Yü-lou.
"Since when has she had any elder sister that might have been buried here?" responded Yüeh-niang.
She then asked the young novice, "What is the surname of this young lady from the commandant's household?"
"Her maiden name is P'ang," replied the novice. "The other day she donated four or five taels of silver to the abbot to pay for a scripture recitation on her elder sister's behalf, in the hope that it might:
Promote her chances of rebirth in Heaven."[30]
"I have heard Father mention that Ch'un-mei's maiden name was P'ang," remarked Meng Yü-lou, "and that she was referred to as Miss P'ang. It must surely be her."
As they were speaking, what should they see but the abbot, who came in ahead of his guest and ordered a young novice to quickly prepare some fine tea. Before long, the sedan chair was borne past the inner gate of the abbot's quarters, where the passenger was allowed to descend. Yüeh-niang, along with Meng Yü-lou and the others, proceeded to look out through the door-blind of the room in which they were secluded to see what the young lady looked like. When they got a closer look, they saw that it was indeed Ch'un-mei, although, compared to her former appearance, she seemed to have grown:
Larger and taller in stature.
Her face was like a full moon,
and she appeared to be:
Modeled in plaster, carved of jade.
On her headdress:
Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;
A phoenix hairpin was half askew.
She was wearing a scarlet jacket with a floriate design, over a skirt with a wide border of kingfisher blue embellished with gold thread, suspended from which decorative pendants tinkled. She was adorned quite differently from the way she had been in the past. Behold:
Her chignon is of an imposing height;
Her phoenix hairpin is half askew.
Pearl earrings hang low beneath her ears;
Golden phoenixes jut behind either temple.
Her scarlet embroidered jacket,
Enhances her jade-white fragrant flesh;
Her kingfisher-patterned skirt,
Shows off her minuscule golden lotuses.
Whenever she moves,
It makes the jade pendants on her breast tinkle;
Wherever she sits,
The reek of orchid and musk assails the nostrils.
Her neck appears to be made of congealed powder;
Flowery ornaments artfully enhance her eyebrows.
Her visage is astonishing,
Her countenance resembles the rare beauty
of a secluded flower;
Her deportment is elegant,
Her nature appealing and agreeable as the
fragrance of orchids.
If she was not engendered in ornate quarters,
She has been raised in orchidacious chambers.
She looks just like:
The alabaster goddess from the Purple Elysium
taking leave of the milky way;
An immortal of the Palace of Clustered Pearls[31]
descending to the mundane world.
The abbot lifted aside the portiere and invited the young lady into the parlor in his quarters. A formal seat was placed all by itself in the place of honor at the head of the room, and Ch'un-mei sat down upon it. When the abbot had finished paying his respects, a young novice came in with a serving of tea.
The abbot then offered her some tea, saying, "This humble monk was unaware that anyone was coming from the commandant's household to visit the grave today, or that you would be arriving to present a sacrifice.
I have been remiss in welcoming you.[32]
Pray extend this humble monk your forgiveness."
"The other day," responded Ch'un-mei, "I put you to a lot of trouble reciting scriptures and praying for the salvation of the soul of the departed."
"How could this humble monk presume to accept such praise?" the abbot blurted out. "What effort did I expend sufficient to repay my benefactress for all the money for the recitation and other acts of beneficence you lavished upon me? This humble monk merely engaged the services of eight Ch'an monks to conduct the rites, recite the scriptures, and perform a litany of repentance. At the end of the day, they also prepared several coffers of paper money and burned them on behalf of the deceased. Only after the rites had been completed did I send the three servitors from your household back inside the city to report back to you."
When Ch'un-mei had finished drinking her tea, the young novice took the utensils away, and the abbot continued to engage her in an animated dialogue. This meant that Wu Yüeh-niang and her fellows were cooped up in their side room and did not feel comfortable about coming out. When Yüeh-niang saw that it was getting late, she sent the young novice to invite the abbot inside and told him that they would like to leave, but the abbot would not consent.
Instead, he went back into the parlor and said to Ch'un-mei, "There is something that this humble monk would like to mention to you."
"Your Reverence," responded Ch'un-mei, "Pray express yourself without constraint."
"Right now," the abbot explained, "there are several sightseeing ladies here, who were engaged in looking over the premises but did not know that you would be arriving. At present, they have expressed a desire to go home, but I do not know what you may feel about it."
"Your Reverence," said Ch'un-mei, "why not ask them to come out so we can meet each other?"
The abbot hastened to convey this request, but Wu Yüeh-niang was still reluctant to come out and said, "Your Reverence, there is no need for us to meet her. It is getting late, and we would like to be on our way."
The abbot felt embarrassed that he had accepted their largess without doing anything adequate to entertain them, and therefore he urged them repeatedly to come out. In the end, Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Wu K'ai's wife felt that they could hardly refuse any longer and consented to come out.
As soon as she saw them, Ch'un-mei exclaimed, "So it turns out to be you two ladies and Sister-in-law Wu."
So saying, she maneuvered Wu K'ai's wife into assuming the position of honor and proceeded:
Like a sprig of blossoms swaying in the breeze,
to kowtow to her; which so affected Sister-in-law Wu that she hastened to return her salutation, saying:
"The present cannot be compared to the past.
You embarrass this old body to death."
"My good sister-in-law," said Ch'un-mei, "how can you say such a thing? I am not the sort of person who ignores distinctions of status:
Exalted or humble, above and below;
This is a self-evident principle."
Having kowtowed to Sister-in-law Wu, she then turned to Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou and proceeded to kowtow to them:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.
Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou were about to return the compliment, but Ch'un-mei would not let them and helped them to their feet.
After kowtowing to them four times, she said, "I did not know that you all were here. If I had known, I would have invited you out so we could greet each other."
"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "since you left us, you have been a member of the commandant's household for some time now, and I have been remiss in not coming to pay a call on you. Pray don't hold it against me."
"My good lady," said Ch'un-mei, "how could the likes of me presume to hold anything against you?"
Then, upon noticing that the wet nurse Ju-i was holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, she remarked, "How little brother has grown."
Yüeh-niang thereupon turned to Ju-i and said, "You and Hsiao-yü, come over and kowtow to your elder sister."
Ju-i and Hsiao-yü, accordingly, came over with ingratiating smiles and performed a half obeisance to Ch'un-mei, while Yüeh-niang said, "Sister, pray accept their salutations."
Ch'un-mei then proceeded to extract a pair of gold-headed silver pins from her hair and stick them into Hsiao-ko's cap.
"Thank Sister for her pins," said Yüeh-niang to Ju-i. "Aren't you going to pay her an obeisance in return?"
Ju-i thereupon, while holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, actually paid an obeisance to Ch'un-mei, which pleased Yüeh-niang no end.
"Sister," said Meng Yü-lou, "if you had not come to the temple today, we would not have had this chance to meet each other again."
"You are right," responded Ch'un-mei. "It is only because my venerable mother was recently buried behind the temple here that I came. After all, I served under her for all this time, and she:
Lacks either relatives or friends.[33]
If I were not to express my concern for her by coming and burning some paper money on her behalf, how would I be able to live with myself?"
Yüeh-niang said, "As I recall, your mother has been dead for quite a few years, but I did not know that she was buried here."
"First Lady," said Meng Yü-lou, "you don't understand what Sister P'ang is saying. She is referring to the death of P'an the Sixth. It was thanks to our sister that she was buried here."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she was reduced to silence.
"Who could be kinder than you, Sister?" remarked Wu K'ai's wife. "You were unwilling to forget the favors you enjoyed from her in the past and have gone to the trouble to have her decently buried. And now, on this festival occasion, you have remembered her, and come to burn paper money on her behalf."
"My good lady," responded Ch'un-mei. "I could hardly help remembering the favorable treatment I received from her. In view of the cruel manner in which she died, and the way in which her corpse was exposed and abandoned, how could I fail to arrange a decent burial for her?"
As soon as they had finished speaking, the abbot instructed a young novice to serve them a vegetarian repast. Two large Eight Immortals tables were duly set up, and their surfaces covered with steamed shortcake, fried pastries, a variety of vegetarian dishes, and the finest golden-leaved Sparrow Tongue tea, brewed with sweet water. When they had finished eating, the utensils were cleared away. Meanwhile, Wu K'ai had also been entertained in one of the monk's quarters, but no more of this.
Meng Yü-lou then got up, intending to go pay a visit to Chin-lien's grave and burn some paper money there on her behalf, in memory of the sisterhood they had shared together. When she saw that Yüeh-niang was not going to follow suit, she got out five candareens of silver and asked a young novice to go buy some paper money for her.
"My Lady," said the abbot, "there is no need for you to buy any paper money. I have a supply of imitation gold and silver paper money here, and you are welcome to take some of it with you to burn on her behalf."
Meng Yü-lou turned her silver over to the abbot and then had the young novice lead her out to Chin-lien's grave under the white poplar tree behind the temple, where she found a three-foot-high grave mound of yellow earth, on which a few clumps of artemisia were growing.
Inserting her incense stick into the mound and igniting the paper money, she performed an obeisance, saying, "Sister Six, I did not know that you had been buried here. But today, your sister Meng the Third, having chanced to visit this temple, has come to burn a packet of paper money on your behalf.
May you find a pleasurable place in Heaven;
And use the cash to cope with any problems."
So saying, she groped out a handkerchief and commenced to weep out loud. There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:
As the paper money burns out,
My pearly tears drop helter-skelter.
I call out to you, "Sister Six,
I weep for you until,
There are barely two breaths
left in my body.[34]
I recall how we never used to make
distinctions between us,
During the sisterhood that we
shared together.
We never allowed ourselves to get
red in the face with anger.
Your temperament was forceful, and I
often gave way to you.
But if we ever lost sight of each other,
If you did not look for me, I would

go looking for you.
We were like the fish that swim in pairs,
with only one eye apiece,
Ardently sticking to one another;
Only to be suddenly blown apart
by a gust of wind.
Having been accustomed to perching
on the same tree,
One day we were forced to fly our
separate ways.
I cry out to you, Sister Six, just
try and listen to me.
What a pity that a person of your
great intelligence,
Should end up today being buried
under the ground."

The wet nurse Ju-i, on seeing that Meng Yü-lou had gone back to the rear of the temple, took Hsiao-ko in her arms, intending to go out for a look at the grave herself; but Yüeh-niang, who was still talking to Ch'un-mei in the abbot's quarters, said, "Don't take the child with you, I'm afraid he might find it frightening."

"Don't worry, Mistress," Ju-i responded, "I can handle the situation."

So saying, she took Hsiao-ko with her and went out to the grave site, where she looked on as Meng Yü-lou burned the paper money and wept, after which they came back inside.

Meanwhile, Ch'un-mei and Yüeh-niang had both adjusted their makeup and put their clothing to rights, after which Ch'un-mei directed her servants to open up the food boxes, and they proceeded to lay out a selection of appetizers on the two tables, including sweetmeats, delicacies of various kinds, and partitioned boxes of assorted dainties. Wine was provided, after being strained through a cheesecloth sieve, and laid out along with silver goblets and ivory chopsticks. Ch'un-mei invited Wu K'ai's wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, and Meng Yü-lou to sit down in the positions of honor while she played the role of host, and the wet nurse Ju-i, Hsiao-yü, and Lan-hua, the senior maidservant in the Wu household, were seated to either side. Wu K'ai was also provided with a table for himself in the monk's quarters where he was located.

Just as they were drinking their wine, they suddenly saw a pair of black-clad servants, who came in, knelt down, and reported, "His Honor is at his new estate and has sent us to invite the young mistress to come and enjoy the show he is putting on that includes tumblers and vaudeville acts. His First Lady and Second Lady are both there, and he would like you to come join them as soon as possible."

Ch'un-mei responded:
Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
saying, "You can go back. I understand the situation."

The two servitors assented and withdrew but did not venture to depart, choosing to wait outside for her to finish entertaining her guests.

Wu K'ai's wife and Yüeh-niang felt that it was time for them to take their leave, saying, "Sister, we don't wish to impose upon you any longer. It is getting late, and you have something to do. We had better be on our way."

Ch'un-mei, however, was reluctant to let them go and, telling her attendants to proffer them large goblets of wine, appealed to them, saying, "We former members of the same household:
Spend less time together than apart,[35]
and have gone our separate ways, but we ought not to break off our relationship. I also:
Lack either relatives or friends.
On the occasion of your birthday, Mother, I will come to pay you a visit."

"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "it is nice of you to suggest it, but I would not presume to put you to such trouble. Some day soon, I will come pay a call on you."

After drinking a cupful of wine, Yüeh-niang said, "I have had enough wine. Sister-in-law Wu does not have a sedan chair, and it is getting late enough to hinder our return."

"If Sister-in-law Wu doesn't have a sedan chair," said Ch'un-mei, "I brought some ponies along with me and can lend one of them to her to ride home on." As she prepared for her own departure, Ch'un-mei called for the abbot and had one of her servants bring out a bolt of muslin and five mace of silver, which she presented to him. The abbot bowed in thanks to her and escorted her out through the gate of the temple. Ch'un-mei exchanged farewells with Yüeh-niang and saw her, together with Meng Yü-lou and the others, into their sedan chairs after which she got into her own sedan chair, and the 2 groups went their separate ways. Ch'un-mei was accompanied by a crowd of attendants who shouted to clear the way as she made her way to her husband's new estate. Truly, if even the separate leaves of a tree may encounter each other, why should people, too, not sometimes meet with good fortune?

A beautiful woman's lot is grievous.
Alas, that one so exquisite
Should turn to a handful of yellow dust.
Is it that Heaven pays no heed,
That good and evil are but matters of chance?
It granted her beauty and intelligence
Then let her go as though she had been nothing. It seems unjust.
And when we ask the Heavens why it happens,
No answer is vouchsafed us.
It is sad.
The beauty of the earth combined with Heaven's fragrance
Passes like the seasons.
They are many who lie buried.
May we not ask where there is gaiety?
Yet there are palaces where people dance and sing,
Where people walk in springtime on the purple path,
And, in the evening, sit beside green-painted windows,
Graceful and exquisite.
Surely the life of man seems purposeless,
Now as in the days long past.

Wu Yueniang prepared the food offering and paper things, and Ximen Dajie, in mourning dress, went in a sedan chair to her husband's house, with old woman Xue in attendance. When they came to the house, Chen Jingji was standing outside the door. He asked the old woman where the things had come from. She made a reverence.

"Your mother-in-law has sent them as an offering to your late father," she said, "and your wife has come too."

"Curses on my mother-in-law!" Jingji cried. "She is half a month too late. It is as if she set up the god of the door on the sixteenth day of the first month. My father has been buried a long time, and she comes now with her tribute of respect."

"Good Brother-in-law, as your wife's mother says, now she is a widow she is like a crab without legs. She knew nothing about your father's coffin coming, and you must forgive her if she is late."

As they were talking, Ximen Dajie's sedan chair came up.

"Who is this?" Jingji said.

"Whom do you expect? Your mother-in-law is not well and she has sent your wife to come and burn paper offerings for your father."

"Take the whore away," Jingji said scornfully. "Better people than she have died by thousands. What have I to do with her?"

"You should not talk like that. When a woman marries a man, she does so to live with him."

"I don't want anything to do with the whore. Be off at once."

The chair men were standing by, and Chen Jingji went up and kicked them. "Take her away," he cried, "or I will break your beggarly legs and pull that whore's hair out.

The sedan-chair men could only take the chair away. By the time old woman Xue was able to speak to Jingji's mother, it had been gone for some time. The old woman could do nothing, so she gave the things to Mistress Chen and came back to tell Yueniang what had happened.

Yueniang was so angry that she nearly fainted. "The rogue is utterly unprincipled!" she cried. "He came here to escape the law, and his father-in-law kept him all those years. This is how he repays us. What a pity that my dead husband kept such a rascal in the place and so gave us all this trouble today. It puts me in the position of a rotten rat, and he dares to insult me."

"Daughter," she said to Ximen Dajie, "you saw with your own eyes that neither my husband nor I ever treated him badly. So long as you live, you belong to the Chen family, and, when you die, you will be a Chen ghost. I can't keep you here. Go to him tomorrow. Don't be afraid. I don't think he will be quite so desperate as to push you into a well. He dare not kill you, because, fortunately, law still has some force in this world."

The next day Yueniang told Daian to go with her daughter. The young woman went in a sedan chair. When they came to the house, Jingji was out. He had gone to his father's grave to put earth on the mound. His mother was a lady of breeding and received her daughter-in-law.

"Go home and tell your mistress that I am very much obliged to her," she said to Daian. "Ask her not to be angry with the young man. He had taken too much to drink yesterday and that is why he behaved so strangely. I will bring him around by degrees." She gave Daian something to eat and dismissed him.

In the evening Chen Jingji came back. The moment he saw his wife he began to kick her and curse.

"You whore!" he cried, "why have you come back? You told me I begged my food from your family. The real truth is that your people have stolen a lot of my property, and that is how they got their wealth. If your people won't keep a son-in-law for nothing, why should I keep you now, you whore? Better people than you have died by thousands, yes, and by tens of thousands."

Then his wife cursed him in return. "You shameless rascal, you unprincipled scamp!" she cried. "Just because that strumpet was murdered, why do you vent your spite on me?"

Jingji pulled her hair and struck her violently with his fist. His mother came and tried to separate them, but he pushed her away and threw her on the floor. The old lady cried. "You rascal! Are your eyes so red that you do not even know your own mother?"

That same night Ximen Dajie was sent back again. Her husband said to her: "If you don't make them give me back my things, I will kill you." This frightened her so much that she stayed at home and never again tried to go and see her husband.

At the Festival of Pure Brightness in the third month, Yueniang prepared incense, candles, paper money, and other things and went outside the city to offer them at her dead husband's grave. She left Sun Xue'e, Ximen Dajie, and one or two maids to look after the house. She, with Meng Yulou, Xiaoyu, and the nurse Ruyi'er carrying the baby, went to the grave in sedan chairs. She asked Uncle Wu and Aunt Wu to go and join them there.

When they came outside the city, everything looked beautiful. The willows were green and the flowers fresh. Hosts of people were celebrating the coming of Spring, for there is no season more delightful. Then the sun is beautiful and the wind gentle, as the eyes of the willow open and the hearts of the flowers are unfolded. The very earth seems perfumed. A myriad flowers seem to compete with each other for the prize of beauty; the herbs put forth new shoots. They are the message of Spring. The light is soft and bright; the scenery warm and perfectly harmonious. The little peach flowers have painted their faces a deep red; the young willows bend their slender waists, tender and narrow as the palace gates. Orioles sing a hundred melodies, and wake people from their midday dreams. Purple swallows sing, and the melancholy of early spring is banished. The sun makes the days longer and warmer, and little yellow ducks splash in the pools. Through the green duckweed they dash. Beyond the river on some estate, we know not whose, the swing hangs high among the mist of green willows.

It is the festival of Spring
And mist is everywhere.
Outside the town the gentle breeze blows away the paper money
And hangs it in the trees.
People laugh and sing on the tender grass.
It is the season of apricot blossom
When the rain comes suddenly
And suddenly is gone again.
The gentle oriole chatters in the cherry trees,
Under the willows, guests who have drunk their fill
Sleep on the riverbank.
Charming women are busy to the strains of music
They bring a rope and make it fast, Swing to and fro
Like a flight of angels.

Yueniang and the others came to Wuliyuan, where the grave was. Daian took the food boxes to the kitchen; they made a fire and the cooks prepared the dishes. Meanwhile, Yueniang, Yulou, Xiaoyu, and Ruyi'er with the baby, went to the hall. There they had tea and waited for Aunt Wu. Daian set out the offerings before Ximen Qing's grave, and still they waited for Aunt Wu. She was delayed because she had not been able to get a sedan chair, and it was almost noon before she came along with Uncle Wu, both on donkeyback.

"I don't know how you manage to ride a donkey," Yueniang said to her.

Aunt Wu drank some tea, then she changed her clothes and they all went together to make their offering. Yueniang took five sticks of incense, kept one for herself, and gave the others, one to Yulou, one to Ruyi'er for the baby, and one each to her brother and his wife. She first put incense in the burner and bowed before the grave. "Brother," she said, "when you were alive, you were a man; now you are a spirit. Today is the Festival of Spring. Your dutiful wife Wu, sister Meng, and your son Xiaoge, who is now a year old, have come to your grave to burn paper money for you. Protect your son's life, that he may live long and come to do worship at your grave. Brother, you and I were once husband and wife. I treasure in my memory the remembrance of your features and your way of speaking, and I am sad."

She covered her face and sobbed. Then Yulou came forward, offered incense, made a reverence and cried with Yueniang. The nurse, Ruyi'er, with the baby in her arms, knelt down. Uncle Wu and Aunt Wu also offered incense and made reverence. Then they went to the arbor and there had food and wine. Yueniang asked Uncle Wu and Aunt Wu to take the places of honor. She and Yulou sat opposite, Xiaoyu and Ruyi'er and Aunt Wu's old maid sat at the side.

That day, Major Zhou also went to visit his ancestral tombs. Before the festival, Chunmei slept with him. She pretended to have a dream and cried during the night. Zhou asked her what was the matter.

"I had a dream," Chunmei said, "and in my dream, my mother came to me. She cried and said to me that she had brought me up, yet I was not going to burn paper offerings for her at the Festival of Spring. Then I cried and awoke."

"If she brought you up, you must do your duty as a daughter. But where is she buried?"

"At the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the Southern Gate."

"Then you must not trouble any more," Major Zhou said. "That temple is my own place of worship. Tomorrow, I shall be going there to visit our family tombs and I will tell a servant to take something to the place where your mother is buried."

The next day, the Major told his servants to take food, wine, and fruit and go to his ancestral tombs outside the city. At the grave he had a large house with halls, rooms and a garden, a place for worship, and shrines. His two wives and Chunmei went with him each in a sedan chair carried by four men. Soldiers marched before them.

Yueniang drank wine with Uncle Wu and Aunt Wu. She was afraid it was getting late, and told Daian and Laian to clear everything away. They went to the village of Apricot Blossom. There was a hill near the village and a wineshop at the foot of the hill. Many people were strolling about, and she told the servants to take their food there. Aunt Wu had no sedan chair, so they all walked and the sedan chairs followed empty behind them. Uncle Wu came last, leading the two donkeys. They walked over the green grass for about three *li*; then came to the Peach Flower inn, and, when they had gone five *li*; saw the village of Apricot Blossom. The red and green dresses of the people seemed like masses of flowers and willows. They had all come to visit their graves. In the distance they could see a temple beneath the shade of a locust tree. It was a building of more than usual magnificence.
Yueniang asked what this building was called.
"It is the place where Major Zhou worships," Uncle Wu said, "and it is called the Temple of Eternal Felicity. Don't you remember how, when my brother-in-law was alive, he gave a great deal of money to repair the building? That is why it looks so new and beautiful."
"Let us go and have a look at it," Yueniang said.
Some of the novices saw them coming and went to tell the Abbot. When he saw a number of people coming, he came out to receive them. He made a reverence to Uncle Wu and then to Yueniang, and told one of the young monks to unlock all the shrines that they might see the different images of Buddha. When they had had tea, all the doors were opened. Yueniang and the others looked everywhere. Then they went back to the Abbot's apartments, and he offered them tea.
"May I ask your name in religion?" Uncle Wu said.
"My name is Daojian," the Abbot said, "and this monastery is the place of worship of his most generous lordship Major Zhou. Under my instruction are more than a hundred monks, and, at the back, is a place for the wandering monks who come here to meditate. They make intercession for the charitable." He asked them if they would not take something to eat.
"We must not put you to inconvenience," Yueniang said. She took five *qian* of silver and asked Uncle Wu to give them to the Abbot. "It is only a trifle to pay for incense to burn before the Buddhas," she said.
The Abbot made a reverence. "I have really nothing to offer you," he said, "but I should be glad if you would take a cup of tea. Thank you for this gift."
Novices set the table and brought vegetarian food and cakes. The Abbot sat down with them and took up his chopsticks to encourage them to eat something.
Suddenly two men in black clothes burst into the room and shouted in a voice like thunder. "Teacher, why don't you come out to welcome the young lady?"
The Abbot put on his robes and hat, told the young monks to clear everything away, and asked the ladies to go into a small room.
"I must go and see the young lady," he said. "When she has finished her worship, I will come back to you."
Uncle Wu suggested that they should leave, but the Abbot would not hear of it.
The monks, ringing bells and beating drums, went to the main gate to receive the visitor. A host of men in black clothes followed a large sedan chair, coming from the east like a flying cloud. The chair men's clothes were wet with sweat.
The Abbot bowed. "I did not know you were coming, Lady," he said. "I beg your pardon for not being ready to welcome you."
"Teacher," Chunmei said, who was sitting in the sedan chair, "I am sorry to put you to so much trouble."
The servants took the offerings and went to the back of the temple where Pan Jinlian was buried. They set out paper money and other offerings before the grave. Chunmei did not go into the temple but straight around to the back. There she left the sedan chair. The servants stood ready to do anything she might wish and, slowly and gracefully, she walked between them to the grave. There she offered incense and made reverence four times.
"Mother," she said, "I have come to offer paper money for you. I trust that you may rest in paradise and make use of this money when you are in need. If I had only known you would be killed, I would have made a plan to bring you to me. It is my fault that I was too late. Now I repent, but it is still too late."
She told the servants to burn the paper money, and sobbed loudly.
Yueniang, in the temple, only knew that some young lady had come and that the Abbot had gone to meet her. When he did not come back, she asked the young monk what was happening.
"A little while ago," the young monk said, "the young lady buried one of her sisters. It is the Festival of Spring today, and she has come to burn paper offerings."
"I should not be surprised if this were Chunmei," Yulou said.
"But she has no sister buried here," Yueniang said. "What is the young lady's name?" she asked the young monk.
"Her name is Pang," the young monk said. "A few days ago she gave the Abbot five taels of silver to hold a service for her sister."
"I remember our husband telling me that Chunmei's family name was Pang." Yulou said. "It must be she."
As they were talking, the Abbot returned and told the young monk to prepare tea. A sedan chair was brought to the second door and Yueniang and Yulou looked through the lattice to see what manner of young lady this might be. They recognized Chunmei. She was taller than before. Her face was like the full moon and she looked as exquisite as a figure of jade. Her head was covered with pearls and ornaments, and phoenix pins were thrust obliquely through her hair. She wore a crimson embroidered coat and a blue skirt with trimmings of gold, and little ornaments that tinkled as she walked. She was very different from the Chunmei they had known.
The Abbot set a large chair in the place of honor and asked Chunmei to sit down in it. The young monk made a reverence to her and brought tea. The Abbot offered it with his own hands. "Really," he said, "I did not expect you today. You must forgive me for not coming to meet you."
"I feel that I have been a great trouble to you," Chunmei said. "The other day I asked you to hold a service for me."
"That was nothing," the Abbot said. "I should have done it out of gratitude for the kindness you have shown. We had eight monks, and in the evening, when the ceremony was over, I burned paper offerings. Then I sent your servant away and bade him tell you all about it."
Chunmei drank tea, and the young monk took away the teacup. But the Abbot sat with her and talked, and Yueniang and the others could not come away. Yueniang was afraid because it was getting very late, and she bade the young monk go and tell the Abbot she would like to say goodbye to him. The Abbot would not hear of it.
"May I mention something to you?" he said to Chunmei.
"Say anything you like, Teacher," Chunmei said.
"There are a few ladies here who came to see the place. We did not know you were coming. Now they wish to go away."
"Teacher," Chunmei said, "why do you not ask them to come and see me?"
The Abbot went and told Yueniang what Chunmei had said, but Yueniang did not wish to go. "It is late and we must go home," she said. "We have not time to come and see her."
The Abbot was very much embarrassed. He felt that he had accepted Yueniang's money and had entertained her very inadequately. He implored them to go and see Chunmei. Then they could refuse no longer. Yueniang, Yulou, and Aunt Wu came out.
"Mothers and Aunt!" Chunmei cried. She made Aunt Wu take the place of honor, then, like a branch of blossoms, swaying in the wind, knelt down and kowtowed. Aunt Wu hastily greeted her in return.
"Sister," she said, "things are very different now. I dare now allow you to make such reverence to me."
"Good Aunt," Chunmei said, "you must not say that. I am not that sort of woman. I know the correct behavior of an inferior to a superior."
When she had kowtowed to Aunt Wu, she turned to Yueniang and Yulou. They wished to salute her, but she would have none of it. She kowtowed to them four times. They helped her to her feet.
"I did not know you were here," Chunmei said. "If I had known, I would have asked you to come before."
"Sister," Yueniang said, "since you left us, I have not been able to come and call on you. I am sorry."
"Lady," Chunmei said, "who am I that you should call on me? Why should you be sorry?"
Then she saw Ruyi'er with the baby Xiaoge. "The young master is quite big now," she said.
"Come here and make a reverence to your sister," Yueniang said to Xiaoyu. Then Xiaoyu and Ruyi'er, both smiling, came and made a reverence to Chunmei and she returned their greeting.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "you should accept their reverence."
Then Chunmei took a silver pin with a gold head from her hair and put it in Xiaoge's cap.
"You must thank your sister," Yueniang said. "Why don't you say something to your sister?"
Then, indeed, the baby did babble something. Yueniang was very pleased.
"Sister," Yulou said, "if you had not come here today, we might never have met."
"I came because my mother is buried behind this monastery," Chunmei said. "I lived with her for several years and she had no relatives of her own. The least I could do was to come and burn some papers for her."
"Now I remember," Yueniang said. "Some years ago your mother died, and you told us you did not know where she was buried."
"You don't understand, Sister," Yulou said. "She means our sister Pan. It is due to her kindness that Jinlian is buried here."
Yueniang said no more.
"Would anyone else have been as kind as you, Sister?" Aunt Wu said. "You did not forget one who had been your friend, and you gave her burial. And at this festival you have come to burn paper offerings for her."
"Lady," Chunmei said, "you know how well she treated me when she was alive. It was such a tragic end. Her body was lying there exposed. I could do no less for her than bury her."
The Abbot told the young monks to set the table again. They brought in two large tables with all kinds of vegetarian dishes and cakes. The tea was made with golden tea leaves as tiny as sparrows' tongues, and the purest of water. They enjoyed their food and, when they had finished, the things were taken away. Uncle Wu was entertained elsewhere by some of the monks.
Yulou rose and said she would like to see the grave of Jinlian. She wished to burn paper offerings too, for they had been as sisters. But seeing that Yueniang did not intend to go, Yulou took five fens of silver from her sleeve and asked one of the young monks to buy some paper money.
"Don't trouble to buy any, Lady," the Abbot said. "I have plenty. Take what you wish."
Then Yulou gave the money to the young monk and asked him to lead the way to the grave under the poplar tree. There she found a mound of yellow earth about three feet high and a few grasses growing on it. She offered incense and burned some paper money. Then she made a reverence, and said: "Sister, I did not know that you were buried here. By chance I came to this monastery, and now I offer you this paper money. May it be of use to you." She sobbed loudly.
When Ruyi'er saw that Yulou had gone to the back, she decided to go too. Yueniang, who was talking to Chunmei, said to the nurse: "Don't take the baby, you may frighten him."
"Don't be alarmed, Lady," Ruyi'er said. "I will see he comes to no harm."
Then she went to the grave, where Yulou was burning paper offerings and weeping as she did so.
The ladies changed their clothes and powdered their faces. Chunmei ordered one of her servants to bring a food box, and all kinds of dainties were set out on the table before them. Wine was heated. The cups were of silver; the chopsticks of ivory. She asked Aunt Wu, Yueniang, and Yulou to take the places of honor, and she took the hostess's seat. Ruyi'er and Xiaoyu sat at the side. Uncle Wu had wine in another room.
While they were drinking, two servants came in and knelt down. "Our master would like you to come and see some performers," they said. "The other ladies are there already, and he asks you to come at once."
Chunmei showed no sign of hurry. "Very well," she said, "you may go back to him."
The two men did not dare to go away, and waited outside the door. Aunt Wu and Yueniang rose. "Sister," they said, "we have troubled you long enough. It is late, and you have other matters to attend to. We must go."
Chunmei would not listen, and still told her servants to fill the cups with wine. "Ladies," she said, "it was not easy for us to meet, but now that we have chanced to come upon each other, I trust we may keep on good terms. I have no relatives of my own, and perhaps you will allow me to come and see you on your birthdays."
"Sister," Yueniang said, "it is extremely kind of you to suggest it, but I dare not put you to so much inconvenience. Will you not allow me to come to you first?"
Yueniang drank another cup of wine and then said she could drink no more. "Aunt Wu has no sedan chair," she said. "It will be very awkward if we are late."
"If she's no chair, I'll be glad to let her have one of my ponies," Chunmei said.
Aunt Wu thanked her and declined. They stood up again and made ready to go. Chunmei sent for the Abbot and gave him a roll of cloth and 5 *qian* of silver. He thanked her and went with all the ladies as far as the main gateway.
There Yueniang said goodbye to Chunmei. The girl watched Yueniang and the others get into their sedan chairs and then got into her own. The 2 parties went in different directions. Chunmei with her servants went to Xinzhuang.

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### Lai-wang absconds together with Sun Hsüeh-o; Sun Hsüeh-o Is Sold to Chou Hsiu's Household

Blossoms open and blossoms fall, [1]open and fall again;
Officials and commoners are wont to replace one another.
Prominent families cannot count upon remaining wealthy;
Poor persons are not necessarily doomed to remain poor.
If you assist people, they will not necessarily rise to Heaven;
If you abuse people, they will not necessarily end in a ditch.[2]
You are urged, in all things, not to be resentful toward Heaven;
Heaven's attitude toward mankind is neither generous nor stingy.[3]

Wu K'ai took charge of Yüeh-niang and the group of men and women that accompanied her as they left the Temple of Eternal Felicity and continued on their way under the tall trees on the long embankment. Meanwhile, Tai-an had already selected an elevated spot in the open air before the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village, from which they could enjoy:
The liveliness of the teeming crowds;
and set out their wine and appetizers:
Making a canopy of Heaven and a carpet of Earth.[4]
He had waited a long time before he saw the sedan chairs of Yüeh-niang and the others approaching.
Upon their arrival, he asked, "Why has it taken you so long to get here?"
Yüeh-niang responded by telling him all about how they had run into Ch'un-mei in the Temple of Eternal Felicity.
It was not long before the wine was decanted, and the group of them sat down to enjoy their drinks. As they did so, what should they see passing back and forth below the tavern in front of them but a stream of:
Perfumed carriages with decorated hubs,
Amid the discord of the teeming crowds.
The chariots and horses rumbled like thunder;
As the pipes and voices rose up tumultuously.[5]
Yüeh-niang and the others, standing on their elevated spot, looked on as the:
Mountains and seas of people,
crowded around to watch the military instructors perform their equestrian acrobatics.
It so happens that among them was the son of the district magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, whose name was Li Kung-pi. He was about thirty years of age and was enrolled as a student at the Superior College of the National University. He had ever been:
As romantic and dashing as can be,
But too lazy to study the classics;
preferring instead to engage in:
Equestrian hunting with falcons and hounds,
Or playing at kickball and suchlike sports.

He was a habitué of the:
Three quarters and two alleys,
of the pleasure precincts, and people referred to him as Bare Stick Li. That day, he was wearing an outfit of light glossy silk, with a small palmetto hat with a golden knob on his head, while his feet were clad in dark tan boots and embroidered stockings. Along with a clerk on the staff of the district yamen named Ho Pu-wei, he was leading a group of twenty or thirty stout fellows, equipped with slingshots, blowpipes, balls, and sticks, who congregated in front of the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village looking on as the military instructor Li Kuei performed his equestrian acrobatics; doing headstands on horseback, hanging on one side of his steed by grasping its belly bands, twirling his spear and flourishing his club. The considerable number of men and women gathered there were cheering vociferously.
This Li Kuei, whose nickname was Shantung Yaksha,[6] wore a flat-topped cap on his head, held in place with a hammered gold ring that floated at the back of his skull. His body was draped in a close-fitting purple gown, his waist was encircled with a gold lamé cummerbund, his shins were encased in patterned puttees, and his feet were clad in long-legged boots and variegated stockings with a flying fish motif. He rode on a steed with a silvery mane and held a gleaming vermilion-handled spear in his hand, from which there floated a commander's standard.
Vaulting into the saddle in the middle of the street, he went on to introduce himself in a loud voice, saying:
Martial arts instructors such as myself
are rare in this world;
My name has been known on the rivers and
lakes for a long time.
Blows with my two fists feel like being
hammered with a mallet;
My two feet carry me forward as nimbly
as though in flight.
In the martial contests in the Southern
and Northern Capitals,
And those in Kuang-tung and Kuang-hsi,
I am without a rival.
It is clear I am an adamantly boastful
and big-mouthed sort;
Though the fact is that I am utterly
devoid of any talent.
My skill with the Shao-lin quarterstaff,
Barely enables me to batter field frogs;
My mastery of the Yüeh school of boxing,[7]
Hardly equips me to terrify little dogs.
When confronted with a real match,
I scarcely dare make even a sound;
If there is no rival to deal with,
I am wont to utter boastful words.
The money I manage to swindle this way
I find hard to hold on to;
Because I am so given to plucking the
"willows" in the quarter.[8]
I am obliged to Young Master Li Kung-pi
from the Northern Capital,
Who sustains me in his household, and
views me as a bosom friend.
Dipped in fresh sauce, I enjoy consuming
half a field of scallions;
Wrapped in thin pancakes, I stuff myself
with half a load of leeks.
Your humble servant has always been
addicted to intemperance;
And enjoys drinking wine throughout
the time from 4:00 to 6:00.
Should my teeth hurt,
I only resort to grinding them;
Should my belly swell,
I merely resort to massaging it.
To sate myself, I have been known to
consume three pecks of rice;
To amuse myself, I have been known to
swill a large crock of wine.
I am exceedingly grateful to my patron,
but have no way to repay him;
In the life to come I will be reborn as
a watchdog to guard his home.
Should a housebreaker show up and try
to make a hole in his wall;
I will rise to the occasion by taking
a bite out of his scrotum.
If you want to know why I would take
a bite out of his scrotum;
It is because I am not as expert at
using my limbs as my mouth.[9]
On this occasion, no sooner did Li Kung-pi set eyes on Meng Yü-lou's tall and slender figure than, before he knew it:
His heart was agitated and his eyes disturbed.
It seemed to him that:
Such a vision is not exhaustible;
Such a view exceeds comprehension.
From his mouth no word was uttered,
In his heart he thought to himself,
"I wonder whose household that woman belongs to, and whether she has a husband or not?"
Turning to the "ball clubber" Trifler Chang, who was a member of his entourage, he called him over and whispered to him, saying, "You go over to that elevated slope and see if you can find out whose household those three women dressed in white belong to. If you succeed in discovering the truth of the matter, come back and report to me."
Trifler Chang, deferentially covering his mouth with his hand, assented and promptly flew off on this errand.
It was not long before he returned and proceeded to:
Whisper into his ear in a low voice,
saying, "Thus and so, they are womenfolk from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing in front of the district yamen. The oldest of them is surnamed Wu and is his sister-in-law. The one who is petite in stature is his First Lady Wu Yüeh-niang. The one with the tall and slender figure and a few white pockmarks on her face is his Third Lady, whose name is Meng Yü-lou. The latter two of them have both chosen to remain in his household and maintain their widowhood."
When Li Kung-pi heard this, he felt particularly attracted to Meng Yü-lou and generously rewarded Trifler Chang for his efforts. But no more of this.
Wu K'ai, along with Yüeh-niang and the others, continued to enjoy the scene for what seemed like half a day until:
The sun began to be swallowed by the hills,
when he directed Tai-an to gather up the food boxes and urged Yüeh-niang to get into her sedan chair and proceed home. Truly, it is the case that:
The young man grasps his brocade bridle and flaunts
his silken sleeves in drunkenness;
The silk-clad young lady lifts aside the embroidered
curtain the better to gaze at him.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The shadows of the flowers under the willows
hold down the dust on the road;
Each time one sets out to enjoy them
one's pleasure is renewed.
Those with affinities will meet though
separated by a thousand li;
Those without affinities will not meet
though face to face.
We will say no more, for the moment, about how Yüeh-niang and the others returned home.
To resume our story, that day, back at home, Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, having nothing else to do during the afternoon, went out and stood by the front gate. It just so happened that:
As providence would have it,
a peddler unexpectedly came along shaking the clapper by which he alerted housewives to his presence. In those days, peddlers who dealt in cosmetics, ornamental trinkets, and mirror polishing all alerted housewives by shaking such clappers.
Upon hearing the sound of the clapper, Hsi-men Ta-chieh said, "My mirror is tarnished," and told P'ing-an to go stop the peddler so he could polish her mirror for her.
The peddler put down his burden and said, "I am not a mirror polisher but deal in gold and silver objects, head ornaments, and trinkets."
As he stood there in front of the gate, he stared fixedly at Sun Hsüeh-o:
Looking her over from top to bottom.
Sun Hsüeh-o responded by saying, "As for you, if you are not a mirror polisher, you can take yourself off. What reason is there for you to stare at me that way?"
The man then said, "Sister Hsüeh-o, and the young lady of the household, I guess you no longer recognize me."
"You look familiar," said Hsi-men Ta-chieh, "but I don't seem able to remember who you are at the moment."
"I am Lai-wang," the man replied, "whom the master drove out of his household."
"Where have you been all these years?" asked Sun Hsüeh-o. "Why haven't we seen you? You've managed to gain quite a bit of weight."
"Upon leaving the master's household," replied Lai-wang, "I returned to my native place in Hsü-chou but was at loose ends and unable to find regular employment. So I joined the entourage of a gentleman who was leaving for the capital to take up an official position. Unexpectedly, while we were en route, his father died, and he had to return home in order to observe the mourning rituals for his parent. I therefore sought employment in the jeweler's shop of Silversmith Ku, where I have been learning the craft of working with precious metals, engraving patterns on larger vessels, as well as head ornaments and other objects. These last few days, business has been slack, so Silversmith Ku has sent me out on the street with a carrying pole to peddle some miscellaneous objects. When I saw you all standing in the entranceway, I did not dare to accost you, lest you accuse me of venturing to:
Dawdle at your door or loiter at your gate.
If you had not called me over today, I would not have made myself known to you."
"Though I scrutinized you for what seemed like half a day," said Sun Hsüeh-o, "I failed to recognize you. As an old member of the household, what were you afraid of?"
She then went on to ask, "What sort of merchandise are you selling in that load of yours? Bring it inside so we can have a look at it."

Lai-wang then proceeded to carry his load into the courtyard and open up the coffers, extracting a variety of head ornaments and incised gold and silver artifacts from the boxes inside them. The patterns displayed upon them were works of exquisite craftsmanship. Behold:
A solitary wild goose holds reeds in its beak;
A pair of fish sport among the aquatic plants.
A peony blossom is artistically incised
with specks of gold;
The chalcedony head of a hairpin is as
lustrous as a flame.
There are also:
A pair of lions playing with a brocade ball,
And a file of camels bearing costly tribute;
Cap ornaments made to delineate the
Palace of the Moon,
Hair clasps carved to represent the
Peach Blossom Spring.
The pins holding the hair on left and right,
Depict pears and persimmons[11] on one side and
a clump of lychees on the other;
The pins worn on the part in front and back,
Depict the Goddess Kuan-yin sitting with her
legs crossed on her Lotus Throne.
There are also:
Frigid sparrows contending for plum blossoms,[11]
And male phoenixes flirting with their mates.
Truly:
The chatelaines are studded with
evenly spaced emeralds;
The cap buttons are fashioned from
glaucous precious stones.
After examining these samples for a while, Sun Hsüeh-o said to Lai-wang, "If you have any other ornaments for sale, bring them out so I can see them."
Lai-wang then brought out another box containing artificial flower ornaments to be worn on the hair over the temples, cap ornaments of kingfisher blue in the shape of bird's wings, and an assortment of cricket-shaped stickpins. Hsi-men Ta-chieh picked out for herself two pairs of flower ornaments for the hair over her temples, and Sun Hsüeh-o selected a pair of emerald-green phoenix hairpins, and a pair of brooches representing the motif of goldfish pierced with willow twigs. [12] Hsi-men Ta-chieh then proceeded to weigh out the silver for her purchase and give it to him, but Sun Hsüeh-o, who owed him one tael and two mace of silver for the two items she had selected, requested that he come back early the next morning to collect her payment.
She then went on to explain, "Today, the First Lady is not at home, having gone to the family graveyard, together with her infant child and the Third Lady, in order to burn paper money at Father's grave."
"While I was at home last year," said Lai-wang, "I heard that Father had died and that the First Lady had given birth to a son. I imagine he must have grown somewhat bigger by now."
"The First Lady's child is only a year and a half old right now," said Sun Hsüeh-o. "The members of our household, both high and low, treasure him like a pearl on a piece of jewelry, and our future prospects are dependent on him."
As they were talking, Lai-chao's wife, "The Beanpole," came out and poured a cup of tea for him to drink. Lai-wang accepted the tea and responded to her with a bow.
Lai-chao himself also appeared and, after chatting with him for a while, said, "You ought to come back tomorrow in order to pay your respects to the First Lady."
Lai-wang then picked up his carrying pole and departed.
That evening, when Yüeh-niang and the others arrived home in their sedan chairs, Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh, together with the maidservants, all kowtowed to her. Tai-an felt unable to keep up with the bearers who were carrying the food boxes, and therefore hired a donkey for himself and took care of dismissing the bearers when they arrived home.
Yüeh-niang told Sun Hsüeh-o and Hsi-men Ta-chieh about their meeting with Ch'un-mei that day, saying, "It so happens that she had taken the trouble to arrange the burial of her mistress from the P'an family behind the Temple of Eternal Felicity, though we knew nothing about it. She came to burn paper money at her grave today, and we happened:
By some fortuitous fluke of fortune,[13]
to run into her there, and renew our acquaintance. Before this, we had already consumed a vegetarian repast provided by the abbot, but afterwards, Ch'un-mei also had two tables set up and directed her servants to lay out the contents of forty or fifty partitioned boxes containing delicacies of every kind, and to decant the wine. It was more than we could hope to consume. When she saw Hsiao-ko, she also presented him with a pair of her own hairpins. She was as friendly as could be. When she got up to go, she was:
Attended by three or five servants,
and rode in a large sedan chair, followed by a crowd of retainers. Moreover, she appears to have grown taller than she was before, and is whiter and plumper as well."
"She has also chosen not to:
Alter her normal demeanor or forget her former status,"
remarked Sister-in-law Wu. "In the days when she was employed in your household, I noticed that her conduct was more proper and her speech more dignified than that of the other maidservants, and that she seemed to possess the potential for better things. One can see today the truth of the saying that:
Good fortune serves to stimulate the intelligence,
and may result in this kind of prosperity."
Meng Yü-lou also chimed in, saying, "Our elder sister may not have asked her about it, but I did, and it turns out that she is pregnant, not having menstruated for the last six months, and that her baby is due in the eighth or ninth month. The commandant is utterly delighted by this. Thus, what Auntie Hsüeh reported to us turns out to be true after all."
After they had talked about this for a while, Sun Hsüeh-o said, "While Mother was not at home today, Hsi-men Ta-chieh and I were standing at the front gate when we caught sight of Lai-wang. It turns out that he has been here learning the craft of working with precious metals and was peddling a load of gold and silver articles and costume jewelry, though we did not even recognize him at first. Upon realizing who he was, we bought several items of costume jewelry from him. He asked about you, Mother, and I told him that you had gone to burn paper money at your husband's grave."
"Why didn't you ask him to wait until I returned home?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"We told him to come back tomorrow," responded Sun Hsüeh-o.
As they were sitting there, and talking together, whom should they see but the wet nurse Ju-i, who came forward and said to Yüeh-niang, "Ever since I arrived home with the little child, for what seems like half a day, he has been in a coma from which he has not awakened. The breath coming out of his mouth is cold, while his body feels:
As scalding as boiling water and as hot as fire."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she hastened in consternation to pick the baby up from the heated k'ang and give him a kiss. Sure enough, she found that he was covered with cold sweat, though his whole body felt feverishly hot.
Losing her temper, she took Ju-i to task, saying, "Whore that you are, you've let the child catch a chill in the sedan chair."
"I had him wrapped up tightly in a quilt," protested Ju-i. "How could I have exposed him to the cold?"
"If it wasn't that," continued Yüeh-niang, "you must have exposed him to a fright by taking him to visit that dead woman's grave. I told you not to take him there, but you ignored my instructions and insisted on taking him with you anyway."
"Luckily," responded Ju-i, "Sister Hsiao-yü can bear witness that I merely carried him with me to take a look at the grave and then came back. Since when did I expose him to any fright?"
"Don't give me any more of your lip," responded Yüeh-niang. "What need was there for you to go look at her grave in the first place, and thereby expose him to a fright?"
She then called in Lai-an and instructed him, saying, "Go at once and summon Dame Liu."
It was not long before Dame Liu showed up.
After taking his pulse, and feeling his body, she pronounced, "He is suffering from a colic brought on by encountering an evil spirit. I will leave you two doses of cinnabar pills which you should help him to wash down with some ginger extract."
She then directed the wet nurse to hold him in her arms and go lie down on the heated k'ang. It was halfway through the night before he broke out into a cold sweat and his fever began to abate. Dame Liu was then provided with a serving of tea, given three mace of silver as compensation for her services, and requested to return the next day to see how he was doing. What with the:
Opening of gates and closing of doors,
the whole household was thrown into a state of consternation for half the night.
To resume our story, the next day, Lai-wang came back to the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence carrying his load of merchandise as before and bowed to Lai-chao, saying, "Yesterday, Sun Hsüeh-o selected a number of my products for herself and promised that if I would return today she would pay me the silver she owed for them, and also arrange a meeting with the First Lady."
"You had better leave for the time being and come back another day," said Lai-chao. "Yesterday, when the First Lady came home, her infant son had fallen ill, and they had to call in the medical practitioner Dame Liu to prescribe medicine for him. As a result, the household has been in a state of disruption and suffering from acute anxiety all night long. Only today does he appear to have gotten somewhat better. Under the circumstances, how could anyone have the spare time to weigh out silver for you?"
As they were speaking, who should turn up but Wu Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and Sun Hsüeh-o, who were in the act of seeing off Dame Liu and caught sight of Lai-wang as they came to the front gate. Lai-wang proceeded to kneel down on the ground and kowtow twice to Yüeh-niang.
"It's been some time since we saw you last," said Yüeh-niang. "Why haven't you come by to pay us a visit?"
Lai-wang told her what had happened to him during the interim and explained that although he had wanted to come, he had not felt comfortable doing so.
"As a former member of the household," said Yüeh-niang, "what were you afraid of? Moreover, your master is now dead. Originally it was simply because that whore from the P'an family engaged in:
Setting fires with one hand, and
Pouring water on them with the other,
fabricating tales about people behind their backs, that your good wife was driven to commit suicide by hanging herself, and you were framed for something you didn't do and condemned to be banished to your native place. But now, Heaven has refused to countenance her, and she is gone for good."
"It's not something I want to talk about," said Lai-wang. "It suffices that you understand it as well as you do."
After they had spoken for a while, Yüeh-niang asked him, "What kind of wares are you offering for sale? Get them out so I can take a look."
When he had done so, she selected several head ornaments for herself, the cost of which came to three taels and two mace of silver, and weighed the payment out for him on a scale. She then invited him to enter through the ceremonial gate into the rear compound and told Hsiao-yü to fetch a jug of wine and a platter of savories for him. Sun Hsüeh-o, who was in charge of the kitchen, personally saw to heating up a large bowl of pork and brought it out for him to eat. When he had had his fill of wine and food, he kowtowed to them in gratitude and went back out to the front gate.
When Yüeh-niang, Meng Yü-lou, and the others had returned to the rear compound after seeing him off, Sun Hsüeh-o surreptitiously whispered to him, "You should feel free to come back here as often as you like. What is there to be afraid of? If I have anything to say to you, I'll have Lai-chao's wife tell you about it. Tomorrow evening, I'll wait for you here inside the ceremonial gate in the little anteroom next to the crape myrtle hedge."
The two of them exchanged winks with each other, the meaning of which was not lost on Lai-wang, and he went on to ask, "Is this ceremonial gate closed at night, or not?"
Sun Hsüeh-o responded, thus and so, "When you come, go to Lai-chao's quarters first, and wait until nightfall, after which, you can scale the wall with a ladder, and then make your way along the other side of the latticework partition. I'll help you down on this side, and the two of us can get together again. There are some personal thoughts that I want to share with you."
When Lai-wang heard these words, truly:
Joy manifested itself about his temples;
Delight spread itself across his cheeks,
and, saying good-bye to Sun Hsüeh-o, he proceeded to take up his carrying pole and go out the gate. Truly:
Without the help of an insider,
A household cannot be broached.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Idle, with nothing to do, while merely
leaning against the doorjamb,
He encounters a lover with whom he once
enjoyed a deeply felt affair.
Not daring to speak loudly enough to
be overheard by anyone else,
She clearly reveals her ardor with the
autumn ripples of her eyes.
Lai-wang proceeded happily on his way home. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.
The next day, he did not take up his carrying pole and go out to peddle his wares but slowly sauntered back and forth in front of Hsi-men Ch'ing's gate waiting for Lai-chao to come out.
When he did so, Lai-wang greeted him with a bow, to which Lai-chao responded by saying, "What a rare bird you are, Brother Wang. Long time no see."
"Having nothing to do," Lai-wang said, "I've dropped by for a visit. The young lady Sun Hsüeh-o from the rear compound owes me several mace of silver for some trinkets she purchased from me, and I have come by to collect the payment."
"In that case," responded Lai-chao, "come into my place and have a seat."
So saying, he ushered Lai-wang into his quarters.
"Why is my sister-in-law not to be seen?" asked Lai-wang.
"Your sister-in-law is on duty in the kitchen in the rear compound today," explained Lai-chao.
Lai-wang then groped out a tael's worth of silver and handed it to Lai-chao, saying, "These few pieces of silver should suffice to purchase a jug of wine for my brother and sister-in-law to enjoy with me."
"There is no need for that much," said Lai-chao.
So saying, he called over his son Little Iron Rod. Little Iron Rod, who had just recently put up his hair on reaching the age of fourteen, went out with a jug and came back with a large vessel of wine, after which, he was sent to the rear compound to summon "The Beanpole."

It was not long before "The Beanpole" showed up with a covered pewter pot of heated rice, a large bowl of boiled hash, and two side dishes, to go with the wine, saying, "How nice it is to see Brother Wang here."
Lai-chao then brought out the silver that Lai-wang had given him and showed it to "The Beanpole," saying, "Our brother has given this to us with which to buy a jug of wine for our enjoyment."
"The Beanpole" laughed at this, saying, "To enjoy something we have done nothing to deserve is hardly the right thing to do."
She then set up a bed table on the k'ang, invited Lai-wang to sit down at it, laid out the refreshments, and decanted the wine. Lai-wang promptly responded by filling a cup of wine to the brim and offering it to Lai-chao, after which, he poured out another cup and presented it to "The Beanpole."
Bowing deeply to them, he said, "It is some time since I have seen my brother and sister-in-law. These cups of watery wine are intended to show my filial respect for the two of you."
"We are hardly likely to accuse you of sponging off us," said "The Beanpole." "But:
When addressing sincere people,
You must not speak insincerely.
The young lady Sun Hsüeh-o in the rear compound appealed to us for help yesterday. She said that:
Your old feelings for each other remained intact,[14]
and asked the two of us, thus and so, if we could help you to get together again. You had better not pretend to be:
Still asleep in dreamland.
If you want to find the route down the mountain,
You had better ask someone who has been over it.[15]
If you should find a way to be reunited, and gain anything in the process:
Don't try to keep it all for yourself; but
Spare us a mouthful of leftover gravy.
After all, we are putting ourselves at considerable risk on your behalf."
Lai-wang responded by getting down on his knees and saying, "All I am hoping for is that my brother and sister-in-law will consent to help us get together again. If so:
I will never dare to forget it."
When they had concluded this exchange, they proceeded to enjoy their wine for a while, after which "The Beanpole" went back to the rear compound to tell Sun Hsüeh-o about it.
Upon returning, she said, "We have agreed that you should come back this evening and hide out in our quarters until the ceremonial gate has been closed for the night and the residents of the rear compound have gone to bed, after which, you can climb over the wall and:
Seize the opportunity to do what you want."[16]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Just retribution is absolutely devoid of bias;[17]
It follows as inevitably as shadows or echoes.
If you seek the causes of bad or good fortune;
Simply scrutinize the deeds that one has done.[18]
On hearing these words, Lai-wang went home and could hardly wait for the evening, when he slipped surreptitiously into Lai-chao's quarters and proceeded to share some wine with the two of them until late at night without anyone else being aware of his presence. After the main gate of the residence had been closed, and the crossbar had been locked in place on the ceremonial gate, the residents of the household, both high and low, all went to bed.
The two of them had arranged a secret signal, so as soon as Lai-wang heard the sound of Sun Hsüeh-o coughing, he proceeded to mount a ladder, crawl onto the plastered wall, and make his way along the other side of the latticework partition to the point at which Sun Hsüeh-o stood ready to help him down onto a bench.
The two of them then retired to the little anteroom on the western side of the courtyard that was used for storing saddles, where they fell to:
Hugging and embracing each other,
as they went on to engage in the game of clouds and rain together. It was a meeting between a widower and a widow with:
The fire of lust in their hearts.
As for Lai-wang:
His tasseled spear was impetuous,
and he worked it with all his strength for some time until his pleasure reached its height as his semen began to flow, and he:
Ejaculated like a geyser.
When they had finished their business together, Sun Hsüeh-o handed him a bundle containing some gold and silver head ornaments, several taels worth of silver, and two outfits of satin clothing and said, "You should come back again tomorrow evening. I still have some other valuables I can turn over to you then. You might as well start looking outside for a safe place for us to go. This household is no place for me to remain in the future. It would be better if the two of us could abscond together and find a place to stay outside where we could become man and wife. Since you have mastered the craft of a silversmith, there is no reason to worry about our being able to make a living."
"At the present time," responded Lai-wang, "there happens to be a maternal aunt of mine who lives on Polished Rice Lane outside the East Gate of the city. She practices midwifery and is well-known in the neighborhood as Midwife Ch'ü. It is an out-of-the-way location where we can safely escape observation. The two of us might as well seek refuge there for a while, and if we see that the coast is clear I can take you with me to my native place, buy a few acres of land, and plant some crops in order to support ourselves."
When the two of them had agreed on this plan, Lai-wang said good-bye to Sun Hsüeh-o, clambered back over the wall, and returned to Lai-chao's quarters, where he waited until the main gate was opened early the next morning and slipped furtively outside.
At dusk that day, he returned to the gate and slipped back into Lai-chao's quarters. That night, he climbed over the wall once again and made out with Sun Hsüeh-o. After this, as the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he met with her in this way on more than one occasion. They also took advantage of the opportunity to make off with a lot of valuable objects, gold and silver utensils, clothing, and so forth. Lai-chao and his wife also fattened themselves by appropriating a share of these stolen goods, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
One day, in the rear compound, Yüeh-niang, who was feeling out of sorts because she feared that Hsiao-ko might be coming down with smallpox, went to bed earlier than usual. The maidservant in Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters at the time was Chung-ch'iu, who had originally worked for Hsi-men Ta-chieh but had been reassigned to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters by Yüeh-niang because Ch'en Ching-chi had asked for Yüan-hsiao, who had formerly served in Li Chiao-erh's quarters. Yüeh-niang had complied with this request by reassigning Chung-ch'iu to Sun Hsüeh-o's quarters, and ordering Yüan-hsiao to work for Hsi-men Ta-chieh. That night, after Sun Hsüeh-o had made sure that Chung-ch'iu was asleep, she proceeded to assemble a large bundle of hairpins, earrings, and head ornaments in her bedroom, packed them in a box, wrapped her head in a kerchief, and put on her traveling clothes. She had previously arranged with Lai-wang that he should wait for her in Lai-chao's quarters so the two of them could abscond together.
Lai-chao said to them, "I have no problem with your making good your escape, but I am responsible for the front gate and cannot afford to let so much as a duckling get away. If the First Lady finds out what has happened and demands to know why I didn't stop you, what am I to say? It would be better if the two of you were to go out over the roof, and break a few tiles in the process, so there will be some evidence of how you got away."
"Brother," responded Lai-wang, "what you say makes sense."
Sun Hsüeh-o also gave them a silver ewer with a hinged lid, a gold earpick, a black satin jacket, and a yellow satin skirt to thank them for their assistance. They decided to wait until the fifth watch when the moon was dark before climbing over the roof.
Lai-chao and his wife poured out two large goblets of heated wine and offered them to Lai-wang and Sun Hsüeh-o, saying, "This will facilitate your escape, and serve to buck up your spirits on the way."
They continued drinking until the fifth watch, when the two of them, while holding sticks of incense, climbed up the ladder and helped each other onto the roof. As they moved across it:
Step by step,
they dislodged and broke a considerable number of tiles. When they had climbed as far as the eaves on the front of the building, they saw that there were still no pedestrians in the street, though they could hear the sound made by a patrolling watchman. Lai-wang was the first to jump to the ground and then helped Sun Hsüeh-o down by allowing her to stand on his shoulders and then lifting her the rest of the way.
The two of them made their way forward, but when they arrived at a crossroads they were stopped by a patrolman, who demanded to know, "Where are the two of you going?"
This had the effect of throwing Sun Hsüeh-o into a state of panic, but Lai-wang responded:
Neither hurriedly nor hastily,
by pointing to the stick of government-grade incense in his hand, and saying, "We are a married couple, and are on our way to burn incense at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak outside the city wall. We are earlier than we should be but hope that you will not hold it against us."
"And what have you got in that bundle you are carrying?" the officer went on to ask.
"It is a supply of incense, candles, and paper money," said Lai-wang.
"If the two of you are going to burn incense at the Temple of the God of the Eastern Peak," the officer responded, "that is a worthy undertaking, and you may continue quickly on your way."
This was just the signal Lai-wang was waiting for. Taking Sun Hsüeh-o by the hand, he proceeded to fly forward as fast as he could go. When they arrived at the city wall, the gate had just opened, and, insinuating themselves into the crowd, they made their way inconspicuously outside the city wall. After turning down a number of streets and alleys, they arrived at Polished Rice Lane, which was an out-of-the-way place, occupied by only a few families, living in:
Low-lying houses and humble dwellings,
that backed on the embankment of a large pond.
When they arrived at Midwife Ch'ü's house, she had not yet opened the door. They had to call out for what seemed like half a day before she got up to open the door, and caught sight of Lai-wang with a woman in tow. It so happens that Lai-wang's surname had originally been Cheng, so he was known to her as Cheng Wang.
"This woman is my newly acquired wife," he explained to her. "If you have the room to accommodate us for a little while, we can go on to look for a place of our own."
So saying, he handed her three taels of silver with which to purchase kindling and rice. When Midwife Ch'ü saw the gold and silver head ornaments they had with them, she realized that their provenance was suspicious.
Her son, Ch'ü T'ang, upon seeing that his mother had agreed to accommodate Cheng Wang and his wife, and that they had brought these things with them:
On seeing their value developed ideas.
Prizing open the door to their room, he made off with some of the valuables and went out to gamble with them but was apprehended, confessed to the circumstances, and was brought before the district magistrate. When District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i saw that they were stolen objects, and that the evidence of this was clear, he dispatched runners to take Ch'ü T'ang to his home and trussed Cheng Wang and Sun Hsüeh-o together with a single length of rope. Sun Hsüeh-o was so frightened that her face turned as sallow as wax, and she proceeded to change into her everyday clothes, put on a pair of eye shades, and tear the rings off her fingers to give to the runners. They were then escorted under guard to confront the magistrate. This event created something of an uproar in the neighborhood, and people came out onto the street to see what was going on.
Among them there were those who recognized them and said, "She is a concubine from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household who has run away with the servant Lai-wang. He was formerly driven into exile but has come back under the name Cheng Wang, fornicated with her, and colluded with her in running off with stolen property, in order to go live together somewhere else. Once there, they have been ripped off in turn by this Ch'ü T'ang, and now that their crimes have been brought to light, they are being taken to confront the magistrate."
There and then:
The news spread from one person to ten,
And then from ten persons to a hundred.[19]
The mouths of the pedestrians on the road
cause stories to fly.[20]
Let us revert to the story of Yüeh-niang back at home. When Sun Hsüeh-o absconded, and her maidservant Chung-ch'iu discovered that the valuables and head ornaments in her cabinet were all gone, and that her clothes had been left:
Scattered about in a state of disorder,
and reported these facts to Yüeh-niang, she was taken completely by surprise.
"Since you slept with her," said Yüeh-niang, "how could you have failed to detect the fact that she was bent on eloping?"
"She was in the habit," responded Chung-ch'iu, "of sneaking outside during the night, and only returning after what seemed like half a day. I did not know what she was up to."
Yüeh-niang also interrogated Lai-chao, saying, "Since you are in charge of the main gate, how could anyone have escaped without your knowing it?"
"The main gate is locked every night," responded Lai-chao. "She could hardly have gotten out unless she flew off like a bird."
Later on, it was only when the broken tiles on the top of the building were discovered that she realized she must have escaped by going over the roof. Yüeh-niang did not venture to send anyone out to look for her, deciding that she had better repress her feelings and put up with the situation.
Who could have anticipated that when the district magistrate undertook to hear the case he started out by subjecting Ch'ü T'ang to the squeezers, which resulted in the recovery of four gold head ornaments, three silver ornaments, a pair of gold earrings, two silver goblets, five taels worth of loose silver, two outfits of clothing, a handkerchief, and a box. From Cheng Wang he recovered thirty taels of silver, a pair of gold hairpins with bowl-shaped ends, a pin in the shape of a Taoist goddess, and four rings. From Sun Hsüeh-o he recovered a gold clasp for the top of the coiffure, a pair of silver bracelets, five sets of gold buttons, four pairs of silver hairpins, and a package of loose silver. From Midwife Ch'ü he recovered three taels of silver. The magistrate issued a tentative ruling that Lai-wang was guilty of the crime of a servant engaging in fornication with his employer and stealing her goods, that Ch'ü T'ang was also guilty of larceny, both of which were miscellaneous capital crimes, commutable to five years of penal exile, and that the stolen goods were all subject to confiscation by the state. He then sentenced Sun Hsüeh-o, Hsi-men Ch'ing's former concubine, as well as Midwife Ch'ü, to be subjected to the squeezers before the court. Midwife Ch'ü acknowledged her guilt and was released; but as for Sun Hsüeh-o, the magistrate directed runners from the district yamen to go to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household and request a formal document agreeing to resume responsibility for her.
Wu Yüeh-niang consulted with her elder brother Wu K'ai about what to do, and they concluded that since she had already created a scandal by her conduct, there was no point in taking her back, since her presence would only serve to further damage the family's reputation. They therefore paid off the runners and asked them to convey this message to the magistrate, who accordingly called in an official go-between and arranged for her to be put up for sale under judicial auspices.
To resume our story, meanwhile, in the commandant's quarters, Ch'un-mei heard it reported that Sun Hsüeh-o from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household had, thus and so, been abducted by Lai-wang, who had also made off with some valuables, and then taken her to live with him elsewhere; but that the matter had come to light, and she had been taken before the magistrate and was now being offered for sale under judicial auspices. No sooner did Ch'un-mei hear this than it occurred to her that she would like to purchase her and put her to work in the kitchen, so she could slap her in the face, and thus repay her for her former hostility.
She therefore said to Commandant Chou Hsiu, "This Sun Hsüeh-o is a skillful cook, capable of producing excellent fare. Why don't we buy her so she can serve us here at home?"
The commandant forthwith dispatched Chang Sheng and Li An to deliver his card to the magistrate and transmit this request. The magistrate, seeing this as a chance to curry influence by doing a favor, agreed to sell her for a mere eight taels of silver, and, after paying over the money, they brought her back to Chou Hsiu's residence and introduced her first to his principal wife, and then to his concubine Sun Erh-niang. Only after this was she taken to meet Ch'un-mei in her quarters.
Ch'un-mei had only just arisen from her bedstead with its incised gold ornamentation and its brocaded curtains, when her maidservants brought Sun Hsüeh-o in to meet her. Upon seeing that it was Ch'un-mei, all Sun Hsüeh-o could do was to bend low as she stepped forward, kneel down on the floor, and kowtow to her four times.
Ch'un-mei responded by opening her eyes wide, calling for the servant's wife who was on duty at the time, and ordering her, "Take charge of this worthless creature for me, strip off the fret from her coiffure, remove her outer garments, and drive her into the kitchen so she can light the stove and do the cooking for me."
On hearing this, Sun Hsüeh-o had no alternative but to groan to herself in silence. It has always been the case that:
The planks used in wall building are sometimes
on top and sometimes on the bottom;
The servile sweeper of the rice will sometimes
rise to become head of the granary.[21]
When confronted with low eaves,
How can we not lower our heads?
Upon finding herself in this situation, all Sun Hsüeh-o could do was to remove the fret on her coiffure, change out of her fancy clothing, and head for the kitchen with a sorrowful expression on her face. A poem testifies to this:

The Calico Bag Monk[22] has made his way as far as Ming-Chou;
With his walking stick and straw sandals, he wanders at will.
No matter how many myriad transformations you can perform;
Every incarnation must cope with its own burden of sorrow.

The dodder clings to the raspberry bush
Its tendrils are not very long.
To lose one's virtue at a rake's hands
Is worse than to be thrown out in the street.
In the night he is kind to me
But the mattress of my bed is not warm enough.
He comes in the evening and goes in the morning
Is this not too hasty of him?
I am going to my end
And the old pain stabs my heart.

Uncle Wu took Wu Yueniang and the others along the bank shaded by many great trees. Daian had already prepared for them at a small hill not far from the wineshop in the village of Apricot Blossom, where everything was busy and lively. He had been waiting for them a long time. Then the sedan chairs arrived with Yueniang and the other ladies, and the donkeys with Uncle Wu and Aunt Wu. He asked Yueniang why they were so late, and she told him of the meeting with Chunmei at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. Wine was served and they all sat down in the open air.

While they were drinking, they could watch the carriages with gaily decorated wheels, and people coming and going. From the hillock on which they were, the people in the street seemed like a sea or a mountain of human beings. Some were standing in a ring watching performing horses. Among them was the son of the magistrate, a young man called Li Gongbi. He was about thirty years old, and a student at the Imperial Academy of Learning. But he was a happy and dissolute young fellow, who cared more about hawks and dogs and horses than for the study of poetry and literature. He was always to be seen about the streets, and people called him Li the Wastrel. Today he was wearing a light silk gown, a palm hat with a gold button, and yellow boots. He was with a man named He Buwei, and they had with them a party of twenty or thirty lusty fellows with crossbows, blowpipes, balls, and quarterstaffs watching Li Gui putting the horses through their paces. Then they performed all sorts of tricks, fighting with spears and staves. The men and women standing by laughed and cheered.

This Li Gui was nicknamed the Demon of Shandong. He wore a hat with a swastika badge, a purple shirt, and an embroidered waistcoat, and was riding a silver-maned horse. He carried a shining spear with a red handle, and behind him were several streamers flying in the wind. He was displaying his skill for the benefit of the people in the street.

The young man Li was looking at this show when suddenly he raised his head and saw the ladies on the hill. One was rather taller than the others, and he could not take his eyes from her. He did not speak, but wondered to what family she belonged and whether she was married. Then he whispered to Little Zhang, one of the men with him: "Go and see who those three people in white are, standing on the hill. When you have made sure, come back and tell me."

Little Zhang hurried away. When he came back, he said: "They are members of Ximen Qing's family. The old man is Wu, the short woman is Yueniang, the first wife, and the tall one with pockmarks on her face, the third wife, Yulou. Of course, they are widows now."

Li felt particularly attracted to Yulou. He gave some money to Little Zhang.

When Yueniang and Uncle Wu had watched the show for some time, they told Daian to pack up the things, and the ladies went to their sedan chairs. Then they went home, as sunset was drawing near.

Sun Xue'e and Ximen Dajie had been left at home. They had nothing special to do, and about midday went to the gate and stood there. As Fate would have it, a mirror man came along. In those days, the people who sold powder, flowers and ornaments, and those who polished mirrors, all had a sign to show who they were.

"My mirror is very tarnished," Ximen Dajie said, and told Ping'an to fetch the man to polish it. He laid down his pack. "I am not a mirror polisher," he said, "I sell gold and silver ornaments and artificial flowers." He stood and looked hard at Xue'e.

"If you are not a mirror polisher," she said, "be off with you. What do you mean by staring at me like that?"

"Lady," the man said, "don't you remember me?"

"Your face seems familiar, but I can't quite remember you," Ximen Dajie said.

"I am Laiwang, who used to serve his Lordship," the man said.

"You have been away so many years you have grown fat," Xue'e said.

"When I left here, I went to my native place Xuzhou. But I could not get work there and took service with a nobleman who had an appointment at the Eastern Capital. I went there with him. On the way his father died and he had to go back again. Then I went to a silversmith and learned this trade. Business is very slack and my master told me to try and sell these things in the streets. I have seen you several times but felt shy about making myself known. If you had not stopped me today, I should not have dared to come to you."

"Now I know you," Xue'e said, "but I should not have known you if you had not told me. Why shouldn't you come? You are an old member of this household. What have you got there? Bring them in and let us see."

Laiwang took his boxes into the courtyard, opened them and, putting the gold and silver ornaments on a tray, showed them to the ladies. They were excellently made. When Ximen Dajie and Xue'e had looked at them, they said: "If you have any artificial flowers, we should like to see them too." Laiwang opened another box. He had all kinds of flowers, some to wear on the forehead, some large enough to make a complete headdress, others in the form of different insects. Ximen Dajie picked out two pairs of flowers for her hair, and Xue'e a pair of jade phoenixes and a pair of gold fish. Ximen Dajie paid for what she took, but Xue'e asked Laiwang to come another day for his money, one tael and two *qian*.

"The Great Lady and the others have gone to your master's grave to burn paper money," she told him.

"I heard last year that my master was dead," Laiwang said. "I suppose the Great Lady's baby is quite big now."

"He is eighteen months old, and the whole household treats him as though he were a pearl or some other jewel. The future of this house rests wholly upon him."

While they were talking, Laizhao's wife brought a cup of tea for Laiwang. He took the tea and made a reverence. Laizhao came out to talk to him. "Come tomorrow and see the Great Lady," he said. Then Laiwang picked up his boxes and went away.

In the evening Yueniang came back. Xue'e and Ximen Dajie and the maids kowtowed to her. Daian could not keep up with the men carrying the boxes, so he hired a donkey. When he reached home, the porters were dismissed.

"Today at the temple," Yueniang told her daughter and Xue'e, "we met Chunmei. Jinlian is buried at the back, and we never knew. Chunmei went to burn some paper money for her and we met her quite by accident. We were very friendly. The Abbot offered us vegetarian food, then Chunmei called for her servants, and they must have set out thirty or forty dishes. We could not drink all the wine she offered us. She looked at the baby and gave him some pins. She was most agreeable. And what a number of servants she had! She was in a large sedan chair with ever so many attendants following it. She is taller and stouter than she used to be, and her face seems whiter and fuller."

"She had not forgotten us," Aunt Wu said. "I remember when she was here, she was much more efficient and a much better talker than any of the other maids. She spoke so gently and quietly. Even then I knew she was a capable girl. Now she has been lucky her intelligence is more evident than ever."

"Sister," Yulou said, "she told me that she has not been unwell for six months. Her fortune is made. I understand she expects to have a baby in the eighth or the ninth month. The Major is delighted. So what old woman Xue said happens to be true."

"Today, while you were out," Xue'e said, "Ximen Dajie and I were standing at the gate and saw Laiwang. He is a silversmith now, and was selling gold and silver ornaments and flowers in the street. At first, I didn't recognize him. I bought a few things. He asked after you and I told him you had gone to the grave."

"Why didn't you ask him to wait for me?" Yueniang said.

"I told him to come again tomorrow." While they were talking, Ruyi'er came to them. "The baby has been asleep ever since we came in," she said, "and I can't get him to wake. His breath seems cold, but his body is as hot as fire."

Yueniang was frightened. She went to the bed and picked up the child. She kissed him and could feel a cold sweat on his body, though he seemed feverish.

"You wicked woman!" she said irritably to Ruyi'er. "He must have got cold in the chair."

"He could not," Ruyi'er said. "I had him well wrapped up in the bed-clothes."

"Well, perhaps when you took him to the grave he got a fright. I told you not to take him, but instead of listening to me you rushed off like a mad woman."

"Xiaoyu knows I had only had him there for a minute or two. How could he be frightened?"

"Don't argue," Yueniang cried. "Whether you had him there a short time or not, he is frightened now."

She called for Laian and sent him for old woman Liu. When the old woman came, she felt the baby's pulse and examined his body. "He has caught a chill," she said, "and would seem to have met an evil spirit." She gave them two red pills and asked them to give them to the child with ginger water. The nurse was told to put the baby to bed. During the night he began to sweat and his body became cooler. They gave the old woman some tea and three *qian* of silver and asked her to come the next day. The whole household was in a state of excitement. Some got up and some lay down, and they were running about half the night.

Next day, Laiwang came to the gate with his wares. Yesterday," he said to Laizhao, "Lady Xue'e bought something from me and told me to call today for the money. And I should like to see the Great Lady."

"Come another day," Laizhao said, "the young master is not well. They had to send for old woman Liu last night, and they were worried and busy all night. He is better today, but I don't think they will feel like seeing you."

As they were talking, Yueniang, Yulou and Xue'e came along with old woman Liu. Laiwang knelt down and kowtowed to Yueniang and Yulou.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," Yueniang said. "Why haven't you been to call on me?"

Laiwang told Yueniang of his adventures. "I felt shy about coming," he said.

"You are an old servant of ours," Yueniang said, "and your master is dead now. Your trouble was really due to that wicked woman Pan, who would carry fire to one place and water to another. Your good wife hanged herself and you were banished. But Heaven could not allow such a creature to live, and now she is dead too."

"I need not say anything, Mother," Laiwang said. "You understand so well."

When they had talked for a while, Yueniang asked what he had to sell. He showed her and she picked out ornaments to the value of three taels and two *qian* and paid him for them. Then she asked him to go to the second door, and told Xiaoyu to give him a pot of wine and some cakes. Xue'e went to the kitchen and herself gave him a large bowl of meat. When he had had a good meal, he kowtowed and prepared to go away. Yueniang and Yulou went to the inner court, but Xue'e stayed and talked to him.

"Come here as often as you like," she said to him. "There is nothing to fear. I will send you a message by Laizhao's wife. Tomorrow evening I will wait for you in the little room by the wall not far from this door." They exchanged glances, and Laiwang knew what the woman meant. He asked if the second door would be closed in the evening.

"Come to Laizhao's room," Xue'e said, "and, in the evening, take a ladder and climb over the wall. I will help you down on this side. I shall have something to tell you when we meet."

Laiwang was delighted. He said good-bye to Xue'e and took away his boxes.

The next day he did not bother to do any business. He came to Ximen's house and, when Laizhao came out, he bowed to him.

"I haven't seen you for a long time, Brother Laiwang," Laizhao said.

Laiwang smiled. "I would not have come except to ask Lady Xue'e for some money."

Laiwang took the man to his own rooms.

"Where is my sister-in-law?" Laiwang said.

"My wife is always in the kitchen during the day," Laizhao told him.

Laiwang gave him a tael of silver. "This is to buy a pot of wine for your wife and yourself."

"But a pot of wine doesn't cost so much as that," Laizhao said. He called his son, Little Iron Rod. The boy was now fifteen years old. He took a pot and went out to buy some wine. Then he went to the kitchen to see his mother.

Laizhao's wife came out with some hot rice and a large bowl of stew with two other dishes. "Oh, I see you are here, Brother Wang," she said.

Laizhao showed his wife the silver and said: "Our brother has given us this to buy some wine."

"I don't think we ought to take it," she said, smiling. "We have done nothing for you." She put a small table on the bed and asked Laiwang to sit down. Then she set out food and wine. Laiwang filled a cup and offered it to Laizhao, then he filled another and offered it to the woman.

"It is a very long time since we were last together," he said politely. "I fear this poor cup of wine is all I can offer you."

"I am not the sort of person who cares too much for wine and meat," Laizhao's wife said. "You are a friend, and you must tell me the truth. Yesterday, the lady told me that she and you still love one another. She has trusted my husband and myself to help you. There had better not be any pretence between us. As the proverb says: If a man wishes to find the track down the mountainside, he must ask a practiced guide. If you two meet here and you get anything out of it, don't keep everything for yourself, but let us have at least a taste of the gravy. We have to be responsible for you."

Laiwang knelt down. "Brother and Sister," he said, "if you help me, I will never forget." Then they had their meal. Laizhao's wife went to the inner court again and talked to Xue'e. Then she returned and told Laiwang to come to her rooms that evening. When the second door was closed and the people in the inner court had gone to bed, he would be able to get over the wall and join his beloved.

Laiwang went away. That night, he came again to Laizhao's rooms and bought wine for him and his wife. They drank until it was late, without anybody knowing that he was there. Then the gate was closed, the second door fastened, and everybody went to bed.

Xue'e and Laiwang had arranged a signal. When he heard a cough on the other side of the wall, he climbed up a ladder and got over the white wall in the dark. Xue'e had a bench waiting for him on the other side. They went to a small harness room near by. There they embraced and began to make love more earnestly. Neither had a mate, and their passion was ready to burst into flame. Laiwang's spear was hard and strong. They sported for a long time; then the moment of greatest happiness came to him, and he yielded to her.

Xue'e gave him some gold and silver ornaments, a few taels of silver, and two suits of clothes. "Come again tomorrow night," she said to him, "and I will have something more valuable for you. Take it and find a place for us to live. I know that this family can hardly prosper now. I will leave it, and we will get a house and marry. You are a silversmith and we shall not have to worry about a living."

"I have an aunt outside the East Gate," Laiwang said. "She is a famous midwife. Her place is out of the way, and I suggest that we go there. We will stay there a while until we know whether there is going to be trouble and, if not, I will take you to my native place. There I will buy a few acres of land, and we will work on that."

He climbed over the wall again and went back to Laizhao. There he stayed till dawn and slipped away as soon as the gate was opened.

The next evening he came again. He went as before to Laizhao's rooms, then over the wall, and they made merry again. So they went on for a long time. They stole a number of valuable things, gold, silver and clothes, and Laizhao and his wife had their share.

One day Yueniang was very depressed because the baby was ill again. She went to bed very early. Ximen Dajie's maid had been given to Xue'e, and Li Jiao'er's maid had been given to Ximen Dajie because Chen Jingji had wanted her. Today, Xue'e sent her maid to bed. She took a number of earrings, pins and ornaments and put them into a box. Then she covered her head with a kerchief. She had arranged with Laiwang that they should meet in Laizhao's place and run away.

"That is all very well," Laizhao said. "You can get away easily enough, but I am in charge of the gate, and how can I let you escape like a pair of wild ducks? The Great Lady is sure to find out, and what am I to say to her when she asks me about it? You had better get over the roof. Smash a few tiles, and then there will be something to show the way you went."

"That is a good idea, Brother," Laiwang said.

Xue'e gave Laizhao and his wife a silver cup, gold earrings, a black silk coat, and a yellow silk skirt. They waited until the fifth night watch, when it was very dark, and then climbed over to Laizhao's place. Laizhao heated two big cups of wine and gave one to each of them. "Drink this," he said. "It will strengthen you for what you are going to do."

At the fifth night watch, each of them took some incense, then they got a ladder and climbed out on to the roof. Step by step they climbed up, breaking a few tiles as they went. When they came to the other side, there seemed to be nobody about, no watchman in the street. Laiwang got down first, then helped Xue'e, who climbed down with her feet on his shoulders. When they came to the street a watchman stopped them and asked where they were going. Xue'e was alarmed, but Laiwang was cool enough. He held out the incense he had brought and said: "We are husband and wife going to offer incense at the temple outside the city. That is why we are up so early."

"What have you in those parcels? "the watchman asked them.

"Incense and paper money." Laiwang said.

"If you are husband and wife and are going to the temple, it is a good work and you may go," the watchman said.

At that, Laiwang took Xue'e's hand and they hurried off as fast as they could go. By the time they came to the city gate, it had just been opened. They went out, turned up one street and down another, and so came to the place where Laiwang's aunt lived. It was a very lonely place: there were only a few ramshackle houses. They came at last to the house of Midwife Qu. The door was shut, but they knocked and, after a while, the old woman, who had just got up, came and opened the door. There stood Laiwang with a woman.

Laiwang's real name was Zheng Wang. "This is my wife, whom I have lately married," he said. "Can you let us have a room? We should like to stay here for a few days while we look for a house."

He gave the old woman three taels of silver for expenses. When she saw the money, old woman Qu could not refuse to let them stay. But, one night, her son, Qu Dang, who had seen that Laiwang seemed to have a great deal of gold and silver, forced the door, stole the valuables, and went gambling. He was arrested and brought before the magistrate. The magistrate, Li, realized that the things must have been stolen and ordered runners to go with Qu Dang to the old woman's house. They arrested Laiwang and Xue'e. The woman was so frightened that her face became the color of wax. She put on plain clothes, covered her face with a

veil, took off her rings, and gave them to the runners. Then they were taken before the magistrate, and people came to hear of the matter. Some recognized them and said: "Surely that is one of Ximen Qing's women. She has been carrying on with one of the servants, the fellow Laiwang, now called Zheng Wang. They stole some things and ran away. Then Qu Dang stole the stuff from them again and now they have to go before the magistrate."
One man told ten, and ten told a hundred, and so the news spread like wildfire.
When Xue'e had run away, her maid discovered that the most valuable ornaments had been taken away and that clothes were strewn about the floor. She went to tell Yueniang.
"You slept with her," Yueniang said, in astonishment: "how was it you didn't notice when she went away?"
"She said she wished to be alone," the maid said. "She went out quietly and then came back. I had no idea what she was doing."
Yueniang sent for Laizhao. "You are in charge of the gate," she said to him. "Why didn't you know that somebody was running away?"
"I have locked up the gate every night," Laizhao said. "She must've flown."
Then they discovered that some of the tiles were broken on the roof, and realized that Xue'e had escaped that way. They did not wish to send anybody to find out where she had gone, and made no fuss about the matter. In his court, the magistrate tried the case. First, he had Qu Dang beaten, and that young man gave up four gold ornaments, three of silver, a pair of gold rings, a silver cup, five taels of silver, two suits of clothes, a handkerchief, and a box. From Laiwang the magistrate took thirty taels of silver, a pair of gold pins, a gold figurine, and four rings. From Xue'e, he took a gold ornament, a pair of silver bracelets, five pairs of gold buttons, four pairs of silver pins, and some silver. From old woman Qu, he took three taels of silver. His verdict was that Laiwang had stolen these things and abducted a woman, and Qu Dang had stolen the stuff from him. The two men were sentenced to imprisonment for five years and the property confiscated. Xue'e and old woman Qu were beaten and the old woman confessed. The magistrate sent to Ximen's house to ask them to take Xue'e away. Yueniang sent for Uncle Wu and discussed the situation with him. They decided that, since everybody had heard about the matter, they would not take Xue'e back. She had disgraced the family and done injury to the reputation of her dead husband. So they gave something to the runners and asked them to get the magistrate to hand Xue'e over to the official go-between to sell. Chunmei heard that Xue'e had been carried off by Laiwang and all that had happened afterwards. She made up her mind to buy the woman and set her to work in her kitchen. Thus she would have her revenge. "This woman's a very good cook," she said to her husband. "She's clever at getting tea and meals ready and I think we might buy her."
Major Zhou sent Zhang Sheng and Li An to the magistrate with a card. When Li learned whom it was who wished to buy the woman, he asked for only 8 taels of silver.
The men paid the money and took Xue'e to Zhou's house. First, they presented her to the first and second ladies, then they took her to Chunmei. Chunmei was in her room, getting up from a gilded bed with silken curtains. The maids took in Xue'e. She recognized Chunmei, bowed her head, and kowtowed 4 times. Chunmei opened her eyes wide. Then she sent for the chief of the serving women. "Pull down this strumpet's hair," she cried, "and take off those clothes. Then let her serve in the kitchen, keeping up the fire, and cooking." Xue'e could only swallow her resentment. It has always been possible for one who begins by sweeping up the rice to become the governor of a granary. Xue'e realised her position. How she was standing beneath low eaves and must perforce bow her head. She took off her headdress and changed her clothes, and went to the kitchen sadly and bitterly.

## 114
## Meng Yü-lou Is Happy to Marry Li Kung-pi; Li Kung-pi in a Fit of Rage, Beats Yü-tsan

Our hundred years of life pass by as though in flight;
Among them, the flowering seasons do not last for long.
When autumn congeals the white dew, the crickets cry;
At twilight during the late spring, the cuckoos weep.
Wealth, eminence, and luxury[1] are blights upon the body;
Renown and great achievements are specters in the eyes.
Spring dreams are phenomena created by humans themselves;
The retributions ordained by azure Heaven are not unjust.

One day, Ch'en Ching-chi heard from Auntie Hsüeh that Sun Hsüeh-o from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing had committed adultery with Lai-wang and absconded with him, along with a quantity of stolen property, to some place outside, but that their crimes had come to light, and she had been put up for sale by the district magistrate, and sold into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, where she was subjected to beating and abuse at the hands of Ch'un-mei both day and night.
Ch'en Ching-chi took advantage of this opportunity to send Auntie Hsüeh to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to say to Yüeh-niang, "I have heard 'wind-borne words' to the effect that Ch'en Ching-chi has openly announced that he no longer wants Hsi-men Ta-chieh as his wife; and that he has drafted formal complaints to submit to the grand coordinator and the regional inspector of the province asserting that Hsi-men Ch'ing, while still alive, had sequestered trunks of gold and silver and other valuables that his family had entrusted to him for safekeeping."
Yüeh-niang, first, because Sun Hsüeh-o had absconded with Lai-wang and made off with a quantity of valuables; second, because the servant Lai-an had run away; and third, because Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu had died, and her obsequies had only just been concluded, already felt herself to be overburdened with:
Seven of this and eight of that.
Consequently, when she heard what Auntie Hsüeh had to say, she was thrown into a state of panic and promptly hired a sedan chair in which to send Hsi-men Ta-chieh back to her husband. She also got together all the furniture, trunks, and other things that she had been provided with as her dowry and had Tai-an hire bearers to deliver them to Ch'en Ching-chi's place.
Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this by saying, "These are merely the things that she brought with her as her dowry. The trunkloads of valuables and gold and silver that my family entrusted to them must also be returned to me."
"Your mother-in-law," reported Auntie Hsüeh, "claims that when your father-in-law was still alive, he only took responsibility for accepting these articles from her dowry, and that she knows nothing of these other trunkloads that you refer to."
Ch'en Ching-chi also demanded that the maidservant Yüan-hsiao should be turned over to him.
When Auntie Hsüeh and Tai-an reported this to Yüeh-niang, she said, "I would prefer not to turn Yüan-hsiao over to him. This maidservant originally worked in Li Chiao-erh's quarters. Right now, I have nobody to look after Hsiao-ko, and I would like to keep her here for that purpose. I would be willing to let him have Chung-ch'iu, however, since she was originally purchased in order to serve Hsi-men Ta-chieh."
But Ch'en Ching-chi refused to accept Chung-ch'iu, and Auntie Hsüeh was obliged to go back and forth repeatedly to negotiate between the two households.
Ch'en Ching-chi's mother, née Chang, finally said to Tai-an, "Brother, when you return home please convey my respects to the First Lady, but since you have so many maidservants available in your household, how can she be so reluctant to relinquish this one on the grounds that she needs her to look after her child? Since she has been serving in Hsi-men Ta-chieh's quarters all this time, and her son-in-law has already deflowered her, how can she be so insistent on retaining her?"
When Tai-an went home and reported this to Yüeh-niang, she found herself:
At a loss for words,[2]
and felt compelled to deliver Yüan-hsiao to Ch'en Ching-chi.
Ch'en Ching-chi was delighted to receive her and remarked to himself, "So it turns out that, somehow or other, things have ended up going my way after all:
Though you may be as devious as any demon,
You'll drink the water I've washed my feet in."
Let us put this strand of our narrative aside for a moment and speak of something else.
To return to the story of District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i's son Li Kung-pi; ever since the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival on which he had caught sight of Wu Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou in front of the tavern in Apricot Blossom Village outside the city, when he had noticed that the two of them were similarly dressed and both good-looking, sent Trifler Chang to identify them, and thereby found out that they were womenfolk from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, he had fallen in love with Meng Yü-lou. He had observed that she had a tall and slender figure, and a face shaped like a melon seed, and though she had a few inconspicuous white pockmarks on her face, her demeanor was romantic and alluring.
It so happens that Li Kung-pi's wife had died, and he had been living the life of a widower for some time. He had engaged go-betweens to look for a suitable wife for him, but so far none of the prospects they came up with appealed to him. Now that he had encountered Meng Yü-lou, his heart was stirred, but:
There was no way he could gain access to her;
and he did not know whether she was prepared to remarry, or whether she would accept him or not. Unexpectedly, when Sun Hsüeh-o's case happened to come before the magistrate's court, and he learned that she had been a member of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, he exerted himself to see to it that the culprits were interrogated with the squeezers before his father's bench, and the stolen property duly retrieved, in the expectation that someone from the Hsi-men Ch'ing household would come to take possession of it. But Yüeh-niang was afraid and refused to send anyone to appear before the court, with the result that Li Kung-pi was disappointed, the stolen property was confiscated by the state, and Sun Hsüeh-o was put up for sale.
At this point, he consulted with his friend the clerk on the staff of the district yamen named Ho Pu-wei, and they decided to send Old Mother T'ao, the licensed go-between, to Hsi-men Ch'ing's place to see if a match could be arranged; promising her that if she succeeded in bringing it about, she would no longer be required to report for duty at the yamen and would be rewarded with five taels of silver.
Old Mother T'ao was delighted by this proposition and set out forthwith:
Running as fast as though she had wings,
straight to the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence.
Lai-chao was standing there at the time and saw Old Mother T'ao come forward, greet him with a bow, and inquire, "Brother, is this the residence of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing?"
"Where have you come from?" asked Lai-chao. "This is the home of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing, but His Honor is deceased. What have you come for?"
"I would trouble you," said Old Mother T'ao, "to go inside and report my arrival. I am the officially licensed go-between of the district yamen, and my name is Old Mother T'ao. The young squire, the son of the district magistrate, has informed me that there is a lady in your household who wishes to be married, and I have come to respectfully propose a match between them."
"You old baggage!" Lai-chao shouted at her. "How unreasonable can you get? His Honor, the head of this household, has been dead for more than a year, and there are only two of his ladies left, who are both bent on preserving their widowhood, and are not about to marry anyone. As the saying goes:
Even to escape wild winds and violent rains,
One should not seek to enter a widow's door.[3]
How can a go-between like yourself:
As if you didn't know any better,
barge in to propose such a match? You'd better get out of here. If the ladies in the rear compound find out about it, you're likely to get a good beating for your pains."
Old Mother T'ao merely laughed at this, saying, "Brother, as the saying goes:
Even if the order of an official or clerk is wrong,
The person deputed to carry it out is not to blame.[4]
If the young squire had not sent me on this mission, I would hardly have ventured to come on my own initiative. No matter whether she is willing to remarry or not, I would trouble you to go inside and convey the proposal so that I can report back on my mission."
"So be it," responded Lai-chao.
"To do someone else a favor,
Is to do a favor to oneself.[5]
If you will wait a little while, I will go inside and convey your message. Of the two ladies of the household, one of them has a son, and the other does not. Which of the two ladies do you think might be willing to remarry?"
Old Mother T'ao responded, "The young squire from the district yamen said that he had seen her out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival, and that it was the lady with a few white pockmarks on her face."
When Lai-chao heard this, he went back to the rear compound and reported, thus and so, to Yüeh-niang, saying, "The district yamen has sent an official go-between to come here, and she is waiting outside."
This caught Yüeh-niang by surprise, and she exclaimed, "Not even half a word of what goes on here in our household is ever leaked abroad. How could anyone outside know anything about it?"
"The young squire from the district yamen," responded Lai-chao, "caught sight of the lady in question out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival. He says that the lady in question is the one with a few white pockmarks on her face."
"It must be Sister Meng the Third that he's referring to," said Yüeh-niang. "It would seem that:
Even during the twelfth month the frozen heart of
the turnip is capable of being moved.[6]
All of a sudden, she wants to better her condition by marrying someone, does she? Truly:
In this world even the depth of the
ocean may be gauged;
It is the human heart alone that is
difficult to measure."[7]
So saying, she went into Meng Yü-lou's quarters, where she sat down and said, "Sister Meng the Third, there is something I would like to ask you about. There is a go-between out front, who says that the young squire from the district yamen claims that he saw you on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival, and that you would like to better your condition by getting married. Is there any truth to this?"
Gentle reader take note: On that occasion:
Without coincidences there would be no stories.
It has always been true that:
A marriage affinity connects people by a single thread.
On that day, out in the suburbs, when Meng Yü-lou observed that the young squire possessed a handsome demeanor, was:
As romantic and dashing as can be,
and that the two of them were about the same age, as well as the fact that he was adept at horsemanship and archery:
Their mutual feelings were visible in their four eyes,[8]
There was no longer any need to express them in words.
The only problem was that she did not know whether he already had a wife or not.
From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she figured to herself,
"My husband is already dead, and I have not borne a child of my own. Although the First Lady has a son, when he grows up in the days to come, since:
Everyone cares the most for his own flesh and blood,
he is sure to cling to his own mother, and I will face the fact that:
The fallen tree no longer provides shade,
and that I will be obliged to:
Try to dip up water with a bamboo basket.
I have also observed that since Yüeh-niang gave birth to Hsiao-ko, her disposition has changed, and she does not care for me as much as she used to. I might as well take a step forward on my own, and seek a refuge where:
The fallen leaves can return to the root.
Why should I insist on foolishly preserving my widowhood here, only to end up:
Squandering the springtime

season of my youth,
And forgoing the pleasures
of my early years?"
She had just been engaged in pondering this question when Yüeh-niang unexpectedly came in and spoke to her about it. Thus it turned out to be the very gentleman that she had been attracted to out in the suburbs on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival that was expressing an interest in her.
She was both delighted and embarrassed by this development, but although she responded by saying, "First Lady, don't believe any such nonsense, I never expressed such a wish," the blood flew to her cheeks.
Truly:
Suppressing her embarrassment, she is disinclined
to open her mouth in public,
Tidying the hair over her temples, without a word,
she only adjusts her tresses.
"This is the sort of question it is up to the individual to decide," said Yüeh-niang. "I can't be bothered by such things."
So saying, she called in Lai-chao and told him, "You go out and invite that go-between to come inside."
Lai-chao, accordingly, went out to the front gate and called for Old Mother T'ao to follow him back to the rear compound into the parlor in Yüeh-niang's quarters, where Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet was displayed in the position of honor at the head of the room. When Old Mother T'ao had finished exchanging the customary amenities with her host, she sat down, and the young maidservant Hsiu-ch'un poured her a serving of tea.
When she had finished her tea, Yüeh-niang asked, "Go-between, what brings you here?"
Old Mother T'ao responded by saying, "As for me:
If I did not have a reason to do so, I would not
visit the Hall of the Three Treasures.[9]
I have come at the behest of the son of the district magistrate, who asked me to respectfully report that there is a lady in your household who wishes to be married, and to propose a match with her."
"Even if there were a lady in the household who wished to be married," responded Yüeh-niang, "no word of this has been noised abroad, so how did the young squire find out about it?"
"The young squire told me," reported Old Mother T'ao, "that on the day of the Ch'ing-ming Festival, out in the suburbs, he had observed the lady in question with his own eyes, and seen that she had a tall and slender figure, and a face shaped like a melon seed, and that there were a few inconspicuous white pockmarks on her face. That is the lady he is interested in."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, needless to say, she realized that he was referring to Meng Yü-lou.
Thereupon, she ushered Old Mother T'ao over to Meng Yü-lou's quarters, where they sat down in the parlor, and waited for some time before Meng Yü-lou, after performing her ablutions and putting on her makeup, came out to receive them.
Old Mother T'ao greeted her with a bow and said, "So this is the lady in question. Sure enough:
The story is not untrue.
Her caliber is outstanding,[10]
Without peer in this world.
She is clearly fit to be the legitimate wife of the young squire. Just look:
If scanned from top to bottom,
Her glamour is incomparable;
If surveyed from head to foot,
Her glamour runs downward apace."
Meng Yü-lou laughed at this and said, "Mother, don't talk such nonsense. Just tell us the present age of the young squire, whether he is married or not, whether he has any concubines at his disposal, what his name is, the location of his native place, and whether he holds any official position or not. Be sure to tell us only the truth, without lying about anything."
"My Heavens," protested Old Mother T'ao, "I am the go-between officially appointed by the district magistrate and am not given to lying like the others may do.
If I've got a sentence,
I'll say that sentence,
without any falsification. His Honor the district magistrate is more than fifty years old, and the young squire in question is his only offspring. He was born on the twenty-third day of the first month at eight o'clock in the morning during the year of the horse, so this year he is thirty years old. He is currently enrolled in the Superior College of the National University and is destined soon to become a provincial graduate or a holder of the *chin-shih* degree. He not only:
Commands a bellyful of literature,[11]
but is also:
Adept at archery and horsemanship.[12]
As for the works of the hundred schools, there is little that he has not mastered. His wife died some two years ago, so all he has at his disposal now is a maidservant who entered his household as part of his wife's dowry and doesn't amount to anything. That is why he is looking for a wife to take charge of his household but has not so far found one of:
Appropriate social and economic standing.[13]
That is why I have respectfully come here to propose a match on his behalf. I have been promised that if the marriage is successfully arranged, I will no longer be required to report for duty at the district yamen and will receive a substantial reward to boot. If the mistress of your household agrees to this match, His Honor has also promised that in the future the household will be relieved of any requirements for corvée labor, or land taxes on your family graveyard; and that if anyone should try to take advantage of you, all you need do is report it, and he will have the culprit arrested and subjected to punishment before the bench."
Meng Yü-lou responded by asking, "Does the young squire have any male or female children, and where is his native place? I fear that when his father's term of office expires, I may be made to traverse:
A thousand mountains and a myriad streams.
My relatives are all here, but I would probably have to leave them behind in order to accompany him."
"The young squire has fathered no male or female children," responded Old Mother T'ao. "He is quite companionless. He is a native of Tsao-ch'iang district in Chen-ting prefecture in the vicinity of the Northern Capital, which is no more than six or seven hundred li north of the Yellow River. The wealth of his household is such that:
The paths run crisscross between the fields,
The mules and horses compose teeming herds,
And the male dependents are without number.
The memorial arches spanning the horse path,
bear placards inscribed by the grand coordinator and the regional investigating censor, with an inscription by the Emperor himself standing above them all. It is all:
Resplendent enough to impress anyone.
Now if he should succeed in taking you into his household as his legitimate wife, and go on to obtain an appointment as an official in the future, you would then be entitled to receive a patent of nobility inscribed on patterned damask, to ride in a carriage embellished with seven aromatic spices, and to be addressed by the honorific title of lady. Is that not an appealing prospect?"
Meng Yü-lou was so impressed by this single speech of Old Mother T'ao's that she expressed herself to be:
Willing a thousand times if not ten thousand times.
She then summoned her maidservant Lan-hsiang and had her set up a table and provide tea and snacks for the go-between, saying. "Please don't take offense at the fact that I have insisted on asking so many questions, but the number of you go-betweens who resort to telling falsehoods is extremely great. You start out by eloquently describing things as if:
A flurry of flowers were descending from Heaven,[14]
Or golden lotuses were bursting from the ground;[15]
but when they are concluded, they don't amount to anything at all. I have, myself, had the experience of being grievously deceived."
"My good lady," protested Old Mother T'ao, "you must evaluate each case individually.
The clear is ever clear,
The turbid ever turbid.
The reputation of the good is often damaged by the bad. I do not purvey falsehoods but try my best as a matchmaker to bring about good matches for people. If you agree to accept the proposal, give me a card stating the year, month, day, and hour of your birth, so I can report back to the young squire with it."
Meng Yü-lou, accordingly, got out a piece of scarlet silk and had Tai-an take it out to Manager Fu Ming in the shop upfront so he could inscribe it with the eight characters that determined her horoscope.
Wu Yüeh-niang then said to her, "Originally, it was Auntie Hsüeh who arranged your marriage into the household. At present, it would be appropriate to send a page boy to summon Auntie Hsüeh, so the two go-betweens can proceed together to deliver the card with your vital statistics, and arrange the match between you."
Shortly thereafter, they sent Tai-an to summon Auntie Hsüeh, and when she saw Old Mother T'ao, she greeted her with a bow, in the way that:
Fellow professionals acknowledge each other;
and the two of them set out together with the card in hand, going out the gate of Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and heading for the district yamen in order to report back to the young squire.
One of them was the matchmaker
from this side;
The other was the go-between
from that side.
With their two mouths, they had a total of
forty-eight teeth between them.
On this mission, they could be counted on to boast that:
The Goddess in the Moon, Ch'ang-o,[16]
is looking for a mate;
The Goddess of Witch's Mountain[17]
is wedding King Hsiang.[18]
As they went their way, Old Mother T'ao asked Auntie Hsüeh, "So you were the original go-between for this lady, were you?"
"That's right, I was," replied Auntie Hsüeh.
"Originally," asked Old Mother T'ao, "what family was she a daughter of, and was this marriage that you arranged for her a second marriage?"
Auntie Hsüeh responded by giving her a full account, word for word, of how Hsi-men Ch'ing had originally married her as a widow from the Yang family.
Old Mother T'ao, on noticing that the card with the eight characters that determined her horoscope stated that she was a thirty-six-year-old woman who was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, said, "I fear that the young squire may consider her to be too old for him. What are we to do about that? He is only thirty years old at present, so she is six years older than he is."
"Let's take this card," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "and show it to a fortune-teller along the way, so he can calculate whether her horoscope presents any obstacles or not. If there are any problems with it, we would not be overstepping the bounds if we were to make her out to be a few years younger than she is."
As they continued on their way, they did not encounter any itinerant fortune-tellers sounding their clappers in the street, but in the distance,
on the south side of the road, they saw a fortune-telling booth of blue cotton fabric, on which there were displayed two columns of large characters that read:
Tzu-p'ing[19] will predict your fate,
be it noble or base;
The iron brush will determine your
success or failure.
Whoever should come to have their
fortunes foretold;
Will be dealt the truth without
any prevarication.
Within the booth a table had been set up, behind which there sat a practitioner who was:
Adept at calligraphy and quick at calculation,
named Master Ling. The two go-betweens approached him and bowed in greeting, at which he asked them to be seated.
Auntie Hsüeh addressed him, saying, "We would trouble you, sir, to calculate the fortune of a certain woman for us."
She then reached into her sleeve and pulled out three coins in lieu of a fee, saying, "Pray don't disdain this meager sum, but deign to accept it for the time being. We happened to be passing by and did not have any more money with us."
"If this relates to a marriage proposal," said Master Ling, "tell me the eight characters that designate the horoscope of the person in question."
Old Mother T'ao then handed him the card with this information on it, so he could evaluate her age and the eight characters of her horoscope.
Master Ling said, "So this does concern a marriage proposal."
He then:
Calculated on the joints of his fingers,
gave his abacus a shake, and proceeded to pronounce, "The horoscope for this woman indicates that she is thirty-six-years-old at the present time, and that she was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month; that is to say, in a *chia-tzu* year, in a *ping-tzu* month,[20] on a *hsin-mao* day, during the *keng-tzu* hour, which calls for the analysis of the horoscopic category 'seal ribbon.'[21] Working backwards, as one does with female horoscopes, she is now in the 'decennial period of fate' designated by the combination *ping-shen*. When the stems *ping* and *hsin* occur in the same horoscope, it indicates that in the future she is sure to hold a position of authority and enjoy the prestige of a principal wife. In the 'four pillars' of her horoscope the 'husband star' occurs more than once. Although this prosperous portent indicates that she is fated to benefit her husband, gain wealth, and enjoy her husband's favor, eventually she is sure to suffer some adversities. Has she met with any such setbacks, or not?"

"She has already lost two husbands," responded Auntie Hsüeh.
"If that is so," continued Master Ling, "in the future she will find a husband who was born in the year of the horse."
"Will she bear any sons in the future?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.
"Her horoscope indicates," said Master Ling, "that it will not be until she is forty-years-old that she will bear an only son to support her in her old age. She will be blessed with good fortune for the rest of her life, and enjoy incomparable wealth and honor, glory and luxury."
Taking up a brush, he then proceeded to compose a poem of eight lines about her future prospects, which read as follows:
The time when flowers and fruits have bloomed
and been harvested is noteworthy;
She is delighted to marry a husband with the
prospect of attaining high office.
Her seductive appearance has lost nothing of
the loveliness of the river plum;
She will doff her bridal veil thrice and let
two husbands paint her eyebrows.[22]
Holding each other's hands, they will embark
along the way to the jade palace;
Hiding her bashfulness, she will undertake to
proffer the golden wedding goblet.
Looking forward to the day when the horse's
head will ascend into the heavens;
She will consent to abandon the tiger's skin
so she can opt for something better.
Auntie Hsüeh questioned him, saying, "Sir, what is the meaning of the two lines:
Looking forward to the day when the horse's
head will ascend into the heavens;
She will consent to abandon the tiger's skin
so she can opt for something better?
We don't understand their significance. Pray be good enough to explain them to us."
"As for the horse's head," said Master Ling, "the lady in question is about to marry a husband who was born in the year of the horse, which is an auspicious star in her horoscope, indicating that she is fated to:
Enjoy a life of glory and luxury.[23]
The tiger's skin refers to her deceased husband who was born in the year of the tiger. Although he did care for her, she was only a concubine in his household. In the future, her husband will have a successful career, and she will live to the age of sixty-seven, with a son to look after her, before her life comes to an end.
Husband and wife will grow old together."[24]
The two go-betweens, upon receiving this statement of her prospects, went on to say, "It is true that the man she hopes to marry was born in the year of the horse, but we fear that the match may be rejected on the grounds that she is too old for him. It would look better if you could alter the horoscope to make her two years younger than she is."
"If you want to change it," Master Ling responded, "I'll alter the year of her birth from *chia-tzu* to *ting-mao*, which would make her out to be thirty-three years old."[25]
Auntie Hsüeh went on to ask, "Will this alteration of her horoscope accord with that of someone born in the year of the horse, or not?"
Master Ling responded, "The stem *ting* is associated with the element fire, and the stem *keng* is associated with the element metal. When fire is employed to smelt metal a superior vessel may be produced. It should be propitious."
Thereupon, he altered the horoscope to make her thirty-three years old, and the two go-betweens took their leave, exited the fortune-telling booth, and headed straight for the district yamen.
The young squire was sitting inside at the time, and the gate-keeper went in to announce their arrival. After a time, the two go-betweens were summoned before him, knelt down on the ground, and kowtowed.
"Where does that other woman come from?" the young squire inquired.
"She is the go-between who negotiated her former marriage," replied Old Mother T'ao.
She then proceeded to recount the progress they had made, saying. "The lady in question is a person of incomparable caliber, but she is a little older than you are, and I did not have the presumption to act on my own. In order to let Your Honor decide, I have acquired a card with her horoscope for your perusal."
So saying, she handed the card to him.
When the young squire, Li Kung-pi, saw that it stated that she was thirty-three years old and was born at 12:00 A.M. on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, he said, "It doesn't matter if she is two or three years older than I am."
"Your Honor is an experienced observer," interjected Auntie Hsüeh. "It has always been true that:
When the wife is two years older,
Yellow gold never molders;
When the wife is three years older,
Yellow gold piles up like boulders.
As for this lady:
Her caliber is outstanding.
She is:
Good-natured and agreeable in disposition;
and as for her familiarity with the works of the hundred schools, and the ability to take charge of a household:
That naturally goes without saying."[26]
"If she's as good as all that," the young squire responded, "and I've already had a chance to look her over, there's no need to arrange a formal viewing. We can have the yin-yang master select a propitious day and hour for the wedding, and go to her place to perform the tea-presentation ceremony."[27]
The two go-betweens asked, "When shall we come back to receive your instructions?"
"There is no reason to delay," the young squire replied. "The two of you can come back to check with me tomorrow, and then return to her place to settle matters."
He then instructed his attendants, saying, "Give each of them a tael of silver as a reward for their efforts."
The two go-betweens were pleased at this and went happily on their way. But no more of this.
When the young squire, Li Kung-pi, realized that the match was going to take place, he was so delighted he could scarcely contain himself and called in his friend on the yamen staff, Ho Pu-wei, to consult about it. He informed his father, District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, of his intentions and sent for the yin-yang master, who selected the eighth day of the fourth month for the betrothal ceremony, and the fifteenth day of the month as a propitious day and hour for him to bring the bride over his threshold. He then weighed out a quantity of silver and commissioned Ho Pu-wei and Trifler Chang to purchase the tea, auspicious red ornaments, wine, and other gifts for the occasion, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
The next day, the two go-betweens, after ascertaining the proposed dates, went to Hsi-men Ch'ing's household to report back to Wu Yüeh-niang and Meng Yü-lou on their mission. Truly:
Marriage affinities are determined
in one's former life;[28]
During which jade has been planted
in the Indigo Field.[29]
On the eighth day of the fourth month, in the district yamen, on the young squire's behalf, there were prepared sixteen trays of preserved fruit, tea and pastries, a headdress of gold filigree, a set of gold head ornaments, a girdle with an agate buckle and seven tinkling pendants, gold and silver bracelets and bangles, and the like. In addition, there were two robes of palace-style crimson brocade, four outfits of figured clothing, and thirty taels of silver as a bride-price. What with all the muslin, cotton, and silk fabrics, there were more than twenty loads of gifts. The two go-betweens accompanied them, and Ho Pu-wei from the yamen staff took charge of the procession, as they made their way to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence and performed the ceremony of presenting the betrothal gifts.
On the fifteenth, the district yamen dispatched a bunch of couriers and idlers who had been hired for the purpose to carry Meng Yü-lou's beds and curtains along with the trunks in which her trousseau was packed. Yüeh-niang looked on and directed them to remove all the furnishings from her quarters. Originally, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive, he had taken one of the gilt lacquer beds with retractable steps that had been part of Meng Yü-lou's dowry and given it to Hsi-men Ta-chieh as part of her trousseau. Yüeh-niang now took the bedstead of inlaid mother-of-pearl from P'an Chin-lien's quarters and turned it over to her to make up for it. Meng Yü-lou proposed to take her maidservant Lan-hsiang with her, while leaving Hsiao-luan behind to assist Yüeh-niang in looking after Hsiao-ko.
Yüeh-niang objected to this, however, saying, "How could I be justified in retaining one of the maidservants from your quarters? After all, Hsiao-ko already has Chung-ch'iu, Hsiu-ch'un, and the wet nurse to take care of him, which is more than enough."
Meng Yü-lou merely chose to leave behind a pair of silver flasks of Mohammedan manufacture for Hsiao-ko to play with, and to serve as a keepsake, while taking all the rest of her belongings with her.
That evening, the district yamen dispatched a large sedan chair borne by four bearers and four pairs of red silk lanterns encased in networks of steel wires, accompanied by eight lictors, to come fetch Meng Yü-lou. She was wearing a gilt-ridged cap:
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,
along with pearl earrings, her body was clad in a scarlet full-sleeved robe, fastened at the waist by a girdle with an agate buckle in a gold setting and seven tinkling pendants, over a willow-yellow skirt sprigged with flowers. She first performed a farewell obeisance before Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet and then kowtowed to Yüeh-niang.
"Third Sister Meng," said Yüeh-niang, "you are cruel. Once you have gone, I will be left alone, all by myself, with no one to keep me company."
The two of them held hands and wept together for a while, after which, the members of the household, both high and low, accompanied her to the front gate, where she donned her bridal veil of gold-flaked red gauze with the help of the two go-betweens and took the golden "precious vase" [30] in her arms. Since Yüeh-niang was preserving her widowhood, she did not feel that she should venture abroad but invited Meng Yü-lou's elder sister, the wife of Han Ming-ch'uan, to escort her to the district yamen, riding in a large sedan chair, wearing a gown of figured scarlet material, over a kingfisher-blue skirt, while:
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets.
The people along the street remarked to each other, "This is the Third Lady of the official Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, who is marrying the son of His Honor the district magistrate. Since this is a propitious day and hour for the wedding, she is on her way to be carried over his threshold."
There were some who had favorable things to say about it,
As well as those who had critical things to say about it.
Those who had favorable comments to make said, "Originally, His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing had a position in society to maintain, and now that he is dead, his First Lady is the only one of the women in his household who is determined to preserve her widowhood, which is truly admirable. She has given birth to a son, and her household is no longer able to support such a large number of people, so she has allowed the others to go their own way, which is an appropriate attitude to take."
Those who had critical comments to make, when:
Gossiping in the streets and discoursing in the alleys,
pointedly remarked, "This is the third concubine from the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing who is now about to remarry. Originally, while that rascal was still alive, he was:
Defiant of both Heaven and principle,[31]
Covetous of wealth and given to lust,
and guilty of seducing other peoples' wives, and now that he is dead, the women in his household are absconding with his property.
Some are marrying other people,
Some are plundering his wealth,
Some are taking furtive lovers,
Some are resorting to thievery.
The feathers of the pheasant are being
plucked one by one.
As the saying goes:
Retribution may take place as much as
thirty years hence;
But here, retribution is taking place
before our very eyes."
The people on the sidelines all expressed their uninhibited views along these lines.
When Meng Yü-lou's elder sister had escorted the bride to the district yamen and seen that the beds and curtains and so forth in her trousseau were properly displayed, she remained there to enjoy the wedding feast before returning home. The bridegroom Li Kung-pi then summoned Auntie Hsüeh and Old Mother T'ao before him and rewarded each of them with five taels of silver and a length of festive red silk, before sending them on their way. That night the bride and groom consummated their marriage:
Emulating the pleasures of fish in the water, and
Exhausting the felicities of connubial bliss.
The next day, Wu Yüeh-niang sent the ritually prescribed gifts of tea and food to celebrate the consummation of the marriage. Aunt Yang was already dead, but Meng the Elder's wife, Meng the Second's wife, and Meng Yü-lou's elder sister also sent ritual gifts of tea to the district yamen. Li Kung-pi, for his part, sent replies to his newly acquired female relatives, inviting them all to come and participate in the "third-day celebrations," including the erection of a tower of variegated bunting in the shape of a mountain, and a feast where they were to be entertained by musicians and singing girls from the licensed quarter, who would greet them with martial music, and perform pieces from the southern-style plays known as hsi-wen.
On that day, Wu Yüeh-niang went to the district yamen in a large sedan chair to participate in the "third-day celebrations" and attend the feast.
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,
while her body was clad in a scarlet full-sleeved robe, a flower-sprigged skirt, and a gilded girdle. As she was drinking wine in the rear hall, the district magistrate's wife came out to keep her company.
On Yüeh-niang's return home after this event, she remembered the way the company had enjoyed themselves:
Amid clustering blossoms and clinging brocade;

whereas, when she arrived home, the courtyard in the rear compound was deserted, and there was no one to welcome her. This reminded her of how she and her sister wives had enjoyed things together in former days, when Hsi-men Ch'ing was still alive. In those days, when she came home from a social engagement, they would all come out to welcome her, and even a long bench would prove insufficient to seat them all; whereas now, there was nobody there. Happening to bump into Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, she was overcome with grief before she knew it and started to weep out loud. Only after she had wept for some time did her maidservant Hsiao-yü succeed in persuading her to stop and dry her eyes. Truly:

The innermost feelings of one's life[32]
are known to no one else;[33]
Only the bright moon shining through
the window discerns them.[34]

We will say no more, for the moment, about Yüeh-niang's grief.

To resume our story, Li Kung-pi and Meng Yü-lou, being:

A woman of beauty and a man of talent,
enjoyed each other:
Like fish sporting in the water.
They fit together as closely as the
lid on a lamp-oil jar.[35]

Every day, he:

Enjoyed himself with his new wife,
remaining with her in the nuptial chamber, and:
Not straying a step from her side.[36]

When he contemplated Meng Yü-lou's face, it seemed to him that:

Such a vision is not exhaustible;
Such a view exceeds comprehension.

The more he gazed at her the more he was enamored by her. He also appreciated the fact that she had brought with her as part of her dowry two maidservants, one of whom, Lan-hsiang, was seventeen years old and could play musical instruments and sing, while the other, Hsiao-luan, was fourteen years old, and beautiful as well. He was:

Delighted in his heart,

by this to such an extent that he scarcely knew what to do with himself. There is a poem that testifies to this:

How praiseworthy are this woman of beauty
and this man of talent;
Heaven has devised this marriage affinity[37]
as propriety dictates.
Amid the twelve peaks of Witch's Mountain[38]
clouds and rain mingle;[39]
Their mutual feelings will surely sustain
a lifetime of bliss.[40]

It so happens that Li Kung-pi's deceased wife had left him with a senior maidservant, about thirty years of age, named Yü-tsan, who was given to:

Putting on makeup and applying powder,

and was a past master at mischief making. She did up her hair in two curled knots on either side of her head but covered it with a kerchief, held in place with a gold lamé headband so that it looked like a gentlewoman's fret, and studded it with brass pins and waxen ornaments that looked like fallen leaves and withered flowers. Her ears were adorned with a pair of muskmelon-shaped pendants. Her body was clad in a skirt and jacket of an off-shade of green and a strange shade of red that revealed glimpses of her undergarments in front and her posterior behind, so that she appeared to others like nothing so much as a rat dressed in lotus leaves. On her feet she wore a pair of cut-velvet moccasins that were:

Oil-stained inside and out,
Mortifying even to Liu Hai,[41]
Resembling a pair of boats,
Manifesting four apertures,

and as much as a foot and two inches in length. She smeared her face with lead powder so that it displayed:

A spot of white on the east,
A blotch of red on the west,

looking for all the world like the surface of a fresh winter melon. In front of people, she gave vent to:

Simpleminded and officious foolishness,
Putting on airs and assuming attitudes.

Before the young squire took Meng Yü-lou into the household as his wife, she devoted herself every day to boiling his soup and cooking his rice, waiting upon him assiduously.

Though not spoken to, she forced herself to speak,
Though not smiled at, she forced herself to smile;

exhibiting a wealth of feeling. But after he married Meng Yü-lou, and she observed that he slept with her every night, that he was so close to her that they were:

Like glue and like lacquer,

and that he no longer paid any attention to her, this maidservant began to give vent to fits of anger.

One day, when the young squire was in his study reading a book, this Yü-tsan prepared a cup of fine tea, flavored with fruit kernels, brought it to his study on a tray which she held with two hands, and smiled ingratiatingly as she lifted aside the portiere and took it inside to present to him. Who could have anticipated that the young squire, after reading his book for a while, had lain his head down on his desk and fallen asleep.

"Father," Yü-tsan called out to him, "who else is as fond of you as I am? I have taken the trouble to prepare this cup of fine tea for you, while that new wife of yours is still fast asleep under her bedclothes. Why has she not bothered to get one of her maidservants to bring you a cup of tea?"

On seeing that the young squire was taking a nap, she went up to him and called out again, but he did not respond, whereupon she exclaimed, "You old beggar! You labored so hard on your nocturnal business last night that you wore yourself out, did you? And now, you are dozing and nodding off in broad daylight. You had better get up and drink your tea."

She managed to wake him up, and when he saw who it was, he blurted out at her, "You crazy uncouth slave! Put the tea down, and get out of here."

Yü-tsan's face turned red with humiliation, and she dumped the tea down on the desk in a fit of pique and left the room, saying,

"You wouldn't know a favor if you saw one.

I went out of my way with the best of intentions to bring you a cup of tea early in the morning, only to be railed at this way. As the saying goes:

An ugly woman is a jewel in the household,[42]
A lovable one is only a source of trouble.

If I am so ugly, you must have been blind from the beginning, since no one had to persuade you to take me on. That better-looking one is hardly worth as much as my juicy cunt."

When the young squire heard this, he caught up with her and kicked her twice, as hard as he could, with his leather boot.

On leaving his presence, Yü-tsan put on a long face, as high as the rafters. From that time on, she no longer applied makeup to her face, and no longer boiled tea or prepared meals. She refused to address Meng Yü-lou as mistress but insisted on employing the pronouns you and I with her. When no one else was around, she would park her posterior on Meng Yü-lou's bed just as if it were her own, but Meng Yü-lou simply ignored her.

She also endeavored, behind Meng Yü-lou's back, to establish her superiority over Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, saying to them, "You should not address me as sister, but as aunt, since I and your mistress are of roughly equal status in the household."

She also went on to admonish them, "But only address me that way in private, and not in front of your master. You must do as I tell you every day, and perform your tasks conscientiously. If you refuse to obey my instructions, I'll put you to work with the coal shovel."

Later on, after she felt that the young squire had pointedly ignored her several times, she began to get lazy, sleeping until the sun was high in the sky before getting up, and refusing to prepare meals or sweep the floor.

Meng Yü-lou, consequently, instructed Lan-hsiang and Hsiao-luan, saying, "You had better not depend on Yü-tsan any longer. The two of you should go to the kitchen yourselves to prepare the meals and serve them to the master."

This only had the effect of angering Yü-tsan further, and she proceeded to:

Lose her temper and become abusive,
Throwing plates and saucers around.

She would go into the kitchen and strike Hsiao-luan and curse Lan-hsiang, saying, "You lousy little slave, and you little whore:

Even when using the pestle and millstone
to hull grain and grind it,
One must come first and then the other.[43]

Was it your mistress who came first, or was it me? Since the three of you have usurped my place, I don't feel like exerting myself any longer. Formerly, that mistress of mine who has passed away never had the discourtesy to address me by my given name as Yü-tsan; but within a few days after the three of you moved in, you have taken to addressing me by my real name. Do you take me to be no more than a servant of yours, or what? Before the lot of you moved in, Father and I enjoyed the pleasure of:

Sharing the same bed and a single pillow;

and there was seldom a day when we did not sleep until breakfast time before getting up. The two of us were so fond of each other, we were:

Like sugar mixed with honey;[44]
Like honey stirred with butter.

And there was scarcely anything in the household that did not pass through my hands. But ever since you arrived, you have:

Appropriated my honey jar,
And smashed it to pieces.

As a result, my marriage affinity has been forcibly disrupted, and I have been relegated to sleeping in the parlor on a cold bench, as though I were in a public shelter, and am no longer able to get so much as a taste of that thingamajig of my master's. I have no way of expressing the resentment this has caused me. Originally, when you were in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, you were merely his third concubine and were known by your personal name as Yü-lou, as if I didn't know all about it. Now that you're here:

You know it and I know it,

and it would be better for everyone if you were to slack off a bit, instead of behaving officiously, putting on meretricious airs, or:

Summoning this one and calling for that.
Since when was I bought by you, and thus subject to your control?"

She did not realize it, but Meng Yü-lou in her room overheard this tirade and nearly fainted with anger, her face changing color and her hands trembling, but she did not venture to protest, or to tell the young squire about it.

One day, when the weather was hot, it turned out to be one of those occasions on which:

Something is destined to happen.

In the evening, the young squire proposed to have Yü-tsan heat some water in the kitchen and bring a bathtub into the bedroom so he could bathe with Meng Yü-lou.

"Have Lan-hsiang heat the water for us," objected Meng Yü-lou. "Don't have her do it."

But the young squire refused to agree to this, saying, "I am making a point of having her do it because I don't want to pamper that slave any further."

When Yü-tsan saw that the young squire wanted the water so he and his wife could:

Bathe together in the orchid-scented bath,
Emulate the pleasures of fish in the water, and
Exhaust the felicities of connubial bliss,

she was not in the best of moods.

Carrying the bathtub into the bedroom, she plumped it down on the floor and then went back to heat a large cauldron of boiling water, while muttering to herself, "Whoever saw the likes of this wanton whore? What with her impulsive capriciousness she is always imposing on me. Though it's only that wantonly juicy cunt of hers, she never lets three days go by without requiring water to bathe it with. When I used to sleep with the master, I would let months go by without exposing mine to so much as a drop of water and never felt that my Buddha's eye had been contaminated; whereas this whore has imposed on me two or three times already."

This tirade of hers commenced while she was leaving the room, and Meng Yü-lou overheard it but did not respond. When the young squire heard it, however, he became enraged. Without finishing his bath, while still stark naked, he slipped on his sandals, picked up a stick from the head of the bed, and headed after her.

Meng Yü-lou tried to stop him, saying, "Let her curse away. While you're enraged this way, I fear that while your body is all hot, if you expose yourself to the breeze, you may come down with a chill. It's hardly worth the risk."

The young squire would not be appeased, however, and said, "Don't you interfere. This slave is guilty of gross impropriety."

So saying, he went forward, grabbed her by the hair with one hand, pulled her over onto the floor, lifted up his stick, and unleashed a series of blows that fell on her like rain. Despite the fact that Meng Yü-lou tried to restrain him from the sidelines, he delivered twenty or thirty strokes to her body, which threw the maidservant into a panic.

Getting to her knees, she appealed to him, saying, "Father, don't beat me any more. I have something to say to you."

The young squire castigated her, saying, "You lousy slave! Go ahead and say it then."

There is a song to the tune "Sheep on the Mountain Slope" that testifies to this:

Father, suppress your rage and abate
your anger.[45]
Listen attentively to what I have to

say to you.
Originally, you spent eight taels of silver
as a bride-price for me;
Acquiring me so that I could take charge
of your household,
And deal with its sesame oil, salt, soy
sauce, and vinegar.
Every serving of food or tea
that you consumed,
Was prepared and cleaned up by me.
After my mistress passed away,
You promoted me to the position
of a stand-in for her.
The two of us came to share the same
coverlet and the same bed,
And had wonderful times together.
It was only because you put me in charge
that I consented to do this.
How could I know that you would deceive me,
saying you would not remarry;
Only to come up, today, with this nefarious
scheme of yours,
Obliterating our past love, as if it had
never happened?
I call out, "Father,
You are too cruel at heart.
I will no longer remain in
your household,
But am prepared to marry
another husband.
When the young squire had heard her out, he grew even angrier and gave her another few severe strokes with the stick.
Meng Yü-lou remonstrated with him, saying, "As long as she is willing to go, there is no need for you to beat her any further. Don't let yourself get worked up into such a state."
The young squire, accordingly, ordered a servant to summon the go-between Old Mother T'ao to take Yü-tsan away, sell her off, and come pay him back. But no more of this. Truly:
When a mosquito gets slapped with a fan,
It is for hurting people with its mouth.
A poem testifies to this:

When most kinds of birds chirp, people are happy to hear them;
But when the crows start to caw, how do people react?
Those who see them are vexed, and those who hear them spit;
Only because they are much too garrulous in front of them.

One day, Chen Jingji heard of this business of Sun Xue'e from old woman Xue. He sent the old woman with a message to Wu Yueniang.
"Your son-in-law says he does not mean to have anything more to do with your daughter. He is going to the Provincial Governor to say that, when your husband was alive, he had a number of chests of gold and silver left with him by old master Chen."
This was one more worry for Yueniang. Xue'e had run away with Laiwang; the boy Laian had run away; Laixing's wife had died and the funeral was only just over. When she heard the message old woman Xue had brought, she was alarmed, sent at once for a sedan chair, and told Ximen Dajie to go to Chen's house. Daian and other servants carried all the things belonging to her to Chen Jingji.
"These things were her dowry," Jingji said. "The things I am asking for are those I gave into their keeping."
"Your mother-in-law told me," old woman Xue said, "that in her husband's time these were the only things they had. She has never seen anything else."
Then Jingji claimed his wife's maid. Old woman Xue and Daian went back to Yueniang and told her. She refused to give up the girl. "She was Li Jiao'er's maid," she said, "and now she is looking after my baby. If he must have somebody, he may have Zhongqiu. She has been my daughter's maid."
Jingji refused to have Zhongqiu, and old woman Xue was kept going backwards and forwards between the two houses. At last Jingji's mother said to Daian: "Brother, go and tell your mistress that she has several maids. Why does she insist on keeping that particular one to look after her baby? And I don't see why she should keep Zhongqiu either, since Zhongqiu was my daughter-in-law's maid and was made a woman by my son."
Daian went and told Yueniang. Then she gave way and sent Yuanxiao. Jingji was very pleased with himself. "It is settled on my own terms after all," he said.

* * *

We now return to Magistrate Li's son. He had seen Wu Yueniang and Meng Yulou outside the city at the Festival of Spring. They were both beautiful and dressed alike, and he knew that they had been Ximen Qing's wives. He liked Yulou because she was tall. Her face was like a melon seed and she seemed charming and gay.
This young man's wife had died sometime before, and he had been looking about for a wife but could find no one who pleased him sufficiently. He was greatly taken with Yulou but did not know how to approach her. Besides, he did not know whether she wished to remarry.
Then he heard that Xue'e had been brought before his father's court. She was one of Ximen's wives also. He succeeded in persuading his father to return all the stolen property to Ximen's people. But Yueniang was afraid to have anything to do with the courts and would not send a man to claim the things. The young man was disappointed. The stolen goods were confiscated and Xue'e was sold. Then he talked over the situation with one of the officers called Yu.
"Why don't you send old Tao, the go-between, to Ximen's house to arrange the matter?" Yu said. "Tell the old woman that, if she brings the matter off, she shall have five taels of silver and be freed from her official work."
The young man spoke to old woman Tao, and the old woman was so delighted that she ran to Ximen's house as if she had had wings. Laizhao was at the door. The old woman made a reverence to him. "May I know if this is Ximen's house?" she said.
"Who are you?" Laizhao said. "What do you want? My master is dead."
"Will you kindly go and tell the lady that I am Tao, the official go-between. My young master tells me that one of the ladies is thinking of remarrying, and I have come to see about it."
"Old woman," Laizhao shouted, "you seem to have lost your manners. My master has been dead more than a year now. There are two ladies here, and neither of them wishes to remarry. You know the proverb: Howling wind and driving rain do not beat upon a widow's door. You are trifling and talking nonsense about marriage. Be off with you, and quickly. If the ladies hear of this, you may get a beating."
The old woman smiled. "The governor may be wrong," she said, "and his deputy too, but the messenger is always right. I should not have come if my young master had not sent me. Whether they wish to marry or not, kindly go and tell them. Then I will go back and let my young master know what they say."
"To do something for others is sometimes advantageous to oneself," Laizhao said. "Wait here, and I will go and tell them. One of the ladies has a baby. The other has not. I have no notion which it is you want."
"My young master told me that he saw her in the country at the Spring Festival. She has a few marks on her face."
Laizhao went and told Yueniang that the official go-between wished to see her. Yueniang was startled. "Nothing that is said here ever goes beyond these walls," she said. "What do they know of us?"
"The woman says they saw a lady with a few marks on her face, at the Festival of Spring."
"That is Sister Meng," Yueniang said. "I shall never remarry."
She went to Yulou. "Sister," she said, "I have something to tell you. A go-between has come, and she says Magistrate Li's son saw you at the Festival of Spring. She says you would like to remarry. Is that true?"
Now, as chance would have it, Yulou had noticed the young man that day and thought how happy and handsome he seemed. He was about the same age as herself, a good horseman, and skilled with the bow. When they looked at each other, they seemed to establish an understanding. But she had not known whether he was married or not. She had said to herself: "My husband is dead, and I have no child of my own. The Great Lady has a son, but, when he grows up, he will do his duty by his own mother and I shall be like a fallen tree that gives no shade, or as if I drew water in a bamboo basket. Since Yueniang has had this child, she does not behave to me as she used to do. It will be well for me to take a step forward and make sure of a home in which to spend my old age. Why should I be so foolish as to stay here? There is nothing here for me, and I am wasting my time."
She was thinking exactly this when Yueniang came and spoke to her. The man whom Yueniang mentioned was the very young man she had seen at the Festival of Spring. She was pleased but also a little ashamed. She said to Yueniang: "Don't believe a word of it. I have never even thought of remarrying." But she blushed.
"It is a matter entirely for you to decide," Yueniang said. "I have no authority over you." She told Laizhao to bring the go-between to the inner court.
Old woman Tao made a reverence to Yueniang and sat down. A maid brought tea, and Yueniang said: "What can I do for you?"
"I should not come to such a magnificent palace as this unless I had something of great importance to say," the old woman said. "I was ordered to come by his Lordship. It is said that there is a lady here who would like to marry again."
"It is possible that the lady may care to remarry," said Yueniang, "but she has never spoken of the matter to anyone. How did your young master come to know of it?"
"He only told me that he saw a lady at the festival. She was tall and had a face shaped like a melon seed, with a few white marks upon it. I think this must be the lady."
Then Yueniang understood that it must be Yulou. She took the woman to Yulou's room. There they sat down and, after a while, Yulou came out to them beautifully dressed. The old woman made a reverence to her.
"This is the lady," she said. "She is unusually beautiful and well worthy to be my young master's first wife."
Yulou smiled. "Don't be silly," she said. "Tell me how old the gentleman is. Has he been married before? Has he any women in his household? What is his name and what his position? Don't waste time. Tell me the truth."
"Heaven!" the old woman cried. "I am the official go-between. I'm not like the rest of them. I never tell lies. I say what I know and nothing else. The magistrate is over fifty, and this is his only son. The young gentleman's animal is the Horse, and he is now thirty-one. He was born at the hour of the Dragon on the twenty-third day of the first month. He is a student at the Imperial Academy of Learning and will shortly take his degree. He has a bellyful of literature, and is very skilled at archery and horsemanship. There is nothing about philosophy he doesn't know. His wife died two years ago, and now he has only a young girl to look after him. She is quite a common sort of girl, and he wants a wife to manage things. He has sent me here especially to ask you to marry him. If you are willing, my master says you shall be excused from paying taxes on your land, houses and property, and if anyone harms you in any way, you have only to point to him and he will be arrested and punished at once."
"Has the young gentleman any children?" Yulou asked. "And what is his native place? I ask this because when their term of office here expires, they will probably go away, and I do not wish to go very far. All my people live here."
"He has no children," old woman Tao said, "and his home is in the Zaoqiang district of Zhengdingfu. It is about six or seven hundred *li* on the other side of the river. They own miles and miles of land, have herds of mules and horses, and a host of people. The Imperial sign stands over all the arches. It is a splendid and glorious place. If you become his first wife, and he gets an official appointment, you will wear ceremonial dress and drive a carriage like a lady. Is that not good enough for you?"
Yulou made up her mind. She told Lanxiang to bring the old woman tea and cakes. "I must apologize for asking so many questions," she said, "but really go-betweens are such clever liars, and I did not wish to be deceived."
"Lady," the old woman said, "you should look carefully. Then you would see that the pure are pure and the foul, foul. Only too often the bad ones bring disrepute upon the good ones. I never lie, I have always set out to be an honest go-between. If you have made up your mind, please write a note and I will give it to the young master."
Yulou found a piece of scarlet silk and told Daian to take it to the shop and get Clerk Fu to write her eight characters upon it.
"When you came here," Yueniang said, "old woman Xue acted as your go-between. We will send for her, and then she and Madam Tao together can take your eight characters. That will look more dignified."
After a while, old woman Xue came. She made a reverence to old woman Tao. As they belonged to the same profession, it was arranged that they should take the note to the Town Hall together.
On the way, old woman Tao said to her companion: "Did you arrange this lady's marriage on the previous occasion?"
"I did," old woman Xue said.
"What family did she come from? Was she a virgin?"
"She is a Yang," old woman Xue said.
Then old woman Tao noticed that the characters on the silk showed that Yulou was born at the hour of the Rat on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, so she was now thirty-seven years old.
"I am afraid my master will think she is rather old," she said. "He is only thirty-one, and she is six years older. Had we not better go to a fortune-teller and find out whether the parties are suited to one another? If the dates don't work out, we will make her a little younger. I shan't consider that anything wrong."
The two women went on, but they did not meet any fortune-tellers in the street. But from a distance they saw a black tent to the south of the road. Outside it were two signs. They bore the inscriptions: "I foretell good and evil fortune as Zi Ping. With an iron pen, I determine whether honor or ill-fame will come. To all who come to have their fortunes told, I tell the truth without fear and without favor." In the tent there was a table, and beside it sat a man who could write and tell fortunes. They went to him and he asked them to sit down.
"We have come to ask about the destiny of a woman," old woman Xue said, taking from her sleeve three *fen* of silver. "This is only a trifle, but please take it. I have very little money with me."
The man asked the eight characters. Tao gave him the card, on which the eight characters were written.
"I see this is a marriage," the man said. Then he began to calculate on his fingers and set out the counters on the abacus. "The woman is now thirty-seven years old," he said. "She was born at the hour of the Rat, on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month. The month is *Jiazi*, the day *Xinmao* and the hour *Gengzi*. She is an honorable woman. Working backwards, as one does with the life of a woman, we find that she is now at the period *Bingshen*. *Bing* comes in conjunction with *Xin*, which shows that she is destined to enjoy power and dignity and to be a lady. She has several husband stars, yet her influence is always happy for her husbands and they will love her. In these two years there seems to be an adverse influence. Has anything happened?"
"Two husbands have died already," old woman Xue said.
"That is good," the man said.
"Will she bear a child?" old woman Xue asked.
"Not yet. She will not have a child until she is forty-one. Then she will have a son who will comfort her declining days. Her fate seems to be excellent. She will be very rich and of high rank." He took a brush and wrote four lines.
Her charm is worthy to be compared with the beauty of the plum.
Three times the red silk is taken away, and twice she paints her brows.
We shall see the day when the horse's head is raised in victory
Then she will cast aside the covering of *Yin* and be free.
"Master," old woman Xue said, "what do you mean by those two last lines? We don't understand. Would you mind explaining?"
"I spoke of the 'horse's head' because the lady is going to marry a man whose animal is the Horse. Afterwards, she will live a life of ease. By 'the covering of Yin' I make reference to the man whose animal was the Tiger. That man is dead, and though he loved her, she was only a concubine in his household. From now onward, she will have a happy life. She will live to be sixty-eight and her son will close her eyes. Husband and wife will live together till they die."
"The man she is going to marry has indeed the horse for his animal," the old women cried, "but we are afraid he will think her too old. Can you make her a few years younger?"
"I will make her thirty-four," the man said.

"If you do that, will that fit in with the Horse?" old woman Xue said.
"Yes," the man said, "the *Ding* fire meets the *Geng* gold. From the gold melted in the fire, a precious jewel is made. It will be all right." He put down Yulou's age as thirty-four. The two old women went on to the Town Hall. There they were taken to the young man. He asked who old woman Xue was.
"She is the go-between of the other party," old woman Tao said. She told the young man the result of her visit. "The lady is very beautiful," she said, "but she is slightly older than you. I did not venture to settle the matter without your consent. Here is the card."
Li looked at it. "Born at the hour of the Rat, the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, thirty-four years of age," it said.
"That is all right," the young man said. "She is only two or three years older than I am."
"Yes, my lord," old woman Xue said hastily, "and doubtless you remember the proverb: When the wife is two years older than her husband, his wealth will be increased, and if she is three years older, she will be like a mountain of gold. The lady is very beautiful and has a perfect disposition. I need hardly say that she knows how to read and can manage a household very economically."
"You need say no more," the young man said. "I have seen her myself. "We must select a day of good omen for the betrothal."
"When shall we come to receive your orders?" the old women said.
"We will not waste any time. Come two days from now."
He gave each of them a tael of silver for her pains, and they went off in high spirits.
Li was very pleased that his marriage was now so far advanced. He consulted with He Buwei and then told his father. Then he sent for the Master of the Yin Yang, who selected the eighth day of the fourth month for the betrothal and the fifteenth for the wedding. He made a handsome present to He Buwei and Little Zhang to buy tea and wine and other things. The two go-betweens went to Ximen's place and told Yueniang and Yulou the days that had been selected. On the eighth day of the fourth month, sixteen dishes of fruits and cakes, a gold headdress, a set of gold ornaments, a cornelian girdle, a set of little bells, gold bracelets and silver pins, two scarlet ceremonial cloaks, four embroidered dresses, thirty taels of silver, rolls of silk and cotton, were made into twenty separate parcels. He Buwei and the two women took them all to Ximen's house.
On the fifteenth, a number of servants from the Town Hall came to take Meng Yulou's things away. Yueniang made them take everything that had belonged to Yulou. Ximen Qing had given his daughter one of the lacquer beds, and now Yueniang gave Yulou the bed decorated with mother of pearl that had been in Jinlian's room. Yulou wished to take Lanxiang with her and leave the younger of her maids to Yueniang. But Yueniang would not agree.
"No," she said, "I will not take your maid. I have Zhongqiu and Xiuchun and the nurse to look after the baby, and they are all I need."
Then Yulou sent all her things away, leaving two little silver pots as playthings for the baby. That evening there came for her a sedan chair carried by four men, with eight men from the Town Hall, and four pairs of red lanterns to attend her. Yulou put on her golden headdress, ornaments, and pearls. Then she dressed in a straight-sleeved scarlet gown. First she went to say farewell to Ximen Qing's tablet; then she kowtowed to Yueniang.
"Sister Meng," Yueniang said, "you are cruel. You are leaving me here alone, and I have no friend left." They held each other's hands and cried.
All the household went with her to the gate, and there an old woman put a veil of red silk on her head and gave her a golden vase to carry. As Yueniang was a widow, she did not go out, but asked Aunt Meng to take Yulou to her new husband.
"That is Master Ximen's third lady," the people in the street said to one another. "Now she is marrying the magistrate's son. This is the wedding day." Some said it was good, and some that it was bad. Those who considered it good said: "Ximen Qing was a very pleasant fellow. He is dead now, and his first wife lives on at his home as his widow. She could not possibly manage the household if it remained so big, so she lets the ladies go their own way, and all is as it should be."
Those who considered it bad said: "Now, even Ximen Qing's wives are remarrying. He was a most unprincipled fellow. He lived for money and to seduce other people's wives and daughters, and, now he is dead, his wives remarry and take his property with them. Some have married; some have run away; some have carried on intrigues with impossible people; some have even descended to theft. They are like the feathers of a chicken, all scattered to the winds. As the proverb says: we may have to wait thirty years for our reward, but, in this case, we see the reward today."
Aunt Meng came with the sedan chair to the Town Hall. The beds and furniture were all in their proper places. She was asked to take wine and then went home. Li gave the two old women Xue and Tao each five taels and a roll of silk, and they went home too. The young couple became husband and wife that same night and enjoyed each other as fishes enjoy water. Next day, Yueniang sent tea and food to Yulou, since Aunt Yang, who would have done it, was now dead. The three Aunt Mengs also sent tea. Then they received an invitation from the Town Hall asking them to go on the third day of the wedding. There was a very grand dinner; musicians and singing girls were present to perform plays and music. Yueniang dressed in pearls and put on a scarlet cloak, an embroidered skirt, and a girdle with a gold buckle, and went in a large sedan chair to the Town Hall. The ladies were entertained in the great hall and the magistrate's wife was there to receive them.
When Yueniang got home after this very lively feast, she went to the inner court. It was so quiet that not a sound could be heard. She remembered how busy all the ladies had been in Ximen Qing's lifetime, and how, when she had come back from a party, they had all come to welcome her home. Indeed, one long bench had not been enough for the ladies to sit on. Now they were all gone. She went to Ximen Qing's tablet and sobbed.
Young Master Li and Yulou, both very lively by nature, were delighted with each other. They were so much attracted one to the other that they found it hard to separate even for a moment. The young man looked closely at Yulou and, the more he looked at her, the more he loved her. And her two maids were very pretty too. Lanxiang was now eighteen. He was so delighted he did not know what to do with himself.
The young man's first wife, when she died, left an old maid called Yuzan. She was now about thirty years old. She painted her face till she looked like a demon. She used to dress her hair in a number of knots, then, around it, she put a handkerchief, and tied it with a gold ribbon as if it had been a hairnet. She wore the strangest green and red clothes and shoes like boats, with four eyes. Each of them was at least one foot two inches long. When she was in the presence of anyone, she shivered and shook, talked in a quavering voice, and behaved in the queerest manner. Before the young master had married again, it was she who served him every day with food and tea. She was very industrious, and smiled and talked even when she did not mean to. When Yulou came, and her young master attached himself so firmly to her, it was a very great trouble to Yuzan. She was furious.
One day, when the young man was reading in his study, she went to the kitchen and made a special cup of tea. She put the teacup on a tray and took it to the study. She put on a smiling face, pulled aside the lattice, and went to offer the tea. But the young man, after reading a while, had gone to sleep on the table.
"Master," she said, "nobody cares for you as I do. I have made you such a nice cup of tea. Your newly married wife is still comfortably asleep in bed. Why don't you order her maids to make some tea for you?"
The young man was half asleep and did not answer. "You old beggar," she said, "you have been so busy all night that you are tired out now. That's why you go to sleep in the daytime. Wake up and have this cup of tea."
Then the young man woke up and saw the maid.
"Put down that tea and go away, you dirty slave," he said.
Yuzan flushed, put down the tea, and went out in a bad temper. "You don't appreciate my kindness," she said. "I had the best of intentions when I made you this tea, and yet you shout at me. I may be ugly, but as the proverb says: an ugly person is a jewel in the household, but the beauty is a source of trouble. I may be ugly, but you used to like me well enough."
The young man kicked her. Yuzan pulled a face long enough to reach the ceiling. She never painted her face again, nor did she make any more tea. When she saw Yulou, she never addressed her as "Lady," but just said "You" and "I." She used to seat herself on Yulou's bed. Yulou said nothing.
Then she said, one day, to her mistress's two maids: "Don't call me Sister, call me Aunt. I am only slightly inferior to your mother and you must call me Aunt when your father is away. You must do what I tell you and work hard. If you don't obey me, you shall have a taste of my shovel."
She tried very hard to make up to the young man but he would have nothing to do with her. Then she was annoyed and would not get out of bed until noon. She refused to cook and would not scrub the floors.
"Don't bother about her," Yulou said to her maids. "Go yourselves to the kitchen and do the cooking and take the food to your master."
Yuzan was terribly jealous. She used to go to the kitchen, break the plates, and curse and beat the maids. "You thievish little whores!" she cried. "you must know that I was here before any of you. Your mother was not here before I was. Now you get hold of everything and don't exert yourselves in the least. The First Lady never used to call me Yuzan, but although you have been here only a few days, you have the audacity to call me by my name. I am not your servant. Before you came, I used to sleep with the young master. We slept together every night and did not get up till breakfasttime. We were like sugar and honey together, and I managed everything. Now you have come and smashed the honey jar and broken the relations between us. I am driven to a cold room where I have to put benches together to make a bed. I never enjoy my master's weapon any more. Indeed, I've forgotten what it is like. There is no place where I can say what I think. When she was in Ximen's family she was only the third lady, and I know she was called Yulou. I know it. And now that she comes here, she ought to control herself a little instead of boasting and ordering people about."
Yulou heard all this. It made her angry but she would not speak to her husband about it. One day, when it was very hot, the young man ordered them to heat some water and bring the bathtub so that he could take a bath with Yulou.
"Tell Lanxiang to go and do it." Yulou said. "Don't ask your own maid."
"No," the young man said, "it is her business to do it. I can't have her going on like this."
When Yuzan heard her master asking for water so that he could have a bath with his wife, she was very annoyed. She brought the tub and plumped it on the floor. Then she heated a great cauldron of water.
"I have never seen such a strumpet," she grumbled. "Always trying to harm me in some cunning way. What a strumpet she must be, washing herself nearly every day. Look at me! I slept with my master for months and months and never used a drop of water. But I didn't offend the eyes of Buddha. This whore has been trying to quarrel with me for a long time." She cursed all the way from the kitchen to the bedroom. Yulou heard her and said nothing, but the young man heard her too, and he was very angry. Though he had no clothes on, he picked up a stick and went out. Yulou tried to stop him.
"Don't be angry with her," she said. "It will be more trouble than it is worth if you go out now, when you are so hot, and catch a chill."
But the young man found it too much. "No," he said, "the ill-mannered slave!"
He went out and seized her by the hair. Then he threw her to the ground, and blows fell from his stick like raindrops. Yulou tried to get him to stop, but she did not succeed until the maid had received thirty blows. Then the maid knelt down before him. "Don't beat me any more, Master," she said. "I know you don't want me any more, and I will go away."
This made the young man angrier than ever and he struck her again. "Since she's ready to go away," Yulou said, "don't beat her. And don't let yourself get into such a state." The young man sent for old woman Tao to take the maid away. She was sold for 8 taels of silver and old Tao gave the money to the young man.

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## Meng Yulou Outwits Ch'en Ching-chi who is Entrapped in Yen-chou Prefecture; Wu Yüeh-Niang Creates a Stir in the District Yamen

As the summer fades and winter comes,[1] spring turns into autumn;[2]
As the evening sun sinks in the west,[3] the rivers flow eastward.[4]
Although one's wealth and distinction are determined by destiny;
When one's luck runs out, the ensuing poverty has its own roots.
If one meets with an opportunity, one should take advantage of it;
When one has occasion for self-esteem it is time to repent.[5]
The general and his fighting stallion[6] are no more to be seen;[7]
The prairie grasses and wildflowers[8] veil the soil in grief.[9]

On that day, after the young squire Li Kung-pi had given Yü-tsan a beating, he summoned Old Mother T'ao to take her away, sold her for eight taels of silver, and used the proceeds to buy a seventeen-year-old maidservant named Man-t'ang to take charge of the kitchen in her place. But no more of this. To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ta-chieh returned to Ch'en Ching-chi's residence and brought with her the beds and curtains, the items from her dowry, and the trunkloads of other goods:
Every third day they squabbled, and
Every fifth day they quarreled.
Ch'en Ching-chi approached his mother, née Chang, to ask if he could borrow some money from her as capital with which to start a business for himself. His maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan had also borrowed fifty taels of silver from his mother, with which to seek a new position for himself. Ch'en Ching-chi, while drunk, got into a shouting match over this at the door of his uncle's residence, which so upset his uncle that he went elsewhere to borrow the money he needed in order to seek a new position and returned the money he had borrowed to Ch'en Ching-chi's mother. This had the effect of upsetting his mother, née Chang, to such an extent that she fell ill and took to her bed, taking medications all day long, and calling in doctors to treat her. Finding herself unable to resist his obstreperous demands, she finally weighed out two hundred taels of silver and turned it over to him so that he, with the help of their servant Ch'en Ting, could open up two rooms on the street-front of their property in which to launch a piece goods store.
Every day, he got together with his cronies Lu the Second, Yang the Elder, and other:
Foxy fellows and doglike companions,[10]
who forgathered in the shop to strum the balloon guitar, play at dominoes or backgammon, and drink until late at night, with the result that his capital was gradually diminished. Ch'en Ting told his mother, née Chang, that he was drinking and wasting his money every day, and she believed him, so that she trusted her son no longer. Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this by claiming that Ch'en Ting, who was responsible for getting the fabrics dyed, had been embezzling the money entrusted to him and forced him and his wife to leave the household and reside elsewhere. He then engaged Yang the Elder to be his manager.
This Yang the Elder, whose formal name was Yang Kuang-yen, and whose nickname was Iron Fingernail, was a past master at:
Peddling ephemera, like the wind and rain;[11]
Telling falsehoods, fabricating fantasies,
and getting hold of other people's money in order to spend it on himself. He was a native of Nobottom ward in Carryoff village of Makebelieve district in Nonesuch prefecture. His father was named Yang Pu-lai, or Poor-parent Yang, and his mother's maiden name was Pai. His younger brother was called Yang Erh-feng. He acquired the art of lying from the Taoist master known as the Barefaced Adept from the Fire Dragon Monastery in the Obdurate Grotto of the Vacuous Mountains. His wife was known as Miss Died-of-fright because his propensity to lie had literally frightened her to death.
Those to whom he makes promises, end up
Catching at shadows and clutching the wind;
And bilking others of their due, he finds
As easy as groping for something in a bag.
Ch'en Ching-chi prevailed upon his mother to come up with an additional three hundred taels of silver, making a total of five hundred taels worth of capital, and trusted Yang Kuang-yen enough to propose that they go together to the canal port of Lin-ch'ing to purchase piece goods for their business.
Yang the Elder went home to collect his luggage, including a bottomless shoulder bag, filled with soft currency and "elm-pod cash."[12] Carrying a black-handled decorated bow, and riding a haughty high horse, he joined Ch'en Ching-chi in setting out for the dock at Lin-ch'ing in the hope of acquiring some hard-to-find goods.
After three li they fared by Nonesuch district;
After five li they came to Makebelieve village;
eventually arriving at Lin-ch'ing.
The large dock area of this river port of Lin-ch'ing was a bustling and flourishing place, where traveling merchants came and went:
A site at which river boats congregated;
An area where transport wagons gathered.
There were:
Thirty-two lanes lined with sporting houses; and
Seventy-two taverns featuring singing girls.[13]
Ch'en Ching-chi was still a young man and allowed himself to be led by this Iron Fingernail, Yang the Elder, into:
Visiting brothels, and
Exploring taverns;
Sleeping by daylight, and
Dissipating at night;
while neglecting the purchases they had come to make.
While visiting a brothel one day, he encountered a painted face named Feng Chin-pao:
Whose demeanor was both romantic and alluring, and
Whose beauty and talent approached perfection.
When he asked how old she was, the procuress said, "She is my own daughter, and my only source of livelihood. This year, she is just seventeen-years-old."
Ch'en Ching-chi no sooner set eyes on her than:
His heart and eyes were entranced,

and he proceeded to pay the procuress five taels of silver for the privilege of spending several nights in a row with her. When Yang the Elder saw that he was infatuated with the painted face, and reluctant to leave her, he persuaded him with flowery words from the sidelines to take her home with him. The procuress started by demanding a hundred and fifty taels of silver for her but allowed herself to be bargained down to a hundred taels, whereupon he paid her the silver and took her home with him. She was carried the whole way in a sedan chair, while Yang the Elder and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted their cartload of merchandise:
Flourishing whips and prancing on their steeds,[14]
with satisfaction. Truly:
The sweetheart from the Swallows' Belvedere,[15]
Turns round her head in vain along the road.
He is carrying off an immortal from Wu-ling,[16]
To make her into a loving phoenix companion.
When his mother, née Chang, saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had not purchased much in the way of merchandise but had used his capital to buy a singing girl instead, she became so upset that:
Alas and alack;
She stopped breathing and died.
Ch'en Ching-chi had no alternative but to purchase a coffin, see that her corpse was dressed for burial, hold a scripture reciting ceremony, arrange for her to lie in state until after the first weekly commemoration was over, conduct a funeral procession to the ancestral graveyard outside the city, and bury her in the same grave with her husband. His maternal uncle Militia Commander Chang Kuan, out of consideration for his mother, chose to make allowances for him.
When Ch'en Ching-chi came home after performing the ceremony of revisiting the grave three days after her burial, he set up her spirit tablet in the center of what had been her three-room suite and turned the other two rooms over to Feng Chin-pao to live in, while relegating his wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, to a side chamber. He also purchased a maidservant named Ch'ung-hsi to wait on Feng Chin-pao, put Yang the Elder in charge of the shop on the street-front of the residence, and indulged himself and the singing girl with:
Unlimited quantities of meat and wine.
Every night, he slept with the singing girl and no longer paid any attention to Hsi-men Ta-chieh.
One day, he learned that Meng Yü-lou had married Li Kung-pi, the son of District Magistrate Li Ch'ang-ch'i, and taken a good deal of property with her; and that on the expiration of Magistrate Li's three-year term of office he had been promoted to the position of assistant prefect of Yen-chou prefecture in Chekiang and had taken his credentials and set out along the internal waterways to assume his new office.
This reminded Ch'en Ching-chi that on a former occasion he had picked up a hairpin of Meng Yü-lou's, that it had been taken from him by P'an Chin-lien while he was in his cups, that she had later returned it to him, and that he still had it in his possession. It occurred to him that, using this hairpin as a piece of evidence, he could take it with him to Yen-chou and claim that Meng Yü-lou had had an affair with him and given him the pin as a gift; and that the property she had taken with her on the occasion of her marriage to Li Kung-pi included the trunkloads of gold and silver that had been entrusted to his family by their relative Yang Chien when it was threatened with confiscation.
"This Assistant Prefect Li," he thought to himself, "is merely a civil official. What sort of standing does he possess? When he learns of this serious accusation, no doubt he will order his son to turn his wife over to me with both hands. If I then bring her home with me, she and Feng Chin-pao will make a pleasing pair for me to enjoy myself with."
Truly:
If his plan prevails, it will be like seizing
the jade hare in the moon;
If his plot succeeds, it will be like snaring
the gold raven in the sun.[17]
If Ch'en Ching-chi had not embarked on this scheme, all might have been well; but when he chose to do so, it was a case of:
A sleepy slugabed encountering the General
of the Five Ways;
A cold and hungry demon running into
Chung K'uei.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
How can he ever start out for Yen-chou
in pursuit of a jade damsel?
The human heart is difficult to fathom[18]
like a stone sunk in the sea.
To vanish inside a nobleman's gates is to be
as unreachable as the ocean depths;
From this point on, the amorous gentleman
is destined to fall into a pit.
To resume our story, one day Ch'en Ching-chi went through his mother's trunks and took out a thousand taels of silver. He set aside a hundred taels to cover Feng Chin-pao's expenses during his absence and arranged for Ch'en Ting to move back in to look after the house and take charge of the piece goods store out front. He then set off with the remaining nine hundred taels of silver in hand, at the Mid-autumn Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, together with Yang the Elder and his servant Ch'en An, for Hu-chou, where they purchased half a boatload of piece goods and silk floss, and then went on to the river's mouth at Ch'ing-chiang P'u, where they moored their boat at the dock, and put up at an inn the proprietor of which was called Ch'en the Second.
That evening, after the lanterns had been lit, he had Ch'en the Second slaughter a chicken and provide wine for them, and he sat down to drink with Yang the Elder, saying, "Manager, I would like you to keep watch over the boatload of merchandise, and stay here at Ch'en the Second's inn for a few days, while Ch'en An and I take some gifts with us and go to Yen-chou prefecture in Chekiang to pay a call on my sister, who is married to the son of the assistant prefect there. I should be able to get back in five days at the most or three days at the least."
"Brother," said Yang the Elder, "go ahead and go if you like. I will be happy to remain here and wait for you at the inn. When you return, we can set off together."
Ch'en Ching-chi, though he:
Never, ever, should have done it,
set out one day, together with Ch'en An, taking some silver and presents with him, and traveled to Yen-chou prefecture, where they went into the city and found lodging in a monastery. Upon making inquiry, he learned that the Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i had assumed office a month ago, and that the boat with his dependents had arrived only three days earlier.
Ch'en Ching-chi did not dare to be remiss but purchased four platters of delicacies, two bolts of satin fabric, and two jars of wine, which he entrusted to Ch'en An to carry. He then dressed himself to befit the occasion, endeavoring to look his best, and headed straight for the prefectural yamen.
When he arrived there, he bowed to the gatekeeper, saying, "Please announce me. You can say that I am Meng the Second, a relative of the newlywed wife of His Honor Assistant Prefect Li's son, who has come to pay her a visit."
When the gatekeeper heard this, he did not dare to be remiss but promptly went inside to report his arrival. The young squire was in his study reading a book at the time.
When he heard that the visitor was a brother of his wife's, he ordered his attendants to bring the presents inside, adjusted his clothing, and said, "Invite him to come in."
He then conducted Ch'en Ching-chi into the reception hall of the prefectural yamen where they exchanged the customary amenities.
After they had assumed their positions as guest and host, he said, "How is it that, the other day, at our wedding ceremony, I did not see you, Brother-in-law?"
"I have been away for the past year," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "and have only just returned from a purchasing expedition to Szechwan and the Hu-Kuang region, so I did not know that my elder sister had married into your family. I am guilty of losing touch with her, but today I have respectfully prepared some meager gifts and have come to call on my sister."
"I did not know anything about you in the past," explained the young squire. "I apologize for my neglect. Forgive me. Forgive me."
A little later, after they had consumed a serving of tea, the young squire ordered his attendants to take the list of gifts and the presents inside and tell their mistress that her brother Meng the Second was there.
Meng Yü-lou, who was sitting in her room at the time, heard the gatekeeper come in and announce that Meng the Second was there.
"He hasn't returned home for the last year or two," she said. "Who else could it be? It must be that my brother, Meng Jui, has finally come home and has taken the trouble to traverse:
A thousand mountains and a myriad streams,
in order to come and see me."
When she saw that a servant had brought in the presents, along with a gift card that was signed, "Your relative, Meng Jui," she knew it must be her younger brother and said, "Invite him to come in."
After ordering Lan-hsiang to straighten up the rear reception room, Meng Yü-lou dressed herself up and prepared to come out and welcome him. When the young squire ushered him into the reception room, Meng Yü-lou was standing on the other side of the hanging screen looking into the interior, but:
Strange as it may seem,
it turned out not to be her brother, but Ch'en Ching-chi.
"I wonder what he is doing here?" she asked herself. "I'd better go out and see what he has to say. As the saying goes:
Whether a kinsman or not,
He is from my home place;
Whether palatable or not,
It is water from my home.[19]
Even though he is no brother of mine, he is my son-in-law."
So saying, she straightened her attire and came out to greet him.
"I did not know that you had married into this household," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so I have failed to call upon you."
Unexpectedly, while he was still uttering these words, the gatekeeper came in and informed the young squire that there was a guest waiting to see him outside.
"Pray entertain my brother-in-law," the young squire said to Meng Yü-lou, as he went out to meet his guest.
When Meng Yü-lou observed that Ch'en Ching-chi was about to kowtow to her, she hastily bowed in return, saying, "Son-in-law, you can skip the obeisance. What wind has blown you here?"
After they had exchanged the customary amenities, she offered him a seat and called for Lan-hsiang to bring out a serving of tea. When they had finished their tea, the two of them engaged in small talk together.
"How is Hsi-men Ta-chieh?" Meng Yü-lou asked.
Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to tell Meng Yü-lou all about how they had been forced to leave Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and how he had tried to recover the trunks of valuables that his family had originally deposited there. Meng Yü-lou also told him about how they had visited the ancestral graveyard on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, and how they had encountered Ch'un-mei at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, where she had gone to burn paper money at Chin-lien's grave site.
She also went on to say, "When I was still in the Hsi-men household, I constantly admonished the First Lady, saying, 'If you love your daughter, you should also love her husband. He is your own son-in-law, after all; it is not as though you are supporting a stranger.' But she believed the slander that petty people purveyed to her and consequently drove you out of the household. As for your later request to recover the trunks your family had entrusted to them, I know nothing about that."
"I will not attempt to deceive you," Ch'en Ching-chi said. "It is true that I was carrying on an affair with Sister Six, as everyone knew. But when the First Lady heard about it from those slaves of hers and drove her out of the household, she ended up being murdered by Wu Sung. If she had been allowed to remain in the household, that Wu Sung, even if he had possessed:
Seven heads and eight galls,
would never have dared to break into the household and kill her. My enmity for the First Lady is as deep as the sea, and Sister Six, though dead in the Underworld, will also never forgive her."
"Enough of that," objected Meng Yü-lou. "It's something you can't do anything about. It has always been true that:
It is better to resolve an enmity
than to contract one."[20]
As they were talking, a maidservant set up a table, and put out wine, cups, and an assortment of delicacies until its entire surface was filled.
Meng Yü-lou then poured out a cup of wine and proffered it to Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "Son-in-law, you have exposed yourself to:
The wind and dust of a long journey,[21]
and gratuitously expended a considerable sum on me. Please accept this meager cup of watery wine."
Ch'en Ching-chi took the cup in his hand, bowed to her, and poured out another cup of wine to proffer to her in return. After she expressed her gratitude, they sat down together.
Upon noticing that the woman insisted on addressing him as Son-in-law:
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"How is it that this whore refuses to recognize her vulnerability, but persists in addressing me as Son-in-law? I'd better sound her out gradually."
At the juncture, when:
Three rounds of wine had been consumed, and
Five courses of food had been provided,
the two of them continued:
Talking back and forth,
until the conversation started to warm up. By this time Ch'en Ching-chi's face was flushed with wine. As the saying goes:
The passions born of wine are
as deep as the sea;
Giving rise to lustful daring
as big as the sky.[22]
Seeing that no one else was present, Ch'en Ching-chi dropped several lines of suggestive language, saying, "Sister, your younger brother yearns for you:
Like a thirsty person longing for drink;
Like a parched person longing for coolness.
I remember, when I was residing in my father-in-law's household, how the two of us used to enjoy board games together, and play at dominoes, sitting across from each other, and feeling connected as intimately as the carapace to the turtle. Who could have guessed that today:
We would be apart from each other;[23]
You to the east and I to the west?"

Meng Yü-lou laughed at this, saying, "Son-in-law, that's a fine way to talk! It has always been true that:
The clear is ever clear,
The turbid ever turbid;
As in time will be seen."
Ch'en Ching-chi responded with an ingratiating smile, groped out of his sleeve a package containing lozenges of fragrant tea in the shape of embracing couples, and gave it to the woman, saying, "Sister, if you have any feeling for me, take pity on your younger brother, and agree to consume this fragrant tea."
So saying, he proceeded to kneel down in front of her. As for the woman:
A spot of red appeared beside each ear,
and the blood flew to her cheeks.
Taking the package of fragrant tea in her hand, she threw it onto the floor, saying:
"You wouldn't know a favor if you saw one.
I proffered wine to you with the best of intentions, and you turn around and play games with me this way."
So saying, she started to leave the table and head back to her room.
When Ch'en Ching-chi realized that she was not rising to his bait, he picked up the package of fragrant tea and called after her, saying, "I came to see you with the best of intentions, but you have apparently changed your mind about me. I dare say you think now that you have married a fine young man who is the son of an assistant prefect, you need not pay any attention to me; as though you never engaged in hanky-panky with me when you were the third concubine in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."
He then reached into his sleeve, pulled out the gold-plated silver hairpin that he had formerly picked up, and held it in his hand, saying, "Who does this object belong to? If you never had sexual relations with me, how did this pin of yours ever fall into my hands? Your name is actually engraved on it. You and the First Lady have been in cahoots to divide up the eight trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, including jade girdles, jewels, and the like, that belonged to Yang Chien at court, and were deposited with you to avoid confiscation at the time of his impeachment, and have brought your share of them with you upon marrying your new husband. Never you fear, when we appear in court I'll have something to say to you."
When Meng Yü-lou heard his accusation and realized that the hairpin he held really was the gold-plated hairpin in the shape of a lotus petal that she had worn on her head, but had lost in the garden on a former occasion, she wondered to herself, "How could it ever have fallen into the hands of this short-life?"
Fearing that if she made a fuss about it the servants might overhear them, she promptly put on an ingratiating smile, came back inside, and took Ch'en Ching-chi by the hand, saying, "My good son-in-law, I was only kidding. There's no reason to get so upset."
Seeing that:
There was nobody about,
she murmured softly:
"If you've got a mind to it,
I've got the will."
The two of them then:
Without permitting any further explanation,
fell to embracing each other and kissing.
Ch'en Ching-chi:
Like a snake devouring a swallow,
stuck his tongue into her mouth and told her to suck it, saying, "Call me your darling son-in-law. Only then will I believe that you really care for me."
"Keep it quiet," the woman said. "I fear that someone may overhear us."
Ch'en Ching-chi then whispered to her, saying, "I have bought half a boatload of merchandise which is waiting for me at the dock in Ch'ing-chiang P'u. If you deign to give yourself to me, thus and so, this evening, you can disguise yourself as a gatekeeper, surreptitiously make your way outside, and come home with me on the boat, so we can become man and wife. There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme. Your father-in-law is only a civil official, after all, and will seek to avoid trouble. He is scarcely likely to take the risk of trying to pursue or arrest you."
"In that case," the woman said, "so be it. Let us agree that tonight you will wait outside the rear wall of the yamen. I will let a bundle of gold and silver and other valuables down to you by a rope over the wall and then disguise myself as a gatekeeper, make my way outside, and go to embark on the boat with you."
Gentle reader take note: Truly:
If a beauty is well disposed,[24]
Not even a barrier a myriad feet in height
will serve to deter her;
If a woman is ill disposed,[25]
Though seated next to one, she is separated
by a thousand mountains.
If Meng Yü-lou had married a fool who was not the equal of Ch'en Ching-chi, this scheme of his might well have succeeded; but she had married the young squire Li Kung-pi, who had the prospect of a promising career before him and was also:
A man of romantic and engaging qualities,[26]
still in the springtime of his youth, whose:
Loving devotion could hardly be surpassed.[27]
Under these circumstances, how could he ever have thought he could seduce her? Aside from the fact that the two of them had not had any relationship in the past, the young gentleman was simply bound to fail in his endeavor. Having told the truth, and revealed his plans to her, he opened himself up to being deceived by the woman.
Truly:
Flowering branches, beneath their leaves,
conceal their thorns;
How can one ever be sure the human heart
contains no poison?
At this juncture, after the two of them had consulted together for a while, and Ch'en Ching-chi had downed several cups of wine, he said good-bye and prepared to leave. Li Kung-pi, forthwith, escorted him to the gate of the yamen and saw him off, with Ch'en An following in his wake.
Li Kung-pi then asked Meng Yü-lou, "Do you know where your brother is staying? I will go tomorrow to pay him a return call and give him some gifts for the road."
"Since when is he any brother of mine?" responded Meng Yü-lou. "He is Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law and has come with the intention, thus and so, of inveigling me into absconding with him. I have already arranged for him to wait outside the rear wall of the yamen at the third watch tonight, in order to:
Counteract his plot with one of my own,[28]
so we can have him arrested as a thief, and thereby eliminate any further trouble from him. What do you think?"
"How can that rascal act so outrageously?" the young squire responded. "It has always been true that:
He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.
It is not I who have sought him out,
He is seeking to find his own death."[29]
So saying, he strode outside, called together a few trusted attendants, and instructed them, thus and so, on the preparations he wished them to make.
Meanwhile, Ch'en Ching-chi, who was quite unaware of the counterplot he was up against, during:
The third watch in the middle of the night,
actually proceeded to take his servant Ch'en An with him, stand outside the rear wall of the prefectural yamen, and signal his presence with a cough. Meng Yü-lou coughed in response and then threw a length of rope with a large bundle of silver attached to the end of it over the wall to him. This silver consisted of two hundred taels that had been taken from the prefectural depository for money confiscated from criminals and levied in fines.
Ch'en Ching-chi was about to tell Ch'en An to pick it up and get out of the way when:
The sound of a watchman's clapper was heard,[30]
and four or five men suddenly appeared out of the dark shadows, calling out, "Thief! Thief!"
In no time at all, they bound Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An and reported the event to Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who ordered that they be incarcerated in the jail and brought before the bench the following morning.
It so happens that the presiding prefect of Yen-chou was a man named Hsü Feng, who was a native of Lin-t'ao prefecture in Shensi province, had passed the *chin-shih* examination in the year 1070 and was a man of absolute integrity and uprightness.
The next morning, he took his place on the bench, with two rows of lesser officials standing to either side, while Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i took the formal roll call, and the keeper of the repository reported on the theft, bringing Ch'en Ching-chi with him, and announcing, "Last night, during the third watch, the two initially unknown but now identified culprits Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An broke open the lock to the repository, stole two hundred taels worth of the money confiscated from criminals, climbed over the wall, and attempted to escape but were apprehended and are now ready to be brought before Your Honor."
Prefect Hsü Feng ordered that they be brought forward, and Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were, accordingly, hustled into the courtroom and made to kneel before the bench.
When the prefect saw that Ch'en Ching-chi was young and had a naturally clear-cut appearance, he questioned him, saying, "Where does this rascal come from, and why should he have come to this prefectural yamen of mine during the night, and stolen this amount of money confiscated from criminals from the government repository? What does he have to say for himself?"
Ch'en Ching-chi merely responded by kowtowing and protesting that he was being treated unjustly.
"Since you are guilty of larceny," said Prefect Hsü, "how can you claim to be treated unjustly?"
Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i bowed respectfully at his side and said, "Venerable sir, there is no reason for any further interrogation. The material evidence is before our eyes. Why do you not subject them to punishment?"
Prefect Hsü then ordered his subordinates to take them down and give them a flogging of twenty strokes with the bamboo.
Assistant Prefect Li remarked:
"Man is a miserable creature;
Unless you beat him he'll never confess.
Otherwise these thieves will try to wriggle out of it."
Thereupon, the lictors standing to either side took hold of Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An, turned them over, and began to beat them with the heavy bamboo.
Ch'en Ching-chi's only response was to curse, saying, "Who could have anticipated that that whore, Meng the Third, would try to ensnare me this way? It is unjust! It is bitter!"
Prefect Hsü Feng was an official with considerable experience in his prefectural office, and on hearing these cries, he thought to himself, "There must be something behind this."
After only ten strokes of the bamboo had been administered, he called out to the lictors, "That's enough for now. Take them back to the lockup, and we can continue the interrogation tomorrow."
Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i responded to this by saying, "Venerable sir, you ought not to let them off so easily. As the saying goes:
The human heart may be as hard as steel;
But legal prosecution is like a furnace.[31]
It may not matter if you let them off overnight, but it will give them an opportunity to concoct some alternative explanation."
"That will not be a problem," said Prefect Hsü. "I know what I'm doing."
Thereupon, the prison guards proceeded to take Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An back to the lockup.
Prefect Hsü Feng had some suspicions about the situation in his mind, so he summoned a trusted subordinate and instructed him, thus and so, to go to the lockup, endeavor to ascertain what lay behind the crime that had been committed, and then report back to him.
This man, thereupon, disguised himself as a prisoner, slept in the same cell with Ch'en Ching-chi that night, and asked him what had happened, saying, "Brother, you are still in the springtime of your youth and don't look like a criminal, but this day you have fallen into the clutches of the law and seem to be the victim of a miscarriage of justice."
Ch'en Ching-chi responded by saying:
"It's a long story.
I was originally the son-in-law of Hsi-men Ch'ing from Ch'ing-ho district. This woman, née Meng, who is the newly married bride of Assistant Prefect Li's son, was formerly a concubine of my father-in-law's, with whom I have had a sexual liaison. Now, on the occasion of her marriage, she brought with her ten trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, as part of her trousseau, that originally belonged to a relative of my family's, His Honor Yang Chien, who had entrusted them to my father-in-law's family for safekeeping. I came here with the intention of recovering them but have been double-crossed by her, thus and so, and ended up being arrested as a thief:
Severely beaten into making a confession,[32]
and rendered no longer able to see the light of day. It's really intolerable."
Having heard this, his questioner made his way back to the rear hall of the yamen and reported it to Prefect Hsü, who said, "Just as I suspected, there was a reason why this man claimed to have suffered an injustice at the hands of this woman, née Meng."
The next day, when he took his place on the bench, with two rows of lesser officials standing to either side, Prefect Hsü Feng had Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An haled before him, directed that a record be made of their testimony, declared their innocence, and ordered them to be set free.
Assistant Prefect Li Ch'ang-ch'i, who was sitting beside him, did not know what was going on and objected repeatedly, saying, "Venerable sir, the guilt of these rascals is apparent. How can you let them go free?"
But Prefect Hsü, in front of his assembled subordinates, gave Assistant Prefect Li a severe dressing down, saying, "I occupy the senior office in this prefecture and derive my authority from the Emperor. It would not be right for me, on your family's behalf, to:
Abuse the law to avenge a private dispute,[33]
and falsely accuse an innocent party of larceny. Your son has married the concubine, née Meng, of his deceased father-in-law, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who brought with her as part of her trousseau, trunkloads of gold and silver, and other valuables, that are subject to confiscation by the authorities. As Hsi-men Ch'ing's son-in-law, the accused has come here in the hope of recovering the said property. How can you bring yourself to frame him, have him arrested for a crime he did not commit, and then expect me to collaborate in this injustice on your family's behalf? As an official, one should:
Raise sons and raise daughters,
Hoping that they will become decent adults.
To allow them to act in this way, is a violation of justice."
In front of the court, he berated Assistant Prefect Li till his face turned red with embarrassment, and:
He hung his head in mortification,[34]
not daring to utter another word. Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were then allowed to go free.
Not long afterwards, Prefect Hsü retired from the bench, and Assistant Prefect Li returned to his own quarters with his mind in a state of extreme turmoil.
When his wife noticed this, she said, "Sir, normally when you return from the courtroom, you act as though:
Nothing in Heaven or Earth could

make you happier;
but today, you seem so unhappy. What's going on?"
"You're only a woman!" shouted Assistant Prefect Li. "What do you know about anything? You have given birth to a worthless son, and today, on his account, Prefect Hsü has subjected me to a severe dressing down in the open courtroom, in front of all the assembled subordinates. It's utterly enraging."
His wife was thrown into consternation by this response and asked, "What's it all about?"
Assistant Prefect Li merely called his son into his presence and shouted to his attendants, "Fetch a heavy bamboo cane. It's utterly enraging!"
He then addressed his son, saying, "You are responsible for bringing this woman into our household as your wife. And now, the son-in-law of her deceased husband has shown up, insisting, over and over again, that she brought with her as part of her trousseau trunkloads of gold and silver that belonged to the convicted court official Yang Chien and were entrusted to his father-in-law's family for safekeeping because they were subject to confiscation. He has come here in order to demand that you return them to him. He says that you surreptitiously removed government silver from the repository and used it to frame him as a thief. I didn't know a thing about this but have suffered a tongue lashing from Prefect Hsü in front of the entire contingent of other functionaries. This is something you have visited upon me when I have not even begun to exercise my authority for a single day. What use do I have for a worthless son like you?"
So saying, he ordered his attendants to begin beating him, and the strokes of the heavy bamboo fell on him like rain. Alas, the young squire was beaten until:
The skin was broken, the flesh was split, and
Fresh blood spurted out.
When the prefect's wife saw that he was being beaten until he was scarcely recognizable, she wept on the sidelines and urged her husband to desist. Meng Yü-lou, also, eavesdropped on the scene from inside the postern gate to the residential quarters in the rear and wiped away her tears.
After he had been given thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo, Assistant Prefect Li ordered his attendants, saying, "Take the young squire into custody, and expel that woman of his from the premises at once. She can remarry anyone she chooses, and thereby avoid any further scandal, and allow me to reassert my integrity."
The young squire, Li Kung-pi, could not bear the thought of being separated from her, and fell to weeping and pleading before his parents, saying, "I would rather allow myself to be beaten to death by my father than relinquish my wife."
Assistant Prefect Li ordered that the young squire should be shackled with iron chains, confined in the rear quarters of the yamen, and not allowed out, with the intention of letting him die there.
His wife wept at this, saying, "Sir, in the course of your career as an official you have reached the age of more than fifty years, and this is the only offspring that you possess. If you confine him until he dies on account of this woman, in the future, when you grow old and retire from office, on whom will you rely?"
"But if I don't do so," said Assistant Prefect Li, "he will only continue to make trouble for me with my colleagues."
"If you don't wish to allow him to remain here," responded his wife, "why not send the two of them back to our ancestral home in Chen-ting prefecture?"
The assistant prefect allowed himself to be persuaded by his wife and consented to let the young squire go. He was given a limit of three days in which to arrange for transportation and set out with his wife for his native place in Tsao-ch'iang district, where he was to continue his studies.
To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi and Ch'en An were released from the yamen in Yen-chou prefecture, they returned to the monastery where they had been staying, picked up their luggage, and went straight back to the inn of Ch'en the Second in Ch'ing-chiang p'u.
When they asked for Yang the Elder, they were told, "Three days ago he went to the prefectural yamen to look for you and was told that you had been incarcerated in the lockup, so he came back, took charge of his boatload of cargo, and headed for home."
Ch'en Ching-chi could hardly believe this, so he went down to the waterfront to see for himself but came up empty-handed, being unable to find the boat.
"That god-damned creature!" he exclaimed. "How could he fail to wait for me, but simply take off on his own?"
On top of everything else, having just been released from the lockup, he had nothing in the way of traveling expenses at his disposal. He and Ch'en An had no recourse but to take passage on another boat, pawn their garments to cover the cost, and scrounge for food on their way home:
As flustered as a dog who has
lost his way home;
As flurried as a fish who has
escaped the net.
Along the route, they sought for news of Yang the Elder but found no trace of him. At the time, it was already late autumn:
The trees were shedding leaves,
The metallic wind was turbulent,
and the atmosphere was desolate. There is a poem of eight lines that describes the hardships suffered by travelers in the autumn:
Stem by stem the caltrop and the lotus wither;
Leaf by leaf the phoenix tree's foliage falls.
The crickets chirp in the decaying grasslands;
The wild geese come down upon the level sands.[35]
Drizzling rain showers drench the green woods;
The frost is heavy as the weather gets colder.
Those who do not have to journey on the roads;
Are quite unable to savor the taste of autumn.[36]
On the day that Ch'en Ching-chi finally arrived home, the servant Ch'en Ting was standing in the doorway. When he saw Ch'en Ching-chi arrive and noticed that:
His clothing looked disheveled,[37] and
His face was dark with sunburn,
it gave him quite a start. After ushering him inside, he inquired about the whereabouts of his boatload of merchandise.
Ch'en Ching-chi was so angry that it took him what seemed like half a day to respond, telling him about the trial he had endured in Yen-chou prefecture, and saying, "I am lucky that the presiding officer, Prefect Hsü Feng, set me free. Otherwise:
My life would have been in jeopardy.[38]
And now, that god-damned creature Yang the Elder has made off with my merchandise, and who knows where he has taken it?"
The first thing Ch'en Ching-chi did was to send Ch'en Ting to Yang the Elder's home to see if he could find out anything, but they merely reported that he had not returned home yet. Ch'en Ching-chi then went in person to inquire about the situation but did not gain any information and came home and entered the house in a highly agitated state.
It so happens that Feng Chin-pao and Hsi-men Ta-chieh had proven to be incompatible:
One turning south and the other facing north.
Ever since Ch'en Ching-chi had embarked on his expedition, they had quarrelled with one another, right up until the day of his return.
Hsi-men Ta-chieh claimed that Feng Chin-pao had been secretly filching money to give to the procuress of the brothel from which she had been purchased, saying, "The servant from her place comes here all the time:
Surreptitiously acquiring things on the sly,
and purchasing wine and meat for her, which she consumes in her own room, while the rest of us do without. She sleeps until noon all the time and refuses to buy anything for the household, simply leaving the rest of us to put up with it."
Feng Chin-pao, for her part, said, "Hsi-men Ta-chieh is so habitually lazy she will:
Neither pick up a bent piece of hay,
Nor glean a standing stalk of grain.[39]
She pilfers rice to exchange for baked wheat cakes to eat, and marinated pork which she sneaks into her room to share with her maidservant Yüan-hsiao."
Ch'en Ching-chi believed this last accusation and accosted Hsi-men Ta-chieh, saying, "So, you lousy worthless whore! I guess you must be suffering from such:
Acute consumption or avid craving,
that you can't help pilfering rice to exchange for baked wheat cakes, and marinated pork to share with your maidservant."
So saying, he gave Yüan-hsiao a beating and kicked Hsi-men Ta-chieh a few times.
Hsi-men Ta-chieh was so upset by this that she chased after Feng Chin-pao and confronted her, head to head, saying, "What an adulterous whore you are! I suppose that the money you have been filching on behalf of that procuress of yours doesn't matter; but you actually have the gall to allege to my husband that I have been pilfering rice and meat for myself. This is a case of:
The curfew violator arresting the watchman.
And you have even incited my husband to kick me. I'll put my life up against yours any day, you whore. After all, what is it worth anyway?"
"What a fine whore you are!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "You offer to put your life up against hers, do you? You're not even worth as much as one of the toes on her feet."
This was one of those occasions on which:
Something was destined to happen,
and it turned out to be a catastrophe.
Thereupon, Ch'en Ching-chi, grabbed Hsi-men Ta-chieh by the hair with one hand and proceeded to pound her with his fist, kick her with his feet, and beat her with a stick. He beat her until blood oozed from her nostrils, and it seemed like half a day before she regained consciousness. Ch'en Ching-chi then retired to the quarters of his singing girl and went to sleep with her, leaving Hsi-men Ta-chieh in her own lesser quarters, where she gave way to:
Sobbing and wailing,
as she cried bitterly, while Yüan-hsiao retired to the adjacent room to sleep. Alas, in the middle of the night, Hsi-men Ta-chieh suspended a length of rope from the rafters, and:
Hanged herself until dead.
At the time of her death she was twenty-three years of age.
The next morning, when Yüan-hsiao got up, she tried to push open the door to her bedroom but could not do so. Ch'en Ching-chi and Feng Chin-pao, who were still in bed at the time, sent their maidservant Ch'ung-hsi to fetch a wooden basin from Hsi-men Ta-chieh's room, so they could wash their feet; but she, also, was not able to push the door open.
At this, Ch'en Ching-chi started to curse, saying, "That lousy whore! How can she still be asleep at this hour and refuse to get up? I'll go kick her door open and pull the hair off her head."
Ch'ung-hsi managed to look in the window and said, "She has already gotten up and is amusing herself in the room by swinging."
She then went on to say, "It looks as though she has suspended herself like a puppet on a string."[40]
Yüan-hsiao also looked inside for what seemed like half a day before exclaiming, "Master, it's tragic. The mistress is hanging from the rafters over the bed and appears to be dead."
Only then was the young gentleman alarmed enough to get out of bed, along with his singing girl, kick open the door to her room, cut the rope by which she was suspended, lay her down, and attempt to revive her for what seemed like half a day. But there was not a breath left in her. There was no way they could tell when it had happened, but:
Alack and alas,
she had died. Truly:
Who knows to what place her true nature
may have flown;
Unless it is in the flying clouds and the
autumn waters?[41]
When Ch'en Ting learned that Hsi-men Ta-chieh was dead, he was afraid of being implicated and went to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence to inform Yüeh-niang of what had happened.
When Yüeh-niang learned that Hsi-men Ta-chieh had committed suicide by hanging herself, and that Ch'en Ching-chi had brought a singing girl into his household, her feelings toward him were truly an instance of the adage:
When the ice is three feet thick,
It is not due to one day of cold.
Taking with her seven or eight of her page boys, maidservants, and servants' wives, she made her way straight to his place. When she set eyes on Hsi-men Ta-chieh's corpse, stretched out straight and stiff, she began to scream with rage, grabbed hold of Ch'en Ching-chi, and had her servants beat him until his entire body looked as though it had been gored with an awl in innumerable places. The singing girl Feng Chin-pao tried to hide under the bed, but she too was dragged out and beaten to a stinking pulp. Yüeh-niang had them smash the doors, windows, and walls of the house until they were in a shambles:
All at sevens and eights;[42]
and also ordered them to ransack her room, and carry away the beds and curtains and other remains of her trousseau. When she arrived home, she invited her brothers, Wu K'ai and Wu the Second, to come and consult with her about the situation.
Wu K'ai said, "Sister, if you don't seize this occasion, when a member of your family has perished, to take the case to court, in the future, when he has trouble making a living, he will come back and demand those trunks from you once again.
If one does not take thought for the future,
One is sure to meet with present misfortune.[43]
The best thing to do would be to take him to court and have the case settled once and for all, in order to:
Stave off any future catastrophe."
"Brother, what you say is right," responded Yüeh-niang, and they proceeded,
forthwith, to set about drafting an accusation.
The next day, Yüeh-niang went in person to the courtroom in the district yamen and submitted her accusation.
It so happens that the newly appointed district magistrate was named Huo Ta-li. He was a native of Huang-kang district in the Hu-kuang region, a holder of the provincial graduate degree, and a person of upright character. When he learned that the case was a serious one, involving a human fatality, he promptly took his place on the bench and accepted the accusation, which read as follows:

The plaintiff, née Wu, is a thirty-three-year-old woman who is the widow of the deceased Battalion Commander Hsi-men Ch'ing.

The target of her accusation is her unworthy son-in-law, who has taken advantage of her widowhood by crediting the accusations of a singing girl, and mistreating her daughter so egregiously that she has committed suicide by hanging herself. She importunes you to show her due consideration by undertaking a thorough investigation of this case, and thereby saving her from an early death.
The son-in-law in question, whose name is Ch'en Ching-chi, originally sought refuge by residing for some years in my husband's household because his family was implicated in a legal case. He is given to drinking to excess and becoming violent, is not the sort to abide by his lot, and is wont to take his cut of both outgo and income. For this reason, fearing legal entanglements, I expelled him from the household. I failed to anticipate that this Ch'en Ching-chi would harbor such hatred for me that he would constantly mistreat my daughter, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, in his own home, and force her to put up with it for some time. Unpredictably, he also brought a singing girl from Lin-ch'ing named Feng Chin-pao into his home and gave her the master suite in which to reside. Believing whatever she said to provoke him, he resorted to humiliating his wife in every way, beating her, pulling her hair, and kicking her until her entire body was covered with bruises, and she could not bear it any longer, feeling as though she was about to die. This year, on the twenty-third day of the ninth month, during the third watch of the night, he drove his wife to commit suicide by hanging herself. If I had not brought an accusation against him, I fear that this Ch'en Ching-chi, with his fierce and uncontrollable nature, would take advantage of my widowhood, since he has actually threatened to attack me with knife in hand. These circumstances are intolerable. [44] I therefore implore that you have him arrested and brought before you in order to examine thoroughly the facts behind my daughter's death. If this case is pursued according to the law, potential felons will be deterred, law-abiding citizens will be able to live in peace, and the dead will be relieved of their sense of injustice. This is the reason why I have brought this accusation before you, as the presiding magistrate of this district, Lord "Azure Heaven," in the hope that you will act upon it.

The district magistrate, Huo Ta-li, in his position on the bench, read the accusation, and observed that Wu Yüeh-niang was attired in mourning garments, was the widow of an official of the fifth rank, and that:
Her countenance was upright and correct, and
Her bearing both nonchalant and elegant.
He then bowed toward her, rose from his seat, and addressed her, saying, "Lady Wu, please stand up. I see that you are the widow of a duly appointed official, and I understand the charges that are enumerated in your accusation. Please return home. There is no need for you to remain here any longer. In the future, it will suffice to have a servant from your household attend the court proceedings. I will issue a warrant for his arrest here and now."
Wu Yüeh-niang promptly bowed to the district magistrate, went outside, and rode home in her sedan chair, delegating Lai-chao to monitor the court proceedings for her.
The magistrate then signed the deposition and deputed two yamen runners with a bench warrant to take Ch'en Ching-chi and the singing girl Feng Chin-pao into custody, along with the neighbors to either side of his residence, and the head of the relevant mutual security unit, who were required to attend the court in person for the scheduled hearing.
Ch'en Ching-chi was at home at the time, engaged in making the funeral arrangements. When he heard that Wu Yüeh-niang had lodged an accusation against him, and that the district yamen had sent runners with a warrant for his arrest, he was so perturbed that:
His ethereal souls flew beyond the sky, and
His material souls fled to the nine heavens.
Feng Chin-pao, for her part, had been so badly beaten that:
Her entire body was racked with pain,[45]
and she was trying to recuperate by lying in bed. When she heard that runners had come to arrest her:
Her fear was so great,
She lost her bearings.
Ch'en Ching-chi impulsively offered money to the runners in order to treat them to wine and food, but they proceeded to truss him up, together with the singing girl, with a single length of rope, and drag them off to the district yamen, along with their next-door neighbors Fan Kang, who lived to the left, and Sun Chi, who lived to the right, and the head of the mutual security unit, Wang K'uan.
When the district magistrate Huo Ta-li saw that the wanted persons had been duly arrested, he promptly took his place on the bench, while Lai-chao knelt up front, and Ch'en Ching-chi, Feng Chin-pao, and the rest knelt at the foot of the steps.
After rereading the accusation, the district magistrate called Ch'en Ching-chi before him and said, "So you are Ch'en Ching-chi."
He then went on to ask, "Which of you is Feng Chin-pao?"
Feng Chin-pao replied, "I am Feng Chin-pao."
The district magistrate then proceeded to interrogate Ch'en Ching-chi, saying, "What a despicable rascal you are. How could you have believed the allegations of that singing girl, and beaten Hsi-men Ta-chieh so severely that she hung herself? What have you got to say in your defense?"
Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him and said, "I beseech Your Honor, Lord 'Azure Heaven,' to investigate the facts in this case. How could I have dared to beat her so severely as to cause her death? It is all because a manager of mine has absconded with the capital I entrusted to him, so that I arrived home in a bad temper and asked her to prepare a meal for me, which she refused to do, that I kicked her a couple of times. Then, in the middle of the night, she:
Hanged herself until dead."
"Since you have taken this singing girl into your household," exclaimed the magistrate, "why should you have imposed upon your wife to prepare a meal for you? It doesn't make any sense. The accusation lodged by the Lady Wu states that it was only because you had beaten her daughter nearly to death that she hung herself. Yet you still refuse to acknowledge it."
"The Lady Wu and I are enemies," protested Ch'en Ching-chi. "That is why she is falsely accusing me. I hope that Your Honor will investigate the facts of the case."
The magistrate was enraged at this and said, "The fact is that her daughter is dead. Who else do you propose to blame for it?"
He then ordered his attendants to take Ch'en Ching-chi down and give him twenty strokes with the heavy bamboo; and he had Feng Chin-pao haled before him, put into the squeezers, and given one hundred strokes on them. When these procedures had been carried out, the runners were ordered to take the culprits off and lock them up.
The next day, he deputed the docket officer Tsang Pu-hsi to take a clerk, along with the head of the mutual security unit, and the next-door neighbors, and proceed to Ch'en Ching-chi's home, where the corpse was brought out and subjected to a formal inquest. It was found that since Hsi-men Ta-chieh's entire body was covered with bruises, and there were rope marks around her throat, it must have been true that Ch'en Ching-chi had kicked and beaten her so severely that she could not bear it any longer and had:
Hanged herself until dead.
Depositions were taken, bond was posted for the witnesses, and the inquest report was duly filled out and submitted upon their return to the district yamen.
The magistrate was incensed at this and ordered that both Ch'en Ching-chi and Feng Chin-pao should be stripped and subjected to another ten strokes of the bamboo. He then issued a provisional finding that Ch'en Ching-chi, who was judged guilty of the crime of beating his wife to death, should be sentenced to strangulation; and that Feng Chin-pao should be sentenced to a hundred strokes of the bamboo and sent back to serve in the brothel from which she had come.
Ch'en Ching-chi was thrown into a panic by this and wrote a note in his prison cell directing Ch'en Ting to scrape together the sum of a hundred taels of silver from the capital of his piece goods store and Hsi-men Ta-chieh's head ornaments, and deliver it secretly to the district magistrate.
That night, the district magistrate altered the deposition so that the provisional judgement read that the defendant had coerced his wife to death, which was only a miscellaneous capital crime, redeemable by five years of penal servitude, or commutation in return for a payment to be used for the transport of charcoal.
When Wu Yüeh-niang learned of this, she knelt in front of the yamen gate and pled for reconsideration of the finding.
The district magistrate responded by calling her before him and saying. "My lady, your daughter was found to have rope marks around her throat, so how can you claim that her husband is guilty of beating her to death? To do so is surely to make a travesty of justice. If you are afraid that he will continue to molest you in the future, I will issue a written injunction prohibiting him from ever visiting your premises again."
He then had Ch'en Ching-chi brought before him and enjoined him, saying, "I have chosen to spare your life today, but it is essential that you should:
Correct your faults and renew yourself.
You must never again make trouble for the household of the Lady Wu. If you are ever brought before me for doing so in the future, I will certainly not spare you. You must immediately purchase a coffin for your wife, see that her corpse is dressed for burial, arrange for a funeral procession, and take care of her burial. When you report back to me, I will then forward the necessary documents to the higher authorities."
Ch'en Ching-chi, having been spared execution, turned over the sum of money required to commute his sentence and returned home, where he had Hsi-men Ta-chieh's corpse encoffined, arranged for her to lie in state until the first weekly commemoration was over, held a scripture recitation in her honor, and had her taken outside the city to be buried. Altogether, he had endured incarceration for half a month, had been compelled to expend a considerable sum of silver, and had been deprived of the singing girl Feng Chin-pao. His belongings had been completely cleaned out, he had been forced to sell his home, he had barely escaped with his life, and he no longer dared to bring charges against his mother-in-law. Truly:
Disaster and good fortune have no gateways, people bring them on themselves; [46]
One must be aware that when joy reaches its zenith, it gives birth to sorrow. [47]
A poem testifies to this:

Storms may be stirred up in untroubled waters within domestic confines;
The value of rectitude and worth of kindness[48] should never be forgotten.
When the Blue Bridge was inundated by water[49] a meeting was expected;
But the 3 lovers have become separated like Orion and Antares.

The savage tiger trusts to its own strength
But often is taken unawares.
It growls like thunder then, but that is all,
For the chains are set upon its legs.
When we see the tiger sleeping,
Its eyes have not the fierceness that we know.
The life of man is in worse case
Should evil men then not take heed?
Ximen Dajie came to Chen Jingji with all her belongings, but they were continually quarreling. He had asked his mother to give him some money to set him up in business. His Uncle Zhang borrowed fifty taels of silver from Mistress Chen and asked Jingji to find some work for him. One day, Jingji got drunk and quarreled with his uncle. This upset the uncle very much. He went elsewhere to borrow money and repaid the fifty taels he had had from his sister. This so distressed Mistress Chen that she fell ill. She had to go to bed; the doctors were sent for, and she took their medicine. Her son worried her so much about money that she gave him two hundred taels and Chen Ding was bidden to start a cloth shop at the front of the house. Jingji invited Lu the Third and Yang, and other foxy and doggish friends, to come to the shop, play the lute, gamble, and dice. This happened every day and, as they drank until midnight, the money was soon gone. Chen Ding told his mistress what was happening, and she placed her confidence in him. But Jingji accused Chen Ding and his wife of making money for themselves out of the dyeing of the cloth, and dismissed them. Then he asked Yang the Elder, whose name was Yang Guanyan, to be his manager.
This man's nickname was Iron Fingernails. He was a thorough-paced rascal, a magnificent liar, and skilled in the art of making something out of nothing. When he promised anything to anyone, they had as much chance of getting it as of catching a shadow, but when he made up his mind to get money out of anybody, it seemed as easy as if he took it from a sack.
Chen Jingji got another three hundred taels from his mother, so now his business had cost five hundred taels. First he had to go to buy cloth at Linqing. Yang went home, packed his baggage, then went back to Jingji and they started together for Linqing to buy what they needed. It was a place of considerable importance and a center of trade. People came to it from all sides. There were thirty-two flower and willow streets and seventy-two halls of music. Jingji was still young and only too glad to go with Yang to places of this sort instead of occupying himself with the purchases he had to make.
One day they went to a house where they saw a girl called Feng Jinbao. She was attractive and beautiful, and perfect from every point of view. They asked how old she was.
"She is my own daughter," the old procuress told them, "and my only source of livelihood. She is just sixteen years old."
Jingji was entranced. He gave the old woman five taels of silver and spent several nights with Feng Jinbao. When Yang saw how absorbed in the girl the young man was, so that he could not be persuaded to leave her, he suggested that Jingji should marry the girl and take her home with him. The old procuress demanded a hundred and twenty taels, but, after some discussion, she came down to a hundred. Jingji paid the money and took away the girl. She sat in a sedan chair; Yang and Jingji rode on horseback with the cloth they had bought. They cracked their whips, set their horses at the gallop, and were very pleased with themselves.
When they got home, Mistress Chen was so much upset to find that they had only bought a small supply of merchandise and that her son had married a singing girl that she died. Jingji bought a coffin, put his mother in it, called in some monks to hold a service and buried her in about a week's time. Her brother Zhang remembered how kind she had been to him and made no trouble with Jingji.
As soon as the young man came back from the grave, he set up his mother's tablet in the upper room and gave the other two rooms to Feng Jinbao, leaving only a little room for his wife. Then he bought a maid called Chongxi for Feng Jinbao. Yang looked after the shop and Jingji stayed at home and enjoyed the finest of food and drink. He spent every night with the singing girl and paid not the slightest attention to his wife.
One day he heard that Meng Yulou had married the magistrate's son and taken with her a considerable amount of property. Then the magistrate's term of office expired, and he was made Sub-Prefect at Yanzhou. He went to take up this new appointment. This reminded Jingji that he had once picked up one of Yulou's pins in the garden. He decided that he would take this pin with him to Yanzhou, and, with that as his evidence, claim that Yulou had had an intrigue with him and had given him the pin. He would say that everything she had brought with her from Ximen's household really belonged to Yang Jian and should have been confiscated.
The magistrate Li, he thought, was only a civil officer and not one of very high rank, and a few sharp words would induce him to order his son to give up Yulou. "Then," the young man said to himself, "I will bring her back with me and, with Feng Jinbao, I shall have two women for my enjoyment." Unfortunately for him, the matter did not turn out as pleasantly as he expected.
He opened his mother's chests and took a thousand taels of silver. He gave a hundred to Feng Jinbao and re-engaged Chen Ding to look after the shop. Then he and Yang, with his servant Chen An, took the remaining nine hundred taels and set off for Huzhou at the time of the Autumn Festival. There they bought silk of various kinds enough to load half a boat. Then they came to the wharf of Qingjiang. They moored their boat and went to an inn kept by a man called Chen the Second. They ordered chickens to be killed and called for wine, and Jingji and Yang the Elder drank together.
While they were drinking, Jingji said to his friend: "You stay here a few days and keep an eye on the boat, and Chen An and I will go to visit my sister who is married to a nobleman at Yanzhou. We shall be back in three or four days."
"Yes, Brother, go by all means," Yang said. "I will wait for you and, when you come back, we will start for home."
So Jingji took his money and some presents and set out for Yanzhou. When he came to the city, he lodged at a temple. He heard that the new Sub-Prefect Li had entered upon his office a month before, but that his family had only arrived three days ago. Jingji wasted no time. He bought some food, put it with two rolls of silk and two jars of wine, and gave them to Chen An to carry. Then he dressed in his best clothes, and so, looking very handsome, came to the Prefecture. There he bowed to the gatekeeper.
"Excuse me," he said, "but I am a relative of your master's daughter-in-law."
The gatekeeper went at once to tell his master. The young man was in his study, reading. When he was told that his wife's brother had come, he ordered the servants to take the presents, and told the gatekeeper to introduce the visitor. He put on his ceremonial dress.
Jingji was taken to the hall, and there he and Master Li made reverence to one another.
"When I married," Master Li said, "I was not aware that my wife had a brother."
"I was away then," Jingji said, "buying goods in Sichuan and Guangdong. I was away about a year and did not know that my sister had married. I am sorry. But now I have brought a few trifles and have come in the hope of seeing my sister."
"I am only sorry I did not know you before," Master Li said.
When they had had tea, the young man ordered a servant to take the presents and the card to Yulou. She was in her room when the message came.
"It must be my brother, Meng Rui, who has come all this way to see me," she said. She looked at the card, and it bore Meng Rui's name. She gave instructions that the visitor should be taken in, told Lanxiang to see that the great hall was tidy, and, when she had dressed, went to see her brother. Through the lattice, she saw her husband with a young man. It was not her brother but Chen Jingji.
"What can this young man be doing here?" she said to herself. "I must go and see. Even if we are not relatives, we belong to the same part of the world, and whether the water tastes sweet or not, it is the water of my native place. Though he is not my brother, he is my son-in-law."
She went in and greeted Chen Jingji.
"Sister," he said, "I did not know that you were married and living here."
The words were hardly out of his mouth when a servant came and told Li that another guest had arrived. He asked his wife to entertain her brother and went to receive the other visitor.
"What wind blows you here?" Yulou said.
When they had exchanged greetings, Yulou asked him to sit down, and told Lanxiang to bring some tea. They talked about the affairs of the family. Yulou inquired after Ximen Dajie, and Jingji told her how his wife and all her belongings had been sent to him. Yulou told him that she had met Chunmei at the Temple of Eternal Felicity at the Festival of Spring, and that she had burned paper offerings there for Pan Jinlian.
"I often used to tell the Great Lady that she should love you as well as her daughter-in-law," she said. "After all, you are her son-in-law and not a stranger. But she would believe the gossip that came to her ears, and that is how you came to be sent away. I never heard anything about your property."
"It is true that I did have dealings with Jinlian," Jingji said. "The Great Lady believed what the slaves said and drove me away. Then Wu Song killed Jinlian. If she had still been in that house, Wu Song, however bold a man he may be, would never have dared to go and kill her. That is a fact I shall never forget. Now Jinlian is dead and in Hades, and she will never forgive."
"Well, it is all over and done with now," Yulou said; "as the proverb says: hatred should be forgotten and not made more intense."
The maids brought food and wine and set it on the table. Yulou poured out a cup of wine and offered it to Jingji with both hands. "Brother-in-law," she said, "you have come a long way and spent much money on me. Please accept this poor cup of wine." Jingji bowed to her and took it. Then he poured out a cup for her. He noticed that she always addressed him as Brother-in-law. "Why doesn't the strumpet take the hint?" he said to himself. "Now let us see what happens."
The wine was passed three times, and they had reached the fifth course. They seemed to be getting on very well. Jingji's face was flushed with wine and, as the proverb says: wine makes desire as deep as the sea and stirs up lust as high as the heavens. There was nobody about, and he began to make evil suggestions.
"I have thought of you," he said, "as a thirsty man thinks of water, as a man seeks refreshment from the blazing heat. You remember how, when my father-in-law was alive, we used to sit close together playing chess. We never thought we should have to separate, and that you would be in the east and I in the west."
"No, Brother-in-law," Yulou said, "but don't forget the difference between right and wrong."
Jingji smiled, took some fragrant tea from his sleeve and gave it to Yulou. "Sister," he said, "if you will have pity on me, take this tea." He knelt down before her.
Yulou flushed, and threw the tea on the floor. "Evidently, you have no idea how to behave in a proper manner," she said. "I was good enough to offer you wine, and now you think you can behave as you like with me." She got up from the table and prepared to go to her room.

When Jingji found that she would not do what he wished, he picked up the tea. "I came here to see you," he said, "but how you have changed. I suppose now you have married the son of a Sub-Prefect I'm not good enough for you any more. When you were the third lady in Ximen Qing's household, things were very different, weren't they?"
He took the silver pin from his sleeve and held it out. "Whose is this pin?" he cried. "If you never had anything to do with me, what am I doing with it? Your name is on it. You and that woman plotted together to share between you all the precious things I left there. They belonged to Yang Jian, and the authorities should have had them. Now you have brought them to this new husband of yours, but wait and see whether I don't bring you to the place where you belong."
Yulou heard this. She knew that the pin was really hers. It was a pin with a gold head shaped like a lotus. She remembered losing it in the garden, but had no idea how Jingji had got hold of it. She was afraid the servants might hear of it, so she smiled at him. She even went over to him and took his hand.
"Good Brother-in-law," she said, "why did you take me seriously? I was joking."
She looked around, saw that there was nobody about, and said quietly: "If you care for me, I care for you too." No more was said. They put their arms about one another and kissed. Jingji put out his tongue like a snake's and made her take it into her mouth.
"You must call me your dearest husband, or I will not believe you," he said.
"Hush!" Yulou said. "Somebody will hear us."
"On a boat in the river I have some goods that I have bought," Jingji said. "We will go to it together. This evening, you can disguise yourself as a servant and come with me. I don't see why we should not. He is only a civil official and will not make any trouble. He won't dare to come and arrest us."
"Very well," Yulou said. "I agree. Come for me this evening and wait at the back of the house. First of all, I will throw a parcel of valuables over the wall. Then I will dress as a servant and come to you by the door and we will go to your boat."
Readers, when a beautiful woman takes an idea firmly into her head, even if the walls are ten thousand feet high, she cannot be prevented from carrying it out. But if she rejects it, you may be sitting in the same room with her, yet it will be as though a thousand mountains kept you apart.
If Yulou had married a fool, a man who was not so attractive as Chen Jingji, Jingji would certainly have succeeded in seducing her, but she had married young Li, who not only had a future in store for him, but was a brisk and lively fellow. She loved him and was quite content with her marriage. There was no reason why she should yield to Jingji. The unfortunate young man told her all his plans, but she deceived him.
When Jingji had drunk more wine, he went away. Young Master Li took him to the gate, and he went away with Chen An.
"Where is your brother staying?" Master Li asked his wife. "I must call on him tomorrow and take some sort of a present."
"He is not my brother at all," Yulou said. "He is Ximen Qing's son-in-law, and he came here because he wanted me to run away with him. I told him I would wait for him this evening at the back of the house. I mean to cheat him so that he is arrested as a thief and got rid of finally."
"Really, the fellow goes beyond all bounds," Master Li said. "But without my going to see him, he will come of his own accord and meet his death at my hands." He went out and told a trusted servant.
Jingji suspected nothing. At the third night watch, he came to the back of the house with Chen An. He coughed and Yulou answered. Then, over the wall, some silver was lowered at the end of a rope. It was about two hundred taels and had been taken from the official treasury. Jingji had hardly told Chen An to take it, when the watchman's alarm sounded, and four or five tall fellows came running out, crying: "Thief! Thief!" They seized Jingji and Chen An. The matter was reported to the Sub-Prefect, and he gave orders that the men should be thrown into jail and brought up for examination the next day.
The Prefect of Yanzou was called Xu Feng. He came from Lintao in Shaanxi. He had taken his examination in *Gengxu,* and was a very just and honorable man. He came to the hall of justice, and all the officers attended him. Sub-Prefect Li came and signed his name in the register. Then an official came and told Xu about the case, and Jingji was brought in.
"Last night," the official said, "about the third night watch, these two men, whose names we now know to be Chen Jingji and Chen An, broke open the treasury door and stole about two hundred taels of silver that are the proceeds of other cases. Then they jumped over the wall, but were caught and arrested."
The Prefect ordered his men to bring forward the thieves, and Chen Jingji and Chen An were hustled towards him. They knelt down. The Prefect saw that Jingji was only a young man and very good-looking. "Young fellow," he said, "where do you come from? What do you mean by coming to a government building to steal money belonging to the treasury? Have you anything to say?"
Jingji kowtowed again and again and protested he was innocent.
"How can you be innocent?" the Prefect said. "You stole the money, didn't you?"
Then the Sub-Prefect, who was sitting beside Xu, bowed and said: "My lord, ask him no more. The silver was found upon him. Why do you hesitate to punish him?"
The Prefect ordered Jingji to be given twenty strokes.
"Men are hard creatures," the Sub-Prefect said. "They never confess without a good beating. This young man, you see, is no exception to the rule."
The attendants threw Jingji to the ground and beat him with a thick cane. He yelled and shrieked. "I never realized what that strumpet Meng was up to," he cried. "It is she who has done this. Oh dear! Oh dear!"
Now Xu was a man who had taken a degree and, when he heard this, he thought there must be something underneath. When the young man had had ten strokes, he gave orders that he should be taken back to prison and brought up again the next day.
"That, I suggest, is the wrong course," the Sub-Prefect said. "The proverb tells us that men's hearts are as hard as iron, but the law is heavy as a mountain. If you give him one night, he will take back his confession in the morning."
"I know what I am doing," the Prefect said, and again told the jailers to put Jingji into prison. He was somewhat suspicious as to what was behind this case, and sent a man he trusted to the prison to ask Jingji what it was all about. The man disguised himself as one of the prisoners and spent the night with Chen Jingji.
"Brother," he said, "you are a young man and you do not look like a thief. I believe you are innocent."
"It is a long story," Jingji said. "I am the son-in-law of Ximen Qing of Qinghe. The woman Meng, who married Sub-Prefect Li's son, was one of my father-in-law's wives. Once she had a love affair with me, and now she has brought ten chests of gold and silver and precious things to Li's son. Those things once belonged to Yang Chien, and he left them in my father-in-law's care. I came here to ask for them, but they laid this trap for me and I fell into it. They arrested me as a thief and made me confess. Oh dear! Oh dear! Now I can see the blue sky and the sun no more."
The Prefect's servant went back and told all this to his master.
"When he mentioned the woman Meng, I wondered what there was at the back of it," the Prefect said.
The next day, he came again to the hall, and Chen Jingji and Chen An were brought before him. The Prefect extracted the real truth from the young man and set him free. The Sub-Prefect, who did not know what had happened, said: "My lord, he stole the money. Why do you let him go?"
The Prefect rebuked his assistant before all the other officers. "I am the Prefect here," he said, "and I serve his Majesty faithfully. It is not my business to take up your private quarrels, and to brand this innocent young man as a thief. Your son married a woman named Meng, one of Ximen Qing's concubines, and she brought with her many things that ought to have been handed over to the government. This young man is Ximen Qing's son-in-law, and he came to claim them. You have no right whatever to make him out a thief and try to have him punished as such. I am not here to do your dirty work. You are an officer and you have children, and you are trying to forward your children's interests. If this is the way you do it, it is an offense against justice."
The Sub-Prefect was ashamed. He flushed and bowed his head. It was a great blow to his pride, and he dared not say a word. Chen Jingji and Chen An went away.
When the Prefect had retired, Li went home in a furious temper. "This is the son you have reared for me," he cried to his wife. "He has caused the Prefect to insult me in the presence of all the officers. It nearly killed me."
His wife was upset and asked what was the matter.
The Sub-Prefect sent for his son and told the servants to bring him a thick rod. "Now!" he cried. "That thief you said you caught is Ximen Qing's son-in-law. That woman of yours brought many things away from Ximen's house and the young man said in the court that they had belonged to the criminal Yang Chien. He came here to demand them. You told me that he stole silver from the treasury and got me to treat him as a thief. I knew nothing at all of the truth, and the result is that I have been disgraced by the Prefect before all the officers of the court. That is what my son does for me, and I have only been in this post a few months. What use is such a son to me?"
He ordered his servants to beat the young man, and the blows rained down upon him. His flesh and skin were torn and the blood gushed out. The old lady could not bear the sight, and sobbed and tried to make her husband stop. Yulou stood, weeping, at the corner door.
When the young man had been given thirty strokes, the Sub-Prefect bade his servants stop.
"Get rid of this woman at once," he said. "Let her marry whom she pleases. I am not going to have her here to ruin my family."
Young Master Li could not bear this. He knelt down before his parents and cried: "I would rather die than give up this woman."
Then the Sub-Prefect ordered his servants to shut up the young man in a room at the back of the house. He was put in chains, for his father meant him to die there.
"My lord," the Sub-Prefect's wife said to him, "you are of official rank, and you are more than fifty years of age. You have only this one son. It is not right that you should let him die for the sake of this woman. When you are old and retired, who will care for you?"
"No," the Sub-Prefect said, "so long as he is here, I shall have everybody insulting me."
"Then send them away to Zhengdingfu, where our home is, if you won't have them here," his wife said.
The Sub-Prefect agreed. The young man was brought out again and told that he would have to take his wife and leave for his native place within three days.
When Chen Jingji and Chen An left Yanzhou, they removed their luggage from the temple and went back to the inn where they had left Yang.
"Yang told me he had received a letter from you saying you were not coming back," the host said. "He has taken everything and gone."
Jingji could not believe this. He went to the river to look for the boat, but it was not to be seen. "What an outrageous scoundrel!" he said then. "Why did he go away without waiting for me?" He had just come out of prison and had no money. So he and Chen An got on a boat and pawned their clothes to pay the passage money. They looked like a pair of stray dogs, like fish wriggling out of the net. All the way along, they asked for news of Yang the Elder, but heard nothing. It was now the end of autumn. The leaves were withered in the woods, and the West wind drove fiercely. It was sad and cold.
Sadly, the lotus withers
Leaf after leaf, the *Wutong* fades
The crickets chirp in the rotted grass
The wild goose rests on the barren sand
A fine rain drenches the dark forest
A heavy frost chills the air.
He who is not a wayfarer
Will never know what Autumn is.
At last Chen Jingji reached home. Chen Ding was standing at the door. Jingji's face was as black as lacquer and his clothes were nothing but rags. The servant was shocked. He took his master in and asked him where the boat was.
For a long time the young man could not speak. Then he told the servant what had happened to him in Yanzhou. "Fortunately," he said, "the Prefect set me free or my life would have been in danger. Then that heaven-destroying rascal Yang stole my merchandise, and I have no idea where he has gone." He told Chen Ding to go to Yang's house to find out if he had returned. Chen Ding was told that Yang the Elder had not yet come home. Then Jingji himself went to Yang's house, but could get no information. He was very much upset and went to his wife's room. He found her quarreling with Feng Jinbao. Indeed the two women had spent all their time quarreling while he had been away.
His wife said that Feng Jinbao had given a great sum of money to the old procuress and that the old woman came every day, stole things away, and brought food and wine that she ate with her daughter. She herself could get nothing to eat. Feng Jinbao used to sleep until noon and would not give her a penny to buy anything with.
Feng Jinbao said that Ximen Dajie did not do a stroke of work. She would not even stoop down to pick up a piece of straw. She stole rice and changed it for buns. She stole the preserved meats and ate them with her maid.
Chen Jingji believed what Feng Jinbao said and cursed his wife. "You whore!" he cried. "Are you starving that you must steal rice and change it for buns? And you and your maid have been stealing meat."
He beat the maid and kicked his wife. This annoyed her so much that she went and beat her head against her enemy's. "You whore!" she cried. "It was you who stole the things and gave them to the old whore. Yet you lie to my husband and say I stole them. That is like the thief arresting the policeman. You told my husband to kick me. Well, I will live no longer and you shall die with me."
"How dare you, you little strumpet," Jingji cried. "You are not worth one of her little toes."
With one hand he seized his wife's hair and beat her with the other. He kicked her, too. She bled from nose and mouth and was unconscious for a long time. Jingji went to the other room with the singing girl.
Alone in her room, Ximen Dajie sobbed bitterly. Her maid went to sleep in another room. At midnight, Ximen Qing's daughter tied a rope around the beam and hanged herself. She was only twenty-four years old.
The next morning, when her maid got up and tried to open the door, she could not. Jingji and Feng Jinbao were still in bed. Feng Jinbao told her maid to go to Ximen Dajie and ask for a bowl so that she could wash her feet. But the maid could not open the door.
"What!" Jingji cried. "Is she still in bed? It is not early now. I will go and open the strumpet's door and pull her hair for her."
The maid looked through the window. "She is up there," she said: "I can see her swinging. She looks as if she were trying to be one of the dolls in a puppet play."
Then Ximen Dajie's maid looked through the window. "Father," she cried, "Mother has hanged herself."
Chen Jingji was much disturbed at this. He and Feng Jinbao got up. They forced open the door and cut Ximen Dajie down. But she had been dead a long time, and nobody knew the hour at which she had died.
When Chen Ding heard of his mistress's death, he was afraid he might be involved in the matter and went to tell Wu Yueniang. So she heard that her daughter had hanged herself and her son-in-law had taken up with a singing girl. The hatred between herself and Jingji was like ice three feet thick, not the result of one night's frost. She went with servants, maids, and women, seven or eight of them, and came to Jingji's door. There she roundly declared that her daughter had hanged herself, and made a great to-do. She seized Jingji and beat him and even stuck awls into him. The singing girl, Feng Jinbao, hid under a bed, but was dragged out and beaten until she was half dead. They smashed the doors and windows and took away the bed and curtains and furniture that had belonged to Ximen Dajie.
Then Yueniang went home and sent for Uncle Wu the Elder and
Uncle Wu the Second.
"Sister," Uncle Wu the Elder said, "we must take this opportunity and bring him before the courts, or he will make things very unpleasant in the future. He is sure to come and demand his property, and, if we don't look a long way ahead, we shall have trouble. We had better go to law at once and have the thing settled once and for all."
"Brother, you are right," Yueniang said.
They drew up an accusation and, the next day, Yueniang herself went to the magistrate. When she went to the Town Hall, her accusation was sent in.
The new magistrate was called Huo Dali. He was a graduate and a native of Huanggang, an upright and conscientious man. When he was told about the suicide, he went to the hall and took the accusation. It said:
The accuser is the Lady Wu, thirty-four years of age, widow of the late Ximen Qing, Captain. She accuses her evil son-in-law as a deceiver and oppressor. He believed the words of a strumpet and forced his wife to hang herself. The Lady Wu implores you to investigate this matter and save her life.
This son-in-law is Chen Jingji. He came to her when he was in trouble and lived in her house for many years. He was fond of wine and caused trouble. He was undutiful and created disturbances within and without the household. Being a law-abiding woman, she got rid of him. Ever since that time he has hated her and treated his wife badly. He beat her and ill-used her, but she bore it for a long time.
Then he brought home a strumpet from Linqing, a certain Feng Jinbao. This woman occupied the room that should have been the Lady Wu's daughter's. He believed whatever she said to him, and ill-used his wife in every way. He pulled her hair and kicked her till her body was covered with bruises, and she could bear it no longer.
Then, at the third night watch on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of this year, she hanged herself.
This Chen Jingji obstinately seeks to oppress the Lady Wu, and threatens that he will kill her also. This is intolerable, and she implores your Lordship to arrest and try him for being the cause of her daughter's death.
So may evil doers know the law, and the good live in peace. So will the dead be avenged.
With this accusation, the Lady Wu accuses this man. To the Magistrate of the District, whose justice is that of the Blue Heavens.
The magistrate looked at Yueniang. She was wearing white. She was, he remembered, the widow of an officer of the fifth class. She was dignified in manner and refined in appearance. He rose and said: "Lady, stand up. I believe you are the widow of an officer. I understand. Go home and leave a servant to take your place here. I will have the man arrested at once."
Yueniang thanked him and went home in a sedan chair, leaving Laizhao behind. The magistrate ordered two runners to take the white badge to their office and arrest Chen Jingji and Feng Jinbao, and order the attendance of the watchman in that neighborhood.
Jingji was very busy making preparations for the funeral when he heard that runners had been sent to arrest him at the request of his mother-in-law. He was almost distracted. Feng Jinbao, who was in bed after the beating she had received at Yueniang's hands, was so terrified when she heard that she was under arrest, that she hardly knew whether she was alive or dead. Without stopping to think, Jingji tried to bribe the runners, but the runners bound them with one cord and hauled them to the Town Hall. The neighbors and the local watchman went to the Town Hall with them.
When the magistrate heard that they had come, he went again to the hall. Laizhao knelt down on the left, Chen Jingji, Feng Jinbao and the others on the steps.
"You wicked man," the magistrate said to Jingji, "why did you listen to this singing girl and cause your wife's death? Have you anything to say?"
"My lord," Jingji said, "I did not beat her. It is all because of a partner I had who went away with me to do business. He stole my money, and when I came home I was in a very bad temper. I asked her for some food and she would not listen to me. I did kick her that time. Then, in the night, she hanged herself and so died."
"You had that strumpet," the Magistrate said angrily. "Why should you ask your wife to get you food? It was unreasonable. According to the accusation that has been brought against you, you beat your wife and she killed herself. Is that true or not?"
"The Lady Wu hates me," Jingji said, "and she has made up the whole of this story. I implore you, my lord, to go most carefully into the matter."
"Her daughter is dead," the Magistrate said. "Do you imagine you are going to get out of it?" He told his attendants to give Jingji twenty strokes with the rod.
Then Feng Jinbao was called forward, and thumbscrews were put on her. The magistrate gave orders that they should be thrown into jail and told one of his underlings to go with the neighbors and police to examine the body. They found bruises all over the body and the mark of the rope around Ximen Dajie's neck. They wrote down this report:

After Chen Jingji had severely handled her, she hanged herself, unable to bear his ill usage any longer.
When this report was brought to the magistrate, he was very angry. He ordered ten more strokes to be given to Chen Jingji and ten to Feng Jinbao also. He declared that Jingji was guilty of his wife's death, and sentenced him to strangulation. Feng Jinbao was sentenced to a hundred strokes with a ro, and afterwards to serve as the public whore. Jingji was in a terrible state. He sent a note to Chen Ding and told him to take every penny there was in the shop and his wife's ornaments, a hundred taels in all, and secretly take them to the magistrate. So, during the night, the magistrate altered the sentence and made it appear that he had been found guilty of having been the cause of his wife's death in the less criminal sense, imprisoning him for 5 years with permission to purchase his freedom. Yueniang continually pressed the magistrate for justice. At last, he sent for her. "Lady," he said, "we've discovered the marks of the rope on your daughter's neck so it's clear that she's not murdered. I wish to be unjust to no one and if you're afraid that he'll make trouble with you in the future, I'll arrange matters in such a way that he'll never come near you again." He sent for Jingji and said to him, "I've been very lenient with you. You must amend your evil ways and begin to lead a new life. I forbid you ever to go and cause a disturbance at this lady's house. If you come before me again, I'll not forgive you. Go home, buy a coffin, bury your wife, then come back, and report to me. I'll send an account of this matter to those in authority over me."
Jingji paid the fine that gave him back his freedom and went home. He put his wife's body into a coffin but kept it at home only 7 days. Then the religious service was held, the body taken outside the city, and buried. He returned to the Town Hall and there spent much money. Feng Jinbao had gone; he had lost all his property; his things were sold and his house disposed of. Only his life was left to him. He dared not mention his mother-in-law's name.

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## Wang Hsüan Relies on Righteousness to Help the Poor; Abbot Jen in the Desire for Profit, Invites Disaster & Chen Jingji Becomes a Monk

Who can say that in our mundane existence destiny is fickle?
Good luck and bad, misfortune and fortune travel hand in hand.[1]
It is only due to the lure of romance that we do ourselves in;
It is not the case that the human heart is straight as a needle.
One may assume one's official conduct to be devoid of injustice;
But how can one know what the Way of Heaven may reveal about it?[2]
If one learns early that success and failure are dictated by fate,
One may be able to walk freely even during the dark of night.

Ch'en Ching-chi, from the time that Hsi-men Ta-chieh committed suicide, Wu Yüeh-niang took him to court, and the singing girl Feng Chin-pao was sent back to the brothel, felt that he had barely escaped with his life. He had been forced to put his house up for sale and had exhausted his capital, had disposed of his wife's head ornaments, and did not even have any furniture left. He also claimed, once again, that Ch'en Ting had been embezzling the money entrusted to him and dismissed him. He did not have enough money to cover his daily expenses, but merely:
Sat at home frittering away his resources.[3]
He also felt driven to visit Yang the Elder's home to inquire about the whereabouts of his half boatload of goods.
One day, upon arriving at the door of Yang the Elder's home, he called out, "Is Yang the Elder at home or not?"
Who could have anticipated that Yang Kuang-yen, having made off with Ch'en Ching-chi's half boatload of goods and sold them for cash, hid out in one place or another until he learned that Ch'en Ching-chi's wife had committed suicide in her home, that his mother-in-law had lodged an accusation against him in the district yamen, and that he had endured half a month of incarceration. At this, he promptly returned home, but did not venture outside.
When he heard Ch'en Ching-chi calling for him at the door, and demanding to know what had become of the boatload of cargo, he sent his younger brother Yang Erh-feng out to confront him, saying, "You persuaded my elder brother to accompany you on a business trip, and nothing has been heard of him for the last several months. I don't know whether you either threw him into the river, or drowned him in the canal, but you actually have the nerve to come here and demand to know what has become of the boatload of cargo. Is a human life more important, or that cargo of your's more important?"
This Yang Erh-feng had always been a tough customer, both a gambler and a "knockabout." His biceps were:
Bulging lumps of purple flesh;[4]
and his chest was covered with:
Tousled lengths of brown hair.
He was a "bare stick" pure and simple. Striding outside, he took hold of Ch'en Ching-chi with one hand and demanded to know the fate of his elder brother. Ch'en Ching-chi, in a state of panic, tore himself loose and started to run toward home.
Yang Erh-feng responded by picking up a three-cornered shard of tile and scratching open the skin on his skull with it, so that:
His face was covered with flowing blood.[5]
He then raced after Ch'en Ching-chi, yelling, "I'll fuck your mother's cunt! Since when have I ever seen any silver of yours? If you come farting around my place, I'll give you a real drubbing with my fists."
Ch'en Ching-chi fled homeward, as though:
Whether his fate were governed by metal or by water,
There was no place for him to hide;
and saw to it that the main gate was:
Locked tight as an iron bucket, so that
Not even Fan K'uai himself could get through.
He then permitted Yang Erh-feng to roundly abuse his parents, and try to smash open the gate with a large brick, without allowing so much as the sound of a breath to escape from his nostrils. On top of everything else, he had hardly recovered from a lawsuit and was as nervous as a man who:
Dreams of a length of rope and fears it is a snake,
so all he could do was put up with it. Truly:
Tender plants are afraid of the frost[6]
and frost fears the sun;
One wicked person will be ground down
upon encountering another.[7]
Shortly after this, he managed to sell his spacious house for seventy taels of silver and bought a small dwelling in an obscure alley in which to live. Later on, he was compelled to get rid of one of his two maidservants, selling off Ch'ung-hsi, and retaining Yüan-hsiao to sleep with him at night. In less than half a month after this, he was forced to dispose of his smaller dwelling, and move into a boarding house. On top of this, his servant Ch'en An left him, since he no longer had any business to conduct, and Yüan-hsiao died. As a result, he found himself:
Completely on his own.
His household belongings and furniture had all been sold, leaving him:
As poor as though he had been utterly cleaned out.[8]
It was not long before he did not even have enough money to pay his rent and had to move into a homeless shelter in order to survive.
When the other beggars in the shelter observed that he was the profligate scion of a wealthy family, and that he had a naturally clear-cut appearance, they made room for him to sleep on the heated k'ang and gave him some baked wheat cakes to eat. The patrolman on duty that night happened to come in and offered him a job as a night watchman, sounding his clapper and ringing his bell.
It was already late winter in the twelfth month at the time. There was a heavy snowfall, and the wind was gusting, making it extremely cold. Ch'en Ching-chi, after sounding his clapper for a time, and letting the patrolman go, set out to ring his bell as he patrolled the local streets and alleys. What with the wind and snow, and the ice that had formed on the ground, he was so frozen that all he could do was to:
Hunch his shoulders and tighten his back,
as he trembled and shivered with the cold. At the fifth watch, when the cocks crowed, he came upon an ailing beggar who was lying on the ground beneath a wall and feared that he might be dead. The local neighborhood head told him to keep watch over him, and to light a bundle of straw to keep him warm.
Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been sounding the watches all night long without any rest, promptly proceeded to sprawl out on the ground and go to sleep. Unexpectedly, he started to dream of the:
Glory and luxury, wealth and honor,
he had enjoyed as a resident of Hsi-men Ch'ing's household, and the fun and games he had indulged in during his affair with P'an Chin-lien. When he awoke from the dream with tears in his eyes, the other beggars asked him what he was crying about.
Ch'en Ching-chi responded to this query by saying, "Brothers, listen to my explanation."
There is a song suite beginning with the tune "Powdery Butterflies" that testifies to this:
During the ninety coldest days of winter,
Snow fills the sky and everything is frozen.
A wild wind shakes Heaven and agitates the Earth,[9]
Chilling me to the point that I am frozen stiff.
My heart is palpitating,
And I find it almost impossible to contend with.
I cannot bear the hunger in my stomach;
I cannot stand the coldness of my body.
Living thus, half exposed to the elements,
It is really cold.
I cannot bear this sense of desolation,
And would like to find a way to death,
But in this flustered state, I cannot
spare my worthless life.
*To the tune "Playful Children," Paracoda One*
Before I know it, the evening bell sounds;
At the evening bell people begin to rest.
Who is it that is calling for me?
It is the neighborhood head Chang Ch'eng.
He calls for me urgently,
And I respond repeatedly.
"Who is going to sound the watches for me
tonight?" he asks.
It would seem that I am in luck, for once,
For he is giving me some baked wheat cakes.
*Paracoda Two*
I am grateful to the neighborhood head for his
concern over my exposure,
And giving me the task of sounding the clapper
to mark the watches;
So I am willing to let him use me this way.
As long as he is able to provide me with
something to eat,
What do I care about the poor and humble
nature of this task?
I am willing to engage in shouting the hour
and ringing the bell.
*Paracoda Three*
When I sit for a while my hands and
feet grow numb;
When I stand for a while my stomach
begins to hurt.
The baked wheat cakes are cold, and I have to swallow
them without any tea to wash them down.
Before the third watch is over, the patrolman on night
duty demands that I light him on his way.
All I can manage is to pay him forty cash,
In order to bribe him into letting me off.
*Paracoda Four*
At the fifth watch when the cocks crow,
And people begin to walk along the streets,
Going hither and thither, every which way,
I happen to come upon an ailing beggar
lying beneath a wall.

I am told to keep him warm without interruption,
And it is only when I detect a warm breath
from his mouth that I can relax.
I no sooner close my eyes than I have
an intimate dream,
From which I suddenly awake and
weep until dawn.
*Paracoda Five*
The beggars ask me, "What are you crying about?"
And I tell them the story of my life
from start to finish.
"My ancestors, for generations, have possessed
substantial wealth.
If you were to mention the Ch'en family
that deals in pine resin,
Who would not have been awestruck at the name?
They resided among the gentry;
My grandfather dealt in salt from
the Huai region,
And my father devoted himself to forming
influential connections.
But since he gave birth to me, I have been given to
excessive drinking and fits of violence.
*Paracoda Six*
First I lost my grandfather, who used
to discipline me,
And later I also lost my father.
My mother doted on me,
And let me do as I pleased.
I became proficient at every kind of
drinking and gambling,
And was familiar with all the taverns
and bawdy houses.
Everything I did was of this kind.
I had no sooner married than my relatives
became implicated in a lawsuit,
And I fled to the home of my in-laws in order to avoid
a heavier risk by seeking a lighter.
*Paracoda Seven*
While I was residing as a son-in-law in
the Hsi-men household,
I manipulated the breeze and the moonlight,
seducing my mother-in-law.
In financial matters, I trusted someone
who took advantage of me.
I also gambled away quantities of yellow
gold and precious jade,
And provided rice and fuel to cover the
expenses of the brothels.
After having beaten my wife to
the point of death,
She committed suicide, and her family
brought a suit against me.
I had to expend a great deal of money,
Before contriving to escape with my life.
*Paracoda Eight*
I sold my spacious home,
And bought a small dwelling;
Moved into a boarding house,
But could no longer afford it.
I took no thought for the future, or how
to preserve what I had left.
Out of hunger, cold, and despair, my
concubine fell ill,
And eventually died in my quarters,
unable to stay alive.
Everything I possessed was utterly
cleaned out,
But I had not lost my taste
for wine and meat,
And had no alternative but to sell off
my ancestral grave sites.
*Paracoda Nine*
I cannot carry the light,
Or support the heavy;[10]
Work as a laborer,
Or engage in farming.
Rather than undertaking anything, I am
reluctant to make a move.
When at leisure with nothing to do,
all I hanker after is food;
When I fall asleep, I do not get up
until the sun is already red.
My doglike nature is as adamant
as steel.
I have grievously wronged all of my ten
relatives and nine kinsmen,[11]
So should I freeze or starve to death, who
will bother to care about me?
*Paracoda Ten*
My landlord is unrelenting in
demanding my rent,
And does not think I will be
able to stay.
His earthenware pots and broken bowls
are utterly useless;
And he has attempted repeatedly to
drive me out the door.
My frozen bones and drenched flesh
are without a refuge,
And I have felt compelled to commit
myself to a homeless shelter.
If only my luck should ever happen to
change for the better,
I would then never be able to forget the
kindness of my benefactor.
For ages I have endured privation and pain
at the death of my wife;
I have no clothes on my back[12] and my mouth
is without nourishment.
My horse is dead, my slaves have fled, and
my home has been sold;
All by myself,[13] I have been forced to move
into unknown territory.
In the morning, I frequent the marketplace
begging for leftovers;
At night, I sleep in the open, up against
the dilapidated walls.
Since there is no other course open to me
in the days to come;

I must live in a homeless shelter and beat
the watchman's clapper."
To resume our story, Ch'en Ching-chi was reduced to spending his nights in the homeless shelter, and his days begging for food on the streets.
It so happens that inside the city wall of Ch'ing-ho district there lived an elderly gentleman named Wang Hsüan, whose courtesy name was T'ing-yung. He was more than sixty years old:
His family holdings were substantial;[14]
he possessed a charitable disposition; and he was:
Chivalrous by nature and open-handed with his wealth.
He had a wide circle of acquaintances, derived pleasure from his philanthropy, and devoted himself to:
Aiding the poor and rescuing the wretched;[15]
Enjoying goodness and respecting the gods.
His two sons had both:
Set up households and established themselves.
His eldest son was named Wang Ch'ien and had inherited the office of battalion commander of the local Horse Pasturage Battalion of the Court of the Imperial Stud. His second son was named Wang Chen and was currently a government student in the prefectural school. The old gentleman had hired a manager and set up a pawnshop on the street-front of his residence. Every day, what with:
His elegant clothing and ample diet,[16]
His leisure and lack of obligations,
he was free to:
Attend scripture readings in Buddhist temples,
Or discourse on the Way in Taoist sanctuaries.
When he had nothing else to do, he would situate himself at the gate of his residence and dispense medicine to the sick, or finger his rosary and recite the Buddha's name. Because there were two apricot trees in his rear garden, he called himself the Layman of the Apricot Hermitage.
One day, he was standing at his gate wearing a double-layered scholar's cap on his head, and a patchwork Taoist gown on his body, when Ch'en Ching-chi happened to pass by and proceeded to go down on his knees and kowtow to him.
Wang Hsüan hastily bowed to him in return, saying, "Brother, who are you? Old and decrepit as I am, my vision is too blurred to recognize you."
Ch'en Ching-chi, trembling and shivering, stood to one side and said, "I would not deceive you, venerable sir. I am the son of Ch'en Hung, the dealer in pine resin."
The old gentleman pondered this for what seemed like half a day before saying, "So you are the respected son of Ch'en Hung are you?"
Noticing that:
His clothing looked disheveled, and
His countenance seemed haggard,[17]
he said, "My worthy nephew, how have you been reduced to such a state?"
He then went on to ask, "Are your father and mother well?"
"My father passed away in the Eastern Capital," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "and my mother is also dead."
"I have heard that you were living in your father-in-law's household," said Wang Hsüan.
"My father-in-law is dead," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and my mother-in-law expelled me from the household. When her daughter died, she lodged an accusation against me, and I was forced to endure a lawsuit. I have had to sell our home and have been robbed of what capital I possessed. As a result, I have been idle for some time, and unable to make a living."
"My worthy nephew," said Wang Hsüan, "where are you living at present?"
Ch'en Ching-chi hesitated for what seemed like half a day before saying, "I will not deceive you, venerable sir. The case is thus and so."
"How sad, worthy nephew," said Wang Hsüan. "So you have been forced to beg for your sustenance. I recall that your family was originally one of considerable substance. At the time when I was acquainted with your father, worthy nephew, you were still young, your hair was done up in a topknot, and you were going to school. Since then, you have fallen into such a state. How regrettable! How regrettable! Are you without any relatives who might be able to help you out?"
"That is the case," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "My maternal uncle Chang Kuan has not seen fit to visit me for some time, so I would not feel comfortable approaching him."
After questioning him for some time, the old gentleman ushered Ch'en Ching-chi into the parlor of his dwelling, ordered a page boy to set up a table and lay out some refreshments, and then urged his guest to eat his fill.
When he noticed how thinly clad he was, he got out a Taoist gown of black wool, a felt cap, a pair of felt stockings, and a pair of woolen shoes; weighed out a tael's worth of silver, along with five hundred copper cash; and gave them all to him, saying, "Worthy nephew, these clothes, and shoes and stockings, are for you to wear. These copper cash are for your living expenses, and ought to enable you to rent half a room to live in. This tael of silver can be used to start a little business of some kind, in order to feed you, and supply your daily expenses. That would be better than living in a homeless shelter, where you will have no chance of improving yourself. When your monthly rent becomes due, you can come to see me, and I will take care of it for you."
Ch'en Ching-chi got down on the floor and kowtowed to him in gratitude, saying, "Your humble nephew understands."
So saying, he took his leave but neither looked for a room to rent nor tried to start a business. Day by day, he spent the five hundred copper cash in taverns and noodle shops, until they were all gone. And as for the tael of silver, he had it melted down and compounded with baser metals and then tried to peddle it in the streets but was arrested by the police, accused of petty larceny, taken to the office of the local ward adjutant, and subjected to the squeezers and a beating. As a consequence, he was not only utterly wiped out, but also left with a buttocks completely covered with welts. In less than two days, he was compelled to pawn his woollen robe and stockings in exchange for something to eat and was reduced, as before, to begging in the streets.
One day, he happened once more to pass by the gate of Wang Hsüan's residence. Wang Hsüan, who was standing there at the time, looked on as Ch'en Ching-chi kowtowed to him and noticed that he was no longer wearing the robe and stockings he had given him, but had nothing but the felt cap on his head, that the feet in his sandals were bare, and that he appeared to be not only chilled but:
Both impoverished and emaciated.
The old gentleman addressed him, saying, "Master Ch'en, how is your business going? I imagine your rent must be due, and you have come here to get it from me."
Ch'en Ching-chi found himself to be:
At a loss for words,
for what seemed like half a day; and it was only after he had been asked time and time again that he replied, saying, "Thus and so, I have been completely wiped out."
"Ai-ya! Worthy nephew," the old gentleman responded, "that is no way to support yourself. Since:
You cannot lift the light,
Or support the heavy,
engaging in some business, however insignificant, is better than having to beg for your food. That way you can avoid becoming a laughingstock to others, and bringing shame on the reputation of your ancestors. Why don't you do as I suggest?"
So saying, he once again ushered him inside and had his page boy An-t'ung provide him with enough food to eat his fill.
He also gave him a pair of trousers, a white cotton shirt, a pair of foot bindings, a string of copper cash, and a peck of rice and said, "Take these things with you, and be sure to start up a small business of some kind. You can sell kindling and charcoal, or beans and melon seeds, in order to make a living for yourself, which would be better than having to beg for your food this way."
Although Ch'en Ching-chi gave his verbal consent to these suggestions, took the money and rice in hand, and left the old gentleman's residence, it did not take more than a few days for him to consume it all, sharing the ready-cooked meat and noodles with his fellow beggars in the homeless shelter. He also gambled away the white cotton shirt and the trousers he had been given.
During the first month of the new year, he was once again out walking the streets, while wrapping his arms around his shoulders to keep warm. Although he was somewhat embarrassed at the prospect of seeing the old gentleman again, he went up to the wall under the gable of the old gentleman's gatehouse and stood there warming himself in the sun. The old gentleman regarded him with a sardonic eye but did not speak to him. Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded:
Hesitantly and punctiliously,
to make his way forward, after which, he knelt down on the ground and kowtowed before him.
When the old gentleman saw that he looked just as destitute as before, he said to him, "Worthy nephew, this is not a viable plan for the future.
One's appetites are as deep as the ocean;
The days and months fly by like shuttles.[18]
How can one ever hope to fill up a bottomless pit? Come inside. I have something to say to you. There is a place that would not only provide you with undisturbed leisure, but also with a haven in which to stay. My only fear is that you may not consent to go there."
Ch'en Ching-chi knelt down and wept, saying, "If my venerable uncle should see fit to take pity on me, no matter where this place may be, if it will only accommodate me, I will consent to go there."
Wang Hsüan responded, saying, "The place in question is not far from our city. On the dock at Lin-ch'ing there is a Yen-kung Temple, a Taoist establishment dedicated to the worship of the river god Yen-kung.[19] That is:
A location teeming with fish and rice,[20]
where river boats congregate in large numbers. The temple is amply supplied with money and provisions, and endowed with a secluded and elegant atmosphere. Abbot Jen, the head priest of the temple, is an old acquaintance of mine, and he has two or three disciples and acolytes serving under him. I propose to provide appropriate gifts and escort you there in order for you to become a disciple of his and enter the priesthood. If you were to study the sacred texts, learn to perform religious music, and thus be able to confer blessings upon people, it would be a good thing."
"If my venerable uncle is willing to help me out that way," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "that would really be wonderful."
"In that case," said Wang Hsüan, "you can go now. Tomorrow is an auspicious day. If you come here early in the morning, I will escort you there."
After Ch'en Ching-chi had gone, Wang Hsüan promptly summoned a tailor and had him make up two sets of Taoist garments, a Taoist cap, and shoes and stockings for him.
The next day, Ch'en Ching-chi showed up as he had promised, and Wang Hsüan had him take a bath in an empty room, comb his hair, put on the Taoist cap, change into a new jacket and new trousers, don a black silk Taoist robe, and slip into felt stockings and a pair of shoes with cloud patterned toes. He also prepared four trays of preserved fruit, a jug of wine, and a bolt of fabric, and sealed up five taels of silver. He then mounted his horse, hired a donkey for Ch'en Ching-chi to ride, and, with his page boys An-t'ung and Hsi-t'ung following them, and two carriers bearing the gift boxes, set out for the Yen-kung Temple on the dock in Lin-ch'ing. It was only a day's journey of seventy li. By the time they arrived at the Yen-kung Temple, it had begun to grow late. Behold:
The image of the sun is about to sink;
The luxuriant shade has already fallen.
The sunset clouds, reflected in the water,
dispense their red glow;[21]
The setting sun, as it crosses the hills,
engenders bluish mists.
Amid the shadows of the verdant willows,[22]
One hears the birds returning to the woods.
In the villages with their red apricots,
One sees the cattle herding into the fold.[23]
Truly:
On the banks of the streams fishermen
head into the woods;
On the meadows the herd boys ride home
astride their calves.[24]
Upon coming to the Lin-ch'ing dock, Wang Hsüan crossed the great bridge over the Kuang-chi lock, gazed at the innumerable boats that were moored on the canal, and arrived in front of the Yen-kung Temple, where he dismounted and prepared to go inside. Behold:
The verdant pines are luxuriant,
The emerald cypresses are dense.
To either side there are peaked red walls,
Upon the facade are three vermilion gates.
Truly, it was an imposing temple. Behold:
The gate of the temple soars aloft,
Its halls and porticos rise boldly.
Displayed on high is an imperial plaque
in letters of gold;
And a picture of officials, leaving and
entering the court.[25]
The thirty-foot-wide great hall,[26]
Contains effigies of the twelve Dragon Kings;
The two colonnades that flank it,
Have images of myriads of aquatic creatures.
Flagstaffs stretch up toward the heavens;
The words on the flags catching the wind.
In all four quarters and the eight directions,[27]
The spring and autumn sacrifices are
offered on schedule;
When rains are seasonable and winds favorable,
The common people perform sacrifices
along the waterways.

The efficacy of a myriad years of burning incense[28]
has been acknowledged;
In the four quarters both officials and commoners
depend on it for peace.
The young servants beneath the gate of the temple had spotted the arrival of the visitors and went inside to report it to the abbot's quarters. Abbot Jen promptly adjusted his clothing and came out to receive them. Wang Hsüan directed Ch'en Ching-chi and the bearers of the gifts to wait outside.
In no time at all, Abbot Jen ushered Wang Hsüan into the reception hall of his quarters, known as the Pine Crane Studio, where he greeted him, saying, "Venerable layman, why has it been so long since you last came to my humble temple? What good fortune has led you to deign to visit me today?"
"It is only because I have been tied up with mundane matters at home," responded Wang Hsüan, "that I have been remiss in paying you a visit for so long."
After exchanging the customary amenities, they sat down in the positions of host and guest, and a young servant presented them with a serving of tea.
When they had finished their tea, Abbot Jen said, "Venerable layman, it is already late in the day, and you might as well stay overnight."
So saying, he ordered a servant to take his visitor's horse back to the stable in the rear and see that it was fed and housed for the night.
Wang Hsüan then said:
"If I did not have a reason to do so, I would not
visit the Hall of the Three Treasures.
It is because I have a favor to ask of you that I have come to pay you this visit. But I don't know whether or not you will agree to it."
"Venerable layman," responded Abbot Jen, "what would you like me to do? Just tell me what it is. I would not presume to reject your command."
"At present," said Wang Hsüan, "there is a young man named Ch'en Ching-chi, who is the son of an old friend of mine. He is just twenty-three years old, is clean-cut by nature, and is as clever as can be. The only problem is that his parents passed away too early so that he has not been properly brought up. His family was quite affluent, so he is not a person from an undistinguished background, and he came into a substantial inheritance, but lost everything as the result of a lawsuit and has been reduced to homeless destitution. Out of regard for my former friendship with his father, I would like to introduce him into your prestigious temple to become a disciple of yours. But I don't know what you may think of this proposal."
"Venerable layman," replied Abbot Jen, "whatever you suggest, I would not venture to oppose. But it has been my misfortune that, though I already have two or three disciples on hand, they are not very intelligent, and none of them are likely to succeed. This has been a source of constant annoyance for me. I wonder whether this young man is a straightforward person or not?"
"As for this young man," responded Wang Hsüan, "I would not deceive your reverence, but you don't need to worry; he is always serious and content to abide by his lot. He possesses a timorous disposition and is straightforward about everything. He would make a good disciple."
"When do you propose to bring him here?" asked Abbot Jen.
"He is waiting outside the temple gate right now," responded Wang Hsüan.
"I have also brought some paltry gifts. I humbly beseech you to accept them with a smile."
This flustered Abbot Jen into asking, "Venerable layman, why did you not say so before?"
He then went on to say, "Invite him to come in."
Thereupon, the bearers proceeded to carry in the gifts, and Abbot Jen saw that the card accompanying them read, "Respectfully presented with a bow by your pupil Wang Hsüan: a bolt of coarse satin, a jug of insipid wine, a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two boxes of fruits, and five taels of white gold."
Abbot Jen promptly bowed in gratitude, saying, "Venerable layman, what need was there for you to put yourself to the trouble of presenting me with all these lavish gifts? You put me in a position in which it would be:
Discourteous to refuse, and
Embarrassing to accept."
Whom should he see at this juncture but Ch'en Ching-chi, who wore a gilt-ridged Taoist cap on his head, a black silk Taoist robe on his body, a pair of shoes with cloud-patterned toes and white socks, and a silk belt around his waist. He had:
Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes;
His teeth were white and his lips were red, and
His face looked as though it were powdered.
On coming in, he went up to Abbot Jen, knelt down on the floor, and proceeded to perform:
Four brace makes eight kowtows.
Abbot Jen asked him, "How old are you?"
"I was born in the year of the horse," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so next spring I will be twenty-three years old."
Upon seeing that he did indeed seem to be clever, Abbot Jen bestowed a Taoist appellation on him, so that he became known as Ch'en Tsung-mei.
It so happens that Abbot Jen already had two disciples at his command. The senior disciple was called Chin Tsung-ming, and the junior disciple was called Hsü Tsung-shun. So Ch'en Ching-chi took his place with them and was known by the appellation Ch'en Tsung-mei.
Abbot Jen called the other disciples out, and they exchanged greetings, after which he formally accepted the gifts he had been offered. A young servant then lit the lanterns, set up a table, and laid out the foodstuff, after which they fell to drinking wine. The surface of the table was covered with cups and platters, along with an assortment of foods including chicken, pig's trotters, goose, duck, fish, shrimp, and the like.
Wang Hsüan did not drink very much, although the abbot and his disciples took turns urging him to do so.
After a while, he said:
"I cannot handle the effects of the wine,"
excused himself, and went to his room, where a bed had been set up for him, and went to sleep for the night.
Early the next morning, a young servant brought water for him to wash his face in, and by the time he had combed his hair and performed his ablutions, Abbot Jen came in to offer him a serving of tea. Before long, breakfast was laid out, and they drank another two rounds of wine together.
After his horse had been fed, and the bearers had been paid for their efforts, Wang Hsüan prepared to make his departure and called Ch'en Ching-chi over in order to instruct him, saying, "While here, you must devote yourself to mastering the scriptures, and obey your master's instructions. I will come visit you from time to time and will see that you are supplied with new clothing and footwear at the change of seasons."
He also turned to Abbot Jen and said, "If he fails to obey your instructions, discipline him as you see fit. I will certainly not endeavor to defend his shortcomings."
He also admonished Ch'en Ching-chi in private, saying, "After I am gone,
I want you to:
Cleanse your heart and reform your ways.
You must devote yourself to the task at hand. If you fail once again to live up to my expectations, I will concern myself with you no more in the future."
Ch'en Ching-chi assented, saying, "Your son understands."
Wang Hsüan thereupon said farewell to Abbot Jen, went outside, mounted his horse, left the Yen-kung Temple, and set off for home.
From this time on, Ch'en Ching-chi led the life of a Taoist novice in the Yen-kung Temple. He observed that Abbot Jen:
Was elderly with a ruddy nose;
Possessed an imposing stature;
Had a clear, resounding voice,[29]
And fully bearded countenance;
Was glib and devoted to drink;
and concerned himself only with:
Welcoming guests and seeing off visitors.
All other matters, both great and small, were left in the hands of his senior disciple Chin Tsung-ming.
At that time, the government had just completed the necessary repair work and reopened the Grand Canal. At Lin-ch'ing two locks had been constructed to control the water where the canal met the Wei River. Crew members from both government and private boats on the canal, on reaching the locks would come to the Yen-kung Temple, in order to seek the protection of the spirits, to fulfill their vows, to seek their fortunes by interpreting the hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*, or casting divining blocks.[30] There were also those who came in order to perform good deeds, by donating money and rice, contributing incense, lamp oil, paper money, and candles, or furnishing pine resin and rush mats.
Abbot Jen was in the habit of taking the surplus supplies from the temple treasury and assigning them to his disciples with which to set up shop on the dock, while keeping the profits from these transactions for himself. His senior disciple Chin Tsung-ming was also not one to be content with his lot. He was about thirty years old, was in the habit of maintaining singing girls from the local brothels as his mistresses, and was:
A libertine devoted to wine and sex.[31]
He also had two innocent young novices at his disposal, with whom he was accustomed to sleep at night, but as time passed he had become tired of them. When he encountered Ch'en Ching-chi and observed that:
His teeth were white and his lips were red,
His face looked as though it were powdered;
that he was:
Clean-cut, unusual, and;
Didn't miss a wink,
he arranged for them to share the same room. In the evening, he would ply him with drink for half the night until he was utterly soused, and then go to sleep on the same bed with him. At first, they slept head to foot and foot to head, but he objected to the smell of Ch'en Ching-chi's feet and had him come share the same pillow with him. But before they had been asleep very long, he complained about Ch'en Ching-chi's breath, and had him turn over so that his bottom ended up against his belly. Ch'en Ching-chi pretended to be asleep and paid no attention to him, but he went on to manipulate his organ until it rose up as hard and straight as a stick, rubbed some saliva on the head of his glans, and proceeded to thrust it into his anus. It so happens that when Ch'en Ching-chi had been residing in the homeless shelter, the beggar boss Hou Lin, whose nickname was Flying Demon, had sodomized him, so that his anus was already enlarged. As a result, Chin Tsung-ming's organ had penetrated him before he knew it.
As for Ch'en Ching-chi:
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"This rascal is asking for it; he is trying to take such egregious advantage of me. Who does he take me for? I'll give him something to savor in return and thereby make him pay for his fun."
Ch'en Ching-chi, thereupon, made a show of crying out in protest, and Chin Tsung-ming, fearing that Abbot Jen would hear him, promptly put his hand over his mouth, saying, "Good brother, be quiet. Whatever you demand from me, I will agree to."
"If you want to have a fling with me," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "and don't want me to reveal it, you'll have to agree to three conditions."
"My brother," responded Chin Tsung-ming, "not to mention three conditions; even if you impose ten conditions, I'll agree to them all."
"The first condition," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "is that if you want to carry on with me, you will no longer sleep with those other two novices. The second condition is that I be given control over the keys to all the doors on the premises, both large and small. The third condition is that you will not raise objections to my going anywhere I want. If you agree to all these conditions, I will let you do what you wish with me."
"That's no problem," said Chin Tsung-ming. "I'll agree to everything."
That night the two of them proceeded to:
Tumble and toss this way and that,[32]
for fully half the night. Ch'en Ching-chi had been a habitué of the world of breeze and moonlight ever since his youth, so there wasn't much he didn't know about anything. On this occasion, what with:
Vows under the covers to be as faithful as the hills,
Promises by the pillowside to be as true as the seas;
Obscene noises and lascivious words,
Sucking at this and toying with that;
he managed to please Chin Tsung-ming to the point that:
His delight knew no bounds.
The next day, as promised, he turned over the keys to Ch'en Ching-chi, and he no longer spent the night with the other two novices, but slept on the same bed with him every day.
As time passed:
One day became two,
Two days became three.
One day, it so happened that Abbot Jen and his two disciples were scheduled to go to someone's home to pray for blessings and perform good works, and the abbot chose to leave Ch'en Ching-chi behind to look after the temple as a crafty means of testing his integrity.
Abbot Jen thought to himself, "The venerable layman Wang Hsüan said that he was conscientious, and I would like to see whether he is conscientious or not."
As he was about to go out the gate, he instructed him, saying, "You stay here and look after that flock of chickens I am raising in the backyard. They are actually phoenixes, and, before long, when I have:
Achieved merit and fulfilled my tasks,[33]
I hope to ascend to Heaven upon one of them, and pay court to the Jade Emperor. Those crocks that are secreted in one of the rooms contain liquid poison. If any one of my disciples should commit a serious offense, I would not beat him, but merely give him a dose of this liquid poison to drink, which would cause him to pass away on the spot. You must conscientiously look after everything, and when I return after the midday repast I will bring you something to eat."
When he had finished speaking, the abbot and his disciples left the temple.
Ch'en Ching-chi closed the door behind them and laughed to himself, saying, "How could he think that I would not see through these things; claiming that those crocks of glutinous millet wine are actually liquid poison, and that those few chickens in the backyard are phoenixes, on which he hopes to mount to Heaven?"
Thereupon, he proceeded to kill one of the fattest chickens, pluck it clean, and cook it in a pot; and then used a basin to dip up some of the wine and heat it on the fire. After which, pulling apart the limbs of the chicken with his hands, and dipping the flesh into a mixture of garlic and vinegar, he feasted until he might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
As he ate, he uttered four lines to describe his pleasure:
With a brass basin I scoop up
the clear wine,
Like mist veiling the bright moon;
I dip the slow-cooked chicken

in garlic sauce,
Like wind sweeping away the clouds.
While he was eating, he heard his master Abbot Jen calling for him outside the gate, upon which, he hastily cleared away the utensils and went out to open the door for him.
Abbot Jen noticed that his face was red and asked him what had happened, but Ch'en Ching-chi merely hung his head in silence.
"Why don't you speak?" Abbot Jen asked him.
"I will explain the situation to you, master," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "After you left, one of those phoenixes in the backyard managed to fly away somehow, which left me in a state of panic. I climbed up onto the roof to look for it for what seemed like half a day, but could not find it. Fearing that when you came back you would give me a beating, I thought of slitting my throat with a knife but was afraid of the pain it would cause. I thought of hanging myself but was afraid the rope might break and I would fall down. I thought of jumping into a well but was afraid the mouth might be too small and would catch me by the neck. Unable to think of any viable alternative, I ended up by dipping out two bowls worth of the liquid poison in those crocks of yours and drinking them down."
"How did you feel after drinking them?" Abbot Jen asked.
"Since drinking them down," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "for what seems like half a day, I have felt;
Neither dead nor alive,
just as though I were drunk."
On hearing this explanation, Abbot Jen and his two disciples laughed to themselves, saying, "He turns out to be straightforward after all."
Consequently, Abbot Jen put up the money to buy an ordination certificate for him, so that from then on, as an ordained Taoist monk, he was free to do as he pleased. Truly:
You may peddle a load of truths for three days
without making a sale;
While in a single day three loads of falsehoods
may actually sell out.
As a result, Ch'en Ching-chi frequently took money in hand and went out to enjoy himself on the dock.
While there, he ran into a "cribber" from the licensed quarter named Ch'en the Third, who told him, "The madam of Feng Chin-pao's establishment has died, and she has been sold to the Cheng Family Brothel, where she is known as Cheng Chin-pao. At present she is doing business in a large tavern on the dock. Why don't you go take a look at her?"
As for the young scamp:
His old feelings for her had not changed.
Taking some silver in hand, he allowed Ch'en the Third to conduct him straight to the tavern. Nothing might have happened if he had not gone there, but since he did go, it was a case of:
Five hundred years ago, these lovers
were fated to meet;
After their affair of the past, they
are to be reunited.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
In this life one must not begrudge
raiment of golden threads;
In this life one should not betray
the years of one's youth.[34]
If you see flowers you would like to
pluck, just pluck them;
Don't wait till the flowers fall to
pluck the bare branches.[35]
It so happens that this tavern was the most prominent tavern in Lin-ch'ing and was called the Hsieh Family Tavern. It had more than a hundred rooms and was surrounded with green balustrades. It backed on a hill, overlooked the Grand Canal, and was known for:
The liveliness of the teeming crowds, and
The coming and going of boat traffic.
What did this magnificent tavern look like?
Sculpted eaves reflect the sunlight;
Painted rafters fly into the clouds.
Green balustrades connect beneath
the balcony windows;
Kingfisher blinds are rolled high
above the casements.
Those blowing pipes and playing flutes,
Are all noble scions or royal princelings;
Those holding cups and raising beakers,[36]
Are bands of courtesans and dancing girls.[37]
Barely visible to drunken eyes,
Soaring into azure Heaven, are ten thousand
mountainous clouds;[38]
Stimulating to poetic thoughts,
Like tumbling drifts of snow, are the waves
of mist-bound water.
By the white duckweed crossing,[39]
One hears trawlers sounding their clappers;
By the red smartweed beachhead,[40]
One hears fishermen beating their bulwarks.
By the tavern side, on the verdant willows,
the wild birds are crowing;
Before the gate, amidst the green poplars,
piebald steeds are tethered.[41]
Ch'en the Third led Ch'en Ching-chi to an upper floor of the tavern, and into a room, furnished with an ebony table and red lacquered benches, where they sat down together. He then summoned a waiter to wipe off the table, supply cups and chopsticks, and lay out a serving of first-class wine and delicacies, after which he sent him downstairs to summon the powdered face for him. Before long, they heard footsteps on the stairs, and Feng Chin-pao came in, holding a little gong in her hand. Upon seeing Ch'en Ching-chi, she paid him a respectful obeisance.
As the saying goes:
When one lover meets another,
Before they know it, all of a sudden, they will
shed two streams of tears.[42]
Truly:
The sounds of a few amorous words are like
warbling orioles;
Tears drop like a strand of pearls falling
off their string.[43]
Ch'en Ching-chi no sooner caught sight of her than he pulled her aside to sit down with him and asked, "Sister, where have you been all this time since I saw you last?"
Feng Chin-pao dried her tears and said, "After I was released from the district yamen, it was not long before my mother, having suffered from shock, fell ill and died. I was subsequently sold into Auntie Cheng the Fifth's establishment as a powdered face. In recent days, however, patrons have been few, and I have been forced to go out onto the Lin-ch'ing dock to seek for customers among the drinkers in the tavern. The other day, I learned from Ch'en the Third that you had come here and opened a money-changing shop. I have been wanting to see you but did not anticipate that you would turn up for a drink in the tavern today, so that I would be able to run into you. I have been longing to death for you."
So saying, she started to weep all over again.
Ch'en Ching-chi pulled a handkerchief out of his sleeve and proceeded to wipe away her tears with it, saying, "My sister, you can stop worrying. I am all right again. After emerging from that lawsuit, and losing all my property, I have sought refuge in the Yen-kung Temple, where I have taken orders as a Taoist monk. My master Abbot Jen has entrusted me with major responsibilities, and I will be able to come see you frequently in the future."
He then went on to ask, "Where are you residing now?"
"I am living just west of the bridge here," responded Feng Chin-pao, "in the place called My Own Tavern operated by Liu the Second. It has over a hundred rooms, and unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls from all over, including the licensed quarter, reside there. During the day, they come out to frequent the various taverns in search of business."
As they talked, the two of them moved closer to each other as they continued drinking. Ch'en the Third went to heat more wine and then came back upstairs with a balloon guitar in hand. Feng Chin-pao then proceeded to play her musical instrument and sing a song to the tune "The Whole Realm Rejoices" in order to entertain Ch'en Ching-chi as he drank his wine.
Tears fall in two streams;
Two streams of tears fall.
Three cups of parting wine;[44]
Parting wine in three cups.
The male and female phoenixes are disunited;
Disunited are the male and female phoenixes.
Behind the mountain ridge the setting sun
is gradually sinking;
Gradually sinking behind the mountain ridge
is the setting sun.
The sky is growing dim and the earth dark.[45]
Dillydallying, they are reluctant to part;
Reluctant to part, they are dillydallying.[46]
When the two of them began to feel the effects of the wine, they could not help taking a small room and:
Doffing their clothes for the game of clouds and rain.
Ch'en Ching-chi had not had access to a woman recently and had thirsted for such an opportunity for some time. On reencountering Feng Chin-pao, he:
Exhausted himself to please her;
Addicted to the clouds and rain,
He was reluctant to call a halt.
Behold:
One of them stirs his jade arms into motion;
The other gently wriggles her willowy waist.
His pair of pupils spouts fire;[47]
Her starry eyes look dissolute.
One of them, his chest soaked with sweat,
Strives mightily to win two or three bouts.
One of them, emitting cosmetic fragrance,
Moans with satisfaction thousands of times.
The engagement is protracted,
As the "divine turtle" penetrates deeply
it is harder than ever;
As the conflict is prolonged,

The gush of his "silvery stream" spurts
well into her interior.
Although he had often challenged singing
girls in furious battles,
None of them had ever risen to the level
of this one's intensity.

It was not long before their engagement was over, and they put their clothes back on. Ch'en Ching-chi saw that it was getting late and took his leave of Feng Chin-pao, after rewarding her with a tael of silver, and giving Ch'en the Third three hundred copper cash.

As he was leaving, he said to Feng Chin-pao, "Sister, I plan to come and see you as often as possible, and we might as well meet here in the future. If you should hanker after me, just send Ch'en the Third to summon me."

So saying, he went downstairs and paid Hsieh the Third, the manager of the tavern, three candareens of silver for the wine they had consumed, after which he returned to the temple. Feng Chin-pao accompanied him as far as the bridge before coming back. Truly:

People may wear out their eyes in the desire for money;
Or ravage their faces with tears for the sake of lucre.

He stands on the steps and his tears fall silently
In the crowd his heart is full of discontent.
He breathes the air about him in a daze
And knows not his own feelings.
A warm breeze comes to the merry feast.
The sun shines brightly on the pollen of the flowers.
Yet even here his sorrow deepens.
He lives a life apart and only longs
To see the Springtide pass.

Chen Jingji had saved only his life. He sold his house and he had spent all his capital. His wife's ornaments were all gone, and there was no furniture left. He suspected that Chen Ding had made money at his expense, and dismissed him. Now he led a miserable existence without a penny to spend. He went several times to Yang's place to find out if Yang had come back with the goods.

One day, he went and shouted: "Is Yang the Elder at home?"

Now Yang had stolen Jingji's things and sold them. He hid himself in one place and another until he heard that Jingji's wife was dead and that the young man had been sent to prison for sometime on his mother-in-law's accusation. Then he came home. When he heard Chen Jingji's voice outside asking for the return of his property, he told his younger brother to go out and see him.

"You took my brother away on some of your business," Yang the Second said. "We have not heard a word from him for months, and, for all we know, you may have thrown him into the river and murdered him. Now, here you are, daring to come and ask about your merchandise. Do you think your merchandise is more important than my brother's life?"

This Yang the Second was a very bad man, a terrible fellow to meet in the gambling den. The purple muscles stood out on his arms and there was a mop of yellow hair on his chest. He was a villain pure and simple. He caught hold of Chen Jingji and demanded his brother. Jingji was frightened, struggled, and tried to get away. Yang the Second picked up a broken tile with three edges and deliberately gashed his own head so that the blood ran down. Then he ran after Jingji.

"I'll shove my spade in your mother's eye," he said. "What do we know about your money that you come farting around our house? Come here, and taste my fist."

Jingji ran for his life. When he got home, he fastened the door as tight as the lid of an iron pail. Outside it, Yang the Second cursed Chen Jingji, his father and his mother. Then he took some stones to smash open the door and Jingji held his breath. He had just come out of jail and had to put up with it. He was like a man who has once been bitten by a snake, afraid even of a piece of rope that he sees in a dream.

Some days later, he sold his house and got seventy taels of silver for it. He rented a small house in a very quiet road and went to live there. He sold the maid he had bought for Feng Jinbao and kept Ximen Dajie's maid to sleep with him. In less than a month, he sold the small house and went to live in a lodging house. Chen Ding no longer served him, and the maid died. He was alone in the world. He sold what furniture he had and was as poor as an old suit of clothes. Then he could not pay his rent and had to go and live at the Beggars' Rest.

The beggars knew he had been a rich man, and he was a good-looking fellow, so they gave him the stove bed to lie on and cakes to eat, and recommended him to the watchman as a bell ringer.

In the twelfth month, towards the end of winter, it was snowing heavily and the wind was very cold. Jingji came back from beating the alarm for the watchman. Then he went around the streets again with his bell. There were wind and snow together, and he had to tramp over the icy ground. It was so cold that he hunched his shoulders and bent his back and shivered all the time. About the fifth night watch, he saw a beggar ill and collapsed against a wall. The policeman thought the beggar was going to die and told Jingji to get some straw to warm him. Jingji went to sleep there, after doing all he could for the beggar. He had a dream. He dreamed he was back again in Ximen Qing's house, enjoying luxury and wealth, playing and joking with Pan Jinlian. Then he cried and woke up. Some of the other beggars came and asked him why he was crying. "Ah, Brothers," he said, "you do not know what I have had to bear." Every night, Jingji went to the Beggars' Rest, and every day went out to beg for food.

Long years he has suffered hardship
Bewailing his wife's death
Without clothes to cover his body
And food to put in his mouth.
His horse is dead
His servant run away
His house is sold.
Now, all alone, he wanders through the land
Standing, in the morning, outside the shops
To beg a scrap of bread
And, in the evening, lodges beside a ruined wall
Away from human habitation.
One hope alone is left to him
To go the watchman's round in the cold night.

In the city of Qinghe there lived an old man called Wang Xuan, whose other name was Ting Yong. He was more than sixty years old and very wealthy. He was a kind-hearted man who spent his money trying to help others. He always gave alms to the poor and assisted those in distress, and was very kind and very devout. His two sons were both married. One, Wang Qian, had inherited his grandfather's position at the royal mews and held the rank of Captain; the other, Wang Zhen, was a student at the Academy of Learning. The old gentleman had a small pawnshop. He had all the food he needed and all the clothes he could wear, and nothing to do but go to temples and monasteries to hear the preachings of the monks. He used to distribute medicine to the people, count his beads, and study the teachings of Buddha. He had two apricot trees in his garden, and took as his name in religion the Hermit of the Apricot Trees.

One day this old gentleman, wearing a monastic habit and a double-brimmed hat, was standing outside his door when Chen Jingji came along. The young man knelt down and kowtowed to him. The old man made a reverence in return.

"Brother," he said, "who are you? My sight is so bad I can't recognize you."

Jingji stood shivering. "Sir," he said, "I am Chen Hong's son."

The old man thought over this for a long time. "So you are Chen's son," he said at last. "My good nephew, how do you come to be in such a state? How are your father and mother?"

"My father died at the Eastern Capital," Jingji said, "and my mother is dead too."

"I believe you have been living with your father-in-law," the old man said.

"Yes," Jingji said, "but when he died, my mother-in-law would not have me any longer. Her daughter died, and we had a lawsuit. I had to sell my house, and I was cheated out of the little money I had. I have no work to do, and there is no way in which I can make a living."

"Where are you living now, my good nephew?" the old man said.

Jingji hesitated a long time, and at last said, "I will tell you the truth. It is like this...."

"Dear, oh dear!" the old man said. "So you are now a beggar. And yet, if I remember rightly, you come of a very respectable stock. Your father was a great friend of mine. But you were a little boy then, and had your hair dressed in a knot, and were going to school. Can it be possible you have come down to this? I am very sorry for you. Have you no relative who can help you?"

"There is my Uncle Zhang," Jingji said, "but he has not come to me, and I don't feel I can go to him."

The old man took Jingji into his house. He told his boys to bring food and cakes and bade Jingji eat as much as he could. Then he saw how poor and thin the young man's clothes were, and found for him a long black cloth gown, a felt hat, and a pair of strong winter shoes and socks. He gave Jingji a tael of silver and five hundred coppers.

"Good nephew," he said, "these clothes and shoes are for you to wear and this money is for you to spend. Rent a little room and start yourself in business with this tael of silver. You will at least be able to make something to eat that way, and it seems to me better than staying at the Beggars' Rest, where you are bound to go downhill. When you have found a room, come and tell me what the rent is and I will pay it for you."

Jingji knelt down on the floor and thanked the old gentleman. He promised to do what he was told and went away with the money. But he did not go to look for a room, nor did he start a business. He spent the coppers in a wineshop, and changed the tael of silver into base money and spent it in the street. Then the police arrested him as a common thief and, when he was taken to the police station, he was well beaten. He came away with nothing but the torn flesh on his back.

In a couple of days he had gambled his clothes away, and even taken off his socks to change them for food. Then he went back to begging on the street.

One day he again went past old Wang's door, and the old gentleman was standing outside. Jingji came and kowtowed to him. The old man looked at him and saw that the clothes and socks had gone. He had only the hat on his head and the boots on his bare feet. He was shivering with cold.

"Master Chen," the old man said, "how is your business getting on? I suppose you have come for the rent for your room."

Jingji could not think what answer to make. At last, when the old gentleman pressed him, he said what had happened and how everything the old man had given him was gone.

"Ah, my good nephew," the old man said. "That is no way to make a living. You are no use for manual labor; you must get some sort of little business. It is much better than this begging. If you become a beggar, people will look down on you, and you will bring disgrace upon your father and grandfather. I wonder why you did not do what I told you."

Again the old man took Jingji into his house and ordered a boy to bring him food. When he had finished eating, the old man gave him a pair of trousers and a white cloth gown, a pair of socks, a string of coins, and some rice.

"Take this," he said, "and do start some business. Even if you sell fire-wood or charcoal or beans or melons, you can at least make a living, and it is surely better than begging."

Jingji promised and took the money and the rice away. In a few days he had spent all the money on food and meat and noodles that he shared with the beggars in the Beggars' Rest. Then he went gambling and sold the white cloth gown.

It was the beginning of the year, and, clasping his shoulders with his hands, he went wandering about the streets. He felt very shy about approaching the old man again, but nonetheless went to the old man's place and stood in the sun beside the wall. The old man saw him, but looked at him with cold eyes and said nothing. The young man came up hesitatingly, knelt down, and kowtowed. Then the old man found out again how Chen Jingji had spent his money.

"Good nephew," he said, "you are off the track altogether. Our bellies are as deep as the sea, and time flies as quickly as a weaver's shuttle. Nobody can help you to fill a bottomless pit. Come in. Now, let me tell you. I know of a quiet and peaceful place. It would be the very best place for you, but I fear you will not wish to go there."

Jingji, kneeling before him, wept and said: "Uncle, if you will only take pity on me once more, I will go, no matter where you send me, and stay in peace there."

"Not far from the Linqing wharf," the old man said, "there is a temple called the Yangong temple. It is a place that produces rice and fish, and much business is done there. The Abbot is a good friend of mine. He has only two or three novices at present and, if I take you to him with some presents, I think he may accept you. It will be very good for you to learn how to read the sacred books and perform sacred music. Then you will be able to offer divine worship for people."

"Uncle, I am very grateful to you. It is an excellent idea."

"If you are willing," the old man said, "come here early tomorrow morning. It is a good day, and I will go with you to the temple."

Jingji went away. The old man sent at once for the tailor and told him to make a religious habit, a hat, shoes, and socks for Chen Jingji.

The next day, Jingji came to the old man's house. He was sent into an empty room to take a bath. Then he combed his hair and put on the new hat, and dressed himself in a whole suit of new clothes. The old man took fruits, a jar of wine, a roll of silk, and five taels of silver. He mounted a horse and gave Jingji a donkey to ride. Two boys went with them and carried the presents. They went outside the city and came to the river, about seventy *li* away. The sun was setting when they came to the temple. Old Wang dismounted and went in. The pine trees were very luxuriant, and the dark cypress trees were massed closely together. The walls were shaped like the character *pa*. On the north side were three rooms. It was a very handsome temple.

The young monks at the gate saw them coming and went to tell the Abbot. He came out to receive them dressed in his robes. The old man told Jingji to stay with the presents outside, and went in with the Abbot. When they came to the Abbot's apartments, the priest said: "My lord Wang, why have you been so long without coming to see me? Why am I favored today?"

"I have been very busy, or I should have come to see you before," the old man said.

They sat down and young monks brought tea.

"It is late," the Abbot said, "and you will not be able to go away this evening." He gave orders that the old man's horse should be taken to the stable.

"I have come to this most venerable temple to ask a favor of you," old man Wang said. "I can only hope that you will grant it."

"Give me your orders," the Abbot said, "and I shall not fail to obey."

"I have brought with me a young man, the son of an old friend. His name is Chen Jingji, and he is twenty-four years old. He is very handsome and not lacking in intelligence. But his parents died while he was still young and his upbringing has been neglected. His family is a very estimable and noble one. At one time they were rich, but they were unfortunately compelled to go to law, and now the young man is homeless. Because of the old friendship between his father and myself, I have suggested that he should come and become a monk in your temple."

"Since that is your wish, how dare I refuse?" the Abbot said. "Unhappily, though I have two or three novices here, none of them has any intelligence and they give me a great deal of trouble. All I should like to know is that this young man is honest."

"I can assure you, Sir, that he is most well-behaved. He is painstaking and clever in all things. I am sure he will make an excellent novice."

"When will you bring the young man?" the Abbot said.

"He is waiting outside at this moment. I have also brought a few humble presents that I ask you to accept with a smile."

"My lord," the Abbot said, "why did you not say so before?" He gave orders that the young man should be brought in. The servants carried in the presents. The Abbot looked at the card: 'Your humble disciple Wang Xuan respectfully offers a roll of coarse silk, a jar of wine, a pair of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two boxes of fruits, and five taels of silver.'

The Abbot quickly made a reverence to the old man. "Why do you give me such a valuable present?" he said: "it would be rude for me to refuse, and it embarrasses me to accept."

He looked at Jingji, who was wearing a Daoist hat, gown, and shoes, and a girdle about his waist. He had beautiful eyebrows and bright eyes. His teeth were bright, his lips red, and his face as white as though it were powdered. He stepped forward and kowtowed four times to the Abbot.

The Abbot asked how old he was.

"My animal is the Horse," Jingji said, "and I am twenty-four."

The Abbot realized that Jingji was indeed intelligent. He gave him the name Chen Zongmei. The other novices were called, one Jin Zongming, and the other, Xu Zongshun. Old Wang asked the Abbot to introduce Jingji to the others. The Abbot accepted the presents; boys brought a light and the table was set. There was plenty of food on the table, and, needless to remark, chickens, ducks, fish and meat. Old man Wang could not drink very much and, though the Abbot tried to persuade him, he soon refused any more and, asking leave to retire, went to bed.

The next morning, boys brought him water and, when he had dressed, the Abbot came to offer him tea. Then they had breakfast and, after it, the old man drank two cups of wine. His horse was well fed, and the Abbot gave a present to each of the two boys.

Before the old man went away, he sent for Jingji. "Work hard," he said, "at learning the Sacred Scriptures, and obey the orders your Teacher gives you. I will come and see you again, and bring clothes, shoes and socks for you at every season."

"If he does not obey you," he said to the Abbot, "punish him. I shall not blame you."
Then he took Jingji aside. "You must cleanse your mind and change your ways," he said. "Learn. If you still remain as bad as you have been, I shall cease to trouble about you."
Jingji promised, and the old man went home. So Jingji was established at the temple, and became a novice.
The Abbot was elderly and red-nosed. He was tall and had a loud and resonant voice. His beard was long; he was a good talker and a good drinker. He spent all his time receiving visitors. The business of the temple was managed by the novice, Jin Zongming. At that time, the government had just completed the canal and built two sluices at Linqing to control the water. So all boats, whether those of officials or people, had to stop there, and it was customary for those who traveled upon them to visit the temple. Some said prayers, some offered gifts, some came in quest of miracles, some came to do works of charity. They gave cloth and money and rice, oil, paper and candles. Some gave poles and mats.
With the money that he could not spend, the Abbot had set up a money-changing shop and a rice store on the river, and put his novices in charge of them, taking the profit for himself.
Jin Zongming was not a good young man. He was about thirty years old, and spent much of his time in the bawdy house. He was a great fellow for wine and women. He had some younger novices of his own, very smart, good-looking boys, and spent the night with them. When Chen Jingji came, Zongming saw how handsome he was, how white his teeth and how red his lips. He seemed so intelligent that he could make his eyes speak for him in place of his mouth. So he asked the young man to come and sleep in his room. In the evening they drank and, when Jingji was drunk, they went to bed together. At first, one had his head at one end of the bed and the other at the other end. But Jin Zongming complained that Jingji's feet smelled, and asked him to come over the other way. Then he complained that Jingji's breath was bad, and asked him to turn his face around. Jingji pressed his back against the other monk's stomach and said nothing, feigning sleep. Then Jin Zongming's penis became firm and erect like a spear. He smeared it with spittle and plunged in. When Jingji had been living among the beggars, two of his companions had misused his bottom and stretched it, so the monk's path was now easy. Jingji still said nothing. "This fellow will fall into my hands," he thought. "He doesn't know who I am and he can't do me much harm. I will let him have a taste and then I will get hold of his money."
He suddenly cried out. Jin Zongming was afraid the Abbot might hear, and covered the young man's mouth with his hand.
"Brother," he said, "don't make a noise. Tell me anything you want and you shall have it."
"I will not tell anybody," Jingji said, "if you will promise me three things."
"Good Brother," Zongming said, "do you say three things? I am ready to promise ten."
"Very well," Jingji said. "If you want me, you must leave the other boys alone. You must let me have the keys of all the rooms. And, if I go anywhere, do not ask me where I have been. If you like to promise these three things, you can do whatever you wish."
"I will do everything you say," Zongming said. They spent half the night in their wild pursuits. Jingji had been a dissolute young wastrel and knew all the tricks of the trade. He used these tricks for the benefit of Jin Zongming, who was perfectly delighted. The next day, he gave all the keys to Chen Jingji. He kept his promise that he would sleep no more with the boys.
Days passed and Jin Zongming was always singing the praises of Jingji to the Abbot. The Abbot believed him and bought a priest's diploma for Jingji. He was not suspicious, and the young man frequently took money and went to the town. There, one day, he met a certain Chen the Third who told him that Feng Jinbao's mother was dead. The girl herself had been sold to Zheng's bawdy house and given a new name. She was now frequenting the wine houses in the street. Chen the Third asked Jingji if he would like to see her. Jingji had not forgotten his old love for the girl. He took his money and went to a large wineshop. He had been happy enough before, but now it was as though he met her whom he had loved for five hundred years.
Do not spare your clothes of silk and gold
Do not let your youth be wasted.
When you see a flower that is ripe for gathering.
Gather it.
Wait not till all the flowers are faded
For then only bare branches will remain
For you to gather.
The wineshop to which they went was the finest in Linqing. It was known as Xie's wineshop, and had more than a hundred rooms. There were green balconies with, at the back, a little hill and, at the front, the river. It was in a very busy position, and all the boats called there.
The sun shines on the carven eaves
The painted columns shimmer in the air.
There are low green rails under the great windows
And long green curtains hanging there.
Young noblemen play the flute and the *sheng*
Singing girls and dancing maidens serve the wine
And bear the wine jars.
The drinkers feast their eyes on the blue sky
And the cloud-covered mountains.
Water and mist, like snow of good omen,
Take away the breath.
The wild birds sing in the green willows
And horses in happy trappings
Are tethered to the willow beside the door.
Chen the Third took Jingji in, and they went into a small room. He bade the waiter bring wine and food and send them a singing girl from downstairs. They heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and Feng Jinbao came into the room. She was carrying a little gong. She made a reverence to Chen Jingji. When the two lovers met, they could not prevent their tears from falling.
Jingji asked her to sit down with them. "Where have you been since I last saw you?" he asked her.
Feng Jinbao dried her tears. "After I came out of prison," she said, "my mother died. The shock had been too much for her. Then I was sold to Madam Zheng the Fifth. But lately, few people have come to see me, and I have had to go to the street to pick up business. Yesterday Master Chen told me that you had a money-changing shop here. I was anxious to see you, and at last my wish has been fulfilled. I have thought of you all the time." She began to weep again.
Jingji took out his handkerchief and dried her tears. "Sister," he said, "do not worry any more. I am all right again now. When I came out of prison, I had to spend all my money. Then I went to the Yangong monastery and became a priest. The Abbot trusts me absolutely, and I shall be able to come and see you as often as I like. Where are you living?"
"I am at Liu the Second's place," Feng Jinbao said. "It is west of the bridge. He has more than a hundred houses, all occupied by singing girls. Most of them come to the wine houses during the day."
They sat side by side and drank together. While the wine was being warmed, Chen the Third gave her a lute and she sang for them.
Tears fall in pairs
Tears fall in pairs
Three cups of wine at parting
Three cups of wine at parting
The phoenix and his mate are together no more
The phoenix and his mate are together no more.
Over the mountaintop
The slanting sun sinks gradually to rest.
Beyond the mountain the sun sets.
Now the sky is dark and the earth is gloomy
They do not wish to part
They do not wish to part.
When they had had wine enough, Jingji and Feng Jinbao went into a small room and did the work of love. It was a long time since Jingji had touched a woman, and he was very eager. Now that he had found Feng Jinbao, he put forth all his strength. They wished that they might never make an end, but at last they did so, and put on their clothes again.
It was late. Jingji left Feng Jinbao. He gave her a tael of silver, and three hundred coppers to Chen the Third. "Sister," he said to the girl, "we will meet here again. Whenever you want me, ask Chen the Third to tell me." He paid three *qian* of silver for the wine and then started back for the temple. Feng Jinbao went with him and left him at the bridge.

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### Liu the 2ND Drunkenly Beats Ch'en Ching-chi; Sun Hsüeh-o is Sold to a Brothel & Becomes a Trollop in the Scoffing Scholar's Own Tavern

When flowers bloom they do not disdain the plots of the poor;
The moon shines on mountains and rivers so that all are bright.
In this world the heart of man alone remains vile;
In all things demanding that Heaven show him favor.
The foolish, the deaf, and the dumb everywhere prosper;
While the clever and the intelligent suffer in poverty.
The year, month, day, and hour of birth determine it all;
However calculated, events are controlled by fate rather than man.[1]

From the time that Ch'en the Third led Ch'en Ching-chi to the Hsieh Family Tavern where he met with Feng Chin-pao, the two of them resumed their former affair. From then on, no three days passed by without their getting together. If Ch'en Ching-chi happened to be tied up at the temple and failed to show up, Feng Chin-pao would send Ch'en the Third to deliver a gift, or a love letter, and request that he come, and he would reward her with five mace or a tael of silver. Later on, he also undertook to supply her with fuel and rice, and to pay her rent. When he returned to the temple, his face was often red. When Abbot Jen asked him where he had been drinking, Ch'en Ching-chi would tell him that he had been enjoying three cups of wine with the manager of the rice shop, in order to reward him for his labors. His fellow disciple Chin Tsung-ming would also cover up for him and continued, needless to say, to have his fun with him in the evenings. As the mornings and evenings succeeded one another, he managed to pilfer nearly half of the assets in Abbot Jen's strongbox without his being aware of it.
One day, it was one of those occasions when:
Something was destined to happen.
Liu the Second, the proprietor of My Own Tavern, who was known as the Turf-protecting Tiger, was the brother-in-law of Chang Sheng, a trusted servant in the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu of the Regional Military Command. He specialized in operating brothels on the Lin-ch'ing dock:
Relying on his power to oppress the weak,[2]
and acting as a loan shark. He would lend money to the singing girls in the brothels at thirty percent interest, and if they failed to pay up when due, he would renegotiate the contract, adding the unpaid interest to the original amount of the loan, and charging interest on the interest. He was:
Given to drinking to excess and becoming violent,
so people did not dare to cross him. He was:
A foreman among the beaters of trollops;
A leader among the abusers of drunkards.[3]
Upon seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi, though still a white-faced youngster, was a disciple of Abbot Jen of the Yen-kung Temple and was maintaining the powdered face Cheng Chin-pao as his mistress in Hsieh the Third's tavern, he drank himself into a stupor, proceeded to clench his bowl-shaped fists, and headed for the Hsieh Family Tavern, demanding to know the whereabouts of Cheng Chin-pao.
This threw Hsieh the Third into such consternation that he bowed hastily in response and said, "Uncle Liu the Second, she is residing in room number two on the second floor."
Liu the Second then proceeded, with giant strides, to ascend the steps. Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao were in the room at the time, drinking together, and enjoying each others' company. They had closed the door to the room and left the blind hanging outside.
Liu the Second tore down the blind with his hands and called out in a loud voice, demanding that Cheng Chin-pao should come out. This flustered Ch'en Ching-chi to such an extent that he was barely able to breathe through his nostrils.
Liu the Second then kicked open the door with his foot, and Cheng Chin-pao felt compelled to come outside, saying, "Uncle Liu the Second, what have you got to say to me?"
"You lousy whore!" said Liu the Second, "you owe me three month's rent and have been hiding out here in order to avoid me."
"Uncle Liu the Second," responded Cheng Chin-pao with an ingratiating smile, "you can go home, and I will have my procuress, Auntie Cheng the fifth, deliver the rent to you."
But Liu the Second proceeded to strike her a blow in the chest with his fist, knocking her to the floor, and banging her head on the steps until:
The flow of blood inundated the ground,
saying, "You lousy whore! I will not wait to have it delivered to me but am demanding to have it right now."
Seeing that Ch'en Ching-chi was in the room, he strode inside and overturned the table, smashing the dishes to smithereens.
"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Ch'en Ching-chi. "Who are you to come in and wreak havoc in this way?"
"Fuck you, you 'sweetie'[4] of a Taoist priest," cursed Liu the Second, whereupon, he proceeded to grab him by the hair and hold him down while he:
Struck him with his fists and kicked him with his feet,
innumerable times. The other customers on the upper floor of the tavern were stupefied by what they saw.
The owner of the tavern, Hsieh the Third, on observing that Liu the Second was drunk, did not initially dare to interfere, but when he realized that he was beating someone until he was scarcely recognizable, he came upstairs and endeavored to intervene, saying, "Uncle Liu the Second, venerable sir, pray abate your wrath. He is unfamiliar with your reputation and has offended you by mistake. You would do well to make allowances for him and let him go, for my sake."
Liu the Second paid no attention to him but continued to beat Ch'en Ching-chi with all his strength until he had:
Rendered him senseless to the nth degree.[5]
He then summoned the local constable and the head of the relevant mutual security unit and had them arrest Ch'en Ching-chi and the powdered face, truss them up together with a single length of rope, and lock them up for the night, instructing them to escort them to the yamen of the Regional Military Command early the next morning.
It so happens that Commandant Chou Hsiu had been ordered by imperial edict to protect his territory, apprehend thieves and bandits, and oversee the canals and waterways in his jurisdiction.
Meanwhile, the fact that Ch'en Ching-chi had been arrested was still unknown to Abbot Jen in the Yen-kung Temple, who thought that he was probably staying overnight in the rice shop, having chosen not to return.
To resume our story, the next day, the local constable, the head of the relevant mutual security unit, and the couriers who patrolled the Grand Canal took charge of Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao, hired donkeys for them to ride on, and set out early in the morning to escort them to the yamen of the Regional Military Command. Upon arriving there, they showed the relevant documents to the head servants Chang Sheng and Li An and explained that the culprits had been in a brawl with Uncle Liu the Second, and that one of them was a Taoist priest from the Yen-kung Temple named Ch'en Ching-chi, and the other a singing girl named Cheng Chin-pao.

The soldiers on duty demanded money of them, saying, "We are the corps of twelve personnel who are responsible for administering punishments and are prepared to accept whatever you choose to give us, but you cannot afford to regard the two head servants lightly."
"I did have money on my person," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "but last night while Liu the Second was beating me, someone made off with it. The clothes I was wearing have all been torn to tatters, so where could I conceal any money? All I've got now is the silver hairpin that holds my topknot in place. I'll pull it out, and you can present it to the two head servants."
The jailers took the hairpin and showed it to Chang Sheng and Li An, saying, thus and so, "He could not come up with so much as a candareen but merely presented us with this silver-plated pin."
"Call him to come here so I can interrogate him," said Chang Sheng.
In no time at all, the soldiers hustled him inside and made him kneel down before him.
"What disciple of Abbot Jen are you?" asked Chang Sheng.
"I am his third disciple," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
"How old are you this year?" he went on to ask.
"I am twenty-three years old," replied Ch'en Ching-chi.
"If you are as young as all that," said Chang Sheng, "you ought to be devoting yourself to your duties as a Taoist priest, and studying the scriptures, rather than going out whoring, and drinking, and creating disturbances. What sort of insignificant yamen do you take the commandant's yamen to be, that you should allow yourself to be brought here without any money in hand? This hairpin of yours is:
Hardly enough to discolor the water.
What would I want with it?"
So saying, he tossed it back to him and told the jailers, "Wait a little, until His Honor takes his place on the bench, and then see that this case is given priority. It is obvious that this servile cur of a Taoist priest is a penny-pinching sort himself, though he feels free to solicit money and provisions from:
The patrons in the four directions.
Quite aside from the fact that you have been brought here because you are accused in a law case, even if you were coming to have a drink or attend a feast, you would be expected to bring along a handkerchief with which to wipe your mouth. When the time comes to administer punishment, see to it that this rascal is beaten and subjected to the squeezers as severely as possible."
He also called Cheng Chin-pao before him, but she had been accompanied by the pimp from the Cheng Family Brothel, who had expended three or four taels of silver on the staff of the yamen, both high and low.
"Since you are a singing girl," said Chang Sheng, "it is only natural that you should go where the pickings are good in order to support yourself. That's no big deal. It all depends on the mood of His Honor. If he is angry, you may be subjected to a session or two with the squeezers; while if he is well disposed, he may simply let you go."
The jailer standing to one side said to her, "If you give me another mace of silver, should you be subjected to the squeezers, I will see to it that your two thumbs are spared."
Li An then said to the jailer, "You take her out of sight and wait. His Honor is about to take his place on the bench."
Before long, lo and behold, the cloud-shaped gong sounded and Commandant Chou Hsiu came in and took his place on the bench. The functionaries, soldiers, and jailers were neatly arrayed to either side in strict formation. Behold:
The walls are decked with crimson silk;
The tables covered with purple drapery.
At the head of the chamber are suspended
red hangings;
On all four sides there hang kingfisher-
hued screens.[6]
The judge adheres strictly to the law;
The admonitory stone tablet is incised with
four lines in the Emperor's hand.[7]
The officers are meticulous and honest;
Beside the external abatises are displayed
two of the commandant's standards.
The soldiers and jailers stand sedately;
The functionaries are arrayed imposingly.
Holding their staffs, they stand before the steps
ready to perform their duties;
With writing materials in hand, they wait on the
sidelines to hear the judgment.
Though only the officers of one region;
They resemble a courtroom full of gods.[8]
On this occasion:
Without coincidences there would be no stories.
It was a case of:
Five hundred kalpas ago, these lovers
were fated to meet;
It is those who are predestined to do so
who come together.
Ch'un-mei, after entering Commandant Chou Hsiu's household, had given birth to a son during the eighth month of the previous year, and the young squire was now half a year old.
His face was smooth as a jade cap ornament, and
His lips looked as though they were rouged.
The commandant cherished him as:
A pearl in the palm;
and valued him more than:
A priceless treasure.
Not much later, his first wife died, and the commandant formally raised Ch'un-mei to the status of his legitimate wife and moved her into the master suite of five rooms. He also bought two wet nurses to take care of breast feeding his infant son, one of whom was named Yü-t'ang, and the other Chin-kuei; and two maidservants to wait on his wife, one of whom was named Ts'ui-hua, and the other Lan-hua. He also had two singing girls as concubines, who were fifteen or sixteen years old, one of whom was named Hai-t'ang, and the other Yüeh-kuei, who also waited upon Ch'un-mei in her new quarters. His senior concubine, Sun Erh-niang, had only a single maidservant to wait on her, named Ho-hua. But no more of this.
At the time, the young squire enjoyed having Chang Sheng hold him in his arms and take him outside to play, and when Commandant Chou Hsiu was holding court, Chang Sheng would stand to one side and allow him to look on at the proceedings.
On that day, when Commandant Chou Hsiu took his place on the bench and ordered that the tablet announcing the category of cases to be heard should be hung up, the local constables brought in the prisoners from their jurisdictions for trial, and Ch'en Ching-chi and Cheng Chin-pao were the first to be called before him.
When the commandant had read the deposition and saw that there were wounds on Ch'en Ching-chi's face, he said, "You rascal, you are a Taoist priest, yet you:
Do not abide by the Rules of Purity.
How can you indulge in sleeping with prostitutes, drinking, and creating disturbances in my jurisdiction?
This kind of behavior is unacceptable.
Lictors, take him down, give him twenty strokes of the bamboo, and revoke his ordination certificate. As for that singing girl, née Cheng, subject her to fifty blows on the squeezers, and have her sent back to work at the brothel from which she came."
The jailers standing to either side came forward, turned Ch'en Ching-chi over, stripped off his clothes, bound him with a length of rope, flourished their bamboo rods, and shouted for the beating to begin. At this juncture:
Strange as it may seem,
Chang Sheng was standing on the platform in front of the courtroom looking on, with the young squire in his arms, when the child broke away from him, approached Ch'en Ching-chi, and poked him out of a desire to be hugged. Chang Sheng fearing that the commandant would see what was going on, went over and picked him up, but the child started to cry out loud and continued to cry as he carried him back to Ch'un-mei in the rear compound.
"What is he crying about?" asked Ch'un-mei.
"His Honor is conducting affairs in the courtroom," responded Chang Sheng, "and had just ordered that the Taoist priest named Ch'en from the Yen-kung Temple should be given a beating, when the child went over and poked him out of a desire to be hugged. When I took him away, he started to cry."
Upon hearing that the culprit was named Ch'en, Ch'un-mei:
Lightly moved her lotus feet,
Gently lifted her beige skirt,
and made her way out to a position from which she could observe the proceedings from behind a hanging screen.
When she saw that the voice and the appearance of the person being beaten in the courtroom resembled those of Ch'en Ching-chi, she wondered, "Why should he have taken orders and become a Taoist priest?"
She then called over Chang Sheng and asked him, "What is this person's name?"
"According to the deposition of this Taoist priest," responded Chang Sheng, "he is twenty-three years old, and his secular name is Ch'en Ching-chi."
Ch'un-mei thought to herself, "So it really is him after all."
She then turned to Chang Sheng and said, "Go ask His Honor to come see me."
At the time, as the commandant presided over the court, Ch'en Ching-chi had only been given ten strokes of his sentenced beating, and Cheng Chin-pao was still being subjected to the squeezers.
When Chou Hsiu heard that his wife was calling for him, he ordered the jailers to suspend the beating and went to see her.
"That Taoist priest you are beating is a cousin of mine," said Ch'un-mei. "Please forgive him for my sake."
"My wife," responded Chou Hsiu, "why didn't you let me know before? I have already had him given ten strokes, and there is no remedy for that."
He then went back to the courtroom and ordered the jailers to let them both off, and to have the singing girl sent back to the brothel from which she came.
He then privately instructed Chang Sheng to call back the Taoist priest and also said, "Go ask your mistress if she would like to see him."
Ch'un-mei was about to have Chang Sheng call him into the rear compound to see her, when she suddenly remembered something.
From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself:
"If I am able to eradicate the obstacle before my eyes,
I may be able to replace it with the love of my heart;[9]
If the obstacle before my eyes cannot be eradicated,
How can I ever replace it with the love of my heart?"
Thereupon, she said to Chang Sheng, "You can let that person go for the time being. I will call him back another time."
She also ordered him not to revoke his ordination certificate.
Ch'en Ching-chi, having endured ten strokes with the bamboo, left the commandant's yamen and hastily made his way back to the Yen-kung Temple.
How could he have known that someone had told Abbot Jen, "That disciple of yours, Ch'en Tsung-mei, has been maintaining the harlot Cheng Chin-pao as his mistress in the Hsieh Family Tavern, which has annoyed the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, the owner of My Own Tavern, into beating him into a stinking pulp.
Along with the woman, he has been tied up and escorted to the yamen of the Regional Military Command. On the grounds that:
This kind of behavior is unacceptable,
the commandant is sending soldiers to hold you for interrogation, and revoke your ordination certificate."
When Abbot Jen heard this, on the one hand, he was old and susceptible to fright, while on the other hand, he was suffering from obesity. When he opened his strongbox and found that it was nearly empty, he received such a shock that the phlegm in his heart rose up to choke him, and he:
Fell to the floor in a faint.
His disciples rushed to his assistance and engaged a physician to come and administer a dose of liquid medicine, but he remained:
Oblivious to human affairs.
Later that night, alas:
He stopped breathing and died.
At the time of his death he was sixty-two years old.
The day after this, when Ch'en Ching-chi arrived back at the temple, the neighbors on the left side said to him, "Do you still dare to go into the temple? Your master, on your account, thus and so, has suffered such a severe shock that he died during the third watch last night."
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he was:
As flustered as a dog who has
lost his way home;
As flurried as a fish who has
escaped the net:
and made his way back to Ch'ing-ho district. Truly:
The case of the deer was one that the minister
of Cheng was unable to solve;

Whether the butterfly was Chuang Chou, or vice
versa, cannot be determined.[10]
At this point the story divides into two. To resume our story, when Ch'un-mei had seen Ch'en Ching-chi in the commandant's yamen, she had intended to keep him there, but an obstacle to doing so suddenly arose in her mind. She consequently sent Chang Sheng out to tell Ch'en Ching-chi to go his way for the time being. She then went back to her room, removed her headdress, took off her embroidered garments, and threw herself down on the bed, where she proceeded to stroke her chest and hug the covers, giving vent to moans and cries of pain. This had the effect of throwing the entire household, both high and low, into a state of consternation.
The commandant's secondary concubine Sun Erh-niang came in to see her and said, "First Lady, you have seemed to be in good health. What has happened to you?"
"You can go," responded Ch'un-mei. "Just leave me alone."
Later on, when the commandant came in from the courtroom and saw that she was lying on the bed and groaning with pain, he too became flustered, took hold of her hand, and asked, "What is it that is troubling you?"
When she did not reply, he went on to ask, "Has anyone been annoying you?"
Once again, she did not make a sound in response.
The commandant then said, "It must be because I have given your cousin a beating just now that you are upset."
Yet again, she did not respond.
The commandant:
At a loss for what to do,[11]
went outside and took Chang Sheng and Li An to task, saying, "If the two of you knew that he was your mistress's cousin, why didn't you tell me about it before I had him beaten ten strokes, and thus made your mistress unhappy? I told you to keep him here so that he could meet with your mistress. Why have you let him go instead? I demand an explanation from the two of you."
"I reported the situation to the mistress," said Chang Sheng, "and she said that I should let him go for the time being. It was only then that I let him go."
So saying, he went into the room and wept bitterly as he pled with Ch'un-mei, saying. "Mistress, I beg you to say a word to His Honor on our behalf. Otherwise, he is bent on punishing us."
Ch'un-mei, thereupon:
Opening wide her starry eyes, and
Raising up her moth eyebrows,
called the commandant into her presence, and said, "It's just that I've been feeling out of sorts and has nothing to do with the two of them. It's only because that rascal:
Is not the sort to abide by his lot,
and has gone so far as to go about masquerading as a Taoist priest, that I want to test his patience for a while before acknowledging him."
The commandant, upon hearing this, no longer held Chang Sheng and Li An to blame but, seeing that Ch'un-mei was continuing to groan with pain, sent Chang Sheng to summon a doctor to come and take her pulse.
The doctor said, "Your venerable wife is suffering from a condition engendered by the six desires and seven passions, that has produced a heavy feeling of congestion in the chest."
The medication he prescribed was prepared for her, but she refused to take it, simply letting it grow cold. Her maidservants did not dare to reproach her for this but brought the commandant in to try to get her to take it, whereupon, she did swallow one mouthful but refused to take any more.
When the commandant left the room, his concubine Yüeh-kuei brought the medication over to her again and said, "Mistress, please take the medicine."
But Ch'un-mei picked it up and threw it in her face, reviling her with the words, "You lousy wanton slave! Why should you keep on trying to get me to swallow this bitter liquid? There's nothing in my stomach."
She then made her kneel in penance before her.
Sun Erh-niang came in and asked, "What has Yüeh-kuei done that has caused the mistress to make her kneel this way?"
The concubine Hai-t'ang explained, "When she tried to get the mistress to take her medicine, the mistress said, 'My stomach is empty, so why should you try to force this medicine on me?' That's why she has made her kneel."
"Mistress," inquired Sun Erh-niang, "have you really not eaten anything today? Yüeh-kuei could not have known that. You ought not to beat her. Pray forgive her this once, for my sake."
She then said to Hai-t'ang, "Go into the kitchen and boil some congee for the mistress to eat."
Ch'un-mei then allowed Yüeh-kuei to get up from her kneeling position, while Hai-t'ang went into the kitchen and, carefully and conscientiously, prepared a small pot of thick congee made from nonglutinous rice, along with four saucers of side dishes. After putting the congee in a large bowl, and providing a pair of ivory chopsticks, she brought the steaming hot congee into the room.
At the time, Ch'un-mei was asleep on the bed, with her face to the wall, and she did not venture to disturb her but waited until she turned over before offering it to her, saying, "Mistress, the congee is here. Won't you eat some of it?"
But Ch'un-mei kept her eyes closed and did not respond.
Hai-t'ang appealed to her once again, saying, "The congee is getting cold.
Won't you get up, Mistress, and have some congee?"
Sun Erh-niang, who was standing by her side, said, "Mistress, you haven't had anything to eat for half a day. If you are feeling any better now, why not get up and have something to eat? It will help to maintain your stamina."
Ch'un-mei hastily crawled into an upright position, told the wet nurse to bring over a lamp, and took the bowl of congee into her hands. After swallowing only one mouthful, she shoved it onto the floor, but fortunately the wet nurse caught it in her hands, so that it did not break.
She then raised her voice and shouted at Sun Erh-niang, "You urged me to get up and have some congee for no good reason. Just take a look at the fine batch of congee that lousy slave boiled up. I'm not recuperating from childbirth, so why should she come up with such a thin batch of congee that I can see my face in it?"
She then said to the wet nurse Chin-kuei, "You give that slave four slaps in the face for me."
There and then, she actually did give Hai-t'ang four slaps in the face.
Sun Erh-niang then said, "Mistress, if you don't want to eat the congee, what would you like to eat instead, in order to relieve your hunger?"
"You want me to eat something," responded Ch'un-mei, "but my abdomen is feeling congested, and I can't keep anything down."
After a little while, she called over her junior maidservant Lan-hua and said to her, "I'd like to try some soup flavored with wing tips of chicken. Go into the kitchen and get that whore of a slave to wash her hands and make me a bowl of soup flavored with wing tips of chicken. Have her put in a good number of marinated bamboo shoots, and see that it is both sour and spicy."
Sun Erh-niang said, "Mistress, since you have told her what to do, she will go and have Sun Hsüeh-o make it for you. When you hanker after some particular dish, it will be as good as medicine for you."
Lan-hua did not dare to be remiss but went straight to the kitchen and said to Sun Hsüeh-o, "The mistress has ordered you to make some soup flavored with chicken wing tips for her. Hurry up and do it. She is waiting to have it."
Sun Hsüeh-o thereupon proceeded to:
Wash her hands and trim her nails,
after which, she killed two little chickens, plucked them clean, removed their wing tips, and cut them into slivers with a sharp knife. She then mixed in pepper, minced scallions, coriander, marinated bamboo shoots, oil, soy sauce, and the like, in order to make a clear broth, with which she filled two bowls, and placed them, while still steaming hot, on a red lacquer tray, for Lan-hua to take back to the master suite.
After looking them over by the light of a lamp, Ch'un-mei swallowed a mouthful but immediately cried out in an angry voice, "Go ask that whore of a slave what kind of soup she thinks she has made? It is as clear and flavorless as water and has no taste at all. You all may have been trying to get me to eat something, but all you are doing is making me angry, for no good reason."
This had the effect of causing Lan-hua to fear a beating, and she promptly returned to the kitchen, where she told Sun Hsüeh-o, "The mistress objects to the tastelessness of the soup and is ranting abusively about it."
Sun Hsüeh-o did not say a word, but proceeded to:
Swallow her anger and keep her own counsel,
as she put the pot back on the stove, made another bowl of soup, to which she added additional pepper, making it redolently fragrant, and gave it to Lan-hua to take back to the master suite. Ch'un-mei once again objected that it was too salty, and picking up the bowl she threw the soup onto the floor. Luckily, Lan-hua was quick enough to dodge out of the way, or it would have splashed all over her.
Ch'un-mei said irately, "You go and tell that slave that I know she is annoyed at having to cook for me, but if she doesn't do any better this time, she will have to answer for it."
When Sun Hsüeh-o heard this:
Though she never, ever, should have done it,
she mumbled out loud, "Sister, since when did you become so high and mighty as to impose on other people this way?"
She did not anticipate that Lan-hua, upon returning to the master suite, would repeat this remark of hers to Ch'un-mei.
If Ch'un-mei had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard it, she immediately:
Pricked up her willow brows,
Opened wide her starry eyes, and
Ground her silver teeth to smithereens,
As her powdered face turned bright red.
"Go drag that whore of a slave in here for me," she shouted.
In no time at all, three or four wet nurses and maidservants succeeded in dragging Sun Hsüeh-o into the room.
Ch'un-mei, in a rage, grabbed hold of her by the hair, tore off her headdress, and cursed her, saying, "You whore of a slave! How can you ask how I became so high and mighty? It was not the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing that elevated me to this status. I bought you in order to serve me, and you have been unhappy to do so. You were told to make me some soup, but what you produced was either too tasteless, or overly salty. Yet you have the nerve to ask in front of a maidservant when I became so high and mighty as to impose on other people. What further use do I have for the likes of you?"
She then sent for the commandant and had him force Sun Hsüeh-o to kneel in the courtyard, after which, she summoned Chang Sheng and Li An from the front compound and ordered them to strip off her clothing, and give her thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo. The servants, accordingly, lined up to either side and lit brightly shining lanterns, while Chang Sheng and Li An stood by with their heavy bamboos in hand.
When Sun Hsüeh-o objected to taking off her clothes, the commandant, who was afraid of angering Ch'un-mei, did not venture to intervene, but Sun Erh-niang, who was standing to one side, pled with Ch'un-mei, saying, "Mistress, order her to be beaten as many strokes as you like, but spare her the humiliation of having her underclothes removed. If she is stripped completely naked in front of the servants, it will not redound to His Honor's credit. I pray you, Mistress, to:
Lift high your gracious hand,
though it is true that she is at fault."
But Ch'un-mei refused this request and adamantly insisted that she be stripped naked to be beaten, saying, "If anyone should try to stop me, I will first dash my child to death, and then hang myself with a length of rope, leaving her behind in my place."
Thereupon, without ordering the beating to proceed, she threw herself to the ground, where she lay in a faint, stretched out at full length:
Oblivious to human affairs.
The commandant, in a state of panic, hastily lifted her up, saying, "Go ahead and beat her however you want. Don't get so upset over it."
Thereupon, the pitiable Sun Hsüeh-o was:
Forcibly turned over on the ground,[12]
stripped of her clothing, and subjected to thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo. She was beaten until:
The skin was broken and the flesh was split.
Ch'un-mei then dispatched a young jailer to summon Auntie Hsüeh in the middle of the night and instructed her to take Sun Hsüeh-o off empty-handed and offer her for sale.
Taking Auntie Hsüeh aside, she said to her, "I want no more than eight taels of silver for her. Take this whore of a slave away, and do your best to sell her into a house of prostitution. I don't care how much money you make on the transaction, but if you dispose of her anywhere else, and I hear about it, I won't have anything more to do with you."
"Who else do I depend on for my livelihood?" said Auntie Hsüeh. "I can hardly refuse to do as you say."
That very night she took Sun Hsüeh-o home with her, where she continued to weep pitifully:
In sorrow and distress,
until the day dawned.
"There's no point in crying any more," Auntie Hsüeh urged her. It's just your bad fortune to have ended up in the hands of your enemy. His Honor is not ill-disposed toward you, but unluckily your old enemy, harboring her old resentment, is out to hurt you, and His Honor feels that:
The situation is out of his control.
Since she has borne him a son, he feels obliged to accommodate her every wish. Even his secondary consort Sun Erh-niang feels that she must give way to her. As the saying goes:
Even a worker who pilfers the rice will sometimes
rise to become head of the granary.
There is nothing more to be said about it. You should swallow your resentment and stop crying."
Sun Hsüeh-o dried her tears and thanked Auntie Hsüeh, saying, "I only hope that sooner or later you can find a good customer for me, who will be able to support me."
"She ordered me repeatedly," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "to sell you into a house of prostitution. But I feel that:
Those who raise sons and raise daughters,
Should be governed by Heavenly principle.
I will endeavor either to find a monogamous match for you, so there will be but:
One husband and a single wife;
or marry you to a merchant with limited capital, who will be able to support you."
Sun Hsüeh-o thanked Auntie Hsüeh for this with:
A thousand thanks and ten thousand
expressions of good will.
Two days later, Old Mother Chang, the proprietress of an inn next door to Auntie Hsüeh's residence, came over to see her and asked, "What woman are you harboring in your place that cries so piteously?"
Auntie Hsüeh invited her inside and said, "This is the lady in question. She comes from a prominent household but was unable to get along with her mistress and has been driven out and turned over to me to find her a husband. She is hoping for a monogamous match, involving but:
One husband and a single wife,
in order to avoid such rancorous conflicts in the future."
"There is a cotton merchant from Shantung lodging at my inn," said Old Mother Chang. "His name is P'an the Fifth, he is thirty-six years old, has several cartloads of cotton wool to sell, and often stays at my place. The other day he told me that he has a mother who is more than seventy years old and is unwell, and that his wife died half a year ago, so that he has no one to look after her. He has repeatedly asked me to arrange a match for him, but I have been unable to find anyone suitable. It seems to me that this lady is about the same age and would make a good wife for him."

"I will not deceive you," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but this lady comes from a prominent household and is adept at both rough and refined domestic work. As for needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments, not to mention:
Skill with cooking pots and stoves,[13]
That naturally goes without saying.
In addition to which, she makes excellent soups. At present, she is just thirty-four years old, and her owner is asking only thirty taels of silver for her, so she ought to be a good match for him."
"Does she have trunkloads of personal belongings?" asked Old Mother Chang.
"She has only the clothing she is wearing and the hairpins and bracelets she has on," replied Auntie Hsüeh. "She is without any other luggage."
"In that case," said Old Mother Chang, "I will go back and tell him about her, and propose that he come over to see her for himself."
After concluding this discussion, and drinking her tea, she sat a little longer and then went home. That evening, she told her lodger about it.
The next day, after breakfast, she actually did bring her lodger over to see for himself. When he saw that Sun Hsüeh-o was both attractive and young, he promptly offered to pay twenty-five taels of silver for her, and to give Auntie Hsüeh an additional tael of silver as her go-between's fee. Auntie Hsüeh did not bother to bargain with him but proceeded to weigh the silver and write out a contract, allowing him to take her away that very night, so they could leave the next morning.
After the transaction was concluded, Auntie Hsüeh had someone alter the wording of the contract, weighed out a mere eight taels of silver, and then had this amount delivered to Ch'un-mei in the commandant's household, and report that she had sold her into a house of prostitution.
P'an the Fifth took Sun Hsüeh-o back to Old Mother Chang's place to spend the night, and during the fifth watch the next morning he thanked Old Mother Chang and took his leave of her, after which, the two of them got into a cart and headed straight for Lin-ch'ing. It was the sixth month at the time, so the days were long, and the sun had just begun to set when they arrived at the dock and made their way to My Own Tavern.
This establishment had more than a hundred rooms, in which unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls from all over, including the licensed quarter, were housed. Sun Hsüeh-o was led into a half-sized chamber containing an earthen k'ang, on which there sat a fifty- or sixty-year-old woman. There was also a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl from the establishment waiting upon her, whose hair was done up in two curled knots on either side of her head, who was made up with white face powder and red lips, was garbed in soft damask clothing, and was standing by the k'ang strumming a balloon guitar.
When Sun Hsüeh-o saw this, she gasped in distress, for she realized that this man P'an the Fifth must be a white slaver, who had bought her in order to make her into a powder-faced singing girl. She was renamed Yü-erh and, like the other young girl, whose name was Chin-erh, was expected to make her living by taking a little gong with her every day, and frequenting the taverns on the dock in order to attract customers, and sing to them.
No sooner did she enter the door than P'an the Fifth:
Without discussing the pros and cons of the matter,[14]
proceeded to give her a beating, and restrict her to her bed for two days, while giving her only two bowls of rice to eat. She was then given instruction in how to play musical instruments and sing, and when she was not up to the mark, she was beaten again, until her body was covered with red and blue bruises. Only after she began to get the hang of it was she given fine clothing, properly made up, and made to stand by the gate:
Leaning upon the door with a smile,[15] and
Provoking attention with her brows.
Truly:
If one's real work had ever found favor in the eyes
of one's contemporaries;
One would not have had to spend money on rouge
in order to paint portraits.[16]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
In straitened circumstances one has no place
to run and no place to flee;
No matter whether one goes south or comes north[17]
it will all be to no avail.[18]
On this night where have the varicolored clouds
ended up being scattered to?
One's dreams follow the path of the bright moon
as it sinks above the brothel.[19]
While Sun Hsüeh-o was working in My Own Tavern, it just so happened, one day, that:
As providence would have it,
Commandant Chou Hsiu sent Chang Sheng to the canal port of Lin Ch'ing to purchase ten piculs of distiller's yeast, with which to brew homemade wine. When the proprietor of My Own Tavern, the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, saw that his brother-in-law Chang Sheng had come to pay him a visit, he immediately had one of his best rooms swept clean and furnished with wine and delicacies, table utensils, seasonal fruits of various kinds, vintage wine, and fresh fish for the occasion, and invited Chang Sheng to come in for a drink.
The wine steward who was in charge of the drinks knelt down in front of Liu the Second and inquired, "Uncle, which of the singing girls from downstairs should I invite up to serve the drinks?"
Liu the Second responded by saying, "Have Old Sister Wang, Chao Chiao-erh, and P'an the Fifth's two girls, Chin-erh and Yü-erh, the four of them, come up to wait on Brother-in-law Chang."
The wine steward assented and made his way downstairs. It was not long before they heard the sound of laughter coming from the stairwell as the four singing girls, made up as flowerlike beauties, and dressed in outfits of light silk and soft damask, came up the stairs and proceeded:
Like sprigs of blossoms swaying in the breeze;
Sending the pendants of their embroidered sashes flying,
to kowtow four times before the guest, and then stand to one side.
When Chang Sheng opened his eyes wide and took a good look at them, he thought to himself, "One of these powdered faces:
Strange as it may seem,
looks just like that Sun Hsüeh-o who used to work in His Honor's kitchen until the young mistress drove her away. How did she ever end up here, engaged in this line of work?"
Sun Hsüeh-o, also, upon surveying the scene, recognized Chang Sheng but chose not to say anything.
Chang Sheng then inquired of Liu the Second, "Where do these powdered faces come from?"
"Brother-in-law," said Liu the Second, "there is no reason for me to deceive you. These two, who work for P'an the Fifth, are named Yü-erh and Chin-erh. This one is called Old Sister Wang, and the other is called Chao Chiao-erh."
"I recognize Old Sister Wang," said Chang Sheng, "and this Yü-erh from the P'an establishment also looks familiar to me."
He then called Yü-erh over to him and whispered to her, "Are you not Sun Hsüeh-o from His Honor's residence? How did you happen to end up here?"
No sooner did Sun Hsüeh-o hear his question than she began to:
Shed two streams of tears,
and said:
"It's a long story."
She then proceeded, thus and so, to explain what had happened, saying, "I was tricked by Auntie Hsüeh, who sold me for twenty-five taels of silver, only to end up here:
Entertaining at parties and endeavoring to sing:
Engaging customers and catering to their wishes."
Chang Sheng had noticed how attractive she was in the past and felt himself drawn to her, while Sun Hsüeh-o did her best to cater to him as she served the drinks, and the conversation between them started to warm up. Sun Hsüeh-o and Chin-erh then took up their balloon guitars and proceeded to sing a song for Chang Sheng as he drank his wine, to the tune "Four Pieces of Gold":
In my last incarnation, I imagine,
I must have owed him a love debt due
in this life;
For he has abandoned me along the way,
So that our lover's knot cannot be tied.
To speak of it floods my cheeks with tears;
When depressed, my sorrow is as deep as the sea.
As for our myriad oaths of fidelity,
What has become of them now?
You wretched scoundrel!
How can you ignore the love I have lavished
upon you all this time?[20]
After the song was finished, the two of them, what with:
The raising of glasses and passing of cups,
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
continued to drink until they began to feel the effects of the wine. As the saying goes:
Worldly wealth, painted faces, and wine
in the sing-song houses;
Who is there who is not deluded
by these three things?[21]
Chang Sheng became enamored of Sun Hsüeh-o, and the two of them spent the night together in a room at the tavern. Sun Hsüeh-o, employing her mastery of the arts of the bedchamber, and whispering oaths of fidelity into his ears, gave herself over to Chang Sheng.
They exhausted themselves to please each other,
Like fish sporting in the water,
in ways that:
Were too multifarious to describe in detail.
The next day, by the time they got out of bed and performed their ablutions, Liu the Second had already brought up a serving of wine and delicacies in order to provide his brother-in-law with a pick-me-up. After they had sated themselves on this repast, served in:
Large platters and large bowls,
Chang Sheng got together his luggage, fed his horse, packed up the shipment of distiller's yeast, and prepared to depart, along with his attendants.
As he was about to go out the door, he gave Sun Hsüeh-o three taels of silver and said to Liu the Second, "See that you look after her well, and don't let anyone take advantage of her."
From this time on, whenever Chang Sheng came to the canal port of Lin-ch'ing on business, he would get together with Sun Hsüeh-o in My Own Tavern; and afterwards, as he traveled back and forth, he agreed to pay P'an the Fifth a few taels of silver every month, in order to maintain her as his mistress, and prevent her from taking on any other customers. Liu the Second, out of a desire to please his brother-in-law, did not even demand any rent for her and went so far as to fleece his other customers in order to pay for her keep, and provide Sun Hsüeh-o with fuel and rice. A poem testifies to this:

Who could know at the time the way in which he would indulge his desires?
Given to lust, and relying on his influence, his acts are unconscionable.
Calamity does not seek people, they court it themselves;
Beauty does not delude people, they delude themselves.

Those of her kin are dead, and all is lost
Unwillingly she must become again
A light of love.
Her tears fall like great drops of jade
She leaves her home and with her dainty feet
Walks to the brothel.
Before the mirror she sighs
Laments the fate of her most perfect beauty
And before men begins to play the whore.
Rain and dew in springtime are like the waters of the sea.
She mates with Master Liu
Whom she finds better than Master Yuan.

Chen Jingji and Feng Jinbao met at the wine house every two or three days. If he failed to come, the girl would send him a message by Chen the Third. And every time he came he gave her a tael of silver or five *qian*. He also gave her rice and firewood, and paid her rent. When he went back to the temple, his face was always red. The Abbot would ask him where he had been drinking, and Jingji would say that he had drunk two or three cups with customers at the rice shop because he was so tired and worn out. Jin Zongming supported him in everything he said, to make sure of his companionship during the night. So things went on for a long time, and Jingji robbed the Abbot of nearly half his takings.
Liu the Second of the wine house was a famous tiger in this neighborhood. He was the younger brother of the wife of that Zhang Sheng who was the trusted servant of Major Zhou. He set up a number of houses for singing girls, foregathered with rich and powerful people, and oppressed the weak. He lent money to the singing girls, taking from them interest at three times the ordinary rate. If they did not pay, he altered the contracts, adding the interest to the loan and so making it more and more. He was fond of wine, and very quarrelsome in his cups; no one dared to cross him in any way. He was indeed a leader of those who beat singing girls and a captain of wineshop bullies.

He had observed Chen Jingji, a handsome young fellow and a novice of Abbot Ren, spending a great deal of time at the large wine house with the girl Feng Jinbao. One day, when he was drunk, he came to the wine house his two fists the size of rice bowls, and demanded Feng Jinbao. The host, Xie, bowed and said: "Uncle Liu, she is upstairs in Number Two." The man bounded upstairs with great strides. Jingji was drinking wine with Feng Jinbao behind a closed door with the lattice pulled down. Liu pulled aside the lattice and demanded that Feng Jinbao should come to him at once. Jingji was so terrified that he held his breath. Liu kicked open the door, and the girl had to come out.
"Uncle Liu," she said, "what can I do for you?"
"You whore!" Liu cried, "you haven't paid me any rent for three months and now you are trying to get away from me."
"Uncle," Feng Jinbao said, smiling, "go home and I will tell mother to send you the money."
Liu struck her in the chest and felled her to the ground with one blow. Her head hit the stairs, and blood streamed over the floor.
"You whore," Liu cried, "I'm not going to wait. I want my money now."
Then he saw Chen Jingji. He went forward, took hold of the table and smashed everything that was on it.
"Who are you," Jingji cried, "to come here and behave in this mad fashion?"
"I'll pound your mother's rice for her, you priest," Liu cried. He dragged Jingji by the hair, knocked him down, kicked him, and struck him. Meanwhile, the people in the wine house stood and watched him as if they were silly. The host could see that Liu was drunk and did not dare to interfere, but when he saw that matters were really getting serious he screwed up courage enough to come and say: "Uncle Liu, don't be annoyed with him. He doesn't know your honorable name, or he would never have done anything to upset you. Please forgive him and let him go, for my sake."
Liu paid no attention and went on beating Jingji until he was half dead. Then he sent for the police and told them to arrest both the girl and the young man and take them before the court. He had, in fact, a commission from Major Zhou to direct the police and keep watch for thieves and bandits on the river.
The Abbot did not know that Jingji had been arrested. He thought the young man had stayed at the rice shop for the night.
The next day the police took the young man to the court. They handed their charge to Zhang Sheng and Li An. This declared that Chen Zongmei, a priest of the Yangong monastery, had picked a quarrel with Liu the Second, and that the girl was a harlot.
The people at the court asked Jingji for money. "We are the executioners here," they said, "and there are twelve of us. We leave it to you. And there are the two officers who must not be overlooked."
"I had some money," Jingji said, "but it was stolen when I was having the trouble with Liu. He tore my clothes to rags. Now I have no money, only this silver pin, and that I must give to these two gentlemen."
The men took the pin to Zhang Sheng and Li An. "The fellow has no money," they said, "he only offers this pin, and it is of very inferior silver."
"Bring him in, and I'll see what he has to say," Zhang Sheng said.
They brought in the young man and he knelt down before Zhang Sheng.
"When did you become a disciple of Abbot Ren?" Zhang Sheng said. "What is your civil name? I don't remember having seen you before."
"My name is Chen Jingji," the young man said, "and I am of good family. I have only recently become a priest."
"Since you are a priest," Zhang Sheng said, "it is your duty to study the Sacred Scriptures; not to come out from your monastery, associate with whores, and make trouble with others. You seem to think my position here is not very important and that it is not necessary to give me anything. Why! if I throw this pin into the water, it won't even cause a ripple on the surface."
He ordered the attendants to take the man away to await the pleasure of his superior officer. "This doggish pair is very stingy," he said. "The only thing these priests care about is their money. Now this is an official matter, and when people come here to a dinner party, the least they can do is to bring a handsome handkerchief to wipe their mouths. When you beat him," he said to the others, "see you do it well."
Then he sent for the girl. She brought a man with her who gave three or four taels to the officers.
"You are a singing girl," Zhang Sheng said to her, "and of course you go to any place where it is busy to make a living. You did nothing wrong. It will all depend on whether my chief is in a good temper or not. If he is in a bad temper, you may get a beating; if not, he may let you go."
After a while they heard the signal, and Major Zhou entered the hall. The officers stood in ranks on either side.
In the eighth month of the year before this happened Chunmei had given birth to a son. The baby was now six months old. His face was like a piece of jade and his lips were as red as rouge. Zhou looked upon this child as the most precious thing in all the world. His first wife had died, and he had put Chunmei in her place. She lived in the upper rooms and had two nurses to look after the child, one called Yutang; the other, Jinkui. She also had two maids, Cuihua and Lanhua. She had two favorite singing girls, both sixteen years old, called Haitang and Yuegui. All these girls were devoted to the service of Chunmei alone. The Major's second wife had only one maid, Hehua.
Very often, Zhang Sheng would take the baby outside the court to amuse him and, when the magistrate was hearing a case, he would stand there with the baby in his arms and look on.
Today, when Zhou entered the court, a number of people were brought before him, but he decided to begin with Chen Jingji. So the young man and Feng Jinbao were brought forward. Zhou read the charge. "You are a priest," he said. "What do you mean by breaking your rule, frequenting whores, drinking, and disturbing the public peace? It is disgusting."
He ordered Jingji to be given twenty strokes of the rod, and canceled his priest's diploma. He put thumbscrews on Feng Jinbao, ordered her to be given a milder punishment, and sent back to the bawdy house. The attendants bound Jingji, took off his clothes, raised their rods and shouted. They were just about to begin their beating when the baby, who was with Zhang Sheng outside the hall, stretched out his arms to the young man and wanted to go to him. Zhang Sheng could hardly hold him. He was afraid that the Major might see the child and hurriedly took him away. The baby cried, and did not even stop crying when he was in his mother's arms again. Chunmei asked what was the matter with him.
"My master was in the hall trying cases," Zhang Sheng said, "and he was just about to have a priest beaten, a man named Chen, when the baby began to struggle and try to get to the man. I had to bring him away and then he began to cry."
When she heard the name Chen, Chunmei gathered up her skirts and went softly to the hall. There she peeped through a screen. She could hear the voice of the man who was being beaten and it sounded like that of Chen Jingji. But she could not understand how Jingji could have become a priest. She called Zhang Sheng to her.
"Do you know the man's name?" she asked him.
"He told me that his name as a layman was Chen Jingji," Zhang Sheng told her.
"It is he," Chunmei said to herself. Then she said to Zhang Sheng: "Go and ask my husband to come and see me."
Major Zhou was watching the punishment being administered to the young man. Jingji had had ten strokes when the Major was told that his wife wished to speak to him. He ordered the officials to stop, and left the hall.
"The priest you are punishing is my cousin," Chunmei said to him. "Please forgive him, for my sake."
"Why didn't you tell me before, my dear?" the Major said. "I have already given him ten strokes, and I can't take them back."
He went back to the hall and told the attendants to release both the man and the girl. Then he told Zhang Sheng to go after the priest and also to find out whether Chunmei wished to see him. This was just what Chunmei did wish, but she hesitated. After thinking for a long time, she said to Zhang Sheng: "Let him go. I will send for him another time."
So the Major allowed Jingji to go after no more than ten stripes. He went back to the temple.
The Abbot heard that his novice, Chen Zongmei, had been carrying on with a singing girl at the wine house, that he had got into trouble with Tiger Liu, and been beaten nearly to death. He heard, too, all that had happened afterwards. Now the Abbot was an old man and fat. He was very much upset. He opened his boxes only to find that many of his most treasured possessions had disappeared. Then he collapsed on the floor. The monks came and sent at once for the doctor. They poured medicine down his throat, but without effect. At midnight, the Abbot breathed his last. He was sixty-three years old.
The next day, as Jingji was approaching the temple, some of the people who lived near by said to him: "Do you still think of going to the temple? Because of you, your Teacher died last night!"
Jingji rushed back to Qinghe like a stray dog.
When Chunmei had told Zhang Sheng to let Jingji go away, she went back to her room. She took off her headdress and her long gown and went to bed. She groaned, pressed her hands to her bosom, and said she felt a pain. The whole house was upset. The Major's second wife came and said: "Lady, you have been very well until now, what is the matter?"
"Leave me alone and don't ask questions" was the only answer Chunmei would give to anybody.
Then the Major came from the hall. When he found his wife lying on the bed, groaning, he too became alarmed.
"How do you feel?" he said, taking her hand.
There was no answer.
"Has anyone been annoying you?"
There was still no answer.
"Perhaps it was I, when I punished your cousin."
Chunmei would not say a word.
The Major did not know what to do. He went out to Zhang Sheng and Li An. "You knew that man was your mistress's cousin," he said. "Why didn't you tell me instead of allowing me to punish him and upset my wife? I told you to stop him and let your mistress see him. Why did you let him go? You are a pair of fools."
"I told the mistress," Zhang Sheng said, "but she said she didn't wish to see him. That's why I let him go."
Zhang Sheng went weeping to Chunmei.
"Lady," he said, "please say a word to master for us, or we shall be beaten."
Chunmei opened her eyes wide and raised her eyebrows. She sent for the Major. "I am not well," she said, "but these two men are not to blame. As for that immoral priest, it is better he should suffer a little. I do not wish to see him now."
Zhou said no more to Zhang Sheng and Li An, but told Zhang Sheng to go and fetch a doctor for Chunmei. She was still in pain.
When the doctor had felt her pulse, he said: "It is anger that has upset this lady." He gave her some medicine, but she would not take it. The maids did not dare to try and persuade her, and they sent again for Major Zhou. He begged her to take the medicine. She took one mouthful and no more. Then he went away.
"Lady, do take some of it," the maid Yuegui said, taking up the cup. Chunmei took it and threw it in the maid's face. "You thievish slave," she cried angrily, "why do you try to make me drink this bitter stuff? What is there in my stomach now?" She told the maid to kneel down.
Then the Major's second wife came and asked why Yuegui was kneeling there. The other maid said: "Because she gave our mistress the medicine."
"But she had had nothing to eat," the Second Lady said. How could she take medicine?"
"Lady," said the second wife, "you have had nothing to eat today, but Yuegui did not know. Won't you forgive her?" She told Haitang to go to the kitchen and get some gruel for her mistress.
Chunmei told Yuegui to get up. Haitang went to the kitchen and very carefully prepared some gruel and four small dishes. She took them to Chunmei, all steaming hot. Chunmei lay on the bed, her face turned to the wall, so that the maid dared not disturb her, but had to wait until she turned over. Then she said: "I have brought you some gruel. Will you have a little?"
Chunmei did not open her eyes, and made no reply.
Haitang said: "Please, Lady, do get up and take some gruel. It will be cold soon."
"Lady, you have had nothing at all," the second wife said. "You must be better now you have had a sleep. Do get up and eat something."
Then Chunmei got up and told the nurse to give her a light. She took a mouthful of gruel and threw the bowl away. Fortunately, the nurse caught it and it did not break.
"You told me to have some porridge," Chunmei shouted to the second wife. "What sort of gruel do you call this? I am not having a baby. Why do you give me slops like this?"
Then she said to the nurse: "Box that slave's ears four times for me." The nurse did so.
Then the second wife said: "Lady, if you don't care for the gruel, have something else. You must not starve yourself."
"It is all very well for you to talk," Chunmei said. "My stomach is too weak." After a while, she said to Lanhua: "I will have some chicken soup. Go to the kitchen and tell that whore there to make me some chicken soup. She must be sure to wash her hands first, and put some pickled bamboo shoots into it. I want it very hot and very sour."
"Lady," the second wife said, "since you fancy it, it will be as good as medicine for you."
Lanhua went to the kitchen. "Mistress wants some chicken soup," she said to Sun Xue'e. "Make it at once: she wants it now."
Chicken soup is made of the wing, cut into very small pieces. Xue'e washed her hands, killed two chickens, plucked them, then cut the meat into very fine pieces with a sharp knife. She took onions and pepper, pickled bamboo shoots and sauce, and the soup was made. She filled two bowls, put them on a red lacquer tray, and Lanhua took them, very hot, to Chunmei.
Chunmei examined the soup under the lamp and tasted it. "Go and ask that whore what she calls this," she shouted. "It is nothing but plain water. It has no taste at all. You talk about my eating something and this is the sort of stuff you bring me."
Lanhua was afraid of being punished. She hurried to the kitchen and told Xue'e that her mistress complained that the soup had no taste. Xue'e did not say a word. She swallowed her anger and humiliation, washed out the pan, and made some more soup. This time she put more pepper into it. It had a delicious smell. Lanhua took it to her mistress.
Chunmei complained that it was too salty, took up the bowl and threw the soup on the floor. If Lanhua had not moved aside, the soup would have caught her.
"Go and tell that slave I know she hates cooking anything for me, but if she doesn't make good soup next time, she will know what to expect."
Then Xue'e made a great mistake. "You have not always been so high up in the world," she muttered, "but what airs you give yourself."
Lanhua heard this and told Chunmei. The woman opened her eyes wide and raised her eyebrows. She clenched her teeth, and her pale face flushed. "Bring that whore here," she cried.
Three or four women dragged Xue'e into the room. Chunmei tore at her hair and threw her headdress to the floor.
"You whore!" she cried, "how dare you say I have not long been so high up in the world? Well, I don't owe my position to Ximen Qing. I bought you so that you should do what I told you, but I find you are too proud. I told you to make some soup for me, and you make it either with no taste at all or with too much. Then you tell my maid that I nave not always been what I am now, and that I only wish to insult you. Why should I keep you here?"
She sent someone for her husband. Xue'e was taken to the courtyard and made to kneel down. Then Chunmei sent for Zhang Sheng and Li An and told them to strip the woman of her clothes and give her thirty strokes with a rod. The servants took lanterns and torches, and Zhang Sheng and Li An each had a big stick.
Xue'e refused to take off her clothes. The Major, who was afraid of his wife, did not say a word.
"Lady," the second wife said. "Let her be beaten, but don't make her take off her clothes with all these men and servants about. I know she was in the wrong, but do forgive her this time."
Chunmei would not listen. She insisted that the woman's clothes should be stripped from her.
"Let anyone try to stop me, and I will kill my child first and then hang myself," she cried. "Then I shall be dead and you can have this strumpet in my place."
She did not give the word to beat Xue'e, but fell on the ground in a faint. Zhou was excited, picked her up, and said: "Tell them to beat her, and don't let yourself get upset like this."
Xue'e was thrown to the ground. Her clothes were stripped off and she was given thirty strokes, till the skin and flesh were torn from her bones. Then they sent for old woman Xue, who was to take her away immediately and sell her. Chunmei took old woman Xue aside. "I want eight taels of silver for her," she said, "and not a penny more. But I insist that she must be sold to a brothel. If you let her go anywhere else and I find out, you will never see me again. Otherwise, you can make what profit you like out of her."
"How can I do other than obey you?" old woman Xue said.
She took Xue'e away. The woman cried all night and Xue tried to console her. "Don't cry," she said. "It was your unhappy fate that brought you back to your old enemy. Your master was fair enough, but unfortunately there was an old hatred between you and her. She treated you badly, and the master could do nothing for you. Now she has borne him this son, he does absolutely everything she asks. Even his second wife must always give way. It is like an old bandit becoming governor of a granary; we have to put up with it. Don't cry."
Xue'e dried her tears and thanked old woman Xue. "I only hope," she said, "that I may come to some place where I shall get food enough to live."
"She told me repeatedly that I must sell you to a brothel," Xue said, "but I have children of my own, and I must think of what is right. I will find a husband for you, some merchant in a small way, and he will treat you as his wife and let you have all you need."
Xue'e thanked her gratefully.
A day or two later, one of the neighbors, Madam Zhang, came to see old woman Xue. "Sister Xue," she said, "who was it I heard crying so bitterly the other night?"
"Come in," old woman Xue said. "It was this lady. She comes from a very exalted family but she had a quarrel with her mistress and was sent away. Now she is here, hoping to find another husband. She doesn't want any more trouble and would like a single man."
"There is a guest from Shandong staying with me," Madam Zhang said, "a dealer in cotton wool. His name is Pan, and he is the fifth in his family. He has large stocks of cotton wool and keeps them at my place. He is thirty-seven years old. Only a day or two ago he told me that he has an old mother, an invalid of about seventy. His wife died six months ago, and he can't find anybody to look after his mother. He asked me, if I could, to find somebody for him to marry. I have looked about, but so far I haven't been able to find anybody suitable. This lady would do for him very well, I think."
"She has belonged to a very good family," old woman Xue said. "She can make clothes, both plain and fancy; she can sew well, and she is an excellent cook. She is thirty-five years old. There ought to be no difficulty, since they are only asking thirty taels of silver for her."
"Has she any boxes?" Madam Zhang said.

"No, she has only the clothes and ornaments she stands up in."
"I will go and tell him. Then he can come and see her for himself," Madam Zhang said. She had tea and went away. That night she told the man all about Xue'e and, the following afternoon, took him to see her. He thought her beautiful and still young, and immediately offered twenty-five taels for her with an extra one for the old woman herself. Old woman Xue did not attempt to bargain. She took what he offered and settled the matter. That evening, he took Xue'e away, saying that he was returning home next day.
Old woman Xue altered the contract and took eight taels to Chunmei, telling her that she had sold the woman to a brothel.
Pan slept that night with Xue'e at Madam Zhang's place. Before dawn next day, he thanked Madam Zhang and set off for Linqing. It was now the sixth month and the days were at their longest. When they came to the wharf, it was about the time when the sun turned to the west. They went to a wine house. There were many wine houses at Linqing, all occupied by singing girls from everywhere around. Xue'e was taken to a small one. She went into a little room with a bed in it. An old lady about sixty years old was sitting there. There was a maid too, about seventeen or eighteen. Her hair was dressed in several knots, her face powdered, and her lips red. She wore a silken dress, and played a lute as she sat on the bed. Then Xue'e cried out, for then she knew that this man, Pan the Fifth, was a woman-dealer, and he had bought her for a harlot.
The man proposed to send Xue'e to the wine houses to make herself agreeable to the customers and so make money. Without a word, he gave her a severe beating, then sent her to bed and kept her there for two days. In those two days, he gave her nothing but two bowls of rice to eat. Then he told her to learn a few songs and taught her how to play, and, when she did not succeed very well, he beat her again. When she was sufficiently trained, he dressed her up in pretty clothes and bade her stand outside the door and smile at the passersby.
Then Heaven took pity on her. One day, Zhang Sheng came to the river to buy ten measures of yeast for his master who wished to make some wine. When Tiger Liu saw his brother, he cleared a room in his wine house, and offered Zhang Sheng a feast. The waiter heated the wine and said: "Uncle, there are several singing girls here. Would you like one? Liu mentioned four names and the waiter went to fetch the girls. Soon laughing voices were heard and, one after the other, the four singing girls came into the room. They seemed as beautiful as flowers and were all dressed in light, soft silken clothes. They came and made reverences to the two men. Zhang Sheng looked at them. It seemed to him that one of them was very like Xue'e, whom his master had dismissed. But he could not understand how she could have become a singing girl. Xue'e recognized Zhang Sheng, but neither of them spoke.
"Brother-in-law," Zhang Sheng said, "who is this girl?"
The Tiger pointed them all out.
"This one, who you say is from Pan the Fifth's house, seems very familiar to me somehow," Zhang Sheng said. He called her forward. "Are you not Xue'e?" he whispered. "What are you doing here?"
Xue'e began to cry. "It's a long story," she told him. "Old woman Xue sold me for twenty-four taels and here I'm. I come to make myself pleasant to the guests and sing for their entertainment."
Zhang Sheng had long been attracted by her beauty. Now, Xue'e entertained him so pleasantly and talked so agreeably that he was very pleased with her. She and I of the other girls took up their lutes and sang for him. Then they passed the wine and Zhang Sheng was more and more delighted. As the proverb says:
Money, girls, and wine houses are 3 things that no man can resist. That night, he asked Xue'e to stay with him. She let him appreciate her skill upon the bed and he was perfectly satisfied. The next day when they got up and dressed, Tiger Liu had prepared an excellent breakfast for his brother-in-law. There was as much as they could eat. Zhang Sheng packed his luggage and fed his horses. When they were laden with the yeast, he started off with the other servants. He gave Xue'e 3 taels of silver and asked Tiger Liu to look after her and give her his special protection. Ever afterwards, when Zhang Sheng came to the river, he went to the wine house to meet Xue'e. They remained attached to one another and every month, he gave a few taels to Pan the 5th so that he might reserve Xue'e for himself and she should not be forced to go out and receive all comers. Liu who wished to please his brother-in-law would not let him pay for the room. He took money from others and paid for the room with that. He also kept Xue'e supplied with rice and firewood.

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## P'ing-an Absconds with Jewellery from the Pawnshop; Auntie Hsüeh Cleverly Proposes a Personal Appeal & Ping'an Meets his Deserts

*Some words of admonition:*

If you are fortunate, do not expect to enjoy it forever;
When your fortune runs out, you will be poverty-stricken.
If you have authority, do not expect it to last forever;
When your authority runs out, you will face your enemies.
One's good fortune should only be relied on providently;
One's authority should always be exercised deferentially.
In this human world of ours, authority and good fortune;
May seem to begin well enough, but often end in calamity.[1]

Sun Hsüeh-o was sold into the life of a singing girl working out of My Own Tavern. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.
To resume our story, after Hsi-men Ta-chieh committed suicide, and Wu Yüeh-niang took Ch'en Ching-chi to court for it, Lai-chao, the head servant in the household, also passed away, and his wife "The Beanpole" took her son Little Iron Rod and remarried someone else. Lai-hsing was then made responsible for the gate.
The maidservant Hsiu-ch'un left the household after being turned over to Nun Wang to serve as a novice. Lai-hsing's wife Hui-hsiu had also died, and he had been some time without a spouse. The wet nurse Ju-i was in the habit of taking the baby Hsi-men Hsiao-ko into his quarters to play, and to enjoy snacks there. Lai-hsing would also provide wine and drink with her. The two of them flirted with each other, back and forth, until they ended up consummating an affair. This happened on more than one occasion, and when Ju-i returned to the rear compound, her face would be red.
When Yüeh-niang became aware of what was going on, she gave her a dressing down; but on the grounds that:
Domestic scandals should not be noised abroad,[2]
she presented her with an outfit of clothing, four hairpins, a silver brooch in the shape of the character for long life, and an ornamental comb for her hair; selected an auspicious day for the occasion; and gave her to Lai-hsing as his wife. During the day, she continued to work in the kitchen, look after Hsi-men Hsiao-ko, and serve in the rear compound; while at night, she would go out to his quarters in the front compound and sleep with him.
One day, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, it was Yüeh-niang's birthday, and Sister-in-law Wu, along with Wu the Second's wife, and the three nuns, came to celebrate it with her and were served drinks in the parlor of the master suite. That evening, arrangements were made for them all to stay overnight in Meng Yü-lou's former quarters on the other side of the courtyard, so they could listen to the nuns recite a precious scroll for them.
During the second watch, the maidservant Chung-ch'iu, who had been assigned to look after their tea, was called for by Yüeh-niang but did not respond. When Yüeh-niang went into the master suite to look for her, what should she see but Tai-an, who was making out vigorously with Hsiao-yü on the edge of the k'ang. Upon seeing her push open the door and come in, they became so flustered they hardly knew what to do with themselves.
Yüeh-niang chose not to say a word about it, merely remarking, "You lousy little stinker! Why haven't you gone to the kitchen and taken care of the tea? The nuns in the other room over there have been reciting a precious scroll all day long and need some tea to drink. What are you doing in here?"
"Chung-ch'iu has been tending the stove," responded Hsiao-yü, "and I told her to prepare the tea."
With her head hanging sheepishly, she then proceeded to make her way outside, while Tai-an headed through the ceremonial gate to the front compound.
Two days later, after Sister-in-law Wu, Wu the Second's wife, and the three nuns had returned home, Yüeh-niang had Lai-hsing vacate his quarters and refurbished them for Tai-an to reside in, while moving Lai-hsing into what had been Lai-chao's quarters, so he could take charge of the front gate. She then had two sets of bedding made for Tai-an, along with an outfit of new clothing, a newly blocked hat with a new hairnet, and a new pair of boots and stockings. She also allowed Hsiao-yü to put up her hair and gave her a fret to wear over it, while providing her with several gold and silver hair ornaments, four silver hairpins with gold heads, bracelets, pendant earrings, finger rings, and the like, along with two outfits of varicolored silk and satin clothing. After choosing an auspicious day for the event, she then gave her to Tai-an as his wife. During the day, she continued to wait on Yüeh-niang in the rear compound, but when the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds was about to be locked for the night, she would go out to sleep with Tai-an. This maidservant constantly secreted goodies of every kind and took them out for Tai-an to eat. Yüeh-niang saw what she was doing but pretended not to notice. As the sayings go:
Those who dote on another do not see clearly;
Those who are covetous can never be satiated.[3]
When veal and wine are not doled out equally;
Even the finest teams will split and scatter.[4]
If the household is not governed impartially;
The male and female servitors will resent it.
To resume our story, when P'ing-an saw that Yüeh-niang had favored Tai-an by giving him Hsiao-yü as a wife, providing him with quarters of his own to live in, and bestowing new clothing upon him, he resented the fact that, though at the age of twenty-one he was two years older than Tai-an, she had not seen fit to provide him with a wife, or with quarters of his own.
One day, in the pawnshop, he was present when Manager Fu Ming accepted a set of gold head ornaments and a gilded buckle from a customer, in return for a loan of thirty taels of silver, which he agreed to redeem, with the added interest, in a month. Manager Fu Ming, along with Tai-an, then proceeded to stow them away in the shop's large storage cabinet.
What they did not anticipate was that P'ing-an:
On seeing their value, developed ideas,
and surreptitiously made off with them, along with the box they were in, and made his way to the brothel of Wu Ch'ang-chiao, or Longfoot Wu, in the Southern Entertainment Quarter, where he patronized the two unlicensed prostitutes that worked there, one of whom was named Hsüeh Ts'un-erh, and the other Pan-erh, and spent two nights with them. When the pimp of the establishment observed that he was spending money so recklessly, that his box contained gold head ornaments, and that he was flaunting silver ingots in order to buy wine, and gifts for the proprietress, he reported him to the local constable, who confined him to his room, boxed his ears twice, and took him into custody.
It was one of those occasions when:
Something was destined to happen.
Who could have anticipated that just at this juncture, Wu Tien-en, who had recently been appointed to the position of a suburban police chief, happened to be riding by in the street, preceded by a pair of runners bearing placards announcing his office. When he saw what was going on, he asked who the shackled culprit might be.
The constable knelt down before him and reported, thus and so, saying, "The person in question appears to have stolen some things and fled to the Southern Entertainment Quarter, where he has been patronizing prostitutes, and paying for them with gold and silver head ornaments. Having found this suspicious, your humble servant has put him under arrest."
"Bring him along with you so I can interrogate him," ordered Wu Tien-en.
P'ing-an was then taken to the police headquarters, where Wu Tien-en took his place on the bench, with armed lictors arrayed to either side, and the local constable dragged his tethered prisoner before him.
P'ing-an recognized Wu Tien-en and thought to himself, "Since he was formerly a manager in my master's household, he is sure to let me go."
The first thing he said was, "Your humble servant is P'ing-an from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household."
"Since you are a servant from his household," said Wu Tien-en, "what have you been up to in this brothel with these gold objects?"
"My mistress," said P'ing-an, "had lent these head ornaments to a relative to wear and sent me to bring them back to her. I was late in returning, and the city gates were closed when I got there, so I went to that brothel to seek a place to stay overnight. I could not have expected to be arrested by the local constable."
Wu Tien-en derided him, saying, "Slave that you are, you're talking nonsense. Your household is amply supplied with this sort of head ornaments, and other objects of gold and silver. What reason would they have for turning over head ornaments like these to a slave like you in order to spend in a brothel? I imagine you must have stolen these things. You had better explain yourself if you want to avoid punishment."
"It is a fact," responded P'ing-an, "that a relative of the family borrowed these head ornaments, and the First Lady sent me to bring them back. I would not dare to tell a lie."
Wu Tien-en was enraged at this and reviled him, saying, "This slave is really a thief. Without a beating, he will not confess."
He then shouted at his attendants, "Put the squeezers on this slave for me."
The squeezers were then fastened onto him, and when they were applied he:
Howled like a stuck pig,
calling out, "Your Honor, stop applying the squeezers to me. If you only let me do so, I will tell you the truth."
"If you tell me the truth," responded Wu Tien-en, "I will stop squeezing you."
P'ing-an then testified, saying, "Your humble servant actually did steal a set of gold head ornaments that someone had left at the pawnshop, along with a gilded buckle."
"Why did you steal them?" asked Wu Tien-en.
"I am twenty-one years old this year," responded P'ing-an, "and the First Lady had promised to find a wife for me, but she has not done so. Meanwhile, she has given one of the maids from her own quarters as a wife to another household servant named Tai-an, who is only nineteen years old. It was because I was so upset over this that I stole these head ornaments from the pawnshop."
"I imagine," pronounced Wu Tien-en, "that this page boy Tai-an must have been engaging in hanky-panky with Mistress Wu, and it must be for that reason that she has given her maidservant to him as a wife. Tell me the truth about it. Since it has nothing to do with you, I will let you off."
"I don't know anything about that," responded P'ing-an.
"You are not telling the truth," pronounced Wu Tien-en. "Subject him to the squeezers once again."
The attendants put the squeezers back on, which threw P'ing-an into such consternation that he called out inarticulately, "Your Honor, don't subject me to the squeezers again. I'll tell you all about it."
"Here we go again," said Wu Tien-en. "Simply tell me about it then. I dare say it has nothing to do with you."
The squeezers were then released, and P'ing-an said, "It is true that the First Lady has been engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an. He started out by seducing her maidservant Hsiao-yü, but when the First Lady discovered it, she chose not to say a word about it but actually bestowed a lot of clothing and jewelry upon her and gave her to him as a wife."
When Wu Tien-en heard this, he had the docket officer take a record of his testimony and make up a formal deposition. He then incarcerated P'ing-an in the police office to await the issuing of arrest warrants for Wu Yüeh-niang, Tai-an, and Hsiao-yü, so that he could hold a hearing on the case.
To resume our story, one day, when it was discovered that the head ornaments in question were missing from the cabinet in the pawnshop, Manager Fu Ming, in a state of fear and consternation, questioned Tai-an about it.
"I have been looking after the wholesale pharmaceutical shop," responded Tai-an, "while you have been earning your livelihood over there. I don't know anything about it."
"I put that box of head ornaments in the storage cabinet," said Manager Fu Ming. "How could they have disappeared this way?"
He then proceeded to look all over for P'ing-an but could find no trace of him. This disturbed Manager Fu Ming so much that he took to:
Burning incense and swearing oaths;
and when the owner sent a servant to redeem the head ornaments he had pawned, Manger Fu could only say that he hadn't been able to find them yet.
When the servant had returned several times without being able to retrieve the head ornaments, he stood outside the door of the shop and made a fuss, saying. "Those things were left with you two months ago, and my master is prepared to pay you back both the original sum for which they were pawned and the interest; so how can you refuse to turn over the head ornaments and buckle to me? They are worth seventy or eighty taels of silver."
When Manager Fu Ming learned that P'ing-an had not returned home that night, he realized that he must have stolen the missing objects and sent people out to look everywhere for him, but they were unable to find him.
When the servant of the owner returned once again and made a fuss outside the door, Manager Fu suggested to Yüeh-niang that they should give him fifty taels of silver to settle the matter, but he refused to accept the offer, saying, "Those head ornaments are worth sixty taels of silver and the buckle, along with the precious stones and pearls with which they are inlaid, are worth another ten taels. So you should pay seventy taels of silver as compensation."
Manager Fu Ming offered to pay him an additional ten taels of silver, but he refused to accept it and insisted on continuing to wrangle with him.
Just as they continued to argue about it, someone showed up and reported, saying, "The page boy P'ing-an from your household stole the head ornaments in question and went off to the Southern Entertainment Quarter where he has been patronizing prostitutes. He has been arrested by Police Chief Wu Tien-en, who is currently holding him in detention. You ought to send someone as quickly as possible to identify the stolen goods."
When Wu Yüeh-niang heard that Wu Tien-en was now serving as a police chief, she recalled that he had originally been employed as a manager by their household, and she invited her elder brother Wu K'ai to come and consult with her about it.
They forthwith wrote out a claim certificate and sent Manager Fu Ming off with it, the next day, to retrieve the missing goods, saying to him:
"If the original objects are only recovered,
There will be no reason for further dispute;
or for anyone to continue farting around this way in front of our door."

Manager Fu Ming took the document with him and set out for the police office, expecting that Wu Tien-en, out of consideration for the fact that they had formerly been colleagues, would allow him to retrieve the head ornaments. He could hardly have anticipated that Wu Tien-en would, on the contrary, revile him as an old dog, and an old slave, order the lictors to drag him down for a beating, and strip off his clothing, so that his bare buttocks were exposed for what seemed like half a day.
Only then did he allow him to get up, before saying to him, "The page boy from your household has testified that your mistress, née Wu, has been carrying on an illicit affair with Tai-an. I have already reported this to the prefectural and district authorities and am planning to issue a warrant summoning her here to respond to his testimony. And yet, old dog bone that you are, you have the nerve to come here and attempt to retrieve the stolen goods."
After being reviled as a slave and an old dog a thousand, if not ten thousand times, Manager Fu Ming hastened home in a state of consternation as fast as he could go. Upon arriving there, he did not dare to conceal the truth of the matter but told Yüeh-niang, thus and so, all about it.
If Yüeh-niang had not heard this, nothing might have happened; but having heard this account, truly, it was just as though:
The eight-boned structure of her skull had been
split asunder;
Only to have poured into it half a bucketful
of icy snow.
She was so upset that her hands and feet became paralyzed, on top of which, she observed that a servant of the owner of the head ornaments had come back to the door, where he engaged her in:
A vituperative altercation,
saying, "Your household has lost track of the head ornaments and has not only failed to return the original objects but has also failed to pay anything in compensation, while tricking me into running back and forth time and again. One day you trick me into coming to pick up the objects, and another day you tell me to wait until you have recovered them. But truly, where do you expect to recover them from? How can you be so unreasonable?"
Manager Fu Ming did his best to placate him, saying, "If you will just have patience for a few days, we will recover the head ornaments for you. And if we fail to do so, we are willing to pay double their worth in compensation."
The servant said, "Wait until I report back to my master," and then went his way.
As for Yüeh-niang, she:
Felt worry piled upon worry, and
Her eyebrows remained contracted.
After sending a page boy to ask her elder brother Wu K'ai to come consult with her, she suggested to him that he should pull strings on her behalf by speaking to Wu Tien-en and persuading him to drop the case.
"I'm afraid he is unlikely to respond to any string pulling," responded Wu K'ai. "The only thing that may move him is a bribe."
"It is thanks to us that he obtained his official position in the first place," said Yüeh-niang. "We gave him a loan of a hundred taels of silver at the time, for which my husband would not even accept a promissory note; and now he is:
Requiting kindness with enmity."
"Sister," said Wu K'ai, "it is pointless to say that. From time immemorial, he is scarcely the only one to:
Forget favor and break faith."
"Brother," responded Yüeh-niang, "I can only rely on you to do your best to find a way of handling this. Give him several tens of taels if you must, in order to recover those head ornaments and return them to their owner: thus preventing any further wrangling over it."
She then proceeded to offer Wu K'ai a meal, before sending him on his way. When Yüeh-niang saw her elder brother to the gate, by fortunate coincidence, she caught sight of Auntie Hsüeh, who was carrying her box of trinkets and leading a young maidservant, as she passed by on the street.
Yüeh-niang called her to a halt and asked her, "Auntie Hsüeh, where are you headed? And why have you not come here to visit for so long?"
"Venerable Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "that's a fine way to talk. I've been extremely busy the last few days and have had too much to do. The young lady, formerly from our household, has sent jailers or servants to summon me several times, but I have been too busy to go."
"Just look at you, Auntie," said Yüeh-niang. "What nonsense you talk. Since when has she become a young lady?"
"Right now," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "she is no longer the young lady, but has been promoted to the status of principal wife."
"How has she become a principal wife?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"Venerable Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "I guess you don't know about it yet. It was just her good luck that after she bore him a son, his first
wife died, and His Honor the commandant moved her into the master suite and made her his legally recognized principal wife, superior in status to his secondary lady, Sun Erh-niang. He has purchased two wet nurses and four maidservants to wait upon her, in addition to which she is served by two former singing girls whom he has deflowered. If she wishes to punish any of them, she subjects them to the rod, and His Honor does not dare to interfere, not wishing to do anything that might anger her. The other day, for some unknown reason, she had Sun Hsüeh-o given a beating, plucked her hair out, and called for me in the middle of the night to take her away, after selling her to me for no more than eight taels of silver. At present, Sun Erh-niang has only one maidservant, named Ho-hua, to wait upon her, while Ch'un-mei has four or five, in addition to the two wet nurses, and still objects that she has too few. Sun Erh-niang doesn't dare to complain about this but merely addresses her as, 'Mistress this' and 'Mistress that,' all day long in order to placate her; and the other day, she said to me, 'Auntie Hsüeh, try to find another young maidservant to wait on me. I regret to say that the one I have isn't able to do much of anything except tend the stove.' Things are complicated in those quarters of hers. Today, while I was still asleep early in the morning, she sent a jailer over twice to summon me to her place as quickly as possible. She wanted me to supply her with a pair of ornaments with kingfisher feather inlays and inscribed with images of auspicious clouds, and a silver pin for holding her chignon in place, in the shape of nine phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks, and with pendants of green and red precious stones set in plaques of gold. She gave me the sum of five taels of silver for this purpose, but I have managed to misplace it somewhere and have not yet given her the pieces she ordered. When I go to see her, she is sure to give me a dressing down. Right now, I'm on the way to deliver this maidservant to Sun Erh-niang."
"Come back to the rear compound with me," said Yüeh-niang, "so I can have a look at that ornament with kingfisher feather inlays."
So saying, she escorted Auntie Hsüeh back to the parlor in the rear compound and offered her a seat. Auntie Hsüeh then opened her box of trinkets and showed the pieces in question to Yüeh-niang. They were, indeed, exquisitely crafted. The first item was about four fingers wide, which was enough to cover a fret, with its gold and turquoise hues setting each other off, its kingfisher feather inlays protruding, and its back plated with gold. The item with the nine phoenixes holding strands of pearls in their beaks, and its gem-studded pendant plaques, was exceptionally well fashioned.
Auntie Hsüeh said, "This ornamental piece cost three taels and five mace of silver to make, while the other piece, inscribed with auspicious clouds, cost only one tael and five mace of silver, but I still haven't located the money she gave me."
As they were speaking, whom should they see but Tai-an, who came in and said to Yüeh-niang, "The man who is trying to retrieve those pawned head ornaments has come back again and is out front making a fuss about it. He says that the owner cannot wait any longer to get them, and that if they are still not forthcoming tomorrow, he will hold Manager Fu Ming accountable and will take him off somewhere to settle the matter. Uncle Fu the Second is so upset at the prospect that he has gone home, and the servant of the owner has also departed after delivering his threats."
"What is that all about?" asked Auntie Hsüeh.
Yüeh-niang gave a long sigh and then told Auntie Hsüeh, thus and so, "That slave of ours, P'ing-an, absconded with a set of gold head ornaments and a gilded buckle that someone had deposited in our pawnshop and fled to a brothel in the Southern Entertainment Quarter outside the city where he patronized a pair of prostitutes. He has been arrested by the police chief Wu Tien-en and is being held in the lockup there. The owner has sent someone to redeem the pawned head ornaments, but they are unavailable, so he has been making a fuss in front of the gate. The police chief Wu Tien-en is malevolently trying to shake us down by not letting us retrieve the stolen objects, and threatening our manager with a beating, with an eye to extorting money from us. I have been unable to come up with a solution to the problem. Ever since my husband died:
Misfortunes and losses have befallen me,
and I have been taken advantage of by others. It is really hard to take."
As she spoke, tears fell profusely from her eyes.
"My Good Lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "There is a road open to you if you do not refuse to take it. If you will write a note to our young lady, I will also explain the situation to her, and she will get His Honor the commandant to issue an order to the police department, which should enable you to retrieve not just one set of head ornaments, but as many as ten, if need be."
"Commandant Chou Hsiu is a military officer," said Yüeh-niang. "I doubt if he has jurisdiction over the police department."
"Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "You may not know it yet, but the Emperor has recently issued an edict conferring a wide range of powers on Commandant Chou. He has the right to call the roll and issue commands to the personnel in charge of the local area, the rivers and canals, the troops and horses, and the stocks of money and grain throughout his jurisdiction. Moreover, the apprehension of bandits and felons both east and west of the Grand Canal is in his hands."
When Yüeh-niang heard this, she said, "If he does actually possess these powers, Auntie Hsüeh, I will indeed trouble you to convey my regards to Sister P'ang Ch'un-mei. Tell her that:
One guest does not trouble two hosts,
and ask her to put in a word on my behalf with His Honor Chou Hsiu, requesting that he try to retrieve this set of head ornaments from the police department for me. If you will do so, I will reward you with five taels of silver."
"My good Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "it is not money that motivates me. When I saw how distressed you were just now, I could hardly bear it. Get
someone to write out a note for you. I don't need any tea but will go straight to the commandant's household and speak to the young lady about it. If I am successful, you can give me whatever you want. Even if I am unsuccessful, I will come back and report to you."
Yüeh-niang then told Hsiao-yü to provide a serving of tea for Auntie Hsüeh.
"It's getting late," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I don't need any tea. Just get one of your senior servants to write out a note for you, and I'll take it with me. You don't know how busy I am."
"I understand," said Yüeh-niang. "You've been out and about for half a day already. Have a pastry before you go."
Hsiao-yü then proceeded to set up a table, and lay out a serving of tea and pastries. Yüeh-niang kept her company as she drank her tea, and Auntie Hsüeh gave two pastries to the young maidservant she had with her.
"How old is this maidservant?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"She is just eleven this year," replied Auntie Hsüeh.
It was not long before Tai-an, in the front compound, finished writing the note; and Auntie Hsüeh, having finished her tea, tucked it into her sleeve, said good-bye to Yüeh-niang, and went out with her box of trinkets. After exiting the gate, and:
Rounding bends and turning corners,
she made her way straight to the commandant's residence.
Ch'un-mei was still lying on a heated k'ang, not having risen yet, when whom should she see but her senior maidservant Yüeh-kuei, who came in and announced, "Auntie Hsüeh has come to see you."
Ch'un-mei then told her junior maidservant Ts'ui-hua to open the casements, so that the sunshine brightly illuminated the gauze covered windows.
Upon coming inside, Auntie Hsüeh remarked, "Young Lady, I see that you haven't gotten up yet."
She then put down her box of trinkets, got down on her knees, and kowtowed to her.
"There's no need for any of that," said Ch'un-mei. "What are you kowtowing to me for?"
She then explained, "I've been feeling out of sorts and have gotten up later than usual today," and she went on to ask, "Have you brought those ornaments with inscribed auspicious clouds and nine phoenixes that you have had made for me, or not?"
"My Lady," responded Auntie Hsüeh, "those two ornaments took quite a lot of trouble to make. It was only last night that I was able to pick them up from the jeweler's shop. I was planning to deliver them to you today but did not expect you to send a jailer after them."
She then took them out and handed them to Ch'un-mei to look over. Ch'un-mei felt that the ornament with the kingfisher feather inlays and inscribed auspicious clouds was not as striking as she would have liked but put them back in their cardboard box and handed them to Yüeh-kuei to put away.
She then ordered a serving of tea for Auntie Hsüeh to drink. Auntie Hsüeh then called in the young maidservant she had brought with her and told her to kowtow to the lady.
"Where is she from?" asked Ch'un-mei.
"The Second Lady has spoken to me several times," explained Auntie Hsüeh, "telling me that Ho-hua is only able to cook, and asking me to find another young girl for her, whom she can teach to do needlework. That is why I have brought this youngster with me. She is the daughter of a country family and is only eleven years old this year. As trainable material, with the proper discipline it should be possible to teach her to do whatever is needed."
"If you had found her a girl from the city," remarked Ch'un-mei, "she might have turned out to be cleverer. What do these country girls know? Just the other day, a certain Old Mother Chang tried to sell me two young maidservants from the countryside. One of them was a ten-year-old, and the other eleven; and their names were Sheng-chin and Huo-pao; but neither of them turned out to be any good. Their parents wanted five taels of silver for each of them and were waiting outside to collect the money. I told the go-between to tell their parents to let them stay overnight, so I could test them out, and see how they responded; and have them come back the next day to collect their silver. I insisted on keeping them overnight, and my maidservants, just as though they:
Didn't know any better,
gave them some pork-ball soup and rice gruel to eat. Early the next morning, my maidservants started to kick up a fuss, and I scolded them, saying, 'What are you making such a fuss about?' It turned out that Sheng-chin had befouled her bedding with shit, and that Huo-pao had pissed in her pants till they were so stiff with dried urine that they could hardly be removed. It made me want to laugh on the one hand but also gave me the creeps; and when Old Mother Chang came back, I had her take them away."
She then went on to inquire, "How much are you asking for this maidservant of yours?"
"Not much at all," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "Merely four taels of silver. Her father is planning to enlist in the army."
Ch'un-mei then said to Hai-t'ang, "Take her over to the Second Lady's room. We'll arrange to pay for her tomorrow."
She also said to Yüeh-kuei, "Bring that large flagon of Chin-hua wine, and pour some of it for Auntie Hsüeh in order to fend off the cold. And bring in a box of whatever pastries are available for her to eat. At this early hour in the morning it would never do to douse her with wine on an empty stomach."
"Sister Yüeh-kuei," said Auntie Hsüeh, "don't pour any wine for me until I've finished talking to your mistress. I've already had something to drink elsewhere."
"Tell me," said Ch'un-mei, "where have you been drinking?"
"Just now," said Auntie Hsüeh, "the First Lady detained me at her place and gave me something to eat and drink. She wept as she told me, thus and so, how the page boy P'ing-an has stolen a set of gold head ornaments that someone had left in the pawnshop, along with a gilded buckle, and run off to amuse himself by sleeping with prostitutes; only to end up being arrested by the local constable, taken to the police station, and forced to endure a beating in the squeezers. The original owner sent someone to retrieve the stolen objects and kicked up a fuss when he was unable to do so. She then sent Manager Fu Ming to try to recover the missing objects from the police station. The police chief, Wu Tien-en, formerly served as a manager in their household, and when her husband was still alive, he enabled him to gain his official position; but now he has turned against them ungratefully and subjected her page boy to the squeezers, in the hope of getting him to implicate her in some sort of misconduct. He not only refused to relinquish the stolen objects without being paid for them but also threatened Manager Fu Ming with a beating, which frightened him so that he is hiding out in his home. She asked me to come convey her respects to you. She doesn't know whether His Honor has any jurisdiction over the police station in question but hopes that you will take pity on her, since she is now all alone in the world, and ask His Honor if he can do anything about it. If he succeeds in recovering the stolen objects so she can return them to their original owner, the First Lady will come in person to express her thanks to you."
"Do you have a note explaining the situation with you?" asked Ch'un-mei. "It doesn't matter though; His Honor is out on duty right now, but when he comes home tonight, never fear, I will speak to him about it."
"I do have an explanatory note from her," said Auntie Hsüeh, as she pulled it out of her sleeve.
When Ch'un-mei had finished reading it, she casually placed it on the windowsill.
Before long, Yüeh-kuei brought in a tray with four dishes of delicacies, and, taking up a large silver goblet, proceeded to fill it to overflowing with wine, and present it to Auntie Hsüeh.
"I can't handle a thing as large as that," said Auntie Hsüeh.
"It's not as large as that thing of your husband's," Ch'un-mei said with a laugh. "Since you're able to handle that all right, why can't you handle this? No matter what, I want you to handle it for me. If you refuse, I'll tell Yüeh-kuei to hold your nose and pour it down your throat for me."
"You'd better let me have some pastries first," said Auntie Hsüeh, "in order to provide a lining for my stomach."
"Old Mother," responded Ch'un-mei, "all you do is tell lies. You just told me that you had been given something to eat where you came from, and now you claim that you need to line your stomach."
"The two pastries I had there," said Auntie Hsüeh, "were not enough to last until now."
"Auntie Hsüeh," said Yüeh-kuei, "if you will drink this large goblet of wine, I will give you some pastries to eat. Otherwise, my mistress will say I am of no use and is likely to give me a beating."
Auntie Hsüeh had no recourse but to let her pour the entire goblet of wine down her throat, which gave her the sensation that:
Her heart was hopping like a little fawn.
Ch'un-mei pursed her lips and told Hai-t'ang to pour out another goblet of wine and give it to her to drink.
Auntie Hsüeh pushed it aside and said, "My Good Lady, I can't drink another drop."
Hai-t'ang then addressed her, saying, "You managed to drink what Yüeh-kuei offered you. If you don't drink what I offer you, the mistress will beat me instead."
This threw Auntie Hsüeh into such a state of consternation that she got down on her knees, so her torso looked as though it were sticking straight out of the ground like a post.
"That will do," said Ch'un-mei. "Bring a pastry over for her to eat, so she can manage to get down the rest of the wine."
Yüeh-kuei did as directed, saying, "Auntie Hsüeh, no one is more considerate of you than I am. I have saved these corn flour pastries with rose-flavored stuffings for you to eat."

She then presented her with a large plateful of stuffed rose-flavored cream puff pastries.
Auntie Hsüeh ate only one of them, after which Ch'un-mei said to her, "You can tuck the rest into your sleeve and feed them to that cuckold of yours when you get home."
Auntie Hsüeh then drank the wine and endeavored to hide her embarrassment as she took the servings of smoked pork and salt-cured goose from the platter, wrapped them up, first in absorbent grass paper and then in cloth, and stuffed the package into her sleeve. Hai-t'ang obstinately insisted on getting her to drink another half goblet of wine. Only upon seeing that she was about to throw up did she desist and clear away the utensils.
Ch'un-mei then said to Auntie Hsüeh, "Come back to check on things tomorrow, and we will weigh out the silver for the young maidservant you brought with you."
She also sent Hai-t'ang to ask for Sun Erh-niang's opinion of her, and, upon returning, she reported, "She said she would like to keep the maidservant and requested that you would pay the asking price for her."
As Auntie Hsüeh was about to say farewell and go out the door, Ch'un-mei said to her, "Auntie, you must not persist in:
Pretending to be both deaf and dumb.
That pair of ornaments inscribed with auspicious clouds that you brought me is not well enough made. You should bring me a set of better ones to look at another day."
"I understand," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "My Lady, would you please have one of your maidservants accompany me, lest the dog should bite my leg."
Ch'un-mei laughed at this, saying, "Our dog knows what he is doing. He stops biting when he reaches the bone."
She then sent Lan-hua to escort Auntie Hsüeh as far as the postern gate.
To make a long story short, at sunset that day, Commandant Chou Hsiu came back from his round of inspection, accompanied by a squad of cavalry with their identifying insignia, carrying blue command standards, and followed by another contingent holding long spears with decorated handles. When he entered the rear hall, the attending maidservants took his official cap and outer garments, after which he went into the master suite to see Ch'un-mei and his young son and was:
Delighted in his heart,
as he sat down to join them. Yüeh-kuei and Hai-t'ang brought him a serving of tea, after which he recounted the events of his tour of inspection that day. Before long, a table was set up, and a meal was served; after which, the candles were lighted, goblets were brought out, and they proceeded to have a drink together.
Upon his asking if anything had happened that day, Ch'un-mei fetched the note and gave it to the commandant to read, saying, "It seems that over at Wu Yüeh-niang's place, thus and so, the page boy P'ing-an stole some head ornaments and has been arrested and incarcerated by the police chief Wu Tien-en, who has not allowed her to reclaim the stolen objects, and beaten the page boy in order to induce him to falsely accuse Yüeh-niang of engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an. In the hope of extorting money from her, he is threatening to forward the case to the prefectural and district authorities."
When the commandant had finished reading the note, he said, "This case falls within the jurisdiction of my office. How can he propose to forward it to the prefectural or district authorities? This rascal, Police Chief Wu Tien-en, is acting outrageously? I will issue a summons for him tomorrow and deal with him myself."
He then went on to say, "I have heard that this police chief Wu Tien-en used to work as a manager in their household. It was only because he was sent by his employer to deliver some gifts to Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching in the Eastern Capital that he was able to obtain this office. How can he do such an about-face and bring a false accusation against his former benefactors?"
"It is just as you say," remarked Ch'un-mei. "See what you can do to take care of the matter on her behalf tomorrow."
Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
The next day, he sent a message to Wu Yüeh-niang telling her to draft a written deposition on the matter and have it delivered to him. He then made out a certified document in the courtroom, written on stationery with decorative borders, and placed it in an envelope. The document read: "The Office of the Regional Military Command of Shantung, with regard to a case of larceny, requests the appearance of the relevant police chief and the culprit before his court. Delivered by the inspectors Chang Sheng and Li An. The above request is mandatory."
The two of them, thereupon, took the document with them and proceeded to go first to Wu Yüeh-niang's residence. Yüeh-niang treated them to wine and food and gave each of them a tael of silver as a reward for their efforts. Since Manager Fu Ming was still confined to his bed at home, Yüeh-niang's brother, Wu the Second, agreed to accompany them to the police station.
Police Chief Wu Tien-en, on seeing that P'ing-an had been incarcerated for two days without anyone from Hsi-men Ch'ing's household offering to grease his palm about the situation, was in the very act of ordering a clerk to draft a document forwarding the case to the prefectural and district authorities, when the two emissaries from the office of the Regional Military Command showed up and delivered the certified document to him. When he saw that the inscription in red ink on the envelope indicated that both he and the culprit were ordered to appear before the commandant, and opened and read the enclosed deposition by Wu Yüeh-niang, he was thrown into a state of panic. Doing his best to placate Li An and Chang Sheng, he gave them each a tip of two taels of silver, wrote up a document about the case, and then took the accused with him as he made his way to the office of the Regional Military Command. Upon arriving there, he had to wait for what seemed like half a day before the commandant took his place on the bench, with soldiers and jailers lined up to either side, and ordered them to be brought before him.
Police Chief Wu Tien-en handed up the document he had drafted, and after the commandant had read it, he said, "This case is one that falls under the jurisdiction of this office. Why have you not forwarded it to me for a decision, but chosen to procrastinate this way, no doubt in the hope of obtaining a bribe? It is clear that you are guilty of malfeasance."
Police Chief Wu Tien-en pleaded, "Your humble servant was just in the process of drafting a document to forward to Your Honor when your summons unexpectedly arrived."
"You dog of an official!" the commandant cried at him. "This conduct of yours is detestable. How high an official are you to try to manipulate the law this way, in defiance of your superiors? I have been commissioned by the Emperor himself to protect this territory, apprehend thieves and bandits, command the military forces, and oversee the canals and waterways. My jurisdiction over these matters is clearly established. How can you feel entitled to arrest a suspect without reporting it to higher authorities, and have the culprit tortured and beaten in the endeavor to get him to falsely implicate innocent parties? It is obvious that you are guilty of malfeasance."
When Police Chief Wu Tien-en heard this accusation, he tore off his official cap and proceeded to kowtow before him at the foot of the steps.
"I really ought to prosecute you, you dog of an official," said the commandant, "but I will let you off this once. If you commit the same offense in the future, however, I will see to it that you are indicted and arraigned."
He then had P'ing-an brought before him and said, "You slave, you are not only guilty of stealing objects but have also given false evidence implicating your employer. If every slave were like you, people would not dare to employ servants."
Turning to his attendants, he said, "Give him thirty strokes with the heavy bamboo; and seal up the stolen objects so that their original owner can send someone to repossess them."
He then called Wu the Second before him and gave him a receipt entitling him to take custody of the objects in question, and gave a card to Chang Sheng to take back to Hsi-men Ch'ing's residence, indicating that he had performed the favor that had been asked of him. Wu Yüeh-niang gave Chang Sheng some wine and something to eat and rewarded him with a tael of silver, after which he went back to report to Commandant Chou Hsiu and Ch'un-mei.
Police Chief Wu Tien-en not only had arrested P'ing-an in vain but had lost quite a few taels of silver for his pains. Wu Yüeh-niang saw to it that the head ornaments and the buckle were returned to their owner, who recognized them as his original objects and took them away without saying a word. When Manager Fu Ming had arrived home, he came down with an acute intestinal fever and was bedridden for seven days when, because it was not properly treated:
Alas and alack,
he died. When Yüeh-niang realized how much trouble it had caused her, she directed that the pawnshop should accept the repayment and redemption of property that had already been pawned but should not pay out anything in return for pawned objects in the future. She merely had Wu the Second and Tai-an continue to operate the wholesale pharmaceutical shop at the front of their property and employed whatever proceeds were made from day to day to cover her household expenses. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.
One day, Wu Yüeh-niang summoned Auntie Hsüeh and offered her three taels of silver as a reward for her successful intervention.
"I don't want it," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "I fear that if word of it gets to the commandant's household, the young mistress will think ill of me."
"I am much indebted to you," responded Yüeh-niang, "but:
Heaven would hardly condone letting you go
unrewarded for your pains.
I will not mention it to her the next time I see her, that's all."
Thereupon, she bought four platters of delicacies, along with a freshly slaughtered pig, a jug of southern wine, and a bolt of satin fabric, and entrusted them to Auntie Hsüeh to deliver to the commandant's household as an expression of her thanks to Ch'un-mei. Tai-an donned a black silk jacket, put the card with the list of gifts into a gilt lacquer box, and accompanied her on her way to see Ch'un-mei. Upon arriving there, Auntie Hsüeh led him
into the rear hall where Ch'un-mei came out, wearing a gilt-ridged cap, gold hairpins and combs, and the ornament with its nine phoenixes on her head, an embroidered jacket on her torso, and a brocade skirt, and accompanied on either side by the maidservants and wet nurses in her service. Tai-an promptly proceeded to kneel down on the floor and kowtow to her.
Ch'un-mei ordered a table to be set up and provided with tea and delicacies for Tai-an and then said to him, "What I did didn't amount to anything. Your mistress ought not to have done all this on my behalf. What need was there for her to take the trouble to send all these gifts to me? I am sure that my husband Commandant Chou will also refuse to accept them."
"My mistress says," responded Tai-an, "that the settlement of that problem caused by P'ing-an the other day was entirely owing to the efforts expended on her behalf by His Honor and Your Ladyship. This doesn't amount to anything. These:
Paltry and insignificant gifts,
are proffered to the two of you to dispense as you see fit."
"I do not feel right about accepting them," said Ch'un-mei.
"Venerable Lady," said Auntie Hsüeh, "if you refuse to accept them, the sender will hold it against me."
Ch'un-mei then invited the commandant to come in and consult with her, after which, they agreed to accept the pig, the wine, and the delicacies, but to return the bolt of fabric. They then gave Tai-an a handkerchief and three mace of silver for his pains and also rewarded the bearer who had carried the gift box with two mace of silver.
Ch'un-mei then asked him, "How is your mistress's infant son doing?"
"The little boy is a very playful sort," responded Tai-an.
She then went on to ask, "Tai-an, when did you put up your hair and start wearing a hair net; and when did you and Hsiao-yü get married?"
"It was during the eighth month," replied Tai-an.
"When you get home," said Ch'un-mei, "be sure to convey my greetings to your mistress, and tell her how grateful I am for her generous gifts. I would like to invite her to come by for a visit, but the commandant is going to leave on another tour of inspection sometime soon. Next year, during the first month, on her son's birthday, I intend to come pay her a visit."
"If you plan to do so," said Tai-an, "I will not only tell my mistress about it when I get home but also offer to come escort you there when the day arrives."
When they had finished speaking, Tai-an prepared to leave, and Auntie Hsüeh said to him, "You go ahead. The mistress wishes to say something else to me."
Tai-an thereupon escorted the bearer of the gift box on the way home and, on seeing Yüeh-niang, told her, thus and so, "The commandant accepted only the pig, the wine, and the delicacies but has returned the bolt of fabric. Ch'un-mei invited me back to the rear compound, gave me a serving of tea and something to eat, asked how Hsiao-ko was doing, and how things were going in the household, rewarded me with a handkerchief and three mace of silver, and the carrier of the gift box with two mace of silver, and asked me to convey her greetings to you, and thank you for your generous gifts. Initially, she refused to accept any of the gifts, but Auntie Hsüeh and I finally persuaded her to accept the delicacies, the pig, and the wine, although she insisted on my bringing back the bolt of fabric. She would have invited you to come by for a visit, but the commandant is due to set out on another tour of inspection in a few days. Next year, during the first month, on Hsiao-ko's birthday, she plans to come here for a visit."
He then went on to explain, "She occupies the master suite of five rooms; was wearing a brocade skirt, an embroidered jacket, and a gilt-ridged cap; looks plumper than she used to; and is waited on by a considerable number of maidservants and wet nurses."
"Did she really say that she is planning to come visit us next year?" asked Yüeh-niang.
"She really did say just that," responded Tai-an.
"When the day comes," said Yüeh-niang, "we will have to send someone to escort her here."
She then went on to ask, "Why has Auntie Hsüeh not appeared?"
"When I prepared to leave," said Tai-an, "she was still seated there engaged in conversation and told me to go on without her."
From this time forth, the two households resumed their social relations without interruption. Truly:
The way of the world responds to cold and warmth;
Human prestige is thereby enhanced or diminished.
A poem testifies to this:

Success and failure, flourishing and decay are controlled by fate;
Everything is determined by the year, month, day, and hour of birth.
Those who harbour ambition in their chests may achieve their goals;
But those whose purses are devoid of money cannot depend on talent.

Only a few monks live in the ancient temple
Few travelers cross the ruined bridge.
When a house is poor, the slaves deceive their master
When one in authority is weak, his underlings will serve him ill.
Where the water is shallow, the fish will not stay
Where the wood has few trees, the birds will not sing.
So it is with the affairs of men.
We can only sigh and be sorry for it.
After the death of Ximen Dajie and the lawsuit with Chen Jingji, Wu Yueniang's servant, Laizhao, died. His wife took her son, Little Iron Rod, and married again. Laixing was given charge of the gate. Xiuchun became a nun with Nun Wang.
After the death of Laixing's wife, he did not marry again. The nurse, Ruyi'er, often used to take Xiaoge and play with him. Laixing gave her wine and, in course of time, their relations became very friendly. Yueniang noticed that Ruyi'er often came back to the inner court with a very red face, and so found out what was happening. She reproached Ruyi'er, but did not make very much fuss about the matter. She gave the nurse a dress and four pins, chose a day of good omen, and married her to Laixing. In the daytime the nurse came to the kitchen and looked after the baby, and at night she went to Laixing.
The fifteenth day of the eighth month was Yueniang's birthday. Her two sisters-in-law and the three nuns came to congratulate her, and she gave them wine in the inner court. In the evening they listened to the nuns reading their texts in the room that had once belonged to Yulou. About the second night watch, Zhongqiu was sent to the kitchen to make some tea. Yueniang called her several times but got no answer. Then she herself went to her room to try to find the maid. She did not find her, but discovered Daian and Xiaoyu on the bed amusing themselves to their own very great satisfaction. When Yueniang came in, they were so taken aback they did not know what to do with themselves.
"You young scamp, what are you doing here? Why don't you go and make tea?" was all Yueniang said.
"I told Zhongqiu to go," Xiaoyu said. She hung her head and went to the back. Daian went through the second door to the other part of the house. Two days later, when the nuns and the two Aunts Wu had gone, Yueniang told Laixing to go to the rooms that Laizhao had had, since he was now the gatekeeper, and gave Laixing's old rooms to Daian. She fitted out Daian with two sets of bedclothes, a new suit, a hat, shoes, and socks. To Xiaoyu she gave a hairnet, some gold and silver ornaments, four pins of silver with gold heads, rings, and two silk dresses. Then she selected an auspicious day and married Daian to Xiaoyu. Xiaoyu spent her days waiting upon Yueniang and at night went to Daian. The girl was always taking away dainties for her husband, but Yueniang pretended not to see. As the proverb says: If you are in love, you never see your lover's faults. Another proverb tells us: A greedy man will never be satisfied. When food and wine are distributed unequally, there will be trouble in the household, and when the mistress is unfair, maids and women will complain.
Ping'an saw that Yueniang had married Xiaoyu to Daian, and that he was given better clothes than the rest. He himself was two years older than Daian—he was twenty-two—but Yueniang had never thought of finding a wife for him.
One day he was in the pawnshop when somebody pawned a set of gold ornaments and two gilded hooks for thirty taels of silver. They were to redeem the things in a month with interest. Clerk Fu and Daian took them and put them in the large press in the shop. Ping'an stole them and took them to Long-footed Wu's place in Nanwazi. There were two receivers of stolen property there, one called Xue Cun and the other Pan Er.
Ping'an stayed there two nights. The man of the bawdy house noticed that he was spending money freely, and also saw that he had some gold ornaments in a box. He pretended to go out with a silver pot to buy some wine, but actually went to the police and told them what he had seen. The police came and found the young man there. They beat him about the head and then arrested him.
It happened that Wu Dian'en, who had recently been made an Inspector, rode down the street, with his tablet of office carried before him. He asked who this man was whom the police had arrested. The police knelt down and said: "This fellow stole some things and came here to spend the money in the bawdy house. We had reason to be suspicious and took him into custody."

"Take him to my court," the Inspector said. They all went to the Inspector's court. When Wu Dian'en had taken his seat, his underlings standing on either side, Ping'an was brought in. He recognized Wu Dian'en, who had once been one of Ximen Qing's friends, and thought he would certainly be set free.
"I am Ximen's servant," he said, "and my name is Ping'an."
"If you are a servant in Ximen's household," Wu Dian'en said, "why did you take these things and go to the brothel?"
"My mistress had lent them to one of her relatives and sent me to fetch them," Ping'an said. "I got back very late and the city gates were closed. I went to the brothel to pass the night. There, unfortunately, the police arrested me."
"Nonsense!" Wu Dian'en said angrily. "Have Ximen's people so much gold and silver that they even let you, a slave, look after gold ornaments like these and take them to the brothel? I believe you stole them. Tell me the truth and you shall not be beaten."
"Really," Ping'an said, "my Mistress's relative borrowed these things, and I was sent to bring them back. I am telling the truth."
Wu Dian'en was angry. "You slave," he cried, "you are a regular thief. I know you will never tell me the truth unless you are beaten. Give him a beating and put the thumbscrews on him."
The boy made a noise like a pig being killed. "Please stop," he cried, "and I will tell the truth."
"Tell me the truth and then I will stop," Wu Dian'en said.
"I stole the ornaments and the hooks from the pawnshop," Ping'an said.
"Why did you do it?"
"I am now twenty-three years old," Ping'an said, "and my mistress promised that she would see about getting a wife for me. She never did so. She has another servant, Daian, who is only twenty, but she has married him to one of her maids. I stole the things because I was jealous."
"Perhaps Daian has had some dealings with your mistress, and that is why she gave him her maid," Wu Dian'en said. "If that is what you say, I will forgive you."
"But I can't say that," Ping'an said.
"If you don't, I must put the rack on you again."
The attendants applied the rack again. Ping'an was so terrified that he cried: "Don't do it. I will tell you."
"Tell me and I will let you go," Wu Dian'en said. He told his attendants to put the rack away.
"Yes," Ping'an said, "my mistress secretly slept with Daian, and Daian also misconducted himself with Xiaoyu, the maid. My mistress found out what was going on between Daian and the maid, but she never said a word. She gave them clothes and ornaments and allowed them to marry."
Wu Dian'en ordered his clerk to write down what Ping'an had said. Then he kept the boy at his office and issued a warrant for the arrest of Yueniang, Daian, and Xiaoyu.
When Clerk Fu discovered the loss of the ornaments, he was very much upset. He asked Daian what he knew about the matter.
"I have been having my dinner in the medicine shop," Daian said. "I know nothing about it."
"I put the box into this cabinet, and it has disappeared," Clerk Fu said.
Then they looked for Ping'an. He had disappeared. Clerk Fu was in a terrible state. He swore all sorts of terrible oaths. When the owner of the things came to claim them, Fu could only say that he had not yet brought them from the house. The man came several times, but still the things were not forthcoming. Then the man stood outside the shop and shouted: "I pawned my things for a month only. I have paid for them and the interest too. Why don't you let me have them? They are worth seventy or eighty taels of silver."
In the evening, Clerk Fu could still see no sign of Ping'an, and realized that the young man had stolen the things. He sent people in every direction to try and find him. The owner of the things came again and kept shouting outside the door. Fu suggested that they should give the man fifty taels, but he would not accept it. He said the ornaments were worth sixty taels, and the hooks and jewels on the ornaments another ten, seventy in all. Clerk Fu offered ten taels more, but the man still refused. While they were disputing and arguing, a man came and said to Clerk Fu: "Your Ping'an has stolen the things and taken them to the bawdy house in Nanwazi. Now Inspector Wu has had him arrested. You had better send somebody to identify them."
Wu Yueniang knew that Wu Dian'en had once been a clerk in her husband's business. She sent for Uncle Wu. Together they made a statement and sent it by Clerk Fu to Wu Dian'en. She thought that the matter would be settled as soon as he received it. Fu took the paper to the office, quite sure that his old friend Wu Dian'en would give him the things at once. To his surprise, he was called an old dog. Indeed Wu Dian'en ordered his attendants to take off Fu's clothes and flog him.
Meanwhile, the Inspector said: "Your boy is here. He tells me that Mistress Ximen has been carrying on an intrigue with Daian. I am sending a report to the authorities, and later I shall send and examine Mistress Ximen herself. I am surprised that you, you old dog, dare to come here and claim these things."
Clerk Fu was sent away, with many shouts of "Old dog!" to pursue him. He hurried home as fast as he could and told Yueniang everything that had happened. She was so frightened that she felt as though her skull had been broken open and icy water poured into it. She was hardly able to move her feet and hands. Then the man who owned the ornaments came again and made a great to-do outside the door.
"You have lost my property," he shouted, "and now you will neither return it to me nor pay me what it is worth. You keep on telling me to come here and go there. Today, you say, you will go to the office and claim the things; and tomorrow, you will tell me to wait a little longer. Where are they? This won't do at all."
Clerk Fu went to the man and pacified him. "Give us one more day or perhaps two," he said, "and you shall have your things without fail. If we do not get them for you, you shall have double what they are worth."
"I will go and see what my master has to say," the man said, and went away.
Yueniang, what with one trouble and what with another, wore a continual frown. She sent a boy to ask her brother, Uncle Wu, to come and talk the matter over. "You must go to Wu Dian'en," she said, "and get this matter settled before things get any worse."
"I don't imagine he will do anything for us unless he gets well paid for it," Uncle Wu said.
"Remember that he owes his position entirely to us," Yueniang said. "And he still owes us a hundred taels of silver. My husband never asked him for any note, yet he repays our kindness by hatred."
"Ah, sister," Uncle Wu said, "there are only too many people who do that."
"Brother," Yueniang said, "I am counting on you to settle this. I will give you some money, and you can get back the ornaments and so end the wretched business."
When Uncle Wu had had something to eat, Yueniang took him to the gate. By chance, old woman Xue went past with a young maid. She was carrying her box.
"Where are you going, old woman?" Yueniang said. "I haven't seen you for a very long time."
"No, indeed, Lady," Xue said. "I have been very busy lately. Yesterday the young lady sent for me several times, but I could not go."
"Old woman, you are crazy," Yueniang said. "What do you mean by this young lady of yours?"
"Well, she is not a young lady any longer," old woman Xue said. "She is the mistress of the household now."
"How did she get into that position?" Yueniang said.
"It was just her good luck," the old woman said. "First, she had a baby. Then the Great Lady died, and the Major made her his first wife. His second wife has to do what she tells her. She has two nurses and four maids to wait on her, and two of them are very good singers. Though the Major has slept with both of them, if the lady takes it into her head to punish them, he never says a word to stop her. And still he is always anxious lest she should have something to complain about. The other day, for some reason or other, she punished Xue'e and pulled her hair out. She was sent away one night and sold for eight taels of silver. This morning, even before I was up, she sent for me twice. I was told to go at once and take two sets of green ornaments and one set of nine phoenix ornaments. They gave me five taels of silver. I have spent the silver, and they haven't seen the ornaments yet. Certainly I shall get a terrible scolding when she sees me."
"Come in and let me see what the ornaments are like," Yueniang said.
She took Madam Xue into the hall of the inner court. The old woman opened the box and took out the ornaments. They were indeed exquisitely made, with a beautiful blending of gold and green, and the backs gilded. Each ornament had a phoenix, and each phoenix held a string of little pearls in its beak.
"This set," the old woman said, "is worth three taels and five *qian*. The other, one tael and five *qian*. I have made no profit at all out of them."
As they were talking, Daian came and said: "The man has come again for those things that were pawned with us. He wants to know how much longer he will have to wait. He says if we don't get the things by tomorrow there will be trouble for Uncle Fu. He will go with Uncle Fu to a certain place. Uncle Fu is not well and has gone home. The man has gone too."
"What is it all about?" old woman Xue said.
Yueniang sighed. "Ping'an stole a set of gold ornaments and a pair or hooks from the pawnshop. He went to the bawdy house outside the city and there Inspector Wu arrested him. Now he is in jail and the man keeps coming for his things and shouts outside the door. Inspector Wu deliberately refuses to give the things up. He beat Clerk Fu. I don't know what to do. Ever since my husband died, I have had nothing but one trouble after another. It is very hard for me to have to put up with all these insults." She began to cry.
"My good lady," old woman Xue said, "there is one way out that you have not thought of. Let me go to the young lady, and ask her to send a card to the Inspector. Then you would get ten sets of ornaments if there were so many."
"Major Zhou is a military officer," Yueniang said. "What can he do with the Inspector?"
"Lady," the old woman said, "don't you know that he has special powers. He has many functions that a military officer usually does not have. He has something to do with the river and the taxes and the soldiers and all sorts of things. He seems to be able to settle any sort of question. And it is his business to see to the capture of robbers who go to the river. This is the very thing for him."
"Well," Yueniang said, "will you go to the young lady for me and ask her to speak to the Major on my behalf? If I get those ornaments back, you shall have five taels of silver."
"Money is not everything, my good lady," old woman Xue said. "I should not think of taking money for helping you out of such a sad predicament. Ask someone to write a note for you and I will take it to the young lady at once. If I do this business for you, just give me anything you think fit."
Yueniang asked Xiaoyu to give Madam Xue some tea.
"If you don't mind, I won't have any tea," the old woman said. "Tell a boy to write the note. I am rather busy."
"You must have something to eat. You have been out half a day."
Xiaoyu brought them tea and cakes, and the old woman ate something with Yueniang. She gave two cakes to the girl who was with her.
"How old is she?" Yueniang asked.
"She is twelve."
Daian finished the note and brought it in. Xue drank her tea and put the paper in her sleeve. She picked up her box and went away.
When she came to the Major's house, Chunmei was still in bed. Yuegui told her that Madam Xue had come. Chunmei told Haitang to open the windows and let in the bright sunshine.
"What, Lady," the old woman said, when she came in, "are you not up yet?" She set down her box and kowtowed to Chunmei.
"There is no need for ceremony between us," Chunmei said. "Stand up. I am not very well. That is why I didn't get up before this. Have you brought my ornaments?"
"Yes," the old woman said, "and I had a very hard business getting them. I did not get them, in fact, until last night. This morning, I was just going to bring them to you when your servant came for me."
She took the ornaments from the box and gave them to Chunmei. Chunmei did not care very much for one of the sets, but she put them in the box and gave the box to Yuegui. When the old woman had had some tea, she called forward the little girl who had come with her and told her to kowtow to Chunmei.
"Who is this?" Chunmei asked.
"The Second Lady has several times told me that her maid is only useful for cooking," old woman Xue said. "She wants a young girl to do needlework for her, and I have brought this one for her to see. She is a country girl and twelve years old. I think she will turn out well."
"You should have got her a town girl," Chunmei said. "Town girls are more intelligent. Indeed, I never think a country girl has any brains at all. How much does she cost?"
"Only four taels," old woman Xue said. "Her father is going to the army and needs the money."
"Take this girl to the Second Lady," Chunmei said to one of her maids. "We will pay for her tomorrow." Then she said to the other maid: "There is some Jinhua wine in the jar. Heat some for Madam Xue and bring her some cakes. If we don't give her cakes, she will say that we only give her wine to drink in the mornings and nothing to eat with it."
"Sister," the old woman said to the maid, "don't heat any wine for me. I have something to say to your mistress. I had some wine before I came."
"Where did you have some wine?" Chunmei asked her.
"I have just come from the Great Lady," old woman Xue said, "and she gave me something to eat. She is in great trouble and she cried to me. Her boy, Ping'an, stole a set of gold ornaments and a pair of gilt hooks from the pawnshop and went after some whore. Then he was arrested. Meanwhile, the owner of the things keeps coming and shouting and demanding his property. Inspector Wu was once a clerk in her family, and when Ximen Qing was alive he was very kind to Wu. But now the Inspector has forgotten all about that, and looks the other way. He had her servant beaten and refuses to give up the things. He insulted Clerk Fu and beat him. Fu got such a fright that he had to go home, ill. The Great Lady told me to bring you her love and ask you to take pity on her. She has no relatives of her own to help her, and she said I was to ask you if you would speak to the Major, so that she can get back the ornaments and give them to their owner. If you are good enough to do this for her, she will call to thank you.
"Have you brought any paper with you?" Chunmei said. "My husband is away on duty, but when he comes back this evening, I will tell him.
"I have the paper here," the old woman said. She took it from her sleeve. Chunmei read it and put it on the windowsill.
Then Yuegui brought four dishes on a tray. She filled a large silver cup with wine and offered it to the old woman.
"Lady," Xue said, "why do you give me so large a thing?"
Chunmei laughed. "It is not so large a thing as your husband's," she said. "If you can put up with that, you can drink this. If you won't drink it of your own accord, I shall tell Yuegui to hold your nose and pour it down your throat."
"Well, give me some cakes first so that I have something to make a foundation for it," the old woman said.
"You are an old liar," Chunmei said. "A moment ago you said you had just had something. Now you say you want something to make a foundation."
"I only had two cakes," old woman Xue said, "and they won't last forever."
"Mother Xue," Yuegui said, "drink the wine and then you shall have the cakes. If you won't, it will mean another beating for me. My mistress always says I am no use."
Old woman Xue could not help herself. She drank the wine and immediately felt as if a young deer were careering about inside her. Chunmei made a sign to Haitang, and the maid gave her another cup. The old woman put it aside.
"Mother," Haitang said, "you took the wine Yuegui offered you. You can't refuse mine. If you do, my mistress will give me a beating."
Old woman Xue knelt down.
"Well," Chunmei said, "give her some cakes to eat with it."
"Mother Xue," Yuegui said, "nobody is so kind to you as I am. I have kept these rose cakes especially for you."
She brought out a large plate of rose cakes, but the old woman ate only one.
"Take the others away and let your old turtle have them," Chunmei said.
When Madam Xue had had some wine, she wrapped up in paper some dried meat, buns and goose, and put the paper into her sleeves. Haitang pressed her to drink another half cup. Then she saw that the old woman was on the verge of being sick, so she cleared the table and urged her no more. Chunmei told her to come the following day and paid her for the ornaments. When Xue was going, she said: "Now, old woman, don't pretend to be deaf and dumb. One of these sets of ornaments is no good. I shall expect a better set tomorrow."
"Very well, Lady," the old woman said. "Will you send a maid out with me? I am afraid of the dog biting my leg."
"My dogs know what they're about," Chunmei said. "They will stop when they get to the bone." But she told Yuegui to take the old woman to the gate.
It was sunset when Major Zhou came back from his office. He went to the great hall. The maids took his hat and clothes. He went to see Chunmei and his little son, and was very happy with them. When he had sat down, the maids brought tea to him and he told Chunmei about the work he had done that day. Then the table was set and they had dinner together. Afterwards, candles were brought and they drank wine. He asked if anything special had happened in the household, and Chunmei gave him the paper that old woman Xue had brought.
"Mistress Ximen's boy, Ping'an, stole some ornaments," she said. "Then he was arrested. Inspector Wu refused the people who went to claim the things and beat the boy severely to make him declare that Mistress Ximen had behaved improperly. He says he is going to send the case to a higher authority."
"But this is my business," Major Zhou said. "What does he mean by talking about sending the matter further? He is a most unreasonable fellow. I will send for him tomorrow and see how he likes a beating himself. I believe he used to be one of Ximen Qing's men. When Ximen went to the Eastern Capital with presents for the Imperial Tutor, it was he who got this appointment for Wu. Now he is trying to do all the harm he can to Ximen's family."
"That is just what I was going to say," Chunmei said. "You must look into the matter tomorrow."
The next day, Major Zhou told Yueniang to send an accusation to him. In his great hall, the Major wrote out an instruction and put it in an envelope. "The Major's office wishes to investigate a certain case of theft," it said. "The thief and the stolen property are to be sent to this office immediately. This instruction will be delivered by officers Zhang Sheng and Li An."
Zhang Sheng and Li An took the document. First they called to see Wu Yueniang. She entertained them with food and wine and gave each of them a tael of silver with which to buy shoes. Clerk Fu was still in bed, so Uncle Wu went with the two men to the Inspector's office.
Wu Dian'en remarked the fact that although Ping'an had been in prison for two days, nobody from Ximen's household had been to see him. He was preparing a document to send to his superiors. Then the two officers from Major Zhou's office came in and handed him an envelope. He read the superscription and opened it. Inside was an accusation from Yueniang. He was alarmed and made himself most agreeable. He gave two taels of silver each to Zhang Sheng and Li An. He wrote a document in reply, sent those concerned to the Major's office, and went with them himself.
After a long time, Zhou came to the great hall, and his underlings stood on either side. They went in and the Inspector handed his document to the Major. The Major read it. "This business belongs to my office," he said. "Why did you deliberately delay handing the matter over to me? You must have had some evil purpose."
"I was just preparing the document when your instructions arrived," Wu said.

"You doggish officer," Major Zhou shouted. "What is your rank that you should dare to go contrary to the law and disregard your superiors? By his Majesty's command, it is my duty to protect this district, control the soldiers here and the river too. You know what my duties are, yet you dare to arrest people, and do not send them to me. You abuse your authority and even punish people yourself. Then you accuse the innocent. Certainly you are actuated by some evil motive."
Inspector Wu took off his hat and kowtowed to the Major.
"I ought to punish you, you doggish officer," Zhou cried, "but this time I will forgive you. If anything of the sort happens again, I shall certainly deal with you as the law requires."
He called Ping'an before him. "You slave," he said, "you stole these things and lied most disgracefully about your mistress. If all servants were like you, no one would dare to employ one." He ordered that Ping'an should be given thirty severe stripes, and sealed up the stolen property until the owner should claim it. Then he called for Uncle Wu, who gave him a receipt for the things.
Then he sent Zhang Sheng with his card to Yueniang. Yueniang gave the man wine and another tael of silver. When he returned, he told the Major and Chunmei what she had said. So Inspector Wu gained nothing by arresting Ping'an, but lost a few taels of silver. Yueniang returned the ornaments and hooks to their owner, who examined them, recognized them as his own, and took them away without a word.
Clerk Fu was very ill and, after seven days, he died. He had taken medicine, but it did him no good. After this trouble in the pawnshop, Yueniang decided to let people redeem their pledges, but would not accept any new ones. She put her younger brother and Daian to look after the medicine shop, and this brought in sufficient to pay the household expenses.
When the business was settled, Yueniang sent for old woman Xue and gave her three taels of silver. The old woman refused to take the money, saying that if she did so, her young lady would be annoyed.
"But I am very much indebted to you," Yueniang said, "and Heaven does not employ people without assuring them of their reward. You need not say anything about it to her."
Then she got ready four dishes, a pig, a jar of wine and a roll of silk, and asked Xue to take them to Chunmei as a mark of her gratitude. Daian, dressed in black clothes, took the list of presents. The old woman took him to the hall in the inner court and there Chunmei came to see him. She was wearing a golden arched headdress, an embroidered coat and a silken skirt, and her women and maids came with her. Daian knelt down and kowtowed. Chunmei told the maids to give him something to eat.
"I have done nothing," she said. "Why does your mistress trouble to send me these presents? I don't think my husband will allow me to accept them."
"My mistress told me to say that she is very grateful for all the trouble you have taken over Ping'an," Daian said. "She has nothing worthy to offer you, but sends these trifles in the hope that you and his Lordship will condescend to give them to your servants."
"It embarrasses me to accept them," Chunmei said.
"If you do not take them, Lady," old woman Xue said, "I am sure the Lady Ximen will blame me."
Then Chunmei asked her husband to come, and asked him what he thought about it. They decided to accept the pig, the wine, and the prepared food, but not the roll of silk. Chunmei gave Daian a handkerchief and three *qian* of silver, and two *qian* of silver to the porter.
"How is your young master?" she asked Daian.
"He is very merry and plays all the time," Daian said.
"When did you first dress your hair as a man's, and when did you marry Xiaoyu?"
"I married her in the eighth month," Daian said.
"Thank your mistress for me and say how glad I should be if she would come and see me. The Major will be away on duty and, in the first month next year, when it is your young master's birthday, I will pay a visit to your mistress."
"Lady," Daian said, "I will tell my mistress as soon as I get home and say that she must expect you."
Then Daian was dismissed.
"Young man," old woman Xue said to him, "you go home. I have something to say to the lady and I will stay."
Daian took the empty boxes and went away. When he got home, he said to Yueniang: "Sister Chunmei took me to the hall in the inner court and entertained me with tea and cakes. She inquired after the young master and asked many questions about this household. She gave me a handkerchief and five *qian* of silver. She also gave two *qian* to the porter. She told me to thank you. For a long time she would not accept the present, but old woman Xue and I urged her, and at last she took the food, the pig and the wine, but made me bring back the roll of silk. She says she would like to send you an invitation, but she cannot do so now as her husband is going away on duty. She is going to come and see us on the young master's birthday. She occupies the upper apartments now, five rooms. She was wearing an embroidered gown and a silk skirt. Her headdress has a gold crown. She is taller and fatter than she used to be and has a great many maids and servants to wait upon her."
"Did she really say she was coming to see us?" the Moon Lady said.
"Yes," Daian said.
"We must certainly send someone to receive her," Yueniang said. "Why hasn't old woman Xue come back with you?"
"When I left, she's still talking to the lady," Daian said. "She told me to come back first." After this, there was close friendship between the 2 households.

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## Ch'un-mei Enjoys Visiting the Pools and Pavilions of Her Old Home; Commandant Chou Hsiu Sends Chang Sheng to Look for Ch'en Ching-chi

Households that are solid without but hollow within must cover their deficiencies;
In entertaining guests and responding to associates their expenditures are great.
When one's horses have died and one's servants fled it is hard to host a banquet;
When towers are foundering and buildings collapsing pipes and voices are silenced.
One's leased farmland and rented commercial outlets must revert to their owners;
One's collections of antiques or gold and jewellery are given to female peddlers.
If one wishes to borrow something temporarily from some well-to-do household;
How can one ever hope to open one's mouth without suffering embarrassment?
Light and darkness alternate swiftly;
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.

And before long, it was the twenty-first day of the first month of the following year. Ch'un-mei, after consulting with Commandant Chou Hsiu, prepared a sacrificial table, replete with four kinds of preserved fruit, and a jug of southern wine, and sent their servant Chou Jen to deliver it to Wu Yüeh-niang. In the first place, it was the third anniversary of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death; and in the second place, it was Hsiao-ko's birthday. Yüeh-niang accepted the gifts and rewarded Chou Jen with a handkerchief and three mace of silver; after which, she hastened to arrange for Tai-an to don his black livery and deliver an invitation to Ch'un-mei to come pay her a visit. The invitation read as follows:
Deeply moved by your bountiful gifts, our humble household has hastily prepared a meager potation as a deferential compensation for your generous largess. It is our ardent wish that you will deign to mount your elegant equipage and condescend to pay us a visit. Our gratitude for your favor will know no bounds.
Respectfully indited by the lady, née Wu, of the Hsi-men household and addressed to the dressing table of the virtuous and venerable consort of His Honor Chou Hsiu.
When Ch'un-mei had read the invitation, she waited until noon before setting out. When she did so:
Her head was adorned with pearls and trinkets,
including gold phoenixes, hairpins and combs, and pearl earrings; her torso was clad in a full-sleeved scarlet robe, decorated with a motif of the four animals representing the cardinal directions paying homage to the *ch'i-lin*, over a skirt of kingfisher-blue variegated brocade, from which suspended jade pendants tinkled, and which was secured with a gold girdle; while on her feet she wore shoes of scarlet embroidery with high white satin heels. She rode in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers and invested with a black satin gold lamé canopy, escorted by soldiers holding rattan rods who shouted to clear the way, accompanied by servants and attendants carrying her dressing case, and closely followed by two smaller sedan chairs for her maidservants.
Wu Yüeh-niang had invited Sister-in-law Wu to join her and had also engaged the services of two singing girls to play their instruments and sing for the entertainment of her guest. Upon hearing that Ch'un-mei had arrived, Yüeh-niang, likewise, dressed herself elaborately in mourning garments in order to receive her. She wore a five-ridged cap with a number of gold and turquoise head ornaments on her head, two pearl earrings dangled beside her ears, and the two sides of her collar were clasped together with a gold chatelaine. On her torso she wore a white satin jacket, over a long trailing skirt of kingfisher-blue satin brocade; and on her feet she wore a pair of jade-colored satin high-heeled shoes. With Sister-in-law Wu, she then went out to the reception hall in the front compound to receive her guest.
Ch'un-mei's large sedan chair was carried all the way to the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds before she alighted from it and proceeded to the reception hall to proffer her greetings, with her servants accompanying her on either side. Upon arriving there, she kowtowed to Yüeh-niang:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder.
Yüeh-niang promptly kowtowed in return, saying hastily, "The other day I
put you to a great deal of trouble on my behalf, and yet you would not even accept the bolt of course fabric I offered you. And now, deeply moved by your bountiful gift of a sacrificial table:
I will never be able to thank you enough."
"You embarrass me," protested Ch'un-mei." "My husband has nothing better than these paltry gifts to offer.
They are no more than tokens of our esteem.
I have wanted since some time ago to invite you over for a visit, but my husband was about to leave on a tour of inspection, so I failed to do so."
"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "when is your birthday? When the day comes, I would like to buy some presents and come to see you."
"My birthday is on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month," responded Ch'un-mei.
"I will be sure to come visit you that day," said Yüeh-niang.
When the two of them had finished with these amenities, and Ch'un-mei had accepted two obeisances from her, she insisted that Yüeh-niang should stand up; after which she proceeded to kowtow to Sister-in-law Wu, who likewise returned the courtesy.
"Sister-in-law Wu," objected Ch'un-mei, "you ought not to do that," and she helped her up with one hand so she could accept her obeisance.
"Sister," responded Sister-in-law Wu:
"The present cannot be compared to the past.
You embarrass this old body to death."
After accepting only half an obeisance from Ch'un-mei, she conducted her to the seat of honor. Yüeh-niang and her sister-in-law then sat down to keep her company in their positions as hosts. The servants' wives, the maidservants, and the wet nurse then came in to pay their respects to their visitor, and Ch'un-mei observed that the wet nurse Ju-i was carrying Hsiao-ko in her arms.
"Little Brother," said Yüeh-niang, "won't you come and kowtow to Sister Ch'un-mei, in order to thank her for coming to celebrate your birthday today?"
Hsiao-ko actually climbed off Ju-i's lap and went over to bow to Ch'un-mei.
"A fine little rascal you are," remarked Yüeh-niang, "refusing to kowtow to our sister, but merely offering her a bow."
Ch'un-mei responded by hurriedly pulling out of her sleeve a brocade handkerchief, as well as a gold brooch decorated with the eight auspicious symbols, which she had them attach to his cap.
"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "I have put you to even further trouble," and she bowed to her in gratitude.
After this, Hsiao-yü and the wet nurse Ju-i came forward and kowtowed to her. Ch'un-mei responded by giving Hsiao-yü a gold-headed hairpin, and Ju-i a pair of silver flower ornaments.
"Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "you may not know it yet, but I have given our wet nurse to Lai-hsing as his wife. Lai-hsing's former wife Hui-hsiu became ill and died."
"She has always hoped with all her heart to remain in this household," remarked Ch'un-mei, "so that is appropriate."
A maidservant then brought in a serving of tea, and after they had consumed it, Yüeh-niang said, "Sister, please come back and sit in my parlor in the rear compound. It is cold in this reception hall."
When Ch'un-mei arrived in the rear compound, the first thing she saw was Hsi-men Ch'ing's spirit tablet, before which lamps and candles had been lit, and the sacrificial table had been set up. Ch'un-mei burned some paper money before it and shed a few tears; after which, standing screens were placed around the company, the charcoal in the brazier was ignited, an Eight Immortals table was set up, and the tea service was laid out. This consisted of deftly prepared steamed shortcake, rare sweets, mouth-watering delicacies, and exotic fruits, in saucers with incised gold ornamentation, with ivory chopsticks, and high-grade tender leaf tea, served in snow-white cups. Yüeh-niang and Sister-in-law Wu kept Ch'un-mei company as she enjoyed her tea, after which, they led her into the interior of the master suite to change her clothes. When she had taken off her outer gown, the servants' wives who had accompanied her opened the dressing case she had brought with her, and she changed into a green jacket of patterned brocade, over a skirt of lilac-colored brocade, before sitting down with her hosts in Yüeh-niang's room, and chatting for a while.
"How is your young son doing?" asked Yüeh-niang. "Why didn't you bring him with you today?"
"I would have brought him with me," responded Ch'un-mei, "so he could kowtow to you; but his father pointed out that the weather is frigid and was afraid that he might catch a cold. He doesn't want to stay in his quarters but likes to have the servant on duty take him out to the courtroom, or carry him outside. The last few days he has been crying a great deal, but I don't know why."
"Doesn't he miss you when you are away?" inquired Yüeh-niang.
"Whatever happens," said Ch'un-mei, "he has two wet nurses who take turns looking after him."
"His Honor Chou Hsiu is well along in years," said Yüeh-niang, "and must be very pleased that you have borne him this little son. It is also your good fortune as a woman. I have heard that his secondary consort Sun Erh-niang has also borne him a daughter. How old is she now?"
"That child of Sun Erh-niang's is called Yü-chieh," responded Ch'un-mei, "and she will be four years old on her next birthday. This child of mine is called Chin-ko."
"I have heard," said Yüeh-niang, "that His Honor also has two other concubines at his disposal."
"Those two are really only maidservants who are learning to sing," said Ch'un-mei. "They are merely fifteen or sixteen years old and are constantly up to mischief."
"Does His Honor bother to sleep with them very often?" asked Yüeh-niang. "My Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "he hardly has the time to do so. He is:
Usually abroad, and
Seldom at home.
At the present time, all over the realm, there have been:
Outbreaks of thieves and bandits;
and he has been ordered by imperial edict to be responsible for many things, including the protection of the territory within his jurisdiction, the policing of the canals and waterways, the arrest of thieves and bandits, and the training of infantry and cavalry. Consequently, he is constantly going out on tours of inspection and is utterly exhausted."
When they had finished speaking, Hsiao-yü brought in a serving of tea for them to drink.
Ch'un-mei then said to Yüeh-niang, "My Lady, would you please take me for a tour of my former mistress's quarters in the garden, beneath the artificial hill."
"Sister," responded Yüeh-niang, "the artificial hill and the garden are no longer the artificial hill and the garden that they used to be. Ever since my husband passed away, there has been no one to look after them, and they have been allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation. The stone markers have fallen over and the trees have died. Without a reason for doing so, I don't go there anymore."
"It doesn't matter," said Ch'un-mei. "I'd just like to go and take a look at my former mistress's quarters."
Yüeh-niang was unable to dissuade her and felt compelled to send Hsiao-yü to go fetch the keys to the garden gate and the gate of the grotto underneath the artificial hill. When the gates had been opened, she and Sister-in-law Wu accompanied Ch'un-mei for a tour of the garden, where they lingered for what seemed like half a day. Behold:
The encircling walls were tumbling down;
The terraces and kiosks were collapsing.
The painted walls to either side were
covered with green moss;
The floriate tiles on the ground were

hidden by verdant grass.
The rock formations before the hill,
Had been so damaged that they no longer
looked impressive;
The summer bedsteads in the pavilions,
Had been leaked on until their frames
had become wobbly.
The door of the rock grotto was
covered with cobwebs;
The water in the fishponds was
swarming with frogs.
Foxes frequently elected to sleep in the
Cloud Repose Pavilion;
Squirrels scampered back and forth in the
Hidden Spring Grotto.
One suspected that for years it had not
been visited by humans;
But it was obvious that all day long it
was frequented by clouds.[2]

After looking around for a while, Ch'un-mei made her way into the former quarters of Li P'ing-erh, where she saw that the second floor was littered with broken-down furniture, the rooms on the ground floor were locked, and the ground in the yard was covered with a tangle of uncultivated grass. Only then did she venture into her former mistress P'an Chin-lien's quarters, where she found that the second floor was still stocked with pharmaceuticals and incense, while the ground floor had only two clothes cabinets and did not even have a bed.

She then asked Hsiao-yü, "What has become of that bed of my mistress's? Why do I not see it?"

"When the Third Lady remarried," said Hsiao-yü, "she took it with her."

Yüeh-niang then came forward to explain the situation, saying, "When Father was still alive, he took that bed with retractable steps that the Third Lady had brought with her as part of her dowry and gave it to Hsi-men Ta-chieh when she married into the Ch'en family. Later, when the Third Lady remarried, I let her have your mistress's bed to take with her."

"I have heard," said Ch'un-mei, "that when you learned of Hsi-men Ta-chieh's death, you had that bed brought back to your place."

"As for that bed," said Yüeh-niang, "I was short of money and sold it for a mere eight taels of silver, which I had to spend on the lictors from the district yamen."

Upon hearing this, Ch'un-mei nodded her head and could not prevent her starry eyes from feeling sour.

From her mouth no word was uttered, but
In her heart she thought to herself,
"It was the disposition of my mistress to:
Contend for supremacy without conceding defeat,
and she made a point of urging her husband to buy that bed for her. I had really hoped that I might be able to acquire this bed of hers as a souvenir, but it has unexpectedly fallen into someone else's hands."

Unable to control her distress, she asked Yüeh-niang, "What has become of that inlaid mother-of pearl bed of the Sixth Lady's?"

"It's a long story,"
responded Yüeh-niang. "Ever since my husband passed away, every day:
There are merely expenditures,
Without any sources of income.
As the saying goes:
If a family lacks a means of subsistence,
Even bushels of gold will not sustain it.
Being short of money, I had it taken away to be sold."

"How much did you sell it for?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"I only got thirty-five taels of silver for it," responded Yüeh-niang.

"It's too bad," remarked Ch'un-mei. "That bed, I remember Father's saying, originally cost more than sixty taels of silver; and now it has been sold for so much less. If I had only known that you were getting rid of it, I would have been willing to pay you thirty or forty taels of silver for it. I would have really liked to have it."

"My good Sister," said Yüeh-niang, "no matter how proficient people may be:
They cannot foresee future developments."

When they had sighed over this for what seemed like half a day, whom should they see but the servant Chou Jen from Chou Hsiu's household, who came to fetch Ch'un-mei, saying, "Mistress, His Honor would like you to return home as soon as possible. Your son has been crying after you."

Ch'un-mei promptly agreed to return to the rear compound, and Yüeh-niang ordered Hsiao-yü to lock the garden gate, after which she accompanied her back to the parlor in the master suite, where already:
Screens displayed their peacocks' tails,
Curtains showed off their mermaid silks,
a feast had been laid out, and two singing girls stood by, with their silver psalteries and balloon guitars, to play and sing for the company. Yüeh-niang proceeded to serve the wine and preside over the feast, but there is no need to describe this in detail.

Ch'un-mei was ushered to the seat of honor but refused to occupy it by herself, insisting that Sister-in-law Wu share it with her. Yüeh-niang took her place as hostess and served the wine, as soup and rice, along with other delicacies, were laid before them, and Ch'un-mei directed her servant Chou Jen to reward the chef with three mace of silver. Words are inadequate to describe the scene:
Platters are piled with exotic viands,
And wine overflows with golden ripples.
Thereupon, what with:
The raising of glasses and passing of cups,
they continued drinking until the sun was about to set.

What should they see at this juncture but another servant from Chou Hsiu's household, who came with a lantern to escort Ch'un-mei on her way home. Yüeh-niang, however, would not let her go and ordered the two singing girls to kneel before her and play their instruments and sing, as a means of encouraging her to continue drinking.

"Select a good song," she told them, "with which to show your respect for Mistress Chou."

She also had Hsiao-yü pour out a large goblet of wine and place it before her.

Urging Ch'un-mei to drink, she said, "Sister, choose one of your favorite songs, and have the two of them perform it for you as you enjoy your wine."

"My Lady, responded Ch'un-mei, "I ought not to drink any more. I fear that my child is crying for me at home."

"Even if your little boy may be crying for you," said Yüeh-niang, "after all, his wet nurses are at hand to look after him. It's early enough yet, and I know you've got no mean capacity for drink."

Ch'un-mei then asked the two singing girls, "What are your names, and whose establishments are you from?"

The two of them knelt down before her and said, "One of us is the younger sister of Han Chin-ch'uan and is named Han Yü-ch'uan; while the other is the niece of Cheng Ai-hsiang and is named Cheng Chiao-erh."

"Can you sing any songs to the tune "Reluctant to Paint Her Eyebrows?" asked Ch'un-mei.

"If Mistress would like us to," responded Han Yü-ch'uan, "we can both do so."

"Since the two of you can sing what she has requested," said Yüeh-niang, "let us pour out some more wine for Mistress Chou to enjoy as the two of you sing for her."

Hsiao-yü, who was standing to one side, promptly poured out more wine, while the two singing girls, one of them playing the psaltery, and the other the balloon guitar, proceeded to sing:
My lover, when can I ever cease
to care for you?
Having endured the spring, it has
now come to autumn.
Who is there who understands what
is in my heart?
Heaven!
You have caused me to become thin
and emaciated.
Upon hearing anything of you, my
two eyes shed tears.
Ever since the beginning, we have
shared our desires.
Who would have thought you could
heartlessly abandon me?

When Ch'un-mei had drunk her wine, Yüeh-niang told Cheng Chiao-erh to pour another cup for her, at which Ch'un-mei said, "Venerable Lady, you must keep me company with another cup for yourself."

Thereupon, both of their cups were filled to the brim, and the two singing girls then continued to sing:
My lover, all on your account I am
losing my allure.
Magpies are crying before the eaves,[3]
unwilling to stop.
There is no call for the deadly tone
of their lively cries.
Heaven!
Nevertheless, they serve to stir up
my dormant feelings;
Causing such desolation that my
two eyes shed tears.
Ever since he elected to go his way,[4]
I can't forget him.
Who would have thought you could betray
my love and abandon me?

"My Lady," said Ch'un-mei, "you should get your sister-in-law to drink a cup of wine."

"My sister-in-law is not much of a drinker," responded Yüeh-niang. "But I'll have her down a small cup to keep you company."

She then said to Hsiao-yü, "Pour out a small cup of wine for my sister-in-law."

The two singing girls then continued to sing:
My lover, on your account I am suffering from
a bout of depression.
I long for you as I sit, yearn for you as I walk,
and sorrow both day and night.
My fragrant flesh has become emaciated,[5]
and my geniality has declined.
Heaven!
I long to see you, but I am
unable to do so,
Which causes me such grief that my
two eyes shed tears.

Originally we were inseparably attached
to each other.
Who would have thought that this time
you could abandon me?
At this juncture, Ch'un-mei saw that Hsiao-yü was standing in front of her, and proceeded to pour out a large cup of wine for her to drink.
"Sister," remarked Yüeh-niang, "she can't handle it."
"My Lady," responded Ch'un-mei, "she can handle two or three cups. Have I not enjoyed drinking with her when I was a member of your household?"
Thereupon, having poured out the wine, she urged Hsiao-yü to drink it. The two singing girls then continued to sing:
My lover, on your account I am suffering
from idle grief.
As I lie on the pillow of my sickbed,
it never seems to end.
With a breastful of sorrow, I cannot help
puckering my eyebrows.
Heaven!
Though I try to forget, my memories
always return.
Upon the sides of my cheeks, my
two eyes shed tears.
Originally the two of us were
indivisibly united.
Who would have thought that for over a year
you would opt to abandon me?
Gentle reader, take note: At this juncture, why did Ch'un-mei choose to have the singing girls perform this particular set of songs? For some time she had been preoccupied by the thought of Ch'en Ching-chi, who was still at large, so that:
There was no way for them to get together.[6]
The seeds of passion and sprouts of ardor,
Inevitably have an effect on the feelings,
And are commonly given melodic expression.
She had also observed that the two singing girls performed sweetly and cleverly and was:
Delighted in her heart,
by the way they waited upon her assiduously, addressing her as "Mistress this," and "Mistress that."
She therefore summoned her servant Chou Jen and had him take out a pair of gift packets containing two mace of silver apiece and awarded one to each of them. The two singing girls responded by putting aside their musical instruments, and kowtowing to her:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder,
in order to express their gratitude for her largess.
In a little while, Ch'un-mei got up to leave, and Yüeh-niang was unable to persuade her to stay any longer. Accompanied by her attendants, bearing lanterns, she said good-bye, went out the gate, and got into her large sedan chair. The servants' wives who had come with her also got into their smaller sedan chairs, and they went their way, with four lanterns in front and behind them, and with soldiers shouting to clear the way. Truly:
When fortune comes, even the crudest iron
looks shiny;
When luck departs, even the brightest gold
lacks luster.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
Daubing her lips with crimson rouge, she
flaunts her jadelike beauty;
Like the phoenix flying down in response
to the playing of the flute.
In front of the hall the speckled bamboo
blinds are rolled up high;
Revealing the swallows as they return to
reoccupy their former nests.
To resume our story, after coming home from her visit to Wu Yüeh-niang's residence, Ch'un-mei longed to see Ch'en Ching-chi but did not know where he had gone. All day long she took to her bed and was not in the best of moods.
Upon finding out what was bothering her, the commandant said, "I imagine you must be worrying that your cousin:
Has not been able to find a place for himself."[7]
He then called in Chang Sheng and Li An and admonished them, saying, "I entrusted you some time ago with the task of locating the whereabouts of your mistress's cousin. Why have you failed to exert yourselves in order to find him?"
"We went looking for him all over the place some time ago," the two of them responded, "but were unable to find him. We have already reported this to our mistress."
"I will set you a time limit of five days," the commandant said. "If you fail to locate him during that period, you will have to answer for it."
Chang Sheng and Li An, upon receiving this command, wore worried expressions as they proceeded conscientiously to:
Reconnoiter the streets and explore the alleys,[8]
looking everywhere for him. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.
To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi had been beaten and let go from the commandant's yamen, he intended to return to the Yen-kung Temple, but someone told him, "Your master Abbot Jen, upon hearing that you had been sleeping with a prostitute and had been beaten up and taken to the commandant's yamen, went to check the contents of his strongbox and found it to be empty, which gave him such a shock that, later that night, he passed away. If you have the nerve to venture into the temple, his disciples are likely to kill you."
Ch'en Ching-chi was frightened by this and did not dare to enter the temple. He also did not have the face to go once again to appeal to the elderly Layman of Apricot Village, Wang Hsüan. By day, he drifted about scrounging for whatever he could pick up, and at night, he sought refuge in a homeless shelter.
One day, it was one of those occasions when:
Something was destined to happen.
Ch'en Ching-chi was standing in the street when he caught sight of the Iron Fingernail, Yang the Elder. He was wearing a new silk cap on his head, a white satin jacket on his torso over an undergown of jet-black damask, aloeswood-colored stockings, and a pair of shiny white loafers, and was riding on a donkey with ornate silver trim on the saddle and bridle, as he came down the street, with a page boy in attendance.
Perceiving that it was Yang Kuang-yen, Ch'en Ching-chi stepped forward, took hold of the donkey's bit with his hand, and addressed him, saying, "Brother Yang the Elder, it is some time since we have seen each other. The two of us were friends and went down river together to purchase piece goods for our business. But, while our boat was docked at Ch'ing-chiang P'u, I made a side trip to Yen-chou prefecture to visit a relative and was entrapped and taken to court. But you did not wait for me to return and absconded to who knows where with half a boatload of my goods. When I went to your house to ask after you, with the best of intentions, your younger brother Yang Erh-feng scratched open the skin on his head with a shard of tile and chased me all the way home, where he pounded on my gate. As a result, today, I have been reduced to the point of being:
As poor as though I have been utterly cleaned out,
while you are able to swagger about and show off your wealth."
When Yang the Elder saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had been reduced to beggary, he laughed disdainfully, saying, "It's just my luck on this occasion to venture outside only to encounter a pestilential ghost. You lousy death-defying starveling of a beggar! Where on earth would the likes of you get half a boatload of goods for me to abscond with? If you don't let go of the bit, I'll subject you to a good whipping with my riding crop."
"At present," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "I am impoverished, while you are loaded with silver. Give me something to sustain me or I will take you to court."
When Yang the Elder saw that he would not let go of the bit, he jumped off his donkey and gave him a few strokes with his whip, while shouting to his page boy, "Drag this death-defying beggar aside for me."
The page boy, exerting all his strength, managed to push Ch'en Ching-chi onto the ground, whereupon, Yang the Elder stepped up and gave him a number of kicks with his foot, until he started to howl outlandishly. In no time at all, they were surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. At this point, a man emerged from the sidelines, who wore a high hat on his head, held in place with a kerchief, and was carelessly draped in a purple jacket, over a white cotton tunic. His two bare feet were clad in rush sandals. He had sunken eyes, broomlike eyebrows, an oversized mouth, and a three-pointed beard. His countenance was adorned with:
Bulging lumps of purple flesh;
while his wrists were lined with:
Swollen rows of blood vessels;
and he was stupefied with drink.
Raising his fists, he approached Yang the Elder and berated him, saying, "Brother, how can you be so unreasonable? He is only an impoverished youngster, so why are you bent on beating him this way? It has always been true that:
An angry fist does not strike a smiling face.
Moreover, he has done nothing to offend you. If you have the means to do so, give him something, out of consideration for your past relationship. If you lack the means, so be it. But there is no reason for you to continue beating him. It has always been true that:
When an injustice is witnessed on the road,
Someone will always try to shed light on it."
"You don't understand," responded Yang the Elder. "He falsely accuses me of absconding with half a boatload of his property. It is obvious that no one as impoverished as he is could have had half a boatload of property to begin with."
"I imagine," opined his interlocutor, "that he may originally have been the scion of a well-to-do family, who has since suffered the misfortune of becoming thus impoverished. Since you, Sir, are such a rich gentleman, I hope that you will comply with my request. If you have the means of doing so, give him something with which to support himself."
When Yang the Elder had heard him out, he actually unfastened the handkerchief in his sleeve, which contained an ingot worth four or five mace of silver, and handed it to Ch'en Ching-chi; after which he raised his hand in farewell to his interlocutor, mounted his donkey, and went nonchalantly on his way.
When Ch'en Ching-chi scrambled to his feet and looked at the man in question, he saw that he was not a stranger, but was the beggar boss, known as the Flying Demon, Hou Lin, who was currently the foreman of a gang of construction workers, and with whom he had formerly shared a bed when he was living in the homeless shelter. At present, he was in charge of a gang of fifty workers, who were engaged in repair work on the sanctuary of the Buddhist monastery outside the south wall of the city known as the Shui-yüeh Ssu, or Water Moon Monastery, presided over by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh.
Taking Ch'en Ching-chi by the hand, Hou Lin addressed him, saying, "Brother, had it not been for the few words of protest I confronted him with, he would hardly have come up with those five mace of silver for you. Louse that he is, at least he knew when to concede. If he had refused to concede, for better or for worse, I would have given him a drubbing with my fists. Come along with me. Let's go to a wine shop and have a drink."
They then made their way to a small meat-eating wine shop, sat down at a table, and ordered the waiter to bring them four dishes to go with their drinks, and two large flagons of wine. Before long, after the waiter had wiped their table clean, he laid out a selection of appetizers on four platters and four saucers, and two large jugs of the olive wine that was in vogue at the time. They were not provided with small cups but with large porcelain goblets.
Hou Lin then turned to Ch'en Ching-chi and asked, "Brother, would you rather eat noodles or rice?"
"The noodles are boiled in hot water," explained the waiter, "and the rice is polished white rice."
"I'll take the noodles," said Ch'en Ching-chi.
Before long, enough boiled noodles to fill two or three bowls were placed on the table. Hou Lin ate only one bowl of them, and Ch'en Ching-chi ate the other two. Only after that did they begin to drink the wine.
"Brother," said Hou Lin to Ch'en Ching-chi, "today you can come with me and spend the night at the establishment where I am staying; and tomorrow I'll take you south of the city to the Water Moon Monastery, presided over by Abbot Hsiao-yüeh. Repairs are under way there to the sanctuary and the two corridors of residence halls, and I am in charge of the fifty workers employed on the project. If you come there, you will not be given any heavy work to do, but merely put to carrying a few baskets of soil. You will be counted as one of the workers and will earn four candareens of silver per day. I can rent space in a side building outside the monastery where the two of us can sleep at night and prepare food for ourselves. I will entrust the lock to you and put you in charge of the place. How would that be? It would surely be better than having to reside in the homeless shelter while ringing your bell and sounding your clapper in place of that beggar of a night watchman, and it would be more respectable to boot."
"If my brother is prepared to show such favor to me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "I will be happy to accept. But I don't know how long this construction project is likely to last."
"It has only been going on for a month so far," responded Hou Lin, "and it may go on until the tenth month, or later, for all I know."
As the two of them talked together, what with:
First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me,
they managed to finish off the two large jugs of wine. The waiter calculated the bill to be one mace and three and a half candareens.
Ch'en Ching-chi offered to pay the tab and produced his ingot of silver to be weighed, but Hou Lin pushed it aside, saying, "You silly younger brother! Do you think I would let you pay for it? I've got the silver for it right here."
So saying, he pulled out his wallet and weighed out one mace and five candareens of silver for the manager, receiving one and a half candareens in change, which he tucked into his sleeve. He then leaned on Ch'en Ching-chi's shoulder as they made their way to the place where he was staying, and they spent the night together.
The two of them were both drunk, and during the night, Hou Lin enjoyed plucking the flower in Ch'en Ching-chi's rear courtyard all night long, exclaiming, "Dear brother! Dear daddy! Dear man! Dear father!" There were no endearments they did not lavish on each other.
Early the next morning, as he had promised, Hou Lin rented half of a side building outside the Water Moon Monastery south of the city, which was supplied with a heated k'ang and a wood-burning stove. He also bought all the cups, bowls, and other utensils that were needed. Later that morning, they reported for roll call at the construction site.
When the other workers saw that Ch'en Ching-chi was no more than twenty-three or twenty-four years old, and that he had a white face and was:
Bright-eyed and clean-cut,
they realized that he was a catamite of Hou Lin's and teased him outrageously.
One of them asked him, "Youngster, what is your name?"
Ch'en Ching-chi responded, "My name is Ch'en Ching-chi."

"If your name is Ch'en Ching-chi," the worker continued, "I guess you are accustomed to being squeezed into."[9]
Another worker remarked, "As young as you are, even if you go in for such things, it's a wonder you can accommodate a pole of that size."
Hou Lin responded to this by shouting at them to leave him alone, saying, "You crazy beggars, what are you teasing him for?"
He then proceeded to distribute spades and shovels, baskets and carrying poles, to the assembled workers, who went about their respective tasks; some of them carrying earth, some of them mixing mortar, and others working on the foundations.
It so happens that Abbot Hsiao-yüeh had appointed a Buddhist follower known as Yeh the Ascetic as the chef in charge of cooking food for the workers on the construction project. This Yeh the Ascetic was about fifty years old and was blind in one eye. He was dressed in a long black gown, his feet were bare, and he wore a ragged woolen sash around his waist. He was incapable of reading the scriptures but was given to reciting the Buddha's name and was good at the physiognomic techniques of the Hemp-robed Master.[10] People referred to him as Adept Yeh.
One day, after their morning work was finished, and the laborers had eaten their lunch, they were sitting, standing, or squatting about at their leisure, when they saw Ch'en Ching-chi come up and ask Yeh the Ascetic for some tea, to which he merely responded by looking him over from top to toe.
"Adept Yeh," one of the workers said to him, "this youngster is a newcomer. Why don't you physiognomize him?"
"Go ahead and physiognomize him," another said. "He looks like a catamite to me."
"I'd say he looks more like a hermaphrodite," said another.
Yeh the Ascetic asked him to step forward and looked him over for a while before saying:
"Your demeanor, I fear, is too tender,
as well as seductive;
Your seductive voice and tender nature
may prove your undoing.
If your demeanor is tender in old age
it invites trouble;
If your demeanor is tender when young
it will not endure.[11]
You are bound to suffer because of the tenderness of your demeanor, though during your whole life it will prove attractive to women.
Throughout your eighth, eighteenth, and
twenty-eighth years,
It will show from the bridge of your nose
to the top of your hair.
Whether you make a living or not, you
will lose at both ends;
At thirty, you can't allow evil forces
to besiege your brow.[12]
Your glance may be captivating and your
brain be quick-witted;
You may attract people, though ignorant
of poetry and history.
Whatever you do, other people may find
you to be charming,
Since the falsehoods you manipulate are
made to seem true.[13]
Don't take offense at what I say, but during your entire life:
Your quick-wittedness and artfulness,
will induce women to help you succeed. How old are you this year?"
"I am twenty-three years old," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
"It is amazing that you survived the events of the year before last," said Adept Yeh. "The fact is that:
If the room between your eyebrows is too narrow,
Your progeny will perish and your wife will die;
If the facial area under your earlobes is murky,
Your kinfolk will die and your household perish.[14]
If your lips do not cover your teeth,[15]
You will always provoke altercations.
If your nose looks like a stove-door,
Your family wealth will be dispersed.[16]
During that year did you experience:
The verbal interchanges of a trial; and
The loss of your family and wealth?"
"I experienced all those things," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
"There is another thing," said Yeh the Ascetic. "The bridge of your nose ought not to be abbreviated. The Hemp-robed Master has two lines that state it very well:
If the bridge of your nose is abbreviated
you will soon be wiped out;
The wealth of your ancestors will be lost
and your family destroyed.[17]
During your early years, no matter how much wealth you inherited from your ancestors, once it came into your hands, you managed to squander it all.
If the upper segment of your face is short
and the lower segment long,[18]
it portends that you will have:
Many successes and many failures;[19]
and that you may spend all your money, and yet get it back.
But in the end:
Though you may manage to find a means
of supporting yourself;
It will end up like ice and frost when
exposed to the hot sun.[20]
Be so good as to take a couple of steps for me to see."
Ch'en Ching-chi took a couple of steps, as requested.
Yeh the Ascetic then went on to pronounce:
"If your head extends in front of your feet,
It portends that you may start out well
but end up impoverished.[21]
If your heels don't come down on the ground,
You may have to sell off your property
and move to another place;[22]
since, during your lifetime, you have:
Failed to preserve your ancestral property.
In the future, you may be fated to have three wives. Have you already suffered the loss of a wife, or not?"
"I have already lost a wife," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
"You may still be fated to have three wives," said Yeh the Ascetic. "After all:
Your face is as radiant as a peach blossom.
But you may have difficulty siring a son, since you are so:
Engrossed by the pleasures of wine and sex.[23]
I fear, however, that there may be:
Misfortune lurking amidst your good fortune.
In their thirties, young men begin to lose their stamina and ought not to venture too often into the world of flowers and willows, but endeavor to moderate their desires."
At this juncture, one of the workers interrupted him, saying, "Adept Yeh, you've got it all wrong. He is already playing the role of a wife to someone himself. What would he do with three wives?"
This had the effect of causing the rest of the company to fall all of a heap with laughter.
They then heard Abbot Hsiao-yüeh sounding his clapper, and the lot of them picked up their spades, shovels, baskets, and carrying poles and went back to work.
Under these conditions, Ch'en Ching-chi continued to work at the Water Moon Monastery for a month or so.
One day, during the middle decade of the third month, Ch'en Ching-chi, along with his fellow workers, had carried up a load of earth and was squatting at the foot of the wall by the door of the monastery, sunning himself, and picking the lice off his body, when he happened to see a man who was wearing a flat-topped cap, held in place with a hammered gold ring that floated at the back of his skull, who was dressed in a close-fitting black gown and a purple cummerbund over the belt around his waist, and whose feet were clad in long-legged boots. He rode astride a brown horse and carried a basket of fresh flowers in his hands.
Upon catching sight of Ch'en Ching-chi, he abruptly jumped off his horse, came forward, and made a deep obeisance, saying, "Uncle Ch'en, we have been searching everywhere for you without success, and it turns out that you are here."
This gave Ch'en Ching-chi quite a start, and he promptly bowed in return, saying, "Brother, where have you come from?"
"I am Chang Sheng," he responded, "a servant in the household of His Honor Chou Hsiu. Ever since he released you from the legal difficulties you were in and let you go, my mistress has not been feeling well, right up until the present time. His Honor sent me out to look everywhere for you, but I had no idea you were here. Had my mistress not sent me, this morning, to go to their country estate outside the city and bring her these herbaceous peonies, so that I had occasion to come by here, I would never have discovered your whereabouts. In the first place, this is an instance of your good fortune, venerable sir; and in the second place, it is lucky for me too. There is no reason for you to hesitate. Just get on my horse, and I will escort you to the commandant's residence."
When the crowd of workers observed this, they could only gaze at each other in astonishment,
not venturing to utter a word. Ch'en Ching-chi, thereupon, handed the key to the room they had been sharing to Hou Lin, mounted the horse, and set out for the commandant's residence, with Chang Sheng following closely behind him. Truly:
When one's lover achieves his desires while in the prime of his youth;
There is no knowing where he will enjoy the bright moon on this night.[24]
A poem testifies to this:

White jade is concealed within coarse rock;
Yellow gold is buried beneath filthy mud.
The day a prestigious person picks one up;
Is like a ladder going to the heavenly gates.

It was the twenty-first day of the first month. Chunmei spoke to her husband and prepared a table of food, four kinds of fruits, and a jar of wine, and sent the servant Zhou Ren with them to Wu Yueniang. It was now two years since Ximen Qing had died, and this was the anniversary of his death; it was also Xiaoge's birthday.
Yueniang accepted the presents and gave the messenger a handkerchief and three *qian* of silver. Then she told Daian to put on his black gown and take a card to Chunmei. On the card was written this message: "To the most virtuous Lady Zhou. Heartfelt thanks for your most precious gifts. Now I have made ready wine and await the honor of your presence. I hope for the coming of your exalted carriage and shall be grateful for the honor of your visit. Wu, the widow of the late Ximen, kowtows."
It was about midday when Chunmei came to see Yueniang. She was wearing many pearls, and her ornaments were those of the golden phoenix. Her gown was broad-sleeved with a unicorn embroidered on it, and her skirt had the design of the hundred flowers. There was a golden buckle on her girdle. Her sedan chair was carried by four men. It had a black silk cover with golden ornaments. Before it soldiers with staves marched to clear the way, and servants carrying dressing cases came after it. There were two small sedan chairs immediately behind for her maids.
Yueniang had invited Aunt Wu. She had also sent for two singing girls. When Chunmei arrived, Yueniang, dressed in mourning, and Aunt Wu went to receive the guest in the outer hall. Yueniang was wearing a five-arched hat and very few ornaments. Her gown was of white silk, and her skirt of light blue. The sedan chair was carried to the second door, and there Chunmei got out and the crowd of servants followed her. When they went into the hall, Chunmei hastily knelt down and kowtowed to Yueniang. Yueniang made reverence in return.
"Lately," she said, "I have given you much trouble. Yet you would not accept the silk and, today, you have sent me valuable presents. I find it hard to express my gratitude."
"I am only sorry that my husband has nothing better than these trifles to offer," Chunmei said. "I have been intending to send you an invitation for some time, but I have not been able to do so because my husband is so often away on duty."

"Sister," Yueniang said, "when is your birthday? I hope to come and see you with a few presents."
"It is the twenty-fifth of the fourth month," Chunmei said.
"I will come to see you on that day," Yueniang said.
Then Chunmei made a reverence to Aunt Wu, and Aunt Wu returned it formally.
"Aunt Wu," Chunmei said, "you should not do that. You should stand and allow me to make reverence to you." But Aunt Wu would not agree, and finally they contented themselves with half the usual ceremonial. Then they sat down. Yueniang and Aunt Wu sat together in the host's place. Then the maids, the nurse, and the serving woman came to see Chunmei. Ruyi'er was carrying Xiaoge.
"My son," Yueniang said, "this is your sister. She has come to wish you many happy returns of the day."
Xiaoge seemed inclined to get down and bow to Chunmei. "You are a good boy!" Yueniang said to him, "bowing like that instead of kowtowing as you should."
Chunmei took a silk handkerchief and a set of gold ornaments from her sleeve and put them on the child's cap. "Sister," Yueniang said, "why should you give him such presents?"
Then Xiaoyu and the nurse kowtowed to Chunmei. She gave Xiaoyu a pair of pins with gold heads, and Ruyi'er a pair of silver flowers.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "I don't believe you know that Ruyi'er is now married to Laixing. His first wife died."
"She is a good woman," Chunmei said, "since she is ready to stay in this household always."
A maid brought tea. After it Yueniang said: "Sister, shall we go to the back room? It is cold here." Then Chunmei went to the room where Ximen Qing's tablet was. There were candles lighted before it. Food was set out, and Chunmei offered it. Then she burned paper offerings and shed a few tears. A screen was brought in and coal put on the fire. A large square table was set, and tea was brought with delicious cakes and rare fruits. The tea was of the scarcest kind. After tea, they asked Chunmei to go and change her clothes in the upper room. She took off her long cloak: her woman opened the box and put on her a dress of embroidered silk with a skirt the color of a purple clove. Then they all sat down in Yueniang's room.
"How is your baby?" Yueniang said. "Why didn't you bring him?"
"I should have brought him to kowtow to you," Chunmei said, "but his father said it was too cold and the boy might get a chill. He has gone to the great hall because he doesn't care for the rooms. I don't know what is the matter with him, but he has been crying a great deal the last few days."
"When you go out, does he often want you?"
"Yes, but there are two nurses to look after him."
"His Lordship is not a young man now, and he must be pleased you have borne him a son. He is your lucky star. I understand the Second Lady has a girl. How old is she?"
"The Second Lady's child is four years old," Chunmei said. "She is called Yujie, and my boy is called Jin'ge."
"I understand that his Lordship has two girls," Yueniang said.
"Two of our maids are learning music," Chunmei said. "They are both seventeen years old and very troublesome."
"Does his Lordship go to them very often?"
"He has hardly any time at home," Chunmei said. "He is nearly always on duty. There are so many thieves and bandits about nowadays. By his Majesty's command, he has to occupy himself with all sorts of matters. He is responsible for the charge of the district; he has to keep watch upon the river; to search out the bandits, and to keep the troops well disciplined. Yes, he has to spend a great deal of his time away."
Xiaoyu brought more tea. Chunmei said to Yueniang: "Lady, will you take me to the garden, where my mistress used to live?"
"Sister," Yueniang said, "you can hardly call it a garden now. Since my husband's death, nobody has bothered about it. It has gone to rack and ruin. The artificial mound has fallen in; the trees have died. I seldom go there now."
"Never mind," Chunmei said. "I only want to see the place where my mistress lived."
Yueniang could not refuse. She told Xiaoyu to find the garden key. Then she and Aunt Wu took Chunmei there. Chunmei went first to the Sixth Lady's room. There were a number of broken tables and chairs upstairs. Downstairs, all the rooms were locked. Grass was growing on the floors. Then she came to the place that had been Pan Jinlian's. The store for medicine and incense was still upstairs. In the room that Jinlian herself had occupied, there were only two cabinets, no bed.
"Where is my mother's bed?" Chunmei said. "I don't see it."
"The Third Lady took it away with her when she married." Xiaoyu said.
"When my husband was alive," Yueniang said, "he gave Meng Yulou's bed to my daughter, so when she remarried, I gave her your mistress's bed."
"But didn't you get the bed back when your daughter died?" Chunmei said.
"I sold it for eight taels of silver and gave the money to the officials at the Town Hall."
Chunmei nodded. Tears fell from her bright eyes. She remembered how, when Jinlian was alive, she always tried to have something that others did not have. "She asked my father to buy her that bed," she said to herself, "and I should have liked to have it to remember her by. Now somebody else has taken it." She was very sad.
"What has happened to the mother-of-pearl bed the Sixth Lady used to have?" she said to Yueniang.
"It is a long story. Ever since your master died, I have been spending money all the time, but no money comes in. As the proverb says: If we cannot make both ends meet, it is no good having gold lying about. I was pressed for money and I sold that bed."
"How much did you get for it?"
"I only got thirty-five taels," Yueniang said.
"What a pity. I remember Father saying it was worth sixty. If I had known you wished to sell it, I would have given forty myself."
"But it never occurred to me that you would like to have it," Yueniang said. They both sighed.
Then a servant came and said to Chunmei: "His Lordship asks you to go back early as the young master is crying for you."
Chunmei went back at once to the inner court, and Yueniang ordered Xiaoyu to lock the garden gate. When they returned to the upper room, they set the screen in position, pulled down the blinds, and wine and food were brought. The singing girls began to play the lute and sing. Yueniang offered wine and asked Chunmei to take the place of honor. Chunmei would only do so on condition that Aunt Wu sat with her. The two ladies sat down, and Yueniang took the host's place. After the wine had been offered, more food was brought in. Chunmei told her servant, Zhou Ren, to give the cook three *qian* of silver. It was an excellent meal, and they encouraged one another to drink.
About sunset, Major Zhou sent servants with lanterns to escort his wife home. Yueniang would not let her go but ordered the two singing girls to sing again. "You must sing your very best songs for Lady Zhou," she said. Then she ordered Xiaoyu to fill a large cup with wine and set it before Chunmei.
"Sister," she said, "bid the singers sing your favorite song and then drink this wine."
"Indeed, I cannot drink any more," Chunmei said, "and I am anxious about my baby."
"You have nurses to look after him, and it is still quite early," Yueniang said. "Besides, I know that you can drink."
Chunmei asked the singing girls their names and where they came from. They knelt down. One said she was Han Yuchuan, the younger sister of Han Jinchuan, and the other that she was Zheng Jiao'er, Zheng Aixiang's niece. Chunmei asked them if they could sing "Languidly I Paint My Brows." Yuchuan said they knew it.
Yueniang offered wine to Chunmei before they began. Then the two singing girls, one with a lute, the other with a zither, sang.
When shall I cease to love you?
Spring is gone and Autumn is here
Who knows my heart?
Heaven sends me sadness. I grow thin.
I wept when I had news of you
The past is always in my mind
I never thought you would so cruelly desert me.
Chunmei drank her wine, and Yueniang told Zheng Jiao'er to pour another cup for her.
"Lady," Chunmei said, "you must drink with me." Their cups were filled, and the singers began another song.
For you, my lover, I cast happiness aside.
Now the magpies chatter in the courtyard
Their voice is sad, and yet they have no cause.
It must be that Heaven
Has made me love you always.
You have gone away, but I never forget.
I never thought you would so cruelly desert me.
"Lady," Chunmei said, "you must ask Aunt Wu to drink a cup."
"Aunt Wu is not a great drinker," Yueniang said. "I will give her a small cup." She told Xiaoyu to set a small cup before Aunt Wu. Then the two singers went on with their song.
For you, my lover, I am become so sorrowful.
I think of you by night and day.
Sitting and walking.
My dainty skin is wasted, my softness become hard.
I am so lonely that my tears fall always.
Yet once we lived together and loved.
I never thought you would so cruelly desert me.
Xiaoyu was standing beside Chunmei, and Chunmei gave her a cup of wine.
"Sister," Yueniang said, "she cannot drink."
"Oh, she can drink one or two cups," Chunmei said. "When I lived here, I often drank with her." She gave the cup to the maid. The two singers continued their song.
For you, my lover, I have suffered griefs
I have been ill and lain for long upon my bed
The sadness in my heart has knit my brows.
You have forgotten me but I still think of you
The thought makes tears stream down my cheeks.
We said that we would be together forever.
I never thought that, after but one year,
You would so cruelly desert me.
Chunmei asked the singing girls to sing this song because she was thinking of Chen Jingji. She could not meet him, but he was always in her mind. For her, the songs expressed a secret sorrow. She was pleased that the singing girls addressed her as "Lady" and told Zhou Ren to give them each two *qian* of silver. The two girls put down their instruments and kowtowed to her.
Then she rose. Yueniang could not persuade her to stay longer and ordered a servant with a lantern to take her to the gate. Chunmei got into her sedan chair, and her maids into the smaller chairs. Before them and behind were four great lanterns, and an escort of soldiers followed.
Chunmei was anxious about Jingji. She did not know where he was. When she reached home, she went to bed at once in a bad mood. Her husband saw this, and decided she must be worrying because she did not know what had happened to her cousin. He sent for Zhang Sheng and Li An and said to them; "I have already told you to find my lady's cousin. Why haven't you done so?"
"We have looked," they said, "but we have not been able to find him. We told the lady so."
"I will give you five days," Major Zhou said. "If you have not found him by that time, you know what to expect."
The two men went all over the place, poking their noses everywhere, questioning people, and their faces became more and more gloomy.
When Jingji left the Major's court, he had intended to go back to the temple. But, when he was told of the Abbot's death, he did not dare. Neither did he dare to go and see old man Wang. So again he wandered about the streets by day and slept at night in the Beggars' Rest. One day when he was standing about the street, he saw Yang the Elder. Yang was wearing a new hat and a white silk gown. He rode on a donkey with a silver-mounted saddle, and a small boy followed him. They were coming down the middle of the street. Jingji recognized Yang at once. He went out and grasped the donkey's bridle.
"Brother Yang," he said, "I haven't seen you for a long time. After you stole my property at the river I went in quite a friendly way to ask at your place. But your brother, Yang the Second, broke his own head and ran after me all the way to my house. Now I am poor, and you are having a fine time."
Yang the Elder could see that Chen Jingji had become a beggar. He smiled haughtily. "This must be an unlucky day for me, that I should come to the street and meet a pestilential fellow like you. You are a beggar. Where could you get the money to buy goods? Do you say I stole your things? Keep your hands off my donkey, or I will use the whip on you."
"I am poor and you are rich," Jingji said. "I only ask you to give me something. If you don't, I shall take you to the proper place and the matter shall be thrashed out there."
Seeing that Jingji still held the donkey's bridle, Yang the Elder jumped off and thrashed Jingji with his whip. "Drive this beggar away," he cried to the small boy. The boy pushed at Jingji with all his might and the young man fell to the ground. Yang kicked him, and Jingji made as much noise as if he had been a devil. A crowd assembled. Among them was a man wearing a high black hat, a kerchief, a purple gown and a white vest. He had bare legs, and a pair of straw sandals on his feet. His eyes were sunken and his eyebrows broad and thick. His mouth seemed to curl upwards and he had three wisps of beard. His face was strong and red and the muscles stood out upon his arms. He had had wine to drink, and this had made his eyes seem fierce.
"Brother," he said to Yang the Elder, shaking his clenched fist, "you are unreasonable. Why should you beat a man so young and poor? You know the saying that a clenched fist should never smite a smiling face. This young man did nothing to provoke you. If you have any money, treat him as a friend and give him some. Why are you beating him? I don't think it is right, and I shall be on his side."
"You know nothing about it," Yang the Elder said. "He says I stole his property. How could a beggar like him have any property worth stealing?"
"I believe he was rich once," the man said. "He doesn't look to me as if he came from a poor family. And as for you, I very much doubt if you have been rich ail your life. Now listen to me. If you have any money with you, let him have some."
Yang brought out a handkerchief in which was a piece of silver worth about four or five *qian*. He gave it to Jingji and raised his hand in salute to the man. Then he mounted his donkey again and rode proudly away. Jingji got up. He saw that his savior was no other than a man he had known in the Beggars' Rest, a fellow called Flying Ghost. He was now acting as foreman to a gang of fifty men who were working at a temple south of the city, building some new rooms. This man took Jingji by the hand. "Brother," he said, "if I had not used strong language to that man, you would not have that silver. He knows when it is time to give way. If he had not done so, I should have let him taste my fists. Come with me and have some wine."
They went to a small wine house, sat down, and ordered two pots of wine and four dishes. The waiter set out the dishes and two pots of olive wine that, at that time, was greatly liked. They drank this wine in large bowls instead of small cups.
"Brother," the man said, "which will you have, noodles or rice?"
"Our noodles are freshly washed and our rice the finest white rice," the waiter said.
"I will have noodles," Jingji said, and noodles were brought. Jingji had two bowls and his friend one.
"Brother," the man said, "come with me to my place today, and tomorrow I will take you to see the Abbot of the temple where I am working. We are building some rooms and cottages there, and I have fifty men working under me. I will give you a very light job. You will only have to carry earth, and for that you shall have five *fen* a day. Then I will get a room and we will sleep there together. We can cook our own food and lock our door, and I will let you have all you need. That will be better than the Beggars' Rest, and going around with the watchman. It will be much pleasanter for us to live together."

"You are very kind," Jingji said. "May I know if this work will last for long?"
"We only started a month ago, and I think we shall finish in the tenth month, but I am not sure."
They drank as they talked and finished two large pots of wine. The waiter brought them the bill. It was for one *qian* and three and a half *fen*. Jingji was going to pay, but Flying Ghost pushed his money aside.
"Do you think I would let you pay, you silly fellow?" he said. "I have money of my own." He brought out a handkerchief and gave the waiter one *qian* and five *fen*, taking back the change. Then he put his arm around Jingji and they went back to his place. That night they slept together. They were both drunk and behaved in an unseemly manner. Indeed they did so all night. Jingji called the man his brother, his sweetheart, his husband, and other attractive names. In the morning they went together to the temple. Here Flying Ghost, whose name was Hou Lin, rented a room with a fire and bought cups and bowls and other things that were necessary.
The workmen saw that Jingji was only about twenty-four or twenty-five. They noticed his white face and handsome appearance and realized that he was Hou's man. They made many jokes about him.
"Young man," one said, "what is your name?"
"I am called Chen Jingji."
"Well, Chen Jingji, you certainly live up to your name."[1]
And another said: "You are very young. How can you do such strenuous work? Are you sure that pole isn't too much for you?"
Then Hou came up. "You beggars," he said, "what do you mean by making fun of him?" He gave spades and shovels and baskets to the workmen, and they went to their tasks. Some carried earth, some mixed the mortar, some worked on the foundations.
One of the monks in the temple was called Ye. The Abbot had given him instructions to cook for all the workers. Ye was about fifty years old. He had only one eye. He wore a long black gown, and his feet were bare. There was a ragged girdle around his waist. He could not read the sacred scriptures, but he was very attentive to his devotions. He was a skillful fortune-teller.
One day, when the work was done and the workers had had their meal, they were all gathered together, some lying down, some squatting on their haunches. Ye looked hard at Chen Jingji.
"This young man is a newcomer," one of the men said to Ye, "why not tell his fortune?"
"In my opinion, he is half one thing and half another," one of them said.
The priest asked Jingji to go to him. "Too handsome and woman-like," he said. "A charming voice and a tender body are unpardonable. When an old man is like this, he will come upon hardship. When a young man is like it, he will not be stout and strong. You suffer from that smooth face of yours. All your life, you will be a woman's man. Eight, eighteen, and twenty-eight. With eight years, eighteen, and twenty-eight, from the root of your nose to the top of your hair, whether you have any means of livelihood or not, you get less at both ends, and at thirty you cannot have a blackness between your brows. Your eyes are very handsome, and your mind is clever. Even if you cannot read, you have charm enough without. Whatever you do, people like you. When you play a trick, it is taken for the truth. Forgive me for saying so, but you are very cunning and get much sport from women. How old are you?"
"I am twenty-four," Jingji said.
"I am surprised that you got past the year before last," the monk said. "Your brows are narrow, and your son and your wife both die. The hanging jade is very dark, and your family will be ruined. Your lips do not cover your teeth and you will have many troubles in your life. Your nostrils are like the hob of a furnace, and you will not be able to keep your property. Have you experienced any such misfortunes?"
"I have had them all," Jingji said.
"One thing I must tell you," the monk said, "that your nose is detached is not a good sign. As the great teacher Ma says, he whose mountain root is broken will waste all his substance in his youth. He will bring ruin to the property he has inherited from his ancestors, and no matter how much his father left to him, he will spend it all. Your upper half is short and the lower half long. This is a sign that you are sometimes successful and sometimes fail. You spend your money, and money comes to you again. But, in the end, you will not leave a family behind you; you will be as when the hot sun shines on the hoar frost. But there is one sign of luck for you in the future. You are to be married three times. Have you ever been married and, if so, is your wife dead?"
"Yes, she is dead," Jingji said.
"Well, three marriages are indicated for you," the monk said. "But there is trouble also. "When you are about thirty, you will suffer from the machinations of others. You must not visit the flowers and the willows."
Then one of the workmen said: "Father Ye, you have made a mistake. He is a wife himself at this very time. How can you say that he will have three wives?"
All the workers laughed. Then the Abbot gave the signal, and they all took their tools and went to work again.
Jingji stayed for about a month and worked there. One day, in the middle of the third month, Jingji, who had been carrying earth, leaned against the temple wall and searched his body for vermin in the sun. A man who wore a swastika in his hat, a black gown with a purple lining, a girdle, and a pair of sandals, rode up on a brown horse. He was carrying a basket of fresh flowers. When he saw Jingji, he jumped off his horse at once and bowed low.
"Uncle Chen," he said, "I have been looking everywhere for you, and here you are."
Jingji, astonished, returned the greeting.
"Brother," he said, "who are you?"
"I'm Zhang Sheng, the servant of Major Zhou," the man said. "Since you left the court, my mistress's been ill all the time. My master ordered me to find you but it never occurred to me that you'd be here. And even now I'd not have seen you if my mistress hadn't told me to go to the country for these flowers. It's really a stroke of good luck for me. Don't waste a moment. Take my horse and go to my master's place." The workers stood and gazed. They did not speak. Jingji gave the keys to his friend Hou, mounted the horse, and rode quickly away.



## Ch'en Ching-chi Plays a Role in the Commandant's Household; Auntie Hsüeh Peddles Trinkets & Proposes a Marriage Match & Chunmei Finds a Wife for Chen Jingji

In this world one has a role to play for three score years and ten;
What need is there both day and night to overtax one's spirits?
The affairs of this world in the end all eventuate in nothing;
The fleeting luxury that beguiles the eye is wont to prove unreal.
Poverty and want, wealth and distinction are allocated by Heaven;
Success and failure, flourishing and decay are but dust in a crack.
So why not let yourself go, enjoying pleasures as they come;
Rather than waiting for the messenger of death to seize you?

When Ch'en Ching-chi arrived at Commandant Chou Hsiu's headquarters and dismounted, Chang Sheng preceded him inside to report his presence to Ch'un-mei. Ch'un-mei ordered that Ch'en Ching-chi should be taken to a duty room in the front of the compound and given a bath in a tub of fragrant water, so that his body would be washed clean. She also sent one of the wet nurses to take out a bundle of new clothes, a pair of boots, and a cap for him to change into. Chang Sheng took the tattered old garments that he had been wearing, tied them up into a bundle, and hung it up in the duty room, before reporting back to Ch'un-mei. At the time, the commandant had not yet retired from the courtroom.
Ch'un-mei then invited Ch'en Ching-chi into the reception hall at the rear of the compound, where she adorned herself elegantly before coming out to greet him.
Upon entering the door, Ch'en Ching-chi went up to Ch'un-mei and set out to perform:
Four brace makes eight kowtows,
saying, "Sister, pray accept my homage."
Ch'un-mei only allowed him to perform half an obeisance, after which, they sat down facing each other and proceeded to talk over the weather, and the events that had befallen them since they were separated, which led them both to:
Shed tears from their eyes.[2]
Ch'un-mei was concerned that the commandant might retire from the courtroom and come in upon them, so, seeing that there was nobody else about, she gave Ch'en Ching-chi a wink and whispered to him, saying, "In the future, if he should raise any questions about yourself, say that you are a younger cousin of mine. I am a year older than you at the age of twenty-five, and I was born at noon on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month."
"I understand," responded Ch'en Ching-chi.
Before long, a maidservant brought in a serving of tea, and the two of them drank it together.
Ch'un-mei then went on to ask, "Why did you ever give up lay life to become a Taoist monk? When you were allowed to go from the yamen here, the commandant did not know that you were related to me. He had you beaten in error and greatly regrets it. I would have detained you here at the time were it not that Sun Hsüeh-o, that worthless creature, was also working here, and it would not have been possible to accommodate you without her making trouble. That's why I let you go. Afterwards, I got rid of that worthless creature and sent Chang Sheng to look everywhere for you, but he couldn't find you. Who could have known that you were working as a laborer outside the city and had fallen into such miserable circumstances?"
"I will not deceive you, sister," said Ch'en Ching-chi:
"It's a long story.
After the two of us were separated, I planned to marry Sister Six, but my father died in the Eastern Capital, which delayed my return, so I was unable to marry her, and she was killed by Wu Sung. I heard that, out of the kindness of your heart, you had her buried on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity. I also visited her grave site and burned paper money there on her behalf. At home, my mother also passed away, and it was not long after I had taken care of her funeral that someone made off with my capital. Upon my return home, my wife Hsi-men Ta-chieh also died, and that whore, my mother-in-law, not only took me to court over it but also reclaimed all of my wife's belongings. After the lawsuit against me, I had to sell my house and was left:
As poor as though I had been utterly cleaned out.
Fortunately, an old friend of my father's, named Wang Hsüan, and known as the Layman of Apricot Hermitage, came to my rescue and escorted me to the Yen-kung Temple in Lin-ch'ing, where he arranged for me to become a Taoist acolyte. Unexpectedly, however, I was subsequently assaulted by a 'bare stick' and ended up being bound and transported to the commandant's yamen, where I was given ten strokes with the rod, and then released.
If I appeal to my relatives, they only ignore me;
If I appeal to my friends, they pay me no regard.
As a result, I ended up working as a day laborer at the Water Moon Monastery. I am profoundly indebted to my sister for caring enough to send your servant to look for me, with the result that I have been able to see you again.
Your kindness will be amply rewarded,
I will never dare to forget it."
As he related these pitiable events, the two of them both shed tears.
Whom should they see at this point but Commandant Chou Hsiu, who retired from the courtroom and came back to the rear compound. When his attendants lifted aside the portiere, and he entered the room, Ch'en Ching-chi came forward and knelt down before him.
This threw the commandant into such consternation that he promptly returned the salutation and said, "The other day, I did not know that you were a worthy young cousin of my wife, having been kept in the dark by my subordinates. I hope that you will forgive me for having treated you so offensively."
"Unworthy as I am," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "it is I who am at fault for having failed to keep in touch.
I can only hope that you will forgive me."[3]
So saying, he kowtowed once again.
The commandant helped him up with one hand and ushered him to the seat of honor. Ch'en Ching-chi, however, was sensitive enough to object to this and insisted on pulling the chair to one side before consenting to sit down on it. The commandant then assumed the role of host, and Ch'un-mei sat down facing their guest.
Before long, a new serving of tea was brought in, and when they had finished drinking it, Chou Hsiu asked, "Worthy cousin, how old are you? Why is it that I haven't met you before? And why did you leave lay life to become a Taoist acolyte?"
"I'm twenty-three," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "while my cousin is one year older than I am, and was born at noon on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month. A while ago, because both my father and mother passed away, my property became depleted, and my wife died, I left lay life to become a Taoist acolyte in the Yen-kung Temple. I did not know that my cousin had married into your household and have, consequently, been remiss in seeking her out."
"My worthy cousin," said the commandant, "ever since you were let go the other day, your cousin has worried about you, both by day and by night, and has been constantly upset, and given to:
Moaning and groaning,
about it, right up until the present time. I have been sending men out to look for you for some time, but without success. Who could have anticipated that today we would get together? It is truly a case of:
An affinity extending to three lives."[4]
He then ordered his attendants to set up a table and provide them with wine. In no time at all, they laid out an assortment of cups and platters, containing chicken, pig's trotters, goose, and duck, which had been stir-fried, roasted, steamed, and deep-fried, along with soup and rice and other dainties, that filled the entire surface of the table.
Within silver flagons and jade goblets,
The wine overflows with golden ripples.
The commandant joined in their conversation and kept them company, feasting until the lanterns and candles were lighted that evening before breaking up.
The commandant ordered his servant Chou Jen to sweep out the library on the west side of the front courtyard, which was already furnished with a bed and bed curtains. Ch'un-mei then brought out two sets of bedding, complete with quilts and pillows, so that Ch'en Ching-chi would have a place to sleep; and also arranged for a page boy named Hsi-erh to wait on him. In addition, she supplied him with two more outfits of silk clothing, so that he would have something to change into when needed. Ch'un-mei also invited him to come into the residential compound for his meals every day. Truly:
At the time one meets with good fortune,
It owes nothing at all to one's efforts.[5]
Light and darkness alternate swiftly;
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.
Behold:
No sooner do the plum trees blossom
at winter's end,
Than one encounters New Year's day
in the first month.
Before one is aware of the apricots
filling the branches,
It is time for new lotus blossoms
to adhere to the water.[6]
When Ch'en ching-chi had resided in the commandant's household for more than a month, the time came for Ch'un-mei's birthday on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month. Wu Yüeh-niang prepared an assortment of gifts for her, consisting of a tray of sweetmeats in the shape of birthday peaches, a tray of birthday noodles, two boiled geese, four fresh chickens, two trays of candied fruits, and a jar of southern wine. Tai-an, clad in black livery, delivered them. Commandant Chou Hsiu was sitting in the reception hall when the gate keeper came in to announce his arrival, and the gifts were carried inside. Tai-an handed over the note that accompanied the gifts and then got down on the ground and kowtowed.
When the commandant had read the note with its list of gifts, he said, "I am much obliged to your mistress for taking the trouble to send these presents."
He then told a servant, "Take these gifts inside, and bring out a serving of tea for this gentleman."
He also handed the gift card to a page boy, saying, "Deliver this to your uncle, and have him seal up a handkerchief and three mace of silver for this gentleman, and a hundred candareens for the bearer. Have him write a thank-you note as well to express our appreciation."

When he had finished speaking, Commandant Chou Hsiu donned his formal clothes and went out to make New Year's calls. Meanwhile, Tai-an waited in front of the reception hall for the return card.
What should he see at this juncture but a young man who was wearing a "tile-ridge" hat, a black silk Taoist robe, and sandals with white socks and came out through the postern gate, carrying the return card and gratuities in his hand, and gave them to the page boy, after which, he went straight back inside.
Strange as it may seem,
he looked just like son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi, and Tai-an thought to himself, "I wonder what he is doing here?"
The page boy then handed the handkerchief and the silver to Tai-an and saw him to the door.
When he got home and reported to Yüeh-niang, she saw that the return card read, "Respectfully indited with straightened skirts by the lady, née P'ang, of the Chou family," and asked him, "Did you not see your sister Ch'un-mei?"
"I did not see my sister," replied Tai-an, "but I did see our son-in-law."
"You crazy jailbird!" laughed Yüeh-niang. "How could we have such an elderly son-in-law? The commandant is far too advanced in years for you to refer to him as our son-in-law."
"It was not the commandant I was referring to," responded Tai-an, "it was our son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi. When I first went in, His Honor Chou Hsiu was in the reception hall, and I handed him your card and kowtowed to him. He thanked me, saying, 'I have put your mistress to the trouble of sending these lavish gifts,' and then told a servant to bring me a serving of tea, and said to a page boy, 'Deliver this card to your uncle, and have him seal up a handkerchief and three mace of silver for this gentleman, and a hundred candareens for the bearer.' When he had finished speaking, His Honor Chou Hsiu put on his formal clothes and then set out on horseback to make New Year's calls. After I had waited for what seemed like half a day, the gentleman in question came out through the postern gate, handed the return card and gratuities to the page boy, and then went back inside, leaving me to take charge of the gift box and return home. If it wasn't him, who else could it have been?"
"You crazy little jailbird!" said Yüeh-niang. "Stop talking nonsense. Who knows where that stray lamb has ended up begging for his food? If he hasn't frozen to death, he has probably starved to death. Whatever would he be doing, for no good reason, in such a household? What would the commandant see in such a creature that would induce him to patronize him?"
"Mistress," said Tai-an, "would you like to make a bet with me about it? My identification of him is:
As certain as certain can be.
Even if he had been burned to ashes, I could identify his bones."
"How was he dressed?" asked Yüeh-niang.
Tai-an responded, "He wore a new 'tile-ridge' hat, held in place with a gold pin, a black silk Taoist robe, and sandals with white stockings; and he looked to be well-fed."
"I can't believe it," exclaimed Yüeh-niang, "I simply can't believe it."
We will say no more at this juncture about their conversation.
To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi reentered the rear compound, Ch'un-mei was still in her room, putting on her makeup and painting her eyebrows in front of her mirror stand.
Ch'en Ching-chi showed her Yüeh-niang's card and asked, "Why should her household be sending gifts to you? What reason could there be for it?"
Ch'un-mei then told him all about how, some time ago, on the Ch'ing-ming Festival, she had run into Yüeh-niang at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city; how, later on, P'ing-an had stolen the hair ornaments from the pawnshop; how the police chief Wu Tien-en had subjected him to a beating in the squeezers and induced him to testify that Yüeh-niang had been engaged in hanky-panky with Tai-an; and how Auntie Hsüeh had come and appealed to her to intervene in the case, with the result that the commandant had exonerated her.
"Her household purchased gifts for us as an expression of their gratitude," she went on to say, "and during the first month, I went to her home to celebrate Hsiao-ko's birthday. We have been keeping in touch with each other ever since, and she promised that on my birthday she would purchase gifts and come pay me a visit."
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this, he gave her a look and said, "Sister, how can you be so irresolute? Don't you remember how that lousy whore forced the two of us to separate and sent Sister Six to her death?
For a thousand years or all eternity,
it would be better if you:
Had nothing to do with each other,
either indoors or out.
But instead you actually intervened on her behalf. Why should you have been afraid to let Wu Tien-en torture that page boy P'ing-an into testifying that she had been engaging in hanky-panky, rather than letting that whore be taken into custody with a length of rope and allowing her to suffer humiliation in the courtroom? What's it got to do with us anyway? Actually, if she hadn't been engaging in hanky-panky with Tai-an, why should she have given her maidservant Hsiao-yü to him as a wife? If I had been here at the time, I never would have let you intervene on her behalf. She has been an enemy of ours, so why have you agreed to maintain relations with her?
The sixth month is the rainy season;
So one can hardly expect to have fair weather?"
This tirade had the effect of temporarily reducing Ch'un-mei to silence, but she then went on to say, "Why not let bygones be bygones? As far as I'm concerned:
Good minds are not obsessed with old enmities."[7]
"At the present time," responded Ch'en Ching-chi:
"Even the best intentions go quite unrequited."
"Since she has already sent these gifts to me," said Ch'un-mei, "I can hardly agree to accept them without doing anything in return. She is expecting me to send someone to invite her."
"From now on," opined Ch'en Ching-chi, "there is no need for us to pay any attention to that whore. What reason is there for issuing her an invitation?"
"Not to invite her would be a source of embarrassment," said Ch'un-mei. "I'll just send her a card, and leave it to her whether she chooses to come or not. If she does come, you should confine yourself to the library where you are staying, and not come out to meet her. In the future, I won't bother with her, and leave it at that."
Ch'en Ching-chi was annoyed by this but did not say a word and went to the front compound to compose an invitation, which Ch'un-mei entrusted to their servant Chou I to deliver to Wu Yüeh-niang. Yüeh-niang, after dressing herself appropriately, set out for the commandant's residence, along with the wet nurse Ju-i, who held Hsiao-ko in her arms and rode in a smaller sedan chair, followed by Tai-an. When she arrived there, Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang, appropriately dressed, came out to welcome her and ushered her back to the rear reception hall, where they sat down together after exchanging the customary amenities, and Ju-i, while holding Hsiao-ko in her arms, kowtowed to them. Ch'en Ching-chi concealed himself in the library and did not come out; allowing Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang to entertain their guest with tea, preside over the feast, and proffer her wine in the rear reception hall. They had engaged the two singing girls, Han Yü-ch'uan and Cheng Chiao-erh, to play their instruments and sing for their entertainment. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
Tai-an, who was being entertained in an anteroom in the front compound, happened to see a young page boy emerge from the rear compound, carrying a tray of soup and rice, and other viands, and head for the postern gate leading to the library on the western side of the courtyard.
"Who are those things intended for?" asked Tai-an; to which the page boy replied, "They are for my uncle to eat."
"What is your uncle's surname?" asked Tai-an.
"His surname is Ch'en," replied the page boy.
Tai-an surreptitiously followed him toward the library on the western side of the courtyard, and when the page boy lifted aside the portiere and went inside, he cautiously peeked through the gauze-covered window and saw that it was indeed their son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi who was sprawled out on the bed in the library, and who promptly got up, upon seeing that his meal was provided, set up a table for it, and proceeded to eat. Having observed this, Tai-an surreptitiously returned outside and sat down in the anteroom where he had been before.
That evening, when the lantern bearers from her household came to fetch Wu Yüeh-niang, she took her leave and went home, whereupon Tai-an told her in detail what he had seen, saying, "It is indeed the case that our son-in-law Ch'en Ching-chi is residing there."
From the time it was discovered that Ch'en Ching-chi had been taken into Ch'un-mei's household, the two families ceased to have any relations with each other. Truly:
Who could have known that the young scamp
would face such adversities?
Even a single thought may turn out to be
the harbinger of resentment.[8]
Although Ch'en Ching-chi was now carrying on a clandestine affair with Ch'un-mei, no one else was aware of it. Whenever the commandant was not at home, Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi would eat together and drink together in her room. During their free time, while playing board games, or laughing and joking with each other:
There was no length to which they would not go.
When the commandant was at home, Ch'un-mei would send maidservants or page boys to take meals out to the library for him to eat. Even in broad daylight, she would frequently go to the library herself and keep him company for half a day before returning to the rear compound. The warmth of their feelings for each other was such that there is no need to describe it in detail.
One day, the commandant led his men and horses out on a tour of inspection. It was the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month, and Ch'un-mei had arranged for a celebratory feast in the ornamental pavilion beside the library on the western side of the courtyard. Together with Sun Erh-niang and Ch'en Ching-chi, the three of them enjoyed drinking realgar-flavored wine and eating festival *tsung-tzu*,[9] while waited upon by maids and attendants. On that auspicious day in the fifth month, what did the celebratory scene look like? Behold:
Urns are planted with green willows.
Vases are studded with red pomegranates.
Portieres of beaded crystal furl
their "shrimps' whiskers,"
Screens of inlaid mica display
their peacocks' tails.
The irises are like sliced jade;
Smiling beauties proffer goblets
of iridescent hue.
The *tsung-tzu* are like piled gold;
Waiting maids raise on high beakers
made of chrysoprase.
Dainties are prepared of the rarest kind,
Fruits are provided just in season.
Efficacious charms and artemisia tigers
adorn their heads;
Variegated strands of yarn are fastened
around their arms.
Each household celebrates the Dragon
Boat Festival;
In every place people happily imbibe
fragrant wine.
Journeying beyond the corporeal realm
in the universe of the drunk;
Thus does one dissipate the idle days
within the Taoist's gourd.[10]
Truly, it is a case of:
Her ornate pendants tinkle, and her
golden lotuses are tiny;
As she gently handles her silken fan
with her slender fingers.
Ch'un-mei ordered the concubines Hai-t'ang and Yüeh-kuei to play their musical instruments and sing for their entertainment. That day, they continued feasting until:
The burning sun sank into the west, and
A gentle rain had a cooling effect.
Ch'un-mei kept raising a large gold goblet in the shape of a lotus blossom, and urging them to drink. After:
Several rounds of wine had been consumed,
Sun Erh-niang:
Could not handle the effects of the drink,
and got up to return to her room in the rear compound, leaving Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi to continue drinking together in the ornamental pavilion:
Playing at guess-fingers or gaming at forfeits;
First a cup for you,
Then a cup for me.
Before long, the maidservants brought out the gauze lanterns, and the wet nurses Chin-kuei and Yü-t'ang put the baby Chin-ko to bed. After losing a game, Ch'en Ching-chi went into the library, where he tried to avoid drinking any more by refusing to come out.
Ch'un-mei first sent Hai-t'ang to invite him back out, and when she learned that he refused to come, she then sent Yüeh-kuei after him, saying, "You must drag him back out, no matter what. If you fail to do so, when you return I'll give you ten slaps on the face, menial creature that you are."
Yüeh-kuei went to the library and pushed open the door, where she found that Ch'en Ching-chi was lying sprawled out on the bed, where he pretended to be snoring and could not be moved.
"The mistress has sent me to invite you back," she said. "If I fail to do so, she has threatened to beat me."
"If she beats you it is none of my business," Ch'en Ching-chi muttered in response. "I'm drunk and can't drink any more."
Yüeh-kuei dragged him up with her hand and gave him a push, saying, "I'm going to drag you there no matter what. If you won't let me do so:
You hardly count as a stout fellow."[11]
She then pushed and pulled Ch'en Ching-chi until he became so excited that, in the dark shadows, he pretended to be drunk and:
Half facetiously but in earnest,
embraced Yüeh-kuei with his arms and gave her a kiss.

This only had the effect of encouraging Yüeh-kuei to:
Assume privileges above her station,
saying, "I came to fetch you with the best of intentions, and you assume the right to treat me so disrespectfully. How can you do such a thing?"
"My child," responded Ch'en Ching-chi, "who is it now that is putting on airs with the best of intentions?"
So saying, he gave her another kiss, and it was only after this that they arrived back in the ornamental pavilion.
"Mistress," said Yüeh-kuei, "you may have threatened to beat me, but I have succeeded in dragging uncle back here."
Ch'un-mei then had Hai-t'ang pour out another large beaker of wine, and the two of them continued to enjoy themselves playing board games together, with the loser having to down a cup of wine as a forfeit. Thereupon, what with:
First a game for you,
Then a game for me,
they continued playing until the maidservants fell asleep from exhaustion. Ch'un-mei then sent Yüeh-kuei and Hai-t'ang back to the rear compound to fetch them some tea. Once the two of them were alone in the ornamental pavilion:
Untying her girdle pendant, she discloses the jade
of the Nymph of the Hsiang River;
Distending her ruby lips, she displays the cloves
of the Han dynasty Secretariat.[12]
Truly, it is a case of:
Amid the flower shadows by the curved balustrade
the lamplight shines aslant;
Beside it there is a fallen hairpin along with a
pair of phoenix-feather shoes.[13]
A poem testifies to this:
As they embrace inside the ornamental pavilion
her cloudy locks are disheveled;
Her powdered sweat becomes congealed fragrance
that permeates the crimson gauze.
In the secluded courtyards the days are long[14]
and nobody comes to disturb you;
One can simply look on as the yellow orioles
peck away at the famous flowers.
At the time, just as the two of them were in the thick of things, the concubine Hai-t'ang came back with the tea and said, "Mistress, you had better return to the rear compound. Your son Chin-ko has just waked up and is crying for you."
Ch'un-mei kept Ch'en Ching-chi company in drinking another two goblets of wine, after which, she rinsed out her mouth with tea, took her leave, and returned to the rear compound. The serving maids were left to clear away the utensils, and the male servant Hsi-erh supported Ch'en Ching-chi on his way back to the library, where he went to bed. But no more of this.
One day, an imperial edict came down ordering Commandant Chou Hsiu to lead the infantry and cavalry under his command to join Chang Shu-yeh, the prefect of Chi-chou, in a campaign against the outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh led by the bandit chieftain Sung Chiang, and to set out as soon as possible.
The commandant said to Ch'un-mei, "You must stay at home and look after our son Chin-ko. You should also engage the services of a go-between to arrange a marriage for your cousin. I will put his name on my roster; and if we are fortunate enough to be successful in our campaign, the magnanimity of the Emperor may result in his being given:
An official post or even half of one,
which will also serve to enhance your reputation."
Ch'un-mei assented to this suggestion; and two or three days later, the commandant packed his gear, mustered his infantry and cavalry, and left Chang Sheng and Li An behind to look after the household, while taking only his servant Chou Jen to accompany him. But no more of this.
One day, Ch'un-mei summoned Auntie Hsüeh and said to her, thus and so, "My husband, on the eve of his departure, suggested that I engage the services of a go-between to find a wife for my cousin. See if you can locate a decent woman of:
Appropriate social and economic standing,
for me. It doesn't matter if she is only fifteen or sixteen years old, so long as she is attractive, has dainty hands and feet, and is clever and adept, since he has a somewhat finicky disposition."
"Do you think I don't know that?" said Auntie Hsüeh. "There is no need for you to tell me about it. I recall that he was not even satisfied by the likes of Hsi-men Ta-chieh."
"If you come up with one who isn't up to snuff," said Ch'un-mei, "just see if I don't box your ears for it. After all, I'll have to address her as my young sister-in-law. It's not a matter to be treated lightly."
When they had finished speaking, Ch'un-mei had a maidservant bring in a serving of tea for her. Who should appear at this point but Ch'en Ching-chi, who came in to have something to eat.
Auntie Hsüeh stepped up and bowed to him, saying, "Brother-in-law, I haven't set eyes on you for a long time. Where have you been keeping yourself? You are to be congratulated. Just now, the mistress has directed me to find a nice wife for you. How will you repay me for doing so?"
Ch'en Ching-chi only frowned at this, without saying anything.
"You old beggar," said Auntie Hsüeh, "why do you have nothing to say?"
"Don't call him brother-in-law," said Ch'un-mei. "That's over and done with. Just address him as Uncle Ch'en, that's all."
"My worthless mouth deserves to be slapped," responded Auntie Hsüeh. "It is prone to make such mistakes. In the future, I will simply address you as Uncle."
On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi couldn't help breaking into a laugh, saying, "That really touches my heart."
Auntie Hsüeh, affecting a bout of silliness, ran up to him and gave him a blow, saying, "Just look at the fine way this old beggar talks. I'm not the one you're after. So how could I ever hope to touch your heart?"
Even Ch'un-mei broke out laughing at this.
Before long, Yüeh-kuei brought in a serving of tea and snacks for Auntie Hsüeh, after consuming which, she picked up her box of trinkets and prepared to go, saying, "I will do my best to locate an appropriate young woman for you, and if I do so, will come to let you know."
"We will not skimp," stated Ch'un-mei, "on the bride price, preserved fruit, festive red silk, gifts of wine, head ornaments, and clothing for her trousseau, as long as she is an attractive girl from a good family, who might appropriately become a member of our household."
"I understand," said Auntie Hsüeh. "I guarantee that she will live up to your expectations."
After some time, Ch'en Ching-chi finished his meal and went back to the front compound.
Auntie Hsüeh, who was still sitting there, asked Ch'un-mei, "When did that gentleman come here?"
Ch'un-mei then proceeded to tell her the story of how he had become a Taoist acolyte and went on to say, "It was I who located him, and have passed him off as a relative of mine."
"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Auntie Hsüeh. "You really have an eye for the future."
She then went on to say, "I have heard that on your birthday, a while ago, the lady from his former household came to visit you."
"She took the initiative by sending gifts to me," said Ch'un-mei. "It was only then that I sent a card inviting her to come for a visit, and she sat around for the better part of the day before going home."
"I was busy on that occasion," said Auntie Hsüeh, "preparing the bridal chamber for one of my customers, which took me all day. I had wanted to come see you but was under such pressure I was not able to do so."
She then went on to ask, "Did Uncle Ch'en see the lady from his former household?"
"He would hardly have agreed to see her," said Ch'un-mei. "He got into quite a quarrel with me over the fact that I even invited her. I said that I had merely done a favor for her household, but he accused me of lacking resolution. He said, 'There is no reason to doubt that it would have been preferable if Wu Tien-en had been allowed to beat the page boy P'ing-an into implicating the First Lady in a scandal, so that she would have been dragged into court. What did it have to do with you, that you should choose to do her a favor, in spite of the fine way she treated us in the past?' "
"What you said makes sense," opined Auntie Hsüeh. "When you get right down to it, people:
Should not be preoccupied with old enmities."
"Since I had received gifts from her," said Ch'un-mei, "not to have invited her for a visit would have been unacceptable.
It is better to overlook another's unkindness,
Than it is to commit unrighteous acts oneself."
"It is no wonder," opined Auntie Hsüeh, "that you are blessed with such good fortune, when you possess such a good heart."
Thereupon, having chatted for what seemed like half a day, Auntie Hsüeh picked up her box of trinkets, took her leave, and departed.
Two days later, she came back and reported that Battalion Commander Chu, who resided inside the city, had a fourteen-year-old daughter, Miss Chu, whom he was prepared to marry off because her mother was dead. Ch'un-mei, however, felt her to be too young and was not interested. Auntie Hsüeh then suggested Ying Po-chüeh's second daughter as a possibility, and reported that she was twenty-one years old. Ch'un-mei rejected this suggestion as well, on the grounds that since Ying Po-chüeh was now dead, she would be in the hands of his elder brother, who would not provide her with anything much in the way of a dowry. She therefore told Auntie Hsüeh to return the cards with the horoscopes of these two candidates.
Several days later, Auntie Hsüeh returned with some artificial flowers in hand and pulled a card with the horoscope of another prospect out of her sleeve. The inscription on the crimson satin surface of the card read: "The eldest daughter of the prosperous dry goods merchant, surnamed Ko, who is nineteen years old, was born in the year of the cock, at midnight on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month, and her personal name is Ts'ui-p'ing."
Auntie Hsüeh then described her, saying, "She is as pretty as a picture, is petite in stature, has a face shaped like a melon seed, possesses a congenial and elegant disposition, [15] is as clever as can be, and her mastery of needlework and suchlike feminine accomplishments goes without saying. Her parents are both alive, and her father has the equivalent of ten thousand strings of cash in capital, operates a dry goods store on Main Street, and does business in Su-chou, Hang-chou, and Nanking. It is an incomparably fine family, and the beds and curtains, and the trunks containing her trousseau, are all manufactured in Nanking."
When Ch'un-mei heard this, she said, "If it's as good a match as all that, we might as well agree to it."
She then told Auntie Hsüeh to go ahead and transmit the needed documents, and she promptly set out to do so. Truly:
If you want to seek an alluring beauty
from a brocaded boudoir,
You must rely entirely upon a red leaf
to be a good go-between.[16]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
The Weaving Maid, positioned at her loom,
attaches the fragrant silk;
An affinity between widely divided people
suffices to connect them.
In Heaven above, the Herd Boy is matched
with the Weaving Maid;
In the human realm, the man of talent
weds an alluring damsel.
When Auntie Hsüeh delivered the nuptial documents, and the family of Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's father, the prosperous dry goods merchant, saw that they came from the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, they were happy to accept the proposal and engaged another go-between named Auntie Chang to go with Auntie Hsüeh in order to arrange the match. Ch'un-mei, for her part, made up two parcels of tea leaves, dumplings, and candied fruit and sent off Sun Erh-niang in a sedan chair to deliver these betrothal gifts to the Ko family home and conclude the match by presenting Ko Ts'ui-p'ing with an engagement ring.
Upon her return, she said to Ch'un-mei, "She really appears to be a worthwhile young woman. She has an attractive demeanor, is as lovely as a flower, and her family is of an appropriate status."
Ch'un-mei thereupon selected an auspicious day for the formal betrothal ceremony, and prepared gifts including sixteen platters of preserved fruit, tea, and pastries; two platters of noodles to celebrate the putting up of her hair; two platters of pearls and trinkets; four jugs of wine; two sheep; a fret for her coiffure; a lavish set of gold and silver hair ornaments, pins, and bracelets; two velvet gowns; and clothing for the four seasons; in addition to bolts of cotton fabric; and a betrothal present of twenty taels of silver. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
The yin-yang master selected the eighth day of the sixth month for the wedding ceremony, when the bride would be brought over the threshold.
Before that date, Ch'un-mei asked Auntie Hsüeh, "Is her family going to supply any maidservants as part of her dowry?"
"They will supply beds and curtains as part of her trousseau," said Auntie Hsüeh, "along with gilt lacquer cabinets and so forth, but there will be no maidservants included in the dowry."
"It would be more convenient in that case," said Ch'un-mei, "if we were to purchase a twelve- or thirteen-year-old maidservant to serve in her room, empty the commode, pour bathwater, and so forth."
"I know of two families," said Auntie Hsüeh, "who are offering to sell their girls as maidservants. I'll bring one back with me tomorrow."
The next day, sure enough, she brought a young girl back with her and explained, "She has been working as a maidservant in the household of the merchant Huang the Fourth's son, and this year she is just twelve years old. Huang the Fourth and Li the Third, along with Lai-pao, who was formerly employed in your household, have all been imprisoned for misappropriation of official funds, until such time as they can make reparation. It is now more than a year since they were incarcerated, and they have been forced to dispose of their possessions, and sell off their houses. Li the Third has passed away, and his son, Li Huo, has been incarcerated in his stead. Lai-Pao's son, Seng-pao, has run away and is said to be serving someone as a groom."
"Are you referring to the servant we knew as Lai-pao?" asked Ch'un-mei.
"He is no longer known as Lai-pao," said Auntie Hsüeh, "but has changed his name to T'ang Pao."
"If this girl has been employed as a maidservant in Huang the Fourth's family," said Ch'un-mei, "how much do they want for her?"
"All they are asking for is four and a half taels of silver," said Auntie Hsüeh. "They are anxiously awaiting it in order to help them repay the misappropriated funds."
"Four and a half taels is too much," said Ch'un-mei, "but I am willing to pay three taels and five mace of silver for her."
She then paid over the sum of three taels and five mace worth of "snowflake" government silver, wrote out a contract for her, and changed her name to Chin Ch'ien-erh.
To make a long story short, on the eighth day of the sixth month, Ch'un-mei dressed herself up with a phoenix cap adorned with pearls and trinkets on her head, and a full-sleeved scarlet robe, encircled with a girdle featuring a plaque of green jade inlaid with gold. Riding in a large sedan chair borne by four bearers, and accompanied by drums and lanterns, she set out to fetch the daughter of the Ko family, preside over the bridegroom's ritual presentation of a goose to the bride's family, and bring her over the threshold in marriage. Ch'en Ching-chi rode on a large white horse with ornate silver trim on the saddle and bridle and was accompanied by soldiers who shouted to clear the way. He wore a scholar's cap on his head, a round-collared robe of black velvet, with a pair of white-soled black boots on his feet, and his head was adorned with two floral ornaments of gold. Truly, it was a case of:
Encountering sweet rain after a prolonged draught;
Meeting an old acquaintance when traveling abroad;
Enjoying the candlelit night in a nuptial chamber;
Finding oneself on a list of successful graduates.[17]
Each time such things are refurbished

they will be as good as new.
When the wedding procession arrived back at the commandant's residence, and the bride descended from her sedan chair, she wore a scarlet gold-flaked bridal veil. Dressed in her wedding finery she accepted a ritual mouthful of rice, before entering the main gate, holding a "precious vase" in her arms. The yin-yang master then conducted her into a decorated hall where she proceeded to pay her respects before the family shrine, after which, she was taken to the nuptial chamber. Ch'un-mei saw to it that the two of them sat down together within the bed curtains, and then she came out again. After the yin-yang master had performed the ceremony of scattering auspicious symbols of fertility upon the nuptial bed, he left upon receiving his gratuity, and the drummers that had been hired for the occasion also went their ways.
After Ch'en Ching-chi had sat within the bed curtains with Ko Ts'ui-p'ing for a while, he mounted a horse and went to his father-in-law's home to thank him for the gift of his daughter. Upon his return he was quite drunk. That evening, being:
A woman of beauty and a man of talent;
They indulged their newlywed passions,
Enjoying the clouds and rain together.
Truly, it is a case of:
When spring touches the apricot and peach trees,
their new buds burst into red flower;
When the breeze plays among the willow fronds,
they are made to bend their green waists.
There is a poem that testifies to this:
To encounter close up such a paragon
of feeling and romance;
Is a consummation that: "Without good fortune
one cannot enjoy."
Wherever has Lieh-tzu allowed the wind
to carry him;
When night after night the beauty of the moon
shines in the willow branches.[18]
That night, Ch'en Ching-chi and the young lady Ko Ts'ui-p'ing found themselves to be highly compatible. The pair of them were like:
Mandarin ducks beneath the quilt;
Phoenix mates within the curtains.
Like fish sporting in the water,
They enjoyed sharing loving cups.
On the third day after the wedding, in the rear hall of the commandant's headquarters, Ch'un-mei prepared a feast, hung up decorative bunting, hired musicians to provide:
Drum music, pipes, and song,
and invited friends and relatives to attend a wedding reception. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
Every day, Ch'un-mei invited the two of them to her quarters so they could share their meals, and they addressed each other as cousins, constantly:
Getting up and sitting down together.
Not a single one of the maidservants, wet nurses, or servants' wives chose to object to this. It so happens that Ch'un-mei had fixed up a suite of three rooms on the western side of the front courtyard to serve as his quarters. Inside, she had provided a curtained bedstead, replastered the walls so that the rooms were as spotless as snow grottoes, and suspended blinds. The library on the outside served as his study and was also furnished with a bed and a couch, tables and mats, and a collection of old books. The letters and calling cards sent and received by the commandant, as well as the documents presented by other bureaucratic offices, all passed through his hands and were either listed in registers, or stamped by him with official seals. The brushes, inkstones, and other appurtenances needed by a writer were all available to him, and the shelves were loaded with books. Ch'un-mei would come out to the library from time to time in order to sit down and talk with him, and they ended up engaging in intercourse with each other on more than one occasion. Truly:

In the morning, he attends feasts in Golden Valley,
In the evening, he favors beauties in ornate houses.
But do not consider these to be occasions for joy,
Time's flowing light only chases the sunset clouds.

When they came to Major Zhou's place, Chen Jingji dismounted and Zhang Sheng went in to tell Chunmei. She ordered him to take Jingji to a room where he could have a bath, and told a woman to take him fresh clothes, boots and hat. The Major was still in the great hall, and Chunmei gave orders for the young man to be taken to the hall in the inner court. There she waited for him, beautifully dressed. Jingji came in and made a reverence to her as though she were his cousin. They sat down facing each other and talked of the things that had happened since they last met. Tears were in their eyes.
Chunmei expected the Major to come at any moment. She looked meaningfully at Jingji and said softly: "If he asks you any questions, say that you are my cousin and that I am a year older than you. I am twenty-five and was born at noon on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month."
"I will remember," Jingji said.
The maid brought tea and Chunmei asked him how he became a priest. "My husband did not know that we had anything to do with one another," she said, "or he would not have punished you. He is sorry now. At that time I could not ask you to stay here, though I should have liked to, because Xue'e was here. That was why I let you go away. I got rid of her as soon as I could and told Zhang Sheng to look for you. I never imagined that things would come to such a pass that you would become a workman outside the city."
"It is a long story," Jingji said. "After we saw each other last, I made up my mind to marry Pan Jinlian. Then my father died at the Eastern Capital, and I came back too late. Wu Song had killed her. I heard that through your kindness she had been buried at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. I went there and burned paper offerings for her. Then my mother died. When I had buried her, my money was stolen. I came home and my wife died. That strumpet, my mother-in-law, took me to law and made off with all my wife's things. To settle the law case I had to sell my house and then I was as poor as if I had been cleaned completely out. Fortunately, I met an old friend of my father who took me to the Yangong temple to be a monk. Then some rascal gave me a beating. I was arrested and taken to the court. When I got away from there, I had no relative or friend to give me a helping hand, so I went to the temple and joined the workmen there. It was good of you, Sister, to tell Zhang Sheng to find me. I feel I am a new man now that I see you again." They both shed tears.
Major Zhou came from the hall. A servant pulled aside the lattice and he went into the room. Jingji stepped forward and knelt down before him. The Major hastily returned his greeting.
"I had no idea," he said, "that you were my good cousin. I was misled, or I should never have treated you so unbecomingly. I must apologize."
"It was my fault," Jingji said. "I have not been to see you. I trust you will forgive me." He again knelt down before the officer. Major Zhou helped him up and begged him to take the place of honor. Jingji was too clever to do this, and sat on a chair in the lower place. When they had all sat down together, tea was brought.
"Good cousin," Major Zhou said, "how old are you? I haven't seen you since we met that day. How did you come to go to the temple?"
"I am twenty-four years old," Jingji said, "a year younger than my cousin here. Her birthday is on the twenty-fifth of the fourth month. I went to the Yangong temple because my parents are dead and my family ruined. I did not know that my cousin had married you. If I had known, I should certainly have called to see you."
"Your cousin has been so worried about you all this time that she has never been at ease," Major Zhou said. "I sent out people to look for you, but they could never find you. It is a piece of good luck that I see you here today."
Major Zhou had been a friend of Ximen Qing. It was therefore to be expected that he would have made the acquaintance of Chen Jingji. But though Zhou was a friend of Ximen, he was an honest man and had never pried into his friend's domestic affairs. Always, when he had been at Ximen's house, Jing and Xia and other officers had been with him and he had never met Jingji. Besides, the young man had been a priest, and it never occurred to Zhou that he was Ximen Qing's son-in-law. So he was deceived by his wife and Jingji and believed that they were cousins.
Zhou ordered the servants to prepare dinner, and it was soon upon the table. The wine pots were of silver and the cups of jade. Wine was poured in a golden stream, and they feasted until the evening. Then the Major bade Zhou Ren prepare a room in the west court. Chunmei found two sets of bedclothes, and a boy called Xi'er was told to wait on him.
The time passed very quickly, the sun and moon racing like a weaver's shuttles.
When the old year drew near its end,
We saw the plum blossom.
Now, suddenly, New Year's Day is here
Dainty flowers appear upon the branches.
Fresh lotus leaves come out
Upon the surface of the water.
Jingji had been at Major Zhou's house for more than a month. It was Chunmei's birthday. Wu Yueniang sent Daian with a plate of longevity noodles, two geese, four chickens, two plates of fruit and ajar of wine. Major Zhou was sitting in the hall when a servant told him that Daian had come. He ordered the presents to be taken in. Daian brought the present list and came in and kowtowed.
"Tell your mistress it is very kind of her to send us these things," Zhou said to Daian. Then he handed the present list to a boy and told him to take it to his uncle. He said that Daian should be given a handkerchief and three *qian* of silver, and the porter a hundred coppers. Then he put on his ceremonial dress and went out. Daian stood at the door of the hall to wait for the return card. He saw a young man wearing a hat with a ribbed rim, a black gown, summer shoes, and light socks come through a corner door and give money to a boy. Then the man went back again. Daian thought he looked very like Chen Jingji, but he could not make out how Jingji could possibly be there. The boy gave Daian the handkerchief and the money, and he went home. He gave the return card to Yueniang.
"Did you see your sister?" Yueniang said.
"No, but I saw brother-in-law," Daian said.
"What do you mean, you young rascal?" Yueniang said, laughing. "What brother-in-law are you talking about? Do you have the audacity to speak of the Major as your brother-in-law, a man of his years?"
"I don't mean the Major," Daian said. "It was Chen Jingji I saw. When I got there, Major Zhou was in the great hall. I gave him my list and kowtowed. He said I was to thank you, and gave me some tea. Then he said to a boy: 'Take this card to your uncle and ask him for a handkerchief and three *qian* of silver for this man and a hundred coppers for the porter.' He dressed then and went out. I saw Master Chen coming by the corner door, and it was he who gave the return card to the boy. Then he went back, and I picked up my box and came away. I am sure it was he."
"I don't believe it, you scamp," Yueniang said. "I am sure that that young lamb must be wandering in other pastures now. He has probably died of starvation by this time. How could he be in that house? Would the Major have him there? Why, Chunmei herself would not have him."
"Lady, will you have a wager with me?" Daian said. "I am sure it was Master Chen I saw. I should know him even if he had been burned to ashes."
"What was he wearing?" Yueniang said.
"A new hat with a ribbed rim and a gold pin," Daian said. "He had a black gown, summer shoes, and white socks. He was looking very well."
"I can't believe you," Yueniang said.
Jingji went to the inner court where Chunmei was adorning herself in front of a mirror. He showed Yueniang's card to her. "Why is this woman sending you presents?" he said.
Chunmei told him that she had met Yueniang at the Temple of Eternal Felicity at the Festival of Spring, and that Ping'an had stolen ornaments from the pawnshop that Major Zhou had recovered for her. "She sent presents to thank my husband," Chunmei said, "and on the baby's birthday I went to see her. Now we are excellent friends, and she promised to send me birthday presents."
Jingji looked very hard at Chunmei. "Sister," he said, "you must have a very short memory. Have you forgotten how that whore treated you? She separated us and she is responsible for Jinlian's death. I only hope I may never set eyes on her again, and here you are actually befriending her. Why did you prevent Wu Dian'en from beating the boy? Then that woman would have been arrested and exposed. It was no business of ours. And, besides, if she has not been carrying on with Daian, why did she marry him to Xiaoyu? If I had been here then, I certainly would not have allowed you to do that. She is our enemy, and I can't understand why you let her come here. Friendship does not seem to mean anything to you."
Chunmei said nothing for a long time. Then she said: "Why not let bygones be bygones? I have a soft heart, and I do not like nursing a grievance."
"In these days," Jingji said, "if you have a soft heart you will suffer for it."
"Well, she has sent me these presents. I can't accept them without doing something in return. She is expecting me to send her an invitation."
"Have no more to do with her," Jingji said. "Why should you invite her again?"
"I shall feel very awkward if I don't," Chunmei said. "I will send her a card, and whether she comes or not will depend upon her. If she comes, you go to the other court and keep out of sight. Afterwards, I will break off relations with her."
Jingji was angry and went off without a word. He went to the front and wrote a card, and Chunmei sent a servant with it to Yueniang.
Yueniang dressed and, with Ruyi'er carrying Xiaoge, went to call upon Chunmei. Daian went with them. Chunmei and the Second Lady both came to welcome them. They went to the inner court and there greeted one another. Ruyi'er, with the baby, made a reverence. Jingji, who was in the other courtyard, kept out of the way.
Tea and wine were set out in the inner court and two singing girls played and sang. Daian was entertained in a small room at the front. He saw a boy, carrying a tray of food and cakes, going to the corner door on the west side. Daian stopped him and asked him where he was taking the tray.
"To my uncle," the boy said.
"What is your uncle's name?" Daian asked.
"Chen," the boy said.
Daian quietly followed the boy and went into the small courtyard on the west side. The boy pulled aside a lattice and went in. Daian peeped through the window. There was no doubt about it. Jingji was lying on a bed, and, when the food was brought in, he got up and began to eat. Daian went back to the front. In the evening people with lanterns came to take Yueniang back. Daian told her what he had seen. From that time onwards, Jingji dissuaded Chunmei from having any more to do with Yueniang, and their relations were broken off.
Jingji, unknown to everyone in Major Zhou's house, associated secretly with Chunmei. When Zhou was out, they had meals and drank wine together, and sometimes played chess and other games. When he was at home, Chunmei sent a maid with food to the young man and sometimes went to him herself, even in the daytime. She used to stay in his rooms for hours at a time. So they came and went one to the other and grew more and more attached.
One day, when Major Zhou was out with some of his men upon a tour of inspection, it was the Summer Festival. Chunmei arranged to have a feast in a summerhouse in the west courtyard. She and the Second Lady and Jingji drank together to celebrate the festival. Their maids and women were all there to wait, and Chunmei bade Haitang and Yuegui sing for them. They drank till the sun turned to the west and a very fine rain came to bring coolness to the day. Chunmei took a great gold cup, shaped like a lotus blossom, and urged the others to drink more. The Second Lady could not, and went to her own room to sleep. Jingji and Chunmei were left alone in the summerhouse. They guessed fingers, played games, and drank together. After a while, the maid brought lanterns and the nurse took away the baby to put him to bed. Jingji lost the game, went to the study, and refused to come back. First, Chunmei sent Haitang for him, but he would not come. Then she sent Yuegui. "You must drag him here, if necessary," she said. "If you fail, I shall box your ears ten times."
Yuegui went to the young man's room. When she opened the door, she saw him lying on the bed, snoring.
"My Lady says I must bring you back with me," she said. "If I do not, she promises to punish me."
"It doesn't matter to me whether you get punished or not," Jingji murmured. "I have had as much wine as I can drink, and I don't want any more."
Yuegui pulled him up. "I have to take you to my mistress," she said, "and if I can't drag you to her somehow, I shall own myself a feeble creature."
Jingji pretended to be more drunk than he was. He put his arms around Yuegui and kissed her. Yuegui made a fuss. "I came to take you away from here, not to behave like this," she said.
"My child," Jingji said, "do what I want of you and I will not treat you as a servant." He kissed her again, and they went together to the summerhouse.
"I have brought uncle," Yuegui said, "so you will not have to punish me."
Chunmei told Haitang to fill the large cups, and they played chess together. They played one game after another until the maids were sleepy and went away, all except Haitang and Yuegui, and Chunmei packed them off to get some tea. Then Chunmei and Jingji were alone together in the summerhouse. They kissed each other.
When they had been very happy together, Haitang returned with the tea. She asked Chunmei to go to the inner court because the baby was crying. Chunmei drank two more cups of wine with Jingji, then they rinsed their mouths with tea and she went to the inner court. The maid cleared the table and Jingji, with the assistance of his boy, went to his study and to sleep.

One day there came an Imperial Edict that instructed the Major to take his soldiers and join Zhang Shuye, magistrate of Jizhou, in an attack upon the bandits in Liangshan, who were led by Song Jiang. Before he set out on this expedition, he said to Chunmei: "Watch carefully over the baby, and send a go-between to arrange a marriage for your cousin. Then I will take him to the field with me. If he has good fortune and does his duty to his Emperor, he will get official rank, and that will be pleasant for you."
Chunmei promised to do this. In two or three months, Zhou joined his troops and went away. He took Zhou Ren with him and left Zhang Sheng and Li An at home.
One day Chunmei sent for old woman Xue. "When he went away," she said, "he told me to see about a marriage for my cousin. Go and see if you can find a suitable girl for him, someone about sixteen or seventeen. She must be beautiful and intelligent, because he has not the best of tempers."
"I know him," old woman Xue said. "You need not go into details. I remember that Ximen's daughter did not satisfy him."
"If you don't find a good girl for him, I shall box your ears," Chunmei said. "She must be pretty, because she and I will be living here as sisters. You must take the matter seriously."
She told a maid to give the old woman some tea. Then Jingji came in for something to eat. "Brother-in-law," the old woman said, "I haven't seen you for a very long time. Where have you been? I find I must congratulate you. I have just been told to find a pretty wife for you. What will you give me as a reward?
Jingji scowled and said nothing.
"Why don't you speak, you old beggar?" the old woman said.
"You mustn't call him brother-in-law," Chunmei said. "That is all over and done with. You must call him Uncle Chen now."
"I ought to be punished," old woman Xue said. "My doggish mouth gave him the wrong title. In the future, I will remember to call him Uncle."
Jingji could not help laughing. "I am glad to hear it," he said.
The old woman put on a great air of gaiety. She went up to him and gave him a little tap. "You old beggar," she said. "I am not your sweetheart. What do you mean by saying you are glad to hear it?"
Chunmei laughed. After a while, Yuegui brought cakes and tea for the old woman.
"I shall take the very greatest pains to find a suitable girl for you," Xue said, "and as soon as I find one I will come and tell you."
"We will see about clothes, ornaments, and all that sort of thing," Chunmei said. "All we care is that she should be a decent girl. This is not an ordinary family."
"I realize that," the old woman said, "and I am sure I shall be able to satisfy you."
Sometime later, Jingji finished his meal and went to the outer court.
"When did he come here?" old woman Xue asked.
Chunmei told her how he had become a priest. "I want to treat him as one of my relatives," she said.
"Excellent!" the old woman said. "You know your way about. I hear Mistress Ximen came here on your birthday."
"Yes," Chunmei said, "she sent me some presents, and I sent her an invitation in return. She was here quite a long time."
"I was very busy that day," the old woman said. "I very much wished to come, but I could not get away. Tell me, did Uncle Chen see Mistress Ximen?"
"He did not, indeed," Chunmei said. "He scolded me terribly because I invited her. He was very angry because I helped her and said I have no memory. Wu Dian'en, he says, should have punished the boy and dragged Mistress Ximen into the case. He says we ought to have left them alone and not bothered about them, because she treated us badly."
"I can understand his feelings," old woman Xue said, "but I don't think we ought to remember the things of the past forever."
"I had accepted her presents, and I could do no less than invite her," Chunmei said. "I have no wish to return evil for evil."
"No," old woman Xue said, "and that is why you have got on so well. You have a good heart."
They talked for some time, then old woman Xue picked up her box and went away. Two days later she came again. One of Master Zhu's daughters, a girl about fifteen, wished to marry as she had no mother. Chunmei considered the girl too young and would not agree. Then the old woman came again and suggested Ying Bojue's second daughter, who was twenty-two years old. But Chunmei would not have this either. Bojue was now dead; his daughter's marriage would have to be arranged by her uncle and she was not likely to have any dowry worth mentioning. So she returned their papers. A few days later, old woman Xue came again with some artificial flowers. She brought with her a proposal of marriage. On it was written: 'The eldest daughter of the silk merchant Ge Yuanwai. Her animal is the Cock. She was born at the hour of the Rat, on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month.'
"Her name is Ge Cuiping," the old woman said. "She is as beautiful as a picture. She is not tall, and her face is shaped like a watermelon seed. She is gentle, well-mannered and clever with her needle. Her parents are both alive and in good circumstances. Her father keeps a silk shop in the High Street and does business in Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Nanjing. We are not likely to find anyone more suitable. Besides, the furniture her father is sending with her is all of the Nanjing make."
"Let us settle this," Chunmei said. She told the old woman to take word to the other party at once. When she came to Ge's place, the silk merchant found that she came from Zhou's house and sent for another go-between, called Zhang, to go back with old woman Xue. Chunmei got ready two packets of tea leaves, dainties, and fruits, and asked the Second Lady to go to Ge's place and see the girl. The Second Lady, when she came back, said that the girl was really very pretty. She looked like a flower, she said, and the family seemed to be a good one. Chunmei found a day of good omen for the betrothal. She sent the girl sixteen different kinds of fruit and food, two sets of ornaments, two sets of flowers and pearls, four wine sets, two sheep, a hairnet, and a complete outfit of gold and silver pins and rings. She sent two silk gowns and dresses for all the year round, with silk and cloth and twenty taels of silver. This was for the betrothal day.
The Master of the Yin Yang selected the eighth day of the sixth month for the wedding. Chunmei asked old woman Xue if the girl had a maid. "No," the old woman said, "her father will supply her with all her furniture, but no maid."
"Then we must buy a girl about thirteen or fourteen years old for her," Chunmei said.
The old woman promised to bring a girl the next day and did so. She was thirteen years old and came from the household of Huang the Fourth, the merchant. Huang and Li the Third had got into trouble over the official finances; they were arrested and thrown into prison and stayed there for more than a year. Li the Third died in jail, and his son was taken in his place. Their property was all sold. Laibao's son had run away and become a groom for some stranger. Laibao, Chunmei discovered, had changed his name to Tang Bao. He was mixed up in this affair.
"How much do they ask for the girl?" Chunmei said.
"Four taels and a half," the old woman said. "They want the money very badly so that they can pay off the authorities."
"Four and a half's too much," Chunmei said. "Give them three and a half and I'll have the girl." She gave the old woman the money and so the matter was settled. She called the girl Jinqian. On the 8 th day of the sixth month, Chunmei put on a pearl headdress, a crimson gown with broad sleeves, a girdle with gold ornaments and jade buckle, and went to meet the bride. She was carried by four men in a large sedan chair and a band of musicians and lantern bearers went with her. Chen Jingji rode on a white horse with a silver-mounted saddle. Soldiers marched before him. He wore a scholar's hat and a black silk gown, a pair of black boots with white soles and a pair of golden flowers in his hair. He seemed like the rain that visits the land after a long drought, or like a man who meets an old friend in a foreign land. Indeed, the happiest day in a man's life is that on which he marries, or passes his examination. The bride's sedan chair came to Major Zhou's place. She was veiled in a veil of scarlet embroidery and carried a vase. When she had entered the great gateway, the Master of the Yin Yang took her to the hall. When the ceremonies were over, she was taken to her own room. Chunmei watched and then came away. When the Master of the Yin Yang had finished what he had to do, the bride and bridegroom sat together for a while. Then Jingji mounted a horse and paid a call upon his father-in-law to thank him for giving him his daughter. When he came back, he was drunk. That night this very lively young man and the beautiful maiden enjoyed the first pleasures of their marriage. They were as happy as 2 lovebirds and as merry as fishes in the water. On the third day after the wedding, Chunmei gave a feast in the hall of the inner court. Musicians were engaged and friends and relatives were invited. Every day, Chunmei asked the young couple to take their meals with her. She called the bride her sister. They were so much together that the maids and serving women looked upon the new bride with respect. Chunmei gave them three rooms in the west courtyard and the rooms were papered until they looked like a cave of snow. New curtains and blinds were fitted. Jingji's study was outside the courtyard. There he kept a bed, tables, and some old books, and there he attended to Major Zhou's correspondence. There, too, Chunmei came to him, not always for conversation only.

## 121
## Ch'en Ching-chi Opens a Tavern in Lin-ch'ing; Han Ai-chieh Encounters a Lover in a Bordello & Wang Liu'er's Return

If the heart is content even a thatched cottage seems ample;
If one's feelings are calm even vegetable roots smell sweet.
The fewer worldly desires one has the more beneficial it is;
When human relations are tepid they are more likely to last.[1]
If one depends on others in order to attain one's ambitions;
In trying to avoid trouble one will deal with local tyrants.[2]
One may achieve an exalted level of distinction for the day;
But it will end with inevitable extinction in years to come.

One day, Commandant Chou Hsiu, and the prefect of Chi-nan prefecture Chang Shu-yeh, in command of their infantry and cavalry, completed a successful campaign against the outlaws in Liang-shan Marsh; and the thirty-six leaders of the band, under the command of their chieftain Sung Chiang, along with their more than ten thousand followers, agreed to accept the offer of an imperial amnesty, so that peace was restored in the affected territory. When this was reported to the throne, the Emperor was greatly pleased and promoted Chang Shu-yeh to the positions of censor-in-chief and pacification commissioner of Shantung, and Commandant Chou Hsiu to the post of commander-general of Chi-nan, with the responsibility for patrolling the waterways and hunting down the bandits in his jurisdiction. The Emperor also decreed that the meritorious officers who had participated in the campaign should all be promoted one grade. Since Ch'en Ching-chi's name had been listed in the roster, he was raised to the rank of counselor, with a salary of two piculs of rice per month, and the right to distinguish himself by wearing an official cap and girdle.[3]
During the middle decade of the tenth month, Commandant Chou Hsiu, with his imperial commission in hand, led the infantry and cavalry under his command on their way home and sent a messenger ahead to report the situation to Ch'un-mei and let the household know about it. Ch'un-mei was as pleased as could be and sent Ch'en Ching-chi, along with Chang Sheng and Li An, to go outside the city to welcome him. A feast was prepared in the reception hall of their residence, to celebrate his official promotion, and the number of his fellow officials and others who came to offer congratulations and proffer gifts was so great they could hardly be counted. When the commandant alighted from his horse and came back to the rear hall, Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang were there to receive him and pay their respects. Ch'en Ching-chi divested himself of his commoner's costume, put on a scarlet round-collared gown, an official cap, black boots, and a girdle with a rhinoceros horn plaque, and came out with his new wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing. When the two of them had paid their respects to him, and the commandant saw that she was a good-looking girl, he rewarded her with a set of clothing and ten taels of silver, which she could use to make head ornaments for herself. But no more of this.
That evening, as Ch'un-mei and the commandant enjoyed drinking wine together in their room, they could not avoid bringing up some mundane household matters, and Ch'un-mei said, "The arrangements for my cousin's marriage cost a good deal."
"Ai-ya," responded the commandant. "Your only relative is this cousin, who has sought refuge with you. If he were to be without a wife, it would not bode well for his future prospects. Even though it has cost us a few taels of silver, it has not been spent on some unrelated person."
"And now you have secured this prospect of advancement for him," remarked Ch'un-mei. "It is more than enough to distinguish him."
"The Emperor's edict has already come down," the commandant went on to say, "so that, any day now, I will have to go to Chi-nan prefecture to assume my office. I will leave you behind to look after the household, and you should provide your cousin with some capital so he can hire a manager, and open a business of some kind. Every third or fifth day, he can go to inspect the books, and he ought to be able to make enough in the way of profit this way to support himself."
"What you propose makes sense," responded Ch'un-mei.
That evening, the two of them enjoyed each other as husband and wife, but there is no need to describe this in detail.
The commandant remained at home for another ten days or so, but during the first decade of the eleventh month, he proceeded to get his baggage together and set out to assume his office in Chi-nan prefecture; taking Chang Sheng and Li An with him, and leaving his servants Chou Jen and Chou I to look after the household. He was seen off by Ch'en Ching-chi, who accompanied him as far as the Temple of Eternal Felicity south of the city before returning home.
One day, Ch'un-mei consulted with Ch'en Ching-chi and said, "The commandant suggested, thus and so, that you should open a business of some kind in the canal port of Lin-ch'ing, and hire a manager to run it for you, in the hope of making enough profit to help support the household."
On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi was as pleased as could be. One day, while he was walking along the street in the process of looking for a manager, it was one of those occasions when:
Something was destined to happen.
Unexpectedly, he ran into his old friend Lu the Second, or Lu Ping-i, who bowed to him and said, "Brother, why is it that I haven't seen you for such a long time?"
Ch'en Ching-chi responded by telling him about the death of his wife and continued, "That rascal Yang Kuang-yen made off with half a boatload of my goods, leaving me:
As poor as though I had been utterly cleaned out;
but I am all right again now. Luckily, my female cousin married into the household of Commandant Chou Hsiu, and they arranged another marriage for me. I have subsequently been raised to the rank of counselor and granted the right to distinguish myself by wearing an official cap and girdle. Right now, I am engaged in looking for a manager to run a business for me. But I haven't been able to find one anywhere."
"That rascal Yang Kuang-yen," said Lu Ping-i, "after stealing your merchandise, hired a manager surnamed Hsieh and opened a large tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, known as the Hsieh Family Tavern. With the profits he makes he acts as a money-lender, making loans to the unlicensed prostitutes and singing girls who gather there from the four quarters in the effort to make a living, and collects substantial sums in the way of interest from them. Every day, he wears fine clothing, eats good meat, and rides around on a donkey. Every three or five days, he goes down to the dock to look over the accounts and collect his profits, while utterly ignoring his former friends. His younger brother, Yang Erh-feng, operates a gambling den in his home and engages in cock-fighting and the raising of dogs. Nobody dares to cross him."
"I ran into him last year," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "and he not only turned against me without any feeling but started to give me a beating, from which I was lucky enough to be rescued by a friend. My hatred for him has infused the marrow of my bones."
He then pulled Lu the Second into a tavern by the side of the road, where they went upstairs to have a drink together.
During their discussion, he asked, "How am I to deal with him in order to vent this anger of mine?"
Lu Ping-i responded with the words, "As the saying goes:
He whose hatred is petty is no gentleman;
He who lacks ruthlessness is not a hero.
If we were to attempt to reason with him, since he is the sort of person who:
Before seeing his own coffin will not
shed tears of repentance,
he is certain not to concede anything. But I have an alternative plan to propose. Brother, there is no need for you to engage in any other business activity. Simply write out a legal accusation against him and submit it to your commandant's yamen. If you are able to recover your stolen goods and silver, you should be able to take over this tavern of his, invest some additional capital in it, and form a partnership with the manager Hsieh the Third. I could then cooperate with Hsieh the Third in operating the business on the dock, and all you would have to do is visit the premises every three or five days to inspect the accounts. I am absolutely sure that in a single month you should be able to realize a profit of more than a hundred taels of silver. That would be preferable to trying to start any other kind of business."
Gentle reader take note: This suggestion that Lu Ping-i made at the time would have the result of causing several people to:
Die an untimely death.[4]
As for Ch'en Ching-chi:
The manner of his death would be
altogether too tragic;
The manner of his demise would be
entirely too grievous.[5]
The nature of his death was as terrible as that of Li Ts'un-hsiao of the Five Dynasties, and that of P'eng Yüeh of the Han Dynasty.[6] Truly:
Though it may not be determined by fate;
It owes nothing at all to one's efforts.
When Ch'en Ching-chi heard this proposal, he promptly bowed to Lu Ping-i and said, "Worthy Brother, what you say makes sense. As soon as I get home, I'll take it up with my cousin and her husband. If this undertaking is successful, I'll put you and Hsieh the Third in charge of the enterprise."
Thereupon, when the two of them had finished their wine and gone downstairs to pay the bill, Ch'en Ching-chi said to Lu the Second, "Brother, be sure to keep this to yourself. If it should work out, I'll come to thank you for it."
"I understand," responded Lu the Second, and the two of them then went their separate ways.
When Ch'en Ching-chi had explained the proposal in detail to Ch'un-mei, he went on to say, "But His Honor is not here right now, so what are we to do?"
The senior servant Chou Chung happened to be standing by their side and said, "That's no problem. If Uncle will write out an accusation, indicating how much money and merchandise he lost, and include one of His Honor's calling cards with it, I will deliver it to the two officials at the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission. When this Yang Kuang-yen is brought before the bench and subjected to a beating in the squeezers, there is no reason to fear that the rascal will not cough up the money."
Ch'en Ching-chi was delighted by this proposal and proceeded at once to write out an accusation, seal it up in an envelope with one of the commandant's calling cards, and send the senior servant Chou Chung to take it to the office of the Provincial Surveillance Commission.

The two officials were sitting on the bench at the time, in the process of conducting a hearing, when the gatekeeper came in and reported, "His Honor Chou Hsiu, the commandant of the Regional Military Command, has sent someone to deliver a document to you."
The officials Ho Yung-shou and Chang Mao-te called for Chou Chung to come before them and inquired about His Honor Chou Hsiu's assumption of the office to which he had recently been promoted. After listening to his explanation, upon opening the envelope and examining the accusation and the calling card, they felt inclined to do Chou Hsiu a favor.
Agreeing forthwith to accept the case, they sent detectives and constables to the port of Lin-ch'ing to arrest Yang Kuang-yen and gave return cards to Chou Chung, saying, "When you get home, convey our regards to His Honor and his wife, and tell them that when we succeed in recovering the missing money, they can send someone here to collect it."
Chou Chung took the return cards back to the commandant's yamen and told Ch'un-mei, "They agreed forthwith to send people to arrest him and said that as soon as they succeed in recovering the money, you can send someone to collect it."
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the two accordion-bound cards read, "Respectfully presented by your pupils Ho Yung-shou and Chang Mao-te," he was utterly delighted.
In less than two days time, the detectives, inspectors, and constables from the Provincial Surveillance Commission who had been dispatched to the port of Lin-ch'ing succeeded in arresting Yang Kuang-yen and his younger brother Yang Erh-feng and bringing them back to the yamen. The two officials there interrogated them on the basis of Ch'en Ching-chi's accusation and, upon subjecting them to a beating in the squeezers and several days of incarceration, succeeded in recovering the sum of 350 taels of silver, and a hundred bolts of porous ramie fabric. In addition, the tableware from the tavern was estimated to be worth 50 taels of silver. In Ch'en Ching-chi's accusation he claimed to be due a reparation of 900 taels of silver, so they were still short 350 taels. They sold their home for 50 taels of silver, but their property was then completely exhausted. Ch'en Ching-chi was thus allowed the right to take over his stake in the Hsieh Family Tavern, and he entered into a partnership with the owner Fatty Hsieh, or Hsieh the Third. Ch'un-mei also provided the sum of 500 taels of silver, so that he had a capital of a thousand taels of silver, and he appointed Lu Ping-i to be his manager. He also had the tavern entirely redecorated, repainting and varnishing it, and decorating it with pictures, so that:
The balustrades were sparkling,
The rafters appeared brand new,
The tables looked shiny bright,
The wine and food well ordered.
On the day that it reopened:
Drums and music resounded to the heavens,
Pipes and flutes were blown harmoniously;
attracting the patronage of itinerant merchants and singing girls from the four quarters. Ch'en Ching-chi celebrated the occasion by sacrificing a pig and burning paper money. As the sayings go:
If you unplug the jug, it will make
three people drunk;
If you uncork the flagon, the aroma
will spread far off.[7]
Spirits and immortals have deposited
their jade girdles;
Ministers and councilors have pawned
their golden sables.[8]
When Ch'en Ching-chi climbed to the top of the large tavern, he found himself surrounded by translucent latticed windows that could be pushed open, and balustrades embellished with green varnish.
In all four directions, clouded peaks
rise in piles;[9]
Above and below, the sky and the water
appear to meet.[10]
To the east, dimly appear the spiraling blue
peaks of Mount T'ai;
To the west, impenetrable dark mists shroud
the imperial capital;
To the north, the red structures of wealthy
homes rise in layers;
To the south, the Huai River's vast extent
is like a strip of silk.
Above and below, the tavern had more than a hundred compartments.
Room after room houses the dancing
skirts of singing girls;
Floor after floor reverberates with
lively pipes and strings.[11]
Words are inadequate to describe the scene:
The viands are piled as high as hills;
The wine flows as copiously as waves.
Truly, it is a case of:
The dancing continued till the moon in the pavilion
amid the willows hung low;
The singing went on until the breeze underneath the
peach-blossom fans expired.[12]
It was the middle of the first month when Ch'en Ching-chi reopened the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock in Lin-ch'ing, and he cleared as much as thirty-five taels of silver per day. It was managed jointly by Fatty Hsieh and Lu Ping-i, who served together behind the counter. Every three or five days, Ch'en Ching-chi would ride a horse, accompanied by his servant Little Chiang, and go to the port of Lin-ch'ing to look over the accounts. Whenever he came, the two managers Lu Ping-i and Fatty Hsieh would prepare a clean room on an upper story of the building that was provided with a curtained bedstead, furnished with tables and chairs, and replastered so that it was as spotless as a snow grotto. They would prepare a feast for him there, and assign four good-looking powdered faces to keep him company. The "cribber" Ch'en the Third would look after seeing that he was supplied with wine.
One day, on the third day of the third month, when spring was at its most beautiful, and the landscape was suffused with floral fragrance:
With their green hues, the locusts and
willows populate the banks;
With their rich reds, the apricots and
peaches shine like brocade.
Ch'en Ching-chi, on an upper floor of the tavern, leaned over the green balustrade and contemplated the scene below, which was alive with activity. There is a poem that testifies to this:
Tossed by the wind, enshrouded in mist,
the brocade banner flutters;
During this era of great peace the days
are beginning to grow longer.
Wine is capable of enhancing the courage
of even a stouthearted hero;
And is equally effective at alleviating
the depression of a beauty.
Deep within the three-foot long branches
on the willow-lined bank;
The tavern's signpost rises at an angle
beside the apricot trees.
The stalwart who has yet to accomplish
his lifelong ambition;
Is prone to sing haughtily as he enters
the Land of Drunkenness.[13]
One day,[14] Ch'en Ching-chi happened to look out the rear window of his chamber on an upper floor of the tavern that overlooked the canal and noticed that there were two barges moored there, loaded with trunks, tables, benches, and other household effects, which four or five workers were moving into an empty suite on the ground floor. There were also two women on the barges, one of whom was middle-aged and tall of stature, with a rosewood complexion; while the other was a young woman, given to:
Putting on rouge and applying powder,
who had an attractive pale complexion and was about twenty years old. The two of them also proceeded to go into the empty suite below.
Ch'en Ching-chi approached Manager Hsieh and demanded to know, "Who are those people who, without asking our permission, are taking it upon themselves to move into our building?"
"They are two women who have come from the Eastern Capital," explained Manager Hsieh. "Having failed to locate their relatives, and being unable to locate a dwelling on such short notice, they asked our neighbor Old Man Fan if they could stay here for two or three days before moving on. I was planning to report this to you sir, but you have asked me about it before I was able to do so."
Ch'en Ching-chi was about to give vent to his anger when he saw the young woman approach him respectfully with straightened skirts and bow deeply, saying, "Pray abate your wrath, sir. Your manager is not at fault. It was we who took the liberty:
For lack of an alternative,[15]
of moving in before coming to ask your permission.
I can only hope that you will forgive us.
If you will permit us to remain here for three to five days, we will respectfully reimburse you upon moving out."
When Ch'en Ching-chi saw that the young woman had a way with words, he proceeded to look her over from top to toe, while the woman glanced back at him with her pair of starry eyes.
Their mutual feelings were visible in their four eyes;
They found they were unable to control their emotions.
As for Ch'en Ching-chi:
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"I must have met her somewhere before, she looks so familiar."
The middle-aged woman who was tall of stature looked hard at Ch'en Ching-chi and said, "Sir, are you not Son-in-law Ch'en from the household of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing?"
Ch'en Ching-chi was startled by this and said, "How were you able to recognize me?"
"I will not deceive you," the woman replied. "I am the wife of his former manager Han Tao-kuo, and this girl is my daughter Ai-chieh."
"The two of you were residing in the Eastern Capital," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "so how have you happened to turn up here? And where is your husband?"
"He is on one of the barges, looking after our belongings," the woman replied.
Ch'en Ching-chi immediately responded by ordering a waiter to go invite him into his presence. Before long, Han Tao-kuo came in and greeted him with a bow. His hair and whiskers had already begun to turn gray.
He then went on to explain the recent events in the capital, saying, "At court, Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, Defender-in-chief T'ung Kuan, Minister of the Right Li Pang-yen, Defender-in-chief Chu Mien, Defender-in-chief Kao Ch'iu, and Eunuch Director Li Yen, all six of them, have been impeached in a memorial to the throne by the national university student Ch'en Tung.[16] His allegations have subsequently been supported by numerous other memorials
from the supervising secretaries and censors. As a result, an imperial edict has come down, ordering them to be remanded to the Three Judicial Offices for interrogation, and they have been sentenced to perpetual military servitude in areas suffering from poisonous miasmas. [17] The grand preceptor's son, Minister of Rites Ts'ai Yu, has been executed, and his property has been confiscated by the state. The three of us were forced to flee for our lives and made our way to my younger brother Han the Second's place in Ch'ing-ho district, only to find that his house has been sold, and that he has fled to who knows where. The three of us, consequently, hired barges and traveled here on the canal, but we scarcely anticipated that we would run into you here.
Such good fortune would suffice for three lives."
He then went on to ask, "Son-in-law, are you still a member of His Honor Hsi-men Ch'ing's household?"
Ch'en Ching-chi explained the preceding events, saying, "I am no longer a member of his household but am serving as a counselor in the household of my cousin's husband Commandant Chou Hsiu and have been granted the right to distinguish myself by wearing an official cap and girdle. At present, I am supporting myself by operating this tavern on the dock with the help of two managers. Since you have run into me, there is no reason for you to move out. It will not be a problem if you choose to reside here for a while. Please feel free to do as you like."
The woman and Han Tao-kuo both kowtowed to him in gratitude and, after finishing their conversation, went back to moving their belongings off the barges.
As he looked on, Ch'en Ching-chi was moved to tell his servant Little Chiang and the "cribber" Ch'en the Third to help them move some of their things, at which Wang Liu-erh said, "There is no need, Son-in-law, for you to go to such trouble on our behalf."
They were both pleased at this exchange, and Ch'en Ching-chi went on to say, "After all, you and I were originally members of the same household. What need is there to quibble about it?"
When Ch'en Ching-chi noticed that:
The light was beginning to wane,
and that it was about four o'clock in the afternoon, he decided to go home and told his managers to take care of supplying their new tenants with boxes of tea and goodies in the morning. He then mounted his horse and set out for home, accompanied by his servant. All night long:
His every thought and every consideration,[18]

was concentrated on Han Ai-chieh, whom he could not put out of his mind.
After spending a day at home, on the following day, he got up early, dressed himself appropriately, and returned to the tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing, accompanied by his servant Little Chiang, where he proceeded to look on for a while as his managers conducted their business.
Han Tao-kuo happened to send a servant over to invite him to come to their quarters for a serving of tea. Ch'en Ching-chi had been hoping for a chance to see Han Ai-chieh again, so when the servant arrived with his invitation, he promptly got up and went inside.
Lo and behold, Han Ai-chieh came out to meet him and greeted him with:
Such a smile you could have plucked it off her face;
bowing to him, and saying, "Sir, please come in and take a seat."
Ch'en Ching-chi went into the chamber and sat down, while Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh came out to keep him company. It did not take them long to finish a serving of tea, as they chatted back and forth about their memories of the past. While this was going on, Ch'en Ching-chi gazed continually at Han Ai-chieh, while Ai-chieh's pair of eyes, like autumn ripples, were fixed infatuatedly on Ch'en Ching-chi. It was clear that they both had the same idea in mind. There is a poem that testifies to this:
Her narrow and upturned shoe-tips are
formed of florid silk;
Her fragrant flesh and creamy breasts
resemble sculpted jade.
Her lovely person is hardly sustained
by her lissome waist;
A bosomful of unexpressed resentment
puckers her eyebrows.[19]
After a little while, Han Tao-kuo went outside, and Han Ai-chieh turned to Ch'en Ching-chi and asked, "Sir, how old are you?"
"I'm twenty-five," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "May I make bold to ask, sister, how old are you?"
Han Ai-chieh smiled at this, and said, "Sir:
We must have been fated to meet.[20]
I, too, am twenty-five years old. We met each other as members of His Honor's household in the past, and now we have been fortunate enough to meet again. Truly:
Those with affinities will meet though
separated by a thousand li."
When Wang Liu-erh observed that the conversation between them had started to warm up, she sensed what was going on and made an excuse to go out herself, leaving the two of them sitting together face to face. Han Ai-chieh then resorted to the use of suggestive language in the endeavor to entice Ch'en Ching-chi. Ch'en Ching-chi, who had been familiar with such matters since his youth, could not fail to understand her intentions and started to get up and leave.
This Han Ai-chieh had colluded with her mother in plying this trade during their journey from the Eastern Capital; and while she had resided in the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching, she had served as majordomo Chai Ch'ien's concubine. When it came to poetry, lyrics, songs, or rhapsodies, as well as the works of the hundred schools, she was acquainted with them all, and there was little she was not familiar with.
Upon seeing Ch'en Ching-chi get up and prepare to go out, and observing that they were alone, she went up close to him and sat down, affecting the:
Coquetry and petulance of a spoiled child,
as she said, "Sir, let me take a look at that gold pin in your hair."
Ch'en Ching-chi was about to pull it out for her, when Han Ai-chieh grasped the knot of hair on top of his head with her hand and pulled out the pin, whereupon she stood up and said, "Why don't the two of us go upstairs and have a word together?"
As she spoke, on the one hand, and walked out, on the other, Ch'en Ching-chi felt compelled to follow her up the stairs. Truly:
Though you may be as devious as any demon,
You'll drink the water she's washed her feet in.
Ch'en Ching-chi followed her upstairs and then said, "Sister, what is it you want to say?"
Han Ai-chieh responded by saying, "You and I have:
A predestined affinity for each other.[21]
There is no need for you to pretend otherwise.
Let us share our fervor on pillow and mat,[22]
Enjoying the pleasures of connubial bliss."
"I fear we may be discovered by the people here," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "That would never do."
Han Ai-chieh, displaying a variety of voluptuous airs, hugged Ch'en Ching-chi around the waist and proceeded to pull down his trousers with her dainty jade-white hands. Both of them felt that:
Their lascivious excitement burned like fire,
And it proved utterly impossible to suppress.[23]
Han Ai-chieh felt driven to take off her clothes and recline face-up on the bed, where they proceeded to engage in intercourse with each other. Truly:
With lustful daring as big as the sky,
what is there to fear?
Amid mandarin duck curtains the clouds and rain:
a lifetime of passion.
In the course of their engagement, Ch'en Ching-chi asked, "What number are you known by?"
"I was born on the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month," responded Han Ai-chieh, "so I am known as Han the Fifth, but my personal name is Ai-chieh."
In no time at all, after:
The clouds dispersed and the rain evaporated,
they sat down next to each other, and Han Ai-chieh proceeded to say to Ch'en Ching-chi, "Ever since the time that the three of us fled from the Eastern Capital but were unable to locate our relatives, we have been short of living expenses. If you have the silver on hand, I beg you to lend five taels to my father. I will take the responsibility to repay you with interest. Pray don't refuse this request."
Ch'en Ching-chi agreed to her request, saying, "That's no problem. You have but to open your mouth and I will weigh out five taels of silver for you."
When Han Ai-chieh saw that he had agreed, she returned his gold pin to him, and the two of them then went on to sit together for what seemed like half a day.
Fearing that they might be subject to gossip, they drank a serving of tea, and Han Ai-chieh invited him to have lunch with her, but Ch'en Ching-chi said, "I've got something to do elsewhere, so I won't eat anything, but I'll send you the money you asked for in a little while."
Han Ai-chieh went on to say, "This afternoon, I will prepare a meager cup of watery wine to share with you. Pray don't refuse my invitation, sir, but come back to see me, no matter what."
When Ch'en Ching-chi had eaten lunch in the tavern's office, he took a casual stroll in the street and happened to run into his former fellow disciple from the Yen-kung Temple, Chin Tsung-ming, whom he greeted with a bow and regaled with the story of his subsequent adventures.
"Worthy brother," responded Chin Tsung-ming, "I did not know that you had been acknowledged as a relative by the household of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu, or that you had opened a thriving business in that tavern.
I have been remiss in not coming to pay my respects.[24]
Tomorrow, I will send a junior disciple to deliver a gift of tea to you. Please come to the temple for a visit when you have the time to do so."
Upon finishing their conversation, Chin Tsung-ming went back to the temple.
When Ch'en Ching-chi returned to the tavern, Manager Lu Ping-i reported to him, "That fellow named Han who is residing here has invited you for a drink, but I didn't know where to find you."
By a lucky coincidence, Han Tao-kuo's servant happened to come back at this point and said, "You are invited, sir, and your two managers are invited as well to keep you company. There are no other guests."
Ch'en Ching-chi, along with his two managers, then proceeded to go into their room, where a repast had already been neatly laid out, consisting of fish, pork, vegetables, fruits, and the like. Ch'en Ching-chi sat down in the place of honor, while Han Tao-kuo assumed the position of host, and Lu Ping-i and Fatty Hsieh were seated to either side. Wang Liu-erh and Han Ai-chieh sat down respectfully on the sidelines, while their servant came back and forth to serve the wine and refreshments.
After drinking a few cups of wine, the two managers, sensing what was afoot, said, "Sir, pray continue to drink at your leisure. The two of us will go back and man the counter."
So saying, they got up and left.
Ch'en Ching-chi was not accustomed to drinking heavily, but when he saw that the managers had left, he relaxed and downed another few cups of wine with the three members of the Han family, until he began to feel somewhat intoxicated.
Han Ai-chieh then ventured to say to him, "Sir, today there is no need for you to go home."
"It is already too late for me to return home by now," said Ch'en Ching-chi. "I might as well go home tomorrow."
When Wang Liu-erh and Han Tao-kuo had drunk with them for a while, they went downstairs, and Ch'en Ching-chi then pulled five taels of silver out of his sleeve and presented it to Han Ai-chieh, who went down and turned it over to Wang Liu-erh, before coming back upstairs. What with:
The sharing of glasses and passing of cups,
Hugging the turquoise and cuddling the red,
they then continued drinking together until the evening fell, at which point Han Ai-chieh:
Divested herself of her fancy attire,[25]
and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to spend the night with her in her upstairs room. On this occasion, what with:
Oaths by the pillowside to be faithful as the hills,
Promises under the quilts to be as true as the seas;
Giving forth oriole's notes and swallow's cries,
They enjoyed to the full their mutual affection;[26]
But it is impossible to evoke all that they did.[27]
When Han Ai-chieh had gone to the Eastern Capital, where she resided in the household of Grand Preceptor Ts'ai Ching and waited upon his elderly wife, she had learned to play musical instruments and sing, and also acquired the ability to read and write. Upon hearing about this, Ch'en Ching-chi:
Felt unable to constrain his pleasure,[28]
and found himself as attracted to her, as he had been to P'an Chin-lien. Consequently, the two of them proceeded to:
Frolic together the whole evening,[29]
And sleep together all night long.
As a result, they could not avoid sleeping until late the next day and did not get up until lunchtime, when Wang Liu-erh made a pick-me-up for them, containing eggs and pork meatballs, which the two of them consumed, along with several cups of warmed wine.
In a little while, one of his managers came in and invited Ch'en Ching-chi to join them for lunch, whereupon he put on his hairnet, performed his ablutions, got dressed, and went out to eat with them. When he had finished his meal, he came back to take leave of Han Ai-chieh before heading back home, but she did not want to let him go and made a show of shedding tears.
Ch'en Ching-chi responded by saying, "After I get home, I'll come to see you every three or five days. There's no reason for you to get upset."
When he had finished speaking, he mounted his horse and headed back to the city of Ch'ing-ho, accompanied by his servant.
Along the way, he said to Little Chiang, "When we get home you must not say anything about the Han family."
"I understand," responded Little Chiang. "There is no need for you to admonish me."
Upon arriving back at the commandant's residence, Ch'en Ching-chi claimed that business was so brisk at the tavern that by the time he had finished reckoning up the accounts it was too late to come home, so he had stayed overnight. He then handed over to Ch'un-mei the thirty-some taels of silver in the form of profits that had been realized since his last trip before going back to his own quarters.
When he arrived there, he was taken to task by Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who said, "What reason did you have for staying away overnight, unless you were out exploring:
The willow paths and flower lanes,[30]
of the licensed quarter? You left me at home, all by myself in an empty room, without a thought for returning home."
Thereafter, she insisted on keeping Ch'en Ching-chi at home for seven or eight days in a row, without letting him return to the dock at Lin-ch'ing. For her part, Han Ai-chieh noticed that he did not return for some time but merely sent Little Chiang to collect the profits from the managers, who wrapped up the silver for him to take home.
As a consequence, Han Tao-kuo felt obliged to have his wife, Wang Liu-erh, entice familiar customers or traveling merchants into their quarters to drink tea or wine. For some time, Han Tao-kuo had enjoyed the convenience of being dependent upon his wife for his livelihood. Moreover, though Wang Liu-erh was forty-five or forty-six years old, and could be said to be middle-aged, she still retained her charm. And now they were lucky enough to have this daughter, who was prepared to take her place, so that the business that was the source of their livelihood would not be interrupted, and they could continue to practice it in the open.
It so happens that when people without any official position, or other source of livelihood, depended on their wives for their support, the latter were known as clandestine harlots, or what are now known as unlicensed prostitutes.
At this time, when Ch'en Ching-chi failed to show up, the wine steward Ch'en the Third arranged for the silk merchant Magnate Ho to patronize Han Ai-chieh. This Magnate Ho, who was about fifty years old and had a thousand taels worth of silk and other piece goods at his disposal, was quite willing to patronize her, but Han Ai-chieh, who was still infatuated with Ch'en Ching-chi, claimed that she was feeling out of sorts and refused:
On three times and five occasions,[31]
to come downstairs, which Han Tao-kuo found extremely annoying. But when Magnate Ho observed that Wang Liu-erh was tall of stature, with a rosewood complexion; had a face shaped like a melon seed:
Painted her eyebrows and dressed her hair,[32]
so that she displayed long spit curls; possessed a seductive pair of starry eyes:
The glint in which suggested intoxication;
and that her lips were daubed bright red, he surmised that she must be a past master at amorous liaisons; offered a tael of silver for the privilege of sharing a drink in her quarters; and ended up spending the night with her. Han Tao-kuo kept out of the way by sleeping in an outer chamber, while his daughter, Han Ai-chieh, on seeing that her mother was entertaining a customer, remained on the upper floor, without coming down.
From this time on, Magnate Ho was rendered so happy by Wang Liu-erh that the two of them were:
As hot for each other as burning charcoal;
and he did not let more than two or three days go by without coming to spend the night with her. Han Tao-kuo, for his part, was thus able to pocket no small amount of his money.
When Han Ai-chieh saw that Ch'en Ching-chi had not come back to see her for more than ten days, she longed for him so that:
Each day was like three months of autumn;

Each night seemed like half a summer.
She couldn't help feeling affected by:
The eye alongside the wood, and
The heart beneath the field.[33]
She therefore sent their servant to the commandant's residence in the city to find out what was going on.
Upon encountering Ch'en Ching-chi's servant Little Chiang, he confidentially inquired, "Why has your master not gone to see her?"
"For the last few days," responded Little Chiang, "he has been feeling out of sorts and has not ventured outside."
When the servant returned and told Han Ai-chieh what he had heard, she consulted with Wang Liu-erh about it and then purchased a set of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two fresh fish, and a box of cookies; after which, in her upstairs room, she:
Ground her ink and picked up her brush,
Spreading out some flowered stationery,[34]
and wrote out a note, which she entrusted to the servant to deliver to Ch'en Ching-chi.
She then placed the presents in boxes, turned them over to the servant to carry, and enjoined him, saying, "When you enter the city and see Master Ch'en, you must hand these things over to him personally, and ask him for an answering note."
The servant proceeded to tuck the note into his sleeve and take charge of the gifts, but of the events of his trip there is nothing to tell. Upon entering the city, he went up to the front of the commandant's yamen and sat down on the stone stylobate.
Who should appear at this juncture but the servant Little Chiang, who happened to come outside, and on seeing him asked, "What have you come again for?"
The Han family servant greeted him with a bow and then pulled him to an out-of-the-way spot, saying, "I've come to deliver some gifts to your master and have something to say to him. I'll wait for him here, if you will be good enough to let him know that I'm here."
Little Chiang promptly turned around and went inside, and it was not long before Ch'en Ching-chi swaggered into sight. It was the fifth month at the time, and the weather was swelteringly hot. Ch'en Ching-chi was dressed in an outfit of thin silk, wore a tile-ridged hat, held in place with a gold pin, on his head, while his feet were clad in sandals and white socks.
The Han family servant hastily bowed to him, saying, "Master, are you feeling somewhat better? Han Ai-chieh has commissioned me to deliver a note and some presents to you."
Ch'en Ching-chi accepted the note and said, "Is Han Ai-chieh well?"
"On observing that you have not visited her for so long," he replied, "she is suffering from heartache. She wishes to send you her regards and would like to know when you might come to see her again."
Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to open up the note and saw that it read as follows:
RESPECTFULLY INDITED WITH STRAIGHTENED SKIRTS TO HER LOVER MASTER CH'EN BY HIS HUMBLE CONCUBINE HAN AI-CHIEH.
Ever since parting from your distinguished countenance,[35] my heartfelt admiration for you[36] has not abated even slightly,[37] but has remained suspended and unforgotten in my heart. Since you promised to return, I have been leaning on the door gazing fixedly into the distance [38] but have failed to see you deigning to visit my humble abode. The other day, I sent a servant to ask after you, but he returned without having seen you, [39] although he heard that you were suffering from some ailment. This has filled my breast with such regret that I remain depressed whether sitting or lying down. Alas, I am not able to sprout a pair of wings so that I might fly to your side. Since you possess a captivating wife to love you at home, you cannot be expected to think of me but have spit me out like the seed of a fruit. I am sending you some boxes of savory foods as a meager expression of my sincere concern for you, and I hope that you will accept them with a smile.[40] I trust my sentiments will be apparent as I am unable to express myself more fully.[41]
In addition I am providing a brocade perfume sachet embroidered with mandarin ducks, and containing a lock of my black hair,[42] as a paltry expression of my heartfelt feelings.
The twentieth day of the middle month of summer.

*Your humble concubine Han Ai-chieh salutes you.*

When Ch'en Ching-chi had read the note, he looked over the perfume sachet and found that it contained a lock of black hair and was embroidered with the motif of two mandarin ducks, and eight characters that read:
Admiringly tendered to my lover,
I'll follow you wherever you go.
He then folded it up as before and concealed it in his sleeve.
There was a wine shop next door to the commandant's yamen, and Ch'en Ching-chi told Little Chiang, "Take the Han family servant into the wine shop to have a drink of wine while he waits for me to write an answering note."
He then went on to tell Little Chiang, "Take these presents into my room, and if the mistress asks anything about them, just say that they were sent to me by Manager Hsieh from our tavern in Lin-ch'ing."
Little Chiang did not dare to be remiss and proceeded to take the four boxes of gifts inside. Ch'en Ching-chi then went into the library and secretively composed an answering note; after which, he wrapped up five taels of silver and, going out to the wine shop, asked the Han family servant if he had enjoyed a drink or not.
"Thank you for the fine wine, sir," the servant responded. "I can't drink any more and am ready to be on my way."
Ch'en Ching-chi gave the silver and the answering note to the servant and said, "When you get home, convey my respects to Han Ai-chieh. These five taels of silver are meant as a contribution toward her living expenses. I will come to see her in the next two or three days."
The Han family servant then went downstairs, and Ch'en Ching-chi escorted him out the door of the wine shop and saw him off.
When Ch'en Ching-chi went into his living quarters, Ko Ts'ui-p'ing asked him, "Who was it who sent these gifts?"
"It was Fatty Hsieh, the manager of the tavern," responded Ch'en Ching-chi. "He had heard that I was not feeling well and sent these gifts as an expression of his concern."
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing believed his explanation. The two of them then, after consulting with each other, sent the maidservant Chin Ch'ien-erh to take a platter with one of the roast ducks, one of the fresh fish, and half a set of the pig's trotters back to the rear compound for Ch'un-mei to eat. She told her that they had been sent by one of the managers of the tavern, and she did not raise any questions about it. Now that this matter has been explained we will say no more about it.
To resume our story, when the Han family servant reached the dock at Lin-ch'ing it was already late in the day, and on entering the door, he handed the silver and the answering note to Han Ai-chieh. On opening the note and perusing it by lamplight, she saw that it read as follows:
RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED IN REPLY TO THE DRESSING TABLE OF HIS INAMORATA HAN AI-CHIEH.
I am much obliged to you for the generosity you displayed toward me at our previous meeting. The sentiments inspired by our love making, and the affection you displayed on pillow and mat, have not been forgotten. I have been intending to hasten to our expected reunion, but a temporary indisposition has forced me to disappoint your expectations. You have also sent someone to ask after me, and present me with these mouth-watering delicacies, for which my gratitude is impossible to contain. In the next two or three days I should be able to thank you in person. I am also sending you five taels of silver, and a silk handkerchief, as a meager expression of my regard, which I sincerely hope you will accept, and deign to appreciate.

*Signed: Respectfully presented by Ch'en Ching-chi*

When Han Ai-chieh had read the note, she saw that a poetic quatrain had been inscribed on the handkerchief, that read as follows:
The handkerchief of Wu silk is inscribed
with a palindrome;
From a flourish of my writing brush the
ink is still fresh.
I have dedicated it to my affectionate
love Han Ai-chieh;
That we may enjoy the century-long love
of mating phoenixes.[43]
When she had finished reading it, Han Ai-chieh handed over the silver to Wang Liu-erh, and mother and daughter gave vent to:
A thousand or ten thousand signs of joy,
in anticipation of Ch'en Ching-chi's return. But no more of this.
Truly:
When a favored friend arrives, one's feelings
can never be satiated;
When a real confidant shows up, conversation
is mutually agreeable.
A poem testifies to this:

Beneath the green gauze window, I opened the seal of your letter;
The paper with its cloud-soaring geese is redolent with perfume.
I know the flourishes of your brush are done with your jade hand;
But your loving thoughts are seen only in what is left unsaid.

In the house of pleasure
The girls adorn themselves with powder and rouge.
When they are idle, they sit down
Looking at the flowers.
When they hear the old melody, they are sad,
But when they would go back to the old country
Where is now their home?
Before the mirror her cloudy hair is but half dressed;
Her tears flow and her silken gown is wet.
Today, once more, she met Pai Ssū-ma before the wine cups
And told her sorrow, playing the lute.
One day Major Zhou and Zhang Shuye, the magistrate of Jinan, took their forces and attacked the bandits of Liangshan. The thirty-six leaders of the bandits and more than ten thousand of their men were captured and order was restored. The victory was reported to his Majesty. The Emperor was pleased and promoted Zhang to be Censor and Commissioner in Shandong. Zhou was promoted to be general in Jinan to command all the forces there, guard the river, and pursue bandits and thieves wherever they might be. All Zhou's officers were advanced one degree in rank. Chen Jingji's name was put on the list, and he was appointed Counselor. Every month he was to draw two measures of rice. Now he was able to wear ceremonial hat and girdle, much to his delight.
In the middle of the tenth month, the new general was permitted by the Emperor to bring back his soldiers. He sent runners in advance to bring the news to Chunmei. She was delighted. She sent Jingji, Li An and Zhang Sheng to meet her husband outside the city. At the same time she prepared a banquet in the great hall to do honor to her husband. A number of officers came with presents.
When Zhou reached home, he went to the hall in the inner court and there his two wives welcomed him. Jingji, dressed in scarlet ceremonial gown, with hat, boots, and girdle, came with his wife. Zhou admired the bride and gave her a dress with ten taels of silver so that she might have some ornaments made. In the evening. Chunmei and her husband talked over the business of the household.
"My cousin's wedding, I am afraid, has cost you a great deal of money," Chunmei said.
"He is your cousin," Zhou said, "and since he has come to make his home with us, we could hardly leave him without a wife. We have spent some money, it is true, but he is not a stranger."
"Now you have secured this honor for him, it is indeed all that he can ask," Chunmei said.
"His Majesty has commanded me to go to Jinanfu to take up my new appointment," the General said, "but I shall not take you with me. We will give your cousin some money to set him up in business with someone. He need only go to look at the accounts every three or five days. If he makes any profit, it will be something for him to live on."
"That is an excellent idea," Chunmei said. They were very happy together and went to bed.
The General only spent ten days at home. Then he started for Jinan to take up his new appointment. It was the beginning of the eleventh month. He took Zhang Sheng and Li An with him and left Zhou Ren and Zhou Yi to look after his house. Jingji went as far as the Temple of Eternal Felicity to speed the General on his way.
One day Chunmei said to the young man: "My husband thinks you should go into business with a partner. If you make any money, it will be yours."
Jingji was delighted. He went out to find a suitable partner and, by chance, met his old friend Lu Bingyi on the street.
"Brother, I haven't seen you for a very long time," Lu said, bowing.
"My wife died, and I had a lawsuit," Jingji said. "Then Yang the Elder stole all my property and I was completely cleaned out. Now things are better again. My cousin married Major Zhou. I went to her, and she found a wife for me. Now I am a counselor and have the right to wear ceremonial robes and hat. I am looking for someone to go into partnership with me, but I haven't found anybody yet."
"After Yang the Elder stole your things," Lu told him, "he started a wineshop at Linqing. He is a partner of Xie. Besides owning that wine-shop, he is acting as a moneylender and doing very well. He lends to the people of Linqing and especially the singing girls. He wears smart clothes and eats good food. Every few days he gets on a donkey and goes to the wine house to collect his share of the takings. He doesn't care for his old friends any more. His younger brother has turned his place into a gambling den. He still keeps dogs and goes in for cock-fighting, and nobody dares to interfere with him."
"I saw him last year," Jingji said. "Instead of showing me the least kindness, he struck me. Fortunately a friend saved me from him. I hate that man as though my very marrow were imbued with hatred."
He took Lu to a wine house on the street, and they talked of finding a way by which Jingji could get his revenge.
"There is an old saying," Lu said, "that if a gentleman hates at all, he hates well. A great man must have a hand that can deal out ruin. When you come to deal with him, you must remember that unless you see a man's coffin, you do not weep for him. I have an idea. Brother, all you need do is to make out an accusation, send it to the court, and demand the money and goods that Yang stole from you. We can get his wine house. Then we need only add a little capital and carry on the place as a business ourselves. I will go and help Xie to manage it, and you can come every few days to go through the accounts. I am sure you would make more than a hundred taels a month. I can think of nothing else that would pay so well."
"Brother, you are right," Jingji said. "I will go and speak to my cousin and her husband about it. If we can get hold of that business, I will let you and Xie manage it."
They drank their wine, went downstairs and paid the reckoning. Jingji impressed upon his companion the necessity for keeping the matter secret, and they parted. When he got home, he mentioned the matter to Chunmei. "The General is not at home," he said. "What can we do about it?"
Zhang Sheng was there. He said: "Uncle, all you need do is to write out your accusation and say how much was stolen. Then seal it up with the General's card and I will send it to the magistrates. They will certainly order Yang's arrest, and, when he has been punished, we shall get the money."
Jingji wrote out an accusation at once. He put the General's card with it and gave it to Zhou Zhong to take to the courts. When Zhou Zhong came in, the two magistrates were in the hall hearing a case, but when they heard that Zhou had sent them a letter they called Zhou Zhong before them at once. They asked him about his master's new appointment, then opened the envelope and took out the card and the accusation. They were only too anxious to do anything for the General and issued a warrant for Yang's arrest at once. Then they gave Zhou Zhong a return card, and said: "Give our respects to your mistress and tell her that we will send you word when we get the money out of Yang." Zhou Zhong took the card and went home.
"The magistrates ordered Yang's arrest," he told Chunmei. "They say we have only to wait, and they will get the money back for us." Jingji looked at the card. It bore the words: "He Yongshou and Zhang Maode kowtow." He was very pleased. Two days later, the Yang brothers were arrested and the magistrates tried them upon the accusation Jingji had brought against them. They beat them and cast them into prison. Then the two Yangs gave up three hundred and fifty taels of silver, a hundred rolls of cloth, and the wineshop was valued at fifty taels. The total sum that Chen Jingji had mentioned was nine hundred taels, so they were still three hundred and fifty taels short. Yang sold his house for fifty, and was utterly ruined. Thus Jingji came into possession of the great wine house and went into partnership with Xie. Chunmei gave him five hundred taels more, so that he had a thousand taels in all. He made Lu Bingyi his manager. They redecorated the whole place, painted the walls, and brightened up the balconies. Everything was made to look new, even the tables.

It was about the middle of the first month when Jingji started this business, and every day they took thirty or fifty taels. Xie and Lu managed everything between them, and Jingji only came every few days. He used to ride there on horseback with a boy in attendance, and Lu and Xie always had an especially beautiful room prepared for him upstairs. They gave him wine and food and picked out the most beautiful singing girls for his benefit. Chen the Third was a waiter there.

One day in the third month, the Spring was bright and beautiful and everything sweet and fragrant. The willows and the locust trees on the banks of the river were wonderfully green, and the pink apricot and peach flowers seemed like embroidery. Jingji, leaning on the railing of his balcony, admired the exquisite scene.

The breeze blows softly
The mist enwraps the embroidered earth like a mantle.
In this season of peace the days grow longer
The hero's spirit grows lighter
And the beautiful maidens are happy once more.
The willows on the river's bank lengthen their branches
A pole is set beside the apricot tree.
The young man has not done all he would
Yet now he can enjoy the singing
And make his way into the world of dreams
To which wine leads.

As Jingji was looking down, he saw two small boats draw to the wharf. They were weighed down by boxes and furniture. Four or five men began to carry these things to the rooms downstairs. On the boat were two women, one middle-aged, tall, and dark-complexioned; the other young and very fair, her face powdered. She seemed about twenty years old. They entered the wine house.

"Who are they?" Jingji said to Xie. "Why did they walk in so haughtily instead of asking leave?"

"They have come from the Eastern Capital to visit a kinsman," Xie told him. "They cannot find a house, so they asked our neighbor Fan to give them a room. They are only going to stay two or three days. I was going to tell you about them when you asked me."

Jingji felt annoyed, but the younger of the two women came and made a reverence to him. "Sir," she said, "please do not be angry. It is not your manager's fault, but mine. We need a room so much that we came without giving you notice. I am very sorry. We shall stay only for a few days. Then we will pay for our rooms and go away."

Jingji listened to these soothing words and looked at the young woman from head to foot. She gazed at him with star-like eyes. Jingji thought: "I have seen this woman before." Then he looked at the other woman, and she looked hard at him.

"Are you not Ximen Qing's son-in-law?" she said to him.

Jingji was taken aback. "How did you know?" he said.

"I am Han Daoguo's wife," the older woman said, "and this is my daughter Han Aijie."

"But you and your husband live in the Eastern Capital," Jingji said. "What are you doing here? Where is your husband?"

"My husband is on the boat seeing to the furniture," the woman said.

Jingji ordered a waiter to go and bring Han. After a while he came. His hair was now white.

"Chen Dong," he said, "of the Imperial Academy, brought an accusation against six of the highest ministers of the Court. They were Cai, the Imperial Tutor; Tong, the Grand Marshal; Li, the Minister of the Right; Grand Marshal Zhu, Grand Marshal Gao, and Grand Chamberlain Li. The Censors supported this indictment, and the Emperor accepted it. They were all arrested, brought before the Supreme Court, and sentenced to banishment for life. Cai Yu, the Imperial Tutor's son, has been executed and his property confiscated. We three ran for our lives. We went first to Qinghe to find my brother, but he has sold my house and disappeared. Then we took a boat and came here. I am very glad to meet you. Are you still in Ximen's household?"

"No," Jingji said, "I left there. Now I am a counselor in General Zhou's department. I have two partners here and keep this wine house for a living. Now that I have met you, I shan't let you go. You must stay here and make this place your own."

Han Daoguo and the women kowtowed to Jingji. They went on moving their things into the wine house. Jingji found things going too slowly, and ordered Chen the Third and a boy to help them. Wang Liu'er thanked him again.

"You really must not thank me," Jingji said. "We belong, as it were, to the same family."

It was late and Jingji began to think of going home. He told his manager to give Han everything he needed to eat and drink. Then he mounted his horse and went home with his boy. All night through, he could do nothing but think of Han Aijie.

Two days later he again dressed himself in his best clothes and went to the wine house with his boy. He attended to his business and then Han Daoguo asked him to take tea. As a matter of fact, he was thinking of going to them when the invitation was brought to him. He went to them. Han Aijie came smiling towards him and made a reverence. Then she asked him to go into their room. Wang Liu'er and Han Daoguo were both there. After tea they talked over past days. Jingji looked at Han Aijie and Aijie looked at him. They soon came to an understanding.

Before very long, Han Daoguo went out. Aijie asked Jingji how old he was, and he asked her. "We are both the same age," she said, smiling. "And we were both members of Ximen's household. Now we meet again here. It would really seem as though Destiny had brought us together over so many miles."

Wang Liu'er saw that they seemed to be on very good terms with one another. She made some excuse and left them. They now sat face to face, alone. Aijie spoke to him with sweet words that he could not fail to understand, for he had been used to the society of women ever since he was a child. He smiled at her.

Both Han Aijie and her mother, on their journey from the Eastern Capital, had done some traffic in their bodies. Now that the girl met Jingji she felt that Heaven had sent him to her. They seemed to understand and love each other without need for words. She came closer and sat beside him.

"Will you show me that gold pin in your hair?" she said. "I should like to look at it." But before he could take it out for her she had taken it out for herself. "Come upstairs," she said, smiling, "and I will tell you something." She led the way and Jingji, who was only waiting for such an opportunity, followed her immediately.

"Sister, what is it you wish to say to me," he asked when they were upstairs.

"You and I have come together today," Aijie said, "and to me it seems that Heaven has ordained our meeting. I am ready to enjoy with you the pleasures of the bed."

"I am grateful to you, Sister," Jingji said, "but aren't you afraid someone may find out?"

She put forth all her powers of fascination. She threw her arms around him and, with her dainty fingers, took down his trousers. Then they gave rein to their passion till they lost all control of themselves. She took off her clothes and gave herself to him.

Jingji asked what place she held in the family. "I was born on the Summer Day," she told him, "and they called me the Fifth Maid, but my name is Aijie."

When they had taken their fill of pleasure, they sat down again together. She put the gold pin back into his hair. "My parents and I came from the Eastern Capital to visit our kinsman," she said. "We are very poor, and, if you have any money with you, I will ask you to give my father five taels and I will pay it back to you with interest."

"I will lend it to him without interest, since you ask," Jingji said.

He gave her the five taels and sat with her for a long time. But he did not wish anyone else to know what was happening, so he would only take a cup of tea with her, and when she asked him to stay and have something to eat, he declined. "I can't stay now," he said, "I have some business to attend to. I will bring you some more money."

"This afternoon, I shall prepare a poor cup of wine for you," the girl said. "That you cannot refuse. You must come." Jingji took his dinner in the wine house and then went to the street for a stroll. In the street he met Jin Zongming, the monk of Yangong Temple. They talked about the things that had happened there.

"I didn't know you had settled down in the General's household and had set up this wineshop, or I would have come to see you," the monk said. "Tomorrow I will send a boy with some tea. I hope you will come to the temple when you have leisure."

Then the monk went his way, and Jingji went back to the wine house.

"Our guest Han has been asking for you," Lu said. "He is anxious to offer you some wine. But we could not find you."

As they spoke, a messenger came from Han Daoguo asking them, the two managers and Jingji, to go. They went. Wine and food were set out on the table. Jingji took the place of honor and Han Daoguo the host's place. The two managers, Lu and Xie, sat facing Wang Liu'er and Han Aijie. Han's servant heated the wine for them. After it had been around several times, the two managers began to see light. "You stay," they said to Jingji, "we must go and attend to business."

Jingji had not a steady head, but, when the two managers had gone, he drank without restraint. After a few cups he began to feel tipsy.

"I suppose you won't go home today," Han Aijie said to him.

"No," Jingji said, "it is late. I will stay until tomorrow."

Wang Liu'er and Han Daoguo went downstairs. Jingji gave five taels of silver to Han Aijie, and she went to give the money to her mother. Then she came back, and they went on drinking. They did not stop before sunset. Aijie took off her long coat and asked Jingji to stay with her. They spoke hot words of love together, and her voice was as sweet as an oriole's. They enjoyed every manner of love's delight.

When Han Aijie had lived in the Eastern Capital as Zhai's concubine, she had often visited the Imperial Tutor's mother. She had learned how to read and write, how to play various instruments, and sing. She had become accomplished and attractive, and Jingji found her equal in charm to Pan Jinlian herself. He sported with her all the night. It was late the next day when he rose, and Wang Liu'er prepared a meal for him. Then he and the girl drank a few cups of warm wine.

The managers invited the young man to have dinner with them. He dressed and went. Afterwards, he came back to say good-bye to Han Aijie. She hated to see him go away, and shed tears.

"Never mind," he said, "I will come and see you again in a few days." Then he mounted his horse and, with his boy following, went back to the city. On the way, he warned the boy that he must not mention the Hans to anyone at home. The boy assured him that he did not need to be told.

When they reached home, Jingji told them that he had had so much to do that he had not been able to come back the night before and had spent the night at the wine house. He gave Chunmei the money he had brought back with him, about thirty taels. His wife, Cuiping, suspected that he had been with another woman and had left her alone at home. Now she clung to him for seven or eight days and would not allow him to go to the wine house. The boy was sent to fetch the week's money.

Han Daoguo was in such need of money that he had to tell his wife to get some other man, a merchant or one of those who came to take tea or to drink in the wine house. He had found before that he was well able to live upon his wife's earnings. It was true that she was growing older, but there was Han Aijie to take her place, and no reason why the business should come to an end. They even followed it openly.

When Chen Jingji did not come back, the waiter Chen the Third found them a merchant from Huzhou. His name was He. He was about fifty years old and had silk goods with him worth a thousand taels. He was very anxious to have Han Aijie, but she was thinking of Jingji and made the excuse that she was unwell. Several times she refused to come down and see the merchant. Han Daoguo was greatly annoyed.

This merchant He saw that Wang Liu'er was tall and dark. Her hair was dressed in long braids and her starlike eyes were extremely seductive. Her lips were painted very red. He thought it undoubtful that she must be skilled in the arts of love, so he gave her a tael of silver and spent the night with her. Han Daoguo went to sleep somewhere else. Han Aijie did not come down. He enjoyed himself immensely. He became so attracted to Wang Liu'er that they were almost inseparable. Every two or three days he came to her and spent the night, and Han Daoguo was very well paid for his self-denial.

Han Aijie missed Jingji. She thought of him so much that one day seemed like three autumns and one night as long as half a summer. She was, in fact, utterly lovesick. At last she sent their old servant to the city to try to get news of her lover. He went to the General's house and secretly questioned the boy.

"Why does your master not come to the wine house any more?" he said.

"My master has not been very well," the boy said. "He has not been out at all."

The old man came back and told Han Aijie. She spoke to her mother, and they decided to buy a pair of pig's trotters, two roast ducks, two live fish, and a box of cakes. Han Aijie made some ink and wrote a card. They gave the things to the old man and told him to take them to Jingji. "When you get to the city," Han Aijie told him, "you must take the things to Master Chen yourself and get a return card from him."

The old man tucked the card away and took the things to General Zhou's. He sat down on a large block of stone. After a while the boy came out.

"What are you doing here again?" the boy asked him.

The old man bowed to him and took him aside.

"I have come to see your master and brought him some presents. Go and tell him I am waiting here to see him."

The boy went into the house, and very soon Jingji came gaily out. It was the fifth month and very hot. He was wearing the lightest of clothes, a brimmed hat, summer shoes, and white socks. The old man bowed to him.

"Master," he said, "are you better? Han Aijie has sent me with these things. Here is her card."

Jingji took it. "How is she?" he said.

"She is not very well, now that you have been so long away from her," the old man said. "She told me to say that you must go."

Jingji looked at the card.

To my lover Chen [it said]. Ever since you left me, I have been thinking of you all the time. You promised me you would come back, and I have stood at the door and waited for you, yet you have never deigned to visit this poor place. Yesterday I sent our old servant for news of you, but he came back without seeing you. He heard only that you were not well. That word made me so sad that I cannot sit or lie down in peace. I wish I had wings that I might fly to you. You are at your own home, where you have a delightful lady to give you pleasure, and you think of me no more. I am like the kernel of a fruit that you have spat from your mouth. I send you some cakes and food to show my love for you. Please accept them with an indulgent smile, for my love knows no bounds. Your unworthy Han Aijie greets you.

Then came the words:

I am sending you an embroidered red bag with a lock of my hair to show how much I love you. The twentieth day of the second month of summer. Han Aijie again makes reverence to you.

Jingji read the letter and looked at the little bag. There was a lock of black hair in it, and, attached to it, a small label with the words "To my lover, Chen." He folded everything up as it had been before and put it in his sleeve.

Not far from the house there was a small wineshop. He told the boy to take the old man there and give him something to drink. "I am going to write a letter," he said. "Take in the presents and, if your mother asks whom they are from, tell her that my manager Xie at the wine house has sent them."

The boy took in the boxes. Jingji went to his study and secretly wrote a letter. Then he took five taels of silver and went to the wineshop.

"Have you had some wine?" he said to the old man.

"Yes, Master! Thank you very much. I can't drink any more because I must be going back."

Jingji gave the letter and the silver to the old man. "Tell Han Aijie," he said, "that she is to spend this money. I will come and see her in two or three days."

The old man took the letter and the silver and went away. When Jingji went home again, his wife asked him who had sent the presents.

"Xie, my manager at the wine house, heard that I was ill and he sent them."

His wife believed him. They gave one of the roast ducks, one fish, and one pig's trotter to Chunmei and told her that they had come from the manager of the wine house. Chunmei suspected nothing.

The sun had set when the old man came back to the wine house. He gave the silver and the letter to Han Aijie. She read it in the light of the lamp. It said:

Younger Brother Jingji kowtows to his beloved Han the Fifth. I thank you for your letter and the delightful gifts that came with it. I, too, feel the desire for clouds and rain, and have not forgotten the joys of the bed I tasted with you. I have thought all the time of coming to you, but I have been ill and you have been disappointed. It was good of you to send someone to see me and to give me such charming dishes and that exquisitely made embroidered bag. I thank you with all my heart. I am offering you five taels of silver and a silk handkerchief, as a token of my love's sincerity. I trust you will appreciate my gift. Jingji kowtows.

There was a short poem written on the handkerchief. Han Aijie read the poem and gave the silver to her mother. So both women were pleased. They waited eagerly for Jingji's coming.

## 122

## Liu the 2ND Drunkenly Curses Wang Liu-erh; Chang Sheng Wrathfully Kills Ch'en Ching-chi

*Some words of admonition:*

All of the forms of discontent,
Arise from lack of forbearance.
If you show patience to events,
Your perception will be bright.
Buddha's words reject argument,
Confucian texts abhor conflict.
This avenue leads to happiness,
But not many persons pursue it.[1]

THE STORY GOES that Ch'en Ching-chi allowed two days to pass, since the third day, the twenty-fifth of the fifth month, was his birthday. On that occasion, Ch'un-mei prepared a feast in the rear reception hall to celebrate his birthday, and the entire household joined in the festivities.

Early the next morning, Ch'en Ching-chi said to Ch'un-mei, "It is some time since I have been to the dock in Lin-ch'ing. Since I am not busy today, I plan to go there. In the first place, I will be able to go over the accounts with the managers of the tavern; and in the second place, I can avoid the stifling summer heat, and come back after my excursion."
Ch'un-mei said in response, "You should go in a sedan chair, and avoid any overexertion."
He then set out in a sedan chair, borne by two soldiers, and accompanied by Little Chiang, and headed straight for the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock in Lin-ch'ing, but of the events of his trip there is nothing to tell.
That afternoon, when he arrived in front of the tavern, got out of his sedan chair, and went inside, his two managers came out to welcome him, saying, "Sir, are you feeling somewhat better?"
Ch'en Ching-chi, whose mind was preoccupied with Han Ai-chieh, merely responded, "I fear I have put the two of you to the trouble of worrying about me."
After sitting with them for a while, he got up; told them, "Write out a copy of the accounts so I can look them over"; and then headed for the interior. The Han family servant came out to meet him and announced his arrival to Wang Liu-erh and her mate. Han Ai-chieh was in her upstairs room:
Leaning on the balustrade and gazing abroad,
Flourishing her brush and expending her ink,
as she composed a set of poems;
In order to dispel her lingering depression.[2]
When it was suddenly reported that Ch'en Ching-chi had arrived, she:
Lightly moved her lotus feet
Gently lifted her beige skirt,
and made her way downstairs, where mother and daughter greeted him with their faces wreathed in smiles, saying:
"The more eminent you are, the harder you are to see.[3]
What wind has blown you here today?"
Ch'en Ching-chi bowed in response to mother and daughter and then went into their room and sat down.
In a little while, Wang Liu-erh prepared a serving of tea for them, and when they had finished drinking it, Han Ai-chieh said, "Sir, please come upstairs and have a seat in my room."
Ch'en Ching-chi went upstairs as requested, and the two of them:
Just like fish in the water,[4]
Resembling lacquer and glue,[5]
did not fail to exchange words expressing:
Deep-felt love and intimate feelings.[6]
A sheet of flowery stationery was sticking out from under Han Ai-chieh's inkstone, and Ch'en Ching-chi picked it up to look at.
Han Ai-chieh explained, "Those are several poems that I wrote in my room up here while longing for you during my leisured hours, in order to:
While away my lingering depression.[7]
But I fear they may be unworthy of your distinguished eyes."
Ch'en Ching-chi then proceeded to peruse them, and they read as follows:
*Spring*
Leaning languidly against the embroidered bed,
I'm too depressed to move;[8]
Languorously unfastening my embroidered sash,
I let my hair tumble down.
Ever since my jadelike lover has departed
I have had no news of him;
Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day
I can only yearn for him.[9]
*Summer*
From a high vantage point on the lofty tower
I gaze into the clear radiance;
The rose blossoms covering the entire arbor
are clothed in rare fragrance.
I have spent idle hours leaning over every
one of the twelve balustrades;[10]
As the perfumed breeze from the south has
begun to penetrate my garments.
*Autumn*
Within the cold hibiscus-blossom curtains
I am unable even to dream;
Since my understanding lover has left me
I can only grieve for him.
The tears I shed upon my pillow are like
the raindrops on the steps;
Outside the window they drip unceasingly
right up till the day dawns.[11]
*Winter*
Ashamed to face the caltrop-patterned mirror,
I retouch my unblemished makeup;
I have withered away on my loved one's account,
losing the freshness of my complexion.
Closing the door, I am no longer concerned
with the idle breeze and moonlight;
And will henceforth instruct the plum blossoms
to do whatever they please.[12]
When Ch'en Ching-chi had finished perusing the poems:
Expressing the most fulsome admiration,
He praised them endlessly to the skies.
Before long, Wang Liu-erh prepared wine and delicacies and brought them upstairs, where she moved the mirror stand out of the way and laid them out on Han Ai-chieh's dressing table.
The two of them sat down next to each other, and Han Ai-chieh proceeded to pour out a cup of wine and proffer it to Ch'en Ching-chi with both hands, bowing deeply to him, and saying, "Sir, during the whole time that you failed to visit me, I could not get you out of my mind for even a moment. But when our servant returned with your contribution toward our living expenses, our whole family:
Felt they could not thank you enough."[13]
Ch'en Ching-chi took the proffered wine in his hand and bowed in return, saying, "It was my trivial indisposition that prevented me from keeping our engagement. Please do not hold it against me."
After downing his wine, he poured another cup and proffered it respectfully to Han Ai-chieh. When she had drunk it, they sat down together and prepared to enjoy some more. Wang Liu-erh and Han Tao-kuo also came upstairs to share a few cups with them but found excuses to go downstairs again in a little while, leaving the two of them to drink together, and share their experiences during the time they had been separated.
After some time, as they drank until they began to feel the effects of the wine:
Their lascivious excitement burned like fire,
and they could not help recapitulating their former passion for each other.
As they engaged in intercourse,
Their affection knew no bounds.[14]
Getting up and putting on their clothes, they washed their hands and resumed drinking. After downing several more cups:
As their drunken eyes grew bleary,
Their residual lust had not faded.[15]
Ever since the last time they had met, the young man had been unhappy at home, and his mind had been so preoccupied with Han Ai-chieh that he had not engaged in intercourse with his wife. On this occasion, when reunited with his inamorata:
He was reluctant to call a halt,
after only one engagement. Truly, like:
Alive or dead predestined lovers,[16]
For the foregoing five centuries,
they had finally been thrown together, and Ch'en Ching-chi's psyche was led completely astray by her. In a little while:
His lustful feelings rose again,
and they engaged in intercourse a second time; after which, he felt that:
His body was so utterly fatigued,[17]
That he could carry on no longer.[18]
He had not eaten anything for lunch and simply collapsed onto the bed and went to sleep.[19]
It turned out to be one of those occasions when:
A disaster was destined to occur.
Unexpectedly, the silk merchant Magnate Ho showed up down below, and Wang Liu-erh entertained him with wine on the ground floor, while Han Tao-kuo went out onto the street to purchase vegetables, delicacies, and fruits to go with the wine. During his absence, the two of them engaged in intercourse, after which, Han Tao-kuo returned with the foodstuffs he had purchased, and the three of them drank several more cups of wine together.
About the time that the sun began to sink in the west, who should appear but the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, the proprietor of My Own Tavern, who was stinking drunk, and whose shirt was hanging open to reveal a torso of purple flesh.
With his fists raised on high, he strode into the ground floor of the tavern and shouted loudly, "Drag out the southerner Magnate Ho so I can beat him up."
This startled the two managers, who were afraid that Ch'en Ching-chi, who was asleep on the second floor, would hear him; so they hastily emerged from behind the counter, came forward, and bowed to him, saying, "Brother Liu the Second, Magnate Ho has not been here."
Liu the Second was not persuaded by this and strode into the interior in large strides, where he tore aside the portiere leading into Han Tao-kuo's quarters with one hand and found that Magnate Ho was inside, sitting shoulder to shoulder with Wang Liu-erh, and drinking wine.
Enraged by this, he cursed at Magnate Ho, saying, "You lousy servile dog! I'll fuck your mother! I've looked everywhere for you, but now I've found you. You've been maintaining two powdered faces in my tavern but have failed to pay them for their services on more than one occasion. In addition to which, you have not paid your rent for the last two months but have been coming over here to make out with another woman."
Magnate Ho hastily came outside and said, "Liu the Second, please go home. I'll come after you."
"You'll come after me, will you, you dog-fucked creature!" Liu the Second cursed at him.
Without any warning, he sent a clenched fist whistling his way that flew right into Magnate Ho's face, creating instantaneously a swollen purple bruise. When Magnate Ho got to his feet he managed to escape out the open door.
Liu the Second then knocked over Wang Liu-erh's table with a single kick of his foot, smashing all the utensils on it; at which Wang Liu-erh cursed at him, saying, "Who do you think you are, you death-defying, lousy, gallows bird, to break into my room for no good reason, only to let off your farts? I'm not the sort of woman who feels:
Inured to such alarms."
Liu the Second responded by stepping forward and giving her a single kick that knocked her flat on her back, and cursed at her, saying, "You whore, I'll fuck your mother! What are you but a nameless unlicensed prostitute, who did not come register yourself with me; as though I would let you get away with plying your trade in this tavern. You had better move out at once. If you delay, I'll subject you to a real beating with my fists."
"What sort of a 'bare stick' or 'knockabout' do you think you are?" retorted Wang Liu-erh. "Do you suppose I have no relatives of my own, so that you can get away with taking advantage of me? What do I want with this life of mine anyway?"
So saying, she plopped down on the ground and began to cry.
"You whore!" Liu the Second cursed at her, "I'll kick you in the entrails until they break. You still don't seem to understand who I am."
The uproar they created was such that, in no time at all, the neighbors to either side, as well as the pedestrians in the street, gathered around them in considerable numbers.
One of the bystanders, who did not comprehend the situation, said to her, "Wang Liu-erh, you are a newcomer and do not know that he is the renowned Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, who is the brother-in-law of Inspector Chang Sheng on the staff of His Honor Commandant Chou Hsiu. He is the proprietor of My Own Tavern and is:
A foreman among the beaters of trollops;
A leader among the abusers of drunkards.

You would do well to cut him some slack, rather than acting as though you:
Don't know what is in your own interest.[20]
No one around here dares to cross him."
"There are people even more powerful than he is," responded Wang Liu-erh. "What reason is there to worry about that gallows bird?"
When Lu Ping-i saw how rough Liu the Second was getting, he and Fatty Hsieh:
Resorting to both appeals and threats,
succeeded in persuading him to leave.
Ch'en Ching-chi was still lying in bed at the time, and when he heard the disturbance on the floor below and got up to see what was going on, the sun was already setting in the west.
When he asked what was going on, Han Tao-kuo was nowhere to be seen, but he ran into Wang Liu-erh, who was coming up the stairs:
With disheveled hair and a soiled face,[21]
and said to him, thus and so, "Some gallows bird of a 'knockabout,' who is known as the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second, who is the proprietor of My Own Tavern, and who claims to be the brother-in-law of Inspector Chang Sheng from the commandant's household, came looking for one of his customers, kicked and beat me for no good reason, and cursed me out before finally leaving. He also smashed our crockery and wine vessels to smithereens."
So saying, she started to weep out loud. Ch'en Ching-chi then called up the two managers to ask them what had happened, but the two of them could only:
Gaze at each other in astonishment,
without daring to utter a word.
Finally, Manager Lu Ping-i, who had a glib tongue, explained, "It was the brother-in-law of the head servant Chang Sheng from the commandant's household, who came here looking for Magnate Ho. He claimed that he owed him two month's rent, and that he had also come to collect the unpaid fees for the services of the prostitutes he had been patronizing at his place. When he saw that he was in Wang Liu-erh's quarters drinking wine:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he tore the portiere aside and struck Magnate Ho a blow with his fist, which frightened Magnate Ho so much that he fled the scene. He then went on to quarrel with Han Tao-kuo's wife, kicking her over with his foot; and the rumpus thus created attracted the attention of all the pedestrians in the street, who crowded in to see what was going on."
Ch'en Ching-chi was worried about creating an incident this late in the day and ordered them to disperse the crowd. He then asked what had become of that rascal Liu the Second, and the two managers told him that they had persuaded him to leave.
On hearing this, Ch'en Ching-chi:
Made a point of remembering it;
and then did his best to placate Wang Liu-erh and her daughter, saying, "Leave it to me. There is nothing to worry about. The two of you, mother and daughter, can continue to live here. When I get home, I'll take care of it."
When the managers had calculated the interest earned since his last visit and turned the silver over to him, Ch'en Ching-chi got up to go, mounted his steed, and, followed by his servant, whipped up his horse and departed. By the time he made it inside the city wall, the sky was already dark, and he was not in a good mood. On arriving home, he went to see Ch'un-mei, turned the interest money over to her, and then returned to his own quarters. Concerning that evening there is nothing more to relate.
The next day:
His every thought and every consideration,
told him that he should tell Ch'un-mei what had happened, but as he contemplated it, he said to himself, "I'd better hold off on it, and wait until I can find some serious faults with Chang Sheng, and get my cousin to persuade His Honor to put an end to him. I cannot tolerate the fact that he has shown more than once that he is not to be trusted. He dares to point out that it was he who located me and knows the truth about my origins, so he figures that I am at his mercy." Truly:
Getting revenge on one's enemies is often
accomplished this way;
When the opportunity arises, one does not
need to seek far for it.
Though you wear out shoes of iron without
finding what you seek;
In the end you may find it without making
any effort whatsoever.[22]
One day, Ch'en Ching-chi went back to the tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock and met with Han Ai-chieh and her mother to discuss the fright they had been exposed to on the previous occasion.
He also asked his Manager Lu Ping-i, "Has that rascal Liu the Second come back to bother you again?"
"Since he left the other day," responded Manager Lu, "he has not returned."
He also asked Han Ai-chieh whether or not Magnate Ho had come back for another visit.
After having something to eat, and checking over the accounts, Ch'en Ching-chi felt obliged to go back to Han Ai-chieh's room on the second floor, where the two of them spent some time engaged in heartfelt conversation and also indulged in a bout of intercourse.
Upon coming out, he took advantage of his free time to call the wine steward Ch'en the Third into his presence and interrogate him, thus and so, as to whether Chang Sheng or Liu the Second were guilty of any serious misdemeanors that he knew of. This Ch'en the Third:
Though he never, ever, should have done it,
told him how Chang Sheng was keeping Sun Hsüeh-o, who had formerly been in his master's household, as his mistress in My Own Tavern. He also told him how Liu the Second lent money to the singing girls in the brothels at 30 percent interest and took advantage of His Honor the commandant's name to conduct his illicit business. Ch'en Ching-chi made a mental note of everything he had said.
After this, he gave two or three taels of silver to Han Ai-chieh for her living expenses, finished checking the accounts with his managers, wrapped up the money that had been earned as interest since his last visit, said farewell, mounted his horse, and set off for home. But enough of this idle chatter. [23] He had harbored the thought of revenge in his heart for some time. In the first place, it was a case of:
Two enemies confronting each other;
and in the second place, it was only to be expected that it might give rise to a catastrophe.
Unexpectedly, just at this time, in the Court in the Eastern Capital, Emperor Hui-tsung was confronted with the fact that the army of the Great Chin regime had crossed the borders of the realm and had penetrated far into the interior. The situation was urgent and the Son of Heaven was thrown into a panic. After consulting with his chief ministers, he dispatched an envoy to travel to the northern kingdom and sue for peace; expressing his willingness to pay an annual ransom of several million taels worth of gold and silver, and colored silk, in return for a settlement. He also abdicated his throne in favor of the crown prince, who changed the reign title from the seventh year of the Hsüan-ho reign period to the first year of the Ching-k'ang reign period and assumed the title of Emperor Ch'in-tsung. When his son had taken his place on the throne, the former Emperor Hui-tsung assumed the title Supreme Taoist Emperor Emeritus and retired to the Lung-te Kung, or Dragon Virtue Palace. The court then appointed Li Kang[24] to the post of minister of war, in charge of the armies of the various circuits; and Ch'ung Shih-tao[25] to the post of general-in-chief, responsible for military affairs both inside and outside the capital.
One day, an imperial edict came down, addressed to Chou Hsiu, the commandant of Chi-nan prefecture, promoting him to the post of commander-general of the Shantung region, in command of an army of ten thousand men, both infantry and cavalry, and ordering him to station his forces in Tung-ch'ang prefecture, where he should join forces with the grand coordinator and censor-in-chief Chang Shu-yeh in defending the territory and resisting the Chin armies.
Commandant Chou Hsiu was presiding in his yamen at the time, when his attendants came in and reported that an imperial edict had come down and invited him to formally receive it. Commandant Chou Hsiu did not dare to be remiss and knelt down before an incense stand in order to listen to the reading of the edict. The imperial messenger then proceeded to declaim it out loud, and the text read as follows:
The edict from the Emperor, whose sovereignty is ordained by Heaven, states:[26]
We have heard that the civil arts establish peace in the country,[27] while military prowess serves to stabilize the realm. The Three August Ones relied on rites and music to establish their kingdoms; the Five Emperors [28] used military campaigns to secure their empires. Undertakings may go smoothly or with difficulty; men may be sagely or foolish.[29] We have inherited the unshakable foundation bequeathed by Our ancestors;[30] and the weighty position passed on to Us by Our predecessor. In performing Our myriad tasks We tremble with anxiety. In olden times, Shun subdued the four malefactors, and T'ang [31] drove out the Miao barbarians. Had they not deployed their armies, they could not have been victorious; had they not employed military might, they could not have established peace. Armies are the teeth and claws of the nation; military power determines the security of the realm. At the present time, the central plain is in danger of collapse, and the barbarians are in revolt. The Liao bandits have encroached upon Our borders from the west; and the Chin rebels have launched a southern invasion with their cavalry. The common people have been greatly afflicted;[32] and We are much concerned about their plight.[33] The military commissioner-in-chief of Shantung, Chou Hsiu, is a man of seasoned talent, and a commander capable of defending cities; who has repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary merit, and whose fidelity and courage are well-known. He deploys his troops strategically and knows how to lead them into battle. We hereby promote him to the posts of commander-general of the Shantung region, and defense commissioner of the four circuits. In concert with the grand coordinator and censor-in-chief of Shantung, Chang Shu-yeh, he is ordered to lead his infantry and cavalry to defend Kao-yang Pass; and to place the disposition of his forces and their battle orders under the jurisdiction of General-in-chief Ch'ung Shih-tao; in the hope of restoring peace to Our endangered society, and expelling the rebellious barbarians. Alas! The appointment of worthy men to office in order to set the country straight; and the willingness to put oneself in danger in order to protect the throne; are indications of the loyalty and sincerity of ministers and sons. Just as the recognition of the good and the rewarding of the worthy, in order to stimulate resistance toward the enemy, are among the important functions of the court. [34] Each of you should exert your loyalty to the utmost, in order to accomplish Our goals. This Imperial command must be obeyed.
Ordered on the stated day of the ninth month of the first year of the Ching-k'ang reign period.
When Commandant Chou Hsiu had listened to the reading of the edict, he sent the imperial messenger on his way. He then called in his two inspectors, Chang Sheng and Li An, and directed them to load up two carts with his trunks of luggage, valuables, and other belongings, and escort them back home.
It so happens that during the year he had served in office at Chi-nan he had amassed enormous sums of gold and silver, which he now stowed in his trunks of luggage and turned over to his two trusted servants, saying, "When you arrive home and have stored this material safely away, be sure to keep watch over the premises by day and by night. Some day soon, in conjunction with the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh, I will take charge of the infantry and cavalry from the four circuits and set out for the front from Ch'ing-ho district."
That very day, Chang Sheng and Li An took care of loading the carts as they had been ordered to do and set out ahead of their master, but of the events of their trip there is nothing to tell. When they arrived home some days later and had stored the material safely away, the two of them proceeded to patrol the premises, by day and by night, both inside and out. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Ch'en Ching-chi saw that Chang Sheng had escorted the carts and come home, and learned that Commandant Chou Hsiu had been promoted to the office of commander-general of the Shantung region and would arrive back before long himself, he decided to reveal what was on his mind to Ch'un-mei, so that when the commandant returned they would jointly be able to disclose the incriminating evidence he had discovered about Chang Sheng.
Unexpectedly, one day, when his wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing was away from home visiting her mother, he was sleeping all by himself in the library on the west side of the courtyard when Ch'un-mei came in to see him early in the morning. Upon observing that there were no maidservants about, the two of them took off their clothes and proceeded to engage in the game of clouds and rain with each other.
What they did not anticipate was that Chang Sheng, ringing his bell as he patrolled the premises, should pass by the postern gate, and overhear what sounded like female laughter coming from inside the library. He immediately silenced his bell and crept slowly up to the window in order to eavesdrop on what was going on.
He found out that Ch'un-mei was inside, engaged in intercourse with Ch'en Ching-chi, and overheard him saying to her, "I can't put up any longer with that rascal Chang Sheng, who is trying to keep me under his thumb by reminding me that it was thanks to him that I was located, and rescued from the plight I was in. He has run me down in front of the other servants more than once. Recently, when he learned that I had opened a tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, he encouraged his brother-in-law, the Turf-protecting Tiger, Liu the Second, to take advantage of your husband's prestige in order to get away with operating a brothel for unlicensed prostitutes, and exploiting them as a loan shark. He is also maintaining Sun Hsüeh-o as his kept mistress in a separate location, and keeping you in the dark about all these things. The other day, his brother-in-law Liu the Second actually forced his way into my tavern and drove the customers away. I have been keeping quiet about these things, not venturing to tell you about them, but now that your husband is on his way home, if we don't let him know about all this, I will not dare to continue doing business on the dock at Lin-ch'ing."
When Ch'un-mei heard this, she responded, "How can that rascal act so improperly? I sold that menial creature Sun Hsüeh-o into prostitution. How can he presume to maintain her in a separate location as his kept mistress?"
"He is not only taking advantage of me," said Ch'en Ching-chi, "but is taking advantage of you as well."
"When His Honor arrives home," pronounced Ch'un-mei, "I'll see that he gets rid of that rascal for good."
As the saying goes:
There are sure to be ears on the other
side of the wall;
How could there not be someone hidden
beyond the window?[35]
The two of them were preoccupied with what they were saying to each other inside the room and were quite unaware that Chang Sheng, who was lurking outside the window, overheard what they said so clearly that he might well have ejaculated:
"Is it not delightful?"
From his mouth no word was uttered, but
In his heart he thought to himself,
"Right now, they may be hatching a plot against my brother-in-law and myself, but I will act first by hatching a plot against them."
So saying, he discarded his bell, went out to the duty room in the front compound, where he picked up a steel-bladed dagger, and then:
The telling is slow, but
What happened was quick;
he sharpened the blade on a whetstone and strode into the library.
Who could have known that:
As providence would have it,
Ch'un-mei was not fated to die at his hands.
Lan-hua, her junior maidservant, had suddenly come out in a state of consternation and interrupted them, saying to Ch'un-mei, "Your son, the young squire Chin-ko, has come down with a fit of convulsions, and you had better go back to see how he is."
This alarmed Ch'un-mei so much that:
Covering two steps with every one,
she had rushed back to the rear compound to look after her child.
No sooner had she left than Chang Sheng burst into the library with dagger in hand, where he failed to see Ch'un-mei but found Ch'en Ching-chi lying under the bedcovers.
Upon seeing him come in, Ch'en Ching-chi cried out, "Ai-ya! What are you coming in here for?"
"I've come to kill you," Chang Sheng announced angrily. "How could you bring yourself to tell that whore that you intended to do me in? Was it not I who was responsible for rescuing you from your earlier predicament? And now you are:
Requiting kindness with enmity.
As the saying goes:
A black-headed beetle is not safe to rescue;[36]
If rescued it will end up eating your flesh.
Don't try to escape, but have a taste of my dagger.
This day a year from now will mark the
anniversary of your death."[37]

Ch'en Ching-chi, whose body was stark naked, had no place to hide, and tried to wrap himself in the quilt; but Chang Sheng tore it aside and jabbed him with the dagger, which penetrated between his ribs, causing his fresh blood to spurt out. When Chang Sheng saw that he was still struggling, he jabbed him in the chest once again, which left him:
No longer able to make a move;[38]
at which point, he grabbed him by the hair and cut off his head. Truly:
So long as one has three inches of breath,
one uses it a thousand ways;
But when the messenger of death shows up,
everything comes to an end.
It is pitiable, but Ch'en Ching-chi was no more than twenty-seven years old when he was made to:
Die an untimely death.
Chang Sheng, with his dagger in hand, proceeded to circle the room and look behind the bed for Ch'un-mei but could not find her, whereupon, he headed out toward the rear reception hall in large strides. When he reached the ceremonial gate between the front and rear compounds, he ran into Li An, who was carrying his watchman's bell and patrolling the premises.
No sooner did Li An see Chang Sheng come charging in like an avenging spirit, with dagger in hand, than he asked him, "Where are you headed?"
When Chang Sheng refused to respond and continued to charge ahead, Li An blocked his way, and Chang Sheng attempted to stab at him with his dagger.
Li An laughed sardonically at this and said, "My uncle is the famous military instructor known as the Shantung Yaksha Li Kuei, but there is no need for me to avail myself of the skills I have acquired from him."
As he spoke, his right foot shot up and kicked the dagger in his antagonist's hand to one side with a clattering sound. Chang Sheng was thrown into a panic by this, and the two of them fell to grappling with each other. But Li An tripped him up with his foot, so that he fell facedown to the ground, and then took off the belt around his waist and tied him up with it in no time at all.
The noise created by their struggle was overheard by Ch'un-mei in the rear compound, and Li An explained it to her, saying, "Chang Sheng came inside with a dagger in hand, but I have succeeded in subduing him."
Ch'un-mei had only just succeeded in coaxing Chin-ko back to consciousness, and when she heard these words she:
Turned pale with consternation,
and rushed out to the library, only to find the dead body of Ch'en Ching-chi lying there, with his:
Fresh blood flowing everywhere,[39]
at which she couldn't help starting to weep out loud.
She then sent someone to report the situation to his wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who hurried home as quickly as possible. When she saw the slain corpse of Ch'en Ching-chi, she:
Fell to the floor in tears,
Oblivious to human affairs.
Ch'un-mei helped her up until she regained consciousness; after which, she had the corpse removed, purchased a coffin in which it could be prepared for burial, and had Chang Sheng incarcerated in the lockup, while she waited for the commander-general to come home and deal with the affair.
In no more than a few days, since the military situation was urgent, and he had received orders to make haste, Commander-general Chou Hsiu managed to finish rounding up the infantry and cavalry from the various circuits and heard that the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh had already arrived in Tung-ch'ang prefecture and was waiting for him to join him there.
When he arrived home, Ch'un-mei told him how Ch'en Ching-chi had been killed by Chang Sheng, and Li An laid the murder weapon before him and knelt down to tell him what had happened. The commander-general was enraged by this and, taking his seat on the bench, had Chang Sheng brought before him, and:
Without discussing the pros and cons of the matter,
ordered his soldiers to give him a hundred strokes with the bamboo, taking turns as they beat him five strokes at a time. In no time at all he was beaten to death. He then lost no time in dispatching flag-bearing couriers to proceed to the Lin-ch'ing dock, take the Turf-protecting Tiger Liu the Second into custody, and bring him back in fetters.
Sun Hsüeh-o, on seeing that Liu the Second had been arrested, feared that she might be taken also, and going into her room:
Hanged herself until dead.
When the flag-bearing couriers brought Liu the Second back to the yamen, Commander-general Chou Hsiu ordered that he also should be given a hundred strokes with the bamboo, and he was beaten to death that very day. As a result:
The district of Ch'ing-ho
was dumbfounded;
The prefecture of Lin-ch'ing
was much disturbed.
Truly:
One who spends his life doing evil
and defying Heaven;
Will, one day, suffer retribution
from Heaven itself.[40]
There is a poem that testifies to this:
In being a person one should never
engage in deceit;[41]
Hovering three feet over one's head
there are the gods.[42]
If the doing of evil deeds received
no retribution;
The cruel people of this world would
devour each other.[43]
At the time, the commander-general, by ordering these two men to be beaten to death, succeeded in ridding the neighborhood of their harmful influence. He then ordered Li An to take care of returning the Hsieh Family Tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing to its original owner, and recovering the capital that had been invested in it. He also instructed Ch'un-mei to hold funeral services for Ch'en Ching-chi on the seven weekly commemorations of his death, and then to select an auspicious day on which to bury him on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city. He decided to leave Li An and Chou I to look after the household during his absence, and to take Chou Chung and Chou Jen to serve him at his military headquarters.
That evening, Ch'un-mei, along with Sun Erh-niang, hosted a farewell feast to see him off, at which, before she knew it, all of a sudden, she began to:
Shed two streams of tears,
and said, "Once you have set out, sir, there is no knowing when you will return. You must be careful when going into battle.
The barbarian troops are ruthless, and
They cannot be lightly confronted."[44]
"The two of you," responded the commander-general, "while you remain at home, must:
Cleanse your hearts and reduce your desires,[45]
while devoting yourselves to caring for my son. There is no need for you to worry about me. Since I have been the recipient of the Emperor's rank and emolument, I must:
Expend my loyalty to requite my country.[46]
As for:
Fortune or mischance, survival or death,
I can only leave them to Heaven."
When he had finished admonishing them, he went to bed for the night.
The next day, the infantry and cavalry under his command were all assembled outside the city wall waiting for him; and when the commander-general set out at their head, the men and horses were all in excellent order. Behold:
Signal flags flutter amid embroidered banners;
Painted drums resound along with bronze gongs.
Three-pronged pitchforks,
And five-pronged pitchforks,
Glitter like autumn frosts.
Spears as sharp as reeds,
And spears of tempered steel,
Proliferate like snowflakes.[47]
Buckler-bearing troops lead the way;
Strong bows and sturdy crossbows[48] come next.
Cannons are drawn behind their carts;
Battle-axes and lances follow in their wake.
The generals in their saddles,
Like the fierce tigers of the Southern Hills,[49]
Are ready for battle and given to combat.[50]
The horses they sit astride,
Like the coiled dragons of the Northern Seas,
Are adept at struggle and prone to fight.[51]
Truly, their blades and spears are as turbulent
as tumbling waters;
In fact, the men and horses sweep forward like
tempestuous winds.[52]
Of the events of their journey there is nothing to tell.
One day, they were met by a mounted scout who told them not to proceed any further and then led them up to the outskirts of Tung-ch'ang prefecture, at which point the commander-general dispatched a courier, bearing his blue commander's standard, to report their arrival and stationed his infantry and cavalry outside the city wall. When Grand Coordinator Chang Shu-yeh learned that Commander-general Chou Hsiu, and the infantry and cavalry under his command, had arrived, he went out to meet him, together with the prefect of Tung-ch'ang, Ta T'ien-tao. Upon arriving back in the courtroom of the prefectural yamen, and exchanging the conventional greetings, they sat down together to discuss the military situation, and the relative urgency of the information available to them.
After bivouacking overnight, the infantry and cavalry set out early the next morning in order to assume their duties in defending the front against the enemy. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when Han Ai-chieh and her mother, in the Hsieh Family Tavern on the Lin-ch'ing dock, learned of Ch'en Ching-chi's death, Han Ai-chieh gave herself over to weeping, by day and by night, and refused to consume either tea or food. She indicated that if she could only go to the commandant's yamen inside the city and be able to see Ch'en Ching-chi's corpse:
She'd be prepared to die if she must.
Her father and mother, along with others, did everything they could to talk her out of it, but she refused to be dissuaded. Han Tao-kuo, finding himself:
At a loss for what to do next,
sent their servant to the commandant's yamen, where he learned that Ch'en Ching-chi's corpse had already been encoffined and buried on the grounds of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city.
When the servant returned and reported this news, Han Ai-chieh expressed the desire to go burn paper money at his tomb, and weep over his grave, as an expression of her grief over the demise of their relationship. Her parents felt compelled to go along with this and proceeded to hire a sedan chair for her, and pay a visit to the Temple of Eternal Felicity. When they asked Abbot Tao-chien where the tomb was located, he ordered a novice to take them behind the temple and point out the location of the tomb.
Han Ai-chieh got out of the sedan chair, went in front of the tomb, lit the paper money, and bowed before it, calling out as she did so, "My darling brother:
I really looked forward to living in harmony
with you until our old age.
How could I have anticipated that this day you would be dead?"
So saying, she commenced to weep out loud and then fell down in a faint, knocking her head on the ground so hard that she lost consciousness. This threw Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh into a panic, and they rushed over to help her up, calling out to her as they did so, but she did not respond, which panicked them even further.
Who should appear at this juncture but Ch'un-mei and Ch'en Ching-chi's wife Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, who arrived in two sedan chairs to conduct the ceremony of revisiting the grave on the third day after the burial, accompanied by their attendants, carrying the three sacrificial animals and other ritual offerings, in order to burn paper money on behalf of the deceased. On their arrival, they saw a young woman, wearing plain white mourning garments and a mourning cap on her head, who had:
Fallen to the floor in tears,
while a man and a middle-aged woman were attempting to help her up, though she fell down again:
Oblivious to human affairs.
They were startled by this and asked where the man was from.
Han Tao-kuo and his wife came forward to greet them with a bow and told them what had happened up until that point, saying, "This is our daughter Han Ai-chieh."
When Ch'un-mei heard the name Han Ai-chieh she remembered that she had met her in Hsi-men Ch'ing's household in the past and also recognized Wang Liu-erh. Han Tao-kuo then went on to tell her all about how they had been forced to leave Ts'ai Ching's household in the Eastern Capital.

He then went on to explain, "Our daughter was acquainted with Master Ch'en Ching-chi but did not realize that he had died, and on finding out, wanted to come see his grave and burn paper money on his behalf. We did not anticipate that on arriving here she should collapse in tears this way."
The two of them then continued trying to resuscitate Han Ai-chieh for what seemed like half a day before she finally spit up a mouthful of sticky sputum and regained consciousness. She choked inarticulately for a while, before giving way to a fit of weeping.
She then got up and proceeded to kowtow to Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing four times:
Just as though inserting a taper in its holder;
while saying, "Although he and I were guilty of:
Cohabitation amid the dewdrops,
the two of us:
Swore to be as faithful as the hills,
And vowed to be as loyal as the seas.[53]
We looked forward to living in harmony
together until our old age.
Who could have known that:
Heaven should fail to comply with our wishes,[54]
and he should predecease me one day, leaving me:
On the ground on all fours?
While he was still alive, he gave me a handkerchief of Wu silk with a love poem in the form of a quatrain inscribed on it. I knew that he had a wife at home, but I was willing to subordinate myself to you as his concubine. In case you don't believe me, I'll show it to you."
So saying, she pulled the handkerchief of Wu silk with the quatrain inscribed on it out of her sleeve so Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing could read it. The poem read as follows:
The handkerchief of Wu silk is inscribed
with a palindrome;
From a flourish of my writing brush the
ink is still fresh.
I have dedicated it to my affectionate
love Han Ai-chieh;
That we may enjoy the century-long love
of mating phoenixes.
Han Ai-chieh went on to say, "I also gave him a little perfume sachet embroidered with two mandarin ducks, for him to suspend from his belt. It had double-headed lotus blossoms depicted on either side, on each petal of which I had stitched a character, so that they read:
Admiringly tendered to my lover,
I'll follow you wherever you go."
Ch'un-mei then asked Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, "Why did we not find this perfume sachet?"
"It was suspended inside his tunic," responded Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, "and I put it inside the casket when he was encoffined."
When they had finished offering their sacrifices before Ch'en Ching-chi's tomb, Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing invited the mother and daughter into the temple where a repast was prepared for them to eat. When Han Ai-chieh's parents saw that:
The light was beginning to wane,
they urged her to get ready to go, but she did not want to leave.
Kneeling down in front of Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing, she wept, saying, "I do not want to return with my mother and father. I would rather join you in wearing mourning and living as a widow, in order to honor our relationship, and show that:
While living I served as his concubine;
When dead I remain close to his spirit."
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing did not choose to say anything in response to this, but Ch'un-mei said, "My sister, I fear that someone still in the springtime of her youth as you are will find it difficult to remain chaste. The best years of your life will be wasted."
"Mistress," responded Han Ai-chieh, "how can you say such a thing? Having committed myself to him, even if:
My eyes were gouged out or my nose broken,
I would feel obliged to maintain my fidelity and swear never to marry anyone else."
She then turned to her parents and enjoined them, saying, "The two of you elders should return by yourselves. I wish to join my mistress and my sister as residents of their household."
Wang Liu-erh:
Shed tears from her eyes,
and wept, saying, "We had hoped that you would support the two of us in our old age. We have only just rescued you from:
A tiger's lair and a dragon's pond,[55]
and today you propose to abandon us."
All Han Ai-chieh said in response was, "I'll not go back with you. Even if you managed to take me with you, I'd only commit suicide." When Han Tao-kuo saw that his daughter was adamant about not returning with them, he and Wang Liu-erh cried together over her decision and shed tears as they set out for the tavern on the dock at Lin-ch'ing; while Han Ai-chieh joined Ch'un-mei and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing as they rode back to the commandant's yamen in their sedan chairs. On the way back, Wang Liu-erh could not bear the thought of relinquishing her daughter and wept over it repeatedly n sorrow and distress. Han Tao-kuo, for his part, feared that it was getting late and hired 2 horses to speed them on their way. Truly,

When the horse is slow and the mind beset,[56] the road ahead is endless,
One's person resembles floating duckweed[57] or tosses like tumbleweed.
There is only the moon as it hovers over the gates of the capital;
That shines indifferently on the grief of those going west and east.

There is a white cloud over the mountain
The leaves are red upon the trees.
They have seen the rise and fall of many things
Yet this world is as it has been always.
Many times the evening sun has passed over the fragrant grass
Many times the tide has ebbed and flowed
They have seen the generations come and go.
The way of Yuan
The road of Yang
They turn and twist like the guts of a sheep
And the wheels of the carriages go astray.
Where the horses neigh near the dreary bushes,
The strains of the recorder and the silver zither
Once were heard
And the sound of singing through the night.
Two days later, it was Chunmei's birthday, the twenty-fifth day of the fifth month. There was a feast in the hall of the inner court and the household kept holiday. The next morning, Jingji said: "I haven't been to the wine house for a very long time. Today I have nothing else to do, so I will go there. It will give me an opportunity to get away from this stifling heat, and I can go through the accounts with my managers."
"You must take a sedan chair and not tire yourself," Chunmei said. She ordered two men to take him in a chair. He set off with his boy and came to the wine house about noon. When he got out of his chair, the two managers welcomed him and asked if he were better. He thanked them, but he was really thinking about Han Aijie. He had hardly sat down before he was up again.
"Get your accounts ready," he said to the managers, "and I will go through them with you when I come back."
He went to the back of the house. There the Hans' old man saw him and hurried in to tell his people. Han Aijie was upstairs on the balcony, composing a poem. Gathering up her skirts, she ran swiftly downstairs. Mother and daughter smiled. "Sir," they said, "it is seldom that we are allowed the pleasure of seeing you. What good wind has blown you here?"
Jingji bowed to them, and they went together into the room and sat down. Wang Liu'er made tea. When they had drunk it, Han Aijie took the young man to her room. They were so delighted in each other's company that they were as merry as the fishes in the water, and they spoke the tenderest words to one another.
Under the ink slab there was a piece of colored paper. Jingji took it and looked at it. "That is the poem I have been writing," Han Aijie told him. "I was thinking of you when I wrote it, but I fear you will find it very bad." Jingji read it.
I rest upon the embroidered bed
And am too weary to move.
Alone, I pull down the silken curtain and bend my head.
My treasure has gone
And I have no message from him.
I think of him throughout the day.
Jingji told her the poem was delightful. Then Wang Liu'er brought them wine and food. She took away the mirror and set out the food on the toilet table. They sat down together and Aijie offered him a cup of wine with both hands. She made a reverence and said: "Since you went away, I have been thinking of you all the time. The other day our old man brought the money you sent, and my parents and I are grateful to you."
Jingji took the cup and bowed to her in return. "It was only because I was ill that I did not come to see you," he said. "I am sorry." He drank the wine and gave the cup back to her. Then they sat down again and drank together. Wang Liu'er and Han Daoguo came up and had some wine with them, but they went away again almost at once. They knew that the young couple would rather get on with their lovemaking.
When they had drunk wine enough, their blood was stirred. They did not only what they had done before, but many things that were new, and their love seemed limitless. Then they dressed again, washed their hands and went on drinking. After a few more cups their eyes sparkled, and they felt that still they were unsatisfied.
The young man had been very ill-content at home. He had been thinking of Han Aijie all the time and had not touched his wife. Now that he again met the girl he loved, he could not be satisfied with one encounter. Their love seemed to have been maturing for five hundred years. He was fascinated by her. Soon his passions were roused again and he set to. Then he felt weary and could do no more. Indeed, he did not even take any food, but simply lay down on the bed and went to sleep.
That day the silk merchant He came to the house. Wang Liu'er drank with him, and her husband went to the street to buy fresh vegetables and fruit. While he was out, the merchant and Wang Liu'er took their pleasure together. When he came back, all three drank together.
About sunset, Tiger Liu rushed into the wine house. He was drunk and his unbuttoned clothes revealed his purple flesh. His hands were clenched. "Where is that Southerner He?" he cried.
The two managers were alarmed. They knew that Jingji was asleep upstairs and did not wish him to be disturbed. "Brother Liu," they said to the Tiger, "he is not here." Liu would not believe them. He strode to Han Daoguo's room, tore the lattice aside, and went in. The merchant was sitting beside Wang Liu'er, drinking.
"Ha, you doggish pair!" he cried. "I have been looking for you everywhere and at last I've found you. You had two girls in my wineshop and you haven't paid them. You haven't paid your rent either, and here you are with another woman."
He stood up at once. "Don't be angry, my friend," he said. "I am just going."
"Going, are you, you dog?" Tiger Liu said, in a furious temper. He drove his fist into the merchant's face, so that it swelled up immediately. He did not trouble about his face; he was only anxious to get to the door and run away. Liu kicked over the table and smashed all the plates. Wang Liu'er cursed him.
"Who are you, you thief? How dare you come farting here? You won't bully me."
Liu went to her and knocked her down. "Who are you, strumpet?" he said. "What do you mean by coming here and practicing your trade in secret without asking my leave? I do not permit you to stay here. Clear out at once, or you will taste my fist."
"Rogue, who are you?" Wang Liu'er said. "I suppose you think I have no one here to defend me. Well, I won't live any longer." She banged her head on the floor and sobbed loudly.
"Woman, you don't frighten me," the Tiger said. "I shall smash your belly in."
There was so much shouting and quarreling that all the neighbors came to look on. One of them said to her: "Mistress Han, you have only just come here, or you would know that this is the famous Tiger Liu, the brother-in-law of Master Zhang of the General's office. He lives at a wine house, and singing girls are his specialty. It is he who controls all the wine drinkers in these parts. You must let him have his way. You don't know how powerful he is. Nobody here ever dares to offend him."
"There must be somebody over him," Wang Liu'er said. "Why should I do what he tells me?"
Lu, seeing the Tiger in a fury, at last succeeded in getting him away. Jingji had heard the noise downstairs. He saw that the sun was setting and got up to ask what all the noise was about. Han Daoguo had disappeared, but Wang Liu'er, her hair in disorder and her face dirty, ran upstairs and told him.
"I don't know who he is," she said. "I only know they call him Tiger. They say he is the brother-in-law of Zhang at the General's office. He came here to see one of the guests and struck and insulted me. He upset the table and smashed all the plates." She cried loudly.
Jingji sent for the two managers and questioned them. They could only tell him the truth. Liu the Second, they said, had come to look for the merchant He. He saw the man he sought in Han Daoguo's room, went in, pulled up the lattice, and struck him. He ran away, and then Liu quarreled with Mistress Han. He knocked her down and people came out of the street to see.
Then Jingji remembered that this Liu was the man who had beaten him in the days when he was a priest. He knew that Liu was too much for him to deal with, so he said no more at that time, except to ask where Liu was then. "We got him out," the managers said. Jingji tried to console Wang Liu'er. "Don't worry," he said. "I am here, and I will protect you. You stay where you are. I am going home, and I shall know how to deal with him." He took the money from his managers, got into his sedan chair, and went home. It was quite dark when he arrived. He was very angry. He gave all the money to Chunmei and went to bed. The next day, he was several times on the point of telling her about Wang Liu'er, but, whenever he thought about it, he decided to say nothing. "I will wait and see if Zhang Sheng does not do something wrong," he said to himself. "Then I will tell Chunmei, and the General will put an end to him. I have never sought trouble with that fellow, but he has bullied me several times. It is his fault, not mine."
One day, Jingji went again to the wine house. He saw the mother and daughter, and they talked about the quarrel.
"Has Liu the Second been here again?" Jingji asked.
"No," Wang Liu'er said, "not since that day."
Then he asked Han Aijie if the merchant He had been to see them again, and she said he had not.
Jingji had his dinner, examined the accounts, and went upstairs to amuse himself with Han Aijie. Then he sent for the waiter, Chen the Third, and asked him if he knew anything that could be held against either Zhang Sheng or Tiger Liu. The waiter told him how Zhang Sheng was keeping Xue'e, who was now a singing girl at the wine house. He told him, too, how Liu lent money to people at a very high rate of interest, and indeed brought much discredit upon the General's administration. Jingji listened very carefully to all this. He got his money from the managers, gave Han Aijie three taels, and took the rest away. Then he rode home. He never forgot the trouble between Liu and himself, and the hatred between them was so strong that it seemed certain that, if they met, trouble was inevitable.

About this time, Huizong, the Son of Heaven, heard at the Eastern Capital that the army of Jin had attacked the frontier and even plundered places on this side. The situation was serious. The Emperor held a conference with his ministers, and it was decided that an envoy should be sent to them to declare that the Emperor was ready to pay several millions of money every year for the sake of peace. At the same time, he abdicated in favor of his son. Thus the seventh year of Xuanhe became the first year of Jinkang , and the new Emperor took the title of Qinzong. The old Emperor called himself the Supreme Daoist Emperor and retired to the Palace of Dragon Virtue. The new Emperor placed Li Gang, the Minister of War, in command of the whole imperial army, and Chong Shidao was appointed Marshal and Generalissimo.

One day an order came to Jinanfu appointing Zhou to the command of all the troops in Shandong, and instructing him to take ten thousand men to garrison Dongchangfu. There he was to join the Censor, Zhang Shuye, and check the advance of the Jin army.

When Zhou received this order, he sent at once for Zhang Sheng and Li An, placed them in charge of his treasure, and sent them home with it. He had been in Shandong for nearly a year and had amassed a considerable amount of wealth. Everything was carefully packed and the men were instructed to take the utmost care of the valuables entrusted to them. The General told them that he would set out for his new appointment from Qinghe.

When the two men reached home, they handed over the treasure to Chunmei. Jingji saw that Zhang Sheng was back again, and heard from him of the General's new appointment, and that he would be home very shortly. He decided to tell Chunmei about Zhang Sheng, so that they could both tell the same tale to Zhou when he arrived.

One day his wife, Cuiping, went to see her mother, and he was asleep in the study when Chunmei suddenly came in. There was nobody about, and they undressed and took their pleasure of one another. At that moment, Zhang Sheng was making the rounds of the house with a bell. When he came to the door in the courtyard by the study, he heard the sound of a woman's laughter. He stopped ringing his bell and went quietly to the window; so he discovered what Chunmei and Jingji were about. He heard Jingji say how he hated Zhang Sheng, and how badly Zhang Sheng had treated him. He heard him say that Zhang Sheng had ordered his brother-in-law, Tiger Liu, to go to the wine house and drive away his customers. The Tiger, with Zhang Sheng behind him, was lending money to people. Zhang Sheng was also sleeping with Xue'e, and keeping the matter dark. "I kept the matter to myself," he said, "because I didn't wish to worry you. But now the General is coming back, and so I tell you. If I don't, I shall never be able to go to the wine house to attend to my business."

"What a scoundrel the fellow is," Chunmei cried. "I sold Xue'e. How dare he sleep with her?"

"He ill-treats me and he has no respect for you," Jingji said.

"Wait till my husband comes," Chunmei said, "and we'll get rid of him for good and all."

The pair never suspected that Zhang Sheng was outside the window and could hear every word they said.

"If I don't finish them, they will finish me," Zhang Sheng said to himself. He put down his bell and went to his room. There he took a dagger and sharpened it on a whetstone. Then he went to the study.

Fortunately, Heaven saved Chunmei's life. One of her maids called her away. The baby had fallen, she said, and asked her mistress to go and see him. She had just left the room when Zhang Sheng, with his dagger, entered it. Jingji was still in bed.

"What do you want?" Jingji said.

"Uncle, I have come to kill you. I was not seeking trouble, but you dared to tell that strumpet that I must die. The proverb says: Black-headed vermin should not be spared; they eat human flesh. Don't try to escape. My knife is waiting for you. A year from today will be your year's mind."

Jingji had not a stitch of clothing on him. He could not get away, but he gripped the bedclothes tightly. Zhang Sheng pulled them off. He drove the dagger into Jingji's side and the blood gushed forth. As the young man still struggled, Zhang Sheng drove his dagger into his breast. That was the end. Zhang Sheng grasped him by the hair and cut off his head. Jingji was only twenty-seven years old when he came to this miserable end.

Zhang Sheng, still grasping his dagger, went behind the bed to look for Chunmei, but she was not there. Then he rushed to the inner court. But when he came to the second door, Li An, who was also going the rounds, saw him coming like the god of wrath, dashing towards him with the dagger raised. He asked Zhang Sheng where he was going but got no answer. Then he stopped Zhang Sheng. Zhang Sheng pointed the dagger at him. Li An laughed. "My Uncle," he said, "is Li Gui the famous Demon of Shandong. You shall know what I can do." He lifted his right leg and kicked the dagger out of Zhang Sheng's hand. It fell with a clang on the floor. Zhang Sheng fought desperately, but Li An got him down and bound him with his girdle.

Chunmei heard the noise. Li An told her that he had secured Zhang Sheng. Chunmei, who had just finished seeing to the baby, was so frightened that she changed color. She rushed to the study and saw that Jingji had been killed. Blood was still running over the floor. She screamed. Then she told servants to go for Cuiping. The young wife came. When she saw that her husband had been murdered, she shrieked and then fainted. Chunmei helped her to her feet, sent to buy a coffin, and put the young man into it. Then she gave orders that Zhang Sheng should be thrown into prison for her husband to deal with.

When General Zhou returned, Chunmei told him of the murder of Jingji. Li An put the dagger before his master and told him what he knew of the story. The General was very angry. He went at once to the hall and called for Zhang Sheng to be brought before him. Without asking a single question, he ordered the attendants to give the man a hundred stripes. So Zhang Sheng was beaten to death. Then he sent to arrest the Tiger. When Liu was taken, Xue'e feared that she too might be arrested. She went to her own room and hanged herself. When Liu was brought before the General, he too was ordered a hundred stripes, and so he died. The news created a great stir in Qinghe and tremendous excitement in Linqing.

Man should avoid deceit
For above his head, God waits.
If they who do all manner of evil
Received not their reward
Then all the ruffians in the world
Would devour each other.

By this execution, the General rid the district of two devils. He bade Li An go to the wine house and give it back to its original owner, bringing back the things that belonged to him. He told Chunmei to hold a service for Jingji, and afterwards the young man was buried at the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the city. Then he gave orders that Li An and Zhou Yi should remain at home to look after the place, while he took with him Zhou Ren and Zhou Zhong.

In the evening. Chunmei and the Second Lady offered him wine before he left. They shed tears and said: "You are going away and we have no notion when you will come back. You must take care of yourself when you are in the battle. The barbarians are very strong, and you must not regard them lightly."

And the General said to them: "You who stay at home must be always prudent. Take care of my son. Don't trouble about me. I take the Emperor's pay, and I must render loyal service to my country. Whether I live or die is on the knees of Heaven."

The next day the troops assembled outside the city. The General took his place at their head, and they marched off. When, one day, they came to Dongchangfu, he ordered a soldier carrying a blue flag to go first into the city. This was a notification to the Commissioner Zhang Shuye that General Zhou's army had arrived. He came out with the Prefect of the place to receive the General, and they went together to their headquarters. There they discussed the military situation and sent out scouts to get news of the enemy. The next day the army set forth to defend the city.

When Han Aijie heard of Jingji's death, she cried day and night and would not take anything to eat. The only thing she could think of was going to the General's place to see the young man's body. She thought that if she could only do that she would be content. Her parents tried to console her, but still she insisted that she must go. Han Daoguo sent his old servant to get what news he could. The old man came back and told them that Jingji had already been buried at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. Then Han Aijie determined to go to the temple to burn some paper offerings for her lover. She would bewail him at his grave.

Her parents could do nothing to dissuade her, so they hired a sedan chair and took her to the temple. There they asked a monk where Jingji was buried, and the monk sent a boy to take them to the grave, behind the temple. Han Aijie got out of her sedan chair and burned some paper money. She made a reverence before the grave and said: "Oh, dearest brother, I had hoped that I might live with you always. Never did I think that you would die so young." She gave a great cry and fell fainting to the ground. Her parents were frightened and came to help her up. They called her, but she made no answer and they became more frightened still.

It was the third day after Jingji's funeral. Chunmei and Cuiping, in two sedan chairs with their servants following, came to burn papers and offer food to the dead. When they came near the grave, they saw a young woman dressed in mourning, lying on the ground, and a man and woman of middle age trying to revive her. But when she got up, she collapsed again in a faint. They were astonished and asked the man who the girl was.

Han Daoguo and his wife made reverence to them, and told them how they had known Chen Jingji, and that the girl was their daughter Han Aijie. Then Chunmei remembered her from the days in Ximen's house and recognized Wang Liu'er also. Han Daoguo told her how they had come to leave the Eastern Capital.

"My daughter was a friend of Master Chen," he said. "Now he is dead, she came to burn paper money for him. But she cried so bitterly that she fainted."

They went back to their daughter and again tried to bring her around. After a while Han Aijie spat out a little water and revived. She still sobbed, but not so loud as before. She kowtowed four times to Chunmei and Cuiping.

"Though I was only his mistress," she said, "we loved each other truly. I had hoped that I might always belong to him, but Heaven would have it otherwise and decreed his death. Now I am all alone in the world. When he was alive, he gave me a handkerchief on which he had written a poem. I knew he was married, but I was willing to serve only for his amusement. If you doubt me, look at this handkerchief." She showed it to them and they both read the poem.

"I gave him a little embroidered bag too," Han Aijie said, "and he always carried it about with him. It had double lotus blossoms on both sides, and on each of the petals I wrote a word. 'I offer this to Chen my lover,' I wrote."

Chunmei asked Cuiping if she knew of this little bag. "It was under his clothes," Cuiping said, "and I put it into the coffin with him."

When they had made their offerings at the grave, they took Han Aijie and her mother into the temple to have tea with them. It was late and Wang Liu'er wished to go home. Her daughter would not hear of it. She knelt down before Chunmei and Cuiping and wept. "I do not wish to go back with my parents," she said to them. "I wish to live with you. Then I can see his tablet every day. We were lovers, and I should like people to say that I had been his wife." Her tears fell like the water from a spring.

"Sister," Chunmei said, "I am afraid you are very young to live such a life. You will be wasting the best of your years."

"No, Lady," Han Aijie said. "For his sake, I would cut out my eyes and break my nose. I shall never marry anyone else."

"You go home, old people," she said to her parents. "I am going with these ladies."

"We have been hoping that you would support us in our old age," Wang Liu'er said, with tears. "We have only just brought you from the Dragon's Pool and then you leave us."

"I will not go back with you," Han Aijie declared, "and if you try to make me, I will kill myself.

Then Han Daoguo saw that his daughter had made up her mind. He and Wang Liu'er cried and went back to the wine house. Han Aijie got into a sedan chair with Chunmei and Cuiping and went to the city with them. Wang Liu'er thought of her daughter and wept all the time. Han Daoguo saw that it was late, so he hired two animals to take them back.

The horses are slow and the heart is eager
It is a hard road that they travel
They are like the weed that floats on the pond
The climbing plant that creeps along the wall.
The moon over the royal palace looks down Upon their parting
The parting of those who go to the east
From those who go to the west.

## 123
## Han Ai-chieh Seeks Her Father and Mother in Hu-chou; Ch'an Master P'u-ching Rescues Souls from Perdition & the End of Ximen's House

*Some words of admonition*

In this human life people should not rely upon heroism;
Their degrees of skill at their jobs are sure to differ.
Even fierce tigers are bound to meet more ferocious beasts;
The most poisonous serpents are also fearful of centipedes.
His seven captures of Meng Huo made Chu-ko Liang famous;[1]
For prevailing over Kuan Yü twice Lü Meng was admired.[2]
The judiciousness of Li An marked him as a prudent man;
And enabled him to fly high and evade his predicament.[3]

When Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh returned to the Hsieh Family Tavern without their daughter, they were faced with the prospect of:

Sitting at home as their resources ran out.[4]

They therefore sent Ch'en the Third to invite Magnate Ho to visit them as before. When Magnate Ho found out that Liu the Second had been killed by the local authorities, so that the threat that he posed was eliminated, he came back and resumed his affair with Wang Liu-erh.

In the course of a conversation with Han Tao-kuo, he said, "Since your daughter, Han Ai-chieh, is preserving her chastity as a member of the commandant's household, and refuses to come back, I propose that once I have sold off my shipment of merchandise, and collected what I am owed, the two of you can come with me on my return to my home in Hu-chou. That would surely be preferable to carrying on this business of yours here."

"If you deign to be so considerate of us, sir," responded Han Tao-kuo, "that would be wonderful."

One day, after Magnate Ho had sold off his merchandise, and collected what was owed him, he hired a boat and set out for Hu-chou, taking Han Tao-kuo and Wang Liu-erh with him.

To resume our story, when Han Ai-chieh had settled into Chou Hsiu's household, she and Ko Ts'ui-p'ing both remained chaste out of respect for Ch'en Ching-chi, addressed each other as sisters, and got along very well, spending their days keeping company with Ch'un-mei. At the time, Chou Chin-ko was already five years old, Sun Erh-niang's daughter Chou Yü-chieh was nine, and the women had nothing to do but look after the children.

Who would have thought that after the death of Ch'en Ching-chi, and Chou Hsiu's departure on his military campaign, despite the fact that every day Ch'un-mei enjoyed:

Delicacies of every variety, and
Clothes of satin and brocade;
while on her head:
What glitters is gold,
What is white is silver,
What are round are pearls,
What sparkle are jewels; and
She lacked for nothing;[5]
she found the nights difficult to endure:
Sleeping in solitude on her lonely pillow,[6]
While flames of desire consumed her heart.

She noticed that Li An was a handsome fellow and was impressed by the way in which, after the death of Chang Sheng, he had continued conscientiously to patrol the premises, both early and late.

One day, during the winter, he was on the night shift in the duty room when he heard someone knocking on the rear gate and promptly asked who it was; to which the only response was, "Just open the door."

Li An hastily unfastened the door only to see someone force their way inside and hide out of the lamplight. When Li An took a look at the person, he saw that it was the wet nurse Chin-kuei.

"Nurse," said Li An, "what are you doing here at such an hour?"

"I have not come on my own initiative," said Chin-kuei. "It is my mistress in the rear compound who sent me here."

"What did the mistress send you here for?" asked Li An.

Chin-kuei laughed, saying, "You wouldn't understand it. She wanted me to see if you had gone to sleep or not, and entrusted me with something to give to you."

So saying, she pulled a bag of clothing off her shoulder and said, "These are for you, and this bag also contains some women's clothing for your mother. The mistress feels much indebted to you for escorting His Honor's cartloads of luggage on the way home, and for saving her life. If it had not been for you, she also would have been slain by that rascal Chang Sheng."

When she had finished speaking, she left the clothes behind and went out the door.

After going only two steps, she turned around and said, "There is another item of importance."

So saying, she pulled out a large ingot of silver weighing fifty taels and tossed it to Li An, after which she continued on her way. The rest of the night passed without incident.

Early the next morning, Li An got up and went straight to his home, taking the clothes with him to give to his mother.

"Where did these things come from?" his mother asked.

Li An told her what had happened the night before; but when she had heard him out, his mother became upset and said, "At the outset, Chang Sheng committed a crime, for which she had him beaten to death with a hundred strokes of the bamboo. What could there be behind her giving you these things today? I am already more than sixty years old at present, and since the death of your father, you are the only person I have left to look to. If you do something that gets you into trouble, who would there be for me to depend on? You had better not go back there tomorrow morning."
"If I don't return," said Li An, "and she should send someone to fetch me, what will you have to say?"
"I will just tell them that you have come down with a severe cold," his mother said.
"If I should end up not returning," said Li An, "wouldn't that serve to make His Honor annoyed with me?"
"You might as well go visit your uncle the Shantung Yaksha Li Kuei," said his mother. "After staying there for a few months, you can come back to check out the situation."
Li An, who was both a filial and obedient son, opted to take his mother's suggestion and proceeded to pack up his luggage and set out for Ch'ing-chou prefecture in order to seek refuge with his uncle Li Kuei.
When Ch'un-mei saw that Li An had not returned, she sent a junior servant to summon him on three or five occasions. At first, his mother said that he was at home recuperating from an illness, but when she saw that people came back to check on the situation, she explained that he had returned to his native place to try to make a living. Ch'un-mei suffered heartfelt frustration at this news. But no more of this.
Time flies by swiftly;[7]
The sun and moon shoot back and forth like shuttles.[8]
The twelfth month ended and spring began,
During the primal decade of the first month.
Commander-general Chou Hsiu, at the head of his twelve thousand troops, had been encamped at Tung-ch'ang prefecture for some time, when he sent his servant Chou Chung to deliver a letter to his family, directing them to send Ch'un-mei and Sun Erh-niang to join him there, along with his children Chin-ko and Yü-chieh. When his dependents were ready to get into their carts and set out, they left only Chou Chung behind, having instructed him to go and invite Chou Hsiu's cousin Chou Hsüan to leave his country estate and come to look after the household during their absence.
It so happens that Commander-general Chou Hsiu had a cousin named Chou Hsüan who lived on his country estate, and who agreed to join Chou Chung in looking after the household along with Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh, while Chou Jen and a contingent of military guards escorted the vehicles of the other family members on their way to Tung-ch'ang prefecture. With regard to this trip, truly:
It was not to save their lives or reputations
that they left their home;
But how could they have known how few persons
survive such expeditions?
There is a set of verses that describes the heroic leadership of Commander-general Chou Hsiu. At this time, when the Central Plain was in a state of turmoil, it was his ambition to overcome the barbarians. Behold:
In all four quarters bandits arise
like swarming bees;
The flames of beacon fires flare up
turning the sky red.
A display of the general's wrath may
pacify the realm;
Sweeping away the barbarians, and
making them submit.
He has long chosen to prefer public
over private interests;
And pledged his life to his country
as if it were not his.
His dagger-axe can shroud the sun
to aid him in battle;
He is able to win the first place
in the Hall of Fame.
Beyond the Yen-men Pass the autumn
wind is tempestuous;
Clad in metal armor he must sleep
under the cold moon.
He has forced his steed to sweat
for twenty years;
Only to achieve streaks of snowy
white in his hair.
The Son of Heaven sees his worth
from miles away;
And has rewarded his efforts with
praise repeatedly.
A golden seal hangs at his elbow,
as big as a dipper;
As surely befits a hero of such
imposing stature.[9]
One day, under the supervision of Chou Jen, the vehicles that were carrying Chou Hsiu's dependents arrived in Tung-ch'ang. When the commander-general saw that Ch'un-mei, Sun Erh-niang, Chin-ko, and Yü-chieh, along with their attendants, had arrived, and that:
Their journey had been a safe one,[10]
he was utterly delighted and arranged for them to be housed in the rear compound of his headquarters.
Chou Jen told him, "I invited your cousin Chou Hsüan from your country estate to come and look after your household, along with my father Chou Chung."
Commander-general Chou Hsiu also asked, "Why is Li An nowhere to be seen?"
"Why bring up the subject of Li An?" Ch'un-mei expostulated. "Because I was feeling grateful to that rascal for apprehending Chang Sheng, I gave him two sets of clothes for his mother to wear. But that evening, while patrolling the premises, he went into the rear compound and made off with a package of fifty taels worth of rental income from your country estate that was lying on a table in the parlor. I sent servants to his mother's place to summon him a number of times, but he claimed to be sick and failed to return. And the last time I sent someone after him, he was told that he had absconded to his native place in Ch'ing-chou."
"That rascal," responded Chou Hsiu. "I had always treated him favorably, and he has turned out to be as ungrateful as that. When I have the time, I will send people there to arrest him."
Ch'un-mei chose not to mention anything about the affair of Han Ai-chieh. After some time had passed, Ch'un-mei observed that Chou Hsiu was preoccupied every day with military affairs and was utterly devoted to serving the national interest on the Emperor's behalf:
Straining his heart and taxing his mind,[11]
while not even taking the time to eat during the day. As for the gratification of sexual desires within the bed curtains, it was a long time since he had indulged in them. She observed that Chou I, the second son of the old family servant Chou Chung, was eighteen years old, possessed:
Clear-cut brows and sparkling eyes;
and was willing to:
Exchange looks with eyes and eyebrows.
Consequently, the two of them began a clandestine affair and became attached to each other.
Morning after morning and evening after evening,
the two of them played board games and drank wine together in her room, while the only person who remained unaware of what was going on was the commander-general.
Who could have anticipated that, one day, Emperor T'ai-tsung of the northern state, the Great Chin, having overcome the state of Liao, and observed that in the Eastern Capital of the Sung dynasty Emperor Ch'in-tsung had ascended the throne, assembled a powerful contingent of barbarian troops and launched a two-pronged invasion of the Central Plain. The grand marshal Nien-mo-ho led a force of one hundred thousand infantry and cavalry through the Ching-ching Pass in T'ai-yüan prefecture in an attempt to invade the Eastern Capital; while the secondary marshal Wo-li-pu led his forces from T'an-chou in an attempt to seize Kao-yang Pass. The Sung armies defending the frontier:
Proved unable to resist them.[12]
This information threw the minister of war Li Kang and the general-in-chief Ch'ung Shih-tao into a panic, and that very night they issued urgent military dispatches ordering the commander-generals of Shantung, Shansi, Honan, Hopei, Kuan-tung, and Shensi to muster the infantry and cavalry in their six jurisdictions, and occupy the strongholds therein, in order to defend their territories, and fend off the enemy. Consequently, Liu Yen-ch'ing, the commander-general of the Shensi region, led the forces of Yen-sui; Wang Ping, the commander-general of the Kuan-tung region, led the forces of Fen-chiang; Wang Huan, the commander-general of the Hopei region, led the forces of Wei-po; Hsin Hsing-tsung, the commander general of the Honan region, led the forces of Chang-te; Yang Wei-chung, the commander-general of the Shansi region, led the forces of Tse-lu; and Chou Hsiu, the commander-general of the Shantung region, led the forces of Ch'ing-yen against the Chin invaders.
To resume our story, when Commander-general Chou Hsiu learned that a powerful contingent of barbarian troops had come to attack the frontier, and received the urgent military dispatch from the Ministry of War, he mustered his infantry and cavalry:
Donned his complete suit of armor,[13]
And marched away at double stages.
By the time his mounted scouts reached the Kao-yang Pass the Chin marshal Wo-li-pu's infantry and cavalry had already penetrated the pass and slain an enormous number of men and horses.
This happened during the first decade of the fifth month.
The armies endeavored to arrest each other; but
Yellow sand flew up in all four directions, and
The tempestuous winds blinded their vision.
Chou Hsiu led his troops into battle, but the Chin commander Wo-li-pu, while urging his cavalry forward in a counterattack, launched an arrow that buried its shaft in his neck, penetrating his throat and causing him to fall off his horse and die. The enemy officers tried to secure his corpse with hooks and cords, but his own men dashed forward, seized his body, and carried it away on horseback. The soldiers wounded in this engagement were without number. Alas, on the day that Commander-general Chou Hsiu died in battle, he was only forty-six years old. Truly:
Loyal generals exert themselves to serve
their home and country;[14]
But the blood of both the worthy and the
stupid stains the sand.[15]
A man of yore whose thoughts on this subject were inexhaustible has left us a quatrain to express his feelings, which reads:
Victory and defeat are outcomes that military
men cannot anticipate;[16]
Security and danger in the final analysis are
things decided by fate.
Advancing to battle without obtaining victory
he dies before his time;[17]
The sun sets and the rivers flow in spite of
one's insuperable grief.[18]
There is also a lyric to the tune "Partridge Sky" that reads:
A handsome hero whose aim it was to stabilize
the state and pacify the land;[19]
His heart was motivated by correct principles[20]
and the will to rout the enemy.
He was as given to planning national affairs
as dealing with family matters;
And was practiced at carrying secret tallies
and wearing tiger-head tallies.[21]
The barbarian cavalry was invincible,
While the prowess of his men was lax.
His troops were unwilling to risk their lives
and his officers were inept.
It was a pity that he suffered such a death
upon the sandy battlefield;
And that for untold years his heroic spirit
could not find expression.
When the grand coordinator Chang Shu-yeh saw that Commander-general Chou Hsiu had perished on the battlefield, he immediately:

Sounded the gong for his troops to retire,[22]
took stock of his losses, withdrew to defend Tung-ch'ang, and submitted an urgent memorial to the throne. But no more of this.
When the retreating troops carried Chou Hsiu's corpse back to Tung-ch'ang, Ch'un-mei and her entire household, both high and low, were so upset that:
Their cries shook the heavens,
as they proceeded to encoffin the body and turn over his military credentials and official seals to the authorities. One day some time later, Ch'un-mei, along with her servant Chou Jen, took charge of the coffin and returned with it to Ch'ing-ho district. But no more of this. At this point our story divides into two.
To resume our story, ever since Ch'un-mei departed, Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh had stayed at home, where they:
Chose to consume only plain tea and simple fare,[23]
Remaining chaste and preserving their widowhood,
as the days and months passed by. One day, as spring expired and the summer began, when the scenery was bright and fresh, and the days grew longer, they became weary of their needlework, and the two of them strolled out to the ornamental pavilion outside the library on the west side of the courtyard, where they saw that:
The many flowers were in full bloom,[24]
Orioles sang and swallows chattered,[25]
and they were:
Touched with heartache by the scene.[26]
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's heart remained relatively unperturbed, but Han Ai-chieh could not get the thought of her lover Ch'en Ching-chi out of her mind. With regard to all things, she was:
Bereft of thought or feeling, and
Saddened by whatever she saw.[27]
The mouth divulges the sprouts of the mind,[28]
And gives shape to them in poetic language.
They took turns composing some quatrains that testify to this.
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:
As flowers bloom in the quiet courtyard
the sun begins to shine;
Outside the tightly locked double doors
the white day brightens.
Collapsed against the silver screen I
wake from my spring sleep;
Upon the branch of a green locust tree
I hear an oriole's cry.
Han Ai-chieh's read:
The spring season is coming to an end[29]
as the summer begins;
Meandering in my upturned shoe-tips I
venture out the door.
As evening comes I lean in depression
on my dressing table;
If I were to neatly paint my eyebrows[30]
for whom would it be?[31]
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:
Wiping the mirror with a red cloth by
light from the window;
I paint my mothlike eyebrows so they
slope to either side.
When my lotus feet are lightly animated[32]
where is there to go?
Smiling beside the stairs I pluck the
pomegranate blossoms.[33]
Han Ai-chieh's read:
My countenance looks like snow and my
spirit resembles jade;
I am not yet ready to banish romance
for fear of defilement.
As I gaze at my visage I pity myself
and also feel regret;
Who is left to savor the beauty of my
newly applied makeup?[34]
Ko Ts'ui-p'ing's read:
Sedge grass spreads over the ground
as thick as a rug;
Elm pods are strewn everywhere like
scattered coins.
Who could have foreseen that rascal
to be so fickle?
Drunken the whole day long he sleeps
under the flowers.
Han Ai-chieh's read:
Besetting sorrow continues to cause
my brows to peak;
Why has my face looked so distressed
for the last year?
Ever since we parted all day long my
soul is disturbed;
There is no road to Heaven that might
allow us to meet.
When the two sisters had finished reciting their quatrains, without their knowing it:
Tears trickled down their cheeks.[35]
Chou Hsüan came upon them at this point and admonished them, saying, "You two sisters ought not to disturb yourselves so. You would do better to stifle your sighs and examine your own conduct. I have had a number of dreams in the last few days that appear to be inauspicious. I dreamed of a bow hanging from a flagstaff, and the flagstaff appeared to be broken. But I don't know whether this should be interpreted as inauspicious or auspicious."
On hearing this, Han Ai-chieh remarked, "I fear it may portend that His Honor has suffered some mishap on the frontier."
As they were wondering about this, all of a sudden they saw their servant Chou Jen, dressed in mourning garments, and in a state of obvious agitation, who came in and reported, "A calamity has occurred. His Honor, thus and so, on the seventh day of the fifth month, was killed in battle at the frontier pass. The First Lady and the Second Lady, along with their dependents, have brought the cart with his bier home with them and have just arrived."
This threw Chou Hsüan into a state of consternation, and he promptly ordered that the front reception hall should be swept out and straightened up so that Chou Hsiu's coffin could lie in state there, and the sacrificial offerings could be formally presented. The entire household, both high and low, then proceeded to give voice to grievous lamentations, and Chou Hsüan made arrangements for funeral services to be held on the seven weekly commemorations of Chou Hsiu's death, and for Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to hold scripture readings on his behalf. His children, Chou Chin-ko and Chou Yü-chieh:
Donned hempen garments and put on mourning apparel;
while visitors came and went to offer their condolences. A day was chosen for the funeral procession, and he was duly buried in his family's ancestral graveyard. But there is no need to describe this in detail.
To resume our story, on behalf of his nephew the five-year-old Chou Chin-ko, Chou Hsüan submitted a memorial to the throne asking that an officially ordained sacrifice be offered at the site of Chou Hsiu's burial, and that his son should be allowed to succeed to his father's official position. An imperial decree was duly issued to the Ministry of War that read as follows:
The deceased Commander-general Chou Hsiu has devoted his life to repaying his country, and died in the course of serving the ruler. His loyalty and courage are worthy of commendation. Officers should be deputed to conduct a sacrificial ceremony at his grave site, and a tablet should be erected at the head of his tomb engraved with his posthumous title as commander-in-chief. His son should be properly nurtured until he reaches the age at which he can succeed to his father's hereditary position.
As for Ch'un-mei, when she was not caring for her son, her lascivious desires were stronger than ever, and she often kept Chou I in her perfumed boudoir for days at a time. As the mornings and evenings succeeded one another:
She indulged her lust without restraint,
until one day she came down with a hectic fever and other symptoms of consumption. Although she took medication for this every day, her appetite for food and drink diminished, her temperament became depressed, and:
Her body became as thin as a stick of kindling,[36]
but her lascivious desires did not abate.
One day, sometime after the celebration of her birthday, and during the hottest period of the summer in the sixth month, she was sleeping late when, unexpectedly, as she and Chou I embraced each other on her bed, and he had just ejaculated, a burst of cold air emerged from her nostrils, her vaginal secretions formed a pool on the bedding, and:
Alas and alack,
she expired on top of Chou I's body. At the time of her death she was only twenty-eight years old.
When Chou I realized that she was no longer breathing, he was reduced to a state of panic, stole some gold and silver and other valuables from her trunk, secreted them in his clothing, and fled from the premises. The maidservants and wet nurses:
Did not dare to conceal these events,[37]
and reported them to Chou Hsüan, who proceeded to put the family's senior servant Chou Chung in manacles and force him to help them track down Chou I.
Strange as it may seem,
he had gone to his aunt's home outside the city to seek refuge and was apprehended there, tied up with a length of rope, and brought back to face the music. Chou Hsüan understood what had happened but was afraid that if the scandal leaked out it might prevent Chou Chin-ko from succeeding to his father's hereditary position. He therefore had Chou I taken to the front reception hall where:
Without permitting any further explanation,
he had him beaten forty strokes with the heavy bamboo, which caused him to die on the spot.
Chou Hsüan then entrusted Chou Chin-ko to the care of Sun Erh-niang and undertook to make the funeral arrangements for Ch'un-mei, having her coffin taken to her husband's ancestral graveyard and buried in the same tomb with the commander-general. He also dismissed the two wet nurses, along with the two concubines Hai-t'ang and Yüeh-kuei, so they could seek employment elsewhere and find husbands for themselves. This left only Ko Ts'ui-p'ing and Han Ai-chieh, who refused to leave, though he urged them to do so.
One day, unexpectedly, the infantry and cavalry forces of the Great Chin regime succeeded in capturing the Eastern Capital of Pien-liang and took the retired Emperor Hui-tsung and his son Emperor Ch'in-tsung into captivity in the northern regions. As a result:
The Central Plain lacked a ruler,[38]
The four quarters were disrupted,
Military weapons were everywhere,
The masses felt driven to flight.[39]
The common people faced the calamity
of disruption;[40]
The populace was forced to suffer in
dire straits.[41]
A large force of barbarian troops had already slaughtered its way across the borders of Shantung province with the result that among the people:
Husbands fled and wives scattered,
Specters cried and spirits howled.[42]

Even fathers and sons were no longer able to care for each other. Ko Ts'ui-p'ing was taken back by her mother's family, while:
Everyone else fled for their lives.[43]
Only Han Ai-chieh was left:
Without a place to seek protection.
She had no alternative but to pack her luggage, dress herself in plain traveling clothes, leave Ch'ing-ho district, and set out for Lin-ch'ing in order to find her parents. But when she arrived in Lin-ch'ing, she found that the Hsieh Family Tavern had been closed and its owner had fled.
Unexpectedly, she ran into Ch'en the Third, who said to her, "Last year, your parents went to Chiang-nan with Magnate Ho to live with him at his home in Hu-chou."
Han Ai-chieh, consequently, set out to seek her parents there, supporting herself along the way by singing songs and accompanying herself on the moon guitar.
When hungry she ate, when thirsty she drank;
Stopping by night and traveling by day;
As flustered as a dog who has
lost his way home;
As flurried as a fish who has
escaped the net.
Her bound feet with their upturned toes were small, and she was beset by:
A myriad pains and a thousand hardships.[44]
After traveling for a few days, she reached the area around Hsü-chou. It was getting late, and she was passing through a solitary village when she came upon an old lady in her seventies.
Her hairdo resembled two strips of snow,
Her chignon was tied into a bag of silk,
and she was busy at the stove, pounding rice and preparing a meal.
Han Ai-chieh went up and bowed to her, saying, "I am a native of Ch'ing-ho district. On account of the current disruption, I am heading to Chiang-nan to seek my parents. I did not realize that it was this late and wonder if you might let me stay overnight at your place. I will leave first thing in the morning and will be sure to pay you for it."
The old lady contemplated the young woman and thought to herself, "She does not look like the maidservant of an impoverished household.
Her movements are cultivated;
Her demeanor is not ordinary."[45]
Behold:
Her raven locks have not been dressed;[46]
She is thinking only of how well-off
she used to be.
Her brows are knit like distant peaks;
She recalls the wealth and distinction
of former years.
During the autumn night the moon is
hidden by misty clouds;
The peony blossoms have been buried
beneath layers of dirt.[47]
"If you are seeking a place to spend the night," the old lady said, "please have a seat on the k'ang while I finish cooking this meal. There is a crew of men engaged in dredging the riverbed who are coming to eat it."
The old lady was tending a stove on top of the k'ang, and in no time at all she produced a large kettle's worth of dried rice mixed with beans and other grains. She also chopped up two large platters of fresh vegetables and flavored them with a pinch of salt. What should appear at this point but a crew of men whose hair was disheveled, whose legs were bare, who wore breechcloths around their waists, and whose feet were caked with mud.
Putting down their spades and shovels, they asked, "Old lady, is our food ready or not?"
"Help yourselves, and eat your fill," the old lady responded.
Thereupon, they proceeded to help themselves to the food and then went their separate ways to consume it.
As they were eating, one of them, who looked thirty-three or thirty-four years old and had a dark complexion and graying hair, asked the old lady, "Who is that person sitting on the k'ang?"
"This woman," the old lady said, "is a native of Ch'ing-ho district who is on her way to Chiang-nan to look for her parents. Since it is already late in the day, she has asked to spend the night here."
The man in question then asked her, "Lady, what is your name?"
"My surname is Han," Ai-chieh replied, "and my father is named Han Tao-kuo."
The man then came forward and took her by the hand, saying, "Sister, are you not my niece, Han Ai-chieh?"
"You look rather like my uncle, Han the Second," exclaimed Han Ai-chieh.
The two of them then:
Embraced each other by the neck and wept.
He then went on to ask, "Where are your father and mother? I thought you were all in the Eastern Capital. How do you happen to be here?"
Han Ai-chieh then proceeded from the beginning to tell him in detail what had happened and concluded by saying, "Because I had married into Commandant Chou Hsiu's household, after the death of my husband I have maintained my chaste widowhood up until now. On learning that my parents accompanied Magnate Ho to his home in Hu-chou, I determined to go in search of them. Because of the current disruption, there was no one available to go with me, and I have chosen to set out alone, supporting myself on the way by singing songs. I could hardly have anticipated that I would encounter my uncle here."
"Ever since your parents moved to the Eastern Capital," said Han the Second, "I have lacked any reliable means of livelihood. Being forced to sell my house, I have ended up working as a common laborer here, engaged in dredging the riverbed in order to earn a bowl of rice for myself. Under the circumstances, I might as well join you in going to Hu-chou in search of your parents."
"Should my uncle decide to go with me," said Han Ai-chieh, "that would certainly be wonderful."
He then filled a bowl with rice and gave it to Han Ai-chieh to eat. Han Ai-chieh sampled a mouthful but found it so coarse that she could hardly swallow it and gave up after consuming only half a bowl. Of the events of that evening there is no more to tell.
At dawn the next day, the crew of workers departed to continue their job, but Han the Second, after paying the rent he owed to the old lady, took Han Ai-chieh with him and went out the door, as they set out on their journey together.
Han Ai-chieh was delicate by nature, and her bound feet with their upturned toes were small. She had an assortment of valuables such as hairpins and combs with her, which she sold off piecemeal in order to support them along the way. On reaching Huai-an, they boarded a boat and continued to wend their way toward Hu-chou in Chiang-nan. After some days, they found their way to Magnate Ho's home in Hu-chou and were reunited with Han Ai-chieh's parents.
Who could have anticipated that Magnate Ho had already died. He had no wives or concubines in his home other than Wang Liu-erh and left behind merely a daughter who was five years old, and an estate consisting of several acres of paddy fields. In less than a year, Han Tao-kuo also died, and since Wang Liu-erh had already had an affair with Han the Second, she took her brother-in-law as her mate, and they supported themselves by farming on Magnate Ho's property.
There were numerous affluent young men in Hu-chou who noticed how clever and good-looking Han Ai-chieh appeared to be and sought to marry her. Han the Second also urged her repeatedly to take a husband, but Han Ai-chieh deliberately cut off her hair, defaced her appearance, and became a Buddhist nun, swearing never to marry anyone again. Two years later, at the age of thirty-one, she came down with an illness and died. Truly:
Before her chaste bones have been buried
under three feet of soil;
Her resentful soul first finds its way to
the nine-layered heavens.
Thus it was that Han the Second and Wang Liu-erh ended up as man and wife and inherited Magnate Ho's estate and landed property. But no more of this.
To resume our story, when the invading infantry and cavalry of the Great Chin regime succeeded in seizing Tung-ch'ang prefecture and threatened to make their way to Ch'ing-ho district, behold:
The officials endeavor to flee;
The city gates are shut by day.[48]
The masses are moved to flight;
Fathers and sons are separated.
Behold:
Smoke arises in all four quarters;
The sun is hidden by yellow sand.
Rapacious boars and long serpents,[49]
Attempt to swallow each other up.[50]
Dragons contend and tigers battle,[51]
Each contending for its dominance.
Black standards and crimson flags,
Overspread the suburban landscape.
Men shriek aloud and women weep,[52]
A myriad homes are terror-struck.
Foreign troops and alien generals,
Are like gathering ants or swarming bees;[53]
Their short swords and long spears,[54]
Resemble thick forests and dense bamboos.[55]
In place after place, dead bodies and human bones
lie scattered higgledy-piggledy;
In pile after pile, split blades and broken swords
are discarded in jumbled heaps.[56]
Every parent holds a son or embraces a daughter;
Every home closes its gates and locks its doors.[57]
Nine out of ten houses have been vacated;[58]
No longer resembling rural or urban communities.
The deer flee and the squirrels scatter;
Leaving no trace of ritual, music, or formality.
Truly, it is a case of:
The palace ladies weep into their red sleeves;
The royal sons flee in their civilian disguise.[59]
At this juncture, when Wu Yüeh-niang in the household of Hsi-men Ch'ing realized that the barbarian troops were approaching and saw that family after family had locked the gates to their houses and fled in disorder, she felt compelled to do likewise and got together some gold, pearls, and other valuables to take with her. At that time, her elder brother Wu K'ai had already died, so she set out accompanied only by Wu the Second, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and her ten-year-old son Hsiao-ko.[60] After seeing that both the front and rear doors to the residence were securely locked, they headed for Chi-nan prefecture to seek refuge with Yün Li-shou. By so doing, she hoped, on the one hand, to escape the invading army, and, on the other hand, to formalize Hsiao-ko's betrothal to Yün Li-shou's daughter.
Along the way:
Every individual they met was feeling panicked;
Each and every one of them in a state of shock.
The unfortunate Wu Yüeh-niang, dressed in her traveling clothes, along with Wu the Second and the other males and females, five of them in all, fell in with the crowds of other fleeing refugees, managed to squeeze their way through the city gate, and made their way into the suburbs. As they proceeded on their way, they arrived at a crossroads in the open countryside where they encountered a Buddhist priest whose body was clad in a purplish-brown cassock, who held a metal staff with nine rings attached to it in his hand, who wore straw sandals on his feet, and over whose shoulder he carried a calico bag containing his sacred texts.
Stepping forward in large strides, he proceeded to press his palms together in front of his chest and bow to her in the Buddhist fashion, saying in a loud voice as he did so, "Lady Wu, where are you going? Pray hand my disciple over to me."
This startled Yüeh-niang so that she:
Turned pale with consternation,
and addressed him saying, "Master, what disciple is it that you are asking for?"
"Lady," the monk replied, "you had better not pretend to be:
Still asleep in dreamland.
You must remember how, ten years ago, on the eastern spur of Mount T'ai, you were being pursued by Yin T'ien-hsi and sought refuge for the night in my mountain cave. I am that same Ch'an Master Snow Cave, whose religious name is P'u-ching. You promised then to let me have your son as a disciple, so why have you not turned him over to me?"
"Master," interjected Wu the Second, "you are a Buddhist monk. How can you be so:
Unamenable to reason?[61]

In this year of political upheaval we are fleeing for our lives. It is her hope that in the future this only child of hers will be able to carry on the ancestral sacrifices. How could she bear to relinquish him to you so he could abandon lay life and become a monk?"
"Are you really refusing to turn him over to me?" the monk asked.
"Master," said Wu the Second, "don't talk such nonsense, or hinder us from making our escape. I fear that the barbarian army may show up at any moment.
Who knows in the morning what evening may bring."[62]
"Since you refuse to turn my disciple over to me," said the monk, "it is already late in the day, and you cannot proceed any further. The barbarians have not yet come this far. You might as well come with me to stay overnight at this temple, before leaving first thing in the morning."
"Master," inquired Wu Yüeh-niang, "what temple is that?"
The monk merely pointed with his finger and said, "the one up there by the side of the road."
As the monk led the way forward, they found themselves at the Temple of Eternal Felicity, which Wu Yüeh-niang recognized as the one that she had visited once before in the past. By the time they arrived there, the abbot and more than half of the resident monks had already fled, leaving behind only a handful of Ch'an monks who were sitting in the lotus position in the meditation hall in the rear, where a large glazed censer was burning incense before an effigy of the Buddha. At the time, the sun was already sinking behind the hills. Behold:
The teeming crossroads are all ablaze with
the light of burning lanterns;
The Temple of the Nine Stars is enhanced by
fragrant mist and tolling bells.
The wheel of the bright moon is suspended
underneath the blue heavens;
A handful of scattered stars serves to
light up the azure firmament.
Within the camps of the Six Imperial Armies,
The wailing of painted bugles frequently resounds;
On the upper floors of the five drum towers,
Water drips in the bronze tanks of the clepsydras.
On all four sides the evening fog,
Densely encompasses the dancing pavilions
and singing platforms;
In the three markets a cloak of mist,
Faintly enshrouds the green gauze windows
and vermilion gates.
Pair by pair, the strolling beauties
return to their boudoirs;
One by one, the young scholars close
the blinds in their studies.[63]
That evening, Wu Yüeh-niang, along with Wu the Second, Tai-an, Hsiao-yü, and Hsiao-ko, five males and females in all, spent the night in the abbot's quarters at the temple. Some of the junior monks recognized her and provided Yüeh-niang and the others with something to eat. Meanwhile, Ch'an Master P'u-ching assumed the lotus position on a platform in the meditation hall, where he kept time by beating on a wooden fish as he recited the sutras. Yüeh-niang, along with Hsiao-ko and Hsiao-yü, slept on the bed, while Wu the Second and Tai-an slept together on the floor. As people who had been suffering from alarm and fatigue, they fell fast asleep.
The only one among them who failed to sleep soundly was Hsiao-yü, who got up in the abbot's quarters and watched through a crack in the door as P'u-ching recited the sutras.
As the third watch of the night gradually approached, behold:
The metallic autumn wind grew desolate;
The slanting moon appeared more somber.
The bustle of human activity subsided;[64]
The myriad pipes of Heaven were silent.
On looking at the large incense-burning censer in front of the effigy of Buddha, she saw that it was:
Half alight but not extinguished.
When Ch'an Master P'u-ching realized that:
The empire was in a state of disorder,
The population was suffering distress,
and that:
The corpses of those killed in battle,
Appeared to be incalculable in number;
He exerted his compassionate feelings,
To dispense his boundless benevolence.
Addressing himself reverently to the Buddha, he recited a spell for dispelling enmity, intended to:
Rescue the incarcerated souls,[65]
Free them from old resentments,
Clear impediments in their way,
So they could be reincarnated,
Without any remaining residues.
Thereupon, he recited the spell for dispelling enmity more than a hundred times.
Shortly thereafter:
A cold breeze blew forlornly,
A chilly wind began to sough,[66]
and several tens of ghosts appeared, some of them:
With scorched heads and singed scalps,
Disheveled hair and mud-stained faces.
Others:
With ruptured fingers and broken arms,
Gutted stomachs and gouged out hearts.
And still others:
Without heads and with crippled limbs;
Or with:
Locked cangues hanging on their necks.
They had come to be enlightened by the Ch'an Master's recitation of the spell and:
Lined up neatly to either side of him.[67]
The Ch'an Master then addressed them, saying:
"You group of living individuals,
Seek to repay enmity with enmity,[68]
Unwilling to seek reconciliation.
Whenever can this come to an end?
You must listen carefully to what I say, if you wish to pursue your separate paths to reincarnation. There is a gatha that says:
I urge you not to harbor enmity;
Acute enmity is hard to resolve.
Enmity can arise in one any day,
But cannot be resolved for ages.
If one repays enmity with grace,
It is to pour hot water on snow.
If you requite hatred with hate,
It is a wolf meeting a scorpion.
I sense those who harbor enmity,
Permit enmity to devastate them.[69]
Those who sense this and repent,
Are able to grasp their natures,
Understand their original minds,[70]
And rid themselves of animosity.
The potency of this sacred text,
Redeems one from his evil karma.
Each of you may be reincarnated,
If you harbor no further enmity.
The head is altered and the face replaced, as
the wheel of transmigration turns;
It is useless to try to grasp what awaits you
in the predestined life to come."[71]
At this juncture, the crowd of ghosts thanked him and then disappeared. Hsiao-yü had been surreptitiously scrutinizing them but did not recognize anyone.
In a little while, another man appeared, who was more than six feet in stature.
His appearance was stately,[72]
He was fully clad in armor,
and his breast had been pierced by an arrow.
"I am Commander-general Chou Hsiu," he said. "In the course of contending with an enemy general, I died on the field of battle. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the second son of Shen Ching, with the name Shen Shou-shan."
Before he had even finished speaking, another person appeared, dressed in impressively immaculate clothing, who said, "I am the wealthy gentleman from Ch'ing-ho district, Hsi-men Ch'ing, who died after suffering a leakage of blood in my urine. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the second son of the wealthy gentleman Shen T'ung, with the name Shen Yüeh."
Hsiao-Yü recognized him to be her former master and was too scared to utter a word.
After this, another person appeared, carrying his head in his hands, while his whole body was covered with blood, and said, "I am Ch'en Ching-chi, who was murdered by Chang Sheng. Thanks to the Master's deliverance and the power of the scriptures, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a son of the Wang family."
After this, a woman appeared who was also carrying her head in her hands, while her chest was covered with blood, and said, "I am the wife of Wu Chih, and concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, P'an Chin-lien, who had the bad luck to be slain by my enemy Wu Sung. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn in the Eastern Capital as a daughter of the Li family."
After this, another man appeared who was dwarflike in stature and whose countenance was purplish and said, "I am Wu Chih who died as a result of Dame Wang's persuading P'an Chin-lien to poison me. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in Hsü-chou as a son of the peasant family named Fan."
After this, another woman appeared whose face was thin and sallow, while her body was dripping blood, and said, "I am Li P'ing-erh, the wife of Hua Tzu-hsü and concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who died from a case of acute metrorrhagia. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as the daughter of Commander Yüan."
After this, another man appeared, who said, "I am Hua Tzu-hsü, who suffered the misfortune of being exasperated to death by my wife. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a son in Battalion Commander Cheng's family."
After this, another woman appeared with her footbindings wrapped around her neck, who said, "I am the wife of Hsi-men Ch'ing's servant Lai-wang, Sung Hui-lien, who:
Hanged herself until dead.
Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a daughter in the Chu family."

After this, another woman appeared, who had:
A sallow face and emaciated flesh,[73]
and said, "I am the wife of Commander-general Chou Hsiu, P'ang Ch'un-mei, who perished from sexual exhaustion. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated in the Eastern Capital as a daughter in the K'ung family."
After this, another man appeared:
Who was stark naked with disheveled hair,[74]
Whose entire body was covered with weals,
and identified himself, saying, "I am Chang Sheng, who was beaten to death. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn as a son in the impoverished Kao family attached to the Ta-hsing guard in the Eastern Capital."
After this, another woman appeared, with a rope around her neck, and said, "I am Sun Hsüeh-o, the former concubine of Hsi-men Ch'ing, who unhappily:
Hanged myself until dead.
Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated as a daughter in the family of the impoverished Yao family outside the Eastern Capital."
After this, another young woman appeared with her footbindings wrapped around her neck, and said, "I am Hsi-men Ch'ing's daughter and Ch'en Ching-chi's wife, Hsi-men Ta-chieh, who also unhappily:
Hanged myself until dead.
Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reincarnated as a daughter of Chung Kuei, a policeman who resides outside the wall of the Eastern Capital."
After this, another young man appeared and identified himself with the words, "I am Chou I, who was also beaten to death. Thanks to the Master's deliverance, I have been reborn as a son in the Kao family that resides outside the wall of the Eastern Capital and am named Kao Liu-chu."
When they had done speaking, they all suddenly disappeared.
Hsiao-yü was so astonished by this that she shivered in awe and thought to herself, "So this monk is capable of communicating with the ghosts of the departed."
She wanted to go back to bed and tell Yüeh-niang about it, but who could have anticipated that Yüeh-niang was fast asleep, and her numinous soul's true being dreamt that, together with Wu the Second and the others, she was still on her way to Chi-nan prefecture, with the string of a hundred imported pearls, and a gem-studded chatelaine in hand, in order to seek refuge from the invading army with Yün Li-shou, and finalize the betrothal of Hsiao-ko to his daughter.
Eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty;[75]
Stopping by night and traveling by day;
they arrived in Chi-nan prefecture, where she asked an elderly man where Assistant Regional Commander Yün Li-shou was stationed.
The elderly man pointed the way out to them, saying, "He is stationed at a place, some two li from here, called the Ling-pi Stockade, which faces the river on one side and the mountains on the other. This Ling-pi Stockade is located on top of the city wall, and there are a thousand troops and horses stationed there. Assistant Regional Commander Yün Li-shou is the stockade commander there."
When Wu Yüeh-niang and her companions, five persons in all, arrived at the gate of the stockade, and Yün Li-shou learned that she had come to consummate the betrothal of their children:
He greeted her like an old acquaintance,[76]
as they exchanged the customary amenities. It so happened that his wife had recently died, so he asked a neighbor called Old Mrs. Wang to keep Yüeh-niang company, provided her with a lavish feast of wine and food in the rear hall of the stockade, and saw that Wu the Second and Tai-an were entertained in another place.
In the course of their conversation, Yüeh-niang mentioned her need to flee from the invading army, and her desire to consummate the betrothal of their children. She also brought out the string of a hundred imported pearls and the gem-studded chatelaine and presented them to him as a provisional betrothal gift. Yün Li-shou accepted them but did not have anything further to say about the betrothal.
That evening, he also arranged for Old Mrs. Wang to spend the night with Yüeh-niang, and to feel her out in order to ascertain her sentiments toward himself.
In the course of doing so, she said to Yüeh-niang, "Although Yün Li-shou is a military official, he is:
A book-reading gentleman;[77]
and ever since you and his wife betrothed your children to each other by exchanging cuttings from the lapels of your blouses, you have been on his mind. Unexpectedly, his wife died, and he has been living as a widower ever since. At present, he is serving as the commander of this mountainous stockade. Although his position is not high:
When mounted he commands the troops;
When dismounted he rules the people;[78]
and their life and death are in his hands. If you see fit not to reject him, he would like to:
Unite with you in connubial bliss,[79]
That you may share your mutual joy.[80]
Your son would also benefit from such a marriage alliance. Once peace has been restored, it would not be too late to return home together."
When Yüeh-niang heard this proposition, she:
Turned pale with consternation,
and was speechless for some time.
Old Mrs. Wang reported what she had said to Yün Li-shou, and the next evening he prepared wine in the rear hall and invited Yüeh-niang to have a drink with him there. Yüeh-niang thought that it was only to formalize Hsiao-ko's betrothal to his daughter and lost no time in joining him there, where they sat down together.
Yün Li-shou then said to her, "Sister-in-law, you may not be aware of it, but although I am only in charge of this mountainous stockade here, I command a considerable body of both infantry and cavalry and possess quantities of money and silk, fancy clothing, gold and silver, and other valuables. The only thing I lack is a wife to take charge of my household. For some time I have thought of you:
Like a thirsty person longing for drink;
Like a parched person longing for coolness.
I could hardly have anticipated that you would show up here today in order to formalize the betrothal of your son to my daughter.
Heaven has granted this affinity,
That we may share our mutual joy.
If we end up here as man and wife:
We can enjoy a lifetime of bliss.[81]
There is nothing unfeasible about such a scheme."
When Yüeh-niang heard this proposal she was enraged and cursed at Yün Li-shou, saying, "Who could have known that you are nothing but:
The skeleton of a dog wrapped in human skin.
My late husband did not treat you with disrespect. How can you now come out with such:
Language fit only for a dog or a horse?"
Yün Li-shou only laughed at this and then, stepping forward to embrace Yüeh-niang, said to her, "Lady, you were residing in a home of your own. What did you come to my place here for? It has always been true that:
It is easier to do business when the
customer comes to your door.[82]
I don't know why it is, but I no sooner set eyes on you than you captivated by soul. There is no alternative. For better or for worse, you must marry me."
So saying, he brought over some wine to share with Yüeh-niang.
"Go up front and call in my younger brother," said Yüeh-niang. "There is something I need to say to him."
Yün Li-shou laughed at this and said, "Your younger brother and your servant Tai-an have already been killed by me."
He then said to his attendants, "Bring those things here to show to the lady."
In no time at all, by the light of the lamp, they brought in the two heads of Wu the Second and Tai-an, dripping with blood. This so perturbed Yüeh-niang that:
Her complexion turned the color of dirt,
and she:
Fell to the floor in tears.
Yün Li-shou responded by:
Stepping forward and lifting her up,[83]
saying as he did so, "Lady:
There is no need for you to be upset.[84]
Since your brother is already dead, you can become my wife. I am a regional commander, so such a marriage:
Would not dishonor you in any way."[85]
Yüeh-niang thought to herself, "Since this lousy character has already slain my brother and my servant, if I don't go along with him, I am likely to forfeit my life as well."
Thereupon, she pretended that:
Her anger had changed to joy,
and said, "You will have to agree to my conditions before I will consent to be your wife."
Yün Li-shou responded, "No matter what your conditions may be, I will agree to them."
"If you first formalize my son's marriage," said Yüeh-niang, "I will then agree to become your wife."
"That's no problem," responded Yün Li-shou.
So saying, he proceeded to call his daughter out and pushed her over to Hsiao-ko so they could:
Share a loving cup,
Tie a nuptial knot,[86]
and become man and wife. Only after that did he pull Yüeh-niang over to him and propose to engage in the game of clouds and rain together; but Yüeh-niang resisted him and refused to comply.
Yün Li-shou was enraged at this and cursed her, saying, "You worthless woman! You tricked me into consummating the marriage of my daughter to your son, and now presume that I would not dare to kill your son."
So saying, he went to the head of the bed, where he:
Picked up a sword and brought it down in a sweep,
Scattering blood for a distance of several paces.
Truly:
When the three feet of sharp blade
struck the neck,
The flood of fresh blood inundated
everything around.
When Yüeh-niang saw that he had hacked Hsiao-ko to death, she couldn't help uttering a loud cry, which caused her to:
Wake up with a jerk,
revealing it all to be but:
A dream of the Southern Branch.
She was so perturbed by this that:
Her whole body was covered with sweat,
And her entire anatomy oozed moisture,
as she cried out, "How strange! How strange!"
"Mistress," asked Hsiao-yü, who was lying at her side, "what are you crying about?"
"Just now, I had an inauspicious dream," Yüeh-niang responded and then went on to tell her all about it.
"I was unable to sleep a little while ago," said Hsiao-yü, "and got up to go and spy surreptitiously on what that monk was doing through a crack in the door. It turns out that he has been communicating with ghosts the whole night long. Just now, my late master, the Fifth Lady, the Sixth Lady, Brother-in-law Ch'en, the commandant Chou Hsiu, Sun Hsüeh-o, Lai-wang's wife Sung Hui-lien, and Hsi-men Ta-chieh all came to speak to him and then went their separate ways."
"Many of them are buried in the graveyard behind this temple," said Yüeh-niang. "It is not surprising that:
The stranded souls of the unjustly dead,
should manifest themselves during the quiet of the night."
Mistress and servant were unable to go back to sleep, and before they knew it, it was the fifth watch, and the cocks crowed. Wu Yüeh-niang hastily got up, washed her face, and went into the meditation hall in order to pay obeisance to the Buddha and burn incense.
Whom should she encounter there but Master P'u-ching, who was sitting on his meditation platform and addressed her in a loud voice, saying, "Lady Wu, have you achieved enlightenment now?"[87]
Yüeh-niang then knelt down and made him an obeisance, saying, "Permit me to inform your reverence that your disciple, née Wu, with her:
Fleshly eyes and mortal body,[88]
did not recognize you to be the incarnation of an ancient Buddha. But thanks to the dream from which I have just awakened, I am now enlightened."
"Since you have already achieved enlightenment," the Master responded, "there is no need for you to continue on this journey. Should you do so, things will turn out the way they did in your dream, and all five of you will lose your lives. The fact that you and your son encountered me is something that was:
Both ordained and fated to happen to you,[89]
because in days past you planted the seeds of your good fortune. Were that not so, it would have been difficult for you to avoid:
The splitting up of your flesh and blood.[90]

Initially, your deceased husband Hsi-men Ch'ing committed evil deeds and was anything but virtuous. This son of yours was reborn into your family in order to dissipate your wealth and destroy your property and would have ended up with:
His body and his head in different places.[91]
I will now undertake to lead him to salvation as my disciple. As the saying goes:
Should a single son leave the home to be ordained,
Nine generations of one's ancestors will be saved.[92]
This will also have the benefit for your late husband of:
Compensating for his evil karma,
so that he too may achieve salvation. If you don't believe me, follow me, and I will allow you to see for yourself."
Thereupon, he strode into the abbot's quarters, where they could see that Hsiao-ko was still asleep on the bed. The Master raised the staff in his hand and touched him on the head with it, while telling Yüeh-niang and the others to take a look. All of a sudden, he turned over, and they could see that it was Hsi-men Ch'ing:
With a heavy cangue around his neck,[93]
And iron chains enclosing his waist.[94]
The Master then touched him again with his staff, and just as before, he appeared to be Hsiao-ko asleep on the bed. When Yüeh-niang saw this, without knowing it, she began to weep out loud, concluding that Hsiao-ko was a reincarnation of Hsi-men Ch'ing.
Before long, Hsiao-ko woke up, and Yüeh-niang said to him, "You must now follow the Master to leave home, take the tonsure, and be anointed as a priest before the Buddha."
In a piteous state, Yüeh-niang embraced him and wept bitterly, feeling that she had raised him in vain in the expectation that upon reaching the age of fifteen he would be able to inherit and perpetuate the ancestral line; and never having anticipated that on meeting this Ch'an Master he would be spirited away into a celibate life. Wu the Second, Hsiao-yü, and Tai-an were also overcome with grief.
Thereupon, Master P'u-ching took charge of Hsiao-ko, conferred the religious name of Ming-wu upon him, and bade farewell to Yüeh-niang; saying to her on the way out, "You do not need to proceed any further. Before long, the barbarian army will withdraw; the territory will be split between two separate dynasties; one to the south and one to the north; and the Central Plain will have a ruler of its own. In no more than ten days:
The armed troops will be withdrawn;
And the territory will be pacified.
You can thus return to your home and:
Spend your days with peace of mind."[95]
"Master," Yüeh-niang responded, "once you have accomplished my son's salvation:
On what day of what year,
will mother and son ever be able to see each other again?"
So saying, she instinctively took hold of Hsiao-ko and began to weep out loud.
"Lady," said the Master, "stop your crying. Another Master is arriving over there."
This fooled them all into swiveling their necks to look in the direction to which he pointed, whereupon, along with Hsiao-ko, he:
Transformed himself into a gust of clear breeze,[96]
and disappeared from sight. Truly:
Having thrice descended to the mundane world
where he was not recognized;
All of a sudden he flew away over the summit
of Mount T'ai's Eastern Peak.
We will say no more here about how Master P'u-ching spirited Hsiao-ko away.
To resume our story, after this event Wu Yüeh-niang, Wu the Second, and the others continued to stay at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. In less than ten days time, sure enough, the Great Chin regime set up Chang Pang-ch'ang as a puppet emperor in the Eastern Capital, with a hierarchy of civil and military officials. The two Sung dynasty emperors, Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung, were subsequently taken to the north in captivity. The Prince of K'ang:
Escaped across the river on a clay horse,[97]
and assumed the throne in Chien-k'ang. This was Emperor Kao-tsung of the Southern Sung dynasty, who appointed Tsung Tse as general-in-chief and succeeded in retaking parts of Shantung and Hopei from the Chin invaders. The country was thus split into two regimes, the Chin dynasty in the north and the Southern Sung dynasty in the south. As a result:
The realm under Heaven was once again at peace,[98] and
The people were able to resume their vocations.
When Wu Yüeh-niang returned home and opened the gate to her residence, she found that nothing of the family possessions or the household furnishings had been lost. Later on, she changed Tai-an's name to Hsi-men An and allowed him to inherit what was left of the family property. Henceforth, people addressed him as the Honorable Young Hsi-men, and he supported Yüeh-niang during her old age. She lived on to the age of sixty-nine before dying a natural death, which was the reward she had earned by doing good deeds and reciting the scriptures during her lifetime. There is a poem that testifies to this:
An idle glance at this transmitted text leaves
one with confused feelings;
Who fully understands the extent to which the
Way of Heaven is cyclical?[99]
Hsi-men Ch'ing's wealth and corruption made it
hard to continue his line;
Ch'en Ching-chi's licentious cavorting ensured
his eventual annihilation.
The goodness of Meng Yü-lou and Wu Yüeh-niang
vouchsafed them long lives;
The wantonness of Li P'ing-erh and Ch'un-mei
led to their early deaths.
It is not strange that P'an Chin-lien should
meet with an awful fate;
And her ill repute last for a thousand years,[100]
perpetuated in fiction.

The wealth and splendor of the past
Are now as nothing.
The silver screens and golden halls
Are now the stuff of dreams.
The setting sun shines on the ruined walls
And the withered rushes.
A cold mist shrouds the ancient palace
And the green moss.
In the passage below the ground
The lamp is nearly out.
The phoenix mirror in the tiring room
Is locked and sealed away.
To whom shall I speak of ruin or prosperity?
The slow moving cloud is a priest's gown
And the wind fills its sleeves.

Han Daoguo and Wang Liu'er went back to the wine house. Their daughter had left them and they had no way of making a living. They sent Chen the Third for the merchant He. Now that Tiger Liu was no more, He had nothing to be afraid of. He came back again to Wang Liu'er. He said to Han Daoguo: "Your daughter has gone and she will not come back. I suggest that, when I have sold all my merchandise and got the money, you had better come back to Huzhou with me. It is better than carrying on this business here."
Han Daoguo thanked him and agreed. That same day the merchant sold all his goods, collected the money, hired a boat and started back with Han Daoguo and Wang Liu'er for Huzhou.
At the General's house, Han Aijie wore mourning with Cuiping. They called each other "Sister" and were very great friends. They spent their days with Chunmei. The General's little son was now six years old, and his daughter ten. The women had nothing to do but look after these children.
But the General was away on duty, and Jingji was dead. Though Chunmei had the choicest food to eat and the finest clothes to wear, though she had golden ornaments and jewels and pearls, everything that she might desire, yet at night she was lonely and she could not bear it. The fires of passion consumed her. She saw that Li An was a man full of vigor. After Zhang Sheng's death, he kept watch over the house and did his duty faithfully.
One winter day, when Li An was on duty in the office, he heard a knocking at the door and asked who was there. Whoever it was, no answer was given: he was simply bidden to open the door. He opened the door. Somebody rushed in and turned with her back to the light. Li An looked closely and saw that it was the nurse.
"Nurse," he said, "what are you doing here so late?"
"I have not come on my own account," she told him. "My lady has sent me."
"Why did she send you?"
"Don't you understand?" the nurse said, smiling. "She told me to come and see if you had gone to sleep. I was to give you these." She took some clothes from over her shoulder. They were women's clothes. "They are for your mother. The other day you had much trouble, bringing back all our master's things. And you saved my lady's life. If you had not been there that day, Zhang Sheng would have killed her."
She put down the clothes and went to the door. But she had hardly taken two steps before she turned around again. "There is something else for you," she said. From her sleeve she took a piece of silver worth about fifty taels, threw it to him, and went off. Li An could not understand what all this meant.
The next morning he took the clothes to his mother. She asked him where he had got them, and he told her what had happened the night before. His mother cried bitterly.
"Zhang Sheng," she said, "did wrong and he was killed. Now she gives you these things. What does it mean? I am more than sixty years old. Your father is dead, and you are my only hope. If anything happens to you, what will become of me? Don't go to that place again."
"If I don't go back, they will only send for me," Li An said. "What shall I do?"
"I will tell them you have a bad cold," his mother said.
"We can't tell them that story always," Li An said. "And my master will be angry with me."
"Go and spend a few months with your Uncle Li Gui," his mother said, "and then we will think what we can do."
Li An was a dutiful son. He did what his mother told him, packed up his luggage and went to Qingzhou to his uncle's place. When Chunmei found that the man did not come to her, she sent a boy for him several times. At first the old woman said her son was ill. Then people came and demanded to search the house, so she told them that he had gone to his native place to get some money. Chunmei was very disappointed.
The days passed quickly. The cold season came to an end, and the days grew warmer. In the first ten days of the first month the General, who was with eleven thousand men in Dongchangfu, sent Zhou Zhong with a letter to Chunmei. It directed his two ladies and their two children to go to him. Zhou Zhong was to stay at home to look after the place and the General's younger brother would look after the estate. This brother, Zhou Xuan, lived on the estate. Zhou Zhong and Cuiping were to remain with him. Zhou Ren with an escort of soldiers took the ladies to Dongchangfu.
At last the party arrived safely. The General was very pleased. He found a place for them at the back of his headquarters. Zhou Ren told his master that Zhou Xuan had gone to live at the house and that he and Zhou Zhong were taking care of it. Zhou Zhong was Zhou Ren's father.
"Where is Li An?" the General asked.
"You do well to mention Li An," Chunmei said. "I was very kind to him. I gave him clothes for his mother, thinking how he had secured Zhang Sheng that night. But one night, when he was supposed to be on guard, he came to the inner court and stole fifty taels of silver. The money, which was on the table, had come from your brother. I sent several times for him and answer came back that he was ill. Then I sent for him again, but he had run off to Qingzhou, his native place."
"I would never have believed it of him," the General said. "Later, I will see about his arrest."
Chunmei said nothing to the General about Han Aijie.
The days passed. General Zhou devoted all his energies to the duties of his office. So careful and diligent was he that he hardly took a minute for dinner in the middle of the day. He had no time at all for lovemaking.
Chunmei came to the conclusion that Zhou Yi, the second son of Zhou Zhong, was a fine, handsome lad. He was nineteen. She made her eyes and eyebrows carry a message to him and soon began an intrigue. Morning and night, they sat together, playing chess and drinking wine. The only man who did not know what was going on was the General himself.
The King of the Jin country had conquered the kingdom of Liao in the north. Then he gathered a great force and invaded China from two directions, at the very time of the new Emperor's coronation. General Nian Muhe with a hundred thousand men came down by way of Taiyuanfu in Shanxi to attack the Eastern Capital. The second general, Gan Libu, came down from Tanzhou and made a raid upon Gaoyangguan. The troops on the frontier gave way, and the Minister of War and the Commander-in-Chief sent desperate orders to the six generals of Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, Guandong and Shaanxi, to place their troops in the road of the invading forces and protect the cities. These generals were Liu Tingqing of Shaanxi, who was in command of the Yan Sui army; Wang Bing of Guandong, who commanded the Fen Jiang army; Wang Huan of Hebei, in command of the Wei Bo army; Xin Xingzong of Ho-nan, of the Zhang De army; Yang Weizong of Shanxi with the Ze Lu army, and Zhou Xiu of Shandong with the armies of Qing and Yan.
When General Zhou realized that the barbarians were massing on the frontier in such strength, and when letters so urgent came from the Ministry of War, he at once marshaled the army and advanced with forced marches. But when his advance guard came to Gaoyangguan, the enemy had already captured that city and there had been a great slaughter there. It was the beginning of the fifth month, and the wind suddenly raised such a sandstorm that the men could not open their eyes. The General was still advancing, when suddenly the enemy attacked. An arrow struck him in the neck and pierced his throat. He fell from his horse dead. The barbarians with hooks and cords tried to secure the body, but the General's own men recovered it and brought it back on a horse. That day many soldiers were wounded. General Zhou was only forty-seven.
When Zhang Shuye, the Commissioner, saw that the general was killed on the field of battle, he immediately ordered the gongs to be sounded as a signal for retirement. The roll was called; he found how many soldiers had been killed or wounded, and took the remainder of his forces back to Dongchang. From there he sent a report to his Majesty.
The killed were brought back by the army. Chunmei and those of her household cried so loudly that the sound shook the skies. They put the general into a coffin and returned his seal of office. Then Chunmei and Zhou Ren took the coffin and went back to Qinghe.
After Chunmei had gone away, Cuiping and Han Aijie ate only the simplest of food. They kept their word and lived as widows. One day, at the beginning of summer, when everything was fresh and bright and the days were lengthening, they took a walk and came to the summerhouse in the west courtyard. There the flowers were blooming, the orioles singing, and the swallows chattering. The beauty of the scene saddened them. Cuiping was not so much depressed, but Aijie, who was thinking of Jingji, was greatly stirred. Frequently, a familiar scene will produce this effect. She wept.

While they were in this sad state, Zhou Xuan came to them. “Sisters,” he said, “you must not be so melancholy. You must try to be cheerful. I myself have had several bad dreams these last few nights. I dreamed that a bow was hanging from a flagpole and that the flag was torn in half. I don’t know whether the omen should be taken as good or evil.”
“It may mean something about the master,” Han Aijie said.
They were trying to make up their minds when Zhou Ren came to them in mourning dress. He was in a great hurry.
“Evil news,” he said. “Our master died on the field of battle on the seventh day of the fifth month. The mistress and the Second Lady are bringing his coffin.”
Zhou Xuan hastily made arrangements to clear the outer hall. The coffin was brought in and set down there. They made offerings to the dead general, and all the members of the household cried and lamented. Then vegetarian food was prepared, and Daoist and Buddhist priests were summoned to hold a funeral service. The two children were dressed in mourning. A host of people called to offer their condolences. Finally, a suitable day was chosen, and they buried the General in the tomb of his ancestors.
Zhou Xuan, acting for his little nephew, sent a memorial to the Emperor asking that royal homage might be offered to the dead general and that some title might be conferred upon the child. The Emperor sent a document to the Ministry of War, and the Minister of War sent it on.
This dead General, Zhou Xiu, forgot his own life in the service of his country [the document said]. His loyalty and courage are worthy of the highest praise. His Majesty therefore appoints an officer to offer food to the dead and confers upon him the title of Marshal. His son shall receive a pension and, when he is of age, shall inherit his father’s rank and position.
Chunmei had nothing to live for now but pleasure, and her passions seemed stronger than ever. She often made Zhou Yi spend the whole day with her. He came to her in the morning and did not go away till evening. They enjoyed themselves without the slightest restraint. Then Chunmei began to suffer from a wasting sickness. She took medicine, but her appetite fell off. Her spirits were depressed, and her body became very thin. Still, she never gave up the joys she most loved.
It was the sixth month, and her birthday was past. The weather was hot. She did not rise early but stayed in bed with Zhou Yi. They were doing the work of love, when suddenly, her breath grew cold. Water came from her cunt, and she died with Zhou Yi still upon her body. She was twenty-nine years old.
The young man was alarmed. He opened Chunmei’s boxes and stole gold and silver and all the jewels he could lay his hands on. Then he fled. The maids went to tell Zhou Xuan. The old man, Zhou Zhong, was put in chains and they went to find his son, Zhou Yi. He was arrested as he was going to his aunt’s house. Zhou Xuan knew this, but he was afraid that all the dirty business would come out and that, if it became public property, it would be very unpleasant for his young nephew when he came of age. So he asked Zhou Yi no questions but simply ordered him to be given forty stripes. So Zhou Yi died. Jin’ge and the Second Lady were both present.
Chunmei’s funeral was hastily arranged, and she was buried with the General. Zhou Xuan dismissed the two nurses and sent away the two girls, Haitang and Yuegui. Only Cuiping and Han Aijie still remained. Han Aijie refused to go.
Then the army of the Jin people captured the Eastern Capital. Both the reigning emperor, and his father were taken and sent to the north. So China was without an emperor and the empire was completely disrupted. Soldiers and war were everywhere, and men and women wandered over the face of the land. The common people cried as though they were drowning in mud, as if they were hung up by their legs. Then the barbarians invaded Shandong, and the people ran away in such a flurry that husband and wife often went in different directions. Fathers and sons lost each other. Devils cried, and Gods screamed.
Cuiping’s mother took her away, and they fled for their lives. Han Aijie was left alone. She dressed herself simply, packed a few things, and set off for Linqing to find her parents. But, when she got to the wine house, the place was closed and the managers had fled. Fortunately, she met Chen the Third. He told her that her parents had gone to Huzhou with the merchant He. She went on. She had taken a moon guitar with her, and on the way she sang songs for the people. Day and night she traveled, like a stray dog escaping from confinement or a fish slipping out of the net. Her feet were very small and the journey was hard for her. After several days she came to Xuzhou. It was very late when she came to a lonely village. There she went to an old lady about seventy years old who was standing before a fire cooking rice. Han Aijie went to her and made a reverence.
“I am a native of Qinghe,” she said to the old woman, “and I am on my way to find my parents because the country in the north is in such a disturbed state. It is late and I should like to spend the night with you. I must set off again early tomorrow. I will pay you.”
The old woman realized that this was no poor girl. Her manner was too gentle and her face too beautiful. She asked the girl to come in and sit down. “I must get on with the cooking of this rice because the men want it,” she said.
The old woman put more fuel on the fire. She prepared rice and beans, chopped up some vegetables, and put them with salt on two plates. Then a few men came in, all barelegged and rough-haired. They were wearing short trousers covered with mud. As they came in, they set down their shovels.
“Now, Mother,” they said, “is dinner ready?”
“Come in and help yourselves,” the old woman said to them. Each took his own food and vegetables and ate it by himself.
There was one man who seemed about forty-five or forty-six. He had a very red face and his hair was light. “Who is that sitting on the bed?” he said to the old woman.
“It is a lady from Qinghe. She is going south of the river to find her parents. It is very late, and she came and asked me if she might spend the night here.”
The man asked her name.
“My name is Han,” the girl said. “My father is called Han Daoguo.” The man went over to her and took her hand. “Are you not my niece, Han Aijie?” he asked her.
“You must be my uncle,” Han Aijie cried.
They threw their arms around each other and wept. He asked where her parents were and why they had come back from the Eastern Capital, and how she had come to be there. Han Aijie told her uncle the whole story. “I married a man at General Zhou’s place,” she said. “Then my husband died and I did not marry again. Father and mother went to Huzhou with a merchant called He, and I am going to them. But the country where I have come from is in such an unsettled state that I could find no one who would take me there. So I came alone, and I have been singing on my way to get the necessaries of life. Then I met you.”
“After your parents went to the Eastern Capital,” Han said, “my business went to bits, so I sold the house and came here as a worker on the river. Every day, I earn just about enough to keep me. I will go with you to Huzhou.”
“That will be splendid,” Han Aijie said.
Her uncle gave her a bowl of rice, but it was such coarse stuff she could only swallow a mouthful. Finally, she succeeded in finishing half a bowl.
The next day, when all the other men had gone to their work, Han the Second paid the old woman and set out with Han Aijie. She was delicate and her feet were very small. The only property she had was a few pins and ornaments, and she sold these to pay for things on the journey. When they got to Huai An, they took a boat and came to Huzhou by river.
So, after a very long journey, they found Han Daoguo and his wife at Merchant He’s place. He had died and left no wife, so Wang Liu’er was looking after his daughter, who was now six years old. He had left a few acres of rice fields. A year after the merchant’s death, Han Daoguo died too. Wang Liu’er had been intimate with her brother-in-law before. Now they married regularly and worked in the fields to keep themselves alive.
Several of the rich young men of Huzhou wished to marry Han Aijie, when they saw how beautiful and clever she was. Her uncle urged her to marry one of them, but she cut off her hair, went to a temple, and became a nun. In her thirty-first year she fell ill and died.
The Jin army plundered Dongchangfu and came on to Qinghe. When they came there, the officers had fled and the city gates were closed, even by day. The people fled in all directions and fathers and sons lost each other. There was dust and mist everywhere, and yellow sand obscured the sun. The wild pigs and the great snakes attacked and devoured one another. Dragons and tigers fought for supremacy. Black banners and red flags appeared in the outskirts: men cried, women sobbed. There was tumult in every house. Valiant soldiers and heroic generals swarmed like ants and bees. Short daggers and long spears were as a thick bamboo forest. Here were corpses; there, decaying bones scattered on the ground. Broken swords and broken daggers lay about. People gathered their babies in their arms, bolted their doors, and shuttered their windows. They fled like rats. Nowhere was any trace of Music or the Rites.
Wu Yueniang learned that the barbarians had arrived and that people were fleeing. She took such valuables as she could and set off to Jinan with Uncle Wu the Second, Daian, Xiaoyu, and Xiaoge, who was now fifteen years old. She proposed to take refuge with Yun Lishou. Uncle Wu was dead. She locked all the doors of the house. She went to Yun Lishou; not only to escape the barbarians, but because she wished Xiaoge to marry there. On the way everybody she saw seemed terribly excited and afraid. The poor Yueniang, dressed in her plainest clothes, followed with the crowd. There were five of them altogether. They struggled and got out of the city. Then they hastened onward. At last they came to a crossroads. There stood a monk wearing a purple gown, a staff with nine rings in his hand. He had straw sandals and, on his shoulders he carried a cloth bag that contained his sacred books. He strode up to Yueniang and made a reverence to her.
“Lady,” he said, “‘where are you going? You must give my disciple to me now.”
Yueniang was frightened and changed color.
“Father,” she said, “what disciple do you mean?”
“Lady, don’t pretend you do not know,” the monk said. “Many years ago, when you were being pursued by Ying Tianxi at Taishan, you came to my cave and spent the night there. I am the old monk of that snow cave and my name is Pujing. You promised that I should have your baby for my disciple. Why have you not given him to me?”
“Master,” Uncle Wu the Second said, “you are a priest, and you must not be so unreasonable. These are troublous times, and we are fleeing for our lives. She wants her son to continue the family. How can she let you have him?”
“Are you sure you will not give him to me?” the monk said.
“Don’t talk like this, Master,” Uncle Wu said. “We must be going on our way. The soldiers are behind us. Time is precious.”
“It is late,” the monk said. “You can go no farther now. If you will not give me the boy, come to my temple and go on your way tomorrow. Even if the Jin soldiers are coming, they will not be here yet.”
“Where is your temple, Master?” Yueniang said.
The monk pointed to the other side of the road. “There is my temple,” he said, and showed them the Temple of Eternal Felicity.
Yueniang had been there before and recognized the place. When they reached it, they found that the superiors had gone and there were only a few monks sitting in the hall at the back. A great glass lamp was still burning before the image of Buddha, and incense was burning too. It was nearly sunset.
Yueniang, Uncle Wu, Daian, Xiaoyu and Xiaoge spent the night in the temple. One or two of the young monks knew them and set out food for them. The old monk sat down in the hall and began to beat a wooden fish and recite the sacred books.
Yueniang, Xiaoyu, and Xiaoge slept in the same bed. Uncle Wu and Daian slept together in some other room. They were all very tired and, except for Xiaoyu, went straight to sleep. She got up and went to the room where the old monk was. Through a crack in the door she peeped in. He was still reading there.
It was the third night watch. The west wind was melancholy and the moon very dim. It was quiet everywhere. There was not a sound to be heard. The light before the statue of Buddha was very low.
Seeing the disturbed state of the Empire and the pitiful condition of the people, of whom so many had perished, the old monk was sorry. With all his heart he prayed to Buddha that their sad spirits might be purified and that hatred might cease among men. He wished to clear the path so that all might come to paradise. A hundred times he recited the same text, which was for bringing peace to the minds of men.
After a while, the cold wind came sadly. Several scores of ghosts appeared. Their heads were burned, their cheeks torn, their hair was tou-sled and their faces dirty. Some had broken arms and legs, some had their bellies ripped open so that their bowels protruded. Some had no heads and some no limbs. Some had died by hanging and some had chains and cangues about their necks. They all came to the old monk and stood on either side of him while he prayed for them.
“You are men who have always repaid evil by evil,” the old man said to them. “You have never had a thought of reconciliation in your hearts. I ask you: when shall this hatred cease? Listen to me, and I will send you to the place of your desire.”
I exhort you
Hate not one another
For hate deep rooted in the heart
Can never be done away.
Hatred may arise in a single day
But in ten thousand days it will still exist.
If you use hate to combat hate
It is as though you cast water upon snow.
If you return hatred for hatred
It is as though a wolf meets a scorpion.
Of men that quarrel, none, I know
Escapes the bitterness of hate.
This is a year of gloom
I wish to make you understand.
Regard your own true nature
Then hatred and ill will will melt away to nothing.
I look deep into the sacred texts
To find salvation for all evildoers.
Go now to be born again
And forgo hate forevermore.
The ghosts all bowed to the old monk and vanished.
Xiaoyu looked at them carefully but could not recognize any of them. After a time, there entered a tall man, seven feet high. There was an arrow in his breast. This was General Zhou. After his death on the field of battle against the barbarians, he came to the Teacher to receive his blessing. Then he went to the Eastern Capital to be born again there as Cheng Shoushan, the son of Cheng Zhen.
The General had only just gone when there came a man in beautiful clothes. He said he was a wealthy citizen of Qinghe and his name was Ximen Qing. He had died from a trouble of the blood. He received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to be born again as Cheng Yue, the son of Cheng Dong.
When Xiaoyu recognized Ximen Qing, she was afraid, and dared not make a sound.
Then came a young man with his head in his hands and his body all covered with blood. He said he was Chen Jingji and that he had been killed by Zhang Sheng. He received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to become the son of a certain Wang.
When he had gone, there came a woman. She, too, held her head in her hands and her bosom was covered with blood. She said she was the wife of Wu Da and Ximen Qing’s concubine, Pan Jinlian. Wu Song, her enemy, had killed her. She received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to be born as the daughter of a certain Li.
Then came a short man with a purple face. He said his name was Wu and that he had been poisoned by Jinlian with the connivance of old woman Wang. He thanked the Teacher for his blessing and went to Xuzhou to be born as the son of a countryman named Fan.
He was followed by a woman, whose face was pale and thin. Water and blood issued from her body. She said she was Li Ping’er, the wife of Hua Zixu and a concubine of Ximen Qing. She received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern capital to be daughter of General Yuan.
Another man followed who said he was Hua Zixu. He had died, he said, as a result of his wife’s misdeeds. He received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital as the son of Captain Zheng.
Then came a woman whose face was pale and thin. She said she was Chunmei, the wife of General Zhou, and that she had died from overindulgence in the pleasures of love. She received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to be the daughter of a wealthy man.
Then a woman whose head was bound with the wrappings of a woman’s foot. She said she was the wife of Ximen Qing’s servant, Laiwang. She had hanged herself. The Teacher’s blessing was granted to her, and she went to the Eastern Capital to become the child of a certain Zhu.
Then came a man, naked, and with his hair all in disorder. His body was covered with bruises. His name, he said, was Zhang Sheng and he had been beaten to death. He received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to be the son of a poor man named Gao.
He was followed by another woman who had a long white cloth wound around her neck. She said she was Sun Xue’e, a concubine of Ximen Qing. She had hanged herself. Now she received the Teacher’s blessing and went outside the Eastern Capital to be the daughter of a poor man called Yao.
Then came a young woman who said she was Ximen’s daughter and Chen Jingji’s wife. She had foot ribbons about her neck. She had hanged herself. Now she received the Teacher’s blessing and went outside the Eastern Capital to be the daughter of Zhong Gui, who was servant to a foreigner.
She was followed by a young man who said he was Zhou Yi. He had been beaten to death. He received the Teacher’s blessing and went to the Eastern Capital to be the son of a certain Gao. He was going to be called Gao Liuzhu. Then he vanished.
Xiaoyu was terrified and shivering. She realized that this monk could indeed speak to the ghosts. She wished to tell Yueniang what she had seen, but Yueniang was fast asleep and dreaming. She dreamed that she and those with her had with them a hundred large pearls and a ring of great value. They were going to Jinanfu to see Yun Lishou. They reached the city and asked for Yun’s place. Then people told Yun, and he knew that she had come about their children’s marriage. They greeted one another as old friends. Mistress Yun had recently died and Yun sent for his neighbor, old woman Wang, to entertain Yueniang. She was taken to the inner court and given a great feast. Uncle Wu the Second and Daian were entertained elsewhere.
Then Yueniang talked about the marriage of their children and the troubles in the country. She offered the hundred pearls and the precious ring. Yun Lishou took them but said nothing about the marriage. In the evening, he told old woman Wang to sleep with Yueniang. He wished her to talk to Yueniang and find out what she thought.
The old woman said to Yueniang that, although Yun Lishou was only a military officer, he was an educated gentleman. Since they had arranged the marriage between their children, he had taken a great fancy to her. Now his wife was dead and he had not remarried. Though his position was not very high, he rode on horseback and had soldiers under his command. When he dismounted, he attended to public business. He had powers of life and death.
“Lady,” the old woman said, “unless you think he is too far beneath you, he would ask you to marry him and it will be to the advantage of you both. Your son can marry too and he can go home when peace returns.”
When Yueniang heard this, she was amazed. For a long time she could not speak. Then the old woman went to Yun Lishou and told him. The next evening, Yun Lishou prepared a great feast in the hall and invited Yueniang. She believed it was to celebrate the wedding of their children and went gladly. When she sat down, he said: “Sister, this is but a poor city, but I have a number of soldiers under my command. I have gold, property, clothes, and jewels in plenty. But I have no wife to manage my home for me. I have been thinking of you all this time, and now I feel like a man dying of thirst who craves for water to drink, or as one who seeks coolness in the broiling heat. You have come here, Lady, for your son’s marriage. It is surely the will of Heaven that we should arrange not one but two marriages. If we marry, we shall be happy all our lives here. And I see no reason why we should not.”
Yueniang was very angry. “I did not realize,” she said, “that beneath a human form you hid the carcass of a dog. My husband always treated you well, yet now you speak to me in the language of dogs and horses.”
Yun Lishou smiled and went closer to her. He put his arms about her and pleaded.
“Lady,” he said, “why did you come here? You came and, why I cannot tell, my spirit seemed to become wholly yours the moment I saw you. I cannot help it, and we must marry.”
He offered wine to her.

"Send for my brother," Yueniang said.
"Your brother!" Yun Lishou said, laughing. "I have killed both him and Daian." He ordered a servant to bring proof of what he said. Two heads, blood still dripping from them, were brought in. Yueniang looked at them in the candlelight and her face became as pale as yellow earth. She cried and fell to the floor. Yun Lishou raised her up.
"Lady," he said, "you must not be sad. Your brother is dead, but I am asking you to marry me. I am not unworthy of you. I am a military officer of high rank."
"This man," Yueniang thought, "has murdered my brother and my servant. If I do not yield, he will kill me too." She began to smile.
"You must do what I wish," she said, "and then I will marry you."
"I will do anything you ask, no matter what it is," Yun Lishou said.
"First let your daughter marry my boy, and then I will marry you."
"Good!" Yun Lishou said. He sent for his daughter and pushed her over to Xiaoge. They drank wine together, exchanged the knotted heart, and so were married. Then Yun Lishou pulled Yueniang to him, and wished to make love to her, but she struggled with him. He was furious.
"You whore!" he cried, "you have deceived me. You got me to marry my daughter to your son. Do you think I am afraid to kill your son?" He drew his sword, and with one blow struck off the boy's head. The blood spurted for yards.
When her child was killed, Yueniang shrieked.
Then she woke up. It was a dream. She was so terrified that her body was drenched with sweat. "Strange! Strange!" she murmured.
"Lady, why are you crying?" Xiaoyu said to her.
"I have had a terrible nightmare," Yueniang said, and told her everything she had dreamed.
"A little while ago," Xiaoyu said, "I found I could not sleep. I went to watch the old monk. He was speaking to the ghosts. I saw him talking to my master, the Fifth Lady, Chen Jingji, Sun Xue'e, General Zhou, Laiwang's wife and your daughter. Then they all disappeared.
"Some of them were buried outside this temple," Yueniang said, "but they died such miserable deaths that they come to the monk. It is so quiet too."
The two women talked until the fifth night watch. The cocks began to crow. Yueniang washed her face and dressed her hair. Then she went to the sanctuary and burned incense before the statue of Buddha. The old monk was there, sitting on a low stool. "Lady," he said in a loud voice, "I think you know now what I mean."
Yueniang knelt down. "Holy Master," she said, "with my fleshly eyes and human body, I did not know that you were Buddha himself. Now, since I have had that dream, I know everything."
"You understand," the old monk said, "so now there is no need for you to go to that man. If you do go, you will find that things happen exactly as they did in your dream. You will all die. It is fortunate for your son that you have met me. It is a reward for your good heart. Had it not been for this, you and your son must soon have parted. You remember what a bad man your husband Ximen Qing was. Your son is your husband. He would spend all your money, ruin your estate, and die by having his head cut off. Now I bless him, and take him as my disciple. You know the proverb that says when a son becomes a monk there is salvation for nine generations. If he becomes a monk, your husband's misdeeds will be forgiven. If you do not believe me, come and see."
He rose and went quickly to the other room where Xiaoge was asleep. The old monk lifted his staff and gently touched the boy's head. He turned around suddenly, and Yueniang saw that it was Ximen Qing. Upon his neck was a heavy cangue and there were chains about his waist. The old monk touched him again with his staff, and again Xiaoge lay upon the bed.
Yueniang cried. She realized that Xiaoge was another incarnation of Ximen Qing. After a while the boy woke up.
"You are going to stay here," his mother said to him, "and become the disciple of this holy teacher. He will cut off your hair and give you orders in the name of Buddha."
Yueniang took the lad in her arms and cried bitterly. She felt that she had brought him up in vain. He was fifteen years old, and she had hoped that he would inherit the property and continue the family. Now the old monk was taking him. Uncle Wu the Second, Xiaoyu, and Daian were all sad. The old monk took the boy and called him Mingwu (Bright Enlightenment).
When Yueniang was going away, the old monk said to her: "You need go no farther. The Jin army is going to retreat. Then land will be divided between two dynasties and we shall have an Emperor again. In ten days all the soldiers will withdraw and peace will be restored. Go home then and spend the rest of your days in peace."
"Master," Yueniang said, "you have blessed my child. When shall I see him again?"
She clasped the boy in her arms and cried aloud. "Lady, don't cry," the old monk said. "Look, there is a Holy Master coming."
They all turned their heads to look, but when they turned around again, the old monk had vanished and become a pure vapor. He took Xiaoge with him. Yueniang, her brother, and the others stayed ten days more at the temple. Then indeed the Jin people made Zhang Bangchang Emperor at the Eastern Capital, and set up a new administration, both civil and military. The two emperors, Huizong and Qinzong, were taken to the north. Then Prince Kang crossed the river on a clay horse and established himself as Emperor Gaozong at Jiankang. He appointed Zong Ze as his commander-in-chief and took back Shandong and Hebei. Thus the empire was divided into two parts. Soon peace was restored, and people returned to their old occupations. Yueniang went home. She opened all the doors and windows. Nothing had been disturbed. She gave the name Ximen An to Daian who, in due course, came into the property. People called him Master Ximen. He lived with Yueniang. When she was 70 years old, Yueniang died. Her end was peaceful, a fitting reward for her kindness and virtue.

The record of this house must make us sad.
Who can deny that Heaven's principle
Goes on unceasingly?
Ximen was mighty and a lawless man
He could not maintain the issue of his house.
Jingji was wild and dissolute
And met a violent death in consequence.
Yueniang and Yulou lived long
And ended their days in peace.
Chunmei and Ping'er were wanton
And soon made their way to Hell.
It is not strange, therefore,
That Jinlian reaped the reward of evil,
Leaving a foul reputation to be spoken of a millennium.

## 124

## Wu Song makes an offering some human Heads as Memorial Sacrifices for real

At the sound of Wu Song's voice, Ximen woke up from his ong nightmare, farted with terror, and pissed in his pants. He scooted out of the backdoor and left via Grandma Wang's shop. "Please have a seat," the girl called. "I'll be right with you."
She hadn't worn mourning after poisoning her husband but had adorned and beautified herself everyday and revelled with her lover. She hastily washed off her make-up, removed her hair ornaments, pinned her wanton locks into a severe bun in the back, and quickly exchanged her red skirt and figured tunic for drab mourning garments. Then, sobbing, she descended the stairs. "Sister-in-law, don't cry," said Wu Song. "When did my brother die? What's wrong with him? What medicines did he take?"
Weeping, Golden Lotus replied, "About twenty days after you left, he had severe pains in the heart. He was ill for eight or nine days. I prayed, I gave him every kind of medicine but nothing could cure him and he died! Now I'm miserable and alone!"
Grandma Wang could hear them through the wall. She was afraid Golden Lotus would make a slip, and she came over to help her. "My brother never had that ailment before," said Wu Song. "How could his heart have killed him?"
"Now, Constable," interjected Grandma Wang, "don't you know the saying: 'The winds and clouds in the sky are unfathomable. A man's luck changes in an instant'? Who can guarantee against misfortune?"
"If it weren't for godmother, here, I would have been helpless," the girl added. "She was the only one of the neighbours who came to my aid."
"Where is he buried?" asked Wu Song.
"I was all alone. How could I go looking for a suitable burial place? There was no other way to do it. After three days, I had him cremated."
"What was the date of his death?"
"In two more days it will be the end of the Seven Times Seven period."
Wu Song was silent for several minutes. Then he left and returned to his quarters. He unlocked the door, went in, and changed into clean sober garments. He had a soldier make a hempen rope which he tied around his waist and concealed on his person a thick-backed and sharp-edged knife. He took some silver and went out, instructing the soldier to lock the door behind them. In the shops in front of the county office, he bought rice and flour and spices, as well as candles and paper replicas of gold and silver ingots. In the evening he went to his brother's house and knocked on the door. Golden Lotus opened it. Wu Song told the soldier to prepare the sacrificial dishes. He lit the lamp before the memorial tablet and laid out wine and tidbits. By the second watch, all was in readiness. Wu Song dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "Brother, your soul's near! In life, you're weak and timid, and the cause of your death's unclear. If you're abused and murdered, come to me in a dream and I'll avenge you!"
He sprinkled wine on the ground, burned the paper money replicas and cried so heart-brokenly that all the neighbours were moved. Inside, the girl also pretended to weep. Finally, Wu Song gave the sacrificial wine and food to the soldier to drink and eat. He got two mats and ordered the soldier to sleep by the door between the inner and outer rooms. He himself bedded down before the memorial tablet. Golden Lotus went upstairs, bolted the door at the head of the stairs, and retired. Wu Song tossed and turned, unable to sleep. It was nearly the third watch. He looked over at the soldier. The fellow was snoring away, motionless as the dead. Wu Song sat up and gazed at the dim glass lamp in front of the tablet. He heard three beats of the watchman's drum and three stick taps. Wu Song sighed. "My brother's a soft mark all his life," he said to himself. "I still don't know how he died."
Before the words were out of his mouth, an icy vapor twisted out from under the altar table, and swirled through the dimness. The lamp before the altar suddenly went out. The paper money on the wall danced wildly. Wu Song's hair stood on end. He stared. A figure had emerged from beneath the altar table. "Brother," it said, "I died a cruel death!"
Wu Song couldn't hear clearly. He moved forward. But the cold vapor had vanished, and the figure was gone. Wu Song fell back in a sitting position on his mat. Was it all a dream? He turned and looked at the soldier. The man was fast asleep. "There must be something wrong about brother's death!" he thought. "He came to tell me but my living essence scattered his shade ..."
Wu Song decided to say nothing now, and wait for morning. Gradually the sky lightened. The soldier got up and heated some water, and Wu Song rinsed his mouth and washed. Golden Lotus came down the stairs. "Brother-in-law, you're restless last night."
"Sister-in-law, what exactly did my brother die of?"
"How can you have forgotten? I told you yesterday evening. His heart pains killed him."
"Who prescribed the medicines?"
"I've the prescription here."
"Who bought the coffin?"
"I asked Grandma Wang, next door, to do it."
"Who were the pall-bearers?"
"Men from Coroner Ho. He took care of everything."
"I see. I have to go down to the county office and check in for roll-call."
Wu Song departed with his soldier orderly. When they reached the end of Purple Stone Street he asked: "Do you know Coroner Ho?"
"Don't you remember, Constable? He came to congratulate you when you received your appointment. He lives in a lane off Lion Street."
"Take me there."
The soldier escorted him to Ho's door. "You can go now," said Wu Song. The orderly left. Wu Song raised the door curtain.
"Is Coroner Ho home?" he called.
Ho had just got up. When he heard that it was Wu Song he trembled hand and foot. He couldn't even put his head kerchief on. Hastily he took out the silver and the bones and concealed them on his person. Then he came out and greeted his visitor.
"When did you get back, Constable?"
"I returned yesterday. I'd like a few words with you. Please come with me."
"Certainly. But first let me give you some tea."
"That's not necessary. I don't want any."
The 2 went to a tavern down the street and sat down. Wu Song ordered 2 drams of wine. Ho rose politely to his feet. "I haven't yet given you a welcome-home feast. You'd really not be so courteous to me."
"Be seated," said Wu Song shortly.
Ho could guess what was on his mind. The waiter poured the wine. Wu Song drank in silence. Ho broke into a sweat. He tried to make conversation but Wu Song did not respond. They consumed several cups. Suddenly, from inside his clothes, Wu Song whipped out the sharp knife and stabbed it into the top of the wooden table. The waiter watched, bug-eyed. Of course, no one dared come near. He turned a greenish yellow. He was afraid to breathe. Wu Song rolled up his sleeves and grasped the hilt of the knife. "I'm a crude fellow. I know only that 'The culprit must pay for his wrong, the debtor for his debt.' You needn't be frightened. Just tell me the truth. I want to know exactly how my brother died. You won't be affected in any way. If I hurt you, I'm no true man! But tell me so much as half a lie and this knife will let daylight into you in four hundred places! Now, start. What's the condition of my brother's body when you saw it?"
Hands on his knees, Wu Song fixed Ho with a burning stare. The coroner drew a bag from his sleeve and placed it on the table. "Calm yourself, Constable. Important evidence's here in this bag!"
Wu Song opened it and looked at the blackened bones and the 10-ounce bar or silver. "Why's this important?"
"I don't know what happened before or after but on the twenty-second of the first lunar month, Grandma Wang who keeps the teashop came to my home to ask me to inspect the body of Wu the Elder for encoffining. On my way I was met at the entrance to Purple Stone Street by Ximen Qing who runs the medicinal drug shop in front of the county office. He insisted that I go with him to a tavern and join him in a bottle of wine. There, he gave me this bar of silver and said: 'Put a cover over everything when inspecting the body.' I knew the fellow was a knave but he wouldn't let me refuse. I drank the wine, took the silver, and went to Wu the Elder's house. When I raised the shroud I saw dried blood in your brother's nose and ears, and gnawed lacerated lips—all signs of poisoning. I wanted to speak out but there was no one here to take his part, and his wife had announced that he died of heart pains. So I said nothing but bit my tongue till it bled and pretended I had been taken by an evil spirit. I was carried home.
"I told my assistants to approve the encoffining but not to accept a penny on my behalf. On the third day, the body was carried off for cremation. I bought some paper money and followed to pay my respects. I managed to get Grandma Wang and your sister-in-law away from the pyre and secretly took these two pieces of bone and brought them home. They're black and flaky—proof of death by poisoning. On this sheet of paper is the date of the cremation and the names of those who attended. That's my story. You're welcome to check it."
"Who is the adulterer?"
"I don't know. But I've heard that a boy called Yunge, who sells pears, went to the teashop with Wu the Elder to catch them. Everyone on this street has heard about it. If you want the details, ask Yunge."
"Right. Since there is such a person, let's go together."
Wu Song sheathed his knife, paid the bill, and went with Ho to Yunge's house. At the front door, they saw the boy returning with a willow basket on his arm. He had been out buying rice. "Do you know who this constable is?" Ho asked him.
"Since the day he killed the tiger! What do you two want with me?" Actually, the lad had already guessed and he added, "There's only one thing. My father is in his sixties and has no one but me. I can't go playing around with you in a court case."
"Here, little brother," Wu Song handed him five ounces of silver. "Give these to your father and then come with me for a chat."
"This will cover the old man's expenses for four or five months," thought Yunge. "It won't matter if I get tied up in court."
He took the money and rice in to his father and accompanied his callers to a restaurant on another street. They went upstairs. Wu Song ordered food for three and turned to Yunge. "Although you're still very young, little brother, you're a filial son who supports his family. That silver I gave you is only for expenses. I need your co-operation. When this affair is finished, I'll give you another fourteen or fifteen ounces and you'll be able to set up in business. Now tell me in detail: How did you and my brother go about catching the adulterers in the teashop?"
"I'll tell you but you mustn't rage. On the thirteenth of the first lunar month, I went looking for Ximen Qing with a basket of snowy pears to earn a bit of change from him. I couldn't find him anywhere. When I asked, I was told: 'He's in Grandma Wang's teashop on Purple Stone Street with the wife of Wu the Elder, the bun seller. They're hooked up together. He's there everyday.' I went directly to the teashop but that old bitch wouldn't let me set foot in the back room! When I said I knew her secret, she pounded me on the noggin, hustled me out, and threw my basket of pears into the street! I was furious! I went to your brother and told him all about it. He wanted to go and nab them right away. I said: 'That's not practical. Ximen Qing is a tough man with his punches and kicks. If you don't catch them in the act, he'll sue you and you'll be in trouble. I'll meet you at the entrance to the street tomorrow. Don't make too many buns! When I see Ximen enter the teashop, I'll go in first. You put your things away and wait. As soon as I toss out my basket, you rush in and nab the adulterers!'

"The next day I went to the teashop with a basket of pears and cursed the old bitch. She pitched into me. I flung out my basket butted her with my head and pinned her against the wall. She couldn't stop your brother when he came charging in because I was holding her but she yelled: 'Wu the Elder is here!' The two inside closed the door. While Wu was shouting, Ximen suddenly pulled the door open, rushed out, and kicked him to the floor. I saw the wife come out. She tried to raise Wu up but couldn't. I got out of there, fast! About a week later, I heard that he was dead. I don't know how he died."
"You're telling the truth? You'd better not lie to me!"
"I'd say the same thing in court!"
"That's it, then, little brother."
The three ate, Wu Song paid, and they went down into the street.
"I must be going," said Ho.
"Stay with me," said Wu Song. "I need you two as witnesses."
They accompanied him to the county office, where the magistrate was holding court.
"Do you have a complaint, Constable?" the official asked when he saw Wu Song.
"My brother Wu the Elder was poisoned and murdered by his wife and Ximen Qing, who were cohabiting in adultery. These two men are witnesses. I request Your Honour to do justice."
The magistrate questioned Ho and Yunge, then discussed the case in private with several county clerks and functionaries. All of these gentlemen, to say nothing of the magistrate himself, were tied up with Ximen. And so they reached a common accord—Don't touch it.
Returning to the courtroom, the magistrate said to Wu Song: "You're a constable in this county. You ought to know the law. Since ancient times the rule of proof has been: 'For adultery catch the pair, for robbery find the loot, for murder produce the body.' Your brother's body is no more, and you didn't catch them in the act. Just the testimony of these two isn't enough to prove murder. You haven't got a case. Don't act rashly. Think it over. We can only do what's appropriate."
From inside his robe, Wu Song brought out the two blackened pieces of bone, the ten-ounce silver bar and the sheet of paper. "Surely Your Honour will see that these're no fabrications."
The magistrate looked at them. "You may rise. I must confer about this. You'll be notified. If proper, we'll bring them in for questioning." Ho and Yunge went with Wu Song to his quarters. Ximen was informed the same day of what was brewing. He quickly sent a crony to dispense silver among various county officials and functionaries
The next morning Wu Song again appeared before the magistrate and urged him to take action. But the official was greedy for bribes. He returned the bones and the silver and said: "Wu Song, you'd not let people provoke you against Ximen Qing. The case isn't at all clear. It's difficult to deal with. As the sages said: 'Even what you see with your own eyes may not be true. How can you believe what is said behind people's backs?' You mustn't be so rash."
Also present was the warden of the prison. "Constable," he said, "in murder cases you need five factors: the body, the wound, the ailment, the instrument, and evidence of presence of the accused. Only then can you investigate."
"Since Your Honour won't accept my complaint," Wu Song said to the magistrate, "I'll have to think of something else."
He gave the silver and the bones to Ho and asked him to keep them for him again. Then he returned to his quarters with the coroner and the boy and instructed his orderly to feed them. "Wait here for me," he requested. "I'll be back soon." Carrying ink and a brush-pen, he left the county office compound with 3 soldiers and bought 4 or 5 sheets of paper that he concealed on his person. He ordered 2 of the soldiers to buy a bull's head, a goose, a chicken, 2 casks of wine, some fruit, and bring them to his brother's house. At mid-morning, he also arrived with the third soldier. Golden Lotus knew by then that he had failed in his accusation, and no longer feared him. Boldly, she waited to see what he would do. "Come down, sister-in-law," he called. "I've something to say."
The girl leisurely descended the stairs. "What is it?"
"Tomorrow is the last day of the Seven Times Seven mourning period for my brother. The neighbours have gone to a lot of trouble for you. I've bought some wine to thank them on your behalf."
"What do you want to thank them for?" Golden Lotus demanded nastily.
"Manners must be observed," said Wu Song. On his instructions, the soldiers lit two large candles and placed them, brightly gleaming, before the altar table. They also lit incense in a burner, hung strings of paper money replicas, piled sacrificial dishes before the spirit tablet, and laid out the wine and edibles for the guests. Wu Song retained one soldier to heat the wine, told two others to arrange a table and some benches in the outer room and then stand guard at the house doors front and back. "Sister-in-law," he said, "entertain the guests. I'll invite them in."
He went first to Grandma Wang, next door. "You shouldn't trouble," she said. "There's nothing to thank me for."
"We have good reason. We've caused you a lot of inconvenience. It's only a snack and a little wine. You can't refuse."
Grandma Wang took down her teashop sign, locked the front door, and went over through the back yard.
"Sit at the head of the table, sister-in-law," said Wu Song. "Godmother, sit opposite."
The women had heard from Ximen, and they drank wine unconcernedly. "What can he do about it!" they thought.
Wu Song also invited a silversmith neighbour, Yao Wenqing, whose shop was on the other side of the house.
"I'm pretty busy," said Yao. "I won't bother you, Constable."
Wu Song pulled him. "Just a cup of weak wine. It won't be for long. Over at our place."
Yao couldn't get out of it. Wu Song seated him beside Grandma Wang. He went next to two shops across the street. The one that sold paper horses for funeral burning was run by Zhao Zhongming. "I can't leave my business," said Zhao. "I won't be able to join you."
"Don't be like that. All the other neighbours have come." Wu Song wouldn't take no for an answer. He practically dragged him home. "You're of our father's generation," he said. He seated Zhao next to Golden Lotus.
Then he invited Hu Zhengqing, who sold chilled wine across the street. Hu had once been a small functionary. He could sense that something was wrong and didn't want to come. But Wu Song paid no attention to his excuses. He hauled him over and sat him next to Zhao.
"Who lives on the other side of your shop, godmother?" Wu Song queried.
"Grandpa Zhang. He peddles noodles."
It happened that Zhang was home. He was startled to see Wu Song. "Is there something on your mind, Constable?" he asked.
"Our family has been a nuisance to you neighbours. We'd like you to have a cup of weak wine with us."
*"Aiya,* I've never shown your family any special courtesy," protested the old man. "Why should you invite me?"
"It's not worth mentioning. Please come."
Wu Song hustled Grandpa Zhang over and requested him to sit next to Yao the silversmith.
Why, you might ask, hadn't any of the earlier arrivals left? Because there were soldiers at the doors, front and back, standing guard!
Wu Song had invited 4 neighbours. These, plus Grandma Wang and Golden Lotus, made a total of six. He pulled over a stool, sat down at the end of the table, and directed the soldiers to close the doors, front and back. The soldier who had remained in the rear room now came and poured the wine. Wu Song hailed the assemblage politely. "Neighbours, forgive my crudeness and drink a few cups with me."
"We never gave you a feast to welcome you home from your journey," the neighbours courteously replied, "and yet you go to so much trouble!"
Wu Song smiled. "It's nothing at all. Please don't laugh at our humble fare."
As the soldier poured the wine, the neighbours could sense something was brewing but they didn't know what to do about it. After three cups, Hu the chilled-wine merchant stood up. "I'm rather busy..." he began.
"You can't leave, now that you're here," Wu Song said loudly. "No matter how busy you are, you'll have to stay."
Hu's heart clanged like fifteen buckets in a single well. "Since he was polite enough to invite me here for wine," he thought, "how can he treat me like this? Why does he refuse to let me go?"
Nevertheless, Hu resumed his seat. "Another round of wine," ordered Wu Song.
The soldier filled the cups for the fourth round. By the time they reached the seventh, the guests were very apprehensive. "Remove the cups," Wu Song shouted to the soldier. "We'll have more later."
Wu Song wiped the table, and the neighbours started to leave. He spread his arms and stopped them. "Now we're going to talk. Is there someone among you respected neighbours who is able to write?"
"Hu Zhengqing writes extremely well," said Yao the silversmith.
Wu Song addressed Hu courteously. "Permit me to trouble you."
He rolled up his sleeves and from inside his garments whipped out his knife. Four fingers clutched the hilt, his thumb pointed at his chest, his eyes glared round and fierce. "In the presence of you honourable neighbours, 'the culprit must pay for his wrong, the debtor for his debt.' I ask only that you be witnesses."
With his left hand he grasped his sister-in-law, with his right he indicated Grandma Wang. The 4 neighbours stared and gaped. At a loss, they looked at each other. None of them dared utter a sound. "Please don't reproach me," said Wu Song. "There's no need to be alarmed. I'm crude but fearless. My motto is 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' No harm shall come to any of you. I request only that you witness this. But if anyone tries to go, don't be surprised if I change my tune and stick him half a dozen times, or even take his life, though I pay for it with my own."
Bug-eyed, the neighbours sat petrified. Wu Song glared at Grandma Wang. "Now listen carefully, you old bitch. You are responsible for my brother's death. I want you to answer my questions."
He turned and faced Golden Lotus. "Trollop! How did you scheme and kill my brother? Tell the truth and I'll spare you."
"Brother-in-law, you're acting outrageously! Your brother died of pains in the heart. It had nothing to do with me!"
Before the words were out of her mouth Wu Song rammed the knife into the table, grabbed her hair with his left hand and clutched her bodice with his right. He kicked the table over, lightly lifted her across, placed her on her back before the altar table, and stood on her. Again he seized the knife in his right hand and pointed at Grandma Wang. "Speak, old bitch. And make sure it's the truth."
The old woman knew there was no escape. "Don't lose your temper, Constable," she said. "I'll talk!"
Wu Song directed the soldier to bring the pen and paper and ink and lay them on the table. With his knife he indicated Hu the former functionary. "Write this down, please—word for word."
Hu stammered his consent. He ground the ink, added water, took up the pen, smoothed the paper and said: "Grandma Wang, give us the facts."
"It has nothing to do with me. What shall I say?"
"Old bitch," Wu Song grated. "I know everything. You can't lie your way out of it. If you don't talk, first I'll carve up this harlot and then I'll kill you, old dog."
He flashed the knife twice close to Golden Lotus's face. The girl was panic-stricken. "Spare me, brother-in-law! Let me up! I'll speak!"
Wu Song picked her up and set her kneeling before the altar table. "Speak, wanton, and be quick about it."
Golden Lotus was scared witless. She had no choice but to tell the whole story, starting from the day she beaned Ximen Qing with the curtain pole. How they used the sewing of the burial garments as a means of getting into bed together, how Ximen kicked Wu the Elder, how they arranged to poison him, how Grandma Wang taught them and egged them on—she related everything from beginning to end. Wu Song made her pause after each sentence so that Hu could write it down.
"Treacherous snake," cried Grandma Wang. "You've spilled it all! How can I deny anything? You've put me on the spot!"
The old woman also confessed and her every word was noted by Hu. Then both women were compelled to impress their thumbprints and make their marks. The four neighbours signed their names and made their marks also. Wu Song had the soldier tie Grandma Wang's hands behind her back with his sash. He rolled up the confessions and put them inside his robe. Wu Song told the soldier to put a bowl of sacrificial wine before the altar table, and then he pushed the two women to their knees in front of the memorial tablet. "Brother, your spirit's near," Wu Song cried. "Today I'll avenge you."
He ordered the soldier to light the paper money replicas. Golden Lotus could guess what was coming. She opened her mouth to scream. Wu Song yanked her over backwards by the head, planted a foot on each arm, and tore open her bodice. Quicker than it takes to tell, he plunged the knife into her breast and cut. Then, clenching the knife in his teeth, he ripped her chest open with both hands, pulled out her heart, liver, and entrails, and placed them on the memorial tablet. Another slash of the knife, and he cut the girl's head off. Blood gushed all over the floor.
The staring neighbours covered their faces. Terrified by Wu Song's savagery, they could only obey his commands. Wu Song sent the soldier upstairs for a quilt, and wrapped Golden Lotus's head in it. He wiped his knife, stuck it in his boot, washed his hands, and spoke to the four neighbours respectfully.
"I hope you won't mind but I must ask you to wait upstairs. I will return shortly."
The neighbours exchanged glances. They dared not refuse. They went upstairs and sat down. Wu Song instructed the soldier to take Grandma Wang upstairs too and keep her under guard. He locked the door to the upper story and told the other two soldiers to stand watch below.
With the head of Golden Lotus wrapped in a quilt, Wu Song went directly to Ximen's medicinal drug shop. He hailed the manager.
"Is Right Honourable in?"
"He just left."
"Please walk with me a few steps. I've something to say in private."
The manager recognized Wu Song. He dared not refuse. Wu Song led him to a secluded lane. Suddenly Wu Song's face hardened. "Do you want to live or die?"
"Constable, I've never done you any harm ..."
"If you want to die, don't tell me where Ximen's gone. If you want to live, tell me truly where he's at."
"He just went... with an acquaintance to ... to that big tavern at the foot of Lion Bridge ..."
Wu Song turned and strode off. The manager was paralyzed with fright. It was several minutes before he was able to totter back to the medicine shop.
At the Lion Bridge tavern Wu Song asked a waiter: "Who is the Right Honourable Ximen drinking with?"
"An acquaintance. They're upstairs in the room overlooking the street."
Constable Wu charged up the stairs. Through a window in the lattice wall, he looked in. Ximen was sitting in the host's place. His guest was seated opposite. 2 singsong girls sat one on either side.
Wu Song shook open the quilt and rolled out the bloody head. He picked it up with his left hand, grasped his knife with his right, swept the door curtain aside, plunged into the room, and threw the gory head in Ximen's face.
Ximen saw that it was Wu Song. *"Aiya!"* he exclaimed.
He leaped on a bench and swung one leg over the windowsill, intending to flee. But he was too high above the street to jump. Ximen was in a panic. Quicker than it takes to tell, Wu Song vaulted onto the table and kicked off the cups and dishes. The two singsong girls were petrified. The wealthy guest, hysterically scrambling to get out of the way, fell to the floor. Because Wu Song was coming at him in a wild rush, Ximen feinted with his hands and lashed out with his right foot. Wu Song dodged but the kick caught his right hand and sent the knife flying. It dropped clattering to the street. Ximen took heart. He feinted with his right, and threw a swift left jab at Wu Song's chest. Wu Song ducked and came in under it. With his left hand, he seized Ximen between the head and shoulder, with his right he grabbed Ximen's right leg, then lifted him high. "Down you go," he shouted.
For Ximen, firstly, he was harassed by the wronged ghost of Wu the Elder. Secondly, he had offended against Heaven's laws. And thirdly, how could he cope with Wu Song's super human strength? Head down, feet up, he plummeted into the centre of the street and landed on his noggin with a crunch that left him half-senseless, startling the passers-by. Wu Song reached under a stool, picked up Golden Lotus's head, then leaped through the window down into the street. He picked up the fallen knife and approached his foe. Ximen was lying flat, already half dead. Only his eyes moved. Wu Song pressed down on him and with one sweep of the knife cut off his head. He tied the two heads together by the hair. Holding them in one hand and the knife in the other, he hurried back to Purple Stone Street and shouted for the soldiers to open the door. He placed the heads as sacrifices before the memorial tablet and ceremoniously spilled a bowl of wine onto the floor. "Brother, your spirit is near," he said, weeping. "Go up to Heaven. I've avenged you—killed the adulterous pair. Now let me burn your memorial tablet."
He told the soldier to ask the neighbours upstairs to come down, and instructed him to bring down Grandma Wang. Again taking up his knife and the two heads, he confronted the neighbours. "Please listen. I've still something to say."
The 4 neighbours clasped their hands and stood politely. "Speak, Constable. We're listening." Wu Song said a few words and as a result, the hero of Jingyang Ridge became a prisoner in a jail, the constable of Yanggu County was changed into a wandering monk.

His Nibs shit himself when he heard Wu Song's shout after waking up from his long nightmare. He fled at once, by the back way and out through Mrs. Wang's. "Please have a seat, brother-in-law, I'll be with you in a minute," Jinlian shouted. Now, since the time she poisoned her husband, not once had she worn mourning for him. Instead she had dolled herself up in the most garish fashion for the benefit of his Nibs and in aid of their mutual pleasures. When she heard Wu Song downstairs, she rushed to wash and clean off all the powder and paint, tore off all her jewellery, her pins and her earrings, discomposed her artfully arranged tresses and removed her red skirt and embroidered robe, replacing them with the rough shirt and skirt of mourning. This done, she descended, snivelling and moaning, to the room below.
"Sister-in-law, enough, stop crying!" said Wu Song. "Tell me when my brother died. What did he die of? And whose medicine did he take?"
Between sobs she replied: "Just ten days or so after you were gone he began to have terrible heart pains. It went on for about eight or nine days. He consulted fortune-tellers but he wouldn't take any medicine. The doctors couldn't do anything for him. He just went and died. He has left me heartbroken!"
Next door, Mrs. Wang heard the noise and her heart misgave her. She hurried round to assist her neighbour in dealing with this crisis. Wu Song was just saying: "But my brother never had an illness of this kind before. How could he suddenly get sick and die just like that?"
"How can you say that?" interrupted Mrs. Wang. "Like the storms of the sky that arise without warning, human misfortune strikes at any time. Who can count on tranquillity for long?"
"I was so thankful for this lady's help," Jinlian added. "I was so helpless. She was the only one, none of the other neighbours offered me any help."
"Where is he buried?" Wu Song asked.
"I was all alone," the girl said. "I didn't know how to find a burial plot. What could I do? After three days we cremated him."
"How long is it since he died?"

"In two days it will be time for the seventh week ceremony."
Wu Song remained plunged in thought for a long time. Finally, he left and went to the government offices, where he unlocked his door, entered and changed into mourning clothes. Then he asked a soldier to prepare him a piece of rope that he tied about his waist. He also concealed on his person a knife with a long blade and short handle, sharp-edged but thick, together with a quantity of silver. He told the soldier to lock the door, and they went off to purchase rice, flour, seasoning and so on, opposite the government offices, and also some incense, candles and paper money. With these supplies they headed back to Wu Da's house. It was evening when Wu Song knocked on the door.
When Jinlian opened, Wu Song told the soldier to go and prepare the food for the offering. He lit a lamp and placed it before the altar with his own hands, and arranged the wine and the dishes. At nine o'clock, when everything was ready, he prostrated himself before the altar and spoke: "Brother, your soul is still near. In life you were weak and helpless, and now your death is unclear. If you were the victim of ill-treatment or injustice, if anyone harmed you in any way, appear to me in a dream and I will avenge you." So saying he poured the wine and burnt the paper money, and then began loudly to lament. He wailed so loudly that the neighbours trembled, every one of them. Jinlian in her room accompanied him with feigned weeping.
When the display of grief was done, Wu Song gave the food and wine of the offering to the soldier. He asked for two mats and told the soldier to sleep in front of the door, while he spread his mat out and slept before the altar. Jinlian retired upstairs to sleep, closing the upstairs door.
Shortly before midnight Wu Song, who had been tossing and turning, unable to sleep, looked at the soldier and saw that he lay there as motionless as if he were dead, snoring loudly. He got up and looked at the glass lamp before the altar. The flame was vacillating and weak. He heard the watch: three beats and three taps, signifying midnight. He sighed and sat down on the mat again. He began muttering to himself: "My brother was always weak and unresisting and I still can't be sure about his death." Hardly had he formulated this thought when from beneath the altar there arose a current of cold air that seemed veritably to curl itself about his bones and fill him with ice. The lamp went out. The paper money on the wall began to flutter and fly in all directions. This glacial emanation made Wu Song's hair stand on end. As he gazed fixedly at the altar, a vague figure crept out from beneath it and cried: "Brother, I had a terrible death!" Wu Song had no time to see clearly. When he approached to question the apparition, the cold air ceased and the figure vanished. Wu Song fell back onto the mat. He sat there asking himself if he was dreaming or not. He turned to look at the soldier. The soldier was still sleeping soundly. "There must be something wrong with my brother's death," Wu Song decided. "He wanted to tell me about it but my vital force frightened the spirit away."
He decided to keep this experience to himself and wait till daylight before making up his mind what to do. The poem says:

*In life an idiot, ridiculed by most,*
*The Three-Inch Midget's now a clever ghost.*
*The power that in a brother's feeling lies*
Can make the injured spirit materialize.

Slowly day dawned. The soldier got up and heated some water. Wu Song washed and rinsed his mouth. The woman came downstairs and said to Wu Song: "You seem to have had a bad night, brother-in-law."
"Tell me," Wu Song said, "what did my brother really die of?"
"How is it you've forgotten?" she said. "I told you last night, he died of heart disease."
"What medicine did he take?"
"I can show you, it's here."
"Who ordered the coffin?"
"I asked the neighbour, Mrs. Wang, to buy it for me."
"And how was it carried out?"
"Mr. Ho, the coroner, supervised everything."
"Well, now I know everything I must go and report to the office. I'll be back later." He left, followed by the soldier but at the entrance to Redstone Road he asked the soldier: "Do you know this Mr. Ho, the coroner?"
"How come you don't remember, Your Honour?" the soldier said. "He came to congratulate you only a little while back. He lives in an alley off Lion Avenue."
"Take me there."
When they reached Uncle Ho's front door, Wu Song said: "You can go now" and the soldier departed. Wu Song raised the curtain and shouted: "Is Mr. Ho there?"
Uncle Ho had just got up. When he heard Wu Song was looking for him, he was so scared he felt his hands and feet begin to shake. He didn't even wait to put on a headdress but went and got the silver and the bones that he concealed on his person before going to greet Wu Song. "When did you get back, Captain?" he asked.
"I got here yesterday. I'd like to have a word with you. Would you be so good as to spare me a few minutes?"
"Of course, Captain. But let me offer you some tea."
"Please don't trouble."
The two men went to a little wineshop on the corner of the street and seated themselves. When Wu Song ordered two measures of wine, Uncle Ho rose to his feet protesting: "You refused my offer just now, Your Honour, how can I accept hospitality from you?"
"Please be seated," Wu Song said.
Now Uncle Ho already pretty well guessed what was coming. However, when the landlord poured the wine, Wu Song simply drank his without saying a word. This made Uncle Ho even more apprehensive. His hands were sweating. He tried making conversation but Wu Song still said nothing, he simply didn't open his mouth. Eventually, after a number of cups, Wu Song suddenly reached inside his clothing, took out the knife and slammed it into the table!
The landlord looked on in horror but certainly he was not going to intervene! Uncle Ho went green. He scarcely dared to breathe. Wu Song rolled up his sleeves, pulled the knife out of the table, pointed it at Uncle Ho and said: "I don't know much about fine manners but I do know that every crime has its author and every debt has to be paid. Don't be afraid. Just tell the truth. Tell me in detail everything you know about my brother's death. If you do this I won't touch you. On my honour I promise you that. But if you're anything less than completely honest with me, I swear this dagger will put five hundred holes in you and turn you into a sieve. So watch out and just tell me straight, what did my brother's body look like?" When he finished speaking, he gripped his knees with his hands and fixed Uncle Ho with a ferocious gaze.
Uncle Ho responded by producing the bag that was concealed in his sleeve and which he now placed on the table, saying: "Don't be angry, Captain. This bag is capital evidence."
Wu Song took the bag and opened it up. Inside he saw the two pieces of blackened bone and the ten taels of silver. "How is this evidence?" he asked.
"I am afraid I do not know all the circumstances of this case," Uncle Ho began. "What I do know is that on the twenty-second of the first month I was sitting at home when Mrs. Wang, the teashop proprietress, came to fetch me to examine the body of Mr. Wu. As I was approaching Redstone Road on the same day, I met Mr. Xi-men, the owner of the medicine shop. He stopped me and asked me to go with him to a wineshop to drink a bottle of wine. Once there he took out a quantity of silver which he gave to me and said, 'When the body is prepared for burial, make sure everything is done properly.' Well, I knew him for a crafty devil and didn't see how I could refuse. After drinking and taking the silver, I went to Mr. Wu's house. When I lifted the shroud I could see traces of blood around the orifices and teeth-marks on the lips that are all signs of death by poisoning. I would have denounced the crime but there was no plaintiff. The wife of the deceased had already said that he died of heart disease. Knowing it would be dangerous to speak out, I bit the end of my tongue and pretended to have a fit. They carried me home and it was my assistants who went to perform the routine preparations for burial. I received no payment for it myself, not a penny. Three days later I heard that they were taking the body off for cremation, so I bought some paper money and went there to the mountain pretending to pay my respects. I managed to shake off Mrs. Wang and the wife of the deceased and secretly collected these two pieces of bone that I took home with me. The fact that they have turned black is proof of death by poisoning. On this piece of paper I have written the exact date and the names of those present. That is my statement, Captain. You may check it for yourself."
"And the lover's name?" Wu Song asked.
"I know nothing about that," Uncle Ho said. "But I heard a rumour about a certain Yunge, known as the Young'un, who sells pears. This young lad, it seems, went with Mr. Wu, your brother, to the teahouse with the intention of catching the lovers at it. The whole street knew about it. If you want the exact details, Captain, you'd better question this Yunge."
"Very well!" said Wu Song. "In that case we'll go and look for him together." He put away his knife, packed up the bones and the silver again, and paid for the wine. Then he set off with Uncle Ho for the Young'un's house.
They reached the Young'un's door just as the young monkey appeared, toting a wicker basket, on his way back from buying rice. "Hey there, Young'un!" Uncle Ho called out. "The Captain here is looking for you. Do you know who he is?"
"I seen him the day they brought in the big tiger," the Young'un said. "Wotcha want with me?"
Actually the young rascal had more or less guessed, so he quickly added: "There's just one thing. Me old dad's over sixty and there' ain't no one else to look after 'im, so I wouldn't want to have to go and sit in gaol on account of you!"
"Don't worry young man," said Wu Song, taking out five taels of silver. "Take this for your father's living expenses and then come with me because I want to talk to you."
The Young'un thought to himself: "This will cover a good three or four months expenses. So even if I do have to go to the tribunal with him, it don't signify." He went in to give his father the silver and the rice and then accompanied the other two to a winehouse on the corner of the street. Wu Song ordered food for three and then addressed the Young'un. "Young man, you're very young but you carry all the responsibility of supporting your old father, that's why I wanted you to have the funds I've just given you. You can be useful to me, and if matters are satisfactorily concluded, I shall give you another fifteen taels or so, to provide you with a little capital. Now please tell me in detail how it came about that you went with my brother to the teahouse to surprise the lovers."
"If I tells yer," the Young'un said, "please, yer mustn't get angry. It were on the thirteenth of the first month. I 'ad a basket of pears and I were looking for Mr. Xi-men, 'oping to make a sale but I couldn't find him nowhere. Then while I were making inquiries someone said: "Is Nibs's at Mrs. Wang's teashop in Redstone Road. He's with the wife of Wu Da, what sells the bread. He's having it off with her, an' he goes there everyday now.' Well I goes straight round there to find 'im. But that old bitch Mrs. Wang stops me and won't let me go inside. I told her what I thought of her and she started beating me and chucked me out — threw my pears all over the street, too. I were so angry I went and found your brother and told 'im everything. So 'e got this idea of going there to catch them in the act. 'Don't be in such a hurry,' I told him. 'That Xi-men Qing's a crafty bugger and 'e knows how to fight; if yer don't get 'im the first time 'e'll accuse you and you'll be the one what's in the shit. Look, I'll meet you here tomorrow at the end of the street. You go and finish yer sales quickly and I'll watch to see if 'is Nibs goes into the teahouse. If he does, I'll go in first. You get rid of yer carrying-pole and wait. When I throw out the basket, you rush in and catch them at it.' So I goes back to the teahouse with another basket of pears. I give the old bitch a taste of my tongue and she came and 'it me and I threw me basket out into the street and butted the old cow and pushed 'er up against the wall. When Mr. Wu barged in I held her back so she couldn't stop 'im but she got to shout 'Wu Da's coming!' So of course them two inside blocked the door. So there's Mr. Wu 'ollering away outside the door that was all 'e could do. And then suddenly that bastard Xi-men Qing opens the door and charges out. He floored Mr. Wu with one kick. I see the woman come out and she went to help Mr. Wu up but 'e weren't moving. So I got out quick. About a week later I 'eard that Mr. Wu was dead. But I don't know 'ow 'e died."
"Is all this true?" Wu Song asked. "You'd better not lie to me!"
"If it were in front of the judge I'd say exactly the same," the Young'un said.
"I believe you young man," said Wu Song. He told the landlord to bring the food and paid the bill when they'd finished eating, and then the three of them left. As they went downstairs Uncle Ho said: "I have to be going now."
"Oh no, please come with me," Wu Song said. "I need the two of you as witnesses." He took them both with him to the magistracy.
"Well, what is it Captain?" the magistrate said when he saw them.
"My brother, Wu Da, has been cruelly murdered, poisoned by my adulterous sister-in-law and her lover, Xi-men Qing. I request justice, Your Honour!"
The magistrate questioned Uncle Ho and the Young'un. Then he called a meeting of his staff. Now all of these officials, not to mention the magistrate himself, received money from Xi-men Qing, so the unanimous verdict was: "This matter is too hot to handle." The magistrate went back to Wu Song and said: "Wu Song, you're a member of my administration, you really ought to know the law better. What it says is, 'For a charge of adultery produce the two lovers; for a charge of theft show the stolen goods; for a charge of assault demonstrate the wounds.' Now you haven't even got your brother's body. Nor did you catch the lovers in the act. All you've got to go on is the word of these two. And you want to base criminal charges on that? It would just look like a personal vendetta. You can't rush into it like that. You'd better go away and think it over. We've got to observe the proper procedure."
Wu Song took out the two blackened bones, the silver and the paper and said: "Here is my reply, Your Honour. No one can say I invented this!"
After examining the objects, the magistrate said. "Very well, you had better go now and leave the matter in my hands. If there is a case to answer I will have the culprits arrested and questioned."
While the magistrate continued his deliberations, Wu Song detained Uncle Ho and the Young'un in his quarters. Meanwhile, his Nibs had heard about it and sent a trusted friend to the government offices to offer money to everyone. Consequently when Wu Song returned to the court next morning to urge the magistrate to make the arrests, what did he find? The magistrate had been bought. He simply returned the bones and the silver saying: "Wu Song, people want to make trouble between you and Xi-men Qing and you shouldn't listen to everything they say. This affair is most unclear, your case would never succeed. Remember the words of the philosopher, 'If that which is before your eyes can prove illusory, what trust should be put in words spoken behind your back?' You must temper your impetuousness." The superintendent of prisons also put his oar in: "In a criminal offence of this nature, Captain, it is necessary to be able to show a body, wounds, physical effects, circumstantial evidence and the culprit's traces. In the absence of any one of these five elements, one cannot instigate an inquiry."
"If Your Honour will not accept the case," Wu Song said to the magistrate, "I shall have to change my tactics." He collected the bones and the money and returned them to Uncle Ho's safe-keeping. Then he went back to his quarters and told the orderly to serve Uncle Ho and the Young'un with food and drink. Telling them to wait, because he would be back soon, he left, taking a number of soldiers with him. He provided himself with an inkstone, brush and ink. He bought four or five pieces of paper that he carried himself, and told two of the soldiers to buy a pig's head, a goose, a chicken, a bucket of wine and an assortment of dried fruit, all of which was to be prepared in the house. It was late afternoon when he and the soldiers reached Wu Da's. Jinlian had already heard that the magistrate had rejected his case and was full of confidence. Feeling she had nothing to fear, she received them quite insolently.
"Please come down, sister-in-law, I'd like a word with you," Wu Song said.
She took her time. When she finally came down, she said: "Well, what is it?"
"Tomorrow is the end of the seven week period. Since you must have caused the neighbours a lot of distress lately, I've brought some wine in order to thank them on your behalf."
"There's no reason to thank them!" she said scornfully.
"One should always be polite," Wu Song said. He told the soldiers to place two candles in front of the altar, brightly illuminating it, and to burn a stick of incense and arrange some paper money. Next the offerings were laid out, the plates piled high with food, together with the wine and assorted fruit. One of the soldiers was sent to warm the wine at the back, while others arranged tables and chairs by the door, and still others guarded the entrance. When he was satisfied with these arrangements, Wu Song called his sister-in-law: "Get ready now to receive your guests. I'm going over to invite them."
He went first to Mrs. Wang's. "There's no reason to trouble yourself, Captain, there's nothing to thank me for," she said.
"I know you've had a lot of trouble, Mrs. Wang," he said. "Of course there's a reason. You must come and take a cup of wine and something to eat, you can't refuse!"
In the end she accepted the invitation. She locked up and went round to Wu Da's by the back way.
"You take the host's place, sister-in-law," Wu Song said, "and let Mrs. Wang sit in front of you."
The old woman had already heard from his Nibs that Wu Song's attempt to bring a case had failed, so she sat down and drank with an easy mind. Both of them were thinking: "There's not much he can do now."
Wu Song also invited another neighbour, Yao Wenqing, proprietor of a silver shop. "I'm overwhelmed with work, you must excuse me," Yao said. "Besides, I don't want to bother you."
But Wu Song wasn't having it. "A cup of weak wine won't take long," he said. "Please come." Wu Song went round to another neighbour's. This was Mr. Zhao, Zhao Zhongming, that is, who had a shop selling the paper objects that are burnt at funerals. "I'm afraid I can't leave the shop," Zhao said. "You'll have to excuse me."
"Impossible," said Wu Song, "the other neighbours are already there." Mr. Zhao found he couldn't get out of it and Wu Song dragged him back to the house. "Old people must be honoured like relatives," he said. "Please sit beside my sister-in-law."
Next, Wu Song went to invite Hu Zhengqing, who had a shop across the road selling cold wine. Mr. Hu had formerly worked for the government and he found the invitation somewhat suspicious. But although he did not at all want to go, Wu Song dragged him off willy-nilly and seated him next to Mr. Zhao.
Then Wu Song asked Mrs. Wang who lived next door to her. "Old Mr. Zhang who sells stuffed dumplings," she replied. Mr. Zhang was at home and had quite a shock when he saw Wu Song coming. "Captain, what can I do for you?" he said.
"Our house has disturbed everyone in the neighbourhood," said Wu Song. This old man was also prevailed upon by Wu Song to come to the house, where he was made to sit next to Mr. Zhao.
And why, you may ask, had the earliest guests not gone away by now? Because the soldiers were guarding the doors of course, front and back, they were all being watched like prisoners.
So now Wu Song had invited these four neighbours, together with Mrs. Wang and Jinlian making six people in all. He moved a chair for himself and sat down a little to one side. The soldiers were told to lock the front and back doors and the one at the back was called on to pour the wine. At this point Wu Song bowed to the company and announced: "Esteemed neighbours, please pardon my lack of courtesy and the informality of this invitation."
They all replied: "But we did nothing to celebrate your return. We oughtn't to let you go to all this trouble."
Wu Song only smiled. "It's so little. Please, I shall think you are laughing at me."
The soldier went on pouring the wine. The neighbours were secretly fearful, because they just didn't know what was going on. After three more rounds had been drunk, Mr. Hu got up to leave, saying: "I'm a busy man, you know."
Wu Song cried out: "You can't leave. Now that you're here you must stay a little longer. I don't care how busy you are."
This left Mr. Hu in a quandary, like the well with fifteen buckets, seven going up and eight going down. He said to himself: "If he really wanted to invite us out of politeness, why should he treat us like this, refusing to let us go?" Nevertheless he was obliged to sit down again.
"More wine," Wu Song said, and the soldier poured a fourth round. In the end they had seven rounds, and everyone felt as if they'd been at a thousand of Empress Lü's banquets, where those who refused a cup were beheaded. Then at last Wu Song called the soldier to clear away the cups, saying they'd drink again later. He wiped the table clean but when everyone got up to leave he stopped them with a gesture: "I've something to say first. Is there any one of you good people who can write?"
Mr. Yao said: "Mr. Hu here writes beautifully."
"Then may I trouble you, Mr. Hu?" Wu Song said, rolling up his sleeves and suddenly producing the sharp knife. He gripped the handle in his right hand, resting his thumb against the guard, and glared round at the company ferociously.
"Worthy neighbours," he began, "seeing that every crime has an author and every debt has to be paid, I need your help as witnesses." At this point he seized his sister-in-law with his left hand and pointed at Mrs. Wang with his right. The four neighbours were so shocked they could only stare, dumbfounded. Though they looked at each other in horror, no one dared utter a sound. Wu Song continued: "Please forgive me, friends but you have nothing to fear. Although I'm a rough and ready sort of fellow and I fear nothing, not even death, and it's my principle that crimes must be paid for, injustice avenged, I certainly intend you no harm. I merely need you as witnesses. However, if any of you should try to leave before the end, I'm afraid you will have to allow me to change my mind. I should be obliged to give him six or seven cuts with my knife, and it would make no difference if I had to answer for it with my life." Everyone continued to stare open-mouthed and no one dared raise a finger.

Wu Song now looked at Mrs. Wang and began to shout: "Now you old bitch hear this! My brother's death is all on your head and I shall be dealing with you in my own time!" Then he turned to Jinlian: "As for you, you trollop, listen to me! If you have any hope of being spared, you'd better tell me the whole truth about how you plotted against my brother's life!"
"Brother-in-law, you're talking nonsense!" Jinlian said. "Your brother died of a weak heart, what fault is it of mine?"
Before she could even finish, wham! Wu Song's knife stuck quivering in the table! Wu Song seized her by the hair with his left hand and punched her in the chest with his right. He kicked over the table and swung the girl over it, forcing her down in front of the altar, where he stood on her to keep her from moving. He pulled the knife from the table with his other hand and pointing it at Mrs. Wang said: "Confess, you bawd!" Seeing there was no way for her to escape, the old woman said: "Don't be angry, Captain, I will tell you everything."
On Wu Song's orders one of the soldiers brought paper, ink, brush and inkstone and laid them out neatly on the table. Wu Song pointed his knife at Mr. Hu and said: "May I trouble you to write everything down, exactly as you hear it."
"I will, I will," Mr. Hu stammered. He ground some ink, took up the brush, spread out the paper and said: "Now then Mrs. Wang, your confession!"
"It's really nothing to do with me," she said, "I don't know what you want me to say."
"I know everything, damn you! You've no way out! If you don't start talking I shall cut this one's head off and then I shall kill you!" He drew the blade of his knife softly across the girls face, twice. She began to scream: "Brother-in-law, forgive me! If you'll let me go I'll tell everything!"
Wu Song flung her on her knees before the altar and bellowed: "Talk then, slut!"
Half fainting with terror, she began to confess. She told everything, from the moment she was lowering the curtain and dropped the pole on Xi-men Qing to the making of the clothes which led to the affair. Finally she came to the part where the Midget was kicked and the plan to poison him was devised, and how Mrs. Wang incited her. She told it all, from start to finish, and Wu Song had Mr. Hu write everything down.
"You ungrateful wretch!" Mrs. Wang cried, "You've told them everything, what am I supposed to say now? You've left me no chance!" And so she too was obliged to make a clean breast of it and Mr. Hu also wrote down her declaration. When the record was complete, from beginning to end, the two accused were made to sign it and then the four witnesses added their full names. Wu Song told the soldiers to take off their belts and used them to tie the old woman's hands behind her back. He rolled up the declaration and put it in his breast pocket. He told the soldiers to bring a bowl of wine and placed it as an offering before the altar. Then he dragged Jinlian to the altar and forced her to her knees. He told the old woman to kneel beside her. Then he said: "Brother, whose spirit is not far from here, your little brother will wash away the injury which was done to you!" He told a soldier to burn some paper money. The girl now understood that her situation was desperate and set up a terrified shrieking. But Wu Song pulled her over backwards and planted both feet on her shoulders. He tore the clothing from her breast and — it's slow in the telling but happens in a flash — with one slash of the knife he opened her up. Placing the knife between his teeth he plunged both hands inside and tore out the heart and liver and placed them on the altar. Then, wham! one more blow cut off the head. There was blood everywhere. The four horrified neighbours covered their faces. They were so shocked by this savagery that no one dared to stir. No, they would do whatever he said. Wu Song sent one of the soldiers upstairs to fetch a bed cover that he used to wrap the head in. He wiped the knife and returned it to its sheath, washed his hands and then announced: "Worthy neighbours, I apologize to you. But I must still ask you to go upstairs and wait for me till my return." The neighbours looked at each other but no one thought of disobeying, so upstairs they went. Wu Song told a soldier to take the old woman up too and lock the door. Two soldiers were left on guard downstairs.
Taking the head with him, Wu Song now hastened to Xi-men Qing's medicine shop. When the manager appeared, Wu Song greeted him and said: "Is your boss there?"
"He's just gone out," the manager said.
"Please step this way with me," Wu Song said. "I want a word with you."
The manager was not unacquainted with Wu Song's ways and he dared not refuse. Wu Song led him apart into a quiet alley and then turned to him and said: "Do you want to die or do you want to live?"
"Please, Captain!" the man protested. "I am sure I have never done anything to offend you!"
"If you want to die, you can refuse to tell me where your boss has gone. But if you want to live you'd better tell me truthfully where he is."
"He ... he ... he went with a friend," the man stammered, "to have a drink ... in the wineshop, the wineshop under Lion Bridge."
Wu Song was off like a shot. The manager however stood there as if paralysed and it was quite some time before he returned to the shop.
When he reached the wineshop under Lion Bridge, Wu Song barged straight in and asked the landlord. "Who is Mr. Xi-men drinking with?"
"Some kind of merchant, I think. They're upstairs, in the room overlooking the street."
Wu Song tore up the stairs. He paused outside the room. His Nibs was in the window seat playing host. Opposite him was his guest and there were two hostesses sitting one on either side. Wu Song shook the head loose from its wrapping. It rolled out, still dripping with blood. Taking the head in his left hand and the dagger in his right, he lifted the curtain and as he entered tossed the head right in his Nibs' face!
His Nibs recognized Wu Song at once. With a cry of horror he leapt onto the chair and started to climb onto the window sill, thinking to escape that way. But when he saw the street below he knew it was too high to jump. Panic seized him. Then Wu Song — it's slow in the telling but happens in a flash — placed a hand on the table and vaulted onto it. With his foot he swept off all the plates and dishes, the two hostesses watching paralysed with fear. The other guest, the merchant, had fallen over backwards in his eagerness to get out of the way. His Nibs in desperation feinted with his hand and launched a flying kick. Wu Song was too intent on getting to grips with him; though he had seen the kick coming, it caught his right hand and sent the knife flying out of the window, to land in the middle of the street below. Seeing his attacker disarmed, his Nibs' confidence revived. He feinted with his right and hit out with his left, aiming at Wu Song's chest. Wu Song ducked and came in under his opponent's guard; with his left hand he grabbed the back of his adversary's neck while with his right he seized his left leg and gave a heave, crying "Down you go!"
Now, one, Xi-men Qing was hampered by the spirit of the man he had wronged; two, heaven's tolerance was ended; and three, he was no match in strength for Wu Song. So he went hurtling through the window, head over heels, to smash in the street below, where he lay, as they say, *in extremis*. Imagine the shock of those who were passing on either side of the street! Next thing, Wu Song bent to pick up the head of the adulteress beside the chair, rushed with it to the window and leapt down into the street. First he picked up his dagger. Then he went to inspect Xi-men Qing, where, half dead already, he lay stiffening on the ground with only his eyes moving. Steadying him with one hand, Wu Song cut off his head with a single blow. He tied the two heads together, and with the heads and his knife sped back to Redstone Road. When the soldiers opened up for him he went to offer the two heads on his brother's altar. He poured the libation of cold wine and proclaimed: "Brother, whose spirit is not far off, may you soon enjoy the peace of heaven! Your brother has avenged you. I have killed the betrayer and his paramour! Soon I will burn a memorial tablet."
Wu Song now told the soldiers to bring the neighbours downstairs. Mrs. Wang was placed in front, closely guarded. Still holding the knife, Wu Song raised the two heads and addressed the group as follows: "I have just one more thing to say to you all and then I am done."
The four of them crossed their hands deferentially and said: "Please speak Captain, we are listening." What Wu Song had to say is of some importance, because of some later consequences:

The hero of Jingyang Pass into prison hurled;
Yanggu's captain turned monk, wandering the world.

At the time when he heard Wu Song say whatv he said, he was panic-stricken and rushed out of the backdoor to Grandma Wang's house after waking up from his long nightmare. Jinlian called out, "Brother-in-law, please sit down, and I will come down in a moment." Now although her husband had been dead only a short time she was not in mourning. So she hurriedly washed the rouge off her face, took the jewellery out of her hair, and ruffled up her hair. She took off her red embroidered skirt and coat, and put on the white mourning clothes. She then commenced an imitation of crying.
Wu Song called out for her to stop crying, and to tell him when his brother had died; and of what sickness and who had given medicine to him.
She replied between her sobs, "Your brother was suddenly seized with some heart disease, about twenty days after you had left. He was sick for about nine days, and then he prayed to the gods, and sought to ascertain by divination whether he would get better. He took all kinds of medicine but they did him no good, and at last he died. He left me with nothing but grief."
Now in the next house Grandma Wang was listening at the partition wall, and when she heard this she was afraid that Wu Song would soon find out the truth. So she at once hurried to come across to Jinlian's assistance, by interjecting evasions.
But Wu Song continued, "My brother had never had any heart trouble how could he die of this illness?"
Grandma Wang who had just arrived replied, "Inspector Wu, why do you ask such a question? There is a saying, 'Man's fate is as uncertain as the weather.' Who can guarantee at any time what is going to happen?"
"I was like a crab without legs," said Jinlian. "I could do nothing, and I am much indebted to this lady and many neighbours who helped me."
"Where was he buried?" he asked.
"I was by myself so how could I go to find a burial place?" replied Jinlian. "After three days I had his remains cremated."
"How long is it since my brother died?"
"In two days more it will be the seventh week since the funeral," Jinlian replied.
Wu Song was wrapt in thought but said nothing, and then he left the house, and went to the *yamen*. He unlocked the door of his quarters, and put on white mourning clothes. He summoned a soldier to bring a hempen rope which he tied round his waist according to custom. He then concealed in his clothes a very sharp dagger, and some silver. He then ordered the soldier to lock the door and go with him to buy some rice, flour, vegetables, incense, candles, and paper joss money.
When this had been done it was evening and they went again to Wu the Elder's house, and Jinlian opened the door, and Wu Song ordered the soldier to prepare a meal. He then lighted a candle, and placed it with some food in front of the memorial tablet. All was ready by about 10 P.M. when Wu Song knelt down and offered sacrifices to the spirit of his brother, and prayed, "Elder brother, your soul is not far away. When you were alive you were good-natured; but now that you are dead you cannot tell me who cheated you. But if anyone has injured you I ask you to give me the information in a dream, and I will take vengeance for your wrong." He then poured the sacrificial wine on the ground, burnt the paper money, and sobbed bitterly. The neighbours on both sides heard him crying, and could not help being sorry for him. Jinlian in the inner room also kept up her imitation wailing. When Wu Song had stopped weeping he took the sacrificial food and wine and invited the two soldiers to join him in eating some. He then asked for two mats, and told the soldiers to sleep on them at the two doors of the room. He himself lay down near the mourning curtain to sleep. Upstairs Jinlian fastened the trapdoor of her room before going to sleep. But Wu Song could not sleep, and frequently turned over on his mat. The two soldiers however were sound asleep, and he heard them snoring. At last about midnight he got up, and noticed that the light in the glass lamp was just flickering. The watchmen outside were beating the hour of midnight on their drums. He heaved a sigh, and sitting down on the mat he soliloquized, "My brother was always weak, and now that he is dead his spirit will be weak." Just then there came a strong gust of cold wind from underneath the curtains that whirled round in a circle, blew out the flickering flame in the lamp, and blew the paper money around the room. The hair on Wu Song's head stood on end, and looking around he saw the shape of a man come from under the curtain and say, "Younger brother! I died a miserable death." But as Wu Song was not sure whether he had heard correctly he looked fixedly but then he failed to see anything, and the cold wind had also gone. He sat down on his mat, and wondered whether he had seen and heard anything or was it really the dream he had expected. The two soldiers were certainly still there snoring. He thought that his brother must have died of an unknown trouble, that his spirit might have come to tell him about it but had been vanished in the presence of his valor at once. But Wu Song kept all this to himself, and did not speak to anyone about it.
At last the dawn came, and the soldiers arose to boil some water. When Jinlian came downstairs she asked Wu Song whether he had slept well. Wu Song did not reply to this but asked, "Sister-in-law, of what sickness did my brother die?"
"Brother-in-law, how is it that you forget it? I told you all about it yesterday. He died of some disease of the heart."
"But whose medicine did he take?"
"I have the prescription for the medicine here," she replied.
"And who bought the coffin?"
"It was bought by our neighbour Grandma Wang."
"And who bore the coffin away?" he asked.
"That was arranged by the neighbourhood chief—He Jiushu."
"So it was like that. Well, I must now go and attend roll call at the *yamen*." He then left with the two soldiers, and when outside on the Zishi Street he asked them if they knew He Jiushu, the neighbourhood chief. They replied that they knew him well, and that he lived on the Shizi Street. He asked them to take him there, and when they reached the house he dismissed them.
Wu Song pushed the door open, and called out, "Is He Jiushu at home?" When He Jiushu heard this he was very flurried but he quickly got the parcel containing the bones and silver and hid them in his clothes; he then went to meet Wu Song. He greeted him with the question, "Inspector, when did you return?"
Wu Song replied that he had come back yesterday, and as he had something to discuss with him he asked him to accompany him to some other place.
"Inspector, I will accompany you but before we go please take a little tea."
Wu Song declined the invitation. They both then went to a restaurant in an alley, and ordered wine.
"Inspector, you have just arrived, and I ought to ask you to drink wine. It is contrary to the usual procedure for you to ask me to take wine." He Jiushu however really had a good idea of what was coming. The waiter brought the wine, and they drank it but still Wu Song did not speak. He Jiushu did not like this continued silence, and became confounded as to the outcome, so he thought he might introduce some other matter but Wu Song paid no attention to anything he said. When, however, they had drunk several cups of wine, Wu Song at last took off his coat, and seizing his dagger, stuck it in the table where it stood erect. The waiter was startled at this, and retreated to a distant part of the room. He Jiushu's face turned yellow, and he was holding his breath. Wu Song rolled up his sleeves, and grasping the dagger with one hand, he pointed with the other at He Jiushu and said, "I am a rough fellow but still I know 'a wrong has its instigator, and a debt has its lender.' You need not be afraid, as I only want you to speak the truth. Tell me the cause of my elder brother's death, and nothing shall trouble you. If I hurt you I would not be a man. But if there is the slightest attempt at deceiving me I will take this dagger, and drill several hundred big holes in your body. Tell me clearly the conditions of my brother's body." So saying he planted both hands on his thighs, and looked fixedly at He Jiushu with wild, fierce staring eyes.
He Jiushu took the parcel from his sleeve, and placing it on the table said, "Inspector, please restrain your temper. Here is the important proof." Wu Song opened the parcel, and saw two brittle black bones and an ingot of ten taels of silver. He asked how these things could be proofs, and He Jiushu then explained all that had happened.
"Who is the adulterer?" asked Wu Song.
"I do not know who he is," replied He Jiushu, "but I have heard people say that a boy named Yun Ge went with Wu the Elder to a tea-house to seize the adulterer. In this street I think everybody knows who he is. If you want to go into this matter carefully, you better see the boy Yun Ge first."
"Very well," said Wu Song, "we will go together, and find him." He took his dagger, and put it back in the sheath; hid the bones and silver in his clothes, and paid the bill for the wine. They then departed, and soon reached the home of Yun Ge. There they saw the boy with a basket made of willow twigs over his arm, containing rice which he had evidently just been out to buy.
"Yun Ge!" called out He Jiushu, "do you recognize this Inspector?"
"Of course, ever since the big beast was killed and carried to the city," replied the boy. "But what do you two want with me?" Really the boy had a good idea what it was about but he continued, "There is, however, one thing; my father is sixty years old, and has no one to look after him so that I cannot take part with you two in a court dispute."
"Good younger brother," said Wu Song, "here take these five taels of silver to your father, and then come back as I have something to say to you."
Yun Ge knew that the silver would be enough to cover their living expenses for about four months. So he thought that he might run the risk even of presenting himself at the court. He gave the money and basket of rice to his father, and then accompanied the two men to a restaurant in an alley. Wu Song ordered rice for all three, and then spoke to the boy, "You are a very young boy, yet you know your filial duty of supporting a family. I have already given you five taels of silver but I have a matter for you to do, and when that is satisfactorily settled I will give you another fifteen taels which you may use as a capital. Now tell me, how did you go with my brother to a tea-house to seize an adulterer?"
Yun Ge then recited all the details of the affair omitting nothing, and when he had finished Wu Song asked him, "Is this really true? You must not tell me any lies."
"Even if you took me to the *yamen* I would say exactly the same," replied the boy.
Wu Song was satisfied and when they had eaten the rice he paid the money, and they all three left. He Jiushu wanted to go home but Wu Song asked him to accompany them to the *yamen* to make a statement there. So they all went to the *yamen*, and when the magistrate saw them he asked what accusation the Inspector had to make.
Wu Song stated, "My brother's wife has committed adultery with Ximen Qing, and also poisoned my brother. These are my two witnesses. I request you to take action in this case."
The magistrate then heard what He Jiushu and Yun Ge had to say. The magistrate discussed the matter with his officers but as they were all on intimate terms with Ximen Qing, they did not like to act in the matter. The magistrate then spoke to Wu Song, "You are an Inspector in the *yamen*, and should know the law in these matters? There is an ancient saying, 'In arresting adulterers you must get both; in arresting a thief you must get the stolen goods; when a man is killed you must see the wound.' In this case you have not seen your dead brother's corpse but have listened to these people's statements so there may be some mistake somewhere. You had better consider the matter carefully, and if you find it correct then we will act."
Wu Song produced the two bones, the ingot of silver, and the paper with the names on, and gave them to the magistrate. He appealed again to him. "I again press my case. These proofs have not been fabricated."
The magistrate replied, "You may get up now, and I will reconsider the matter. If I find that you have a strong case then I will arrest the adulterer."
Wu Song detained the two witnesses in his quarters. Now Ximen Qing heard of what had happened in the *yamen*, so he sent a confidential servant to the secretary of the magistrate to promise bribery.
Early the following day Wu Song again entered the court, and strongly urged the magistrate to issue a warrant. But to his surprise the magistrate handed him back the bones, etc. and said, "You had better not listen to other people's talk, and become so keenly opposed to Ximen Qing. The case is not clear to me so that I cannot act. The sage said, 'Even if you see a thing done, yet you cannot be sure that it is really so. How can you believe what is said behind one's back?' Don't get nervous so easily."
A jailer who was there said, "In cases of murder we require to see the corpse, examine the wounds, ascertain the cause of death, obtain the things used, and find traces or clues. If all these five necessaries are obtainable then the case can be taken up."
"As Your Magistrate will not take the matter up now, I'll think of another plan," said Wu Song. He took the bones, etc., and handed them back to He Jiushu. He then went to his quarters with the two witnesses, and had a meal prepared for them. After the meal he asked them to wait there till he came back.
He took three soldiers with him, and hid in his clothes an ink slab, a brush, ink stick, and about five sheets of paper. He sent two of the soldiers to buy a pig's head, a goose, a chicken, some wine, and fruit, and take them to Pan Jinlian's house. He then took the one soldier with him to the same place where he arrived about 10 A.M.
Jinlian was already aware that his appeal for justice at the *yamen* had failed so she was not afraid of him, and felt quite confident of herself. Wu Song called out, "Sister-in-law, please come downstairs as I have something to say to you." She presently came down, and then asked him what he had to say.
"Tomorrow will he the end of the seventh week for sacrificing to my elder brother's spirit. You have caused trouble to the neighbours, so now I am thinking of giving them a feast so I have bought some wine, etc."
She was pleased with this but asked what he wanted to thank them for.

"We must not be stinting in courtesy." He then told the soldier to light two candles in front of the mourning curtain. He also placed there an incense bowl, and spread the paper money on the floor. The food was arranged on the table ready for a feast. One soldier was sent into the kitchen to warm the wine. Two soldiers set out the tables and chairs and two others were put as sentries at the front and back doors. When all this had been arranged Wu Song asked Jinlian to stay there to receive guests, as he would go and invite them.
The first person he went to was Grandma Wang, who lived next door but she declined the invitation. He reminded her that she had been of great assistance before, and this was why he wished her to come to the feast. He had provided food and wine, and as all was now ready he hoped that she would come. She at last agreed, took down the shop signboard, closed the door, and then went out by the back door to Jinlian's house. Wu Song there asked Jinlian to take the seat of honour, and Grandma Wang sit opposite to her. Grandma Wang had got the news from Ximen Qing so she drank the wine without restraint. But both women were wondering what Wu Song was going to do.
Wu Song then went and invited a silversmith named Yao Wenqing to come to the feast but he said he was too busy. But Wu Song pressed him to go, and asked him even to drink one cup of wine, and then leave. At last Yao agreed to go, and Wu Song got him to sit next to Grandma Wang.
Wu Song then called on another neighbour called Zhao Zhongming who was a maker of paper horses for funerals. He also pretended to be very busy in his shop, and begged to be excused. But Wu Song pressed the invitation, and said that most of the neighbours were already there so he could not stay away. At last he also consented and upon reaching the house Wu Song asked him to sit next to Jinlian on account of his venerable age.
Wu Song next went to invite Hu Zhengqing to the feast. He had a shop for the sale of cold wine but as he had previously been an employee at the *yamen* he suspected that Wu Song was arranging something so he declined to go. But Wu Song would not agree to this, and at last dragged him off by force, and made him sit next to Zhao.
Wu Song asked Grandma Wang who was her neighbour on the other side. She replied that he was named Zhang, and sold noodles. When Wu Song entered Zhang's house the latter appeared to be surprised, and asked what he wanted. When he heard of the invitation to the feast he also declined but after some persuasion he went, and Wu Song placed him next to Yao.
When these people were once inside they found they could not depart as there was a soldier at both the front and the back door. There were altogether six persons at the feast. Wu Song took a stool, and sat down at one side of the table. He then told the soldiers to close the doors. When fresh warm wine had been served by the soldiers, Wu Song saluted the gathering and addressed them, "I hope that you, honourable neighbours, will forgive my rude manner of inviting you to attend this feast."
They replied, "We, mean people, ought to have welcomed you back from your journey but instead you have invited us to this feast."
"This is only a small affair but I hope that you will not laugh at it."
The soldier came round and filled up their cups with wine. The neighbours thought that Wu Song had some evil object in view but they could not yet grasp his ideas. When they all had drunk three cups of wine Hu Zhengqing got up and said that he must now go as he was very busy. But Wu Song would not let him go. "Since you have come, how can you go? Even if you are busy you must stay." Hu Zhengqing was very much unset by this, and his heart was beating like fifteen buckets being hurriedly lowered into a well for water—eight going down while seven were coming up. He thought that as Wu Song had pressed him to come and drink wine, and now strongly objected to his leaving, there must be something else coming. Wu Song called for more wine, and the soldier kept on filling their cups until they had all had seven cups so that they all began to feel like having eaten the Dowager Empress Lu 's (B. C. 180) thousand feasts. Then Wu Song told the soldier to clear the table, and said that they would resume their feast later on. When this had been done the neighbours all got up to take their leave but Wu Song caught hold of those on either side of him, and asked them to wait as he had something to say to them. He then asked which of them could write characters, to which Yao replied that Hu Zhengqing was a good writer, and Wu Song asked the latter with salutation to oblige him in that work. He then rolled up his sleeves, drew forth his dagger, and placed the hilt against his breast with the blade pointing outwards; and then with wide glaring eyes he addressed them, "Honourable neighbour! There is a saying, 'A wrong has a source, a loan has a lender.' Now I want you all to act as witnesses." He then seized hold of Pan Jinlian with his left hand, and pointed with his right hand at Grandma Wang. The neighbours were astounded at this unexpected movement, and stood with open mouths looking at each other but not one of them dared say a word. Wu Song called out, "Neighbours, you must not be afraid. You know that I am a rough man. I face death without fear. If there is an injury I will avenge it. If I have an enemy I will oppose him. But I have no intention of injuring you gentlemen, as I only brought you here as witnesses. If you gentlemen go I may change my attitude, and give you a surprise. If any man goes now he will have to face my dagger, and I will be responsible for his death upon my life."
The neighbours all stood aghast, and dared not move.
Wu Song glared at Grandma Wang and shouted, "You, old bitch, must now listen to me. You are the cause of my brother's death. I will now ask a few questions." He then turned his head and addressed Pan Jinlian, "You slut! How did you kill my brother? If you speak the truth I will spare you."
Jinlian replied to this, "Brother-in-law, how unreasonable you are! Your brother died of some heart trouble, and I had nothing to do with it." She had hardly finished saying this when Wu Song caught her by the hair, and with the other hand grasping her clothes he lifted her and placed her on the ground in front of the mourning curtain. He held her in that position by standing on her with both feet. Then taking his dagger in his hand he spoke to Grandma Wang, "You old bitch! Now you speak the truth." She would have liked to escape but she could not move an inch. She said, "Inspector, you need not get angry. I will tell you all about it."
Wu Song ordered the soldier to arrange on the table the paper, ink brush, and ink slab, and pointing his dagger at Hu Zhengqing he told him to write down every sentence as it was spoken.
Hu Zhengqing was trembling with fright and he stuttered in reply, "I—I—will—will—write—write—" He then rubbed the ink on the slab, took up the pen, and then told Grandma Wang to speak the truth.
Grandma Wang replied, "It is not my affair. What do you want me to say?"
"You old bitch!" swore Wu Song. "I know all about it so what are you delaying matters for? If you do not speak the truth immediately, I shall stab my dagger into this slut, and then kill you, the old bitch." So saying, he brandished the dagger above Jinlian's face, and she quickly called out, "Brother-in-law, please forgive me. Let me get up, and I will tell you all about it."
Wu Song lifted her up, and made her kneel in front of his late brother's curtain, and shouted, "Slut, hurry up!"
Jinlian was now thoroughly terrified, and she told Wu Song the whole affair from beginning to end: how his brother had been kicked, and how Grandma Wang had planned the poisoning. She hid nothing. As she spoke Hu Zhengqing wrote it all down sentence by sentence.
Grandma Wang then spoke to Jinlian, "You snake! You first confess, so that I cannot get out of it. There is only bitterness for me, old as I am." She then confessed all her part, and it was all written down by Hu. Both women were then told to sign their statements. All the four neighbours were then asked to sign their names as witnesses. Wu Song then told the soldiers to bring the scarf, and tie Grandma Wang's hands behind her back. While they were doing this he rolled up the document, and put it away in his breast. He then told the soldiers to bring a cup of wine, and place it in front of the mourning curtain of the late Wu the Elder. He then seized Jinlian and dragged her along the floor, and summoned Grandma Wang and made both of them kneel before the curtain. Shedding tears, he addressed the tablet of his brother saying, "Elder brother! Your spirit cannot be far away! Today, I take revenge for you." He then told the soldiers to burn some paper money. Jinlian saw the danger of what was being done, and attempted to speak but Wu Song seized her by the hair, and pushing her on the floor stood upon her two arms with his feet. Then he stooped down, and ripped open her blouse exposing her breasts. Taking his dagger he cut open her breast, placed the bloody tool in. his mouth; and ripping open her breast with both hands, took out her heart, spleen, liver, lungs, and kidneys and offered them to his brother's tablet. He then cut off Jinlian's head, and the floor was covered with blood. The witnessing neighbours were so horrified that they dared not even offer advice but covered their faces with their hands. Wu Song told a soldier to go upstairs, and bring a bed sheet. He wrapped Jinlian's head in it, cleaned his dagger, and replaced it in its sheath. He washed his hands, and then said, saluting, "I am afraid that I have somewhat upset you gentlemen but I beg to be excused. Please go upstairs, and I will soon be with you." The neighbours looked at each other but there was not one who dared to disobey him, and they all went upstairs. Wu Song then told a soldier to take Grandma Wang upstairs also. The trapdoor upstairs was closed, and he placed two soldiers as sentries to watch the place.
Wu Song then left with the bundle containing Jinlian's head, and hurried off to Ximen Qing's medicine shop. Upon arrival there he asked the manager whether his master was in, and was informed that he had just gone out. Wu Song asked the man to come nearer as he had something further to say to him but the manager recognized Wu Song and dared not refuse to meet him. He took him to a quiet part of the alleyway outside but there he changed his manner, and said, "Do you want to live or die?" The manager replied, "Inspector, I am only a small man but I have never injured you in any way."
Wu Song said, "You will die if you do not tell me where Ximen Qing has gone to; but you will live if you tell me the truth."
"He has just gone—gone—to—to—a wine shop at the—the—Shizi Bridge—to—to—drink—wine."
Wu Song rushed away at once but the manager was so astonished that he was almost rooted to the spot.
Upon reaching the wine shop Wu Song asked the proprietor who was drinking wine with Ximen Qing, and was told that he was upstairs drinking wine with another wealthy man in a small apartment. Wu Song went upstairs, and peeping through the door screen he saw Ximen Qing and a friend sitting at a feast with two singsong girls. He opened the bundle, and took out the head with blood still dripping from it. Holding it in his left hand and a dagger in his right, he thrust the curtain to one side, and entered the room and threw the head into Ximen Qing's face.
Ximen Qing recognized Wu Song at once, and was startled. Jumping up, he stood on his chair, and placed one foot on the window sill with the idea of escaping but when he looked down into the street below he dared not jump.
Wu Song sprang on the table, and kicked off all the dishes. The two girls were so astonished that they could not move, and the friend collapsed on the floor. Ximen Qing seeing the fierce attitude of Wu Song suddenly kicked Wu Song's right hand, and knocked the dagger out of his hand, and it flew through the window into the street.
Ximen Qing was now no longer afraid of his opponent so raising his right arm as a guard he flung his left fist at Wu Song's breast. But the latter avoided the blow, seized hold of Ximen Qing's hair, and lifted him up. As he lifted him up with one hand, he caught hold of a foot with the other hand, and called out, "Now, down you go!" Ximen Qing felt as though he was in the grasp of some aggrieved ghost; that Heaven would not forgive him; that he was helpless against Wu Song's great strength; Wu Song had turned him upside down, and threw him through the window. He fell on his head in the street below, and was unconscious. The people on the street were stupefied at this strange occurrence. Wu Song then picked up the bloody head of Pan Jinlian, and jumped with it through the window, into the street below. There Ximen Qing was stretched out stiff yet his eyes were moving. So Wu Song took his dagger and cut off his head also. Fastening the two heads together, and with his dagger in hand, he hurried off to Zishi Street. Calling out to the soldiers inside to open the door, he entered and placed the two heads in front of the mourning curtain of his late brother, and then sprinkled the cold wine on the floor as a libation for the spirit. Weeping he addressed the dead man's tablet: "Elder brother, your spirit cannot be far away but it may now ascend to Heaven. I have avenged the wrong for you, and killed both the guilty persons. I shall now burnt your tablet so that the funeral ceremony is now completed."
He then told the soldiers to bring the neighbours downstairs, and when they arrived he placed Grandma Wang in front of them. Holding the dagger in one hand and the two heads in another, he said, "I have still one thing to say before you go."
The neighbours all agreed to listen to whatever he had to say.

His glorious record would not save
This man from being treated vile.
Abandon his official post,
And wanders far as brigand bold.

**125**

**The Night Witch-Ogress of Mengzhou Road Sells Drugged Wine & meat pies of a Man's Flesh on the Mengzhou road; Constable Wu Song Meets the Gardener Zhang Qing at Crossroads Rise**

Wu Song said to the 4 neighbours: "The crime I committed to avenge my brother was proper and reasonable. Though it may mean my death, I've no regrets. I'm sorry I frightened you. I'm going to give myself up now. I don't know whether I'll live or die. First, I'll burn my brother's memorial tablet. May I trouble you to sell my possessions to raise money for my trial? Today I'll surrender to the magistrate. All I want you to do is to testify and tell the truth, regardless of the consequences."
He burned the memorial tablet and the paper ingot replicas, then brought two trunks down from upstairs, opened them and gave their contents to the neighbours. Next, he set out for the magistracy, escorting Grandma Wang and carrying the two heads. The whole county town was in an uproar. Countless watchers lined the streets.
When the magistrate heard who was coming and why, he was shocked. He immediately called his court into session. Wu Song brought Grandma Wang forward and knelt. He placed the murder knife and the two heads before the dais. Wu Song knelt to the left, Grandma Wang knelt in the middle, and the neighbours knelt to the right. Constable Wu took out the confessions which Hu had written down and read them from beginning to end.
The magistrate had the recorder question Grandma Wang. What she answered corresponded with her confession. The four neighbours gave corroborating testimony. Coroner Ho and Yunge were called. They also offered clear evidence.
Guarded by a court officer and the coroner's assistants, all those concerned in the case returned to Purple Stone Street, where the body of Golden Lotus was examined. They went next to the street outside the tavern at Lion Bridge for an inspection of Ximen's corpse. Certificates stating the circumstances surrounding the death were filled out, after which all returned to the county office and the certificates were submitted. The magistrate ordered that long cangues be fitted to the necks of Wu Song and Grandma Wang and that they be committed to jail. The witnesses were lodged in the gatehouse.
The magistrate considered Wu Song a gallant principled man. He remembered the mission Wu Song had undertaken for him to the capital and his various good qualities. He wanted very much to help him. He summoned the court officers.
"That Wu Song is a loyal fellow. We'll change the indictment to this: 'Wu Song, wishing to sacrifice to the memory of his brother, was prevented by his sister-in-law, and for that reason they quarrelled. She tried to knock down the memorial tablet, Wu Song sought to protect it, and they fought, in the course of which he killed her. Ximen Qing, who was her adulterous lover, intervened. The two men battled, evenly matched, all the way to Lion Bridge, and there the lover was killed.' "
The new indictment was read to Wu Song and the others involved. The magistrate wrote an order directing that all concerned be taken under guard to Dongping Prefecture for disposition of the case by the prefect.
Although Yanggu was only a small county it had men who appreciated chivalry. Leading families gave Wu Song donations of silver. Others sent him wine and food and money and rice. Wu Song went to his quarters, packed his luggage, and entrusted it to one of his soldiers. He sent Yunge twenty or thirty ounces of silver to use in looking after his father. More than half the men under his command presented Wu Song with meat and wine.
Armed with the transfer order, the county officers in charge wrapped up Coroner Ho's cremation record, the silver Ximen had given him, the charred bones, the confessions and the murder weapon and proceeded with his charges to Dongping Prefecture. By the time they got to the prefectural office a noisy crowd was waiting at the gates.
Chen Wenzhao, the prefect, on hearing of their arrival, immediately called his court into session. An intelligent official, Chen already knew about the matter. He had them brought before him and read the report from Yanggu County. Next, he looked over the record of the testimony and questioned each of the witnesses. He directed the keeper of stores to retain the various exhibits and the murder weapon, had Wu Song's heavy cangue exchanged for a light one, and committed him to jail. A heavy cangue was placed around Grandma Wang's neck and nailed fast. She was locked in a cell for the condemned.
The county officers were allowed to return. As to Coroner Ho, Yunge and the 4 neighbours, the prefect said, "These six can go home. Let them stay there until further notice. The wife of the principal Ximen Qing must wait here in the prefecture. When I receive instructions from the imperial authorities I will render a detailed judgment."
The county officers and the 6 returned to Yanggu. Wu Song remained in jail. Several soldiers brought him food. Prefect Chen sympathized with Wu Song, and thought him a gallant high-minded person. He frequently sent people to inquire after him. As a result, none of the jailers asked him for a single penny, in fact they brought him food and wine. Chen lightened the charges against Wu Song still further, and sent the case up to the Legal Office of the Imperial Government for examination and decision. At the same time he dispatched a trusted emissary to the capital with confidential letters to friends in the Ministry of Criminal Proceedings. These discussed the matter with the Legal Office, and then rendered the following decision:
*Whereas Grandma Wang stimulated sexual cravings and adulterous desires; and whereas she instigated the woman to poison her husband; and whereas she told the woman to prevent Wu Song from sacrificing to the memory of his brother, as a result of which he killed her; and whereas she provoked the man and woman into indecent behavior: it is therefore decided that Grandma Wang shall be executed by being sliced to death. Wu Song, although he was avenging his brother when he fought and killed the adulterer Ximen Qing, and although he voluntarily surrendered, cannot be completely exonerated. He is to be given forty strokes on the back, tattooed with the mark of the criminal, and exiled to a place two thousand* li *distant. The adulterous couple committed major crimes but they are dead and no more need be said about them. The other persons involved in the case are free to return to their homes.*
This decision is to be implemented immediately upon receipt. When Prefect Chen read this document, he summoned before his court Coroner Ho, Yunge, the four neighbours and the wife of Ximen Qing. Wu Song was brought from jail. The decision from the Imperial Government was read to him. The cangue was removed, and he was given forty strokes. The jailers saw to it that only six or seven actually cut his flesh. A seven-and-a-half-catty cangue was fastened around his neck and the mark of the criminal was tattooed in two lines on his face. The prefect exiled him to prison in the district town of Mengzhou. The others, in accordance with the decision, were allowed to go home.
Grandma Wang was brought from her cell to hear the verdict of the Imperial Government. The reason for the execution was written on a placard; and the prisoner signed her acknowledgement. She was then tied seated on a wooden "donkey" with three ropes and nailed to it by four long spikes driven through her limbs.
The prefect of Dongping gave his order: "Slice her!"
Grandma Wang and the "donkey" were carried out by strong bearers and paraded through the streets. Terrible drums rumbled, frightful gongs sounded. With the placard in the fore and staff-bearers bringing up the rear, with two sharp knives held aloft and a bunch of paper flowers waving, the procession marched to the centre of the city. There Grandma Wang was sliced to death.
Wu Song, wearing a light cangue for walking, witnessed the execution. Neighbour Yao gave him the money he had obtained by selling the constable's possessions, bid him farewell and went home. Two guards were assigned by the court to take Wu Song to Mengzhou. The work of the prefect was done.
Wu Song and his guards set out. His orderly gave him the luggage he had been looking after and returned to Yanggu. The three men left Dongping Prefecture and proceeded slowly along the winding road to Mengzhou. The guards knew Wu Song was a man of chivalry, and they treated him with gingerly respect. Observing this, he was generous with the money in his pack, and bought them meat and wine at village inns.
We'll cut the idle chatter. Wu Song had killed in the beginning of the third month, he had spent two months in jail, and now he was on the road. That made it the middle of the year. The blazing sun overhead was hot enough to crack stones and melt metal. They could march only in the cool of the early morning.
After some three weeks of travel, they came to a big road. Near the crest of a hill they paused. It was mid-morning.
"Let's not rest here," said Wu Song. "When we get to the bottom again, we'll find a place to eat and drink."
"A good idea," said the guards.
As they rounded the top of the hill, they looked down. In the distance below was a thatched house. A pennant indicating that wine was sold there hung from a willow abutting a stream.
Wu Song pointed. "A tavern."
The three hurried down the slope. Beside a bluff they met a fuel seller carrying a load of wood. Wu Song hailed him.
"Would you mind telling us what this place is called?"
"This hill is Mengzhou Road Hill. There ahead, beside that grove of large trees, is Crossroads Rise."
Wu Song and the guards continued on. At Crossroads Rise the first thing they saw was a huge tree. Even four or five men holding hands couldn't encompass it. Thick withered vines coiled up around its trunk. Beyond the tree was the tavern they had seen earlier.
A woman was seated outside beside a window. She wore a green silk tunic. Her hair was adorned with gleaming golden pins and wild flowers. When she saw Wu Song and the two guards approaching, she rose and came forward to greet them. A crimson skirt of fine silk draped the lower half of her body. Her face was rouged and powdered. Her open tunic revealed a peach-coloured silk blouse with gold buttons.
"Rest a while, travellers," she said. "We have good meat and wine here. And if you'd like a delicacy, you can try our big dumplings."
The three men went inside. The guards rested their staves against a table and stools made of cypress, untied their bucklers, and sat down. Wu Song removed the pack from his back and put it on the table. He unwound his sash and took off his shirt.
"There's no one here to see," said the guards. "We'll take off your cangue on our own responsibility. You'll be able to drink a few bowls of wine in comfort."
They peeled off the seals, opened the cangue and put it on the floor beneath the table. All three stripped to the waist and hung their garments on the window sill. The woman, smiling, came up to them.

"How much wine do you want?"
"Never mind about that," said Wu Song. "Just heat it and keep it coming. And slice four or five catties of meat. Add up the bill and I'll pay you."
"Our big dumplings are also very good."
"Bring us twenty or thirty as a side dish."
Giggling, the woman went into the rear and brought out a large bucket of wine. She set three big bowls on the table and three pairs of chopsticks, then sliced two platters of meat. After serving four or five rounds of wine, she pulled a hamper of steamed dumplings from the stove and placed it before the men. The guards immediately began to eat.
Wu Song broke one of the dumplings open. "What's in these?" he asked. "Human flesh, or dog's?"
The woman giggled. "You're teasing. Who ever heard of such a thing in these times of peace and clear skies? For generations our family has served nothing but dumplings of pure beef."
"In my wanderings among the gallant fraternity I've often heard men say: 'What traveller dares stop by the big tree at Crossroads Rise? The fat ones become filling for dumplings, the thin ones fill up the stream!' "
"Who would say such a thing? You're just making it up!"
"There are hairs in this dumpling that look a lot like pubic hairs. They made me suspicious," said Wu Song. "Why isn't your husband around, madam?"
"He's away on a trading trip."
"You must be lonely, here all by yourself."
Smiling, the woman thought: "This criminal exile dares toy with me! He must want to die! 'The moth seeks the flame.' Well, he's brought it on himself. I'll fix the cold!" Aloud she said: "Quit your joking. Have a few more bowls of wine and then cool off beneath the tree. Or you can rest here in the house if you like."
"She's up to something," though Wu Song. "I'll kid her along."
"This wine is pretty flat," he said. "If you have any thing better, we might try a couple of bowls."
"I have a wine with an excellent bouquet but it's a bit muddy."
"Fine. The muddier the better."
The woman smiled grimly to herself. She went in and brought out a pot of turbid wine.
Wu Song looked at it and said: "This is a very good wine indeed. It tastes best when it's heated."
"You certainly know your wines. I'll warm it right up." The woman laughed and thought to herself: "That criminal exile really deserves to die. So he wants it warm! That will make the drug work all the faster. I've got the knave in the palm of my hand!"
She heated the wine, poured out three bowls and smiled. "Try this, gentlemen."
The two guards couldn't wait. They raised their bowls and drank.
"I've never been able to drink without something to go with it," said Wu Song. "Slice me some more meat."
As soon as the woman went to the rear, Wu Song poured the wine in a dark corner. Then he smacked his lips and said with relish: "Excellent! This wine has a real kick in it!"
The woman only pretended to go for the meat. She quickly returned. Clapping her hands, she cried: "Down you go! Down you go!"
To the guards it seemed as if the heavens were whirling. Stricken dumb, they fell over backwards. Wu Song pretended to close his eyes and collapse face up beside his stool.
He heard the woman laugh and say: "Got you! 'Wretched scoundrels it's only meet, you drink the water that washed my feet!' " And she called: "All right, fellows! Out here, quick!"
A couple of big bruisers hurried into the room and, on her instructions, carried out the two guards. They returned for Wu Song but they couldn't lift him. He lay there, inert. He seemed to weigh a thousand catties.
"Useless oafs," the woman snarled. "All you can do is eat! You're good for nothing else! I'll handle this myself!"
She slipped out of her green tunic and crimson skirt. Arms bare, she picked up Wu Song effortlessly. He promptly hugged her close to his chest and wrapped both legs around her thighs in a scissors grip. The woman squealed like a stuck pig, and the bruisers came rushing back. Wu Song roared at them so fiercely that they stopped dead in their tracks with fright. Inexorably, he pressed the woman to the floor.
"Spare me, good fellow," she pleaded. She no longer dared to struggle.
Just then a man put down a load of fuel outside the tavern entrance. When he saw Wu Song crushing the woman he bounded in with large strides.
"Let her go, good fellow," he exclaimed. "Spare her! I have something to say!"
Wu Song jumped up, planted his left foot on the prostrate woman, and faced him with clenched fists. The man wore a head kerchief of indented black silk, a white cloth tunic, puttees, eight-thonged hemp sandals, and a sash around his waist. He had a protuberant forehead and prominent cheek-bones. A wispy beard adorned his chin. He was about thirty-five or six.
Clasping his hands respectfully before his chest, he gazed at Wu Song and queried: "May I ask your name, sir?"
"En route or at rest my name is the same. I am Wu Song the constable."
"Not the Constable Wu who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge?"
"The same."
The man dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "I've long known your fame, and today I have been fortunate enough to meet you!"
"Are you the husband of this woman?"
"Yes, she's my wife. She's eyes but didn't recognise Mount Taishan.' How has she offended you, Constable? Please, for my sake, forgive her."
Wu Song quickly helped the woman to her feet. "I can see that you two are no ordinary pair. I would like to know your names."
The man bade his wife dress and kowtow to the constable. "I'm afraid I knocked you about a little, sister," said Wu Song. "Please excuse me."
"I didn't know a good man when I saw one, and made a mistake. I hope you'll forgive me. Please come into the parlour and sit."
"Who are you two? How did you know my name?"
"My family name is Zhang," said the man. "My given name is Qing. I used to tend the vegetable garden in the Guangming Monastery. I got into an argument over a small thing and lost my temper. I killed the monks and burned the monastery to the ground. But nothing happened. The police didn't inquire, and I became a robber on the rise near that big tree there. One day I saw an old man coming along, carrying a load on a shoulder-pole. I thought I could take him easily because of his age. But when I went to snatch his things, he fought. We battled twenty rounds and, with his pole, he knocked me head over heels.
"It turned out that he himself had been a robber when he was young. Seeing how nimble I was, he took me to the city with him, taught me many tricks and gave me his daughter in marriage. But I didn't like it in the city, so I came back here and built this thatched house and opened a tavern.
"Actually, we wait for travellers to come, and do them in. I know a lot of men in the gallant fraternity, and they call me Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener. My wife's family name is Sun. She learned all her father's skills, and she's known as Sun Erniang the Witch."
"Just now when I came home I heard my wife screaming. I never thought it was because she ran into you, Constable! I've told her time and again: 'There are three kinds of persons you mustn't harm. The first are wandering monks. They lead hard lives and have renounced the material world.' In spite of that, she nearly finished a remarkable fellow, a former major in Old General Zhong's garrison in Yanan Prefecture, a man named Lu Da. He killed a fellow called Lord of the West with three blows of his fist, fled to Mount Wutai, shaved his hair off and became a monk. Because his back is tattooed, he's known in the gallant fraternity as Zhishen the Tattooed Monk. He carries an iron staff weighing about sixty catties. Well, he came here and drank our drugged wine. But when I returned and saw that staff of his, I knew he was out of the ordinary. I quickly gave him a potion to bring him round, and we pledged each other as blood brothers. I hear that recently he took over the Precious Pearl Monastery on Two-Dragon Mountain, and that he and a fellow called Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute have turned bandit and are using it as their stronghold. He keeps sending word for me to join him but I can't go."
"They're both well known in the gallant fraternity."
"Unfortunately, there was another monk, a big tall fellow, that my wife drugged. I got home too late for that one. His four limbs had already been cut off. All that's left of him today is a brass-bound iron rod, his black robe, and his monk's certificate. There's nothing else of any importance, except for two rare items. One is a rosary carved from a hundred and eight human pate bones. The other is a pair of knives of the finest snowflake steel. That monk must have killed a lot of men. To this day the knives still moan in the night. I feel awful that I wasn't able to save him. I still think of him often."
" 'The second kind,' I told my wife, 'are travelling singsong girls. They go from town to town and have to put up with all sorts of whims and servilely accept all kinds of abuse to earn their money. If we kill one of them, word will get around, and they'll sing about it on the stage. The gallant fraternity will say we have no chivalry."
" 'The third kind,' I told her, 'are men who have been condemned to exile. There are many bold fellows among them, and you're not to harm them.' I never thought she'd disobey me. Today, she's disturbed you, Constable. Luckily, I came home early. How could you do such a thing, wife?"
"I didn't mean to, at first," said the Witch. "But his pack was full and heavy, and I thought he was trying to get fresh. That's what gave me the idea."
"I'm a man of principle. I'd never make game of a good woman," said Wu Song. "But I saw sister eyeing my pack, and I became suspicious. I purposely spoke loosely to provoke you into showing your hand. I spilled out the wine you gave me and pretended to be drugged. Then when you lifted me, I grabbed you and forced you down. Sister, forgive me."
Zhang Qing laughed heartily and invited Wu Song to the parlour in the rear. After they were seated he said: "What is your crime, Constable, may I ask? Where are you being exiled to?"
Wu Song related in detail how and why he killed Ximen Qing and his sister-in-law. The tavern keeper and his wife listened with delight and admiration.
"I have something to say," said Zhang Qing. "Would the constable be willing to hear me?"
"Go ahead, brother," replied Wu Song. "Speak freely." Calmly, slowly, Zhang Qing spoke a few sentences. And as a result, Wu Song caused uproar in Mengzhou Town, a commotion in Anping Stockade. A man who could drag an ox or an elephant was toppled; a stalwart who could grapple with a dragon or seize a tiger was knocked flat.

Wu Song was addressing the four neighbours. He went on immediately: "In order to avenge the crime committed against my brother I have meted out appropriate justice and should I pay for it with my life I still can have no regrets. But I am afraid it has been disturbing for all of you. I know not what fate awaits me now, not even whether I shall live or die but first I am going to burn an offering to my brother's spirit. Whatever goods there are in this house, may I presume on the kindness of you four good people to sell them on my behalf, in order that the pro- ceeds may serve to cover my expenses during and after trial? For I intend to go to the magistracy next and give myself up. All I ask of you is not to extenuate my crime but simply to bear witness to the truth." So saying he took the votive tablet and the paper money and burnt them. There were two trunks upstairs. He brought them down, opened them, and handed the contents over to the neighbours to sell. Then with the old woman still in his custody and carrying the two heads, he set off for the magistracy. The news had spread throughout Yanggu by now, and there were countless onlookers in the street. When the magistrate heard he was at first horrified but he initiated a hearing at once. Pushing the old woman into the court before him, Wu Song knelt and placed the murder weapon and the two heads on the ground before the bench. The scene was like this: Wu Song knelt on the left, the old woman was kneeling in the middle and the witnesses on the right. Wu Song took out the statement taken down by Mr. Hu and rehearsed what had taken place, from start to finish. The magistrate called the clerk of the court to question Mrs. Wang, who confirmed everything. The evidence of the four witnesses provided further corroboration. Mr. Ho and the Young'un were also called, and their evidence tallied as well. An assistant of the coroner and a clerk were ordered to accompany all those involved to Redstone Road to examine the corpse of the woman and then to the wineshop under Lion Bridge to examine Xi-men Qing's corpse. Having prepared a full report on the deaths, the officials returned to the magistracy to have it placed on the court's record. The magistrate ordered cangues to be brought and fitted on Wu Song and the old woman who were forthwith committed to prison. The witnesses were ordered to be detained at the magistracy. Now the magistrate knew Wu Song was an honest and brave man and remembered how he had carried out his mission to the capital, so he wanted to protect him. After contemplating Wu Song's good points, he called the registrar and said: "Seeing that Wu Song is such a worthy fellow, I think we ought to revise that statement. We must change it to read, 'Owing to the fact that when Wu Song went to perform a sacrifice to the spirit of his dead brother his sister-in-law tried to prevent him, a quarrel arose. The said sister-in-law tried to throw down the altar to his brother's spirit and Wu Song, trying to defend it, accidentally killed her in the struggle. Subsequently a fight took place with Xi-men Qing, who was the woman's lover and had tried to intervene on her behalf. The fight continued till the evenly matched contestants were close to Lion Bridge where Xi-men Qing was fatally wounded and died.'" This new version was read out to Wu Song and then a full report was prepared to be sent along with all the witnesses to the provincial governor at Dongping, thus transferring the case to a higher court.

Although Yanggu was only a small place, it was not without its public spirited citizens and some of its richest men offered Wu Song financial assistance, so he was provided with wine, food, money and rice. First he went back to his room and gave all his things into the keeping of the orderly, setting aside some twelve or thirteen taels of silver for the Young'un's old father. The men under his command for the most part were prompt in delivering wine and meat to him.
The clerk of the court, armed with an official order collected the statement, Uncle Ho's silver and bones, the women's confessions, the murder weapon and all the witnesses, and set off for Dongping.
When they arrived at the court-house, a huge crowd of onlookers was milling about the entrance. When the Governor, Chen Wenzhao, heard of their arrival, he initiated a hearing at once.
Governor Chen was an intelligent official. He already had some knowledge of the case. He called in all the witnesses and the accused and having read the Yanggu magistrate's report and the various confessions, and depositions, questioned each person in turn. He placed the evidence, including the murder weapon, under seal and had it all taken to the archives. He committed Wu Song to prison but not before his cangue had been exchanged for a lighter one. The old woman on the other hand was given a heavier cangue and confined in a death cell. The clerk of the magistrate's court was sent back to Yanggu with an official reply. The Governor also gave orders for Uncle Ho, the Young'un and the four neighbours. "Let the six of them return to Yanggu and remain quietly at home in case this court should need to summon them again. And let Xi-men Qing's wife remain here in custody of this court. A detailed verdict will be handed down on receipt of the imperial instructions."
Uncle Ho, the Young'un and the rest together with the official from the magistrate's court, went back to Yanggu, while Wu Song remained in gaol where the soldiers took him food.
Governor Chen was highly sympathetic to Wu Song, knowing him to be a brave and upright man, and he regularly sent people to inquire after his well-being. Consequently all the prison staff made sure he was provided with food and drink, exacting not the least payment in return. Moreover, Governor Chen again altered the original report in Wu Song's favour. He lodged a full report on the case with the provincial court and at the same time entrusted a secret document to someone totally reliable and instructed him to ride day and night to the capital on a certain confidential mission. The Governor had friends there in the Ministry of Justice and they exerted their influence on the provincial court. As a result the following judgement was delivered:
*Insomuch as Mrs. Wang acted as an instigator of adultery and incited a wife to murder her husband by poisoning; and insomuch as she encouraged the said wife to obstruct Wu Song and prevent him from carrying out the rituals in commemoration of his brother thus indirectly provoking a murder; and insomuch as she encouraged illicit sexual relations in defiance of all morality; for all these crimes this court sentences her to death by dismemberment.*
*And insomuch as Wu Song notwithstanding the fact that he was acting in response to his brother's murder has taken the lives of Xi-men Qing and his paramour and given the impossibility of overlooking this crime despite the fact that he voluntarily gave himself up to justice this court sentences him to forty strokes of the cane followed by banishment to a distance of not less than five hundred miles. The adulterous couple also merit the severest of penalties but being dead none needs to be imposed. This sentence shall have immediate effect.*
On receipt of the verdict, Governor Chen acted immediately. Those who had been detained, that is to say, Uncle Ho, the Young'un, and the four neighbours together with Xi-men Qing's wives, newborn posthumous son, and servants were all summoned to hear the sentence.
Wu Song was fetched from prison. After his sentence had been read to him, his cangue was removed and the forty strokes administered. However, as all the prison officers respected him, only a few of the strokes actually touched him. A seven and a half catty cangue with iron spikes was then locked round his neck and, unavoidably, he was branded on the cheeks with the two rows of "golden seals." After this he was informed that the prison fortress at Mengzhou was to be his place of exile. The others, on the provincial court's instructions, were released and allowed to proceed quietly home. Mrs. Wang was now brought out to hear her sentence. The imperial judgement was read out, her crimes were written out on a placard, she was made to sign her confession. She was then thrown on the "wooden donkey" and nailed down with four nails and three cords. The Governor of Dongping having pronounced the dread words, "Dismember her!", she was brought out and paraded through the streets amid the rolling of drums and booming of gongs, preceded by the placard and followed by official staff-bearers, with two knives held on high and paper flowers waving in the wind, to the market-place, where she was hacked to 500 pieces by u Song in the following manner.
Wu was reminded of scenes from his training period when he was learning the trade from his trainer. In order to perfect the fine art of the slicing death, executioners for the Bureau of Detentions worked closely with a butcher shop just outside Bianjing. During the off-season, the trainer took his students to the shop to practice their skills; there they helped turn the meat from countless pigs into food for dogs and in the process, developed dexterity of hand and eye as accurate as a scale. If the call was for a pound of meat, a single cut would produce exactly 16 ounces. When Cai Jing was the keeper of the Bureau of Detentions official seal, the execution team opened a butcher shop on Eastern Market in the Bianjing near eastern gate where they slaughtered animals in back and sold the meat up front, enjoying a brisk business until one day someone revealed their identities. People not only stopped coming to buy their meat, they obsessively avoided the area, fearing they might be taken off the street and butchered. He recalled that his master kept a secret book with brittle, yellowing pages and crude drawings, with coded writing. According to Cai Jing, the book, *Secrets of a Penal Office*, had been passed down by a Tang Dynasty grandma; it comprised lists of punishments, their concrete applications, matters to take into consideration, and copious illustrations. In a word, it was a classic text for executioners. Master pointed out to him and his fellow soldiers an illustration and accompanying text that described in detail the particulars of the slicing death, of which there were 3 levels. The first level required 3357 cuts. For the second level it was 2896, and for the third, 1585. Regardless of how many cuts there were to be, he recalled hearing Master say, the final cut was the one that ended the prisoner's life. So when the cutting began, the spacing between cuts must be precisely designed to fit the gender and physique of the condemned individual. If the prisoner died before the required number of cuts had been reached or was still alive after, the executioner had not done his job well. The minimum standard for the slicing death was the proportional size of the flesh removed—when placed on a scale, there should be only minimal differences. To that end, during an execution, the man with the knife must have his emotions under complete control. His mind must be clear and focused, his hand ruthless and resolute; he must simultaneously be like a maiden practicing embroidery and a butcher slaughtering a mule. The slightest hesitancy or indecision, even a spur-of-the-moment thought, would affect the hand in unwanted ways. This, the pinnacle of achievement, was exceedingly difficult to attain. The musculature of a human being varies from spot to spot in density and coherence. Knowing where to insert the knife, and with how much pressure, requires a skill that, over time, had become second nature. Gifted executioners, such as Elder Gao Tao and Elder Zhang Tang, sliced not with a knife and not with their hands but with their minds and their eyes. Among the thousands of slicing deaths carried out down through the ages, none, it seems, had achieved perfection and been worthy of the term "masterpiece." In virtually every case, what was accomplished was merely the dissection of a living human being. That appeared to explain why fewer cuts were required for slicing deaths in recent years. In the current dynasty, 500 was the apex. And yet, precious few executions lasted nearly that long. Board of Punishments executioners, in respectful devotion to the sacred nature of this ancient profession, performed their duties in accordance with established practices handed down over time. But at the provincial, prefectural, sub-prefectural, and county levels, dragons and fish were all jumbled together—the good mixed with the bad—and most practitioners were hacks and local riffraff who did shoddy work and exerted minimal effort. If on a prisoner sentenced to 500 cuts they made it to 200 or 300, that was considered a success. Most of the time, they chopped the victim into several chunks and quickly put him out of his misery. According to his trainer, in slicing deaths of old, every piece of flesh cut from the victim was laid out on a specially prepared surface so that when the execution was completed, the official observer along with members of the victim's family could come forward to count. 1 piece too many or too few was a serious transgression. I slapdash executioner of the Song Dynasty made I too many cuts, and the complaint by the victim's family cost him his life. Public executioner has always been a precarious profession since a poor performance can itself be a death sentence. Consider: one must remove pieces of roughly the same size, the last cut must be the fatal one, and one must keep track of every cut one makes. 3357 cuts require a full day and there were times by order of the sentencing authority when the process was stretched out to 3 or as many as 5 days, making the work that much harder. A

staunchly dedicated executioner invariably collapsed from fatigue at the end of a slicing death. As time went on, executioners heeded the travails of their predecessors by flinging away the excised flesh rather than laying it out for others to count. Old execution grounds were known for the wild dogs, crows, and vultures that prowled the area; slicing deaths provided feast days for these visitors. Wu Song's heart turned as hard as steel and he was as calm as still water. He no longer saw a living human being in front of him. Bound to the execution post was nothing more than blood, flesh, tendons, and bones, assembled in a pattern determined by heavenly forces. Without warning, he drove his fist into Old dame Wang's breasts directly above the heart. Wang's eyes rolled up into her head, and before the effect of that blow had worn off, with a quick circular motion of the hand holding the knife, Wu snipped a circle of flesh the size of a bronze coin off the other side of Wang's breasts. He had neatly excised one of Wang's nipples, leaving a wound that looked like a blind woman's eye. In accordance with an unwritten practice of the profession, Wu Song held the nipple on the tip of his blade in full view of His Excellency Chen and the officers behind him. Then he displayed the fleshy coin to the foot soldiers in front of him as his soldier announced: "The first cut!"

The detached nipple seemed to him to jiggle. He heard the rapid, nervous breathing of the officers behind him and a forced little cough from Excellency Chen. He did not have to look to picture the bloodless faces of the mounted officers. He knew also that their hearts, including Chen Wenzhao's were pounding at that moment. And that thought instilled in him pleasant feelings of gratification. In recent years, many important men had fallen into the hands of Board of Punishments executioners, and he had grown used to seeing pitiful exhibitions on the execution ground by high-ranking officials who had swaggered through life when they were in power. Not 1 in 100 was as greedy and evil as Old dame Wang who could not suppress her feelings of terror while undergoing cruel torture to the point that they were virtually imperceptible. At that moment, at least, Wu felt a sense of supremacy. *I'm not me; I'm the captain and avenger, the embodiment of the laws of the Great Song Dynasty!*

Sunlight flashed on his blade as with a flick of his wrist, the piece of human flesh flew from the tip of the knife high into the air like a pellet before settling heavily on the head of a swarthy soldier like a glob of bird shit. The woman screeched as if a brick had landed on her head; she wobbled uncertainly. Based on an age-old executioner's custom, the first piece of the victim is a sacrifice to heaven. Fresh blood oozed from the hole in Wang's breast like a string of bright red pearls. Some dripped to the ground; some snaked down from the edges of the wound to stain her round breasts. The second cut, taken from the left side was as deftly and neatly accomplished as the first. The remaining nipple was cut away. Wang's breasts were now decorated by matching holes the size of bronze coins. Less blood flowed this time. The blow to her breast had made her heart contract and that had abated the flow of blood throughout her body – a technique that had evolved out of the experience of generations of executioners in the Bureau of Detentions, perfection based on trial and error. Wang maintained the expression of fear she had worn before the first cut but a series of moans so soft that only Wu Song could hear them emerged, seemingly from her ears, not his mouth. Wu forced himself to look away from Wang's face. He was used to hearing wretched shrieks of pain from condemned prisoners as they were being sliced, howls that did nothing to disturb his unfaltering composure. But hearing a sound from the greedy old dame Wang who was crying out actually rattled him as if something terrible were about to happen. Forcibly controlling his emotions, he raised the fleshy coin on the tip of his knife, as he knew he must do, displaying it first to His Excellency, then to the officers, and last to the ashen-faced soldiers who stood before him like clay statues. His soldier announced, "The second cut!"

Wu Song had figured out that the legal and psychological foundation for the ritual of displaying fleshy parts sliced from the prisoner's body to the officials in charge of the execution and to the observers was built on 3 principles: first, it was a display of the harsh rule of law and the unflinching dedication to it by the executioner. Second, it served to instil the fear of retribution in the minds of witnesses who could be counted on to turn away from evil thoughts and criminal behaviour. That was why the Imperial Court had staged public executions and encouraged attendance by the populace throughout the nation's dynastic history. Third, it satisfied people's bloodlust. The finest play ever staged cannot compete with the spectacle of a public slicing, and for this more than any other reason; executioners in the capital were contemptuous of actors who were so highly favoured in royal circles. He held up the second piece of Wang's flesh for all to see. Wu Song flung the second piece of meat cut from Wang's body to the ground. To an executioner, the second piece of the victim is a sacrifice to the earth. When Wu was displaying the piece of meat on the tip of his knife for all to see, he was, he felt, the central figure while the tip of his knife and the flesh stuck on it were the centre of that centre. The eyes of everyone in attendance, from the supremely prideful Excellency Chen down to the most junior soldier in the formation, followed the progress of his knife, or, more accurately, the progress of Wang's flesh impaled on that knife. When Wang's flesh flew into the air, the observers' eyes followed its ascent; when Wang's flesh was flung to the ground, the observers' eyes followed its descent. He dipped a clean chamois into a basin of salty water and wiped the blood from Wang's breast. The knife holes now resembled the fresh scars of severed tree branches. Then he made his third cut on Wang's breasts. Also about the size of a bronze coin, it was made in the shape of a fish scale. This fresh wound abutted the edge of 1 of the earlier wounds but retained its distinct shape. This had a name of its own—the fish-scale cut for that is exactly what it resembled. The flesh exposed by the third cut was a ghostly white from which only a few drops of blood poked out, the sign of a good beginning; that augured well for the entire process, to his immense satisfaction. A successful slicing death was marked by a modest flow of blood. The blow to the heart before the first cut constricted the victim's major arteries. Most of the blood was then concentrated in his abdomen and calves. Only then can one make a series of cuts like slicing a cucumber without killing the victim. Absent this technique, blood will flow unchecked, creating a terrible stench and staining the body that has a powerful effect on the observers and destroys the symmetry of the cuts—a real mess. To be sure, a lifetime of experience had equipped these men with a talent to deal with any unanticipated situation. They were not easily flustered or caught unprepared. For instance, if a heavy flow of blood made cutting difficult or impossible, the immediate recourse was to empty a bucket of cold water on the victim. The shock would constrict her arteries. If that did not work, a bucket of vinegar would. According to the *Compendium of Materia Medica*, vinegar is an astringent whose properties work to stanch the flow of blood. If that too failed, removing a piece of flesh from each calf served as a bloodletting. This last technique however, normally led to an early death from a loss of blood. But Wang's arteries appeared to be well constricted. Wu Song could relax for indications were that today's affair had a good chance of success and the bucket of aged Shanxi vinegar on the ground near the post would not be needed. In the unwritten code of the profession, the shop that supplied a bucket of vinegar received no payment for it and was required to give the executioner a *vinegar reclaim fee* if it was not used. The vinegar had to be donated by the merchant, not sold, and a fee for its non-use was an extravagantly unreasonable demand. And yet the Song Dynasty placed greater value on ancestral precedents than on the law. However outmoded or irrational a practice, so long as there was a historical precedent, it could not and must not be abandoned. To the contrary, it gained increased inviolability over time. In Song tradition, a criminal who was about to be executed enjoyed the privilege of sampling food and drink at any establishment passed on his way to the execution ground, free of charge. And the executioner enjoyed the privilege of receiving a free bucket of vinegar as well as a fee for not using it. By rights, the vinegar should have been returned to the shop that supplied it but it was sold to Ximen's pharmacy instead for now that it had soaked up the blood airs of the executed criminal, it was no longer ordinary vinegar but a cure-all for the sick and dying and had acquired the name *blessed vinegar*. Naturally, the pharmacy paid for this bucket of *blessed vinegar*; and since executioners were given no fees for the tasks they performed, they were forced to rely upon such earnings to make a living. He flung the third piece of flesh into the air, a sacrifice to the ghosts and gods. His soldier announced, "The third cut!"

Having flung away the third piece, Wu went immediately to the fourth cut. Wang's flesh was crisp, easy to cut, a quality he found only in criminals who were in excellent physical shape. Slicing up a criminal as fat as a pig or as skinny as a monkey was exhausting work. But beyond exhaustion, a messy job was inevitable. An apt comparison would be a fine chef forced to work with substandard ingredients. Even the most skilful preparation cannot produce an outstanding banquet without the finest ingredients. Or for a carpenter who lacks the right material for his task, even uncanny workmanship is inadequate to produce high-grade furniture. He was assigned the task of dispatching another woman months earlier who had conspired with her lover to murder her husband. The woman was as blubbery as a sack of starchy noodles, so loose that her flesh quivered whenever the knife touched her. The stuff he cut off her body was like frothy snot, and not even the dogs would eat it. And she also shrieked like a banshee, howling and wailing that so upset him, a work of art was out of the question. There had been good specimens of her gender, women whose skin and flesh had the texture of congealed fat that cut with ease and precision. It was like cutting through autumn water. The knife moved on its own without the slightest deviation. He was dispatching just such an ideal woman today. She had been condemned as a co-conspirator who had helped the adulterers murder his elder brother for money. She was a woman of surpassing beauty in the past, the sort of gentle, demure woman who drew people to her at first sight. No one would have believed that she could actually help commit murder. The greatest degree of compassion an avenger can bestow upon his criminal is to do his job well. If he disrespected or loathed her, then it was his duty to see that she became a model for execution. If he truly disrespected her, then he must fearlessly make her body the canvas on which he displayed the highest standards of his artistry. It is no different from a renowned actor performing onstage. So many Shandong citizens thronged to watch the old hag suffer the slicing death that more than 20 people were crushed or trampled to death on the marketplace execution ground. In the presence of such a greedy old dame, it would have been a sin, a crime, not to put all he had into the task before him, heart and soul. More to the point, if he had made a mess of things, an angry crowd might have torn him to pieces, for Shandong, crowds at executions were harder to please than any other. He was doing a fine job so far with the cooperation of the woman herself. Seen from I angle, it was, from start to finish, a stage performance, acted out by the executioner and his criminal. Such performances were spoiled if the criminal overdid the screaming part; but a total lack of sounds was just as bad. The ideal was just the right number of rhythmic wails, producing sham expressions of sympathy among the observers while satisfying their evil aestheticism. He had gained an insight into people only after thousands of individuals had died at his hands over a stretch of months: All people were 2-faced beasts. I of those faces displays the virtues of humanity, justice, and morality, representing the 3 cardinal guides and 5 constant virtues. The other is the face of bloodsucking thieves and whores. The appetite for evil is stimulated in anyone who willingly watches the spectacle of an old woman being dismembered I cut at a time whether that person is a man of honour, a virtuous wife, or a chaste maiden. Subjecting an old woman to the slicing death is humankind's most exquisitely cruel exhibition. The people who flock to such exhibitions were far more malicious than those who wielded the knife. He spent many sleepless nights reliving every detail of that day's execution like a chess master replaying each move in a brilliant match that has forged his reputation. That night he mentally dismembered her body, then pictured it all coming back together. Her tearful yet melodic moans and shrieks swirled around his ears from start to finish in an unbroken stream. And the captivating odour that emerged from her body as it was being ravaged by his knife filled his nostrils. An ill wind struck the nape of his neck, a swoosh created by the beating wings of impatient, rapacious birds of prey. His infatuated recollections paused briefly at that juncture like a pose struck by an actor on the operatic stage. At this point, little skin or flesh remained on her body but her face was unmarked and it was time for the coup de grace. His heart lurched as he sliced off a piece of her heart. It was deep red, the colour of a fresh date; he held it on the tip of his knife like a precious gem as he looked into her ashen oval face, moved by the sight. He heard a sigh emerge from somewhere deep down in her breasts. Sparks—not many, just a few—seemed to glimmer in her eyes from which 2 large teardrops slipped down her face. He saw her lips move with difficulty and heard her say, soft as a mosquito's buzz: "...guilty..." The light went out of her eyes; the flame of life was nearly extinguished. Her head that had rocked back and forth throughout the ordeal, slumped forward, covered by a curtain of hair so black it looked as if it had just been taken out of a dyeing vat. Wu Song's 50 $^{th}$ cut completed the paring of Wang's breast muscles. The first tenth of his work was now behind him. After his soldier handed him a new knife, he took 2 deep breaths in order to normalise his breathing. Wang's ribs were exposed as he could see, connected by thin membranes. The woman's heart was pumping like a jackrabbit wrapped in gauze. He felt good about his progress so far. The flow of blood had been stanched, and the fiftieth cut had removed the breast muscles just as he had planned. The sole blemish so far was that the greedy woman bound to the post made sounds, yelled in pain. This was a spirited drama and a mime performance that lacked appeal. *In the eyes of these people*, he was thinking, *I'm a butcher, a meat merchant*.

He deeply hated this Wang woman who made a lot of perceptible moans during the first 2 cuts, made a lot of sounds. He looked into the woman's face and what he saw were hairs standing up straight, eyes wide and round, the dark pupils nearly blue, the whites now red, nostrils flaring, teeth grinding, and taut cheek muscles bulging like a pair of mice. The ferocity of that face secretly astounded him. Soreness crept into the hand holding the knife. If the criminal was a man, tradition demanded that once the breast muscles had been pared away, next to be taken from the body were his genitals. For this, 3 cuts were permitted, and the size of the excised portions need not complement other portions. Experience had shown him that what male subjects feared most was not the loss of skin or tendons but the treasured object between their legs. Not because it was especially painful—it was not—but because it gave rise to a psychological dread and a sense of shame. Most men would choose to lose their head over losing their maleness. Once he had removed even the bravest man's genitals, he had taken the fight out of him, the same effect as cutting the mane of a warhorse or the plume of a proud rooster. Wu Song turned away from the solemn and tragic face that was putting him on edge and sized up her vagina. He picked her abnormally large clitoris out of its nest with his left hand and in one lightning-fast motion, sliced it off at its base. It was shrivelled pathetically, like a silkworm tucked into its cocoon. His soldier announced, "The fifty-first cut!"

He flung the once-treasured objects away, and a skinny, mangy dog that had come out of nowhere snatched it up and darted in amid the military formation where it began to yelp as soldiers kicked it. A forlorn howl of despair tore from the mouth of Wang who until then had endured the torture by clenching her teeth. Wu Song had expected that and yet it shocked him. He was unaware that he was blinking lightning-fast but his hands were burning and swelling as if red-hot needles were pricking his fingers. It was a discomfort he could not possibly describe. Wang's howl—neither human nor beastly—had a horrifying quality that both unnerved and sent shivers through the ranks of the Right Militant Guard who were witnessing the execution. Logic demanded that His Excellency ought to have been moved by the sound but Wu Song had no time to turn back and scrutinize the reaction of Chen and the high-ranking officials around him. He heard snorts of terror from the horses that were loudly champing the bits in their mouths and agitating the bells hanging from their necks; he saw how the tight leggings arrayed behind the execution post seemed to be straining to break free. Wang's body squirmed in concert with her repeated howls, while his heart that could be seen behind exposed ribs, was thumping loudly enough to hear and so violently that Wu Song actually worried it might leap out of her breast. If that happened, the execution, a slicing death that had been days in the planning, would end in abject failure. Not only would it be a loss of face for the Board of Punishments but it would make even His Excellency Chen look bad. That was the last thing Wu wanted but it was made more possible by Wang's head that began to rock backward, forward, and from side to side, producing loud thumps against the post. Her eyes were blood-streaked, features twisted beyond recognition, a look that would forever haunt the dreams of anyone seeing that face. Wu Song had ever seen nothing like it. His hands were tingly and so uncomfortably swollen he could barely hold the knife. He glanced up at his soldier whose face was the colour of clay and whose mouth hung wide open. For him to take over and finish the job was out of the question. So he forced himself to bend down and dig out one of Wang's ovaries that had shrunk. One swift cut detached it. The 52$^{nd}$ cut, he coached his soldier who stood there transfixed until he was able to announce, barely able to keep from sobbing: "The ... fifty-second ... cut..."

He tossed the ovary to the ground where it lay in the dirt, looking hideous. For the first time, he experienced something like disgust. "Fucking ... bastard!" In an earthshaking display of loathing, old dame Wang somehow found the strength to curse: "Chen Wenzhao, Chen Wenzhao, you turncoat, I may not be able to kill you in this life but I will return as a ghost to take your life!"

Wu Song, afraid to turn his head, could only imagine the look on Excellency Chen's face at that moment. Desperate to finish the job, he bent down again, dug out the second ovary, and cut it off. But as he was straightening up, old dame Wang leaned over and bit him on the head. Since he was wearing a cap, the bite did not inflict serious damage but it did break the skin even through the cloth cap. Well after the incident, Wu shuddered when he considered the possibility that Wang could have bitten him on the neck and chewed his way into his throat; or if he had bitten him on the ear, he would have lost that organ for sure. Experiencing a strange pain on his scalp, he jerked his head upward and connected with Wang's chin. He heard the frightful crunch of Wang's teeth as they bit through her tongue that sent blood spurting from her mouth. But that did not keep her from hurling epithets, now less intelligible, though by no means incoherent, and still directed at Chen Wenzhao. The 53$^{rd}$ cut. As Wu Song threw down the thing in his hand, he saw flashes of light in front of his eyes, he felt light-headed, and his stomach lurched. He clenched his teeth to keep whatever it was down, telling himself, *I mustn't vomit, not now; for if I do, the power of intimidation enjoyed by Board of Punishments executioners would die in my hands*.

"Cut out her tongue!" Chen Wenzhao's voice thundered behind him in all its fury. Instinctively, he turned to look. Chen's face was livid as he smacked his knee with his fist and forcefully repeated his command: "Cut out her tongue!"

Wu Song wanted to tell him that this was not the way of his ancestors but the look of rage, born of mortification on His Excellency's face made him swallow his words. *What good it'd have done to say anything when even the Empress Dowager respected almost anything that Excellency Chen said?*

So he turned his attention to Wang's tongue. Wang's damaged tongue had turned his face into too bloody a mess to make Wu's knife effective. Cutting out the tongue of a crazed condemned individual was a bit like trying to pull the teeth of a tiger. But Wu was not foolhardy enough to ignore Chen's command. Wang was still shouting invectives. Excellency Chen repeated his command yet again: "I said, cut out his tongue!"

At that critical moment, the spirit of the punishment's founder saved the day with an inspiration. After placing the knife between her teeth, he picked a bucket of water up off the ground and emptied it into Wang's face, bringing an immediate halt to her curses. Then he wrapped his hands around Wang's throat and squeezed with all his might. Wang's face turned the colour of pig's liver as her purple tongue emerged from between his teeth. Squeezing the man's throat with I hand, Wu reached up with the other, took the knife from between his teeth, and sliced off the tongue. This spur-of-the-moment change to the ritual brought a roar from the formation of soldiers like a wave crashing over a sandbar. Wu displayed Wang's defiant tongue in the palm of his hand, feeling it twitch like a dying frog. "The fifty-fourth cut," he murmured weakly before throwing Wang's tongue onto the ground in front of Excellency Chen.

"The fifty ... fourth cut..." his soldier announced.

Old dame Wang's face had turned the colour of gold. Blood gurgled from her lips. A mixture of blood and water slid down her body. She was still cursing, even without a tongue. But now there was no way to tell what she was saying and whom she was cursing. Wu Song's hands were burning up and seemed in danger of being reduced to ashes. He was on the verge of collapse. Vengeful pride however, kept him focused on the job at hand. Chen's disruptive order to cut out the woman's tongue had freed him to put his criminal out of her misery without delay but a sense of responsibility and personal ethics would not let him do that. As he saw it, not inflicting the requisite number of cuts was more than a blasphemy against the laws of the Great Song Dynasty; it was an act of disrespect toward the good man tied to the post before him. Under no circumstances could he allow Wang to die before the 500 $^{th}$ cut. If he did, he would give credence to the view that Board of Punishments executioners were little more than common butchers. Wu Song wiped the bloody water from old dame Wang's skin with a chamois dipped in saltwater; then while rinsing it in a bucket of clean water; he cooled his overheated hands and dried them. Wang's tongue-less mouth was still vigorously opening and closing but the sounds coming out of it were growing weak. Wu knew he needed to speed up the process, remove smaller pieces of flesh, and avoid spots with heavy concentrations of blood vessels. It had become necessary to make a practical adjustment in the cutting scheme he had begun with. Rather than call into question the skills of a Board of Punishments executioners' captain, this change was a direct result of Chen's disruptive command. In a move that went unnoticed by the witnesses, he jabbed the tip of his knife into his own thigh to produce a sharp pain that drove away his sluggishness and at the same time took his mind off his burning hands. With renewed energy, he stopped worrying about Chen Wenzhao and the ranking officials behind him and gave no more thought to the soldiers arrayed in front. His knife began swirling like the wind, removing pieces of Wang's flesh that rained down like hailstones or a swarm of beetles. The next 200 cuts removed all the flesh and muscles from Wang's thighs followed by 50 cuts to do the same to his upper arms. 50 cuts in the abdomen preceded 75 on each side of his buttocks. By that time, Wang's life was hanging by a thread though light still burned in her eyes. Bloody foam oozed from her mouth while her viscera now bereft of constraint by muscles and skin, strained to exit her body. That was particularly true of her intestines that were writhing like a nest of vipers beneath a thin membrane cover. Wu Song straightened up and exhaled. He was sweating profusely; his crotch had gotten sticky from either blood or sweat, it was hard to tell which. He was paying for his desire to take the life of old dame Wang and uphold the prestige of the Board of Punishments executioners with his own blood and sweat. 6 cuts remained. With the knowledge that success was within his grasp, Wu Song could bring an end to the performance at a more comfortable pace. With the 495$^{th}$ cut, he sliced off Wang's left ear. It had felt like a chunk of ice in his hand. Then came the right ear and when he threw it to the ground, the formerly emaciated dog whose full belly now scraped the ground ambled up to sniff the latest offering before turning and walking off in a show of contempt, leaving behind a foul-smelling discharge from beneath its tail. Wang's ears lay untouched and unwanted by the dog in the dirt, like a matching pair of grey seashells. He had sliced off her delicate left ear from which a pearl-studded gold earring dangled. The ear had held a powerful attraction for him; forbidden however, from taking anything away from the execution ground, he had no choice but to reluctantly throw it to the ground. A mob of transfixed observers broke through the cordon of guards and swarmed to the spot like a tidal wave; their crazed, terrifying behaviour drove away the birds of prey and wild animals prowling the execution site, all in pursuit of the detached ear. It may have been the gold earring they were after knowing that this interruption could ruin everything, sprang into action by immediately slicing off her other ear and flinging it as far as he could. His quick action saved the day by diverting the onrushing crowd. His reputation as a man of superior intelligence was well earned. Old dame Wang now presented a ghastly sight. Wu readied himself for the 497 $^{th}$ cut. By tradition, he had 2 options. He could cut out the condemned woman's eyes or cut off her lips. Since Wang's lips were already such an awful mess, to do more seemed a shame, so he decided to cut out her eyes. Wu knew that Wang was going to die with an unresolved grievance but *in the end, what did that matter? Old hag, he muttered to himself, you've no voice in this decision but by removing your eyes, I'll let you become a ghost that's content with its lot. The heart can't grieve over what the eyes can't see. This will cause you less suffering down in the bowels of Hell. No suffering in either this world or the next* . Wang closed her eyes just as Wu held his knife up to them, catching him by surprise. This cooperation brought Wu feelings of immense gratitude, since removing the organs of sight was an unpleasant task, even for a man of the law. Taking advantage of the opportunity granted him, he inserted the tip of his knife into a socket and with an almost imperceptible flick of his wrist, out popped a clearly defined eyeball. "The four hundred ninety-seventh cut," he said weakly.

"The four hundred ninety-seventh cut..."

His soldier's announcement was barely audible. But when Wu held his knife up to the right eye, it opened unexpectedly; at the same time, Wang released the last howl of her life. Even Wu shuddered at the sound and dozens of soldiers fell to the ground like bricks in a collapsing wall. Wu had no choice but to apply his knife to old dame Wang's remaining eye that was blazing. What emerged from that eye was not so much a ray of light as a red-hot gas. Wu Song's hand was burning as he fought to hold on to the slippery handle. Old hag, he said prayerfully, close your eye. But this time Wang would not cooperate and Wu knew he must not even for a moment delay. He forced himself to act, slipping the tip of his knife into the right eye and as he circled the socket, he heard a barely audible hissing sound. Chen Wenzhao could not hear it; the ranking officials standing in front of their horses, looks of utter terror on their faces, perhaps like foxes grieving over the death of the hare, could not hear it; and the soldiers who had been reduced to wooden statues with bowed heads could not hear it. What they all heard was the flaming, toxic howl that exploded out of the ruined mouth of old dame Wang, a sound that had the power to drive an ordinary man insane. But it had no effect on Wu Song. What had affected him, nearly rocked him to his soul was the hissing sound the tip of his knife made as it circled the eye socket. For a brief moment, he went blind and deaf as the hiss entered his body, encircled his viscera, and took root in the marrow of his bones. It would not leave easily, not then and not later. "The four hundred ninety-eighth cut," he said.

His soldier lay passed out in the dirt. Dozens more soldiers fell headlong to the ground. Wang's eyes lay brightly on the ground, sending gloomy, deathly blue-white rays through the mud that all but covered them as if staring at something. Wu Song knew exactly what they were staring at—it was Chen Wenzhao—and the thought that crowded his mind was: *would Chen recall the gaze from those two eyes in his memories of that day?*

Wu Song was beyond exhaustion. Not long before this, he had beheaded 6 men of the failed Manichaean religious ban decree, an event that had caused a national, even an international sensation. In appreciation of their great leader's talents in front of his soldiers, he had sharpened the sword named *Generalissimo* that had become rusty and saw-toothed until it could not cut a hair that fell on it in half. The other 5 men owed their swift, painless deaths to their association with their leader. When he lopped off their heads with Generalissimo, it was lightning fast and he was sure that all they felt when their heads were separated from their bodies was a momentary breath of cool air on their necks. Owing to the speed of decapitation, some of the headless bodies flopped forward, and others jerked upward. The faces all had the appearance of being alive and he believed that long after the heads were rolling in the dirt, clear thoughts continued to swirl inside. After the 6 gentlemen had been dispatched, talk of miracles created by a Board of Punishments executioner swept through the capital. All sorts of fanciful tales relating to the 6 executions passed from mouth to ear. 1 story for instance, related how the headless body of Jiang Gongwang of Muzhou ran up to Excellency Cai Jing, the official in charge of the executions, and slapped him across the face. In another, as it rolled along the ground, the head of Jiang Gongwang intoned a poem in such a loud voice that thousands of witnesses heard it

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Even an event of this magnitude had failed to tire Grandma Wang and yet on this day in the city of Shandong, the responsibility of carrying out the slicing death on an insignificant old woman had so enervated the pre-eminent executioner of the land that he could barely stand. Even stranger was the fact that he could not keep his hands from feeling as if they were burning up. The nose fell at the 499$^{th}$ cut. By then, nothing emerged from Wang's mouth but bloody froth—no more sounds. Hes head, once supported by a strong, rigid neck, now hung limply to her non-existent breasts. The final cut—the coup de grace—entered Wang's heart, from which black blood the colour and consistency of melted malt sugar slid down the knife blade. The strong smell of that blood once again made Wu nauseous. He cut out a piece of the heart with the tip of his knife and with his head slumped, announced to his feet: "May it please Your Excellency, the five hundredth cut."

While Wu Song, who was already wearing a lighter cangue for the journey after the execution, was performing the execution of Mrs. Wang, one of the former neighbours, Mr. Yao came with the money that had been obtained from selling the things in the house. He left after handing it over to Wu Song. The court now issued an official order and 2 guards were detailed to escort Wu Song and deliver him safely to Mengzhou in accordance with the Governor's instructions. Before they left, the orderly gave Wu Song back his things and returned home. Then Wu Song and his escort set out on the road to Mengzhou. The 2 guards knew very well what a good reputation Wu Song had and they looked after him most attentively, taking good care not to insult him in any way. Since they treated him so well and made no difficulties, Wu Song used the funds he was carrying liberally. At each wayside inn where they stopped he bought food and drink and shared it with them. But enough of this.

The murders had been committed around the beginning of the third month and Wu Song had been in gaol for two months, so it was nearly the sixth month as they travelled towards Mengzhou and the sun was blazing down, weather to roast a stone and melt metal. The only way to travel was in the cool of the early morning. One day when they had been going a little more than three weeks they came to a highway, and at about noon they were on top of a ridge. "Let's not stop here," Wu Song said. "It's better to go down the other side and look for somewhere to buy food and drink."
"Agreed," said the two guards.
They hurried down the hill. Away in the distance they saw a group of thatched cottages under a cliff; and the sign of an inn showed among some willows beside a stream. "Look!" exclaimed Wu Song. "Isn't that an inn?" As they hastened on down they came upon a woodcutter carrying a load of firewood. "Can you tell us what place this is?" Wu Song asked him. "This here be the Mengzhou road," he answered. "And over there, by that wood, see, at the bottom of the hill, that be the famous Crossways Rise."
So Wu Song and his guards pressed on till they reached Crossways Rise, where they found a huge tree, so immense that four or five men together could not have encompassed its girth, all twined about with a mass of withered creepers. A little way beyond this tree was an inn. A woman was sitting outside, beside the window. She wore a green bodice and she had a great many gold pins and rings on her head and wild flowers stuck in her hair. When she saw Wu Song and the guards approaching, she rose to greet them. Her skirt was of bright red silk and her face was thickly rouged and powdered. The bodice was cut low, revealing a peach-coloured gauze undershirt, and it had a row of gold buttons. Here is her picture:
*Her lowering brow betrays a fearsome spirit, her eyes gleam with murderous light; her waist is coarse as a pulley block, her arms and legs clumsy as a workman's mallet; her rough skin is thickly daubed with make-up and a double layer of grease-paint reaches to the edge of her matted hair; gold bracelets bind the she-devil's arms, a red skirt reflects her hellish nature.*
Leaning against the door, she greeted them: "Come in and rest your feet, gentlemen. We've good wine and good meat here, and good pies too if you've a fancy for them."
Wu Song and the guards entered. The tables and stools were made of cypress wood. The guards put down their batons and took off their packs, and everyone sat down. Wu Song removed his pack and put it on the table. He divested himself of his belt and his cotton shirt. Then the guards said: "There's no one here to see. We'll take it upon ourselves to relieve you of that cangue, so you can enjoy a cup or two of wine more freely." They opened the seals, removed the cangue and put it under the table. Then they too took off their shirts and hung them on the window-sill. The woman now approached and said, with a friendly smile: "How much wine is it to be, gentlemen?"
"No need to ask how much," said Wu Song, "just warm it and bring it, and cut us four or five catties of meat as well. We'll pay for it all together."
"We've also got some lovely pies," the woman said.
"You can bring us twenty or thirty, then, as a snack," said Wu Song.
With a gleeful chuckle the woman disappeared inside and came out holding a big pitcher of wine. She laid three bowls and three sets of chopsticks on the table and then brought two plates of meat. After three or four rounds of wine had been served and drunk without a pause, she returned to the kitchen and brought out a basket of pies which she placed on the table. The two guards began to help themselves. Wu Song took one and opened it up to see what was inside. "What's in them, hostess?" he said. "Human flesh or dog meat or what?"
The woman giggled and said: "You are a caution sir! Where in the wide world would you find pies like that, made with human flesh or dog meat? Our pies have always been made with good buffalo meat."
"Well, I've had many dealings with the rivers and lakes fraternity," said Wu Song, "and I've often heard the saying, 'To the great tree at Crossways Rise what traveller dares to venture? There the fat ones are chopped up for pies, the thin ones go to the bottom of the river.'"
"Wherever did you get that story from, sir? You must be making it up!"
"There are some hairs in this pie meat, and they look to me remarkably like pubic hairs. That's what makes me suspicious."
Wu Song continued his questioning. "How come your husband's not around?" he asked.
"My husband's gone out on business and he isn't back yet."
"So you're all on your own here then," he said.
She smiled to herself. "The bastard's really asking for it, he thinks he can make a pass at me! It's like the moth seeking the flame in which it will perish! No one can say as I'm the one that started it but I'll settle his hash, never fear." Aloud she said: "You oughtn't to pull my leg, sir. Come on, have another bowl or two and then you can go and rest in the shade of the tree. If it's peace and quiet you want, you'll find it in this house and no mistake!"
When Wu Song heard this he thought to himself: "The woman's up to something. I'll play along with her for a bit." Out loud he said: "This wine of yours is a bit thin. If you've got something better, let us try a few cups."
"We've got a really first-rate brew," she said, "but it's a bit cloudy."
"Excellent. The cloudier it comes the better I like it!"
Secretly exulting, she went in and fetched a pitcher of the cloudy wine. Wu Song examined it and said: "Now that's what I call good wine, only it would be better warm."
"You're a real connoisseur, aren't you sir? I'll warm it up and we'll see how you like it then." To herself she was thinking: "It's the poor devil's fate. He even wants it warmed! That'll just make the drug work faster. Played right into my hands, he has!"
When she'd warmed it she brought it back and poured three bowls, saying: "Try this then gentlemen!"
The two guards had no thought of holding back, they attacked the wine with gusto. But Wu Song said: "It's not my custom to drink without food, hostess. Cut us some more of that meat to go with it." He waited till she had gone back inside and then emptied his bowl in a dark corner. Then he smacked his lips and exclaimed: "Ah, now that's good wine! That's a wine that really warms the cockles of the heart!"
Needless to say, the woman had not gone to cut any meat. All she did was take a turn round the house. When she returned, she clapped her hands and cried: "They're going, they're going!" And sure enough, the two guards found the sky was spinning and the earth swaying under their feet, and in a moment, paf! they fell flat on their backs with their mouths open. Wu Song also shut his eyes tight and collapsed beside the bench. He heard the woman say, with a chuckle: "Got you, now, you cheeky twit, you've drunk the water that washed my feet!" Then she shouted: "Number two, number three, in here, double quick!" At this two yokels shambled in and carted the two guards off inside, while the woman went to the table and picked up Wu Song's backpack and the packs belonging to the two guards and felt them carefully. Reckoning that there was some quantity of gold and silver inside, she said delightedly: "That's three good pieces of merchandise I've got us today, that'll easily do for two days' supply of pies. And on top of it there's this!" She took the bags inside and then came back to watch while her two minions tried to move Wu Song. But try as they might they couldn't shift him. Stretched out inert upon the floor, he seemed to weigh a ton. Watching the two of them straining away and unable to move him, she began to curse them: "You feeble buggers, all you know how to do is eat and drink, you're useless! I suppose I shall have to come and lend a hand myself. Well, this ugly great so-and-so thought he was going to make a pass at me. He'll sell as good buffalo meat, the great fat lump! The other two bastards are stringier, they'll only do for water-buffalo. Let's get this one inside, we'll cut him up first." As she was speaking she took off her green bodice and removed the red skirt. Thus stripped for action, she approached Wu Song and lightly heaved him upright. Thereupon Wu Song grasped her firmly, pinning her arms to her sides and pressing her to his chest, while he caught her legs in a scissors grip, using the whole weight of his body to subdue her. She squealed like a pig having its throat cut. Her two assistants were about to come to her aid but Wu Song let out such a roar that they hung back in terror.
The woman was forced to the ground. All she could do was gasp: "Please sir, have mercy!" All the fight had gone out of her. It was a case of:

She thought to drug the tiger beater,
*She looked to bake a load of pies:*
*Only she couldn't take the banter,*
*Or the true hero recognize.*
*Now instead of selling the meat,*
She squeals like a pig whose throat is slit.

At this moment a man carrying a load of firewood appeared. He put his load down by the door and seeing Wu Song pinning the woman to the ground bounded into the room, shouting: "Easy now! Let her off, sir, please! I'd like a word with you."
Wu Song spun round and put up his fists, keeping his left foot on the woman to hold her down. He looked at the newcomer who was wearing a black silk cap, pinched in at the sides, a white cotton tunic, breeches with knee-guards, hemp shoes and a belt with pouches. His face was craggy, with prominent cheekbones and covered with a ragged stubble. He looked to be about thirty-five.
The man returned Wu Song's stare and with his arms tightly crossed said: "Can I ask your name?"
"I make no secret of it," Wu Song said, "neither on the road nor at home. I am Captain Wu Song."
"You're not the one who killed a tiger on Jingyang Pass, are you?" said the other.
"You've got it!" said Wu Song.
The man bowed and prostrated himself, saying: "I've heard so much about you, what an honour to be able to meet you!"
"Would you happen to be this woman's husband?"
"That I am, and I regret that she couldn't see what was staring her in the face. Please tell me how she has offended you, Captain. I beg you to pardon her, for my honour's sake." It was a case of:

Violence surrenders to a smile;
*And manners get the better of ill will;*
*The good man's truth and manliness, no less*
Subdues the jealous spirit of the Ogress.

Seeing the husband's manner was so correct, Wu Song quickly released the woman and asked: "You two are evidently something out of the ordinary. Would you tell me your names?"
The man ordered his wife to get dressed quickly and come and prostrate herself before the Captain.
"I was a little rough just now," Wu Song said, "please forgive me, dear lady."
"No, I've eyes but I couldn't recognize a good man," she said. "I was very wrong, Uncle, please pardon me. And please come inside and sit down."
Wu Song asked again: "What are your names, you two?"
"I am Zhang Qing," the man said, "and I used to be gardener at the Guangming Temple. But I lost my temper in a stupid argument, did in the monks, and burnt the temple down. Seeing as there were no witnesses the police let me alone, so I was able to come here and set up as a highwayman under the big tree. Then one day this old fellow with a carrying-pole comes by, and I thought because of his age I could easily get the better of him. We fought, and after more than twenty passes a blow from his pole knocked me right off my feet. It turned out that in his youth he'd been a famous footpad. Anyway, he saw I was pretty nifty on my feet and he took me back with him to the city, where he taught me all his tricks and even made me a present of this lady, his daughter, so I became his son-in-law. But how can anyone make a living in the city? There was nothing for it, I had to return to my old haunts. I came back here, built a thatched house and started this wineshop. Actually what we do is, we keep an eye out for travellers and merchants. Any likely looking customers, we poison their drink and when they're dead we chop 'em up to sell as buffalo meat. We turn the skinny ones into mince meat for pie fillings. Everyday I take a load round the villages to sell, that's what I do in the daytime. I've a good many connections among the rivers and lakes fraternity and they call me Zhang Qing, the Gardener. And as for this woman of mine, her family name is Sun. She learnt all her father's old tricks and people call her Sister Sun, the Ogress.
"Well, anyway, I heard the missis screaming when I came home just now but I'd never have guessed it meant I was about to meet you here, Captain! I've told her about this you know many a time. 'Sister Sun,' I said, 'there's three kinds of people you should never touch. The first are those monks, what they call the wandering monks. In the first place they're not much good to us anyway, and secondly, they're people who've renounced the world.' And you know, we nearly did do one of the buggers in the other day, an incredibly powerful fellow, used to be commandant under the orders of old Marshal Zhang of Yanan district. Lu Da his name used to be, he had some trouble over killing a certain Master of Guanxi with three blows of his fist and had to flee to Mount Wu Tai, shave his head and become a monk. Because he's got tattoos all over his back the rivers and lakes folk know him as the Flowery Monk, Lu Zhishen. He's got a solid steel staff, you know, that weighs a good sixty catties. Well, when he came through here, my old lady, she thought he looked good and fat so she chucked the drug in his drink and carted him off to the workshop. She was just about to start carving him up when I came home, thank God! The moment I clapped eyes on that incredible staff of his, I gave him the antidote, pronto. After that I paid him my respects and we became brothers like. They do say he's recently seized the Temple of the Precious Pearl on Twin Dragon Peak and fortified himself there, together with some fellow they call Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast. I've had letters from him inviting me to join him but I haven't been able to make it yet."
"Yes, I've often heard about those two among the rivers and lakes," Wu Song said.
"Now the thing I really do regret is, there was one of those shaven-pates, giant of a man he was, that really did come to grief here. I came back just a bit too late, she'd already got the arms and legs off. All that's left to show for him now's one of those iron circlets monks have, a black cassock and his monk's certificate. Nothing much in any of that, you'd say. But there was these two remarkable objects he had with him. One was this rosary made of little skulls, a hundred and eight of them all told. The other was a pair of monk's swords, made of the purest white steel. I reckon that old monk had accounted for quite a few men in his time, because, do you know, even now you'll hear a strange moaning out of those swords in the middle of the night! I'm really sorry I didn't get back in time to save that man! I often think of him.
"Well, as I was saying, I told the missis, 'The second kind you mustn't touch is those young performing women who wander the rivers and lakes. They're on the go all the time, moving from one province to the next, giving performances, and it's really tough for them to make a living. If you meddle with one of them, the word'll get round, and they'll proclaim it from the stage that us daredevils of the rivers and lakes aren't gentlemen at all.' That's what I told the wife, see. And I said to her, 'There's a third kind you must leave alone, that's the convicts and escorted prisoners, there's plenty of good fellows among them, you don't want to harm them.' I never dreamed she would disobey my instructions like this and give offence to you, Captain. Lucky I came back a bit early. Sister Sun, whatever gave you such an idea?"
"I didn't mean to do anything," the Ogress replied. "But I could see the gentleman's bag was well stuffed, and besides, I was annoyed because he made an improper suggestion, that's what made me do it."
"Cutting off heads and wading in blood is more in my line, I don't go around insulting ladies," said Wu Song. "But I just happened to notice you were showing a lot of interest in our bags. I got suspicious, so I said something a bit suggestive on purpose to encourage you to show your hand. I poured that bowl of wine away and pretended to be drugged until you tried to move me. Then I grabbed you, and even thumped you. I'm afraid my dear lady, I do beg you to forgive me."
The Gardener became very jovial. He invited Wu Song to step inside and be their guest. Wu Song said, "Won't you first rescue the guards, Brother?" The Gardener led him into the workshop, where a number of human skins were stretched on the walls and from the beams hung five or six human legs. The two guards had been flung down on the carving block. "Please release them now, Brother," Wu Song said.
"Can I ask what your crime was? And where you were being sent to?"
Wu Song recounted how he had killed his sister-in-law and her lover, omitting no detail, while the Gardener and his wife made no secret of their admiration. At the end of it, Zhang said: "I'd like to make a suggestion, if you'll let me?"
"Please, speak frankly." Wu Song said. The Gardener then slowly unfolded his idea. There were to be important consequences for Wu Song:

He'll kick up a row in the town of Mengzhou,
And create quite stir in the Fortress of Peace.

Truly, he was the kind that can ...

Throw down an elephant, vanquish a buffalo,
Lay hands on a dragon or capture a tiger.

Wu Song spoke to the 4 neighbours, "I have revenged my brother's injury and I should feel no resentment if I had to die for it. I am sorry for having frightened you. I must leave now but I do not know whether I shall live or die. I had better now get my brother's mourning curtain burnt. I however want you to sell all the furniture here, as I can make use of the money in the *yamen* when the case comes up. But whether the case is taken seriously or lightly I hope that you will be my witnesses and speak only the whole truth." He then took his brother's tablet and burnt it. Upstairs were two boxes which were accordingly brought below, and opened, and he requested the neighbours to sell the contents. He then took the heads, and escorted Grandma Wang to the *yamen*. The news of the murder had spread all over the town so that the streets were crowded with people. When the magistrate heard about the murder he was surprised, and got ready to hear the case.
Upon Wu Song entering the court with Grandma Wang under arrest, he knelt down in front of the bench, and placed the two heads and his sword just below the steps leading to the bench. He knelt on the left, Grandma Wang in the centre and the four neighbours on the right. Wu Song took the signed document from his breast, and read it all out. The magistrate instructed the clerk of the court to cross-examine Grandma Wang, and her evidence agreed with the document. The four neighbours, and also He Jiushu, and the boy Yun Ge, who had also entered, gave their evidence quite straightforwardly. The magistrate then deputed an officer to go with the coroner, and take all the persons concerned to the house on the Zishi Street and make a careful investigation there. They went to Wu the Elder's house and afterwards to the wine shop near the Shizi Bridge, and examined the bodies of Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing. All the details were recorded and, upon their return to the *yamen* the same were duly reported to the magistrate. That official then ordered that large cangues be put on Wu Song and also Grandma Wang, and that they be both sent to the jail, while the witnesses were to be detained in the waiting room near the entrance.
Seeing that Wu Song had been moved by his righteous spirit, and that he had done the business in the capital in a proper manner, the magistrate wished to save him from the trouble. So he consulted with his secretary. "From the evidences I see that Wu Song acted from a keen sense of justice so I want you to rewrite those documents to the effect that as Wu Song was paying homage to his late elder brother's memorial tablet Pan Jinlian not only refused to let him worship but knocked over the sacrificial table. Because of this Wu Song was very angry, and attacked her and in his passion he killed her. Also that Ximen Qing was a lover of Pan Jinlian and when he heard of this he took the opportunity of meeting Wu Song near the Shizi Bridge, and there they fought. And in this fight Wu Song killed his opponent."
The secretary did this, and read the new documents to both the prisoners and the witnesses also who were then sent to the Prefect with a dispatch asking him to give judgment.
Now Yanggu County was only a small place but the inhabitants were upright so that many subscribed money to present to Wu Song, while others sent wine and food to him in prison. Before his departure, he was allowed to go to his quarters and pack up his things, and place them in charge of his orderlies. He also sent about twelve taels of silver to Yun Ge's old father. His soldiers even sent him food and wine as presents.
The *yamen* officials took the necessary dispatches, and then sent them with the prisoners and witnesses to Dongping Prefecture. Upon reaching that place they found large crowds around the entrance to the *yamen*. The Prefect having been informed of the affair took his seat on the bench. The Prefect Chen Wenzhao was a very intelligent official, and after reading the dispatches and cross-examining the witnesses he had the bones, dagger, and other material evidences sealed up and locked up in the storeroom. He ordered that Wu Song's cangue should be replaced by a much lighter one, and that he be remanded to prison. But on the other hand he ordered that Grandma Wang should have a much heavier cangue fastened round her neck, and that she be sent to the prison where criminals were awaiting execution. He then told the official from Yanggu County that he could return, and that the witnesses also could return to their homes. The wife of Ximen Qing had also come to watch affairs, and she was ordered to remain in the Prefect's *yamen* until the Imperial authorities' decision was known.
Prefect Chen knew that Wu Song was a righteous and honest man, and from time to time he deputed men to look after him. For the same reason the jailers gave him food and wine without asking for any money.

The Prefect in making his report to the Provincial Governor made the case as trivial as possible. He then dispatched a confidential clerk to the capital with private letters, with instructions to arrange for the case to be settled. The official in charge of the Imperial Board of Punishments was on good terms with the Prefect Chen Wenzhao, and he talked the case over with the Provincial Governor: Regarding Grandma Wang she had beguiled them to commit adultery, and had instigated Pan Jinlian to poison her husband. She had told Pan Jinlian to send Wu Song away so that he could not sacrifice to his elder brother's spirit, and that was why he had killed Pan Jinlian. Grandma Wang had interfered between husband and wife, upsetting the harmony of married life, and should therefore suffer death by being sliced to death. [20] Regarding Wu Song—he had killed the adulterer Ximen Qing out of revenge for his brother's death but he could not be acquitted for his crime. He should be beaten forty times with the bamboo and then banished to the frontier. Both the adulterer and the adulteress had committed a grievous crime, and they deserved their deaths. The witnesses should all be allowed to return to their homes. The Provincial Governor wrote a judgment in accordance with the above, and dispatched it to the Prefect, and the latter carried out the sentence accordingly.

Grandma Wang was brought from her cell to hear her fate. The reason for execution was written on a signboard and she was made to sign her acknowledgement. She was then seated on a wooden frame known as the "donkey," tied to it with three ropes and had four nails hammered through her limbs to the frame. The Prefect gave the order to slice her, and she was paraded through the streets to the pounding of drums and the crash of gongs. Carried by bearers, with the signboard in front and with a pair of sharp swords raised high and with a bunch of paper flowers, she was taken to the square in the centre of Dongping market square where she was sliced to death.

Wu Song was beaten with forty strokes but the jailer saw to it that only six or seven blows actually broke the skin. He was branded on the face, and sent to the prison at Mengzhou. He was escorted by 2 men who treated him well on the road, as they knew that he was a good man. Wu Song saw that they were taking care of him, so he did not find fault with them. He had silver and gold in his bundle from the sale of his possessions by the neighbour Yao Wenqing, and when they stopped at inns in village on the way, he paid all the expenses out of his purse. He had committed the murder at the beginning of the third month, after remaining under arrest for more than two months, it was now about the middle of the year, and the blazing sun was hot enough even to melt the gold in the quartz. Therefore, they always walked during the early morning when it was a little cool. After about twenty days on the way the three men got on a big road which took them over a mountain range. When they had reached the top of the pass it was about 10 A.M., and as they were all tired Wu Song told his escort to take it easily, and to have a drink at the first inn when they got down the hill. They agreed to this, and hurried down the hill. They soon saw in the distance a hillock with a number of straw huts on it. There were some willow trees by the side of a stream, and flying from the top branches was a wine-shop flag. They all hurried their steps down the road, and when they were near the bottom, they met a woodcutter carrying a bundle of firewood.

Wu Song asked him what was the name of that place, and the man replied that it was called the Cross Road. When they reached the village they saw a gigantic tree with a trunk that five men could not have encircled, and hanging from it were dead creepers that had twined round its branches. A few steps away from the tree was an inn, and a woman was sitting inside near an open window. Her coat was of green gauze, and in her hair was a golden-coloured hairpin. At both of her temples were flowers in the hair. When she saw the three men arriving, she got up to receive them at the door. They then saw that her short skirt was of brilliant red silk, and that she had red and white powder on her face. Her dress was open exposing an inner pink cotton waist belt. On her dress were golden buttons. She welcomed them, saying, "Guests, please come inside and take rest. We have good wine, good meat, and excellent refreshment." The three men entered and sat down. The tables and stools were made of cedar wood. Wu Song took off his bundle, and placed it on the table. He removed his belt and outer garments, and put them in the same place.

The two soldiers saw that there was no man about to see what they were doing, and so they removed the cangue from Wu Song's neck, and placed it under the table. They then also removed their outer garments, and placed them on the windowsill.

Now the woman with a smiling face, asked how much wine they wanted. "You need not ask how much," replied Wu Song. "You just keep on bringing it, and also bring about five *jin* of meat. I will pay you when we have finished."

"We have also very good dumplings."

"Then bring us about forty."

She gladly went inside and soon brought out a large jar of wine, with three large cups, three pairs of chopsticks, two dishes of meat, and a basket of dumplings. The two soldiers partook of the meal but Wu Song took one dumpling and opening it looked inside and called out, "Is this human flesh, or dog's flesh?"

The woman laughed, and replied, "Please do not make me laugh so much. In this peaceful empire and general tranquillity how could there be human flesh, or dog's flesh in the dumplings. In our house we have never put anything in dumplings except beef."

"I have travelled extensively," replied Wu Song, "and I have heard that very few people dare pass the tree at this Cross Road, that fat men are cut up for making the dumplings, whereas thin men are just killed and used for filling up the river."

"Where did you hear that nonsense? It must be your own fabrication."

"I see human hair in this dumpling, that look a lot like pubic hair, so I still have my doubts. How is it that there is no man in this place?"

"My husband has gone to visit a friend and has not returned yet" she replied.

"Then you must feel lonely in this dismal place."

She laughed at this, and said to herself. "Is this exile not to find death? He likes to flirt with me! You are really the moth that flies into flame only to get yourself burnt to death. I would not make trouble with you but now I have a plan to deal with you." So she replied, "Don't try to flirt with me. Drink your wine, and then go and cool yourself under the tree. Or if you want to rest, you can rest in the inn."

When Wu Song heard this he came to the conclusion that the woman had some bad intention and he decided to put her to the test. So he remarked, "Woman, this wine is rather weak. If you have better wine let us have it."

"I have excellent wine with a lovely taste but it does not look quite clear."

"Splendid! The duller it is the better."

The woman was laughing at this in secret and going inside she took out a jug of dark coloured wine on a tray. Seeing this, Wu Song said, "This is really good wine but it would taste better when warmed." The woman said, "This gentleman is indeed an experienced drinker; I will warm it for you." Laughingly she added to herself, "That banished thief ought to die now, as he wishes to drink hot wine which will make the medicine soon produce the desired effect. That fellow will soon be in my hands." When the wine was warmed she took it in, and poured out three cups full. Laughingly she said, "Gentlemen, please try this wine."

How could those two soldiers restrain their thirst? They fell to the wine immediately. Wu Song said, "I am not used to drinking pure wine. Please bring us some meat to eat with this wine." When the woman had gone to do this, he scattered the wine on the floor in a place where it could not be seen, and then making the sound of drinking, he said, "What good wine! It certainly has a 'kick' in it."

But the woman had not gone to bring the meat, and just then returning she clapped her hands and called out, "At last! At last!" when she saw that the two soldiers who had drunk the wine had fallen backwards with tightly closed mouths. Wu Song then closed his eyes, and intentionally fell off his stool, and he heard the woman laugh and say, "That's all right! I am not afraid of you cunning devils now that you have drunk the water in which I washed my feet. Come, Small Two and Small Three!" He then heard two stupid fellows rush in, and seize the two soldiers and carry them into the inner room. The woman came and took the bundles and belts lying on the table. She felt the silver inside, and laughingly said, "I have got three men today so that I shall be able to make plenty of dumplings; I get plenty of booty too!" She took the belts and bundles away, and upon returning she ordered the two stupid fools to carry Wu Song inside also. But Wu Song lay rigidly flat on the ground so that they could not move him. The woman seeing this abused them, "What stupid clowns! You eat and drink but are of no use for anything else! Do you expect me to pick him up? Does this big fellow expect to play with me? Such stout flesh will sell as yellow beef but those two soldiers are so thin that they can only be put to vend as water-buffalo beef. But we must carry this man inside as I will kill him first." So saying she took off her coat of green gauze and skirt of red silk so that she was entirely naked above the waist, and she took hold of Wu Song to lift him up. But as she stooped down Wu Song embraced her, and pressed her to his breast. He twined both his legs round the lower part of her body, and held her tight. She squealed like a pig going to be slaughtered. The two fellows were on the point of coming to her assistance but Wu Song shouted at them in such a loud voice that they could not move. The woman feeling helpless called out, "Sir, please forgive me!" But he would not release her. Just then he saw a man set down a load of firewood at the door, to rest a while. When he saw the pair on the floor he sprang forward and said, "Sir, restrain your anger! Forgive her, and I will say something to you," At this Wu Song got up, planted his left foot on the woman, and placed himself on the defensive with his two fists ready. He saw that the man was wearing a black crape cap, a white coat, puttees round his legs, hempen sandals; a money purse was round his waist and his cheek bones were prominent. He had a small beard; and appeared to be about thirty-five years of age. He clasped his hands over his heart, and addressed Wu Song, "May I inquire what is your name?"

"Whether I travel or stay at home I do not change my name, I am Drill Instructor Wu Song."

"So are you the man who killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge?"

"Certainly."

The man knelt down, and kowtowed saying, "I have heard of your fame for a long time, and today I fortunately meet you."

"Are you the husband of this woman?"

"Yes, I am sorry that I did not recognize you. I do not know how my wife offended you but I hope that you will forgive her."

Wu Song lifted the woman up and said, "I see that you two, husband and wife, are not average people. What is your name?"

The woman went and put on her dress again and then came and kowtowed to Wu Song who said to her, "Excuse my intrusion! Please do not blame me!"

"I did not notice that you are a fine man. It was my mistake of a moment. I hope that you will forgive me. I request you to come inside and take a seat."

"But what is your name, and how do you get to know my name?"

"My name is Zhang Qing," said the man, and previously I was in charge of the vegetable garden of the Guangming Monastery near here. At one time in a fit of temper I killed the monks, and burnt down the monastery. After that I had no enemies, and as the officials did not come here to investigate the matter I started business as a highwayman. One day an old man passed here carrying a load of fuel, and I attacked him. We had about twenty bouts but at last that old man knocked me down. In fact, that man had himself been a highwayman some time before, and he took me to his home in the town and there taught me all the tricks of the trade. While there he induced me to marry this woman who was his daughter. But I did not care to live in the town so I came here, erected this house, and opened it as an inn. But in fact I am on the lookout for the rich people to intoxicate them with a drug and when they are unconscious I cut off their flesh, and sell it as beef, and mince the smaller bits to put inside the dumplings. Everyday I take the flesh to the village for sale, and this has been going on for a long time. I am on intimate terms with many brigands, and they call me Market Gardener Zhang Qing. My wife has the surname Sun but people always call her, 'Sun the Night Witch.' Upon returning to my home just now I heard my wife shrieking but did not expect to meet you Drill Instructor. I have repeatedly told my wife that there were three types of men whom she must not harm. First—traveling monks: they lead a thrifty life, and moreover are homeless, how can we harm such poor people? Once we nearly destroyed a celebrated man. This was Major Lu Da who was in the army of the General Old Zhong at Yanan Prefecture, and who killed the butcher Zheng Guanxi, and became a monk at Mount Wutai. He had figures tattooed on his back, and is therefore known by brigands and others as the 'Tattooed Monk' Lu Da Zhishen. He carried an iron monk staff of sixty *jin* weight, and passed here at one time. My wife seeing that he was a big man and very stout, put a drug in his wine, and was going to have him carried into the next room to be killed when I just arrived. I at once saw by the huge staff who he was, and administered a counter-remedy so that he recovered, and I adopted him as my elder brother. I have heard that he is now at the Baozhu Monastery on the Lianglong Mountain with Yang Zhi, the 'Blue Faced Brute,' where they act as brigands. He has written me many letters inviting me to go and join them but so far I have not been able to go."

"I've often heard of the fame of those two men," said Wu Song.

"My wife drugged another monk. What a pity that a giant monk should have died! I came back too late when his legs and arms had been cut off. But I kept his iron crown, his monk's gown, and his monk's certificate. But these are of no importance when compared with the two other things I have kept. I have his string of beads made from the bones of the one hundred and eight skulls, and also his two wonderful broad swords. Because of these things I think that monk must have killed a good many people and even now his sword makes a hissing sound in the night. I was sorry that I could not save his life, and I often still think of him. Secondly, there are the journeying prostitutes who wander about from place to place, and carefully adapt themselves to the company they meet. Their money is hard earned, if we kill them then many people are bound to get to know about it, and we should have the reputation of not being very brave men. So I instructed my wife not to kill such women. Thirdly, there are the banished prisoners among whom there are often very fine men and they also must not be killed. I never thought that my wife would not pay attention to what I said, and so she commit the fault of seizing you Drill Instructor, and fortunately I came back in time to save your life." Turning to his wife he asked, "How is it that you had such an idea today?"

"At first I did not intend to hurt this man," said the Night Witch. "But I saw that he had a very heavy bundle, and also he talked as though he had the intention of flirting with me."

"I killed vile people and shed their blood," said Wu Song, "so how could I dally with an honest woman? I saw that you were taking a keen interest in my bundle, so I became suspicious, and intentionally spoke lightly so that you would think I should easily fall into your hands. I poured the wine on the ground, and pretended to be poisoned, and you quickly came and seized hold of me. So I took hold of you at the same time. I hope that you'll pardon me."

Upon hearing this Zhang Qing burst into loud laughter, and then invited Wu Song to come and sit down in an inner room. Wu Song however asked that his escort should be released. Upon going into the kitchen where men's flesh was prepared, he saw men's skin stretched out on the walls. Hanging from the rafters were several men's legs, and the two soldiers were stretched out on a bench.

Wu Song said, "Brother, please enable these two men to get up."

"What's your crime and to what place are you going?" asked Zhang Qing.

Wu Song then told him in detail how he had killed both Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian. Both Zhang Qing and his wife were pleased upon hearing the details, and the former said, "I'd like to tell you something but I wonder if you'd like to listen to it." Wu Song asked him to proceed and Zhang Qing spoke slowly and deliberately. A man with strength of elephant's defeated by the tiger-slayer.

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## Wu Song cuts a dash in the Fortress of Peace, Astonishes the Prisoners, & hi s Prestige Shakes Anping Stockade; The Young Master's ousted from Happy Woods, the Kuaihuo Forest Is Restored to Shi En, & he Retakes Happy Grove

"It's not that I'm a wicked man," said Zhang Qing, "but wouldn't it be better instead of suffering hardships in prison, to knock off these two guards and stay here for a time? If you want to head for the hills, I'll take you to Precious Pearl Monastery on Twin-Dragon Mountain and you can join up with Lu Zhishen. How about it?"

"That's very considerate of you, brother. There's just one thing: All my life I've fought only tough rogues. These guards have been very kind to me all along the road. If I kill them, Heaven will not forgive me. Save them, if you respect me. Don't do them any harm."

"Since you're so chivalrous, Constable, I'll bring them round."

Zhang Qing had his men remove the guards from the chopping block, and his wife concocted a brew. Pulling the guards' ears, Zhang poured the medicine down their throats. Before long, they awakened as if from a dream and crawled to their feet. They looked at Wu Song. "How did we get so drunk? That certainly is fine wine! We didn't drink much, but we really got sozzled. We must remember this place, and stop here for some more on the way back."Wu Song laughed, and Zhang and his wife chuckled. The guards were mystified.

The two assistants slaughtered chickens and geese, cooked a meal, and laid a table with cups and platters. Zhang told them to put it in the rear garden beneath the grape arbor, where he invited Wu Song and the guards to be seated. Wu Song had the guards sit at the head of the table. He and Zhang sat opposite. The wife sat at the side. The assistants kept pouring wine and bringing platters of food.

Zhang drank with Wu Song until dark. He showed the constable the pair of knives. They were indeed of the finest steel, and obviously hadn't been made in a day. The two spoke of feats of good fellows in the gallant fraternity, of deeds of murder and arson.

"Song Jiang of Shandong, or Timely Rain as he's called, is a loyal, generous man of magnificent courage," said Wu Song. "Because of something that's happened, he also had to take refuge in Lord Chai's manor."

When the guards heard who their prisoner's friends were, they grew petrified with fear. Dropping to their knees, they kowtowed.

"I've put you two to the trouble of bringing me this far," said Wu Song. "Would I have let you do that if I intended to kill you? No need to fear when I talk of the gallant fraternity. I've never harmed a good person. Just relax and drink your wine. Tomorrow, when we get to Mengzhou, I'll show my appreciation to you both."

That night, all rested in Zhang Qing's home.

The next day Wu Song wanted to leave, but Zhang Qing wouldn't hear of it. He entertained him for three days in succession. Wu Song was very grateful. The two pledged each other as blood brothers, with Wu Song as the younger, since Zhang was nine years his senior.

Finally, Wu Song took his departure. Zhang gave him a farewell drinking party, then returned his luggage, pack and purse, presented him with ten ounces of silver, and handed two or three silver pieces to the guards. Wu Song gave his ten ounces to the guards as well. He put on his cangue, which again was sealed. Zhang and his wife walked with him to the gate. Wu Song said goodbye with tears in his eyes and set off for Mengzhou.

He and the guards reached the town before noon. They went to the prefectural court and presented the documents from Dongping Prefecture. The prefect read them, accepted charge of Wu Song, wrote a receipt of prisoner for the guards and told them to return. Of them we'll say no more.

Wu Song was taken to the prison. Above the entrance was a plaque, with the words: "Anping Stockade." The local guards put him in a room by himself, turned over his papers and got a receipt. No more need be said of that.

A dozen or so ordinary prisoners came over. "If you have a letter of introduction or any silver in your pack, good fellow," they said, "take them out, and when the head keeper comes, give them to him. Then they'll go easy on you when they give you the Spirit-Breaking Beating. It'll be cruel if you have no present for him. We're ordinary prisoners like yourself. That's why we're letting you know. 'When the rabbit dies, the fox mourns. All are of the same animal kingdom.' You're new here. We were afraid you might not have heard."

"Thank you for telling me. I happen to have a few things with me. If he asks me nicely, I'll give him some. If he acts tough, I won't give him a penny!"

"Don't talk like that," cried the prisoners. "You know the old sayings: 'Fear not the authorities—except those that have authority over you!' and 'Neath a low-eaved roof who dares raise his head?' It's better to be careful!"

Before they had finished speaking, someone said: "Here comes the head keeper!" They all scattered.

Wu Song opened his pack and sat waiting in his room. The man entered the building and inquired: "Which one of you is the new prisoner?"

"I am, sir," said Wu Song.

"You've got eyes, haven't you? Why must you wait for me to ask? I hear you're the man who beat the tiger to death on Jingyang Ridge and was a constable in Yanggu County. I thought you'd know a thing or two. How can you be so dull-witted? In this place of mine, here, you'd better not hit so much as a cat!"

"All this talk is because you want me to give you a present, I suppose? Not half a penny! Maybe you'd like a taste of my fine two fists? I've got money, but I'm keeping that to buy myself wine. What are you going to do about it? If you don't like it, you can sent me back to Yanggu County!"

The head keeper stamped off in a rage. Once more the other prisoners crowded around.

"You shouldn't have talked back to him," they exclaimed. "Now you're going to suffer. He'll tell the warden, and you'll surely be killed!"

"I'm not afraid. He can do what he likes. I'll be civilized if he will. If it's battle he wants, I'll give it to him."

Just then three or four guards came and shouted for the new prisoner.

"Here is your lord," said Wu Song. "I haven't left. What are you yelling about?"

The guards escorted him to the examination room, where the warden was formally seated. Half a dozen soldiers pushed Wu Song forward. The warden directed them to remove the cangue.

"Prisoner, know this," he said. "The Emperor of Military Virtue, first emperor of Song, decreed that all exiles, when they first arrive, shall be beaten a hundred blows to break their spirit. Guards, hold him prone!"

"Don't move, not one of you! If you want to beat me, go ahead. No one need hold me. If I dodge one blow, I'm no true man. You can start all over from the beginning. I'm not the courageous fellow from Yanggu County if I utter a single cry."

The onlookers laughed. "That lunatic wants to die. We'll see how much he can take!"

"Hit hard. Merciful blows only annoy me."

This remark provoked more laughter from the people on both sides of the room. Just then a young man standing beside the warden whispered something in the official's ear. Of average height, he was about twenty-five, with a fair complexion, a mustache and goatee. A white kerchief bound his head, and he wore a black silk tunic. One hand was bandaged with white silk strips.
The warden addressed the prisoner: "Wu Song, were you ill during your journey here?"
"No, I drank wine, I ate meat and rice, and I walked without falter."
"This scoundrel was sick on the way," the warden announced. "I can see from his complexion that he's just recovered. We'll put the beating off for the time being."
"Say you were ill, quick," the beaters on either side of Wu Song whispered. "The warden is giving you a break! Say you were sick and be done with it!"
"I wasn't sick. I wasn't! Beat me. Get it over with. Let's have no delays. I don't want deferred payments that you can collect at any time!"
Again the onlookers laughed, and the warden joined them.
"Not only were you ill, but you must be still running a high fever to talk so deliriously! Pay no attention to him. Guards, take him back to the single room."
Three soldiers returned Wu Song to his quarters. The prisoners all hurried over to question him. "Did you bring a letter from some good friend of the warden?"
"Not I."
"Then postponing the beating is not a good sign. Tonight, they'll certainly finish you off!"
"How?"
"In the evening they'll bring you two bowls of dry brown rice. When you're full, they'll take you to an earthen dungeon, tie you, roll you up in a straw mat, stuff your seven openings, and put you, head down, against the wall. In less than half a watch you'll be dead. That's called the 'upside down bowl' method."
"Is that their only way?"
"Another is also to tie you up, then put a huge sack of sand on you. You're finished in less than a watch. That's called the 'sack of earth' method."
"What else do they do?"
"Those two are the most frightful. The others aren't so bad."
Just then an army man entered with a hamper. "Which one is the new prisoner Constable Wu?" he asked.
"I am," said Wu Song. "What's on your mind?"
"The warden told me to bring you this snack."
Wu Song looked. There was a measure of wine, a platter of meat, another of noodles, and a large bowl of broth. "Does this mean they're going to work on me when I've finished?" he wondered. "I'll eat first and think about that later!"
He drained the wine at one go, then he ate all the meat and noodles. The man collected the dishes and left. Wu Song sat musing in his room. He laughed coldly. "Let's see what they're going to try!"
At dusk, the man came again with the hamper.
"What do you want?" asked Wu Song.
"I was told to bring your evening meal," the man replied. He laid out several vegetable dishes, another large measure of wine, a big platter of fried meat, a bowl of fish soup, and a large bowl of rice.
"They're sure to kill me after I've finished this," Wu Song said to himself. "Let them! At least I'll be a well fed ghost! Eat first, and decide what to do later!"
Wu Song consumed the meal. The man collected the dishes and departed. Not long after, he returned with another fellow. One carried a bathtub, the other a bucket of hot water.
"Your bath is ready, Constable," they said.
"Will they strike after I've bathed?" Wu Song wondered. "Who cares! I'll have a good wash first!"
The men poured the water into the tub, and Wu Song jumped in and scrubbed. When he was through, they handed him a large towel. He dried himself and put on his clothes. One man spilled out the water and went off with the tub. The other hung up mosquito netting and laid a rattan mat and a woven bamboo pillow on his bed, for coolness. He said good night and departed.
Wu Song closed and bolted the door of his room. "What is all this, anyhow?" he thought. "It's up to them. We'll see what we shall see!"
He lay down and slept. Nothing happened that night.
He rose at dawn and opened the door. The man who had come the previous night again arrived with a bucket of hot water. After Wu Song had washed his face and rinsed his mouth, a man came and combed his hair with a fine comb, piled it in a neat knot on the top of his head, and bound it with a kerchief. Another man brought a hamper, from which he extracted a vegetable dish, a large bowl of meat broth, and a big bowl of rice.
"Whatever you may be up to," Wu Song thought. "I'm going to eat!"
When he was through, they served him a cup of tea. Only when he had finished that, did the man who brought the food speak.
"This place isn't very comfortable. If the constable would move to that room, there, we could give better service."
"Here it comes!" Wu Song thought. "I'll go with you and see what happens!"
One man gathered Wu Song's belongings and bedding. The other led him to a room nearer the front and pushed open the door. Inside was a spotlessly clean bed, and a newly placed table and stools. Wu Song entered.
"I thought they were taking me to the earthen dungeon, and instead they bring me here," he mused. "This is much better than that other room."
He sat alone and rested till noon. Again the man came with the hamper and a pitcher of wine. He took out four kinds of fruit, a cooked chicken, and many steamed rolls. He segmented the tender chicken, poured the wine, and invited the constable to tuck in.
"What's going on here?" Wu Song wondered.
In the evening there was another large meal, followed by a bath and relaxation in the cool air. "I believed what those prisoners told me. Why am I being treated so well?" he said to himself.
Food and wine were delivered as usual on the morning of the third day. After breakfast, Wu Song strolled around the stockade grounds. Prisoners were carrying water, chopping kindling, and doing various odd jobs neath the open sky. It was the middle of summer, but they had no place to avoid the heat.
Hands clasped behind his back, Wu Song asked: "Why are you working in the broiling sun?"
The prisoners laughed grimly. "For us this is Heaven," they said. "Who would dare hope for shade and a chance to sit down! There are others who weren't able to pay any bribes. They're locked in the big dungeon, more dead than alive, spending their days in heavy chains!"
Wu Song made a circuit of the prison temple. Beside an urn for burning written prayers was a huge stone with a hole in the middle that was used on occasion as a base for a flagpole. Wu Song sat down on it for a while, then returned to his room. He was sitting there, thinking, when the man came again with meat and wine.
But enough of idle chatter. Wu Song had been in the new room for several days, during which time he was continually wined and dined, with no sign of anyone wanting to harm him. He was quite puzzled. When the man brought his meal at noon and put down the hamper, Wu Song could restrain himself no longer. He put his hand on the hamper.
"Whose household are you from?" he demanded. "Why do you keep serving me food and wine?"
"I told you the other day, Constable. I'm a trusted servant in the home of the warden."
"Who, specifically, instructs you to bring these meals? What do they oblige me to do?"
"I'm acting on orders of the warden's son."
"I'm a prisoner, a criminal. I haven't done a thing to benefit him. Why should the warden's son send me food?"
"I wouldn't know that, sir. My instructions were to deliver meals and not say anything for three to six months."
"Very peculiar," Wu Song said. "Are you trying to make me soft and fat, and then finish me off? I can't figure it out. If I don't know what's behind this food and wine, I can't consume them in peace. What sort of person is the warden's son? Where did he meet me? Unless you tell me, I won't eat his meals."
"Do you remember the man in the examination hall with the white head kerchief and the bandaged right hand, the day you first arrived? That was the warden's son."
"He wore a black tunic and stood beside the warden?"
"That's right."
"Was he the one who saved me from the Spirit-Breaking Beating, then?"
"That's right."
"Strange! I'm from Qinghe County, he's from Mengzhou. We've never met before. Why is he treating me so well? There has to be a reason. I must ask you. What's his name?"
"Shi En. He's skilled with fists and staves, and everyone calls him Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub."
"Sounds like a good man. Ask him to come. If he's willing to meet me, I'll eat your food. If not, I won't touch a morsel!"
"He instructed me not to give you any details, and not to talk about a meeting until three months to half a year had passed."
"Nonsense! Ask him to come and see me."
The servant was scared, and very reluctant. But Wu Song grew angry, so he had no choice but to comply.
Shi En hastened over. He dropped at Wu Song's feet and kowtowed. The constable at once returned the courtesy.
"I am a prisoner, under your rule," said Wu Song. "I have never had the honor of knowing you. Yet you saved me from a beating the other day, and now you sent me food and drink. It's really not right. And you haven't asked me to do a single thing. Such unmerited kindness disturbs my sleep and spoils my appetite."
"Elder brother's fame has long thundered in my ears. I hated the long distance that separated us. Today we meet at last. I wanted to pay my respects earlier, but I had no suitable gifts, and I was ashamed. I dared not call on you."
"Your servant said you didn't want to speak to me until after three months to half a year. What did you want to see me about?"
"That rustic has no tact. He shouldn't have said anything."
"Must you give me this ceremonious palaver? You've got me bursting with curiosity. What exactly do you want with me?"
"Since my servant has already spoken, I might as well tell you. Because you are a big hero, a real man, there is something I must beg of you. Only you can do it. I didn't want to ask you right away, since you've travelled a long distance to get here. I thought I'd give you a few months to regain your strength."
Wu Song laughed heartily. "Last year, after a three-month bout of malaria, I got drunk and fought a big tiger on Jingyang Ridge. With three punches and two kicks I killed it. What couldn't I do today!"
"I don't think I'd better speak yet. Recuperate a little longer. When you've completely recovered, I'll tell you the whole story."
"You mean I haven't got my strength back? All right. How heavy is that big stone in front of the temple?"
"Probably four or five hundred catties."
"Let's take a look. I wonder whether I can move it."
"Please have some wine first."
"There'll be time enough for that when we come back."
The two men walked to the temple. The prisoners on the grounds bowed and hailed them respectfully. Wu Song shook the stone slightly. He laughed.
"This soft life is spoiling me. I'll never be able to pick it up!"
"You shouldn't scoff," said Shi En. "That stone weighs four or five hundred catties!"
Wu Song grinned. "You really think I can't lift it? Get back, you men, and watch this."
He slipped off his tunic and tied the sleeves around his waist. Embracing the stone, he raised it easily, then tossed it away with both hands. It dropped with a thud, sinking a foot into the earth. The watching prisoners were astonished.
Wu Song grasped the stone with his right hand and lifted. With a sudden twist, he flung it upwards. It sailed ten feet into the air. He caught it in both hands as it came down and lightly put it back in its original place. He turned and looked at Shi En and the prisoners. His face wasn't flushed, he wasn't even breathing hard, his heart beat calmly.
Shi En threw his arms around him, then kowtowed. "Fantastic, brother! Truly a god!"
The prisoners all dropped to their knees. "A god indeed!"
Shi En took Wu Song to his private residence and begged him to be seated.
"Tell me now," said the constable. "What is it you want me to do?"
"Please sit a while. My father will be here soon to see you. Then I'll deign to trouble you."
"You want a person to do something, don't be so wishy-washy! That's no way to get things done. Even if it needs a stab or a hack, I'll do it! If I'm toadying to you in the least, I'm no man!" Clasping his hands respectfully together, Shi En finally spoke. And as a result, Wu Song displayed his man-destroying skill, he showed again his tiger-killing prowess. Truly, his two fists pounded like thunder, his flying kicks startled the wind and rain.

Well, what the Gardener said to Wu Song was this: "Don't think I'm nasty-minded, Captain, but rather than you go and suffer in prison, wouldn't it be better if we finish off those guards of yours right now? You could stay here with us for a while. Afterwards, if you agree to become an outlaw, I'd personally send word to the Temple of the Precious Pearl on Twin Dragon Peak and arrange for you to join Lu Zhishen's band. What do you say?"
"It is very good of you, Brother, to show such concern for my welfare," said Wu Song, "but there's just one thing. All my life I've fought only with bullies. These two guards have been kind to me and looked after me well, they've done everything they could for me on the journey. If I let any harm come to them, heaven will not pardon me. If you really want to please me, for my sake let them off, don't do them any harm."
"Since you're so magnanimous, Captain, I'll give them the antidote at once."
The Gardener told the two assistants to get the guards down off the carving block. His wife prepared a bowl of the antidote and then he pulled them by the ears and made them swallow it. In less than an hour they awoke as if from a dream and sat up. When they saw Wu Song, they said: "However did we get so drunk in this place? That wine must be really something! We hardly touched a drop and it knocked us out cold. We must remember this place. We'll come and try their wine again on the way back."
Wu Song couldn't help laughing, and the Gardener and the Ogress joined in. The guards couldn't make out what was going on. Meanwhile the two assistants went and slaughtered chickens and geese and cooked them and set out dishes and cups. The Gardener ordered a table and chairs to be placed under a vine-covered trellis at the back and invited Wu Song and his guards out into the garden.
Wu Song made the guards take the place of honour, while he and Zhang the Gardener sat with the Ogress on one side. The two assistants poured the wine and came and went with plates of food. The Gardener plied Wu Song with wine. When evening came he got out the two monk's swords to show Wu Song. They were indeed of the very finest steel and more than one day's work had surely gone into their making. The two men reminisced about the heroes of rivers and lakes and told many a tale of killing and burning. At one point Wu Song said: "That noble and generous fellow, Song Jiang of Shandong province, known as the Opportune Rain, has had to take refuge with Mr. Chai in his country residence, because of some affair he got involved in." On hearing this talk the two guards suddenly became terrified and threw themselves down on their knees. Wu Song said: "Surely you can't suppose I intend you any harm, after you've looked after me for such a space? All this talk of the heroes of rivers and lakes is nothing to be frightened of, there's no way we would want to harm good people. Just drink up and tomorrow when we reach Mengzhou I'll give proof of my gratitude."
They spent the night at the Gardener's. Wu Song wanted to leave in the morning but the Gardener wouldn't let him go and insisted on their staying another three days. Wu Song was moved by the attentions of the Gardener and his wife and since Zhang was his elder by five years formally pronounced him his elder brother.
Now Wu Song announced his intention of leaving again, but not before the Gardener had organized a send-off party. The Gardener returned all their things to them, the duffle bag and the packs, and gave ten taels or so of silver to Wu Song and two or three taels in loose change to the guards. Wu Song divided his among the guards. Then the cangue was fitted again and the seals replaced. The Gardener and his wife saw them to the gate and they set off for Mengzhou. As the poem says:
His new brother's counsel
*Is to join the robber rout.*
*But he's no mind to cancel*
*The justice meted out*

*For his killing of the woman*
*Who acted like a whore:*
*For he's no common felon*
Without regard for law.

It was not yet noon when they reached the city. They went straight to the government offices and presented the documents from Dongping district court. When the governor had examined these, Wu Song was taken into custody and a receipt was sent back with the two guards. We say no more of them.

Wu Song was immediately consigned to the prison fortress. When he arrived there, he found a big plaque bearing three characters which read: "Fortress of Peace." The guards took him to his cell and then went to hand in the documents and get a receipt. No more of this.

Once Wu Song was ensconced in his own cell, a dozen or so of his fellow inmates came to see him. "You're new here," they said, "so if you happen to have anything in your pack there, a letter of recommendation or some spare cash, you'd better have it ready. The chief warder will be here in a minute and you'll need to give him something. Then if they do give you the disciplinary beating, that's meant to soften you up, they'll go easy on you. But if you haven't got anything for him you'll really cop it! We're all in the same boat here, that's why we're warning you. You know the saying, 'When the rabbit dies the fox mourns; creatures feel for their own kind.' We were afraid since you've just come you might not know about these things, that's why we thought we'd better tell you."

"Thank you all for your good advice," Wu Song said. "I do happen to have something here, and if he speaks to me nicely I shall reward him. But if he's rude, I shan't give him a cent!"

"Oh no!" the others exclaimed, "That's not the way at all. You know what the ancients said, 'Fear not the law but him who wields the law.' And there's that proverb too, 'When you walk under the eaves, better keep your head down.' You want to watch out you know!"

They'd hardly finished speaking when someone shouted: "The chief warder's coming!" At this they all dispersed.

Wu Song took off his pack and sat down in his cell. Next thing, in comes the gaoler shouting "Where's the new prisoner?"

"That's me," said Wu Song.

"What's the matter with you? Are you blind or something? Why wait for me to ask? Aren't you the fellow who killed the tiger on Jingyang Pass and was made captain in Yanggu? You oughter be smart, how come you don't know what's what? Think you can face me out, do you? Why, you couldn't even beat up a cat!"

"And you're just making a big noise because you think I ought to bribe you! Well you won't get a cent!" Wu Song said. "All you'll get is a taste of my fists! I have got some money, but I shall keep it to buy myself wine. What are you going to do about that? Why, you haven't even got the power to send me back to Yanggu!"

After the head warder had departed in high dudgeon, the other convicts crowded round Wu Song. "Now you've done it!" they said. "In a minute you're really going to be sorry! He'll have gone off to report to the Warden, you can count on it. It's not likely you'll get off with your life!"

"I'm not scared of him. I'll treat him the same way he treats me. If he's reasonable, I'll be reasonable too; if he wants a fight, that's what he'll get!"

Hardly had he finished speaking when three or four prison guards marched in demanding to know where the prisoner, Wu Song, was. "Here I am, you fools, did you think I'd run away?" Wu Song answered sarcastically. "I don't see the need for all this shouting!" Ignoring this they marched him off to the administration office to see the prison Warden. Several guards brought him in and the Warden barked out orders for the cangue to be removed. "Prisoner, in accordance with the original decree of Emperor Wude, our forefather, every newly arrived prisoner receives one hundred disciplinary lashes. Guards, secure the prisoner and administer the punishment!"

"Keep your hands off!" Wu Song warned. "If you want to beat me, go ahead, but you don't have to hold me. If I dodge a single blow, you can call me a coward and start again. If I so much as make a sound, you can say I'm not the hero of Yanggu!"

All the onlookers laughed. "The fellow's crazy," they said, "he's committing suicide! Well, let's see how he can take it."

"Come on then, if you're going to beat me try to do it properly," said Wu Song. "Don't hold anything back or I shall feel insulted."

This provoked further mirth. But as the guards took up their sticks in readiness, a cry rang out. Standing by the Warden's side was a man of about twenty-five, of average height and pale complexion, bearded and bewhiskered, his head bound about with a white scarf and sporting a black silk tunic. One hand was wrapped in a white bandage. He now spoke a few words in the Warden's ear. Thereupon the latter said: "Newly arrived prisoner Wu Song, tell us about the illness you contracted on the journey."

"I contracted no illness on the journey," Wu Song said. "I drank, I ate everything available, and I marched."

"The fellow was sick on the way here," the Warden said. "I can see from the look of him he's only just recovered. The beating will be postponed."

The guards on either side whispered to Wu Song: "Quick, say you've been ill. He's doing you a favour. All you've got to do is say you're feeling bad."

"But I'm not, I'm perfectly fit," Wu Song protested. "Beat me and be done with it. I don't want to put this beating in store and have it hanging over me. Let's get it over with as soon as possible."

Again there was laughter all round. Even the Warden was grinning. "The man's obviously still delirious with fever. He's sweating and spouting nonsense, I shall pay no attention to him. Take him back to the lock-up."

Several guards escorted Wu Song back to his cell. The other convicts gathered round and said: "Are you really going to tell us you didn't have some special letter of recommendation for the Warden?"

"Definitely not."

"In that case this postponement doesn't look good at all. They'll come and finish you off in the night."

"And how do you think they'll do it?"

"This evening they'll feed you two bowls of dry brown rice and some salted fish. As soon as you're full, they'll take you down to the dungeons, tie you up and roll you in straw mats, stop up the seven apertures and put you upside down on the wall. In less than an hour you'll be gone. It's what they call 'hanging the pot'."

"Is that the only method they've got?"

"There's another where they tie you up and get a sack and fill it full of sand and squash you under it. Same as before, in less than half an hour you're a goner. That's called 'sandbagging'."

"What else can they do?"

"Isn't that horrible enough? What would they need more for?"

Hardly had the convicts finished speaking when a guard entered, carrying a hamper, and asked: "Which of you is the new prisoner, Captain Wu?

"I am," said Wu Song, "what do you want with me?"

"The Warden sends this snack for you."

Inside the hamper were a big pot of wine, a plate of meat, a bowl of noodles and a big bowl of broth.

"I suppose they're giving me this snack because they're coming to kill me later," Wu Song thought to himself. "Well anyway, I may as well eat now, let's take things one at a time."

When he had drained the wine and polished off the meat and noodles, the man returned and cleared away the things.

Alone in his cell, Wu Song considered his situation. "Now we shall see what they're going to do with me," he thought fatalistically. But as night fell, the same man entered again with another hamper. "What have you come for?" Wu Song asked him.

"I've been sent to give you your dinner."

He had brought several plates of vegetables, another big pot of wine, a plate of roast meat, a bowl of fish soup and a big bowl of rice. "After all this," Wu Song said to himself, "they'll definitely be coming to kill me. Well, let them. At least I won't be a hungry ghost when I die. So let's eat first and think about things after."

As soon as he had finished, the man collected the dishes and left. But in a little while he returned with another man. One was carrying a bath-tub, the other a big bucket of hot water. "Your bath, Captain," they said.

"I suppose they'll start on me when I've had my bath," he thought. "Well, I'm not afraid of them. I may as well spruce myself up a bit."

The two men filled the bath and he got in. When he'd washed, they handed him a bathrobe and a towel. He dried himself and dressed and then one of the men poured away the bath water and removed the bath, while the other brought a rattan mat and a mosquito-net. After hanging the mosquito-net, spreading the mat and placing a cool pillow on it, he bade Wu Song good night and departed.

Wu Song closed the door and bolted it. "What does all this mean?" he was thinking to himself. "Well let them do what they like. I'll know sooner or later." He laid his head on the pillow and slept soundly all night.

At daybreak Wu Song unbolted the door of the cell and the man who had served him the day before reappeared carrying hot water for washing. He invited Wu Song to wash his face and rinse his mouth with the water he provided for the purpose. He also brought a barber who combed Wu Song's hair, tied it in a knot on top of his head and covered it with a cap. Following this another man entered with a hamper from which he produced plates of vegetables, a big bowl of broth and a big bowl of rice. "I've no idea what you're up to," Wu Song thought, "but I'm going to eat anyway." When he'd eaten, a pot of tea was produced, and when he'd drunk the tea, the man who'd brought the food came back and said: "You're not very comfortable here, Captain, you'll be better off if we move you into the next room. It's a more suitable place for us to serve your tea and food."

"This is it!" Wu Song thought. "But I'll just go with him and see what happens."

While one man collected Wu Song's pack and bedding, another led him from his cell to somewhere on the opposite side of the corridor. They opened the door and inside was a spotlessly clean bed, with table and benches recently placed along either side. When he saw this, Wu Song thought to himself: "Here was I thinking they were about to take me down to the dungeons, how come they bring me somewhere like this! It's much better than the cell."

Wu Song sat there till midday, when the man came again with a hamper and a bottle of wine. Opening up the hamper he laid out fruit of four kinds, a cooked chicken and a quantity of steamed rolls. He carved the chicken, poured out the wine and invited Wu Song to eat. "What is going on?" Wu Song wondered. In the evening, there was more food and Wu Song was invited to bathe and lie down in the cool. "I believed it would be exactly as the other convicts said," he thought. "Then how is it they keep treating me so nicely?"

On the third day they brought him food and wine, same as before, and when he had breakfasted he went out for a stroll in the prison grounds. There he came upon a gang of convicts carrying water, chopping firewood and doing a variety of jobs, all under the baking noonday sun. It was high summer and nowhere was there any relief from the heat. Standing with his hands behind his back, Wu Song asked these convicts: "Why are you working in the sun like this?"

The convicts laughed. "Listen, friend, simply to be allowed to work this way is heaven on earth for us. How on earth could we expect to sit on our arses keeping cool? Them as don't have the means to bribe the gaolers are locked up in the great dungeon, live or die, it's all one to them, they'll pass the rest of their days like that, loaded down with chains."

After this Wu Song went to take a turn around the Temple of the Heavenly Prince. Next to the paper-burner was a block of granite with a hole in it, a massive stone, which served as occasional support for a flag-staff. He went and sat on this stone for a while, and then went back to his room and sat on the floor, turning things over in his mind, till the man came again with wine and food. To cut a long story short, Wu Song spent several more days in that room, and each day good food and wine was brought him and no attempt whatsoever was made to harm him. He simply did not know what to make of it.

Finally one day when the man came at noon with food and drink, Wu Song could hold back no longer. Placing his hand on the hamper, he asked: "Who is your master? Why do you keep bringing me all this?"

"I told you, didn't I? I'm a servant of the Warden's household."

"But you still haven't answered my question. This food and wine you bring me each day, who is it told you to bring it? And what does he want of me?"

"Actually it's the Warden's son who's sending it."

"But I'm only a convict, I haven't even halfway done anything for the Warden, so why send me all this?"

"Who am I to say? I'm just obeying the Young Master's orders. He says to go on bringing you the stuff for five or six months and then he'll explain."

"Stranger and stranger! Are they trying to fatten me up before they do me in? It's a bloody conundrum and I just don't see how I'm ever going to solve it. But there's something fishy about all the food, so how can I be comfortable eating it? Tell me, this Young Master of yours, what's he like? How does he know me? I won't eat any more unless you answer."

"Remember when you'd just arrived, sir, in the administration office, the one who had a white dressing and a bandaged hand? That's the Warden's son."

"Do you mean the one in the black tunic standing right next to the Warden?"

"That's the one."

"Wasn't he the one who told them to stop when they were about to give me the beating?"

"Right sir. It was the Young Master that spoke up for you, that's why they didn't beat you."

"This is really odd! I'm from Qinghe, he's from Mengzhou, we've never met before, so why's he so concerned about me? There's got to be a reason. Listen, this Young Master of yours, what's his name?"

"His name's Shi En, and he's a martial arts expert, so people call him the Golden-Eyed Tiger."

"He's obviously a good man. Ask him to come here and see me. If you do that I can accept his food and wine. If you don't get him to come, I refuse to touch anything."

The servant began to object. "The Young Master told me not to say anything about it. He said I was to serve you five or six months before he'd meet you."

"Shut up. Just tell your Young Master to come here and meet me."

At first the man was too scared, but when Wu Song began to lose patience he was obliged to go back and report what Wu Song had said.

After a long wait the Young Master rushed in and prostrated himself before Wu Song, who hurriedly returned the compliment, saying: "I am a convicted criminal under your jurisdiction, I cannot claim the honour or your acquaintance, yet recently you saved me from a severe beating and now every day you provide me with excellent food and wine, all of which I have done nothing to deserve. I have done you no service. To be thus rewarded without reason renders one unable either to eat or sleep in peace."

"I have long been familiar with your name, my friend, it has sounded like thunder in my ears," said the Young Master, "but an unfriendly fate kept us apart and I could not contact you. Now it is my good fortune that you are here and I would have come to greet you at once, only I was ashamed because I had nothing suitable to give you."

"I believe I heard your servant say that I was supposed to wait several months and then you would speak to me about something. What exactly was it you wanted to speak to me about?"

"The idiot doesn't know how to behave. He had to blurt it all out when he ought to have been keeping his mouth shut!"

"Really sir!" Wu Song protested, "all this shilly-shallying about, you'll drive me crazy. For heaven's sake, can't you tell me right out what it is you want of me?

"Well, since the clod has let the cat out of the bag, I suppose I'd better explain. Because you're such a strong man, there is something I'd like to ask you to do, no one but you is capable of it. But because you must be tired from the journey here and haven't had time to recuperate, I want you to rest for a few months first. Then, when you've fully recovered your strength, I'll tell you all about it."

"Your Honour," Wu Song said scornfully, "last year on Jing-yang Pass after I'd been sick with malaria for three months, and was drunk into the bargain, I was able to throw down a great tiger and kill it with just three blows of the fist and a couple of kicks. What do you suppose I'm capable of now?"

"But I'm not going to tell you today. Not till you've had a bit more rest and got your strength back fully."

"You still think I'm not strong enough? All right. There's a big block of stone I saw yesterday outside the Temple of the Heavenly Prince, what do you suppose it weighs?"

"I should think about four or five hundred catties."

"Let's go and see if I can lift it."

"Finish this wine first."

"Time enough for that when we come back."

The two men went to the Temple of the Heavenly Prince. When the convicts saw Wu Song with the Warden's son, they all bent low and saluted. Wu Song began to rock the stone a little. He grinned and said: "I'm really getting out of shape, I can't shift it."

"A stone that weighs four or five hundred catties, that's not to be taken lightly," said the Young Master.

"Do you really believe I can't lift it?" Wu Song said scornfully. "All right, everyone, stand back and watch this!" He removed the upper part of his robe and tied it about his waist, and then with single jerk lifted the stone clear off the ground. Then he threw it with both hands. It plunged to the ground, sinking in to a depth of a foot. The onlookers marvelled at what they saw. Wu Song went to the stone and lifted it again and tossed it into the air. It rose to a height of ten feet. Wu Song caught it in both hands as it descended and replaced it gently in the original spot. He turned to the Young Master and the crowd. His face was un-flushed, his heartbeat regular and his breathing easy. The Young Master stepped forward, embraced him, and then prostrated himself, saying: "You're not just an ordinary human! You're a god!" The convicts all echoed his words: "A god, truly a god!"

His strength is a miracle, wondrous to see.
*He's filled with true power in the highest degree.*
*The hand of this hero the universe appals*
He tosses the stone like a juggler his balls.

The Young Master now took Wu Song into his private residence and made him sit down.

"Now you must tell me what it is you want me to do for you," Wu Song said.

"Let's just sit a little till my father comes, then I'll be ready to explain it to you."

Wu Song did not conceal his disgust: "Now look here, Your Honour, if you want someone to do something for you, it's no good messing around like a young girl, never coming out with anything clearly, that's not a man's way of going about it. Even if it's something terrible, I'll do it for you. But don't imagine I'm going to flatter you, you'll not catch Wu Song doing that!" So the Young Master, standing quite still with his hands clasped together, expounded the business to Wu Song. And it was because of this that Wu Song was to display his fearsome aptitude for killing, to bring to bear once more the full force of his tiger-killing might. Truly, when his 2 fists strike, a thunderbolt falls, a flying kick from him raises a storm.

ZHANG QING said, "As you are on your way to be imprisoned we can kill your escort, and then you can stay here for some time. If you are willing to become a bandit I will go with you to the "Lianglong Mountain' where we can make the acquaintance of Lu Da and join his band."

"It is very good of you to arrange for me this way but there is another matter. I have always been keen on fighting against strong men, but those two soldiers have treated me quite well on the road, so that if I now ill-treat them Heaven will not tolerate it. If you admire me I hope you will at once help them to recover instead of injuring them."
"Drill Instructor, you are an upright man, and I must save these men's lives," said Zhang Qing. He thereupon ordered two waiters to release the soldiers lying on the bench. Sun Er Niang, the Night Witch, prepared the antidote, and gave it to Zhang Qing, who forced it down the throats of the unconscious soldiers. In less than an hour the soldiers recovered as from a dream and got up. They recognized Wu Song and asked him, "How did we get drunk in this place? The wine must have been so good! We did not drink much so how did we get drunk? We must remember this place so that we can have some more of this wine on our way home."
Wu Song, Zhang Qing, and Sun Er Niang all laughed upon hearing this, but the two soldiers did not understand why. The two waiters killed a chicken and a goose, and after cooking them brought them in with wine and other food. Zhang Qing told the servants to arrange a table under the vine frame in the garden at the back, and then requested Wu Song and the two soldiers to go there and partake of the feast. Wu Song asked the two soldiers to take the seats of honor, and he and Zhang Qing sat down opposite to them while Sun Er Niang took her seat at the side of the table.
The two servants served the wine and food. It was evening before they had finished the meal, and then Zhang Qing brought out the monk's swords for Wu Song to inspect. It was indeed made of excellent steel, and must have taken a long time in making. The two men talked about bandit adventures, killing of men, and incendiarism.
"There is a Shandong man called Song Jiang, nicknamed 'Welcome Rain,'" said Wu Song, "who has sought refuge just now with Squire Chai."
The two soldiers upon hearing such talk were astonished, and rising kowtowed to Wu Song. Wu Song spoke to them, "You two treated me well on the road, so I will never ill-treat you. We are only speaking about bandits and robbers so you need not be afraid. We certainly would not injure good men like you. Take no notice of what we say, but just drink your wine, and tomorrow when we reach Mengzhou I will reward you."
They stayed at that place for the night, but next morning when Wu Song wanted to depart, Zhang Qing was not willing to let him go. He gave way and stayed there for three days more. At last he recognized the generosity of Zhang Qing and his wife. Zhang Qing was nine years older than Wu Song, and therefore he adopted the latter as his younger brother. At last when Wu Song decided to depart Zhang Qing prepared the parting cup of wine, and bade him farewell, and gave him about ten taels and the two soldiers about three taels of silver. Wu Song gave his silver to the soldiers, and put on again his cangue. Upon leaving Wu Song could not avoid shedding tears at the kindness received from Zhang Qing and his wife.
Wu Song and his escort reached Mengzhou the following morning. They went straight to the *yamen*, and presented the dispatch from Dongping Prefecture. After the magistrate had perused the dispatch, he wrote a reply, handed it to the soldiers who returned to Dongping. Wu Song was sent to the prison, but just as he got to the entrance he noticed a signboard with the three characters, "Anping Stockade." He was put in a cell by himself. He had not been there long before about ten men in the adjoining cell came to speak to him saying, "Kind sir, if you have any letters of recommendation or any money, you must not forget to hand them to the man who will come to search you. If you give him money he will see that the blows with the bamboo are only light, but if he gets no money the blows will be extremely severe. We are criminals like yourself, and therefore tell you what to expect. Do you not know the saying, 'When the hare dies the fox mourns; and so animals grieve for their kind.' As you have only just arrived we thought it better to tell you about this."
"I am much obliged to you for the information," said Wu Song. "I have something at my side, and if the man is polite to me I will give it to him. But if he demands anything I will not give him a cent."
A prisoner said, "Sir, you should not talk like that. There is an ancient saying, 'Fear not the authorities, except those that have authority over you.' When you are under the eaves of a low house you have to bend your head. It would be better if you took a little care." While he was saying this another prisoner called out, "Here comes the head jailer!" At this all the prisoners dispersed. Wu Song fastened his belt, and sat down in his cell. Soon the head jailer entered and asked, "Where is that new prisoner?"
"I am the man," replied Wu Song.
"Well, you seem to have eyes, ears, and yet you have got to be told," said the head jailer. "You are the man who killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge and was a Drill Instructor at Yanggu County, so I suppose you know how matters are arranged. How dare you come here where I am! There is not even a cat here that you dare beat."
"Did you come here to talk and expect me to give you something?" asked Wu Song. "But I have not got anything to give you except my two fists. I have, however, a little silver, but I shall want that to buy food and wine for myself. So what shall you do? How would it do if you took me back to Yanggu County?"
The head jailer retired in an angry mood, and immediately the prisoners crowded forward, and said, "Sir, you treated him roughly, and it won't be long before you are in trouble. He will certainly go and speak to the warden of the jail and put an end to your life."
"I am not afraid," replied Wu Song, "let him try and do his worst. Civility meets civility; violence meets violence."
While he was saying this about four jailers came and entering his cell called out in a loud voice, "Now, where is that new prisoner Wu Song?"
To which Wu Song replied, "I am here! I will not go away! But why do you shout like that?"
The men did not reply to this, but took him away to the Inspection Office where the warden was seated. About six soldiers took charge of him, and placed him in front of the warden who ordered that the cangue be removed. The warden then addressed him. "Prisoner, are you aware of the old decrees of the Emperor Taizu, that the newly arrived exile should receive one hundred severe blows with the bamboo?"
"There is no need for many men to be employed in that," said Wu Song. "If you want to beat me there will be no need for men to hold me down. If I flinch from a single blow I forfeit my reputation of being a tiger-killer. You need not be too careful in keeping a count of the blows as it won't matter if there are a few extra. If I make any noise I forfeit my name of being the brave man of Yanggu County."
The bystanders laughed at this, and one said, "This foolish fellow is looking for death! We shall see how he can stand the torture."
Wu Song continued, "Make the blows as hard as you like, show no kindness to me. I shall not be pleased if you show me any favor."
The audience on both sides again laughed. Two men seized the bamboo, and shouted as he advanced. Standing at the side of the Prefect, however, was a very tall man of about twenty-five years of age. He had a fair complexion and a small beard of three tufts. He wore a white crape girdle round his waist. That man whispered something into the warden's ear who then spoke, "Prisoner Wu Song, what illness had you on the way to this place?"
"I had no illness at all but just drank and ate on the journey."
"This man must have been taken ill on the road, judging by his appearance," said the warden, "so perhaps I ought to postpone beating him with the bamboo."
The two men who were ordered to beat him whispered to Wu Song, "You say at once that you are sick. The warden wishes to show mercy to you. You better offer an excuse."
"I am not sick," said Wu Song. "I do not want to stop them from beating me. Let them beat me and so finish the matter. If they don't do it now, I shall always be expecting it."
The audience and also the warden laughed at this, and the latter said, "I think that he must have a fever, and he is talking in this delirious way because he has not had a good sweat to get the fever out. We will not listen to what he says now, and put him in solitary confinement."
About four soldiers took him back to his cell, where all the other prisoners crowded outside and asked, "Did your friend write a letter to the warden?" Wu Song denied this and they continued, "In that case it is not good, because they will now come in the night and kill you."
"How will they kill me?"
"They will bring you two big bowls of rice, and after you have eaten that, they will take you inside the prison. There they will swathe you tightly in cordage, stop up your nostrils, ears, and mouth, and then turn you upside down and leave you against the wall. In less than an hour you will be dead."
"What else might they do?"
The prisoners replied, "They might bind you with ropes, and then get a sandbag and press it tightly on your body. Again, if they do that you will die in less than an hour."
"Have they any other way of killing me?" asked Wu Song.
"Those two are what most men are afraid of, and the others are not as bad." While they were speaking a soldier came bearing a basket and asked where Drill Instructor Wu Song was. Wu Song laughed and said, "Here I am! What have you to say?"
The man replied that the warden had sent some refreshment for him. Wu Song looked and saw a bowl of wine, a plate of meat, a bowl of vermicelli, and a bowl of soup. He wondered what their plan was in sending him such food. He thought it better to partake of the meal, and wait for developments. He did this, and had soon finished the food. The soldier took all the vessels away, and then Wu Song sat down and soliloquized, "I wonder what they will do next." When it was nearly dark the head jailer came with a round box, and said, "I am sent here with your supper." Wu Song saw that there was vegetable, wine, meat, fish soup, and rice. He thought, "Surely they will kill me after I have eaten this meal! If I eat all this and then die I shall at least be a well-fed ghost. Let they do what they may. After supper I will think of some scheme."
The soldier waited until Wu Song had finished the meal, and then removed the dishes. But he soon came back with another soldier, one carrying a tub, and the other a bucket full of hot water, and they asked Wu Song to take a bath. Wu Song thought that they would kill him after the bath. "But I am not afraid of them, so I will take my bath." The soldiers emptied the hot water in the tub, and Wu Song had his bath. When finished he was supplied with a towel, and told to dress. One soldier emptied the water, and took the tub and towel back. The other soldier spread the gauze silk mosquito net, arranged the cool bedding and pillow, and then withdrew. Wu Song put the bar across the door, and then sat down to think matters over. "What is their intention in all this? Let them do as they like. I will watch the proceedings?" So he went to sleep and nothing happened during the night.
He was awake quite early and opening the door of his cell he saw the same soldier who had waited on him the previous night, and he had now brought a basin of water for Wu Song to wash his face. He had also brought a cup of cold water with which Wu Song rinsed his mouth. A barber came and dressed Wu Song's long hair into a knot on the top of his head, and then inclosed the knot in a small hood. Still another man entered with his breakfast of rice, meat-soup, and vegetables. He ate his breakfast, and then drank a cup of tea. Just then the man who brought the food asked him to remove to another cell which was much more convenient, and would save time at meal. He agreed to this, and the servant took him to another room and when the door was opened he saw that the apartment was very clean and the bed nice and tidy. The furniture appeared to be quite new. But Wu Song was still perplexed as to why they had brought him to such a comfortable place. The room was very much better than the place he had been in. He sat down there until noon, when a man brought him a jug of wine with four kinds of fruit, roasted chicken, and some steamed buns. The man took the chicken in his hands, and tore it into small pieces. He poured out the wine, arranged the chopsticks, and invited Wu Song to dine. Wu Song was however still perplexed as to the mystery of all this fine treatment.
In the evening they brought his supper, and allowed him to enjoy the cool in the open. He could not help but think of what the other prisoners had predicted, so this treatment made him more and more perplexed.
During the third day he was treated in the same way, and he even went for a stroll in the prison yard after breakfast. He saw many prisoners in the sun cutting firewood, carrying water, and doing various odd jobs. It was a very hot day in the sixth lunar month, and he was sorry that they had no shade from the heat of the sun's rays. Walking up to them with his hands behind his back he asked why they worked in the sun. They laughed at the question and one man replied, "Sir, we have been sent here to work, and this place is like heaven compared with some other places. We should not care to think that this place is too hot. Many prisoners are not so well treated, but remain chained up in cells, and whether they wish to live or die makes no difference."
Wu Song walked away to the prison shrine to the King of Heaven where by an urn for burning papers he noticed a large stone block which had a hole in the center to hold a staff. He took his seat on it for some time and then returned to his apartment, where a servant brought his food again.
But we need not go into the details of his daily life. For several days he got his food and wine, and he was still doubtful as to the outcome of it. But one day he could not endure this suspicion any longer so when the servant brought his food he asked him who was his master, and how it was that he sent him nice food every day. The man replied that he had previously told Wu Song that he was the confidential servant of the warden.
"But who tells you to bring me this food and wine every day?"
"It is the warden's son who instructs me to do this."
"But I am a criminal and I have not done anything for the warden's son so why does he treat me in this way?"
"That I do not know. But he told me that after three months like this he would explain matters fully."
"How strange! It seems to me that they are just feeding me so as to fatten me ready for killing. It is quite a riddle, and how can I guess its real meaning? How can I eat the food with ease, if the matter is not explained clearly? What kind of man is your young master, and where did we meet before? If I knew that, I might eat the food with contentment."
"He is the same man who stood on the right of the warden with his forehead wrapped in white cloth when your case first came into court."
"So he is that man? When I was on the point of being beaten he said something to the warden, and thus saved me from that, I suppose."
"That is so," said the man.
"How strange! I am a Qinghe County man, whereas he is a Mengzhou man, and as we are not acquainted with each other how is it that he treats me like this? I think he must have a reason for this, but what is it? But I ask you one more question: What is his name?"
"He is Shi En with the nickname, 'Golden Eyed Tiger Cub.' He is skillful with the cudgels."
"He must be a good fellow. You go and request him to come here, and have an interview with me. When he does that then I will partake of his food. If you won't go and ask him to meet me then I won't eat any more."
"But he told me also that I was not to speak with you much, as after about three months he would come and explain matters to you himself."
"Don't talk nonsense! You go and ask him to come here now, and that will settle the matter."
The man was afraid, and was unwilling to do this. Seeing this Wu Song was vexed, and sprang up. The man at once withdrew to carry out the request.
After quite a long time Shi En came hurriedly, and upon seeing Wu Song knelt down. Wu Song ran forward to raise him up, and said, "I am a criminal, and have not had the honor of meeting you before. A few days ago I was beholden to you for saving me from a beating, and since then I have been honored by your kindly sending me food and wine. This you ought not to have done. You have not given me any work to do, so I am a useless fellow, and in eating your food I feel guilty and uneasy."
"I have long heard of your name like a crash of thunder," said Shi En. "But unfortunately we have ever been separated by impassable roads so that I could not meet you. Fortunately we meet today and I must pay you respect. I am sorry that as I had no suitable presents for you, I did not dare to approach you before."
"Your servant told me that in about three months you would have something definite to say to me. Now, what is it you wish to say?"
"My servant was simply outspoken to your question, but he did not know anything about the matter. How could he talk in that reckless manner?"
"You evade my question with literary skill! But why not tell me now instead of leaving me in a melancholy frame of mind? Please speak outright! Do you want me to do something?"
"As the servant has said this, I will tell you. As you are a great hero and a straightforward man, I have one thing to request you to do for me, which nobody else can do. But you came from a good distance, and must have been tired upon your arrival here, and have not had time to regain your strength. So if you will now rest for a few months to restore your strength, I will tell you something when you are in better form."
Wu Song burst into loud laughter upon hearing this, and said, "Last year I was very ill with fever for three months, but when passing Jingyang Ridge I being somewhat tipsy killed a tiger with only three blows of my fist and a couple of kicks. Am I not better today than on that occasion?"
"I cannot tell you about the affair just now. We had better wait until you are quite in good health, and then I will tell you."
"But why do you think that I am not strong now? Well, yesterday I was at the King of Heaven's Shrine, and saw there a large boulder. What is the weight of that?"
"I am afraid that it may be about four hundred *jin* in weight," said Shi En.
"I will go there with you to see whether I can lift it or not."
"Let us finish our wine, and then I will go with you," said Shi En.
"I would rather go first, and drink the wine when we come back," replied Wu Song.
So they both went to the King of Heaven's Shrine, and when they arrived the prisoners there stood to attention, and gave salutations.
Wu Song took hold of the boulder, and moved it. He laughed and said, "I am now so delicate that I cannot move it?"
"That is a very heavy stone, and you cannot make little of it," said Shi En.
"So you really think I cannot lift it up? All of you get out of the way, and watch me lift it." He then took off his upper garments, and tied them round his waist, and easily lifted the stone up. He threw it away, and it fell with a thud on the ground making a hole about a foot deep. All the bystanders were thunderstruck at this. But Wu Song had not finished. He now seized the stone with one hand, drew it out of the hole, and hurled it about ten feet high. As it fell he caught it in both hands, and gently placed it in its original place. He immediately turned round and faced the crowd of spectators, and they could see that his face was not red; his heart was not palpitating, and that he was not out of breath from his exertion.
Shi En embraced Wu Song and paid his respects kneeling to Wu Song, and said, "Elder brother, you are an extraordinary man. You have supernatural powers."
The prisoners standing round also knelt down, and saluted Wu Song saying, "You really have supernatural powers."
Shi En took Wu Song to his private apartment, where they sat down. Wu Song said, "Now, I hope, sir, that you will tell me what that business is."
"Wait a little, until my father comes, when I will tell you all about it," replied Shi En.
"If you want to tell me to do a thing, then don't act in such a childish way," said Wu Song. "This doesn't look manly. Even if it's a matter of the sword, I can do it. If I refuse to do a man's job, then I'm no longer a man." Shi En clasped his hands over his heart, told Wu Song about the affair which involved killing of men, and equalled in grandeur the killing of a tiger. He raised his fists—the thunder roared and wind and rain were shaken.

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### The Young Master Shi En Reestablishes himself & Once More Controls & reigns at his Mengzhou Road Establishment; Wu Song drinks his fill & Strikes the Door God, Jiang Gate Guard Giant While Drunk

"Please be seated, brother," said Shi En, "and I'll tell you my story in detail."
"Don't pussyfoot around. Just give me the main points," said Wu Song.
"Since childhood I learned jousting with spear and staff from masters in the gallant fraternity. I became known around Mengzhou as the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub. Outside the East Gate of this town is a market village called Happy Grove. Merchants from all over Hebei and Shandong go there to trade. There are over a hundred large inns in the village, and twenty or thirty gambling houses and money exchange shops. Since I was a skilled fighter, I went to Happy Grove with eighty or ninety tough prisoners and opened a tavern. Every enterprise had to pay me regular tribute. Even singsong girls, passing through, had to see me first before they could ply their trade. Money kept coming in. There wasn't a month when I didn't collect two or three hundred ounces of silver.

"But then Zhang, the stockade garrison commandant, came from East Luzhou. He brought with him a man named Jiang Zhong, known in the gallant fraternity as Jiang the Gate Guard Giant because he's so huge and strong. What's more, he's very skilled in weapons, and he's a marvel at rough and tumble fighting and wrestling. He says boastfully: 'I spent three years competing on Mount Taishan and never met my match. There's no one like me under the sky!' He simply moved in and took over my territory. When I tried to stop him, he gave me such a drubbing I couldn't get out of bed for two months. You saw me the other day, with my head bound and my hand bandaged. My wounds still haven't fully healed.
"Originally, I was going to take my men and have it out with him. But he has the backing of Commandant Zhang's garrison. If I created a row, it would cause dissension with the garrison. So here I've been, burning with rage and no way to get revenge. I've known for a long time what a great fighter and man of justice you are, brother. If only you can help me hit back at that rogue, I'll be able to close my eyes peacefully when I die. But I've been afraid because you've had a long hard journey that you haven't regained your strength. I wanted to wait several months till you recovered completely, then tell you about it. I didn't expect that clod of a servant to be so loose-mouthed. That's the whole truth of the matter."
Wu Song laughed. "How many heads has Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, and how many arms?"
"Only one head and two arms. How could he have more?"
"If he had three heads and six arms, like the ogre Nezha, I might be a little worried. But since he has only one head and two arms, why should I be afraid?"
"The problem was I just wasn't strong and skilled enough to beat him."
"I'm not bragging, but all my life I've been beating tough guys and virtueless scoundrels. Since the situation is what you say, what are we doing here? Get some wine and we'll drink it on the way. I'll go with you. You can watch me pummel him like I did the tiger! If I hit him too hard and kill him, I'm quite willing to pay for it with my life!"
"Sit and wait a bit longer, brother. My father wants to see you. When it's time to go, we'll go. We mustn't be rash. Tomorrow, I'll send a man to look around. If the knave is at home, we'll go the day after. If he's not, we'll discuss this further. Barging in will only stir up the grass and alert the snake. It won't be any good if he plays a trick on us."
"No wonder he beat you up! You don't behave like a man at all! If we're going, let's go now! Never mind tomorrow, or the day after. Come on! Who cares if he expects us!"
Just then the old warden rounded a screen and entered. "I've been listening for some time, warrior," he said to Wu Song. "I'm glad to meet you. To my son you're the sun emerging from the clouds! Please join me in the rear hall for a while."
Wu Song followed him, and the old man invited him to be seated.
"I'm prisoner," protested Wu Song. "I wouldn't dare sit in the presence of Your Honor."
"Don't talk like that, warrior. My son has been very fortunate to find you. No need for ceremony."
"Forgive me, then," begged Wu Song. He sat down opposite the warden. Shi En stood beside them.
"Why are you still standing?" asked Wu Song.
"My father is keeping you company, brother. Please make yourself at home."
"I feel uncomfortable when you act so formally."
"Since the warrior insists, and no outsiders are around..." said the warden. He indicated for his son to be seated.
A servant brought wine and tidbits. The warden personally handed Wu Song a filled cup. "Everyone has great respect for your courage, warrior. My son was doing business in Happy Grove not because he was greedy for gain, but to improve the appearance and atmosphere of our district. Then that Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, relying on the garrison's backing, muscled in and openly took over. Only a warrior hero like yourself can avenge this insult. Don't refuse my son. Drain this cup and accept his four kowtows. Let him call you elder blood brother as a sign of his respect."
"How can I, a man of no talent or learning, do that? I'd be pushing my luck too far."
But Wu Song downed the wine and Shi En kowtowed to him four times. He quickly returned the courtesy, and they pledged each other as blood brothers. Wu Song drank freely. He became very drunk, and had to be helped to his room. Of that we'll say no more.
The next day Shi En and his father conferred. "He must be feeling the effects of all that wine he had last night. We can't ask him to go today," said the warden. "We'll tell him that the man we sent to inquire says Jiang is not at home, and put it off another day."
Shi En acted accordingly when he saw Wu Song, adding: "We'll start tomorrow morning, after breakfast."
"All right," said Wu Song. "I'll just have to suppress my wrath another day!"
They finished their morning meal, had some tea, and went for a stroll outside the prison grounds. When they returned, they chatted in the guest hall about lance techniques, and put in a few practice rounds with fists and staves.
At noon Shi En invited Wu Song into the residence, where they ate and drank many cups. Wu Song was ready to go on drinking, but he noticed that Shi En kept plying him courteously with more food. He wasn't too pleased and later, when he returned to his room, he asked the two servants, who came with his bath water, about it.
"Why did the young master give me only meat instead of letting me have more wine?"
"To tell you the truth, Constable, the warden and the young master talked it over. Originally they were going to send you to Happy Grove today, but they were afraid you wouldn't be up to it because you were drunk last night. They held back on the wine so that tomorrow you'll be in shape to go."
"They thought because I was drunk, I wouldn't be fit?"
"That's it."
Wu Song could barely wait for daybreak. He rose early, washed and rinsed his mouth. He bound his head with a kerchief tied in a swastika knot, put on an earth-brown tunic, a red silk waist sash, leg-wrapping to the knee, and eight thonged hemp sandals. He covered with a plaster the tattoo of the criminal on his cheek. Shi En came and invited him to his house for breakfast.
When Wu Song had finished eating Shi En said: "We've horses saddled at the stable, ready to go."
"What do I need a horse for? I don't have small feet. There's only one thing I must ask."
"Speak freely, brother. Is there anything I'd refuse you?"
"After we leave the town, let's operate on the principle of 'Don't pass one without having three.' "
"What do you mean by that? I don't understand."
Wu Song laughed. "If you want me to beat up Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, you've got to invite me to three bowls of wine at every tavern we pass."
"It's fourteen or fifteen *li* from the East Gate of the town to Happy Grove," Shi En thought, "and there must be a dozen taverns on the way. If he has three bowls in each, that means thirty-six bowls before he gets there. He'll be drunk. That will never do."
Again Wu Song laughed. "You're afraid I won't be able to fight? Actually, I'm no good without wine. The more I drink, the better I am. It's only when I'm really drunk that I have my full strength. If drink hadn't given me courage on Jingyang Ridge would I have been able to beat that huge tiger? I need to be soused before I go into action. Then I've strength and spirit, both."
"I didn't know, brother. We have plenty of good wine at home. I was afraid drinking would slow you down, that's why I didn't dare ask you to drink your fill last night. Since drink only makes you stronger, I'll send a couple of servants on ahead with some of our best wine and something to eat, and have them wait for us on the road. Then we can indulge at leisure as we travel."
"That's more like it. I'll be primed by the time I fight Jiang the Gate Guard Giant. Without wine, I'd never have the skill. I'll give him such a drubbing for you that everyone who sees will laugh!"
Shi En made the necessary preparations. He told two servants to set out with hampers of wine and food and to take some copper coins. The warden quietly directed twenty stalwart men to trail behind Wu Song to meet any emergency.
Shi En and Wu Song left the Anping Stockade and departed from Mengzhou Town through the East Gate. Before they had gone five hundred paces they saw beside the road a building with a wine pennant sticking out from beneath its eaves. The two servants with the food and wine were already there, waiting. Shi En and Wu Song sat down in the tavern. The servants laid out the tidbits and produced the wine.
"I want a large bowl, not a small. Three portions," said Wu Song.
A servant put a large bowl down in front of him and filled it. With no further ado, Wu Song downed three bowls in succession. The servants collected the crockery and hastened on. Wu Song laughed.
"That just whetted my appetite. Let's go."
They left the tavern. Although the golden autumn breezes had started, it was still the heat of summer, and the two unbuttoned their tunics. After travelling another *li* or so they reached a place that was neither village nor hamlet. But they could see a wine pennant hanging high on a tree. In a grove by the road they found a little shop which sold a simple local brew. Shi En halted.
"They have only rustic grog here. Does this count as a tavern or not?"
"It has a wine pennant, so it comes under the rule of 'Don't pass one without having three.' "
The two men entered and sat down. The servants set out the bowls and tidbits and poured the wine. Wu Song downed three and rose. The servants gathered the utensils and hurried on ahead. Shi En and Wu Song left the inn. Before they had gone two *li* they saw another tavern. Wu Song polished off three bowls and continued on his way.
To make a long story short, he had three bowls at every tavern they encountered. But it seemed to Shi En, even after ten or more stops, that Wu Song was not particularly drunk.
"How much further to Happy Grove?" asked the constable.
"Not much. It's just beyond. Over there in the distance, where those trees are."
"When we get there, go somewhere and wait. I'll find him myself."
"Fine. I know just the place. Be careful. Don't underestimate your foe."
"Never mind. Let the servants go with me. If there are any more taverns, I still want to drink."
Shi En had the servants accompany Wu Song, and he himself departed.
During the next three or four *li*, Wu Song consumed more than ten bowls of wine. By then it was noon, and very hot, though there was a slight breeze. The warmth from the liquor welled up in Wu Song in a wave. He spread open his tunic. He was only half drunk, but he pretended to be completely intoxicated, and he weaved and staggered. As they neared the grove, one of the servants pointed.
"That's Jiang's tavern at that three-forked crossroads."
"All right. Keep away and stay out of sight. You can come after I've knocked him down."
Wu Song skirted around the back of the grove. A big tough fellow wearing a white tunic and holding a fly-whisk was seated in a folding armchair in the shade of a locust tree. Still feigning drunkenness, Wu Song glanced at him.
"That must be Jiang the Gate Guard Giant."
He plunged on past. After another forty or fifty paces, he could read the pennant on the pole beneath the eaves of the large tavern: *Riverside View*. Attached to a rail, painted bright green, before the door were two gold-spangled banners reading respectively: *In drunkenness the universe is large* and *In the wine pot the days are long*.
A shed on one side of the yard contained a butcher's table, block, knives and skewers. The shed on the other side housed a stove and hamper for steaming buns.
Inside, three great wine vats in a row were half sunk into the earthen floor, and each was more than half full. A young woman sat at an enclosed counter in the middle of the room. She was the concubine Jiang had recently obtained in Mengzhou, where she had been a talented singer of court opera arias of many kinds in the houses of pleasure on the west side of town.
Wu Song observed all this with his drunken eyes, then entered the tavern and sat down opposite the counter. He placed both hands on the table and gazed fixedly at the young woman. When she became conscious of his stare, she turned her head and looked elsewhere.
There were six or seven waiters. Wu Song pounded on the table. "Where is the host?" he shouted.
The head waiter came over. "How much wine would you like, sir?"
"Two drafts. But let me taste a sample, first."
The waiter told the woman behind the counter to draw two measures of wine. From the bucket she filled he ladled out one bowlful and heated it. He placed the bowl before Wu Song.
"Here you are, sir. Try this."
Wu Song sniffed, and shook his head. "No good. Change it." The waiter saw that he was drunk. He walked over to the counter. "Humor him, mistress, and give him something else."
The young woman poured back the rejected wine and ladled out some first-quality liquor. Again the waiter heated a bowlful and brought it over. Wu Song tasted it.
"This wine isn't any good either. Change it, quickly, and I'll forgive you."
Swallowing his anger, the waiter returned to the counter. "Change this again for something better, mistress," he urged. "There's no use arguing with the likes of him. He's drunk and looking for trouble. Let's give him some top quality."
The woman ladled out a measure of the best wine. The waiter brought the bucket to the table and heated a bowlful. Wu Song tried it.
"Now this wine has something to it! Tell me, what's the host called?"
"His name is Jiang."
"Why isn't it Li?"
The woman heard him. "Where did that oaf get so drunk?" she muttered. "Who asked him to come here and get fresh?"
"He's just some stupid rube from the sticks," said the waiter, "talking a lot of crap!"
"What did you say?" Wu Song demanded.
"We were having a private conversation. Drink your wine, sir, and mind your own business."
"Waiter, tell that girl behind the counter to come out and have some wine with me."
"Watch your mouth! She's the host's wife!"
"So what? Drinking with me won't hurt her."
The young woman was furious. "Coffin bait," she screamed. "So you want to die!" She pushed open the counter, preparing to charge out.
Wu Song removed his earth-brown tunic and stuffed it into his waistband. Raising the bucket, he sloshed the wine all over the floor. He strode in through the counter, colliding with the girl who was trying to come out. Of course she was no match for him. With one hand he grasped her waist, with the other he seized her hair, mussing her carefully piled coiffure, then lifted her over the counter and tossed the poor girl into one of the open wine vats. She landed with a splash.
Immediately, he emerged again from behind the counter. Several of the more agile waiters rushed him. Wu Song grabbed one and threw him head first into another wine vat. A second he also flung into a vat of wine with one quick move. Two more waiters he downed with a punch and a kick.
With three in the vats unable to climb out, and two on the floor unable to get up, all were farting and pissing in terror. Only one managed to get away.
"The lout is sure to tell Jiang the Gate Guard Giant," thought Wu Song. "I'll go and meet him halfway! If I beat him up on the road I can let everyone see and give them a good laugh!"
He stepped out briskly. The varlet had indeed hurried to report to the Gate Guard Giant. Jiang was astonished. He kicked over the folding chair, cast aside the fly whisk and lumbered into motion. He met Wu Song on the open road. Although Jiang was big, recent bouts of wine and sex had weakened him, and the news which brought him forward in such a rush had been a severe shock. How could he cope with Wu Song who was as strong as a tiger and determined to best him?
But Jiang was scornful of his foe, thinking that he was drunk, and he closed in rapidly. Quicker than it takes to tell, Wu Song flourished his two fists at Jiang's face, then turned and started away. Enraged, Jiang raced after him. Wu Song lashed out backwards with his left foot and kicked him it the groin. As Jiang clasped his injured section and doubled over in pain, Wu Song whirled around and swung his right foot in a flying kick to the forehead that slammed the big man over on his back. Wu Song planted one foot on his chest and, with keg-like fists, began pommelling Jiang's head.
This maneuver we just described—the flourishing of fists and turning away, the backward left kick, the whirling around and the forward right kick—is called "The Jade-Circle Steps with Duck and Drake Feet." It was one of Wu Song's most skilful fighting moves. A remarkable trick!
Jiang, on the ground, begged for mercy.
"If you want me to spare you, you must promise me three things."
"Not three, but three hundred, if you let me live!"
Wu Song pointed at him and made his demands. And as a result: Appearance was changed and a patron was sought, hair was cut in long bangs and a man went forth to kill.

Now when the Young Master stepped forward and said: "Brother, please be seated and I will recount to you in full a matter of the utmost importance to me," Wu Song replied: "Hold nothing back, if you please. But stick to the point and tell it straight."

"I had the fortune to acquire in my youth," the Young Master began, "some degree of competence in the martial arts, from masters who belonged to the rivers and lakes fraternity. That is why in Mengzhou they have bestowed on me the name of Golden-Eyed Tiger. I run a little trading centre here, outside the East Gate, at a place called Happy Woods. We get a crowd of merchants from the north, and there are over a hundred lodging houses, together with twenty or thirty money changers and gaming houses. Partly relying on my own powers and partly by conscripting some eighty or ninety hardened convicts from the prison camp, I have been able to set up an establishment of my own and also to receive contributions from all of the money changers and gaming houses.

"At least, that's how it is normally. Even the travelling singers and other ladies of easy virtue are obliged to speak to me first on arrival before they are allowed to ply their trade. These affairs provide a regular income, bringing in something like two or three hundred taels of silver a month. It's what I live on.

"Recently, however, one Colonel Zhang was posted to the prison garrison here from Dongluzhou, and he brought with him a certain individual named Jiang Zhong, an enormous fellow, immensely strong, known therefore throughout the rivers and lakes as Jiang the Door-God. And in addition to his size and strength he's an expert fencer with sword or staff, equally good with his fists and feet, and a formidable wrestler! He boasts of remaining unbeaten three years running in the contest on Mount Taishan and insists he hasn't a rival in the world! So now this villain marches in and appropriates my territory. I didn't want to let him get away with it, but he beat me up so badly I was in bed for two months! The other day when you came my head and hand were still bandaged and even now the scars haven't healed completely.

"Well, I had thought of getting together a group of my people and going to pay him back, but the trouble is he can call on the support of Colonel Zhang and his guard, so if I attack him I'm going to have problems right here in the prison fortress. I'm eaten up with rage and there's nothing I can do to get even. But I've heard so much about your reputation for valour, so what would you say to helping me get my own back? If you did I'd be able to die in peace. I was only afraid that after such a hard journey you'd not have the necessary energy and strength, that's why I said I'd wait a few months before putting this proposition to you. My fool of a servant couldn't keep his mouth shut and blurted it out. Anyway, that's the truth of it."

Wu Song laughed when he heard all this, and said: "This Door-God, how many heads has he got and how many arms?"

"Just one head and two arms, what do you expect?"

"Well, supposing he had three heads and six arms now, and all the strength of Nazha the Ogre, then perhaps I might be afraid of him. But you say he's only got one head and two arms and he's nothing like Nazha. So what's there to be afraid of?"

"I just don't have the strength or the skill to defeat him."

"I don't want to brag but all my life I've used what powers I have to combat bullying and injustice. If it's like you say, then why are we sitting here? If you've got some wine, bring it along, we'll drink it on the way. I'm going there with you right away. You'll see, I shall give that scoundrel the same treatment I gave the tiger. And if I should punch him a bit hard and he dies, well, I'm quite prepared to forfeit my life."

"Sit down, brother, please. Wait till my father comes. We'll go when the time's right, there's no point in rushing things. Tomorrow I'll send someone to reconnoitre and find out if our man is at home. If he is, we'll go the next day. If he's away we'll reconsider. It would be a pity to go all the way there for nothing. Besides, we might just alert our quarry and give him a chance to play some trick on us."

"Small wonder he defeated you!" Wu Song replied impatiently. "That's not the way a man does things. If we're going to do it, come on! Forget all this talk about today and tomorrow, let's go! What difference does it make if he's expecting us or not?"

Just at this moment, as the son was attempting in vain to restrain Wu Song, the father came out from behind the screen and said: "Bravo! I've been listening to you all this time. I'm delighted to see you. Your presence here is like a ray of sunshine, so far as this son of mine is concerned. Please come with me into the back room for a moment."

Wu Song followed him inside. The Warden requested him to be seated.

"I am a convict, Your Honour, how can I sit in your presence?" Wu Song said.

"Nonsense! My son is most fortunate to have found a champion of your stature. There's no call for false modesty."

So Wu Song, with a deprecatory bow, sat down. But the Young Master remained standing. "Why don't you sit down too?" Wu Song said to him.

"In the presence of my father?" he replied. "Please brother, just make yourself comfortable." "How can I, with you standing like that?"

"If that's how you feel, since there's no one else present ..." said the Warden, motioning his son to sit down.

Servants brought wine, fruit and nuts and a variety of other snacks. The Warden with his own two hands offered Wu Song a cup, saying: "Everyone pays tribute to your great courage, my friend. Now, this business venture of my son's at Happy Woods, it's not just a question of personal gain, you know, it actually helps Mengzhou to grow, improves the tone of our district, you might say. But that so-called Door-God has seized control by force, in full public view. Without the benefit of your help there's no way we can satisfy our need for revenge. Don't refuse my son. Empty this cup of wine, accept his sincere homage and allow him, as a mark of the respect in which he holds you, to call you elder brother."

"I have no talent or learning, who am I that your son should honour me like this?" Wu Song said. "It's tempting fate to accept unmerited praise." But he drank the wine and the Young Master prostrated himself four times. Wu Song immediately returned the compliment and henceforth they called each other brother. Wu Song went on drinking enthusiastically that day till he was very drunk and had to be helped to his room. We say no more of this.

Next day father and son had a talk. "Wu Song was dead drunk last night," they agreed, "he must be still affected. How can we expect him to go today? We'd better pretend the man we sent to reconnoitre has told us the enemy is not at home and we have to postpone the mission." So the Young Master went to Wu Song and said: "It can't be today. The scout has learnt that the fellow is away. Let us go tomorrow after lunch."

"No matter," said Wu Song. "If it has to be tomorrow, it gives me another day to stoke up my anger."

When they had breakfasted and drunk tea, the Young Master and Wu Song went for a stroll outside the camp. On their return they discussed spear technique and compared some moves with the fist or staff. Since it was midday, the Young Master invited Wu Song to the residence and ordered wine for him and some dishes to go with it. Impossible to say how many cups were drunk. But Wu Song began to notice that when he wanted to drink the Young Master only pressed more food on him, and he started to feel rather annoyed. After lunch they parted and Wu Song went back to the guest-room. When the two servants came to prepare his bath, Wu Song asked: "Your Young Master today kept urging me to eat more but he wouldn't offer me any more wine. Why was that?"

"I can tell you about that, sir, because actually this morning the two of them was talking about it. They wanted you to go today, see, only they thought you was pissed last night. They was afraid you couldn't bring it off 'cos you'd have a hangover. That's why they didn't want to give you wine. They're going to ask you to go and finish the business tomorrow."

"You mean they think that if I'm drunk I'll make a mess of it?"

"That's about the size of it."

That night Wu Song couldn't wait for dawn to come. He rose early and washed and rinsed his mouth. He put on a swastika scarf and an earth-coloured tunic, tied at the waist with a red satin belt. He bound his legs with gaiters reaching to the knee and wore eight-buckled canvas shoes. He stuck plasters over the convict's tattoos on his cheeks. Soon the Young Master came to take him to breakfast in the residence. When Wu Song had eaten and drunk tea, the Young Master said: "A horse is ready for you in the stables."

"There's nothing wrong with my legs, what do I need a horse for," Wu Song said. "There's just one thing I need you to do for me."

"Tell me what it is without fear. I couldn't possibly refuse."

"When we leave the camp, I want to observe the rule of 'For every sign take three'."

"Tell me please, what is this rule? I've never heard of it."

"I'll explain. If you want me to defeat the Door-God, every time on our journey we lay eyes on an inn sign, you must invite me to have three bowls of wine. Without those three bowls you won't get me past an inn. That's the rule of 'For every sign take three'."

This gave the Young Master pause. "From the East Gate to Happy Woods, it's a good five miles," he said. "Establishments where they sell wine, well, at a guess there must be twelve or thirteen of them. Three bowls in each, that'll come to something like thirty-six bowls before we get there. You'll be drunk, won't you? Then how can you deliver the goods?"

Wu Song found this exceedingly funny. "You think if I'm drunk I don't have strength," he said. "But it's the opposite, if I'm not drunk I don't have strength. With a little drop of wine in me I've got a little bit of strength, if I'm half drunk I've got half my full strength. But when I'm completely drunk something seems to inspire me! If I hadn't had all the force of being drunk, how do you think I'd have killed the tiger on Jingyang Pass? I was totally pissed that day and I did the job easily, I was brim-full of strength and energy."

"I didn't realize you were like that," said the Young Master. "Our wine is very good, too, I was just afraid that if you got too drunk you wouldn't be able to do the job, that's why I didn't offer you more and let you drink your fill. Since the wine only increases your strength, we'd better send two of the servants on ahead with some of our good wine, some fruit and nuts and other dishes, to wait for us along the road. Then we can enjoy the journey."

"Now that's very much to my liking," said Wu Song. "That'll put me in exactly the right mood for tackling the Door-God. Without wine, I might not know how to go about it. I'm going to knock him into kingdom come for you, people will laugh to see him in such a state."

The Young Master made the arrangements at once, sending two servants off with the wine and food on a carrying-pole, providing them also with a small sum of cash in coppers. Meanwhile the Warden, unbeknownst to the others, selected a dozen stalwart men whom he ordered to follow at a distance in case there was need of assistance.

So the Young Master and Wu Song set off from the Fortress of Peace, leaving Mengzhou by the East Gate. They had not gone more than a few hundred yards when beside the highroad they saw an inn, its sign sticking out from under the eaves. The servants were there already, waiting for them. The Young Master invited Wu Song inside and made him sit down. The servants had the wine ready and were about to serve it, when Wu Song said: "None of your tiny cups, please. Serve it in big bowls and make sure there are three of them." The servants accordingly produced big bowls and poured the wine. Wu Song did not hang back. He drank off three bowls at once and rose to go. The servants hurriedly cleared up the things and rushed on ahead. Wu Song gave a satisfied smile. "That's beginning to work now. Let's go!" he said. So off they went.

It was late summer, fiercely hot, though a little autumn breeze had started up, and the two men loosened their clothing. They had not gone half a mile when they came to a place not quite big enough for a village, where they could see another inn sign emerging from a clump of trees. Penetrating this grove, they found themselves before a little country inn:

*Along the old road in the village stands an inn beside a stream. Willows cast deep shade before the door, lotus are aflutter in a pool; the inn flag dances in the autumn breeze, a short screen of rushes excludes the sun's harsh rays. On the dresser pitchers of rough wine glimmer, by the stove a heady young brew steams. Even before a bottle is unstoppered the scent carries five miles, making three neighbouring households drunk.*

The Young Master paused at the door and said: "This is just a country tavern, selling cheap rough wine, do you have to drink here?"

"Sour or salt, sharp or rough — just as long as it's wine, I've got to have my three bowls. That's the rule, 'For every sign take three'."

So in they went and sat down, while the servants produced fruit and nuts to go with the wine. Wu Song drank off his three bowls and got up to go. The servants hurriedly cleared up and rushed off again. The two friends left the inn and in less than a mile they found another inn beside the road. Wu Song entered, drank his three bowls and left. But enough of this. Wu Song and the Young Master continued their journey thus: at each inn Wu Song entered and drank his three bowls. Yet although he must have drunk something like ten bottles, he was not, so far as the Young Master could see, drunk.

"How much further is it to Happy Woods?" Wu Song asked his companion.

"Not far. Do you see that wood over there, on the horizon? That's it."

"Since we're nearly there, you'd better go and wait for me somewhere. I'll go and find him on my own."

"That's fine by me. I know where to go. But do be careful. Don't underestimate him."

"Don't worry about that. Just tell the servants to stay with me. If there are any more inns on the way I shall want to drink more."

The Young Master told the servants to follow the same procedure as before and then went his own way, while Wu Song continued on. In a little more than a mile he downed another nine cups or so. It was around noon and the sun was exceedingly hot, in spite of the light breeze, and the wine began to mount to his head. He opened the front of his tunic. Although less than three quarters drunk, he pretended to be totally intoxicated, deliberately lurching and stumbling, tilting one way, then swaying back. When he reached the wood, the servants pointed and said: "That's Jiang, the Door-God's inn, over there where the road forks."

"We've arrived then," said Wu Song. "You lot had better go and hide and keep well clear till I've knocked him out." Skirting the wood in order to approach from behind, he saw a man in a white linen tunic, built like the wooden guardian at a temple door. This character had set up a folding chair under a locust tree and was sitting there with a fly whisk in his hand, enjoying the cool. Here's the description of him:

*The face devilish, the countenance coarse; the body a mass of purple flesh, with bulging blue veins; the face adorned with brown curling whiskers and a few wild strands beside the lips. Crazy staring eyes, glinting beneath the brows like stars. This is truly one of the two ugly door-gods, not the god-like semblance of a hero!*

Still feigning drunkenness, Wu Song staggered along, casting sideways glances at the man and saying to himself: "That big fellow must be the Door-God." He gave him a wide berth. Thirty or forty paces further on at the fork in the road he came upon an impressive inn. A flag-pole sticking out from under the eaves carried a sign on which was written in four large characters: "Bellavista Wines and Beverages." A closer look revealed a green railing in front of the entrance on which were displayed two banners respectively bearing the following messages, in gold characters: 'In drunkenness the world grows bigger' and 'In the wine pot the days grow longer.' An outhouse on one side of the inn yard contained a butcher's table, with chopping-block, chopper and other tools of the trade, while on the other side was a stove and firewood for making steamed bread; inside the main building was a row of huge wine vats, half buried in the ground and more than half full. In the middle was a counter behind which sat a very young girl: this was in fact the Door-God's concubine, recently acquired in Mengzhou, where she had been a hostess in one of the houses of pleasure in the entertainment district and known for her renderings of operatic songs.

Leering drunkenly at the girl, Wu Song erupted into the room and sat down at a place opposite the bar. Pressing both hands on the table, he ogled the girl, who responded by turning her head away.

There were five or six waiters on duty. Wu Song pounded the table and shouted: "Who's in charge here?" A waiter approached and asked: "'Ow much wine was you wantin', sir?"

"I'll have two measures first, just to try."

The waiter went to the bar and asked the girl to serve out two measures of wine. From the bucket she ladled out a bowl and warmed it, then presented it to Wu Song, saying: "'Ope you enjoys it, sir."

Wu Song picked it up and smelt it. He shook his head. "This is dreadful stuff, dreadful! Change it!"

The waiter saw he was drunk. He went back to the bar and said: "Better just give him something else, miss."

The girl took the wine and poured it away, then drew off some wine of a better quality. The waiter warmed a bowl and took it to Wu Song, who sipped and exclaimed: "This isn't any good either! Change it, double quick, or you'll be sorry."

Swallowing his annoyance, the waiter took the wine back to the bar and said: "Reckon as 'ow you'll 'ave to change it again, miss. Best not to argue — 'e's drunk an' 'e's looking to pick a quarrel. Just give 'im some of the best."

The girl ladled out some of the best wine and gave it to the waiter, who set the pitcher down and warmed a bowl. Wu Song drank it and said: "Now, this is more like it!" After a while he asked: "Tell me, waiter, what's the owner's name?"

"'Is name's Jiang," the man replied.

"Are you sure it's not Pimp?" Wu Song said, smirking.

The girl heard this and said to herself: "The swine's pissed, he's come here looking for trouble."

The waiter said to her: "'E's from the back of beyond, you can see that, 'e don't know nothink, don't you listen to 'is bleedin' nonsense!"

"What was that you said?" Wu Song asked.

"It's a private conversation," the waiter said. "Just shut up and drink your wine!"

"Waiter, tell the young lady behind the bar to come over here and have a drink with me," Wu Song said.

"Are you crazy or something? She's the boss's woman."

"So what? That doesn't prevent her having a cup of wine with me does it?"

"You lousy beggar!" the girl shouted in a fury. "You oughter be dead!" She flung open the bar flap and was about to rush out.

But Wu Song had already slipped his arms out of that earth-coloured tunic of his and knotted the sleeves around his waist. Pouring the pitcher of wine over the floor, he dashed behind the bar, colliding with the girl. With Wu Song's strength what hope did she have against him? One arm grasped her by the waist, while the other demolished her elaborate coiffure. Lifting her bodily over the bar, he hurled her towards where the wine was stored. With a resounding splash, the unfortunate girl landed right in the middle of a big vat of wine. As Wu Song bounded out from behind the bar, some of the more athletic waiters tried to rush him. Wu Song was ready for them. He caught one and lifted him easily, flinging him away so that he landed head first in a wine vat. Another charged and he grabbed him by the head and hurled him into another wine vat. Two more charged and he knocked them both down, one with a punch and the other with a kick. The first three were now in the wine vats and struggle as they might they could not get out. The next two lay motionless on the floor. Most of the establishment's forces had now been reduced to a pile of shit. There was just one who got away. "That bastard's gone off to get the Jiang the Door-God," Wu Song said to himself. "I'd better go and meet him. If I beat him up out on the road, it'll give the people something to laugh at." So saying he strode out of the inn.

The other waiter had indeed rushed off to tell Jiang the Door-God. The latter received quite a shock. He struggled to his feet, knocking over the folding chair and flinging away the fly whisk. Wu Song was waiting for him. They met in the middle of the road. Now although Jiang the Door-God was big, his strength had been sapped by recent bouts of drinking and sex, together with the unexpectedness of the event. He was in such a hurry he had no time to stop and think. Wu Song was built like a tiger and equally determined to beat him. Deceived by Wu Song's appearance of drunkenness, the Door-God rushed in without thinking. It's slow in the telling but happens in a flash. Wu Song started by feinting with a right and left to the head, then turned suddenly and danced away. Enraged, the Door-God lunged after him and was caught with a flying kick to the groin. As he doubled up, clutching himself with both hands, Wu Song whirled around and caught him again with his right foot, fair and square on the temple, toppling him over backwards. Stepping forward and planting a foot on his chest, Wu Song raised that fist the size of a barrel and began pounding him in the face.

Now this routine we have just described — that's to say, feinting with both hands, turning, kicking with the left foot, landing, turning again and kicking with the right foot — has a name. It's called 'jade bracelet steps and mandarin duck footwork.' It was something Wu Song had practised all his life, he had no equal for it.

Jiang the Door-God now lay beaten on the ground and crying for mercy. "I'll spare you, but only on three conditions," Wu Song told him.

*"Spare me sir, I beg you. Even three hundred conditions, I accept them all," cried the Door-God, prostrate at Wu Song's feet. Pointing a finger at Jiang, Wu Song proceeded to tell him the 3 conditions. And as a result, certain changes occurred c* hanges are made to head and face, a new master is sought; the hair is cut, the eyebrows plucked, a man goes forth to kill.

"Sir, please select the more important part, and tell me that at once without any attempt at literary skill," said Wu Song.

"In my youth I had a teacher who trained me so well that I got the nickname in the Mengzhou district of the 'Golden Eyed Tiger Cub.' Just outside the East Gate of this town there is a market place called 'Kuaihuo Forest.' The merchants there all come from Shandong and Hebei provinces. At that spot there are over one hundred inns and about thirty gambling dens, besides many money-changing shops. Previously I relied upon my athletic skill and opened an inn there where I employed about eighty criminals as assistants, and supplied all the gambling dens, shops, and inns with meat and wine. Moreover, all the prostitutes who came to that place had to see me first, and I controlled their affairs. I made plenty of money, and every month my income was about three hundred taels of silver.
"Recently a Drill Instructor named Zhang came here with a man named Jiang Zhong from East Luzhou. The latter is a tall fellow—over six feet high, and because of this, people give him the nickname Jiang the 'Door God.' He is quite skilled with lance and cudgel, and also at hand combat. He used to boast that no man is his equal in those matters, that for three years he has established himself with no rivalry and that no one throughout the empire can contend with him. He once fought with me over the Kuaihuo Forest and gave me such a beating that I was confined to my bed for two months. When you arrived here I had my head bandaged, and my arm in a sling, and even now I have not quite recovered. I was waiting until I could find a man who would fight him, because he has the soldiers from Drill Instructor Zhang who would easily repulse any attack that I could make. I am extremely annoyed because I cannot avenge myself. I have heard that you are a great hero, and if I could get you to help me against this boastful fellow and get my hatred satisfied, I would be contented even on my death. I was afraid that after your hard journey you would not be in good health so I gave instructions that you were to be fed and treated well. I would wait until you recover your full strength, and then we can discuss the matter. I did not expect that my servant would have broached the matter so soon, but as he has told you, I cannot conceal the real situation from you."
"How many heads and arms has this Jiang the 'Door God'?" asked Wu Song laughingly.
"Of course," replied Shi En, "he has only one head and two arms. How could he have more?"
Wu Song laughed again and said, "I thought that perhaps he had three heads and six arms, like Nezha, son of Li Jing, but as he is only an ordinary man why should I be afraid of him?"[1]
"As I have no particular skill I cannot oppose him successfully," said Shi En.
"I do not wish to boast, but I am always confident in my own skill to fight the strong but evil men of the empire. Now this being the case why should I remain here? I will go straightway without waiting for another drink. You come with me, and see how I crush that beast. I will forfeit my life if I happen to kill him with my fist."
"Elder brother, please wait a bit," said Shi En, "until my father arrives. If he approves of our plan you can go. We must not be reckless in this matter. We had better send a man tomorrow to inquire whether Jiang the 'Door God' is at home, and if he is there then we can go the following day, and if he is not there then of course we shall have to wait. If we went there without preparation it would only scare him out of his cover, and he would be on his guard hereafter."
Wu Song was anxious to go, and said, "Sir, do you think he would try to hit me if I went there? Is this a man's job? Let us go at once and not wait for any tomorrow. If we are decided then we must go at once, and not be afraid of any preparation he may make."
Shi En could not induce him to alter his mind, and just as he had given up the idea, the warden came from behind a screen close to where they were sitting, and said, "Hero, I have been eavesdropping for some time. Today I am very fortunate in meeting such a hero. My son is as enlightened as beholding the sun blazing forth from a cloudy sky. I request you to come with me to an inner room where we can have a chat for a short time."
They accordingly adjourned to the inner room where the warden asked Wu Song to be seated, but the latter declined as he was a criminal, and dared not be seated in the presence of an official.
"Do not talk like that," replied the warden. "Hero, my stupid son has been extremely fortunate in meeting you so why should you be so polite?"
Wu Song begged to be excused, and then sat down, but asked why Shi En should not also sit down.
"My father is sitting with you, please do not worry about me."
"If you remain standing I shall not feel comfortable," said Wu Song.
"Hero," said the old warden, "as you take things like this I will ask my son to be seated, seeing that there is no other person present."
The servant brought in wine, food, and fruit, and the old man personally offered a cup of wine to Wu Song, and said, "Hero, who would not pay respect to such a brave man as you? Previously my son was engaged in some business at the Kuaihuo Forest, not for coveting wealth and profits, but to improve the prospects of the town, and add something to the atmosphere there. It was unexpected that such a man as Jiang the 'Door God,' relying solely on his brutal strength, could have taken the trade from him, This injury and wrong would never be avenged without such a hero and righteous warrior as you. I hope that you will not forsake my son, and if you will pledge me by drinking this cupful of wine, my son will give you four kowtows, and respect you as his elder brother."
"I am not skillful in arms so how dare I receive your son's respects? If I should vainty would ruin my chances of old age." He however drank the wine, and Shi En kowtowed to him four times. Wu Song hurriedly returned the respects, and made a sign of their brotherhood.
That day Wu Song was very happy, and so drunk that he had to be led to his room by a servant.
The next day the old official spoke to his son, Shi En, "Yesterday Wu Song got quite intoxicated so how can we ask him to start on that errand? We had better get a man to tell him that Jiang the 'Door God,' is away from home just now, and that he had better wait for a day or two."
So Shi En went himself to Wu Song, and spoke to that effect. He said they might start off the following day.
"Tomorrow will do just as well," said Wu Song. "But I have to keep my anger for one day."
So after they had had breakfast they went together for a stroll in front of the hall. They discussed matters relating to military drill, fencing, and fighting. At noon they had their meal together, and Shi En noticed that Wu Song was liable to get drunk again before the day was out so he served few cups of wine. After lunch they both retired to their own quarters. Two servants brought hot water for Wu Song to have a bath. Wu Song asked them, "How is it that at lunch there was such a lot of food and so little wine?"
"We dare not deceive you," replied the servants. "This morning the old warden and his son were talking about you. They noticed that you had drunk a lot of wine, and they were afraid that if you had plenty of wine today it might delay the business they have in view for you. Therefore they did not offer you much wine. Tomorrow they will certainly ask you to undertake that affair."
"It means that if I get drunk the matter will be spoiled?"
"That is what they thought," replied the servant.
That night Wu Song awaited the daybreak with impatience. As soon as it was daylight he got up, and after a wash, put on a turban with a "Wan 〃swastika decoration; a coat of yellow color with a waist belt of red silk; hempen shoes, with puttees folded up to the knees. He told the servant to bring him a plaster which he put on his face to cover the branded mark there indicating that he was a criminal.
Shi En soon came, and invited him to have breakfast with them. After the meal Shi En told him that there was a horse standing at a trough at the back, ready for him to ride.
"My feet are not small," said Wu Song, "so why should I ride? There is one matter however that I should like you to attend to."
"Elder brother, speak plainly, as there is nothing that I would not do for you."
"When you go with me outside the town I want you to give me a 'don't pass one without three.'"
"What is that?" asked Shi En. "I do not understand you."
Wu Song laughed and replied, "I will tell you. When you want me to fight Jiang the 'Door God,' you will invite me to drink three cups of wine at each inn we pass by on our way. If I do not get three cups of wine then I shall not be able to go any further. That is the meaning of 'don't pass one without three.'"
Shi En said, "From here to the Kuaihuo Forest is about five 〃; and on the way there are about twelve inns. So if you have three cups at each inn that will be thirty-six cups of wine before we get there. You will get drunk, and that will make you unable to succeed in the matter."
Wu Song laughed, and said, "Are you afraid that I will get drunk, and then not be able to do the work? But if I get no wine I shall be unable to act. If I have only a little wine I cannot do much business; if I get only half I can do only half; but if I get a full quantity I can exert all my strength and skill and do anything. If I get drunk I have great courage. If I had not been drunk how could I have killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge? When I fight with Jiang the 'Door God,' I must be drunk, and then I shall be able to exert my power to the full."
"I did not know that you were like this," said Shi En. "We have plenty of good wine here, but I was afraid that if you get drunk, you would not be able to attend to business. Therefore last night I did not offer you, my elder brother, much wine. But as things are as you say, then I will tell two servants to get a good supply of wine, and eatables, and take them ahead so that you can partake of them stage by stage on our journey."
"That is just my idea," said Wu Song, "and it will encourage me in fighting against Jiang the 'Door God.' If I had no wine how could I exert all my skill? Now let me give him a good beating today so that many people will have a loud cheer."
So Shi En prepared a lot of wine and food, and also plenty of cash, and sent two servants with them in advance. His father also secretly selected about twenty stout men to form a rear guard in case of need.
Shi En started off with Wu Song, and when they were about three hundred paces from the East Gate of Mengzhou they saw an inn at the side of the road. There they found the two servants, who spread the food and wine on a table. Shi En invited Wu Song to sit down and partake of the feast.
"I do not want small cups," said Wu Song. "Bring me three big bowls."
The servants brought three large cups, and filled them with wine. Wu Song without any ceremony drank the wine, and immediately got up. The servants hurriedly packed up the things, and went off again ahead of Wu Song.
Wu Song laughed, and said that he now felt much better in his stomach. They started off again. It was then the month of July, and the weather was very hot, with refreshing breezes. They loosened their coats. They had not gone a third of a 〃when they came to a few houses on the roadside, and there among some trees was another inn. Upon coming closer they saw that it was a small inn which sold homemade wine.
Shi En stopped and asked, "This is only a very small inn—shall we stop here?"
"It will do. I will drink only three cups of wine," said Wu Song. "If I cannot get three cups of wine we cannot go on."
They entered the inn, and the servants again spread the food and wine on the table. Wu Song again drank three cups of wine. The servants packed up the things, and went on ahead.
The two men resumed their journey, but they had not gone a 〃before they came to another inn. There again Wu Song drank three large cups of wine. We need not recite how many times they went through this process of drinking wine, but after about ten inns Shi En saw to his surprise that Wu Song was by no means drunk.
Wu Song at last asked how far they were from the Kuaihuo Forest Village. Shi En replied that it was in the forest which they could now see in the distance. Wu Song asked Shi En to wait for him in some other place as he would go himself and find his man. Shi En agreed to this, but he asked Wu Song not to treat his opponent too lightly.
"Never mind," said Wu Song. "Let these two servants go with me, and show me the way. If we come to any more inns however, I will still stop and drink wine."
Shi En instructed the servants accordingly, and he then departed.
In the next 〃Wu Song drank about ten cups of wine. It was getting near noon, and the day was very hot with only a little cooling breeze. Wu Song was beginning to feel the effect of the wine, and he unloosened his clothes. He was not quite drunk, but pretended to be intoxicated and staggered along. When they reached the forest the servants pointed out the inn belonging to Jiang the 'Door God,' which was at a crossroad.
Wu Song told the servants to hide themselves some distance away, and that they were only to come for him when he had given Jiang a good beating. He then entered the forest by the back entrance. He came across a very big man, dressed in a white silk gown, with a fly whisk in his hand. He was seated in a chair in the shade of an ash tree. Wu Song exaggerated his stumbling gait, but did not omit to steal glances at the man whom he thought must be Jiang the 'Door God.' Wu Song however continued on his way, and he had not gone more than about fifty strides when he came to the crossroad where there was an inn with a long pole sticking out from the eaves flying a cloth flag bearing four characters meaning, "Delectable Snuggery." As he came to the front he saw a green varnished railing, with two flags on which were golden characters, reading:

"When, drunk the universe seems big,
In the pot there is plenty of time."

On the one hand inside the railing was a stall with meat, and a large chopping block, with knives, choppers, etc. On the other side was a stall with bread on it, and a steam stove. Further inside were three big jars arranged in a line half sunk into the ground and half full of wine. In the center of the room there was a counter with a young woman sitting behind it. She was Jiang the 'Door God's concubine, and had previously been a singsong girl. Looking askance at the girl Wu Song entered the room, and sat down on a chair just opposite to the counter. He placed both hands on the table, and deliberately stared at the girl. She turned her head away. Wu Song saw that there were about seven waiters in the inn. He tapped the table and called out, "Where is the proprietor of this establishment?"
A waiter came forward and asked Wu Song how much wine he wanted.
"I want four cups of wine," replied Wu Song, "just to see what it tastes like."
The waiter went to the counter, and got the wine from the girl, and placed it in a pan of hot water over a fire to warm. When quite warm he served it to Wu Song who smelt at it, shook his head and said, "Bad! Bad! Bad! Bring some better stuff!"
The waiter thought that Wu Song was drunk, and he went to the counter again, and whispered to the girl, "Please change this wine for him." The girl changed the wine for a better quality, and the waiter warmed it at the fire as before. When he served it Wu Song tasted it, and said, "This is also bad! Change it at once, and I will let you off this time."
The waiter smothered his rising anger, and went to the counter and said to the girl, "Please change this wine again and don't be captious with him. He is evidently drunk, and is in a quarrelsome mood." The girl changed it for a still better quality, and the waiter heated it on the fire as before. He served it to Wu Song who drank it, and said that it was much better. He then asked the waiter what was the name of his master. When Wu Song heard that it was Jiang, he asked why it was not Li. The girl hearing this called out: "Where did this man get drunk, and comes here to try and make trouble?"
The waiter remarked, "He is evidently a yokel from some other village, and he is just farting, not saying anything important."
"What do you say?" asked Wu Song.
The waiter replied: "We are just talking between ourselves. Guest, take no notice, and just drink your wine."
"Waiter, tell that girl at the counter to come here and drink wine with me."
"Don't be absurd!" said the waiter. "She is the wife of the proprietor."
"What does it matter if she is?" replied Wu Song. "It is not a serious thing if she drinks wine with me."
"You are dead!" yelled the girl. "You are a deadman!" Instantly she pushed open the wicket in the counter, and came forward. Wu Song jumped up, stripped off his upper garments, and tied them round his waist. Throwing a bowl of wine on the floor, he stepped towards the girl, and seized hold of her. His grip was so forceful that she could not move. One hand was round her waist, and the other hand stripped the ornaments off her head and dashed them to pieces on the ground. He then grasped her hair, lifted her over the counter, and dropped her in one of the wine kangs. There was a great splash of wine, and it was really pitiable to see the girl in such a position. There were several waiters who now rushed to attack Wu Song. But Wu Song was in no hurry. As they came up he quietly seized them, and dropped them one by one into the wine jars. Two of them he knocked down with his foot or fist. Those in the jars could not get out, and the two he had knocked down could not get up. They were all in a mess. One servant had however run away, and Wu Song knew that he was going to report the affair to Jiang the 'Door God,' so he went after him. He thought if he met him on the way it would only be an opportunity for people to watch the fun and enjoy the sport. The servant told Jiang the 'Door God,' who was startled, and jumped up knocking over the chair. He threw down his fly whisk and hurried off. He soon met Wu Song at a place where the road was quite wide. Jiang had been indulging in women and wine so that he was not strong and was startled at this unexpectedness. He saw that Wu Song was approaching like a tiger, and began to wonder how he should deal with him. He noticed that the latter appeared to be drunk so he decided upon a sudden attack. The movements of both were very rapid. Wu Song first shook both fists at Jiang, but stepped quickly to one side. Jiang angrily sprang forward, but Wu Song whizzed round and kicked Jiang in the crotch. Jiang clasped both hands to his crotch and stooped down. Wu Song kicked again, and striking Jiang on the forehead, knocked him backwards. Taking a step forward Wu Song planted his foot on Jiang's breast, and then stooped down to hit him in the face with both his great fists. Wu Song's methods of using his fists and feet is called, the "Jeweled Ring Swing" and the "Mandarin Duck Kick," and in both of these he was quite an expert. Jiang still lying on the ground pleaded for mercy. Wu Song replied that if he wanted to save his life he must agree to do three things. Jiang asked to be forgiven and said that instead of three Wu Song could make three hundred demands, and all would be agreed to.

Disguise is useful when one meets,
A bully who will disdain reason;
The hair is cut; the eyebrows trimmed,
When death demands a quick conclusion.

**128**

**The Young Master makes 3 visits Shi En to the Condemned Cell of Death Row; Wu Song Goes Wild, Creates a Disturbance, & reaps havoc at Flying-Clouds Quay/Pond/Pool**

"One," said Wu Song, "you must leave Happy Grove and return all equipment to its original owner Shi En the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub. Who told you to take his things?"
"I promise, I promise!" Jiang said hastily.
"Two, I'm going to spare you today, but I want you to round up all the head toughs in Happy Grove and have them apologize for you to Shi En."
"I promise that, too!"
"After you've turned everything over I want you to leave Happy Grove and go back directly to your native village. You're not allowed to live in Mengzhou Prefecture. If you don't get out, I'll beat you up every time I see you. If I meet you ten times, I'll beat you up ten times! A light job will leave you half dead, a real going over will take your life! Do you promise?"
Jiang wanted very much to live. "Oh, yes, I do," he cried. "I agree completely!"
Wu Song hauled him to his feet. Jiang's face was black and blue, his mouth swollen, his neck twisted, blood flowed from a cut on his forehead. Wu Song pointed a finger at him.
"To a man who killed the huge tiger on Jingyang Ridge with only three punches and two kicks, what's a scurvy knave like you? Return everything to Shi En and be quick about it! You'll get another drubbing if you dally, and this time I'll finish you!"
Now that he knew his adversary was Wu Song, Jiang could only piteously beg for mercy.
By then Shi En and twenty or thirty stalwart soldiers arrived as reinforcements. But they saw that Jiang was already defeated, and they surrounded Wu Song delightedly.
"The original owner is here. Move out immediately," Wu Song directed. "And bring those other proprietors over to apologize, quick!"

"Please come and sit in the tavern, sir," said Jiang.
Wu Song went with his following. Wine was all over the floor. There wasn't a place you could set your foot. The two varlets were still trying to scramble out of the vats. The woman had just crawlingly emerged. Her face was battered, her soaked skirt was dripping wine. The waiters had long since disappeared.
Wu Song sat down with his party. "Clean this place up," he shouted.
Jiang got a cart for the woman, loaded on her belongings and sent her off. Then he found a few uninjured waiters and had them ask over the dozen or so other big personages. They all came and apologized to Shi En on his behalf. Jiang brought out his best wine, laid a table, and invited everyone to be seated. Wu Song asked Shi En to sit at the head of the table, above Jiang. A large bowl was placed before each guest, the wine was poured, and all drank several rounds. Wu Song then addressed the gathering.
"Honored neighbors, when I was exiled here after killing certain persons in Yanggu County I heard that this tavern had been taken by force by Jiang the Gate Guard Giant from Shi En, depriving him of his livelihood. You needn't think that Shi En is my master. There is nothing between us. It's just that I have always fought wicked men. If I see injustice on the road, I draw my sword and pitch in, even though it may mean my life! I meant to destroy Jiang today, and rid this place of a plague. But out of consideration for you honorable neighbors I decided to spare the rogue. I have ordered him to leave this district tonight. If he doesn't, the next time I meet him I'll do to him what I did to the tiger on Jingyang Ridge!"
When the guests heard that before them was Constable Wu, the famed tiger-killer, they all rose and apologized for Jiang. "Cool your wrath, gallant constable," they said. "Let him return the premises to its owner and move out."
Jiang was too frightened to speak. Shi En checked the equipment, and took over the tavern. Shame-faced, the big fellow thanked all present, loaded his belongings on a cart, and departed. Wu Song plied the neighbors with wine until all of them were drunk. It was late in the evening when they left. He slept right through till the following morning.
On hearing that his son had regained possession of the Happy Grove tavern, the old warden got on his horse and rode to thank Wu Song. He remained several days, drinking in celebration. Everyone in and around the village, learning of Wu Song's prowess, came to pay their respects. The tavern was repaired and went back into operation. The warden returned to Anping Stockade. No one knew where Jiang and his woman had gone, though Shi En sent men out to inquire. He devoted himself to business and thought no more of his former foe. Wu Song remained with him. Profits were from thirty to fifty per cent higher than before. The proprietors of the various other enterprises—the inns, the gambling houses, the money exchange shops—sent Shi En regular contributions, twice as much as before, and he gratefully honored Wu Song like a father. His fall control of Happy Grove was restored. Of that we'll say no more.

Time passed quickly. Soon a month had gone by. The heat gradually lessened, and jade-like dew brought coolness. The golden winds marked the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. To make a long story short, one day Shi En was chatting in the tavern with Wu Song of barehand fighting and staves and spears when three military men arrived at the gate, leading a horse.
They entered and asked the host: "Which one is the tiger-killer, Constable Wu?"
Shi En recognized them. They were adjutants of General Zhang Mengfang who commanded the garrison in Mengzhou Prefecture. Shi En walked up to them and said: "What do you want Constable Wu for?"
"The general has heard of Constable Wu's gallantry and has sent us with a horse to fetch him. Here is His Excellency's invitation."
Shi En read it. "Zhang is my father's superior," he thought, "and can give him orders. Wu Song, as an exiled prisoner, is of course also under him. He'd better go."
To Wu Song he said: "These gentlemen have been sent to fetch you by General Zhang. They've even brought a horse for you. What do you think, brother?"
Wu Song was a straightforward fellow who never beat around the bush. "Since he's sent for me, I'll go," he replied, "and see what he has to say."
He changed his clothes and head kerchief, summoned a servant to accompany him, got on the horse and went with his escort to Mengzhou Town. Before the general's residence he dismounted and followed the adjutants into the hall where Zhang was waiting.
The general was cordial. "Bring him here and let me meet him," he cried.
Wu Song came forward, kowtowed, then stood to a side with his hands clasped courteously.
"I've heard that you're a splendid man, a hero without peer, a fearless fighter who stands by his friends to the death. I need someone like you. Would you be willing to serve under me as an adjutant?"
Wu Song dropped to his knees. "I'm an exile in the prison. If your Excellency is kind enough to raise me, I will gladly be your groom, holding your whip and running by your stirrup!"
Zhang was very pleased. He ordered that tidbits and wine be brought and plied Wu Song with liquor until he was very drunk. Then he had him escorted to rest in a room prepared for him in a wing off the main building.
The next day a man was sent to Shi En's to fetch his things. Thereafter, Wu Song remained in the residence. The general frequently called him to the rear chambers to eat and drink. He was allowed to pass through any room, and was treated like a member of the family. A tailor was summoned to make him autumn clothes, new inside and out.
Wu Song was quite happy. "The general seems keen on advancing me," he thought. "Ever since I arrived he keeps me by his side every minute. I haven't even had time to go to Happy Grove and see Shi En. Although Shi En sends people to inquire about me, apparently they're not permitted to enter the residence."
The general was extremely partial to Wu Song. Whenever anyone sought Wu Song's help on some matter, he had only to make a request, and Zhang granted it. People outside sent him gifts of money and silks and satins. He had to buy a box of woven willow to keep them in, all under lock and key. But no need to speak of that.
Soon it was the eighth lunar month. General Zhang laid a feast in the Duck and Drake Bower deep in the rear courtyard to celebrate Mid-Autumn Festival. He invited Wu Song. When Wu Song saw that the general's wife and other female members of the household were present, he drank one cup and turned to leave.
"Where are you going?" the general called.
"With the ladies here, I had better withdraw."
Zhang laughed. "Nonsense. I respect you as a man of principle and especially invite you to drink with us like a member of the family. Why should you go?" He told Wu Song to sit down.
"I'm just a prisoner. How can I sit at the same table with Your Excellency?"
"Must you act like a stranger? There's no one here but our own people. It's perfectly all right."
Wu Song made several more polite attempts to leave, but the general wouldn't hear of it. He insisted that Wu Song join them. Finally, apologizing for his presumption, the young man sat, but a good distance from his host, and turned slightly on his chair so that he wouldn't be facing him directly. Zhang instructed the bondmaids to pour wine for Wu Song. After the constable had downed six or seven cups, the general ordered more fresh tidbits to go with the wine. Then two courses of food were served. Zhang chatted with Wu Song, asking questions about jousting with staves.
"A true man like you shouldn't be drinking from such a small cup," he said, and shouted: "Bring a big silver flagon for this warrior!"
Zhang's urgings to drink came at Wu Song like a flurry of arrows. He finished several flagons, and by the time the moon was shining in the east windows he was half drunk. Forgetting all courtesy, he continued drinking steadily.
The general ordered a bondmaid called Jade Orchid, of whom he was very fond, to sing a ballad. "There are no outsiders here," he said. "Only my trusted Constable Wu. Sing us a mid-autumn song about the moon. That's what we'd like to hear."
Jade Orchid took a pair of ivory clappers, came forward and curtsied to each of the diners. Then she sang a mid-autumn lay by the poet Su Dongpo. It went like this:

*When is there a bright moon?*
*Ask the sky, cup in hand.*
*Who knows what year it is*
*In the palaces of heaven.*
*Long to go there, riding the wind,*
*But the cold I cannot stand*
*In that lofty jade firmament:*
*I dance alone with my shadow,*
*As if in another world.*
*With the beaded curtains rolled high,*
*The moonlight, streaming through the open window,*
*Drives away sleep.*
*I should not be resentful, but why*
*Is the moon always roundest at parting?*
*As people have their sorrows and joys, separating and reuniting,*
*So has the moon its bright and dark, waxing and waning.*
*Since ancient times, it has always been thus!*
*If we cannot for long be heart to heart,*
*Let us enjoy the same moon, far apart!*

Her song finished, Jade Orchid put down her ivory clappers, again curtsied to each guest, and stood to one side.
"You serve a round, too," Zhang directed.
The young woman picked up a tray of cups and another bondmaid poured. Jade Orchid presented one to the general, one to his wife, and a third to Wu Song. Zhang ordered that they be filled to the brim. Too embarrassed to raise his head, Wu Song accepted the cup, keeping himself as far from Jade Orchid as possible. He hailed the general and his wife, lifted his cup, drained it, and returned it to the tray.
Zhang pointed at Jade Orchid. "She's quite intelligent," he said to Wu Song. "Not only does she sing, but she's very good with a needle. If you don't mind her humble origin, after a time we'll choose an auspicious day and give her to you as a wife."
Wu Song rose and bowed. "How can a man in my position accept a woman from Your Excellency's household? That would be pushing my luck too far."
The general laughed. "I've said so, and it must be done. Don't try getting out of it. I won't go back on my promise."
Wu Song drank another dozen cups, one after the next. Fearing that he might do something discourteous under the influence of liquor, he rose and thanked the general and his wife, then walked through the front hall to his room in the wing. As he opened his door, he could feel the wine stirring within him, and he knew he couldn't sleep. He changed his clothes, removed his head kerchief, took a staff, went into the garden and performed several exercises, whirling the staff above his head. From the look of the sky, it must have been about the third watch.
He returned to his room and was starting to undress when he heard voices in the rear courtyard shouting: "Thief! Thief!" Wu Song said to himself: "The general is so good to me. If there's a thief in his rear yard, I ought to lend a hand!"
He grasped his staff and strode to the rear courtyard. Jade Orchid approached him and said tensely: "A thief has gone into the garden!" Wu Song hurriedly searched among the flowers. He couldn't see a thing. As he was running out again, from the shadows someone threw a stool beneath his feet. He stumbled over it and fell. Six or seven soldiers, yelling "Catch the thief!," pounced on Wu Song and tied him up.
"It's me!" Wu Song cried in agitation. But the soldiers paid no attention. Lamps sprang to light in the large hall, revealing Zhang seated inside.
"Bring the thief here," called the general.
The soldiers, beating Wu Song with cudgels, drove him into the hall.
"I'm not a thief," he cried, "I'm Wu Song."
The general was furious. His face darkened. "Exile, your crooked heart never changed! I raised you back to respectability, never did you any harm. I even invited you to drink my wine, sit at my table! I was going to make you an official! How could you do such a thing?"
"Excellency, it wasn't me! I came to catch the thief. Why am I being held as the culprit? I have never stolen. I'm an honorable man!"
"You dare to deny it! Take him to his room and search. We'll see whether he has the booty!"
The soldiers took him to his quarters under guard and opened his willow trunk. Beneath some clothes were silver drinking vessels and about two hundred ounces of gold and silver.
Wu Song stared, gaping, and cried out he was wronged. The soldiers carried the trunk to the hall. Zhang examined its contents.
"Shameless exile! Here is the proof. How can you deny it? 'Any animal can be reborn, but the souls of men are difficult to change!' You look like an honest man but you're a habitual criminal! Your guilt is clear, no matter what you say!"
Zhang had the booty sealed, and said: "Keep him in a closed room tonight. We'll deal with the rogue in the morning!"
Wu Song groaned that he was wronged, but who would listen? The soldiers removed the valuables and locked him in a windowless room. That same night Zhang notified the prefect's office and dispensed money among clerks and scribes.
The next morning, as soon as the prefect started court, police and inspectors brought Wu Song before him and produced the booty. A confidant of Zhang's handed the prefect a letter from the general, setting forth how he had been robbed. The prefect ordered the attendants to bind Wu Song and hold him down. Warders and bailiffs placed the inquisition instruments in front of the prisoner. Before Wu Song could say anything, the prefect spoke.
"A scoundrel under sentence of distant exile, of course you'd turn thief! You saw the chance and couldn't resist. Since the proof is here, there's no point in listening to his lies. Beat him, hard!"
The jailers seized split bamboos and rained blows on the recumbent prisoner. Wu Song knew it was hopeless. He had no choice but to confess: "On the fifteenth of this month I saw many silver flagons in the residence of the general, and my greed was aroused. That night I stole them by guile and took them for myself."
"This rogue was tempted and he stole," said the prefect. "No question about it. Put a cangue on and take him to prison!"
The jailers affixed a long cangue around Wu Song's neck, led him off to the section for the condemned, and locked him in.
"Zhang set this trap to ruin me," he thought. "If I can remain alive and get out of here. I'll deal with him!"
But his legs were in fetters day and night and his wrists, were enclosed in wooden manacles. He wasn't allowed the slightest freedom.

Shi En had already been informed of what was happening, and he hurried into town to confer with his father. The old warden said: "Commandant Zhang must be behind this, getting revenge for Jiang the Gate Guard Giant. He no doubt paid General Zhang to lay a trap for Wu Song, and bribed high and low to do his bidding. I'm sure he wants to have Wu Song killed. But I've been thinking about this. Wu Song's crime does not call for the death penalty. All we have to do is buy a few clerks and bailiffs and we can protect him while he is in prison. Then we'll see what else we can do."
"The present bailiff is a man named Kang. We're very good friends," said Shi En. "Why don't I ask him to help?"
"Wu Song is being persecuted on your account. There's no better time to aid him than right now."
Shi En went to Kang's house with one hundred ounces of silver, but the bailiff had not yet returned from the prison. A member of Kang's family went to inform him of Shi En's arrival. Kang soon came home and the two friends met. Shi En told him the story in detail.
"I'll be frank with you, brother," Kang said. "This is all the work of those two pledged blood brothers with the same surname—Commandant Zhang and General Zhang. Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, who is hiding out in the Commandant's house, got him to buy over the general, and they cooked up this scheme together. All the others, high and low, have been bribed by Jiang. Every one of us has received his money. The prefect is bending over backwards to help him. They're surely aiming to have Wu Song killed.
"They haven't been able to do it legally because Clerk Ye does not agree to a death sentence. Ye is an upright and virtuous man who is strongly opposed to ordinary people being harmed. And so, Wu Song still hasn't suffered. Now that I've heard you, brother, I'll look after him in the prison. I'll see to it that he's well treated and not the least abused. Send someone to Clerk Ye quickly to plead with him to prepare the verdict quickly. That's the way to save Wu Song's life."
Shi En presented Kang with a hundred ounces of silver. The bailiff politely refused several times before finally accepting.
The friends parted and Shi En returned to the prison. He found a man who was close to Ye, and through him sent the clerk a hundred pieces of silver with a plea that he have the charge against Wu Song adjudicated as soon as possible. Ye knew that Wu Song was a chivalrous person. He wanted to aid him, in fact he had already marked the case as open to question. The prefect, having taken General Zhang's bribe, was opposed to leniency.
But burglary was not a capital offence, and so the matter dragged on, and the conspirators decided to have Wu Song killed in prison. Now that Clerk Ye had received the hundred ounces of silver and learned that Wu Song had been framed, he reduced the charges in the indictment and promised to get sentence passed the moment the preliminary detention period had ended.
The next day Shi En prepared a large quantity of food and wine and asked Kang to take him to Wu Song. They went directly to the big jail where he was incarcerated. Kang was already looking after him, and his restraints had been removed. Shi En, after dispensing twenty or thirty pieces of silver among the lesser keepers, gave Wu Song the food and drink he had brought.
"You've been framed by General Zhang to avenge Jiang the Gate Guard Giant," he whispered to Wu Song. "But don't worry. I've persuaded Clerk Ye to save you. He'll get you out of here as soon as the preliminary term is up and sentence is passed. Then we'll see."
With his fetters removed, Wu Song had been thinking of attempting a jailbreak. But Shi En's information caused him to abandon the idea. After reassuring Wu Song, Shi En returned to the stockade.
Two days later, he came again with more food and wine and money, and again Kang led him in. The fare he delivered to Wu Song, the silver he distributed among the keepers. He returned home and sent more largesse to high and low, urging them to hasten the adjudication. On his next visit, again conducted by Bailiff Kang, he brought some clothes, as well as meat and wine, and invited all the keepers to drink, so that they would be good to the prisoner. He asked Wu Song to change into fresh clothes and to partake of the wine and food.

Now that he was familiar with the routine, Shi En visited three times in a few days. He was seen by one of Commandant Zhang's confidants, who reported to his master. The commandant told the general, who sent an emissary with gifts to relay the information to the prefect. This greedy official wanted to be worthy of his bribe, and he dispatched an agent to hang around the prison and question any persons who did not belong there.
When Shi En learned of this, he decided not to risk going again. The bailiff and the keepers continued to look after Wu Song, and Shi En went often to Kang's home to get the news. Of that we'll say no more.

In the nearly two months that followed Clerk Ye made every effort to persuade the prefect. It was thus the official discovered that General Zhang had been given a large amount of silver by the Gate Guard Giant and, in conjunction with Commandant Zhang, had framed Wu Song.
"You've earned a pretty penny," the prefect thought indignantly, "and you want me to do your dirty work!" He lost his ardor in pursuing the matter.
At the conclusion of sixty days, Wu Song was brought before him, and the shackles removed. Clerk Ye read the indictment defining the crime. The prefect ordered a punishment of twenty blows and exile to the prison in Enzhou. The purloined property was returned to its original owner. General Zhang had no choice but to send a member of his household to bring it back.
Wu Song was beaten twenty strokes and tattooed with "the golden print" of a criminal. A seven-and-a-half-catty cangue was affixed around his neck, the necessary documents were drawn, two strong policemen appointed as escorts, and a time of departure designated. The prisoner and his guards set out immediately.
Because the old warden had spent money freely, and Clerk Ye had shown his concern, and the prefect knew he had been framed, Wu Song was beaten lightly. He suppressed his anger and left the town wearing the cangue, with the two guards following behind. They had gone about a //when Shi En emerged from a tavern along the highway.
"I've been waiting for you, brother," he said. His head and hand were again bandaged.
"We haven't seen each other in a long time. What's happened to you?"
"The prefect found out about my three visits to the jail, and he stationed a man inside to keep watch. General Zhang had his people patrolling outside the main gate. So I couldn't visit you any more. I could only get news at Bailiff Kang's home. Half a month ago Jiang the Gate Guard Giant returned to Happy Grove with a gang of soldiers. They beat me up and made me bring the neighbors to apologize. Then they took over my tavern and a lot of equipment. I've been in bed ever since. Today I heard you were exiled to Enzhou and brought these two padded tunics for you to wear on the road. And here is a brace of cooked geese, to eat when you get hungry."
Shi En invited the guards in for drinks, but they refused.
"This lout Wu Song is a crook," they said. "If we drank your wine, tomorrow there'd be all kinds of talk at the prefecture! Get away from us, if you don't want to be beaten!"
Clearly it was no time to argue. Shi En offered the guards ten ounces of silver, but they wouldn't take them. Angrily, they insisted that Wu Song get going. Shi En gave him two bowls of wine and tied a bundle of clothing around his waist, the geese he hung on the cangue.
"There are two padded tunics in the bundle," he said softly in Wu Song's ear, "and a small packet of silver. You'll need money on the journey. Also two pairs of hemp sandals. Be careful and alert. These knaves are up to no good."
Wu Song nodded. "That goes without saying. I know all about it. I'm not afraid of these two, or two more like them! Go home and rest, and please don't worry. I have some ideas of my own!"
Shi En kowtowed and, weeping, departed. Of that we'll say no more.
The prisoner and his escort proceeded along the highway. Before they had gone several more //, one of the guards whispered to his companion: "Any sign of the other two?"
Wu Song heard, and laughed coldly to himself. "So there are more of you rogues coming to get tough! Don't celebrate too friggin soon!"
His right hand was locked in the cangue, but his left was free, and with this he began eating one of the geese. He paid no heed to the guards. He finished the first goose by the time they had walked four or five //, then went to work on the second, holding it with his right hand and dismembering it with his left. Another five //and that goose, too, was completely consumed.
When they were still about eight or nine //from their destination, two men appeared on the road ahead, waiting with halberds and swords. They joined the prisoner and his escort and walked along with them. Wu Song observed his guards exchange significant glances with the newcomers. He was eight-tenths sure of what was impending, but he kept his own counsel and pretended to have seen nothing.
A bit further on, they came to an area of many fish ponds linked by streams and rivers. As the five men began crossing a wide-planked bridge, they passed an arch on which a placard read: "Flying-Cloud Ponds."
"What's the name of this place?" Wu Song deliberately asked.
"You're not blind," said the guards. "Can't you see the sign?"
Wu Song halted. "I have to take a piss." The two with the halberds started closing in on him. "Down you go," he cried. He lashed out with a leg and kicked one of them tumbling into the water below. The other was hastily turning when a kick from Wu Song's right foot sent him splashing to join his mate. The two guards fled the bridge in panic.
"Where do you think you're going?" Wu Song roared. He wrenched open the cangue and tore it in two, and raced after his quarry. One of them collapsed in fright. Wu Song caught up with the second and slammed him to the ground with a punch in the back. From the water he retrieved a halberd. A few stabs and the fellow expired. He then finished the other terror-paralyzed guard in the same way.
The two he had kicked into the stream had just struggled out and were starting to flee. Wu Song gave chase. He hacked one to the ground and seized the other.
"Tell the truth and live!"
"We two are apprentices of Jiang the Gate Guard Giant. He and Commandant Zhang told us to join forces with the guards and murder you!"
"Where is your master now?"
"When I left he was in the Duck and Drake Bower in the rear courtyard, drinking with the Commandant and the General. He's waiting for us to return and report!"
"So that's how it is. In that case, I can't spare you!"
Wu Song's hand rose and his blade descended. He killed the man, removed his sword, selected the best of his victims' blades for himself, and rolled the bodies into a pond. To make sure the guards were dead, he pierced them both again a few times with a halberd. Then he stood on the bridge and surveyed the carnage.
"Although I've finished these four varlets," he thought, "my hatred won't be appeased until I've killed General Zhang, Commandant Zhang, and Jiang the Gate Guard Giant!" Halberd in hand, he pondered silently. He made up his mind. He was going back to Mengzhou Town. And as a result, Wu Song destroyed greedy men and could breathe once more. Truly, the ornate hall was carpeted with corpses, the red festive candles shone on blood-steeped floors.

Now when Wu Song was treading down Jiang the Door-God and said: "If you want me to spare your life you must agree to three conditions," and the latter replied: "Just tell me what they are, I'll agree to them!", here is what Wu Song told him: "Condition number one is that you give up Happy Woods and restore it entire, with all its goods and chattels, to its rightful owner, the Young Master Shi En — incidentally, who told you to steal it from him in the first place?"
"Yes, yes, I accept," said the Door-God in a hurry.
"And number two is that you get all the bosses and leading lights of Happy Woods to come and beg forgiveness of the Young Master."
"Yes, I accept!"
"And number three, as soon as you've made restitution in full, you quit this place and take yourself back where you came from, double-quick. I don't want to see you in Mengzhou again. If you stay I shall beat you up every time I see you. As many times as I catch you, you'll get a beating, and you'll be lucky if I only half kill you. I might finish you off completely. Understood?"
"Yes, yes, yes, I accept everything!" the Door-God babbled, desperate to save his life.
Wu Song hauled him to his feet. His face was black and blue and his lips swollen; his neck was twisted sideways and blood was streaming from his temples. Pointing a finger at him, Wu Song said: "Look at you, you blackguard, you're nothing compared to the great tiger of Jingyang Pass which, with just three blows of my fist and two kicks I actually killed. You'll get exactly the treatment you deserve. So look sharp and make restitution. If I think you're dragging your feet, just the least little bit, I'll have your life!"
Now that he knew it was Wu Song he had to do with, Jiang couldn't have enough of ducking and bowing and pleading for mercy. At this very moment, the Young Master appeared at the head of the twenty or thirty stalwart troops who had been sent to lend a hand. When they saw Wu Song had already defeated the Door-God, they made no secret of their approval. Everyone crowded around him.
Wu Song made a sign to the Door-God and said: "The rightful owner is back, you can clear off now, but first tell everyone to come and apologize."
"Please come inside and sit down," the Door-God said.
When Wu Song and the others entered the inn, they found the floor was swimming in wine, while the two waiters and the woman still scrabbled at the sides of the wine vats. When the woman managed to drag herself out her face was bruised and her skirt was sopping, wet through with wine. The other waiters had vanished.
Wu Song and his friends sat down and the Door-God shouted: "You lot, look sharp, get the place cleaned up!" Next he ordered a cart. The woman's belongings were loaded onto it and she was dispatched. Then several unharmed waiters were found and sent off to the village to summon some of the bosses. When they arrived at the inn the Door-God had them apologize to the Young Master on his behalf.
Wine was brought, of the best, with some dishes; a table was laid and everyone was invited to sit. Wu Song gave the Young Master the place of honour, above the Door-God, and ordered big bowls for everybody. The wine was poured.
After several bowls, Wu Song rose to speak. "Gentlemen, when I was banished here, after killing someone in Yanggu, I heard that this establishment in Happy Woods, which had been set up as a trading centre by Mr. Shi the younger, had been misappropriated by Jiang the Door-God and a bunch of his thugs, who were thus depriving the rightful owner of his livelihood. Maybe you all think I'm working for the Young Master, but you're wrong, there's nothing between us. It is simply that I have always made it my habit to combat injustice. When I come upon something unfair I gird my loins and rush to help, without fear or favour. Today I intended to beat the life out of this Jiang and rid the world of a pest. But out of consideration for you I decided to spare him. However, I've told him he's got to clear out tonight. If he doesn't leave, next time he meets me he's going to end up like the tiger on Jingyang Pass."
When they understood that this was the Wu Song who killed the tiger of Jingyang Pass, they all expressed their regrets at Jiang's behaviour and said: "We beg you not to get excited. Just let him move out and restore everything to the owner."
Jiang was too scared to even open his mouth. The Young Master, after checking the inventory, repossessed the inn. The shamefaced Jiang thanked all present, obtained a cart, loaded his things onto it and took himself off. Of him we need say no more.
Wu Song now invited the neighbours and the celebrations went on till they were quite drunk. It was already late when they dispersed and Wu Song slept soundly till morning.
When the Warden heard that his son had regained control of the inn at Happy Woods, he mounted and rode over to thank Wu Song personally. The celebrations in Wu Song's honour continued for days. By now the people of Happy Woods all knew Wu Song's reputation and no one omitted to pay his respects. The inn was tidied up and repaired, and opened for business again. The Warden went back to the business of administering the Fortress of Peace.
The Young Master sent out spies to discover, if they could, where Jiang and his family had taken themselves off to, but their whereabouts remained a mystery. So he settled down to his work and paid Jiang no further heed. He invited Wu Song to stay on at the inn. The Young Master's business flourished, profits more than doubling. Every betting shop and stall in the place handed over money with interest. The Young Master had gained tremendous status from Wu Song, and he honoured Wu Song as he might his own mother and father. Of the Young Master and his continued management of Happy Woods we shall say no more. It was a case of:
What was obtained by force, to force again is lost;
*Mostly the way of virtue's the way to gain the most.*
*Happy Woods once more o'erflows with happiness.*
Evil requites the wicked, the innocent gain redress.
The days slipped by and soon a month had passed. The fierce heat of summer soon gave way before the autumn equinox. Fresh breezes dissipated the sultry heat. Autumn had arrived.
But to cut a long story short, one day when the Young Master was sitting in the inn chatting with Wu Song about martial arts, a couple of soldiers appeared at the inn door leading a horse. Entering, they asked the owner: "Which is Captain Wu Song, killer of the tiger?"
The Young Master recognized the speaker as one of the aides of the Mengzhou garrison commander, General Zhang Mengfang. He stepped forward and asked: "What do you want with Captain Wu?"
The officer replied: "His Excellency has heard that Captain Wu is a brave soldier. He has sent us with a horse to fetch him. Here is the order."
The Young Master examined it. Privately he was thinking: "General Zhang is my father's superior — my father is under his command and so also, as a convicted prisoner, is Wu Song. I'd better advise him to go."
So he spoke to Wu Song: "These officers have been sent from General Zhang's headquarters to fetch you. They've even brought a horse for you. What do you think you should do?"
Wu Song, always straightforward, didn't prevaricate. "Since he's calling for me, I'd better go and see what he wants." He changed his clothes and cap and accompanied by with one of the retainers mounted and rode with the officers to Mengzhou.
Arriving at the General's residence, he dismounted and followed the officers in, till they stood at the entrance to the hall where General Zhang awaited them. The General smiled to himself when Wu Song arrived. "Let him come in," he said, "I want to see him." Wu Song entered and saluted, then stood to one side respectfully with his arms crossed.
"I have heard you are a strong and valiant soldier," the General said, "the sort who fears no enemy, one who'd be loyal through thick and thin. I need such a man on my staff. Would you be prepared to serve as my personal aide?"
Wu Song knelt and thanked the General. "I am a convict from the prison camp," he said. "If you show me this enormous favour, of course I shall be your faithful servant, yours to command in any service."
General Zhang expressed his satisfaction. He ordered food and drink and plied Wu Song with wine till he was quite drunk. He had a room off the main gallery furnished for Wu Song to sleep in. Next day servants were sent to the Young Master's to fetch Wu Song's luggage. From now on Wu Song lived at General Zhang's and the General required his company at all hours, constantly inviting him into his own quarters to eat and drink. Wu Song had the run of the residence and was treated like one of the family. The General commanded a tailor to equip Wu Song with a complete set of autumn clothes.
Wu Song found all this very flattering. But he said to himself: "Apparently the General is determined to advance me. He hasn't once let me out of his sight since I came, and I've no time even to go and see the Young Master at Happy Woods, who's most likely been sending people to see me but they're not allowed in."
The fact is that since his arrival the General seemed to have taken a great fancy to Wu Song. If anyone with some official business requested Wu Song's help and Wu Song spoke to the General, the latter always agreed to everything. So people gave Wu Song gifts of gold and silver and silk and suchlike. Wu Song bought a wicker trunk and locked these gifts up in it. Of this no more.
Time sped by and soon it was the Mid-Autumn Festival. What a fine mid-autumn scene it was:
*The jade disk shines coldly in the sky; the autumn breeze blows softly. On the path by the well the Wutong leaves are fallen; the pond is choked with weeds. Mournful is the cry of the first geese, anxious the music of the winter cricket. Tossing in the wind the willows are half stripped; glistening with raindrops the hibiscus flaunts its beauty. Autumn's breath even-handedly urges on the season's changes; moonlight envelopes river and hill.*
To celebrate the festival, General Zhang arranged the feast in an interior court, beneath the Ducks and Drakes Tower, and he invited Wu Song. But when Wu Song saw that there were ladies present, he just drank one cup and was about to turn round and leave. The General stopped him with a shout: "Where do you think you're going?"
"Sir!" Wu Song replied. "You are feasting with the female members of your family, it is not correct for me to be here."
The General treated this as absurd. "Nonsense!" he said. "I respect you as a man of integrity and invited you on purpose to come and feast with us, like one of the family, why should you withdraw?" He told Wu Song to sit down.
"But I am a convict," Wu Song protested. "How can I sit with Your Excellency?"
"My dear fellow," the General said, "why be so difficult? There are no outsiders present, there's nothing to stop you sitting down."
Wu Song went on protesting his unworthiness and trying to leave, but the General would have none of it, and insisted that he sit down with them. In the end Wu Song saluted respectfully and seated himself as far away as possible, maintaining a respectful posture. The General told the maids to offer Wu Song wine. After half a dozen cups the General ordered more snacks and then a complete dinner was served — and repeated. All this time they chatted about martial arts.
"When real men drink, it shouldn't be from small cups," the General said. "Bring a big mug and pour for our friend here."
Wu Song was immediately served with several mugs of wine. Moonlight was now flooding through a window on the east. Wu Song was quite drunk. He had lost all his inhibitions and just kept on drinking.
The General called for one of his favourites, a girl called Yulan, to sing for them. Here's what Yulan was like:
*Fair as a lotus, with cherry lips and eyebrows drawn in a curve like the blue line of distant mountains and, lying beneath, a pair of eyes bright as autumn waters. A graceful slender waist girt with a green skirt that allows but a precious glimpse of the feet. The white body delicately perfumed, the arms lightly encased in sleeves of scarlet silk. A peacock brooch to restrain luxuriant locks. Holding the ivory clappers high above her head she struts the stage.*
So motioning to Yulan, the General said: "There are no outsiders here, no one but my good friend Captain Wu. Why don't you sing us some Moon Festival songs? Let us hear your voice."
Yulan picked up the clappers, curtsied and launched into a Mid-Autumn song by Su Dongpo:
When will the moon be bright again?
*Cup in hand, ask the clear sky.*
*Who knows in the palaces of heaven what year*
*It is tonight? I would ride the wind there but fear*
*The cold of those remote and beauteous regions*
*Would be more than I could bear.*
*I shall get up and dance with shadows,*

*There is nothing like it among men.*
*The blind is pulled right up*
*And moonlight floods the room, banishing sleep.*
Hate should not be. And why
*Is the moon so often full at parting?*
*Men have their joy and grief, their partings and reunions,*
*The moon has its light and dark, waxing and waning.*
*It has ever been thus, that there is nothing perfect.*
Let us just hope for life, and that miles apart
The sight of beauty may join our hearts.
When she had finished, Yulan put down the clappers, curtsied and stood to one side.
"Yulan, bring us a round of wine," said the General.
She took up a tray at once, while a maid filled the bowls. Then she took the wine round, offering it first to the General, then to his wife and finally to Wu Song. The General ordered the bowls to be filled to the brim. During all this, Wu Song would not raise his eyes. He received the wine where he sat apart, emptied the bowl in one go to the health of the General and his lady, and quickly put it back.
Pointing to Yulan, the General said: "This girl is clever and quick-witted, she's an excellent musician and a good hand at needlework. If you don't have any objection, I propose that within the next few days, whenever it's most auspicious, you can get married."
Wu Song jumped to his feet, bowed and said: "I am nobody, how could I possibly presume to marry somebody from Your Excellency's household? I should really be making a fool of myself."
"If I suggest it," said the general, "I mean it. There's no point in arguing. I never go back on my word."
By this time Wu Song had drunk a dozen bowls in quick succession and the wine was beginning to rush to his head. It is to be feared that he was no longer in complete control of himself. He rose to his feet and bowing to the General and his wife returned to his room off the main gallery. But when he went inside, he found the wine and food lay heavy on his stomach and he couldn't sleep. So he changed and took off his cap, picked up a club, and went to practise in the centre of the hall, under the light of the moon. After executing several movements, completing several routines, he glanced up and saw from the sky that it was well past midnight. He returned to his room and was about to undress and go to bed when he heard a cry of "Thief! Thief!" from the inner chambers of the residence. "The General has been so kind to me," he said to himself, "if there's a thief in his quarters it's my duty to go and help."
Seizing his club, he hastened to the inner chambers. Here he met the singer, Yulan, rushing out in a panic. "A thief has got in," she shouted, "he's gone into the garden!"
Club in hand, Wu Song dashed into the garden to investigate. He looked around but saw nothing. He turned and hurried back inside. But he failed to observe a wooden stool which was suddenly thrust out from the shadows, so that he tripped and fell. Immediately half a dozen soldiers appeared and shouted: "We've got him!" They fell on Wu Song and trussed him up with hemp rope.
"It's me!" Wu Song shouted. But they had no intention of letting him explain. At this moment a blaze of lamps and candles flooded the building. From the hall where he was sitting, General Zhang bellowed: "Bring him here!" The soldiers dragged Wu Song stumbling into his presence.
"I'm not the thief, I'm Wu Song," the captive shouted.
When he saw who it was the General exploded. His whole face changed. "You bloody convict!" he shouted. "So you're the thief, are you, a villain with the heart and soul of a dog! And I was fool enough to give you a leg up, to try to help you. I would have denied you nothing, why, I even asked you to drink with us, to sit and eat with us! I had plans for you, I would have given you an official post. Is this the way you repay me?"
Wu Song cried: "But sir, I've done nothing wrong! I came to catch the thief, how can you take me for the thief? I'm a man of honour, I don't do things like that!"
"Don't deny it, you shameless villain! Take him back to his room and search it for stolen goods."
The soldiers escorted Wu Song back to his room, where the wicker trunk was opened. On top there were a whole lot of clothes. Underneath they found silver wine cups and platters, a treasure trove of several hundred taels. Wu Song stood gasping in amazement, he couldn't believe his eyes. The soldiers carried the trunk back to the hall. On seeing it, the General burst out again: "You bloody convict, have you no conscience? The stolen goods have been found in your trunk, you can't deny it! It's right, what they say, 'You can't judge a man by his appearance.' On the outside you look like an ordinary human being, but inside you've the heart and soul of a thief! Now that there's proof you haven't a leg to stand on." He gave orders for the stolen goods to be put under seal and taken to the strong room for safekeeping and said he would deal with the thief in the morning. Wu Song loudly protested his innocence, but no one would listen to him. The soldiers, having disposed of the loot, placed him in a cell under guard. The General meanwhile had quickly sent someone to inform the magistrate and bribe the court officials.
Next day at dawn, when the court was already in session, with the magistrate, his assistants, bailiffs and guards all present, Wu Song was brought in. The stolen goods were produced and a confidant of the General's presented an affidavit giving details of the robbery. Having perused this document, the magistrate ordered his officers to tie Wu Song up. The gaolers then brought out the instruments of persuasion and placed them in full view. When Wu Song tried to explain, the magistrate interrupted: "This fellow is a banished convict, of course he's going to steal, no doubt the mere sight of riches was too much for him. In view of the fact that we have the stolen goods, clear evidence of the crime, there's no need to listen to his rubbish, just take him away and beat him soundly."
Each of the gaoler's assistants took a split bamboo and started raining down blows. Wu Song understood clearly that there was absolutely nothing he could do but submit and produce a confession: "On the fifteenth of this month I saw in the quarters of the General a quantity of silver wine cups and platters. My greed was aroused and I found an opportunity to purloin it under cover of night for my own personal advantage."
After this confession the magistrate said: "There you are! With this scoundrel it's simply a case of the mere sight of riches being too much for him, that's all there is to it. Take him and fit him with a cangue." The gaolers took Wu Song away, fitted the cangue and locked him away in a cell for condemned men.
When they took him down into the dungeons, Wu Song thought: "The awful thing is, it was all a trap that bastard General Zhang set for me, and I fell for it. If ever I come out of this alive he's going to be sorry!"
The gaolers committed Wu Song to the dungeons where he wore chains on his feet at all times and his hands were secured by wooden manacles, allowing him not the slightest relief.
Meanwhile, what of the Young Master? The matter had already been reported to him and he had gone hurriedly to the prison fortress to consult his father. "Obviously Captain Zhang is behind this, carrying out Jiang the Door-God's revenge on his behalf. He has bribed General Zhang and they concocted this scheme to destroy Wu Song," said the Warden. "No doubt he sent someone to pay off everyone concerned. After receiving money and gifts they wouldn't give Wu Song a chance to explain. Evidently they want him dead. But I've been thinking: Wu Song's crime does not merit the death penalty. All we've got to do is buy over a couple of gaolers and we can easily protect him whilst he's there. When he gets out we'll have to think of something else."
"The head gaoler at present is a fellow called Kang, who's a very great friend of mine," said the Young Master. "Suppose I go and ask him to help?"
"Well, it's on your account that Wu Song is suffering persecution, what better time to help him than now?"
The Young Master collected up a few hundred taels of silver and went off to see Kang the gaoler at his home. But Kang was out. The Young Master told one of his family to go to the gaol and inform him. In a little while Kang returned and spoke with the Young Master.
The Young Master told him the whole story. "I'll tell you the truth," said Kang. "All this is the doing of Captain Zhang and General Zhang. They've not only the same name, they're sworn blood brothers as well. At present Jiang the Door-God is hiding in Captain Zhang's house. He got the captain to bribe General Zhang and they cooked up this scheme between them. Jiang has bribed absolutely everybody, we've all had money from him. In the court the magistrate is quite ready to let him call the tune. They'd like to finish Wu Song off, but there's one person involved in the case, the clerk of the court, a fellow called Ye, who won't consent. That's the only reason they can't touch him. You see, this law official is an upright and honest man, he won't agree to the death of an innocent party, that's why Wu Song is still untouched. After what you've just told me, sir, I shall look after him myself, so far as the gaol is concerned. I'll go over there and make things a bit easier for him right away. In future he shan't suffer a moment's unease. What you'd better do is quickly send someone to talk to Mr. Ye and ask him to speed up the sentencing, then your man will be safe."
The Young Master took out a hundred taels of silver for Kang, but the latter refused. He refused three times before finally accepting it.
The Young Master left and returned to the fortress. He sought out someone who knew Ye well and sent him a hundred taels of silver, asking him to treat the case as urgent and get a sentence as quickly as possible. In fact Ye knew all about Wu Song's good qualities and was inclined anyway to help him. He had already classified the case as doubtful but knew the magistrate had received General Zhang's bribes and would not countenance a light sentence. However, the charge against Wu Song was one of theft, which was not a capital offence, so what they were aiming to do was to let the case drag on, while they planned a way of ending Wu Song's life in the gaol.
Now after receiving the hundred taels of silver from the Young Master and learning that Wu Song had been framed, the clerk of the court willingly reduced the charges in the indictment and agreed to help save Wu Song by procuring a sentence as soon as the preliminary detention was completed.
Next day the Young Master prepared great quantities of wine and food and got Kang to take him to the gaol and admit him to see Wu Song and give him the provisions. By this time Kang had already checked up on Wu Song and his conditions had been improved. The Young Master also took along twenty or thirty taels of silver which he distributed among the prison staff. As he took out the food and drink and encouraged Wu Song to eat, the Young Master whispered in his ear: "It's absolutely clear that the trouble you are in was all contrived to get Jiang his revenge and to destroy you. But take heart, do not despair. I've already sent a message to Clerk Ye. He knows all about you. As soon as you've served out your term here you'll be sentenced and allowed to leave and then you can take what action you like."
As soon as Wu Song's conditions were relaxed he had formed the intention of trying to escape. But when he heard what the Young Master had to say, he changed his mind.
After thus reassuring Wu Song, the Young Master returned to the fortress. Two days later he again prepared food and drink and some money, and got Kang to admit him to the prison to see Wu Song. They talked and he regaled Wu Song with food and wine. He also administered some small change in tips for the prison staff.
A few days later the Young Master once more prepared food and drink and had some clothes made, and through the good services of Kang again got himself admitted to the prison, where he invited everyone to drink and gave them money so they would take good care of Wu Song. He made the latter change his clothes and take some wine and food.
Now that he knew the way, the Young Master visited the prison three times in just a few days. He had become over-confident and his visits were observed by one of Captain Zhang's men who reported the fact. Captain Zhang passed the information on to General Zhang. General Zhang in turn sent someone carrying presents for the magistrate to report the matter to him. The magistrate, since he was corrupt and in their pay, ordered that the prison be constantly inspected and any strangers detained and questioned. The Young Master was told of this and thereafter did not dare go back again, so it was left to Kang and the other gaolers to take care of Wu Song. But the Young Master went regularly to Kang's house, where he received the news and was able to keep up with all the developments. Of this no more.
For the next two months or so, Ye did all he could to talk the magistrate round. He often explained the ins and outs of the case to him. Thus the magistrate learnt that General Zhang had received considerable sums of money from Jiang the Door-God, and that they were in cahoots with Captain Zhang to trap and destroy Wu Song, and he said to himself: "You lot have been receiving money for all this, but you want me to do the dirty work." He began to lose his enthusiasm for the job and neglected it.
When he had done nearly sixty days, Wu Song was brought forth from the prison and the court ordered the cangue to be removed. The clerk of the court read out the charges and the sentence was announced: twenty strokes of the cane and banishment to the prison camp at Enzhou, the stolen goods to be restored to the owner. General Zhang had to send one of his people to collect the stolen goods. Wu Song received the twenty strokes, had his cheeks tattooed with the golden seals and was fitted with a seven and a half catty iron-spiked cangue. A certificate was made out and two officers detailed to escort him. A deadline was fixed for his departure.
The two officers, bearing the certificate, led Wu Song from the court. The flogging he received, since the old Warden had spent his money so freely and since the friendly clerk of the court was overseeing it, and since the magistrate knew that Wu Song had been the victim of a plot, was not at all severe; in fact he got off lightly.
Wearing the cangue and closely guarded by the two officers, Wu Song left the town, inwardly seething with anger. They had gone about half a mile when they came to an inn by the highway, from which the Young Master emerged to greet Wu Song. "I've been waiting for you," he said. His head was bandaged and his arm was in a sling.
"I haven't seen you for so long," Wu Song said. "How did you come to be in this state?"
"I'll tell you," said the Young Master. "After that time when I came to visit you three times in a row, the magistrate got to hear about it and started sending people to make random checks at the gaol and General Zhang also sent men to watch the gates on every side. I couldn't come to see you again, but I got news of you at Mr. Kang's. Then a fortnight ago when I was at the Happy Woods inn, Jiang the Door-God reappeared, with a gang of thugs. They beat me up really badly and Jiang insisted that I get all the locals to come and apologize. He seized the inn again, like before, and took over all the fixtures and stock. I had to stay home, I wasn't even able to get up from my bed. But today when I heard you were banished to Enzhou I got two padded coats for you for the journey. And there's two cooked geese here as well that I want you to have."
The Young Master invited the two guards. He suggested they should all go to an inn. But the guards refused, making a great fuss about it: "Wu Song is a vicious thief, if we accepted your offer, we'd really be in hot water at the government offices. You'd better clear off, unless you want to be beaten up."
The Young Master saw it was no good. So he took out a dozen taels of silver and offered them to the guards. They would not accept. Instead they indignantly urged Wu Song to get a move on.
The Young Master ordered two bowls of wine which he made Wu Song drink, and tied a bundle round his waist and attached the two geese to his cangue for him. Then he whispered in Wu Song's ear: "Inside the bundle are the two padded coats and some loose change wrapped up in a scarf. I want you to eat well on the journey. There's also a pair of hemp sandals with eight eyelets. You must watch out during the journey. Those two bastards don't seem to harbour good intentions."
Wu Song nodded. "No need to tell me, I'd already noticed. But even if they were twice as many I wouldn't fear them. You go home and rest and please don't worry. I can handle it."
The Young Master bade Wu Song goodbye with tears in his eyes. Of this no more.
Wu Song and his two guards set out. When they had gone a mile or two, the guards began to talk quietly among themselves. "Where's them two got to then?" Wu Song heard them say. He silently considered this. "You fools, you've given it away," he thought contemptuously. "I suppose someone was going to come along and knock me on the head!"
Wu Song's right hand was secured by the cangue but his left hand was free. So he grasped the geese which were attached to his cangue and applied himself to eating, without looking at the two guards. After a mile or so he was attacking the second of the cooked geese. He held it down with his right hand and tore pieces off it with his left. Eating occupied all his attention. A mile or so more and he had accounted for both the geese. They were now about three miles from their starting-point, when two men appeared ahead of them, standing by the roadside. These two carried halberds and had swords stuck through their belts. They waited, and then, when Wu Song and his guards were passing, fell into step beside them. Wu Song was able to observe certain signs expressive of a hidden meaning passing between the guards and the two who carried halberds. He also noticed that they were embarrassed when he caught their eye, but he said nothing and pretended he hadn't seen.
Before they had gone much further they came to the edge of a vast area of rivers and fish-ponds. On all sides were desolate creeks and broad channels. The five men reached a place where the water was crossed by a bridge of broad wooden planks. There was a tall structure beside it bearing a sign which read: "Flying Clouds Quay." At this point Wu Song innocently asked: "What do you call this place?"
"Are you blind or what?" the two guards replied. "Can't you see that sign next to the bridge there, what says 'Flying Clouds Quay'?"
Wu Song came to a halt and said: "I want to wash my hands, then."
As the two with halberds approached him he gave a shout of "In you go!" and with a flying kick sent one of them sailing head over heels into the water. The other hurriedly tried to turn round, but Wu Song's right foot was already poised and it propelled him into the water with an enormous splash. The two guards were terrified and wanted to get off the bridge and run for it, but Wu Song shouted: "Where do you think you're going?" With one wrench he broke the cangue in two and hurled it from the bridge. One of the guards collapsed from shock, the other made a run for it, but Wu Song charged after him and felled him with one blow of the fist. He picked up a halberd which was floating on the water and fell on the guard, striking several blows. The guard expired on the spot. Wu Song then turned back and dealt with the one who had fainted, cutting him to pieces. The two in the water had struggled to the shore and were hoping to escape. Wu Song gave chase and cut one of them down. He shouted to the other: "If you tell me everything, I'll spare you!"
The second halberdier said: "We work for Mr. Jiang. Our master made the plan together with Captain Zhang. They sent us to help the guards, the idea was to take care of you."
"Where is your master right now?"
"When we left he was with the Captain and the General — they were all at General Zhang's house, drinking wine in the Ducks and Drakes Tower, waiting for us to go back and report."
"Well, in view of all this I find I can't let you off after all," Wu Song said. He raised his blade and brought it down again. The man was dead.
He detached the swords and took the best one. He tipped the two corpses into the water. Then he wasn't sure if they were both dead, so he picked up the halberd again and thrust it into each of the bodies several times.
Now he stood there on the bridge, looking around him and thinking: "I've killed these four stooges, but the big shots, the two Zhangs and Jiang, are still getting off scot-free. Where's the satisfaction in that?"
Halberd in hand he stood there, for a moment undecided. Then he knew what to do. He turned back and headed at full speed for Mengzhou.
If he hadn't, things would have been different. He would never have killed so many corrupt men, or released so much pent-up anger.

In the painted hall, the bodies point this way and that,
In the red light of the candles, the room is swimming in blood.

"THE first thing," said Wu Song, "is that you immediately restore all the household goods and furniture to Shi En, the 'Golden Eyed Tiger Cub.'"
Jiang immediately agreed to do this.
"Secondly, that as soon as I allow you to get up you will summon all the brave heroes of this Kuaihuo Forest to come and give obeisance to Shi En."
Jiang also agreed to do this.
"Thirdly, that as soon as you have done these two things you will leave this district, and not return to it again. If I see you here again I will again beat you. And if you come ten times, I will beat you ten times. If I treat you lightly you will be nearly dead, but if I beat you thoroughly you will certainly be killed. Do you also agree to this condition?"
Jiang wanted to preserve his life so as soon as he heard this he also agreed.
Wu Song picked him up, and saw that his face was bruised and that his lips were swollen already. His head was wrested to one side, and blood was flowing from a wound in his temple. Wu Song pointed his finger at Jiang the 'Door God,' and abused him, "What a small thing you are! When I killed the tiger I only gave three blows of my fist and a couple of kicks. Be quick and hand over those plunderings. If you are a little slow I shall beat you again."

Jiang the 'Door God,' now knew that his opponent was Wu Song, and he signified his submission. While they were talking thus Shi En arrived with about twenty armed men to settle the issue by force if necessary. They were exceedingly delighted to see that Wu Song had been victorious, and they all gathered round him. Wu Song pointing his finger at Jiang the 'Door God,' said, "The original proprietor of the shop has now arrived so now send for the men to make obeisance to him."

Jiang asked them all to go and sit down in the inn. Wu Song took them all to the inn, where they found the floor was all flooded with wine. The men and the girl had managed to get out of the jars but their faces were badly besmeared, and their clothes were dripping with wine. All the other waiters had run away. Wu Song and his followers entered the inn and sat down. He told Jiang to get his things packed, ready, and put the baggage on a cart, and send them and the girl off in advance. The waiters were sent off to bring the heroes of the village to the inn to pay respects to Shi En. When they arrived they were all asked to take their seats at the tables on which was a bountiful supply of the best wine.

Wu Song told Shi En to take the seat of honor, and Jiang the 'Door God,' to sit by his side. Each man had a large cup, and after they had all drunk several cups of warm wine Wu Song spoke, "Honorable neighbors, I, Wu Song, committed murder at Yanggu County, and was banished to this place. Upon arrival here I heard people say that this inn in the Kuaihuo Forest formerly belonged to Shi En, and that it was taken from him by force, and without payment, by Jiang the 'Door God.' But you must not suppose that Shi En is my master or that I have any thing to do with him. I have always tried to punish those who are unfair to their fellow men. In my travels I would draw out my sword whenever I see any injustice. I have never been afraid of death. Today I would have given Jiang the 'Door God,' a very severe thrashing, and rid this village of an evil but out of due regard to you honorable neighbors I spare his life, on the condition that he must go to some other district this very evening. If however I ever see him return to this place I will deal with him in the same way that I treated the tiger on Jingyang Ridge."

Upon hearing this all the neighbors knew that he was Wu Song, and they now stood up and spoke in favor of Jiang the 'Door God,' "Good sir, please appease your anger. We will see that he goes, and restores the property to Shi En."

Jiang dared not say a word, but duly handed over the property to Shi En. He saluted the neighbors, put his baggage on a cart, and departed.

Wu Song drank wine with the neighbors until they were all drunk. They left in the evening when Wu Song went to sleep, and did not get up until the following morning about 9 A.M.

When Shi, the old warden, heard that his son had again got control of the Kuaihuo Forest, he rode a horse, and upon reaching the inn he thanked Wu Song for what he had done. During the following days they had bountiful feasts for celebration. In the Kuaihuo Forest there was not a single man who did not hear of Wu Song and come to congratulate him. The inn was renovated, and reopened. Shi, the old warden, returned home, but Wu Song stayed at the inn where the business was more prosperous than before. All the gambling dens and exchange shops sent greater sums to Shi En, so that he was now making double profits. Shi En paid great respects to Wu Song, and looked upon him as a parent.

After more than a month the weather got cooler, and pleasant breezes introduced the beginning of autumn. We might write a lot about this pleasant period, but we must desist. One day Shi En was discussing with Wu Song the art of fencing and hand combat, when they saw three soldiers leading a horse stop in front of the inn, and ask for the proprietor, and then also asked whether "that tiger slayer, Wu Song, was also there."

Shi En recognized the soldiers as the adjutants of Colonel Zhang Mengfang at Mengzhou. So he went outside and asked what they wanted Wu Song for.

"Our commander has ordered us to come here to invite Wu Song," said a soldier. "Here is our written order."

Shi En read the order and thought, "This Colonel Zhang is my father's superior, and my father is at his disposal. As Wu Song is a banished convict and also under his control so that he will have to go." So Shi En went inside and told Wu Song that these soldiers had an order from Colonel Zhang to take him to see that officer, that they had brought a horse for him to ride. And he asked what did he think about it?

Wu Song was a straightforward man, and at once replied, "As the Colonel wants me, I must go and see what he has to say."

So Wu Song went at once to change his dress, and taking a servant with him, mounted the horse, and set off for Mengzhou. Upon arrival at Colonel Zhang's house he dismounted, and followed a soldier inside.

When Zhang saw Wu Song he was much pleased, and told him to come forward. Wu Song saluted, and clasping both hands stood with attention at one side.

Zhang spoke, "I have heard that you are a great man, without equal in bravery, and are firm and constant with your companions whether in life or death. For some time I have been looking out for such a man as you, but do not know whether you would care to act as my confidential personal guard."

Wu Song knelt down and said, "I am a criminal. If I am to be favored by such a promotion I would, of course, like to be your servant, and wait upon Your Excellency."

Zhang was much pleased at this, and ordered a servant to bring some fruit and wine. When it arrived he poured out the wine himself, and offered it to Wu Song. Wu Song drank much wine. He also arranged for him a room quite close to his own quarter.

The following day he sent a messenger to Shi En to get Wu Song's things as the latter was going to stay at the Colonel's residence. After that Zhang often had Wu Song in his private apartments at meals, and treated him as a member of his family. A tailor was ordered to make suits of clothes for him for the autumn season. Wu Song was much pleased at these indications of good will, and knew that it was very unusual for such a high official to treat men in this way. "Since I came here I have not been a few steps away from His Excellency so that I have had no opportunity of going to the Kuaihuo Forest to visit Shi En. But he has several times sent men to see me, but they have never been allowed to come inside here."

In the *yamen* Colonel Zhang and Wu Song became more and more intimate as time went on. Whatever Wu Song spoke in favor of any man who had confided in him with any important affair Colonel Zhang would agree to. Therefore people gave Wu Song much silver, money, silk, etc. which he stored away in a ratten basket.

Time passed quickly, and it was soon the middle of autumn. Colonel Zhang prepared a feast in his inner apartments to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, and invited Wu Song to join him. When Wu Song arrived he saw the wife and family of Zhang were there, so after drinking one cup of wine he prepared to depart, but Zhang asked where he was going. Wu Song replied, "As your wife and family are here I must act in a polite way and not stay."

Zhang laughed, but was pleased to hear this. He said, "You make a mistake! I respect you as a hero. I particularly asked you to come, and dine with me, so what difference does it make that my wife and family are also here? Please sit down."

"But I am a criminal," replied Wu Song. "So how dare I sit down in your company."

"Hero," said Chang, "why should you not associate with us? There are no strangers here, so why not sit down?"

Wu Song still wanted to go, but Zhang repeatedly pressed him to stay. At last he agreed to stop, and sat down on the edge of the chair in accordance with etiquette. A maidservant filled their cups with wine, and their conversation was about military skill. At last Zhang asked him why he drank so little wine, and he told the girl attendant to bring large silver cups for the wine. He then gave Wu Song plenty of wine, and one cup quickly followed another. The bright moonlight was streaming through the eastern window. Wu Song was now drinking to excess, and being half drunk threw decorum to the wind, and forgot his manners. Zhang sent for a young maidservant named Yulan, whom Zhang liked very much because of her singing. When she arrived he said to her, "There is nobody here except my personal bodyguard Wu Song. You can sing to us that song about the Mid-Autumn Moonlight." Yulan took her ivory castanets, and saluted. She then sang the poem by Su Dongpo:

THE AUTUMN MOON

I cannot sleep a bit tonight,
The sky's so clear with moonlight;
I roll up jeweled blinds and gaze,
On scene so vast and lovely.
The moon has light, and shadows black,
Now full, but soon a crescent;
But why not always full and round,
And perfect—never changing?
All men have pleasures—sorrows too,
And friendship mixed with hatred;
I hope for future manifest,
With beauty, virtue constant.
Bright moon sails th' empyrean blue,
And knows the ways of Heaven;
It's breast unstirred by feelings vile,
A piece of jade quite flawless.
I wish to mount the wind and fly,
To those far heights so dizzy;
And climb the pure, cold towers of jade,
And gaze on jeweled heavens.
But all! I should a shadow cast,
Upon the scene below me;
I am but human and of clay,
Must leave those heights for Chang'e.

("Chang'e" is the goddess in the moon.)

When Yulan had finished, she gave a woman's salute; put down her ivory castanets, and stood at one side.

Colonel Zhang spoke to her, "Yulan, you can fill up our cups with wine." She took a tray with wine, and a maidservant accompanied her filling the cups. She first served the Colonel, then his wife, and then Wu Song. When Wu Song was receiving his wine he bowed his head slightly as a sign of compliments. He saluted both Colonel Zhang and his wife, and then drank the wine at one draft, and returned the cup to the girl.

Colonel Zhang pointed to Yulan and said to Wu Song, "This girl is very clever. She is skilled not only in music, but is very capable at needlework. If she finds favor in your eye we could select a lucky day, and marry her to you."

Wu Song saluted and replied, "I am hardly worthy of marrying a woman from your household. Would it not also injure my prospects of a livelihood here?"

The Colonel laughed, "As I have said I must give her to you, so do not decline my proposal."

Wu Song felt that he had taken too much wine and was afraid that he might lose his manners. He got up, saluted everybody, and left. Upon entering his own room he felt that he could not sleep on account of the wine so he took off his upper garments and unwound his turban. Taking a cudgel he went out into the yard. There was bright moonlight, and he went through a few exercises. Noticing the position of the moon and stars he knew that it was about 1 A.M. So going indoors again he was just on the point of undressing when he heard cries in the inner apartments that thieves had got in. Wu Song thought that as the Colonel had treated him so well it was his duty to go and rescue him from the thieves. So seizing his cudgel he hurried off to the inner apartments, and there met Yulan in an agitated state. She shouted out, "A thief has entered the garden." So he went into the flower garden, and searched for the thief without finding him. At last he gave up the search, and was carelessly returning when in a shadow he fell over a stool that had been left there. Immediately about eight soldiers rushed forward shouting, "Here's the thief!" They seized him, and bound his hands behind his back with a rope.

Wu Song called out, "It is not I!" but the soldiers were not going to listen to anything he said. Wu Song saw that Colonel Zhang was seated in a room where there was a bright light from a large candle. Zhang called out, "Bring the thief here!"

The soldiers beat Wu Song at each step as they took him into the room where he called out, "I am Wu Song. I am not a thief." Upon looking at him Zhang was very angry, and abused him, saying, "You banished thief! You previously had the eyes, eyebrows, heart, and liver of a thief. Yet I treated you well, asked you to dine with me, and had the intention of making you an official. So how is it that you have now done this vile thing?"

"Sir, I came to try and arrest the thief," said Wu Song, "and they have arrested me by mistake. I am a most respectable person so how could I commit a theft?"

"You rascal need not offer any excuse," said Zhang. "Take him to his room, and see if there are any stolen goods there."

The soldiers took Wu Song to his quarters, and opened his boxes. At the top was his clothing, but underneath were silver drinking cups and vessels, which were worth about two hundred taels of silver. Upon seeing these Wu Song stared with astonishment as they were not his things. The soldiers took all the valuables to Zhang who said, "Banished thief! So impertinent you are! These things have been found in your boxes so what excuse can you make? There is a saying, 'It is easier to get animals reincarnated, but the souls of men never change.' Outwardly you have a honest man's appearance, but it is evident that you have the heart of a criminal." Turning to the soldiers he said, "Take the stolen things, and after sealing them up place them in the treasury for the night and tomorrow we will cross-examine this villain."

Wu Song called out, "I am being wrongly accused." But the soldiers would not allow him to say anything more. They took Wu Song away, and locked him up in a cell. Zhang sent a messenger that same night to report the affair to the Prefect, and also offered bribes to all the lower officials. Early the next morning the Prefect took his seat on the bench, and was surrounded by all the minor officials, *yamen* aides, and policemen. Wu Song was brought into court under arrest, and the sealed packages of the stolen goods were also brought in. A confidential secretary of Colonel Zhang handed to the Prefect a dispatch stating the details of the case agaist Wu Song. The jailers placed before Wu Song the instruments for punishment, but before Wu Song could utter a single word, the Prefect said, "This fellow was banished from a distant place, and how could he help becoming a thief. He has evidently seen valuables about, and so has harbored evil thoughts. Since the booty has been discovered in his possession so that there is no need for us to listen to his stupid talk, and we will give him a severe beating."

The jailer took the split bamboo, and dealt Wu Song a perfect downpour of blows. Wu Song knew that there was something underhand in all this, but as he saw no means of escape he confessed as follows: "On the fifteenth day of this month I saw many silver drinking cups in the *yamen*, and that was when I got the idea of stealing them." This forced confession was duly recorded, and handed to the Prefect who said, "This fellow was evidently led astray upon seeing so many valuables, but we won't go into that. Bring the cangue here, nail it on his neck, and take him to prison for execution. The jailer fastened on Wu Song an oblong cangue, and took him off to the jail where prisoners await execution. Upon arriving there Wu Song thought matters over. He could see no other explanation, but that Colonel Zhang had arranged this trick to get him into trouble. He thought however if he could survive this infliction he would take the matter in hand and look for revenge. In the prison both Wu Song's legs and hands were locked with chains so that he could hardly move at all.

Now Shi En heard of this affair and went to discuss it with his father. His father said, "Evidently this is the revenge of Jiang the 'Door God,' who must have heavily bribed Colonel Zhang, and then both of them have arranged this plot. They must have bribed everybody so that no one wants to hear his defense, but all hope to kill him. I think that he is not so guilty as deserving of death so we had better send money and bribe the jailers. They may alleviate the punishments, and allow him to live. Besides we must find other ways to save him."

"There is a minor officer in the prison named Kang who is my intimate friend," said Shi En, "so I have to go and talk to him."

"You are under an obligation to Wu Song so if you do not go who else would go?" said his father.

So Shi En took about two hundred taels of silver, and went to Kang's house, but the jailer had not returned from the prison. Shi En sent a servant to the prison, and in a short time Kang arrived. Shi En told him all about Wu Song.

Kang replied, "The matter has really been arranged between Colonel Zhang and his friend Captain Zhang. Jiang the 'Door God,' has been staying with Captain Zhang and requested him to bribe his friend Colonel Zhang for him to do this vile thing. Every official concerned has been bribed as well. In the prison every jailer has been paid to do this. The Prefect is willing to take the responsibility for the killing of Wu Song, but Chief Clerk Ye does not agree. Ye is a very honest and upright man, and would not punish innocent persons, so Wu Song is in no danger at present. Now that I have heard your version of the case I will see that Wu Song is well treated in the prison. You had better however send someone to explain the case to Chief Clerk Ye, and ask him to arrange for Wu Song's release."

Shi En gave Kang one hundred taels of silver, and after some declination Kang accepted it. Shi En then returned home, and found a man who was a personal friend of Chief Clerk Ye. He explained the matter, and gave him one hundred taels of silver to approach Ye about the matter.

Now Chief Clerk Ye already knew that Wu Song was a hero, and he had already a mind to save him although the Prefect had personally given him instructions to deal with the prisoner harshly. Examining the accusations he saw that even if Wu Song had stolen goods he was not deserving of death. Taking everything into consideration he decided to exempt Wu Song from the crime, especially as he had now received one hundred taels of silver through a friend of the prisoner.

The next day Shi En took a large quantity of wine and food to the prison, and was allowed by Kang to give it personally to Wu Song. Shi En also gave the jailers about thirty taels of silver and they loosened the chains binding Wu Song. Shi En told Wu Song that he had spoken to Chief Clerk Ye about his case, and he would be treated much better and that when the sentence had been served he would be released. At that time Wu Song's bonds had not been so tight so that he had even begun to think of escaping from the prison, but now that Shi En had held out hope of other arrangements he gave up that idea. Shi En spoke many comforting words to Wu Song before he left for home.

Two days later Shi En took a further supply of wine, food, and money to the prison, and after seeing the jailer Kang he was allowed to interview Wu Song again. Upon returning home he engaged a man again to visit the officials concerned, and urged them to settle the case of Wu Song as soon as possible. After a few days more Shi En again visited the prison and distributed more money, wine, and food to the jailers, and begged them still to treat Wu Song with leniency. He also brought new clothes for Wu Song to change. Altogether Shi En visited the prison three times in this way.

Now it happened that a confidential servant of Captain Zhang saw Shi En visiting the prison, and reported the matter to his master. Captain Zhang conveyed this information to his friend Colonel Zhang who passed it to the Prefect with a present of money. The Prefect was a corrupt official, and received the bribe. He deputed a man to visit the prison, and keep a watch there as to what was happening. Whenever the spy saw an outsider there he would arrest him. But Shi En got to know of this so he kept away for some time. The jailers continued to treat Wu Song well. Shi En now had to visit the home of Kang, the prison official, where he got all the necessary news.

Chief Clerk Ye, who had the case in hand, had already made up his mind as to what should be done and reported to the Prefect all the underhand management of the two Zhangs. The Prefect himself was now well aware that Colonel Zhang and his friend Captain Zhang had received plenty of money from Jiang the 'Door God,' and that was why they both were trying to injure Wu Song. The Prefect thought, "Those fellows have got the money, and expect me to do the dirty work." Accordingly he was determined not to press the case any further. At the end of the second month Wu Song was taken before the Prefect who ordered the cangue be removed. Chief Clerk Ye read out the confessions of Wu Song's guilt, and the Prefect gave judgment that he be given twenty blows with the bamboo, and be sent to the prison at Enzhou. The stolen goods were to be restored to the owner, and they were duly delivered to the messenger from Colonel Zhang. The blows were duly inflicted on Wu Song, then his face was branded with characters, and a cangue weighing about ten pounds was fastened round his neck. A dispatch was written, and handed to two strong men who had been selected to convey Wu Song to En Chow.

Now Shi En's father had bribed the men not to give heavy blows. Both the Prefect and Chief Clerk Ye knew that Wu Song was wronged and so condoned the punishment.

Wu Song suppressed his anger. After the punishment the escort set off with Wu Song walking in front. They had not gone a quarter of a //when they passed an inn at the side of the road where Shi En came out and spoke to Wu Song: "I have been waiting here for some time in order to see you before you go."

Wu Song saw that Shi En had a bandage round his head, and his hand was suspended from his neck. So he asked, "I have not seen you for a long time, but how is it that you dress like this?"

"After I visited you in the prison the third time the Prefect got to know it, and sent a spy to keep watch in the prison, and Colonel Zhang also had another spy outside the prison to watch my movements. Therefore it was not advisable for me to visit you again in the prison. So I only went to the jailer Kang's house to get news.

"About a month ago Jiang the 'Door God,' accompanied by a number of men, came to the inn at the Kuaihuo Forest and assaulted me. They also insisted upon me paying obeisance to Jiang the 'Door God,' in the presence of mediators. He then took the inn and the furniture from me again. Today I heard that you are to be banished to Enzhou, so I bring two suits of cotton clothes here so that I can give them to you personally. I have also prepared two roasted geese which I hope you will partake of before starting on your long journey." He also invited the escort to enter the inn, and dine with them. But the two men declined because Wu Song was a thief, and if the officials got to know of this affair they would be complicated. They continued that if Shi En did not want a beating he must get away at once. Shi En did not like this talk so he offered the escort ten taels of silver. They angrily declined the money, and pressed Wu Song to start. Shi En bought two cups of wine, and offered them to Wu Song. He also strapped the bundle of clothing round his waist, and fastened the two roasted geese to his cangue. He then whispered to Wu Song, "Inside the bundle are some bits of silver which you can use for your expenses on the journey. There are also two pairs of hempen shoes for you. On the way you must beware of these two ruffians.'

"You need not say anything more," said Wu Song. "I understand. Even if there were four such men I should not be afraid. You go back now, and don't worry about me. I already have a plan."

Shi En wept as he departed.

Wu Song and his escort resumed their journey, but they had gone only a few //when the two soldiers conversed in an undertone, "Those two men have not arrived yet." But Wu Song heard this remark, and laughed to himself and thought, "Those two fellows evidently will be unfortunate if they come and fight with me. One of Wu Song's hands was fastened to the cangue, but the other hand was free. With the free hand he took the roasted geese off the cangue, and ate them as he walked. He had eaten both of them before they had gone a couple of //more. They were barely three //from the town when he saw two men at the side of the road. They both had halberds in their hands, and swords in their belts. As the escort came up they fell in behind without saying a word. But as they went along Wu Song noticed that they were winking to each other, and he almost got their meaning. They had hardly traveled another //before they came to a rapid flowing river with a large pool.

There was a broad wooden bridge across the river with an gate arch at one end on which were three characters, "Feiyun Pool." Pretending not to see this he asked his escort, "What is this place called?"

The two men replied, "As you are not blind you ought to be able to see the characters on the gate arch that this is the Feiyun Pool."

Wu Song stopped on the bridge, and said, "I need to pee here."

The two armed with halberds had barely come one step nearer when Wu Song cried out "down you go!" and with one kick he knocked one into the water. The other turned to escape, but Wu Song kicked him in the back, and he turned a somersault into the water as well. The two other men escorting him were excited at this, and turned to get off the bridge, but Wu Song shouted out, "Where are you going?" At the same time he wrenched the cangue into two parts, and pursued the men. On leaving the bridge one man fell, but Wu Song ignored him and catching up to the other one hit him with his fist, and knocked him down. One of the halberds had not fallen in the water so Wu Song got this, and killed both men. Both of the men whom he had kicked into the river had by now swum to the bank, but Wu Song overtook them, and killed one of them at once. He seized hold of the other, and said, "If you tell me the truth I will not kill you."

The man said, "We are both followers of Jiang the 'Door God.' He and Colonel Zhang sent us to accompany your escort, and to kill you at the first opportunity."

"Where is Jiang the Door God, just now?"

"When we started off he was with Captain Zhang at Colonel Zhang's house, drinking wine in the Yuanyang Tower, and they told us to go there, and report the result of the plot."

"Under these circumstances I cannot forgive you," said Wu Song, and taking the halberd he killed that man also. He selected the best of the weapons, and threw the men's bodies into the river. He stayed on the bridge for some time looking round, and thought, "I've killed these four men but I'll not be satisfied until I've also killed Colonel Zhang, Jiang the 'Door God,' and Captain Zhang." He at last started off to return to Mengzhou.

Red lamp shines in drawing-room,
Sudden death has stained the floor.

## 129

### In Ducks & Drakes Tower, the General Zhang's bloodwill spill & Spatter; The false pilgrim Wu Song travels & comes to Centipede Hill Ridge during a Night Walk

It was already dusk when he entered the town. Wu Song went straight to a stableyard abutting the wall of General Zhang's rear garden and there concealed himself. The groom was still in the residence and had not yet returned.

Soon, a door near the corner of the wall squeaked open. The groom emerged, carrying a lantern. Someone inside the residence closed the door. Hidden in the shadows, Wu Song heard the watchman's drum. It was the fourth interval of the first watch. The groom fed the horses, hung up the lantern, spread his bedding, undressed and went to bed. Wu Song made a noise outside the stable door.

"I've just retired," shouted the groom. "You're too early if you've come to steal my clothes!"

Wu Song leaned his halberd beside the door, held the sword in his hand, and rattled the door. This was too much for the groom. He leaped naked from his bed, grabbed a pole, pulled the bolt and started to open the door. Wu Song barged in with a rush and seized him. The groom opened his mouth to yell, but the sight of the sword gleaming in the lamplight turned his bones to beancurd.

"Spare me," he pleaded weakly.

"Do you know me?" Wu Song demanded.

The groom recognized his voice. "Brother," he said, "this has nothing to do with me! Spare my life!"

"Then tell the truth! Where is General Zhang?"

"With Commandant Zhang and Jiang the Gate Guard Giant. The three of them have been drinking all day in the Duck and Drake Bower."

"Is that the truth?"

"May I die of boils if I'm lying!"

"In that case I can't spare you!" With one stab Wu Song killed the groom. He kicked the body aside and slipped the sword back into its sheath.

From the bundle around his waist he took the clothes Shi En had given him, changed into them, bound them tightly, and tucked the sheathed sword into his sash. He wrapped his loose silver in a coverlet from the groom's bed, thrust the bundle into his bag, and hung the bag next to the stable entry. He removed one of the double stable doors from its socket, leaned it against the garden wall, went back in to blow out the lamp, then came out again. Grasping his halberd, he clambered up the door to the top of the wall.

There was a faint moon. Wu Song leaped down into the garden, opened the small door in the wall, went out and returned the stable door to its original position, re-entered the garden and closed the wall door, but left it unlatched.

In a nearby building a lamp was gleaming. It was the kitchen. Two maids were complaining as they heated a kettle of hot water.

"We've been waiting on them all day, and still they don't go to bed," one of them was saying. "They keep wanting tea! And those two guests are so drunk they ought to be ashamed! But instead of coming down and resting, they just talk and talk and talk!"

Wu Song leaned his halberd against the building, pulled out his bloody sword, pushed open the creaking door, and rushed in. He grabbed one of the girls by the hair and killed her with a single stab. The other wanted to flee, but her feet seemed nailed to the floor. Though she opened her mouth to scream, no sound came out. She was paralyzed with terror (Even I, the teller of this tale—to say nothing of a girl—would have been too scared to utter a peep!) Wu Song thrust with his sword and killed her.

He dragged the bodies over beside the stove and blew out the kitchen lamp. In the light of the moon, he crossed stealthily over to the main hall. As a man who had free access to every quarter of the residence, he knew his way, and proceeded quickly to the Duck and Drake Bower. On tiptoe, he mounted the stairs.

By then the attendants were weary and annoyed, and had gone off elsewhere. Wu Song could hear the voices of General Zhang, Commandant Zhang and Jiang the Gate Guard Giant. At the head of the stairs he listened. Jiang was praising the general.

"I'm very grateful, Your Excellency, for helping me get revenge. I must show my thanks further, in a substantial manner."

"I would never have done such a thing if it weren't for the sake of my dear friend Commandant Zhang. Although it's cost you a bit of money, all the arrangements have been nicely made. It must be over by this time. The wretch probably is dead. I told the guards to finish him at the Flying-Cloud Ponds. We'll know definitely when the four come back in the morning."

"Four against one," said the commandant. "A cinch! Even if he had more lives than a cat, he'd have lost them all!"

"I told my apprentices to strike at the ponds, too," said Jiang, "and to report back as soon as the deed was done."

A raging flame in Wu Song's heart spurted up madly and pierced the black sky. His right hand tightened around the sword, the fingers of his left hand spread rigid. He burst into the room. Five large flowery candles and moonlight streaming in through two windows gave plenty of illumination. A wine pitcher and flagons had not yet been removed.

Jiang, seated in an armchair, was so startled at the sudden appearance of Wu Song that his heart flew into the clouds. Quicker than it takes to say, as the big man was scrambling to his feet, the sword carved his face with such force that the chair split and overturned. Wu Song whirled, blade in hand, as General Zhang started to move. Wu Song swung, gashing his neck just below the ear. The general fell heavily to the floor. Both victims struggled for life.

Commandant Zhang was a trained military man. Although drunk, he was no weakling. When he saw the other two go down, he knew there was no escape. He picked up an armchair and raised it above his head. Wu Song stepped in to meet the charge, and pushed. Even sober, Zhang would have been no match for the mighty strength of Wu Song. He fell on his back. Wu Song bounded forward, and with one sweep of the sword cutoff his head.

The powerful Jiang was straining to rise. Wu Song's left foot lashed out and kicked him over. Holding him down, Wu Song decapitated him, turned, and did the same to General Zhang. On the table there was still meat and wine. Wu Song seized a flagon and drained it, then had three more. He cut a strip from the clothes of one of the dead men, dipped it in blood and wrote large on the white calcimined wall:

THE SLAYER IS WU SONG THE TIGER-KILLER.

He stamped the silver flagons flat and placed them inside his tunic. As he started to leave, he heard the voice of the general's wife, on the floor below, say to some servants: "Those gentlemen are all drunk. Go up, a couple of you, and help them down."

Two men began mounting the stairs. Wu Song hid and waited. They were attendants of the general, and both had taken part in seizing Wu Song the day before. He let them come up, then slipped around behind them and cut off their escape. When they entered the room and saw the three bodies lying in pools of blood, they were stricken dumb, and stared at each other in alarm. It was as if the domes of their skull had been opened in eight parts and half a bucket of icy snow poured in.

As they turned to flee, Wu Song felled one with a stab in the back. The other dropped to his knees and begged for mercy. "I can't spare you!" said Wu Song. He grabbed the man and thrust. Blood drenched the ornate chamber. Lamplight flickered over the strewn bodies.

"I might as well do this thoroughly," thought Wu Song. "Even I kill a hundred, I can only be executed once!" Holding his sword, he went down the stairs.

"What was all that racket about, up there?" the general's wife called.

Wu Song went quickly to the front of the building. "Who's that?" she wondered when she saw the big fellow come out. His sword slashed her forehead, and she fell, screaming. He held her down and tried to remove her head, but the blunted sword wouldn't cut. Wu Song looked at it in the moonlight.

"No wonder!" He went to the kitchen, got his halberd, threw the sword away, and returned to the building. There was Jade Orchid, the maid who had sung to him, leading two children. She saw her mistress lying dead, and cried out in dismay. Wu Song ran his halberd through her heart. The two children he similarly dispatched. One thrust each was enough.

From there he traversed the central hall, and bolted the main gate of the residence. He came back, found two or three more women, and killed them too, all speared to the ground.

"I'm satisfied, at last," he said to himself. "Now I can go!"

He discarded the sword sheath and left through the door in the rear wall with his halberd. In the stableyard he retrieved his rucksack, put the flattened silver flagons inside and tied the bag around his waist. Then he set out, halberd in hand.

At the town wall he thought: "If I wait till dawn when they open the gates, I'll be taken. I've got to get over the wall and leave while it's still dark." He clambered to the top. Mengzhou Town was a small place, and its crude wall was not very high. From the ramparts Wu Song probed down with the shaft of his halberd till the end touched the ground, then he leaned and vaulted to earth.

He landed beside the moat. He could see in the moonlight that the water was only a foot or so deep. Since it was the middle of the tenth lunar month, most springs were dry. Wu Song removed his shoes and stockings and knee-length leg-wrappings, tucked up his clothing, and waded across. He remembered the hemp sandals Shi En had given him, took them out of his bag and put them on.

He heard the watchman's drum beat in the town. It was the third interval of the fourth watch. "Today I got that dirty rage out of my system," he thought. "This is no place for me to hang around!" With his halberd, he marched east along a party. By the fifth watch, the darkness was fading, but it was not yet fully light.

It had been a hard night, and he was weary, the wounds from his beating were painful. He couldn't go on. He saw, nestled in a grove, a small ancient temple. Wu Song entered, leaned his halberd and removed his bag. Using the bundle for a pillow, he stretched out.

He was just closing his eyes when two long hooked poles snaked forward and pinned him down. Two other men ran in, seized and tied him.

"The rascal is nice and fat," said the four knaves. "Big brother will be pleased!"

Wu Song struggled in vain. They took his bundle and halberd and hauled him like a sheep, hustling him along so fast that his feet scarcely touched the ground. They headed for a village.

On the way, they discussed him. "Where did he get that blood all over him? Robbing someone?" Wu Song remained silent, and let them talk. After travelling four or five //, they came to a thatched building. They pushed him in. A lamp was gleaming through the small doorway of a side room. The four stripped him and tied him to a pillar.

Wu Song observed two human legs hanging from a rafter near the stove. "I've fallen into the hands of evil assassins," he muttered. "I'll die here and no one will know! If I thought this was going to happen, I would have given myself up at Mengzhou! There I'd be executed with one hack of the blade, but I'd leave a clean name to posterity!"

The four had his bundle. "Brother, sister-in-law, come quickly," they called. "We've got a fine piece of merchandise here!"

"I'll be right with you," a voice replied. "Don't do anything without me. I'll do the carving myself."

In less time than it takes to drink a cup of tea, a woman, followed by a big man, entered the room. They stared at Wu Song.

"Isn't that brother-in-law?" the woman exclaimed.

"Sure enough, it's my brother!" cried the man.

Wu Song looked. The man was none other than Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener, and the woman was Sun the Witch. The four varlets, astonished, untied Wu Song and returned his clothes. His head kerchief had been torn to shreds, so they gave him a broad-brimmed felt hat instead. It seemed that Zhang Qing had several places of business in addition to the one at Crossroads Rise. Wu Song hadn't known.

Zhang Qing invited him into the front parlor, and courtesies were exchanged. The host was shocked at his appearance.

"Whatever happened to you, brother?"

Wu Song told the whole story—from his beating of Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, to his frame-up by Jiang, Commandant Zhang and General Zhang, his terrible revenge against them all, to his final capture by the four in the temple.

The four ruffians dropped to their knees and kowtowed. "We are Brother Zhang Qing's men," they said. "The last several days we lost at gambling, and we went into the grove hoping to pick up a little business. We saw you come along the path, all spattered with blood, and go into the temple to rest. We didn't know who you were. Recently, Brother Zhang Qing has instructed us: 'Bring them back alive.' So we took you with hooks. Otherwise we might have killed you. Truly, 'We had eyes but didn't recognize Mount Taishan!' In our blunder, we knocked you about. Brother, forgive us!"

Zhang and his wife laughed. "We told them to bring in only live merchandise because we were worried. Of course they had no idea what we were thinking. If you weren't tired, brother, forty men couldn't have taken you, to say nothing of these four oafs!"

The four fervently kowtowed. Wu Song told them to get up. "Since you have no money for gambling," he said, "I'll give you some." He opened his bundle and dispensed ten pieces of silver. They thanked him profusely. Zhang Qing added another two or three ounces of his own, and the four left to divide the money.

"You don't know how concerned I've been, brother," said Zhang Qing. "After you left I was afraid you'd run into trouble, that sooner or later you'd return. So I told those louts: 'I want only live merchandise.' The slower ones they catch live all right, but the ones they can't subdue they used to kill. Now I don't let them carry knives when they go out. They can only use hooks and trip ropes. When they called me just now, I had a strange feeling, so I ordered them to wait for me. Who would have thought it was you, brother!"

Sun the Witch said: "When word got round that you beat up Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, and that you were drunk when you did it, there wasn't a traveller who wasn't amazed. We heard about it from merchants who do business in Happy Grove. We didn't know what happened afterwards. You're tired, brother. Please go to the guest-room and rest. We'll talk about what to do later."

Zhang led Wu Song to the guest-room, where he lay down and slept. Husband and wife went into the kitchen and prepared fine delicacies and excellent wine to serve Wu Song when he got up. Soon all was in readiness.

Not until the fifth watch did those who had concealed themselves in General Zhang's residence in Mengzhou Town dare to emerge. Their cries and lamentations roused servants and attendants, and brought in the military guards stationed outside. At the sight which confronted them, all raised a terrible clamor. The neighbors stayed fearfully at home.

As soon as it was light, the matter was reported to the Mengzhou authorities. The startled prefect immediately dispatched men to examine and count the bodies, determine how the murderer had entered and fled, and produce a drawing of the scene of the crimes, with specifications.

On their return they gave this report: "He entered through the stableyard, where he killed the groom and left two pieces of old clothes. He killed two maid servants in the kitchen by the stove. Beside the kitchen door was one of the murder weapons—a blunted sword. Upstairs he killed General Zhang and two of his attendants. In addition two guests—Commandant Zhang and Jiang the Gate Guard Giant—were also killed. On the white wall he wrote in blood: 'The slayer is Wu Song the tiger-killer!' Downstairs he stabbed to death the general's wife, Jade Orchid, two nursemaids, and three children. The total number of bodies is fifteen. He also stole six gold and silver drinking flagons."

The prefect ordered that all four gates of the town wall be closed and that soldiers, police and ward chiefs make a house-to-house search for the criminal Wu Song. The following day officials arrived from the Flying-Cloud Ponds section.

"We have discovered four bodies in the water," the local ward chiefs stated. "There are bloodstains from the murder beside the bridge." They handed in a formal written report.

On the prefect's order, the local county sheriff was sent to investigate, and to pull out and examine the bodies. Two were policemen from the county office. Their families encoffined them for burial and brought formal complaints before the prefect urging that the culprit be caught and made to pay with his life.

For three days the town gates were kept closed, and every house was visited, but in vain. The prefect issued documents ordering all subdivisions under the district's jurisdiction to join in the search. The details of Wu Song's place of birth, age and appearance, together with a drawing of his likeness, were circulated, and three thousand strings of cash offered for his capture. Anyone who could report his whereabouts would be rewarded. Anyone who concealed and sheltered him would be considered guilty to the same degree as the criminal. The notice was also sent to neighboring districts and prefectures.

We'll speak now of Wu Song, who rested in Zhang Qing's home four or five days. The search for him was like a fine-toothed comb, with much hue and cry. Police swept through every village and hamlet. When Zhang Qing learned of this, he talked to Wu Song.
"It's not that I'm afraid for myself to keep you here," he said. "But the police are going from door to door, very hot. If anything should go wrong, you'd have only me and my wife to blame. I know of a good refuge for you. I've mentioned it before. The question is would you be willing to go?"
"I've been considering, too. Trouble is bound to come. It's not safe here. I had an elder brother, but my sister-in-law murdered him. I've only recently come to Mengzhou, but I've already been framed for a crime. I have no home and no relations. If you know of a safe place, why wouldn't I go? Where is it?"
"It's in Qingzhou Prefecture—Precious Pearl Monastery on Two-Dragon Mountain. Brother Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk and a bold fellow called Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute have turned robbers there. They control that territory. The Qingzhou army and police don't dare even glance in their direction. It's the best refuge for you. Anywhere else, you'd be caught sooner or later. Lu keeps writing and urging me to join him. But I'm very fond of this place, so I haven't gone. I'll write a letter telling him all about you. He'll surely accept you, for my sake."
"You're right, brother. I've been thinking of joining them myself. Only the time never seemed right, or the chance propitious. But now, since I've killed people, and the chase is closing in, and I've no other place to hide, it's an excellent idea. Give me a letter to take along, and I'll leave today."
Zhang Qing got paper and wrote a detailed introduction, which he handed to Wu Song, then began preparing a farewell feast. His wife shook her finger at him reprovingly.
"How can you let brother-in-law go off like this? He's sure to be taken!"
"What do you mean, sister-in-law?" queried Wu Song.
"There are notices out everywhere, offering a reward of three thousand strings of cash, with your picture and all about you. There are two golden prints plainly on your face. If you're stopped on the road, you'll never be able to deny it!"
"Cover them with a couple of plasters," suggested Zhang.
His wife smiled scornfully.
"Aren't you the clever one, speaking such nonsense! Would that fool any policeman? I have a proposal, but maybe brother-in-law won't agree."
"Why not? I'm fleeing from disaster."
Sun the Witch laughed. "I hope you won't think this is too crazy."
"I'll do it, no matter what."
"Two years ago, I knocked off a monk who came here. We stuffed our dumplings with him for several days. He left a metal hoop which had bound his long hair, a set of clothes, a black robe, a multi-colored short sash, a monk's certificate, a rosary of a hundred and eight pate-bones, and a shark-skin sheath containing a pair of fine steel knives embossed with a snowflake pattern. The blades often groan in the night. You've seen them, brother-in-law. Today, you're on the run. We'll cut your hair in long bangs like a pilgrim monk and cover the tattoos on your face. You'll carry the certificate as identification. His age and appearance were similar. Fate has been kind. Use his name on the road, and no one will presume to question you closely. How does that strike you?"
Her husband clapped his hands together. "She's right! I'd forgotten all about him. Brother, what do you say?"
"Sounds all right to me. But I'm afraid I don't look much like a man who's renounced the material world."
"We'll fix you up," said Zhang.
His wife went into another room and returned with a bundle. She opened it and took out some clothing. She told Wu Song to change all his garments, both inner and outer. He examined the monk's vestments.
"They seem to have been made for me!" He put on the robe, tied the sash, removed the broad-brimmed felt hat, let his hair down, folded the ends up, put the metal hoop on, and hung on the rosary.
Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch gazed in admiration. "This must have been ordained in a previous existence!"
Wu Song looked in the mirror and burst out laughing.
"What's so funny?" asked Zhang.
"I can't help it. Me, a pilgrim monk! All right, brother, cut my hair."
With a scissors, Zhang trimmed his hair, front and back. Since time was short, Wu Song packed his bundle and got ready to go.
"Listen to me, brother." Zhang said. "Don't think I'm trying to gain anything by this, but you'd better leave General Zhang's drinking vessels here. I'll give you silver coins instead, which you can carry on the road. It will be safer."
"You're very far-sighted, brother." Wu Song gave him all the flattened flagons and received in exchange a bag of silver pieces. This he put in his purse which he tied inside his sash.
They wined and dined together, then Wu Song bade Zhang and his wife farewell. He hung the pair of knives at his waist. It was evening, and all was in readiness. Sun the Witch had sewn him an embroidered bag for the certificate and told him to wear it inside, next to his chest, Zhang offered some final words of advice.
"Be careful on the road. Don't get into any scrapes. Go easy on the drinking. Don't quarrel with anyone. In other words, act like a monk. Nothing's worth getting excited about. You don't want people to see through you. When you get to Two-Dragon Mountain, write and let me know. My wife and I won't be here much longer. One of these days we'll pack up and join you fellows on the mountain. Take care of yourself, brother. Give our respects to Lu and Yang."
As he left the gate, Wu Song hitched up his sleeves and rocked off with stately pace. Zhang and his wife watched after him approvingly.
"The very picture of a pilgrim monk!"
Leaving the big tree at Crossroads Rise, Wu Song set forth. It was the tenth lunar month. The days were short. Before he knew it, it was dark. After travelling less than fifty //he saw a high rise before him. With a bright moon to light his way, he climbed to the top. He estimated the time to be about the first watch. On the crest of the hill he halted and looked around. The moon, rising in the east, clearly illuminated every shrub and blade of grass. He heard laughter in the grove ahead.
"Strange," he thought. "Who could be laughing on this quiet height?"
He entered the grove. Amid the pines was a cemetery temple—a thatched structure of ten or so rooms. He pushed open a small pair of windows and peered inside. A Taoist priest was embracing a girl by the window on the other side, laughing and fooling around while gazing at the moon.
Anger rose in Wu Song's heart, bile seethed in his gall. "Here is a priest withdrawn to the wooded hills, and he plays these kinds of games!" He pulled the pair of steel knives from his waist and looked at them, gleaming silvery in the moonlight. "They're fine blades," he thought, "but they haven't done a lick of business for me yet. I'll test their metal on that scoundrel!"
He hung one knife from his wrist, returned the other to its scabbard, slipped his arms out of his robe, wrapped the sleeves around his waist and tied them behind, then went to the front of the temple and knocked on the door. At this, the priest closed and locked the rear window. Wu Song picked up a stone and pounded on the portal, hard. A side door opened and an acolyte emerged.
"Who are you?" the boy yelled. "How dare you come in the middle of the night and make such a racket! What are you banging on our door for?"
Wu Song glared. "I'll dedicate my knife with this frigging acolyte, first!" he shouted.
He slashed, and there was a thud as the boy's head departed from his neck and hit the ground. From within the temple the priest roared, "Who dares to slaughter my acolyte!"
He came bounding out, a sword in each hand, and rushed at Wu Song. "Lucky I don't keep my skill locked away in my trunk," Wu Song laughed. "This really scratches me where I itch!" He drew the other knife from the sheath and whirling the pair, advanced to meet the priest. Back and forth, back and forth, the two battled in the moonlight, encased in swirls of icy vapor. More than 10 rounds they fought and the clash of their arms rang upon the heights. I of the 2 was doomed to die. In the chill glow and dim shadows a head would roll. In the murderous encounter blood would rain.

General Zhang was listening to his namesake Captain Zhang boasting about how he had accomplished Jiang the Door-God's revenge by having Wu Song done to death, and none of them had the slightest idea that the four would-be assassins had all been killed by Wu Song at Flying Clouds Quay. And Wu Song meanwhile stood on the bridge for a long while, pondering what to do. As he hesitated, his anger mounted till it seemed to fill the sky. "Until I have killed General Zhang," he said to himself, "how will I ever settle this spleen of mine?" So he went over to the corpses and took the swords from them, choosing the best and sticking it through his belt, and selected a good halberd and shouldered it, and then turned back in the direction of Mengzhou.
Night was just falling as he entered the town. The houses were already shut up, every door was locked:
*At the Nine Luminaries incense fills the air and bells are being struck. A big round moon hangs in the sky, a few stars prick heaven's vault. In brigade headquarters a bugle insistently calls; in Five Drums tower the water clock drips steadily. One after another ladies steal back to their bedchambers, gentlemen close the curtains.*
When Wu Song entered the town he went straight to General Zhang's and prowled along the boundary wall of the compound till he came to a place where there was a stable. He crouched down and listened. It sounded as if the groom had gone inside the residence and was still in there. As he waited, the side-door creaked open and the groom emerged, carrying a lantern, while someone shut the door from the inside. Wu Song remained hidden in the shadows. Just at that moment, listen! ... the drum beat the hour. It was half-past eight. He watched the groom climb onto the hay to hang up the lantern, then spread out his blanket, undress and lie down to sleep. Wu Song approached the stable door and started to make a noise.
"I've only just gone to bed!" the groom yelled. "If you're counting on stealing my clothes you've cocked up, mate!"
Wu Song propped his halberd against the wall, drew his sword and began to rattle the door.
This was too much for the groom. He leapt out of bed, just as he was, stark naked, grabbed a pitchfork, and then removed the beam which secured the door. Before he even had time to open it, Wu Song had given it a mighty shove and crashed through. He knocked the groom on the head and subdued him in a trice. Before the groom could cry out, in fact, he had seen the sword glinting in the moonlight, and his legs turned to jelly. He was far too terrified to do more than produce a strangled cry of "Mercy!"
"Do you know me?" Wu Song asked.
Only when he heard the voice did the groom realize it was Wu Song. "Please sir, I 'ad nothing to do with it, be merciful!" he cried.
"Just tell me the truth. General Zhang, where is he right now?"
"'E's with Captain Zhang and Mr. Jiang, they been drinking all day. They're still at it, over there in the Ducks and Drakes Tower."
"Are you telling the truth?"
"Cross me heart an' hope to die!"
"It's no good, I can't let you go!" Raising his arm, Wu Song killed him with a single cut. He kicked the body aside and returned the sword to its scabbard. Then by the light of the lantern he undid the clothes from the Young Master that he had fastened round his waist and exchanged what he was wearing for the two new items of clothing. He fastened them securely, girded on sword and scabbard and wrapped some loose silver in the groom's quilt and stuffed it in his bag which he hung up on the door. Then he propped the two leaves of the gate against the wall and after blowing out the lantern slipped out to retrieve his halberd before mounting the gate and climbing onto the wall.
There was just a little moonlight now, as Wu Song sprang from the wall down into the garden. He first opened the side-door and went to replace the leaves of the stable gate. Then he turned and went back inside again, closing the side-door so that it looked as if it was bolted, although he did not replace the beam.
Following this he headed towards a light, which turned out to be coming from the kitchen. Two maids were standing beside the soup cauldron, grumbling: "All day they've 'ad us running after them and still they don't go to bed. It's nothink but 'Bring us more tea.' And them two guests oughter be ashamed, gettin' theirselves pissed as newts like that! They don't never think of goin' off to bed, just jabber, jabber, jabber!"
While these two maids were nattering on about their grievances, Wu Song put down his halberd, drew the bloodstained sword at his waist, gave the door a mighty shove so that it opened with a groan, and charged in. He grabbed the first of the maids by the hair and killed her with one cut. The other would have run off, but her feet were as if nailed to the floor. She wanted to scream but she seemed to have lost her tongue. She was literally struck dumb.
Now, forget about two simple servant girls, had it been yours truly, I too would have been speechless, I can tell you!
Wu Song raised his arm and killed this one with one blow. He dragged the two corpses in front of the stove. He extinguished the lamp and with the aid of the moonlight streaming through the window advanced into the house.
Of course Wu Song had been a member of the household, he knew the geography. Stealthily he reached the stairway leading up into the Ducks and Drakes Tower. Feeling his way carefully he crept up the stairs. By this time all the attendants had taken themselves off, fed up with waiting. So just the three of them were there, General Zhang, Captain Zhang and Jiang the Door-God, still talking. Jiang's fawning tones reached the ears of Wu Song where he stood listening on the landing: "It's all thanks to you, sir, that I can have my vengeance. I shall never be able to repay your great kindness!"
"I only did it for the sake of my friend Captain Zhang here," the General replied. "Otherwise I wouldn't have touched the business. Well, it's cost you a penny or two, but you've the satisfaction of knowing you've settled the blighter's hash. Any time now they'll be making their move, so I think we can say he's as good as dead. Finish it off at Flying Clouds Quay, that's what I told 'em. They'll be here in the morning to make their report."
Captain Zhang chipped in: "Four of them against one, it can't possibly go wrong. Even supposing he had several lives, he'd still be a goner!"
Jiang added: "I told my people to go along too. I said to lend a hand and come back and report when it's over."
Indeed it was a case of:
*Behind closed doors the truth is heard;*
*Revenge is waiting in the wings.*
*Before the cold the cricket sings,*
*The Reaper's call can't be deferred.*
When Wu Song heard all this, the flaming pillar of rage in his heart grew ten thousand feet tall, splitting the sky's vault. With the sword brandished in his right hand, the fingers of his left hand tense, he charged into the room.
Three or four decorated candles were blazing and in several places moonlight filtered in, so the room was clearly illumined. The drinking vessels had still not been cleared away. Jiang the Door-God was sitting in a folding chair. When he saw Wu Song he had such a shock his heart, liver and lungs leapt into his mouth.
It's slow in the telling but happens in a flash. Before Jiang could offer any resistance, Wu Song brought his blade down, just the once, slashing down across the man's face and chopping right through the chair. Only as Wu Song turned and raised the sword again did General Zhang start to move his feet. But as he did so Wu Song's sword caught him, slashing from the ear to the neck and he crashed to the floor.
So these two lay there, nearer to death than life. But Captain Zhang was after all a military man of no mean ability, so although drunk he still had some fight left in him. Having seen the other two cut down, and not rating his own chances of getting away, he picked up a folding chair and moved in. But Wu Song was ready and checked the attack. Then he brought all his strength to bear. It matters little that Captain Zhang was drunk, even if he'd been stone-cold sober he'd never have matched Wu Song's phenomenal strength. He lost his balance and toppled backwards. Wu Song was onto him and cut off his head with one blow.
Now Jiang the Door-God was a pretty tough customer. He had just managed to struggle to his feet again. But Wu Song lifted his left foot and felled him again with a flying kick. He held him down and cut off his head. Turning, he cut off General Zhang's head as well. Seeing that there was meat and wine on the table, he now picked up a wine jar and drained it at a single draught. After three or four more he went to one of the bodies and cut off a piece of cloth. He dipped this in the blood and went and wrote in big characters on the whitewashed wall these words: "The tiger-killer, Wu Song, did this." He then took the drinking vessels and stamped them flat, stuffing several inside his shirt front. Before he could leave he heard the general's lady shouting: "The gentlemen upstairs are all drunk. You two, run up and assist them!"
She had hardly finished speaking when two men could be heard coming upstairs. Wu Song slipped to the side of the landing. When they appeared he saw it was two of the household servants who had previously been involved in his capture. Standing in the shadows he let them go by and then barred the door. Inside the room they immediately saw the three corpses lying in a pool of blood. They stared at each other in horror, unable to utter a sound — you know the feeling, when your scalp seems to split into eight pieces, or some one pours a bucket of iced water over you! They were about to retreat, but Wu Song had crept up behind them. His sword arm rose and fell, and one was cut down. The other knelt on the floor and begged for mercy. "It's no good, I can't let you off," Wu Song said. He held him and chopped off his head. From all this killing the pavilion was swimming in blood, bodies could be seen lying everywhere in the flickering light of the candles. Wu Song said to himself: "It had to be all or nothing; kill a hundred, you can only die for it once." Sword at the ready, he went downstairs.
"What's all the hullabaloo upstairs?" the General's wife was inquiring as Wu Song rushed in. At this monstrous sight she shrieked: "Who are you?"
But Wu Song's sword was already flying. It caught her square in the forehead and she fell with a shriek right there in front of the pavilion. Wu Song held her down but when he tried to cut off her head the sword wouldn't cut. Baffled, he saw by the light of the moon that the blade was completely blunted. "So that's why I couldn't get her head off," he thought.
He slipped out of the back door to get his halberd again and threw away the blunt sword. Then he turned and went back to the tower. A lamp could be seen approaching. It turned out to be the singing girl, Yulan, the one he'd had the trouble with before. She was accompanied by two children. When the light of her lamp fell on the General's wife where she lay dead on the floor, Yulan screamed: "Merciful heaven!" Wu Song raised his halberd and ran her through the heart. He also killed the children, a single thrust to each. He went to the central hall, bolted the main door and returned. He found two or three more young girls and stabbed them to death too. "Now at last," he said, "my heart is eased. Now it's time to stop." He threw away the scabbard, picked up his halberd, went out of the side-door, took from his shirt front the drinking vessels he had squashed and put them in the sack he had left in the stable, tying it on at his waist. And off he strode, halberd in hand. Reaching the city wall, he thought: "If I wait for the gates to open I'll be caught. Surely the best thing to do is to climb the wall now, while it's still dark, and clear off." So he leapt up onto the wall.
This Mengzhou was only a small place and the wall was of packed earth and not too high. Peering down from the parapet, he felt around with his halberd, holding it with the point reversed. Then he vaulted down, leaning his weight on the halberd. Steadying himself with the shaft, he landed beside the moat. The water gleamed in the moonlight, but it was not more than one or two feet deep. It was real October weather and everywhere the springs were dry. Standing by the moat he took off his shoes, leggings and knee guards, hitched up his clothing and waded across to the other bank. Then he remembered that in the package the Young Master had given him there was a pair of hemp sandals with eight eyelets. He took them out and put them on. As he heard the drum beat for half-past one in the morning, he told himself that finally his rage had been fully appeased. "Well," he said to himself now: " 'Tis fine to stay in Liang hall, but in the end its comforts pall'. I'd better beat it!" Halberd in hand, he took an eastward path.
As the poem says:
*To wield the sword was his only intention,*
*But he also finds some drink on the way.*

*One against many, he kills his opponents;*
*A murderous heart makes the murderers pay.*
*So many angry ghosts to detain him,*
*What hope can he have of getting away?*

That night he went on walking till after five. The sky was still dark, day had not yet dawned. It had been a hard night and Wu Song was exhausted. Besides, the wounds from his beating were hurting again and he simply couldn't take any more. When he saw a little old temple, surrounded by trees, he entered it at once, dropped his halberd, took off the pack to use as a pillow and flung himself down to sleep.

He had only just closed his eyes when two hooks were thrust into the temple from outside, pinning him to the ground, while two men charged inside and quickly subdued him, tying him up with a rope. The four villains now began to discuss him: "This bugger's good and fat. The boss'll be real pleased with 'im!"

Struggle as he might, Wu Song could not escape. They picked up his pack and his halberd and hauled him off to the village, like a sheep to market, harrying him along so fast that his feet barely touched the ground. All the way they were discussing him among themselves. "Did you see? The bugger's all covered in blood, what's 'e been up to? D' you suppose we've caught a thief?"

Wu Song kept quiet and listened. They'd not gone more than a mile or so when they came to a thatched hut. They pushed Wu Song inside. Through a doorway on one side a lamp was burning. They stripped off his clothes and tied him to a pillar.

When he looked around, Wu Song saw hanging from a beam beside the stove two human legs. "I've fallen into the hands of a bunch of real cutthroats," he thought to himself. "Now I'm going to die uselessly. If I'd known this was going to happen, I might just as well have gone to Mengzhou and turned myself in. I'd have died at the hands of the executioner, of course, but at least I'd have left a reputation behind me."

Holding the pack the four who had brought him in cried: "Boss! Mistress! Come and look! We got a lovely piece of goods here!"

There was an answering cry from inside: "Coming! Don't begin yet! I'll come and do the carving myself!" And in less time than it takes to drink a cup of tea, a couple appeared from the back, first a woman, and behind her a big man. They both took a good long look at Wu Song. "Why, if it isn't Uncle!" the woman exclaimed.

"'Course it is, it's our old friend," the man said.

And now at last Wu Song realized that these two were none other than the Gardener and the Ogress. The four who had brought him in, much chastened, hurried to undo the rope and return his clothes so that he could get dressed. His head cloth was torn so they gave him a felt hat to put on.

In fact, Zhang the Gardener had quite a number of establishments like the inn at Crossways Rise, that's why Wu Song hadn't recognized his surroundings.

The Gardener now invited Wu Song inside, and after the exchange of courtesies said with a great show of concern: "How did you get like this, my old friend?"

"It's a long story," said Wu Song. "After I left you and went to the Fortress of Peace, I received great favours from the Warden's son, the Young Master, nicknamed the Golden-Eyed Tiger. We hit it off at once and he kept me supplied every day with wonderful food and drink. He had an inn, you know, to the east of the town at Happy Woods, a most profitable place, that was pinched from him in broad daylight by a certain villain known as Jiang the Door-God, a protégé? of one Captain Zhang. The Young Master told me all this. Well, I could see it wasn't right. I beat that Jiang the Door-God up one day when I was drunk and got Happy Woods back for the Young Master, who valued me highly after this. Afterwards, this Captain Zhang bribed General Zhang and they hatched a plot. The General invited me to join his staff, but it was all a trap, the purpose being to accomplish Jiang the Door-God's vengeance. The evening of Mid-Autumn Festival, the cry went up that a thief had got in. They decoyed me into the house and meanwhile hid some silver cups in a chest of mine. Then they arrested me and handed me over to the Mengzhou court, accused of theft. I was beaten till I confessed and locked up. The Young Master managed to get in to see me by bribing everyone and I was not ill-treated after that. And then thanks to the rectitude and generosity of the clerk of the court, their plot to destroy me failed. It turned out also that the gaoler, Kang, was a friend of the Young Master's — they did all they could to let me off lightly. I was sentenced to a flogging and banishment to the prison camp at Enzhou.

"Yesterday evening when I was being taken out of town, would you believe it? — that General Zhang produced another plot. He got Jiang the Door-God to send two of his people to collaborate with the police guards in killing me. They made their move when we got to Flying Clouds Quay, a lonely spot. But I got in two kicks first and dumped the two henchmen in the water. Then I got those bloody guards, each with a halberd thrust, killing them and chucking them in the water. I reckoned I had to work off my anger, so I returned to Mengzhou. At half-past eight, after entering the stables and killing a groom, I scaled the wall and killed two maids in the kitchen. In the Ducks and Drakes Tower I killed General Zhang, Captain Zhang and Jiang the Door-God, and afterwards two attendants. I went downstairs again and dealt with the General's wife and daughters and the singer. I left at once, by jumping down from the city wall. After a mile or two I was exhausted and my wounds were hurting, I could go no further. So I went into a little temple intending to rest a while. That's when I was tied up by these four."

Wu Song's four assailants now flung themselves on the floor and said: "We works for Mr. Zhang, we does. We bin losin' a lot at the tables, see, so we went to try an' make a bit in the woods. We seed you a-comin' down the path, all drippin' with blood, like. An' then you lays down on the ground inside the temple. We 'adn't got no idea 'oo you was. But Mr. Zhang tell us only to take 'em alive, see, so we just used the 'ooks to pin you down. If 'e 'adn't give us that order, like as not we'd've done you in. Honest, we couldn't see what was starin' us in the face. We treated you 'orrible, sir. 'Ow can you ever pardon us?"

The Gardener and his wife explained happily: "We were worried, see. That's why I've been telling them to bring the goods back alive. 'Course they didn't know what was in my mind." The Gardener turned to the gang: "Listen, you lot: if our friend here hadn't been tired, forget about the four of you; if you'd been forty you still wouldn't have got near him."

In reply to this they knocked their heads on the ground.

"If it's money for gambling you want," Wu Song cried, "I can help you out." He opened his pack and took out a dozen taels of silver for them to divide. When they expressed their gratitude, the Gardener also produced two or three taels and distributed them.

"Well" said the Gardener, "You can't imagine how worried I've been. After you left I was sure you were going to get into some kind of scrape or other. Anyway, I knew you'd be back sooner or later. So I says to this ere lot, 'Every time you get hold of some goods, see that you bring 'em back alive.' You see these idiots, sometimes they can take the slower ones alive, but if someone puts up a fight they just kill him. So now I don't let them take any knives along, only the hooks and some rope. When I heard them calling just now I had some misgivings, I can tell you. I told 'em straight off not to do anything till I'd been and had a look. And who should it be then but our old mate!"

"We heard all about your beating up Jiang the Door-God," the Ogress added, "how you took him apart, even when you were drunk. Everyone said it was amazing! Some of the traders from Happy Woods told us about that, but we didn't hear what happened afterwards. You must be tired though, why not go and have a little sleep? We can talk later."

The Gardener showed Wu Song to his room so he could rest, and then they both went to the kitchen to prepare some very special dishes and wine of the best for entertaining Wu Song. Soon this was ready and nothing lacked but for Wu Song to wake up and join them. There's a poem here:

*When authority sleeps the long knives awaken,*
*All's out of kilter when justice is far.*
*But forget how in palaces evil is rampant*
*From the rivers and lakes, deliverance is near.*

Meanwhile, back in Mengzhou at General Zhang's, it was early morning before all those who had hidden dared come out. Their cries aroused the household servants and the guards on duty outside, who immediately raised the alarm when they viewed the scene. Yet no one emerged from the neighbouring houses. Not until almost full daylight did anyone go to the government office to report the incident. The governor was horrified by what he heard. He hurriedly sent to determine the number of dead and the assassin's point of entry and escape. After making sketches and diagrams the investigators returned and reported: "The murderer entered by way of the stables where he killed the stable boy and discarded two items of old clothing. He then proceeded to the kitchen where he killed two maids beside the stove and abandoned one of the murder weapons by the back door, a blunted knife. In an upper room he killed General Zhang and two of his retinue. Two visitors, Captain Zhang and Jiang, alias the Door-God, were also killed. On the whitewashed wall the murderer wrote in big characters using a rag dipped in blood, "The tiger-killer, Wu Song, did this." The body of the mistress of the house was found downstairs and outside were those of Yulan, her two attendants and three little girls — in all a total of fifteen dead. Six items of silverware were missing."

The governor immediately ordered the gates of Mengzhou closed and commanded officers of the militia and police, together with local authorities in the city and districts, to carry out a thorough search in order to apprehend the criminal Wu Song. The next day police authorities from Flying Clouds Quay arrived to report that four people had been murdered: there were blood-stains under the bridge and four corpses floating in the water. In response to this report the governor sent the sheriff to have the four bodies retrieved and examined. Two were local policemen whose next of kin prepared the bodies for burial and lodged a formal complaint, demanding that the culprit be arrested and sentenced to death. The city gates remained closed for three days while a door-to-door search was carried out; every household, every family, no one escaped questioning. The governor put out an order underlining the responsibility of all local authorities at every level — district and ward, urban and rural — to assist in the search and bring the murderer to justice. A full description of Wu Song was circulated, giving his birthplace, age, physical appearance and bearing, with sketches, and announcing a reward of three thousand in cash. Anyone with knowledge of his whereabouts was to report it immediately and would receive the due reward. Anyone found to be harbouring the criminal or giving him food would be charged as an accomplice and sent up for trial with him.

When Wu Song had been staying at the Gardener's for a few days, it became clear that the situation was far from good. Police were pouring out of the city to search the villages and countryside. In view of this, the Gardener felt obliged to say: "Listen, it's not that I don't want you to stay because I'm worried about my own skin, but this thing's really hotting up. They're knocking on every door. What I'm afraid is that if something was to go wrong, you'd blame us. But I do know of a really safe refuge for you, and I'd tell you about it right away if I thought you were prepared to go there."

"I've been thinking too," said Wu Song. "I can see they aren't going to let the matter rest, so I'll never be really safe here. As for family, I had just the one brother and he was cruelly murdered by my sister-in-law. I came here only recently and fell into a trap. I've no home or family left, so if you do know of a good place for me, I shall go there, why not? You'd better tell me where it is."

"It's in Qingzhou," the Gardener said. "There's this temple there called Temple of the Precious Pearl, on Twin Dragon Peak. Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk and a pal of his called Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast, have made themselves a stronghold there, a base for pillaging and plundering. The local militia and the anti-bandit brigade daren't so much as look them in the face, you'll be perfectly safe if you go there. Anywhere else they'd catch up with you sooner or later. Those two have often written to me and asked me to join their company and it's only because I'm attached to my own home that I didn't go. I'll write a letter for you to take, telling all about your situation, and I'm sure they'll have you, for my sake."

"You're quite right," said Wu Song. "I've been thinking that too. Only I wasn't sure the time was ripe. But I'm a murderer now, it's an established fact and I've nowhere to hide. It's the best possible plan. Please write the letter and I'll be off today."

So the Gardener penned a full account and gave the letter to Wu Song. They were in the middle of a farewell dinner when the Ogress pointed a finger at her husband and said: "You can't let him go like this, he's going to get himself caught."

"What do you mean? Why should I be caught?" said Wu Song.

"There's police notices everywhere and a reward of three thousand on your head. They've got pictures of you and all your personal details posted up everywhere. And there's the two golden seals on your face, plain for all to see. If you go ahead, it's just a foregone conclusion."

"We can always stick a couple of medicinal plasters on his cheeks," said the Gardener.

"Trust you to come up with something cock-eyed like that," said the Ogress. "How's that supposed to fool the police? I've got a better idea, only I don't know if you'll like it."

"I'm in a tight spot, I can't afford to be fussy," said Wu Song.

"Well, but promise not to get angry if I tell you," said the Ogress.

"Don't worry, I won't," said Wu Song.

"A couple of years back we had one of them travelling monks come through here. We put him down, and he did us for several days' pies. We've still got his metal circlet, a set of clothing, a black cassock, a short coloured silk sash, a certificate, a set of one hundred and eight beads in the shape of human skulls, a shark-skin scabbard with two monk's swords of snow-white patterned steel — you saw those two swords yourself, brother, often at night there's a kind of keening comes from them. Now you're in such trouble your best chance is to cut your hair and become a monk. When we've put the patches on your cheeks to hide the golden seals, this monk's certificate will be all the passport you need. He had just about your age and looks, it's like it was preordained. If you use his name and don't stop, who's going to ask questions? What do you say?"

The Gardener clapped his hands. "She's right! I'd forgotten all about that!"

It was a case of:

*The pursuit is hot, he's in a spot,*
*He's in the tightest corner;*
*Now it's the best escape he's got,*
*To become a holy brother!*

"Well brother, what do you say?" the Gardener asked.

"It's not a bad idea," said Wu Song, "only I'm afraid I don't look much like a monk."

"Let's try dressing you up," the Gardener said.

The Ogress went and fetched a bundle, from which she took a variety of clothing. They made Wu Song change everything. "It's as if they'd been made for me," said Wu Song, when he saw the things. He put on the black robe, fastened the sash, took off his hat to loosen his hair, then doubled it back and secured it with the circlet, and hung the beads round his neck. The Gardener and the Ogress both applauded the effect. "It must have been ordained in a previous life," they said. When he saw himself in a mirror, Wu Song roared with laughter. "Why are you laughing?" the Gardener asked. "I look so funny, I'm really like a monk," Wu Song replied. "Now cut my hair please."

The Gardener took the scissors and cut Wu Song's hair in front and behind.

Filled now with a sense of urgency, Wu Song packed his bag and was eager to be off at once. But the Gardener said: "Listen brother, I don't want you to think me greedy, but you'd better leave General Zhang's silver drinking vessels here. I'll give you some loose silver for them to use on the journey. It's by far the best way."

"Just as you say brother." Wu Song fetched them out and gave them to the Gardener, who gave him the equivalent in loose silver. He put this away in his purse, tied it and hung it on his belt.

When Wu Song had eaten and drunk his fill, he thanked the Gardener and his wife, hung the two swords on his belt and prepared to leave that evening. The Ogress took out the monk's certificate and stitched a special cover for it, which she made Wu Song wear round his neck, next to the skin. Wu Song thanked them both.

Just before he left, the Gardener said: "Be very careful on the journey. You must be moderate in everything. Eat and drink little, don't get into quarrels, and do all the things a monk does. Keep calm always and don't cause scandal. Write and let us know, if you can, when you get to Twin Dragon Peak. We don't expect to remain here long. I wouldn't mind betting we'll soon be packing up too and moving to the mountain to join the band. Look after yourself, brother, and please give my regards to Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi."

As he marched off, Wu Song put his hands in his sleeves and adopted the mincing gait of a monk. The Gardener and his wife exclaimed in admiration: "He's a perfect monk!" Here's the picture:

*The hair in front falls in a fringe to the brows, it straggles to his shoulders at the back. The black robe envelopes him like an ominous cloud, the coloured sash binds him about like the mottled python's coils. The metal circlet glitters on his forehead like a fiery eye; the vest reveals the contours of an iron frame. The two swords give off a deadly autumn chill, the rosary of skulls wafts unease about him as he goes. Before him, the man-devouring yakshas bow down perforce, even the fierce door-gods who guard the scriptures needs must lower their gaze.*

After bidding the Gardener and his wife farewell that afternoon and leaving the crossroads of the tree behind him, Pilgrim Wu chose a lonely road. It was November, when the days are short and night falls in the blink of an eyelid. He had barely gone fifteen miles when he came to a steep hill.

By the light of the moon he began to climb, step by step. He calculated it must be somewhat after seven o'clock. When he reached the top he looked about him and saw that the moon rising in the east was flooding the landscape with light. At that moment he heard laughter, coming from a clump of trees ahead. "That's odd!" he thought. "Who can be laughing on a lonely moor like this?" He headed for the trees to investigate, and there among a group of pines he found a small family shrine, composed of a dozen or so thatched rooms. In one of these a double-leafed window was flung open and revealed a man holding a woman and gazing at the moon while engaged in lustful dalliance. When Pilgrim Wu saw this, his gorge rose. "This is supposed to be a holy man, living here in the wilderness as a hermit, and look what he gets up to!" he exclaimed, unsheathing the two swords at his waist, which glittered like polished silver.

Gazing on his swords in the moonlight, he said to himself: "The blades are good, but I have yet to set them to work. Let's try them out now." He hung one of the swords on his wrist and returned the other to its scabbard. He drew back the long sleeves of his robe and tied them behind his back. Then he approached the shrine and knocked on the door. The window at the back closed at once. Pilgrim Wu picked up a stone and began hammering on the door with it. Thereupon a side-door burst open and out popped an acolyte. "Who do you think you are?" he scolded. "What do you mean by kicking up such a row in the middle of the night, banging on people's doors like this?"

Pilgrim Wu fixed the lad with a glare and shouted: "This bloody acolyte is meat for my sword!" Almost before he'd finished speaking, the acolyte's head fell, splat! on the ground. Then there was a great roar from within: "Who has the temerity to kill my acolyte?" and out leapt the gentleman who had been seen in the window. Brandishing two double-edged swords, he set upon Wu Song.

Wu Song greeted this with a great shout of laughter: "Only too happy to oblige," he bellowed. "Just what the doctor ordered!" With that he drew the second sword from its scabbard and engaged the stranger with both weapons. The battle waged to and fro, back and forth, in the light of the moon, the stranger's double-edged blades glinting frostily, Wu Song's swords filling the air with chilly light.

Long they fought, locked together as if in a lover's embrace. On they went, until the hawk had taken the hare, so to speak. It was after a dozen bouts that a piercing scream rang out over the hillside, and one of the two contestants fell. Then:

*A man's head rolls among the cold shadows,*
*Amid baneful thickets the blood wells out.*

WU SONG reached Mengzhou in the evening, and went to Colonel Zhang's house. He found no one in the yard, and hid himself there. In a short time he heard a door open, and saw a groom enter the yard holding a lighted lamp. The groom hung up the lamp, and fed the horses with hay. He then took the lamp and returned to his room where he undressed, and went to bed. Just then a watchman outside struck his drum four times indicating that it was about 10 P.M. Wu Song went to the door of the man's room, and pushed the door a little. The groom heard the noise and called out, "I am just going to sleep, and it is still a little early for you to steal my clothes."

Wu Song placed his halberd at the side of the door, and drawing a sword from his belt he again pushed the door. The groom could not stand this noise, so he sprang from his bed, seized a stick, and went to the door. Immediately Wu Song threw the door open and stepping forward he seized the groom by the hair. The groom was surprised, and was about to cry out, but seeing the sword in Wu Song's hand could only beg for mercy.

"Do you know me?"

The groom recognized the voice of Wu Song, and said, "Elder brother, I had nothing to do with it. Please spare me."

"Tell me the truth, where is Colonel Zhang now?"

"Colonel Zhang has been drinking wine all day with Jiang the 'Door God,' and Captain Zhang, and they are still drinking in the Yuanyang Tower."

"Is that really so?"

"If I do not speak the truth may I be seized by the foulest disease."
"Then I cannot spare your life," said Wu Song, and he killed the man straightway. He then changed his clothes, and put on the new suit that Shi En had given him. He took a blanket off the groom's bed, wrapped his silver inside it, and placed it near the door of the room. He next lifted a door out of its socket, and placed it against the wall. He blew out the lamp in the room, and taking his halberd he climbed up the door and over the wall.
It was a bright moonlight night. He soon found the door, and opened it from inside. He took the door reared against the wall, and put it back in its place. He then returned to the garden, and went toward the place when he saw many lamps. The light came from the kitchen, and looking inside he saw two women servants round the stove, and heard them grumbling, "We have been waiting on them all day, and yet there is no sign of their going to bed. The guests too have no sense of shame. They are almost drunk, and yet they would not go to sleep." While they were still murmuring, Wu Song leaned his halberd against the wall, drew his bloody sword, and pushing the door open, entered the kitchen. He seized one of the women by her hair, and cut off her head. The other woman seeing this was paralyzed with fear—her legs could not move, and she could not even scream. Wu Song killed her also, and then blew out the lamps. The moonlight shining through the windows enabled him to find his way about, and he crept towards the guest chamber. He knew the way. He found the ladder leading up to the Yuanyang Tower, and stealthily ascended. The men servants had already departed as they were tired of having been on duty continuously all day long. Listening at the door Wu Song could hear the three men talking together inside.
He heard Jiang the "Door God," say, "I am obliged to you for taking revenge in my behalf, and I shall fully recompense you."
"Who would like to do this but for my younger brother Captain Zhang?" said Colonel Zhang. "Though you have spent much money, yet you have well disposed of that fellow. He must be dead by now. When those four men come back early tomorrow morning we shall know how the deed was done at the Feiyun Pool."
"Four men ought to be enough to kill one man," said Captain Zhang.
"Well, I told those two followers of mine that they must get it done there, and report to us as soon as possible," said Jiang the "Door God."
Upon hearing all this Wu Song's anger was enough to burst the sky, and pushing open the door he entered the room. There were about five lamps burning, and the moonlight entered the room through windows, so there was plenty of light. On the table were many drinking vessels. When Jiang the 'Door God' saw Wu Song he was so thunderstruck that his spirit flew away to heaven. Before he could stir Wu Song struck him in the face with his sword, and he fell down. Quickly turning round Wu Song struck at Colonel Zhang, who tried to evade the blow, and was cut in the neck. Captain Zhang had military training, and although he was almost drunk, yet when he saw these two men struck down he sprang to action, and seizing a chair raised it above his head, and advanced. But as he struck Wu Song took hold of the chair, and pushing it back upset the balance of Captain Zhang who fell on the floor. In a second Wu Song was on top of him, and cut off his head. Jiang the "Door God," made an effort to get up, but Wu Song kicked him so that he turned a somersault, and Wu Song taking a sword cut off his head. Wu Song then cut off Colonel Zhang's head.
Taking a cup of wine from the table Wu Song drank it off at one draft. He then cut pieces of cloth from the clothing of the dead men, and dipping them in the blood that was covering the floor he wrote eight characters on the white wall: "The murderer is Wu Song, the Tiger Slayer." He then took the silver utensils from the table, flattened them out with his foot, and placed them in his bosom. He prepared to descend the tower, but just then he heard the mistress below call out, "The officials are evidently drunk, so you two go upstairs and assist them down." As two servants came up the ladder Wu Song hid at one side of the door, and as they entered he saw that they were the same confidential servants who had arrested him a few days before. He was in the shade, and allowed them to pass, and then stepped out behind them. The servants were so astounded upon seeing the decapitated bodies lying there in pools of blood that they could not utter a sound. The hair on their heads stood on end, and they felt as though a bucket of icy water had been poured over them. As they turned to run away they faced Wu Song who instantly killed one of them. The other one knelt down and begged for mercy, but Wu Song declined to pardon him, and killed him also. The dead were lying all about the room, and blood had been spattered over everything, Wu Song thought, "It is the same whether one kills only one or a hundred—the penalty of death is not more." He sheathed his sword, and went down the ladder. The mistress below asked what the noise upstairs was about. When she saw a big man advancing towards her she called out, "Who is that?"
Without saying a word Wu Song struck her a blow with his sword, and she screamed as she fell down. Wu Song was surprised that his blow had not been effective, but upon examining his sword in the moonlight he saw that the blade had been dulled. It was no wonder that it would not cut any more. So he went into the kitchen, and exchanged the sword for his halberd. Upon returning to the tower he saw the singsong girl Yulan with two children, and they were examining the corpse of their mistress. She called out in astonishment. He took his halberd, and drove it into Yulan's breast, and then also killed the other two children. Opening the door he entered the private apartments, and finding three women there he killed them also. Wu Song soliloquized, "I have killed enough, and will now get away." He went to the stable where he had left his things, and taking the silver cups from his bosom he made them into a bundle with his other things. Holding his halberd in his hand he strode towards the city gate. But before he reached there he thought, "If I wait for them to open the gate they may try to arrest me so I had better try and get over the wall." So he went and got on the city wall. It was an earth wall faced with bricks, and not very high. He jumped down and landed at the side of the moat. In the moonlight he could see that the water was only a few feet deep. It was then the tenth lunar month, the time when spring is dry, so there was not much water in the moat. He took off his boots, puttees, and socks, and lifting up his clothes he waded through the water to the opposite bank. He remembered that Shi En had given him a new pair of hempen shoes so taking these out of his bundle he now put them on. Just then he heard the watchman inside the city strike the hour of 4 A.M. He had been very angry, but now he found that his temper had all vanished. He felt no hankering to stay near that place so he set off at a good pace along the eastern road.
He walked until about 5 A.M. when he began to feel tired, and also felt the pain in his legs from the blows he had received some days ago. Just then he saw an old temple in a grove of trees, so he entered and finding it vacant he lay down to sleep with his bundle as a pillow. He was on the point of closing his eyes when he saw two hooked sticks reaching out to catch his clothes. At the same moment two men rushed in, seized hold of him, and bound him with cords. One man said, "This man is very fat so we can send him to our elder brother." Wu Song struggled, but could not release himself. The four persons took charge of his sword and bundle. They led him off, and took him to a near village. On the way the four persons spoke, "See! There is blood on this man. Where can he have come from? He must be a wounded bandit." Wu Song listened to their conversation, but kept quiet.
After about a //they came to a straw hut, and pushed Wu Song inside. On one side of the room was a small door leading to another room where a lamp was burning. The four persons stripped the clothes from Wu Song, and bound him to one of the pillars supporting the roof.
Looking upwards, Wu Song saw two human legs hanging from a rafter. He thought, "These people are evidently murderers, and they have me entirely in their power. If I had known of this I would rather have admitted my guilt in Mengzhou Prefecture, and submitted to execution, than have such a fate as this."
The persons examined Wu Song's bundle, and called out, "Brother and sister-in-law, come here! We have got some first-class booty," A voice in the inner room replied, "I am coming, and will open the bundle. Leave it alone." Before you could have drunk a cup of tea, the small door opened, and two persons entered. In front was a woman, and behind her a man. They stared at Wu Song, and the woman said, "Is not this our brother?" The man said, "Yes, he is my brother." Wu Song upon looking at them closely recognized the man as Zhang Qing, the "Market Gardener," and the woman was Sun Er Niang, the "Night Witch." When the four persons saw that Zhang Qing knew Wu Song they hurriedly untied the ropes, and gave clothes for him to dress. They had torn his turban so they found a felt cap for him. Zhang Qing invited Wu Song to go to the inner room, where he saluted him. When he saw the blood on Wu Song's clothes Zhang Qing was surprised, and asked, "What has happened to you?"
"That is a long story," said Wu Song. He then recited to them all the experiences he had had since he last met Zhang Qing at the Cross Road, and also related how he had been captured in the little old temple in the woods. When they heard all this the four assistants knelt and begged Wu Song for forgiveness, saying that they went to the woods to look for some booty because they had lost all their money in gambling.
Then Zhang Qing and his wife both laughed, and said, "We have been anxious for some time that these four assistants should not kill people, but rather get them alive. How could they understand our arrangement? If our younger brother had not been tired forty people of your sort would not have been able to get access to him."
"Well, never mind," said Wu Song. "As these four assistants have no money to gamble I myself will give them some money." He opened his bundle, and divided ten taels of silver between them. The four rascals thanked him for this. Zhang Qing seeing this also gave them about three taels of silver.
Zhang Qing said, "My brother, since your departure I have thought that you would escape and come here again. So I instructed my men that they were to take captives alive. As we were afraid that they would kill people, so I did not supply them with swords, but only hooks on sticks with which they could capture men. Just now when I heard that they had captured something valuable I was afraid that they might kill you so I told them to wait until I had inspected the booty. But still I never imagined that it was really you."
"We heard that you had beaten Jiang the 'Door God,'" said Sun Er Niang, "and whosoever heard the news was quite startled. The merchants from the Kuaihuo Forest who passed here could not however give us any news as to what had happened to you after that affair. But you must be very tired just now, so please go to our guest chamber, and take a rest before you tell us all about it."
So Wu Song took this advice, and went to sleep. Zhang Qing and his wife prepared food for Wu Song in the kitchen. It was all ready in a short time, and they then waited for Wu Song to eat the same.
The following morning when the servants who had not been killed found out what had happened in Colonel Zhang's quarters they did not dare to raise the alarm. It was quite daylight when they went to the Prefect's *yamen*, and gave the information there. The Prefect was greatly surprised at the news, and sent men to investigate the case. The reports stated how Wu Song had killed altogether fifteen persons, and had written his name in blood on the wall. The police were then instructed to closely watch the city gates, and to search for Wu Song.
The next day a report came that four men had been killed at the Feiyun Pool, and the bodies thrown in the water. He sent an official to investigate that case also, who duly reported that two of the men were the official escort for Wu Song, and the other two were servants.
For three days a careful search was made in every house in the city, and for every ten houses a letter had to be written pledging that the culprit was not hidden there. All this did not furnish any clue however. The Prefect also issued orders to all the surrounding counties and villages, giving details of the case, describing Wu Song's appearance and dress, and offering a reward of three thousand strings of cash for those who might arrest him. Anyone harboring Wu Song would be treated as a fellow criminal.
Wu Song stayed with Zhang Qing for five days, and heard the rumors and reports from outside sources. Zhang Qing also heard the news, and therefore spoke to Wu Song, "Brother, as you are aware, the officials are giving your case most urgent attention, and are searching every house in the district. I am afraid that they will at last visit this house, and then we shall all be involved. I have found a safe place for you to go to—in fact I mentioned the place to you some time ago—but I do not know whether you would care to go there."
"I have been thinking of the same thing for the last few days," said Wu Song, "and have been aware that I cannot stay here in safety. But now that my only brother is dead and I have no relatives so if you know of a safe place why should I not go there? Where is this place?"
"It is at the Lianglong Mountain in Qingzhou Prefecture. There are my brothers Lu Da and Yang Zhi who are at the head of a gang of brigands. The officials at Qingzhou are afraid of interfering with them. If you went there, there would be no danger of your being arrested again, but if you went to any other place there would be that danger. They have frequently sent me letters asking me to join them, but so far I have not been able to do so. I can write a letter stating your abilities, and they would admit you to their band."
"What you say is quite true," replied Wu Song. "I had that idea myself, but to my regret I found no opportunity of going there. Now that I have killed these people I must find a safe refuge, and your plan is an excellent one. If you will write the letter now I will leave here today."
Zhang Qing wrote a letter, handed it to Wu Song, and prepared a meal for the final leave-taking.
Sun Er Niang pointed at her husband and asked, "Why do you ask him to go in this way? If he leaves here he will meet somebody, and be arrested."
"Why should I not go?" asked Wu Song. "How do you know that I should be arrested?"
"The full details of your case have been published, and are posted everywhere offering a reward for your arrest. Your face is branded with characters so that on the way you would be detected very easily."
"We can put a plaster on his face to cover those characters," said Zhang Qing.
Sun Er Niang laughed, "You are the smartest man in the world, but you have now uttered a very foolish remark. How would a plaster deceive those officials? I have a plan, but I think our brother would not care to try it."
"I want to escape, so what is there that I would not try?"
Sun Er Niang again laughed. "Well, if I tell you, you must not misunderstand me."
"Whatever you say I will do," replied Wu Song.
Sun Er Niang said, "Two years ago a wandering monk passed this way, and I killed him and made his flesh into dumplings. I keep all his clothing, his iron head ring, his string of beads which were all carved out of human bones, and also his broad swords made of the best steel, with fine fish-skin sheaths. Now you can wear these things, and arrange your hair so as to hide the branded characters. There is also a monk's certificate which will be equal to a talisman for you. His age and appearance were about the same as yours. Would not this be a splendid disguise? You can also adopt his name, and on the road nobody would ask questions. Will you try this?"
Zhang Qing clapped his hands to show approval and said. "Wife, a good plan. I have forgotten all about that. Brother, what do you think about it?"
'It will do," said Wu Song. "I am only afraid that I should not look like a monk."
"Well, let me disguise you and then we shall see," said Zhang Qing.
Sun Er Niang went into another room, and brought a bundle. Opening it she spread out monk's clothes, and asked Wu Song to put them on.
He looked at them, and thought they would fit him nicely. He put the clothes on, rearranged his hair, and encased it with the monk's iron head ring and donned the string of beads. Both Zhang Qing and his wife applauded, and said that he looked true to life.
Wu Song took a mirror, and upon examining himself he burst into laughter.
"Why do you laugh so loudly?" asked Zhang Qing.
"I am so strange. I never expected to become a monk. Elder brother, please cut my hair."
Zhang Qing took the scissors, and cut his hair. Wu Song realized that his position was getting serious so he got his bundle ready for departure.
"Now please listen to what I say," said Zhang Qing. "You had better leave here the silver cups, etc. you took from Colonel Zhang's house, and in exchange for them I will give you silver to cover your traveling expenses."
"That is a very good suggestion," said Wu Song. He then exchanged the cups for silver, and put it in his belt. He buckled on his two knives, and was ready to start. Sun Er Niang handed him the monk's certificate with a cover to carry it in. She asked him to suspend this from his neck, and wear it next to his skin. Wu Song bade them farewell, and Zhang Qing asked him to take every care on his journey. "Be sparing with wine, and avoid quarrels with people. Act like a monk. In all transactions avoid haste, or a display of temper, or people will suspect you. When you reach the Lianglong Mountain please give us a letter. We shall not be staying here a long time as we may shortly go to that mountain retreat ourselves. Brother! Be careful! Be careful! Give our respects to Lu Da and Yang Zhi."
So Wu Song rolled up his sleeves for comfort in walking, and set out with big strides.
When he left the Crossroads it was the tenth lunar month, and the days were getting short. He had traveled about sixteen //when he was close to a high mountain range. It was evening, but as the moon was shining bright he continued his way up to the mountain. When he reached the top of the pass it was about 9 P.M. and he stopped to admire the beauty of the scene in the moonlight. In the silence he heard someone in the forest laughing. He thought, "That is strange! This is a very lonely spot, so where can the laughter come from?" He walked towards the trees and saw a temple surrounded by fir trees in a cemetery, on the side of the hill. The temple was small with about ten rooms, and one of the windows was open. Standing at the window and admiring the moonlight view was a Taoist priest who was holding a woman in his arms. This provoked Wu Song's anger, because it was improper for a priest to have a woman in a temple. He got out his broad swords, and soliloquized, "These are the best of swords, but now I am going to test your quality." He rolled up his sleeves, and sheathed one sword, but held the other sword in his hand. He went to the door of the temple and knocked. As soon as the priest heard this he closed the window. Wu Song picked up a stone, and hurled it at the door. A small door at the side opened, and a small acolyte came out and shouted, "Who are you? Why do you come and disturb us at midnight? Why do you knock at the door like this?"
Wu Song opened wide his big round eyes and shouted, "Let this stinking acolyte christen my sword!"
So saying he slashed the boy's head off. The priest instantly appeared on the scene, and called out, "Who has dared to kill my acolyte?" He leapt out towards Wu Song brandishing a pair of double-edged swords.
Wu Song laughed loudly. "I'm quite ready! I don't keep my skill in a box. This is scratching me at the itch." So saying he drew the second sword out of its scabbard, and advanced towards the priest. In the bright moonlight, their swords flashed in all directions as they fought.

One of these will lose his head,
Red blood spattered on the ground.

## 130
## Wu Song gets drunk & beats Red Star Kong Liang; The Dandy Elegant Tiger Chivalrously Releases & treats Song Jiang with honour

Pilgrim Wu pretended to leave an opening, and the priest dashed in with his two swords. Wu Song whirled, aimed and slashed. The priest's head went rolling off to one side, his body dropped on the stone flagging.
"That girl in the temple, come out," Wu Song shouted. "I won't kill you! I only want to question you!"
The girl emerged, knelt before him and kowtowed.
"No need for that. Just tell me: What's the name of this place? What was that priest to you?"
"I'm a daughter of the Squire Zhang family at the foot of the hill. This is our ancestral cemetery temple. The priest came one day and spent the night at our house. No one knew where he was from, but he claimed to be able to tell fortunes and practise geomancy. My parents didn't want to keep him in our home, so they asked him to study the geomantic conditions in the cemetery. He sweet-talked them into letting him stay on a few days. Then he saw me, and wouldn't leave. He lived in our house for two or three months. He killed my father and mother and brother and sister-in-law, and forced me to come up to this temple with him. The acolyte was a boy he had also kidnapped, from some other village. This place is known as Centipede Hill. The priest, whose name was Wang, thought it a propitious spot, so he called himself the Flying Centipede."
"Don't you have any relatives?"
"Several families of them. But they're all farmers. Not one dared stand up to him."
"Did the knave have any property?"
"He'd accumulated about two hundred ounces of silver and gold."
"Go get it, quickly. I'm going to burn down the temple."
"Wouldn't you like some food and wine, sir?"
"Yes, if you've got any."
"Please come into the temple, then."
"You wouldn't have anyone else hidden there, waiting to do me in?"
"How many heads have I got to lose, that I'd dare try to trick you?"
Wu Song followed the girl into the temple. By the small window was a table with wine and meat. He filled a large bowl and drank. The girl collected the priest's gold and silver. Wu Song set fire to the temple. She handed him the money.
"It's yours. I don't want it," he said. "You'll need it to live on. Now get out of here, quick! Go on, go!"
The girl kowtowed and thanked him, and went down the hill. Wu Song threw the two bodies into the flames, and sheathed his knives. That same night he crossed the hill and travelled a winding road to the prefecture of Qingzhou.
For another dozen or so days he walked. Sure enough, in every town, village and hamlet were posters calling for the apprehension of Wu Song. But seeing him in his guise as a pilgrim monk, no one thought to question him.

It was the eleventh lunar month, and the weather was cold. Though he stopped frequently for food and drink, Wu Song was chilled through. As the road climbed to the top of a hill, he saw ahead a high craggy mountain. He went down the hill and walked on for another four or five //. A tavern stood by a clear stream. Behind it loomed a hill of tumbled boulders. The tavern was just a small country wine shop. Wu Song went in and sat down.
"Host," he called, "two measures of wine. You can bring some meat, too."
"We have some simple home brew, Reverend," said the tavern keeper, "but I'm afraid we're out of meat."
"Bring the wine, then. It will ward off the cold."
The host drew two measures and served Wu Song in a large bowl. He brought also a side dish of vegetables. Wu Song soon finished the wine and called for another two drafts. Again the host served, in a large bowl, and Wu Song continued drinking. He was already half drunk from his tippling on the way. Now with four more drafts, consumed quickly, and having been fanned by the wind, he could feel the wine rising to his head.
"Don't you really have anything to eat in this place?" he bawled to the tavern keeper. "Then sell me some of the meat you keep for yourself! I'll pay. I've got silver!"
The host laughed. "I've never seen a monk like you. Drinking wine and eating meat without a qualm. Where am I going to get you meat? Forget it, Reverend."
"I'm paying for what I get. Why won't you sell me any?"
"I told you. We've only got this white wine. We don't have anything else."
While they were arguing, a big fellow and three or four companions came in. The host greeted them, all smiles and bows.
"Please be seated, Second Young Master," he said.
"Have you prepared everything as ordered?" asked the big fellow.
"The chicken and meat are cooked and ready, just waiting for you."
"And my flowery-jug wine?"
"It's here."
The man and his companions walked to a table opposite Wu Song and sat down. The host brought wine in a flowery jug, opened the clay stopper, and poured the wine into a large white basin. Wu Song could see that it was a vintage brew, fresh from cellar storage. Its bouquet wafted to his nostrils. The fragrance was almost unbearable. Wu Song's throat tickled. He could scarcely restrain himself from rushing over and grabbing.
Now the host went to the kitchen and returned with a tray bearing two cooked chickens and a platter of boiled meat. He placed these before the man he called Second Young Master, along with vegetable dishes, then proceeded to ladle out wine for heating.
Pilgrim Wu looked at his lone dish of vegetables, and he flushed with anger. It was a case of "satiated eyes and starving stomach." The wine was working in him. He wanted to pound that other table to smithereens!
"Come here, host," he roared. "What do you mean by cheating your customers!"
The tavern keeper hurried over. "Don't lose your temper, Reverend. If you want more wine, just say so."
Wu Song glared. "Surly oaf! Why wouldn't you sell me flowery-jug wine and chicken and meat? I pay silver for everything."
"The wine and chickens and meat come from that gentleman's home. He's only using my place to cook and eat them."
Wu Song's craving blinded him to reason. "Farts, farts!" he bawled. "You're a stinking liar!"
"I never saw a monk behave like such a savage!"
"What's savage about me? This buck has paid for everything you've served!"
"And I've never met a monk who calls himself 'this buck'!"
Wu Song jumped up and fetched him a slap in the face that knocked him rolling to the other side of the room. Half the host's face was swollen, and it took him some time to crawl to his feet. Angrily, Second Young Master rose swiftly and shook his finger at Wu Song.
"Where's your sense of fitness, you friggin monk! Punching and kicking! Haven't you ever heard that 'He who renounces the material world leaves passions behind'!"
"So I hit him! What business is that of yours?"
"I offer you friendly advice, and you dare to get tough!"
Wu Song pushed his table aside and strode forward. "Are you talking about me?"
The big fellow laughed. "You want to fight me, friggin monk? That's putting your head in the tiger's mouth!" He beckoned. "Come outside, dirty pilgrim! I'll talk to you there!"
"You think I'm afraid?" Wu Song shouted. "That I don't dare fight?" He rushed to the door. The big fellow strode out, and Wu Song followed.
Eyeing Wu Song's bulk, Second Young Master was wary. He struck a defensive pose and waited.
The pilgrim monk stepped up and grasped his hands. The man strained to throw him. By what could he do against such enormous strength? With a twist, Wu Song pulled him against his chest. Then with a thrust he flipped him to the ground as easily as turning over a baby. The big fellow hadn't been able to raise a finger in his own defence.
The three or four village men who were his companions watched, trembling, not daring to come to his aid. Wu Song planted one foot on his recumbent foe and pounded him with twenty or thirty blows of the fist where it hurt, then lifted him up and heaved him into the stream. The companions exclaimed in dismay. Confusedly, they waded in and hauled him out. Supporting him, they made off in a southerly direction. The host, his face paralyzed from the slap, could scarcely walk. He went and hid himself in a rear room.
"So you're all gone! Fine," said Wu Song. "Now I can do some eating and drinking!"
He scooped a bowlful of wine from the large white basin. The pair of chickens and the platter of meat had not been touched. He tucked in with both hands, and in half a watch he had polished off eight-tenths of the food and wine.
Drunk and satiated, the sleeves of his robe tied behind his back, he left the tavern and followed a path by the stream. He staggered and blundered along, buffeted by the north wind. About five // from the tavern a yellow dog came out from behind an earthen wall and started barking at him. Wu Song was drunk and quarrelsome. How dare that yellow cur trail after him and bark?
With his left hand he pulled out one of his knives and gave chase. The dog yapped at him from the bank. Wu Song thrust and missed. The force of his charge sent him plunging into the stream. He was so drunk he couldn't rise. The yellow cur stood and barked.
It was mid-winter. Although there were only two or three feet of water in the stream, it was icy cold. At last Wu Song managed to crawl out, dripping wet. He saw his knife, glittering in the water where he had dropped it. He squatted to pick it up, and tumbled in again. This time he couldn't find his feet. He lay in the stream, rolling helplessly.
From around a screen wall on the bank a gang of men emerged, led by a big strapping fellow. He wore a broad-brimmed felt hat and a padded tunic of gosling yellow. In his hand was a staff. The dozen or so men behind him all carried wooden rakes and cudgels. They heard the dog barking. One of them pointed at Wu Song.
"That varlet of a pilgrim in the stream is the one who beat up Second Young Master! He couldn't find you, Elder Brother, so he went back to the tavern with twenty or thirty vassals to nab him! But the lout's right here!"
Before the man had finished speaking, the younger brother Wu Song drubbed was seen approaching in the distance. He had changed his clothes and was carrying a halberd. Behind him were twenty or thirty vassals, armed with spears and staves, whistling fiercely as they searched. When they reached the screen wall they discovered Wu Song.
"There's the oaf who pounded me, brother!" the young fellow said to the man in gosling yellow.
"Take him to the manor and give him a good going over!" the elder brother directed.
"Get him!" shouted the younger man.
Thirty or forty fellows charged into the water. Poor Wu Song, drunk, was no match for them. He hastily tried to get up. But they all pounced on him and dragged him by his heels from the stream. They hustled him around the wall on the bank. There stood a large manor, enclosed by high whitewashed walls. Surrounding the grounds were weeping willows and tall pines.
The men pushed him into the manor, stripped him, took his knives and bundle, and tied him to a big willow. "Get some vines and flay the wretch," they cried.
They had hit him four or five times when a man emerged from the manor house. "Who are you brothers beating there?" he queried.
The two big fellows clasped their hands together respectfully. The elder said: "Today, Teacher, younger brother went with three or four neighbor friends to that tavern on the path ahead for a few drinks. This scoundrel of a pilgrim picked a quarrel, beat up younger brother and threw him in the stream. His face and head were cut and battered. If his friends hadn't hauled him out he might have frozen to death. He came home, changed his clothes, got some men and went hunting for the churl. That dirty pilgrim had finished off all the meat and wine, and was soused to the ears. He collapsed in the stream outside our front gate. We've brought him here to beat him. He's obviously not a real monk. There are two criminal tattoos on his face that he's covered with his hair. He must be an escaped prisoner on the run. We'll get the truth out of the scoundrel and turn him over to the authorities!"
"What's the use of questioning him," exclaimed the younger brother who'd been pummeled. "That rascal has hurt me all over. I'll be lucky if I can leave my bed in two months. Beat the rogue to death, I say, and incinerate him! That's the only way I'll be able to breathe freely again!"
He raised the vines.
"Wait a moment, young brother," said the man they called "Teacher."
"Let me take a look at him. He seems like a brave fellow."
Wu Song was beginning to sober up. He knew what was going on, but he kept his eyes closed. He let himself be beaten without uttering any sound. The man examined his back.
"Strange," he mused. "Those look like recent marks of the stripes a prisoner is given on discharge." He came around to the front of the captive, grasped his hair and pulled his head up. "But this is my brother, Wu the Second!" he cried.
Wu Song opened his eyes and gazed him. "Brother!" he exclaimed.
"Untie him, quickly," the man shouted. "He's my brother!"
The man in the gosling yellow tunic and the young fellow who had been trounced were startled. "This pilgrim is Teacher's brother?" they asked.
"He's the one I've so often told you about—Wu Song who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge. How did he become a wandering monk?"
The two brothers hastily unbound Wu Song. They gave him dry clothing and helped him into the manor hall. Wu Song started to drop to his knees and kowtow. Surprised and happy, the man stopped him.
"You're not quite sober yet, brother. Sit a while and talk."
Wu Song was overjoyed to see him. The effects of the wine were soon half gone. Hot water was brought to that he could wash and rinse his mouth, and he was given a potion to sober him up. Then he kowtowed.
The man he greeted was none other than Song Jiang, known as the Timely Rain, of Yuncheng City.
"I thought you were at Lord Chai's manor," said Wu Song. "What are you doing here? I'm not seeing you in a dream?"
"After you left, I remained there for half a year. I was afraid my father would be worried, so I sent my brother Song Qing home. Later I received a letter from them saying that, thanks to the efforts of Constables Zhu and Lei, no more pressure was being put on the family, but that I was still wanted and there were notices out for my arrest. The search, however, was not very intense. Squire Kong, of this manor, several times sent an emissary to my home to inquire about me. He met Song Qing who told him that I was at the manor of Lord Chai. So Squire Kong dispatched a man to bring me here. This section is called White Tiger Mountain, and the manor belongs to Squire Kong. The young fellow you fought is his youngest son. Because he's hot-tempered and belligerent he's known as Kong Liang the Flaming Star. The one in the gosling yellow tunic is the squire's eldest son. His name is Kong Ming, and he's called the Comet. Both are fond of spears and staves, and I've taught them a bit, so they call me 'Teacher.' I've lived here half a year now. These last few days I've been thinking of going to Fort Clear Winds. I was just about to leave. While I was still at Lord Chai's I heard how you killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and that you were made a constable in Yanggu County, and later killed Ximen Qing in a fight and were exiled. But where, I didn't know. How did you become a pilgrim monk, brother?"
"After parting with you at Lord Chai's manor I killed the tiger of Jingyang Ridge and delivered it to Yanggu County town. The magistrate made me a constable. Later, my shameless sister-in-law took Ximen Qing for a lover and poisoned my brother. I killed them both and surrendered myself to the magistrate. He turned me over to Dongping Prefecture. The prefect was lenient and exiled me to Mengzhou ..."
Wu Song went on to tell of his meeting with Zhang Qing and his wife at Crossroads Rise, how he met Shi En, and fought Jiang the Gate Guard Giant, and killed General Zhang and fourteen others, how he returned to the home of Zhang Qing, why Sun the Witch disguised him as a wandering monk, how on Centipede Hill he tried out his knives on Wang the priest, how he got drunk in the village tavern and beat up the younger Kong ... He told Song Jiang the whole story in detail.
The Kong brothers listened in amazement. They dropped to the floor and kowtowed. Wu Song quickly returned the courtesy. "I'm afraid I roughed you up a bit," he apologized. "Forgive me."
" 'We had eyes but didn't recognize Mount Taishan!' It's we who need to be forgiven!"
"Since you are so kind, please have my certificate and letter and luggage dried. And don't lose my two knives and that rosary."
"You needn't worry, sir," Kong Ming replied. "I've already instructed people to attend to it. As soon as everything is in order your belongings will be restored to you."
Wu Song thanked him. At Song Jiang's request, Squire Kong came out and met Wu Song. The old man spread a feast in his honor. Of that we'll say no more.
That night Song Jiang asked Wu Song to share his room, and they talked long of all that transpired during the previous year. Song Jiang was very pleased. The next morning Wu Song rose at daybreak, washed and rinsed, went to the central hall and had breakfast. Kong Ming kept him company. Kong Liang, in spite of his aches and pains, also attended him. The squire ordered that sheep and pigs be slaughtered and another feast prepared.
Several neighbors and relatives came from the village to pay their respects that day, as did several retainers of the Kong family. Song Jiang was glad to see his friend so honored. After the banquet was over and the guests had departed, he spoke to Wu Song.
"Where are you planning to settle?"
"As I told you last night, brother, Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener has written a letter of introduction so that I can join the band of Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk in the Precious Pearl Monastery on Two-Dragon Mountain. He's going there himself, later."
"Good. I recently received a letter from home saying that Hua Rong, Commandant of Fort Clear Winds, has heard that I killed Yan Poxi, and has been sending messages urging me to spend some time with him. The fort isn't far from here, and I'd been meaning to go, but bad weather has held me back. Why don't we go together?"
"I'm afraid that's not a good idea, brother. I've committed such serious crimes that even a general amnesty wouldn't clear me. That's why I've decided to become a bandit on Two-Dragon Mountain. Besides, I'm disguised as monk now. Travelling together would be awkward. People might get suspicious. There could be trouble, and you'd be implicated. I know we're brothers to the death, but it might involve Commandant Hua Rong as well, and that would be bad. I'd better just go to Two-Dragon Mountain and be done with it. If Heaven pities me, and I don't die, and I receive a pardon, there'll still be time for me to seek you out again."
"As long as you haven't lost your desire to serve the emperor, Heaven will surely protect you! Since you've made up your mind, I won't try to dissuade you. But stay here with me a few days, first."
The two remained at Squire Kong's manor for ten days or more, then announced that they were setting forth. The old squire wouldn't hear of it. He kept them another four or five days, but Song Jiang was determined, and he had no choice but to give them a farewell feast.
The next morning Wu Song was presented with a newly made pilgrim's robe. His certificate, letter, head hoop, rosary, knives and gold and silver were all returned. He and Song Jiang were each given in addition fifty ounces of silver to spend on the road. Song Jiang tried to refuse, but the squire and his sons forceably put the money into their bundles.
Now Song Jiang's garments and weapons were in order. Wu Song was wearing his pilgrim's garb, with the hoop on his head and rosary around his neck, the knives in their sheaths. He collected his bundle and tied it to his waist.
Song Jiang took up his halberd, hooked on his sword, donned his wide-brimmed felt hat and bid farewell to Squire Kong. The two sons directed vassals to carry the luggage. They themselves saw the guests off more than twenty // down the road before taking their leave.
Shouldering his pack, Song Jiang said: "There's no need for these vassals to accompany us any farther. Brother Wu Song and I will go on from here."
The Kong brothers bid them farewell, and returned to the manor with the vassals. Of that we'll say no more.

Song Jiang and Wu Song chatted as they walked, and at evening they rested for the night. They rose early the next morning, made breakfast, then marched forty or fifty // till they came to a market town called Lucky Dragon. Here the road forked, and Song Jiang asked one of the inhabitants: "Which way to Two-Dragon Mountain, and Fort Clear Winds?"
"Those are two different directions. The west road will take you to Two-Dragon Mountain. If you want to get to the Fort, you have to take the east road and cross Clear Winds Mountain."
Song Jiang turned to Wu Song. "Brother, we part here. Let's have three farewell cups, first."
"I'll accompany you down the road a piece."
"No, don't. 'Though you see a friend off a thousand //, sooner or later you must part.' Just concentrate on your own long journey ahead. Get there as soon as possible. After you've joined the band, go easy on the drinking. If the imperial court pardons you, urge Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi to surrender, too. Some day you may be sent to fight along the frontier. You'll earn honors for your future wife and children, and leave behind a good name when you die. You won't have lived in vain. I myself am a man of no talents. Though I'm loyal to the emperor, I cannot advance. But you, brother, who are so courageous, will surely do big things. Don't forget your stupid brother's words. I hope we shall meet again."
Wu Song listened carefully. They downed several cups in a tavern, paid, left the tavern and proceeded to the fork in the road at the end of the town. Wu Song kowtowed four times. There were tears in Song Jiang's eyes.
"Remember what I've told you, brother," he exhorted. "Don't drink too much. Take care of yourself!"

Wu Song strode off along the western road. Reader, please note: He was heading for Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi, to join their band on Two-Dragon Mountain. Of that we'll say no more.

Song Jiang took the eastern road to Clear Winds Mountain. Wu Song was still in his thoughts. After travelling for several days, he saw a high mountain in the distance. It was oddly shaped, and thickly covered with trees. Song Jiang gazed at it appreciatively a long time. Then, anxious to cover ground, he pushed on steadily, without bothering to seek a resting place.

Before he realized it darkness began closing in, and he looked around in alarm. "If it was summer," he thought, "I could sleep in a grove. But it's mid-winter, with chill winds and frost. The night will be very cold. And there may be ferocious beasts, tigers and leopards. If I can't cope with them, I'm liable to lose my life!"

He continued east along the road for about a watch, growing more and more worried. He couldn't see, and stumbled over a trip-cord. Immediately, a bell tinkled among the trees. Fourteen or fifteen robbers, who had been lying in ambush, came yelling out. They seized Song Jiang and bound him, taking his halberd and bundle. Lighting torches, they escorted him up the mountain. He could only bemoan his fate. Before long, they reached the stronghold.

In the light of fires Song Jiang could see a log palisade enclosure, in the middle of which was a main hall. Here stood three armchairs draped with tiger skins. Behind this building were a hundred or so thatched huts. The robbers trussed Song Jiang up like a dumpling and tied him to a pillar.

"The big chieftain has just retired," said one of the robbers on service in the hall. "Don't report to him now. When he sleeps off his drinks, we'll ask him to come, and give him a broth of the heart and liver of this ox to sober him up! And we'll all be able to eat fresh meat!"

"What rotten luck," thought Song Jiang. "To have to suffer a fate like this just because I killed a painted hussy! I never dreamed I'd leave my bones here!"

The robbers lit lamps and candles, illuminating the room. Song Jiang was frozen stiff, but he couldn't move. He stared around, then lowered his head and sighed.

About the third watch, four or five robbers emerged from the rear of the hall. "The big chieftain is up," they announced, and turned the lamps still brighter. Song Jiang stole a glance at the man who appeared. On his head was a turban, bound in place by a red silk ribbon. He wore a date-red padded tunic. He seated himself in the middle armchair.

This bold fellow was from Laizhou Prefecture, Shandong Province. His name was Yan Shun and he was known as the Elegant Tiger. Originally, he had been a dealer in sheep and horses. But he went broke, and took to the greenwood and became a bandit.

Now, seated in the middle armchair, he was completely sober.

"Where did you get this ox, boys?" he asked.

"We were lying in ambush behind the mountain when we heard the bell ringing in the grove," they replied. "This ox, travelling alone with a bundle on his back, had stumbled over our trip-cord. We brought him here for your sobering-up broth."

"Fine. Invite the other two chiefs to join me."

The robbers went and soon returned from the side of the hall with two audacious men. The one on the left was short, with burning eyes. He came from the Huaihe River valley and his name was Wang Ying. He was known in the gallant fraternity as the Stumpy Tiger. A carter by trade, he had been unable to resist temptation on the road, and had robbed a merchant. He escaped from prison after his arrest and fled to Clear Winds Mountain. He and Yan Shun took the mountain over when they turned bandit.

The man on the right had a clean fair complexion, and his face was adorned with a mustache and a goatee. He was tall, slim, broad-shouldered, and handsome. His head was bound with red silk. He came from Suzhou, and his name was Zheng Tianshou, But because of his good looks he was known as the Fair-Faced Gentleman. He had been a silversmith and since childhood, had been very fond of spears and staves. Eventually, he drifted into the gallant fraternity. While passing Clear Winds Mountain he met and fought the Stumpy Tiger fifty or sixty rounds, with neither able to best the other. Yan, impressed by his skill, invited him to join them as third in command.

All three chieftains took their seats. "Let's get started, boys." Wang the Stumpy Tiger urged. "Cut out this ox's heart and liver and cook us three portions of sour and peppery sobering-up broth!"

A robber brought a large bronze basin filled with water and set it down in front of Song Jiang. Another robber, rolling up his sleeves, held a shiny pointed carving knife. The first robber scooped up water with his hands and splashed it on Song Jiang's chest. Cold water drives the hot blood away, so that the heart and liver, when removed, are crisp and tasty.

The robber then flung some water in Song Jiang's face. The captive sighed. "What a pity that Song Jiang should die here!"

Yan Shun heard him. "Stop!" he shouted to the robbers. "Did that fellow say something about 'Song Jiang'?"

"He said: 'What a pity that Song Jiang should die here.' "

Yan rose from his chair. "You fellow. Do you know Song Jiang?"

"I am Song Jiang."

Yan came closer. "Which Song Jiang are you?"

"From Jizhou Prefecture. I was clerk of the Yuncheng County magistracy."

"Not Song Jiang the Timely Rain from Shandong Province? The one who killed his concubine and fled, Song Jiang of the gallant fraternity?"

"Yes. But how did you know?"

Astonished, Yan grabbed the knife from the robber and cut Song Jiang's bonds, then draped over his shoulders his own date-red padded tunic, carried him to the middle chair and carefully sat him down. He shouted to Wang and Zheng, and all three knelt and kowtowed. Song Jiang hastily returned the courtesy.

"Not only don't you kill me, but you treat me with such decorum! What's the meaning of this?"

The three remained kneeling. "I ought to gouge my eyes out with that knife," cried Yan. "Imagine not recognizing a good man! If I hadn't seen you, if I'd asked a few less questions, I might have finished a noble warrior! Heaven was good and fortunately you spoke your great name, or I'd never have known! In the ten years and more I've been in the greenwood I've often heard chivalrous men tell how just and generous you are, helping those with hardships, saving those in danger. I cursed my luck that I never had a chance to pay my respects. Today, Heaven has let us meet. I'm happy with all my heart!"

"What virtue or ability have I, to deserve such kindness?"

"You're considerate and kind to men of talent, a companion of courageous men, you're famed far and wide! Who wouldn't admire you? The stronghold in Liangshan Marsh is flourishing. Everyone has heard. People say it's due mainly to you. Why do you come here, and alone?"

Song Jiang told how he rescued Chao Gai, killed Yan Poxi, how he lived with Lord Chai and Squire Kong for a long time, and why today he was seeking Hua Rong at Fort Clear Winds. The three chieftains listened delightedly. They presented him with clothes, ordered the slaughter of sheep and horses, and gave him a feast that very night. They ate until the fifth watch, when attendant robbers helped Song Jiang to bed.

The next morning he rose early and related his adventures on the road. He told too of how heroic Wu Song was. Slapping their thighs regretfully, the three leaders said: "We have no luck! It would be fine if he came here. Too bad he's gone to that other place!"

But enough of idle chatter. Song Jiang stayed six or seven days on the mountain, and they wined and dined him every day. Of that we'll say no more.

It was the beginning of the last lunar month, a time when Shandong people visit their family graves. A robber scout came up the mountain and reported: "There's a sedan-chair on the road, with seven or eight men behind carrying two boxes. They're on their way to a cemetery to burn paper ingots."

Stumpy Tiger was a lecherous fellow. A sedan-chair was almost sure to have a woman in it. He assembled forty or fifty men to go with him down the mountain. Neither Song Jiang nor Yan Shun could stop him. Flourishing spears and swords, off went the gang, beating brass gongs. Song Jiang and the remaining two chieftains sat drinking in the stronghold.

Stumpy Tiger was gone two or three watches. A far-ranging scout returned and said: "Chieftain Wang caught up with the party on the road. The seven or eight soldier escorts ran away. He captured the woman in the sedan-chair. The only thing of value was a silver incense burner."

"Where has he taken the woman?" asked Yan.

"To his house on the rear of the mountain."

Yan laughed.

"So brother Wang lusts after women," said Song Jiang. "That's not how a bold man should behave."

"In everything else, he's quite forward-looking, but he does have this failing," Yan admitted.

"Both of you come with me while I speak with him."

Yan and Zheng followed Song Jiang to Wang's place on the rear slope of the mountain. They pushed open the door. Stumpy Tiger had his arms around a woman and was pleading with her. He thrust her aside when he saw the three men enter, and invited them to be seated.

Song Jiang turned to the woman. "In whose household are you, madam? What is it that brings you out wandering idly around in times like these? Anything important?"

The woman advanced shyly and curtsied to each of the three. "I am the wife of the Commandant of Fort Clear Winds. This is the first anniversary of my mother's death. I was on my way to burn paper money at her grave. I would never dare to wander idly around. I beg you, great chieftain, save my life!"

Song Jiang was astonished. He thought: "But I'm on my way to join the commandant of the fort. Can she be Hua Rong's wife? How can I save her?"

"Why hasn't your husband Commandant Hua Rong gone together with you to the cemetery?" he asked.

"Commandant Hua Rong is not my husband."

"Didn't you just say you're the lady of the Commandant of Fort Clear Winds?"

"The fort has two commandants—a civil and a military. Hua Rong is the military commandant. My husband, Liu Gao, is the civil commandant."

"Her husband is Hua Rong's colleague," Song Jiang thought. "If I don't rescue her, it will look bad when I get there."

To Stumpy Tiger, he said: "I have a suggestion. I wonder whether you'd be willing to accept it?"

"I'll hear anything you have to say, brother."

"In the gallant fraternity, anyone who 'wastes his marrow' is a joke. This woman is an entitled lady by decree of the imperial court. For me and gallantry's sake, let her return to her husband. What do you say?"

"Listen to me, brother. I've never had my own woman here in the stronghold. Those big-hat officials are the cause of all the trouble in this world. Why should you care about her husband? Indulge me in this, brother."

Song Jiang dropped to his knees. "If it's a wife you want, I'll get you a fine one. I'll pay for the wedding and give you a girl who'll serve you well. But this woman is the wife of an official who is a colleague of a friend of mine. You must let her go as an expression of goodwill."

Yan and Zheng helped Song Jiang to his feet. "Please get up, brother. There's no problem," they assured him.

"In that case, I sincerely thank you."

It was obvious to Yan Shun that Song Jiang was determined to save the woman. Heedless of the wishes of Stumpy Tiger, Yan shouted for the sedan-chair bearers. The woman kowtowed to Song Jiang worshipfully.

"Thank you, great chieftain," she cried.

"Don't thank me, lady," he replied. "I'm not a chieftain here. I'm just a traveller from Yuncheng County."

The woman left the stronghold, carried by the two bearers. Their lives spared, the men flew down the slope, regretting only that they hadn't been born with two more legs each!

Stumpy Tiger Wang maintained an embarrassed, morose silence. Song Jiang pulled him to the front hall and said: "Don't be upset, brother. Come what may I'm going to get you a bride who will give you joy. I'm a man of my word."

Yan and Zheng laughed. Wang was annoyed, but he couldn't very well show it. Song Jiang had him tied up by the code of chivalry. He smiled politely and accompanied Song Jiang to the center of the stronghold, where a feast was laid. Of that we'll say no more.

When the soldiers escorting the sedan-chair had its occupant snatched from them, they returned to Fort Clear Winds and reported to Commandant Liu: "Your lady has been kidnapped by the bandits on Clear Winds Mountain!"

"Idiots! You abandoned her!" Liu lambasted them with a big cudgel.

"There were only half a dozen of us, and thirty or forty of them! What chance did we have?"

"Bullshit! If you don't get her back, I'll have every one of you thrown into prison!"

There was no way out. The escort pleaded for another seventy or eighty soldiers, armed them with spears and staves, and set forth. When they had covered half the distance, they saw the sedan-chair racing towards them.

"How were you able to get away?" they asked Commandant Liu's wife.

"When I told them who I was, they were scared stiff! They kowtowed and told the bearers to bring me back."

"Lady, have mercy on us! Tell the commandant we fought and rescued you. Otherwise, we'll all be beaten!"

"I know what to say, never fear."

The soldiers thanked her and formed an escort around the sedan-chair. On the return trip, they were impressed by the speed of the bearers.

"When you two carry a chair in town, you waddle along like ducks," they said. "What makes you so fast today?"

"We're really pretty tired, but those knuckle-raps on the back of the skull drive us forward."

The soldiers laughed. "You must be seeing ghosts. There's nobody behind you."

Only then did the bearers turn around. "*Aiya!*" they exclaimed. "We were running with such gusto we were drumming the backs of our heads with our own heels!"

The soldiers roared. They convoyed the sedan-chair into the fort. Commandant Liu was delighted.

"Who was responsible for your rescue?" he asked his wife.

"After those scoundrels seized me, I wouldn't succumb to their wiles, and they were going to kill me. But when I said I was the commandant's lady, they were afraid to touch me, and hastily kowtowed. Then our men came and fought and brought me home."

Liu rewarded the seventy or eighty soldiers with ten bottles of wine and a large pig. Of that we'll say no more.

Song Jiang remained in the mountain stronghold another six or seven days. But he was anxious to join Hua Rong, the military commandant. The three chieftains could not persuade him to stay. They gave him a farewell feast and presented him with gold and other valuables, which he put into his pack.

The morning of his departure he rose early, washed and rinsed, had breakfast, tied on his belongings, and said goodbye to the three chieftains. Carrying wine and tidbits, they insisted on seeing him off for twenty or more *li* down the slope. When they reached the highway, they filled the cups for a final toast. The chieftains hated to let him go.

"You must come and stay with us on your way back from the fort!"

Song Jiang shouldered his pack and took up his halberd. "We'll meet again," he assured them. He bid the chieftains a courteous farewell.

If it were I, the teller of this story living in those days, I would have grabbed him around the waist and pulled him back to the stronghold by force! Anything to prevent him from joining Hua Rong! He nearly died without even having a place for burial! Truly, the bumpy roads we travel are all part of Heaven's plan. Can the gales and storms we encounter be sheer accident then? Whom did Song Jiang meet after joining Commandant Hua Rong?

When those two had fought a dozen bouts, Wu Song, the false pilgrim, sold the stranger a dummy. He deliberately allowed him to come in with both weapons at once, then dodged aside and, taking careful aim, struck a blow — just one. The stranger's head fell one way and his body slumped on the stone path.

"You there, inside! Young woman! Come out!" Wu Song shouted. "I won't harm you, I only want you to tell me what's going on."

The woman emerged from the hut and prostrated herself.

"No need for ceremony," Wu Song said. "Just tell me, what place is this? What's the relationship between you and that priest?"

Weeping, she replied: "I am the daughter of Squire Zhang who lived at the bottom of the hill. This is our family shrine. I don't know where the priest is from. He came to spend a night with us and said he was an expert in magic and *fengshui*. My parents made the mistake of letting him stay at the manor and asked him to come here and inspect the siting of our shrine. He took them in completely and they allowed him to stay on. Then one day he saw me and after that he refused to leave. Within a few months he brought about the death of both my parents, and my family, and forced me to live here with him. The acolyte was kidnapped also. This place is called Centipede Hill. The priest decided the *fengshui* was good here, so he started calling himself 'Taoist Wang, the Flying Centipede'."

"Don't you have any other relatives?" Wu Song asked.

"A few, but they're just farmers. They wouldn't dare argue with him."

"Does he have any valuables?"

"He collected two or three hundred taels of silver."

"Then you'd better go and get it, because I'm going to set fire to the shrine."

"Do you want something to eat and drink, Father?" she asked.

"I wouldn't say no, if there is anything."

"Then please come inside."

"You haven't got someone lying in wait for me in there, have you?"
"I wouldn't dare! I've only got one life!"
Wu Song followed the woman into the building and saw a table beside the window loaded with food and drink. He took a big bowl of wine and polished it off. Then, when the woman had collected up all the valuables, he started a fire inside. The woman offered the bundle of gold and silver to him, in return for sparing her life.
"I don't want your stuff," he said. "You'll need that to live on. Go on now, take yourself off!"
She thanked him humbly and set off down the hill. Wu Song dragged the bodies into the fire to cremate them, stuck his swords back in their scabbards and left that same evening, following a winding path across the hills towards Qingzhou.
He travelled for ten days or so, and everywhere he came to, every village, wayside inn, market town or local centre, there were posters advertising Wu Song as "wanted." Despite this, because of his disguise no one questioned him on the road.
It was December and the weather bitterly cold. One day he had bought wine and food for the journey, but fighting the cold was still a problem. He climbed a small hill and saw a high mountain ahead which looked exceedingly steep and dangerous. Descending from his vantage point, he marched on another mile or two till he saw an inn. There was a stream running past the gate and behind the house a wilderness of scattered rocks and broken ground. It was this kind of remote country inn:
*The door faces a stream, at the back are beds of reeds and water chestnuts; beside the rough perimeter fence plum trees display their ivory blossoms; in front of the window pines sway their gnarled green limbs; on the dark tops of tables and chairs, china cups and bowls are ranged. The yellow clay walls are decorated with pictures of tipsy gods and poets; a blue pennant dances in the winter wind; two lines of verse welcome the customers. The mere smell of a place like this makes the horseman yearn to call a halt, the sailor to head for harbour.*
So Pilgrim Wu descended from his vantage point and hastening to the inn entered and sat down. "Landlord, bring two measures of wine!" he called. "I'll order food later."
"I'll tell you the honest truth, Reverend. The only wine we've got is some plain country brew, and as for meat, we're right out of it."
"Bring me the wine, then. It'll do to keep the cold out."
The landlord went and got the two measures of wine, which he poured into a large bowl for Wu Song, and gave him also a dish of cooked vegetables as a stopgap. Wu Song finished the wine in a trice and called for more, which the landlord supplied, again in a large bowl. Wu Song concentrated on drinking. He had been half drunk on the way, even before he climbed the hill. Now, with these additional four measures and the effect of the north wind, the wine rose to his head. He began to kick up a row: "Landlord, are you quite sure you haven't got anything else? If not, then please give me something from your own table. Of course I'll pay you for it."
The landlord grinned. "I've never seen a monk like you," he said. "You think of nothing but eating and drinking. But where do you suppose I'd get anything? Not a hope, Father!"
"I wouldn't take your food without paying, why won't you sell it to me?"
"I told you already, I've only got this ordinary wine, what else can I sell you?"
While this discussion was in progress, a tall man walked into the inn, followed by two or three others. Here's how this gent struck Wu Song:
*His headdress is the red of a fish's tail, his gown the green of a mallard's head. On his feet he wears a pair of strong boots, about his waist is knotted a length of red cloth. He has a round face and big ears, broad lips and a determined set to his chin. He is well-built and his age is about twenty-five. This young gentleman is proud and heroic in his bearing and not at all given to venery.*
When the tall gent and his pals walked into the inn, the landlord greeted them effusively: "Please, sir, please, take a seat."
"Have you done what I ordered?" the newcomer asked.
"The chicken and the meat are all ready," the landlord replied. "We were just waiting for your arrival, sir."
"How about my special bottle of Qinghua wine?"
"It's right here, sir!"
The tall gent took his party to the table opposite and sat down at the head, while his companions seated themselves lower down. The landlord fetched a bottle of special wine, removed the stopper and poured it into a big white jug.
Wu Song was watching all this out of the corner of his eye. He could tell it was fine vintage wine from the bouquet wafted towards him on the breeze. When he smelt it, Wu Song's throat really began to feel dry and he found it hard to resist slipping closer to grab some. At this point the landlord went off to the kitchen and returned with a pair of roast chickens and a plate of selected meats which he placed before the newcomer. He added some dishes of vegetables and began to ladle out the wine into cups. When Wu Song compared this with what was in front of him, a miserable plate of boiled vegetables, there was nothing he could do to control his anger. For indeed, the eyes were fed but the stomach stayed empty. The wine he had drunk, too, was having its effect. He crashed his fist down, shattering the table, and shouted: "Landlord, come here! What a cheating bastard you are!"
The landlord remonstrated: "Please calm yourself, Father. If you want more wine, you've only to ask."
Wu Song glared at him and shouted: "You've got no principles, you bastard. All that vintage wine and chicken and meat and stuff, why wouldn't you sell it to me? I offered you good money."
The landlord said: "The wine, the chicken and the meat are all what the gentleman brought himself, he's only paying for the table."
But Wu Song was still hungry, he wasn't interested in explanations. "Bollocks! Bollocks!" he bellowed.
"I've never seen a monk as wild as you!" the landlord protested.
"What do you bloody well mean by calling me wild?"
"And I never heard a monk using such language!"
This was too much for Wu Song, who leapt to his feet and thrust his five fingers in the landlord's face, dealing him a blow which sent him reeling. The tall man sitting opposite was furious when he saw this. One half of the landlord's face was completely swollen and for a long time he was unable to rise. The stranger jumped up and pointing to Wu Song said: "You bastard, you're certainly not obeying the religious rule, you're far too ready with your fists and feet. I thought a monk was supposed never to give way to his emotions!"
"Okay, so I hit him, what's it to do with you?" Wu Song said.
The man said angrily: "For your own good, I'm warning you, priest. Keep a civil tongue in your head!"
This so enraged Wu Song that he overturned the table. "Who the hell do you think you're talking to!" he bellowed.
"You lousy beggar," the other answered, undismayed. "Are you looking for a fight? That's really tempting fate, you know!" Then, pointing his finger at Wu Song, he went on: "Come outside then, priest, and let me teach you a lesson!"
"Do you think I'm scared? Do you really think I won't hit you?" Wu Song shouted, and took up a position near the door. The other man slipped through the door and Wu Song followed him. But when the man saw how big and strong Wu Song was, he opted for discretion and took up a defensive stance. Wu Song charged straight in, blocking his opponent's defensive blow. The other was thinking to repel him by main force, but he reckoned without Wu Song's massive strength. With a jerk Wu Song grappled him to his chest, then with a twist he had him over, as easily as someone up-ending a little child. The man did not get in a single blow or kick. When his companions saw this, their hands shook and their legs went limp, no one dared to intervene. With one foot on the man's chest, Wu Song raised his fist and let it fall. After twenty or thirty blows he dragged the man to his feet, and threw him into the stream in front of the door. There was now a great uproar from the man's companions; chaos reigned. Finally they went down to the stream and fished their friend out. Supporting him, they disappeared in a southerly direction. The landlord, meanwhile, who had been knocked senseless and half paralysed by the blow, escaped into the back of the house and hid.
"All right," said Wu Song, "since you've all gone, I may as well take some sustenance!" He took a bowl and started ladling out the wine into a cup and set about some serious drinking. The chickens and the meat on the table were still untouched. He didn't bother with chopsticks, but tore off chunks with both hands and wolfed them down. In less than an hour he had eaten most of it. Now full, and not a little drunk, with the sleeves of his robe knotted behind his back, he left the inn and marched off along the bank of the stream. But the north wind tired him and his legs could scarcely carry him, so he veered this way and that along the path. He was scarcely more than a mile from the inn, skirting the side of an earthen wall, when a yellow dog appeared and started barking at him.
So there was Wu Song, with this big yellow dog yapping at his heels. He was very drunk and needed no excuse for a quarrel. This dog that went on barking and barking infuriated him, so he drew the sword from his left-hand scabbard and bounded after it. The dog fled along the bank of the stream, still barking. Wu Song struck out at it, but he struck empty air. He used such wild force that he went head over heels into the stream and couldn't get out.
The winter moon was in the heavens and it was the dry season, but although there were only a few inches of water, it was unbearably cold. When he managed to crawl out, drenched to the skin, he saw his sword lying in the water. He bent down to fish it out and splash! in he fell again! He was still floundering about in the water when on the other bank, beside the perimeter wall, a bunch of people appeared. The foremost of them was a tall man with a felt hat, a goose yellow surcoat, carrying a staff, and behind him came a dozen or so fellows with pitchforks and peeled staves. One of these pointed and said: "That there bugger in the stream's the one as hit little brother. Little brother were looking for you just now, but 'e couldn't find you. So 'e went and got up a party of twenty, and they buggered off to the inn to nab 'im. But 'e's turned up here!" He had scarcely finished speaking when the man who had been beaten appeared in the distance. He had changed his clothes and now carried a halberd. There were twenty or thirty retainers with him, complemented by a bunch of lads from the village. Wielding clubs and spears they advanced behind their leader with much shouting and whistling as they searched for Wu Song. When they reached the earthen wall, they saw him. The leader pointed and shouted to the man with the goose yellow robe: "That's him, that's the damned priest who beat me up!"
"Tie him up and take him up to the manor for a good thrashing," said the man in goose yellow.
"Move!" shouted the leader of the other party. His followers obeyed. The wretched Wu Song was too drunk to escape. As he still struggled to climb out he was seized and dragged onto the bank. They took him to a big manor house on the other side of the stream, surrounded by a whitewashed wall, shaded by hanging willows and stately pines and set in a walled compound. They dragged him inside, stripped him naked, took his swords and his bundle, tied him to a big willow tree and sent for a rattan cane to flog him.
They had just applied the first few blows when someone emerged from the manor and asked: "Who's that you're beating there?"
The two gentlemen joined their hands in greeting and said: "Let us tell you what happened, master. We went with two or three friends and neighbours to have a drink at the inn down the road and this damned monk came and picked a fight with us. He beat younger brother up badly and chucked him in the stream. His face was all cut and he could have died of the cold if his friends hadn't rescued him and brought him back. After he'd changed his clothes and got together a party he went to look for the monk. The bastard had finished off our food and wine and got himself drunk and fallen in the stream. So we brought him here to give him a good thrashing. Now you can see he isn't a monk at all; he's got a couple of golden seals on his face, only the crafty bugger had combed his hair down to hide them. He must be an escaped criminal on the run. We're going to get to the bottom of this first and then we'll send him off to the police for them to deal with."
The one who had been beaten interjected: "What's the point of questioning him? The blighter really hurt me. I won't get over it for months. Surely, the best thing is to kill him. We can burn the body and then I'll be properly revenged." So saying, he raised the cane and was about to resume the beating. But the other man stopped him: "Don't beat him, brother. Let me have a look at him first. It sounds as if he might be a good fellow."
By this time Wu Song was beginning to sober up. He could hear all right, but he kept his eyes tight closed, and when they beat him he didn't utter a sound. Walking around him, the other man saw the wounds on his back. "Hallo!" he said, "this looks like an official flogging, and the scars are still fresh." He came round to the front of Wu Song, stretched out his hand and lifted the hair to take a good look. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Why, isn't it my old friend, second brother Wu?"
Now Wu Song opened his eyes wide and saw the other. "Well, if it isn't my friend!"
"Quickly, untie him!" the other man shouted. "He's my brother!"
The man in the yellow robe, and the other who'd been beaten, got quite a shock. "How can this monk be your brother, master?" they stammered.
"He's the one I've so often told you about, the one who killed the tiger of Jingyang Pass. He's Wu Song. I didn't know he'd become a pilgrim."
The two brothers hurriedly untied Wu Song and sent for some dry clothes for him. Then they escorted him into the thatched hall. When Wu Song wanted to prostrate himself, the other man, who was obviously overjoyed, raised him up and said: "You still haven't quite got over your hangover, brother. You'd better sit down for a bit and talk."
The pleasure of this meeting did much to sober Wu Song up. Hot water was called for, so he could wash and he was given a pick-me-up. Then he ceremoniously expressed his thanks and they began to chat of old times.
Now this person was none other than that famous native of Yuncheng, Song Jiang the Just.
"I thought you were at Mr. Chai's," Wu Song said. "What are you doing here? Or am I dreaming?"
"After you left Mr. Chai's I stayed there six months. But I didn't know how things were at home, I was afraid my father might be in trouble. First I sent my younger brother, Song Qing, back to see. Later I received a letter from home which said, 'Thanks to the good offices of Sergeants Zhu and Lei, there has been no more trouble with the law. Only you are still "wanted" and there's a general warrant out for your arrest.' The business had in fact calmed down.
"Meanwhile a certain Squire Kong from these parts had been sending for news of me. After my brother returned home and told them I was at Mr. Chai's, Squire Kong sent someone to Mr. Chai's to take me back to his place. This place where we are is called White Tiger Mountain, and this is Squire Kong's estate. That young fellow you had a fight with is the squire's younger son. He's Kong Liang, and because his nature is impetuous and he is always getting into fights, they call him Red Star. The fellow in yellow is the elder son; he goes by the name of Kong Ming, nicknamed Blazing Comet. They're both very keen on fencing, so I've been giving them a few lessons, that's why they call me master. I've been here six months and I'm planning to move on to Windy Fort. I was thinking of setting off in the next few days. I heard all about your exploits when I was at Mr. Chai's, how you killed the tiger on Jingyang Pass and became a captain in Yanggu, and I heard that you'd fought and killed Xi-men Qing. But I don't know where you were banished to or how you became a monk."
"Yes, after I left Mr. Chai's and said goodbye to you," Wu Song explained, "I came to the Jingyang Pass and killed the tiger and had it taken to Yanggu where the governor made me captain. And then my sister-in-law behaved disgracefully — she had an affair with this Xi-men Qing and poisoned my brother. I killed them both and gave myself up to the authorities. At first my case was dealt with in the district, but then it was transferred to Dongping, where Governor Chen came to my rescue and had me banished to Mengzhou." He went on to tell how he ran into the Gardener and his wife, the Ogress, at the crossroads, how in Mengzhou he made the acquaintance of the Young Master and beat up Jiang the Door-God, and later killed General Zhang and fourteen others and escaped to the Gardener's again. He explained why the Ogress advised him to dress as a monk, how he tried out his swords on Centipede Hill, killing Wang, the Taoist and how he got drunk at the village inn and beat up the younger Kong. All his affairs, from beginning to end, he recounted to Song Jiang. The two Kong brothers listened spellbound. When he finished, they humbly prostrated themselves. Wu Song hurriedly returned the compliment, saying: "My behaviour was disgraceful, forgive me, please forgive me!"
The two brothers said: "We couldn't see what was staring us in the face! It's all our fault."
"Since you're so kind," said Wu Song, "might I ask you to have my certificate dried and the letter and my luggage and clothes. And I wouldn't want to lose those two swords or the beads."
"Don't worry about all that," the brothers said. "We've already sent someone to fetch your things and it will all be restored to you."
Wu Song thanked them. Then Song Jiang invited Squire Kong to come and meet Wu Song. Squire Kong ordered wine and arranged a banquet. Of this no more.
That evening Song Jiang invited Wu Song to share his room and they talked far into the night about the things which had happened during the past year or more, and Song Jiang received much pleasure from it. Wu Song was up at dawn next day. After washing and rinsing his mouth he went and breakfasted in the main hall. Kong Ming kept him company. Kong Liang, or Red Star, though still sore from the beating, also helped entertain him. Their father, Squire Kong, ordered goats and horses killed and arranged a banquet. During the day some neighbours and relatives from the village came and visited. There were also some retainers who came to pay their respects, to Wu Song's great satisfaction. After the banquet, Song Jiang asked Wu Song: "Where are you planning to go after this?"
"As I told you last night," Wu Song said, "the Gardener has written me a letter so I can go to the Temple of the Precious Pearl on Twin Dragon Peak, where Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk has joined a band. The Gardener intends to go to the mountain himself later on."
"That's good," said Song Jiang. "To tell you the truth, I had a letter from home recently in which they said that the commander of Windy Fort, Colonel Hua Rong, 'the Archer,' keeps writing and asking me to go and stay with him, ever since he heard about my killing Yan Poxi. We're not far from Windy Fort here, and for several days I've been thinking of going. The only reason I haven't started yet is the weather looked uncertain. Sooner or later I'll go, so why don't we go together?"
"I'm afraid it might not bring you luck if you took me along." Wu Song said. "You see, my crime is very serious, it won't easily be forgiven. That's why I think that to go to Twin Dragon Peak and become an outlaw is my only way out. Besides, dressed as a monk I couldn't very well travel with you, it would make people suspicious. And if there was some kind of fracas, you'd be implicated. Anyway, we're friends till death. I just don't think it's a good idea to compromise Colonel Hua's fort, that's all. You'd better let me go to Twin Dragon Peak. If fate favours us and death does not intervene, there may be an amnesty and it will be time enough then for me to come and see you."
"Since you're so faithful to the emperor, heaven will protect you. And as you've obviously made up your mind, I won't try to dissuade you. But do stay and keep me company a few days longer before you go."
So they both stayed another ten days at Squire Kong's on White Tiger Mountain. And when they did finally make up their minds to leave, the squire was most reluctant to let them go. He managed to detain them a few more days, but after that Wu Song was determined to get going and Squire Kong had to content himself with organizing a farewell banquet. He entertained them for a whole day, and the following morning a new set of monk's clothing was presented to Wu Song, together with the black robe, the monk's certificate he was supposed to carry, the letter, the circlet for his hair, the set of beads, the swords and some other valuables. And everyone contributed fifty taels of silver for his travelling expenses. He put on the circlet, attached the beads to his belt, strapped on the two swords, packed his bag and tied it to his belt. Likewise Song Jiang took up his halberd, stuck the sword through his belt, and donned his felt hat. They both bade farewell to Squire Kong. The two sons ordered some retainers to carry the luggage and accompanied them for the first five miles or more of the way before saying farewell. Then Song Jiang slung his pack on his back, saying: "There's no need for the servants to come any further. We'll go on now by ourselves." The two Kong brothers said goodbye and returned to the manor. Of them no more.
We now follow Song Jiang and Wu Song as they continue their journey, chatting along the way, marching on till evening and then stopping for the night. Next day they rose early, ate and departed. They travelled ten miles or more after breakfast and came to a place called Dragonsborough, situated at a crossroads. Song Jiang asked the people there: "We want to get to Twin Dragon Peak and Windy Fort, which road should we take?"
"They're both in different directions," was the answer. "If you want to go to Twin Dragon Peak you take this road leading westwards. If you want Windy City, you take the road which heads east, past Windy Mountain."
Song Jiang listened carefully and then said: "Dear brother, we have to part now, so let's drink three farewell cups together first."
Parting is the theme of a poem attributed to *Huan Xisha*:
*Parting's hard, when the time comes to shake hands and go. All those shared scenes of mountain and forest draw to a close. Your heart is lonely, your resources are exhausted. When you break your journey grief weighs your spirit down, in the rest house there's nothing to do but sit and twiddle your thumbs. The long evening passes in solitary contemplation, slowly, oh so slowly.*
Pilgrim Wu said: "I'll go with you a little way and then turn back."
"There's no need," said Song Jiang. "As the saying is, 'You can go with your friend a hundred miles, but in the end you still must part.' Remember you've got a long way to go yourself. Try to get there as soon as possible. Once you've joined the company, be moderate in your drinking. If there's an amnesty, you can try to persuade Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi to give themselves up. Maybe you'll be sent to serve on the frontier, win yourself a good name with your sword and be able to establish a family. That way you'll know you haven't lived in vain. I myself have but little talent and although people can trust me, I shall never be successful. But you are such a great hero, you will certainly perform great and memorable deeds. Please do not despise my words. We shall meet again one day, I hope."

After these words they drank a few more cups, then paid the bill. When they left they walked together till the edge of the town, and at the crossroads Wu Song prostrated himself four times. Song Jiang was sentimental from the wine and was most loath to say goodbye. Again he said to Wu Song: "Dear brother, do not forget what I said. Be moderate in your drinking. And look after yourself! Do look after yourself!"

Pilgrim Wu Song now took the road to the west. For the reader's information, he went straight to Twin Dragon Peak and joined up with Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi. We shall leave him there.

Song Jiang meanwhile after saying goodbye to his friend turned east and set his course for Windy Mountain. He missed Wu Song. After a few days' travel he saw Windy Mountain, looming in the distance. Here's what it was like:

*On all sides jagged ridges; dangerous peaks all around. Gnarled and ancient pines harbour eagle's nests; from forked branches of old trees dangle twisted vines. Waterfalls that hang in the air produce a cold blast that gives you goose pimples; amid the play of green shadows light dazzles the eye producing fearful visions. The sound of water carries from deep channels; the woodcutter's axe rings out; crowded peaks rear up, mountain birds call; herds of tailed deer leap through the thorns; packs of foxes howl as they roam in search of prey. This has to be either a monk's place of retreat, or a robber's lair.*

Song Jiang saw that mountain looming before him. It was a wonderful sight, all covered in thick forest, a delight to the eye. Feeling he could never have enough of looking at this scenery, he continued on for several stages without thought of finding somewhere to stay the night. When he realized that it was getting late he began to be worried. "If it was summer, I could spend the night anywhere in the woods," he thought. "But unfortunately it's the middle of winter. It's wild weather and the nights are bitterly cold, I'd never survive. Besides, suppose I should meet some danger-ous wild animal, how could I defend myself? Most probably I would lose my life." So he took a little path to the east. After walking about two hours, he was so preoccupied that he failed to notice a rope stretched across the path close to the ground and it tripped him. A bell rang out through the forest and four or five men who were waiting in ambush leapt out shouting and overpowered him. They took his halberd and pack and after lighting torches they dragged him off up the mountain. All Song Jiang could do was lament his fate. Soon he was a captive in the mountain fortress.

When he looked around him by the light of the torches, he found he was surrounded by a wooden palisade. In the middle was a thatched hall. Three chairs with tiger-skin covers were placed on a dais and beyond there were over a hundred thatched huts. His captors took Song Jiang, trussed up like a festival dumpling, and tied him to one of the main pillars. Some soldiers who were in the hall said: "The chief is still sleeping, don't go and tell him now. Wait till he's slept off his wine, then you can invite him. We'll cut out this big idiot's heart and liver to make the chief a pick-me-up soup, and we can all have some fresh meat."

Bound to his pillar, Song Jiang was thinking to himself: "My God, what a fate! and all because I killed a strumpet! How my whole life is changed into bitterness! Who would have thought my mortal span was destined to finish here!" He saw the soldiers lighting many lanterns and candles. His whole body was numb with cold, he hadn't the least freedom to move; all he could do was gaze helplessly around him, lower his head and sigh.

About eleven to twelve o'clock some soldiers appeared from behind the hall and shouted: "The chief's getting up!" They turned the lights up higher in the hall. Watching out of the corner of his eye, Song Jiang saw this chief enter. His hair was bound in an oval bun and covered with a red silk turban, he wore a robe of burgundy cloth. He seated himself on the middle one of the three chairs with tiger-skin covers. Here's what he looked like:

Round-eyed, with brown hair and whiskers quite sandy;
*His stature's heroic, his spirit the same.*
*In rivers and lakes they call him the Dandy.*
Although in reality Yan's his true name.

This stalwart was a native of Laizhou in Shandong and his name was Yan Shun. He was nicknamed the Dandy. He had once been a dealer in livestock, until he lost his capital and was obliged to take to the greenwood and turn robber. So having awoken from his drunken sleep, the Dandy took the middle one of the three chairs and said: "Where did you get this great ox from, boys?"

"We were just setting up an ambush behind the mountain when we heard the bell go off among the trees," they replied. "It was this poor idiot, marching all alone with a pack on his back. He'd blundered into the trip-rope. So we thought we'd bring him here, chief, to make you a pick-me-up."

"Excellent," said the Dandy. "Quickly then, go and tell the other chiefs to join me."

A moment later two men were seen approaching the hall one from each side. The one on the left was little more than five feet tall, but he had piercing eyes. If you'd like to know more about his appearance, here you are:

Dressed in a robe of blue patterned silk,
*Haughty of mien but in nature most coarse.*
*Covetous, lustful, strong as an oak,*
Wang is his name but he's known as Short-Arse.

This gentleman was from the Huai Valley and his name was Wang Ying. Because he was so small the rivers and lakes fraternity had dubbed him "Short-Arse." He had once been a carter, but seeing so many riches on the road gave him ideas and he robbed a merchant, got sentenced for it, escaped from prison and took refuge on Windy Mountain. He and the Dandy had taken over the mountain as a base for robbery.

The man on the right was exceptionally pale and clear complexioned. He had a moustache and a little pointed beard. He was a fine figure of a man, tall and slender, with broad shoulders. He wore a red turban. Want to know what he was like? Here you are then:

A robe of pure gold and dark glossy green,
*A supple wolf's waist, girded so tightly.*
*Though as fearsome a robber as ever was seen,*
He's known to the others as Gentleman Whitey.

He was from Suzhou and his name was Zheng Tianshou. Because of his pale complexion people called him "Whitey." He had been a silversmith, but from childhood was addicted to fencing with spear and staff, and drifted into the rivers and lakes way of life. Happening to pass Windy Mountain, he ran into Short-Arse, and the two of them fought half a dozen evenly poised bouts. The Dandy, seeing the newcomer was talented, invited him to join them on the mountain, so Whitey took the third chair.

When the three chiefs were seated, Short-Arse said: "Come on now, lads, give us a real good pick-me-up! Let's have this great Ox's heart and liver out double-quick! We'll have 'em in a sweet and sour soup."

One of the soldiers brought a big brass basin full of water and placed it in front of Song Jiang, while another soldier rolled up his sleeves and brandished a sharp knife, of the kind specially adapted to scooping out hearts. The man with the water plunged both hands in and splashed water on the area around Song Jiang's heart — a person's heart, you understand, is a region where the blood is hot; cold water disperses the hot blood, so that when you take the heart and liver out it's particularly crisp and delicious. When the soldier also sprinkled water on Song Jiang's face, the latter heaved a sigh and said: "O wretched Song Jiang, your life must end here!"

The moment the Dandy, with his own ears, heard those two words, he shouted to the soldier to stop splashing the water: "What's that he said about 'Song Jiang'?" he asked.

"He said 'O wretched Song Jiang, your life must end here'," replied the soldier.

The Dandy rose to his feet and said: "You there, do you know Song Jiang?"

"I *am* Song Jiang," came the reply.

"Which Song Jiang are you?" said the Dandy, approaching closer.

"I am Registrar Song Jiang of Yuncheng in Jizhou."

"You don't mean to say you are Song Jiang of Shandong, the Opportune Rain, the one who killed Yan Poxi and fled to the rivers and lakes?"

"You know all about that then? Yes, I am he."

Appalled, the Dandy seized the soldier's knife and cut the bonds. Then he tore off his own burgundy robe and wrapped it around Song Jiang. He placed him on the middle one of the tiger-skin chairs and ordered Short-Arse and Whitey at once to get down on their knees. All three knocked their heads on the ground. Song Jiang slipped off the chair to return the compliment. "Why are you honouring me like this, instead of killing me? What does it mean?" he asked, bowing to the ground.

The three chiefs remained kneeling there together. "I would like to take that knife and gouge my own eyes out, for failing to recognize a great man," the Dandy said. "If I hadn't been and looked for myself, and made these inquiries, we could easily have finished off a righteous man. I thank my stars that you were impelled to speak out your own name, for how else would I have learnt the truth? I have frequented the rivers and lakes and roamed the greenwood for many a year now, and I know well your reputation for bravery and generosity, for helping the needy and supporting the oppressed; but it had never been my fortune to meet you face to face. Today heaven has ordained our meeting and my dearest wish is fulfilled."

Song Jiang replied: "What poor talent can I lay claim to, that you should so overestimate my worth?"

"It is well known how you respect men of honour and receive heroes, you are renowned throughout the known world. Who does not honour you? How the stronghold in the Marshes of Mount Liang has prospered in recent times everybody knows, and people say it is all due to your efforts. What I would like to know, however, is why are you alone and what brings you here?"

One after another, Song Jiang told them about the rescue of vChao Gai, the killing of Yan Poxi, the sojourn with Mr. Chai and Squire Kong and how he was now heading for Windy Fort to find Colonel Hua, the Archer — to the manifest delight of the three chiefs. Afterwards they had clothes brought for him and then goats and horses were slaughtered and they feasted until dawn. At the end of the evening soldiers were called to help Song Jiang to bed.

They were up betimes and Song Jiang recounted more of his adventures on the road, and when he told of the prowess of Wu Song, they stamped their feet and lamented: "Just our luck! If only he'd come to us, how splendid that would be! Why did he have to go there?"

But enough of all this. Suffice it to say that Song Jiang stayed about a week on Windy Mountain and every day he was entertained with drinking and feasting.

It was now well into the last lunar month and in Shandong it's the custom to visit graves on the twenty-fifth. Some of the robbers came up from the foot of the mountain and reported: "There's a sedan chair coming along the main road, with an escort of half a dozen soldiers, and they're carrying two boxes, looks like they're heading for a grave site to burn paper money."

Now Short-Arse was a great lady's man. When he heard this report, he assumed the sedan chair must be carrying a lady, so he mobilized thirty or forty troops and prepared to set off down the mountain. There was nothing Song Jiang or the Dandy could do to dissuade him. Off they went, brandishing pikes and beating a gong. Song Jiang, the Dandy and Whitey went on with their drinking.

When Short-Arse had been gone four or five hours, one of the scouts returned and reported: "The soldiers ran off before Chief Wang got to them. The sedan chair was taken, with a lady inside. There was only a silver incense burner, nothing else of value."

"Where have they taken the lady?" the Dandy asked.

"Chief Wang has taken her to the hut on the mountain," the man replied.

The Dandy laughed. But Song Jiang said: "I suppose our friend Wang Ying has designs on her, but that's not the behaviour of a gentleman."

"Our friend has difficulty in controlling himself, it's his one big failing," said the Dandy.

"Then let's all three of us go and reason with him," said Song Jiang.

So the others took Song Jiang to Short-Arse's place on the mountain. They pushed open the door and found Short-Arse trying to make love to a woman. When he saw them he thrust the woman away immediately and asked them to sit down.

"Whose wife are you, madam?" Song Jiang asked. "What business causes you to be abroad in such a season?"

Blushing, she took a step forward and offered her humble respects before replying: "I am the wife of the governor of Windy Fort. My mother passed away and this is her anniversary, so I was on my way to burn offerings on her grave. Obviously I would not be travelling if it were not needful. I implore you to spare my life!"

Song Jiang received a shock. "Here I am, on my way to stay with Colonel Hua, and this must be his wife," he said to himself. "Obviously I'm obliged to help her!"

He asked her: "Why didn't your husband, Colonel Hua, accompany you to the grave?"

"I am not Colonel Hua's wife," she replied.

"But you just said you were the wife of the governor of Windy Fort!"

"But you see, recently Windy Fort has been given two governors, a civil one and a military one. Colonel Hua is the military governor. My husband is the civil governor, Governor Liu Gao."

Well, Song Jiang was thinking to himself, if her husband is a colleague of Colonel Hua's and if I don't rescue her, it certainly won't look very good when I arrive there tomorrow. So he turned to Short-Arse and said: "There's something I'd like to say to you, my friend, but I don't know if you're prepared to listen."

"Say whatever you like," said Short-Arse.

"In general, a hero indulging in fornication provokes ridicule. And from what this lady says, she is the wife of an important official. Don't you think, for my sake, and for the sake of chivalry, you might let her go, so she can be reunited with her husband?"

Short-Arse replied: "Listen here, I've never had a woman of my own to be my consort here; besides, it's these high and mighty officials who grab all the women nowadays, why are you so concerned about her husband? Can't you just indulge me in this little thing?"

Song Jiang went down on his knees and said: "If it's a wife you want, I can find you a much better one later. Only this woman is the wife of an official who is my friend's colleague, so please, just let her go!"

The Dandy and Whitey helped Song Jiang up, saying: "Get up, please, this is a simple concession to make!" Song Jiang thanked them profusely.

Seeing Song Jiang was so serious about wanting to rescue the woman, the Dandy didn't wait to hear Short-Arse's wishes, he simply gave the order for the sedan chair bearers to take her away. The woman herself, when she heard this, bowed down before Song Jiang as reverently as someone laying out candles before a shrine, intoning: "Thank you, Great Sir!"

"It's not me you must thank," said Song Jiang. "I'm not the chief here, I'm just a visitor from Yuncheng."

She left at once after expressing her thanks. The two chair bearers, glad to get away with their lives, bore her off down the mountain, flying along as if they were only sorry their parents had endowed them with no more than one pair of legs.

Short-Arse was much out of countenance, but he said nothing. Song Jiang drew him aside into the main hall and tried to console him: "Dear friend, do not be upset. Come what may, I shall find you a wife who will completely satisfy you. I always keep my word."

The other two started laughing. Short-Arse was still angry, but Song Jiang treated him with such ceremony that he could not show his feelings and he joined in the laughter. The feasting now continued on the mountain. Of this no more.

Now when their mistress was snatched, the soldiers from Windy Fort had to return to the fort and report to Governor Liu that the bandits from Windy Mountain had taken their mistress. Governor Liu was furious when he heard this, and swore at them for their incompetence and for abandoning their mistress. He beat them ferociously. "But there's only a few of us," they protested, "how could we stand up against thirty or forty of them?"

"Shut up!" he shouted. "If you don't go and get her back I'll have you thrown into dungeons and tortured!"

Well, there was no escape for them, nothing for it but to enlist seventy or eighty troops from the fort and set off with spears and staves to do their best to rescue her. To their surprise, when they were half way there they met the two bearers racing down the mountain with their mistress. "How did you escape?" they asked.

"The blighters carried me off to their mountain stronghold," she replied. "But when they heard I was Governor Liu's wife, they were so scared they quickly paid their respects and told the bearers to take me back."

The soldiers said: "Please have pity on us and tell the Governor we rescued you, to save us from punishment."

"That story suits me all right," she said.

The soldiers prostrated themselves in gratitude and then closely surrounding the chair they set off. When they saw how fast the bearers went, the soldiers said: "In the city you two generally carry the chair at a snail's pace. How come you can go so fast now?"

"Actually we're exhausted," the bearers said, "but these blows on the back keep driving us on."

"Are you seeing ghosts or something? There isn't anyone behind you!"

Only then did they dare turn round and look. "Aiyo!" they exclaimed. "We were running so fast we must have been kicking ourselves on the back of the head!" This provoked general laughter.

Pressing round the chair they all arrived at the fort. Governor Liu was delighted. "Who rescued you?" he asked his wife.

"When those blighters kidnapped me I resisted their advances so they were going to kill me. But when I said I was the governor's wife they didn't dare, in fact they couldn't wait to pay their respects. Then these fellows came and delivered me by force."

When Governor Liu heard this he ordered a dozen bottles of wine and a pig to be brought as a reward for the soldiers. Of this no more.

As for Song Jiang, after saving the lady he stayed another week at the mountain stronghold, but then he wanted to go and find Colonel Hua and began to say his farewells. Since they could not persuade him to stay, the three chiefs laid on a little farewell celebration, and each gave him some money, which he wrapped in his bundle. The day he was leaving he rose early and washed and rinsed his mouth, breakfasted, packed his things, said good-bye and set off down the mountain. The three chiefs, bringing wine, nuts and food, accompanied him more than five miles in the direction of the main road. They all drank before the final parting.

Still reluctant to see him go, they said: "Brother, on your return from Windy Fort, you have to come and see us again at the stronghold."

Song Jiang, luggage on his back and halberd in hand, simply said: "We're sure to meet again." Then he saluted and left them.

Now, had yours truly been present at that time, I'd have taken him by the shoulder or grasped him round the waist, forcibly to restrain him. For just because he insisted on going to stay with Colonel Hua, Song Jiang all but met with an untimely death and no decent burial! But indeed,

Troubles are sent by Heaven to try us,
Who can predict life's ups and downs?

WHILE the two men were fighting Wu Song suddenly made a feint, and his opponent lunged forward. Wu Song stepped to one side avoiding the blow, and at the same moment brought down his sword, and cut off his opponent's head. He shouted, "You, woman, inside there come here! I will not kill you. I only want to ask you a few questions."

The woman came forward and kneeling down saluted Wu Song.

"You need not salute me," said Wu Song. "What is this place called? Who is this man?"

The woman cried, "I am the daughter of Old Zhang who lives at the foot of the hill. This temple is in our ancestral graveyard. I do not know where this man came from, but he came to our house and asked us to let him stay there for the night. He said that he was skilled in the arts of *feng shui*, and had good knowledge of telling fortunes. My father and mother did not want him to stay with us, so they asked him to come to this temple and examine the spiritual nature of the surroundings. One day he saw me, and so was unwilling to depart. He stayed here for three months, and killed my parents, my brother, and my sister-in-law. He then coerced me to stay here with him. The boy here was kidnapped by him from some other place. These hills are the Wugong Ridge. This man thought that the land situation here was auspicious. He said his name was Wang, a Taoist priest, and gave himself the nickname, 'The Flying Centipede.'"

"Have you any relatives about here?"

"I have several relatives, but none of them dared say anything to this man."

"Had he any money?" asked Wu Song.

"Yes, he had accumulated about two hundred taels of silver."

"You go and pack it up. I am going to burn this temple down."

The girl asked Wu Song whether he wanted to eat or drink.

"You can bring the food here," replied Wu Song.

"Please come inside and dine there."

"I am afraid there may be other men who might plot to kill me."

The girl said, "I have only one head, so how dare I attempt to cheat you?"

Wu Song followed the girl inside, and saw near the window a table loaded with food and wine. While he had drunk for a time, the girl brought in the silver and offered it to Wu Song. He would not accept it, and told the girl to take it for herself. The girl knelt, saluted, and taking the silver departed down the mountain.

Wu Song set the place on fire, and threw the two corpses in the flames. He then sheathed his swords, and followed the road across the mountain towards Qingzhou prefecture.

During the next ten days he passed through many villages, hamlets, and towns, and noticed that the proclamation about himself was posted upon the walls. But on account of his disguise as a monk nobody suspected him.

It was now the eleventh lunar month, and the weather was getting quite cold. One day as he ascended a small ridge he saw in the distance a high mountain which appeared to be steep and difficult to cross. After going about two //further he came to an inn. It was built under a cliff, and in front of the door was a pure mountain stream. Near the inn were a few houses. He entered and called for wine and meat.

The innkeeper replied, "I will not deceive you, Reverend, I have no meat left, and I have only plain vegetables and wine."

The innkeeper brought a bowl of wine, and some cooked vegetables. Wu Song had soon finished the wine, and asked for some more. On the road he had already had some wine so when he had taken this he began to feel tipsy. He called out, "Waiter, have you nothing else for me? If you have any meat left for your own family, please give me a part to eat, and I will pay you for it."

The innkeeper laughed and said, "Strange! You are a monk yet you ask for wine and meat. But I have no meat, so I cannot help you."

"I do not want it on credit so why don't you let me have it?" asked Wu Song.

"I have already told you that I have no meat, and only wine. I have nothing else."

Just then a big man entered the inn followed by four villagers, and the innkeeper welcomed them with a smiling face, and asked them to be seated.

"Have you done what I told you?" asked the man.

The innkeeper replied, "The chickens and meat are already cooked, and prepared for you."

"And where is the special wine I ordered?" asked the man.

"It is also here."

The man and his followers sat down at a table facing Wu Song. The innkeeper brought in a jar of wine, and removing the clay with which it was sealed, he poured out the wine into a jug. Wu Song saw that the wine jar had been kept in store for mellowing a long time, and the flavor of it was wafted towards him. He felt a great desire to taste the liquor. Just then the innkeeper brought in a tray loaded with roasted chicken, and another tray of lean cooked meat. He placed these before the men, and began to serve them with the wine. Turning to the small quantity of vegetables on his own table, Wu Song could not avoid being angry. Seeing such a big spread of food, and feeling very hungry he brought his fist down on the table and called out, "Waiter! Here! Why you insult your guest?"

"Reverend! do not worry," said the innkeeper (hurrying to him). "If you want more wine you need not make such a noise."

Wu Song glared at him, and shouted, "How unreasonable you are! Why don't you allow me to buy some of the wine and meat? I can pay for it."

"The wine and meat was sent here by this man himself, and they only come here to dine."

But Wu Song would not listen to this as he wanted something to eat, so he swore at the man; "Farts! Farts! You're giving me farts!" The waiter replied, "Your manners are very rude seeing that you are a monk."

"Why do you talk about manners when I have already offered to pay for what I eat." He then slapped the waiter's face, who staggered to one side.

The man at the other table, seeing this, was angry. He saw that the waiter could not get up. He pointed at Wu Song and said, "You are a damned monk, but you do not carry out your principles well. Why do you hit people in this way? A monk ought not to display temper in this way."

"I hit him, it has damned nothing to do with you," replied Wu Song.

"I give you some good advice," said the man. "Why do you reply in this bellicose manner?"

Now Wu Song was highly excited, overturned the table, and stepping forward shouted, "What did you say?"

The man laughed, and said, "Do you want to fight with me, you stupid monk?" He beckoned with his hand. "You crook. Come here, and talk with me." "Do you think I am afraid of you?" asked Wu Song, and straightway went toward the door. The man stepped out of the door, followed by Wu Song. When Wu Song came outside the man noticed that he was of big build and not to be despised. Wu Song advanced in a fighting attitude. The man tried to kick at Wu Song who however was too quick, and avoiding the kick he seized hold of the man's hand, and pulled him forward. He then pulled him sideways and pushed him down just as though he was a small boy. The man's companions were looking on at this, but did not dare to interfere, and stood there trembling. Wu Song placed his foot on the man, and then hit him about forty times with his fist in unimportant places. He then lifted him up, and threw him into the brook. The companions rushed into the water, and rescued him. They brought him to the bank, and then they all walked off along the road.

The innkeeper was still holding his sore head in a room at the back. Wu Song entered and said to himself, "Well, they have all gone, so I will now have a drink." He took the jug of wine, and had a good drink. He then seized the two chickens, and without using chopsticks ate them with his fingers. He had nearly finished all the food and wine in an hour and being quite full he left the inn, and went on his way by the side of the brook. But there was now a very strong head wind so that he found it difficult to walk against it. He struggled on about two //when he came to an earth wall where a yellow dog rushed out and began barking at him. Wu Song was partly drunk, and felt annoyed at the dog barking, so he took his sword from his belt and attempted to hit the dog with it. But the dog always escaped his blows, and pursuing it to the bank of the stream Wu Song struck another blow, missed his footing and fell into the water, not being able to get up. The dog stood still on the bank, barking at him, but he could not get on his legs again. It was winter-time, and although the water was only about two feet deep it was very cold. At last he struggled up, and stood with the water dripping from his clothes. His sword was lying in the water and it seemed to be very bright and clear. He stooped down to pick it up, but fell into the water again, and could not get up. While he was tumbling there a number of men came out of the house, and stood on the bank. With them was a very big man, wearing a felt cap, and a yellow silk jacket. In his hand was a stick, and about ten men, who were with him, were also armed in the same way. When they saw Wu Song, they cried out, "Here is the crook who attacked our young master who has just gone to the inn with thirty men to capture him." Just then they heard whistles being blown, and the band of thirty men joined the others on the bank. A big man spoke to the man in the yellow silk jacket, "This is the very monk who attacked me." The man spoken to was his brother, and replied, "Arrest him and bring him into our farmyard where we will punish him."

The men seized Wu Song and dragged him out of the stream and went along. Now Wu Song was really drunk and could not struggle. They took him into the yard of a big farmstead which had high whitewashed walls surrounded by fir and willow trees. They stripped him of his clothes, and then beat him severely with a bundle of rattan canes. When they had beaten him about five blows a man came on the scene, and asked, "Whom are you beating?" The brother explained and added, "We suspect that he is really not a monk. He is branded on his face with two lines of characters, which had been hidden by his hair. He is evidently an escaped convict. We will ask him where he comes from, and then send him under arrest to the officials."

The younger brother interposed, "We won't ask any questions. He hurt me severely, and it will be at least a month before I can recover. It would be better to beat him to death, and then burn his body. Then I shall feel that I have had my revenge." He seized the bundle of canes to continue the beating, but the stranger interposed saying, "Sir, please wait until I have had a look at him. He looks like a fine fellow."

Now Wu Song had heard all this, and understood it, but he did not utter a word, and kept his eyes closed.

The stranger examined Wu Song's back, and saw there the scars from the previous beating. "How strange! These stripes must be from a punishment he has recently received." He then went to the front, and lifting up Wu Song's long hair had a good look at his face. He exclaimed, "Is this not my younger brother Wu Song?"

Wu Song now opened his eyes and replied, "Are you not my elder brother?"

"Release him at once," said the stranger. "This is my younger brother."

The brothers were surprised at this turn of events, and asked, "How can this fellow be a brother of yours?"

The stranger replied, "Have I not told you many times about Wu Song who killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge? This is he. I do not understand yet how he has got into this situation."

The brothers released Wu Song at once, gave him his clothes, and then they all went into the hall. Wu Song attempted to kneel down to give a kowtow, but the stranger stepped forward and prevented this, saying, "Younger brother, the wine is still upsetting you. Please sit down, and we will talk together." Wu Song was much pleased at seeing this man, and as he still felt slightly tipsy, he asked for some cold water to wash his hands and face in, and also rinse his mouth. After this he felt better, and after saluting his friend he sat down.

The man was no other than Song Jiang of Yuncheng County.

"I thought you were living with Squire Chai," said Wu Song. "How is it that you are here? It seems like a dream to see you now."

"After your leaving us," said Song Jiang, "I stayed with Squire Chai for about half a year. I did not know how affairs were at home, and as my father might be anxious on account of our long absence, I at last decided to send my brother Song Qing home. After this, a letter arrived from home stating that due to the good care of Inspectors Zhu and Lei there was no more trouble at my home, and only I myself was wanted. An official proclamation had been issued to all places urging my arrest. The case, however, was now almost forgotten. Old Kong had however often made inquiries about me at my home and upon my brother's return, had found out where I was. He therefore sent for me from Squire Chai's home to this place. This is called 'Baihu Mountain,' and this farmstead belongs to Old Kong. The man you fought with is Old Kong's second son. He is very hot tempered, and has the nickname 'Fiery Star,' his name is Kong Liang. The other man with the yellow silk jacket is Kong Ming, the eldest son of Old Kong, and has the nickname 'Restless Star.' They were both very eager to learn fencing, so they asked me to be their teacher. I have been here for about six months. I would like to go to the Qingfeng Fortress and have been thinking of starting the last two days. While I was with Squire Chai, I heard about your killing the tiger on Jingyang Ridge, and that you became a Drill Instructor at Yanggu County, and that you killed Ximen Qing there. But afterwards, I could not find out your whereabouts. How is it that you are now wearing a monk's dress?"

Wu Song then told what had happened to him since leaving Squire Chai's home, and how he had killed so many people. How he had adopted the disguise of a monk's dress, and had fought with Old Kong's son. When Kong Liang and Kong Ming heard the account of the adventures of Wu Song, they both were surprised and kowtowed to him. Wu Song at once raised them up, and said, "It is my fault that I attacked you."

The brothers replied, "We were at fault for not recognizing your eminence. We ask for your pardon."

"Now that you know me, I hope that you will help me in drying my monk's certificate and letters, recovering all my baggage, swords, clothes, etc.," said Wu Song.

Kong Ming replied, "I will attend to that, and see that you get them all back."

We need not say how they all went to explain matters to Old Kong, and were entertained by that gentleman.

That evening Song Jiang invited Wu Song to share his room, and during the night they talked about the affairs of the previous year. Wu Song rose early the next morning, and after washing his face and mouth went into the hall for his breakfast. Kong Ming was there, and dined with Wu Song. Kong Liang was also there, and although he was not recovered from his pain, yet he waited upon Wu Song.

Old Kong gave orders for a pig and goat to be killed, and prepared a feast. That day many of the relatives of the family, and also the neighbors, visited and paid respects to Wu Song.

That evening after the feast Song Jiang asked Wu Song where he intended to find refuge. Wu Song explained that he had a letter from Zhang Qing introducing him to Lu Da at the Lianglong Mountain, and that he wished to join the brigands there.

Song Jiang thought that was all right. He said, "I have today received a letter from Hua Rong, commander of Qingfeng Fortress, stating that he knew that I had killed Yan Poxi, and urging me to seek refuge at his town. This place is not far from Qingfeng Fortress, and I am thinking of going there. But as the weather has been trying these few days, I have not set out on the journey. How would it be if we went there together?"

Wu Song replied, "I am afraid that it would not do for us to live there because as you know I am a convicted criminal. I must avoid trouble by joining the brigands at the Lianglong Mountain. Moreover, as I am now a monk it would not look well for you to travel in my company. It would only arouse suspicions, and you might also get involved. We shall be true to each other till death shall separate us, but I should not like to get you into trouble with the commander of Qingfeng Fortress. I had better go by myself to the Lianglong Mountain. If Heaven takes pity on me I may escape death, and if I am afterwards given an official post, then we may be reunited."

"As you have those ideas," said Song Jiang, "you will eventually return to the Emperor's court, and Heaven will watch over you. I will not attempt to dissuade you, but we can spend a few days here in each other's company."

These two friends stayed about ten days at Old Kong's farmstead. At the end of that period, however, Old Kong was unwilling to let them go, so they stayed about three days more. Then as they were decided to go, Old Kong prepared a feast. He gave Wu Song a new suit of monk's clothes, and also fifty taels of silver. He also presented Song Jiang with the same but as the latter refused to accept them, Old Kong put them in his baggage. Upon their departure Old Kong sent servants to carry their baggage for some distance, and both Kong Ming and Kong Liang also accompanied them for about seven //on their way. Song Jiang at last asked the two brothers to come no further, but return home. This they did, and the servant also returned.

Wu Song and Song Jiang traveled together, and the following day when they had gone about twenty //, they came to a market town called Ruilong, where the road divided. So Song Jiang asked a man, "We are going to the Lianglong Mountain and also Qingfeng Fort. Which of these roads must we take?" The man replied that the western road would lead to the Lianglong Mountain, while the eastern road lead to Qingfeng Fort.

"Young brother," said Song Jiang, "we must separate here, but before we go let us take a parting cup of wine."

"I will come with you for a day's journey on your road," said Wu Song, "and then come back here." "That will not do," said Song Jiang. "There is an ancient saying, 'Accompany a person three hundred //, and yet there is bound to be a parting at last.' You had better go your own way from here. When you become a brigand, try avoid drinking too much wine. I hope you will urge and advise Lu Da to surrender to the Emperor's official, if there is such an opportunity. Later on, if you are sent to the frontier you can accomplish meritorious deeds for the Emperor and thus get your wife and children rewarded by heritage. You can get a good name, and have your actions recorded in history, and so your life would not be lived in vain. I have no ability, and although I am loyal there is no hope of promotion for me. You are a brave hero, and can do great things yet, but please do not forget me."

They then went into an inn and drank a parting cup. They proceeded to the place where the road divided, and there they took leave of each other. Song Jiang could not avoid weeping when they parted. He again asked Wu Song not to forget what he had just said—avoid drinking too much wine.

Song Jiang traveled along the eastern road, and within a few days, he approached the Qingfeng Mountain. It was odd looking, covered with dense forest. He enjoyed the scenery very much, and was so engrossed that he did not even inquire about a resting place. But when evening was drawing nigh, he began to feel anxious and thought, "If it were summer, I could sleep in the forest, but as it is now midwinter, the nights are exceedingly cold, and I must find some shelter. Moreover, here there will be wild animals, poisonous snakes, and tigers, so that I shall be in danger of death." He continued on his way, but after about two hours more, it was so dark that he could not see the road, and soon he fell into a trap which caused a bell to ring. Very soon about fifteen men came on the scene, and arrested him. They took his halberd and bundle, lit a torch, and took Song Jiang up the mountain to their stronghold. Looking round, he saw that the place was protected by a wooden fence, with a large straw shed in the middle. Inside the shed were three chairs covered with tiger skin. On all sides were smaller straw sheds. The soldiers tied him up to a post. Several soldiers in the big hut called out, "Our chief is asleep so that you cannot see him just now. When he awakes, we can take this fellow's liver and heart and make an excellent soup. We shall soon have some fresh meat."

Song Jiang thought, "I am a most unfortunate fellow! I killed a girl, and am now in this awkward predicament. But who would have expected me to die in such a place as this." The soldiers now began to light the lamps. Song Jiang was exceedingly cold, and sighed at his bad fate. About midnight three or four soldiers came from behind the big shed and said, "Our chief has now got up." They went to the lamps, and trimmed the candles. The chief soon came, and Song Jiang stealthily looked at him. His hair was dressed in a knob on the top of his head, and was covered in a red silk turban. His gown was of bright red silk. He sat down in one of the chairs covered with a tiger skin. His name was Yan Shun, and his nickname was 'Elegant Tiger.' His family was at Laizhou in Shandong province. Previously he had been a horse dealer, but had lost all his money and so had become a bandit.

"Where did you capture this fellow?" he asked. The soldiers told him how this had happened.

"That is good," said Yan Shun. "Go and tell the other two chiefs to come here, and partake of this fellow."

A soldier went, and in a short time the two chiefs arrived. One of them was a dwarf, but had very brilliant eyes. His name was Wang Ying, and his nickname was 'Stunted Tiger.' He was a Lianghuai man, and had previously been a porter. He had once been arrested and imprisoned because he had killed a passenger on the road and robbed him of his property. But later he had escaped from the jail. He had joined Yan Shun at the Qingfeng Mountain, and taken to brigandage.

The other chief had a white face, with a beard and mustache. He was broad shouldered but rather lanky. He wore a brown silk turban, and had a distinguished appearance. He was a Suzhou man. His name was Zheng Tianshou, and his nickname was 'White Faced Squire.' Previously he had been a silversmith, and from his youth had been skillful with the cudgels, and had always been fond of strolling about. Once he had happened to meet Wang Ying, the 'Stunted Tiger,' and they had fought for about fifty bouts without either being victorious. Yan Shun had been watching this fight, and had admired Zheng's skill so he invited him to come and join them as brigands.

The three chiefs sat down, and 'Stunted Tiger' spoke, "Be quick, and let us have this fellow's liver made into sour soup for us three."

A soldier brought a large bowl of water, and placed it in front of Song Jiang. Another soldier rolled up his sleeves, and took a knife for cutting out the heart. The first named soldier opened Song Jiang's dress, and poured cold water over his bosom. The water was used to force the hot blood from the heart, and make the heart and liver tender when taken out. The cold water was splashed in Song Jiang's face so that he gasped, and cried out, "What a pity that Song Jiang should die like this!"

When Yan Shun heard the name Song Jiang, he at once told the soldier to stop splashing the water on the man. He then asked, "What did that man say?" When the soldier repeated it, Yan Shun got up and asked, "Do you know Song Jiang?"

"I am Song Jiang."

"Which Song Jiang do you mean?" asked Yan Shun.

"I am Song Jiang who was a clerk in the *yamen* at Yuncheng County."
"Are you the Song Jiang sometimes called 'Welcome Rain' who killed Yan Poxi, and then escaped?"
"How do you know that?" asked Song Jiang. "I certainly am that person."
Yan Shun was astonished. He took the knife from the soldier, and cut the ropes binding Song Jiang. He then took the bright red silk gown he was wearing, and put it on Song Jiang. He lifted him up, and seated him in his own chair. He then summoned the other two chiefs, and they all three went down on their knees and kowtowed to Song Jiang.
Song Jiang arose and also gave them a kowtow. He asked, "Why have you gentlemen not killed me? Why do you pay such respects to me?"
"I feel that I ought to gouge out my own eyes because they failed to recognize you," said Yan Shun. "I did not even ask you any questions so that I was almost on the point of killing a hero. If Heaven had not luckily moved you to say your name we should not have found out who you are. I have acted as a brigand for ten years, and during my travels I have heard that you distributed money in good cause and assisted people in distress. Only I have been so unfortunate that I could not pay you the respects earlier. Now I am contented that Heaven has arranged for us to meet today."
"What virtuous acts have I done that you should now regard me in this manner?" asked Song Jiang.
"Elder brother, you befriend great heroes," said Yan Shun. "Your name resounds in all parts, and where is the man who would not respect you? Just now matters at Liangshan Marsh are prospering, and that is known in all quarters. It has been said that all the prosperity there has been due to your assistance. I did not expect you to turn up at this spot."
Song Jiang then told all the details of his adventures with Chao Gai, his murdering of Yan Poxi, and how he was now on his way to the Qingfeng Mountain to find Hua Rong. All the chiefs were very glad to hear all this, and gave Song Jiang clothes to put on. They had a sheep and a pig killed, and that night they entertained Song Jiang to a feast. The next day Song told them all about Wu Song, and what that brave hero had done. The chiefs felt much regret that Wu Song had gone to somewhere else without calling at their place.
It was the custom in Shandong province to visit the family graves during the first ten days of the last month of the year. One day a soldier reported that in the valley below there was a sedan chair followed by about eight men, who were carrying two boxes, and they were evidently going to a grave to offer sacrifices. 'Stunted Tiger' was a lecher, and when he heard this report, he at once assumed that there might be a woman in the sedan chair. He summoned about fifty soldiers to follow him down the mountain. Song Jiang and Yan Shun were opposed to this expedition, but could not stop it. The bandits seized their weapons, and striking a gong they set off down the mountain. The other three were left behind, drinking wine.
About three hours later, a scout reported to Yan Shun that 'Stunted Tiger' had attacked the eight soldiers who had all run away, leaving the sedan chair in which was a woman. There were only incense sticks in the silver box.
"Where has the woman been taken to?" asked Yan Shun. "'Stunted Tiger' has taken her into his own room," was the reply. Yan Shun laughed. "Then our brother Wang Ying must be lustful, which is not creditable to a hero," said Song Jiang.
"He is very brave on all occasions," said Yan Shun, "but he has just that one fault." "Let us go, and give him some good advice," said Song Jiang. So they all three went to 'Stunted Tiger's' quarters, and upon pushing open the door they saw that he was embracing a woman, and was making solicitations. When he saw his friends he pushed the woman away from him, and asked them to be seated.
"Lady, what family do you belong to?" asked Song Jiang. "What urgent business have you that brings you to this place?"
The woman blushed, and gave three feminine salutes. "I am of the family of the commander of Qingfeng Fortress. My mother is dead so I seized this opportunity to visit her grave, and offer sacrifice to her spirit. I would not think of coming here on an idle trip. I beg you to save my life!"
Song Jiang was startled on hearing this, and thought, "I was going to seek refuge with Colonel Hua Rong, the commander of Qingfeng Fortress and this woman perhaps is his wife. Why should I not save her?" So he again asked, "If you are the wife of Hua Rong how is it that he did not accompany you to the grave?"
"I will tell you," said the woman. "I am not his wife."
"But just now you said you were the wife of the magistrate," said Song Jiang.
"You do not understand," said the woman. "At Qingfeng Fortress there are now two chiefs—one military and the other civil. The military commander is Colonel Hua Rong. The civil magistrate is Liu Gao, who is my husband."
Song Jiang thought, "Her husband is a fellow officer of Hua Rong. If I do not help her it will not look well for me to go and see my friend Hua Rong." He turned to 'Stunted Tiger,' and said, "I have something to say to you, but I do not know whether you will like it or not."
'Stunted Tiger' said, "Elder brother, please say what you have to say."
"If a hero commits debauchery everybody is ashamed of him," said Song Jiang. "This woman says she is the wife of an official appointed by the Imperial Court. What do you think if you take into account my friendly advice and the rules of common decency, and let her go to rejoin her husband?"
"Brother, listen to me," said 'Stunted Tiger,' "I have not a wife to accompany me at the stronghold, moreover in the present generation, many wives are monopolized by one person. Better leave this matter alone, and let me have this woman."
Song Jiang knelt down and kowtowed. He said, "Sir, if you want a wife, I will look round, and find you a very good one. I will endow her with wedding presents, and you can marry her. But this woman is the wife of an official, who is a comrade of my friend, so we must have some consideration of his feelings, and let this woman go."
Yan Shun and Zheng Tianshou both raised Song Jiang up, and said, "Elder brother, please get up. This matter will be easily arranged."
Song Jiang said, "Thank you for not standing in the way of this being done."
Yan Shun saw that Song Jiang was determined so without asking 'Stunted Tiger' whether he agreed or not, he ordered the captive sedan chair bearers to take the woman away at once.
The woman upon hearing this order saluted Song Jiang, and expressed her thanks many times.
"Lady," said Song Jiang, "do not thank me. I am not a leader at this stronghold, but merely a guest from Yuncheng County."
The woman again expressed her thanks, and then entering the sedan chair, she was quickly borne down the mountain by the two bearers whose lives had been spared. They almost flew down the mountain as though they had very many legs.
'Stunted Tiger' was disappointed, and also ashamed.
Song Jiang took him to the front hall telling him not to worry. "I will certainly get you a wife later on, and then you will be able to enjoy yourself. You can depend upon me keeping my promise."
Upon this both Yan Shun and Zheng Tianshou laughed.
'Stunted Tiger' had been balked of his prey by the rules of decorum, but although he was angry he dared not say a word.
The soldiers reported the seizure of his wife to the Magistrate Liu Gao. He was very angry, and abused them for their dereliction of duty. He had them beaten as punishment.
They stated that they were outnumbered as there were about forty of the bandits.
"Nonsense!" said the magistrate. "If you do not now go and recapture my wife, I will have you all put in prison."
The men had no escape so they asked other soldiers to join them, and altogether about eighty soldiers started off to rescue the magistrate's wife. They had not gone half the distance on the return journey when they met the two bearers carrying the sedan chair with the lady inside.
"How did you get away from the mountain?" asked they.
"Those fellows who seized me," said the lady, "were quite upset when I told them that I am the wife of Magistrate Liu, and they at once ordered the chair bearers to take me down the mountain again."
The soldiers replied, "Lady, we pray you to say that we rescued you, and so save us from further punishments."
"I know how to speak to the magistrate," she said.
They all saluted and expressed their thanks. They all escorted the chair and went along. But the chair bearers still walked very quickly so the soldiers asked them, "In ordinary days you walked like ducks or geese, so how is it you hurry so much now?"
"We really cannot walk fast," said the chair bearers, "but we are afraid that those terrible fellows will catch us up and give us a beating."
The escort laughed and said, "Have you seen a demon? Where are the men following you?"
The chair bearers now dared to look round, and seeing nobody pursuing them they exclaimed, "*Ai Ya*! We have had no time to look behind before, because our heels were kicking our backs as we raced along."
When they reached the *yamen* the magistrate was very much pleased to see his wife again, and asked her who had rescued her.
"When those bandits seized me they made vile solicitations, but I did not listen to them, and they were going to kill me. When they heard however that I was your wife they were immediately startled and saluted me. When all these soldiers arrived on the scene, they rescued me, and brought me back."
When the magistrate heard this he ordered ten jugs of wine and a roasted pig to be given to the soldiers as a reward for their efforts.
After the woman had left the mountain Song Jiang stayed there about ten days, and then expressed his desire to visit Colonel Hua Rong. The three chiefs of the bandits did not want him to go, but at last they prepared a feast, and made him presents of much silver.
Song Jiang bid them good bye. The three chiefs accompanied him down the mountain for about seven *li* where they drank the parting cups of wine, and before separating they urged Song Jiang to come and visit them again on the mountain when he left the magistrate's protection. This, Song Jiang promised to do. If the author were living at that time, he would not have allowed Song Jiang to depart and face death again in the Hua Rong's service.

Why should people look for trouble,
Which is not like changing clouds?

## 131

### Song Jiang goes to see the lights at Night & Views the Hill of Lanterns' Display; Hua Rong Turns Topsy-Turvey Clear Winds Fort, Rong Makes a Row at Qingfeng Town, & fights with his colleague

Clear Winds Mountain was not far from Qingzhou, a hundred *li* or so. The fort was located in Clear Winds Town, because here the road divided into three forks leading to three bandit-controlled mountains. The town, inhabited by 4000 or 5000 households was separated from Clear Winds Mountain by a ride of only a stage or more. That day the 3 bandit chieftains returned to their mountain lair and Song Jiang travelled on alone, his pack upon his back, following the winding road to Clear Winds Town. There he asked for Hua Rong's residence. "Headquarters of the fort's in the centre of town," said his informant. "Civilian Commandant Liu lives in a small enclosure to the south, Military Commandant Hua lives in a small enclosure to the north."
Song Jiang thanked the man and proceeded to the northern enclosure. Guards standing at the gate asked him his name, then went in to report. Soon a young officer came out. He enthusiastically hauled Song Jiang inside, while shouting for the guards to carry his pack and halberd and sword, and led him to the main hall where he invited him to be seated on a cool bamboo couch. He dropped to his knees, kowtowed four times, then rose.
"I've thought of you often in the five or six years since we parted, brother," he said. "I heard that you killed your tramp of a mistress. There were notices out for your arrest all over. I was on pins and needles. I must have written a dozen letters to your manor, inquiring. Did you ever receive them? Today Heaven is kind, and we're able to meet again. I never felt so relieved in my life!"
Once more Hua Rong kowtowed. Song Jiang raised him to his feet. "Don't be so courteous, brother. Please sit down, and I'll tell you the rest of my story."
Hua Rong seated himself respectfully slightly at a bias, and Song Jiang related in detail how he killed Yan Poxi, took refuge with Lord Chai, met Wu Song at Squire Kong's manor, and of his capture at Clear Winds Mountain and his encounter with Yan Shun.
"You've had your share of troubles, brother," said Hua Rong. "How fortunate that you could come here now. Stay a few years and then we'll see."
"If my brother Song Qing hadn't written urging me to go to Squire Kong's manor I would have called on you sooner."
Hua Rong asked Song Jiang to the rear hall and summoned his wife to pay her respects, and then his younger sister. He supplied his guest with a change of garments and shoes and stockings, and a bath of fragrant water, after which he laid a feast of welcome.
During the meal Song Jiang told how he rescued the wife of Commandant Liu. Hua Rong frowned.
"What did you do that for? It would have been a good chance to shut her mouth permanently!"
"You amaze me! I thought I was doing something for the sake of your colleague. And I had to offend Wang the Stumpy Tiger and practically force him to let the woman go. I don't follow you."
"I don't mean to gossip, brother, but Clear Winds Fort defends a vital area of Qingzhou Prefecture. If I were in sole command here, the bandits wouldn't be so free with their raids, I can tell you! But this greedy, contemptible Liu has been made my superior. He's only a civilian official, and he has no ability besides. He's been squeezing the rural property-holders from the day he took office. He has no respect for the law. There's nothing he won't do. I'm the military commandant, but I'm under him. He makes me furious. I'd like to kill the dirty beast! Why did you have to save the rascal's wife! She's a nasty piece of business, always egging him on to evil deeds, encouraging him to harm people, to be hungry for bribes. What if she suffered insults and humiliation? Brother, you saved a bad woman!"
"No, that's wrong. You know the old saying: 'The knot of hatred should be opened, not tightened.' He's your colleague. Although he has shortcomings, you should overlook his faults and praise his virtues. You mustn't be so narrow-minded."
"You see things very clearly, brother. When I meet him in the office tomorrow I'll tell him how you rescued his wife."
"Behaving in this manner will be a manifestation of your own merits."
All day Hua Rong and his wife and family wined and dined Song Jiang. In the evening they prepared a bed and canopy for him in a room off the rear hall, for his night's rest. The next day they again served him sumptuous meals. To be brief, it went on like this for four or five days. Hua Rong directed several of his most trusted men—a different one each day—to show Song Jiang around the bustling market section of the town, and the temples and monasteries in the outskirts. He gave them money for expenses.
In the market section there were a few small brothels and tea-houses and wine shops, needless to say. Song Jiang and his guide wandered idly through the brothels, then went to the suburbs to look at a Taoist temple, after which they returned to a wine shop in town and drank. The guide tried to pay, but Song Jiang insisted on footing the bill. He said nothing about this to Hua Rong. His guide was very pleased. He was able to pocket the expense money, and had a pleasant time to boot. Song Jiang followed the same procedure with each of the other guides, always paying his own way. He was, as a result, well-liked in the fort.
A month went by. Winter was drawing to a close and the new year commencing. Soon it was Lantern Festival time.
The town residents talked over how they would celebrate it. They all chipped in, went to the King of Earth Temple and erected in front of it a framework of a turtle-shaped hill on which they hung six or seven hundred colored lanterns, and topped it all off with bunting and streamers. In the temple courtyard, there were various games. People also built trellises and suspended pretty lanterns in front of their homes. In the market section of town every shop had its own entertainments and amusements. While not as lavishly celebrated as in the capital, the festival to the local people seemed like heaven on earth.
On the fifteenth of the first lunar month—Lantern Festival Day, Song Jiang was drinking with Hua Rong in the fort. The weather was clear and fine. Around mid-morning Hua Rong got on his horse, rode down to headquarters and mustered several hundred soldiers. He instructed them to go into town that evening and keep order. He also selected a roster to guard the gates of the fort.
Early in the afternoon he returned and asked Song Jiang to lunch.
"I hear there's a lantern display in town tonight," said Song Jiang. "I'd like to see it."
"I wish I could go with you. But I'm too busy. I can't get away. There will be two or three attendants to keep you company, though. Come home early. I'll be waiting here to celebrate the festival with you with a few cups of wine."
"Of course."
As the day drew to a close, a round bright moon floated up from the east. Song Jiang strolled out with three attendants. In town he saw the fancy lanterns hanging from lattices in front of every door. Many showed story pictures. Some were cut-outs of lovely flowers—white peony, hibiscus, lotus.
Holding hands to keep together in the crowds Song Jiang and his escort went to the King of Earth Temple and admired the hill of lanterns, then walked south along a winding street. After proceeding six or seven hundred paces they saw ahead a bevy of glowing lanterns and a throng of merry-makers before the gate of a high-walled compound. Gongs brayed, music tootled, people cheered. They were watching a troupe of dancers in comic masks.
Song Jiang was short and couldn't see over the heads of the crowd. The attendants knew some of the performers, and they pushed a path through the onlookers to give Song Jiang an unobstructed view. The chief comic did an exaggerated imitation of a rustic's walk, and Song Jiang roared with laughter.
Inside the open gate, Civilian Commandant Liu, his wife and several other women were observing the show. When Liu's wife heard Song Jiang laugh, she looked and recognized him in the light of the lanterns. She pointed him out to her husband.
"That short swarthy fellow laughing there is one of the bandit chieftains on Clear Winds Mountain who kidnapped me!"
Startled, Liu shouted to six or seven of his guards to grab the short dark man who was laughing. Song Jiang heard him and quickly left. But before he had passed a dozen houses, the soldiers caught up, seized him, pulled him into the compound, tied him up, and took him into the hall. When the three men who had been escorting Song Jiang saw that he was arrested, they ran back to inform Hua Rong.
Commandant Liu, seated in his hall, ordered that the prisoner be brought forward. The guards swarmed up with Song Jiang and forced him to kneel.
"You're a Clear Winds Mountain thieving robber! How dare you come here to see the lanterns?" barked Liu. "Now that you're caught, what have you got to say for yourself?"
"My name is Zhang San. I'm a merchant from Yuncheng County, an old friend of Commandant Hua Rong. I arrived here only a few days ago. I've never been a robber on Clear Winds Mountain."
Liu's wife came out from behind a screen. "You're lying," she shrilled. "Don't you remember you insisted I call you 'chieftain'?"
"You're mistaken, madam. I told you that I was a merchant from Yuncheng, that I had also been seïzed by the bandits and couldn't leave the mountain."
"In that case what are you doing here, looking at lanterns?" Liu demanded.
"Up there you sat on the middle chair as big as life," the woman insisted. "Even when I called you big chieftain you paid no attention to my pleas!"
"How can you have forgotten, madam? I rescued you, and made them let you go! Yet now you say I'm a brigand!"
The woman pointed at Song Jiang in a rage. "If you don't give these crooked types a good drubbing they never admit anything!"
"Absolutely right," said Liu. "Get split bamboos and beat this knave," he shouted.
Song Jiang was flailed severely in two storms of blows. Blood flowed from his lacerated flesh.
"Chain him," Liu directed, "and tomorrow put him in a cage cart! We'll send this 'Yuncheng Tiger' Zhang San to the prefecture for disposition!"

Hua Rong was shocked when Song Jiang's escort rushed back and reported. He hastily penned a missive which he dispatched to Liu with two of his trusted officers. They waited at the gate of Liu's compound while the sentry went in and announced: "Two men from Commandant Hua with a letter."
Liu directed that they be brought in. The couriers handed him the message. He tore open the envelope and read:

Hua Rong respectfully greets his colleague and brother: A poor relation of mine, Liu Zhang who came recently from Jizhou, while viewing the lanterns unintentionally offended Your Excellency. I beg you to restrain your wrath and release him. I will be extremely grateful. Please forgive my clumsy writing.

Liu Gao angrily tore the letter to shreds. "That Hua Rong is too discourteous! He's an appointee of the imperial court. How can he consort with bandits, and try to pull the wool over my eyes! The knave of a prisoner says he's Zhang San from Yuncheng County. Hua Rong says he's Liu Zhang from Jizhou. He needn't think he can beguile me! Just because he says the man's name is Liu—the same as mine—does he imagine I'll let him go?"
The commandant ordered that the messengers be thrown out. They were hustled through the compound gate, and immediately returned to Hua Rong and reported.
"My poor brother Song Jiang!" Hua Rong exclaimed. "Get my horse ready immediately!" He donned his armor, tied on his bow and quiver of arrows, grasped his spear, and mounted. With forty or fifty men, bearing spear, and staves, he set out directly for Liu Gao's compound.
The guards at the gate didn't dare stop them. At the sight of Hua Rong's forbidding visage they took fright and fled. Hua Rong rode up to the main hall, dismounted, and stood, spear in hand, his soldiers arrayed behind him.
"Commandant Liu, please come out," he called. "I have something to say to you!"
Liu was terrified. Hua Rong was a military man. He didn't dare face him. When Liu still failed to emerge after several minutes, Hua Rong thought a moment, then ordered his men to search the compound's wings. They made a quick sweep and found Song Jiang in a side room. He was in chains and suspended by a rope from a rafter. His legs were torn and lacerated from his beating. The soldiers cut him down, broke off the shackles, and carried him out. Hua Rong ordered them to take him home.
He got on his horse, spear in hand. "Commandant Liu," he cried. "Though you're the senior officer here, you have no right to treat me like this! Who doesn't have relatives? How dare you seize a cousin of mine, drag him into your residence, and label him a brigand? You've gone too far! I'll settle with you later!"
Leading his soldiers, he returned to his own enclosure to look after Song Jiang.
Liu promptly mustered two hundred men and ordered them to go to Hua Rong's and bring Song Jiang back. Among these were two captains. Although skilled in arms, they were no match for Hua Rong. But they could not disobey Liu Gao. And so they marched with their company to Hua Rong's enclosure. The soldiers at the gate reported their arrival. It was still early in the morning. The two hundred men stood gathered outside the gate, not daring to enter. They all were afraid of Hua Rong.
When the day was fully light, the large double doors swung open, revealing Commandant Hua Rong seated inside his hall, a bow in his left hand, an arrow in his right. Liu's men crowded towards the gateway. Hua Rong raised his bow.
"You men," he shouted, "don't you know that 'the culprit must pay for his wrong, and the debtor for his debt'? Liu Gao has sent you here. Don't risk your necks for him! You two captains are new. You haven't seen my skill. I'm going to give demonstration of now to use a bow and arrow. Then any of you who want to show your mettle for Liu Gao, come ahead, if you have the nerve! My first shot will be at the knobbed cudgel of the painted door god on the left."
He fitted the arrow, stretched his bow and, with a yell, let fly. The arrow slammed into the knob of the cudgel. The two hundred men were amazed. Hua Rong selected a second arrow.
"Watch, you men! This one is for the tassel on the helmet of the door god on the right."
The arrow whistled swiftly towards the tassel and hit it squarely. Both arrows stuck into the opened double doors. Hua Rong pulled a third arrow from the quiver.
"And this is for the heart of that captain in white!"
"*Aiya!*" the man exclaimed. He turned and fled. The rest of the company, yelling, followed hastily.
Hua Rong ordered that the gates of the enclosure be shut. He went to the rear hall to see Song Jiang. "I was late, brother," he apologized, "and they made you suffer!"
"That doesn't matter. The only thing that worries me is that Liu Gao will probably try to get back at you. We'll have to make plans of our own."
"I don't care if it means giving up this post! I'm going to have it out with him!"
"I never dreamed that woman would return evil for good and tell her husband to have me beaten! I was going to give my real name but then I thought that matter of Yan Poxi would cause trouble. So I said I was Zhang San, a merchant from Yuncheng. That pig of a Liu Gao wanted to send me, under the name of Zhang San, to the prefecture in a cage cart, and have me executed as a bandit chieftain from Clear Winds Mountain! If you hadn't rescued me, I could never have talked him round, even if my lips were of bronze and my tongue of iron!"
"I thought as a man of letters he'd surely sympathize with someone of the same name. That's why I wrote you were Liu Zhang. Who would have thought he'd be so lacking in feeling? Well, you've been rescued and brought home. Now we can wait and see."
"You're wrong, brother. Though you've saved me by your military skill, you have to give this a lot of thought. 'Beware of hiccuping when you eat, and stumbling when you walk,' as the ancients say. You've openly snatched a prisoner away from him. And when he sent men to take me back, you frightened them off. Do you think he'll let it go at that? He's sure to send in a written report. I'd better take refuge on Clear Winds Mountain tonight. Tomorrow, you deny any knowledge of my affairs. It will seem like a mere squabble between civil and military administrators. If he captured me again, you wouldn't have a leg to stand on."
"I'm a man of simple courage. I have none of your wisdom and farsightedness, brother. But will you be able to travel with your wounds?"
"It doesn't matter. There's no time to lose. Once I get to the foot of the mountain I'll be all right."
Ointments and poultices were applied to Song Jiang's injuries, and he ate meat and drank wine. He left his pack in Hua Rong's care. Toward dusk, on Hua Rong's instructions, two soldiers saw him off to beyond the gates of the fort, and from there Song Jiang made his way through the night alone. Of that we'll say no more.

Liu Gao's men came straggling back. They said: "Hua Rong is very brave and fantastically skilled! None of us dared get within range of his bow!" And the two captains added: "If one of his arrows hits, it lets daylight right through you! We couldn't approach him either!"
That knave Liu was, after all, a civilian official, and very crafty. "Because of this attempt to seize Song Jiang, Hua Rong is sure to let him leave for Clear Winds Mountain tonight," he mused. "Tomorrow, he'll deny knowing anything about it. If I take it up with higher authorities, they'll assume it's just a tiff between civil and military administrators. How am I going to cope with him? I'll send twenty or thirty soldiers five /down the road to lie in wait for Song Jiang. If Heaven is kind and I nab him, I'll keep him quietly locked up here and send a man to the prefecture immediately with a request that the military command come and get him. They'll arrest Hua Rong at the same time and execute them both! Then I'll rule Fort Clear Winds alone, and won't have to take any more guff from those oafs!"
He picked twenty or so men and, armed with spears and staves, they set out the same night. Around the second watch they returned with Song Jiang, his hands tied behind his back. Liu Gao was delighted.
"Just as I expected! Lock him in the rear yard. No one is to know about this!"
Liu wrote a formal accusation which he dispatched to Qingzhou Prefecture by two trusted envoys, travelling through the night at flying speed.
The next day Hua Rong, who assumed that Song Jiang had already reached Clear Winds Mountain, sat at home thinking. "There's nothing he can do about it," he said to himself, meaning Liu Gao. He made no inquiries, and Liu pretended to be unaware of anything unusual. Neither mentioned the matter.
In Qingzhou the prefect was holding court. His family name was Murong, his given name was Yanda, and his younger sister was a concubine of the emperor. With this backing he rode high in Qingzhou, harming the people, abusing his colleagues, and doing pretty much as he pleased. He was about to adjourn for breakfast when his police officers handed him the complaint from Commandant Liu alleging bandit activities. The prefect was startled.
"Hua Rong is the son of a military commander who has made great contributions to the nation. How could he be conspiring with the brigands on Clear Winds Mountain? That's a serious crime. Can it be true?"
He summoned the commander of the prefectural army and directed him to go and investigate. Huang Xin, the commander, highly skilled in weapons and much respected by the people of Qingzhou, was known as the "Suppressor of the Three Mountains." There were three dangerous mountains under the jurisdiction of the prefecture: Clear Winds, Two-Dragon, and Peach Blossom. All were rife with bandits. Huang Xin boasted he would capture every one of them. Hence his nickname.
On receiving his orders from the prefect, he mustered fifty stalwart men, put on his armor, and mounted his horse, lethal blade in hand. The company arrived at Fort Clear Winds that same night and proceeded directly to Liu Gao's enclosure. Huang Xin dismounted and was led by Liu into the rear hall. Courtesies were exchanged, wine and food were served. His men were also taken care of. Then Song Jiang was brought out for the commander's examination.
"There's no need to question him," said Huang Xin. "Make a cage cart and put the varlet in it!"
A red hand was tied around Song Jiang's head and a paper pennant inserted reading: "Zhang San of Yuncheng, chieftain of the Clear Winds Mountain bandits." No one paid any attention to Song Jiang's denials. He could only submit to their will.
"Does Commandant Hua Rong know you've captured Zhang San?" asked Huang Xin.
"We caught him during the second watch and have kept him hidden here. Hua Rong thinks he's gone. He's sitting peacefully at home."
"In that case, it will be easy. Tomorrow morning lay a feast of mutton and wine in the main hall of the fort, and conceal forty or fifty men all around. I will personally invite Hua Rong to attend. I'll say 'Prefect Murong has heard that you civil and military administrators are not getting along and has sent me to bring you together over wine and make peace.' In that way I'll get him to the hall. When you see me fling down my cup, that will be the signal to grab him! I'll take them both with me back to the prefecture. How does that sound?"
"Very shrewd," said Liu appreciatively. "You make it 'as simple as catching turtles in a jug.' "
That night the plan was finalized. At dawn the following day they hid soldiers in the tents left and right of the big hall, and preparations were made as if for a feast. After breakfast Huang Xin got on his horse and went with only two or three attendants to call on Hua Rong. The sentry at the gate announced his arrival.
"What does he want?"
"He told me only to say: 'Commander Huang is calling.' "
Hua Rong went out and welcomed him. The commander dismounted. Hua Rong invited him in and courtesies were exchanged.
"What business brings you here, Commander?"
"Orders from the prefect. He's heard that you and the civil administrator aren't getting along, but doesn't know why. He's afraid some private squabble will affect public affairs, so I've been sent to invite you two to a feast and make peace between you. It's all laid out in the big hall of the fort. I've come to fetch you."
Hua Rong smiled. "Would I presume to be rude to Liu Gao? He's my superior. It's just that he's always finding fault. I never expected the prefect to be disturbed. And you've been troubled to come all the way to my humble home! I don't know how to apologize!"
Huang Xin leaned close and said in a low voice: "The prefect is on your side. If there ever should be any need to lead troops into action, what use would Liu Gao be? He's only a civil administrator. You just play along with me."
"I'm grateful, Commander, for your concern."
Huang Xin requested him to get on his horse and ride with him to the fort Hua Rong politely urged the commander to have a few cups of wine first.
"After we've smoothed this over, we can drink all we please," said Huang Xin.
Hua Rong ordered his steed, and the two rode out side by side. At the fort they dismounted. The commander took him by the hand and they entered the hall together. Liu Gao was already waiting. The three men met and Huang Xin called for wine. Attendants led Hua Rong's horse away and closed the gates of the fort.
Hua Rong didn't know it was a plot. He considered Huang Xin a regular military official, and didn't suspect him of any evil design. The commander raised his cup and turned to Liu Gao.
"The prefect has heard that there is some discord between you two. He's quite worried and has sent me here to patch things up. He hopes you'll put your responsibility to the imperial court above all else, and that if you have any disagreements in the future you'll discuss them calmly."
"I'm a man of no talent, who knows only a little administrative procedure," said Liu Gao. "I'm very sorry the prefect is upset. There's no conflict between us here. That's just a rumor."
Huang Xin laughed. "Excellent!"
Liu Gao drank. Huang Xin filled a second cup and addressed Hua Rong.
"In view of what Commandant Liu says, I'm sure it's only idle talk. Please join me in this round."
Hua Rong drained his cup. Then Liu Gao poured wine for Huang Xin.
"A toast to you, Commander, in thanks for coming to our humble place. Drink it down."
Huang Xin accepted the cup. Holding it in his hand, he looked around. About a dozen soldiers came into the hall. He flung the vessel to the floor. From the rear there rose a mighty clamor. Forty or fifty stalwart soldiers swarmed out of the tents on both sides of the hall, seized Hua Rong and pressed him down.
"Tie him up," shouted Huang Xin.
"What crime have I committed?" protested Hua Rong.
Huang Xin laughed. "You dare to complain! You're in league with the bandits on Clear Winds Mountain, in defiance against the imperial court! That's your crime! It's only out of consideration for your past prestige that I'm not arresting your wife and family as well!"
"Where's your proof?"
"I'll show you proof. I'll let you see your spoils and one of your bandit cronies. Nobody's wronging you. Guards! Bring him here!"
A cage cart containing a man with a red headband and a paper pennant was rolled in. It was Song Jiang. Hua Rong gaped. They stared at each other, speechless.
"This has nothing to do with me," said Huang Xin. "I'm acting on the charges of Liu Gao, the complainant here."
"It doesn't matter who's accusing him," said Hua Rong. "This man is my relation, from Yuncheng Town. If you insist that he's a bandit, we'll argue it out in court!"
"In that case I must take you along to the prefecture. You can do your arguing in person."
The commander told Liu Gao to muster 100 soldiers for an escort.
"You tricked me into coming, Commander," said Hua Rong. "Although you've arrested me when we get to court, the case will still have to be argued. We're both military officials. Don't strip me of my clothes, but let me ride in a cage cart too."
"That's easy. I grant your request. And I'm asking Commandant Liu to come with us to the prefecture so we can get this straightened out. We want no one wrongfully executed." Huang Xin and Liu Gao mounted their horses. With 50 prefecture soldiers, plus 100 from the fort, guarding the 2 cage carts they set out for Qingzhou. And as a result, leaping flames consumed hundreds of homes, knives and axes took nearly 2000 lives. Truly, provocation brings trouble to the provoker, and injury rebounds against the injurer.

Now Windy Mountain was no great distance from Qingzhou, a mere thirty miles or so in fact. And Windy Fort was situated at a main crossroads in Qingzhou district, at the place called Windy City. Windy Fort had been established here at Windy City for the very reason that this crossroads connected three dangerous mountain regions. It contained a garrison of three or four thousand, and was just one stage away by road from Windy Mountain.
On the day in question the three chiefs returned to their stronghold on the mountain, while Song Jiang went on alone. With the pack on his back, he made his way to Windy City. On arrival there he asked one of the inhabitants where he could find Colonel Hua.
"The garrison headquarters is right here in the town," the man answered. "There's a compound on the south which is the residence of the civil chief, Mr. Liu. Colonel Hua's residence is in the compound to the north."
Song Jiang thanked his informant and directed his steps north-ward. The guards at the main gate asked his name and went inside to report. Immediately a young officer rushed out, pulled Song Jiang to one side and prostrated himself. Here's what he looked like:
*White teeth, red lips, bold eyes, strongly drawn eyebrows, the waist narrow but the shoulders broad as an ape's. He knows how to manage a mettlesome steed or skilfully launch a hawk. He can split the willow twig at a hundred paces and the strength of his arm is wondrous to behold; he bends the bow round as the autumn moon and his feathered shaft scatters the winter stars. The Archer they call him: this scion of great leaders is actually Hua Rong.*
The young officer who appeared was indeed none other than Colonel Hua, the military commander of Windy Fort. After his most respectful greeting, Colonel Hua ordered his men to take Song Jiang's luggage, halberd and sword and escort him into the main hall. Here, after inviting Song Jiang to take a comfortable seat, he prostrated himself again four times, before rising and saying: "It's, let me see, nearly six years now since we parted and I've thought of you many a time. I heard that you killed a harlot, there are notices up everywhere demanding your arrest. When I learnt you were in such trouble I felt as if I was sitting on a mat full of pins. I wrote many times to your home to ask about you, I don't know if you got the letters. But now at last heaven has rewarded me, it is my great good fortune to have you come here. This meeting makes me happy for life." He prostrated himself yet again.
Song Jiang raised him up, saying: "Please brother, this courtesy is excessive. Be seated, I beg of you, and let me tell you my story."
Colonel Hua sat down opposite, and Song Jiang recounted the killing of Yan Poxi, the sojourn with Mr. Chai, the meeting with Wu Song at Squire Kong's, his capture by the Windy Mountain band and meeting with the Dandy … and so on. He left nothing out. Afterwards Colonel Hua said: "To think that you've been through so much! I'm so glad you've come here now. You can stay with me a year or two, we'll have plenty of time to decide what to do later."
"If my younger brother had not written urging me to go to Squire Kong's, it was always my intention to come and spend a little time with you," said Song Jiang.
Next Colonel Hua invited Song Jiang to sit in the inner hall while his wife came and paid her respects, followed by his younger sister. Then he sent him off to change his clothes, including his shoes and stockings, and bathe in scented water, while a feast was being prepared in the inner hall.
At the banquet that day, Song Jiang gave Colonel Hua a full account of how he had rescued Governor Liu's wife. Colonel Hua scowled when he heard this and said: "That was a mistake. What did you go and rescue the woman for? What an opportunity to shut her mouth!"
"How strange!" Song Jiang said. "I heard she was the wife of the governor of Windy Fort. It was for the sake of your colleague I insisted on her release, that's why I refused to listen to the protests of Wang Ying. So what's all this?"
Colonel Hua said: "You don't understand. Don't think I'm boasting, but this Windy Fort is strategically vital for Qingzhou and if I was in sole command you'd never have all these bandits from far and near creating mayhem here. But now I've got this miserable louse over me as civil governor! He's not only a civilian, he's also totally incompetent. Since he took office all the local property owners have been swindled and the law's been turned upside down, he'll stop at nothing. I'm a soldier and deputy governor, and every day that fool does something to drive me crazy. I could kill him, the dirty bastard! Why the hell did you rescue his wife? That woman is evil, I tell you, she drives her husband on to every kind of shamelessness, ruining good men, indulging in bribery and corruption … the cow deserves to be humiliated! Yes, you should never have rescued the bitch!"
Song Jiang rebuked him for this tirade: "Brother, you're wrong there. Remember the old saying, 'Resentment should be purged, not fed.' You and he are colleagues, even if he has some faults, you should ignore the failings and see the good side. You really shouldn't be so prejudiced!"
Colonel Hua relented: "I'm sure you know best, brother. Next time I see Mr. Liu at the office I'll tell him how you rescued his lady."
"I expected no less of your generosity, brother."
Colonel Hua and his family continued to ply Song Jiang with food and drink from dawn to dusk. In the evening a bed was set up for him in a room off the inner hall. Next day the feasting went on. But we will not bore you with any more of this.

For the next week or so Song Jiang continued to enjoy Colonel Hua's hospitality in the fort. Colonel Hua had in his employ a number of personal aides. One of these gentlemen, in turn, was given each day an amount of money for incidental expenses and charged with taking Song Jiang around to witness the activity on the streets of Windy City, to see the beauty spots, the palaces, monasteries and temples, and to visit places of entertainment. From now on one of these aides always accompanied Song Jiang, keeping him entertained with visits to the town.

It goes without saying that in Windy City there were quite a few brothels, teahouses and wineshops. One day, after Song Jiang and his companion had spent a little time in one of the pleasure houses and been to see some temples and monasteries on the outskirts, Taoist and Buddhist, the aide suggested a drink at one of the wineshops in town. When they were leaving, the aide took out money to pay. But Song Jiang refused to let him and paid with his own money, and when he returned he did not tell Colonel Hua about this. Song Jiang's drinking companion of course was delighted: he'd saved his money and he'd also had a very good time. A different companion was allotted to take Song Jiang out each day and every time it was Song Jiang who paid. Soon there was no one in the fort who did not love and honour him.

It was almost a month after Song Jiang came to Colonel Hua's. Winter was ending and spring just beginning and the lantern festival was almost upon them. The townsfolk busied themselves discussing the placing of lanterns and making preparations for the festival. A collection was taken up, and in front of the temple of the Lord of Earth a small turtle mountain was constructed — the top was festooned with coloured streamers and hundreds of decorated lanterns. Inside the temple itself all kinds of events were organized. Everyone erected stands in front of their door, all vying to exhibit the most splendid display of lanterns. Every imaginable activity was on offer in the city and although it obviously could not equal the capital it still seemed a very heaven on earth.

Song Jiang was drinking with Colonel Hua in the compound on the day of the lantern festival. The weather was splendid, clear and sunny. In the morning Colonel Hua rode over to the barracks to give instructions for a hundred or so troops to keep order in the town in the evening, assigning a body of men to each of the four gates. Before noon he returned to the fort and invited Song Jiang to have a snack.

"I've heard there are to be illuminations in the town tonight," said Song Jiang. "I'd like to see them."

"I would take you myself," said Colonel Hua, "but unfortunately I'm on duty, so I'm not free to go with you. You'd better go to see the illuminations with some of my people and come back early. When I get home I'll drink a few cups with you to celebrate the festival."

"Splendid!" said Song Jiang.

Soon it was evening and a bright moon was rising in the east. Song Jiang with two or three of Colonel Hua's personal aides strolled along the bank of a stream. When they reached the centre of town they saw the illuminations: on the stands before each house coloured lanterns were hung, painted with many a famous tale. There were lanterns too decorated with paper cut-outs in the likeness of peonies, hibiscus and lotus flowers and in all manner of wondrous shapes. Walking hand in hand our friends came to the turtle mountain. Then they saw:

*Amid the stones of the mountain two dragons play in water; sunset clouds illume a solitary crane gliding through the sky. Lotus lamps and plum blossom lamps cast pools of coloured light; lamps in the shape of water-lily and hibiscus create a host of dancing colours. Silvery moths vying in brilliance flutter in pairs around perfumed spheres, silvery trees try to outshine each other like patterned banners or jade curtains. Local airs and country rhythms are shouted out under the coloured lanterns; girls of the silk trade stroll and laugh together in the flickering light of the candles. Though it may lack the elegance of fine music, this celebration of nature's bounty has many years of tradition behind it.*

After admiring the turtle mountain, they wandered off towards the south. Another five or six hundred paces brought them to a particularly brilliant display of lights where a small group of people were gathered at the gate of a high walled compound, whence a lot of noise was proceeding. Amid the sound of gongs and fifes, the spectators were applauding. It was a group of masked dancers. Song Jiang was rather short and he couldn't see through the crowd, so his companions, who knew some of the performers, cleared a path through the crowd for him. At this moment some piece of rustic clowning by the dancers made Song Jiang guffaw.

Now it so happened that Governor Liu and his wife with several other ladies were watching within this compound. When the governor's wife heard Song Jiang laughing, she recognized him by the light of the lamps and pointed him out to her husband, saying: "That short dark fellow there, he's one of the blighters who kidnapped me the other day on Windy Mountain."

Governor Liu reacted immediately. He called half a dozen of his attendants and told them to apprehend the dark fellow who was laughing. Song Jiang heard the order and made to leave. But he had hardly passed more than ten houses when they caught up with him, pouncing and carrying him off, as the black hawk seizes a red swallow, or the merciless tiger devours a little lamb. They took him inside the compound, bound him with four ropes, and dumped him in front of the courtroom. His four companions, seeing him arrested, rushed back to inform Colonel Hua.

Governor Liu was waiting in the courtroom and ordered the prisoner to be brought in. They shoved him forward in front of the bench and forced him to his knees. Governor Liu shouted: "You, a brigand from Windy Mountain, how dare you come here brazenly to see the lights? Now you're caught, have you anything to say for yourself?"

Song Jiang replied: "I am a merchant from Yuncheng. My name is Zhang, Third Brother Zhang. I am an old friend of Colonel Hua's. I only arrived a few days ago. I was never a robber on Windy Mountain."

At this point the wife slipped out from behind the screen and shouted: "Who are you expecting to fool, you cheeky devil! Have you forgotten how you wanted me to call you big chief?"

"With respect, madam, you must be mistaken," Song Jiang replied. "Don't you remember that I told you then I was a merchant from Yuncheng and was a captive there, not at liberty to leave the mountain?"

Governor Liu said: "If you were a captive, held there by force, how were you able to come and see the lights?"

The woman added: "You liar! When you were up there on the mountain you sat among the leaders as bold as brass and I had to call you chief! What sort of a captive is that?"

"Madam," said Song Jiang, "have you forgotten that it was I who secured your release? Why are you so determined to make me out a bandit?"

The woman was furious. She pointed at Song Jiang and scolded: "The lousy beggar, beating's the only thing he'll understand!"

"Quite so!" said the Governor, and called for split canes to be brought.

After two successive floggings, Song Jiang's wounds all opened, his skin split and fresh blood poured out. Then manacles were called for to secure him, and a prison cart, which was to take Third Brother Zhang from Yuncheng next day to the provincial court.

Now his companions had rushed back to inform Colonel Hua, who was devastated when he heard and immediately wrote a letter which he sent with two able members of his staff to Governor Liu's. The guards at the gate went inside and reported that there was a letter from Colonel Hua. Liu Gao ordered the bearers to be admitted and they presented the letter. The Governor broke the seal and opened it:

*Hua Rong respectfully greets his colleague and begs to inform the Governor that his cousin Liu Zhang recently arrived from Jizhou, on going to witness the illuminations, had the misfortune to offend in some way. If the Governor will pardon him, Hua Rong will be eternally grateful. Hua Rong begs the Governor to overlook the inadequacy of his style.*

That put the lid on it. Liu Gao tore the letter into little pieces and yelled: "That bastard Colonel Hua doesn't know what's what! He's supposed to be a government official. Yet he's in league with the bandits, and what's more, he's lying to me. The prisoner has already confessed to being Third Brother Zhang, the Yuncheng bandit, how can he be called Liu? Really, it's too much! Does he imagine I'll let him off just because he says his name is Liu, the same as mine?"

He told the guards to throw the bearers of the letter out. Unceremoniously ejected, they returned to the fort in great haste and told Colonel Hua what had happened. "My poor friend!" Colonel Hua exclaimed. "Bring my horse!" He donned his best uniform, slung his bow over his shoulder, grasped his spear and galloped off to Governor Liu's residence, accompanied by thirty or forty men all fully armed. When the guards saw him they dared not stand in his way. His expression was terrible and it struck so much fear into them that they fled in all directions. Colonel Hua charged in and dismounted in front of the courtroom, spear in hand, while his troops deployed. "I wish to speak to Governor Liu!" he bellowed.

Liu Gao heard and was so terrified his spirit fled, his senses scattered. He had a healthy respect for Colonel Hua's martial prowess and had no intention of coming out to meet him. Seeing the Governor would not come out, Colonel Hua waited there a little while, then ordered his men to search the buildings on either side. The search soon revealed Song Jiang in a side-room off the main hall, where he had been hung from a rafter, all trussed up and loaded with padlocks, his legs flayed and bleeding. Some of them freed him, cutting the ropes and smashing the padlocks. Colonel Hua ordered him to be taken home at once. Colonel Hua mounted again and brandishing his spear shouted out as follows: "Governor Liu, you are supposed to be an official, what call have you to insult Hua Rong? Doesn't everyone have relatives? What do you think you're playing at, dragging my cousin into your house and calling him a bandit? What a nerve! You haven't heard the last of this!" At the head of his troop he galloped back to the fort, to take care of Song Jiang.

Now when Governor Liu realized that Colonel Hua had freed the prisoner, he immediately detailed several hundred men to go to Colonel Hua's and seize him again. Amongst these men were two new instructors. Although they were relatively skilled with arms, they could not match Colonel Hua's military art, but they did not dare disobey Liu Gao. At the head of their troops, they rushed to Colonel Hua's fort. The guards went in to report this arrival. It was not yet light, and the two hundred or so soldiers remained milling about at the gate. No one wanted to be first to enter since they feared Colonel Hua's prowess.

When it got lighter, it was seen that the gates were wide open, and Colonel Hua was revealed sitting in the courtroom. In his left hand he held a bow, in his right a drawn arrow. As the crowd pressed about the gate, Colonel Hua raised the bow and shouted: "You there, you men, haven't you heard that there's a cause of every wrong, a collector of every debt? Liu Gao sent you here, but do you really want to die for him? You two instructors are not yet familiar with my skill. I'm going to give you a little demonstration with the bow. After that, if you really want to die for Liu Gao, then feel free to just step inside. I am now going to put an arrow through the knob on the end of the weapon of the door-god on the left." He fitted an arrow, bent the bow to its limit and wham! the arrow struck the very middle of the knob on the end of the door-god's weapon. Everyone seeing this trembled. Colonel Hua took a second arrow and cried: "Now everyone watch while I shoot the red tassel on top of the head of the door-god on the right." Another arrow whizzed off and flew straight to its target. The two arrows now stuck quivering in the two leaves of the door. Colonel Hua took a third arrow and shouted: "Now watch my third arrow. This one is destined for the head of the instructor dressed in white!"

With a cry of "Aiya!" this individual turned and fled. The rest followed, amid a tumult of shouts. Colonel Hua ordered the gates closed and retired to the inner hall to see Song Jiang. "I failed you, brother," he said, "allowing you to suffer this injury."

"It's nothing," replied Song Jiang. "But I am afraid that scoundrel Liu Gao won't leave you alone now. We ought to devise a plan of some sort."

"I'd give up this post for the sake of having it out with that louse!"

"Who would have thought that the woman would return hatred for kindness, inciting her husband to give me such a beating! I should have given my true name in the first place. Only I was afraid that the Poxi affair was known, that's why I said I was Third Brother Zhang, a merchant from Yuncheng. Still, it was a bit much of Liu Gao, trying to turn me into Third Brother Zhang the bandit from Yuncheng and send me up to the district court in a prison cart! He got it into his head I was the chief of the Windy Mountain bandits and from then on all the talk was of beating and execution. If you hadn't come to my rescue, nothing I said could have shifted him, I'd never have convinced him, not in a month of Sundays!"

"And my idea, you see, was that since he's a scholar he ought to respect somebody with the same name, that's why I wrote 'Liu Zhang.' It didn't occur to me he could be so lacking in human feelings. But now you're safely here and we'll have plenty of time to decide what to do later."

"I think that's a mistake," said Song Jiang. "Since you rescued me by force the whole affair needs careful thought. Remember the old saying, 'When you eat beware of choking, when you walk watch out for tripping up.' You've openly robbed him of his prize, he immediately sent troops to get me back and you scared them off, I don't see how he can let the matter rest. He'll certainly report you. I'd better leave tonight, then you can repudiate me and it'll just look like the usual difference of opinion between the military and the civil arm. Even supposing he does capture me again, he'll have nothing on you."

Colonel Hua said: "I'm just a soldier, I'm afraid … I don't have your logic and foresight. Only I'm afraid with your wounds you won't be able to travel."

"That won't stop me," said Song Jiang. "One shouldn't delay in an emergency. I can hold out till I reach the mountain."

That afternoon ointment was applied to Song Jiang's wounds and he ate some food. His luggage he left at Colonel Hua's. At dusk two soldiers escorted him out of the camp. He started his journey that same night. Of this no more.

Meanwhile Liu Gao's men had struggled back to the barracks one by one. "Colonel Hua is such a tough nut, no one wants to get within reach of his arrows," they said. "Give him an arrow and he'll shoot you as full of holes as a sieve," the two instructors added. "That's why no one can get near him."

But not for nothing was Liu Gao a scholar. His mind was deep and devious, and he was full of schemes. Here is what he had worked out: "After this incident, I think we can count on Colonel Hua's sending the bandit straight off to Windy Mountain tonight. And tomorrow he'll come to me with excuses. So even if it went to court, it would look like a difference of opinion between the civil arm and the military. That way I'd never be able to get even with him. But tonight I'll send a score of men to set an ambush at the second milestone. If heaven favours me and we catch him, I'll have him quietly locked up here and send someone in secret to the provincial court to request a military escort to come and get him. They can take Colonel Hua in at the same time, and they'll both be finished off together. That way I'll be left in sole command of Windy Fort. I won't have to put up with that fellow's insolence any longer."

That very evening he dispatched a troop of around twenty well-armed men. At approximately nine o'clock they returned with Song Jiang, tightly bound. "Just as I hoped," Liu Gao gloated. "Now take him and lock him up in the inmost court and don't breathe a word to anyone." He made out an official report at once, carefully sealed and marked urgent, and entrusted it to two of his most reliable men to deliver by night to the Qingzhou district court.

Next day, Colonel Hua, assuming Song Jiang had got away to Windy Mountain, sat at home and considered things. "I don't see that there's anything he can do," he said to himself. So he gave the matter no further thought. Liu Gao also kept quiet. Nothing was said on either side.

Now the court was actually in session in Qingzhou. The governor had the double surname of Mu-Rong, and the given name Yanda, and he was an elder brother of one of the concubines of the current emperor, Huizong. Relying on the influence of his sister, he made his own rules in Qingzhou, riding roughshod over the people, intriguing against friends and colleagues and in general doing exactly as he liked. He was just on the point of going home for breakfast when his assistants came in with the urgent letter from Liu Gao. It concerned a case of banditry. What he read shocked him: "Colonel Hua is the son of a high-ranking official," he said. "What's he doing consorting with the bandits of Windy Mountain? It's a most serious crime, certainly not something to be condoned." He summoned the commander of the district militia and ordered him to Windy Fort.

This commander was General Huang Xin. On account of his notable military ability, the people of Qingzhou went in awe of him and referred to him as the Tamer of Three Mountains. For there were in the district of Qingzhou three dangerous mountains: Windy Mountain, Twin Dragon Peak and Mount Peachblossom. These were all areas to which bandits and outlaws resorted, and Huang Xin was always boasting that he would put down the gangs on all three. Hence his nickname, the Tamer. After reporting to the court and receiving the Governor's order, the Tamer chose fifty seasoned troops and equipped himself for battle. That same evening, brandishing his double-edged sword, he set off for Windy Fort. He dismounted in front of Liu Gao's office. Liu Gao received him and took him into the inner hall. After the exchange of courtesies a banquet was organized and the troops were suitably regaled. Afterwards Song Jiang was brought out for the Tamer to see. "No need for questions," said the latter. "Get a prison cart at once and shove the scoundrel inside." A piece of red silk was bound round Song Jiang's head and a paper pennant stuck in it bearing the words, "Third Brother Zhang, the Yuncheng bandit, leader of the Windy Mountain rabble." Song Jiang dared not protest, he was obliged to submit to their will.

"Does Colonel Hua know that you've got Zhang?" the Tamer asked Liu Gao.

"I took him at night, at nine o'clock," Liu Gao replied. "I locked him up secretly here in the residence. Colonel Hua must think he's got away because he's just sitting at home doing nothing."

"In that case it's easy. Tomorrow lay in plentiful supplies for a feast in the main hall of the fort and set an ambush of fifty or so men all around it in advance. I will go myself to Colonel Hua's residence and personally invite him to attend. The reason I'll give as follows: 'His Excellency, Governor Mu-Rong has heard that the military and civil authorities are not in accord and has sent me with express orders to arrange a meeting.' Once we've lured him into the hall I shall give the signal by dashing my cup to the floor. Then we go into action and capture him."

The plan was agreed on that night, and early next morning the ambush was set in the rooms on either side of the main hall, while the semblance of a feast was created in the hall itself. The Tamer then mounted and rode to Colonel Hua's residence, taking only a few men with him. When the guard reported, Colonel Hua asked: "Why has he come?"

"The word is that General Huang Xin has some special business with you," the man replied.

This was enough to bring Colonel Hua out to receive him. The Tamer dismounted and Colonel Hua asked him in. After the exchange of formalities, Colonel Hua asked: "May I inquire, General Huang sir, what business brings you here?"

"I have the honour to bear the Governor's commission. He told me that for some unknown reason the civil and military authorities here are not in accord. He fears that your personal animosity may cause you to neglect your public duties. He has sent me to organize a feast so that the two of you may be reconciled. This has already been arranged in the great hall, so I request you to mount and accompany me thither."

"Of course I would not think of intriguing against Liu Gao," said Colonel Hua easily. "He also has an official appointment here. It's just that he is always finding fault with me. But it was far from my intention to upset the Governor. And now I have given you all the trouble of coming here. How can I make amends?"

The Tamer, bending his ear and speaking very softly, said: "The Governor puts his trust in you alone. If there are any military emergencies, Liu Gao is only a civilian, he would be no use for dealing with them. All you need to do is follow my advice."

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir," Colonel Hua said.

The Tamer suggested they leave at once, but Colonel Hua said: "Please honour me, sir, by accepting some wine before we go."

"Before a conference a cup or two of wine is not a bad idea," the Tamer said.

Finally Colonel Hua called for the horses and they rode together to the main compound where they dismounted and taking Colonel Hua by the hand the Tamer led him into the main hall. Here they found Liu Gao already waiting for them. Now the three were assembled, Liu Gao ordered wine and the servants took Colonel Hua's horse away and closed the main doors. Colonel Hua was completely unsuspecting. Confident in the fact that the Tamer was a soldier, he assumed he could not possibly harbour any ill intentions.

The Tamer, holding a cup of wine, now spoke to Liu Gao as follows: "The Governor has heard that the civil and military authorities do not see eye to eye and he is most concerned. He has sent me here to bring the two of you together. Whatever happens he hopes that the two of you will always put your duty to the Emperor first and act in accord if the need should arise."

Liu Gao said: "Call me a fool if you like. No doubt it's due to my lack of experience as an administrator that I have caused the Governor this distress. In fact there's no real quarrel between us, it's just gossip."

The Tamer smiled approvingly and said: "That's splendid."

Liu Gao drank the wine and the Tamer poured another cup and said to Colonel Hua: "In view of what Mr. Liu has just said, that it is mere idle gossip, nothing more, I would like you to drink this cup."

Colonel Hua took the cup and drank it. Then Liu Gao took another cup and filled it and said to the Tamer: "Please do us the signal honour of drinking." The Tamer took the cup and raised it in his hand and looked very deliberately around him. At this moment a small group of soldiers effected an entry and the Tamer dashed the cup to the floor. Immediately there was a sound of cheering outside and on both sides of the hall forty or fifty hardened troops were revealed. In a moment they had overpowered Colonel Hua. "Tie him up!" the Tamer shouted.

"But what have I done?" Colonel Hua cried.

"You'd best keep quiet!" said the Tamer with a sneer. "You're a villain and you're in league with the Windy Mountain bandits, traitors to the Emperor one and all, that's what! Because of your former reputation, I've tried to keep it quiet. Lucky for you I haven't brought in all your family."

"Where is your evidence?" Colonel Hua cried.

"I'll give you evidence all right! I'll show to you a true and indubitable villain, you shall know all. Guards, bring him out!"

A moment later a prison cart, complete with paper banner and red inscription, was rolled into the room. In it was Song Jiang! The two men stared at each other, dumbstruck.

"Anyway, it's out of my hands," the Tamer roared, "because the accuser is Liu Gao!"

"But that's nothing, it's nothing," Colonel Hua protested. "This is my relative. He's from Yuncheng. You can't make him out to be a bandit. Take the matter to court and let the court give judgement."

"All right, I shall do just that. I'm sending you up to the district capital for trial. You'll get your judgement there." He told Liu Gao to assemble an escort of a hundred men.

Colonel Hua said: "General Huang, you tricked me into coming here. All right then, you've got me, so send me to the court and let them decide. Only since I'm a soldier like yourself, please allow me to keep my uniform and just send me in a prison cart."

"No problem," said the Tamer. "It shall be as you say. And Liu Gao shall go too to give evidence. He shall not be allowed to harm the prisoners in any way."

The Tamer and Liu Gao mounted their horses and with the two prison carts, surrounded by a thirty or forty man military escort and a hundred guards from the fort, travelled with all dispatch to Qingzhou district court. And this was to have an important result:

In the conflagration a hundred households will burn;
Amid the swords and axes two thousand lives are lost.

And truly it is as they say,

Trouble's cause is trouble's target, so hold your horses,
Malice seeks who malice uses, so watch your step.

THE Qingfeng Mountain was only about thirty *li* from the Qingzhou Prefecture. In the prefecture was Qingfeng Town which had three roads leading to it from three wild mountains, and for which reason a military station was established there. The town had about five thousand families.
Song Jiang traveled along one of these roads by himself, and upon reaching the town he inquired for the residence of Colonel Hua Rong. He was told that the *yamen* was in the center of the town. The residence of the military officer was on the north side, and that of the civil official on the south side of the main road.
Song Jiang went to the military residence, and found several soldiers at the entrance. They asked for his name, and one then went inside to report his arrival. In a short time Hua Rong came out and led Song Jiang to a hall where he asked Song Jiang to be seated on a divan and gave four salutes with the hands.
He then said, "I think it must be about six years since we separated, and during that period I have often thought of you. I heard that you had killed a loose woman, and the officials issued the usual proclamation for your arrest. When I heard of the case, I felt very uneasy and although I wrote several letters to your home I do not know whether you have received them. Now today I have the pleasure of meeting you, and am exceedingly delighted, and my anxiety has vanished."
Song Jiang asked the magistrate Hua Rong to be seated, and offer no further obeisance. He then told him all about his affairs, and how he had been detained at the Qingfeng Mountain.
"Elder brother," said Hua Rong, "you have experienced many difficulties. I am much pleased that you have come here. You can stay here for a few years with safety."

"While I was living with Old Kong I received a letter from my younger brother telling me to come here. But even had I not received such a letter I would have come all the same."
Hua Rong asked Song Jiang to come into his private apartments where he introduced him to his wife—Cui. He then introduced his sister also. After this Song Jiang was asked to take a bath and to change his dress for dinner. During the meal Song Jiang told Hua Rong all the details of how he had assisted the wife of Magistrate Liu to escape from the bandits, stronghold.
"It would have been much better if you had not interfered," said Hua Rong frowningly.
"Is that not rather strange?" asked Song Jiang. "When I heard that she was the wife of your colleague I thought it better to restrain 'Stunted Tiger,' and allow the woman to escape. Why do you now speak like this?"
"You do not understand. I am not boasting, but this is a very important place. If I were in sole charge here the brigands, near or far, would not dare to disturb the district. But recently this very stupid fellow was appointed to take the senior post. He was a civil official but illiterate, and as soon as he arrived he started to extort money from all the wealthy people. He never observed the Imperial laws. As I was his assistant, he took every opportunity of insulting me, so that at times I felt much regret that I could not have killed him. Oh! Why did you save his wife from ill-treatment? That woman has not a noble character and is always egging on her husband to do wicked things, to injure the people, and to squeeze money. It would have been much better had you allowed the bandits to rape her. You made a mistake in rescuing such a bad woman."
"I think you are wrong," said Song Jiang. "There is an ancient saying, 'If enmity is not settled amicably there is no end to it.' He is your colleague so if he has a small fault you should overlook it, and dwell more on his good points."
"Elder brother," said Hua Rong, "your exposition is very clear. When I meet Magistrate Liu in his *yamen*, I will explain to him how you saved his wife."
"If you do that it will show your goodness to him."
After that for some time Hua Rong and his wife entertained Song Jiang at many feasts. Hua Rong had several confidential servants, and every day one of these was appointed to attend to Song Jiang's needs. Hua Rong gave them money, and they conducted him for strolls round the town to see the temples and sights. Song Jiang did not want them to pay for any wine, etc. they had, and he always paid these expenses himself, but he never told Hua Rong that he had done this. The companions liked this arrangement as they could keep for themselves the money advanced by Hua Rong, so they respected Song Jiang and loved him much.
Song Jiang had stayed with Hua Rong for about a month when it happened to be the Lantern Festival. It was on the 15th of the first month of the year and the people subscribed money, and erected an imitation mountain in front of the temple dedicated to the God of the Earth. The scenery was covered with festoons, and was illuminated by about seven hundred lanterns. There were also lanterns exhibited at every house, and inside the temple were all kinds of amusements. The whole town was happy with festivities. Though this place could not be compared with the Capital City, yet it was considered the Heaven on Earth in that vicinity.
At this feast, Song Jiang had dined with Hua Rong. It was a very fine day, and about 11 A.M. Hua Rong mounted his horse, and went to his *yamen*. He gave orders that in the evening a hundred soldiers should patrol the streets, and preserve order, and that other soldiers should guard the barriers outside the town. About 3 P.M. he returned home, and dined with Song Jiang. The latter mentioned that he wished to have a look of the display of lanterns in the town that evening. Hua Rong stated he would have liked to accompany him, but his official duty would not allow him to do that. He would, however, depute two or three men to go with Song Jiang. He would wait for his early return for dinner.
In the evening the moon rose in the east, and it was a full moon. Song Jiang started off for a stroll accompanied by three confidential servants. There was a brilliant display of lanterns in the form of peonies, mimosas, and lotus flowers of all sizes cut out of paper. They visited the God of the Earth's temple, saw the imitation mountain with its illuminations, and then strolled off towards the south side of the town. They had only gone about 700 paces, when they came to a house with a big display of lanterns, and a big crowd of people outside the front gate. Gongs were sounding, and the crowd was applauding. Song Jiang saw that there was a masquerade inside the courtyard, but as he was of short stature the crowd in front obstructed his view. His companions however asked the people to make room, and so Song Jiang got a good view. The actors displayed awkward manners, and Song Jiang could not avoid laughing at the exhibition. Now it happened that the magistrate and his wife were inside the courtyard with some other women watching the show, and when Song Jiang laughed, Madame Liu looked in his direction, and at once recognized him. She pointed at Song Jiang and said to her husband, "That dwarf fellow who is laughing is the chief of the bandits who seized me on the Qingfeng Mountain." Magistrate Liu was surprised at this, and ordered about seven of his attendants to arrest the small man who was laughing at the gate. Song Jiang had however heard the order, and went away at once. He had not gone far, when the soldiers caught up to him, and seizing him took him inside the courtyard where they bound his arms with ropes. When his companions saw that he had been arrested they hurried off, and reported it to commander Hua Rong.
Magistrate Liu took his seat on the bench at once, and Song Jiang was brought in, and made to kneel.
"You are one of the bandits from Qingfeng Mountain," said Magistrate Liu. "But how dare you come here to look at the show of lanterns? Now that you have been captured what have you got to say?"
"I am a native of Yuncheng County," said Song Jiang. "My name is Zhang San, and I am a friend of Colonel Hua Rong. I have been here for several days, and I am not a bandit on the Qingfeng Mountain."
The magistrate's wife was standing behind a screen at the back of her husband, and when she heard this she came forward, and spoke to Song Jiang herself. "You cannot get out of it. Have you forgotten how I addressed you as the chief?"
"Lady, you are mistaken. At that time did I not tell you that I had been captured by the bandits, and could not leave the mountain?"
"If you were a traveler, and were captured, how could you leave the mountain and come here to look at the lanterns?" asked Magistrate Liu.
"When you were in your stronghold," interjected Madame Liu, "you sat on the middle chair, and had an ostentatious manner. When I addressed you as the chief you paid no attention at all."
"Lady," replied Song Jiang, "have you forgotten that I did my best, and obtained your release? Why do you now accuse me of being a bandit?"
Madame Liu was angry at this, and pointing at Song Jiang she cursed him, "You prevaricator! You will not admit it unless you are thrashed.'
The magistrate agreed to this, and at once gave orders for Song Jiang to be beaten with the split bamboo. This was done, and Song Jiang was severely beaten so that he was soon covered with blood. He was then bound with chains, ready to be conveyed in a prisoner's cart to the Prefectural Town under the name: "Zhang San, The Tiger, from Yuncheng County."
Colonel Hua Rong was upset when he got the report of the arrest of Song Jiang. He immediately wrote a note to his colleague Magistrate Liu, and sent a confidential servant with it. The letter was duly delivered and read by Magistrate Liu as follows: "I, Hua Rong, have a relative named Liu Zhang who arrived from Jizhou a few days ago. He went to see the lanterns, and may have offended you. I beg you, sir, forgive him and release him, and I will come to express my regrets in person. Moreover, I wish you to excuse me for this improvident note as no disrespect is intended."
Magistrate Liu was very angry upon reading this, and tore the letter into pieces. He said, "Colonel Hua Rong is entirely wrong. He is an official appointed by the court, and yet he associates with bandits, and also tries to deceive me. The prisoner said himself that his name was Zhang San and that he came from Yuncheng County, whereas this letter names him Liu Zhang, and says he came from Jizhou. But he will not deceive me. He thinks that I will be inclined to let the man go because he uses my name Liu." After saying this, he dismissed the messenger without an answer.
When Hua Rong heard of this, he was very much excited, and ordered his horse to be got ready. He changed his dress, and armed himself with a bow and arrows. He summoned about fifty soldiers armed with cudgels to accompany him and set out to visit his colleague. Upon reaching the *yamen* the guard at the gate saw that Hua Rong was very angry, and being afraid ran away. Hua Rong dismounted in front of the hall, and his soldiers drew up on both sides. He held a spear in his hand, and called out, "I request Magistrate Liu to come here, and speak with me."
Magistrate Liu hearing this, was panic-stricken. He was afraid to go outside to meet Hua Rong who was a military officer. Hua Rong waited a little time, and then he ordered his soldiers to search the buildings on both sides for Song Jiang. They soon found him tied to a beam, with both feet fastened with chains, and his legs showing traces of the beating he had had. The soldiers broke the chains, and released Song Jiang. After mounting his horse again, Hua Rong called out, "Magistrate Liu, what are you going to do? Where is there a family without some relatives? What is your idea in keeping my relative in your home and falsely accuse him of being a bandit? That is a great insult to me! I will talk to you tomorrow." He then departed with Song Jiang and his soldiers.
Magistrate Liu was very angry at this, and ordered two hundred soldiers to proceed to Hua Rong's quarters, and bring the prisoner back. The Drill Instructors in charge were skilled with the spear and sword, but were not the equal of Colonel Hua Rong. Although they did not like the job, yet they dared not decline to go.
The soldiers reached Hua Rong's *yamen* while it was still dark. They paraded in front of the gate, but no one dared to enter. They were all afraid of Hua Rong. Now as the day was breaking, they saw that the gates were open, and upon looking inside they could make out Hua Rong seated in the main hall. In his left hand, he held a bow, with an arrow in his right hand. He saw the soldiers standing outside the gate, and lifting the bow he shouted to them, "You soldiers are not concerned in this quarrel. I will settle it with Magistrate Liu himself. He sent you here, but you need not fight for him. You two Drill Instructors have been newly appointed, and you do not yet know my military skill. Today, I will give you a display of that, and afterwards if there is any man who wishes to fight with me he may enter without fear. I will now shoot an arrow at the cheek of the God drawn on the door." Thereupon he lifted the arrow to the string; stretched the bow to the full extent; called out "Go!" and the arrow flew and struck the drawing of the Door God in the exact spot as predicted. The soldiers were struck with awe.
Hua Rong took another arrow, and shouted out again, "Soldiers! Now watch an arrow hit the tassel on the helmet of the Door God on the right-hand side of the door." The arrow whistled through the air and struck the exact spot. The two arrows were still sticking in the leaves of the door, Hua Rong shouted again, "Soldiers! Now watch my third arrow strike the breast of your Drill Instructor who is dressed in white uniform." The man referred to, called out "*Ai Ya*!" and turning, ran away. Upon seeing this the soldiers took to flight likewise.
Hua Rong gave an order for the gates to be closed, and went to see Song Jiang in the room at the back. He said, "Elder brother, you have suffered too much owing to a fault on my part."
"It does not matter to me," said Song Jiang; "I am only afraid that he will not put up with you. We must devise some scheme to get out of this trouble."
"I no longer wish to be an official," said Hua Rong; "I must settle this dispute with that fellow."
"I did not expect that woman to return my generous act with enmity," said Song Jiang, "and she even asked her husband to beat me. I did think of giving my true name, but I did not do so because I was afraid that he would then remember the murder of Yan Poxi. I did not anticipate that Liu Gao would be so unreasonable as to arrest me, and put me in a prisoner's cart. He wanted to charge me with being the chief of the bandits so that I might be executed. If you had not rescued me, I should have been tongue-tied, and could not have said anything."
"I wrote your name as Liu," said Hua Rong, "because that was also his name, and as a scholar, he might let you go on that account. I never thought he turned out to have no feelings. Now that I have rescued you I will settle the dispute with him by and by."
"You are wrong," said Song Jiang. "Now owing to your influence, I was rescued. There is an ancient saying, 'When eating food, beware of choking; when going a journey beware of stumbling.' You rescued me by force, so he sent soldiers to arrest me again, and as that failed the matter cannot rest as it is. He will certainly report it to his superior. So this evening I must escape to Qingfeng Mountain, and remain in hiding there. You can pretend to have no knowledge of the event, and 'bury the case in a pigeonhole.' They have no proof if I escape now, and the higher official will ascribe the case to a petty personal quarrel between civil and military authorities."
"I am only a soldier," said Hua Rong, "and am without your farsightedness. I am afraid that you are so severely injured that you cannot walk far."
"Never mind that. As matters are urgent there can be no delay. I will walk slowly towards the bandits' retreat." He had his wounds dressed, left his things with Hua Rong, and set off at once.
When Magistrate Liu's soldiers returned he heard them report what a terrible fellow Hua Rong was and that nobody dared to go and face his arrows. Both the Drill Instructors also said, "Who did that would soon have a hole in his body. We are not keen on that."
Magistrate Liu was a civil official so he could consider things from other phases. He anticipated that Hua Rong would allow Song Jiang to escape to the mountain, and then come to discuss matters. "I have not sufficient evidence so that it will only end in a wrangle between us. Tonight I will dispatch about twenty soldiers to a place about two *li* on the road to the mountain, and keep a lookout there. If we succeed in capturing him he must be brought here secretly and imprisoned. Then I will report the matter to the Prefect, and ask him to send soldiers to take charge of both Song Jiang and Hua Rong. Then I shall have sole control of this county, with no more molestation from those fellows."
That evening he dispatched about twenty soldiers to lie in wait on the road. Two hours before midnight, the soldiers returned having arrested Song Jiang. Magistrate Liu was very pleased at the success of his plans, and said, "I was quite correct in my estimate of what he would do. Place him in the jail at the back of my quarters, and see that not a single person gets to know of this." That night, he wrote a dispatch, and sent it with two confidential servants to Qingzhou Prefecture.
The next day Hua Rong thought that Song Jiang would have arrived at the mountain stronghold and took no more care of Liu Gao.
The Prefect of Qingzhou was Murong Yanda, and his sister was a concubine of the Emperor Huizong. Relying on his sister's influence at the court he did outrageous things at Qingzhou Prefecture. He injured the people, and insulted his colleagues. On this day he had sat at an early court, and was just on the point of going to breakfast when the urgent messengers from Magistrate Liu arrived. He read the dispatch, and was surprised. He said, "Hua Rong is the son of a meritorious minister so how is it that he associates now with bandits? It is a very serious crime, but how can I know whether the charge is true or not?" He sent for Colonel Huang Xin who was highly skilled in military drill. He was in charge of the defenses of Qingzhou Prefecture, and had got the nickname of 'Supressor of Three Mountains.' These three mountains were in that prefecture, and were the Qingfeng Mountain, Lianglong Mountain, and Taohua Mountain. These three mountains were the resorts of bandits. He had boasted that he would capture all the bandits, and that was how he got his nickname.
Upon reaching the hall, the Prefect told him about the report, and gave him orders. Colonel Huang Xin put on his mailed coat, and took his sword; mounted a horse and set out at once with about fifty soldiers for Qingfeng Town. Upon arriving there, he was well received by Magistrate Liu who entertained him in his own private quarters. The prisoner Song Jiang was sent for so that Huang Xin should see him.
"I do not want to ask him any questions," said Huang Xin. "Have a cart prepared, and put the prisoner inside it." This was duly done, and Song Jiang had not said a word.
"Does Hua Rong know that you have arrested Song Jiang?" asked Huang Xin.
"He was arrested during the night," replied Magistrate Liu, "and has been kept secretly in prison since then. Hua Rong is at home, and thinks Song Jiang has got to the mountain."
"That makes our task easy," replied Huang Xin. "We must prepare a feast at the headquarters, and invite him to partake of it with us. We will lay around the hall an ambush of fifty soldiers. When he comes I will give a signal by throwing my wine cup on the floor, and the soldiers then come forth and seize him. What do you think of that plot?"
"That will do splendidly," replied Magistrate Liu. "It reminds me of catching a turtle in a jar."
The next day, the hall was prepared for feast, and tents were erected on both sides of the hall for the ambush. After breakfast Huang Xin mounted his horse, and accompanied by about three men went to visit Hua Rong. Upon the servant reporting the arrival of Huang Xin, Hua Rong asked what Huang Xin had come there for, and the servant replied that it was a friendly visit. Hua Rong went outside, saluted Huang Xin, and when they had taken their seats in the hall Hua Rong asked, "Upon what official business have you come to see me?"
"The Prefect ordered me to come to see you because he had heard that the relations between you and the civil administrator here were not amicable. So he told me to prepare a feast, and invite both of you to conciliate you."
"How can I dare to cheat Magistrate Liu?" asked Hua Rong. "He is my superior officer, but he has frequently tried to find fault with me. I never thought that the Prefect would know about it. How can I thank you for troubling to come all this distance?" Huang Xin leaned forward, and whispered to Hua Rong. "The Prefect is quite well aware that you are the better, and more useful man, and he thinks that the magistrate here is not up too much. It will be all right if you come along with me now."
"It is very kind of you to say that," said Hua Rong. "But before we go, let me offer you some wine."
"It would be better if we drink wine after you two have talked matters over."
Hua Rong agreed to this, and they both mounted their horses and went off. Upon reaching the headquarters they dismounted, and Huang Xin taking Hua Rong by the hand led him into the hall. Magistrate Liu was there waiting for them. Huang Xin ordered a servant to bring the wine. The servants outside had taken Hua Rong's horse to the stable, and had shut the gate of the *yamen*. Hua Rong had no suspicion of a plot, and trusted Huang Xin because he was also a military officer.
When the wine was served Huang Xin took a cup, and offering it to Magistrate Liu said, "The Prefect feels uneasy to hear that you two officials here do not see eye to eye, so he instructed me to come here as mediator. We must always understand that Imperial affairs are of the first importance, and discuss matters amicably."
"I have not much ability," said Magistrate Liu, "but I understand a little of the rules of propriety. It is my fault indeed, if I have given the prefect any cause for anxiety. We two have had no disputes, so somebody must have circulated false statements about us."
"Splendid!" said Colonel Huang Xin.
Magistrate Liu drank his wine, and Colonel Huang Xin then handed another cup of wine to Hua Rong, and said, "As Magistrate Liu says this there must be somebody that have made these false reports. In that case, please drink this wine."
Hua Rong took the wine, and drank it. Magistrate Liu then poured out some wine, and offered it to Huang Xin saying, "I am sorry to have troubled you to come so far to this our humble place. Please drink this wine."
Colonel Huang Xin took the cup, and looked around. Instantly several soldiers came to the hall. He threw the cup on the floor, and at once there arose a shout. Soldiers from all sides entered the hall, and arrested Hua Rong. Colonel Huang Xin ordered them to bind Hua Rong's hands, and the latter called out, "What is the charge against me?"
Colonel Huang Xin laughed, and said, "You need not shout! You have joined the bandits of Qingfeng Mountain to plot rebellion against the Imperial Court. You know what the charge will be. But because of our previous acquaintance, I will not implicate your family."
"But where is the proof of what you say?" asked Hua Rong.
"You shall see the proof," said Colonel Huang Xin. "I will not be unjust to you." Turning round, he ordered, "Bring the man here!" In a short time, a prisoner's cart was wheeled into the hall, and Hua Rong saw Song Jiang therein. Hua Rong was startled, and could not say another word.
"This has nothing to do with me," called out Huang Xin. "Magistrate Liu made the accusation against you."
"Never mind!" said Hua Rong. "This man is a relative of mine. He is a native of Yuncheng County. You accuse him of being a bandit, so he will answer that charge in the proper court where there will be discrimination."
"I am going to take you both to Qingzhou Prefecture," said Huang Xin, "and there the matter will be thoroughly gone into."
He then asked Magistrate Liu to provide an escort of a hundred soldiers. Hua Rong spoke to Colonel Huang Xin, "Colonel, you tricked me to come here and have me arrested but I may even at the Imperial Court have explanation about this matter. I must ask you to allow me to retain my military uniform while I am being conveyed in the prisoner's cart."
"I can easily agree to that," said Huang Xin. He then told Magistrate Liu that he also had to proceed to Qingzhou, and state his accusation there. The two then mounted their horses, set out for Qingzhou, accompanying the 2 prisoners in 2 captive carts, and with an escort of about 150 soldiers.

As you have prepared the bed,

You must lie on it contented.

This affair caused 100 houses to be burnt down and 2000 people to be killed in an armed conflict.

## 132

### The Suppressor of the 3 Mountains fights a battle, Embroils, & Makes a Great Stir in the Qingzhou Prefecture road; the Thunderer comes to the field of desolation, Wanders in the Dark Amidst the Devastated Village, & Traverses a Field of Rubble

The mounted Huang Xin carried his lethal blade. Liu Gao, also on horseback and wearing armor, held a pitchfork in his hand. Their host of a hundred and fifty bore cudgels and staves and tassel-bedecked spears, and at their waists were swords and knives. Two rolls of the drums and a crash of the gongs, and the convoy guarding Song Jiang and Hua Rong left Fort Clear Winds and started towards the prefecture of Qingzhou.

Before they had gone forty *li* they saw ahead a large forest. As they neared a gap in the mountains, one of the advance guard—a soldier from the fort—pointed and exclaimed: "Men are watching us from among those trees!"

The entire procession immediately halted.

"Why have you stopped?" Huang Xin demanded, from his horse.

"People in that forest ahead are looking at us."

"So what! Keep going!"

They drew nearer the forest. Suddenly twenty or thirty gongs began crashing in unison. The fort soldiers, panic-stricken, turned to flee.

"Stand where you are!" barked Huang Xin. "Spread out." To Liu Gao he said: "Guard the cage carts!"

Liu was speechless with fright. He could only stammer to himself: "Heaven, save me from disaster. *Aiyaya!* I pledge a hundred thousand scriptures! Thirty prayer services! Only save me!" His face was like a ripe melon—alternately green and yellow.

Huang Xin was a military officer, and he wasn't lacking in courage. He beat his horse forward and looked. On four sides of the forest nearly five hundred bandits were arrayed in ranks. All were fierce-visaged stalwarts. Their heads were wrapped in red cloth, they wore padded tunics, with sharp swords at their waists and long spears in their hands. They had the company completely surrounded.

Three bold fellows bounded out of the woods, one in black, one in green, one in red. All wore head kerchiefs emblazoned with gold swastikas and had swords at their waists. They stood, halberds in hand, blocking the road. The man in the middle was Elegant Tiger Yan Shun. On his right was Stumpy Tiger Wang Ying, on his left was the Fair-Faced Gentleman Zheng Tianshou. They shouted at Huang Xin.

"All travellers must stop here and pay three thousand ounces of gold, or they can't go on!"

Huang Xin, from his horse, yelled back: "Where are your manners, knaves? You're talking to Suppressor of the Three Mountains!"

The three glared. "We don't care who you are! Unless you pay three thousand ounces of gold you can't get through!"

"I'm a prefectural commander on an official mission! I don't have to buy your permission to travel!"

The bold trio laughed. "The emperor himself couldn't pass here without paying three thousand ounces of gold! If you haven't got it, leave your prisoners as security. We'll return them to you when you bring the money!"

Huang Xin was furious. "How dare you scoundrels act so high and mighty!" He shouted for his drums and gongs to sound, clapped his horse, and charged directly at Yan Shun, waving his sword.

All three bandit leaders raised their halberds and engaged Huang Xin. The commander, on horseback, fought them valiantly a dozen rounds, but three against one were too many. Liu Gao, trembling, was unable to move forward. Seeing the pickle Huang Xin was in, Liu got ready to run. Huang was afraid he'd be taken by the trio and that his reputation would be ruined. He pulled his horse around and returned at a gallop, pursued by the three halberd-wielding chieftains. Huang Xin had no time to consider the unit under his command. On flying steed he raced back alone to Clear Winds Town.

At this, his soldiers cried out in dismay. They abandoned the cage carts and scattered. Liu Gao desperately yanked at his horse's bridle and flailed three times with his whip. The animal broke into a run, but a trip-rope across the road quickly brought horse and rider tumbling down. A swarm of bandits seized Liu and captured the cage carts. Hua Rong, who had already pried his cage open, jumped out and snapped his bonds. He broke open the other cart and rescued Song Jiang. Several of the bandits grabbed Liu Gao and tied his hands behind his back. They also caught his horse and three or four other mounts. They stripped Liu of his garments and gave them to Song Jiang, who was naked. The captured horses were first led up the mountain, then the three chieftains and Hua Rong and some bandits escorted the bound and stripped Liu Gao back to the stronghold.

Not having had any news of Song Jiang for some time, the three chieftains had sent a few competent scouts into Clear Winds Town to inquire. "Commander Huang Xin threw down his cup as a signal," they were told, and had Hua Rong and Song Jiang arrested. They're both in cage carts, "and will be taken to Qingzhou."

This was reported to the three chieftains, who came down with their men. They made a wide flanking sweep and were waiting on the road when the soldier convoy arrived. The small paths were covered as well. As a result Hua Rong and Song Jiang were saved and Liu Gao captured. All now returned to the mountain lair.

That night at the second watch hosts and guests gathered in Righteousness Hall. After Song Jiang and Hua Rong were seated in the middle, the three chieftains sat down opposite and prepared to serve them with food and drink.

"Boys," Yan Shun called to his men, "drink and be merry!"

Hua Rong thanked the brave trio. "You've saved the lives of my brother and me and avenged our wrongs! We can never repay you! My only worry is my wife and younger sister. They're still in Fort Clear Winds. Huang Xin is sure to seize them. How can they be rescued?"

"Don't worry, Commandant," said Yan Shun. "I doubt whether Huang Xin will dare to take your lady. Even if he does, he'll have to pass here on his return to the prefecture. Tomorrow my two brothers and I will go down the mountain and bring your lady and sister here to you." He ordered a scout to slip into town first and investigate.

"I'm very grateful," said Hua Rong.

"And now bring that varlet Liu Gao to me," said Song Jiang.

"He's tied to the main pillar," said Yan Shun. "We'll cut out his heart and present to you as a gift!"

"I want to slice him open personally!" said Hua Rong.

"Knave," cried Song Jiang, "there was never any enmity between us! Why did you listen to your wicked wife and injure me? Now we've caught you! What have you got to say?"

"What's the use of talking?" exclaimed Hua Rong. He plunged a knife into Liu's chest and carved, then placed the man's heart before Song Jiang. Bandits dragged the corpse to one side.

"We've killed this dirty beast, but his whore of a wife is still alive," said Song Jiang. "Our vengeance hasn't yet been satisfied!"

"Set your mind at ease, brother," said Wang the Stumpy Tiger. "When I go down tomorrow, I'll capture his woman. This time I'll keep her for myself."

Everybody laughed. They feasted that night, then all retired. The next morning they rose and discussed their attack on Fort Clear Winds.

"The boys had a hard day, yesterday," said Yan Shun. "We'll let them rest, today. Tomorrow morning, we'll go down. That will be time enough."

"You're right," said Song Jiang. "The men and horses must regain their strength. We mustn't be too hasty."

When Huang Xin reached Clear Winds he hurried to the fort, mustered soldiers and mounts and posted a tight guard at each of the four gates. Then he wrote a dispatch and ordered two officers to deliver it at flying speed to Prefect Murong.

The prefect, on receiving reports from Clear Winds and learning of the emergency, summoned his court that same night. He was greatly alarmed when he read Huang Xin's dispatch. It said: "Hua Rong has rebelled and is involved with bandits on Clear Winds Mountain. There's no guarantee the fort can stand. The situation is critical. First-rate generals must be sent immediately to hold the territory!"

He summoned General Qin, commander of all the armed forces in the prefecture, to come at once for an urgent military conference. Qin, whose given name was Ming, was from Kaizhou on the other side of the mountains. Because of his irascible temper and booming voice he was known as Thunderbolt. Qin was descended from a long line of military men. His weapon was a wolf-toothed mace, and when he plunged into battle, ten thousand men couldn't withstand him.

Qin presented himself before the prefect and the two exchanged courtesies. Murong showed him Huang Xin's dispatch.

"Those brigands have got their nerve," growled Qin Ming. "Have no fears, Your Excellency. I'll get my forces ready. If I don't take those bandits I swear you'll never see me again!"

"Move quickly. They're liable to attack Fort Clear Winds."

"There will be no delay. I'll muster my men tonight. We'll leave first thing in the morning."

Pleased, the prefect directed that wine and meat and dry rations be prepared and kept in waiting outside the city for the troops on their departure. Qin Ming was enraged to learn that Hua Rong had rebelled. He mounted and rode back to headquarters. There he mustered a hundred cavalrymen and four hundred foot soldiers. He ordered them to assemble outside the city and get ready to march.

In a monastery courtyard in the outskirts the next day, Murong had muffins steamed, large bowls laid out, and wine heated. Each soldier was to be given three bowls of wine, two muffins and one catty of cooked meat. Everything was in readiness when the detachment was seen emerging from the city. On a crimson banner in the lead were the words: *General Qin, Commander of Infantry and Cavalry.*

Qin Ming in his armor was indeed a splendid sight. When he saw Murong waiting to encourage the troops, he ordered a soldier to hold his weapons, dismounted and went forward to be received by the prefect. Courtesies were exchanged, and Murong faced the general, wine cup in hand.

"May all go well and you return victorious!"

Food and drink were dispensed among the troops, a signal cannon was fired. Qin Ming took his leave of the prefect, and vaulted into the saddle. He spread his forces in march formation. Bearing halberds and hatchets, they headed for Fort Clear Winds. The town of Clear Winds was southeast of Qingzhou, but it was quicker to go directly south and skirt around Clear Winds Mountain. Soon they were north of the mountain on a small road.

Bandit scouts reported their advance. The brigand chieftains had been getting ready to attack Fort Clear Winds when they heard the news: "Qin Ming is leading a force of men and horses this way!" They exchanged frightened glances.

"Don't be alarmed," said Hua Rong. "As the old saying goes: 'When the enemy approach swiftly, they must be stopped in their tracks.' Give the men food and drink, and do what I say. We'll use force first, then guile." He softly outlined his idea. "How does that strike you?"

"Excellent," said Song Jiang. "Exactly the way to do it!"

He and Hua Rong worked out the details, then each bandit went to prepare for his own particular task. Hua Rong selected a good horse and armor, and got his bow, arrows and iron spear in readiness.

Qin Ming and his men pitched camp for the night ten *li* from the foot of the mountain. They rose at dawn the next day and had breakfast. A signal cannon was fired, and the march quickly resumed. The general chose a broad open area and deployed his forces in battle positions. Then he sounded his drums.

A thunderous crash of gongs responded from the mountain, and a brigand troop came rapidly down the slope. Qin Ming reined his mount and glared, wolf-toothed mace athwart his body. Surrounded by a horde of bandits was Hua Rong. Gongs crashed again when they got to the foot of the slope and arrayed themselves in battle formation. Iron spear in hand, Hua Rong, from his horse, hailed the general respectfully.

"Hua Rong," Qin Ming shouted, "your family have been military commanders for generations, appointed officers of the imperial court. You were made commandant of the fort, put in control of a large area, and were paid and supported by the government. When were you given less than your due? But now you're consorting with brigands and rebelling against the court! I've been sent to arrest you! If you're wise, you'll get off your horse and submit! Don't make me bloody my hands and soil my feet!"

"Hear me, General," said Hua Rong with an apologetic smile. "I never wanted to rebel against the imperial court. It was all the doing of that scoundrel Liu Gao—making something out of nothing, using his official position for private revenge, forcing me to turn my back on home and country and take refuge here! I hope you will investigate, General, and straighten this out!"

"Dismount and be bound! What are you waiting for? Your fancy words are only meant to deceive my soldiers!" Qin Ming shouted for his drums left and right to thunder. Flourishing his wolf-toothed mace, he charged.

Hua Rong laughed. "A good man makes allowances for you, and you don't even know it. Just because I addressed you politely as a superior officer you thought I was afraid of you!" With levelled spear he spurred his horse forward.

The two men fought for nearly fifty rounds, neither vanquishing the other. Hua Rong executed a feint, wheeled his mount around and rode toward his bandits at the foot of the mountain. Qin Ming pursued furiously. Hua Rong rested his spear in his saddle rings, and reined in his horse. He fitted an arrow to his bow, pulled the string taut, then twisted around and let fly. The arrow neatly sheared the big red tassel from the top of the general's helmet, to give him a hint.

Startled, Qin Ming abruptly checked his mount. By the time he recovered himself enough to resume the chase, the bandits had all noisily swarmed back up the mountain. Hua Rong, on another path, also returned to the stronghold.

Qin Ming was enraged. "That dirty bandit is very rude!" he thought. He shouted for the drums and gongs to sound, and followed up the slope.

Yelling, the troops, climbed behind him, with the infantry in the lead. They crossed two or three crests when suddenly, from the cliffs above, they were deluged with logs, rocks, bottles of lime and molten metal. The advance guard, unable to get away, suffered forty to fifty losses. The remainder were forced to retreat.

Very angry, Qin Ming led his horse down the slope and sought another path to the top. He was still searching at noon when, on the west side of the mountain, gongs crashed and a band of men bearing red flags sprang out from among the trees. Qin Ming immediately led his troops in a charge. But the gongs fell silent and the red flags disappeared. And the road on which his adversaries had come was not a true road at all, but only a few wood-cutters' paths, and even these were blocked with felled criss-crossed trees.

The general was about to have them cleared when a soldier reported: "Gongs on the east side of the mountain and a force coming with red flags!"

At the head of his men, Qin Ming galloped to the eastern slope. The gongs had ceased and the red flags were gone. The general looked everywhere for a path up the mountain. But all the trails were blocked with trees and brushwood.

Another scout reported: "Gongs on the western slope! And men with red flags again!"

Qin Ming clapped his mount and raced to the scene. The men had vanished, and so had their flags.

The general ground his teeth almost to powder. He was fuming with rage. Again the pounding of gongs shook the earth in the east. Again Qin Ming charged east with his detachment. And again there was not a bandit or red flag to be seen.

His chest swelling with fury, the general decided to send scouts up to seek a path. A clamor once more arose in the west. Qin Ming's anger spurted to the heavens. With his entire force he rushed westward. But nowhere on the mountain, above or below, could they see a single bandit. Qin Ming shouted for his men to find paths on both sides and start up.

"None of these are real paths," one of the soldiers explained. "But on the southeast side there's a good road that goes to the top. We'd have serious casualties if we tried to climb here."

"Since there's a road, we must reach it tonight." Qin Ming marched rapidly southeast with his infantry and cavalry.

The light was beginning to fade, and men and horses were tired. Everyone was longing to reach their destination, where they could pitch camp and eat. But then on the mountain they saw torches dancing, and gongs wildly crashed. Qin Ming turned angrily and went up with a cavalry troop of fifty. They were met by a shower of arrows from among the trees. Several soldiers were wounded. The general had no choice but to lead his troop down again.

He directed his men to eat a meal, and not bother about anything else.

Just as they lit their fires, eighty or ninety bandits carrying torches came marching down the mountain, whistling shrilly. Qin Ming hastily went after them. The torches were extinguished. Although there was a moon, it was obscured by clouds, and its glow was dim.

Qin Ming lost all control of his temper. He ordered his soldiers to light torches and set fire to the woods. Through the mountain gap the strains of flute and drum drifted down. Qin Ming ran his horse up and looked. In the light of a dozen torches he saw Hua Rong and Song Jiang on a summit drinking wine. The general, unable to get at them, could only rein in his mount and curse.

Hua Rong laughed. "Calm yourself, General. Go back and rest. Tomorrow, you and I will battle to the death!"

"Rebellious brigand, come down! I'll fight you three hundred rounds right now!"

"You're weary, General. Defeating you today would be too easy. Come back tomorrow."

Qin Ming was mad with rage. He wanted to find a path up, yet he feared Hua Rong's skill with a bow. He could only curse impotently. Suddenly he heard a clamor among his troops below. Hurriedly, he rode down. Fiery cannon-balls and flaming arrows were winging into them from the opposite slope. Twenty or thirty bandits were shooting at them from the shadows behind. Soldiers yelled, horses whinnied, and all crowded into a deep ravine for shelter.

By then it was nearly midnight, and the troops were groaning bitterly. Suddenly they were engulfed in a torrent of water, which came sweeping down, and they struggled for their lives. As they were crawling out, they were hooked by barbed poles and hauled up the mountain. Those who were unable to escape the water drowned in the rushing stream.

Qin Ming's brain was bursting with rage. He noticed a side path and urged his steed up. Before he had travelled fifty paces, horse and rider fell into a pit. Fifty brigands, who had been hiding in ambush, hooked him with their poles and hauled him out. They stripped him of his armor, clothes and helmet, bound him with ropes, retrieved the horse, and led their prizes up the slope.

The entire operation had been planned by Hua Rong and Song Jiang.

First they had the bandits keep Qin Ming running back and forth, east and west, till men and mounts were exhausted and didn't know what to do. Next, they dammed two brooks with sacks of earth. Late at night, when the soldiers and horses were forced to take shelter in the ravine, they released the pent-up waters and finished them off. More than half of Qin Ming's five hundred men were drowned in this manner. A hundred and sixty or seventy of the remainder were captured, along with seventy or eighty good horses. Not a single soldier got away. Finally, they trapped Qin Ming and his steed in the pit.

By the time bandits brought Qin Ming to the stronghold, it was already light. Five bold warriors, seated in Righteousness Hall, saw the men lead up the bound captive and detain him within the entry. Hua Rong left his armchair, hurried over, untied Qin Ming, supported him into the hall, then dropped to his knees and kowtowed. The general at once returned the courtesy.

"I am your prisoner, a man you can pulverize to death," he said. "Why do you greet me so respectfully?"

Hua Rong, still kneeling, replied: "Our men didn't recognize you and discomfited you by mistake! Please forgive us!" He presented Qin Ming with garments of silk and satin, and the general put them on.

"Who are these gallant leaders?" Qin Ming asked.

"This is my blood-brother Song Jiang, formerly clerk of Yuncheng County. These three are the chieftains here: Yan Shun, Wang Ying and Zheng Tianshou."

"I have heard of these three, of course. And isn't County Clerk Song known in Shandong Province as Song Jiang the Timely Rain?"

"That is my humble name," said Song Jiang.
Qin Ming hastily kowtowed. "I've long known your fame. I never thought I'd have the honor of meeting you today!"
Song Jiang at once returned the courtesy. Qin Ming noticed that he moved his legs awkwardly.
"Is there something wrong with your legs?" the general queried.
Song Jiang told him of his adventures from the time he left Yuncheng until Liu Gao had him beaten. Qin Ming shook his head.
"We heard only one side of the story and made a lot of mistakes. Let me go back and tell Prefect Murong about this."
Yan Shun begged that he stay with them a few days, and ordered that sheep and horses be slaughtered and a feast be laid. The captured soldiers were concealed in buildings on the rear of the mountain, but they too were given food and wine. After the general had downed a few cups, he rose to his feet.
"Since you are good enough not to kill me, sirs, return my armor, horse and weapons, and let me go back to the prefecture."
"You would be wrong to do that, General," said Yan Shun. "You've lost all of your five hundred men. How can you return? Prefect Murong would surely condemn you as a criminal. Better to remain in our crude mountain fortress for a while. Although it's beneath your talents, why not stay on with us permanently? Gold and silver we share and share alike, and we give clothing in complete sets. Wouldn't that be preferable to being persecuted by the big-hat officials?"
Qin Ming walked to the entry of the hall. "I was born a man of the great Song empire, and I shall serve it as a ghost when I die. The court commissioned me a general and gave me the rank of Commander of Infantry and Cavalry. They've treated me very well. How can I rebel and become a brigand? Kill me and be done with it!"
Hua Rong hurried after him and took his arm. "Don't be angry, brother. Please listen to me. I am the son of a high court official myself. But I had no choice. I was forced into this. If you're not willing, we wouldn't dream of insisting. Please be seated. When the meal is over I will get your armor, helmet, horse and weapons and return them to you."
Qin Ming still held back, and Hua Rong continued to exhort him. "You've expended strength and spirit a whole day and night, General. You must be exhausted. And how will your horse be able to travel unless it is fed?"
"That's true," thought Qin Ming. He went back into the hall and resumed his seat. The five bold gallants apologized to him and toasted him by turns.
The general was indeed weary, and his hosts' considerate treatment softened his reluctance. So he relaxed and drank until he was bleary. Then he was helped into bed and he slept. The others went about their various affairs. Of that we'll say no more.
Qin Ming slept right through till mid-morning the following day. He jumped out of bed, washed, rinsed his mouth, and announced he was leaving. "Wait until after breakfast," his hosts urged, "and we'll see you off down the mountain." But the impetuous Qin Ming insisted on departing at once. Food and wine were hastily served. The general dressed in his helmet and armor. His horse was led out and his wolf-toothed mace brought. Men were sent on ahead to attend him below.
The five bold gallants saw him off down the mountain and bid him farewell. Qin Ming's horse and weapons were returned. He mounted and, holding his wolf-toothed mace, left Clear Winds Mountain and set out rapidly for Qingzhou in the broad light of day.
When he was about ten *li* from the town—it was then late morning—he saw much smoke in the distance, but no travellers on the road. A strong suspicion rose in his mind. Soon he reached the outskirts of the town. Here, what was formerly a community of hundreds of families had been completely burned out. Everywhere were disorderly heaps of tiles and rubble. Scorched bodies of men and women lay without number.
Shocked, Qin Ming raced his horse across the debris to the town wall and shouted for the guards to open the gates. The bridge over the moat was up, and the top of the wall was lined with soldiers, flags, log sections and ballista stones. The general reined in his steed.
"Lower the bridge," he shouted. "Let me in!"
The men on the wall had seen him coming from afar. Now they beat the drums and yelled. "I am commander Qin Ming! Why don't you let me in?"
Prefect Murong appeared on the battlements. "Rebellious brigand," he cried. "Have you no shame! You came last night with men and attacked the town! You slaughtered many innocent people and burned scores of homes! And today you try to trick us into opening the gates.' The imperial court treated you very well, but you have behaved outrageously, you scoundrel! I have already reported you to the court. Sooner or later we'll catch you and pound you to bits!"
"You're mistaken, Your Excellency! My forces were defeated and I was taken up the mountain by those rascally bandits. I've only just got away from them. How could I have attacked the town last night?"
"Don't I know your horse, armor, weapons and helmet? Everyone on the wall clearly saw you directing red-turbaned bandits in murder and arson! You can't deny it. If you were defeated and captured, how is it that not a single one of your five hundred soldiers came back and reported? You'd like to beguile us into opening the gates so that you can get your family out? We executed your wife this morning! If you don't believe me, look at this!"
A soldier held out a spear. Dangling from the end of it was the head of Qin Ming's wife. The general was an emotional man. Rage filled his chest. Speechless, he could only bitterly lament. Arrows rained down on him from the wall. He had to withdraw. He gazed at the fire-gutted homes. In some places wood was still burning.
As Qin Ming rode through the rabble he seriously considered killing himself. But after thinking a long time, he let his horse wander back along the road on which he had come. Before he had gone ten *li* he saw a band of mounted men riding towards him from a grove. The five bold fellows in the lead were none other than Song Jiang, Hua Rong, Yan Shun, Wang Ying, and Zheng Tianshou. They were followed by nearly two hundred bandits. Song Jiang bowed in the saddle.
"Didn't you return to Qingzhou, Commander? Where are you going, out here alone?"
"Some villain rejected by Heaven and Earth—who deserves to be cut to pieces!—disguised himself as me, attacked the town, levelled homes and slaughtered the people! As a result my whole family was executed, and I have nowhere to go! If I could find that rogue I'd pound him till my wolf-toothed mace broke to pieces!"
"Calm yourself, General! I have a suggestion, but this isn't a good place to talk. Please come to our stronghold and we'll confer there. If you permit us, we'll go now."
Qin Ming had no choice but to acquiesce, and all rode to Clear Winds Mountain.
During the journey, no one spoke. They dismounted at the pavilion outside the gates of the lair and entered on foot. Bandits had already laid out wine and tidbits in Righteousness Hall. The five gallant men invited Qin Ming in and asked him to be seated in the middle. Then they knelt before him. The general hastily returned the courtesy. Song Jiang spoke first.
"We hope you won't blame us, General. Yesterday, we tried in vain to convince you to remain with us, but you were determined to leave, and so I thought of a plan. I had one of our men put on your armor and helmet, take your wolf-toothed mace, and ride your horse to Qingzhou Town with a band in red turbans and kill many people. Yan Shun and Stumpy Tiger Wang went with reinforcements of another fifty, and made it appear that you were trying to bring out your family. We committed all this murder and arson to compel you to give up any hope of ever going back. Today, we present ourselves before you for punishment."
Qin Ming was furious. He longed to throw himself on Song Jiang. But then he realized that, first, this had been fated. Second, he had been put at a disadvantage by their abject courtesy. And third, he couldn't vanquish them single-handed anyway. He was forced to swallow his rage.
"You meant well, brothers," he conceded, "but you injured me grievously! You caused my whole family to be killed!"
"If we hadn't acted the way we did, would you have given up the idea of returning?" said Song Jiang. "Hua Rong has a younger sister who would make you a fine wife. She's virtuous and clever. I would be delighted to sponsor the match and provide all your household furnishings. What do you say?"
This love and respect touched the general's heart, and he agreed. Everyone insisted that Song Jiang sit in the center, with Qin Ming, Hua Rong and the other three bold fellows occupying seats of lesser rank. Heartily, they ate and drank, and discussed the forthcoming attack on Fort Clear Winds.
"That's easy," said Qin Ming. "You brothers don't have to worry. Huang Xin was under my command. Whatever he knows about arms, I taught him. What's more, we're on excellent terms. Tomorrow I'll go to the fort, get them to open the gate, talk privately with Huang Xin, and persuade him to join us. I'll bring out Hua Rong's family, capture Liu Gao's termagant wife, and avenge the hurts you have suffered. This will be my entrance gift. How does that strike you?"
"We are privileged to have so generous a man as a colleague," exclaimed Song Jiang.
When the feast was over, all retired. They rose early the following morning, breakfasted, and made ready. Qin Ming mounted and went down the slope. Wolf-toothed mace in hand, he raced to Clear Winds.
From the day he arrived in the town Huang Xin mobilized the soldiers and the people, kept the forces in the fort on continuous alert, and closely guarded the gates. But he dared not go forth to give battle. Though he frequently sent emissaries to Qingzhou to inquire, the prefecture show no sign of sending him any reinforcements.
Now, a man came in and reported: "Commander Qin Ming is here, alone, on horseback. He wants us to open the gate and let him in."
Huang Xin mounted and galloped to the portal. Sure enough, there was only a single rider. Huang Xin ordered his men to open the gate and lower the drawbridge. He welcomed the general, rode with him to the main hall and invited him in. Both dismounted, entered the hall and exchanged courtesies.
"What brings you here, alone, General?" asked Huang Xin.
Qin Ming told how he had lost his men and horses, then said: "Song Jiang the Timely Rain from Shandong is generous and chivalrous. He befriends every good fellow under the sun and is respected by all. Today, he is on Clear Winds Mountain, where I have joined their band. You have no wife and family. If you heed my advice, you'll join up too. It's better than forever taking abuse from civilian officials."
"Since you are there, Excellency, how can I refuse? I never heard that Timely Rain is on the mountain. How did he get there?"
Qin Ming laughed. "He's the 'Zhang San' of Yuncheng you were escorting to the prefecture the other day. He was afraid to give his real name because of another case he's involved in. So he called himself Zhang San."
Huang Xin stamped his foot. "Had I known he was Song Jiang, I'd have let him go on the road! I didn't recognize him and heard only Liu Gao's version of the story. I nearly caused his death!"
While the 2 were conferring in the hall, a soldier entered. "Two columns of foot soldiers and cavalry beating drums and gongs are advancing swiftly on the town!" Qin Ming and Huang Xin mounted and rode out to confront the foe. At the gate, they saw beneath a huge cloud of dust that blocked the sun an approaching host whose fierce aura obscured the heavens. 2 columns of troops were closing in on the town. 4 gallant men had come down from the mountain. How did Qin Ming and Huang Xin meet the foe?

So there was General Huang Xin, the Tamer, on horseback, sword in hand, and Governor Liu riding beside him, dressed in armour and bearing a trident, together with an escort of one hundred and fifty or so seasoned troops armed with tasselled spears or staves, and short swords stuck in their belts. A double roll of the drums, a clash of cymbals, and they were off on their mission to deliver Song Jiang and Colonel Hua to Qingzhou.
They had not travelled much over ten miles from Windy Fort when they were confronted by a forest. They had reached a defile through the mountains, and the guards pointing ahead said: "There are lookouts among the trees," and refused to go on.
"Why have you stopped?" the Tamer asked, looking down from his horse.
"There's men concealed in the forest there, watching," he was told.
"Pay no attention to them, just keep going," the Tamer ordered.
But as they were about to enter the forest, dong! dong! — twenty or thirty big gongs sounded all together. The troops began to panic, they were on the point of fleeing.
"Stop!" the Tamer ordered. "I want you to spread out!" To Governor Liu he shouted: "Guard the prison carts!"
Liu was too terrified to make an answer. "Heaven help us, heaven preserve us!" was all he could get out, together with mumbled promises to pay for a thousand copies of the classics and endow three hundred temples, if only heaven would spare him. Terror had turned him part green and part yellow, like a ripe melon.
The Tamer, however, was a real soldier, by no means devoid of courage. He spurred his horse forward to investigate: hundreds of enemy troops were pouring out of the forest on all sides, each one tall and strong, all with fierce expressions and blazing eyes, their heads bound with red cloths, all wearing padded robes, with swords in their belts and long spears in their hands. In no time at all they had surrounded the convoy. Three heroes now leapt out of the forest. One wore black, one green and one red. Each had a head scarf emblazoned with a gold swastika and carried sword and halberd. There they stood, blocking the way. The one in the middle was Yan Shun, the Dandy; Short-Arse Wang was in the lead; and bringing up the rear was Whitey Zheng Tianshou.
They now cried in unison: "Travellers must halt here and pay the toll of three thousand ounces of gold, before they are allowed to proceed."
"You villains!" the Tamer shouted down at them. "This is intolerable! Can't you see the Tamer of Three Mountains is here?"
All three glared at him. "Oh that's who you are, is it?" they said. "But you still have to pay the toll, otherwise you're not allowed to pass."
"I bear the Emperor's commission and I am travelling with a prisoner, what's this nonsense about a toll?"
"Who cares about your Emperor's commission? If you were the Emperor himself riding in state you'd still need the gold. If you haven't got it, you can leave your prisoners here as a gage while you go and fetch it."
"You scum! How dare you!" shouted the enraged Tamer, and ordered the drums to be beaten and the gongs sounded. Then he slapped his horse and brandishing his sword charged the Dandy. Acting as one, the three heroes levelled their halberds and attacked the Tamer. Since all three of them came at him at once, the Tamer needed all his strength and energy just to fight ten bouts. What chance had he of prevailing against the three of them? As for Liu Gao, he was a civilian and he had no thought of joining in. Given the strength of the opposition, his one idea was to flee. The Tamer now began to fear he would be taken, to his eternal dishonour. He was obliged to turn his horse and gallo back the way he had come, while the three chiefs pursued him, halberds levelled.
Mindless now of his troops, the Tamer galloped right back into Windy City. When the troops saw the Tamer turn his horse, they let out a great cry, abandoned the prison carts and fled in all directions. Only Liu Gao remained. Seeing the situation had turned so ugly, he frantically pulled his horse's head round and gave it three blows with his whip. The horse broke into a gallop but immediately ran into a trip-wire and came crashing down. The enemy rushed forward and seized Liu Gao. They also captured the prison carts.
Colonel Hua had quickly broken out of his prison cart and snapped his bonds. He then smashed the other cart and rescued Song Jiang. Some of the troops held Liu Gao while others caught his horse and three other horses that had been pulling the carts. They stripped Liu Gao and gave his clothes to Song Jiang, and sent the horses on ahead to the mountain. The three heroes, together with Colonel Hua and the troops, carried the bound and naked Liu Gao back to the mountain retreat.
The way all this came about was like this: the three heroes, in the absence of any news from Song Jiang, had sent some of their men down the mountain to reconnoitre in Windy City, where they heard people saying: "The Tamer threw his cup on the floor as a signal and Colonel Hua and Song Jiang were seized, flung into a prison cart and bundled off to Qingzhou." It was this news that caused the three to muster their troops and march in a flanking movement to block the main road ahead of the party, whilst posting scouts along all secondary routes. By these means they came to rescue our two friends, capture Liu Gao and return with them all to the mountain.
It was evening when they reached the mountain retreat, after nine o'clock. They all went to the assembly hall. Colonel Hua and Song Jiang were asked to join the company and the three hosts feasted them, pressing food and wine upon them most liberally. The Dandy ordered wine for all the troops. Colonel Hua expressed his gratitude to his rescuers: "You have saved our lives and repaired the injustice done to us. Song Jiang and I will never be able to repay you for this. One problem remains: I still have my wife and younger sister in Windy City, and the Tamer is sure to seize them. How can we rescue them?"
The Dandy said: "Don't worry, Colonel, I don't imagine the Tamer will dare to touch your wife; if he does, she will probably be brought along this road. Tomorrow we'll go down and get your wife and sister back for you." He sent men down at once to reconnoitre.
"I am deeply obliged to you," said Colonel Hua.
Song Jiang now said: "Bring me that scoundrel, Liu Gao."
"Tie him to the pillar," the Dandy said. "We'll cut out his heart and liver for your gratification."
"I'll do it with my own hands," Colonel Hua said.
"You bastard!" Song Jiang said to Liu Gao. "I never did you any harm or gave you cause to hate me, why did you listen to that bitch's slanders? Now we've got you, what have you to say for yourself?"
"No point in asking." Colonel Hua said, and plunging his knife into Liu Gao's breast ripped out his heart and presented it to Song Jiang. The soldiers cleared away the corpse.
"Well, this piece of filth is dead now," said Song Jiang, "but that bloody wife of his lives on, that's one score still unsettled."
"Don't you worry about that," said Short-Arse. "I'll go and get her myself tomorrow. This time she has to be mine." Everyone laughed.
They went on drinking, and in the end all retired to rest. When they rose next day, they discussed how to attack Windy Fort. The Dandy said: "The men had a tough time yesterday. Today they'd better rest. It'll be time enough if we go tomorrow."
"That's reasonable," said Song Jiang. "Men and horses need rest to regain their strength, there's no point in rushing things."
We shall now leave them to their preparations in the mountain retreat, and join the Tamer. After he galloped back to the barracks in Windy City, he immediately reinforced the guards at the four gates. Then he composed a report and told the two instructors to ride post haste and deliver it to Governor Mu-Rong.
Hearing that urgent news of a military crisis had come, the Governor went into session at once. This is what he read in the Tamer's report: "Colonel Hua is a traitor, he has joined the Qingzhou bandits. At this moment Windy City is indefensible, the situation is desperate, please send a competent general at once to secure the place." Horrified, the Governor sent for General Qin, divisional commander of Qingzhou, to come at once to discuss the military situation.
This General Qin was a native of Kaizhou beyond the mountains. His given name was Ming, but because of his volatile temper and his raucous voice people called him Thunderclap. He was from a long line of famous warriors, and his weapon was a wolf-tooth mace, which he wielded with irresistible ferocity. On receiving the Governor's summons, he hurried to the government office. Respectful greetings completed, the Governor handed him the Tamer's report and bade him read it.
"Those bandits are getting too confident by far," the General said, "but don't you worry, I'll raise a force immediately and I promise I'll capture the buggers, or else never see you again!"
"If you delay, General," the Governor said, "I'm afraid Windy Fort will fall."
"Who'd think of delaying in a situation like this?" the General said. "I shall raise an army at once and in a few days' time we'll be off."
The grateful Governor ordered wine and food and dry provisions to be taken to the city boundary for the troops.
The news that Hua Rong was a turncoat had enraged General Qin Ming. He mounted his horse and galloped round to his headquarters where he mustered a force of a hundred cavalry and four hundred foot and ordered them to parade outside the city, prior to embarking on the campaign. Meanwhile Governor Mu-Rong had some bread made in a temple garden outside the city; big bowls were also laid out and a quantity of wine warmed. Each man got three bowls of wine, two rolls and a slice of meat. It was all just ready when the troops began marching out of the city. Here they came in their neat ranks:
*The banners and pennants dance like flames, the pikes and lances are thick as a field of hemp. Divided into ranks of eight, the column advances like a great snake, sufficient indeed to instil fear in the heart of god or demon. Dark green or fiery red are the tassels on their weapons, embroidered in rich hues the standards that they bear. A tumult of horses' hooves approaching and receding — the whole world seems threatened; to which side will victory belong?*
It was still early in the day when General Qin Ming paraded his troops and led them forth from the city in orderly ranks, under a red banner which bore the words "General Qin Ming, commander in chief." Governor Mu-Rong watched Thunderclap riding out in full battle array and indeed it was a glorious sight:
A fluttering flame is the plume on his helm,
*His surcoat's the reddest you'll find in the realm;*
*His linked armour glitters like stars in the sky,*

*His boots are dark green, like the mountains so high.*
*An avenging Fury, he straddles his mount,*
*The flash of his breastplate's like cash beyond count.*
*His cudgel is cruel but prettily made,*
*When angry his eyes seem to start from his head;*
*His character's sudden as thunder in spring.*
This is the picture of General Qin Ming.
Well, as Thunderclap rode out from the city, he found Governor Mu-Rong waiting beyond the city wall to reward the troops. He quickly handed his arms to a soldier and dismounted to speak with the Governor. After an exchange of courtesies, the Governor took a cup and spoke some words of encouragement to the General: "Make sure you turn the situation to good advantage and come back quickly, singing a song of victory!"
When the troops had been treated, a signal gun was fired and Thunderclap bade the Governor farewell. He sprang into the saddle, the ranks formed up and at his command, shouldering their weapons, they marched on Windy Fort.
Now Windy Fort lay south-east of Qingzhou, but to go due south, skirting round the side of Windy Mountain, was deemed quicker. Before long they were travelling along a small road just north of the mountain.
Meanwhile in the mountain retreat on Windy Mountain the scouts had made a thorough reconnaissance and returned to make their report. Everyone was ready for their attack on Windy Fort, when the news came in: "Thunderclap is on his way with a big army!" They all stared at each other in horror. But Colonel Hua said: "There's no need for anyone to be afraid. They always say that in an emergency, when the enemy's almost upon you, the best thing is to put up a good fight. Let the troops have as much food and drink as they can take. Now, here's what we must do. First we must fight hard, and secondly we must use our heads. We shall do so ... and so .... What do you say to that?"
"It's a great plan," said Song Jiang. "That's just what I would have recommended." Having laid their plans, Song Jiang and Colonel Hua dismissed the troops so that each could make his own preparations. For himself, Colonel Hua selected a reliable mount, a good set of armour, bow and arrows and an iron spear. All were then ready and waiting.
Meanwhile Thunderclap had been leading his troops towards Windy Mountain and had arrived within two or three miles of it. Here they encamped. They were up at dawn. When they had breakfasted a signal gun was fired and they set off in the direction of Windy Mountain. They chose their route across a wide empty space so that the troops could spread out. When their drums began to beat, immediately in response a shattering crash of gongs sounded on the mountain and enemy troops began to pour forth. Thunderclap reined in his horse, rested his wolf-tooth mace and stared. Colonel Hua was advancing down the mountain, his troops pressing about him. When they reached the bottom, gongs were sounded again and the men formed ranks. Colonel Hua on horseback raised his iron spear and shouted a salute to Thunder-clap. The latter merely replied: "Colonel Hua, you come from a family of military men, serving the Emperor. You have been appointed commander of a fort, with a wide jurisdiction. You draw a salary from the government. What cause have you ever had for complaint? Yet now you consort with brigands! You're a traitor to the Emperor and I've been sent to arrest you. You'd better dismount and submit to being bound, it will save us all a lot of unpleasantness."
Colonel Hua brushed this aside: "General, be so good as to hear what I have to say. Do you really think I would betray the Emperor? The fault lies entirely with Liu Gao, who with absolutely no justification turned a private vendetta into a public cause, and so persecuted me that I now have no home to go to, no country I can call my own. If I take refuge here, temporarily, it is because I am obliged to. I beseech you to look into the affair and lend me your help."
"Get off your horse and surrender, what are you waiting for?" Thunderclap responded. "Cut the talk, you're just trying to confuse us." With that he called for the drums to be beaten again, whirled his mace about his head, and charged Colonel Hua.
"Thunderclap, you're a fool," Colonel Hua sneered. "Can't you see I was just giving you a chance? I spoke respectfully because you're my commanding officer, don't imagine it was because I'm afraid of you." So saying he levelled his spear and charged Thunderclap.
There under Windy Mountain the two of them fought a desperate battle. Truly it was an irresistible force meeting an immovable object. They really tested each other, those two warriors:
*A pair of raging tigers from the southern mountains, two green dragons of the northern sea. When a dragon is angry its horns bristle with menace, when the tiger is enraged its teeth and claws are terrible to behold; terrible the teeth and claws, like silver hooks embedded in a fuzzy velvet ball, menacing the horns; like a blur of yellow leaves shaking on a gold tree. The weapons whirl and clash, the steel spear tip never far from its target; the combat surges to and fro, the wolf-tooth mace displaying a thousand tricks. When the wolf-tooth mace strikes down it misses the head by only a hair's breadth. When the steel spear darts towards the heart it stops but half a finger's breadth away. The wielder of the spear affrights the firmament; the owner of the dancing wolf-tooth mace rages like lightning rending the clouds. One is the awesome general, upholder of the state, the other is the black star, protector of the nation's boundaries.*
Well, they went on fighting and after forty or fifty bouts there was nothing to choose between them. Eventually Colonel Hua dodged aside and turning his horse back towards the mountain vanished along a narrow trail. Thunderclap rode furiously in pursuit. Colonel Hua laid his spear in the rest and reined in his horse. He took the bow in his left hand, selected an arrow and bent the bow into an arc, twisted round and let fly. The arrow, as if to deliver a warning, struck the red tassel off Thunderclap's helmet. This stopped him in his tracks. He recovered quickly and set spurs to his horse, eager to close for the kill. But the enemy troops had all disappeared up the mountain, while Colonel Hua had taken a different path back to the mountain retreat.
When he saw they had all disappeared, Thunderclap was more furious than ever. "These bloody bandits, the nerve of them!" he roared. He ordered drums and gongs to be sounded for an attack up the mountain. The troops advanced cheering, the infantry leading the way. They had negotiated several ridges, when suddenly wood and stone missiles, bottles of lime and molten metal began to rain down on them from the slopes above. The troops in front were unable to pull up in time and fifty or more were killed. The remainder had to beat a retreat.
Thunderclap was a hot-headed man, and a fire had now been lit in his brain that nothing would do to extinguish. After reaching the bottom with his troops, he began looking for another way up. This search continued till midday, when gongs rang out on the western flank of the mountain and a bandit column emerged from the trees and undergrowth. But when Thunderclap charged to encounter them, the gongs ceased and the bandits disappeared. And when Thunderclap looked for the way they had come, there was no proper road there at all, only some woodcutters' paths, and even these were blocked with a tangle of tree trunks and branches and offered no practicable route.
He was just about to order his men to open up a path when some soldiers arrived and announced: "There's gongs being struck over to the east and an enemy column is advancing there."
Thunderclap marshalled his forces and raced over to the eastern end of the mountain. But when he arrived the gongs were silent and the enemy had disappeared. Thunderclap galloped about in all directions searching for a route, but all he found was a tangled mess of felled trees and branches blocking the paths.
At this point scouts returned and reported: "There's gongs and enemy troops over to the west." Thunderclap slapped his horse and galloped back to the western end of the mountain, but when he got there, no drums, no enemy. Well, as you know, Thunder-clap was not a patient man; by now he was grinding his teeth together as if he intended to grind them to powder.
Just then, from where they were on the western side of the mountain, infuriatingly, they heard the gongs sounding with redoubled vigour over on the east. They raced back to the east, but there was not a bandit to be seen. The bandits had all vanished into thin air.
Fuming with anger, Thunderclap was just about to order his men to force a route up the mountain, when shouting was heard over to the west.
Thunderclap's fury knew no bounds. Frantically goading on his troops he raced westwards. They searched high and low, but not a soul did they see! "Look for a way up the mountain!" Thunderclap commanded.
"There's no proper route on this side," one of his men said. "The only real way up's over there on the south-east. If we try and get up this way, we'll get ourselves into serious trouble."
"We'll take the proper road then, and we'll do it right away," said Thunderclap. He chased his men to the south-east.
It was getting dark by now. The troops were worn out with marching. When they reached the bottom of the mountain all they wanted was to make camp and eat. At this point torches were seen moving about high up on the mountainside, and a cacophony of drums and gongs began to sound. All Thunder-clap's anger was renewed, and he ordered a detachment of fifty horse into the attack. They were met with a hail of arrows from the tree line above and many of them were hit. Thunderclap had to withdraw. He told the troops now just to concentrate on preparing food. But the fires had hardly been lit when eighty or ninety torches were seen moving down the mountain, amid a shrill sound of whistling. Thunderclap was just about to go after them when suddenly the torches all went out at the same time. Although there was a moon that night, it was masked by clouds and only a glimmer of light filtered through. But Thunderclap was now too angry to sit still, so he ordered his men to light torches and burn the trees down. Just then drums and fifes were heard somewhere up the mountain. Thunderclap galloped towards the sound. Then he saw that on the summit a dozen or more torches had been lit. Up there Colonel Hua and Song Jiang were revealed, drinking together.
This vision caused Thunderclap almost to suffocate with rage. He reined in his horse and began to hurl insults at them from below. Colonel Hua shouted back: "General Qin, you shouldn't get so worked up. Go away and rest now; tomorrow we'll engage in a little fight to the death — your death."
"You traitor! Come down here! I'll have three hundred bouts with you right now, and then we'll see!"
Colonel Hua merely laughed. "General Qin, you're too tired. If I beat you now there's no honour in it. Go back and rest and come again tomorrow!"
Still more enraged, Thunderclap continued to shout insults up the mountain, while looking for a way up. But he feared Colonel Hua's arrows so he had to be satisfied with the insults.
At this point a cry went up among his own ranks. Thunderclap hurried down to see what was going on and found that fire arrows and blazing missiles were being hurled down in that quarter. And behind the missiles a company of crossbowmen were causing havoc. Thunderclap's troops, yelling blue murder, rushed to take cover in another part of the mountain where there was a deep ravine.
It was now past midnight. The troops were sheltering from the crossbow bolts, all complaining bitterly, when a great flood came rushing down from the head of the stream, engulfing the men and horses that were gathered there in the river bed. Each man was obliged to fight for his life. Those who managed to climb out onto the bank were immobilized by the enemy with hooked poles and carried as prisoners up the mountain. Those who couldn't crawl out drowned in the flood. Thunderclap's rage was now beyond description, it was as if his brain was melting. But just then he saw a small path leading off on one side. He urged his horse forward up this path. Before he had gone fifty paces, man and horse crashed head over heels into a concealed pit. Fifty men with hooks who were lying in ambush on either side dragged Thunderclap out, stripped him of his armour, uniform, helmet and weapons, and tied him up. Then, having rescued his horse, they transferred him and it to the Windy Mountain retreat.
Now all these tricks, of course, had been thought up by Colonel Hua and Song Jiang. First they had their men draw Thunderclap's forces this way and that, now to the east, now to the west, in order to tire them out, taking care themselves never to remain fixed in one spot. They had dammed up the waters of two streams with sandbags in advance, waiting until nightfall, then forcing the troops into the bed of the stream and releasing the pent-up waters. The resulting flood finished off Thunderclap's army. Thunderclap had brought more than five hundred troops, remember. More than half of these were overwhelmed by the flood and paid with their lives. Those who were captured alive numbered around a hundred and seventy while eighty good horses were seized, not a single one having got away. And on top of all this, Thunderclap himself was caught in the trap.
When the group who had captured Thunderclap returned to the camp it was almost dawn. The five leaders were sitting in the assembly hall. Thunderclap was brought bound before the dais. Colonel Hua immediately leapt to his feet and went to meet him, personally loosening his bonds and helping him up onto the dais, then prostrating himself before him. Thunderclap hurriedly returned the compliment. Then he said: "I am your prisoner. You could beat me to death if you wished. Why do you honour me like this?"
Colonel Hua knelt and said: "Our men didn't respect you, really they were unmannerly. Please forgive us." So saying he took clothes and gave them to Thunderclap to put on.
"That leader of yours, who is he?" Thunderclap asked.
Colonel Hua replied: "That is my friend and brother, the Yuncheng registrar, Song Jiang. And the other three are the chiefs of this stronghold, Yan Shun, Wang Ying and Zheng Tianshou."
Thunderclap said: "I know those three. But this registrar Song, would it by any chance be the person they call the Opportune Rain, Song Jiang the Just from Shandong?"
"That is correct, I am he," said Song Jiang.
Thunderclap hurriedly prostrated himself and said: "I have heard so much about you, I never expected to have the honour of meeting you here today!"
Song Jiang did not fail to return the courtesy at once.
Noticing that Song Jiang had a problem with his leg, Thunder-clap asked: "Excuse me for asking, but is there something the matter with your leg?"
Song Jiang accordingly told him his story, from the time he left Yuncheng to the occasion when Governor Liu flogged him to get a confession.
Thunderclap simply nodded and said: "We only heard one side of the story and we got things all wrong. When I get back to headquarters I will put Governor Mu-Rong in the picture."
The Dandy insisted that Thunderclap stay a few days, and to this end slaughtered buffaloes and horses for a big feast. The captured enemy soldiers were all housed at the back of the mountain retreat, and were well supplied with wine and food.
After several cups, Thunderclap rose to his feet and said: "Gentlemen, since you have been so generous as to spare my life, please return to me my helmet and armour, my horse and my weapons, and let me go back to the capital."
The Dandy replied: "General, with respect: you came from Qingzhou with five hundred men and now you've none left. How can you go back? Governor Mu-Rong is bound to hold you responsible. Wouldn't it be better to stay here a while, even if this is a God-forsaken outlaws' retreat? No doubt this place of ours is beneath your dignity, but surely it's only sensible to shelter here for a time? Everything we get here is shared between us, clothing comes in whole suits, isn't that better than going back to suffer the insults of the bigwigs?"
Thunderclap stepped down from the dais before giving his reply: "All my life I've served the Emperor, in death I shall serve him too. The court made me a general and appointed me divisional commander. I've never been given any cause for dissatisfaction. How can I become a bandit and betray the Emperor's trust? If you want to kill me, go ahead. But don't expect me ever to join you."
Colonel Hua stepped down from the dais and took him by the arm. "My respected friend, do not be angry. Let me tell you this: I too come from a line of military commanders, but like it or not I've been obliged to take refuge here. Still, if you are unwilling to become an outlaw how could we possibly force you? All we ask is that you sit down for a while till we finish eating, then we'll return your armour, helmet, horse and weapons."
Thunderclap still refused to sit down, so Colonel Hua went on: "General, you've been exhausting your strength and energy for a day and a night, you yourself are almost too tired to stand, how can your horse continue unless he's fully fed?"
When he thought about it, Thunderclap could not but agree. So he went back to the dais and sat down again to eat and drink with them. The five leaders took the cup in turn and toasted him. Thunderclap, being thoroughly tired out and unable to resist the entreaties of all of them, drank himself into a stupor and had to be helped to his bed. After that the others went about their business. Of this no more.
It was already after ten when Thunderclap awoke next morning. He leapt from his bed, performed his ablutions, and was eager to leave. The others tried to persuade him not to go: "Have some breakfast first, General. Afterwards we'll all come and see you off."
But Thunderclap was an impatient man. He couldn't wait to be off down the mountain. So they quickly organized some food and drink, then fetched him his helmet and armour and helped him dress. His horse was brought out and his wolf-tooth mace. Men were sent on with these to wait at the bottom. Then the five of them accompanied him down. When they said goodbye, his horse was brought and his weapons. Thunderclap mounted, took his mace, and taking advantage of the daylight left Windy Mountain. He travelled with all speed and reached the crossroads around noon. Far off in the distance he seemed to see a cloud of smoke and dust, but there was not a single passer-by. Thunder-clap had a premonition that something was wrong. When he reached the city walls, where there used to be a hundred dwellings, he found that all had been burnt to the ground and everywhere lay broken tiles and debris, and countless bodies of men and women.
Horrified, Thunderclap spurred his horse and cantered across this scene of desolation till he reached the city wall. When he shouted for them to open the gates, the drawbridge remained up. Troops were on the alert, with banners and flags waving and ballista missiles piled up ready. Reining in his horse, Thunderclap again shouted for them to lower the drawbridge and let him in. They had already seen it was Thunder-clap. A drum started to beat and a confused hubbub arose.
"I am General Qin," Thunderclap shouted again, "why don't you let me in?"
Governor Mu-Rong now appeared on the battlements and shouted back angrily: "You traitor, do you know no shame? Many ordinary citizens lost their lives and many houses were burnt down when you attacked us yesterday. And now you have the nerve to come here and try to tempt us into opening the gates! What a mistake the Emperor made in giving you responsibility! See how you perform your duty! But I've already sent a report to the Emperor and sooner or later you'll get your desserts, you'll be captured and cut into a thousand pieces!"
Thunderclap was outraged: "Your Honour, yesterday I lost my troops and was taken prisoner by the bandits on the mountain. I've only just managed to get free, how could I possibly have attacked the town?"
"Do you suppose I don't know that horse of yours?" the Governor replied. "And your armour, your weapons, your helmet? Everyone in the town clearly saw you inciting the bandits to kill and burn, what's the point in denying it? If you expect me to believe you were defeated and captured, how come not one of the five hundred troops came back to report? Now you've come to persuade us to open the gates so you can fetch your family. Well, we've already executed your wife. If you don't believe me, take a look at her head!"
Some soldiers held up a spear with the head of Thunderclap's wife on the end. Thunderclap was a hot-tempered man, but when he saw the head of his wife, his breath seemed to stop and his heart to shrivel up. Words failed him utterly. All he could do was curse his fate. But now ballista missiles began to rain down on him from the town walls and he was forced to withdraw.
Much of the ground was still covered in flames from fires which had not been put out. He turned his horse and cantered back over the field of debris. At first in his despair he wanted to find a place to die. He considered this for a long time, but then he gave his horse its head and galloped back the way he had come. He had not gone more than three miles when he saw a body of horsemen emerging from the forest, five leaders out in front. They were of course Song Jiang, Colonel Hua and the other three, with a couple of hundred men. Song Jiang inclined and said: "Why aren't you back in Qingzhou, General? Where are you going now, all on your own?"
Thunderclap replied angrily: "Some swine, unfit to inhabit the earth, some accursed villain who deserves to roast in hell, pretended to be me and attacked the city, destroyed people and houses, killed innocent folk and brought about the death of all my family. There'll be no escape for him now, be he in heaven or under the earth. When I find him I shall beat him till I smash this mace into smithereens."
Song Jiang said: "Calm yourself, General. You've no wife now, but don't worry. Allow me to act as a matchmaker for you. I've got something in mind already. Please come with us, it's not easy to tell you about it here. If we go back to the mountain retreat it will be easier to explain. Let us go together now."
There was little alternative but to comply, so Thunderclap returned with them to the mountain. The journey was uneventful. When they reached the gatehouse they dismounted and entered the camp. Some of the men prepared wine and food in the assembly hall and the five leaders invited Thunderclap in and gave him a place in their midst. Next all five threw themselves on their knees while Thunderclap hastily returned the compliment by kneeling also. Then Song Jiang began: "Please don't be angry with us, General. Yesterday, you remember, we were trying to persuade you to stay, and you were absolutely fixed against it. So I devised a plan. I got one of the men to make himself up like you, wearing your armour and helmet, riding your horse and carrying your mace, and attack Qingzhou, inciting the bandits to kill people. The Dandy and Short-Arse Wang reinforced them with another fifty men, and made it look as if it was you trying to get your family out. This killing and arson was intended to put paid to your idea of going back. But now we must apologize for this."
This account increased Thunderclap's anger, and he sorely wished to challenge Song Jiang and the others. At the same time, he couldn't help thinking: "In the first place, it's probably the fault of my stars, and secondly, they've let me off quite lightly, and then again, I don't know if I could actually handle them. I'd better swallow my anger." So he said: "You may have meant well when you asked me to stay, but you've done me irreparable harm in causing the death of my wife and all my family."
Song Jiang said: "But without this, how would you ever have submitted? Now that you've no wife, I know that Colonel Hua has a younger sister who is very virtuous. I will sponsor the match and provide a dowry and give you a house. What do you say?"
Thunderclap, seeing they all showed him such respect and kindness, resigned himself to going along with them. The company placed Song Jiang in the middle, Thunderclap at the head and Colonel Hua next to him and the other three in the places that befitted them. They drank to the accompaniment of loud music, and all the while discussed how to attack Windy Fort.
Thunderclap said: "Should be easy, no need for you to spend a lot of thought on it. The Tamer is my subordinate. What's more, he was my pupil in martial arts. Anyway, we've always got along fine. I'll go tomorrow and get him to open up for me. Once I'm inside, I'll tell him to surrender and join us. I can marry Hua Rong's sister and we can also take Liu Gao's wife, so you can all have your revenge and wipe the slate clean. I'll make it my joining gift, how about that?"
"That is indeed handsome of you!" said Song Jiang delightedly. "It pleases us immensely!"
When the feast broke up that day they all went to rest. They rose early next day, breakfasted and put on their uniforms. Thunderclap mounted and preceded them down the mountain. Mace in hand, he galloped towards Windy City.

Now when the Tamer had returned to Windy City, he first alerted the military authorities and posted soldiers from the camp to keep a strict watch night and day, reinforcing the guard on all the gates. He decided against making any sortie, but regularly sent out scouts, who reported no sign of reinforcements from Qingzhou. When they came to him and said that Thunderclap was outside the gates, alone, on horseback, asking for the gates to be opened, he mounted and galloped off to see for himself. Having ascertained that the rider was indeed alone, with no escort, he gave orders for the gates to be opened and the drawbridge lowered. He personally met Thunderclap and escorted him in. The latter dismounted in front of the main hall and the Tamer invited him to enter. After the exchange of courtesies, the Tamer asked: "Why have you ridden here all alone, General?"

Thunderclap first told him all about how he had lost his army, and then said: "Song Jiang the Just of Shandong, he whom they call the Opportune Rain, is truly a noble and generous man. All brave men under the sun honour and respect him. When I was on Windy Mountain recently I joined the band. You too are without family attachments, why not listen to my advice and join them too? You won't have to put up with the insolence of civil administrators."

"Since the advice comes from you, how can I not follow it?" the Tamer said. "I had not heard that Song Jiang was on the mountain. When did he arrive?"

Thunderclap laughed. "Remember that prisoner you were escorting the other day, Third Brother Zhang, the Yuncheng bandit? That was he. He was afraid to give his real name, because it might remind people of the sentence against him. That's why he called himself Zhang."

The Tamer stamped his foot. "If I'd known it was Song Jiang I'd have let him escape on the way. I knew nothing about it, I only heard Liu Gao's version. To think I nearly caused his death!"

While Thunderclap and the Tamer were talking in the hall, thinking of setting out shortly, one of the guards entered and announced: "Two columns of troops, with drums and fifes, are marching on the town."

They both leapt on their horses and rode to encounter the enemy. When they reached the town gates, they saw a great cloud of dust, a deathly cloud that obscured the sky:

2 army columns are heading for the town;
4 heroes on the mountain are coming down.

THE soldiers escorting the prisoners were armed with spears, cudgels, halberds, and swords, and were morally supported further by a band of drums and gongs. They had barely covered fourteen *li* when as they were approaching a big forest the soldiers in the advance halted and reported that they saw spies among the trees. But the unconvinced Huang Xin merely growled at the column for having stopped, and ordered that they should march on, and take no further notice of the supposed spying. The column had to obey, and the wood was now close at hand when suddenly about thirty gongs were sounded simultaneously among the trees, with the natural consequence that the soldiers were frightened out of their wits, and began to scatter. Huang Xin's shout, however, stopped them. "Stand firm! Fall into ranks! Magistrate Liu! You guard the prisoners."

Already, Magistrate Liu on his horse had got the wind up, and exclaimed, "May we be saved by the Goddess of Mercy from a calamity! *Ai Ya*! *Ai Ya*! I will offer a a hundred thousand scriptures, at thirty altars for the benefit of those in the afterlife. Save us! Save us!" His face became the color of a green pumpkin, and then turned yellow.

Huang Xin, being a military officer, had no fear. He whipped his horse, and dashed to the front. There he could see that there were about five hundred brigands among the trees. They were all tall, and had fierce appearances. They all wore red turbans, and short jackets, and had swords in their belts, and long spears in their hands. They had by this time surrounded his column. Then three big men sprang out of the forest. Their dress was blue, green, and red respectively, and on their turbans was the "Wan" swastika in gold. They each carried a big sword and a halberd in hand—barring the road. These were the bandit chiefs, namely 'Elegant Tiger,' 'Stunted Tiger,' and the 'White Faced Squire.' They bellowed out, "You can go no further unless you give us three thousand taels of gold."

Colonel Huang Xin shouted, "You fellows are not going to treat us in this way. The 'Supressor of Three Mountains' is here."

The three bandit chiefs glared at him, and shouted, "Even if you guarded ten thousand mountains you would have to pay just the same. You shall not pass here without payment."

"I am a Colonel on official business, so why should you expect me to pay the money?"

The chiefs laughed, "Even if the Emperor himself came this way, he would have to pay the toll. If you have no money, then you can leave the man who transacts official business as ransom with us until you raise the cash."

Huang Xin was highly infuriated by such insolence, shouted back, "You brigands! How dare you be so impudent!" Ordering the drums and gongs to be beaten so as to have a martial air, he whipped his horse and charged with his sword in hand. The chiefs defended themselves, but although Huang Xin used all his available skill and strategy he could not hold himself against the three even after ten bouts.

Magistrate Liu was at the back shivering in his shoes, and instead of helping he was seriously thinking of running away.

Huang Xin at last realized that he was in danger of being captured by these men; so turning his horse, galloped back to his soldiers with the three brigand chiefs following at his heels.

Huang Xin had no time to care for his own soldiers, but rode off by himself towards the town whence they had just come. When the soldiers saw Huang Xin leaving them there was confusion, and they left the prisoner's cart, and scattered in all directions. Magistrate Liu was soon left by himself, and seeing the hopeless position of affairs whipped his horse, and followed the rabble. But some of the brigands seeing Magistrate Liu escaping drew a rope across his track-brought his horse down, and took him prisoner.

Having released Hua Rong and Song Jiang from the cage on the cart, they stripped the clothes from Magistrate Liu and gave them to Song Jiang. The band then set out for their stronghold on the mountain with the horses as their booty, and the magistrate as their prisoner.

Now before this conflict the brigands had sent spies into Qingfeng Town, and they had duly reported that Hua Rong had been arrested, and that Huang Xin had captured Song Jiang on the road. So every road had been watched, and the ambush cleverly arranged.

The bandits reached their camp about 10 P.M. that evening, and the chiefs assembled in the hall to discuss matters. They all sat down to take dinner with Song Jiang and Hua Rong in the central seats of honor.

"I and my elder brother Song are deeply indebted to you for saving our lives and revenging our wrong. In the town however are my wife and my sister, and I am afraid that Huang Xin will now arrest them. How can we save them?"

"Colonel Hua, do not worry about that," said Yan Shun. "I think that Colonel Huang Xin will not dare touch your family. We know that even if he does, he will still have to pass along this road again. We three will go tomorrow, and bring your family here." He then ordered some of his men to go into the town, and spy what was being done there.

Hua Rong expressed his gratitude for this action.

"Let us now have the prisoner Liu Gao here," said Song Jiang.

"He is bound to a pillar on the veranda," said Yan Shun. "We will cut open his chest, and present you with his heart."

"I will do that myself," said Hua Rong.

They all went outside to the veranda. There Song Jiang reviled Liu Gao. "Previously I had no quarrel with you, so why did you foolishly listen to your wife's false statements. Now that we have caught you, what have you to say?"

"Don't ask him any questions," said Hua Rong. He opened the prisoner's breast with his sword, and cutting out the heart presented it to Song Jiang. The soldiers took away the corpse.

"We have disposed of this vile scoundrel," said Song Jiang, "but as we have not yet got his whore of a wife. My hatred of her still exists."

"Never mind, brother," said 'Stunted Tiger,' "I will go tomorrow, and get her, and she will then belong to me."

They all laughed at this. They soon finished their feast, and went to sleep.

Early the next morning they again discussed an attack on Qingfeng Town. Yan Shun said, "Our men are all tired out after yesterday's work so we had better let them rest today."

They all agreed to this as there was no particular urgency about the proposed actions.

Upon reaching Qingfeng Town Colonel Huang Xin issued an order that foot soldiers and cavalry should strengthen the guards at the four barriers outside the town. It was not a walled town. He also wrote a dispatch to Prefect Murong, and sent two express messengers with it. They reached the prefectural town during the night, but when the Prefect was informed that an urgent dispatch had arrived he at once went to the *yamen* to receive it. The dispatch read: "Hua Rong has rebelled, and joined the bandits on Qingfeng Mountain. It is extremely important that reinforcements should be dispatched at once to safeguard the town."

The Prefect was surprised at the news, and at once sent for General Qin Ming, commander-in-chief of the troops in the Prefecture. Now the General was a native of Kaizhou in Zhili province, and had an excitable nature. He always spoke in a very loud voice, and therefore he got the nickname, "The Thunderer."

For two generations his forefathers had been in the army. He was skilled in the use of the mace with which he could overcome even ten thousand soldiers. When he heard the Prefect's summon he at once went to the *yamen*. After they had exchanged the usual salutations the Prefect handed him the dispatch to read.

General Qin Ming was very angry, and said, "How dare the fellow do such a thing! Your Excellency need not worry. I will send soldiers at once. I swear that if I do not arrest those bandits I will not see you again."

"I am afraid," said Prefect Murong, "that if we delay the bandits will attack Qingfeng Town."

"I will see that action is taken immediately," replied General Qin Ming. "I will give orders this very night, and the soldiers will march off early in the morning."

The Prefect was much pleased, and at once gave orders that wine and rations for the troops should be sent outside the town, and distributed to the soldiers the following morning.

General Qin Ming went to his headquarters, and issued orders mustering one hundred horsemen and four hundred infantry for the expedition the following morning outside the town.

The Prefect went himself to a monastery outside the city, and there supervised the distribution for each soldier of two steamed buns, one *jin* of meat, and three bowls of wine. When this had been prepared he saw the soldiers leaving the town with a red flag bearing the name, "General Qin Commander-in-chief of Infantry and Cavalry." General Qin was with them, wearing his helmet and armor. His appearance indeed was a fine spectacle. As soon as he saw the Prefect he rode forward, and dismounted. After the usual ceremony of saluting, the Prefect presented the General with a cup of wine, and said, "Take due precautions, and quickly return with victories."

When the rations had been distributed to the troops a signal cannon was fired, and they marched off on the road to Qingfeng Town.

The bandits on Qingfeng Mountain were duly informed by their scouts of the departure of these troops, and were rather surprised at this sudden move. Hua Rong said, "Gentlemen, don't worry. There is an ancient saying, 'Urgent report of the arrival of troops demands a determination to face them even unto death.' We had better order our men to take enough food and wine, and afterwards act according to my instructions. We must first use force, and then outwit them with guile." He then whispered his plan.

"Your plan is good," said Song Jiang. "Let it be carried out."

"The men were ordered accordingly, and that day Song Jiang and Hua Rong arranged their plan. Hua Rong selected one of the best horses for himself, and put on his mailed armor and helmet. He also got in good condition his bow, arrows, and spears.

Now General Qin Ming, "the Thunderer," marched with his army until he was a few *li* from Qingfeng Mountain where he encamped for the night. When his troops had had their meal about 4 A.M. next morning, he ordered a cannon to be fired as a signal for a forward march. He selected an open space where the troops were spread out accompanied by the rolling of drums. Just then, however, he heard gongs being sounded on the mountain, and saw a large body of mounted bandits galloping down the mountain path. He recognized Hua Rong among the brigands, and pulling up his horse he seized his "Wolves Teeth Mace." Upon reaching the foot of the mountain a gong was again sounded, and all the mounted bandits formed themselves into ranks. Hua Rong on his horse saluted "the Thunderer."

"Hua Rong," shouted "the Thunderer," "your ancestors were military officers, and you yourself received your commission from the Emperor. You were given a salary, and commanded to guard this county, so where have you got dissatisfied? Now you join these bandits, and openly rebel against the government. I have come here to arrest you. If you are intelligent, just dismount, and be bound by ropes, and so a dirty business may be avoided."

Hua Rong laughed at this, and said, "Sir, please listen! How dare I rebel? Magistrate Liu Gao has concocted false charges against me. As he was persecuting me I had no other place for refuge than this. I request that you personally investigate the charges, and so help to clear me of the accusation."

"How long will it be before you dismount?" asked "the Thunderer." "You have made a sophisticated speech in order to demoralize my troops." He ordered the drums to be sounded, and raising his mace he advanced towards Hua Rong.

Hua Rong laughed again, "Qin Ming! Do you not understand the forbearance of a decent man? I have treated you as my superior officer, but please do not think that I am afraid of you." Thereupon he urged his horse forward, and held his spear ready for action.

They both engaged in conflict, but after about fifty rounds neither of them gained any advantage. So Hua Rong decided to make a feint, and turning his horse he galloped away down the road. "The Thunderer" was very angry at this and pursued him. Hua Rong put his spear aside, took his bow, and reined in his horse. Turning round in the saddle he shot an arrow which severed the tassel on the "Thunderer's" helmet, and it fell to the ground. This served as a warning, and "the Thunderer" being startled dared not go any further. He pulled up his horse, and turned round with the idea of dealing with the followers who had come with Hua Rong. But the bandits had all turned, and were in retreat up the mountain. Hua Rong had also now turned off the road, and was also heading for the mountain by another path.

This escape of the enemy made General Qin Ming, "the Thunderer," more angry, and he said, "These rascals are detestable." He at once gave orders for a general advance up the mountain, and the drums and gongs were beaten accordingly. The soldiers shouted as they advanced. They had not gone very far when they were assailed from above by chamber pots, bottles of lime, large boulders, and logs of wood rolled down the slope. About fifty men were killed at once, and the rest realizing their danger turned and fled. General Qin Ming was now extremely angry, but also had to retreat. About noon many gongs were beaten on another hill to the west, and he saw there another body of bandits with red flags. He led a number of his cavalry in that direction, but when they got there they could not see the flags and brigands. There was only a small track there for woodcutters, and even that was obstructed by a heap of timber and bushes. He gave order that the trees be removed, but just as his soldiers were going to do this, they heard gongs sounded on another hill to the east side, and looking across they saw bandits there with red flags.

General Qin Ming immediately rushed his cavalry to the eastern hill, but upon arriving there, there were no bandits or red flags. Again there was only a small track obstructed by loose trees and bushes. Just then a scout reported to him that there were bandits with red flags again on the western hill. General Qin Ming again galloped his cavalry to the western hill, but upon arriving there there was not a single bandit to be seen. "The Thunderer" was now mad with rage, and ground his teeth with passion. Again he heard the brigands sounding their gongs on the eastern hill, but upon going there again there was only the same result. He gave orders that a road up the mountain must be found, and one of his soldiers stepped forward, and spoke respectfully, "There is evidently no proper road here, but on the southeast side there is a good road up the mountain. If we try to find a way here I am afraid we shall be entrapped."

"We must go at once by that road," said the general. The troops were rushed in that direction, but when they reached their objective it was growing dusk so they encamped there, and went to prepare their evening meal. Just then they happened to see lighted torches upon the hill, and many gongs were being beaten.

General Qin Ming was so angry that he led about fifty cavalrymen up the mountain. They were met by a storm of arrows, and several of his men were wounded. He returned to the camp, and ordered his soldiers to get the evening meal finished as quickly as possible. The cooking fires had just been lighted when they saw about ninety bandits on the mountain who had many torches, and were blowing whistles. General Qin Ming quickly got some of his soldiers ready, and was on the point of starting when the bandits extinguished their torches. It was a cloudy night so that there was not much moonlight. General Qin Ming was still angry, and he now gave his officers orders to set the forest on fire. But before this could be done there was a sound of flutes and drums, and he saw about ten torches blazing on the top of a hill. Mounting his horse he went towards the light, and there saw Hua Rong and Song Jiang seated at a table eating and drinking. General Qin Ming reined in his horse, and shouted insults to them.

Hua Rong laughed, and said, "General Qin, you need not be so hot-tempered. Go back and rest yourself. Tomorrow we will fight again, and either you or I will be victorious."

"Rebellious bandit!" thundered General Qin Ming. "Come down, here! I will have a few hundred bouts with you now and afterwards we can discuss matters."

Hua Rong laughed, and said, "General Qin, you must be tired after today's exertions, so if I defeat you now it would not be much to my credit. Go back, and come again tomorrow."

General Qin was angrier than ever, and continued to insult them. He would have gone to look for a road up the mountain but for the fear of the arrows from Hua Rong's bow. While he was still cursing them, however, he heard a noise in his camp below. He turned his horse, and galloped back to his camp, but upon reaching there he saw that the bandits were attacking the camp with fireballs and fire arrows. In the shadows at the rear of the camp many brigands let fly a shower of crossbows. His soldiers seeing their danger were leaving the camp, and seeking shelter in the deep ditches.

It was now about 1 A.M. While his men were hiding in all kinds of hollow there was a rush of water, and they were in danger of being drowned in a mountain torrent. The bandits occupied the banks of the stream, seized the soldiers by iron hooks, and many of the latter were drowned in the water. General Qin Ming was almost crazy with anger at this, but just then he noticed a small footpath. He turned his horse into it, and went forward. He had not gone more than about fifty paces when his horse stumbled and fell into a pit. Immediately about fifty brigands armed with iron hooks appeared, and lifted up the General. They stripped him off his mail, helmet, and weapons, and binding him with ropes took him up the mountain.

All this was in accordance with the plans of Hua Rong. He had divided his men so as to entice General Qin to gallop backwards and forwards, and so exhaust his men and horses without obtaining any result. He had filled bags with earth, and dammed up the mountain stream, and then during the night forced the enemy into the stream and then released the water. Of General Qin Ming's troops about half were drowned in this way, and about two hundred were captured alive. Also about eighty fine horses were seized.

When the bandits reached their stronghold with General Qin Ming, day was just breaking. The five leaders were already seated in the main building when the brigands arrived, and brought General Qin to the hall. Hua Rong immediately jumped up from his seat, and leaving the hall went and untied the ropes binding the General. He conducted "the Thunderer" into the hall, and there kowtowed to him. The General returned the courtesy, and questioned, "I am your prisoner and you may now kill me. But why do you treat me like this?"

Hua Rong knelt down, and said, "Our men did not recognize your eminence, and have ill-treated you, we ask for your forgiveness."

General Qin Ming was presented with new uniform, and he then asked Hua Rong, "Who is this leader of these heroes?"

"This is Song Jiang, formerly a clerk in the magistrate's *yamen* at Yuncheng County. These other three are the leaders of this stronghold—Yan Shun, Wang Ying, and Zheng Tianshou.'"

"I know these three gentlemen," said General Qin Ming. "Is Song Jiang also known in Shandong province as 'Welcome Rain'?"

"That is I," interposed Song Jiang.

General Qin Ming saluted, and said, "I have heard of your illustrious name for a long time, but I never anticipated meeting you here today."

Song Jiang quickly returned the salute, but in his doing so General Qin Ming noticed that he limped a little so he asked what was the cause of it. Thereupon Song Jiang told him in detail his adventures from the time he lived at Yuncheng County.

General Qin Ming wagged his head, and said, "What a great many mistakes are made by listening to only one side of a case! Let me get back and tell the Prefect Murong all about this affair."

Yan Shun requested the General to stay with them for a few days. Now they at once started feasting with goat and horse meat. After a few rounds of drinking, the General arose and said, "Gentlemen and heroes, as you are so good as not to kill me I now request you to return to me my helmet, and mail, my horse, and sword, and allow me to go back to Qingzhou Prefecture."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Yan Shun. "You must remember that you have lost all your soldiers so how can you return to Qingzhou Prefecture? Would not the Prefect bring an accusation against you? It would be better if you stayed here for a few days. It is true that the accommodation at this wild spot is rather rough, but we will divide our gold and silver with you, and give you whatever clothes you require, and you will be quite safe here from the wrath of your superior officer."

General Qin Ming stepped out of the hall, and said, "While living, I am a subject of the Great Song Empire, and when dead I shall be a ghost of it. I received my commission as a General from the Emperor, and as I have been well and fairly treated how can I become a bandit, and rebel against the Emperor? You gentlemen can kill me at any time that suits your convenience."

Yan Shun came forward and persuaded general Qin Ming, "Elder brother, please listen to what I say, I am also the son of an official who received his appointment direct from the Court, but have been forced by circumstances to become a bandit. As you are unwilling to join us we request you to stay with us at least for a little time until the feast is over. I will return to you the armor, helmet, your horse and arms, and you can then go if you like."

General Qin Ming was unwilling to stay, so Hua Rong again spoke to him, "When you arrived, you were extremely tired with your previous exertions, and your horse was also wearied so that you must at least give it time to eat its fodder before you depart."

General Qin Ming thought that this was quite true, so he sat down at the feast. The five men acted as hosts, and saw that he was well supplied with wine. They treated General Qin Ming so well that it was not long before he was drunk, and they then conducted him to a room where he lay down to sleep.

He awoke about 9 A.M. the next morning, and after toilet he wished again to leave the mountain. After breakfast they gave him his armor and helmet. Men were also sent down the mountain with his arms and horse with instructions to wait there for him. The five brigand chiefs accompanied him down the mountain, and before leaving, handed him his arms and horse. General Qin Ming mounted, and rode off at great speed towards Qingzhou Prefecture.

He was only about four //from his destination, and it was about II A.M. when he saw clouds of smoke and dust in the distance. When he saw this he became suspicious as he had not met a single person on the road. As he approached the town of Qingzhou Prefecture, he saw that the suburbs were in flame. The houses were all in ruins, and among the débris were the corpses of men, women, and children.
He made his way through the ruins, but when he reached the city gate he found that the drawbridge was up, and that there were numerous soldiers on the wall armed with logs and huge boulders. He reined in his horse, and shouted, "Let down the bridge as I wish to enter the city."
The soldiers had seen him coming, and recognizing him they raised a shout, and beat their drums.
The Thunderer shouted, "I am General Qin Ming. Why do you not let me into the city?" Just then he noticed the Prefect Murong was standing at the breastwork of the wall gazing at him, and saying, "Rebellious bandit! Why are you not ashamed of yourself? Last night you came here with soldiers and attacked our town; killed many innocent people, and burnt many houses. And yet today you come again, and by deception try to get the gates opened. The Emperor has treated you well, but now you act in this ungrateful way. I have however written a memorial to the Court about your affair. Sooner or later you will be arrested, and cut into pieces."
"Your worship," shouted General Qin Ming, "I took soldiers to attack the bandits, but was defeated, and taken up the mountain as prisoner. I have just been released so how could I be here and attack the city last night?"
"Do you think that I did not recognize you by your armor, your arms, your helmet, and your horse? All the men here saw you last night directing the bandits to kill the people and burn the houses. So why do you prevaricate now? Even if you were defeated how is it that not a single one of your men returned to report the matter? Do you try to deceive my men and get the gate open so that you can see your family again? If so let me tell you that your wife and all your family were killed this morning. If you do not believe this I will have your wife's head brought here for you to look at."
The soldiers immediately putting the head on a spear held it aloft for General Qin Ming to gaze at. He was a hot-tempered man and the depth of his misery made him unable to utter a word. The archers now commenced to shoot a shower of arrows at him so he turned his horse and retreated for safety. As he returned the houses all around were still burning, and amid all this destruction he could not find a place where he could put an end to his own life. He was buried in deep thought as he rode along. He had not gone more than four //when he saw a troop of cavalry emerging from a forest, and they were led by five heroes in front. He recognized them as the five chiefs of the bandits.
Song Jiang rose in his stirrups, and saluting said, "Why do you return from Qingzhou Prefecture, sir? You are by yourself, but where are you going?"
General Qin Ming was very angry at this, and said, "I should like to know who has been in my disguise in an attack on the town, and had so many people killed, so many houses destroyed, and my own family wiped out. He is deserving of death. He has made my situation so terrible that I cannot find a way in heaven or earth to end my misery. If I find that man I will smash him into pieces with my mace."
"Sir, do not be angry," said Song Jiang. "I have a proposal to make, but this is not a suitable place to discuss it. I request you to accompany us to our mountain stronghold where I can explain it to you."
General Qin Ming saw no other way but to follow them. They said nothing on the road, but when they reached the stronghold they all dismounted, and entered the main hall where a feast was soon spread. The chiefs requested General Qin Ming to take the seat of honor. They then knelt down before him, but he immediately did the same to them.
"Sir, please excuse us," said Song Jiang. "Yesterday we tried to detain you on our mountain. But as you were determined to go so we thought of a plan, and dressed one of our bandits in your armor and helmet, gave him your mace and horse, and instructed him to lead our men to attack Qingzhou Prefecture, and kill the people there. These men were reinforced by Yan Shun and 'Stunted Tiger' who each led about fifty men, and acted as if you yourself wanted to get your wife and family out of Qingzhou Prefecture. The object of this destruction was to put an end to your desire to go back. We now confess our faults."
Upon hearing this General Qin Ming boiled with rage. He would have liked to fight with Song Jiang at once, but on second thoughts he knew that he was destined by fate to join them. Further he could not fight when they were all in such a submissive attitude, and again he was entirely by himself, and was powerless against so many. Therefore he suppressed his anger, and replied, "Though it was kind of you to detain me here yet it resulted in a great injury to me as all the members of my family were killed."
"If we had not done that," said Song Jiang, "you would not have been willing to give up all thought of returning to your family. As, however, you have no wife, now Hua Rong is willing to marry his younger sister, who would make an excellent wife, to you. What do you say to that?"
General Qin Ming was persuaded as he saw that they all meant so much respect and care for him.
They then all sat down with Song Jiang in the place of honor, and partook of the feast provided. During the meal they discussed their plans for an attack on Qingfeng Town.
General Qin Ming said, "It will be an easy task, and you need not worry about it. Huang Xin is my subordinate, and I trained him in all military matters. Also we are on good terms with each other. So tomorrow I will go, and get the town barriers opened. I will talk matters over with him, and induce him to come with me and join your band. I will bring all Hua Rong's family here, and will also arrest Magistrate Liu Gao's wife so that you will be revenged for what she did to you."
"That will be most excellent," said Song Jiang.
The following morning General Qin Ming mounted his horse, and taking his mace, went down the mountain to Qingfeng Town. At the town the barricades were well and strongly guarded by soldiers and although many scouts had been sent out, yet no news arrived of any reinforcement from Qingzhou Prefecture. When General Qin Ming arrived and demanded admittance a messenger was sent to Huang Xin who mounted his horse and hurried to the barricade. There he saw General Qin Ming by himself without even an orderly. He at once gave orders for the drawbridge to be lowered, and when General Qin Ming rode over it Huang Xin conducted him to his quarters. After the usual salutations Huang Xin asked how it happened that the General had returned by himself and unaccompanied. The General then told him how he had been defeated and now joined the bandits who were led by Song Jiang of whom he spoke very highly. He argued strongly that Huang Xin should also join the bandits, and so avoid the abuse of the civil authorities. "As you've joined the bandits, my benefactor," said Huang Xin, "I'll go with you." They discussed the whole situation and were on the point of rising when a soldier reported that large bodies of men and horses were marching upon the town. Qin Ming and Huang Xin immediately mounted their steeds, and galloped to the barricades where they saw the cloud of dust raised by the movement of large troops.

The town is invaded with troops,
While 4 chiefs descend a mountain.

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### Stone General Shi Yong Delivers a Letter at the inn in a Village Tavern; The Tamer Hua Rong Shoots a Wild Goose on the wing at the Marshes of Mount Liang

But when Huang Xin and Qin Ming went outside the gate and took a closer look they saw that one of the columns was led by Song Jiang and Hua Rong, the other by Yan Shun and Stumpy Tiger Wang, and there were about a hundred and fifty men in each. Huang Xin ordered the fort soldiers to lower the drawbridge and open the gates. He himself went forward to greet the arrivals and conduct them into the town.
Song Jiang had already instructed his men that they were not to harm any of the local people or the soldiers in the fort. Now they fought their way into the southern enclosure and killed every member of Liu Gao's family with the exception of his wife. She was taken by Stumpy Tiger Wang. The bandits loaded all of Liu Gao's gold and silver and other valuables onto carts. Liu had also had a number of horses, cattle and sheep. All of these were led away.
Hua Rong loaded onto carts the valuables in his own compound, and moved out with his wife, children and younger sister. The townspeople who had been serving in his household he bid return to their homes.
When all was in order, the brave brigands, left the town of Clear Winds and went back as a single detachment to their mountain stronghold.
Zheng Tianshou welcomed the new arrivals in Righteousness Hall. Huang Xin greeted the assembled gallants and was seated below Hua Rong. Song Jiang directed that Hua Rong's wife and children be provided with a place to rest, and that Liu Gao's property be distributed among the bandits. Stumpy Tiger Wang concealed the woman he had captured in his own quarters.
Yan Shun asked: "Where is Liu Gao's wife?"
"This time you must let me keep her as my woman," said Wang.
"You can have her. But call her out. I have something to say," said Yan Shun.
"And I want to question her," said Song Jiang.
Wang summoned the woman into the hall. Weeping, she begged for mercy.
"I saved you and let you go, you harpy! I treated you as the lady of an official," shouted Song Jiang. "Why did you stab me in the back? We've caught you now! What have you got to say for yourself?"
Yan Shun leaped from his chair. "Why bother with a hussy like her?" He pulled out a sword and cut her in two.
Stumpy Tiger was enraged. He grabbed his halberd and advanced on Yan Shun. Song Jiang quickly rose and intervened.
"Yan Shun was right to kill her, brother," he said. "You saw how, thanks to my efforts, she was allowed to leave the mountain and rejoin her husband. Yet she made a complete about-face and had him injure me. Brother, if you kept her by your side, sooner or later she would have caused trouble. I promise to find you a good wife, one who'll completely satisfy you."
"I was flunking the same thing, brother," said Yan Shun. "If we didn't kill her, one day she would harm us."
The others also spoke placating words to Wang. He listened in silence. Yan Shun ordered that the corpse be removed and the blood cleaned away, and that a feast of celebration be laid in the hall.
The next day, with Song Jiang and Huang Xin serving as sponsors, and Yan Shun, Stumpy Tiger Wang and Zheng Tianshou acting as introducers, Hua Rong's sister was wedded to Qin Ming. All gifts and furnishings were contributed by Song Jiang and Yan Shun. Feasting lasted for font of five days.
About a week after the marriage a scout came up the mountain and reported: "Prefect Murong of Qingzhou has advised the Council of Administration in writing that Hua Rong, Qin Ming and Huang Xin have rebelled, and requests that a large army be sent to annihilate them."
"We couldn't hold out long in this small stronghold," the leaders agreed. "How could we cope if we were surrounded by a big army?"
"I have an idea," said Song Jiang. "But I don't know if you gentlemen will find it suitable."
"We'd like to hear it."
"South of here is an area called Liangshan Marsh. It's about eight hundred //in circumference and embraces the Water-Girt Fortress and the Liao Er Lowlands. There, Chao Gai the Heavenly King has amassed a force of nearly five thousand men. They control the entire region. When government troops go out hunting robbers, they don't dare even look in their direction. Why don't we gather our men and horses and join their band?"
"Since there is such a place, that sounds fine to me," said Qin Ming. "But we don't have anyone to take us to them. Would they be willing to accept us?"
Song Jiang laughed. He told of the hijacking of the birthday gifts, and how Liu Tang had delivered Chao Gai's letter to him and sent him gold in thanks, and how this resulted in his having to kill Yan Poxi and flee to the gallant fraternity.
"Then you are their benefactor, brother," said Qin Ming, very pleased. "There's no time to lose. Let's get our things together quickly."
Final plans were made that day. A dozen or so carts were laden with wives, children, gold, silver, valuables, clothing and luggage, and nearly three hundred good horses rounded up. Those bandits who didn't wish to go were given silver and sent down the mountain to seek other masters. The remainder, including the soldiers Qin Ming had brought, amounted to about five hundred men. Song Jiang ordered that they divide into three contingents and set out. They were to pretend to be government troops on their way to capture Mount Liangshan.
When everything that was to be taken along was loaded on the carts, the stronghold was burned to the ground, and the expedition started down the mountain in three units. The unit led by Song Jiang and Hua Rong contained nearly fifty foot soldiers and the same number on horseback. They guarded the women and children on six or seven carts, and went first. Second was Qin Ming and Huang Xin with around ninety horses and the supply wagons. Bringing up the rear was Yan Shun, Stumpy Tiger Wang and Zheng Tianshou with fifty horses and about two hundred men. They headed for Liangshan Marsh. People seeing this large contingent of soldiers and horses on the road, observed too their banner clearly inscribed with: *Official Bandit Capturing Force*, and so no one dared stop them. By the end of a week, they were far from the prefecture of Qingzhou.
The forward unit, led by Song Jiang and Hua Rong was only about twenty //in advance of the units following. They arrived at a place called Twin Mountains. It consisted of two high mountains, identical in shape, with a broad post road running between. On the heights ahead they heard the beating of drums and gongs.
"Robbers!" said Hua Rong.
He fastened his spear to his saddle, took out his bow and arrows, checked them over, then put the bow back in its "flying-fish" case. After shouting for his cavalry to urge the other two units to catch up, he concentrated all his carts, people and horses together. Hua Rong and Song Jiang then went forward with twenty riders to scout the road ahead.
Before they had gone half a //they saw a company of over a hundred mounted men, in red clothing and red armor, gathered around a young warrior, also in red. His weapon levelled, he reined in his horse at the foot of the slope and shouted: "You and I are going to fight it out today, until one wins and the other loses!"
Around the bend of the mountain opposite came another hundred horsemen. These were all dressed in white, surrounding a young warrior similarly clad. He was carrying a crescent-tipped lance. This band had white banners, that band had red.
Now the banners waved, and the thunder of drums shook the earth. There was no further parley between the young men. Lances in hand they galloped forward and fought over thirty rounds on the broad road, with neither the victor. Hua Rong and Song Jiang watched in admiration from their horses, Hua Rong edging his mount closer step by step. One of the lances was hung with the tail of a spotted leopard. From the other dangled a pennant marked with golden coins. In the heat of battle, the woollen tassels decorating the weapons had become entangled, and the lances couldn't be pulled apart.
Hua Rong immediately produced his bow from its "flying-fish" case with his left hand, snatched an arrow from its animal-shaped quiver with his right, notched the shaft to the string, pulled the bow to the full, and let fly at the tangle of leopard's tail and strings of wool. The arrow clipped the wool neatly and the weapons came free. A mighty cheer welled from the throats of the two hundred watchers.
The warriors halted their combat and raced over to Song Jiang and Hua Rong. They bowed from their saddles.
"May we ask the name of the officer who shot that miraculous arrow?"
"This pledged brother of mine is Song Jiang, clerk of the Yuncheng magistracy in Shandong, and known as the Timely Rain," said Hua Rong. "I am Hua Rong, commandant of the fort at Clear Winds."
The young men stabbed their lances into the ground, dismounted and kowtowed like falling gold mountains or toppling pillars of jade.
"We have long known the fame of you both!"
Song Jiang and Hua Rong hastily got off their horses and raised up the two young men.
"Please tell us what you young warriors are called."
"I am Lu Fang," said the man in red. "My family are Tanzhou people. Because I've modelled myself after Duke Lu Bu of antiquity and have learned, like him, to use the crescent-tipped lance, people call me the Little Duke. I used to trade in medicinal herbs in Shandong, but I lost all my money and couldn't go home. So I set up as a robber on Twin Mountains. Recently, this warrior came and tried to take over. I proposed that he control one mountain and I the other, but he wouldn't agree. Every day I come down and fight him. I didn't realize that today I was fated to meet Your Excellencies."
Song Jiang then questioned the man in white, and he said: "I am Guo Sheng, from Jialing in Sichuan. I was a trader in mercury, but the wind upset my boat while crossing the Yellow River and I couldn't return home. I had learned the crescent lance from a Major Zhang in Jialing, and became quite good at it. Everyone called me the Second Rengui. I heard in the gallant fraternity that there was another lance man holding Twin Mountains and robbing, and I came here to match weapons with him. Though we've fought for more than ten days now neither can vanquish the other. But it has given us the Heaven-sent opportunity to meet you two gentlemen today!"
Song Jiang told them everything that had transpired earlier, and said: "Since we've been fortunate enough to meet, suppose we make peace between you two, how will that be?"
The two warriors were delighted, and they agreed. By then the rear units had caught up, and each bold fellow came forward and was introduced. Lu Fang invited them to his mountain lair, where he slaughtered cattle and horses and laid a feast. Guo Sheng wined and dined them the following day. Song Jiang proposed that they combine forces and go together to Mount Liangshan and join up with Chao Gai.
Both young men accepted with pleasure. They mustered their men and horses, gathered their valuables, and prepared to set forth.
"Not so fast. We can't do it this way," Song Jiang cautioned. "If we advance on Liangshan Marsh with five hundred men and mounts, their scouts will report it and they'll think we've come to capture them. That won't be any joke! Let me and Yan Shun talk to them first, and the rest of you come later. March in three units, like before."
"Brother is far-sighted," said Hua Rong and Qin Ming. "We'll proceed according to your plan. You take half a day's start. The rest of us will look after our people and horses, and follow."
With Yan Shun, mounted, and a dozen men on foot, Song Jiang rode on towards Liangshan Marsh. Noon of the second day found them travelling on the highway. They observed a large tavern ahead.
"You're tired," Song Jiang said to his men. "We'll stop and have some wine."
He and Yan Shun dismounted, told the men to loosen the horses' girths, then all entered the tavern. There were only three large tables and a few small ones. A man was sitting alone at one of the large tables. His head kerchief was knotted like a pig's snout, with expensive circlets of twisted bronze thread from Taiyuan hanging down behind. He wore a black silk tunic and had a white girdle around his waist. His legs were clad in knee-length stockings. Hempen sandals shod his feet. A short staff rested beside him, a bundle lay on the far side of the table. He was tall, sallow, clean-shaven, with protuberant cheekbones and bright eyes.
Song Jiang summoned a waiter.
"We have a large party. My friend and I will sit inside. Ask that gentleman to change his table for a smaller one, and leave the big one to my men."
"I'll attend to it."
Song Jiang and Yan Shun seated themselves inside and instructed the waiter: "First give each of our party three large bowls of wine and some meat, if you have any. Then serve us here."
The men filled the kitchen, and the waiter approached the fellow sitting alone. He looked to be some sort of police guard.
"Can I trouble you, corporal? Won't you give this large table to the party of those two gentlemen inside?"
The man bridled at this lowly form of address. "I was here first," he said irritably. "I'm not moving for any gentlemen's party!"
"He's acting pretty rude," Yan Shun said to Song Jiang.
"Let him. You mustn't go down to his level in dealing with a fellow like that." Song Jiang pushed Yan Shun back into his seat.
The man turned and looked at Song Jiang, and laughed coldly. The waiter continued his urging.
"Please help me out. What harm is there in changing a table?"
Angrily, the man pounded the table. "Varlet, who do you think you're talking to! Don't try to push me around because I'm alone. I wouldn't change for the emperor himself! If you keep yammering I'll give you a taste of my long-necked fists!"

"I didn't say anything wrong."
"A churl like you wouldn't dare!"
This was too much for Yan Shun. "You, fellow, don't act so friggin tough! If you don't want to change, forget it! Just quit your friggin bullying!"
The man leaped to his feet and grasped his short staff. "It's none of your business what I say to him! There are only two men under the heavens I respect! The rest are dirt beneath my feet!"
Angry, Yan Shun picked up a stool and lumbered forward. But Song Jiang was struck by what the man had said, and he placed himself between them.
"Neither of you start anything! Let me ask you: Who are the only two men under the heavens you respect?"
"If I told you, you'd be awe-stricken!"
"What are their names?"
"One is from Henghai County in Cangzhou, descendant of the imperial Chai family—Lord Chai, the Small Whirlwind."
Song Jiang silently nodded. "And the second?"
"Another miraculous man! Clerk of the Yuncheng magistracy in Shandong, Song Jiang the Timely Rain, Defender of Chivalry!"
Song Jiang looked at Yan Shun and smiled. Yan Shun had long since set down his stool.
"Those are the only two I have any regard for. Even the emperor of the great Song Dynasty can't scare me!"
"Not so fast," said Song Jiang. "I know those two you mentioned. Let me ask you—where did you meet them?"
"Since you know them, I won't lie. Three years ago I spent four months in Lord Chai's manor. But I've never met Song Jiang."
"Would you like to?"
"I'm searching for him right now."
"Who asked you to do that?"
"His brother Song Qing the Iron Fan has given me a letter for him from home."
Smiling, Song Jiang took the man's arm. "If fated, men come together though a thousand //apart. If not, they miss each other though they meet face to face. I am Song Jiang, the man you seek."
The fellow stared at him, then dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "Heaven ordained that I should find you, brother! I might have missed you and gone on to look for you at Squire Kong's!"
Song Jiang pulled him inside and asked: "Is something wrong at home?"
"Listen, brother. My name is Shi Yong, I'm from the prefecture of Daming. I used to run a gambling house there. Local people nicknamed me General Shi. I got into a quarrel with a fellow while gambling and killed him with one blow of my fist. I ran away and took refuge with Lord Chai. Many of the gallant fraternity there spoke of you, brother, so I went to Yuncheng to join you, but you were away. I met your younger brother, and when he heard I came from Lord Chai's manor, he said you were at Squire Kong's, on White Tiger Mountain. I told him I would go to you there, and he wrote a letter and asked me to deliver it to you. 'When you find my brother,' he said, 'tell him to come home at once.' "
Worried, Song Jiang asked: "How many days did you stay at our manor? Did you see my father?"
"I just spent one night, then left. I didn't see the old gentleman."
Song Jiang told him of their plan to go to Liangshan Marsh. Shi Yong said: "After I left Lord Chai's I heard of you often from men of the gallant fraternity, how generous and upright you are, how you help those in difficulty and danger. If you're joining the band on Mount Liangshan you must take me with you."
"That goes without saying. What's one man more? Come and meet Yan Shun."
Song Jiang told the waiter to pour. After the three had drunk, Shi Yong got the letter from his bundle and handed it to Song Jiang. The clerk looked at it. The envelope was sealed the opposite of normal, and it was not inscribed with the usual "All's well." Song Jiang's anxiety increased. He tore open the envelope and read the letter. It concluded with:

... Early in the first lunar month father died of illness. He is still lying in his coffin at home. We are waiting for you to return so that we can bury him. Please return immediately, do not delay!
In sorrow, your younger brother,
Qing

Song Jiang cried out in anguish and beat his chest. "Unfilial son that I am! How badly I've behaved! He is dead and I am not there to perform my duties as a son! I'm no better than a beast!" He beat his head against the wall and lamented. Yan Shun and Shi Yong put their arms around him, and he wept till he was dazed. It was some time before he recovered.
"Don't take it so hard, brother," the other two urged.
"I'm not without feeling for our men," he said at last, "but my old father was the one I loved best. Now he's gone. I must return home tonight. Tell our brothers to go up the mountain themselves."
"Brother," said Yan Shun, "the old gentleman is no more. Even if you went home, you wouldn't see him alive. All parents die. Take a long-range view. Lead us to the stronghold, and then I'll accompany you back for the funeral. It won't be too late. 'Without a head a snake can't travel,' as the old saying goes. They'll never let us in if you're not with us."
"It would delay me for days. I can't do it. I'll write a letter in detail, telling the whole story. Take Shi Yong with you. When the others catch up, go together up the mountain. It would be different if I hadn't heard about my father's death. But since Heaven has let me know, every day seems like a year. I'm burning to get back! I don't want my horse and I don't need anybody to go with me. I'll travel alone through the night and be home tomorrow."
Nothing Yan Shun and Shi Yong said could make Song Jiang change his mind.
He had the waiter bring pen and paper and, weeping, he wrote the letter, exhorting the stronghold leaders to accede to his wishes. Then he handed the missive, unsealed, to Yan Shun. He borrowed Shi Yong's hemp sandals, concealed some silver on his person, hung a sword at his waist, and took Shi Yong's short cudgel. Song Jiang wouldn't pause even long enough to let food and wine touch his lips. He walked directly through the door.
"Brother, wait at least till you've seen Qin Ming and Hua Rong. There'll still be time," urged Yan Shun.
"I won't wait. Just take my letter and everything will go smoothly. Brother Shi Yong, please explain to our brothers about my father's death, and ask them to forgive me for leaving in such haste."
Song Jiang regretted only that he couldn't get home in one bound. Alone, he flew off down the road.
Yan Shun and Shi Yong drank some wine, ate some tidbits, and paid the bill. Shi Yong took Song Jiang's horse and they proceeded with the men another four or five //till they came to a large inn. There, they put up for the night.
The next day, by mid-morning, the rest of the expedition arrived. Yan Shun and Shi Yong told about Song Jiang's rushing home for the funeral of his father. The other leaders berated Yan Shun.
"Why didn't you keep him here a while?"
"He wanted to kill himself when he heard his father died," Shi Yong explained. "Nobody could prevent him from leaving. He was in a tearing hurry. He's written a detailed letter of introduction and wants us to go on ahead. He says when they see the letter, there won't be any problem."
Hua Rong and Qin Ming read the missive. "This has happened while we're on the march. Whether we go forward or retreat, we're going to have difficulties," they said. "We can't go back, we can't split up. The only thing we can do is advance. Let's seal the letter and bring it to the leaders on the mountain. If they won't accept us, that will be the time to discuss what to do next."
The nine bold gallants, marching together, pressed on with their band of five hundred men and horses towards Liangshan Marsh. As they travelled along a broad road through a reedy section, the beat of drums and gongs rang out across the water. Suddenly the slopes and the meadows were alive with colored flags and pennants. Two quick craft shot out to the center of the lake. The first was manned by forty or fifty bandits. Seated on the prow was Panther Head Lin Chong, their chieftain. On the second craft was the same number of bandits, and on its prow sat another leader, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon.
Lin Chong hailed the marchers: "Who are you churls? Which official's army? Do you think you can capture us? We'll kill every one of you! Not a man will be left alive! You ought to know the reputation of Liangshan Marsh!"
Hua Rong and Qin Ming got off their horses and stood on the shore. "We're not government troops," they called. "We have a letter here from our brother Song Jiang, the Timely Rain, of Shandong. We've come to join you!"
"Since it's brother Song Jiang who's written, please go on ahead to the tavern of Zhu Gui. Show him the letter and then we can meet."
A black flag on Lin Chong's boat waved, and a little craft with three fishermen glided out of the reeds. One remained in the boat and two came ashore.
"You officers come with us," they said.
A white flag waved on one of the two larger craft, and they sailed on, to the crash of gongs. The newcomers gazed around in astonishment. "No wonder government troops don't dare interfere here. Our little mountain stronghold could never compare!"
Following the two fishermen, they made a wide sweep and arrived at the tavern of Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile. Zhu Gui greeted them, ordered the slaughter of two yellow oxen, and wined and dined his guests.
He read the letter, then led them to a pavilion overlooking the water and shot a whistling arrow into the reeds on the opposite shore. A little craft sped over. Zhu Gui gave the bandit boatman the letter and directed him to deliver it to the stronghold. Then, in the inn, he feted the nine chieftains with pork and mutton. Places of rest were provided for the men and horses, and all retired.
At mid-morning the next day the bandits' military advisor Wu Yong arrived at the inn. Each of the chieftains was introduced and courtesies were exchanged. Wu questioned them carefully. Then nearly thirty large boats came. Wu Yong and Zhu Gui invited the nine chieftains to board. The wives, children, carts, men, horses and belongings were all also loaded on the various craft.
They sailed to the Shore of Golden Sands, and there disembarked. Through the pines a host of gallant men, headed by Chao Gai and accompanied by drums and musical instruments, advanced to greet them. The nine chieftains were provided with horses and sedan-chairs and were conducted into the stronghold to Righteous Fraternity Hall. There they were seated, facing their hosts, in opposite rows.
In the armchairs on the left were Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Lin Chong, Liu Tang, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Ruan the Seventh, Du Qian, Song Wan, Zhu Gui, and Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat. (Several months before, he had escaped from the prison in Jizhou, fled to Mount Liangshan and joined the band. Wu Yong had sent someone to bribe the jailors.)
In the armchairs on the right were Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Huang Xin, Yan Shun, Wang Ying, Zheng Tianshou, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, and Shi Yong.
Fragrant incense was lit in a burner between the rows, and both sides vowed loyalty. That day they celebrated joyously. Steers and horses were slaughtered, and a banquet was laid. The newly arrived rank and file respectfully greeted the stronghold leaders outside the hall, then joined the lesser officers in a feast. Living quarters on the rear of the mountain were provided for the wives and children.
Qin Ming and Hua Rong, at the dining-table, praised Song Jiang's many virtues, and told how he was avenged on Clear Winds Mountain. The leaders heard this with delight. They related how Lu Fang and Guo Sheng fought with lances and how Hua Rong, with a single arrow, sliced the tangled woollen tassels and freed their weapons.
Chao Gai didn't believe it. "Can he really shoot so accurately?" he asked. "I'd like to see it some day."
All imbibed wine till they were half drunk, and many food courses had been served. "Let's stroll for a while on the front of the mountain," the hosts suggested, "and then come back for more."
With each politely begging the other to go first, hosts and guests went down the stairs and wandered about admiring the scenery. When they reached the third entry guarding the stronghold, lines of geese honked by overhead.
Hua Rong thought: "Chao Gai is sceptical about my shooting the woollen tassels apart. If I don't show what I can do, in the future they won't respect me."
He looked around. One of the attendants accompanying them carried a bow and arrows. Hua Rong asked the man for his bow. It was a fine weapon, with a gold grip incised with magpies, and suited perfectly to his taste. He quickly selected a good arrow.
"Some of you didn't seem to believe the story about my shooting the tangled tassels apart," he said to Chao Gai. "A flight of geese is coming this way. I don't want to boast, but I'm going to put this arrow through the head of the third goose in line. Don't laugh at me if I miss."
He notched the arrow to the string, pulled the bow to the full, aimed, and sent the feathered shaft winging into the sky. Sure enough, it hit the third bird and brought it tumbling to the slope below. Some soldiers were sent down after it. They returned with the goose, the arrow cleanly transfixing its skull.
Chao Gai and the others were amazed. They called Hua Rong the General with Miraculous Arms.
"None of the great bowmen of antiquity could match him," said Wu Yong. "We're very fortunate to have him with us!"
From that day forward Hua Rong was respected by one and all in Liangshan Marsh. Now, they returned to the hall and feasted until late, after which, everyone retired.
The next day there was another banquet, and the order of precedence among the leaders was decided. Originally, Qin Ming was before Hua Rong. But because he had married Hua Rong's younger sister he had to rank below him, in the sixth place, while Hua Rong took the fifth chair, right after Lin Chong. Liu Tang was seventh, Huang Xin eighth, followed by the three Ruan brothers, then Yan Shun, Stumpy Tiger Wang, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Zheng Tianshou, Shi Yong, Du Qian, Song Wan, Zhu Gui and Bai Sheng, in that order, a total of twenty-one leaders.
When the feasting and celebration had ended, more large boats and carts were built within the fortress area. Spearheads and other weapons were forged, armour and helmets made, banners, clothing, bows and arrows put in order. The men of Mount Liang were preparing to repel government troops. Of this no more need be said.

Song Jiang travelled all night after leaving the tavern, and reached his own village late the following afternoon. He stopped to rest at the wine shop run by a ward chief named Zhang, who was on good terms with Song Jiang's family. Zhang observed his sorrowful expression and tear-filled eyes.
"You've been away for half a year, but today, fortunately, you've come home. Why are you looking so dejected? You ought to be happy. A general amnesty has been declared. Your crime surely has been reduced."
"That may be true, uncle, but it's only of secondary importance. How can I help being distressed since my old father has passed away?"
Zhang laughed. "You're jesting. He was here drinking a short time ago. He's just gone back. Why are you talking like that?"
"Don't make fun of me, uncle." Song Jiang showed him the letter. "My brother Song Qing has written here very plainly: Our father died early in the first lunar month. He urges me to come home and attend the funeral."
"Nonsense. Nothing of the sort. He was drinking here at noon with Squire Wang of East Village. I wouldn't lie."
Song Jiang didn't know what to say. His mind was filled with doubt. He thought for a long time. When it began getting dark, he said goodbye to the ward chief and hurried home. He entered the manor gate. All was peaceful. Vassals greeted him respectfully.
"Are my father and brother here?" he asked.
"The squire has been wearing out his eyes, looking for your return," they said. "How fortunate that you've come back. He's just returned, himself. He was drinking with Squire Wang at Zhang's wine shop in the village. He's having a nap inside."
Song Jiang was astonished. He threw aside the short cudgel and hurried into the thatched house. His younger brother Qing, seeing him, dropped to his knees and kowtowed. He was not wearing mourning. Song Jiang was enraged.
"How dare you, you monster! Father is alive and well. How could you write such a lying letter? I was ready to kill myself. I wept till I lost my senses. What sort of unfilial son are you!"
Before Song Qing could reply, Squire Song rounded a screen and emerged. "Calm yourself, son," he said. "It's not your brother's fault. I was thinking of you every day, and I told him to write saying I had died, knowing that would bring you home quickly. I heard there are many robbers on White Tiger Mountain. I was afraid you might be inveigled into joining them and become a disloyal, unfilial person. So I sent the letter calling you home. When Shi Yong arrived from Lord Chai's place, he was deputed to deliver it. The idea was mine entirely. It had nothing to do with your brother. Don't blame him. I've just come back from Zhang's wine shop and was lying down inside when I heard that you'd returned."
Torn between happiness and anger, Song Jiang kowtowed to his father. "Have you heard anything lately about the status of my case?" he asked. "An amnesty has been proclaimed. The charges against me are sure to be reduced. Ward Chief Zhang says the same thing."
"Before your brother Qing came home, Constables Zhu Tong and Lei Heng did a lot for you. A 'Wanted' poster was put up, but no one came around to trouble me. Why have I summoned you home? The emperor has named his heir to the throne, and in celebration has issued a general amnesty. Charges on all major criminal acts have been lessened by one degree. The edict is already in force. If you were brought before a judge now, at worst you would be exiled, but you no longer could be punished by death. So let them do what they will. We'll find some way to cope."
"Have Constables Zhu Tong and Lei Heng called here at the manor?"
"I heard the other day that they've been sent out on missions," said Song Qing. "Zhu Tong has gone to the Eastern Capital. I don't know where Lei Heng's been sent. But two new police officers have been added in the county town, both named Zhao."
"You've had a long, hard journey, son," said the old squire. "Why not go to your room and rest."
It was a happy family reunion. Of that we'll say no more.
At dusk, the jade-rabbit moon appeared in the east. Less than a single watch later everyone in the manor was asleep. Suddenly, a loud clamor arose at the front and rear gates. On all sides torches surrounded the manor, and voices shouted: "Don't let Song Jiang get away!" The old squire, hearing this, cried out bitterly.
And as a result, gallant heroes gathered on the bank of a river, in a market area loyalty and courage were manifested to the full.

When Thunderclap Qin Ming and Huang Xin, the Tamer of Three Mountains stood at the gates looking out, they saw the two approaching columns were almost upon them. In fact, one column was led by Song Jiang and Colonel Hua, the other by Yan Shun, the Dandy, and Short-Arse Wang. In each there were more than a hundred and fifty men.
The Tamer at once ordered the guards to lower the drawbridge and open the gates, and both columns entered the town. Song Jiang had already issued an order: no citizen was to be touched, no soldier harmed. But the southern barracks was to be reduced and Liu Gao's family all executed.

Short-Arse first seized Liu Gao's wife for himself. The troops then loaded all the property — money, valuables and other goods — onto carts. Buffaloes and sheep were also appropriated in large numbers. Colonel Hua went to his own residence and loaded his valuables and other items onto carts and picked up his wife and younger sister. There were some local servants who were all sent home. When all the leaders had packed their things, a column of men and horses moved out of Windy City and headed for the mountain.

Carts, people and horses having arrived in the camp, Whitey Zheng Tianshou invited everyone to meet in the hall. The Tamer, after he and the others had paid their respects, seated himself one place down from Colonel Hua. Song Jiang gave orders for a residence to be prepared for Colonel Hua's family and Liu Gao's possessions to be divided up equally among the troops.

By now Short-Arse had secreted the woman in his own house. "Where is Liu Gao's wife?" the Dandy asked him.

"This time you've got to let me have her as my slave," replied Short-Arse.

"Have her if you want her," the Dandy said, "but bring her here now because I've got something to say."

"And I want to question her too," said Song Jiang.

When Short-Arse brought her in, the woman wept and pleaded.

"You shameless hussy," Song Jiang shouted. "I rescued you because you were the wife of an official, why did you repay me with lying accusations? You're our prisoner now, what have you got to say for yourself?"

The Dandy sprang forward and said: "What's the good of asking her, the filthy bitch?" With that he drew his sword and with one cut severed her head from her body.

Short-Arse, seeing his woman decapitated, was furious. He snatched up a halberd and was about to attack the Dandy, but Song Jiang and the others intervened.

"Yan Shun was right to kill the woman," Song Jiang said. "Look what happened before, when I told you to free her and let her be reunited with her husband. It didn't stop her turning round and asking her husband to do me in. My friend, if you had kept her by you, sooner or later you'd have come to regret it. Anyway, I'm going to find you a better one, someone who will prove entirely satisfactory."

"That's exactly what was in my mind," said the Dandy. "If I hadn't killed her, it wouldn't have been any good, sooner or later she would have done us serious injury."

They were all trying to talk him round but Short-Arse remained silent. The Dandy told some men to remove the corpse and clear up the blood, and a celebration feast was prepared.

Next day with Song Jiang and the Tamer as sponsors and the Dandy, Short-Arse and Whitey as witnesses, a marriage was arranged between Thunderclap and Colonel Hua's younger sister. The dowry was provided by Song Jiang and the Dandy. There was feasting for four or five days.

About a week after the wedding, a scout got wind of something and came up the mountain to report: "There's a rumour that Governor Mu-Rong of Qingzhou has sent a report up to the Emperor saying that Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and the Tamer are in rebellion. They say a big force is being raised to destroy them and sweep Windy Mountain clean."

The leaders, when they discussed the news, were all agreed: "This place is too small. We can't afford to become too attached to it. If a big force is sent, they've only got to surround us and then what can we do?"

"I've a proposal," said Song Jiang. "But I don't know if it will meet with your approval."

"Let's hear what it is," they all said.

"There's a place to the south of here," Song Jiang said, "called the Marshes of Mount Liang. It's a hundred leagues in circumference. There, in the Place of Many Meanderings and in Duckweed Marsh, Leader Chao Gai has assembled a company of almost five thousand, foot and horse. In their home in the marshes the government troops and anti-banditry forces dare not meet them face to face. Why don't we marshal our men and go to join them?"

"If this place exists it sounds ideal," said Thunderclap. "The only thing is, without an introduction are they likely to receive us?"

Song Jiang responded happily by telling them the story of the birthday convoy and its treasure. He told also of the letter Liu Tang delivered and the gift of gold and how this led to the death of Yan Poxi and his taking refuge with the outlaws.

Thunderclap was quite excited. "In that case those people owe you a favour," he said. "We should waste no time. Let's pack up and leave at once."

So it was decided. A dozen carts were procured. Onto them were loaded families, valuables, clothing, baggage and other items. The horses, around three hundred of them, were to be taken along. Some of the men did not want to go: they were given silver and told they were free to leave. Those who did want to go were incorporated with Thunderclap's soldiers into an army four or five hundred strong. Before they left, Song Jiang divided them into three columns. They were to pose as government troops sent to subdue Mount Liang.

When these preparations were completed and all the carts loaded, the barracks was razed to the ground. The three columns then set off. Song Jiang and Colonel Hua led off with fifty foot soldiers and fifty cavalrymen, closely guarding six or seven carts and the families. Thunderclap and the Tamer followed with ninety horses and the provision carts. The Dandy, Short-Arse and Whitey brought up the rear with fifty horses and two hundred men. Thus they all left Windy Mountain and took the road for Mount Liang. Anyone who met them on the road could see clearly displayed the banners proclaiming that they were government troops sent to suppress bandits, for which reason no one dared interfere with them. After travelling nearly a week they had put a considerable distance between themselves and Windy Mountain.

Now between Song Jiang and Colonel Hua, riding at the head of the first column, which also incorporated the carts bearing the families, and the last group of men and horses there was a distance of six or seven miles. The leaders had now arrived at the place called Twinhills. Here there are two hills, identical in shape, with a broad stretch of the highroad running between them. As the two leaders proceeded, they heard gongs and drums from the hillside up ahead.

"There must be bandits ahead," said Colonel Hua, stopping suddenly and taking out his bow, which he tested and then put back in its case. Ordering the cavalrymen behind to stop the carts, Song Jiang and Colonel Hua rode forward with a score of horsemen to reconnoitre.

Less than a quarter of a mile further on they came upon a group of horsemen, perhaps a hundred of them, surrounding a young warrior. Here's how this young fellow was dressed:

*On his head a three-cornered cap, with gold badge and jade pin; for dress, an embroidered coat, richly decorated with a bold pattern of flowers; armour like the scales of a fire dragon, a belt fastened with an agate clasp. He rides a charger like a dragon smeared with red grease and wields a halberd with carved red shaft and squarish blade. Behind him every single one of his followers is clad in red, both coat and armour.*

This young stalwart also carried a halberd with a square blade and a carved shaft. So on one side it was all plain white banners and on the other all flaming red. Then on each side a flag dipped, one red, the other white, and amid rolling drums and musical flourishes the two riders without a word levelled their lances, spurred their horses and joined battle, each striving for victory. Colonel Hua and Song Jiang reined in their horses to watch. What a ferocious contest it was!

*The pennants flutter, garments float in the wind. Like whisps of flying cloud brushing the earth reflecting red shadows, like fires sweeping through the grass in the light reflected from snow. Like in the winter garden the red tea flower vying with the white plum, like in lush spring gardens the pear's powder contending with the peach's rouge. The one turned toward the south and the heat of the sun, like a red stove whose flames lick at the sky. The other oriented to the west and Venus, like Mount Tai dipping its head into the jade well.*

The two of them wielding their square halberds fought more than thirty bouts and victory inclined neither way. Colonel Hua and Song Jiang began to applaud. As Colonel Hua gradually edged his horse forward to see better, he realized that the two contestants were on the brink of a deep ravine.

Now each of the halberds was adorned near the tip with a decorative tassel, one in the form of a leopard's tail, the other a multi-coloured streamer, and in one of their encounters these threads became entangled. Try as they might they could not separate their weapons.

When Colonel Hua saw this he steadied his horse and with his left hand took his bow from its case, whilst with the right he took an arrow from the quiver and fitted it to the string. Stretching the bow to its fullest extent, he aimed carefully at the leopard's tail and the point where the strings were entangled, and loosed the arrow. With just the one shot he cut the entangled strings and immediately the two weapons flew apart. Two hundred men watching exclaimed in admiration.

The two warriors stopped fighting and galloped towards Song Jiang and Colonel Hua. Bowing deeply in salute, they asked: "May we please inquire the archer's name?"

Colonel Hua replied: "This famous fellow is the Yuncheng registrar Song Jiang the Just of Shandong, otherwise known as the Opportune Rain. I am Hua Rong, commander of Windy Fort." When they heard this the two young men stuck their halberds in the ground, dismounted and threw themselves down before Song Jiang and Colonel Hua saying: "These names are known far and wide!" Song Jiang and Colonel Hua also dismounted and raised them up, saying: "Please tell us your names." The one in red said: "My name is Lü Fang. I am from Tanzhou. Because Lü Bu was always my hero I studied the use of the square halberd and everyone calls me the Little Duke. I was selling medicines in Shandong, but I lost my capital and was unable to return home. So for the time being I set up as a robber here at Twinhills. Recently this fellow came along and wanted to seize my hideout. He could have had just one of the hills, but no, that wasn't good enough for him, so every day we come here and fight it out. But what I never dreamt was that I was destined to meet you here today!"

Song Jiang then asked the one in white his name. "I am Guo Sheng," he said, "from Jialing in Xichuan. I was a trader in mercury, but I lost everything in a storm on the Yellow River and couldn't return home. I had learnt the use of the square halberd from Major Zhang in Jialing and because I was pretty handy with it people called me the Halberdier. I heard from the rivers and lakes fraternity that someone who could use the square halberd had occupied this site at Twinhills so I came here to measure my skill against his. We've been fighting for ten days now, but neither of us has had the advantage. But what a surprise to meet you here today! I count it a blessing from heaven!"

Song Jiang now recounted the previous events and then said: "Since we have met, will you allow me to make peace between you" The two consented willingly. As the poem says:

A mere brass chain, to beat apart hard steel,
*That's quite a feat.*
*An arrow tip, to separate two blades,*
*It's also pretty neat.*
*But let me tell you this, and don't you doubt it:*
*The firmness of a hero's mind can split*
The toughest metal — there's no two ways about it.

The others had now come up with them and were duly introduced. L? Fang invited them all to his mountain retreat, where oxen and horses were slaughtered for a feast. The next day it was Guo Sheng's turn to provide the entertainment. Song Jiang suggested they should both enlist and go with the company to Mount Liang to join Chao Gai's band of robbers. The young men were over the moon at this suggestion and agreed at once. When their two forces had been mustered and their possessions collected they were ready to leave at once. But Song Jiang said: "Wait a minute, we shouldn't travel like this. If we all go together to Mount Liang, there's five hundred or so of us and they'll have scouts outwatching on all sides. Suppose they think we really are an anti-bandit force? That wouldn't do at all! Let Yan Shun and me go first and tell them. The rest of you can follow later, still in your three columns."

"You think of everything," Colonel Hua and Thunderclap said admiringly. "That's the best plan. We can start at intervals. You start half a day earlier. We'll marshal our forces and follow."

We shall leave the others at Twinhills, preparing to set out at intervals and we shall go along with Song Jiang and the Dandy, riding off with a dozen men as an advance party to Mount Liang. They rode for two days. Then, having travelled till noon, they found a large winehouse beside the road. Song Jiang said: "The men are all tired, let's stop for some wine before going on." So the two leaders dismounted and went into the shop, telling the men to loosen their saddle girths and follow.

Inside they found that there were only three large tables and a few small ones. One of the large tables was already occupied by one man. He was very tall, and had a sallow complexion and angular cheekbones, lively eyes and a sparse growth of hair on his chin. Song Jiang called the landlord over and said: "We're a large group. The two of us will go and sit inside there, if that's all right. Please ask that customer to move to another table and leave the big one free for our men to have a few drinks."

"I'll arrange it," the landlord said.

Song Jiang and the Dandy went and sat inside and ordered the wine. The men were to have large bowls, three bowls each, and if there was meat they would buy some for everyone, but first pour the wine. The landlord, seeing the group had filled all the seats around the stove, went over to the customer, who looked pretty much like a policeman, and said: "Sorry to trouble you, constable, but would you mind moving to leave this big table for the men belonging to those two officers inside?"

The man took exception to the form of address and protested angrily: "I thought it was supposed to be first come first serve! Who cares about some bloody officers' men? Want to change places, do they? Well, I bloody well won't!"

The Dandy reacted angrily: "Do you hear how rude he is?" he said to Song Jiang. Song Jiang restrained him, saying: "Let him be! Don't stoop to his level."

The man turned his head and gave Song Jiang and the Dandy a very dirty look.

The landlord said anxiously, "Sir, please have a regard for my business. I don't see anything wrong with changing places."

The man began to swear. He struck the table and said: "You bloody so-and-so, you don't know anything, you think because I'm on my own you can browbeat me into changing places. Well I wouldn't bloody move it was for the Emperor himself. If you don't buzz off, you'll get acquainted with my fists!"

The landlord said: "What have I said to upset you?"

"You wouldn't dare say anything to upset me," the man said.

This was all too much for the Dandy, who said: "You're really too big for your boots. If you don't want to change, all right. But just stop throwing your weight around."

The man leapt to his feet, grabbed his staff and answered: "If I choose to tell him off, what's it to do with you? There's only two people in the world I'd listen to, the rest I rate no higher than the mud under my feet."

The Dandy was furious. He picked up a stool and was about to hit the other with it, but Song Jiang, finding something remarkable in the fellow's manner of speech, stepped between them and said soothingly: "There's no need to fight. I'd like to ask you, those two people you'd listen to, who are they?"

"You'll get a shock if I tell you," the other said.

"Tell me their names."

"One is a descendant of Emperor Chai, that's Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind."

Song Jiang nodded to himself and said: "And who's the other?"

"The other's also a great gentleman. He's the Yuncheng registrar, Song Jiang of Shandong, known as the Opportune Rain."

Song Jiang gave the Dandy a surreptitious smile. But the Dandy had already put the stool down.

"Those two aside," the man went on, "I'm not afraid of anyone, not even the Emperor himself."

"Hold on," said Song Jiang. "Let me ask you another question. Both the gentlemen you mentioned are known to me. Where did you meet them?"

"You know them, do you? Well, I'll tell you no lies. Three years back I stayed more than four months at Mr. Chai's. Only I never met Song Jiang."

"Would you be interested to meet Blackie, then?" Song Jiang asked.

"I'm on my way to find him right now," said the other.

"Who told you to look for him?"

"His younger brother, Song Qing, alias Iron Fan. He gave me a letter for him."

This delighted Song Jiang. He took the other by the arm and said: " 'If fate decrees a meeting a thousand miles are nought, if it's not destined you'll miss what's right next door.' I am Song Jiang, whom men call Blackie!"

The man took a good long look and then threw himself down, saying: "Heaven be praised for this meeting. It could all so easily have gone wrong. I'd have gone all the way to Squire Kong's for nothing!"

Song Jiang now took him inside and asked: "Is anything wrong at home?"

"Let me tell you," he said. "My name is Shi Yong and I'm from Daming. I used to run a gaming house and locally I was known as the Guv. But I hit a man at the tables and killed him so I had to run. I took refuge at Mr. Chai's. I was always hearing about you from the rivers and lakes people who came by and I went to Yuncheng to find you, but they told me you'd had to leave. I met your younger brother and when he heard I'd come from Mr. Chai's he told me you were at Squire Kong's estate on White Tiger Mountain. Seeing I was so keen to meet you he gave me a letter to deliver to you at Squire Kong's. He said if I saw you to tell you to go home at once."

This worried Song Jiang. "How long did you stay at my house?" he asked. "Did you see my father?"

"I was only there the one night. I didn't have time to see the Squire before I left."

Song Jiang now told Shi Yong about the plan to go to Mount Liang.

Shi Yong said: "I've been hearing about you all the time from the rivers and lakes fraternity ever since I left Mr. Chai's, about your valour and generosity, how you help the needy and succour the poor. If you're going there to join the outlaws please take me along, you must!"

"Certainly I will, one more is nothing. Come now and meet the Dandy." Song Jiang told the landlord to pour three cups. After they'd drunk, Shi Yong pulled the letter out of his pack and gave it to Song Jiang, who noticed at once that the envelope had been sealed upside down and without the customary message "in peace." He became even more worried. He hurriedly tore it open and read. Half-way through he came to these words: *Father became ill at the beginning of February and has now passed away. He is still lying in his coffin at home; we are waiting for you to return home for the funeral. Please, please do not delay! Your grief-stricken brother, Song Qing.*

Song Jiang gave a stricken cry and almost passed out when he read this. His heart was pounding and he began to revile himself in this fashion: "Unfilial, contrary son, how ill you have acted! Your old father is dead and you couldn't act like a human son, you're no better than an animal!" He began to knock his head against the wall and weep loudly. The Dandy and Shi Yong did their best to restrain him. But he went on weeping wildly and it was a long time before he came to his senses. "Don't be so hard on yourself, brother," the other two kept urging.

"Don't think I'm unfeeling or wish to let you down," Song Jiang said to the Dandy. "It's just that I can't help thinking of my father; now he's gone I must hurry back this very night, so you'll just have to go on to Mount Liang by yourselves."

"Brother, since your father is no more, even if you do return home you won't be able to see him," said the Dandy. "Everyone's parents must die, you must try to accept it. Take us there first and afterwards I'll accompany you home to the funeral. That'll be time enough. You know the old saying, 'A headless snake can't walk.' If we go without you it's most unlikely they'll let us stay."

"But I'll lose too much time if I take you there first, I can't accept that. I'll write a detailed letter for you explaining everything. You can take Shi Yong along too, when the rest catch up you can all join them on the mountain together. I didn't know about my father's death until now. But now that heaven has chosen to inform me, a day seems like a year and I'm on fire with impatience. I don't need my horse or any attendants, but I must hasten home this very night." There was nothing the Dandy and Shi Yong could do to persuade him not to leave.

Song Jiang asked the waiter for brush, inkstone and paper, and wrote a letter, in which he repeatedly urged their case, weeping while he wrote. He put the letter in an envelope without sealing it, and handed it to the Dandy. He borrowed Shi Yong's sandals with eight eyelets, stored some silver on his person, buckled on a sword and took Shi Yong's short staff. Refusing to touch food and drink, he wanted to leave at once. The Dandy said: "Why not wait until General Qin and Colonel Hua get here? You can have a word with them first, there'll still be time."

"No, I'm not waiting," said Song Jiang. "You can take my letter, there'll be no problem. Friend Shi, please explain to everyone for me — tell them how unfortunately I have to go home for the funeral and ask them to forgive me." And then wishing he could accomplish the journey in a single stride, he raced off all alone, heading for home.

The Dandy and Shi Yong, having paid for all they had had, including the snacks, set off with the rest of the men, Shi Yong riding Song Jiang's horse. A mile or two further on they found a large hostelry where they decided to spend the night and wait for the others. Next morning about eight, the rest of the company caught up with them. The Dandy and Shi Yong greeted them and explained about Song Jiang's going off to the funeral. The others were critical: "Why on earth didn't you persuade him to stay?"

Shi Yong explained: "When he heard his father had died he even wanted to kill himself, nothing would have made him wait, he simply had to rush home. He wrote this letter for us, explaining everything, and told us to go on without him. He said when they saw this letter there would be no problem."

Colonel Hua and Thunderclap, having read the letter, put the following proposal to everyone: "We're already embarked on this business, to go back is as difficult as to go on. We can't return where we came from, and it would be difficult to disperse. The only thing is to go ahead. Let us seal the letter and go on to Mount Liang and see. If they won't have us, we'll have to think of something else."

The nine leaders, riding together now, with an army of five hundred, gradually drew nearer to the Marshes of Mount Liang and began to look for the way to the mountain stronghold. As they were traversing an area of reedbeds, they heard the sound of gongs and drums wafted towards them over the water. And then suddenly the mountain and the whole countryside were filled with coloured banners, and two fast boats were shooting out from the marshes. The first of these was manned by forty or so troops with the leader seated in the bow: this was Leopard's Head Lin Chong. The second boat carried a slightly smaller number of troops and the leader seated in the bow was Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil. Lin Chong in the first boat now shouted out: "You lot, identify yourselves! Under whose orders are you? How can you have the audacity to come here and try to arrest us? Don't you realize you'll be killed, every man jack of you? Don't you know the reputation of our Marshes of Mount Liang?"

Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and the others quickly dismounted. Standing there on the bank they shouted: "We are not government troops. We have a letter from our friend, Song Jiang, and we've come to join your band."

"If you've got a letter from Song Jiang," Lin Chong shouted, "please proceed to the inn of Zhu Gui. We'll need to see the letter first, and then we'll invite you to a meeting."

A green flag was run up on the boat and immediately a smaller boat shot out from the reeds. Aboard it were three fishermen. One of them looked after the boat while the other two stepped ashore and said: "Come with us, all the commanders." One of the two patrol boats now displayed a white flag, some gongs sounded and the two boats sped off.

The group were amazed by all they saw. "What organization!" they exclaimed. "How can government troops take this lot on? Compared with this our little outfit is nothing at all!"

They followed the two fishermen. Making a big circuit they came to the inn of Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile. When he heard what they had to say, the Crocodile invited them in and introductions were carried out. Then he had two oxen killed and wine and food were distributed. Having examined the letter, he went to the pavilion over the water and fired off the whistling arrow in the direction of the reeds on the opposite bank. A fast boat appeared at once. The Crocodile gave orders to the troops in it to take the letter to the mountain stronghold. At the inn pigs and sheep were slaughtered to feast the nine leaders, and their troops were temporarily quartered round about.

Next day at eight o'clock the military leader of Mount Liang, "Professor" Wu Yong, appeared at the inn to welcome them. They were introduced to him one by one. After the exchange of courtesies and a good many questions, thirty or so empty boats arrived to pick them up. Wu Yong and the Crocodile invited the nine leaders to embark, followed by the families, carts, troops and baggage. All were carried over in the various boats to Golden Sands Landing on the other side. They disembarked and there on the path among the pine trees the leaders of Mount Liang with Chao Gai at their head came ceremonially to receive them amid a thunderous roll of drums. All nine having been presented to Chao Gai, he invited them up the mountain. Riding on horses or in sedan chairs everyone arrived at the assembly hall, where they saluted each other in pairs.

The left-hand row of chairs was now taken by Chao Gai, the Professor, the Taoist Gongsun Sheng, Leopard's Head Lin Chong, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, the Ruans, Du Qian, Song Wan, the Crocodile and Bai Sheng (the Daytime Rat, who had escaped from Jizhou gaol a month or two earlier and joined the others on Mount Liang — the Professor had sent someone to bribe the gaolers so he could escape). Occupying the right hand row were Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, The Tamer, the Dandy, Short-Arse Wang, Whitey, the Little Duke, the Halberdier and Shi Yong. Burning joss-sticks were set between the two rows of chairs and an oath of loyalty was sworn by both sides. There was much blowing of flutes and tapping of drums, and oxen and horses were slaughtered for a grand feast. Meanwhile the new troops were entertained outside the hall by the lesser chiefs. Quarters were prepared at the rear of the stronghold for the families. Thunderclap and Colonel Hua spoke at the feast in praise of Song Jiang's many good qualities and told of the revenge killings on Windy Mountain. The leaders of Mount Liang were most impressed. They told also of the halberd contest between the Little Duke and the Halberdier, and of how Colonel Hua's arrow severed the threads and parted the halberds. Chao Gai didn't quite believe this part and was heard muttering to himself: "Hm, can he really be so accurate as he claims? One day we'll set up an archery contest and see."

The drinking went on that day till they were all half drunk and many dishes were consumed. Then the leaders said: "Let us go and walk on the mountain for a while; we'll come back afterwards and continue the feasting."

Everyone assented and they went to stroll on the mountain and enjoy the fine views. They had gone down as far as the third entrance gate when they heard in the sky the honking of some migrating geese. Colonel Hua was thinking to himself: "Chao Gai didn't believe it just now about my shooting the threads. I'd better try and give them a little demonstration of my skill right away. I must show them what I can do so they'll respect me later." His eyes searched the company till he saw someone who was carrying a bow and arrows. He asked for the bow and took it in his hand and examined it. It was a finely crafted weapon with rich decorations and was well suited to his purpose. He took a good arrow and said to Chao Gai: "Perhaps you remember hearing just now how I broke the threads on the halberds — I think you were all a little sceptical. Do you see that flock of geese there, away in the distance? I'm not trying to boast, but with this arrow I will shoot the third in the flock through the head. Only please don't laugh at me if I miss." Fitting the arrow to the string, he stretched the bow to its fullest extent, aimed carefully and loosed the arrow. What they then saw was this:

*The painted bow is bent into a full moon; the feathered shaft zooms like a shooting star. The hand that draws the bow is strong, the arrow speeds towards its goal. The winging geese prove no more elusive than a target stretched in the air; the arrow homes in like metal drawn to a magnet. A falling shadow among the clouds, a startled cry amid the grass. The line of geese is sundered in the sky; the company of heroes continues to assemble.*

When Colonel Hua shot his arrow, it was of course the third bird in the flock that tumbled from the sky and fell on the hillside. A soldier was sent at once to fetch it. The arrow had transfixed its head! Chao Gai and the others were astounded. They were lavish in their praises of Colonel Hua's archery. The Professor said: "Never mind about Li Guang, the great Yang Youji himself could not have bettered that! Our stronghold is really lucky to get this man!" From then on Colonel Hua was honoured by all and sundry on Mount Liang.

They now returned to feasting in the hall and continued till evening, when everyone went to rest. Next day a further banquet was arranged and each of them was allotted his proper place in the hierarchy. Thunderclap was now seated below Colonel Hua because the latter was his brother-in-law. Colonel Hua was given the place next to Leopard's Head Lin Chong in fifth position, so Thunderclap was sixth, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil seventh, the Tamer eighth. Then after the three Ruans came the Dandy, Short-Arse, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Whitey, Shi Yong, Du Qian, Song Wan, the Crocodile and Bai Sheng: twenty-one leaders in all.

When the places had been decided and the welcoming feast concluded, they set about building more big boats, extra accommodation and new carts, laying in provisions, making new weapons, armour and helmets, preparing flags and banners, clothing, crossbows, arrows and so on, so that all was in readiness for repelling the government troops. Of this no more.

Meanwhile Song Jiang, after leaving the wineshop, had been travelling day and night to reach home. At four in the afternoon he was on the outskirts of his village and stopped for a little rest at headman Zhang's inn. This Zhang was an old friend of Song Jiang's family. When he saw Song Jiang's unhappy expression and the tears in his eyes, he said: "You haven't been home for a year and a half, Registrar. Today you ought to be happy! How come you look so sad, is something troubling you? You ought to be pleased about the amnesty, your sentence must at least be reduced."

"That's as may be," said Song Jiang. "But a sentence is not all there is in life. How do you expect me not to be miserable when my old father, my one and only father, is dead?"

Zhang burst out laughing. "You are a one," he said. "Making jokes like that! Why, His Worship the Squire was right here drinking in this place of mine not an hour past. What do you go and say something like that for?"

"Please don't make fun of me," said Song Jiang, taking out the letter and showing it to Zhang. "My younger brother, Song Qing, says quite clearly that our father passed away at the beginning of February this year and he wants me to go home for the funeral."

"What an extraordinary thing!" Zhang exclaimed. "I tell you, he was here drinking in the company of Squire Wang from Eastside, just about noon today. Why would I tell you a lie?"

Song Jiang was beginning to feel very puzzled. He could not make this out at all. He remained plunged in thought for a long time. But as soon as evening came, he bade the innkeeper farewell and hurried towards his home.

When he entered the house, there were no signs of activity. When they saw Song Jiang, the servants all came to pay their respects. "Are my father and brother at home?" he asked them.

"Every day he's had such a craving for the sight of you, sir," they said. "He'll be overjoyed you're here. He just got back from drinking with Squire Wang of Eastside, over at old Zhang's, and he went to his room to sleep."

Song Jiang was greatly moved. He threw down his short staff and entered the thatched hall. Immediately Song Qing rushed up to receive him and prostrated himself. When he saw his brother, who was not dressed in mourning, Song Jiang exploded. Pointing an accusing finger at him, he shouted: "You heartless little monster, what do you mean by it? Father's inside, apparently, why ever did you write that letter to torment me? Two or three times I thought of killing myself. I cried till I was almost out of my mind. How could you be so unnatural!"

Before his brother could begin to explain, the Squire himself rushed out from behind the screen and said: "Don't be angry, my son. It's nothing to do with your brother. It was because I kept thinking every day how badly I missed you, so I told your brother to write and say I was dead and you must come home quickly. I had heard, too, that there were many robbers on the White Tiger Mountain, and I was afraid they might catch you and persuade you to become an outlaw, a man without honour or respect for his family. That's why I was so anxious to say something that would make you come home. Then Shi Yong turned up from Mr. Chai's and agreed to deliver a letter to you. The whole thing was my idea, it was nothing to do with your brother, so don't blame him. I had just returned from old Zhang's when I heard you'd come home."

After hearing this, Song Jiang pressed his fist to his brow and bowed low before his father, grief and joy mingling in his breast. "Do you happen to know how the case against me stands nowadays?" he asked. "There's been an amnesty so the sentence ought to be reduced. That's what old Zhang was telling me just now."

Squire Song said: "Before Song Qing returned, Sergeants Lei and Zhu were most helpful. There was a general warrant out against you, but no one came to bother me again. Perhaps you wonder why I summoned you home. Well, I heard recently that the Emperor has named his heir and an amnesty has been proclaimed to celebrate it. All criminals throughout the land are to have their sentences reduced by one degree. So even if you were discovered and brought to trial, the most you could get is banishment, it couldn't be the death penalty."

"Do Sergeants Zhu and Lei still come to the house?" Song Jiang asked.

"I heard just the other day," said his brother, "that they've both been transferred. Zhu Tong has been posted to the Eastern Capital, and Lei Heng has gone I don't know where. Recently two new officers, both called Zhao, joined the police department in the provincial capital."

"But you've been travelling my son, you must be tired," said the Squire. "Go to your room now and get some rest."

There was great happiness in the house that night. But of this no more.

Now the sky has darkened, the hour is late. The jade hare is rising in the east. It must be about eight o'clock and all in the manor are sleeping. Suddenly at the front and back doors a great hubbub arises. What is it? On every side, there are torches, all around the manor house, and confused shouts of "Don't let Song Jiang get away!" The old Squire ceaselessly curses his fate.

Well, but for this things might have been different. We would not have seen:

On the riverbank the heroes all assembled;
In busy streets displays of courage and resolve.

WHEN General Qin Ming and Colonel Huang Xin surveyed the outskirts of the town they saw that Song Jiang and Hua Rong led one group of bandits, while "Stunted Tiger" and Yan Shun led another. They had about one hundred fifty men each.

Huang Xin gave orders that the drawbridge be lowered, and the bandits be allowed to enter the town. Song Jiang had previously issued an order that his men were not to kill even one person in the town, that they were first to reach the southern side of the town to exterminate the family of Magistrate Liu Gao. "Stunted Tiger" however took his men to Magistrate Liu Gao's house and seized the magistrate's wife for himself. The magistrate's house was looted, and all the valuables, horses, cattle, etc. were taken away. Hua Rong took his men to his own house where he took all his family and their possessions on carts. He announced that any of the men at his *yamen* might remain in their homes, or go with the bandits to the mountain, just as they wished. When all this had been done the bandits returned to the mountain with their loot, etc. Zheng Tianshou had remained behind in charge of the stronghold, and when he saw the bandits returning with cartloads of loot he welcomed them to the main hall. After Hua Rong had introduced Huang Xin and the new comrades they all sat down.

Song Jiang gave orders that Hua Rong's family should be given proper quarters, and that the loot from Magistrate Liu Gao's house should be equally divided among the bandits. "Stunted Tiger" had taken the captured woman to his own rooms.

In the main hall Yan Shun asked where Magistrate Liu Gao's wife was and "Stunted Tiger" replied, "You must now let me keep her to be my wife."

"You may keep her," said Yan Shun, "but first she must come here as I have something to say to her."

"I also want to ask her a question or two," said Song Jiang.

"Stunted Tiger" sent a man, who soon brought in Madame Liu Gao who was weeping and begging pardon.

"You vixen!" said Song Jiang, "I saved your life on this mountain because you were the wife of the magistrate, but why did you return evil for my good? Now that you have been arrested what have you got to say for yourself?"

Yan Shun jumped up and said, "Why do you ask questions of this slut?" So saying he drew his sword, and killed the woman on the spot. When "Stunted Tiger" saw this he seized a sword, and advanced to fight with Yan Shun. Song Jiang and the others however also arose, and intervened. Song Jiang said, "Yan Shun has done the right thing in killing this woman. I saved her life, and sent her down the mountain to rejoin her husband, and yet she caused her husband to injure me. If you keep her it would only end in trouble. I will get you a wife later on, and you will then be satisfied."

"I am of the same opinion," said Yan Shun. "If we do not kill her she would do us further injury."

"Stunted Tiger" listened to all this, and remained silent. Yan Shun ordered the servants to remove the corpse, and then spread out a feast for celebration.

The next day Hua Rong prepared the marriage of his sister to General Qin Ming under the auspices of Song Jiang and Huang Xin, Yan Shun, "Stunted Tiger," and Zheng Tianshou acting as go-between. All the dowry was prepared by Hua Rong.

All this was done, and after the wedding there was general feasting for about five days.

About ten days after the wedding one of the bandit's scouts came up the mountain and reported that Prefect Murong at Qingzhou Prefecture had sent a memorial to the Imperial Court denouncing Hua Rong, Qin Ming, and Huang Xin as rebels, and petitioning that a large army be sent to quell the rebels and the bandits. Upon receiving this news, they held a general discussion and all agreed that their position on that mountain was not too secure and that if a large army had them surrounded, they could not avoid being captured.

"I have a plan," said Song Jiang, "but I do not know whether you, my brethren, would approve of it."

"Let us hear it," they all cried.

"To the south of this place there is Liangshan Marsh with a circumference of two hundred *li*; and in that area are the towns Wanzi Fortress and Liao-er Hollow. That district is now controlled by about five thousand bandits under the command of Chao Gai, and the government troops dare not look them in the face. How would it be if we take all our men there, and join that gang?"

"As there is such a place," said General Qin Ming, "your proposal is admirable. But as we have nobody to recommend us would they be willing to admit us?"

Song Jiang laughed aloud, and related the whole story from the seizure of the birthday presents unto the sending of a letter to him through Liu Tang and how he killed the woman Yan Poxi, and later joined the highwaymen.

Qin Ming was pleased at hearing this, and said, "So you are their benefactor! In that case there is no need for any delay, and we can go there at once."

That day all the details were discussed and arrangements made. All the women and children, valuables, clothes, stores, etc. were loaded on about ten carts. There were about three hundred horses available. All those men who did not want to go to Liangshan Marsh were paid off, and allowed to go their own way. There were altogether about five hundred who agreed to go. These were divided into three companies, and they left the mountain separately, disguised as troops going to fight against Liangshan Marsh. When everything was ready for departure all the buildings on the mountain were destroyed and set on fire. Song Jiang and Hua Rong took command of the leading company. They had flags on which was written: "Government troops for the arrest of brigands." So that on the way no one attempted to impede the progress of such a considerable force.

Song Jiang and Hua Rong rode at the head of their column; next to them were the carts containing the women, children, stores, etc., and bringing up the rear was the main force. They had gone about seven *li* when they came to a place called Mount Duiying—having, two equally high and shaped mountains on both sides of a broad-way. As they were proceeding they heard drums and gongs on the mountains.

Hua Rong said, "There are evidently brigands in front," and so saying he buckled his spear, got his bow and arrows ready for action. He gave orders that the main force should move forward, and stay with the carts in one body. The two leaders then took about twenty of the mounted bandits to make reconnaissance. They had only gone half a *li* when they saw about a hundred mounted men, following a youth, all in red. Balancing a halberd in his hand, he gave a challenge, "I will fight with you today, and see who must be the winner."

Instantly another young warrior in white holding another halberd also led about a hundred mounted men, clad in white, down a small mound, to meet the challenge. Each side had its respective red and white flags. The roll of drums seemed to shake the very rocks. Grimly both warrirors gave reins to their steeds, and engaged in a deadly combat. After about thirty bouts neither leader gained any advantage.

Song Jiang and Hua Rong witnessed this contest from a distance and applauded the skill that was displayed. Hua Rong urged his horse forward slowly until he was quite close to the combatants. He then noticed that one man had a leopard's tail on his halberd whereas the other had a spotted streamer of five colors, and during the contest these had become entwined so that the two weapons could not be separated. Hua Rong reined in his horse, seized his bow, and shot an arrow, cutting the tangle and releasing the two halberds at the same moment. At this feat a shout of applause involuntarily broke from the throats of the two bodies of mounted men.

The two young men stopped fighting, and advanced to Hua Rong and Song Jiang with a salute, "We request the name of the marvelous archer."

Returning the salute Hua Rong answered, "This is Song Jiang, my adopted brother. I am Hua Rong, military Prefect of the Qingfeng Town."

The two young men dismounted, thrusted their halberds in the ground, and bowed down. "We have heard of your fame for a long time."

Hua Rong and Song Jiang quickly dismounted, and raised the two men to their feet. "We ask for your worthy names," they said.

The young warrior in red replied, "I am Lu Fang, of Tanzhou. I am a great admirer of the Marquis Lu Bu of the Three Kingdoms period, and therefore I learned the skill with the halberd. People have given me the same nickname as Lu Bu, the 'Little Marquis of Wen.' Some time ago I took some unprepared medicine to Shandong, but lost all my capital in that venture, and I could not go back to my native village. Temporarily I took charge of the bandits here at Mount Duiying. A few days ago this worthy came, and wanted to take my stronghold by force. I proposed to let him occupy one mountain while I held the other one, but he would not agree to that. So every day we met, and fought about that matter. By an act of Heaven our fighting has resulted in our fortunately meeting you."

Turning to the warrior in white Song Jiang asked for his name.

That person replied, "My unworthy name is Guo Sheng, and I am from Jialing in Sichuan province. I was a trader in quicksilver, but one day a strong wind upset my boat on the Yellow River so that I could not return to my native town. Formerly at Jialing I was trained in the use of the halberd by a Major Zhang, and I became so skillful that people gave me the nickname 'Rival of Rengui.' I heard that at Mount Duiying there was a man who had held that place against all comers by the use of the halberd so I came here to have a trial of strength with him. We have been fighting for about ten days without either of us winning. We did not anticipate meeting you, but Heaven has evidently favored us."

Then Song Jiang told them about his affairs, and he suggested that they should come to amicable terms. Both men agreed to this, and all were pleased. By this time all the three contingents of the brigands had arrived, and Song Jiang introduced the leaders. Lu Fang invited them all to go to his stronghold up the mountain, where he provided a banquet. On the following day Guo Sheng invited the bandits leaders to come to his mountain, and there they had another feast.

Song Jiang suggested that they should both go with them and join the brigands under Chao Gai at Liangshan Marsh. Gladly they agreed to this, and prepared their effects for an early departure. But Song Jiang said that as they had now more than five hundred strong men their movements would be duly reported to Liangshan Marsh by spies or scouts, and there they might suspect some hostile intention. So he suggested that he would go in advance with Yan Shun, and announce their proposal. They could come along afterwards, but not in one body, but divided into three contingents. The other leaders agreed to this plan as much better, and it was arranged that Song Jiang and Yan Shun should have a start of a half-day.

These two were accompanied by about ten men when they departed for Liangshan Marsh. On the third day of their journey about noon they came to an inn, and as they were all tired Song Jiang decided to stop there for food and wine. He gave orders that the horse's girths were to be slackened, and when this had been done they all adjourned to the inn. Song Jiang saw that there were only three large tables and a few smaller ones. One of the big tables was already occupied by a man. He noticed that the man wore a turban in the shape of a pig's snout, at the back of which were two finely wrought copper rings of Taiyuan make. He wore a black silk gown with a white waist sash; had puttees and hempen shoes. Leaning against the table was a short cudgel, and on the table was a bundle of clothes. The man was about eight feet high; had a sallow complexion with prominent cheekbones; the eyes were clear, there was neither mustache nor beard.

Song Jiang spoke to the waiter. "We have a large party, but we two will sit in your inner room. Will you ask that customer to be so good as to change to another table and let my men dine on that big one." To this proposal the waiter assented.

Wine was ordered; each man to have three big cups. Food was also placed on the tables. As several of Song Jiang's men could not find seats the waiter went to the guest before mentioned, who looked like a junior officer, and said:

"May I trouble you, my officer; but would you mind moving to another table so that the followers of these other honored guests may have a seat as we are short of room?"

The man was annoyed at being addressed in this way, and replied, "I was here first, I don't care who wants me to move—I won't move."

"You see he is so rude," remarked Yan Shun to Song Jiang.

"Leave him alone," said Song Jiang. "We must not follow his bad example."

Just then the man turned round, and seeing the two leaders, he laughed sneeringly.

The waiter said to him, "Sir, you may render a favor to our business here, and change tables."

The man banged the table and with an angry voice shouted, "You prick! You insult me because I am by myself, but even if the Emperor himself came here I would not shift. You do not know me, but you will soon make the acquaintance of my fist."

"Why are you so angry?" said the waiter. "I have not said any thing to insult you."

"You dare not say any thing to me," the man roared.

Yan Shun could not endure this, and called out, "Fellow, you don't have to act so stinking tough. You don't want to move, that's fine, but why threaten the poor waiter?"

The man jumped up, and seizing his cudgel said, "I may have insulted him, but that is not your business. There are only two persons I give way to, and all others I treat like mud."

Yan Shun was excited, and seized a stool to use as a weapon. But Song Jiang intervened as he saw that the man was not a common vulgar person. "Let us not have a row about this," he said, and addressing the man he asked, "I request you to tell me who are the two men whom you would give way to?"

"If I tell you that, you would be stupefied."

"But still I would like to know their names," insisted Song Jiang.

"Well, one is Chai Jin, the 'Small Whirlwind.'"

Song Jiang nodded approvingly at this and asked who was the other one.

"He is even greater. His name is Song Jiang of Shandong. He is called 'Welcome Rain.'"

A wink passed between Song Jiang and Yan Shun at this, and the latter put down the bench.

The man continued, "Those two men I would give way to, but I fear nobody else."

"Stop, I know both of them," said Song Jiang. "But where did you meet them?"

"As you know them I will tell you the truth. About three years ago I stayed for more than four months at Chai Jin's house, but never met Song Jiang there."

"Do you want to know him now?"

"I am in fact now trying to find him."

"Who set you to do this?"

"His own brother."

Song Jiang shook the man by the hands, and rejoiced. "As decreed by Heaven, you have met him, you might have failed although you traveled a hundred *li*; I am Song Jiang."

The man looked at him closely and saluted. "Heaven has favored me by this fortunate meeting with you. I might have easily passed you by and travel to look for you in vain at Old Kong's place."

Song Jiang took the man into the inner room, and asked, "Tell me the home news."

"Ah, Elder brother, let me tell you, my name is Shi Yong and I am a native of Daming Prefecture, Zhili province, and I was given the nickname of "Stone General." Once I made a row with a person at a gambling den and killed him with my fist. I escaped to Squire Chai's home for refuge. While staying there I heard so much of your fame that I set out for your home at Yuncheng County to make your acquaintance. There your younger brother informed me that you had gone to Old Kong's home at the Baihu Mountain. As I decided to go there, your brother gave me a letter for you; and he said that if I met you, I must tell you to go back home as quickly as possible."

Song Jiang had a misgiving when he heard this, and asked, "How long did you stay at my home? Did you meet my father?"

"I only stayed there one night," said Shi Yong, "and did not see your father."

Song Jiang then told him all about their plans of going to Liangshan Marsh. The other suggested that he might be allowed to join them. Song Jiang readily agreed to this, and then introduced him to Yan Shun. More wine was ordered as they all sat down.

Shi Yong soon got out the letter from his bundle, and handed it to Song Jiang. It could be at once noticed it had been addressed in an unusual way—indicating trouble. The two characters "with peace," ordinarily used had also been omitted. Song Jiang now had a great misgiving. Quickly he tore the letter out of the envelope, and read these in the latter part—"Father was taken ill and died in the first month of this year. The coffin is still in the house, and we wait until you return to bury him. Return at once with all speed. I, your younger brother shedding tears and blood from my eyes in writing this letter."

Now Song Jiang burst into lamentations, and striking his breast he exclaimed, "Unfilial son! A wrongdoer! My father dies, and I have not done my duty. I am like an animal." He thus cried with a flood of tears, and banged his head against the wall in utter despair.

Yan Shun and the "Stone General" seized hold of him, but Song Jiang continued to wail in a dazed condition and it was for some time before he could come to himself.

Yan Shun said, "Elder brother, do not give way to your grief so much."

"My affections cannot be restrained," said Song Jiang. "I cannot forget about my father. He is no longer alive so I must depart this very night to my home. You must go to the mountain without me."

"Brother, your father is no more," said Yan Shun. "But even if you return home at once you will never see him again. In this world parents do not live forever. So please make your mind easy, and again lead us to the mountain. When that matter is settled you can return home without any delay, and attend to funeral matters. I will accompany you there. There is an ancient saying, 'A snake without a head cannot go forward.' You are our head, and if you do not go with us they will not receive us."

"I cannot agree," said Song Jiang, "because in going to the mountain you will delay me too much time. So I will write a letter stating all the details, and you can take the letter to Chao Gai, and he will then receive the whole company. If I had not known about my father's death I would have gone with you, but as Heaven has given me the information, every day will be like a year in length, and it is imperative that I should return at once. I need neither horse nor companion but must start off straightway through the night."

Yan Shun, and the "Stone General" could do nothing further to change his mind. Song Jiang asked the waiter for pen and paper, and while writing, he was weeping all the time. He wrote most emphatically that the company must be allowed to join the bandits. The letter was not sealed and was handed to Yan Shun. Song Jiang was now ready to go, but Yan Shun asked him not to leave until Hua Rong, Qin Ming, and the other leaders arrived. But Song Jiang would not wait even for that, and instructed "Stone General" to explain the whole situation to the other leaders. He then set off.

Yan Shun and "Stone General" paid for the food and wine, and the latter then mounted Song Jiang's horse, and took the men about two *li* further along the road to another inn where they stopped. About 7 A.M. the following day the main body of the bandits arrived, and Yan Shun explained what had happened.

The other leaders were annoyed, and asked why Yan Shun had not asked Song Jiang to wait.

"Stone General" explained that Song Jiang was completely upset by the sad news, and in fact would have committed suicide, and would not agree to stay until they all arrived. He had hurried off at once to return to his home. He had left a letter behind which would induce Chao Gai to receive them.

Hua Rong and Qin Ming read the letter, and then said to the leaders, "We are in a dilemma, as there will be difficulty whether we proceed or retire. We cannot go back, or separate our forces, so we had better go forward. We will now seal the letter up as we have all read it, and go on our way. If we are not received at the mountain then we can discuss some other plan."

So these nine heroes all set off again, and in due course reached Liangshan Marsh. As they were proceeding amidst reeds and rushes they heard drums and gongs beaten on the lake and many flags were visible on the mountain. On the lake were two speedy boats. On the first was Lin Chong with about fifty men, and on the next Liu Tang, the Red Haired Demon, with also fifty men.

"Who are you?" called out Lin Chong. "Whose troops are you? How dare you come here to arrest us! We would kill the whole lot of you. You ought to know the reputation of us on Liangshan Marsh."

The leaders dismounted at the side of the lake, and replied, "We are not government soldiers, but have come here to join you bandits. We have here a letter from Song Jiang, the 'Welcome Rain.'"

Lin Chong said, "You had better take the letter to that inn over there where you will find our leader Zhu Gui."

A blue flag was waved on Lin Chong's boat, and a boat with three fishermen came out of the reeds, and upon reaching the bank two of them disembarked, and told the strangers to follow them. On the first boat a white flag was now waved, and gongs were sounded and both boats returned.

When Hua Rong saw the way in which the brigands promptly obeyed orders he remarked, "It is no wonder that the government troops keep away from this place. How can our stronghold compare with theirs?" He and his company followed the two fishermen to the inn.

They were introduced, and sat down to a meal with wine. After Zhu Gui, the "Dry Land Crocodile," had read the letter he went to the arbor on the bank, and shot a whistling arrow across the lake. Instantly a fast boat emerged from the reeds and came along. He told the boatman to take the letter to the leaders on the mountain, and then ordered pigs and sheep to be killed, and a feast prepared for the nine guests. He also ordered that all the men should encamp about there for the present.

The following day about 7 A.M. Wu Yong came to the inn, and was duly introduced and they talked the matter over. He and Zhu Gui then invited the leaders to embark, and all the baggage, etc. was loaded on the fleet of about twenty boats that was placed at their disposal. Upon reaching the Golden Strand they all disembarked, and were met by Chao Gai and many of the bandits. They then all went up the mountain, and gathered in the assembly hall. All the eleven leaders with Chao Gai were seated along the left side of the hall. Among them was Bai Sheng, the "Daylight Rat" who had escaped a few months ago from the prison at Jizhou Prefecture. On the right-hand side of the hall were seated the new nine leaders with Hua Rong.

In the center was burning an incense urn over which they all took the oath. All the newcomers were then sworn in. They were all given quarters, and then there was general feasting for everybody. Over the wine Hua Rong and General Qin Ming spoke highly of Song Jiang, and gave full details of his adventures. They also described their meeting with Lu Fang and Guo Sheng, and how Hua Rong had cut the tangled streamers with an arrow. To all this Chao Gai listened, and commented, but in his heart he doubted some of the statements made. He said, "Tomorrow, I hope that you will give us an exhibition of your skill as an archer."

The following day the leaders agreed to go for a stroll, and view the scenery round the mountain. They had passed the third barrier when they heard overhead the cries of a flock of wild geese which was flying in single file.

Hua Rong thought that as Chao Gai did not seem to be convinced the previous day as to his skill in archery, so he would now show him a specimen of his shooting, and so gain Chao Gai's respect. So he asked one of the archers to lend him his bow and arrow, and then turning to Chao Gai he spoke, "When I said that I cut the streamers binding the two halberds together I thought that perhaps some of you did not believe me. Now you see that flock of wild geese overhead. I do not wish to boast, but I will bring down the third bird in the column with this arrow sticking in its head. If I miss I hope that you will not laugh at me." He fitted the arrow, and pulling the bow to its full limit released the arrow which flew overhead and brought down the third bird. A man was sent to bring the goose, and upon his return it was seen that the arrow had gone through its head. When they saw this Chao Gai and the other leaders were deeply impressed, and called Hua Rong "The General with an uncanny arm."

Wu Yong said, "After this we cannot call you 'Little Li Guang,' because even Yang Youji was not as good as you.[72] We really are very fortunate to have such a man as you here." There was not a man on Liangshan Marsh who did not respect him after that.

The next day they had a celebration feast in the great hall, and elected Hua Rong to the fifth position. Qin Ming was married to Hua Rong's sister and was elected the sixth leader. The position of the other leaders were also arranged. Liu Tang the seventh, Huang Xin, the eighth, and so on. The bandits were detailed to build boats, make arms and ammunitions, erect buildings, etc. but we need not go into the many details.

Song Jiang traveled through the night, and the day following his departure, he reached his native village about 4 A.M. in the afternoon. He stopped at an inn kept by Zhang, the village chief, for a rest. Zhang was on good terms with all the members of Song Jiang's family. He saw that Song Jiang had been crying so he asked, "You have been away from home for nearly a year and half, and it is good for you to return now. But how is it that you seem to be in trouble? What is the matter? Your crime has been mitigated."

"Old Uncle, what you say about my affairs is quite right, but as my father has died how can I rejoice?"

Zhang laughed, and said, "Is this one of your jokes? Your father was here only a short time ago drinking wine, and has just gone back home an hour ago. Why do you talk like this?"

"Uncle, please do not jest with me." Song Jiang then produced the letter he had received. "You will see from this that my younger brother, Song Qing, states that my father died in the first month of this year, and is waiting for me to return home for the funeral."

"Ah! But nothing of the kind has happened. Your father came here with a man to drink wine this morning. How could I talk lies about such a matter?"

Song Jiang now doubted the letter, although the matter was not clear yet. He thought over the matter but found no explanation, and then at last decided to go home and clear the matter up. When he entered the gate of the homestead he saw no signs of mourning. When the servants recognized him they saluted, and he asked, "Where are my father and Song Qing?"

"Your father has been expecting you every day. He will be much pleased to see you. He has just come back from drinking with a friend, and is asleep inside."

Song Jiang was surprised at this, and throwing down his cudgel, he entered the house. His brother Song Qing upon seeing him kowtowed, and he was not wearing mourning. Song Jiang was now angry, and abused his brother. "You undutiful beast! My father is at home, so why did you write me that letter saying that he was dead. I was so upset that besides crying I tried to kill myself. So unfilial you are!"

Song Qing was on the point of replying to this when his father emerged from behind the screen in the room. "My son, do not get angry," he said. "That was not your brother's fault. I wanted very much to see you again, so I told your brother to write the letter stating that I was dead, and urging you to return home at once. I heard that you were at Baihu Mountain where there are many brigands, and I was afraid that you might join them, and become both disloyal and unfilial. The letter was given to a man Shi Yong who had just come from Squire Chai's place looking for you. The whole scheme was arranged by me so that you must not feel any resentment to your brother for carrying out my orders. I had just now returned from Zhang's inn, and was going to sleep when I heard your voice."

Song Jiang kowtowed to his father, and was much pleased at this unlooked-for climax. He asked, "How about my affair here? I have heard that my crime has been pardoned."

"At first they troubled us a great deal," said Old Sung, "but afterwards Inspectors Zhu Tong and Lei Hong used their influence so they made no more trouble here. On the appointment of the Crown Prince, the Emperor issued a decree reducing all sentences by one degree, and abolishing the sentence of death from a number of crimes. Even if your return home was known to the *yamen*, you would not receive the capital punishment but be banished to a distant district. So we can leave the matter alone."

"Do those two Inspectors ever come here now?" asked Song Jiang.

"I heard sometime ago," said Song Qing, "that they had been transferred to some other places."

Old Song however insisted that his son must be tired, they must all retire, and this was done. It was now dusk and the moon was rising in the east. About 9 pm as they were all asleep, there was a big noise outside the front and back gates. They then saw that the premises were surrounded by men who held burning torches. They called out, "Don't let Song Jiang escape!" On hearing this, his father was upset.

A crowded street; a compact throng,
Loyalty and justice seen.
A river's bank, the scene where strong
Heroes meet and disagree.

## 134

### The professor Wu Yong speaks of the Magic Messenger on Mount Liang, Recommends, & Writes to Dai Zong; Song Jiang on Jieyang Mountain Ridge Meets Li Jun the White Water Dragon

Squire Song placed a ladder against the wall, climbed to the top and looked. Over a hundred men were outside with torches. At their head were two newly appointed Yuncheng County constable—the brothers Zhao Neng and Zhao De.

"If you know what's good for you, Squire Song," these two now shouted, "you'll send your son Song Jiang out and let us deal with him. If you don't tell him to turn himself over to the authorities, we'll arrest the both of you!"

"Song Jiang hasn't come home," the old man said.

"Don't lie," Zhao Neng retorted. "He was seen drinking in the village at Ward Chief Zhang's place. And he was followed home from there. You can't deny it."

"Don't argue with him, father," Song Jiang urged, beside the ladder. "I'll go out and give myself up. I know everybody in the county office. What's more, an amnesty has been announced. I'm sure to be given a reduced sentence. It's no use pleading with these wretches. The Zhao brothers are a couple of rogues. Although they've suddenly got themselves appointed constables, they know nothing about gallantry. They're not friends of mine. Pleading with them is a waste of time."

The old man wept. "I've harmed you, my son."

"Calm yourself, father," said Song Jiang. "Going before the court will be a good thing. Otherwise I might have taken to the hills and joined up with murderers and arsonists. Then if I were captured, I'd be ashamed to see you again. This way, I may be sent to another prefecture, but exile has a time limit. Sooner or later I'll come home and look after you in your old age."

"All right, then. I'll spread some money among high and low and buy you a good place of exile."

Song Jiang mounted the ladder and called: "Quiet down, out there. Leniency to my crime has already been declared. It's no longer a capital offence. If you two constables will come into our humble manor and have a few cups of wine with us, I'll go with you to the magistrate tomorrow."
"You're not going to get us in there with any of your tricks," Zhao Neng exclaimed.
"Would I implicate my own father and brother? Come in. You don't have to worry."
Song Jiang came down from the ladder, opened the manor gate, and invited the two constables into the guest hall. That night they were wined and dined on chicken and goose. The hundred or more soldiers were also given food and drink, and each some money. Bars of silver worth twenty ounces were presented to the two constables as "thanks for their kindness."
The constables spent the night in the manor, and at dawn the next day proceeded with Song Jiang to the county. When it was daylight, they brought him before Shi Wenbin, the magistrate, who had just opened court. The jurist was delighted. He ordered the prisoner to submit his confession. Song Jiang took a brush pen and wrote:

The crime occurred because last autumn I purchased Yan Poxi as a concubine. She was no good, and I accidentally killed her in a quarrel when I was drunk. I ran away to avoid being punished. Today, captured, and brought before the court, I set forth these details and state that I shall willingly accept whatever sentence the court decrees.

The magistrate read the confession and ordered Song Jiang remanded into custody.
Everyone in the county heard of Song Jiang's arrest, and there was not a person who didn't pity him. They pleaded with the magistrate to forgive him, telling what a good man Song Jiang was ordinarily. The jurist was more than inclined to go easy. He formally accepted the confession and directed that Song Jiang be confined to the prison but that he need not be fettered.
Squire Song bribed high and low, dispensing money freely. Yan Poxi had died half a year before, so there was no aggrieved party in the case. Zhang Wenyuan, feeling that he had lost his mistress anyway, was unwilling to make an enemy of Song Jiang. The magistrate drew up his findings and, when the sixty-day detention period was over, sent the prisoner to the prefecture of Jizhou for sentencing.
The prefect reviewed the case, taking cognizance of the amnesty which lessened the severity of the crime. He directed that Song Jiang be given twenty strokes and exiled to the prison in Jiangzhou. Many of the officers and functionaries of the prefecture also knew Song Jiang, and besides, he dispensed a bit of money. Nominally, he was to be beaten twenty blows and tattooed with the mark of his exile. But there was no aggrieved party to witness it being done, and many people supported him, so it was all inflicted very lightly. In the presence of the court a cangue was placed around his neck for travelling and documents of transfer issued. Two guards were designated as escorts—Zhang and Li Something-or-Other.
On receipt of the documents, the guards set off with their prisoner. Song Jiang's father, Squire Song, and his brother, Song Qing, were waiting outside the prefectural compound. They served the guards wine and gave them silver. They brought Song Jiang a change of clothes, a pack to carry on his shoulders, and soft hemp sandals for walking. The squire took Song Jiang aside and spoke to him quietly:
"Jiangzhou is a good place, with plenty of fish and rice. I bought you an exile there. Serve out your sentence patiently. I'll have your brother Qing visit you. Whenever there's a reliable person going in your direction I'll send you expense money. You'll be passing Mount Liangshan on your way. If those brigands come down and rescue you and urge you to join their band, don't do it, or people will criticize you for being disloyal and unfilial. Don't forget what I have told you! May you have a peaceful journey, child. I pray Heaven be merciful and that you return again soon for a happy reunion with your father and brother."
With tears in his eyes, Song Jiang bowed and bid farewell to the old man. His brother Qing saw him down the road. When it was time for them to part, Song Jiang said: "Don't any of you worry about me. My only concern is that father is getting old and I'm bedeviled by this case and have to leave home. Look after him. Don't leave him alone to come and see me in Jiangzhou. I have lots of friends in the gallant fraternity. Any of them will help me out with money if I need it. If Heaven is kind I'll be back one day."
Song Qing, weeping, bowed and departed. He returned home to look after his father. Of that we'll say no more.

Song Jiang proceeded along the road with the two guards. Because they had received his silver and knew that he was a gallant fellow, they looked after him on the journey. The three marched all day. At night, they put up at an inn, where they made a fire and cooked some rice. Song Jiang bought wine and meat and treated the guards.
"I'll be frank," he said. "From here on we'll be skirting Mount Liangshan. On the summit are a number of bold men who know my name. They might come down to rescue me and give you two a fright. I suggest we get up early tomorrow and follow small paths which detour around the mountain. Even if we have to travel a few extra *li* it'll be worth it."
"We'd never have known if you hadn't told us, sir Clerk," the guards replied. "We're familiar with a few paths. We definitely won't run into them there." Plans were made accordingly that night.
The three rose at the fifth watch the next morning and lit a breakfast fire. They soon left the inn, and walked along narrow trails for about thirty *li*. Suddenly a band of men appeared round the bend of the mountain ahead and advanced towards them.
Song Jiang groaned. Leading forty or fifty brigands was none other than Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon. They plainly intended to finish off the two escorts. The terrified Zhang and Li collapsed to their knees in a heap.
"Brother," Song Jiang called, "who do you want to kill?"
"These two varlets, of course," replied Liu Tang. "Who else?"
"Don't soil your hands. Give me your knife. I'll do it."
The guards moaned. Liu Tang handed Song Jiang his blade.
"Why do you want to kill them?" Song Jiang asked.
"Our brothers on the mountain top sent a man to Yuncheng to inquire about your trial. At first we were going to snatch you from the jail, but we heard your situation wasn't too bad there. Then we learned you were being exiled to Jiangzhou. To make sure we didn't miss you, chiefs big and small have been posted on every road and path. We're here to welcome you and invite you up the mountain. Naturally, we've got to kill these guards."
"This won't honor me, it will disgrace me. I'll become disloyal, unfilial. If you insist, I have no choice but to kill myself." Song Jiang raised the blade to his throat.
Liu Tang grabbed his arm. "Wait, brother. Let's talk this over." He wrested back the knife from Song Jiang's hand.
"Pity me, brother," Song Jiang pleaded. "Let me go on to Jiangzhou Prison. When my term is up I'll come back and we'll meet again."
"That's not in my power to decide," said Liu Tang. "On the main road ahead our Military Advisor Wu Yong and Commandant Hua Rong are waiting to greet you. If you'll allow me, I'll ask them to come and confer."
"You can confer all you like. I've nothing more to say."
A bandit was sent to report. Not long after, Wu Yong and Hua Rong were seen galloping towards them, followed by a dozen men on horseback. The two dismounted and bowed.
"Why hasn't the cangue been removed?" Hua Rong demanded.
"What a thing to say," Song Jiang remonstrated. "It's affixed according to government law. Who would dare touch it?"
Wu Yong laughed. "I see what you mean. No problem. We won't ask you to remain in our mountain stronghold, then. But Chieftain Chao Gai hasn't seen you in so long. He's hoping to have a private chat. Stay with us for a while, and we'll send you on your way."
"Only you, Teacher, understand." Song Jiang raised the two guards to their feet and said, "Don't worry. I'd rather die than let them harm you."
"We owe you our lives, sir Clerk," they cried.
The column left the main road and came to a thicket of reeds along the bank. Boats were already waiting. They crossed over to the road on the other side and got into sedan-chairs. At Unity Pavilion they rested, and messengers were dispatched to ask the various lieutenants to assemble. Then all continued up the mountain to the Fraternity Hall. There, Chao Gai expressed his thanks to Song Jiang.
"Ever since you saved us at Yuncheng and we came here, there hasn't been a day that we haven't remembered your great kindness. What's more, you brought us several heroes to grace our humble lair. We don't know how to express our gratitude."
"After leaving here, I killed a lecherous wench and wandered about for a year and a half. I intended to come back and see you, brother, but I ran into Shi Yong in a village inn. He had a letter from home, saying that my father had died. Actually, my father was afraid I'd join your band of gallant men, and was using this method to get me to return. Although I had to face trial, I was protected by officials high and low, and I wasn't hurt much. They exiled me to Jiangzhou, a good place. Since you summoned me, I had to come. Now we have met. But there's a time limit on my journey and I don't dare overstay. I must bid you farewell."
"What's the hurry? Please sit a while, at least."
The two took their seats in the center of the hall. Song Jiang told the two guards to sit behind his chair and not separate from him by an inch.
Chao Gai ordered his chieftains to pay their respects to Song Jiang and seat themselves in two rows. Lieutenants poured the wine. First Chao Gai drank to Song Jiang, followed by Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng and Bai Sheng. After a few rounds, Song Jiang rose to his feet.
"Your affection touches me, brothers. I'm a criminal, a prisoner. I dare not remain. I must leave you, now."
"You mustn't be annoyed with us, brother," said Chao Gai. "Since you don't want us to create trouble for the two guards, why not give them some money and send them back. They can say the Liangshan Marsh men took you by force. It probably won't be considered their fault."
"I won't hear of it. You're not honoring me, you're harming me. I haven't been filial to my old father at home for a single day. How can I go against his instructions and get him into trouble? Before, I wanted to join you, but Heaven ordained that Shi Yong should meet me in that village inn and cause me to go home. My father told me why he preferred that I should face trial. When I was ordered into exile, he exhorted me to shun personal happiness if it would hurt the family and bring distress to his declining years. He put it to me very plainly: 'Don't take the easy way. That would go against Heaven's principles and your father's teachings.' What's the point of my life if I become disloyal and unfilial? If you won't permit me to go down the mountain, I prefer to die at your hands!"
His tears streaming like rain, Song Jiang threw himself on his knees. Chao Gai, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng raised him.
"Since you're determined to go to Jiangzhou, brother," they said, "relax and spend the day with us. We'll see you down the mountain tomorrow morning."
After much persuasion he agreed to drink with them. But he refused to have his cangue removed, and insisted that the guards remain with him all the time.
He spent the night, but rose early the next morning and announced that he was leaving.
"Hear me, brother," said Wu Yong. "The superintendent of the two prisons in Jiangzhou is my very good friend. His name is Dai Zong, and he's called Superintendent Dai. Because he knows some Taoist magic and can walk eight hundred *li* in a day, everyone refers to him as 'the Marvellous Traveller.' He's extremely chivalrous and generous. Last night I wrote a letter of introduction for you. You two can become acquainted. If you need any help, send word to us here."
The chieftains couldn't convince Song Jiang to stay, so they gave him a farewell banquet and gifts of silver and gold. They also presented the guards with twenty ounces of silver. With a man carrying Song Jiang's pack, all escorted him down the mountain. There, each took his leave. Wu Yong and Hua Rong accompanied him across the lake and twenty *li* along the road. Then, they too returned to the mountain stronghold.
Song Jiang and the guards pushed on towards Jiangzhou. The guards had observed what a large force there was on the mountain, and how respectful the chieftains were to Song Jiang. Moreover, they had received the brigand leaders' silver. And so they were very solicitous to Song Jiang during the journey.
They marched more than half a month and came to a place where they could see a tall mountain ahead. "Good," said the guards. "Jieyang Ridge. When we've crossed that we'll be at the Xunyang River. From there we go by water to Jiangzhou. It's not far."
"It's going to be a hot day," said Song Jiang. "Let's cross the ridge while it's still early and find a place to rest."
"A good idea," said the guards.
The three men hurried forward. They climbed for some time and traversed the crest. On the slope below they could see an inn backed against a cliff, with a strangely shaped tree at the door. Before and behind the building were thatched huts. A wine pennant hanging in the shade of the tree gladdened Song Jiang's heart.
"We're hungry and thirsty and there's an inn that sells wine," he said. "Let's have a few bowls before going on."
Soon they entered the inn. The guards eased themselves of the luggage and leaned their official staves against the wall. Song Jiang had them sit at the head of the table while he himself sat at the foot. An hour passed and no one appeared.
"Host, where are you?" Song Jiang called.
"Coming, coming." From an adjoining room a big fellow emerged. He had red bristly whiskers and bloodshot tiger eyes. A torn bandanna bound his head, bare arms protruded from a sleeveless vest, a cloth apron encircled his waist. He greeted the three respectfully.
"How much wine will you have, sirs?"
"We've been walking and we're hungry," said Song Jiang. "What kind of meat have you?"
"Only cooked beef and some cloudy white wine."
"Fine. Bring us two catties of sliced beef and a measure of wine."
"Forgive me, sir, but here on the ridge we always collect in advance."
"So you want your money first. I don't mind. Just a moment while I get you some silver."
The host watched stealthily while Song Jiang opened his pack and took out some silver coins. He could see the pack was heavy and obviously contained things worth taking. Pleased, he accepted the coins, went inside, drew a bucket of wine and sliced a platter of beef. He came out, placed three large bowls and three pairs of chopsticks on the table and poured the wine. As the travellers ate, they chatted.
"There are many evil men around, these days," one of them remarked. "It's said they've done in countless good fellows. They drug their wine and meat and, when their victims go down, steal their valuables and put their flesh into dumplings. It's incredible. How can such things happen?"
The host laughed. "You're the ones who've said it. Don't eat, then. My meat and wine are drugged."
Song Jiang smiled. "Big brother has heard us talking about drugs and he's teasing us."
"Brother," said the guards, "we'd like a bowl of heated wine."
"Right. I'll warm it up for you," said the host. He heated the wine and poured out three bowls.
The travellers were hungry and thirsty and the meat and wine were before them. Why shouldn't they tuck in? Each man consumed a bowl. The eyes of the guards began to bulge, and they drooled from the corners of their mouths. Staring at each other, they toppled over backwards.
Song Jiang jumped up. "How can you be so drunk on only one bowl of wine?" He went to raise them to their feet, but suddenly he too felt dizzy and his eyes swam. He fell heavily to the floor.
The three stared at one another, paralyzed. They were unable to move.
"How lucky," said the host. "I haven't had a speck of business in days, and now Heaven sends me these three pieces of merchandise."
He dragged Song Jiang to the butchering hut beside the cliff and placed him on the skinning bench. Next, he hauled over the other two. Then he returned to the inn and carried Song Jiang's pack and luggage into the rear room and opened them up. They were filled with silver and gold.
"In all the years I've been running this inn I've never seen a prisoner like him. Where did he get so much money? It's a gift from the sky!"
He rewrapped the bundles and went outside to watch for the return of his helpers so that he could start butchering.
He stood by the door for a while, but there was no sign of them. Further down the slope he saw three men climbing rapidly towards him. Recognizing one of them, he hurried forward. "Where to, brother?" he hailed in greeting. A big fellow replied: "We're looking for a man. He should be coming this way by now. I've been waiting for him every day at the foot of the mountain, but he hasn't shown up. I can't imagine what's delaying him."
"Who is he?"
"A remarkable and chivalrous person."
"And who would that be?"
"The clerk of Yuncheng County in the prefecture of Jizhou, Song Jiang. Surely, you've heard of him?"
"Not Song Jiang of Shandong Province, famed in the gallant fraternity as the Timely Rain?"
"None other."
"Why would he be coming here?"
"I don't know. The other day I met a friend from Jizhou and he said: 'Song Jiang, the clerk of Yuncheng County, has got into some kind of trouble in Jizhou and has been exiled to the prison in Jiangzhou.' He's got to pass this way. There isn't any other road. I often thought of going to Yuncheng to meet him. Now, he's coming through here. Why shouldn't I take this chance to become acquainted? I've been waiting at the foot of the mountain for four or five days, but no prisoner has appeared. Today I've come for a stroll up the ridge with these two brothers. I thought we'd have a bowl of wine here and see how you are. What's business like these days?"
"Frankly, it's been practically dead the past few months. Today, thank Heaven and Earth, I've caught three pieces of merchandise, and they've got some stuff on them."
"Who are they?" the big fellow asked quickly.
"Two are guards and the third is a prisoner."
"Is the prisoner a dark, short, chunky man?" the big fellow queried in alarm.
"It's true he is not very tall, and he's rather dark complected."
"You haven't gone to work on him yet?" the big fellow asked hastily.

"I dragged him into the shed only a short while ago. I can't start till my helpers get back."
"Let me take a look at him, first."
The four men entered the butchering shed beside the cliff. Song Jiang and the two guards were draped over the skinning bench, lying with their heads touching the ground. The big fellow didn't know Song Jiang. He examined the tattoo on his cheek, but it wasn't clear. The big fellow didn't know what to do. Suddenly he had an idea.
"Get the guards' pack and we can read his documents."
"The very thing," said the host. They went into the house, obtained the guards' bundle and opened it up. In it were a large bar of silver, several silver coins and a document case. The contents of the latter were carefully examined.
"A lucky thing," the four men exclaimed.
"Heaven sent me up this ridge, today. If you'd set to work a little earlier you'd have taken my brother's life," the big fellow cried. "Give him something quickly to bring him out of it."
The host hastily prepared a herbal mixture. Then he and the big fellow returned to the butcher shed, removed Song Jiang's cangue, lifted him up and poured the concoction down his throat.
The four then carried Song Jiang to the front part of the inn reserved for guests. With the big fellow holding him, he slowly revived and opened his eyes. He didn't recognize any of the men standing before him. The big fellow asked his two friends to support Song Jiang, and he dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
"Who are you?" Song Jiang asked. "I must be dreaming." The host also kowtowed.
"What is this place?" queried Song Jiang. "May I ask your names, sirs?"
"My name is Li Jun," the big fellow said, "from Luzhou. I earn my living as a helmsman on Yangzi River ships. Because I'm a good swimmer I'm known as the Turbulent River Dragon. Our host here is a native of Jieyang Ridge. He's a smuggler. His name is LiLi, but everyone calls him Hell's Summoner. These two are from the banks of the Xunyang. They're here to sell smuggled salt. That's their specialty. Right now, they're living with me. They're brothers, and swim and handle boats well on the big Yangzi. Tong Wei is called the Dragon from the Cave. Tong Meng is called the River Churning Clam."
Each of the brothers kowtowed four times. "But I was knocked out by drugs," said Song Jiang. "How did you know my name?"
"A friend of mine who has just been Jizhou on business told me about you," Li Jun replied. "He said you were being sent to the prison in Jiangzhou. I'd often thought of going to your county to pay my respects, but I never was fortunate enough to have the chance. When I heard you were going to Jiangzhou I knew you would have to pass here. I've been waiting for you at the foot of the mountain for six or seven days, but you didn't show up. Today, Heaven happened to send me and these two brothers up the ridge. We stopped in for some wine and got to talking with LiLi. I was startled by his story and hurried to the butchering shed. We hadn't met before, but I suddenly thought of your documents, and that's how I knew it was you, brother. May I have the temerity to ask why the clerk of Yuncheng County is being sent to Jiangzhou prison?"
Song Jiang told what had happened from the time he killed Yan Poxi to when he was given the letter by Shi Yong in the village inn, returned home, stood trial and was exiled to Jiangzhou. His four listeners sighed.
"Why not stay here?" asked LiLi the host. "Why go to prison and suffer hardships?"
"The men on Mount Liangshan begged me to remain with them, but I refused because I was afraid to implicate my father," Song Jiang explained. "How can I stay with you?"
"Our brother is a man of principle," Li Jun said to the host. "He won't do anything wrong. Now you'd better revive those guards."
By then LiLi's helpers had returned, and he ordered them to carry the guards into the section for guests. The antidote was administered and the drugged escorts awakened. They gazed at each other blearily.
"We must have been tired from the walk to have got drunk so easily."
The others all laughed.
That evening LiLi gave a feast and they spent the night at the inn. The next day he wined and dined them again, and returned the luggage to Song Jiang and the guards. Li Jun and the Tong brothers accompanied the travellers down the mountain. They stopped to rest at Li Jun's house, where he served food and wine. He entertained Song Jiang solicitously, and they pledged each other as blood brothers.
After several days Song Jiang was determined to continue his journey, in spite of Li Jun's urgings to stay. Li Jun gave the escorts some silver, and Song Jiang again put on his cangue, gathered his luggage and bid farewell to Li Jun, Tong Wei and Tong Meng. Leaving Jieyang Ridge, he and the guards proceeded towards Jiangzhou.
They marched for some time. Early in the afternoon they came to a bustling market town. Attracted by a crowd, Song Jiang pushed his way through and saw that they were watching a wandering medicine seller putting on a display with weapons. Song Jiang and the guards halted and joined the audience. The man first showed his skill with a lance. Then, he set that down and gave a demonstration of unarmed combat.
"Excellent," Song Jiang exclaimed.
The man picked up a tray and addressed the crowd. "I've come to your honorable town from afar to ply my trade," he said. "There's nothing starling about my talent. I rely entirely on your good will. Though I've been praised in distant places, you can see that I'm a mere juggler. I'm selling plasters for injured muscles and bones. If you've no need for them, bestow a few silver coins or coppers, so that my journey here will not have been in vain."
He passed the tray around, but no one gave him any money. "Gentlemen, be generous," he pleaded. Again he passed the tray. His audience only stared. They donated not a copper.
Song Jiang could see that the man was upset. He told the guards to give him five ounces of silver. "Drill Instructor," he said, "I'm only a criminal and can't offer anything worthwhile. But take these five bits of silver as token of my esteem. Please don't scorn them as too few."
With the coins in his hand the man said: "In all of famous Jieyang Town there is not one gallant able to recognize my abilities. Only this gentleman, himself under penalty of the law, passing by, presents me with five pieces of silver. How true the verse:

*People once laughed at Zheng Yuanbe*
*For dallying in the Houses of Joy.*
*But wealth is no mark of nobility,*
*Nor do clothes in abundance prove chivalry.*

These five pieces of silver are worth more to me than fifty. I bow to you, sir. Please tell me your name, that I may spread it everywhere."
"A few paltry coins don't amount to anything, Drill Instructor. There's no need to thank me."
While they were talking, a big fellow parted the crowd and charged towards them. "You varlet," he shouted. "Who's this knave of a prisoner who dares to sully my prestige in Jieyang Town!" Raising both fists, he rushed at Song Jiang. Because of this, a fight ensued, and as a result, dragons churned waves in the Xunyang River, fierce tigers climbed heights in Mount Liang Marsh.

What happened next was that Squire Song set a ladder against the wall and climbed up to see what was going on. A forest of torches revealed a hundred men or more, led by the two new police sergeants from district headquarters. These sergeants were two brothers called Zhao Neng and Zhao De.
The two of them now said: "Squire Song, if you've any sense you'll hand over your son, Song Jiang. We'll take care of him. If you try to prevent his coming to trial, we'll take the lot of you in, yourself included."
"And when is he supposed to have come back?" the Squire asked.
"Quit fooling around!" said Zhao Neng. "There's witnesses saw him come here from old Zhang's, where he'd been drinking. He was followed here. You can't possibly deny it."
Song Jiang, standing beside the ladder, said: "There's no point in arguing with him, father. I'll give myself up, there's no reason not to. I've got friends in the district court, and the provincial court as well. Besides, if there's been an amnesty the sentence will have to be reduced. There's nothing to be gained by talking to these blighters. The Zhaos were always a bad lot. Now these two have managed to wangle themselves a promotion. They've never had any kind feelings towards me. It's a waste of time trying to talk them round."
"But it's all my fault," the Squire wailed.
"Don't worry, father," said Song Jiang. "Maybe it's not such a bad thing if my case comes to trial. Suppose I had gone off to seek refuge among the rivers and lakes, I'd certainly have met up with a bunch of cutthroats and arsonists. Then if I'd been captured, how would I have been able to look you in the eye? As it is, if I'm banished to another province I don't suppose it's forever, one day I shall return. Eventually I shall be there to look after you, father, when you die."
"All right then," the Squire said. "And I shall give a little something to everyone to make sure you get a good place of exile."
So Song Jiang now climbed the ladder and called out: "Stop making such a racket. There's been an amnesty and my crime no longer calls for the death penalty, so wouldn't you two sergeants like to step inside and take a cup of wine or two first? We'll go to the court afterwards."
"Don't try anything on," growled Zhao Neng. "You're not trying to trick us, are you?"
"Do you think I'd want to get my father and brother into trouble?" said Song Jiang. "You're perfectly safe to come in."
Song Jiang descended the ladder and opened the manor gates. He invited the sergeants to sit in the main hall and that night chickens and geese were killed and the wine flowed. The troops and hangers-on were all entertained as well and some silver and other gifts were found for them. The sergeants each received silver ingots amounting to twenty ounces, "for their pains." Indeed this was a case of:

A policeman smells money: he gives you a smile.
*No money? Then count on a look full of bile.*
*That's why they speak of money's good looks,*
And say money can laugh at the statute books.

The two sergeants stayed the night at Song Jiang's. Next morning shortly after dawn, they were all ready and waiting outside the courtroom. It had just become light when the magistrate opened the session. The two sergeants brought in the prisoner, Song Jiang. The magistrate, Shi Wenbin, expressed his satisfaction and invited Song Jiang to make a statement. Song Jiang took the brush and wrote as follows:
*Unfortunately last year in the autumn having secured the services of Yan Poxi as concubine and finding her to be unsuitable an altercation arose and I accidentally killed her, in a moment of drunkenness. Having previously fled from justice, I now submit myself to the judgment of this court and declare myself willing to accept any punishment without question.*
Having read this deposition, the magistrate ordered Song Jiang to be remanded in custody.
Now when they heard Song Jiang had been captured, everyone in the town was sorry for him and went to the government offices to plead for leniency, urging his normal good qualities. The magistrate himself, in his heart, was very much inclined to pardon him. He accepted Song Jiang's deposition and ordered him to be detained but without cangue or fetters. Squire Song bought the goodwill of all and sundry with money and gifts. By this time Mrs. Yan had been dead for six months, so there was no plaintiff. And Third Brother Zhang, the loss of his mistress being already past history, did not see any point in making himself an enemy. The findings were drawn up and after the due sixty days handed over to the court in Jizhou. The governor having reviewed the case and seeing that it fell within the amnesty's terms for clemency ordered twenty strokes of the cane and banishment to Jiangzhou prison camp. The provincial officials all knew Song Jiang and also had received gifts. He was supposed to be beaten before being exiled, but as there was no plaintiff or witness against him everyone was able to help him out and make sure he was not hurt. The court imposed the cangue and an iron seal and two guards were assigned to escort him. No doubt they were called Zhang Something-or-Other and Li Somebody-Else.
When the two policemen bearing the order brought Song Jiang out in front of the courtroom, his father and brother were there waiting for him with wine for the two guards, and some silver which they presented to them. They made Song Jiang change his clothes. When he had tied his pack and put on hemp sandals, Squire Song took his son aside and said by way of encouragement: "Jiangzhou is a good place, rich in fish and rice. I spent good money to get you sent there. You'll be able to manage there very well. I'll send your brother to see you from time to time. And I hope there'll be other people passing that way who can take letters. But in order to get there you'll have to pass the Marshes of Mount Liang. If they come down from the mountain and try to seize you and get you to join them, please don't listen or you'll give people reason to call you disloyal and unfaithful. Try to bear this in mind always. Travel slowly. If heaven is kind, you'll soon come back and be reunited with your father and brother."
Song Jiang was in tears as he said goodbye to his father. His younger brother accompanied him on the first stage of his journey. Before they parted, Song Jiang said to his brother: "Don't grieve for me. The only thing that bothers me about this sentence is that I have to turn my back on hearth and home when father is getting on in years. Brother, please keep a constant watch on things at home, don't on my account come to Jiangzhou and leave father all alone with no one to look after him. I have many friends among the rivers and lakes fraternity who'd all be willing to help me, I'll always have somewhere to go for money if I need it. If heaven smiles on me I shall most certainly be back one day!"
His brother wept as he said goodbye and then returned home to look after their old father. We shall leave him there.
Song Jiang and the two guards proceeded on their way. Since they'd had money from him, and since he was generally accounted a good fellow, they were very helpful to him on the journey.
After one day's travelling they stopped at an inn, where they cooked themselves some food and Song Jiang bought wine for the others. Song Jiang said to them: "I'll be frank with you. The way we are taking at the moment lies quite close to the Marshes of Mount Liang. There are some brave men up there on the mountain who, if they hear my name, are liable to come down and seize me. I'm afraid they might rough you up a bit. Tomorrow let's get up a bit earlier and choose a smaller road — even if we have to walk a bit further it will be worth it."
"If you hadn't said anything we wouldn't have known," they said gratefully. "We know some roundabout ways, you can be sure we won't run into them."
This is what they agreed in the evening, and next morning they rose and breakfasted at dawn. When they left the inn they chose an obscure route. But when they'd gone about ten miles, a group of men appeared on the hillside in front of them. Song Jiang cursed his luck. Who should it be but Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil, with fifty men, bent on killing his guards? Zhang and Li were terrified. They knelt cowering on the path, trying to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible.
Song Jiang called out: "Hold, brother, who do you want to kill?"
"Those two cowards, of course. What do you expect?" Liu Tang replied.
"Don't dirty your hands, give the sword to me and let me do it!"
The two unfortunates bewailed their fate. "This time we're really in for it!" they exclaimed.
"But why do you want to kill these two guards?" Song Jiang asked as he took the sword.
"Our friends on the mountain sent out spies who heard about your arrest. We wanted to go and get you out of Yuncheng gaol, but then we heard you weren't there any longer and weren't too badly off. Later we heard you'd been banished to Jiangzhou, but we were afraid we might get the wrong road, so everyone was told to go in different directions to lie in wait for you and invite you up the mountain. Surely the best thing to do with these two is to kill them?"
"This is not something which will help me, you know. On the contrary, you are trying to ruin my reputation. If you're so determined to destroy me, you'd better take my life. I'd rather die." So saying, Song Jiang held the sword to his own throat.
The Red-Haired Devil hurriedly stopped him, saying: "Please, don't be so hasty!" and took the sword from him.
Song Jiang said: "If you have any feeling for me, let me go to Jiangzhou prison camp and wait till I have served out my sentence. Then when I return I will come and see you."
The Red-Haired Devil said: "But I dare not listen to that. The military commander, 'Professor' Wu Yong, and Colonel Hua are waiting to greet you up on the main road. Please allow me to invite you to discuss matters with them."
Song Jiang said: "But that's exactly what I intended. I want to discuss it all with you."
Soldiers were sent on to report and in no time at all the Professor and Colonel Hua were seen galloping towards them, followed by a dozen riders. They dismounted, courtesies were exchanged, and then Colonel Hua said: "Why have they not removed the cangue?"
"Dear brother," Song Jiang said, "what are you saying? This is a penalty imposed by our national law, how can you dare to touch it?"
"I understand your meaning," said the Professor pleasantly. "It's quite all right, we won't make any attempt to keep you on the mountain. But Leader Chao Gai has not seen you for such a long time, he really would like to have a heart-to-heart talk with you. He invites you to spend just a little time on the mountain. After that we'll send you on your way."
"Professor, you're the only one who understands me," said Song Jiang. After helping up the two guards, he said: "I don't want them to have any cause for fear. Even if I were to die, please do not harm them."
The two guards said: "We owe you our lives, Registrar."
The whole body of men now left the road and went to an area of reedbeds beside the water. Already there was a boat there waiting. When they arrived at the main route up to the stronghold, mountain sedans were summoned to carry them. They paused for a rest at the Golden Pavilion. Men were sent to every part of the mountain to summon the leaders to a meeting and they all gathered in the assembly hall. Chao Gai spoke: "Ever since that time you saved our lives in Yuncheng, dear brother, and we found sanctuary here, not a day has passed without my recalling our indebtedness to you. If you will allow me now to invite you to honour our little place with your presence, my gratitude will know no bounds."
Song Jiang replied: "Since we parted and I killed that trollop and fled to the rivers and lakes a year and a half has passed. It was my intention to pay you a visit here on the mountain, only I happened to run into Shi Yong at a country inn and he gave me a letter from home which said my father had passed away. Actually it was all because my father feared I might join you and enter the band — that's why he sent me the letter to get me to go home. Although I have been sentenced, I have received great kindness from all the authorities and have got off very lightly. Now I'm banished to Jiangzhou, which is a pretty good place. I come here in obedience to your summons, which I would not dream of refusing. But now that I have seen you I cannot stay long, so let us part immediately."
"Why such a hurry?" Chao Gai said. "Please stay a little longer."
They both sat down together. Song Jiang told his guards to sit behind him and not leave his sight.
Chao Gai had the various leaders come and pay their respects to Song Jiang. They sat in two rows, while the lesser chiefs poured for them. Chao Gai took the cup first and then passed it to all in turn, from the military commanders, "Professor" Wu and Taoist Gongsun Sheng down to the Daytime Rat. After only a few rounds Song Jiang rose to his feet and said: "Dear friends, much as I appreciate your kindness to me, I am a sentenced criminal and I must not tarry here. It is time for me to say goodbye."
"Your attitude is really very strange," said Chao Gai. "I know you don't want any harm to come to the two guards, but why not just give them some money and send them away? They can say they were attacked by us here on Mount Liang, no one can reasonably punish them for that."

"Don't talk like that!" Song Jiang said. "That's not the way to help me out. Indeed it's the way to ruin me. I've an old father at home, I must always remember that. I have never afforded him all the honour he deserves. How can I violate his commands, how can I consent to sully his name? Previously I got carried away and I really was on the point of joining you. But heaven ordained that I should run into Shi Yong at that country inn and thus I was led to go home. My father explained why he thought it better for me to receive my sentence and suffer exile, he was most insistent on it. Just before I left he again urged me not to sacrifice the family honour to my own convenience, never to disgrace the family name, to spare my father such shame and horror. For this reason he told me and my brother that if we had no regard for his wishes we would be going against heaven's will; if we broke his commands we would show ourselves to be unfilial and dishonourable men, and in that case for what purpose had we lived? So if you are not willing now to let me leave, I would prefer to receive death at your hands." When he finished speaking, the tears flooded down and he flung himself on the ground.

Chao Gai, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun Sheng together raised him up and said: "If you are so determined to go to Jiangzhou, then be at ease for this one day and tomorrow morning we will escort you down the mountain."

Over and over again they begged him to stay and drink with them just for one day. They wanted the cangue to be removed but he would have none of it. He insisted also on remaining with his two guards.

Song Jiang did stay that night, but he was up early next morning, impatient to be off. The Professor said: "I want to tell you something. I have a dear friend who works as a warder at the Jiangzhou prison camp. He is Dai Zong, generally known as Superintendent Dai. He has a certain magic power: he can travel three hundred miles in a day, which is why people call him the Magic Messenger. He's entirely honourable and generous. Last night I wrote this letter for you to take. When you're there you can get to know him. Then if you have any problem he can let us know."

Since they could not hold onto Song Jiang, the leaders gave him a farewell feast. A tray of gold and silver was presented to him and the guards also got twenty taels. Then, carrying Song Jiang's luggage for him, they escorted him down the mountain before one by one taking their leave of him. The Professor and Colonel Hua accompanied him further, another six or seven miles down the road. Then they too went back to the mountain.

So Song Jiang with his escort took the road to Jiangzhou. The two guards, having seen that enormous army on the mountain and observed how they all bowed down before Song Jiang, and having just been given all that money, took the greatest possible care of him during the journey. They had been travelling something more than a fortnight when they came to a spot where a steep hill faced them. The guards said: "Good! Once we're past this hill it'll be the river, and after that the route to Jiangzhou is all by water. Not far to go at all."

Song Jiang said: "The weather is oppressive. Let's get this hill over with first and then look for somewhere to stay."

"Right you are," they said. They pressed on up the hill. It took them half a day's march but when they reached the top they were in sight of an inn on the other side, nestling against the hillside, with a gnarled old tree beside the door and surrounded by thatched huts. When they reached that tree's shade the inn sign was plain to see. It was a sight that brought great relief to Song Jiang's heart and he said to the guards: "We're truly hungry and thirsty. It turns out there's an inn here, so let's get some wine before we go on."

They went in. The two policemen put down their baggage and leant their staves against the wall. Song Jiang left them the place of honour and sat down at the bottom of the table. They waited a long time and no one came out, so Song Jiang shouted: "Can't you see there are customers?"

"Coming! Coming!" came a shout from inside and a big fellow emerged from a side-room. Here's how he looked:

Red curly beard in a horrible tangle,
*Staring red eyes like a terrifying tiger,*
*With exactly the look of a fiend from the underworld,*
It's no wonder they dubbed him Hell's Executioner.

This man who came out was wearing a torn head-cloth, a cotton vest which left his arms bare and a piece of linen wrapped about his waist. He looked at Song Jiang's party and barked out a salute. "How much wine would you like, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We've been travelling and we're hungry," Song Jiang said. "Have you any meat in the house?"

"All we've got is boiled beef and rough country wine," the man replied.

"That'll do fine. Bring us two catties of beef and a measure of wine, to begin with."

"Don't take it amiss, sirs, but here in the mountains what we say is 'pay first before you drink'."

"Pay first before you drink," Song Jiang repeated. "That's all right by me. Just wait while I find you the money." He opened his bundle and took out some change. The man standing on one side watched surreptitiously. Seeing the pack so deep and heavy, so full of substance, he secretly exulted. He took Song Jiang's money and went inside to fill a jug of wine and cut the meat. He brought out the meat and put down three bowls and three pairs of chopsticks. He then poured the wine.

The three men talked as they ate. "Recently among the rivers and lakes there are said to be some nasty customers around. Many a good man has fallen foul of them. Maybe the wine or food is drugged and knocks them out. Then they're cut up and the flesh is used for pie fillings. But it's hard to believe. How could such things be true?"

The innkeeper laughed sardonically. "If that's what you think, you'd better not eat or drink. Of course my stuff is all laced with drugs!"

Song Jiang laughed. "Our friend here heard what we were saying, so he's having a joke with us!"

"Let's have some warm wine," the guards said.

"I'll go and warm it then, if that's what you want," the innkeeper said.

When he returned he poured three bowls of warm wine. Hungry and thirsty as they were from the walking, how could they hold back when it was right in front of them? Each drank a bowl right off. Then suddenly the two guards' eyes were popping out of their heads, saliva began to dribble from the corners of their mouths. After swaying first this way, then that, they pitched over. Song Jiang jumped up, exclaiming: "How can you be so drunk with just one bowl?" He took a step forward to help them up, but then without warning his own head began to spin and his vision blurred, and he crashed to the floor. They stared at each other helplessly, unable to move hand or foot.

"Bloody hell!" the innkeeper said. "No business for days, but now heaven's sent me three nice pieces of stuff!" He dragged Song Jiang out first and got him into the work room under the cliff and onto the bench. Then he went back and got the other two. He returned for the packs and took them to the back. When he opened them and saw that they were full of money, he said: "I've been running this place for a good many years now, but I never came across a convict like this one. I wonder how a criminal like this comes to have so much loot? I guess he must have dropped down from heaven as my reward!" He tied the bundles again and went to the door to await the return of his assistants to help him with the cutting up.

He stood there at the door quite a while, but he didn't see a soul until three men appeared at the bottom of the hill and began to climb steadily towards him. He recognized them and greeted them hurriedly: "Where are you off to, then?" One of the three, a large man, said: "We've come up here to meet someone, we reckon he ought to have reached here by now. We've been looking out for him down there every day but we haven't seen him, he must have got held up somewhere."

"Who exactly is it you're expecting?"

"Someone pretty remarkable."

"But who is this remarkable person?"

"Prepare for a surprise then. It's the Yuncheng registrar, Song Jiang!"

"You don't mean the one who's known among the rivers and lakes as the Opportune Rain?"

"The very same."

"But what's he doing in these parts?"

"I don't exactly know myself. The other day a friend from Jizhou turned up and he said, 'For some reasons Registrar Song Jiang of Yuncheng has been tried in Jizhou and sentenced to exile in the Jiangzhou prison camp.' I worked it out that he's got to pass here, there's no other road. I often meant to go and see him in Yuncheng, but now he's coming here I don't want to miss such an opportunity to make his acquaintance, that's why I've been waiting down there for several days. Today these two friends and I thought we'd stroll up the mountain to buy a bowl of wine from you and have a little chat. How's business at the moment?"

"To tell the truth, the last few months there's scarcely been any business at all. Today, though, heaven smiled on me and I've got my hands on three nice pieces of stuff, and a bit of loot thrown in."

"What sort of people were they, these three?"

"Two policemen and a convict."

"You haven't started on them yet, have you?"

"I just took them into the workshop and I'm waiting for the lads to come back and help me with the cutting up."

"Would you let me have a look at them first?"

The four of them went into the operating room under the cliff. There on the work bench Song Jiang and the two guards were laid out with their heads hanging over the edge. The big stranger looked at Song Jiang carefully, but he didn't know him of course. Nor did the golden seals on his cheeks provide a clue. But after a moment's consideration he had an idea: "Get the policemen's packs. We can look at the official order. That should tell us something."

"Right!" The innkeeper went and got the packs from the back. When they opened them they found a great deal of silver inside. On top was the money they'd been given recently. They opened the document pouch and looked at the order. "Bloody hell!" they exclaimed.

"Heaven must have ordained it, that we should come up here today," the big man exclaimed. Think if you'd started work a little sooner! You came so close to a terrible accident that would have ended our brother's life!"

It was a case of:

When anger or revenge must strike you cannot run away.
*What chance will bring or fate ordain you cannot ever say.*
*You cannot wear out iron shoes, however hard you try,*
What comes will come without your help, no use to reason why.

"Quick, go and get the antidote," the big man urged. "You've got to revive our friend straight away."

The innkeeper was equally horrified. He hurriedly mixed the antidote and returned with the big man to the workshop. First they removed the cangue. Then, holding Song Jiang upright, they poured the mixture down his throat. After that the four of them carried him out into the front saloon. With the big man supporting him, Song Jiang gradually came round. He looked at all the people in front of him with a blank expression, failing to recognize any of them. The big man asked his two friends to take his place while he pressed his knuckles to his forehead and prostrated himself.

"But who are you?" Song Jiang asked. "Am I still dreaming?"

The innkeeper now prostrated himself also. Song Jiang acknowledged the courtesy and said: "Please get up, both of you. Where in fact am I? May I be so bold as to ask your names?"

"My name is Li Jun," the big man answered. "I'm from Luzhou. I work as a pilot on the Yangtze river. Being as I am a river expert, they call me the White-Water Dragon. The publican here is from these parts, from Jieyang Hill. He's a smuggler by trade, name of Li Li, but people also call him Hell's Executioner. The other two are from the banks of the river Yangtze, near here. They're salt smugglers and they're here now on business, they've been staying with me. They're also experienced at swimming and handling river boats. They're brothers; this one is Tong Wei, alias the Cave Dragon, and the other is Tong Meng, alias the River Rider."

The two brothers prostrated themselves before Song Jiang four times.

"I was unconscious until just now, how do you know my name?" said Song Jiang.

"I've got this friend," the White-Water Dragon began, "he's a businessman and he's just returned from Jizhou. He mentioned your name and said you'd been sentenced to exile in Jiangzhou prison camp. Well, so many times I'd thought of going to pay my respects to you in your home town, only my fate never permitted it. When I heard you were going to Jiangzhou and had to pass by here, I went and waited for you at the bottom of the hill. Five or six days I waited but I didn't see you. Today on a lucky impulse these two friends and I came up here to get ourselves a cup of wine. We fell into conversation with the Executioner and what he said gave me a start, I can tell you! We rushed into the workshop right away, but I didn't know you, see, so after giving it some pretty hard thought I suggested we take a look at the official order, and then we knew it was you. Do you mind if I ask you a question? I heard you were arrested in Yuncheng. But why have you been banished to Jiangzhou?"

Song Jiang duly gave them a full account of the killing of Yan Poxi, and everything up to the time Shi Yong gave him the letter at the inn and he went home and was sentenced and banished to Jiangzhou. The four men kept sighing in sympathy.

"Why don't you stay here instead of going off to suffer hardship in Jiangzhou prison?" the Executioner asked.

"The people on Mount Liang kept on begging me to stay there, but I wouldn't because I didn't want to disgrace my old father," Song Jiang said. "So how can you think I would stay here?"

The White-Water Dragon said to the Executioner: "You see? A man of honour can't be made to bend the rules. You'd better go and revive those guards."

The Executioner called his assistants, who had returned by now, and they carried the two guards out into the front room and administered the antidote. When they came round, they stared at each other and said: "It must have been weariness from all that travelling. How else could we have got drunk so quickly?" Everyone laughed.

That evening the Executioner provided wine for everyone and they stayed at his house. Next day there was more wine and food, and Song Jiang and the guards were given back their baggage. Having said goodbye, Song Jiang, the White-Water Dragon and the Tong brothers went down the hill together as far as the White-Water Dragon's house, where they stayed. Wine and food were brought out and they were entertained royally. The White-Water Dragon treated Song Jiang like a brother and begged him to stay a few days longer. But Song Jiang was determined to go. When he saw it was impossible to persuade him, the White-Water Dragon presented the guards with silver. Song Jiang was fitted with the cangue again, the bags were packed and they said goodbye to the White-Water Dragon and his two friends. Turning their backs on Jieyang Hill they took the road for Jiangzhou.

The three had marched without pause for the first part of the day when around noon they came to a place full of people and noise, a bustling market town. When they reached the centre, they found a crowd gathered round in a circle to watch something. Song Jiang pushed through the crowd to get closer to whatever was going on and found it was a practitioner of martial arts and peddler of patent medicine. They stood and watched him as he performed with the staff. After a while the artist laid aside his staff and gave a demonstration with his fists. Song Jiang applauded: "Great staff play, and great boxing!" The man took up a plate and said: "I've come a long way to bring my art to you good people. My skill is nothing special, of course, but I trust in your bounty. True, I have received praise in many quarters, but to your discerning eyes I probably seem a common mountebank. Still, if you want an efficacious ointment, I have some here. If you've no need of ointments, then I would ask you to donate a few ounces of silver or a copper coin or two, just so my visit will not have been altogether in vain."

He went among the crowd with the plate, but not one cent did he receive. "Good sirs," he began again, "pardon me, I pray, if I trouble your generosity!" He passed round again with the plate, but the people just stared blankly, not one coin did they give him.

Song Jiang, seeing his embarrassment when he had passed the plate twice to absolutely no effect, told his guards to take out five taels of silver. To the performer, he said: "Master, I'm just a convict, I haven't got much to give you. These five taels of silver are just a token of my good will, please do not despise them."

The man took the silver and after weighing it in his hand pronounced: "In the whole of Jieyang City, it seems, a great place like this, there's not a single connoisseur who can show his appreciation. Only this kind gentleman, quite contrary to the nature of things since he himself is subject to a judicial sentence and merely in transit here, presents me with five taels of good silver. It puts me in mind of the verse:

They said that the poet had got it all wrong
*Who went to the brothel to peddle a song.*
*But many rich men with their riches won't part;*
It isn't fine clothes that show a big heart!

These five taels are truly equal to fifty from someone else. I humbly bow down to you, sir, and beg to inquire your name, that I may proclaim it wherever I go."

Song Jiang replied: "Master, even if this paltry sum were worth so much, there wouldn't be any need to thank me."

But while they were speaking, a big stranger thrust his way through the crowd, bellowing: "Who the bloody hell is this? Where've you come from and where are you bloody going? What d'you mean by coming here and trying to ruin my reputation in Jieyang?" Then up went his fists and he took a swing at Song Jiang.

If this fight had not taken place, things might well have been different. We might never have seen how:

In the river Yangtze dragons churn the waves;
In the Marshes of Mount Liang, tigers rush the slopes.

OLD SONG put a ladder against the wall, and looking over saw about a hundred men in the light of torches. In front of them were the two Inspectors who had been recently appointed at Yuncheng County. They were brothers, called Zhao Neng and Zhao De, and they called out, "Old Song! You will know our business, and we hope that you will surrender your son Song Jiang. We will treat him well. If he does not surrender we shall have to arrest you, his father."

"When did Song Jiang return?" asked Old Song.

"Do not talk nonsense," said Inspector Zhao Neng. "A man saw him this afternoon at Zhang's wine shop, and followed him here. You need not try to hide him."

Song Jiang was standing at the foot of the ladder, and said, "Father, do not talk with them any further. I will surrender as I have many friends at the *yamen*, and I have already been pardoned. Why plead with these fellows? They are both wellknown to be rascals. They have suddenly been made Inspectors, but what do they know about reason. There is no good feeling between them and me, so it is a waste of time to talk with them."

"I have brought you trouble," said Old Song to his son.

"Do not let that upset you. If they go into my case it cannot do any harm. If I escape now I should be arrested eventually, and should have no further chance of seeing you. If I am now arrested, and even banished to some other district I shall at least eventually return, and meet you again. I should be able to be with you at your last moments."

"As you look upon it like this," said Old Song, "I will myself bribe the officials concerned, and see that you have every advantage."

Song Jiang now mounted the ladder, and called out, "Do not make such a noise. My crime has been pardoned so that I cannot be executed. Will you two Inspectors come inside our humble farmhouse, and drink wine with me? Tomorrow I will go with you to the *yamen*."

"You need not attempt to entice us into your trap," said inspector Zhao Neng.

"Why should I implicate my father and brother by such a trick? You can come inside without any suspicion," said Song Jiang. He then descended the ladder, opened the farmyard gate, and invited the two Inspectors indoors. They were entertained to wine, chicken, and goose. The soldiers were provided with food, and also money. Old Song presented the two Inspectors with twenty taels of silver. That night they all slept at the farmhouse. At dawn the following day the party started out for the town. When they reached the *yamen* it was broad daylight, and the magistrate occupied the bench. He asked Song Jiang to state his case, and listened to the following statement. "I did a great wrong to take Yan Poxi as my concubine, and once we quarreled after taking too much wine, and I happened to kill her quite unintentionally. I escaped but have now surrendered for justice, and will confess the crime as stated."

The magistrate ordered that the prisoner be detained in the jail. All the *yamen* employees were sorry to see Song Jiang as a prisoner. Many of them spoke to the magistrate of the good things Song Jiang had done in the past, and begged him to show mercy to the prisoner. The magistrate was inclined to be lenient, and he gave orders that the prisoner should have no cangue or be chained up in the prison. Old Song bribed all the officials concerned. Madame Yan had died about six months ago so that there was now no one to press the accusation of murder. As Yan Poxi was also dead her old lover Zhang Wenyuan had now no enmity against Song Jiang. So after sixty days the case was referred to Jizhou Prefecture for a sentence. The Prefect considered the case as reported by dispatch, and in view of the Emperor's decree he passed a light sentence. Song Jiang was to receive twenty blows with a bamboo, be branded, and transferred to a prison at Jiangzhou. But as the officials at Jizhou had all been bribed, they reported that the sentence had been carried out although nothing was done to Song Jiang.

But he was given a small cangue, and sent to Jiangzhou under the escort of two men—Zhang Qian, and Li Wan. Old Song and his son Song Qing were waiting outside the *yamen* for the escort, and invited them to take a final meal at an inn there. Money was presented to the escort, and Song Jiang was given new clothes, new hempen shoes, and a bundle of useful articles. Old Song took Song Jiang to one side and there said to him, "I know that at Jiangzhou there is plenty of rice and fish, and I will bribe the officials there to supply you with food. I shall send your brother there with money, and he will see you often. On your way you will pass close to Liangshan Marsh, but if the brigands there capture you I hope that you will not join them as people would abuse your name and say that you were both disloyal and unfilial. This point you must not forget. Make no haste on the way. Heaven will watch over you, and you will soon return home, and be reunited to your father and younger brother."

Song Jiang was much affected and burst into tears and thus took leave of his father. Song Qing accompanied him for the first stage of the road. When they separated at last Song Jiang said to his brother, "I am now a prisoner, and while I am away I want you to look after our father, and never mind coming to Jiangzhou to see me. I know a great many bandits, and they will help me. I can easily get all the money I want. If Heaven takes pity, I shall return home some day."

When they took leave of each other Song Qing wept bitterly. He returned home, and looked after his father in accordance with Song Jiang's wish.

The escort and Song Jiang continued their journey and because Song Jiang had given them plenty of money, they treated him well. One evening when they were at an inn Song Jiang said, "I will not deceive you. We shall pass quite close to Liangshan Marsh, where there are many brave men, and when they hear that I am passing they will perhaps try to liberate me. So tomorrow it would be better for us to start early, and travel by small side roads even though they take us a little out of our way."

"Sir, if you do not tell us we should not know it. But we know the side roads, and shall not meet those men." They discussed their plans, and the next morning they got up about 4 A.M. After breakfast they set out, and went by a side road. They had traveled about ten *li* when they saw a company of men coming round a mountain just in front. Song Jiang said it meant trouble; as he recognized among them Liu Tang, the Red Haired Demon. The escort was afraid, and knelt down.

"Younger brother," said Song Jiang, "whom do you want to kill?"

"Elder brother," replied Liu Tang, "had we not better kill those two fellows at once?"

"You need not soil your hands in that way," said Song Jiang. "Give me your sword, and I will kill them myself."

Liu Tang handed him the sword, and Song Jiang then asked, 'Why do you wish to kill them?"

"I am acting according to the orders of our chief on the mountain who knew all about your case. We wanted to go to Yuncheng County and rescue you from prison, but we then heard that you were not in prison, and were being well treated. Afterwards we heard that you were to be escorted to Jiangzhou so we guarded all the roads so that we could take you to our mountain. Why not kill these two men?"

"This is the way you will disgrace me, as I shall thereby lose my reputation of loyalty. I would much rather die myself than suffer disgrace." So saying he took the sword to cut his own throat. Liu Tang sprang forward, and caught him by the arms saying, "Elder brother, do not be hasty. Let us discuss matters." He took the sword from Song Jiang who said, "Younger brother, if you respect me please let me go to the prison at Jiangzhou, and when I have served my sentence I will certainly visit you, and discuss matters with you."

"I cannot take the responsibility for such a course," said Liu Tang. "On the main road there are Wu Yong and Hua Rong whom I will ask to come here to decide this matter."

"I am quite determined whatever you do."

One of the brigands was dispatched, and in a short time Wu Yong and Hua Rong came galloping up. They both dismounted, and after the usual salutations Hua Rong asked, "Why has your cangue not been removed?"

"That is a legal procedure with prisoners. Who would dare to infringe the regulations?" asked Song Jiang.

Wu Yong laughed and said, "I understand your idea. It is easy for us to let you proceed on your way, but our chief Chao Gai has not met you for a long time, and he would like to have a confidential talk with you. So I request you to come with us up the mountain, and after the interview you can go your own way."

"You have grasped my idea," said Song Jiang. "In case however I die I hope that you will not punish my escort. I want them to be at ease."

"Sir, we depend on you saving our lives," said the two men.

They all then set out, and soon came to the lake where they found a boat waiting for them. They crossed the lake, and found sedan chairs waiting and were carried up the mountain. Men were sent in all directions to summon all the leaders to the assembly hall for a conference. When they had assembled Song Jiang was conducted to the hall where Chao Gai addressed him. "Formerly you saved our lives at Yuncheng County, and we escaped to this place, and we have been thinking of your generosity ever since. Since we arrived here many gallant heroes have joined us on your esteemed recommendation. This has added luster to our straw sheds, but we have had no opportunity of repaying your benevolence."

"Since I left you," said Song Jiang, "I killed a bad woman, and escaped to the wilds where I have been wandering for about six months. I have often wished to come here to pay my respects to you, and on the way here I met a man named Shi Yong in a village inn who had a letter for me stating that my father had died. But it was my father's desire that I should not enter your band, and when I received the letter I at once returned home. As to my case I was well treated by the officials, and was not punished severely. I was banished to Jiangzhou which is not a bad place. When I heard of your orders I dare not decline to come here, and now that I have met you I cannot stay here, but must proceed on my way as the time limit is nearly up."

"Why be in such a hurry?" said Chao Gai. "Please take a seat."

So they all sat down, and Song Jiang asked his escort to stand behind his chair. Chao Gai asked all the leaders to approach and salute Song Jiang, and after this they all took their seats. After they had been drinking wine for some time Song Jiang at last arose and said, "It is obvious that you regard me with respect, but as I am a criminal I cannot stay here and must now take my leave of you."

"Why feel so estranged?" asked Chao Gai. "As you do not wish your escort to be injured we will give the men money, and they can then return, and report that we bandits at Liangshan Marsh have captured you, and so they will not be blamed."

"Do not talk like that," said Song Jiang. "Such a procedure would not be to my credit, but would bring trouble. I must be filial, and respect my father's wishes, or otherwise he will be implicated. It was Heaven's will that I should meet Shi Yong and return home. If now I stay here I shall be opposing Heaven, and disobeying my father, and shall have a bad reputation. If you will not agree to let me depart it would be better if you kill me at once." He then burst into tears, and knelt down on the ground.

The leaders raised him up and said, "As you are determined to go to Jiangzhou, we ask you to stay here for the night only, and early tomorrow morning you can depart." They wanted to take off his cangue, but he would not let them do so. They all sat down to drink more wine.

The following morning when he was preparing to leave Wu Yong spoke to him, "Please listen to me now. I have a very good friend at Jiangzhou who is superintendent of the two prisons there. He is called Dai Zong. He knows Taoist magics, and can travel about two hundred fifty *li* in one day so that people call him the Divine Traveler. He distributes wealth in good cause. Last night I wrote a letter to him which I am going to give you, and when you reach your destination you must make his acquaintance. Whatever happens you can make him your confident."

A feast had been prepared for Song Jiang, and the leaders also presented him with money. They also gave the escort twenty taels of silver. The leaders accompanied Song Jiang down the mountain. Wu Yong and Hua Rong crossed the lake, and went with him about eight *li* along the road before they bade him good-by.

Song Jiang and his escort continued on their way to Jiangzhou, and they had been traveling for about two weeks when they came to a place where there was a high mountain. The escort said that the mountain was called Jieyang and after crossing it they would come to the Xunyang River where they could get a boat to take them for the remainder of the journey to Jiangzhou.

"As the weather is fine just now," said Song Jiang, "let us now cross the mountain and find a place to rest on the other side."

The escort agreed to this, and they all set out. It was almost noon when they reached the summit, and from there they saw an inn at the foot of the mountain. In front of the inn were several large trees, and many grass huts were around it. In the shade of the trees was a flag flying. Song Jiang was much pleased and said, "We will stop at the inn for some refreshment, and then push on."

When they reached the inn they all entered, and the escort put their sticks against the wall. They all sat down at a table with Song Jiang in the inferior seat. They waited for a long time, but nobody came to attend to their wants. So Song Jiang called out, "Is there nobody in charge here?"

From an inner room a voice answered, "Coming! Coming!" and a very big man came out of a side room. He had a red complexion with bushy whiskers, and his eyes were bloodshot and as fierce as a tiger's. On his head was a tattered turban, and his gown was without sleeves. Around his waist was a large cummerbund. He called out, "How much wine do you want?"

"We are very hungry," said Song Jiang. "What kind of meat have you got?"

"I have some beef and strong liquor."

"That is fine. Bring us two *jin* of beef and a horn of wine," ordered Song Jiang.

"Do not think me strange, but I make it a rule to have the money paid in advance with the order."

"That is all right. I will pay you first. Wait a bit, and I will get the money." Song Jiang opened his bundle, and took out some money. The man stealthily looked at the bundle, and saw that it was very heavy at which he was much pleased as he knew there must be plenty of silver there. He took the silver from Song Jiang, and went into another room, and soon returned with the beef and wine. The three men dined together, and their conversation was about the bandits abroad, who would sell drugged food and wine to travelers and rob them of all their wealth and make pies out of their flesh. One of them said he did not believe such tales.

The proprietor of the inn heard this and laughingly said, "You had better be careful because this food and wine may be drugged."

Song Jiang laughed and said, "So you are ridiculing us for talking about drugged food."

"Elder brother, a cup of warm wine would be much better," said one of the escort.

"I will go and get some warmed wine for you." The man then went, and soon returned with three cups of hot wine. The three guests were hungry, and when they saw the food and wine they only thought of eating and drinking same. They soon emptied their cups, and almost immediately the escort fell back with saliva running from their mouths. Upon seeing this Song Jiang jumped up, and said, "What is the matter with you two? Are you drunk after drinking only two cups of wine?" He stepped forward to raise them up, but he was also feeling faint, and fell down. As they all lay there they all looked at each other, but not one of them could move or get up.

The inn proprietor said, "I am sorry. For many days I have found no business, but today Heaven has sent me these three." He first seized Song Jiang and dragged him into a room at the back where he placed him on the block of wood where men were usually cut up. He then dragged the other two men to the same place. He also took their baggage, and put it in another room, where he opened it and found the silver. He said, "I have kept this inn for many years, but have never before seen a prisoner with so much money. What is the reason for this? It must be a gift from Heaven for me!" He then fastened up the baggage, and went to the door of the inn to look for his assistants. But although he glanced in all directions he could not see a single one anywhere. He however saw three travelers coming up the road towards the inn. He recognized them, and went forward to meet them. He asked 'Elder brothers, where are you going?"

One of the tall men replied, "We are going up the mountain to meet a certain person, and he ought to be here today. We have been waiting for several days, and cannot understand what has delayed him."

"Who is the man you are waiting for?"

"He is a certain famous man."

"What is his name?"

"I think you know him. He is Song Jiang of Yuncheng County and is coming from Jizhou Prefecture."

"I have heard of him, but what is he traveling this way for?"

"I did not know before, but today a friend of mine has arrived from Jizhou, and he said that Song Jiang has been banished to the prison at Jiangzhou, but he did not know for what reason. I think he must come this way. I have often thought of going to Yuncheng County to make his acquaintance, but as he is passing this way now I must meet him. That is why I come here today with my two friends. How has business been with you this last month?"

"I will be frank with you," replied the inn proprietor. "During the last few months I have done no business, but today Heaven has sent me three men with many things."

"What kind of men?" hurriedly asked the man.

"Two men escorting a prisoner."

"Is the prisoner a little fat man with a dark complexion?"

"He is not very tall and has a swarthy complexion."

"Have you killed him?" hurriedly asked the visitor.

"I dragged him into the room, but have not cut him up as my assistants are absent."

"Let me have a look at him."

The four men went into the room, and there were the three men lying on the cutting-up-block. But they did not recognize Song Jiang so the visitor said they would examine the baggage, and read the official dispatch. When this had been done the man reading the dispatch said, "Heaven has directed me to come here today. If I had been even a little late my elder brother would have been cut up." He gave orders for an anti-drug to be administered to revive Song Jiang. This was quickly done, and he was carried into the other room and seated in a chair. Soon he opened his eyes, and looked around. The visitor saluted him, and Song Jiang asked, "Who are you? Am I not still dreaming? What is this place? What is your name?"

The visitor replied, "I am Li Jun of Luzhou, and I am captain of a boat that sails on the Yangtze River. I have a good knowledge of currents, etc., and so people call me the 'Muddy Water Dragon.' This man is the innkeeper and he robs travelers who come this way. His name is Li Li, and his nickname is 'Hell's Judge.'"

They then explained how the event had happened, and Song Jiang told them all about his adventures. They pressed Song Jiang to stay there instead of going to prison, but again he stood firm and declined their offers. They administered restoratives to the escort, and they soon recovered. When they came round they said, "We are very unlucky as we got drunk so easily."

At this the others all laughed. That night they all slept at the inn. The next day they were invited to Li Jun's house where they stayed for a few days then Song Jiang and his escort set out on their journey again.

The three men traveled until about 11 A.M. when they came to a market town. The street was very crowded, and they saw a crowd forming a ring round some object. Song Jiang forced his way through the men, and saw in the ring a man with a stave who was selling medicine. He watched the man performing with his stick, and when that was finished Song Jiang applauded his skill. The man took a tray, and addressed the crowd, "I come from a distant place, for certain business. I am perhaps not well skilled in military arts, but I hope that you will praise me to your friends so that they will buy my drugs. If you want the medicine you can buy some now, but if you do not care for the medicine then please contribute a small amount of money, and not let my tray be quite empty." He passed the tray round the crowd, but nobody gave money. "I hope you gentlemen will be generous in assisting me." He again walked round with the tray, but nobody contributed even a copper.

Song Jiang seeing this asked his escort to let him have five taels of silver, and offering it to the man said, "I am a criminal, and cannot give you much. This small amount will however indicate that I hold you in respect."

The man held the money aloft on the palm of his hand, and said, "It is strange that in this town of Jieyang Town there is not one man who appreciates my skill. This benefactor in passing through the town however presents me with this money. In the words of the poet

'Men laughed at Zheng Yuanhe,
Who lavishly spent his money;
Such men are not always rich,
Or dressed in the best of clothes.'

"This silver is equal to ten times the amount from a wealthy man. I salute you my benefactor, and request your name so that I can spread your fame abroad."

"Sir, do not talk about it, as my gift is so trifling," said Song Jiang.

While this was happening a big man had pushed his way through the crowd, and he now said to Song Jiang, "What fellow are you? Where do you come from? How dare you come here, and try to cast our town in the shade by offering money?" He raised his fists to strike Song Jiang.

Dragons now were stirred to fury,
But they found their destiny.

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### Unrestrained Mu Hong the Unstoppable Chases Timely Rain Song Jiang; Xunyang River Boatmen Riot on the Xunyang river in the Night & the pilot acts up

"Just because he can do a few friggin tricks with a lance, he thinks he can throw his weight around," the big fellow shouted, glaring. "I've ordered everyone to ignore him, but you, rogue, have to show off that you have money and give him silver. You're trying to weaken my power in this town!"

"Suppose I gave him a bit of silver. What's it to you?"

The big fellow seized Song Jiang. "Thief of an exile. You dare talk back to me!"

"Why not!"

The big fellow swung both fists at Song Jiang's face. Song Jiang ducked. Once again the big man charged. Song Jiang was all set. But then the drill instructor dashed in from behind the crowd, grabbed the assailant by head kerchief and waist and, with a poke in the ribs and a quick twist, slammed him to the ground. He struggled to rise. The drill instructor knocked him flat with a swift kick. The two guards intervened to restrain the fighting medicine man. The big fellow managed to crawl to his feet. He looked at Song Jiang and the drill instructor.

"If you think you can get away with this, just wait!" He strode off in a southerly direction.
"May I ask your name and place of origin?" Song Jiang politely queried the medicine man.
"My ancestral home is Luoyang, in Henan Province, and my name is Xue Yong. My paternal grandfather was an officer in the headquarters of Old General Zhong. But he offended some of the senior bureaucrats and so never rose in rank. His sons and grandsons have been forced to earn their living with displays of arms and selling medicines. In the gallant fraternity I'm known as the Sick Tiger. Dare I enquire who you are, sir?"
"Song Jiang is my name. My ancestral home is Yuncheng County."
"Not Song Jiang the Timely Rain from Shandong Province?"
"The same."
Xue Yong dropped to his knees and kowtowed. Song Jiang hastily raised him to his feet.
"Let's have a few cups together, what do you say?"
"I'd be honored. I've been longing to meet you, but I never could find an opportunity." The drill instructor gathered his weapons and medicines and went with Song Jiang to a nearby wine shop.
"We have meat and wine," said the proprietor, "but I don't dare sell you any."
"Why not?" asked Song Jiang.
"That big fellow you were fighting with just sent word that if I do he'll smash my shop to pieces. I can't go against his wishes. He's the boss of this town. Who dares oppose him?"
"In that case we'll leave. The scoundrel is sure to be looking for an excuse for another quarrel."
"Let me go back to my inn and pay what I owe. I'll look you up in Jiangzhou in a day or two. You go on ahead, brother," said Xue Yong.
Song Jiang gave him twenty pieces of silver and they parted. The clerk and the two guards walked until they came to another wine shop. "The Young Master has given orders," said the host. "We can't sell you anything. It's useless to ask."
Song Jiang and the guards had nothing to say. They tried several more shops, and in each one they got the same answer. At the edge of the town were several small inns, where they tried to put up for the night. None of the hostels would accept them. When Song Jiang asked why, they said the Young Master had given definite orders: "Don't let those three in."
Obviously, there was no use talking. They continued on towards the main highway. The red ball of the sun was low in the sky and dusk was falling. The three travellers began to get worried.
"Just because we watched a display of arms we offended that brute," they said. "Now there are no inns or villages in sight. Where are we going to sleep?"
They saw lights gleaming through a grove of trees in the distance at the end of a small path. "People must be living there," said Song Jiang. "We can beg their pardon and ask them to let us stay the night. In the morning we'll go on."
"Those lights are well off the main road."
"What else can we do? We may have to walk an extra two or three //tomorrow, but what of it?"
They travelled about two //and there among the trees was a large manor. They rapped on the gate and a vassal opened it.
"Who are you, knocking at this late hour?"
"I'm a prisoner on my way to Jiangzhou," Song Jiang said apologetically. "We've gone beyond where we originally intended to spend the night and we've no place to stay. We hope your manor will put us up. We'll pay whatever's customary in the morning."
"Wait here. I'll ask the squire. If he agrees, you can stay." The vassal went inside. He soon returned. "The squire says please come in." He led the three to a thatched building.
The squire told the vassal to quarter them in the gate-house and give them supper. The gate-house also had a thatched roof. The vassal lit a lamp and told the three visitors to rest. He fetched three portions of rice and soup and vegetables and bid them eat. When they had finished he cleared the table and departed.
"We're alone here, sir Clerk," said the guards. "We'll take off your cangue and all have a comfortable night's sleep and set out early in the morning."
"Good," said Song Jiang.
The cangue was removed and he and the two guards went out to relieve themselves. Song Jiang gazed at the star-filled sky and at the rustic lane running behind the houses on the edge of the threshing ground. He made a mental note of it. They returned to the gate-house, bolted the door and lay down to sleep. They agreed that it was kind of the squire to let them stay.
Suddenly they heard voices on the threshing ground. Song Jiang peered out through a crack in the door. The squire and three vassals were looking the manor over in the light of their torches.
"Just like my father," Song Jiang said to the guards. "He won't retire till he's checked everything personally."
At that moment someone outside the manor shouted: "Open the gate." Vassals complied, and six or seven men entered. The fellow in the lead gripped a halberd, those behind him carried pitchforks and clubs. Song Jiang could see them plainly in the torchlight.
"That one with the halberd is the man who attacked us in town," he said.
He heard the squire ask: "Where have you been, son? Who have you been fighting with, coming home so late bristling with arms?"
"You don't know what's been going on, father," the big fellow replied. "Is elder brother at home?"
"He's drunk. He's sleeping it off in the rear house."
"I'll get him up. I need him to help me chase a man."
"You've been quarrelling again. If you get your brother, you know he'll go to extremes. What's wrong? Tell me."
"A weapons-twirling medicine man came to town today and put his show on without asking permission first from brother and me. I ordered that no one was to give him a penny. But along came a prisoner and, just to show off, gave the fellow five pieces of silver. That was one in the eye for our prestige! I went to knock the prisoner around a bit, and that wretched medicine pedlar threw me down and hit and kicked me. My middle still hurts. I sent men around to tell all the wine shops and inns not to serve those louts or put them up. They'll have no place to stay tonight. Then I had a gang from the gambling den go down to the inn where that medicine man was staying and drub him. I've got him tied in the arms master's house now. Tomorrow, I'll take him down to the river, bind him hand and foot, and toss him in. That'll pay him off! But I can't find the prisoner those two guards are with. There aren't any inns ahead where he can stay. I don't know where he's found shelter. I want to get brother, divide into two parties and track the rascal down!"
"Don't be churl, son. Suppose he gave silver to the medicine seller. What is that to you? Why did you attack him? You ended up being beaten yourself. But you weren't hurt badly. Listen to me—forget it. If your brother hears you've been beaten, he won't quit till he's killed someone again. Take my advice—go into the house and sleep. The middle of the night is no time to go knocking on people's doors and upsetting all the villagers. Try earning a few good marks for your next incarnation."
The big fellow paid no attention. Grasping his halberd, he went inside the manor, with the old man following behind.
"What an unlucky coincidence," Song Jiang said to the guards. "This is bad. Taking shelter in his manor! We'd better leave. He'll kill us if he finds out we're here. Even if the squire doesn't say anything, the vassals won't dare to conceal it from him."
"You're right. We must get away without delay."
"No use trying to leave by the front gate. We'll dig our way out through the manor wall behind this house."
The guards toting the luggage and Song Jiang carrying his cangue, they slipped around to the rear of the house and dug a hole in the manor wall. Then they fled along a path in the starlight towards the depths of the grove.
They pushed on blindly for about a watch. Ahead they saw a thicket of reeds and a large body of roiling water. They had reached the banks of the Xunyang River. They heard voices behind them and shrill whistling, and saw the bobbing of many torches.
"Heaven save me," Song Jiang cried.
The three men hid in the reeds and watched the torches draw nearer. Very alarmed, they floundered around in a panic. There was no escape. Before them was the large river, on either side were broad coves. Song Jiang raised his head to the sky and lamented: "If I'd known it was going to be like this I'd have stayed on Mount Liangshan. Who'd have thought I'd meet my end here!"
Suddenly, gliding through the reeds, a boat appeared. "Over here, boatman," Song Jiang called. "Save us. I'll give you silver."
"Who are you three?" the boatman queried. "What are you doing here?"
"We're being chased by robbers, and jumped into these reeds. Come quickly and ferry us across. I'll pay you extra."
At that promise, the boatman moved his craft up and the three clambered on board. One of the guards threw the luggage into the hold, the other poled the boat with his official staff. The boatman plied the sweep-oar in the stern. The clinking of the bag's contents as they struck the boards filled him with secret satisfaction. Soon the little craft was well out in the center of the river.
The pursuers had by then reached the shore. There were a dozen torches among them. The two big men in the lead held halberds. Their twenty or more followers were armed with lances.
"Boatman," they called, "row over here."
Song Jiang and guards, huddled in the hold, said: "Don't do it. We'll give you more silver."
The boatman nodded. He ignored the gang on the bank and plied his creaking oar.
"If you don't bring your boat here," the pursuers threatened, "we'll kill every one of you."
The boatman laughed coldly, but did not reply.
"You dare disobey?" bawled the gang on the bank.
"I'm Zhang the Boatman. Stop your friggin yelling," the rower replied with a grin.
The biggest man among the torches changed his tune. "Oh, it's you, brother Zhang. Didn't you see us two brothers here?"
"Of course. I'm not blind."
"Come back, then. We want to talk to you."
"We'll talk tomorrow. My passengers are in a hurry."
"Those three on your boat are the ones my brother and I are after!"
"They're relatives of mine. They're food and clothing to me. I've invited them out for a bowl of 'deck knife noodles.' "
"Row back. We'll talk about it."
"Turn my food and clothing over to you? Fat chance!"
"Don't say that, brother Zhang. We only want the prisoner. Bring him here."
The boatman continued plying his oar. "I haven't had a passenger in days. I'm not going to row him back and give him to you. Forgive me. See you again some time."
Song Jiang didn't understand his hidden meaning. He whispered to the guards: "How lucky we met this boatman. He's saved our lives and stuck up for us. We won't forget his kindness. Where would we be if it weren't for this boat to ferry us across?"
The boatman rowed on. Soon they were far from the shore. Sitting in the hold, they could see the torches gleaming in the reeds.
"What good fortune," Song Jiang said. "How true it is that 'When good folk meet, evil men keep their distance.' We've managed to escape disaster."
As he plied his oar, the boatman sang a Huzhou tune, with his own words:

*Born and raised on the river's edge,*
*Towards officials and Heaven I'm fearless and bold.*
*Last night demon Hua Guang tried to do me in,*
*Before he left, I snatched his brick of gold!*

Song Jiang and the guards felt their bones go soft with fright. But then Song Jiang thought: "He's only jesting." While the three men were discussing this new development, the boatman put down his oar.
"You, prick, and you two police guards, it's your kind who are always squeezing us smugglers. Today you've fallen into my hands. What would you rather eat—'deck knife noodles' or 'dumplings in soup'?"
"Don't joke, sir," said Song Jiang. "What do you mean?"
The boatman glared. "Who's joking! If it's 'deck knife noodles' you want, I've a blade beneath this deck which can slice the wind. I don't need three or four slashes. One cut each will dump you dead in the water. If it's 'dumplings' you prefer, take your clothes off and jump into the river naked as dumplings and drown yourselves!"
Song Jiang clutched the guards. "Woe is me," he cried. "How true is that 'Luck comes but once, but trouble comes in droves.' "
"Talk it over and give me an answer, quick," barked the boatman.
"We didn't come here of our own choice," Song Jiang pleaded. "I committed a crime and am being exiled to Jiangzhou. Have pity. Spare our lives."
"You're wasting breath. Spare you three? Not even half a man shall be spared! I'm Dog-Faced Master Zhang. Father or mother mean nothing to me. Shut your friggin mouths and get into the water!"
"Our gold and silver and valuables and clothes—you can have them all. Only let us live!"
From beneath the deck boards the boatman took out a gleaming cutlass. "What shall it be?" he shouted.
Song Jiang raised his face to the sky and sighed. "Because I failed in respect to Heaven and Earth, was unfilial to my parents and committed a crime, I've implicated you two."
The guards gripped his arms. "Say no more, sir Clerk. We'll die together and that will be the end of it."
"Off with your clothes and into the river," roared the boatman. "Jump, or I'll hack you in!"
Huddled together, the three men stared at the water. They heard the creaking of oars, and the boatman looked quickly around. Flying towards them was a light craft. A big man with a trident stood on the prow. Two young fellows were wielding sweep-oars in the stern. In the starlight the vessel drew rapidly near.
"Ahoy," the big man with the trident hailed. "Who dares to operate in our waters? Any merchandise you have on board you'll have to share with us!"
"So it's you, brother Li," the boatman exclaimed hastily. "I couldn't imagine who it was. Out on business, brother? Why didn't you take me along?"
"So you're at it again, brother Zhang. What have you got there? Anything worthwhile?"
"You'll laugh when I tell you. I haven't had any business for days. I lost at gambling again and was left without a copper. I was sitting gloomily off the reef when a gang chased three pieces of merchandise right into my boat. Two friggin guards and a swarthy short prisoner. I don't know who he is. Claims he's been exiled to Jiangzhou, but he doesn't have any cangue around his neck. The gang after him was led by those two Mu brothers from our town. They really wanted him. But when I saw there was something to be got out of him I wouldn't give him up."
"Whew! Could that be my brother Song Jiang?"
The man's voice sounded familiar. From the hold Song Jiang called: "Who are you, bold fellow? Save me! I'm Song Jiang!"
"My brother, sure enough," the big man exclaimed, startled. "Why didn't you speak up?"
Song Jiang hurried out on deck. The starlight was very bright, and he saw that the man on the prow was Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon and that the two in the stern with the sweep-oars were Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave and Tong Meng the River Churning Clam.
Li Jun leaped on board. "You've had a fright, brother! If I came a little later you'd have been a goner. Thank Heaven I was bored and restless at home and came out in my boat to do some salt smuggling. I never dreamed I'd find you in this predicament."
The boatman was stupefied, speechless. Finally he asked: "Brother Li, you mean this swarthy fellow is Song Jiang the Timely Rain from Shandong?"
"Of course."
Dropping to his knees, the boatman kowtowed. "Just your name, sir, would have stopped me from doing an evil deed! I nearly took your life!"
"Who is this good fellow?" Song Jiang asked Li Jun. "What is his name?"
"He's a blood brother of mine, from Little Lone Mountain. His name is Zhang Heng, and he's known as the Boat Flame. His specialty is conducting this 'quiet and respectable' business on the Xunyang River."
Song Jiang and the guards laughed. The two boats were rowed together to the bank and moored, and Song Jiang and his escorts were helped ashore.

"I've often told you, brother," Li Jun said to Zhang Heng, "of all the gallant men under the sky, there's none to compare with Clerk Song, the Timely Rain of Yuncheng Town. Today you can examine him closely."
Zhang Heng struck his flint, lit a lantern and peered at Song Jiang. He threw himself down on the sand and again kowtowed. "Brother, please forgive me!" Then he asked: "Gallant brother, why have you been exiled here?"
Li Jun related the story of Song Jiang's crime, adding: "He's being sent to Jiangzhou."
"There's something I must tell you," Zhang Heng said to the clerk. "My mother bore two sons—me and my younger brother, Zhang Shun. He's a remarkable boy, with skin as white as snow. Not only can he swim forty or fifty //on the surface of the water, he can stay below for seven days and seven nights. Because he's like a white streak in the water and because he's so skilled with arms, he's been nicknamed White Streak in the Waves. At one time he and I were doing quite a business on the Yangzi."
"I'd like to hear about it."
"Whenever we lost at gambling, I would take our boat to a quiet shore and ferry people across the river. Travellers who wanted to save money and get to the other side quickly would board my craft. When I was full up, my brother Zhang Shun would come along, disguised as a passenger also, with a large bundle on his back. I'd row to the center of the river, stop, cast anchor, take out a big cutlass and demand passage money. My agreed price had been five hundred coppers, but I demanded three thousand. I asked my brother, first, and he pretended to refuse. Grabbing him by neck and waist, I threw him kaplunk into the water. Then I went to each of the others for my three thousand. They were all scared stiff. Every one of them paid up. After I collected, I delivered them to a secluded spot on the opposite shore. My brother had already swum underwater and reached the bank. As soon as the passengers were gone, he joined me, we divided the money and went gambling. That was how we earned our living."
"There must have been plenty of customers along the river who sought you for trips like that," said Song Jiang.
Li Jun and the others laughed.
"My brother and I are in a different line of business now," Zhang Heng went on. "We're smugglers on the Xunyang. Zhang Shun has gone to Jiangzhou Town today to sell some fish fry. Look him up when you get there. I'd give you a letter to him, only I can't write."
"We'll find a scribe in the village," said Li Jun. He instructed the Tong brothers to stay and watch the boats.
Li Jun and Zhang Heng, carrying a lantern, led Song Jiang and guards in the direction of the village. Before they had travelled half a //they saw that torches were still gleaming brightly upon the river bank.
"Those two brothers haven't gone back yet," said Zhang Heng.
"Who do you mean?" asked Li Jun.
"The two brothers of the Mu family in our town."
"Call them to pay their respects to our brother, here."
"You mustn't do that," Song Jiang said quickly. "They're the ones who were chasing me."
"Don't worry," said Li Jun. "They didn't know it was you. They're one of us." He waved his hand and whistled, once.
The torch-bearing men came running towards them. When the Mu brothers saw Li Jun and Zhang Heng in polite conversation with Song Jiang, they halted, surprised.
"Are you two brothers familiar with these three?" they asked.
Li Jun laughed. "Do you know who this is?"
"No. He went against our authority in town and gave money to that medicine man. It damaged our prestige, so we've been after him."
"He's the one I've often told you about—brother Song Jiang, clerk of Yuncheng County, Shandong, known as the Timely Rain. Hurry and greet him."
The Mu brothers cast their halberds aside and kowtowed. "We've long heard of your fame. Who'd have thought we'd meet today? We behaved rashly and injured you, brother. Please forgive us."
Song Jiang helped them to their feet. "Your names, bold warriors?"
"They're from a well-to-do family, local people," Li Jun said. "Mu Hong, the older brother, is called the Unrestrained. Mu Chun, the younger, is called the Slightly Restrained. They run Jieyang Town. You may not know this, brother, but we have three powers around here. I'll explain. On Jieyang Ridge and below, LiLi and I run things. In the town, the Mu brothers are boss. Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun control all the smuggling along the Xunyang River. That's what we mean by the 'Three Powers.' "
"We had no idea," said Song Jiang. "Since we're brothers, I must beg you to release Xue Yong."
Mu Hong smiled. "The lance twirler? No problem." To Mu Chun he said: "Get him and return him to our brother, here." He turned again to Song Jiang. "Please come to our humble manor to receive our courtesies and forgive our wrongs."
"Excellent," said Li Jun. "Excellent. We'll all go."
Mu Hong sent two vassals to watch the boats and invite the Tong brothers to join them. He directed another man to go on ahead and inform the manor to prepare food and wine, slaughter a sheep and a pig, and lay a feast. When Tong Wei and Tong Meng arrived, all walked together. They reached the manor around the fifth watch. Squire Mu was requested to greet his visitors, then they took their seats as hosts and guests in the thatched hall. Song Jiang sat opposite the squire.
They had not been chatting long when the sky began to lighten. Mu Chun arrived with Xue Yong the Sick Tiger, and he was introduced to everyone. Mu Hong feasted Song Jiang and the others until evening, at which time all retired.
The next day Song Jiang wanted to leave, but Mu Hong wouldn't hear of it. He insisted that his visitors remain. He took Song Jiang on a stroll through town and showed him the sights of the surrounding villages.
After the third day Song Jiang, afraid he would exceed the time limit for his arrival at the prison, was determined to go. When the pleas of Mu Hong and the others proved in vain, a farewell feast was laid. The following morning Song Jiang bid farewell to the squire and the assembled gallants.
"Remain here a while with Mu Hong," he urged Xue Yong. "Then come to Jiangzhou and we'll meet again."
"Don't worry, brother," said Mu Hong. "I'll take good care of him." He presented Song Jiang with gold and silver on a platter and gave each of the guards some money.
A scribe in the manor wrote a letter for Zhang Heng which he requested Song Jiang to deliver to his brother Zhang Shun. Song Jiang put it in his bundle. Everyone saw him to the edge of the Xunyang where Mu Hong summoned a boat and put Song Jiang's luggage and cangue on board. They drank a parting toast, and there were tears in everyone's eyes as they bid him farewell. Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Mu Hong, Mu Chun, Xue Yong, Tong Wei and Tong Meng returned to their respective homes. Of that no more need be said.
Song Jiang and guards embarked for Jiangzhou. This boatman was different from their previous one. He raised a sail and soon delivered them to their destination. Song Jiang wore the cangue around his neck once more. The guards, carrying his documents and bearing the luggage, proceeded with him to the office of the Jiangzhou prefectural government.
The prefect was holding court. His name was Cai Dezhang and he was the ninth son of Cai Jing, the premier. For this reason he was known in Jiangzhou as Prefect Cai the Ninth. An avaricious official, he was pompous and rude. The premier had seen to it that he was appointed to this post because Jiangzhou was a populous wealthy city.
The guards handed him the documents and produced Song Jiang. He could see that the prisoner was no ordinary man. "Why is there no prefectural seal on your cangue?" he demanded.
"We were caught in the rain on the road, and it washed off," the guards explained.
"Write a statement about that immediately and take him to the prison outside the city. I will send prefectural guards with you."
The prefect designated two men, who took the statement from the two original guards, then all five left the court and stopped for some refreshments in a wine shop outside the prefecture. Song Jiang gave the Jiangzhou escorts three ounces of silver. They delivered him to the prison, obtained a receipt and placed him in a single cell. They had put in a good word for him with the warden and the head keeper. Then they returned with their receipt to the Jiangzhou prefectural office.
The two original guards turned Song Jiang's luggage over to him, thanked him a thousand times and went back to the city. "Although we had a bad fright," they said, "we earned lots of silver." They reported to the Jiangzhou prefectural office, were given an official reply, and set out on the return journey to Jizhou.
Song Jiang invited the head keeper to his cell and gave him ten ounces of silver. He also sent the same amount to the warden, plus gifts. Nor did he forget to tip the others working in the prison and the soldiers on guard. All got silver for tea money. As a result, he was well liked.
Not long after, he was brought to the registration room and his cangue removed. The warden, who had taken the bribe, said: "Song Jiang, you have just arrived and I must tell you this. Wu De, the founding emperor, decreed that all newly exiled prisoners shall be beaten a hundred strokes to quell their arrogance. Guards, turn him face down."
"I caught a heavy cold on the road," said Song Jiang, "and I still haven't recovered."
The warden nodded. "The prisoner really does look sick. See how sallow and thin he is. Just credit him with a beating on the books. This fellow was a county functionary. Let him work as a copyist."
A written order to this effect was immediately issued, and Song Jiang expressed his thanks. He collected his luggage from his cell and moved into the Copying Section. The other prisoners, seeing that he was getting special treatment, bought wine and held a small party to congratulate him. The next day Song Jiang gave them a party in return. From time to time he invited the head keeper and guards in for drinks, and he often sent gifts to the warden. He had plenty of money and valuables and that made it easy for him to approach people. Before half a month had gone by there wasn't a man in the prison who didn't think well of him.
"Guide your actions by the moods of the powerful, treat a man according to his status," as the old saying goes. One day Song Jiang was drinking with the head keeper in the Copying Section.
"Brother," the head keeper said, "I reminded you recently that it's the custom here to send the prison superintendent gifts. Why have you delayed so long? It's more than ten days already. He'll be coming soon, and it will be awkward."
"Never mind. He wants money, but I won't give him any. You, brother, can ask me any time you need some. But I won't give that superintendent a copper. I have something to say to him when he comes."
"He's very fierce, sir Clerk, and a demon with his hands and feet. If you offend him and he gets rough, don't say I didn't warn you."
"He can do as he likes. But don't worry. I can handle him. Maybe I'll give him something, maybe not. Perhaps he'll be afraid to ask me. It's hard to say."
While they were talking, a guard came in and reported: "The superintendent is here. He's in the hall, furious. 'Why hasn't that new prisoner sent me the usual money gift?' he's yelling."
"What did I tell you?" said the head keeper. "Even we're afraid when he comes."
Song Jiang smiled. "Forgive me, brother. I can't keep you company any longer. We'll drink again another day. I must go and speak to him."
The head keeper rose. "We don't want to see him!" Song Jiang said farewell and went from the Copying Section to the Registration Hall where the superintendent was waiting. And because they met, Jiangzhou Town was turned into a den of tigers and a lair of wolves. Street corners became mountains of corpses and seas of blood. Men broke Heaven's mesh and Earth's net, and returned to Liangshan Marsh.

Now when Song Jiang made the mistake of giving five taels of silver to that martial arts master, a big man suddenly appeared among the Jieyang crowd and bellowed: "That scoundrel has no business barging in here with his bloody staff tricks and whatnot, I've already warned everybody to ignore him. And now you, you little shit, just because you want to show off how much money you've got, you go and pay him for it and cause me to lose face in my own home town!"
Song Jiang answered: "If I choose to give him money, what business is it of yours?"
The big stranger grabbed Song Jiang and shouted: "You dare to answer me back, you bloody convict?"
"Why shouldn't I answer you?" Song Jiang said.
The other raised his fists and swung at Song Jiang's jaw, but Song Jiang ducked. The man closed again and Song Jiang was about to retaliate when the martial arts master fell on the man from behind. He grasped his topknot in one hand while with the other he grabbed his waist and with a sudden twist sent him sprawling. When his opponent tried to struggle to his feet he felled him again with a kick. The two policemen had to restrain the martial arts artist while the other crawled to his feet. He gave them a black look and said: "Come what may, I'll get even with you two!" With that he left, heading south.
"May I ask your name and where you're from?" Song Jiang said to the martial arts man.
"I'm from Luoyang in Henan," the other replied. "My name is Xue Yong. My grandfather was on old field-marshal Zhong's staff, but he got on the wrong side of some officials and was never promoted. That's why his descendants have to earn their living giving demonstrations and selling medicines. Among the rivers and lakes I'm known as the Pill Monger. Will you now permit me to make so bold as to ask your name?"
"My name is Song Jiang and I'm from Yuncheng."
"You don't mean to say you're Song Jiang the Just of Shandong, the Opportune Rain?"
"Yes, at your service."
The Pill Monger prostrated himself at once and Song Jiang raised him up, saying: "How about having a cup of wine together?"
"Good idea, I've been longing to make your acquaintance, but I just didn't have the opportunity." He quickly gathered together the articles of his trade and they went off together to a neighbouring hostelry to order a drink. But the host said: "I've got plenty of wine and food, certainly, but I daren't sell you any."
"Why not?" Song Jiang asked.
"It's that big chap you fellows were fighting, it's his orders. If I sell you wine he'll come and smash this place up. I live here and I can't afford to offend him. He's the big boss here in Jieyang, everyone does as he says."
"In that case we'd better just go and find somewhere else to stay," Song Jiang said. "Obviously that man likes to make trouble."
The Pill Monger said: "I'll go back to my inn and pay for the room. We can meet again in a couple of days time in Jiangzhou. You go on ahead."
Song Jiang took out twenty taels of silver which he gave to the Pill Monger and then said goodbye and left.
Song Jiang and the two guards had to leave that inn. But when they went into the next place for a drink, the landlord said: "We all know the young master's orders, how can we sell you anything? You're just wasting your time and energy, it won't do you any good." There was nothing they could say to this, so they went on, and kept on going, because in every establishment they tried the answer was the same. Eventually they reached the very edge of town, where there were a few meagre little eating-places in one of which they hoped to find a room for the night. Even here they were rejected. When Song Jiang asked, the answer was always: "We've already received the young master's orders, we can't provide you with shelter." Song Jiang could see it was no use discussing it, so they set off resolutely down the main road. The sun was a red disk setting towards the horizon and the light was fading fast:
*Mist swathes the distant peaks; cold vapours envelop the tall sky. Troops of stars pay homage to the pale moon, vying with her in splendour; green waters bow to blue mountains in a contest of jade hues. From the old temple, deep in the woods, the bell's gentle tolling fades away; from the fishermen's boats dots of light begin to wink. On the branch the nightjar cries to the evening moon; in the garden the butterfly comes to rest amid flowers.*
They began to be worried when they realized it was getting late. "We should never have stopped to watch that fellow with the staves and got the big man annoyed," they said to themselves. "Now it turns out that we're caught with no village ahead of us and no inn behind. Where are we going to spend the night?"
At that moment they saw lights far away along a track on the edge of a wood. Song Jiang said: "Hey, see that light? There must be a house there. Why not go there and ask them politely to let us stay the night? We'll leave early in the morning."
"But those lights are not on our route," said the guards.
"That doesn't matter. It's not on our way, but even if that means walking another mile or two tomorrow, it won't make a lot of difference."
So they left the main road and before they had gone a mile a big manor house appeared beyond the wood. They went up to the door and knocked. In response to their knock a servant opened the door and asked: "Who are you? And why do you come knocking on doors and disturbing people in the middle of the night?"
"I'm a convict travelling to my place of exile in Jiangzhou," Song Jiang explained somewhat nervously. "We missed the right moment to stop for the night and now we can't find anywhere. I'd like to ask if we can stay here. Of course we'd pay whatever is appropriate."
"In that case just wait here a moment," said the servant. "I'll go and tell the Squire, and if he's agreeable you can stay."
The man disappeared inside and quickly returned to say: "The Squire asks you to come in."
They were received in the thatched hall by the Squire, who told the servants to show them to their room and invited them to partake of some supper. A servant led them down the steps to a room at the side. He lit a lamp and invited them to make themselves comfortable, while he brought three portions of rice, together with soup and various dishes. Later he collected the bowls and plates and vanished inside.
"Well, Registrar," the guards said, "seeing there aren't any strangers present, we might as well take off that cangue, so you'll sleep more comfortable. Then tomorrow we can be off early."
"Good," said Song Jiang.
When the cangue was off, they all went outside to wash. The sky was filled with stars. Song Jiang noticed that there was a building beside the threshing floor and behind it was a narrow road leading off into nowhere. They went in again, closed the door and prepared for sleep. "It's really lucky that this old gentleman is letting us sleep here tonight," they said. Just as they were speaking, they noticed there were people with lighted torches milling about on the threshing floor. Song Jiang put his eye to a crack in the wall and saw the Squire accompanied by three servants with torches going around inspecting everything. "This old gentleman is just like my father," he thought. "He wants to see to everything himself. Even at this time of day he won't just go to bed, he has to see everything is all right first."
As Song Jiang was speaking, a great clamour arose outside, with voices shouting for the gates to be opened quickly. Several men rushed in, the foremost of them carrying a halberd and the rest equipped with pitchforks and staves. By the light of the torches Song Jiang could make out that the leader was the same big man who had wanted to beat him up earlier at the inn in Jieyang. He also heard the Squire say: "Where've you been, my son? And who've you been fighting with? What do you need all these weapons for at this time of night?"
"Listen father, is my brother at home?" the big man asked.
"Your brother was drunk tonight," the Squire replied. "He took himself off to sleep at the back."
"I'll go and wake him up. We're going on a manhunt."
"I don't know who you've been quarrelling with, but waking your brother up isn't going to settle it. You'd better tell me what it's all about."
"You've no idea, father, there was a mountebank, a peddler of quack remedies, in town today, the blighter had the cheek not to come and get our permission first. He went straight to the market-place and started selling his medicines without a licence and performing with his staves, so I told everyone not to give him a single penny. And then this convict pops up, heaven knows where from, and wants to pretend he's the great gentleman, and get everyone's attention, so he gives him five taels of silver, just to make me a laughing-stock in Jieyang. I was just on the point of beating him up when that bloody peddler hit me from behind and knocked me down. He punched me and kicked me so hard my ribs are still hurting. I told all the innkeepers not to let them in, either to drink or to stay, so the three of them won't have a roof over their heads tonight, and I got a bunch of thugs from the gambling houses to go to that peddler's inn and haul him out and give

him a good thrashing. They've hung him up now in the sheriff's. Tomorrow we'll take him down to the river, tie him in a sack and chuck him in. That should take the wind out of the bugger's sails. But now I can't find where the convict and the two policemen have got to. There's no inn further down the highway, I just can't think where they're spending the night. I want to get my brother so we can split forces to give us a better chance of catching the bugger."

"You really shouldn't be so hasty, my son," said the Squire. "What business is it of yours if he decides to give the peddler some money? Why do you have to beat him up? All right, so you got a beating, but you're not seriously hurt. You just listen to me. Don't tell your brother about this. If you get beaten up, what's he supposed to do about it? And you're liable to kill someone. Now you listen to what I say. Go to your room now and go to bed. It's after midnight. Don't go making a row and waking people up, disturbing the whole neighbourhood. Gain some merit by exercising a little restraint."

The big man paid no attention to his father's words. He took his halberd and rushed inside. The Squire hurried after him.

"Now we're in a real mess," Song Jiang said to the guards. "What are we going to do? It turns out we've picked his home to stay in. The only thing to do is to get out. If he discovers we're here he's going to kill us. Even if the Squire doesn't tell him, is it likely the servants will keep quiet about it?"

"You're right," the guards said. "We shouldn't waste any time, we must leave at once."

"We'd better not take the main road." Song Jiang said. "We'll leave from the back."

The guards shouldered their bags and Song Jiang was fitted with the cangue again. They forced a gap in the fence at the back of the house and by the light of the moon and the stars pushed ahead down a small track leading into the heart of the woods. In their haste they paid no heed to where they were going. After walking for about two hours, they came to a place that was full of rushes, with a big river sweeping past. They had reached the banks of the river Yangtze.

Just then they heard shouts behind them and saw a flurry of torches chasing after them amid a general hue and cry. "Merciful Heaven, we're done for!" exclaimed Song Jiang. They plunged on into the thick of the reeds, but when they looked back the torches seemed to be getting nearer. With mounting alarm they waded on through reedbeds which seemed to stretch ahead of them to the very limits of the earth, if not of the sky too. But then there was a broad river blocking their path, with wide inlets on each side. Song Jiang's sighs ascended to heaven: "If I'd known this was going to happen, I should have stopped with them on Mount Liang. Who would have thought that I would come to end my days here?"

At this critical juncture, the reeds suddenly parted and a boat glided stealthily out. Song Jiang immediately hailed the helmsman and offered to give him silver if he brought his boat over and rescued them. The boatman asked: "Who are you and how did you get here?"

"We're being pursued by robbers, and they've driven us into this corner," Song Jiang said. "Quickly bring your boat here and ferry us over the water. I'll give you more even than you ask for."

At this mention of more silver, the boatman drove his boat across to them. They leapt in at once. One of the guards dropped the bundles into the boat's hold, while the other shoved the boat off with his staff of office. The boatman leant on his oar, at the same time listening to the satisfying sound the bundles made as they fell on the deck and secretly rejoicing. Driven by the boatman's oar the boat was soon out in midstream. Meanwhile, their pursuers had reached the river bank. A dozen torches could be seen. Each of the two leaders carried a halberd and the score or so of followers were each equipped with spears or staves. "Ahoy there, boatman!" they shouted. "Bring your boat over here, quickly!"

Song Jiang and the two guards huddled in the bottom of the boat and said: "Don't do it, boatman! We'll give you a bit extra if you don't."

The boatman nodded and ignoring the people on the bank rowed the boat with a creaking oar towards the middle of the river. Those on the bank shouted: "You there, boatman, don't go away! We'll kill you for this!" The boatman gave a few contemptuous snorts but vouchsafed no answer. Again the men on the bank called out: "Who are you? How can you have such a nerve? Come back here!"

"Zhang's my name," the boatman shouted back scornfully. "And you'd better keep a civil tongue in your heads!"

"Of course, it's old Zhang." said the tall man on the bank. "Can't you see it's me and my brother?"

"'Course I can see you. I'm not blind, am I?"

"If you can see us, why don't you come over here? We want to talk to you."

"If you want to talk you can wait till tomorrow. My passengers are in a hurry."

"Your passengers are what we're after!"

"My passengers are my relatives, my meat and drink, my all. I've invited them on board for a bowl of knife noodles."

"If you'll come back here we can come to an agreement."

"You think I'm going to hand over my meat and drink? That's a laugh!"

"Friend Zhang, that's not what we mean. We only want that convict. Just bring him here, there's a good fellow!"

Continuing to row, the Boatman said: "I haven't had something like this for days, I'm certainly not coming back just to have you take them away from me. You'll just have to put up with it. We can talk another day."

Song Jiang had not caught the boatman's meaning. He and the two guards in the bottom of the boat were quietly saying: "What a bit of luck that this boatman has saved our lives. We'd better let him know we won't forget his kindness. It's just as well this boat was here to ferry us across."

Eventually the boatman was far enough away from the shore. Looking back towards the shore, they saw the lights moving away through the reeds. "Bloody hell!" Song Jiang said. "It's really like they say, 'Meet a good man and the evil flee.' This has got us out of a pretty tight corner."

But as he rowed on, the boatman now broke into song — a Huzhou ditty:

On the bank of the river born I was,
*Fear no law, neither man's nor God's.*
*The King of Hell said he wanted a ride,*
When I got his gold, he went over the side.

When Song Jiang and his guards heard this song, their legs felt a bit wobbly. But Song Jiang decided he must be joking. However, before they could give the matter more thought, the boatman threw down his oar and said: "Now then, you lot, it seems you've a taste for getting smugglers into trouble, but today it's me you're up against! Which do you prefer, knife noodles or wonton soup?"

"Don't make fun of us, my good man," said Song Jiang. "What do you mean by knife noodles and wonton soup?"

The boatman glared at him and answered: "Who says I'm bloody joking? If it's the noodles you want, I got a knife in the hold there keen as the March wind, it'll cut you into ribbons in a jiffy — and there won't be no seconds, one go'll do it! If it's the soup, then strip off and over the side with you, you got the whole river to die in."

"Heaven have mercy!" Song Jiang lamented. "It's like they say, 'troubles never come singly, happiness never returns'."

"Think it over if you must, but let me know quick," the boatman growled.

"Boatman, let me explain. I'm a convict, banished to Jiang-zhou, can't you find it in your heart to pity me and spare the three of us?"

"Spare the three of us!" the boatman mimicked. "You make me sick! I won't spare one half of one of you. Don't you know my reputation? Dogface Uncle Zhang, they call me, an' if it was me own mother and father it wouldn't cut no ice with me! So shut your fucking mouth and get in the water!"

Song Jiang tried again. "We'll give you everything that's in our bundles, all the money and valuables and clothes and stuff, if only you'll spare our lives!"

"You can all three get your clothes off double-quick and jump in the river," the boatman shouted. "Jump, if you're going to, if not I'll shove you in!"

So there were Song Jiang and the guards clutching each other and on the point of throwing themselves in the river, when, creak, creak, creak, the sound of oars came over the water. Song Jiang quickly looked around. A fast boat was flying downstream towards them. There were three men in the boat: a big man holding a forked spear standing in the bow and two youths in the stern plying oars. Under the starlight it rapidly approached. The big man in the bows hailed them: "You there in the boat, identify yourselves. What are you doing in these waters? Any goods you may be carrying, who sees them has part."

The boatman turned to see who it was and hurriedly replied: "Oh, it's Mr. Li! I was wondering who it could be. Been out on business too, have you sir? Why didn't you let me in on it?"

"You've been operating round here too, have you Zhang? What've you got in the boat? Anything of substance?"

"I tell you, it'll make you laugh. I hadn't been doing much, not for days. I lost a bit gambling too, hadn't a cent left. So there I was sitting on the bank, feeling pretty low I can tell you, when I was approached by these three pieces of goods being chased along by a bunch of men. Turned out to be two fucking policemen, with a little dark-faced shit of a prisoner, where from I couldn't rightly say. According to him he's been banished to Jiangzhou, but he doesn't have no cangue. The crowd that was chasing after them was the two Mu brothers from town. They were dead keen to get their hands on them. But I'd already seen there was something substantial there, so I didn't give them up."

"Wait a minute! I suppose it couldn't be my friend Song Jiang?"

The voice sounded familiar to Song Jiang, so he called out: "Who's that on the other boat? Please rescue Song Jiang!"

It gave the other quite a shock. "It is, it's my friend. Why ever did you not speak out before?"

Song Jiang crawled out onto the deck to see who it was. The stars were bright and he could make out the man standing in the bows of the other boat quite clearly:

*On the banks of the Yangtze he makes his home, this hero of universal fame. His brows are thick, his eyes large and his complexion ruddy, his beard and whiskers are stiff as iron filaments. He has a voice like a gong and his stature's immense. He knows well how to wield a frosty blade, and he'll surge through the waters and leap o'er the waves with amazing effect. Such is Li Jun, native of Luzhou, known to all as the White-Water Dragon.*

It was indeed Li Jun, the White-Water Dragon, and the two rowing in the stern were the two Tong brothers, the River Rider and the Cave Dragon.

As soon as he knew it was Song Jiang, the White-Water Dragon leapt aboard. "What a close shave!" he exclaimed in horror. "If I'd come a minute or two later, you could have perished. It must be heaven was directing my steps today, because when I was sitting at home I suddenly felt restless, so I decided to row out into the channel and smuggle a little salt. I had no idea I was going to find you here in such a predicament!"

The boatman meanwhile had been pondering all this, not daring to open his mouth. Now at last he said: "Mr. Li, is this dark gentleman really Song Jiang of Shandong, the Opportune Rain?"

"Who else?" said the White-Water Dragon.

The boatman prostrated himself and said: "Oh sir, why didn't you tell me your name? You'd have saved me from doing something terrible! I was near to finishing you off!"

"What is our friend's name?" Song Jiang asked the White-Water Dragon.

"Let me introduce him. This gentleman is my adopted brother, a native of Little Mount Solo, named Zhang Heng, nicknamed the Pilot. He works here on the Yangtze river at a fine safe trade!" Song Jiang and the two guards laughed at this.

The two boats now rowed over to the landing. When the boats had been tied up, Song Jiang and his guards were helped out onto the bank. The White-Water Dragon said to the Pilot: "I've often told you there there's never a gentleman like Registrar Song of Yuncheng for uprightness. Now you can really get to know him."

The Pilot struck a flint and lit a lamp so he could take a good look at Song Jiang, then flung himself down on the sand in respectful greeting, saying: "Please forgive me for what I did!" Song Jiang also took a good look at the Pilot:

*Immensely tall, and with slanting eyes, he is famous up and down this stretch of the Yangtze. He surges through the water like a water sprite, he leaps o'er the waves like a flying whale. He doesn't fear dangerous waters and wild winds. The sight of him fills the flood dragon with dread. He is yet another of the stars sent down by heaven to stir things up on earth. He lives at Little Mount Solo and they call him the Pilot.*

"Why are you under arrest, sir?" the Pilot asked.

The White-Water Dragon explained about Song Jiang's sentence and banishing to Jiangzhou. The Pilot listened and then said: "I'd like to tell you something, in my family there were two of us, myself and this younger brother of mine, born of the same mother, and would you believe it? He's completely white, white as snow. Not only can he swim ten to fifteen miles, but he can keep going under water for seven days and seven nights, he can live in the water just like a fish! And on top of that he's a martial arts expert. People call him the White Eel. We used to make our living on the banks of the Yangtze, with a scheme of our own devising."

"I'd like to hear about it," Song Jiang said.

"When we lost money gambling, we'd take a boat to a clear place on the river bank and offer to ferry people across privately. There was always a few takers who wanted to save a penny or two or was in a hurry. As soon as the boat was full I'd get my brother to dress up as a merchant with a big sack who wanted to be ferried across. I'd row out into midstream, put down the oar, cast anchor and pull out a big knife. Then I'd ask for the money. Originally I might have asked just five hundred coppers, but now I'd change it to three thousand. I'd ask my brother to pay up first. As we'd arranged, he would refuse, so I'd grab him by the scruff of the neck and the seat of his pants and chuck him in the river, splash! Then I'd ask the others in turn. They'd all be terrified by now and they'd fork out without a murmur. When they'd paid up I'd deliver them to a remote spot on the other bank, then I'd pick up my brother from the river and we'd go over the other side, divide up the spoils and go off to gamble. We made a good living like that."

"I suppose there were plenty of customers along the river who wanted a service of that kind," said Song Jiang, and the others all laughed.

The Pilot said: "We've changed our trade now. I do a little private business on the river here, smuggling, that is, while my brother's working at present in the fish trade in Jiangzhou. I'd give you a letter for him when you go there, only I don't know how to write, so I can't."

"We'll go into the village and hire a scribe to write it for you," said the White-Water Dragon. Leaving the Tong brothers to look after the boats and carrying lanterns they set off for the village.

They'd barely gone a few hundred yards when they saw torches were still flickering along the bank. The Pilot said: "Those two brothers haven't given up and gone home yet."

"What two brothers?" said the White-Water Dragon.

"The two Mu brothers from town."

"Let's call 'em over to pay their respects to our friend here," said the White-Water Dragon.

Song Jiang protested at once: "That's not at all a good idea. They've been trying to catch me!"

"Don't worry about that," the White-Water Dragon reassured him. "It's just that they didn't know it was you. They're in the same line of business as us."

The White-Water Dragon waved and let off a piercing whistle and immediately the torches and the little band of men began to approach at speed. When they came close and saw the Pilot and the White-Water Dragon conversing politely with Song Jiang, the Mu brothers had a shock. "Are you acquainted with these three then?" they said. The White-Water Dragon grinned. "Don't you know who this is?" he said.

"We've no idea. We only know he gave money to that mountebank in the town and made us lose face. We can't wait to get our hands on him."

"Well he's the one I've told you about so many times. Registrar Song Jiang of Yuncheng, otherwise known as the Opportune Rain. You'd better show your respect at once."

Throwing away their halberds they flung themselves on the ground. "We've heard of you so often," they said, "but we never thought to meet you here like this. We fear we have been appallingly rash and done you great injury. We implore you to forgive us."

Song Jiang helped them up and said: "Please tell me your names, gentlemen."

The White-Water Dragon spoke for them. "They're brothers and they're from a rich family. They're from hereabouts. Their names are Mu Hong, the Unstoppable and Mu Chun, the Irrepressible. They control the city of Jieyang. There's three of us here, you see. Let me explain. On Jieyang Hill and its environs, I'm the boss, together with the Executioner. In Jieyang City it's those two. The smuggling on this stretch of the Yangtze is controlled by the Pilot, Zhang Heng and his brother Zhang Shun, the White Eel. Together we're known as the Three Bosses."

Song Jiang said: "We didn't know anything about that. But if we are all brothers, let me beg you to release the Pill Monger."

"You mean the mountebank? Don't worry, I'll tell my brother to go and get him and bring him here. Allow us to invite you to our house to make up for our rudeness."

The White-Water Dragon said: "That's great. We'll all go to your house then."

Mu Hong sent two servants to watch the boats and ask the Tong brothers to join them. He also sent men on ahead to give advance warning and order wine and food, have sheep and pigs killed and get ready a great feast.

They waited till the Tongs arrived and then all went back to the manor together. It was around dawn. At the manor Squire Mu was invited to come out and meet them and they all sat down in the thatched hall, Mu Hong and Song Jiang opposite each other. They talked for a while and it soon became fully light. Mu Chun arrived with Xue Yong, the Pill Monger, and joined them. Mu Hong entertained Song Jiang and the rest royally at the feast he had organized. They stayed at the manor that night. Next morning Song Jiang wanted to leave at once but Mu Hong wouldn't hear of it. He insisted they all stay on at the manor and took Song Jiang off to stroll in town and see the sights of Jieyang. Three days he kept him. Song Jiang became anxious that he was exceeding the limit and insisted he must leave. No matter how much Mu Hong and the others insisted they couldn't get him to stay longer. So they arranged a farewell feast.

Next day Song Jiang was up at dawn, bade farewell to his hosts and before leaving told the Pill Monger to stay on a few days at the manor and then come on to Jiangzhou so they could meet again. Mu Hong said: "Don't worry, we'll look after him here." He then had a tray of silver brought, which he presented to Song Jiang and made a further gift of silver to the two guards. Before they actually got going the Pilot found someone at the manor to write him a personal letter to his brother which Song Jiang packed in his bag. The company saw them off as far as the bank of the river. There a boat was summoned. The luggage was taken aboard first, whilst the people waited on the bank. Song Jiang's cangue was fitted for the journey and they all came on board to offer him a farewell drink. Everyone was weeping at the prospect of parting. The White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, the two Mu brothers, the Pill Monger and the Tong brothers all went their separate ways. Of them no more.

We shall now follow Song Jiang and his guards as they travelled by boat to Jiangzhou. This boatman was nothing like the first one. He hoisted a sail and in no time was able to set them ashore at Jiangzhou. With Song Jiang wearing his cangue as usual and the guards carrying the official order and the baggage, they presented themselves at the government offices. The court happened to be in session. The governor of Jiangzhou was called Cai Dezhang, and he was the ninth son of Cai Jing, the Grand Preceptor at court — Jiangzhou people referred to him as Cai the Ninth. He was greedy and extravagant and extremely haughty in all his dealings. His father had got him appointed to Jiangzhou because it was a region of rich revenues, populous and rich in produce.

The guards presented their papers and escorted Song Jiang into the courtroom. The governor looked Song Jiang over and noticing something irregular about him said: "Why does the cangue not bear the provincial seal?"

"There was heavy spring rain along the way," the guards explained, "and the seals were ruined."

"Write out your report immediately," the governor said, "and send him to the prison camp outside the city. This court will appoint its own guards to accompany you."

Accordingly the two guards escorted Song Jiang to the prison camp and handed him over. The Jiangzhou guards received the report, and inspected Song Jiang and his escort. But first they all went to a wineshop and had a drink. Song Jiang took out several taels of silver and gave them to the Jiangzhou guards. An official receipt for the prisoner was made out and he was taken to a cell to wait. The Jiangzhou guards went to the warder's room to put in a word for him to be reasonably treated and to complete the procedures for handing him over and getting a receipt, before returning to the city. The two original guards handed

over all Song Jiang's luggage amid many protestations of gratitude before bidding him farewell and returning. They said to themselves: "Although we've had some rough times, we've made a good bit of money out of it." After waiting a while at the government offices for the report they had to take back, they set out on the return journey to Jizhou.

Song Jiang meanwhile intended to buy himself some favourable treatment, and when the warder came to his cell he gave him ten taels of silver. He sent another ten taels to the warden's office, together with other gifts. Amongst the officers of the camp and the regular soldiers detailed to serve there he distributed silver so they could buy some extra food. For this reason his presence was welcome to all and sundry.

In a little while he was taken to the inspection room, where the cangue was removed and he was interviewed by the warden. The latter, having received the bribes, said: "New prisoner Song Jiang, hear this: in accordance with the regulation laid down by Emperor Wu De every new prisoner must receive a hundred disciplinary lashes. Guards, secure the prisoner." Whereupon Song Jiang said: "I became infected with a bad cold on the way here and am not yet recovered."

"The man certainly appears to be sick," said the warden. "His colour is yellow and his body emaciated, these are symptoms of sickness. Just credit him with the punishment. Since he has served in a government office, let him work as a copying clerk in the office of this camp."

An order to this effect was drawn up and Song Jiang was told to report to the office. He expressed his thanks and went back to his cell to pick up his things and transfer them to the office. When the other convicts saw Song Jiang had been given such status, they bought wine to honour him. Next day Song Jiang bought provisions himself to return the compliment. Shortly after he invited the head gaoler and other guards, and he regularly sent gifts to the warden. Since he was well provided with gold, silver and other valuables it was no problem for him to make friends. As they say: "The world's favour goes with fortune, men's kindness is linked to rank."

One day when Song Jiang was drinking with the head gaoler in the office, the latter said to him: "Do you remember, friend, how a little while back I told you how our prison superintendent always expects a present? How come you haven't sent him anything yet? It's been more than ten days. He's coming here tomorrow, and it's going to look quite bad."

"Don't worry about that," said Song Jiang. "If the fellow asks for money he won't get any. If you need any yourself, all you have to do is ask for it, but that superintendent isn't going to get a penny out of me. Let him come: I've got something to say to him."

"Registrar, this man's got a hell of a temper. And besides, he really knows how to use his fists and his feet. If there's trouble and he comes down on you hard, don't say I didn't warn you."

"He must do as he pleases. But don't worry. I've got my own methods. Maybe I'll give him something, maybe I won't. Maybe he'll ask me for it, maybe he won't."

But even before he'd finished speaking, a guard came in and announced: "The superintendent's come. He's in the main hall, kicking up a horrible row, wants to know where the new prisoner is and why he hasn't sent the customary gift."

"What did I say?" said the head gaoler. "Now he's going to take it out on all of us."

Song Jiang only laughed. "You'll have to excuse me now," he said. "We'll continue our conversation another time. I'll go and have it out with him at once."

The gaoler stood up, saying: "As for us, we'd better keep out of his way."

Song Jiang left the office and went straight to the inspection room to find the superintendent. Now if Song Jiang had not see that man, it would not have happened that:

Jiangzhou is changed into a den of wolves and tigers;
Bodies are heaped at the crossroads, the streets awash with blood.

And as a result:

Heaven's snare is broken, they return to the Marshes;
The world's trap is sprung, they return to Mount Liang.

THE big man said, "I have ordered the people not to give any money to this man, so how dare you offer him money without my consent."

Song Jiang replied, "I gave him money, but that is not your business."

The fellow took hold of Song Jiang and said, "You banished thief! How dare you reply to me?"

"Why should I not answer you?" asked Song Jiang.

The man raised his fist to strike Song Jiang, but the latter stepped back to avoid the blow. The man however advanced a step, and was in the act of striking when the medicine seller seized him, and lifting him up threw him to the ground. The big fellow was getting up when the medicine seller knocked him down again with his foot. The escort with Song Jiang now intervened to persuade the medicine seller not to go any further.

The man had now got up, and spoke, "Wait a little. We will soon see who is who." He then went away.

Song Jiang turned to the medicine seller, and asked for his name.

"I am a Luoyang man. My name is Xue Yong, and my grandfather was an officer in the army, but owing to intrigues of his fellow officers he got no further promotion. My father and myself have had to sell medicine for a living. Abroad I have got the nickname of the 'Sick Tiger.' I beg to ask your name."

"I am Song Jiang of Yuncheng County."

The man knelt down when he heard this. Song Jiang raised him up and said, "Let us find a place where we can drink wine together." He agreed, and gathering his things together went with Song Jiang to an inn near by.

The innkeeper, however, said, "Although I have both wine and meat yet I dare not supply you with them."

"Why not?" asked Song Jiang.

"Because you have had a row with that big man. He told the people that if anybody supply you with wine or food he would smash up our places. We dare not offer any resistance to him. He is the bully of this town, and we all have to do as he says."

"In that case we shall have to go," said Song Jiang.

"I should like to go now to the inn where I live, and settle my bill," said Xue Yong. "I will come to Jiangzhou to see you in a few days."

Song Jiang agreed to this, and gave him twenty taels of silver. They then went their own ways.

Song Jiang and his escort tried to get food at several inns, but they could not get refreshment anywhere. They at last left the town, and traveled until it was nightfall without being received by any inn. They discussed matters, and could not understand why they should have provoked the big fellow by giving the medicine vendor money. Just then however they happened to see a light in a forest in the distance and they decided to go and ask for a night's lodging.

It was not on the main road, but they agreed that it was the only place for a rest. When they had gone about half a //off the road they came to a large farmhouse. They knocked at the gate, and the farm laborers asked, "Who are you, and why do you come after dark like this?"

"I am a prisoner on the way to Jiangzhou," said Song Jiang. "We cannot find an inn to stop at, and I beg you to allow us to stay here for the night. We shall leave early tomorrow, and pay you for the lodging."

The servant asked them to wait there while he went, and reported the matter to his master. He soon returned and admitted them. The master gave orders that they were to have rooms and also food. When they had finished their meal, and the things had been cleared away the escort said that as there were no strangers in the room Song Jiang could remove his cangue, and have a peaceful sleep that night. He did this, and then they went outside to lavatory before retiring for the night. It was a clear starlit night, and looking round they saw that there was a footpath at the side of the wheat stacks leading behind the room in which they were housed. When they returned to their room Song Jiang said that it was very fortunate for them to get such a place for the night. Just then they heard men light a torch, and come searching round the wheat stacks. Looking through a crack in the door Song Jiang saw that it was the host with three laborers who bore torches. Song Jiang said, "This farmer reminds me of my father who could never sleep until he had been all round the premises at night." Just then however they heard someone knocking at the farm gate. The farm laborer opened the gate, and about seven men came in the farmyard. The leader held a halberd in his hand, and his men were armed with sticks. Song Jiang recognized the leader in the light of the torches, as the bully of Jieyang Town. The old host asked, "Where have you come from, and whom are you looking for?"

The leader replied, "You do not know, father. Is my elder brother at home?"

"Your brother became drunk, and is sleeping in the room at the back."

"I will go and call him," said the leader. "He will go with me to drive a fellow out of this district."

"With whom have you had a dispute? Your brother would not put up with the dispute. You had better tell me all about this matter."

The leader then recited all that had happened on the street that morning, and that he had given orders to all the innkeepers not to supply food or lodging to the prisoner who was passing. They had captured the medicine seller and the following day they would take him to the river, bind him with ropes, and throw him into the water. "As regards the prisoner and his escort we have not been able to find them yet. I want my brother to go with me now and search everywhere for those three fellows."

"My son!" said the farmer. "This is not a creditable affair. If the prisoner gave some money what has that got to do with you? Why do you now wish to attack him? You listen to me, and let the matter drop. You must not speak to your elder brother about this. If he hears that you have been ill-treated he will certainly want to support you. I am afraid that you will kill someone. Listen to me now, and go to bed. Do not attempt to disturb other people's rest this night."

But the son would not listen to his father's advice, and entered the yard with a halberd in his hands, followed by his father.

Song Jiang had heard all this, and spoke to his escort, "This is an unfortunate position. What shall we do? We had better go on our way for if this man gets to know that we are here he will kill us. The farmer may not say anything about us, but how dare the servants conceal us from him?"

The escort agreed, and wanted to go at once. Song Jiang said, "We cannot leave by the gate so we will get through a wall at the back of this building." They got their baggage, and having got through the wall they found a footpath leading into the forest, and they went that way. They had been walking about an hour when they came to a river bordered by reeds. It was the Xunyang River. Just then they heard behind them a great noise and many whistles being blown. It was a critical moment, and they all prayed to Heaven for assistance. They hid themselves in the reeds, and watched the flaming torches approach. They were all afraid, and went further into the depth of the reeds until they reached the edge of the reeds facing the swift running river.

Song Jiang had given up all hope when he saw a small boat emerge from the reeds. He called out, "Sir, please come here, and save us three men. We will give you money."

"Who are you, and how did you get in such a place?"

"There are men pursuing us, and we came here just to escape from them. Bring your boat here at once, and you will be rewarded."

The boatman forced his boat through the reeds, and the three men were soon on board. The baggage was thrown into the boat, and the boatman heard the noise it made and knew it contained silver, and was pleased. He sculled the boat out into the river. Looking back they saw about ten men standing on the bank of the river with lighted torches. The pursuers saw the boat, and there was much shouting for the boat to return. The three men lay down in the bottom of the boat, and the boat proceeded on its way. The pursuers called out, 'If you do not return we shall kill you later on." The boatman only laughed at this threat and replied, "My name is Zhang the Boatman. Stop goddamn yelling at me."

A voice from the bank said, "Zhang, do you not recognize us?"

"I am not blind," replied Zhang. "Of course I can see you."

"Then come here as I have something to say to you," the voice replied.

"You can speak to me tomorrow," replied Zhang the boatman. "My passengers are in great haste."

"But we want to arrest your passengers," said the voice.

"These three men are relatives of mine," said Zhang, "and I depend on them for a living. I invited them to eat a bowl of 'deck knife' noodles and when that is finished I will come back. Do you think I shall give you my livelihood for you to enjoy?"

"Zhang! That is not our idea. We only want to arrest the criminal. Come here!"

"I have had no customer for several days so that I am not going to give you now what I have just got. Do not take this ill, and I will meet you again in a few days." Song Jiang was stupefied and though he had heard all this, he did not understand it at all. But he decided that they would always be beholden to this man for saving their fives. They had narrowly escaped a great danger. As the boatman rowed, he sang a Huzhou song:

Alone I live on the river's bank;
Not a friend but money do I adore.
Last night the moon helped me fine;
I saw some gold and captured it.

Song Jiang and his escort were terrified when they heard this song. But on second thoughts Song Jiang considered that the boatman might be singing in a playful or jesting manner. They were discussing the question in the bottom of the boat, when the boatman lay down his scull and said, "You fellows! I know that you have cheated us people, and now I have you in my hands. Do you three fellows want to eat 'deck knife noodles,' or would you prefer to eat 'dumplings in soup'?"

"Do not joke with us, sir," said Song Jiang. "What do you mean by 'deck knife noodles' and 'dumplings in soup?'"

The boatman glared and said, "I am not joking. If you want to eat 'deck knife noodles,' I have a sword here, and I can quickly mince your bodies, and throw the pieces into the water. If you prefer 'soup pies' then you quickly strip off your clothes, and jump into the river."

"We are in a tight corner," said Song Jiang to his escort. "There is a saying, 'Blessings do not come in pairs; calamities never come singly.'"

"You three had better turn the matter over, and let me have your answer quickly," said the boatman.

"You do not understand," replied Song Jiang. "We have no escape. I am a criminal and am being conducted to Jiangzhou by these two policemen. Please take pity on us, and spare our lives."

"This is nonsensical language," the boatman said. "Spare three of you! I will not let even one escape. I am sometimes known as 'Dog-faced Zhang.' I do not make any difference even with my own father or mother. Shut your stinking mouths and get into the water!"

"We have much silver, gold, clothes, and other valuables in our baggage, and we will give them all to you. Please spare our lives," begged Song Jiang.

The boatman picked up a bright sword with a very broad blade from the bottom of the boat, and shouted, "Now you three! Which is it to be?"

Song heaved a sigh as he looked towards heaven. "Because I have failed in showing respect to Heaven, and have been unfilial to my parents, I have committed a crime, and implicated both of you two men."

The men took hold of Song Jiang, "Sir, enough! We three will all die together."

The boatman called out, "Now you three, get your clothes off, and jump into the water."

The three men embraced each other, and gazed at the water. Just then they heard the sound of sculling on another boat, and the boatman turned his head to listen. A boat was quickly approaching from up river, and was soon alongside. There were three men in the boat, and one of them was a big man and was standing with a pitchfork in his hands. The other two were young men, and they were sculling. The big man called out, "Who are you and how dare you do business here? You will have to divide with us all that you have in your boat."

The boatman quickly replied, "Ah! Is that brother Li? I thought it might be someone else. Where are you going to do business? You have not got brothers with you this time?"

"Younger brother Zhang, what is your game?" asked the tall man. "What things have you got in your boat? Have you any valuables?"

"If I told you, you would only laugh," said the boatman. "These last few days I have had no business—have lost all my money in gambling, and have not even a single cash. I was in a melancholy mood when these three men came to my boat with their baggage. Two were policemen and the other a small-sized criminal with a sallow complexion. I do not know who they are, but they are going to Jiangzhou. The prisoner however was not wearing a cangue. A number of men came to the river's bank with the two brothers Mu who wanted to capture the three men. As I judged that the escort had plenty of money I declined to hand them over."

"Ah! Can this be my brother Song Jiang?" asked the tall man.

Song Jiang seemed to recognize the voice and called out from his hiding place. "Who are you? I request you to save Song Jiang's life."

The tall man was startled at this and replied, "You really are my brother! Why not get up?"

Song Jiang crept out. It was a bright starlit night, and he immediately recognized the man as Li Jun, the "Muddy Water Dragon." Behind him he could make out the two men who were sculling as Tong Wei, the 'Cave Dragon,' and the other as Tong Meng, the 'River Churning Clam.'

Li Jun also recognized Song Jiang, and jumped across to the other boat saying, "Brother, you have been frighted. Had I not just happened to arrive in the nick of time you would have been killed. Today fate decided that I should be very fidgety at home, so that I got my boat to try to intercept some salt smugglers. I had not the slightest idea that I would save your life."

The boatman had listened to all this with great surprise, and now asked, "Can this man be Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain,' of Shandong?"

"Of course it is."

The boatman knelt down, and kowtowed saying, "My God! Why did you not mention your name before, and so stopped me from attempting your life? I was nearly to murder you."

"Who is this boatman?" asked Song Jiang.

"He is my sworn brother," replied Li Jun. "He comes from the Xiaogu Hill, and his name is Zhang Heng. He is known as the 'Boatman,' and he lives as a virtuous pirate on the river."

Song Jiang and his escort laughed at this. The two boats were soon brought to the side of the river and moored.

Li Jun addressed the boatman Zhang Heng, "Today you are favored by Heaven to meet the greatest hero in the world, Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain.' Take a good look at him, and never forget him." Zhang Heng took a flint and steel and striking a light lit a lamp, and had a good look at Song Jiang. He then knelt down, and said, "I hope that you will overlook my serious mistake. How did you come to be banished to the prison at Jiangzhou?"

Li Jun explained the whole situation, and then Zhang Heng said to Song Jiang, "Brother, I have something to say. I have a younger brother of the same mother. He is a big muscular fellow, can swim about fifteen //; and can stay in the water for seven days at a time. In the water he swims in a straight line. He is also a skilled gymnast. Because of this he has received the nickname the 'White Fish.' His name is Zhang Shun. Previously we lived on the Yangtze River very peacefully and orderly, but the time came when we had no money, and then we took our boat to a quiet solitary place to do some illicit business. Those people who like to save money and at the same time get quick ferrying came to us. I arranged for my brother to pretend to be a traveler, and also to come to our boat with his baggage. When the boat was full I would push off, but would soon drop the anchor, and taking a sword demand the fares. The proper fare was five hundred cash,

but I would demand three thousand cash. I would first ask my brother, and when he refused to pay I would take his head in one hand, and the seat of his trousers in the other and throw him overboard. The other passengers would then willingly pay the amount demanded without raising the least objection. I would then row them to a quiet part of the bank, and they would quickly disembark and disappear. My brother would swim underneath the water to the side of the river, and emerge when nobody was about. We would soon meet, and divide the money. We earned a good living by this means for some time."
"I suppose you had plenty of patrons who looked out for your boat," said Song Jiang.
The men all laughed at this wit.
"We soon found another business," said Zhang Heng. "I came here to help in salt smuggling whereas my brother started in business at Jiangzhou as a wholesale fishmonger. I should like to write a letter to him, but unfortunately I do not know characters."
"We will go into the village here, and find a man to write the letter for you," said Li Jun.
They set off to the village, but they had not gone half the distance to that place when they saw many lighted torches on the riverbank.
"I see that the brothers Mu have not yet gone back," said Zhang Heng.
"Let us bring them here," said Li Jun.
"That will never do," said Song Jiang, "as they want to arrest me."
"They are our friends," said Li Jun. He then whistled and the torches immediately approached. When they arrived they were surprised to see Song Jiang with Li Jun and Zhang Heng, and asked, "Do you know these three men? How is it you are with them?"
Li Jun laughed loudly and said, "Who do you think he is?"
"We do not know his name. But we saw him give money to a medicine vendor in the market town, and so undermined our influence there. So we tried to arrest him."
'This is Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain,' from Shandong, of whom I have spoken to you many times. Quickly pay your obeisance."
The two brothers kowtowed and said, "We have heard of your fame for a long time, but we did not expect to meet you this day. We have treated you badly, and hope that you will forgive us."
Song Jiang raised them up, and said, "I beg that you will give me your name."
Li Jun interposed, "These brothers are of a rich family in this town. This one is Mu Hong, and his nickname is the 'Unrestrained' and his younger brother is Mu Chun nicknamed 'Slightly Restrained.' They are the tyrants of Jieyang Town. There are two other groups of tyrants whom you will have heard of. On the Jieyang Mountain I myself and Li Li are the tyrants. On the banks of this river are two tyrants, namely, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun. These form the three groups of tyrants."
"I have not heard of these men before," said Song Jiang, "but as we are all brothers I hope that you will now release Xue Yong."
"Do you refer to that medicine vendor?" asked Mu Hong laughingly. "Do not worry about him. I will send my brother to release him, and bring him here. We now beg you to come to our home where we can offer suitable apologies for our blunder."
'They agreed to this, and messengers were dispatched with an order to prepare a feast for the coming guests. Two men were sent to summon the two boatmen to join them also at the feast.
It was about 4 A.M. when they all reached the farmhouse, and were welcomed by Old Mu. It was almost dawn when Xue Yong arrived. They feasted together all that day. On the following day Song Jiang wished to continue on his way but Mu Hong would not agree to this. They all went for a stroll viewing the sights in the town; thus they stayed at Mu's house for three more days, and then Song Jiang insisted upon departure as he was afraid that the time limit would be over.
At last they agreed to his departure. Upon his departure Zhang Heng got a letter written introducing Song Jiang to his brother at Jiangzhou. They all shed tears as he embarked on the boat. The boat had sails, and as the wind was favorable it soon reached Jiangzhou. They went straight to the *yamen*, and presented their dispatch to the Prefect.
The Prefect Cai Dezhang, the ninth son of the Prime Minister Cai Jing, was a proud man with an overbearing manner, and he was addicted to taking secret commissions. His father appointed him here because the prefecture was a very wealthy place. He saw that Song Jiang did not look like an average man so he asked him, "How is it that there is no written statement on your cangue?"
The escort stated that on the journey there had been much rain which had washed the written statement away.
The escort was dismissed and Song Jiang was sent to the prison where he was put in a small house separate from the main building.
Song Jiang duly bribed the attendants and the warden with ten taels of silver each, so that they were all pleased. When he was called to the inspection room the warden said, "Song Jiang, listen to me. The founder of the Song Dynasty, Emperor Taizu, made a law that criminals who had been transferred to a prison should receive one hundred blows with the bamboo. Now, those on my left and right, take the prisoner and inflict the usual punishment."
"On the journey here, sir," said Song Jiang, "I caught a cold, and have not quite recovered from it."
"I can see that you are not quite well," replied the official, "so we will postpone the blows today. He was previously a clerk in a *yamen* so that we will use him in that capacity in this *yamen*." He thereupon wrote out an order to that effect.
Song Jiang expressed his thanks, and returning to his quarters took his baggage to the office where he was to work as a writer. The prisoners realized that Song Jiang was a man with influence. They bought wine, and invited him to drink with them, and he received their congratulations. The next day Song Jiang invited the prisoners to wine in the same way. He also often asked the lower officials to dine with him, and sent presents to the warden. The result was that he had many friends. Within a fortnight they were all pleased to have made his acquaintance. An ancient says, "Human relations vary—sometimes friendship, sometimes the opposite. Some fawn upon the wealthy and avoid the poor."
One day when Song Jiang was entertaining one of the turnkeys the latter said, "The other day I told you that you must not overlook giving the head jailer some money, but how is it that you have not yet done so? It is now nearly ten days since you came here. He will certainly come to see you tomorrow, and then it will be too late to offer money."
"Never mind that," said Song Jiang. "If he wants money I will not give him any. But if you turnkeys want money and ask me for it I will certainly supply the same. That superintendent shall not have a single cash. When he comes here I shall have something to say to him."
"Sir, but that man is a stern disciplinarian, and he is over us," said the turnkey. "If you have a disagreement with him he will certainly abuse you. In that case do not say that I did not warn you."
"Don't worry about that," said Song Jiang. "It may be of course that I shall give him something, and it may be that he does not want anything."
While they were talking about this a messenger came in, and reported that the head jailer was coming. He was evidently in a temper as he called out, "How is it that the newly arrived prisoner has not given me regular money?"
The turnkey said, "Did I not tell you so?"
Song Jiang laughed and said, "I will go to meet him and will see you later." He did this.

Seas of blood, and heaps of corpses,
At the crossroads in the town;
Mandarin nets were spread on all sides,
But the bandits broke them down.

## 136
## Welcome Timely Rain Song Jiang Meets the Divine Marvellous Traveller Magic Messenger; Black Whirlwind Iron Ox Fights White Streak Eel Fish in the Waves & have a set-to in the river

Seated on a bench in the Registration Room the superintendent was shouting: "Where is the new exiled prisoner?"
The guard pointed at Song Jiang. "That's him."
"You swarthy sawed-off bait for the executioner," roared the superintendent. "Who's backing you that you dare withhold my money?"
"Gifts must be given willingly," Song Jiang retorted. "They can't be forced. You're very petty."
The men watching from both sides, hearing this, broke into a cold sweat.
"Thief of an exile," the superintendent raged. "You have the temerity to call me petty. Guards, turn this rogue up and give him a hundred strokes of the persuader!"
Everyone in the prison was on good terms with Song Jiang. When the order was given to beat him, they all departed hurriedly, leaving him and the superintendent alone. The superintendent was furious. He grabbed the persuader staff and rushed towards Song Jiang.
"What crime have I committed that you want to beat me?" Song Jiang queried.
"Thief of an exile, you're completely in my hands. I can treat your slightest cough as a crime!"
"You're just picking fault. It's not that serious. I haven't committed any capital offense."
"You haven't, eh?" the superintendent fumed. "I can take your life as easily as I swat a fly, if I feel like it."
Song Jiang laughed coldly. "Because I don't give you money I deserve to die. In that case what should be the fate of a man who has befriended Wu Yong of Mount Liangshan?"
The superintendent dropped the staff. "What's that you say?"
"I'm talking about Military Advisor Wu Yong's friend. Why do you ask?"
The superintendent hastily pulled Song Jiang aside. "Who are you? How do you know about that?"
Song Jiang smiled. "I'm from Yuncheng County, Shandong Province. My name is Song Jiang."
Startled, the superintendent clasped his hands together respectfully. "Song Jiang the Timely Rain!"
"It didn't seem worth mentioning."
"Brother, this is no place to talk. I can't kowtow here. In the city we can speak freely. Please come with me."
"I'll be with you in a few moments. I just want to lock my door."
Song Jiang went back to his room, got Wu Yong's letter, took some silver, came out, locked the door, and asked the guard to keep an eye on things. Then he and the superintendent left the prison and went into Jiangzhou. They mounted the stairs to the upper storey of a tavern off the street and sat down.
"Where did you see Wu Yong, brother?" asked the superintendent.
Song Jiang produced the letter from inside his clothes and handed it to him. The superintendent tore open the envelope, read the missive, then concealed it in his sleeve. Dropping to his knees, he kowtowed.
Song Jiang quickly returned the courtesy. "I'm afraid I spoke rudely to you. Please forgive me," he begged.
"All I knew was that a prisoner named Song had been delivered," the superintendent explained. "It's our custom for all newly arrived exiles to pay five ounces of silver. But more than ten days passed and there was no sign of the gift. I wasn't very busy today, so I came down to collect in person. I never knew it was you. I hope I didn't offend you there in prison, brother. I beg your pardon."
"The head keeper spoke to me of you several times. I intended to call on you and pay my respects, but I didn't know where you lived and had no occasion to go into town. I could only wait for you to come. That's what delayed our meeting. I didn't care about the five ounces of silver. I thought if I deliberately withheld them, brother would be sure to come. Today we've met and all my wishes have been answered."
Who was this superintendent? He was none other than Dai Zong to whom Wu Yong had written a letter of introduction, the head of Jiangzhou's two prisons. In Song times prison heads in the Jinling region were called "Master"; in the Hunan region they were known as "Superintendent". Dai had an astonishing talent. Whenever he was out on an urgent mission he would wrap a picture of a god around each of his legs, and this gave him miraculous travelling powers. He could cover five hundred //in a single day. He could do eight hundred if he tied two to each leg. For this reason everyone hailed him as Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller.
Now that both men had revealed their feelings and motives they were very pleased with each other. Sitting in a corner room, they summoned the waiter and ordered wine and tidbits and vegetable dishes. Over the wine, Song Jiang told of the many bold heroes and men he had met on the road. Dai Zong, too, spoke frankly, revealing his relations with Wu Yong.
They talked intimately and without reserve. Before they had finished more than two or three cups of wine they heard a tumult of voices on the floor below. The waiter hurried into their room.
"Superintendent, you're the only one who can handle him," he said to Dai. "There's no other way. Please go and settle this."
"Who's raising all that row down there?"
"It's that brother Li we often see you with, the man called Iron Ox. He's trying to borrow money from the host."
Dai laughed. "That rascal is misbehaving again. I couldn't imagine who you meant." To Song Jiang he said: "Excuse me a minute, brother. I'll bring him up."
Dai went down the stairs and soon returned with a big dark complected fellow. Song Jiang was taken aback by the man's appearance. "Who is this brother?" he asked the superintendent.
"One of our prison guards, Li Kui, from Baizhang Village, Yishui County, in Yizhou Prefecture. He's nicknamed Black Whirlwind. In his native parts he's also known as Iron Ox. He had to run away from home because he beat a man to death. He wandered to Jiangzou and here he's remained, although later there was an amnesty. Because he's nasty when he's drunk, many people are afraid of him. He can wield two battle-axes, and he's good with fists and cudgel. He's on our prison staff."
Li Kui looked Song Jiang over. "Who's this swarthy fellow?" he asked Dai Zong.
The superintendent smiled. "You see what a crude lout he is, sir Clerk. No manners whatsoever."
"I only asked," said Li Kui. "What's crude about that?"
"Instead of saying 'Who is this gentleman?' you said 'Who is this swarthy fellow?' If that isn't crude, what is? Well, I'll tell you who he is. He's the noble brother you've been wanting to join for so long."
"Not Blacky Song Jiang, the Timely Rain from Shandong?"
"Must you be so vulgar?" Dai shouted. "Referring to him like that! Haven't you any sense of rank? Kowtow to him, quickly. What are you waiting for?"
"I will if he's really Song Jiang. But if he's just some idler, I'll be blown if I will. You're not just making sport of me, are you, brother?"
"I am indeed Blacky Song Jiang, of Shandong," Song Jiang assured him.
Li Kui clapped his hands. "My blessed grandfather! Why didn't you say so earlier? Iron Ox delighted!" He flopped to the ground and kowtowed.
Song Jiang hastily returned the compliment. "Brave brother, please be seated," he pleaded.
"Come sit beside me and have some wine," said Dai.
"All right, but none of those piddling little cups for me. I want a large bowl."
"What angered you downstairs?" Song Jiang asked.
"I've a big silver ingot that I pawned for ten ounces of silver coins," said Li Kui. "I wanted to borrow ten ounces from the host here to get the bar back, plus a little more for spending money. But the knave wouldn't lend me a thing. I was just going to deal with him and smash his premises when brother Dai called me upstairs."
"You need only ten ounces to redeem your ingot? Aren't there any interest charges?"
"I've got the interest money. All I need is another ten ounces."
Song Jiang took out ten coins and gave them to Li Kui. "Go redeem your ingot," he said. Dai Zong wanted to intervene, but Song Jiang had already handed the money over.
"Great," said Li Kui. "You two brothers wait here. I'll repay as soon as I get my ingot. And I'll invite brother Song outside the town to eat and drink with us."
"Stay a while," said Song Jiang. "Have a few bowls here, first."
"I'll be right back." Li Kui pushed the door curtain aside and went downstairs.
"You shouldn't lend him money," Dai Zong said. "I tried to prevent you, but you were too quick."
"Why not?"
"Li Kui is pretty straight, but he loves to drink and gamble. Where would he get a big silver ingot! It's just a ruse, and you fell for it, brother. He must be going to gamble. That's why he left here so fast. If he wins, he'll return your money. If he loses, you'll never see a penny of those ten ounces of silver. I'm ashamed to have been the cause of this."
Song Jiang laughed. "Don't treat me like a stranger, brother. The silver's not worth talking about. Let him lose it. He seems like a straightforward loyal fellow."
"He has his good points. He's just too rude and rash. In the Jiangzhou prison when he gets drunk he doesn't bother the inmates, but he beats up the toughest guards. He's caused me no end of trouble. The slightest injustice drives him wild, and he tears into bullies. Everyone in Jiangzhou is afraid of him."

"Let's have another cup or two, and stroll around outside the city."
"I nearly forgot. I want to show you the scenery along the river."
"That will be fine. I'd like to see the beauties of Jiangzhou."
Meanwhile, Li Kui, having obtained some money, thought: "What luck! Brother Song Jiang never met me before, but he lends me ten ounces of silver. He certainly deserves his reputation for righteousness and generosity. What a shame I've lost steadily at gambling these last few days. I haven't a copper to invite him out. I'll gamble with these ten ounces of silver he's given me. If I win a few strings of cash, I'll be able to wine and dine him, and that will make me look good."

Li Kui hurried to a gambling den outside the city run by a man called Little Zhang Yi. He threw his ten ounces of silver down on the gambling floor and said: "Let me have the toss coins."
Little Zhang Yi knew he played honestly. "Wait a while, brother," he urged. "You take the next round."
"I want this one."
"Bet from the sidelines which way the coins will fall."
"I don't want to do that. I want to toss them myself. I'm betting five ounces of silver." Li Kui snatched the coins from a man who was waiting to toss. "Who'll cover my bet?"
"I will," said little Zhang Yi.
"Tails," cried Li Kui, and tossed. The coins, came up heads.
Little Zhang Yi reached for the money.
"I came here with ten ounces," said Li Kui.
"I'll beg you another five, then," said Little Zhang Yi. "If you get tails, I'll return you the five you just lost."
Li Kui took the coins and tossed. "Tails," he shouted. Again the coins turned up heads.
Little Zhang Yi grinned. "I told you to wait for the next round and not grab the toss coins, but you wouldn't listen. Now you've thrown two heads in a row."
"This silver doesn't belong to me."
"It doesn't matter whose it is. You've lost and that's that."
"Lend it to me, then. I'll pay you back tomorrow."
"Idle chatter! As the old saying has it: 'There's no pity in gambling.' You've lost. What are you making such a fuss about?"
Li Kui hitched up the front of his gown. "Are you going to return me that money or not?"
"Brother Li, you gamble honestly as a rule. Why are you behaving so badly today?"
Li Kui did not reply but picked his money up from the floor and also snatched ten ounces of silver belonging to other gamblers, and put them all in the pocket of his cloth gown. Glaring, he said: "I usually play straight, but today's an exception."
Little Zhang Yi rushed up to wrest back the money. Li Kui made a feint and threw him to the ground. A dozen gamblers swarmed against the big fellow. Li Kui feinted east and struck west, feinted south and struck north. He pounded them till they had no place to hide, then he headed for the gate.
"Where are you going, young man?" the gate-keeper asked.
Li Kui thrust him aside, kicked open the gate and went out, pursued by the other gamblers. They shouted after him: "How can you behave like this, brother Li? Taking our silver!" But they didn't dare come close.
As Li Kui was walking away, a man ran up behind him, seized his arm and shouted: "How dare you grab other people's property, you scoundrel?"
"What friggin business is that of yours?" Li Kui spun around to find himself looking at Dai Zong and, standing to Dai's rear, Song Jiang. A look of embarrassment spread over Li's face.
"Don't blame me, brother. Iron Ox usually plays fair. But I lost your silver and had no money to invite you out. I got excited and behaved badly."
Song Jiang laughed. "Any time you need silver, just ask me. You obviously lost, so give them back their money."
Li Kui had no choice but to take the silver from his pocket and put it in Song Jiang's hand. Song Jiang called Little Zhang Yi over and gave him the money.
"I'll take only what belongs to us," said the gambler. "I don't want the other ten pieces which brother Li lost to me. He's liable to hold it against me."
"Take it all, and don't worry," Song Jiang urged, but the gambler was adamant. "Did he hurt any of you?" Song Jiang asked.
"The game master, the collector and the gate-keeper—he knocked them all down."
"Then let this be their compensation. If you won't accept this for them, I'll go to them myself."
The gambler took the silver, thanked Song Jiang and departed.
"Now," said Song Jiang, "let's have a few cups with brother Li."
"Up ahead beside the river is the Pipa Pavilion," said Dai. "It was once frequented by the Tang poet Bai Juyi. Now it's a tavern. We can have some wine there and admire the river scenery."
"Hadn't we better buy some tidbits in town first, to take along?"
"No need. They serve meals, too."
"In that case, let's go."
The three men proceeded to the Pipa Pavilion. One portion of it overlooked the Xunyang River, the other was used as living quarters for the host. Upstairs were ten or so tables. Dai Zong selected a clean one and invited Song Jiang to be seated. The superintendent sat down opposite, and placed Li Kui at his side. They ordered vegetables, fruit and seafood delicacies to go with the wine. The waiter produced two jugs of "Springtime in Jade Bottles"—a famous Jiangzhou liquor—and removed the clay stoppers.
"A large bowl for me," said Li Kui. "I can't drink out of those little cups."
"Rustic," Dai barked. "I want you to just drink your wine and keep quiet."
"This gentleman and I will use cups," Song Jiang told the waiter. "Give our big brother a large bowl."
The waiter responded and went out. He soon returned with a bowl which he placed in front of Li Kui. He poured the wine and served the tidbits. Li Kui grinned.
"You're really a fine man, brother Song, as everyone says. You understand me. Getting you as a friend is one of the best things that ever happened to me."
Six or seven rounds of drinks were consumed. Song Jiang was pleased with his two companions. After drinking several cups, he suddenly got a craving for hot pepper fish soup.
"Is there any fresh fish around here?" he asked Dai Zong.
"Don't you see all those fishing boats on the river?" Dai responded with a smile. "The whole region is teeming with fish and rice."
"Some hot pepper fish soup would be just right for sobering up."
Dai called the waiter and ordered three servings of fish in hot pepper soup. Not long after, the soup arrived.
" 'Beautiful crockery is more satisfying than delicious food,' " Song Jiang quoted. "Although this is only a tavern, they certainly have lovely bowls." He picked up his chopsticks. After urging Dai Zong and Li Kui to eat, he tasted the fish and sipped the soup.
Li Kui didn't bother with chopsticks. He pulled the fish out of his bowl with his hand and ate it, bones and all. Song Jiang couldn't help laughing. He took two more sips of soup, then put down his chopsticks and stopped eating.
Dai Zong said: "This is preserved fish, brother. I'm sure it's not to your taste."
"I thought a little fresh fish soup would go well after wine. But this fish isn't really very good."
"I can't eat mine, either. I don't like salted fish."
Li Kui, who had finished his own bowl, said: "If you brothers don't want yours, I'll eat it for you." He scooped the fish out of Song Jiang's bowl with his fingers and consumed it, then did the same with Dai Zong's. He spattered the whole table with soup.
Song Jiang watched Li Kui demolish three bowls of fish soup, including bones. He summoned the waiter.
"I think this brother is still hungry. Bring him two catties of sliced meat. I'll pay when you've added up the bill."
"We've no beef, only mutton. You can have all the fat mutton you want."
Li Kui flung the remnants of his soup in the man's face, slopping his clothes.
"What are you doing?" Dai Zong yelled.
"This sassy villain has the nerve to pretend I eat nothing but beef and won't give me any mutton."
"I only asked," the waiter protested. "I didn't say anything."
"Go slice the meat," said Song Jiang. "I'll pay."
Swallowing his anger, the man sliced two catties of mutton and served it on a platter. Li Kui didn't stand on ceremony. In a twiddle of thumbs, he chomped the whole thing down.
"You're a good man," Song Jiang said admiringly.
"Brother Song can read my friggin mind. Meat's much better than fish."
Dai called the waiter over. "The bowls you served that fish soup in were very nice, but the fish was too salty. Don't you have any fresh fish you can make a pepper soup of for this gentleman here, to cut the effects of the wine?"
"To tell you the truth, sir, that fish was last night's. Today's live catch is still on the boats. But none of it can be sold until the catch-master comes. So we don't have any fresh fish yet."
Li Kui jumped up. "I'll get a couple for brother."
"Don't go," said Dai Zong. "We'll ask the waiter to buy some."
"Those fishermen won't dare refuse me. There's nothing to it."
The superintendent couldn't stop him. Li Kui left. "I hope you'll excuse me, brother," Dai said to Song Jiang, "for introducing you to a man like that. He has absolutely no manners. I'm very embarrassed."
"That's his nature. No one can change it. But I respect his honesty."
The two chatted and joked in the Pipa Pavilion.
Li Kui went down to the river. Eighty or ninety fishing boats were moored in a row to willow trees along the bank. Some of the fishermen were sprawled asleep in the stern, some were mending nets on the bow. Others were bathing in the water. It was the middle of the fifth lunar month, and a red sun was sinking in the west. Of the catch-master there was no sign, and so no fish were on sale.
"You've got fresh fish on board," Li Kui called. "Let me have a couple."
"We can't open the hatches till the catch-master comes. Don't you see all those pedlars waiting on the bank?"
"Who cares about your friggin catch-master. Just let me have two fish."
"We haven't burned the paper ingots yet to pay the gods. How can we open the hatches and give you fish?"
Before the fishermen could stop him, Li Kui jumped onto one of the boats. He didn't understand anything about these craft, and he hauled up a bamboo partition.
"Don't do that," the fishermen on the bank yelled.
Li Kui groped around under the hatch cover, but he couldn't find any fish. The river boats had large openings in the stern which let the water in and kept the fish in the hold alive. The bamboo partition was to prevent them from swimming out. Jiangzhou was supplied with fresh fish through this method. When Li Kui pulled up the partition, all the fish in the boat escaped.
He leaped over to the adjoining craft and hauled up its bamboo partition. Seventy or eighty fishermen rushed on board and attacked Li Kui with bamboo poles. Enraged, he stripped off his gown and stood with only a checkered kerchief covering his loins. He snatched half a dozen of the punting poles with both hands and snapped them like scallions. The startled fishermen left hastily, undid the moorings of their boats and shoved off.
Li Kui, naked as an owl, angrily seized a broken pole and charged up the bank to continue the battle. The pedlars shouldered their carrying-poles and fled in confusion.
In the midst of this turmoil, a man was seen approaching along a path. "You've come at last, master," several persons called. "That big dark fellow has been grabbing fish. He's driven off all the boats."
"Which big dark fellow? How dare he behave like that?"
"There, on the bank, chasing and beating people."
The man sped towards Li Kui, shouting: "Have you eaten a panther's heart or a tiger's gall that you dare mess up my business?"
Li Kui looked at him. He was over six feet tall, about thirty-two or three, with a black mustache and goatee. His head was swathed in blue silk of a swastika pattern, through which a lock of hair protruded bound by a string of heartsblood red. He wore a white cloth gown, tied at the waist by a red sash. On his feet were many-looped hemp sandals with black and white bird's-foot design. He held a weighing scale in one hand.
He had come to sell fish, but when he saw Li Kui knocking people about, he passed his scale to a pedlar and rushed forward. "Who else do you want to beat, scoundrel?" he cried.
Without a word, Li Kui whirled his pole and swung. The man dodged and seized the pole. Li Kui grabbed him by the hair. Three times the man snatched for his legs, hoping to trip him up. But Li Kui had the strength of an ox. He simply held him off and prevented him from grappling. The man pummelled Li Kui's ribs, but the big fellow was unperturbed. When he started kicking, Li Kui pushed his head down and pounded his back like a drum with a fist of iron. He couldn't get away.
Someone ran up behind Li Kui and wrapped his arms around his waist, helped by another man. "You can't do this," they exclaimed.
Li Kui turned his head and saw Dai Zong and Song Jiang. He released his grip and the man he had been thumping sped away like a wisp of smoke.
"I told you not to go for fish," Dai scolded. "And here you are, fighting. Suppose you killed him? You have to spend the rest of your life in jail."
"Afraid I'd implicate you? If I killed anyone, I'd bear the whole blame myself."
"Don't talk like that, brother," said Song Jiang. "Put your gown on, and we'll have some wine."
Li Kui retrieved his gown from beneath a willow, slung it over his arm, and set off with Dai and Song. Before they had gone a dozen paces a voice behind them shouted: "Swarthy rascal, you and I are going to have this out."
Li Kui turned. The catch-master, naked except for a breechcloth, had skin as white as snow. He had removed his blue silk head binding, revealing a topknot of hair tied with string of heartsblood red. He was poling a boat towards the bank.
"Villain who deserves ten thousand slices," he yelled. "If I fear you I'm no man. Whoever runs from this fight is a craven coward."
Li Kui roared with rage, cast his gown aside, and rushed to meet the foe. The man poled his boat a bit closer to the bank, cursing steadily.
"Come ashore, if you're such a man," Li Kui invited.
The catch-master poked Li Kui in the legs with his pole. Furious, the big fellow leaped on board. Quicker than it takes to say, the man set himself and, with a few shoves of the pole, sped the craft like an arrow to the middle of river.
Li Kui knew how to swim, but not very well. He was confused and alarmed. The man stopped his swearing and set the pole down.
"Come on," he said, "let's see who'll be the victor." He seized Li Kui by the arms. "I'm not going to fight you yet. I want you to drink some water, first." With his feet he tipped the boat over, turning it bottom up and dumping both men in the river.
Song Jiang and Dai Zong, who had hurried to the bank, groaned. Nearly five hundred people were also watching from beneath the willows. "The big dark fellow was tricked," they said. "Even if he escapes with his life, he'll get a bellyful of water."
The river parted and Li Kui was lifted up, only to be shoved down under again. The two men battled in the jade waves—one dark to the point of blackness, the other pale as glistening frost. Fiercely interlocked they fought, and the five hundred spectators on the bank raised cheer after cheer.
Li Kui had been ducked so often that his eyes were white. Again he was lifted, again pushed under. He was clearly getting the worst of it. Song Jiang told Dai Zong to ask people to save him.
"Who is that big white fellow?" Dai Zong asked.
"He's our local catch-master," someone replied. "Zhang Shun."

When Song Jiang heard that name, he exclaimed: "Not the one they call White Streak in the Waves?"
"Yes, that's him."
"I have a letter for him back at the prison from his brother Zhang Heng," Song Jiang told the superintendent.
Dai went to the edge of the bank and called: "Brother Zhang, stop fighting. There's a letter for you from your older brother Zhang Heng. That big dark fellow is our friend. Let him go. Come ashore and talk."
Zhang Shun recognized the superintendent. He released Li Kui, hurried to the shore, climbed the bank and greeted Dai respectfully. "Forgive my bad manners, Superintendent," he said.
"For my sake, rescue that brother of mine and bring him here," Dai pleaded. "There's someone I want you to meet."
Zhang Shun dived into the river and swam swiftly to where Li Kui was floundering about, his head in the water. Zhang grasped him by the hand. His legs treaded water so powerfully he seemed to be walking on land, and the waves only came up to his navel. With one hand he hauled Li Kui towards the shore. The audience on the bank cheered. Song Jiang was stricken dumb with amazement. The two men soon reached the bank. Li Kui, gasping, vomited up a lot of water.
"Please come with me to the Pipa Pavilion where we can talk," said Dai.
Zhang Shun got his gown and put it on. Li Kui did the same, and the four men went to the pavilion.
"Do you know me, brother?" Dai asked Zhang Shun.
"Of course, Superintendent. But it's never been my good fortune to meet you."
Dai pointed at Li Kui. "Did you know this fellow before? Today you two have clashed."
"Naturally I know brother Li. But this is the first time we've matched strength."
"You ducked me plenty," said Li Kui.
"And you really pounded me," Zhang Shun replied.
"You're now brothers who've contended," said Dai. " 'You don't know a man till you've fought him,' as the old saying goes."
"In the future, don't try to start anything with me on land," Li Kui warned.
"I'll just wait for you on the water."
All four men laughed, and mutually apologized for their rudeness. Pointing at Song Jiang, Dai addressed himself to Zhang Shun.
"Do you recognize this brother?"
"No. I've never seen him before."
Li Kui jumped to his feet. "That's Blacky Song Jiang."
"Not Clerk Song of Yuncheng, the Timely Rain from Shandong?"
"Yes, he's brother Song Jiang," Dai confirmed.
Zhang Shun promptly kowtowed. "I've long known your fame, but I never dreamed we'd meet today. Many's the time I've heard brothers in the gallant fraternity tell of your virtues, how you rescue those in danger and help the needy, how righteous you are, how generous."
"You mustn't exaggerate. Not long ago I spent a few days in the home of Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon, below Jieyang Ridge. Then, because of an encounter with Mu Hong at the Xunyang River, I also met your brother Zhang Heng. He wrote a letter which he asked me to deliver to you. I have it back at the prison. I came here today to the Pipa Pavilion with Superintendent Dai and brother Li to drink some wine and admire the river scenery. I got a sudden craving for fish soup to sober me up, and brother Li volunteered to get the fish. We couldn't stop him. Hearing a great row down by the bank, we sent the waiter to see what was going on. He said the big dark fellow was beating people. We rushed down to stop him. Little did we think that we would meet you, warrior. I have indeed have been blessed by Heaven today. I've made the acquaintance of three bold gallants. Please, let's be seated and have a few cups."
They summoned the waiter to lay the table and bring wine and tidbits.
"If it's fish you want, brother," Zhang Shun said to Song Jiang, "I'll get you some."
"Thank you."
"I'll go with you," said Li Kui.
"Not again?" said Dai. "Haven't you drunk enough water?"
Zhang Shun laughed, and took Li Kui's hand. "We'll go for the fish together and see what the response is."
They left the pavilion and went down to the river. Zhang Shun whistled, once. All the fishing craft on the lake came poling towards them.
"Who's got any golden carp?" Zhang Shun asked.
"Here," cried one of the boatmen.
"I've got some," shouted another.
In an instant a dozen golden carp were produced. Zhang Shun selected four large ones and strung them together with a tendril of willow. He told Li Kui to take them up to the pavilion and have the kitchen start preparing them. He himself counted the peddlers and instructed an apprentice to commence weighing and selling the catch. Then he returned to the Pipa Pavilion to rejoin Song Jiang. "Why did you bring so many?" the clerk asked him. "One would have been enough."
"Such small gifts are not worth mentioning. What you can't finish you can take back to you residence for snacks." They sat in accordance with their age. Li Kui, being older, took the third place. Zhang Shun had the fourth. The waiter was told to bring two jugs of best quality "Spring in Jade Bottles," plus seafood and various delicacies to go with the wine. Zhang Shun instructed the waiter to make pepper soup with one of the carp. Another was to be steamed in wine, sliced and fried in batter. The four men talked freely as they sat drinking. Just as they were loosening up, a girl of sixteen, dressed in silks, came in. She curtsied, hailed each respectfully, and started to sing. She interrupted Li Kui, who had begun boasting of his bold exploits. The other three men turned to listen to the girl. Li Kui jumped up and thrust two fingers against her forehead. With a scream, she fell over backwards. People crowded in to see what the matter was. The girl's peach-like complexion had turned earthen; her lips were unable to speak. She lay motionless. The host wanted to detain the four men and torn them over to the authorities. Truly, an inelegant uncultured fellow, unmoved by fragrant jade beauty, had created a troublesome problem.

So Song Jiang took leave of the head gaoler, left the office and made his way to the inspection room. Here he found the prison superintendent sitting on a stool in front of the door.
"Where's this new prisoner?" he growled.
One of the prison guards pointed out Song Jiang and said: "That's him."
"You black-faced little runt," the superintendent roared. "Who said you could skip the customary gift of cash?"
"'A gift is that which is freely given, it comes from the heart.' How can you demand a gift by force?" Song Jiang said. "That just shows how low you are."
The onlookers felt their hands grow clammy with sweat. The superintendent exploded. "You prison scum, you dare to speak like that to me? You've really got it back to front, calling me low! 'Oy, guards, take the bugger off and give him a hundred strokes."
But all the prison officers were sympathetic to Song Jiang and when they heard the order to beat him they made themselves scarce. The superintendent now found himself alone with the prisoner. The fact that everyone had left him in the lurch made him even angrier. He picked up the whip and advanced on Song Jiang, intending to thrash him within an inch of his life.
Song Jiang said: "If you're going to beat me, you'd better tell me what my crime is!"
"You're in my hands, you scum, if you so much as cough, that's crime enough!"
"You want to find fault with me, but you'll find nothing that's a capital offence."
The man was furious: "You think you don't deserve death, but I tell you, if I want to finish you off, I'll do it, easy as killing a fly."
"If I deserve death just for not giving you money, what about someone who's a friend of the leader on Mount Liang, a friend of 'Professor' Wu Yong's, what would that crime deserve?" said Song Jiang smiling ironically.
When the superintendent heard this, he hurriedly dropped the stick he was holding. "What's that you said?" he stammered.
"I merely asked what would happen to someone who knows the bandit leader, 'Professor' Wu Yong. Why are you so surprised?"
Flabbergasted, the superintendent grabbed Song Jiang's arm and said: "Who exactly are you? Where do you get your information from?"
"I am from Yuncheng district in Shandong. My name is Song Jiang."
The man could hardly believe his ears. He hurriedly saluted Song Jiang with joined hands and said: "You mean you're the famous Song Jiang, known as the Opportune Rain?"
"Yes indeed, for what it's worth," said Song Jiang.
"This is not somewhere we can talk properly," said the other. "I daren't even show you the proper courtesy here. Let's go somewhere in town where we can speak our hearts."
"By all means, but do me the favour of waiting a moment while I go and lock my door."
Song Jiang quickly went to his room, collected the Professor's letter and took some silver. He locked his door and asked the prison guard to keep an eye on things. Then in the company of the superintendent he left the prison camp. They hurried into Jiangzhou where they immediately repaired to a tavern, one that was a little off the street, and found themselves a place upstairs.
"Tell me, I beg you, how did you come to meet the Professor?" the superintendent asked.
Song Jiang took the letter from his pocket and handed it to the superintendent. The latter broke the seal, read it through and then, having tucked it away in his sleeve, stood up and prostrated himself at Song Jiang's feet. Song Jiang immediately returned the courtesy and said: "I am afraid just now I used language that must have been hurtful to you, please forgive me."
"I had only heard that someone called Song had arrived in the prison. It is the custom for prisoners to give me five taels of silver. Over ten days had passed and I saw no sign of it. Since today was a holiday, I decided to come and get it. I had no idea that the prisoner was yourself. The language I used just now was highly offensive. I sincerely beg you to forgive me."
"The head gaoler mentioned your name to me many a time," said Song Jiang. "I resolved to pay my respects to you, but I didn't know where you lived. Also I had no excuse to go into the city, so I had to wait for you to come to me. It was in order to have the chance of a meeting that I withheld the silver, not because I begrudged it you. I was sure you would come if I delayed the payment. And now you see it has come to pass and my dearest wish is fulfilled."
But who do you suppose this person is with whom Song Jiang is talking? It is the very man whom the Professor recommended, that is to say, Dai Zong, chief superintendent of the two prisons in Jiangzhou. At that time, during the Song Dynasty, all the chief prison officers in the area of Jinling were called "officers of the court." In Hunan the heads of gaols were all called "superintendent." This Dai Zong, by the way, had an amazing Taoist power: when he travelled, bearing important military intelligence for example, he would bind two special amulets onto his legs and initiate a special "walking mode." With two amulets he could travel two hundred miles in one day, with four he could cover four hundred. For this reason he was known as Dai Zong the Magic Messenger. As the poet testifies:
His face is broad, his lips well formed, his eyes bright and prominent. He is tall and thin in build and elegant in bearing. Jewel-like flowers adorn his headgear. Yellow insignia indicate his office of messenger; a red braid marks him as an emissary. The power in his legs enables him to outstrip a thoroughbred; seldom is his silk robe free of dust. Amazing the ability of this Magic Messenger: ask him to do three hundred miles, it's off in the morning, back at dusk.
So Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger talked away to their hearts' content. They sat themselves down in the tavern and told the waiter to prepare wine and side dishes, while they settled down to enjoy themselves in their little upstairs nook. Song Jiang recounted tales of the brave men he had met, the people and events he had encountered on his travels. The Magic Messenger likewise opened his heart and told all about how he had come to know the Professor.
As they were thus engaged, talking of their affairs, and after they had downed two or three cups, a commotion arose downstairs. The waiter rushed into the room and said to the Magic Messenger: "Please, superintendent, you're the only one who can deal with him, no one else can! Please may I trouble you to come and talk some sense into him?"
"Who is it kicking up such a row down there?" the Magic Messenger asked.
"It's that fellow who is often with you, that Mr. Li, the one they call Iron Ox. He's downstairs asking for the owner because he wants to borrow money from him."
"Oh, so it's that devil who's making all the fuss, is it? I wondered who it could be." Turning to Song Jiang, the Magic Messenger said: "Please stay here while I go and fetch him up." He disappeared downstairs and a moment later returned with a big black-faced individual, whose appearance Song Jiang found quite startling. "Who is the big fellow?" he asked.
"He's one of the warders at the prison. His name is Li Kui. He originates from Five Furlongs village in the Yishui district of Yi-zhou. He is nicknamed the Black Whirlwind, and his friends all call him Iron Ox. He killed a man and had to flee from justice. Although he received a pardon, he ended up here in Jiangzhou and never went back home. His temper is ugly when he's had a few too many, and the people in the town are terrified of him. He's a pretty skilful fighter with two axes, but he's also good with his fists or the staff. At the moment he's employed here at the prison."
There is a poem that describes him:

His home is in Yizhou, east of the Jade Hills,
*Killing, arson and violence give him his thrills.*
*No need to blacken his face, he's black as a whole,*
*His eyes are as red as a burning coal.*
*Down by the river bank he grinds his great axe;*
*At a tall pine on the cliff edge he idly hacks.*
*He is strong as a wild bull, rigid as steel;*
The name of Iron Ox strikes universal chill.

Iron Ox meanwhile had been observing Song Jiang and said: "Superintendent, who is the dark chap?"
The Magic Messenger turned to Song Jiang with a laugh and said: "You see what a monster he is? Absolutely no manners!"
"I asked a question, what's wrong with that?" said Iron Ox.
"Why couldn't you say 'Who is that gentleman?' instead of 'Who's the dark chap?' If that isn't rude I don't know what is. Anyway, I'll tell you. This gentleman is a very famous person, someone whose protection you have often said you would like to have."
"You mean Song Jiang the Black of Shandong, known as the Opportune Rain?"
"Really, what a brute you are! The way you say it — without any of the respect due to position. Well, why aren't you prostrating yourself? How much longer are you going to wait?"
"If it really is Song Jiang, of course I'll prostrate myself. But if it's just a nobody, why the hell should I show him respect? How do I know you aren't having me on?"
Then Song Jiang spoke. "I can assure you I am Song Jiang," he said.
Iron Ox clapped his hands. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?" he said. "That's real good news to me!" With this he flung himself down before Song Jiang, who immediately returned the courtesy and said: "My muscular friend, please be seated."
"Come and sit by me," said the Magic Messenger, "and have some wine."
"I can't stand these piddling little cups," said Iron Ox. "Let's have some big bowls."
"What were you so upset about downstairs?" Song Jiang inquired.
"I've got this big lump of silver which I gave as security for ten smaller sums that I needed for ordinary use. I asked the landlord here to lend me ten taels, I was going to redeem the lump sum and then pay him back and I needed some small change too. The bugger refused me! I was just going to teach him a lesson, smash the place up for him, when you called me up here."
"Is ten taels all you need?" Song Jiang asked. "Isn't there interest to pay?"
"I've already paid the interest. I just need ten taels to get my capital back."
Song Jiang took out ten taels of silver and offered them to Iron Ox, saying: "Here, go and redeem your funds."
Iron Ox accepted. "That's great!" he cried. "Now you two please wait for me here. I'll go and get the silver and then come to repay you. Afterwards I want to invite Song Jiang to drink a cup or two with me, somewhere out of town."
"Why not sit down and drink a cup or two first?" said Song Jiang.
"I'll go first and then come back," said Iron Ox. He thrust aside the curtain and went downstairs.

"You really shouldn't have lent him money," the Magic Messenger said. "I wanted to stop you, but you'd already let him get his hands on it."
"Why, what's wrong?" said Song Jiang.
"He's honest and big-hearted enough, but he's got a terrible weakness for drinking and gambling. When did he ever have a big lump of silver in hock? I'm afraid you've been had. He was in such a hurry to get out of the door, he must have gone to gamble. If he wins, then you'll get your money back, but if he loses, how's he going to find the ten taels to return to you? And I shall feel bad because I'm responsible."
"Stop treating me like an outsider," Song Jiang said. "Why make such a fuss about a little bit of money? Let him go and lose it if he likes. I'd say he's got the look of a proper hero."
"It's true he's got good qualities, but he's far too rough and too reckless. When he gets drunk up at the prison he doesn't bother the inmates, but he always picks a fight with the strongest of the warders. I've had all sorts of problems with him. He thinks he's got a flair for searching out injustices and beating up bullies. That's why everyone in Jiangzhou is so scared of him."
The poem says:

Bribery makes the law an ass.
*Many a prisoner's paid the price.*
*Revenge for the suffering of the weak,*
Heaven has lodged in Li Kui's fist.

"Well, let's drink up," said Song Jiang, "and then let's go and take a stroll in Jiangzhou."
"Of course, I was forgetting," the Magic Messenger said. "I ought to take you to see the river."
"The sights of Jiangzhou, that's just what I would like."
Let us leave the two of them drinking their wine, and follow Iron Ox, who after getting the silver said to himself: "Just imagine! Song Jiang hardly knows me and he's ready to lend me ten taels of silver! That's real thoughtfulness for you, they certainly tell no lies about his generosity! The trouble is, he had to arrive here when I've just been losing continuously at the tables. I haven't a sou. How can I do the proper thing and invite him? Well, since I've got the silver I'd better go and try my luck again. If I can win a few taels I'll be able to invite him and put up a reasonable show."
So Iron Ox hurried off to Zhang's gambling house, somewhere outside the city limits. He went straight to the table and flung down the ten taels of silver. "Pass me the cup. I want to throw," he shouted.
Zhang, who knew that Iron Ox always played fair, said: "You'd better sit this one out. You can come in on the next throw."
"I want to bet on this one!"
"Why don't you just stay on the sidelines and try guessing what's going to come up?"
"I don't want to, I want to bet on this throw. I shall put five taels on." One of the players was just about to throw, but Iron Ox swept the cup out of his hands and shouted: "Who is betting against me?"
"All right then, I am," Zhang said. "For five taels."
Iron Ox shouted: "Heads!" and threw, clunk. It was tails.
Zhang scooped up the silver.
"Wait a minute," Iron Ox shouted. "That's ten taels I put down."
"All right," said Zhang. "I'll put another five on. If it's heads this time I'll give you back all your silver."
So Iron Ox took the cup and shouted "Heads!" and again it came out tails.
Zhang grinned and said: "I told you not to bet this time, I said wait. You wouldn't listen to me and now tails have come up twice."
"This silver isn't my own," said Iron Ox.
"What difference does it make whose it is? You've lost, what more is there to say?"
"Well, there's nothing for it," said Iron Ox, "you'll have to lend me some money, I'll pay you back tomorrow."
"Are you crazy? You know the proverb, 'There's no father or son at the gaming table.' You lost, fair and square, so what are you whinging about?"
Iron Ox pulled up his tunic and shouted: "Are you or aren't you going to give me back my money?"
"Mr. Li," Zhang said, "you're usually such a good loser, why're you so churlish today?"
Iron Ox said nothing. He simply seized the silver, grabbing another ten taels or so of other people's, and stuffed it all down the front of his shirt. Then he glared at them and said: "I'm usually a good loser, am I? Well, just for the moment I'm tired of being a good loser."
Zhang rushed forward to wrest the silver from him but Iron Ox sent him flying with a little push. A dozen or more gamesters now converged on Li Kui but he lashed out left and right; he beat them till they didn't know where to hide themselves. He then made for the door. "Hey, where do you think you're going?" the doorman said, but Iron Ox shoved him aside, kicked open the door and left. The other gamblers pursued him as far as the door, shouting: "Mr. Li, that's not fair! You've taken our money!" They contented themselves however with standing at the door and shouting; no one dared approach any nearer.
Iron Ox was already on his way when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and a voice saying: "What the devil do you mean by stealing the punters' money?"
"You fuck off!" Iron Ox shouted. But when he turned round to look, he saw it was the Magic Messenger, and behind him was Song Jiang. His face fell. "Forgive me, forgive me," he said. "I'm usually a good loser, but today I didn't want to lose your money. And now I haven't even the means to invite you. It made me so sick I just didn't know what I was doing. I'm afraid I was a little hasty."
This made Song Jiang laugh out loud. "If it's just silver you need, for your expenses," he said, "why don't you ask me? Given that there's no doubt you've lost to him, you'd better give him back the money, and quickly."
Li Kui had no alternative but to take out the money and hand it over to Song Jiang who called Zhang over and gave it to him.
"Saving your honours, I shall only take what is mine," Zhang said, "we'll forget about the ten taels Mr. Li lost to me in two throws, for the sake of avoiding recriminations."
"Just go ahead and take it," said Song Jiang, "have no scruples about it."
But Zhang could not be persuaded.
"Well at least no one has been hurt, I hope," Song Jiang said.
"There's the cashier, the croupier and the doorman, he knocked them all out," Zhang said.
"Then let them divide this money between them," Song Jiang said. "I don't suppose Mr. Li will want to show his face here again, so I will give it to you on his behalf."
Zhang accepted the money, saluted and withdrew.
"Now," said Song Jiang, "let us all go and drink a few cups together."
"Down by the river," said the Magic Messenger, "there's a wineshop called the Inn of the Lute. It dates from the days of the poet Bai Juyi, in the Tang Dynasty. Let's go there. We can enjoy the view of the river while we're drinking."
"What about some dishes to go with the wine? Should we get them here in the town first?" said Song Jiang.
"No need, nowadays they've got everything there."
The three of them made their way to the Inn of the Lute. This turned out to have the river Yangtze on one side and the innkeeper's house on the other. There were a dozen or so tables inside. The Magic Messenger chose a nice clean one and asked Song Jiang to take the place of honour. He himself sat down opposite, with Iron Ox beside him. When they were seated they told the innkeeper to send up some dishes of vegetables, fruit and fish.
The waiter brought two jugs of a wine known as "Spring in a jade bottle," which is a famous Jiangzhou brew, and removed the clay stopper. Song Jiang gazed out at the river. It was really a first-class prospect:
*Distant peaks rise blue above the clouds; far reaches of the river flash like silver. Flocks of gulls and egrets swirl above the shoreline; a few fishing boats thread their way home through the reeds. White wavelets lap against the skyline; the cool wind breathes soughingly across the face of the water. Amid sunset clouds mountains approach the empyrean; the Inn of the Lute lies half open to the water. The eye is taken by such spaciousness and exquisite decoration: the railing's reflection cased in liquid crystal, jade waters sparkling outside the window. Here sat in days gone by the poet Bai Juyi who rose to literary fame and Sima who achieved high rank after bitter trials.*
Iron Ox said: "This wine should be drunk in big bowls. It's nonsense to drink it by the thimbleful."
"Don't be so uncouth," said the Magic Messenger. "Just drink your wine and shut up."
But Song Jiang called the waiter over: "Serve the two of us in the small cups, and bring a big bowl for our big friend here."
The waiter got the extra bowl and then poured the wine and served the dishes.
Iron Ox said: "Song Jiang really is a great man, everything they say about him is absolutely true. How well he understands my tastes. To have him as a sworn brother is really worth something!"
The waiter who served them poured six or seven rounds and then Song Jiang, elated with the company and the wine, suddenly felt a desire for hot fish soup. "Do they have good fish here?" he asked the Magic Messenger.
"Can't you see the river is packed with fishing boats?" the Magic Messenger said. "How could there not be good fish?"
"After all this wine I could really do with some fish soup," Song Jiang said.
The Magic Messenger called the waiter and ordered three bowls of fish soup with chillies and spring onions. They came at once, and when Song Jiang saw them he said: "Good food is nothing to fine china, as the saying is. This is only a simple tavern but look what beautiful china they've served us in!" He picked up his chopsticks and invited the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox to start eating. He himself took some fish and a few mouthfuls of soup.
Iron Ox did not use his chopsticks. He merely plunged his hand into the bowl and pulled out a fish, which he consumed whole, bones and all. Song Jiang couldn't help laughing. He drank another two mouthfuls of soup and then put down his chopsticks and stopped eating.
"I'm afraid the fish is too salty for you," said the Magic Messenger.
"No, I just like to drink the soup, after so much wine. Though actually I have to agree that the fish is not especially good."
"I can't eat it either. Far too salty, quite inedible."
Iron Ox, who had finished the fish in his own bowl, said: "If you both don't want it, I'll eat it for you." He reached over and fished out what was in Song Jiang's bowl and ate it, and then treated the Magic Messenger's bowl the same way. Drops of soup flew all over the place and spattered the table.
When Song Jiang saw that Iron Ox had gobbled up three bowls of fish soup and the bones as well, he called the waiter and said: "I think our big friend here is hungry. Could you get a big piece of meat and cut him a couple of pounds in slices? I'll pay you in just a moment."
"I'm afraid we only have mutton," the man said. "We've no beef. We could give you some good fat mutton, if you like, but that's all there is."
Hearing this Iron Ox flung the remains of his soup in the waiter's face, drenching him from head to foot.
"Whatever are you doing?" the Magic Messenger cried.
"I won't stand for it," Iron Ox answered. "The bugger wants to suggest I only eat beef, to avoid selling me any mutton!"
"I was only asking, that was all," the waiter protested.
"Just go and cut some," said Song Jiang. "I'll pay for it."
The waiter swallowed his anger and went to cut two pounds of meat, which he put on a plate and placed on the table. Iron Ox did not hold back. He grabbed the meat with both hands and commenced to stuff himself. It was all gone in a flash.
"Heavens, what a fellow you are!" Song Jiang exclaimed.
"What a great man this Song Jiang is," said Iron Ox. "How he understands my tastes, damn it. Meat is better to eat than fish any day."
The Magic Messenger called the waiter again. "That fish soup you just gave us — the bowls it was served in are magnificent, but the fish itself is salty and quite inedible. If you've got any other fresh fish, make us another bowl of hot soup, the gentleman here needs something to clear his head after the wine."
"I'll be honest with you," the waiter said. "That fish was yesterday's. Today's live fish is still in the boats. They can't start selling until the factor comes, that's why we haven't got any really fresh fish."
Iron Ox jumped up, saying: "I'll go and get you some myself."
"No, stay where you are," said the Magic Messenger. "We can send the waiter for it."
"The fishermen on the boats won't refuse me," said Iron Ox. "So it had better be me." And before the Magic Messenger could stop him he was off.
The Magic Messenger turned to Song Jiang and said: "I have to ask you to forgive me for bringing that individual along. He's so rude, it's enough to make one die of shame."
"It's his nature," Song Jiang said. "What's the point of trying to change him? I admire his honesty and directness."
Thus the two of them sat talking and laughing together. Here's a poem:

Mist on the Pen river, miraculous scene;
*Mountains cluster above the banks,*
*Moonlight, a silver flute and solitude;*
*Withered sedge, stripped bamboo*
And the dew falling.

Meanwhile Iron Ox had arrived at the riverside, where he found the boats drawn up in a straight line, about eighty or ninety of them, made fast under the green willows. Some of the fishermen lay in the stern, asleep, others were mending their nets in the bows, and still others were bathing in the river. It was the middle of the fifth month, and the sun's red disk was just sinking in the west. But there was no sign of the factor, who was supposed to come to the boats to sell the fish. Iron Ox went and stood near the boats and shouted: "Hey, there! You on the boats, get me two live fish!"
The fishermen replied: "We have to wait. We can't start trading till the boss comes. Can't you see the buyers are all sitting on the bank there?"
"I'm not waiting for your fucking boss. Just give me two fish."
"We haven't even burnt the paper sacrifice, we can't start selling yet. What makes you think we'd sell any to you?"
Seeing that none of them was disposed to get him the fish, Iron Ox leapt onto one of the boats and none of the fishermen dared to stop him. But Iron Ox knew nothing of boats. The first thing he did was to start pulling up the bamboo gate. The fishermen on the bank yelled at him to stop. Next he started rummaging around under the planks of the deck. But how could there be any fish there? You see, the boats on this river have part of the stern cut away, to about half way up the hull, to let the river water flow through, which is how they keep the fish alive. The opening is closed off by a bamboo gate, which allows fresh water to enter but stops the fish escaping. This is why Jiangzhou has such good fish. Iron Ox knew nothing about all this. By pulling up the bamboo gate he had let all the fish escape. When he jumped onto another boat and began to do the same thing, all seventy or eighty fishermen rushed onto the boat in order to beat him with their bamboo poles.
Iron Ox waxed furious. He wasn't going to stand for this. He stripped off his cotton tunic leaving only a simple cloth tied about his loins. Seeing a confusion of bamboo poles coming at him he raised both arms and caught four or five of them in his hands, snapping them like someone breaking off chives. The fishermen were horrified. They cast off quickly and poled their boats out into midstream. Iron Ox, half naked, his rage waxing still greater, seized a broken punt pole and leapt onto the bank, where he proceeded to lay into the buyers, who panicked and took to their heels, complete with their carrying-poles.
In the midst of all this confusion, a man appeared, emerging from a little side-alley. "Boss, boss!" they shouted, as they saw him and all gave tongue to their complaints: "That ugly great thug came to steal our fish. He's chased all the boats away."
"What thug?" the newcomer asked. "Who dares to commit such an outrage?"
"The bugger's still there by the river," they said, "looking for people to beat up."
The newcomer advanced towards Iron Ox, saying: "Listen here, you! Even supposing you've eaten a leopard's heart or a tiger's gall, you ought to be afraid of crossing me!"
Iron Ox examined the speaker. He was very tall and about thirty-two years old. He had a full set of whiskers, moustache and beard, he wore a green gauze turban folded in the form of a swastika, and under it a red skull cap; he was dressed in a tunic of white cloth, bound by a belt and had white gaiters and canvas shoes with many buckles and eyes. He was holding a portable scales, and had indeed come to sell the fish. When he saw Iron Ox creating such a commotion, he handed his scales to one of the merchants and advanced on Iron Ox, shouting: "So you want a fight, do you, you swine?" Without even replying, Iron Ox whirled his pole and struck at the other man. But the other darted in and snatched the pole. So Iron Ox grabbed him by the hair, while the other went for the legs, trying to trip him. But how could he have had the strength to match Iron Ox, whose strength was like a water buffalo's? Strain as he might, he couldn't budge him. He essayed several jabs to the ribs but Iron Ox barely noticed them. He tried a flying kick, but Iron Ox merely pressed his head down towards the ground and began hammering his back with iron fists. Struggle as he might he could not get free.
As Iron Ox continued to beat his victim, someone encircled him with his arms from behind while another person assisted, shouting: "Disgraceful! Absolutely disgraceful!"
Iron Ox turned and saw it was Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger. He stopped at once and his adversary escaped from his grip and vanished like smoke.
The Magic Messenger berated Iron Ox. "I told you not to go for the fish, and here you are fighting with these people! If you happened to kill someone, who'd save you from prison or execution?"

"You're afraid I might involve you in something, but if I killed someone, I'd take the responsibility myself," said Iron Ox.
Song Jiang now spoke. "My friend," he said, "don't argue! Just put your tunic on and let us go and drink wine."
Iron Ox picked up his tunic, which was lying at the foot of a willow, and threw it over his shoulders. Then he followed Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger. They hadn't gone ten paces when they heard someone shouting behind them: "You black assassin! We'll see who wins this time!"
Turning to see who it was, Iron Ox saw that it was the same man. But he had stripped naked, except for a pair of bathing trunks, revealing a body white as snow. He had taken off his turban but retained the red skull cap. He was not far from the bank, standing alone in a little fishing boat, which he manoeuvred with a pole, and hurling taunts at Iron Ox. "Come on, you black traitor! Call me a coward if I'm afraid of you! The first to break off is no man!"
Iron Ox went wild when he heard the taunts. He gave a tremendous roar and then, throwing off his tunic, turned and charged. The other manoeuvred his boat so that it was near the bank and held it steady with one hand on the pole, shouting insults all the while. Iron Ox replied in kind. "Come up here on the bank then, if you're not afraid!"
The other man struck Iron Ox a blow on the legs with his pole, to infuriate him still further and tempt him to jump onto the boat. The telling is slow, it happens in a flash. All the man wanted was to lure Iron Ox onto the boat. When he succeeded, he pushed his pole into the bank and shoved with both feet so that the boat shot out into midstream, like a leaf whirled away by a sudden gust of wind. Now, although Iron Ox was not completely unfamiliar with the water, his experience of it was not extensive, and he felt a certain trepidation. His opponent, meanwhile, had ceased his insults and thrown down his pole. "Come on, then!" he shouted. "Now we're really going to see who's the best man." He gripped Iron Ox's shoulders and said: "But first of all we're not going to fight, I'm going to teach you how to drink water." He rocked the boat so violently that it capsized and the two heroes were catapulted head over heels into the river, disappearing with a resounding splash. Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger rushed to the bank, but the boat was out in the river and they could only look on helplessly. A crowd had gathered by now and there were four or five hundred people watching under the willow trees. "That black thug is going to learn a lesson," they were saying. "If he comes out of it with his life, he'll at least have got a bellyful of water!" Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger watched the surface of the river break as Iron Ox's opponent dragged him up, only to thrust him under again. The struggle was proceeding out in midstream, where the water rippled by in emerald waves; one body showed as completely black, the other seemed white as frost. They gripped and twined about each other so tightly they seemed welded into one. Every one of the four or five hundred onlookers on the bank was cheering them on.
*One is the prodigy of Yishui district; the other is the strange devil of Little Mount Solo. One has a skin that's supple and smooth, the other a hide that might be composed of charcoal dust. One is a metamorphosis of the celestial white serpent, the other a reincarnation of the great black tiger. One is hammered out of sterling silver, the other wrought of tempered steel. One is the white-tusked elephant of Mount Wutai, the other is the iron-scaled dragon of Hell's River. One is a painted Lohan showing off miraculous powers; the other a stone door-god displaying ferocious strength. One writhes and turns until his whole body is soaked in sweat and he exudes real pearls; the other strains till moisture steeps his whole body and black ink floods forth. One resembles the God of Fire, whose form is glimpsed in still clear depths; the other is like the black fiend, whose face appears amid surging white waves. The white dragon obscures the sun in the sky, the black fiend blots out the sky's reflection in the water.*
Iron Ox's friends saw that he was helpless in the other's grip and had swallowed water till only the whites of his eyes showed. He was being repeatedly dragged up and submerged. He had gone under more than a dozen times:
Sail a boat on dry land, such a hard task he craves;
*But a bout under water, for that he don't qualify.*
*Black Whirlwind should never have whipped up the waves.*
From Iron Ox, we might say, he has turned water buffalo.
Seeing Iron Ox was definitely getting the worst of it, Song Jiang asked the Magic Messenger to get someone to help him. "Who is that big white fellow?" the Magic Messenger asked the fishermen. Those who knew replied: "That's the factor, who controls the local sale of fish; his name is Zhang Shun and he's a brave man."
At this point Song Jiang remembered something. "Would that be the person they also call White Eel?"
"That's him!" they all cried.
"I've got a letter for him from his brother, Zhang Heng, the Pilot," he told the Magic Messenger. "It's back at the prison."
The Magic Messenger immediately gave a shout in the direction of the river: "Mr. Zhang, stop fighting! We've got a letter for you from your brother. That black fellow is our friend, please let him go, and come up here to talk to us." Out in the river White Eel recognized the Magic Messenger, whom he had seen many times. He let go of Iron Ox, swam to the bank and dragged himself out. He saluted the Magic Messenger and said: "Superintendent, please forgive me if I've done wrong."
"If you want to do something for me, please go and help my friend there. When you bring him back I'll introduce you to someone," the Magic Messenger said.
White Eel dived in again and swam to Iron Ox, who by now was having the greatest difficulty in keeping his head above water. In a moment White Eel was beside him and had grabbed one of his arms. He swam as easily as if he was walking on dry land, his body half out of the water, kicking up big waves with his legs and striking out with his free arm, as he towed Iron Ox to the bank. The onlookers all cheered. Song Jiang was amazed. Finally, when Iron Ox and White Eel were both on the bank, Iron Ox panting for breath and vomiting out water, the Magic Messenger said: "Now we shall all go to the Inn of the Lute to talk."
White Eel put on his tunic again and Iron Ox did likewise and the four of them went back to the inn.
"Do you know who I am?" the Magic Messenger said to White Eel.
"Of course I know the Superintendent, but until now I had not had the opportunity to pay my respects."
Pointing to Iron Ox, the Magic Messenger asked: "And do you know him? I am afraid he attacked you today."
"How could I not know Iron Ox? Only we had not actually been introduced till now."
"That was quite a ducking you gave me!" said Iron Ox.
"And what a drubbing you gave me!" said the other.
"Well now it's made you sworn brothers," said the Magic Messenger. "As the saying is, 'You only really know someone when you've fought with him.'"
"But don't provoke me on dry land," Iron Ox said.
"I shall wait for you in the water," White Eel replied.
They all laughed at this and the two former enemies asked each other's forgiveness. Then the Magic Messenger pointed to Song Jiang and said to White Eel: "And do you know who this gentleman is?"
White Eel looked him up and down and said: "I don't. I've never seen him before."
Iron Ox jumped to his feet and said: "This gentleman is Song Jiang the Black!"
White Eel said: "Can it really be Registrar Song from Shandong, the Opportune Rain?"
"It is indeed my friend," said the Magic Messenger.
Immediately White Eel prostrated himself before Song Jiang, saying: "I have long heard of your renown, but I didn't expect to meet you here today. I have often heard the folk of the rivers and lakes speak of your great virtue, your kindness to all who need help and your generosity."
"Enough, I don't deserve such praise," said Song Jiang. "A little while back I spent a few days with Li Jun, the White-Water Dragon, near Jieyang. Afterwards I encountered Mu Hong near the Yangtze river and met your brother Zhang Heng, who wrote a letter which he asked me to give you. It's back at the prison, I didn't bring it with me. I came here with Superintendent Dai and our friend Iron Ox just to drink a few cups at the Inn of the Lute and enjoy the scenery. When I happened to say I would like some fresh fish soup to clear my head, Iron Ox insisted on coming to get the fish, nothing we could say would stop him. Then we heard a commotion down by the river. We asked the waiter to go and see what was happening, and he told us it was a big black fellow fighting with someone. So we rushed here to stop it. I had no idea I should meet you. In one day I have made the acquaintance of three great heroes. I must really say fortune has smiled on me. Let me ask you all to sit down and join me in a few more cups."
So the waiter was employed again bringing wine and dishes and preparing another feast. White Eel said: "Since you want fresh fish, I shall go myself to get you some."
"Thank you very much," Song Jiang said.
"I'll go with you," Iron Ox said.
"Oh no, not again!" said the Magic Messenger. "Haven't you drunk enough water already?"
White Eel guffawed and then taking Iron Ox by the hand, said: "This time we'll both go. Let's see what they say to that!" Indeed it can be said that:

He scraps like a tiger on land;
*In water he fights like a dragon.*
*Yet his friendship he'll always extend.*
In his home town he's truly a paragon!

Together they left the inn and went down to the river. White Eel gave a whistle and the boats all came rushing towards the bank. "Who's got golden carp?" White Eel asked.
"I have," one answered, and "I've got some," said another. In a moment a dozen fine carp were being presented. White Eel chose the four biggest, threaded them on a willow branch and sent Iron Ox back first to the inn to have them cooked. Meanwhile he organized the buyers and instructed his deputies to start weighing and selling the fish. Then he too returned to the inn and to the company of Song Jiang, who thanked him for the fish. "But why so many?" Song Jiang asked. "If you had given me just one it would have been more than sufficient!"
"A little thing like that! It's not something to make a fuss about," White Eel said. "If you can't eat it all now, you can take it back to your temporary residence for dinner."
They sat in order of seniority. Since Iron Ox was older than White Eel, he took the third place and the latter the fourth. The waiter was called again and two bottles of their best wine, "Spring in a jade bottle," were brought, together with fish, and side dishes. White Eel told the waiter to use one of the fish for soup, steam another in wine, and to cut one into small pieces. As they enjoyed their wine, each of the four men told of something close to his heart, and everything was going swimmingly, when a young girl of about fifteen in a gauze dress suddenly appeared and, having softly wished them all a thousand happinesses, opened her mouth and proceeded to sing. Iron Ox was just on the point of telling them boastfully about various feats of daring when this singing burst out. Since the other three all started listening to the song, he had lost his audience. A fury seized him and jumping up he thrust his parted fingers into the girl's face. With a scream, she collapsed on the floor. Everyone gathered around the girl. Her face was the colour of earth and no sound issued from her lips. The proprietor of the inn now prevented the four from leaving and said the affair must be referred to the police. It was really a case of "Boil an egret, burn a lute, earn yourself a fine dispute."

WHEN Song Jiang reached the inspection room he saw the head jailer there sitting on a stool. The latter immediately called out, "Is this the prisoner who recently came here?"
A messenger standing there agreed to this.
"So you are the 'Black Dwarf,' who deserves death. Upon whose influence are you relying that you disdain to give me any money?"
"Presents are made when people are on friendly footing," said Song Jiang. "Why do you demand a present? You are a mean-souled fellow."
The men standing about perspired with fear when they heard this. The head jailer was very angry and replied, "Banished thief! You are very impudent. How dare you call me a mean-souled fellow? Now, executioners, seize this fellow, and give him a hundred blows with the bamboo."
But the men standing about were all on friendly terms with Song Jiang, and when they heard this order they all sneaked out of the room. Seeing this movement the head jailer was very much annoyed, and taking a stick he advanced to beat Song Jiang.
"Sir!" said Song Jiang, "for what crime are you going to beat me?"
"You are a criminal, and are entirely in my hands. Even if you only cough in my presence that would be a crime."
"But even if I have a small fault I am not deserving of death."
"You say that you are not deserving of death," said the head jailer who was now very angry, "but if I decide to even kill you that can be easily done. I could kill you just like a fly."
Song Jiang, spoke in a sneering manner, "Because I have not given you money you think I am deserving of death, but what should a friend of Wu Yong at Liangshan Marsh deserve?"
Upon hearing this the man hastily dropped his stick and asked, "What is that you say?"
"I said that Wu Yong may have a friend here."
The man was startled, and seizing hold of Song Jiang asked, "Who are you? Why you talk like this?"
Song Jiang laughed and said, "I am Song Jiang of Yuncheng County, in Shandong."
The man was surprised and saluted saying, "So you are Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain.' But this is not a good place for us to talk, and I cannot kowtow to you here. I request you to accompany me to a place in the town where we can talk matters over."
Song Jiang agreed to this and returned to his room. He took Wu Yong's letter and some silver. He then locked the door, and told a messenger to look after his room. They left the prison, and going into the town entered an inn, and sat down in an upper room.
"Sir, when did you last see Wu Yong?" asked the head jailer.
Song Jiang took the letter and handed it to the man who after reading it placed it in his sleeve. He then knelt down and kowtowed to Song Jiang.
Song Jiang also kowtowed, and said, "What I said has upset you. Please forgive me."
The jailer said, "I was informed that a criminal named Song was being sent to my prison, and I expected to get the usual five taels of silver. But although I waited more than ten days no money was sent to me, so today as I had a little leisure I went to investigate the matter. I never suspected that you were the man. I am afraid that my manner was rather offensive, and I ask you to overlook it kindly."
"I heard of you through the jailer, and wished to meet you, but as I was not certain where you lived I thought it better to wait until you came to see me. So I had to wait a good few days. It was not that I did not intend to give you these five taels of silver, but simply that I wished to meet you personally. I am much pleased that we have fortunately met here today."
Now who was this head jailer? He was no other than Dai Zong. Now in that period of the Song Dynasty, head jailers at Jinling were called "Master," whereas in Hunan they were called "Superintendent." This Superintendent Dai Zong had a very supernatural power. Whenever he had to travel on some extremely urgent matter he wrapped a puttee bearing a picture of a divine horse over his legs. He then by magic could travel a hundred and sixty *li* a day. If he doubled the number of puttees then by magic he could travel two hundred seventy *li* daily. That was why people called him the "Divine Traveler."
These two men talked matters over, and became much pleased with each other. They summoned the waiter to their private compartment, and ordered a big dinner to be prepared. Song Jiang told Dai Zong all that had occurred on the journey, and the latter laid bare his heart and told Song Jiang all his intimate relations with Wu Yong. They had been drinking for some time, and were quite intimate when they heard a row down below.
The waiter rushed into their compartment, and said, "There is a man below making a row, and nobody but you, sir, can stop him."
"Who is the man," asked Dai Zong.
"He is the man Li, the 'Iron Ox,' who always accompanies you on your trips, and he wants to borrow money from our manager."
Dai Zong laughed and said, "I know the fellow. He is very unruly. I request you, sir, to stay here, and I will go and bring him upstairs."
Dai Zong went downstairs, and soon returned with a big wild-looking man.
Song Jiang was surprised at seeing him, and asked, "Sir, who is this?"
"This is my assistant, Li Kui, the 'Black Whirlwind,' and he comes from Yishui County, in Yizhou Prefecture, Shandong province. In his own village he is called Li, the 'Iron Ox.' There he killed a man and escaped here. The government issued a pardon afterwards, but he then had not enough money to take him back home. He is a great drunkard, and when drunk he is a dangerous man. He is skilled in the use of the battle-axe and the cudgels. At present he occupies a minor post in this prison."
Li Kui looking at Song Jiang asked Dai Zong, "Who is this black fellow?"
Dai Zong laughed and remarked to Song Jiang, "Sir, you will understand that this fellow is rather vulgar and has no manners."
"I only ask for his name," said Li Kui, "so why do you say I am vulgar?"
"Younger brother," said Dai Zong, "you ought to speak to me like this, 'Who is this gentleman?' But instead you asked, 'Who is this black fellow?' and that is not a nice expression. I will however tell you who he is. He is the hero whom you have often said you would try to meet."
"Can he be Dark Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain,' of Shandong?"
Dai Zong exclaimed, "Hey! How dare you refer to him in that coarse manner? And why don't you immediately kowtow to him, instead of delaying so long?"
"If he is Song Jiang I will of course kowtow to him. But if he is some other fellow why should I kowtow? Sir, do not deceive me or laugh at me about this matter."
"I am Dark Song Jiang of Shandong," interposed Song Jiang.
Li Kui clapped his hands and said, "Master, why did you not say this before, and so enable the 'Iron Ox' to have the pleasure a little sooner." He knelt on the floor and kowtowed.
Song Jiang raised him up and said, "Good fellow, please be seated."
Dai Zong invited him to sit by his side, and drink wine with them.
"Very well," said Li Kui, "but I shall want a large bowl of wine, and not one of these little cups."
"Brother," asked Song Jiang, "what was that row about down below?"

"I had a big ingot of silver in a pawn shop on which they had advanced me ten taels of silver, and today when I asked the innkeeper to loan me ten taels of silver to redeem the pledge at the pawn shop he declined to advance any loan so I got angry, and broke up many of the things in the shop. Just then you summoned me up here."
"Was there any interest to be paid for the loan of the silver?" asked Song Jiang.
"Yes, there was interest to be paid on the redemption of ingot."
Song Jiang put his hand in his pocket and drew an ingot of ten taels of silver. Handing this to Li Kui he said, "Here is some silver which will enable you to redeem the ingot from the pawn shop."
Li Kui took the silver, and said, "Thank you. Please wait here until I come back from the pawn shop. When I have redeemed my ingot of silver I can change it, and repay you. Then we will all go and drink wine outside the town."
"Please sit down, and drink wine with us now, and then go there afterwards," said Song Jiang.
"I will go now, but be back very soon," said Li Kui. He opened the curtains and departed.
"It would have been better if you had not lent him that money," said Dai Zong.
"Why not?"
"Although he is straightforward yet he has a weakness for wine and gambling. When did he ever have an ingot of silver? He has cheated you to get the money. You noticed how quickly he left us when he had got the money. He has probably gone gambling, and if he wins he will return your loan. But if he loses how can he repay the loan? I shall then feel ashamed as he is my assistant."
Song Jiang laughed, "But we are not strangers! Don't talk about such small things. If he wants to gamble then never mind. My opinion is that he is a loyal and straightforward man."
"He is a skilled athlete, and is very brave, but has a very coarse nature. In the prison when he is drunk he never hits the prisoners, but is always fighting with the brave jailers. I have had a lot of trouble with him. He always takes up the cudgels on behalf of the weaker brothers, and for this reason the people of this town are afraid of him."
"Let us have another drink," said Song Jiang, "and then go for a stroll outside the town."
"I had forgotten," said Dai Zong, "that I have not yet shown you the scenery round here."
When Li Kui had left with the silver he thought, "Song Jiang is not a common man. We are not old friends, and yet he immediately advanced me this money. He is a hero who despises wealth and stands for justice—of that there is no shadow of doubt. These few days I have lost all my money in gambling so that I have not even a cash, and cannot invite him to dine with me. Now that I have the money I will gamble again, and when I have won I will then go and invite him to a feast." Li Kui went outside the town, and entering the gambling den of Little Zhang Yi, he took his seat at the table, and put down his money. He called out, "Give me the dice box. I will be banker this time."
The proprietor knew that Li Kui had always been fair in his gambling, so he said, "Elder brother, let us just finish this round, and then you can have the dice box."
"But I want to gamble now."
"You had better watch us on one side, and do the guessing," said Little Zhang Yi.
"I am not going to guess. I want to gamble, and here is my stake five taels of silver." He took the dice box, and asked, "Now what is your stake?"
"I will stake five taels also," said Little Zhang Yi.
Li Kui threw the dice, but only low numbers turned up. Little Zhang Yi reached across for the money, but Li Kui said, "I have ten taels here."
"But you staked five taels, and if you had won I would have paid you that amount."
Li Kui did not answer, but threw the dice again, and again only low numbers turned up.
Little Zhang Yi laughed and said, "Do not be in such a hurry. You have shaken twice with bad luck. You had better rest a bit now."
"But this money belongs to another man," said Li Kui.
"That makes no difference. You will pay just the same. You have lost so we need not discuss anything else."
"Very well," said Li Kui. "But please lend me some money, and I will repay you tomorrow."
"That is nonsensical talk," said Little Zhang Yi. "There is an old saying, 'In gambling there are no duties (to parents or brothers) observed.' You have lost, so why wrangle about the money?"
"Will you give me the money or not?" asked Li Kui.
"Li Kui! You have always been straight in gambling, so how is it that today you wrangle about such a clear case?"
But Li Kui did not reply. Instead he grabbed the money, and also all the other's silver on the table, and put it in his coat. He then said, "I have always been straight, but today I cannot observe the usual procedure."
Little Zhang Yi now advanced to attempt to recover the money, but Li Kui struck him a blow, and knocked him to the ground, while all the other gamblers rushed forward to recover their money, but Li Kui hit on every side, and kept them off. He then rushed away to escape. The gatekeeper tried to stop him saving, "Where are you going?" but Li Kui pushed him on one side, opened the gate, and went out. The gamblers were following him and as they reached the gate they called out, "Li Kui, you are quite unfair to take all our money." There was not one who was brave enough to pursue him, but as Li Kui was running, a man took hold of him and called out, "Why do you take other people's money?"
"What has it got to do with you?" asked Li Kui. Turning his head he saw that the man was Dai Zong, and behind him was Song Jiang. He was surprised at seeing them there, and said, "Brothers, please excuse me. Previously the 'Iron Ox' has always been fair and square in gambling but today I have lost the money you gave me. I wished to invite you to a feast, but as I had no money I got annoyed, and grabbed other people's money."
Song Jiang laughed at this. "If you are short of money you can always come and ask for it from me. As you have lost all your money to him today, you had better give him the money."
Li Kui took all the money out of his coat, and placed it in Song Jiang's hands. The latter summoned Little Zhang Yi and handed him the money.
Little Zhang Yi said, "Li Kui lost ten taels of silver to me, but although he took it by force I will not take it back from him I have no desire to make him my enemy."
"You can take the money," said Song Jiang, "without being afraid of him in the future."
Little Zhang Yi was however still unwilling to take the money.
"Has he already injured any of you?" asked Song Jiang.
"He struck the 'banker,' the other gamblers, and the gatekeeper," said Little Zhang Yi.
"Then, take this ten taels of silver from Li Kui and distribute it among those men as compensation for their wounds. I will take Li Kui away, and he will not trouble you again."
Little Zhang Yi took the money, and after expressing his thanks went his way.
Song Jiang asked the other two to go with him, and drink wine.
"On the riverside there is the Pipa Pavilion. It is the ruins of a building of the Tang Dynasty. We can drink wine there, and enjoy the view of the river."
"We can buy some eatables in the town, and take them there with us," suggested Song Jiang.
"There is no need for that," said Dai Zong. "We can get all we want at the inn."
"All right," said Song Jiang. They all proceeded to the Pipa Pavilion, and entering they found about ten tables arranged. They selected a clean one, and sat down according to the rules of propriety—Song Jiang in the place of honor, Dai Zong facing him, and Li Kui at the side. They called for wine and food. The proprietor brought them large jars of the best wine, and Li Kui said, "Let us have big bowls, as I do not like these small cups."
"What a rude fellow you are!" said Dai Zong. "You just drink your wine and keep quiet."
"We two will have the small cups," said Song Jiang to the proprietor, "but you can let this gentleman have a big bowl."
The proprietor did this, and Li Kui laughingly said, "What a splendid fellow you are. People spoke well and truly of you. How well you have met my desires! Life will not be unworth to live when I have you as my sworn brother."
After they had drunk about six cups of wine, Song Jiang saw that they were getting merry and he thought it would be nice to have some hot chilli fish soup. He asked Dai Zong whether they could get fresh fish at the inn.
Dai Zong laughed, "Have you not noticed that all the boats on the river are fishing boats? This is just the place to get abundant fish."
"Well, how would it be if we had some fresh hot chilli fish soup?"
Dai Zong called the waiter and ordered fish for three. Very soon it was served, and when Song Jiang saw it he said, "Excellent food served in a superb dish. Although the inn is small yet the dishes are extremely fine." He took up his chopsticks and invited the others to partake with him. He ate a little of the fish and tasted the soup. Li Kui, however, did not use his chopsticks, but took the fish in his hand, and ate it including the bones. Song Jiang could hardly suppress his laughter, and after taking a little more soup put down his chopsticks, and said:
"It is just a habit of mine to drink a little fish soup after drinking wine. This fish does not seem to be very nice."
"I also do not like it," said Dai Zong, "salted fish does not suit my taste."
Li Kui finished the fish in his own bowl, and then remarked, "As you two elder brothers do not like it I will eat it for you." So he reached across the table, and with his hand took the fish from Song Jiang's bowl and ate it. He then did the same with Dai Zong's bowl of fish. When he had finished the table was covered with the soup which had dripped from the fish.
Song Jiang summoned the waiter and told him, "Our brother here is very hungry so please bring plenty of meat for him, and I will pay for it."
The waiter said they had only mutton—no beef. Upon hearing this Li Kui took the bowl of soup and threw it in the waiter's face and clothes.
"Why do you do that?" asked Dai Zong.
"Because that fellow is so unreasonable," replied Li Kui. "He insults me by saying that I can eat beef only."
"I just asked you what meat you would like," said the waiter.
"Go and bring what you have got," said Song Jiang.
The waiter smothered his anger, and soon returned with a tray of mutton which he placed on the table. Li Kui without saying a word reached out his hands, and took the mutton. He had very soon eaten the whole lot.
"What a robust fellow!" exclaimed Song Jiang. "He is really a strong man."
"How well you understand my nature!" replied Li Kui. "The mutton is much better than the fish."
Dai Zong spoke to the waiter, "You have especially fine dishes, but the fish you served in them was not of the best. If you have any better fish please bring some for my friend here."
The waiter laughed and said, "I dare not deceive you, gentlemen. The fish was caught yesterday. The live fish caught today is still on the boats and we cannot buy it until the wholesale dealer begins to sell. For this reason we cannot supply you with fresh fish today."
Li Kui jumped up, "I myself will go, and buy a pair of live fish for my elder brothers."
"You must not go," said Dai Zong. "The waiter can go himself and ask for some fish."
"The fishermen will let me have the fish at once," said Li Kui. "It is a small thing." He went off at once although Dai Zong tried to stop him.
Dai Zong spoke to Song Jiang, "I hope that you will excuse me for introducing that kind of man to you. He is not a respectable man, and I am somewhat ashamed of his manners."
"That is his natural disposition, and how can you help it? I think he is a very sincere and honest man."
They stayed in the Pipa Pavilion joking and talking for some time.
Li Kui arrived at the river bank, and there he saw about ten fishing boats all tied up in a line along the quay, under overhanging willow trees. Most of the fishermen were asleep on board, but there were a few repairing the nets, and some bathing in the river. That time was about the middle of June, and the sun was just setting in a red western sky. The wholesale merchant who sold the fish was not there.
Li Kui shouted out, "Bring me two fresh fish."
A fisherman replied, "The wholesale merchant has not come, and we dare not sell any fish without him. You see that all the fish dealers are waiting for him over there."
"Why should I wait for any damned fish merchant?" said Li Kui. "Let me have two fish at once."
"We have not yet burnt the joss paper for the spirits, so how can we let you have any fish?" replied the fisherman.
Li Kui saw that they would not give him the fish so he jumped on to the boat. The fish was in tanks in the holds and although Li Kui did not understand the arrangements of the boat he removed a bamboo screen. The fishermen could not stop him, and the spectators on the bank were astounded. Li Kui groped inside the water, but could not find a single fish. These boats had a hole at the stern which kept the tanks supplied with fresh water. There was a small bamboo screen which although admitting the water prevented the fish from leaving the tank. Because of this arrangement the fish was always fresh when sold at Jiangzhou. When Li Kui had removed the bamboo screen all the fish in the tank had escaped. As he could find no fish Li Kui jumped on to another boat, and did the same thing again. About eighty fishermen now rushed at Li Kui with bamboo poles to beat him. He, seeing the advancing crowd, immediately stripped off his coat and shirt, and seizing about six of the nearest bamboo poles in both hands he broke them into pieces at once. The fishermen were astonished at his strength, and immediately unloosened the moorings of the other boats and sculled them away from the wharf. Li Kui was now very angry and taking one of the broken bamboo poles he leapt ashore, but the fish merchants there immediately put down their loads, and ran away. In the noise and confusion a man arrived on the scene, and the men called out, "Here comes the merchant. This black man has been trying to seize the fish, and so has frightened away all the fishing boats."
"Who has dared to do this crazy thing?" asked the merchant.
The men pointed to Li Kui, "There he is. He threatens to beat us."
"You fellow with a leopard's heart and a tiger's gall," said the merchant, "how dare you come here, and upset my affairs like this?"
Li Kui saw that the merchant was big sized, and of about thirty-three years of age; he had a black moustache, and wore a blue turban with a red ribbon entwined in his hair; his shirt was of white cloth and he had a silk girdle; his hempen sandals were fastened with black and white strings; in his hand he carried a balance. He handed the balance to another man, and, advancing, shouted at Li Kui, "Whom are you going to fight?"
Li Kui did not answer, but lifted his bamboo pole to strike the man. The man stepped forward and seized hold of the pole. Li Kui seized hold of the man's hair. The man raised his foot, and kicked Li Kui who, however, still held on to his opponent's hair. The man struck several blows with his fist, but Li Kui did not mind these at all, but when the man kicked him, he pulled the man down to the ground, and hit him with his fist—his blows were like iron mallets and sounded like the beating of a drum. The man had no means of escape, but a bystander seized hold of Li Kui by the waist, and another man took hold of Li Kui's hand, and they called out, "Stop this! Stop this!" Li Kui turning his head saw that the men holding him were Song Jiang and Dai Zong. He at once released his hold, and the man immediately rushed away.
Dai Zong complainingly said to Li Kui, "I told you not to come here for fish, and now I find you fighting. If you had killed the man would you not have had to answer for it in prison?"
"You are afraid that I would implicate you. If I had killed a man I would answer the charge of murder, and not you."
"Brother, do not discuss the matter any further," said Song Jiang. "Let us go and drink some more wine."
Li Kui got his coat and shirt and throwing them over his arm he accompanied the other two. They had gone hardly ten steps when they heard a man behind cursing them. "You deserve death! I want to fight with you, and we will see who will win this time." Li Kui turned round, and saw it was the very man he had just fought with. He was now stripped naked except for a small pair of drawers. His hair was bound up with red tapes on top of his head without a turban. He was by himself and carried a bamboo pole such as are used on boats. He was quickly approaching on a small boat and shouted, "You, rascal, deserving of hacking into a thousand pieces. If I were afraid of you I should not be brave. If you walk away, you are coward."
Li Kui roared with rage at this, and throwing down his clothing he stepped forward. He and the man cursed each other and as Li Kui was standing on the bank the man threatened to strike his leg with the bamboo pole. Li Kui leapt on to the boat, and what happened occurred quicker than we can relate. The man had inveigled Li Kui to come on the boat, for as soon as Li Kui was on board he pushed the boat away from the wharf and it floated off into the current. Li Kui could swim only a little, so this movement filled him with fear. The man put down his pole, and addressed Li Kui, "Now we will fight and see who will win." He seized Li Kui's arm. "But before we fight I am going to give you a drink of water." He was standing with both legs outstretched, and all at once he moved his weight onto one leg, turned the boat upside down and threw them both into the river.
Song Jiang and Dai Zong had watched all this from the bank, and were excited when both men fell into the river with a mighty splash. There was a big crowd of men also watching this, and one of them said, "That black man has now got his deserts. Even if he does not drown he will get a bellyful of water." Now they could see both men in the water, and the boatman caught hold of Li Kui, and ducked him into the water again. They struggled together in the water, but there was not a single man on the wharf who did not applaud the spectacle. It was evident that Li Kui was getting the worst as he was frequently pushed down underneath the water. Song Jiang asked Dai Zong to get some one to act as peace-maker.
Dai Zong asked the crowd who the boatman was, and a man replied, "He is Zhang Shun, and is the wholesale dealer in fish here."
Song Jiang was startled upon hearing this. "Surely can he not be Zhang Shun, the 'White Fish'?"
"Yes, that is so."
"I have a letter from his brother Zhang Heng in my quarters," said Song Jiang.

Dai Zong hearing this shouted at the top of his voice; "Brother Zhang! Stop this fighting! Here is a letter from your elder brother. That man is one of us, and you can forgive him, and come here to talk matters over."
Zhang Shun heard this, and also recognized Dai Zong so he released Li Kui and swam to the wharf. He saluted and said, "Sir, please excuse me."
"In my behalf I will ask you to go and save that man's life," said Dai Zong. "When you return with him I will introduce you to somebody."
Zhang Shun without a word dived into the river, and soon reached Li Kui who was in difficulties. Zhang Shun took hold of Li Kui with one hand, and treading the water, and swimming with the other hand drew Li Kui towards the wharf. Upon their landing all the crowd applauded. Song Jiang was filled with admiration at this fine display by Zhang Shun. Li Kui was alternately vomiting water and taking in deep drafts of breath.
"Let us all go to the Pipa Pavilion and talk matters over there," suggested Dai Zong.
Li Kui and Zhang Shun put on their clothes, and all four set off for the inn. When they had all taken their seats Dai Zong spoke to Zhang Shun, "Brother, do you know me?"
"Yes, I know you, but I have had no opportunity of meeting you before this," said Zhang Shun.
Dai Zong pointed at Li Kui and said, "He has offended you today, but surely you also know him."
"Of course I know brother Li Kui. Only we have never been at loggerheads previously."
"But you nearly drowned me today," interposed Li Kui.
"You gave me a good beating too," responded Zhang Shun.
"Well, I hope that you will both turn out to be good friends," said Dai Zong. "Remember the saying, 'Friends are often made after a fight.'"
"You avoid meeting me on the road," said Li Kui.
"Well, I prefer to meet you in the water," said Zhang Shun.
They all laughed at this joke, and agreed not to talk about that affair again.
Dai Zong pointing at Song Jiang asked Zhang Shun whether he knew who that was.
Zhang Shun said he did not. He did not remember having met him before.
Li Kui got up and said, "This elder brother is Song Jiang."
"Can he be 'Welcome Rain' of Shandong—Song Jiang?"
"Yes, it is he," said Dai Zong.
Zhang Shun kowtowed and said, "I have heard of your great fame for a long time, but have never expected to meet you. All travelers speak highly of you—your great generosity and your distribution of wealth in good cause."
"Do not mention my small affairs," said Song Jiang. "A few days ago I was at Jieyang Mountain, and stayed with Li Jun, 'Muddy Water Dragon,' and afterwards at Xunyang River I met your brother, Zhang Heng, who gave me a letter to hand to you. It is in my baggage at my lodgings." He then explained how they had come to the Pipa Pavilion to drink wine and how Li Kui had gone to get some fresh fish against their wishes. How they had heard a row, and had come to see what had happened. He said he had been exceedingly fortunate in meeting three heroes in one day. He asked them all to drink three cups of wine with him to celebrate the auspicious occasion.
"If you wish fresh fish," said Zhang Shun, "I myself will go and get some."
Li Kui offered to go with him, but Dai Zong objected, "Have you not had enough river water for today?"
Zhang Shun laughed and taking Li Kui by the hand said, "You come with me for the fish, and we will see how the fishermen will look upon us." So they both set off, and upon reaching the wharf Zhang Shun whistled and all the fishing boats in the river came at once to the wharf. Zhang Shun called out, "Which boat has caught golden carp today?"
Two men on different boats called out that they had the fish, and they soon brought about ten big carp to the wharf. Zhang Shun selected four of the biggest, strung them on a willow twig, and handing them to Li Kui told him to take them to the pavilion. He stayed behind to see the fish weighed and sold to the various dealers. When he got back to the Pipa Pavilion Song Jiang said to him, "Why do you send so many fine fish? One would have been enough."
"These are only small things, and not worth mentioning," said Zhang Shun; "you can take what you like, and any left over you can take along to your lodgings."
They all sat down in order of seniority. The waiter was told to boil the fish, and to steam another one in wine. While this was being done, they drank wine and chatted together about their respective affairs. They then saw a girl about sixteen years of age, wearing crepe clothes that came to their table, gave them the usual woman's salutations, and commenced to sing. Now it happened that Li Kui was just then, in the midst of relating a story of his own exploits, and found it interrupted by the song, and that the other three were only listening to the music. He was annoyed and jumping up he flipped the girl's forehead with two fingers. The girl made an exclamation and fell down. She lay there without moving. The waiter was frightened and told the four guests that they must not attempt to leave until the matter had been investigated by the proper officials.

The unforeseen may sometimes end
Conditions that is perfect.

## 137
## In the Xunyang Pavilion, Song Jiang Writes & Recites a Seditious Poem he should have known better; From Mount Liang Marsh, the Magic Messenger Dai Zong Sends a False Report in a forged Letter

The host detained the 4. "Gentlemen, what have you done?" he cried.
Very flurried, he ordered his waiters to revive the girl. They sprayed her with water, and she opened her eyes. They helped her to her feet. A bit of skin had been rubbed from her forehead. It was this which had caused her to faint. Everyone was greatly relieved. When the girl's parents heard that the perpetrator was Black Whirlwind, they were stunned. They didn't dare protest. Now their daughter had regained her speech. The mother bound the girl's head with a kerchief and collected her hair-pins and ornaments. "What is your name?" Song Jiang asked the woman. "Where do you live?"
"Our family name is Song. We're from the capital, sir. This girl is our only child. Her father has taught her a few ballads. On his instructions, she sings here in the Pipa Pavilion. But she's an impatient, ignorant child. She insisted on singing even though she saw you gentlemen were talking. So this brother moved his hand and injured her a bit. Nothing worth going to the authorities about, and involving you gentlemen."
Song Jiang was pleased that the woman spoke with a proper understanding of her place. "If you'll send someone with me to the prison," he said, "I'll give you twenty ounces of silver for your daughter's recuperation. Find her a good man and get her married. That's better than singing in this tavern for a living."
The girl's parents kowtowed. "Twenty ounces is really too much," they said.
"My word is my bond. I never lie. Let your husband come with me and I'll give him the money."
Again they thanked him. "We are deeply grateful for your assistance, sir."
Dai Zong berated Li Kui. "You must get on with people better. Look how much silver you've made brother spend."
"I only touched her with my finger and down she went. I never saw such a friggin female. Who told her to be so tender? Why, you could punch me in the face a hundred times and I wouldn't mind."
Song Jiang and the others laughed. Zhang Shun called the waiter. "The bill is on me."
"Never mind," the waiter said politely. "It doesn't matter. Just go along."
Song Jiang wouldn't hear of Zhang Shun paying. "I was the one who invited you two," he protested. "Why should you pay?"
But Zhang Shun wouldn't budge. "It's a rare privilege to know you, brother," he said. "Zhang Heng and I both were thinking of joining you when you were in Shandong. Today, I've been lucky enough to meet you at last. You must let me make this small gesture. It's only a trifling token."
"Since brother Zhang respects you so, why not let him have his way?" Dai Zong suggested.
"All right," said Song Jiang. "But only on condition that I treat him to a few cups in return, another day."
Zhang Shun was delighted. Carrying the remaining two carp, he, Dai Zong, Li Kui and the girl's father left the Pipa Pavilion with Song Jiang and escorted him back to the prison. All sat for a while in the Copying Section. Song Jiang gave two small bars of silver weighing twenty ounces to the girl's father. The man thanked him and departed. Of that no more need be said.
It was growing dark. Zhang Shun presented the fish, Song Jiang gave him the letter from his brother, and they bid each other farewell. Then Song Jiang handed a large fifty ounce silver ingot to Li Kui. "You may have use for this, brother," he said.
Dai Zong also took his leave. He and Li Kui hurried to return to the city.
Song Jiang sent one of the fish to the warden, the other he cooked for himself. Because it was fresh and delicious, he ate more than he should, and in the middle of the night his stomach knotted with cramps. By dawn he had more than twenty bouts of diarrhea. He lay weak and faint in his room. Song Jiang was always very good to people, and everyone in the prison cooked him soup and gruel and looked after him.
The next day, knowing that Song Jiang liked fish, Zhang Shun brought him two more large golden carp, in thanks for delivering the letter from his brother. He found him sick in bed, being cared for by the other prisoners. Zhang Shun wanted to call a doctor.
"I over-ate that nice fresh fish. If you buy me some diarrhea medicine I'll be fine," said Song Jiang.
Zhang Shun presented one fish to Warden Wang and one to Head Keeper Zhao, bought the medicine for Song Jiang, and departed. Of that no more need be said. The prisoners brewed the medicine and continued looking after the patient.
Dai Zong and Li Kui, bringing meat and wine, came to the Copying Section the next day to call on Song Jiang. The worst of his illness was over, but he was hardly in condition for wine and meat. They had no choice but to consume it themselves outside his room. They kept him company till late in the day, then said goodbye and left. Of that, too, no more need be said.
After resting six or seven days, Song Jiang felt completely recovered. He considered going into town and seeing Dai Zong. Another day passed without any visit from the superintendent. Early the following morning after breakfast Song Jiang took some silver, locked his door, left the prison and strolled into the city. Outside the prefectural office, he asked someone where Superintendent Dai lived.
"He has no wife or children," the man said. "He stays in the Guan Yin Monastery next door to the City Temple."
Song Jiang went there, but Dai's door was locked. He had already gone out.
Next, the clerk sought Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. "He's a headless ghost, that one," several people said. "He hasn't any home, except for the prison. And he has no routine. He'll spend a few days here, a couple of days there. You never know where he's at."
Song Jiang then went looking for the catch-master Zhang Shun. "He lives in a village in the suburbs," he was told. "Even when he sells fish it's by the river bank outside the city. He only comes into town to collect money."
The clerk again left the city, still hoping to find Zhang Shun. But he met no one he could ask. He walked on, alone and depressed. Then he came upon a lovely stretch of river, and was enchanted by the view. He saw ahead a several storied tavern. Beside it, hanging from a tall pole, was a blue banner emblazoned with the words: *The Excellent Cellar by the Xunyang River. Xunyang Pavilion,* the tavern's name, was written large in the calligraphy of poet Su Dongpo on a sign beneath the eaves.
"I heard of Jiangzhou's Xunyang Pavilion back in Yuncheng," Song Jiang mused, "and here it is. Although I'm alone, I mustn't miss this opportunity. I'll go upstairs and relax a while."
On the carved vermilion pillars to either side of the door were two white plaques on which a couplet was written: *Incomparable wine* and *A world-famous place to dine.*
Song Jiang entered, mounted the stairs and sat down in a room overlooking the river. He leaned on the railing and gazed around appreciatively.
A waiter came in. "Are you waiting for others, sir, or are you here by yourself?"
"I was expecting two guests, but they haven't show up. Bring me a jug of good wine, first, and some fruit and meats. I don't want any fish."
The waiter went downstairs and soon returned with a jug of "Moonlight Breeze on Lovers' Bridge"—a fine liquor, and a tray of vegetable dishes and tidbits to go with it. Then came fat mutton, crispy chicken, less-steeped goose and fillet of beef, all served on vermilion plates and platters.
Song Jiang was very pleased. "Delicious food well arranged on excellent crockery. Jiangzhou deserves its fame," he thought. "Although I'm here as an exile, I can still admire the scenery. We have a few scenic spots and antique remains at home, but nothing to compare with this."
Seated beside the railing, he drank steadily. Gradually, without being aware of it, he became drunk. In a surge of melancholy, he thought: "I was born in Shandong Province and raised in Yuncheng Town. A clerk by profession, I know many a good fellow in the gallant fraternity, and have earned something of a reputation. But though over thirty, I haven't made my name yet or done anything outstanding. Instead, I've the tattoo of the criminal on my cheek and am living in exile. Who knows when I'll see my old father and brother again?"
The wine went to his head, and he wept, very depressed. Suddenly, he decided to write a poem. He ordered the waiter to bring brush-pen and ink-stone, then rose and scanned appreciatively the poems which others had written on the white calcimined walls.
"Why not write my poem on the wall, too?" he said to himself. "Some day, when I've earned my place in the world, I'll come here and read it again, and think back on my present misery."
Stimulated by the wine, he ground a thick mixture of ink, soaked his brush-pen in it, and wrote on the white wall:

*Since childhood, I studied classics and history,*
*And grew up shrewd and intelligent.*
*Today, a tiger enduring in the wilderness.*
*I crouch with tooth and claw, intent.*
*A criminal's tattoo upon my cheek,*
*An unwilling exile in far Jiangzhou,*
*I shall have my revenge some day,*
*And dye red with blood the Xunyang's flow.*

Song Jiang laughed uproariously, delighted with his effort. He drank several more cups of wine. By now he was dancing for joy. Again he took up his pen and added four more lines:

*Heart in Shandong, body in Wu,*
*Drifting, I breathe sighs into the air.*
*If I achieve my lofty aim,*
*No rebel chief will with me compare.*

At the bottom, in large script he wrote: "by Song Jiang of Yuncheng." and tossed the pen on the table. He intoned the verses to himself, then downed a few more cups of wine. He was very drunk. Song Jiang asked for the bill, paid, and told the waiter to keep the change. Brushing smooth his long sleeves, he staggered down the stairs and returned to the prison. He opened his door and collapsed on the bed.
He slept straight through till the following dawn. When he awakened he remembered nothing about having written a poem in the Xunyang Pavilion. He had a bad hangover, and lay on his bed all day. Of that no more need be said.

Opposite Jiangzhou, on the other side of the river, was a town called Wuweijun, a desolate place. Living there was a former deputy prefect named Huang Wenbing. Although he'd read a bit of the classics, he was a narrow-hearted sycophant who envied men of ability. Those superior in talent he injured, those inferior he mocked. His speciality was harming people throughout the township.
He knew that Prefect Cai was the son of the premier, and frequently crossed the river to call and ingratiate himself. He hoped that this would lead to an appointment making him an official again. It was Song Jiang's fate to arouse this man and be treated by him as an adversary.
That day Huang Wenbing was sitting idle and bored at home. He called two servants, bought some attractive gifts, crossed the river in his own swift boat, and went to call on the prefect. But Cai was in the midst of an official banquet, and Huang didn't dare interrupt. He returned to the boat, which his servants had moored, by coincidence, below the Xunyang Pavilion.
It was a hot day, and Huang strolled up to the tavern. After looking over the wine cellar, he mounted the stairs to the rooms along the balcony. He glanced at the many poems upon the wall. Some were well-written, others were incoherent nonsense. Huang smiled superciliously.
He then read the verses of Song Jiang. "This is rebellious," he exclaimed. "Who could have written it?" He looked at the signature: "Song Jiang of Yuncheng."
Huang read the poem again: *Since childhood I studied classics and history, / And grew up shrewd and intelligent...* He laughed coldly. "Thinks pretty well of himself!"
He continued: *Today, a tiger enduring in the wilderness, / I crouch with tooth and claw, intent...* Huang cocked his head to one side. "The lout has no sense of fitness."
He read on: *A criminal's tattoo upon my cheek, / An unwilling exile in far Jiangzhou...* Again Huang laughed. "This is no noble-minded person. He's only an exiled prisoner."
Once more he read: *I shall have my revenge some day, / And dye red with blood the Xunyang's flow...* Huang shook his head. "Who does the villain want to wreak vengeance on? And why here? He's only an exile. How much of a stir can he make?"
*Heart in Shandong, body in Wu, / Drifting, I breathe sighs into the air...* Huang nodded. "At least those lines make sense."
*If I achieve my lofty aim, / No rebel chief will with me compare...* Huang stuck out his tongue and wagged his head. "What brass. An incomparable rebel leader! If that's not a proclamation of revolt I don't know what is!"
Huang read the signature again: "Song Jiang of Yuncheng."

"Where have I heard that name before?" he pondered. "Probably some petty functionary."
He summoned the waiter. "Who wrote this poem?"
"A man who was here last night. He drank a whole jug all by himself."
"What does he look like?"
"He has two lines of tattooing on his cheek. He must be one of the inmates of the city prison. A swarthy, short, fat fellow."
"I see," said Huang. He asked for a pen and ink, copied the poem on a sheet of paper, and placed it inside his clothes. "Don't scrape it off," he cautioned the waiter.
He went down the stairs and returned to the boat, where he spent the night. The next day after breakfast, with the servants bearing the gifts, he again proceeded to the prefecture. Cai had already completed court and had withdrawn to the residence. An officer went in to announce Huang. Before long the man came out and conducted Huang to the rear hall. There, Cai joined him. After some friendly chatter and when the gifts had been presented, both men took their seats.
"I came across the river last night to pay my respects," said Huang, "but Your Excellency was giving a banquet and I didn't want to intrude. So I've come today, instead."
"Such an intimate friend, you could have joined us. I'm sorry I missed you." Cai ordered that tea be served.
After a few sips, Huang asked: "May I be so bold as to enquire whether there has been any word from you honorable father the premier lately?"
"I received a letter from him just a couple of days ago."
"What's the news of the capital?"
"He says the Royal Astrologer in a report to the throne states that an evil star is shining on our land of Wu, and on Zhu, and that there are probably trouble makers abroad who must be eliminated. What's more, says my father, children on the street are chanting this rhyme: *The destroyer of our country is home and tree; water and work are armed soldiery; stretched in a line are thirty-six; Shandong will put us in a terrible fix.* He advises me to keep a careful watch on my prefecture."
Huang thought a moment. Then he smiled. "I'm not surprised, Excellency." He took from his sleeve the poem he had copied and handed it to Cai. "Here's the reason."
The prefect read it. "A rebellious poem. Where did you get it?"
"I didn't dare to intrude last night, and walked back to the river bank. For want of something better to do, I went into the Xunyang Pavilion to escape the heat. I saw poems idlers had inscribed on the white-washed wall, including this newly written one."
"What sort of person is the author?"
"He's put his name down. Song Jiang of Yuncheng."
"Who is he?"
"He tells us in his poem: *A criminal's tattoo upon my cheek, / An unwilling exile in far Jiangzhou.* He's an exile, a criminal in the city prison."
"What can a fellow like that do?"
"Don't underestimate him, Excellency. He fits in exactly with the children's rhyme your honorable father mentions in his letter."
"What do you mean?"
*"The destroyer of our country is home and tree.* Put the top of the character for 'home' over the character for 'tree' and you've got the character 'Song.' He's the man who'll pillage our country's money and grain. Then, *Water and work are armed soldiery*—the second line. Place the 'water' radical next to the character for 'work' and you've got 'Jiang,' the man who will raise armed soldiers. And it's Song Jiang who's written the rebellious poem. This is a warning from Heaven. How fortunate for the populace!"
"What about *Stretched in a line are thirty-six; Shandong will put us in a terrible fix?"*
"Thirty-six either refers to the year of our emperor's reign, or it's a number of some sort. As for *Shandong will put us in a terrible fix,* Yuncheng County is in Shandong. We've something to coincide with every line of the rhyme."
"Is the fellow still here?"
"When I questioned the waiter last night he said the man wrote the poem the day before yesterday. But it's easy enough to find out. Check the prison register."
"An extremely good idea." Cai ordered an attendant to fetch the register of the city prison from the record room. Cai examined it personally. Sure enough, there was the entry: "Fifth month. One newly exiled prisoner—Song Jiang of Yuncheng County."
"The man in the rhyme. This is very important," said Huang. "If we delay, news that we're on to him may leak out. Better seize him immediately and lock him up. Then we can discuss what to do next."
"Precisely," said the prefect. He convened court and summoned the superintendent of the city's two prisons. Dai Zong presented himself and hailed the prefect respectfully.
"Take some police, go to the city prison and bring Song Jiang of Yuncheng here," Cai ordered. "He's written a rebellious poem in the Xunyang Pavilion. I don't want a moment's delay."
Shocked, Dai Zong silently groaned and left the prefectural office. He mustered a number of prison guards. "Go home and get your weapons and assemble at my quarters next door to the City Temple," he instructed them.
The men departed. Using his magic travel method, Dai sped to the prison's Copying Section and pushed open Song Jiang's door. His friend was there. When the clerk saw Dai enter, he hurried forward to greet him.
"I went into town the other day, but couldn't find you anywhere," Song Jiang said. "I was so bored I walked to the Xunyang Pavilion and finished a bottle of wine all by myself. The effects still haven't worn off."
"Brother," Dai exclaimed, "what sort of poem did you write on the wall?"
"Who knows? I was drunk."
"Just now the prefect summoned me and ordered me to bring men and arrest you for having written a rebellious poem in the Xunyang Pavilion. I was very shaken, but I told my men to wait for me by the City Temple to give me time to let you know first. Brother, what are we going to do? How can we get you out of this?"
Song Jiang scratched his head in perplexity. "I'm a goner," he moaned.
"There is a way, though it may not work," said Dai. "I can't delay any longer. I'll have to bring my police and arrest you. Mess your hair, spill your filth on the floor, roll in it, and pretend to be mad. When I come with my men, speak wildly and act as if you were out of your mind. I'll go back to the prefect and report that you're insane."
"Thank you, brother. Save me, I beg you!"
Dai quickly bid farewell and returned to the city. At the City Temple he assembled his police and proceeded with them to the prison at a rapid pace. "Where is the new exile, Song Jiang?" he shouted with feigned ferocity. He led his men to Song Jiang's room in the Copying Section.
There they found the clerk, his hair in disarray, rolling in his own filth upon the floor.
"Who are you pricks?" Song Jiang demanded.
"Seize the wretch," Dai roared.
Eyes glaring, Song Jiang fought in a frenzy. "I'm the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor of Heaven. He's sent me here with a hundred thousand divine troops to slaughter all of Jiangzhou. The King of Hades leads my advance guard, the Demon General commands my rear. The Jade Emperor has given me a golden seal weighing eight hundred catties. I'm going to kill every friggin one of you!"
"He's crazy," said the policemen. "What's the use of arresting him?"
"You're right," said Dai. "Let's go back and tell them. If we have to take him, we'll come again."
They returned to the prefecture, where Cai was waiting in his court. "Song Jiang has taken leave of his senses," they reported. "He rolls in filth and talks wild. He stinks so badly we didn't dare bring him here."
Cai was about to inquire further when Huang emerged from behind a screen. "Don't believe them," he advised the prefect. "That poem he wrote was not the work of a madman. There's something fishy going on. Bring him in. If he can't walk, carry him."
"You're right," said Cai. He turned to the superintendent. "No more excuses. I want him here."
Orders were orders. Dai groaned inwardly, and led his police once more to the prison. "It's not going well, brother," he whispered. "I'll have to take you along." Song Jiang was placed in a large bamboo cage and carried to the prefectural court.
"Bring the rogue forward," the prefect directed.
Guards brought Song Jiang before the official dais, but he refused to kneel. "How dare you question me," he cried, glaring. "I'm the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor. He's sent me here with a hundred thousand divine troops to slaughter all of Jingzhou. The King of Hades leads my advance guard, the Demon General commands my rear. The Jade Emperor has given me a golden seal weighing eight hundred catties. Hide before I kill every friggin one of you!"
The prefect was at a loss. Again Huang addressed him. "Summon the warden and the head keeper. Ask them whether he was mad when he arrived, or did this happen only recently. If he was crazy when he came, then it's real. If this condition developed only now, then it's false."
"Very well put," said the prefect. He sent for the warden and the head keeper and questioned them. It was impossible for them to lie.
"He didn't show any signs of madness when he arrived," they admitted. "He only became this way lately."
Cai was furious. He instructed the guards to truss the prisoner up and give him fifty blows. Song Jiang was pounded till he was more dead than alive. His skin burst and his blood was streaming. Dai Zong watched, agonized, unable to help him.
At first Song Jiang continued to babble like a lunatic, but finally he could bear no more. "I wrote a rebellious poem because I was drunk," he cried. "I didn't mean anything by it."
Having obtained a confession, the magistrate directed that a twenty-five-catty cangue for capital felons be placed around the prisoner's neck and that he be detained in the big jail. Song Jiang had been beaten so badly he couldn't walk. The cangue was nailed fast and he was thrown into a cell for the condemned. Dai secretly ordered the guards to treat him well, and arranged for food to be sent in. Of that we'll say no more.
Cai adjourned court and invited Huang to the rear hall. "Were it not for your far-sightedness," the prefect said, "I might have been fooled by that villain."
"The case is urgent, Excellency. It would be best if you rushed a man to the capital with a letter to your honorable father, reporting how you are dealing with this matter of national importance. Suggest that if he wants the man, alive, you'll send him by prison cart. If he doesn't, or if he's afraid the fellow will escape en route, you'll execute him here and eliminate a great danger. The emperor will also be very pleased with the news."
"There's reason in what you say. I was intending to send a person to the capital with gifts for my father, anyway. I shall mention your contribution in my letter and ask him to request the emperor to put you in charge of a wealthy city, so that you may quickly gain fame and fortune."
"All my life I shall rely on your beneficence, Excellency, and serve you as humbly as any groom."
The prefect wrote the letter and affixed his seal. "Who will you send as a trusted messenger?" Huang asked.
"The superintendent of our two city prisons is a man named Dai Zong. He knows certain charms by which he can cover eight hundred //in one day. I'm giving him the mission. He'll make the round trip in ten days."
"If he travels that fast, splendid."
Cai entertained Huang with wine in the rear hall. The next day Huang took his leave of the prefect and returned to Wuweijun.
Cai filled two hampers with gold and jewels and precious baubles, then closed and sealed them. The following day he summoned Dai Zong to the rear hall.
"I have here some gifts and a letter which I want delivered to my father the premier in the Eastern Capital before his birthday, which is on the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. The date is fast approaching, and only you can get there in time. Don't tell me about difficulties. Travel day and night and bring back a reply and I'll reward you handsomely. I have figured out your itinerary and just how long it should take, using your marvellous travel methods, and shall be awaiting your report. Don't dally on the road. This must not be delayed."
The superintendent couldn't refuse. He accepted the hampers and the letter, bid the prefect farewell, and left to prepare. Then he went to see Song Jiang in his cell.
"You can relax, brother," said Dai. "The prefect is sending me on a mission to the Eastern Capital, with a time limit of ten days. While I'm at the premier's residence I'll pull a few strings and get you out of this. Li Kui will be responsible for bringing you your food every day. Just be patient a little longer."
"I hope you can save my life, brother."
The superintendent summoned Li Kui and said: "Our brother has written a rebellious poem and has been convicted. We don't know yet what the outcome will be. I'm leaving today on a mission to the Eastern Capital and will be back soon. It's up to you to see it that he gets his food every day."
"So he wrote a rebellious poem. What friggin difference does that make? Thousands of plotters have become big officials! You just go on to the capital and don't worry about a thing. No one in this prison will dare bother him. I'll return good for good. But if anybody plays rough, I'll take my battle-ax and chop his friggin head off!"
"Be careful, please. If you get drunk our brother is liable to miss his meals."
"If that's what worries you, I won't touch a drop all the while you are gone. I'll look after brother Song Jiang every minute. Why not?"
Dai was very pleased. "You seem very determined."
That day, he set out on his journey. Li Kui indeed gave up drink. He remained in the prison, tending to Song Jiang, never leaving him by so much as a step.
Dai Zong returned to his quarters, put on leggings, hemp sandals, and an apricot-yellow robe bound by a waist sash, into which he tucked his identification plaque. Dai changed his head kerchief and put the letter into his pouch, along with some money for the road. The hampers he carried on either end of a shoulder-pole.
Once outside the city, he attached two charms to each of his legs, murmured some magic words, and set forth. He travelled all day, and put up at an inn in the evening. Removing the charms, he burned simulated gold ingots of paper as a gift to the Emperor of Heaven. Then he retired.
He rose early the next morning, had some food and wine, and left the inn. Again he attached the four charms, shouldered the hampers, and travelled—so rapidly that the wind and rain whistled in his ears, and his feet didn't touch the ground. He stopped only once or twice for a snack along the road.
At the end of the day he again spent the night at an inn. The following morning he got up at the fifth watch, to take advantage of the dawn cool. Attaching the charms, he struck out with the hampers on his shoulder-pole. By mid-morning he had covered nearly three hundred //without encountering a single clean tavern.
It was a sticky day in early summer. Dai's clothes were soaked with sweat. He was nearly prostrated from the heat. Hungry and thirsty, he noticed a tavern ahead. It was beside a lake at the edge of a grove. Dai was there in the twiddle of a thumb. The tavern was spotlessly clean, and had twelve red lacquered tables, with benches to match, all in a row beside the windows.
He went in, chose a secluded table rested his hampers, untied his sash and removed his gown. This he sprayed with water and hung on the window railing to dry. As he sat down, the waiter approached.
"How much wine, sir? Would you like some meat to go with it? We have pork, mutton and beef."
"Go easy on the wine. And bring me some rice."
"Besides wine and rice we sell steamed bread and vermicelli soup."
"I don't want meat. Have you any vegetables?"
"How about some peppery stewed bean-curd?"
"Just right."
The waiter soon returned with bean-curd and two vegetable dishes, and poured out three large bowls of wine. Dai was famished. He quickly finished the wine and bean-curd. He was waiting for rice when the earth and sky began to turn dizzily. His sight fading, Dai fell backwards off the bench.
"He's down," the waiter called.
From within the tavern a man emerged. It was Zhu Gui, the Dry-Land Crocodile, member of the Mount Liangshan stronghold.
"Take his hampers inside and see whether he's got anything on him," Zhu Gui ordered.
Two assistants searched Dai and found a paper packet. They handed it to Zhu Gui. He removed the paper and revealed an envelope inscribed: "Peaceful Family Letter, with the Utmost Respect to His Father from His Son Cai Dezhang." Zhu Gui tore open the envelope and read the missive from beginning to end. It said:
Today we have arrested a man who fits the prediction rhyme and who has written a rebellious poem—Song Jiang of Shandong, and are holding him in prison ... We await your orders for his disposition.
Zhu Gui was shocked beyond speech. His assistants were lifting Dai to carry him into the butchering shed when Zhu Gui noticed a red and green object attached to the sash lying on the bench. He picked it up. It was an official's identification plaque. Etched in silver were the words: "Dai Zong, Superintendent of the Two Prisons, Jiangzhou."
"Wait." Zhu Gui said to the cohorts. "I've often heard our military advisor talk of his friend Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller from Jiangzhou. Can this be the man? But why is he bearing a letter that will harm Song Jiang? Heaven has sent him into my hands." He instructed his assistants: "Give him the antidote and bring him round. I want to question him."
The assistants poured a mixture into some water, raised Dai up and fed it to him. He soon opened his eyes and struggled to his feet. He saw Zhu Gui with the letter in his hands.
"Who are you?" Dai shouted. "How dare you drug me? And you've opened the letter to the premier. Don't you know what a crime that is?"
Zhu Gui laughed. "So what? What's opening the premier's letter to a man who's opposing the Song emperor?"
Dai was astonished. "Who are you, bold fellow? What is your name?"
"I'm Zhu Gui, the Dry-Land Crocodile, of the gallant band in Liangshan Marsh."
"Since you're one of the leaders, you must know Wu Yong."
"He's our military advisor. He controls all our military operations. How do you know him?"

"He's a very close friend."
"You're not Superintendent Dai, the Marvellous Traveller of Jiangzhou, he so often speaks about?"
"I am."
"When Song Jiang was on his way to exile in Jiangzhou, he stayed at our stronghold, and Wu Yong gave him a letter to you. Why are you helping to take his life?"
"Song Jiang is like a brother to me. He wrote a rebellious poem and I couldn't prevent his arrest. I'm on my way to the capital right now to find a way to save him. I'd never harm Song Jiang."
"You don't believe me?" retorted Zhu Gui. "Take a look at this."
Dai read the letter the prefect had written. He was shocked. He told Zhu Gui how he had met Song Jiang, when he came with the note from Wu Yong, and how Song Jiang got drunk and wrote a rebellious poem in the Xunyang Pavilion.
"In that case, please come with me to the stronghold and talk it over with our leaders," said Zhu Gui. "We've got to rescue Song Jiang."
First he wined and dined Dai Zong. Then he went to the pavilion overlooking the lake and shot a whistling arrow to the opposite cove. A bandit promptly rowed over in a boat. Zhu Gui helped Dai and his hampers on board. They landed at the Shore of Golden Sands and climbed to the fortress. When it was reported to Wu Yong that they were at the gate, he hurried down to greet them.
"It's been a long time," he said to Dai. "What good wind blows you here? Please come up. We'll talk in the stronghold."
Wu Yong introduced him to the other leaders, and Zhu Gui told the reason for Dai's visit: "Song Jiang is in prison."
Chao Gai hastily invited Dai to be seated and asked him how this came about. Dai related in detail the story of Song Jiang and his rebellious poem. Chao Gai was very alarmed. He proposed to the other leaders that they immediately muster men and horses, raid Jiangzhou and bring Song Jiang back to the fortress.
"That's not the way, brother," Wu Yong said. "Jiangzhou's quite far from here. A large body of men and horses would only provoke disaster. 'Disturbing the grass alerts the snake.' It would mean Song Jiang's life. What's needed here is guile, not force. I'm not very clever but I have a little plan by which we can rescue Song Jiang. It involves Superintendent Dai."
"Let's hear it, Military Advisor."
"Dai has to bring back a reply to the letter Prefect Cai is sending to the Eastern Capital. We'll write a false one and turn the tables on them. The reply Superintendent Dai will deliver will say: 'Take no action against the prisoner Song Jiang. Send him here under appropriate guard. After thorough interrogation we shall execute him and put his head on display and discredit the prediction rhyme.' When Song Jiang is being escorted through this area, our men will snatch him. What do you think of my plan?"
"Suppose he doesn't pass this way? We'll miss our chance," said Chao Gai.
"That's no problem," said Gongsun Sheng. "We'll dispatch scouts near and far to inquire. Whichever path he travels, we'll be waiting for him. One way or another, we'll get him. Our only worry is that they won't convoy him to the capital."
"The plan sounds all right," said Chao Gai, "but who's going to write the reply of Cai Jing the premier?"
"I've thought of that," said Wu Yong. "The four most favored styles of writing today are those of Su Dongpo, Huang Luzhi, Mi Yuanzhang, and Cai Jing. In all of Song, they are considered the most perfect. I have a scholar friend in the town of Jizhou named Xiao Rang. Because his calligraphy is so good, he's known as the Master Hand. He's also skilled with lance, staff, sword and knife. I know for a fact he can write in the style of Cai Jing. We'll have Superintendent Dai go to his house and say: 'The Yue Temple in Tai'an Prefecture needs an inscription written for a monument. Here are fifty ounces of silver for your family's expenses while you're gone.' Dai will bring him here. Later, we'll trick his wife and family into coming up the mountain also, and we'll get Xiao to join our band. How's that?"
"If he can write the reply, that's fine," said Chao Gai. "But we'll need a seal as well."
"There's another friend I have in mind for that. He's the best in the whole central plain, and he also lives in Jizhou. His name is Jin Dajian. He carves writing beautifully in stone and cuts excellent jade seals. What's more, he's a demon with lance and staff. He's known as the Jade-Armed Craftsman because he carves jade so well. Dai will give him fifty ounces of silver and tell him he's needed to engrave the monument. We'll capture him too on the way. We can use men like Jin and Xiao here in our stronghold."
"Very shrewd," commended Chao Gai.
That day a feast was laid for Dai Zong, and in the evening all retired.
The next morning after breakfast, Dai was disguised as a deacon and given two hundred ounces of silver. He tied on his charms, went down the mountain, and was ferried from the Shore of Golden Sands to the opposite side, where he set out for Jizhou. In less than two watches he arrived. He inquired for Xiao Rang the Master Hand.
"He lives in front of the Confucius Temple east of the prefectural office," Dai was told.
The superintendent went to Xiao's door and coughed. "Is Master Xiao at home?" he called.
A scholar emerged and looked at Dai. He's never seen him before. "Where are you from, Deacon?" he asked. "What can I do for you?"
Dai greeted him courteously. "I am the deacon of Yue Temple in Tai'an. We're repairing our Five Sacred Mountains Building and our local gentry want a monument carved. They've instructed me to give you fifty ounces of silver to care for your family while you've away and to ask you to come with me to our temple to write the inscription. The opening date has already been set and cannot be postponed."
"I only write the words on the stone, nothing more. If you're in a hurry for the monument, you'll need an engraver as well."
"I have another fifty pieces of silver. I intend to invite Jin Dajian the Jade-Armed Craftsman. An auspicious day has already been chosen. Please favor us with your guidance. We'll get Jin and go together."
Xiao Rang accepted the silver and took Dai to call on Jin. They went past the Confucius Temple and Xiao pointed. "That's Jin coming now."
Xiao hailed him and introduced him to Dai. He explained what it was that Dai wanted. "The deacon is giving each of us fifty ounces of silver to go with him," the scholar added.
Jin was pleased at the mention of the money. He and Xiao invited Dai to a tavern for a few cups of wine and some vegetable dishes. Dai gave him the silver for family expenses.
"The necromancer has selected a lucky day," the superintendent said. "I'd like both of you to leave with me at once."
"It's very hot today," said Xiao. "If we go now we won't get very far, and won't reach any place where we can put up for the night. Why not start tomorrow at the fifth watch? Just call for us and we'll go."
Jin concurred. "He's right, you know."
They arranged to leave at dawn, and returned to their homes to prepare. Dai stayed over with Xiao Rang, at the scholar's request.
At dawn the next day Jin, with a bundle of clothes and his tools, called for Xiao and Dai, and they left Jizhou. Before they had gone ten //Dai spoke.
"You two masters continue slowly. I mustn't rush you. I'll go on ahead and inform the gentry so that they can come and greet you." He lengthened his stride and hurried forward.
The two craftsmen, their bundles on their backs, proceeded at a leisurely pace. By early afternoon they had covered about eighty //. Suddenly, a shrill whistle ahead broke the stillness, and a band of forty of fifty bold fellows leaped out from concealment on the slope. In the lead was Wang the Stumpy Tiger of Clear Winds Mountain.
"Who are you two?" he called. "Where are you going? Take them, children. We'll eat their hearts with our wine!"
"We're on our way to Tai'an to carve a stone monument," said Xiao. "We haven't any valuables. Only these clothes."
"I don't want your valuables or your clothes," shouted Wang. "It's your clever hearts and livers I'm after as a savoury for my drinks!
Alarmed, Xiao and Jin mustered all their skill with arms. Raising their staves, they charged the Stumpy Tiger. Wang attacked with halberd, and the three fought half a dozen rounds until Wang was forced to turn and flee. The craftsmen were about to pursue when, on the heights, they heard the crash of gongs. From the left came Guardian of the Clouds Song Wan. From the right came Skyscraper Du Qian. Behind was Zheng Tianshou the Fair-Faced Gentleman and over thirty others. They seized Xiao and Jin and dragged them into the forest.
"Don't worry," said the four gallants. "We've been ordered by our chieftain Chao Gai to invite you up the mountain to join our band."
"What use would we be in your stronghold?" said Xiao. "We haven't the strength to strangle a chicken. All we can do is eat."
"In the first place Military Advisor Wu is your friend and, secondly, we know of your skill with weapons," said Du Qian. "That's why we sent Dai Zong to your homes to invite you."
Xiao and Jin looked at each other, speechless. All went together to the tavern of Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile, where food and drink were served. The same night a boat was called and the party proceeded to Mount Liangshan.
On arrival at the stronghold they were greeted by Chao Gai, Wu Yong and the other chieftains. The two craftsmen were given a feast of welcome and were told about forging the letter from Cai Jing.
"And so we're inviting you two to join us," the leaders concluded, "and become part of our righteous fraternity."
The craftsmen clutched Wu Yong anxiously. "We've no objection to staying here," they said, "but what of our wives and children? When the authorities hear about this they'll surely harm them."
"Set your minds at ease, brothers," Wu Yong said. "Tomorrow morning you'll understand."
That night all drank until it was time to retire.
At daybreak a bandit arrived and reported: "They're here."
"Please go and receive your families," Wu Yong sand to Jin and Xiao.
The two men could scarcely believe him. Halfway down the mountain they met sedan chairs coming up, bearing their wives and children. The two questioned them in astonishment.
"After you left, yesterday," the women related, "these sedan-carriers arrived and said: 'Your husbands are at an inn outside of town suffering from heat stroke. They want you and the children to go there at once and look after them.' But when we left the town they wouldn't let us out of the sedan-chairs, and brought us here."
Both families had been reunited. Xiao and Jin had nothing to say. They abandoned all hope of leaving and went back up the mountain to join the band.
When the families were settled in, Wu Yong conferred with Xiao on the writing of Cai Jing's reply. As to the seal, Jin said: "I've always been the one who's carved all of Cai Jing's seals, both of his official name and his popular name." They set to work and soon finished the letter.
A banquet was laid for Dai Zong, who was given detailed instructions. The superintendent bid all farewell and went down the mountain to the Shore of Golden Sands, where a bandit ferried him across to Zhu Gui's tavern. Dai tied the charms to his legs, took leave of Zhu Gui, and strode forth on his journey.
After seeing Dai off to the ferry point, Wu Yong and the other chieftains returned to the mountain fortress and feasted. Suddenly, while they were drinking, Wu Yong uttered a cry of lamentation. Everyone was mystified.
"What's wrong?" they queried.
"That letter I prepared is the death warrant for Dai Zong and Song Jiang!"
"What's the matter with it?" the chieftains asked in alarm.
"I thought only of one thing and forgot another. There's a terrible error in that reply!"
"I wrote exactly in the style of Cai Jing. Not a word was wrong," said Xiao. "Please tell us, Military Advisor, where was the error?"
"The seal I carved corresponds to Cai's in every detail," said Jin. "How'd anyone see any flaw?" Wu Yong raised 2 fingers and revealed the mistake to the assembled warriors. And as a result, bold fellows caused havoc in Jiangzhou Town and threw White Dragon Temple into confusion. In a shower of arrows men fled for their lives in a forest of weapons, heroes were saved.

Now when Iron Ox stuck his fist in that girl's face and knocked her down, the innkeeper thrust himself between them, saying: "Gentlemen, please what are you trying to do?" Anxiously he called his waiters and assistants over to give the girl first aid. When they sprayed water over her face she came to and they helped her to her feet. She had lost a chunk of skin from her temple, which was the cause of her fainting. Now they had brought her round there was general relief.
The girl's parents had heard the name Black Whirlwind, Iron Ox's other name; they were struck dumb and for a long time stood there not daring to open their mouths. Once the girl had regained her speech, her mother took out a handkerchief and bound up her head and then began gathering up her hairpins.
"What is your name, where do you live?" Song Jiang asked them.
"Our name is Song, sir, I'll tell you no lies," the old woman said. "We're from the capital. This is our only daughter, her name's Yulian. Her father has taught her a few songs, and nothing would satisfy him but that she should come to this restaurant and sing to people, to earn a bit of money, you know. But she's so flighty, she has no sense of what's proper. She took no heed that you were talking, she just had to go and sing. Then this gentleman gets impatient and gives her a bit of a knock. We certainly don't want to make a complaint and give you gentlemen a lot of bother."
Seeing that she spoke so circumspectly, Song Jiang said: "If you send someone with me to the camp, I will give you twenty taels of silver. Let her rest and later you can find her a good husband so she won't have to come here and sing for her living."
The old couple prostrated themselves in gratitude, saying: "We don't deserve so much!"
"A promise is a promise," Song Jiang said. "I never go back on my word. Let your husband come with me and I'll settle up with him."
The old people thanked him again. "We are deeply grateful, Your Honour," they said.
"Now look at you," the Magic Messenger said to Iron Ox. "Just in order to shut someone up you've made our friend spend all that money!"
Iron Ox said: "I only meant to touch her with my finger. She fell down by herself. How was I to know the bloody girl was so fragile? You could punch me in the face a hundred times and it wouldn't do anything to me!"
Song Jiang and the others all laughed. White Eel called the waiter over and said to him: "I'm paying."
"Don't worry about that," the man said. "I just want you to leave."
Song Jiang didn't want to accept the offer. "I invited you," he said. "Why should you pay?"
But White Eel was adamant. "When you were in Shandong we were even planning to join you. Now I've got the luck to be here with you face to face, you've got to let me do this little thing."
The Magic Messenger said: "Song Jiang, my friend, it seems Mr. Zhang has set his heart on inviting you, I think you should give way."
"All right, then," said Song Jiang. "On condition that you allow me to invite you another time."
White Eel was satisfied. Carrying the two carp he, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox, and also old Song, accompanied Song Jiang from the inn back to the prison camp. Arriving there, they went and sat in the inspection room while Song Jiang fetched two bars of silver amounting to twenty taels for the old man, who thanked him and departed. Of him no more.
It was getting dark by now. White Eel gave Song Jiang the fish and the latter handed over his brother's letter. White Eel now left. Song Jiang also gave Iron Ox a fifty ounce silver bar, saying: "This is for you." After which the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox said goodbye and returned to the town.
Song Jiang presented one of the fish to the warden and kept the other himself. The fish was temptingly fresh and tasty, and Song Jiang ate too much of it. That night he had such a pain it felt as if his guts were being tied in knots. By daybreak he had been to the bathroom twenty times. He was so giddy he collapsed on his bed and slept. Since everyone liked him in the camp, they all brought him rice porridge and soup and looked after him and fed him. Next day White Eel came with two more big golden carp, since he knew Song Jiang liked fish, to thank him for bringing the letter. He found him in bed with diarrhoea, attended by the inmates of the camp. White Eel wanted to call the doctor, but Song Jiang said: "It's my own fault for being greedy. I ate too much fish. Just get me some of that special mixture for diarrhoea and I'll be fine." He told White Eel to give the fish away, one to the warden and the other to the Magic Messenger. White Eel did so, and got him the medicine, then left. Of this no more.
The inmates of the camp continued to look after Song Jiang. Next day the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox came to see him in the office, bringing wine and meat, but they found him still sick and unable to face any food, so they consumed it themselves in the front room. They stayed till evening. Of this no more.
Song Jiang continued to rest in the camp for another week or so, after which he felt well much better, quite recovered from the sickness, and began to think about going to see the Magic Messenger in the town. Another day passed and the Magic Messenger did not turn up, so next day after breakfast somewhat before nine o'clock he took some silver, locked his room and left the camp. He strolled easily down the road till he reached the town. In front of the government offices he asked where he could find Superintendent Dai. Someone said: "He has no family, he stays at the monastery of the Goddess of Mercy next door to the Temple of the City God." Thither he directed his steps, but found the door locked and no one in.
Next he inquired about Iron Ox. "He's a restless soul, he doesn't have any fixed place," everyone told him. "He tends to sleep at the gaol, but he doesn't have a regular routine. He'll spend a couple of nights here and a few more there, you can never really say where he lives." Song Jiang also asked about the factor, White Eel. "He lives in a village outside the city," they said. "At the time of the fish auction he's always down by the river. He only comes into town to collect money."
After hearing all this Song Jiang decided to go and look for White Eel in the country. Hoping to meet someone of whom he could ask the way, he strolled along gloomily by himself. When he had left the town behind the river scenery was beautiful, he felt he would never tire of it. He found himself in front of an inn. Raising his eyes he saw the inn sign, a pole from which hung a blue inn pennant bearing the words "Famous wines of the Yang-tze River." Attached to the carved eaves was a sign with three characters in the calligraphy of Su Dongpo: "The Yangtze Pavilion." He thought: "At home in Yuncheng I often heard about the wonderful Yangtze Pavilion in Jiangzhou. So this is it! Although I'm on my own here, it would be a pity to miss it. Why not go in by myself and have a drink or two?"
Beside the door were two red carved pillars and on them two white signs each with five characters: "Finest wine in the world, at the world's finest inn." He went upstairs and found himself a seat in an alcove beside the river. Leaning on the rail he looked around. It was indeed a fine inn, with a view that Song Jiang felt no amount of praise could do justice to. The waiter came upstairs and asked: "Are you waiting for someone sir, or are you by yourself?"
Song Jiang said: "I was expecting two people but they haven't come yet, so bring me a jug of good wine first. You can give me some side dishes and some meat too, but I don't want any fish. The waiter went downstairs with the order. Soon he returned with a tray and a jug of Blue Bridge Wind and Rain wine. He set out the dishes of vegetables and fresh fruit of the season, poured the wine, arranged some plates of fat mutton, tender chicken, marinated goose and prime beef all served on handsome red china. Song Jiang quietly appreciated all this, congratulating himself on his good fortune: "This kind of well-presented food and clean china is typical of all that's best in Jiangzhou. Although I'm sent here as a banished man, I have the opportunity to see some really fine scenery. We've got several famous mountains and ancient monuments at home, but nothing to compare with the prospect here."

Being all on his own, Song Jiang drank one cup after another, leaning on the rail and taking his ease, and he gradually became somewhat tipsy. Suddenly he was filled with melancholy: "I was born in Shandong, I grew up in Yuncheng, I come from an educated family, I have known many heroes of the rivers and lakes, but although I've gained a certain undeserved reputation, I am past thirty and have still achieved no lasting fame and gained no real profit, my cheeks are lined by care, and here I am now, a banished man. My father and younger brother remain at home, what chance have I of ever seeing them again?" Imperceptibly the wine mounted to his head, tears welled up in his eyes, as an overwhelming emotion took hold of him. Suddenly he felt inspired to write a poem. He asked the waiter for a brush and inkstone. After getting up and looking around him, he saw a whitewashed wall covered in previous customers' compositions. "Why not write it here?" he thought to himself. "If later I prosper, and if I pass this way and see it again, it will remind me of former times and today's bitterness." While the euphoria of drunkenness was still upon him, he ground some ink, loaded his brush and going over to the whitewashed wall wrote with a flourish:

I passed a studious youth,
*But later learned discretion's worth.*
*Like a tiger lying in wait on the hill*
*With sheathed claws I bide my time.*
*At present I mourn my branded cheeks,*
*My banished state, here in Jiangzhou.*
*But the day of my revenge will come*
And the banks of the Yangtze swim in blood.

When he'd finished and looked at what he'd written he was filled with pleasure and he drank several more cups, growing merrier by the moment. He became so excited that his hands began to dance and his feet to tap. He took up the brush again and went and wrote four more lines after the first poem:

My heart's in the north, my body in the south,
*By this river I wander, wallowing in sighs.*
*My ambition's lofty as the clouds; if it succeeds,*
I can scorn the most famous outlaws' deeds.

At the end of this he also wrote in big letters: "Song Jiang of Yuncheng wrote this." Then he threw the pen down on the table and recited it to himself. After drinking a few more cups he became really drunk. The wine had completely vanquished him. He called the waiter and asked for the bill. Taking out some silver he gave the waiter more than he owed and told him to keep the change. Then he marched out. Stumbling and swaying he made his way back to the camp. He opened the door of his room and collapsed on the bed, falling asleep at once and not waking till morning. When he awoke he had a hangover and remembered nothing of his poetic efforts at the Yangtze Pavilion the night before.

Now on the other bank of the river opposite Jiangzhou there was a town called Wuweijun, a somewhat desolate place. Here lived a retired official by the name of Huang Wenbing. This individual, although a scholar, was also a great proponent of flattery and servility; he was narrow-minded and prone to envy and spite. Those who were better than himself he would destroy, those who were inferior he ridiculed, and he delighted in offending the local people, who often referred to him as Bee Sting Huang or Bee Huang, for short. He knew that Governor Cai was the son of Grand Preceptor Cai at court and took every opportunity of buttering him up, crossing the river with great frequency to pay him visits, all in the hope of being recommended for a post, since he wanted to serve as an official again. Evidently Song Jiang was destined to be unfortunate, because he came up against this adversary.

One day this Huang Wenbing was sitting at home feeling bored. He decided to take two servants and go and buy some seasonal gifts. Next he took a fast boat across the river from his house and directed his steps towards the government offices, intending to pay Governor Cai a visit. Unfortunately an official dinner was in progress and he didn't like to go in. Returning to the boat, he found his people had moored it outside the Yangtze Pavilion. Since it was a warm day he decided to go and pass some time inside. He strolled in, and after looking around, took himself upstairs, where he remained leaning happily on the rail. There were a good many poems on the whitewashed wall, he observed. Some were quite good, but others were irregular and confused enough to arouse his contempt. When he came to Song Jiang's poem with the four additional lines, he received a shock: "This is seditious, if I'm not mistaken. Who could have written it?"

Then he saw Song Jiang's name at the end. He read the poem through again: " *I passed a studious youth, But later I learned discretion's worth*. This fellow has a pretty high opinion of his own value," he said to himself. " *Like a tiger lying in wait on the hill, With sheathed claws I bide my time*. The villain evidently has no regard for what is befitting his status. *At present I mourn my branded cheeks, My banished state, here in Jiangzhou*. But this is not some person of rank, it is evidently a convict! *But the day of my revenge will come And the banks of the Yangtze swim in blood*. On whom does the villain desire vengeance? He plans to stir up trouble here. What does he think he can achieve, if he's only a convict? *My heart's in the north, my body in the south, By this river I wander, wallowing in sighs*. These two lines at least are reasonable." When he came to " *My ambition's lofty as the clouds; if it succeeds, I can scorn the most famous outlaws' deeds,*" he nodded to himself and said: "This is an unconscionable villain, he wants to outdo all the great outlaws. If that isn't sedition I don't know what is!" He read the name, "Song Jiang," again, and said: "I've heard that name somewhere. I believe it's some minor official or other."

He called the landlord over and asked: "Who exactly was the author of these two poems?"

"A geezer who came last night all on his own. He drank a whole bottle of wine and got roaring drunk and went and wrote all that."

"What was he like?"

"He had the golden seals on his cheeks, reckon he was one of them convicts from the prison."

"No doubt of it," said Huang Wenbing. He asked for a brush and inkstone, and copied the poems down on a piece of paper, which he put away. He told the landlord not to rub it out.

When he left the restaurant Huang Wenbing took the boat and went home to sleep. Next day after breakfast accompanied by a servant carrying a box with gifts he made his way to the government office. The governor had just adjourned the court and was in his residence. The servant went in to announce him and after a certain time Governor Cai sent a servant to take Huang into the inner hall. The governor now entered and after an exchange of small talk and the presentation of the gifts they both sat down. "I came across to see you yesterday, Your Excellency, but I found there was an official reception so I didn't like to intrude," Huang Wenbing respectfully explained. "I have come again today to pay my respects and assure you of my gratitude for all the favours you have shown me."

Governor Cai said: "But you're a friend and a colleague, there was nothing whatsoever to stop you coming in. I am afraid I have failed in hospitality."

The Governor's servants now brought tea. Huang Wenbing said: "May I make so bold as to ask, Your Excellency, if you have been vouchsafed any news of your gracious father?"

The Governor replied: "We did receive a letter from home the other day."

Huang Wenbing said: "And what is the news of the noble preceptor, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"In his letter my papa writes that recently the court astrologers have reported to the Emperor that intensive study of the heavens has revealed an evil star, which is shining on the kingdoms of Wu and Chu. It appears that troublemakers are active in the region, and it is essential to investigate and suppress them. In addition children in the market-place have been heard singing a certain rhyme: 'The bane of our land are home and wood; water and work will do us no good. Thirty-six stand in a row, in Shandong rebellions grow.' My good papa accordingly warns me of the need to keep a tight rein on my province."

Huang Wenbing turned this over in his mind for a while and then said with satisfaction: "Your Excellency, this is not news to me." He took from his sleeve the poem that he had copied and presented it to the Governor, saying: "See what I have here!"

"This is seditious!" the Governor said when he had read it. "Where did you get hold of it?"

"Yesterday afternoon, when I did not want to intrude on you, I went back to the river and having nothing better to do I entered the Yangtze Pavilion to relax and escape the heat. I was looking at the poems customers had written when I saw this, which had been recently written on the whitewashed wall."

"Who do you think could have written it?"

"Your Excellency, the name is clearly written underneath. It says 'Song Jiang of Yuncheng wrote this'."

"I wonder who this Song Jiang is then?"

"He's written plainly enough, '*At present I mourn my branded cheeks, My banished state, here in Jiangzhou*. He's obviously a prison inmate, one of the convicted criminals in the prison camp."

"I wonder what he's up to!"

"You must not neglect this. It's exactly as it said in your gracious father's letter. That rhyme the children were singing corresponds precisely to this man."

"How do you make that out?"

" 'The bane of our lan`d are home and wood.' The one who would lay waste our country's wealth and goods must have a name composed of the character for 'home' and the character for 'wood.' That's 'Song,' what could be clearer? The second line, 'water and work do us no good' points to one whose name has 'water' next to 'work,' obviously 'Jiang.' This fellow whose family name is Song, given name Jiang, writes seditious poems. As they say, 'Hear heaven's voice, let the people rejoice!'"

"But what do you make of 'Thirty-six stand in a row, in Shandong rebellions grow'?

"Either it's the year of the Emperor's reign, or it's some kind of magic number. As for 'in Shandong rebellions grow,' well, Yuncheng is in Shandong. This rhyme fits the facts in every particular."

"But is there such a person here?"

"When I asked the innkeeper yesterday he said this person had written the poem only the day before. It's a simple matter, we just need to check the list of prisoners, we'll soon see if he's on it or not."

"You think of everything, my friend," said the Governor, and ordered a servant to tell the prison registrar to bring him the prison records. When the records were brought from the registry, the Governor examined them himself and saw that the name Song Jiang of Yuncheng did indeed appear at the end, as a prisoner who arrived in the fifth month.

"It's our man in the rhyme!" Huang Wenbing cried. "This is serious! If you delay I fear the news will leak out. Better seize him at once and shove him in the lock-up. You can think what to do with him afterwards."

"You're absolutely right." said the Governor. He went into session at once and told an official to summon the prison superintendent immediately.

When the Magic Messenger had saluted, the Governor said: "Take some guards and go at once to the prison camp and arrest the criminal who has been writing seditious poems in the Yangtze Pavilion, a fellow called Song Jiang of Yuncheng, and bring him here. Do not lose a moment."

The Magic Messenger was horrified and lamented in his heart. As soon as he left the courtroom he went and sent all the gaolers home to fetch their weapons and told them to come to a meeting at his house next to the Temple of the City God. They all went off in different directions, while the Magic Messenger sped to the prison camp, using his magic walking, and burst into the copying room. Song Jiang was there when he pushed open the door, and seeing who it was hurriedly greeted him, saying: "The other day I went into town but I couldn't find you anywhere. Since you weren't in and I was bored, I went to the Yangtze Pavilion and drank a bottle of wine. I've been feeling dizzy for the last two days. I've still got the hangover."

"Brother, what's this you wrote on the wall there the other day?"

"Who remembers everything he does when he gets drunk?"

"The Governor just called me into the courtroom and told me to get plenty of guards and go and fetch Song Jiang, accused of writing a seditious poem at the Yangtze Pavilion. I'm to bring you before the court. It gave me quite a shock, I can tell you. For the moment I've got all the guards waiting at the Temple of the City God, so I could come and let you know first. What are we going to do? How are we going to get you out of this?"

Song Jiang hearing this scratched his head but could think of nothing. He could only lament. "This time I'm really done for!" he said.

"I'll tell you one possible way out dear brother, but I don't know if you'll like it. I daren't delay now, but before I come back with the others to arrest you, you must mess up your hair and smear excrement on the floor and fall down in it. You must pretend to be mad. When we come for you, rave and gibber as if you've gone clean out of your mind. I'll go back and tell the Governor about it."

"I'll gratefully follow your suggestion, brother, I just hope it works."

The Magic Messenger hurried off. He went to his house beside the Temple of the City God and told all the guards to hurry with him to the prison camp. Arriving there he shouted with deliberate fierceness: "Where is the new prisoner Song Jiang?"

What the chief of militia saw when he led his men into the copying room was Song Jiang with his hair in total disorder, rolling about in his own filth.

When he saw the Magic Messenger and the guards Song Jiang said: "Who the bloody hell are you?"

The Magic Messenger gave a calculated roar: "Seize the bastard!"

Rolling his eyes and wildly waving his arms, Song Jiang babbled: "I am the Jade Emperor's son-in-law. His Majesty has sent me here with a hundred thousand men to kill all of you Jiangzhou people, the King of Hell is in the vanguard and the Demon General in the rear. They gave me a silver seal weighing more than eight hundred catties to kill you scum."

The guards all said: "This is obviously a lunatic. What's the use of arresting him?"

"You're quite right," said the Magic Messenger. "We'd better go and report this. If they really want him we can always come back."

They all went with the Magic Messenger to the government offices where the Governor was awaiting them in the courtroom. They reported to the Governor as follows: "Evidently this Song Jiang is mad. He's covered in excrement and he doesn't even care, he's ranting and raving and he stinks to high heaven. We didn't like to bring him here."

Before the Governor had time to inquire further, Huang Wen-bing slipped out from behind the screen and said to him: "Don't believe it. The one who wrote the poems did not write like a madman. There's some deception here. Arrest him anyway. If he can't walk, then have him carried here."

"You're right," said the Governor. "Don't argue," he told the Magic Messenger, "just bring him!"

The Magic Messenger having received this order could only lament and return with the guards to the prison camp. He told Song Jiang: "Dear brother, things do not look good. I'm afraid you'll have to go." A bamboo cage was brought and in it Song Jiang was taken to the district court.

"Bring the felon here," the Governor ordered.

The guards forced Song Jiang in front of the bench, but he refused to kneel. He glared at Governor Cai and said: "Who the hell are you? How can you dare to question me! I am the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor and I have orders from His Majesty to bring an army of a hundred thousand troops to kill all you Jiangzhou people. The King of Hell is in the vanguard, the Demon General in the rear, and they've given me a silver seal weighing eight hundred catties. Let me go at once or you shall die for it!"

The Governor could not make head or tail of all this. But Huang Wenbing said: "Call the prison warders and ask them if this man was mad when he arrived, or whether he only recently became mad. If he was mad when he came, then it's genuine. But if he only recently became mad, he's a fake."

"That's a very good idea," said the Governor. He sent people to the prison camp, where the warders did not dare deceive him and had to say: "When this man arrived he did not seem to be mad, this madness seems to have appeared only recently."

The Governor was outraged. He ordered the gaolers to tie Song Jiang up and give him fifty lashes on the spot without pause. Song Jiang was beaten till he lost consciousness and was half way to nirvana. The skin was broken, wounds opened and the blood poured out. The Magic Messenger could only watch and lament and could think of no way to help him. At first Song Jiang continued to rave, but finally under the torment of the beating he confessed: "It was a mistake, I was drunk, the poem was a piece of foolishness, it has no meaning."

Having obtained this confession, the Governor imposed the twenty-five catty cangue of a condemned man and ordered Song Jiang to be locked up in the prison. He had been beaten till he could no longer walk. After the cangue was fitted he was thrown into a cell for condemned prisoners. The Magic Messenger did what he could to help by telling the gaolers to take great care of this prisoner. He also arranged food for Song Jiang. Of this no more.

When the court adjourned Governor Cai invited Huang Wen-bing into the residence to thank him. "If not for your perspicacity and far-sightedness," he said, "I was close to being deceived by that scoundrel."

Huang said: "Your Excellency, this business is still pressing. Quickly write a letter, to be delivered with all possible speed to the Grand Preceptor, informing him of everything, and pointing out how you are dealing with a matter of national import. And tell him at once that if he wants the prisoner alive a prison cart will be used to transfer him to the capital; but if he does not want him alive, given the very real danger of losing him *en route*, let him be beheaded right here, as an example to felons and to deter further disorders. When this is known at court it cannot fail to please."

"What you say makes good sense. When I write home I will commend your efforts and ask my father to petition the Emperor on your behalf for an appointment as governor of some wealthy district, so you may gain wealth and fame."

Huang thanked him. "I am deeply indebted to you, Your Excellency. I shall remain forever your faithful servant."

Having thus persuaded Governor Cai to write a letter home and put his seal on it, Huang Wenbing now asked: "Whom can you send with it that you trust?"

"I have a prison superintendent in my district called Dai Zong who can do what is known as magic walking, he can cover more than two hundred miles a day and still arrive early. If we get him to take it, he'll be there and back in around ten days."

"If he is really so fast, that's splendid, splendid!"

The Governor laid on wine in a back room, and entertained Huang Wenbing. Next day the latter bade the Governor farewell and returned to Wuweijun.

Governor Cai prepared two gift boxes and filled them with gold, pearls, jewels and other such pleasant things and placed his seals upon them. First thing next morning he summoned the Magic Messenger to the residence and said: "I have certain gifts and a letter which I want delivered to the Grand Preceptor's palace in the Eastern Capital to honour my father's birthday on the fifteenth of the sixth month. Since the date is so close, you are the only one who can get there in time. If you spare no effort, going without pause for sleep, and bring back the reply, I shall value your services most highly. Be assured that I have your future very much at heart. I have worked out how long it should take with your magic walking, and I shall await your return. Do not linger on the way or make any mistake."

The Magic Messenger could hardly refuse. He was obliged to take up the letter and the gift boxes and make his farewells. After making arrangements for the journey he went to the prison and said to Song Jiang: "Don't worry, brother, the Governor is sending me to the Grand Preceptor's but I'll be back within ten days. I can make some inquiries at the Preceptor's court and perhaps find a way to resolve your affair. I will leave the matter of your food in Iron Ox's hands. He will arrange for you to get it and won't let you go short. So just stay calm and resist for a few days."

"If you can just save my life that will be quite enough," said Song Jiang.

The Magic Messenger called Iron Ox and gave him his instructions there and then: "Our brother made the mistake of writing a seditious poem and has got a prison sentence for it. How it will end I don't know. I'm under orders from the Governor to go to the Eastern Capital, but I'll be back in a little while. I am making you responsible for bringing him his food, morning and evening. Be sure to look after him properly."

Iron Ox answered: "Why the hell should reciting a bloody poem be such a big deal? People can have led actual rebellions and they get promoted to important posts. But don't worry, you can go off to the Eastern Capital with an easy mind, no one in the prison will dare to interfere with him. If everyone behaves, all well and good. If they don't, I'll get my axe and behead the fuckers."

Before he left, the Magic Messenger again admonished him: "Take care, brother, don't indulge in wine and neglect our brother's meals. Don't go and get drunk and leave him to starve."

"Brother, set your mind at rest. If you're really so worried, I'll promise to give up drinking completely until the day you return. I'll stay in the prison and look after Song Jiang all the time, how's that?"

The Magic Messenger was very pleased with this. "If you're truly resolved to look after him well, that's fine." After the Magic Messenger had said goodbye that day and left, Iron Ox really did give up drinking and stayed all the time in the prison to look after Song Jiang, not straying by so much as a footstep from his post.

We will leave Iron Ox to look after Song Jiang and follow the Magic Messenger as he returns home, puts on new leggings and hemp shoes and an apricot yellow tunic, adjusts his belt and attaches his name tablet to it, dons a new headdress, puts the letter and travelling expenses away in the bag, slings the two gift boxes on a pole and leaves town. He has with him four of the special amulets for magic walking, two for each leg. He has only to intone the magic formula and magic walking will commence:

*Like riding on mist he goes, like walking on air. Feet skimming the ground he soars over the mountains. One minute he's leaving a country town, the next he's passing a great city. Truly miraculous are the priceless magic amulets, with them a hundred leagues is as an inch before one's nose.*

The day the Magic Messenger left Jiangzhou he travelled till nightfall before stopping at an inn to rest. He removed the amulets and burnt a quantity of paper gold as an offering. After a night's rest he was up early, partook of food and drink and left. He had tied on the four amulets again and was carrying the boxes on a pole. He set off at a grand pace, flying along with the sound of wind and rain in his ears, his feet not touching the ground. He planned to stop only for some vegetarian food and plain wine, or a few snacks. When night fell, he stopped at once and found an inn to rest in. Next day he was up at dawn to profit from the morning cool. On he went with his four amulets and the boxes on a pole. When he had done nearly a hundred miles, quite early in the morning, he looked about for a clean inn, but not one did he see. It was the beginning of the sixth month and so hot the sweat was pouring off him, he was completely drenched, and he was afraid of getting sunstroke. Also he was extremely hungry and thirsty. Then he saw in front of him, by the edge of a little wood, a most inviting inn, situated beside the water on the edge of a lake. He lost no time in approaching. It looked spotlessly clean and had places for twenty; the tables and benches were painted red and lined up along the windows. He entered with his carrying-pole and found a secluded seat. He put down the boxes, took off the shoulder strap, and sprinkled his yellow tunic with water and hung it up to dry on the window rail. As soon as he sat down the waiter approached and said: "How much wine can I serve you, sir? And what would you like to eat with it? We've got pork, mutton or beef."

The Magic Messenger said: "I don't want a lot of wine, but bring me a spot of rice."

"As well as wine and rice we've got fresh bread and noodle soup."

"I won't eat meat. Have you got any vegetarian food?"

"I can find you some chilli tofu, how about that?"

"That'll do fine."

In no time at all the waiter had produced a bowl of tofu, served some dishes of vegetables and poured three big bowls of wine. Since the Magic Messenger was hungry and thirsty, he scoffed the wine and the tofu in one go and was about to ask for more rice when suddenly the whole world started to spin. His brain began to cloud, stars danced before his eyes, and he collapsed in a heap beside the bench. "He's gone!" the waiter cried, and a man immediately appeared from inside. This is what he was like:

His frame is big, his waist is small,
*For guests he always has a smile.*
*This hero on Mount Liang they call*
Zhu Gui the Dry Land Crocodile.

When the Crocodile entered, he said: "Take the boxes in, but first search him and see if he's carrying anything."

Two rascals hastened to do his bidding. When they searched the Magic Messenger they drew from an inner pocket a roll of paper containing a letter which they handed to the Crocodile. The Crocodile tore it open and saw that it was a personal letter because the envelope bore this message: "Hoping it finds you in peace, this letter carries respectful greetings, dear father, from your most obedient son Cai Dezhang." The Crocodile broke open the envelope and began to read. The letter began: "Having captured a certain Song Jiang of Shandong, author, as the popular rhyme foretells, of a seditious poem, and having closely confined him in prison for the time being, I now await your instructions ..."

For quite a while the Crocodile was struck dumb by the gravity of what he read. His assistants picked the Magic Messenger up and lugged him into the butcher shop to cut him up. But his belt was left beside the bench, with the red and green name tablet still attached to it. The Crocodile picked this up and examined it. Engraved on it in silver letters was: "Dai Zong, Chief Superintendent of the two prisons of Jiangzhou."

"Stop!" the Crocodile shouted to the assistants, "don't begin yet. I often heard the military leader say that in Jiangzhou there is a 'magic messenger' named Dai Zong who is his dearest friend. I wonder if this can be he? But why would he be carrying a letter so injurious to Song Jiang? Thank heavens this letter has fallen into our hands! Let's get the antidote and bring him round. There's a few answers I'd like to get from him."

His assistants mixed the antidote in some water. They supported the Magic Messenger's head and poured it into him. In a little while his eyebrows began to twitch and his eyes to flutter. Then with an effort he sat up. When he saw the Crocodile was holding the opened letter in his hand, he shouted: "Who the hell are you? How dare you knock me out with drugs! And how could you take it on yourself to break open a private letter to the Grand Preceptor? That is a most fearful crime!"

The Crocodile only laughed: "What does the fucking letter matter? So what if it's a letter to the Preceptor I've opened? As far as I'm concerned, a letter like this gives me a bone to pick with the Emperor himself."

The horrified Dai Zong asked: "Who are you, my friend? May I ask your name?"

"I've no call to hide or conceal it," he replied. "Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile, from the band of heroes on Mount Liang, that's me."

"Then if you are one of the leaders of Mount Liang, you must know 'Professor' Wu Yong?"

"'Professor' Wu Yong is our military leader, in charge of our army. How do you know him?"

"We are close friends."

"I suppose you're not by any chance the Magic Messenger of Jiangzhou, Superintendent Dai Zong, of whom our military leader has so often spoken?"

"I am he."

"But before Song Jiang went to his place of exile in Jiangzhou, he passed through our mountain stronghold and the Professor gave him a letter for you. So why do you now seek to undo Mr. Song and take his life?"

"Song Jiang and I are also close friends. Recently because he composed a seditious poem I was unable to save him from prosecution. Now I am on my way to the Preceptor's court where I hope to find some way of saving him. How could I possibly want to harm him?"

"If you don't believe me, take a look at this letter of Governor Cai's."

The Magic Messenger looked and got a shock. He told the Crocodile everything about the letter from the Professor and his first meeting with Song Jiang and how Song Jiang had got drunk in the Yangtze Pavilion and written that poem, with such unfortunate results. The Crocodile said: "In that case, you must please come to the mountain retreat and discuss with the leaders what to do, how we can save Song Jiang's life."

Having hurriedly ordered wine and food to be served in the Magic Messenger's honour, the Crocodile went to the water pavilion and loosed a signal arrow towards the opposite shore. In response to the signal, some soldiers quickly rowed over in a boat. The Crocodile and the Magic Messenger got into the boat with the boxes and were rowed across to Golden Sands Landing. When the Professor was informed at the camp he rushed down to receive them. Greeting the Magic Messenger, he courteously said: "It is long since we parted, what wind has blown you here? Please come up to our stronghold and meet all the leaders."

The Crocodile explained why the Magic Messenger had come and how Song Jiang had recently been sentenced. On hearing this, Chao Gai anxiously asked the Magic Messenger to take a seat and tell them what exactly Song Jiang had received such a sentence for. The Magic Messenger told them all about the affair of the seditious poem. Chao Gai was so upset by this that he wanted everyone immediately to saddle their horses and muster their men and go down to attack Jiangzhou and bring Song Jiang back.

But the Professor objected: "Not so fast, brother. Jiangzhou's a long way from here. With all those troops on the move we'd be certain to make a big stir and raise the alarm, with the gravest consequences for Song Jiang. We can't use just force in this matter, we must use our brains. Now I'm not very clever, and all I can devise is a simple plan, but with Superintendent Dai's assistance I think we can certainly save Song Jiang's life."

Chao Gai said: "Please tell us your plan, it's sure to be good."

"Governor Cai has sent Superintendent Dai with a letter to the capital. He is expected to bring back the Grand Preceptor's answer. Now this answer is our opportunity. We must forge an answer for the Superintendent to take back. The letter will say, 'On no account are you to take action against the criminal Song Jiang yourself. He must be sent under close guard to the capital. We will interrogate him to uncover all the facts, then execute him publicly in order to scotch the rumours.' When they bring him past here we will send troops down the mountain to seize him. How's that?"

"But suppose they don't pass this way? It could all go disastrously wrong!" Chao Gai objected.

Taoist Gongsun Sheng said: "That's all right. We can send out scouts far and wide, so that whichever route they take, we've only to wait and in the end we'll get him. I'm only afraid they might not send him."

Chao Gai said: "Very well then. But there isn't anyone who can write the letter in Preceptor Cai's calligraphy."

"I've already thought of that," said the Professor. "Nowadays four schools of calligraphy are flourishing: Su Dongpo's, Huang Luzhi's, Mi Yuanzhang's, and the Grand Preceptor Cai Jing's. These four, Su, Huang, Mi and Cai are the four greats of the Song Dynasty. Now I am acquainted with a certain bachelor in Jizhou, by name Xiao Rang, whom everyone calls Magic Hand, because he is able to reproduce all the famous calligraphers' styles. He is in addition quite adept with the spear and the staff, and knows how to thrust and parry with a blade. I am sure he can do the Grand Preceptor's writing. Why don't we send Superintendent Dai to speak to him and say, 'The Temple of the Peaks in Tai'an wants an inscription done, they're sending you this payment in advance of fifty taels of silver for your family's expenses,' and then get him to come. Afterwards we can send people to bring all his family up the mountain so we can persuade him to join our company. How about that?"

Chao Gai said: "He can write the letter, that's all right, but we'll need a seal as well, to stamp it."

"There's another friend of mine, I've got it all worked out. This one is also a native of central China, living in Jizhou. His name is Jin Dajian, he's a great stone-carver and he makes beautiful seals and jade carvings. He also knows how to use a staff. He's such a wonderful carver of jade that everyone knows him simply as the Craftsman. We'll send another fifty taels to persuade him to come and do the carving. While he's on the way, we'll carry out the same plan. We can use both of these men in the stronghold."

Chao Gai said: "That's brilliant!"

After a banquet that day in honour of the Magic Messenger they all went to bed.

Next day after breakfast the Magic Messenger was asked to dress up as the abbot of a monastery. Carrying a few hundred tales of silver, he tied on his amulets and descended the mountain. He was ferried across from Golden Sands Landing to the other bank and set off at speed for Jizhou. In under four hours he reached the city and began asking for Magic Hand Xiao Rang. Someone told him: "His house is by the Confucian temple to the east of the government offices."

When the Magic Messenger arrived at the door, he gave a cough and asked: "Is Master Xiao at home?" A scholarly-looking gentleman emerged. Not knowing who the Magic Messenger was, he asked: "What is it, father? What can I do for you?"

After a courteous greeting, the Magic Messenger said: "I am abbot of the monastery of the Temple of the Peaks in Tai'an. We are engaged in repairing the Five Peaks Tower and the rich men of our district want to have a tablet inscribed. They have entrusted me with the mission of presenting this silver to you, fifty taels in remuneration for your services, and asking you to be so good as to accompany me to the temple to carry out the work. The day is chosen, it brooks no delay."

Magic Hand said: "All I can do is to write the pattern, nothing else. If you want to set up a tablet you need an engraver as well."

"I have another fifty taels of silver here and it is my intention to ask Jin Dajian, the Craftsman, to do the engraving. We have found an excellent day for it, I do hope you will agree. If you can help me find the Craftsman, we will all go together."

Magic Hand took the silver and went with the Magic Messenger to seek the Craftsman. When they arrived at the Confucian temple, Magic Hand suddenly pointed: "That fellow coming towards us is the Craftsman, Jin Dajian." Magic Hand stopped him and introduced him to the Magic Messenger, explaining about the Tai'an temple and the repair of the Five Peaks Tower, and the rich people wanting a tablet, and how the abbot had fifty taels of silver for each of them if they went along with him. Jin Dajian was impressed by the silver. The two of them invited the Magic Messenger to have a cup of wine and some side dishes with them in a local hostelry. The Magic Messenger handed over the silver to the Craftsman and said: "The fortune-teller has fixed the day, I would like you to get going right away."

"The weather's very hot," said Magic Hand. "If we start now we won't get very far and we may not even find somewhere to spend the night. It would be better to get up at dawn tomorrow and take ourselves off then."

"I'll second that," said the Craftsman.

So they agreed to get an early start next day and went home to pack their things in readiness. Magic Hand invited the Magic Messenger to spend the night with him.

Next day at dawn the Craftsman appeared with his luggage and the three of them set off together. When they had gone less than three miles, the Magic Messenger said: "You keep going at your own pace, I don't want to hurry you. I'll go on ahead to tell the leaders so they'll be ready to receive you." With this he quickened his pace and raced on in front. The other two, with their luggage, proceeded quite slowly. In the early afternoon, when they had done some twenty miles or so, they suddenly heard a wild whistle and a band of men came leaping down the hillside. There were around fifty of them and they were led by Short-Arse Wang of Windy Mountain, who roared out: "You two, who are you and where are you heading? Catch 'em boys, we'll have their hearts to eat with our wine."

"We're only two craftsmen going to engrave a tablet for the Tai'an temple, we haven't a penny of our own, all we've got is some clothes."

"I don't want your money or your clothes," said Short-Arse. "All I want from a pair of clever dicks like you is your hearts and livers to eat with wine."

Thus beset, Magic Hand and the Craftsman had to summon up their courage, raise their staves and charge him. Short-Arse likewise raised his halberd and attacked. Wielding their various weapons they had fought out half a dozen bouts when Short-Arse suddenly turned about and left. They were about to give chase when they heard a sound of gongs on the mountain and from the left appeared the Door-God in the Clouds, Song Wan, and from the right Skyscraper Du Qian, followed by Whitey Zheng. Each was accompanied by thirty troops. They immediately seized Magic Hand and the Craftsman and dragged them into the forest.

"Don't be afraid," they said. "We are under orders from Leader Chao to invite you to come and join our band on the mountain."

Magic Hand said: "What does the mountain stronghold want us for? We haven't the strength to tie up a chicken, all we're good for is eating up rice."

The Skyscraper said: "General Wu knows you. Also he knows about your valour and martial skills. The Magic Messenger was sent specially to get you."

They looked at each other in amazement, uncertain what to say. But by now they had reached the Crocodile's inn, where everyone was provided with wine and food, and the same night a boat was summoned and they were taken up the mountain. When they reached the stronghold they met Chao Gai, the Professor and all the other leaders. A banquet was held and they were told about the forging of Cai Jing's reply — "That's why we invited you to come and join our company."

When they heard this they each put a restraining hand on the Professor's sleeve and said: "Wecould stay here, that's no problem, but we've both got our families at home to think of, when the authorities find out they'll make them suffer."

The Professor said: "There's no need for you to worry about that. Tomorrow you'll see why." The rest of the evening was given up to eating and drinking.

First thing next morning a soldier came and announced: "They're all here."

The Professor said to Magic Hand and the Craftsman: "Please come and personally receive your families." They didn't know whether to believe him or not. Halfway down the mountain they met a number of sedan chairs carrying their families up — everyone was there, young and old. Magic Hand and the Craftsman were amazed and asked them what exactly had happened. They all said: "After you left yesterday, these people came with the sedan chairs and said you were at an inn outside the city and had caught a fever. They wanted us to come with the whole family to save you. Once we left the city they wouldn't let us get out of the chairs. They just brought us straight here." Both families told exactly the same story. Magic Hand and the Craftsman kept quiet after that and resolved to return up the mountain and join the band. Two dwellings were prepared for their families. The Professor then asked them to join him and discussed with Magic Hand the writing of the reply in Cai Jing's handwriting which was going to save Song Jiang's life. The Craftsman said: "I have carved every seal of the Grand Preceptor's, both with his official name and his personal name." The two of them set to work and produced the letter. After this there was a banquet, and then the Magic Messenger was sent off on his journey, having been told exactly what to do. The Magic Messenger said his farewells and went down the mountain. The soldiers rowed him across from Golden Sands Landing to the Crocodile's inn. There he tied on his four amulets, said goodbye to the Crocodile and set off.

After the Professor had seen the Magic Messenger off at the ferry, he returned with the others and they had a big dinner. But just as they were drinking, he suddenly uttered a loud despairing cry. The other leaders asked: "What ever is the matter, general?"

"You just can't imagine! That letter of mine has signed the Magic Messenger's and Song Jiang's death warrants!"

Horrified, they asked: "But what is wrong with your letter?"

"I couldn't see the wood for the trees! It contains a fatal flaw!"

Magic Hand said: "I copied the Grand Preceptor's hand perfectly, not a word was wrong. Where is the fault?"

The Craftsman also said: "I'm sure my carving was perfect, not a single slip, so what's this fatal flaw you're talking about?"

The Professor joined his fingers and explained the mistake. Without this mistake, how would we have seen that:

In Jiangzhou town, the heroes create turmoil,
In White Dragon temple, the pot starts to boil.

Nor would it have been the case that:

Amid a storm of arrows men flee for their lives,
From the midst of a forest of weapons, a hero is saved.

WHEN Li Kui had knocked the girl down the innkeeper said, "Well, what are you four men going to do?" He also told the waiter to blow some water on the girl's face. This done the girl came out of her faint, and got up. They then saw that the skin on her forehead showed a scar. Her father and mother had now arrived on the scene, but when they knew that this had been done by Li Kui the "Black Whirlwind," the were afraid to say a word. The mother took a handkerchief and tied it round the girl's head. She picked up her hairpin which had fallen to the ground.

"What is your name?" asked Song Jiang.

The mother replied, "I will tell you the truth, sir. Our name is Song, and we come from the capital. We have no son, and only this daughter whose personal name is Yulian. Her father taught her singing, and then told her to come to this pavilion to sing to the guests, and so earn a little money. She is quite untrained and sometimes sings when the guests are talking. Today this occurred, and this gentleman's hand slipped so that she got hurt. But that is only a small affair, and is not worth bringing into court."

Song Jiang saw that she was speaking in a conciliatory manner, and said, "If you will come with me to my lodging I will give you twenty taels of silver as compensation. You can then find a husband for her so that she need not depend on her singing for a living."

"We did not expect so much," replied the parents.

"What I say is final," said Song Jiang. "My words have not a double meaning. You tell your husband to come with us, and I will give him the money."

"Your succoring us in this way fills us with deep gratitude," replied the parents.

Dai Zong spoke to Li Kui, "You are always querulous and now you have caused our elder brother here to spend a lot of money."

"I did not use much force with my finger," said Li Kui, "she tumbled down herself. You can see for yourself how delicate she is. If you hit me in the face with your fist a hundred times it would have no effect on me."
Song Jiang and all the bystanders laughed at this. Zhang Shun told the waiter that he would pay the bill for the wine, etc. supplied. "Never mind!" said the waiter. "That does not matter."
"But I asked you gentlemen to come here and dine with me," said Song Jiang, "and I cannot agree to your paying the bill."
"It is seldom that we meet you," said Zhang Shun. "When you lived in Shandong we often talked of going there to see you. Today fortune has brought about this gathering, and if I pay, that will only be a very small part of what I think is due to you."
"Sir," said Dai Zong, "as our brother, Zhang Shun, appears to be determined I suggest that you give way to him in this case."
"If he pays today then I must invite him some other day to dine with me," said Song Jiang.
Zhang Shun was much pleased at this. Picking up two of the fresh carp he and the others and the old man Song, accompanied Song Jiang to his lodgings in the city where they all sat down. Song Jiang took the twenty taels of silver, and gave them to old man Song who expressed his thanks and departed. Song Jiang also took the letter out of his baggage, and handed it to Zhang Shun who also then departed. He also took fifty taels of silver and presented these to Li Kui who then left with Dai Zong.
Song Jiang presented one of the carp to the warden, and had one cooked for himself. He found the fish nice eating and took a lot of it. In the night about 3 A.M. he had pains in the stomach, and was seized with violent diarrhea and vomiting. He was soon rendered extremely weak. He had the sympathy of the jailers who came, and offered him bowls of rice congee.
The next day Zhang Shun wished to show his gratitude to Song Jiang for the letter he had received, so he got two more fresh carp to present to Song Jiang. But when he reached the prison he found Song Jiang lying on the bed unable to get up. He decided to go and fetch a doctor at once, but Song Jiang said that it was only caused through eating too much fish, and said he would soon be better if Zhang Shun would get for him some diarrhea medicine called "*Liu He Tang*." He asked him to take the fish away and present them to the warden and the head turnkey Zhao. Zhang Shun did this, and, when he returned with the medicine he gave it to Song Jiang and then left. In the prison was a man who knew how to make up medicines, and he administered the drugs.
The following day Dai Zong and Li Kui brought some meat to the prison for Song Jiang who had recovered, but was not yet strong enough to take meat. They stayed with him till the evening, and then departed.
It took Song Jiang about a week to recover his strength, and then as he felt quite better he decided to go into the town to see Dai Zong.
For a whole day nobody had been to the prison to visit him. So, soon after breakfast he took some money, locked the door of his lodging, and left the prison sauntering slowly. Upon reaching the vicinity of the *yamen* he began to ask passers-by where Dai Zong lived. One man told him that Dai Zong had no home, but he often stayed at the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin Monastery near the City God Temple. Upon reaching that place however he found his door locked.
So he asked bystanders where Li Kui, the "Black Whirlwind," lived. They said that he also had no fixed residence, but sometimes could be found in the prison. He was often moving about—two days in the eastern side, and then for some time on the west side.
He then inquired for Zhang Shun, the wholesale fish dealer, and they said that he lived in some village, and he only came to the wharf when there was fish to sell and only came into the town when he wanted to collect some accounts.
As Song Jiang could not find anyone he knew he continued his walk, and went outside the town. He admired the views of the river, and he came at last to an inn on the river's bank, which had a blue flag flying from a pole with the characters, "Xunyang River View Point." Under the eaves was a board with three characters, "Xunyang Pavilion," written by the great poet Su Dongpo. Song Jiang remembered that at home he had heard of this pavilion, but did not know that it was in such a place. As he was there by himself he decided to step inside, and have a look at it. When he got to the door he saw two white boards hanging from the red pillars with these inscriptions: "Nowhere is there wine equal to ours; our inn is famous everywhere." He went upstairs, and found a room overlooking the river. The view of the river from the veranda was very fine.
The waiter came and asked, "Will you wait for some other guest, or will you drink wine by yourself?"
Song Jiang told him he would not wait, and that he could bring wine and food, but no fish. The waiter soon returned with Lanqiao fine wine and food. Song Jiang was highly pleased with the fine refreshments supplied. He was glad that he had found such a place in such ideal surroundings—it was worth being banished to such a spot for a few years. In Shandong they had fine old mountains, but nothing could equal to this. He drank and ate by himself, and was not aware that he was nearly drunk. He soliloquized, "I am from Yuncheng County in Shandong, and although a clerk I have met some fine men on my travels. Though I have a good name everywhere, yet now I am over thirty years of age and yet I have not made a glorious record. But branded as a criminal and banished here how can I meet my father and my younger brother who are now at home."
The wine now began to take effect, and he began to weep. The more he thought of his affairs the more he felt aggrieved. All at once he felt inclined to write an epic so he asked the waiter to bring a brush and ink slab. He looked round and saw that the whitewashed walls of the room were already well covered with inscriptions. He thought "Why should I not add my little quota? I will put the date down as well, and then when I come here again on some future occasion I shall realize what trouble I passed through at this moment." So he rubbed the ink on the slab, and wetting his brush he wrote on the white wall as follows:

In youth I studied hard the classics old,
As old I grew I fixed my mind intense,
Now like a tiger bold I hide in hole,
And lie with tooth and claw to wait my chance.
My face was branded as a criminal,
And then to Jiangzhou I was banished,
But soon the tide will turn; I'll have revenge,
And stain this spot with enemies blood galore.

When he had finished this and reread it, he was much pleased with the result, and laughed loudly. He was partly drunk, and gesticulated with his arms. He again picked up the brush, and added the following lines:

My body is in Wu; but heart in Shandong;
I float on sea and river like a weed;
I laugh at rebels bold whose fame is unsung,
For they just failed where I'll succeed.

Written by SONG JIANG OF YUNCHENG COUNTY
Placing the pen on the table he read aloud the whole thing. He drank more wine, and became quite drunk. He summoned the waiter, and paid the bill, and then staggered off downstairs. He reached his quarters in the prison, and throwing himself on the bed slept there until about 5 A.M. the next day. When he awoke from his drunken sleep he did not remember what he had written the previous day. He however felt the effects of his drunken carouse, and therefore did not go out that evening.
On the opposite bank to Jiangzhou was a wild and uncultivated country in which there was a town called Wuweijun. In this town there lived an expectant magistrate named Huang Wenbing who although a well-read man was a cringing fellow. He had a mean heart, and was envious of men who had got better official apointments. He tried to injure the successful ones, and treated with scorn the unfortunate ones. He acted in this way particularly in his own village.
He had heard that the Prefect Cai Jiu was a son of Prime Minister Cai, and therefore he frequently crossed the river to visit the Prefect, and made presents on the least pretext, in the hope that eventually he would be given a better official post. It was very unfortunate that Song Jiang should have this mean fellow as an opponent. It happened that Huang Wenbing had that day purchased a present for the Prefect, and crossed the river with it. When he reached the *yamen* he found that the Prefect was giving a feast to some officials so that he could not enter. He returned to his boat which was moored close to the Xunyang Pavilion. As it was a very hot day he went into the inn to rest a while. Going upstairs he went on the veranda to enjoy the view. Turning round he noticed the walls of the room covered with verses some of which were quite good, and some rather absurd which made him laugh. When, however, he happened to read the verses bearing the name of Song Jiang he was startled and thought, "Is that not rebellious? Who has written it?" He then saw the name of the author, and sneered, "This fellow is very vain, and has also ambitious ideas. He is a low mean fellow, and is evidently also a criminal. Who can be his enemy on whom he wishes to have revenge? He evidently thinks of making trouble here although he is only a useless criminal. As he is evidently banished and away from home, he could accomplish nothing." But when he read the last two lines he put out his tongue in disgust, wagged his head and said, "The fellow has no decency. He is evidently a rebel. But surely I have heard of that name Song Jiang before this." He summoned the waiter and asked him who had written the verses.
The waiter informed him that they had been written by a man who came there yesterday, and drank some wine.
"What kind of man was he?"
"He was branded on the face," replied the waiter, "and evidently resides in the prison. He had a sallow complexion; was not tall, and was rather stout."
Huang Wenbing asked for a brush and paper, and upon these being supplied he copied the verses down. He told the waiter that the verses must not be rubbed off the wall. He then went on his boat, and slept there for the night.
After breakfast the next day he got a man to carry his presents, and went to the Prefect's *yamen* again. He was told by the servant to wait in a room, and very soon the Prefect entered. After exchanging greetings, the prefect accepted the presents; and they both sat down.
Huang Wenbing then explained how he had come to visit the Prefect the previous day, but had retired on hearing that the Prefect was giving a feast.
The Prefect said this ought not to have stood in the way of Huang Wenbing joining him seeing that they were friends. The Prefect then said, "A letter has come from the capital stating that recently the Imperial Astrologer has examined the skies, and reports that the Dipper indicates that in the lands of Wu and Zhu there is a man who is going to create a rebellion. It is important that a careful watch should be kept for the man. It has also been reported to me that little boys on the streets in this town are always repeating these sentences:
"The country will be destroyed because in the home, there is wood.
"The war was caused by drops of water beside the work.
"There will be thirty-six in both directions, and they will create disorder in Shandong."
(A pun on words Song Jiang; "in the home there is wood" refers to the Chinese character for "Song," meaning "pine." The ideogram for "Song" depicts a tree, the character for "wood" under a roof. "Drops of water beside work" is a pun on the word "Jiang" or "river," the Chinese character depicting three drops of water beside the character for "work." "Thirty-six" is a reference to the "36 Heavenly Spirits," a subdivision of the "108 Stars of Destiny," the heroes of mount Liang Marsh.)
"Because of all this I have instructed all officials to be on their guard."
Huang Wenbing thought in silence a little time and then laughed, "Sir, there is nothing accidental in this." Taking the verses out of his sleeve he handed them to the prefect and said, "I did not expect to find the matter contained in these verses."
The Prefect read the document and said, "These are seditious verses. Where did you get them?"
Huang Wenbing explained how he had happened to notice them on the wall of the Xunyang Pavilion.
"But what kind of man can have written them?"
"Sir, it is clearly stated that the verses were written by Song Jiang of Yuncheng County."
"But who is Song Jiang?" asked the Prefect.
"In the verses he states that his face has been branded, and that he was banished to this place. So that he must be a prisoner here."
"In that case he cannot do any serious thing," said the prefect.
"Sir, you should not treat such man too lightly. In view of the letter received from the capital mentioning the strange rumors, it is clear that this man is the one referred to."
"Why do you think that he is the man?" asked the Prefect.
Huang Wenbing then explained the meaning of the riddle as heard on the streets. "It is quite clear that he is the person referred to, and in the interests of peace and order he should be dealt with."
"Do you know that there is such a man here?"
"The waiter at the inn said that he was there two days ago," said Huang Wenbing. "If you look through the register of the prison here you will soon know whether such a man is there or not."
"Your suggestion is very valuable and to the point," said the Prefect. He sent a messenger at once to bring the register from the prison, and when it arrived he looked through it carefully. He soon found the entry that Song Jiang had recently arrived.
"That is the man," said Huang Wenbing, "and besides writing the seditious verse, he is the man also referred to in the riddle. It is a serious matter. If you do not act at once the news may leak out, and so your plans may be defeated. You had better get this man arrested and imprisoned and meanwhile you can decide what to do."
"What you say is quite true," said the Prefect. He then sent for the head jailer, and very soon Dai Zong entered. He then ordered him to have Song Jiang brought there immediately.
Dai Zong was astonished at this order, and knew that it meant trouble. He went, and got soldiers armed and ordered them to assemble at his own quarters in the City God Temple. He then used his dodge of quick traveling, entered the prison, pushed open the door of the clerk office, and found Song Jiang inside.
Song Jiang said, "A few days ago I went into the city, but could not find you anywhere. So I went to the Xunyang Pavilion, and drank a bottle of wine all by myself. Since then I have stayed indoors to recover from the effects of the wine."
"Elder brother," asked Dai Zong, "what did you write there?"
"How can I remember what I wrote when I was drunk?"
"I have just been summoned to the Prefect who told me to bring to him the prisoner Song Jiang who wrote those seditious verses in the Xunyang Pavilion. I was astonished to hear this. I summoned my soldiers to my own quarters, and then rushed here to warn you. Now what shall we do? What can I do to save your life?"
Song Jiang scratched his head as he realized the danger. "This time I shall be killed."
"I will tell you a plan," said Dai Zong. "I cannot stay here any longer, as men will soon come for you. So unloosen your hair, tumble about on the ground covered all over with night-soil, and pretend to be mad. When I come with the soldiers you can ramble in talk like a lunatic, and I will then leave you alone, and report to the Prefect that you are in a mad fit."
"Many thanks for your good advice," said Song Jiang. "I do hope that you will assist me in carrying it through."
Dai Zong hurriedly took his leave, and upon arriving at the City God Temple he ordered the soldiers already assembled there to follow him to the prison. When they got there Dai Zong with an assumed voice called out, "Where is that newly arrived prisoner Song Jiang?" The jailer took them all to Song Jiang's lodging where they found the latter lying on the floor in his own night-soil, with his hair all streaming loose. When he saw the soldiers he asked, "Who are you pricks?"
Dai Zong shouted at the top of his voice, "Seize that fellow!" Song Jiang gazed upwards, and showed the white of his eyes. He struck out with his hand, and spoke in a confounded manner, "I am the son-in-law of the Heavenly Jade Emperor, and he told me to lead a hundred thousand troops to Jiangzhou and kill all the people here. The King Yama is my advance guard, and in my rear are the Five Great Generals. He gave me a golden seal weighing eight hundred *jin*. I will kill the whole lot of you fellows."
The jailer said, "He is quite mad. What is the use of trying to arrest him?"
"That is so," said Dai Zong. "I will go back and report the matter. If they insist upon seeing him then I will return here."
The soldiers accompanied Dai Zong to the *yamen* where they found the Prefect waiting for them. Dai Zong reported to the Prefect, "The prisoner Song Jiang has gone quite mad. He rambles in his speech, and lies on the floor with his body and clothes covered all over with night-soil so I thought it better not to bring him here in that disgraceful condition."
The Prefect was just on the point of cross-examining Dai Zong when Huang Wenbing emerged from a screen behind the Prefect's seat where he had been hiding and listening. He said, "Sir, do not listen to this. The man who wrote those verses is by no means mad. There must be a subtle trick in this affair. Better have him brought here in whatever state he is. Even if he cannot walk he may get somebody to carry him along."
"What you say is quite sensible," said the Prefect. He then told Dai Zong that he must bring the man whether mad or otherwise.
When Dai Zong received such definite orders he knew that it meant trouble. He took his men off to Song Jiang's quarters where he spoke, "Brother, our plan has failed. You must come with me." A bamboo basket was brought in; Song Jiang was lifted inside, and in this way was carried on the shoulders of the men into the hall where the prefect was waiting.
The Prefect told them to produce the prisoner, and the men took him out of the basket, and placed him in front of the bench. They told Song Jiang to kneel, but instead he stared at the Prefect and asked, "Who are you, and what do you want to ask me about? I am the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor and supporting me are the Five Great Generals. My father-in-law has sent me to take the lives of the people of Jiangzhou. The King Yama is my advance guard. My seal weighs eight hundred *jin*. You had better get out of my way as very soon I shall kill you all."
The Prefect was nonplused at this, but Huang Wenbing interposed, "Let us send for the jailer, and ask him whether this prisoner was mad when he arrived. If he was mad when he first came then it is genuine, but if he is only recently mad it must be pretended madness."
The Prefect agreed to this, and sent for the jailer and also the turnkey. When they arrived he warned them to tell him the truth.
The jailer replied that when the prisoner arrived he was not mad, but he became mad that very day.
The Prefect was angry at this, and told the soldiers to bind the prisoner, and give him fifty blows with the bamboo. This they did, and Song Jiang's flesh was broken, and was covered with blood. Dai Zong had to watch all this with a sore heart, but could do nothing to save his friend. Song Jiang stood this for some time, but at last could no longer endure the pain. He confessed, "I ought not to have written those seditious verses when I was drunk."
The Prefect wrote this confession down, and ordered that an extra large cangue should be fastened round the prisoner's neck, and that he be sent back to prison. This was done, and Dai Zong had to give orders to the jailers to take special care of the prisoner.
The Prefect retired from the bench, and was accompanied by Huang Wenbing to his private quarters. There he said, "Had it not been for your valuable suggestion I should have been deceived by that fellow."
"Sir, this kind of case should be quickly settled," said Huang Wenbing. "You should immediately write a report of the case, and send it forthwith to your father at the capital, so that they will see how well you handled the Emperor's affairs. With that dispatch you can send a private note stating that if they wish to spare his life you can send him by cart to the capital. But as you are afraid that he might be rescued on the way you could have him executed here if they do not want to spare his life. That will put an end to the danger. When the Emperor hears of how you have dealt with the case he will be extremely pleased."
"What you say is very reasonable," said the prefect. "In my dispatch I will mention what valuable assistance I got from you, and recommend you for a good post."
"I have to depend on your influence for this life," said Huang Wenbing, "and in some future life I am willing to be a beast at your disposal in order to return your great favor. Huang Wenbing stayed while the Prefect wrote the dispatches and sealed them. He then asked the Prefect, "Who is the confidential servant that will take this dispatch?"

"Here we have the best messenger Dai Zong, the Divine Traveler, who can travel about two hundred fifty *li* a day, I will send him off early tomorrow morning, and he will be back in ten days."
"If he can go so quickly that will do very well," replied Huang Wenbing.
They then adjourned to another room where the Prefect entertained Huang Wenbing to some wine. The following day the latter returned home.
Early the next day the Prefect packed up a few presents, and sealed the package with labels of paper. He then summoned Dai Zong and said, "I want you to take these dispatches and presents to my father, the Prime Minister, at the Eastern Capital, and convey my congratulations for his birthday on the fifteenth day of the sixth month. As that date is so near I want you to get there with all speed, and travel day and night. When my father writes his reply you must bring it here also as quickly as possible. I am aware of the rapidity of your flight, and I shall await your return with great expectation, so do not loiter on the way."
Dai Zong dared not raise any objection to this, so he received the packages, saluted, and withdrew to his quarters. He then went to the prison, and saw Song Jiang. "Elder brother, be at ease. The prefect is sending me to the Eastern Capital (Kaifeng), but I shall be back within ten days. When I am at the capital I will arrange some means of helping you. I will tell Li Kui to bring you rice every day so that you will not be short of food. So please be patient for a few days more."
"I am much indebted to you for saving my life," said Song Jiang.
Dai Zong found Li Kui, and told him, "Our elder brother wrote some seditious verses, and we do not yet know what the government judgment will be. I am now going to the Eastern Capital, and will soon be back. You must look after the rice for Song Jiang, and take it to him yourself at all mealtimes."
"That is not a serious matter," said Li Kui. "What's the damned difference? Many traitors have become officials. You go with an easy mind, as nobody in the prison here will make any trouble. If anybody attempts to create trouble for him I will chop his damned head off with my axe."
When Dai Zong was on the point of departing he said to Li Kui, "Now, younger brother, take care. Keep off the wine, and avoid omissions of the rice. If you get drunk your elder brother will be hungry."
"You go with an unembarrassed mind," said Li Kui. "If you doubt me then I will not touch a drop of wine till you come back. I will wait upon Song Jiang in the prison from morning till night."
Dai Zong was much pleased at this. "Younger brother, it is very good of you to say that." He then departed.
Li Kui kept his word, and not only abstained from wine, but also waited closely upon Song Jiang.
Dai Zong put on his puttees, and hempen shoes. He wore also a yellow shirt and a cummerbund, and hid the dispatches in the latter. He changed his turban, and carrying the two wicker baskets of presents on his shoulder he left the city. There he put on his charmed puttees, and chanted the magical spell as he rushed off along the road at a great speed. That evening he stopped at an inn to rest, and offered some paper joss money. He slept there that night. He started off again the next morning in the same way. He traveled at such a speed that a violent storm seemed to keep roaring in his ears. His feet scarce touched the ground. On the way he stopped occasionally to get a little food and wine at the inns. The second day was like the first. On the third day he had started very early, and had covered about a hundred *li* by about 10 A.M. He felt hungry, but could not find an inn to rest. It was the sixth month and the middle of summer, and he was perspiring freely in the heat of the sun. All his clothing was wet with his perspiration, and he was afraid of getting a sunstroke. Just as he was feeling very hungry and tired he espied on the side of the road a small inn situated between a forest and a lake. Almost immediately, he arrived at the inn and saw that it was very clean, with about twenty tables all newly varnished, and windows wide open on all sides. He entered, took a seat at a table, took a cup of cold water, and rinsed out his mouth. He took off his gear, the wicker baskets from his shoulders, his cummerbund containing the dispatches, and placed them on the table. He took off his wet yellow shirt, and hung it in an open window.
When the waiter came he asked Dai Zong how much wine and food he wanted.
"I don't want much wine," said Dai Zong, "but enough rice for one person."
"We also have buns and vermicelli," said the waiter.
"I am a vegetarian. What kind of vegetable soup have you got?"
"We have some bean curd nicely flavored with chilli."
"That will be fine," said Dai Zong.
The waiter retired and very soon had the food and wine served and placed on the table. Dai Zong soon finished what had been supplied as he was both hungry and thirsty. Soon after he felt very dizzy, lost consciousness, and fell to the ground.
The waiter seeing this called out, "He has fallen!" and a man came out of the room at the back. He was Zhu Gui, the "Dry Land Crocodile," of Liangshan Marsh. He said, "Take the wicker baskets into the other room, and then search his clothing." Two men then appeared and searched Dai Zong's clothing. They soon found the dispatches hidden in the cummerbund, and took these to Zhu Gui. He read the inscription, and found that it was written by the Prefect to his father. He opened the envelope, and read the dispatch. "We have arrested Song Jiang of Shandong who wrote seditious verses. We have him in prison awaiting your decision."
On reading this he was so astonished that he could not speak. The men had now carried Dai Zong into another room to be killed and there they found on him a wooden tabled warrant. Zhu Gui seized it and saw that the characters were in silver as follows: "Dai Zong, head jailer of the Prison, at Jiangzhou."
When Zhu Gui read this he told the men to leave Dai Zong alone. He remembered that the teacher of the bandits at Liangshan Marsh had often said that he had a close friend at Jiangzhou named Dai Zong. "Could this be the man? But how is it that he has this letter about Song Jiang? I have been favored by Heaven in getting hold of this letter."
He called one of his men, and told him to administer an antidote to enable Dai Zong to recover. This was done, and the mixture was poured down Dai Zong's throat. In a short time he opened his eyes, and got up. When he saw the letter in Zhu Gui's hand he shouted angrily, "Who are you? What courage you have! You drugged my wine, and made me asleep. You opened the Prefect's letter. Your crime is a serious one."
Zhu Gui laughed and said, "This damned letter is nothing! What's opening the Prime Minister's letter to a rebel to the Great Song Emperor."
Dai Zong was startled at this bold remark, and asked, "Kind hero, who are you?"
"I am Zhu Gui, the 'Dry Land Crocodile,' of Liangshan Marsh."
"As you are a leader of Liangshan Marsh, you must know Wu Yong."
"He is our military councillor here. But how do you know him?"
"He is a personal friend of mine," said Dai Zong.
"He often spoke of a friend of his at Jiangzhou called Dai Zong—can you be that man?"
"Yes, I am that person."
"Sometime ago a man Song Jiang was banished to Jiangzhou, and as he passed this place he met Wu Yong who gave him a letter for you. How is it that you are now carrying letters which concern the killing of Song Jiang?"
"I am on very intimate terms with Song Jiang," said Dai Zong. "He wrote some seditious verses, and I could not see a way to save his life. I would not injure him in any way. I am now taking letters to the capital where I hope to find some means of saving his life. How can I intend to injure his life?"
"If you do not believe it," said Zhu Gui, "you had better read these letters yourself."
When Dai Zong read them he was surprised. He then told all details of the affair to Zhu Gui.
"This being the case," said Zhu Gui, "you had better come with me to Liangshan Marsh where we can deliberate and find some plan to liberate Song Jiang."
After they had drunk some more wine Zhu Gui shot a whistling arrow across the lake, and very soon a boat issued from the reeds. They both embarked, and were conveyed across the lake to the Jinsha Bank and were soon in the brigands' stronghold on the mountain. Their arrival had already been announced, and Wu Yong met them at the barrier. After salutations Wu Yong said, "I have not seen you for a long time. What wind has blown you here today? Please come into our stronghold." Dai Zong was there introduced to all the other leaders, and Zhu Gui explained what had happened, and how Dai Zong had been brought there.
As soon as Chao Gai heard of Song Jiang's misfortune he immediately went to give orders that horses and men should assemble, and advance at once to attack Jiangzhou.
Wu Yong remonstrated, "Elder brother, do not be so reckless. Jiangzhou is a long way from here, and I am afraid that our men might meet a calamity before they get there. 'Beat the grass and the snake will be startled.' In that case, the result would be only to drive our enemy into cover, and endanger Song Jiang's life. So we must use strategy instead of force. I am not very clever, but I have a small plan which may save Song Jiang if Dai Zong will carry it through."
"Let us hear of your plan," said Chao Gai.
"The Prefect of Jiangzhou has written dispatches to his father, Prime Minister Cai at Kaifeng. We can make a plot on this letter. We can write a forged reply, and ask Dai Zong to take it to Jiangzhou. In the letter we will say that Song Jiang must not be executed, but sent to Kaifeng for trial, and that after a close cross-examination he will be executed at the capital, which will put an end to all the rumors. When he passes close to this place on his way to Kaifeng, we can rescue him from his escort. What do you think of that?"
"And if he is not sent by this route then your plan will fail," said Chao Gai.
"That will not matter," said Gongsun Sheng. "We can send spies to find out which way the escort will travel, and we can have men in every place so that we shall be sure of rescuing him at one place or another. I am afraid, however, that the Prefect will not send him to Kaifeng for trial."
"The plan will do," said Chao Gai, "but we have no one who can imitate the handwriting of the Prime Minister, Cai."
"I have thought that over," said Wu Yong. "In the empire there are only four men whose penmanship is famous. They are Su Dongpo, Huang Luzhi, Mi Yuanzhang, and the Prime Minister Cai Jing. These four are all first class. I know a *Xiucai* scholar (BA), graduate of the county level Imperial examinations at Jizhou who is very good at imitating anybody's handwriting. His name is Xiao Rang and he is called 'Sacred Handed Calligrapher.' He is also very good with the spear and sword. I know that he can imitate Cai Jing's writing very closely. A good plan would be for Dai Zong to go to his home and tell him a fancy tale that at the Yue Temple, in Taian Prefecture they want to erect a new stone tablet, and that they would be glad if he would go there and write the characters. For which service Dai Zong is to offer fifty taels of silver. When they have departed another man is to induce his family to come to our mountain. Then we can get them all to join our band here."
"It is a good plan to get the letter written," said Chao Gai, "but how are we going to get a proper seal?"
"I know a man who can make an exact reproduction of the seal," said Wu Yong. "He is the best in the land, and lives at Jizhou. His name is Jin and he has a double personal name Dajian. He is a splendid engraver on jade stone, and he has the nickname the 'Jade Armed Craftsman.' We can offer him also fifty taels of silver and pretend to go to Taian Prefecture, and engrave the characters on the stone tablet there. On the way we can arrange to bring him to our stronghold here."
"A splendid plan!" said Chao Gai.
The following morning Dai Zong dressed himself as a lay temple assistant. He took with him about two hundred taels of silver. He put on his charmed puttees, and started off. He arrived at Jizhou in less than four hours. Upon inquiring he soon found out that Xiao Rang lived near the Confucius Temple on the east side of the *yamen*. He went to the house, and called out at the door, "Is Scholar Xiao at home?"
A scholar soon appeared, but as he did not recognize Dai Zong he asked, "Where are you from, and what do you want?"
After saluting, Dai Zong said, "I come from the Yue Temple, at Taian Prefecture where as a verger I look after the offerings made in the temple. Just now we wish to repair one of the towers, and a wealthy man offered fifty taels of silver which I have brought to present to you, and to ask you to go there, and write an inscription for a new stone tablet to be erected. I hope that you will come with me without delay as a lucky day has already been selected."
"I can only write essays or good penmanship," said Xiao Rang. "If you want the characters on a stone tablet you must employ an engraver for that work."
"I have also got another fifty taels of silver to engage Jian Dajian, the 'Jade Armed Craftsman' to do that work. I must ask you to introduce me to him so that we three can go together."
Xiao Rang took the money, and then went with Dai Zong to show him the way to Jian Dajian's house. They had just passed the Confucius Temple when Xiao Rang pointed to a man approaching and said he was Jian Dajian. Xiao Rang called Jin, and when he arrived presented him to the verger of the aforementioned temple, and explained what his business was.
Jian Dajian was much pleased to see the money. They invited the "verger" Dai Zong to go with them into a wine shop where they entertained him to wine and food.
When Dai Zong had given Xiao Rang the money, he suggested that as a diviner had selected the day they should start on their journey that day.
"Just now the weather is hot," said Xiao Rang, "and we cannot travel far even we set out today. Let us start tomorrow morning about 5 A.M."
This was agreed to, and Xiao Rang took Dai Zong to stay at his house that night.
The next morning they all started off about 5 A.M., and they had only gone a few *li* when Dai Zong said, "I will not press you two gentlemen to go any quicker, but if you like I can go in advance, and announce that you are coming to the temple." He then left them with his usual speed. The two men continued on their way slowly. By about 3 P.M. they had covered about three *li*; when as they approached a hill they heard a whistle, and saw a big man with about fifty followers. The big man at the head was Wang Ying, 'Stunted Tiger,' and he called out, "Who are you two men? Where are you going? Seize them! We will soon have their hearts to drink wine with."
"We are going to Taian Prefecture," said Xiao Rang, "to engrave an inscription on a new stone tablet there. We have only these clothes, and have no spare money."
"We do not want either your clothes or money," said "Stunted Tiger." "We shall be satisfied if we drink the wine with your hearts."
But Xiao Rang and Jian Dajian were very angry at this, and seizing their cudgels they advanced to attack "Stunted Tiger."
"Stunted Tiger" defended himself with his halberd and fought for about seven bouts when he withdrew. His two opponents pursued him when they heard gongs being sounded on the mountain, and on their left they saw Song Wan, the "Diamond in the Clouds," and on their right was Du Qian, the "Sky Feeler," and behind them was Zheng Tianshou, the "White Faced Squire." With each leader were about thirty men who rushed forward, seized the two men, and took them into the forest. The leaders said, "You need not be afraid. We have been ordered by Chao Gai to arrest you, and take you up the mountain where he hopes you will join our band."
"What do you want us to do in your stronghold?" asked Xiao Rang. "We are very weak, and shall only eat our rations."
"Our military leader, Wu Yong," said Du Qian, "is your friend, and he knows that you have certain abilities. He intentionally sent Dai Zong to induce you to come here."
Xiao Rang and Jian Dajian looked at each other in surprise at this, but could not say a word more. They soon reached the roadside inn managed by Zhu Gui, "Dry Land Crocodile." There they were treated to a meal, and were then put on a boat and taken across the lake. Upon reaching the stronghold they were met by Chao Gai, and Wu Yong who entertained them to a feast. Wu Yong explained how they proposed to forge a letter from the Prime Minister Cai, and asked them to join in "this righteous adventure."
Both men agreed to help in this plot, but pointed out that their families would be in danger as soon as the officials found out that they had joined the bandits.
"You two gentlemen need not fear that," said Wu Yong. "Tomorrow you will understand how we have safeguarded them."
Early next morning one of the men reported, "They have all arrived." Wu Yong asked the two recruits to meet their families.
When Xiao Rang and Jian Dajian heard this they could hardly believe it, but when they descended halfway down the mountain they saw many sedan chairs coming up the mountain carrying their families, old and young, and were very much surprised. When they asked their people for an explanation their wives said, "When you had just gone, these men came and said that you had stopped at an inn just outside the town. They added that there you were sick, and that you wanted us all to go there at once to look after you. When we got outside the town these men refused to allow us to get down, but brought us here without any stop."
Both Xiao Rang and Jian Dajian upon hearing this were dumbfounded, and giving up any thought of an alternative they returned to the stronghold. When they had all been assigned quarters Wu Yong came and discussed with Xiao Rang about the matter of writing the false reply from Prime Minister Cai.
Jian Dajian said that he had previously been employed to cut the seal for the Prime Minister. The two men set to work accordingly, and had soon written the false dispatch which was duly sealed. This was handed to Dai Zong with detailed instructions, and he took his departure with his mailed armor and soon he disappeared.
After Dai Zong had departed the leaders sat down to another feast, when Wu Yong suddenly exclaimed, "*Ai Ya*! I have been confounded."
"Why, how is that?" asked the other leaders.
"That letter we sent is of no avail," said Wu Yong, "and will only result in the death of both Dai Zong and Song Jiang."
"What was the mistake?" asked the leaders in anxious tones.
"I have been careful at the beginning, but in the conclusion there is a serious oversight," said Wu Yong.
"I wrote exactly like Prime Minister Cai, would have written," said Xiao Rang. "I made no mistake. I am not aware of anything being wrong."
"I'm sure that there's not the slightest difference in the seal I engraved," said Jian Dajian. Wu Yong then explained where the oversight was. This will lead to a bitter fight near the Bailong Temple at Jiangzhou.

Amidst arrows lives were saved,
From throngs of swords heroes escaped.

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### The Gallant heroes of Mount Liang Marshes raid the execution ground & Rescue Men; 29 Bold Heroes' leaders assemble & Hold a Meeting at the White Dragon Temple

Wu Yong explained what was wrong with the letter. "I was careless," he said. "I didn't see it. The seal reads 'Cai Jing, Member of the Hanlin Academy.' That seal will cause superintendent Dai to stand trial!"
"But that's the seal the premier uses on all his writings and essays," Jin protested. "The one I carved is exactly the same. What's wrong with it?"
"A father writing to his son would never use his formal title. I forgot about that. When Dai returns to Jiangzhou he'll surely be questioned. If the truth comes out, it will be terrible."
"Let's send a man after Dai, quickly, and bring him back," Chao Gai suggested. "We'll re-do the letter."
"He couldn't catch him. Dai is using his magic travel method. He must have covered five hundred *li* by now. We can't delay. Dai and Song Jiang have to be saved."
"How can we save them?" asked Chao Gai. "What's your plan?"
Wu Yong spoke softly in Chao Gai's ear for several minutes, concluding with: "Issue the order quietly among our men. Tell them how to act. Instruct them to move promptly, without fail."

The bold fellows, on receiving their commands, took the implements they needed and went down the mountain that very night. They headed for Jiangzhou. Of that we'll say no more.

Dai returned to Jiangzhou and reported to the prefectural office with the reply within the allotted time. Prefect Cai was very pleased. He rewarded his emissary with three ceremonial beakers of wine. Then he took the letter.
"Did you see the premier?" he asked.
"No," said Dai. "I only stayed one night, then came directly home." The prefect opened the envelope and read:
I've received all your gifts, intact ... As to that demon Song Jiang, the emperor wants to see him personally. Send him to the capital immediately in a cage cart under a trustworthy guard. Make sure he doesn't get away on the road ... I have spoken to the emperor about Huang Wenbing. He undoubtedly will be given a good appointment.
Cai was delighted. He presented Dai with a flowery silver ingot weighing twenty-five ounces. He also ordered that a cage cart be assembled and discussed the guard to be sent. The superintendent thanked him and returned to his quarters. He bought wine and meat and went to see Song Jiang in the prison. We'll say no more of that.
The prefect urged the builders to hurry with the cart. A day or two later, all was in readiness to take the prisoner to the Eastern Capital. The gate-keeper entered and announced that Huang Wenbing was calling.
Cai received him in the rear hall. Huang had brought wine and fresh fruit. "You're always so thoughtful," murmured the prefect. "You really shouldn't."
"Meager gifts from my rustic village," said Huang. "Not worth mentioning."
"Congratulations on the honors which will soon be yours."
"What makes you say that, Prefect?"
"I received a reply yesterday. The evil-doer Song Jiang is to be sent to the capital. Your contribution has been reported to the emperor. You will be given a high position. It's all in my father's letter."
"I'm deeply grateful for Your Excellency's recommendation. Your messenger is indeed a marvellous traveller."
"Read the letter yourself, if you don't believe me."
"A private, family letter—I wouldn't have dared ask. But since you permit me ..."
"Why not, a trusted friend like you."
Huang read the letter from start to finish, then turned it over and looked at the seal on the flap. He observed that it had been newly cut. Huang shook his head.
"This letter is a fake."
"You must be mistaken. It's my father's own handwriting. It must be authentic."
"His style is easily copied. Did he put this seal on letters to you in the past?"
"No, he just wrote informally. Probably the seal was near at hand and he reached for it automatically."
"Please don't think I'm being meddlesome, but the letter is a forgery. The styles of writing of Su, Huang, Mi and Cai are very popular these days. Anyone can imitate them. And this seal—it was made when your father became a member of the Hanlin Academy. He affixed it to all his essays and calligraphy. Many people have seen it. But why would he still be using it today, now that he's risen to the position of premier? In any event, a father writing to his son certainly wouldn't add an official signature seal. The premier possesses infinite wisdom and intelligence. He'd never make a mistake like that. If you don't believe me, Prefect, question the messenger closely. Ask him who he saw at the Residence. If he answers incorrectly, then the letter is false. Forgive me for talking so much. It's only because you've been so kind that I dare to speak."
"That's easy enough. He's never been to the Eastern Capital before, I have only to query him and I'll know whether he's lying."
The prefect told Huang to conceal himself behind a screen, and he convened court. He then sent attendants out in all direction to look for Dai Zong. They were to say the prefect had need of him, and to report at once.
The day he returned, Dai went to see Song Jiang in the prison and spoke softly in his ear, telling him what had transpired. Song Jiang was very pleased. A man invited Dai out for wine the following day, and he was drinking in a tavern when an attendant, who had been looking for him, came in. He conducted Dai to the prefectural court.
"You certainly did a good job of the mission I troubled you with the other day," said Prefect Cai. "I still haven't rewarded you properly."
"When entrusted with a task by Your Excellency, I could only do my best."
"I've been rather busy lately. I haven't had a chance to ask you about it in detail. By which gate did you go into the capital?"
"It was already dark when I got there. I didn't notice."
"Who received you at the gate of the family residence? Where did they put you up?"
"A gate-man took your letter in. A short while later he came out and accepted the hampers. He told me to find an inn for the night. I returned to the Residence at dawn the following morning, and the gate man handed me a reply. I wanted to be sure to reach Jiangzhou on time, so I didn't bother to ask questions and hurried back."
"Did you notice how old the gate-keeper was? Was he dark and thin, or fair and fat? Tall or short? Did he have a beard?"
"It was dark when I reached the Residence, and the next morning at dawn the light was dim. I couldn't see very clearly. He didn't seem very tall, around medium height. I think he had a bit of a beard."
"Take this man before the court," the prefect shouted angrily.
A dozen prison guards came out from the side and dragged Dai to the front of the dais.
"I've done no wrong," the superintendent cried.
"You death-deserving scoundrel! Our old gate-keeper Wang passed on years ago. His son, who has the job now, is only a beardless youth. He has no right to enter the Residence. Any letters that arrive he gives to Secretary Zhang, who hands them over to Majordomo Li. Only Li can notify the inside and accept presents. If a reply is requested, you have to wait three days. And how could anyone who wasn't a trusted attendant and who didn't question you in detail simply take my gifts? My mind was slow the other day. I let you hoodwink me. The truth, now, where did you get that letter?"
"I didn't know all that. I was confused and in a hurry to come back."
"You're lying. These thieving wretches—if you don't beat them they never confess. Guards, pound this rogue for me, hard!"
The prison guards knew it was hopeless. They couldn't be concerned for their superintendent's dignity. They tied Dai, held him prone, and beat him till his skin split and his fresh blood flowed. Dai couldn't take it. "The letter is false," he exclaimed. "Where did you get it?" the prefect demanded.
"I was passing through Liangshan Marsh when a gang of brigands seized and bound me. They hauled me up the mountain to cut my heart out. When they searched me, they found and read your letter. They decided to keep the hampers and set me free. But I couldn't come home. I wanted to kill myself. They wrote this letter, figuring it would cover me. I was afraid of being punished, so I deceived you, Excellency."
"That may be partly true, but plenty of it is poppycock. You're in cahoots with those Liangshan robbers. You plotted with them to steal my hampers, and now you're telling me this fancy tale. Beat him some more!"
But in spite of the torture Dai would not admit to any connection with the men of Liangshan. Again the prefect had him beaten. Dai stuck to his story.
"Enough," said the prefect. "Put a big cangue on him and throw him in jail."
He left the court and summoned Huang. "If it weren't for your shrewdness I'd have committed a serious blunder," he said gratefully.
"Dai is obviously also in league with the Liangshan Marsh bandits," Huang said. "They're organized, and plotting a revolt. It must be nipped in the bud, or it will mean disaster."
"I'm going to take the confessions of Dai Zong and Song Jiang and draw up formal documents. I'll have them both decapitated in the market-place and then send a written report to the higher authorities."
"Extremely wise, Excellency. It will please the imperial court and win you high praise for your meritorious handing of this important matter. It will also forestall the Liangshan bandits from coming to raid the prison."
"You are very far-sighted. I shall write a report personally guaranteeing you and recommending that you be raised in rank."
Prefect Cai entertained Huang, and saw him to the gate of the prefectural compound. Huang returned to Wuweijun.
The next day Cai opened court, summoned the scribe, also named Huang, and said: "Compile all documents on Song Jiang and Dai Zong and add in their confessions. Also write criminal convictions to be posted on the day they are beheaded in the market-place. Since ancient times, rebellious plotters have been executed promptly. Decapitating these two will avert calamity."
Scribe Huang was on very good terms with Superintendent Dai. But he had no way to rescue him, and he groaned inwardly.
"Tomorrow is a national day of mourning," he said, "and the day after is Midsummer Ghosts' Day—you can't execute them then. The following day is a national holiday. Nothing can be done till after the fifth."
Huang had no better plan, he could only delay Dai's death as long as possible. He did this usually for condemned men whenever he could. The prefect agreed with his suggestion and set the execution date for the sixth.
On the morning of the appointed day a crossroads in the market-place was swept to serve as an execution ground. After breakfast soldiers and executioners were mustered—well over five hundred men—and assembled outside the prison gate. At mid-morning the warden went to the prefect and formally requested him to supervise the beheadings. Scribe Huang had no choice but to present the convictions. On each the word "Decapitate" was inscribed, and the announcements were pasted on reed mats.
Although the head keeper and guards in the city prison were friends of Dai Zong and Song Jiang, there was nothing they could do to save them. They could only bemoan their fate.
Everything was in readiness. The prisoners' arms were bound, the hair of each was soaked with gluey paste, twisted up in the shape of a pear and transfixed with a red artificial flower. They were driven before a black-faced idol and fed a bowl of "Eternal Rest Rice" and a cup of "Permanent Parting Wine." Then they were taken from the shrine. Cangues were locked round their necks. Surrounded by sixty or seventy guards, Song Jiang, followed by Dai Zong, were marched out of the prison gate. The two men looked at each other, but they were unable to speak. Song Jiang stamped in futility, Dai Zong hung his head and sighed.
A crowd of nearly two thousand jammed the market-place around the crossroads, which was guarded by a wall of soldiers with spears and staves. Song Jiang was placed facing south, Dai Zong was placed facing north and, still bound, they were forced to sit. All were waiting till three quarters afternoon, when the supervisor would come and the executions would take place. The spectators read the announcements of criminal conviction. They ran as follows:
Jiangzhou Prefecture.
Criminal Song Jiang. Wrote a rebellious poem, spread evil rumors, and colluded with bandits in Liangshan Marsh to foment a rebellion. Sentenced to be decapitated. Criminal Dai Zong. In order to help Song Jiang, secretly handed over a private letter, colluded with the bandits in Liangshan Marsh and plotted with them to foment a rebellion. Sentenced to be decapitated.
Supervisor of executions: Cai, Prefect of Jiangzhou
The prefect reined his horse to a halt and sat, waiting. From the east side of the market a band of snake charmers pushed their way through the crowd. The soldiers tried to beat them back, but they wouldn't leave. In the midst of this disturbance, a group of medical cure pedlars who gave displays of arms elbowed through the spectators on the west.
"You unmannerly louts," the soldiers shouted at them. "Where do you think you are—shoving like that?"
"Ignorant rustics," the men retorted. "We've travelled all over the country, and nowhere have we been prohibited from looking at people. Even when the emperor has culprits killed in the capital you're allowed to watch. Just because your little town is executing two men you think you're shaking the world. We want to see. What's all the friggin fuss about?"
"Get back there," shouted the prefect. "Don't let them come any closer."
At this moment a convoy of porters, carrying goods on shoulder-poles, arrived from the south.
"Heads are going to be chopped off here," the soldiers yelled. "Go another way."
"We're bringing things to your prefect. How dare you stop us?"
"Even if you were officials from the prefectural office, you'd have to detour!"
The porters set down their burdens, detached their carrying-poles, and stood, holding them, among the spectators.
From the north a troupe of merchants approached, pushing two carts. They insisted on passing through the execution grounds.
"Where do you think you're going?" the soldiers barked.
"We're in a hurry. Let us through."
"Not a chance. Criminals are being knocked off here. If you've in a hurry, take another road."
The merchants laughed. "That's easy enough to say. We're from the capital. We're not familiar with your cruddy roads. We can only stick to the main highway."
The soldiers wouldn't let them go on. The merchants crowded together in a stubborn knot and refused to retreat. Arguments were raging on all four sides of the crossroads. Prefect Cai was unable to quell them. He observed that the merchants had climbed onto their carts and were watching from there.
Not long after, the group of officers on the execution grounds parted and a man stepped forward and announced: "Three quarters past noon."
"Cut off their heads," ordered the prefect.
Soldiers opened the prisoners' cangues. Two executioners stood with swords at the ready. Quicker than it takes to say, rioting broke out. One of the merchants pulled a small gong from his tunic. Standing on the cart he struck it sharply three times. On all sides, men went into action.
A hulking dark tiger of a fellow, stark naked, appeared in the upper story of a tea-house beside the crossroads. Brandishing a battle-ax in each hand, he uttered a heaven-splitting roar, leaped down, hacked the executioners to death, and began carving his way towards the mounted prefect. Soldiers thrust at him with their spears, but nothing could stop his headlong advance. They crowded around Cai and rushed him off to safety.
Daggers suddenly appeared in the hands of the snake charmers on the east side, and they began killing soldiers. The medicine men on the west side, holding spears and staves, let out a yell and charged into the soldiers and guards, slaughtering left and right. On the south, the porters swung their carrying-poles, felling soldiers and spectators indiscriminately. The merchants on the north jumped down from the carts and tipped them over, blocking the road. Two of the merchants darted through the melee and got Song Jiang and Dai Zong on their backs. Some of the remainder produced bows and arrows and started shooting. Others threw stones they had concealed in their clothes. A few waved pennanted signal spears.
The merchants were in fact Chao Gai, Hua Rong, Huang Xin, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. The medicine men were Yan Shun, Liu Tang, Du Qian and Song Wan. Disguised as porters were Zhu Gui, Stumpy Tiger Wang, Zheng Tianshou and Shi Yong. The snake charmers were actually the three Ruan brothers and Bai Sheng. These leaders from Liangshan Marsh had brought with them more than a hundred men, and all were locked in furious battle.
They saw the big dark fellow laying about him vigorously with his battle-axes. Chao Gai and the others did not recognize him, but they knew that he had been the first to go into action, and that he was killing more of the foe than anyone.
Then Chao Gai suddenly remembered something. The Marvellous Traveller had spoken of a certain Black Whirlwind, officially called Li Kui, who was dear to Song Jiang: a wild, rough sort of fellow, he had said. So Chao Gai called out: "You there, in front, are you by any chance the Black Whirlwind?"
But the one he addressed paid no attention, and continued consuming lives with his big axes like a blazing inferno. Chao Gai ordered the men carrying Song Jiang and Dai Zong to follow in the big dark fellow's wake.
By now bodies of soldiers and civilians were sprawled all over the crossroads, and blood flowed in rivulets. Countless more had been felled and wounded. The Liangshan leaders abandoned their carts and merchandise and continued behind the big fellow, fighting their way out of the city. Hua Rong, Huang Xin, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng, covering the rear, sent swarms of arrows in their pursuers. Neither the soldiers nor the people of Jiangzhou dared come too near.
Li Kui slaughtered down to the stream's edge, his whole body spattered with blood. He went on killing along the bank.
Halberd in hand, Chao Gai shouted: "Don't hurt the ordinary people. This has nothing to do with them!"
But the big man wouldn't listen. He cut down victims one after another.
They walked six or seven *li* along the stream outside the city until they saw before them a broad river. Here, all paths came to an end. Chao Gai was very distressed. Only then did Black Whirlwind speak: "Don't worry. Carry our brothers into that temple."
Ahead, near the river, was a large temple, its double gates tightly locked. Li Kui smashed them open with his battle-axes, and they all went into the courtyard. Ancient junipers and pines blocked out the sunlight. A plaque upon the building was inscribed in letters of gold: *Temple of the White Dragon Spirit.*
Song Jiang and Dai Zong were carried inside and set down. Song Jiang open his eyes and saw Chao Gai and the others. "Brothers," he exclaimed, weeping, "this must be a dream."
"You wouldn't stay with us on the mountain, brother. That's why you're in such a predicament today," Chao Gai expostulated. "Who is that big swarthy fellow who fights so powerfully?"
"Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. He was ready to spring me out of prison all by himself. But I didn't think we could get away with it, so I didn't agree."
"A remarkable man. He fought harder than any of us, and was absolutely fearless in the face of every enemy weapon."
"Bring fresh clothing for our brothers," Hua Rong called.
While they were changing, Li Kui started down the porch, battle-axes in hand. Song Jiang shouted after him: "Where are you going, brother?"
"Looking for those monks. I'll kill them all. Not only didn't the louts come out to welcome us, they even barred their friggin gates. If I find them, I'll slay them before those gates as a sacrifice!"
"Come over here, first. I want to introduce you to my brother, the chieftain."

Li Kui cast aside his axes and dropped to his knees before Chao Gai. “Forgive Iron Ox’s crassness, brother,” he entreated. He was also introduced to the others and discovered he and Zhu Gui came from the same township. Both men were exceedingly pleased.
“Brother,” Hua Rong said to Chao Gai, “you told us to follow brother Li, and now here we are, with a big river cutting us off, and no boat to take us across. When the soldiers from the city catch up how will we be able to repel them and escape?”
“Never mind,” said Li Kui. “I’ll fight my way back into the city and chop them into mincemeat, friggin prefect and all!”
Dai Zong had just revived by then, and he cried: “Don’t be rash, brother. There are six or seven thousand troops in the city. If you go charging in you’ll be throwing your life away.”
Ruan the Seventh said: “I see some boats along the opposite bank. My brothers and I will swim over and haul a few back. How will that be?”
“The best possible idea,” said Chao Gai.
Stripping and tying on daggers, the Ruan brothers dived into the river. They had swum about half a //when three boats, being rowed with the speed of wind, prows raised, came flying across the surface of the water. On each were a dozen or more men, all with weapons in their hands.
The watchers on the shore grew alarmed. “My fate is bitter,” Song Jiang lamented when he heard of the approaching vessels. He hurried out of the temple to look. Seated in the foremost craft was a big fellow holding a five-pronged pitchfork. His hair was twisted up on top of his head and bound by a red cord. He wore a pair of white silk swimming pants, and he was whistling sharply.
It was none other than Zhang Shun. Song Jiang waved his arms and shouted: “Save me, brother!”
Zhang Shun and the others recognized him. “We will,” they cried.
Their boats flew towards the shore. The Ruan brothers turned around and swam back. All headed for the bank before the temple.
Zhang Shun was leading a dozen sturdy fellows. Zhang Heng, on the second craft, led Mu Hong, Mu Chun, Xue Yong and ten or more vassals. On the third boat Li Jun was in command of LiLi, Tong Wei, Tong Meng and a dozen salt smugglers. Fully armed, they disembarked and climbed the bank.
To Zhang Shun the sight of Song Jiang was a gift from heaven. Weeping, he kowtowed and said: “I was beside myself when I heard that you had been tried. But I couldn’t think of how rescue you. Then I heard that Superintendent Dai had been taken, and brother Li Kui had disappeared. I went to my brother Zhang Heng and took him to Squire Mu’s manor and called together many of our friends. Today we were going to fight our way into Jiangzhou and snatch you out of prison. I never dreamed that gallant men would have saved you already and brought you here. May I ask which of these heroes is Chao Gai, chieftain of Liangshan Marsh?”
Song Jiang pointed to a man standing to the fore. “That is brother Chao Gai. Let’s all go into the temple and be ceremoniously introduced.”
The nine leaders of Zhang Shun’s party, the seventeen of Chao Gai’s, plus Song Jiang, Dai Zong and Li Kui, a total of twenty-nine, entered the White Dragon Temple. This event later became known as the “White Dragon Temple Small Meeting.”
Shortly after the twenty-nine had exchanged formal greetings, one of the bandits hurried in and reported: “In Jiangzhou City, to the beating of gongs and drums, a huge host of men and horses has been assembled and are marching forth to catch us. You can see them in the distance, their flags covering the sky, their swords thick as flax. Armored horses are in the lead, followed by hordes of spearsmen. With great swords and broad axes they’re speeding down the road to White Dragon Temple!”
“Let me at them!” Li Kui roared. He seized his twin axes and rushed through the temple gates.
“If we fight, we fight to a finish,” shouted Chao Gai. “Rally round me, bold fellows. We’ll return to Liangshan Marsh only after we’ve slaughtered every man of Jiangzhou’s army!”
“We’re at you orders!” responded the assembled heroes. 145 yelling, to the riverbank. And as a result the waves were en-crimsoned and corpses were piled mountain-high. Truly, wave-leaping dragons spewed poisonous flames, mountain-climbing tigers roared gales into the sky.

When Chao Gai and the others asked the Professor: “What is the error contained in your letter?” the latter replied: “When I wrote that answer which Superintendent Dai has just taken I had a lapse of concentration, I completely overlooked something. The letter was stamped with the four characters, ‘Hanlin Academician Cai Jing,’ was it not? It’s that stamp which is going to betray the Magic Messenger.”
“But I’ve seen Preceptor Cai’s writings and compositions many, many times,” said the Craftsman. “They always bear that stamp. I carved it perfectly, there’s not a single error, how can there be something wrong?”
“Don’t you see?” the Professor said. “Governor Cai, present governor of Jiangzhou, is the Grand Preceptor’s son. How can a father use his own name on the stamp when he writes to his son? It’s simply not done! That’s the mistake I made. I completely overlooked it. When the Magic Messenger reaches Jiangzhou they’ll put him to the torture and demand the true facts. It’s a disaster.”
“Quickly, send some one to catch him and bring him back,” said Chao Gai. “Then we can write it again, can’t we?”
“How could anyone catch him? He’ll be doing his magic walking. He’ll have done at least a hundred and fifty miles by now. But there’s not a moment to be lost. There’s just one way for us to save them.”
“How can we save them, what’s your plan?” said Chao Gai.
The Professor leant forward and whispered in Chao Gai’s ear: “We must do this, and this … and so, and so…. You must pass the word round quietly, let everyone know. This is our only chance, we must not let it slip.”
When they had all received their orders, each made his preparations for travel and that same night they went down the mountain and headed for Jiangzhou. Of this no more. You may ask why I do not tell you what the plan was, but just be patient and you shall see.
By this time the Magic Messenger had arrived back in Jiangzhou exactly on time and gone to deliver the letter. Governor Cai was delighted to find him so punctual and entertained him for three whole hours. On receiving the letter, he asked: “Did you see my father?”
“I only stayed one night and left the next day,” the Magic Messenger replied. “I was not able to see His Excellency.”
The Governor broke open the letter and read first of all that the various items in the boxes had all been safely received. Further on his father said that he wished personally to question the dangerous criminal, Song Jiang, who was to be sent immediately to the capital in a secure prison cart closely guarded and with an appropriate escort. Every precaution was to be taken to prevent his escaping along the way. The letter ended by saying that Huang Wenbing would be recommended in due course to the Emperor and would undoubtedly receive an appointment. When he read all this, Governor Cai’s joy knew no bounds. He had a silver ingot weighing twenty-five catties brought and presented it to the Magic Messenger. He also ordered a prison cart and discussed whom to send with it as escort. The Magic Messenger thanked him and went home. He bought some wine and meat and went to the prison to see Song Jiang. Of this no more.
Governor Cai did all he could to expedite the construction of the prison cart and within a day or two it was on the point of setting off, when the porter suddenly announced: “Huang Wen-bing of Wuweijun is asking to see you.” Governor Cai invited Huang into the residence. Huang presented several gifts, new wine and seasonal fruit, for which the Governor thanked him, saying: “This is too much, you really shouldn’t.”
“Just local stuff, barely worth your trouble,” Huang replied.
Governor Cai said: “I have to congratulate you on a prestigious appointment.”
“Has Your Excellency heard something then?” Huang responded.
“The messenger returned yesterday. The malefactor Song Jiang is to be sent to the capital. And in due course you will be recommended to the Emperor and you will receive an important post. It’s all in my father’s letter.”
“Then I am most deeply grateful for Your Excellency’s interest. And that messenger of yours is indeed miraculous.”
“If you don’t believe me, take a look at the letter and see for yourself.”
“I fear it is taking too much on myself to read your personal letter. But if you insist, I would like to take just a glance at it.”
“We are the closest of friends, of course you can see it.” He told a servant to bring the letter and then handed it to Huang Wenbing.
Once he got it in his hands, Huang Wenbing examined that letter from head to tail. He turned it around and looked at the envelope and observed that the stamp was new. He nodded to himself and said: “This letter is not authentic.”
“You must be mistaken. It is written by my father himself, it is in his own hand. How can it not be authentic?”
“Your Excellency, when a letter comes from home does it usually bear this stamp?”
“Indeed, in the general run of things the letters do not have this stamp, they are usually addressed informally. In this case the chop must just have been lying to hand, so he stamped the envelope with it”.
“Your Excellency, please do not count it an impertinence on my part! But this letter has been written to deceive you. At present there are four famous styles of calligraphy, Su, Huang, Mi and Cai, and everyone has studied them. In addition, this stamp came out when your father was appointed a member of the Hanlin Academy, it appeared on official documents and there are many who have seen it. But now he has been promoted to Grand Preceptor. Why would he go back to the Hanlin Academy stamp? And what is more, this is a father writing to his son, he could not use his own name on the seal. Your worthy father is a man of great knowledge and understanding. How could he make a careless mistake like this? If you do not believe me, question the messenger carefully about the people he saw at your father’s palace. If he gets it wrong, the letter is forged. Please do not think ill of me for saying all this. It is only because you have shown me such favour that I so presume.”
“Well, it’s easy enough,” the Governor said. “The fellow has never been to the capital before, we’ve only to question him and the truth will out.”
Governor Cai had Huang Wenbing sit behind the screen while he went into session and announced that he had business with the Magic Messenger. Officers were accordingly sent out in all directions to look for him. There is a poem which says:
After the poem, the forged letter;
*The bandits were trying to make things better.*
*But for the sting in Bee Huang’s tail,*
The governor, poor fool, had fallen for it all.
When the Magic Messenger got back to Jiangzhou he had gone first to the gaol to see Song Jiang, in whose ear he whispered all that had happened. Song Jiang was overjoyed. After that someone invited the Magic Messenger to drink with him. So he was drinking in a tavern when he heard that the officers were looking for him. When he reached the court, the Governor said: “I gave you a hard mission and I have not yet sufficiently shown my appreciation of your efficiency.”
“I went as a special messenger in your service, of course I wouldn’t waste any time,” the Magic Messenger replied.
“I’ve been very busy lately, I didn’t have time to ask you more. When you went to the Grand Preceptor’s palace for me the other day, which gate did you enter by?”
“When I reached the capital it was already dark, I couldn’t tell which gate it was.”
“Who was it who received you in our residence? And where did you stay?”
“When I got to the palace I found a gate and went in with the letter. Almost immediately a porter appeared. He took the boxes and then told me to go and find an inn to sleep. Next morning I got up at dawn and went to wait at the gate. They brought the answer out right away and since I didn’t want to be late I naturally didn’t ask any questions but just got going at once.”
“Which porter did you see? How old was he? Was he a thin dark man, or a fat man with a pale complexion? Was he tall or short? Did he have a beard and whiskers or was he clean-shaven?”
“It was quite dark when I arrived, and I left next morning in the fifth watch, so it still wasn’t properly light, you couldn’t make anything out clearly. As far as I could tell he was getting on, he was about medium height, and I think he had something of a beard.”
The Governor exploded. “Arrest this man!” he screamed. A dozen guards rushed forward and threw the Magic Messenger to the ground.
“But I haven’t done anything!” the Magic Messenger protested.
“You deserve to die, you bastard!” the Governor shouted. “Our old gatekeeper, Wang Gong, has been dead for years. There’s only Young Wang now to keep the gate, how can you say he’s old and has a beard? And in any case the porter, Young Wang, isn’t allowed to enter the house. If any missive or package arrives the procedure involves first Zhang, the major-domo, then the secretary, Li, who reports within, and only then is it received. And for a reply there’s always a wait of three days. I sent those two boxes of things, how could they be received just like that, instead of some confidential person coming and asking you to give a complete account? I was in a hurry yesterday and for a moment you fooled me. Now you’d better confess right away where you got that letter from!”
“I was just so worried about getting back in time, I didn’t give it much thought,” the Magic Messenger said.
“Bollocks!” screamed the Governor. “The only way to get the truth out of this lying bastard is to beat him. Guards, beat this man till he squeals!”
The prison guards could see there was nothing for it. Without regard for the superintendent’s dignity they tied him up and beat him till cuts opened, the flesh split and the blood flowed freely. Unable to stand any more, the Magic Messenger confessed: “It’s true, the letter’s a fake!”
“And how did this forged letter come into your hands?” the Governor yelled.
“On my way I had to pass the Marshes of Mount Liang. A band of robbers set upon me, tied me up and took me up the mountain. They were about to cut my heart out, but then they found the letter on me. They took all the things in the boxes but they left me alive. Thinking it was impossible for me to return, I begged them to kill me there on the mountain; but instead they wrote this letter so that I could return safely. I deceived you because I was too afraid of being held responsible.”
“It sounds plausible, but there’s still something wrong,” the Governor said. “It’s obvious you were hand in glove with those robbers in the Marshes of Mount Liang. The plan was to get your hands on my goods, so why all these lies? Beat him again!”
Under further torture the Magic Messenger confessed his connection with the Mount Liang band. The Governor continued the beating and interrogation for a while, but since he was only getting the same story he said: “There’s no point in going on with this. Put a heavy cangue on him and throw him into prison.” With that he adjourned the session and went to thank Bee Sting Huang. “But for your perceptiveness, I might have made a serious blunder.”
“It’s obvious this villain was in league with the Marshes of Mount Liang, it is a conspiracy, and if we do not repress it there will be dire consequences.”
“When we have obtained confessions from these two, and drawn up a case, we will have them beheaded in the market-place. Then, when it is done, we will send a full report to the Emperor.”
“Your Excellency’s judgement is indeed clear and incisive. Firstly it will be most pleasing to the Emperor, who will see how successfully you have brought this business to a conclusion. And secondly, it will forestall any attempt by the outlaws on Mount Liang to raid the gaol.”
“My friend, your understanding is remarkable, you think of everything. I shall mention you in my report and I shall personally interest myself in your advancement.”
After lavish hospitality that day, Bee Sting Huang was seen off in style and returned to Wuweijun.
When he convened the court next day, Governor Cai summoned the court secretary and said: “Get the case copied out quickly and append the confessions of Song Jiang and Dai Zong to it. Have a crime sheet written out and fix the day for a beheading at the execution ground. With planned and premeditated crimes of this nature no time should be lost. By executing Dai and Song we will prevent much trouble later.”
Now the court secretary who was dealing with the case, also called Huang, was on good terms with Dai Zong, but he could think of no excuse that would get him off. He could but pity him. However he did say: “Tomorrow is an imperial remembrance day; and the day after is the full moon of the seventh month, both these are days on which executions are not permitted. And after that it’s a national holiday. The execution really cannot be carried out for the next five days.” Well, the first step to save Song Jiang had come from Heaven, the next was up to the heroes of Mount Liang.
Governor Cai needs must follow Secretary Huang’s advice. So it was only on the morning of the sixth day that he sent men to the crossroads to sweep the execution site. After breakfast, a guard was selected, together with the headsmen and their assistants, over five hundred men in all, and sent over to wait outside the main prison. After nine o’clock the prison guards asked the Governor if he would come himself to supervise the execution. Secretary Huang now displayed the crime sheet in the courtroom, the sentence of beheading was duly announced, and rush mats were laid down. All the prison officers of Jiangzhou, knowing there was nothing they could do to help Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger despite their friendly feelings towards them, grieved for their fate. When these preliminaries were completed, back in the main prison the Magic Messenger and Song Jiang had their hands tied behind their backs and their hair washed with starch and made into an oval bun to which an artificial red flower was added. They were then driven to an altar with a black-faced god and given the bowl of eternity rice and the cup of farewell wine. They bowed to the god when they finished, and mounted the wooden donkey. Some sixty prison officers now herded them through the prison gate. The two men looked at each other, but found nothing to say. Song Jiang merely stumbled a little and the Magic Messenger lowered his eyes and sighed. Several thousand citizens of Jiangzhou were there to watch, jostling and craning their necks:
*Hatred hangs like a cloud, the atmosphere is dense with resentment. No gleam lightens the air above, all around a sad wind howls. Tasselled spears threaten; the low note of drums saddens all hearts. Staves and cudgels thickly cluster; the monotonous gong subdues the spirit. The crime sheet waves on high; after this going, men say, how can there be a return? White paper flowers flutter; life is but a passing moment, all aver. Eternity rice is hard to stomach, the wine of everlasting farewell sticks in the gullet. Now the hideous executioner grips his knife; the fell minister of justice grasps his axe. Under black banners the sprites are gathered, ghosts linger at the crossroads. The presiding officer prepares to give the signal, the coroner is ready and waiting, to cart away the corpse.*
The executioner had summoned a group of ruffians to harry the prisoners along to the execution ground at the crossroads, surrounding them with a forest of spears and staves. Song Jiang’s face was to the south, the Magic Messenger’s to the north. They were obliged to sit now and wait till the presiding officer arrived and gave the signal at twelve forty-five.
Raising their eyes, the people read the crime sheet, which said:
*Jiangzhou prisoner, Song Jiang, author of a seditious poem containing wild and felonious language. Guilty of collusion with the robbers of Mount Liang and conspiracy against the state. Sentence: death by decapitation. Criminal, Dai Zong, convicted of illegally purveying to Song Jiang a private letter and of complicity with the robbers of Mount Liang and conspiracy against the state. Sentence: death by decapitation. Presiding officer: Governor Cai of Jiangzhou.*
The Governor reined in his horse. Everyone was waiting for the signal.
Then suddenly on the eastern side of the execution ground a group of snake charmers were seen trying to force their way forward to have a closer view of the proceedings. The guards attempted to push them back but without success. While all this was going on, on the west of the execution ground a group of martial arts merchants and medicine peddlers began trying to force their way in. The guards shouted: “ ‘Oy there, you lot, where’s your manners? Who do you think you are, to come pushing in like this?”
The martial arts merchants responded: “You provincial louts, we’ve travelled the world, we been everywhere, we have, do you think we haven’t seen a man killed before? If the Emperor himself executes someone in the capital, everyone’s allowed in to see it. What’s so earth-shattering about the execution of two men in this God-forsaken dump? Why the hell shouldn’t we come and have a look?”
As this lot were arguing with the guards, the presiding officer shouted: “Move back, you can’t come through!”
While the row continued unabated, there appeared on the south side of the execution ground a group of porters with carrying-poles who also wanted to get in to watch. The guards shouted: “You there, where are you trying to take those loads?”
“We’re carrying goods for the Governor, you can’t stop us!” they replied.
“If you’re working for the Governor, you’d better find yourselves another route,” the guards said.
The porters set down their loads and grasping the poles settled down among the crowd to watch. At this point on the north of the execution ground a group of merchants pushing two carts appeared, also bent on forcing their way through. “Where do you think you’re going?” the guards shouted.
“We’re just passing, please let us through,” the merchants replied.
“How d’you think you’re going to get through here?” the guards said. “If you want to get on with your journey you’d better find another route.”

"That's no bloody good," they said. "We're from the capital, we don't know your blasted streets, we've got to stick to the main route."
Since the guards would not let them pass, the merchants became jammed in a tight mass so they could not move anywhere. On all sides now the noise was incessant. The Governor could see there was no remedy. He could only watch as the merchants climbed onto the carts and settled down to view the spectacle.
In a short while the crowd in the square parted a little, and a voice rang out: "The time is twelve forty-five!" The Governor as presiding officer then ordered: "Let the decapitation take place!" Two assistant executioners removed the cangues and the ministers of justice took up their axes — it's slow in the telling — everyone wanted to get a clear view — it happens in a flash. A deafening tumult arose. Suddenly, as the word "decapitation" reached the ears of the merchants on their carts, one of them took out a little gong and struck it several times: dong, dong, dong! Everywhere things began to happen. But first there's a poem:

On impulse, he enters the tavern's door,
*By waters that smoke in the autumn air.*
*With wine, he seeks to ease his grief,*
*With verse to purge his heart of care.*
*But the exile's song fails of its aim,*
*And he lands in a dismal dungeon again,*
*Till the heroes of Mount Liang, provoked,*
Descend like a storm on the town for his sake.

Then from the upper floor of a teahouse at the crossroads a great black tiger of a man, stark naked and brandishing a pair of broad-edged axes, leapt down like a bolt from the blue, letting out a wild whoop that echoed round the heavens like a thunderclap. His axes rose and fell and the two executioners fell to the ground. In a moment he had hacked a path to where the supervising officer sat on his horse. The guards hurriedly readied their spears, but they were powerless to stop him. Everyone fled in a bunch, pressing round the Governor.
At this moment the snake charmers on the east produced swords, and began killing the guards. The martial arts merchants on the west raised a great cry and also started a general massacre, killing prison officers and guards. The porters on the south began whirling their poles in all directions, knocking down guards and spectators. The merchants on the north jumped down off their carts and pushed them forward to block the road. Two of these merchants dived into the m□□ and emerged, one carrying Song Jiang, the other carrying the Magic Messenger. Some of them took out bows and started shooting arrows, others took out stones and set up a bombardment and still others took out iron-tipped spears which they began to wield.
Now these supposed merchants were of course Chao Gai, Colonel Hua, the Tamer, the Little Duke, and the Halberdier. The fake martial arts merchants were the Dandy, the Red-Haired Devil, the Door-God in the Clouds and Skyscraper. The fake porters were the Crocodile, Short-Arse, Whitey and Shi Yong. The snake charmers were the three Ruan brothers and the Daytime Rat. Seventeen leaders of Mount Liang had come on this expedition, with over a hundred men, and they were all now hard at it, mowing people down on all sides.
And in the thick of it was the big swarthy fellow, tirelessly whirling his axes and felling opponents. Chao Gai and the others did not know who he was, but it was easy to see he was in the forefront and had accounted for the greatest number of the enemy. Then Chao Gai suddenly remembered something. The Magic Messenger had spoken of a certain Black Whirlwind, officially called Li Kui, who was dear to Song Jiang: a wild, rough sort of fellow, he had said. So Chao Gai called out: "You there, in front, are you by any chance the Black Whirlwind?" But the one he addressed paid him no heed and went on furiously whirling his axes and killing people. So Chao Gai instructed the soldiers carrying Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger to stick close behind the black fellow. The latter simply went on killing, there in the market-place, making no distinction between military and civilian, until the corpses lay all about in heaps and the gutters ran with blood. The number of those who were overthrown was countless.
The leaders of Mount Liang had abandoned their carts or their loads and were all following the big black fellow, fighting their way out of the city. Bringing up the rear were Colonel Hua, the Tamer, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, four famous bowmen who shot off their arrows behind them like a cloud of locusts. Who of the soldiers and people of Jiangzhou dared come forward? By now the big black fellow had hacked his way to the banks of the river. He stood alone on the bank slaughtering people, his body drenched in their blood. Chao Gai now rested his halberd and said: "This is no fault of the ordinary people, stop killing them!" But the other paid no attention. He went on wielding his axes, a single blow to each one, felling them in rows.
When they had progressed along the bank about two miles from the town, they were confronted by a broad river, with no way across it. Chao Gai lamented when he saw this, but the big man cried: "Don't worry, just take our brothers into the temple."
There was indeed a big temple, close to the river bank, but its gates were tight shut. The big fellow heaved his axes and burst it open. Inside they found a screen of ancient junipers and dark green pines, providing deep shade. In front of them the monastery sign said in gold letters: "Temple of the White Dragon." The soldiers carried Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger inside and laid them down. Only then did Song Jiang trust himself to look around. When he saw Chao Gai and the others tears came to his eyes. "Is this a dream, brother?" he asked.
Chao Gai chided him: "You wouldn't stay with us on the mountain, and now just look at the result! But tell me, who is that big dark fellow who is wreaking such havoc?"
"He's Li Kui, whom they call 'the Black Whirlwind.' Many times he suggested helping me to escape from the main gaol, but I was afraid we would be caught and didn't let him."
Chao Gai said: "His energy is amazing, and his courage unflinching."
Colonel Hua said: "Bring clothes for our two brothers here."
During this conversation, Iron Ox was suddenly seen rushing off waving his two axes. Song Jiang called to him to stop. "Where are you off to?" he asked.
"I'm going to find that blasted monk and kill him, the unthinkable swine didn't receive us, he even shut the bloody gates. I'm bloody well going to make a sacrifice of him, if I can only find the bugger."
Song Jiang said: "Come here and meet the leaders first."
Accordingly Iron Ox threw down his two axes and knelt right down in front of Chao Gai, saying: "Elder brother, forgive Iron Ox for being so uncouth."
When he was introduced to everyone, he and the Crocodile were delighted to learn that they were countrymen.
Colonel Hua now said to Chao Gai: "You told everyone just to follow Iron Ox and now look where we are! There's a big river in front of us blocking our way. We're cut off and there's no boat to take us across. If the army in the city decide to pursue us, what can we do against them? How can we save ourselves?"
Iron Ox said: "Don't worry. We'll all go back and attack the city first, and finish off that bloody Governor Cai once and for all. We won't leave till we've done that."
At this point the Magic Messenger had just regained consciousness and he cried: "Brother, why must you always be so fool-hardy? There are five or six thousand troops in the city, if we go and attack them we're bound to be destroyed!"
Ruan the Seventh said: "Over there on the other side of the river I can see some boats tied up. Why don't I and my brothers swim over and fetch boats to ferry us all across?"
"That's by far the best plan," said Chao Gai.
So the Ruan brothers stripped off their clothes and dived into the water, each equipped with a sharp knife. But when they had only gone about three hundred yards, three rowing boats appeared upstream and came flying towards the others, with a whistling sound like the wind. To their considerable dismay they saw there were about ten men in each, all fully armed. When they told Song Jiang, he said: "Then I must be doomed!" and rushed out of the temple to see. On the first boat sat a big man holding a five-pronged fork which flashed bravely in the sunlight. His hair was tied on top of his head with a red cord and he wore white silk trousers for swimming. He was whistling. And who do you think this was?

East runs the River for many a league,
*Follow its course and a hero you'll meet.*
*His face is like chalk and his body's like whey,*
*He travels in water as if on his feet.*
*In the gorges no rapids can cause him to fear,*
*To snatch from the dragon his ball he would dare;*
*He masters the flood like a fish in the sea,*
His name is White Eel, world-famous is he.

When the White Eel in the first boat saw them, he shouted: "Who are you? How do you dare to hold a meeting at the White Dragon temple?"
Song Jiang dashed out of the temple and said: "Brother come and help us!" When he saw it was Song Jiang, White Eel gave a great shout of "Right away" and the three boats flew towards the bank. Seeing this the Ruan brothers turned back. The whole company was now assembled on the bank in front of the temple.
White Eel had a dozen sturdy fellows with him in the boat. His brother the Pilot was in the second boat with Mu Hong, Mu Chun and the Pill Monger, and a dozen retainers. In the third boat were the White-Water Dragon, the Executioner, the two Tong brothers and a dozen smugglers. All were now standing on the bank, fully armed. White Eel was elated when he saw Song Jiang. He prostrated himself and said: "Ever since you were sentenced I have been unable to rest. But I could think of no way to rescue you. Recently I heard that Superintendent Dai was taken and elder brother Li had disappeared, so I went and got my brother and went to Squire Mu's to ask for news. We were just on our way now to attack Jiangzhou. We planned to free you from gaol, of course we had no idea they had already rescued you and brought you here. Dare I ask if this great company has something to do with the famous leader of the Marshes of Mount Liang, Chao Gai?"
Song Jiang indicated the foremost figure of the group and said: "This is indeed elder Brother Chao Gai. Please come into the temple everyone so you can be introduced."
So all of these leaders, that is, the nine from the boats, and Chao Gai's party of seventeen, together with Song Jiang, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox, making altogether twenty-nine, met together in the White Dragon temple. This is what became known as the Lesser Gathering in the White Dragon temple.
When the introduction ceremonies between each of the twenty-nine heroes were just completed, one of the men burst into the temple and breathlessly announced: "In Jiangzhou town there's drums and gongs and a huge army's on the move, they're coming for us! You can see the banners blocking out the sun and swords as thick as grass! There's armoured foot and horse in front, and spearmen behind that and they're pouring down this road to the White Dragon temple!"
Iron Ox immediately let out a great roar of "Kill 'em!", grabbed his axes and charged out of the door. Chao Gai shouted: "It's all or nothing now! Rally round me, men, and we'll smash the might of Jiangzhou before we go home to Mount Liang!"
The others all cried in unison: "Let's go!" And a hundred and fifty men all shouting together raced along the riverbank towards Jiangzhou. But for this, how would we have seen:

The river flowing with blood, the corpses heaped in mounds;
*The green river dragon spitting deadly fire,*
The mountain tiger raging like a storm through the heavens.

WHAT oversight has been made in the letter?" asked Chao Gai.
"In writing the letter I failed to exercise sufficient care," said Wu Yong. "I overlooked the four characters, 'Hanlin Cai Jing' on the seal. That's enough to result in the arrest of Dai Zong."
The Hanlin Academy was the highest academic and administrative institution. The senior echelons of the Imperial civil service were drawn from members of the academy. "But I know," said Jian Dajian, "that Cai Jing always uses such a seal on all his essays and letters. There is not the slightest error, so why do you say there has been an oversight?"
"You gentlemen overlook the fact that the Prefect at Jiangzhou is the son of the Prime Minister Cai Jing," said Wu Yong. "Is it likely that a father writing to his son would use such a seal? There is the mistake! I overlooked that. When Dai Zong presents the dispatch at Jiangzhou they will suspect it and cross-examine him. If he tells the truth there will be serious consequences."
"Would it not be better to send a man after him, and bring the letter back?" asked Chao Gai.
"How can we do that? Is he not the Divine Traveler? He will now be nearly two hundred *li* on his way. We must not however have the slightest delay in this matter, but must go at once to save those two men."
"How can we save them?" asked Chao Gai. "Have you any plan?"
Wu Yong whispered in Chao Gai's ear, and then said, "Sir; we must do this and issue an order to our men to start at once. It permits of no delay."
Chao Gai issued the orders, and all the men went to get their arms, and very soon were on their way to Jiangzhou.
Dai Zong arrived back at Jiangzhou within the scheduled time, and Prefect Cai was very glad to see him back so quickly, and offered Dai Zong three cups of wine as a reward. When the Prefect received the dispatch he asked, "Did you see my father?"
"I stayed there for only one night, so I did not see the Prime Minister," replied Dai Zong.
The Prefect read the letter which began with "I have duly received your presents." Then in the middle of the letter was this, "The Emperor would like to see the rebel Song Jiang, so you must send him here in a cart well guarded, and care must be taken that he does not escape on the way." The letter concluded with this, "As regards Huang Wenbing, his case will soon be put before the Emperor, and he will be appointed to a higher post."
The Prefect was highly delighted, and gave Dai Zong twenty-five taels of silver. He then issued an order for a prisoner's cart to be got ready for Song Jiang, and appointed an escort to go with it.
Dai Zong after expressing his thanks went to his quarters, bought some food, and took it to Song Jiang in the prison.
Prefect Cai gave orders that the cart for the prisoner must start in a day or two. Just then the gatekeeper reported that Huang Wenbing wished to see the Prefect, and was told to bring the visitor into the private apartments. Huang had brought wine and fruit which he presented to the Prefect who after thanking him said, "You give me so many presents that I hardly know how to recompense you."
"Don't mention it. They are only small things from the country."
"I shall congratulate you that you will soon be appointed to a good post."
"How do you know that?"
"Yesterday I got a reply from my father in the capital, and he orders me to send that seditious man Song Jiang there. Your name will be mentioned to the Emperor and you will be promoted very soon."
"Many thanks for your recommendation. Your messenger must have flown like a spirit."
"I will show you the reply which will convince you that I am telling you the truth."
"As it is a personal letter from your father I dare not presume to look at it. But as you have asked me to do so I will beg you to let me see it."
"You are a very intimate friend of mine," said the Prefect, "so why should you not read my letter?" He sent a messenger to bring the letter, and handed it to Huang Wenbing. The latter read the letter through, and looking carefully at the seal noticed that it looked quite like the impression from a new seal. He wagged his head, and said, "This letter is not genuine."
"You are mistaken," said the Prefect; "I know it is my father's handwriting. Why do you think it is false?"
"Sir, please allow me to speak. Do the letters from your father always bear this seal?"
"Other letters from my father did not bear such a seal as this, as he always signs his name. But the seal must have been at his side so he just used it for this letter."
"Please pardon me if I am too loquacious, but I think that this letter is a forgery to deceive you. As you know the styles of writing of Cai, Su, Huang, and Mi are well known everywhere so that many people have learned them. Only this seal is exactly like what your father used when he was a member of the Hanlin Academy. But as he is now the Prime Minister why would he use this seal? Moreover, as he is writing to you, his son, why does he use a seal with his full name on? Your father is the most able and illustrious man in the empire, and would not make such a mistake as this. If, however, you do not believe me then you can cross-examine the messenger as to what people did he see in the Prime Minister's residence. If his answers are wrong then the letter must be false. You have been very kind to me in the past so I presume to talk to you in this free manner. Please excuse me."
"Never mind," said Prefect Cai Jiu. "The messenger has not been to Kaifeng before so I shall soon find out if he did not go there this time." He asked Huang Wenbing to sit behind the screen, and sent a messenger to summon Dai Zong as he wanted to see him about some other matter.
Now when Dai Zong arrived at Song Jiang's cell in the prison he whispered to him all that had happened at Liangshan Marsh. The next day Dai Zong was invited by a friend to dine at a wine shop in the town, and while they were drinking a messenger came and told Dai Zong that the Prefect Cai wanted to see him. When he reached the *yamen* the Prefect spoke to him, "I think that I did not reward you sufficiently for the excellent service in which you carried out that commission to Kaifeng."
"I am your messenger so why dared I to be slow in executing your business."
"I have been very busy lately and have not had the opportunity of speaking to you about that matter again. When you visited the capital by which gate did you enter?"
"When I reached Kaifeng it was evening and almost dark so that I could not see the name of the gate."
"Whom did you speak to at the door of my father's residence? Where did you rest while you were there?"
"I gave your letter and presents to the doorkeeper, and he told me that I had better sleep in some inn for the night. I did so, and the next morning I went to your father's residence about 4 A.M., and received the reply. As I knew the matter was urgent I did not delay by talking to the doorkeeper, and started off immediately on my return journey."
"Could you tell me how old was the doorkeeper, was he lean or stout, tall or little, and had he a moustache or not?"
"It was dark in the evening when I was there, and the following morning it was not quite daybreak so that I could not get a clear view of the gatekeeper. He was not very tall, and had a little moustache."
The Prefect became angry at this, and shouted out to his attendants, "Seize that man!" They did this, and bound him with ropes.
"I have committed no crime," said Dai Zong.
"You deserve death," shouted Prefect Cai Jiu. "The doorkeeper Old Wang at my father's house died a number of years ago, and that work is now done by his son who is quite young so that he cannot have a moustache as you say. Moreover, Young Wang could not go inside with the letter. When letters and dispatches arrive his duty is to call a servant named Zhang who would take the letters to the steward Li who after delivering it and finding all in order, would come to the door to receive the presents. It takes two or three days before a reply can be got. Further, the presents would not be received in an irregular manner as it is usual for a confidential clerk to receive them, and he would ask many questions. Yesterday I was so busy, that I was almost deceived by you. Now you have a chance of speaking the truth, and you must tell me where you got this letter."
"When I was on this business I did everything with the greatest speed, and therefore did not notice clearly who handed me the letter."

"Nonsense! You, thief, will not speak the truth unless I beat it out of you," shouted Prefect Cai Jiu. "You there! Beat this fellow severely!"
The attendants did not like to do this, but they knew that if they dealt only light blows the Prefect would notice it, and only be more angry. So they took Dai Zong, and dealt heavy blows so that blood was soon flowing from the wounds. Dai Zong could not stand the pain any longer, so he confessed, "Certainly the letter is a false one."
"Where did you get it?" asked the Prefect.
"When I was passing Liangshan Marsh I was seized by some bandits who took me to their stronghold, and were going to cut me open, and take out my heart. They found your letter in my clothes, and so they released me. I knew that I could not return here and attempted to commit suicide. But they wrote the reply and told me that that would save my life. I was afraid that if I told you the truth you would punish me so I deceived you in this way."
"That may be so, but there is still something in your statement that means deception. It is evident that you are in complot with the bandits on Liangshan Marsh, and planned to take my letter there, and then make up this tale when you returned. Beat this fellow again!"
But Dai Zong was now determined not to admit that the bandits were his friends. When Prefect Cai Jiu saw that the beating had no effect he said, "I will not ask him anything else. Put a cangue on this man, and lock him up in the prison."
This was done, and then Prefect Cai expressed his thanks to Huang Wenbing. "If it had not been for your valuable suggestion I should have made a serious blunder."
"It is evident that this fellow is in close alliance with the bandits on Liangshan Marsh, and that he has planned all this deception himself. If you do not have him executed at once you will live to regret it," said Huang Wenbing.
"I am going to cross-examine these two prisoners, and after getting their confessions will have them executed before I report the case to the Emperor."
"Your measures are excellent," said Huang Wenbing. "I am sure that the Emperor will appreciate very much your capable administration. If you do this it will prevent the brigands from trying to rescue their friends from jail."
"You have been of great assistance to me and I will report the case to the Emperor, and strongly recommend you for promotion."
After dining together Huang Wenbing returned to his own home.
The next day when Prefect Cai Jiu entered the court he summoned the clerk, and told him to quickly write out the case, and add to it the statements made by both Song Jiang and Dai Zong. He was also to write out a wooden tablet stating the crimes of both men who were to be executed at the crossroads the following day. Now it was a general rule that rebels were to be executed without delay. When they were executed there would be no further trouble.
Now the clerk, named Huang, was a personal friend of Dai Zong, but although he would have liked to save him yet he saw no means of doing so. But he replied, "Tomorrow will be the anniversary of the late Emperor's death, and the following day will be the 15th of the seventh month, the Festival of Departed Spirits, so that we cannot execute the prisoners on those days. Three days from now is also debarred as it is the anniversary of the Emperor ascending the throne, but five days from now there will be no obstacle in the way." By saying this Huang hoped to postpone the fatal day.
Prefect Cai Jiu agreed to this, and early in the morning of the sixth day he gave orders for the execution ground to be prepared for the execution. On that day about five hundred soldiers were on parade in front of the prison about 10 A.M. with the executioner. The superintendent of the jail informed the Prefect that everything was ready. Clerk Huang produced the boards with the names of the prisoners, and the Prefect wrote opposite each name the character "Behead." The boards were attached to two reed mats to be suspended on the prisoners' backs. In the jail of Jiangzhou many jailers sympathized with the prisoners, but they could not save them. In the jail the prisoners' hands were bound; their hair was washed with glue so that it stood upright, and in it was stuck a goose quill, and a red silk flower. They were taken to the Green Faced Idol inside the prison where they partook of their final meal and wine. They then kowtowed to the idol, and were conducted to the main entrance of the prison. Neither of the prisoners uttered even a word. Song Jiang occasionally stamped with his foot, while Dai Zong hung his head and sighed. There was a huge crowd of about two thousand civilians pressing forward to see the sight. Upon reaching the execution ground at the crossroads the soldiers formed a ring. The prisoners were placed in the center, and told to sit down—Song Jiang facing the south, and Dai Zong facing the north. It was about a quarter to one when the official in charge of the execution arrived.
The crowd witnessed that on Song Jiang's back was a board with this announcement: "This criminal, Song Jiang, purposely wrote a seditious poem, containing false and devilish sentiments. He was in complot with bandits of Liangshan Marsh, in rebellious designs. According to law he is to be executed."
On Dai Zong's back was a board bearing this statement: "This criminal, Dai Zong, secretly conveyed a letter for Song Jiang to Liangshan Marsh concerning rebellious designs, and according to law he is to be executed."
Now, the Prefect reined in his horse to await the report. He noticed that on the east side of the execution ground there was quite a crowd of snake charmers who were trying to get to the execution ground but they were being forced back by the armed guard.
He also heard a noise on the west side, and saw there a crowd of medicine sellers armed with sticks who were also being repulsed by the soldiers.
A soldier called out, "You fellows have no manners! Why push and shove like that?"
"What do you say? We travel in all parts so why should we be stopped here? We have seen men executed in many places. Even when the Emperor at the capital orders an execution he allows anybody to witness it. But you fellows at this insignificant place, try to make it appear an important affair when you only kill a couple of men. If we go inside and look on what damned difference does it make?"
They still tried to force their way in, but the soldiers would not let them do so. In this tumult the superintendent of the execution shouted out, "Do not admit those fellows!"
While this row was still proceeding the Prefect sitting on his horse saw a crowd of men on the south side carrying loads on bamboo poles over their shoulders. They were also trying to get to the execution ground. The soldiers called out, "This is an execution! What do you fellows come here for?"
"We are carrying these things to give to the Prefect so why don't you let us proceed?"
"Even men in the Prefect's *yamen* have to go some other way," replied the soldiers.
The men put down their loads, held the poles in their hands, and stood looking on.
The Prefect now noticed on the north side a number of hawkers pushing carts who also were insisting upon seeing the execution. The soldiers blocked the way, and the hawkers said, "We are in a hurry. Let us go through."
"This is an execution. You cannot go this way!"
The hawkers laughed, "That sounds easy. But we come from the capital and do not know the byroads about here. We only know the main road." The soldiers still would not allow them to pass, and the hawkers put down their carts and stood on them so that they could see over the heads of the soldiers.
By this time there was a general uproar on all sides and just then a messenger pressed his way out through the crowd, and coming to the prefect announced, "It is now a quarter to one." The Prefect ordered that the execution was to take place.
Inside the ground were two executioners who held swords in their hands ready for the final moment. The word "Execute" had been called out when one of the hawkers standing on thier carts took a small gong out of his clothes, and struck it four times. Immediately the crowds on all the four sides pressed forward.
Overlooking the execution, ground was a tea-house, and standing on the veranda was a tall man with a sallow complexion. When he heard the gong he bellowed out like a clap of thunder, and with an axe in each hand he leapt from the veranda onto the ground. He rushed at the executioners and killed them on the spot. He then rushed at the Prefect who was seated on his horse, and the numerous soldiers who were armed with spears could not impede him. Seeing this hopeless position the Prefect Cai Jiu took to flight with those soldiers. The sudden attack from all sides resulted in many soldiers being killed, and the remainder scattered about leaving the prisoners behind. The hawkers soon released the two prisoners and put them in their carts. Some of the attacking crowd used bows and arrows, others spears, others bamboo poles, while others simply threw stones at the soldiers. This huge crowd were bandits from Liangshan Marsh led by seventeen of the leaders under Chao Gai. But Chao Gai was surprised to see the man with the two axes who was doing deadly work among the soldiers. He did not know the man, but Dai Zong informed him that the man was Li Kui, 'Black Whirlwind,' a very rough character who however was a supporter of Song Jiang.
Chao Gai called out, "Are you not 'Black Whirlwind'?" but the man did not reply as he was still busy brandishing his two axes. Chao Gai therefore told the two bandits who carried Dai Zong and Song Jiang on their backs respectively to follow the big black fellow. All the bandits now moved towards the crossroads where many soldiers and people had been killed, and the ground was covered with streams of blood.
The bandits followed Li Kui and they fought their way out of the town. The rear was brought up by four of the leaders with men armed with bows who discharged arrows rapidly at the crowd of soldiers and civilians who dared not approach them. The bandits at last reached the bank of the river. Chao Gai saw that Li Kui was covered with blood, and was still killing people who were in the way, so Chao Gai called out to him, "We are not fighting civilians so do not kill any more people." But Li Kui paid no attention to this, and continued killing people. Wherever he saw a man he killed him. When the bandits had gone about two //along the bank of the Yangtze River they still could not find a way for further progress. Chao Gai was much annoyed at this unexpected check, but Li Kui called out, "Never mind! I will carry my brother Song Jiang on my back to the temple." They then saw a large temple, but noticed that the doors were firmly closed. Li Kui however took his axe, and soon cut the doors open.
Chao Gai noticed that there were very old fir trees which cast deep shadows on both sides of the door, and that above the door was a board with four characters in gilt, "Bailong Spirit Temple."
The men carried Song Jiang and Dai Zong into the temple, and put them down there. Song Jiang now opened his eyes, and seeing Chao Gai and the other men he cried, saying, "Elder brother, am I not dreaming?"
"Sir, if you had only been at Liangshan Marsh this trouble would not have arisen," said Chao Gai. "But who is this sallow complexioned man who has been killing so many people?"
"He is Li Kui, the 'Black Whirlwind.' He tried to rescue me from prison but I was afraid and would not listen to his suggestions."
"He is a very rare kind of man," said Chao Gai. "He is not afraid of either swords, axes, or arrows."
"I think we had better find new clothes for our two brothers," interposed Hua Rong.
Just then Li Kui came out of the porch of the temple with two axes still in his hands.
"Where have you been?" called out Song Jiang.
"I want to find the caretaker of this temple, and kill him," replied Li Kui, "I do not know what spirits or demons have caused them to fasten the doors of the temple in broad daylight, so I thought it better to sacrifice to the door god with his head but so far I could not find him anywhere."
"Come here," said Song Jiang, "and I will introduce you to my commanding officers."
Li Kui threw his axes down and kneeling before Chao Gai said, "Brother, please excuse my rough manners." He then saluted all the other men who were standing around, and among them was much pleased to recognize Zhu Gui who was a compatriot of his own village.
Here Hua Rong interrupted, "Elder brother, as you said that it would be better if we all followed this man, Li Kui, who will guide us to a better spot, but now we are all in an awkward position, because we are surrounded by water, and have no means of escape should troops be dispatched from the town to capture us. "
"Do not get excited," said Li Kui, "I will go with you into the town, and kill some more men even including the Prefect Cai Jiu so as to enjoy ourselves."
Dai Zong had now regained consciousness, and after listening to this said, "Younger brother, you must not do such a stupid thing. There are about seven thousand cavalry in the town, and against them you would stand no chance."
Ruan the Seventh, said, "On the other side of the river there are many boats. I and my two brothers will swim across, and get the boats to come here so that you can all embark."
Chao Gai thought this a good plan, and the three brothers Ruan stripped off their clothes, armed themselves with a dagger each, and plunged into the water. They had not swam more than a third of a //when the men on shore saw three boats coming down the river. The men on the boats were sculling energetically, and a whistle was being blown. There were about ten men on each boat who were well armed and this filled the brigands with great anxiety. Song Jiang who was inside the temple heard the noise, and said, "In my life there is nothing but trouble." He got up and went outside to see what was happening. He saw a big man standing on one boat armed with a five-pronged spear. On his head he wore a red turban, and was dressed in white silk. He was blowing the whistle. Song Jiang at once recognized him as Zhang Shun and signaled to him with his hand shouting out, "Younger brother, save me!"
Zhang Shun at once recognized Song Jiang, and called out that he was coming. The boats almost flew to the bank of the river. The brothers Ruan who were swimming saw the three boats, and at once turned back to the bank they had left. Song Jiang knew the men on the boats. On the first boat was Zhang Shun with about ten followers. The second boat carried Zhang Heng, Mu Hong, Mu Chun, and Xue Yong with about fifteen other men. On the third boat were Li Jun, Li Li, Tong Wei, and Tong Meng and about ten other men. They were all armed and disembarked.
When Zhang Shun met Song Jiang he was much pleased and wept saying, "From the time of your imprisonment I have felt uneasy, but could see no way of setting you free. Then I heard of the arrest of Dai Zong, and in addition I did not meet Li Kui so I had to find my elder brother Zhang Heng and we both went to Old Mu's farmhouse and summoned many of our friends to assemble at that place. Today we intended to go to Jiangzhou to rescue you from the prison, but did not think that other men would precede us with that object. We dare not venture to make acquaintance of such great heroes as these—are they not all chivalrous men under Chao Gai from Liangshan Marsh?"
Song Jiang pointed with his finger and said, "This is my elder brother, Chao Gai. Please come inside the temple, and I will introduce all of you to each other."
They then all went into the temple, altogether twenty-nine leaders, and there occurred what we have called, "The Meeting at the Bailong Temple."
They had just finished their general introduction to each other, when one of the bandits rushed into the temple in an agitated manner and said, "In the town there is great noise of gongs and drums assembling the troops, and many soldiers are already passing the gates to arrest us. There are myriads of flags enough to conceal the sun, and swords as numerous as a field of hemp. Cavalry was in front and officers with so many big swords and big axes in the rear; they are now rushing upon this temple."
Li Kui upon hearing this shouted, "Kill them!" and seizing his two axes he rushed out of the temple.
Chao Gai called out, "If you don't do it at once, it can never be done. All you gentlemen must now assist me in defeating these soldiers, before we go back to Liangshan Marsh."
His followers all cried out with one voice, "We will obey your orders."

Waves were stained with blood so rare,
Dragons came forth from their lair;
During storm that raged then,
Tigers leapt from mountain den.

## 139
## Song Jiang plans the capture of, Attacks, & Cleverly Takes Wuweijun; White Eel Zhang Shun Captures & Arrests Bee Sting Huang Wenbing alive

Liu Tang and Zhu Gui escorted Song Jiang and Dai Zong on board. Li Jun, Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers put the boats in order. From the river's edge they could see the government troops advancing from the city, six or seven thousand strong. The cavalrymen in the van wore helmets and armor. They were equipped with bows and arrows and carried long lances. Behind them hordes of foot soldiers, shouting and waving banners, surged fiercely forward.
Li Kui, stark naked, dashed towards them, brandishing his axes. He was closely followed by Hua Rong, Huang Xin, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. Eyeing the bristling lances of the cavalry ahead, Hua Rong feared for Li Kui's safety. He quietly pulled out his bow, fitted an arrow, stretched the string to its utmost, and let fly at the commander of the horsemen. The whistling shaft brought him tumbling to the ground. Startled, the cavalrymen pulled their mounts around and fled for their lives, knocking down half the infantry in the process.
At this point, the bold gallants charged. They slaughtered the government troops till bodies littered the plain and the river was dyed red with blood, and fought to the city walls of Jiangzhou. From the ramparts the defenders flung down logs and bombarded them with ballista stones, covering the frantic retreat into the city of the last of the government troops. Then the big gates were barred. For several days no one dared to come out.
The bold fighters, pulling Black Whirlwind back with them, returned to the boats before the White Dragon Temple. Chao Gai reassembled his forces and ordered all men on board. The three craft shoved off. Sails were raised to catch a favorable wind. Filled with fighters and commanders, the boats headed for the manor of Squire Mu. An uneventful journey brought them to his dock, where they disembarked.
Mu Hong invited them into the inner hall of the manor. Squire Mu emerged and greeted Song Jiang and his companions.
"You chieftains have had a hard night," the old man said. "Please avail yourselves of our guest house and rest."
The visitors retired to rooms provided, where they rested and mended their clothing and weapons. Mu Hong instructed his vassals to kill a yellow ox, a dozen pigs and sheep, as well as chickens, geese, fish and ducks, and prepare rare and tasty dishes for a feast in honor of his guests.
During the drinking, many details were recalled. Chao Gai said to the two Mu brothers: "If you hadn't come to our rescue in your boats we'd surely have landed in their net."
"What made you choose that road out of the city in the first place?" Squire Mu queried.
"I went to fight wherever people were thickest, and these fellows followed," Li Kui explained. "I didn't ask them to."
Everybody laughed.
Song Jiang rose and addressed the assembly. "Superintendent Dai and I would be dead now if you hadn't come to our rescue. Our gratitude is as deep as the sea. We don't know how to thank you. I hate only Huang Wenbing. That villain did nothing but pick fault and spread slanders. He tried to ruin us. I must have vengeance. I beg you bold gallants to do me a great favor once again and attack Wuweijun, kill Huang Wenbing and slake Song Jiang's burning hatred. What do you say?"
"We can't get away with another sneak raid," mused Chao Gai. "How shall we proceed? Those treacherous scoundrels will be on their guard. Perhaps we should return to the mountain stronghold and muster a larger force. We'll get Wu Yong, Gongsun, Lin Chong and Qin Ming to join us. There's still time."
"If you go back, you won't be able to come again," Song Jiang said. "In the first place, it's too far. In the second place, the Jiangzhou Prefecture will surely warn all districts to be on the alert. We have to strike now, before they have a chance to get ready."
"You're quite right," said Hua Rong. "The problem is we have no one who is familiar with the roads and terrain. We'll send a man into Wuweijun first, to reconnoiter. We've got to know how to get in and out of there and where, exactly, Huang Wenbing lives. Then we can make our move."
Xue Yong stood up. "I've been around a lot. I know Wuweijun better than any of you. Why not let me go in and see what I can find out?"
"If you would, brother," said Song Jiang, "that would be fine."
Xue Yong took his leave that same day, and departed.
Song Jiang and the brigand leaders remained in Mu Hong's manor and discussed the attack on Wuweijun. They put their lances and swords in order, arranged their bows and arrows, accumulated boats large and small, and made preparations. Two days later, Xue Yong returned, bringing with him a man he presented to Song Jiang.
"Who is this brave fellow?" Song Jiang asked.
"His name is Hou Jian, and his home town is Hongdu. He's a first-rate tailor. Needle and thread in his bands really fly. He's also good with lance and staff, a skill which I have taught him. Because he's dark and thin and agile, people call him the Long-Armed Ape. At the moment, he's doing some tailoring in the home of Huang Wenbing. I happened to run into him, and brought him here."
Song Jiang was very pleased. He invited the man to be seated. Hou Jian was one of the stars of Earthly Fiends. The loyalty between him and Song Jiang was immediate and natural. Song Jiang asked for news about Jiangzhou and the terrain in and around Wuweijun.
"Prefect Cai tallied his soldier and civilian losses. There are more than five hundred dead and countless wounded by arrows," Xue Yong said. "He's rushed a messenger off to report to the throne. The Jiangzhou city gates are shut every day from noon on. Anybody going in or out is questioned closely. The harm done to you, brother, is not Prefect Cai's fault. Each time he acted against you and the Superintendent, it was at the instigation of Huang Wenbing. Since our raid on the execution grounds, Jiangzhou has been in chaos. It's patrolled night and day. When I was inquiring in Wuweijun, I met this brother as he was coming out to eat. I got the details from him."

"How do you know all this, brother Hou?" Song Jiang asked. "Since childhood I have loved jousting with lance and staff," said Hou Jian. "I owe much to Teacher Xue's instructions. That is something I shall never forget. The last few days I have been doing some tailoring in the home of Huang Wenbing. Coming out, I ran into Teacher. He mentioned your great name and told me what has been going on. I've always wanted to meet you, so I took this opportunity to come and report in full.
"Huang Wenbing has an older brother, Huang Wenye. Both are sons of the same mother. Wenye is a good man. He repairs bridges and lays roads, builds idols and sustains monks, rescues the endangered and succors the poor. For this reason he is known in Wuweijun as Huang the Buddha. But Huang Wenbing, although he was once a deputy prefect, is vicious and cruel. In Wuweijun they call him Huang the Wasp. The brothers live in two separate compounds near the town's North Gate, but their entrances are in the same lane. Huang Wenbing's compound is right up against the town wall. Wenye's is due south, and borders on a large street.
"When I was working there, I heard Wenbing come home and say: 'They fooled the prefect. I exposed their trick and advised him to cut off their heads first, and then report to the imperial court.' Wenye criticized him behind his back. He said: 'What a disgraceful thing to do. It's none of his affair. Why should he want to harm them? If there's any justice in Heaven, retribution is bound to follow. He's bringing disaster down on his own head.' When the Wasp heard of the raid on the execution grounds he became very alarmed. Last night he went into Jiangzhou to see the prefect and make plans. He still hasn't returned."
"How far is the Wasp's house from his brother's?" Song Jiang asked.
"Originally, it was all one compound. It's divided into two, now, separated by a vegetable garden."
"How many people in Huang the Wasp's home? How many families are there?"
"Male and female, forty or fifty."
"Heaven has willed that I shall have my revenge and has sent me this man," cried Song Jiang. He turned to his cohorts, "I rely entirely on your support, brothers."
"We'll go through with it though we die! We'll destroy that deceitful villain and wipe your slate of vengeance clean."
"It's only the Wasp I hate. This has nothing to do with the people of Wuweijun. Since his brother is virtuous, you must not harm him, or people will revile us for lacking benevolence. And not the slightest injury may be done to the citizenry. I have a plan. I hope you brothers will assist me."
"We await your instructions."
"If I may trouble Squire Mu, I would like eighty or ninety gunny sacks and a hundred or so bundles of reeds and faggots, plus five large boats and two small. I'd like Zhang Shun and Li Jun to handle the two small boats. Zhang Heng, the three Ruan brothers and Tong Wei will be in charge of the five large craft and man them with good swimmers. This is essential."
"We have here all the reeds, oil-soaked faggots, and sacks you can use. Every man in the manor can swim and handle a boat. Just take what you want," said Mu Hong.
"Brother Hou will first conduct Xue Yong and Bai Sheng into Wuweijun and conceal them there. The next day at the second interval of the third watch when they hear the tinkling of a belled pigeon which we'll release outside the town gate, Bai Sheng will mount the wall and stick a white pennant on a pole at a point nearest to the Wasp's house. That is where we'll climb the town wall."
Song Jiang continued: "Shi Yong and Du Qian, disguised as beggars, will also hide inside the town, near the gate. As soon as they see flames rising, they will kill the gate guards. Li Jun and Zhang Shun will patrol the river in their small craft and be ready for action."
Song Jiang finished making his disposition. Xue Yong, Bai Sheng and Hou Jian left first. Shi Yong and Du Qian disguised themselves as beggars, concealed daggers on their persons, and followed. The large boats were laden with sand-filled sacks, reeds and oil-soaked faggots. When the time came, each of the bold leaders girded up his clothing and readied his weapons. The fighting men hid in the holds.
Then the chieftains went on board. Chao Gai, Song Jiang and Hua Rong were on Tong Wei's craft. Yan Shun, Wang the Stumpy Tiger and Zheng Tianshou were on Zhang Heng's craft. Dai Zong, Liu Tang and Huang Xin joined Ruan the Second. Lu Fang, Guo Sheng and LiLi were with Ruan the Fifth. Mu Hong, Mu Chun and Li Kui went with Ruan the Seventh. Only Zhu Gui and Song Wan remained in Squire Mu's manor. Their job was to watch for possible developments in Jiangzhou. Tong Meng went ahead in a fast fishing craft to scout the town.
The brigands and fighters crouched in the holds. Peasants, vassals and boatmen manned the oars. Stealthily through the darkness the vessels advanced on Wuweijun.
It was the seventh lunar month, a still, windless night. A bright moon shone on the clear waters, which reflected on their jade surface the dark green shadows of the mountains. By the first watch the craft, large and small, had reached the banks of the Wuwei River, and were moored in a line deep in the reeds. Tong Meng returned in his fast little boat.
"All quiet in the town," he reported.
Song Jiang ordered his men to unload the sandbags and reeds and dry faggots onto the bank. He scrutinized the town wall. When the watchman's drum beat out the commencement of the second watch, Song Jiang directed the brigands to shift the bags and reeds to near the wall. The bold gallants had their weapons in hand. With the exception of Zhang Heng, the three Ruan brothers and the two brothers Tong, who were left to guard the boats, all moved towards the wall of the town.
About half a //from the North Gate, Song Jiang directed that a belled pigeon be released. Atop the wall a white pennant on a bamboo pole suddenly appeared fluttering in the breeze. Song Jiang ordered his men to pile the sandbags at that point against the wall, and told the fighters to climb up with the reeds and oil-soaked faggots.
Bai Sheng met them on the ramparts. He pointed downwards inside the town. "Huang the Wasp lives in that lane."
"Where are Xue Yong and Hou Jian?" Song Jiang queried.
"Concealed in the Wasp's compound, waiting for you."
"Have you seen Shi Yong and Du Qian?"
"They're hiding beside the town gate."
Song Jiang led his men down the wall into the town and proceeded to the door of the Wasp's compound. Hou Jian was lurking beneath the overhanging eaves. Song Jiang summoned him softly.
"Open the door of the vegetable garden, and the men will pile the reeds and faggots inside. Tell Xue Yong to set them ablaze, then knock on the Wasp's door and say: 'Your neighbor's house is on fire! We've brought crates of his belongings here for safekeeping!' When they open the door I've arranged what to do next."
Song Jiang sent two groups of men to guard both ends of the lane. Hou Jian opened the door of the vegetable garden and the fighters brought in the reeds and faggots and laid them in a pile. He handed fire-making materials to Xue Yong, who lit the reeds. Hou Jian rushed out and pounded on Huang Wenbing's door.
"Your neighbor's house is on fire! We've brought crates of his belongings here for safekeeping. Open up, quick!"
Those inside could see the flames rising in the next compound, and they hastily opened the door. Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the others charged in, yelling fiercely. They killed everyone in sight, a total of nearly fifty persons, young and old. Not a single one was spared. But the Wasp was not at home.
The bold gallants collected all the money and valuables Huang had extorted from innocent people. A loud whistle, and the brigands shouldered crates and hampers of booty on carrying-poles and mounted the ramp to the top of the town wall.
When Shi Yong and Du Qian saw the fire they pulled out their daggers and killed the soldiers guarding the gate. Neighbors hurried along the street with buckets and ladders to fight the blaze.
"Stop where you are," Shi Yong and Du Qian shouted. "There are thousands of us here from Liangshan Marsh. We're wiping out Huang the Wasp's family, one and all, to avenge Song Jiang and Dai Zong. This has nothing to do with you. Go home and hide. Don't interfere in things that are none of your business."
Some of the neighbors weren't convinced, and stood watching. But when they saw Black Whirlwind Li Kui rolling towards them brandishing his axes, they cried out in dismay, picked up their ladders and buckets, and fled.
In the rear lane was a contingent of soldiers who guarded the town gate. Many of them rushed forward with empty sacks and barbed poles to extinguish the flames. Hua Rong quickly bent his bow and sped an arrow into the man in the lead. He stumbled to the ground.
"Anyone who wants to die, come fight the fire," Hua Rong shouted. The soldiers retreated in a body.
Xue Yong set every part of Huang the Wasp's compound to the torch. It was soon being consumed by crackling flames.
By then Li Kui had smashed the lock and opened the town gate. Half the raiders left through this exit. The other half went over the wall. They were met by the three Ruan brothers, Zhang Heng and the two Tong brothers. The crates and hampers of booty were loaded onto the craft. It was already known in Wuweijun that the gallants of Liangshan Marsh had snatched the proposed victims from the execution grounds in Jiangzhou and slaughtered many people. Who would dare now to pursue them? Everyone stayed out of their way.
Bitterly disappointed that they hadn't taken Huang the Wasp, Song Jiang and his brave company boarded the vessels and rowed towards Mu Hong's manor. Of this we'll say no more.
The flames in Wuweijun, encrimsoning the night sky, stirred excited conversation all over the city of Jiangzhou. A report was made to the prefect. Huang the Wasp, who was at that moment with the official, became disturbed.
"There's a fire in my town. I'd better go home and look after things."
Prefect Cai ordered that the city gate be opened to let Huang out and that a government boat take him across the river. Huang thanked the prefect and departed. With his retainer he hastily boarded the craft and set out. From the river he stared at Wuweijun. The flames were burning fiercely, reflecting red on the surface of the water.
"That fire's near the North Gate," one of the boatmen said.
Huang grew more agitated. As they approached the center of the river, a small craft was seen rowing past them. Shortly after, another little boat appeared. Instead of passing, it proceeded directly in the path of the government vessel.
"Who are you?" the retainer shouted angrily. "Veer off!"
A big fellow jumped up in the small boat. He had a grappling hook in his hands. "I've been ordered to Jiangzhou to report on the fire," he said.
Huang popped out of the cabin. "Where is it?"
"North Gate. Huang the Wasp's whole family has been slaughtered by bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh. They've taken all of his valuables and set the place to the torch."
Huang groaned. He was absolutely stunned. The man snagged the boat with his hook and jumped on board. Huang was a very sharp person. He immediately sensed that something was wrong. He darted to the stern and dived into the river.
But a man from the other little boat was waiting for him underwater. He seized Huang around the middle and hauled him back to the government vessel. The big fellow helped heave him on deck, then bound him securely with rope. Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves had made the underwater capture. Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon was the big man with the grappling hook. They now both stood on the deck of the government craft. The official boatmen fervently kowtowed.
"We're not going to kill you," Li Jun assured them. "We only want this scoundrel Huang the Wasp. Go back and tell that thieving donkey of a prefect the gallants of Liangshan Marsh will let him keep his head for the time being. But sooner or later we're coming to collect it."
"We'll do that," the trembling boatmen stammered.
Zhang Shun transferred the prisoner to his own craft and let the government vessel depart. The two bold fellows sculled their swift little boats towards the manor. They found the chieftains waiting for them on the bank, where the crates and hampers were being unloaded. Song Jiang was beside himself with joy when he saw that Huang had been captured.
"Just the man we've been looking for," the assembled gallants exclaimed.
Li Jun and Zhang Shun brought Huang ashore. Surrounded by the whole company, he was taken to the manor. Zhu Gui and Song Wan greeted the returning raiders. All went into the thatch-roofed hall and sat down.
Song Jiang stripped Huang of his wet clothes, tied him to a willow tree, and asked the leaders to sit around in a circle. He called for a pot of wine and cups for all. From Chao Gai the highest to the lowest-ranking Bai Sheng, they totalled thirty bold gallants. When the cups were filled, Song Jiang turned to his captive.
"Huang Wenbing, you knave! I've never done anything against you. Why should you want to harm me? Four or five times, you tried to get Prefect Cai to kill me and Dai Zong. A man who's studied the books of the sages—how could you be so vicious? There's no terrible blood feud between us. Why have you conspired against me? Your brother Huang Wenye was born of the same mother, yet he's a kindly man. The folk in your town call him Huang the Buddha. Last night I ordered that he was not to be disturbed. But you, you rogue, do nothing but injure people! You tie up with the powerful, inveigle yourself in with officials, and persecute the innocent. In Wuweijun you're known as Huang the Wasp. Well, today I'm going to remove your sting!"
"I acknowledge my crimes," said Huang. "I ask only for a quick death."
"Thieving donkey," shouted Chao Gai. "You're going to die, never fear. You wouldn't have behaved as you did if you knew this day of reckoning was at hand."
"Which one of you brothers will do the deed for me?" Song Jiang asked.
Li Kui the Black Whirlwind leaped forward. "I'll slice the villain for you, brother."
He took a sharp knife, looked at Huang and laughed. "In the prefect's rear hall you lied and slandered, stirred him up, invented stories out of whole cloth, deceived him. So you want a quick death? I'm going to see to it that you die slowly."
He started by carving the prisoner's legs. It wasn't long before he had sliced him to ribbons. Only then did Li Kui cut open Huang's chest, pull out his heart and hold it up for the assembled gallants to see.
All returned to the thatch-roofed hall and congratulated Song Jiang. To their astonishment he dropped to his knees. They hastily knelt with him.
"What is it?" they cried. "Speak freely. There's nothing we're not willing to hear."
"I'm a person of no talent, only a clerk. But I've always tried to be good to people and make friends with the bold and gallant. Unfortunately, lacking the strength and the ability, I have never been able to treat them as is their due and satisfy my life-long wish. When I was being exiled to Jiangzhou, Chao Gai and you other chieftains urged me to remain with you. But because of my father's strict instructions I was unable to do so. Later, I had a Heaven-sent opportunity to meet another band of heroes at the Xunyang River. Who would have thought that in my ignorance I would get drunk and write wild words and put Superintendent Dai's life in jeopardy? With fearless disregard of danger, you gallants snatched me from the tiger's den, the dragon's lair, and saved my wretched life. And now you have graciously helped me get my revenge.
"But we have committed great crimes, and caused turmoil in two prefectural towns. This will surely be reported to the emperor. I have no choice but to join you brothers in Liangshan Marsh. What about the rest of you? If you feel the same, gather your belongings and we'll go together. If there are some who don't wish to go, I await your orders. It's just that I'm afraid this is going to stir up a tremendous reaction ..."
"We'll all go," Li Kui interrupted. "Anyone who refuses gets a knock from my friggin ax. I'll cut him in two."
"How can you speak so crudely? Each brother must make up his own mind."
The men conferred. "We've slaughtered scores of officers and soldiers and thrown two towns into disorder. The prefect is bound to report to the imperial court, which is sure to send an army to capture us," they said. "If we don't leave with brother Song Jiang, to live and die together, where else can we go?"
Very pleased, Song Jiang thanked them. That same day Zhu Gui and Song Wan were sent ahead to inform the mountain stronghold.
The marchers were divided into five units. In the first were Chao Gai, Song Jiang, Hua Rong, Dai Zong and Li Kui. In the second were Liu Tang, Du Qian, Shi Yong, Xue Yong and Hou Jian. In the third were Li Jun, LiLi, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Tong Wei and Tong Meng. In the fourth were Huang Xin, Zhang Shun, Zhang Heng, and the three Ruan brothers. In the fifth were Mu Hong, Mu Chun, Yan Shun, Stumpy Tiger Wang, Zheng Tianshou and Bai Sheng. These twenty-eight leaders and some of the men divided the booty taken at Huang the Wasp's house and loaded it onto carts.
Mu Hong also put Squire Mu and the entire household in vehicles, along with family valuables and possession. Vassals who did not want to go along were given silver and told to find other masters. Those who did joined the party. The first four units had already set out. Mu Hong issued a dozen torches, set fire to the manor, left his fields, and headed for Liangshan Marsh.
One behind another, the units proceeded, separated by intervals of about twenty //. We'll speak now of the first unit, led by Chao Gai. Song Jiang, Hua Rong, Dai Zong and Li Kui, all mounted, and followed by a body of men and carts. Oh the third day of the march they came to a place called Yellow Gate Mountain.
"An evil-looking mountain," Song Jiang said to Chao Gai. "It must be infested with bandits. We'd better send someone to urge the rear units to catch up before we go on."
The words were scarcely out of his mouth when drums beat and gongs clashed in a gap in the mountain. "What did I tell you?" exclaimed Song Jiang. "We'll halt right here. When the rest of our force joins us we'll deal with those louts."
Hua Rong fitted an arrow to his bow, Chao Gai and Dai Zong each clutched halberds. Li Kui held his axes. They gathered protectively around Song Jiang and urged their mounts forward. Four or five hundred bandits came riding down the slope, with four bold fellows at their head each with a weapon in hand.
"You rioted in Jiangzhou, raided Wuweijun, slaughtered government soldiers and people. You still hope to return to Liangshan Marsh?" the four shouted. "We've been waiting for you a long time. Leave us Song Jiang, if you have any sense, and we'll let you live."
Song Jiang stepped out and knelt upon the ground. "There were persons who injured me, Song Jiang, but I could not redress my grievances. Then, gallant men came from all sides and rescued me. Have I offended you four heroes in some way? Restrain your noble hands. Forgive and spare me, I pray."
The four rolled from their saddles, cast their weapons aside, flew forward and dropped to their knees. "We have heard of the great fame of Song Jiang the Timely Rain from Shandong. Though we longed to meet you, it was never possible. Then we heard that you had been convicted in Jiangzhou, and we decided to raid the prison. But we couldn't get any reliable news. The other day we sent one of our men into the city to inquire. He came back and said: 'A large band of bold fellows has already rioted in Jiangzhou and snatched him from the execution grounds. They took him to Jieyang Town. After that, they set fires in Wuweijun and plundered the home of Huang the Wasp.' We figured you must pass this way, and we've had scouts on the lookout. But we weren't sure these were your rescuers, so we put on this little show. Forgive us if we've alarmed you, brother. Today we meet at last. We've prepared some poor fare in our small stronghold as a welcome. Won't you and your gallant escort join with us a while?"
Song Jiang was very pleased. He helped the four to their feet and asked their names. The leader was called Ou Peng, and he came from Huangzhou. He had been a military guard on the Yangzi. But because he had offended his superior officer, he was forced to flee and become a bandit. He had earned himself the nickname Golden-Winged Hawk.
The second was Jiang Jing, from Tanzhou in Hunan. Originally he had studied for the imperial examinations. But when he failed to pass, he abandoned the pen and took up the sword. A clever fellow, he was a skilled mathematician. In ten thousand calculations, he was never off an iota. He was also good with lance and staff, and a sharp tactician in battle. And so he was known as the Magic Calculator.
The third was Ma Lin, from Jinling in Jiankang. He had been an idler who played the double flute. But when he wielded his big skewer knife, a hundred men couldn't come near him. People called him the Elfin Flutist.
Tao Zongwang, the fourth man, was from Guangzhou. His family were tenant farmers. He could ply an iron spade and was very strong. He was skilled also with spear and knife, and was known as the Nine-Tailed Tortoise.
These four bold fellows welcomed Song Jiang, and their underlings brought forth tidbits, a large pot of wine and two platters of meat and laid them out and poured the wine. The cups were handed first to Chao Gai and Song Jiang, then to Hua Rong, Dai Zong and Li Kui. The rest of the unit were introduced, and they were also served wine.
In less than two watches the second unit arrived, and its leaders were introduced. After all had been given wine, they were invited up the mountain, and the ten chieftains proceeded to the stronghold on Yellow Gate Mountain. The four leaders ordered that cows and horses be slaughtered to feed their guests. Bandits were sent down the mountain to invite the other eighteen chieftains to the feast when the remaining three units arrived. Before half the day was gone, they too had come and met their hosts at the festive board in the meeting hall of the fortress.
While they were drinking, Song Jiang said to the four leaders: "I'm on my way to join the forces of brother Chao Gai on Mount Liangshan. I wonder whether you would be willing to abandon this place and come with me?"
"If you two noble warriors don't scorn us as unworthy, we would be pleased to serve as your grooms."
Song Jiang and Chao Gai were delighted. "In that case," they said, "please prepare to depart."
All of the chieftains were glad, and they spent the night in the stronghold.

The next day Song Jiang and Chao Gai went down the mountain and set forth as heads of the first unit, as before. The other units followed, keeping a distance of twenty //between each. Collecting their valuables, the four leaders and their four or five hundred men burned down the Yellow Gate Fortress and brought up the rear as the sixth unit.

Song Jiang was happy they had joined. As he rode along he said to Chao Gai: "Although I've had some alarming experiences since taking to outlawry, I've come to know many good fellows. Today, I'm going with you, brother, to the mountain stronghold and my mind is settled. We'll live and die together."

They chatted of many things upon the road. Before they knew it, they reached Zhu Gui's inn.

Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Lin Chong and Qin Ming, who had remained in charge of the fortress, and two new arrivals Xiao Rang and Jin Dajian, had already been informed by Zhu Gui and Song Wan of their impending arrival. They sent a lesser chieftain every day by boat to the inn to meet them. Now, they proceeded with him to the Shore of Golden Sands. To the thunder of drums and the tootling of flutes, the returning chieftains mounted horses and sedan-chairs and commenced the climb.

At the pass they were greeted with wine by Wu Yong and the other five. All then proceeded to Fraternity Hall, where a burner of good incense was lit. Chao Gai requested Song Jiang to take the seat of highest leadership. Song Jiang wouldn't hear of it.

"You mustn't do this, brother," he protested. "I owe my life to the fearless rescue by you gallants. You, brother, are the leader of this stronghold. How can you relinquish it to a man of no talent? I'd rather die than accept."

"Don't talk like that, brother," Chao Gai responded. "We seven wouldn't even be here if you hadn't waded through a sea of blood to save us and brought us up the mountain. You are the rightful benevolent leader. No one is better qualified to take the chair."

"But you are my senior, a man of sixty years. I'd be ashamed." Song Jiang pushed Chao Gai into the first chair. He himself sat down in the second. Wu Yong sat in the third chair, Gongsun Sheng in the fourth.

"Old leaders take seats on the left as hosts, new on the right as guests, without regard to merit or rank," Song Jiang directed. "We'll see how you distinguish yourselves in future engagements, and then decide."

"Very fitting," the others agreed.

Amid the sounding of horns and beating of drums, a total of forty leaders feasted and celebrated.

Song Jiang spoke in detail how the children's ballad at the Eastern Capital had been interpreted by Huang Wenbing so as to complicate Song Jiang himself. How the false letter conveyed by Dai Zong had been explained by Huang who had strongly urged the Prefect to have both Song and Dai executed. "If you bold gallants hadn't rescued us, we wouldn't be here today."

Li Kui jumped to his feet. "Good. Brother fits the Heavenly prediction exactly. Although he had to suffer because of Huang, he had the pleasure of watching me carve him to pieces. We've lots of men and horses. Let's rebel! What's there to be afraid of? Brother Chao Gai will be Emperor of Greater Song, brother Song Jiang will be Emperor of Lesser Song. Wu Yong will be Premier, Gongsun will be Commander-in-Chief, and we'll all be generals. We'll slaughter our way into the Easter Capital, seize the friggin throne, and rejoice! It will be great! Much better than this friggin marsh!"

"Iron Ox," Dai Zong cried, "you're talking nonsense. You can't behave here like you did in Jiangzhou. You must take orders from these two brothers who are our leaders, and not be forever shooting off your mouth. If you keep interrupting like this, we'll cut your head off as a warning to others."

*"Aiya,* if you do that, it will take me a long time to grow another. All right, I'll just drink my wine and be quiet."

Everybody laughed. Song Jiang harked back to the time of their first battle with government soldiers.

"I was terrified when I heard they were going after you," he said to Chao Gai. "Who would have thought that it would be my turn next."

"You would have saved yourself a good deal of trouble if you remained here on the mountain with us, as we urged, instead of going to Jiangzhou," Wu Yong reminded him. "But everything happens according to Heaven's will."

"Where is that knave Colonel Huang An today?"

"He fell ill and died two or three months after."

Song Jiang sighed. That day, all ate, drank and were merry. Chao Gai first saw to it that Squire Mu and his household were settled in, then divided Huang the Wasp's family valuables among the lesser bandits who had done well, and gave to Dai Zong the hampers of gifts he had been taking to the capital for the prefect. Dai refused to accept. He insisted on contributing them to the general treasury.

Chao Gai introduced Li Jun and the other new leaders to the rank and file, who greeted them respectfully. Oxen and horses were slaughtered for several days in a row for the feasting and celebration. Of that we'll say no more.

At Chao Gai's orders, homes were provided on the front and rear of the mountain, more buildings were erected inside the fortress, and the fortifications were strengthened.

On the third day of feasting, Song Jiang rose and addressed the other chieftains: "I have an important matter to attend to. I wonder if you would allow me to leave for a few days?"

"What is it, brother?" asked Chao Gai. "Where do you wish to go?" Calmly, Song Jiang replied. And as a result, he barely escaped with his life from a forest of knives, and on a mountainside, he received a revelation of immortality.

Truly, because the goddess gave him the three books, he was able to create several fine pages in history.

Now these heroes from Mount Liang assembled in the White Dragon temple outside Jiangzhou, having just stormed the execution ground and rescued Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger, were seventeen in all, namely Chao Gai, Colonel Hua, the Tamer, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, the Red-Haired Devil, the Dandy, the Door-God in the Clouds, the Skyscraper, the Crocodile, Short-Arse, Whitey Zheng, Shi Yong, the three Ruan brothers, and the Daytime Rat. Under their command were eighty or ninety seasoned troops. Those who had joined them on the Yangtze river amounted to nine more leaders, namely the White Eel, his brother the Pilot, the White-Water Dragon, the Executioner, the two Mu brothers, the two Tong brothers and the Pill Monger. They had more than forty men, all of them smugglers. They had arrived in three big boats. In addition there was Iron Ox, who had led the charge out of the city along the banks of the river. So altogether that meeting in the White Dragon temple numbered about a hundred and fifty.

And now they heard the soldier say: "There's a great beating of drums in Jiangzhou city, and waving of banners and sounding of gongs. They're heading this way, shouting and cheering."

When he heard this, Iron Ox gave a roar, seized his axes and bounded out of the door. The others too raised a shout, and brandishing their weapons sallied forth to encounter the enemy. But first the Red-Haired Devil and the Crocodile transferred Song Jiang and the Magic Messenger onto one of the boats for safety. The White-Water Dragon, White Eel and the Ruan brothers took charge of the boats. Along the bank they could see the forces streaming out of the city, some five or six thousand horsemen, the first ranks all in full armour, equipped with bows and arrows and wielding long lances. Behind them thronged the infantry, charging to the attack with waving banners and loud cries.

At this point Iron Ox was well in advance of the others. Waving his axes and stripped for action, he was rushing to the attack. Behind him were Colonel Hua, the Tamer, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, all backing him up. Colonel Hua seeing how the enemy cavalry that faced them were steadying their lances feared for Iron Ox's safety and surreptitiously reached for his bow, fitted an arrow to it, bent it to the full and let fly at the leader of the cavalrymen. The very first arrow sent him tumbling headlong from his horse. This gave the rest of the cavalry such a fright that thinking only of saving themselves, they jerked their horse's heads round and fled, trampling half of their own infantry as they did so. At this point all the heroes charged, cutting down the enemy till the bodies lay piled in heaps and the river ran red with blood. They went on killing till they were at the gates of Jiangzhou. By then the troops defending the city had prepared ballista missiles and stones which they rained down on the attackers. All the government troops now beat a hasty retreat inside the walls and closed the gates. It would be days before they dared venture forth again. The heroes, dragging a reluctant Iron Ox with them, returned to the White Dragon temple and prepared to board the boats. Chao Gai drew them up in good order, and one by one they went down into the boats, which shoved off and left.

The wind was directly behind them so they hoisted sail, the three bigger boats carrying the troops and the leaders setting their course for Squire Mu's. With a following wind they were at the jetty in no time and all disembarked. Mu Hong invited them all into the inner hall where Squire Mu came out to receive them and Song Jiang was able to meet all the other leaders. The Squire said: "You've been hard at it all afternoon, please go and rest in the guest quarters to restore your strength." So they all retired for a while and rested or repaired their clothes and arms. Meanwhile Mu Hong had the servants slaughter an ox, a dozen pigs and sheep, and provide chickens, geese, fish and ducks for a magnificent banquet in honour of the leaders. Later while they were drinking, many incidents were recalled. Chao Gai said: "If you hadn't come with those boats to save us we would have been in serious trouble."

Squire Mu asked: "What made you try and leave the city by that road?"

Iron Ox said: "I was just looking for where there were most people to kill. It was they who chose to follow me, I didn't tell them to." This made everyone laugh.

Song Jiang now rose to his feet and said: "We would both have lost our lives, Superintendent Dai and myself, if all of you had not come to the rescue. Our debt to you is deep as the ocean, how can it ever be repaid? But I still can't get over the way that bastard Huang Wenbing just kept on and on, repeatedly finding ways to express his malice and engineer our downfall. How can I leave this injustice unavenged? I hesitate to ask you this, but would you all do me one more enormous favour? Would you go with me to attack Wuweijun and kill that swine Huang Wenbing, in order to take from me this inexhaustible anger of mine, before we go back home? What say you?"

"But to enter the enemy camp secretly, to raid their very headquarters, that's something that can only work once, how can it be repeated?" Chao Gai objected. "They will be ready for us now. Wouldn't it be better to go back to the mountain fortress and recruit a big force, together with 'Professor' Wu and Taoist Gongsun, Leopard's Head Lin Chong and Thunderclap? There'd still be time enough to avenge you."

Song Jiang said: "If we go back to the mountain first, we can't come out again. In the first place it's a long way. And then Jiangzhou must have reported it to the court and they'll be on the alert everywhere. We mustn't do something foolish. No, we have to take advantage of this opportunity, strike while the iron is hot, there's no point in waiting till they're fully prepared."

Colonel Hua said: "He's right. But all the same, we've nobody who knows the roads, or exactly where he lives. We should send someone first to spy out the land and find out as much as possible, to see exactly what there is there in Wuweijun and pinpoint Bee Sting Huang's house. Then we can get to work."

The Pill Monger now jumped up and said: "I've travelled a lot in the rivers and lakes and I know this place called Wuweijun pretty well. Suppose I go and take a look?"

"That would be great," Song Jiang said.

That same day the Pill Monger said goodbye and left. Song Jiang and the others, meanwhile, remained behind at Squire Mu's and considered the attack on Wuweijun. Swords and spears and bows and arrows were got ready and also a number of large and small boats and suchlike. These preparations were complete when, having been gone two days, the Pill Monger returned, bringing with him another man.

When the Pill Monger greeted Song Jiang, the latter asked: "Who is this good fellow?"

"This is Hou Jian. He's from Hongdu. He's a master tailor. He can make the needle simply fly and his thread just races along. But he's also pretty handy with spear and staff, as I know because he was my student. Because he's small, dark and wiry they call him the Long-Armed Ape. I found him working at Bee Sting Huang's house so I brought him along."

Song Jiang was very pleased with this and asked Hou Jian to sit and join their discussions. The latter was in fact one of the original baleful stars, or demon princes, so of course he was a kindred spirit.

When Song Jiang asked about Jiangzhou, and about the roads in Wuweijun, the Pill Monger said: "Governor Cai has now counted their losses. More than five hundred government troops and civilians were killed. The number wounded by arrows is beyond reckoning. He has sent messengers to ride night and day to report it to the court. The city gates are closed at midday and anyone wanting to get in or out is questioned closely. Of course the persecution you suffered is not the fault of Governor Cai, it's all because of that Huang Wenbing, who repeatedly incited him against both of you. Now since the raid on the execution ground there is great alarm in the city, and they're on the alert night and day. When I went to Wuweijun to gain intelligence I bumped into my friend Hou Jian, when he was leaving the house to eat, that's how I got all this information."

"And how did you know about all this, Mr. Hou?" Song Jiang asked.

The Ape replied: "From childhood I have always loved practising with spear and staff. My master here taught me such a lot, I shall always be grateful to him. Recently Bee Sting Huang called me to his house to make him some clothes. When I was leaving I happened to meet my master; he mentioned your name and told me about this business. I very much wanted to meet you so I came personally to make this report. This Huang Wenbing has an elder brother called Huang Wenye, another son of the same mother. Huang Wenye devotes himself to good works: mending bridges and repairing roads, paying for Buddha images and feeding monks, rescuing the oppressed, succouring the needy. In Wuweijun they call him Buddha Huang. His younger brother, on the other hand, although he's a retired official, has a malicious spirit and spends his time doing evil. Everyone in Wuweijun calls him Bee Sting Huang. The two brothers live apart, though they are in the same street close to the north gate of the town. Bee Sting Huang is nearer to the town wall and Buddha Huang is towards the main street. One time when I was working there Bee Sting Huang came home and I heard him say, 'Governor Cai has been cheated and I have advised him to execute the offenders first and report to the Emperor afterwards.' Buddha Huang was angry when he heard this, and said, 'Why do always have to stick your nose into everything? It's nothing to do with you, why do you always want to make life difficult for other people? If there's justice in heaven and present retribution, all you're doing is heaping coals of fire on your own head.' Then in the last couple of days, news of the raid on the execution ground reached us, and Bee Sting Huang was scared stiff. He rushed off to Jiangzhou to see the Governor and discuss things with him and he still hasn't returned."

"What is the distance between Bee Sting Huang's house and his brother's?" Song Jiang asked.

"It used to be a single house, before they were divided. There's just a vegetable garden in between."

"How many people are there in the house, and how many separate households?"

"About forty or fifty, counting both men and women."

"Heaven favours my revenge, this person must have been sent to help me," Song Jiang said. "All the same, I shall need the support of all of you."

They all said with one voice: "Even if we have to die in the attempt, we are determined to rid the world of that evil scheming bastard, in order to avenge your wrongs and wipe out your hatred."

"My quarrel is only with this scoundrel Huang Wenbing, it's nothing to do with the people of Wuweijun. And since his brother is an honest fellow he must not be harmed either. We do not want posterity to say we acted dishonourably. When we attack we must avoid doing the least harm to any of the people. But I've a plan for this attack. All I ask of you is a little help."

"We will do whatever you ask," they replied in unison.

Song Jiang said: "I would like to ask Squire Mu to provide eighty or ninety sacks and we shall also need over a hundred bundles of reeds for burning. We'll use five big boats and two small ones. I'd like White Eel and the White-Water Dragon to take charge of the two small boats and I'll explain how to manoeuvre them; on the big boats we'll have the Pilot, the three Ruans and Tong Wei, the Cave Dragon, with all the others who are experienced on water manning them. This should enable my plan to succeed."

Mu Hong said: "We've got dry reeds, fuel and sacks, our people on this estate all know the water and can handle boats, so just go ahead, please, and tell us what to do."

Song Jiang said: "First I want Mr. Hou to take the Pill Monger and the Daytime Rat into Wuweijun and hide there. In a few days' time a pigeon with a bell attached to it will be released outside the gates at midnight. Then the Daytime Rat is to go up on the city wall and stick out a white silk pennant near Bee Sting Huang's house, as a signal to show which part of the wall is nearest to it. And Shi Yong and Skyscraper are to dress up as beggars and go to the city gates and wait there. When they see the fire it will be their signal to kill the guards on the gate. The White-Water Dragon and White Eel will approach on the river and lie there in readiness."

When Song Jiang had allotted these duties, the Pill Monger, the Daytime Rat and the Ape set off. Next it was the turn of Shi Yong and Skyscraper, dressed as beggars and each carrying a concealed dagger. The sacks filled with sand and mud were brought and together with the reeds and the fuel loaded onto the boats. The other leaders stood in readiness, well provided with arms, and the fighting men hid under the decks of the boats. The leaders now boarded their boats. Chao Gai, Song Jiang, and Colonel Hua were on the Cave Dragon's boat; the Dandy, Short-Arse and Whitey were with the Pilot; the Magic Messenger, the Red-Haired Devil and the Tamer were with Ruan the Second; the Little Duke, the Halberdier and the Executioner were with Ruan the Fifth; Mu Hong, Mu Chun and Iron Ox were with Ruan the Seventh. That left the Crocodile and the Door-God in the Clouds, who remained at Squire Mu's to listen for the news from Jiangzhou. Tong Meng, the River Rider, was sent ahead in a fast fishing boat to reconnoitre. The brigands and other fighting men were hidden under the decks, while the farm-hands and boatmen manned the boats. They came secretly the same night to Wuweijun. It was seasonal weather for the seventh month, cold nights and a fresh breeze, the water glistening under the moonlight, with the river in shadow and brightness flooding the hills, as if all were fashioned in jade.

It was about the first watch when all the boats arrived at Wuweijun where they chose a place where the reeds were thick and moored in a long line. The River Rider returned and reported: "All's quiet in the town." Song Jiang ordered the men under his command to unload the sandbags, reeds and dry firewood and move them to beside the town wall. They heard the drum beat the hour: it was exactly nine o'clock. Song Jiang told the soldiers to take the sandbags and firewood and pile them up beside the wall. The leaders now took up their arms, leaving only the Pilot, the Ruans and the Tongs to guard the boats and hold themselves in reserve, while the rest charged towards the town. When they were just a few hundred yards from the north gate, Song Jiang gave orders for the pigeon with the bell to be released and on top of the town wall a bamboo pole appeared with the white signal tied to it, fluttering in the breeze. Song Jiang immediately ordered his troops to pile up the sandbags at this spot and then told the assault party to carry their loads of reeds and firewood up onto the wall. The Daytime Rat was waiting for them there. He pointed and said: "Bee Sting Huang's house is in that street."

"Where are the Pill Monger and the Ape?" Song Jiang asked.

"They've entered Bee Sting Huang's house, they're waiting for you," was the reply.

"And have you seen Shi Yong and Skyscraper?"

"They're in position near the town gate."

Song Jiang now ordered his men to descend from the wall and proceed to Bee Sting Huang's door. The Ape suddenly materialized under the eaves of the house. "Go and open the garden gate and let them in," Song Jiang whispered urgently. "Tell them to make a bonfire of the reeds and the primed firewood and tell the Pill Monger to fetch fire and light it. Then go and knock on Bee Sting Huang's door and shout, 'The official's house next door is on fire, bring out any boxes and trunks for safekeeping.' After they open the door I'll take care of them."

Song Jiang told everyone to line up on both sides while the Ape went and opened the garden door. The troops carried the reeds and firewood inside and piled it up there. The Ape had found the tinder and handed it to the Pill Monger. The fire was lit. The Ape slipped out and went to knock on the door of the house, shouting: "The official's house next door is on fire, we've got to move all the chests and boxes out for safekeeping, come on, open the door quickly!" When those inside awoke they saw the flames next door and hurriedly opened the door and rushed out. With wild shouts, Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the others fell on them. Each hero went to work on his own account: if they saw one, it was one dead; if they saw two, it was a pair. The members of Bee Sting Huang's household, family and others, young or old, some forty or fifty all told, were slain one and all. There was not one survivor. Only Bee Sting Huang himself was missing. The company collected up all of the very considerable quantity of family possessions in gold and silver that he had long been extorting from honest citizens. Then when a whistle was heard they shouldered these goods and rushed to the wall. Meanwhile Shi Yong and Skyscraper after seeing the fire had each drawn his sharp knife and killed the soldiers on the gates. When they saw a group of neighbours approaching down the street carrying buckets and ladders to fight the fire, they shouted: "Stop where you are! We are the company from the Marshes of Mount Liang. There's thousands of us here and we've come to kill Bee Sting Huang and his thieving clan and to avenge Song Jiang and Dai Zong. We intend no harm to the people. Go home quickly and shut your doors. Don't meddle with what does not concern you." Some of the neighbours were still not convinced and simply stood there gaping, but when Iron Ox suddenly charged out, whirling his axes, there was a terrified shout and they picked up their ladders and buckets and fled in disorder. Some guards also issued from a backstreet with some men who were dragging fire-fighting equipment, ropes and hooks, aiming to fight the fire. But Colonel Hua quickly armed his bow and shot the first one through, crying: "If you want to die, then come and try to put the fire out." The others beat a hasty retreat. Finally, the Pill Monger took a torch and set fire to Bee Sting Huang's house front and back and the flames began to rage. Here's how it was:

*Black clouds enfold the earth, red flames fly toward heaven. A myriad golden snakes march irresistibly forward, the writhing flames scatter a thousand embers. A fierce breeze fans the flames, carved beams and painted pillars last but an instant; leaping flames fill the sky, mansion and hall are gone in a flash.*

It was not just an ordinary fire, for

Bee Huang had an evil nature,

*He roused the god of fire.*

*His malice raised an evil flame,*

He made the fire that burnt him.

Shi Yong and Skyscraper had already killed the guards on the gate and Iron Ox destroyed the lock with a blow of the axe. When the gate was open, half the band left the town through the gate below while the other half departed over the wall above. The Pilot, the Ruans and the Tongs came to help them carry the booty aboard the boats. The people of Wuweijun had already heard about the raid on Jiangzhou execution ground, in which countless people were killed, so no one dared interfere. They simply went back home and hid. For Song Jiang and his friends the only thing missing was that they had failed to capture Bee Sting Huang himself. They embarked, shoved off and returned to Squire Mu's. Of this no more.

Now in the city of Jiangzhou, when they saw the fire in Wuweijun painting the sky red, everyone began to talk about it, and naturally the Governor was informed. It so happened that Bee Sting Huang was with the Governor just then discussing some business. When he heard the news he hurriedly said to the Governor: "There is a fire in my district. I must hurry back home to see what's going on." Governor Cai immediately ordered the gates to be opened and arranged for him to go on an official boat. Bee Sting Huang thanked him and left at once, found his servants and boarded the boat with all haste. They rowed out into the stream and headed for Wuweijun. The fire was now seen to be raging fiercely and the reflection painted the surface of the river red. The helmsman said: "It's somewhere near the north gate which is on fire." This did nothing to reassure Bee Sting Huang. When they reached the middle of the river, a small boat was seen rowing in the opposite direction. Before long another boat appeared, rowing towards them. But instead of passing them by, it came straight at them. "Ahoy there! Who are you?" Bee Sting Huang's servants shouted. "What are you doing rowing straight towards us?" Suddenly in the other boat a large man jumped up with a grappling iron in his hand and shouted in reply: "This boat is heading for Jiangzhou with a report on the fire!" So Bee Sting Huang emerged and asked: "Where is the fire?"

"Near the north gate in Mr. Huang's house," the other replied. "His family have all been killed and his goods stolen by the robbers of Mount Liang. Now they've set fire to the house."

Bee Sting Huang began wildly cursing his fate, he nearly went out of his mind. When he heard him, the other man grappled their boat with his hook and leapt aboard. Bee Sting Huang was no dim-wit, he guessed what was about to happen and he rushed to the stern and dived into the river. But someone from the second boat was already lurking under the water. He seized Bee Sting Huang round the waist and supporting his head dragged him aboard the boat. The big man on board assisted. They tied him with rope. The one who grabbed Bee Sting Huang from the bottom of the river was White Eel; the one in the boat with the grappling hook was the White-Water Dragon. With these two now aboard, the official boat's helmsman saw no better policy than to prostrate himself. The White-Water Dragon said: "I'm not going to harm you. I only want this bastard Bee Sting Huang. Go back and tell that ass, Governor Cai, that we of the Mount Liang band will let him keep his donkey's head for the time being, but sooner or later we'll return and take it."

Shaking like a leaf, the helmsman stammered: "I will tell him."

Now they had Bee Sting Huang in their boat, the White-Water Dragon and White Eel were content to let the official boat go.

The two men in their fast boats raced back to Mu Hong's. When they got there they found all the company on the bank waiting for them. The boxes had been unloaded. When he heard that they had captured Bee Sting Huang, Song Jiang could scarcely contain his joy, which was shared by the whole company. "I'm looking forward to meeting this person," he said. The White-Water Dragon and White Eel duly bundled Bee Sting Huang out onto the bank. When everyone had had a good look at him, he was locked up and they all left the river and returned to Squire Mu's house. The Crocodile and the Door-God in the Clouds joined them here and everyone went to the thatched hall. Song Jiang had Bee Sting Huang's wet clothing removed and he was tied to a willow tree. The leaders were asked to sit in groups. Song Jiang ordered a pot of wine and everyone raised their cups. Beginning with Chao Gai and going right down to the Daytime Rat, thirty of them in all were present.

Song Jiang began to berate Bee Sting Huang: "You scoundrel! I had no quarrel with you, neither past nor present, why did you try to ruin me, not once but five times, telling Governor Cai to have us both killed? You're supposed to have read the classics, how could you behave so viciously? There's no personal vendetta between us, why did you have to plot against me? Your brother Huang Wenye was born of the same mother, how is it that he spends his days doing good? I'm told that in your town they call him Buddha Huang. I was most careful not to do him the least harm yesterday. But you, all you do is attack people and suck up to the powerful. You toady to government officials, you oppress good citizens. I have heard that in Wuweijun they call you Bee Sting Huang. Well today I'm going to pluck your sting out."

Bee Sting Huang said: "I recognize my faults, please let me die."

Chao Gai shouted: "You bloody fool, do you think you're not going to die? Today you're going to learn to regret not having acted better from the beginning."

Song Jiang asked: "Which of you will do it for me?"

Iron Ox jumped to his feet at once and said: "I'll do it for you, I'll settle this villain. He's good and fat, I see, he'll make good eating when he's roasted."

Chao Gai said: "That's right, get a sharp knife and a basin of charcoal, we'll cut the bugger into little pieces and have him with the wine. That's the cure for our brother's anger!"

Iron Ox took a knife and said to Bee Sting Huang with a smile: "Now, you bastard, while you were sitting in Governor Cai's back room you could argue the hind leg off a donkey, if it was for the sake of ruining others and getting the Governor excited with pure fabrications. Now you want to die quickly, but I say you shall die slowly." Then with the sharp knife he began cutting pieces from the legs, choosing them carefully, and roasting them on the charcoal to serve with wine. Cut a piece, roast a piece. It wasn't long before Bee Sting Huang expired. Then Iron Ox slit open the chest and took out the heart and liver and handed it to them to make a soup. When the company had seen Bee Sting Huang carved up they all went to the thatched hall to celebrate with Song Jiang. There is a poem about this:

Bee Sting Huang was a toady and a schemer,
*Toward better men he harboured jealous hate.*
*But what he got for scheming was slow death,*
To be carved and roasted was his awful fate.

Suddenly Song Jiang knelt on the ground. All the others hurriedly knelt too and said: "Dear brother what is the matter? Please tell us what it is, of course we will listen."

Song Jiang said: "I have no skills. From childhood I studied the classics. When I grew up I tried to make the acquaintance of the world's heroes. But because my strength is slight and my talent weak, I have never been able to entertain them fittingly, as is my life-long wish. After I was banished to Jiangzhou, I have to thank Chao Gai and all of you who tried so hard to make me stay, but I was determined to see my father, that's why I couldn't. Then, since heaven so ordained it, my way took me to the Yangtze river and I ran into a number of other heroes. But fool that I am, I got drunk and in a moment of madness wrote something which put Superintendent Dai's life at risk. I owe my life to your fearlessness, when you braved the tiger's lair, the dragons' pool, to rescue me by force. You even put yourselves out to help me achieve my revenge. Now we have committed a great crime and caused an uproar in two cities, all of which will be reported to the Emperor. So I have no alternative but to seek refuge with our brothers in the Marshes of Mount Liang. I would like to know the views of everyone on this. If you are agreeable, let us pack up and leave at once."

Almost before he had finished, Iron Ox jumped up and cried: "We'll all go, we'll all go. If anyone says he won't, he'll get a fucking taste of my axes, I'll chop him in two!"

Song Jiang said: "You express yourself too violently, we will only go if it is truly and honestly what everyone wants."

Everyone gave their opinion: "We have killed hundreds of officers and troops, we've turned two places upside down, the court is bound to be informed and a force will be sent to take us. Where can we go, if we don't go with you, live or die together?"

Song Jiang thanked them with joy in his heart. The Crocodile and the Door-God in the Clouds were sent on in advance to advise those guarding the stronghold, and the others left afterwards in five parties. The first group to leave consisted of Chao Gai, Song Jiang, Colonel Hua, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox, the second of the Red-Haired Devil, Skyscraper, Shi Yong, the Pill Monger and the Ape, and the third of the White-Water Dragon, the Executioner, the Little Duke, the Halberdier and the two Tongs. The fourth group comprised the Tamer, White Eel, the Pilot and the Ruan brothers, and the fifth the Dandy, Short-Arse, the two Mu brothers, Whitey and the Daytime Rat. The twenty-eight leaders in their five groups commanded a thousand men. Each man received a share of the booty from Bee Sting Huang's house and loaded it onto the carts. Mu Hong took along the old squire and the household retainers, and also loaded suitable amounts of goods and valuables onto carts. Amongst the retainers there were some who did not want to go. They were all given silver and went their own ways. Some of the servants wanted to go. They were taken along. After the first four parties had left one after another, Mu Hong collected up everything in the house, then got a dozen torches and set fire to the manor. This done, he abandoned his estate and set his course for the Marshes of Mount Liang.

No need to tell of how each of the five contingents fared on their journey, setting off in succession, separated by some seven miles or so. Rather we shall tell how the first of them, that is to say, Chao Gai, Song Jiang, Colonel Hua, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox, rode forward, accompanied by carts and their company of soldiers, and travelled for three days till they came to a place known as Yellow Mountain. Song Jiang said to Chao Gai as they rode towards it: "This mountain has a wild aspect, do you suppose there are troops waiting in ambush there? Do you think we should wait till the others catch up so that we can all pass at the same time?" He had hardly finished speaking when the sound of gongs and drums broke out in the pass up ahead. "What did I say?" said Song Jiang. "Stay where you are, we must wait for our friends behind to catch up, so we can confront the villains." Colonel Hua meanwhile fitted an arrow to his bow, Chao Gai and the Magic Messenger grasped their halberds, Iron Ox took up his axes and closely surrounding Song Jiang they all spurred their horses forward. Immediately on the hillside four or five hundred troops materialized. From the front ranks four big fellows, all armed, rode out and shouted loudly: "You lot have raised an uproar in Jiangzhou and plundered Wuweijun, you have killed many government troops and civilians, and now you are planning to retreat to the Marshes of Mount Liang. Well, we four have been waiting for you a long time. If you want to get back safely you must leave Song Jiang here and we'll spare your lives."

When he heard this, Song Jiang rode out in front, dismounted and knelt and said: "Song Jiang was caught in a trap, then rescued by all these heroes. He does not know in what way he has offended you, but hopes you will condescend to spare him."

When they saw Song Jiang kneeling before them, the four men hurriedly reined in their horses, threw down their weapons, rushed forward and threw themselves on the ground, saying: "We four brothers had only heard the famous name of Song Jiang of Shandong, the Opportune Rain, we never thought we would live to see the day when we would meet him. We heard how you had been sentenced for something in Jiangzhou and we decided we would come to raid the gaol, only we didn't have accurate information. The day before yesterday we sent some of our men to Jiangzhou to find out more. When they came back they told us a group of brave men had already devastated Jiangzhou and carried out a daring raid on the execution ground to rescue you. They told us you had set off towards Jieyang, but afterwards returned to burn Wuweijun and plunder the residence of Bee Sting Huang. We guessed you would be coming this way. We repeatedly sent out scouts to watch this road. But we feared the report might be false, that is why we tested you with these questions. Please do not hold it against us, now that we have truly found you. To celebrate this good fortune we have prepared a humble feast in our camp, as a most inadequate welcome. We beg you all to come to our humble camp for entertainment."

Song Jiang was delighted and raised them up and politely asked to know their names. The first one was called Ou Peng and was from Huangzhou. He had been a guard on the Yangzi but he had offended his superior officer and had been forced to take refuge in the rivers and lakes and become an outlaw. He had given up his name and changed it to Golden Wings. The second was called Jiang Jing, and he was from Tanzhou in Hunan. He was a failed scholar, who when he did not pass the state examination gave up the pen for the sword. Since he was quite clever and fairly expert in calligraphy and numbers — he could manage six figure sums without the slightest error — and was also adept with spear and staff and good at marshalling and deploying troops, everyone called him the Magic Calculator. The third was called Ma Lin and he was from Jinling in Jiankang. He had once been an insignificant idler, but he could play the flute and was also so quick with a knife that even a hundred attackers could not penetrate his defence. They called him the Magic Flautist. The fourth was Tao Zongwang from Guangzhou. He was from the class of tenant farmers. He was handy with a spade and had great strength. He could also handle a spear and a knife and they called him the Nine-Tailed Turtle. There is a poem about these four:

Sturdy and powerful beyond all compare
*He covers the ground as if walking on air,*
*Golden Wings is exactly the name for Ou Peng,*
Head of the Yellow Mountain gang.
*In youth he wasted his days with the pen*
*As an adult in tactics he sought to excel.*
*A soldier of worth and a demon with figures,*
Jiang Jing is both gifted in fighting and letters.
*His flute in the mountains rings loud as a bell,*
*With a couple of knives he can weave quite a spell.*
*Ma Lin's appearance is ugly as sin,*
But he's first of them all when a battle he's in.
*Zongwang is like a fierce tiger made,*
*He lays about him with a spade.*
*This Nine-Tailed Turtle has tricks beyond count.*
These are the leaders of the Yellow Mount.

Such were the 4 worthies who had detained Song Jiang. Soon their men brought boxes of fruit, a big pitcher of wine and two big plates of meat, and cups were provided for everyone. Chao Gai and Song Jiang were served first, then Colonel Hua, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox. Introductions were made all round and everyone was given wine. A few hours later the next party arrived, and all got handed cups and were introduced. When they had all raised their cups they were invited up the mountain. So the first two groups, consisting of ten leaders, went up to the Yellow Mountain stronghold where the four incumbents had oxen and horses slaughtered for them, and sent a succession of men down the mountain to invite the leaders of the three remaining groups up to join in the feasting. They all arrived within the day and attended the celebrations in the assembly hall.

Whilst he was drinking, Song Jiang spoke thus: "I am at present on my way to take refuge with Leader Chao Gai in the Marshes of Mount Liang and become one of their company. I wonder if you four would be interested in leaving this place and going with us to the great fortress on Mount Liang, to become members of the band?"

The four replied in unison: "If the two noble leaders do not reject us, we would like nothing better than to serve them in whatever they command."

Song Jiang and Chao Gai were delighted with the reply: "In that case, please prepare everything for the journey."

This decision was pleasing to everyone. They stayed for the rest of the day and the following night, and the next morning Song Jiang and Chao Gai still sharing the command went down the mountain and set off first. The rest all set out in due order, the distance between them being only some seven miles. The Yellow Mountain four got together their valuables and other things, collected three or four hundred men, burnt down the fortress palisades and followed behind as a sixth party.

Song Jiang was pleased to have added these four from Yellow Mountain, and he said to Chao Gai as they rode along: "During these wanderings in the rivers and lakes, although I've had some big frights, I've also got to know a good many fine fellows. Here I am now on my way to the mountain retreat with you, and this time I am resolute, together we shall live or die, you and I." They chatted thus as they pursued their way, and without noticing it arrived at the Crocodile's inn.

Now the four leaders who had stayed behind to guard the Mount Liang stronghold, namely the Professor, Taoist Gongsun Sheng, Leopard's Head Lin Chong and Thunderclap, with the two new arrivals, Xiao Rang the calligrapher, alias Magic Hand, and Jin Dajian the engraver, alias the Craftsman, had already been informed of events by the Crocodile and the Door-God in the Clouds, and every day they had been sending a welcoming party of the lesser chiefs over to the inn. They now all went together across to Golden Sands Landing and with much beating of drums and blowing of flutes began the journey on horseback or in sedans up to the stronghold. When they reached the pass, the Professor and the other five welcomed them with wine, and they all went to the assembly hall, where joss-sticks were lit.

Chao Gai now invited Song Jiang to become lord of the mountain retreat and asked him to take the highest place. Song Jiang, of course, refused. "You are absolutely wrong," he said. "It is only thanks to your courageous intervention that I am still among the living. You, my friend, were always the chief of the mountain stronghold, how can you resign that position to someone of no talent? If you insist on this I would prefer to die."

Chao Gai said: "Why do you talk like this? If you hadn't risked everything to rescue me and the other seven in the first place, enabling us to escape to the mountain, this company today would not exist. You are truly the stronghold's patron. If you do not take the seat, who deserves to?"

Song Jiang said: "As far as age is concerned, you are my senior by ten years. How can I take precedence? It would be most dishonourable of me!"

Only at the third instance was Chao Gai prevailed upon to take the seat, with Song Jiang in second place, the Professor in third, and Taoist Gongsun Sheng in fourth.

Song Jiang said: "We shouldn't make distinctions of merit. The original leaders of Mount Liang should all sit in the hosts' places on the left, and the new arrivals should take the guests' places on the right. Later when people's contribution can be judged they can be classified individually."

Everyone responded with one voice: "This is absolutely right."

In a line on the left were Leopard's Head Lin Chong, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, the Ruans, Skyscraper, the Door-God in the Clouds, the Crocodile and the Daytime Rat. On the right according to age, all deferring to each other, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Tamer, the Magic Messenger, Iron Ox, the White-Water Dragon, Mu Hong, the Pilot, White Eel, the Dandy, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Magic Hand, Short-Arse, the Pill Monger, the Craftsman, Mu Chun, the Executioner, Golden Wings, the Magic Calculator, the Tong brothers, the Magic Flautist, Shi Yong, the Ape, Whitey and the Nine-Tailed Turtle. Altogether forty leaders sat down together at that banquet, amid much tootling of flutes and rattling of drums.

Song Jiang began to speak of the business of Governor Cai and the children's rhyme. "I tell you, that unspeakable bastard Bee Sting Huang, it was absolutely nothing to do with him! Yet he had to go to the Governor with this insane rigmarole! According to him, 'The bane of our land are home and wood' meant that someone who would lay waste the country and its wealth must have in his name the character for wood added to the character for home, that's 'Song,' of course. 'Water and work do us no good' meant that someone with the character for work added to the three dots that stand for water would do great harm — in other words 'Jiang.' So Song Jiang was clearly implied. The following lines 'Thirty-six stand in a row, in Shandong rebellions grow' meant Song Jiang would create an uprising in Shandong. That's why they arrested me. Then the Magic Messenger unluckily delivered the forged letter and that made Bee Sting Huang urge the Governor to carry out the execution first and report it later. If you hadn't come to the rescue I certainly wouldn't be here now."

Iron Ox now jumped up and said: "Dear brother, I think we can see heaven's will in all this. Although you had to put up with a lot from him, he's been repaid by our cutting him up alive. We've plenty of troops, so if we do rise up what have we to fear? Chao Gai will be our emperor, Song Jiang the prince, the Professor will be chief minister, and Taoist Gongsun the senior counsellor. The rest of us will be the army. We'll plunder the capital and capture the bloody throne, and then we can all live a life of ease up there, won't it be grand? Better than staying here in these bloody marshes, surely?"

The Magic Messenger hurriedly shouted: "Iron Ox, you're talking bloody nonsense! Remember where you are, you can't go on behaving like you did in Jiangzhou. You've got to pay attention to our two leaders' wishes and commands. If you go shooting your mouth off again, I'm going to make an example of you and bash your brains out!"

Everyone laughed when Iron Ox answered: "Aiya! If you bash my brains out I don't suppose I'm likely to grow some more in a hurry. I'd better just drink my wine."

Song Jiang also spoke of the first battle when the Mount Liang forces had to repel the government troops. "When I first heard that news I truly feared for you. I little thought that one day I myself would also be in the same situation."

"And yet if you'd listened to us before and remained comfortably in the mountain stronghold, instead of going on to Jiang-zhou, wouldn't you have saved yourself a lot of trouble?" the Professor said. "But it was your fate, that's the only way to explain it."

Song Jiang said: "By the way, where is Brigadier Huang An who led that attack on Mount Liang?"

Chao Gai said: "He didn't last more than a couple of months. He fell ill and died."

Song Jiang responded with a sigh.

Everyone seemed very happy feasting that day. Chao Gai first made arrangements for housing Squire Mu's family. Then he ordered Bee Sting Huang's possessions to be brought and distributed to the men as a reward for their efforts. He also called for the original treasure boxes and offered them to the Magic Messenger. The latter refused and asked for them to be taken to the treasury for general use. Chao Gai asked the troops now to come and pay their respects to the White-Water Dragon and others and there were general introductions. Oxen and sheep were slaughtered and the feasting continued in the camp for days on end. Of this no more.

Chao Gai now assigned lodgings for everyone on the mountain and the construction of houses and repairing of walls recommenced. At dinner on the third day, Song Jiang stood up and addressed the company as follows: "I still have one important matter on which I would like to crave your indulgence. I wish to go down the mountain again and request a few days' leave of absence, if this is agreeable to you all."
Chao Gai said: "Where do you want to go, and what is this important matter?"
Song Jiang calmly explained where he was planning to go. And this was to have important consequences:

Amid a forest of spears and blades, another narrow escape;
Surrounded by wild cliffs, the hero is granted a vision.

Indeed, the Mystic Lady was to give him 3 books and he was to write some pages of history.

In the Bailong Temple there were seventeen leaders including Chao Gai, and ninety brigands. To these were added nine leaders under Zhang Shun, and their forty followers. The latter were all experienced smugglers on the Yangtze River and they arrived in three boats. When they heard that troops were leaving the town to capture them they all followed the lead of Li Kui and left the temple fully armed, a body of over one hundred and fifty men. Song Jiang and Dai Zong were first placed in safety on a boat. Li Jun, Zhang Shun, and the three brothers Ruan remained with the boats, and got everything ready for a rapid flight.
The brigands saw that there were about seven thousand soldiers advancing towards the temple from the town. They all wore helmets, and armor, and were fully armed.
Li Kui stripped himself of all clothing for the fight, and was rushing forward with two axes in his hands in front of the men. Just behind him were Hua Rong, Huang Xin, Lu Fang, and Guo Sheng acting as his bodyguard. Hua Rong saw that all the mounted troops were armed with spears, so he took his bow and shot an arrow at the commanding officer who fell off his horse wounded. The troops seeing this, realized their danger, turned their horses round, and retreated, scattering the infantry about who had been supporting them. The bandits seized the opportunity, and running forward attacked the confused mass. They killed right and left, and soon blood was flowing in all directions. They pursued the troops up to the town gates where the soldiers on the walls threw boulders and logs of wood on Chao Gai's brigands. The troops had retreated into the town, and closed the gates behind them. They were too afraid to even open the gates for several days afterwards.
The men under Chao Gai returned to the Bailong Temple, and embarked on the boats near there. Chao Gai supervised the embarkation, dividing his men equally on the three boats. Sails were hoisted, and as there was a favorable wind, they set out for Old Mu's village. They soon reached their destination and disembarked. The son of Old Mu met them, and took them all to the guest hall where his father received them.
The bandits all found a good resting place for that night. A great feast was prepared and they all partook of same. When the wine was handed round they chatted about their recent exploit. Chao Gai said, "We should have been captured had it not been for the timely arrival of our brothers with their boats."
"But why did you take that road?" asked Old Mu.
"I myself preferred the most crowded road, where I could kill a great number. They followed me. I did not ask them to do so," said Li Kui.
The whole party laughed, and thereupon Song Jiang arose, and addressed them, "if you gentlemen had not arrived both Dai Zong and myself would have been executed. Today your favors are as deep as the sea, so that I can never recompense you. There is only one man I hate, this is Huang Wenbing, because he searched minutely for my smallest fault, and several times tried to put me to death. I must be revenged. May I request you, gentlemen, to do one more act of great kindness and accompany me to Wuweijun to kill Huang Wenbing, and so appease my enmity?"
"We rescued you from the execution ground," said Chao Gai, "but how can we do this second thing? They will now be ready and prepared for us. We had better return to Liangshan Marsh, and come here again with more men including our leaders Lin Chong, Qin Ming, and others."
"If you go to the mountain you will not be able to get back here," said Song Jiang. "First, because it is a long way there, and secondly, the officials will have time to get reinforcements from all quarters. We must not indulge in false hopes, but seize the present opportunity and do the deed before they can get ready for us."
"What you say, elder brother, is quite true," said Hua Rong, "but nobody knows the road or the lay of the land about there. We must first send a spy to the village of Wuweijun, and discover the best way of procedure, and find out where Huang Wenbing lives. Then we shall have no difficulties to begin our work."
Xue Yong now stood up and addressed them, "I have been there for several times and know the village of the Wuweijun very well. Shall I go as your spy and report on the position there?"
"That will be an excellent plan," said Song Jiang.
So Xue Yong bid adieu and left that night.
Song Jiang and the leaders at Old Mu's house discussed their plans for the attack on the Wuweijun and got all implements of warfare ready. After two days Xue Yong returned accompanied by another man.
"Who is this man?" asked Song Jiang.
"He is Hou Jian of Hongdu" (the modern Nanchang, Jiangxi province), replied Xue Yong. "He is an excellent tailor and can use the needle with great speed. He is a pupil of mine in the use of military weapons, and can use the stave and spear with skill. He is thin and also very light and therefore he has got the nickname 'Nimble Monkey.' He works at the home of Huang Wenbing. I asked him to come here."
Song Jiang was much pleased at this, and asked him to be seated for a conference. This Hou Jian was also a baleful star and could easily be induced to help them. Song Jiang asked him many questions about the roads to the village of the Wuweijun and the latest news about Jiangzhou.
Xue Yong said that Prefect Cai Jiu had had a roll call of the army and the people and found that over five hundred had been killed. He did not know how many had been wounded. An urgent messenger had been dispatched to the capital to report the matter. The town gates were now open only in the morning, and all men passing in or out were very closely interrogated. Everybody knew that the Prefect Cai Jiu did not wish to injure elder brother but had been egged on by Huang Wenbing to put you and Dai Zong to death. Since you two had been rescued from the execution ground the whole town was in a nervous state, and everybody was expecting further trouble. "I went to the village of Wuweijun to spy where I happened to see this man Hou Jian and when I talked matters over with him I knew all the particulars."
"Well, Hou Jian, how do you know these?" asked Song Jiang.
"From my youth I have had lessons in the military arts from Xue Yong," said Hou Jian, "and cannot forget his kindness to me. A few days ago Huang Wenbing sent for me to go to his house and make some clothes. I met Xue Yong on the street, and from him I knew your plans. I wanted to come here and report matters in detail. Now, Huang Wenbing has an elder brother, named Huang Wenye, and they are both of the same mother. Huang Wenye is a philanthropist, and is always repairing bridges and roads, redecorating the idols and providing food for the monks, and helping poor people in distress. The people in the town always call him Huang the Buddha. On the other hand, Huang Wenbing has a bad disposition, and is always trying to injure people. He has the nickname 'Stinging Wasp.' These two brothers live in two detached houses in a small alley near the North Gate. I had work to do at Huang Wenbing's house and one day I heard him say that the Prefect Cai Jiu had been cheated, but he had pointed out the deception, and had recommended the Prefect to kill the persons concerned. Huang Wenye then scolded his brother, saying, "You are again doing something that will injure other people. It is not your affair so why do you wish to interfere and injure these people? Heaven will see that your 'crows will come home to roost' very soon." The other day we heard of the affair at the execution ground, and Huang Wenbing went off to Jiangzhou to discuss measures with the Prefect, and so far he has not returned."
"How do their houses stand?" asked Song Jiang.
"They are close together," said Hou Jian, "with only a vegetable garden between them."
"How many people are there in Huang Wenbing's household?" asked Song Jiang.
"Altogether there are about fifty people," replied Hou Jian.
"Heaven tells me to take revenge," said Song Jiang, "and has sent this man to help me. I therefore appeal to all you brothers for your assistance."
"We will all go," the leaders replied. "We will kill these wicked people and assist in your revenge."
"I will deal with Huang Wenbing himself," said Song Jiang, "and I do not want you to injure any of the people at the village as they are not at fault. His brother Huang Wenye is benevolent so under no circumstances must he be injured for otherwise people would rightly abuse me. I have a certain plan and I hope that you will assist me in carrying it out."
All the brigand leaders said, "We will follow your orders."
"Then I will ask Old Mu to prepare for us about ninety sacks," said Song Jiang, "about one hundred bundles of faggots, five large boats, and two small boats. I want Zhang Shun and Li Jun to row the two small boats, while Zhang Heng, the Brothers Ruan, and Tong Wei will manage the five large boats and take with them good sailors. That is part of my plan."
"All the things you require are ready now," said Mu Hong. "and the people of this village are all good sailors. May I ask for further details of the plan?"
"Well, I want Hou Jian, Xue Yong and Bai Sheng to go to the Wuweijun village, and hide there secretly. About 2 A.M. tomorrow we will all reach the village and then release a pigeon with a whistle on its tail. When Bai Sheng hears that whistle he must ascend the wall, and display a piece of white silk to indicate the position of Huang Wenbing's house. Shi Yong and Du Qian will disguise themselves in the village as beggars, and when they hear the signal they must set fire to some house, and then run to the village gate and kill the gatekeepers. Li Jun and Zhang Shun must cruise about on the river in their boats, and wait there for further developments." When Song Jiang had explained his plans all the men concerned left at once to carry out their various duties. The cloth sacks were filled with sand, bundles of reeds and oil were got ready and placed on the boats. The brigands then armed themselves, and took their positions in the bottoms of the boats. The leaders were then divided up, and allocated to their seven boats. Zhu Gui and Song Wan were to stay behind, and got information as to anything that might occur in Jiangzhou. Tong Meng went in advance in a quick boat as a scout. That night all the boats reached the village without any difficulty.
It was the end of the seventh lunar month and the nights were cold. It was a bright moonlight night and the river was calm. The hills were reflected in the river, and even their green color was clearly shown in the water. The boats reached Wuweijun village about 10 P.M. where the bank of the river was covered with thick reeds. Tong Meng, the scout, soon came and reported that all was quiet in the village. Song Jiang ordered that the sand bags, the bundles of reeds, and some firewood should be taken near the village gate. Just then they heard the watchman in the village beating his drum indicating the end of the second watch. The leaders and men all moved near the village leaving only six men on the boats. When they were all assembled near the North Gate Song Jiang gave an order, and the pigeon was released. Soon they saw a bamboo pole on the wall with a white flag fluttering in the breeze. Song Jiang ordered that the sand bags be piled against the wall near the flag, and that the men climb over the wall. Bai Sheng was waiting for them on the wall and pointed out the house where Huang Wenbing lived.
Song Jiang inquired for Xue Yong and Hou Jian and Bai Sheng said that they were already in the house. He was also informed that Shi Yong and Du Qian were waiting near the village gate. Song Jiang then led his men down from the wall to the entrance of Huang Wenbing's house where he found Hou Jian hiding inside the gate. He summoned Hou Jian, and whispered to him, "Go and open the garden gate. Tell the men there to bring all the reeds, oil, and firewood inside. Xue Yong is to set fire to the whole pile and Hou Jian to knock at the door of the house and shout 'Your brother's house is on fire! We want to bring the boxes of his possesions here.'" Song Jiang then divided his men into two parts, one to watch the front gate and the other guard the back door.
Hou Jian carried out his instructions. The servants inside Huang Wenbing's house saw the flames, and at once opened the door. Song Jiang and his followers thereupon rushed forward shouting "Kill." They killed every person they met, and very soon there were over fifty dead men, but so far they had not seen Huang Wenbing. In the house were large stores of wealth which had been extorted from people from time to time, and these were now seized by the brigands and taken away.
When the fire broke out Shi Yong and Du Qian had attacked the gatekeepers and killed them. The neighbors seeing the flames were running with ladders and buckets of water to put out the fire. Shi Yong called out to them, "You people must go back. We are bandits from Liangshan Marsh, and have only come here to help Song Jiang to take his revenge and kill Huang Wenbing. This does not concern you, and you must not interfere. All go back home!" Many people did not believe this, and stopped to look on. But when they saw Li Kui, the "Black Whirlwind," approaching with an axe in each hand, they quickly retreated with their buckets of water and ladders with a shrill outcry.
In a street at the back were some soldiers who now came to help to put out the fire. Hua Rong shot an arrow at them, and Li Kui shouted, "Let those who want to die come forward." But without any hesitation the soldiers retreated.
Xue Yong was now inside the house, setting fire to all the rooms. Li Kui returned to the village gates and hacked them with his axes. The brigands all made their escape, and carried all the loot to the boats.
The people in the village had heard of the fight at Jiangzhou and dared not pursue the bandits.
Song Jiang followed his men to the boats, and was disappointed that he had not met Huang Wenbing.
The fire at the Wuweijun village illuminated the sky all red, and this could be seen in Jiangzhou where the prefectural *yamen* was soon informed of the incident. Huang Wenbing was staying in the *yamen* and when he heard the report he hurried to see the Prefect. "My village is in flames! I will go there, and see the remains." The Prefect gave an order for the town gate to be opened, and that an official boat be got ready. Huang Wenbing expressed his thanks and embarked at once. The red flames were reflected in the water. One of the boatmen said that the fire was near the North Gate. Huang Wenbing saw that this was true, and became much more afraid. When the boat was in the middle of the river he saw a smaller boat passing by, and another came towards the official boat. When quite close a big man on the smaller boat held a pole with a double-pronged hook, and called out, "We are going to Jiangzhou to report about the fire."
Huang Wenbing emerged from the cabin, and asked where the fire was.
The man replied that the fire was near the North Gate and that all the people in Huang Wenbing's house had been killed by bandits from Liangshan Marsh who had escaped with all the loot.
Huang Wenbing unvoluntarily heaved a deep sigh, and was almost frightened out of his senses. When the man heard this he drew the boats together with his hooked pole, and jumped on board the official boat. Huang was crafty, and knew at once that they were arresting him so he retreated through the cabin to the stern where he dived into the river. But he was face to face with a man who had dived from the other boat, and who seized him by the waist. He was brought to the side of the boat and was hauled on board and bound with a rope. The man who had captured Huang Wenbing in the water was Zhang Shun, the "White Fish," and the man who had used the hooked pole was Li Jun, the "Muddy Water Dragon."
The boatmen on the official boat all kowtowed and Li Jun told them that they were quite safe as he only wanted Huang Wenbing and that they could go and report to the Prefect Cai Jiu what had happened and tell him that at present the bandits would not trouble him any further. The men were awfully afraid, and went off at once with their boat. Huang Wenbing was on the smaller boat and was taken at once to Old Mu's village. The boats with the loot had arrived there already, and the loot had been unloaded on the bank. Song Jiang and the leaders were pleased to hear of the arrest of Huang Wenbing who was taken to the village. All the leaders assembled near the guest hall where there was a willow tree. Song Jiang stripped the clothes off Huang Wenbing and bound him to the tree trunk. Song Jiang ordered a servant to bring a large pot of wine and offer a drink to all the leaders. This having been done Song Jiang cursed the prisoner.
"Huang Wenbing, you rotter! I had no enmity towards you so why did you try to harm me, and incite the Prefect several times to kill both me and Dai Zong? You have studied books of the sage so why did you do this vile thing? I had not killed your father so why have you insisted on putting me to death? You have the same mother as your brother Huang Wenye and yet he always acts benevolently, and is called Huang the Buddha. Therefore last night I saw to it that he be quite free from any harm. You have a bad reputation; you fawn on the rich and influential, and make presents to them; you oppress good people. No wonder that the people call you the 'Stinging Wasp.' But today I am going to take away your sting."
"I know that I am at fault," said Huang Wenbing, "and request a quick dispatch."
"You donkey!" shouted Chao Gai. "You will soon be dead! If you had only known beforehand what will happen today you would have repented of your crimes before this."
"Who will help me to execute him?" asked Song Jiang.
Li Kui jumped up and said, "I will cut him to pieces. He is very fat, and I think it is better to roast his flesh over the fire."
"Splendid!" said Chao Gai. "Bring a sword and cut him up into small pieces. Get a fire ready for the roast and we will also have some wine to appease the enmity of our worthy brother."
"You want a quick death," said Li Kui, "but I will kill you by slow degrees." Taking the sword he cut Huang Wenbing's leg and then cut slices off other parts and placed them over the fire to roast. At last he cut open the breast and taking out the heart placed it in boiling water to provide a restorative for drunkenness. When the leaders and brigands saw this they all saluted Song Jiang who knelt down to them and then they all did likewise. They then asked whether he had anything to say.
"I was only a clerk, and had no ability," said Song Jiang, "but I have always been trying to make the acquaintance of heroes. I remained poor and uninfluential and therefore could not do much entertaining of friends. I was branded and banished to Jiangzhou and when passing Liangshan Marsh declined the offer of Chao Gai to join you heroes there, because my father had given me definite orders to the contrary. But Heaven favored me and on my journey I happened to meet many fine heroes at Xunyang River. While drunk I wrote some extravagant poetry, which endangered the life of Dai Zong. You gentlemen were not afraid of 'entering the tiger's den and the dragon's pool' in order to save our lives. You all united to help me to get revenge. But we have now committed a great crime, and made rows in two cities, and it will certainly be reported to the Emperor. I cannot help, therefore, but seek refuge with you at Liangshan Marsh, but I do not know whether you would now allow me to do so. If you are willing we will depart today, but if anyone is unwilling let him follow his own desires. If you are afraid of the consequences of what we have done then any delay will only make matters worse."
Interrupting him Li Kui jumped up and shouted, "We must all go! If there is anyone who will not go I will chop him in two with my axe."
"You talk wildly," said Song Jiang, "our brothers here must go willingly or not at all."
Many of the leaders said, "We have killed many soldiers, and have upset the whole district so that it will undoubtedly be reported to the capital. Troops will be dispatched immediately to attack us. If we do not go with you to Liangshan Marsh where else can we go for safety?"
Song Jiang was much pleased and thanked them all for their decision.
That day Zhu Gui and Song Wan were dispatched to Liangshan Marsh to report their plans. All the rest of the bandits were divided into five companies for the march and the loot was distributed equally for each company. Old Mu and all his family and servants loaded up their things to go with the brigands, and then set fire to all the buildings. We need not follow all the five bands of brigands but the leading band under Chao Gai had traveled about seven //on the third day when they came to the Huangmen Mountain.
While riding on horseback Song Jiang remarked to Chao Gai, "This mountain looks queer and hideous and I think there are large bands of highwaymen among it. We had better halt a little, and allow those behind us to catch up to us." Before Chao Gai could reply to this they heard the noise of gongs and drums being beaten at the foot of the mountain where the road passed.
"What do you think of that?" asked Song Jiang. "We must stop here and fight them when those behind arrive here."
Hua Rong took his bow and fitted an arrow to it. Chao Gai and Dai Zong held their halberds while Li Kui got both his axes ready to protect Song Jiang. They all galloped in front of their men. About five hundred brigands came into view with four leaders in front, one of whom shouted, "You made trouble at Jiangzhou, killed many soldiers there, looted Wuweijun village, and are now on your way to Liangshan Marsh. We have waited for you for a long time, and now if you will hand over Song Jiang to us we will leave you alone."
Song Jiang upon hearing this rode forward, dismounted, knelt down, and said, "I was wronged, and had no means for redress. But heroes came from all parts to save my life. I am not aware how I have offended you four heroes so I hope that you will forgive me."
The four men immediately dismounted threw aside their weapons, ran forward, and kneeling before Song Jiang said, "We have heard of the fame of Song Jiang, the 'Welcome Rain,' of Shandong, and have long expected to meet him. We heard of your imprisonment at Jiangzhou and after talking it over we decided to go there to rescue you from the prison. We first sent a spy to Jiangzhou and he returned and reported that you had already been rescued by a number of bandits who had taken you to Old Mu's home. Afterwards we heard that you had destroyed Huang Wenbing's house and looted all his things. We anticipated that you would pass this way, and have been waiting here for several days to meet you. We were afraid that our reports might not be reliable so we decided to challenge your men so as to make sure of seeing you. We hope that you will overlook our rough manner. We have been lucky in meeting you today. We have prepared a feast for you in our stronghold, and invite you all to come and stay with us for a few days."
Song Jiang was overjoyed and raised up the four men asking for their names in turn. The head man was Ou Peng, a Huangzhou man. Previously he had been a soldier, but finding his superior officer very unfair he had left, and become a brigand and had gained the nickname of the "Golden Winged Hawk."
The second was Jiang Jing of Tanzhou in Hunan. He had failed in the government examinations and had then studied military exercises and strategy. He was also very good at calculations on the abacus, and with the most intricate calculation he never made the slightest mistake. Because of this he was known as the "Marvelous Mathematician."
The third was Ma Lin, a Jinling man. He had been a man of leisure and could play on two metal flutes at the same time. He was so swift with the sword that over a hundred men could not get near him, and for this he had got the nickname "Iron Flute Immortal."

The fourth man was Tao Zongwang, and he was a Guangzhou (Henan) man. He had been a farmer and defended himself quite well with a hoe. He had got the nickname of "Nine Tailed Tortoise."
After the introductions the brigand servants offered a big jug of wine and two plates of meat. This refreshment was also offered to the men, and it took nearly two hours before they had all partaken when the second detachment of men arrived. They also took the feast of welcome and then they all proceeded up the mountain. Men were left behind to conduct the third, fourth, and fifth detachments of Chao Gai's men to the stronghold, and it was about half day before they all arrived. A great feast had been prepared for all the men, and during the feast Song Jiang spoke, "I am on my way to take refuge at Liangshan Marsh where I shall throw in my lot with Chao Gai. I do not know whether you four heroes are quite satisfied with this place or whether you would prefer to join our band at Liangshan Marsh."
"If you two gentlemen would accept our small services," said all the four leaders, "we should be delighted to join you."
Chao Gai was much pleased at this, and said that they would be heartily welcomed.
They stayed on the mountain for one day and the new recruits got all their things in order. On the following day Song Jiang and Chao Gai started off in charge of the first detachment as before, and the whole columns covered a distance of about seven //: The four new leaders formed the rear, and altogether they had about five hundred men in their detachment.
On the road Song Jiang spoke to Chao Gai, "I have in my life traveled far and wide, and met a great many dangers, but never have I been in the company of so many heroes. I now give up all my other thoughts in thinking but will follow you until death does separate us."
The band duly reached Liangshan Marsh. After several days of arranging matters a general meeting was held, at which Chao Gai requested Song Jiang to accept the position of chief.
"How can it be?" said Song Jiang. "You overlook that you have faced great risks in saving my life. Why should you ask me to take your position as chief! If you press me any further I should think of committing suicide."
"Why talk like that?" said Chao Gai. "If, in the first place, had you not faced great risk of death in order to save the lives of us seven men we should all of us have been dead long ago. You are our great benefactor. Who could accept the position if you do not?"
"My elder brother," said Song Jiang, "I should be ashamed to occupy the position as you are ten years my senior." He again and again urged Chao Gai to keep the leadership, and at last the latter took his seat with Song Jiang the second, Wu Yong the third, Gongsun Sheng the fourth.
Song Jiang now addressed the men, "We must not now make any distinction of meritorious service, so I will ask all the old leaders of Liangshan Marsh to take their seats on the left, and all the new leaders on the right. When future services are rendered, we will decide the position of each leader."
They all agreed to this and took their seats accordingly. There were altogether nine leaders on the right, and twenty-seven on the left.
During the feast Song Jiang explained in detail how the children's ballad at the Eastern Capital had been interpreted by Huang Wenbing so as to complicate Song Jiang himself. How the false letter conveyed by Dai Zong had been explained by Huang Wenbing who had strongly urged the Prefect to have both Song and Dai executed. "How could we escape death if you gentlemen did not rescue us?"
Li Kui jumped up and said, "My good elder brother! You justly answer the will of Heaven as announced by the boys in the street of the capital. You suffered from Huang Wenbing's ill-favor, but he suffered from the slashes of my sword. We are a strong band here so what have we to be afraid of? Our elder brother Chao Gai can now be made the Emperor of the Great Song Empire, and our elder brother Song Jiang can be the Emperor of Lesser Song. Wu Yong can be Prime Minister, Gongsun Sheng can be Minister of Education. We will form an army, attack the capital, and seize the damned throne. There we shall enjoy ourselves. Would it not be better than living on this stinking marsh?"
"'Iron Ox'!" replied Dai Zong, "you are talking nonsense. You cannot talk wildly here as you used to do at Jiangzhou. Here you should listen to our leaders and await their orders. You are not allowed to talk nonsense and interfere with the affairs. If you are still meddlesome, your head will be cut off as an example to the rest of our band."
"*Ai Ya! Ai Ya!*" exclaimed Li Kui, "if you cut off my head, how long it'll be before another head grows there? But I'll now confine myself to filling the neck with wine." All the assembled leaders laughed at this. During the next few days all the loot from Huang Wenbing's house and the presents sent by the Prefect Cai Jiu to his father Cai Jin were distributed equally among the brigands. On the third day, Song Jiang at a feast told the leaders that he wanted to ask leave to go to a certain place.

Spears and swords in forest dim,
Our hero will escape;
Excellent, service was prescribed,
By the mountainside.

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## Song Jiang Meets the Mystic Queen of the 9th Heaven & Receives 3 Heavenly Mystic Books in Circular Road Dead-End Village

"You have escorted me to this stronghold and feasted me for several days. I've been happy," said Song Jiang. "But I keep wondering about my old father at home. When Jiangzhou reports to the capital, the imperial court is sure to refer the matter to Jizhou, which will in turn instruct Yuncheng County to put pressure on my family as a means of forcing my arrest. There's no guarantee my father will be able to live through it. I've been thinking. If I could move him up here, I wouldn't have to worry. Would you brothers permit me?"
"This kind of matter is of great importance to all men," said Chao Gai. "I wouldn't have you stay here, revelling, while your old father at home is in difficulty. Of course we'll permit you. But our brothers have had several hard days in a row, and we haven't settled things in the fortress yet. Give us another day or two till we've checked our forces, and we'll go together."
"I could do that, only I'm afraid they'll start pressuring the family very soon. I'd better not delay. Anyhow, I don't want a lot of men. It would be best if I went secretly, alone. With the help of my brother Song Qing I can move my father up here during the night. Man or ghost, no one will know. If I went with a large party we'd only alert the local authorities and make the operation more troublesome."
"If anything should go wrong, there'd be no one to rescue you."
"I'd die willingly, for my father's sake."
Song Jiang insisted on leaving immediately. He wore a broad-brimmed felt hat, carried a cudgel, and hung a dagger at his waist. He went down the mountain, escorted as far as the Shore of Golden Sands by the various chieftains, who then returned.
He was ferried across the river to Zhu Gui's inn, and struck out along the road to Jizhou. He paused only to eat and drink, stopping at night and continuing again at break of day.
When he neared his village it was already evening, too late to go on to the manor. He spent the night at an inn and resumed his journey the following morning. But he reached Song Family Village too early, and he hid himself in a grove. When it was dark he walked up to the manor and knocked on the rear gate. Song Qing opened it. At the sight of Song Jiang he was astonished.
"Brother, why have you come home?" he exclaimed.
"To get father and you."
"They know here all about what you did in Jiangzhou. The county sends two constables every day to hang around and watch us. We're not allowed to leave. As soon as the documents arrive from Jiangzhou, they're going to arrest father and me and put us in jail until you're captured. There are nearly two hundred soldiers patrolling the neighborhood day and night. Don't delay another minute. Hurry back to Liangshan Marsh and beg the chieftains to rescue us."
Song Jiang broke into a cold sweat. He didn't dare enter the manor. He turned and hastened off in the direction of the mountain stronghold.
It was night, and the hazy moon shed little light. Song Jiang stuck to the small secluded paths. He had been travelling about a watch when he heard men shouting behind him. He looked back. A //or two away he saw the light of torches. "Stand where you are, Song Jiang," someone yelled.
He hurried on, "I wouldn't listen to Chao Gai," he thought, "and this is the result. Heaven be merciful and rescue me!"
In the distance were habitations of some sort, and he hastened towards them. The wind blew away the clouds, and in the bright moonlight Song Jiang could see the place clearly. He groaned. It was a desperate situation. For he recognized Circular Road Village. Surrounded by high mountains, with a stream at their foot, it had only this one road. Whether you went left or right within the village, you made a complete circle and returned to your starting point. There was no other way.
Song Jiang turned to retrace his steps. But the men behind had already blocked the road, their torches illuminating it as bright as day.
He plunged into the village and sought refuge. In a grove of trees he discovered an ancient temple. Pushing open the compound gates with both bands, he entered. There, in the moonlight, was a front and a rear building. He looked them over, but could see no place of concealment. Song Jiang was frantic. Outside, a man said: "He must be in the temple."
Song Jiang recognized the voice as Zhao Neng's. He had to hide, but where? The shrine, that was it. He pulled aside the curtain, climbed in, rested his club, and curled up behind the idol, not daring to breathe.
He could see torches entering the building, and pecked out. Zhao Neng and Zhao De, leading forty or fifty men, and all carrying torches, were searching the temple.
"I'm in a dead end," Song Jiang thought. "Spirits of the Nether Region, defend me!"
And the spirits answered his prayer. All the men passed by without examining the shrine.
"Heaven be praised," said Song Jiang.
But then Zhao De advanced towards the shrine with his torch, and Song Jiang thought: "They've got me, for sure."
The constable raised the curtain with his halberd and shone his torch high and low. Suddenly the torch smoked and a piece of soot fell in Zhao De's eye, blinding him for the moment. He dropped the torch to the floor, stamped on it, and extinguished the light. He went out of the building and spoke to the soldiers in the courtyard.
"The varlet's not in the temple. But there aren't any other paths. Where could he have gone?"
"Probably in that grove in the center of the village. He can't get away, Constable. This is Circular Road Village. There's only one road, in or out. On all sides are trackless forests and high mountains. Block the village exit and he can't escape even if he sprouts wings. As soon as it's daylight, we'll make a thorough search and nab him."
"Very well," said the two constables. They led their soldiers out of the temple.
"The spirits are indeed defending me," thought Song Jiang. "If I get away with my life, I swear I'll repair this temple and rebuild our family chapel. Oh, Spirits of the Nether Region, protect me!"
Even before he finished saying this, he heard soldiers outside the temple gate shouting: "Constables, he's here." Zhao Neng, Zhao De and their men hurried back.
"What rotten luck," thought Song Jiang. "I'm sure to be caught."
At the temple entrance Zhao Neng asked: "Where?"
"Look," said the soldiers. "Dirty hand prints on the gate. He must have pushed it open and gone inside."
"You're right. Search again—and carefully." ordered the constable. The men poured into the temple and began probing.
"My fate is against me," thought Song Jiang. "This time I'm finished!"
The soldiers pried everywhere in the two buildings. About the only things they didn't upend were the paving bricks. Again their torches brightly illuminated both the edifices.
"He's probably inside the shrine," Zhao Neng said to Zhao De. "You didn't search thoroughly enough. I'll look myself."
A soldier took his torch, Zhao Neng pulled the curtain aside, and six or seven men put their heads in. If they hadn't, nothing would have happened. But because they did, a gust of evil wind suddenly rose from within and blew out their torches, plunging the temple into darkness. They couldn't see a thing.
"That's funny," said Zhao Neng. "How does an evil wind come out of nowhere? The spirit must be in there. Our torches probably annoyed it. Let's go. We'll guard the village exit and search here again when it's daylight."
"We can't look carefully now, but at least we can poke around with our spears," said Zhao De.
"True," said Zhao Neng.
But as the two men moved forward, a huge gale arose from the rear of the building. Sand and gravel came raining down. The whole structure rocked on its foundations. A black cloud swallowed everything, an icy chill crept in. The men's hair stood on end. Zhao Neng recognized the danger.
"Get out, quickly, brother," he yelled to Zhao De. "The god is angry."
The whole party fled pell-mell. Several tumbled, a few twisted their legs. But they crawled to their feet and frantically bolted through the temple gate.
"Spare us," someone inside bleated. Zhao Neng went back into the compound. Two or three soldiers had fallen down the steps and their clothing had snagged in the exposed roots of some big trees. All their struggles couldn't free them. They had cast aside their halberds and were tugging at their clothes and begging for mercy. Song Jiang, still in the shrine, couldn't help laughing.
Zhao Neng extricated the soldiers and led them outside. "That's a very powerful spirit," the other men said. "You were messing around too much in there, and it sent its little demons after us. We'd better get down to the village entry and make sure that Song Jiang doesn't fly away."
"Right," the constables agreed. "If we hold that, we've got him."
The party marched off to the village entry.

Song Jiang, in the shrine, said to himself: "Although the louts haven't caught me, how am I going to get out of the village?" As he was racking his brain, he heard steps approaching on the rear portico. Song Jiang groaned. "Why didn't I leave here earlier?"
Two boys, clad in green, walked directly to the shrine. "Our Queen invites the Star Lord to speak with her," they said.
Song Jiang dared not utter a word. Again the boys addressed him.
"Come, Star Lord. The Queen invites you."
Song Jiang had not the courage to reply. The boys were insistent.
"Star Lord Song, do not delay. The Queen is waiting."
He heard sounds like the singing of birds. But they were not boys' voices this time. From beneath the idol's throne two girls, also dressed in green, emerged and stood before shrine platform.
Song Jiang was amazed. The girls were Earth Fairies. He heard them say. "Star Lord Song, the Queen awaits." He pulled open the curtain and came out. Their hair piled in spirals on their heads, the green-clad girls stood bent forward at the waist, each with palms together.
"Fairy maids, whence have you come?" Song Jiang queried.
"Our Queen has instructed that we invite the Star Lord to the palace."
"You're making a mistake. My name is Song Jiang. I'm not any 'Star Lord.' "
"Of course we're not. Please come along. Star Lord. The Queen is waiting."
"Which queen? I've never met her. How dare I go?"
"You'll understand when you get there. No need to ask."
"Where is the Queen?"
"In the palace to the rear."
The green-clad girls led the way. Song Jiang followed them out of the building. They went through a door in the comer of the compound wall. "This way, Star Lord," they said.
Song Jiang emerged into the open. The sky had a moon and was full of stars. A fragrant breeze rustled the leaves of the surrounding trees and bamboos.
"I never knew there was a place like this behind the temple," he thought. "I could have hidden here and saved myself all that fright."
He walked on, noting two long walls and tall pines on either side, each so thick that two arms couldn't meet around it. The path between was broad and rounded like a turtle's back.
"Who would have thought there'd be such a good road behind that ancient temple," he mused.
Before they had gone another //: he heard the babbling of a brook. Arching over it was a blue stone bridge with vermilion railings. Along the banks were exotic flowers and strange grasses, hoary pines and dense bamboos, green willows and enchanting peach trees. The brook, emerging from a stone fissure, flowed beneath the bridge like tumbling silver. like rolling snow.
They crossed to the other side. Between two rows of grotesque trees was a large star gate with a vermilion lintel. Passing through it, Song Jiang saw a palace ahead. "I was born here in Yuncheng County, but I never heard of this place." He thought, halting in astonishment.
His green-clad escort urged the "Star Lord" on. They led him through the palace gates. He was confronted by a magnificent courtyard flanked on either side by crimson-pillared esplanades draped with embroidered curtains. Directly ahead was a huge hall, festooned with glowing candles and lanterns.
He followed his guides step by step across the courtyard to a moon terrace. Several boys and girls on the steps of the hall hailed him. They were also dressed in green.
"Star Lord, invited by our Queen, please enter."
As Song Jiang mounted the steps of the hall, he trembled and his hair stood on end in spite of himself. The flagstones were of carved dragon and phoenix. The green-clad youths parted a curtain of a dais, went in and announced: "Star Lord Song awaits without."
Song Jiang kowtowed and prostrated himself before the steps of the dais. "I am only a lowly commoner who has never seen the Celestial One. I beg your Heavenly mercy and forgiveness," he said.
A voice inside invited "Star Lord" Song to be seated. Song Jiang didn't dare lift his head. Four green-clad youths raised him up and helped him to an embroidered pouffe. He sat down awkwardly.

"Roll up the curtain," a voice commanded.
Four youths rolled up the pearl-beaded curtain and supported it with a gold hook.
"I trust you've been well since last we parted?" said the Queen.
Song Jiang rose and again kowtowed. "A servile mortal such as I dares not gaze on your sacred visage."
"Since you are here, Star Lord, there is no need for excessive courtesy."
Only then did Song Jiang venture to lift his head and look. The hall glittered with gold and jade, and was lit by dragon lanterns and phoenix candles. Boys and girls dressed in green on either side held jade wands and pennants and waved large fans. In the center on a bejewelled carved couch sat the Queen. Dressed in filmy golden silks, she held a scepter of white jade. Her eyes were lovely, her countenance divine.
"Please come forward, Star Lord," she said. She ordered that wine be served.
Two green-clad girls poured wine into a jade cup from an intricately carved pitcher of gold. The first girl handed the cup to Song Jiang. He rose, unable to refuse, and accepted it. Facing the Queen, he knelt and drank. The fragrant liquor drifted to his brain like ambrosia, seeped into his heart like dew.
Another girl offered him a platter of fairy dates. Trembling lest he commit some gaucherie, he picked up a date with the tips of his fingers, ate it, and concealed the pit in his hand. Again the green-clad girl poured wine, and again he downed it at one go. The Queen signalled to refill his cup. This was done, and he drank once more.
A fairy maid offered the dates. He ate another two. In all, he imbibed three cups of fairy wine and consumed three fairy dates. He was feeling a little drunk and feared that he might behave improperly.
"I have no capacity for wine," he said. "I hope the Queen will excuse me from taking more."
"Granted," said the Queen, "since the Star Lord is not a drinker. Bring the Three Heavenly Books and present them to the Star Lord."
A youth went behind a screen and brought out a jade tray on which were Three Heavenly Books wrapped in gold silk and proffered them to Song Jiang. The packet was five inches long, three inches wide, and three inches thick. Song Jiang was afraid to open it. He kowtowed, accepted the packet reverently, and put it in his sleeve.
"Star Lord," said the Queen, "we have given you Three Heavenly Books. You must act according to Heaven's behest and show complete loyalty to the emperor. When you become an official, you must defend the country and bring peace to the people. Expel wickedness and pursue justice. Never forget this."
Song Jiang promised, and again kowtowed.
The Queen continued: "Since your heart is not yet pure nor your duties done, the Jade Emperor, as a punishment, has banished you to earth temporarily. Soon you will return to Heaven's Purple Palace, so in no way relax your efforts. If because of new sins you are condemned to Hell I shall not be able to save you. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with these three books. You may show them to the Occult Star, but to no other. After you have completed your mission, burn them. They are not to be left on earth. Remember all I have said. Today, I am a divinity and you a mortal. We cannot remain together. You must go back now, quickly."
The Queen instructed her fairies to send him on his way. "We shall meet again in fairyland's towers of gold and jade," she said.
Song Jiang thanked her, and followed some green-clad girls out of the hall and through the Star Gate. The fairy maids saw him as far as the stone bridge.
"You had a fright not long ago and would have been captured if our Queen hadn't intervened," they said. "Tomorrow, when it is light, you will escape. Oh, look, Star Lord. Two dragons are playing in the water."
Song Jiang leaned over the rail and gazed. Two of the girls gave him a sudden push. Song Jiang let out a yell, and landed in the shrine. He had been dreaming.
He crawled to his feet and looked out. The moon was at its zenith. Song Jiang estimated it to be around the third watch. In his hand he found three date pits. And in his sleeve was the silk-wrapped packet. He opened it up. Sure enough, there were the Three Heavenly Books. He could still taste the fragrant wine.
"A strange dream," he mused. "It seemed so real. Yet if it was only a dream, what are these Heavenly Books doing in my sleeve, why can I still taste the wine, what are these date pits doing in my hand? And how can I remember every word? If it wasn't a dream, why have I fallen into this shrine? The answer is obvious. The spirit here is extremely potent, and manifests itself very powerfully. Which one is it, I wonder?"
He raised the curtain to let some light in. On a throne carved with nine dragons sat a beautiful female figure, exactly the same as the Queen.
"She called me 'Star Lord,' " he said to himself. "Evidently I was no ordinary person in my previous life. These Three Heavenly Books will certainly be useful, and I will not forget the divine instructions. Those green-clad fairy maids said: 'Tomorrow, when it is light, you will escape.' The sky is already turning light. I'm getting out of here."
He groped around until he found his cudgel, brushed the dust off his clothes and cautiously emerged from the building. He walked along the left esplanade and went out of the temple. He looked up at the signboard over the gateway. In letters of gold, it read: "Temple of the Mystic Queen."
Song Jiang placed his fingers on his forehead and bowed his thanks. "How lucky. So it was the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven who gave me those Heavenly Books! And she's saved my life, as well. If only I can see that divine face again, I surely will repair this temple and add more halls. I prostrate myself, wise and beneficent Queen, and beg your protection."
He advanced stealthily towards the village entry. He hadn't gone very far when he heard wild shouts in the distance. "Trouble again," he thought, and halted. "I can't get out of the village, and if they see me, they'll take me. I'd better hide behind those trees on the side of the road."
No sooner had he slipped into his place of shelter than several soldiers, knives and lances in hand, ran frantically in his direction, panting and stumbling. "Mystic Spirit, save us," they cried.
"Very peculiar," thought Song Jiang. "They're supposed to be waiting to nab me at the village entry. What are they doing here?"
A moment later Zhao Neng tore down the road. "Spirit," he bawled, "Spirit, protect me!"
"Why is that oaf in such a tizzy?" Song Jiang wondered.
Then he saw their pursuer. He was a huge fellow, stripped to the waist and bulging with fantastic muscles. In his hands were two great battle-axes.
"Halt, you friggin pricks," the man roared.
As he drew nearer, Song Jiang recognized him. It was none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind.
"This must be a dream," said Song Jiang. He dared not emerge.
In front of the temple Zhao Neng tripped over the exposed root of a pine tree and fell to the ground. Li Kui caught up, put a foot on his back and raised a big ax. Two other bold fellows also raced up, pushing their broad-brimmed felt hats back onto their shoulders. Each held a halberd. The first was Ou Peng, the second Tao Zongwang. Li Kui, afraid that they would compete with each other for the honor of capturing the knave at the expense of fraternal loyalty, swung his ax and cleaved Zhao Neng from head to chest. Then he chased after the fleeing soldiers, killing left and right, as they ran in all directions.
Afraid to come out; Song Jiang watched as three more gallants appeared. The first was Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon, the second was Shi Yong the General, the third was Hell's Summoner LiLi. The six men conferred.
"We've killed all those rogues," they said, "but can't find brother. A fine state of affairs!"
"There's a man standing behind that pine," cried Shi Yong.
Only then did Song Jiang step forward. "Thank you, brothers, for rescuing me again," he said. "How can I ever repay you?"
The six were overjoyed. "Brother is here," they exclaimed. "Leader Chao Gai must be told at once."
Shi Yong and LiLi hurried off to report.
"How did you know where I was?" Song Jiang asked Liu Tang.
"When you left the mountain Chao Gai and Wu Yong were uneasy. They told Superintendent Dai to go down and find out what happened to you. But Chao Gai still was worried. He set out with me and these companions as reinforcements. He was afraid you'd get into trouble. On the road we met Dai. 'Two thieving donkeys are after brother to arrest him,' he told us. Chao Gai was very angry. He instructed Dai to go back to the stronghold and say that only Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and a few others were to remain and hold the fort. All the rest were to come out and search for you.
"Then we heard someone say: 'Song Jiang has been run to ground in Circular Road Village.' We slaughtered all the scoundrels patrolling the entry, except for the few who fled into the village. Brother Li Kui gave chase, and we followed. We never thought we'd find you here."
Before he had finished speaking, the others arrived. When all had assembled, Song Jiang thanked them, every one.
"I urged you not to go down the mountain alone, brother, but you wouldn't listen," said Chao Gai. "You nearly lost your life."
"My concern about my father gave me no rest. I had to go and fetch him."
"This will please you, then. I sent Dai Zong with a few others after your father and brother. They've already arrived at the stronghold."
Song Jiang was delighted. He kowtowed to Chao Gai. "For such beneficence, brother, I would die willingly."
All mounted horses and left the village. Song Jiang touched his fingers to his forehead, gazed up at the sky and thanked the Mystic Queen for her protection. He vowed that one day he would prove his gratitude.
The column proceeded back towards Liangshan Marsh. Wu Yong and the other chieftains holding the fortress were at the Shore of Golden Sands to greet them. They went together to Fraternity Hall.
"Where is my father?" Song Jiang asked eagerly.
Chao Gai sent a man to fetch Squire Song. Not long after, the old man arrived, riding in a sedan-chair which his son Song Qing the Iron Fan was helping carry. Everyone assisted him down and escorted him into the hall.
Song Jiang was overjoyed. Smiling broadly, he kowtowed. "Forgive your unfilial son for causing you such alarm."
"Those two wretched constables sent men. They were waiting only for the documents to arrive from Jiangzhou so that they could bring your brother and me into court. When I heard that you were at the rear gate, there were eight or nine soldiers in the thatch-roofed hall up front. Then they disappeared, but we didn't know what drove them away. Finally, at the third watch, over two hundred men opened the manor gates, put me in a sedan-chair, and told your brother to load up our valuables and set fire to the manor. I had no chance to ask why, and they brought me here."
"We owe it all to these brothers that we are together again."
Song Jiang told Song Qing to kowtow and thank the chieftains. Chao Gai and the leaders also kowtowed to Squire Song. Cows and horses were slaughtered and a feast was laid to celebrate the reunion of Squire Song and his sons. The whole day was spent in rejoicing. The next day they feasted again, and chieftains, large and small, joined in the merrymaking.

On the third day Chao Gai once more gave a banquet of celebration. Gongsun Sheng was suddenly reminded of his old mother in Jizhou. It was a long time since he'd seen her, and he wondered how she was. During the drinking, he rose and addressed the chieftains.
"I am deeply grateful for the kindness which you have always shown me. Flesh and blood couldn't be treated better," he said. "I have been happy since I followed our leader Chao Gai here up this mountain. But I have never once gone home to see my old mother. And I imagine my old Taoist teacher also misses me. I wish you would grant me a leave of four or five months to visit them. It would please me mightily, and then I wouldn't have to worry about my old mother."
"I recall your saying that your mother has no one to look after her in your home in the north," replied Chao Gai. "Since you ask, we can't refuse, though we hate to part. When you're ready, we'll see you off."
Gongsun thanked him. All drank freely that day, and in the evening retired to their quarters to rest. The following morning a farewell feast was given for Gongsun Sheng.
He resumed his garb of a wandering Taoist priest, tied one pouch at his side, another over his middle, hung a pair of swords across his back, a coir hat over his shoulders, and held a tortoise shell fan in his hand. The chieftains went with him down the mountain. At the pass a feast was laid and they drank in farewell.
"We cannot keep you, sir priest," said Chao Gai, "Don't disappoint us. Though we didn't want to let you go, we couldn't very well refuse since it's a question of your mother. But we expect you back in a hundred days or so. Don't break your word."
"How could I? You leaders have been so considerate of me for so long. I'll go home, visit my Taoist teacher, see to it that my mother is well provided for, and return."
"Why don't you take a few men with you?" asked Song Jiang. "They could help bring your old mother back. Then you could look after her all the time."
"My mother has always liked peace and quiet. She can't stand excitement. That's why I don't dare bring her to this place. We've got a few fields and some slope land. She can manage. I only want to make sure that she's all right, then I'll rejoin you."
"In that case, so be it. We'll be looking forward to your early return," said Song Jiang.
Chao Gai offered Gongsun gold and silver on a platter for his journey.
"I don't need all that," he said. "Just enough for expenses."
But Chao Gai forced him to take half. Gongsun put the money in his side pouch, placed his palms together and bid the chieftains farewell. After crossing from the Shore of Golden Sands, he set out in the direction of Jizhou.

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As the chieftains prepared to go back up the mountain they were startled to see Li Kui burst into tears.
"What's the trouble, brother?" Song Jiang hastily inquired.
"A fine life," bawled Black Whirlwind. "This one goes to fetch his pa, that one goes to see his ma. Iron Ox didn't pop out of some friggin hole in the ground!"
"What is it that you want?"
"My old mother is home alone. My older brother is a hired hand. How can he support her? I want to bring her here so she can have a few years of happiness."
"You're absolutely right," said Chao Gai. "We'll send a few men with you to escort her back. An excellent idea."
"It can't be done," Song Jiang interjected. "Brother Li is too irascible. If he goes home, he's sure to get into trouble. Even if we send men with him, that won't be any good either. He's too hot-tempered. He'd quarrel with them on the road. Besides, he's killed a lot of people in Jiangzhou. Everybody there knows Black Whirlwind. Notices calling for his arrest must have been circulated. Of course his native village has been alerted. He's so fierce-looking, he sticks out like a sore thumb. And his home's quite far away. If anything should go wrong, we might not get the news. Better wait till things quiet down, brother Li. There will still be time."
"You're not fair, brother," Li Kui cried impatiently. "You fetched your father here and he's happy. Should my mother stay in her village and suffer? Do you want Iron Ox's belly to burst with rage?"
"Calm yourself, brother. We'll let you go, but on three conditions."
"What're they?" Song Jiang told him, counting the conditions off on his fingers. And as a result, Li Kui with his earth-rocking, heaven-shaking hands fought mountain-climbing, chasm-leaping tigers.

Now when Song Jiang at the feast told everyone that he wanted leave of absence to go down the mountain, he explained: "Here we are, we've been feasting for days and we're having a fine time, but I have no idea how things are going with my old father at home. Since Jiangzhou have informed the Grand Preceptor, in my home district of Jizhou they will be obliged to take action and get the Yuncheng authorities to persecute my family and hold them responsible for my capture. I am afraid my father's life is at risk. I long to see him and, with your approval, I would like to go home to fetch him and bring him here to the mountain, to put an end to my anxieties."
Chao Gai said: "My dear brother, this is an important question of moral obligation. Certainly it is not right for us to be enjoying great pleasures while at home your father is suffering. How could I do other than agree with you? The only thing is, since we've all been celebrating for some days now, none of the troops here are prepared. Why not wait a couple of days till we can equip a detachment and go together with you to fetch him?" "In itself, waiting a few days is nothing," Song Jiang said, "but I fear that the Jiangzhou authorities will send orders to Jizhou to persecute my family, that's why the matter brooks no delay. However, there's no need to send a big force, I shall go alone in secret, and my younger brother, Iron Fan, will help me bring my father here with the utmost haste. That way, not a soul need know in the village. If we took a big troop of men the whole district would certainly be alerted, which could defeat our purpose."
Chao Gai said: "But supposing you should meet with some mishap along the way, there'd be no one to help you out."
Song Jiang said: "For the sake of one's father, even death is worth risking." Nothing they could do would persuade him to stay, he was determined to leave at once. He chose a broad-brimmed hat, picked up a short staff, buckled on a sword, and went down the mountain. The other leaders accompanied him as far as Golden Sands Landing before returning.
After crossing and landing at the Crocodile's inn, Song Jiang took the highway to Yuncheng. On the way he stopped only for food when he was hungry, for drink when he was thirsty, resting late and starting early. Finally he found himself approaching the Song village. Since it was late in the day he went to stay the night at an inn. Next day he hurried on to the Song village, but then it was too early, so he lay low in a wood till evening. When he went and knocked on the back door, Iron Fan came to open it. The sight of his brother appeared to give Iron Fan quite a shock. "Why have you come home?" he said in consternation.
Song Jiang replied: "I have come to fetch father and you."
"But everyone here knows now about that business of yours in Jiangzhou. The district authorities have sent two inspectors, they come looking for you every day. We are under house arrest, we can't move anywhere. They're only waiting for the official order from Jiangzhou in order to arrest us both and throw us into prison until they catch you. There are several hundred soldiers on patrol, night and day. You mustn't waste any time. Go back to Mount Liang and ask all the leaders to come to rescue us."
Song Jiang was so upset by this that he broke out in an icy sweat. Not daring even to enter the house, he simply turned around and left. He raced back along the road towards Mount Liang. It was dark and the moon was misty, so it was hard to find his way. He deliberately chose the smallest and most isolated of roads to travel on. When he had been going almost two hours, he heard shouting behind him. He turned and listened. The pursuit was only about half a mile behind. He could see a forest of torches blazing in the night and could hear shouts of "Don't let Song Jiang get away!"
"If I'd only listened to Chao Gai, this would never have happened!" he thought as he hurried on. "May heaven pity me and come to my aid!"
He could see a place of some kind ahead of him; it was still distant, so he just kept doggedly on. In a little while the wind swept away the thin clouds and the moon emerged fully. Then he knew exactly where he was. It made him cry out in dismay and he nearly fainted. The place where he found himself was known as "Dead-End Village." It was surrounded in fact by high mountains and steep perpendicular cliffs; a deep river ran along the bottom of the valley and there was only the one road. Once you were in this place, search as you might on one side or the other you'd find nothing but the one road, with no other way in or out. When Song Jiang realized where he was, he would have liked to turn back, but escape was blocked by his pursuers. The torches blazing behind him made it almost like broad daylight and he had no choice now but to keep on towards the village and hope to find somewhere to hide. After skirting the edge of a wood he saw an old temple. Here's what he saw:

*The walls are in ruins, the roof sags: green moss decks the painted walls of the two galleries, rank grass fills the flower beds. The arms are broken off the demons at the gate and their ugliness no longer impresses; in the main hall the god sits bareheaded in defiance of etiquette. The spider has spun his web on the altar, the mole and ant makes their nest in the incense burner. The fox sleeps nightly in the urn for burning paper offerings, the bat rests undisturbed on the screen before the image.*

Song Jiang pushed open the door of the temple and aided by the moonlight entered and looked for a place to hide. He examined the main hall, front and back, but it afforded no hiding-place. He was beginning to panic. Just then he heard voices outside: "Why not have a look inside this temple, chief?" He recognized one of the voices as Zhao Neng's. Desperate for somewhere to conceal himself, his eye fell on a niche or shrine intended for an image. He drew back the curtain, crouched down and hopped inside. He found a place for his cudgel and then huddled on the floor, scarce daring to breathe. As he did so, the light of the torches came inside the building.

When he managed to peep out, he saw Zhao Neng and Zhao De with a troop of fifty men holding torches which they shone about to illuminate every corner of the temple. "This time I have reached a dead end," he thought to himself. "All I can do is pray for the protection of the spirits and the gods' compassion." When after a while they started to leave, one after another, and no one had looked in the shrine, Song Jiang said to himself: "It's a miracle!" But at that very moment, Zhao De approached the shrine with his torch and shone it inside. "Now they've got me for sure!" Song Jiang thought. Using the handle of his halberd in the other hand Zhao De lifted the curtain. As he moved the torch to illuminate the shrine from top to bottom, the smoke swirled about and a speck of black soot fell in Zhao De's eye, blinding him. He threw the torch down and extinguished it with his foot. He left the building, saying to the soldiers: "He's not in the temple — there's no other road, where the devil can he have got to?"

"He's probably hiding in the trees by the village," they said. "But there's no fear he'll get away. This place is called 'Dead-End Village,' the only way out is back along this road. There are high mountains and woods all around, and there's no way up. All you've got to do, sergeant, is block the approach to the village. Then he can grow wings and fly up into the sky, if he likes, but he can't escape. When it gets light we can search the village real good and we'll have him."

"Right!" said Zhao De, and began to depart with his troops.

"Really the gods must be on my side," Song Jiang was just thinking. "If I get out of this alive, I must repair this temple and build a new ancestral hall, it can only be that the spirits protected me."

He had hardly finished this thought when a soldier in front of the temple door shouted: "Sergeant, he's here!"

The Zhaos and their men came racing back.

"What cursed luck!" Song Jiang thought, "Now I'm bound to be caught!"

"Where is he?" Zhao Neng demanded, arriving at the door.

"Take a look at these two handprints in the dust on the temple door, sergeant," said the soldier. "He must have shoved it open just now and dodged inside."

"You're right, we'd better go over it again real thorough."

The whole lot came in again and started searching. Song Jiang was thinking: "What a stupid fate mine is, this must mean I'm finished!"

They searched the place from top to bottom, they did everything but turn over the bricks. After a period of searching and shining the torches around, Zhao Neng said to his brother: "He must be in that shrine there. You didn't search it carefully enough just now. I'm going to have a good look." A soldier held up a torch, while Zhao Neng raised the curtain with one hand and half a dozen heads peered in. But before they could focus properly on everything inside, a gust of foul air burst from within and blew out all the torches, swirling about and obscuring the whole temple, so they even couldn't see one another. "My God!" said Zhao Neng. "Usually when you get a foul wind like this it means there's a god in there, who wants to rebuke us for shining the light around, that's the reason why this kind of foul wind arises. We'd better go. We'll simply set up a block on the road and wait for daylight before searching any more."

Zhao De said: "But we still haven't searched properly inside the shrine. We'd better give it a poke with a halberd."

"You're right," said Zhao Neng.

But as the two of them were about to proceed, the mysterious wind began to blow again from the back of the temple, and it blew till the sand flew up and stones began to move, it came surging forth, causing the roof of the temple to creak to and fro and a black cloud to descend enveloping everyone. The cold draught froze them and their hair stood on end. Zhao Neng didn't at all like this turn of events. "Let's get out brother, the god is angry," he yelled to Zhao De. Everyone fled from the temple in confusion. They didn't stop running till they were outside the gate. Some fell head over heels, others sprained their ankles, but they all scrambled up again and fled for their lives. Someone could still be heard inside the temple compound screaming for mercy. Zhao Neng went back in to look and found one or two soldiers had fallen inside the entrance courtyard and got their clothing caught in the roots of a tree, so that struggle as they might they could not break free. They had thrown away their pikes and were tugging at their clothing and screaming for help. Song Jiang listening in his hiding-place could barely restrain his laughter.

Zhao Neng freed the men's clothing and hustled them out of the door. Several of the soldiers in front said: "We said this god was too powerful, but you lot would stick around in there and you only set those demons off. We'd best go and set up the road block so he can't get away." Zhao Neng and Zhao De both agreed: "That's right, we only need to guard the road securely on every side." With this they all went off to the entrance to the village.

Meanwhile Song Jiang in his hiding-place was assessing his fortunes: "It's true I haven't been caught, but how am I ever going to get out of here?" Just at that moment, as he was vainly racking his brains for a solution, he heard someone moving about outside. "Oh, no! Trouble again!" he thought. "Why didn't I get out before?" However, it turned out to be only two young acolytes in green who stopped beside the shrine and said: "We have instructions from Holy Mother to invite the Heavenly Prince to speak with her." Song Jiang was much too wary to make the slightest sound in answer. So the acolytes repeated: "Holy Mother invites you, Heavenly Prince, please to come with us." Song Jiang still did not dare speak. Again the acolytes said: "Prince Song, please do not delay, Holy Mother has been waiting a long time for you." From the fluting tones Song Jiang knew that these were not men speaking, so he raised himself from the floor of the shrine and looked out. What he saw was two young female disciples dressed in green standing beside the altar. He had quite a shock, because they looked so much like ceramic images.

When they said again: "Prince Song, Holy Mother invites you," he drew aside the curtain and stepped right out. The two acolytes, each with her hair tied in the shape of a shell at the back, bobbed up and down and made him a kowtow. Here is what he saw:

*Their skin is like pearls, their hair green, they have white teeth and shining eyes. As they flutter about, not a speck of dust sullies their purity, they radiate heavenly grace and harmony. Styled like a conch shell, their hair rises up like a mountain peak. The phoenix slippers are elegant as lotus petals. Their robes are of dark green, interwoven with silver thread, they are girt with purple sashes and gold clasps. Such perfection of elegance and refinement suggests messengers from heaven.*

Then Song Jiang asked: "What is the reason for this heavenly visitation?"

"We come at Holy Mother's behest to invite the Heavenly Prince to her palace."

"You must be mistaken," Song Jiang said. "My name is Song and my given name is Jiang, but I'm not a heavenly prince."

"How can we be mistaken? Please come now, Holy Mother has long awaited you."

Song Jiang said: "Who is this Holy Mother? I've never even met her, how can I presume to visit her?"

"If you come, then you will meet her. Don't ask so many questions."

"Where is she?"

"In her residence at the back."

With the disciples in green leading the way, Song Jiang left the temple. They passed through a gate in the corner of a wall that extended behind and to one side of the temple, and the acolytes said: "Prince Song, this is the entrance." Song Jiang followed them through the gate and looked about him. The sky was bright with stars and the moon shone, a soft breeze whispered and all around were luxuriant groves and bamboo thickets. "So this is what there is behind the temple," Song Jiang thought. "If I'd only known, I wouldn't have hidden in the temple and had to suffer all those shocks."

Where he was walking there were banks on either side planted with great pine trees, so large a man could not encircle them with his arms. In the flat space between was a broad avenue curved like the back of a tortoise. Song Jiang kept thinking to himself: "I had no idea there was such a fine road behind the temple."

When he'd followed the acolytes for less than half a mile, he heard the tinkling of a running stream. Ahead was a bridge of black stone with a red rail on either side. The banks were enlivened with exotic flowers and rare grasses, dark green pines, luxuriant bamboos, jade-green willows, and delicate apricots, whilst under the bridge the water tumbled like scattered silver or billowing snow, gushing from the mouth of a stone grotto. After passing the bridge, two rows of unusual trees appeared and in the middle a tall red star gate. He passed through and lifting his eyes beheld a palace:

*The red door is studded with gold nails, there are green tiles and carved eaves. Winged dragons twisting round the pillars play with a bright pearl; paired phoenixes on the screen outshine the sun. The surrounding walls of clay are stained vermilion, and all around the palace flowers bloom among stately willows. The hall is of great splendour, and within it the light from an auspicious lantern casts lovely shadows. Wafted through windows arched like a turtle's back sweet breezes lightly stir the yellow gauze; beyond the curtains tied back with delicate ribbons, the pale moon hangs silently in a sky like purple velvet. If this is not the abode of some heavenly being, it must be at least the dwelling of an earthly queen.*

"I was born in Yuncheng," Song Jiang thought, "yet I never knew this was here." He stood there nervously, not daring to go on. The acolytes urged him forward. They led him on through the gates of the palace into the wide forecourt. The two side galleries had vermilion pillars, hung about with embroidered curtains, the great hall in the centre was bedecked with lanterns and candles. The acolytes led him step by step from the courtyard to the platform. Before the steps leading up into the hall were more acolytes in green who said: "Holy Mother welcomes you, please enter." When he arrived at the main hall Song Jiang was trembling all over and his hair was standing on end. He stopped on a brick stairway depicting dragon and phoenix. The acolytes passed through the curtains and the order was given out: "Heavenly Prince Song please approach the throne." On reaching the screen before the throne, Song Jiang bowed low and prostrated himself, saying: "Your humble servant is not worthy. I can only pray for mercy and beg you to favour me with your graciousness."

From behind the screen came the order: "Be seated, Heavenly Prince."

But Song Jiang dared not so much as lift his head. So four of the acolytes raised him and placed for him a seat of fine porcelain, and he was obliged to sit. Order was given for the screen to be rolled back. Several acolytes rushed to roll up the spangled curtain, securing it with golden hooks.

Holy Mother now asked: "I trust you have been well since we parted?"

Song Jiang rose to his feet and bowing said: "Your humble servant dares not look at Your Holiness."

"Now that you are here there is no need for further ceremony."

Now at last Song Jiang ventured to raise his eyes. He saw the throne all glittering and bright, adorned with lanterns and candles. On either side were young green-clad girl acolytes holding sceptres and tablets and servant girls with flags and fans. In the centre, on a throne embellished with precious stones and dragons, sat Holy Mother.

Holy Mother spoke again: "Please approach, Heavenly Prince." She ordered the acolytes to bring wine. Two junior acolytes filled jade cups from a bottle of "Rare Flower" wine. A senior acolyte offered a cup of wine to Song Jiang. Not daring to refuse, he rose to his feet, took the jade cup in his hands and, fixing his eyes on Holy Mother, knelt and drained it. The wine tasted superb and seemed to suffuse his being with a glow of understanding, as if he were bathed in heavenly dew. Another acolyte now appeared with a plate of celestial dates which she offered to Song Jiang. He was terrified of committing a breech of decorum, so he took one with the very tips of his fingers and then having eaten it kept the stone in his hand. The acolyte poured another cup of wine and presented it to him, and again he was obliged to drink. Holy Mother ordered another cup after this, so another was poured and offered and again he drank. The dates were offered again and he ate two. Altogether now he had drunk three cups of wine and eaten three dates. He began to feel the slight flush of intoxication. He was terrified of getting drunk and losing his composure, so he bowed and said: "Your humble servant has no strong head for wine and begs to be excused."

"If the Heavenly Prince cannot take wine, he may desist," was the reply from above. "Fetch me the three mystic books. I shall give them to the Heavenly Prince."

An acolyte slipped behind the screen and returned bearing a jade tray with a package wrapped in yellow silk and containing the three mystic books. They were presented to Song Jiang. When he looked at them, they were as though five inches long, three inches wide and three inches high. He did not dare open them but bowed and took them reverently and bestowed them in his sleeves.

Holy Mother spoke: "Heavenly Prince, I give you these three books that you may always perform heaven's will. Be ever a steadfast proponent of righteousness, preserve your land and people, shun evil and pursue justice. I have a four-line mystic verse for you. Commit it to memory and have it always with you, do not ever forget it."

Song Jiang bowed again and expressed his eagerness to receive the mystic verse. Holy Mother intoned:

Chance lodgings will bring many joys,
*Scaling the heights will hold no fears.*
*Against foes without, bandits within*
Many a valiant deed is done.

When he had heard it, Song Jiang again bowed reverentially. Holy Mother spoke again: "Because evil desires are not entirely eradicated from your heart, and your journey is yet unfinished, the Jade Emperor has sentenced you to remain here below for a space. But in a while you will mount again to the Purple Mansions. Meanwhile you must not be in any way remiss. If for some further transgression you are again sent down to the underworld, I shall be unable to save you. These three books you must study attentively and with profit. This knowledge is to be shared only with the Occult Star, it is not for the eyes of others. After your success you must burn them, they must not remain in the world. Commit their injunctions to memory. At present there is a gulf between heaven and earth. It would not be right for you to tarry here long, you must return quickly." So saying, she ordered the acolytes to take him back with all speed. "We will again meet here in the jade halls of the golden palace on another occasion."

Song Jiang thanked Holy Mother and followed the disciples who led him out of the palace and through the star gate as far as the stone bridge. There they said: "The Heavenly Prince has just had a fright. But for the Holy Mother's protection you would have been caught. But when daylight comes you will undoubtedly be delivered from your predicament. Do you see the two dragons playing in the water beneath the bridge?"

Song Jiang leant on the rail and looked over. He did indeed see two dragons playing in the water, but just then the acolytes gave him a push and with a loud cry he fell … and found himself in the shrine. It had all been a magic dream.

He pulled himself to his feet and looked around. The moon was high, he guessed it to be around midnight. When he felt in his sleeves, he found three date stones and the package, which he took out and examined. It contained indeed the three volumes of the sacred books. And he could still taste the wine on his tongue, too.

"This is a very strange dream," he thought. "It is like a dream and not a dream. If it was a dream, how do the sacred books come to be here in my sleeve? And the taste of wine in my mouth and the date stones in my hand? And I remember exactly what was spoken, I haven't forgotten a word. So perhaps I wasn't dreaming. Certainly I am here in the shrine now, it's as if I was catapulted here. The explanation must be quite simple. It must be that this goddess is so potent she can manifest her divine power in this manner. Only I wonder which goddess it was?" He pulled aside the curtain in order to see. On the carved throne sat a beautiful lady, exactly like the one in the dream. Song Jiang thought: "This Holy Mother insisted I was a heavenly prince. It looks as if in a previous life I must have been someone of some importance. These three tomes will surely be useful. I still remember the mystic four-line verse she gave me. The acolyte said, 'When daylight comes you will undoubtedly be delivered from your predicament.' It's getting light already, I'd better be going."

He felt about him till he laid hands on his cudgel, brushed the dust off his clothes, carefully descended from the shrine and made his way via the left-hand gallery to the front of the temple. When he looked up he saw an ancient sign with four gold characters inscribed on it: "Temple of the Mystic Lady." Song Jiang joined his palms and prayed: "Heaven be praised. Of course it was the Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven who gave me the three books and preserved me from death. If ever again I am allowed to see the sun, I shall certainly return and restore the temple. I entreat her divine mercy to defend and protect me." After giving thanks, he set off cautiously, heading for the entrance to the village.

He was only a little way from the temple when he heard a tremendous hullabaloo occurring some way ahead of him. "This is no good," he said to himself. "I'd better wait for a bit, I obviously can't get out now. If I go forward I'm bound to be caught. The best thing will be to hide behind this tree at the side of the road."

When he'd slipped behind the tree, he saw a bunch of soldiers approaching in a disorderly rout, out of breath and trailing their swords and spears, all frantically shouting: "Heaven save us!"

Watching from behind his tree, Song Jiang thought: "Strange. They were supposed to be blocking the way out of the village, waiting to catch me. Where are they charging off to?" The next minute Zhao Neng also appeared, shouting as he ran: "We're done for!"

"What is it that's scared him like that?" Song Jiang wondered.

Then he saw a huge fellow chasing behind. On the top half of his body there was not a stitch of clothing, his immense physique was totally exposed. He was waving a pair of double-edged axes and shouting: "Don't let the bastard get away!" If it was not clear in the distance, there was no doubt when he got nearer: it was Iron Ox.

"Am I dreaming?" Song Jiang wondered, still not daring to come out of hiding.

When Zhao Neng reached the temple he tripped over the root of a pine tree and crashed to the ground. Iron Ox caught up with him, planted a foot on his back and raised his axe. He was already about to strike when two more pursuers appeared behind him, their felt hats resting on their shoulders, each wielding a halberd. The senior of these two was Golden Wings, the junior was the Nine-Tailed Turtle. When he saw them Iron Ox, fearing that in defiance of all the rules of brotherhood they might rob him of his glory, chopped Zhao Neng in half with one tremendous blow down the middle that opened up his whole chest, and then raced away to massacre more of the fleeing troops, who were running in all directions.

Behind these, three more heroes could now be seen, doing great destruction: in front the Red-Haired Devil, second Shi Yong, and third the Executioner. All six now paused to confer: "Well, we've routed those bastards, but we still haven't found our brother Song Jiang. What can we do now?" Suddenly Shi Yong shouted: "Who the devil is that, hiding behind that bloody pine tree?"

Song Jiang at last saw fit to reveal himself: "You have just saved my life," he said. "How can I ever repay you?"

They were immensely relieved to see him. "There you are!" they said. "We must go and tell leader Chao at once!" Shi Yong and the Executioner both rushed off.

"How did you know to come here to rescue me?" Song Jiang asked the Red-Haired Devil.

The latter replied: "When you first went down the mountain, Leader Chao and the Professor were anxious. So they told the Magic Messenger to follow you and find out where you were. But Leader Chao still could not rest easy, so he asked me and the others to come and back you up, as he feared something might go wrong for you. On the way we ran into the Magic Messenger, who said, 'Two bloody fools are chasing our brother.' Leader Chao was furious. He sent the Magic Messenger back to the mountain to tell the lot who stayed behind, that's to say the Professor, Taoist Gongsun Sheng, the Ruan brothers, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, the Crocodile and the Daytime Rat, to look after the defence of the stronghold, and told everyone else to come and help look for you. Some one said they'd followed you to Dead-End Village. We killed all the blighters who were blocking the approach to the village, there's no one left there. There was only these few who fled into the village. Iron Ox went after them and we followed. We were afraid you weren't here…."

Before he could finish, Shi Yong arrived with Chao Gai, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Tamer, the Pill Monger, the Magic Calculator, and the Magic Flautist. The Executioner also arrived with the White-Water Dragon, Mu Hong, the Pilot, White Eel, Mu Chun, the Ape, Magic Hand and the Craftsman. This great band of heroes all converged. Song Jiang thanked all the leaders. Chao Gai said: "I implore you brother not to go down the mountain on your own again. You refused to listen to me once more and look what troubles resulted."

Song Jiang said: "My friends, this was all on account of my father. I was intensely worried, I simply could not sit still. It would have been quite impossible for me not to come and fetch him."

"I have news that will make you happy, then," Chao Gai said. "I already told the Magic Messenger to take Skyscraper, the Door-God in the Clouds, Short-Arse, Whitey, and the two Tong brothers and fetch your father and the rest of your family. They should be in the mountain retreat by now."

Song Jiang was overjoyed to hear this and thanked Chao Gai, saying: "After this great favour you have done me, I could die now without regret!"

Chao Gai and Song Jiang, both equally happy with the turn of events, now mounted horses and rode with the others out of Dead-End Village. Song Jiang put his hand respectfully on his forehead as he rode and turning his eyes heavenwards, gave thanks to the gods for their protective power and prayed that he might come again some other day to fulfil his vow. There is an old song which directly describes how Song Jiang's righteousness and honour obtained heaven's grace:

When chaos reigns and fortune's overthrown
*Heroes establish an order of their own.*
*In Shandong now a hopeful dawning pricks;*
*The four great stars are grown to thirty-six.*
*Above Yuncheng an auspicious air's observed;*
*This was the spot for Song Jiang's birth reserved.*
*In youth the annals and classics are his passion;*
*Grown up, he turns to charity and compassion:*
*His are all the virtues of the righteous;*
*The Mystic Lady adds to them her scriptures.*
*Roaming the world, with heroes he oft converses,*
*And suffers many an ill ere his luck reverses.*
*To the Marshes of Mount Liang he'll then retire,*
And raise a host that will expiate Heaven's ire.

So now the whole company left Dead-End Village and returned to the Marshes of Mount Liang. The Professor led the defenders of the camp out to Golden Sands Landing to meet them. They all then went to the assembly hall and formally greeted each other. Song Jiang anxiously inquired: "Where is my father?" Chao Gai requested Squire Song to come out, and in a little while Iron Fan appeared, resting one hand on a mountain sedan which was carrying Squire Song. Everyone helped the Squire down from the sedan and escorted him into the hall. Song Jiang's heart leapt at the sight and he broke into a delighted smile. "You have had too many shocks, father, I have not been a good son to you, I should never have allowed you to suffer these things."

Squire Song said: "It's all the fault of those two dreadful Zhao brothers. They sent people to watch us every day, waiting for the order from Jiangzhou so they could arrest us and clap us into prison. When we heard you knocking on the back door there were already eighty or ninety soldiers in the thatched hall in front. Then they disappeared and we didn't know what had frightened them away! In the third watch two hundred or more men opened the gate and bundled me into that sedan and carried me off. They told your brother to pack our belongings and set fire to the manor. Naturally I couldn't wait to know what was going on. They brought me here."

Song Jiang said: "The fact that our family is reunited here today is entirely due to the valour of our friends here." He told his young brother to express thanks formally to all the leaders. When Chao Gai and the others had all paid their respects to Squire Song, cattle and horses were slaughtered and a grand feast was organized in honour of Song Jiang's reunion with his father. They were all quite drunk when they parted that night. The celebrations continued next day and everyone, great and small, had a good time.

On the third day, Chao Gai had also prepared a feast in honour of Song Jiang's father, when Taoist Gongsun Sheng was suddenly reminded of something which stirred him deeply. His thoughts had turned to his old mother in Jizhou. It was long since he left home and he had no idea how she was. So whilst they were all busy drinking, Gongsun Sheng suddenly stood up and addressed the leaders as follows: "I have to express my deep gratitude to all this brave company for having so long looked after me and shown me such great kindness. But since the day this poor Taoist came with our leader Chao Gai to the mountain, a time filled indeed with feasting and pleasure, not once has he been back home to visit his old mother. My religious teacher will also, I fear, be anxiously awaiting me. I would like therefore to make a visit to my home town, bidding you all farewell for some three or four months, after which I shall return and be with you again. This would fulfil my dearest wish and ensure that my poor mother does not have to wait in vain."

Chao Gai said: "I always listen to what you say, father. Your mother up there in the north has no one to look after her. Now that you tell me this, how can I refuse you? Only it's so hard to part with you. If go you must, just wait till tomorrow so we can send you off properly."

Gongsun Sheng thanked him. They got drunk again that day before the evening ended and everyone went to bed. Early next morning a feast was arranged below the pass to bid Gongsun Sheng farewell.

Gongsun Sheng had dressed in his previous fashion as a wandering Taoist, with a pouch attached to his belt and a bag tied at the waist, a pair of fine swords slung on his back, a hat of palm bark hanging on his shoulders and a fan shaped like a tortoise shell which he held in his hand. Thus equipped he went down the mountain. All the leaders accompanied him and there was a farewell celebration below the pass where everyone raised a cup in his honour. After the first round Chao Gai said: "If we cannot persuade you to stay, father, please do not break faith with us. I part with you most unwillingly, but for the sake of your respected mother we cannot prevent you. After a hundred days I hope the crane will deign to return to this humble abode. Please do not fail to keep your word."

Gongsun Sheng said: "After you have all treated me so kindly for so long, how could I ever break my word to you? I will go home and visit my religious teacher and make proper arrangements for my poor mother, then I will return to the mountain retreat."

Song Jiang said: "Why not take someone with you, father? Then you could bring your mother here to the mountain, so you could look after her all the time."

Gongsun Sheng said: "All her life my mother has loved peace and quiet, she cannot stand shocks. That's why I wouldn't like to bring her. At home we've a little farm on the hillside, my mother manages it well enough by herself. I just want to go and visit her, then I'll be back with you again."

Song Jiang said: "In that case, look after yourself. I just hope you will soon make us happy with your return."

Chao Gai brought out a tray of gold and silver as parting gift and Gongsun Sheng said: "That's far too much. All I need is a little for travelling expenses."

Chao Gai persuaded him to take half. He tied it in his pouch, bowed low, said farewell, crossed from Golden Sands Landing and set off for Jizhou.

The rest were dispersing and were about to return up the mountain when suddenly Iron Ox let out a great cry and burst into tears. "What ever is the matter?" Song Jiang hurriedly asked him. "Fuck it all!" he said between sobs. "This one goes to fetch his dad, that one goes to see his mum, but you'd think Iron Ox simply came out of a hole in the ground!"

Chao Gai asked: "But what do you want?"

"I've got an old mother who's alone, too. My elder brother works on someone else's farm, how can he keep her and make her happy? If I could go and get her and bring her here so she can be happy for a while, that would be really good."

Chao Gai said: "Then let it be so. I'll send some others with you to help bring her back, it's entirely reasonable."

"Impossible!" Song Jiang said. "Our friend Li has a most difficult character. If you let him go home he's sure to get into trouble. If you send anyone with him that won't do either. Since his temper's like a blazing fire, he's bound to clash with someone along the way. He killed lots of people in Jiangzhou. It's not for nothing you know that they call him the Black Whirlwind. Anyway, is it likely the authorities haven't acted already and sent the order for his arrest there? Just look at you, Iron Ox! Your very appearance is wild and dangerous. If something goes wrong, it's a long way off, how can we know about it? You'd better wait a while and when you know everything is quiet you can go, that'll be time enough."

But Iron Ox said impatiently: "You're not such a patient man either. When you wanted to fetch your father you went dashing off down the mountain. If my mother is suffering there in the village because of me, it breaks my heart to think."

Song Jiang said: "Don't be so hasty. If you really want to go and fetch your mother, then you should accept three conditions. If you do, we'll let you go."

Iron Ox said: "Tell me what they are then." On his fingers, Song Jiang listed the 3 conditions. And it was from this that Iron Ox...

Put forth the hand that shook heaven and earth;
And fought the fearsome tiger in the mountains.

WHILE dining one day Song Jiang addressed the bandit leaders as follows: "I am greatly indebted to you for saving my life and receiving me on your mountain. We have been feasting merrily here now for several days, but I do not know how my father is feeling at home. As a result of the affair at Jiangzhou, I expect that instructions have been sent to Yuncheng County for the arrest of my father and family. In that case the worst may happen to him, but I have no information here about it. I think I had better bring my father here, and then I shall no longer be anxious about him. Would you gentlemen allow me to go on that important business?"

"This is an important matter relating to the affection between son and father," said Chao Gai. "We are all enjoying ourselves here so how could we allow your father to be in misery at home? Of course we must allow you to go home. But we have recently had a busy time, and we have not yet quite fixed up our quarters here. Within two days, however, we can summon a band of soldiers to go to bring your father here."

"It sounds all right to wait for a few days," said Song Jiang, "but I am afraid that a summons has already been dispatched from Jiangzhou for the arrest of my father. The sooner I go the better it will be. There is no need for many men to go with me, because I can go secretly, and bring my father here without a single person getting to know about it. If I took many men on such an expedition the people would be startled, and afraid, and it would be difficult to do the business."

"Brother, if you travel alone you would have no assistance in case of trouble," said Chao Gai.

"Shall I die for my father's sake I would not regret it," said Song Jiang.

They would not agree to let him go that day, but as Song Jiang was determined they at last gave him a felt hat, a sword, and a stick, and accompanied him down the mountain where he departed by himself.

He crossed the lake, and started on the road to Yuncheng County, and when not far from that place he stayed one night at an inn. The next morning he arose early, and arrived at the village quite early. But as it was daylight he hid in a wood for the nightfall when he went to his village. When he knocked at the door of his father's home the door was opened by his brother Song Qing who was startled to see him and hurriedly spoke, "Elder brother, why have you returned?"

"I have come to take both you and my father away," replied Song Jiang.

"Everybody here knows of your affair at Jiangzhou," said Song Qing. "The magistrate sends two Inspectors here every day to see that we do not leave, and as soon as a dispatch arrives from Jiangzhou we shall be arrested, and locked up in prison. We shall wait there until you are arrested. Both day and night there are about two hundred soldiers patrolling near our house. You must go at once to Liangshan Marsh, and ask the brigands to come here immediately to rescue our father."

When Song Jiang heard this he was startled, and had a cold sweat all over his body. He dared not enter the house, but at once departed on the road to Liangshan Marsh. That night the moon gave a dim light, and it was not easy to see the footpath. He decided to travel by small bypaths on his way back. He had only been walking for about two hours when he heard behind him the noise of many men. He turned round, and saw many torchlights about half a //away, and even heard one man shout, "Don't let Song Jiang escape." He went on his way and thought, "I am in trouble now because I did not listen to Chao Gai's advice. May Heaven have pity on me and rescue me." Just then the wind blew the clouds away, and there was bright moonlight. He recognized the place which he was approaching. It was a small village called Huan Dao, and was surrounded by high mountains which made it difficult in traveling. Below the mountain there was a stream, and a footpath which was the only way, wherever one approached the village. He wanted to avoid this place, and turned to find another way, but the men close behind prevented him from returning as near them the fields were well illuminated by the torchlights. He therefore went forward, now looking for a spot where he could hide. He came to a wood in which he noticed a temple, so he went there pushed open the door, and looked round inside for a hiding place. He could not find a suitable place in the buildings either at the front or the rear of the temple, and he was getting quite anxious. Just then he heard a man outside call out, "We must all go inside this temple," and he recognized the voice of Inspector Zhao Neng. In the room where he happened to be was a shrine so he raised the curtain and went inside the niche. There he crouched, trembling with fear. The men were now inside the temple, and were searching in the rooms with their torchlights. Song Jiang thought, "I am evidently in a tight corner, and must pray to the gods for protection." He did this and the men went away one after the other, without looking in his hiding place. "Heaven has had pity on me!" he thought, but Inspector Zhao De had not yet left the room, and he now raised the curtain, and looked inside the niche. Song Jiang was terrified. However there was so much smoke from the torchlights and dust on the curtain that Zhao De got some in his eyes, and he could not see clearly. He threw his torch on the ground, stamped out the flame, and then going outside said to his men, "The fellow is not in the temple. But where can he have got to as there is no other path?"

"He must be hiding in the woods," said a soldier. "He cannot escape from this place, and he cannot go up the mountain. We had better guard the road, and even he can fly he cannot get away. We can wait until daybreak, and then make a thorough search."

Inspector Zhao De agreed to this, and led his soldiers out of the temple.

"The gods have protected me. If they save my life this time I will certainly rebuild the temple and images," said Song Jiang to himself. He heard a soldier outside said, "He must be here." Zhao Neng, Zhao De, and the soldiers again entered the temple. Song Jiang was again trembling with fear.

"Where is he?" asked inspector Zhao Neng to the soldier.

"Inspector," replied the soldier, "look at these marks of hands on the door. They were made by somebody who pushed open the door to get into the temple."

"That is so," said inspector Zhao Neng. "We must make another careful search."

The soldiers again went all over the temple looking carefully, but without any result. The men then made a search in the room where Song Jiang was, but when they lifted the curtain in front of the niche there arose a big wind which blew out their torches, and made everything as black as night.

"What a strange thing!" exclaimed inspector Zhao Neng, "The spirit of the Goddess must be here, and she rebukes us in this way for searching in her temple. We must go away at once. We will guard the road till daybreak and then come back."

"But that is the only place in the whole temple that has not been properly searched," said Inspector Zhao De. He took a spear, and was stepping forward when there was a great gust of wind outside the temple which shook the building, and hurled stones about. A dark cloud now filled the room. It was very cold, and hair stood on end. They were horror-stricken. Inspector Zhao Neng gave the order for all to leave as the Goddess was offended. The men all left hurriedly, and when outside the temple they ran for their lives.

Song Jiang, although still afraid, could not avoid laughing at this. But he realized his position. "Those fellows have failed to find me, but they still guard the path." While he was still thinking he heard the steps of people approaching from behind. "Further trouble!" he thought. "I cannot get away!" Looking round the curtain he saw two little figures dressed in blue clothes who said, "We have been commissioned by the Goddess to invite you." Song Jiang dared not speak, and the figures continued, "You may now proceed." Song Jiang dared not move, and the figures repeated, "Star Lord Song, you need have no further suspicion. The Goddess has waited a long time for you."

Song Jiang knew by the tender tone of the voices that these must not be males so he emerged from under the chair of the idol, and looking out he was astonished to see that they were two young maids with blue clothing, resembling the two images made of mud. He heard a voice outside say, "Star Lord Song, the Goddess calls for you." He pulled the curtain to one side, and then saw that the two figures had hair twisted round on the tops of their head; they were standing in a proper, respectful attitude, and had their hands raised in saluting position. He asked, "Where are you two fairies from?"

"We have been sent here by the Mystic Goddess to invite you Star Lord to come to the Heavenly Palace," said Little Blue Clothes.

"There must be some mistake. My name is Song Jiang. I am not a 'Star Lord.'"

Little Blue Clothes replied, "Why mistake? You may now go. The Goddess has waited for you a long time."

"What Goddess?" asked Song Jiang. "I have not worshiped and known before so how dare I go now?"

"If you go there you will soon know her. You need not inquire any further about her," said Little Blue Clothes.

"Where does the Goddess live?" asked Song Jiang.

"In a palace at the back of this temple," replied Little Blue Clothes. The two figures moved off, and Song Jiang followed them. They left the temple, and turning a corner they came to a door in a wall. "Star Lord Song, you may enter through this door," said Little Blue Clothes. They entered, and Song Jiang looked round. The sky was studded with stars, and the breeze was fragrant. There were many trees and bamboos on all sides. He thought, "If I had known of this place before I would have come here to hide, and not have faced all those dangers in the temple." As he advanced he noticed that there were fragrant flowers on both sides of the path, with fir trees of huge dimensions. The path was very smooth, and bore markings like those on the back of a tortoise. He thought, "I did not expect to find such a delightful place behind the old temple." They had not gone very far when he heard the sound of flowing water, and soon came to a bridge made of blue stone, with red balustrades. They crossed this, and on both banks of the stream were numerous strange flowers and grasses; deep green firs; luxuriant bamboos; weeping willows; peach trees with red flowers. The water below was as pure as silver and snow, and evidently flowed from a cave in the rocks. Across the bridge was a long avenue of strange trees leading to a vermilion red starred gate. Upon entering that Song Jiang looked upward, and saw a palace. He thought, "I was born and brought up at Yuncheng County, but I never heard of this place." He was rather afraid, and dared not go any further. Little Blue Clothes urged him to go forward, and they entered the gate. There was a path, now, with dragons carved on the stones, and this led to the hall with large vermilion red pillars on the veranda and richly embroidered curtains hanging between the pillars. In the hall were many lanterns which gave a very brilliant light. Little Blue Clothes went up the dragon carved stone slope, on to the veranda where there were many other Little Blue Clothes who said, "The Goddess requests the Star Lord to enter." Song Jiang was now trembling with fear, and his hair was standing on end. The flags of the floor bore imperial designs of dragons and phoenixes.

Little Blue Clothes went inside the curtain and announced, "Star Lord Song Jiang has arrived, and is waiting outside." Song Jiang bowed his head and saluting said, "I am only a mortal from the earth and have not made the acquaintance of the gods. I pray for your pity, and that you will bestow grace upon me."

A voice inside the screen called out, "Request Song Jiang to be seated." He dared not raise his head. The four little blue-clothed maids brought an embroidered cushion, and he had to sit down quite uneasily. The voice inside again called out, "Roll up the curtain." The Little Blue Clothes did this, and hooked the curtain up. The Goddess spoke, "Star Lord, have you been well since we parted?"

Song Jiang replied, "I am only a mortal, and dare not even look at your divine person."

"As you are here you need not stand on any ceremony," said the Goddess. So Song Jiang raised his head, and saw a large hall filled with glittering articles of gold and jade, with lanterns of dragon and phoenix designs (i.e., imperial symbols). On both sides were Little Blue Clothes with audience tablets in their hands, and holding aloft banners, umbrellas, and fans. In the center of the hall was a couch ornamented with dragon designs and precious stones, and there sat the Goddess. She wore a dark crimson silk robe embroidered with golden threads, and was holding a jade scepter. She had admirable eyes, and a general fairy-like appearance. She said, "Star Lord, you are here by my invitation." She then gave an order for wine to be served, and Little Blue Clothes at once brought it in a precious porcelain vase ornamented with lotus flowers. The chief of the Little Blue Clothes offered a cup of wine to Song Jiang, who dared not refuse it. He arose, took the cup, and facing the Mystic Goddess he drank the wine. The wine was very fragrant, and he had the sensation of his heart being sprinkled with pure dew. Another Little Blue Clothes came forward with a tray of dates, and offered them to him. He was afraid of committing a breach of etiquette, so he tremblingly took just one single date off the tray, munched it slowly, and kept the stone in his hand when finished. Another cup of wine was now offered to him, and he again drank. The Mystic Goddess ordered that more wine be offered, and he drank the third cup. He also partook of two more dates in the same way as before. He now felt slightly intoxicated, and being more afraid of committing a breach of etiquette, he kowtowed, and said, "I do not drink much wine usually, and I request that you do not press me further with your delicious fragrant nectar."

The Mystic Goddess issued an order, "As the Star Lord does not want any more wine, do not offer it. Let the Three Heavenly Books be bestowed on him."

A Little Blue Clothes went behind a screen, and returned with a tray on which was a bundle made of imperial yellow silk containing the Three Heavenly Books which were offered to Song Jiang. The bundle was about five by three inches, and Song Jiang bowed in accepting it, and placed it in his sleeve.

The Mystic Goddess said, "Star Lord Song, I have given you three volumes of the Heavenly Books, and in future you can act as the agent of Heaven. In all affairs be honest and upright. In official affairs support the Emperor and bring peace to the people. When affairs are wrong rectify them. Do not forget this, but do not disclose the source of it to anyone."

Song Jiang bowed, and signified his obedience to these orders. The Mystic Goddess continued, "Because your mind is still depraved, and you have not yet completed the journey fit for your soul, the Jade Emperor has decreed that you must continue your life on the earth. Now live there a good life, and in a short time you will go to Heaven. If you do evil things you will go to Hell, and I cannot save you from that. Read, mark, and inwardly digest the truths contained in those three Heavenly Books. Nobody but the Secret Star may ever see those books. When you have completed your meritorious duties then burn the books so that those who come after you may not get them. Heaven and Earth are wide apart, and as you cannot stay here long you had better return to earth at once." She then ordered the Little Blue Clothes to conduct him back to the earth. Her last sentence was: "We shall meet again at the Imperial Palace in Heaven some other day."

Song Jiang thanked her, and then followed two Little Blue Clothes out of the Star Gate of the Palace. When they reached the blue stone bridge the Little Blue Clothes said, "You have had a shocking experience, but you were protected by the Mystic Goddess so that you were not arrested by the soldiers. It will soon be daybreak when all the danger will have passed with the darkness. Star Lord, look over the balustrades, and watch the two dragons playing in the water."
Song Jiang did this, and saw the dragons. While he was doing so the two Little Blue Clothes pushed him over the balustrades into the water and he suddenly awakened as though from a dream.
Looking round he saw that he was back in the temple and from the position of the moon that it was after midnight. He noticed that he had three date stones in his hand, and feeling inside his sleeve found the Three Heavenly Books there. He had a distinct flavor in his mouth of the fragrant wine. He thought, "What a strange dream! But was it a dream, or the real thing? If it was a dream, how about these books, date stones, and the flavor of wine? I remember so clearly all that she said, and can never forget it. But if I have been asleep all this time in the temple this idol must have great spiritual powers. What is the name of this idol, I wonder?" He raised the curtain, and looked at the idol. It was the image of a beautiful woman just like the Mystic Goddess he had seen. "As the Mystic Goddess called me 'Star Lord,' it is evident that in my former life I was a very important person. I must make use of these Heavenly Books, and not forget what I was told so clearly. The Little Blue Clothes said there would be no danger after daybreak, and as it is quite daylight now, I will go and look round." He stretched his hand into the niche, and took his short stick. He brushed the dust off his clothes, and then slowly walked on to the veranda of the temple. Looking upwards he saw a board over the door with the characters: "Taoist Temple of the Mystic Goddess." He saluted with both hands raised, and exclaimed, "What a pity! But as the Mystic Goddess of Heaven has saved my life and presented me with these Heavenly Books, I will certainly return here when I have made my fortune and will put all things in good condition. I hope that the Goddess will condescend to protect me in the future." This done he cautiously left the temple and made his way towards the entrance to the village. He had not gone far when he heard a great noise in the distance. He thought, "Another calamity! I will stay here. If I go forward they will arrest me. I had better hide in these bushes at the side of the road." He did this, and then saw a great many soldiers hurrying into the wood along the road out of breath, and calling out, "May the Gods spare our lives!" Hiding behind the trunk of a tree, he thought this was very strange. "Why have they come here to arrest me instead of waiting at the entrance to the village as they said they would?" Looking again, he saw inspector Zhao Neng who was also exclaiming, "Ye Gods! Ye Gods! Save me!" Song Jiang thought, "But why are they hurrying along and making such a noise?" Just then he noticed a big man in the rear who was evidently chasing the soldiers. His breast was bare, and he carried an axe in each hand. He called out, "Stop you damned pricks!" As he came nearer, Song Jiang recognized him as Li Kui, "Black Whirlwind." Song Jiang thought, "Is not this another dream? I cannot leave this spot however." Just then he saw that Inspector Zhao Neng had tripped over the root of a fir tree, and had fallen to the ground. Li Kui rushed forward, and planted his foot on inspector Zhao Neng. He raised his axe to deal the death blow. Just at that moment he saw two men after him—Ou Peng and Tao Zongwang—who were armed with halberds, and being afraid that they were coming to get credit for killing his prisoner he at once brought his axe down and chopped Inspector Zhao Neng in half. The soldiers seeing this scattered in all directions. Yet Song Jiang did not dare to leave his hiding place. He saw three other big men coming along, and when they were closer he recognized Liu Tang, Shi Yong, and Li Li. One of them said, "We have scattered the troops, but where is Song Jiang? What shall we do now?"
Shi Yong exclaimed, "Look! There is a man hiding behind that tree."
Song Jiang came out, and said, "I am much obliged to you brothers for again saving my life. How can I ever repay you?"
They were all much pleased at seeing him, and immediately Li Li and Shi Yong went off to inform Chao Gai.
"How did you know that I had come this way?" asked Song Jiang.
Liu Tang replied, "When you had left the mountain Chao Gai and Wu Yong were much worried about you and dispatched Dai Zong to find out what way you had gone. But even then Chao Gai was still anxious, and dispatched us to support Dai Zong in case you were in any danger. On the way we met Dai Zong who said that there were two Inspectors who were trying to arrest you. When Chao Gai heard this he was very angry and sent Dai Zong to Liangshan Marsh to get a large body of men to come and rescue you. When near here a man on the road told us that you had gone to this village. So we came here, and met the soldiers whom we attacked, and killed many of them. Li Kui chased many soldiers in this direction and we followed him. We had no idea that you were here."
Just then Shi Yong returned with about seven of the leaders and Chao Gai who were all pleased te see Song Jiang.
Chao Gai said, "You would not listen to my advice, but left the mountain unattended. If we had not arrived you would have been in a dangerous position."
"As I was anxious about my father's safety," said Song Jiang, "I could not stay."
"I will tell you now some good news," said Chao Gai. "I gave orders for Dai Zong and other leaders to get your father and brother, and they have escorted them to Liangshan Marsh."
Song Jiang was exceedingly pleased at hearing this, and saluted Chao Gai, "Sir, you have done me a great favor, and I shall never forget it in my life."
They then all mounted their horses, and returned from the Huan Dao Village. Song Jiang rode with his hands in a praying position as he was expressing thanks to the gods for his marvelous escape, and promising that he would make sacrifice later as a thank offering. They all duly reached Liangshan Marsh without any further incident. Upon reaching the stronghold Song Jiang met his father and brother at the main hall, and was exceedingly pleased to see them again. He said, "Father, I have been an unfilial son and caused so much trouble to you."
"That hateful fellow Zhao Neng came every day to see that we did not escape," said Old Song. "He was only waiting for a letter to arrive from Jiangzhou then he would have arrested us and taken us to prison. When I heard you knocking at the back door I knew that there were about nine soldiers in front of the house. But they disappeared afterwards. At midnight there came about a hundred men who forced open the gate of our farmyard. They forced me to enter a sedan chair, and told your brother to take with us some things. They then set the farmyard on fire. They took us here without allowing me to inquire who they were or where they were going."
"Today we are all united together again," said Song Jiang, "owing to the exertions of our brothers at this place." He then told his younger brother to salute and thank Chao Gai and the other leaders for their timely action. After this, Chao Gai and the leaders all paid their respects to Old Song. They then all sat down to a great feast to celebrate the union of the father and the son.
On the third day of this feasting Gongsun Sheng recollected that his mother was still at Jizhou in Zhili province, and that he had not heard from her for a long time. During a feast Gongsun Sheng stood up, and addressed the assembly, "I am grateful to you heroes for your kind treatment to me. Since my arrival here we have had many glorious feasts and much pleasure, but all this time I have never once been home to see my mother. I am afraid that my old Taoist teacher will be anxiously thinking of me so I request that you will allow me to leave you for five months so that I can go and see how things are at home."
"I have heard you say before that your mother was in the North," said Chao Gai, "but as you mention this matter today we cannot stand in your way. If you will wait till tomorrow we will arrange matters for your departure."
Gongsun Sheng thanked Chao Gai for granting leave. The next day a special farewell meal was arranged in honor of him. He wore his old Taoist priest robe, with a palm hat. On his back were two swords, and in his hand he carried a fly brush. All the leaders were assembled, and they all drank him toast.
Chao Gai finally spoke to him, "Do not break your promise about returning to us. We would rather not allow you go and we are only allowing you to go because of your anxiety about your mother. After a hundred days we shall be looking forward to your return."
"How dare I break my promise to you when you have treated me so liberally?" said Gongsun Sheng. "When I have visited my Taoist teacher and made proper arrangement for my mother I will return here at once."
"Would it not be better if you took some men with you so that you could bring your mother to our mountain here?" asked Song Jiang.
"My mother likes to live a quiet life," said Gongsun Sheng, "and hates any bustle. She won't agree to come here. We have fields and houses, and my mother prefers to stay and attend to those matters. I will just visit them, and then rejoin you here."
"In that case we will do as you wish," said Song Jiang. "We hope that it will not be long before we see you again."
Chao Gai presented Gongsun Sheng with a quantity of gold and silver to cover his traveling expenses, and the latter said, "I do not want so much." He only took half, and placed it in his belt. He then took his leave and departed.
He had just left when Li Kui, the "Black Whirlwind," entered the main gate crying loudly. "What is the trouble about?" asked Song Jiang.
"I am very angry," said Li Kui. "People bring their fathers here, while others go to see their mothers. I didn't come out from under the damned earth without father and mother!"
"Well, what is your idea?" asked Chao Gai.
"I have a mother at home," said Li Kui. "My elder brother works as a servant at another house, and cannot do much to support my mother. If I bring her here to enjoy her life I should feel much more contented."
"You are right," said Chao Gai, "I will let you have some men to go with you and bring your mother here."
"That won't do," said Song Jiang. "Li Kui has a bad temper, and should he return to his native village it would cause some trouble. If you sent men with Li Kui that would also not do as he has a fiery disposition, and would make some disturbance on the way. He killed many men at Jiangzhou, and everybody knows that he is the 'Black Whirlwind.' There will be a warrant out for his arrest. To look at his face would be enough to arouse suspicions anywhere. He would have a long way to go and in case of danger, how could we help him? You had better stay here until matters have settled down a bit, and then perhaps you could go in safety."
Li Kui was vexed at this, and said, "Elder brother, you are most unfair. You got your father to come here for safety, while my mother is to remain at home in misery. It makes me so angry that my stomach is quite upset."
"Younger brother, do not get vexed," said Song Jiang. "You can go if you will comply with three conditions."

The hand that shook mountains
Fought tigers with boldness.

**14**

**The False Li Kui Robs Lone Travellers on the highway Road; Black Whirlwind Iron Ox Kills 4 Tigers on Yiling Heights Mountain**

"You're going to Yishui County in Yizhou Prefecture to get your mother. The first condition is that you don't drink on the way," said Song Jiang. "You've got such a rotten temper no one dares go with you. So the second condition is that you go alone and fetch her quietly. The third condition is that you leave your two battle-axes here. Be careful during the journey. Go soon and return quickly."
"Nothing hard about those conditions. Don't worry, brother. I'll depart today and I won't tarry at home."
Li Kui tied up some belongings, hung a dagger at his waist, and took a halberd, and one large and four or five small silver ingots. He drank a few cups of wine and respectfully bid the leaders farewell, then went down the mountain and crossed at the Shore of Golden Sands.
Chao Gai and Song Jiang, after seeing him off, returned to Fraternity Hall and took their seats. Song Jiang was uneasy in his mind.
"Brother Li Kui is bound to get into a scrape," he said. "Is there anyone among us who comes from his home area? Someone who could go there and keep tabs on him?"
"Zhu Gui is an Yihui County man," said Du Qian. "They're from the same township."
"I forgot about that," said Song Jiang. "Li Kui hailed him as a neighbor when they met at White Dragon Temple."
Song Jiang sent for Zhu Gui. A young brigand flew down the mountain to the inn and fetched him.
"Brother Li Kui has gone home to get his mother," Song Jiang said. "Because he's nasty when drunk, we didn't ask anyone to go along. But we're afraid he'll get into trouble. I hear you're from the same parts. I wish you'd go and keep an eye on him."
"Yes, I'm from Yishui. My brother Zhu Fu has a tavern outside the west gate of the county town. Li Kui is from a hamlet called Dongdian East, which is part of the village of Baizhang. He has a brother named Li Da, a hired hand. Li Kui has always been fierce. He had to leave because he killed a man. He's been knocking about ever since and has never returned home. I can go easy enough, but I've no one to look after the inn. I haven't been back in a long time either. I'll be glad to see my brother again."
"No problem about the inn. I'll ask Hou Jian and Shi Yong to take charge while you're gone."
Zhu Gui bid the leaders farewell, went down the mountain, gathered some belongings, turned the inn over to Shi Yong and Hou Jian, and set out for Yizhou.
Song Jiang dined and drank with Chao Gai every day in the fortress, and studied the Heavenly Books with Wu Yong the Occult Star. Of that, we'll say no more.

*

Li Kui, on leaving Liangshan Marsh, travelled alone and reached the border of Yishui County. As promised, he did no drinking, and kept out of trouble. There's nothing to relate on that. Outside the west gate of the county town he saw people crowded around a proclamation board. He pushed among them and listened to a man who was reading aloud:
"... The first is main culprit Song Jiang, of Yuncheng County. The second is accomplice Dai Zong, former superintendent of the two Jiangzhou prisons. The third is accomplice Li Kui, of Yishui County, Yizhou Prefecture ..."
Li Kui seethed inwardly, his control melting away. A man hastened up from behind and locked him a restraining embrace.
"Brother Zhang," cried the man. "What are you doing here?"
Black Whirlwind turned his head and looked. It was Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile.
"What about you?" Li Kui demanded.
"Come with me and I'll tell you."
The two went to a nearby tavern outside the west gate of the town and sat down in a quiet room in the rear. Zhu Gui pointed his finger at Black Whirlwind.
"You're very rash. That proclamation offers a reward of ten thousand strings of cash for Song Jiang, five thousand for Dai Zong and three thousand for Li Kui. And you stand there looking at it! Suppose some sharp-eyed, quick-handed fellow hauled you off to the authorities? What would you do then? Because brother Song Jiang was afraid you'd quarrel, he didn't send anyone along. But he was also worried you'd get into trouble. So he ordered me to catch up and keep an eye on you. I left the stronghold a day later than you did but got here a day ahead. Where have you been all this time?"
"He told me not to drink any wine. That's why I couldn't walk very fast. How do you know this tavern? Do you live around here? Where is your house?"
"The tavern belongs to my brother Zhu Fu. I used to live in these parts. I was a travelling merchant. But I went broke and became a bandit in Liangshan Marsh. This is the first time I've been home."
Zhu Gui introduced his brother to Li Kui, and the tavern keeper treated them to wine.
"Brother Song Jiang instructed me not to drink. But now I've reached my home parts. If I drink a bowl or two, what's the friggin difference?"
Zhu Gui didn't venture to stop him, and they drank until the fourth watch. Food was then served, and Li Kui ate. Around the fifth watch, when the moon and the stars were fading and dawn was brightening the sky, he started for the village.
"Don't take the small path," Zhu Gui advised. "Follow the main road east from the big oak tree, straight to Baizhang. That will bring you into Dongdian East. Fetch your mother out and return quickly to the mountain stronghold."
"It's nearer if I go by the path. Who's got the patience to take the big road?"
"There are tigers along that path, and robbers who'll steal your bundle."
"They don't worry me." Li Kui put on his broad-brimmed felt hat, picked up his halberd, hung on his dagger, bid farewell to Zhu Gui and his brother, and headed for the village of Baizhang.
By the time he travelled a dozen *li* or so, the sky had gradually turned light. A white rabbit popped out of the dew-drenched grass and scampered before him. Li Kui gave chase. "That little animal has guided me a stage forward," he said, laughing.
Ahead was a grove of about fifty large trees. Autumn had just begun, and their leaves were a brilliant red. When Li Kui reached the edge of the grove a big fellow suddenly emerged.
"Shell out money for a safe passage, if you know what's good for you," the man shouted. "Otherwise I'll take your bundle."
Li Kui looked him over. His head was bound in a red silk kerchief, and he wore a padded gown of crude cloth. He grasped a battle-ax in each hand. A black substance was smeared all over his face.
"Who the hell are you, daring to play the robber in this place?" Li Kui roared.
"When you hear my name you'll tremble. I'm Black Whirlwind! Leave your money and your bundle and I'll spare your life and let you pass."
Li Kui laughed. "No such friggin thing. Who are you, oaf? Where are you from? How dare you use my name and play the fool here?" He charged, halberd in hand.
The man realized he had met his match and turned to flee. Li Kui stabbed him in the thigh, felling him to the ground, and planted a foot on his chest.
"Recognize me?"
"Master, spare your servant's life!"
"I am Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, a man among bold men. You've sullied my name, you lout!"
"My family name is also Li, but of course I'm not Black Whirlwind. You're so famous in the gallant fraternity, the very mention of your name frightens demons. So I borrowed it when I became a robber here. I stop only persons travelling alone. When they hear the words 'Black Whirlwind,' they drop their luggage and run. I've made some tidy profits that way, but actually I've never harmed anybody. My real name is Li Gui, and I live in that village yonder."
"You've got a friggin nerve, robbing and ruining my reputation. You've even copied my two axes. Well, I'll give you a taste of one of them." Li Kui raised the weapon.
"If you kill me, master, you'll be destroying two," Li Gui hastily cried.
Li Kui stayed his hand. "What do you mean by that?"
"I didn't want to become a robber. But I've a ninety-year-old mother at home, with no one to support her. So I've been using your renowned name to scare lone travellers and snatch their bundles. That's how I've been able to take care of her. I never really injured anybody. If you kill me, my old mother will surely starve to death!"
Although Li Kui was a fiend who killed without batting an eye, these words gave him pause. "I've come home specially to fetch my mother," he thought. "If I kill a man who's supporting his own mother, Heaven and Earth will not forgive me." And he said: "All right, knave, you can live." He let him up.
Still holding his axes, Li Gui dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
"Just remember that only I am the true Black Whirlwind," Li Kui cautioned him. "You're not to spoil my name from now on."
"Today my life has been spared. I'm going home and changing my profession. I'll never again use master's name here to rob."
"You're a filial son. Here are ten ounces of silver to give you a start in your new business."
Li Kui gave him a ten-ounce silver ingot. The man thanked him and departed. Black Whirlwind laughed.
"He fell right into my hands. Since he's a filial son, he'll have to change his occupation. If I killed him, Heaven and Earth would have been angry. I had to let him go."

With his halberd, he trudged up the mountain path. By mid-morning he was hungry and thirsty. All around were small trails, but there wasn't a tavern or restaurant in sight.
Then, in the hollow ahead, he saw a number of thatched cottages. As he hurried towards one of them, he observed a woman coming out from the rear. A wild flower was tucked into the bun of hair in the back of her head, and her face was rouged and powdered. Li Kui rested the butt of his halberd.
"Sister-in-law, I'm a traveller who's passing by. I'm hungry, but I can't find a tavern. If I pay you a string of cash will you give me food and wine?"
The woman saw how tough he looked, and she dared not refuse. "We haven't any wine," she said, "but I can cook some rice for you."
"That will do. Don't hold back. I'm friggin hungry."
"One measure will be plenty, I suppose?"
"Better make it three."
The woman lit the fire in the kitchen, washed the rice in the stream, and set it on to cook.
Li Kui went to the slope behind the house to relieve himself. He saw a man approaching stealthily around a bend of the mountain. Li Kui returned to the rear of the house. The woman, who was about to go up the slope to pick some vegetables, opened the rear door and saw the man.
"Husband," she called, "how did you hurt your leg?"
"I had a close call. One slip and you'd never have seen me again! Of all the friggin luck! I've been waiting for a lone traveller for half a month, but business has been bad. Then today one came along, and who do you think it was? The real Black Whirlwind! I had to run into that donkey's prick! Of course I was no match for him. He brought me down with one in the thigh from his halberd and wanted to kill me. I put on an act and cried: 'If you kill me you'll be destroying two.' He asked me what I meant, and I said: 'I have a ninety-year-old mother, with no one to support her. She'll starve to death, for sure.' That donkey's prick believed me. Not only did he spare my life, he gave me silver to start a new business and look after my mother. I was afraid he'd get wise and come after me, so I left the grove, found a place for a quiet nap, and came back around the mountain."
"Keep your voice down," said the woman. "A big swarthy fellow arrived just now and asked me to cook him some rice. I'll bet he's the one. He's sitting outside the front door. Take a look at him. If it's him, find me some drug and I'll put it in the vegetables. After he passes out, you and I will dispose of him. We'll take his gold and silver and move to the county town and go into business. That will be better than robbing travellers on the road."
Li Kui, who had heard every word, said to himself: "The rogue! I gave him silver and spared his life, and now he wants to kill me! That's unforgivable!"
He came around to the back door as Li Gui was about to leave and grabbed him by the hair. The woman ran towards the front door. Li Kui threw his captive to the ground, pulled out his knife and cut his head off. He hurried round to the front door, dagger in hand, seeking the woman. But she had disappeared. He went back and searched the house. Beneath some old clothes in two bamboo hampers he found a few pieces of silver and a number of ornamental hairpins and earrings. These he appropriated, and from the body of Li Gui retrieved the silver ingot he had given, and wrapped the loot in his bundle.
The three measures of rice on the stove were steaming hot, but he had no vegetables to go with them. He scooped the rice into a bowl and ate. Suddenly, he grinned. "What a fool I am. There's good meat right before me. Why shouldn't I eat it?"
He whipped out his dagger and cut two pieces of flesh from Li Gui's leg. After washing them in the stream, he cooked them over burning kindling he took from the stove, roasting and eating at the same time. When he was full, he dragged Li Gui's body into the house and set the place on fire. Halberd in hand, he continued along the mountain path.
The sun was already low on the western horizon by the time he reached the hamlet of Dongdian East. He went directly to his home, pushed open the door and entered.
"Who's there?" his mother called. Li Kui saw that she was blind. She was sitting on the bed, murmuring the name of Buddha.
"It's Iron Ox, ma. I've come back."
"You've been gone so long, son! Where have you been all these years? Your brother's working as a hired hand. He scarcely gets enough to feed himself. He can't really take care of me. I thought of you often, and wept till my tears ran dry. That's why I've become blind. What have you been doing with yourself?"
Li Kui thought: "If I tell her I'm a brigand in Liangshan Marsh, ma won't be willing to go with me. I'd better make up a story." Aloud, he said: "Your Iron Ox is now an official. I've come to fetch you."
"That's fine, son. How are you going to take me?"
"I'll carry you on my back to the road, and there we'll find a cart to travel in."
"Wait till your elder brother gets home. Talk it over with him, first."
"What for? We'll just go."
They were about to depart when Li Da, the brother, returned, with a jug of rice. Li Kui kowtowed before him.
"Brother, it's been years."
"Why have you come back, you scoundrel? To get us involved again?"
"Iron Ox is an official," the mother said. "He's come to take me with him."
"Don't believe his bullshit, ma. When he killed a man, I was the one who had to wear fetters and manacles and suffer all kinds of torments. Lately, I heard that, in league with the bandits in Liangshan Marsh, he snatched criminals from an execution ground, ran riot in Jiangzhou, and that he's now a member of the Liangshan gang. A few days ago Jiangzhou notified our local authorities to be on the alert and arrest him. They wanted to take me in first as surety, but my master spoke to the officials on my behalf. 'Li Kui left more than ten years ago and nobody knows where he's gone,' he said. 'He's never returned. It must be someone with the same name who pretends he comes from these parts.' And my master handed out a few bribes. Otherwise I would have to produce the culprit within a fixed time on pain of being beaten. There's a proclamation offering three thousand strings of cash for his capture."
Li Da turned on Iron Ox. "Why haven't you died, instead of coming home and telling a lot of lies!"
"Don't get excited, brother. We'll go to the mountain stronghold together and be happy. It's not a bad life."
The furious Li Da longed to strike him, but he knew he was no match for his younger brother. He thumped the jug down on the floor and went out.
"He's going to report this and bring men to seize me," thought Li Kui. "I've got to get out of here, fast. My brother has never in his life seen a big ingot of silver. I'll leave this fifty ounce piece for him on the bed. When he comes back and finds it he won't pursue me."
He took the big ingot from his waist pouch and placed it on the bed. "Ma," he said, "I'll carry you away on my back and that will be the end of it."
"Where are we going?"
"Don't ask me. I promise you we'll be happy. Toting you will be easy enough."
He hoisted his mother onto his back, picked up his halberd, left the house and strode forth along a secluded path.
Li Da hastened to his landlord master and reported, then, with a dozen or so vassals, rushed back to the house. His mother was gone. On the bed was a big silver ingot.
"He's left me this ingot, but where has he gone into hiding with our mother?" thought Li Da. "He must have other men from Liangshan Marsh with him. If I catch up they'll surely kill me. He's probably carrying ma to their mountain stronghold to enjoy a good life."
Since there was no sign of Li Kui, the vassals didn't know what to do.
"Iron Ox has carried my mother off, but who can say which path he's taken?" said Li Da. "There are so many of them, we'd never be able to find him."
Obviously, Li Da was perplexed. The vassals hung around for a while, then went home. Of that we'll say no more.

Li Kui, his mother on his back, hurried along a small path towards the mountains. Night had fallen when they reached the foot of a slope. His mother, being blind, couldn't tell whether it was morning or evening. Li Kui knew the height ahead was called Yiling Mountain. Only on the other side was there human habitation. He trudged upward with her in the starlight.
"Son," she said, "could you ask someone for some water?"
"After we cross the ridge, ma, we'll find a house where we can rest and eat."
"I had only dry rice at noon. I'm very thirsty."
"My throat is burning too. After I've carried you to the top, I'll look for water."
"Save me, son. I'm dying of thirst."
"And I'm pretty near exhausted."
Li Kui plodded to the summit. He set the old woman down on a large rock beside a pine tree and stabbed the blade of his halberd into the ground nearby.
"Be patient, ma. I'll fetch you some water."
Li Kui could hear the gurgling of a brook, and went in the direction of the sound. He found it, finally, after crossing two or three foothills. He drank several mouthfuls.
"How can I bring this water to my mother?" he pondered. He stood up and gazed around. High on a ridge above he saw a temple. "Good," he thought. Grasping hanging vines and shrubs he clambered up. He walked to the temple, pushed open the courtyard gate and entered. It was a private chapel dedicated to the Great Sage of Sizhou. Before it was a large stone incense burner.
Li Kui tugged at the vessel, but it and its base were carved from a single block. He couldn't budge it. Anger boiled within him. He lifted it up, base and all, and clonked it down on the stone step, knocking the urn free. This he took to the stream, scrubbed it with bunches of grass and washed it clean. He then filled it half with water and, holding it in both hands, retraced his path to the summit.
His mother was not on the big rock beside the pine, though the halberd was still nearby. He called to her to come and drink. There was no sign of the old lady anywhere. He shouted a few more times, without response.
Li Kui became alarmed. He cast aside the incense vessel and peered carefully around. His mother had vanished.
Then, on the grass about thirty paces away, he saw the bloodstains, and he began to tremble. He followed the trail of blood to a large cave. Two tiger cubs outside were licking a human leg. Li Kui couldn't stop shivering.
"I came all the way from Liangshan Marsh to fetch my old mother," he thought. "Did I carry her here on my back, in spite of trials and tribulations, just for you to eat? That leg, which some friggin tiger has dragged here, must be my mother's!"
Li Kui was consumed with fury. His trembling ceased, his reddish whiskers bristled. He prodded the two cubs with his halberd till they snarled, bared their claws and attacked. He stabbed one to death. The other ran into the cave. Li Kui chased it inside and killed it. Crouching in the cave, he looked out. A savage tigress was returning to her lair.
"You are the beast who ate my mother!" he thought. He lay down his halberd and pulled out his dagger.
The tigress sat down at the mouth of the cave, her hindquarters and swishing tail inside the entry. Li Kui examined her carefully. With all his might he drove his dagger up her bunghole with such force that blade and hilt penetrated her stomach. With a roar the tigress leaped over a chasm, the knife still in her. Li Kui snatched up his halberd and gave chase. The tigress, in great pain, charged down the cliff.
Li Kui was about to follow when a sudden gale arising among the trees brought down a shower of leaves and branches, "Clouds herald dragons, gales foretell tigers," as the old saying goes. From the place where the wind blew, a roaring tiger leaped out. It had upward-slanting eyes and a white forehead, and it charged directly at Li Kui.
Coolly, Black Whirlwind thrust his halberd into the neck of the hurtling beast. It halted abruptly, for the blade had pierced its windpipe, staggered back six or seven paces, then fell like a collapsing mountain and expired on the bluff. Li Kui went into the den to see whether there were more tigers, but there was no sign of any. Very weary, he made his way to the private chapel and slept till daylight.
He rose early and collected his mother's leg and whatever other bones remained, wrapped them in his robe and buried them in a grave he dug behind the chapel. He wept bitterly. Finally, hunger and thirst impelled him to gather his bundle, take up his halberd, and proceed slowly across the ridge.
He met half a dozen hunters armed with bows and arrows. When they saw him coming down the slope covered with blood, they were startled.
"Are you a mountain spirit, or what, sir traveller?" they demanded. "How dare you cross the ridge all alone?"
"Yishui County is offering three thousand strings of cash for me," Li Kui thought. "I can't tell them who I really am." Aloud, he said: "I'm a traveller. I was crossing the ridge with my mother last night and she got thirsty. While I was down fetching her water, a tiger dragged her off and ate her. I followed the trail to the den and killed first two cubs, then two big beasts. I slept in the chapel to the Great Sage of Sizhou until daybreak. I've just come from there."
"You, one man, killed four tigers? We don't believe you. Even ancient heroes like Li Cunxiao and Zi Lu only killed one each. You might have done in the two cubs, but two full-grown tigers—impossible! We've been beaten time and again for failing to eliminate those two beasts. Ever since they made their lair on Yishan Mountain three or four months ago, no one has dared cross the ridge. We don't believe it. You must be kidding."
"I'm not from around here. Why should I kid you? Come up and see for yourself. And bring some men to carry the tigers down."
"We'll be very grateful, if it's true. A wonderful thing!" The hunters whistled shrilly. In a few minutes forty or fifty men, armed with barbed spears and cudgels, were following Li Kui up the trail. It was broad daylight by the time they reached the summit. Sure enough, there were two dead cubs at the cave, one outside and one in. The body of a female tiger lay at the foot of the cliff. A dead male tiger was sprawled before the chapel to the Great Sage of Sizhou.
Overjoyed, the hunters tied the legs of the beasts together and carried them down, slung on poles. They requested Li Kui to claim the reward, and sent a man ahead to inform the village head and the gentry. All came out to greet Black Whirlwind and the tigers were brought to the manor of Squire Cao. A retired petty official, Cao was a nasty, unscrupulous type. Through various crooked deals he had recently become very rich.
Cao invited Li Kui to be seated in his thatch-roofed hall, and asked how he killed the tigers. Li Kui repeated his recital. Everyone listened, open-mouthed.
"What is your name, warrior?" Cao asked.
"My family name is Zhang. I have no given name. I'm called Zhang the Brave."
"You're indeed worthy of that title. Otherwise, how could you have killed four tigers?" Cao ordered a feast in honor of his guest. Of that we'll say no more.
When word spread that four tigers had been killed on Yiling Mountain and carried to the manor of Squire Cao, excitement in the village ran high. Everyone, men and women, young and old, flocked to see the dead beasts, and to peer at the hero Squire Cao was entertaining in his hall.
Among the spectators was Li Gui's wife. She had fled to this village of Yiling where her parents lived. Going to view the tigers, she recognized Li Kui. She rushed home and told her parents.
"That big swarthy fellow who killed the tigers is the man who murdered my husband and burned down our house. He's known as Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh."
The parents immediately informed the village head. "If he's Black Whirlwind," the official thought, "then he's Li Kui, who killed a man in Baizhang Village on the other side of the mountain and ran away to Jiangzhou. He made trouble there too, and our county has been directed to arrest him on sight. A reward of three thousand strings of cash is offered for his capture. And here he is!"
The village head quietly sent a man for Squire Cao. On the excuse that he wanted to change his clothes, Cao left the hall and hastened to the home of the village head.
"That tiger killer is none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, from Baizhang on the other side of the mountain. There's a notice out for his arrest."
"Better check carefully," said Cao. "If he's not, you'll be making a big mistake. If he is, it's no problem. We can take him easily enough. But if he's not the man there'll be trouble."
"Li Gui's wife recognized him. He stopped at their house to eat, and killed Li Gui."
"In that case, we'll ply him with wine and ask him whether he wants to go to the county town to claim the reward for the tigers, or whether he'll take some recompense here in the village. If he's unwilling to go to the county office, then we know he's Black Whirlwind. We'll keep toasting him in relays till he's drunk. Then we'll tie him up, inform the county authorities and have them send a constable to come and get him. We can't go wrong."
"Very good," the others agreed.
Squire Cao returned home to dupe Li Kui. As he poured more wine, he said: "Forgive me for having left you. Please remove the pouches around your waist, rest your halberd and make yourself comfortable."
"Fine," said Li Kui. "My dagger is in the belly of the tigress. I've only the sheath here. When you cut her open, I'd like it back."
"Don't give it a thought. I've plenty of good blades. You must let me present you with one."
Li Kui handed his dagger sheath and pouches to vassals to keep for him, and leaned his halberd against the wall. Squire Cao ordered a large platter of meat and a big pot of wine. The gentry, the village head and the hunters toasted Li Kui with large bowls and flagons.
"Will you be going to the authorities to claim the reward for the tigers, or would you prefer to receive some recompense here?" asked the squire.
"I'm a traveller, passing through, and I don't have much time. I happened to have killed a few tigers. There's no need to claim any county reward. If you have a little money here, that will do. If you don't, I'll go on without it."
"We couldn't treat you so shabbily. Our Yiling Village will collect a fund for you. We'll send the tigers to the county ourselves."
"I'd like a cotton robe to exchange for these clothes."
"Of course," said Cao. Li Kui was given a black robe to replace his blood-stained clothing.
Drums pounded and flutes warbled at the door, as everyone congratulated Li Kui with cold wine and hot. He didn't know he was being tricked, and he drank freely, completely forgetting Song Jiang's injunction. In less than two watches, he was so drunk he couldn't stand.
He was helped to a room in the rear of the hall and laid out on a bench. They tied him securely to it with two ropes. Cao told the village head to rush men to report to the county authorities, and take Li Gui's wife with them to file a formal accusation.
The entire Yishui County office was thrown into a turmoil on hearing the news. The astonished magistrate hastily summoned court.
"Where is Black Whirlwind being detained?" he queried. "That man's a rebel. He mustn't get away."

"He's tied up in Squire Cao's manor," the complainant and hunters replied. "But no one can restrain him for long. We haven't tried to bring him here because we're afraid he'd escape on the road."
The magistrate summoned the county constable Li Yun, and said: "Li Kui the Black Whirlwind has been captured in the manor of Squire Cao in Yiling. Take a strong force and bring him in, secretly. I don't want the whole countryside aroused. He might get away."
Constable Li mustered thirty veteran soldiers. Fully armed, they proceeded rapidly towards Yiling Village. Yishui was a small county, and the story couldn't be suppressed. It was the talk of every market-place. "Black Whirlwind, who rioted in Jiangzhou, has been taken. Constable Li has been sent to get him!" Zhu Gui, in his brother's home outside the county town, also heard the news, and hurried to the rear to consult with him.
"That oaf has done it again! How am I going to rescue him? Song Jiang was afraid he'd get into trouble and sent me to keep an eye on him. Now he's been captured! If I can't save him, how am I going to face my brothers when I get back to the stronghold? What a mess!"
"Don't be upset," urged Zhu Fu. "Constable Li Yun has superb skill with weapons. Forty or fifty armed men, together, couldn't down him. What chance would the two of us have, no matter how much we wished? It's brains, not brawn, that will do it. Li Yun is very fond of me. He often teaches me weapons play. I know how to deal with him, though I won't be able to stay here afterwards. Tonight we'll cook twenty or thirty catties of meat cut it into large chunks, prepare a dozen bottles of wine, and mix in a sleeping draught. At the fifth watch we two and a few helpers will carry the stuff to a secluded place along the road. When Li Yun and his party come with their prisoner, we'll offer them wine to celebrate. They'll fall unconscious and we'll free Li Kui. How does that strike you?"
"Very clever. We can't delay. Let's prepare carefully and make an early start."
"The problem is Li Yun doesn't drink much. Even if he passes out, he'll recover quickly. Another thing—if he finds out later, I won't be able to remain here."
"Your tavern business isn't very good anyhow. Why not take your wife and children and go with me up the mountain and join our band? Gold and silver we share and share alike. You'll have whole sets of clothing. You'll be happy there. Have two of your assistants find a cart tonight and sent your family and valuables and luggage on ahead. Let them wait for us at the hamlet of Shilipai. Then we'll all go to the stronghold. I have some knockout medicine in my bag. Since Li Yun doesn't drink, sprinkle plenty on the meat and make him eat. He'll keel over too. After we rescue Li Kui, we'll go up the mountain together. Does that suit you?"
"All right, brother, that's the way it'll be."
Zhu Fu sent men for a cart, made up four or five bundles and loaded them on. Bigger items were left behind. He told his wife and children to ride in the cart, and instructed two of his assistants to escort them and wait at the hamlet.
That night the brothers cooked the meat, cut it into large chunks and mixed in the drug. With the wine, it made up two shoulder-pole loads. They took also twenty or thirty empty bowls and some cooked vegetables, on which they sprinkled the drug as well, for those who didn't eat meat. A couple of assistants carried the two loads. The brothers themselves brought boxes of tidbits. By the fourth watch they were waiting near a crossing along the secluded mountain trail. At daybreak they heard in the distance the approaching sound of drums and gongs. Zhu Gui moved into the crossing.
In Yiling Village, the thirty-odd soldiers had drank half the night. Around the fourth watch, they set out with Li Kui, his hands bound behind him. Constable Li brought up the rear on horseback. They had been marching for a time when Zhu Fu stepped out and barred their path.
"Congratulations, Teacher," he said. "Won't you rest a while?"
He scooped a jug of wine from a bucket and poured it into a large flagon, which he offered to Li Yun. Zhu Gui presented a platter of meat, and the assistants held up the boxes of tidbits. The constable dismounted and hurried forward.
"Young brother, you shouldn't have troubled to come all this way," he said.
"I only wanted to show my respect," Zhu Fu replied.
Li Yun accepted the flagon. Although he touched it to his lips, he did not drink. Zhu Fu knelt before him.
"I know you don't drink, Teacher. But this a victory libation. Have at least half a cup."
Li Yun couldn't refuse. He took a couple of sips.
"If you don't want wine, you must have some meat," Zhu Fu urged.
"I ate my fill tonight. I couldn't eat another thing."
"You've come a long way, Teacher. You must be hungry again. We don't have anything fancy, but do taste a little, or I'll lose face badly."
Zhu Fu selected and proffered two pieces of meat. Pressed with such solicitude, Li Yun had no choice but to eat them. Zhu Fu served wine also to the gentry, the village head and the hunters, filling their cups three times.
Zhu Gui called the soldiers and vassals to come and drink. Those varlets weren't fussy. They didn't care whether the wine and meat were cold or hot, tasty or otherwise—they tucked in. The provisions disappeared as fast as wispy clouds in the wind, as blossoms fallen into a stream.
Li Kui watched with shining eyes. The moment he saw Zhu Gui and his brother he knew it was a ruse. "How about giving me something to eat, too?" he said deliberately.
"Meat and wine for a wicked devil like you?" Zhu Gui barked at him. "The executioner's waiting! Shut your mouth!"
Li Yun faced his soldiers. "Let's march. Quickly," he ordered.
But the men only looked at each other, unable to stir. Lips trembling, legs numb, one by one they fell to the ground.
"I've been tricked," Li Yun cried agitatedly. He tried to press forward. But his own head grew heavy and his legs light, and he melted into a heap, completely out.
Zhu Gui and his brother seized halberds. "Don't think you can get away," they yelled, and rushed at the vassals and onlookers who had not drunk or eaten. The fast runners escaped, the slower were stabbed and killed.
With a roar Li Kui burst his bonds. He grabbed a halberd and charged towards the prostrate Li Yun. Zhu Fu stepped firmly in his path.
"Mind your manners. He's my teacher. A good man. You go on ahead."
Li Kui assented. "But I'll burst if don't kill that old donkey Cao," he swore.
He caught up with the squire and ran him through, then dispatched Li Gui's wife and the village head. His blood lust aroused, he slaughtered a whole row of hunters and all thirty soldiers. The onlookers and vassals, hating their parents for giving them only one pair of legs, fled deep into the wilds. Li Kui started to pursue.
Zhu Gui restrained him. "This has nothing to do with them," he shouted. "Stop injuring ordinary people!"
Only then did Li Kui desist. He stripped some clothing from a dead soldier and put it on. He and the two brothers, halberds in hand, marched on along the path.
"This is no good," Zhu Fu said. "I've condemned my teacher to death. When he awakes, what will he be able to tell the magistrate? He's sure to chase after us. You two keep going. I'll wait for him here. He's always been so kind to me, so loyal to his friends. I'll ask him to go with us to the stronghold and join the band. I owe him that. Otherwise he'll suffer when he returns to the county office."
"You're right, brother," said Zhu Gui. "I'll go on with the cart. Li Kui will stay here to help you. If Li Yun doesn't catch up soon, don't be foolish and wait too long."
"Naturally," said Zhu Fu.
Zhu Gui continued his journey, alone. Zhu Fu and Li Kui sat by the roadside. Sure enough in less than a watch, Li Yun halberd tightly grasped, came flying down the path. "Robbers, stay where you're," he shouted. He rushed forward fiercely. Li Kui was afraid he would hurt Zhu Fu. He jumped up and advanced to meet him with levelled halberd. And as a result, 2 new tigers were added to the company on Mount Liang, 4 men were welcomed in Fraternity Hall.

"Just tell me what those three conditions are, brother," Iron Ox said. And Song Jiang told him: "If you want to go back home to fetch your mother, the first condition is that you do not drink on the journey. Second, given that you're so hot-tempered, we can't send anyone with you, so you must just go quietly by yourself and bring your mother straight back. Third, don't take those two axes with you. Control yourself during the journey, go quickly and come back soon."
Iron Ox said: "There's nothing I can't keep to in that. Don't worry, I'll leave today, and I won't waste any time."
On this occasion Iron Ox's preparations were quickly made. He just stuck a dagger in his belt, shouldered a halberd, provided himself with one large silver ingot and three or four small ones, drank a few cups of wine, shouted out a salute, bade everyone farewell, went down the mountain and across the water from Golden Sands Landing, and was gone.
After they had seen him off, Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the others went back and sat down in the assembly hall. But Song Jiang was still uneasy. "This Iron Ox," he said, "if he's on his own he's sure to get into some trouble. Is there anyone of the company who comes from the same part of the world? Someone who could go there and get news of him?"
Skyscraper said: "There's the Crocodile, he's from Yishui in Yizhou, he's Iron Ox's countryman."
"Of course, I had forgotten," Song Jiang said. "Iron Ox said so himself the other day in the assembly at the White Dragon temple."
So Song Jiang sent for the Crocodile. One of the men raced down the mountain with the message; he arrived at the inn and asked the Crocodile to go up to the fortress. "Our friend Iron Ox has just gone off home to fetch his mother," Song Jiang said to the Crocodile. "I didn't want to send anyone with him, because he gets so aggressive when he's been drinking. But I'm really afraid he may get into trouble on the way. I've just heard that you are his compatriot. Would you mind going there to his district to keep an eye on him?"
The Crocodile replied: "Yes, I am from Yishui district in Yizhou and I've a brother called Zhu Fu who has opened an inn outside the west gate of the city. This Iron Ox lives in the same area, at East Dongdian outside Baizhang village. He's got an elder brother called Li Da, who works on someone else's land — a pretty wild character, who killed a man once and fled to the rivers and lakes and has never gone back home. If you want me to go back there and make some inquiries it's no problem. The only trouble is there won't be anyone to look after the inn. Still, I haven't been home for a long time and I'd very much like to go back and pay my brother a visit."
"There's no need to worry about the inn," Song Jiang said. "I'll get the Ape and Shi Yong to look after it for you for a while."
The Crocodile was satisfied with this. He said goodbye and went back down the mountain to the inn, where he packed his bags, handed over the establishment to the Ape and Shi Yong, and set off for home.
Back at the mountain retreat Song Jiang passed the days feasting and drinking quite contentedly with Chao Gai, and studying the mystic books with "Professor" Wu Yong, the Occult Star. Of this no more.
Meanwhile Iron Ox all on his own left the Marshes of Mount Liang and took the road to Yishui. He diligently abstained from wine on the road, so he did not provoke any incidents and the journey was uneventful. When he reached the west gate of Yishui, he saw a knot of people studying a notice. He placed himself in their midst and heard someone read out: "The first name on the notice is the chief bandit Song Jiang, he is from Yuncheng. The second name is the lesser bandit Dai Zong, he is superintendent of the two prisons in Jiangzhou. The third name is the lesser bandit Li Kui, he is from Yishui in Yizhou." Iron Ox, listening at the back, was on the point of making some totally inappropriate and uncalled-for remark, when someone came thrusting through the crowd, seized him by the waist and cried: "Brother Zhang, what are you doing here?"
When Iron Ox twisted round to see who it was he recognized the Crocodile. "What are you doing here?" he asked.
"I want a word with you," the other said.
They went together to an inn in a district just outside the west gate. They found a clean room at the back and sat down. The Crocodile pointed at Iron Ox and said: "What a foolhardy fellow you are! That notice says clearly that there's a reward of a hundred thousand for the capture of Song Jiang, five thousand for the Magic Messenger, and three thousand for Iron Ox. So why were you standing there looking at it? Suppose someone had been sharp-sighted and quick-handed enough to catch you and hand you over to the police, what would you have done then? Our brother Song Jiang was afraid you would cause a disturbance, so he didn't want to send anyone with you. But he still feared you would do something silly here, and he sent me along to find out how you were getting on. I was a day behind you leaving the mountain, but I got here a day ahead, why's it taken you so long?"
Iron Ox answered: "He told me I wasn't to drink on the way, that slowed me down. How did you know about this inn? You're from here, aren't you, where is your house?"
"This inn belongs to my younger brother, Zhu Fu," said the Crocodile. "Yes, I do come from these parts. I used to do business in the rivers and lakes but I lost all my money, that's why I joined the company on Mount Liang and became an outlaw. So now I'm visiting my home." He called his brother Zhu Fu over and introduced him to Iron Ox. Zhu Fu ordered wine for Iron Ox. "Our brother told me not to drink," Iron Ox said, "but I'm home now, so what's bloody wrong with drinking a bowl of wine?" Not daring to try and stop him, the Crocodile let him drink.
They sat there drinking into the small hours. Some food was ordered and Iron Ox ate. Around dawn, when the moon and stars were fading and a rosy glow was spreading in the east, he set off for his village. "Don't take the short cut," the Crocodile told him. "When you pass the big tree take the highway heading east and go straight to Baizhang. That'll take you to East Dongdian. Find your mother and bring her at once and we'll go back to Mount Liang together."
Iron Ox said: "I most certainly will take the short cut. It's a long way, who wants to waste time taking the highway?"
The Crocodile said: "There's lots of tigers along that small track. And there's robbers too."
Iron Ox replied: "Do you think I'm afraid of them?" He put on his hat, took up his halberd, buckled on a sword, bade farewell to the Crocodile and his brother and set off for Baizhang.
When he'd gone a couple of miles it began to grow lighter. As he was walking through the wet grass, a white rabbit suddenly appeared, hopping along ahead of him. Iron Ox chased after it for a while. Then he laughed and said: "This creature has led me a merry dance." There is a poem which says:
Quiet reigns on the mountain path,
*The west wind shakes yellow leaves from the trees.*
*Chancing upon a hare he chases it too far,*
And quite forgets that his journey is urgent.
As he was proceeding on his way, Iron Ox saw in front of him a small mixed wood of big trees. The season was early autumn and the leaves had all turned. When he reached a hut on the edge of this wood, a big man emerged and shouted: "You'd better pay the toll here, if you can. If not, I'll have your baggage."
Iron Ox looked at him. His hair was tied in a red silk bandanna and he wore a robe of rough cloth. He carried a pair of axes and he had blackened his face. Iron Ox shouted back: "Who the fuck are you? And what makes you think you can rob highways here?"
The other said: "Want to know my name do you? Well, it'll frighten you out of your wits! I am the Black Whirlwind, that's who I am! Now, if you put down the money for the toll, and your baggage, I'll spare your life and you can go!"
Iron Ox roared with laughter. "You fucking son of a bitch! What are you, and where have you sprung from? You've even pinched my goddamn name, so you can stand here talking bloody nonsense!" So saying he levelled his halberd and charged. The other offered no resistance whatsoever. Instead he tried to flee, but was brought down by a blow to the thigh from Iron Ox's weapon. Planting one foot on the man's chest Iron Ox shouted: "Do you know who I am?"
The other cried: "Please sir, spare the life of this stupid fool!"
"I am the real Black Whirlwind, famous throughout the rivers and lakes! I am Li Kui and you have abused my name!"
"My name really is Li, but I'm not the real Black Whirlwind. It was because you're so famous in the rivers and lakes that I took your name, which even the spirits are scared of. By purloining your name I was able to rob as I liked on the highway here. If a merchant comes through on his own, just hearing the name Black Whirlwind is enough, he throws down his baggage and runs for his life. I've been able to scrape a living like this. But I haven't really hurt anyone. I gave myself the professional name of Li Gui. I live in the village just down the road."
"The insolence of the bastard! Robbing folk of their bags and baggage on the highway and ruining my reputation! You even copied my trick of using two axes! Well you'd better be prepared for one of my axe blows now." He stretched out his arm and snatched one of the axes and prepared to strike. But the panic-stricken Li Gui cried: "Sir, if you kill me you're killing two people at once!"
Iron Ox arrested his stroke. "If I kill you I'm killing two people? How's that?"
"I would never have had the courage to rob on the highway, if I hadn't got a ninety-year-old mother at home with no one else to look after her. That's why I made bold with your name, sir, to scare people, so I could lay hands on a few goods to support my poor mother. But God's truth, I really never hurt anyone. So now you see, if you kill me, my old mother is going to starve to death."
Now although Iron Ox was a violent character who could murder someone without blinking an eyelid, when he heard this story he thought to himself: "Here's me going home specially to fetch my mother, and if I then go and kill someone who's his mother's sole support, heaven will not look kindly on it. No, I mustn't, I must spare the bugger." So he let him go, and Li Gui, after taking back the axe, bowed deeply and prostrated himself.
Iron Ox said: "But remember, I'm the only true Black Whirlwind, so from now on don't go taking my name in vain."
"I shall change my name at once and go home and change my profession," the other said. "I'll never again take advantage of your name to rob highways."
Iron Ox said: "You have a filial heart. I will give you ten taels of silver as capital to help you change your profession." He gave him an ingot and Li Gui bowed in thanks and departed.
Iron Ox laughed about it afterwards. "The poor sod fell slap into my hands. Anyway, he's a filial son and he's going to change his ways, if I'd killed him it would not have been pleasing to heaven. But now I'd better get going." He took his halberd and trudged on along the small mountain path. There is a poem here:
One seeks his mother: his intention misfires.
*One claims a like virtue, but the tale is a liar's.*
*When sons thus their love for a mother proclaim,*
Just ask if the words and the deeds are the same.
Iron Ox had walked till well into the morning, by which time his stomach told him he was hungry and thirsty. There was nothing around him except a proliferation of mountain paths; there was no inn or eating-house in sight. But as he went on he began to catch glimpses in the distance of a couple of thatched cottages nestling in a hollow on the hillside. He headed for one of the houses and was able to observe a woman coming out of the back. A bunch of wild flowers was stuck in her hairdo, and her face was plastered with rouge and make-up. Iron Ox put down his halberd and called out: "Hey, Auntie, I'm a traveller and I'm starving. I can't find any sort of inn anywhere. I'll pay you a good price if you'll get me something to eat and drink."
When she looked at Iron Ox and saw his physique, the woman dared not refuse him. Reluctantly she replied: "There isn't anywhere to buy wine but I can cook you some rice."
"All right. But do plenty. I'm bloody starving."
"Will a litre be enough?"
"Make it three."
The woman went to the kitchen to light the stove and then after washing the rice beside the stream came back to cook it. When Iron Ox went out the back to wash his hands, he saw a man limping down the hill. After he'd gone back into the house he heard the woman open the back door — she was about to go up the hill to get vegetables. Meeting the man, she asked: "What's the matter with your leg, dear? Have you twisted your ankle?"

"I was that close to never seeing you again!" he replied. "Can you imagine how bloody unlucky I was? I went out looking for a lone traveller. I'd been waiting two whole weeks without doing any good. Today, I thought I'd just found myself something, and who do you think it turned out to be? Only the real Black Whirlwind! Well, since it was that fucker I'd bumped into, I naturally hadn't a hope against him. He clobbered me in the leg, in fact. Then he knocked me down, and was just about to do me in, when I got the idea of shouting, 'If you kill me you're killing two!' He asked me why and I told him, 'I got this ninety-year-old mum at home with no one to look after her and she's sure to starve!' The silly bugger actually believed me! He let me go and gave me some silver to start a business with and told me to change my way of life and look after my mother well. I was afraid he might be watching and follow me, so I got out of that wood and found a very lonely spot and slept there a while, before coming back here round the other side of the mountain."

The woman said: "Keep your voice down. Just now a big dark fellow came up and told me to cook him food, I think it might be him. He was sitting out there by the door, you'd better go and take a look. If it is him, go and get the drug to put in his food. When he eats it, it'll knock him out and the two of us can deal with him. If we can make some money out of him, we'll be able to move into town and start a business; we won't have to stay here robbing highways."

When he heard this, Iron Ox said to himself: "The bastard! I just gave him some silver, and spared his life, and now he wants to kill me! That's really a bit too much!" He strolled over to the back door. As luck would have it, the wretched Li Gui was just coming out. Iron Ox grabbed him by the hair. The woman fled through the front door. Iron Ox pinned Li Gui's arms and forced him to the ground. He pulled out his knife and speedily severed his neck. Knife in hand he rushed to the front door to find the woman, but he couldn't discover where she had gone to. He went inside again and searched the house. He found two wicker baskets full of old clothes, and at the bottom he found some loose change in silver and some jewellery. He took it all. He also went and retrieved the silver ingot from Li Gui's body and tied it all up in his bundle. Then he went and looked at the pot. The three litres of rice were about done: all that was missing was some dishes to eat with it. He helped himself to rice and ate it plain for a while. Then he suddenly laughed and said to himself: "I'm an idiot! There's good meat staring me in the face but I didn't think of eating it!" He took out his knife and went and carved two good hunks of meat from Li Gui's leg, washed them in water, put some more charcoal in the stove and proceeded to roast them. Thus cooking and eating as he went along, he ate till he was full. Then he dragged the body back into the house and set fire to it. Shouldering his halberd he departed.

By the time he reached East Dongdian the sun was already setting in the west. He hurried to his home, pushed open the door and entered. His mother was sitting on the bed. "Who is it?" she cried out. He looked and saw that she was blind in both eyes. She was sitting on the bed praying. "Mother, Iron Ox has come home," he said.

"My son, you've been gone such a long time!" she said. "Where have you been all these years? Your brother works on someone else's estate, he just scrapes a living and there's not really enough to feed me. I cried my eyes out, thinking about you, I went blind in both eyes. How have things been with you?"

Iron Ox thought: "If I tell her I'm an outlaw in the Marshes of Mount Liang, she'll never agree to go with me. I'd better make something up." So he said to her: "I've become an official now and I've come to take you back with me."

"That's wonderful," she said. "But how will you be able to take me?"

"I'll carry you on my back for the first part. Later we'll look for a cart."

"Wait till your brother comes, then we can see about it."

"Why wait? We'll go now."

But just as they were about to leave, Li Da appeared with a pot of rice.

When Iron Ox saw him walk in, he prostrated himself and said: "It's been a long time, brother!"

His brother responded angrily: "What the bloody hell have you come here for? I suppose you want to get us into trouble again."

The mother said: "Iron Ox is an official now. He's come to take me with him."

"Mother! Don't believe that shit! The first time when he killed that chap I had to wear a cangue and fetters and suffer a thousand indignities. Now I hear that he's mixed up with that crowd from the Marshes of Mount Liang. They raided the execution ground recently and turned Jiangzhou upside down. He's joined a gang of robbers, do you hear? The other day orders arrived from Jiangzhou, with a warrant for his arrest, and the court wanted to detain me until he's caught. Luckily the chap I work for spoke up for me. He said my younger brother had disappeared more than ten years ago and never returned, and that it might be someone using the same name who had falsified his particulars. My boss paid everyone money on my behalf, that's how I managed to get out of it, otherwise they'd have held me hostage and beaten me. Now there's a notice up offering a reward of three thousand for his capture. You'd better have died, instead of coming back here to tell us a pack of lies!"

"Don't be angry, brother," Iron Ox said. "If you'd just come back with me to Mount Liang, where we can have a fine life, wouldn't it be great?"

Li Da was furious. He would have liked to attack his brother, but he knew he couldn't handle him, so he hurled the pot of rice on the floor and left.

Iron Ox said to himself: "If he's gone like that, he'll go and tell people where I am and they'll come to get me. If I want to get out of this we'd better leave as soon as possible. My brother has never seen a lot of money, so what I'll do is, I'll leave him this big fifty-tael ingot. I'll put it on the bed. When he comes back he'll find it and he'll give up the idea of chasing me." He felt around in his pouch and took out the ingot and placed it on the bed. Then he said: "Mother, I'm going to carry you on my back now."

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Don't ask questions, just remember you're going to be happy. I can easily carry you." So saying, he picked up his mother, took his halberd and left. He chose the remotest of paths.

Li Da, meanwhile, had gone rushing off to his master's house to report the matter. He raced back with a dozen farm-hands, but when he reached home he could see no sign of his mother. But he did see the ingot on the bed. This caused him to reflect: "Iron Ox has left me the silver and taken mother off somewhere. There must be some of his friends from Mount Liang with him. If I follow, they'll kill me. No doubt he's taken mother off to join their idle life in the stronghold on the mountain." The others saw no sign of Iron Ox and had no idea what was going on. Li Da told them: "Iron Ox has carried my mother off. But I don't know which way they've gone. There are so many different paths round here, how can we hope to find them?" Seeing that Li Da didn't know what to do, they hung around for a while and then all went home separately. Of this no more.

We must return to Iron Ox. Fearing that his brother would send people after him, he carried his mother deep into the mountains by narrow, lonely paths. It was getting late:

*Evening mist floats across distant hills: the smoke of fires obscures fantastic peaks. Rooks in ragged flocks seek the wood. A hundred bird calls fill the trees. Wild geese in their orderly formations drop and disappear among the reeds. The fireflies' points of light hover over country paths and settle in the rank grass that is their home. The autumn wind sweeps through the trees scattering dead leaves. Frosty air is wafted into the deepest corners of the mountains.*

As daylight was fading, Iron Ox and his mother arrived at the foot of a steep ascent. The mother's sight was so bad she knew no difference between night and day. Iron Ox recognized the spot. It was called Yiling Heights. Once past it, they would find human habitations. By the light of the stars and the moon, the two of them, mother and son, slowly proceeded up the mountain, until the mother said: "My son, if you could find me a drink of water it would be so nice."

Iron Ox said: "Wait till we're past this mountain, mother. We'll find someone to give us lodging and something to eat."

"I ate some dry food for lunch, I'm terribly thirsty." she said.

"My throat feels as if it's on fire, too," Iron Ox said. "Just wait till we're at the top and then I'll find you some water."

"My son, I implore you, I'm dying of thirst."

"And I'm completely exhausted, too," Iron Ox said. Near the top he saw there was a big black rock beside a pine tree. He set his mother down on this, stuck his halberd in the ground and said: "Be patient, mother, and sit here for a moment, while I go and find some water." He could hear the sound of water, coming from the bottom of a ravine somewhere, so he followed his ears and after skirting several cliffs, came upon a gully down which a goodly stream of water was running. There's a poem that describes what he saw:

It winds 'twixt the cliffs with such boisterous zest,
*You know that its birthplace is up on the peak:*
*The river runs ever, and never finds rest.*
Till it runs to the ocean, great billows to make.

When he reached the bank of the stream he scooped water up in his hands and drank a few mouthfuls. Then he thought: "How am I going to carry this water to my mother?" He stood up and looked around in all directions. Far up the slope he saw a building. "That's it!" he thought. Grasping vines and creepers he hauled himself up the steep incline. He pushed open the gate and looked inside. It was in fact a shrine dedicated to a local god. In front of the main hall there was a stone incense burner. Iron Ox tried to lift this, but it was a solid block and tug as he might it wouldn't budge. Suddenly he lost patience and wrenched the base right out and smashed it against the stone steps in front of the hall. The bowl broke off and he picked it up and went back down to the stream, where he plunged it in the water and got a bunch of grass and scrubbed it clean. He filled it half full with water, raised it in both hands and returning by the way he had come staggered off up the hillside.

But when he reached the pine tree his mother was not on the stone. Only his halberd was there. He called out that he'd brought her water. But still she did not appear or answer his call. He began to get worried. He put down the incense burner and looked around in all directions: still no sign of her. About thirty paces away, however, he found traces of blood. When he saw this his heart misgave him. Following the trail of blood, he came to the mouth of a big cave, where two tiger cubs were toying with a human leg. Truly, we can say that:

The false Black Whirlwind felt the heat:
*In life a fake, in death ... roast meat.*
*Now it's the mother's leg that's savaged:*
*To man or beast by hunger ravaged*
All that's flesh is good to eat.

Iron Ox pondered: "I came back from Mount Liang to get my mother. With enormous effort I carried her this far, and all for you to go and eat her! For if that human leg the fucking tigers have brought here is not my mother's, whose could it be?" He was filled with a great rage, his light-coloured hair stood on end, he raised his halberd and ran at the tiger cubs. Startled by this, the tiger cubs, one big, one small, snarled and lunged at him with all their teeth and claws. He killed one of them at once. The other fled inside the cave. He followed it inside and dispatched it there. From this vantage point, squatting inside the tiger's lair, he saw a big tigress charging towards him, snarling and showing her claws. "You're the monster that ate my mother!" he said to himself. He put down his halberd and took the knife from his belt. When she reached the mouth of the cave the tigress first swept the entrance with her tail, then began to enter backwards. When he saw what she was doing, Iron Ox, employing every ounce of his strength stabbed desperately at the base of the tail, burying the knife in her anus. Such was the strength of his blow that the blade and hilt penetrated right through to her belly. With a deafening roar the tigress sprang away from the cave taking the knife with her, and bounded down the sheer side of a ravine. Iron Ox picked up his halberd and left the cave. The tigress maddened by the pain went on crashing down the rocky incline. Iron Ox was just about to go after her when from behind the trees a sudden gale arose. It blew so furiously the leaves were shaken from the trees like rain. According to the old saying: "Clouds originate from dragons, and wind is produced by tigers." At that moment, amid a storm of wind and by the light of the stars and the moon, a great roar burst out and a huge tiger with sad eyes and a white forehead appeared. This beast sprang furiously at Iron Ox. Calmly taking advantage of the animal's own momentum, Iron Ox held his blade firm and struck under the throat. The tiger never attempted a second spring. Firstly it was only concerned to escape the pain. And in the second place, its windpipe was pierced. It fled no more than half a dozen paces before it collapsed on the mountainside with a sound like half the mountain falling, and expired on the spot.

So Iron Ox had killed a whole family of tigers. But he still went back into the cave with his weapon in hand to have a look, in case there was another tiger. There was no sign of one. Exhausted, he returned to the temple and slept there till dawn. Early next morning he collected up his mother's remains, two legs and some other bones, and wrapped them in a shirt. Then he dug a grave at the back of the temple and buried the bones. He wept for a long while. There is a poem about this:

At Yiling, with the wind in the west, the season autumn,
*The tigers, male and female, gather in the forest on the heights.*
*Soon the sight of his old mother's sparse remains,*
*Causes the hero to lament her fate.*
*Oblivious to danger he visits the tiger's den,*
*And four tigers pay with their lives for his revenge!*
*Behind the local temple he inters his mother's bones.*
This hero's name? Li Kui, the famous Iron Ox!

By now Iron Ox was exceedingly hungry and thirsty. He was obliged to collect his luggage, take up his halberd and slowly make his way down the mountain. Suddenly half a dozen tiger hunters appeared, equipped with traps and bows and arrows. When they saw Iron Ox, strolling down the mountain all spattered with blood, they had quite a shock. "Are you the god of the mountain or something?" they asked. "How do you dare to cross this mountain alone?"

Iron Ox considered his reply carefully. "Recently that notice has gone up in Yishui, there's a reward of three thousand for my capture," he thought. "I daren't tell them my real name. I'd better invent a story." To the hunters he said: "I am a merchant. Yesterday afternoon I was crossing the pass with my mother. Because my mother wanted a drink I went down to the stream to get some water. A big tiger dragged my mother off and ate her. I tracked it to its lair and killed first two cubs and then two big tigers. I slept in the temple till it got light and then came down the mountain."

"Don't believe you!" the hunters shouted in unison. "How could one man kill four tigers? After all, the famous tiger killers in history are each only said to have killed one. Two tiger cubs, that's possible, but the two big tigers, that's really beyond a joke! Goodness knows how many beatings we've all received because of those two beasts. Ever since that den of tigers has been here on Yiling Heights, which is nearly six months now, no one has cared to venture there. We just don't believe you. Who do you think you're going to fool?"

Iron Ox replied: "I'm not from these parts, why should I want to lie to you? If you don't believe me, we'd better go back up the mountain together and I'll try to show you. You can bring some porters along to help carry the tigers down."

The hunters said: "If it's really true, we shan't be able to thank you enough, it will be great news."

The hunters whistled and in a moment thirty or forty men had gathered, all carrying long hooks and staves. They followed Iron Ox back up the mountain. Dawn had broken by now and when they reached the top the two dead tiger cubs by the den were clearly visible — one outside and one in the entrance — and then also the tigress dead on the mountainside, and a big male tiger lying dead in front of the shrine. The sight of four dead tigers sent the hunters into raptures. They got rope and tied them up to carry them down the mountain. They offered to go with Iron Ox to collect the reward, but first they sent someone on ahead to inform the village headman and other notables, who all came out to meet them. The tigers were carried to the house of a rich man, Squire Cao by name. This individual was a retired government official, who devoted himself to mischief and debauchery in the district. He had recently used some kind of skulduggery to add considerably to his fortune. This Squire Cao now came to see for himself and invited Iron Ox to sit in the thatched hall and tell him how he came to kill the tigers. Iron Ox told the story of how he had come to the mountain the night before with his mother and how she wanted a drink and how this led to the killing of the tigers. Everyone was amazed. Squire Cao wanted to know the great hero's name. Iron Ox replied: "Zhang is my name. I have no given name, people just call me Big Zhang."

There's a poem about this:

Everyone knows of the bogus Li Kui;
*Nobody speaks of how Li Kui pretended.*
*But with Li Kui becoming Big Zhang for the day,*
Who's true and who's false? It's quite a conundrum!

Squire Cao said: "Big indeed! Only a very big man could kill four monsters like that!" He ordered a feast to be laid in a side-room. Of this no more.

Now when it became known in the neighbourhood that four tigers had been killed on Yiling Heights and taken to Squire Cao's it became a topic of conversation in every local establishment and everyone living in the village or on the surrounding slopes, man, woman or child, flocked to see the tigers and to get a glimpse of Squire Cao entertaining the hero who had killed them, drinking with him in the main hall. Amongst them all was Li Gui's wife who had taken refuge with her parents in her old home in the village. She came with everyone else to see the tigers. When she recognized Iron Ox, she hurried home to tell her mother and father: "That big black fellow who killed the tigers is the one who killed my old man and burnt my house down. He's the Black Whirlwind, alias Iron Ox, one of the robbers of Mount Liang." Her parents went at once and told the headman. The headman said: "If he's the Black Whirlwind, then he's the one who's wanted for the murder of a man in Baizhang, the one that fled to Jiangzhou and got involved in some other business too, and we received an official order for his detention. Recently the authorities announced a reward of three thousand for his capture. So now he's here, is he!" He secretly sent someone to ask Squire Cao to come and see him. Squire Cao excused himself from the company, saying he wanted to wash his hands, and hurried round to see the headman, from whom he learnt that the killer of the tigers was Li Kui, who had killed a man in Baizhang on the other side of the mountain and whose arrest had been ordered by the authorities. Squire Cao said: "Listen carefully. In case we've got this wrong, it wouldn't be a good idea to annoy him. If we're right then there's no problem. We can easily capture him. I'm just afraid it might not be him, in which case we'd be in trouble."

The headman said: "Apparently Li Gui's wife recognized him. He went to their house asking for food, and then killed Li Gui."

Squire Cao said: "In that case all we need do is give him plenty of wine and ask him if he wants to go to the government office to collect the reward for killing the tigers or if he'd rather collect it in the village. If he doesn't want to go to the government office, then he's our man. I'll get someone to change the cups around, we'll get him drunk and then send someone to the magistracy to ask them to send a sergeant to arrest him, it can hardly go wrong." There is a poem about this:

The tiny mustard seed, they say,
*Will go through the needle's eye,*
*And it's always on a narrow road*
*You meet an enemy.*
*Li Gui's jealous ghost has not*
*Yet taken its departure;*
*And the Whirlwind truly stands*
*In an unpropitious quarter.*
*For killing the tigers on the hill*
*He's earned the official fee;*
*For the killing of a man he deserves*
*To be placed under lock and key.*

*Remember the man that watched the bird*
*That watched the praying mantis.*
*Now the best policy it seems is*
Don't advertise your prowess.

When the headman and the others had accepted this proposal, Squire Cao went back home. He detained Iron Ox, plying him with wine and saying: "I'm sorry I had to leave you for a moment just now. Let me ask you to undo your belt and put down your halberd, please make yourself comfortable."
Iron Ox said: "Very well, but I'm afraid I lost my knife in the tiger's belly, I've only got the sheath now. If I need to cut anything I shall have to ask someone to lend me a knife."
"Don't you worry about that," said Squire Cao. "I've got plenty of good blades. I shall be happy to give you one."
Iron Ox took off his sword and his belt and gave them to a retainer to put away for him. He leant his halberd against the wall. Squire Cao called for a big platter of meat and a big jug of wine. The rich men and the headman, the hunters and all the rest drank many toasts with Iron Ox taking it in turns and using large bowls and cups. Squire Cao asked: "I wonder, would you prefer to deliver the tigers to the authorities and claim the reward personally, or would you rather just seek some form of recompense from us here?"
"I am just a traveller, passing through," Iron Ox said. "My time is valuable and just because I happened to kill this family of tigers there's no need to go to the government and ask for a reward. If you feel inclined to offer me something here, that will be quite all right; if not, I shall just continue my journey."
Squire Cao said: "We certainly don't want to hold you up. Just wait a little while, and we'll make a collection here in the village towards your travel expenses. We can take the tigers to the authorities ourselves."
"I would be grateful if you could provide me with some clothes, though, so I can change."
"Of course, of course," said Squire Cao. He produced a padded robe of fine black cloth so Iron Ox could change his blood-stained clothing. Then to the sound of drums and flutes, wine was brought. They all pressed Iron Ox to drink, a cup of warm wine, followed by one of cold. Not realizing that it was a plot, Iron Ox drank to his heart's content. He had completely forgotten Song Jiang's instructions. Within a few hours he was drunk as a lord and couldn't even stand on his feet. They carried him into an empty room at the back and tipped him onto a wooden bench. Then they took two ropes and tied him down. The headman was told to send messengers flying to the district office to report the matter. Li Gui's wife was sent along too to make an official statement from which an indictment could be drawn up.
There was great excitement in Yishui. The Governor, greatly concerned, went into session at once. "What have you done with this Black Whirlwind?" he asked. "This is a dangerous conspirator, we must not let him get away."
The plaintiff and the hunters said: "We've got him tied up at the house of Squire Cao, of this district. Since there's no one capable of subduing him, we were afraid something might go wrong and we might lose him on the way, that's the reason we didn't bring him with us."
The Governor sent for his sergeant of police. When the latter presented himself before the bench he barked out a salute. Who this was you can learn from the poem:

His face is broad, his eyebrows thick,
*Thick as you've ever seen.*
*His beard and whiskers red, his eyes*
*Like a foreigner's jade green.*
*This is the famous Green-Eyed Tiger,*
This is sergeant Li Yun.

The Governor sent for this Li Yun and told him: "They've got the notorious Black Whirlwind, alias Iron Ox, tied up in the house of Squire Cao at the bottom of Yiling Heights. Take plenty of men and bring him here secretly, but don't alarm the public or let him escape."
Green-Eyes left with his orders. He selected thirty experienced men, all well-armed, and hastened off to Yiling.
Now Yishui was only a small place. Nothing could long remain hidden there. Already the rumour was going round the market: "They've caught that Black Whirlwind who created such havoc in Jiangzhou. Green-Eyes has been sent to pick him up."
The Crocodile, who was staying with Zhu Fu's family outside the east gate heard this and rushed to the back room to tell his brother: "This black fellow has got himself into trouble again, how can we rescue him? It's precisely because Song Jiang feared he might get into trouble that he sent me to keep an eye on him. Now he's been caught how can I go back to the mountain fortress and face our leader if I don't rescue him? What are we going to do?"
Zhu Fu said: "Don't worry brother. But I tell you, this sergeant Li is a good fellow. He can hold his own against forty or fifty at once. Even you and I, supposing we made a concerted effort together, could not handle him. No, we've got to use our brains, not just brute force. Green-Eyes and I are normally good friends, he has taught me some useful tricks in martial arts. So I know pretty well how we can deal with him, only I won't be able to stay here afterwards. Tonight we must get twenty or thirty catties of meat cooked, and order a dozen bottles of wine. The meat must be cut in big pieces and then we'll mix a drug in with it. Before daybreak we and some of the inn servants will carry it to a quiet place along the road and wait for them when they're bringing Iron Ox, to offer them wine. When the drug takes them we can rescue Iron Ox. How about that?"
"Great plan," said the Crocodile. "We mustn't waste any time. We must get it all set up and then be off."
Zhu Fu said: "The problem is, Green-Eyes doesn't drink. So even if we can drug him, he'll come round pretty quickly. And one more thing: when this business gets out, I won't be able to remain here."
The Crocodile said: "Listen brother, this inn of yours, you don't make much out of it, do you? Wouldn't it be better for you to get your family and go with me to the mountain? If you join the band you'll have gold and silver galore and as many clothes as you like, it's a great life! Tonight, get a couple of your chaps to look for a cart to take your wife and valuables off with instructions to wait by the tenth milestone so we can all meet up and go to the mountain. Now, I happen to have some of the drug here in my pack. If Green-Eyes doesn't drink, we'll drug his meat and get him to eat a lot. When he passes out we'll rescue Iron Ox and take him back, what's difficult about that?"
Zhu Fu said: "You're right." He gave orders for a cart to be found, made up several bundles and loaded them on the cart, abandoning the rest of his household goods, told his wife and children to get onto the carts and told two of his people to take them on ahead.
That night the Crocodile and Zhu Fu cooked the meat, cut it into big pieces and mixed in the drug. Together with the wine they made two loads of it, and also took along twenty or thirty cups. They even took a quantity of vegetables, also drugged. This was in case there were any who did not eat meat, in order to take care of them too. There were two inn servants carrying a load each. The two brothers took some fruit and nuts and they all set off well before dawn and stopped in a very quiet part of the road. When it was just beginning to get light they heard gongs in the distance. The Crocodile posted himself beside the road.
Now around the fourth watch a party of thirty or forty soldiers, who had been drinking in the village half the evening, brought Iron Ox out with his hands tied behind his back. They set off with Green-Eyes riding at the back. When he saw them coming, Zhu Fu stepped forward and barred the way, saying: "Greetings, Master! I want to invite you to take a break." He ladled out a jug of wine, poured some into a big cup and offered it to Green-Eyes. The Crocodile brought out the meat and the servants offered the fruit and nuts. Green-Eyes hurriedly dismounted, rushed forward and said: "My dear friend, you should not have gone to all this trouble."
Zhu Fu said: "It's just a little token of my respect."
Green-Eyes took the cup but did not drink.
Zhu Fu knelt and said: "I know you do not drink, Master. But this wine is in your honour, so please just this once taste half a cup."
Green-Eyes could scarcely refuse this invitation, so he made a show of taking two sips.
Zhu Fu said: "Since you do not drink, let me invite you to have some meat."
"I am still full from last night," Green-Eyes said. "I couldn't eat anything."
"You have travelled quite some way, you must be hungry. Even if you don't want to eat, please take just a little something, in order not to shame me." He selected two good pieces and proffered them. Seeing him so attentive, Green-Eyes reluctantly ate two pieces of meat. Zhu Fu now offered wine to the local magnates, the headman, the hunters and the rest, whilst the Crocodile went and invited all the soldiers and retainers. This lot didn't care whether it was hot or cold, good or not good, they simply guzzled all that was to hand. Like the wind sweeping away the scattered clouds or the river bearing off fallen blossoms, they made a clean sweep of it.
Iron Ox was watching all this. Seeing the Crocodile and his brother, he knew that there must be some plan, so he said: "Aren't you going to offer me any?"
"You're a criminal!" the Crocodile shouted. "Who'd give anything to you? A murderer like you, you'd do better just to shut your mouth!"
Green-Eyes looked at his men and was about to give the order to move off again, when he saw they were all gaping at each other, quite unable to move. Their lips trembled, their legs had gone numb. They stumbled and fell. "It's a trap," Green-Eyes started to shout, but when he tried to move he too felt his head sinking and his legs floating, and he crashed to the ground. He fell in a flaccid heap and lay there unconscious. The Crocodile and Zhu Fu each took a halberd, and shouting: "You're not getting away!" set upon those who had not yet eaten or drunk and other bystanders. The quickest escaped, those who were slow were killed on the spot.
Iron Ox now gave a great shout. He burst his bonds, grabbed a halberd, and was on the point of killing Green-Eyes. Zhu Fu hurriedly intervened, saying: "Don't harm him, he's my teacher, we're good friends. Just get out of here, quick!"
Iron Ox replied: "If I don't kill that old ass Squire Cao I shall never calm down." He rushed off, brandishing his halberd, and killed Squire Cao and Li Gui's wife. Then for good measure he killed the headman, and since he was now really aroused he slaughtered a crowd of hunters and the thirty or so soldiers. The others, retainers and onlookers, only wished their parents had given them more than two legs. They ran for their lives, fleeing down the remotest paths.
Iron Ox was still busy looking for people to kill. "It's nothing to do with innocent bystanders, stop killing them!" the Crocodile shouted, standing in his way. Only then did Iron Ox desist. From the bodies of soldiers he stripped off two pieces of clothing which he put on.
The three were now preparing to set off, halberds in hand, down the smallest paths. But suddenly Zhu Fu said: "This is not right. I have sentenced my teacher to death. What's he going to say to the Governor, when he recovers? He'll have to follow us. You two go on ahead, I'll wait for him. I can't forget the great kindness he's shown to me. He's always been fair and honest with me. I'll wait and ask him if he'll join us and go to the mountain to join the outlaws. It's my duty to do this. I don't want him to have to go back and face the music."
The Crocodile said: "You're quite right. Now, I'll go on ahead with the cart, but I'll leave Iron Ox here with you to assist you. Only remember, Green-Eyes didn't eat a lot, so he'll come round in less than a couple of hours. If he doesn't appear by then, don't insist on waiting for him."
"Of course we won't," Zhu Fu said.
So the Crocodile went on ahead. Zhu Fu and Iron Ox sat down by the roadside and waited. And of course in under 2 hours they saw Green-Eyes racing towards them, brandishing his halberd and shouting: "Stop, you scoundrels!" Iron Ox seeing him so furious, leapt to his feet, raised his halberd, and charged him, much to Zhu Fu's distress. Well, because of this, 2 more tigers were eventually added to the Marshes of Mount Liang and four heroes were honoured before the great assembly hall.

LI KUI had asked for the three conditions, and Song Jiang replied, "When you go to Yishui County, in Yizhou Prefecture, Shandong province to bring your mother here you must not drink wine on the way. That is the first condition. Secondly, you must go by yourself, because you have a hasty disposition and I am afraid that nobody wants to go with you. Thirdly, you must not take those axes with you, and on the way you must be discreet, and quickly get back here."
"I can easily comply with those conditions," said Li Kui. "You need not worry. I should like to leave today." On that day he got his baggage ready, armed himself with swords. He took one large ingot, and about five small pieces of silver. He drank a few cups of wine, took leave of his companions, and then went down the hill and across the lake.
After his departure the leaders were assembled in the main hall when Song Jiang spoke, "I am afraid that our younger brother Li Kui will get into trouble. I do not know whether there is any man here from his village. If so he might follow him, and report to us what happens on the way."
"Zhu Gui comes from the same village as Li Kui," said Du Qian.
"I had forgotten that," said Song Jiang. "Of course they recognized each other as such at the Bailong Temple near Jiangzhou." He immediately sent a man to summon Zhu Gui, and soon the latter arrived from his inn.
"Our brother, Li Kui, has just gone to Yishui County to bring his mother here. No man was sent to accompany him on account of his bad temper when drunk. I understand that you are from his native district, and therefore I should be glad if you would follow him, and watch what might happen to him."
"I am a Yishui County man," said Zhu Gui. "I have a younger brother who keeps a wine shop in that town just outside the West Gate. This man Li Kui lived near a village called Baizhang in that district. He has an elder brother named Li Da who is in regular employment. Li Kui is a fierce and stupid man. Some time ago he committed murder at his village, and had to leave home, and dared not return. I have no objection to follow him, and look after him, but who will look after my inn while I am away? I have not been home for a long time, and should very much like to meet my brother again."
"You need not worry about your inn as I will send Hou Jian and Shi Yong to look after it during your absence," said Song Jiang.
This was all arranged, and Zhu Gui started off on his way to Yishui County.
Li Kui traveled by himself, and duly reached his destination. He had stuck to the conditions laid down by Song Jiang, and had not taken any wine on the way. At the West Gate he saw a big crowd of men reading a proclamation posted on the wall. He entered the crowd and listened to a man who was reading the proclamation for the information of the illiterate crowd. It read as follows: "(1) There is a thief called Song Jiang of Yuncheng County; (2) Also a jailer named Dai Zong, from the prison at Jiangzhou; (3) Also another thief named Li Kui, of Yishui County." As soon as he heard his own name Li Kui got excited, and did not know what to do when a man embraced him saying, "Elder brother Zhang, what are you doing here?" Upon looking at the man he recognized him as Zhu Gui, the "Dry Land Crocodile," and asked, "And what are you doing here?"
"Come with me and we will discuss matters," said Zhu Gui. They went together outside the town, and stopped at an inn in a small hamlet, where they entered a small room at the back of the premises.
Zhu Gui pointed at Li Kui, "What a nerve you have! That proclamation was offering a reward of ten thousand strings of cash for the arrest of Song Jiang; five thousand strings for Dai Zong, and three thousand strings of cash for your arrest. Why did you stop there looking at such a notice? Should any man recognize you you would be arrested at once. Song Jiang was afraid that you would get into trouble, and sent me here to watch over you. I left the mountain a day after your departure, and arrived here a day before you. What has delayed you?"
"It is due to Song Jiang ordering me not to drink wine," said Li Kui. "I walked slowly because of that. Do you know anyone at this inn? Where is your home in this place?"
"This inn belongs to my younger brother, Zhu Fu, and I used to live here. I was once a merchant, but lost all my capital, and so went to Liangshan Marsh. I have not been here since that time." He called for his brother, and introduced Li Kui to him. Zhu Fu then brought in some wine and invited them to partake of same.
'Our elder brother gave me an order not to drink wine," said Li Kui. "But as I am no longer on the road and have reached my destination, I may drink two cups of wine now."
Zhu Gui raised no objection to this, and they stayed eating and drinking there until nearly 2 A.M. It was a bright moonlight night and Li Kui wished to go, but Zhu Gui said, "You had better avoid the byroad, but turn round to the east when you come to a clump of trees and that will bring you to your home at Baizhang Village. You must bring your mother here, without delay, and we will set off at once for Liangshan Marsh."
"I will go along the byroads, and will lose no time," replied Li Kui.
"By that unfrequented road there are tigers and also bandits," said Zhu Gui.
"What am I afraid of?" asked Li Kui. He then armed himself with his two weapons, and left the two brothers. When he had gone about three //it was getting daylight, he saw a hare leap out of the grass at the side of the path, and race off along the road. He pursued his way, and in about two //came to the clump of trees, with leaves of red autumn tints. As he turned round the trees he met a big man who shouted, "You will be aware that if you pay us money we will not interfere with your baggage."
The man wore a coat of rough cloth and had a red silk turban. His face was sallow, and he held an axe in each hand.
Li Kui shouted, "Who are you that dare commit highway robbery here?"
"If I told you my name you would be frightened. I am called the 'Black Whirlwind.' If you pay our toll we will spare your life."
Li Kui laughed loudly, "How dare you use my own name in this way? Who are you, and where do you come from, you barefaced rascal?" He took his halberd and advanced towards the man.
The man saw that he had a very strong opponent and tried to retreat, but Li Kui struck him with his halberd so that he fell to the ground. Li Kui put his foot on the man's breast and asked, "Do you know me now?"
The man on the ground said, "Please forgive me, sir."
"I am Li Kui, the 'Black Whirlwind.' Why do you use my name in this way?"
The man replied, "My name is Li, but I am not the 'Black Whirlwind.' You have a great name, and if I use it people are afraid of me. It was because I found out the power of your name that I became a highwayman. I only stop single individuals, and as soon as they hear your name they drop their baggage and run away. I do not kill people, and yet I make a little profit. My name is Li Gui, and I live at the village a little up the road."
Li Kui said, "You are a real prick. You seize traveler's baggage, and also carry axes in both hands like me, so that you injure my reputation. You can taste one of my axes," so saying he seized an axe out of the man's hand.
Li Gui , called out, "Sir, if you kill me you will kill two persons."
"How do you make that out?" asked Li Kui, staying the blow.
"At home I support my mother who is ninety years of age, and this is my only means of helping her in her old age," said Li Gui. "I never injure people, but only make them afraid. If you kill me, my old mother will die of starvation."
Li Kui who never twinkled his eyes in chopping off people's heads, paused and thought when he heard this. "Here am I trying to succour my old mother, and yet killing a man who supports his old mother. Heaven will not allow me to live if I do this. No! No! I will forgive this man." He took his foot off Li Gui, who saluted him.
"I will let you off," said Li Kui, "but in future you must not make use of my name."
"As you have spared my life," said Li Gui, "I will give up this kind of life and earn an honest living in some other way."
"You are a filial son," said Li Kui, "so I will give you ten taels of silver to enable you to start a business." He did this, and then went on his way.
Li Kui could not help laughing. "That fellow was quite in my hands, and yet I have started him on a fresh life." He walked on, and about 10 A.M. he was both thirsty and hungry. The footpath was quite isolated without a single house within sight. But after going some distance he saw two small straw huts a long way off. He went towards the huts, and when near he saw a woman come from behind the hut. She had a flower in her hair, and was well rouged. He spoke to her, "Sister, I am a traveler, and cannot come across an inn. I am very hungry. If you can supply me with food and wine I will pay you well."
The woman dared not refuse this when she saw the build of Li Kui. "I have no wine, but can find you a little food."
"That will do," said Li Kui. "Let me have a good meal as I am damned hungry."
"Will a peck of rice be enough?" she asked.
"Three pecks would be better."
The woman took the rice, washed it in the stream, and then boiled it. While she was doing this Li Kui went to the back of the house to relieve his bowels and there saw a man trudging along. Just then the woman came out of the back door to get some vegetables, and she asked the man, "What is the trouble with your leg?"

"You very nearly saw the last of me," replied the man. "Of all the damned luck. I went to that place, and waited nearly a fortnight for a traveler to pass, but there was nothing doing. Today, however, a traveler arrived, but do you think who it was? It was Li Kui, the REAL 'Black Whirlwind'! Of all people it had to be that donkey's prick. He knocked me down with a blow of his halberd, and intended to kill me. But I deceived him by saying, 'If you kill me, you will kill two.' He asked me for an explanation, and I told him falsely that I had an old mother at home who depended on my support. If I was killed she would die of hunger. The fool believed me, and spared my life. He even gave me money to turn over a new leaf. So when he let me go I did not come straight here as he might have found me out, but instead I went up the hills and made a long detour."
"Don't talk so loudly!" the woman said. "A man came here, and asked for some food and it may be the same man. He is sitting outside the front door. You go and have a look at him. If he is the same man then go and get some drug to put in his food, and when it takes effect we can kill him. We can then get his money, which will enable us to live in the town and enter into trade—much better than being mere highwayman here."
Li Kui thought, "What a rascal! I spared his life, and even gave him money, and yet he plans to kill me. Heaven cannot allow such man to live!" He went round the corner to the back door where they were talking. As soon as Li Gui saw Li Kui he tried to escape, but Li Kui seized hold of him. The woman saw this, and went through the house to the front door. Li Kui knocked Li Gui on the ground, and then taking his sword cut off the man's head. He then went inside the house to seize the woman, but she had disappeared. He however searched in the rooms, found the place where they kept the money and woman's ornaments, and he took these. He noticed that the rice was well boiled, but there were no vegetables. Li Kui thought, "There's perfectly good meat here!", and cut off two pieces of meat from Li Gui's leg and roasted them over the stove, eating as he cooked. When he had eaten enough, he placed the corpse in the house and set the whole place on fire. He then continued on his way, and reached his village of East Dongdian about 5 P.M. He soon found his home, pushed open the door and entered. His mother called out from her bed, "Who is that?" Li Kui saw that his mother was blind, and was sitting on the bed reciting her prayers. He called out, "Mother! Your 'Iron Ox' has returned!"
"My boy, you have been absent for a long time. Where have you been employed? Your elder brother works as a servant but the wages he gets are hardly enough to support us. I have often thought of you, and have weeped so much that I have become blind in both eyes. What are you doing now?"
Li Kui thought, "If I tell her that I am a brigand from Liangshan Marsh she will not go with me. I must tell her some fibs." So he said, "Mother. I am in government employment, and have come to take you away with me."
"Splendid! But how can I go?"
"I will carry you on my back to the road where we can find a cart."
"Well, wait until your elder brother comes, and then we will discuss the matter."
"Why wait?" asked Li Kui. "I am going with you."
Just then it happened that his elder brother Li Da entered the room carrying an earthenware jar containing rice for his mother. When Li Kui saw his brother he kowtowed and said, "Brother, I have not seen you for years."
Li Da spoke abusively, "Why have you returned? Much trouble you will bring here again?"
His mother answered, "Your brother is now in government employment, and has specially come to take me away with him."
"Mother! Don't believe his farts," said Li Da. "Some time ago he killed a man, and I was arrested, and wore a cangue for it. I have had much suffering for him. I have heard that he has joined the brigands at Liangshan Marsh, and recently rescued some of them from an execution ground at Jiangzhou. A warrant is out for his arrest, and as they have not found him they wanted to arrest me. My master pleaded for me at the *yamen*, and said that my brother Li Kui left home ten years ago, and we have not heard anything of him since then. He thought that perhaps the bandits were using the name of Li Kui falsely. My master gave money to the officials at the *yamen*, and that is why they have not arrested me. A proclamation has been issued offering a reward of three thousand strings of cash for the arrest of my brother, Li Kui. Now, he returns home, and talks nonsense to you."
"Do not worry," replied Li Kui. "How would it be if we all went to Liangshan Marsh, and had a good time there?"
Li Da was angry at this, and tried to strike his brother, but was aware that he could not overcome him. He then threw the earthenware jar on the floor, and ran out of the room.
"He has gone to report my arrival," said Li Kui to himself, "so I must leave at once before they arrive to arrest me. My brother has never seen much money so I will leave fifty taels of silver on the bed for him. When he sees it he will not be so keen to witness my arrest." He did this and said, "Mother! I will now carry you on my back."
"Where are you going to?" she asked.
"You need not ask, anyhow it is a much better place than this," said Li Kui. He then lifted his mother on his back, and left the house with her.
Now Li Da had run and informed his master of the return of his brother, and soon came back with about ten farm laborers. When he entered the room he found nothing but a piece of silver on the bed. He then considered, "My brother has left this money for me. Where can he hide now? He may come with other men from Liangshan Marsh. If I try to overtake him I shall only get into trouble."
As the laborers could not find Li Kui they did not know what to do, but Li Da told them, "My brother has evidently gone, and carried off my mother. There are many byroads about here, but how can we find which way he has gone." The men saw that Li Da did not know what to do so after a rest they all returned to the farm.
Li Kui, carrying his mother on his back, chose the quietest paths, and towards evening arrived at the foot of a range of mountains. He recognized the place as Yiling, and knew that if he crossed the range there were farmhouses on the other side. The moonlight was bright, and he had no difficulty in slowly ascending the mountain path. His mother asked him to find some water as she was quite thirsty, and Li Kui assured her that as soon as they had crossed the mountain he would find a house where they could rest and get food. His mother replied that at the last meal she had had only dry rice without any liquid, and so was very thirsty. He replied, "My throat also burns like a fire, and my breath is like smoke issuing from my mouth. You wait until I get to the summit when I will have a look around for some water."
"I feel as though I must die. I am so thirsty," said his mother.
"I am getting very tired, mother," replied Li Kui.
When he reached the summit he put his mother down by the side of a big green boulder, and left his sword there, and went off to look for water. He soon heard the sound of running water, and after a few turns he came to a small stream. He had a good drink, using his hands as a cup, and then thought, "How can I carry some water to my mother?" He looked around on all sides, and at last espied a temple in the distance. He made his way there through the dense bushes. At last he reached the temple, and saw that it was called, "The Great Sage Temple of Sizhou." In front of it was a stone incense urn, and he seized hold of it with the idea of using it to carry the water. But the stone urn was one solid piece with the base, and he could not move it. At this he got angry and using his full strength at last rooted the stone out of the ground. He then lifted it, and broke the top part from the base on the stone steps leading up to it.
He carried the stone urn off to the stream where he thoroughly washed it, and cleaned it out with grass. He then half filled it with water, and carried it off in both hands. He followed the same way back, but had great difficulties in making his way with such an awkward load. When he reached the big green boulder, however, he was astounded not to see his mother although his sword was still there. He called out aloud for her, but there was no response. He became very anxious, as although he looked all around carefully he could find no traces or clue of her departure. But when he had gone a distance of about thirty steps he found the grass covered with blood. He trembled with fear now, but followed the marks. These at last brought him to a cave where he saw two tiger cubs inside eating a human leg. Shaking with anger he thought, "I came from Liangshan Marsh to take my mother, and carried her here on my back, but it seems that she has been eaten by the tigers." His mind was inflamed with passion, and his face glared with a fierce look—his moustaches standing out like porcupine's quills. Seizing his sword he slashed at the tiger cubs. They growled, showed their teeth and claws as they reared on their hind legs, and rushed at him. He killed one with a single cut of his sword, and the other cub retreated to the cave. Li Kui followed with sword in hand and killed the second cub. He then turned round and saw the tigress outside racing towards the cave. He said, "So you are the damned beast who has devoured my mother." He threw down his long sword, and took the dagger from his waist. The tigress stopped at the entrance, lashing its tail from side to side, and not having seen Li Kui, turned round facing outside. Li Kui jumped forward, and stabbed the beast in its rear, driving the dagger in to the hilt and penetrating its stomach—a mighty lunge typical of the rage that he felt. The tigress roared, and leapt away with the dagger sticking in her body, and galloped away. Li Kui picked up his sword and left the cave. As the tigress had galloped off wounded a strong wind sprung up, shook the trees as in a big storm. There is an ancient saying, "Clouds originate with dragons, whereas winds originate with tigers." At that spot the moonlight was quite bright, and suddenly there was a tremendous roar, and a tiger leapt forth. It rushed at Li Kui, who deliberately and without fear, slashed with his sword, and cut its throat as it sprang at him. The tiger feeling the pain, and finding breathing difficult, retreated a few steps, and then as it expired gave forth its last roar which sounded something like a landslide of half a mountain. Li Kui had now killed four tigers, and he now entered the tigers'den in the cave, looking carefully to see whether there was still another one. Having found nothing there and being tired, he made his way back to the temple, and slept there that night. The next day he collected the remains and torn clothing of his mother, and buried them behind the temple. He could not avoid crying while doing this. He felt very hungry now, and continued his way across the range of mountains. He soon met five hunters armed with crossbows and arrows. Li Kui's clothes were all covered with blood, and this sight startled the hunters. They asked, "Are you a guardian spirit of this mountain? How otherwise dare you cross the range?"
Li Kui thought, "I cannot tell them who I am because there is a reward offered for my arrest." So he replied, "I'm a traveler, and last night I was crossing the mountain with my mother. While I went to get some water for her a tiger attacked and ate her. So I found the tiger's den, and there killed two cubs, and afterwards two fully grown tigers. I slept last night in the Great Sage Temple and have just come from there."
"We don't believe that," cried the hunters. "How could one man kill four tigers? We might believe you killing two cubs, but to kill two fully grown tigers is really a big achievement. We have been beaten by the officials for not killing those two tigers. Those tigers have been on the mountains for a long time, and during the last five months nobody has dared go that way. We do not believe what you say! You need not try to humbug us."
"I do not belong to this district," said Li Kui. "Why should I humbug you? If you don't believe me then I will go and show you the dead tigers, and you can get them carried down the mountain."
"If this is true we shall be much indebted to you," said the hunters. They blew whistles, and soon about fifty men had assembled at that spot. They got poles and ropes, and then all accompanied Li Kui up the mountain. There sure enough they found the bodies of the four tigers, and carried them down the mountain. The hunters reported the matter to the head of the first village they came to, and they then all adjourned to the big house of the local wealthy man—Old Cao. This man was a clerk in the county *yamen*, and had made his wealth by extortion in his own village. He was disliked and also feared by his own neighbors. Yet he was always talking of loyalty and filial piety so that he was well known as a hypocrite. As soon as he heard what had happened he invited Li Kui into the hall where he asked for full details of the remarkable event. Aftert his had all been recited he asked for the name and home address of Li Kui.
"My name is Zhang," replied Li Kui, "but people generally call me 'Courageous Zhang.'"
"You are certainly courageous," said Old Cao, "if you had not a large gall you could not have killed four tigers." He then gave orders for a big feast to be provided in honor to the "Courageous Zhang."
It was soon known in the villages around that four tigers had been killed by one man and in no time the people were crowding into the village, and into Cao's house to see the tigers There they gazed at the great hero who was being entertained in the hall by Cao. Among the people was the wife of Li Gui, whose husband Li Kui had killed a few days ago. She had run away to her parents' home and when she heard the news about the tigers she followed the crowd. She recognized Li Kui and immediately returned home and reported the matter to her parents. They went at once to the village chief who was given to know that Li Kui was the criminal for whose arrest a reward had been offered. He secretly sent a messenger asking Old Cao to come and discuss a very urgent matter. When Cao received the message he decided not to tell Li Kui, but merely said that he wished to retire and change his clothes, but when outside the room he hurried straight off to the other village.
"This man who has killed the tigers," said the village chief, "is Li Kui, the 'Black Whirlwind' of Baizhang Village, and there is a summon out for his arrest."
"In that case you must make careful inquiries among the people, and make sure of the matter before we act. It will be an easy matter to arrest him when we are sure about his identity. If he is not the man then we should only make trouble by arresting him."
"There is a woman here, Madame Li, who recognizes him," said the chief. "He came to her house and later he killed her husband."
"As that appears to be conclusive," said Cao, "we had better entertain him at the feast, and then ask him whether he prefers to go to the magistrate and ask for a reward for killing the tigers, or whether he prefers to receive the reward in our village. If he objects to go to the magistrate for the reward we can assume that he is guilty. Then we must press him to take plenty of wine and get him drunk when we can easily tie him up. Then we can go to the magistrate's *yamen* and ask them to send a police inspector to arrest him and so there can be no failure."
The village chief agreed to this and made arrangements accordingly with his men. Cao returned home and there resumed his seat at the table with Li Kui. He said, "I hope you are not offended at my leaving you. Please make yourself quite at home. Loosen your dress and put your dagger at one side."
"I left my dagger in the belly of one of the tigers," said Li Kui, "and only have the scabbard here. When they cut the tiger open I hope they will find my dagger and return it to me."
"Never mind that!" said Old Cao. "I have a very good dagger here which I will present to you."
Li Kui thereupon took off the scabbard, and belt and handed them to a servant. Cao ordered a fresh supply of food and wine. The village chief, the hunters, and several other men were present at the feast, and they each in turn toasted Li Kui. During the feast Old Cao asked Li Kui whether he would prefer to receive the reward for killing the tigers at the magistrate *yamen* or in that village.
"I am only a traveler," said Li Kui, "and have hardly time to go to the magistrate. I just happened to kill the tigers on my way, and do not care to go to the magistrate. I will receive the reward here, but even if there is no reward I can leave without it."
"We do not care to treat you disrespectfully," said Cao, "so you must at least wait until we have collected the money to present you. We will send the tigers to the magistrate *yamen*."
"Could you first give me a change of clothing," asked Li Kui, "as these clothes are rather soiled."
Old Cao agreed to this and ordered a servant to bring a suit of blue cloth. Li Kui took the new clothes, and when he had changed he was met outside the door of the hall by many men who also wished to drink a cup of wine with him. One cup of wine was warm, another was cold, and so on. Li Kui did not suspect any plot, and drank freely with great joviality. He had now quite forgotten Song Jiang's order that he was not to drink wine. It was not very long before he was dead drunk. The men then removed him to a small empty room at the back where they stretched him on a bench, and then bound him to the bench with ropes. The village chief then sent urgent messengers to report the matter to the magistrate's *yamen*. He also had an accusation drawn up for Madame Li who accompanied the messenger to the *yamen*.
When the magistrate heard the report he was startled and asked, "Where has the 'Black Whirlwind' been arrested? We must not allow this rebel to escape!"
The messenger and the hunters told him that Li Kui was imprisoned in Old Cao's house in their village. They were afraid that he might escape, and did not dare to try to bring him to the *yamen*. The magistrate summoned Inspector Li Yun to the court, and instructed him to take a large body of policemen to Old Cao's house and arrest the prisoner Li Kui, the "Black Whirlwind." He was to exercise great care, and be sure that the prisoner did not escape.
Inspector Li Yun got together about thirty of his most trusted men, armed them and departed for the village. The county was only a small place so that everybody knew what was happening. Now the news soon reached the village on the east side of the town where Zhu Gui was living with his brother. Zhu Gui spoke to his brother, "That fellow Li Kui is evidently in trouble. What shall we do to save him? I was specially deputed by Song Jiang to come here, and watch the proceedings, Li Kui will be arrested, but if I do not save his life how can I go back and face our elder brother Song Jiang? What shall we do?"
"Do not get excited," said Zhu Fu. "This Inspector Li Yun is a skilled military man, and fifty men cannot rival him. You and I are no match against him although we worked together on the same plan. We must use strategy and not force. Now Inspector Li Yun is a close personal friend of mine, and every day he has been training me in the use of military weapons. I have a plan, but it will prevent our living in this place any more. We must boil about twenty pounds of meat and cut it up into large pieces and prepare about ten jars of wine. In both of these we must, mix some sleeping drug. About 4 A.M. we must start off with our assistants carrying the food and wine and wait in a quiet spot on the road for Li Yun. When he arrives we must offer him and his men the food and wine as a gift, and get them all senseless. Then we can release Li Kui and escape."
"That is a splendid plan," said Zhu Gui, "and we will get things ready at once."
"Inspector Li Yun does not drink wine," said Zhu Fu, "and as he will only take the drugged meat he will probably recover consciousness before the others. As soon as he finds out how we have deceived him it will not be safe for any of us to stay here."
"You are an innkeeper here," said Zhu Gui, "but you do not make much money. It would be better if you can go with me to Liangshan Marsh and join the brigands there, and get much money and new clothing and enjoy life generally. We can tell two of your servants to get a cart, load up your valuables with your wife, and send them on in advance to wait for us at a village called Shilipai."
"Brother, that is a good idea," replied Zhu Fu. He arranged matters accordingly, and it was not long before the cart had started on its way.
That evening the two brothers boiled the meat and mixed the drug in same. They also prepared the wine in the same way. The whole supply was made up into two loads, and they also took about thirty cups with them. The two servants and the two brothers divided the loads. They got away about 4 A.M. and halted when they came to a quiet desolate spot on the road. It was just dawn when they heard the sound of gongs approaching, and Zhu Gui went forward by himself to meet the party. It was Inspector Li Yun with his men escorting the prisoner Li Kui, the "Black Whirlwind," to the town. Inspector Li Yun was riding a horse in the rear of his party. As they came up to Zhu Fu he called out, "Sir, I request you to stop, and accept a little refreshment." He at once offered Li Yun wine while Zhu Gui passed round the meat. Upon seeing this Inspector Li Yun quickly dismounted and hurrying to the front spoke to Zhu Fu, "Friend, why have you come so far as this to entertain us?"
"I wish to give you a little comfort," replied Zhu Fu. He saw that Inspector Li Yun was not drinking the wine so he continued, "I am aware that you are a teetotaler but I particularly request you to take a little liquor this time."
Inspector Li Yun did not like to refuse this pressing offer so he took a few sips. Zhu Fu then pressed him to take a little meat, but Inspector Li Yun declined this as he said he had had a big dinner last night.
"But you have a long way to go," replied Zhu Fu, "and you will be hungry before you reach your destination. Please take a little at least and so save my face with your men."
Here again Inspector Li Yun did not like to cause annoyance by declining the offer, so he ate some of the meat. All the policemen also partook of the wine and the meat, and Zhu Gui even offered it to all the villagers who were following the party. Without making inquiries as to whether it was hot or cold they all set to and had a good feed. They all took it in a happy-go-lucky style and no questions were raised.
Li Kui seeing Zhu Gui and his brother knew that this was some trick so he said, "Are you not going to give me some of this stuff?"
"Why should we? You are only a mere criminal," replied Zhu Gui. "You had better shut your mouth as you have not long to live."
Just then Inspector Li Yun saw that his men were looking at each other stupidly and could not move so he exclaimed, "We have been fooled by a ruse." He tried to move, but instead he also fell down and was soon asleep.
Zhu Gui and Zhu Fu seizing their halberds now shouted out, "Let no man depart!" Some men however tried to get away, but they were soon caught and killed on the spot. Li Kui seeing this burst asunder the ropes and taking a halberd went up to Inspector Li Yun to kill him. But Zhu Fu stopped him, "Do not kill him! He is my teacher, and is an extremely good man."
"Then let me at least kill that ass, Old Cao," said Li Kui. He went forward and found Old Cao and the wife of Li Gui, he killed both of them. He also killed the hunters, the vilage chief, and all the soldiers. He then stripped a soldier of his uniform and put it on himself. The three men then left the scene by a small side path. But Zhu Fu soon stopped and said, "How can I leave like this? Inspector Li Yun was my teacher, but how can he face the magistrate alone when all his men have been slaughtered? He must come to pursue us when he recovers consciousness, and I will wait for him and suggest to him to escape with me and join the bandits at Liangshan Marsh."
Zhu Gui said, "Younger brother, what you say is quite true. I will go forward and join the cart. Li Kui will stop here with you and wait for him. But if Inspector Li Yun will not come with you then you must not insist on waiting for him."
"I agree," said Zhu Fu. Zhu Gui then departed.
Zhu Fu and Li Kui sat down and after about 2 hours they saw Inspector Li Yun rushing towards them with a halberd in his hand and shouting, "You brigands shan't escape." Li Kui saw that Inspector Li Yun was furious and fearing that he might strike Zhu Fu, stood up, with his halberd to fight with Inspector Li Yun.

Mount Liang Marsh gains 2 tigers,
And welcomes and fetes 4 men.

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**The Happy Elegant Panther/Leopard Meets Magic Messenger Dai Zong on a Narrow Road in Byway Path; Morbid Sick Guan Suo Yang Xiong Meets Madcap Shi Xiu on an Avenue in the Big Street**

Li Kui and Li Yun fought 6 or 7 rounds, with neither besting the other. "Stop," cried Zhu Fu, separating them with his halberd. "Listen to me." The contestants paused.
"Teacher, please hear me," he said to Li Yun. "You have been much kinder to me than I deserve, and have instructed me in lance and staff. I am very grateful. The problem is my brother Zhu Gui is one of the chieftains on Mount Liangshan. He was ordered by his leader Song Jiang the Timely Rain to look after brother Li Kui here. You were taking him to the authorities. How could Zhu Gui go back and face Song Jiang? We had to play that trick on you. Brother Li Kui wanted to finish you, but I wouldn't let him, and he killed only the soldiers. We were going to put ourselves a long way from here, but I guessed you couldn't return to the county office, and would have to come after us. I remembered how good you have always been to me, and decided to wait for you. Teacher, you're so intelligent. There's nothing you don't know. Today, scores of men have been killed and Black Whirlwind has escaped. How can you report back to the magistrate? You're sure to be put on trial, and there's no one to rescue you. Wouldn't it be better if you went with us up the mountain and joined Song Jiang's band? What do you say?"
Li Yun thought for several minutes. "Suppose they won't have me?" he finally said.
Zhu Fu laughed. "Surely you've heard of the Timely Rain from Shandong? He welcomes bold fellows from all over."
Li Yun sighed. "I've become a man without a home or country. Luckily I have no wife or children, so I don't have to worry about the authorities arresting them. I suppose I'll just have to go with you."
Li Kui chuckled. "Brother, why didn't you say that earlier?" He gave Li Yun a deep bow.
Since the constable had no family or property, the three men set out together after the cart. Halfway, they caught up with Zhu Gui, who was delighted. They had an uneventful journey. As they neared Mount Liangshan they were met by Ma Lin and Zheng Tianshou, who said: "We've been sent down to inquire about you. Now that we've seen you, we'll go back and report." The two scouts went on ahead.
The following day the four gallants, with Zhu Fu's family, arrived at Fraternity Hall in the stronghold on Mount Liangshan. Zhu Gui came forward and introduced Li Yun to Chao Gai and Song Jiang and the other leaders.
"This is Li Yun, a constable of Yishui County. His nickname is the Black-Eyed Tiger."
Then he introduced his brother. "This is my younger brother Zhu Fu. He's known as the Smiling Tiger."
Li Kui kowtowed to Song Jiang, and his two axes were restored to him. He related how he had taken his mother from Yiling, how she had been devoured by a savage beast, and how, because of this, he had killed four tigers. Tears coursed down his cheeks as he told his story. But when he went on to relate how he killed the robber who was masquerading as himself, everybody laughed.
"You killed four tigers," Chao Gai and Song Jiang said, smiling, "and today you are adding two live tigers to our stronghold. That calls for a celebration."
All the assembled bold fellows were pleased. Cows and horses were slaughtered and a feast was laid. Chao Gai gave the two newly arrived chieftains seats on his left, before Bai Sheng.
Wu Yong said: "Our fortress has become quite prosperous recently. Gallant men from everywhere are flocking to join us. This is due to the virtue of brothers Chao Gai and Song Jiang and is the good fortune of you all. Under these circumstances, we instruct Zhu Gui to resume control of his tavern east of the mountain, and let Shi Yong and Hou Jian return. Zhu Fu and his family shall be given a house to live in. Our fortress has many enterprises today. It's not like before. We're going to set up three more taverns. They will keeps tabs on what is going on outside, and aid fighters coming up and going from the mountain. If the imperial court sends out a bandit-catching force they can inform us. If the troops head this way, we can prepare.
"West of the mountain is a wide plain. Tong Wei and Tong Meng will go there with a dozen men and open a tavern. LiLi with another dozen will open a tavern to the south, Shi Yong with the same number will set one up to the north. All will build pavilions overlooking the water and prepare signal arrows and boats to ferry men across. Any military activity, urgent or otherwise, they will report at once.
"Before the mountain we shall build three large gates, and Du Qian will be in charge. He is excused from all other duties and is not to leave his post. Tao Zongwang will supervise all labor—the digging of ditches, channels and canals, repairing the walls and ramparts, the building of a large road in front of the mountain. He originally was a farmer and he knows about these things. Jiang Jing will be in charge of the granary. He'll check everything that goes in and out, and keep accounts. Xiao Rang shall issue all documents and passes for movement within and outside the fortress, up and down the mountain, and through the three gates, and the identifications of chieftains, big and small.
"We'll trouble Jin Dajian to carve all necessary troop tallies, document seals, and stone plaques. Hou Jian will look after clothing, armor, pennants and flags. Li Yun will be in charge of buildings and halls. Ma Lin will surprise the construction and repair of fighting ships, large and small. Song Wan and Bai Sheng will fortify and defend the Shore of Golden Sands. Stumpy Tiger Wang and Zheng Tianshou will do the same at Duck's Bill Shore. Mu Chun and Zhu Fu will receive all money and grain coming into the fortress. Lu Fang and Guo Sheng will take charge of the rest chambers in the two wings on either side of Fraternity Hall. Song Qing will arrange all banquets."
For the next three days everyone fasted. No need to say more. It was a time of peace for Liangshan Marsh. The men trained daily, practicing their military arts. On the water, the chieftains taught navigation and swimming, and fighting aboard ships. Of that no more need be said.

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One day Song Jiang was chatting with Chao Gai, Wu Yong and the other leaders. "We brothers are all here together," he said. "But Gongsun still hasn't returned. I thought a hundred days would be plenty for him to see his mother and teacher in Jizhou. His time is long since up and we have no news of him. Can he have broken his promise to us? I wish brother Dai Zong would find out what's happened, and why he hasn't come back."
Dai Zong said he would go. Song Jiang was very pleased.
"Only you can travel so quickly. We'll be expecting news from you in ten days."
Dai Zong bid them all farewell. Early the next morning, disguised as a lieutenant of the Imperial Guards, he left Mount Liangshan for Jizhou. He tied the four charms to his legs and performed his magic ritual. On the road he ate only vegetables and vegetable soups. In three days he reached the border of Yishui County. He heard a man say: "A few days ago Black Whirlwind got away and many people were killed. It seems Constable Li Yun was involved. No one knows where they've gone. They still haven't been taken."
Dai Zong smiled coldly.
While travelling that day he observed in the distance a man coming towards him, a lance of hollow iron alloy in his hand. The man halted when he saw how rapidly Dai Zong was moving.
"Marvellous Traveller!"
Dai Zong peered at the person who had hailed him. Standing in a path on the slope was a big fellow with a round head and large ears, a straight nose and a square mouth, fine brows and wide-set eyes, a narrow waist and broad shoulders.
"We haven't met, sir," said Dai Zong. "How do you know my name?"
"Then you truly are the Marvellous Traveller?" The man cast his weapon aside, dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
Dai Zong hastily raised him up and returned the courtesy. "What is your name, sir?"
"I'm called Yang Lin, from the prefecture of Zhangde. Mainly, I live outside the law, and I'm known in the gallant fraternity as the Elegant Panther. Several months ago I met Master Gongsun Sheng in a tavern on the road. We drank together and he told me how chieftains Chao Gai and Song Jiang on Mount Liangshan welcomed bold men, how loyal and fine they are. He wrote a letter on introduction for me and urged me to take it to the fortress. I didn't think myself worthy, but Master Gongsun said: 'At Lijia Entry is a tavern run by Zhu Gui. He gets men across who want to join the band. The recruiting officer who reports new arrivals to the leaders is Superintendent Dai. He's known as the Marvellous Traveller. He can cover eight hundred *li* in a single day.' You walked so swiftly, I shouted your name, just to see how you'd react. I didn't dream it was really you. Heaven has willed that we should have this chance encounter."
"It's because of Master Gongsun that I'm on my way to Jizhou. I'm trying to get news of him. Chao and Song have ordered me to find out what's happened to him and bring him back to the fortress. I didn't expect to have the pleasure of meeting you."
"Although I'm from Zhangde, I've been to every shire in the prefecture of Jizhou. If you won't scorn my services, I'll be glad to take you around."
"I would consider myself fortunate. After we've found Master Gongsun, we'll go to Mount Liangshan together. There will be time enough."
Yang Lin was very pleased. He kowtowed to Dai Zong and pledged himself his blood brother. The superintendent removed his magic charms and the two continued on slowly. In the evening they rested in a village inn. Yang Lin treated Dai Zong to food and wine.
"When I'm performing my magic I'm not allowed to eat meat," the superintendent said.
They dined on vegetable dishes. The following morning they rose early, cooked breakfast and prepared to set forth.
"I'll never be able to keep up if you walk in your magic manner," said Yang Lin. "I'm afraid we can't travel together."
Dai Zong smiled. "I've a way to take people with me. I'll put two of the charms on your legs, perform the ritual, and you'll be able to walk just as fast. You can travel or halt whenever you like. Otherwise, you certainly wouldn't be able to stay with me."
"I'm just a common mortal. I don't have your spiritual qualities."
"That doesn't matter. Using my magic formula I can take with me anyone I want. I have only to perform the ritual and we travel together. If I stick to a vegetable diet, there's no problem."
He tied two of the charms on Yang Lin's legs and two on his own. Then he performed the ritual, blew on the charms, and they lightly set forth, moving rapidly or slowly, as Dai Zong saw fit. On the road they talked of deeds of the gallant fraternity. Although they proceeded in a leisurely manner, without being aware of it they covered a great deal of ground.
By late morning they arrived at a place surrounded by high mountains. In the middle was a post station for changing horses.
"This is Horse Watering Valley," said Yang Lin. "There used to be a big band of men on the tall mountain ahead. I don't know about lately. It's called Horse Watering Valley because it's so pretty here, with winding streams amid jade-green hills."
As they reached the foot of the mountain a clamor of beating gongs and pounding drums broke out. A hundred or two bandits emerged and blocked their path. Two big fellows in the lead, both carrying halberds, shouted at them: "Stand where you are! Who are you pricks and where are you going? Pay for a free passage, if you have any sense, and we'll spare your lives!"
Yang Lin grinned. "Brother," he said, "watch me knock off these louts." Twirling his lance, he sped forward.
The two big fellows advanced to meet his fierce charge. But as he drew nearer, the one in the lead exclaimed: "Don't make a move. Aren't you brother Yang Lin?"
Yang Lin halted. Only then did he recognize his adversary. The man, weapon in hand, bowed deeply and ordered his tall companion to do the same. Yang Lin called Dai Zong over.
"I'd like you to meet two brothers of mine," he said.
"Who are they? How do they know you?"
"This bold fellow, Deng Fei, is the one who knows me. He's from Xiangyang prefecture in the Gaitian District. Because of his red eyebrows he's known in the gallant fraternity as the Fiery-Eyed Lion. He is skilled with the iron chain weapon. When he flails it, no one can touch him. We operated together many times, but I haven't seen him in five years. I never thought I'd meet him here, today."
Deng Fei indicated Dai Zong. "Who is this brother?" he asked Yang Lin. "He's obviously no ordinary man."
"He's Dai Zong, the Marvellous Traveller, one of the bold fellows of Liangshan Marsh."
"Not Superintendent Dai of Jiangzhou, who can walk eight hundred *li* in a single day?"
"The same," Dai Zong acknowledged.
The two brigands hastily bowed and said: "We've often heard your great name. Who would have thought that today we could pay our respects?"
"What is the name of this gallant fellow?" asked Dai, indicating the second leader.
"Meng Kang, from Zhending Prefecture. He used to be a boat builder," Deng Fei explained. "He was constructing a large vessel to transport a load of marble. But the official in charge kept hurrying and persecuting him to such an extent that Meng killed him. He abandoned his family and fled to the greenwood where he became a robber. That was some years ago. Because he's tall and fair and powerfully built, he's been given the nickname the Jade Flagpole."
Dai Zong was very pleased.
The four chatted a while and Yang Lin asked: "How long have you two been together?"
"Over a year," said Deng Fei. "Six months ago we met another brother, Pei Xuan, a scribe from the prefecture of Jingzhao. Highly competent at writing complaints, honest and intelligent, he's a man who would never commit the slightest wrong, and was known locally as Ironclad Virtue. He's also skilled with weapons and has more than his share of cleverness and courage. But the imperial court appointed a corrupt prefect to Jiangzhao who framed him and ordered that he be exiled to the island of Shamen. As he was passing through, we killed his escort and rescued him, and he took refuge with us. We formed a band of nearly three hundred. He's excellent with a pair of swords, and since he's the eldest among us, we've chosen him our leader. Won't you come up to our humble stronghold and meet him?"
Deng Fei instructed his men to bring horses. Dai Zong and Yang Lin removed the charms from their legs and swung into the saddles. The party started up the trail. Before long they reached the fortress, where they dismounted. Pei Xuan, who had already been informed, hastened down the steps to greet them.
Dai Zong and Yang Lin looked at him. He was indeed a handsome man, fair complected, stout, with a calm, steady manner. The two were very pleased, and Pei Xuan invited them into the meeting hall. After courtesies were exchanged, he placed Dai Zong in the seat of honor. Then Yang Lin, himself, Deng Fei and Meng Kang were also seated, in that order. Hosts and guests later joined in a feast, and drank to the accompaniment of fifes and drums.
Dai spoke of the recruitment program of Chao and Song, and how they welcomed bold men from all over. He told of their kindness, virtue and benevolence, and their many fine qualities, of how harmony prevailed among the chieftains, of the eight hundred *li* of territory controlled by Mount Liangshan, of the strength of the fortress walls and ramparts, of the misty waters that surrounded them on every side. He explained how, with their large force of men and horses, they had no fear of attack by government troops.
"We have a mountain stronghold here too," said Pei Xuan, "and about three hundred horses. Our wealth would fill ten carts, not counting our grain and fodder. We've also nearly five hundred men. If you don't scorn us as too inferior, brother, I wish you would take us to your big fortress and let us join your band. Perhaps we could make some puny efforts that would be of use. How does my idea strike you?"
Dai Zong was delighted. "Chao and Song are very straightforward in their dealings with people," he said. "If we can get the assistance of you gentlemen it will be like adding flowers to embroidery. Since you've decided, please pack your belongings. When Yang Lin and I come back from seeing Master Gongsun in Jizhou we'll all disguise ourselves as government troops and march through the night."
Everyone was pleased. They drank until they were mellow, then removed to the pavilion on the rear slope overlooking Horse Watering Valley, where they continued drinking and admired the scenery.
"How beautiful," said Dai Zong. "Lovely and secluded. How did you two happen to come here?"
"Originally this was the lair of a few worthless varlets," said Deng Fei. "We simply took over."
They all laughed. The five soon were very drunk. Pei Xuan performed a dance with his two swords. Dai Zong was fulsome in his praise. The visitors spent the night in the stronghold.
The next morning Dai Zong and Yang Lin announced they were leaving. None of the entreaties of their three hosts could persuade them to remain. The brigand leaders saw them off down the mountain and returned to the fortress. They began packing and getting ready to move. Of that we'll say no more.
Travelling by day and resting at night, Dai Zong and Yang Lin soon reached the outskirts of Jizhou Town. There they put up at an inn.
"Brother," said Yang Lin, "Master Gongsu is a student of Taoism. He's probably in some mountain grove. He wouldn't live in town."
"You're right," Dai Zong agreed.
They walked around the outskirts of Jizhou, inquiring about Master Gongsun, but no one knew him. They went back to the inn. The next morning they tried more distant villages and market-places, again without any success. They returned to the inn once more.
"Could there be someone in the town who knows him?" Dai Zong wondered on the third day.
He and Yang Lin went looking in Jizhou. Every reliable person they asked said: "Don't know him. Are you sure he lives in town? He's probably in some famous mountain monastery in an outlying county."
They came to a large street. Further down, musicians were welcoming an approaching man. Dai and Yang stopped to watch. First came two prison guards. One toted colorfully wrapped gifts. The other carried bolts of satin and brocade. Behind, shaded by a black silk umbrella, walked a prison executioner. A fine figure of a man, he wore a gown of embroidered blue indigo. His long eyebrows extended into his sideboards, his eyes turned up at the corners, his complexion was pale brown, and he had a wispy moustache. He was a Henanese, and his name was Yang Xiong. He had come to Jizhou with a paternal cousin who had been appointed prefect, and had remained ever since. The prefect who succeeded his cousin also knew him, and made him warden of the town's two prisons, as well as the official executioner. Yang Xiong was a first-rate man with weapons, but his complexion was rather pale, and so he was nicknamed the Pallid.
To his rear another prison guard carried a sword with a demon's head hilt. They were returning from an execution, and friends, who had bedecked Yang Xiong with red ribbons and offered him their compliments, were seeing him home.
As the procession was passing Dai Zong and Yang Lin, a group of people, wine cups in hand, stopped it at an intersection. Seven or eight soldiers emerged from a side street, headed by a certain Zhang Bao, better known as Kick a Sheep to Death. He was part of the garrison guarding the town walls. His cronies were impoverished idlers from in and around the town who were always extorting money. Zhang had been reprimanded several times, but to no avail. It irked him that Yang Xiong, not a local man, should be feared and respected.
Now, seeing the Henanese showered with gifts, and himself backed by a gang of half-drunken knaves, he decided to vent his spleen. He pushed his way through the crowd of well-wishers at the intersection.
"My respects, Warden," he cried.
"Come and have a drink, brother," said Yang Xiong.
"It's not wine I want from you, but a hundred or so strings of cash!"
"Although I know you, brother, we've never had any financial dealings. How can you ask me for money?"
"You've squeezed plenty of riches out of the people today. Why not share some with me?"
"It's only that others wanted to give me a bit of face. I didn't squeeze anything. What are you trying to provoke? You're military and I'm civil administration. One has nothing to do with other."
Zhang Bao did not reply, but called to his men, who rushed forward and seized the gifts and brocades. "Mannerless rogues," shouted Yang Xiong, incensed, advancing to intervene. Zhang Bao clutched him by the front of his robe, while two scamps grabbed his arms from behind. The mass attack was too much, and the guards turned and fled. Yang Xiong, held powerless, could only fume, unable to break lose.
While all this turmoil was going on, a big fellow carrying a load of brushwood on a shoulder-pole approached. He saw the scoundrels holding Yang Xiong, and his sense of fairness was offended. He set down his load and pushed through the crowd.
"Why have you attacked the warden?" he demanded.

Zhang Bao glared. “Miserable wretch of a beggar, what business is it of yours?”
The big fellow was enraged. He lifted Zhang by the hair and flipped him to the ground. Before Zhang’s ruffians could come to his defence, one punch apiece from the big fellow sent them reeling. Yang Xiong, freed, brought his own skill into play. His fists flew like shuttles, knocking rascals flat left and right. Things looked bad for Zhang Bao. He crawled to his feet and scooted. The furious Yang Xiong pursued with large strides, Zhang following the men who had snatched the bundles, Yang Xiong chasing after Zhang. They disappeared into a lane.
The big fellow was still slugging away at the intersection. Dai Zong and Yang Lin watched in admiration. “Quite a man.” they said. “Truly ‘He sees injustice and leaps into the fray.’ ” They went up to him.
“Bold fighter,” they urged, “for our sakes, desist.” They hauled him into a lane, Yang Lin carrying his brushwood, Dai Zong holding his arm and guiding him into a tavern. Yang Lin set down the load and followed them inside. The big fellow clasped his hands together gratefully.
“Thank you, brothers, for getting me out of that predicament.”
“We two are strangers,” said Dai Zong. “While we admired your gallantry, we were afraid you might hit someone too hard and kill him, so we pulled you away. Please have a few cups with us. Now that we’ve met, let’s be friends.”
“You not only help me, you invite me to wine. It’s really not right.”
“ ‘Within the bounds of the four seas, all men are brothers.’ You mustn’t speak like that,” said Yang Lin. “Please be seated.”
Dai Zong urged him to sit at the head of the table, but the young fellow wouldn’t consider it. Finally Dai Zong and Yang Lin sat there and their guest seated himself opposite. They summoned the waiter. Yang Lin gave him two pieces of silver. “Never mind asking what we want. Just bring us anything that goes with wine, and put it all on one bill.”
The waiter took the money and left. He returned with vegetable dishes and various tidbits to consume while drinking. The three men downed several cups.
“What is your name, sir? Where are you from?” asked Dai Zong.
“I’m called Shi Xiu. My home is the prefecture of Jiankang, in Jinling. Since childhood I’ve been fond of weapons. Whenever I see injustice I feel I must lend a hand, so I’ve been nicknamed the Rash. I was travelling with my uncle, who was selling sheep and horses, but he died on the road, and I soon lost our capital. I couldn’t go home, and I remained here in Jizhou, selling brushwood for a living. Since you’ve honored me with your acquaintance, what I tell you is the absolute truth.”
“A certain matter has brought us here,” said Dai Zong, “and that has enabled us to meet you and witness your courage. But you’ll never prosper, selling brushwood. Why not join the gallant fraternity, and be happy the rest of your days?”
“I have some skill with arms, nothing more. How can I aspire to happiness?”
“In these times it doesn’t pay to be too proper. The addlepated emperor is kept in the dark by corrupt officials. My understanding wasn’t terribly clear, but on impulse I joined Song Jiang’s band in Liangshan Marsh. Now we all get fair shares of gold and silver, and receive whole sets of clothing. Sooner or later the imperial court will declare a general amnesty and we’ll all be given official posts.”
Shi Xiu sighed. “I’d love to go, but I don’t know how to get in.”
“If you really would like to join, I could write you an introduction.”
“May I have the temerity to ask you two gentlemen your names?”
“I am called Dai Zong. and this brother is called Yang Lin.”
“Not the Marvellous Traveller, famed among bold men?”
“I am that humble person,” Dai Zong acknowledged. He told Yang Lin to take ten ounces of silver from their bundle and give it to Shi Xiu for his business.
Shi Xiu had to be urged repeatedly before he would accept the money. Now that he knew who Dai Zong was, he was eager to talk about joining the band. But just then a search party was heard outside the tavern, making inquiries. Dai Zong and the other two looked. It was Yang Xiong and more than twenty policemen. They started coming in. Startled by the large number, Dai Zong and Yang Lin took advantage of the excitement to slip away.
Shi Xiu rose and greeted Yang Xiong. “Warden, where are you coming from?”
“I’ve been looking all over for you, brother, and you’ve been here drinking wine. Those oafs were holding my arms and I couldn’t go into action until you rescued me. I ran after them to get my packages and had to leave you behind. When these brothers saw me pummeling them, they pitched in to help, and I got my gifts and brocades back. By the time I returned, you were gone. Someone said ‘A couple of travellers pressed him to drink with them,’ and so we’ve been searching the taverns.”
“They’re from out of town, and they invited me to have a few cups. We were just chatting. I didn’t know you were looking for me.”
Yang Xiong was very pleased to have found Shi Xiu. “What is your name, sir?” he asked. “Where is your home, and what are you doing here?”
Shi Xiu related the same story he had told Dai Zong and Yang Lin.
“Where have the travellers gone?” asked Yang Xiong.
“They saw you coming in with a large party and thought there might be trouble, so they left.”
Yang Xiong spoke to the policemen, “Let the waiter bring two jugs of wine and give each of you men three large bowlfuls. Then you can leave me here. I’ll see you again tomorrow.”
The men drank and departed. Yang Xiong turned to Shi Xiu.
“You mustn’t treat me like a stranger. I imagine you have no relatives here. Let’s pledge each other blood brothers. What do you say?”
Shi Xiu was delighted. “May I ask your age, Warden?”
“Twenty-nine.”
“I am twenty-eight. Please be seated and accept my kowtow as your younger brother.”
Shi Xiu kowtowed four times. Yang Xiong was very pleased. He instructed the waiter to bring wine and tidbits and said to Shi Xiu: “Today we must drink till we’re good and soused.”
While they were indulging, Yang Xiong’s father-in-law, Master Pan, entered with half a dozen men. Yang Xiong rose.
“What are you doing here, father-in-law?”
“I heard that you were in a fight, and came to help.”
“Thanks to this brother, I was rescued. He gave Zhang Bao such a drubbing that the rogue’s afraid of his shadow. Shi Xiu and I have pledged each other blood brothers.”
“Excellent. Give these brothers who’ve come with me some wine.”
Yang Xiong ordered the waiter to serve them three bowls each. The men drank and left. Yang then asked his father-in-law to be seated at the side of the table. He himself sat at the head, with Shi Xiu opposite. The waiter poured the wine. Pan saw what a big, heroic type Shi Xiu was, and he liked his looks.
“My son-in-law won’t go wrong with you two helping each other,” he said. “No one will dare pick on him now as he goes about his official duties.” And he asked: “What is your line of business?”
“My father was a butcher.”
“Do you know how to slaughter?”
Shi Xiu laughed. “Of course. I was raised in a butcher’s family.”
“I used to be one, myself, but I’m too old. I’ve only this one son-in-law, and he’s an official. So I’ve had to give it up.”
The three drank until they were mellow, then had the bill added. Shi Xiu gave the tavern the brushwood to cover the wine bill. All went home with Yang Xiong.
“Wife,” he called, when they had entered the door, “come and meet your young brother-in-law.”
From behind the portiere a voice retorted: “Since when have you had a younger brother?”
“Don’t ask. Just come out.”
The door curtain was raised and a young woman emerged. She had been born on the seventh day of the seventh month, and she was called Clever Cloud. Formerly she had been married to a petty official in Jizhou prefecture named Wang. After two years, he died, and she married Yang Xiong. They had been husband and wife for less than a year.
Shi Xiu hailed her respectfully. “Sister-in-law, please be seated.” He dropped to his knees to kowtow.
“I’m much too young,” Clever Cloud protested. “How can I accept your courtesy?”
“I’ve acknowledged him my blood brother, today,” said Yang. “That makes you his sister-in-law. You may receive half the full obeisance.”
Like pushing a golden mountain, like a falling pillar of jade, Shi Xiu kowtowed four times. The young woman returned him two curtsies. He was invited into the parlour while a room was prepared, after which he was urged to rest. But enough of idle chatter.
The next day, as Yang was leaving for his office, he instructed his household: “Have clothes and headgear made for Shi Xiu.” He also told them to fetch his guest’s luggage and bundles from the inn.

As to Dai Zong and Yang Lin, on leaving the tavern they returned to their inn outside the town and rested, continuing their search for Gongsun the following day. But in the two succeeding days they met no one who knew him, nor had they the slightest clue as to where he had gone. After talking it over, they packed their luggage and left Jizhou the same day for Horse Watering Valley. There they rejoined Pei Xuan, Deng Fei and Meng Kang and their men, and all disguised themselves as government officers. They set out for Liangshan Marsh that same night.
Dai Zong made an impressive contribution, bringing such a large force of men and horses to the mountain. A feast was laid in celebration. Of that we’ll say no more.

Master Pan offered Shi Xiu a proposition. He said: “At the rear of a dead-end lane behind our house we have an empty building. There’s well water conveniently at hand. It would make a good butcher shop and you could live there and look after everything.”
Shi Xiu inspected the place. It was indeed an ideal spot. Pan found an old skilled assistant of his to do the heavy work. He said Shi need only keep the accounts. The young man agreed. He had the assistant decorate the tables, the tubs and the chopping blocks in black and green, sharpen all the knives and arrange the counters. Shi Xiu put the pig pens in order and drove in a dozen fat swine. On an auspicious day, he formally opened the shop. Neighbors and relatives arrived to offer congratulations and hang streamers of red. This was followed by two days of festive drinking. Yang Xiong and his family were happy to have Shi Xiu running the shop. Of this, there’s nothing much to be told. Pan and Shi did the buying and selling, and time passed quickly. Soon, two months had gone by. It was late autumn and the beginning of winter. Shi Xiu changed into brand new clothing, inside and out.
One morning, he rose at the fifth watch and went to another county to buy hogs. Returning there days later, he found the shop closed and the chopping blocks and knives all put away. Shi Xiu had a subtle mind. He was a man who kept his own counsel.
“As the old saying goes: ‘Good times don’t last forever, all flowers fade,’ ” he thought. “Brother is often away on official business and doesn’t bother about home affairs. Seeing that I’ve bought new clothes, sister-in-law must be saying things behind my back. And certain persons are sure to be spreading stories about me because I’ve been gone a couple of days. They’re suspicious of me, so they’ve closed the shop. Why should I wait for them to say it openly? I’ll just resign and go home. As the old saying goes: ‘Who wants to do the same thing all his life?’ ”
He drove the hogs into the pens, changed his clothes, packed his belongings, wrote out a detailed account, and entered the family house through the rear door. Master Pan had laid out a modest repast. He invites Shi to sit down and drink.
“You’ve had a long, hard trip, bringing in those hogs,” said Pan.
“I did no more than my duty, old sir. Here are my accounts. May Heaven strike me dead if I’ve kept a penny for myself.”
“What kind of talk is this? There’s no question about it.”
“I’ve been away from home six or seven years. It’s time I went back. I’m handing in my accounts. Tonight, I’ll take leave of brother and tomorrow morning I’ll depart.”
The old man laughed. “You’ve misunderstood. You must stay on. Let me explain.” Pan spoke only a few words. And as a result, in gratitude to his benefactor, a warrior with his three-foot blade dispatched a wicked monk to the depths of Hell.

Let me remind you now how Iron Ox levelled his halberd and charged Green-Eyes and there beside the highroad the two of them fought several bouts and neither had the advantage. Then Zhu Fu, known as Smiler, interposed his weapon to separate them, saying: “Cease fighting and listen to me!”
The two put up their weapons and Smiler said to Green-Eyes: “Hear me out, master. I know I have received from you more honour and love than I deserve, not to mention instruction in the use of spear and staff. How could I ever forget it? But you see, my elder brother, the Crocodile, has become one of the leaders in the Marshes of Mount Liang, and he was entrusted by Song Jiang, the Opportune Rain, with the task of looking after our friend Iron Ox here. Supposing our friend were arrested by you, how would my brother be able to go back and face Song Jiang? That’s why we had to drug you and rescue him. Iron Ox even suggested using this opportunity to finish you off but I wouldn’t let him, so he confined himself to killing some of the troops. We were about to make a clean getaway, when it occurred to me that you wouldn’t go back without giving chase. So remembering how kind you’ve always been to me, I waited for you here. Master, you’re smart, you know the score. A lot of your men have been killed and you’ve let Iron Ox, the notorious Black Whirlwind, escape. How could you go back and face the governor now? You’d be in deep trouble, and there wouldn’t be anyone to come to the rescue. Wouldn’t it be better to come with us to the mountain and join Song Jiang’s band? What do you say?”
Green-Eyes pondered this at some length, before saying: “Suppose he doesn’t want me?”
Smiler dismissed the objection with a laugh. “Surely you know about Song Jiang of Shandong, with his reputation for welcoming all kinds of good men and seeking the friendship of heroes?”
Green-Eyes gave a sigh and said: “I certainly seem to be in the position of having a home I can’t call my own and a country I can’t return to. The one consolation is that I have no wife and children, so I don’t have to worry about reprisals. I’d better go with you.”
Iron Ox was delighted. “Why didn’t you say so in the first place?” he exclaimed, honouring Green-Eyes with a bow.
Green-Eyes in fact had never married and had no family responsibilities or possessions, so right away the three of them set off together to join up with the cart. When he saw them coming the Crocodile was greatly relieved. All four now went on their way with the cart and nothing worthy of narrating occurred. When they were approaching the Marshes of Mount Liang, they met the Magic Flautist and Whitey, who said: “The two chiefs sent us down the mountain to seek news of you. Now we’ve found you we’ll rush back and report.” They did so, and the next day the four travellers together with Smiler’s family found themselves in the Assembly Hall of the stronghold on Mount Liang.
The Crocodile stepped forward and introduced Green-Eyes to the two chiefs and all the other leaders, saying: “This is Li Yun, otherwise known as the Green-Eyed Tiger, sergeant of the Yishui constabulary.” Then he introduced his brother, saying: “This is my own dear brother, Zhu Fu, otherwise known as the Smiling Tiger, or Smiler.” Iron Ox paid his respects to Song Jiang and his two axes were restored to him. He told the story of how he had taken his mother to Yiling Heights and how she was eaten by the tigers and he killed all four of them. He also told how the false Li Kui had tried to rob him and got himself killed, a tale which made everyone laugh. The two chiefs said: “You killed four fierce tigers, and now our stronghold has gained two living tigers. That cer~tainly calls for celebration.” Amid general rejoicing, goats and horses were slaughtered and a great banquet was held in honour of the two new leaders. Chao Gai then gave them seats on the left immediately above the Daytime Rat.
The Professor now spoke. “Recently,” he said, “our enterprise has prospered exceedingly. Our fame, it seems, is drawing good men to us here from all quarters. We must put it down to the quality of our two beloved leaders and to the good fortune of you all. Anyway, I would now like the Crocodile to take up the reins again at the inn, replacing Shi Yong the Guv and the Ape. A house should be prepared for Smiler and his family.
“Our activities have now expanded considerably. It is not as it was in the old days. I think we should set up three more inns to serve as listening posts and to direct good men who wish to join us. If the court sends troops out against us we will have news of their coming and will be able to prepare. Over to the west there is a broad plain. The two Tong brothers, the River Rider and the Cave Dragon, will take a dozen companions and open an inn there, whilst the Executioner will take a dozen to the south side of the mountain and open another, and the Guv will open one on the north. They are to set up the old system of the water pavilion and the signal arrow, backed up by boats, that word may be brought immediately if a military threat arises.
“On the approaches to the mountain we will build three new gates with Skyscraper in overall command of defence. That will be his sole responsibility and he will not be assigned any further duties, but he is to be on call day and night and not absent himself without cause.
“The Nine-Tailed Turtle will be responsible for digging canals and channels and maintaining the waterways, keeping open the access by water, and ensuring that the Place of Many Meanderings is in a proper state of repair. He will also be in charge of the main route up the mountain. Having been a farmer, he must be familiar with this kind of work.
“The Magic Calculator will be responsible for stores and provisioning, for keeping tabs on all our income and expenditure and maintaining proper accounts. Magic Hand will devise security passes for all who need to move within the camp or without, either on the mountain or in the world below, or to pass through the three gates. He will also register all the leaders, greater and lesser. The Craftsman will be so good as to engrave all the necessary identifications, seals, plaques and so on. The Ape will see to the making of clothing and armour and the various banners and pennants. Green-Eyes will supervise the provision of housing and halls for the fortress and the Magic Flautist will be in charge of the building of boats of every kind. The Door-God in the Clouds and the Daytime Rat will move down to the lower camp at Golden Sands Landing. Short-Arse and Whitey will move to the camp at Duck’s-Bill Landing. The younger Mu brother and Smiler will receive all incoming cash and provisions. The Little Duke and the Halberdier will supervise the rest chambers on either side of the Assembly Hall. Iron Fan will be in charge of banquets.”
When all the duties had been allotted, there was feasting for three days, but of this no more. Hereafter things were quiet on Mount Liang. Every day there was drill for the troops, together with martial arts instruction and demonstrations. In the waterside camps the leaders gave instruction in boatmanship, swimming and naval combat. We say no more of this.
Then one day Song Jiang happened to say to Chao Gai, the Professor, and the assembled company: “Here we are, all gathered here today, and there is just one person missing: Taoist Gongsun, of whom there is still no sign. I remember that when he left for Jizhou to visit his old mother and his teacher, he promised he would be back in a hundred days. It’s been a long time now and we’ve had no news of him; I hope he isn’t going to fail us and not return. I would like to ask the Magic Messenger to go and make inquiries for me, to find out if anything has happened to him and why he hasn’t come.”
Song Jiang was pleased when the Magic Messenger cheerfully agreed. “No one could go as quickly as you,” he said, “we’ll expect to hear news in ten days or so.” The Magic Messenger bade them all farewell that same day and left early next morning, disguised as an imperial staff officer. Then it was like this:
*Though he goes as a soldier he commands no company of men. But to be a traveller is nothing new to him. His legs eat up the miles. As overseer of income and expenditure he carries a certificate hanging from a rattan cane; as commander of troops he carries a yellow scroll inscribed with orders. Three hundred miles from home, he needs but a day to return; in a military emergency, he’s there in a moment. In the morning he could still be in the far north eating gruel, by evening he’s in the south eating yellow pears.*

So the Magic Messenger left Mount Liang and took the road to Jizhou. He fastened the four magic amulets to his legs and initiated his magic walking mode. On the way he paused only for an occasional cup of plain tea and some simple vegetarian fare. After three days he reached Yishui district. When he questioned the people there he was told: "That there Black Whirlwind were in action here t'other day, and he injured a mighty number of people and that Sergeant Li Yun, him as they call Green-Eyes, got mixed up in it. We don't know where he went to, but to this day he's not been caught." This caused the Magic Messenger some amusement. The same day, as he was proceeding on his way, a man appeared in the distance carrying a hollow-shafted steel spear. This character, when he saw the speed at which the Magic Messenger was travelling, stopped and cried out: "Ho there, Magic Messenger!"

The Magic Messenger glanced behind him and saw it was a big fellow, standing on a little path that ran across the hillside. He had a round head and big ears, straight nose and square-cut chin, finely arched eyebrows with the eyes set well apart, narrow waist and broad shoulders. The Magic Messenger turned right round now and said: "I've never met you before, how pray d'you know my name?"

The other answered immediately: "Then you really are the Magic Messenger!" He lowered his spear and prostrated himself. The Magic Messenger hurriedly raised him up and returned the compliment, then said: "May I know your name?"

"I am Yang Lin," the other replied. "I am from Zhangde. I have long frequented the greenwood, and the rivers and lakes fraternity call me 'Elegant Panther.' A few months ago at an inn I met Taoist Gongsun. We spent some time together, eating and drinking, and he told me all about Mount Liang, where the leaders Chao Gai and Song Jiang welcome good men. He wrote a letter for me and told me to go to the stronghold and join the company, only I didn't feel I could go just like that. However, he also said: 'On the road to Leeside there's an inn, it's been there for years, run by one Zhu Gui, the Dry Land Crocodile. All who want to join the stronghold are first received there.' And he told me there was a special messenger in the stronghold, Superintendent Dai, known as the Magic Messenger, who can do three hundred miles a day. When I saw you scorching along just now I gave you a shout, just to see. I didn't know it was really you. What an unexpected piece of luck!"

"It's precisely to look for Taoist Gongsun that I'm on my way to Jizhou right now," said the Magic Messenger. "We've had no news of him and the two chiefs have sent me to Jizhou to make inquiries and to find him and bring him back, so it's quite a coincidence, meeting you like this."

"Although I'm from Zhangde," said Panther, "I've covered every inch of this district of Jizhou. If you've no objection I'll come with you and show you around."

"I'll be delighted to have your services. When we've found Taoist Gongsun we can go straight back to Mount Liang together."

This was most satisfactory to Panther, and he asked the Magic Messenger to treat him as younger brother. The Magic Messenger put away his magic amulets and the two of them went on their way at a leisurely pace. At evening they found a village inn to rest in. Panther ordered wine and wanted to invite the Magic Mess~enger. The latter said: "I have to abstain when I'm in my magic walking mode." So they both ordered vegetarian food.

They were up early next morning, and having breakfasted and packed up they set off again. Panther asked: "If you're going to use your magic walking, how will I be able to keep up? I'm afraid it's not convenient for us to travel together."

"The magic walking will do for a companion too. I'll tie two of the amulets on your legs, and when I start the walking you'll go as fast as I do. When I go, you'll go and when I stop, you'll stop. Otherwise you certainly couldn't keep up with me."

"But I'm just made of ordinary flesh and blood, I haven't got your spiritual powers."

"It doesn't matter," said the Magic Messenger. "In the magic walking mode I can take anyone with me. With the aid of the magic you'll go just like me. So long as I fast and abstain, there'll be absolutely no problem." So saying, he took the two amulets and bound them round Panther's legs. The other two he tied on himself. Then he performed the magic, blew lightly upon the amulets, and the two of them soared off, speeding up or slowing down all according to the pace set by the Magic Mess~enger. As they went they chatted about matters of the rivers and lakes, and although they proceeded so easily they covered a considerable distance without knowing it. Around midday they arrived at a place that was ringed with high mountains, a stage road running through the middle of it. Panther realized where they were and said: "Brother, this is the spot people call Waterworld. A formidable band of robbers used to frequent that mountain up ahead, though I don't know what it's like nowadays. They call it Waterworld because these slopes are full of winding streams and picturesque scenery."

Just as the two men were approaching the hillside, there was a sudden peal of gongs, drums and flutes and a hundred or more bandits rushed out and blocked their way, a couple of stalwarts at their head wielding halberds. "Halt!" they shouted. "Who the hell are you, and where do you think you're going? You'll pay the toll, if you know what's what, and make it snappy if you want us to spare your lives!"

"Just watch this, brother!" said Panther gleefully. "Just watch me flatten the stupid bastards!" He levelled his spear and charged.

Impressed by the ferocity of this onslaught, and with the benefit of a closer look, the more senior of the two shouted: "Hold your hand! Isn't it my friend Yang Lin?"

Panther recognized him. Putting aside his weapon, the first man stepped forward and paid his respects, and then bade his tall companion do likewise.

Panther said to the Magic Messenger: "Please come and let me introduce you to two friends."

"Who is this and how does he come to know you?" the latter asked.

"This is Deng Fei, from Xiangyang in Gaitianjun. Among the rivers and lakes, he is known as the Red-Eyed Lion, because of his bloodshot eyes. The way he handles an iron chain, no one can get near him! We used to be associates, but we parted five years back and I hadn't seen him since. What a surprise to meet him here today!"

Redeye asked: "Tell me please, who is this? He looks to be someone quite out of the ordinary."

"This is my friend Dai Zong, the Magic Messenger, from the company on Mount Liang."

"Would that be Superintendent Dai of Jiangzhou, who can do three hundred miles a day?"

"That's correct," said the Magic Messenger.

Both newcomers hastened to show their respect, saying: "We have often heard your name. We never expected to have the honour of making your acquaintance here today."

Here is a poem to describe this Redeye:

*In his hometown the days he just idly wasted,*
*Until the joys of the vagabond life he had tasted.*
*Eyes bloodshot from many a cannibal feast,*
*Deng Fei is the name of this red-eyed beast.*

"And may I know his name too?" the Magic Messenger said, indicating the second man.

Redeye said: "This is my friend Meng Kang of Zhending. He's an expert boat builder. One day he was supposed to construct a large boat for transporting marble but the official in charge gave him so much stick that he upped and killed him, so then he had to leave home and take refuge in the rivers and lakes and become an outlaw. That was a long time back. They call him 'Jade Flagpole,' because he's tall and pale, and held to be good-looking."

There's a poem to describe him:

*Grasping the bow, he'll lead the charge,*
*Or build you a trim fighting barge.*
*This shipwright's name they Meng Kang call,*
*Or Flagpole, because he's white and tall.*

This meeting was most pleasing to the Magic Messenger. As the four of them conversed, Panther happened to ask: "When did you two meet up?"

"I'll tell you," said Redeye. "It was over a year ago. Six months ago we met someone else in these parts called Pei Xuan, from Jingzhao. He was an officer of the district court and he's wonderfully skilled in drawing up legal documents. Being honest and clever and absolutely incorruptible, he's known round here as Sterling. He's also expert with spear and staff, a great exponent of fancy sword play and as brave as they come. But the court sent us a corrupt governor, who picked a quarrel with him and had him exiled to the island of Shamen. When they were passing here we killed his guards and set him free, so he agreed to join us. We've got a band of several hundred. Sterling is a great hand at fighting with two swords and since he's the senior of us we've made him our chief. I'd like you both to come to our stronghold now so you can meet him." With this he ordered his men to bring horses and invited the Magic Messenger and Panther to mount. Together they rode off towards the mountain stronghold.

They soon arrived. As they were dismounting, Sterling, who had been forewarned, hurried out to meet them at the bottom of the steps.

He was an imposing figure. He was pale and somewhat portly, and had a calm and steady manner. There's a poem for him:

*In questions of law he knows what is right;*
*When his brush starts to move, the devils take fright.*
*To be just and unselfish he'll always aspire:*
*This sterling official is Pei Xuan the lawyer.*

Sterling invited the two heroes into their assembly hall where courtesies were exchanged. The Magic Messenger was honoured with the first place, then Sterling, Panther, Redeye, and Flagpole in that order. They were entertained with a banquet and there was great feasting that day. You must understand, friends, that these were all members of the company of stars, destined to come together when the time was ripe. As the poem says:

*For these heroes to meet there's a very good reason,*
*Each link of the chain its neighbour must seize on.*
*The founders of Han performed menial tasks,*
*So why think Mount Liang hasn't got what it asks?*

Later, while they were all feasting, the Magic Messenger told them about the leaders Chao Gai and Song Jiang, how they welcomed good men, seeking the acquaintance of heroes from every corner of the empire; he told of their kindness, bravery and generosity and their many other good qualities. He told of the spirit of cooperation among all the leaders and of how secure was the territory of Mount Liang, a hundred leagues in circumference, with the Place of Many Meanderings and Duckweed Marsh in the centre surrounded by vast expanses of misty waters, and he told of the hundreds of troops and the system for raising the alarm if government troops should approach. The three from Waterworld were fascinated by all this. Sterling said: "We've a few troops of our own here too, three hundred or so, and something like a dozen cartloads of booty, as well as ample provisions and fodder. If you don't think it presumptuous, would you consider taking us to join the band on Mount Liang? We would like to offer our humble services. What do you say?"

The Magic Messenger replied with great satisfaction: "The two chiefs welcome every addition, you can stake your life on it. Obtaining your valuable services would be a real plus for us. If you're serious, why not get your things together and wait while Panther and I go and find Taoist Gongsun in Jizhou? Then when we come back with him we'll all disguise ourselves as government troops and march by night to Mount Liang."

Everyone expressed their satisfaction with this arrangement. There was much drinking, and later they moved to the Golden Pavilion so they could enjoy the Waterworld scenery while they continued their carousal. It was indeed beautiful:

*A vast expanse of wild water, and all around it the dark blue hills. A number of ancient trees reflect the declining sun, shreds of coloured mist drift among distant peaks. Lonely are the empty fields, there are no children watching cattle here; it is cool at the old ferry, here no one comes to water their horses. There is nothing to be seen but the stockade the robbers have built to protect their camp, and the banners they have hung all about.*

The Magic Messenger kept exclaiming: "What beautiful scenery, it's truly sublime! How did you two come here?"

Redeye said: "A pack of useless bastards used to hang out here, but we kicked them out," and everyone laughed.

The five of them were quite drunk that night. Sterling stood up and performed a sword dance, inspired by the wine. The Magic Messenger couldn't stop applauding. When evening fell they all went back to the stronghold to rest. The Magic Messenger and Panther insisted on leaving next morning and the other three, finding there was nothing they could do to make them stay, accompanied them down the mountain to see them off. After this they went back up and set about packing and preparing for their departure. Of this no more.

Meanwhile the Magic Messenger and Panther left the Waterworld stronghold and travelling from dawn till dusk were soon at the gates of the city, where they found themselves an inn for the night. Panther said: "Listen, Taoist Gongsun is a monk, so I assume he will be staying out in the wilds, at some remote little place; he won't be within the city."

The Magic Messenger said: "I'm sure you're right."

So the two of them first made inquiries outside the city, asking everywhere for news of Taoist Gongsun. But no one had heard of him. On the second day they went even further afield to ask, but still found no one who knew of him. They returned to their inn to rest. On the third day the Magic Messenger said: "Maybe there's someone in the city who knows him." So that day they started inquiring in the city. They asked a number of elderly people, but only got the answer: "Never heard of him. Reckon he's not from here. Perhaps he lives at a big temple out in the country, somewhere in the mountains maybe."

Now as they were walking along a certain main street, they saw in the distance a group of musicians greeting someone who was coming down the road. They stopped at the side of the road to watch. Two prison guards led the way, one of them carrying a number of brightly wrapped gifts, the other a quantity of satin and brocade. Behind them, shaded by a black silk umbrella, marched an executioner. This gentleman was a most impressive figure. He was dressed in an embroidered robe of indigo silk, had thick eyebrows stretching right to the temples, slanting eyes and a yellowish skin, and a few whiskery hairs on his chin. He was in fact from He'nan and his name was Yang Xiong. He had come here with a cousin who had been appointed governor and he had remained ever since. The next governor to be appointed was also his friend and made him warden of the two prisons, with the additional duty of serving as the city executioner. Because he was extremely skilled in martial arts and because of his unhealthy complexion, people called him the Morbid Swordsman. There is a poem which details his qualities:

*His arms are adorned with carved stones of varying hues, his turban ring elegantly set with gems. Jade hibiscus flowers are stuck in the long hair at his temples. His vest displays his rank of executioner, his robe is dyed scarlet. At an interrogation he officiates with confident skill, his axe bites like the wind. His complexion is a shade yellow, his eyebrows are bushy. This is Yang Xiong, whom men call the Morbid Swordsman.*

Well then, this Morbid was marching along amid his followers, a prison officer behind him bearing a blade with a demon-headed handle. At the time when the Magic Messenger and Panther saw them in the street, Morbid was returning from a public execution in the main square and his friends and admirers had decked him with red streamers and were accompanying him home. A crowd of people who had gathered with winecups in their hands at the crossroads blocked their progress. At this point seven or eight armed men also appeared from a side-street. The leader of this group was one Sheepsbane Zhang Bao. He was a member of the city guard and was friendly with a bunch of ne'er-do-wells who spent their time extorting contributions to their own welfare from people within and without the city. Innumerable brushes with authority had failed to persuade Sheepsbane to mend his ways. Because Morbid was a relative newcomer to the city and because many people feared him, Sheepsbane chose to treat him with insolence. On this occasion, seeing Morbid loaded with so many gifts of good silk, and being seconded by this rabble who had all been drinking heavily, he was particularly eager for a confrontation. When the crowd with winecups had brought Morbid to a standstill, Sheepsbane thrust himself forward and shouted: "Greetings, Mr. Gaoler!"

"Come and have a cup of wine, my friend," said Morbid.

"I don't want your wine," Sheepsbane replied. "I've come to ask you for the loan of a few hundred strings of cash!"

"But we're mere acquaintances, we've never had any financial dealings, why ask me for money?" said Morbid.

"I can see you've been robbing the people of a fair old quantity of goods, why shouldn't you lend me some?" said Sheepsbane.

"What do you mean, 'robbing the people,' these are all gifts!" said Morbid indignantly. "You can't threaten me like this. I don't have to answer to you, we have separate jurisdictions."

Instead of replying, Sheepsbane goaded his gang into action. Pressing forward in a boisterous throng they seized all the embroidered silk.

Exclaiming "These hooligans are intolerable!" Morbid tried to move forward to attack them, but Sheepsbane held him by the collar in front, while two others secured his arms from behind. When the mob went into action, the prison guards had melted away. Morbid was so hemmed in by Sheepsbane and his two companions that he couldn't strike a blow. He was obliged to swallow his rage, as he was quite unable to break loose from their hold.

At the height of the confusion, a big man carrying a load of firewood appeared. He saw how Morbid was being obstructed and could not free his arm, and he decided an injustice was being committed. He set down his load, thrust his way through the crowd and said: "What are you doing to the Warden?"

Sheepsbane glared at him and shouted: "You mangy cur, you lousy starving beggar, who asked you to butt in?"

Thus provoked, his temper flaring, the big man responded with a rapid move that threw Sheepsbane down on his back. When some of Sheepsbane's cronies tried to intervene, the big man dealt out blows which sent them flying in all directions. Freed at last, Morbid was now able to deploy his own skills and began to throw some useful punches, and soon after the whole pack of vagabonds were flat on their faces.

Sheepsbane had seen there was no future for him here and crept away. The enraged Morbid now bounded after him. In pursuit of Sheepsbane and the silk thieves Morbid disappeared up a side alley. The big fellow, however, still did not pause but went on chastising the culprits at the crossroads.

Meanwhile the Magic Messenger and Panther were exclaiming to themselves in admiration: "What a fellow! Just look at him: 'He sees an injustice and whips out his sword to set it right!' He's a real hero!" Truly, it was a case of:

*To leap from its scabbard the noble blade longs,*
*Because in the world it can see there are wrongs.*
*But aiming to right them, just watch how you go:*
*Are you sure you can tell who's friend and who's foe?*

The Magic Messenger and Panther now approached the man and said: "My friend, we beg you now to rest your arm." They led him aside into an alleyway. Panther relieved him of his load and the Magic Messenger took him by the hand and invited him to enter a wineshop. Panther put down the load and joined them in an alcove. Crossing his hands in sign of respect, the man said: "Thank you most kindly for your help, good sirs."

"We are both strangers here," they said. "But when we saw how valiantly you were fighting, we feared lest you hit somebody too hard and accidentally take his life. So we decided to come forward and invite you to drink a few cups of wine with us. Please let us be friends."

"I already owe you for getting me away from there, how can I drink your wine as well? That's really too much!"

"Within the four seas all men are brothers," said Panther. "What is there to feel bad about? Please take a seat."

The Magic Messenger offered him the place of honour, but there was no way he would accept it. In the end the two of them sat down together and the stranger sat on the opposite side of the table. The waiter was called and Panther took out a tael of silver and handed it over, saying: "No need to ask anything, just make sure we're supplied with food to go with our wine, whatever you've got, we'll reckon it all up afterwards."

The waiter took the silver and disappeared for a moment, returning with dishes of vegetables and nuts and stuff to go with the wine. The three men drank several cups, and then the Magic Messenger asked: "May I ask your name and where you are from?"
"My name is Shi Xiu," the other said, "and I am from Jiankang in Jinling. I learnt a little spear and staff play when I was young, and I've always held to one principle: when I see a wrong being committed I do what I can to help. Because of this people call me Madcap. I came here with an uncle to sell sheep and horses, but unfortunately he died on the road. Since I'd spent all my money I couldn't get home, so I had to stay here and sell firewood for a living. Because you've honoured me with your friendship, I have told you the exact truth."
The Magic Messenger said: "And we came here on an affair of our own, my friend and I, that's how we happened to meet you. This business of selling firewood, now, I don't see how it's ever going to get you very far. Wouldn't you be better off if you opted for the rivers and lakes? — you could have a great time, for all the rest of your days."
"But I only know a few tricks with the staff, I've got no other talent; how can I hope to find success and happiness?"
"In these times truth is not honoured. In the first place the Emperor is not clear-sighted, and in addition he is obstructed by corrupt officials. My example may not count for much, but for my part I went and joined Song Jiang's band in the Marshes of Mount Liang, where everyone has their share of gold and silver and clothes come in whole suits. We all hope that there'll be an amnesty later and we'll be given official posts."
Madcap sighed and said: "I'd like to join them, but I've no way to get in."
"If you'd really like to go, I can give you a reference."
"Might I ask the names of you two gentlemen?"
"I am Dai Zong and my friend is Yang Lin."
"I've heard stories in the rivers and lakes about someone called the Magic Messenger, is that you, by any chance?"
"It is," said the Magic Messenger. He told Panther to look in the pack beside him and take out a ten tael silver ingot and give it to Madcap, who refused three times before they prevailed upon him to accept it. Now finally convinced that he was talking to the genuine Magic Messenger from Mount Liang, he was on the point of expressing what he really felt about joining the band on Mount Liang, when they heard someone outside demanding entry. As they were wondering what was going on, Morbid rushed in with a score of others, all police officers. Seeing so many people, the Magic Messenger and Panther took fright and profited by the general confusion to slip away.
Madcap stood up and said by way of greeting: "Well, Warden, where did you get to?"
Morbid said: "I've been looking for you all over the place, my friend. And here you are drinking wine. That bastard had got me jammed in so I couldn't lift a finger until you came to the rescue and got me out of trouble. At first I was too busy chasing the bugger, to make him pay for it, and I forgot about you. These people all heard I was being attacked and came to help. We got all the silk back, everything was fine except I couldn't find you. Then someone said two strangers had taken you to the inn for a drink. That's how I managed to track you down."
"Yes," said Madcap, "two strangers invited me here to have a few cups and some talk. I didn't know you wanted me."
"Please would you tell me your name? And where you come from and why you are here?" said Morbid, with the utmost cordiality.
"My name is Shi Xiu, I am from Jiankang in Jinling. People call me Madcap because it's my nature to rush in and help when I see an injustice. I came here with an uncle who sold sheep and horses. He died suddenly on the journey. I ran out of money and stayed here selling firewood for a living."
Morbid took a good look at him. He was strongly built and everything about him matched:
*The physique of a wild mountain tiger, a temper like oil poured on fire. A brave and noble heart, allied to a cool mind; everywhere he renders assistance. He fights with a staff or relies on his two fists. His mighty reputation has spread throughout the world. This is Shi Xiu whom men call Madcap.*
Morbid asked Madcap: "What happened to the two strangers who were drinking with you?"
"I suppose they thought something was up when you came in with such a crowd. That must be why they left."
Morbid said: "I see." Then he said to his companions: "Let the waiter bring in two bottles of wine. You can each have three big bowls, then you can leave. I'll see you again tomorrow." The policemen drank up and left.
"Don't think this impertinent of me, but I assume you've got no family here," Morbid said to Madcap, "so I'd like from now on to call myself your brother, how about it?"
Madcap was flattered. He asked: "May I make so bold as to ask your age?"
"I am twenty-nine."
"And I am twenty-eight. So please, sit down and let me pay my respects to you, as the elder."
Madcap kowtowed four times to Morbid, who expressed his pleasure by ordering the waiter to bring some special delicacies to accompany the wine. "You and I are going to get really drunk," he said. Whilst they were drinking, Morbid's father-in-law, Old Pan, appeared with a small search party. Morbid leapt to his feet and said: "Father-in-law! What are you doing here?"
The old gentleman said: "I heard you had got into a fight with someone, so I came to find you."
"Luckily my friend here came to the rescue and beat that scoundrel Sheepsbane so badly he'll be scared of his own shadow from now on. Now Mr. Shi and I have got to know each other and become brothers."
The old man said: "Good, that's fine, you can treat these people to a bowl of wine and then they can go home."
Morbid ordered more wine. Everyone drank three bowls and then left. Morbid made his father-in-law sit down between them, while he took the head of the table and Madcap the other end. When they were seated, the waiter poured for them. Noting with satisfaction Madcap's strong, heroic build, the father-in-law said: "My son-in-law needs a friend like you, so there won't be problems when he performs his official duties. No one will want to mess him about now." He also asked what sort of trade Madcap was involved in.
"My father used to be a butcher."
"Do you know how to slaughter cattle then?"
Madcap laughed: "I was brought up in a butcher's family, of course I know how to slaughter cattle."
"I used to be a butcher, but now I'm too old for it. I've just got this one son-in-law and he joined the government service, so my old trade has to be abandoned."
They drank till they were quite tipsy, then the bill was reckoned up and Madcap left his load of firewood at the inn in payment. They went back to Morbid's house. As he entered, Morbid shouted out: "I want you to come and meet someone, dear!"
From behind the curtain came an answering shout: "Who is it, my love?"
"Don't ask questions, just come and see!"
The curtain was raised and the wife came forth. What was she like then?
*Luxuriant black hair, finely arched eyebrows, lustrous eyes, perfumed breath, a true straight nose, tender pink cheeks, perfect complexion, an airy figure, delicate white hands, a reed-like waist, soft full hips, little pointed toes, slippers crowded with embroidery, bounteous breasts, white, white legs, and something more, something narrow, tight and hard of access, crimson, crammed and close — but who can tell what thing that was?*
Or as the poem says:

*28 summers, a tasty morsel!*
*Such dangling moons a poor fool's heart can harrow.*
*No need to have heads roll, for such a force'll*
*Suck up invisibly the living marrow.*

She had been born on the seventh day of the seventh month, and she was called Felicity, because of the festival on this day. She had been married first to an official, a local man, but he had died two years before so then she married Morbid. They had been married for less than a year.
When she came out, Madcap hurriedly stepped forward and bowed. He begged her to be seated and then began to kowtow.
She said: "I am too young to accept this honour."
Morbid said: "This is my new friend, we've just become brothers. As my wife you can accept half the honour."
Accordingly Madcap kowtowed four times, performing the obeisance with a flourish. She returned the compliment gracefully and asked him to come in and sit down. An empty room was prepared for him to rest in. We will not bore you with more of the details.
Next day when Morbid left for the office he told his household: "Prepare Madcap some proper clothing." He also gave instructions for some baggage Madcap had left at an inn to be brought and stored in the house.
As for the Magic Messenger and Panther, when they saw that crowd of officers arrive at the inn in search of Madcap, they had slipped away in the confusion and returned to their inn outside the town. Next day they made further inquiries about Taoist Gongsun and continued for two days, but to no avail. No one knew him or could say where he might have got to. After some discussion, they decided to return. They packed their things and went back to Waterworld, where they were joined by Sterling, Redeye, Flagpole and their troops, and that same night, disguising themselves as a government force, set out for Mount Liang. The Magic Messenger was glad of the opportunity to show proof of his value to the stronghold. His arrival with so many additional troops was celebrated on the mountain with a feast, of which we need say no more.
Meanwhile Morbid's father-in-law had been having discussions with Madcap. What he wanted to do was set up a butcher's shop. "At the back of the house," the old man explained, "there is a cul-de-sac, with an empty building at the end. It's got water, so it would make a fine workshop. I suggest you set things up there and take charge."
Madcap had a look at the place and agreed that it was ideal. Old Pan found one of his former assistants, an experienced hand, to do most of the work so Madcap would only have to supervise the accounts. Madcap agreed and instructed the assistant to paint the meat counter, tubs and chopping block black and green, sharpen the knives, and set up the counters. The workshop having been fitted out, with a pen for the pigs and a dozen fat pigs to go in it, an auspicious day was selected and the shop opened. Neighbours and friends all flocked to the opening when the shop was festooned with red decorations, a deal of celebratory wine was drunk and all of Morbid's family declared themselves well pleased with the new shop under Madcap's supervision. No more of this.
Madcap and Morbid's father-in-law busied themselves with trade. Time sped by and soon it was more than two months since the opening. Autumn was ended and winter approaching. Madcap looked a different man now; he had a whole set of new clothes. One day he rose early, at dawn, and went out into the country to buy pigs from another district. He was away for three days and when he got back he found the shop closed. Arriving at the house he found the chopping block had been put away and the knives locked up in the store.
Now Madcap was not slow-witted. When he'd thought it over, he believed he understood. He said to himself: "No man's happiness lasts a thousand days, no flower blooms for a hundred. My friend must be away on official business and isn't looking after things at home. No doubt his wife saw me having new clothes made and started to say things behind my back. And because I was away for a couple of days tongues started to wag. They decided something was going on and closed the business down. Well, I won't wait to have it out with them, I'll leave before they tell me to and go back home for a bit. Like they say, it's always a mistake to plan too far ahead."
He drove the pigs into the pen and went into the workshop to change. He collected his stuff and carefully drew up a final account. He entered the house from the back door. The old man had arranged some vegetarian food and wine and invited him to sit and have a drink. "You've had a hard journey," he said, "it's a tiring business collecting the pigs."
"I only did what had to be done, sir. But see this, I've drawn up a clear account, and may heaven strike me dead if there's the least gain for me in it."
"Why ever should you say something like that?" said the old man. "No one supposes there's anything wrong."
"Well anyway," said Madcap, "I've been away from home six or seven years, I want to go and spend a bit of time at home now, that's why I've made out the account for you. I'll say goodbye tonight and leave first thing tomorrow."
The old man began to laugh. "You've it all wrong," he said. "You don't need to go. Let me explain." The old man held forth for quite some time, and spoke with emphasis. And as a result of his words,

*The avenger draws his deadly blade,*
*The faithless priest is sent to hell.*

LI KUI and Inspector Li Yun fought for about seven bouts, without either gaining an advantage. Zhu Fu at last also took a halberd and rushing between the two stopped the fighting. "No more fighting!" he said, "listen to me! Teacher! I am much obliged to you for your instructions, and shall always think of repaying you for favors received. My brother Zhu Gui received orders from Song Jiang, the commander-in-chief, at Liangshan Marsh to come here to help Li Kui. If you should arrest Li Kui and send him to prison how could my brother face Song Jiang if he had not helped Li Kui to escape? I am responsible for the plan to get you to drink the drugged wine. Our elder brother wanted to kill you, but I interposed and saved your life. We thought that you would pursue us as you would not care to return to the *yamen* without obtaining your revenge. But when I remembered what favors you had bestowed on me in the past I decided to stay here and speak to you. Teacher, you are an intelligent man and will know how difficult it will be for you to explain to the magistrate how your policemen were killed and the prisoner escaped. You will undoubtedly be tried and nobody will help you. Would it not be better if you come with us to Liangshan Marsh and there join our band? What do you think of that?"
Inspector Li Yun thought the matter over for some time and at last said, "I am afraid that they will not allow me to join their band."
Zhu Fu laughed at this question. "Teacher, have you not heard the reputation of Song Jiang who is famous for welcoming and receiving heroes from all quarters?"
Inspector Li Yun sighed, "I am homeless and without a place of refuge. I, however, have neither wife nor child to be arrested. I will go with you."
Li Kui laughed. "But, elder brother, why didn't you say this before?" He then exchanged salutations. All three men then pursued the cart of Zhu Gui, which they met halfway. They journeyed to Liangshan Marsh, and upon arriving there Li Yun and Zhu Fu were introduced to the leaders by Zhu Gui who mentioned their nicknames, "Blue Eyed Tiger" and "Laughing Tiger." Li Kui then told them of his adventures and of the death of his mother and Song Jiang laughing said, "You are a wonderful fellow. You killed four tigers and have now brought two living tigers to our stronghold." Everybody was pleased at the news, and a feast was arranged to celebrate the occasion.
Wu Yong spoke, "Our affairs have recently been very prosperous and we must have a great reputation everywhere. Great heroes have come here from all quarters because of the great virtue of our two chiefs, Chao Gai and Song Jiang, and also because they have heard of our great happiness. I propose that we establish three more inns in the surrounding country so that we can spy on travelers, and also look out for any more heroes who may pass this way. They can also inform us of any movement of troops so that we shall not be taken by surprise. On the west side there is a very wide area where we can well have an inn in charge of Tong Wei and Tong Meng with about ten men. An inn can be established on the road to the south, in charge of Li Li, with about ten men. Shi Yong and ten more men can start an inn on the north road. We must arrange boats and signaling arrows. We must also establish three barriers on those roads for our outposts, and we can place Du Qian in charge of them. We must also place a number of men under Tao Zongwang to deepen the creeks and waterways, and repair the roads in the surrounding area. He knows how to undertake that kind of work. Our granaries and storerooms must be kept in order by Jiang Jing. Xiao Rang can have charge of all our means of communication between the various units. All engraving work on tablets etc. shall be in charge of Jian Dajian. All clothing armor, flags, etc shall be under the control of Hou Jian. Li Yun shall have charge of all building constructions. Ma Lin in charge of all boats. Song Wan and Bai Sheng to be stationed at our main entrance, the Jinsha Bank, while Wang Ying and Zheng Tianshou be stationed at our outpost at Yazui Beach, Mu Chun and Zhu Fu to be in charge of the treasury, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng to be in charge of the assembly hall; Song Qing to be in charge of all rations." These appointments were agreed to, and arranging the details of all these staff matters took fully three days. Everything went smoothly at Liangshan Marsh and the men were drilled every day.
One day Song Jiang spoke to Chao Gai, Wu Yong, and other leaders, "Just now we are all assembled at this place in the cause of justice, but our Gongsun Sheng is absent. He went to Jizhou, Zhili province, to visit his mother and teacher and said that he would return in a hundred days. He has now been absent for a long time and yet no tidings has arrived concerning him. We had better send Dai Zong to make inquiries, and then we shall know what has happened."
Dai Zong agreed to do this and early the following day he departed for Jizhou. On the way he took only tea and simple food without meat. On the third day he arrived at Yishui County, and there happened to hear a man say that Li Kui had escaped a few days ago after killing many policemen and that inspector Li Yun had disappeared, and nobody knew where he had gone to.
Dai Zong was amused at this. He had left the town, and was proceeding on his way when he saw a man in the distance approaching who was armed with a spear. The man seeing Dai Zong traveling at such a great speed called out Dai Zong's nickname, "Divine Traveler!" Upon hearing this Dai Zong turned his head to look at the man. He saw a big man with a straight nose, and a big mouth, a handsome countenance, a slender waist but broad shoulders. Dai Zong retraced his steps and said to the man, "I do not seem to remember you and yet you have called my name."
The man quickly replied, "You are the 'Divine Traveler,'" and he thereupon kowtowed. Dai Zong returned the compliment and then asked, "What is your esteemed name?"
"I am Yang Lin of Zhangde Prefecture, Henan province. I am a highwayman and people call me 'Gay Leopard.' A few months ago I met Gongsun Sheng at an inn on the road, and he told me that at Liangshan Marsh there are many heroes who are keen for justice. He gave me a written introduction for Liangshan Marsh and urged me to join your band. I did not dare to go there straightway. He also informed me about the inn kept by Zhu Gui who was always looking out for suitable men. He also told me about you. I did not expect that Heaven would favor me and enable me to meet you like this today."
"I have orders from Song Jiang to proceed to Jizhou, and find out what has become of Gongsun Sheng," said Dai Zong, "and I never expected to meet you."
"I know the Jizhou district very well," replied Yang Lin, "and if you like I will accompany you to that place."
"That will suit me very well," said Dai Zong. "After I have found Gongsun Sheng we can proceed to Liangshan Marsh together."
Yang Lin was much pleased at this. Dai Zong now took off his charmed puttees and they both traveled along the road at an ordinary pace. They stopped that evening at an inn, and there Dai Zong told Yang Lin that he was a vegetarian. Yang Lin agreed to eat the same food. The following morning when they had started off Yang Lin said, "I am afraid that I am only holding you back, because I cannot travel at your speed. Would it not be better if we each went our own way?"
"I can fasten two of my charmed puttees on your legs," said Dai Zong, "and then we can both travel quickly."
"I am only a common person," said Yang Lin, "and am afraid that I could not equal your skill in rapid locomotion."
"Never mind!" said Dai Zong, "I have a means whereby any man can travel with me. I myself am a vegetarian but that will not be any obstacle to the other people." He then took two of his charmed puttees and put them on Yang Lin's legs. He had two on his own legs also. He then recited a spell breathed on the puttees, and they both started off. Dai Zong controlled the speed at which they traveled whether slow or fast. They conversed as they traveled and did not notice how far they had gone. About 10 A.M. they came to a post station which was surrounded by hills. Yang Lin knew the place as Yinma Valley, and told Dai Zong that the hill in front was generally infested with brigands, but he did not know whether there were any there now. The hills had a fine appearance with many pointed peaks, and streams winding in all directions. Just as they reached the foot of the mountain they heard gongs and drums being beaten and saw their way obstructed by a body of about one hundred men. In front were two big men armed with swords, who called out, "Halt! Who the hell are you and where are you going? If you pay our road toll we will spare your lives."
Yang Lin laughed and said to Dai Zong, "Elder brother, you can now watch me kill those pricks." Seizing his spear he advanced. The two men noticed the fierce look of Yang Lin and one called out, "No need for fighting! Are you not Yang Lin?"

Yang Lin stood still as he recognized them. The men now advanced and saluted. Yang Lin beckoned Dai Zong to approach and introduced them to each other. "This is Deng Fei, of Xiangyang Prefecture, who is nicknamed 'Fiery Eyed Beast.' He is skilled in the use of a chain, and in fight nobody can get near him. We used to be in the same band but I have not seen him for five years. I never expected to meet him in this place."
Deng Fei asked Yang Lin who his friend was as he was evidently no ordinary person.
Yang Lin introduced Dai Zong, and after the usual compliments he then introduced the second man. "This is Meng Kang of Zhending Prefecture, Zhili province, and he is a boat builder. Once a commander-in-chief was worrying him about the work and he killed the man and then sought refuge in the mountains, and lived as a bandit. Because of his great size people call him 'Flagstaff.'"
Dai Zong was much pleased and asked, "How long have you two gentlemen been doing business at this delightful spot?"
"I will tell you the truth," replied Deng Fei. "We have been here for more than a year. About six months ago we met on the west side of this place a man named Pei Xuan, a Jingzhao Prefecture man, who had been an official clerk and used to write out excellent official indictments in this division. He was well known as an upright official and could not be tampered with, and so he gained the nickname of 'Iron Faced Clerk.' He was both wise and brave. A very covetous Prefect was however appointed to this Prefecture and made false accusations and banished Pei Xuan to Shamen Island. On the way the escort passed this place, and we attacked them, killed most of the men and rescued Pei Xuan. We now have about three hundred men here. Pei Xuan is now our leader, and he is very skillful with two swords, one in each hand. We request you two gentlemen to come with us to our stronghold where we will introduce you to our leader." He then ordered horses for Dai Zong and Yang Lin and the party soon reached the stronghold. Pei Xuan had already been informed by messenger of the newcomers and he met them at the entrance. He was a fine type of man and had a very dignified appearance. After the usual introductions and salutations he invited them to come into the main hall where he asked Dai Zong to take his seat facing him with Yang Lin and the others at the sides. A feast was arranged for that evening and during same Dai Zong gave free accounts of the power of the bandits at Liangshan Marsh, and eventually suggested that they should join them.
"Here we have about five hundred men, and three hundred horses, plenty of food and treasures. But if you do not disdain our humble establishment you might introduce us to your leaders and we might be of some use to you," said Pei Xuan.
"Our two leaders, Chao Gai and Song Jiang, would treat you well, as they are keen on having heroes like you in their band," replied Dai Zong. "If you go it will add brilliance to our present splendor. At present I am on my way to Jizhou Prefecture to find one of our leaders Gongsun Sheng, and upon my return journey I will call here, and if you will be ready we can all depart together to Liangshan Marsh."
They were all pleased with this proposal, and continued with their feasting and drinking.
The next day Dai Zong and Yang Lin went on their way, and the bandits began to make preparations for their early departure to Liangshan Marsh.
Dai Zong and Yang Lin soon reached Jizhou Prefecture and upon entering an inn there Yang Lin said, "As Gongsun Sheng is a keen Taoist moralist it is very probable that he is staying in some secluded spot in the mountains or forests and not in this town."
Dai Zong agreed and they left the inn, and went outside the town. They traveled in the surrounding country and continually inquired for Gongsun Sheng, but nobody had heard of him. The next day they extended their journey, but again without any result.
On the third day of their wanderings Dai Zong said, "Perhaps there will be somebody in the town who knows him. Let us go there." They made inquiries in the town that day, but without success. As they were going along the main street, however, they saw a procession with music. In front were two jailers carrying presents and rolls of silks and at the rear was a large umbrella of blue silk under which walked an executioner. The latter was well dressed in blue silk. His eyebrows were long and his beautiful eyes were tilted upwards. His skin was light brown and his mustache was scanty.
He was a Henan province man, named Yang Xiong, and his cousin had been Prefect of Jizhou Prefecture. The new Prefect knew Yang Xiong and had appointed him superintendent of two prisons and also chief executioner. He was skilled in military exercises, and because he had a yellow skin people called him "Sick Guan Suo" (Guan Suo being the name of a strong man of Tang dynasty). Behind Yang Xiong in the procession was the executioner carrying a sword. An execution had just been carried out in the town at the crossroad, and on his way back to his home many people had congratulated him. He had to stop in many places on the street and drink wine with his numerous friends. Just as the procession reached them Yang Lin and Dai Zong saw a band of about eight men emerge from a side street under the leadership of a man called Zhang Bao whose nickname was the "Goat Kicker." This man was in command of the city guard, but the men with him were a gang of rowdies who lived by demanding money from all classes of people both in the town and outside. The officials had failed to suppress their depredations. Many people were afraid of Yang Xiong, but Zhang Bao was not of the number. Knowing that Yang Xiong would have received many rolls of silk on way Zhang Bao had got these rowdies together in order to create a disturbance on the street. Yang Xiong had stopped to drink wine, and Zhang Bao pressed his way through the crowd and said to him, "Congratulations!"
Yang Xiong returned the salute and replied, "Brother, please join me with wine."
"I did not come for a drink," said Zhang Bao, "but to borrow a hundred strings of cash from you."
"Although I know you," replied Yang Xiong, "I do not remember having been very intimate with you so why should I lend you money?"
"Today you have fraudulently taken valuables from a great many people so why should you not lend me some money?" asked Zhang Bao.
"These things were duly presented to me as gifts by my admirers," said Yang Xiong. "So why do you say they were fraudulently taken from people? You are a military man whereas I am in charge of the prisons so that we have nothing to do with each other, and you have no claim on me."
Zhang Bao did not attempt to reply to this, but turning round told the rowdies to seize the rolls of silk. Yang Xiong protested, saying "You have no manners." He was going to strike the rowdise but was seized hold of by Zhang Bao, but two of the rowdies grabbed hold of his arms. Several men advanced in threatening attitudes, and Yang Xiong's men bolted upon seeing that Yang Xiong could not move, and also had to submit to the indignities. A man in the crowd carrying a load of firewood, however, jumped forward to assist Yang Xiong. He called out, "Why do you beat this official like this?"
Zhang Bao stared at the interrupter and said, "Beggars should mind their own business. This has nothing to do with you." The man was enraged at this insult, and seizing hold of Zhang Bao's hair threw him to the ground. The rowdies came to the rescue of Zhang Bao, but the man fought them with his fists—striking on all sides. This had taken men from holding Yang Xiong, and he, freeing himself, also joined in the fight. The rowdies were soon knocked down, and Zhang Bao seeing the position made his escape. Yang Xiong was now very angry, and pursued Zhang Bao. The men with the booty were in front, and when they turned into an alley Zhang Bao followed them with Yang Xiong running after him.
The man who had changed the position kept on fighting the rowdies who were left behind. Dai Zong nodded to Yang Lin and said, "What a fine man! He draws his sword to help another in trouble on the road." The two advanced and spoke to the man, "Listen to us! There has now been enough fighting." They conducted the man into an alley close by, where they found an inn. Yang Lin had carried in the man's load of firewood.
After the usual salutations Dai Zong said, "We are quite strangers here, but we witnessed your chivalrous action, and being afraid that you might kill one of the men we intervened. Please drink wine with us, and let us become intimate friends."
"I am much obliged to you, gentlemen, for amicably settling that affair," replied the man, "and many thanks for your invitation."
They all sat down. Yang Lin summoned the waiter, and giving him a tael of silver told him to serve whatever food was available. This was soon placed on the table with wine, and answering a question the guest stated, "My name is Shi Xiu, and I am a Nanjing man. I have had some training in military exercises, and I love to help people on the road who are in difficulties. Because of this people call me 'Desperado.' I went with my uncle on a business trip, but he died on the way. I went on with the business, but lost all the money so that I could not go back. Therefore I stayed here, and eke out a livelihood by selling firewood. I tell you all this because of your helping me in that matter on the street."
"We are on business here," said Dai Zong, "and are pleased to meet such a chivalrous hero as you. You merely sell firewood here so how can you hope to become wealthy? Would it not be better if you became a brigand and enjoyed life a little?"
"I am only skilled in the use of stick," said Shi Xiu, "but as I have no other ability how can I improve my position and enjoy life?"
"You need not say you have no other ability," said Dai Zong. "It is only too true that the government is corrupt and the officials are traitorous. I had a friend who through temper got into trouble, but he joined the bandits at Liangshan Marsh where he now has good clothing and plenty of money. When government affairs are put in order he will undoubtedly be recalled and receive a good post."
Shi Xiu sighed, "I would like to go, but I do not see how it could be done."
"If you want to go I could introduce you to the bandits."
"I dare not ask the names of you two gentlemen," said Shi Xiu.
Dai Zong disclosed their names, and offered Shi Xiu ten taels of silver which however the latter accepted only after much pressing. Just then they heard men outside and looking round they saw Yang Xiong with about twenty policemen. Dai Zong and Yang Lin were afraid of the police, and made their escape.
Shi Xiu went forward, and asked Yang Xiong where he was going. The latter said, "Brother, I have been looking for you everywhere. Why did you come in here to drink wine? When I was held up by Zhang Bao and his gang, I could not have got free had you not intervened for which I am much obliged to you. I went to arrest Zhang Bao, and get my presents back and so had to abandon you for the nonce. These men all came to my assistance, and when I had recovered all the stolen things I came to look for you, but could not find you. I however heard that you had come here with two men so I came here to look for you."
"I just came in here with two strangers to drink wine, and I did not think you would be looking for me."
Yang Xiong asked for his name, etc. and Shi Xiu gave him the information, and also his life's short history which we have just read.
Yang Xiong then invited all the men to drink three cups of wine, and this having been done they all departed.
"I think that you have no relatives in this town," said Yang Xiong, "and I therefore suggest that we become sworn brothers."
Shi Xiu asked for his honorable age and upon learning that he was twenty-nine, he said, "Well, I am only twenty-eight, so I must ask you to be seated, and receive my kowtow and salutations." This was done—Shi Xiu giving four kowtows. Yang Xiong was much pleased at this and ordered the waiter to bring more wine. He said, "Younger brother, we will celebrate this by getting drunk."
While they were drinking wine Yang Xiong's father-in-law named Pan came in with about five men, "What do you want, sir?" asked Yang Xiong.
"I heard that you had had a fight on the street," said Old Pan, "and therefore I came to find you and help you."
"My younger brother here came to my assistance," said Yang Xiong, "and we beat our assailant Zhang Bao so that he would run away upon seeing our shadows. Just now I have become the sworn brother of this gentleman, Shi Xiu."
"That is splendid," said Old Pan, "when my men have had a drink they will depart." The men were served with three cups of wine each, and then left. Old Pan then took his seat between the two friends.
"I am much pleased that you have become a sworn brother of my son-in-law," said Pan. "Having your assistance he will fittingly be an employee in the *yamen* and nobody will dare try to deceive him. What business are you engaged in, may I ask?"
"My father was a butcher," said Shi Xiu.
"And do you follow the same occupation?" asked Old Pan.
"As a boy I, of course, got to know all about the trade,"said Shi Xiu laughingly.
"I followed the same trade," said Old Pan, "until my son-in-law here got a position in the *yamen* when, of course, I had to give up that trade."
When they had drunk some more wine together Yang Xiong paid the bill, and they took their departure, Shi Xiu shouldering his load of firewood. Upon reaching the door of Yang Xiong's house he called out, "Wife, come and be introduced to my newly sworn brother."
A voice inside the curtain asked, "Who is this new sworn brother?"
"You need not ask questions," said Yang Xiong; "you can come and see for yourself."
The curtain was raised and a woman stepped forth. She had been born on the 7th day of the seventh lunar month, and therefore had the name of Qiaoyun or "Clever Clouds" (the seventh month is called the "clever month"). She had first married an official clerk called Wang, who had died after two years of married life. Her second husband was Yang Xiong and they had been married almost a year.
Shi Xiu saluted her, but she objected, "I am much younger than you, and cannot accept such marks of respect."
"We have become sworn brothers today," said Yang Xiong, "so that you are the elder brother's wife, and therefore can receive at least half of these salutations." Accordingly Shi Xiu kowtowed four times. The woman responded with two kowtows, and then invited them inside. She also prepared a spare room for Shi Xiu's use.
We need not go into many details. The next day Yang Xiong before he left for his office in the *yamen* told his wife to see that Shi Xiu had whatever clothes he required.
When Dai Zong and Yang Lin had left Shi Xiu in the inn they went outside the town and found an inn there. The next day they continued their inquiries for Gongsun Sheng without any result. So they gave up their search, and returning to Yinma Valley they joined Pei Xuan and his company and started off with them for Liangshan Marsh where they were all duly introduced and placed on the strength.
Old Pan discussed with Shi Xiu the question of reestablishing a slaughterhouse. He said that behind his house there was an alley with a dead end and also an empty house. There was also a well, and he thought it a very suitable place for a slaughterhouse. Shi Xiu could live on the premises.
Shi Xiu was much pleased at the proposal, and agreed at once. Old Pan made inquiries and soon found suitable assistants. He suggested that Shi Xiu should keep the accounts. They soon purchased the stock in trade, knives, benches, etc. and after selecting a lucky day they started business. All the neighbors and relatives came to take part in the feasting on the opening day.
Matters proceeded smoothly for a long time. One day during the winter Shi Xiu went into the country to buy pigs, and upon his return three days later he found that the butchery was closed. Upon going inside he discovered that all the tools and fittings had been removed. He thought, "There is a saying, 'Men cannot be good for a thousand days, and flowers cannot bloom for a hundred days.' Yang Xiong has to go to his office every day, and cannot look after the home affairs. His wife must have been talking behind my back, and finding fault because I have been away for three days. He has suspected me, and has closed the business. I will not trouble to even ask for an explanation, but will just return to my old home." So he made up his accounts, changed his clothes, packed up his own things, and entered by the back door. He found that Old Pan had prepared a vegetarian feast in readiness for Shi Xiu's return. Old Pan said, "You have been a long way, and must be very tired."
"Sir, that's my duty," replied Shi Xiu, "Now I have squared up the account book, and everything is in order. If there is any error may Heaven and Earth destroy me."
"Why do you talk like this?" asked Old Pan. "There is no necessity for it."
"I have not been home for nearly seven years," said Shi Xiu, "and as I must now go I have squared up all the accounts."
Old Pan laughed loudly and said, "You are mistaken. Please listen to me."

Revenge is sought, so toll the knell,
And send an unfaithful monk to hell.

## 143
## Morbid Yang Xiong gets Drunk & Berates & Curses his wife Clever Cloud; Madcap Shi Xiu Shrewdly Plans the Killing of Monk Pei Ruhai & ends the lecher's life

"I know what you're thinking," said Master Pan. "You come home after an absence of two days and find that all the butcher's implements have been put away. Of course you assume we've closed down, and so you want to go. Even if our business wasn't as good as it is now, even if we really did close down, we'd still keep you in our home. The fact of the matter is this: Today is the second anniversary of the death of Wang the Scribe, my daughter's first husband. We're going to have some prayers said for him, that's why we've shut up shop for a couple of days. We've asked monks to come tomorrow from the Grateful Retribution Monastery to conduct a service and we'd like you to look after it. I'm too old to stay up all night. I thought I'd talk to you about it, first."
"In view of what you've said, old sir, I'm willing to remain a while longer."
"Don't let your imagination run away with you, in the future. Just do what's proper according to your station."
They drank several cups of wine and ate a few vegetable dishes, and that was the end of it.
The next morning lay brothers arrived bearing scriptures, and set the scene for the ceremony. They installed idols and sacrificial implements; drums, gongs, bells and chimes; incense, flowers, lamps and candles. In the kitchen, meatless dishes were prepared.
Yang Xiong came home late in the afternoon. "I'm on duty at the prison tonight," he said to Shi Xiu. "I can't be here. May I trouble you, brother, to take care of matters?"
"Don't give it a thought. I'll keep an eye on things for you."
Yang Xiong departed, and Shi Xiu posted himself at the front door. Just as dawn was breaking the following day, a young monk pushed aside the gate screen and entered the courtyard. Palms piously together in the Buddhist fashion, he bowed deeply to Shi Xiu, who returned the courtesy.
"Please be seated, Reverend."
A lay brother carrying two boxes on the ends of a shoulderpole had come in behind the monk.
"Old sir," Shi Xiu called. "There's a monk here to see you."
Master Pan emerged and the monk hailed him: "Godfather, why haven't we seen you at our monastery?"
"I haven't had time since opening this shop."
"I've brought some paltry gifts to commemorate the scribe's passing away. Just some noodles and a few packets of dates."
"*Aiya*. Reverend, there's no need for you to spend any money," said the old man. But he said to Shi Xiu: "Please take them for me."
Shi Xiu carried the packages inside. He instructed a servant to bring tea and serve it to the monk.
Meanwhile, the girl came downstairs. She wore only light mourning attire and make-up, since more would not be appropriate to a woman who had remarried. "Who are the gifts from?" she asked Shi Xiu.
"A monk who calls your father 'godfather.' "
The girl smiled. "That must be Pei Ruhai, who's known as the Preceptor, a very honest monk. He used to run his family's silk-thread shop before he joined the order in the Grateful Retribution Monastery. Because his superior is a secular prelate, Ruhai is able to call my father godfather. He's just two years older than me. I call him my reverend brother. His name in the order is Master Hai. Wait till you hear him chant tonight. He has a beautiful voice."
"So that's how it is," Shi Xiu thought. He already had a one-tenth inkling of what was brewing.
She went out to meet the monk. His hands clasped behind his back, Shi Xiu followed as far as the door and watched from behind the curtain. The monk rose when the girl emerged, placed his palms together and bowed.
"You had no right to spend money on presents," she said.

“They’re only small things, sister. Not worth mentioning.”
“How can you say that? We shouldn’t take gifts from a man who’s renounced the world.”
“We’ve built a new Hall for the Spirits of the Departed on Land and Sea. We wish you would honor us with a visit and look it over. But perhaps the warden would disapprove.”
“He’s not so petty. When my mother was dying I promised to have prayers offered for those who died in childbirth. I’ve been meaning to go to your temple and trouble you to have this done.”
“But such prayers are my duty. No trouble at all. Whatever you wish me to do, you’ve only to ask.”
“Then please chant a few scriptures for my mother.”
A little maid served tea. Clever Cloud wiped the rim of a cup with her handkerchief, then proffered it respectfully in both hands to the young monk. He stared boldly and greedily into her eyes, and she gazed back at him, smiling.
“Lust engenders boundless audacity,” as the saying goes. Shi Xiu observed all this from behind the door curtain. By now he had guessed two-tenths. “Believe not that in straight forwardness there is only honesty. Beware, rather that evil lurks behind the guise of virtue,” he said to himself. “That girl has dropped me hints several times, but I’ve treated her strictly as a sister-in-law. So that’s the kind of wench she is! If I catch her, don’t think I won’t act on Yang Xiong’s behalf!”
He thought about it, three-tenths sure. He raised the door curtain and went outside. The monk hastily set down his teacup and addressed him.
“Sir, please be seated.”
“This brother-in-law is a new blood brother of my husband,” the girl explained.
“Where are you from, sir?” the monk queried, with polite gravity. “What is your name?”
“Shi Xiu, from Jinling,” was the curt reply. “Because I fight injustice, even when it’s no affair of mine, I’m known as the Rash. I’m a crude fellow without any manners. Forgive me.”
“Not at all, not at all! I must fetch some more monks for the ceremony,” the young man said hastily. He headed for the gate.
“Come back soon, reverend brother,” the girl called.
He hurried away without reply. The girl saw him as far as the gate, then returned to the house. Shi Xiu stood outside the door, his head bent in thought. He was by this time four-tenths sure.
Later, a beadle came and lit the candles and the incense. Shortly after, Hai the Preceptor returned with several monks. Master Pan asked Shi Xiu to receive them. After they drank their tea, they began beating drums and gongs and singing verses in praise of the departed. Hai and another young monk conducted the ritual—ringing bells, burning prayers to the gods, offering sacrificial food to the Defenders of Heaven and the Chief Watcher of the Celestial Altar, entreating that the spirit of the departed Wang the Scribe be allowed to enter Heaven soon.
The girl Clever Cloud, simply adorned, entered the garden. She lit a stick of incense, inserted it in a small burner which she held in her hands, and prayed before the idol. This aroused Hai the Preceptor to greater fervor. He rang his bells and gave full vent to his voice. The sight of the luscious Clever Cloud, piously undulating, caused the other monks to reel and stagger.
When the prayers of entreaty for the dead ended, the monks were invited inside for a meal. Hai sat behind the others. He turned his head, looked at the girl and smiled. She put her hand over her mouth to smother a laugh. Their eyes exchanged loving glances.
Shi Xiu observed it all. He was five-tenths annoyed. The monks were each served a few cups of wine before their vegetarian meal, and were given some money. Master Pan said he was weary, and retired. When they had finished eating, the monks went out for a stroll to aid digestion, then returned to the ceremonial arena.
Shi Xiu’s irritation had reached sixth-tenths. Claiming to have a stomach ache, he lay down in a room behind the partition wall.
Clever Cloud, her passions stirred, didn’t care whether anyone was watching her or not. She brought tea and fruit and cakes to the monks, who were once again beating drums and gongs. Hai abjured them to concentrate on their prayers and supplications. The ritual continued. By midnight the other monks were exhausted, but Hai was only getting into stride. He chanted loud and clear. Clever Cloud, who had been standing for a long time by the door curtain, was inflamed with desire. She instructed her little maid to tell Reverend Brother Hai she wished to speak to him. The scoundrel hastened over. She put her hand on his sleeve.
“When you come for the memorial service money tomorrow you can talk to papa about those prayers for mama. Don’t forget.”
“I won’t. I’ll say: ‘If we’re to fulfil her wish, we should do it promptly,’ ” said the young monk. And he added: “That brother-in-law of yours looks tough.”
The girl tossed her head. “Don’t pay any attention to him. He’s not a real relative.”
“I won’t worry, then,” said Hai. He slipped his fingers inside the girl’s sleeve and pinched her hand.
She made a pretense of pulling the door curtain between them. That rogue of a shaven-pate grinned and went off to continue his prayers for the dead.
Shi Xiu, feigning sleep behind the partition, had missed none of this. He was seven-tenths positive. The ceremony ended at the fifth watch. After the idol was removed and the paper money burned, the monks thanked their hosts and departed, and Clever Cloud went upstairs to bed.
“Brother Yang Xiong is chivalrous, but that wife is a sexy bitch,” Shi Xiu said to himself indignantly. Repressing his anger, he went back to sleep in the butcher shop.
The next day Yang Xiong came home, but Shi Xiu didn’t say a word. After eating, Yang again left and Hai the Preceptor, wearing a fresh cassock, returned once more. On hearing of his arrival, the girl quickly descended the stairs. She hurried out to greet him, invited him into the house and ordered tea.
“You must be exhausted from all those ceremonies last night, reverend brother,” said the girl. “And we still haven’t paid.”
“Not worth mentioning. I’ve come about those prayers your mother wanted read. Just write out what you want me to say and I’ll include it while chanting scriptures at the monastery.”
“Excellent,” said Clever Cloud. She told the little maid to ask her father to join them.
Master Pan entered and thanked the monk. “I couldn’t stay up so late last night, and had to leave you,” he said apologetically. “I didn’t expect Shi Xiu to develop a stomach ache. You were left with no one to look after you. I’m very sorry.”
“Think nothing of it, godfather.”
The girl said: “I want to fulfil mama’s wish to have prayers said for women who died in childbirth. Reverend brother says he can include them in the scriptures which will be chanted in the monastery temple tomorrow. I suggest he go back now, and tomorrow, after breakfast, you and I will visit the temple and attend the prayers. We’ll have done our duty.”
“All right,” said Master Pan. “But I’m afraid we’ll be busy at the butcher shop tomorrow, with no one to handle the money.”
“You’ve got Shi Xiu. What’s there to worry about?”
“Your wish is my desire, daughter. Tomorrow we’ll go.”
Clever Cloud gave Hai some silver and said: “Please don’t scorn this as too small. Perhaps you’ll have some meatless noodles for us when we call at your monastery tomorrow.”
“I shall respectfully await your coming to burn incense.” Hai stood up. “Many thanks. I’ll divide this money among the other monks and look forward to your visit.”
The girl saw him off to the outside of the gate.
Shi Xiu, in the butcher shop, rose and slaughtered hogs and attended to business. That evening, Yang Xiong returned. When he had finished supper and washed his feet and hands, the girl had her father speak to him.
“When my wife was dying,” Master Pan said, “my daughter promised her to have prayers said at the Grateful Retribution Monastery for women who died in childbirth. I’m going there with Clever Cloud tomorrow to see it done. I thought I’d let you know.”
Yang said to the girl: “You could have spoken to me about this directly.”
“I didn’t dare. I was afraid you’d be angry.”
Nothing more was said that night, and all retired. The next day at the fifth watch Yang got up and went to sign in at the office and commence his duties. Shi Xiu also rose and set about his butcher shop business. The girl, when she awakened, made herself up seductively and put on her prettiest clothes. Carrying an incense burner, she bought some paper money and candles and summoned a sedan-chair. Shi Xiu was busy in the shop and didn’t pay much attention.
After breakfast, Clever Cloud dressed up Ying’er the little maid. At mid-morning Master Pan changed his clothes. He went over to Shi Xiu.
“Can I trouble you to keep an eye on our door? I’m going with my daughter to fulfil a prayer wish at a temple. We’ll be back later.”
Shi Xiu smiled. “I’ll look after the house, you look after sister-in-law. Burn plenty of good incense and return soon.” he was eight-tenths sure.
Master Pan and Ying’er walked along with the sedan-chair as it proceeded to the Grateful Retribution Monastery. It was solely because of Clever Cloud that Hai the Preceptor, that sneaky shaven-pate, had adopted Master Pan as his godfather. But due to Yang Xiong’s vigilant eye, he had been unable to get to her. Although he and the girl had been exchanging languishing glances ever since she became his adopted “sister,” it hadn’t gone beyond that. Only the night of the memorial service did he feel he was beginning to get somewhere. The date for their meeting had been fixed and the tricky shaven-pate had, so to speak, sharpened his weapons and girded his loins.
When his visitors arrived he was waiting outside the mountain gate. Beside himself with joy at the sight of the sedan-chair, he came forward to greet them.
“I’m afraid we’re imposing on you,” said Master Pan.
Clever Cloud, as she stepped down from her sedan-chair, said: “Thank you so much for your trouble.”
“Not at all,” replied Hai. “I’ve been reciting scriptures with the other monks in the Land and Sea Hall since the fifth watch without a break. We’ve been waiting for you, sister, so that we could burn the prayers. It will be a virtuous deed.”
He escorted the girl and her father into the hall. Incense and candles and other such paraphernalia had been prepared, and the monks were busy at their scriptures. Clever Cloud curtsied to them in greeting and paid homage to the Three Treasures—Buddha, his teaching, and their propagators. The wicked shaven-pate led her before the idol of the God of the Nether Regions, where she burned the prayers for her departed spouse. Paper money was then also burned, after which the monks were given a vegetarian meal, paid for by Clever Cloud.
Hai summoned a couple of novices to act as servants and asked Master Pan and Clever Cloud to his own apartment to dine. He lived deep within the monks’ quarters. Everything was ready.
“Bring tea, brothers,” he called when they entered his rooms. Two novices served tea in snow-white cups on a vermilion colored tray. The leaves were delicate and fine.
After they finished drinking he said: “Please come and sit inside, sister.” He led the girl and her father to a small inner chamber containing a gleaming black lacquer table and, on the walls, several paintings by famous artists. On a little stand fragrant incense was burning. Master Pan and his daughter sat at one end of the table, Hai at the other. Ying’er stood to one side.
“Ideal quarters for a man who’s renounced the world,” the girl commended. “So quiet and peaceful.”
“You’re making fun of me, sister. How can it compare with your fine home?”
“We’ve wearied you all day,” said Master Pan. “We must be getting back.”
The monk wouldn’t hear of it. “Godfather, it hasn’t been easy to get you here, and we’re not exactly strangers,” he said. “The simple meal I’m offering has already been paid for by sister. Have some noodles before you go. Brothers, hurry with that food!”
Before the words were out of his mouth, two platters were brought in laden with rare fruits, unusual vegetable and all sorts of tidbits, and place upon the table.
“What a spread,” the girl exclaimed. “We’re being too much of a nuisance.”
The monk smiled. “It doesn’t amount to anything. Just a small token of my esteem.”
The novices poured the wine and Hai said: “You haven’t been here for a long time, godfather. You must try this.”
Master Pan sipped. “Excellent. A very strong bouquet.”
“One of our patrons taught us how to make it. We’ve put to brew four or five bushels of rice. When they’re ready we’ll send your son-in-law a few bottles.”
“You mustn’t do that.”
“I’ve nothing really suitable to offer. Sister, at least have a cup of this wine.”
The novices kept filling the cups. Hai also pressed Ying’er to down a few.
“That’s enough for me,” said Clever Cloud finally. “I can’t drink any more.”
“You come so seldom,” said Hai. “You must have one more.”
Master Pan called the sedan-chair carriers and gave them each a cup of wine.
“Don’t worry about them,” said the monk. “I’ve already ordered that places be laid for them outside for wine and noodles. Relax and enjoy yourself, godfather. Have some more wine.”
As part of his scheme to get the girl, the wicked shaven-pate had served a wine that was particularly good and potent. It was too much for Master Pan. A few more cups and he was drunk.
“Put him to bed and let him sleep it off,” Hai instructed the two novices. They supported him to a cool, quiet room and made him comfortable.
“Have no fears, sister,” the monk urged Clever Cloud. “Another cup of wine.”
The girl was willing enough, and the wine was stirring her senses. “Why do you want me to drink so much?” she asked huskily.
In a low voice the monk replied: “Only because I think so well of you.”
“I’ve had enough,” the girl said.
“If you’ll come into my room I’ll show you Buddha’s tooth.”
“That’s why I’m here, to see Buddha’s tooth.”
Hai took Clever Cloud upstairs to his bedroom. It was very neat and clean. The girl was half enchanted already.
“How nice. You certainly keep it spick and span.”
The monk laughed. “All that’s missing is a wife.”
Clever Cloud smiled. “Why don’t you choose one?”
“Where could I find such a patroness?”
“You promised to show me Buddha’s tooth.”
“Send Ying’er away, and I’ll take it out.”
“Go see whether father is still drunk,” Clever Cloud said to the little maid. Ying’er went downstairs to Master Pan. Hai closed the door at the head of the stairs and bolted it. The girl laughed.
“Why are you locking me in?”
Lust surged up in the wicked shaven-pate, and he threw his arms around her.
“I love you. For two years I’ve been racking my brains how to get you, and today you’re here at last. This chance is too good to miss.”
“My husband is a hard man. Do you want to ruin me? If he ever finds out, he won’t spare you.”
The monk knelt at her feet. “I don’t care. Only have pity on me.”
“Naughty monk.” The girl raised her hand. “You know how to pester people. I’ll box your ears.”
Hai chuckled. “Hit me all you like. I’m only afraid you’ll hurt your hand.”
Enflamed with passion, Clever Cloud embraced him. “You don’t think I’d really hit you?” she murmured.
He picked her up and carried her to the bed. Then he disrobed her and had his heart’s desire. Only after a long time did the clouds expend their rain.
Holding the girl in his arms the monk said: “As long as you love me, though I die for it I won’t care. The only flaw is that, while today you’re mine, our joy is quickly past. We can’t revel all night together. Long waits between meetings is going to kill me.”
“Calm yourself,” said Clever Cloud. “I’ve thought of a plan. My husband is on duty at the prison twenty nights out of the month. I can buy Ying’er’s co-operation. I’ll have her watch at the rear gate every night. If my husband isn’t home, she’ll put a stand with burning incense outside. That will mean you can come. Find a friar to beat on a wooden fish at the fifth watch outside our rear gate as if summoning the faithful to prayer. Then you won’t oversleep and will be able to slip away. The friar can both keep watch and see to it that you’re gone before dawn.”
The monk was delighted. “Very clever. Take care of your end. I have just the man. He’s a mendicant friar called Friar Hu. He’ll do whatever I tell him.”
“I’d better not stay too long, or those oafs will get suspicious. I must go home at once. Don’t miss our next appointment.”
The girl got up, straightened her hair, reapplied make-up, opened the stairway door and went down. She told Ying’er to awaken Master Pan, and quickly left the monks’ living quarters. The sedan-chair carriers have finished their noodles and wine and were waiting at the monastery entrance. Hai the Preceptor escorted them as far as the mountain gate, where Clever Cloud bid him farewell and mounted the sedan-chair. With Master Pan and Ying’er she returned home. Of that we’ll say no more.

Hu had formerly worked in the monks' quarters, but he had retired and now lived in a little temple behind the monastery. He was known as Friar Hu because he rose at the fifth watch every day and beat on a wooden fish to announce the coming of dawn and urge the Buddhist faithful to pray. After daybreak he would beg alms for food. Hai summoned him to the monk's quarters, treated him to three cups of good wine, and presented him with some silver.
Hu stood up and said: "I've done nothing to merit this. How can I accept? You're always so kind to me."
"I know what an honest fellow you are. One of these days I'm going to purchase a religious certificate for you and have you accepted into our order. The silver is just to let you buy yourself new clothes."
Hai the Preceptor frequently instructed his monks to send Hu lunch. Or to include him when they went out to perform a religious service, so that he could also receive a small fee. Hu was very grateful.
"He's given me money again," thought Hu. "He must have some need of me. Why should I wait for him to bring it up?" And he said: "If there's anything you want, I'd be glad to do it."
"Since you're good enough to put it that way, I'll tell you the truth. Master Pan's daughter is willing to be intimate with me. She's going to have an incense stand put outside her rear gate whenever it's safe for me to call. It wouldn't be wise for me to check, but it doesn't matter if you go and have a look. Then I can risk it. Also I'd like to trouble you, when you're calling people to prayers near dawn, to come to her rear gate. If there's no one around, bang on your wooden fish and loudly summon the faithful, and I'll know I can leave."
"Nothing hard about that," said Friar Hu. He fully assented.
The next day he went begging alms at Master Pan's rear gate. Ying'er came out and said: "What are you doing here? Why don't you do your begging at the front gate?"
Hu began chanting prayers. Clever Cloud heard him and came to the rear gate. "Aren't you the friar who heralds the dawn at the fifth watch?" she asked.
"That I am. I tell folks not to sleep too much and to burn incense in the night, so as to please the gods."
The girl was delighted. She instructed Ying'er to run upstairs and get a string of coppers for the friar. When the little maid had gone, Friar Hu said: "I'm a trusted man of Teacher Hai. He's sent me to get the lay of the land."
"I know about you. Come tonight. If there's an incense stand outside, tell him."
Hu nodded. Ying'er returned with the copper coins and gave them to him. The girl went upstairs and confided in Ying'er. The little maid saw this as a chance to gain some advantage, and was glad to help.
That day Yang Xiong was on duty at the prison. Before evening, he left with his quilt. Ying'er, who had already received a small emolument, couldn't wait till nightfall, and put the incense stand out while it was still dusk. Clever Cloud hurried to the rear gate and waited. Around the first watch a man, his head bound by a kerchief, suddenly appeared.
Startled, Ying'er called out: "Who's there?"
The man did not reply. Clever Cloud reached out and yanked off the kerchief, revealing a shaven pate. She cursed him fondly.
"Wicked badly. You really know what you're about."
Arms around each other, they went up the stairs. Ying'er took in the incense stand, bolted the gate and went to bed.
That night the two lovers were as close as glue and turpentine, sugar and honey, marrow and bone juice, fish and water, indulging merrily in licentious pleasure. Just as they were falling asleep, they heard the rap-rap-rap of a wooden fish and a voice loudly calling believers to prayer.
The monk and the girl were instantly wide awake. Hai the Preceptor threw on his clothes.
"I'm going. See you tonight."
"Come whenever the incense stand is outside. If it's not there, stay away."
The girl tied the bandanna round his head. Ying'er opened the rear gate and let him out.
From then on, Yang Xiong had only to be on duty at the prison, and the monk came. Master Pan was at home, but he went to bed early. Ying'er was part of the conspiracy. There remained Shi Xiu to be deceived, but by then the girl was so intoxicated with sex she didn't care. As for the monk, from the time he began savoring the charms of Clever Cloud, his very soul seemed to have been snatched away. The moment the friar reported that the coast was clear, the monk would leave the monastery. With the collusion of Ying'er, Clever Cloud would let him in. Joyous love-play went on in this manner for more than a month.
Shi Xiu every evening, after cleaning up the butcher shop, retired to an adjacent room. The problem of Yang Xiong's wife was still troubling him, but he had no proof. He hadn't seen any sign of the monk. When he awakened at the fifth watch each morning he would sometimes jump up and peer outside. There was only a friar in the lane heralding the dawn by beating on a wooden fish and shouting a call to prayers.
Young Shi Xiu was clever. Already nine-tenths sure, he analyzed the phenomenon coolly. "This lane is a dead-end with no other families," he mused. "Why should a friar come here, of all places, to summon people to prayer? He's definitely up to something."
It was then the middle of the eleventh month. One morning, when Shi Xiu woke as usual at the fifth watch, he again heard the friar beating on the wooden fish as he entered the lane. At the rear gate of the house the friar shouted: "May the gods save all living things from misery and hardship."
Shi Xiu hopped out of bed and glued his eye to a crack in the door. A man with a kerchief binding his head slipped out of the shadows and departed with the friar, after which Ying'er closed the gate. Shi Xiu now had the whole picture.
"Brother Yang Xiong is chivalrous, but he's picked himself a wanton for a wife," he thought angrily. "He's completely deceived, and she's playing her own little game."
At daybreak he hung the hog carcasses in the shop and commenced serving the early morning customers. After breakfast he went out to collect some accounts. He headed for the prefectural office at noon to see Yang Xiong, and met him coming over the bridge. "What brings you here, brother?" asked the warden.
"I've been collecting accounts in the neighborhood. I thought I'd drop by."
"I'm always so tied up on official business, I seldom have time to drink with you and relax. Let's go and sit down for a while."
Yang Xiong took him to a tavern, chose a secluded room upstairs and told the waiter to bring good wine and some fresh tidbits. They downed three cups. Shi Xiu sat with lowered head, deep in thought. Yang Xiong was an impetuous man.
"You're unhappy about something," he asserted. "Has anyone at home said anything to offend you?"
"No, it's not that. I'm grateful to you, brother. You've treated me like your own flesh and blood. I've something to tell you, but I don't know whether I dare."
"How can you act as if I were a stranger? Whatever it is, speak out."
"When you leave the house every day, your whole mind is on your official duties. You don't know what's happening behind your back. Sister-in-law isn't a good person. I've noticed signs of it several times, but I didn't dare tell you. Today it was so obvious I had to come and speak frankly."
"I haven't got eyes in the back of my head. Who is the man?"
"When you had that memorial service at home, Hai the Preceptor, that knave of a bald-pate, was asked to officiate. I saw him and sister-in-law making eyes at each other. Two days later, she and her father went to the monastery temple to hear the prayers her mother wanted said, and they both came home smelling of wine. Lately, I've been hearing a friar beating a wooden fish and calling people to prayer in our lane. I thought there was something peculiar about the villain, and this morning I got up at the fifth watch to have a look. Sure enough, there was that scoundrelly bald-pate, a bandanna over his head, coming out of the house. A hussy like that, what do you need her for!"
Yang Xiong was furious. "The bitch. How dare she!"
"Control yourself, brother. Don't say anything tonight. Just behave as usual. Tomorrow, say that you're on duty, but come back at the third watch and knock on the front gate. The knave is sure to sneak out the back. I'll be there to catch him, and then you can dispose of him."
"A good idea."
"Be careful what you say tonight."
"I'll meet you there tomorrow, then."
The two drank a few more cups, paid the bill, went downstairs, left the tavern and prepared to go their separate ways.
Four or five captains hailed Yang Xiong. "We've been looking all over for you, Warden. The prefect is waiting in his garden. He wants you to joust with us with staves. Come on, hurry it up."
"The prefect wants me. I'll have to go," Yang said to Shi Xiu. "You go back first."
Shi Xiu returned home, put the butcher shop in order, and retired to his room.
Yang Xiong went to the rear garden of the prefect and fought a few demonstration rounds with staves. Mightily pleased, the official rewarded him with ten beakers of wine. When the gathering broke up, the others invited Yang out for more imbibing. By evening he was very drunk and had to be supported home.
Clever Cloud thanked his escort. She and Ying'er helped him up the stairs, lit a lamp and toned it on brightly. Yang sat on the bed as the little maid removed his padded shoes and his wife took off his bandanna and cap. The sight of her reaching for his head covering stirred a surge of rage within him. "Sober thoughts become drunken words," as the old saying goes. He pointed at her and cursed:
"Baggage! Strumpet! I'm going to finish you off, come what may!"
The girl was too frightened to reply. She eased Yang down on the bed. He fell asleep the moment his head touched the pillow, but he continued muttering. "Wretch. Dirty whore. Your lover dares spit in the tiger's mouth. You ... You ... You'll pay for this!"
The girl didn't dare breathe. She stayed with him while he slept. At the fifth watch he awoke and asked for a drink of water. Clever Cloud scooped up a bowlful and gave it to him. The lamp was still burning on the table. Yang drank.
"Why haven't you undressed and come to bed?"
"You were stinking drunk. I was afraid you'd want to vomit. How could I take off my clothes? I lay at the foot of the bed all night."
"Did I say anything?"
"You're not bad when you're drunk. You only go to sleep. But I couldn't help worrying about you during the night."
"We haven't had brother Shi Xiu in for drinks in some time. Prepare a few things at home and I'll invite him."
Clever Cloud did not reply. She remained seated on the step of the bed, her eyes swimming with tears. She sighed.
"I was drunk last night, wife, but I didn't give you any trouble. Why are you so upset?"
The girl put her hands over her tear-filled eyes. Yang pressed her for an answer. Clever Cloud, covering her face, pretended to weep. Yang raised her from the step to the bed, insisting that she speak.
"When my parents gave me in marriage to Wang the Scribe I hoped it would be for life. Who expected him to die so soon?" she sobbed. "Now I'm married to you, a chivalrous, bold hero, and you don't even protect me."
"This is crazy. What do you mean I don't protect you? Who's picking on you?"
"At first I wasn't going to say anything, but I'm afraid you'll be taken in by him. I've been wanting to tell you, but I'm also afraid you'll just swallow it and not do anything."
"What the devil are you talking about?"
"I'll tell you. But promise me you won't be too hurt. For a while, after you brought Shi Xiu home and recognized him as a blood brother, everything was all right. But later, he began dropping hints. The nights you were on duty he would say. 'Brother's not coming home again. Won't you be lonely, sleeping by yourself?' I ignored him, though he made such remarks more than once. But never mind about that. Yesterday morning, I was in the kitchen washing my neck when that rogue came up behind me. Seeing that there was no one around, he slipped his hand under and fondled my breasts. He said: 'Sister-in-law, are you pregnant?' I pushed his hand away. I was going to yell, but I was afraid the neighbors would laugh and mock you. Then, back you come, soaked to the gills. How could I speak? 'I hate him so I could tear him apart with my teeth, and you ask sweetly after brother Shi Xiu'!"
Yang was consumed with rage. " 'A tiger's picture shows its pelt but not its bones; you can know a man's face but not his heart!' That villain had the nerve to come to me with a lot of stories about Hai the Preceptor, and all the while there was nothing to it! The lout is scared. His idea was to smear you before you could speak!"
Angrily, Yang said to himself: "He's not my real brother. I'll drive him away, and that'll be the end of it."
At daylight he went downstairs and spoke to his father-in-law. "Salt the animals that are already slaughtered. From today on, we won't do any more of this business," he said. He smashed the counters and tables in the butcher shop.
Shi Xiu, when he was bringing out meat to hang at the front door and open the shop, saw the wreckage. A shrewd fellow, he understood at once. He smiled.
"Of course. Yang got drunk and let the cat out of the bag. His wife turned the tables by accusing me of getting fresh, and got him to close the shop. If I argue, it will only be washing Yang Xiong's dirty linen in public. I'd better retreat a step and try to think of another plan."
He went in and collected his belongings. Yang Xiong, not wanting to embarrass him, left first. Carrying his bundle, his dagger at his waist, Shi Xiu bid Master Pan farewell.
"I've imposed on your household too long. Today, brother has closed the shop and I must go. The accounts are written out in detail. If they're so much as a penny off, may Heaven strike me dead."
Master Pan had received his orders from his son-in-law and couldn't ask Shi Xiu to stay. He let him depart.
Shi Xiu found an inn in a nearby lane, rented a room and moved in.
"Yang Xiong is my pledged blood brother," he thought. "If I don't clear this matter up, I may be sending him to his death. He believes his wife and blames me. At the moment, I'm in no position to argue. I must be able to prove it to him. I'll find out when he's on duty again at the prison, get up at the fourth watch, and see what the score is."
After a couple of days at the inn, he hung around outside Yang Xiong's front gate. That evening, he saw a young guard from the prison taking off with the warden's quilt.
"That means he's on duty tonight." Shi Xiu said to himself. "I can do a little work and see what happens."
He returned to the inn and slept till the fourth watch. He rose, hung on his dagger, quietly left the inn, and concealed himself in the shadows of the lane near Yang Xiong's rear gate. Around the fifth watch the friar, with a wooden fish tucked under his arm, came to the head of the lane and peered stealthily around. Shi Xiu darted behind and grabbed him, pressing his dagger against the friar's neck.
"Don't move. One sound and you're a dead man. The truth, now. What are your orders from Hai the monk?"
"Spare me, bold fellow. I'll speak."
"If you're quick about it, I'll let you live."
"Hai the Preceptor is mixed up with Master Pan's daughter. He comes every night. When I see incense burning at the rear gate, that's the signal to tell him he can slip it in. At the fifth watch I beat on the wooden fish and call to prayers. That's to tell him to pull it out."
"Where is he now?"
"In the house, sleeping. When I bang on this fish, he'll leave."
"Give it to me, and your clothes."
Shi Xiu snatched the fish. As the friar was undressing, Shi Xiu drew the dagger across his throat and killed him. He put on the friar's cassock and his knee-length stockings, sheathed the dagger, and entered the lane, tapping the wooden fish.
At the sound, Hai hurriedly got out of bed, flung on his clothes, and went downstairs. Ying'er opened the rear gate and the monk darted into the lane. Shi Xiu was still loudly clobbering the fish.
"Must you make such a racket?" the monk hissed.
Shi Xiu did not reply, but let him walk to the head of the lane. Suddenly he flung the monk down and pressed him to the ground.
"If you raise your voice I'll kill you. I'll have your clothes first."
Hai the Preceptor recognized Shi Xiu. He dared not struggle or cry out. Shi Xiu stripped him and left him without a stitch.
Silently, he pulled the dagger out of his stocking and finished the monk with three or four stabs. He placed the knife beside the body of the friar, tied the clothes of the 2 men into a bundle, and returned with it to the inn. Softly, Shi Xiu opened the inn gate. Quietly, he closed it. Then he went to bed. Of that, we'll say no more.
An old man called Master Wang who sold gruel in the district was carrying his pots on a shoulder-pole at the fifth watch and holding a lantern, followed by a little boy. They were out to catch the early mounting trade. The old man stumbled over the corpses and fell, spilling the gruel. "Oh," exclaimed the little boy. "There's a drunken monk lying here." The old man groped around. His hands felt blood. He uttered a wild cry and went into hysterics. Neighbors opened their doors and hurried out, striking lights. They saw "bloody gruel" spread all over the place and two bodies lying on the ground. The neighbors seized the old man and hauled him off to court. And as a result, disaster struck from the heavens, flames rose from the earth.

When Madcap returned and saw that the shop was closed he wanted to leave, but Old Pan said: "Wait a minute. I know what you're thinking. You've just got back after two days absence and you see all the butcher's implements have been packed away, so you think we've decided to close the shop and you have to leave. But even if it wasn't such an excellent business, even if we did decide to close the shop, we'd still keep you here and look after you. No, let me tell you how it is. This daughter of mine was previously married to a certain Registrar Wang of this district. Sadly, he died and this is the second anniversary of his death. We are going to have some prayers said for him, that is why we've closed the business for a couple of days. Tomorrow I have asked some monks from the Temple of Divine Favours to come and perform the rites and I'd like to ask you to take charge of it all. I'm an old man and I can't manage late nights. That's why I'm telling you this."
"Now that you've told me," said Madcap, "I shall just be patient."
"Then from now on please don't have any more suspicions. I hope you will carry on as before."
They drank a few cups and ate some vegetarian food, and then cleared up the cups and dishes.

Some lay brothers turned up carrying the scriptures on a pole. They set up an altar and arranged the Buddha images and the dishes for offerings, together with drums, cymbals and gongs, incense, lamps and candles, while vegetarian dishes were prepared in the kitchen. In the afternoon Morbid came home and said to Madcap: "Dear brother, this evening I am on duty at the prison, I won't get home till late. I shall have to rely on you to see to everything."
"Don't worry, brother," said Madcap. "I'll take care of it for you."
When Morbid had left, Madcap went to wait in front of the door. In a little while he saw a priest approaching with a chicken. This is what met his eyes:
*A gleaming pate, fresh from the razor, assiduously perfumed with musk; a warm yellow cassock, newly stitched, exuding a heady odour of sandalwood; curling slippers, stained deep green by the craft of Fujian, a sash of nine tassels, dyed with true purple fetched from the west; bold staring eyes, forever turning after beautiful women, a sensual mouth, full of sweet words, apt for seducing young women at funerals. In the extremity of his lust, he searches out the nuns in their convents; when the lecherous fit is upon him, he ambushes pilgrims in the abbot's quarters.*
This priest entered and greeted Madcap most reverently. Madcap returned the greeting and said: "Please have a seat, father." An assistant bearing two containers followed immediately behind.
Madcap went to call the old man: "A priest has come, sir." When in due course the old man appeared, the priest greeted him with: "Godfather, why do you never come and see me at the temple?"
"Well, you see," the old man answered, "I've got this shop now, and I haven't had time to go anywhere."
The priest said, "Here are a few poor gifts to celebrate the Registrar's anniversary. Just a few noodles and some dates."
"Oh dear," said the old man. "There was no need for that, it's really too generous of you!" He told Madcap to take the gifts. Madcap took them inside and ordered the servants to bring tea, which was served to the priest at the door.
At this point the woman came downstairs. She didn't have to be in deep mourning, but was just plainly dressed with scarcely any make-up. "Who sent these things?" she asked Madcap.
"A priest," he replied. "He calls your father godfather."
She looked pleased. "It must be Brother Hai — Pei Ruhai that is, a very good man. He used to manage the family silk shop, but then he left the world to enter the Temple of Divine Favours. Since his superior is a secular prelate, he was able to name my father as his godfather. He's just two years older than I am, so I call him elder brother. At the temple everyone calls him Father Hai. Just wait till you hear him chanting the prayers this evening, he's got a lovely voice!"
"I see," said Madcap. But in his heart he felt certain misgivings.
When the woman went down to see the priest, Madcap with his hands behind his back followed her some of the way, but then stood and watched from behind the curtain. He saw the priest rise to his feet and with joined hands greet her most effusively.
"You are really too generous, elder brother," she said.
"Just a few trifling gifts, my dear, nothing to make a song and dance about."
"How can you say that? How can we accept things from someone who has renounced the world?"
"Our temple has just built a new oratory for the souls of those who suffered violent death by land or water. I would have asked you to come and view it, only I wasn't sure if your husband would approve or not."
"My husband's not narrow-minded. Actually when my mother was dying I made a vow to have prayers said for the release of her soul. I have been meaning for some time to pay you a visit at the temple and trouble you to arrange it for me."
"But that is absolutely one of my duties, how could it be any trouble? You have only to say the word and all shall be done according to your wishes."
"Well, then, elder brother, let me request you to read some more sutras for my mother."
At this point a servant brought tea and the woman took a cup and wiped the rim with her handkerchief and offered it with both hands to the priest. Receiving it, he stared greedily at the woman, while she simpered back at him. Lust, as they say, engenders boundless audacity. The fact that Madcap was watching behind the curtain was no hindrance. Madcap said to himself: "'Virtue's not always what it seems, morality is oft a sham.' The hussy likes to use flirtatious language to me, I've observed it more than once. But I always treated her as if she were my true relative. Now it's clear she's no better than she ought to be. Still, if I catch her at it, it's no good her thinking I won't act on behalf of my friend."
Madcap was by now highly suspicious. He drew aside the curtain and made his appearance. The lecherous bonze put down his cup and said: "Please have a seat, sir." The woman said: "This gentleman is a brother my husband has just adopted."
Smiling meekly the priest said: "May I be permitted to ask your name, sir, and where you are from?"
"Shi Xiu from Jinling," he replied shortly. "They call me Madcap because I've a habit of helping people just for the hell of it. I'm a pretty ordinary type, with no airs and graces, I trust you'll forgive me."
"No offence, no offence!" the monk replied. "I'd better go and fetch the other monks for the service," he said and prepared to take his departure.
"Come back soon, brother," the woman said.
"I will, I will," said the priest.
After seeing the priest off, she returned. Madcap was standing by the door with lowered head, lost in thought. No doubt you've heard it said, my friends, that among all the people of this world, it's the priests who are the most lecherous. Why should this be? Seeing that laymen and priests are all men, born of the father's seed and the mother's blood, why should the priests be more lecherous? It's like the story of Pan's donkey in the Three Books. Of all the people in the world it's the priests who have the easiest life. Three meals a day, with good food supplied free by benefactors, a monastery full of spacious rooms and grand halls to live in, no worldly affairs to cause unrest, a comfortable bed with fine covers to sleep on, nothing to tax the brain and all the time in the world to dream. Compare this with the rich man, who even if he lives in plenty, each day has so many tiresome affairs to worry him, and can't sleep at night because his mind is obsessed with money and possessions, not to mention the women who share his bed and trouble him with their demands. Or compare the life of the common man, every day spent in bitter toil, longing when he rises in the morning for evening to come, up at dawn and not in bed till late at night, and when at last it's bedtime unable to go to bed without first feeling around in the rice bin and finding it empty, knowing tomorrow there's no money left. Even if the wife has some charms, he can't work up much enthusiasm. Now, if we bear in mind all these facts about the monks and their easy life, we can understand this kind of affair. People in the old days used to satirize such things, they said the monks were really terrible. Su Dongpo for instance wrote: "A smooth shaven head and poisonous as a snake, the two things simply can't be separated." There's also a little verse about monks:

*In one word, you can call him bonze*
*Or baldpate does as well,*
*Devil's fiddler if you like,*
*Or sex-crazed fiend from hell.*

Madcap stood in front of the door thinking for a long time. Then he went to help welcome the priests. In a little while a cleric appeared and lit candles and joss-sticks. Then came Father Hai, mustering a whole company of bonzes to attend the altar. Madcap and the old man received them together. When they had been served tea, drums and cymbals began to sound and the singing of the praises of the dead man commenced. Father Hai and another young monk of about the same age officiated, wielding the bells and pestles, dispatching written prayers by burning them, making offerings to the defenders of the faith and the guardians of the altar and praying that the spirit of the departed registrar be soon permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven. At this point the woman appeared, got up in her widow's weeds. She approached the altar with a little incense burner in her hands and lit joss-sticks as she worshipped the Buddha. Father Hai waved his bells and chanted with redoubled vigour. And when the other priests caught sight of Morbid's wife, they were all plunged into confusion. Here's how it was:
*The deacon reads the litany crazily, he gets it all back to front; the preceptor makes a thorough mess of reciting the scriptures, you can't make head or tail of it. The acolytes lighting the incense knock over the vase; the brother who's supposed to carry the candle picks up the joss-sticks instead. During the antiphons and the homily, the Song Dynasty is read as Tang; in the penitential ritual Registrar Wang is called Bailiff Wang. The person shaking the bells lets them fly from his hand. The one beating the cymbals falls senseless to the ground. The rhythm blurs, the sounds become harsh. The whole place is in turmoil, the ceremony in chaos. The keeper of the scriptures is so confused he absent-mindedly beats the acolyte's hands instead of the drum, the choir-master's vision is so dazzled he beats out a rhythm on an old monk's bald pate. After ten years of asceticism, they let go for an instant, and then a thousand door-gods would not suffice to hold them back.*
Now when those priests saw Morbid's wife at the ceremony, unconsciously their hands began to dance and their feet began to tap and all thoughts of piety and spirituality were scattered to the winds. They were totally unable to control themselves. It's due to this kind of thing that you'll seldom meet a truly virtuous priest!
Madcap was watching from one side. "Talk of piety!" he scoffed. "They say true who say ''tis easier far to put on piety than to avoid sin.'"
In a little while when the ceremony for the dead was finished the priests were all invited inside for a vegetarian meal. Father Hai stationed himself at the back where he could leer at the woman, who laughed back, covering her mouth with her hand. The two of them went on ogling each other, making no attempt to hide their feelings. Madcap observed it all, with considerable distaste. The monks sat down at the table. First a few cups of simple wine were drunk, then the vegetarian food was served and the gift of money distributed. "Please tuck in, fathers," the old man said.
In no time the priests had scoffed their food and stood up to take a post-prandial stroll. After a few turns, they returned to the altar. Madcap was very ill at ease, and complaining of a stomach pain went to rest in the room next door.
Now her lust had been aroused, the woman seemed not to care at all about being observed and went to serve the priests herself. The drums and cymbals sounded again and a little later tea and snacks were served. Father Hai exhorted the monks to pray earnestly, begging the lord of heaven to show his mercy, as they scattered holy water about and worshipped the Three Treasures. The service continued till nearly midnight. The other monks were exhausted, but our friend Father Hai still went on chanting at the top of his voice. As the woman watched behind the curtain in the doorway, her passions blazed up, she was overcome with desire. She told the maid to tell Father Hai she wanted to speak to him. Eagerly the bald lecher approached her. Grasping his sleeve, she said: "Dear brother, tomorrow when you come to receive the fee, please speak to my father about the prayers for my mother. You won't forget, will you?"
"I won't forget. I shall tell him a vow's a vow and ought to be fulfilled," said the priest. Then he added: "That brother-in-law of yours looks pretty fierce."
"You needn't worry about him," she replied. "He's not even a real relation."
"Then I won't. I supposed he was a real brother of the Warden's."
The two of them chattered happily together for a while, until the priest went off to scatter grain for the ghosts. They didn't know that Madcap was in the room next door, pretending to sleep and taking note of everything. That night at three in the morning when the altar had been dismantled and all the paper offerings burnt, the priests gave thanks and departed. The woman went upstairs to sleep. Madcap thought to himself: "My friend has such a noble spirit, it's really bad luck he picked a bitch like that!" But he kept his indignation to himself and took himself off to sleep in the workshop.
No one said anything about all this when Morbid returned next day. After eating he went out again and immediately Father Hai was there knocking on the door, having changed into a smart new robe. When the woman heard he had come, she hurried downstairs to receive him, inviting him to come in and sit down, and ordering tea. She thanked him for the service the day before: "We put you to a lot of trouble yesterday and you still haven't received the fee," she said. "It's nothing," he replied. "I've come to tell you about those prayers for your mother's soul we talked about yesterday, dear sister. When I go back to the temple I shall be chanting the sutras. Just write out the prayer you want said, that's all it needs."
"All right," she said. She told the maid to go and ask her father to join them. When he came in the old man thanked the priest. "I'm an old man and I haven't much staying power nowadays," he said. "I'm afraid I neglected my duties as host last night. It was most unfortunate that Mr. Shi was also indisposed and there was no one to look after you properly. Do please forgive us."
"There's nothing to worry about, godfather," the priest said.
The woman said, "I want to renew the service for mother's soul. Brother Hai says he will be performing a service tomorrow at the temple and will add the prayers for mother. Let him go back to the temple now and recite the sutras and we will go along after breakfast tomorrow and write down her name on the prayers that are to be chanted. It will mean we have fulfilled our duty."
The old man said: "It sounds a good idea, only tomorrow we may have a lot of business and there won't be anyone to look after it."
"We can leave Mr. Shi to look after it. What's the problem?"
"We'll do as you say then. Tomorrow we'll go to the temple."
The girl went and got some money for the offering and gave it to the priest. "I fear this is very little recompense for your pains, Brother Hai. Tomorrow we'll come to the temple and beg a bowl of plain noodles from you."
"I shall await your coming to burn incense." Having received his fee he stood up and thanked them: "It is more than I merit. I shall go back now and share it with the others, and later I shall expect you, sister, for the ceremony."
The woman saw him off. Madcap, after resting a while in the workshop, rose to get on with his work of slaughtering pigs.
When Morbid came back that evening, his wife waited till he had eaten and washed his hands and feet. Then she prompted her father to say to him: "My daughter here promised my old lady on her deathbed to give her a service for the dead at the Temple of Divine Favours. I want you to know that we are going to go and perform the sacrifice there tomorrow. We won't be long."
"Why couldn't you tell me that yourself?" Morbid said to his wife.
"I thought you might be angry if I said it. I didn't dare," she said.
Nothing of importance happened that evening. They all just went to bed.
Next day Morbid rose at dawn and went off to report for duty at the office. As soon as Madcap got up he went to work in the shop. The woman began by painting her face and dressing herself up to the nines. Then she packed some incense, bought paper offerings for burning and candles, and ordered a sedan chair. Madcap was busy with the shop from early morning and he paid no heed to all this. When breakfast was over the maid, Ying, also dolled herself up and a little later the old man, in a new suit of clothes, came to Madcap and said: "I shall have to trouble you Mr. Shi to keep an eye on the place for me while I and my daughter go and fulfil our vow. We won't be long."
"Of course I'll look after everything," Madcap replied. "Take good care of your daughter, burn plenty of incense, and come back soon." But he was full of forebodings.
The sedan set off for the Temple of Divine Favours, with the old man and Ying, the maid, walking beside it. There is an old poem which comments aptly on all this:

*You may study your scriptures all morning,*
*And chant your fine prayers until late*
*But the finest of prayers and intentions*
*Can nowise alter your fate.*
*How can the heart that's not blind*
*Ask heaven to change its mind?*
*If it's melons you plant you'll have melons,*
*And if you plant beans you'll get beans.*
*So it's what's in the heart from the outset*
*That determines what everything means.*
*Is it Hell, is it Heaven, who knows?*
*Each one of us reaps what he sows.*

These words, handed down from olden time, tell us that good and evil get their desserts, as sure as shadow follows substance. Best stick to the six virtues and the ten thousand reasons, respect the Three Pillars — the Buddha, the Law and the Monkhood — and the Five Precepts — kill not, steal not, lust not, gossip not, drink not. Unfortunately the clergy can turn into dogs and swine, a disgrace to their tradition and a legacy of shame to future generations.
Now it was solely on account of this woman that the bald lecher, Father Hai, had asked Old Pan to be his godfather. He had however been so far prevented by Morbid's watchful eye and could not proceed in the affair. Since he and the woman had first been acquainted, eyes and looks had spoken volumes, but as yet nothing of substance had occurred. Nevertheless, on the night of the ceremony he had seen that she was really interested. The appointment was duly made, and now the bald lecher, having sharpened his spear and polished his sword, that is to say, having girded up his loins, went to wait at the main gate of the temple. When he saw the sedan approaching he could scarcely contain himself. He dashed forward to receive them.
"I'm afraid we are giving you too much trouble," Old Pan said.
Descending from the chair, the woman said: "We are very very grateful to you, dear brother."
"Not at all, not at all," said Father Hai. "I have personally been in the oratory with the other monks chanting the sutras since dawn. I took no rest until just now. I have been waiting for you so we can burn the prayers. This is a most meritorious business." He led the girl and the old man into the oratory, where flowers, fruit, incense, candles and the like had been set out and a dozen or so monks were chanting sutras. The woman greeted them reverentially, wishing them all a thousand happinesses, and then paid homage to the Three Treasures. Father Hai led her before the Buddha of the Underworld to offer prayers for the remission of sins. After the chanting of the prayers paper offerings were burnt and then the priests were invited to a meal, in recompense for their services. Father Hai now proposed that his godfather and dear sister take tea with him in his inner sanctum. He was inviting the woman into his room in the heart of the temple buildings. All had been prepared in advance: the moment he called for tea two novices appeared with it. The tea was brewed from the choicest leaves and served in snow-white cups on a vermilion tray. When everyone had put their cups down, he said: "Please come and sit inside for a while, dear sister." He led her into a small chamber where some paintings by famous artists were displayed on a gleaming black table and sticks of sweet incense were burning on a little altar. The old man and his daughter sat at the table, the priest sat down opposite them and the maid, Ying, stood on one side.
The girl said: "What a wonderful place this is, brother, for a holy person like you. So quiet and secluded, so harmonious!"
"Don't make fun of me," the priest replied. "How can this compare with your great mansion?"
"We've troubled you for a whole day, now," the old man said. "We should be going."
The priest wouldn't hear of it. "You come here so seldom," he said. "Besides, you're like part of my family, and my sister paid for the banquet today, so why don't you stay and have a simple bowl of noodles with me before you go? The brothers will have it ready in no time." He had scarcely finished speaking when two platters were brought in, the kind of stuff that's only brought out on special occasions, rare fruit and exotic dishes as well as every kind of vegetarian fare. This food completely covered the table.
"You've prepared a feast, why have you gone to so much trouble?" she said.
"It's not really worthy of you, it's just a small mark of my esteem," he answered with a smile.

The brothers filled their cups and Father Hai said: "It's such a long time since you've been here, godfather. Please try some of this wine."
The old man drank and said: "Excellent wine, really first-class."
"A benefactor showed us how to make it the other day. We made three or four gallons. Another day I'll send over a few bottles for your son-in-law."
"Oh no, you really shouldn't," the old man said.
"I'm sorry I have nothing better to give you, dear sister," Father Hai said. "But do at least taste a cup of this wine."
The two brothers poured wine in turn, and even Ying was encouraged to have a few cups.
"You're a wonderful host, but really I can't drink any more," the girl said.
"You come so seldom, you've got to have a few more cups!"
The old man asked for the sedan chair carriers to be brought in so they could all drink a cup together.
"No need to be concerned about them, godfather," the priest said. "I've already arranged it. They've got a place to sit and drink with the brothers outside. So don't worry, just relax and have a few more cups."
Of course it was on account of the girl that the bald lecher had arranged to have this exceptionally strong wine. Old Pan needed little persuading. He drank two more cups and became irremediably drunk.
Then the priest said: "We'd better send godfather to bed to sleep it off." He called two brothers to lend a hand, and they helped the old man to a nice quiet room where he could sleep. Then he said to the girl: "Now you can sit back and enjoy a few more cups." Well, in the first place the girl was quite willing, but in addition the wine had enflamed her passions. Is it not said that wine provokes passion and lust ruins mankind? With a few cups of wine under her belt, she felt her head spinning. "Oh, brother," she gabbled, "why do you keep wanting me to drink wine?"
"It's because I hold you in such high esteem," he replied, laughing wildly.
"I can't drink any more," she said.
"Please come up to my room and see my Buddha's tooth," said he.
"Ooh, yes, I want to see your Buddha's tooth," she said.
He led her upstairs, to an upstairs room which was his bedroom, beautifully furnished. She was absolutely delighted with it. "What a beautiful bedroom you have, it's so neat," she said.
"The only thing missing is a mistress for it," he said, smirking.
"Why don't you look for one?" said she, with a giggle.
"Where would I find a benefactor like that?" he said.
"Come on, show me your Buddha's tooth," she said.
"Send Ying away and I'll get it out," he said.
"Ying, why don't you go down and see if the master has woken up?" she said to the maid.
As soon as Ying had gone off to see her master, he locked the door. "Ooh, brother, why are you locking me in?" said she.
The bald lecher's lewd heart was beating wildly. He rushed to the woman and embraced her, saying: "I love you passionately. For two whole years you have filled my thoughts. Now you are here at last, there's this wonderful opportunity, surely you are going to make me happy?"
She said: "My husband's not a good man to get on the wrong side of. You just want to ruin me. If he gets to know he won't forgive you."
He knelt and said: "Take pity on me, I implore you."
She raised her hand and said: "You priests just want to get people into trouble. This hand of mine ought to give you a big slap."
He giggled and said: "Go ahead, do, and please don't spare me."
She was fully aroused now. She hugged him tight and said: "Do you really think I should hit you?"
His reply was to hug her back. Then, after removing all clothing and apparel, they embarked on the delights of the shared pillow. Truly we can say:
*Where now the teachings of religion, what price moral precept? Crazed with desire, what cares he for the husband's hurt? Consumed by lust, she's out to ensure His Reverence's downfall. In loud pants his breath comes, like an ox snoring under the willows. With coarse meanings her sweet cries blend, like an oriole warbling among flowers. Wanton words and thoughts whispered in the ear by the one, eternal oaths and pillow-vows from the other. The priest's room is transformed into a shrine to pleasure; the Temple of Divine Favours is become a true garden of delights. How shameful to think that the precious seed of enlightenment is all to be spilt in Felicity!*
From ancient times until now, people have handed down a verse which compares these priests to woodworm. There is no timber so sound that they won't bore into it. What defence have ordinary people against them? As the old poem says:

*Like lascivious monkeys these profligate beasts*
*Reverse the true sense of their calling as priests.*
*So leave them like beasts in the jungle to roam,*
*And never admit them into your home!*

After they had both come, the lewd bonze hugged her tight and said: "If you love me, even death has no terrors for me. But although I'm glad you've made me so happy today, it is such a brief instant of happiness! If we cannot prolong our pleasures for a whole night, in the end it is going to kill me."
She said: "Don't worry, I have a plan. About twenty nights every month my husband has to be on duty at the prison. I shall bribe Ying and have her stand at the back door every night. When it gets late, if my husband isn't home, she will set out a little altar and burn incense as a signal. Then you will know it is safe to come. If you are afraid of going to sleep at dawn and not waking in time, you can find one of those lay brothers who wake people up and pay him to come to the back door and beat the wooden fish and sing out a prayer, then you'll know you have to leave. If he is in your employ there are two advantages: one, he can keep watch outside for you, and two, he can make sure you don't oversleep."
The monk thought this was a wonderful idea. "Masterly!" he said. "You do just as you said. And for my part, there's a lay brother here called Brother Hu, I can get him to come and keep watch."
"I daren't linger here now, or those oafs will become suspicious," the girl said. "I'd better be going. Do make sure you arrange everything properly." She quickly rearranged her hair and repaired her make-up. Then she unlocked the door and went downstairs. She told Ying to waken her father and they hurriedly left the temple buildings. The sedan chair carriers had drunk and eaten and were waiting at the temple gates. Father Hai escorted her as far as the main gate of the compound and then she said goodbye to him and got into the chair and together with her father and Ying proceeded home. Of this no more.
As for Father Hai, he went off to find the lay brother who did the morning calls. At the temple this happened to be a lay brother called Hu, who lived like a hermit in a little hut at the back of the compound and was known to everyone as Brother Hu. He rose before dawn each day and came to strike the wooden fish, summoning people to morning prayers. As soon as it was light he would go begging for food. Father Hai called him to his room, where he had prepared a few cups of good wine and some silver to give him. Brother Hu stood there and said: "I haven't done anything, how can I take a reward? I've already received so much kindness from you."
Father Hai said: "I know well that you are very conscientious. One day I shall give you the money to help you buy your monk's certificate, so you can shave your head and become my disciple. For the moment take this and go and buy some proper robes." In fact Father Hai had often instructed the other priests to give Brother Hu food for the midday meal, and to take him along when there was a reading of the sutras so he too could receive some alms. Brother Hu was deeply grateful and had as yet been unable to repay the debt. "Now he gives me more silver," he said to himself, "it must be because he wants me to do something for him, maybe I shouldn't wait for him to say it first." So he said: "If you have something that needs doing, Father, or anything in which I can be of service to you, please don't hesitate to tell me."
Father Hai said: "Brother Hu, I know what a good person you are, so I won't beat about the bush. That daughter of Old Pan's wants to have a relationship with me, and we have agreed that when a little altar with incense is set up outside her back door it will be a signal for me to come. It's a bit difficult for me to hang about round there. But if you were to go along first and check for me if the coast is clear, I'd be able to go. It would also be helpful if when you get up at dawn to call the monks to prayers you could go round to the back door again and after making sure there's no one about strike the wooden fish and sing out a prayer so I'll know it's all right to come out."
"No problem at all!" said Brother Hu.
So it was agreed. When Brother Hu went next day to Old Pan's back door to beg for food, Ying came out and said: "You there, you Taoist, why don't you come to the front door to ask for food, what are you doing coming round the back?"
But Brother Hu began chanting his prayers and Felicity heard him. Having taken a look she went to the back door and asked: "Aren't you the disciple who gives the morning call to prayers?"
"That's right," he answered. "I prevent people from oversleeping, and in the evening I light incense and help people to gain merit."
Scarcely able to contain her excitement, she sent Ying upstairs to get a string of copper cash for the brother. When Ying had gone the brother said: "Father Hai has taken me into his confidence. He sent me here to reconnoitre."
"I know about it," she said. "You can come again tonight, and if you see the altar with incense burning, go and tell him."
He nodded. When Ying returned with the money, she gave it to him and he left. She went upstairs again, and there she unburdened herself to Ying. As they say: "A maid should be your slave." But provided there's something in it for her, why shouldn't she be happy to cooperate, even in an important affair? Likewise, the way things are between mistresses and servants, there's mutual exploitation but not trust. All the same, one can't do without them.
Well, it happened that Morbid was on duty at the prison that night. Before evening he came back to fetch his bedding so he could sleep there. Ying, who had already received some small recompense, didn't even wait till evening before starting to prepare the altar and set it up by the back door at dusk. Her mistress concealed herself to one side where she could watch. Some time after seven o'clock, a figure with its head wrapped in a scarf stole through the doorway. "Who is it?" Ying called. She got no reply. But when the handkerchief came off, a shining bald pate appeared. Recognizing Father Hai, the mistress now gently scolded: "You old devil, you know all the tricks!" They went upstairs together with their arms round each other's waists. Ying put away the altar, locked the back door and went to bed. The other two spent a night of bliss in each other's arms, tight as rubber, close as lacquer, like sugar in honey, like marrow in the bone, like a fish in water. It is said: "Pleasure hates the night to be so short, and only prays the golden rooster will postpone his call." They had only just gone to sleep when the tock-tock of the wooden fish was heard and the loud entoning of a prayer, startling the couple from their dreams. He hastily grabbed his clothes, and said: "I must be going. I'll see you again tonight."
"From now on come any time the altar is at the back door, don't fail me. But if it's not there, you most definitely must not come."
He rose and wrapped his head in the scarf as before and Ying opened the back door and let him out. From now on every time Morbid was on night duty at the prison the priest came to his house. There was no one there but the old man and he went to bed early. As for the maid, Ying, she was already on their side. It was only a question of deceiving Madcap. The woman was so besotted that she took little care. And the priest had tasted woman now — it was as if the two of them were bewitched. Whenever he received word from the brother, the priest was out of the temple like a shot. Felicity had fully involved Ying in the game, instructing her to let him in and let him out. So it was a joyous life for Pan's daughter, secretly entertaining her priest as lover. Soon the affair had been going over a month and the priest had made something like a dozen visits.
Now when Madcap closed the shop each day and bedded down in the workshop, he thought a good deal about this matter. Only he couldn't be sure: he had not actually seen the priest coming and going. Often he would jump out of bed at dawn, hoping to get to the bottom of the affair. All that happened was that he would hear the brother turning into the lane beating the wooden fish and loudly entoning a prayer. Now Madcap was no fool and he already had a pretty good idea what was afoot. This is how he argued to himself. "This lane is a cul-de-sac. Why does this lay brother come here every day, striking the wooden fish and shouting out prayers? There's something fishy about it." Then one day, the tenth of the eleventh month, when Madcap was awake at dawn, he heard the sound of the wooden fish and the brother entering the lane and stopping at the back door to sing out: "O Buddha of all the worlds, rescue all the faithful from hardship and misfortune." His suspicions aroused, he leapt out of bed and went to spy through a crack in the door. He saw someone with a scarf over his head emerge from the shadows and go off with the lay brother. Afterwards Ying came and locked the door. Madcap said to himself: "Brother, you are such a noble soul, this lustful woman is abominable, she's deceiving you, she's carrying on an affair."
As soon as it was light, he hung up his pork in the front of the shop to make some early sales. After breakfast he went to collect some accounts, and then headed for the government offices to find Morbid. He ran into Morbid just as he reached the town bridge. "Where are you going?" Morbid asked him. "I've been out collecting accounts, brother, so I decided to come and see you," he replied.
"I'm always so busy at work," Morbid said, "that I never have time to enjoy a few cups of wine with you. Let's go and sit down somewhere." He took Madcap into a little tavern under the town bridge where they chose a secluded alcove and sat down. Morbid told the waiter to bring a bottle of good wine and some fruit and nuts and seafood to go with it. But even after three cups Madcap remained quiet and thoughtful and Morbid, by nature impetuous, asked: "Is there something troubling you, brother, has something at home upset you or offended you?"
Madcap replied: "I've got no problem with your household. But since you have been so kind as to treat me almost as your own flesh and blood, will you permit me to mention something?"
"Why do you treat me like a stranger today? If you've something to say, then of course there's nothing to stop you."
"Well, when you go out each morning your mind is only on your official duties. You don't notice what is going on behind your back. Your wife is not behaving herself. I've seen things with my own eyes, several times, but I didn't like to say. But what I saw today was so clear I couldn't refrain from coming to find you. Please forgive my bluntness."
"I haven't got eyes behind my back. Who is it?"
"That bloody priest you got to read the service in your house, that Father Hai. He and your wife were making eyes at each other, I saw it all. And three days later when they went to the service in the temple they came back loaded with bottles of wine. Then recently a brother has been coming to our street beating the wooden fish and shouting out prayers. He makes a tremendous din. Well, this morning I got up at dawn to watch. I saw that bloody priest with a scarf round his head coming out of the house. She's a shameless woman, you'd be better off without her!"
Morbid exploded. "The filthy bitch, what's she playing at?"
"Keep calm, brother," Madcap said. "Don't say anything about this tonight. Just behave as usual. Tomorrow morning pretend you're going to be on night duty, then come back after midnight and knock on the door. That blackguard will undoubtedly try to escape by the back door and I'll grab him for you to dispose of."
"Right, that's what we'll do," said Morbid.
"But don't go babbling about it tonight," Madcap warned him again.
"I'll meet you again tomorrow," said Morbid.
They drank a few more cups, then paid the bill, went downstairs together and after leaving the tavern were about to go their separate ways, when suddenly Morbid was hailed by four or five of the Governor's officers. "Warden, we've been looking for you everywhere. The Governor is waiting in his garden; he told us to fetch you for some staff play with us. Hurry up now."
"The boss wants me, I'll have to go," Morbid said to Madcap. "You go on home." So Madcap took himself home, tidied up the shop and went to the workshop to sleep.
But Morbid was summoned by the Governor to the garden of the residence where he fought several bouts with the staff. The Governor enjoyed the spectacle and had wine brought. Ten big cups were drunk off as a prize. After this they left, but Morbid was invited by some of his colleagues to continue drinking with them. It was quite late when they helped him home, by now completely drunk. There's a poem which says:

*'Tis said that wine and sex are oft combined;*
*The drunkard seeks to ease the sexual urge;*
*But now this hero's something on his mind*
*To fire a rage which drunkenness won't purge.*

When Morbid's wife saw he was drunk, she thanked his friends and then got him upstairs with Ying's help. A lamp was lit and turned up fully. Morbid sat on the bed. Ying went to take off his boots, the wife removed his cap and unwound his turban. Suddenly as Morbid looked at his wife, something arose in his heart. As they say: "In drunkenness the truth will out." He pointed his finger at her and shouted: "You slut, you strumpet, I'm going to do for you, regardless!" She had a great shock and didn't dare answer, but simply helped him into bed. As he drifted off to sleep he continued to mutter: "Slut, filthy whore, that blackguard thinks he can spit in the mouth of the tiger! Don't you imagine I'm ever going to let you off!"
Not daring even to breathe, she waited for him to fall asleep.
Five o'clock. Morbid roused himself from his stupor and asked for a drink of water. His wife ladled out a bowl and gave it to him. On the table the lamp was still burning. Morbid drank and then asked her: "Didn't you come to bed last night?"
"You were dead drunk," she said. "I was afraid you might throw up, I didn't dare undress. I spent the night at the foot of the bed."
"Did I say anything?"
"You can always hold your drink, you just go to sleep, but last night I was worried for some reason."
Then he said: "I haven't had time lately to enjoy a cup of wine with my good friend Madcap. Would you prepare some food so I can invite him here?"
She made no reply, but just sat on the step of the bed with tears welling from her eyes and sighing. Morbid asked: "Listen, I was drunk last night but you say I didn't hurt you, so why are you so upset?"
She pretended to hide her tears and said nothing. So he asked her again and she went on covering her face and pretending to cry. Finally he pulled her up onto the bed and insisted on knowing what was troubling her. Choking back her sobs she said: "When my parents arranged my marriage to Registrar Wang, I thought I was going to be married once and for all. Who would have thought he'd go and leave me in the lurch? Now I'm married to you, such a great hero, and a gentleman to boot, who would have imagined that you couldn't protect me?"
"Great heavens! Who dares to insult you! When have I failed to protect you?"
"At first I didn't want to say anything. I was afraid you'd only listen to him. Then I thought of telling you but I was afraid you'd just let it pass."
"You'd better explain what all this is about!"
"Don't be too upset, then, if I tell you. It all began when you adopted that Madcap and brought him home. It was all right at first. It wasn't till later he began to make insinuations. When he knew you weren't coming home to sleep, he would look at me and say: 'Brother's away again tonight. Won't you be lonely sleeping on your own?' Of course I paid no attention, even though it didn't happen just once. Anyway, never mind that. Yesterday morning, when I was washing my neck in the kitchen, the blighter came up behind me and because there was no one else about put one arm round and touched my breast and said: 'Are you pregnant?' I

slapped his hand away and I would have screamed, only I was afraid the neighbours would laugh at us and make up stories about you. I was waiting till you came home. But you came back drunk as a lord and I didn't dare say anything. I hate him, I can't bear him, and you come and ask me about your dear friend!" Well it was a case of:

*Smart answers the wanton will never lack,*
*'Tis the husband's role to be misled.*
*As the front door closes on Morbid's back,*
*The back door admits the priest to his bed.*

Morbid was outraged. He said: "'You can paint a dragon or a tiger but you can't show its bones; you can recognize the outside of a man but you can't know his heart.' The bugger even came and told me to my face a whole lot of stuff about Father Hai, stories without any foundation. Obviously he was scared. He wanted to get in first with this story about you." He kept muttering angrily: "He's not my brother any more. I'll chuck him out, that's what!"

As soon as it was light, Morbid went downstairs and said to his father-in-law: "Kill all the livestock and salt the carcasses. From today the business is closed." In a trice he had broken up the counter and the workbench. When next morning Madcap went to put out the meat he found counter and workbench smashed.

Madcap was no fool, he couldn't fail to understand. He laughed grimly: "I see," he said. "So Morbid got drunk and couldn't keep his mouth shut, he let the cat out of the bag. He's listened to that hussy's account of things, she's turned it all upside down and said I misbehaved. She's made her husband close the shop. If I try to have it out with him it'll make him lose face. I'd better back off a bit and find a different way." He went back into the workshop and packed his things. Morbid also kept away, reluctant to embarrass him. Madcap shouldered his pack, stuck a sharp knife into his belt and went to say goodbye to Old Pan. "I've bothered you in your home too long already. My brother has closed the shop now, so I shall take myself off. I've drawn up the accounts perfectly clearly, there's not a cent missing. If there's anything not right, may heaven strike me dead." Following his son-in-law's instructions, the old man made no attempt to detain him. The poem says:

*Pillow talk always appeals;*
*What's behind you can't be seen.*
*The faithful friend he expels,*
*And lets the adulterer in.*

After saying goodbye, Madcap went and found an inn in a neighbouring side-street and rented a room for himself. He was thinking: "Morbid is my adopted brother. If I don't clear this matter up between us, it'll be putting his life at risk. The trouble is that for the moment he's been convinced by that woman and thinks I'm guilty. I can't prove anything, but I've got to try and make him see how things really are. I'd better go and find out which day he is going to sleep at the prison, then get up before dawn and solve the riddle." After two days at the inn he went to watch at Morbid's door. That evening he saw a servant from the gaol carry out Morbid's bedding, and he said to himself: "That means he's on duty tonight. I must get to work now."

He returned to the inn to sleep but rose during the fourth watch. He took his dagger, quietly opened the door of the shop and stole round to the lane which Morbid's back door opened onto. There he hid in the shadows to watch. Exactly at five o'clock the lay brother appeared clutching the wooden fish. When he reached the mouth of the lane he peered around cautiously. Madcap slipped out from his hiding-place and came up behind him. He laid one hand on him and with the other pressed the knife to his neck, whispering: "Don't move; if you make a noise I shall kill you! Just tell me the truth. Why did Father Hai tell you to come here?"

"I beg you, sir, spare my life and I will tell you," the lay brother stammered.

"Be quick then, or I'll kill you."

"Father Hai is having an affair with Old Pan's daughter. Every night he wants me to look and see if there's an altar outside the back door — that's the sign that says he's going to get it in. He told me to come at dawn to strike the wooden fish and pray to the Buddha — that lets him know it's time to pull it out."

"And where is he now?"

"He's still inside, sleeping. When I strike the wooden fish he'll come out."

"Give me your robes and the wooden fish." As the brother started undressing Madcap grabbed the wooden fish. When the brother got his clothes off, Madcap slit his throat. Then he dressed up in the dead brother's robes and knee-length stockings, put away his dagger, and walked into the lane striking the wooden fish.

Father Hai lying in bed heard the tock-tock of the wooden fish and hurriedly rose, threw on his clothes and rushed downstairs. Ying opened the back door and he slipped out. "Why do you keep von beating it?" he hissed to Madcap, who hadn't stopped striking the wooden fish. Madcap made no answer but waited till he got to the mouth of the lane and then threw him to the ground, pinned him down and growled: "Don't make a sound, keep quiet or I'll kill you! Just let me have your clothes."

Father Hai recognized Madcap and was too scared to struggle or open his mouth. Madcap stripped off all his clothes, leaving him stark naked, without a thread. Then silently he pulled the knife out of his stocking and stabbed the priest three or four times, till he was dead. He placed the knife beside the body of the brother, made all their clothes into a bundle and returned to the inn. He opened the door carefully and closed it quietly behind him and went back to bed. Of this no more.

Now in the town there was an old fellow called Wang, who sold rice soup. That morning he had taken up his gruel, and holding a lantern and followed by a young lad set forth to catch the early trade. Just as he came to the place where the corpses lay he happened to stumble and spilt his rice soup on the ground. At the same moment the boy shouted out: "Oh my God! There's a drunken priest lying here." After feeling around with his two hands, the old man discovered them to be smeared with blood. He began to curse loudly. He couldn't think what had happened. Some neighbours who heard all this opened their doors and came out. Torches were shone on the scene, revealing blood and gruel all over the place and two corpses lying on the ground. The neighbours detained the old man and insisted on taking him to the authorities. Truly,

*Calamities fall from the skies;*
*Out of the ground disasters rise.*

OLD Pan spoke to Shi Xiu, "Uncle, do not go. I understand your ideas. After an absence of two days you return, and find the butchery closed, and things cleared out, so you thought the business was finished. Even if the business was a failure you could still stay at our home. It is just two years since my daughter's first husband, Wang, died, and she wished to have a memorial service conducted by monks. Therefore we closed the butchery and monks will come from the Baoen Monastery tomorrow. We would like you to take charge of the arrangements made. I am too old, and would be continually falling asleep in the night."

"In that case," said Shi Xiu, "I will stay here for sometime."

"After this I must ask you, uncle, not to have any suspicions of what we do here," said Old Pan.

Early the next day the monk's assistant arrived to arrange the room for prayers. He erected an altar, arranged the drums, cymbals, gongs, and musical stone, and set out the lamps and incense. He then went into the kitchen to prepare the feast.

When Yang Xiong came he told Shi Xiu that he was on duty and would not be back that night. He must therefore not wait for him. He left all the matters in his hands.

"You need not worry about anything," said Shi Xiu. "I will look after everything."

Yang Xiong then departed and Shi Xiu took charge. Shortly afterwards the door curtain was raised and a young monk entered who gave Shi Xiu a Buddhist salutation. Shi Xiu also saluted, and asked the monk to be seated. He then called out to Old Pan in the next room, "Father-in-law, the monk has arrived."

Old Pan came in, and the monk spoke to him, "My adopted father, why have you not been to our temple for such a long time?"

"We have opened a new butchery here so that I have had very little spare time," said Old Pan.

"This is the anniversary of the death of Wang and I have not sent you any presents, but I hope that you will accept this vermicelli and some dates I have had prepared for you," said the monk.

"Why do you spend so much money? How unnecessary!" said Old Pan. He asked Shi Xiu to take them, and the latter carried the tray with the presents into the next room. Shi Xiu soon returned with tea which he offered to the monk.

Just then Madame Yang, Pan Qiaoyun, the "Clever Cloud," came down the staircase into the room. She was plainly dressed, and had no rouge on her face. She spoke to Shi Xiu, "Who has sent the presents?"

"They are from a monk who called your father his adopted father," said Shi Xiu.

Pan Qiaoyun laughed and said, "I know. They are from the monk Pei Ruhai, the monk whose religious name is Master Hai. He is a monastery tutor and a very honest man. He is the son of Old Pei of the silk goods shop, and is now at the Baoen Monastery. He is two years my senior, and therefore I can address him as elder brother; uncle, you can listen to his recital of the prayers this evening, as he has a very good tone."

"Is that so?" said Shi Xiu. In listening to her however, he suspected she had some hidden desire.

Shi Xiu did not follow her, but looked on through the bamboo curtain. He saw that the monk gave her a very elaborate salute. The woman asked the monk, "Why did you spend so much money for the presents?"

"Sister, the presents are so small that they are not worth mentioning," replied the monk.

"As you have become a monk, how can we accept your presents?" said the woman.

"At our monastery we have just begun building a prayer hall for the dead. We should like you to honor us with a vist to see it. I hope that your husband will raise no objections to that."

"I do not think he will mind that," said the woman.

"When my mother was dying I made a vow that I would offer prayers to those who have died in childbirth, and sooner or later I will trouble you to fulfill my vow for me in your temple."

"That's my business; whatever you order me I will do as you desire," said the monk.

"Sometime I will ask you to recite the prayers for my late mother's benefit," she said.

Just then a maid-servant entered with tea. The woman took the cup, wiped it clean with her sleeve, and then offered it to the monk. The monk took the cup, but at the same time he gazed amorously into her eyes. The woman returned his gaze with a smile.

Neither of them suspected that their exchange of flirtation was being closely watched by Shi Xiu behind the bamboo curtain. He now began to understand the woman a little better. He thought, "How deceptive are appearances. She always spoke to me in a very free and open manner, but I thought it was because I was a sworn brother of her husband. Now I think she cannot have been a very virtuous woman. She is now however in my hands, and I must deal with the matter for Yang Xiong." He raised the curtain, and entered the room.

The monk immediately put down his cup of tea and said, "Brother, please be seated."

The woman interposed, "This is the sworn brother of my husband."

The monk had suspicions at once and hurriedly inquired, "Brother, may I ask where you are from, and also your name?"

"Me! My name is Shi Xiu. I am from Nanjing! I help other people to revenge their wrongs and therefore they call me the 'Desperado.' I am however only a stupid fellow, and if I intrude in your affairs I hope that you will not resent it."

"Never mind! Never mind!" said the monk hurriedly, "I am just now going to summon the monks to come and commence the service." He left the room at once.

That fickle woman called after him, "You must soon come back." She then went into the inner room.

Shi Xiu stood near the door with bowed head in deep thought. It was not long before the monks arrived, lit the candles, and began to burn incense. They began their intoning of the prayers accompanied by drum beating, cymbals, etc., when Shi Xiu and Old Pan had supplied them with tea and hot soup.

Soon Pan Qiaoyun entered, lit her incense, and offered her prayers, swaying seductively as she performed the rituals. This aroused Hai the Tutor and her monk increased the sound of his intoning. The other monks were sent reeling and nudged each other as they witnessed this display of the two lovers. When the service was over the monks were asked to dine in the next room. Hai maneuvered his way to the rear of the monks, and turning his head to the woman he laughed. The woman smiled, but placed her hand over her mouth as though to avoid an explosion of laughter. They again exchanged lovers' glances and clearly made known their passions. Shi Xiu had noticed all this and was more upset.

The monks in the other room had all sat down, and partook of the vegetarian food. Old Pan wished them all a good time, and asking to be excused he withdrew to go to sleep. After the meal the monks strolled about the rooms. Shi Xiu said he had stomach ache, and begged to be excused—he thereupon lay down on a bench and pretended to go to sleep.

The woman now felt her passions rising so to divert her own thoughts she busied herself in making tea and serving it to the monks. The service went on until about I A.M. when most of the monks were drowsy, but Hai still continued reading the prayers with great vigor. Pan Qiaoyun, was behind a screen, and noticing this she allowed her passions to arise. She called a maid-servant and sent her to summon Hai to come to her. The young monk continued his intoning as before but slowly made his way towards the screen. When near Qiaoyun she seized his sleeve and said, "You must come here and collect the fees, and do not forget to speak to my father about the vows I made when mother died."

"I will not forget," said the monk. "I will tell him that you wish to redeem your vows as soon as possible. What about your uncle—is he not an awkward man?" Qiaoyun shook her head and said, "You take no notice of him. He is not a blood relation of ours."

"In that case I shall feel more at ease." So saying he clasped the woman's hand under cover of his sleeve and she moved the curtain to cover the act also. He laughed, returned to his place, and continued intoning the prayers as before. They did not realize that all this had been clearly seen by Shi Xiu who was pretending to be asleep on the bench.

About 4 A.M. the service was finished, and the monks departed. Qiaoyun went upstairs to sleep.

Shi Xiu thought, "My adopted brother, Yang Xiong, is a great hero, and it is a great pity that he married a loose woman of this kind." He could not avoid being angry at the position of affairs.

The next day Yang Xiong returned, but Shi Xiu did not speak about the matter. As soon as he had had his meal Yang Xiong however left again. Shi Xiu saw the young monk arrive, but this time he was dressed in his best clothes. Qiaoyun hurried downstairs, received him, and ordered tea to be brought. She said, "I am afraid that we put you to a lot of trouble last night, but we have not repaid you yet."

"That was only a very small affair. Last night we talked about your vows, and now we are reading prayers at our temple. You could just come to our temple, and get a written statement. That would be all right."

She agreed, and sent a girl servant to ask Old Pan to come, and discuss the matter. When he arrived he saluted the young monk, and apologized for retiring so early the previous night, but he had been very tired. "Uncle Shi Xiu fell sick, and also retired early so that there was no one to look after you. I am sorry."

"Do not be so courteous," said the monk.

Qiaoyun now spoke, "I want to redeem the vow I made when my mother died. Our friend tells me that tomorrow there will be a service at the monastery temple, and we might avail ourselves of the opportunity, and attend to pray."

"Very well," said Old Pan. "But I am afraid that we might be busy at the butchery tomorrow, and there will be nobody there to attend the matters."

"You can ask Shi Xiu to look after the business," she said.

"Just so," said Old Pan. "We can go to the temple tomorrow."

Qiaoyun then got the money for the services rendered by the monks, and handed it to the young monk. After returning suitable thanks he left for the temple.

Yang Xiong again returned home, and after supper Old Pan told Yang Xiong of the proposed visit to the temple the following day. Yang Xiong asked his wife why she did not speak to him herself, to which the woman replied that she was afraid that he might refuse her.

The next day a sedan chair was obtained for Qiaoyun and she set off about II A.M. accompanied by Old Pan and the girl servant Ying-er, carrying the candles and incense. The young monk Hai was waiting for them at the monastery gate, and he was much pleased to see them. Qiaoyun emerged from the chair, and thanked the monk for meeting them. The monk said, "The monks have been praying in the temple since early this morning, and we have awaited your arrival. He led the way into the hall where there were still about ten monks reading the scriptures.

Qiaoyun saluted, and gave three kowtows to the Buddha. After burning incense and paper, the monks were asked to go and get their meal, and Hai requested Qiaoyun and Old Pan to go to his private apartments for tea. Tea was duly served in silver cups with red saucers. When tea was finished Hai asked them to go into the adjoining room. It was a very small room with a black lacquer couch, and many pictures on the walls. On a small table was a vase with burning incense. Old Pan and Qiaoyun took their seats on the couch with the monk facing them.

"What a nice place you have," said Qiaoyun, "and how quiet and secluded!"

"Do not joke about my humble bare quarters," said the monk "it is a mere barracks compared to your honorable mansion." Old Pan said, "We have given you much trouble, we will now depart."

"All the food has been provided because of your visit, why do you depart without taking any? He then ordered the servant to bring in the food, and this was soon done. The meal was of the best food.

"Why do you prepare food for us; we give you a lot of trouble," remarked Qiaoyun to the monk.

"I am afraid the meal does not by any means equal my respects and feelings for you," he replied. He then pressed Old Pan to try the wine provided.

"What a fine taste!" said Old Pan.

"Yes, the brewing method I learned from a donor of our temple and used quite five piculs of rice in making it. I will send a bottle of it to your house tomorrow as you like the flavor."

"That is quite unnecessary," said Old Pan.

The servants kept filling Old Pan's cup with wine, and the girl servant who was sitting with them also drank several cups of wine. Old Pan wanted to summon the sedan-chair carriers also to drink of the wine, but Hai the Tutor, said that it was unnecessary as they had already had some with their food outside. In fact the monk had prepared this strong wine especially for Old Pan in order to further his own plans. Very soon Old Pan was drunk, and the monk suggested that he should now have a sleep. He summoned the servants to take Old Pan into another room to sleep on the bed there. Qiaoyun had also drunk some wine, and was feeling rather confused. She asked, "What was the use in getting me merely to drink the wine?"

The monk whispered, "Because I love you. Will you now come into another room to have a look at Buddha's tooth?"

"Very well, I should like to see it," she replied.

They went upstairs to a room which was the monk's private apartment and was nicely furnished. She was much pleased and said, "What a nice chamber, and how clean!"

"Yes, but it is short of the adornment of a woman."

She laughed, "Then why don't you get one?"

"Where is the donor who would present me with one?"

"But you asked me to come here to see Buddha's tooth."

"Well, first send away your girl servant, and then I will show it to you."

She told the girl to go downstairs, and see whether Old Pan had awakened. The girl went, and the monk closed the door after her.
Qiaoyun was now alone with him and she laughed. "Why do you close the door?"
"I am in love with you, and have waited for two years for this opportunity. I hope that we shall now complete our desires." He embraced her.
"You must not forget that my husband would be annoyed. You must not try to cheat me. If he finds out he will never forgive you."
He knelt down and said, "I hope that you will take pity on me."
"You are so skillful in dealing with me but I like to give you big blows upon your face with my hand." He laughed, "You would enjoy beating me."
He then picked her up and carried her to the bed, where he undressed her and had his heart's desire.
Thus they enjoyed themselves for a long time, after which the monk embracing her said, "If I die now I shall have no regrets. But today our pleasure has been brief and I should like to arrange a whole night's assignation."
"You must not worry about that. I have a plan. Twenty days out of one month my husband is on duty at the prison. I will bribe my girl servant and she will wait outside the back door. A table will be placed there with incense, and you can easily get in that way. You must arrange for a wandering monk to come at daybreak, and beat a wooden fish at our back door, and then you can depart in due time. You can, of course, bribe him to keep a lookout to see that no one is coming."
He was much pleased at this proposal and said, "Admirable! That will do. There is a wandering monk here, named Hu, and I will arrange with him to do so."
"I cannot stay here much longer. I am afraid that somebody will suspect me. I must go at once." She quickly combed her hair, rouged her face again, opened the door, and went downstairs. She told the girl servant to see if Old Pan was now ready, and she went into the original room. The chair-bearers were waiting at the gate. The young monk had followed Qiaoyun, and now conducted her to the gate. She entered her chair and with Old Pan and the servant girl returned home.
Master Hai soon arranged matters with the wandering monk named Hu who lived at a small temple close by. His duty at the temple was to arise before sunrise, and beat the wooden fish to summon all the monks to prayers.
The next day the wandering monk went to Old Pan's house, and met the girl servant who asked him, "Why do you come to the back door?"
The monk commenced to recite the prayers. Qiaoyun inside heard this, and coming out said, "Are you not the monk who announces the dawn?"
"Yes, I do that every day. You will also burn some incense to Buddha in the evening."
She was much pleased at this, and sent the girl servant upstairs to get a string of cash for the monk. As soon as the girl had gone the monk spoke, "I am the confident of the monk Hai who asked me to come here, and keep a lookout."
"I understand," she said, "you must come again this evening, and have another look. If there is an incense table here you can report to him and he can visit me."
The monk nodded his head as the girl just then returned, and handed him the money. He went his way.
Qiaoyun went upstairs, and there told the girl servant her plan, and gave her some money.
That evening Yang Xiong left for his duty in the prison. The girl servant duly placed the incense table near the back door, and shortly afterwards a man wearing a hat, contrary to clerical custom, entered the gate, and the girl asked who he was, but the man did not reply, but continued on his way. Qiaoyun who was near, however, took the cap from the man's head, and seeing then the shining skull of the monk she exclaimed, "What an excellent disguise!" They embraced, and went upstairs. The servant took the incense table inside and closed the door. The lovers passed a happy night together. The next morning they were both aroused by the sound of the wooden fish being beaten. Hai the Tutor, quickly dressed and said, "I must go now, but I will come again this evening."
From that day the monk visited Qiaoyun in this way every time that the husband was away from home. Old Pan was always asleep, and they had to hoodwink only Shi Xiu. This affair went on for more than a month.
Now Shi Xiu was attending to the affairs of the butchery and although he had some suspicion about the conduct of Qiaoyun he had not seen anything further to convince himself. He was a very early riser and every day he heard the wandering monk strike the wooden fish at daybreak. But Shi Xiu hearing the sound knew that it meant something.
On the 15th day of the eleventh month Shi Xiu was awake very early, and he listened to the beating of the wooden fish, and then also heard the traveling monk say, "Buddha saves everyone from trouble and difficulties." Shi Xiu got up, and peeping through a crack in the door he saw a man wearing a cap go out by the back door, and depart with the wandering monk. A short time afterwards he saw the girl servant close the back door. He ejaculated, "Why does my adopted brother tolerate such a woman! She is evidently deceiving him, and does some underhand affair." He went about his business in the abattoir as usual, and then in the afternoon went into the town to collect some accounts, but instead went to the *yamen* to see Yang Xiong. On the way he saw him who asked him, "Where are you going?"
"I came to collect accounts," said Shi Xiu, "and then thought of finding you."
"I have always been very busy, but now we can have a little wine together if you will come with me," said Yang Xiong. He then took Shi Xiu to a wine shop near at hand where they sat down in a quiet corner, and Yang Xiong ordered wine and food.
They drank three cups of wine, and then Yang Xiong noticed that Shi Xiu was hanging his head down as though lost in thought.
Yang Xiong was a quick-tempered man. "I see that you have been upset by something. Is there someone at our home who has said anything against you?"
"There was nothing of that kind at our home," said Shi Xiu. "Elder brother, you have always treated me well as your own brother, but there is something I do not dare to speak to you about."
"Why do you talk, my younger brother, in this unusual way today? Whatever is in your mind you may tell me!"
"Elder brother, you go to your office every day so that you cannot know what is happening at home. Your wife is not a good woman, but although I have known this for some time I did not dare to tell you before this. But today all has been made quite clear so that I can tell you the truth. I hope you will excuse my straightforwardness."
"I have no eye at my back," said Yang Xiong, "so please tell me who the man is."
"Some days ago when you had Buddhist prayers at your house, I noticed that the monk Hai was exchanging loving glances with your wife. Three days afterwards she and Old Pan went to the temple to fulfill a vow, and upon their return I noticed that they were both drunk. Nowadays I have heard a monk striking a wooden fish in the alley behind your house. As I thought it strange, so today I got up very early, and saw the monk Hai leave your house wearing an ordinary cap. What do you want this woman for?"
Yang Xiong was very angry at this, and said. "How dare that bitch do this?"
"Please do not lose your temper," said Shi Xiu. "You must not mention this matter today, and tomorrow you must tell your people that you are going to the office. Then you can return about midnight, and knock at the door of your house. The monk will try to leave by the back door. I will wait there, and seize him and hand him over to you."
"A good idea," said Yang Xiong. "I will do as you say."
After finishing their wine they separated. Yang Xiong spent the afternoon with some colleagues practicing with fencing sticks, and he drank so much wine that he was drunk by evening. When he returned home his wife undressed him, and assisted him to bed. When Yang Xiong saw his wife doing this he remembered what he had heard about her. There is an old saying, "When drunk, people talk of affairs." Pointing at his wife he now said, "You deceiver! I shall kill you some day or other."
She was startled, but did not reply, She waited upon him, and heard his rambling remarks, "You filthy whore! You deserve—deserve—deserve to be killed. I—I cannot— I cannot spare your life."
She dare not take any notice of this, and waited until he fell asleep. About 5 A.M. Yang Xiong awoke out of his drunken sleep, and asked for water which his wife got for him. He asked her, "Wife, why did you not undress?"
"I saw that you were drunk, and being afraid that you might vomit I did not undress to sleep."
"What did I say in my drunkenness?" asked Yang Xiong.
"Previously you have always been quiet when drunk, but last night you seemed to be cross about something."
"For quite a few days I have not drunk with Shi Xiu so I want you to treat him to some wine."
She did not reply to this, but sat down on a couch and cried bitterly.
"Wife, I came home drunk last evening, and yet I did not provoke you. What are you troubled about?"
She did not reply to this, but only put her hands over her eyes. He again asked the question without getting a reply, and she now pretended to cry. He thereupon took hold of her, and carried her to his bed, and repeated his question. Still crying she now answered, "When my parents married me to the clerk Wang they thought that I was settled for life, but who would have expected that in mid-life he would die, and leave me a widow. When I met you, and saw that you were a great hero I married you, but I never expected that you could not protect me."
"You talk in a strange manner. Who has deceived you, and where did I not protect you?"
"I would not say just now, but I am afraid that you have been cheated by him, and if I told you you would only be angry."
"You can say just what you have to say."
"Then if I tell you, you must keep your temper. When you first brought Shi Xiu here he had good manners, but since then he has shown his true habits. Now when you stay away from home he would approach me saying, 'Your husband will not return tonight so that you will find it very dull and cold by yourself.' But I gave him no notice although he said that every day. But what is more important is this. Yesterday morning I was washing my face in the kitchen, and he entered by the back door. Seeing no one else about he came up and fondled my breasts with his hand. I pushed him away, but was afraid to call out as I did not want our neighbors to hear as that would have made them talk about your disgrace. I intended to tell you when you returned, but alas! you were too drunk to understand. I detest that man and yet you ask about his condition."
Yang Xiong was very angry at this, and said, ""In drawing a tiger, you show its skin, but not its bones; in knowing man, you may know his face, but not his heart.' He told me that it was the young monk Hai who was doing this, but it was evidently he himself, who has been guilty. He is no longer my sworn brother, and tomorrow he shall get out." In the morning Yang Xiong went downstairs, and spoke to Old Pan, "That butchery business is finished. I want you to close the business, and take down all the fittings and furniture at once." This was done.
That morning when Shi Xiu came to open the abattoir he found that all the tools, etc. had been removed. But he was very understanding, and soon guessed what had happened. He laughed, "So, this is the way! Yang Xiong has let the cat out of the bag while drunk. He has told his wife what I said, and in order to protect herself, she has manufactured some slander about me, and got her husband to close the business. If I tried to defend myself it would lead to other people knowing of the trouble, and so my friend Yang Xiong would lose face. I will retreat one step and think of some other plan of clearing myself." So he went inside the abattoir, and packed up his things.
Yang Xiong was afraid that Shi Xiu was too ashamed to come to see him, so he went off to his office.
Shi Xiu took his sword and baggage to Old Pan's house and said, "I have given you much inconvenience, and as my sworn brother has now closed the business I will go. I have settled the accounts, and you will find everything in order. Should there be some slight mistakes in the accounts then may Heaven punish me for it."
As Yang Xiong had told Old Pan to close the business the latter could not do anything, and so Shi Xiu departed. He soon found an inn in the town where he engaged a room. There he meditated, "I am an intimate friend of Yang Xiong, and if I do not make the whole affair clear it would ruin his life. Just now he is hoodwinked by his wife, and I am not going to raise any objection. Eventually, however, I must make the matter clear to him. In the meantime I will find out when he is on duty, and then watch what goes on at his home during the night."
After staying in the inn for two days, he made inquiries at Yang Xiong's neighborhood. In the evening he saw a messenger from the jail came to take Yang's beddings so he concluded that Yang Xiong would sleep at the jail that night. He went to the inn and slept until about 3 A.M. when he got up, took his sword, quietly slipped out of the inn and going to the alley at the back of Yang Xiong's house he hid there in a dark spot. About 4 A.M. he saw the wandering monk arrive, and begin looking around. Shi Xiu crept up behind the monk, and seizing hold of him placed the blade of his sword across the back of the monk's neck. He said, "Keep quiet or I will kill you. Speak the truth! Why does monk Hai tell you to come here and do this?"
"Kind sir, spare my life and I will tell you the truth."
"Be quick then! I will not kill you."
The monk said, "The monk Hai comes here every night to stay with Yang Xiong's wife. I come in the evening to report whether there is an incense table outside, and if so he enters the house. At 5 A.M. I come and beat the wooden fish to awaken him to leave the house."
"Where is he now?" asked Shi Xiu.
"He is asleep in the house. If I strike the wooden fish he will come out."
"Well, let us change clothes," said Shi Xiu. The monk took off his clothes, and then Shi Xiu killed him on the spot. Shi Xiu put on the monk's robes, and then struck the wooden fish. Monk Hai in bed heard the sound, dressed and quickly left the house. As Shi Xiu was still beating the wooden fish the monk Hai spoke in a low voice, "That is enough! I am here!"
Shi Xiu took no notice of this, but coming up to the monk Hai, he pushed the monk to the ground. Shi Xiu held the monk down and exclaimed, "Hold your tongue! If you make a noise I will kill you. I am going to take away your gown." The monk now recognized Shi Xiu, and was afraid. He let Shi Xiu take all his clothes so that he was soon stark naked.
Then Shi Xiu took his sword and killed him. He then placed the sword in the hand of the first monk he had killed, wrapped up the dead men's clothes, and made off to his inn. He very quietly opened the door and shut it after him and went to sleep without being seen by anyone. That morning a hawker of cakes and congee happened to pass the dead bodies, and fell over them in the dark. The small boy who accompanied him called out, "Here's a drunken monk." The hawker got up, and found his hands covered with blood, and was much upset. He made such a noise that the neighbors came out with lights, and disclosed the two dead bodies lying in blood. They seized the hawker, and took him to the *yamen*.

Misfortune dropped from Heaven,
And fell on this poor man.

## 144
### Morbid Yang Xiong gets rough, Goes Wild on Jade Screen Mountain, & Murders his Wife; Madcap Shi Xiu Sets Fire to the Zhu Family Arms Inn & burns it down

The neighbors brought old Master Wang before the prefect of Jizhou who had just convened court. Kneeling, they said: "This old man spilled his gruel upon the ground, and when he looked he saw two bodies lying in it. One was a monk the other a friar. Both were stark naked. Beside the friar was a knife."
"Every day I get up at the fifth watch and sell gruel and muffins for a living," the old fellow said. "This morning I started out a little earlier, with an iron-headed little monkey who helps me. I didn't look where I was going, and tripped and fell. All my bowls and dishes were broken. Have pity, Excellency. The sight of those two bloody corpses really gave me a fright. I roused the neighbors, but they turned me in. Please use your great wisdom to investigate and clear this up."
The prefect had his statement taken, and directed that the local district authorities and coroners proceed with the old man and the neighbors to the scene of the crime, and there examine the bodies and report back. This was done.
"The murdered monk was Pei Ruhai, of the Grateful Retribution Monastery," said the district officers. "The body beside him is that of Hu Dao, a friar who lived in the monastery's rear. The monk is naked, and he died from three or four stab wounds. The murder weapon was found next to Hu Dao. His throat was cut. It would appear that Hu Dao stabbed the monk to death and then, out of fear of punishment, committed suicide by cutting his own throat."
The prefect summoned other monks from the monastery and questioned them, but none of them could throw any light on the matter. He couldn't decide. The clerk of the court offered a suggestion.
"Since the monk was naked, he must have been up to some nefarious activities with that friar, and they fought to the death. The old gruel seller was not involved. The neighbors should be released to await further instructions, after posting surety bond. Turn the bodies over to the monastery for encoffining and removal. Proclaim a judgement that the deceased killed each other, and that will be the end of it."
"We'll do it that way," the prefect agreed. He issued appropriate orders. Of that we'll say no more.
The murders soon became the talk of the town. Some idlers were inspired to compose this ditty:

*Bestial unbridled shaven-pate*
*With a beauty in secret disported.*
*His crimes besmirched all monk's names.*
*In a lane his body lay*
*Naked in a pool of blood.*
*Cast it off a cliff*
*In deep snow*
*To feed the tigers!*
*He forgot the scriptures the abbot taught him*
*Mulien rescued his mother*
*And went to Heaven,*
*But this thieving baldy*
*Disgraced his mother in death!*

Subsequently, a few young scholars got wind of the story. They took up their pens and wrote this song:

*Most evil are monks*

*Who break the Commandments*
*And revel in lust*
*Day after day.*
*Strange was this fellow's behavior.*
*He shared the lady's pillow*
*and ne'er with her would part.*
*Mad like many monks,*
*Big and small.*
*You can see it on the streets.*
*Because someone talked loosely,*
*Death came to Hai the Preceptor.*

Everyone in Jizhou was discussing the matter, and Clever Cloud was scared stiff. But she didn't dare say anything, and could only lament inwardly.

Yang Xiong was in the prefectural office when the murder of the monk and the friar was reported, and he had a pretty good idea of how it happened. "This must be the work of Shi Xiu," he thought. "I was wrong to put the blame on him. I've some spare time today. I'll find him and get the true story."

As he was crossing the prefectural bridge, a voice hailed him from behind. "Brother, where are you going?"

Yang turned around. There was Shi Xiu. "Brother," said Yang, "I was just looking for you."

"Come to my place, and we can talk."

Shi Xiu took him to a small room in his inn. "Well, brother, was I lying?"

"Don't hold it against me. I made a stupid mistake. I got drunk and let something slip. She fooled me. She said a lot of bad things about you. I was looking for you today so that I could apologize."

"I'm an unimportant fellow of no talent, but I'm absolutely clean and honest. I'd never do anything underhanded. I came to you because I was afraid she'd harm you. I have proof." Shi Xiu brought out the clothing of the monk and the friar. "I stripped this from their bodies."

Yang Xiong looked, and rage flamed in his heart. "Forgive me, brother. Tonight, if I don't pulverize that baggage, I'll burst!"

Shi Xiu laughed. "There you go again. You work in a government office. Don't you know the law? You can't kill her unless you catch her in the act. Besides, I may be just making this up, and you'll be killing an innocent person."

"But I can't let her get away with it!"

"Listen to me, brother, and I'll tell you how to behave like a real man."

"How is that?"

"East of town is Jade Screen Mountain, a secluded place. Tomorrow, you say to her: 'I haven't burned incense to Heaven in a long time. Let's go together.' Trick her into going with you up the mountain, and have her bring Ying'er. I'll be there, waiting. We'll have it out face to face and get the facts straight. You can then write a declaration of divorce and drop her. Isn't that a good plan?"

"There's no need. I know you're clean. She told a pack of lies."

"But that's not all. I'd like you also to hear how she managed their assignations."

"Since you're so wise, brother, I can't go wrong taking your advice. Tomorrow, I'll definitely bring the slut. Don't fail me."

"If I'm not there, you'll know everything I said is false."

Yang Xiong returned to his office. That evening when he came home he spoke only, as usual, of ordinary affairs. He rose the next morning at daybreak and said to Clever Cloud: "Last night in my dreams I met a spirit who berated me for not having kept my vow to burn incense in that Yue Temple outside of East Gate. I have time today, so I can do it. I'd like you to go with me."

"You can go yourself. What do you need me for?"

"I made the vow when we were courting, so we must go together."

"All right, then. We'll have a vegetarian breakfast, take warm baths, and depart."

"I'll buy incense and paper money and hire a sedan-chair. You bathe and fix your hair. I'll be back soon. Tell Ying'er also to get ready."

Yang Xiong went to the inn and spoke to Shi Xiu. "We leave after breakfast. Don't be late."

"Have the sedan-chair bearers wait halfway up the slope, and you three come the rest of the distance alone. I'll be waiting in a quiet spot. Don't bring any outsiders."

Yang then bought the paper money and candles, returned home and had breakfast. The girl had no suspicions, and made herself up neatly and attractively. Ying'er would accompany her. Bearers were waiting with the sedan-chair at the front gate.

"Please look after things here," Yang Xiong said to his father-in-law. "I'm going with Clever Cloud to burn incense."

"Burn plenty and come home early," said Master Pan.

The girl mounted the sedan-chair and set out, followed by the little maid, with the warden bringing up the real. After they passed through the East Gate, Yang said to the porters in a low voice: "Go to Jade Screen Mountain. I'll pay you extra."

In less than two watches, they were climbing the slope. Jade Screen Mountain is twenty *li* outside of Jizhou's East Gate. On it are many scattered graves. Further up you see nothing but green grass and white poplars, but it's devoid of any nunnery or monastery.

Halfway up, Yang told the bearers to halt. He opened the latch, raised the curtain and asked the girl to step out.

"What are we doing on this mountain?" Clever Cloud said.

"Just start walking. Porters, stay here. Don't come up. In a little while I'll give you wine money."

"No problem. We'll await your orders."

Yang led the girl and Ying'er up four or five levels. He could see Shi Xiu sitting above.

"Why haven't you brought the incense and paper money?" Clever Cloud asked.

"I've sent someone on ahead with them."

He helped the girl to an ancient tomb site. Shi Xiu, who had placed his bundle, dagger and staff at the foot of a tree, came forward.

"My respects, sister-in-law."

"What are you doing here, brother-in-law?" Clever Cloud hurriedly replied, startled.

"Waiting for you."

Yang said to the girl: "You told me that he made remarks to you several times, and felt your breasts and asked if you were pregnant. There's no one here but us. You two can get the story straight."

"*Aiya!* It's past. Why bother?"

Shi Xiu stared at her. "Well, sister-in-law, what do you say?"

"Have you nothing better to do than rake that up now?"

"Sister-in-law, look." Shi Xiu opened the bundle, took out the clothes of Hai the Preceptor and the friar and flung them at her feet. "Do you recognize these?"

The girl blushed. She was unable to speak. Shi Xiu whipped out his dagger and handed it to Yang Xiong. "Question Ying'er."

Yang seized the maid and forced her to her knees. "The truth, little hussy," he shouted. "How did she start her lechery in the monks' quarters? What about the signal with the incense table? And the friar beating on the wooden fish? Tell me, and I'll let you live. One lie, and I'll hack you to mincemeat."

"It wasn't up to me, sir," cried Ying'er. "Don't kill me! I'll tell you everything! We all had wine at the monks' quarters. Then we went upstairs to look at Buddha's tooth, but she sent me down to see whether Master Pan had recovered from his drinking. Two days later a friar came begging alms at the rear gate. She told me to get him a string of copper cash. She must have made the arrangement with him then. Whenever you were on duty at the prison, she had me put a table with incense outside the rear gate. That was the signal for the friar to tell the monk the coast was clear. Hai the Preceptor disguised himself as an ordinary man and wore a bandanna on his head. The mistress snatched it off, and I saw his shaven pate. Every morning at the fifth watch, when we heard the sound of the wooden fish, I had to open the rear gate and let him out. My mistress promised me a bracelet and new clothes. I had to obey. He came dozens of times, before he was killed. She gave me some hair ornaments and instructed me to tell you that brother-in-law had made wicked remarks and got fresh with her. I hadn't seen it myself, so I didn't dare. This is the whole truth, every word!"

"Well, brother," said Shi Xiu, "there it is. This isn't anything I've told her to say. Now please question sister-in-law."

The warden grasped Clever Cloud. "Bitch, the maid has confessed everything. Don't try to deny it. Tell me the truth and I'll spare your wretched life."

"I was wrong. For the sake of what we once were to each other as husband and wife, forgive me."

"Brother, don't let her gloss this over," said Shi Xiu. "Make her confess in detail."

"Speak, bitch," Yang barked. "Be quick about it."

Clever Cloud had no choice but to relate how she and the monk became lovers, beginning with their flirtation the night of the memorial ceremony, and all that followed.

"Why did you tell brother I tried to get fresh with you?" Shi Xiu demanded.

"When he came home drunk the other night and swore at me, he hit very close to the mark. I guessed that you knew, and had told him. Two or three nights before that, Hai instructed me what to say if this should happen. So the following morning, I had a story all prepared. Actually, you hadn't done any such thing."

"Today, the three of us are here together and the facts are clear," said Shi Xiu. He turned to Yang. "What to do about it is up to you."

"Take the ornaments from that wanton's hair, brother, and remove her clothes. I'll attend to her."

Shi Xiu did as bidden. Yang cut two ribbons from the girl's skirt and tied her to a tree. Shi Xiu also ripped off Ying'er's hair ornaments. He took up his knife. "Why leave this little tramp? Get rid of the weeds, roots and all," he said.

"Of course. Brother, give me that blade. I'll do it myself."

Ying'er opened her mouth to scream. With one blow Yang cut her in two.

"Brother-in-law," pleaded the girl at the tree, "reason with him."

"Sister-in-law," said Shi Xiu, "brother will deal with you personally."

Yang Xiong advanced on Clever Cloud, pulled out her tongue and cut it off, so that she wouldn't be able to shriek. He pointed at her in a rage.

"Harlot, you had me confused. I nearly fell for your lies. You've sullied my brother's name and you're sure to kill me if you get the chance. My best bet is to strike first. What kind of heart has a bitch like you? I want to see for myself!"

He sliced her open from breast to belly, hauled out her organs, hung them on the tree, and cut her into seven parts. Then he wrapped her hair pins and ornaments into a bundle.

"Come here, brother," Yang said to Shi Xiu. "We need a long-range plan. A treacherous male and a lecherous female have both been killed by us. The question is where can we find refuge?"

"I have a place. We'll go together."

"Where is it?"

"You've killed a person and so have I. We'll join the band in Liangshan Marsh. Where else could we go?"

"But we don't know anyone there. Why should they accept us?"

"Everyone in the gallant fraternity has heard that Song Jiang, the Timely Rain from Shandong, is recruiting bold fellows from all over. Who doesn't know that? You and I are both good with weapons. Of course they'll accept us."

"It's always better to expect the worst. In that way you don't run into trouble. I'm an official. They'll be suspicious of me, and won't want us."

Shi Xiu laughed. "Wasn't Song Jiang a county clerk? I tell you there's nothing to worry about. Do you remember those two men I went drinking with in that tavern the day we met? Well, one of them is Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller. The other is Yang Lin the Elegant Panther. They're both from Liangshan Marsh. Dai gave me a ten-ounce ingot of silver. I still have it in my bundle. That means I can go to him."

"I'll go home for some money, then, and we'll leave."

"You mustn't dither so, brother. If you go back into town and are arrested, how will you get away? You've those hair pins and ornaments, and I have some silver. Even if there were three of us, it would be more than enough. Why try to take more? How could I rescue you if anything went wrong? This business will be out in the open soon. We mustn't hang around. I say let's get to the other side of the mountain."

Shi Xiu shouldered his bundle and picked up his staff. Yang Xiong put the dagger in his waist sash and took his halberd. As they started to leave the ancient tomb, a man stepped out from behind a pine.

"So you kill people neath a clear blue sky and then go off to join the band in Liangshan Marsh," he cried. "I've been listening for a long time!" He dropped to his knees and kowtowed.

Yang knew him. The man's name was Shi Qian. He came from Gaotang Prefecture, before settling in Jizhou. He could fly from roof to roof, climb walls, scale fences and steal horses. He had been brought before a magistrate in Jizhou, but Yang had intervened and saved him. He was known as Flea on a Drum.

"What are you doing here?" Yang demanded.

"I haven't had any business for several days, brother Warden, and I came to poke around in some ancient tombs to see whether I could dig up anything of value. When I saw you attending to your affairs, I didn't venture to disturb you. Then I heard you say you were going to join the band in Liangshan Marsh. Around here all I can do is steal chickens and swipe dogs. I'll never amount to anything. How fine it would be if I could go with you two brothers up the mountain. Will you take me?"

"Since you're one of the bold fellows, and since they're looking for recruits in the fortress, they wouldn't object to one more," said Shi Xiu. "Come along."

"I know a good path," said Flea on a Drum.

With him in the lead, the three followed a trail to the rear of the mountain and set out for Liangshan Marsh.

To return to the two sedan-chair carriers who had been waiting at the halfway point. The sun was already in the west, but Yang and the two women still hadn't come down. Their orders were to remain where they were, but they could stick it out no longer, and they plodded up the path. They saw a flock of crows around an ancient tomb. The men draw nearer. The raucously cawing birds were fighting over a piece of human intestine.

Frightened, the porters hurried back to town and told Master Pan, who took them to the prefect. The county sheriff and coroners were dispatched to the scene, where they found and inspected the bodies. They returned and gave their report.

"We discovered beside a pine tree the dismembered corpse of Pan's daughter Clever Cloud. The maidservant Ying'er lies dead before an ancient tomb. Nearby, the clothes of a woman, a monk and a friar are heaped."

The prefect, recalling the killings of the friar and the monk Hai a few days before, carefully questioned Master Pan. The old man told how he got drunk in the monks' quarters and related the events leading to Shi Xiu's departure.

"It looks as if the girl and the monk were committing adultery, and the maid and the friar were acting as accomplices," said the prefect. "Shi Xiu probably was outraged and killed the friar and the monk. Today, Yang doubtlessly slaughtered his wife and the maidservant. That's what must have happened. We'll capture Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu and get positive proof."

He issued notices calling for the arrest of the fugitives and offering rewards for their apprehension. The porters were allowed to go home, pending further notification by the court. Master Pan bought coffins and had the bodies buried. Of that we'll say no more.

On leaving Jizhou, Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu and the Flea travelled steadily, resting at night and continuing the next morning. In a few days they reached the pretecture of Yunzhou. After crossing Fragrant Woods Hollow, they saw before them a high mountain. It was growing dark, and they made for an inn beside a stream. A waiter was in the process of locking up as they reached the gate.

"You must have come a long way to arrive here so late," he said.

"More than a hundred *li*," Flea on a Drum replied.

The waiter let them in and gave them a room. "Would you like a fire?" he asked.

"We'll attend to it ourselves," said the Flea.

"We've no other guests and there are two pots of boiled water on the stove. You're welcome to use them if you wish."

"Have you any meat and wine?"
"We had some meat this morning, but people from neighboring villages bought it all. There's a jug of wine left, but nothing to go with it."
"That'll do. And bring us five measures of rice. We'll cook it here."
The waiter brought the rice to the Flea, who cleaned it and put it on to boil. Shi Xiu laid out his luggage. Yang gave the waiter one of the hairpins in payment for the wine and promised to settle the full account the next day. The waiter fetched the jug and opened it, and placed a few hot vegetable dished on the table. The Flea carried in a bucket of hot water for Yang and Shi Xiu to wash their hands and feet with.
The wine was poured, and the three asked the waiter to sit down and join them. They drank from four large bowls.
Shi Xiu noticed a dozen good halberds under the eaves.
"Why do you need weapons in this inn?" he asked.
"They belong to the master."
"What sort of person is he?"
"You've been around, sir. Haven't you heard of this place? That big mountain out there is called Lone Dragon Mountain. The high cliff before it is Lone Dragon Cliff. On top of it is my master's residence. All the land around here for thirty //belongs to the Zhu Family Manor. Lord Zhu, my master, has three sons. They're known as the Three Zhu Warriors. This manor has five or six hundred families, all tenants, and two halberds have been issued to each family. You're staying in the Zhu Family Inn. Usually, there are several dozens of our men spending the night here. That's why we keep the halberds handy."
"What use are they in an inn?"
"We're not far from Liangshan Marsh. Those bandits might come to rob our grain. We have to be prepared."
"If I gave you some silver would you let me have one of the halberds?"
"Oh, no. Each halberd has its owner's mark. My master would beat me. He's very strict."
Shi Xiu laughed. "I was only kidding. Don't get excited. Have some more wine."
"I can't. I must go to bed. Enjoy yourselves, sir guests. Drink all you want."
The waiter retired. Yang and Shi Xiu had another round.
"Would you like some meat?" the Flea asked them.
"Didn't the waiter say they don't have any?" Yang replied. "Where would you get meat?"
The Flea chuckled. He walked over to the stove and lifted a cooked rooster out of a pot.
"Where does that come from?" asked Yang.
"I went out in back to relieve myself and saw this rooster in a cage. I thought it would go well with your wine, so I quietly killed it by the stream, brought out a bucket of boiling water, cleaned the bird and cooked it. And here it is, ready for you two brothers to eat."
"Still as light-fingered as ever, you villain," said Yang.
The Flea grinned. "I haven't changed my profession."
The three laughed. They tore the bird apart with their hands and ate it, together with the rice they had cooked.
The waiter slept only a little while. Uneasy in his mind, he got up and looked things over, front and back. On the kitchen table he saw feathers and bones. A pot on the stove was half filled with greasy water. He hurried out to the cage in the rear of the inn. It was empty. He hastened into the room where the three men were staying.
"Is that anyway to behave?" he demanded. "Why did you steal our rooster and eat it?"
"You're seeing ghosts," scoffed the Flea. "I bought that bird on the road. Who's seen your rooster?"
"Where is it, then?"
"Dragged off by a wild cat, eaten by a weasel, pounced on by a hawk—who knows?"
"That bird was in the cage just a short while ago. If you didn't steal it, who did?"
"Don't wrangle," said Shi Xiu. "We'll pay you whatever it's worth."
"It heralds the dawn. Our inn can't do without it. Even ten ounces of silver wouldn't be money enough. Give me back our bird."
"Who are you trying to extort?" Shi Xiu said angrily. "Just for that I won't give you a penny. What are you going to do about it?"
The waiter laughed. "Regular fire-eaters, aren't you? Our inn is different. We'll drag you up to the manor and try you for being bandits from Liangshan Marsh!"
"Suppose we were? Do you think you could capture us and claim the reward?" Shi Xiu demanded.
Yang Xiong was also very irate. "With the best of intentions, we were going to give you some money. Now we won't," he said, "let's see you take us!"
"Thieves, thieves," shouted the waiter.
Four or five big bruisers, stripped to the waist, charged into the room and made for Yang and Shi Xiu. With one blow of the fist each, Shi Xiu knocked them flat. The waiter opened his mouth to yell. The Flea slapped him so hard that his face swelled up and he couldn't utter a sound. The bruisers fled through the rear gate.
"Those louts must be going for help," said Yang. "Let's finish eating, quickly, and get out of here."
The three ate their fill, shouldered their packs, put on comfortable hemp sandals, attached their daggers, and helped themselves to one halberd apiece from the weapons rack.
"A henchman is a henchman," said Shi Xiu. "We can't let any of them off."
He lit a bundle of straw in the stove and set fire to all sides of the inn. Fanned by the wind, the thatched roofs burst into blaze, great tongues of flame leaping into the sky. The three men struck out along the highway.
When they had marched for about two watches, they saw before and behind them innumerable torches. Nearly two hundred men, shouting and yelling, were closing in.
"Keep calm," said Shi Xiu. "We'll take to the small paths."
"No," said Yang Xiong. "Let them come. We'll kill them singly or in pairs. At daybreak, we'll go on."
Before the words were out of his mouth, they were attacked from four sides. Yang was in the lead, Shi Xiu covered the rear, the Flea defended the middle. With halberds they fought the charging vassals, who came at them with staves and spears. The pursuers didn't know what they were letting themselves in for. Yang, wielding his halberd, promptly felled half a dozen. The assault group fled pell-mell. Shi Xiu gave chase and hacked down half a dozen more.
When the other vassals saw this carnage, they decided they wanted to live, and that this was not a very healthy atmosphere. They turned and ran, with the three in hot pursuit. More shouting rose, and two long hooked poles snaked out of the dry grass, fastened onto the Flea and dragged him into the underbrush. Shi Xiu whirled to go to his rescue. From behind, another two hooked poles shot out. The sharp-eyed Yang Xiong swiftly knocked them aside with his halberd and stabbed into the thicket. There were cries, and the ambushers hastily departed. The two saw them pulling away the Flea, but they had no heart for a fight in the depths of the thicket, and could only let him go.
They finally found a path and went on. The glow of the distant torches provided them with illumination, since the path was bare of trees or shrubbery, and they proceeded along it in an easterly direction.
The vassals, after searching for them in vain, collected their wounded. They brought the Flea, his hands tied behind his back, to the Zhu Family Manor.
Yang and Shi Xiu were still walking at daylight. A village tavern lay ahead.
"Let's buy some wine and food, brother, and ask directions," Shi Xiu suggested.
They entered the tavern, leaned their halberds against the wall, sat down, and ordered food and drink. The waiter served a few vegetable dishes and heated some wine. They were about to start, when a big man came in. His face was broad, his eyes bright, his ears large, his appearance rough and ugly. He wore a tea-brown robe, a head kerchief decorated with swastikas, a white silk waist sash, and oiled leather boots.
"His Excellency wants those loads delivered to the manor right away," he shouted.
The tavern host replied hastily: "Everything's ready. We'll send them over very soon."
The man turned to go. "Hurry it up," he said. He was passing Yang Xiong's and Shi Xiu's table on the way to the door. Yang recognized him.
"Young man, what are you doing here?" Yang called. "Won't you take a look at me?"
The big fellow stared. Recognition grew in his eyes. "What're you doing here, benefactor?" he exclaimed. He dropped to his knees and kowtowed. And because Yang encountered this man, the pledge of alliance between the 3 villages became as naught, and the roar of assembled tigers brought down disaster.

When that group of neighbours detained Old Wang, the seller of gruel, they took him straight off to the government office and reported him. The court was in session. They knelt before the Governor and declared: "This old man was carrying a load of gruel and spilt it on the ground and discovered two corpses there: one was a monk, the other a lay brother. Neither body had a stitch of clothing on. There was a knife beside the body of the lay brother."
The old man gave his statement: "I generally go out in the morning to sell gruel. It's how I earn my living. Most times I get going in the fifth watch. This morning I got up a bit early and I was just walking along with this stupid boy of mine, not looking where I was going, when I suddenly tripped up and went and smashed all my bowls and dishes. That's when I saw these two bodies on the ground — swimming in blood, they were. It gave me a right turn, I can tell you. I started screaming, and those people grabbed me and dragged me here to the court. I hope Your Honour will judge me mercifully."
The Governor had his statement taken and signed an order requiring the local authorities and officials from the coroner's office to go with the neighbours, Old Wang and anyone else involved in the affair to inspect the bodies and draw up a detailed account.
When they had made their inspection, they reported back to the Governor: "The dead priest is a canon from the Temple of Divine Favours, Pei Ruhai; the lay brother lying beside him is Brother Hu, who lives at the back of the temple. The priest was absolutely naked, and he had three or four stab wounds which were obviously the cause of death. Next to Brother Hu there was a sharp knife and his throat was cut. It looks as if Brother Hu picked up the knife and killed the priest with it, then horrified by his crime, took his own life."
The Governor ordered the monks at the temple to be detained and questioned to find out the cause, but none of them knew anything. He was quite unable to deliver a verdict. Then the secretary in charge of the case suggested: "It is evident that this naked priest and the brother were up to something utterly improper and illegal. They killed each other. It's nothing to do with Old Wang. Just release the neighbours on security, to be available if needed, while the bodies are delivered to the abbot of the temple to be placed in coffins, prepared for burial, and then removed, and deliver a verdict of mutual killing."
"Yes, that's what I'll do," the Governor said. Later the witnesses were all released. Of this no more. Some young busybodies of Jizhou made up a poem which says:

*This bloody bonze, sad to relate*
*With a lady made a date,*
*Gave his evil lust its head,*
*Coveted the marriage bed.*
*Forbidden pleasures were his aim,*
*This monk who besmirches monkhood's name;*
*Now in the gutter he lies dead,*
*Naked in a pool of blood.*
*Mulian died to save his mother*
*Not so this unworthy brother:*
*The Buddha's law he set aside.*
*And for a harlot's body died.*

Later some literary gents heard all about it and picked up their brushes and produced an account which goes like this:
*Lust among the clergy must end in death, when all's clandestine, nothing in the clear. These two clerics' bodies are quite bizarre, lying on the ground without a stitch, victims of the assassin's knife. The monk lies dead in a pool of his own blood, the brother has truly reaped the wind. Are they then so keen to die for each other, these monks? Or was it a fight to the death for possession of a single grave? Whichever way you look at it, it's two funerals for the price of one.*
This affair had set the whole town talking. Felicity was scared out of her wits. There was no one she could talk to about it, all she could do was secretly lament to herself.
When somebody told Morbid at work that a monk and a lay brother had been killed he half guessed what had happened. "I'll bet this is Madcap's work," he thought. "The other day I wronged him by thinking him guilty for a while. I've got some free time today, I'd better go and see him and get him to tell me the facts."
When he reached the bridge, he heard someone behind him call out: "Brother, where are you off to?" Turning, he saw that it was Madcap. "You're just the person I wanted to see," he said.
"Come to my place," said Madcap, "I've got something to tell you." He took Morbid to a little room in the inn where he was staying, and said: "Do you still think I was lying?"
"Forgive me, brother," said Morbid. "Sometimes I'm a stupid fool and do something silly. I got drunk and couldn't hold my tongue. The woman fooled me. She said bad things about you and I couldn't see the truth. I've come today to apologize humbly and beg your forgiveness."
Madcap said: "Brother, I may not be very clever, but I'm a man of honour, how could I do something like that behind your back? Now, the reason I wanted to see you was that I was afraid later on you might fall into a wicked trap. I have some evidence I want you to see. I've brought the clothes that the monk and the brother were wearing. Look!"
Morbid was furious. "Forgive me, brother," he said. "Tonight I'm going to tear that harlot to pieces, I've got to relieve my feelings."
Madcap said with a grin: "Listen to you! You are a public official, how is it you don't know the law? How can you kill someone if you haven't caught them in the act? I might have just made it all up, then you'd be killing an innocent person."
Morbid said: "But how can I let something like that go unpunished?"
"You just do as I say and I'll show you how to act like a real man."
"What's your advice then?"
"Outside the east gate there is a hill known as Jade Screen Hill. It's a very quiet spot. Tell your wife tomorrow: 'It's a long time since I burnt any incense. I want you to come with me today.' Get her to go with you to the hill and take Ying along as well. I shall be there waiting for you, right at the top, and we'll ascertain the truth of the matter, once and for all. Then you can sign a divorce document and get rid of her, isn't that the best way?"
"Brother, there's no need for all this. I know you're innocent. What she said was all lies."
"All the same, I want you to know exactly what she's really been up to."
"Well, since you've thought it out so carefully, I won't fail you, I'll get the strumpet to come tomorrow, only don't you let me down."
"If I'm not there, everything I've said is false."
Morbid said goodbye and left the inn and went back to work till evening. When he went home he didn't mention it. He kept his mouth shut and just behaved as usual. Next morning he rose at first light and said to his wife: "Last night I dreamed a spirit came and told me I had not yet fulfilled an old vow. I promised to go at sunrise to the Temple of the Sacred Peaks beyond the east gate to burn incense, and I've never done it. I've some free time today so I want to go and do it now, and you have to come with me."
"You can go by yourself, what's the point of my going?"
"I originally vowed to do it when I got married, so you should come too."
"In that case let's have an early meal of vegetarian food and bathe in hot water first."
"I'll go and buy the incense and paper offerings. You order the sedan and bathe yourself, comb your hair, put in your hair pins and wait for me. And tell Ying to come too, for the outing."
Morbid went next to the inn to tell Madcap they'd be going after breakfast and not to be late.
Madcap said: "Listen, when you're nearly there, all of you leave the sedan chair halfway up the hill and continue to the top on foot. I'll be waiting in a quiet spot at the top. Don't let anyone else come up."
Having settled this with Madcap, Morbid went and bought candles and paper offerings. Then he went home and had breakfast. His wife suspected nothing. She took considerable care over her appearance, getting herself up very neatly, and Ying also dressed herself up. The bearers had already brought the sedan chair and were waiting outside.
Morbid said to his father-in-law: "Please look after the house. Felicity and I are going to burn incense. We won't be long."

"Burn plenty of incense, but don't be too long about it," said Old Pan.
Felicity climbed into the sedan, Ying walked alongside and Morbid followed. As they left by the east gate, Morbid whispered to the bearers: "If you go on a bit further to Jade Screen Hill, I'll pay you extra." In less than two hours they reached Jade Screen Hill, which was six or seven miles from the east gate of the city. Here there were a great many tombs scattered about. On top it was nothing but green grass and white poplars, there were no buildings at all, no temple compound. When Morbid had brought his wife halfway up the mountain he told the bearers to put down the chair, take out the poles and draw back the curtain. He told his wife to get out.
"Why have we come to this hill?" she asked.
"You just keep on going till you get to the top," he said. "Bearers, you wait here. Don't come with us. In a little while, I'll give you money to buy wine."
"Fair enough, we'll just wait here," they answered.
Morbid led his wife and Ying up the hill. After the third or fourth ridge, they were able to see Madcap sitting at the top.
"Where's the paper and the incense?" the wife asked.
"I sent someone on ahead with it," Morbid answered. He hurried them onwards until they came to a place where there were some old tombs. Here Madcap, who had placed his bundle, dagger and staff at the foot of a tree, approached and said: "Greetings, sister!"
She promptly replied: "Why are you here too, sir?" But even while she spoke she was trembling inside.
"I've been waiting here quite a while," Madcap said.
Morbid said: "The other day you told me that Uncle made a habit of using suggestive language to you, and also put his hand on your breasts and asked if you were pregnant. Now it's quite private here, let's hear what you both have to say."
"Oh dear," she said. "What's the point of talking about what's over and done with?"
Madcap scowled and said: "What are you talking about? This is no laughing matter. You've got to give my brother an explanation."
"But why should you want to bring it all up again?" she said.
"It's no good trying to brazen it out. I can show you proof." He went to his bundle and took out the clothing of Father Hai and the brother and threw it on the ground. "Do you recognize this?"
She blushed scarlet. She could think of nothing to say.
Madcap whipped out his dagger and said to Morbid: "You've only to ask Ying and you'll know the truth of it."
Morbid forced the maid down onto her knees in front of them and roared: "Now, you little bitch, tell us everything and be quick about it! How was the adultery committed in the priest's room? How were the meetings arranged with the incense altar as a signal? How was the brother told to come and beat the wooden fish? If you tell the truth I'll let you off. But if you tell a single lie I'll make mincemeat of you!"
Ying cried: "Master, it's not my fault, don't kill me, I'll tell you everything. They were drinking wine in the priest's room and they went upstairs to see the Buddha's tooth. They sent me downstairs to look at the Old Master who was sleeping off his wine. They made a secret agreement. Three days later he sent that brother here to beg food. I was told to go upstairs to get money for him, that's when the mistress arranged with him that when Master was on duty at the gaol I would put the altar outside the back door, it was to be the signal. He'd come and look and then go back to tell the father. That night Father Hai came in ordinary clothes with a scarf over his head. In the fifth watch the brother came and beat the wooden fish and prayed loudly to the Buddha — that was the signal for me to open the back door and let the father out. You see, when the father came, I couldn't not know about it, I had to be told. The Mistress promised me a bracelet and a set of clothes, but anyway I had to do what she said. That's how the affair was set up, he must have come a dozen times, then he got killed. She also gave me a few pieces of jewellery and told me to tell the Master that Mr. Shi had used suggestive language to her. But that's something I didn't actually see, so I didn't like to say anything. That's the whole truth, I haven't made anything up."
When Ying had finished, Madcap said: "Do you see? It's impossible that I should have told her to say all that. Please ask your wife to explain everything fully."
Morbid seized the woman and shouted: "You filthy whore, the maid's told everything, don't try to deny it. Make a full confession and I'll spare your worthless life."
"I've done wrong," she said. "But for the sake of the love we once had for each other, spare me this time."
Madcap said: "You mustn't be left in any doubt, you'd better ask her for a full account."
Morbid shouted: "Speak, you harlot!"
One by one she told him all the details of her secret affair with the monk, from the evening of the service for the dead up to the time of the regular relationship.
"Why did you say I had harassed you?" Madcap asked.
"The other day when he was drunk he shouted at me and I realized he suspected something. I guessed you had seen my fault. That's why I said it. In the morning he started asking about you, so I just slipped in this story. You are not really like that at all."
"Now you've confessed all this in front of three witnesses. It's up to brother now to decide how you should be dealt with."
Morbid said: "Brother, you can take off the strumpet's hair ornaments and clothes. Then I'll attend to her."
So Madcap stripped her of her hair ornaments and clothes and Morbid cut two of her skirts into strips and with his own hands bound her to a tree. Madcap also removed all Ying's hair ornaments. Then he offered Morbid his dagger and said: "Brother, what's the point of leaving this little bitch alive? Get the roots out all in one go!"
"You're right," said Morbid. "Give me the knife and I'll do it."
Realizing her situation was desperate, Ying started to scream but Morbid, with a flourish of the dagger, severed her neck. Thereupon the wife, tied to the tree, began to implore Madcap: "Do something, please, help me!"
Madcap merely said: "It's his business, not mine."
Morbid advanced on her, dug out her tongue with his knife and cut it off, which put an end to the screams. Then he pointed and shouted: "You worthless whore, for a time I got it all wrong, you nearly fooled me. Quite apart from the fact that my brother's reputation was ruined, it's obvious that sooner or later you would have killed me. Isn't it better I should act firmly now? What sort of heart and liver does a woman like you have, I wonder? Let's take a look!" And with one cut he opened her up from breast to belly and took out the five organs and hung them on a pine tree. Having done this, he tied her hair ornaments and clothes in a bundle, and said to Madcap: "Come, brother, you and I must do some serious thinking. An adulterer and his whore have been killed, the thing is now where can you and I take refuge?"
Madcap said: "I've already thought about that and I know where; get ready to start, we must get going at once."
"But where to?"
"You and I, we've both killed someone, where else should we go but to the Marshes of Mount Liang?"
"Wait a minute! Neither you nor I know any of that lot, why would they ever take us?"
"You're wrong, there. Nowadays Song Jiang of Shandong, the Opportune Rain, famous throughout the rivers and lakes, has declared that he welcomes all honourable men and will receive brave men from anywhere, who doesn't know that? We've both of us got good fighting skills. Why should we be afraid they won't let us stay?"
"One ought to be prepared for the worst, to avoid disappointment. One problem is that I'm a government official. They may well be suspicious and refuse to take us in."
This made Madcap laugh. "Have you forgotten Song Jiang himself was a court registrar? But I'll tell you something to put your heart at rest. Remember the day I met you, and the two men who were drinking with me at the inn before you came in? One of them was Dai Zong, the Magic Messenger from Mount Liang and the other was Yang Lin, the Panther. They gave me ten taels of silver, which I've still got in my bundle. So we can go and invest it there with the outlaws."
"Well, if that route is really open to us, I'll just go and collect some cash for our travelling expenses and then let's go."
"Brother, are you still so muddle-headed? If you go back to the city and get yourself arrested, how are you going to escape? In any case, you've got all those bracelets and jewels you just put in your bundle and I've got some silver. Even if there were twice as many of us it would suffice for our needs. What do you want to go and get more for? If you get into trouble, who's going to rescue you? This business will soon be out, so we've no time to waste. We must leave in the opposite direction."
So Madcap shouldered his bundle and picked up his staff, while Morbid tucked away his dagger and took up his pike, and they were just about to leave the tombs when someone jumped out from behind a pine tree and shouted: "Here you go, in this wide world, in these realms of light, you go and murder someone and now you're off to the Marshes of Mount Liang to join the outlaws, I've heard it all!" He prostrated himself as they stared at him.
Now this man was known to Morbid. He was a certain Shi Qian from Gaotang, and this was one of his haunts. His work was walking on rooftops and scaling walls, vaulting fences and doing dodgy deals. He had been in trouble with the authorities in Jizhou, but Morbid had rescued him. People called him "The Flea on the Drum." There's a poem about him:

*His limbs are supple, his body stout,*
*Beneath thick brows bright eyes peer out.*
*His appearance is a trifle weird,*
*He floats as smoothly as a bird.*
*In the dead of night he'll pass through walls,*
*In the silent hours he roams the halls.*
*Men hide their goods when they see him come,*
*Shi Qian he's called, or Flea on the Drum.*

"What are you doing here?" Morbid asked him.
"I'll explain, Brother Warden. Recently I just haven't been able to make ends meet. I've had to come here and dig up tombs, in the hope of finding something to live on. When I saw what you were up to here I didn't dare show myself. But then I heard you were planning to go to Mount Liang to join the company. Well, all I've been able to do round here lately is to nick a few chickens and dogs. There's no future in that. If only I could go with you to join the outlaws! The question is, would you be willing to take me with you?"
Madcap said: "I suppose you can be counted among the bold spirits, and nowadays they welcome all good men, so why not, since there's only one of you? Yes, if it's what you want, you can come with us."
"Then I know a good way to go," said the Flea.
With the Flea leading, they took a small path down the other side of the hill and set off for Mount Liang.
Meanwhile the two sedan chair bearers were still waiting halfway up the hill. They waited till the sun was going down in the west, but there was no sign of their three customers. Since they'd been ordered to wait they had not dared to go on up. But in the end they had to climb slowly up the hill to find out what had happened. What they saw was a great flock of crows that had settled on the tombs, squabbling over something. When they got closer they saw that the crows were tearing at a pile of inner organs and intestines, hence all the commotion. Horror-struck they raced off home to tell Old Pan, who went with them to report the matter to the Jizhou authorities. The Governor immediately ordered a district official and the coroner to go to Jade Screen Hill and examine the bodies and then report back to him. They reported: "We found the body of Pan's daughter, Felicity, mutilated and tied to a tree. The servant, Ying, was lying dead at the foot of a tomb. Near the tomb there was a pile of clothes, women's clothes and the clothes of a monk and a lay brother."
When he heard this the Governor remembered the earlier affair of Father Hai and the lay brother. He interrogated Old Pan. The old man told him how he had got drunk in the monks' quarters and the reasons why Madcap had gone away.
"Obviously the woman committed adultery with the monk," the Governor said. "The servant and the lay brother aided and abetted them. I imagine this Madcap, on account of their wrongdoing, killed the brother and the priest; and now without a doubt Morbid has killed his wife and the servant. I'll wager that's the way it is. Arrest Morbid and Madcap and we shall know all."
He issued notices and a reward for the capture of Morbid and Madcap, while the sedan chair bearers were allowed to go home until the court called them. Old Pan went off to buy coffins and bury the bodies. Of this no more.
As for Morbid, Madcap and the Flea, they had left the territory of Jizhou, travelling in great haste. When they reached the province of Yunzhou and passed Sandalwood Bottom, they saw a high mountain ahead, just as the light was beginning to fade. In front of them there was an inn on the banks of a stream. When they got closer they were able to take a good look:
*Before it runs the highroad, behind it a broad stream. A thicket of poplars and weeping willows guards the main gate, while one or two white-blossomed plum trees flank the house. A hedge of thorns runs all the way round a pond with reeds and caltrops; in front and behind a reed curtain and barred doorway shield the hearth. On the right an alcove with a line of verse upon the wall: "In the quiet pavilion dawn greets the visitor from the Five Lakes." On the left the matching quotation: "In the rustic abode day welcomes the traveller from the Three Islands." Although this inn is situated out in the wilds, there's many a carriage travels this road.*
Night was falling and the waiter was just about to close the doors, when he saw there were three people wanting to come in. He said: "You must have come from far, to be abroad so late."
"We've done more than thirty miles today," the Flea replied. "That's why we're out late."
When he had let them in, the man asked: "Have you eaten yet?"
"We'll take care of that for ourselves," the Flea replied.
"There's no one staying here at the moment," said the man. "There's two clean pots on the stove, you're welcome to use those."
"Have you any wine and meat we can buy?"
"We had some meat this morning, but we sold it all to the locals. We've only got a pot of wine here now, there's nothing to go with it."
"That's all right. Just let us have five bushels of rice, and we'll manage the rest."
The waiter fetched the rice and gave it to the Flea, who washed it and then cooked it. Madcap arranged the luggage inside their room, while Morbid took out one of the women's hairpins and gave it to the waiter saying that if he would fetch the pot of wine for them they'd settle up in the morning. The man took the hairpin and disappeared inside, coming out with the pot of wine which he opened and placed on the table together with a few dishes of hot vegetables. The Flea brought a bucket of hot water and invited Morbid and Madcap to wash their hands and feet. The wine was prepared and they invited the waiter to sit and drink with them. Four large bowls were poured and drunk.
Madcap had noticed that there were a dozen or so good halberds stored under the eaves and he asked the waiter: "Why do you keep these weapons in your house?"
"The landlord left them here," he replied.
"What sort of a man is your landlord?"
"Come on, you're a gentleman of the rivers and lakes, aren't you? How come you don't know about this place? That mountain up ahead is called Lone Dragon Peak. On this side of the mountain there's a cliff known as Lone Dragon Heights. That's where the landlord has his residence. Zhu Castle, they call it, it covers an area of ten square miles. Baron Zhu, that's the owner, has three sons known as the Brothers Zhu. There's six or seven hundred families living on the estate as tenant farmers and each household has to keep two halberds for the Baron. This place is called Zhu Arms. There's often several dozen people staying here at the inn, that's why the halberds are kept here."
"But what's the point of keeping the weapons here?" Madcap asked.
"The Marshes of Mount Liang are not far off. We're afraid those robbers will come here to get provisions, that's why we've got to be prepared."
"If I gave you some silver for it would you sell me one of those halberds?" Madcap asked.
"Certainly not. There's a number on every one of them. I'm not going to get into trouble with my landlord. His rules are very strict."
"I was only joking," Madcap said with a laugh. "Stop worrying and just drink up."
"I can't take any more," the waiter said. "I'm going to bed. But please feel free to drink more yourselves." He left them to it.
They drank another round, and then the Flea said to them: "Would you like some meat?"
"Our host said he hadn't got any meat," Morbid said. "Where do you propose to find it?"
The Flea sniggered. He went to the stove and pulled out a cockerel.
"Wherever did that come from?" Morbid asked.
"When I went round the back to wash my hands, I saw this chicken in a coop. I said to myself, my friends haven't got anything to eat with their wine, so I crept up close and killed it. I got some hot water and plucked it and boiled it and then I brought it here for you."
Morbid said: "You really are a bloody master thief, aren't you?"
"The leopard doesn't change his spots," said Madcap, laughing.
They all had a good laugh as they pulled the chicken apart and ate it, helping it down with plenty of rice.
Now when the waiter went to bed he felt uneasy, so he got up again and went to make a thorough inspection of the premises. On the kitchen table he noticed some chicken feathers and bones. He went to the stove and saw half a pot of stock. Anxiously he went and looked in the coop at the back of the house. No cockerel! He rushed back inside and shouted: "You're really disgusting, you lot! Why have you eaten the inn's rooster?"

The Flea replied: "You're imagining things! Really! I brought the chicken we ate, I bought it on the way. I haven't seen your rooster!"
"You tell me then, where's it gone?" the waiter demanded.
"Maybe it was taken by a wildcat, or a weasel ate it, or a sparrow hawk carried it off, how should I know?"
"It was in the coop. If you didn't take it, who did?"
Madcap said: "Enough of all this fuss. We'll give you money to pay for the cockerel, and there's an end to it."
"It's the rooster I keep to wake me up, we can't do without it here. Even if you gave me ten taels of silver it wouldn't make up for it. I want my cockerel back."
Madcap started to lose his temper. "Who are you trying to fool? Suppose I decide not to pay you anything, what then?"
The waiter laughed contemptuously. "You're playing with fire you know. This isn't just an ordinary inn. I can take you up to the castle and say you're bandits from Mount Liang and have you handed over to the authorities!"
Madcap was furious. "And supposing we were heroes from Mount Liang, how would you be able to capture us and get the reward?"
Morbid was also angry by now. "We generously offered to pay you. But if we don't, how do you think you're going to detain us?"
The waiter set up a cry of "Thieves!" and immediately four or five bouncers, stark naked, dashed out from the interior of the inn and tried to rush Madcap and Morbid. Madcap raised his fist and knocked them all down, one blow to each. When the waiter tried to cry out, the Flea gave him a slap that caused his whole face to swell and rendered him speechless. The bouncers escaped by the back door.
"Friends, those bastards have obviously gone to fetch help," Morbid said. "We'd better eat up and go."
As soon as they'd had enough, they tied their bundles, put on their shoes, and stowed away their daggers. Each of them also picked a stout halberd from the store of weapons under the eaves.
"All the same, we can't let him get off so lightly," said Madcap. He got some straw from in front of the stove, held it in the flames and set fire to the house on every side. Fanned by the wind, the thatched building began to blaze with a merry crackling sound. In no time the flames were leaping up to the heavens. The three of them now set off, heading for the highroad. As the song says:

*All on account of a pilfered fowl,*
*The Brothers Zhu a-hunting go.*
*On Mount Liang, the storm winds blow,*
*Zhu Castle is at last laid low.*

When they had been going about four hours, they saw an innumerable host of torches, in front and behind. There must have been several hundred people, creating a great hullabaloo, racing towards them.
"Don't worry," said Madcap. "We'll take a smaller path."
"No, let's make a stand," said Morbid. "If there's one, kill one, if there's two kill a pair. We don't want to move on before it's light."
He had scarcely finished speaking when the pursuers closed in on them from all sides. So with Morbid in front, Madcap in the rear and the Flea in the middle, they levelled their halberds and engaged the retainers. The latter at first advanced confidently, whirling their spears and staves. Morbid wielding his halberd quickly downed half a dozen. Those in front fled and those behind did their best to withdraw. Madcap waded in and knocked down half a dozen more. Hearing that a dozen had been killed or wounded, the remainder now, preferring to live than die and judging the situation to be far from favourable, began to retreat, while our three heroes steadily pursued them. At this juncture, there was another burst of shouting and two long hooks reaching out from the undergrowth pinned the Flea and dragged him out of sight. When Madcap turned round to rescue him, two more hooks reached out from behind to catch him. But Morbid spotted them and with a blow of his halberd he cut them off. Then he thrust his halberd into the undergrowth. There was a scream and the hidden enemy fled. The Flea was taken, but the other two decided it was too dangerous to follow and had no heart to continue the fight. Giving the Flea up for lost, they cast about for a way out. They could still see the torches milling about in the distance and there were no bushes or trees around. As soon as they found a path they set off, travelling due east along it. Their assailants lost the trail, so they collected their wounded comrades and with the Flea bound hand and foot withdrew to Zhu Castle.
Morbid and Madcap walked till it grew light and they came to a remote country inn. "Let's go and buy a bowl of wine before we go on, and we can ask the way too," said Madcap. They entered the inn, propped their halberds against the wall and sat down opposite each other. They told the landlord to bring wine and cook something for them. He laid out dishes of vegetables and fruit to go with it, and brought the wine. Just as they were about to start on this, a big fellow rushed in. He was strongly built with a square jaw, piercing eyes, and big ears, an ugly, coarse fellow in appearance. He wore a tea-coloured robe, a cloth decorated with swastikas on his head, a white sash round his waist and a pair of tall boots of oiled leather. "His Honour wants those loads up at the manor right away," he shouted.
The landlord hurriedly replied: "The minute they've loaded up I'll send them along."
The man who had given the order turned to leave, saying "Be quick about it!" On his way out he passed Morbid and Madcap, whereupon Morbid, recognizing him, gave a great shout: "Hey there, young feller-me-lad, what are you doing here? Didn't you see me?"
When he saw who it was, the other shouted: "Benefactor, how did you get here?" Then he prostrated himself in front of Morbid. Now if Morbid had not run into this person, things would have been different. As it was,

*The oath of loyalty is to be foresworn;*
*The roaring of tigers heralds a crisis.*

UPON reaching the *yamen* the neighbors went into the court, and the magistrate soon came and took his seat. The neighbors all knelt down, and made a statement: "This hawker fell down with his load of cakes and congee. When we came we saw two corpses on the ground—one was a monk, and the other a traveling monk—and they were both naked. There was a monk by the side of the traveling monk."
The hawker then stated: "I always go out early every morning selling my cakes and congee. This morning as I was going along I stumbled over something at that spot, and all my food was spilt, and my cups and plates broken. Sir, please have pity on me! I was surprised to see the two dead bodies. When the neighbors came they arrested me, and brought me to your *yamen*. I request your honor to have the matter carefully investigated."
The magistrate had this statement duly recorded, and issued an order for the neighborhood chief and the coroner to examine the case and report. These men held a post-mortem and duly made their report in detail. They gave their opinions that the traveling monk for some unknown reason had murdered the monk Hai, and then being conscious of his guilt had committed suicide. The magistrate summoned all the monks of that temple to come to court, but when he explained to them the conclusions of the coroner there was not a single one who could throw any light on the mystery.
The magistrate released the neighbors on bail and ordered the temple to arrange for the burial.
On this strange amorous affairs some neighbors composed a song:

We laugh at the monk of Baoen Monastery,
Who loved a woman willing,
And risked their lives for pleasures gay,
The idle moments filling.
For pleasure which was uncontrolled,
The blind, dumb Gods consented,
For well they knew the sin unfold,
They'd both be unlamented.
They should have waited and avoid
The trial—who was stronger;
The ground from blood would have been free,
And they had lived much longer.

Other neighbors listening to this song also composed one as follows:

Lust invites murder,
Without failure;
And lays down the cleaver,
By a naked figure.
Big baldhead died today.
With little baldhead lusty;
Pursued by bosom comrade,
In all faith mighty.

These two songs were sung in every street in that neighborhood. The wife of Yang Xiong heard them with a distracted stare, but she dared not say a word and felt much worried.
Yang Xiong heard of the two murders, and understood who had done the deed. He thought, "I had unjustly condemned him on insufficient evidence. I have leisure today, so I will go and find Shi Xiu, and ask him what he knows about the case."
Yang Xiong left the *yamen*, and had just crossed the bridge when he heard someone behind him calling out, "Elder brother, where are you going?" Upon turning round he saw that it was Shi Xiu and said, "Younger brother, I was looking for you."
"Elder brother, please come to my place where we can talk matters over." They both went to Shi Xiu's inn where they sat down in a small room. There Shi Xiu asked, "Elder brother, did I not tell you the truth?"
"Younger brother, please excuse me for the mistake I made. I got drunk that day, and accused my wife, and she turned round and said many bad things about you. I was now coming to find you, and was going to confess my fault."
"Elder brother, I may not be without a fault, but I am a perfectly honest man so how could you think of me as capable of doing such things? I was afraid that you had been deceived by some ruse, and therefore, I came to find you, and show you a proof of my innocence." He thereupon spread out the monks' robes.
When Yang Xiong saw the robes he became excited, and said, "Younger brother, excuse me. Tonight I will hack that woman into small pieces, and so appease my wrath."
Shi Xiu laughed, "You are getting angry again. As you work in the *yamen* you are supposed to know all about the law. How could you kill her when you have not caught her in the act? Also if I have been telling you nonsense, you would make a mistake in killing her."
"Then what should I do?"
"It would be better if you follow my advice. Outside the East Gate there is Cuibing Mountain, a very lonely spot. Tomorrow you can tell your wife that you want her to accompany you to sacrifice at a temple. She can also take her maidservant with her. I will go there beforehand and when you arrive you can confront her with me, and we will go over the whole matter. Then you can sign a bill of divorcement and release her. Would not that be better?"
"You need not go into details. I know your innocence. That woman is the liar."
"Of course I want you to know all that has passed between those two."
"Your plan is admirable," said Yang Xiong. "I will go tomorrow with that slut, and I hope that you must not fail to come."
"If I do not turn up tomorrow then you can assume that I am the liar," said Shi Xiu.
The two friends then took leave of each other, and Yang Xiong returned to his work at the *yamen*. Upon reaching home that evening he did not say a word, but let everything be as usual. The following morning when he got up he, however, said to his wife, "Last night I dreamt that a spirit accused me of having overlooked some vow. I now remember that I once took a vow at a temple outside the East Gate, and have not yet fulfilled my oath. As I have leisure today, I will go there and would like you to come with me."
"Why not go alone," replied his wife. "What is the use for me to go with you?"
"My oath concerned our marriage so that it is necessary for both of us to go."
"In that case we will get away immediately after breakfast," said his wife.
"I will go and hire a sedan chair, and buy some incense," said Yang Xiong. He also told the maidservant to get ready, and go with them. He then went to the inn and spoke to Shi Xiu of the arrangements made. Shi Xiu asked him to leave the sedan chairs when halfway up the hill, and walk the remainder of the distance, as it was not advisable to have outsiders about the temple. Yang Xiong agreed to this, and then went to buy the incense and paper. When he got back he found that his wife and servant were dressed up in their best. The wife got in the sedan chair, and Yang Xiong and the maidservant walked behind. When outside the East Gate Yang Xiong quietly told the carriers that they were to go to Cuibing Mountain, and that he would pay them well. They duly reached the mountain in about two hours as the place was only about seven //from the town. The mountain was covered with green grass, and tall poplars, but there was no temple there. When halfway up the mountain Yang Xiong stopped, and told the chair carriers to rest at that place while the three of them would walk the rest of the way.
His wife asked, "Why have we come to such a place as this?"
But Yang Xiong told her not to ask useless questions. The three then started off, and soon reached the top of the mountain where they met Shi Xiu.
The wife then asked, "How is it you did not bring the paper and incense up here?"
"I told one of the men to bring that up here," replied Yang Xiong. He took his wife towards an ancient grave that was there. Shi Xiu put his bundle and sword and stick against the trunk of a tree after which he saluted Pan Qiaoyun.
She hurriedly asked, "How is it that you have come here?" As she spoke she stared with fear.
"I have been waiting here for you for a long time," he replied.
Yang Xiong turned to his wife, "A few days ago you made some serious charges against my sworn brother that he laid his hand on your breasts. There is nobody about here so you two can now discuss that matter, and make things clear."
The wife exclaimed, "*Ai Ya!* Why talk about bygone matters?"
Shi Xiu stared at her, "Madame, why not?"
"There is nothing to talk about unless you yourself have said something," she replied.
"Madame! Is that so?" He then opened his bundle and spread out on the ground the dead monks' clothes. "Do you recognize this clothing?" asked Shi Xiu.
Qiaoyun blushed scarlet, and did not reply.
Shi Xiu seized the sword, and handed it to Yang Xiong, saying, "You had better ask the maidservant."
Yang Xiong seized the girl, and made her kneel down before him. He spoke in a loud voice, "Now you speak the truth and I will forgive you for what you have done. But if you speak only one lie I shall most certainly kill you on the spot."
"Sir," replied the maidservant, "this is not an affair of mine. Do not kill me, and I will speak the truth." She then told him all that had occurred between his wife and the monk, and how she had been bribed to do her part of the plot.
Yang Xiong now seized his wife and called out, "Now bitch, tell me the truth, and if you say no falsehood I will not kill you."
"It was my mistake," said his wife. "As we are man and wife, I beg for your forgiveness."
"We cannot pass this over so easily, elder brother," said Shi Xiu. "Why should she not give a full explanation?"
"I agree! Bitch, give me the whole truth!" shouted Yang Xiong.
The woman then confessed completely, and told all that had been arranged and carried on with the monk.
Yang Xiong then told Shi Xiu to strip his wife naked which was done. Yang Xiong then took his sash and tied her to the tree. Shi Xiu took the ornaments out of the servant's hair, and said to Yang Xiong while he handed him the sword, "Why should we spare this little plotter. If she remains there will always be a source from which trouble might grow."
"That is so," said Yang Xiong; "I will kill her myself."
The maidservant saw that she was in a dangerous position, and attempted to shriek, but Yang Xiong, with one blow, cut her in two.
The woman tied to the tree called out, "Brother-in-law, please intervene!"
"This is not my affair," replied Shi Xiu.
Yang Xiong stepped up to the tree, took hold of the woman's tongue, and cut it off with his sword. He then pointed at her and said, "You whore! I have almost been deceived by you. You nearly estranged me from my sworn brother, and might have put an end to my life some day. I think you must have some strange heart inside you so I am going to have a look at it." He plunged his sword into her breast, ripped open her belly. He took out her heart, spleen, liver, kidneys, and lungs, and hung them up on the tree, and then cut her into seven parts. He then asked Shi Xiu to come near and discuss matters. He said, "Now we have killed the adulterer and the adulteress too. But where shall we now go for safety?"
"We have both committed murder," said Shi Xiu, "and the only thing left for us is both to join the brigands at Liangshan Marsh."

"Stop a bit! Neither of us know a single person at that place so it is unlikely that they will accept us."
"You overlook the fact, elder brother, that Song Jiang is in charge there, and he is famous everywhere as a man who is always on the lookout for heroes. We both have military skill so how could he turn us away?"
"When things are difficult at first and quite easy afterwards there will be no regret. But as I am an official I am afraid that I should arouse their suspicions, and that they would not be willing to welcome us."
Shi Xiu laughed and asked, "Was he not a clerk in a *yamen* himself at one time? But you must not forget that on the day we first drank in an inn I had been with two men, and they were leaders from Liangshan Marsh. They even gave me a present of silver, and they will remember me."
"Very well, younger brother, you go on the road to Liangshan Marsh, and I will return home and get some money to cover our traveling expenses."
"That will not do, because if you enter the town you would have a difficulty in getting out if they hear of what has happened today. People would undoubtedly inquire about your wife's absence. I have however enough money in this bundle to cover all our traveling expenses. So we had better both go together straightway by the road on the other side of the mountains."
They both then packed up their things and set forth. They had only gone a short distance when they heard a voice behind them, and turning round saw a man emerging from the trees. He called, "I have been listening to all that you have said, and after committing murder in broad daylight you are now escaping to Liangshan Marsh." Yang Xiong recognized the man as Shi Qian, a native of Gaotang Prefecture, who however had lived in that neighborhood for many years. He was well known as a housebreaker, and was particularly good in scaling walls. He was known as the 'Flea on the Drum.'
"What are you doing here?" asked Yang Xiong.
"Nowadays I have nothing to do," replied Shi Qian, "so I came here to open some ancient grave and take the things. I happened to see you arrive, and was a witness of what happened but I dared not intervene. I heard you two talking about going to Liangshan Marsh and joining the bandits. For a long time I have been stealing all kinds of things even chickens, cats, and dogs so I thought I had better join you. Would you mind if I go along with you?"
"I think they would be pleased to have you at Liangshan Marsh," said Shi Xiu. "You can accompany us if you like."
Shi Qian knew a small footpath, and led the other two.
The two sedan chair carriers waited until evening without seeing the three persons return. Although Yang Xiong had told them not to go up the mountain yet at last they went to see what was the cause of the delay. They saw a flock of crows on a grave making a great noise, and upon approaching they saw that the crows were eating the viscera hanging from the tree. They were startled, and immediately hurried down the mountain, and informed Old Pan who went with them to the *yamen* to report the case. The magistrate heard the reports, and ordered the coroner to investigate the case on the spot.
Upon his return he reported all that he had seen, and gave the names of the victims. The magistrate at once recollected the murder of the two monks, and cross-examined Old Pan who told him all that he knew of the seducing affairs. The magistrate correctly summed up the case that Shi Xiu had killed the monks, and Yang Xiong had killed his wife and the girl servant. He issued summons for the arrest of those two men.
Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, and Shi Qian continued on their way, and one evening, at dusk when near Xianglin Hollow they stopped at an inn near a stream. They told the waiter that they had walked about thirty //that day and were hungry. The waiter said there were no other guests at the inn, and if they liked they could cook the food themselves as the pans were quite clean.
"Have you any meat here?" asked Shi Qian.
"We had some meat early this morning, but people in the surrounding villages have bought it all during the day," replied the waiter. "We have a little wine left, and also some vegetables."
"All right, that will do," replied Shi Qian. "Give us also some rice and we will do our own cooking."
This was done, and while Shi Qian did the cooking, Shi Xiu arranged their baggage and spread out their beddings. Yang Xiong took a woman's silver hairpin, and gave it to the waiter as payment for the food, etc. Shi Qian got a bucket of water for them to wash their feet and hands. When the wine was ready they asked the waiter to drink with them. Shi Xiu noticed that there were many halberds hanging on the wall under the eaves of the inn so he asked the waiter why they had so many arms.
"Those belong to the landlord of this inn," replied the waiter.
"What kind of man is your master?"
"As you are travelers, why do you not know the name of this place?" replied the waiter. "The mountain here is called the Dulong Mountain. The high ridge is the Dulong Ridge. Our master lives on the top of that ridge. Within a radius of about five //round this place is the Zhu Family Village. Our headman is Zhu Chaofeng, and he has three sons who are known as the three heroes. In this area there are about five hundred laborers who all work for our headman, and he supplies them with these halberds. This inn is called the Zhu Family Inn, and we generally have about ten men staying here who act as a guard, and those are their halberds."
"But what do they use the halberds for in such a quiet place as this?" asked Shi Xiu.
"This place is not very far from Liangshan Marsh, so that we are always afraid of those bandits coming here to borrow grain from us."
"If I give you some money will you sell me one of those halberds?" asked Shi Xiu.
"I cannot do that," said the waiter. "All the halberds are numbered, and I have to account for the lot. If one was missing I should be beaten with sticks. Our master has very severe rules about such matters."
"I was only joking," said Shi Xiu laughingly. "You must not be afraid of us."
"I have now had enough, and will now retire, and go to sleep. You gentlemen can go on drinking," said the waiter.
When the waiter had gone the three men went on drinking, but Shi Qian suddenly asked, "Wouldn't you like some meat with this?"
"The waiter said they had sold all the meat so that there is none left," replied Yang Xiong.
Shi Qian laughed loudly at this, and going to the kitchen came back with a large chicken.
"When I went outside to relieve bowels I noticed this bird in the roost," said Shi Qian. "As I could find no meat, I went and killed this chicken, plucked it and cooked it. So that is how we can have it now."
"You are still a thief when you take things like this," answered Yang Xiong.
"He evidently has not reformed his old habits," said Shi Xiu laughingly.
The three still laughing set to, and soon tore up the whole bird for their meal.
But the waiter could not go to sleep, and very soon he took a stroll round. He saw on the table the bones and feathers, and going to the roost found that the bird was missing. So he hurried back into the room, and asked, "Gentlemen, you seem to have no manners. Why did you steal our rooster?"
"No! No!" exclaimed Shi Qian. "We bought a bird on the way here, and have not seen yours."
"Then where has our bird gone to?"
"Perhaps a stray cat, a weasel or a kite has taken it. But we know nothing about it," said Shi Qian.
"The bird was in the roost when I left you," said the waiter, "so if you have not stolen it who has?"
"We will not wrangle any further," said Shi Xiu; "we will pay for what you have lost."
"But the cock was our dawn announcer so all our affairs will be upset now that it has gone. Even ten taels of silver would not be enough, and I must ask you to return us our cock."
"Who are you trying to fool?" asked Shi Xiu in a temper. "If we do not make up for your loss what would you do?"
The waiter laughed and replied, "You should not make trouble here, as this inn is unlike others, and you might be arrested on a charge of being bandits from Liangshan Marsh."
Shi Xiu cursed the man saying, "Even if we were from Liangshan Marsh how could you arrest us, and get a reward from your village chief?"
The waiter without replying called out, "Robbers," and immediately about five men rushed into the room. But Shi Xiu met them, and one by one he knocked the men down with his fist. As the waiter was still complaining, Shi Qian slapped his face, and stopped his noise. The five men picked themselves up, and retreated through the back door.
"Those men will soon bring others, so we better have a big meal and get away," said Yang Xiong.
The three friends after a hearty eating, picked up their things, and helped themselves to a halberd each from the inn's stock.
Shi Xiu said, "If we are going to be hung we might as well be hung for a house as for a cock," so saying he rushed into the kitchen, lit a torch, and began to set fire to the inn. Very soon the whole place was in flames. The three friends set off, but they had not gone far when they found themselves surrounded in the distance on all sides by many hundreds of men with torchlights.
Shi Xiu said, "Let us keep cool, and try to find a footpath somewhere."
Yang Xiong said, "It would better to stop in one place, and kill these men one by one as they come up to us. We may not go until daybreak."
While he was speaking, some of the men were quite close, and they were armed with sticks. Yang Xiong attacked them, and soon killed about seven men, when the rest retreated. Shi Xiu had done the same thing in another direction with the same result. The three friends continued on their way, but did not notice the men hidden in the grass until one of them grabbed hold of Shi Qian with a hooked pole, and pulled him down into the tall grass. Shi Xiu went to his assistance, but another pole grabbed hold of him. Yang Xiong saw this, struck the pole with his halberd, and freed his friend. He then stabbed in the grass at the hidden men and shouting in pain, they soon all ran away. But Shi Qian was missing and the 2 friends saw no means of rescuing him. They therefore continued on their way, and following any small path, they saw they went towards the east. They soon found themselves outside the circle of flaming torches. They walked during that night and early the following morning they stopped at an inn. There they had just finished their breakfast when they noticed a man outside who had big eyes and ears. He had a rough appearance, wearing brown silk clothes with a white belt. He called out to the waiter, "Our master tells you to go to his village with a load." Yang Xiong recognized the man and asked him what he was doing there. The man then recognized Yang Xiong and saluted.

Union, 'twixt 3 hamlets broken,
Roaring tigers make much sorrow.

## 145
## The Striking Heaven Soaring Skyhawk Eagle Writes 2 Letters Requesting Reprieve & twice invokes the oath of loyalty; Song Jiang's 1st Attack on the Zhu Family Manor/Castle & Village

Yang Xiong raised the man to his feet and called Shi Xiu over.
"Who is this brother?" asked Shi Xiu.
"Du Xing is his name. He's from the prefecture of Zhongshan. Because of his crude features everyone calls him Demon Face. Last year he came to Jizhou as a trader. He killed one of the other merchants in his company in a fight, and was brought before the prefect and committed to my prison. I talked with him and found him very knowledgeable about hand-to-hand fighting and jousting with staves. So I used my influence and got him off. I never expected to meet him in this place."
"Are you here on official business, benefactor?" asked Du Xing.
Yang leaned close to his ear. "I killed a man in Jizhou and want to join the band in Liangshan Marsh. We spent last night at the Zhu Family Inn. Shi Qian, who's travelling with us, stole their rooster and we ate it, and the waiter raised a fuss. We got angry and set fire to the inn and ran away in the night. Pursuers caught up with us and we two knocked down several, but a couple of hooked poles reached out of the thicket and dragged Shi Qian away. We barged around until we came here. We were just about to ask for directions when you unexpectedly arrived, brother."
"Don't let it worry you, benefactor. I'll get them to return Shi Qian to you."
"Sit down and have a drink with us."
The three men sat and drank. Du Xing said: "Since leaving Jiizhou I benefited greatly from your kindness. Here, a big official took a liking to me and appointed me his steward. Every day all the thousand and one things in his household are in my hands. He trusts me completely. That's why I have no thought of going home."
"Who is this big official?"
"Before Lone Dragon Mountain are three cliffs, and on each of these is a village. Zhu Family Village is in the center, Hu Family Village is to the west, Li Family Village is to the east. These three villages and their manors have a total of nearly twenty thousand fighting men. Zhu Family Manor is the strongest. It is headed by Lord Zhu, who has three sons, known as the Three Warriors. The eldest is called Dragon, the second is called Tiger, the third is called Tiger Cub. They have a drill instructor, Luan Tingyu, who's known as the Iron Staff. Ten thousand men are no match for him. The manor has nearly two thousand fearless vassals.
"Hu Family Manor, to the west, is headed by Squire Hu. He has a son named Hu Cheng, the Flying Tiger, who is a powerful fighter. But above all he has a daughter, Hu Sanniang, known as Ten Feet of Steel because of the two long gleaming swords she wields. She's as bold a horsewoman as you'll ever meet.
"My master heads the eastern manor. His name is Li Ying, and he's skilled with a steel-flecked iron lance. On his back he carries five concealed throwing knives. He can hit a man at a hundred paces, quicker than you can blink.
"The three villages have a solemn pact. If one is attacked by evildoers, the others must go to its rescue. They're worried that bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh will raid them for grain, so they've prepared to defend themselves, together. I will take you to meet my master, and we'll request him to write a letter asking for Shi Qian's release."
"Your master Li Ying, isn't he the one known in the gallant fraternity as Heaven Soaring Eagle?" queried Yang Xiong.
"The very same."
Shi Xiu said: "I've heard that Li Ying of Lone Dragon Mountain is a Chivalrous fellow. So this is where he's from. They say he's a remarkable fighter, a real man. We'll go to him."
Yang asked the waiter for the bill, but Du Xing insisted on paying. The three left the tavern. Du led them to the Li Family Manor. It was a huge affair. Fronting on a river cove, it was surrounded by whitewashed walls beside which grew hundreds of willows each thicker than two arms could embrace. They crossed a lowered drawbridge to the manor gates and entered. Twenty racks on either side of the outer chamber of the main hall were filled with gleaming weapons.
"Please wait here a moment, brothers," said Du. "I will inform the master that you've come."
Du Xing went inside. Shortly afterwards he emerged with Li Ying. Du brought Yang and Shi into the reception chamber, where they kowtowed. Li Ying returned the courtesy and invited them to be seated. The two visitors and their host politely argued over who should sit where, but finally took their places. Li called for wine.
Again the two visitors kowtowed. They said: "We beseech you, sir, to send a letter to the Zhu Family Manor, asking them to spare the life of Shi Qian. We shall never forget your kindness, now or in the hereafter."
Li Ying summoned the family tutor, dictated a letter, and affixed his seal. He directed his assistant steward to deliver it at once on a fast horse and return with the captive. The man took the missive, mounted, and left. Yang and Shi expressed their thanks.
"You needn't worry," said Li Ying. "When they get my letter, they'll release him."
The two thanked him again. "Please come with me to the rear chamber," said their host. "We can have a few drinks while we're waiting."
They went with him and found that breakfast had been prepared. When they finished eating, tea was served. Li asked them some questions about jousting with spears. Their replies showed they knew what they were talking about, and Li was very pleased.
At mid-morning the assistant steward returned. Li Ying, in the rear chamber, asked: "Where is the man you were sent to fetch?"
"I sent the letter in," said the messenger, "confident they would let him go. Instead, the three sons came out and were quite unpleasant. They wouldn't answer your letter, and they wouldn't release the man. They're determined to turn him over to the prefectural authorities."
Li Ying was surprised. "Our three villages have a life-and-death alliance. They ought to respect my letter. How can they behave like that? You must have spoken rudely, to provoke such a response." He turned to Du Xing. "Steward, you'd better go yourself. See Lord Zhu personally, and explain the circumstances."
"I will, sir. But I suggest you write a missive in your own hand. Then, they'll have to let him go."
"Very well," said Li Ying. On a flowery sheet of paper he wrote a letter, added his personal seal to the envelope and handed it to Du Xing.
A fast horse was led out from the stable, already saddled and bridled. Whip in hand, Du walked through the manor gates, mounted, struck the animal a sharp blow, and galloped off towards the Zhu Family Manor.
"Don't worry," Li Ying said to his two callers. "When they receive this personal letter, they're sure to let him go quickly."
Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu profusely thanked the squire. He drank wine with them, while waiting in the rear chamber.
Daylight was beginning to fade, and still Du Xing hadn't returned. Li Ying became concerned, and he sent men down the road to meet him. A vassal soon came in and reported: "Steward Du is approaching."
"Who else is with him?"
"He's galloping back alone."
Li Ying shook his head in wonderment. "Very strange. He isn't usually so dilatory. Why is he slow today?"
He left the hall, followed by Yang and Shi. Du had dismounted and was just entering the manor gates. His face was tight with rage and his teeth were bared. For several minutes he was unable to speak.
"Tell us in detail," said Li Ying. "What happened?"
Du Xing controlled himself with an effort. "I carried your letter to their third big gate, and found, by coincidence, the three sons sitting there. I hailed them courteously. 'What do you want?' Tiger Cub snarled. I bowed and said: 'My master has sent me with this letter. I respectfully submit it.' His face darkened, and he replied: 'How can your master be so ignorant? The wretch he sent this morning brought a letter asking us for that Liangshan Marsh bandit Shi Qian. We're going to take him before the prefect. Why have you come again?' I said: 'Shi Qian isn't a member of the Liangshan Marsh band. He's a merchant from Jizhou who's come to see my master. There was a misunderstanding and he burned down your inn. My master undertakes to rebuild it. As a courtesy to us, please be lenient and forgive him.' The three brothers shouted: 'We're not going to let him go.' I said: 'Please, sirs, at least read the letter my master has written.' Tiger Cub took

it and, without opening it, tore it to shreds. He yelled for his men to throw me out of the manor. He and Tiger said: 'Don't make your betters angry, or we'll'—I wasn't going to tell you this, but those animals really were too crude—'we'll nab that Li Ying and take him up before the court as a Liangshan Marsh bandit as well!' They yelled for their vassals to lay hands on me, but I jumped on my horse and raced away. I was burning with rage all the way home. What scoundrels! After all these years of close alliance, to behave so churlishly!"

When Li Ying heard this, his fury burst out of control and spurted sky-high. "Vassals," he roared, "bring me my horse!"

"Calm yourself, sir," Yang and Shi pleaded. "Don't spoil the local harmony for our sakes."

But Li would not listen. He put on golden armor with animal-faced discs, chest and back, and over that a voluminous red cape. Behind him, he affixed five throwing knives. He took his steel-flecked spear, donned his phoenix-winged helmet, strode out of the manor gates, and selected three hundred of his toughest vassals. Du Xing also put on armor, got a lance, and mounted. With him were twenty other horsemen. Yang and Shi girded up their robes. Halberds at the ready, they followed Li Ying's horse as the company advanced rapidly on the Zhu Family Manor.

The sun was linking in the western hills when they reached Lone Dragon Cliff.

They spread out in battle formation. The manor was strategically well situated upon a cliff and surrounded by a broad stream. It was enclosed by three sets of walls, one within the other, each twenty feet high and built of sturdy rock. The front and rear gates of the manor were equipped with drawbridges. Within the walls were huts bristling with weapons. In the gate-house atop the wall were war drums and gongs.

Li Ying reined in his horse in front of the manor. "Three sons of the Zhu Family," he shouted. "How dare you slander me!"

The manor gates opened and out rode fifty or sixty horsemen. In the lead, astride a charcoal roan steed, was Tiger Cub, third son of Lord Zhu. Li Ying shook his finger at the youth.

"The smell of milk hasn't gone from your lips. You've still got baby hair on your head. Your father has a life-and-death alliance with me. We've sworn to defend our villages jointly. When your family is in difficulty and needs men, we give them at once. When it needs materials, we never stint. Today, in good faith, I sent you two letters. Why did you tear them up? Insult me? Why have you committed this outrage?"

"Yes, we have a pact with you to defend our mutual interests," Tiger Cub retorted, "and to grab any bandits from Liangshan Marsh and destroy their mountain lair. How is it you're colluding with them? Are you planning to become a rebel too?"

"Who says Shi Qian is from Liangshan Marsh? You're slandering an innocent man. That's criminal."

"He's already confessed. Your lies aren't any use. They can't conceal the facts. Now, get out of here. If you don't, we'll grab you for a bandit and turn you in as well."

Furious, Li Ying whipped up his horse and charged at Tiger Cub with levelled lance. The youth spurred his own mount forward, and the two fought before Lone Dragon Cliff. To and fro, up and down, nearly eighty rounds they battled. Tiger Cub realized he couldn't vanquish his adversary. He turned his horse and ran. Li Ying gave chase. Tiger Cub rested his lance athwart his animal's neck, fitted an arrow to his bow and drew it to the full. Twisting in the saddle, he aimed and let fly. Li Ying dodged, but the arrow struck him in the shoulder, and he tumbled to the ground. Tiger Cub wheeled his mount and started back, intending to seize him. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu uttered a great shout and dashed in the path of the youth's horse with raised halberds. Tiger Cub knew he was no match for them, and again he hurriedly turned his mount. Yang jabbed the horse in the withers, and it reared in pain, nearly unseating its rider. Zhu Family archers, who had followed after the horsemen, began whizzing arrows at Yang and Shi. They had no armor, and had to withdraw. By then, Du Xing had lifted Li Ying to his steed and ridden away. Yang and Shi followed in the wake of the retreating Li Family vassals. The Zhu Family forces pursued them for two or three //: But daylight was fading, and they returned to their manor.

Holding Li Ying, Du Xing rode home. At the gate he dismounted and helped his master into the rear chamber. The women of the household came in to attend him. They extracted the arrow, removed his armor, and applied a poultice to the wound.

That night, the men conferred. Yang and Shi said to Du Xing: "That rogue has insulted Li Ying. He's wounded him with an arrow and we haven't rescued Shi Qian. It's all our fault for having involved your master. We two will go to Mount Liangshan and entreat Chao and Song and the other leaders to come and avenge him and rescue Shi Qian." They thanked Li Ying and requested leave to depart.

"It's not that I didn't try, but the odds were too great," said Li Ying. "Please forgive me." He directed Du Xing to present Yang and Shi with gold and silver. They didn't want to accept, but Li Ying said: "We're all in the gallant fraternity. No need for courtesy."

Only then did they take his gifts. They kowtowed and bid him farewell. Du Xing saw them to the edge of the village and pointed out the main road, then returned to the Li Family Manor. Of that we'll say no more.

Yang and Shi pushed on towards Liangshan Marsh. They saw in the distance a newly built tavern, its wine pennant fluttering in the breeze. On arrival, they ordered drinks and asked directions. Actually, this tavern was a lookout place recently added by the men on Mount Liangshan. Shi Yong was in charge. He overheard them asking the waiter how to get to the fortress, and could see that they were no ordinary men. He walked over to their table.

"Where are you two gentlemen from? Why do you want to go up the mountain?" he queried.

"We're from Jizhou," Yang Xiong replied.

Shi Yong suddenly remembered. "Then you must be Shi Xiu."

"No, I'm Yang Xiong. This is Shi Xiu. How do you know his name, brother?"

"We haven't met. But not long ago brother Dai Zong stopped here on his way back from Jizhou and told me a lot about him. Today, you two want to go up the mountain. That's very good news."

The three exchanged courtesies, and Yang and Shi told Shi Yong of their encounter with the Zhu Family. Shi Yong directed the waiter to serve them the best wine. He opened the window of the pavilion over-looking the water, bent his bow, and shot a whistling arrow. Instantly, a bandit rowed a boat over from the reeds in the cove opposite. Shi Yong escorted the two on board and delivered them to Duck's Bill Shore. He had sent a man ahead to report, and now Dai Zong and Yang Lin came down the mountain to welcome them. After courtesies were exchanged, they went together to the stronghold.

When the leaders were informed that more bold fellows had arrived, they convened a meeting in the hall and sat in their chairs of rank. Dai Zong and Yang Lin led in Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu and presented them to Chao and Song and the other leaders. Chao questioned them carefully on their backgrounds. The two told of their skill with arms and of their desire to join the band. The leaders were very pleased, and offered them seats.

After a time Yang Xiong said: "There is a man named Shi Qian who also wants to join. But unfortunately he stole a rooster that heralded the dawn at the Zhu Family Inn and we got into a row. Shi Xiu burned the place down and Shi Qian was captured. Li Ying sent two letters requesting his release, but the three sons of the Zhu Family have refused to let him go. They've vowed to take all the gallants in this stronghold, and they've cursed and reviled you in every way. Those varlets have no sense of fitness whatsoever."

If he hadn't told this, nothing would have happened. But he did, and Chao Gai flew into a rage.

"Children," he shouted to the assembled bandits, "take these two out, cut off their heads, and report back."

Song Jiang hastily intervened. "Calm yourself, brother. These two warriors have come a long distance, and with one thought in mind—to help us. Why do you want them executed?"

"Ever since our bold fellows took over here from Wang Lun, we've always placed chivalry and virtuous behavior towards the people first. Brother after brother has gone down the mountain, but none of them has injured our prestige. All our brothers, new or old, are honorable and chivalrous. These rogues, in the name of the gallants of Liangshan Marsh, stole a rooster and ate it, shaming us by association. They must be decapitated, and their heads displayed at the scene of the crime as a warning. I will personally lead our forces down and purge the Zhu Family Village so that our reputation for valor will not be lost. Children, off with their heads!"

"Wait," said Song Jiang. "Didn't you hear what these two brothers just said? Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum has always been light fingered. It was his behavior that provoked the Zhu Family. In what way have these two brothers shamed our stronghold? I've heard many people say that the Zhu Family Manor is hostile to us. Cool down, brother. We have many men and horses, but we're short of money and grain. Although we're not looking for trouble with the Zhu's, since they've started the provocation, this is a good chance to go down and nab them. When we defeat the manor, we'll capture enough grain to last us four or five years. We're not seeking an excuse to harm them, but those oafs are really much too rude. You are the highest leader here, brother. Why sally forth on minor matters? I have no talent, but with a contingent of men and horses, and the help of some of our brothers, I'd like to attack the Zhu Family Manor. If we don't wipe it out, we won't return. For one thing, only vengeance will restore our prestige. Secondly, we must pay those pipsqueaks for their insults. Thirdly, we'll get a lot of grain for the use of our fortress. And fourthly, we can ask Li Ying to come up and join our band."

"A very good idea," said Wu Yong. "We in the fortress shouldn't destroy men who are like our own hands."

"I'd rather you decapitated me than hurt one of our brothers," said Dai Zong.

At the urging of all the leaders, Chao Gai finally pardoned Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu. They thanked him and kowtowed.

"Don't be angry," Song Jiang said to them soothingly. "It's a rule of our stronghold, and we must obey. Even I could be decapitated if I violated it. I could expect no forgiveness. Pei Xuan, the Ironclad Virtue, has recently been made provost marshal, and rules regarding rewards and punishments have been promulgated. Don't hold it against us, please."

Chao asked Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu to take seats after Yang Lin, and all the rank and file bandits were summoned to join in congratulating the new chieftains. Cows and horses were slaughtered and a celebration feast was laid. Living quarters were allocated to Yang and Shi, and ten bandits were appointed to each as attendants.

The banquet ended that evening, and the next day they feasted again. Then the leaders conferred. Song Jiang directed Ironclad Virtue to compile a list of men to go down the mountain, and he invited the other leaders to accompany him in a raid on the Zhu Family Manor. He was determined to demolish it. It was agreed that Wu Yong, Liu Tang, the three Ruan brothers, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng would remain to hold the fortress, in addition to Chao Gai. Those guarding the shore, the gates and the taverns would also remain at their posts. Newly arrived Meng Kang, who had been appointed boat builder, would replace Ma Lin as the supervisor of war vessels. A written announcement was drawn stating that the leaders participating in the raid on the Zhu Family Manor were divided into two units. The first included Song Jiang, and would head a body of three thousand foot soldiers and three hundred cavalry. When armored and equipped, this would go first, as the van.

The second unit would include Lin Chong, and would also head three thousand foot soldiers and three hundred cavalry. This body would follow, as reinforcements.

Song Wan and Zhang Tianshou would continue holding the small forts at the Shore of Golden Sands and Duck's Bill Shore, respectively, and be responsible for supplying the attackers with grain and fodder. Chao Gai saw the raiders off and returned to the stronghold. Song Jiang's party made straight for the Zhu Family Manor. Nothing untoward happened on the way, and they soon were approaching Lone Dragon Mountain. When they were about a //or so away, they pitched camp. Song Jiang's tent was in the middle, and he sat there conferring with Hua Rong.

"I hear the roads to the manor are very tricky," he said, "and that it's difficult to move up on them with soldiers. I'll send a couple of men to scout out which paths are best. Then we can advance and engage the foe."

"I've been idle for a long time, brother," said Li Kui. "I haven't killed a single person. Let me go in first."

"Not you, brother," said Song Jiang. "If we needed a shock assault, I'd send you. But this is careful, delicate work. You're not suitable."

Li Kui laughed. "That friggin manor. Why trouble yourself? I'll take two or three hundred of the lads, and we'll carve our way in and cut all the wretches down. What do you need scouts for?"

"You're talking rot. Get out of here, and don't come till I call you."

Li Kui left, muttering to himself: "All that fuss about swatting a few flies."

Song Jiang summoned Shi Xiu and said: "You've been here before. I'd like you and Yang Lin to scout around."

"Since you've come with a large force, they're of course on their guard at the manor. How should we disguise ourselves?"

"I'll dress up as an exorcist," said Yang Lin, "and conceal a knife in my clothes. I'll carry a prayer wheel as I walk along. The moment you hear the sound of it, come up to me and stay close."

"I sold fuel in Jizhou," said Shi Xiu. "I'll tote a load as if I was selling again. I also will have a concealed weapon. In an emergency I can use the carrying-pole as well."

"Good. We'll work out the details, and prepare tonight. We'll get up at the fifth watch and go."

The next morning, Shi Xiu left first with his load of fuel. Before he had gone twenty //: he encountered a complicated maze of paths which seemed to go round in circles through thick groves of trees. He couldn't figure them out. Shi Xiu set down his load. Behind, he heard the hum of an approaching prayer wheel. Yang Lin, a broken straw hat on his head, wearing an old priest's robe and twirling a prayer wheel, was coming towards him with stately tread. No one else was in sight, so Shi Xiu spoke to him: "These paths all twist and turn. I can't remember which was the one I took with Li Ying the other day. It was nearly dark and they knew the way and travelled fast. I wasn't able to get a good look."

"Stay off the paths, then, and stick to the main road."

Shi Xiu shouldered his load again and continued on. He saw a village ahead, and several taverns and butcher shops. He walked up to the gate of one of the taverns. He noticed that racks of weapons stood in front of every shop, and that all the men in them wore golden vests with the word "Zhu" emblazoned on the backs. People on the streets were similarly dressed. Shi Xiu respectfully hailed the old man who was passing by and bowed.

"May I ask you about a local custom, grandpa? Why are there weapons at every door?"

"Where are you from, stranger? If you don't know, you'd better leave quickly."

"I'm a date-seller from Shandong. I've lost my capital and can't go home. Now I sell fuel. I'm not familiar with your local ways."

"Go quickly. Get out of sight. There's going to be a big battle here soon."

"How can that be, a nice place like this?"

"You really don't know? Well, I'll tell you. This is called Zhu Family Village. It's ruled by Lord Zhu, whose manor is up on that cliff. He's offended the bold fellows in Liangshan Marsh, and they've come with men and horses to kill us all. But the paths to our village are too complicated, and they're camped outside. The manor has directed every able-bodied young man to get ready. The moment the order comes, they're to rush to the said of our fighters."

"How many people have you here in this village, grandpa?"

"Nearly twenty thousand. And we can count on help from the villages to our east and west. The eastern one is ruled by Heaven Soaring Eagle Li Ying. The western one belongs to Squire Hu. He has a daughter called Ten Feet of Steel who's a terror with weapons."

"In that case, you've nothing to fear from Liangshan Marsh!"

"That's right. If we ourselves had just arrived, we too could be easily captured."

"What do you mean, grandpa?"

"We have a jingle that goes:

*A fine Zhu Family Village,*
*Its paths twist round about,*
*Getting in is easy,*
*But just try getting out!"*

Shi Xiu began to weep. He flopped to the ground and kowtowed.

"I'm a poor trader who lost his capital on the road and can't go home, and now I'm selling fuel," he cried. "This is awful. I've landed in the middle of a battle and can't escape. Pity me, grandpa. I'll give you this load of fuel, only show me the way out!"

"I don't want your fuel for nothing. I'll buy it from you. Come with me. I'll treat you to some food and wine."

Shi Xiu thanked him, shouldered his load, and went with the old man to his house. His host poured out two bowls of white wine, filled another with rice gruel, and set them before him. Again Shi Xiu expressed his thanks.

"Grandpa," he begged, "tell me how to get out of here."

"You just turn whenever you reach a white poplar. Take the path that starts from there, whether it be narrow or broad. Any other path leads to a dead end. No other tree will do. If you take a wrong path, you'll never get out, whether you go left or right. The dead-end trails are strewn with hidden bamboo spikes and iron prongs. You're liable to step on them, and you're sure to be captured. You wouldn't have a chance of getting away."

The young man kowtowed and thanked him. "What is your name, grandpa?"

"Most people in this village have the surname of Zhu. Only my family is named Zhongli. We've always been here."

"I've had enough food and wine. Some day I'll repay you well."

While they were talking, they heard a clamor outside. A voice shouted: "We've caught a spy." Startled, Shi Xiu and the old man hurried into the courtyard. They saw seventy or eighty soldiers escorting a man with his hands tied behind his back. Shi Xiu recognized Yang Lin. He had been stripped naked. Shi Xiu groaned inwardly.

"Who is that?" he made a pretense of asking the old man. "Why is he bound?"

"Didn't you hear them say he's a spy sent by Song Jiang?"

"How was he caught?"

"He's a bold rascal. He came alone, disguised as an exorcist priest, barging into the village. Since he didn't know the way, he could only follow the main road. Left or right would have taken him into dead ends. He'd never heard the secret of the white poplars. Someone saw him wandering off on a wrong turning, and thought he looked suspicious. So he reported to the manor, and they sent men to nab him. The rogue pulled a knife and wounded four or five of them. But they were too many, and he was overpowered. Now he's been recognized as a robber. They say he's called Yang Lin the Elegant Panther."

Down the road a voice exclaimed: "The Third Son of the manor has come on patrol."

Through a crack in the courtyard wall Shi Xiu saw twenty foot soldiers with red-tasseled spears, followed by five mounted men, all with bows and arrows. Behind, another four or five riders on white horses were gathered protectively around a young warrior on a snow-white steed. In full armor, he carried a bow and arrows, and gripped a lance. Shi Xiu recognized him, but feigned ignorance.

"Who is that young gentleman passing by?"

"Lord Zhu's third son, Tiger Cub. He's engaged to Ten Feet of Steel of the Hu Family Manor, west of here. Of the three sons, he's the most terrific fighter."

Shi Xiu again thanked the old man and said: "Please point out which road I should take."

"It's late already, and a battle may be raging ahead. You'll be throwing your life away."
"Save me, grandpa, I beg you."
"Spend the night here. Tomorrow, if things are quiet, you can leave."
Shi Xiu thanked him, and remained. Four or five mounted men were going from door to door and exhorting the populace: "If you see a red signal lantern tonight, use might and main to catch the Mount Liangshan bandits and claim the reward."
When they had gone, Shi Xiu asked: "Who was that official with them?"
"He's our local sheriff. Tonight they're planning to capture Song Jiang."
Shi Xiu gave this some thought. Then he borrowed a torch, said good night, and retired to sleep in a thatched hut in the rear.
Song Jiang and his forces were encamped outside the village. Neither Shi Xiu nor Yang Lin had returned. Ou Peng was sent to the village entrance to check. After a while he reported back.
"People are saying they've caught a spy. Those paths are very complicated. I didn't dare to go further in."
Song Jiang grew angry. "I can't wait for a report any longer. Now the word is they've caught a spy. That means our two brothers have been trapped. We'll attack tonight, regardless. We'll fight our way in and rescue them. How do the rest of you feel about it?" he asked the other leaders.
"I'll go first," said Li Kui. "Just to see what it's like."
Song Jiang ordered all men to arm themselves and put on their gear. Li Kui and Yang Xiong would be the vanguard. Li Jun would command the rear. Mu Hong would take the left flank, Huang Xin the right. Song Jiang, Hua Rong and Ou Peng would lead the central contingent.
Amid waving flags, pounding drums and braying gongs, the raiders, shouting and brandishing swords and axes, marched rapidly on the Zhu Family Manor.
It was dusk when they reached Lone Dragon Cliff. Song Jiang urged the forward contingent to attack the manor. Li Kui, stripped to the buff and brandishing two steel battle-axes, rushed ahead like a streak of fire. But at the manor, he found the drawbridge raised and not a light showing anywhere. Li Kui was going to jump into the moat and swim across, but Yang Xiong stopped him.
"No, don't. If they've closed the manor gates, they must have some scheme. Wait till brother Song Jiang arrives, then we'll decide what to do."
To Li Kui this was unbearable. He smote his battle-axes and shouted up the cliff: "Lord Zhu, you friggin crook, come out! Your master Black Whirlwind is here, waiting!"
There was no response from the manor.
Song Jiang, followed by Yang, arrived with his men. The manor was quiet. He reined in his horse and looked. Not a weapon or a soldier was in sight. Warily, he thought: "I'm wrong. The Heavenly Books say clearly: 'Avoid rashness in the face of the enemy.' I didn't foresee this. I thought only of rescuing our two brothers, and moved my troops up through the night. I didn't expect that when I got in deep, right up to their manor, that the foe's army wouldn't show. They must be up to something."
He ordered his three contingents to withdraw at once. Li Kui objected.
"We've come this far. You mustn't retreat," he cried. "You and I will fight our way in. All of you, follow me!"
Before the words were out of his mouth, the manor knew about it. A signal rocket arched through the sky. On the cliff thousands of torches suddenly flared. Arrows showered down from the gate-house above the wall. Song Jiang hastily withdrew his forces along the road on which it had come. The rear guard under Li Jun set up a shout. "We're cut off! They've laid an ambush!" Song Jiang directed his men to seek other roads. Li Kui, flourishing his axes, dashed about, looking for adversaries, but he couldn't find a single enemy soldier. Another signal rocket soared from the cliff. Before the sound of it had died away, thunderous shouts rang from all sides. Pop-eyed and slack-mouthed with astonishment, Song Jiang was completely at a loss. In spite of his civil and military skills, he had fallen into the net. Truly, a plan for snaring tigers and dragons was being used to catch a heaven-startling, earth-shaking man.

Morbid raised the other man to his feet, and made to introduce him to Madcap. "Who is this fellow?" Madcap asked.
"He's an old friend by the name of Du Xing," Morbid replied. "He's from Zhongshan. Because he was blessed with such a coarse complexion, people call him Uglymug. He was a trader and he came to Jizhou last year on business. But in a fit of rage he killed one of the foreign merchants he was travelling with. He was sentenced and they locked him up. I heard that he was an expert with fists and staff, so I did what I could to help him. It's quite a surprise to meet him here."
Uglymug asked: "What official business brings you here, benefactor?"
Morbid leant forward and said confidentially: "I have killed someone in Jizhou and I'm on my way to the Marshes of Mount Liang to join the outlaws. Last night we stayed at the Zhu Arms and because a travelling companion of ours, known as the Flea, stole the inn's rooster for our supper, we got into a fight with the waiter there. We lost our tempers and burnt the place down. We cleared off immediately, but we had been followed. We did for a number of them, all by ourselves, but some others hidden in the undergrowth stuck out a couple of hooks and collared the Flea. We two ended up here. We were just going to ask the way when we met you."
"Don't you worry, benefactor," said Uglymug. "I'll get them to release the Flea and return him to you."
"Sit down and drink a cup with us, old chap," said Morbid.
They sat down together and as they were drinking Uglymug said: "After I left Jizhou, thanks to your kind assistance, I moved here, and gained the favour of an important man who received me into his household and made me his steward. All his financial affairs are entirely in my hands, he trusts me completely. So I don't plan to go back home."
"What's the name of this man?" Morbid asked.
"Here on the edge of the Lone Dragon mountains," Uglymug began, "there are three bluffs, each with its village. The place in the middle is the Zhu family's estate, to the west are the Hu family and to the east the Li family. Altogether, counting villagers and retainers, there's around twenty thousand fighting men. Chief of the three is the Zhu place: Baron Zhu and his three sons, known as the Brothers Zhu — Dragon Zhu, Tiger Zhu and Wildcat Zhu. They've also got an arms instructor called Luan Tingyu, known as Ironstaff. That man is formidable. In addition the manor has several thousand fearless retainers.
"Over to the west is the manor of Squire Hu. He has one son, Hu Cheng, known as Flying Tiger. He's pretty good, too. But above all he has a daughter, Hu Sanniang, known as Steelbright, because of the two bright swords she wields. She's as bold a horsewoman as you'll ever meet.
"Now the man I serve is the master of the eastern manor, Skyhawk. His name's Li Ying, and his weapon's a solid steel spear. He also carries at his back five throwing knives. With these he can spit a man at a hundred paces, just like that!
"These three villages have sworn an oath of loyalty to each other, to work together, in good times or bad, and to provide mutual assistance. What they fear is that the heroes of Mount Liang may come foraging, so the three villages have made preparations for resisting them.
"I'm going to take you back to my village now to meet Skyhawk and to get him to send a letter requesting the release of the Flea."
Morbid said: "This Skyhawk of yours, would he be the gentleman who's made that name so famous among the rivers and lakes?"
"That's him," replied Uglymug.
"I've heard it many times from the brethren of the rivers and lakes: in the Lone Dragon Mountains there is a certain Skyhawk, who is a bold spirit. So this is where he hangs out! He has the reputation of being a fine fighter and truly a man of parts. Let's go and meet him, then."
So Madcap called the waiter over and asked for the bill. But Uglymug was having none of it, and produced the money himself.
The three left the inn and Uglymug conducted the others to Skyhawk's manor. What Morbid saw was a fine compound, surrounded by a broad piece of water, with a whitewashed wall and hundreds of ancient willows of immense girth. The gate was reached by a drawbridge. Entering the compound, they saw twenty or more arms racks, stacked with gleaming weapons, in front of the main hall.
Uglymug said: "Please wait here a moment while I go in and announce you and ask the master to come and meet you."
He disappeared inside and a few minutes later Skyhawk came out. What met the eyes of Morbid and Madcap was a fine figure of a man, as the poem describes:
*Eyes like an eagle and head like a lion; a swallow's neck, ape's shoulders and wolf's waist; this is a man who is open-handed and single-minded, truly heroic. He likes to ride a snow-white charger, and is wont to wear a blood red robe. Five throwing knives he carries at his back, and a barbed spear of steel with inlaid hasp. Such a man is not easily gainsaid. This imposing personage is called Li Ying, otherwise known as Skyhawk.*
When Skyhawk came out, Uglymug presented Morbid and Madcap, who prostrated themselves. Skyhawk hurriedly returned the compliment and invited them into the hall. After many modest protestations, all were finally seated and Skyhawk called for wine. Morbid and Madcap again saluted him and said: "Might we ask you to be so kind as to write a letter to Baron Zhu asking him to spare the life of our friend the Flea? We should be eternally grateful to you."
Skyhawk called for the household tutor to perform this business. A letter was composed and duly certificated with Skyhawk's personal seal. It was then handed to the assistant chief steward with instructions to take a fast mount and ride like the wind to Zhu Castle to fetch the gentleman in question.
After the steward had departed on horseback bearing the letter, Morbid and Madcap kowtowed once more. Skyhawk said: "Don't worry, my friends. When they get my letter they're bound to release him." Again they expressed their thanks.
"Come inside and we'll have a few cups together," Skyhawk said. They followed him in, and found a repast awaiting them. After eating they drank tea while Skyhawk quizzed them about shooting and was pleased at finding their answers most sensible.
Halfway through the morning, the assistant steward returned. Skyhawk sent for him and said: "Where's the man I sent you to fetch?"
The steward replied: "I saw the Baron and delivered the letter. I think he was about to release the man when the Brothers Zhu came in and began to kick up a terrific row. They would neither answer your letter nor release the man; they are determined to hand him over to the authorities."
Skyhawk was horrified. "But we've all signed a life or death pact," he said. "They've got to respect my letter. How can they behave like this? You can't have explained properly, that's the problem. Mr. Du," he said, turning to Uglymug, "you'd better go along and see to it yourself, explain carefully what it's all about."
"Of course I'll go, sir," said Uglymug, "only could you write something in your own hand, so when I get there they'll feel obliged to release him?"
"It shall be done," said Skyhawk, quickly taking up a piece of the best paper on which he wrote a letter in his own hand. He stamped it on the front and affixed his personal seal, then handed it to Uglymug. A fast mount was brought round from the stables at the back of the house, saddled and bridled. Uglymug picked up a whip and strode through the gate. Mounting, he applied the whip and shot off towards Baron Zhu's castle.
"Now you two really can relax," Skyhawk said. "When they receive this letter in my own hand he'll be freed in no time."
They thanked him most sincerely, and the drinking continued in the inner room, as they waited for the result.
It was beginning to grow dark, yet still there was no sign of Uglymug. Skyhawk began to have misgivings. He had just ordered someone to go and look out for Uglymug, when a retainer came in and said: "The chief steward, Mr. Du, is coming."
"Is there anyone with him?" Skyhawk asked.
"No, he's riding back on his own," the man replied.
Skyhawk shook his head. "Stranger and stranger," he said. "He's never let me down before, what's the matter with him today?"
Morbid and Madcap went with him to see. As Uglymug dismounted and came through the gate, they saw his expression: he was purple with rage, his teeth bared in a horrible grimace. It was a while before he could even speak. A poem says:

*He was born with a face that's already a curse,*
*But when he's angry it even gets worse,*
*Not like a human being at all,*
*More like the black-faced lord of Hell.*

Skyhawk said: "Tell us exactly what happened!"
When Uglymug had managed to catch his breath, he said: "Bearing your letter, I went up as far as the third gate. There I came upon Dragon Zhu, Tiger Zhu and Wildcat Zhu. I saluted and Wildcat Zhu shouted out: 'What are you doing here?'
"I bowed very low and said: 'I have a letter here that my master has written to you.'
"His face changed, the bastard, and he yelled: 'What's he playing at, that master of yours? He sent some lousy beggar here this morning with a letter asking for the Mount Liang bandit, Shi Qian. I'm going to hand him over to the authorities. You're wasting your time!'
"I said: 'This Shi Qian is not one of the Mount Liang bandits, he's a merchant from Jizhou. He was coming to see our master when a misunderstanding occurred and he accidentally burnt down your inn. My master vows that he will restore it completely for you. He humbly begs you to show consideration, exercise restraint and pardon the offense.' But they all shouted in unison: 'We won't, we won't!' So then I said: 'Please read this letter of my master's.' Wildcat Zhu took it and without even breaking the seal tore it into little pieces, saying he'd have me kicked out. Tiger Zhu and Wildcat Zhu said: 'Stop provoking us or we'll have that Skyhawk of yours arrested as well, as an accomplice of the bandits of Mount Liang.' I didn't dare press them further. Truly I was treated disgracefully by those three animals and they slandered you vilely. They ended by ordering their people to seize me but I leapt into the saddle and galloped straight back. I can tell you, though, all the way back I was choking with rage. How dare those bastards flout the life or death pact which has existed between you all these years! They've no loyalty at all!"

*This talk of friendship's mere hot air,*
*When genuine loyalty isn't there,*
*When things go wrong it's an empty word:*
*To trust in a pact is just absurd.*

When Skyhawk heard what had happened anger rose in him like a column of fire, towering and unquenchable. He called for his horse to be saddled. "Please moderate your anger," Morbid and Madcap pleaded. "You mustn't upset everything on our account."
But Skyhawk wasn't listening. He went back in and provided himself with a suit of gilded chain-mail, wrought with animal heads guarding his breast front and back, donned a red robe, and stuck five throwing knives into the back of his kneeguards. He picked up his steel spear and put on a phoenix-winged helmet. He went outside and picked three hundred stalwart retainers. Uglymug also put on armour, took up his spear and mounted. He collected another twenty or more riders. Morbid and Madcap tagged along, wielding their halberds. Led by Skyhawk on horseback, this entire force set off at speed, heading for the castle of Baron Zhu.
The sun was already sinking towards the mountains when they reached Lone Dragon Heights, where horse and foot deployed. The castle was of solid construction, set on an eminence at the foot of the Lone Dragon Mountains and surrounded on all sides by a sizeable moat. Besides being built on a bluff, it had three layers of ramparts constructed from large blocks of stone to a height of about six metres. There were two gates, front and back, each approached by a drawbridge. Within the walls, on all sides, there were sheds simply bristling with spears, swords and other weapons, while the gate tower was full of military drums and gongs.
Skyhawk reined in his horse and shouted up at the castle: "You there, Brothers Zhu, what do you mean by insulting me?" At this moment the gates opened and out charged fifty or more horsemen, led by the Baron's third son, Wildcat Zhu, on a flame-coloured steed.
*On his head he wears a helmet in the shape of a golden lotus leaf. He's dressed in armour like plum blossom. At his waist swings an embroidered sheaf with bow and arrows. In either hand he grasps a sword and spear of pure steel. Red tassels hang from his horse's brow. He's a sight to fill the heart with dread!*
When Skyhawk saw Wildcat Zhu he pointed a finger at him and said: "Look at you! The mother's milk still wet on your lips and your head still covered in fluff! Your father and I swore eternal loyalty, we agreed to cooperate and made a pact for mutual defence and protection. If there's a problem in your household, if you need extra hands, we send them over at once; if you need supplies we hold nothing back. Today I've twice sent someone to you with a letter asking for something, why did you tear up my letter and insult my honour? What's your game?"
Wildcat Zhu said: "It's perfectly true we have a life or death pact. We vowed to work together, to defend each other against the bandits of Mount Liang and wipe out the mountain stronghold. So why have you gone and joined the rebels, why are you conspiring with them?"
"Who are you calling a bandit from Mount Liang?" Skyhawk said. "Why are you slandering someone, what have you got against him?"
"The bandit Shi Qian has confessed to it himself, so stop talking rubbish," Wildcat Zhu replied. "It's irrefutable. Either you leave now or I'll have you arrested and handed over too as one of them."
Skyhawk was enraged. He settled himself in the saddle, took a firm grip on his spear and charged. Wildcat Zhu likewise gave his horse its head and attacked. Back and forth and to and fro, the pair of them fought hundreds of encounters, there at the foot of Lone Dragon Heights. When Wildcat Zhu saw that he could not prevail, he turned his horse and galloped off. As Skyhawk urged his horse in pursuit, Wildcat Zhu rested his spear on the horse's back, grasped his bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right, fitted the arrow to the string and bent the bow. Twisting in the saddle, he took careful aim and loosed the shaft. Skyhawk tried to dodge but it caught him in the arm and he fell headlong from his mount. Wildcat Zhu then turned his horse and came at him with the spear. When Morbid and Madcap saw this they gave a great shout, twirled their halberds and placed themselves menacingly in the path of horse and rider. This was more than Wildcat Zhu could cope with. He pulled up his horse and galloped off, but not before the horse had taken a blow on the rump from Morbid's weapon. Maddened by pain the animal reared up, almost throwing its rider. The supporting archers however now began to shoot their arrows. Morbid and Madcap had no armour and they were obliged to turn and run for it. Uglymug fled too, once he had rescued Skyhawk and hoisted him onto his horse. Morbid and Madcap escaped with the crowd of retainers. The Zhu forces pursued them for a few miles, but when it began to get dark they went home.
Uglymug reached the manor bearing Skyhawk. He dismounted and took the squire inside and made him sit. All the household came to see. They pulled out the arrow, stripped off his armour and anointed the wound with an appropriate salve. All night there were discussions in the back room. Morbid and Madcap said to Uglymug: "Those villains have insulted your master, they've wounded him with an arrow; the Flea is still being held, and it's all our fault that your master got involved. What we'll have to do is go to Mount Liang, the two of us, and ask for help from the leaders, Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the rest. We'll beg them to come and avenge your honour and rescue the Flea."
Before they left they went to thank Skyhawk.
"I did my best," he said to them. "But it was beyond my power. Please forgive me."
He told Uglymug to get some gold and silver to give them. They didn't want to take it, but Skyhawk said: "Among friends of the rivers and lakes, there's no reason to refuse." So in the end they accepted, thanked Skyhawk and bade him farewell. Uglymug escorted them to the end of the village and then, after pointing out the road, bade them farewell and returned to Skyhawk's. Of this no more.
So Morbid and Madcap set off for Mount Liang. Before long they saw in the distance a newly built inn, with its flag sticking out very straight. They went in and ordered something to eat and drink and asked for directions. This inn was one of the newly established lookouts for Mount Liang and the landlord was none other than Shi Yong, the Guv. As they drank they kept questioning the waiter about the route to Mount Liang, and this drew the Guv's attention: "Where are you two from and why do you keep asking about the way to Mount Liang?" he asked.
"We are from Jizhou," Morbid replied.
The Guv suddenly had a thought: "You're not Madcap by any chance, are you?" he asked.
Morbid replied: "I'm Morbid. My friend here is Madcap. But how do you know about him?"
"I don't know you myself," the Guv said eagerly to Madcap. "But when my friend Dai Zong, the Magic Messenger, returned from Jizhou, he was full of your praises. I've heard so much about you and now you want to go up the mountain. I'm very pleased to hear it."

Having exchanged the usual courtesies, Morbid and Madcap told the Guv about recent events. The Guv ordered his waiter to serve them with the best wine. A window was opened at the back of the inn, a bow was pulled and a whistling arrow fired off. Immediately from the reeds on the other side of the water two soldiers rowed out in a boat. The Guv invited the others to embark and they were rowed across to Duck's-Bill Landing. Messengers had already been sent up the mountain and almost at once the Magic Messenger and Panther appeared to welcome them. When the introductions had been completed they went together up to the fortress where all the leaders, hearing of the arrival of some brave men, had assembled in the great hall. The Magic Messenger and Panther brought the newcomers into the hall to meet the two leaders and all the others. After greeting them, Chao Gai asked them all about their travels. But first they spoke of their experience in martial arts and their wish to enter the company. This pleased everyone and they were invited to sit down. Morbid recounted little by little how a comrade known as the Flea, who also wanted to join, had unfortunately stolen the Zhu inn's cockerel and caused a rumpus as a result of which Madcap had set fire to the inn and the Flea had been taken and Skyhawk had written two letters asking for his release but the Brothers Zhu had refused point-blank to let him go and vowed that they would capture all the heroes of the mountain stronghold, whom they had roundly insulted. "They're a bunch of unmannerly scoundrels," he concluded.

It would have been well if Morbid had held his tongue, but he blurted all this out and Chao Gai flew into a great passion. "Take these two outside and cut off their heads!" he ordered. As the poem says:

*Before they recounted the Flea's misdemeanour,*
*Morbid and Madcap should have thought twice.*
*Though the heart of a hero may burn like a fire,*
*The law of the greenwood is rigid as ice.*

Song Jiang hurriedly intervened. "Calm yourself, brother," he said. "These gentlemen thought nothing of travelling a long way to join us, why do you want to cut their heads off?"

Chao Gai replied: "Here on Mount Liang, ever since we put paid to Wang Lun, we have been ruled by honour and have always treated the people decently. No one who has gone down the mountain has ever disgraced us. Everyone, whether a new recruit or an oldtimer, has a heroic spirit. These two villains, in the name of the heroes of Mount Liang, have stolen a chicken. Thus they have shamed us all. First we will cut off their heads, then we will take the heads down there with an escort of troops and show them to the villagers to cleanse our name and prove that we are not common thieves. Let them be executed at once!"

"But brother," Song Jiang objected again, "did you not hear what they said? This fellow Shi Qian, the Flea, has always been that way inclined, and it's he who got that bloody Zhu family so worked up. Do you really think these two friends wanted to bring disgrace on our company? Anyway, I've often heard people saying that the Zhu crowd want to fight us. At present, what's more, our numbers are great and money and provisions are getting short. We wouldn't have gone to seek them out deliberately, but since they'll always be looking for a pretext to attack us, we'd better take this opportunity to have a go at the bastards. If we capture their place there's three or four years' supplies there for us. It's not our aim to make trouble for them, but they're really getting too big for their boots! So calm down, please, brother, because whatever my limitations as a commander, I intend to ask for volunteers and assemble a force to go down the mountain and attack the Zhu domain. If we don't make a clean sweep, I vow never to return to the mountain. In this way we'll wipe out any slur on our name, and at the same time avenge all the insults and obtain much-needed provisions for the camp. And we can even ask Skyhawk to join our company."

Professor Wu Yong said: "What Song Jiang says is right. Why should we execute our brothers?"

The Magic Messenger said: "Better you cut off my head than send such a signal to other brave men who might want to join us!"

In the end, after everyone had had a say, Chao Gai relented. Morbid and Madcap kowtowed to express their thanks. Song Jiang tried to reassure them by saying: "Don't be surprised friends. This is the rule of Mount Liang. We all have to submit to it. If I myself commit a fault, I must have my head cut off. There can be no mercy. The lawyer Pei Xuan, known as Sterling, who just joined us, was recently appointed provost marshal and has drawn up the code and established the penalties. So please don't harbour any resentment."

Morbid and Madcap responded by kowtowing and expressing their thanks all over again. Chao Gai then allotted them seats below Panther Yang Lin. All the troops on the mountain were invited to celebrate the arrival of new leaders, cows and sheep were slaughtered and a feast prepared. The two newcomers were allotted quarters so they had somewhere to live, and each was given ten men to serve him. There was more feasting next day, and then a conference to discuss plans.

Having asked Sterling to make a list of those who were going, Song Jiang requested volunteers to accompany him on his raid against Zhu Castle, which he was bent on destroying. It was determined that, apart from Chao Gai who would remain in charge in the mountain stronghold, those who were to stay to defend it were Professor Wu, the Red-Haired Devil, the three Ruan brothers, the Halberdier and the Little Duke. Others were appointed to take charge of the landings, the main gates and the inns. Flagpole, the new arrival, was put in charge of boat-building, replacing the Flautist as supervisor of war vessels. Orders were written out and those who were to go down the mountain and attack Zhu Castle were divided into two contingents: the first consisted of Song Jiang, Colonel Hua, the White-Water Dragon, the elder Mu brother, Iron Ox, Morbid, Madcap, Tamer, Golden Wings and the Panther, with three thousand infantry and three hundred horse. They armed themselves and set off first down the mountain. The second contingent consisted of Leopard's Head, Thunderclap, the Magic Messenger, White Eel, the Pilot, the Flautist, Redeye, Short-Arse and the Daytime Rat. They too would lead three thousand infantry and three hundred horse and would follow on in support of the others. Finally Golden Sands Landing and Duck's-Bill Landing were left in the hands of the Door-God in the Clouds and Whitey, to guard and secure their lines of supply.

Chao Gai saw them all off down the mountain, and then went back to the stronghold.

So Song Jiang and the other leaders pressed on towards Zhu Castle and nothing occurred on the way. Soon they were nearing Lone Dragon Heights. With less than a mile to go, the leading party pitched their camp. Song Jiang sat in his tent in their midst, conferring with Colonel Hua. "I have heard that the roads through the Zhu domain are very confusing and it's difficult for troops to advance there. Before we launch our attack we should send in two scouts to learn the various turnings of the road and find out the best route."

Iron Ox said: "Brother, I've been idle for a long while. I haven't killed anyone recently. Let me go first."

"Absolutely not." Song Jiang said. "When it comes to open fighting, you can go first. But this is a job which calls for attention to detail, you're not suited to it."

Iron Ox laughed contemptuously. "Why all this trouble for the sake of a fucking farmhouse? Just give me a few hundred men and I'll go ahead and kill all those fucking peasants, what need is there to send in scouts?"

Song Jiang shouted angrily: "You're talking rubbish! When we want to storm the place, we'll call for you."

Iron Ox took himself off, muttering: "What a lot of fuss just to swat a bloody fly!"

Next Song Jiang called Madcap and said: "You've been there before, so I'd like you to go with Panther."

Madcap said: "Since we've come here in such force, I can't believe they won't be ready for us. How should we disguise ourselves, in order to get in?"

Panther said: "I shall disguise myself as an exorcist. I'll be carrying a hidden knife and holding a rattle and I'll just amble along quietly till I'm inside. You just listen for my rattle and stay close."

"When I was in Jizhou I used to be a seller of firewood," Madcap said. "I'll take a load of firewood in to sell. I'll carry a concealed weapon too, and in an emergency I can also use the carrying-pole."

"Good," said Panther. "We'll work it all out and make our preparations tonight. We'll start at dawn."

So all because of a row over a chicken, the tigers came out to fight. There's an old poem that says it all:

*Often it's the weak who have an easy time, the strong are too prone to stir up trouble. Still, though it's good to live without strife, show me the man that's always blameless! A blunt axe serves to smash a brick; with the sharpest knife you can't cut water. The hair turns white, the teeth decay, the tongue's the only part that lasts.*

Madcap went in first, with his load of firewood. He had gone no more than five miles or so when he found he was lost in a maze of pathways that seemed to twist and turn in every direction, obscured by trees and thick undergrowth — impossible to know which way was right. Madcap stopped and set down his load. Behind him he heard the sound of the rattle approaching, and Panther appeared, a battered straw hat on his head. He was wearing an old exorcist's robe and holding the rattle, and he drifted along as if without purpose.

After checking that there was no one around, Madcap called out to him: "It's impossible to find the way among all these turnings, and I can't remember which way we went when I came here the other day with Skyhawk. It was getting dark at the time and the others all knew the way so I didn't pay attention."

Panther said: "Don't worry about all the turnings. Just keep to the main path."

Madcap picked up his load and went on, always following the widest path. Presently he came to a village with several inns and shops. Still shouldering his load he stopped at the door of an inn. The customers had all left their weapons in front of the door and each man wore a yellow singlet bearing the character *Zhu.* Everyone was the same. Seeing an old man, he saluted him and respectfully asked: "Can you tell me something about your customs, sir? What are all those weapons doing in front of the door?"

"Where have you come from?" the old man said. "If you really don't know, you'd better get out of here at once."

"I'm from Shandong and I used to trade in dates," Madcap said. "But I lost my capital and couldn't get home, that's why I've come here to sell firewood. I don't know the local customs and geography."

"You'd better go somewhere else at once and hide," the old man said. "There's going to be a massacre here, before very long."

"It seems to be such a fine place! Why should there be killing?"

"If you really don't know," the old man said, "I'd better tell you. This is called Zhu village, and that place up there at the top is Baron Zhu's seat. Something has stirred up the bandits of Mount Liang recently, and now they've brought a force down to the edge of our territory. They plan to attack us and kill us. The only thing that bothers them is that the roads here are very confusing and they're afraid to advance. That's why they've stopped outside the village. The order's just come down from the castle that every fit man and youth in every household must be prepared, and as soon as the order comes we are to go and help them."

"How many men do you have then, sir, in the village?"

"There's a couple of thousand in this village alone," the old man replied. "And there's two more villages, to the east and the west. The place to the east belongs to Skyhawk Li Ying, as he's called. To the west is Squire Hu's place — he's got a daughter, Miss Hu, known as Steelbright, who's an expert fighter."

"In that case, surely there's nothing to fear from Mount Liang?"

The old man assented: "If we were coming here ourselves for the first time, without knowing the roads, we'd fall into the trap too."

"Why do you say that, sir?" Madcap asked.

"We've a poem about these roads of ours," the old man said.

*A grand old place is Zhu,*
*Its roads they coil about.*
*Though 'tis easy to get in,*
*Once in you can't get out.*

After listening to all this, Madcap began to lament. He threw himself down on the ground in front of the old man. "Poor me," he wailed. "I'm just a poor wanderer who's lost all his money and can't get home. Isn't it a bit hard, if I'm just trying to sell a bit of firewood and I meet up with a lot of murderers and can't find any way to escape? Kind sir, have pity on me. I beg you to accept this firewood and tell me how to get out of here."

The old man said: "Why should I take your firewood for nothing? I'll buy it from you. But come inside and let me offer you something to eat and drink."

Madcap thanked the old man and still carrying the firewood followed him into the house. The old man poured two cups of clear wine and filled a bowl with rice gruel. He bade Madcap eat. Madcap thanked him again, saying: "But please tell me how to get out."

The old man said: "As you go towards the village, you'll notice a white willow. That's where you should turn. Don't worry about whether the path is wide or narrow, just look for the turnings where there's a white willow, then there's a way through. If you don't see the tree, it's a dead end. If there's another kind of tree, it also means there's no way through. If you make a mistake you can turn this way or that way, but you'll never get through.What's more, in the dead end paths there's pointed bamboos buried in the ground and barricades of iron spikes, one false step and you'll set off flying arrows, you're sure to get yourself caught."

Madcap thanked him and asked: "Would you please tell me your name, sir?"

"Most people in this place are called Zhu. But I've got a double-barrelled name, Zhongli. This is where I live."

"I've eaten and drunk well. Some day I must repay you."

At this moment a great commotion arose outside. Madcap heard people shouting: "A spy's been caught." Anxiously he followed the old man outside to look. Eighty or so soldiers were carrying a captive towards them. He was soon able to make out that it was Panther, stripped naked and bound hand and foot. Madcap kept his distress to himself and innocently asked the old man: "Who is that they're bringing? Why is he tied up?"

"Can't you hear them saying it's a spy sent by Song Jiang?" said the old man.

"How did they catch him?" Madcap asked.

"They say he was very daring. He came here all on his own to spy on us, slipped into the village disguised as an exorcist. But he didn't know the roads. He always chose the widest paths, turning this way and that till he was caught in a dead end — he didn't know the system of turning at the white willow, you see. People saw he kept making mistakes and behaving strangely, so they reported him to the Baron's people up there, who came to get him. The villain pulled out a knife and proceeded to wound four or five of them. But there were a lot of people around who joined in and so he was taken. There were some who recognized him as a notorious robber, named Yang Lin the Panther."

He had hardly finished speaking when an outcry arose ahead. Voices were heard saying it was the third son from the castle on patrol. Madcap watching through a crack in the wall saw twenty men with tasselled spears and half a dozen horsemen behind them, all equipped with bows and arrows. There was also a group of three or four on grey horses and in their midst a young fellow seated on a pure white horse, fully armed with a bow and a gleaming spear in his hand.

Madcap recognized him, but he deliberately asked the old man: "Who is that young gentleman passing by?"

"That's Baron Zhu's third son. He's known as Wildcat Zhu and he's betrothed to Steelbright, from the Hu village to the west. Of the three brothers he's the bravest."

Madcap bowed and said: "Please now would you point me in the right direction to get out of here?"

"It's getting late," the old man said. "Suppose they're fighting out there, you'd just be throwing your life away for nothing."

"Then please tell me what I can do to save myself," Madcap said.

"You'd better stay the night with me," the old man said. "If we hear it's all quiet tomorrow morning you can leave then."

So Madcap gratefully remained with the old man. In a little while half a dozen mounted messengers came knocking on doors and shouting: "People of the village, tonight you must look for the red signal lanterns. If you all do your best we shall catch those Mount Liang brigands, hand them over and get the reward." When they had gone, Madcap asked: "Who was that?"

"The officer was the chief of our local anti-brigand squad," the old man said. "They plan to capture Song Jiang tonight."

Madcap thought about this for a while. Then he asked for a light, retired to the bedroom, covered himself and slept.

Now as for Song Jiang, encamped with his troops outside the village, he had waited in vain for Madcap and Panther to return from the village and report. So in the end he sent Golden Wings who got as far as the outskirts and then returned and reported: "I heard the people talking there. They're saying a spy has been caught. Seeing that the roads are so devious and confusing I didn't dare go further in."

Song Jiang was extremely disturbed by the news. "How can we wait for a report now before we attack? If they're saying a spy has been caught it must mean our two friends have fallen into a trap. We must attack tonight. We must go in and fight to rescue our companions. What do the rest of you say?"

Iron Ox jumped up and said: "I shall be the first. Now we'll see what's what!"

Song Jiang issued orders, telling them all to arm themselves. Iron Ox and Morbid were to lead the first group, spearheading the attack, the White-Water Dragon and some others were to bring up the rear. The elder Mu brother was given the left flank and the Tamer the right. Song Jiang, Colonel Hua, Golden Wings and others commanded the centre. Thus with waving banners and loud cheers, with thundering drums and piercing gongs, wielding great swords and broad axes, they advanced on Zhu Castle. By the time they had fought their way to the foot of Lone Dragon Heights it was dusk.

Song Jiang ordered the first group to press home the attack on the castle. Iron Ox, in the vanguard, had stripped naked and was brandishing his two axes of tempered steel. His progress was swift as a forest fire. He reached the castle gates and paused to take stock. The drawbridge was raised on high, and no lights showed in the gate tower. Iron Ox was about to dive into the water but Morbid stopped him, saying: "No way! The gate is closed, it must be a trap. Wait till the chief arrives, we'll discuss it with him."

Iron Ox was most reluctant to give up. He stood by the bank, waving his two axes, and shouted: "Come on out, Baron Zhu, you lousy old fox, the Black Whirlwind wants a word with you!" But there was no reply from the castle.

When Song Jiang came up with his troops, Morbid drew near to him and reported that they could see no defenders in the castle, and no sign of movement. Song Jiang reined in his horse to look for himself: no swords, no spears, no men and no horses. Now he began to be afraid. "I've been a fool," he said hoarsely. "The mystic books state categorically that when engaging the enemy one should not act hastily. I had a moment of blindness. I was too anxious to rescue our two companions, that's why I attacked at once, without waiting for scouts to make a reconnaissance. We've reached their castle and there's no sign of the enemy, so they must have something up their sleeves. Order the three columns to retreat immediately!"

Iron Ox shouted: "Brother, now all our troops are here, don't order a retreat. We'll go in and smash them, you and I. Everyone follow me!"

Before he finished speaking the castle seemed to hear him: a rocket went off, soaring into the sky, and on Lone Dragon Heights above them thousands of torches were lit simultaneously, while from the gate tower crossbow bolts began to rain down. Song Jiang hurriedly tried to turn back the way he had come, but an outcry arose from the White-Water Dragon's troops in the rear. "The way we came in is blocked!" they were shouting. "It's an ambush!" Song Jiang ordered his troops to cast around in all directions for a way out. Iron Ox went on brandishing his axes, searching for someone to kill, but he could not find a single enemy.

Then on Lone Dragon Heights, there was a second loud report. The sound seemed to reverberate forever, as thunderous shouts rang out on all sides, causing Song Jiang to stand and gape in helpless amazement. For all your political and military acumen, how will you escape such a comprehensive scheme? For it was a real plan to trap the tiger and catch the dragon that had been devised, to seize the man of whom heaven and earth go in awe.

YANG XIONG raised the man and then introduced him to Shi Xiu as Du Xing of Zhongshan Prefecture. He had a fierce face, and therefore people called him the "Demon Face." Previously he had come to Jizhou Prefecture, and had entered into business with some other men. During a quarrel with his partner he had lost his temper and killed him. He had been arrested and tried, but Yang Xiong, knowing that he was very skillful with the cudgel and lance, had saved his life by getting a light sentence passed.

The man asked, "On what official business do you come here, my benefactor?"

Yang Xiong whispered in his ear, "I committed murder at Jizhou, and am now escaping to Liangshan Marsh, where I shall join the brigands." He then told him about all the trouble at the inn and how Shi Qian had been captured.

"You need not worry about that matter," said Du Xing, "because I can arrange for Shi Qian to be released."

They asked him to join them at the wine. Du Xing then explained that at that village he was entrusted by the headman with important matters, and he had great influence there. There were three villages in close alliance, and altogether they supported an armed force of about 20,000 men. The most influential man was Zhu Chaofeng who had three valiant sons named "Dragon," "Tiger," and "Tiger's Cub." They had a drill instructor named Luan Tingyu, nicknamed "Iron Staff," who was invincible. In the western village was a headman who had a son called Hu Cheng, nicknamed "Flying Tiger," who was very courageous. His sister, Hu San

Niang, nicknamed "Ten Feet of Green," was a skilled rider, and could fight with a sword in each hand. At the village on the east side was a man Li Ying, nicknamed "Striking Hawk," who was his master who always carried five thowing knives on his back, and could throw these a hundred paces, and kill men at that distance. These villages supported each other whatever the risk or danger, and were prepared to fight gainst the brigands of Liangshan Marsh when they came to command the grain. Du Xing offered to take them to Li Ying and get him to release Shi Qian.
They accepted this offer, and settled their accounts with the innkeeper. They then followed Du Xing to the Li Family Village. Yang Xiong noticed that it was a big village, with a moat all round. The banks of the moat were very high, and on the top were many hundreds of large willows. They crossed a drawbridge and passed through a gate in a wall. They came to the principal hall in front of which were over twenty racks filled with spears, swords, etc., all of which were polished bright and in good order.
Du Xing asked the other two to wait outside while he went inside to announce their arrival. It was not long before Li Ying came out, and after being introduced invited Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu to come inside. When they had had some wine Yang Xiong explained the object of their visit, and as a result Li Ying told his scribe to write a letter asking for the release of Shi Qian, and sent a mounted messenger with it to the neighboring Zhu Family Village. It was not long before the messenger returned and reported that the headman had at first been willing to release Shi Qian. But when his three sons heard of it they objected, and insisted upon Shi Qian being sent to the magistrate for trial.
Li Ying was surprised at this, and wondered what was the use of the alliance when even his urgent letter had been ignored. He asked Du Xing to go there himself, and try to secure the release.
Du Xing agreed to go, but asked Li Ying to write a letter by his own hand which he would take with him. This was done, and mounting a horse Du Xing galloped off.
It was almost night time before Du Xing returned. As he dismounted they saw that he was in a towering rage. His face was red with passion, and as he raised his lips he showed the tightly set teeth. For some time he could not speak.
"Take your time and tell us all about it," said Li Ying at last.
Du Xing slowly repressed his anger, and then spoke, "I took your letter to the village and dismounted at the third gate where the three sons of Zhu Chaofeng were seated. I saluted them separately and then 'Tiger's Cub' called out, 'Well, what do you come here for?'
"I replied in a respectful manner, 'I have here a letter from my master.' I presented it. 'Tiger's Cub' showed annoyance as he replied, 'Why does your master not understand human affairs? Early this afternoon he sent some fellow here with a letter asking for that brigand Shi Qian to be released. Just now we are going to send him to the magistrate so why have you come here?'
"I replied that Shi Qian was not a bandit, but was a guest on his way to visit my master. He made a mistake in setting fire to his inn. That you would go tomorrow and make full compensation for the damage done, and hoped that they would overlook the offense and accept a full apology.
"Then all replied, 'That cannot be done.' So I requested them to kindly read your letter, but 'Tiger's Cub' simply took it from me, and tore it into bits without reading it. He then ordered me to get out of their village at once. They also warned me not to incite them to anger any further or they would ... I would not dare to speak their exact words—they were really crude—but they said they would arrest you, sir, also as a bandit of the Liangshan Marsh, and send you to the *yamen*. They told their servants to seize me but I jumped on the horse and galloped off. It is evident that the sworn alliance between our villages is no longer of any value, as those fellows are quite unreasonable."
While Li Ying listened to this he became more and more annoyed, and at last called out, "You men! Quickly get my horse ready."
Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu asked him to keep cool as they did not wish to see the peaceful relations between the villages disturbed by what they had done. But Li Ying took no notice of this, went indoors, put on his armor, with a large silk gown over it, put his five throwing knives on his back, and took a spear in his hand; put on his iron helmet; and summoned three hundred men to accompany him. Du Xing also put on his armor, and got twenty horsemen to follow him. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu took their halberds, and also followed.
It was late in the afternoon when they reached the other village, and there the men stood in ranks. The village was situated on raised ground and had three protecting walls, one inside the other. The walls were built of stone, and were about twenty feet high. The village was surrounded by a moat, over which were two drawbridges in front of the north and south gates. In the towers at the gates were drums, gongs, etc. for summoning the men to fight.
Li Ying reined in his horse before the bridge, and shouted, "Why have you three sons of the Zhu family defamed me?" At once the gate of the village was opened, and a body of about fifty horsemen galloped out. In front rode the third son, "Tiger's Cub," on a roan-colored horse.
Li Ying pointing at him shouted, "You fellow still have your milk teeth and childhood's tufts of hair. Your father entered into a sworn alliance with me to defend these villages. If your family had trouble we would render unlimited assistance, or if short of something we would supply it. Today I sent a letter which you tore up. Why did you insult my messenger in that way? Have you no decency?"
"Tiger's Cub" replied, "Our family entered into an alliance with you so that we could together resist the encroachments of the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. But now you have become intimate with them and intended open rebellion."
"Why do you say that I am intimate with bandits? Why have you arrested an ordinary man, and falsely accused him?" "The prisoner has already confessed that he is a thief so why do you talk in this wild disorderly manner? You cannot hide his crime. You clear off at once, or I will arrest you also."
Li Ying was now very angry, and whipping his horse he galloped forward. "Tiger's Cub" crossed the bridge, and did the same. They met in combat, and charged each other about eighteen times. As the "Tiger's Cub" could not overcome Li Ying he at last turned his horse round and retreated. Placing his spear on the horse he took his bow and arrow, and turning his body shot at Li Ying who was following close behind. Li Ying tried to avoid the arrow, but it struck him in the shoulder, and he fell off his horse. "Tiger's Cub" pulled his horse round, and rushed forward to seize Li Ying.
Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu seeing the danger of Li Ying shouted, seized their halberds, and rushed towards "Tiger's Cub," who seeing that the odds were against him retreated. As the horse turned, however, Yang Xiong struck it, and the animal reared with the pain. "Tiger's Cub" was almost thrown off, but kept his seat. The villagers now rushed forward, and as Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu were not wearing their armor they now retreated along with Du Xing, Li Ying, and their followers. They were pursued for about a *li* when the villagers returned to the village as it was getting dark.
Upon reaching their village Li Ying had his wound dressed, and then the four men discussed the position. Yang Xiong expressed regret that all this trouble had arisen through their affairs, and considered that there was no way of obtaining the release of Shi Qian. They thought that the best thing was for them to proceed to Liangshan Marsh, where they would petition Chao Gai to send an expedition to avenge the insult to Li Ying.
Li Ying agreed to this, and pressed the two men to accept some silver to cover their expenses. At last they accepted the money and left at once for Liangshan Marsh. Li Ying and Du Xing remained behind.
Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu soon reached the neighborhood of Liangshan Marsh, and stayed at the inn kept by Shi Yong as an outpost. When they inquired about the road to Liangshan Marsh, Shi Yong asked where they came from, and what business they had at the stronghold. When Yang Xiong said they came from Jizhou, Shi Yong immediately asked if his name was Shi Xiu, and when they had all been introduced Shi Yong explained that he had heard all about Shi Xiu from Dai Zong who had just returned, and was staying at the stronghold. Shi Yong then shot a whistling arrow across the lake, and soon a party of bandits appeared in boats. They crossed the lake, and were taken up to the stronghold where they were duly introduced to all the leaders. They explained fully all that had occurred at the Zhu Family Village, and how Li Ying had been grossly insulted.
When Chao Gai had heard all the details he was angry, and said, "We have gathered here many loyal and brave men, and have bestowed much benefit on the people in the surrounding country. When we go on any expedition we are never deficient in valor. All our brothers here are great heroes. But these two men have been implicated in a petty theft of a chicken, and if we associate with them we shall lose our great reputation. So we must kill these two men, and send their heads to the village to show the people that we have nothing to do with robbers. Then as the people in the village have reviled us we must go there and destroy their village. Thus we shall preserve our reputation for valor."
Song Jiang however spoke, "That will not do. These two men did not take part in the theft as that was the affair of Shi Qian who was traveling with them. What they have done was not disgraceful. We have heard several times that the Zhu Family Village has been unfriendly to us. Elder brother, restrain your anger. We have not got a big stock of grain or money, but let us not make too much of that. As they however have insulted us we can go and punish them for that. If we defeat them we shall have food supplies for at least five years. You cannot go yourself because you are our leader, but I will go and command the punitive expedition. If I fail then I will not return. I finally propose that Li Ying be admitted to our numbers."
"What you say is extremely proper," said Wu Yong. "It would not do to kill our brothers who are willing to join us."
"It would be better if you kill me instead of these men," said Dai Zong.
All the other leaders expressed their support of these views, and Chao Gai agreed. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu expressed their apologies.
The following day Song Jiang took three thousand bandits, three hundred mounted men, and nine other leaders. He also placed a similar number of men in charge of Lin Chong and nine other leaders, and these were to be his reserves. They soon reached the neighborhood of the Zhu Family Village and encamped. A tent was erected for Song Jiang, and there he discussed matters with Hua Rong. "I have heard that round this village there are numerous small roads so that it would not be advisable to send our men there at present. We must first send two spies to find out all about the roads, and then we can advance with greater security."
Li Kui offered to go as a spy, as he said he had not killed a man for a long time.
"You must not go now," said Song Jiang, "because we shall want you when the fighting commences."
Li Kui laughed at this. "There is no need to send spies. If you let me have two hundred men I could enter the village, and settle this matter quite easily."
"Don't talk nonsense!" shouted Song Jiang. "You can wait outside until I call for you."
As he went out however Li Kui called out, "Those villagers are only like flies. Why are you so nervous?"
Song Jiang summoned Shi Xiu, and instructed him to go into the village with Yang Lin.
"The people will already be on the *qui vive* as your men are here," said Shi Xiu. "How can we enter the village without being seen?"
"I can get into the village disguised as a monk," said Yang Lin. "I will carry the prayer rings, and shake them as I go along. You can follow me some distance behind."
"At Jizhou I sold firewood," said Shi Xiu, "and I think that I may get in the village with a load of firewood."
Yang Lin thought this a good idea, and they both agreed to start off that evening. They started off about 5 P.M. and had about three *li* to go. They noticed the numerous paths and roads on all sides, and that the country was well covered with dense trees. Shi Xiu put down his load, and spoke to Yang Lin as there was no one about. "There are so many footpaths about that I have not yet recognized the road I was on with Li Ying. As it is now getting dark we cannot make out our way very clearly."
"We need not worry about that," replied Yang Lin. "Let us follow what appears to be the main road."
They continued their way, and soon came to a place where there were shops and inns, and Shi Xiu stopped in front of an inn. There were many men there with uniforms bearing the character "Zhu." He spoke to an old man, "Sir, what is the reason for these swords being stacked at every door?"
"Where do you come from?" asked the old man. "As you do not know you had better go on your way."
"I am from Shandong, and having no money I brought this firewood into the village to sell it. I do not know the customs of this place."
"You had better get away at once and seek refuge," said the old man. "It will not be long before there is big fighting here."
"What will the fighting be about?"
"You evidently do not know, but I will tell you. This village hates the bandits of Liangshan Marsh, but they are now encamped just outside the village. Our chief has summoned all the men to assemble here."
"And how many men are there in this village?"
"In this village there are about ten thousand men, but the other village would also join us in any fighting."
"Why are you afraid of Liangshan Marsh brigands when you have so many men?"
"Even I myself was nearly seized when I first came here. There is an old saying that the roads round this place are so well arranged that men might enter the village, but they could not get out."
Shi Xiu burst into tears, and bowing said, "What hard lines for me! I cannot go back even if I sell my firewood. So I will give you this firewood if you will tell me how I can get away."
"I cannot accept your offer, but I do not mind buying the firewood from you. Please come inside my house, and take a meal before returning."
Shi Xiu thanked him for this, and followed the old man into the house. After partaking of the congee offered, Shi Xiu again asked to be shown the way out.
"You just go your way in the village until you come to a poplar tree where you can turn. You must not turn if there is no poplar tree, or there would be death. No other trees will do—take no notice of them. If you make one mistake your position will be hopeless, as on the other roads there are hidden pointed stakes and hooks."
Shi Xiu thanked him for the information, and asked for his name. The man's name was Zhongli. Shi Xiu then departed promising to reward him for the food, and wine some other day. Just then there was a great uproar outside, and voices were calling out, "A spy is seized!" Looking out Shi Xiu saw about eighty armed men with a prisoner whom he recognized as Yang Lin. Shi Xiu was much surprised, and turning to the old man asked, "Who is the man? Why have they bound him?"
"Have you not heard them say that he is a spy? He has evidently got in the village in the disguise of a monk, and not knowing the roads he has taken the wrong road and has been captured. Somebody has recognized him as the bandit, Yang Lin." Just then a patrol of about fifty men came up in charge of a young man on a white horse. Shi Xiu recognized him, but asked the old man who he was.
"That is the third son of Old Zhu, our village chief, and is named 'Tiger's Cub.' The girl 'Ten Feet of Green' is betrothed to him."
Shi Xiu again thanked him, and asked to be shown the road. The man urged him not to go that day, as there was great danger and it was getting dark. After further pressing, Shi Xiu again went indoors. Shortly afterwards there was knocking at the street door, and a voice called out, "The red lamp will be the signal tonight, and when you people see it, you must join the attack on the brigands." When the man had gone Shi Xiu asked who he was, and was informed that he was the local police inspector and that that night he hoped to arrest Song Jiang. Shi Xiu thought matters over, and then taking a fire, he bade the old man good night and went to the room at the back, and sleep there.
Song Jiang was waiting in his tent for a long time, and at last as Shi Xiu and Yang Lin had not returned he sent out Ou Peng to see whether he could get any news. When he returned he reported that he had heard cries in the village about a spy. The paths were so numerous and complicated that he dared not go any farther.
Upon hearing this Song Jiang was very angry. "Evidently they have captured our two brothers so why should we wait here any longer as we cannot get any inside information. We must attack at once, and try to save the lives of our brothers. What do you think of that?" he asked the other leaders.
"I will fall on slaughtering," offered Li Kui.
Song Jiang issued orders that all the men should prepare for an immediate advance. Li Kui and Yang Xiong were to be in charge of the vanguard; Li Jun in charge of the rear guard; Mu Hong on the left wing; Huang Xin on the right wing, while Song Jiang, Hua Rong, and Ou Peng took charge of the main body. There was at once a great hubbub, waving of flags, beating of drums and gongs, and a great display of swords and axes. It was evening. Upon reaching the Zhu Family Village Li Kui found that the bridge had been drawn up, and as there were no lights showing in the village he thought of going through the water. But Yang Xiong held him back, and said, "As the village gates are closed it may be only a plot or trap for us. We will wait until the other leaders arrive, and then we will discuss matters."
Li Kui could not endure any delay so lifting aloft his two axes he yelled, "Old Zhu you damned crook! You come out! The 'Black Whirlwind' is waiting here for you."
No reply came from the village to this challenge. Just then Song Jiang and the other leaders came up, and were told of the position. Song Jiang was surprised not to see even a single man on the other side, and also became suspicious. Suddenly he remarked, "I have made a mistake. In the three Heavenly Books I received it was stated quite clearly, 'In warfare make no undue haste.' I forgot about this in my haste to save the lives of our comrade and have brought troops here without proper plans for entering the village. Now that I am here the enemy hides. There is evidently a plot, and I must at once give orders for a retreat."
Li Kui said, "But as we have come so far we cannot retreat without doing something. I will go forward, and you can follow me."
While he was speaking a skyrocket went up from the village, and instantly on all the hills surrounding the village there were numerous lights from torches. From the tower above the village gate came a shower of arrows. Song Jiang gave the orders for retreat, but Li Jun, leader of the rear guard, came and said, "The road we arrived by is now all obstructed and there's probably an ambush." Song Jiang gave an order for a number of equestrians to try to find some other road. Just then, another skyrocket went up on one of the surrounding hills, followed by loud shouts from all sides. Song Jiang was quite perplexed. Even the strategist with the most elaborate plans could not avoid getting into a tight corner?

Plans to catch a tiger,
Or a dragon in its den,
Are ready to capture,
The extraordinary men.

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**10 Feet of Steelbright Green Alone Captures Short-Arse Stumpy Tiger Wang Ying; Song Jiang's 2nd Attack on the Zhu Family Manor/Castle & Village**

Song Jiang, on his horse, gazed around. Enemy troops were lying in wait in every direction. He ordered his men to fight their way towards the main road. Soon, he again heard cries of consternation. When he asked the cause, the men said: "These paths all wind in circles. No matter how we turn, we keep coming back here."
"Advance to where you see torches and people's dwellings," he said.
Before long, the vanguard once more set up a cry. "We can't head for the torches. The paths are strewn with bamboo spikes and iron barbs and blocked with sharp-pronged branches like deer antlers."
Song Jiang groaned. "Heaven has forsaken me."
Just then there was a stir in the left flank contingent under Mu Hong. A messenger reported: "Shi Xiu is here." In a moment, Shi Xiu, twirling his blade, rushed up to Song Jiang's horse.
"Don't be alarmed, brother," he said. "I know how to travel these paths. Pass the word, quietly: Take any path, whether narrow or broad, which starts at a white poplar."
Song Jiang issued the appropriate order. When they had proceeded another five or six *li*, he saw ahead a large concentration of enemy men and horses. He shouted for Shi Xiu and asked: "Why are there so many of those rogues up there, brother?"
"They use a lantern as an assembly signal."
Hua Rong peered from his saddle. He pointed and said to Song Jiang: "You see that lantern with a candle in it among the tress? Whichever way we go, east or west, it moves in that direction, and their troops gather at the lantern to meet us. It's their signal, all right."
"How can we deal with the lantern?"
"Easy," said Hua Rong. He fitted an arrow to his bow, urged his mount forward, and let fly. He hit the red lantern squarely, knocking it out.
With no lantern to guide them, the ambushing foe was thrown into confusion. Song Jiang told Shi Xiu to lead the way, and they fought their way out of the village.

There were shouts on the mountain ahead and a wildly dancing row of torches. Song Jiang ordered a halt. He sent Shi Xiu to investigate. Before long, Shi returned and reported: "It's another contingent from our fortress, come to reinforce us and scatter the enemy troops."
Song Jiang urged his men forward into the fray, forcing a passage away from the village. The Zhu Family Manor soldiers dispersed and withdrew.
The forces of Lin Chong and Qin Ming joined up with Song Jiang's men, and they all halted outside the village. By then it was daylight. They pitched camp on high ground and counted their men and horses. Huang Xin, Suppressor of the Three Mountains, was missing. Startled, Song Jiang asked about him. The men who had been with him the night before explained.
"When Commander Huang received your order, he went to seek a path. But two hooks shot out of the reeds and tumbled his horse. Half a dozen men seized the commander and pulled him away. We couldn't rescue him."
Song Jiang was enraged. He wanted to kill Huang's soldiers for not having reported this earlier. Lin Chong and Hua Rong finally cooled him down. The others were upset.
"We haven't taken the manor," they said, "and we've lost two brothers besides. What are we going to do?"
"The three villages have an alliance," said Yang Xiong. "But Li Ying, who rules the east village, was wounded by Tiger Cub Zhu the other day, and he's resting at home. Why don't you go and consult with him, brother?"
"I'd forgotten about that," said Song Jiang. "He knows the terrain and the situation well." He ordered that two bolts of silk, two sheep and two jugs of wine be prepared as gifts, along with a good riding horse, complete with saddle and bridle. He set out to deliver them personally, leaving Lin Chong and Qin Ming to guard the camp.
Hua Rong, Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu and three hundred cavalrymen mounted and went with him towards the Li Family Manor. At the walls, they found the gate-house close and the drawbridge raised. Soldiers lined the ramparts. Within the gate-house, a battle drum thundered. Song Jiang shouted from his horse.
"I am Song Jiang, a warrior from Mount Liangshan, here to call on your lord. I have no other purpose. You needn't be on guard against me."
When Du Xing saw that Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu were among the party, he opened the manor gate, came across the moat in a small boat and hailed Song Jiang respectfully. Song Jiang dismounted and returned the courtesy. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu drew near.
"This is the brother who introduced us to Lord Li," they said to Song Jiang. "He is known as Demon Face Du Xing."
"Ah, Steward Du. Could I trouble you to tell Lord Li that Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh has long known of his fame, though we have never had occasion to meet. Because we are in conflict with Zhu Family Manor, we are passing by here. I would like to present him with some colored silk, a fine horse, two sheep and some wine-trifling gifts—and request the pleasure of meeting him. I want nothing else."
Du Xing took this message into the manor. Li Ying was seated in bed in his hall with a quilt draped over his shoulders, recovering from his wound. Du Xing told him what Song Jiang had said.
"He's a rebel from Liangshan Marsh. How can I receive him?" Li replied. "Though groundless, I would become suspect to the authorities. Say that I am sick in bed, that I can't get up and meet him. I hope to have the honor another day. As to the gifts, I cannot presume to accept them."
Du Xing again crossed the moat. "My master sends his respects," he said to Song Jiang. "He was hoping to welcome you in person, but because of his wound he is ill in bed and is unable to greet you. He will make a special point of it some other day. The gifts which you so graciously present, he dares not accept."
"I know what's in your master's mind. I want to see him because I've been unsuccessful in my attack on the Zhu Family Manor. He won't see me because he's afraid they would resent it."
"No, that's not the reason. He's really ill. Although I'm originally from Zhongshan, I've been here many years, and I know something of the local situation. The Zhu Family Manor is in the center, the Li Family Manor to the east, the Hu Family Manor to the west. They have a solemn alliance to help one another in time of danger. Because the Zhu's wounded my master, he hasn't gone to their aid. But the Hu's probably will. They're not much to worry about, except for their woman general, who's called Ten Feet of Steel because of the two shining swords she wields. She's a remarkable warrior. She and Tiger Cub of the Zhu Family are engaged, and one of these days they'll marry. When attacking the Zhu Family Manor the east needn't concern you, but watch your west.
"The manor has two gates, one facing the front of Lone Dragon Cliff, the other facing the rear. It's no use assaulting only the front gate. Both gates must be attacked simultaneously. That's the only way you can break in. The paths to the front gate are twisted and complicated. They wind round and round and are of different widths. Only those with white poplars at their starting points are through paths. The rest are dead-ends."
"What if they cut all the poplars down?" said Shi Xiu. "How will we be able to travel?"
"The stumps will still be there, won't they? Those will be your markers. Attack only in daylight. Don't try to advance at night."
Song Jiang thanked Du Xing and returned to camp with his party. Lin Chong and the others met them on the way, then all went to the camp and conferred. Song Jiang told of Li Ying's refusal to meet him, and of the advice given by Du Xing.
"With the best intentions in the world we send him gifts, and the oaf doesn't even come out to greet brother!" Li Kui blurted. "Give me three hundred men and I'll crack open his friggin manor and drag the varlet over by the head and make him pay our brother his proper respects!"
"You don't understand, brother," said Song Jiang. "He's virtuous and law-abiding. He's afraid of the authorities. How could he meet us?"
Li Kui grinned. "Shy, like a child."
Everyone laughed.
"Nevertheless, two of our brothers have been captured, and we don't know whether they're alive or dead," said Song Jiang. "I hope you brothers will do your utmost and join with me in another attack on Zhu Family Manor."
The other leaders rose to their feet. "Give the orders. We'll obey. Who do you want to go first?"
"If you're afraid of children, why not send me?" cried Li Kui.
"You're not suitable for the van, not this time," said Song Jiang. While Li Kui fumed with lowered head, he selected Ma Lin, Deng Fei, Ou Peng, and the Stumpy Tiger. "You four and I will go first," he stated.
For the second contingent he chose Dai Zong and seven others, and told them to prepare to attack via water. The third group was to be led by Lin Chong, Hua Rong, Mu Hong and Li Kui, and would be divided into two columns to serve as reinforcements.
The order of battle decided, the leaders ate, then put on their armor and mounted their horses.
Since Song Jiang himself was leading the van which would launch the first assault, it flaunted a large red banner inscribed with the word "Marshal." He, the other four leaders, a hundred and fifty cavalrymen, and a thousand foot soldiers marched rapidly on Zhu Family Manor.
Before Lone Dragon Cliff Song Jiang drew rein and stared at their objective. Two white banners floated over the ramparts. Brightly embroidered on them were the rallying calls: *Fill in the Marsh and nab Chao Gai. Level the Mountain and catch Song Jiang.*
Angrily, Song Jiang vowed: "If I don't take Zhu Family Manor I'll never return to Mount Liangshan!"
The other leaders were equally enraged. When the second contingent arrived, Song Jiang left them to attack the front gate, while he and his unit went round to the cliff's rear. There, the manor was as solid as a wall of bronze, and heavily fortified.
While he was examining it, an enemy force came charging from the west, shouting fiercely. Song Jiang left Ma Lin and Deng Fei to hold the rear gate. With Ou Peng and Stumpy Tiger and half the men, he went forward to meet the foe. Riding towards him down the slope were about thirty horsemen. In their midst was the girl warrior known as Ten Feet of Steel, astride a black-maned steed and whirling her shining swords. Followed by four or five hundred armed vassals, she was coming to the aid of Zhu Family Manor.
"A formidable-looking adversary," said Song Jiang. "That must be the famous daughter of the Hu Family. Who dares to give her battle?"
Wang the Stumpy Tiger was a lecherous fellow. When he heard that the warrior was a lady, he immediately hoped to capture her for his own. With a yell, he urged his mount forward, his lance levelled. Both armies shouted. The girl smote her horse and galloped towards Stumpy Tiger, flourishing her blades. A superb artisan with the double swords and an outstanding veteran with the single lance clashed in scores of rounds.
Song Jiang soon could see that Wang was no match for the girl. The short-legged man had longed to catch her quickly, but by the tenth round his hands were trembling and his legs were paralyzed with fatigue, and his skill with the lance was faltering. If they weren't in a battle to the death, Wang would gladly have yielded.
Ten Feet of Steel was an intelligent, sensitive girl. "That's a crude varlet," she thought. She closed in, swinging both blades. It was too much for Stumpy Tiger. He turned his horse and fled, pursued by the girl warrior. She hung up her right sword, stretched forth her lovely arm, and plucked Wang from the saddle. The vassals rushed forward, grabbed him by the feet, and dragged him off, a prisoner.
With levelled lance Ou Peng hurried to his aid. Ten Feet of Steel urged her mount forward to meet him, swords at the ready. They fought. Ou Peng was descended from generations of military men, and was first-rate with the iron lance. Song Jiang observed his skill admiringly. But despite Ou Peng's excellence, he was unable to gain the slightest advantage over the girl.
Deng Fei had seen from afar the capture of Stumpy Tiger Wang, and now witnessed the failure of Ou Peng to vanquish the girl. He galloped towards the contestants, shouting and brandishing his iron chain. The warriors of the Zhu Family Manor, who had been watching for some time, feared for the girl's safety. Quickly, they lowered the drawbridge and opened the gate. The Dragon, leading three hundred men, rode lickety-split, lance in hand, to seize Song Jiang.
Ma Lin galloped, with twin swords, to head off the Dragon. Deng Fei was worried about Song Jiang. Keeping close to him, he watched the clashes raging on both sides amid wild shouts. Song Jiang realized that Ma Lin couldn't defeat Zhu the Dragon, and Ou Peng clearly was making no headway against Ten Feet of Steel.
Song Jiang was growing extremely anxious when a troop of horsemen appeared, riding in rapidly from an angle. He looked, and was delighted to recognize Qin Ming. When the Thunderbolt had heard the noise of battle at the manor, he had decided to join in.
"General Qin," Song Jiang called, "help Ma Lin!" Qin Ming had a low flash point. The Zhu Family had captured his disciple Huang Xin, and his temper hadn't improved. He clapped his steed forward and unlimbered his wolf-toothed cudgel, riding directly at the Dragon. With raised lance, the Dragon advanced to meet him. This left Ma Lin free to lead a body of men after Stumpy Wang's captors. Ten Feet of Steel promptly abandoned Ou Peng to attack Ma Lin. Man and girl both used double swords, and their clash on horseback was like jade snowflakes swirling in the wind. Song Jiang stared, positively dazzled.
The Dragon and Qin Ming fought ten rounds or more, but the Dragon was no match for the Thunderbolt. Drill instructor in the Zhu manor, Luan Tingyu, mounted and rode forth with his hammer. Ou Peng cantered towards him. But Luan, instead of coming on directly, swerved as Ou Peng gripped his lance, and appeared to flee. Ou Peng gave chase. Luan threw his hammer, hit Ou Peng squarely and knocked him from his mount.
"Children, to the rescue," roared Deng Fei. He charged at Luan, swinging his iron chain.
Song Jiang shouted for his men to get Ou Peng back in the saddle. The Dragon, being bested by Qin Ming, smote his horse and ran. Luan left Deng Fei to engage Qin Ming. They fought nearly twenty rounds, with no result. Luan feinted, then galloped into the wilds, with Qin Ming, brandishing his cudgel, hot on the trail. Luan raced his steed into the deep grass. Unaware that this was a ruse, Qin Ming pounded after him. Men of the Zhu Family Manor were lying in ambush. When Qin Ming appeared, they pulled taut a rope across the path and sent horse and rider tumbling to the ground. Yelling, they grabbed him. Deng Fei galloped heedlessly to save the Thunderbolt. He saw the trip rope rising before him, and pulled frantically on the rein to turn his steed.
"Get him," cried voices on either side. Hooked ropes landed on Deng Fei like a tangle of hemp, and he too was captured, still seated on his horse.
Song Jiang groaned. The rescued Ou Peng mounted once more.
Ma Lin sped from Ten Feet of Steel to protect Song Jiang. He rode south, chased by the girl, Luan and the Dragon. He knew he couldn't get away, and was reconciling himself to being taken when he saw a bold fellow on horseback galloping towards him from due south, followed by about five hundred men, mounted and on foot.
Song Jiang recognized the rider as Mu Hong the Unrestrained. From the southeast came another three hundred fighters, preceded by two racing gallants—Yang Xiong the Pallid and Shi Xiu the Rash. From the northeast came another bold fellow, who shouted: "Let that man alone!" It was the master bowman Hua Rong.
The rescuers converged from three directions. Song Jiang was overjoyed as they joined to do battle with Luan and the Dragon and his men. Concerned for the two, the manor command directed Tiger to hold the gates, while the young gentleman Tiger Cub sallied forth on a fiery steed, holding a long lance and leading five hundred infantry and cavalry. These plunged into the fray.
Before the manor Li Jun, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun crossed the stream which served as a moat, but were prevented from advancing by a shower of arrows. Dai Zong and Bai Sheng, on the opposite bank, could only shout in frustration.
Daylight was fading. Song Jiang instructed Ma Lin to escort Ou Peng safely from the village. Then he ordered that the gongs be beaten as the signal for his gallants to converge and fight their way out. He whipped up his horse and made a circuit of the combat area, worried lest any brothers had become lost.
Suddenly, he saw Ten Feet of Steel galloping towards him. He had no time to defend himself. He smote his steed and raced east, with the girl in close pursuit. Eight hoofs drummed the ground like inverted bowls as the two animals sped deep into the village. Ten Feet of Steel was catching up, and was preparing to strike when a voice boomed from the slope.
"Why is that friggin female chasing my brother?"
Song Jiang looked. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, whirling his battle-axes, was striding towards them, leading seventy or eighty brigands. The girl reined her mount, turned and headed for the woods. But from the glade a dozen horsemen came directly at her. Foremost among them was Panther Head Lin Chong. "Where do you think you're going?" he shouted at Ten Feet of Steel.
The girl charged him with flying swords. Lance levelled, he met her and they fought more than ten rounds. Lin Chong feinted and deliberately let the girl close in. Parrying her blades with his lance, he stretched forth an arm as strong as an ape's, grabbed her and, with the twist of a waist as sinewy as a wolf's, yanked her over to him. Song Jiang cheered heartily. Lin told his men to bind the girl and cantered over to Song Jiang. "Are you hurt, brother?"
"No, I'm all right," Song replied. He instructed Li Kui to go into the village and bring out the remaining leaders. "Tell them we'll confer at the edge of the village. It's getting late. They're to stop fighting."
Li Kui and his party left. Lin Chong, protecting Song Jiang, proceeded to the village entry, with Ten Feet of Steel mounted and under guard. The Liangshan leaders won no gains that evening. All hastened to the edge of the village.
The Zhu Family forces returned to the manor, leaving behind countless dead. They put their prisoners in cage carts. If they could capture Song Jiang, they intended to deliver the whole lot to the authorities in the Eastern Capital and claim the reward. The Hu Family had already turned Wang the Stumpy Tiger over to the Zhu Family Manor.
Song Jiang, having regathered his forces, went to the encampment at the edge of the village. He directed that Ten Feet of Steel be brought forth, and ordered twenty veteran brigands and four mounted chief to seat the bound girl on a horse.
"Take her to Mount Liangshan tonight and deliver her to the care of my father, squire Song, then report back to me. We'll decide what to do with her when I return to the fortress."
The leaders thought Song Jiang wanted the girl for himself, and took special care in escorting her. They sent the wounded Ou Peng on ahead in a cart to recuperate in the stronghold. The escort party set out immediately. Song Jiang brooded in his tent. He didn't sleep all night. At dawn he was still seated there.
That day a scout reported: "Military Advisor Wu Yong is coming with the three Ruan brothers, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng, and five hundred men."
Song Jiang welcomed them outside the camp and led Wu Yong to his tent. When they were seated, Wu had wine and food laid, and toasted Song Jiang and congratulated his commanders.
"Chieftain Chao Gai has heard that you had some difficulty during your first assault. He sent me with these five leaders to lend a hand," Wu Yong said. "How have you been getting on?"
"It's hard to put it briefly. Those rogues of the Zhu Family have a pair of white banners over their manor gate which read: *Fill in the Marsh and nab Chao Gai. Level the Mountain and catch Song Jiang.* What brass! In our first assault, because we didn't know the terrain, we lost Yang Lin and Huang Xin. Near dusk we tried again, and Ten Feet of Steel took Stumpy Tiger Wang, Luan Tingyu wounded Ou Peng with his hammer, and trip ropes unhorsed Qin Ming and Deng Fei. Both were seized. That's how bad it's been. If Lin Chong hadn't captured Ten Feet of Steel, we'd be deflated completely. We can't seem to make a dent in this place. I'll vanquish the Zhu Family Manor and rescue our brothers, or die in the attempt. I couldn't go back and face brother Chao Gai, otherwise."
Wu Yong smiled. "Heaven has ordained that the Zhu Family Manor shall fall. This is a good opportunity for us. I think we can bring it about very soon."
Song Jiang was amazed. "What do you mean?" Calmly smiling, Wu Yong held up 2 fingers and explained. Truly, a hand extended from the clouds and snatched to safety those who had landed in the net.

So there was Song Jiang seated on his horse and he looked around him and saw that he was in the midst of an ambush. He gave the order to force a way through along the main paths, but at that moment came news that the fifth detachment had been brought to a complete standstill, and despairing cries arose from his men. "Now what's the problem?" Song Jiang asked.
"The roads in front are a complete maze," they replied. "We keep on going and just get back to where we started."
Song Jiang said: "Tell them to look for the way out by following the torches, the places where there are houses and people."
But they had not gone far before the cry arose again from the troops in front: "We took a route which leads towards the torches and lights, and there's sharp pointed bamboos and barbed wire, and they've stuck deer's horns everywhere to block the way."
Song Jiang said: "Is Heaven bent on destroying me?"
At this moment of crisis there was a commotion among the elder Mu brother's troops on the left flank and someone reported: "Madcap is here!" And sure enough Madcap arrived in front of Song Jiang's horse, gripping his blade. "Don't worry," he said. "I know the way. Pass the word quietly to all your forces that they should only take a turning where they see a white willow tree, tell them not to worry about whether the way is wide or narrow."
Song Jiang instructed his men to look for a white willow before turning. They had progressed a little under two miles when it became apparent that the number of enemy troops in their path was continually increasing. Song Jiang was very concerned. He shouted to Madcap: "How is it that the enemy forces ahead keep growing?"
Madcap said: "They're using the lamps as a signal."
Colonel Hua, on horseback beside Song Jiang, pointed and said: "Do you see that lamp in the dark spot under the tree? When we head east the lamp points to the east, if we head west it points west. That must be it! It's obviously a signal."
"Can't we do something about that lamp?" Song Jiang said.
"No problem," said Colonel Hua. He took his bow and fitted an arrow to it. Then urging his horse forward he loosed an arrow into the dark. Just the one shot sufficed, it sped straight to the target and shot the red light out. All around them the troops of the ambush, not seeing the red light any longer, fell into confusion.
Song Jiang ordered Madcap to lead the way and they fought their way through to the edge of the village. At this point a hubbub arose on the hillside and a line of bobbing torches was seen moving confusedly in from one side. Song Jiang ordered the foremost troops to halt and sent Madcap to investigate. He returned soon after and reported: "The second contingent from Mount Liang have arrived to reinforce us and they've routed the enemy." Song Jiang now encouraged his troops to redouble their efforts to break out of the village, as the Zhu troops fled in disarray. After meeting up with Leopard's Head, Thunderclap and the others they bivouacked on the outskirts.
When it was fully light, they built a stockade on top of a high mound and positioned their forces. The Tamer, Huang Xin was not seen among them. Highly disturbed by this, Song Jiang asked why. Some soldiers who had been with the expedition the day before came and said: "In accordance with your orders, General Huang went ahead to reconnoitre. He rashly entered some thick reedbeds where his horse was brought down by two concealed hooks, and half a dozen of them took him alive. There was just nothing we could do!"
Song Jiang was furious. He would have killed the bodyguards for not having reported this before, but Leopard's Head and Colonel Hua restrained him.
The mood was grim. Everyone was saying: "We've failed to take the castle and we've lost two of our comrades into the bargain. What is going to come of all this?"
Morbid said: "We're dealing with three villages that have united. But the one to the east is Mr. Li's, who was shot in the arm the other day by that villain Wildcat Zhu. At present he's at home recovering. Might it not be a good idea to go and consult him?"

"I had forgotten all about him," Song Jiang said. "He must know the local geography and conditions." So he told them to collect a quantity of silk, horses, goats and wine. Then, choosing a good mount, saddled and bridled, he went himself to request an audience with Skyhawk, leaving Leopard's Head and Thunderclap to guard the camp. He took with him Colonel Hua, Morbid and Madcap. They mounted and with three hundred horsemen set off for the Li manor.

When they reached their destination they found the gates bolted and the drawbridge raised, while a good many troops were ranged along the wall. From the gate tower a drum began to beat.

Song Jiang shouted up: "I am Song Jiang of Mount Liang. I have come to consult your master. I have no bad intention, you have nothing to fear from me."

When Uglymug looked down from the gate tower and saw Morbid and Madcap were there, he quickly opened the gates and crossed the moat in a small boat to greet Song Jiang. Song Jiang hurriedly dismounted and returned the courtesy. Morbid and Madcap came forward and said: "This is our friend Du Xing, known as Uglymug, who took us to meet Mr. Li."

Song Jiang said: "So this is Mr. Du! I should be most grateful if you would tell Mr. Li that I, Song Jiang of Mount Liang, am well acquainted with his great reputation, although it has not been my good fortune to meet him yet. Today, because the people of Zhu want to fight with us, I have come here to offer a few little gifts, some silk and a few thoroughbreds, some goats and some wine, and to beg an audience with him, not for any other purpose."

Bearing this message Uglymug rowed back and went to the main hall, where Skyhawk was sitting on a bed, swathed in bandages. When he reported Song Jiang's request for an interview, Skyhawk said: "He is one of the Mount Liang rebels, how can I talk to him? It's out of the question. Go back and tell him that I'm lying in bed wounded and can't move, so it's impossible for me to see him now. Tell him he can visit me another time. As for the gifts, don't accept them."

Uglymug went back across the water to Song Jiang and said: "My master greets you most respectfully and says he wishes he could receive you, but being gravely wounded he is obliged to keep his bed and is unable to grant you an interview. He hopes it may be possible to meet some other day. As for your most generous gifts, it is quite impossible for him to accept them."

Song Jiang said: "I understand your master's meaning. I have failed to capture Zhu Castle. I wanted to meet him, that's all. But he doesn't want to upset Baron Zhu and his clan, that's why he refuses to see me."

Uglymug said: "That's not how it is at all. He truly is seriously indisposed. But I have lived here a number of years, although I'm a native of Zhongshan, and I know pretty well how things stand. Zhu Castle is situated between our manor here to the east and the Hu domain to the west. These three estates have signed a life or death pact guaranteeing mutual assistance. Now they have injured my master and he will not go to help them. It is likely, though, that the people over to the west, the Hu family, will come to their assistance. Most of that lot aren't up to much, but Miss Hu, the daughter, known as Steelbright for the two bright swords she uses, has true worth. She is betrothed to Baron Zhu's third, Wildcat Zhu, and sooner or later they'll be married. If you want to attack Zhu there's no need to watch out to the east, but you must seal off the roads to the west. There are two ways into Zhu Castle, a front way and a back way. One can be approached from the front of Lone Dragon Heights, the other from the far side. If you only attack from the front it won't be enough. It needs a concerted assault from both sides, that's the way you'll smash them. The front gate is a problem. The approach is complex and difficult, the paths winding and turning all the way, and their width keeps changing. You must only take the turnings where there is a white willow. If there isn't such a tree it's a dead end."

Madcap said: "Suppose they've gone and cut down the trees, how are we going to remember the way?"

"Even if they've cut down the trees, they can't eradicate them completely. There's bound to be a stump left. But you've got to attack by day, it's no good trying to go in there in the dark."

Song Jiang thanked Uglymug for all this information and returned with his troops to the base. When Leopard's Head and his force joined them, they held a meeting in the main camp. Song Jiang told the others about Skyhawk's refusal to see him and the information Uglymug had given them. Iron Ox burst out: "After we'd sent them all those presents, that motherfucker wouldn't even come out and receive you! I'll take three hundred men and smash up his fucking manor. I'll force the bastard to come out and pay his respects."

Song Jiang said: "Don't talk nonsense, brother. He's an honourable gentleman and he doesn't want to get on the wrong side of the law. It's obvious he wouldn't be in a hurry to see us."

Iron Ox muttered: "It's bloody childish. He's just scared." Everyone began to laugh.

"Be that as it may," Song Jiang said, "we've lost two comrades and we don't even know if they're still alive or not. I must ask you all to do your utmost, and renew the attack on Zhu Castle with me." They rose to their feet as one man and said: "You are the leader, no one would dream of disobeying! Who shall go first?"

Iron Ox said: "I shall go first, since all the rest of you are scared of little children!"

"It's no good having you in the vanguard," Song Jiang said. "We can't use you for this."

Iron Ox lowered his head, swallowing his anger. Song Jiang then ordered the Flautist, Redeye, Golden Wings and Short-Arse to march with him in the vanguard. Next he instructed the Magic Messenger, Thunderclap, Morbid, Madcap, the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel and the Daytime Rat to muster a band of sailors. Finally he told Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, Mu the Unstoppable and Iron Ox to form two supporting forces. When all the duties had been allotted, they armed themselves and mounted.

Song Jiang had decided to lead from the front, commanding the vanguard. Preceded by a large banner with characters in red, and followed by the other four leaders, with a hundred and fifty cavalry and a thousand foot, he marched on Zhu Castle. Scouts went in front of them to check the route. Soon they stood before Lone Dragon Heights. Song Jiang reined in his horse to have a good look at the castle. It was indeed a brave sight. There is a poem in praise of it which will tell you what it looked like:

*In front of the mountains is Lone Dragon Heights*
*Where Zhu Castle stands, most wondrous of sights;*
*On all sides defended by a broad moat,*
*With clusters of willows scattered about.*
*Inside the ramparts are weapons in stacks;*
*In front of the gates there are spears in their racks.*
*The enemy leaders are strong and aggressive,*
*Three valiant youngsters whose ardour's excessive:*
*Dragon is one who'll be hard to defeat;*
*Tiger's another you won't want to meet;*
*Wildcat has mastered war's arts most fully,*
*Shouting insults and curses like a great bully.*
*Baron Zhu is a man of astuteness and more;*
*Of gold, silver and silk he has a great store.*
*A pair of white banners flutters on high,*
*Proclaiming in words that no clarity lack:*
*"We shall level the Marshes and capture Chao Gai;*
*We shall flatten Mount Liang and get Song Jiang the Black!"*

Song Jiang was filled with anger when he saw those banners. "If I don't defeat Zhu I shall never return to Mount Liang," he vowed. The other leaders were also outraged. When Song Jiang knew that the rest had all come up behind him, he left the second force to attack the front gate of the castle whilst he led the first force round to the back of Lone Dragon Heights. Seen from this side the castle was a solid mass of ramparts, strongly fortified. As they were surveying it, a column of troops was observed in the west, coming up behind them with a great deal of shouting. Leaving the Flautist and Redeye to seal off the rear approach to Zhu Castle, Song Jiang took Golden Wings and Short-Arse and half the troops to meet the oncoming force. This consisted of around three hundred cavalry, who came streaming down the mountain. In their midst was a woman warrior, exceedingly handsome:

*A pair of gold pins subdue the curls; phoenix slippers thread the stirrups. Chain mail overlays a robe of red silk; an embroidered belt girds the willow waist. Here is a frosty blade that will strike down the fiercest warrior, a slender force to vanquish the wildest opponent. Radiant as the crab-apple in flower is Steelbright who leads the charge.*

Steelbright it was, Squire Hu's daughter. She rode a horse with a bluish mane, and she twirled a pair of glittering blades. Behind her came three or four hundred retainers. They were on their way to relieve Zhu Castle.

Song Jiang said: "They told me the Hu manor has a woman warrior who's very brave. This must be her. Who wants to fight her?"

Before he'd even finished, Short-Arse, who was a notorious womanizer and reckoned, on hearing talk of a woman warrior, that a single bout would suffice to capture her, cheered and galloped out in front, readying his lance for the charge. There were cheers from both sides as Miss Hu, slapping her horse and brandishing her two swords rode to the encounter.

What you had now was an expert swordswoman pitted against an outstanding lancer. They fought a dozen bouts, until it became evident to Song Jiang that Short-Arse's technique with the spear was failing and he was losing the strength to parry. The fact was that when Short-Arse first saw the girl he just couldn't wait to get his hands on her. He never thought that after a dozen bouts his arm would weaken, his legs grow stiff, his spearsmanship go all awry. He hadn't been looking for a fight to the death, he had just thought to have some fun.

But Steelbright was not to be trifled with. "This fellow's a lout," she thought to herself. Then she went in with her two swords, lunging at once both high and low. Short-Arse had more than met his match. He turned his horse and tried to flee. But Steelbright was on him again at once. Sheathing the sword in her right hand she stretched out a long agile arm, plucked him from his embroidered saddle and made him captive. The retainers gathered round and unceremoniously dragged Short-Arse away. There's a poem about this:

*The power of lust outweighs discretion.*
*His life he sets at nought.*
*The sex destroy his self-possession,*
*By a woman he'll be caught.*

When Golden Wings saw Short-Arse taken, he levelled his lance and charged to the rescue. Steelbright galloped towards him, waving her swords, and the two began to fight.

Now Golden Wings came from a family of famous soldiers and was an expert with the steel lance. Song Jiang watched, silently urging him on. But brilliant as his spearsmanship was, he could not get the slightest advantage over the woman warrior. Redeye, who was watching from afar and had seen Short-Arse taken prisoner and Golden Wings unable to subdue the woman, now urged on his mount and charged to the rescue, whirling a steel chain and letting off a tremendous shout. Meanwhile in Zhu Castle, where they had been watching for some time, they began to fear that Steelbright might lose. They hastily lowered the drawbridge and opened the gates and Dragon Zhu himself, leading out three hundred men, galloped with levelled spear at Song Jiang, hoping to capture him. The Flautist saw this, and waving his two swords galloped to encounter Dragon Zhu. Redeye fearing for Song Jiang's safety stuck by his side, as the fight raged on amid a tumult of shouts. As Song Jiang began to be really concerned that the Flautist could not handle Dragon Zhu and Golden Wings could not get the better of Steelbright, another column of troops came charging in from the side. To Song Jiang's delight it was Thunderclap Qin Ming, who had heard the sound of fighting and was coming to lend a hand. Song Jiang shouted out: "General Qin, look to the Flautist!"

Now Thunderclap was an impetuous man. Moreover, the Zhu forces had captured his friend and disciple the Tamer. He was not in a good mood. He gave his horse a slap and flew at Dragon Zhu, his face set in a terrifying grimace. Dragon Zhu readied his lance to receive the onslaught. The Flautist now led his troops away to try to recapture Short-Arse. Steelbright saw them coming and turned away from Golden Wings in order to receive the Flautist's attack. This encounter, since both were wielding two swords, gave the appearance of wind whirling up powdered jade, of snowflakes scattering among fairy petals. Just to watch it blurred one's vision.

On the other side Thunderclap and Dragon Zhu fought a dozen bouts. Dragon Zhu was no match for Thunderclap, but among his men was Ironstaff, who charged forward with steel chain and lance. Golden Wings rushed to meet him. Before the horses clashed, the instructor put up his lance and rode away to one side. As Golden Wings galloped after him, Ironstaff's flying chain caught him and knocked him headlong from the saddle. Redeye gave a great shout: "To the rescue, lads!" and charged after Ironstaff, whirling his chain.

Song Jiang told his men to save Golden Wings and get him on a horse. Meanwhile Dragon Zhu, unable to withstand Thunderclap, slapped his horse and fled. Ironstaff also broke off combat with Redeye and engaged Thunderclap. The two of them fought some twenty bouts and neither had the advantage. Eventually Ironstaff feinted and then slipped away. Thunderclap gave chase, whirling his mace, as Ironstaff galloped into a thicket. Unsuspectingly Thunderclap followed. Of course the Zhu force had positioned men in ambush in all such places. As soon as they saw Thunderclap they stretched out ropes to trip his horse. Horse and rider crashed to the ground and amid a tumult of shouts Thunderclap was taken.

Redeye saw Thunderclap fall and rushed to his assistance. Too late he saw the trip-wires and tried to turn back, but with much cheering on either side of him a tangle of hooks snaked out and he too was taken.

All that Song Jiang watching from afar could do was curse his luck and see to it that Golden Wings was put on a horse. The Flautist broke off the fight with Steelbright and rushed to support Song Jiang. They rode away southward, with Ironstaff, Dragon Zhu and Steelbright all in pursuit. They could see no way out and they were fully expecting to be captured when they saw away to the south a horseman was galloping towards them with five hundred troops behind him. It was Mu the Unstoppable. Another three hundred or more cavalry with two leaders were racing up from the southeast. One of the leaders was Morbid and the other was Madcap. From the northeast came yet another horseman, who was shouting out: "Get away from them!" It was Colonel Hua, the Archer. These three groups of cavalry converged on Song Jiang, who was immensely relieved to see them.

They now joined forces against Ironstaff and Dragon Zhu. Those watching from the castle feared for the safety of their two champions, so leaving Tiger Zhu to guard the gate the youngest brother, Wildcat Zhu, rode out from the rear of the castle. Mounted on a mettlesome charger and wielding a long lance, he was the leader of over five hundred cavalry, who now flung themselves into the fray.

Meanwhile in front of the castle, the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot and White Eel had crossed the water, but came under a hail of arrows from the castle and were unable to make any progress. The Magic Messenger and the Daytime Rat could only give encouragement from the other bank.

It was beginning to get dark, so Song Jiang hurriedly told the Flautist to get Golden Wings to safety outside the village. He also gave orders for the gongs to be sounded, as a signal to all his commanders to break off the fight and withdraw.

Song Jiang himself slapped his horse and galloped here and there to round up his men. He was afraid some of them might get lost. As he was doing so, he saw Steelbright charging towards him. He was unprepared for this, so he galloped off to the east with Steelbright in hot pursuit.

Eight hooves beat the earth like upturned cups. The chase took them deep into enemy territory. Steelbright was gaining on him and Song Jiang was about to turn and fight when a shout rang out from the mountainside: "What does that bloody woman think she's doing chasing our leader?"

It was Iron Ox, whirling his two axes, racing towards them at the head of a force of seventy or eighty. Steelbright reined in her horse and rode off towards the forest. Song Jiang also halted, and was able to observe another few dozen cavalrymen emerging from the forest. At the head of them rode a fellow who was bravely built and nobly accoutred.

It was Leopard's Head, who shouted as he rode forward: "Where do you think you're going, you bitch?" Steelbright whirling her swords charged him. Leopard's Head levelling his long curved spear rode to meet her. Before they had fought ten bouts he feinted. When Steelbright came in close to slash at him with her two swords, he parried with his spear and reaching out with an easy movement of his agile arm and a bend of his supple waist, plucked her from her horse.

Song Jiang applauded loudly, his delight knew no bounds. Ordering his men to tie her up, Leopard's Head galloped over to Song Jiang and asked: "Are you hurt, brother?"

"No, I'm not hurt," the latter replied.

Iron Ox was now ordered to rush round the village rounding up all the leaders and ordering them to come to the camp outside the village for a conference. He rode off with his troops behind him. Leopard's Head, protecting Song Jiang, with Steelbright in custody, headed back to the camp outside the village.

That night all the leaders gathered anxiously in the camp, worried at not having prevailed in the fight.

The Zhu forces likewise withdrew to the castle. They had suffered countless casualties. Dragon Zhu ordered all the prisoners to be confined in prison carts, to be taken together to the capital, once Song Jiang had been captured, and exchanged for the reward. The people of Hu had already handed over Short-Arse to Zhu Castle.

Having assembled most of his forces on the outskirts of the village, Song Jiang set up camp. He first ordered Steelbright to be brought and instructed twenty experienced soldiers and four leaders on fast mounts to deliver her with all speed, bound hand and foot and also on horseback, to Mount Liang and hand her over to his father, Squire Song, to look after, and then report back. He told them that he would dispose of her when he returned to the mountain. The others all thought Song Jiang wanted the woman for himself, so the mission was carried out with great care. Golden Wings was also to be sent in a cart back to the mountain to recuperate. Everyone carried out these orders, travelling with all speed. But Song Jiang grieved in his tent all night, unable to sleep. He watched till morning.

Next day scouts came to report that Professor Wu Yong was on the way, with the three Ruan brothers, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, and five hundred cavalry. Song Jiang went out to meet him, and then took him back to the tent. The Professor had brought food and drink with him, and drank a toast to celebrate with Song Jiang and reward the leaders of the expedition.

"Back in the mountain stronghold," he said, "our leader Chao Gai has heard all about your first unsuccessful expedition and has sent me and five others to lend a hand. How did you fare today, well or badly?"

"It's not easy to say in a word. That unspeakable Zhu crowd had erected two white banners over their gate, saying 'We shall level the Marshes and capture Chao Gai, we shall flatten Mount Liang and get Song Jiang the Black!' They are insolent! In our first attack the topography was against us and we lost Panther and the Tamer. We launched an assault in the evening and Short-Arse was captured by Steelbright, while Golden Wings was injured by the instructor's chain. Then Thunderclap and Redeye were unseated and captured by means of trip-wires. With losses like these our morale would have been severely damaged if Leopard's Head had not managed to capture Steelbright. With things as they are, I don't know what we can do next. I'd sooner kill myself right here than fail to destroy Zhu Castle and rescue our comrades. I certainly wouldn't be able to go back and face our friend Chao Gai again."

But the Professor only laughed. "This Zhu Castle," he said, "has really been tempting heaven. And now there's a wonderful opportunity. I should say it will only take us a day and a night to destroy it."

Song Jiang was both astonished and delighted. "How'd it take only a day and a night to destroy it?" he asked eagerly. "What's this opportunity?" Smiling patiently, the Professor laid 2 fingers together and explained what he meant by an opportunity. Truly, this was a case of:

*He reaches up into the sky and pulls down the clouds;*
*He delivers them from the snares of heaven and earth.*

WHEN Song Jiang gave the orders for retreat there soon arose from his men many cries, and when he inquired the reason he was told that the roads were like a maze, and although they had retreated they had all got back to where they started from. He then gave orders that they were to advance to those places where there were torches displayed. Very soon further cries were heard, and he was then informed that his men had tried to get to the lighted torches, but had found the roads studded with bamboo spikes and iron pricks so that they could not advance.

Song Jiang was very much distressed and had no plans. Just then, however, a cry arose in the left wing of his armed men, "Shi Xiu has returned!" Very soon Shi Xiu appeared, and spoke to Song Jiang, "Keep cool, sir! I know the road. Tell our men to follow the road, and when they come to white poplars they must turn there, and not at any other place."

Orders were given accordingly, and when the men had gone about two //they found themselves face to face with a large body of armed villagers.

Song Jiang asked Shi Xiu about the position.

They have a lamp as a signal," replied Shi Xiu.
"Do you see that lamp among the trees? I have noticed that as we go eastward that lamp also moves eastward, and if we go westward the lamp moves in the same direction. That is evidently done to indicate our directions and movements," said Hua Rong.
"How can we stop this movement of the lamp?" asked Song Jiang.
"That is quite easy," said Hua Rong. Running forward in front of the vanguard he shot an arrow at the lamp and brought it down. The village guard not seeing the lamp any longer did not know where to go, and were soon in confusion. Song Jiang gave orders for a speedy advance. Shortly there was a great uproar in front, and the torchlights were moving in all directions. Song Jiang called a halt, and sent Shi Xiu to find out the position. He soon returned, and reported that the relief party from Liangshan Marsh had now arrived, and was attacking the village guard in front. Song Jiang ordered an attack so that the village guard was soon between two fires. The villagers soon gave way, and scattered. The united bandits now halted, and encamped on some high ground to await the dawn. The roll was called, and they discovered that Huang Xin was missing. His men said that during the night attack they had got on the wrong road, and Huang Xin had been dragged off his horse by hooks from tall grass.
Song Jiang was very angry with the men because they had not duly reported this, and threatened to kill those responsible for this dereliction of duty.
Yang Xiong tried to pacify Song Jiang, "There are three villages in alliance here, but Li Ying's village is now free from that alliance. Why not go there and talk matters over with Li Ying?"
Song Jiang admitted that he had forgotten about Li Ying, and at once decided to go to see him. He left Lin Chong and Qin Ming in charge of the temporary camp. Song Jiang took three other leaders and about three hundred cavalry with him. Upon reaching the village they found the drawbridge raised and the gates closed. A drum was sounded on the tower over the gate. Song Jiang called out, "I am Song Jiang from Liangshan Marsh, and have come here only to pay a visit to your chief Li Ying."
Du Xing was on the tower, and he recognized some of the leaders. He at once had the gate opened, and taking a boat came across the moat. Upon landing he saluted Song Jiang, and was introduced by Hua Rong and Shi Xiu. Their object in visiting the village was explained, and Du Xing agreed to go back, and report the matter to the chief, Li Ying. When he reached the village hall he found Li Ying seated on a bed with a blanket over his shoulders nursing his wound. When Du Xing had delivered his message Li Ying replied, "Song Jiang is a bandit of Liangshan Marsh so I cannot agree to receive him here. I am above disloyalty, but if I saw him, people would suspect a double game. You can go back, and tell him that I am sick, and as I cannot leave my bed I cannot meet him now, but may see him at some future date. I request him to take back his presents, as I cannot receive them."
Du Xing returned, and duly conveyed this message to Song Jiang who understood Li Ying's meaning. Du Xing then told Song Jiang of the girl Hu San Niang who was betrothed to "Tiger's Cub," and was famous as a great warrior. She lived in the Hu Family Village, and that was the place that Song Jiang must be on guard against as Li Ying would remain neutral on account of having been wounded and discourteously treated by the Zhu Family Village. The last-named village had two gates, and to succeed he must attack both gates at the same time. To attack one gate only would lead to disaster. The roads near the front or main gate had been specially made to confuse strangers, but the clue was in following the poplar trees.
Here Shi Xiu interrupted, "But those poplar trees have all been cut down now, so that clue will be missing."
"Even if they have cut them down there will still be the stumps left," replied Du Xing, "so that there would be no difficulty in broad daylight."
Song Jiang thanked Du Xing for the information, and then rode back with his cavalry to the temporary camp. There the leaders had a conference, and heard the news. They all agreed to join in an attack on the Zhu Family Village. Li Kui was very keen on again going in front of the attack, but Song Jiang ordered him to stay behind which rather upset Li Kui, and he sat with head bowed down. Song Jiang selected Ma Lin and three other leaders to accompany him in the vanguard. Dai Zong and eight other leaders were to take men by the moat. While Lin Chong, Hua Rong, and two other leaders were to bring the reserves by two separate roads. After all the men had had their food Song Jiang started off displaying a large red flag with the character "*shuai*," i.e., commander-in-chief. Upon reaching the Zhu Family Village, Song Jiang halted his men, and noticed that over the gate were two white flags bearing the announcement, "We will fill up the lake and capture Chao Gai. We will tear down the hill at Liangshan Marsh and seize Song Jiang." Song Jiang was very angry upon reading this, and swore, "If I do not raze this village to the ground I will never go back to Liangshan Marsh." The other leaders were also angry. Song Jiang waited until he saw that all his men had arrived, and that the two reserve bodies were there, and then gave the order for a general assault on the front gate. He then led part of his men to the other gate. The rear gate was strongly guarded. Approaching from the west, outside the village wall, was a large body of armed men who were shouting and making a great noise. Song Jiang ordered Ma Lin and Deng Fei to take half the men and guard the gate while he took the other half under Ou Peng and Wang Ying to oppose the advancing force. As the force came round a small mound it was seen that it consisted of about thirty horsemen under the command of a young girl—the "Ten Feet of Green"—who rode in front, and carried a sword in each hand. This body was followed by about five hundred armed men on foot.
"I suppose this must be the powerful daughter of the Hu family we have heard so much about," said Song Jiang. "Who is willing to meet her in single combat?"
Wang Ying came forward and shouted, "I will go," and spurring his horse he dashed forward. Now this man had a weakness for women, and when he saw this girl his only desire was to make her his prisoner.
Hu San Niang, the "Ten Feet of Green" whipped her horse, and rushed forward for a fight. She was very skillful with the sword, whereas Wang Ying was a superior spearman. They met and after about ten bouts Song Jiang perceived that Wang Ying could not overcome the girl. Wang Ying had thought that he would seize her at once, and at first had only played with his spear. But when he realized that he could not take her easily, he began to use his extreme strength and skill, but found that she was nonplused.
The girl was quite well educated and intelligent. She thought, "This fellow is very crude, and treats me too lightly," so she attacked him very strongly. Wang Ying could not stand this, and he pulled his horse round to retreat.
The girl was however too quick for him. Placing her sword in a rest she raced her horse after Wang Ying, and seizing hold of him pulled him out of his saddle. The villagers rushed forward, and seizing him led him away as a prisoner. Ou Peng seeing this galloped forward to try to save Wang Ying, but found himself in mortal combat with the girl. Ou Peng was the son of a military officer who had instructed him in the use of the lance with which he was very skillful. Song Jiang watched the fight with secret satisfaction. But in spite of his skill Ou Peng could not overcome the girl, he had met his equal. Deng Fei considering the position critical now rushed forward armed with an iron chain. Zhu, the 'Dragon,' in command of the Zhu family villagers now rushed forward to assist Hu San Niang by capturing Song Jiang, but was met by Ma Liu with whom he fought. Seeing this Deng Fei returned to protect Song Jiang. Song Jiang seeing these two deadly combats was nonplused, but just then a detachment of horsemen came in view led by Qin Ming who hearing the noise of combat had brought up the reserves. Song Jiang called out, "Qin Ming, you take the place of Ma Lin in this fight!" Now Qin Ming was very hasty, and was already irritated because these people had arrested Huang Xin who had been one of his pupils. Seizing his mace he whipped his horse, and rushed forward to attack Zhu, the 'Dragon.' Ma Lin seeing Qin Ming retired, and went off to try to rescue Wang Ying. The girl Hu San Niang, the "Ten Feet of Green" seeing this movement left Ou Peng, and rushed to attack Ma Lin. These two were armed with two swords each, and now there was a brilliant flash of steel as the four swords were lashed, and thrust backwards and forwards. Song Jiang could not distinguish any particular sword as they were so quickly crossed and withdrawn. Qin Ming and Dragon Zhu fought about ten bouts without either gaining an advantage. There now came on the scene another combatant—Drill Instructor Luan Tingyu, who emerged from the village gate on horseback, armed with a lance and a heavy iron mace. Ou Peng was free, and advanced to fight this new man. Luan Tingyu retreated, and Ou Peng galloped after him. Luan Tingyu seeing his opponent near at hand flung the iron mace and knocked Ou Peng off his horse. Seeing this Deng Fei called out, "To the rescue!" and galloped up to engage Luan Tingyu. Song Jiang ordered his men to go and rescue Ou Peng. "Dragon" Zhu had retreated as he could not overcome Qin Ming, and that individual now charged forward also to attack Luan Tingyu. After about twenty bouts with Qin Ming, Luan Tingyu watched his opportunity and also retreated. As Qin Ming was pursuing, Luan Tingyu went into a place where the grass and reeds were very tall and dense. Qin Ming followed him, never suspecting that he was merely going into a trap. Suddenly his horse was pulled down by a lasso, and as he fell he was seized by men who had been waiting in ambush. Deng Fei had seen Qin Ming disappear from his horse, and galloping into the tall grass to rescue him met the same fate, and was also made a prisoner. Song Jiang seeing this, called off Ou Peng and Ma Lin as he saw that they could not overcome their opponents. The three leaders then galloped off in retreat followed by their men. They were pursued by "Dragon" Zhu, Luan Tingyu, and Hu San Niang the "Ten Feet of Green."
Song Jiang saw in the distance a horseman approaching followed by about five hundred men. He soon recognized him as Mu Hong. There was also another large body of men to the east of these who he saw were led by Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu. He also was pleased to see another body of men approaching in charge of Hua Rong. Song Jiang gave orders for his men to fight a rearward action, but not to delay their retreat too much as it was getting dusk. Song Jiang was in advance finding the proper road, and while by himself he found that Hu San Niang was chasing him to cut him off from his men. Not being a match or her, Song Jiang retreated, and now there was a very speedy race between the two. Just as they reached a small hillock a man appeared who called out. "Why is that woman pursuing my elder brother?" He was none other than Li Kui. The girl seeing this rescue party turned her horse towards a wood near at hand. Just then Lin Chong also appeared accompanied by about ten horsemen. Lin Chong shouted, and the girl without hesitation galloped towards him waving her two swords. They fought for about ten bouts, and then Lin Chong saw her weakness. He allowed her to strike at him with both swords, and warding off the blows with his spear he at the same moment dropped his spear and seized hold of the girl with both hands. He held her firmly, and soon had her bound by his men with ropes. Song Jiang issued an order for all the men to fall back to the place they had started from, and sent Li Kui to carry this order to all the leaders.
It was now evening. Song Jiang and Lin Chong with their men and prisoner soon reached the rendezvous. The villagers had all withdrawn into the village for the night.
Song Jiang summoned four sergeants, and about twenty men, all mounted, and gave them instructions to take the girl Hu San Niang to Liangshan Marsh, and hand her over in the custody of his father. Most of the leaders concluded from this that Song Jiang wanted the girl for himself, but they said nothing.
The following morning a scout came to the camp, and reported that another body of about five hundred men under the commander of Wu Yong was approaching. Song Jiang went out of the camp to receive Wu Yong. Wu Yong had brought a large quantity of rations for the troops.
Wu Yong said, "Chao Gai heard that you had not been successful yesterday, so he dispatched me with these men, and rations to help you. How did the fight get along these days?"
"That is a long story," replied Song Jiang.
He then explained what had taken place the previous day. He added that he had no plans but that if he could not succeed in defeating those villagers and rescuing the four comrades he would prefer to die at that place instead of returning to Liangshan Marsh. He dared not face Chao Gai after being in such disgrace. Wu Yong laughed at this, and said, "The Zhu Family Village ought of course to be defeated. Just now we have a fortunate opportunity and we can succeed very soon."
"But how can we defeat those people?" asked Song Jiang surprisingly. Wu Yong still laughed, and took his time to explain matters. Holding up 2 fingers, he explained the position.

A hand stretching forth to seize a cloud,
Just helped a man enmeshed in net.

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### The 2 Suns, Colonel Sun Li & Blackface Sun Xin attack the prison, Break Open the Jail, & Rescue Men from Prison; The Xie Brothers Snake Zhen & Scorpion Bao are sprung from gaol & Make their Escape from Prison

"A friend of Shi Yong who wants to join our band is very close to Luan Tingyu. He's also on excellent terms with Yang Lin and Deng Fei." said Wu Yong. "He knows you're having difficulty in attacking the Zhu Family Manor. He's offering this plan as a kind of entry gift, after which he will join us. We can carry it out in five days. Doesn't that please you?"
"Marvellous," cried Song Jiang. His face was wreathed in smiles.
About the same time the first attack on the Zhu Family Manor was in progress certain things were happening in the Shandong coastal prefecture of Dengzhou. Outside the prefectural town was a mountain infested with wild animals. These did considerable harm to human life. The prefect therefore summoned the local hunters and ordered them to kill and produce the body within a fixed time of a tiger which was roaming the mountain. The village chiefs in front of and behind the mountain were also directed to take part. If the hunters did not get results in the time allotted they would be severely punished and cangues placed around their necks.
At the foot of the mountain lived two brothers who were hunters. The elder was called Xie Zhen, the younger Xie Bao. Both used two-pronged spears of steel-flecked iron and were remarkably skillful fighters. They were considered the best huntsmen in the prefecture. Xie Zhen's nickname Was Two-Headed Snake, Xie Bao's was Twin-Tailed Scorpion. Their parents were dead, and they had never married. The elder was tall, ruddy complected, with a narrow waist and broad shoulders. The younger, an even tougher fellow, was still taller, with round face, swarthy skin, and two flying demons tattooed on his legs. When possessed by one of his terrible rages, he wanted to pull up trees, shake mountains, and turn earth and sky upside down.
After hearing the prefect's edict, the two brothers returned home and made ready their snare-bow, poisoned arrow, crossbows and forked obstacles, put on their panther skin pants and tiger pelt capes, took their pronged spears and went up the mountain. They set their snare-bow, climbed a tree and waited all day. Nothing happened. They dismantled the bow and went home.
The next day they took some dry rations and again mounted the slope. They waited until dusk, then again set the snarebow and climbed a tree. By the fifth watch, there still wasn't any activity. They moved the bow to the western side of the mountain and sat until daylight, at which time they decided not to wait any longer. Both men were growing worried. They said: "We've been give three days to catch the tiger. If we don't, we'll be punished. What are we going to do?"
At the fifth watch of the third night of their vigil, weariness overcame them. Sitting back to back, they began to doze. No sooner had they closed their eyes than they heard the twang of the snare-bow. They leaped down, grabbed their pronged spears and peered into the darkness. A tiger had been struck by the poisoned arrow and was writhing on the ground. The hunters approached, spears in hand. When the beast saw them it ran, arrow and all. The brothers gave chase. Halfway down the mountain, the poison did its work. With a roar of anguish, the tiger rolled down the slope.
"Good," said Xie Bao. "That's Squire Mao's rear garden below. We'll go to his place and collect the tiger."
The brother descended the mountain to the manor and knocked on the gate. By then it was dawn. A vassal opened the gate and went in to report to the squire. Before long, Squire Mao emerged. The brothers set aside their spears and hailed him respectfully.
"Uncle!" they said, "we haven't seen you in a long time. Sorry to have to trouble you."
"What are you doing here so early, nephews? What's on your minds?"
"If it weren't important, we wouldn't dare disturb your slumbers," said Xie Zhen. "Because of the prefect's edict, we've been out after a tiger. For three days we've been hunting, and this morning, at the fifth watch, we finally shot it. He's rolled down the slope into your rear garden. We'd like your permission to get him."
"Of course. But why not sit a while, first? You must be hungry. Have some breakfast." The squire instructed his vassal to bring food and wine, and urged the two brother to help themselves.
After eating they rose and thanked him. "We appreciate your kindness. We'd like to go and get that tiger, if we may."
"Since he's in the rear part of my manor, what's there to worry about? Have some tea. There's plenty of time."
The Xie brothers couldn't very well refuse. They sat down again while the vassal served them tea.
"And now," said the squire, "you can collect your tiger, nephews."
"Thank you, uncle," said the brothers.
Squire Mao led them to the rear garden and instructed a vassal to unlock the gate. But no matter how the man tried, he couldn't budge it. "It hasn't been opened for a long time," the squire explained. "The lock is probably rusty. Use a hammer."
The vassal took a hammer and smashed the lock. They all entered the garden and walked towards the part near the mountain. There was no tiger.
"Could you be mistaken, nephews?" queried the squire. "Maybe you didn't watch carefully. Maybe it didn't land in my garden."
"How could we be mistaken?" said Xie Zhen. "We were born and raised here. Wouldn't we know where we were?"
"Search for yourselves. If you find it, you can take it away."
"Brother, look at this," cried Xie Bao. "This patch of grass has been rolled flat, and here are bloodstains. Who says this isn't the place? Some of uncle's vassals must have carried it off!"
"Don't talk like that," said the squire. "How would our household's vassals know there was a tiger in the rear garden? And carry it away? You saw that we had to break the lock open. We went into the garden with you and let you search. How can you say such things?"
"Uncle," said Xie Zhen. "You'd better give us back our tiger. We have to turn it over to the authorities."
"You two are completely unreasonable. I invite you to breakfast and you invent a story that we've stolen your tiger."
"Invent, nothing. Your family was also informed of the authorities' time limit. You hadn't the skill to catch your own tiger, so you took ours. Now, you'll claim a reward while we two brothers will be beaten."
"What's it to me if you're beaten?"
The young men glared. "Do you dare let us make a thorough search?"
"Is this your home or mine? Every family is entitled to its privacy. You beggars have no manners whatsoever."
Xie Bao forced his way into the hall. No tiger. Fury rose in his heart and he started fighting. Xie Zhen smashed the railing in front of hall and barged in with him.
The squire set up a howl. "Xie Zhen and Xie Bao are robbing us in broad daylight!"
The brothers pulverized the furniture. They saw the whole manor was getting ready to come at them in force, and they left with quick strides through the front gate.
They pointed accusingly and shouted: "You've stolen our tiger! We'll let the court decide this!"
At that moment two or three riders approached the manor, leading a band of men. Xie Zhen recognized Mao Zhongyi, the squire's son.
"Your vassals have stolen our tiger, and your father refuses to return it! In fact he wants to beat us up!"
"Those rustics are very ignorant. My father must have been deceived by them. Don't be angry. Come in with me and I'll see to it that you get it."
The brothers thanked him. Mao Zhongyi shouted for the vassals to open the gate, and he asked Xie Zhen and Xie Bao to enter. Then he ordered that the gate be closed, and he yelled: "Grab them!"
From porches on both sides of the courtyard twenty or thirty vassals converged on the two brothers, joined by the men who had arrived with the riders. These latter were police. The brothers were overpowered before they could defend themselves, and bound.
"Our household shot a tiger last night," Mao Zhongyi asserted. "How can you make false claims against us? And you force your way in, rob our valuables and smash our furniture. That's criminal. Turn them over to the authorities. We'll be ridding our prefecture of a scourge!"
Actually, Mao Zhongyi had delivered the tiger at the fifth watch to the prefectural office. He brought police back with him to size the Xie brothers. The two were fooled by his ruse more easily than he expected, and now no one would listen to them. The squire put a bag of "loot" with their pronged spears and added a number of pieces of wrecked furniture as "evidence." These and the prisoners, who were stripped naked and their hands tied behind their backs, were taken into the prefectural town.
Wang Zheng, the court clerk, was the squire's son-in-law. He spoke first to the prefect. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao were then brought before the court. They were not permitted to say anything, but were bound and beaten. The prefect insisted they admit that "on the pretext of seeking a tiger, we entered with pronged spears and forceably committed armed robbery." When the brothers could stand the beating no longer, they confessed as demanded. The prefect ordered that a cangue of twenty-five catties be fixed around the neck of each man and that they be confined to prison.
Father and son returned to the manor and conferred. "Those two varlets mustn't be released. The best thing would be to kill them, to avoid any future trouble."
They went into town and gave private instructions to the clerk Wang Zheng: "We want this grass pulled up by the roots so that it won't sprout again. We will see to it that inducements are paid on every level, from the prefect right on down."
Xie Zhen and Xie Bao were delivered to the prison's section for the condemned, and men were brought to a pavilion to meet the warden. His name was Bao Ji, and he had already received Squire Mao's silver and instructions from Clerk Wang to kill the two brothers. Bao was seated in the center of the pavilion.
A keeper said to the young hunters: "Go quickly and kneel before him."
"So you're the so-called Two-Headed Snake and the Twin-Tailed Scorpion, are you?" Bao snarled.
"Those are nicknames others have given us," said Xie Zhen. "But we've never harmed any good people."

"Animals," the warden barked. "I'm going to turn you into a One-Headed Snake and a Single-Tailed Scorpion! Take them and lock them up."
The keeper led them back to their cell. He looked to see that no one was around, then said: "Do you know me? I'm the brother of your brother's wife."
"We are our family's only sons. We don't have any brother," Xie Zhen said.
"Aren't you brothers of Major Sun?"
"He's the brother of our paternal cousin's husband. We've never met you. Could you be Yue Ho?"
"The same. My name is Yue Ho. We're originally from Maozhou Prefecture, before my ancestors moved here. My older sister married Major Sun. I work in this place as a jailkeep. Because I sing well people call me Iron Throat. My brother-in-law, seeing that I like weapons play, has taught me a few styles of fighting with the lance."
This Yue Ho was a quick and clever fellow. He had easily learned to play many musical instruments, and was orderly and thorough. As for lances and staves, they were like sugar and honey to him. He saw that the two brothers were gallant lads and he wanted to save them. But you can't spin a rope with one strand, you cannot applaud with one hand. He could only give them a bit of news.
"I'll tell you something," he said. "Bao Ji the warden has been bribed by Squire Mao. He's sure to try and kill you both. What are you going to do?"
"If you hadn't mentioned Major Sun I wouldn't have thought of it," said Xie Zhen. "But since you have, I'd like you to deliver a message."
"To whom?"
"To a woman relative on my father's side. She's married to the brother of Major Sun. They live outside East Gate in the hamlet of Ten Li Marker. Actually, she's a cousin, and she's known as Gu Dasao the Tigress. She and her husband run a tavern. They also have a slaughter-house and a place to gamble. When she fights, no twenty or thirty men can touch her. Even Sun Xin, her husband, can't vanquish her, skilled as he is with weapons. She's very fond of my brother and me. And my mother is Sun Xin and Sun Li's aunt. So they're also cousins, but on my mother's side. If you would be good enough to let them know, secretly, I'm sure our cousin the Tigress would come and rescue us."
"I'll attend to it, kinsmen, rest assured."
Yue Ho went out and got some buns and cooked meat, which he sneaked into them. Then, on the excuse of urgent personal business, he locked the prison door, entrusted the key to a minor keeper and hurried out of the town's East Gate to the hamlet of Ten Li Marker. He soon found the tavern. Slabs of beef and mutton were hanging outside its door. In the rear of the tavern was a gambling room. A woman sat behind the counter. Confident that this was Gu Dasao, Yue Ho approached and hailed her respectfully.
"Is this the Sun place?"
"It is. Would you like some wine, sir? Or do you want to buy meat, perhaps? If you'd like to gamble, we've a room in the back."
"My name is Yue Ho. I'm the younger brother of Major Sun's wife."
"So it's you, cousin Yue Ho." Gu Dasao smiled. "You look just like her. Do come in and have some tea."
Yue Ho followed her inside and was seated as a guest.
"I heard you were working in town," said Gu Dasao. "But we're poor and have little spare time, so we've had no chance to meet you. What wind blows you here today?"
"I wouldn't dare disturb you if it weren't important. Two new felons were brought to our prison today. Although we had never met, their names were well known to me—Xie Zhen the Two-Headed Snake and Xie Bao the Twin-Tailed Scorpion."
"They're my cousins. Why have they been put in prison?"
"They killed a tiger, and a rich landlord, Squire Mao, stole it from them. Then he had them seized as thieves and armed robbers, and taken before the prefect. He's bribed everyone, high and low. Sooner or later, Bao Ji the warden is going to have them murdered. It's unfair, and I don't like it, but I can't save them on my own. Since we're related, and chivalry comes first, I told them what I knew. They said no one but you can rescue them. That may be, but only if you act fast."
Gu Dasao uttered a cry of lamentation. She shouted to her assistants to fetch her husband. Several of them ran out, and soon returned with Sun Xin, who was introduced to Yue Ho. Sun's family had been military men for generations. They came from Qiongzhou. Because their unit was transferred to Dengzhou, the two Sun brothers had moved with it.
Sun Xin was big and strong. Having learned his skill with arms from his army brother, he was deft with a ribbed rod, and was known as the Junior General. His wife told him the story.
"You'd better go back, cousin," he said to Yue Ho. "They're already in prison. We'll need you to look after them. As soon as my wife and I think out a plan, we'll join you directly."
"Any way I can be of service, I'll be glad to do my best."
Gu Dasao served Yue Ho wine and gave him a bag of silver. "Spread this around among the minor keepers," she said, "to make sure they take good care of our cousins."
Yue Ho thanked her, took the silver, returned to the prison and put the money to use. Of that we'll say no more.
Gu Dasao conferred with Sun Xin. "Any ideas on how to save them?" she asked.
"That scoundrel Squire Mao has money and power. He wants to prevent your cousins from ever coming out. He won't quit till he's made sure. He certainly will see to it that they're killed. They have to be snatched out of that prison. There isn't any other solution."
"I'll go with you tonight," said Gu Dasao.
Sun smiled. "You're too rash. We must have a long-range plan. We need a place to go after the jailbreak. We can't carry it off, anyhow, without the help of my brother and two other men I have in mind."
"Who are they?"
"An uncle and a nephew who are mad about gambling—Zou Yuan and Zou Run. At present they are robbers on the Mountain in the Clouds. We're on very good terms. If I can get them, we can do it."
"The Mountain in the Clouds isn't far. Go immediately and invite them here for a conference."
"I'll do that. You get some wine and tasty dishes ready. They'll come if I ask them."
Gu Dasao instructed her assistants to slaughter a hog, and she laid the table with wine and platters of fruit and delicacies.
By dusk Sun returned with two bold fellows. The first was Zou Yuan. A Laizhou man, he loved gambling since childhood, and had always been an idler. But he was loyal and generous, and skilled with several weapons. He could be forceful and relentless, too, when the occasion arose. In the gallant fraternity he was known as the Dragon from the Forest.
The second man was his nephew Zou Run. The two were about the same age, and there was not much difference between them. Big and tall, Zou Run had a peculiar feature—a tumor on the back of his head. Whenever he lost his temper in a fight, he would butt his opponent. One day he suddenly butted a pine tree and snapped it in two, astonishing his watchers. From then on everybody called him the One-Horned Dragon.
Gu Dasao invited them into the inner room and urged them to be seated. She told the whole story and raised the question of raiding the prison.
"I have eighty or ninety men under my command, but only about twenty I can trust," said Zou Yuan. "And we won't be able to stay in these parts after we do the job. There's a place I've been thinking of going for a long time. I wonder whether you two would be willing to join us."
"We'll go anywhere you like, as long as you save my cousins," said Gu Dasao.
"Liangshan Marsh is thriving, and Song Jiang is very agreeable to accepting new members. There are three friends of mine under his command—Elegant Panther Yang Lin, Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion, and Shi Yong the General. They joined the band a long time ago. After we've rescued your cousins, we'll all go to Mount Liangshan and join up, too. What do you say?"
"Couldn't be better," cried Gu Dasao. "Anyone who tries to back out I'll puncture to death with my lance!"
"There's one thing, though," Zou Run reminded them. "When we've got our men, what if Dengzhou sends troops and cavalry after us?"
"My older brother is a major in the prefectural garrison, and he's the best fighter they have," said Sun Xin. "Whenever bandits attack the town, he's the one who kill and scatters them. His reputation is known all over. I'll invite him here tomorrow and get his promise to help."
"I'm afraid he won't want to turn outlaw," said Zou Yuan.
"I have an excellent way to convince him." Sun Xin replied.
They drank till half the night was gone, then retired till the following morning. Sun kept his guests at home with him, and dispatched an assistant and a couple of men to town with a large cart, which they pushed. "Go quickly to the garrison and see my brother Major Sun and his wife Madame Yue. Say: 'My mistress is very ill and hopes you will come at once.' "
To which Gu Dasao added: "Say my condition is critical, that I have something important to tell them. Say they must come, that this is their last chance to see and hear me."
The assistant went off with the cart and Sun Xin waited at the doorway. Around lunch time, he saw the cart in the distance, bringing his sister-in-law, with his brother on horseback, followed by a dozen foot soldiers. As the procession neared Ten Li Marker, Sun Xin reported to his wife: "They're coming."
"Now this is what I want you to do," said Gu Dasao. In an undertone, she gave her instructions.
Sun Xin went out and greeted his brother and sister-in-law. As Madame Yue got down from the cart, he asked her to come in and see the patient. Sun Li dismounted and also entered. He was indeed a fine figure of a man. Very tall, with a full beard, he was known as the Sickly General because of his yellow-tinged complexion. But he pulled a stiff bow, rode a spirited horse, and wielded a long lance. From his wrist hung a steel rod with tiger eyes and ridged like a bamboo. People turned faint at the very sight of it.
As he walked through the gate with his brother, Sun Li asked: "What's wrong with sister-in-law?"
"She has a very peculiar ailment. Let's talk about it inside."
Sun Li entered. Sun Xin told his assistant to take the soldiers to the tavern opposite and give them drinks, and to bring the horse into the yard. He urged Sun Li to be seated.
After a while, Sun Xin said to his visitors: "Please come in and see the patient."
He led them to an inner room, but no one was there.
"What room is she resting in?" Sun Li asked.
Just then, Gu Dasao entered, followed by Zou Yuan and Zou Run.
"What ailment have you, sister-in-law?" queried Sun Li.
"Brother-in-law, my respects. I'm suffering from a need to rescue cousins."
"This is very strange. Rescue which cousins?"
"You're not deaf and dumb. Surely you know those two in town are my cousins. And yours, as well."
"I don't understand. Which two do you mean?"
"The matter is urgent. I'll come straight to the point. Squire Mao at the foot of the Mountain in the Clouds and Clerk Wang are plotting against Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, and sooner or later are going to have them killed. I've talked it over with these two bold fellows. We're going to raid the prison, rescue them, and all join the band in Liangshan Marsh. Since you'll probably be implicated, I feigned illness and invited you and sister-in-law here to tell you of our plan. If you don't want to go with us, we'll go alone. What justice can we expect from the imperial court? If we leave, nothing will happen to us. If we stay, we'll be prosecuted. 'The nearest to the flames is the first burned,' as the saying goes. You'll be made the scapegoat and go to prison, and there'll be no one to send you food and rescue you. What do you think of our idea?"
"I'm a military officer of Dengzhou Prefecture. How dare I do such a thing?"
"Since you refuse, you and I must fight to the death, right now!"
Gu Dasao produced two sabres, and Zou Yuan and Zou Run both pulled out daggers.
"Wait, sister-in-law," Sun Li shouted. "Not so fast. I'm thinking of the future. Let's talk this over."
Madame Yue was so frightened she couldn't utter a word. "Even if you won't go, at least send sister-in-law on ahead," said Gu Dasao. "We'll stage the raid without you."
"Let me go home and pack some things first and see how the land lies, since you're going through with it. Then we'll go into action."
"This news was leaked to us by your brother-in-law Yue Ho. You can get your luggage together while we're raiding the prison. There'll still be time."
Sun Li sighed. "If that's how you people want it, I can't prevent you. The authorities would surely prosecute me after you'd gone. All right, then. Let's talk this over and get started."
It was arranged for Zou Yuan to go to his stronghold on the Mountain in the Clouds, collect his valuables and horses, and come back with twenty trusted men. Zou Yuan departed. Sun Xin would go into town, find out what news Yue Ho had, fix a time for the raid, and get word secretly to Xie Zhen and Xie Bao.
The next day, having gathered his gold and silver on the Mountain in the Clouds, Zou Yuan returned with his men. These, plus the seven or eight loyal assistants of Sun Xin, and the dozen soldiers Sun Li had brought, made a total of over forty. Sun Xin slaughtered two pigs and a sheep, and saw to it that everyone ate his fill. He instructed Gu Dasao to carry daggers concealed on her person and enter the prison disguised as a woman delivering food. The forces were divided into two groups and proceeded towards town. Sun Xin went with Sun Li. Zou Yuan led Zou Run.
Bao Ji, the warden of the Dengzhou prison, had received money from Squire Mao and was waiting for a chance to murder the two young hunters. Yue Ho, holding his staff of office, was standing in the passage of the prison gateway, when he heard the entry bell ring.
"Who's there?" he called.
"A woman with food," Gu Dasao replied.
Yue Ho guessed it was she, and opened the gate and let her in. Then he closed it and led her along the corridor. From the pavilion, Bao Ji spotted her.
"Who is that woman?" he yelled. "How dare she deliver food here? 'No outside contact is allowed in prisons' since ancient times."
"She's the Xie brothers' sister. She's bringing them something to eat."
"Don't let her in. Give it to them yourself."
Yue Ho took the food, opened the cell door and handed it to the hunters.
"What we talked about last night, how's it going?" they asked.
"Your cousin is already in. We're just waiting for the others to get set."
Yue Ho opened their fetters. They heard a keeper announcing: "Major Sun is knocking at the gate."
"He's a garrison officer," said Bao Ji. "What does he want in my prison? Don't let him in."
Gu Dasao moved swiftly towards the pavilion.
Outside, someone called: "Major Sun is pounding on the gate."
Angrily, Bao Ji came down from the pavilion.
"Where are my brothers?" Gu Dasao shouted at him. She pulled out two gleaming daggers.
Bao Ji could see that he was in danger, and he started to hurry from the courtyard. He ran right into the Xie brothers, who had dashed out of their cell, the cangues in their hands. Before Bao Ji could defend himself, Xie Zhen struck him heavily with the corner of his cangue, crushing the warden's skull.
Gu Dasao had already stabbed four or five keepers. Yelling, she and the two hunters fought their way out. Sun Li and Sun Xin were at the gate. When they saw four figures emerging, they all went quickly towards the front of the prefectural office. Zou Yuan and Zou Run were just coming out, carrying Clerk Wang's head.
Shouting fiercely, the whole company marched off, those on foot in the lead, Major Sun riding his horse, and arrow fitted to his bow, covering the rear. People along the street closed their doors. No one dared show himself. The prefectural police recognized Major Sun and were afraid to intervene.
Crowded around Sun Li, the party sped through the town gate and went directly to Ten Li Marker. There, Madame Yue was helped onto a cart, Gu Dasao mounted a horse, and the procession continued.
"Why don't we take our revenge on that old crook Squire Mao?" Xie Zhen and Xie Bao proposed.
"A good idea," said Sun Li. To Sun Xin and Yue Ho he said: "Escort the cart and keep going. We'll catch up with you."
The two did as they were instructed. With the Xie brothers, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, and the rest of his cohorts, Sun Li proceeded directly to Squire Mao's Manor. Mao Zhongyi was giving a feast in honor of his father's birthday. They were completely unprepared when a host of bold fellows came charging in, shouting and killing. Squire Mao, his son and their entire family, old and young, were slaughtered. In the bedrooms, the raiders collected gold and silver and other valuables and wrapped them into a dozen bundles. They led out seven or eight good horses from the stable in the rear, and on four of these loaded their loot. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao also selected some fine clothes and put them on. They set fire to the manor and mounted their horses.
Hurrying for thirty /; they caught up with the cart. The whole party then continued together. They took another four or five good horses from a manor house along the way, marching swiftly through the night towards Liangshan Marsh.
In a day or two they reached Shi Yong's tavern. Zou Yuan asked him about Yang Lin and Deng Fei.
"They went with Song Jiang to attack the Zhu Family Manor, but two assaults both failed. I hear that Yang and Deng were captured. I don't know what's become of them. It's said that the three sons of the manor are brave warriors, and that they were helped by their weapons teacher Iron Staff Luan Tingyu, and that's why our two attacks were defeated."

Sun Li laughed. "We plan to join your stronghold, but we haven't shown the slightest merit. Suppose we offer a plan for cracking the manor for you? How will that be as an entrance gift?"
Shi Yong was delighted. "I'll be pleased to hear it."
"Luan and I both learned our skill with arms from the same teacher. We each use weapons in the same way and know the same military arts. If I were to say I was being transferred from the Dengzhou to the Yunzhou army garrison and wanted to drop in to see him while passing by, he surely would invite me in. With me and my party striking from within, and your forces attacking from without, we'd be certain to win. How does that sound?"
While Sun Li was speaking, a junior officer reported: "Our Military Advisor Wu Yong has come down from the mountain and is heading for Zhu Family Manor."
Shi Yong directed the messenger to request the Military Advisor to come and meet the new arrivals. Before the words were out of his mouth, several mounted men trotted up to the tavern. They were Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, and the three Ruan brothers. Behind came Wu Yong, at the head of five hundred troops. Shi Yong escorted the leaders into the tavern, then brought in Sun Li and the others and introduced them. He told of their intention to join the band, and of Sun Li's plan.
Wu Yong was extremely pleased. "Since you bold fellows are willing to join us," he said, "I suggest you don't go up the mountain yet, but come with us to the Zhu Family Manor and carry this meritorious scheme to a successful conclusion. Will that suit you?"
Sun Li and the others gladly consented.
"I will go ahead with my men," said Wu Yong. "You gallants follow after."
Wu Yong went first to Song Jiang's camp, where he found him frowning and depressed. He drank with him to cheer him up and told him the news.
"Shi Yong, Yang Lin and Deng Fei know the major of the Denzhou garrison, Sun Li the Sickly General. He and Luan Tingyu, the weapons instructor in the Zhu Family Manor, both learned from the same teacher. Sun Li is here with seven men to join our band. As an entrance gift he's offering a plan, in which he'll take part, for attacking the manor from within and without. He's on his way here to see you."
Song Jiang soared out of his dark mood to the highest joy. He ordered that wine be prepared and a feast be laid, and waited for his guests. Sun Li told his entourage to find a place to rest. He brought the Xie brothers, the two Zou's, Sun Xin, Gu Dasao and Yue Ho, to call on Song Jiang. After courtesies were exchanged, Song Jiang wined and dined them. Of that we'll say no more.
Wu Yong quietly notified his forces of secret signals. On the third day, they would do this... on the fifth day they would do that... The plans finalized, Sun Li and his party, with their cart, and people on horse and on foot, advanced towards the Zhu Family Manor. To Dai Zong, Wu Yong said, "Please go up to the fortress and bring back four leaders. I need them." Dai Zong departed on his mission that same night. And as a result, new wings were added to the land of the Marsh, and the mountain stronghold changed forever its original garb.

What the Professor told Song Jiang was as follows: "We've an excellent opportunity today because someone recommended by the Guv who wants to join our company is a good friend of that Ironstaff's, besides being an intimate of Panther and Redeye. He knows about your not having managed to capture Zhu Castle, and has offered us this scheme in return for our allowing him to join us, as a joining gift so to speak. He'll soon be here. The plan can be carried out within five days. How about that?"
Song Jiang's face broke into a smile of relief. "That's wonderful!" he said.
Now all this, including the plan itself, you shall hear about, friends, all in good time. Just store it up in your memory, because at the same time as Song Jiang started the attack on Zhu Castle something else had happened. It's awkward to describe a little bit of this and then a little bit of that, so for the moment just keep in mind that there are two themes connected with the storming of Zhu Castle and let us concentrate on this someone wanting to join the company and the business of providing an excellent opportunity. Later we will get back to the other story.
On the coast of Shandong there is a provincial capital called Dengzhou. Outside the city there is a mountain. On this mountain there is an abundance of wild animals, wild boar, wolves, tigers and leopards, which often attack people. For this reason the governor had rounded up hunters and charged each of them with catching a tiger on Dengzhou mountain within a certain time-limit. Village headmen on both sides of the mountain were also roped in and told to catch a tiger within the time-limit or suffer the severest penalties.
Now there were on Dengzhou mountain two hunters who were brothers, the elder called Xie Zhen and the younger Xie Bao. These two brothers both liked to use solid steel tridents and their skill in a fight was truly awesome. The local hunters all reckoned they were the best. The elder was nicknamed Two-headed Snake, the younger Two-tailed Scorpion. They were orphans and unmarried. The elder was tall with a red complexion like a crab-apple, a slender waist and broad shoulders. The younger was tremendous: he was equally tall, and his face was round and very dark. Two flying Rakshasas were tattooed on his legs, and when he was angry he seemed about to leap up to the heavens, or to pluck up trees and shake the mountains.
When these two brothers were presented by the authorities with the unwelcome task, they went home and got out their trap with the poisoned arrow, their crossbows and tridents, dressed themselves up in animal skins and set off, steel tridents in hand, for Dengzhou mountain. There they set their trap and waited for a whole day, but to no avail. They picked up the trap and left. Next day they took some provisions with them, climbed the mountain again and waited. When it began to get dark they set the trap and climbed a tree. They waited till just before dawn, but nothing stirred. They picked up the trap and moved it to the western flank of the mountain. There they waited till it was fully light, but again with no success.
They began to be worried. "The time-limit's only three days," they said to themselves. "If we miss it we'll have to pay the penalty. What are we going to do?"
On the night of the third day, in the small hours, despite their cramped and weary limbs, they fell asleep, leaning back to back. But they had scarcely closed their eyes when there was a sudden sound from the trap. They both leapt up, grabbed their tridents and began to look in all directions. What should they see but a tiger wounded by a poisoned arrow and rolling on the ground! They rushed towards it with their tridents at the ready, but at their approach the beast fled, with the arrow still stuck in it. They gave chase. Nearly halfway round the mountain the poison began to take effect and the tiger, maddened by pain, gave a mighty roar and went plunging down a steep slope.
"That's all right," said Scorpion. "I know this mountain. It'll be in Squire Mao's back garden. Let's go down and ask him to let us get it."
They shouldered their tridents and went down to Squire Mao's house and knocked on the door. It was still early in the morning. They were let in and someone went to tell the master. After a long wait, Squire Mao appeared. The brothers put down their tridents, saluted and said: "It's a long time since we've seen you, sir. We come to greet you."
"But why come so early?" Squire Mao asked. "Is there something you want to say to me?"
Snake said: "Of course we wouldn't dream of disturbing you if there wasn't a reason. We've been ordered by the authorities to catch a tiger, and there's a strict time-limit. We've been lying in wait three days, and this morning at dawn we wounded one, but then suddenly it fell down the mountain and landed in your garden. We were hoping you'd allow us to come in and get it."
"Of course you may, if it fell in my garden," said Squire Mao. "Why don't you just sit down for a bit? I expect you're hungry. Have some breakfast before you go and get the tiger."
He told the servants to get breakfast for them. But when he urged them to have more, they stood up, thanked him and said: "We truly appreciate your kindness, sir. But please would you let us go and get our tiger now?"
"If it's in my garden, what are you worried about?" said the Squire. "Do sit down and have some tea. Time enough to get it afterwards."
The brothers could hardly refuse. They sat down and the servants brought tea for them. At last the Squire said: "Now we'll go and get the tiger." "We are truly grateful," they said.
Squire Mao took them to the back of the house and told a servant to get the key to open the garden door. Try as he would to open it, it wouldn't budge.
"We seldom go into this part of the garden," the Squire said. "I expect the lock is rusty, that's why it won't open. Go and get a hammer to break it open."
The servant brought a hammer and they broke the lock and everyone went into the garden. They searched the whole hillside, but nothing did they find.
"Are you sure you weren't mistaken?" the Squire said to the brothers. "Perhaps you weren't watching carefully. Maybe it didn't fall into my garden."
"How could we be mistaken?" said Snake. "We were born and bred here. We know the district well."
"Well, just go on looking," said the Squire. "If it's here, finish it off and take it away."
"Look at this, brother," cried Scorpion. "There's a patch of grass here that's been rolled completely flat. And look, there's traces of blood. Who says it wasn't here? The Squire's people must have finished it off."
"What are you talking about?" said the Squire. "How would my people even know there was a tiger here, let alone finish it off? You saw for yourselves that we had to break the lock, and we all came in at the same time as you. You're talking absolute nonsense!"
"Just give us back our tiger, sir," said Snake. "So we can take it to the authorities."
"You're both crazy," said the Squire. "Out of the kindness of my heart I offer you breakfast. Then you go and make a false accusation about our stealing your tiger!"
"What false accusation?" said Scorpion. "You are also a headman in your household and the time-limit for catching a tiger applies to you too. Only you haven't the ability to catch one for yourself, so when you see we've got one you decide to take it to get the reward and let us pay the penalty!"
"What's it got to do with me, if you have to pay a penalty?" said the Squire.
Glaring ferociously, Scorpion said: "Do you want us to search the place?"
"This is my house, not yours," said the Squire. "Everyone has a right to privacy. Really! The impudence of these two beggars!"
But Scorpion had already charged into the hall to look. He found nothing. His anger grew inside him and he began to smash everything in sight. Snake likewise pulled out the balustrade and began to hammer things with it.Squire Mao let out a shout: "Help! They've come to rob me in broad daylight!"
The two brothers smashed up all the furniture in the hall and then as the servants were preparing to attack them, strode out of the front door, pointing accusingly and saying: "You've cheated us of a tiger! We'll denounce you to the court!"

*At catching beasts, they're most astute;*
*But the Squire's art is trapping men.*
*Because a tiger's in dispute,*
*Mount Liang will take two dragons in.*

As they were engaged in this slanging match, some horsemen rode up to the house, followed by a band of men. Snake recognized Squire Mao's son, Mao Zhongyi.
He went over to him and said: "Your people have stolen our tiger, and your father won't give it back. He even wants them to beat us up!"
"They're just an ignorant bunch of peasants," said Mao Zhongyi. "My father must have been deceived by them. Don't be angry. Now I'm home I'll get them to give it back."
The brothers thanked him. He ordered the door to be opened and took them inside. Once they were in, he ordered the doors to be shut and yelled: "Get them!" From the corridors on either side thirty or forty men sprang out, the Squire's retainers plus the group that came with the riders, who turned out to be policemen. The brothers could do nothing. The whole lot fell on them at once and tied them up.
Mao Zhongyi now said: "We shot a tiger yesterday, why did you pretend it was yours? You made it an excuse to come in here looting and destroying our property, what sort of punishment do you suppose that deserves? Well, we're going to hand you over to the court. That'll rid the district of a public menace."
What had happened, of course, was that Mao Zhongyi had already delivered the tiger to the authorities in the early morning, and had returned with a group of policemen to arrest the brothers. The latter, unfortunately for them, had not understood the situation at all and had fallen into his trap. It needs no further explanation. Squire Mao had the steel tridents they had used brought, and a bag of alleged stolen goods; some pieces of broken furniture and other household objects were slung on carrying-poles; the brothers themselves were stripped naked and their hands tied behind their backs. Then the whole lot was sent to the court.
Now in this district there was a clerk of the court called Wang Zheng, who was Squire Mao's son-in-law. Wang had already gone to the magistrate and told him about the case. When the two brothers were brought before the court they were allowed to say nothing in their defence. They were thrown down and beaten, to make them confess that they had cheated over the tiger and that it was all a pretext for them to come armed with tridents to rob the household. Unable to withstand the beating, they were forced to confess to the charges as required. The magistrate ordered them to be fitted with twenty-five catty cangues and thrown into the main prison.
When Squire Mao and his son got back home they considered the affair: "It'll be a problem for us if they release those two fools. Wouldn't it be best to finish them off once and for all, to avoid any further consequences?" So they went back to the government office and made it known to registrar Wang Zheng that they would like him to cut the weeds and pull out the roots so they wouldn't sprout again. They promised they would take care of the magistrate.
The two brothers were assigned to the cells for condemned criminals. They were taken to the central area of the prison, where they met the head warder. This important personage was called Bao Ji. He too had received silver from Squire Mao and had Wang's instructions to finish them off. He was already sitting in the centre of the hall. The junior warder said to them: "Go and kneel down there in front of him, quickly."
"You're supposed to be some kind of two-headed snake and two-tailed scorpion, is that it?" Bao Ji roared at them.
"People have given us some such nicknames," said Snake. "But we've never done any kind of harm to innocent people."
"Well you two animals are in my hands now, and I know how to turn a two-headed snake into a one-headed snake, and a two-tailed scorpion into a one-tailed scorpion! I've got you here in my prison now."
When the junior warder took them to their cell, he looked around to see there was no one and then said: "Do you recognize me? I'm your elder brother's brother-in-law!"
Snake said: "There's only the two of us. We haven't got an elder brother."
The warder said: "Surely you are brothers of Colonel Sun?"
Snake said: "Colonel Sun's younger brother is married to a cousin on my father's side. But I've never met you. Are you by any chance Yue Ho?"
"That's right, I'm Yue Ho. I'm from Maozhou. My family moved here, and my elder sister became Colonel Sun's wife. I got a job here as a warder. I've a good singing voice, so people call me Lungs. My brother-in-law taught me some tricks with the staff, because he saw I had an aptitude for martial arts." There's a poem to say what Yue Ho is like:

*He's smart and he's stylish, his get-up is choice;*
*He's as lucid a speaker as any on earth.*
*They call him the Lungs for the power of his voice:*
*Quick-witted Yue Ho is a hero from birth.*

This Lungs was indeed quick and ingenious. He knew every kind of weapon, for whatever he studied he could master. He never did anything by halves. As for the art of staff and spear, he loved it like sugar and honey. He could see that Snake and Scorpion were good fellows and he was determined to help them, only you can't make cloth from a single thread, nor can you clap with one hand. The most he could do on his own was give them some information.
So he said: "There's something I think you ought to know: Chief Warder Bao has been taking money from Squire Mao. It must mean they want to finish you off. Do you have any useful connections?"
Snake said: "Well, now you've mentioned him there's Colonel Sun — if you would approach him, I could give you a letter to take."
Lungs said: "Who should I give the letter to?"
"Like I said, there's this cousin of ours, on our father's side, who's the wife of Colonel Sun's younger brother. She lives outside the east gate, at the third milestone. Although she's really a cousin, we call her Auntie Gu. She runs an inn, but it's also a butcher's and a gambling house. Auntie Gu is a match for twenty or thirty men. Her husband, Sun Xin, is skilled in fighting, but even he can't get the better of her. She's the one person we really get on with. Actually our mother also was the aunt of Colonel Sun and his brother, so they're cousins on our mother's side too. If you would be so good as to secretly carry a letter to her explaining our situation, I'm sure she will come to the rescue."
After hearing all this Lungs said: "No need to worry now friends." He first went and got some provisions — pancakes and meat — and went back to give them to the brothers. Then on the pretext of having some business to see to he locked up, asked another gaoler to keep the door, and set off towards the third milestone outside the east gate. He soon came to an inn. Carcasses of buffalo and sheep were hanging outside the door. Inside, in an inner room, a group of men were gambling. There was a woman sitting at the counter. Here's what she looked like:
*Thick eyebrows and big eyes, a chubby round face, a whole headful of outlandish hairpins and rings, together with a couple of quite fashionable bracelets. Sometimes when she's angry she pulls up one of the rails from the well and beats her old man about the head with it. When something really sets her off, she grabs a stone awl and raps the servants' legs. This one was not born to handle a needle and thread: she has turned staff and spear play into woman's work.*
Lungs went right in, saluted Auntie Gu and said: "Is this the Sun's?"
Auntie Gu replied cheerfully: "It certainly is. Do you want to drink wine or buy some meat? If you want to gamble, it's in the back."
"I am the younger brother of Colonel Sun's wife. Yue Ho is my name."
Auntie Gu looked pleased. "So it's cousin Yue Ho! I should have known. You're just like sister-in-law. Do please come in and have some tea."
Lungs followed her into the inn and took the guest's seat. Auntie Gu started the conversation: "I've heard that you have a job in the capital. I'm afraid we're worked off our feet here and never have any free time, or we would have tried to see you. What wind blows you here today?"
"I wouldn't have disturbed you either, if I didn't have some important business. We have just received two criminals who happen to have been sentenced by the court. I didn't know them before, but I have heard a lot about them. One is Xie Zhen, the Two-headed Snake, the other is Xie Bao, the Two-tailed Scorpion."
"They are my relatives," Aunie Gu said. "Whatever have they done to be sent to prison?"
"They shot a tiger and a rich man, Squire Mao, stole it. He turned the truth upside down, making them out to be thieves who had broken into his house, and handed them over to the court. He gave bribes to all and sundry and intends sooner or later to have prison Chief Warder Bao do them in and that'll be that. I saw at once it's a serious business and quite beyond my powers to help them by myself. But for the sake of family ties and even more importantly for the sake of justice, I had to let them know how things stood. They said you were the only one who can save them. But unless you act quickly and decisively, it's going to be impossible to get them out of it."
Auntie Gu responded by expressing her shock, but at the same time she sent some of her people to tell her husband to return home urgently to discuss things. They soon found him and brought him back to meet Lungs.
A poem describes Sun Xin's qualities:

*Of fighters the finest,*
*With bearing most martial,*

*Penglai now his home,*
*And Hainan his birthplace.*
*Endowed with high spirit*
*And an amazon for mate,*
*The strength of two dragons,*
*The Still but a young man,*
*They call him Blackface.*

This Sun Xin, or Blackface to give him his popular name, was born in Hainan, to a well-known military family. The father being posted to Dengzhou, the sons grew up there. Blackface was tall and strong. He had learnt all his elder brother's skills, and like him was pretty useful with the spear and whip, which is why people compared him to the black-faced warrior, whose image guards the doors of courtrooms. Auntie Gu related what she had heard to Blackface.

Blackface said to Lungs: "In that case you'd better go back there at once. Whilst they're in the prison we need you to keep an eye on things. My wife and I will try to work out a long-term solution. We'll come and find you afterwards."

Lungs said: "If I can be of use in any way, I promise to do my utmost."

Auntie Gu brought wine for them and then took out a quantity of small change which she gave to Lungs, saying: "Please would you take this and share it among the people at the gaol so that they will treat my cousins well."

Lungs took the money and thanked her and then went back to the gaol to distribute it. Of this no more.

As for Auntie Gu and Blackface, here is how their discussion went.

"What's your plan to save my cousins?" Auntie Gu asked.

"That Squire Mao has money and influence," said Blackface. "If he's had your cousins thrown into prison it won't end there. He'll definitely want to destroy them; they're certain to die under his orders. It's going to be difficult to save them, unless we can get them out of the prison."

"Let's go then, right away," said Auntie Gu.

"My goodness, you are impetuous! We've got to plan ahead. Once we get them out of gaol, there's got to be some route for them to take. Unless my elder brother helps us, and a couple of others, the thing's not going to work."

"Who are these others?" Auntie Gu asked.

"They're an uncle and nephew, a pair of fanatical gamblers called Zou Yuan and Zou Run. I have just seen them in Dengyun Mountain valley, where they've collected together a band of robbers. They're good friends of mine, and with their help I think we can manage it."

"That's not far," said Auntie Gu. "You'd better go tonight and ask them to come here and discuss it."

"I'll go right away," said Blackface. "You can prepare some food and drink while I go and invite them here."

Auntie Gu told her people to kill a pig, prepare some plates of dried fruit to accompany the wine, and set the tables. Blackface returned at dusk with a pair of stalwarts in tow. The senior was called Zou Yuan and he was from Laizhou. From his youth he had loved gambling and had grown up somewhat idle, but he was loyal and generous and he had, what is more, notable martial skills and a proud spirit: he wouldn't give way to anyone. Among the rivers and lakes he was known as the Forester. The second, who was his nephew, was called Zou Run. He was about the same age as his uncle, and both men were about equal in a fight. He was tall and well built. He had a strange birthmark: a prominent lump on the top of his head. Due to this people called him Rhinoceros. He was very much inclined to pick a fight with people. When angry he would butt people with his head. Once he actually butted a pine tree standing beside a mountain stream and knocked it down, to the amazement of the onlookers.

Auntie Gu asked them to come inside and sit down. She told them what had happened, and they discussed plans for breaking into the gaol.

The Forester said: "Although I've got around ninety men, there are only about twenty I have confidence in. If we do this, it won't be safe to stay around here afterwards. I've got somewhere to go to — I've been intending to go for quite a while. Would you two be prepared to go with me?"

Auntie Gu said: "I'll go anywhere with you, so long as we can rescue my cousins."

"They're doing extremely well at the moment in the Marshes of Mount Liang," the Forester said. "Song Jiang welcomes good people into the company. I know three people there under his command: one is Panther Yang Lin, another is Deng Fei or Redeye and the third is Shi Yong, the Guv. They've all been members for some time. How d'you say if after rescuing your cousins we all go and join the company on Mount Liang?"

"That's fine," said Auntie Gu. "If there's anyone who doesn't want to, I'll take my spear and stick it through him myself."

"There's just one thing," said the Forester. "If we get them out, there are government troops in Dengzhou and I'm afraid they're going to come after us. What are we going to do about that?"

"My brother is commander of the troops in Dengzhou," said Blackface. "He's the only one in the city that really counts for anything right now. Every time bandits have approached, he's always been the one that routed them. He's made a name for himself. Tomorrow I'll go and ask him to join us. If he agrees there'll be no problem."

The Forester said: "But he might object to becoming an outlaw."

"I know how to persuade him," said Blackface.

They went on drinking half the night and slept till it was daylight. Then, having persuaded the two outlaws to stay, Blackface told a servant to get a couple of others and a cart and go to the barracks in town and ask for his brother, Colonel Sun, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Yue. They were to give them this message: "Our mistress is gravely ill, please come back to see her."

"Say only that I'm gravely ill and have something important to tell them," Auntie Gu admonished them. "Say they must come because it may be their last chance to hear what I have to say."

The servants went off, pushing the cart. Blackface placed himself in front of the door, to await his brother. At supper time the cart was seen approaching, bearing Mrs. Yue. Behind came Colonel Sun on horseback and a dozen or so soldiers, all heading for the third milestone. Blackface went inside to tell Auntie Gu. "My brother and sister-in-law are coming," he said.

"Do exactly as I said," said Auntie Gu.

Blackface went out to receive the visitors. He invited his sister-in-law to leave the cart and step inside to see his sick wife.

Colonel Sun dismounted and strode through the gate. He made an impressive figure: pale yellowish complexion, cheeks adorned with a luxuriant growth of whiskers, immense stature. His true name was Sun Li, but he was also nicknamed the Bilious Marshal, on account of his colour. He was a fine shot with the bow and a masterful horseman; his weapons were the long spear and a long steel whip, which now hung from his wrist, supple as a jointed bamboo and deadly as the gleam in a tiger's eye. Barbarians on distant shores surrendered the moment they saw him.

"What exactly is the matter with my sister-in-law?" he asked as he entered.

"Her illness is very strange, please come inside and talk," Blackface replied. He told some of his people to take the soldiers to the back and give them something to eat and drink, and to look after the Colonel's horse. Then he ushered his brother and sister-in-law into an inner room and asked them to be seated. After a little while he said: "Brother and sister-in-law, please come to see my wife."

They followed him into the sickroom, but there they found no patient. "But where is she?" Colonel Sun asked. As he spoke Auntie Gu entered the room, with the Forester and Rhinoceros at her heels. Colonel Sun asked: "Goodness me, is there really something the matter with you, sister-in-law?"

"Greetings, brother-in-law," she said. "I am infected with a need to rescue my cousins."

"How extraordinary!" said Colonel Sun. "To rescue what cousins?"

"It's no good pretending to be deaf and dumb," she said. "You're there in the city, you don't mean to say you don't know those two are my cousins, and therefore relatives of yours too?"

"I really don't understand," said Colonel Sun. "What two are you talking about?"

"With all due respect," she said, "I have to speak bluntly because it's so urgent. Those two, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, Snake and Scorpion, have fallen into a trap set by Squire Mao of Dengyun Mountain and the clerk of the court, Wang, who are plotting against their lives. I have just made a plan with these two gentlemen, to go to town and break into the gaol to rescue them. After that we'll all go to Mount Liang and join the outlaws. I'm afraid there's going to be a big to-do, and you may well be implicated. That's why I pretended to be ill, so I could get you here and tell you the whole story. If you don't want to go with us we shall go to Mount Liang on our own. But the way things are nowadays at court, those who clear off escape without consequences, whereas those who remain pay the penalty. As the proverb says: 'Who's closest to the fire is the first to get burnt.' If you get sentenced and sent to prison because of us, there won't be anyone to take you food or look after you. So what do you propose to do?"

Colonel Sun said: "But I am an officer of the Dengzhou army, how can I do something like that!"

"If you won't, then it's got to be either you or me," she said, producing two swords that were by her side. At the same time the Forester and Rhinoceros drew their short swords.

"Wait, sister-in-law!" Colonel Sun cried. "Don't be so hasty. Wait till I've had a chance to consider all the consequences. I must think it over." Mrs. Yue, frightened out of her wits, went on screaming for a long time.

Auntie Gu said: "If you refuse to come with us, send sister-in-law away first, then we can get down to it."

Colonel Sun said: "If that's what we're going to do, let me go home first and pack some things and check up on what you told me, before we set out."

"Brother-in-law, it was one of your Yue relations who told us all this. Whilst we go and break into the gaol, you can go and do your packing, but make it quick."

Colonel Sun took a deep breath and said: "If this is what you've all decided, I don't see how I can refuse. I don't see why I should have to pay the penalty afterwards instead ofyou. Okay, okay, okay, let's just make our plans and then go."

The Forester was first told to go back to the camp on Dengyun Mountain to collect his valuables and horses, and bring the twenty or so men who were trustworthy to join them at the inn. When he had left, Blackface was sent into town to ask Lungs for the latest news. He would agree a time with Lungs for the raid, and ask him to secretly inform Snake and Scorpion.

Next day when the Forester had collected some money from his camp he returned with his men to lend a hand. There were also seven or eight trusted servants at Blackface's, so that together with the twenty soldiers Colonel Sun had brought they now had a force of more than forty. Blackface slaughtered two pigs and a sheep and everyone feasted. Auntie Gu, having concealed a sharp knife on her person and dressed herself up as a serving woman, left first. Blackface with Colonel Sun and the Forester with his nephew Rhinoceros made up two parties, each accompanied by the men they had brought. Then it was:

*Hunting a tiger becomes tiger-hunting;*
*Wicked officials had better watch their step.*
*Hard iron cuts through the effects of bribery*
*An attack on the gaol takes the lid off the pot.*

Back in Dengzhou gaol, Chief Warder Bao, bribed with Squire Mao's gifts, was continuing to do all he could to bring about the death of the two brothers. Lungs, meanwhile, was standing staff of office in hand beside the stone lion at the prison gate, when someone rang the bell. "Who is it?" he asked.

"The woman with the food," Auntie Gu replied.

After taking a look, Lungs opened the gate to let Auntie Gu in. He closed it behind her and led her down the corridor. Chief Warder Bao, who was sitting in the central pavilion, saw them and shouted: "Who is that woman? Who told her she could bring food in here? Nothing is supposed to get in here, not even the wind."

"It's a relative of Snake's and Scorpion's. She's bringing food for them."

"Don't let her into the cell," Chief Warder Bao bellowed. "You people take the stuff in yourselves."

Lungs took the food from her. He opened the cell door and gave it to the brothers. "That business you told us about yesterday," they asked, "how did it go?"

"Your cousin has come," he said. "You'll see her soon." He unlocked their fetters for them. At this moment another underling ran in and reported: "Colonel Sun is at the gate, he wants to come in."

"He's the garrison commander," Bao said. "What the devil is he doing in my prison? Don't open."

Auntie Gu now wandered into the central pavilion. Outside someone was shouting: "Colonel Sun is getting impatient. He keeps banging on the door."

Chief Warder Bao angrily started to go out. Shouting "Where are my brothers?" Auntie Gu drew out two gleaming knives. Bao realized trouble was coming and started to run for it. The brothers had lifted off their cangues and slipped out of their cell. They ran straight into the Chief Warder. Bao had no time to react. With one blow of the cangue, Scorpion smashed in his skull. Meanwhile Auntie Gu had got to work and had stuck four or five gaolers through. All shouting together they fought their way out of the gaol. Outside Colonel Sun and Blackface had stopped two of the guards escaping, but four others emerged and went racing off towards the government offices. But the Forester and Rhinoceros were just emerging from the government offices holding up the head of Wang, the clerk of the court. People fled screaming from the streets, as Colonel Sun rode out, grasping his bow with an arrow fitted and ready. The householders had all bolted their doors and didn't dare venture out. None of the policemen, when they saw it was Colonel Sun, had a mind to interfere. The Colonel, with his men around him, charged out of the city gates and headed for the third milestone. Mrs. Yue was helped into a cart, Auntie Gu mounted a horse, and they were ready to start. But Snake and Scorpion said: "How can we let that villain Squire Mao get away with such an injustice and not pay him back?"

"You're right," said Colonel Sun. He told his brother, Blackface, and Lungs to go on ahead, escorting the cart and said the rest of them would catch them up later. Blackface and Lungs accordingly set off, escorting the cart.

Led by Colonel Sun, Snake and Scorpion, together with the Forester and Rhinoceros and half the troops, rode towards Squire Mao's. It so happened that Mao Zhongyi and his father were having a drink in celebration of the latter's birthday, so they were totally unprepared. With ferocious yells the party charged inside and killed everyone, Squire Mao, his son, and all the household, young and old. Not a soul was left living. In a bedroom they discovered a dozen bags of gold and silver and valuables, and from the stables they took seven or eight good horses, and four pack horses. Snake and Scorpion picked out some good clothes for themselves, and then they set fire to the manor and burnt it down. Then they mounted again. Within ten miles they had caught up with the cart and its escort, and they all rode on together. From landowners along the way they took four or five more horses. They continued on towards Mount Liang by night.

There are some lines which say:

*On the one hand loyalty, virtue and independence of spirit; on the other hand debauchery, venality and unpatriotic behaviour. Evil natures, vile fortune and abuse of office heap sorrows upon good men. A shameful plot to steal a tiger gives rise to a scheme to break open the gaol. In a trice the city's bitterness turns to a sea of corpses.*

In a few days they reached the Guv's inn. When the Forester saw the Guv he asked about Panther and Redeye. The Guv informed him how Song Jiang had gone to attack Zhu Castle and they had both gone with him. Two attempts to take the castle had failed, and it had been reported that Panther and Redeye had both been taken captive there, but it was not known what had become of them. He also told how the three Brothers Zhu were said to be assisted by an instructor known as Ironstaff, which was why the second attempt had failed. Colonel Sun grinned broadly when he heard this. "We have all come here because we want to join the company, but since we have done nothing to win acceptance, I'd like to offer you a plan for taking Zhu Castle. Do you think this could be our joining present?"

The Guv was delighted. "I can't wait to hear this plan," he said.

"That Ironstaff," Colonel Sun began, "had the same arms instructor as I did. All that I learnt about spearsmanship he knows too; all that he learnt about martial arts, I know through and through. Now, suppose we say we are a company that has been posted from Dengzhou to the garrison at Yunzhou and that I wanted to see him as we pass through. He is bound to come out and receive me. When we get inside I'll get him to collaborate and that will settle the whole thing. How about that?"

Colonel Sun had hardly finished explaining his plan to the Guv when a guard appeared and reported: "The Professor is coming down the mountain on his way to Zhu Castle to reinforce our troops."

As soon as he heard this the Guv told the man to go back quickly and ask the Professor to come and see them. Before he'd even finished speaking, a body of troops halted in front of the inn: they were led by the Halberdier, the Little Duke and the three Ruan brothers. Immediately behind them was the Professor, with five hundred troops, cavalry and foot. The Guv took them into the inn and introduced everyone, explaining that they wanted to join the company and were presenting a plan.

The Professor was delighted. "Since you are all prepared to join us in the mountain stronghold, I suggest that instead of going up the mountain right now, you be so good as to come with us to Zhu Castle so we may bring this meritorious business to a successful conclusion. What do you say?"

Colonel Sun and the rest of his party were happy to agree to this.

The Professor said: "I shall start at once. Let this be our plan: my troops will go first and you will all follow on behind as quickly as possible."

Accordingly the Professor reached Song Jiang's camp first. He found Song Jiang's plunged in gloom, his expression morose. The Professor produced some wine to lighten his comrade's mood and then told him what the Guv, Panther and Redeye all knew, that Colonel Sun, commander of the Dengzhou garrison and the Zhu Castle arms instructor, Ironstaff, both had the same master; and that the eight leaders who would be arriving shortly wanted to join the company of Mount Liang, and were offering to set up this scheme as their joining present. It had been decided to launch a conspiracy within the castle and after the business had been settled this way they would come to meet Song Jiang. When he had heard all this through, Song Jiang's joy knew no bounds, his gloom evaporated. He immediately ordered wine to be prepared to welcome the newcomers.

Colonel Sun ordered his company, with the cart, the troops and the horses, to halt somewhere and wait while he himself took Snake, Scorpion, the Forester, Rhinoceros, Blackface, Auntie Gu and Lungs, a party of eight, to see Song Jiang. After the greeting ceremonies, Song Jiang offered them all wine and a banquet. Of this no more.

The Professor gave everyone secret orders: what to do on the third day, what to do on the fifth day and so on. When they all had their orders, Colonel Sun and the others left as had been agreed, with the cart, troops and horses in a long line, heading for Zhu Castle to set the plan in motion. Meanwhile the Professor said, "I want the Magic Messenger to go to the mountain stronghold and fetch four of the leaders for me. I've some urgent business for them." If he had not sent the Magic Messenger post haste to the mountain to fetch these 4, things would have been very different:

*In the Marshes, they'd have had to grow new wings;*
*Many a post would have fallen vacant on the Mountain.*

"THE favorable opportunity lies in this," said Wu Yong, "that our Shi Yong has introduced to our band a man who is a personal friend of Luan Tingyu of the Zhu Family Village. This new recruit knows that you did not succeed in attacking this village, and has suggested a plan of attack. He is now on his way here and in five days his plan will be carried out. What do you think of that?"

Song Jiang was much pleased upon hearing this.

Now at Dengzhou in Shandong there were two hunters Xie Zhen and Xie Bao who were very skillful in the use of the trident. Of all the hunters in that district they were the best. Xie Zhen was known as "Double Headed Snake," while Xie Bao had a nickname "Double Tailed Scorpion." Both of them had neither father, mother, or wife. They were both over seven feet in height, had broad shoulders, small ordinary waists, and brown complexions. Xie Bao had a rough temper, and at times would "shake heaven and earth."
The officials had issued a proclamation that the hunters would be held responsible for killing the tigers in Dengzhou, and if they did not kill the tigers in due time they would be punished. These two hunters had received the order and had prepared poisoned arrows, and then proceeding to the mountains where the tigers were known to be they hid themselves in a tree to wait for the tiger. After waiting there a whole day they returned home without having seen or even heard the tiger. They did this again the following day with the same result. At about 3 A.M. on the third day they again waited in a tree and were so tired that they leaned against each other and fell asleep. They had not yet closed their eyes when they were awakened by a sound of their trap, and springing up they looked around, and saw a big tiger writhing on the ground with the poisoned arrow sticking in its body. Seizing their tridents they ran forward, but the tiger seeing the hunters ran off carrying the poisoned arrow in its body. They followed it. The poison however was taking effect, and very soon the tiger roared loudly and sinking to the ground rolled down the hillside.
Xie Bao recognized the place down below as the garden of an Old Mao. They went down the hillside, and knocked at the door of the farmstead. It was now daylight and upon being admitted they explained to Old Mao that they had come to take the tiger in his garden they had shot that morning. Old Mao agreed to this, but as he was afraid they were hungry after their nights work he invited them to take food and wine with him, and then go and look for the wounded tiger. They agreed to this and after the meal Old Mao took two of his men, and went with the hunters into the garden, but although they looked everywhere they found no tiger. Old Mao suggested that the hunters had made a mistake as there was no tiger. Xie Bao, however, pointed to a spot where the grass had all been leveled, and there were marks of blood of the tiger on the ground. "It looks as though someone had moved away the tiger," he said.
"Do not make such statements," said Old Mao. "My farm servants did not know anything about a tiger being here, so how could they have had anything to do in the matter? You noticed that when we entered the garden the lock on the gate was rusty and we had to break open the gate. I also came with you to look for the tiger."
"Sir, you must hand the tiger over to us so that we can take it to the *yamen* and get the reward."
"What you say is quite unreasonable," said Old Mao. "Your statements are not correct in suggesting that I have taken the tiger away."
"Why should we make false charges?" asked Xie Bao. "Evidently you have taken the tiger, and sent it to the *yamen* so as to get the reward yourself. We shall be beaten by the magistrate."
"That is not my business," said Old Mao.
"Well, will you let us search your buildings?"
"I cannot agree to that. You, a couple of beggars, now have no decency," said Old Mao.
The brothers became angry, and began to damage his things by force.
Old Mao called out: "The Xies are plundering in broad daylight!" Seeing that an ambush was lying in the farmstead, the brothers left the yard saying that they would bring a charge against him in the *yamen*. They had not gone far when they saw the son of Old Mao on horseback with a group of men, and upon their explaining what had happened he said that some mistake had been made, and asked them to go back to the farmstead with him. They agreed to do this, but upon getting inside the gate of the farmyard the brothers were seized by the farm laborers by order of the son.
The son then said that the previous day they had shot a tiger themselves. He would hand the hunters over to the *yamen* for making false claims and trying to make trouble.
Old Mao had the brothers bound with ropes, and sent them to the *yamen* for trial. At the *yamen* the case was dealt with by a recorder named Wang Zheng who was a son-in-law of Old Mao, and he reported the case to the Prefect who ordered the two brothers to be beaten for making false claims. In order to avoid the punishment the brothers made a forced confession. They were then put under heavy cangues and sent to prison. Old Mao and his son talked matters over, and agreed that they could not feel safe until the hunters died in prison so they went to see Wang Zheng, and said they wished the case dealt with more thoroughly, and were willing to bribe the Prefect themselves.
The jailer Bao Ji was also bribed with the request to kill the two prisoners. But the under-jailer was a cousin by marriage to the Xies and disclosed the plot against the brothers, although they had never met before. The name of the jailer was Yue He, and his nickname was "Iron Flute." He was well skilled in all military drill, and also in the use of the spear. He knew that the prisoners were good men suffering from gross injustice, so he decided to assist them in escaping. He told them that the head jailer had received a bribe to put them to death. Xie Zhen then asked the under-jailer to take a letter to his aunt's daughter, married to Sun Xin, who was called Sister-in-law Gu Dasao, and who kept an inn outside the East Gate. She was very kind to both the prisoners, and upon the matter being explained to her she would make arrangements to rescue them.
Yue He agreed to do this and asking another under-jailer to take his duty he slipped out of the prison, and duly told Gu Dasao, the "Tigress," the story, and asked her to rescue the two prisoners.
She considered the situation bad, and sent a servant for her husband Sun Xin whose nickname was "Young General." This was a powerful man, very skillful with the iron bludgeon and the spear. He soon arrived, and upon being informed of the trouble he asked Yue He to return to the jail, and they would think of some plan of helping the prisoners to escape. He gave Yue He some money to distribute among the other jailers, and the latter then went back to the jail.
Sun Xin said that to rescue the prisoners he must go to bring two of his friends. He went straight away, and that evening returned with them. One was Zou Yuan, noted for his honesty and generosity. Because of his fearless disposition he was called the "Forest Dragon." The other one was Zou Run, the "Horned Dragon," and he got this nickname through once having knocked down a fir tree with his head. Zou Run upon hearing the details said he had only twenty loyal followers and after attacking the jail and releasing the two prisoners, the district would not be safe for them to stay in and they must all of them make straight for the refuge at Liangshan Marsh. He said he knew the leaders at that place.
Gu Dasao thought it an excellent plan, and said she would kill any man who would not go with them.
"But there is still one doubtful point," said Zou Run. "If we are pursued by cavalry what shall we do?"
Sun Xin said he had a plan and the next day he went to see his elder brother Major Sun Li who had charge of the cavalry in the town, and by threatening to use force Gu Dasao, the "Tigress," made him agree to join with them in their plots, and afterwards go with them to Liangshan Marsh.
The following day Yue He was near the entrance to the jail when he heard the doorbell ringing. He asked who was there, and Gu Dasao gave her name, and said she had brought some food for a prisoner. He knew her object, and admitted her. The jailer Bao Ji had been liberally bribed by Old Mao, and when he was told by Yue He that the woman was a relative of Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, and had brought food for them, he said the food must be left at the gate to be sent in to the prisoners. So Yue He took the food into the inner prison, and handed it to the two prisoners. He told them who had brought it, and said they would soon meet her. He then unlocked the bolt which fastened them to their beds. Just then he heard at the gate an attendant jailer report that Major Sun was at the gate waiting to enter. The jailer Bao Ji replied, "He is in command of troops. What does he want in my prison? Don't open the door."
Now Madame Sun had got near Bao Ji. Again a voice outside the room called out, "Major Sun is outside, and insists upon being admitted."
Jailer Bao Ji was very annoyed at this, and came out of the room. Gu Dasao asked him in a loud voice, "Where are my brothers?" She took two swords out of her belt, and threatened jailer Bao Ji. He understood the situation, and walked away. He had not gone far before he met the two prisoners Xie Zhen and Xie Bao who had both got rid of their cangues. Jailer Bao Ji was unarmed, and picking up a piece of cangue Xie Bao hit him on the head, and brained him. Gu Dasao had already killed about three jailers and now joined the two prisoners and Yue He. Going to the prison gate they opened it, and they all set off. The people closed their doors, and those policemen or soldiers who were about, seeing Major Sun in charge of the party, did not dare even ask a question. The party duly left the town, and reached Major Sun's home.
There Major Sun's wife got in a cart, and Gu Dasao mounted a horse. Sun Xin and Yue He went with the women as guard while Major Sun, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, and the men went off in another direction to have revenge on Old Mao who was the cause of all this trouble. Upon reaching the farm they killed him and his son, and then took all the valuables available. They found eight horses in the stables, and loaded four of them with the valuables, and saddled the others for riding. They then set fire to the farm buildings.
They soon caught up to the cart, and all proceeded on their way to Liangshan Marsh.
Upon reaching the inn kept by Shi Yong they were told of the defeat at the Zhu Family Village and that the enemy had three great warriors on their side.
When Major Sun heard this he laughed, and said, "We are going to join these heroes, but we have not done any meritorious service yet. But if we now go and help in the attack on that village we shall be in a much better position to be admitted to Liangshan Marsh. Now I know all the same military drill as Luan Tingyu, as he and I were taught by the same teacher in those matters. I will go and say that I was just passing his village on official business, and he will admit me. While inside we can easily act in concert with the heroes outside." He had hardly finished saying this when **a** man reported that Wu Yong was leaving Liangshan Marsh to go to join Song Jiang. Shi Yong at once told the man to ask Wu Yong to come immediately to that inn as there was a very important matter for discussion. This was done, and very soon Wu Yong arrived with about five hundred men.
After the strangers had been introduced by Shi Yong and their object explained, Wu Yong was pleased, and urged that they should at once join with them in an attack on the Zhu Family Village. As they agreed to this he said that he would ride in advance, and announce the arrangement to Song Jiang and the other leaders. Upon arriving at the camp he found Song Jiang with a melancholy expression. He told him of the new recruits, and mentioned that one of them Major Sun was taught by the same teacher as Luan Tingyu of the opponent village, and that he was prepared to enter that village as a friend, but would act in concert with the attackers outside.
Song Jiang was much pleased to hear of this, and ordered a feast for the new recruits.
Wu Yong arranged the plans, and explained them to the leaders under strict secrecy. Having received the instructions, Major Sun departed with the new recruits for the Zhu Family Village while Dai Zong was instructed to go to Liangshan Marsh to bring four other leaders.

The eagle old on Liangshan Marsh
Receives new wings to help its flight;
At the mountain stronghold
A renovation will be in sight.

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## The Professor Wu Yong Uses & carries out a Double Linked Plan; Song Jiang's 3rd Attack on the Zhu Family Manor/Castle & Village

"I want Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan, the Master Hand Xiao Rang, Hou Jian the Long-Armed Ape and the Jade-Armed Craftsman Jin Dajian," said Wu Yong. "Tell them to bring their tools and come down the mountain tonight. I need them."
Dai Zong departed.
A soldier posted outside the camp entered and reported: "Hu Cheng, from the Hu Family Manor in the west, is here with gifts of cattle and wine. He asks to see you."
Song Jiang said to invite him in. Hu Cheng approached the tent in the center of camp, kowtowed, and offered a sincere plea.
"My sister is young and untutored. In a moment of rudeness she offended you and your generals captured her. I'm here to beg forgiveness. It is because she has been pledged to a son of the Zhu Family that she displayed a misplaced valor and landed in captivity. If you will release her, whatever you require you have only to command and I will deliver."
"Please be seated," said Song Jiang. "That Zhu Family are boors. They're always picking on the people of our mountain stronghold. For that reason we've come with armed forces to avenge ourselves. We have nothing against the Hu Family. Your sister and her men seized our Stumpy Tiger Wang. And so we returned the compliment and captured her. Give Wang back to us and you can have your sister."
"Though we didn't expect it, the Zhu Family have already taken him."
"Where is he now?" Wu Yong asked.
"Locked up in their manor. I don't dare ask for him."
"If you don't return the Stumpy Tiger, how can we release your sister?" Song Jiang said.
"Don't talk like that, brother," Wu Yong urged. "Let me say a few words. Sooner or later the Zhu Family is going to have an alarm. Don't send people from your manor to help them. If any of them try to take refuge with you, tie them up and bring them here. When you do that, we'll return your sister. She's not in this camp. We sent her to our mountain fortress the other day and entrusted her to the care of Squire Song. You needn't worry. We have a plan."
"I wouldn't dare go to the aid of the Zhu Family. Should any of their people seek refuge with me, I'll bind them and bring them here to you."
"If you do that," said Song Jiang, "it will be worth more to us than any gold or brocade."
Hu Cheng thanked them and left.
We'll tell now of Sun Li who changed his banner to read: *Sun Li Major of the Dengzhou Garrison*. He arrived at the rear gate of the Zhu Family Manor with his company of men and horses. The soldiers on the walls, seeing the banner, reported to their leaders.
"He's like a brother to me. Since childhood we learned to play with weapons from the same teacher," Luan Tingyu said to the three sons of the Zhu Family. "I wonder what he's doing here."
Luan opened the manor gate, lowered the drawbridge, and rode out with twenty men to welcome him. Sun Li and his company dismounted. They exchanged greetings.
"I thought you're with the Dengzhou garrison," said Luan. "What are you doing in these parts?"
"The high command has transferred me here to Yunzhou Prefecture to defend the cities and town against the bandits of Liangshan Marsh. We were passing by and I knew that you were with the Zhu Family Manor, so I came to see how you are. We intended to approach your front gate, but the village entry was full of troops and cavalry. I didn't want to disturb them. I came along the paths through the hamlets to the rear gate to pay my respects."
"We've had one clash after another with those bandits the last few days. We've already caught several of their leaders. When we get Song Jiang, their chief, we'll turn them all over to the authorities. How fortunate we are that you've come to protect us! You'll be like 'flowery stitches on brocade,' like 'rain to parched sprouts.' "
Sun Li smiled. "I have no talent. But I can assist you to nab those rogues, so that your worthy goal will be achieved."
Luan was delighted. He led them into the manor, pulled up the drawbridge and bolted the gate. Sun Li and his party changed into fresh clothes and were presented in the main hall to Lord Zhu and his three sons. After courtesies were exchanged, Luan addressed Zhu: "My brother Sun Li is known as the Sickly General. He was major of the Dengzhou garrison, but the high command has just transferred him here to protect Yunzhou."
"I too shall be under your supervision," said Lord Zhu.
"Scarcely that, with my lowly rank. I shall be looking forward to constant enlightenment by you, and your instructions."
The three sons invited the guests to be seated.
"You must be weary, after several days of fighting," Sun Li said to them.
"There's been no decisive battle as yet," said the Dragon. "But you brothers must be tired from your long journey in the saddle."
Sun Li instructed his wife and Gu Dasao to go to the rear chambers and pay their respects to the female members of the household. Then he summoned Sun Xin, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, and presented them.
"These three are my brothers," he said. He pointed at Yue Ho. "This is the officer sent from Yunzhou to fetch me." Indicating Zou Yuan and Zou Run, he said: "These two are army officers from Dengzhou."
Zhu and his three sons were clever. But Sun Li had come with women and children, luggage and carts. What's more, he was an old friend of Luan Tingyu. Why should they suspect him? They ordered that cows and horses be slaughtered and a feast be laid, after which the guests were wined and dined.
A day or two later a soldier of the manor reported: "Song Jiang is sending another force against us."
"I'll go and take that robber personally," said Tiger Cub. He left the manor, lowered the drawbridge and led forth a hundred mounted men.
Ahead were five hundred fighters, on horse and on foot. The chieftain in their lead was equipped with a bow and arrows. Twirling his lance, he urged his beast forward. It was Hua Rong.
When Tiger Cub saw him he spurred his mount, levelled his lance and charged. Hua Rong galloped towards Tiger Cub. Before Lone Dragon Cliff they fought a dozen rounds, with neither vanquishing the other. Hua Rong executed a feint, turned and moved off. Tiger Cub was about to give chase when one of his cohorts recognized his opponent.
"Don't pursue him, general. He might strike you a sneak blow," the man called. "He's a crack archer."
Tiger Cub reined his animal to a halt, then led his party back into the manor and raised the drawbridge. Hua Rong and his contingent were last seen riding away. Tiger Cub dismounted in front of the main hall and went to the rear chambers for food and drink.
"Did you catch any robbers today, young general?" Sun Li asked.
"Among those louts was some Hua Rong or other, a first-rate man with the lance. We fought fifty rounds, then he withdrew. I wanted to go after him, but my soldiers said he's fantastic with the bow and arrow. So I brought my company back."
"Though I'm not very capable, in a day or so I'll nab him and few of his gang."
At the feast that day Sun Li had Yue Ho sing a few ballads, to the pleasure of the assembled diners. In the evening the gathering broke up, and all retired for the night.
A manor soldier suddenly reported, around noon of the fourth day: "Song Jiang's forces are coming at us again."
The three sons of the Zhu Family donned their armor and went outside the manor gate. They could hear the crash of gongs and the thunder of drums in the distance. The shouting foe, banners waving, had spread out in battle formation. Lord Zhu took his seat in the tower atop the gate. To his left was Luan Tingyu, to his right was Major Sun Li. The three sons and the men Sun Li had brought were arrayed before the gate.
From the enemy position Panther Head Lin Chong shouted imprecations. Stung, the Dragon yelled for the drawbridge to be lowered. He took his lance, mounted, and rode forth with two hundred foot soldiers and cavalry. They galloped, shouting, towards Lin Chong. In the gatehouse the big drums pounded, and the two sides winged arrows against each other.
Lin Chong raised his long, serpent lance and engaged the Dragon in combat. Thirty rounds they fought, with neither being the victor. On each side gongs crashed, and both contestants withdrew.
The Tiger was enraged. Sabre in hand, he climbed into the saddle and raced upon the field, shouting his challenge: "Song Jiang, fight to a finish!"
Before the sound of his voice had died away, a rider emerged from the opposite ranks. Mu Hong the Unrestrained had come to do battle. The two fought for thirty rounds, again with no result. Tiger Cub was furious. Seizing his lance he flew onto his horse, and galloped forth with two hundred cavalrymen.
Yang Xiong the Pallid, astride his steed, lance in hand, charged from the Song Jiang position to meet him. Now the two sides were locked in slashing combat and Sun Li could restrain himself no longer.
"Get my ridged rod," he called to his brother Sun Xin. "And my armor, helmet and robe."

He put on his equipment and let out his own horse, known as the Piebald Steed. Heaving the saddle on its back, he tightened the three girths, hung the tiger-eyed, ridged steel rod from his wrist, grasped his lance, and mounted. To the accompaniment of crashing gongs from the Zhu Family Manor, Sun Li rode onto the field.
Lined up opposite on the other side, their animals reined in motionless, were Lin Chong, Mu Hong and Yang Xiong. "I'll take those rogues," Sun Li exclaimed as he cantered forward. Pulling his beast to a halt, he shouted: "If there's a good fighter among you thieving scoundrels, let him come forward and battle with me to the death!"
A rider galloped out, bridle bells tinkling. Everyone stared. It was Shi Xiu the Rash. The gap between the horses narrowed, and the two lances met. Fifty rounds the contestants fought. Sun Li feinted, letting Shi Xiu close in and thrust. Agilely, he dodged, yanked Shi Xiu from the saddle, carried him under one arm to the front of the manor, and dumped him on the ground.
"Tie him up," he shouted.
Meanwhile, the three sons had thrown Song Jiang's forces into disarray, scattering and driving them off.
The three sons gathered their men and returned to the foot of the gate tower. They clasped their hands together and bowed to Sun Li respectfully.
"How many robbers have been captured so far?" Sun Li asked.
"The first one we caught was Shi Qian," Lord Zhu volunteered. "Then we took the spy Yang Lin. Later we captured Huang Xin. Ten Feet of Steel of the Hu Family Manor caught Stumpy Tiger Wang. Two more were taken on the battlefield—Qin Ming and Deng Fei. Today, you, sir, captured Shi Xiu. The lout burned down my inn. That makes a total of seven."
"Don't hurt any of them. Build seven cage carts, quickly. But give them food and wine, keep them in good health. It would look bad if we starved them. Later, when we've taken Song Jiang, we'll deliver them all to the Eastern Capital. Everyone will know your fame, and will sing the praises of the three sons of the Zhu Family."
Lord Zhu thanked him. "We are fortunate to have your help, Major. The Liangshan Marsh gang is doomed."
He invited Sun Li to a feast in the rear hall. Shi Xiu was locked in a cage cart.
Hear me, gentle reader: Shi Xiu's skill with weapons was in no way inferior to Sun Li's. But to fool the Zhu Family he let himself be taken. This caused the manor people to trust the major completely. Sun Li secretly instructed Zou Yuan, Zou Run and Yue Ho to check the number of doors in the rear building. At the sight of them, Yang Lin and Deng Fei were pleased. Seeing that no one was around, Yue Ho softly told the prisoners of the latest developments. Gu Dasao and Madame Yue, in the compound's interior, looked over the entrances and exits of the living quarters.
On the fifth day, Sun Li and the others strolled around the manor. Shortly after breakfast a soldier reported: "Song Jiang has divided his forces into four columns and is advancing to attack."
"Even if he had ten columns, what would it matter?" said Sun Li to the Zhu Family. "Tell your underlings not to be alarmed, but just get ready. First, conceal a party with hooks and snares. We want live prisoners. Dead ones are no use."
The men of the manor donned their armor, and Lord Zhu went with a group to watch from the gate tower. To the east they could see a body of men and horses approaching, led by Panther Head Lin Chong. Behind him were Li Jun and Ruan the Second, and five hundred fighters on horse and on foot. From the west another five hundred were coming, with Hua Rong in the lead, followed by Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun. Due south were five hundred more, commanded by Mu Hong the Unrestrained, Yang Xiong the Pallid, and Black Whirlwind Li Kui. In every direction infantry and cavalry were advancing, battle drums pounding in unison, shouts rising to the skies.
"Those villains are coming at us in force today," said Luan Tingyu. "We mustn't underestimate them. I shall take a company through the rear gate and deal with the foe to the northwest."
"I shall go through the front gate and fight the eastern foe," said the Dragon.
"I'll also go through the rear gate and take on the enemy attacking from the southwest," said the Tiger.
"I'm going via the front gate to grab Song Jiang," said the Tiger Cub. "He's the chief robber."
Pleased, Lord Zhu rewarded them with cups of wine. All mounted and sallied forth with troops of three hundred cavalry each. Those remaining to guard the manor stood in front of the gate towers and cheered. Zou Yuan and Zou Run had already hidden big axes and were standing near the door of the building which held the prisoners. The Xie brothers, also with concealed weapons, stayed close to the rear gate. Sun Xin and Yue Ho were in position on either side of the front gate. Gu Dasao, after having assigned soldiers to protect Madame Yue, paced with a pair of daggers before the hall, ready to strike at the signal.
Three volleys thundered on the manor drums, a cannon boomed, the front and rear gates swung open, the drawbridges were lowered, and the army surged forth. Four Zhu Family contingents marched to engage the foe.
Sun Li and a dozen men promptly occupied the front bridge. On the gate tower, Sun Li unfurled the original banner. Yue Ho, lance in hand, entered, singing. At the sound of his voice, Zou Yuan and Zou Run whistled several times, shrilly. Swinging their axes, they cut down the few dozen soldiers guarding the temporary prison and broke open the cage carts. The seven released captives seized lances from the weapons racks. When she heard their shouts, Gu Dasao charged into the inner chambers and slaughtered all the women with her daggers. Lord Zhu recognized his danger and ran to jump into a well, but Shi Xiu hacked him down with one blow of his sabre and cut off his head.
The ten or more bold fellows separated to kill the manor soldiers. Near the rear gate the Xie brothers set fire to the haystacks. Black smoke tunneled into the sky. When the attackers saw this, they redoubled their forward drive.
Tiger, seeing the manor ablaze, hastened back. "Where do you think you're going?" shouted Sun Li, and blocked his passage over the bridge. Tiger understood. He turned his steed and galloped toward Song Jiang's position. But Lu Fang and Guo Sheng, waiting with barbed lances, tumbled horse and rider. Brigand fighters swarmed all over him and chopped him to mincemeat. The soldiers in front of the manor scattered, and Sun Li and Sun Xin escorted Song Jiang in.
To the east, the Dragon found he was no match for Lin Chong. He raced his horse to the rear of the manor. But when he reached the back drawbridge he saw the Xie brothers, inside the gate, throwing the bodies of slain vassals into the flames. He pulled his mount hastily around and sped north. Suddenly, he was confronted by Li Kui. Black Whirlwind bounded towards him, whirling his axes and cutting the animal's legs from under it. The Dragon fell helplessly to the ground. With one swing Li Kui split his skull open.
When these happenings were reported to Tiger Cub, he didn't dare return. He hurried to the Hu Family Manor. On the orders of Hu Cheng, vassals seized and bound him. As they were taking him to deliver him to Song Jiang, they met Li Kui, who cut off Tiger Cub's head with a single sweep of his ax. The vassals fled and Li Kui charged towards Hu Cheng. Obviously, it was a bad situation. Hu Cheng raced his steed into the wilderness. Abandoning his home, he rode for his life. He finally took refuge in the prefecture of Yanan. In later years, when order was restored, he became a general.
Black Whirlwind went on killing smoothly. He charged into the Hu Family Manor and slaughtered the old squire and the whole family, young and old. He instructed his men to load the squire's horses with the forty or fifty bundles of loot he collected, then put the manor to the torch and started back with his prizes.
Song Jiang was by then seated in the hall of the Zhu Family Manor, listening to the reports of his chieftains' achievements. They had captured nearly five hundred men and an equal number of good horses, in addition to innumerable cattle and sheep.
Song Jiang was very pleased, although when he thought of Luan Tingyu he sighed regretfully. "What a pity that gallant fellow was killed."
A brigand entered and announced: "Black Whirlwind has burned down the Hu Family Manor and cut off their heads. He's returned to present his booty."
"But Hu Cheng had already surrendered. Who told him to kill those people? Why has he burned their manor?"
Stained with blood, his two axes stuck in his sash, Li Kui entered and hailed Song Jiang respectfully. "I've killed the Dragon and cut down the Tiger Cub," he said. "That lout Hu Cheng got away, but I made a clean sweep of Squire Hu and the entire family. I've come to be commended."
"People saw you kill the Dragon, but why did you kill the others?" demanded Song Jiang.
"I got into the swing of it. I was heading for the Hu Family Manor when I ran into Tiger Cub. I finished him off with one chop. Too bad that oaf Hu Cheng got away, but I killed every single person in his manor."
"You rogue! Who told you to go there? You knew that Hu Cheng came with gifts of cattle and wine the other day and surrendered. Why didn't you listen to me? Why did you take it on yourself to kill his whole family in deliberate violation of my order?"
"Maybe you've forgotten, but I haven't. He also sent his friggin woman to kill you the other day, yet now you're all sympathetic! You're not engaged to his sister. Why should you care about her brother and father?"
"Iron Ox, you're raving! What would I want with her? I have something else in mind. How many live ones have you taken, you swarthy devil?"
"Who's got the patience? Any live one I met, I cut down."
"You've disobeyed my orders. That's a beheading offence! It wipes out the credit you deserve for killing the Dragon and the Tiger Cub. The next time you violate an order I won't forgive you!"
Black Whirlwind grinned. "So I don't get any credit. But all that killing was a real pleasure."
Military Advisor Wu Yong was seen approaching with a company of mounted men. On reaching the manor they drank to Song Jiang and congratulated him. Song Jiang conferred with Wu Yong. He wanted to annihilate the village attached to the manor, but Shi Xiu reminded him of the old man who had been of such help in telling the secret of the paths. "There are many good people like him in the village. They shouldn't be harmed."
Song Jiang instructed Shi Xiu to fetch the old man. Not long after, Shi Xiu brought him to the manor. The oldster kowtowed to Song and Wu Yong. Song Jiang rewarded him with silks and a bag of gold and told him he could remain in the village permanently.
"If it weren't for your kindness we would have obliterated your village," Song Jiang said, "and every family in it. But now, thanks to your meritorious conduct, they all shall be spared."
The old man could only kowtow again.
"I've been worried about you ordinary folk for several days," Song Jiang continued. "Today, we've taken the Zhu Family Manor and rid you of an oppressor. Each family shall receive a load of rice, as a sign of our concern."
He put the old man in charge of distribution. At the same time, he had the manor's surplus grain loaded onto carts. Gold and silver and other valuables he gave as rewards to the leaders and men of his forces. All cattle, sheep, donkeys, horses, and the like were driven off for use in the mountain fortress.
As a result of the capture of the Zhu Family Manor, the brigands obtained five hundred thousand loads of grain. Song Jiang was very pleased.
The chieftains big and small assembled their fighters. Several new leaders were added: Sun Li, Sun Xin, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, Yue Ho and Gu Dasao. Seven gallant men had been rescued.
Sun Li, with his own horses and the valuables he had brought from home, took his wife and followed the main force up the mountain. Local villagers, supporting the old and carrying small children, burned incense and lit festive lanterns, kowtowed and gave thanks, as they saw them off.
Song Jiang and the leaders mounted. The army, divided into three contingents, marched through the night on the return trip to the mountain stronghold.

We'll speak now of Li Ying the Heaven Soaring Eagle who had been resting and recovering from his arrow wound. He kept the gates of the manor closed and did not go out, but he frequently sent men in secret to get news of the Zhu Family Manor. He was both startled and glad to learn that Song Jiang had conquered it.
A vassal entered and reported: "The prefect has come with forty or fifty men to inquire about the Zhu Family Manor."
Li Ying hurriedly ordered Du Xing to open the gate, lower the drawbridge and escort them in. He bound his injured arm in white silk and went out to welcome his callers and invite them into the main hall. The prefect dismounted, entered the hall, and seated himself in the center. His clerk sat by his side. Next were two sheriffs and several captains. At the foot of the platform were many bailiffs and prison guards. Li Ying kowtowed to the prefect and stood before him.
"The slaughter of the Zhu Family, how did that come about?" the prefect demanded.
"Their son the Dragon wounded me in the left arm with an arrow. I've kept my gates closed and have not ventured out. I have no knowledge of the affair."
"Lies! A complain accuses you of complicity with the Liangshan Marsh bandits. You lured out the Zhu forces so that the bandits could break into the manor. The other day you received from them saddle horses, sheep, wine, silks, gold and silver. How can you deny it?"
"I'm a law-abiding man. I'd never accept their gifts."
"I can't believe that. I'm taking you to the prefecture. There, you can confront your accuser and have this out."
At a word from the prefect, the guards seized Li Ying, and the sheriffs and captains tied his arms. The entourage swarmed around the prefect as he mounted his horse.
"Who is the steward Du Xing?" asked the prefect.
"I am that humble person," said Du.
"Your name is also in the complaint. Take him along."
Du was promptly fettered. The party left the manor. With Li Ying and Du Xing under restraint, they marched without halt along the road.
Before they had gone thirty /; Song Jiang, Lin Chong, Hua Rong, Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu suddenly emerged from the edge of the forest and blocked their way. "The gallants of Liangshan Marsh are here together," shouted Lin Chong.
The prefect and his party didn't dare put up a fight. Abandoning Li Ying and Du Xing, they fled. "After them," yelled Song Jiang. Brigands pursued them for a while, then returned.
"We'd have killed that friggin prefect if we'd caught up with him," they reported, "but he got away."
They untied the ropes and opened the fetters on Li Ying and Du Xing, and led forward two horses for them to ride.
"Won't you come and take refuge in our Liangshan Marsh for a time, sir?" said Song Jiang.
"I can't do that," said Li Ying. "You're the ones who tried to kill the prefect. It has nothing to do with me."
Song Jiang smiled. "Do you think the authorities would accept such an argument? Even if we went off without you, you'd still be implicated. You're not willing to become an outlaw, but at least stay in our mountain fortress a few days. As soon as we hear you're in no danger, you can come down again."
Li Ying and Du Xing had no choice, surrounded as they were by a whole army. Divided into three contingents, the force wound its way to Mount Liangshan.
Chao Gai and the others, beating drums and blowing flutes, came down the mountain to welcome them with wine. All repaired to Fraternity Hall and seated themselves fanwise.
Li Ying was introduced to the leaders. After courtesies had been exchanged, he said to Song Jiang: "Du Xing and I have seen you back to your stronghold, General, and have met the leaders. I don't mind staying here for a time, but I'm concerned about my family. I'd like to go down and see."
Wu Yong laughed. "No need, sir. Your family is already here. And your manor has been burned to the ground. What would you go back for?"
Li Ying looked sceptical, until he saw carts and people advancing up the path. They were vassals from his manor and members of his family. He hastened to them.
His wife said: "After you were taken by the prefect, two sheriffs came with four constables and a patrol of three hundred soldiers. They wrapped our belongings into bundles and made us get into carts. They took along all our hampers and livestock, and put the manor to the torch."
Li Ying uttered a cry of lamentation. Chao Gai and Song Jiang apologized. "The truth is that we have long heard of your excellence," they said, "and so we evolved this scheme. We beg your forgiveness."
Since they put it that way, Li Ying had no choice but to comply.
"Please ask your family to rest in a wing of the rear hall," said Song Jiang.
Li Ying observed that many of the chieftains had their wives and children with them. He told his spouse: "We can only obey him."
Song Jiang then invited Li to the front part of the hall for a chat. Everyone was pleased. In a jocular tone, Song said to Li Ying: "I'd like you to meet the two patrol sheriffs and the prefect."
Out stepped Xiao Rang, disguised as the prefect, and Dai Zong and Yang Lin, who had assumed the roles of the sheriffs. Pei Xuan had been the clerk, Jin Dajian and Hou Jian had been the captains. Song Jiang also summoned the four constables. They were Li Jun, Zhang Shun, Ma Lin, and Bai Sheng.
Li Ying gaped at them, speechless.
Song Jiang instructed the lesser chieftains to slaughter cows and horses quickly for a feast both of apology to Li Ying and of celebration over the addition of twelve new leaders: Li Ying, Sun Li, Sun Xin, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, Du Xing, Yue Ho, Shi Qian, Ten Feet of Steel and Gu Dasao. The women leaders had a table of their own in the rear hall with Madame Yue and the female members of Li Ying's family.
All brigands, large and small, were rewarded, and merry pipes and drums sounded in the hall. The bold fellows drank and dined until late. When the festivities ended, the new leaders retired to the quarters assigned to them.
The chieftains were invited to another feast the following day to seek their aid in another matter. Song Jiang called forth Stumpy Tiger Wang and said: "When we were on Clear Winds Mountain I promised you a wife. I haven't forgotten, but I haven't yet fulfilled my pledge. Today, my father has a daughter he'll give to you in marriage."
Song Jiang requested Squire Song to bring the Hu Family girl to the feast.
"My brother Wang Ying is a good fighter. Of course, his skill can't be compared with yours," Song said to her apologetically. "But I've promised him a bride, and I still haven't produced one. You, sister, are now my father's ward. I'd like all these leaders to serve as match-makers and give you in marriage to Wang Ying. Today is an auspicious day."
Ten Feet of Steel saw how deeply Song Jiang felt his chivalrous obligations. She was unable to refuse. The bride and groom kowtowed their thanks. Chao Gai and the other leaders were pleased. They all praised Song Jiang for his virtue and loyalty. Everyone feasted the entire day, and many toasts were drunk in congratulations.
In the midst of the merrymaking, a messenger came up the mountain and reported: "There is a man from Yuncheng Town in Zhu Gui's inn. He requests to see you leaders."
Chao Gai and Song Jiang were delighted when they learned who it was. "If we can persuade our benefactor to join our band, we'll have achieved the wish of a lifetime," they said. Truly, he who cannot distinguish between gratitude and hatred is no real hero. He who cannot tell black from white is no genuine stalwart.

Now the request the Professor made to the Magic Messenger was this: "Dear friend, go back to the mountain and get these four: Sterling, the Hand, the Ape and the Craftsman. Tell them to bring the tools of their trade and to make haste. I have a job for them to do."
The Magic Messenger departed.
At this moment a sentry came to report that young Hu, Steelbright's brother from the Hu manor to the west had arrived, bringing oxen and wine, and was requesting an interview. Song Jiang ordered him to be brought in.
Young Hu marched right into the tent, bowed and declared: "My sister in a moment of madness, due undoubtedly to her youth and ignorance of the ways of the world, foolishly attacked you and has been taken prisoner. I beg you to be merciful. This rash action which brought about her captivity is owing to the fact that she had been promised to the Zhu family. If you will release her, we shall be happy to supply you with anything you may need."
"Please be seated and let us talk," Song Jiang replied. "That unmannerly crowd in Zhu Castle have insulted us without provocation, which is why we have come here to seek redress. We have no quarrel with the Hu family. But your sister led a force to capture one of our leaders, which is why we returned the compliment by taking your sister prisoner. If you will return our leader to us, I will release your sister to you."

"Unfortunately," young Hu replied, "the people from Zhu Castle have already taken him away."
"Then where exactly is he?" the Professor interposed.
"He's locked up in Zhu Castle. It's quite impossible for me to get him."
"If you won't go and get him for us, how can we return your sister?" said Song Jiang.
"Wait a moment, brother," said the Professor. "Let me say something first. Mr. Hu, some time hereafter you're going to hear noises from Zhu Castle. Your people, I trust, will not send reinforcements to help them out. If people from Zhu try to take refuge with you, you had better tie them up. When you have taken some captives your sister will be returned to you. The fact is that at present she is not here in the camp. She has already been sent back to the mountain stronghold and handed over to Squire Song for safekeeping. But you can rest easy. We know what we're doing."
"We will certainly not give them aid now. If anyone from the castle seeks refuge with us we will take them prisoner and hand them over to you," said Hu Cheng.
"If you do that it will be better than a gift of gold and silk to us."
Hu Cheng prostrated himself and left.
Meanwhile, Colonel Sun had changed the emblem on his banner to "Colonel Sun, commander of Dengzhou troops" and was leading his company towards the rear entrance of Zhu Castle. Those watching from the walls saw the Dengzhou banner and went to report. When Ironstaff heard that it was Colonel Sun, he came out to see for himself. He said to the Brothers Zhu: "Colonel Sun is my friend. When we were young we studied martial arts under the same master. I wonder why he's coming here?"
Taking some twenty or more troops, he had the gates opened and the drawbridge lowered and rode out to meet the visitor. Colonel Sun and his men dismounted and after the exchange of courtesies Ironstaff asked: "If you belong to the Dengzhou garrison, brother, what are you doing here?"
Colonel Sun replied: "An order has come from the regional commander-in-chief transferring me to the garrison at Yunzhou, to strengthen their defences against the bandits of the Marshes of Mount Liang. Along the way I heard that you were here at Zhu Castle, so I came to see you. We approached by the front gate first, but I found the castle was invested by a hostile force encamped outside the village. I thought it unwise to risk an engagement, so I made inquiries in the village and found a way round to the back gate. So here I am, come to greet you."
Ironstaff said: "We've been fighting with the Mount Liang bandits recently. We've got several of their leaders here as prisoners. We now want to capture the leader, Song Jiang, and hand him over to the authorities. Heaven must have sent you at this moment to lend a hand. It's gilt on the gingerbread for us, it's like fresh rain on parched earth."
Colonel Sun laughed. "Don't expect too much of me, but I'll see what I can do to help catch those slaves and complete your good work."
Ironstaff was delighted, and took them all into the castle right away. The drawbridge was raised again and the gates closed. Colonel Sun and all his company were settled in, with their carts, weapons, men and horses. After changing their clothes they all went to the main hall to meet. Courtesies were exchanged and Ironstaff said to Baron Zhu, "This dear friend of mine, Colonel Sun, sometimes called the Bilious Marshal, is a commander of Dengzhou garrison. Now the high command is sending him to reinforce the defences of Yunzhou."
The Baron said: "I too shall place myself under your command."
Colonel Sun replied: "You do me too much honour. I trust you will favour me with your advice and instructions."
The Brothers Zhu now asked everyone to be seated. Colonel Sun began the conversation with: "You have fought many days, you must be weary of battle."
Dragon Zhu said: "But we still haven't won. My brothers and] I are indeed weary from long days in the saddle."
Colonel Sun now told Auntie Gu and Mrs. Yue, the two sisters-in-law to go to the back room and pay their respects to the family, and asked Blackface, Snake and Scorpion to come in and be introduced. "These three are my friends," he said. He pointed out Lungs and said: "This is the official who was sent from Yunzhou to fetch me." Pointing to the Forester and Rhinoceros he said: "These two are army officers from Dengzhou."
Now although Baron Zhu and his sons were not stupid, they could see that Colonel Sun had his family and luggage with him as well as the cart, weapons, men and horses, and in addition he was a friend of Ironstaff's, so they suspected nothing. They simply went about killing oxen and horses to welcome the visitors. There was great feasting.
A couple of days later, on the third day, a castle sentry came to report: "Song Jiang has moved his men into position to attack the castle."
Wildcat Zhu said: "I shall ride out and get the villain myself!"
The drawbridge was lowered and he charged out at the head of more than a hundred cavalry. They soon came upon a body of men, around five hundred in all, surrounding a leader, fully equipped with bow and arrows. This leader, who slapped his horse and dashed forward, was Colonel Hua, the Archer.
When he saw him, Wildcat Zhu kicked his horse, levelled his lance and charged. Colonel Hua likewise urged his horse on to the encounter. There at Lone Dragon Heights the two fought a dozen or so bouts and neither had the advantage. Then Colonel Hua gave his adversary the slip, turned his horse and cantered off, tempting his adversary to follow. Wildcat Zhu was just about to give chase when a friend behind him spoke out: "Commander, don't follow him. I'm sure it's a trick. He's an expert archer."
Wildcat Zhu listened to the advice. Reining in his horse, he abandoned the chase and led his men back to the castle. The drawbridge was raised again and they watched Colonel Hua withdrawing also with his troops. Wildcat Zhu dismounted right in front of the main hall and went to an inner room to drink wine. Colonel Sun inquired: "How many brigands did you capture today, Commander?"
"The villains have got a certain Colonel Hua in their ranks. He's pretty handy with a spear. I fought more than fifty bouts with him, but then he ran away. I was going to chase him, but my men told me he's a good archer. So we broke off the engagement and came back."
"I've no skill to boast of," said Colonel Sun. "But another day I'll have a go and see if I can take some of them."
At the banquet that evening Lungs was asked to sing. Everyone enjoyed the performance. After the banquet they all rested. At midday on the fourth day, one of the castle guards reported: "Song Jiang's troops are advancing again!"
The Brothers Zhu armed themselves and hurried to the front gate. Gongs and drums could be heard in the distance, amid shouts and waving banners. Before long the enemy were facing them in battle order. By now Baron Zhu was sitting above the gate. On his left was Ironstaff, on his right Colonel Sun and the three Brothers Zhu. Some of the troops that Colonel Sun had brought were also lined up on either side.
Now from Song Jiang's ranks Leopard's Head emerged and began hurling insults. Dragon Zhu in a frenzy shouted for the drawbridge to be lowered. He grasped his spear and mounted. Followed by several hundred troops he hurled himself with a great shout on Leopard's Head's force. From the castle gate a drum began to beat and from both sides every bow and crossbow opened fire at the opposing lines. Leopard's Head levelled his snake head lance and joined combat with Dragon Zhu. They fought more than thirty bouts, but neither prevailed. Gongs rang out on either side and both men turned their horses. Tiger Zhu was furious. He grasped his sword, mounted and galloped to the front. In ringing tones he challenged Song Jiang to single combat. He had hardly finished when Song Jiang's ranks parted and out rode a horseman: it was Mu Hong the Unstoppable, answering Tiger Zhu's challenge. They fought more than thirty bouts but again neither had the advantage. This enraged Wildcat Zhu. He grasped his spear, leapt onto his horse and with two hundred cavalry launched himself against the front rank. From Song Jiang's ranks Morbid rode forward with his spear and rushed against Wildcat Zhu.
When Colonel Sun saw the two sides engaged in such furious combat, he could wait no longer. Calling to his brother Blackface to bring his spear, armour, helmet and robe, he accoutred himself and went to get his horse, which was a piebald. He fitted the saddle, securing it with three girths, hung the jointed whip from his wrist, grasped his spear and mounted. As a gong sounded in Zhu Castle, Colonel Sun took to the field. On Song Jiang's side, Leopard's Head, Mu Hong, and Morbid all reined in their horses and rejoined the main force. As he galloped forth, Colonel Sun said: "Let's see now if we can capture the bastards." Causing his horse to rear up, he shouted: "You there, you scum, if there is anyone among you who thinks he's good, let him answer me in single combat!"
With a flurry of bridle bells from among Song Jiang's ranks a rider galloped forth. All eyes turned towards him. It was Madcap, taking up Colonel Sun's challenge. The two horses closed, two spears were brandished. They fought fifty bouts before Colonel Sun feinted and allowed Madcap to lunge with his spear, dodging as he did so and lightly lifting the other from his horse and dragging him to the castle gates where he threw him down and shouted: "Come and tie him up!"
After harrying Song Jiang's troops a while, the Brothers Zhu scattered and brought their troops back to the gate tower. There they found Colonel Sun, reclining with a cup of wine among an admiring crowd.
"How many of the bastards have you got?" the Colonel inquired.
Baron Zhu said: "First we got one called Shi Qian, the Flea. Then we got Panther and one they call the Tamer. Steelbright, from Hu manor, took a certain Short-Arse Wang, and our troops took Thunderclap and Redeye. And now you yourself have captured this Madcap, he's the one that burnt my inn down. So we've got seven."
"Don't let any harm come to them," said Colonel Sun. "Have seven prison carts made to put them in, and give them food, to keep them strong and healthy, don't let them wither away, it doesn't look good. Later when we get Song Jiang we'll send the whole lot up to the Eastern Capital and get the Emperor to proclaim it, and make the Brothers Zhu famous."
Baron Zhu said: "We're so lucky to have your help, Colonel. This will be the end of the brigands of Mount Liang, I'd say."
Colonel Sun was invited to a banquet in an inner room, while Madcap was placed in the prison cart.
Now, you must understand, friends, that Madcap's skill in fighting was no less than Colonel Sun's. But they wanted to deceive the people in Zhu Castle. He purposely allowed himself to be taken to make people trust Colonel Sun.
Colonel Sun now secretly sent the Forester and Rhinoceros, uncle and nephew, with Lungs to the back of the castle to examine the gates and see how many ways in and out there were. When Panther and Redeye saw the Forester and Rhinoceros they were very excited. Lungs checked that there was no one around and told them all the news. Meanwhile Auntie Gu and Mrs. Yue were counting all the entrances and exits to the inner rooms.
Until the fifth day Colonel Sun and the others amused themselves strolling in the castle grounds. At dawn on the fifth day, after breakfast, one of the castle guards reported: "Song Jiang is coming to attack the castle and he has divided his forces into four columns."
"Why should he divide them into four columns?" said Colonel Sun. "There's nothing for your troops to worry about. All we need to do is to be prepared. First organize some hooks and ropes. We want to take them alive, dead ones are no use."
Everyone in the castle armed. The Baron himself took a company of men to a vantage point on the gate tower. They saw a body of troops approaching from the east, with a leader at its head. This was Leopard's Head Lin Chong, and behind him came the White-Water Dragon and Ruan the Second, with about five hundred troops. Another five hundred or so were approaching from the west, led by Colonel Hua the Archer with the Pilot and White Eel. And five hundred troops were coming straight towards the observers in the tower over the south gate. These were led by Mu Hong the Unstoppable, Morbid and Iron Ox. There were enemy troops on all sides. Drums and gongs were sounding. The noise was deafening.
Ironstaff said: "It's not going to be an easy fight today. I will go to the back gate and deal with those who are coming from the northwest."
Dragon Zhu said: "I shall go to the front gate and deal with the ones who are coming up from the east."
Tiger Zhu said: "I will go to the back gate too, and deal with the ones from the southwest."
Wildcat Zhu said: "I shall ride out of the front gate and capture Song Jiang. He's the important one."
Baron Zhu was well pleased and offered them all wine. Everyone mounted and with three hundred cavalry they burst out of the castle gates. The remainder guarded the castle precincts and lined up cheering on the battlements. By this time the Forester and Rhinoceros had hidden big axes on the left hand side of the prison door. Snake and Scorpion had concealed weapons somewhere near the back gate. Blackface and Lungs were keeping guard on the left and right of the front gate. Auntie Gu left one of the soldiers to look after Mrs. Yue and with her two swords took up a position next to the hall, listening to the talk, and ready to spring into action.
Now three drums began to beat in the castle, a gun was fired and the gates opened, front and back, the drawbridge was raised, and on four sides the parties went separately into battle. Soon after, Colonel Sun took a dozen troops and stationed them on the drawbridge. Now Blackface by the gate raised the signal flags they had brought with them on the gate tower and Lungs, brandishing his spear, began to sing. When they heard the singing, the Forester and Rhinoceros gave several loud whistles and whirling the big axes cut down the dozen or so prison guards in no time at all and broke open the prison carts. This released seven raging heroes, who each found himself a weapon and began to yell blue murder. Auntie Gu with her two swords charged into the inner chambers and systematically killed every one of the women in the hall. The Baron, seeing the situation had turned so ugly, was on the point of throwing himself down the well, but was stabbed by Madcap first and had his head cut off. A dozen or so heroes went on killing the castle's defenders independently. Snake and Scorpion at the back gate set fire to the piles of hay for the horses and a fiery column of black smoke began to mount to the heavens.
The four columns of troops, seeing the castle on fire, made desperate efforts to push forward. When Tiger Zhu saw the fire he first tried to return. But Colonel Sun guarding the draw-bridge, bellowed "Where the hell do you think you're going?" and blocked the way. Tiger Zhu in consternation turned his horse's head and charged Song Jiang's lines again. This time the Halberdier and the Little Duke raised their halberds and brought down both man and horse. The troops then fell on him and turned him into mincemeat. The foremost ranks fled in all directions. Colonel Sun and his brother welcomed Song Jiang into the castle. Meanwhile Dragon Zhu's eastern column had found Leopard's Head too much for them and were streaming back towards the castle. When they reached the drawbridge they saw Snake and Scorpion by the back gate pitching the defenders' bodies one by one into the flames. Dragon Zhu desperately wrenched his horse's head round and fled northwards. Suddenly he ran into Iron Ox, leaping towards him and whirling his two axes. In a trice the horse's legs were cut from under him and before Dragon Zhu could lift a finger he was thrown headlong. One blow from Iron Ox's axe and his head was rolling on the ground.
When troops from the castle reported the situation to Wildcat Zhu, he dared not return so he went straight to Hu manor to seek refuge. There Hu Cheng ordered his people to arrest him and tie him up. Hu Cheng was on his way to hand Wildcat Zhu over to Song Jiang when they had the bad luck to run into Iron Ox who with one blow of the axe cut off Wildcat Zhu's head. The retainers fled in all directions, while Iron Ox, still whirling his axes, turned on Hu Cheng. Things did not look at all good to Hu Cheng, so he galloped off into the wilderness, forsaking all family ties for the sake of preserving his life. He settled in Yan'an district, and later he made good, becoming a famous military commander.
Iron Ox, meanwhile, went on killing as he pleased. He charged into Hu manor and killed Squire Hu and his entire household, every one of them — not a soul was left. He told his men to get all the horses and collect up all the valuables and cash in the manor, which were loaded onto the forty or fifty packhorses they found. The place was then set alight and Iron Ox returned to hand over his contribution.
Song Jiang was now seated in the main hall of Zhu Castle and the leaders were coming to claim their honours. They had taken four or five hundred prisoners, more than five hundred horses and innumerable livestock. Song Jiang was delighted with the result. "The only pity is that Ironstaff was killed. He was a good man." As he was expressing this regret, someone announced: "Iron Ox has set fire to the Hu manor and is coming to present the heads he has cut off."
"Hu Cheng came and surrendered to us the other day," said Song Jiang. "Who gave Iron Ox permission to kill him? How dare he burn their house down!"
At this moment Iron Ox walked in, covered in blood from head to foot, the two axes swinging at his waist. He went straight up to Song Jiang, saluted and said: "I killed Dragon Zhu and I killed Wildcat Zhu too, cut off their heads. Hu Cheng got away, blast him, but I killed Squire Hu and all his family beautifully. I've come to claim my reward."
Song Jiang roared at him: "We saw you kill Dragon Zhu, but who says it was you that killed the others?"
"I killed whoever I came across, and then when I was pursing them to Hu manor I met Steelbright's brother coming out with Wildcat Zhu so I cut off his head with my axe but unfortunately the other bugger got away. The rest of the family I killed, there's absolutely no one left."
Song Jiang shouted: "You stupid bastard! Who told you to go there? Didn't you know Hu Cheng came the other day to surrender, bringing us gifts of oxen and wine? Why did you contravene my orders and go there to kill them all on your own initiative?"
"You may have forgotten, but I haven't," said Iron Ox. "The other day the bastard told that bloody woman to catch you and kill you. But now you want to be all merciful. You haven't even married his sister yet, but you want to behave like a brother-in-law."
Song Jiang shouted: "You moron, stop talking such bollocks. What do I want with the woman? I've got other things in mind. All right, you black bastard, how many did you take alive?"
Iron Ox replied: "Who the fuck would bother with that? If I saw any alive I cut their heads off."
Song Jiang shouted: "For deliberately flouting a military order, you wretch, you should be executed. But as your reward for killing Dragon Zhu and Wildcat Zhu I will commute the sentence. Next time you disobey orders you will not be pardoned."
Iron Ox merely grinned: "Even if I don't get a reward, I had a great time with all that killing!"
At this point the commander-in-chief, Professor Wu Yong was seen with his troops arriving at the castle to celebrate with Song Jiang. After a discussion, Song Jiang and the Professor decided that Zhu Castle and its environs should be obliterated. But Madcap made a request: "There's an old man here, Zhongli by name, who is truly charitable. He told me the way and I owe my life to him. When there's someone as kind-hearted and good as that around, we surely oughtn't to destroy the place."
When he heard this, Song Jiang told Madcap to go and find the old man. In a little while Madcap returned to the castle with him and brought him in to pay his respects to Song Jiang and the Professor. Song Jiang presented the old man with a bundle of silver and silk, praising him as an example to the people: "But for your kind-heartedness, we would have swept this whole village away. Not one family would have been spared. But because you showed such goodness, we will pardon everyone in the village."
The old man prostrated himself and Song Jiang said: "For many days we have been here turning your lives upside down. But today we have destroyed Zhu Castle and rid you all of a great scourge. Now every household shall receive a hundred catties of rice as a gesture of humanity."
The old man was given the responsibility of distributing the gift, while the bulk of the grain remaining in the castle was loaded onto carts. The valuables and cash were distributed among the men of the three companies as bounty. The oxen, sheep, mules, horses and other animals were sent to the mountain to be disposed of there. The overthrow of Zhu Castle produced five hundred thousand catties of provisions. Song Jiang was delighted.
All the leaders, men and horses now prepared for departure, including all the new arrivals — Colonel Sun, his brother Blackface, Snake and Scorpion, the Forester and Rhinoceros, uncle and nephew, Lungs and Auntie Gu — and the seven who had been freed. Colonel Sun and his party, with horses, possessions and family, including Mrs. Yue and followers headed for the mountain in a big troop. All the villagers, young and old, turned out to see them off, burning incense and lighting lamps to honour them and thank them. As soon as the others had all mounted, Song Jiang divided the troops into three columns. They set off, the leaders knocking their whips on the stirrups, the rearguard all singing a victory song.
Now our story divides in two.
First let us deal with Skyhawk Li Ying, who, now fortunately recovered from his arrow wound, had shut himself up in his manor and would not come out. Secretly however he regularly sent out scouts to gather news of events at Zhu Castle. When he learnt that Song Jiang had destroyed it, his shock and his pleasure were about equal. But then his scouts reported that the provincial governor had arrived with a force of around fifty men to investigate the Zhu Castle affair. Skyhawk hurriedly instructed Uglymug to open the manor gates, lower the drawbridge and let them in. Wrapping a strip of gauze round his injured arm, Skyhawk came out to greet the visitors and invited them into the main hall. The governor dismounted and entered. He took the place of honour, his secretary sat down beside him, after them a police sergeant and several court officers, and below the steps a number of prison guards and attendants.
Skyhawk prostrated himself before the governor and then stood and waited. The governor asked: "What's all this about fighting at Zhu Castle?"
"I had been shot with an arrow by Wildcat Zhu and wounded in the left shoulder. I know nothing about Zhu Castle because I kept my doors closed and didn't go out."
"Rubbish!" said the governor. "Someone in Zhu Castle accused you of being in league with the bandits of Mount Liang and so you invited them down to destroy the castle. The other day you accepted saddles, horses, sheep, wine and patterned silk from those bandits. How can you lie about it?"
"I respect the law," said Skyhawk. "I would never receive anything from them."
The governor said: "Who's going to believe that? You'd better come back to the government offices with me. Confronting you with our witness should settle it." He ordered the bailiffs to arrest Skyhawk and take him to the government offices to find out which of the two was lying — he or the Zhu witness. The two court officers tied Skyhawk up. When the governor, surrounded by his men, had mounted, he asked: "Is that Mr. Du, the manor steward?"
"Yes, sir," said Uglymug.
"Your name is also mentioned in the accusation. We'd better take you along too and lock you up with him."

The party rode out of the manor gates. So Skyhawk and Uglymug both left the manor under arrest and were carried off without delay. But they had barely gone ten miles when from the edge of a wood out rushed Song Jiang, Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua the Archer, Morbid and Madcap, together with a small body of troops, and barred the way. Leopard's Head gave a ringing cry: "The company of the Marshes of Mount Liang are here!"
The governor and his suite dared not put up any resistance. They abandoned Skyhawk and Uglymug and ran for their lives. Song Jiang gave orders for them to be caught. Some of the others went after them, and in a little while returned and said: "We caught some of them and killed that sodding governor, but we don't know where the others went to."
Skyhawk and Uglymug were released from their bonds and let out of the cages. Two horses were brought for them to ride. Then Song Jiang said: "Mr. Li, sir, I would like you to come with us to hide on Mount Liang for a while. What do you say?"
Skyhawk said: "That's quite impossible. Your killing the governor has got nothing to do with me."
Song Jiang smiled and said: "How can you expect the authorities to make that distinction? If we leave you, they will certainly consider you to be implicated. If you don't want to become an outlaw, sir, at least come and rest in the mountain stronghold for a few days. When we hear that it has all blown over, it will be time enough for you to go back."
So, however unwillingly, Skyhawk and Uglymug were obliged to go too, riding with the outlaws. For how could they go back?
They all rode on till they reached Mount Liang. When they got to the camp, the leader Chao Gai came down the mountain with drums and fifes to greet them. Some wine was drunk to welcome them and then they all went up to the Assembly Hall in the main camp, where they sat round in a circle and Skyhawk was invited to meet the other leaders.
After the introductions, Skyhawk had something to ask Song Jiang: "You have brought us here to the camp and introduced us to all the leaders, it wouldn't be difficult to accept your way of life, but what would become of my family? Please let me go back now."
"You are mistaken, sir," said the Professor with a smile. "Your family are all on their way to the camp and your manor is burnt to the ground. What would you go back to?"
Skyhawk couldn't believe his ears, until a moment later he saw carts, arms, men and horses filing up the mountain and recognized the people from his manor, with all his family and household. To his anxious questioning, his wife replied: "After the governor had taken you away, two inspectors and four sergeants came round with three hundred men and registered all our things. They asked us very politely to get in the carts and then fetched everything out of the house, boxes, trunks, cattle and sheep, horses, mules, donkeys and so on. Then they set fire to it and it burnt down."
Skyhawk cursed his fate when he heard this. Chao Gai and Song Jiang got up and came to apologize: "You see, we had heard so much good of you. That's why we thought up this scheme, we do ask you to forgive us."
They spoke so politely Skyhawk felt he had to go along with it.
Song Jiang said: "We would like you and your family to reside in the building at the side of the main hall."
Skyhawk saw that all the members of his own family were now among the leaders in the hall, at the front or at the back, and he said to his wife: "We must do as they say, then."
At the behest of Song Jiang and the others, the time was now devoted to conversation and rejoicing, and Song Jiang now spoke with a big smile on his face. "Sir, I'd like you to meet those two inspectors and the governor." The "governor" was in fact the Hand and the two "inspectors" were the Magic Messenger and Panther. The governor's secretary was Sterling, the court officers were the Craftsman and the Ape. He also introduced the four sergeants, who were the White-Water Dragon, White Eel, the Flautist and the Daytime Rat. Skyhawk looked on open-mouthed and speechless.
Song Jiang quickly called for oxen and horses to be killed and Skyhawk was invited to join them in celebrating the arrival of twelve new leaders, to wit Skyhawk himself, Colonel Sun and his brother Blackface, Snake and Scorpion, the Forester and Rhinoceros (uncle and nephew), Uglymug, Lungs, the Flea, the woman warrior Steelbright and Auntie Gu and also Mrs. Yue. A separate banquet was held for Skyhawk's family in the hall at the back. All the troops who had fought also had their reward. Amid much tootling of flutes and tapping of drums the company of heroes feasted in the main hall and did not break up till the early hours, when the new leaders retired to their allotted accommodation.
Next day another feast was held because there was a matter to be settled by all the leaders. Song Jiang called out Short-Arse and said to him: "Since the early days on Windy Mountain I promised you a wedding. It has been much on my mind that I have not yet fulfilled that promise. But now my father has a daughter whom he will offer you as wife."
Song Jiang asked Squire Song to bring forward Steelbright. He himself proposed to her on behalf of Short-Arse, saying: "This brother of mine, Wang Ying, whose martial skill is great, though not equal to yours, was originally promised a wife by me, but this business has long remained unfinished. Now, dear sister, you are my father's adopted daughter, all the rest of us here are the witnesses, this is a most auspicious day, so then, dear sister, will you accept to become the wife of Wang Ying?"
Seeing that Song Jiang was so honourable and serious, Steelbright could hardly refuse. In reply she kowtowed twice and thanked him. Chao Gai and the others were well pleased. They praised Song Jiang saying he was a true gentleman. The rest of the day was to be entirely devoted to feasting and celebration. During the banquet however a guard came up the mountain to report: "There is someone from Yuncheng district at the Crocodile's inn wanting to speak with you."
When they heard who it was, Chao Gai and Song Jiang were very excited. "If that honourable man is coming to join us, it will satisfy a long-felt wish." It was truly a case of:

*No hero the man who mixes gratitude and revenge;*
*He who knows black from white is truly a man.*

WU YONG sent Dai Zong to Liangshan Marsh to bring four other leaders to the camp.
That day Hu Cheng, brother of the girl Hu San Niang, the "Ten Feet of Green," arrived in the camp, and addressed Song Jiang, "My sister was very stupid in provoking your anger, and she deserved to be captured by you. I hope, however, that you will forgive her for her youthful rashness."
Song Jiang asked him to be seated, and then said, "The people of the Zhu Family Village have no sense of decency, and have repeatedly tried to deceive us. Therefore we have had to fight them yet we are on good terms with your village. Your sister had one of our leaders arrested so we had to treat her in the same way. We might exchange the prisoners, and so settle accounts."
"But our prisoner has already been taken away to the Zhu Family Village," said Hu Cheng. "I have no means of getting them to hand over the prisoner to you."
"In that case," said Song Jiang, "how can we release your sister?"
"There is another way," said Wu Yong, addressing Hu Cheng. "Your village must decline further assistance to the Zhu Family Village, and when they send a messenger to call for help you can arrest that man. If you do this then you can exchange that prisoner with us for your sister. You can now return and need not worry about her."
"We will never help them again," said Hu Cheng. He then departed.
Major Sun displayed a flag bearing his late official position, and duly arrived at the gate of the Zhu Family Village with his retinue. His arrival was duly reported, and Luan Tingyu at once recognized his old schoolmate. He went to the gate, had it opened, and welcomed Major Sun. They all entered the village.
Luan Tingyu asked how Major Sun came there at such a time, and the latter explained, "I have just been appointed to take command of the troops at Yunzhou, and guard the district against the brigands at Liangshan Marsh. As I was passing quite close to your village I thought that I would call and visit you."
Luan Tingyu then explained that the brigands had been attacking his village for several days, and that he was trying to capture the leader Song Jiang. The arrival of Major Sun was very opportune, like rain for dry grass.
Major Sun laughed, and said that he had no special ability, but he would help them in capturing the brigands. He made arrangements for quarters for his men and the horses and carts, and then changed his dress, and went to see old Zhu.
After the introduction and the usual salutations Major Sun said that as the village was in his district he would specially look to the advice and assistance of Old Zhu. He then inquired how their fighting against the brigands had resulted.
"We have not been very successful," said Dragon Zhu.
Major Sun then arranged for the ladies Gu Dasao and Yue to be introduced to the women's apartments. He then introduced Sun Xin, Xie Zhen, and Xie Bao as his younger brothers who were traveling with him. He introduced Yue He as a clerk of his *yamen*, and Zou Yuan and Zou Run as minor army officers.
Upon the third day after this an outpost reported that Song Jiang's troops were moving for another attack upon the village.
"Tiger's Cub" Zhu said he would go, and arrest the brigand's chief. He took about a hundred mounted men, and lowering the drawbridge left the village. He soon met a body of about five hundred brigands. He halted his men, and went forward alone. Hua Rong also advanced by himself to engage in combat. They met, but after about fifty bouts neither had any advantage. Hua Rong tried a ruse, and retired as though defeated. "Tiger's Cub" turned to pursue him when one of his men called out, "Do not pursue him as he may have some secret trap for you. Your opponent is a skilled bowman." "Tiger's Cub" listened to this advice, and stopped to pursue, but instead ordered a retreat into the village. Hua Rong also withdrew his men.
Upon reaching headquarters, "Tiger's Cub" told Major Sun about the fight, and how both had retired. They then all feasted together until well into the night.
The next day about noon Song Jiang's men were again advancing for an attack, and the three brothers Zhu all went with their men to repel the attack. There was a great noise of gongs and drums and a big display of flags. Zhu Chaofeng, the village chief, went on the gate tower, and sat down there with Luan Tingyu and Major Sun. Very soon they saw Lin Chong ride out from the brigands, and coming near the village gate he cursed loudly.
"Dragon" Zhu was annoyed at this, and mounted his horse. The drawbridge being lowered, he went across supported by a loud crashing of gongs and drums. He engaged in combat with Lin Chong, but after about thirty bouts neither had any advantage, and they both retired.
"Tiger" Zhu now mounted and dashed over the drawbridge. He was met by Mu Hong, and they had about thirty bouts without any definite result.
"Tiger's Cub" Zhu now took to the saddle, and was met by Yang Xiong, but again there was a draw.
Major Sun now called for his spear, and armor, and mounted his horse. He rode out to the bandits troop, and challenged the best man to come out and fight against him. Very soon Shi Xiu came out on horseback, and they had about fifty bouts. Then Major Sun by a trick let Shi Xiu thrust in with his spear, and by evading it, Major Sun suddenly seized hold of his opponent, dragged him off his horse, and carried him to the village gate. He was greeted by all the men as a great conqueror. Major Sun asked how many men had been captured so far, and was informed that this made the seventh. He said they must treat the prisoners well, because when they got Song Jiang they would send the whole lot in carts to the district city.
Major Sun sent Zou Yuan and Zou Run to visit the prisoners, and secretly told them of the plans for the coming struggle.
On the fifth day Song Jiang again had his men advancing for an attack. Major Sun now suggested that the defenders be not excited but be prepared to take prisoners instead of trying to kill the enemy. This was agreed to and arranged. Zhu Chaofeng again took his seat at the observation post on the tower above the gate. He saw large bodies of men on all sides, and it looked as though this was to be the final mass attack. The three brothers and also Luan Tingyu were ready to take their men out of the four gates to meet the bandits.
The war drums were beaten, and a rocket fired in the village, the four gates were opened, the drawbridge lowered, and the armed men rushed out of the gates. Major Sun had charge of his own men, and took up his position on the bridge in front of the main gate. His brother Sun Xin took the official flag, and stuck it on the tower over the gate. Upon a signal from Yue He the other leaders of the bandits inside the village blew whistles and attacked the villagers who were guarding the prison van. They soon broke open the van, released the seven brigands, and armed them. Gu Dasao seized two swords, and went into the rooms of Old Zhu, killing any woman she met. Zhu Chaofeng saw all this on the tower over the gate, but before he could raise an alarm he was killed by Shi Xiu. The brigands under Major Sun now attacked the villagers at the gate. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao went to the stables, and set fire to the fodder storage. The brigands under Song Jiang seeing the great fire pressed onward their attack.
"Tiger" Zhu seeing the fire, galloped back towards the village, but was stopped at the gate by Major Sun. He realized the treachery, and beat a hasty retreat. But he was confronted by Lu Fang and Guo Sheng who soon overcame him and killed him. The villagers, seeing their leaders killed, scattered in all directions. The bandits under Song Jiang now had a clear road, and advancing on the main entrance were admitted by Major Sun and his men.
At the other gate, "Dragon" Zhu had also failed to defeat Lin Chong in personal combat, and seeing the fire at the rear gate had also galloped back to the village. At the gate he saw Xie Zhen and Xie Bao throwing the dead bodies of villagers from the wall, and he retreated. He then met Li Kui with his two axes, and in a short encounter was soon overcome, and killed.
"Tiger's Cub" Zhu got reports of the treachery in his rear, and realizing that it was useless to retreat he led his men in the direction of the Hu Family Village. Upon arriving there he was arrested by Hu Cheng who intended to send him bound as a prisoner to Song Jiang. Shortly afterwards, however, Li Kui appeared and he at once took the "Tiger's Cub" and killed him on the spot. The villagers seeing this all scattered. Li Kui now advanced to attack Hu Cheng who mounted his horse, and galloped off. Li Kui continued his way through the Hu Family Village killing the whole family of Old Hu. Li Kui and his men looted the farmstead, and then set fire to it.
The leaders of the bandits assembled in the main hall. Song Jiang was highly elated at the victory, but expressed his regret at the death of Luan Tingyu. When he heard that the Hu Family Village had been looted and burnt, he asked why that had been done seeing that the chief Hu Cheng had been friendly towards them only a few days ago. Li Kui stepped forward. He was covered with blood, and had his two axes stuck in his belt. He said, "I killed the 'Dragon,' and 'Tiger's Cub,' but Hu Cheng got away on horseback. I made a clean sweep of the whole family of Old Hu. I now report my meritorious conduct."
"It has been reported already that you have killed 'Dragon' Zhu, but nobody has confirmed your other statements," said Song Jiang.
Li Kui then gave details of what he had done.
"But why did you do such a thing in defiance of my order that Hu Cheng and his village should be spared."
"You forget, but I remember," said Li Kui. "The 'Ten Feet of Green,' Hu San Niang was sister of Hu Cheng, and she wanted to goddamn kill you a few days ago. You must not expect to make her your wife."
"'Iron Ox,' you should not talk such nonsense," said Song Jiang. "Why should I want her as a wife when I have other plans for her? How many prisoners did you take alive?"
"None. If I saw one alive I killed him at once."
"You do not observe my orders. I ought to have you executed for that, but this time I will excuse you because you killed 'Dragon' Zhu, and 'Tiger's Cub' Zhu, and many others. In future, however, if you do not carry out my orders I shall certainly have you executed."
Li Kui laughed and said, "I may have no merit, but I certainly have had the pleasure of killing people."
Song Jiang then discussed with Wu Yong as to whether they should kill everybody in the village, and make a clean sweep of their enemies. But Shi Xiu pointed out that there were some good and innocent people in the village, and mentioned, as an instance, Old Zhongli who had shown him the roads in the village. Song Jiang asked Shi Xiu to go, and find the man, and bring him there. In a short time Shi Xiu returned with Old Zhongli who saluted Song Jiang and Wu Yong. Song Jiang presented him with some silver and said, "Because of your benevolent assistance to one of our leaders I show mercy to all the people in this village. We have thought of exterminating everybody, but on account of your great virtue we will spare their lives. We have been victorious, and have killed all those who were really opposed to us. We will even give each family in this village a picul of rice, in order to show our good intentions. We will entrust the distribution of the rice to you, as you are a good upright man."
All the valuables in the village and also the cows, sheep, and horses were sent to Liangshan Marsh. After the rice had been distributed as promised there was still about 50,000 piculs left which were also sent to Liangshan Marsh. The new recruits with Major Sun were duly admitted to the band, and all then went to Liangshan Marsh.
Now Li Ying had been wounded by an arrow, and he did not take part in all this. He remained in his village, and had messengers who reported to him all that had taken place in the Zhu Family Village. When the bandits had all gone a messenger reported to him one day that the Prefect had arrived in the village, and was making an investigation. Li Ying dressed up in his best silks, and went to meet the Prefect. The Prefect was seated in the main hall of his farmstead. With him were a recorder, a clerk, several servants, and many jailers. Li Ying saluted, and stood to attention. The Prefect asked him what he knew of the attack on the village.
"I was wounded by an arrow shot at me by 'Tiger's Cub' Zhu. I was confined indoors, and did not know the fighting."
"Nonsense!" remarked the Prefect. "I received a petition from the Zhu Family Village stating that you had brought the brigands from Liangshan Marsh to attack that village. They looted the village and you received their presents, but how is it that you did not go back with them?"
"I know the law in such matters," said Li Ying, "how dare I receive bribery from the bandits?"
"It is hard to believe what you say," said the Prefect. "I must arrest you, send you to the court where you can answer the charges made against you by the villagers." Li Ying was arrested, and bound, Du Xing was also arrested, and then they all mounted their horses, and set off.
They had gone only about ten *li* when they were stopped in a forest by Song Jiang and four other leaders. With the brigands was Lin Chong who shouted out, "We are from Liangshan Marsh," and the Prefect and his escort upon hearing this galloped away leaving the prisoners behind. Song Jiang ordered a party to pursue the men, who soon returned and reported that they had all escaped. The two prisoners were released, and given horses to ride on.
Song Jiang suggested to Li Ying and Du Xing, the prisoners, that it would be better if they both took refuge at Liangshan Marsh.
"That will not do," said Li Ying, "because you tried to kill the Prefect, and I had nothing to do with it."
Song Jiang laughed, "The court will not discriminate as to who among us killed the Prefect. If we go and leave you the officials will arrest you as being implicated. If you do not care to join our band, then you can leave us after staying at Liangshan Marsh until things settle down."
The two men saw no means of declining this offer as they were completely in the hands of the bandits so they fell in with the proposal, and accompanied them to the mountain. Upon arriving there they were duly introduced to all the leaders. Li Ying then asked that a man be sent to the village to find out how his people were faring as he was rather anxious about them.
Wu Yong laughed at this and said, "All your people are already here, and as the whole village has been burnt down what is the use for you to go back?"
Li Ying did not believe this until he saw many of his villagers about. Among the prisoners he even saw his wife who told him, "When you had left with the Prefect and inspectors about three hundred soldiers came to the village, and arrested us. They took all the cattle, and set fire to the houses and buildings." Li Ying was very much upset. Chao Gai and Song Jiang however bowed to Li Ying, and said, "We brought you all here because we heard that you're a good man. We hope that you'll excuse us for taking such liberties." Li Ying agreed to let matters remain as they were. Song Jiang then explained that the Prefect, inspectors, and soldiers who had taken him and Du Xing as prisoners, and had taken all the villagers to mount Liang Marsh were his own followers who had acted the part of officials. When the men were pointed out to Li Ying he recognized them, and was astounded at the way in which he and his people had been duped. Song Jiang spoke to the "Ten Feet of Green," Hu San Niang, and suggested that she should marry Wang Ying. She agreed to this, and the marriage took place soon afterwards. A few days afterwards, a messenger arrived from Zhu Gui, and said that there was a guest staying at the inn who wished to meet Song Jiang. Song Jiang was pleased to hear this and willing to receive the man.

Black and white all people know,
Bandits know their enemies.

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### The aroused Sergeant Winged Tiger Lei Hits & Kills singer Bai Xiuying with his Cangue; the Handsome Whiskers Loses & Misses the Official Prefect's innocent Little Son

"A band of travellers were passing the forest along the highway when our men stopped them," said the messenger. "One is Constable Lei Heng from Yuncheng Town. Chieftain Zhu Gui has invited him to the inn, where he is now being wined and dined. I was sent to report."
Chao Gai and Song Jiang were overjoyed. Together with Wu Yong, they went down the mountain. Zhu Gui had already ferried their guest to the Shore of Golden Sands. Song Jiang hastily kowtowed.

"It's been a long time since we parted," he said. "I've thought of you often. What brings you to our humble abode?"
Lei Heng returned the courtesy. "I was sent on official business by my local county to the prefecture of Dongchang. On the way back, I was stopped at the crossroads by bandits who demanded passage money. When I mentioned my name, brother Zhu Gui insisted that I stay with him for a while."
"A Heaven-sent good fortune!"
Song Jiang invited Lei Heng to the fortress, introduced him to the leaders, and feted him with wine. For five days, they met and chatted every day. Chao Gai inquired after Zhu Tong.
"He's now the warden of our county jail," said Lei Heng. "The new magistrate is very fond of him."
Song Jiang brought the conversation around to Lei Heng joining the band. But the constable said: "My mother is very old. I can't abandon her. I'll join you after she's lived out her final years."
He kowtowed and bid them farewell. Try as he might, Song Jiang could not persuade him to remain. The other leaders presented him with precious gifts, as did, of course, Song Jiang and Chao Gai.
Lei Heng went down the mountain with a large bundle of gold and silver. The leaders saw him off to the foot of the road. There he was ferried across to the highway and returned to Yuncheng. Of that no more need be said.
As to Chao Gai and Song Jiang, on coming back to Fraternity Hall they requested Wu Yong, military advisor of the stronghold, to determine the assignments of the various leaders. Wu Yong consulted with Song Jiang and, the following day, all were summoned to hear the dispositions. The first were those in the inns on the outer perimeter.
"Sun Xin and Gu Dasao were tavern-keepers originally," said Song Jiang. "We're instructing them to replace Tong Wei and Tong Meng, for whom we have another use. Shi Qian shall help Shi Yong, Yue Ho shall help Zhu Gui, Zheng Tianshou shall help LiLi. Thus, we will have taverns to the north, east, south and west, each selling wine and meat, and each with two chieftains, to receive bold fellows from all over. Ten Feet of Steel and Stumpy Tiger Wang shall hold the lower part of the rear mountain and look after the horses. The small fort at the Shore of Golden Sands shall be commanded by the brothers Tong Wei and Tong Meng. The small fort at Duck's Bill Shore shall be held by uncle and nephew Zou Yuan and Zou Run. The road in front of the mountain shall be guarded by a troop of cavalry under Huang Xin and Yan Shun. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao shall hold the first pass in the front of the mountain, Du Qian and Song Wan the second, Liu Tang and Mu Hong the third. The three Ruan brothers shall guard the water fortifications on the south side. Meng Kang shall continue to be in charge of boat building. Li Ying, Du Xing and Jiang Jing shall supervise all money, grain, and gold. Tao Zongwang and Xue Yong shall control building and repair of rampart walls and terraces. Hou Jian shall govern the making of clothes, armor, banners and military garments. Zhu Fu and Song Qing shall arrange the feasts. Mu Chun and Li Yun shall build the housing and the palisades. Xiao Rang and Jin Dajian shall deal with all correspondence and documents regarding guests. Pei Xuan shall head the legal department, and dispense rewards and punishments. Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Sun Li, Ou Peng, Ma Lin, Deng Fei, Yang Lin and Bai Sheng shall control the stronghold's various hostels. Chao Gai, Song Jiang and Wu Yong will live on the summit in the center, Hua Rong and Qin Ming will live to the left, Lin Chong and Dai Zong will live to the right—all within the fortress. Li Jun and Li Kui will live on the front of the mountain, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun on the rear. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu will protect both sides of Fraternity Hall."
The assignments having been made, one chieftain was feasted each successive day. The organization of the mountain fortress was now tight and efficient.

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After leaving Liangshan Marsh, Lei Heng, shouldering his pack and carrying his halberd, made tracks for Yuncheng. At home he saw his mother and changed his clothes. Taking the official reply, he called on the magistrate in the county office, reported verbally, and handed over the various documents and endorsements. Then he returned home to rest.
As usual he signed in and checked out at the county office every day, while awaiting a new assignment. He was walking down a street one day when a voice hailed him from behind.
"When did you get back, Constable?"
Lei Heng turned around. It was an idler known as Li the Second.
"Only a couple of days ago."
"You were gone for quite a while. Maybe you haven't heard. A travelling singer has come from the Eastern Capital. She's beautiful and talented. Her name is Bai Xiuying. The wench called to see you but you were out on a mission. She's performing at the theater now. She sings all kinds of ditties. They put on a variety show every day there—dancing, music, and singing. The place is jammed. Why don't you go and have a look? She's a delicious little actress."
Lei Heng, having nothing better to do, went to the theater with Li the Second.
Placards in letters of gold had been put up all around the entrance, and from a flagpole a vertical banner hung down almost to the ground. They went in and took the first seats on the left. A preliminary-act comedian was performing on stage. Li left Lei Heng in the crowd and slipped out for a drink.
After the comedian finished an old man came out. He wore a bandanna covering his forehead, a tea-colored silk gown bound by a black waist sash, and carried a fan.
"Bai Yuqiao from the Eastern Capital, that's me. I rely in my old age on my daughter Xiuying, who sings and dances and plays musical instruments. We travel all over and entertain."
A gong crashed and the girl came on stage. She bowed in each direction. She plied her stick against the gong with such rapidity that it sounded like scattering peas. Then she cut it short with one sharp blow and recited:

*Twittering fledglings soar as old birds return,*
*Gaunt grow the old sheep while lambkins wax fat,*
*Men struggle a lifetime for clothing and food,*
*But lovebirds fly freely to where pleasure is at.*

Lei Heng shouted his applause.
"Next on my program," said the girl, "is a romantic story called 'A Love Pursues in Yuzhang City.' " She spoke a few words and began to sing, alternately talking and singing while the audience in the mat-awning-covered courtyard roared approvingly.
Just as Xiuying reached the climax of the tale, the old man interrupted.
" 'Though not such a skill as earns horses and gold, it moves men of intelligence,' " he averred. "You gentlemen have applauded. Now, daughter, come down. The next act is rattling the drum with money ..."
The girl took up a platter, pointed at it, and chanted: *"I'll go to the rich, halt where there's gain, pass when I'm lucky, and head for prosperity.* When I place this before you, don't let it go away empty."
"Walk among them, daughter. Which one of you gentlemen will start us off?"
Holding the platter, the girl approached Lei Heng. The constable groped in his purse. He hadn't a penny.
"I forgot my money today. I'll bring you some tomorrow."
Xiuying laughed. " 'If the first brew of vinegar isn't strong, the second is sure to be even flatter.' Sitting in a front seat, you ought to set a good example."
Lei Heng reddened. "I didn't bring any money. It's not that I'm unwilling."
"You remembered to come to hear me sing, sir. Why didn't you remember your money?"
"I could give you four or five ounces of silver. It means nothing to me. Unfortunately I forgot to bring any."
"You haven't a penny in your pocket, and you talk grandly of four or five pieces of silver! Do you expect me to 'Slake my thirst looking at a sour plum' or 'Assuage my hunger with a drawing of a muffin'?"
"Have you no eyes, daughter?" Bai Yuqiao called. "Can't you tell the difference between a city man and a rube? Don't waste your time on him. Ask some kind gentlemen who has a little sense to start us off."
"Are you saying I haven't any sense?" Lei Heng demanded.
"If you know how a polished scholar should act, a dog's head can sprout horns!" the old man retorted.
A noisy stir ran through the audience. Lei Heng grew angry.
"You cheap lackey! How dare you insult me!"
"Does it matter what I say to a cowherd like you?"
Someone in the audience recognized Lei Heng, and he cried: "Stop talking like that. He's our county's Constable Lei."
"Did you say 'constable' or 'constipated'?" Yuqiao sneered.
Lei Heng couldn't contain himself. He leaped from his chair onto the stage and seized the old man. With one punch and one kick he puffed up his lips and knocked out a couple of teeth. The attack was fierce, and others rushed to separate them. Lei Heng was persuaded to go home, and the audience hastily departed.
Now it happened that the singer had been intimate with the new magistrate when he was still in the Eastern Capital, and this was one of the reasons she had brought her show to Yuncheng. After Lei Heng gave here father such a drubbing, she called a sedan-chair and went directly to the magistrate.
"Lei Heng beat up my father and drove out my audience. He's deliberately abusing me."
"Draw up a complaint, immediately," the magistrate heatedly exclaimed, in a clear demonstration of the influence of "pillow power." He also examined the old man's injuries and had these noted as evidence.
Lei Heng had friends in the county office, and they tried to intercede for him. But they couldn't prevail against the girl. She refused to leave, and pouted and flounced until the magistrate had to give in. Lei Heng was arrested, brought before the court, beaten till he confessed, collared with a cangue, and an order issued that he be paraded in the streets. At the girl's insistence, the magistrate instructed that Lei Heng be put on display at the theater door.
The next day, when Xiuying went to perform, Lei Heng stood by the entrance way. The guards were public servants like Lei Heng himself, and they were reluctant to strip him, as this type of punishment required. The girl thought: "I've already come out against him openly. Why fear to infuriate him further?"
She went to a nearby tea-house, sat down, and called the guards over. "You're all closely connected, so you go easy on him," she said. "The magistrate ordered you to display Lei Heng, bound and stripped, but you're too full of sympathy. Just wait till I tell the magistrate! We'll see whether I can cope with you or not!"
"Don't lost your temper, madam. If we have to, we'll strip him."
"In that case, I'll reward you."
The guards had no choice but to remove Lei Heng's clothes there on the street. "We can't help ourselves, brother," they said apologetically.
During this turmoil, Lei Heng's mother arrived, bringing him food. She saw him standing there, naked, and she started to cry.
"You work in the magistrate's office, just like my son," she berated the guards. "Is it worth the money she gave you to act like this? You might get into trouble yourself, some day."
"Listen, old mother, we wanted to do the right thing. But the complainant came to see the 'bound and stripped' sentence enforced, and we couldn't refuse. She threatened to make things hot for us with the magistrate. So we couldn't save face for Lei Heng."
"Who ever heard of a complainant seeing to it in person that a sentence is carried out?"
A guard lowered his voice. "She's very close to the magistrate, old mother. One word from her and we're sent up. That's why we're in such a fix."
The old woman began opening Lei Heng's bonds. "That slut knows how to use her connections. I'm going to untie this rope. Let's see what she can do about it."
Xiuying, in the tea-house, heard all this. She walked over. "What did you just say, old baggage?"
Lei Heng's mother pointed at her angrily. "You've been mounted and pressed by thousands, you screw for any man who comes along, you bitch! What right have you to swear at me?"
Xiuying's willow tendril eyebrows contracted, her starry eyes glared. "Old bawd," she screamed. "Beggar woman! How dare a low person like you curse me?"
"What are you going to do about it? You're not the magistrate of Yuncheng!"
The actress rushed up and with one push sent the old woman staggering. Before she could steady herself, Xiuying closed in and slapped her left and right.
Lei Heng, a filial son, was enraged. He raised his cangue and brought it down on Xiuying's head. A corner of it struck her squarely and split open her skull. She collapsed to the ground, her brain matter flowing, her eyes bulging, absolutely motionless. Plainly, she was dead.
The others at once brought Lei Heng to the magistrate and reported. The magistrate directed that Lei Heng be taken to the scene under guard, together with county officials, the district chief and witnesses, and that an examination of the body be conducted. This done, all returned to the court, where Lei Heng freely confessed. His mother, under surety to appear, was ordered to return home and await further instructions. Lei Heng, a cangue around his neck, was committed to prison.
The warden of the prison was Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard. When Lei Heng was delivered, he couldn't do much for him. But he treated him to wine and food, and instructed a guard to sweep out and prepare a clean cell. Not long after, Lei Heng's mother also brought food.
Weeping, she said to Zhu Tong: "I'm over sixty, and this child is everything to me. You two have been such friends. Have pity and look after him."
"Don't worry, old mother. You needn't bring him food any more. I'll take care of everything. If I can find the chance, I'll save him."
"Do that and you'll be like my parents reborn! If anything should happen to him, it would be the end of me!"
"I'll remember. You can rest assured."
The old woman thanked him and left.
Zhu Tong tried to think of a way to rescue Lei Heng, but in vain. He asked someone to intercede with the magistrate, and spread bribes among high and low. The magistrate was very fond of Zhu Tong, but he hated Lei Heng for having killed his paramour, and was deaf to all pleas. What's more, the old scoundrel Bai Yuqiao flooded the magistracy with petitions that Lei Heng pay for his daughter's life with his own. And so, after sixty days of detention, Lei Heng was ordered committed to the prison in Jizhou Prefecture. The record scribe was sent on ahead with the relevant documents, and Zhu Tong was directed to deliver the prisoner there under armed escort.
Zhu Tong selected a dozen guards and left Yuncheng with Lei Heng. After marching ten *li* they came to a tavern.
"Let's have a few bowls of wine," Zhu Tong suggested.
Everyone went into the tavern and drank. Zhu Tong took Lei Heng out in the back, as if they were going to relieve themselves. In a secluded spot, he opened the cangue and freed him.
"Go home, brother, quickly, and get your mother. Travel all night, find refuge. I'll take the consequences."
"I don't mind fleeing, but you'll be implicated."
"Brother, you don't know. The magistrate is furious that you've killed his doxy. You're under sentence of death. If you went to the prefecture, they'd surely execute you. Letting you go isn't a capital offense. I have no parents to worry about. It doesn't matter if all my property is confiscated in recompense. Go as far as you can, and quickly."
Lei Heng kowtowed his thanks. He hurried home along a path from the rear door. He gathered his valuables and departed with his mother. They travelled through the night to Liangshan Marsh, where he joined the band. Of that no more need be said.

*

Zhu Tong buried the cangue in the deep grass. He emerged and shouted: "Lei Heng has escaped. This is terrible!"
"We'll chase him to his home and bring him back," exclaimed the guards.
Zhu Tong delayed them to give Lei Heng time to go a long distance, then returned to the county office.
"I was careless," he confessed. "The prisoner got away on the road. We searched without success. I'm willing to accept any punishment."
The magistrate liked Zhu Tong very much. He would have preferred to let him off. But Bai Yuqiao threatened to go to a higher court and accuse Zhu Tong of deliberately letting Lei Heng escape. The magistrate had no choice but to report the matter to the prefecture of Jizhou. Zhu Tong's family immediately sent someone there who spread bribes around liberally. When the constable was remanded to Jizhou the prefect knew all about it. He imposed a sentence of twenty blows, and ordered that Zhu Tong be committed to the prison in the prefecture of Cangzhou.
Zhu Tong, a cangue for travelling around his neck, set out with two guards carrying the relevant documents. Members of his family gave him clothing and money, after tipping the guards. On leaving Yuncheng, the party followed a winding road to Henghai County in Cangzhou Prefecture. The trip was uneventful.
The prefect was holding court when the guards delivered the documents and their prisoner. He could see that Zhu Tong, with his ruddy face and handsome beard extending down past his middle, was no ordinary person. Favorably impressed, the prefect said: "Don't take this man to prison. I want him here in the prefecture as my attendant."
The cangue was removed, a reply was written, and the two guards took their leave and returned to Yuncheng.
From then on Zhu Tong served in the prefectural office. He dispensed a certain amount of largesse among the sheriffs, captains, keepers of the gates, messengers, jailors and guards. Since he had an amiable disposition as well, he was liked by all.
One day the prefect was sitting in his court. Zhu Tong stood below in attendance. Summoning him forward, the prefect asked: "Why did you let Lei Heng go and end up here?"
"I would never have dared to do that. It's just that I was careless, and he escaped."
"Did you really deserve such a severe punishment?"
"The complainant in the original case insisted that I confess to having released him. So the sentence had to be severe."
"Why did Lei Heng kill that singer?"
Zhu Tong explained the circumstances in detail.
"Then you considered him filial and thought letting him go was the only chivalrous thing to do?"

"Would I have had the temerity to deceive the authorities?"
Just then, from behind a screen, the prefect's little son came out. Only four years old, he was a pretty child, and the prefect loved him better than gold or jade. The boy went directly to Zhu Tong and asked to be picked up. Zhu Tong held him in his arms, and the child grabbed his long beard.
"I want this bearded fellow to carry me. No one else," piped the little boy.
"Let go of him," said the prefect. "Behave yourself."
"I want him to carry me. I want him to take me out to play."
"I'll take him outside for a stroll," Zhu Tong suggested. "We'll be back soon."
"All right," said the prefect. "Since that's what he wants."
Zhu Tong carried the child to the street and bought him some good sweets. After a short while, he brought him back.
"Where did you go?" the prefect asked the little boy.
"This bearded fellow took me on the street to play. And he bought me sweets and fruit."
"You shouldn't have spent your own money," the prefect said to Zhu Tong politely.
"Only a small token of my esteem," said Zhu Tong. "It's not worth mentioning."
The prefect ordered wine for the constable. A serving girl brought a silver pitcher and platter and poured Zhu Tong three large beakers of wine in succession.
"Any time the child wants you to take him to play, you can carry him out for a walk."
"Your wish is my command, Excellency."
Thereafter, Zhu Tong took the little boy for a stroll every day. He had money in his purse and he wanted the prefect to be pleased, so he spent it on the child freely.
Half a month went by, and it was the fifteenth day of the seventh month—the Driving Out of Devils Festival. Glowing lanterns were set afloat upon the river, and people prayed and did good deeds. That evening, the nursemaid spoke to Zhu Tong.
"The child wants to see the river lanterns, Constable. Madam, his mother, says you can take him."
Zhu Tong promised he would. The little boy was dressed in a green silk robe, and short strings of beads were tied to the two tufts of hair sticking up like horns on the top of his head. Zhu Tong carried him on his shoulder as they left the gate of the prefectural compound and walked towards the temple. Lighted lanterns were sailing upon the water.
It was early evening. Zhu Tong strolled around the temple grounds with the little boy. People were earning blessings by setting live fish free in a special pool. The child climbed on a railing overlooking the river and watched happily as the lanterns floated by. A man behind Zhu Tong tugged him by the sleeve.
"Brother, would you come away a moment so we can talk?"
Zhu Tong looked around. To his surprise, there was Lei Heng.
"Get off that railing and sit here," Zhu Tong said to the child. "I'm going to buy you some candy. Don't leave this spot."
"Come back quickly. I want to watch the river lanterns from the bridge."
"I'll only be a minute." He turned and went off with Lei Heng.
"What are you doing here?" Zhu Tong asked.
Lei Heng pulled him into a secluded corner and said: "After you saved me, I had no other place to go with my old mother, so I joined Song Jiang's band in Liangshan Marsh. I told them of your benevolence, and Song recalled your kindness to him in previous days. Chao Gai and the other leaders were extremely moved. They sent me and Military Advisor Wu Yong to see you."
"Where is Teacher Wu?"
A man stepped out from behind him. "Wu Yong is here." He kowtowed.
Zhu Tong hastily returned the courtesy. "It's been a long time, Teacher," he said. "I trust all has been well with you?"
"Our stronghold leaders send their respects. They've deputed Constable Lei Heng and me to invite you up our mountain to join our righteous assembly. Though many days have passed, we haven't dared to approach you. Tonight, we meet at last. Please come with us to our fortress and satisfy the wish of our highest chieftains, Chao Gai and Song Jiang."
For some time Zhu Tong was unable to answer. Finally, he said: "Teacher, you're making a mistake. You mustn't ask me that. Suppose we were overheard? Brother Lei Heng committed a death-penalty crime. Out of chivalry I allowed him to escape. He could no longer let himself be seen, so he went up the mountain and joined your band. Because of him, I've been exiled here. But if Heaven is merciful, in another year or so I'll be able to go home and become a respectable citizen again. Why should I do the sort of thing you propose? Please go back, both of you. Staying here, you may cause misunderstanding."
"But, brother, you're only an attendant, here," Lei Heng argued. "That's no job for a real man. It's not only me who wants you to join us. Our highest chieftains have both been hoping to see you for a long time. What will they think if you delay?"
"Brother, what are you saying? You haven't thought. I let you escape because your mother was old and your family poor. Now you suggest I'm lacking in chivalry."
Wu Yong interceded. "Since the constable doesn't want to go, we shall bid farewell and leave."
"Please give my humble regards to the chieftains," said Zhu Tong. They walked together towards the bridge.
There was no sign of the little boy. Zhu Tong groaned. He searched high and low. Lei Heng grasped his arm. "Don't bother looking, brother. Probably the two men who came with us, when they heard you say you wouldn't go, took the child away. We'll go find them, together."
"This is no time for jokes. That little boy is the prefect's very life. I'm responsible for him."
"Brother, just come with me."
Zhu Tong, Lei Heng and Wu Yong left the temple and went outside the city. Zhu Tong was quite upset.
"Where have they gone with the child?" he demanded.
"We'll go to my place, brother," said Lei Heng. "I'll return him to you."
"The prefect will be angry if I get back late."
"Those two who came with us are ignorant fellows," said Wu Yong. "They must have taken him to where we're living."
"What's their names?" asked Zhu Tong.
"I don't know them," said Lei Heng. "I heard one of them being called Black Whirlwind."
Zhu Tong was shocked. "Not the fellow who killed those people in Jiangzhou?"
"That's the man," said Wu Yong.
Zhu Tong stamped his feet in anguish and groaned, then hurried on. When they were about twenty //from the city, they saw Li Kui the Black Whirlwind ahead.
"Here I am," called the big fellow.
Zhu Tong hastened up to him. "Where is the prefect's son?"
Li Kui hailed him respectfully. "Greetings, brother Warden. The child is here."
"Bring him out, then, and give him to me."
Li Kui pointed to his own hair. "I'm wearing his bead decorations."
Zhu Tong looked, and demanded in alarm: "Where is he now?"
"I put a drug in his mouth and carried him from the city. He's sleeping in that grove. Please see for yourself."
It was a bright moonlit night, and Zhu Tong plunged in among the trees. He saw the little boy lying dead on the ground.
Zhu Tong rushed out the grove, enraged. The three men were gone. He peered in every direction. Then he saw Black Whirlwind standing in the distance. The big man smote his battle-axes. "Come on. Come on!" he cried.
Wild with fury, Zhu Tong hitched up his robe and tore after him. Li Kui continued retreating, with Zhu Tong in pursuit. But what chance had he to catch up with the experienced mountain traveller? Soon he was gasping for breath.
Ahead of him, Li Kui called again: "Come on. Come on."
The seething Zhu Tong wanted to swallow him down in one gulp. But he couldn't get near him. The chase dragged on through the night. Gradually, the sky brightened. Li Kui moved faster when Zhu Tong speeded up, slower when he lagged, and not at all when he halted. Zhu Tong saw him enter a large manor.
"The rogue has gone to ground at last," thought the constable. "Now I can have it out with him."
He hurried into the courtyard and halted in front of a large hall. In racks on either side were many weapons. "This must be some big official's residence," he thought. He called: "Is anyone at home?"
A man emerged from behind a screen. And who was it? None other than Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind.
"Who are you?" Chai Jin enquired.
When Zhu Tong saw this handsome and graceful lord, he bowed and replied: "My name is Zhu Tong. I was warden of the Yucheng prison. But I committed a crime and was exiled here. Last night I took the little son of the prefect to watch the lantern floating on the river, and Black Whirlwind killed him. He's here now in your manor. May I trouble you to help me seize him and turn him over to the authorities?"
"Since you are Beautiful Beard, please be seated."
"May I beg to ask your name, my lord?"
"I'm Chai Jin, and am called the Small Whirlwind."
"I've long known of your great name." Zhu Tong kowtowed. "I didn't expect to have the honor of meeting you today."
"Your name has also been long known to me, sir. Please come into the rear hall where we can talk."
As he followed Lord Chai inside Zhu Tong asked: "How does that scoundrel Black Whirlwind dare to hide in your manor?"
"That's easy. I have always welcomed bold men of the gallant fraternity. An ancestor of mine gave up the throne, and because of that the first Song emperor bestowed on my ancestors the Wrought Iron Pledge. When a wrongdoer takes refuge with us, no searchers dare enter. A dear friend of mine knows you well. He's one of the leaders in Liangshan Marsh—Song Jiang, called the Timely Rain. He wrote a secret letter instructing Wu Yong, Lei Heng and Black Whirlwind to stay here at my place and invite you to go with them up the mountain and join the band. Since you couldn't be persuaded, Song ordered Li Kui to kill the prefect's son, to cut off any chance of you returning to the city, and thus compelling you to go to the stronghold and assume a chair of leadership. Teacher Wu, brother Lei, aren't you coming out to apologize?"
The two men emerged from an anteroom and kowtowed before Zhu Tong. "Forgive us, brother," they said. "We were acting on brother Song Jiang's orders. If you go with us to the fortress, you'll understand."
"I know you brothers meant well, but your methods were too cruel!"
Chai Jin murmured soothing words. "I'll go if I have to, but I want to see Black Whirlwind first!"
"Brother Li," the lord called. "Come out and apologize."
Li Kui walked from a side room and voiced loudly a respectful greeting. The sight of him sent flames spurting 30000 feet high in Zhu Tong's heart. He couldn't control his rage. He rushed towards Li Kui murderously. It took the combined efforts of Chai Jin, Lei Heng and Wu Yong to restrain him. "I'll go up the mountain," said Zhu Tong. "But first you've to promise me one thing."
"Not one but scores if you so desire," said Wu Yong. "What's it you wish?" And because of Zhu Tong's request, there was turmoil in Gaotang Prefecture and strife in the mount Liang Marsh stronghold. A noble patron of learning fell into the clutches of the law; a hospitable relative of the emperor was cast into a dungeon.

Now on the day that Song Jiang arranged the marriage of Steelbright and Short-Arse and everyone praised him for his humanity and a feast was held to celebrate the event, a messenger came up from the Crocodile's inn to report: "Our men have stopped a group of travellers who were passing near the wood on the highway, and apparently one of them is Sergeant Lei from Yuncheng. The Crocodile has invited him to stay. He is being well looked after with wine and food at the inn. They sent me to tell you."
Chao Gai and Song Jiang were very excited by this news, and with the Professor and all the other leaders they went down the mountain to welcome the newcomer, whom the Crocodile had already sent across in the boat to Golden Sands Landing.
Song Jiang hurriedly prostrated himself and said: "It's a long time since I saw you, but you have always been in my thoughts. What brings you here to our place?"
Sergeant Lei immediately returned the courtesy and said: "I was sent by my office on official business to Dongchang district. I was just on my way back when I was stopped at the crossroads by a group of men who demanded I pay a toll. When I happened to mention my name, Mr. Zhu began insisting that I should stay."
"Heaven be thanked for this!" Song Jiang exclaimed. He ushered Sergeant Lei into the main hall and all the leaders were invited to meet him. Wine was served. Sergeant Lei stayed five days and each day conversed with Song Jiang. It occurred to Chao Gai to ask Sergeant Lei for news of his colleague, Sergeant Zhu, and he answered: "Sergeant Zhu is now working in the prison service of our district, the new governor is very pleased with him." Song Jiang brought the conversation round to the subject of Sergeant Lei's joining the company on Mount Liang. He refused, pleading an aged mother as his excuse. He would join them, he said, when she passed away.
Eventually Sergeant Lei prostrated himself and announced his intention of departing. Although Song Jiang and the others repeatedly urged him to stay he would not. All the leaders gave him presents of money and silk; Song Jiang and Chao Gai were no exception of course. With a big bag to carry this booty, Sergeant Lei set off down the mountain, the leaders seeing him off as far as the road. After crossing on the ferry he took the road to Yuncheng. Of this no more.
When Chao Gai and Song Jiang returned to the Assembly Hall in the main camp, they asked the Professor to assign the various duties. The Professor did so, after discussing it with Song Jiang, and all the leaders were invited to assemble to hear the roster read.
"Blackface and Auntie Gu," Song Jiang began, "are innkeepers by trade, so I want them to replace the two Tong brothers, who will be employed elsewhere." He went on to assign the Flea to assist the Guv at his inn, Lungs to assist the Crocodile and Whitey to assist the Executioner, Li Li, so that each of the four inns north, south, east and west, was now provided with two leaders, selling wine and food and recruiting good men from all over the place. "Steelbright and Short-Arse can go to the other side of the mountain and look after the horses. Let the two Tong brothers guard Golden Sands Landing. Let the Forester and Rhinoceros guard Duck's-Bill Landing. The Tamer and the Dandy are to go down to guard the highway on this side of the mountain with their cavalry. Snake and Scorpion must guard the first gate on this side of the mountain. Door-God and Skyscraper will guard the second gate at the Place of Many Meanderings. The Red-Haired Devil, and Mu Hong the Unstoppable will guard the third gate, the entrance to the main camp itself. The Ruan brothers will guard the waterside camp on the south of the mountain. As before, Flagpole shall supervise the boats. Skyhawk Li Ying, Uglymug and the Calculator will look after the finances and provisioning and treasury in the main camp. The Nine-Tailed Turtle and the Pill Monger can supervise the building of a lookout for the main fortress. The Ape can go back to supervising the manufacture of clothing, armour, banners and war robes. Smiler and my brother Iron Fan will be in charge of banquets. Mu Chun the Irrepressible and Green-Eyes will deal with housing and fences. Hand and the Craftsman will set up an office for correspondence with guests and visitors. Sterling as before will be responsible for military regulations and penalties. The remainder, the Halberdier, the Little Duke, Colonel Sun, Golden Wings, the Flautist, Redeye, Panther, and the Daytime Rat, will each take one of the eight sides of the stronghold to keep watch. Chao Gai, the Professor, and I will reside in the headquarters at the top of the mountain. Colonel Hua and Thunderclap will reside in the camp on the left. Leopard's Head and the Magic Messenger will reside in the camp on the right. The White-Water Dragon and Iron Ox will be based in front of the mountain in the mountain stronghold. The Pilot and White Eel will be based at the back of the mountain. Morbid and Madcap will guard the Assembly Hall, on either side." Once all the leaders had been allotted their duties, they took it in turn each day to give a celebratory banquet. The protocol of the camp was now clearly established. As it says in the poem:

*At that camp on its lofty mountain crest,*
*Establishing order is what they do best,*
*They've all but the trappings of life at the court,*
*And such fame in the marshes as cannot be bought.*

Now when Sergeant Lei left Mount Liang, shouldering his pack and gripping his halberd, he set off for Yuncheng. Arriving there, he first went home to see his mother. Then he changed his clothes and went to the government offices to report to the district magistrate and deliver the reply from his mission. After delivering his verbal report and returning his official warrant to the office, he went home to rest. After that his life continued as before, going in to the office every day, making himself available for the next official mission he might be sent on.
One day as he was waiting outside the office he heard someone calling behind him: "When did you get back, sergeant?"
Turning to look, he saw it was one second brother Li, a well-known local idler.
"Just a few days ago," he replied.
"You've been away, so you probably don't know there's a new singer from the Eastern Capital in town. She's absolutely phenomenal, in every department. Fleur, they call her. The girl called on you but you were away on official business. She's performing at the theatre now, she does all the well-known songs. They put on some kind of variety show every day, with dancing, or music or singing and it draws a huge audience. Why don't you come and take a look? That girl's really something."

Since he had nothing better to do, Sergeant Lei agreed to go with this Li to the playhouse. There were signs written in gold characters over the door and from the flag-pole hung banners as tall as a man. They went in and found seats right in the front row on the left. On stage a comic curtain-raiser was being performed. Li left Sergeant Lei there in the crowd while he went out to get some wine. After the curtain-raiser, an old man came on, with a turban wound about his head and a tea-coloured silk shirt, trailing a long black cloth and carrying a fan. He opened his mouth and declaimed: "I am from the Eastern Capital, Bai Yuqiao's my name. I am old now, but my daughter Fleur supports me with her singing and dancing and her music. She's always at your service, to entertain you."

Next, to the clamour of gongs Fleur Bai stepped out onto the stage and curtsyed in all directions. Taking up the gong stick she beat out a rapid rhythm like the sound of scattering beans, ending with a quick crack of the clappers, and then recited a short poem. After this she said: "My next number is a truly beautiful tale. It's a romantic and refined piece, entitled 'A Yuzhang love story'." She launched into the piece, singing and speaking in turns, to repeated applause from all present. From his position in the front row Sergeant Lei had a good view of her, and indeed she was as accomplished as she was beautiful:

*Floating gauzes like the drifting snow, lustrous tresses like massed clouds, a pair of cherry lips, a complexion of peaches and apricots, a willow waist, a seductive manner and a sweet nature. The singing tones soft as the fluting of birds in the branches, the movements in the dance proud as a phoenix stalking through flowers. The melody is classical, nothing forced or unnatural. Between high notes and low, from quick to slow, the voice moves, all in accordance with the rules of harmony; and the variations of emphasis and mood are ruled by superlative taste. The bamboo flute produces ravishing trills; the clappers impart an elegant emphasis to each word.*

When the story reached its climax, Fleur's father cried: "Well, we don't grow rich by horse-trading or gambling, but we do provide something to satisfy the thoughtful and discerning. We've had the applause, friends. Now my daughter will take a turn among you for a little number known as drumming up support."

Fleur took up the plate and struck a pose, saying: "At a rich door I begin, on a wealthy spot I stay my steps, I travel to a lucky place, I journey by a happy way, the hand you see before your face, empty send it not away."

Her father said: "Off you go now, girl, our public are eager to show their appreciation."

Holding out her plate Fleur stopped first before Sergeant Lei. But when the latter felt about him for money, he found he hadn't got a cent.

"I'm afraid I haven't got anything on me," he said. "Tomorrow I'll reward you."

Smiling ironically she said: "'If the vinegar on top's got no bite, the rest is going to be too weak.' Really now, sir, you've got a seat in the front row, you ought to give a lead."

Blushing scarlet, Sergeant Lei said: "I really didn't bring anything, it's not that I would withhold it."

"Are you telling me you come to the playhouse and don't think to bring any money?" she asked.

"I'll give you four or five taels of silver, it's no problem," he said. "Only today I really did forget to bring it."

"You haven't a cent, but you talk about four or five taels of silver, that's like telling me to quench my thirst by looking at plums, or fill my stomach with a painted cake!"

Her father said: "Where's your eyes, child? Can't you see this is just a small town person, a bumpkin, why do you go on asking him? You should look for some man of real understanding and culture, and get him to start the ball rolling."

"Are you suggesting I'm uncultured?" Sergeant Lei protested.

"As you don't know what every mother's son ought to know about how to behave, there's as much hope of any culture from you as for a dog to grow horns."

At this point everyone rose to their feet.

Lei Heng gave a roar: "How dare you insult me, you cheeky bugger!"

The old man replied: "And if I say you're a cowherd from the sticks, so what?"

Someone who knew Sergeant Lei shouted out: "That's not right! It's Sergeant Lei, an officer of our district."

"Seems more like an arsehole to me," said the performer.

This was beyond Sergeant Lei's enduring. He leapt up onto the stage and made for the artiste. With one blow of his fist and one kick he split his lip and knocked his teeth out.

When the bystanders saw the man was badly hurt, they intervened to break up the fight, advising Sergeant Lei to leave. The audience dispersed too, amid scenes of pandemonium.

Now Fleur had previously been a close friend of the new magistrate when he resided in the Eastern Capital, which is indeed why she had now chosen to ply her trade in Yuncheng. When Sergeant Lei hit her father and she saw he was seriously hurt, she called a sedan chair and went straight to the magistrate's office to make a complaint against Sergeant Lei for beating her father, breaking up a performance and trying to swindle her. The magistrate was outraged. "Make a written accusation at once," he said. It was a real case of 'pillow power.' The father was invited to write down the accusation, show his wounds and name witnesses.

Now there were plenty of people in the district who knew Sergeant Lei well and they went to the government office to lay out bribes on his behalf. But the girl was already inside the magistrate's, throwing a tantrum, and the magistrate had no alternative but to take action. He gave orders forthwith for Sergeant Lei to be arrested and brought to the magistracy, where he was beaten and forced to confess, placed in irons and paraded through the streets to be publicly shamed. The girl also wanted to show off her power and asked the magistrate to have him exposed at the door of the theatre. So next day, just before the performance, the magistrate ordered Lei Heng to be taken to the theatre door.

Now all the guards were colleagues of Sergeant Lei's. How could they be expected to tie him up? The girl gave it some thought. The news had already got around that she was picking on him and people were going to blame her anyway. So she left the theatre and went to sit in a teashop, where she summoned the guards to her. "I know you're all hand in glove with him," she said. "You don't want to touch him. His Honour told you to tie him up, but you want to be lenient. But when I go to His Honour and tell him, do you really imagine he's not going to take it out on you?"

"Don't be angry, miss," the guards said. "We'll go and tie him up, don't worry."

"If you do I shall reward you financially," she said.

So the guards had to go to Sergeant Lei and say: "We're not trying to pick on you, brother, but we're going to have to sort of tie you up." And then they showed him off in public with his hands and feet bound.

This caused quite a commotion, in the middle of which Sergeant Lei's mother arrived bringing him food. When she saw they had him tied up, she began to weep noisily. "You're all colleagues of my son's," she scolded, "working just like him in the same department. Just look what money can do! Who can ever hope to keep out of trouble?"

"Listen, old lady," they answered. "We'd much rather have let him off. But since the plaintiff has demanded that he be bound we've no excuse for not doing it. If we didn't they'd go and complain to the magistrate and we'd be for it! That's why we've got to do it, see."

The old lady said: "Since when has it been permitted for the plaintiff to set the penalty for the accused?"

"Listen here," the guards whispered. "She's a very particular friend of the magistrate's. One word from her and we'd be done for. So it's as hard on us as it is for you."

The old lady started to undo the bonds, scolding all the while. "That dirty bastard, how he abuses his position! Well I'm going to undo these bonds, and let's see what he says to that!"

When the news reached the teahouse where Fleur was sitting, she came rushing round at once and shouted: "You there, what are you playing at?"

The old lady was in no mood for pleasantries. She pointed a finger and cursed her roundly: "How dare you raise your voice to me, you whore! Thousands have humped you, millions have, you bitch! You're common property!"

When Fleur heard this her willow brows became perpendicular, her starry eyes nearly popped out of her head: "You poisonous insect, you vermin, who gave you the right to shout at me?"

"Why shouldn't I shout at you? You've got no authority here, you're not the governor of this town!"

Enraged, Fleur dashed at the old lady and gave her a slap which made her stagger. When the old lady tried to retaliate, Fleur came in again and started boxing her ears. She showed no sign of stopping.

Now Sergeant Lei was a very filial son, and when he saw his mother being beaten up, anger exploded in his heart. He tore off the cangue and brought it down with a crash on Fleur's head. He hit her with great violence, using the end of the cangue; the blow cracked open her skull and she crashed to the ground. The brains spilled out, the eyeballs burst and she lay without movement. She was obviously dead.

The bystanders who had witnessed the killing of Fleur Bai seized the murderer and went straight away to the magistracy to denounce him and render a detailed account of the events. The magistrate sent men to bring Sergeant Lei to him under arrest. All those involved were collected; the local headman, neighbours, friends and such were all summoned to appear, and when the body had been examined, they were escorted to the magistracy. Sergeant Lei confessed everything, quite openly. His mother was released on her own security to wait at home. Sergeant Lei was fitted with a cangue and committed to the cells.

Now the gaoler there happened to be Whiskers Zhu Tong. When Sergeant Lei was brought he did not ill-treat him in any way, rather he laid on wine and food for him, and told the gaolers to sweep and prepare a clean cell to make him comfortable. In a little while Sergeant Lei's mother arrived at the gaol with food. Sobbing she complained to Whiskers: "Here I am, over sixty years old, and this son of mine is my whole life. I beg you sir to be kind to him and take good care of him."

"I assure you, ma'am," said Whiskers, "that you are leaving him in good hands. You don't need to bring him food any more. I shall look after him. If there's the least chance of it I will get him off."

"If you can save my son, I shall worship you like my own parents," she said. "If anything happens to him, I'd sooner die."

Whiskers said: "I shan't forget it. There's nothing for you to worry about."

When the old lady had prostrated herself in thanks and left, Whiskers turned it over in his mind for a whole day, but could think of no means to rescue his friend. He employed people himself to go to the magistracy and buy support and persuade everyone to show leniency. But although the magistrate liked Whiskers, he had it in for Sergeant Lei for killing his mistress and said he could not pardon him. Besides he had the girl's father nagging at him; he was having charges drawn up and urged the magistrate to sentence the culprit and make him pay with the life that he owed.

When Sergeant Lei had been in the gaol sixty days and the interval before sentencing had been completed, it was decided to send him to the provincial capital. The clerk in charge of the case left first, armed with a complete dossier. Whiskers was appointed to escort Sergeant Lei.

Whiskers set off from Yuncheng, with a dozen prison guards and Sergeant Lei in custody. They had barely gone four miles when they saw an inn. "We'll all go in here and have a cup or two of wine," Whiskers announced.

While the others were drinking, Whiskers took Sergeant Lei off to a quiet corner and removed the cangue. Having released Sergeant Lei, he said to him: "Leave now old chap. Go straight home, get your mother, and go as fast as you can to seek refuge somewhere else. I'll take the blame for this."

"I've no problem with going away," said Sergeant Lei, "but how can I leave you to get into trouble?"

"Don't you see?" said Whiskers. "The magistrate blames you for killing his mistress. He has judged it to be a capital offence. He must be sending you to the capital to be executed. I won't get the death penalty for releasing you. Besides, I haven't any parents to worry about, all I'm likely to lose is my possessions. You've simply got to put as much distance as you can between yourself and this place."

Sergeant Lei prostrated himself in thanks, set off by a small back road and raced home. He made all his valuables into a bundle, and with his mother travelled night and day to Mount Liang, to join the outlaws. Of this no more.

Whiskers threw the empty cangue into the undergrowth and then went to tell the guards: "Sergeant Lei has got away, what can we do?"

"We'd better go quickly to his house and pick him up," they said.

Whiskers purposely delayed for as long as possible, which allowed Sergeant Lei to get a good long way away. Then he went back to the office with the guards to own up.

"I'm afraid I've been careless," he said. "I let Sergeant Lei escape while he was in my custody. He fled and we couldn't catch him. I have no excuse and I am ready to pay the penalty."

The magistrate liked Whiskers, and would have liked to let him off, but the girl's father wanted to complain to a higher authority that Whiskers had deliberately let Sergeant Lei escape, so the magistrate was obliged to report Whiskers' crime to the provincial capital. Some of Whiskers' relatives went to the capital to hand out bribes, so when he was sent there and the case was investigated by the court and the facts established, he was only sentenced to twenty strokes and banishment to Cangzhou prison camp. He was fitted with a cangue for travelling and two court officers were appointed to escort him on the road, bearing the dossier of the case. His relatives supplied him with clothes and money for his expenses and gave presents to the two guards. Then they left Yuncheng for the place of banishment. Of the journey we need say nothing.

On arrival they entered the town and went straight to the government office. The Governor had just gone into session, so the two guards took Whiskers to the court and handed over the documents. The Governor read them. He saw that Whiskers was something out of the ordinary, with his ruddy complexion and a fine long beard reaching below the waist. He liked what he saw so much that he ordered the new convict not to be placed in the cells but retained in the government office for special duties. The travelling cangue was removed and the guards were given a receipt with which they returned whence they had come.

Every day then Whiskers waited for orders in front of the courtroom in the government office. All the constables, court officers, door-keepers, messengers, gaolers, prison guards and so on received gifts from him. Seeing that he was so friendly and polite, everyone liked him. Then one day, when the court was in session and Whiskers in attendance, the Governor called him up and said: "Why did you let Sergeant Lei go and allow yourself to be sent here as a convict?"

Whiskers respectfully replied: "I had no intention of letting him go. It's just that I was careless and he escaped."

"Then why did you get such a heavy punishment?" the Governor asked.

"The plaintiff was determined to make me confess I did it on purpose, so my interrogation was severe," said Whiskers.

"How did Sergeant Lei come to kill that singer?"

Whiskers recounted Sergeant Lei's story in detail.

"So you saw what a filial son he was and you let him go out of respect for his virtue?" the Governor suggested.

"How would I have dared to cheat the government and deceive my superiors?" Whiskers protested.

At this juncture a young boy burst out from behind the screen. This was the Governor's own son, a fine looking lad about four years old, the apple of his father's eye. When the child saw Whiskers he went straight up to him and wanted to be picked up. Whiskers had to take him in his arms and give him a hug. The boy grabbed Whiskers' beard in both hands and said: "I want to hug this beard."

"Let go of him, child," the Governor said. "Don't pester him."

The boy said: "I want this beard. I want him to come and play with me."

Whiskers said: "Shall I take him to the area in front of the court and play with him for a while? I'll come straight back."

"Since the child wants you to hold him, you'd better go and play with him for a bit and come back afterwards."

So Whiskers carried the child off to the front of the courtroom and bought some sweets and dried fruit to eat with him. He took him for a little walk and then returned to the courtroom.

"Where have you been?" the Governor asked his son.

"Mr. Whiskers played with me in the street and he gave me some sweets and some fruit and he let me eat them."

"Why did you spend your money to buy things for the child?" the Governor asked.

"It was just some trifles to please the little chap," said Whiskers. "Nothing to make a fuss about."

The Governor ordered wine to be brought for Whiskers. Slave girls appeared with a silver jug and some fruit and nuts. They poured out wine and Whiskers was made to drink three bumpers.

"Any time my son wants to play with you," said the Governor, "just take him out, will you?"

"Your wish is my command," said Whiskers.

From that day on he took the child out for a walk every day. He carried a wallet and in order to please the Governor he would pay out little sums when the child was with him.

A fortnight later it was the fifteenth of July, the festival of Hungry Ghosts, when according to tradition lights are floated on the river and altars are set up everywhere for prayers and offerings. That evening a nursemaid from the residence called out to Whiskers: "Sergeant Zhu, the young master wants to go and see the lights tonight. The mistress says you can take him."

"I'll take him, then," Whiskers replied.

The child came out, dressed in a green silk shirt, with his hair arranged on top of his head in two little horns braided with pearls. Whiskers hoisted him onto his shoulders and carried him out into the town. They went to watch the lights being floated in the river at the Temple of the Redeeming Buddha. At that time it happened to be the first watch of the evening and they saw something like this:

*Bells are ringing, clouds of incense rising, pennants fluttering everywhere. Sticks of choicest incense smoulder in the pots, dishes are piled high with every kind of vegetarian fare. Wielding gold pestles, priests intone sacred texts to improve the lot of the dead; people dressed in mourning clothes pile up silver to ease the way to heaven of impeded souls. People gather at the Hall of Benevolence, to view representations of the officials of Hell, the eight obstacles and the three types of torment. Around the temple walls the four ways of birth and the six incarnations are impressively depicted. The branches of the willows are sprinkled with pure water; flaring lanterns float among the water lilies in the pond.*

As Whiskers carried the Governor's son round the temple to see the sights, they came to the pond for releasing fish beside the Water and Land pavilion where people were floating their lights. The child climbed onto the balustrade and laughed gleefully. At that moment someone tugged Whiskers' sleeve from behind and said: "Please give me a moment of your time."

Whiskers got quite a shock when he turned round and saw that it was Sergeant Lei. "Come down from there," he said to the child. "And sit down here while I go and get you some sweets. Whatever you do, don't go away."

"Don't be long," said the child. "I want to go and look at the lights from the bridge."

"I'll be back immediately," said Whiskers, as he turned and went with Sergeant Lei to talk. "Why have you come here?" he asked.

Sergeant Lei led him to a quiet place and prostrated himself. "When you saved my life," he said, "I had nowhere else to go with my old mother, so I had to go to the Marshes of Mount Liang to join Song Jiang's band. When I told them about your generosity, Song Jiang also remembered how you helped him to get away that other time, and Chao Gai and the others were deeply moved. They asked the Professor and myself therefore to pay you a visit."

"Where is the Professor, then?" Whiskers asked.

"The Professor is here," said a voice behind him. The Professor came forward and prostrated himself.

Whiskers hurriedly returned the courtesy, saying: "It's a long time since we met. I trust all is well with you?"

"Many, many leaders in the mountain stronghold send you their regards," said the Professor. "They have commanded me to come here, with our brother Sergeant Lei, to request you to join our loyal band on the mountain. We've been here several days, but we couldn't find a way to speak to you. Today we waited here and managed to catch you. So please agree to come with us to the mountain stronghold and fulfil the wishes of our two leaders."

Whiskers thought about this for a long time before he could find an answer. Eventually he said: "I'm afraid you've misjudged me, sir. Please don't say any more about this. I'm afraid if someone should overhear, it could have serious consequences. My friend Sergeant Lei committed a capital offence. I let him escape for the sake of friendship and loyalty. He can't show his face now, so he went to join the outlaws on the mountain. I got sent here on account of him, but heaven may relent. In a year and a half I may manage to return home, and become a respectable citizen again. How can you imagine I would join you? Please go back now, and don't come here stirring up trouble."
Sergeant Lei said: "My dear friend, you're really nothing better than a servant here. Serving others is in no kind of work for a real man. It's just not manly. It's not only my idea that you should join us on the mountain, our two leaders have long wanted you to come. It's really not very good of you to keep them waiting!"
Whiskers said: "What are you talking about, brother? Have you forgotten that I let you escape because of your old mother and your difficult family circumstances? And now you come here and accuse me of disloyalty!"
The Professor said: "If you don't want to come with us, Sergeant, we had better say goodbye and leave you in peace."
"Please give my humble respects to the leaders," said Whiskers. Together they went to the bridge.
When Whiskers got back, there was no sign of the Governor's son. Cursing his fate, he searched absolutely everywhere, until Sergeant Lei put a hand on his arm and said: "Don't go on looking. I bet it's the two chaps we brought with us. They probably heard you didn't want to come with us and carried the boy off. We'll go with you to find them."
Whiskers said: "It's no joke. His Excellency dotes on that child and he entrusted him to me."
"You'd better come with us then," said Sergeant Lei.
The three of them, Whiskers assisted by the Professor and Sergeant Lei, left the Temple of the Redeeming Buddha and headed out of town. Whiskers was extremely worried. "Wherever have these mates of yours taken the child?" he said.
"Just keep going. When we get to the place where we're staying we'll give you back the child," said Sergeant Lei.
"Time's getting short," said Whiskers. "I'm afraid the Governor will think something's wrong."
The Professor said: "Those two we brought with us aren't very bright, I'm sure they'll have taken the child back to where we're staying."
"These friends of yours, who are they exactly?" Whiskers asked.
"I don't really know," said Sergeant Lei. "But I think I heard the name Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind."
"Not the murderer who killed someone in Jiangzhou?" cried the horrified Whiskers.
"That's the one," said the Professor.
Whiskers staggered a little and then with many a groan hurried on. They were five or six miles from the city when they saw Iron Ox Li Kui up ahead. "I'm here," he called to them. Whiskers raced towards him. "What have you done with the child?" he asked.
Iron Ox saluted and said: "My respects, sergeant. The child is here."
"Then hand him over to me, very, very carefully."
Iron Ox pointed to his own head and said: "This is what he tied his hair with."
Whiskers looked, and again asked where the child was. Iron Ox said: "I had a drug with me and I administered it to him before I carried him off. He's sleeping in that wood now. Go and see for yourself."
The bright moonlight aided Whiskers as he plunged into the wood to look for the child. He found him lying on the ground. But when he put out his hand to touch him, he saw that the head was split in two. The child was dead.
A great rage filled Whiskers' heart. He stumbled out of the wood. The other three had disappeared. He looked in all directions. Then he saw Iron Ox a long way off waving his two axes and shouting: "Come on, come on, I'm going to have a few bouts with you!"
Seething with rage, careless of life and limb, Whiskers hoisted up his robe and bounded in pursuit. Iron Ox turned and ran, with Whiskers hot on his heels. But Iron Ox was a hardened mountaineer and there was no way Whiskers could catch him. Soon he had to stop for breath. "Come on, come on," Iron Ox shouted back at him. "We're going to fight. It'll be you or me."
Whiskers couldn't wait. He would have eaten him alive, only he couldn't get his hands on him. The chase went on and on, till gradually day began to dawn. If Whiskers ran faster, Iron Ox also speeded up; if he went slower, Iron Ox slowed down. But Whiskers could never catch him. Eventually he saw Iron Ox disappear into a large compound. "So the villain's got a bolt-hole, has he? But I won't let him get away with it." he said to himself.
Whiskers went right to the main hall of the house. Here he found stacks of weapons on both sides of the building, and he said to himself: "This must be the house of some official."
He halted and shouted out: "Is there anyone in?"
A man emerged from behind the screen at the back. And do you know who it was?
*One of ancient and illustrious lineage, noble scion of a royal line, his portals defended by vermilion inscription and cast-iron guarantee, host to good men from far and wide, provider of faultless hospitality to every guest, dispenser of largesse with a smiling face, skilled exponent of brush and sword, gentleman of Mengchang dubbed Little Whirlwind, the world famous Chai Jin.*
He who came out was indeed Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind. He said: "And who might you be?"
At the sight of such an imposing figure of a man, of such liberal endowments, Whiskers hurriedly bowed and said: "I am Zhu Tong, warden of Yuncheng prison. I was banished here on account of an offence I committed. Last night I took the Governor's little son out to see the lights and he was killed by Iron Ox Li Kui. I saw this Iron Ox enter your compound this morning. I beg you to do all you can to help apprehend him and send him to justice."
Chai Jin said: "You are Whiskers, aren't you? Please sit down."
"Might I ask your name?" Whiskers said.
"My name is Chai Jin and they call me the Little Whirlwind."
"Of course I have heard much about you," said Whiskers, hurriedly prostrating himself. "I never expected to have the chance of meeting you like this."
"I have heard a lot about you too, Whiskers," said Chai Jin. "Please come inside so we can talk."
Whiskers followed Chai Jin inside. Then he said: "How is it that villain Iron Ox dares to enter your house?"
"I had better explain," said Chai Jin. "I have always enjoyed knowing the brethren of the rivers and lakes. Because of the acts of my ancestor and his meritorious abdication, my family enjoy the privilege of a cast-iron guarantee. If anyone guilty of wrongdoing hides in my house no one can come here searching for him. Recently a dear friend of mine, with whom you too have had a connection, and who is now one of the leaders on Mount Liang, namely Song Jiang, the Opportune Rain, wrote to ask me if I would allow Professor Wu Yong, Sergeant Lei and Iron Ox to stay in my place whilst they tried to persuade you to go up the mountain and join the loyal band. He knew that you might refuse to go so he instructed Iron Ox to kill the child, in order to cut off your return route, and leave you no alternative but to take your place among the leaders on the mountain. Professor, Sergeant! Why don't you come out and join our discussion?"
Thereupon Professor Wu and Sergeant Lei emerged from a room at the side. They went straight to Whiskers and prostrated themselves. "Dear brother, please forgive us," they said. "It was on Song Jiang's orders, he told us to do it. If you will come to the mountain stronghold, all will be explained."
"I accept that you had good intentions," said Whiskers. "But that was really too cruel!"
After Chai Jin had done his utmost to calm him, Whiskers said: "I suppose I can go with you, but just let me have a sight of that Black Whirlwind!"
"Mr. Li!" Chai Jin called out. "Come and join our discussion!
Iron Ox also issued forth from the room at the side and saluted. When Whiskers saw him his heart was filled with an indescribable fury, vast and ungovernable. He leapt to his feet and rushed at Iron Ox, ready for a fight to the death. Chai Jin, Sergeant Lei and the Professor struggled hard to restrain him. Finally he said: "If you want me to join you on the mountain you'll have to promise me one thing, or I won't go."
"Not one but a dozen," said the Professor. "Please tell us what it's." And if Whiskers had not made this condition, things would have been different.

*A tumult in Gaotang district, repercussions on Mount Liang,*
*Cause a royal friend of the righteous to clash with the law,*
*Lead to a hospitable royal relative languishing in gaol.*

THE messenger stated that a few days ago they had stopped some travelers near a forest, and among them was Inspector Lei Heng of Yuncheng County, who was recognized by Zhu Gui, and the latter had got the former to stay at the inn. Song Jiang and Chao Gai were much pleased to hear this, and they went with Wu Yong to receive Inspector Lei Heng, and bring him to the headquarters.
Upon meeting, Song Jiang said, "I have been thinking of you very often, and it is with great pleasure that I now meet you here. But what has brought you this way?"
Lei Heng after a deep bow said, "I was deputed by our magistrate to go to Dongchang Prefecture, and I am now on my way back. I was however recognized by Zhu Gui when our party was held up by your people."
"Heaven fortunately arranged that," said Song Jiang. He then took Lei Heng to headquarters where he was entertained for about five days. Chao Gai happened to ask for news about Inspector Zhu Tong, and was informed that he was a head jailer of the prison at Yuncheng County. He was held in high esteem by the newly appointed magistrate.
Song Jiang gradually brought the conversation round, and suggested that Inspector Lei Heng join them, but the inspector rejected the idea. His mother was very old, and could not stay alone, but when she died he could join them. When at last he left the mountain they gave him many presents. Upon reaching Yuncheng County Inspector Lei Heng duly delivered the dispatches he was carrying, and reported to the magistrate the results of his journey. One day as he was on his way to the *yamen* he heard someone behind call out, "Inspector, when did you get back?" Upon turning round he recognized an idler named Li the Second, and replied, "I came back some days ago."
"Then you cannot have seen that beautiful girl Bai Xiuying who had just arrived here from the Eastern Capital. She was inquiring for you, but you were away at the time. She sings splendidly, acts well, plays the lute feelingly, and is very popular with all the men. Would you care to see her? She is one of the best singsong girls."
Inspector Lei Heng was off duty at the time so he agreed to go with Li the Second. At the door he noticed many announcements in golden characters. He entered, and took the first seat. There was an actress performing on the small stage. Li the Second, disappeared as soon as Lei Heng was seated. When girl's song finished an old man came on the stage holding a fan in his hand and he spoke, "I am Bai Yuqiao and I come from the Eastern Capital. I am getting very old, and have to depend upon my daughter Bai Xiuying for a living." A gong was then sounded, and his daughter came on the stage, and bowed to the audience. She went through a few tricks with a small gong, and then sang the following song:

The young birds chirp; the old ones come;
Old goats lean, but kids are fat;
In life how hard to get a crumb,
Let alone a little clothing;
In love our men are frolicsome,
So diff'rent to the mandarin duck.

Lei Heng applauded. The girl spoke, "Today you will have noticed a bill at the door announcing that I would sing the gay and amorous song, 'At Yuzhang City, Su Qing was twice expelled.'" Her song was received with general applause. She sang some more verses of the above song, and then her father spoke, "Our repertoire is very select, but particularly suited for an intelligent audience like this. Now that the applause is over I will ask my daughter to go round, and collect your donations." The girl took up a tray, and said, "I begin with the wealthy, and stop with the profitable pass the lucky spots, and go to the prosperous places. I hope you will all give something."
"They will all contribute," said her father.
She first came to Lei Heng when he felt in all his belts and pockets, but could not find a single cash. He said, "I have forgotten to bring my purse, but I will come again tomorrow and reward you."
"If you don't contribute the others will follow your example," said the girl. "You are sitting in the best seat."
Lei Heng blushed, and said, "When I left home I had no idea of coming here so I did not carry a purse."
The girl laughed, "You came here, and listened to my singing so why did you not bring some money?"
"Never mind! I will give you three taels of silver tomorrow. Just now I have not a single cash."
"As you have no cash today you need not talk about giving silver tomorrow," said Bai Xiuying. "It seems as though you were showing me a plum to quench my thirst and a painted cake to satisfy my hunger."
Her father also added, "My daughter! Have you no eyes? You ask people without looking whether they are likely to have money. You had better pass him by and ask more generous people for money."
"Do you wish her to infer that I am ungenerous?" asked Inspector Lei Heng.
"It would be easier for a dog to grow horns than for you to be generous," said the father, Bai Yuqiao.
The audience all laughed at this joke. Inspector Lei Heng was angry, and said, "You foolish slave! How dare you insult me?"
"To insult a village cowboy is a small matter," replied Bai Yuqiao.
A bystander interposed, "Don't talk like that. This is Inspector Lei Heng."
"This is a donkey dick," replied Bai Yuqiao.
Lei Heng could stand no more of this. He jumped on to the stage, and gave Bai Yuqiao a blow on the jaw which knocked some teeth out. Many bystanders intervened, and prevented further blows, and induced Lei Heng to leave.
Now the girl had been on intimate terms with the county magistrate when he was previously in the Eastern Capital. When the daughter saw how badly her father had been mauled she took a sedan chair at once, and went to call on the magistrate. She told him how her father had been treated in the tea-house. The magistrate was angry, and asked her to write out an accusation at once. This was done. The girl was so determined that she would not leave the magistrate's *yamen*, but stayed there crying. This prevented Lei Heng's many friends from seeing the magistrate and settling the matter in favor of Lei Heng. Lei Heng was arrested, and upon being brought into court was beaten with a bamboo. The magistrate also ordered that he wear a cangue, and be paraded on the street with it.
The girl wished to further display her influence with the magistrate so she again spoke to him, and asked him to order that Inspector Lei Heng be paraded in front of the tea-house. The magistrate gave this order.
The men in the *yamen* were all friendly to Lei Heng, and would not do him any harm. The girl knew this so she went into a tea shop just near, and called out to his attendant to come inside. She said to him, "The magistrate wants to punish Lei Heng, but I know that you are the prisoner's friend and treat him well. I will go to tell the magistrate, and see what he will do."
"Please do not get angry," said the attendant; "I will punish him."
"In that case I will reward you for your service," replied the girl.
The attendant went to Lei Heng, and told him what the girl had said. Then he began to execute the punishment. There was a big crowd all round looking on, and soon Lei Heng's mother arrived with some food for him. When she saw her son was being abused she cursed the attendant: "You are a friend of my son like all the others in the *yamen*, but how much money did you get for doing this dirty work? Who will stand for you when it is your turn to be charged?"
"Madam, please listen to me," replied the attendant. "The plaintiff insisted upon your son being sent to be bound up here as the orders issued. So what else can I do? If we disobey orders, the plaintiff would complain to the magistrate, and we would be punished. I have no means of saving his 'face.'"
"What right has the plaintiff," said Lei Heng's mother, "to ask for details of the punishment to be executed in this way?"
The attendant whispered to Madame Lei, "The plaintiff is very friendly with the magistrate, and a word from her goes a long way."
Madame Lei went up to her son, and began to untie the fastenings while she was cursing. "That girl must be a real slut to use her influence in this way. I will untie these ropes myself, and then see what she will do."
The girl Bai Xiuying in the tea shop had heard all this, and she now came out on the street, and spoke to Madame Lei, "What did the old woman say just now?"
Madame Lei was annoyed at this, and pointing at the girl she replied, "You've been mounted and squeezed by thousands, you'd screw any man, you bitch! How dare you abuse me?"
The girl raising her eyebrows, and staring replied, "You old pimp! Beggar-woman! How dare you insult me!"
"I have insulted you! Well, what then? You are not the magistrate of this district!"
The girl, Bai Xiuying, rushed forward, and slapped Madame Lei's face. She followed this up with a vigorous assault of slaps and blows. Lei Heng saw all this, and could not stand it. He was boiling with rage, and seizing the cangue, he broke it in two pieces, then seizing it he hit the girl's head with it, and broke her skull. She fell down dead, with her brains leaking out and her eyes bulging.
The bystanders seized Lei Heng, took him to the *yamen*, and made a full statement to the magistrate. The magistrate ordered the coroner and the neihbourhood chief to take Lei Heng to the spot, inspect the corpse, and make their report. Lei Heng confessed fully, and was sent to prison. His mother was released on bail.
The jailer was Zhu Tong, the "Beautiful Whiskers." He gave his friend Lei Heng a good room, and supplied food and drink.
Zhu Tong thought of finding a means of allowing Lei Heng to escape, but for a day he could not find a plan. He however arranged for a friend to interview the magistrate, and explain the case. The magistrate had some esteem for Zhu Tong, but would not listen to any proposal made as he was still angry that his sweetheart had been killed. The girl's father was pressing the magistrate for prompt action, and wanted Lei Heng executed at once. After sixty days of detention in the prison Lei Heng was sent to the Prefect at Jizhou for trial. Zhu Tong was placed in charge of the escort. When they had gone about four //from Yuncheng

County, Zhu Tong ordered a halt at an inn by the roadside. While the escort was drinking wine Zhu Tong took Lei Heng to a quiet spot at the back of the inn. He took off the prisoner's cangue, and said, "Younger brother, you are free. Go at once, and get your mother and then both of you can escape. I will face the case at the *yamen*."
Lei Heng replied, "I do not object to escape but it would only get you into trouble."
"Younger brother, you do not understand. The magistrate was angry because you killed his sweetheart, and has worded the report so that you will be executed upon your arrival at Jizhou. If I allow you to escape I shall not be executed for that crime. I have no parents now or even relatives, and can use whatever money I have for my own case. Go at once, and be more careful in the future."
Lei Heng argued no more, but escaped. He took his mother, and went to Liangshan Marsh.
Zhu Tong came inside the inn again and said, "Lei Heng has escaped. What can we do?"
"Let us go at once to his home, and arrest him, as he is sure to go there," replied the escort.
Zhu Tong, however, remained undecided for a long time, and then took the escort back to the *yamen*.
He reported to the magistrate that owing to his own carelessness Lei Heng had escaped, and he held himself responsible for the misfortune.
The magistrate was inclined to save Zhu Tong, but Bai Yuqiao would not let the matter drop. So he sent Zhu Tong to Jizhou Prefecture, for trial. Zhu Tong sent a man in advance with plenty of money to arrange matters with the officials. After his trial he received twenty blows with the bamboo, and was then sent to the prison at Cangzhou, Zhili province. He was put under the escort of two men. Upon arrival at Cangzhou the escort was dismissed, and sent back. The Prefect liked the appearance of Zhu Tong, and instead of sending him to prison gave him a post as a menial official in his *yamen*.
The minor officials treated Zhu Tong with respect, as they soon saw that he had a very good easy disposition. One day while the Prefect was sitting in court listening to a case he summoned Zhu Tong, and asked him, "For what reason did you assist Lei Heng in escaping?"
"I had no intention of allowing him to escape," said Zhu Tong, "and he only got away owing to my carelessness."
"Then your fault was not very serious," said the Prefect.
"But the plaintiff claimed that I had done it purposely, and demanded severe punishment."
"Why did Lei Heng kill the singsong girl?"
Zhu Tong then explained all the details of the murder.
The Prefect considered that under the circumstances as Lei Heng had acted from strong sense of filial piety, Zhu Tong had done the right thing in allowing the prisoner to escape.
Zhu Tong told the Prefect that he would not dare to deceive him so as to gain such a good reputation. Just then a son of the Prefect about four years of age entered the court. The Prefect regarded his child as a jewel of the greatest value. The boy approached Zhu Tong, and wanted to be lifted up. Zhu Tong took him in his arms. The child stroked Zhu Tong's beard and said, "I like men with beards."
The Prefect told his son not to annoy Zhu Tong by pulling his beard.
"I want him to come and play with me," replied the child.
"I will just go, and play with him outside, but will soon come back," said Zhu Tong.
The Prefect agreed to this, and the pair left the court. Zhu bought some sugared fruit in the street for the child, and then returned to the court with the boy still in his arms.
"Where did you go, my son?" asked the Prefect.
"This old beard took me to the street, and bought for me some sugared fruit which I ate," replied the little boy.
"Where did you get the money from to buy such sweets?" asked the Prefect to Zhu Tong.
"Do not mention it," replied Zhu Tong. "It is merely to express my reverence to you."
The Prefect ordered a servant to bring some wine for Zhu Tong. A woman servant soon brought it in, and offered Zhu Tong three large bowls of wine. The Prefect asked Zhu Tong to look after the boy and play with him in future.
"Your orders shall be closely observed," said Zhu Tong. After this Zhu Tong was always with the child, playing with him, and always spent sums of money to buy things for him.
In another fortnight was the Festival of Departed Spirits (15th of the 7th month), and many lamps were floated on the rivers for the spirits. A woman servant came to Zhu Tong, and told him that the boy wanted to go in the evening, and see the lamps floating on the river. The Prefect's wife had agreed to let him go with Zhu Tong. The boy was dressed in green silk, and wore a cap with imitation beards on each side. Zhu Tong carried him on his shoulder through the *yamen* gate to the Dizang Temple where they could get a good view of the river. It was about 9 P.M., and Zhu Tong carried the little boy round the temple to the Releasing Life Pool.[77] The boy leaned on the rail, and enjoyed watching the lamps floating on the water.
While there a man pulled at Zhu Tong's sleeve and said, "Elder brother, please come here as I have something to say." Turning, Zhu Tong was surprised to see Lei Heng. He told the boy to sit down at that spot while he went to buy some sugared fruit for him. He must not go away.
"Please come back quickly," replied the boy, "because I want to go to the bridge and see the floating lamps there."
Zhu Tong agreed, and then went off to Lei Heng. He asked why Lei Heng had come there.
Lei Heng drew Zhu Tong to one side where there was no one about. Then Lei Heng explained that he had taken his mother to Liangshan Marsh and joined the bandits. But Chao Gai and also Song Jiang were so much indebted to the splendid assistance of Zhu Tong that they had specially instructed Wu Yong to come with Lei Heng, and convey their deep gratitude to him.
"Where is Wu Yong now?" asked Zhu Tong.
A voice behind him said, "Here I am!" and turning he saw Wu Yong.
After the usual exchange of salutations Wu Yong invited Zhu Tong to accompany them to Liangshan Marsh. He urged him to go with them that night.
For some time Zhu Tong could think of nothing to say, but at last he replied, "You are wrong. I am afraid that somebody will hear what you say. Lei Heng has committed a murder. I let him escape, and am now an exile here for his sake. After about half a year more I can return home, and see my people again. I cannot join your band. You had better return at once, and not get into trouble by staying about here."
"You have a job here," said Lei Heng, "but it is hardly suitable for a hero like you. It is not my idea to take you away, but I come because both Song Jiang and Chao Gai would like very much to see you, and thank you personally for what you have done."
"I do not understand you," replied Zhu Tong. "I helped you to escape, and also to take your old mother away. But why do you come today, and endeavor to involve me in some trouble?"
"As you do not care to come with us," said Wu Yong, "we shall of course have to return without troubling you any further."
"Then please convey to our friends at Liangshan Marsh my kind regards," said Zhu Tong.
Upon returning to the spot where he had left the small boy, Zhu Tong could not find him anywhere, and became alarmed. Lei Heng seeing the position said that his companion had taken the boy, and that Zhu Tong should not worry so much.
"But this is a very serious matter for me," replied Zhu Tong. "If the boy has any misfortune the life of the Prefect will be in danger."
Lei Heng and Wu Yong got Zhu Tong to go with them outside the town.
"Where are your companions who have taken the child away?" asked Zhu Tong.
"Just come to our rooms and there we will give you the small boy," replied Lei Heng.
"Time is passing quickly," said Zhu Tong, "and I am afraid that the Prefect will blame me."
"Our companions are rather stupid, and will probably have taken the child to our rooms," said Wu Yong.
"What is the name of your companion?" asked Zhu Tong, and was informed that he was Li Kui. At this Zhu Tong was very much upset, and hurried forward. They had gone about a *li* when they met Li Kui and Zhu Tong asked him where the boy was.
After saluting Li Kui replied that the boy was there, and Zhu Tong wanted to see him at once. Li Kui said the boy was sleeping in the wood. Zhu Tong went to the place indicated, and there saw the boy lying on the ground. Upon going to pick the boy up Zhu Tong saw that he was dead—his skull having been cleft in two. At this Zhu Tong was boiling with rage, and he rushed out of the wood. The three men had disappeared, but looking round Zhu Tong saw Li Kui some distance away, and ran after him. On the way he stripped his clothing ready for a fight. Li Kui was a fast runner, and Zhu Tong could not overtake him, and was soon out of breath. It was now dark except for the moonlight, and Li Kui had no difficulty in keeping well in front. Soon they came to a farmhouse, and Li Kui went inside. "Now," thought Zhu Tong, "I will capture him, and kill him." Upon entering the farmyard Zhu Tong noticed many military weapons arranged in front of the main building. He thought this place must belong to some official so he shouted out, "Is there anybody inside?" In response, a man came out and asked, "Who are you?"
"I am Zhu Tong, jailer from the prison, at Yuncheng County, and I am in pursuit of a criminal who entered this farmyard. He is named Li Kui and he has murdered the son of the Prefect of Jizhou. Please help me to capture him."
The man asked him to wait a little, but Zhu Tong would not do so, and asked for his name.
"I am Chai Jin, 'Small Whirlwind,'" replied the man. Zhu Tong had heard of his reputation, and after salutations Squire Chai Jin asked him to go into the house, and talk matters over. They entered and Zhu Tong then asked how such a man as Li Kui could use that farm as a hiding place.
"I welcome all kinds of wanderers here," replied Squire Chai Jin. "As I have a special iron tablet bestowed by the Emperor to my ancestor as a distinction for great merit, no criminal may be arrested at my house. I received a special note from Song Jiang, a friend of ours, asking me to allow Lei Heng, Wu Yong, and Li Kui to stay at my house for a few days. They were on their way to request you to join them at Liangshan Marsh. As you refused to join them, Li Kui kidnaped the boy, and killed him, so that you could not return to the *yamen* and face his father."
Just then Lei Heng and Wu Yong entered the room, and after saluting Zhu Tong they said, "Please forgive us for the crime committed. We did it only by order of our chief, Song Jiang. If you come with us to Liangshan Marsh all will be explained to you."
"Your asking me to go to Liangshan Marsh was all right," replied Zhu Tong, "but your method of inducing me to go was exceedingly cruel. I will go with you now, but I must first see Li Kui."
Squire Chai Jin agreed to this, and called in Li Kui to make a full apology to Zhu Tong. When Li Kui entered he gave Zhu Tong a kotow. Zhu Tong was enraged at seeing the man, and rushing forward seized him to kill him on the spot. The other three men however intervened and held Zhu Tong.
"Before I go with you," said Zhu Tong, "I've something to say."

Battleaxes break the law,
Offspring of the Emperor dies.

## 150
## Iron Ox Li Kui Beats Chancellor Yin Tianxi to Death; Mr. Chai Jin Jin Is Trapped, Captured, & becomes a prisoner in Gaotang Prefecture

"If you want me to go up the mountain," said Zhu Tong, "you must kill Black Whirlwind to appease my rage! Then I'll go."
"You can eat my prick," roared Li Kui. "I was carrying out the orders of brothers Chao and Song! It hadn't a tooting fart to do with me!"
Zhu Tong moved to throw himself on Li Kui. The other three restrained him. "If Black Whirlwind is there, I'll never go up that mountain," Zhou Tong vowed.
"That's easy," said Chai Jin. "I'll keep him here with me. You three go on to the stronghold and satisfy the wishes of Chao and Song."
"The prefect is sure to send a warrant for my arrest to Yuncheng County. They'll take my wife and children. How can we deal with that?"
"Don't worry," said Wu Yong. "Song Jiang has probably brought your family into the fortress by now."
Only then did Zhu Tong relax. Chai Jin treated his guests to wine, and the same day saw them off. They left towards evening. Lord Chai provided them with three riding horses and an escort of vassals. He accompanied them to the outside of the pass.
At the final parting, Wu Yong gave Li Kui some words of advice. "Behave with care. Stay a while in the lord's manor. Don't stir up any trouble and get him involved. In a few months or half a year, after Zhu Tong has cooled down, we'll bring you back to the fortress. We'll probably invite Lord Chai to join us, too."
The three mounted and departed. Chai Jin and Li Kui returned to the manor. Zhu Tong went with Wu Yong and Lei Heng to become a member of the band in Liangshan Marsh. When they came to the end of Cangzhou Prefecture, the vassals rode the horses back, and the three continued on foot.
The journey was uneventful, and they soon reached the tavern ran by Zhu Gui. He sent word to the stronghold of their arrival. Chao Gai and Song Jiang, accompanied by greater and lesser chieftains, were waiting to greet them on the Shore of Golden Sands, to the beat of drums and the shrilling of flutes. All got on their horses and climbed to the fortress, where they dismounted and went to Fraternity Hall. They talked for a while of old times together. Then Zhu Tong voiced his apprehension.
"You've called me to the mountain, but the prefect of Cangzhou is certain to notify Yuncheng County to seize my wife and children. What can I do?"
Song Jiang laughed. "Set your mind at ease, brother. We sent men to fetch them several days ago."
"Where are they now?"
"They're resting at the place of my father the squire. Why not go and see for yourself?"
Zhu Tong was delighted. Song Jiang led him to his father's villa. Zhu Tong was reunited with his family. He observed that they had brought all their valuables.
"A man came with a letter the other day saying you had already joined the mountain band," his wife related. "So we packed our belongings and travelled through the night to get here."
Zhu Tong kowtowed and thanked the brigand leaders. Song Jiang asked both him and Lei Heng to make their homes on the mountain summit. For successive days he gave feasts in their honor, as new chieftains. Of that no more need be said.

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The prefect of Cangzhou, when it began getting late and Zhu Tong didn't return with his son, sent people out to look for them. They searched half the night. The next day, someone found the body in the grove, and notified the prefectural office. Shocked, the prefect went to the grove. He wept as though his heart would break. He had the body encoffined, and cremated it.
Summoning court the following morning, he issued notices for the arrest of Zhu Tong to all the surrounding areas. Yuncheng County reported that Zhu Tong's wife and family had fled to places unknown. Rewards for Zhu Tong's apprehension were offered in the various prefectures and counties. Of that, we'll say no more.

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When Li Kui had been with Lord Chai for over a month, a messenger delivered an urgent letter to the manor. Chai Jin accepted and read it. He was astonished.
"In that case I'll have to go," he exclaimed.
"What's the trouble, Excellency?" asked Li Kui.
"I have an uncle, Chai Huangcheng, who lives in Gaotang Prefecture. That rogue Yin Tianxi, brother-in-law of the prefect, Gao Lian, has taken over his garden. My uncle is so infuriated that he's fallen ill, and he may not live. He must have some dying words he wants to impart. My uncle has no children. I'll have to hurry to his side."
"Would you like me to keep you company?"
"I'd be glad if you're willing to go."
Chai Jin packed some luggage, selected a dozen good horses, and told a number of vassals to get ready. The next day at dawn Lord Chai, Li Kui and their company climbed into their saddles, left the manor and headed for Gaotang.
They arrived in less than a day and dismounted in front of the residence of Chai Huangcheng. Chai Jin left Li Kui and the others in the outer hall and went to his uncle's bedroom. Seated beside Huangcheng's bed, he wept. The lady his uncle had married after the death of his first wife came in.
"You've had a tiring ride," she said. "You mustn't upset yourself."
Chai Jin greeted her courteously and asked what had happened.
"The new prefect, Gao Lian, is also the military commander here," she said. "Because Marshal Gao in the Eastern Capital is his cousin, he feels he can do anything he pleases. He brought with him his brother-in-law Yin Tianxi. Everybody calls him Counsellor Yin. Although quite young, Yin knows he has the prefect's backing, and he hurts people with his outrageous behavior. One of his toadies told him that we have a pretty rear garden with a pavilion overlooking a pool. He broke in with twenty or thirty scamps one day, examined the garden, and wanted to drive us out of our home and move in himself.
"Your uncle Huangcheng said to him: 'Our family is of noble origin. An earlier emperor bestowed a Wrought Iron Pledge on our family that no one may oppress us. How dare you seize my home? Where is my wife and family supposed to go?'
"The knave wouldn't listen. He insisted that we leave. Your uncle tried to push him away, and was beaten for his pains. He's been in bed ever since. He can't get up and he can't eat. Medicine doesn't seem to do any good. Heaven may be far but the grave for him is near, I'd say. Fortunately, you've come to take charge. So even if the worst should happen, we won't have to worry."
"Don't despair, aunt. We'll get a good doctor to treat him. If there's any dispute about this, I'll send a man back to Cangzhou to get the Wrought Iron Pledge, and show that to Yin. If we have to go before the authorities, or even the emperor himself, we have nothing to fear."
"Huangcheng failed in all his efforts," said his wife. "But I'm sure, in your hands, we'll get results."
Chai Jin stayed a while with his uncle, then came out and told Li Kui and the others about the dispute. Li Kui jumped to his feet.
"That unreasonable varlet! I'll give him a couple of licks with my axes first, then we can start discussions."
"Calm yourself, brother Li. You can't get rough with him without any provocation. Besides, although he may have powerful backing, our family is protected by the Pledge. If he won't listen to reason here, in the capital there are persons just as influential as he, and the law is clear. We'll fight him in court."
"The law, the law! If everyone obeyed the law, everything would be serene! I'm in favor of hitting him first and talking afterwards. If he complains to the court, I'll hack him and the friggin judge together!"

Chai Jin laughed. "No wonder Zhu Tong wanted to fight you. You're both such hotheads. This is an imperial city, not your mountain stronghold where you can act as you like."
"So what? Jiangzhou and Wuweijun are also imperial cities. Didn't I kill men there too?"
"Wait till I've seen how the land lies. When the need arises, I'll ask your help, brother. Until that happens, please remain here quietly."
At that moment a servant hurried out to request Lord Chai to go to his uncle. Chai Jin went quickly to the bedside. His uncle spoke to him with tears in his eyes.
"You're a man of high principle, nephew, a credit to our ancestors. I die today because of the humiliation imposed on me by Yin Tianxi. You owe it to me as one of the same flesh and blood to write a complaint to the emperor and obtain redress. From beneath the Nine Springs of the Nether World I will thank you. Take care of yourself. I have no other bequests."
Having spoken, Huangcheng died. Chai Jin wept bitterly. His aunt feared he would faint. "Restrain your grief," she urged. "We must talk about the funeral arrangements."
"The Wrought Iron Pledge is in my home. I haven't brought it. But I'll send a man for it immediately. If necessary, I'll file a complaint in the Eastern Capital. But uncle has passed away. First we must proceed with the encoffining and dress in mourning. We'll confer about other things later."
Chai Jin ordered that inner and outer coffins be prepared in the official manner, and that a memorial tablet be set up in keeping with the rites. The whole family dressed in deep mourning, and young and old lamented. Li Kui, outside, heard their weeping. Angrily, he ground a fist into the palm of his hand. But when he asked the servants what was going on, no one would tell him. Monks were invited to conduct the prayers.
Two days went by. Riding a spirited horse, Yin Tianxi and twenty or thirty cronies had been carousing outside the city, amusing themselves with slingshots, crossbows, blowpipes, inflated balls, stick branches for catching birds, and musical instruments. Now, pretending to be drunker than they actually were, they staggered up to the residence of Chai Huangcheng. Yin reined in his horse and shouted a demand to see the person in charge.
Chai Jin, wearing mourning, hastily emerged. Yin addressed him from his saddle.
"What part of the family are you?"
"I'm Chai Jin, the nephew."
"I gave orders the other day that they were to move out. Why haven't I been obeyed?"
"Uncle was sick in bed. We couldn't disturb him. He died in the night. We'll move when the forty-nine day mourning period is over."
"Farts! I give you three days more. If you're not out by then, I'll put a cangue around your neck and let you taste a hundred blows of my staff!"
"You mustn't persecute us like this, Counsellor. We're descendants of a royal family, and protected by an old imperial Wrought Iron Pledge. It must be respected."
"Take it out and let me see it," Yin shouted.
"It's in my home in Cangzhou. I've already sent for it."
"The rascal's lying," Yin said angrily. "Even if there is such an edict, it doesn't scare me. Men, give this fellow a drubbing!"
The gang started toward Chai Jin. Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind, had been watching and listening through a crack in the door of the house. Now he pushed it open, dashed up to Yin with a roar, dragged him from his horse, and with one punch knocked him sprawling. The thirty ruffians rushed to Yin's aid. Li Kui promptly flattened half a dozen. Yelling, they all turned and fled.
Li Kui picked Yin up and pummelled him with fist and foot. Chai Jin couldn't restrain him. It wasn't long before Yin was lying dead on the ground.
Chai Jin groaned. He led Li Kui to the rear hall and said: "They'll be sending men here very soon! You can't stay! I'll deal with the prosecution. You've got to go back to Liangshan Marsh, quickly."
"I can go, but you'll be implicated."
"The imperial Pledge will protect me. You must go at once. There's no time to lose."
Li Kui gathered his battle-axes, took some travel money, left through the rear gate, and set out for the mountain fortress.
Not long after, more than two hundred men, armed with swords, spears and staves, surrounded the residence. Chai Jin came out and said: "I'll go with you to the authorities and explain."
They bound his arms and went in to look for the culprit, a big swarthy fellow. He was gone. They took Chai Jin to the prefecture court, where he knelt in the center of the hall. Gao Lian, the prefect, had ground his teeth in venomous rage when he heard that his brother-in-law had been beaten to death, and had been waiting for the assailant to be brought in. Now, Chai Jin was flung down at the foot of the prefect's dais.
"How dare you kill my Yin Tianxi?" Gao shouted.
"I am a direct descendant of Emperor Shi Zong. My family has a Wrought Iron Pledge of imperial protection from Tai Zu, the first emperor of Song. It's in my home in Cangzhou," Chai Jin replied. "I called to visit my uncle Chai Huangcheng, who was gravely ill. Unfortunately, he died, and we are now in mourning at his residence. Counsellor Yin came with thirty men and wanted to drive us out. He wouldn't listen to my explanations and ordered his men to beat me. One of my vassals, Big Li, while defending me, killed him in the heat of battle."
"Where is Big Li?"
"He panicked and ran away."
"He's your vassal. Would he have dared kill a man without orders from you? You deliberately let him escape, and now you try to delude this court. Rascals like you never confess unless they are beaten. Take him, guards, and give it to him hard!"
"To save his master my vassal Big Li accidentally killed a man. It's not my fault. We have Emperor Tai Zu's Pledge. Am I to be beaten like a common criminal?"
"Where is the Pledge?"
"In Cangzhou. I've already sent for it."
"The scoundrel is opposing this court," Gao Lian raged. "Beat him, guards, with all your strength!"
They pounded Chai Jin till his flesh was a pulp and his blood streamed in rivulets. He was forced to confess: "I ordered my vassal Big Li to kill Yin Tianxi." A twenty-five-catty cangue for the condemned was placed around his neck, and he was cast into prison. Yin's body, after inspection by the medical examiner, was put into a coffin and buried. Of that no more need be said.
Yin's sister wanted vengeance. She had her prefect husband confiscate the property of Chai Huangcheng, arrest the members of his family, and take over for themselves the house and gardens of the residence. Chai Jin languished in jail.

Li Kui travelled through the night to get back to Liangshan Marsh. On arriving at the fortress he reported to the leaders. Zhu Tong was filled with rage the moment he saw him. He rushed at Li Kui with his halberd. Black Whirlwind, brandishing his axes, clashed with him in combat. Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the others exhorted them to stop. Song apologized to Zhu Tong.
"Killing the prefect's little boy wasn't Li Kui's idea. Military Advisor Wu Yong thought of this device when you wouldn't agree to joining us. Now that you are here, forget it. Let's all strive together in harmony and loyalty. We don't want outsiders to laugh at us."
Song Jiang turned to Li Kui. "Tell sir Beautiful Beard you're sorry."
Li Kui glared. "A fine business. I've done plenty for this stronghold. He hasn't done a thing. Why should I tell him I'm sorry?"
"Although it was the Military Advisor's order, you did kill the prefect's son. From the point of view of age, Zhu Tong is your older brother. Kowtow to him, for my sake. Then I'll kowtow to you, and that'll be the end of it."
Li Kui couldn't very well refuse. To Zhu Tong he said: "I'm not afraid of you, but brother Song Jiang insists. I can't help myself. I apologize." He threw his axes aside and kowtowed, twice.
Only then was Zhu Tong appeased. Chao Gai ordered that a feast be laid to cement the reconciliation.
"Lord Chai went to Gaotang because his uncle, Chai Huangcheng, was ill. The prefect's brother-in-law, Yin Tianxi, wanted to take over the house and gardens, and cursed Chai Jin. I knocked the lout around and killed him," said Li Kui.
"You escaped, but they're sure to prosecute Lord Chai," Song Jiang cried in alarm.
"Calm yourself, brother," said Wu Yong. "We'll know more about it when Dai Zong returns."
"Where has brother Dai Zong gone?" asked Li Kui.
"I thought you'd only stir up trouble, hanging around Lord Chai's manor," said Wu Yong, "and I sent Dai Zong to bring you back. If he found you were gone, he'd surely follow you to Gaotang."
Before the words were out of his mouth, a scout entered and announced: "Superintendent Dai has returned."
Song Jiang went forward to welcome him. After Dai came into the hall and was seated, he was asked for news of Lord Chai.
"I went to his manor and learned that he and Li Kui had left for Gaotang. I hurried after them. In Gaotang, the whole city was agog. Everyone said: 'Yin Tianxi tried to seize the residence of Chai Huangcheng, and a big dark fellow beat him to death. Lord Chai was implicated, and tied up and cast into prison. All the property of Chai Huangcheng's family has been confiscated. There's no guarantee that Lord Chai's life will be preserved.' "
"That swarthy rogue has done it again," said Chao Gai. "Wherever he goes, there's turmoil."
"Chai Huangcheng was beaten by Yin, and he died of rage. Then Yin came to take over his residence and ordered his men to beat Lord Chai. Even if he were a living Buddha, I wouldn't let him get away with it!" Li Kui retorted.
"Lord Chai has always been benevolent to our fortress," said Chao Gai. "Today, he's in danger. We must rescue him. I'll go personally."
"You're the highest leader here, brother, you shouldn't make a move lightly," said Song Jiang. "I've long been indebted to Lord Chai. Let me go on your behalf."
"Although Gaotang is a small city, it's densely populated, has a large military force, and plenty of grain. We mustn't underestimate it," said Wu Yong. "I propose that we ask twelve chieftains to lead a vanguard of five thousand men, with a supporting force of three thousand under ten chieftains."
The twenty-two chieftains bid farewell to Chao Gai and the others and left the mountain stronghold for Gaotang.
By the time the vanguard force reached the edge of the prefecture, Gao Lian had already been informed by his scouts. "I'd been intending to clean out that lair of shabby bandits in Liangshan Marsh," he sneered, "and now they present themselves to be tied. A Heaven-blessed chance." He directed his aides: "Transmit my order immediately to muster our army, go forth from the city, and engage the enemy. Let the citizenry man the walls."
On horseback Gao was military commandant, afoot he was the prefect. As soon as his order was issued, all his officers, from generals to sergeants, assembled their units and inspected them on the drill fields, then marched out of the city against the foe. Gao Lian had a personal contingent of three hundred crack troops known as the "Flying Miracles," who came from Shandong, Hebei, Jiangxi, Hunan, north and south of the Huai, and east and west of the Zhejiang River. Shouting, banners waving, drums pounding, gongs crashing, they waited only their adversaries' approach.
With the arrival of the five thousand men under Lin Chong, Hua Rong and Qin Ming, the two hosts confronted each other, drams and banners plainly visible, each temporarily halted by powerful flights of arrows. Trumpets blared, and the big battle drums throbbed.
Hua Rong, Qin Ming and the ten other chieftains reined in their horses at the most advanced position. Lin Chong, his serpent lance at the ready, spurred his mount forward. "Gao the thief," he yelled. "Come out, quickly!"
Gao Lian gave his animal its head. With thirty officers he rode to the arch of pennants. There, they halted. Gao pointed at Lin Chong. "Death-deserving rebel brigands! Dare you disturb our city?"
"People-harming crook," shouted Lin Chong. "One of these days I'm going to the Eastern Capital and pulverize your scoundrelly relative Gao Qiu, that thievish minister who deceives the emperor! I won't rest until I do!"
Gao Lian turned fuming to his cohorts. "Who will ride out and seize this robber?"
From among the officers emerged a captain named Yu Zhi. He clapped his steed and advanced brandishing his sabre. Lin Chong galloped towards him. They had fought less than five rounds when Lin Chong ran his serpent lance through the man's chest and brought him tumbling to the ground.
Gao was startled. "Who will get our revenge?"
Another captain, Wen Wenbao, holding a long lance, astride a sleek brown horse with equipage of tinkling bells and clinking jade, was already racing towards Lin Chong, his animal's hoofs churning a cloud of dust.
"Rest a while, brother," cried Qin Ming. "Watch me cut this varlet down."
Lin Chong reined his mount, retracted his steel lance, and allowed Qin Ming to go ahead. The two battled more than ten rounds. Qin Ming deliberately left himself open. As Wen lunged and missed, Qin swung his mace and stove in the captain's skull. Wen collapsed at his horse's hoofs, and the frightened animal scampered back to the defenders' position. From both sides rose a mighty roar.
Gao Lian, having lost two of his officers, drew from its sheath upon his back his precious Dragon Sword. He muttered an incantation, then shouted: "Speed." And from the midst of his army a black mist rolled. Soon it covered half the sky. Sand flew, stones rolled, the earth quaked, the heavens shook. A weird gale swept across the field against the brigands. Lin Chong, Qin Ming, Hua Rong and the others couldn't see. Terrified horses whinnied and bolted. The fighters turned and fled.
Gao Lian waved his sword. His three hundred Miracle soldiers charged, followed by his entire army. Lin Chong's forces scattered in disorder, exclaiming piteously. Of the five thousand, more than a thousand were destroyed. For fifty //they retreated, and finally made camp. The rout complete, Gao Lian returned with his army to the city.
When Song Jiang's contingent reached the camp, Lin Chong and the others told them what had happened. Song Jiang and Wu Yong were shocked.
"What magic can it be," they wondered, "that is so potent?"
"Probably some evil spell," Wu Yong averred. "If we knew how to turn back the wind and fire, we could defeat them."
Song Jiang opened his Heavenly Books. In the third volume he found the necessary formula. Delighted, he memorized the words of the incantation. Then he reorganized his ranks. At the fifth watch they breakfasted. Banners flying, drums pounding, they marched rapidly towards the city.
This was reported to Gao Lian, who again mustered his victorious troops and his three hundred Miracle soldiers. He opened the gates, let down the drawbridge and deployed his men in battle positions.
Song Jiang, sword in hand, rode to the front. He could see a bevy of black pennants in the midst of Gao Lian's army.
"Those soldiers are his so-called 'Spellbinders,' " said Wu Yong. "He's probably going to work some magic again. How are you going to cope with him?"
"Don't worry. I have an antidote. Let none of you have any fear or doubt. Just concentrate on plunging into the fray."
Gao Lian, to his officers, said: "Avoid clashes and combat. But when I bang on my shield, rush together in strength and grab Song Jiang. I will reward you well, personally."
He hung on his saddle a bronze shield emblazoned with heraldic emblems of dragon and phoenix. Shouts rose from the opposing armies, as he rode forward, holding his sword. Song Jiang pointed his finger at him.
"I couldn't get here last night and my brothers carelessly took some casualties. Today I'm going to wipe all of you out, completely!"
"Dismount, you rebellious brigands, and let yourselves be bound," Gao shouted back. "I don't want to have to soil my hands with your blood!"
He waved his sword, whispered a few word under his breath, then yelled: "Speed!"
A dark miasma appeared, and was driven by a strange wind towards Song Jiang and his forces. Before it could reach them, Song muttered an incantation and twisted the fingers of his left hand into a cabalistic sign. With his right hand he pointed his sword. "Speed!" he shouted.
The wind reversed itself and blew back towards Gao's position. Song Jiang was about to order his men to charge. Gao quickly raised his bronze shield and beat on it with his sword. His Miracle soldiers were at once concealed in a swirling cloud of yellow sand. From his army hordes of monstrous animals and poisonous serpents poured forth.
Song Jiang and his men were scared stiff. Throwing away his sword, Song pulled his horse around and fled. His officers crowded together and ran for their lives. His troops rushed away, every man for himself.
Again Gao Lian brandished his sword. With his Miracle soldiers in the lead, and followed by the rest of his forces, his entire army launched a murderous assault. Song Jiang's men were severely defeated. Gao Lian chased them for more than twenty //: Then gongs were beaten as a signal for his soldiers to re-assemble, and they returned to the city.
At a hillock Song Jiang reined in his horse and pitched camp. Although his men had suffered heavy losses, fortunately all of his chieftains survived. When his forces were settled he conferred with Military Advisor Wu Yong.
"We've been vanquished twice in our attack on Gaotang. We can't seem to break his Miracle soldiers. What are we going to do?"
"Since the rogue can work spells, he's sure to raid our camp tonight," said Wu Yong. "We must plan our defense. We'll leave a small contingent here, and the rest of us will go back to our original encampment."
Song Jiang ordered that only Yang Lin and Bai Sheng and certain men remain. The others returned to the old camp and rested.
Yang and Bai led their fighters half a //behind the hillock and hid themselves in the deep grass. At the first watch a gale rose and thunder crashed. From their place of concealment Yang and Bai and their three hundred men saw Gao Lian advancing on foot, followed by his three hundred Miracle soldiers. Howling and whistling, they rushed savagely into the camp. They found it was empty, and started to leave.
Yang and Bai let out a yell. Gao and his Miracle soldiers, fearing a trap, scattered and ran. The brigands winged random volleys after them with their bows. An arrow struck Gao Lian in the left shoulder. The fighters spread out and pursued, killing as they raced through a pouring rain.
By then Gao Lian and his Miracle soldiers were far away. Yang and Bai had only a limited contingent. They dared not go any deeper into enemy territory. Abruptly, the rain stopped, the clouds vanished and the stars came out. In the light of the moon, the brigands collected twenty enemy wounded, who had been felled before the hillock by blade and arrow, and led them to Song Jiang's camp. They told of the strange thunderstorm.
Song Jiang and Wu Yong listened in consternation. "That was only five //away, but we didn't have any wind or rain here," they said.
Everyone discussed it. "Truly magic," they agreed. "It rained only in the place, and from a height of just three or four hundred feet. The clouds must have picked up water from nearby ponds."
"Gao Lian charged into our camp carrying a sword and with hair unbound," Yang Lin related. "I hit him with an arrow, and he returned to the city. I didn't go after him because we hadn't enough men."
Song Jiang rewarded Yang Lin and Bai Sheng. He had the wounded prisoners executed. He set up seven or eight small strong points around the main camp and assigned a chieftain to each, as a precaution against an enemy raid. He also sent a messenger back to the mountain fortress for reinforcements.

Gao Lian, in the city, nursed his wound. “Defend the city,” he instructed his army. “Be constantly on the alert. But don’t get involved in any battles. When I’ve recovered there will be time enough to capture Song Jiang.”
After the defeat inflicted upon him, Song Jiang brooded. He said to Wu Yong: “We can’t seem to lick Gao Lian. Suppose he gets more troops from somewhere and they attack in force. How will we be able to withstand them?”
“There’s only one way to counter his magic,” said Wu Yong. He spoke softly in Song’s ear. “If we don’t get that person to help, we may be unable to save Lord Chai and we’ll never take the city.” Truly, to dispel the magic clouds and mists a person had to be found who understood the secrets of Heaven and Earth.

Now what Whiskers said to them was: “You want me to go to the mountain with you — well, I’ll do it, but only if you can purge this anger of mine by executing Black Whirlwind.”
This infuriated Iron Ox. “Well, fuck me! It was the two leaders who ordered it, what’s it got to do with me, you arsehole?”
The outraged Whiskers would have thrown himself on Iron Ox, but the other three restrained him. “If he’s going to be there,” said Whiskers, “you can kill me before you’ll get me to the mountain.”
“There’s no problem, I’ve got a solution,” said Mr. Chai. “Iron Ox can stay here with me. Then you three can go to the mountain, as the leaders have requested.”
“But after what’s happened,” said Whiskers, “the Governor is bound to have made out a warrant, and they’ll go straight over to Yuncheng and arrest all my family, what am I to do about that?”
“Don’t worry,” said the Professor. “By now I imagine Song Jiang has already taken your family to the mountain.”
Whiskers felt a bit better after this. Mr. Chai poured wine for them and gave a farewell feast. That very evening they bade him goodbye and prepared to set off. Mr. Chai had his people saddle three horses to carry them to the bounds of his territory. Before they parted, the Professor said to Iron Ox: “You be careful. You’re to stay with His Excellency for a while, but don’t play the fool and stir things up, or get him into any trouble. In a few months’ time, when Whiskers has settled down a bit, we will come to fetch you, and most likely we shall invite Mr. Chai to join our company too.” The three men then mounted and left.
We shall not follow Mr. Chai and Iron Ox back to the manor, but tell how Whiskers Zhu, accompanying the Professor and Sergeant Lei, came to the Marshes of Mount Liang and entered the company. When they had travelled one stage and reached the limits of Cangzhou, Mr. Chai’s retainers returned home with the horses.
The three men headed for Mount Liang, and nothing worthy of note happened on the way. They soon reached the inn of the Crocodile, who sent men up the mountain to report their arrival. Chao Gai and Song Jiang, with all the other leaders, greater and lesser, came down to the accompaniment of drums and fifes and met them at Golden Sands Landing. Everyone was introduced and then they rode up to the main camp where they dismounted and went to the great Assembly Hall, where the events that we already know of were recounted.
Whiskers said: “Now that I have been called here to the mountain, the Governor of Cangzhou is sure to have sent a warrant for the arrest of all my relatives. What can I do about it?”
Song Jiang smiled and said: “My advice is not to worry. Your wife and son were all brought here days ago.”
“Where are they then?” Whiskers asked.
“They are resting in my father’s house, go and see for yourself.” Song Jiang told Whiskers, to the latter’s immense relief.
Song Jiang had people take Whiskers to Squire Song’s residence, where he found all his family and also all of his valuable possessions. His wife said: “A little while ago someone brought a letter which said you had joined the company on the mountain, so we packed and came here at once.”
Whiskers went back and thanked everyone. Song Jiang then invited Whiskers and Sergeant Lei to the lower camp on the mountain where a feast was laid on, and the arrival of these new leaders was celebrated over several days. Of this no more.
Back in Cangzhou the Governor, when it got really late and Whiskers had still not brought his son back, sent people off to search in every direction. They spent most of the night searching. Next day someone found the dead body in the wood, and told the Governor. This gentleman was desolated. He went to the wood to see for himself. His grief was limitless. He had a coffin made and burnt paper offerings. A day later he went into session and ordered notices to be posted everywhere, demanding the apprehension and arrest of the said Sergeant Zhu. The authorities in the Sergeant’s home district had already reported that Whiskers’ wife and children had fled from their home and their whereabouts was unknown. A reward for the capture was announced in every district and town. Of this no more.
Meanwhile Iron Ox had been living at Mr. Chai’s for several months when suddenly one day a man bearing a letter burst through the manor gates. Chai Jin greeted him politely, took the letter and read it. “Then I must go at once,” he said in some consternation.
“Is it something serious?” Iron Ox asked.
“I have this uncle called Chai Huangcheng,” Mr. Chai began. “He lives in Gaotang. A certain rogue called Yin Tianxi, who is the brother-in-law of the governor there, Gao Lian, has been demanding he give up a garden that he owns. He’s had an apoplexy and is lying ill in bed. They think he’s close to death and apparently he has some last wishes he wants to make known, so they’ve come to fetch me. He has no children, so it’s essential that I go.”
“If you’ve got to go why don’t I go with you?” said Iron Ox.
“Yes, if you like, let us go together,” said Chai Jin.
Mr. Chai did his packing and picked a dozen good horses and some retainers to accompany them. At dawn next day Mr. Chai, Iron Ox and their retinue mounted and rode out of the gates, heading for Gaotang.
In less than a day they arrived. They entered the town and dismounted in front of the uncle’s residence. Leaving Iron Ox and the rest of the party outside the main hall, Mr. Chai entered the sick room to see his uncle:
*This face is like gold leaf, the body a withered branch; the spirit is slow and sad, the breath but a tenuous thread. The teeth are tightly clamped together, neither food nor drink has passed these lips for days. The innards are so swollen no pill can get down. Grievers and mourners are already at hand, the doctors have given up hope.*
Chai Jin sat down beside the bed and wept unreservedly. His uncle’s second wife came out and tried to comfort him. “You rode here in such haste,” she said. “You must try not to upset yourself too much.”
When greetings had been completed, Chai Jin asked for a full account. The second wife said: “The new governor, Gao Lian, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, is a cousin of Marshal Gao in the capital. He relies on this connection to do just as he likes here. He brought a brother-in-law of his along with him, Yin Tianxi, whom people call Chancellor Yin. Actually he’s only a young man, but he uses his brother-in-law’s position to ride roughshod over everyone. A bunch of toadies he goes around with told him that behind our house we have a very attractive garden with a water pavilion. The swine came round here with twenty or thirty scheming rogues and marched straight through to the back to look at it. Now he wants to chase us out and come to live here himself. Huangcheng said to him: ‘Our family is of royal descent; we have a charter and a cast-iron guarantee from a previous emperor, which says no one is allowed to annoy us. How dare you try to take our house! Where are my family going to go?’
“The blighter just wouldn’t listen. He’s determined to throw us out. When Huangcheng tried to stop him, he got beaten up. That’s what brought on this seizure. He took to his bed and hasn’t moved since. He won’t eat or drink, no medicine does any good, it’s obvious he’s not long for this world. But now with you here to look after things, whatever troubles lie ahead it’s not going to get worse.”
Chai Jin said: “My dear, don’t worry. We’ll get a good doctor to treat him. If there’s any more trouble, I shall send someone home to get our imperial certificate to convince them. Even if the case goes before the Emperor himself there’s nothing to fear!”
“Huangcheng is so hopeless at practical matters. He’s not a patch on you, Your Excellency,” she said gratefully.
After seeing his uncle, Mr. Chai went out and explained everything to Iron Ox and the rest of his people.
When he heard it, Iron Ox leapt up and said: “What a bloody nerve! I’ve got my axes here. I’ll go and give the bastard a few chops first, and then we can discuss things.”
“Calm yourself, Mr. Li,” said Mr. Chai. “What’s the point in arguing with boors like that? Although he thinks he’s powerful enough to bully people, I’ve got a certificate at home to protect me. It’s no good disputing with him here, but in the capital there are people bigger than him, we must prepare our case carefully and appeal to the law.”
“The law my arse! If the law means anything, how come the world is in such a mess? Me, I’d strike first and talk later. Then if the bugger still wants to complain, I’d go and cut off the heads of all those fucking officials.”
“No wonder Whiskers has got it in for you and you two have got to be kept apart,” said Mr. Chai with a laugh. “This is an imperial city. You can’t employ your savage methods here.”
“So what if it is an imperial city?” said Iron Ox. “Didn’t I kill men in Jiangzhou and Wuweijun too?”
“Let me look into the affair first,” said Mr. Chai. “If I need your services, I’ll let you know. In the meantime there’s nothing you need do except sit down in this room and wait.”
At this point a maid came out and begged Mr. Chai to go in and see his uncle immediately.
Chai Jin entered the room and approached the bed. Huangcheng’s eyes were filled with tears. “My dear and respected nephew,” he said to Chai Jin, “I know you will not let our ancestor be shamed. That so-called ‘Chancellor’ has destroyed my life. On behalf of your own flesh and blood please take this letter to the capital to denounce him and obtain redress. Your kindness will bring relief to me in the underworld. Take care! This is my last and only wish!”
So saying, he gave up the ghost. Chai Jin wept bitterly for a time. Fearing that he was going to faint, the second wife did her best to enliven him. “You’ve been worried all the day. But now it’s time to consider what to do next.”
“I have the documents at home,” Chai Jin said. “I’ve sent for them but they haven’t come yet. But I’ll send someone as fast as possible with all that is needed, to lodge an accusation in the capital. Now we must honour my uncle; we must organize the coffin and the funeral service. When we’ve completed all the ceremonies we will discuss things again.”
Mr. Chai ordered everything to be done properly: the two coffins, inner and outer, obtained, a suitable memorial tablet set up, mourning clothes provided for the whole household. Everyone went into mourning.
Iron Ox had been outside and heard all the weeping in the inner appartments. He rubbed his hands together in eager anti~cipation of a fight. But when he questioned the servants no one would tell him anything. Meanwhile monks were invited to the house to organize prayers and offerings.
On the third day, the Chancellor turned up in front of the house. He was riding a prancing steed, and had with him a score of hangers-on, with bows and crossbows, some blowing on flutes, or fooling around with balls, staves or musical instruments. They were on an excursion and were all somewhat drunk and pretending to be more drunk than they really were. The Chancellor reined in his horse and shouted that he wanted to speak to whoever was in charge inside.
Mr. Chai responded by hurrying out to receive him, dressed completely in mourning.
“What’s your position here?” the Chancellor inquired arrogantly.
“I am a nephew of Chai Huangcheng’s. My name is Chai Jin.”
“The other day I told them to move out of here. Why have my orders not been obeyed?”
“My uncle was sick and we couldn’t move him. He died the other day and we can’t move till the seven days period is complete.”
“Bugger the seven days period. I’ll give you three days to move. If you’re not out in three days, I shall order you a cangue and let you have a hundred blows of my staff!”
“You had better not threaten us like this, your Honour! Our family has an imperial lineage, and we have a cast-iron guarantee. That’s something you can’t ignore!”
“Let me see it then!” said the Chancellor.
“It’s at home, but I’ve sent someone to fetch it.”
“This bugger’s talking nonsense!” the Chancellor said to his followers in a great rage. “Even if he’s got it, this cast-iron guarantee does not impress me. Take him away and beat him for me.”
Before his attendants could move, Iron Ox, who had been watching the proceedings from a gap in the door, flung the door open and with a huge bellow threw himself at the Chancellor’s horse, dragged him off it and felled him with a single blow of the fist. When Yin’s companions rushed to the rescue, five or six of them fell to Iron Ox’s fists and the rest fled in confusion. Iron Ox picked the Chancellor up and began to hammer him with fists and feet. There was nothing Mr. Chai could do to stop him. The Chancellor was now indeed in a sorry state, lying sprawled on the ground like a sacrificial victim:
*The bully has such a false view of his worth,*
*He heeds not the justice of heaven and earth.*
*But Iron Ox is here, so he won’t get away.*
*Till the King of Hell greets him and asks him to pay.*
Now that the Chancellor lay there dead by Iron Ox’s hand, Mr. Chai could only curse his luck. He ordered Iron Ox into the back room to discuss what to do. “Obviously they’ll come here to get you,” he said to Iron Ox. “So you’re not safe here. Leave me to take care of the authorities. You must go at once to Mount Liang.”
“But if I go,” said Iron Ox, “you’ll get the blame.
“I’ve got the cast-iron guarantee to protect me,” said Mr. Chai. “So you have to go, and without delay.”
So Iron Ox picked up his axes, took some money for travel expenses and departed, taking the road to Mount Liang.
It wasn’t long before several hundred well-armed men appeared and surrounded the house. Knowing they had come to arrest the culprit, Mr. Chai went out and spoke to them: “I am going to go with you to the magistracy to make a statement.”
They tied his hands first and then went into the house to look for the murderer, the big black fellow. Not finding him, they took Mr. Chai still with his hands tied to the courtroom where he was told to kneel. When Governor Gao Lian had heard that his brother-in-law had been killed, he ground his teeth in fury and couldn’t wait to get hold of the criminal. Mr. Chai was flung down before the bench while the Governor shouted: “How dare you kill my brother-in-law!”
Mr. Chai declared: “I am of imperial lineage. Our family has a charter and a cast-iron guarantee. It’s at my house in Cangzhou. I came here to see my uncle because he was ill. Unfortunately he died. At present we are preparing the funeral. Mr. Yin brought a crowd of people to the house and wanted to drive the family out. He wouldn’t listen to what I had to say and ordered his people to beat me. One of my retainers, Big Li, came to rescue me and happened to kill Mr. Yin.”
“Where is this Big Li?” the Governor roared.
“He was frightened and he ran away,” said Mr. Chai.
“If he is a retainer, how could he kill someone unless you ordered him to? You let him go on purpose, because you want to pull the wool over my eyes! You’re a villain! You obviously won’t confess till we beat you. Guards! Take him and thrash him within an inch of his life!”
Mr. Chai protested: “Big Li was protecting his master. If he accidentally killed someone, it’s not my fault. Since I have the imperial guarantee it’s quite illegal to beat me.”
“Where is this imperial guarantee?” said the Governor.
“I’ve sent someone home to fetch it,” said Mr. Chai.
This incensed the Governor still further. “The villain is opposing the authorities! Thrash him!” he roared. “Give him all you’ve got!”
The guards set to work. They beat Mr. Chai till the skin was in shreds and the blood flowed, and got him to confess that he had ordered his retainer Big Li to kill the Chancellor, Yin Tianxi. Then a twenty-five catty cangue, appropriate for a condemned man was fitted and he was consigned to prison. The body of the Chancellor was prepared for burial and the coffin was interred. Of this no more.
The Governor’s wife was determined to avenge her brother. She urged her husband to confiscate Chai Huangcheng’s prop~erty, imprison all his people and seize the house and all the lands. This was a bitter time for Chai Jin, languishing in prison:
*The words of a woman are like a snake’s poison,*
*The power of the charter an empty illusion.*
*Just to think that the ancestor gave up a throne,*
*While his grandson can’t even defend what’s his own!*
Meanwhile Iron Ox had rushed straight back to Mount Liang. Arriving at the stronghold he went to see all the leaders. When Whiskers Zhu saw him, he exploded with anger and reaching for his halberd tried to hurl himself upon him. Iron Ox took out his two axes to retaliate. Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the rest rushed forward to separate them.
Song Jiang tried to placate Whiskers by saying: “The business of the little boy was not Iron Ox’s fault. It was a plan of the Professor’s, because he could not persuade you to join us on the mountain. Now you are here with us, forget the past and try to work with us in order to strengthen our reputation for loyalty, lest outsiders deride us.” He then called upon Iron Ox to apologize to Whiskers.
Scowling ferociously, Iron Ox exclaimed: “But he started it all! I’ve put in a lot of work for the mountain stronghold, he hasn’t deserved half as much as I have, and now I’m the one who’s asked to apologize!”
Song Jiang said: “But you’re the one who killed the child, even if it was on the Professor’s orders. And again, he is your senior. Please, for my sake give him a few courteous words and I’ll prostrate myself before you.”
Iron Ox had to give way before Song Jiang’s insistence. He said: “I’m not afraid of you, and this is only because the boss makes me do it and leaves me no alternative: I apologize to you.” And at Song Jiang’s insistence he also threw down his axes and bowed to Whiskers twice. Whiskers’ anger was at last appeased. Chao Gai ordered a feast in the camp to celebrate their reconciliation.
Iron Ox now explained how Mr. Chai had gone to Gaotang to visit his sick relative and how the Governor’s brother-in-law had wanted to seize the garden and threatened to beat Mr. Chai and been killed by himself. Song Jiang was greatly disturbed by this account. “So you ran off and left Mr. Chai to face the music,” he said.
“Let us keep calm, friends,” said the Professor, “and wait till the Magic Messenger gets back. Then we’ll hear what’s happened.”
“Where has the Magic Messenger gone?” Iron Ox asked.
“I was afraid you might make trouble when you were staying at Mr. Chai’s,” said the Professor. “So I sent him to call you back. When he got there and found you gone, he must have gone on to Gaotang to look for you.”
He had hardly finished speaking when one of the men came in to report that the Magic Messenger was back. Song Jiang went to receive him and then brought him into the hall. When he was seated they asked him about Mr. Chai.
“When I got to Mr. Chai’s manor,” he replied, “they told me he had gone with Iron Ox to Gaotang. So I went there straight away and made inquiries. I found everyone in the city was talking about how the Chancellor in a dispute over Chai Huangcheng’s estate had been killed by a big black fellow and how Mr. Chai was held responsible and had been bound and thrown into prison. All Chai Huangcheng’s property has been confiscated and Chai Jin’s life is under grave threat.”
Chao Gai said: “This big black idiot has done it again! Wherever he goes he stirs up something!”
Iron Ox said: “Chai Huangcheng was beaten up by that bastard and died of chagrin. He came to grab their house and threatened to beat Chai Jin. Not even a living Buddha could put up with all that!”
Chao Gai said: “Mr. Chai has always been a friend of the mountain stronghold. Now he’s in trouble. How can we not go to his assistance? I shall go myself.”
“You’re our commander-in-chief,” said Song Jiang. “You can’t act like that without a plan. I myself have long been a friend of Mr. Chai, please allow me to go down on your behalf.”

The Professor said: "Although Gaotang is only a small administration, it's densely populated and has a big defence force and ample supplies, we mustn't underestimate them. I propose an advance guard of twelve leaders, Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the White-Water Dragon, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Colonel Sun, Golden Wings, Panther, Redeye, the Flautist and the Daytime Rat, with five thousand cavalry and foot, and in support a force led by Song Jiang and myself, with Whiskers, Sergeant Lei, the Magic Messenger, Iron Ox, White Eel, Morbid and Madcap, ten leaders in all, with three thousand horse and foot."
After bidding farewell to Chao Gai and the rest, these twenty two leaders left the mountain and set out for Gaotang. Indeed, they marched out in perfect order:
*A swirling of embroidered banners and signal flags, a medley of trumpets and gongs. Forks, three-pronged and five-pronged, glitter like autumn frost; spears with steel or wooden points slant thick as winter's snow. Fierce warriors fill the road, archers and crossbowmen in the lead; guns follow on carts, stout halberdiers and lancers pressing after. The commanders on horseback have the ferocity of the tiger of the Southern mountains, every one of them a stern, indomitable warrior. Their mounts are like the green dragon of the northern sea, battle-steeled and unscareable. Here are engines of war as powerful as a flood; here are the troops to sweep all before them like a tempest.*
When the advance guard of the Mount Liang forces reached the border of Gaotang, some government soldiers reported it to the Governor. "Aha, you rebellious rabble hiding away in the Marshes of Mount Liang," said the latter, with a cold smile. "I was intending to come and get you anyway, but now you've come to me of your own accord! Heaven must want me to succeed." To his minions he shouted: "You there, quickly pass on the order for the army to advance and engage the enemy and for the people to man the ramparts." For this Governor had two hats: he commanded the army and he governed the people. The moment the order was received all the army officers and government officials of every rank took up their positions to receive the enemy.
Under Gao Lian's immediate command there were three hundred special troops known as the Celestial Guard. These were all picked troops from Shandong, Hebei, Jiangxi, Hunan, or from either bank of the Huai river, or the east and west parts of Zhejiang. These three hundred Celestial guards were indeed a sight to behold:
*Wild and dishevelled is their hair, their heads framed in an aura of mist. They are dressed in gourd-shaped armour, and a thousand flames leap up behind them. Their foreheads are daubed yellow and painted with the eight diagrams. They are cloaked in protective leopard skins; they wear face masks of copper like burnished gold and carry hard steel scourges like brooms. Front and back they are protected by bright steel. Their banners dazzle the eye, as they spread out on either hand like countless black vapours. One could be witnessing the heavenly powers descending from the Dipper, or some comet falling from on high.*
So the Governor led out his three hundred guards, fully armed and accoutred; he rode forth, with the rest of the army under his command drawn up around him in battle formation. The three hundred guards were in the centre. Waving their banners and cheering, with thundering drum and shrilling fifes, they awaited the enemy.
Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, and Thunderclap now arrived on the scene with their five thousand troops. The two armies met, flags and drums facing each other, while bows and crossbows on either side set up a deadly fire at the front ranks. Bugles rang out and drums thundered in both armies. Colonel Hua and Thunderclap with ten other leaders galloped to the front and reined in their horses. Leader Leopard's Head slanting his eight-pronged lance galloped out in front and shouted out: "Let the commander of Gaotang show himself!" Giving his horse its head, Gao Lian with some thirty or so of his officers, galloped to the pennants gate, and reined in his horse. He pointed at Leopard's Head and bellowed: "You foolhardy gang of rebels, how dare you flout my authority?"
Leopard's Head shouted back: "You vicious tyrant and plunderer! One day I shall go to the capital and get that Gao the Ball, oppressor of the righteous and despoiler of the people. I shall cut him into ten thousand pieces! Then I'll be satisfied!"
Gao Lian was outraged. He turned and asked: "Who wants to be first to go and get the scoundrel?"
One of the group of officers, a commander named Yu Zhi, rode forward, slapping his horse and whirling his sword.
Leopard's Head charged him at once. Before they had fought five bouts Yu Zhi received a thrust in the chest and was knocked head over heels from his horse.
Greatly shocked by this, Gao Lian asked: "Who will go and avenge him?"
Another captain rode forward, named Wen Wenbao. He wielded a long lance and rode a handsome bay and his harness bells and the jade ornaments on his belt all jingled as he rode out in front. Four hooves hammered the ground as he charged Leopard's Head.
Thunderclap immediately gave a great shout. "Wait, brother! Just watch me cut his head off!"
Leopard's Head reined in his horse and rested his lance, allowing Thunderclap to fight Wen. After about ten bouts, Thunder-clap left an opening, allowing his opponent to lunge forward. Thunderclap raised his arm and struck down and sliced off half Wen's head. He died in the saddle. The horse galloped back to the enemy ranks. A great tumult arose in the opposing ranks.
When Gao Lian saw two of his commanders defeated he reached behind him and drew his magic sword. After muttering a spell, he gave a loud cry of "chrr!" Immediately a column of black smoke rose from his lines. As the black smoke filled the heavens, sand and stones began to blow about, heaven and earth shook and a strange wind blew, sweeping towards the opposing army. Leopard's Head, Thunderclap, Colonel Hua and the other commanders could not face it. The terrified pack horses whinnied and bolted. Everyone turned and ran.
With a wave of his sword. Gao Lian signalled the three hundred Celestial guards to charge, with the regular troops following in support. They routed Lin Chong's troops, who scattered like falling stars and driven clouds, in total panic. It was like some natural disaster when brother loses brother and children are separated from parents. Of the five thousand troops more than a thousand were annihilated. The remainder fled back more than fifteen miles before daring to stop and make camp. After observing the rout, Gao Lian recalled his own troops and retired to the city to rest.
When Song Jiang arrived with the support force, he was greeted by Leopard's Head and the others, who told him what had happened. Song Jiang and the Professor had a shock. "What kind of trick is that, to have such a terrible effect!" Song Jiang said.
"It's some kind of magic," said the Professor. "You'd need to be able to stop the wind and turn back fire to defeat such an enemy!"
Hearing this Song Jiang opened his mystic books, and in the third volume found a method for stopping the wind and turning back fire. Delighted with what he'd found, he diligently committed the spells and magic formulae to memory. Then he made dispositions for his forces. They breakfasted at dawn and with waving banners and beating drums marched on the city.
Their approach was reported in the city. Gao Lian called up his victorious army again, including the three hundred Celestial guards. The gates were opened, the drawbridge lowered, and they marched out of the city and deployed in battle formation.
Waving his sword Song Jiang galloped to the front. A cluster of black pennants could be seen in Gao Lian's lines. "Those black pennants among their forces indicate masters of wizardry," said the Professor. "I'm afraid with a weapon like that we won't be able to stand up to them."
"Fear not, Professor!" said Song Jiang. "I have my own secret mode of offence. Let every man go forward without fear or hesitation in his heart."
Gao Lian now ordered all his commanders not to try and challenge the enemy to single combat but to observe the signals and together use all their strength to seize Song Jiang. He himself offered a big reward.
Shouts arose now on both sides as Gao Lian rode out in front of his troops. He had hung on the pommel of his saddle the bronze shield which gave him the power to summon beasts, decorated with dragon and phoenix insignia, and he was brandishing his magic sword.
Song Jiang pointed a finger at Gao and upbraided him: "Yesterday before I arrived my commanders carelessly suffered some casualties. Today I shall most certainly punish you."
"You bunch of rebels!" Gao riposted. "Get down off your horses double-quick and let us tie you up, to save me the trouble of soiling my hands and muddying my feet!"
And with this he waved his sword, muttered a spell and cried: "Chrr!" Immediately the column of black smoke arose and the strange wind began to blow. Song Jiang did not wait till the wind reached him. He also uttered a spell, formed a secret sign with his left hand while raising the sword in his right, and also pro~nounced "Chrr!" Immediately the wind stopped blowing towards Song Jiang's forces and turned back against Gao's ranks.
Song Jiang was about to give the order to charge, but Gao had seen how the wind had changed. He hurriedly took his bronze shield, rapped it with his sword and then rolled a ball of sand towards the company of celestial guards. From among the troops a pack of fearsome beasts rushed forth:
*There are wildcats with darting claws, lions with shuddering heads. Flashing chimeras reveal their savage ferocity, rearing monsters parade their awesome power. Wolves and jackals become rows of snarling teeth, vomiting fearsome warriors; tigers and leopards turn into bevies of gaping mouths, spitting out wild horses. Bristling wild boar burst through the ranks, curly-haired mastiffs savage the men. Python like dragons rear into the sky, vicious serpents that could swallow an elephant infest the earth.*
When Gao's bronze shield rang out, this pack of weird beasts and venomous reptiles poured forth, while Song Jiang's troops gazed on in horror.
Song Jiang was the first to throw away his sword, clap heels to his horse and lead the retreat. The other leaders fled for their lives all in a bunch. The lesser commanders also took flight, so tightly packed together you could not tell one from the other. Gao was after them, waving his sword and urging on his troops, the celestial guard in the lead and the regulars behind them. Song Jiang's army suffered a huge reverse. Gao harried them for half a dozen miles before giving the signal for his men to regroup and return to the city.
Arriving at the foot of a hill, Song Jiang halted his troops and made camp. Although they had suffered losses among the troops, the leaders were fortunately all unscathed. Having settled his troops, Song Jiang held a discussion with the Professor. "This time in the attack on Gaotang we have lost a second battle. We've no means of overcoming the celestial guard, what shall we do?"
"If this blighter can employ wizardry," said the latter, "he will surely come tonight to raid our camp. We must have a plan to pre-empt him. Let's leave just a small force here, while the rest of us go back to the old camp."
Song Jiang gave the orders. Only Panther and the Daytime Rat were left in charge of the camp while the others went back to the old camp to rest.
Now Panther and the Daytime Rat disposed their troops in an ambush several hundred yards outside the camp. About the first watch this is what they saw:
*In every quarter the murk deepens; from every side the mist spreads. A violent gale arises, shaking heaven and earth. Driving rain causes the seas to boil and the rivers to burst their banks. The Lord of Thunder rages, riding backwards on the Firebreather to vaunt his might; the Lightning Goddess spits, goading the Golden Snake into a venomous display. Great trees are torn up by the roots, deep waters emptied to the dregs.*
During the big storm that night as Panther and the Daytime Rat with their three hundred men lay hidden in the undergrowth, they watched Gao stealthily approach with his three hundred Celestial guards. After certain secret signals, they charged into the camp. They found it empty and were turning round to leave when Panther and the Daytime Rat raised a great shout. Gao and his men suspected they were caught in a trap. They scattered and fled, each of the Celestial guards taking his own path to escape. Panther and the Daytime Rat began loosing crossbow bolts at random, firing for all they were worth, and one of the bolts struck Gao in the left shoulder. Braving the elements they spread out and attacked the fleeing enemy forces. But when Gao and his Celestial guards had put some distance between themselves and the camp Panther and the Daytime Rat, not having many troops at their disposal, dared not continue the pursuit.
A little later the rain had ceased and the sky cleared. The stars were visible again and in the moonlight they found that more than twenty of the Celestial guards had been shot or wounded at the foot of a grassy knoll. They took the wounded to Song Jiang's camp and also told him about the storm. Song Jiang and the Professor were alarmed by what they heard. "We are only a mile or two away, but we had no rain or wind!" they exclaimed.
"It must be the magic," everyone concluded. "It was only in that place and from a height of a few hundred metres. The moisture must have been drawn up from nearby ponds."
Panther said: "Gao Lian charged into our camp, with his hair flying and waving his sword. One of my crossbow bolts hit him and he retreated to the city. We didn't have enough men so I didn't dare pursue him further."
Song Jiang rewarded Panther and the Daytime Rat, the wounded Celestial guards were executed, and the rest of the leaders were ordered to set up seven or eight small camps around the main camp, to protect them from further attacks, while someone was sent to the mountain stronghold to fetch reinforcements.
Meanwhile the wounded Gao was convalescing in the city. He ordered the army to man the defences and to be on the alert night and day. He ruled out any further offensive until he was recovered from his wound, when he vowed he would capture Song Jiang.
When Song Jiang saw his troops defeated his heart was filled with gloom. He discussed matters with the Professor. "Once again we haven't managed to break the power of Gao Lian. Suppose they raise more troops and mount a stronger attack, what then?"
The Professor said: "We'll only break Gao Lian's magic if we do this and this. Unless I can get a certain person to come, it'll be difficult to save Chai Jin and we'll never take Gaotang." Indeed, in order to overcome the power to raise fog and clouds it was necessary to invite a master of the most transcendental and profound knowledge.

I will go with you to Liangshan Marsh on the condition that you kill Li Kui," said Zhu Tong. "Then my anger will be appeased."
Li Kui was angry at this, and swore, "You can kiss my ass! I was told by Chao Gai and Song Jiang to kill the boy. It doesn't have a stinking fart to do with me!"
Zhu Tong again tried to get at Li Kui, but was held back by the others. Squire Chai Jin intervened, "This matter can be easily arranged. You three may go to Liangshan Marsh according to Chao Gai's wish, and leave Li Kui behind here?"
"But the Prefect will order for the arrest of my family," said Zhu Tong. "What about that?"
"I think that Song Jiang has probably sent men to bring all your family to the mountain," said Wu Yong.
This appeased Zhu Tong, and at last he agreed to go. That evening the three men mounted horses given them by Squire Chai Jin, and left for Liangshan Marsh. They duly reached their destination, and were received by the leaders of the bandits. During the reception Zhu Tong asked if anything had been done about his family. At this Song Jiang laughed, and said, "You need not worry about them because they have been here for several days."
Zhu Tong was pleased at this, and was taken to see his wife. She told him that a letter had been brought to their home stating that he had joined the bandits, and that she was to join him there. After this Zhu Tong lived with his family at Liangshan Marsh.
At Cangzhou the Prefect became anxious at the nonreturn of his son and Zhu Tong, and sent men to look for them. They all returned by midnight without having found a trace of them. The next day the body of the boy was found in the wood. The Prefect was filled with anguish, and went at once to see the corpse. The next day he issued an order for the arrest of Zhu Tong. Inquiries made at Yuncheng County discovered that Zhu Tong's family had left there some days before.
Li Kui had stayed at Squire Chai Jin's for a month when one day he saw a messenger arrive with an urgent message. Squire Chai Jin read the letter and was startled. He said, "As things are like this, I must go and look into the matter myself."
"What is it about?" asked Li Kui.
"I have an uncle at Gaotang Prefecture, and he is very ill because a man is trying to deprive him of his garden. As he is about to die he asks me to go, and hear his will. As he has neither son nor daughter I must go at once to him."
"I should like to go with you," said Li Kui. "What do you say?"
"As you want to go I have no objection," said Squire Chai Jin. He then selected about ten of his best horses and men to go with them. They started the following morning at daybreak, and reached Gaotang Prefecture the same day. Upon reaching the house they dismounted, and Squire Chai Jin went inside to see his uncle, leaving the others with Li Kui in a guest room. Squire Chai Jin found his uncle on the bed in a very weak state. Hi aunt said, "You have ridden a good distance to pay us this visit, but I hope that our trouble will not upset you." After answering several questions she continued, "The new Prefect here, Gao Lian, is a cousin of Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard. He does all kinds of bad things here, and relies upon his influence and position to hush any objection. He brought with him his brother-in-law, named Yin Tianxi, who has got the nickname Yin, the 'Prefect's Deputy'; and he also acts just as badly as his brother-in-law. One of his hangers-on informed him that we had a very nice flower garden with a fine arbor in a pond. One day he came here with about thirty dissolute fellows, and after looking round our garden he said we must remove as he had decided to come and live here himself. My husband told Yin Tianxi that our family was of very high standing, and that we held an iron tablet inscribed by the Emperor himself. Therefore we could not submit to such treatment. 'If you take our home, where can we go to?' But he would not listen to what my husband had said, and insisted upon our leaving at once. My husband got so excited that he tried to fight with Yin Tianxi, but the fellows around seized my husband and assaulted him. As a result of this he has been seriously ill ever since. Medicine has not improved his health, and he is expecting to die very soon. As you are his cousin you must devise some plan for this situation."
"Do not worry about it," replied Squire Chai Jin. "Let us send for the best doctors, and see whether they cannot cure my uncle. I will send a man to my home to bring the Imperial iron tablet here, and then I will discuss matters with the officials. We need not be afraid of these local mandarins when I have that tablet."
"Perhaps my husband has not managed the business properly," said his aunt, "and I hope that you will succeed."
After attending to his uncle's requirements Squire Chai Jin went to the guest room, and explained the position to Li Kui and the men.
Li Kui was very angry at this and said, "These fellows are unreasonable. But I will go and ask them to bite my axe, and after that we can discuss matters with them."
"Don't be so stupid," replied Squire Chai Jin. "This official has great influence, but when I show him my imperial tablet, if he will not listen to me, then I may go to the capital, and lay the case before the highest official."
"Laws! Laws!" said Li Kui. "At the present time laws are of no use in our country. Better fight and discuss afterwards. Then if these fellows appeal to the mandarins against us we shall chop off the heads of the mandarins themselves."
Squire Chai Jin laughed, "You should not forget that you cannot meet Zhu Tong because he wants to fight with you. But still you must remember in this city you cannot act as you wish as if you were on the mountain stronghold."
"What difference does this city make? When I was in Jiangzhou did I not kill many men there?"
"Wait until I have seen how the matter goes," said Squire Chai Jin, "if I see a chance of using you I will let you know."
Just then a maid servant entered, and asked Squire Chai Jin to go and see his uncle again. Upon entering the sick room Squire Chai Jin saw that his uncle had tears in his eyes, and the latter said, "You are very courageous, and did nothing to defend our family. As we are blood-relations I want you to take the imperial iron tablet to the capital, and there bring a charge against Yin Tianxi of being the cause of my death. Revenge me, and then in the grave I shall rest contented. Take due care of yourself, and I have nothing more to say." After saying this he expired.
Squire Chai Jin burst into tears, and his aunt begged him not to be so much upset. "The Imperial iron tablet has not yet arrived from my home," replied Squire Chai Jin, "but as soon as I can get it I will proceed at once to the capital. But we can talk matters over after the corpse has been dressed and placed in the coffin." He then made all the usual arrangements, and observed the rites.
Three days after this Yin Tianxi went to the country with his followers armed with bows and arrows and all kinds of musical instruments. They all got more or less drunk, and upon reaching Squire Chai Jin's house, they reined in their horses and called to speak to the master. Squire Chai Jin upon hearing the message went to the gate dressed in his mourning clothes.
Yin Tianxi seated on his horse asked, "Who are you?"
"I am the nephew of Chai Huangcheng," replied the Squire.
"A few days ago I told him to remove from this house," said Yin Tianxi. "How is it that he has not done so?"
"My uncle was very sick after your visit, and could not remove," replied Squire Chai Jin. "He died a few days ago, and after waiting the proper seven days we can remove the household goods."
"Absurd!" said Yin Tianxi, "I allow you only three more days. After that if you are still here I shall have you beaten one hundred times, and put a cangue on your neck."
"You must not insult me in that way," said Squire Chai Jin, "because our family comes from very honorable ancestry. I am the possessor of the Imperial iron tablet so who dare be disrespectful to me?"
"Well, let me look at your iron tablet," shouted Yin Tianxi.
"It is at my home at Cangzhou," replied Squire Chai Jin, "but I have already sent a messenger to bring it here."
"You are talking very foolishly," said Yin Tianxi with anger. "Even if you have such a tablet it will not make any difference. You men! Beat this fellow!"
Li Kui was standing inside looking through a crack in the door, and hearing all this. He now rushed out, and seizing Yin Tianxi pulled him off his horse. The followers of Yin Tianxi came to his assistance, but Li Kui used his fists right and left, and drove them off. They all decamped. Li Kui picked up Yin Tianxi, and gave him such a beating that the latter soon died.
Squire Chai Jin was annoyed at this as it would lead to trouble, and told Li Kui to go inside to discuss matters. There he spoke, "The officials will soon be here to investigate this case, and you must escape at once to Liangshan Marsh. I will deal with the officials."
"If I escape you will be involved," replied Li Kui.
"I have the Imperial iron tablet," said Squire Chai Jin, "and that will protect me. You must go at once."
Li Kui agreed, and taking his axes, he left by the back door.

It was not long before about a hundred armed men arrived, and Squire Chai Jin went out and spoke to them. "I will go with you to the *yamen* and give my evidence there." The men bound him with ropes, and then searched his house for Li Kui without finding the latter. They then took Chai Jin to the *yamen* as a prisoner, where he knelt down.
The Prefect was very angry that his brother-in-law was killed, and he shouted at Squire Chai Jin, "How dare you kill my brother-in-law, Yin Tianxi?"
"I am a descendant of Emperor Chai Shizong who received from the Emperor Taizu an iron tablet. I live at Cangzhou. My uncle was very sick so I came here to see him. Unfortunately he died, but has not yet been buried. Yin Tianxi came to the house with about thirty armed men, and told us to clear out of the house at once. As I objected to this he set his men to beat me. A villager named Li Da, came to my assistance, and during the fight he killed your brother-in-law."
"Where is this Li Da?" asked the Prefect.
"He was very much afraid of the consequences of this action, and ran away."
"He was a servant at the house, and must have done this with your approval. You purposely told him to escape, and now come here to try to deceive me. If I don't have you beaten now I suppose you will not speak the truth. Jailer, beat this prisoner very severely!"
"As it was Li Da who killed the man that is not my crime," said Squire Chai Jin. "I have an Imperial iron tablet protecting me from injustice so how dare you torture me?"
"Where is the tablet?"
"I have already sent a man to bring it here from Cangzhou."
The Prefect was angry and shouted, "This fellow is doing his best to thwart the law. Beat him!"
The attendants seized Squire Chai Jin, and beat him till the blood flowed. Then Squire Chai Jin falsely confessed that he had told Li Da to commit the foul deed. A heavy cangue was then fastened on his neck, and he was sent to prison.
The sister of Yin Tianxi was not satisfied with this, and got the Prefect to arrest also the whole family, and put them in prison. She also got the house sealed up.
Li Kui traveled day and night to get to Liangshan Marsh, but on arriving there he was seen by Zhu Tong who was angry at the sight of him. Zhu Tong seized a halberd, and Li Kui took his axes. Chao Gai and the other leaders interposed to stop the fighting.
Song Jiang spoke in an apologetic tone, "Li Kui killed the Prefect's son in accordance with Wu Yong's order, and the latter only thought of that because you would not join us. Do not think of that affair any more, but let us work together here, and not let outsiders laugh at us." He then turned to Li Kui and told him to apologize to Zhu Tong.
Li Kui stared at Song Jiang and said, "I have been here a long time, and have done many meritorious deeds. But Zhu Tong has only been here a few days, and has done nothing so far. Why should I apologize to him?"
"Although Wu Yong gave the order yet you actually did the deed," said Song Jiang. "But apart from that Zhu Tong is your elder brother, and if you will salute him now and become friends, I myself will give you a salutation, and so end this trouble satisfactorily for all."
Li Kui turned to Zhu Tong and said, "I am not afraid of you. But as my elder brother Song Jiang orders me to do it I will salute you as my friend, and here I apologize for what I did."
He gave Zhu Tong two salutations, and the latter was appeased. Li Kui then told the assembled leaders what had happened to Squire Chai Jin. When Song Jiang heard the news he was startled, and said, "You have escaped and let Squire Chai be involved."
"Do not get excited," interposed Wu Yong. "I was afraid that Li Kui would make some trouble at Squire Chai Jin's place so I sent Dai Zong there to investigate and report. If Li Kui was not there Dai Zong was to go on to Gaotang Prefecture and make inquiries there."
While he was speaking a scout entered, and reported that Dai Zong was just arriving.
Dai Zong soon entered the hall, and Song Jiang asked for news about Squire Chai Jin. He reported that not finding Li Kui at Chai Jin's home he had hurried on to Gaotang Prefecture. There he heard the news that a dark complexioned man had killed Yin Tianxi. That as Squire Chai Jin was implicated he had been arrested, and was put in prison. All the furniture and also the house had been confiscated. Squire Chai Jin was undoubtedly in danger of losing his life.
"That black fellow is always stirring up trouble," said Chao Gai. "Everywhere he goes there is some strife."
"Squire Chai Jin's uncle was killed by Yin Tianxi," said Li Kui. "Then he came, and wanted to take possession of the house, and I heard what was said. Even if I were a living Buddha I could not have remained passive with such injustice."
"Squire Chai Jin has always been on good terms with us here," said Chao Gai, "and now that he is in danger I will go myself to rescue him from the peril."
"How can you do that by yourself when you are our great chief?" said Song Jiang. "As I am indebted to Squire Chai Jin I will go in your place."
"Gaotang Prefecture is a small place, but the people and soldiers are many so that we must not consider this matter as only trifling," said Wu Yong. "We must send at least five thousand men under the command of Lin Chong, Hua Rong, and ten other leaders, as an advance guard. The main body consisting of three thousand men must be in charge of Song Jiang and nine other leaders."
They all left Liangshan Marsh that very day, and upon nearing Gaotang Prefecture the Prefect was informed by his own men of the advance of the brigands. Upon hearing this the Prefect Gao Lian, sneered and said, "These are bandits of Liangshan Marsh, I will now capture them as they come here. Let all preparations be made for an immediate march outside the town. The people left behind can guard the city." He mounted his horse and went to the parade ground where the troops assembled, and soon began to march out of the town gates. His own bodyguard consisted of three hundred men called the "Flying Spirits." He commanded these specially selected men himself. They had armor, a double-edged sword on their back, and were mounted on horses. They formed the center of the army with the other soldiers on both wings.
The two armies duly met, and faced each other standing in readiness. Both sides sounded their ram's horns and beat their drums. Lin Chong, armed with a big crooked spear, galloped forward, and coming near the opposing force shouted, "Gao, you thief! Come out!"
Gao Lian advanced with about thirty officers, and then halting shouted, "You, fellow, are not aware that you will soon die. How dare you come here!"
"You robber of the people!" replied Lin Chong. "Very soon I shall go to the capital to kill that rascal Marshal Gao Qiu. When I cut him up into small pieces I shall be contented!"
Gao Lian was angry, and turning round asked his attendants who would volunteer to kill this thief. General Yu Zhi came forward, and whipping his horse dashed towards Lin Chong. They fought, and after about five bouts, Lin Chong mortally wounded General Yu Zhi who fell dead off his horse.
Gao Lian was surprised, but called for another volunteer. General Wen Wenbao next came forward mounted on a cream-colored horse which had many bells tinkling, and he was armed with a long spear. He galloped, and met Lin Chong.
General Qin Ming seeing this called out to Lin Chong, "Let me meet this man while you take a rest." Lin Chong therefore retired, and left his opponent to General Qin Ming. They fought and after about ten bouts Qin Ming tried a trick, and hit his opponent on the head killing him on the spot.
Both sides raised loud shouts after this. Prefect Gao Lian, seeing that two of his champions had been killed, drew his precious sword from its sheath on his back, and holding it in front he muttered a charm, and immediately a large dark magical mist arose in his army. It rose upwards like a whirlwind throwing sand and stones in all directions, and moved towards the opposing brigands. The bandits could not see anything, and being thrown into confusion they began to retreat. Gao Lian waved his sword and ordered his special bodyguard to charge. The other troops on either wing also advanced to the attack. The brigands were now in hopeless confusion and in their retreat were cut down by the pursuing troops. During the general rout about a thousand bandits were killed. After pursuing about a //Prefect Gao Lian recalled his men, and they returned to the town.
Song Jiang at last got together Lin Chong and Wu Yong, and they were surprised at the fatal defeat. Song Jiang said, "What is this devilish charm that threw our men into confusion?"
"It was done by a magical spell," replied Wu Yong. "If we had had a trick of turning the wind we should have won."
Song Jiang now remembered the Heavenly Books he had, and upon looking through these he found in volume three the description of a method of turning winds or fire. He was now much pleased, and carefully memorized the magic spell as given. He mustered all his men, and after they had partaken of a meal he ordered a general advance towards the town.
Prefect Gao Lian was informed by a scout of the return of the bandits and immediately gave orders. The town gate was opened, and the troops again marched out. When the two armies were close they halted, and Song Jiang rode forward. He saw many black flags in Prefect Gao Lian's troops. Wu Yong said, "Those black flags must be part of the magic spell, and they will be used again. What are you going to do?"
"Do not be anxious!" replied Song Jiang. "I have a means of gaining a victory this time. You tell our men this, and order that they must advance without any fear."
Gao Lian addressed his troops, "This time we will have no single combats, but instead you will all advance on hearing my signal. You must capture Song Jiang this time, and I will reward you handsomely." His charmed breast plate was engraved with animals and seal characters. He carried his sword in his hand, and went in front of his bodyguard on horseback.
Song Jiang pointed to him and cursed him, "Yesterday I was not here, and therefore my men were defeated by you. Today I will see that you are killed."
Gao Lian replied in a loud voice, "Do not make me soil my hand, you rebellious thieves, but submit at once and become my prisoners." He then held his sword aloft and muttered a charm. Immediately a black mist arose, and began to whirl round.
Song Jiang also took his sword, and uttered his spell. The black whirlwind immediately turned, and went back towards Prefect Gao Lian's army.
Gao Lian seeing the black whirlwind returning took his charmed breastplate and rattled his sword on it. Immediately a cloud of sand arose, and from this mass emerged strange monstrosities, snake and insects.
Song Jiang was quite nonplused at this, turned his horse, and galloped off to escape these monstrosities, followed by the other leaders and all his men.
Gao Lian ordered a general advance, and his army pursued the fleeing bandits. They chased them for about five //; and then a gong was sounded to stop the attack, and the troops returned to the town.
The brigands reached their camping ground, and Song Jiang held a consultation with Wu Yong as they had been defeated twice at Gaotang Prefecture for the purpose of rescuing Squire Chai Jin.
Wu Yong said, "As this man uses such supernatural agencies he will probably attack us tonight, so we must prepare for same." Song Jiang then ordered Yang Lin and Bai Sheng to guard the camp with three hundred men while the other leaders retired to another place.
These two leaders posted their men at various points hidden in the grass. They waited until nearly 9 p.m. when a storm arose with wind and thunder. The two leaders then saw Gao Lian with his bodyguard, advancing upon their camp whistling. But finding nobody there Gao Lian and his troops returned. The two leaders hidden in the grass signaled to their men who immediately without showing themselves raised a loud shout. Gao Lian could not understand this, and fearing a trap in the dark ordered a retreat, and his troops scattered in all directions. The bandits now discharged arrows from their ambush and one of these hit Gao Lian in the shoulder. Many soldiers were killed. Gao Lian led some of his men back, and after pursuing them for some distance Yang Lin and Bai Sheng summoned their men to return. The rain had now stopped and it was a bright starlit night with a cloudless sky. They returned to the camp with about twenty prisoners, and reported the matter to Song Jiang. He was surprised to hear the details because at his camp there had been neither wind nor rain nor thunder. It was the general opinion that Gao Lian had used his supernatural powers again. Yang Lin was sure that he had wounded Gao Lian with an arrow, and said that Gao Lian had his hair unbound and flying loose. Being afraid of another attack from Gao Lian, Song Jiang ordered his men to take precautionary measures.
That night he sent to Liangshan Marsh for reinforcements.
Gao Lian upon returning to the town issued an order that the gates and moat should be carefully guarded both day and night, but that no further fighting would take place against Song Jiang until his wound was healed.
Song Jiang had a talk with Wu Yong. "Gao Lian has defeated us twice, and our losses have been great. What can we do if he gets reinforcements from other districts?"
"I know a man who can overcome these supernatural tricks of Gao Lian," said Wu Yong, "and if we don't get him to help us I don't see how we can attack the town or rescue Squire Chai Jin."

To raise mist and cloud,
A supernatural man was brought.

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### Magic Messenger Dai Zong Seeks & Fetches Gongsun Sheng a 2nd Time & wins the argument by using his wits; Iron Ox Li Kui Splits the Skull of Taoist Luo the Immortal Sage Open & believes he's chopped the Sage to bits

"If we are to break Gao Lian's spells," Wu Yong said to Song Jiang, "we must send a man immediately to fetch Gongsun Sheng."
"The last time Dai Zong went, he spent many days, but all his inquiries failed," said Song Jiang. "Where can he look for him now?"
"The prefecture of Jizhou has numerous counties, towns and villages under its jurisdiction. He'd never find him in such places. It seems to me that since Gongsun is a Taoist, he's more likely to live on some famous mountain where there are Taoist caves and retreats. We'll ask Dai Zong to search in the mountainous regions of Jizhou. He'll surely find him." Song Jiang summoned Dai Zong and explained what was wanted.
"I'll go," said Dai. "But it would be better if I had a companion."
"When you use your magic travel method, who can keep up with you?" said Wu Yong.
"I'll put some charms on his legs too, and he'll be able march swiftly."
"Let me be your companion," Li Kui requested.
"If you want to travel with me, you must eat only vegetarian dishes on the road and obey my commands."
"No problem. I'll do whatever you say."
"Behave yourself and don't cause any rows," Song and Wu cautioned him. "Return quickly, once you've found Gongsun."
"Because I killed Yin Tianxi, Lord Chai is being prosecuted. Don't I want to save him? I wouldn't stir up any trouble."
The two emissaries concealed weapons on their persons, tied their luggage, bid a respectful farewell to Song Jiang and the others, left Gaotang and set out for Jizhou. When they had walked about thirty //; Black Whirlwind halted.
"Let's have a bowl of wine before going on, brother."
"You can only have vegetables with your drink during the magic travel."
"What difference would a little meat make?" Li Kui said, laughing.
"There you go again. It's getting late. We'll find an inn for the night, and continue on in the morning."
They walked another thirty //; until it was dusk, and put up at an inn. They made a fire, cooked rice and bought some wine. Li Kui carried a bowl of vegetables and another bowl of vegetable soup into the room, where he joined Dai Zong.
"Why aren't you having any rice?" Dai asked.
"I don't feel like it."
Dai Zong thought: "That rogue must be fooling me and eating meat behind my back." He finished his own vegetable dish and went softly to the rear. There was Li Kui with two measures of wine, wolfing down a platter of beef. "I knew it," Dai said to himself. "I won't say anything, but tomorrow I'll have a little fun with him."
He went back to their room and slept.
Li Kui finished off the meat and wine. Afraid that Dai might question him, he returned quietly and went to bed.
At dawn Dai awakened and told Li to light a fire. They cooked a few vegetables for breakfast, then put their luggage on their backs, paid the bill and left the inn.
Before they had gone twenty //; Dai said: "We didn't use our magic method yesterday, but today we have to make time. Tie your bundles on tight. I'm going to work the magic on you. We'll be covering eight hundred //before we rest."
He attached four charms to Li Kui's legs and said: "Wait for me at the tavern up ahead." He muttered an incantation and blew on Li's legs. Black Whirlwind strode off. He flew as if he were riding a cloud. Dai Zong laughed. "I'll keep him hungry all day." He affixed charms to his own legs, and followed.
Li Kui didn't understand this magic, and he walked as usual with a free stride. At once the sound in his ears was like the rush of wind and rain, the houses and trees on either side seemed to fall backwards as he passed, his feet felt propelled by cloud and mist. He grew frightened and tried to stop several times. But his legs refused to halt. It was as if someone were pushing them. They moved without touching the ground. Taverns selling meat and wine continued to fly towards his rear. He couldn't buy anything.
"My old grandpa," he swore. "Let me stop a minute!"
Soon the red sun was level in the west. Li Kui was hungry and thirsty. But he still was unable to halt. Drenched in a foul sweat, he panted for breath. Dai Zong narrowed the gap between them.
"Brother Li," he called, "why don't you buy a snack to eat?"
"Save me, brother," Li Kui bawled. "I'm dying of hunger!"
Dai Zong pulled a few wheat cakes out of his tunic and commenced to munch.
"I can't stop. How can I buy anything?" Li Kui yelled. "Give me a couple of cakes to take the edge off my appetite."
"I will, if you'll only stand still."
Li Kui extended his hand back, but his reach was short by about ten feet. "Good brother," he cried. "Let's stop!"
"It's very peculiar today. I can't halt my legs either."
*"Aiya.* My friggin legs won't listen to me. They just keep running. If they get me mad I'll take my big ax and cut them off!"
"That's a good idea. Otherwise even by next New Year's day you'll still be running."
"Good brother, you're making fun of me. If I chop my legs off, how will I be able to get back?"
"You probably didn't obey me last night. Now even I can't halt. Well, you can just keep going."
"My lord and master, forgive me and let me stop!"
"With my magic you can't eat meat, especially beef. If you eat one slice of beef, you have to run until you die."
"That's terrible! I deceived you last night, brother. I secretly bought six or seven catties of beef and ate them all! What am I going to do?"
"No wonder even my legs can't be halted. You're going to be the death of me."

Li Kui bawled his laments to the heavens. Dai Zong laughed.
"Promise me one thing and I'll remove the spell."
"Ask me quickly, master, you'll see how I obey!"
"Will you deceive me and eat any more meat?"
"If I do, may a boil as big as a bowl grow on my tongue! I saw you sticking to vegetables, but I thought that would be too much of a nuisance, so I tried to fool you. I'll never do it again!"
"In that case, I'll forgive you."
Dai Zong caught up, and brushed Li Kui's legs with his sleeve. "Stand," he cried. Li Kui immediately halted. "I'm going on ahead," said Dai. "You can follow slowly."
But when Li Kui attempted to step out, he couldn't lift his feet. They felt like cast iron. "Another calamity," he yelled. "Save me again, brother!"
Dai Zong looked back and laughed. "Did you mean what you just vowed?"
"I respect you like my own father! Would I dare go against your commands?"
"You'll really obey me?" Dai encircled Li Kui's wrist with his hand. "Start," he ordered. The two easily walked on.
"Have mercy, brother," Li Kui begged. "Let's rest."
They found an inn, and entered. When they got to their room, Dai removed the charms and burned a few sheaves of sacrificial money.
"How are you now?" he asked.
Li Kui kneaded his limbs and sighed. "These legs feel like they belong to me again at last."
Dai told him to order wine and a vegetable meal, and set water on to boil for washing their feet. Afterwards, they retired and slept until dawn. They got up, performed their ablutions and had breakfast. They paid the bill and set forth. When they had gone about thirty *li* Dai produced the charms.
"I'm only giving you two, today," he said to Li Kui. "You won't go quite so fast."
"My honored father, I don't want them!"
"You promised to listen to me. We're on an important mission. I won't play any tricks. But if you don't obey me, I'll immobilize you like I did last night. You'll have to stand right here until I go into Jizhou, find Gongsun, and come back."
"Tie them on, tie them on," Li Kui said hastily.
Dai and Li attached to their legs only two charms each. Dai Zong then spoke the incantation. He held onto Li as they continued their journey. Using this magic, Dai could stop or go whenever he pleased. Li Kui dared not disobey. On the road they consumed nothing but wine and vegetable dishes, resuming their march immediately after.
But we mustn't be too wordy. Travelling by magic means, in less than ten days they were resting at an inn in the outskirts of Jizhou. The following day they entered the city, with Li Kui disguised as Dai Zong's servant. They inquired all day, but could find no one who knew Gongsun Sheng. They returned to the inn and retired.
The next day they explored the small streets and narrow lanes of the city, again without success. Li Kui fumed irritably.
"That beggarly Taoist! What friggin place is he hiding in? When I see him, I'll drag him off by the head to brother Song Jiang!"
Dai Zong frowned. "There you go again. Don't you remember what you suffered last time?"
Li Kui laughed apologetically. "I wouldn't, actually. I was only kidding."
Dai again berated him. Li dared not reply.
They spent another night at the inn. They rose early the next morning, and searched the villages and towns on the city's perimeter. Whenever they met an old man, Dai greeted him respectfully and asked the whereabouts of Taoist teacher Gongsun Sheng. But none of them knew him, though Dai made dozens of inquiries.
By noon both men were hungry. They went into a noodle shop by the side of the road to buy something to eat. The place was full and all the tables were occupied. The two stood waiting in the aisle.
"If you gentlemen would like some noodles," a waiter said, "you can sit with that old man."
Dai Zong saw an old fellow seated alone at a large table. He hailed him respectfully and bowed, then he and Li Kui sat down opposite, side by side. Dai told the waiter to bring four bowls of noodles.
"One for me and three for you," he said to Li Kui. "That should be enough."
"Hardly. I could do six without any trouble."
The waiter grinned. Time passed, and there was no sign of the noodles. Li Kui saw steaming bowls being carried into an inner room, and he began to lose patience. The waiter placed a bowl of hot noodles down before the old man, who tucked in without any ado, bending low over the table to sip.
"Waiter," the impetuous Li Kui cried angrily, "you're keeping me waiting." He slammed his fist on the table, bouncing hot soup out of the bowl into the old man's face and spilling the noodles.
Annoyed, the old man grabbed Li Kui. "What right have you to overturn my noodles?" he shouted.
Li Kui clenched his fists and was going to hit him. Dai Zong yelled at him to behave, and apologized on his behalf.
"Don't quarrel with this fellow, old gentleman. I'll buy you another bowl."
"You don't understand, sir. I've a long way to go. I wanted to have some noodles and get home early to hear a sermon. Delaying my breakfast delays my journey."
"Where are you from, and who are you going to hear?"
"I'm from Two Fairies Mountain in Jiugong County, which is part of Jizhou Prefecture. I came into town to buy some good incense. I'm on my way back to the mountain to hear Luo the Sage. He's lecturing on 'How to Live Forever.' "
Dai Zong thought: "Could Gongsun Sheng be there, too?" And he asked: "Old gentleman, do you have a Gongsun Sheng in your village?"
"If you asked someone else, sir, you probably wouldn't get any answer. Most people don't know him by that name. He's a neighbor of mine, and he lives alone with his old mother. For a time he was away from home on religious wanderings, and he was called Gongsun the Pure. Now, he's given up his family name altogether, and he's known simply as the Pure Taoist. No one calls him Gongsun Sheng. That was his secular name. They wouldn't know who you meant."
"This is really a case of 'Wearing out iron shoes seeking in vain, then finding a solution with the greatest of ease'! Old gentleman, how far is Two Fairies Mountain from here? Is the Pure Taoist at home?"
"It's only about forty-five *li* from this county. Pure Taoist is the leading disciple of Luo the Sage. His master would never let him leave."
Dai was delighted. He urged the waiter to hurry with the noodles, then he ate with the old man. Dai paid the bill, and they left the shop together.
After asking the old man for directions, Dai said: "You go on ahead, old gentleman. I'll join you later. I want to buy some incense and paper money first."
The old man bid him farewell and departed.
Dai Zong and Li Kui returned to their inn, collected their luggage and bundles, attached the charms, left the inn and set out for Two Fairies Mountain. Using the magic travel method, they covered the forty-five *li* in no time. They asked the way to the mountain on arrival at the county town of Jiugong.
"Go east from here," their informant said. "It's only five *li*."
The two followed directions and, sure enough, in less than five *li* they reached the foot of Two Fairies Mountain. There, they met a woodcutter. Dai bowed courteously.
"Could you tell us where the Pure Taoist lives?"
The woodcutter pointed. "Through that mountain pass. There's a little stone bridge right outside his gate."
The two traversed the pass and saw a dozen thatched buildings surrounded by a low wall. Outside there was a small stone bridge. As they approached it they met a peasant girl coming from the enclosure carrying a basket of fruit. Dai Zong bowed.
"I see you're from the Pure Taoist's home. Is he in, do you know?"
"He's in back, refining cinnabar pills."
Pleased, Dai softly instructed Li Kui: "Conceal yourself in that thicket. After I've seen him I'll call you."
Dai Zong went in and looked around. A reed curtain hung in front of the door of a three-room thatched cottage. Dai coughed, and a white-haired old woman emerged. He bowed politely.
"I would like to see the Pure Taoist, old mother."
"What is your name, sir?"
"Dai Zong, from Shandong Province."
"My son is away on a religious journey. He hasn't returned yet."
"We're old friends. I have something important to tell him. Please let me see him."
"He's not home. You can leave a message, if you wish. You can see him when he comes back."
"I'll drop in again."
Dai bid the old woman farewell and returned to Li Kui outside the gate.
"I'll have to use you today. His mother says he's not at home. Go in and ask to see him. If she tells you he's away, start smashing things but don't hurt her. I'll rush in and stop you."
Li Kui took his pair of axes from his bundle, tucked them in his waist sash, and entered the gate. "Send someone out," he shouted.
The old woman hastily emerged. "Who is it?" she called. She became frightened when she saw Li Kui glaring at her, and said: "What is it you want, young man?"
"I'm Black Whirlwind from Liangshan Marsh. I'm under orders to invite Gongsun Sheng. Tell him to come out, so we can meet face to face. If he refuses, I'll set this friggin place on fire and burn your home to the ground!" And he shouted: "I want him to come right out!"
"Don't be like that, bold fellow. This isn't Gongsun Sheng's house. My son is called the Pure Taoist."
"Just tell him to come out. I'll know when I see his friggin face."
"He's on a religious trip and hasn't returned."
Li Kui pulled out his big axes and knocked down a wall. The old woman moved forward to stop him.
"If you don't call your son, I'll kill you," cried Li Kui. He raised his axes.
The old woman collapsed to the ground in terror. Gongsun Sheng emerged from the house, running.
"Don't you dare," he yelled.
At the same time Dai Zong shouted: "Iron Ox, how can you frighten this old mother?" He helped her to her feet.
Li Kui tossed his axes aside and hailed Gongsun respectfully. "Brother, forgive me. This was the only way to get you out."
Gongsun first supported his mother into the house, then returned and invited his two visitors into a quiet room and asked them to be seated. "How fortunate you've tracked me down," he said.
"After you left the mountain, brother," said Dai Zong. "I sought you in Jizhou, but was unable to discover where you'd gone. So I gathered a band of brothers and went back to the stronghold. Brother Song Jiang recently tried to rescue Lord Chai in Gaotang, but was twice defeated because of magic used by the prefect Gao Lian. He can't cope with it, and has sent me and Li Kui to request your assistance. We searched all Jizhou for you without success. Fortunately, we ran into an old gentleman in a noodle shop who told us where to find you. A village girl said you were at home refining cinnabar, but your old mother insisted you were away. So I asked Li Kui to arouse you into coming out. It was a crude method, and I beg your pardon. But to brother Song Jiang at Gaotang, every day is like a year. We urge that you go with us and demonstrate your unflagging chivalry."
"I have drifted about since childhood, and have become acquainted with many gallant men. Though I left Liangshan Marsh and returned home, I haven't forgotten you. But my mother is old and has no one to look after her, and my teacher, Luo the Sage, wants me by his side. I was afraid the stronghold would send people looking for me. That's why I changed my name to the Pure Taoist and hid myself here."
"Song Jiang is in danger. Have mercy, brother. You must make this trip."
"My mother has no one to take care of her, and my teacher never would let me go. It's really out of the question."
Dai Zong kowtowed and pleaded. Gongsun raised him to his feet. "We can talk about this later," he said. He served his guests wine and vegetable dishes in the quiet room, and the three ate.
"If you refuse to go, brother," said Dai Zong, "Song Jiang will surely be captured by Gao Lian. The chivalry of our mountain fortress will be ended."
"Let me ask my teacher," said Gongsun. "If he agrees, I'll go with you."
"We'll go to him at once."
"Relax and spend the night here. We can start the first thing in the morning."
"For Song Jiang in his present position each day is like a year. Please, brother, let's go now."
Gongsun led Dai and Li along a road to the Two Fairies Mountain. It was the end of autumn and the beginning of winter. The days were short, the nights long, and it grew dark early. By the time they were halfway up the slope, the red sun was sinking in the west. They followed a path through the dimness of a pine grove to the temple presided over by Luo the Sage. On a vermilion plaque over the gate inscribed in letters of gold were the words: "Temple of the Purple Void."
The three straightened their clothes in the Garments Pavilion, then proceeded along a covered walk to the Hall of Pines and Cranes. Two boy novices informed the Sage of their arrival. He ordered that they be invited in. They entered. Luo had just finished his prayers and was seated on a cloud-decorated dais. Gongsun advanced and greeted him, then stood and waited, body bent respectfully. Dai Zong hastily kowtowed. Li Kui only stared.
"Who are these two gentlemen?" Luo asked.
"Brothers of former days I've told you about, Teacher, gallant friends from Shandong. Gao Lian, prefect of Gaotang, has been using magic. Brother Song Jiang has sent these two brothers to ask my help. I wouldn't venture to decide on my own. I've come to ask Teacher's permission."
"You've escaped the fiery pit of human frailty, you've learned to make longevity pills. Why go back to that life?"
Dai Zong again kowtowed, "Please allow Teacher Gongsun to go with us," he requested. "After he's broken Gao Lian's spell, we shall escort him back."
"You two gentlemen don't understand," said Luo the Sage. "This is not a matter of concern to religious persons. Leave here. Make other plans."
Gongsun could only lead them away. They left the Hall of Pines and Cranes and went down the mountain the same night.
"What did that old mystic teacher say?" asked Li Kui.
"Why didn't you listen?" said Dai Zong.
"I couldn't understand his gibberish."
"He said Gongsun couldn't go."
"We travel all this distance, I'm given a hard time, and we finally find him," shouted Li Kui, "and all we get is parts! That old thief had better not make me lose my temper or I'll crush his hat with one hand, grab him by the waist with the other, and fling him down the mountain!"
Dai Zong frowned. "Do you want to be rooted to the spot again?"
Li Kui smiled abashedly. "No, no. I was only joking."
When they reached Gongsun's home the Taoist prepared some food. He and Dai Zong ate, but Li Kui sat wrapped in thought and didn't touch a morsel.
"Rest here tonight," said Gongsun, "and tomorrow I'll plead with my teacher again. If he agrees, I'll go with you."
Dai Zong bid him good night, put his luggage in order, and retired to the quiet room with Li Kui. But Black Whirlwind couldn't sleep. He endured his wakefulness till around the fifth watch, then got up softly. He listened to his companion. Dai Zong was snoring peacefully.
"Are you a friggin craven?" Li Kui mentally addressed Gongsun. "That old man is full of crap! You used to be a member of our stronghold. Why do you need permission from that friggin teacher? Suppose he doesn't agree? Won't that harm brother Song Jiang? I won't stand for it! I'll kill the old rogue! Then Gongsun will have no one to ask, and he'll have to go with us!"

Li Kui groped for his two axes, quietly opened the house door and, step by step in the moonlight, made his way up the mountain. The double portals of the Temple of Purple Void were shut, but the fence around the compound was not high, and he cleared it in a leap. After opening the portals in readiness for a retreat, he crept into the grounds till he came to the Hall of Pines and Cranes. He heard someone within chanting scriptures. He crawled closer and poked a hole through the paper window. Luo the Sage was seated alone on his dais. Two smoking candles on a table before him shed a bright light. "That wretched Taoist," thought Li Kui. "He deserves to die."

Stealthily, he crept to the latticed door and, with one push, swung it creaking open. He charged in, raised his axes and brought them down on the Sage's forehead. Luo collapsed on his dais. His flowing blood was white. Li Kui laughed. "The varlet must have been a virgin. He's still got all his male essence. He hasn't used any of it! There's not a drop of red blood in him!"

Li Kui took a close look at his handiwork. His ax had cleaved the Sage's hat and split his head right down to his neck. "Today, I've removed a trouble-maker," Black Whirlwind observed with satisfaction. "We won't have to worry about Gongsun not going."

Turning, he left the Hall of Pines and Cranes and hurried along the corridor. A young black-clad novice blocked his way.

"You killed our teacher," the boy yelled. "Don't think you can escape!"

"Little knave," cried Li Kui. "Have a taste of my axes!"

He chopped, and the boy's head rolled to the foot of the terrace. Li Kui laughed. "I'd better get out of here."

He left the temple portals and flew down the mountain. At Gongsun's house he slipped in and closed the door behind him. Once more he listened in the quiet room. Dai Zong was still asleep. Softly, Li Kui returned to bed and slept.

Gongsun rose at daylight and laid out some breakfast. He and Dai Zong ate.

"Please take us up the mountain again so that we may plead with your teacher," said Dai.

Li Kui bit his lips to keep from laughing.

The three followed the same path and climbed the slope. At the Hall of Pines and Cranes inside the Temple of Purple Void they were met by two novices.

"Is the Sage within?" asked Gongsun.

"He's meditating on his cloud dais," the boys replied.

Li Kui was astonished. He stuck his tongue so far out in consternation, for a long time he couldn't pull it back. They pushed aside the door curtain and entered. Sure enough, there seated on the dais was Luo the Sage. "Could I have killed the wrong man last night?" Li Kui wondered.

"What brings you three here again?" Luo queried.

"We wish to beg your permission for Gongsun our teacher to rescue mercifully many people in distress," said Dai Zong.

"Who is that big swarthy fellow?"

"A brother in chivalry of mine, Li Kui."

The Sage laughed. "I was going to refuse Gongsun. But for that dark fellow's sake I'll let him take this one trip."

Dai Zong kowtowed, and relayed the information to Black Whirlwind.

Li Kui thought: "The rascal knows I wanted to kill him. Why does he make such friggin remarks?"

"I'll send you three immediately to Gaotang," said Luo. "How will that be?"

They thanked him, and Dai Zong said to himself: "This Sage has much stronger magic than my Miraculous Travel Method."

Luo directed his novices to bring three handkerchiefs.

Dai asked him: "How are you going to get us to Gaotang so quickly? Please explain."

The Sage stood up. "Come with me."

They left the hall and followed him to the top of a bluff. A red kerchief was spread upon the ground.

"Purity, stand on that."

Gongsun placed both feet on the kerchief. With an upward sweep of his wide sleeve, Luo cried: "Rise!"

The kerchief turned into a red cloud and carried Gongsun high into the air till it was two hundred feet above the mountain.

"Stop," shouted Luo the Sage, and the red cloud hung suspended.

Next, a blue handkerchief was spread, and Dai Zong was told to stand upon it. At the command, "Rise," it changed into a blue cloud and soared up till it was at a level with the red. Each the size of a large sleeping mat, the two clouds circled in the heavens. Li Kui stared, open-mouthed.

Luo then had a white kerchief spread upon the bluff top, and he instructed Li Kui to step on.

"This is no joke," the Black Whirlwind grinned. "If a man fell off he could raise quite a bump on the head!"

"You see those other two, don't you?" said Luo.

Li Kui stood on the kerchief and the Sage shouted: "Rise!" The kerchief changed into a white cloud and started upwards.

"*Aiya*," yelled Li Kui, "mine is unsteady! Let me down!"

Luo waved his right hand, and the red and blue clouds smoothly returned to earth. Dai kowtowed his thanks, and stood on Luo's right. Gongsun stood on his left. Above, Li Kui was shouting.

"I have to piss and shit like everyone else! If you don't bring me down, I'll pour it on your head from up here!"

"I'm one who has given up the material world. I've never harmed you. Why did you come over the wall at night and hack me with your axes?" Luo asked. "If I weren't possessed of virtue, you'd have killed me. And you murdered my novice."

"It wasn't me! You're mistaking me for somebody else!"

The Sage laughed. "Although all you did was chop off a couple of gourds, your intentions were bad. I'm going to make you suffer a bit for that." He waved his hand. "Go!"

An ugly wind blew Li Kui into the clouds. Two warriors, wearing head kerchiefs of imperial yellow, escorted him under guard. The wind and rain howled in Li Kui's ears. He looked down. Houses and trees seemed to be falling backwards as he passed. His feet felt as if they were being hastened by clouds and mists.

He had no idea how far he had gone. He was scared out of his wits, and was trembling all over. Suddenly, he heard a scraping sound, and found himself rolling down the roof of the main hall of the prefecture of Jizhou.

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The magistrate, Ma Shihong, was holding court. Arrayed outside the building were many police and functionaries. When they saw a big swarthy fellow tumbling down from the sky they were very startled.

"Bring that rogue here," shouted Ma.

A dozen jailors and guards hustled Li Kui forward.

"Where are you from, rascally sorcerer?" demanded the magistrate. "Why have you dropped from the heavens?"

Li Kui, in his fall, had banged his head and split his brow. He was too stunned to speak.

"He must be a wizard," Ma affirmed. He directed that punishment implements be brought.

Guards and jailors tied Li Kui up and dragged him to the grassy sward before the hall. A captain poured dog's blood on his cranium. Another tipped a bucket of urine and turds and drenched him from head to toe. Li Kui's mouth and ears were full of the stuff.

"I'm not a wizard," he bawled. "I'm an attendant of Luo the Sage!"

Everyone in Jizhou knew that Luo the Sage was a living spirit on earth. They were reluctant to harm Li Kui any further. They pushed him before the magistrate.

"Luo the Sage is famed for having attained virtue and becoming a living god," said a functionary. "If this is one of his followers, we mustn't punish him."

The magistrate laughed. "I've read a thousand books and know ancient and modern history, but I've never heard of a living god who had a disciple like this! He's just an evil sorcerer. Guards, give him a good drubbing!"

They had no choice but to turn him over and beat him till he was more dead than alive.

"Admit you're a wizard, knave," shouted the magistrate, "and we'll stop."

Li Kui had no choice but to confess that he was "Wizard Li the Second." A big cangue was nailed around his neck and he was cast into prison. He was put into the section for the condemned.

"I am a spirit general and officer of the day," he asserted loudly. "How dare you place a cangue on me? I'm going to wipe every one of you out in Jizhou Town!"

The guards and warden all knew that the virtue of Luo the Sage was of the highest purity, and they admired him greatly.

"Who are you, really?" they asked Li Kui.

"Officer of the day, spirit general, and intimate of Luo the Sage! I made a mistake and annoyed him, so he flung me here that I might suffer a bit. But he'll be sending for me in two or three days. If you don't serve me meat and wine I'll slaughter you and your whole families!"

The guards and warden were frightened. They bought wine and meat and invited Li Kui to dine. Seeing this, he grew wilder in his speech, which scared his listeners still more. They brought hot water for him to bathe in, and clean clothing.

"If you stint on wine and meat, I'll fly away," he threatened. "I'll make you suffer!"

The guards and jailors apologized and entreated. Needless to say, he remained in the Jizhou prison.

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All of this Luo the Sage related to Dai Zong, who pleaded that he spare Li Kui. Luo kept Dai as his guest in the hall and questioned him about activities in the mountain fortress. Dai said that Chao Gai and Song Jiang were chivalrous and charitable, doing only what was morally right, never harming faithful officers of the emperor, noble-hearted men, filial sons, righteous husbands or chaste wives. He told of their many virtues.

Luo was very pleased.

Dai stayed with him for five days, and each day he kowtowed and begged the Sage to save Li Kui.

"Men like that can only be driven away," said Luo. "Don't take him back with you."

"You don't understand," replied Dai. "Li Kui is stupid, he doesn't know the rites, but he has his good points. First of all he's absolutely straight. He'll rarely ask anyone for anything. Secondly, he doesn't flatter people, but when he's loyal it's to the death. Third, he's not lecherous, greedy or treacherous, but brave and bold. For these reasons, Song Jiang loves Li Kui. I wouldn't be able to face brother Song if I went back without him."

Luo laughed. "I've known for some time that he is one of the stars of Heavenly Spirits. Because many people on earth behave too wickedly, as a punishment to them and him he was sent down to kill them. Would I dare go against the will of Heaven and harm a man like that? I only want to rough him up a little, then you can have him back."

Dai thanked the Sage, and Luo called: "Are any warriors around?" A wind rose outside the Hall of Pines and Cranes, and when it passed a warrior in a turban of imperial yellow stepped forward and bowed. "What are your orders, Teacher?"

"Bring that man back you escorted to the Jizhou prison. He's paid for his crime. Go and return quickly."

The warrior respectfully assented. In about half a watch, he dropped Li Kui down from the air. Dai hastily helped him to his feet.

"Where have you been these last couple of days, brother?" he asked.

Li Kui saw Luo the Sage and fervently kowtowed. "My own father, I'll never dare to offend again!"

"You must curb your temper from now on," said Luo. "Concentrate on serving Song Jiang. Shun all wicked thoughts."

Li Kui again kowtowed. "You are like my own father! Would I dare disobey your commands?"

"Where did you go these last few days?" Dai pressed him.

"The wind that day blew me to the Jizhou magistrate's office and rolled me down the roof. They all grabbed me and that friggin magistrate said I was a wizard. He had me knocked down and tied up and told his prison guards to pour dog's blood and piss and shit all over me and beat me till my legs were jelly. Then they put a cangue on me and threw me into prison. Though I was beaten, I got some good food and wine out of it. Those rogues were afraid of the Sage, so they let me bathe and gave me a change of clothes.

"They were wining and dining me just now in a pavilion, when that yellow turbaned warrior jumped down from the sky. He opened my cangue and told me to close my eyes. It was like a dream, till I landed back here."

"The Teacher has over a thousand such warriors," said Gongsun. "They're all his personal attendants."

"Living Buddha," cried Li Kui. "Why didn't you tell me before and save me from making that stupid error?" Again he kowtowed to the Sage.

Dai Zong also kowtowed. "I've been here indeed a long time," he said. "The military situation at Gaotang is desperate. Please be merciful and let teacher Gongsun go with us and rescue brother Song Jiang. After we've smashed Gao Lian we'll escort him back."

"I was opposed to letting him go originally. But because of your lofty loyalty, I'll permit him to make the trip. I've something to impart first that you must remember." Gongsun came forward and knelt before the Sage to receive his instructions. Truly, he was filled with desire to save the world and bring tranquility to the land, a man destined for high rank and prestigious position.

Now what the Professor told Song Jiang was that they would never break the magic power unless they quickly sent someone to fetch Gongsun Sheng, the Taoist.

Song Jiang said: "But last time the Magic Messenger spent a long time looking for him and drew a complete blank. Where are we going to look now?"

The Professor said: "Just think how many towns, villages and hamlets there are under the jurisdiction of Jizhou. He can't have searched them all. The way I see it, Taoist Gongsun is a very spiritual person, he must be staying in some famous hermit's cave or some blissful abode beside a rushing stream. This time tell the Magic Messenger to go and have a good look outside the city, wherever there is a famous mountain or sacred spot. I am confident that he'll find him."

Accordingly Song Jiang summoned the Magic Messenger and said: "You are to go to Jizhou and fetch Taoist Gongsun."

The Magic Messenger said: "I will gladly go. But it would be good if I could have a travelling companion."

"But how can anyone keep up with you when you start your magic walking mode?" said the Professor.

"If I have a companion, I tie the magic amulets on his legs too," said the Magic Messenger. "That enables him to travel fast as well."

Iron Ox said: "I'd like to accompany Superintendent Dai."

"If you want to go with me, you'll have to eat vegetarian food for the whole journey and obey my orders," said the Magic Messenger.

"No problem," said Iron Ox. "I'll do whatever you say."

Song Jiang and the Professor said: "You'd better watch out on the journey. Don't stir up any trouble. If you find him come back as fast as possible."

Iron Ox said: "It was me who killed the Chancellor and got Mr. Chai into trouble, so naturally I want to save him. I'm certainly not going to cause any more trouble."

The two men concealed weapons on their persons, tied their bundles, bade farewell to Song Jiang and the others and left Gaotang by the Jizhou road.

When they had gone about six miles, Iron Ox stopped and said: "I'd travel more easily if we could stop and have a bowl of wine for the journey."

"If you want to do the magic walking with me you can only have a non-alcoholic drink," said the Magic Messenger. "And we must go straight on afterwards."

"We could eat a little bit of meat, what's wrong with that?" said Iron Ox.

"There you go again," said the Magic Messenger. "But anyway, it's late. Let's look for somewhere to stay. We'll have an early start tomorrow."

After another couple of miles, as dusk was falling, they found an inn where they stopped and lit the fire to cook their rice and procured some wine. Iron Ox brought in a bowl of vegetarian food and a bowl of vegetable broth and gave it to the Magic Messenger.

"Why aren't you eating?" the latter asked.

"I'm not hungry," Iron Ox replied.

The Magic Messenger thought to himself: "He's cheating me, the rogue. He must be eating meat behind my back."

The Magic Messenger finished his vegetarian meal and stole to the back to investigate. There was Iron Ox with two measures of wine and a plate of beef, eating away. "What did I say!" the Magic Messenger exclaimed to himself. "I won't expose him now. I'm going to have some fun with him tomorrow."

The Magic Messenger returned to the room and went to sleep. After eating for a while, Iron Ox began to worry about what the Magic Messenger had said, and crept back into the room and went to sleep.
The Magic Messenger woke at dawn and told Iron Ox to light the fire and cook some vegetarian food for breakfast. Then they shouldered their bags, paid their bill and left the inn. Before they had gone a mile, the Magic Messenger said: "We didn't do any magic walking yesterday. We need to get on a bit faster today. So make sure your pack is tied on securely, because I'm going to say the spell over you and then we'll do three hundred miles without stopping."
He took out four amulets and tied them on both of Iron Ox's legs. He said: "Wait for me when you get to the next inn." Then he pronounced the formula and blew on Iron Ox's legs.
Iron Ox shot off. It felt just as if he was riding on a cloud, he seemed to be flying.
The Magic Messenger laughed to himself: "He's about to suffer a day of hunger." He fastened on his own amulets and followed.
Iron Ox had no understanding of this mode of travel. He tried to walk just as usual. But the sound of wind and rain was in his ears, houses and woods appeared to fall away as if in long lines on either side, the clouds and mist beneath him seemed to speed his feet on their way. He started to feel afraid. He made several attempts to stop but his two legs would not respond. It was as if there was someone underneath pushing him, his feet simply would not touch the ground, they just kept on going. When he came to an inn and couldn't just pop in and buy something to eat, he cried out: "Please, old chap, let's take a break!"
When they had been travelling till the sun was going down red in the west, Iron Ox was hungry and thirsty. But still he couldn't control his legs. Fear brought him out in a stinking sweat, his breath came in short pants. The Magic Messenger drew closer and called out: "Iron Ox, my friend, why don't you go and buy some snacks to eat?"
"Brother, help me please," Iron Ox replied. "I'm starving!"
The Magic Messenger took some cakes out of his pocket and started eating them.
"I can't buy anything because I don't know how to stop," Iron Ox cried. "Give me a couple, please, to ease my hunger."
"Come a bit closer and I'll give you some," said the Magic Messenger.
Iron Ox stretched out his hand, but he couldn't get closer than three metres and he couldn't reach the cakes. "Please, please brother," he implored. "Wait for me a minute!"
"There's something funny about it today," said the Magic Messenger. "I can't stop either."
"Aiya!" Iron Ox moaned. "These fucking feet of mine won't obey me at all, they just keep going on their own like this, I'd like to get an axe and chop of my bottom half!"
The Magic Messenger said: "Perhaps that's the only solution. Otherwise we shall just keep on going till next New Year's Day and we still won't be able to stop!"
"Please, don't laugh at me!" said Iron Ox. "If I were to chop off my legs I know you'd laugh at me!"
"Maybe you didn't do everything I said yesterday?" said the Magic Messenger. "Today even I can't stop. You'll just have to keep on going!"
Iron Ox cried: "Please, old chap, please let me stop."
"When you're using this magic of mine you mustn't eat meat. Beef above all things is forbidden. If you eat a single piece of beef, you'll have to go ten thousand miles without stopping."
"Then it's a disaster! I deceived you last night, I was a fool. I did secretly buy a few little pieces of beef to eat. It was so good!"
"No wonder then that today even I can't stop going. We'll just have to go on till we reach the end of the sky, it'll take us about three or four years to get back!"
Iron Ox began to shout his complaints to heaven. The Magic Messenger was laughing his head off. "If from now on you'll do everything I say, I'll make the magic stop," he said.
"I will, old chap, I will!"
"Are you going to cheat again and eat meat?"
"If I eat meat again after today, may a boil the size of a rice bowl grow on my tongue! When I saw you were going to eat vegetarian food I simply couldn't stomach it, that's all. But I won't do it again!"
"All right then, I'll let you off!" He took a step back and flapping his sleeve against Iron Ox's legs cried "Halt!", just once. Iron Ox's legs stopped going immediately and remained as if nailed to the ground. They couldn't move.
"I'll go on ahead," said the Magic Messenger. "You follow on slowly."
Now when Iron Ox tried to move his feet, they wouldn't stir from the spot; he tugged at his legs but they wouldn't budge. It was as if they had been cast in iron.
"Oh no! Not again!" Iron Ox exclaimed. "How am I going to get anywhere now?" Then he yelled: "Brother! Help! Help!"
The Magic Messenger turned round, laughing. "Are you going to listen to me now?" he asked.
"I shall respect you like my father, I will never dare to disobey you in anything!"
"This time you'd really better do as I say!" said the Magic Messenger. Touching Iron Ox with his hand, he said "Go!" and they both began to walk easily on.
"Brother, please take pity on me and let's soon have a break!" Iron Ox said after a while. And before long they came to an inn where they stopped for the night. When they went to their room the Magic Messenger took off the amulets, burnt some paper money as an offering, and asked Iron Ox: "Well, how do you feel now?"
Iron Ox said: "These two legs belong to me again."
"Who told you to go and secretly buy wine and meat last night?"
"It's only because you wouldn't let me eat meat I ate some secretly, so now you've had a good laugh at my expense."
The Magic Messenger got Iron Ox to prepare some vegetarian food and non-alcoholic wine for their supper and warm the water to wash their feet. Then they lay down to rest. They slept till dawn. When they had completed their toilet, breakfasted and paid the bill they set off. Before they had gone a mile the Magic Messenger took out the amulets and said: "I'm only going to give you two today, so you'll go a bit slower."
"I'd rather not have any at all, old man," said Iron Ox.
"If you do as I say, we're going to achieve something very important, you and I. Why should I try to make fun of you? But if you don't do as I say, I shall nail you down again like I did yesterday, and you'll have to wait till I've been to Jizhou and found Taoist Gongsun before I can come back and release you."
Iron Ox hurriedly said: "I will, I will."
This time the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox both put on two amulets and when they started the magic walking the Magic Messenger held Iron Ox's elbow. This magic, you see, enabled him to move or stop just by willing it. Iron Ox from now on didn't dream of disobeying him. For the rest of the journey they just bought vegetarian fare, ate and then went on. To cut a long story short, by using the magic walking they were soon outside the walls of Jizhou, where they found an inn to stay.
Next day they went into the city, the Magic Messenger dressed as the master and Iron Ox got himself up as his servant. They searched all day, but no one had heard of Taoist Gongsun, so they retired to their inn to rest. They spent the whole of the next day searching all the little side-streets and alleys, but heard no news. Iron Ox was getting restive. "That bloody monk, where the fucking hell is he hiding?" he complained. "When I find him I'm going to take him by the scruff of the neck and drag him to our leader!"
"There you go again! If you don't listen to me, I'm going to make you regret it!"
"I was only joking," said Iron Ox with a sheepish grin.
But the Magic Messenger went on grumbling for a while and Iron Ox did not dare to answer back. They reached the inn and rested.
They were up early next morning and searched every neighbourhood outside the city walls. Every time he saw an older person, the Magic Messenger bowed and respectfully asked where Taoist Gongsun's house was, but not a single one knew him. He asked in a dozen different places. In the late afternoon when they were really hungry from so much walking they came upon a vegetarian restaurant beside the road and went in to have a snack. But all the tables were taken, not one was free, so they had to go out and stand in the road. The waiter said: "If you want some noodles, sirs, you'd better sit here with this old gentleman."
The Magic Messenger saw an old man all by himself occupying a big table, so he greeted him respectfully and they both sat down opposite. Iron Ox, who was sitting a little behind the Magic Messenger, told the waiter to bring them four bowls of noodles. The Magic Messenger said: "One bowl for me and three bowls for you, are you sure that will be enough?"
"No point in economizing," said Iron Ox. "Make that six, I'll take care of them."
This made the waiter laugh. But they waited hours, and still the noodles didn't come. Watching all the noodles being taken in for other people, Iron Ox became pretty impatient. Then the waiter brought a bowl of steaming noodles and placed it in front of the old man. Without a word of apology, the latter began to eat. Since the noodles were very hot, he lowered his head and leaned forward over the table. Iron Ox lost his temper. Because the noodles hadn't come, he gave a great shout of "Waiter! We've been waiting here half the day!" and banged the table, splashing hot soup all over the old man's face and spilling his noodles. Highly incensed, the old man got up and grabbed Iron Ox. "Where's your manners? Why did you spill my noodles?" he said indignantly.
Iron Ox clenched his fist and was about to strike the old man, but the Magic Messenger hurriedly intervened. He apologized to the old man. "Don't waste your time with him, sir. I will buy you another bowl," he said.
"That's not the point," said the old man. "I've got a long journey ahead of me, and I want to eat quickly so I can go back to hear the talk. If I take too long it will ruin my journey."
"Where are you from, sir?" the Magic Messenger asked. "Whose talk is it you want to hear, and what is he talking about?"
"I am from Nine Halls Village by the Two Immortals Peak in this province. I came here to get some good quality incense and I'm going to hear the Blessed Sage on the mountain speaking on 'The Secret of Longevity.'"
It occurred to the Magic Messenger that this might be where Taoist Gongsun was, so he asked: "Do you by any chance have a Taoist called Gongsun Sheng in your village?"
"Anyone else wouldn't be able to answer your question," said the old man. "Not many people know him. We are neighbours. He's got an old mother. He spends his time wandering about begging, this monk, and nowadays he's called Gongsun the Pure because recently he changed his name to Brother Purity and is no longer Gongsun Sheng. No one knows his old worldly name now."
"It's just like they say," said the Magic Messenger. "You can wear out a pair of iron shoes in the search and still not find what you're looking for; but then you get it without lifting a finger!" He respectfully asked the old man: "How far is this Two Immortals Peak from here?"
"It's just fifteen miles," the latter replied. "Brother Purity is the chief follower of the Blessed Sage. The master won't let him out of his sight."
The Magic Messenger was delighted. He got them to bring the noodles quickly and ate in the old man's company. When they'd paid the bill, they left together. After asking the way, he said to the old man: "You go on ahead, sir. We'll buy some incense and paper to burn and then follow you." The old man said goodbye and left.
The Magic Messenger and Iron Ox went back to the inn to collect their luggage. Then they tied on the amulets again and set off for Two Immortals Peak in Nine Halls Village. With the magic walking they did the fifteen miles in no time. When they asked in the village for Two Imortals Peak, a resident gave them directions: "Out of the village go east and in a mile and a half you're there."
They followed these directions, and just as they had been told, they were soon looking at that mountain, which was indeed outstandingly beautiful:
*The mountain is green as if carved from jade; the emerald peaks are swathed in clouds. On opposing cliffs tigers crouch and dragons coil; on every side the howling of apes, the call of the crane. In the morning the summit is lost in cloud, at nightfall the sun hangs in the branches of the trees. Everywhere the tinkle of running water, as if each stream stirred a string of jade pendants. Waterfalls seem to hang in the air and in the mountain cave the zither softly sounds. Perhaps it's a Taoist busy with his rites, or maybe some saintly elder preparing potions.*
When they reached the mountain, the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox met a woodcutter. The Magic Messenger greeted him politely and said: "Can I ask you where Brother Purity lives?"
The woodcutter replied: "Just past yon eastern spur of the mountain, 'tis the place with a little stone bridge in front of the gate."
Beyond the spur they found a collection of thatched huts surrounded by a low wall, outside which was a tiny stone bridge. As they reached it a peasant woman came out carrying a tray of fresh fruit.
The Magic Messenger said: "You've just come from the house of Brother Purity, is that right? Is he at home?"
"He's at the back, making up pills," she answered.
Inwardly rejoicing, he told Iron Ox: "Go and hide behind a tree while I go inside. If I find him, I'll come and fetch you."
He entered what was apparently a typical three-room house with a reed curtain hanging over the doorway. At his shout, a white-haired old lady emerged from the inner room. Here's what he saw:
*A grey-haired old crone, but still with a rubicund complexion; eyes misty as the smoke of an Autumn Festival lantern, eyebrows white as sunlight glittering on frost. She wears a plain black skirt, like a female immortal in the heavens. Her outer robe is sackcloth, like the old Dame's on Mount Li. In her figure you seem to see a crane soaring among the clouds, in her face the look of a mountain pine proudly standing against the snow.*
The Magic Messenger greeted her most respectfully and said: "My greetings, madam. I would like to request an interview with Brother Purity."
"What is your name, please?" the old lady asked.
"My name is Dai Zong, and I have come here from Shandong.
"My son has gone out begging. He isn't back yet."
"I am an old friend, and I want to speak to him about a most urgent matter. Please let me see him."
"He's not at home. If you've got something to say to him you can certainly wait here. When he gets back he'll come and see you."
"I'll come back."
He took leave of the old lady and went out to find Iron Ox. "Now I need to make use of you. Since his mother insists he's not home, you go in now and ask for him. If she says he's not in, threaten her, but remember she's his mother, don't hurt her. When I come in and tell you to stop, do so at once."
Iron Ox first took his two axes out of his pack and tucked them behind his back. Then he went into the house and shouted: "Come out!"
The old lady hurriedly received him and said: "Who is it?"
When she saw Iron Ox scowling at her she was very scared. "What do you want, sir?" she asked.
"I am the Black Whirlwind from the Marshes of Mount Liang," said Iron Ox. "Under orders from my leader I have come to ask for Taoist Gongsun Sheng. Ask him to come out and I'll behave nicely. If he doesn't, I shall start a fucking fire and burn your house to the ground. No arguing now. Just make it snappy!"
"Please be patient, sir," she said. "This is not Gongsun Sheng's house. It belongs to Brother Purity."
"Just ask him to come out, that's all," said Iron Ox. "I'll know him by his fucking face."
"He's gone out begging and he hasn't come back yet."
Iron Ox took out an axe and began to hack at a wall. When the old woman rushed forward to stop him, he said: "If you don't ask your son to come out, I'm going to kill you." He raised his axe as if to strike and the old lady collapsed in a heap. At this moment Taoist Gongsun rushed out, crying: "Stop this disgraceful behaviour!" As the poem says:

*This mountain hideout's the perfect place*
*Pharmacy's secret arts to trace.*
*Only a rude and rough onslaught*
*Will persuade the Taoist to come out.*

The Magic Messenger also rushed in shouting: "Iron Ox, why are you frightening the old lady?" He hurriedly helped her to her feet.
Iron Ox threw down his axe and respectfully saluted Taoist Gongsun. "Don't be angry with me," he said. "If I hadn't done it you weren't going to come out."
Taoist Gongsun first helped his mother into the inner room. Then he came back and greeted the other two and invited them into a clean room to sit. "What caused you to look for me here?" he asked.
The Magic Messenger said: "Since you left the mountain I have already been once to Jizhou in search of you and couldn't find any trace. I did however get together a band of brothers to join the company on the mountain. Now Song Jiang has gone to Gaotang to rescue Mr. Chai and he has lost several battles to the governor, who has been using magic. He doesn't know what else to try, so he sent me with Iron Ox to find you and ask you to come. We looked all over Jizhou but couldn't find you. We chanced upon an old man from this district in a vegetarian restaurant, and he led us here. We met a peasant woman who told us you were at home preparing pills and potions. But your mother kept denying it, so I got Iron Ox to provoke you into coming out. It was a bit of a nasty trick but please forgive us. For our leader in Gaotang every day that passes increases the danger. Please agree to come with us, for the sake of loyalty to our great enterprise."
Taoist Gongsun said: "It is true that in my youth I used to frequent the rivers and lakes and enjoy the companionship of brave men. But since the time I left Mount Liang and returned home I have had no taste for that life: in the first place I have an aged mother with no one else to look after her; secondly my present master, the Blessed Sage, wants me to stay. I was afraid someone might come looking for me, that is why I changed my name to Brother Purity and hid myself away here."
The Magic Messenger said: "But right now Song Jiang is in extreme peril. Please, out of compassion, Father, come with us, if only for a little while."
Taoist Gongsun said: "The problem is there will be no one to look after my mother. And I doubt if my master would allow it. No, really I can't."
The Magic Messenger threw himself down in supplication. Taoist Gongsun raised him up and said: "Let's think about it later." He left them sitting there in the room while he went to arrange some vegetarian food for them.
When the three had been eating for a while, the Magic Messenger said with many a sigh: "If you won't come with us, Song Jiang will be captured by Gao Lian and from now on the loyal company of the mountain stronghold is no more!"
Taoist Gongsun said: "Let me go and ask my master. If he gives his consent I will go with you."
"Then go and ask him right away."

"Just be patient for this one night. I will go first thing tomorrow morning."
"But for our leader every day that passes is like a year, please let's go now."
So Taoist Gongsun stood up and together with the other two set off on the path to Two Immortals Peak. It was that season when autumn is turning into winter, when the days are short and the nights long and it is easy for the traveller to be benighted. When they were halfway up the mountain a red sun was already sinking in the west. Through the shadow of the pine trees a little path led directly to the hermitage of the Blessed Sage. Before it was a red sign with three gold characters saying "Temple of the Purple Void." The scene that met their eyes when they arrived there was indeed impressive:
*The dark green pines stand thickly, the paler green cypresses are luxuriant. A bunch of greybeards listen to the scriptures, while a group of black-robed priests mix medicines. The green wutong trees, the green bamboos, are like a jade screen at the mouth of the cave shutting out the cold; white snow and yellow shoots seem to seal in the heat of the furnace in the pill manufactory. Wild deer wander down the paths, trampling the flowers; mountain apes leap across the gorges picking fruit. The sound of Taoists reciting the scriptures is wafted to the ears, hermits can be seen discussing the law. From the altar to the Heavenly Void the sound of priests chanting the litanies carries on the breeze, from the phoenixes atop the Hall of the Dipper comes the tinkling of jade. Veritably one thinks oneself in heaven, for where else could one go to seek paradise?*
In the vestibule the three of them arranged their dress and then entered from the corridor passing the main hall to the Pines and Cranes Pavilion at the back. Two acolytes, seeing that Taoist Gongsun was bringing two strangers, went and reported it to the master. They returned with an invitation to enter.
When the three men entered, the master had just been praying and was seated on the monk's throne. Taoist Gongsun stepped forward and greeted him reverently, then waited with bowed head. The holy man whom the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox now observed had a truly other-worldly air:
*His monk's circlet is bedecked with jade leaves, his crane robe is embroidered with gold thread. He has long whiskers and broad cheekbones, and is a steadfast practitioner of the rule to suppress passion; he has green eyes with large pupils, and is replete with longevity pills. He is always nibbling Anqi dates or gobbling Fangshuo peaches. His solar plexus is filled with qi: he is brimming with health and vitality. His name is inscribed in the mystic register: he is a pure and unblemished immortal. This is indeed one who loves to stroll at night under the moon and harken to the distant cry of the peacock, or travel a thousand leagues soaring among the clouds on the crane's back.*
The Magic Messenger hurriedly bowed, but Iron Ox simply stared. "Why are these two here?" the holy man asked Taoist Gongsun.
"They are the two young friends I told you about," said Taoist Gongsun. "They are loyal friends from Shandong. It's because the governor of Gaotang has been using magic powers that our friend Song Jiang has sent them here to summon me. Of course I wouldn't go without your permission, so I have come to ask you for it."
"My son, if you wish to escape the burning pit and prepare yourself for longevity, how can you have any desire to return to those realms?"
The Magic Messenger bowed again and said: "I beseech you to give Taoist Gongsun leave. As soon as Gaotang is defeated we will send him back."
"You know nothing about it," said the Blessed Sage. "It is not for the laity to involve themselves in our affairs. Go, take yourselves off."
Taoist Gongsun had no alternative but to take them away. They left the hermitage and went down the mountain that same night.
Iron Ox asked: "What did that old monk say?"
The Magic Messenger said: "Didn't you hear what he said?"
"I know, but I can never work that kind of crap out."
"Well, the upshot of what the master said was that he couldn't go."
Iron Ox began to rave. "The two of us have come all this way, and had a world of trouble finding him, and now he comes out with that shit? That really makes me sick! I'm going to get that bloody monk, I'll twist his crown off with one hand, grab him round the waist with the other and pitch him down the mountain!"
The Magic Messenger gave him a look and said: "You want to have your feet nailed down again?"
Iron Ox said hastily: "I don't mean it, I don't mean it. I was just joking!"
They went back to Taoist Gongsun's house, where a supper was prepared for them. Taoist Gongsun said: "Please stay here tonight, and tomorrow I'll go and plead with my master again. If he gives his permission I'll go with you."
So the Magic Messenger bade him goodnight and the two of them collected their things and went to the clean room. They both went to sleep, but around midnight Iron Ox stealthily got up. Judging by his companion's heavy breathing that he was soundly asleep, he said to himself: "Isn't it fucking stupid? You're a member of the company of Mount Liang, yet you have to come and ask permission from some fucking priest! If the bugger refuses again tomorrow morning, all our leader's great enterprise goes to pot. I can't stand for that. It's only a question of killing that bloody Taoist, and then he's got no one to ask and he'll have to come with us."
He groped around for his axes and then quietly opened the door and set off up the mountain, moving forward steadily by the light of stars and moon. When he reached the Temple of the Purple Void, the main gates were shut. But the fence was not particularly high. With a spring he was over it. He opened the main gate and entered stealthily. When he got to the Pines and Cranes Pavilion he heard someone behind the partition reciting the Jade Pivot sutra. He crept up close and made a hole in the paper window with a wettened finger: the Blessed Sage was there alone, seated on his throne. On a table before him burnt a little pot of choice incense, and two painted lamps were lit, throwing a bright light on the text.
"This bloody Taoist deserves to die!" Iron Ox said to himself. He crept up to the door and then gave a single push, so that both halves sprang open with a shuddering groan. He rushed inside, raised the head of his axe and brought it crashing down on the Sage's head. It cut right through into the chair. The blood that flowed out was white. Iron Ox chuckled at this. "The bloody Taoist's a virgin, obviously," he said. "He hoards all his spunk and won't let a drop of it go. There's not a trace of red blood."
Looking carefully, he saw that even the priest's crown had been cut in two and the skull was split down to the spinal column. "Well, that's the end of that problem," he said. "He won't be making any more fuss about Taoist Gongsun's going." He turned and ran from the Pines and Cranes Pavilion, leaving the temple by the main corridor. On the way he came upon a black-robed acolyte who barred the way and shouted: "You have killed our master, where do you think you are going?"
"You can have a taste of my axe too, you young bugger!" Iron Ox yelled. He raised his arm, the axe fell, and the head went bounding along the temple floor. That made two he had killed. "I'd best be off now!" he said with a laugh. He made his way to the main gate and positively flew down the mountain. Arriving at Taoist Gongsun's house he slipped inside and bolted the door. Back in the room he could hear that the Magic Messenger was still fast asleep. He went back to sleep again too.
In the morning Taoist Gongsun got up and prepared breakfast and told the others to eat.
"Please will you go with us again to the mountain and plead with the Sage," the Magic Messenger said to Taoist Gongsun. This caused Iron Ox to smile ironically to himself.
Taking the same road as before, they returned to the mountain. They went again to the Pines and Cranes Pavilion in the Temple of the Purple Void. Two acolytes met them. "Where is the Sage?" Taoist Gongsun asked.
"The Sage is on his throne nurturing his spirit," the acolytes replied.
Iron Ox had a huge shock. His mouth fell open and it was quite a while before he closed it. When they drew aside the curtain and entered they saw the Blessed Sage seated on his throne in the middle of the room. Iron Ox thought to himself: "Can I possibly have killed the wrong person last night?"
"Why have you three come again?" the Blessed Sage asked.
"I have come to implore my master's compassion," said the Magic Messenger, "to help rescue our company from their present straits."
"Who is this big dark fellow?" the Blessed Sage asked.
"He is my comrade, his name is Li Kui," said the Magic Messenger.
"I had not intended to allow Taoist Gongsun to go," said the Blessed Sage with a slight smile. "But for the sake of his honour I shall allow him to absent himself for a little while."
The Magic Messenger prostrated himself in gratitude. Iron Ox thought to himself: "The bastard knows I wanted to kill him, that's why he fucking says it."
At this point the Blessed Sage said: "Shall I have all three of you transported to Gaotang in an instant of time?" They thanked him and the Magic Messenger thought: "It seems as if this Blessed Sage knows some trick like my magic walking."
The Master told his acolytes to bring three handkerchiefs.
The Magic Messenger said: "May I ask, Master, how you propose to transport us to Gaotang?"
The Blessed Sage rose and said: "Come with me." They all followed him out to the cliff. First he took a red handkerchief. He spread it out on the rock and said: "Let my disciple climb onto it." Taoist Gongsun placed both feet on the handkerchief and with a flap of his sleeve the Blessed Sage shouted "Rise!" and the handkerchief turned into a red cloud and Taoist Gongsun went soaring into the sky till he was two hundred feet or more above the mountain. The Blessed Sage shouted "Stop!" and the red cloud became stationary. Then he spread out a blue handkerchief and made the Magic Messenger step onto it. He shouted "Rise!" and the handkerchief changed into a blue cloud and rose up into the sky with the Magic Messenger on it. The two clouds, red and blue, about the size of two rush mats, floated there in the sky above them, while Iron Ox watched open-mouthed. The Blessed Sage now spread a white handkerchief on the rock and bade Iron Ox step onto it. Iron Ox grinned nervously and said: "No tricks now. If I should fall off, I'd look a proper idiot."
"Don't you see the other two?" said the Blessed Sage.
Iron Ox stood on the handkerchief and the Blessed Sage pronounced "Rise" and the handkerchief changed into a white cloud and flew up into the sky. Iron Ox shouted: "Aiya, mine is unstable, bring me down again!"
The Blessed Sage motioned with his right hand and the red cloud and the blue one gradually sank back to earth. The Magic Messenger prostrated himself and stood with bowed head in front of the Sage, while Taoist Gongsun stood on his left. Above them Iron Ox was shouting down: "I've got to relieve myself, I'm going to pee and shit, if you don't bring me down I'm going to do it on your head!"
The Blessed Sage said: "I am a contemplative, I never did anything to upset you, why did you come by night and break in and try to chop me with an axe? If I had not been protected by my virtue, I would be dead. And you killed one of my acolytes too."
"Not me," said Iron Ox. "Perhaps it's a case of mistaken identity!"
The Blessed Sage laughed. "Although you actually only split two of my gourds, your intention was evil, and for that reason I am going to make you suffer for a time." And he signalled with his hand and shouted "Go!", and an ill wind arose and blew Iron Ox off into the midst of the clouds. At this point two yellow-turbanned strong men took charge of Iron Ox. With the sound of wind and rain roaring in his ears he was gradually swept into the territory of Jizhou. He was frightened out of his wits and his hands and feet trembled violently. Then there was a sudden swishing sound, and he fell slap bang into the middle of the Jizhou court of justice.
Governor Ma was actually sitting in his court, with quite a number of officials present in the courtroom, when suddenly, to everyone's utter amazement, this big swarthy character fell from the sky.
"Bring him here!" Governor Ma shouted. Immediately a dozen guards and gaolers dragged Iron Ox before the bench.
"Where the devil have you come from?" the Governor roared. "How do you manage to fall out of the sky like that?"
Iron Ox's pate was cracked and his forehead cut by the fall and at first he was simply unable to speak.
The Governor said: "He must be some kind of magician. This calls for the instruments of justice to be employed." The guards and gaolers tied Iron Ox up and dragged him to an open space in front of the court-house. One of the officers fetched a bowl of dog's blood and plunged his head into it, while another brought a bucket of shit and poured it over Iron Ox, drenching him from head to foot. Iron Ox's mouth and ears were filled with piss and shit.
"I'm not a magician," Iron Ox protested. "I'm a follower of the Blessed Sage."
Now of course everyone knew that the Blessed Sage was a living saint and for this reason they were reluctant to do him any injury. They dragged him before the bench again and one of the officials said: "This Blessed Sage of Jizhou is renowned throughout the world as a living saint. If this is one of his followers we cannot punish him."
Governor Ma merely laughed. "I have read thousands of books and have heard of many wonders ancient and modern, but I never heard of a holy man having a disciple like this one. He's a magician, I tell you. Give the bastard a good hiding!"
The guards were obliged to throw Iron Ox down and beat him to within an inch of his life.
"Confess you're a magician and the beating will stop!" the Governor shouted.
So Iron Ox had to confess that he was "Second Brother Li, the Magician." A heavy cangue was produced and fitted, and he was escorted to the main gaol. When he arrived at the cells for the condemned, he said: "I'm one of the top brass of the spirit world, how dare you put a cangue on me? You people of Jizhou are all going to come to a sticky end."
Now every officer in the gaol knew that the virtue of the Blessed Sage was immense, all held him in the greatest respect, so they said to Iron Ox: "Tell us honestly who you are."
"I am the Blessed Sage's favourite disciple and chief bodyguard. But I committed a small fault and the Sage was angry with me and has cast me in here, allowing me to suffer like this. In two or three days' time he will come to get me out. If you don't provide some food and wine for my comfort I shall see to it all of you and your families die."
This put the wind up all the officers of the gaol and they bought wine and meat which they pressed upon Iron Ox. Seeing how scared they were, Iron Ox invented even more stories. More and more frightened, they brought him hot water to wash in and clean clothes to put on.
"If you don't bring me enough wine and food," Iron Ox told them, "I shall fly off, and you will really be in trouble." The gaolers all had to plead with him. Iron Ox of course remained in the gaol. We shall say no more of this.
When the Blessed Sage told the Magic Messenger all the above, the latter was very upset and begged him to release Iron Ox. The Blessed Sage retained the Magic Messenger in his quarters for the night and asked him for information about the affairs of the mountain stronghold. The Magic Messenger told of the many good qualities of the two leaders, their loyalty and generosity, their obedience to heaven's will, their vow never to harm honest officials and upright citizens, filial sons and chaste women, and all their various virtues. The Blessed Sage was most impressed. The Magic Messenger stayed five days, daily kowtowing and pleading with the Blessed Sage for Iron Ox's release. The Blessed Sage said: "It's best to expel such people, don't take him back with you."
The Magic Messenger said: "But you see, although Iron Ox is a bit of a fool, and rather undisciplined, he has his good points. For one thing he's absolutely straight and would never pick on anyone. Also he's no toady, he'll stick to his guns even if he has to die for it. And thirdly, he's not a philanderer, nor is he greedy or treacherous, and he is always foremost in a fight. For all these reasons Song Jiang loves him. If I were to go back without him, it would be very difficult for me to face my leader."
The Blessed Sage said: "I know full well that this person is one of the baleful stars come down to earth. Because men have committed too many sins he has been sent as a scourge. How could I go against heaven's will and harm this person? I intend only for him to suffer a while, afterwards I shall return him to you."
The Magic Messenger prostrated himself in gratitude.
The Blessed Sage called out: "Where is my yellow-turbanned bodyguard?" and a sudden gust of wind swept through the Pines and Cranes Pavilion. When it had passed, a mighty yellow-turbanned bodyguard stood before them. Here is what they saw:
*Face red as a beetroot and hair like black silk, he seems at least ten feet tall and built with strength enough to lift a ton. His yellow turban is tilted on one side and secured with a gold ring which throws back the sun's bright rays; over his embroidered robe the iron armour spreads a frosty shadow that would swallow the moon. He stands guard over the altar of the law and every evil spirit that draws near to earth is vanquished forthwith.*
"What is your command, Master?" said the yellow-turbanned bodyguard.
"That criminal I sent you with to Jizhou has served his term," said the Blessed Sage. "I want you to go back to Jizhou and fetch him. Go quickly and return quickly."
The bodyguard saluted and left. About an hour later Iron Ox tumbled out of the heavenly void.
The Magic Messenger immediately helped him to his feet and asked: "Where have you been for the last two days, brother?"
But Iron Ox had seen the Blessed Sage and was busy kowtowing and saying: "Forgive me, Master!"
The Blessed Sage said: "From now on you had better control yourself. Do all you can to help Song Jiang and do not nurture evil tendencies."
Iron Ox prostrated himself again, saying: "I shall never dare to disregard the Master's words."
"But where exactly have you been all this time?" the Magic Messenger asked again.
"That gust of wind the other day blew me to Jizhou district court," Iron Ox replied. "I bounced off the roof of the courtroom and they seized me. Governor Ma said I was a magician so they tied me up and then the guards from the prison poured dog's blood and shit all over me and beat me till my legs were like pulp. They put a cangue on me and chucked me in the main gaol. When they asked me how I had managed to fall out of the sky, I told them I was the Blessed Sage's favourite disciple and chief bodyguard and that I was being punished like this because of a little fault I committed, and that in a few days time he would come and release me. Although I was beaten, I got quite a lot of wine and food out of them, because they're so scared of the Blessed Sage. They bathed me and gave me clean clothes. While I was in one of the inner rooms enjoying a bit of wine and meat, this yellow-turbanned fellow suddenly dived out of the sky, took off my cangue, told me to shut my eyes, and I was wafted here like in a dream."
Taoist Gongsun said: "The Master has more than a thousand of these yellow-turbanned bodyguards, all at his service."
"My God!" Iron Ox cried. "Why didn't you tell me that before? I would never have misbehaved!" He hurriedly prostrated himself again.
The Magic Messenger said: "We have been here many days now, and the troops in Gaotang are in a desperate situation. I humbly beg the Master to allow Taoist Gongsun to go with us to rescue Song Jiang and destroy Gaotang before returning to the mountain."
The Blessed Sage said: "Originally I didn't want to let him go but now on account of your great loyalty I'll permit him to absent himself for a while. But I've some words for him which I want him to remember." Taoist Gongsun stepped forward and knelt to hear the Blessed Sage's instructions. He was indeed filled with ambition to bring peace and salvation to the world and destined to ride the phoenix and tread the clouds.

Wu Yong said, "The only man who can overcome Gao Lian is Gongsun Sheng, and we must send for him at once."
"Previously Dai Zong went to Jizhou to find Gongsun Sheng without success," said Song Jiang, "so where can he go this time?"
"Jizhou is a very big district." said Wu Yong, "with many villages, county towns, and hamlets. I think he must be somewhere there. As he is a great Taoist he will probably be at some temple in some remote mountain, and we must tell Dai Zong this time to make inquiries at all the mountains in isolated spots."
Song Jiang sent for Dai Zong, and then told him about their plans for finding Gongsun Sheng.
"I will go," said Dai Zong, "but it would be better this time if somebody accompany me."
Li Kui was there, and volunteered to go. "In that case," said Dai Zong, "you will not eat meat while on the way with me, and also you must obey my orders implicitly."
"Where is the difficulty in that?" said Li Kui. "I will of course do what you say."

"On the way you must be careful," said Song Jiang to Li Kui, "as we do not want any trouble this time. When you find Gongsun Sheng you must return at once with him."
"There will be no row this time," said Li Kui.
The two men started off at once, and when they had got about ten *li* beyond Gaotang Prefecture, Li Kui suggested that they should stop at an inn for some wine. But Dai Zong reminded him that he had promised to abstain from meat. They went on until evening, when they stopped at an inn. Li Kui went and got the food, and soon brought in some vegetables for Dai Zong.
"Why don't you also dine with me?" asked Dai Zong.
"I do not feel hungry just now," said Li Kui; "I will dine by and by."
"This fellow probably tries to deceive me," thought Dai Zong, "and will get some meat behind my back." He however finished his meal, and then went stealthily to see what Li Kui was doing. In a room at the back he found Li Kui with a plate of beef and two horns of wine. He decided, however, not to disturb him at his meal, but would have a practical joke with him the following day. Dai Zong then went to bed. The next morning he was up by about 4 A.M., and awakening Li Kui they got their breakfast, and went on their way. They had only gone a short distance when Dai Zong said, "Yesterday we did not travel by supernatural power so we have to hurry up today. Now pack up your things firm, I will apply the charm to you and you can travel three hundred *li* where you can stop. You can go in front, but when you come to an inn you wait for me there." He then put the enchanted puttees on Li Kui, repeated the incantation, and blew at Li Kui who sailed off. He took very long strides, and in fact was like a cloud floating along with a strong wind behind.
When Li Kui had gone Dai Zong laughed, "He will be hungry before the day is done." Dai Zong then put on his enchanted puttees, and flew after Li Kui.
Li Kui did not suspect there was a joke being played on him. He felt the wind rushing past his ears, and saw the trees and houses whirl past him. The speed became so great that he became afraid, but when he tried to stop he found that he was quite helpless. He had the sensation of being swept along by some invisible force. When he saw an inn he was simply whirled past it although he would have liked to stop there and have a drink. He called out, "Sir, stop here! stop here!" His flight continued until the western sky began to redden for sunset, and he was now not only thirsty but very hungry as well. His body was covered with perspiration and he was panting for breath.
At last Dai Zong caught up to him, and asked, "Elder brother Li, why did you not stop at some inn for a meal as I asked you?"
"Elder brother!" replied Li Kui, "Save me! Save me, before I die from hunger!"
Dai Zong took some cakes out of his breast pocket, and began to eat them. Li Kui seeing this called out, "I cannot stop. Please give me a bite."
"Brother," said Dai Zong, "if you will only stop I can give you some."
Li Kui turned round, and reached out a hand, but found that Dai Zong was nearly a furlong away. He himself was now traveling along at the same rate, but without seeing where he was going. He called out, "Elder brother! Elder brother! Let us stop here."
"Things are very strange today, as I cannot control my legs, and they will not stop," said Dai Zong.
"*Aiya*! My legs are the same. I am quite helpless. They won't goddamn obey me at all today. The only escape would be for me to cut off my legs with my axe."
"That appears to be the only way, because if we go on like this we shall never stop until the first day of the New Year."
"Elder brother, please do not play practical jokes with me. If I cut off my legs how can I go back?"
"Last evening you must have disobeyed my order, and I think that is why we are like this today. You must go on."
"Elder brother, please forgive me."
"I cannot do anything because you must have broken the important rule about abstaining from meat. If you have committed that sin you will probably have to continue your flight for very many years."
"What a prospect! I deceived you yesterday, and ate some meat. But it was not very much—only about six *jin*. What can I do now?"
"No wonder that we cannot stop today. You have seriously injured me, and rendered me helpless."
Li Kui hearing this threw his hands up towards heaven, and wept.
Dai Zong could not help laughing, "If you would swear to always listen to what I say I might be able to find a way out."
"Sir, please say what you like in future, and I will obey every word."
"Well never dare again to deceive me about eating meat."
"If I do that again may my tongue be blistered. Yesterday I saw you eat the vegetables, but I did not like the taste, and so ate just a very little meat. I will never do that again."
"In that case I will forgive you just this time." So saying Dai Zong hastened his speed, caught up to Li Kui, and catching hold of his leg, pulled it hard, and shouted, "Stop!" They began to slow down, and soon stopped. Dai Zong said, "I will now go in front, and you can come slowly behind." But when Li Kui tried to go he found that he could not move. His feet were like cast iron, and he could not lift them. "Trouble again! I request you to assist me," he said.
Dai Zong turned his head, laughed, and said, "Will you take an oath that you have spoken the truth?"
"You are my elder brother, and I will strictly do what you ask me to do," replied Li Kui.
"Will you really do as I tell you this time?" asked Dai Zong. So saying he took hold of Li Kui, and saying, "Rise," and the latter began to walk.
"Please take pity on me as I am tired, and should like a rest," said Li Kui. Soon they came to an inn and stopped there.
Upon entering the inn they bought some sacrificial joss money, and burnt it to the gods.
"Well, what about today's journey?" asked Dai Zong. Li Kui rubbed his legs, and said, "These legs appear to be mine just now."
Dai Zong got some warm water, and they both bathed their feet. They then partook of a vegetarian repast, and went to bed.
The next morning they were up early, and after breakfast they started off again on the road. When they had gone about a *li* Dai Zong took the enchanted puttees, and said he would put only a pair of them on Li Kui's so that he could travel slower that day.
"I do not want them," said Li Kui.
"You must do as I tell you," said Dai Zong. "We are on important business, and I will not trifle with you. If you don't do as I wish I will leave you here rooted to the spot. I will then go to Jizhou. and after finding Gongsun Sheng I will return here and release you."
"Do it! Put them on!" replied Li Kui hurriedly.
They were put on, and that day the two men traveled together. Whatever Dai Zong proposed Li Kui agreed to at once.
They duly reached Jizhou, and stopped at an inn there. The day following their arrival Dai Zong dressed as a master with Li Kui as his servant. All that day they made inquiries in all parts of the town without finding any trace of Gongsun Sheng. The next day was the same although they tried all the small alleys. At the end of that day Li Kui lost his temper and said, "Where can this Taoist beggar have got to? When I goddamn find him I will take him by the hair and drag him off."
Dai Zong frowned at him, "You are at it again! Don't forget what trouble you got into once before." Li Kui laughed, and said, "I was only joking."
They returned to the inn that evening to rest, and the third day they spent all their time outside the town making inquiries in all the villages. But again nobody had ever heard of Gongsun Sheng. About noon as they were both hungry they entered an inn for a meal. The inn was very crowded, and they could not find a seat. The waiter however asked them to sit at a table where there was an old man. Dai Zong saluted the old man, and they sat down. They ordered four bowls of vermicelli and Dai Zong said to Li Kui, "If I eat one bowl to your three bowls will that do?"
"Not enough!" said Li Kui. "If they bring six bowls I could eat the whole lot."
The waiter laughed at this. After waiting a long time however no food was served. The other tables were however being served with vermicelli, and seeing this Li Kui became angry. The waiter now brought a bowl of hot vermicelli, and set it in front of the old man at their table. The old man without any ceremony began to eat. He had his head bowed down to the bowl eating when Li Kui called out, "Waiter, why have we to wait so long?" So saying he struck the table so hard that the bowl of hot vermicelli was upset. The old man was annoyed at this, and taking hold of Li Kui said, "Have you no reason? Why have you upset my bowl of vermicelli?"
Li Kui held up his fist to strike the old man, but Dai Zong interposed and told him not to do so. Dai Zong addressed the old man, "Take no notice of this man as he is very stupid. I will supply you with another bowl of vermicelli."
"You do not understand," replied the old man, "I come from a distant place, and must hurry back as quickly as possible according to the order I received."
"Where did you come from, and who gave you orders?" asked Dai Zong.
"I am from the Erxian Mountain in Jiuguan County in Jizhou," said the old man. "I came here to buy incense, and must get back quickly because True Man Luo the Immortal has promised to disclose to us the secrets of immortality."[78]
Dai Zong thought a bit, and then asked if he had heard of a man Gongsun Sheng.
"If you had asked anybody else they could not have answered you," said the old man. "He is a neighbor of mine, and lives with his mother. He is often away from home, and was once called Gongsun Yiqing, but now is known as the Taoist Qing. People have forgotten his original name."
Dai Zong repeated the old proverb, "You can wear out iron shoes in fruitless searching, and yet by a lucky chance you may find the lost thing without even looking for it." He asked the old man, "How far is this Erxian Mountain? Is the Taoist Qing at home just now?"
"It is about fifteen *li* from here. The Taoist Qing, is a pupil of the True Man Luo who would not dispense with him."
Dai Zong was much pleased and when they all had their food he paid the bill, and they left the inn. He then got full directions of the road and let the old man go in advance.
Dai Zong and Li Kui put on the enchanted puttees, and set off and soon reached the Erxian Mountain. There they met a woodcutter, and asked him where the Taoist Qing lived. The man told them to cross a pass on the hill, and they would come to a house with a stone bridge opposite the door. That was where the Taoist Qing lived. They followed these directions, and found the house. There they asked a woman carrying a basket of fruit whether the Taoist Qing was at home. The woman replied that he was in a room at the back preparing a magic drug. Dai Zong asked Li Kui to wait outside while he went in by himself. Dai Zong entered, and came to a room with a reed curtain in front of the door. Here he coughed, and a white-haired old woman came out. He saluted her, and said, "I come here to see the Taoist Qing."
"What is your name?" she asked.
"I am Dai Zong, and have come from Shandong."
"My son has not yet returned from his travel abroad."
"I am an old friend of his," said Dai Zong, "and have a message for him."
"He is not here, but you can tell me the message, and I will tell him when he returns."
"As he is not here I will call again to see him," said Dai Zong. He again saluted and went outside, and said to Li Kui, "An old woman says that he is not at home so now I want you to go inside and see what you can do. If she tells you the same story you must make a row, but avoid striking the old woman. When I hear the noise I will come in, and intervene between you two."
Li Kui put down his pack, and putting his two axes in his waist belt he entered the house and shouted, "Is anybody here?"
The old woman came, and asked, "Whom do you want?" When she saw Li Kui, however, she was afraid.
"I am the 'Black Whirlwind' from Liangshan Marsh, and have orders to come here for a man Gongsun Sheng. Tell him to come here at once. If he comes I will be respectful, but if there is any obstacle I will burn down this goddamn house."
"Sir, do not get excited, this is not the home of Gongsun Sheng, but of the Taoist Qing."
"Then tell him to come here. I know his damned face."
"He has gone abroad, and has not returned yet."
Li Kui took his axe and striking the wall made a big hole in it. He then said, "If you won't call your son I will kill you at once." He then advanced with his axe in a threatening attitude, and the woman fell down. A door opened, and Gongsun Sheng came out saying, "You have no decency." Dai Zong just then also entered, and said, "'Iron Ox,' why have you knocked this old lady down?" He went and lifted her up.
Li Kui threw his axe on the ground, and said, "Please excuse me. I did this only because you would not come out to see us."
Gongsun Sheng took his mother inside, and then came and saluted both Dai Zong and Li Kui. He then took them into a small room, and Dai Zong explained the position at Gaotang Prefecture, and asked Gongsun Sheng to help them against the troops who had defeated them. Gongsun Sheng was unwilling to go and leave his old mother alone, but Dai Zong pressed him, and said that if Gongsun Sheng did not help them they would be defeated again, and probably Song Jiang himself would be captured.
Gongsun Sheng at last agreed to go to consult his master True Man Luo the Immortal. He, with Dai Zong and Li Kui, then left the house, and went to Erxian Mountain. By the time they got there it was dusk. A small path through pine trees brought them to a small temple with three characters over the door, "Pole Star Temple." They entered an arbor in front of the door, and arranged and dusted their clothes. They then went inside. Two acolytes had seen them coming, and had announced their arrival to Luo the Immortal. He asked them to come into the Pine and Stork Room where he usually sat in silent meditation. Gongsun Sheng and Dai Zong kowtowed, and then stood in respectful attitude. But Li Kui instead of following their example was staring about the room.
Gongsun Sheng then explained the object of the visit, and asked Luo the Immortal, to advise him whether he should go to rescue Song Jiang.
"You sought refuge here from the wicked world," said Luo, "and wished to attain immortality. So why do you now think of returning?"
"We only want him to help us in defeating Prefect Gao Lian, and after that he can return here," said Dai Zong.
"That is hardly a matter for a priest to interfere in," replied Luo "You can decide that question yourself."
Gongsun Sheng and the other two then withdrew, and returned to Gongsun Sheng's house. Upon arriving there Li Kui asked what the priest had said. "Did you not listen?" asked Dai Zong.
"I listened but could not understand what he said," replied Li Kui.
"He said that Gongsun Sheng should not go," said Dai Zong.
Li Kui was angry at this. "We have come so far, and undergone many tribulations, and now we have at last found Gongsun Sheng but the priest tells him not to go. I feel like killing that priest."
Dai Zong frowned upon him, and said, "Must I again fasten your feet to the ground?"
"No! No! I was only joking," said Li Kui.
That evening they talked over a plan, and at last Gongsun Sheng agreed to go with them the next day, and get the priest to agree to their proposal. But Li Kui could not sleep as he was thinking the matter over. About 4 A.M. he got up, and heard that Dai Zong was snoring while fast asleep.
He thought, "We are heroes so why should we ask a priest for his opinion about our own affairs. If I kill the priest there will be no obstacle in our way." He took his axe, and quietly opening the door he went towards Luo's temple, easily finding his way in the bright moonlight. Upon reaching the temple he found that the gates were closed. The wall was not very high, and he soon leapt over it. Then opening the gates from the inside he went towards the temple. He soon found the room, and breaking a piece of the paper on a window he looked inside. Candles were burning on a table, and the Immortal Luo was slowly chanting the scriptures. Li Kui thought, "That fellow deserves death." He pushed the door open, and going straight to Luo the Immortal, he struck him on the head with his axe, and killed him on the spot. Li Kui saw that the blood was white, and laughed saying, "He evidently was a virgin, he's full of semen! There's not a drop of red blood in him! He cannot stop Gongsun Sheng from going now." He left the room, but was stopped by an acolyte who called out, "You have killed our master. Where are you going?" Li Kui without hesitation used his axe, and also killed the boy. He then quickly left the temple, and going down the hill soon came to Gongsun Sheng's house where he quietly opened the door and slipped into bed.
The next morning Gongsun Sheng was up early, and prepared the breakfast. While eating Dai Zong reminded Gongsun Sheng that he had to take them to the temple again. Upon hearing this Li Kui could hardly suppress a laugh. He said nothing, and accompanied the other two up the hill. Upon entering the temple they saw the two acolytes, and Dai Zong inquired if the True Man Luo the Immortal was in.
"He is sitting on the bed meditating," replied the acolyte.
Upon hearing this Li Kui was dumbfounded, and stood with his mouth wide open, and his tongue hanging out. The curtain was raised, and looking into the room they saw Luo the Immortal, sitting on the bed. Li Kui thought, "Last night I must have made a mistake."
"What do you three men want now?" asked Luo.
"We came to ask for your mercy," replied Dai Zong, "and beg you to save us from calamity."
"Who is that dark man?" asked Luo pointing to Li Kui.
"He came with me, and his name is Li Kui," replied Dai Zong.
Luo the Immortal, laughed, "I did intend to allow Gongsun Sheng to leave me, but I have changed my mind on account of that dark fellow." Dai Zong saluted the priest, and then turning to Li Kui told him what had been said. Li Kui knew then that the priest was aware that he had tried to kill him.
"How would you like if I dispatch you three men to Gaotang Prefecture in a few minutes?"
Dai Zong thought that a better way than using his enchanted puttees, and so they thanked Luo the Immortal. Luo then ordered the acolytes to bring three pieces of clothes, and asked the three men to follow him. He took them outside to a place and there spread a red cloth on a stone. He said, "Taoist Qing,you can stand on this." Gongsun Sheng did so, and the True Man Luo waved his sleeve, and said "Rise!" Immediately the cloth became a cloud which ascended carrying Gongsun Sheng upwards about fifty feet when Luo called out "Stop!" and there Qing remained stationary. He then spread a blue cloth on the stone, and invited Dai Zong to stand on it. He did so, and the same process was gone through. Li Kui was astonished, and gazed with open eyes at the two clouds in the sky on which stood his two companions.
Luo the Immortal now spread a white cloth on the stone, and asked Li Kui to stand on it. Li Kui laughed, "This is no joke! If I fall I shall have a big lump on my head."
"Do you see those two men?" asked Luo.

Li Kui took his position, and after the same process he rose up on a white cloud. "I do not feel safe," said Li Kui "Let me come down!"
Luo the Immortal, hearing this, waved his sleeve again, and the red and black clouds descended. Li Kui seeing this called out, "I also want to come down."
"I am a priest and have never offended you. Why did you attempt to kill me last night? If I had had no virtue you would have killed me. You also tried to kill my acolyte."
"It wasn't me! You must have made a mistake!" replied Li Kui from aloft.
Luo the Immortal, laughed, and said, "You certainly broke two of my gourds last night. You are a bad man! I am going to punish you for that." So saying he again waved his sleeve. "Go!" he said, and a strong wind arose, and carried the white cloud right up into the sky with Li Kui on it. On each side of the cloud were two men with yellow turbans, and looking downward Li Kui saw houses, forests, and mountains skimming past under his feet. He was exceedingly afraid, and trembled in every limb. All at once he heard a great noise and the next moment he fell on the roof of the *yamen* in Jizhou and rolled off into the courtyard. The Prefect was sitting on the bench with a full court, and they were all startled by this strange and sudden appearance of a big man rolling off the roof of the court.
"Seize that man," ordered the Prefect.
The attendants seized Li Kui, and brought him as a prisoner before the Prefect who asked, "What kind of magic is this? Where do you come from?"
Li Kui could not speak as in his fall his head had been injured. "He must be a wizard," continued the Prefect, "Use the means to exorcise evil spirits." The jailers took Li Kui outside, and there an attendant took a bowl of dog's blood, and threw it over his head. Another attendant poured a bucket of urine and nightsoil over him, and he was covered all over with the filth. His mouth and ears were full of blood, piss, and turds.
At last Li Kui spoke, "I am not a wizard. I am only a servant of True Man Luo the Immortal."
At that place they all knew the True Man Luo as a Living Immortal on earth, so they ceased their activities against Li Kui. They took Li Kui into the court, and there a secretary spoke to the Prefect, "If this man is a servant of Luo the Immortal, had we better not punish him?"
The Prefect laughed, and said, "I have read many thousand of books both ancient and modern, but have never read of a Living Immortal having this kind of servant. He must be a wizard. Jailers! Beat him!" The jailers forced Li Kui on the ground, and beat him with the bamboo until he was almost unconscious.
"Now you fellow speak the truth, and I will stop the punishment," said the Prefect.
"I will confess," said Li Kui, "I am a wizard, called Li Er." A cangue was put on him, and he was sent to prison. Upon reaching the cell Li Kui said, "I am a spirit general of the Living Immortal, so how dare you put this cangue on me? I will duly report this indignity, and everybody in this town will die."
The jailers all respected the Living Immortal as they knew his great power, so they asked Li Kui, "Now, who are you really?"
Li Kui replied, "Truly, I am a confidential general of Luo, the Living Immortal. But as I had made a mistake, Luo sent me here so that I would be punished by you. He will send to rescue me in two or three days. If you don't treat me well and give me some meat and wine, I shall tell him, and he will kill all you people."
The jailers were afraid of him, and gave him a good meal. Li Kui seeing their fear spoke wildly again, and the men being more afraid brought hot water for him to bathe, and also wash his clothes. He then swore that if they did not treat him well the next day he would fly away, and send trouble to them. They beseeched him to take pity on them, and promised to treat him well.
True Man Luo the Immortal, told Dai Zong how Li Kui had tried to kill him, and how he would punish him. Dai Zong expressed his great regret, and begged Luo to spare Li Kui. Luo asked Dai Zong to come into the temple where they discussed the affairs of Liangshan Marsh. Dai Zong explained that both Chao Gai and Song Jiang distributed wealth in good cause and were acting like agents sent from Heaven. They had sworn not to injure good officials or patriots who were willing to die for their country; filial sons or worthy grandsons; men of high principles or chaste wives; and they had done fine work.
Luo the Immortal, considered this, without expressing an opinion. Dai Zong stayed there for five days, and every day he kowtowed to Luo, and begged him to have mercy for Li Kui. The True Man however said that Li Kui was a bad man, who was not deserving to be saved from his distress.
"Master, you do not understand," replied Dai Zong. "He is a very simple fellow, but has good intentions. He is very straightforward, and the making of wealth has no attraction for him. Again he is not a flatterer and is loyal even in the face of death. Again he is not lustful and is very brave. Because of these qualities he is liked by Song Jiang and if he does not return to Liangshan Marsh I should not dare to face Song Jiang again."
True Man Luo laughed, "He was evidently born under a murderous star, and Heaven has sent him here to kill off those sinful people. I will not oppose the will of Heaven. I have punished him enough, and will now have him back to you."
Dai Zong kowtowed and expressed his gratitude. Luo the Immortal, then summoned his strong men who came, and stood awaiting orders. Luo said to them, "That man you took to Jizhou has now finished his period of punishment. You must go and release him from the jail and bring him back here." The men vanished, and in about an hour they reappeared throwing down Li Kui from aloft. Dai Zong went forward to lift Li Kui up, and said to him, "Younger brother, where have you been these last few days?"
Li Kui noticed Luo the Immortal and kowtowed to him before replying, "Sir! I dare not offend you again."
"After this you must abstain from taking life," said Luo the Immortal, "you must exert all your strength to assist Song Jiang, and must avoid bad thoughts."
Li Kui again kowtowed, "You are my newly adopted father, and I will certainly do as you say."
"But where have you been these last few days?" asked Dai Zong.
Li Kui then recited his experiences at the court and prison in Jizhou, and how he had been brought back. When he was told that Luo the Immortal, controlled about one thousand of such stout men as had taken him to Jizhou, Li Kui said, "If I had only known all about this I would never have even tried to attack the True Man Luo."
Dai Zong again pressed Luo to let Gongsun Sheng accompany them to Gaotang Prefecture. Luo said he would not place any obstacle in his way, though he did not like to let him go. He however had some advice to give him.

To help the age and guard the country,
Magic power must now be used.

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## The Taoist Dragon in the Clouds Gongsun Sheng Defeats Gao Lian by Magic Trick; the Black Whirlwind Iron Ox Descends into the Well to Rescues Chai Jin

"Younger brother," said Luo the Sage, "the magic you've learned is the same as Gao Lian's. But now I'm going to teach you the Divine Method for Summoning the Five Thunderbolts. With this you can save Song Jiang, defend the country, preserve peace for the people, and act righteously on Heaven's behalf. I will see to it that your old mother is looked after. You may rest assured. You are one of the stars of Heavenly Spirits. For that reason, I permit you to help Song Jiang. Retain the virtues you have learned. Let no mundane desires lead you astray, lest you be deflected from your important cause."
Gongsun Sheng knelt and received the Method. Then, with Dai Zong and Li Kui, he took leave of the Sage and his Taoist colleagues, went down the mountain and returned home. Collecting his twin swords, his iron helmet, and Taoist cloak, he bid farewell to his mother, and set forth along the road out of the mountains.
When they had travelled thirty or forty *li* Dai Zong said to Gongsun: "I'll go on ahead and report to Song Jiang. You and Li Kui follow the highway. I'll come back and pick you up."
"Good, you do that," said Gongsun. "We'll move as fast as possible."
"Take care of the Teacher," Dai admonished Li Kui. "If anything goes wrong, I'll make you suffer for it."
"He knows the same magic as Luo the Sage," Black Whirlwind replied. "I wouldn't dare neglect him!"
Dai Zong affixed his charms and, invoking his marvellous travel means, swiftly departed.
Leaving Two Fairies Mountain and Jiugong County behind them, Gongsun and Li Kui pushed on along the main road, resting in inns at nightfall. Black Whirlwind was afraid of Luo the Sage's magic. He treated Gongsun with the greatest solicitude and kept his impetuosity tightly in check.
On the third day of their journey, they came to a town called Wugang, a populous, busy place.
"These last couple of days have been tiring. Let's have some wine and noodles before going on," Gongsun suggested.
"Fine," said Li Kui.
They saw a small tavern beside the post road and went in. Gongsun sat down at the head of the table. Li Kui undid the pack around his waist and seated himself opposite. They ordered wine and vegetable tidbits.
"Have you any meatless pastries?" Gongsun asked the waiter.
"No, we've only meat and wine here," said the man. "But there's a shop at the town entrance that sells date cakes."
"I'll go and buy you some," Li Kui volunteered. He took copper coins from his purse, headed into town and bought the cakes. Starting back, he heard people in a crowd by the side of the road cry admiringly: "What strength!"
Li Kui looked. They were surrounding a big fellow, watching him manipulate a large ribbed iron mallet. He was tall, his face was pitted with smallpox scars, and there was a large groove in his nose. Li Kui estimated the mallet to weigh about thirty catties. The man swung it and smashed a paving block to bits with a single blow. The crowd cheered. This was more than Li Kui could bear. He shoved the packet of date cakes inside his tunic and reached for the big hammer.
"Who the hell are you, that you dare take my mallet," the man shouted.
"That's some friggin farce you put on, trying to win applause! It hurts my eyes," said Li Kui. "I'll show these people how it should be done!"
"Go on, take the hammer. But if you can't wield it, I'll punch your neck!"
Li Kui picked up the mallet and flipped it about as if it were a child's slingshot. He toyed with it for a few minutes, then set it down lightly. He was neither red in the face nor panting, and his heart did not beat fast.
The man dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "I would know your name, big brother."
"Do you live around here?"
"Just up ahead." The man led Li Kui to a house and unlocked the door. He invited Li Kui in and asked him to be seated.
Li Kui noted an anvil, hammers, a forge, pincers, awls and pokers. "Must be a blacksmith," he thought. "We need a man like this in the fortress. Why don't I ask him to join?"
"What's your name?" he queried.
"I'm called Tang Long. My father was a garrison officer in the prefecture of Yanan. Because he was a good ironsmith, he served directly under Old General Zhong. He died a few years ago. I'm mad about gambling, and I've knocked about a lot. I'm here as a blacksmith temporarily only to earn my keep. My real love is play with weapons. Since I'm marked all over with smallpox scars, people call me the Gold-Coin Spotted Leopard. May I ask, brother, what your name is?"
"Li Kui, Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh."
Tang Long kowtowed twice. "I've heard so much about you. Who'd have thought we'd meet today!"
"You'll never prosper hanging around this place. Come with me to Liangshan and join us. We'll make you a chieftain."
"If you don't despise me and are willing to take me along, I'll gladly serve as your groom." He pledged himself to be Li Kui's younger brother, and Black Whirlwind accepted him.
"I have no family to entertain you here," said Tang Long, "but I can treat you to three cups of simple wine in town to mark our brotherhood. Rest here tonight, and we'll set out tomorrow."
"There's a teacher in the tavern ahead, waiting for some date cakes I've bought. We have to go as soon as he's eaten. We must leave immediately."
"What's the hurry?"
"Our brother Song Jiang is involved in a fierce battle on the edge of Gaotang Prefecture. Only this teacher can save him."
"Who is he?"
"Don't ask. Just get your things together and come."
Tang Long hastily packed a bag, took silver for travelling expenses, put on a broad-brimmed felt hat, hung a dagger at his waist, and grabbed a halberd. He left his dilapidated home and crude furnishings, and followed Li Kui to Gongsun Sheng in the tavern.
"Where have you been all this time?" the Taoist demanded reproachfully. "I'd have gone back if you kept me waiting much longer."
Li Kui was afraid to reply. Instead, he introduced Tang Long, and told of their pledge of brotherhood. Gongsun was pleased to learn that he was a blacksmith. Li Kui produced the date cakes and instructed the waiter have them heated. The three downed several cups of wine together, ate the cakes, and paid the bill.
Tang Long and Li Kui shouldered the packs. With Gongsun, they left the town and made their way along a winding road towards Gaotang.
By the time they had covered two thirds of their journey, Dai Zong returned to meet them. Gongsun was delighted.
"How's the battle going?" he asked.
"Gao Lian has recovered from his arrow wound. He marches out with soldiers and challenges us every day. But brother Song Jiang is afraid to engage them. He's waiting for you."
"It will be easy."
Li Kui introduced Tang Long to Dai Zong and related what had transpired. The four men hurried on to Gaotang. About five *li* from the brigands' camp they were met by Lu Fang and Guo Sheng leading a hundred cavalrymen. The four mounted and proceeded to the camp.
Song Jiang and Wu Yong were waiting to greet them. Obeisances were exchanged, the travellers were offered wine, politely questioned about their journey, and invited into the headquarters tent. All the chieftains came to congratulate them on bringing Gongsun, Li Kui introduced Tang Long. When the courtesies were completed, a celebration feast was laid.
The next day Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Gongsun conferred in the tent on how to smash Gao Lian. "Give the order to attack the city," Gongsun said to Song Jiang. "We'll see what the enemy reaction is. I have a plan."
Song Jiang transmitted the command to the leaders of each encampment. These led their men to the moat around Gaotang, where they again made camp. At dawn, everyone rose and had breakfast, and the warriors donned their armor. Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Gongsun rode to the fore.
Mid waving banners the men shouted, while the thunder of drums and the bray of gongs beat against the city walls.
During the night an officer had reported to Gao Lian, the prefect, now recovered from his arrow wound, that Song Jiang's forces had arrived. In the morning Gao put on his armor, opened the city gate, lowered the drawbridge, and rode forth with his three hundred Miracle soldiers, plus officers high and low.
When the two armies were in sight of each other's drums and pennants, they spread out in battle position. Intricately carved drums thundered. Beribboned, embroidered banners waved. From Song Jiang's position a V-formation of ten horsemen trotted up. The left wing consisted of Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Zhu Tong, Ou Peng and Lu Fang. In the right wing were Lin Chong, Sun Li, Deng Fei, Ma Lin and Guo Sheng. The three commanding generals rode between them.
On the opposite side, golden drums pounded, and a front row of banners parted to permit the forward passage of Gao Lian, prefect of Gaotang, surrounded by twenty or thirty of his officers. He halted before the banners and hurled imprecations.
"Swamp bandits! Since it's a fight you want, we'll fight you to the death! Whoever runs is no real man!"
"Who will ride forth for me and cut this scoundrel down?" Song Jiang demanded.
Hua Rong, lance raised, kicked his horse and cantered to the center of the clearing.
"Who will take this rogue for me?" Gao Lian called.
A captain named Xue Yuanhui, wielding a pair of sabres, galloped forward on a spirited mount. The two men battled several rounds. Hua Rong turned his steed and rode towards his original position. Brandishing his sabres, Xue raced in pursuit. Hua Rong slowed his horse slightly, fitted an arrow to his bow, twisted around suddenly in his saddle, and let fly. Xue tumbled head first to the ground. Both sides roared.
Angrily, Gao Lian clanged his sword three times on the animal-embossed bronze shield hanging from the pommel of his saddle. A yellow dust storm rose from the midst of the Miracle soldiers, dimming the sun and darkening the earth and sky. The men yelled, as from the yellow cloud there emerged savage beasts and weird serpents. Song Jiang's forces began retreating in alarm.
But then Gongsun pulled out an ancient sword with a pine tree pattern. He pointed it at the enemy, muttered an incantation, and shouted: "Speed!"
A golden ray shot into the yellow cloud and zapped every serpent and beast. As they fell they were seen to be only white paper cutouts, and the haze of yellow dust disintegrated.
Song Jiang pointed with his whip. All three contingents charged, mowing down men and horses of the foe. Their drums and banners were scattered in disarray. Gao Lian fled to the city with his Miracle soldiers. Song Jiang's forces chased them to the foot of the walls. But the drawbridge was hurriedly raised and the gates slammed shut. Logs and ballista stones rained down on the attackers.
At Song Jiang's command, gongs were beaten as a signal for his forces to make camp and be counted. They had won a stunning victory. Song Jiang summoned Gongsun to his tent and thanked him for his marvellous Taoist sorcery. Then he rewarded the army's three contingents. The next day they divided and assaulted the city vigorously from all sides. To Song Jiang and Wu Yong, Gongsun said: "Although we destroyed more than half the enemy effectives last night, the three hundred Miracle soldiers got safely into the city. We must pound them hard, for tonight that villain is sure to raid our camp. We'll pull out in the dark of night, first erecting false palisades, and lie in ambush all around. Tell our men when they hear the sound of thunder and see flames rising in the camp to rush in and attack."
Orders were so given. Early in the afternoon they withdrew from the city and returned to camp, where they drank and loudly made merry. When darkness fell, all quietly slipped away and took up ambush positions on the camp's perimeter.
Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Gongsun, Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng waited on a rise. Sure enough, in the middle of the night Gao Lian mustered his three hundred Miracle soldiers. Each man carried on his back an iron gourd containing sulphur, nitrate, and other gunpowder material. Each held a hooked blade and an iron whisk, and bore in his mouth a reed whistle. Around the second watch the city gate was opened, and the drawbridge lowered, and they marched forth with Gao Lian at their head and followed by thirty cavalry.
As they neared the brigands' camp Gao Lian performed a secret spell. A black mist erupted heavenward. A wild wind howled, driving before it sand and stones, ripping up earth and soil. With their fire-making equipment, the three hundred Miracle soldiers ignited the contents of their gourds, and blew together on their whistles. In the inky darkness, the flames illuminated their bodies as they surged into the camp, brandishing sabres and axes.
On the bluff, Gongsun grasped his sword and murmured an incantation. A thunderbolt burst in the empty camp, setting it ablaze. The frightened Miracle soldiers tried to run, but they were engulfed by flames, which reddened earth and sky. There was nowhere they could flee.
The fighters lying in ambush now closed in on the palisades. They could see very clearly from the outer darkness. Not one of the three hundred Miracle soldiers was allowed to escape. All were slaughtered, to the last man.

Gao Lian hastened towards the city with his thirty remaining cavalry. A pursuing battle steed was rapidly closing the gap between them. Its rider was Panther Head Lin Chong. He had almost caught up when Gao Lian yelled for the drawbridge to be lowered, and clattered into the city with eight or nine of his escort. Lin Chong captured the rest.
Once inside, Gao Lian ordered the citizens to man the ramparts. Song Jiang and Lin Chong had annihilated virtually his entire army as well as all his Miracle soldiers.
The next day, Song Jiang's forces again surrounded the city. "Who'd have thought he'd foil the magic I studied for years," Gao Lian said to himself. "What can I do?" He would have to dispatch men to neighboring prefectures to plead for aid.
Hastily, he penned notes to Dongchang and Kouzhou. "They're not far," he thought, "and the prefects in both received their appointments through my cousin. I'll request them to send reinforcements immediately." He dispatched two senior staff officers with the missives, letting them out through the west gates. They travelled west along the road at top speed.
The brigand leaders wanted to pursue them, but Wu Yong said: "Let them go. We'll use their own plan against them."
"What do you mean?" Song Jiang queried.
"They're very weak in the city in both officers and men, and they're begging for aid. We can have two of our columns pretend to be reinforcements and stage a mock battle with us on the road. Gao Lian will surely open the gates and come out to help them. That will be our chance to take the city. Meanwhile, we'll lure Gao Lian off onto a small path, and there we'll capture him."
Very pleased, Song Jiang directed Dai Zong to return to Mount Liangshan and fetch two columns of men and horses and have them approach the city separately.
Every night Gao Lian burned huge fires in the center of the city as a beacon and watched eagerly from the ramparts for his reinforcements. After several days, defenders on the walls observed a turmoil among Song Jiang's troops, though they didn't seem to be attacking. When this was reported to Gao Lian he quickly donned his armor and mounted the ramparts. He saw two columns of men and horses, their dust obscuring the sun, their shouts shaking the heavens, advancing rapidly. The brigand forces surrounding the city scattered at their approach.
Convinced that rescuers had arrived, Gao Lian mustered his forces. He opened the gates, and all charged out, dividing to join the fray.
When Gao Lian reached Song Jiang's position he saw the brigand leader, together with Hua Rong and Qin Ming galloping off along a path. Gao Lian and his men chased after them hotly. Suddenly, he heard cannon fire on the other side of the hill, and he grew suspicious. He and his unit turned around and started back. Gongs crashed on both sides of the path, and down the right slope came Lu Fang, and down the left slope came Guo Sheng, each leading five hundred men.
Gao Lian fled hurriedly, most of his escort already wiped out. When he got to the outskirts of the city he saw the banners of the men of Liangshan flying from its walls. No reinforcements were visible anywhere. Gao Lian ran with his broken remnants towards the mountains.
Before they had gone ten /i; a body of men and horses surged out from around a bend, headed by Sun Li, and blocked their road. "I've been waiting for you," Sun shouted. "Dismount and be bound!"
Gao Lian turned to go back. But from behind another unit appeared, with Zhu Tong in the lead. Both sides began closing in. With all roads cut, Gao Lian could only abandon his horse and scramble into the mountains on foot. His soldiers ran with him.
Frantically, Gao Lian mumbled an incantation and shouted: "Rise!" On a black cloud he floated as high as the hilltops. Then Gongsun rounded the slope and saw this. From his horse, he gazed towards the sky and uttered a few phrases. "Speed!" he cried, pointing his sword upwards.
Gao Lian plummeted to earth from his cloud. Lei Heng sped forward from the side. With one sweep of his halberd, he cut him in two.
Lei Heng carried Gao Lian's head as all went down the mountain. A messenger was dispatched to report the news to Song Jiang swiftly. Song Jiang pulled back his outlying troops and entered Gaotang. He ordered that the citizenry were not to be harmed, and had proclamations posted assuring them that their lives and property were safe.
Next, he went to release Lord Chai from prison. The warden, jailors and guards had all left. Only the prisoners themselves, about fifty in number, remained. Their fetters were removed.
But Lord Chai was not among them. Song Jiang was worried and puzzled. In one of the buildings he found the family of Chai Jin's uncle, in another the family of Chai Jin himself. They had been arrested in Cangzhou and imprisoned here together. Because of the continuous fighting, they had not been questioned.
Only Lord Chai could not be found. Wu Yong directed that the jailors and guards be summoned. One of them said: "I am Lin Ren, the warden of this prison. Prefect Gao Lian instructed me to keep Lord Chai in a separate cell and make sure he didn't escape. 'If luck goes against us,' Gao Lian said, 'finish him off.' Three days ago he ordered me to take Lord Chai out and kill him. I could see that he was a good man. I didn't have the heart. So I stalled. 'He's very ill,' I said. 'He's eight tenths gone already. There's no need to do anything.' But then they really put the pressure on me, so I said: 'Chai Jin's dead.' The prefect was busy fighting every day, and he had no time. But I was afraid he'd send people to check up. If they found Chai Jin, I'd be in for it. So yesterday I took him to a dry well in the rear courtyard, removed his fetters, and pushed him in to hide there. I don't know whether he's alive or dead."
Song Jiang hastily had Lin Ren lead him to the well. He peered down into its black maw, unable to fathom its depth. He called, but no one answered. A rope was lowered. It extended about ninety feet before touching bottom.
"He doesn't seem to be there," said Song Jiang, and tears rolled from his eyes.
"Don't upset yourself, Commander-in-Chief," urged Wu Yong. "We won't know until we send someone down to see."
Before the words were out of his mouth, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind pressed forward and shouted: "Let me go."
"Good," said Song Jiang. "You're the one who put him in his predicament. It's only right that you should repay."
Li Kui laughed. "I'm not afraid to go down. Just don't cut the rope."
"Don't be funny," said Wu Yong.
A long rope was tied to a large basket, a frame placed over the well mouth, and the rope slung over the frame. Li Kui stripped to the buff, grasped his battle axes, and sat in the basket, which was lowered into the well. Two copper bells were affixed to the upper portion of the rope.
Gradually, the basket reached bottom. Li Kui crawled out and felt around. He touched a heap of bones. "Father and mother," he cried. "What friggin thing is this?"
He continued groping. The well bottom was damp. There wasn't a dry place to set foot. Li Kui put his axes in the basket and felt around with both hands. The area was quite wide. Finally he touched a man, crouched in a puddle.
"Lord Chai," he exclaimed.
But the man didn't move. Li Kui put a hand in front of the man's face. Only faint breath was coming from his mouth.
"Thank Heaven and Earth," Li Kui said. "He can still be saved!"
He climbed into the basket and shook the bells. The others hauled him up. He emerged alone and told what he had found.
"Go down again and put Lord Chai in the basket," directed Song Jiang. "After we've got him out, we'll send the basket down for you."
"I had two tricks played on me at Jizhou, brother. I don't want this to be a third."
Song Jiang laughed. "Would I fool you? Go down, quickly."
Once more Li Kui got into the basket and descended into the well. On reaching bottom, he crawled out, carried Lord Chai over, put him in the basket, and rang the bells. Those above began pulling immediately. When the basket reached the top, everyone was delighted to see Lord Chai.
Song Jiang examined him. He had a gash on his forehead, the flesh on both legs had been beaten to a pulp, and his eyes were half open and half closed. He was a sorry sight. A doctor was called to treat him.
Li Kui was bellowing at the bottom of the well. Song Jiang ordered that basket be lowered and that he be pulled up. Li Kui was very angry when he reached the surface.
"You're no good, any of you," he raged. "Why didn't you send the basket down for me?"
"We were so worried about Lord Chai, we forgot," Song Jiang explained. "Please forgive us."
He ordered a cart for Chai Jin to lie on, and more than twenty others for the lord's family and that of his uncle, together with their valuables. He instructed Li Kui and Lei Heng to escort them to the Liangshan stronghold. He also directed that Gao Lian's entire household of thirty or forty, good and bad alike, be executed in the marketplace. The warden Lin Ren was rewarded. As much as possible of the riches in the prefecture's treasury and the grain in its granary, as well as Gao Lian's private property, were packed and carried off to the mountain fortress.
The brigand officers, high and low, left Gaotang and returned to Liangshan Marsh, troubling none of the prefectures and counties they passed through on the way. After several days, they reached the stronghold. In spite of his illness, Chai Jin got up and thanked Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the other leaders. Chao Gai ordered that a house be built near Song Jiang's residence on the summit for Lord Chai and his family.
All of the leaders were very pleased, for they had acquired two more commanders—Chai Jin and Tang Long. They banqueted in celebration. Of that, we'll say no more.

*

By then Dongchang and Kouzhou had heard that Gao Lian, prefect of Gaotang had been killed and that the city had fallen. They immediately dispatched written reports to the emperor. Officials who had escaped from Gaotang also brought news of this to the capital. Marshal Gao Qiu thus learned that his cousin had been slain.
At the fifth watch the next day he went to the imperial antehall and waited for the morning bell. Hundreds of officials in ceremonial robes thronged the inner hall, waiting to attend the audience. At the third section of the fifth watch, the emperor entered the imperial chamber. Three times the ceremonial staff tapped, and civil and military officials formed in separate ranks as the emperor seated himself on the throne.
"Let those with business present their petitions," intoned the chief of ceremonies.
Marshal Gao stepped forward and spoke: "Of late Chao Gai and Song Jiang, leaders of the bandits in Liangshan Marsh in Jizhou Prefecture, have committed a series of terrible crimes, plundering cities and robbing government granaries. In savage hordes they slaughtered government troops in Jizhou and ran riot in Jiangzhou and Wuweijun. Most recently, they wiped out the entire city of Gaotang and walked off with everything in the granary and treasury. They are like a canker in our vitals. If we don't quell them quickly they will grow so strong that we shall be unable to control them. I beseech Your Majesty to act."
The emperor was shocked. He ordered Gao to assemble an army, arrest the culprits, thoroughly purge the Marsh, and kill all such persons.
"We don't need a large army to deal with those petty outlaws. If Your Majesty will grant me a certain man, he will take care of them," said Gao.
"If you consider him so useful, he must be good. Have him go at once. Let us hear news of victory soon and we shall raise him in rank and reward him well. He will be given a high and important post."
"He is the direct descendant of Huyan Zan, the general from Hedong who won fame at the start of the dynasty. His name is Huyan Zhuo. He wields two steel rods and is a man of peerless courage. At present he is garrison commander of Runing Shire, and has under him many crack soldiers and brave officers. With the services of this man we can restore order to Liangshan Marsh. If given good officers and skilled troops and placed at their head, he will swiftly clean out the lair and return victorious."
The emperor directed the Council of Military Affairs to send an emissary to Runing immediately to fetch Huyan Zhuo. When the imperial court was concluded, Gao personally selected an official from the Council to serve as the emissary. He was sent forth that same day, and a time limit set for his return.
Huyan was conducting business in his military headquarters in Runing when an officer at the city gate entered and announced: "An emissary has come with an imperial edict ordering you, General, to the capital for a special mission."
With several prefectural officials Huyan went to the gate and conducted the emissary to military headquarters. Huyan read the edict and had a feast laid for the emissary. Then he donned his helmet and armor, saddled his horse and gathered his weapons, and left Runing with an escort of thirty or forty. They travelled through the night and soon reached the capital after an uneventful journey. Huyan Zhuo dismounted before the Chancellery of Imperial Defense and went in to see Marshal Gao.
Gao Qiu was holding court. The gate-keeper announced: "Huyan Zhuo, summoned from Runing, is at the gate." Very pleased, Gao directed that he be brought in. After asking Huyan solicitously about himself, Gao rewarded him.
Early the next day, Gao presented Huyan to their sovereign. The emperor could see that he was no ordinary man, and the imperial countenance smiled. He presented Huyan with a fine horse known as the Ebony Steed Which Treads in Snow. Pitch black in color except for snowy white hoofs, it could cover a thousand //in a single day. This beast was given to Huyan as his mount.
After thanking the emperor, Huyan Zhuo returned with Gao Qiu to the chancellery, where they discussed how to take Liangshan Marsh.
"I've spied out that place, Your Excellency," said Huyan. "They've many officers and men, and they're well equipped with fine horses and weapons. An adversary not to be despised. But I have two men I can guarantee to lead my vanguard, while I follow with our main force. We definitely will win a great victory."
Gao was delighted. "Who're these men?" he asked. And because of the 2 Huyan guaranteed, the mountain citadel added fresh wings, and the fighters of mount Liang Marsh smashed the government hosts. Truly, though their names were never inscribed in the Imperial Commendation Records, they were registered in the rolls of Fraternity Hall.

Now here is what the Blessed Sage said to Taoist Gongsun: "My son, you have studied magic. You can match Gao Lian. I am going to reveal to you the orthodox technique of the Five Thunders. Following this method it is possible to rescue Song Jiang, protect the country and pacify the people, and perform heaven's will. Do not become entangled in human desires and neglect the great task, concentrate on following the essence of Taoist practice which you have learnt. As for your mother, I will send someone morning and evening to see that she is all right, so have no sad thoughts about her. I know that you are one of the stars from the upper regions of heaven, and that is why I give you leave to go and assist Song Jiang. I have this eight character verse which you must have in mind if you are to avoid future mistakes." Here is the verse the Sage pronounced:

*On encountering darkness halt,*
*Reaching Kaifeng turn back.*

When Taoist Gongsun had humbly received the secret doctrine, the three of them bade farewell to the Blessed Sage and the other Taoists and went down the mountain. When they reached Taoist Gongsun's home he got together his priest's cloak, his two swords, his iron circlet, jade sceptre and other religious objects and bade farewell to his mother and then off they went.
When they had gone some ten miles, the Magic Messenger said: "I shall go on ahead to let Song Jiang know, and you Father must continue along the road with Iron Ox. I'll return later to meet you."
"Right you are," said Taoist Gongsun. "We'll press on by ourselves."
"Mind you serve the father faithfully on the journey," the Magic Messenger commanded Iron Ox. "If there's any trouble I shall make sure that you regret it."
Iron Ox said: "He's got the same magic as the Blessed Sage. How could I dare not treat him with respect?"
The Magic Messenger tied on his amulets and raced on ahead, doing his magic walking.
As for Taoist Gongsun and Iron Ox, after leaving the Two Immortals Peak they took the main road and at evening sought accommodation for the night. Iron Ox, fearing Taoist Gongsun's magic, served him most attentively on the journey: he didn't dream of misbehaving! After travelling for three days they came to a place called Battle Knoll. Here they found a populous community and Taoist Gongsun said: "We've been travelling several days and we're tired. We'd better buy ourselves some non-alcoholic wine and some plain noodles before we go on."
"Hear hear," said Iron Ox.
They found a small inn beside the highway, so they went in and sat down. Taoist Gongsun took the place of honour, while Iron Ox removed his belt and sat down next to him. They called the waiter, to ask for wine and some vegetarian food.
"What kind of vegetarian snacks have you got?" Taoist Gongsun asked.
"We only sell wine and meat," the waiter said. "There isn't anything vegetarian. But they sell date cakes in the market."
"I'll go and buy some," Iron Ox said. He got some silver out of his pack and went off to the market, where he bought a bag of the date cakes. He was about to return when he heard the sound of applause somewhere off to one side, and cries of "What strength!" People were crowding round a big fellow who was putting on a performance with an iron hammer the size of a melon, to the admiration of the onlookers.
The man was very tall, with a pock-marked face and big scar on his nose. The hammer must have weighed something like thirty catties. The big fellow swung his hammer and "pow!" smashed it down into a paving stone, which was reduced to powder. The crowd applauded.
This was too much for Iron Ox. He tucked the date cakes inside his shirt and went to grab the hammer. "Who the fuck are you?" the big man shouted. "How dare you steal my hammer!"
"What's so fucking wonderful about what you're doing?" said Iron Ox. "What is there to get excited about? It offends my eyes! Let me show you how, just watch me for a bit!"
"I'll lend you the hammer," said the other. "But if you fail to lift it, I'll give you a good thrashing!"
Iron Ox took the hammer like someone picking up a marble. He swung it around for a bit and then gently put it down. He was not even flushed. His heartbeat was measured and his breathing unhurried. Seeing this, the other man threw himself down, and said: "Please tell me your name."
"Where do you live?" Iron Ox asked him.
"Just over there," the other answered. He led Iron Ox to a place with a locked door. He unlocked the door and invited Iron Ox in to sit down. The house was full of anvils and hammers, there was a furnace, forge, chisels and other tools of the trade. "This fellow must be a blacksmith," Iron Ox said to himself. "He'd be very useful to us in the stronghold. Why not persuade him to join?"
So Iron Ox said to the stranger: "Would you mind telling me your full name, sir?"
"My name is Tang Long. My father was an officer of the Yan'an garrison. Because he could work iron he happened to be of service to old Marshal Zhong and was employed on his staff. A little while back my father passed away up there and I became addicted to gambling and fell into the way of the rivers and lakes, which is why I come to be here and spend my time working as a smith. I am passionately fond of spear and staff play. Because I am covered in these pock marks people call me Spots. May I ask what your name is?"
"I am Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind, from the Marshes of Mount Liang," said Iron Ox.
Spots prostrated himself all over again, and said: "I have heard so much about you. I never expected to meet you here today!"
"How will you ever make a career for yourself here?" said Iron Ox. "Wouldn't it be better to go with me and join the band on Mount Liang? We'd make you one of the leaders."
Spots said: "If you're really willing to take me with you, I would do anything for you." So saying he prostrated himself to Iron Ox as to an elder brother, while the latter accepted him as younger brother.
"I have no family or other ties," Spots said. "Why don't we go into town and have a few cups of wine together, to celebrate our becoming brothers? We can rest tonight and start early tomorrow."
"I've got this priest at an inn up the road," said Iron Ox. "He's waiting for me to bring him some date cakes to eat before we go on. We can't waste any time. As soon as possible we must continue our journey."
"Why are you in such a hurry?" Spots asked.
"It's like this, our leader Song Jiang right now is attacking Gaotang and he is waiting for us to take this priest back to lend a hand."
"Who is he then, this priest?" Spots asked.

Iron Ox said: "Don't ask so many questions. Pack your bags quickly and let's go!"
Spots hurriedly tied his bundle, got some silver for travelling expenses, donned a hat, buckled on a sword, grabbed a halberd, abandoned his tumbledown old house with its rough furnishings and accompanied Iron Ox to the inn where Taoist Gongsun was waiting.
"Why have you been so long?" Taoist Gongsun grumbled. "If you're going to waste so much time, I shall go back home."
Iron Ox dared not answer back. He presented Spots and explained how they had become brothers. When he heard that Spots was a blacksmith, Taoist Gongsun was mollified. Iron Ox got out the date cakes and told the waiter to serve them. After drinking several cups and eating the date cakes, they called for the bill. Iron Ox and Spots shouldered their packs and with Taoist Gongsun left Battle Knoll and took the road for Gaotang. Early one morning, after three stops and two full days of travel, they saw the Magic Messenger coming to meet them. Taoist Gongsun was very pleased and quickly asked: "How has the battle been going?"
The Magic Messenger said: "That bastard Gao Lian has recovered from the arrow wound. Every day he marches out and issues a challenge. Song Jiang stands firm and doesn't venture forth."
"We shall be all right then," said Taoist Gongsun.
Iron Ox presented Spots to the Magic Messenger and explained all about him. The four then hurried on to Gaotang. When they were just over a mile from the camp, the Little Duke and the Halberdier came out to meet them with a hundred cavalry and some extra horses. The four mounted and rode into the camp where they found Song Jiang and the Professor awaiting them. After the greetings, a celebratory wine was served, questions were asked and answered, and then they were invited into the command tent where there was a banquet for all the leaders. Iron Ox presented Spots to Song Jiang, the Professor and all the rest. After courtesies had been exchanged the whole camp settled down to feasting.
Next day in the command tent Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun discussed how to defeat Gaotang. Taoist Gongsun said: "You must give the order to strike camp and advance. We'll see what the enemy does, but don't worry, I have a plan."
The same day Song Jiang spread word throughout the camp that everyone was to muster their troops and advance on Gaotang. They pitched camp again beneath the walls. After an early breakfast, they armed themselves. The three leaders rode out in front of the army, and with banners waving, drums beating, men cheering and gongs sounding, they bore down on the city.
Inside the city Governor Gao Lian had been recovering from his arrow wound. That night a soldier reported that Song Jiang's army was on the march. At dawn next day the Governor put on his armour, had the city gates opened and the drawbridge lowered, and marched out of the city to encounter the enemy, with his three hundred Celestial guards and all his officers. As the two armies drew close enough for the banners and drums of the other side to be clearly seen, the ranks deployed in battle formation. On either side special drums were beaten and many-coloured banners waved.
Ten riders now detached themselves from Song Jiang's ranks in a V formation. On his left wing were five leaders: Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, Whiskers, Golden Wings and the Little Duke, on the right another five, namely Leopard's Head, Colonel Sun, Redeye, the Flautist and the Halberdier. Three horsemen remained in the centre, the chief of them the commander-in-chief Song Jiang. He was dressed like this:
*On his head a cloth of alizarin red, his waist girt with an outlandish belt with lion's head clasp. His brocade military robe has a big eagle on the back, his burnished helmet has a brilliant phoenix in flight on the brim. Green boots tread jewelled stirrups, gold armour shines like the rippling scales of a dragon. His gilt saddle flap consorts with the purple silk whip; the embroidered saddle cloth perfectly matches his horse, which is dappled like peach blossom.*
The rider on Song Jiang's left was the chief military adviser of Mount Liang, Professor Wu Yong, and on his right was the deputy military adviser, Taoist Gongsun. Together the three commanders rode out in front of their troops.
On the other side Governor Gao Lian also rode out in front and in stentorian tones roared out: "Now listen here, you bunch of swamp-dwelling ruffians, since you've come here to seek us out, there's got to be victory and defeat, there's got to be a winner and a loser, the one who turns tail is no man!"
Song Jiang's response was to shout: "Who will take that bastard for me and cut his head off?"
Immediately the Archer, Colonel Hua, levelled his lance and urged his horse forward, charging into action. Gao Lian in turn shouted: "Who will capture that bandit for me?"
Someone rode out from a group of staff officers, waving a pair of sabres and mounted on a fiery horse. He charged into action to encounter Colonel Hua. There in front of the armies they fought several bouts, till Colonel Hua suddenly turned his horse and fled back towards his own side. His opponent did not realize it was a trick. Giving his horse its head and brandishing his sabres he galloped in pursuit. Colonel Hua deliberately reined in his horse, took his bow and arrows, and twisting in the saddle loosed a shaft which sent his pursuer tumbling head over heels from his horse. A cry arose from the watching armies on both sides.
Gao Lian was enraged. He hurriedly grasped the special brass shield for calling out wild beasts which hung from the pommel of his saddle, and took a firm grip of his sword. He knocked three times on the shield and from among the ranks of the Celestial guards a cloud of yellow sand arose engulfing everything so that the sky was veiled and the earth grew dark and the sun's brightness was extinguished. A great cry arose as this cloud of yellow sand spewed forth jackals, wolves, tigers, leopards, together with divers unknown beasts and poisonous reptiles. All the troops naturally fled.
Taoist Gongsun, however, grasping his famous sword, with its ancient pattern of pine trees, faced the enemy forces and pointed as he pronounced a muttered spell, climaxing in a shout of: "Chrrr!" Immediately a golden ray shot out and the whole pack of strange beasts and venomous reptiles fell back writhing and squirming into the cloud of yellow sand in front of the armies. The soldiers were now able to observe that they were all white paper cut-outs. The cloud of sand also subsided and vanished. Song Jiang now pointed with his whip stock and the three wings of his army charged forward together. Soldiers died and horses fell, the standards were scattered. Gao Lian hastily withdrew his Celestial guards into the city. Song Jiang's troops pursued them to the city walls, but the drawbridge was quickly drawn up and the gates closed, while blocks of wood and ballista missiles poured down on them like rain. On Song Jiang's orders, a gong sounded the order for his troops to return to camp. Numbers were counted and a great victory was celebrated. Back in the tents praise and thanks were given for the magic powers and virtue of Taoist Gongsun, and the army was rewarded.
Next day the army, in four divisions, mounted a furious attack on the town from every side. Taoist Gongsun said to the other two leaders: "Although we destroyed the greater part of their forces yesterday, the three hundred Celestial guards evidently managed to retreat into the town. If we press them hard today the buggers will undoubtedly try to steal into our camp by night. This evening we must take up a position somewhere. At night we'll pull out our forces after dark, and lay an ambush in four separate groups. We'll build false defences. All the commanders are to wait till they hear a loud report and see fires within the camp and then attack."
Orders were given accordingly. The attack was continued until midday, and then the troops on all four sides returned to camp, where there was music and feasting. As night began to fall, the leaders quietly led their separate forces away and set up the ambush all around.
Song Jiang, the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Little Duke and the Halberdier waited on top of a small rise. At nightfall Gao Lian had, as expected, assembled his three hundred Celestial guards each carrying an iron gourd filled with sulphur and brimstone, gunpowder and explosive materials. Each man also carried a hook, an iron broom, and a reed whistle between his teeth. Some time before midnight the city gates were opened, the drawbridge lowered, and with Gao Lian leading them the Celestial guards, followed by another three hundred cavalry, went into action. When they were close to the camp, Gao Lian made a magic signal: a black cloud enveloped the sky and a violent wind arose, flinging sand and stones about and shaking the earth to its very foundations. The Celestial guards took out their tinder-boxes and lit the touch-papers at the mouth of the iron gourds, blew a blast on their whistles and amid the darkness, their bodies masked by the blaze, with swords and axes whirling, swept into the camp.
Taoist Gongsun on top of the hill made magic with his sword and a clap of thunder rang out across the whole flat area of the camp. The three hundred Celestial guards recoiled in dismay. The empty camp was now alive with flickering lights, casting a red glow everywhere. There was no way of escape. The troops lying in ambush on every side closed in. Surrounded as they were by the stockade and darkness, not one of the three hundred Celestial guards got away. All died there in the camp.
Gao Lian with some three hundred cavalry raced back to the city. Some troops were in close pursuit. This was Leopard's Head Lin Chong's force. Seeing the pursuers were so close behind, the drawbridge was raised in a hurry. Only eight or nine horsemen got back into the city with Gao Lian. The rest were taken alive by Leopard's Head and his men. Back in the city Gao Lian ordered the citizens onto the battlements to defend it. His army, including the Celestial guards, had been wiped out by Song Jiang and Leopard's Head.
Next day Song Jiang was quick to deploy his troops around the city again. Gao Lian said to himself: "All those years I spent studying magic, who'd have thought they could defeat me! What am I going to do now? My only hope is to send someone to request help from the neighbouring districts." He hastily composed two letters and sent them to two cities that were not far off, whose governors had both been preferred by his brother. He asked them to come by night with troops to reinforce him. Two aides-de-camp were entrusted with the letters, the west gate was opened and they galloped off on the road westwards.
When the commanders of the besieging force wanted to pursue them, the Professor said: "Let them go. We'll match their plan with one of our own."
"How do you propose to do that?" Song Jiang asked.
"The forces within the city are greatly reduced in numbers. That is why they are sending for help. We can use two detachments of our own troops to play the part of a relieving force, caught up in a fight with us on their way to the city. Gao Lian will naturally open the gates and come to their assistance. This will give us the opportunity to take the city and also to entice Gao Lian onto a narrow path where we can capture him."
This was all greatly to Song Jiang's liking. He told the Magic Messenger to return to Mount Liang and form two detachments of troops, with instructions to approach separately.
Now every day Gao Lian was having sticks piled up in an open space in the city and lit as a signal bonfire. In the city they were continually on the lookout for a relieving force. After a few days the sentries on the city walls saw confused fighting in Song Jiang's lines and immediately reported it. Gao Lian hurriedly armed himself and went up onto the battlements to look. He saw two columns of troops advancing, raising a cloud of dust that cloaked the sun and wildly cheering, whilst the besieging troops fled in all directions. Gao Lian decided it must be that two relief columns had arrived. He quickly ordered the gates to be opened and the defending troops sallied forth, dividing in pursuit of the enemy.
When Gao Lian ran into Song Jiang's army, he saw the latter with Colonel Hua and Thunderclap riding away down a small path. He immediately gave chase. But when he suddenly heard a string of explosions, he began to suspect something. He ordered his troops to turn back. Gongs began to sound on either side. On the left the Little Duke came down, on the right the Halberdier, each with five hundred troops. Gao Lian tried to flee but the greater part of his troops were destroyed.
When Gao Lian fled from the thick of the battle, it was only to find that the banners of Mount Liang were now flying over the city walls. Raising his eyes for a second look, he noted that there was no sign whatsoever of a relieving force. His only resort now was to lead the remnants of his army away into the mountains by a small lonely path. But had barely gone three miles when a troop of men and riders led by Colonel Sun appeared from behind the mountain and barred the way. "We've been waiting a long time for you!" Colonel Sun shouted. "Dismount and allow us to tie you up!"
Gao Lian tried to turn back, but there was another body of troops barring the way behind him. The leader of these was Whiskers. Trapped between these two forces, with every escape route blocked, Gao Lian could only abandon his horse and flee up the mountain. From all sides now his opponents pursued him over the mountainside. Gao Lian desperately gabbled a spell and shouted "Rise!" Immediately he began to ascend slowly into the sky on a black cloud, till he was level with the peak.
At this point Taoist Gongsun appeared on the side of the mountain. When he saw what was happening, he waved his sword towards the sky, muttered a spell and shouted: "Chrrr!" He pointed up with his sword and Gao Lian came crashing down out of his cloud. Immediately Sergeant Lei rushed over and cut him in two with one blow of the halberd.
Thus did this wretched governor learn the illusory nature of power, like the man who awoke from a dream of glory to find he had been lording it over an anthill:

*Heaven's scrutiny can't be fooled.*
*By the powers of Earth be ruled.*
*The law should be observed:*
*The spirits must be served.*
*The cruel are cruelly rent,*
*The despot's power is spent.*
*Be on the look-out all your life,*
*For hardship, danger and strife.*

Sergeant Lei picked up the head and they all trooped back down the mountain. First they sent an urgent message to the commander-in-chief. When Song Jiang heard that Gao Lian was dead he marshalled his forces and marched into Gaotang. Orders were first issued not to harm the people. Peace was declared, and a total amnesty. Then they went to the gaol to rescue Mr. Chai. The chief gaoler and all his staff had fled by this time and only some forty or fifty convicts remained. They all had their cangues removed and were set free. But there was no sign of Mr. Chai among them. Song Jiang was extremely anxious. Then in a detention room he came upon all the family of Mr. Chai's cousin, Chai Huangcheng. In another cell he found all the members of Mr. Chai's family who had been brought from his home province and locked up there. Because the fighting had been continuous for several days, they had not yet been questioned or dealt with. But he could find no trace of Mr. Chai.
The Professor had the Gaotang gaolers rounded up and questioned. Among them was one who said: "I am Lin Ren, a warder from the prison. The day before yesterday His Excellency Governor Gao Lian gave orders for Chai Jin to be locked up under tight security, lest he should escape. The order said: 'If anything goes wrong you must put him to death.' Three days ago the Governor wanted to take Chai Jin away for execution. I could see he was a good man and I did not want to do it. So I got out of it by saying: 'The man is seriously ill; the execution cannot be carried out.' Later when they put even more pressure on me, I reported that Chai Jin was dead. Because of the continual fighting the Governor had no time to check up, but I was afraid he would send someone to do so and my crime would be discovered, so yesterday I took Chai Jin to a dried-up well at the back of the prison. I removed his cangue and told him to hide in the well. I don't know whether he is still alive or not."
Song Jiang told this warder to take him there at once. They found the dry well behind the prison and looked down it. It was pitch black and it was impossible to say how deep it was. They shouted down, so anyone there should have heard. They lowered a rope to the bottom: it was over eighty feet deep. "Obviously Mr. Chai is long since dead," Song Jiang said. He shed tears.
"It's no use grieving, commander," said the Professor. "Who dares go down and investigate, to see if he's there or not?"
Before he'd even finished speaking, Iron Ox popped up and shouted: "Just let me go!"
"Good," said Song Jiang. "Since it was you who got him into trouble in the first place, it's fitting for you to make recompense."
Iron Ox merely laughed. "I'm not afraid of going down there," he said. "Only don't cut the rope!"
"What a joker you are," said the Professor.
They got a big bamboo basket and a thick rope, which was tied to a wooden frame, and then thrown into the well. Iron Ox stripped to the skin, took his two axes and sat in the basket while they lowered him. Two bells were attached to the rope.
Slowly Iron Ox descended to the bottom. He clambered out and started to feel about on the floor of the well. Presently he touched a pile of something. It was a skeleton. "Well, blow me!" he exclaimed. "What a fucking horrible place this is!"
As he went on feeling about, he found the bottom of the well to be soaking wet, with no firm ground to stand on. He threw his two axes into the basket and began to feel about with both hands. He stretched his arms out in all directions and eventually touched a human body huddled in a pool of water. "Mr. Chai!" Iron Ox shouted out. There was a slight movement. When he touched the body he seemed to hear a faint whisper. "Thank heavens, it seems as if it's still possible to save him!" he said. He climbed into the basket and shook the bell till they pulled him up.
When Iron Ox told them what he had found below, Song Jiang said: "You'll have to go down again and put Mr. Chai into the basket. We'll pull him up first and then lower the basket again for you."
"Listen," said Iron Ox. "I was made a fool of twice on the way to Jizhou. I hope this isn't going to be a third time someone plays a trick on me."
Song Jiang laughed. "Why should I play tricks on you? You get down there again, quickly." So Iron Ox had to get into the basket and go down the well again.
When he reached the bottom and clambered out, he lifted Mr. Chai bodily and put him in the basket. He gave a tug to the rope and those above hearing the bell began to haul on it. When the basket and its load reached the top, all were overjoyed. Chai Jin's head and face were swollen and cut and his legs coated in mud and he could not open his eyes. He was a sorry sight to behold, and Song Jiang implored the doctor to cure him.
Iron Ox, meanwhile, had been left bellowing at the bottom of the well. Song Jiang hurriedly ordered the basket to be lowered again to bring him up. When he rose to the surface Iron Ox indignantly exclaimed: "You're not very kind, all of you! You didn't want to send the basket down again for me!"
"We were too concerned about Mr. Chai," Song Jiang said. "That's why we forgot you. I'm sorry."
Song Jiang had them lay Mr. Chai in a cart. The two families went first, together with a lot of their possessions that had been recovered. Altogether there were more than twenty carts. He told Iron Ox and Sergeant Lei to guard and escort them to Mount Liang. Then he had Gao Lian's family, young and old, good and bad, thirty or forty people in all, executed in the market-place. The helpful warder Lin Ren was rewarded. The coffers and granaries of Gaotang, together with all stores of private wealth, were emptied and everything in them transported to the mountain. Then all the commanders left Gaotang and returned victorious to the Marshes of Mount Liang. They exacted no penalties whatsoever on the places they passed through. They travelled several days before reaching the stronghold.
Despite his weakness, Chai Jin got up to thank Chao Gai, Song Jiang and all the others. At Chao Gai's instance, another house was built on the summit, where Song Jiang had his residence, for Chai Jin and his family to live in. Everyone was pleased with this. Two new leaders, Chai Jin and Spots, had now been added to the company and a banquet was held to celebrate. Of this no more.
Meanwhile the news of Gao Lian's death and the fall of Gaotang to the rebels had reached the governors of the two neighbouring districts. They wrote to the Emperor. The fleeing Gaotang officials also arrived in the capital and recounted what had happened. Marshal Gao heard how his younger brother had been killed.
Next day before dawn Marshal Gao was up and awaiting the dawn bell in the court of the Waterclock. All the courtiers had assembled there in ceremonial dress to await the dawn audience. In the third drumbeat of the fifth watch the Emperor entered the hall. Three taps of the staff and the officials civil and military lined up in their ranks. When the Emperor was seated, the master of ceremonies called out: "If there are matters to report stand forth and declare them; if not, take leave and depart."
Accordingly, Marshal Gao came forward and said: "Recently in Jizhou the leaders of the Mount Liang bandits, Chao Gai and Song Jiang have been creating mayhem. They have plundered cities and robbed government stores. They have raised an army of ruffians who recently massacred the forces of Jizhou. They caused havoc in Jiangzhou and Wuweijun, and still more recently they wiped out Gaotang and made off with all the government stores. This activity poses a grave threat to internal security. If it is not dealt with soon, the rebel power will grow day by day, till it becomes difficult to control them. I beg Your Majesty to take action."
The Emperor was greatly perturbed by this report and handed down the following order: Marshal Gao was to pick commanders and deploy troops to eradicate the evil. The marshes were to be swept clean and total extermination effected.
Marshal Gao submitted: "To deal with a bunch of outlaws like these there is no need to raise a big army. I can do the job with just one man whom I shall recommend."
The Emperor said: "If it is someone appointed by you, I have no doubt that he will be excellent. Let him set off at once and return quickly with news of victory. He shall have promotion and an ample reward. He can expect to be given the highest responsibility."
Marshal Gao said: "The man I have in mind is from Hedong, and is a direct descendant of General Huyan Zan, who won fame at the founding of the dynasty. His name is Huyan Zhuo. He fights with two steel rods, and his valour is such that a thousand men cannot stand against him. He holds the position of military commander of Runing and has many brave soldiers and valiant officers under his command. This is the man I recommend for the pacification of Mount Liang. If he is given command of a force, with sufficient foot soldiers and cavalry and keen officers, he will in short order clean out that nest of bandits and return in triumph."
The Emperor graciously gave his consent and an imperial order was issued requiring the council to send a messenger immediately to summon Twin Rods, as he was popularly known. After the dawn audience Marshal Gao conferred with the council of ministers and appointed a military officer to bear the imperial order and deliver the summons. The man left the same day, bearing strict orders for Twin Rods to report to the capital without delay and receive his instructions.
Twin Rods was holding a meeting of his military council when the usher announced: "An imperial order is on its way, sir, requiring your presence in the capital to hear about an important assignment."
Twin Rods and his officers received the bearer of the imperial command at the city gate and invited him to the council chamber. When Twin Rods had read the edict he laid on a feast for the messenger. He hurriedly got together his helmet, armour, horse and weapons, and with a personal retinue of thirty or forty followers travelled non-stop to the capital.
Nothing of importance happened on the journey. Arriving in the capital he dismounted before the palace and sought out Marshal Gao. Gao the Ball was in session at the time. The usher called out: "Marshal Huyan Zhuo from Runing is here."
Marshal Gao was well pleased and called him in at once. This Twin Rods was a most striking figure:

*Descendant of an official who helped found the dynasty, great great grandson of a famous general of the first emperor, he has inherited a truly miraculous technique with the rods; he is bold and experienced in battle. He would beard the tiger in its den with a bare sword, and flights of eagles are not beyond the reach of his arrows. This is the famous warrior who is nicknamed Twin Rods.*

After the interview Marshal Gao rewarded him financially. Next morning at dawn he had an audience with the Emperor. The Emperor recognizing that this was someone quite out of the ordinary, looked upon him with a gracious smile and presented him with a "snowy-footed raven-hued steed," that is to say a horse black as an ink-stick, but with four white socks, as white as mourning sackcloth. That is why it is called a "snowy-footed raven-hued steed." It could do three hundred miles a day and was a personal gift of the Emperor's to Twin Rods.

Twin Rods expressed his thanks and then Marshal Gao took him back to the military council chamber to discuss matters relating to the raising of an army to annihilate Mount Liang.

Twin Rods said: "May I say something? According to my intelligence, the troops of Mount Liang are well led and have a high level of fighting skills. They should not be underestimated. I would like to recommend two officers to lead the attack. With their forces added to our own we can be certain of success."

Marshal Gao was glad to hear this. "Who is it you recommend then, to lead the attack?" he asked.

Now if Twin Rods had not recommended these two officers, things would have been different. As it was, important new leaders joined up in the Place of Many Meanderings, and in the Marshes of Mount Liang the government troops got a hiding. Although the two names may not appear on the imperial roll of honour, they are certainly good enough to grace the Assembly Hall of the Heroes.

"Disciple," said True Man Luo the Immortal, the spell you have learned is the same as Gao Lian, but I will now disclose to you the means of controlling thunder so that you can help Song Jiang to guard the country and pacify the people as an agent appointed by Heaven. You need not be anxious about your mother as I will see that she is well looked after. You are one of the stars of the constellation and therefore I let you go for some time. You must remember what I told you of the divine principles, and avoid being deceived by human desire, as this will upset your plans."

Gongsun Sheng kowtowed, and received the method for controlling thunder. He, Li Kui, and Dai Zong saluted Luo and the other priests there. They then went to Gongsun Sheng's home where he put on his traveling dress, took his double-edged sword, and after bidding adieu to his mother they all departed.

When they had walked about ten //Dai Zong said he would go in advance to Gaotang Prefecture, and announce their approach. Gongsun Sheng agreed to this, and promised that they would follow behind.

"On the road I want you to wait upon Gongsun Sheng," said Dai Zong to Li Kui. "You must also be careful to avoid all further trouble."

"He has the same magic power as Luo, so how dare I deceive him?" asked Li Kui.

Dai Zong then put on his enchanted puttees and vanished from sight.

Gongsun Sheng and Li Kui continued their way, and towards evening stopped at an inn. Li Kui had felt the great powers of Luo the Immortal and therefore he dared not display his temper, but waited upon Gongsun Sheng with every attention. On the third day they came to the town of Wugang where the streets were very crowded. As they were both tired Gongsun Sheng said they would get some vegetarian food at that market town. They entered a small inn at the side of the street, sat down, and ordered food from the waiter.

"What kind of vegetarian cakes have you?" asked Gongsun Sheng.

"We have only wine and meat," replied the waiter. "But at the entrance of the street you can get cakes made with dates."

"I will go and buy the cakes," said Li Kui. He went and after purchasing the food was on his way back to the inn when he heard the applause, "How strong!" Looking round Li Kui saw a big crowd round a very big man who was holding a heavy iron hammer with a head as big as a watermelon. His face was pock-marked. The hammer, Li Kui thought, must have weighed about thirty *jin*. The man swung it round, and brought it down on a stone in the street, and broke the latter into small bits. The crowd applauded this exhibition of strength, but Li Kui did not think it amounted to much. So putting the cakes in his breast he stepped forward, and took hold of the hammer.

"What are you doing? Who are you?" asked the owner.

"These people applaud you, but what for?" asked Li Kui. "It does not seem very wonderful. You just watch me do it."

"You may try," said the man, "but if you fail the penalty will be a blow from my fist."

Li Kui lifted the hammer, and after whirling it round his head brought it down on the ground lightly and with ease. His face was not red, his heart did not palpitate, and his breathing was regular. He looked quite cool and collected.

The tall man seeing this, saluted, and asked for his name.

"Where do you come from?" asked Li Kui.

"I live just opposite," replied the man. He then conducted Li Kui to his home, and upon reaching the house he unlocked the door, and asked Li Kui to be seated. Li Kui noticed that the room contained all kinds of implements of a blacksmith, a hammer, a stove, tongs, steel punches, and so on. He thought that the man must be a blacksmith, and as they had no such person at their stronghold it would be a good thing to invite this man to join them. He asked the man his name.

"I am Tang Long, and my father was a military official at Yanan Prefecture, Shaanxi province. This year my father died, and through gambling I have lost all the money. I work here as a blacksmith, and like to practice the use of lance and stick. Because of my pock-marked face the people call me the 'Cash Marked Leopard.' I beg to ask for your honorable name."

Li Kui told him, and also that he came from Liangshan Marsh. Upon hearing this the man saluted, and said he had heard of Li Kui's fame, and was very fortunate to meet such a hero. Then Li Kui suggested that he should go with him to Liangshan Marsh, and join the bandits there. The man agreed to this at once. Li Kui then asked him to go with him to the inn to be introduced to Gongsun Sheng. The man got a few things together, and left his house to follow Li Kui.

Upon reaching the inn Li Kui duly introduced the new partner, and explained fully how they had met. After a meal together they three all started on their journey. When near their destination they met Dai Zong, and Gongsun Sheng inquired whether there had been any more fighting.

"Gao Lian's wound is nearly healed now," replied Dai Zong, "and every day there is fighting. Song Jiang has been acting merely on the defensive awaiting your arrival."

The four men then went on their way to Gaotang Prefecture, and soon reached the bandits' camp. There Tang Long was introduced, and duly joined the brigands. They were all pleased to see Gongsun Sheng.

The next day there was a general council held of all the leaders to discuss their future plans. Gongsun Sheng said that orders could be issued for a general advance on Gaotang Prefecture. He would go and see what the opposing army was doing. The next day the bandits all moved forward fully equipped, with flying banners, rolling of drums, and clash of gongs. Song Jiang, Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng rode in the front.

Gao Lian had been informed of the approach of the bandits, ordered his army to leave the town. The two bodies of fighting men soon met, and stood in ranks. There was a great display of banners, and a great noise of drums and gongs. Song Jiang and the two leaders advanced. Gao Lian was seated on his horse surrounded by about thirty officers with a large flag. As Song Jiang approached Gao Lian shouted, "You thieves! As you come here to fight I hope you won't run away this time when you are defeated. Running away does not look nice."

Song Jiang turned, and asked who would volunteer for a single combat. Hua Rong immediately set spurs to his horse, and dashed forward without saying a word.

Gao Lian also asked for a champion to meet Hua Rong and Xue Yuanhui dashed forward.

These two fought for a long time, and then Hua Rong retired. Immediately Xue Yuanhui pursued him, flourishing his sword. Hua Rong, however, got his bow, and turning round in his saddle shot an arrow which wounded Xue who fell off his horse. The troops applauded.

Gao Lian was very angry at this, and taking his copper plate from his saddle he beat it with his sword. Immediately a yellow cloud of dust arose, and obliterating the sunlight made the field quite dark. Out of the cloud now emerged all kinds of strange animals, tigers, leopards, and insects. The troops shouted and moved forward. Gongsun Sheng however on his horse took his sword, and waving it towards the approaching troops called out, "Go!" A flash of light emerged from his sword, and meeting the weird animals they all fell down. The assembled troops now saw that these animals had only been made of paper as they were all consumed by the flame. The yellow cloud of dust also disappeared.

Song Jiang now ordered his men to charge, and they meeting the opposing troops entered into conflict. It was soon over and Gao Lian and his troops retreated into the town. When Song Jiang came up they found the bridge drawn up, and the town gate closed, and the troops on the wall shower stones and blocks of wood on them. Song Jiang then gave the signal for his men to withdraw, and slowly they returned to their camping ground. The men were rewarded for the victory and Gongsun Sheng was loudly praised.

The next day the bandits surrounded the town on all sides. Gongsun Sheng said to Song Jiang and Wu Yong, "Yesterday we defeated more than half of the opposing army, hut we did not touch the bodyguard of Gao Lian. Today we must attack with great force. Tonight they will probably attack our camp so we will leave the camp deserted, and station our troops at other points all round. We must instruct our men to remain quiet until they hear a clap of thunder and see a large flame in the camp when they must rush towards the camp."

Orders were given accordingly, and in the afternoon the brigands were withdrawn from the town, and were given a good feed in the camp. When it was dark the men were divided under their various leaders and all left the camp. Song Jiang, Gongsun Sheng, and several other leaders took up a position on a mound near the camp.

That night Gao Lian provided his bodyguard with iron gourds filled with saltpeter and gunpowder. Each man also had a hooked sickle, an iron broom, and a whistle. Near midnight the town gate was opened, and his men marched out. Gao Lian was on horseback, and used his magic spells. A strong wind sprung up which whirled stones and dust in all directions. The soldiers soon lit their gunpowder, blew their whistles, and advanced in the great confusion.

Gongsun Sheng now used his magic, and in the deserted camp there was a clap of thunder with many flashes of lightning. Gao Lian's troops saw that the camp was deserted, and being frightened by the spectacle they all tried to retreat. But they now found their way blocked by the bandits who attacked fiercely, and in the end not a single one of the three hundred troops was left alive. Gao Lian, however, had been able to get back to the town with about nine of his bodyguard of thirty men. Upon entering the gate he gave orders for the drawbridge to be raised and the gate closed. He then ordered all the people in the town to mount guard on the walls.

The next day Song Jiang surrounded the town with his bandits. Gao Lian considered that all his study of magic was of no avail as he had been thoroughly defeated. What could he do? He decided that the only thing left was to send to the surrounding districts, and ask for help. He wrote two letters accordingly and sent messengers with them. Both of the Prefects concerned had been appointed by his elder brother in the capital so he thought they could not refuse assistance.

Wu Yong saw the two messengers leave the town, but said, "We must not stop them, but let them go. We can make use of their plot to defeat them."

"What is your plan?" asked Song Jiang.

"Evidently there are very few soldiers in the town now," said Wu Yong, "and they are sending for reinforcements. We must get two squadrons of cavalry, and delude the people in the town that they are reinforcements for them. We must arrange for a sham battle, and let the supposed reinforcements win. Then Gao Lian will open the town gate and welcome them. When however he finds out his mistake he will probably try to leave the town by some means, and we must look out for him and capture him."

Song Jiang applauded this plot, and sent Dai Zong to Liangshan Marsh to bring two squadrons of cavalry.

Gao Lian had gathered a great deal of straw and grass to a vacant spot on the wall with the idea of burning this at night so as to guide the reenforcements should they arrive after dusk.

A few days afterwards the outposts reported to Gao Lian that the bandits were fighting against some troops. Gao Lian went to the observation post, and saw a large body of cavalry fighting against the brigands. Many bandits were on the grounds, and others were running away. Gao Lian considered that these were the reenforcements so he mustered his soldiers, had the city gates opened, and marched out his soldiers to attack the bandits. He saw Song Jiang, Hua Rong, and Qin Ming leaving the battlefield by a small side road. He advanced to pursue them but just then many gongs were sounded on a hill some distance away, and suspecting some trap he ordered a retreat. As he retreated he found that he was surrounded by brigands on his left and right who were closing in. He hastened his retreat, but about half of his men were cut off and taken prisoners. Looking towards the town he saw the brigands' flags flying there. He looked round for the supposed reinforcements, but could not see a single man. He, therefore, led his men towards a small hill to escape, but when near he saw a large body of brigands already there. He turned to try to find another way, but saw bandits on all sides. He dismounted his horse with the idea of going up the hillside on foot. He soon realized that he was being hemmed in again, and reciting a spell he caused a black cloud on which he mounted himself and ascended into the sky. Gongsun Sheng had however seen this, and uttering a spell he caused the cloud to descend bringing Gao Lian to the ground. There Gao Lian was attacked by Inspector Lei Heng who soon killed him. Upon receiving news of the death of Prefect Gao Lian, Song Jiang entered the town with his men, and issued an order that the people were not to be disturbed by his men nor anything looted. He then went to the city prison to release the prisoners, and found that all the jailers had left their posts and run away. He released about fifty prisoners without however finding any trace of Squire Chai Jin. In one cell, however, he found the family of Chai Jin's uncle, and then in another cell found all the family of Squire Chai Jin. As Gao Lian had very little spare time he had postponed cross-examining them until a later time. But Wu Yong had come across a turnkey in the prison who told him that some days ago before Prefect Gao Lian had given him the special duty of attending to the prisoner Squire Chai Jin, and had ordered him that in case of any disorder in the town he must kill Chai Jin at once. Three days before, Prefect Gao Lian had sent to the prison for Chai Jin to be executed. This turnkey thought Squire Chai Jin a fine type of man, and declined to carry out the order. But he sent a reply that Chai Jin had been killed. As he was afraid that further inquiry might be made he smuggled Squire Chai Jin out of the prison, and lowered him into a dry well. Upon hearing this Song Jiang went with the turnkey to the well. He looked down, but as it was quite dark he had no idea how deep it was. He called out, but got no reply. He then got a rope about 30 feet long and lowered it down the well. Again there was no result. Song Jiang considered that Squire Chai Jin was not there, and burst into tears. "Do not cry," said Wu Yong. "In order to make sure we must lower a man down the well."

Just then Li Kui came on the scene and offered to go down the well.

""As you have involved him in trouble," said Song Jiang, "you must make recompense for him."

"I will go down. I am not afraid," said Li Kui laughingly, "but don't cut the rope."

"That is a villainous thought," said Wu Yong. "Of course we shall not cut the rope."

A basket was obtained, and fastened to the end of the rope, a three-legged derrick was erected over the well with the rope running over the top. Li Kui got in the basket, and was slowly lowered down. Upon reaching the bottom Li Kui got out of the basket, and began to feel around in the dark. He felt some bones, and was rather upset by this. He however felt around, but found nothing. It was all mud and water. He again searched round and found a small hole in the side of the well, and there he felt a man. "Squire Chai Jin," he called out, but got no reply. He took hold of the man who was still breathing. "Thanks to Heaven and Earth, I have saved your life," said Li Kui. He took his seat in the basket; and rang a small bell that was fastened to the rope. The basket was pulled up, and upon reaching the top he explained that Squire Chai Jin had been found.

"Then you must go down again, and send Squire Chai Jin up first," said Song Jiang.

"When I went to Jizhou I was deceived twice, so that today I do not want to be fooled again," said Li Kui.

"We certainly will not fool you," said Song Jiang. "You quickly go down."

Li Kui went down again, placed Squire Chai Jin in the basket, and rang the bell on the rope. The basket was pulled up, and everybody was pleased to see Squire Chai Jin again. He was almost unconscious, had big wounds on his thigh and head. A doctor was sent for at once.

Li Kui thought they had forgotten him, and shouted loudly. Song Jiang hearing this, had the basket lowered and they soon brought Li Kui up in the basket. Upon getting to the top, Li Kui was angry. He said, "You people are bad! Why didn't you lower the basket for me at once?"

"We saw that Squire Chai Jin was very badly wounded, and for the moment forgot about you. Please excuse us," said Song Jiang.

A cart was obtained and Squire Chai Jin was laid down in it. Others were obtained for Chai Jin's relatives and altogether about twenty carts, set off for Liangshan Marsh. On the way the bandits did not trouble the people. Within a few days Squire Chai Jin recovered and was given quarters near Song Jiang's at Liangshan Marsh.

The victory of the bandits under Song Jiang was duly reported by the Prefects of Dongchang and Kouzhou to the minister at the Eastern Capital. Marshal Gao Qiu of the Imperial Guard learned that his cousin Prefect Gao Lian had been defeated and killed by the bandits. Early the next morning before dawn, he went to the palace to have an audience with the Emperor. There were many ministers and high officials also waiting for the audience. About half past 4 A.M. the Emperor appeared, and took his seat on the throne. An official called out, "Those who have business may now speak. If there is no business His Imperial Majesty will retire."

Gao Qiu stepped out of the ranks of the standing officials, and addressed the throne: "At Mount Liang Marsh in Jizhou, there's a strong company of bandits under Song Jiang and Chao Gai. They've ravaged the surrounding country, done great damage to the people, and their property. This is a vile state of affairs. If they aren't suppressed, I'm afraid the province will be in danger. I await Your Majesty's order." The Emperor was surprised at the news, and issued a decree that Gao Qiu use all the necessary military forces to suppress the bandits at once. Marshal Gao Qiu decided to send to Runing Prefecture in Henan province for a famous general named Huyan Zhuo to take charge of the expedition, and the Imperial edict was issued accordingly. Upon that man's arrival the Emperor presented him with a black horse. Gao Qiu and Huyan Zhuo then discussed details and the latter recommended 2 other generals to assist him.

Merit should be comprehended,
Virtue entered honors list.

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**Marshal Gao Raises a 3-Column Army Troop & finds himself 3 commanders; Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo Deploys his linked Armoured Cavalry**

"I've in mind a district garrison commander in Chenzhou, a man named Han Tao," said Huyan. "Originally he's from the Eastern Capital. He's passed the Second Degree Military Examination and wields a datewood lance eighteen feet long. Everyone calls him the Ever-Victorious General. He can lead the vanguard. The other man I want is a district garrison commander in Yingzhou. His name is Peng Qi, and he also hails from the Eastern Capital. His family have been military people for generations. He uses a three-pointed two-edged lance. His skill with weapons is extraordinary, and he's known as the Eyes of Heaven General. This man can be second in command."

Marshal Gao was very pleased. "With Han and Peng in the van, we need have no fears about those impudent bandits," he exclaimed.

He wrote out two summonses and directed the Chancellery of Imperial Defense to dispatch messengers from the Council of Military Affairs with them immediately to Chenzhou and Yingzhou to fetch Han and Peng. In less than ten days the garrison commanders arrived in the capital. They went directly to the chancellery and presented themselves to Gao and Huyan.

The next day Gao and his entourage went to the training ground and watched imperial troops practicing and drilling. Then Gao returned to the Chancellery and conferred with the Council of Military Affairs on important matters of military strategy.

He asked Huyan and Han and Peng: "How many men have the three of you together?"

"About five thousand cavalry," said Huyan. "Ten thousand, if you include the infantry."

"Go back to your respective cities and pick three thousand of your best cavalry and five thousand foot soldiers. Assemble, set forth, and clean out Liangshan Marsh."

"Our cavalry and infantry are crack troops," said Huyan. "Both men and horses are in fine fettle. Your Excellency need have no worry about them. But we're short of clothing and armor. We don't want to cause delay and inconvenience, but we must request more time to prepare."

"If that's the case, go to the capital armory and pick out as much as you need in the way of clothing, armor, helmets and weapons. I'll issue the order now. We want your forces well equipped so that they can cope with the enemy. The day you're ready to march I'll send officials to check you over."

Huyan took the order and went with some of his people to the armory. There he selected three thousand sets of steel armor, five thousand sets of horsehide armor, three thousand bronze and iron helmets, two thousand pikes, one thousand swords, countless bows and arrows, and over five hundred cannon, and loaded them all onto carts. The day the three men were leaving the capital Gao issued them three thousand battle chargers and all the grain their forces would require, and gave them personal gifts of gold and silver, silks and satins.

Huyan, Han Tao and Peng Qi submitted written guarantees of victory, and took their leave of Marshal Gao and officials from the Council of Military Affairs.

They mounted their horses and rode back to Runing. The journey was uneventful. When they arrived, Huyan directed Han Tao and Peng Qi to return to their respective cities, raise their armies and bring them to Runing.

In less than half a month the three columns were complete. Huyan issued the equipment he had drawn from the imperial armory—clothing, armor, helmets, swords, pikes and saddles. He also had chainmail made, plus various other items of military ware, and distributed these as well among the three columns.
They were ready to go. Gao sent two officials from his chancellery to review them. The officials handsomely rewarded the three commanders, and Huyan marched forth with his three columns. Han Tao led the van, Huyan commanded the main force in the middle, Peng Qi and his men brought up the rear. The three columns of infantry and cavalry were a splendid sight as they hastened grimly towards Liangshan Marsh.

To the mountain stronghold came a far-posted scout with a report of the approaching troops. Chao Gai and Song Jiang, together with Military Advisor Wu Yong, magic expert Gongsun Sheng, and the various other chieftains had been feasting daily in celebration with Chai Jin. When they heard that Two Rods Huyan Zhuo of Runing was leading an army of infantry and cavalry to attack, they conferred on strategy.
"I've heard of him," said Wu Yong. "He's a direct descendant of Huyan Zan, the general from Hedong who helped establish the dynasty. His skill with weapons is superb. When he wields those two steel rods of his no one can come near him. We must use our most competent and courageous officers. To capture him we'll have to apply first force and second guile."
Before the words were out of his mouth, Black Whirlwind Li Kui spoke up. "I'll nab the wretch for you!"
"You'd never do it," said Song Jiang. "I have a plan of my own. We'll ask Qin Ming the Thunderbolt to fight the first bout, Panther Head Lin Chong the second, Hua Rong the third, Ten Feet of Steel the fourth, and Sickly General Sun Li the fifth. These bouts must come one right after the next, like the spokes of a spinning wheel. I myself will head ten brothers who will command our main divisions. On the left will be Zhu Tong, Lei Heng, Mu Hong, Huang Xin and Lu Fang. On the right will be Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, Ou Peng, Ma Lin and Guo Sheng. Our water approaches will be defended by boats under the command of Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers. Li Kui and Yang Lin will lead two columns of infantry and lie in ambush as reinforcements."
Shortly thereafter, Qin Ming went down the mountain with a unit of men and horses. They set up a battle position on a broad plain.
Although it was already winter, the weather was pleasantly warm. The next day, they saw in the distance the approaching government troops. The van, led by Ever-Victorious General Han Tao, made camp and built surrounding palisades. There was no fighting that night.
The two armies faced each other at dawn the following day. Horns blared, and the thunder of drums shook the heavens. On Song Jiang's side Qin Ming the Thunderbolt rode forth from the arch of pennants, his wolf-toothed mace athwart his mount. On the opposite side at the arch of pennants appeared Han Tao, leader of the van. Holding his lance crosswise, he gave his horse rein and shouted at his foe.
"We heavenly hosts have arrived! But instead of surrendering, you dare to resist! You're asking to die! I'll fill in your Marsh and pulverise your Mount Liangshan! I'll capture you rebellious bandits, take you to the capital, and have you smashed to bits!"
Qin Ming was a hot tempered man. Without a word, he clapped his steed, and rode straight at Han Tao, flourishing his mace. Han Tao kicked up his horse, levelled his lance, and galloped to meet him. They fought over twenty rounds, and Han Tao began to weaken. He turned to go. From behind him came Huyan Zhuo, commander of the main contingent. He saw that Han Tao was being bested, and he charged forth on the snowy-hoofed black steed the emperor had given him, roaring and waving his steel rods.
Qin Ming recognized him, and prepared to do battle. But Lin Chong the Panther Head cantered up, calling: "Rest a while, commander. Let me go three hundred rounds with this fellow, then we'll see."
Lin Chong levelled his serpent-decorated lance and charged Huyan. Qin Ming wheeled his mount to the left and rode out of sight behind a bend. The new adversaries were evenly matched. The lance and rods interwove in flowery patterns for more than fifty rounds, but neither man could vanquish the other.
Hua Rong appeared for the third bout. At the entrance to the field of combat he called: "Rest a while, General Lin. Watch me capture the lout."
Panther Head turned his horse and departed. Huyan had seen enough of his high-powered use of weapons. He let him go and returned to his own position, while Lin Chong disappeared around a bend with his men. Huyan was already among his rear column when Hua Rong emerged with lance at the level. Peng Qi the Eyes of Heaven General, astride a glossy brown piebald that could run a thousand //in a day, rode towards Hua Rong. Holding crosswise his three-pointed, two edged, four-holed, eight-ringed weapon, Peng shouted: "Traitorous robber! You're devoid of all morality! Let's fight this one to a finish!"
Hua Rong was furious. Without a word, he clashed with Peng Qi.
More than twenty rounds they battled. Huyan could see that Peng was weakening. He gave his horse rein and engaged Hua Rong.
Before they had fought three rounds, the girl warrior Ten Feet of Steel rode out for the fourth round. "Rest a while, General Hua," she cried. "Watch me take this oaf!"
Hua Rong led his contingent off to the right and departed round a bend. Even before the battle between Peng Qi and Ten Feet of Steel approached a decisive stage, Sun Li the Sickly General, who would fight the fifth bout, had already arrived. He had reined his horse at the edge of the field of combat and was watching the two contestants.
They fought in a cloud of dust with murderous intensity, one with a long-handled sabre, the other with a pair of swords. For over twenty rounds they battled. Then the girl separated her blades and rode off. Peng Qi, eager for glory, gave chase. Ten Feet of Steel hung her swords on the pommel of her saddle. From inside her robe she pulled out a red lariat bearing twenty-four gold hooks. She let Peng Qi draw near, then suddenly twisted around and flung the rope. The noose landed squarely on him before he could ward it off, and he was dragged from his horse. Sun Li yelled a command, and his men rushed forward and grabbed the fallen rider.
Huyan, enraged, galloped to the rescue. Ten Feet of Steel clapped her steed and met him. The seething Huyan would have swallowed her down in one gulp, if he could. They battled more than ten rounds, Huyan increasingly frantic because he couldn't defeat the girl.
"What a spitfire," he fretted. "After all this fighting, she's still so tough!"
Impatiently, he feinted and let her close in, then raised his steel rods and started to bring them down. The swords were still in their resting place when the rod in Huyan's right hand was only a hair away from the girl's forehead. But Ten Feet of Steel was clear of eye and swift of hand. A sword sprang into her right fist, flew up and warded off the blow with a clang of metal and a shower of sparks.
The girl galloped back towards her own position. Huyan raced in pursuit. Sun Li promptly levelled his lance, intercepted Huyan and engaged him in fierce combat. Song Jiang moved up with his ten divisions and deployed them in battle formation. Ten Feet of Steel and her contingent, meanwhile, had ridden away down the slope.
Song Jiang was very pleased that Peng Qi the Eyes of Heaven General had been taken. He rode to the front to watch Sun Li and Huyan do battle. Sun Li sheathed his lance and went at Huyan with the steel rod ribbed like bamboo, which had been hanging from his wrist. Now, both were wielding rods of steel. Even their style of dress was similar. Sun Li wore a five cornered iron helmet bound in place by a red silk band around his forehead, a white-flowered black silk robe flecked with jade green, and darkly gleaming gold embossed armor. He rode a black stallion, and wielded a bamboo-shaped steel rod with dragon's eyes. Truly, a bolder picture than Yuchi Gong, that hero of old.
As to Huyan Zhuo, he wore a high pointed five-cornered helmet bound round the forehead by gold-flecked yellow silk, a black robe with sequins of seven stars, and darkly gleaming armor of over-lapping leaf. He rode the snowy-hoofed black stallion given him by the emperor, and wielded two octagonal steel rods polished bright as water. The one in his left hand weighed twelve catties, the one in his right thirteen. He indeed resembled his ancestor Huyan Zan.
Left and right over the field of combat they fought for more than thirty rounds, with neither man the victor.
When Han Tao saw Peng Qi captured, he quickly gathered the rear column and led them forward in a headlong rush. Song Jiang, afraid that they would break through, pointed his whip, and his ten commanders moved their divisions up to meet them, the last two spreading out in an enveloping pincers. Huyan hurriedly wheeled his columns around and each engaged their adversaries.
Why didn't the Liangshan warriors win total victory? Because of Huyan's "Armored Cavalry." Both horses and men wore chainmail. The battle steeds were draped to their hoofs, the soldiers protected to the eyes. Although Song Jiang's animals were equipped with some cover, this consisted mainly of red-tasseled net masks, copper bells, and plumes. The arrows sped by his archers were easily deflected by the chainmail. And all three thousand of Huyan's cavalry were armed with bows. They spewed flights of arrows which discouraged the men of Liangshan from coming any closer.
Song Jiang hastily had the horns sound the call to withdraw. Huyan also pulled his forces back twenty //i where they made camp.
The Song Jiang army encamped west of the mountain and settled their horses. At Song Jiang's command, his swordsmen hustled Peng Qi forward. Shouting for them to fall back, Song Jiang rose and untied his captive's bonds, then escorted him into the headquarters tent. He seated Peng Qi as a guest and kowtowed. Peng Qi at once returned the courtesy.
"I am your prisoner. By rights I should be killed. Why are you treating me with such courtesy, General?"
"Most of us are hunted men who have taken temporary shelter in the Marsh. The imperial court has sent you, General, here to arrest us. The proper thing for me would be to submit and be bound. But I fear for my life. And so I've criminally clashed with you. I beg your forgiveness for my presumptuousness."
"I have long known of your fraternal devotion and righteousness, of your aid to the endangered and your succor to the needy. But I never expected such chivalry! If you will spare my miserable life, I will serve you with every breath in my body!"
That day Song Jiang had the Eyes of Heaven General Peng Qi escorted to the mountain fortress to be introduced to Chao Gai and given refuge there. After rewarding his three armies, he conferred with his commanders on the military situation.

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Meanwhile, Huyan Zhuo discussed with Han Tao how to vanquish Liangshan Marsh.
"Today, those louts moved forward in a quick covering action when they saw us coming at them," said Han Tao. "Tomorrow, we ought to hit them with our entire cavalry. That way, a big victory will be guaranteed."
"Exactly what I had in mind. I just wanted to make sure you agreed."
Huyan then ordered that all three thousand of the cavalry be stretched out in a single line, divided into troops of thirty, and that all the horses in each troop be connected together by chains. On nearing the foe, the men were to use arrows at a distance and their lances when they got close, and drive relentlessly ahead. The three thousand armored cavalry would become one hundred platoons, each locked in solid formation. Five thousand infantry would follow as support.
"Don't challenge them in person, tomorrow," Huyan admonished Han Tao. "You and I will stay behind with the reinforcements. When the fighting starts, we'll rush them from three sides."
It was decided they would go into action the next day at dawn. The following day Song Jiang set five troops of cavalry to the fore, backed by the ten divisions, with two contingents to left and right lying in ambush.
Qin Ming rode forth and challenged Huyan. But the imperial troops only shouted, and no one appeared. The five Liangshan cavalry units spread out in a line. Qin Ming was in the center, Lin Chong and Ten Feet of Steel were on the left, Hua Rong and Sun Li were on the right. The ten divisions under Song Jiang stood to the rear, a dense mass of men and horses. About a thousand imperial foot soldiers were arrayed opposite. Although they beat their drums and yelled, not a single man rode out to joust. Song Jiang grew suspicious. He quietly gave the order for his rear forces to withdraw, then rode up to Hua Rong's contingent to look.
Suddenly, a volley of cannon fire erupted from the opposite side. The thousand imperial foot soldiers separated into two sections and platoons of linked cavalry poured through in an enveloping three-sided phalanx. Arrows winged from both flanks. The middle bristled with long lances.
Startled, Song Jiang ordered his archers to reply. But how could they withstand this assault? Every animal in the thirty-horse platoons galloped together, unable to hold back even if it wanted to. From all over the hills and plains the linked cavalry charged.
Song Jiang's forward five cavalry units were thrown into a panic. They couldn't stem the tide. The rear divisions, also unable to make a stand, broke and ran. Song Jiang raced away on his horse, guarded by his ten commanders.
A platoon of imperial linked cavalry closed in after them. Li Kui, Yang Lin and their men rose out of their ambush in the reeds and drove them off. Song Jiang fled to the water's edge. Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers were waiting with war boats. Song Jiang hurriedly boarded one of craft and ordered them to rescue the chieftains and get them into the boats, quickly.
A platoon of linked cavalry rode right up to the river and showered the craft with arrows, but shields blocked the arrows and no one was hurt.
The boats were rowed hastily to Duck's Bill Shore, where everyone disembarked. In the fort there a count was made. They had lost more than half their effectives. Fortunately all of the chieftains had been saved, although several of their mounts had been killed.
Shortly thereafter, Shi Yong, Shi Qian, Sun Xin and Gu Dasao arrived. "The imperial infantry swarmed all over us," they reported. "They levelled our inns and houses. If our boats hadn't rescued us, we would have been captured."
Song Jiang consoled them and took stock of his commanders. Six had arrow wounds—Lin Chong, Lei Heng, Li Kui, Shi Xiu, Sun Xin and Huang Xin. Innumerable lesser chieftains had also been struck by arrows or otherwise wounded.
When Chao Gai learned of this, he came down the mountain with Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng. They found Song Jiang frowning and depressed.
"Don't fret, brother," Wu Yong said soothingly. "Both victory and defeat are common fare for the soldier. Why worry? We'll work out a good plan to deal with that linked cavalry."
Chao Gai ordered the naval forces to strengthen the shore stockades, repair the boats, and guard the beaches day and night. He urged Song Jiang to return to the mountain stronghold and rest. But Song insisted on remaining at the fort on Duck's Bill Shore. He agreed only that the wounded commanders should go up and recuperate.

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Huyan Zhuo went back to camp after his tremendous victory and had the linked horses unchained. Warriors came forward, one by one, to claim their commendations. They had slain countless numbers of the foe. More than five hundred prisoners had been taken, and over three hundred battle chargers. Huyan sent a messenger to the capital to report the glad tidings, and he richly rewarded his three columns.
Marshal Gao was holding court in his chancellery when word came from the gatehouse: "Huyan Zhuo has won a victory in his campaign against Liangshan Marsh. A messenger has brought the news."
The marshal was so delighted that he went to the imperial court early the next morning and, without waiting his turn, relayed the information. Extremely pleased, the emperor presented him with ten bottles of vintage wine bearing the imperial yellow seal, and a fine brocaded robe. He directed that an official deliver one hundred thousand strings of cash to Huyan's army. Bearing the imperial order, Gao returned to his chancellery and dispatched an official with the money.
On learning that an imperial emissary was coming, Huyan and Han Tao went twenty //to meet him. They brought him to the camp, accepted the emperor's reward with thanks, and served wine and entertained the emissary. He suggested that the rewards be distributed among the troops at once. He said he would wait until they had captured the brigand leaders, and then he would take them, in addition to the five hundred prisoners already rounded up, to the capital, where they would be paraded through the streets and punished.
"I don't see Peng Qi around," the emissary noted.
"In his eagerness to take Song Jiang, he plunged deep into enemy terrain and was captured," Huyan explained. "Those villains won't dare attack again, but we're going after them. We must eradicate their mountain fortress, sweep clean the marsh, capture the brigands and destroy their lair. Unfortunately, they're surrounded by water, and there are no roads leading in. We can see their forts in the distance, but the only way we can hit them is with long-range cannon. I have heard that in the Eastern Capital there's a cannon expert named Ling Zhen. He's known as Heaven-Shaking Thunder. He makes pieces with a range of fourteen to fifteen //i. When his stone cannon balls land, the earth and sky quake, mountains tumble and cliffs split asunder. If we can get him, we'll smash the bandits' lair. Ling Zhen is also very skilled with weapons. His archery and horsemanship are splendid. I wish you'd go back to the capital and speak to the marshal about this. Ask him to rush Ling Zhen out here, and we'll take the brigands' stronghold."
The emissary agreed, and set out the next day. Nothing happened on the road. On reaching the capital he went to see Gao and told him that Huyan requested cannoneer Ling Zhen so that he could perform a great deed. Gao issued a summons for Ling Zhen, who was assistant custodian of the imperial armory. Ling's ancestral home was in Yanling. In the Song Dynasty, he was the best cannoneer in the country, which was why he was known as Heaven-Shaking Thunder. Moreover, he was an excellent fighter with all kinds of weapons.
Ling Zhen reported to Marshal Gao, who commissioned him a commander of the army in the field and instructed him to ready his horse and arms and depart. Ling gathered the powder and explosives he needed, plus various types of cannon, stone balls and mountings, and loaded them on carts. Taking his armor, helmet, sabre and luggage, he left the Eastern Capital with thirty or forty soldiers and headed for Liangshan Marsh.
When he reached the camp he called first on Huyan, the commanding general, then on the leader of the van Han Tao. He inquired about the roads and paths distant and near the brigands' shore fort and the state of the cliffs guarding their mountain stronghold. Ling Zhen prepared three types of cannon—Fireball, Golden Wheel, and Mother and Sons. He had his soldiers assemble the mountings, brought his guns to the river bank, and primed them for action.
Song Jiang, in the Duck's Bill Shore fort, conferred with Wu Yong on how to achieve a break-through on the battlefield. But they could not think of anything.
A spy entered and reported: "The Eastern Capital has sent a cannoneer, Ling Zhen, Heaven-Shaking Thunder. He's set up guns near the river and he's getting ready to bombard our forts."
"It doesn't matter," said Wu Yong. "Our mountain stronghold is surrounded by a marsh which is full of creeks and ponds. It's a long way from the river. Even if he has guns that can reach the sky, he'll never hit it. We'll just abandon this fort on Duck's Bill Shore and let him shoot. Then we'll talk some more."
Song Jiang left the fort and returned to the mountain stronghold. Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng escorted him to Fraternity Hall.
"How are we going to crack the enemy?" they asked.
Almost before the words were out of their mouths, they heard the boom of artillery at the foot of the mountain. Three cannon balls were fired. Two landed in the river. A third scored a direct hit on the Duck's Bill Shore fort.
Song Jiang watched glumly. The other leaders blanched.
"If Ling Zhen could be inveigled to the river we could nab him," said Wu Yong. "Then we could discuss what to do about the enemy."
"We'll send Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers in charge of six boats. Zhu Tong and Lei Heng will be on the opposite shore," said Chao Gai. And he told what each would do.
The six naval leaders received their orders and divided into two units. Li Jun and Zhang Heng took forty or fifty good swimmers in two fast craft and slipped across through the reeds. Backing them were Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers with another forty or so men in a fleet of small boats. On reaching the shore, Li Jun and Zhang Heng and their men, shouting and yelling, charged up to the cannon mountings and knocked them over.
Soldiers hurriedly reported this to Ling Zhen, who at once took two Fireball cannon and his lance, mounted his horse, and hastened to the scene with a thousand soldiers. Only then did Li Jun and Zhang Heng and their men leave. Ling Zhen chased them as far as the reedy shore, where a line of forty small craft, manned by a hundred or more sailors, were moored.
Li and Zhang went aboard, but didn't cast off. When Ling Zhen and his force came in sight, everyone on the boats shouted and jumped into the water.
Ling Zhen's men seized the boats. Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, on the opposite shore, began yelling and pounding drums. Ling Zhen ordered his soldiers to board the craft and go across and get them.
When the boats reached the middle of the river, Zhu Tong and Lei Heng struck a gong loudly. Forty or fifty swimmers rose from beneath the waves and pulled the plugs from sterns. Water flooded the craft. Strong hands capsized many of the boats, dumping the soldiers into the river.
Ling Zhen made haste to go back, but his craft's rudder had already been removed under water. Two of the chieftains clambered aboard. With one quick rock, they turned it bottom up. Ling Zhen landed in the water. He was grabbed by Ruan the Second from below and dragged ashore. There, other chieftains who were waiting had him bound and taken up the mountain.
Over two hundred soldiers were captured. More than half of the remainder had been drowned. The few who escaped with their lives reported to Huyan Zhuo. He hastily mustered his forces and galloped to the rescue. But the boats had already crossed to Duck's Bill Shore. It was too far for arrows. Besides, the raiders were gone.
All Huyan's fuming was to no avail. He could only return to his camp, seething with rage.

When word reached the stronghold that Heaven-Shaking Thunder Ling Zhen had been captured, Song Jiang and all the leaders went down to the second gate to meet him. Song Jiang personally untied his bonds.

"I told you to invite the commander courteously to call at our fortress," he said to his men reprovingly. "How could you behave so rudely?"
Ling Zhen kowtowed and thanked the leaders for not killing him. Song Jiang poured him a libation cup. Then, he took Ling Zhen by the hand and led him up to the fortress. Ling Zhen saw that Peng Qi had been made one of the chieftains. The cannoneer sealed his lips and said not a word. Peng Qi offered him some advice.
"Leaders Chao Gai and Song Jiang act righteously for Heaven, receiving bold fellows from all over. They are waiting only for an amnesty and acceptance into the emperor's forces so that they may serve the country. Since you and I are here, we should take their orders."
Song Jiang added a few courteous apologetic phrases.
"I can remain easily enough," said Ling Zhen. "My only concern is that my wife and mother are still in the Eastern Capital. When it's known about me, they're sure to be put to death. What can I do?"
"Rest easy in your mind," said Song Jiang. "In a few days we'll bring them here."
Ling Zhen thanked him. "You are too considerate. When I die I'll be able to close my eyes."
"Let a feast be laid in celebration," Chao Gai directed.
The next day there was a meeting of the leaders in Fraternity Hall. As they drank, Song Jiang discussed with them the problem of the linked cavalry. No one could think of how to cope with it. Finally, Gold-Coin Spotted Leopard Tang Long rose to his feet. "Though I have no talent, I'd like to suggest a plan," he said. "But we need a certain weapon and a cousin of mine."
"What kind of weapon and who's this cousin?" asked Wu Yong. Calmly, Tang Long clasped his hands together, stepped forward, and replied. And truly, from the capital of jade and gold, a man fabulous as a unicorn and bold as a lion was lured to captivity.

Now when Marshal Gao asked Twin Rods: "Who is it that you recommend for leading the attack?" the latter replied: "The man I refer to is district commander in Chenzhou. His name is Han Tao. He was originally from the Eastern Capital. He has passed the second grade military examinations. His weapon is a spear of jujube wood. They call him Victorious because he wins so often. He is just the man to lead the main attack. Another is the district commander of Yingzhou. He is called Peng Qi and hails from the Eastern Capital too. His family have been soldiers for generations. His weapon is a double-edged blade with three prongs. His martial skill is so outstanding they call him the Supremo. He can be second in the attack."
Marshal Gao was well satisfied with what he heard. "With these two leading the attack, we can forget about those brigands," he said. He immediately signed two orders prepared by the Chancellery and had the Council send messengers to ride post-haste to Victorious and the Supremo and order them to report with all speed to the capital. Within a short space of time the two commanders had arrived. They went straight to the Chancellery where they met Marshal Gao and Twin Rods. Next day Marshal Gao took them all to the imperial parade ground where they practised manoeuvres. After reviewing the troops, they returned to the Chancellery and met with members of the Council to discuss important military matters.
Marshal Gao asked: "How many troops do you have altogether, in your three armies?"
Twin Rods replied: "About five thousand cavalry, and if you include the foot soldiers perhaps as many as ten thousand."
Marshal Gao said: "I want all three of you to go back to your districts and choose another three thousand spirited cavalry and five thousand foot soldiers. Then you can start on your mission to destroy the bandits of the Marshes of Mount Liang."
Twin Rods said: "Our three armies of cavalry and foot are all hardened troops, tough soldiers and well-trained horses, you can have absolute confidence in us. But I am afraid we still lack some clothing and armour. I don't want to miss the deadline and fail to carry out our mission on time. Would you consider giving us a few weeks' grace?"
Marshal Gao said: "If that's your problem, you can go to the imperial armoury and choose whatever you like of clothing, armour, helmets and swords, no matter how much. I'll make out a requisition. It is essential that the troops should be fully equipped, in order to cope with the enemy. When you are ready to leave I will personally send someone to inspect you."
So Twin Rods took the order and went with the others to the imperial armoury to get the equipment. He took out three thousand suits of armour, five thousand sets of good leather guards for the horses, three thousand brass helmets, two thousand long spears, a thousand swords, an unspecified number of bows and arrows and more than five hundred iron cannon-balls. These were all loaded onto carts. Shortly before they were due to leave, Marshal Gao himself presented them with three thousand war-horses. Each of the three leaders was handsomely rewarded with silver and silk and their armies were fully provisioned. All three handed in written guarantees of victory, bade farewell to Marshal Gao and the other members of the Council, mounted their horses and rode off in the direction of Runing. Nothing worthy of note occurred on the journey.
Arriving back at his base, Twin Rods ordered the other two to return to their districts, muster their troops, and march back with them. In less than a fortnight the three armies were ready. Twin Rods now divided among them the items received from the government: clothing, armour, helmets, swords, banners, spears and saddles, and also some chain-mail that he had had made and some other items of weaponry. Now all that was needed was the order to march. Marshal Gao sent two officers from the Chancellery to inspect them. A bounty was distributed among the troops, and then Twin Rods marched them out of the city. Here's how it was:
*The riders are wearing iron armour, their mounts are fitted with brass bells. Streaming banners fill the sky with colour, gleaming swords flash white for miles around. The curved bows are painted with magpies, sheaves shaped like flying fish are full of arrows. Eagle feathers decorate the panniers; lion-mouthed pots are tied on securely with leopard's tail thongs. Helmets deep enough to guard the nape and fringed with pearls leave only the eyes visible; the heavy armour of the horses, decked with tassels, exposes nothing but their legs. Those who will pioneer the route carry big axes, behind them come the fighting men with long spears. A thousand armoured cavalry leave the city. The three commanders are advancing on the Marshes.*
They marched out of the city in formation, Victorious with the vanguard, Twin Rods leading the central force and the Supremo bringing up the rear. The three armies of cavalry and foot raced towards the Marshes of Mount Liang.
Advance scouts from Mount Liang returned to the stronghold and reported the event.
Chao Gai and Song Jiang, the military adviser Professor Wu Yong, his deputy the magician Taoist Gongsun and the rest were all in the Assembly Hall, occupied with day-long celebrations of Chai Jin's arrival, when they received the report: "Marshal Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo from Runing is approaching with an army to attack us."
Together they debated how to meet this attack. The Professor said: "I know of this character. He is a relation, a direct descendant in fact, of the famous general Huyan Zan, who made a name for himself at the founding of the dynasty. He's an experienced and valiant fighter. With his preferred weapon, the two rods, no one can get near him. We need a bold and resolute commander. We must first oppose him with force and then capture him by guile."
Before he'd finished speaking, Iron Ox said: "I'll go and capture the bastard for you."
Song Jiang said: "Who asked you to go? I've already got it worked out: we will ask Thunderclap to lead the first party, Leopard's Head Lin Chong the second, Colonel Hua the third, Steelbright the fourth, and Colonel Sun the fifth. These first five forces will attack in rotation, each moving subsequently to the rear. I myself with ten comrades and a large body of troops will follow in support. On my left I will have five commanders: Whiskers, Sergeant Lei, Mu the Unstoppable, the Tamer, and the Little Duke. On my right will be Morbid, Madcap, Golden Wings, the Flautist, and the Halberdier. We will ask the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel and the three Ruan brothers to reinforce us by water in boats. Finally, Iron Ox and Panther will conceal themselves with two separate forces in reserve."
When Song Jiang had completed these dispositions, Thunderclap led the first force down the mountain to take up their position on a flat area of wasteland. Although it was winter the weather happened to be pleasantly warm. Nothing happened for a day, but then the government army was seen approaching. The advance guard led by Victorious encamped and built a palisade. They made no attempt to engage the enemy that evening.
At dawn the next day a roll of drums sounded three times from both camps and the troops formed up. Thunderclap now appeared on horseback resting his wolf's-tooth mace, riding out from the opening in the ranks which was marked by a gate of pennants. Victorious, leader of the advance guard with his long lance, reined in his horse and began to insult Thunderclap in ringing tones: "The imperial army is here. If you don't surrender quickly and still dare to resist, you'll really be asking for it! I am going to flatten your place in the bogs, I shall smash your Mount Liang to pieces and take you all alive, you rebel scum! I shall take you back to the capital to be cut into a thousand pieces!"
Now Thunderclap was not a patient man. He said no word in answer to all this but simply slapped his horse, whirled his mace and charged at Victorious. The latter likewise levelled his lance and galloped at Thunderclap. The two fought twenty bouts or more, till Victorious began to flag and tried to break off. By now Twin Rods and the main force had come up from behind and, seeing Victorious was in difficulties with Thunderclap, he galloped forward whirling his two rods. He was riding the horse the Emperor had given him, the snowy-footed raven-hued steed. Ranting and raving he rode out in front of his troops. But just as Thunderclap was about to attack him, the second contingent from Mount Liang arrived, led by Leopard's Head, who cried out to Thunderclap: "Time to take a break, General Qin, while I fight a few hundred bouts. I can manage this one!" Leopard's Head raised his halberd and charged Twin Rods. Thunderclap pulled his troops back from the left flank and withdrew up the slope to look on while Twin Rods fought with Leopard's Head. They were a perfect match. Halberd clashed prettily with rod, and rod elegantly parried halberd. They fought as many as fifty bouts and neither had the advantage.
Now the third detachment from Mount Liang arrived, under Colonel Hua, who shouted out under the gates: "Take a rest, Major Lin, and let me capture the bastard for you."
Leopard's Head withdrew his troops. Having seen the military prowess of Leopard's Head, Twin Rods also returned to his ranks. Leopard's Head wheeled his troops about and withdrew up the mountain, making way for Colonel Hua, who charged forward with levelled lance. By now the government rearguard had come up to relieve Twin Rods.
The Supremo, wielding his double-edged blade with three prongs, which also had four holes and eight rings, and mounted on his hundred-league bay charger rode forward out of the ranks and challenged Colonel Hua: "You miserable renegade! You're not fit for anything! Now you're going to feel the strength of my arm!"
Colonel Hua was too angry to reply. He merely urged his horse forward to encounter the Supremo. They fought more than twenty bouts. Twin Rods saw that the Supremo's strength was beginning to fail, so he gave his horse its head, whirled his rods and charged Colonel Hua. Before they had had three bouts the fourth Mount Liang detachment arrived, led by the woman warrior Steelbright. She shouted: "Time for you to take a rest, Colonel Hua! I'm going to get that bastard!"
Colonel Hua pulled his troops out to the right and withdrew to the mountain slopes. But before the Supremo had time to engage Steelbright, the fifth Mount Liang detachment under Colonel Sun arrived. Colonel Sun reined in his horse and lined up his troops to watch the contest between Steelbright and the Supremo. The two of them had disappeared in a baleful cloud of dust. One fought with a blade on a long pole, the other with two swords. When they had fought more than twenty bouts, Steelbright put up her two swords, turned her horse and rode away. The Supremo, thinking to snatch glory, galloped in pursuit. Steelbright now hung the two swords on her saddlebow and from beneath her robe took out a red cotton lasso with twenty four metal hooks attached to it. She waited until the Supremo had almost caught her up, then turned in the saddle and let fly with the lasso. Her aim was perfect and before the Supremo could even raise his arm he was dragged from his horse. Colonel Sun ordered his troops forward immediately to take the Supremo captive.
Twin Rods was livid. He rode furiously to the rescue. Slapping her horse Steelbright rode to meet him. Twin Rods was prepared to eat her alive. But after twenty bouts he still wasn't able to get the better of her. He said to himself: "This bloody amazon has stood up to me for I don't know how many bouts. She is really something!" Increasingly desperate, he resorted to a trick: he allowed her to come in and then tried to hammer down on her with the two rods. Her two swords were still inactive as the rod in his right hand began to descend towards the crown of her head. But so sharp of eye was she and quick of hand that in a flash she was parrying with the swords. Her right hand went flying upwards, so that the rod came crashing down only to meet the blade of the sword with a great clang, sparks flying in all directions.
Steelbright turned her horse and galloped back to her own side. Twin Rods galloped in pursuit. Colonel Sun levelled his lance, urged on his horse and charged towards him. Behind him Song Jiang and his ten picked leaders had arrived and were deploying their forces. Steelbright retired with her troops to the mountain slope. Song Jiang was delighted when he heard they had captured the Supremo and he came to the front to watch the combat between Colonel Sun and Twin Rods.
Colonel Sun with his lance and with the jointed steel rod hanging from his wrist, galloped to encounter Twin Rods. They both fought with the rods, a form of combat at which both were equally skilled. Colonel Sun wore a cross-barred helmet, a scarlet silk headcloth, and a black robe studded with jade green decorations. His gilt armour had a blackish sheen to it and the horse he rode was a piebald. Wielding his "tiger's eye" rods, jointed like bamboo, he outshone the heroes of olden days.
Twin Rods had a great spiked helmet, a golden headcloth and a black robe studded with the seven stars. He had a black armoured vest and rode his famous black charger with white socks. He wielded his two octagonal rods of especially hardened steel. The one in his left hand weighed twelve catties and the one in his right hand thirteen. He was the very image of his famous ancestor. The two of them traded blows there in front of the armies. They fought more than thirty bouts and there was nothing to choose between them. Song Jiang could not stop applauding.

*Each on a piebald strong as a dragon,*
*Twin Rods versus Colonel Sun;*
*The skill of each is truly a marvel, they'll*
*Kill each other before they're done!*

Among the government forces, Victorious now heard that the Supremo had been defeated. He mustered his troops, who were bringing up the rear, and charged forward. Song Jiang, to prevent his breaking through, pointed with his whip and the ten leaders, with a mixed body of men, quickly deployed in defence. The four detachments behind formed into two halves and mounted a pincer movement. When he saw this, Twin Rods hastily wheeled his forces round so they could face the attack on both sides.
Why could the Mount Liang forces not win this battle outright? Well the force commanded by Twin Rods consisted of what is called "linked cavalry." The horses bore leather armour and the men wore chain-mail. The horses' armour left only their hooves showing, while the men's chain-mail allowed only their eyes to be seen. Although Song Jiang did have some armoured cavalry they were equipped with no more than red-tasseled masks and brass bells and pheasants' feathers and the like. There was no way this could give them protection against arrows. Twin Rods' three thousand cavalry were all equipped with bows and loosed off arrows, so their adversaries dared not close with them. Song Jiang hurriedly gave the signal to withdraw. Twin Rods likewise retreated some six or seven miles and pitched camp.
Song Jiang marshalled his troops and retired to the western slopes of the mountain where they halted and made camp. At his orders, his bodyguards brought in the Supremo, clustering closely around him. Song Jiang immediately stood up and ordered them back. After untying the bonds himself he led the Supremo into his tent and gave him the guest's seat. Then he prostrated himself. The Supremo hastily returned the compliment, saying: "I am a prisoner. I should expect to die. Why, sir, do you treat me like an honoured guest?"
Song Jiang said: "It is only because we have nowhere else to shelter that we have temporarily occupied the marshes. We are forced to take refuge there for a while, the times being so evil. The Emperor has sent you to arrest us. By rights we should surrender to you, but that would be to give away our lives. We are guilty of opposing you and have caused you much offence. I entreat you to forgive us."
The Supremo replied: "I have long known of your loyalty and humanity, how you help those who are in danger and relieve those in distress, but this is generosity beyond all expectation. If you should choose to spare my worthless life, then in recompense I must devote myself entirely to your service."
Song Jiang said: "We all confidently await the Emperor's pardon. We hope for an amnesty which will allow us to offer our services to the country, in defence of which we will not flinch from ten thousand deaths." As the poem says:

*Because such greedy officials abound,*
*These loyal brothers go to ground.*
*If they weren't all loyal and lovers of right,*
*Why would the hundred and eight unite?*

The same day Song Jiang had the Supremo taken up to the stronghold and presented to Chao Gai. He stayed there in the camp. The three armies and all the leaders were rewarded and the military situation was discussed.
As for Twin Rods, he withdrew to the camp and conferred with Victorious as to how they could overcome the forces of Mount Liang. Victorious said: "Did you see when we pushed forward today how eager those bastards were to attack us? Tomorrow we must attack with massed cavalry and we can be sure of victory."
Twin Rods said: "That's what I was going to do. I just wanted to make sure we are in agreement."
Accordingly he gave the order. "Tell the three thousand cavalry to form up in ranks of thirty, linked together with iron rings. When they encounter the enemy they are to set up long range fire with arrows; when they close they must charge with spears. Divide the three thousand armoured cavalry into a hundred linked units. The five thousand infantry will follow in support. Tomorrow there must be no retreating. You and I will clean up behind. If we are attacked we will take up a three-sided formation and charge."
So the plan was made and the next day they marched out at dawn to do battle.
Song Jiang next day organized his cavalry with five divisions in front, ten commanders bunched together behind them and two concealed divisions, left and right. Thunderclap was first in the field. But when he challenged Twin Rods, the only response from the opposing army was a loud cheer. They did not offer to engage. The five leading divisions now spread out in a straight line. Thunderclap was in the centre, Leopard's Head and Steelbright on the left and Colonel Hua and then Colonel Sun on the right. Soon Song Jiang arrived with the other ten, in tightly massed ranks of cavalry. Opposing them they could see around a thousand infantry, beating drums and shouting, but not a single cavalryman rode out to do battle. Song Jiang was greatly troubled by what he saw. Quietly he gave the order: "Tell our rearguard to withdraw." Then he rode over to Colonel Hua's position to observe from there. Suddenly a series of reports were heard from the enemy front ranks. The ranks of the infantry immediately parted and out rode the linked cavalry in a three-sided formation. They advanced, volleying arrows from the two sides and with levelled lances in the centre. Desperately Song Jiang ordered his troops to fire back. But they could offer no serious resistance. All the horses in the linked units of thirty had to gallop forward together; there was no chance for anyone to hold back.
The linked cavalry filled the whole field of battle. And still they came charging on. Song Jiang's five leading divisions were thrown into utter confusion and could not stick to their plan. The large group of cavalry behind them could not make a stand and all ran for their lives. Song Jiang galloped off, surrounded by his ten commanders. A unit of linked cavalry was hard on his heels, when the troops hidden in the reedbeds — led by Iron Ox and Panther — charged out to the rescue. Song Jiang's forces retreated as far as the water, where the six water leaders — the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel, and the Ruan brothers — were waiting. Six war boats were drawn up ready. Song Jiang hurriedly embarked and ordered each captain to go under his own steam to rescue the other leaders and get them on board. Having continued the pursuit up to the water's edge, the linked cavalry set up a barrage of arrows. But the boats were protected by shields, so these caused no casualties.
The boats were now hurriedly rowed across to Duck's-Bill Landing, where everyone disembarked. In the waterside camp the troops were counted. There had been heavy losses, but fortunately all the leaders were safe. Although some had had their horses killed, they had escaped themselves.
In a little while the Guv, the Flea, Blackface and Auntie Gu all came racing up the mountain and said: "Their infantry are attacking now. They've practically demolished the inn. But for the signal boat we would have been captured."
Song Jiang comforted each of them. When they checked all the leaders it was found that six of them had been wounded by arrows: Leopard's Head, Sergeant Lei, Iron Ox, Madcap, Blackface and the Tamer. Of the men, countless numbers had received arrow wounds. When Chao Gai heard, he came down the mountain with the Professor and Taoist Gongsun to find out more. Song Jiang's brows were knit in an unremitting frown, his expression deeply gloomy. The Professor did his best to reassure him: "No point in grieving, brother. Victory and defeat are part and parcel of the soldier's trade. What's the good of moaning? We've got to think of a new plan to overcome the linked cavalry."
Chao Gai now issued the following order: "The water-borne troops are to strengthen their defences and secure their boats, defend the landing place and keep watch day and night. Song Jiang is to go up the mountain to rest."
But Song Jiang refused to go. He remained in the camp at Duck's-Bill Landing, and instead ordered the wounded leaders to be taken up the mountain to recuperate.
Twin Rods, after his great victory, returned to camp. The linked cavalry were disconnected and came forward in turn to ask for their reward. Countless numbers of the enemy had been killed, more than five hundred taken alive, more than three hundred war-horses seized. Accordingly Twin Rods sent someone to the capital to report the victory, whilst he distributed rewards to the three armies.
Marshal Gao was presiding in his chancellery when it was reported: "General Huyan has had a great victory over the forces of Mount Liang. He has sent someone with the report." Gao was delighted with the news. Next day at dawn he hurried off to tell the Emperor, without even waiting his turn. The Emperor was exceedingly well-pleased. He graciously bestowed on Gao ten bottles of yellow seal imperial wine and a fine embroidered robe. He also ordered an official to carry a hundred thousand strings of cash to the army camp to divide among the troops. Marshal Gao returned to the chancellery with the imperial edict and duly dispatched someone with the reward.
When Twin Rods heard that an envoy from the Emperor was on the way, he and Victorious rode out several miles to meet him. When they had brought him back to the camp and expressed thanks for the great favours received, they entertained him with wine. Victorious was told to distribute the money among the troops, and the five hundred captives were ordered to be brought, so their heads could be cut off and sent to the capital, as evidence of what had been achieved.

The emissary inquired: "How did you come to lose Colonel Peng?"
Twin Rods said: "He was so eager to capture Song Jiang that he attacked deep behind the enemy lines and got taken himself. But those bandits won't dare show themselves again. I shall press home the attack however. It is essential to clear out the mountain stronghold and sweep the marshes clean. We're going to capture the whole lot of them and wipe out the nest of vipers. The problem is there's water on every side of them and no access by road. You can view their defences from a distance but the only way to get rid of them is to bombard them with cannon and smash that thieves' den to pieces. I have heard that in the capital there is a famous gunner called Ling Zhen, also known as Thunderer, from the sound of his guns. He's an expert with cannon, and can throw a shell fifteen miles or more. Wherever his shells fall they cause huge devastation. If we can get him, we'll pound their stronghold. He's even an expert in martial arts, and can handle a bow or a horse brilliantly. When Your Excellency returns to the capital, please acquaint the Marshal with this matter and ask if this man can be sent to us as a matter of urgency, so we can capture the thieves' den within the time-limit."
The emissary agreed to start next day. Nothing worth telling occurred on the journey. Back in the capital he went to see Marshal Gao and told him about Twin Rods' request for the master gunner Ling Zhen and about the contribution he was to make. Marshal Gao immediately issued an order instructing the master gunner Ling Zhen to report to him.
This Ling Zhen was in fact a native of Yanling. He was the top gunner of the Song Dynasty. People called him Thunderer. In addition he was an expert in martial arts.

*City walls crumble when he opens fire;*
*Ghosts, gods grieve as the smoke mounts higher.*
*His explosions set the heavens aflame.*
*Four hundred provinces know his name.*

When Thunderer reported to Marshal Gao, he received his commission, with orders to requisition horses and all necessary equipment and get going. So he got together the necessary guns and ammunition, with explosives of every kind. The cannon-balls and guns were loaded onto carts. He equipped himself with suitable clothing and armour, a helmet and a sword. Then with all his luggage and equipment and with thirty or forty troops he left the capital and took the road to Mount Liang. On arrival he went first to see Twin Rods, then he saw Victorious, leader of the vanguard. He found out all he could about the camp in the marshes, distances and routes, and the inaccessible parts of the mountain stronghold. He chose three kinds of missile for the bombardment. The first were wind shells, the second gold wheel shells and the third shrapnel shells. First he had the soldiers secure the guns to their carriages. These were set up on the water's edge and prepared for firing.
Now in the smaller camp at Duck's-Bill Landing, Song Jiang and the Professor had been discussing how to regain the initiative, but they could find no workable plan. Then a scout reported: "They've sent a master gunner from the capital. He's called Ling Zhen or Thunderer. He's been setting up his guns at the edge of the water. They're preparing to bombard us and break down our defences."
"That's not too serious," said the Professor. "We're surrounded by water, there are many channels and the Place of Many Meanderings is set back from the water a long way. So even if they had cannon that would shoot down the sky, they'd hardly be able to hit us. Let us evacuate the little camp at Duck's-Bill Landing, and wait and see what they can manage with their guns. After that we'll make up our minds what to do."
Song Jiang gave the order to evacuate the little camp at once. Everyone moved up the mountain. Chao Gai and Taoist Gongsun received them in the Assembly Hall. "But what's your plan for defeating the enemy?" they asked.
The question was scarcely out before an explosion was heard down below. Three guns had been fired in rapid succession. Two of the shots fell in the water, but one hit the camp at Duck's-Bill Landing, spreading gloom in Song Jiang's heart and causing the others to turn pale.
The Professor said: "If someone could tempt Thunderer down to the water's edge, we could capture him. Then we'd be able to work out how to defeat the enemy."
Chao Gai said: "Then let the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel and the Ruan brothers row over and put this plan into action, supported by Whiskers and Sergeant Lei on land."
When the six boat captains had received their orders they formed into two parties. The White-Water Dragon and the Pilot went first, with some fifty troops who were good swimmers in two fast boats. Stealthily the boats glided out from the reeds, and behind them a second group led by White Eel and the Ruan brothers with forty or more small boats. When the White-Water Dragon and the Pilot reached the other shore they charged at the guns with wild shouts and overturned them.
The gunners immediately reported this to Thunderer. Thunderer got two cannon with wind shells, loaded them onto horses and raced to the scene with a thousand troops. The White-Water Dragon and the Pilot then withdrew with their men. Thunderer pursued them as far as the reedbeds on the edge of the water, where he found forty or more small boats drawn up in a straight line, manned by several hundred sailors. White-Water Dragon and the Pilot had already escaped to their boats, but these boats had deliberately not rowed away. When they saw the enemy the crews gave a great cheer and all dived into the water. As Thunderer's troops were about to attack the boats, Whiskers, Sergeant Lei and their troops began shouting and beating drums on the opposite bank. Thunderer seized a lot of the boats and ordered all his men to board them and attack the enemy on the other side. When the boats were right out in the middle of the water, Whiskers and Sergeant Lei on the other bank beat gongs, and fifty sailors rose from the depths and grabbing the boats by the stern pulled out the bungs, so that the water rushed in. They then capsized them, flinging all the troops into the water. Thunderer tried desperately to turn back but his boat's rudder had been torn off and sent to the bottom. The two leaders now surfaced on either side of his boat and tilting it suddenly hurled him out. Ruan the second was waiting for him underwater. He embraced him and dragged him out onto the other bank, where the leaders were ready to receive him. They trussed him up securely and carried him off to the mountain. Two hundred enemy troops were plucked alive from the water, about half the force drowned, and only a few escaped with their lives and returned to base.

*Why did they let those crews get away?*
*Why not use their guns like they ought to?*
*Of their thunderous barrage we've nothing to say.*
*More lethal are storms in a few feet of water.*

When Twin Rods heard what had happened, he rushed there with his troops. But the boats had all disappeared into Duck's-Bill Landing. It was too far for arrows to carry, and anyway there was no one to be seen. He had to swallow his anger. He stood there fuming for a long time, but in the end had to withdraw.
The leaders took Thunderer up the mountain, sending someone on ahead to report to Song Jiang. Song Jiang and the other leaders went down as far as the second gate to receive them. When he saw Thunderer, Song Jiang hurriedly loosed his bonds with his own hands and blamed everyone, saying: "I told you to invite the commander politely to come and see us, why have you treated him in such an unmannerly fashion?"
Thunderer prostrated himself in gratitude for their sparing his life. Having given him a cup of wine, Song Jiang took him by the hand and invited him up the mountain. When they reached the main stronghold and he saw that the Supremo had become one of the outlaws' leaders, Thunderer was rendered speechless.
The Supremo reassured him: "Chao Gai and Song Jiang are obedient to heaven's will. They welcome good men here and strive for the nation's peace. Since we are here it behoves us to obey them."
Song Jiang also reassured him and he replied: "I would have no objection to staying and serving you. But my mother and wife are still in the capital, if people there get wind of this, I am afraid they will be executed. So what am I to do?"
Song Jiang said: "There's nothing to worry about. In a few days' time we will send you back."
Thunderer thanked him and said: "Such is your kindness, I shall die content."
Chao Gai said: "This calls for a celebration."
Next day a grand assembly of all the leaders was held in the hall. While they ate and drank, Song Jiang and the other leaders discussed how to defeat the linked cavalry. They were getting nowhere, when Spots stood up and said: "I have no qualifications to speak, but I would like to propose a solution. The linked cavalry can only be broken by a weapon which a good friend of mine possesses."
"What's this weapon you say we could use, my friend?" the Professor asked. "And who's this good friend of yours?" Spots explained, taking his time and with his hands crossed respectfully in front of him. And the answer to these questions was to have important consequences: several leaders will make the journey to the capital, and more than three thousand cavalry will meet an evil genius. Truly, there was to be:

*A plan to steal the Unicorn from the jade city;*
*A plot to grab the fabled beast in the golden palace.*

"WHOM do you recommend as the commander for the vanguard?" asked Marshall Gao Qiu.
Huyan Zhuo replied, "I have confidence in Colonel Han Tao at Chenzhou. He is a Shandong man and is skilled in all military strategy. His nickname is 'Ever Victorious General.' Another fine man is Colonel Peng Qi at Yingzhou. He comes from Kaifeng and all his ancestors have been military men. He is also skilled in strategy and has the nickname of 'Heavenly Eyes General.'"
Marshall Gao Qiu was much pleased at this, and immediately had dispatches prepared for those two Colonels to come to the capital at once. Within a few days they duly arrived and had interviews with Gao Qiu and Huyan Zhuo, and were promoted to their new posts. They discussed plans for the coming campaign against Liangshan Marsh. They had altogether five thousand cavalry, and five thousand infantry. Gao Qiu ordered that three thousand cavalry and five thousand infantry be sent to the front at once.
Huyan Zhuo, however requested several days' postponement of the start of the expedition as the troops were not well equipped.
Gao Qiu gave them permission to draw freely from the Imperial stores at the capital for whatever armor, etc. were required. They must make all arrangements, and when they were ready to leave for the front he would dispatch a staff officer to inspect the troops, and report direct to himself.
Huyan Zhuo visited the ammunition depots, and dispatched large quantities of war materials including five hundred rockets. Before their departure Gao Qiu gave them three thousand more battle steeds, and also many presents in silver and gold.
The General and his two Colonels then distributed their supplies of equipment, and had everything ready and within half a month their troops were assembled at Runing Prefecture. Two staff officers arrived from the Capital to inspect and encourage the troops. After a general parade the armies were mobilized towards Liangshan Marsh.
The bandit scouts duly reported the arrival of the troops, and a council of war was held by the leader of Liangshan Marsh.
"I have heard of the great fame of this General Huyan Zhuo," said Wu Yong,"this is a man not to be slighted. We must employ our bravest men in the first battle and afterwards we can try strategy."
Li Kui here interposed, "I will go to capture that fellow."
"How can you go?" said Song Jiang. "I have a plan. We must fight the battle with five detachments in turn; first, General Qin Ming; second, Lin Chong; third, Hua Rong; fourth, Hu San Niang; fifth, Sun Li. They must follow each other in that rotation so that each will have a rest between bouts." He then announced how he himself and other ten leaders would be divided into three parts. He then gave orders where the bandits should proceed to and await the attack.
On the following day the enemy came in view, but they had not all taken up their position before it was evening. Early the next morning the drums were beaten, and both armies were on parade. General Qin Ming rode forward with his heavy mace. General Huyan Zhuo spoke, "This is the Imperial army, and you had better surrender at once. If you refuse to do so then your body will be hacked up into thousand pieces. I am going to wipe out the nest of bandits here. Many will be killed, and all the rest will be captured and sent as prisoners to the Capital."
General Qin Ming took no notice of this, but advanced waving his mace. Colonel Han Tao accepted the challenge, and rode out to meet Qin Ming. They fought for some time without any result, and then Han Tao retired.
The next combatants were General Huyan Zhuo and Lin Chong. After about fifty bouts these two retired.
Then came Hua Rong who fought about twenty bouts with Colonel Peng Qi.
These were followed by Hu San Niang who fought against Colonel Peng Qi for about twenty bouts and then she retired. Peng Qi thought that he had won so he pursued her. She, however, only put aside her sword, and now took a long red rope with numerous hooks. She waited until Peng Qi was quite close, and then suddenly turning in her saddle she cast the rope, caught Peng Qi, and pulled him off his horse. Sun Li was quite close, and he galloped forward with a few men and took Peng Qi captive.
General Huyan Zhuo was very angry at this trick, and rushed forward to engage Hu San Niang himself. But after ten bouts he found that he could not overcome her. He decided to beat her by a trick. He waited until she rushed at him, and met her with an iron whip in each hand, and used both at the same moment. She parried both blows with her swords—the swords met the whips with a loud crash, throwing off sparks—and she rode away unhurt. He pursued her on horseback, but was intercepted by Sun Li who fought with him. These two fought for about thirty bouts. Han Tao now gave orders for a general advance, and upon seeing this movement Song Jiang issued similar orders to his men. The troops of General Huyan Zhuo were all well protected by armor, and the only exposed spots were their eyes. The bandits now shot arrows, but did no damage on the enemy because of the armor. But when the two thousand archers of General Huyan Zhuo discharged their arrows they took effect on the bandits who had not the armor. Song Jiang seeing the position ordered a general retreat. Upon reaching their camp they stopped, and Song Jiang sent for the prisoner Peng Qi. Upon reaching his tent Song Jiang himself unbound the ropes on the prisoner, and invited him to sit down.
"I am your prisoner," replied Colonel Peng Qi, "and am quite ready for death. But why are you treating me like this?"
"As we have no safe place to live in," replied Song Jiang, "we have to take our position at Liangshan Marsh for the time being. When the Emperor sent you here to capture us, we would have surrendered if we were not afraid that we should all be killed. Therefore we are forced to fight against you. It is quite unintentional that we oppose your power, and we must plead for your mercy."
"For a long time I have heard of your love for justice and benevolence," replied Peng Qi, "and that you are always assisting those in distress. Now I know as a fact that your chivalry is real. If you now spare my life I shall be extremely grateful to you."
That day Song Jiang sent Peng Qi to Chao Gai at Liangshan Marsh where he was to be quartered, but treated well.
Upon General Huyan Zhuo reaching the camp he discussed with Han Tao what steps should be taken to defeat the bandits.
"Today," said Colonel Han Tao, "the brigands felt the effect of our advancing army so they retreated. Tomorrow we must pursue them, with all our cavalry and defeat them completely."
General Huyan Zhuo agreed that that must be done. He accordingly issued orders that the following day three thousand cavalry must be linked up in small rings of thirty each. They were to wait until the bandits were close, and then rush forward with spears. These 100 squadrons of cavalry should be supported by five thousand infantry. There would be no single combats, and the General and Colonel Han Tao would take up their position in the rear instead of in front of the army.
The following day Song Jiang arranged his men in five companies in front in charge of ten leaders. On either side was a company in ambush. Qin Ming again rode in advance to challenge the opponent, but no one came out to meet him. Song Jiang was suspicious, and ordered his rearguard to withdraw a little. He then rode to the front to see what happened. All at once a series of rockets was fired in the opposing army, and the infantry in front opened out into two divisions, and the cavalry dashed forth. The infantry on both sides discharged a shower of arrows. Song Jiang signaled for his men also to use their bows and arrows. But this could not resist the opposing troops which still advanced nearer. Now the bandits could not sustain the severe attack, and were soon thrown into confusion. They gave way all along the line, and were soon scattered about. Li Kui and Yang Lin, now led forth the men in ambush and attacked the opposing troops. Song Jiang and a number of men embarked on boats which were waiting in the creeks. When the troops reached the banks they found that their arrows had no effect on these boats which had boards at the sides to protect the men behind. The boats withdrew to a spot where the men disembarked on the opposite bank, but there were not many men there. Of the leaders six had been wounded, and among the men there were a great many casualties. Just then Chao Gai and Wu Yong arrived on the scene, having heard of the disastrous defeat. Song Jiang was very depressed and Wu Yong spoke to him, "Elder brother, do not be sad. In fighting victory or defeat is inevitable. Do not worry too much. We must think of some plan to defeat our enemy." Chao Gai issued orders for the boats to be ready to meet another attack by the opposing troops. He asked Song Jiang to retire to the mountain stronghold, and take rest there. Song Jiang however refused to go, but insisted that the leaders who had been wounded should go there.
General Huyan Zhuo was highly pleased with the victory, and rewarded his men liberally. They had captured about five hundred men and three hundred horses. The matter was duly reported to the capital by special messenger. Marshal Gao Qiu was much pleased to hear of the defeat of the bandits. He duly reported the victory to the Emperor who was pleased and ordered presents and money and wine to be sent to General Huyan Zhuo.
General Huyan Zhuo received the Imperial Edict, and distributed the reward among his men. He promised a further attack on the bandits whom he intended to completely exterminate. He, however, asked the imperial messenger to send a man from the capital, named Ling Zhen, who was expert in making explosives, and could attack a place five //distant. With that man's assistance he could easily crush the bandits. The messenger agreed to take this message, and duly delivered the same to Marshal Gao Qiu, who at once sent for Ling Zhen who was a Yan Ling man, and was the leading expert in ammunition at that time. His nickname was "Roaring Thunder." Marshal Gao Qiu gave him the new appointment, and dispatched him immediately to General Huyan Zhuo. Ling Zhen loaded many carts with ammunition, and taking about forty men he set out for Liangshan Marsh. He duly reported his arrival to General Huyan Zhuo, and discussed the military situation. He had brought three kinds of ordnance: (1) for incendiary bombs; (2) quick-firing explosives; and (3) for shrapnel bombs. Frameworks were erected on the banks of the lake, and the guns placed in position.
Song Jiang and Wu Yong were now discussing the situation, but could not decide on any plan for the defense of their stronghold. A scout, however, reported that "Roaring Thunder" Ling Zhen had arrived from the capital, and was placing guns in position all round the lake.
"That does not matter," said Wu Yong, "because we are surrounded by water, and the banks in places are a good distance away. However many guns they have, the shots will not reach our stronghold. We can abandon the camp at the foot of our hill, and watch how they will attack us."
Song Jiang accordingly issued an order that all men must withdraw to the main stronghold on the mountain.
Chao Gai and Gongsun Sheng, however, asked how they were going to meet the expected attack. While they were talking, they heard the roar of the guns. They saw two of the shots fall in the lake, but the third shot exploded in the camp at the foot of the mountain. Many of the leaders were upset by this new mode of attack.
Wu Yong said, "It would be a good plan if somebody would go and inveigle Ling Zhen to the bank. Once we have captured him we can then easily defeat the enemy."
"We must appoint Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun, and the three brothers Ruan to go by boat, and do this decoy work," said Chao Gai. "Two other leaders Zhu Tong and Lei Heng can assist them on the bank."
These leaders agreed to go, and divided themselves into two parties. One party embarked on two boats with about forty men on each boat, and went into the tall reeds. Li Jun and Zhang Heng on their boat got close to the gun carriage and overturned it. Ling Zhen upon hearing of this led about a thousand soldiers to the spot. Li Jun and Zhang Heng with about a hundred bandits seeing the troops coming retreated along the bank leaving their boats behind. When the soldiers were near, the bandits all dived into the water, and seeing this Ling Zhen ordered his men to embark on the abandoned boats, and cross the lake to attack the bandits. On the other bank were Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, who watching the position sounded their gongs and drums, and upon hearing this the bandits in the water turned, and took off the rudders of the boats so that they could not be steered, and the water also began to leak into the boats. The men in the water now seizing the gunwale of the boats, capsized them. Ling Zhen seeing the position ordered the boat to retire, but just then his boat was also held by the bandits and overturned. Ling Zhen himself was thrown into the water. Ruan, the Second, was in the water, and he seized hold of Ling Zhen and swam with him to the other bank. There Ling Zhen was bound with ropes, and taken to the mountain stronghold as a prisoner. Altogether about two hundred men were taken as prisoners; five hundred were drowned; and three hundred managed to escape back to their base. When General Huyan Zhuo heard of the disaster he rushed many troops to the spot, but all the boats had reached the other bank. He was very much annoyed at this defeat, but led his men back to camp.
Upon receiving the report of the capture of "Roaring Thunder," Ling Zhen, Song Jiang went down the mountain. Upon meeting the prisoner Song Jiang himself took off the binding ropes, and said to the escort, "I told you to invite this General and conduct him to our stronghold. Why have you no decency and treat him like this?"
Ling Zhen saluted, and thanked Song Jiang for his mercy. Song Jiang sent for a beaker of wine, and offered it to the prisoner. When the latter had drunk the wine Song Jiang conducted the prisoner up the mountain road. Upon reaching the stronghold Ling Zhen saw Peng Qi acting as a leader of the brigands, and could not say a single word.
"The two leaders here, Song Jiang and Chao Gai," said Peng Qi, "are agents sent from Heaven. They have collected heroes from all parts, and are now waiting for the Imperial Edict to exempt them from punishment, when they will be quite ready to devote themselves to the service of the country. As I am here I now obey the orders of the leaders."

Song Jiang courteously apologized to Ling Zhen, and invited him to join them.
"It makes no difference to me," said Ling Zhen, "that I stay here but my wife and family will be in danger when it is known that I have joined you."
"Don't worry about that," said Song Jiang; "I will arrange to have them all brought here for safety."
Ling Zhen expressed his thanks and said, "If you help me in that way, I'll die with a peaceful heart."
Chao Gai invited Ling Zhen to a feast. At the feast, there was a general discussion as to future military operations, and Tang Long said, "I've a proposal to make: *a plan to seize a monster, complete in all its detail*."

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## The Professor Wu Yong Sends the Flea Shi Qian to Steal some Armour & he Steals; Spots Tang Long inveigles & Lures the Spearsman Xu Ning up the Mountain

"My ancestors have always been armorers," Tang Long said to the chieftains. "Because of this skill my father was raised by Border Area Governor Old General Zhong to be head of the Yanan garrison. The linked cavalry method won victories for the previous emperor. The only way you can beat it is with barbed lances. I have a drawing of such a lance, passed down to me by my family, which can serve as a likeness. I can make one for you, but I don't know how to use it. Only my cousin, a drill instructor, knows. The art has been handed down from generation to generation. They never teach it to any outsider. My cousin can ply the lance ahorse or on foot. When he goes into action, he's like nothing human."
"You don't mean Xu Ning, Drill Instructor of the Metal Lancers?" Lin Chong interrupted.
"The very man."
"I'd forgotten until you mentioned him. His skill with metal and barbed lances is indeed unique. We met many times when I was in the capital and tested our military arts against one another. We developed a deep mutual respect and affection. But how can you get him to come up here?"
"Xu Ning has a matchless ancestral treasure. It protects his family from evil spirits. I often saw it when I went with my father to visit Xu Ning's mother in the Eastern Capital. It's a suit of goose-feather armor hooped in metal. Known as 'lion's fur,' it's light and snug-fitting, and no blade or arrow can pierce it. Many high officials have begged to see it, but Xu Ning always refuses. He cherishes it like his life. He keeps it in a leather box which he hangs on the central beam of his bedroom. If we can get hold of that armor, he'll have to come whether he wants to or not."
"No problem at all," said Wu Yong. "We'll ask our talented brother Shi Qian, Flea on a Drum, to attend to it."
"If it's there, I'll get it, by hook or crook," Shi Qian avowed.
"Do that, and I guarantee to bring Xu Ning up the mountain," said Tang Long.
"How?" Song Jiang demanded.
Tang Long leaned close and whispered in his ear. Song Jiang laughed. "Very shrewd."
"You'll need three men to go with you to the Eastern Capital," Wu Yong said. "One to buy the gunpowder and other ingredients for the cannons, and two to fetch Commander Ling Zhen's family."
Peng Qi rose and said: "If someone could go to Yingzhou and fetch my family as well, I would consider it a blessing."
"Have no fears, Commander," said Song Jiang. "Write notes, both of you, please. I'll have people see to it." And he directed: "Yang Lin, take some money and the letter, and go with men to Yingzhou and bring Commander Peng Qi's family. Xue Yong go to the Eastern Capital in the guise of a medicine pedlar who gives exhibitions of weapons skill and fetch the family of Commander Ling Zhen. Li Yun dress as a merchant and buy the gunpowder and other ingredients. Yue Ho and Tang Long accompany Xue Yong."
After Shi Qian went off down the mountain, Song Jiang had Tang Long make a sample barbed lance, under the supervision of Lei Heng who came from a family of blacksmiths. Once this was done, he directed the stronghold's armorers, with Lei Heng in charge, to copy the model in large numbers. Of this we'll say no more.
A send-off feast was laid for Yang Lin, Xue Yong, Li Yun, Yue Ho and Tang Long, and they went down the mountain. The next day Dai Zong also departed to inquire carefully into the situation. It would be hard to tell all the details in a few words.
Shi Qian concealed on his person certain tools and implements as he left Liangshan Marsh. He followed a winding road until he reached the capital. He spent the night at an inn and the next day quietly entered the city. He inquired where he might find Drill Instructor Xu Ning.
"Go through the gate of the battalion compound," a man instructed, pointing. "He lives in the fifth house. It has a black gate in the corner of the wall."
Flea on a Drum entered the compound and looked first at Xu Ning's front gate, then walked around and examined the rear. The house and courtyard were enclosed in a high wall, but he could see a cute two-storey building, and beside it a tall decorated pole. He studied the layout a while, then called at the house of a neighbor.
"Do you know whether Drill Instructor Xu is at home?"
"He doesn't get back till evening. He leaves again at the fifth watch for guard duty in the palace."
Shi Qian thanked the man politely and returned to the inn. He got his tools and hid them on his person.
"I'm going out and probably won't be back tonight," he said to the attendant. "Look after the things in my room."
"No need to worry. This is the imperial city. We don't have any thieves around here," the attendant replied.
Shi Qian went into the city, had some dinner, then quietly approached the home of Xu Ning in the compound of the Metal Lancers Battalion. He looked around but couldn't find any suitable place to hide. Night was falling, and he took up a position inside the compound gateway. Soon it was dark. There was no moon in the winter sky.
He noted a big poplar behind an Earth God Temple. He shinnied up, sat astride a limb, and watched silently. Xu Ning returned and went into his house. Two people with lanterns closed and locked the compound gate, then went back to their homes. In a drum tower the beat of the first watch sounded. Through the chill overcast the stars appeared lustreless. Dew turned to frost. All was still.
Shi Qian slid down from his tree, stole to Xu Ning's rear gate, and effortlessly scaled the courtyard wall. He crossed a small garden to the kitchen and peered in. Two serving girls were still cleaning up in the light of a lamp. Up the decorative pole he went, and over to the upcurved eave of a corner of the roof. Lying in this concealment, he looked into the window of the upper storey. Xu Ning and his wife were seated beside a stove. The woman held a child of six or seven in her arms.
It was their bedroom. Sure enough, there was a big leather box tied to the beam. Near the door hung a bow and arrows and a dagger. On a clothes rack were garments of various colors.
"Plum Fragrance," Xu Ning called, "fold these clothes for me."
One of the serving girls came up the stairs. On a long sideboard table she folded a purple embroidered robe, an official tunic with a green lining trimmed at the bottom by multi-hued embroidered flounces, a colored silk neckerchief, a red and green belt sash, and several handkerchiefs. These, plus a yellow kerchief packet containing a golden sash decorated with a lichee design and from which two otter tails dangled, were all wrapped in a cloth and placed to warm on a fender above the stove. Shi Qian's eyes didn't miss a thing.
Some time after the second watch Xu Ning went to bed.
"Are you on duty tomorrow?" the wife asked.
"The emperor is going to the Auspicious Dragon Hall. I must get up early and go at the fifth watch to attend him."
The wife said to Plum Fragrance: "Your master is on guard duty tomorrow at the fifth watch. You girls get up at the fourth, heat water and prepare something to eat."
"Obviously, that leather box on the beam has the armor in it," thought Shi Qian. "It would be best if I could take it during the night. But I must do it without alarming them, or tomorrow I'll never get out of the city, and that would ruin our whole operation. I'll wait till the fifth watch. There'll be time enough."
When both husband and wife were in bed, the two serving girls lay down on pallets outside the bedroom door. A night lamp had been lit upon the table. Soon the four were asleep. The girls had worked hard all day, and were exhausted. They snored lustily.
Flea on a Drum crept over, produced a long hollow reed, poked it through a hole in the window, and puffed. The lamp went out.
Around the fourth watch Xu Ning rose and called to the girls to fetch hot water. Awakening, they noticed that the lamp was extinguished.
"*Aiya!*" they exclaimed. "You've got no light."
"Go to the back and get another one. What are you waiting for?"
Plum Fragrance and the other girl opened the door at the head of the stairs and went down. As soon as he heard the stairs creak, Flea on a Drum slid down the pole and hid in the darkness beside the rear door. The girls opened this, came out and went to open the gate in the courtyard wall. Shi Qian darted into the kitchen and hid under the table. Plum Fragrance returned with a lighted lamp, closed the door and started the stove. The other girl went upstairs with a burning charcoal brazier. Before long, the water was boiling, and Plum Fragrance took that up, too.
Xu Ning washed, rinsed his mouth, and called for some heated wine. The girls laid out meat and buns. When Xu Ning finished, he instructed them to feed his orderly who was waiting outside. Shi Qian heard him descend the stairs and tell his orderly to eat. Then Xu Ning shouldered his pack, took his metal lance and came out. The girls lit a lantern and saw him to the gate.
Flea on a Drum emerged from beneath the table, mounted the stairs, climbed the lattice wall to the beam and crouched upon it. After closing the house door, the girls blew out the lantern, came up the stairs, undressed, and threw themselves down on their pallets.
When he was sure they were asleep, Shi Qian on the beam extended his long reed and again puffed out the lamp. Softly, he untied the leather box. He was about to come down when the wife, hearing a noise, awakened.
"What's that sound up on the beam?" she called to Plum Fragrance.
Shi Qian promptly squeaked like a rat.
"Can't you hear, mistress?" said the girl. "Those are rats, fighting."
Shi Qian emitted a series of squeaks like a whole battle, slipped down, stealthily opened the door at the head of the stairs, agilely swung the box to his back, went down the stairs, opened the house door, and stepped out. The various guards were departing, and the battalion compound gate was open, it having been unlocked at the fourth watch. He mingled with the crowd and left swiftly, not stopping until he reached his inn outside the city.
It was still not yet light. He knocked on the door and went to his room to get his luggage. He tied this and the box to a carrying pole, paid his bill, left the inn and headed east. Only after covering more than forty *li* did he stop at an eating house and make himself some food.
Suddenly a man came in. Shi Qian looked up. It was none other than Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller. Dai observed that Shi Qian had got what he had gone for. The two conversed in low tones.
"I'll take the armor to our mountain fortress," Dai Zong said. "You follow slowly with Tang Long."
Shi Qian opened the leather box, took out the metal-bound goose feather armor and wrapped it in a bundle, which Dai Zong tied to his body. The Marvellous Traveller left the inn, performed his magic rites, and sped off to Liangshan Marsh.
Shi Qian tied the empty leather box openly to one end of his carrying pole. He finished eating, paid the bill, shouldered the pole, and set out. When he had gone about twenty *li* he met Tang Long. They went into a tavern to confer.
"I want you to follow me along this road," Tang Long said. "Whenever you see a tavern, eating house or inn with a white chalk circle on the door you can go in and buy meat and wine. At those inns you can rest. Put the leather box where everyone can see it. Wait for me one stage from here."
Tang Long slowly drank his wine, then proceeded to the Eastern Capital.

In Xu Ning's house, the two serving girls rose at daybreak. They observed that not only was the door at the head of the stairs open, but the inner door and house door below as well. They made a hasty check. Nothing seemed to be missing. They went upstairs and reported to their mistress.
"We can't understand it. All the doors are open, but nothing is gone."
"At the fifth watch, I heard a noise on the beam. You said it was rats, fighting. Better take a look and see whether that leather box is all right."
The girls did so, and screamed. "It's disappeared!"
Hurriedly, the wife got out of bed. "Ask someone to go to the Auspicious Dragon Hall at once and notify the master. Tell him to come home as soon as possible."
Plum Fragrance and her companion hastily sent three or four men, one after another, with the message, but all returned with the same reply: "The Metal Lancers have accompanied the emperor to the Inner Palace Gardens. The Gardens are surrounded by his personal guard. Nobody can get in. You'll just have to wait for Xu Ning to come home."
The wife and girls were like ants on a hot griddle. But there was nothing they could do. They fluttered about anxiously, unable to eat or drink.
Only at dusk did Xu Ning remove his official robe. He gave it to his orderly. Carrying his metal lance, Xu slowly returned. At the gateway of the battalion compound, a neighbor spoke to him.
"Your house has been robbed! Your wife has been waiting for you all day!"
Startled, Xu Ning hurried home. The serving girls met him at the door.
"The thief must have slipped in when you left at the fifth watch," they said. "All he took was that leather box on the beam."
Cries of anguish burst through Xu Ning's lips from the depths of his vitals.
"Who knows when that thief crept into our room," exclaimed his wife.
"Anything else wouldn't have mattered," said Xu Ning. "But that goose feather armor has been a family heirloom for four generations! It's never been lost. Marshal Wang the dilettante offered me thirty thousand strings of cash, but I hadn't the heart to sell it. I thought I might need it in battle again. Because I was afraid that something might happen to it, I tied it on the beam. Many people asked to see it, but I said it was gone. If I raise a hue and cry about it, they'll surely laugh at me. Now it really is gone. What can I do?"
That night he couldn't sleep. "Who could have stolen it?" he wondered. "It must have been someone who knew I had the armor."
His wife thought a while and said: "The thief must have already been in the house when the lamp went out. Someone who became enamored of it and tried to buy it from you probably sent a high-class housebreaker to steal it when you wouldn't sell. Get people to ask around quietly and find out where it is. Then we'll decide what to do. Don't 'disturb the grass and alert the snake.' "
Xu Ning listened in silence. He rose the next morning at dawn and sat brooding in the house.
At breakfast time, there was a knock at the courtyard gate. The orderly went to see who it was. He returned and announced: "Tang Long, son of the head of the Yanan garrison, is calling to pay his respects."
Xu Ning directed that he be invited in. On seeing Xu Ning, Tang Long kowtowed.
"I trust all has been well with you, cousin," he said.
"I heard my uncle had returned to Heaven," Xu Ning replied. "I was tied down by official duties and your home is far away, so I never went to offer my condolences. I haven't had any news of you, either, cousin. Where have you been? What brings you here?"
"It's a long story. I've had bad luck since my father died, and wandered to many places. Today, I've come directly from Shandong to the capital to see you."
"Cousin, stay a while," said Xu Ning. He ordered that wine and food be brought for his guest.
Tang Long took from his pack two, long thin gold bars like scallion leaves, weighing twenty ounces, and presented them to Xu Ning.
"Before he died, my father asked me to give you these as a remembrance. There wasn't anybody I could trust to deliver them, so I've come today to hand them to you myself."
"How very kind of uncle to think of me. I've done absolutely nothing to show my esteem. I'll never be able to express my gratitude."
"Don't talk like that, cousin. Father was a great admirer of your skill with arms. He was sorry we lived so far apart and couldn't see each other. That's why he's left you these momentous."
Xu Ning thanked Tang Long and accepted the gold bars. He had wine served and entertained him. But his brows were knit and he looked glum all the while they were drinking.
Finally, Tang Long rose and said: "You don't seem very happy, cousin. Is something troubling you?"
Xu Ning sighed. "Of course you don't know. It's a long story. Last night we were robbed."
"Did you lose much?"
"Only the goose-feather metal-hooped armor known as 'lion's fur,' left to me by my ancestors. But it's a remarkable suit, and last night it was taken. I'm very upset."
"I've seen that armor. It really is beyond compare. My late father often praised it to the skies. Where were you keeping it?"
"In a leather box tied to the main beam in the bedroom. I can't imagine when the thief slipped in and got away with it."
"What's the leather box like?"
"It's of red sheepskin, and the armor inside is wrapped in fragrant silk quilting."
"A red sheepskin box?" Tang Long appeared startled. "Does it have cloud head sceptres stitched in white thread on the surface, with a lion playing with an embroidered ball in the middle?"
"Cousin, where have you seen it?"
"Last night I was drinking wine in a village tavern about forty *li* from the city. I saw a sharp-eyed thin swarthy fellow carrying it on a shoulder pole. I wondered what was in it. As I was leaving the tavern I asked him: 'What's that box for?' He said: 'Originally it held armor. But now it's only got a few garments.' That must be your man. He evidently has hurt his leg, because he walks with a limp. Why don't we go after him and catch him?"
"If we can do that, it will be a blessing from Heaven!"

"Let's not delay then. We'll go at once."
Xu Ning quickly changed into hemp sandals, fastened his dagger, took his halberd, and left the city with Tang Long through the east gate. They strode swiftly along the winding road. Ahead they saw a tavern with a white circle on its wall.
"Let's have a bowl of wine," Tang Long suggested. "We can inquire here."
They went in and sat down. Tang Long asked the host: "Has a sharp-eyed dark thin fellow carrying a red sheepskin box passed this way?"
"There was a man like that last night. He seemed to have a bad leg, and was limping."
"Did you hear that, cousin?" Tang Long exclaimed.
Xu Ning was beyond speech. The two paid for their wine and hurried through the door. Further on, they came to an inn. A white circle marked its wall. Tang Long halted. "I can't go another step," he said. "Why not spend the night here, and continue the chase early tomorrow morning?"
"I have official duties. If I'm not there for roll call I'll surely be reprimanded. What can I do?"
"You needn't worry about that, cousin. Your wife will explain, of course."
At the inn that night they again made inquiries. The attendant told them: "Last night a thin swarthy fellow put up here. He slept late and didn't leave till mid-morning. He asked about the road to Shandong."
"That means we can catch him," said Tang Long.
The two men rested at the inn and departed before dawn, continuing along the winding road. Whenever they saw a white chalk circle on a wall, Tang Long called a halt for food and wine, and to ask the way. At each place they were told the same thing. Xu Ning was anxious to retrieve his armor, and he hastened along with Tang Long.
As daylight again began to wane, they saw ahead an ancient temple. In front of it, Shi Qian had rested his load and was sitting under a tree.
"Good," exclaimed Tang Long. "There, cousin, beneath that tree, isn't that your red sheepskin box?"
Xu Ning looked, then rushed forward and seized Shi Qian. "Impudent scoundrel," he roared. "How dare you steal my armor!"
"Stop, stop. Quit your yelling. Yes, I took your armor. What are you going to do about it?"
"Vulgar beast! You have the nerve to ask me that!"
"See if there's any armor in that box."
Tang Long opened the container. It was empty.
"What have you done with my armor, rogue?" Xu Ning demanded.
"Now listen to me. My name is Zhang. I'm an eldest son and I come from Tai'an Prefecture. A wealthy man in our prefecture knows Old General Zhong of the Border Garrison and learned from him about your goose feather armor and that you don't want to sell. So he hired me and another man called Li the Third to steal it. He's paying us ten thousand strings of cash. When I jumped from that pole in your yard I sprained my leg and I can't walk fast. So I've let Li go on ahead with the armor and have kept only the box. If you pressure me and take me before the court, I won't say a word even if I'm beaten to death. But if you forgive me, I'll go with you and get it back."
Xu Ning hesitated for several moments, unable to decide.
"There's no danger of him flying away, cousin," said Tang Long. "Let's go with him and recover your armor. If he doesn't produce it, you can always state your case to the local magistrate."
"That's quite true, cousin," Xu Ning agreed.
The three men continued along the road and spent the night at an inn. Xu Ning and Tang Long kept an eye on Shi Qian. But Flea on a Drum had bandaged one leg as if it were sprained, and Xu Ning, thinking he couldn't walk very fast, wasn't especially watchful. The following morning they rose and went on. Shi Qian frequently bought them food and drink, by way of apology. They travelled all day.
The next morning Xu Ning was growing increasingly anxious. Was Shi Qian really leading them to the armor? During their march they came upon three or four horses hitched to an empty cart by the side of the road. Behind it stood the driver. A merchant stood to one side. When he saw Tang Long, he dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
"What are you doing here, brother?" Tang Long queried.
"I had some business in Zhengzhou," the merchant replied. "I'm on my way back to Tai'an."
"Excellent. We three would like a ride. We're going to Tai'an, too."
"I wouldn't mind even if there were more of you, to say nothing of only three."
Very pleased, Tang Long brought him over to Xu Ning.
"Who is this?" Xu Ning asked.
"I met him last year when I went to a temple in Tai'an to burn incense. His name is Li Rong and he's a righteous man."
"Since Zhang can hardly walk, I suppose we'd better ride." Xu Ning told the driver to start, and the four men got in the cart.
"Tell me the name of your rich patron," Xu Ning demanded of Shi Qian.
Flea on a Drum stalled for a few minutes, then said: "He's called Lord Guo."
"Do you have a Lord Guo in Tai'an?" Xu Ning asked Li Rong.
"Yes. He's a very wealthy man who hobnobs with big officials," Li Rong replied. "He supports a whole bevy of hangers-on."
Xu Ning said to himself: "Since there is such a person, I needn't be suspicious."
Li Rong chatted about play with weapons, and sang a few songs. The day passed quickly and pleasantly.
Soon they were only little more than two stages from Liangshan Marsh. Li Rong had the driver take the gourd and buy some wine and meat for his three passengers. Li filled a ladle and offered it to Xu Ning, who drained it at one go. Li called for more. The driver, pretending that his hand slipped, let the gourd drop, spilling its contents on the ground. Li shouted at him and ordered him to buy more wine.
Suddenly, Xu Ning began to drool from the corners of his mouth, and fell headlong in the cart. Who was Li Rong? Actually, he was Yue Ho the Iron Throat. He and the other two jumped down and hurried the horses on. They went directly to the tavern of Zhu Gui, the Dry-Land Crocodile, where they all carried Xu Ning to a boat and ferried him across to the Shore of Golden Sands. Song Jiang had already been informed, and had come down the mountain and was waiting with the other leaders.
Xu Ning by then awakened from the drug, and he was given an antidote. When he opened his eyes and saw the men standing around him, he was astonished.
"Cousin," he said to Tang Long, "why have you duped me into coming here?"
"Listen to me, cousin," said Tang Long. "I had heard that Song Jiang accepted bold men from all over. And so in Wugang Town I pledged myself a blood brother to Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and joined the forces in the stronghold. Now Huyan Zhuo is using linked cavalry against us on the battlefield and he's got us stymied. I proposed barbed lances, but you're the only one who knows how to wield them. So I came up with this scheme."
"Cousin, you've ruined me!"
Song Jiang advanced, wine cup in hand, and said apologetically: "I'm here in this marsh only temporarily, just waiting for an imperial amnesty so that I can repay our country with my utmost loyalty and strength. I'm not covetous, I don't like killing, and I never perform unrighteous or un-chivalrous deeds. I devoutly hope you will sympathize with me, Inspector, and join me in acting in Heaven's behalf."
Lin Chong also sought to mollify him. Cup in hand, he said: "I'm here, too, brother. Please don't refuse."
"You duped me into coming." Xu Ning said to Tang Long. "The authorities are sure to arrest my wife. What can I do?"
"Don't let that worry you, Inspector," said Song Jiang. "I personally guarantee her safety. In a few days you will be reunited."
Chao Gai, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng all apologized to Xu Ning, and a feast was laid in his honor. The most agile of the young brigands were selected to learn the use of the barbed lance. Dai Zong and Tang Long were dispatched to the Eastern Capital at all possible speed to fetch Xu Ning's family.
Within ten days Yang Lin brought Peng Qi's family from Yinzhou, Xue Yong brought Ling Zhen's family from the Eastern Capital, and Li Yun returned with five cartloads of gunpowder and explosives. A few days later Dai Zong and Tang Long led Xu Ning's family up the mountain. Amazed, Xu Ning asked how they had come.
"After you left and were unable to report for roll call, I dispensed a little money and jewelry as bribes," his wife related, "and said that you were sick in bed. So there wasn't any fuss. Then suddenly cousin Tang Long arrived with the goose feather armor. 'We got it back,' he said, 'but cousin fell ill on the road, and he's lying in an inn at death's door. He wants to see you and the children.' I believed him, and we got into the cart. I don't know where we went, but we twisted and turned and ended up here."
"Everything else is fine," Xu Ning said to Tang Long. "It's just too bad my armor had to be left at home."
Tang Long laughed. "You'll be glad to hear, cousin that after sister got in the cart, I went back into the house and got it. I also inveigled your serving girls into wrapping up all your valuables. I put them and your armor on a carrying pole and brought the whole lot."
"It looks as though we'll never be able to return to the Eastern Capital."
"There's one more thing I must tell you. We ran into a party of merchants on the way. I dressed in your armor and smeared my face. Using your name, I robbed them. By now the Eastern Capital must have sent out notices for your arrest."
"You've harmed me grievously, cousin!"
Chao Gai and Song Jiang offered words of apology. "If we hadn't done that, Inspector, would you have been willing to remain with us?"
They allotted a house to Xu Ning and his family. The leaders met to discuss how to deal with the linked cavalry of the enemy. By then the barbed lances manufactured under the supervision of Lei Heng were ready. Song Jiang and Wu Yong requested Xu Ning to teach their men how to use them. "I'll gladly reveal all my secrets. I'll train your junior officers," said Xu Ning. "Let me have the most stalwart." In Fraternity Hall, the leaders watched Xu Ning select men to learn the use of the barbed lance. And as a result, a force of 3000 armoured horses was smashed, and a hero was taken within a designated time.

Now Spots addressed the assembly of leaders as follows: "I was born into a family of weapons makers. On account of this expertise, my father came to serve under His Excellency the Old Field Marshal and was made garrison commander at Yan'an. This system of linked cavalry was used already by the last dynasty to achieve victory. The only way to break it is to use a special hooked spear. Our family inherited drawings of this and if you wanted me to make one I could set my hand to it. But even though I can make you one, I don't know how to use it. If you want someone who can use it, this cousin of mine is the man you need. He is the only person who holds the secret of using these hooked spears: it's a secret art his family have inherited and they won't teach it to any outsider. On horseback or on foot, there's a special way to do it, it's really amazing!"
When he finished, Leopard's Head asked: "Are you by any chance speaking of Xu Ning, instructor of the imperial armoury, known as the Spearman?"
"That's exactly who I mean," said Spots.
"I'm glad you mentioned him. I had forgotten," said Leopard's Head. "This 'hooked spear' method of the Spearman's is quite unique. We saw a lot of each other when I was in the capital, we used to compare fighting techniques. There was a great deal of mutual respect and friendship between us. The only thing is, how can we get him to join us?"
"The Spearman's forebears left him one very important heirloom," Spots continued. "There's nothing else like it in the world. It provides absolute protection. In the days when my father was garrison commander and went to the capital to visit his aunt I often saw it. It is a suit of armour made of wild goose quills bound with metal strips. When you wear it, it is both light and strong, no sword or arrow can pierce it. People have called it the Lion's Pelt. Many a nobleman has asked to have a look at it, but the Spearman has never been keen to let people see it. This armour is as dear to him as his life. He stores it in a leather case which he hangs from a beam in his bedroom. If we can first get our hands on this armour of his, he'll have no choice but to come to us here."
The Professor said: "In that case, there shouldn't be any problem, seeing that we have a very light-fingered gentleman among us. We'll send the Flea off to get it."
"My only fear is that the armour might not really exist," said the Flea. "If it does, you can be sure I won't come back without it."
"If you can steal the armour, I undertake to get its owner here," said Spots.
"How are you going to do that?" Song Jiang asked.
Spots went up close and whispered something in Song Jiang's ear. Song Jiang laughed and said: "That's brilliant!"
The Professor said: "We want three more people to go to the capital with them. One must go to buy smoke-bombs, gunpowder and other supplies needed for the guns. The other two are needed to fetch Thunderer's family."
When he heard this, the Supremo stood up and said: "If someone could be sent to Yingzhou to fetch my family, I should be truly grateful."
"Don't worry, commander," said Song Jiang. "Just write out a letter, each of you, and I shall tell someone to do it."
Panther was now told to take some money and the appropriate letter and go with a small company to Yingzhou and fetch the Supremo's family. The Pill Monger was to disguise himself as a mountebank and go to the capital to fetch Thunderer's family. Green-Eyes dressed as a merchant was to go to the capital to buy gunpowder and other supplies. Lungs would accompany Spots and the Pill Monger would travel with them.
The Flea was sent off first. This done, Spots was asked to prepare a model of the hooked spear. Sergeant Lei would oversee its production, since Sergeant Lei's family had been blacksmiths. Spots produced the example of a hooked spear and showed those in the camp responsible for arms production how to make spears according to the pattern, under the supervision of Sergeant Lei. Of this no more.
A big send-off party was held in the main stronghold, and then Panther, the Pill Monger, Green-Eyes, Lungs and Spots bade farewell and left. The following day the Magic Messenger was also sent down the mountain to keep an eye on things.
It now becomes difficult to tell everything at once.
Let us follow then the Flea, who after leaving Mount Liang, collected all the necessary tools and equipment and secretly, carefully disguised, made his way by a roundabout route to the capital, where he found himself an inn for the night. Next day he strolled into the city and started asking for the address of imperial armourer Xu Ning.
Someone gave him directions: "Go into the government quarters and it's the fifth house on the east side, the one with a black door."
Having entered the compound and located the front door of the house, the Flea strolled round to the back. There was a high wall, and above it two small watch-towers. To one side stood an ornamental column. The Flea inspected this for a while. Then he went back to the street and asked someone: "Is Instructor Xu at home?"
"Most likely he's at work and hasn't come back yet," they replied.
"Do you know when he will return?" the Flea asked.
"Not till evening," they replied. "He goes out early in the morning and works in the palace."
The Flea apologized for troubling the man and went back to his inn. He got his tools and concealed them on his person. Then he said to the waiter: "I probably won't be back tonight."
"Don't you worry," said the waiter. "There won't be any problem."
The Flea entered the city again and got something to eat for his dinner. Then he strolled over to the Spearman's house in the imperial armoury. He looked around but couldn't find anywhere to hide. It was already dark, however, so he slipped inside the compound. It was a cold winter's night and there was no moon. Behind an earthen shrine there was a tall cypress tree. Gripping the trunk with his legs he shinned up it and sat astride a branch at the top. He watched quietly and saw the Spearman return and enter the house. He also saw two men with lanterns enter and close the gate of the compound, drawing the bolt across, before retiring each to his own house.
Soon the drum sounded the hour in the watch-tower. It was cold and overcast and no stars were visible. The dew gradually turned to frost. When all was quiet in the compound, the Flea slipped down to the ground and stole across to the Spearman's back door. He climbed over the wall effortlessly and crept inside. He was in a small garden. He paused outside the kitchen and watched. There was a light on in the kitchen and two maids were still clearing up. By scaling the column he was able to reach the eaves. Here he paused to observe for a while. Looking at the upper floor he saw the Spearman and his wife sitting beside the stove, facing the fire. She was holding a small child, about six or seven years old. He looked at the bedroom. As expected, there was a big leather case tied to a beam. A bow and arrows and a sword were hanging by the door. In the wardrobe hung brightly coloured clothing. At this moment the Spearman called out:
"Peachblossom, come and fold up my clothes!"
A maid came up the stairs and on a small side table proceeded to fold up a robe with purple embroidery and round collar, then another lined with imperial green and with embroidered parted skirts, followed by a brocade kerchief of many colours, a red and green knotted sash, and a handkerchief. She also used a small yellow handkerchief to wrap up a lichee-coloured gold belt with otter tails and put it in the bundle which she placed on the rack near the stove. All this the Flea carefully noted.
Shortly after nine o'clock the Spearman got ready for bed. His wife asked: "Are you on duty tomorrow?"
"Tomorrow is the day the Emperor visits the Dragon Hall. I have to be there before dawn to wait for him."
The wife said to the maid: "The master has to be up before dawn tomorrow and go out to work. You'd better get up at three to warm the water for him and prepare some dim sum for breakfast."
"Obviously that leather case hanging from the beam is the famous armour," the Flea reasoned to himself. "It'll be good if I can get my hands on it during the night. But if I cause any disturbance I won't be able to get out of the city tomorrow and the whole business is likely to fail.... I'd better wait till early morning, that'll be the time to get to work."

The Spearman and his wife went to sleep, while the two maids made up their beds outside the room. A night light was left burning on the table inside.
The five people were sleeping. The two skivvies, having spent the whole day serving till evening, were exhausted and fell fast asleep. The Flea came down from his perch and took out a reed which he poked through a hole in the window and with one puff blew out the night light.
In the early hours the Spearman rose and told the maids to get up and warm his water. When the two girls roused themselves from their dreams they found the light had gone out in the room.
"Oh dear, the light's gone out!" they exclaimed.
The Spearman said: "Then go and ask for a light next door, what are you waiting for?"
The Flea heard them open the door and grope their way down the stairs. He slid down the column and went to wait in a dark place near the back door. When he heard them open the back door, go out, and open the gate in the wall he slipped into the kitchen and squeezed under the kitchen table. The maids returned with the light someone had given them, closed the door and went to light the fire in the stove. They then went to light the charcoal fire upstairs. When the water started to boil they took it upstairs. After washing and rinsing his mouth, the Spearman asked them to warm some wine and bring it up. They prepared food and cakes and took them up. The Spearman ate and then asked them to take food to his orderly who was waiting outside. The Flea heard the Spearman come downstairs and tell his orderly to eat. Then he picked up his bundle, took his steel spear and went out of the door. When the two maids lit a lantern and went out to see him off, the Flea emerged from his hiding-place under the table and went upstairs. By means of the partition he clambered up into the rafters and crouched there. The two maids shut and bolted the door, blew out the light, and went upstairs and undressed. Then they threw themselves down and slept.
As soon as they were asleep the Flea took out his reed again and blew out the upstairs light. He gently lifted the leather case down from its beam. He was about to go downstairs when the Spearman's wife woke up and hearing a noise called out to the maids: "What's that noise in the rafters?"
The Flea made a noise like a rat. One of the maids said: "It's a rat, can't you hear madam? That's the noise they make when they're fighting."
The Flea again imitated the sound of rats fighting. Then he lowered himself down, opened the landing door, very slowly raised the leather case and put it on his back, felt his way down the stairs, and opened the back door. By the time he reached the gate of the compound, the patrol were already out and about. They had unlocked the main gate before dawn. Firmly grasping the leather case, the Flea attached himself to a group of people and took advantage of the general hubbub to slip out of the city unnoticed and return to his inn. It was still dark when he knocked on the inn door. He went to the room and got his luggage. He made up a bundle for the carrying-pole. He paid the bill, left the inn and set off on the road east.
When he stopped at an inn about ten miles out of the city to have some breakfast, he ran into someone he knew. This was none other than the Magic Messenger. When he saw that the Flea had the goods, there was a muttered discussion and then the Magic Messenger said: "I'm going to take the armour back to the camp, you follow on slowly with Spots."
The Flea opened the leather case and took out the precious armour. They rolled it up and made a bundle of it. The Magic Messenger tied it on securely. As soon as he left the inn he started his magic walking and returned to Mount Liang.
The Flea now fastened the empty case on his carrying-pole, in such a way that it was clearly visible. He breakfasted, paid, picked up his pole and left. After six or seven miles he encountered Spots. The two of them went to an inn to talk.
Spots said: "Just do as I say and continue along this road. When you come to an inn or eating place or rest house, look to see if there is a white circle painted with flour. If there is, go in and buy wine or food. If it's a rest house, stop there for the night. Put the case where it can be clearly seen. After a day's travel from here wait for me."
The Flea went off to carry out this plan. Spots calmly had another drink and then set off in the direction of the capital.
It was daylight now, back at the Spearman's house. When the two maids got up they found the door to the upstairs landing open, and the downstairs door and the front door also unlocked. They looked around the house anxiously but everything seemed to be in its place. They ran upstairs and told their mistress: "Somehow the doors are all unlocked, but nothing seems to be missing."
"I heard that noise in the rafters early this morning," said their mistress. "But you said it was only rats fighting. You'd better go and see that nothing has happened to the leather case."
When the maids saw, they raised an outcry: "The leather case has disappeared!"
Panic-stricken, the mistress said: "Quickly, send someone to the palace to tell the master, tell him to come home and look for it as soon as possible!"
The maids rushed away to try and find someone who would go to the palace and tell the Spearman. They asked three or four but they all returned and said: "The armourers are in attendance in the Emperor's inner garden. The entrance is strictly guarded. No one can enter! You'll just have to wait till he comes back."
The Spearman's wife and the maids were like ants on a hot plate. They rushed about aimlessly this way and that, and didn't eat a bite. It wasn't until dusk that the Spearman was able to take off his ceremonial robes and go off duty. He picked up his steel spear and returned home. When he reached the gate of the compound a neighbour told him: "Your wife has been robbed. She's waiting for you. She's frantic for you to get home."
The Spearman had a terrible shock. He rushed to his house, where the two maids met him at the door. "When you went out this morning, master, a thief slipped into the house. The only thing he took was that leather case you keep hanging from the beam."
A great wail arose from the Spearman when he heard this, right from the pit of his stomach it came, rolling up to issue from his mouth.
His wife said: "I really can't imagine when the thief got in."
"Everything else is unimportant," he said. "But this special armour has been handed down through four generations, and has never been lost till now. Marshal 'Flash' Wang offered me thirty thousand for it, but I wouldn't sell. I was afraid that one day I would need it in battle and I was so worried something might happen to it, that's why I tied it to the beam. So many people have asked to see it, but I've always pretended I didn't have it any longer. Now it's been stolen. I shall be a laughing-stock! It's gone, and whatever am I going to do?"
He did not sleep a wink that night. He kept turning it over in his mind. "Who could it possibly have been? It must be somebody who knows about that armour of mine."
His wife gave her opinion. "The thief must have crept in last night, when the light went out, don't you think? There must be someone who envies what you've got, he offered you money and you wouldn't sell, so he got this master thief to come and steal it. You'd better go out and tell someone to make thorough inquiries, it's no good just talking about it. And you want to be careful too not to put the culprit on his guard."
But despite this good advice, when day came the Spearman got up and just sat at home moping.
Around breakfast time, there was a knock on the door, and after going to see who it was the orderly returned and said: "Someone called Tang Long is asking to see you — he says he's the son of Commander Tang who was head of the Yan'an garrison."
The Spearman told him to show the guest in. Spots kowtowed most respectfully to the Spearman and said: "I hope you are keeping well?"
The Spearman replied: "I heard that your father had passed away. But you know I've been so tied up with official duties and it's such a long way too, I just haven't had time to get over there and offer my condolences. And I have had no news of you. Where are you living these days? Where have you come from?"
"It's a long story," said Spots. "Since father died I've been a bit down on my luck. Lately I've been wandering among the rivers and lakes. I was in Shandong. I came to the capital so I thought I'd pay you a visit."
"Won't you sit down?" said the Spearman, calling for wine to be brought.
Spots felt around in his pack and brought out two twenty tael gold ingots in the shape of garlic bulbs, which he gave to the Spearman saying: "Before he died my father left this for you as a memento. I didn't have anyone I could trust to bring it, that's why I didn't send it before. I've come here now specially to give it to you."
The Spearman said: "It was really kind of your father to remember me. I've done nothing to deserve it. How can I ever repay his generosity?"
"Don't say that," said Spots. "When my father was alive he often spoke admiringly of your fighting skills. But unfortunately the world's a big place, so you never happened to meet again. That's why he wanted to leave you this little remembrance."
The Spearman thanked Spots and took the gifts. Then he called for wine. While they were drinking the Spearman remained pensive and gloomy and eventually Spots rose and said: "Why do you look so unhappy? Something seems to be weighing on your mind."
The Spearman heaved a sigh and said: "I ought to explain, but it's a long story. Last night we had a robbery here."
"What exactly was stolen?" Spots asked.
"The thief took just one thing: that special armour bequeathed to me by my ancestors, known as 'the Lion's Pelt.' That's what I lost yesterday, and that's what presses so heavily upon my spirits."
"I can remember seeing this armour of yours," said Spots. "It really is matchless. My father could never stop admiring it. Where were you keeping it when it was stolen?"
"I kept it inside a leather case which I tied to one of the rafters in my bedroom. I really don't know when the thief got in and took it."
"What is it like, this leather case you kept it in?" Spots asked.
"A red sheepskin case," the Spearman replied. "And it was wrapped in scented cotton."
Spots pretended to be very surprised. "A red sheepskin case? Don't tell me it had a white cotton cover decorated with a green sceptre of good fortune? And a lion in the middle playing with an embroidered ball?"
"Good heavens, have you seen it somewhere?" the Spearman exclaimed.
"Last night I stopped at a country inn about fifteen miles from the city to order some wine. I saw a thin dark fellow with prominent eyes. He was carrying it on a pole. When I saw it I said to myself: 'I wonder what he keeps in that leather case?' I asked him as I was going out: 'What do you use that leather case for?' He said, 'It used to be for storing armour in, but now I've just got some old clothes in it.' That must be the man. I happened to notice his legs moved like lightning. He went dashing off. Why don't we follow him?"
The Spearman said: "It will be a miracle if we can catch him!"
"Stop dithering, then, and let's go!"
The Spearman hurriedly changed into his hemp sandals, buckled on his sword, picked up a halberd and he and Spots left the city by the eastern gate. They travelled at a good pace. They came to an inn with a white circle on the outer wall, and Spots said: "Let's have a bowl of wine before we go any further, and we can make some inquiries here."
When they were seated inside, Spots asked: "Tell me landlord, has a thin dark chap with staring eyes, been through here, with a red leather case on a carrying-pole?"
The innkeeper replied: "A fellow like that did come by yesterday evening. Carrying a red leather case he were — seemed to be something wrong with his legs too, he were limping a bit."
"Do you hear that, brother?" Spots said to the Spearman. But the Spearman was too excited to say anything.
They paid up and left. Further along the road they came to another inn with a white circle on the wall. Spots stopped and said: "Brother, I can't go another step. Let's spend the night at this inn. We can start early tomorrow."
The Spearman said: "But I'm a government official. If I don't turn up for duty tomorrow I shall be in trouble."
"It's no good worrying about that," said Spots. "Your wife will make some kind of excuse for you."
When they inquired at the inn that night, the waiter said: "Last night a man like the one you describe stayed here. He only slept till the early hours of this morning, then he left. He kept asking the way to Shandong."
"Then we'll be able to catch him," Spots said. "If we start before dawn we're sure to get the bugger tomorrow. Once we've nabbed him, then we'll see."
They spent the night at the inn and left at dawn to continue the pursuit. Whenever Spots saw a white circle on the wall he went in to buy wine and food and to make inquiries, and everywhere they said the same thing. The Spearman was so desperate to have his armour back he forgot about everything except the chase.
When dusk was approaching they came to an old temple, in front of which, under a tree, the Flea had put down his carrying-pole and was sitting on the ground.
When Spots saw this he cried out: "Got him! Under the tree there, look, isn't that the case your armour was in?"
The Spearman raced ahead and grabbed hold of the Flea, saying: "You villain, what do you mean by stealing my armour?"
"Hold on!" the Flea protested. "Stop shouting. Suppose I did steal your armour, what do you want from me?"
"You ... you shameless animal!" the Spearman spluttered. "How can you ask me that?"
"Why don't you look and see if there's any armour in that case?" said the Flea.
Spots opened the case and looked inside. It was empty.
"What have you done with my armour, you monster?" the Spearman yelled.
The Flea said: "Let me explain. My name is Zhang. I'm the eldest in my family and I come from Tai'an. A certain rich man of this district, who wants to get in with the Old Field Marshal, heard that you had this special armour and wouldn't sell it, so he paid me and a mate of mine, third brother Li, to go and steal it from your house. He promised us ten thousand for it. But when I was climbing down the pillar in your house I twisted my ankle, so I couldn't walk properly. I told friend Li to go on ahead with the armour and leave me to carry just the empty case. If you want to do something to me you can take me to the police, but not even to save my life, not even if you beat me to death, will I confess. It's no good thinking I will betray another person. So if you will spare me the official investigation, I am willing to help you try and get the armour back."
The Spearman hesitated for a long time, unable to make up his mind. Spots said: "Brother, you needn't be afraid he'll get away. Why don't we take him with us to get the armour back? If we haven't got the armour, what's the point of going to the police and making an accusation in this place?"
"You're right," said the Spearman. So now the pursuit continued with all three of them. They stopped at inns to rest. Whenever they spent the night somewhere the Spearman and Spots kept a close watch on the Flea. The Flea, of course, had bandaged his leg to make it look as if it was hurt. The Spearman seeing that he had difficulty walking, was only half on his guard. Next morning they rose early to continue their journey. The Flea paid for all their wine and food, in order to curry favour with them. They travelled all day.
Next day on the journey the Spearman became quite worried. He had begun to wonder if he would ever get his armour back.
As they were walking along, they saw three or four oxen yoked to an empty cart beside the road. Behind was the driver and next to him a merchant, who prostrated himself when he saw Spots.
"What are you doing here, friend?" Spots asked.
"I've been doing business in Zhengzhou and now I'm returning home to Tai'an," the other replied.
"That's great," Spots said. "We'd like to ride in your cart. We're heading for Tai'an also, on holiday."
"Of course I can take three of you. It wouldn't matter if you were more."
Spots was delighted. He called the Spearman over to be introduced. The Spearman asked: "Who is this?"
"Someone I got to know last year when I went to Tai'an to burn incense. He's called Li Rong, and he's a very good man."
"In that case, since our friend Zhang can't walk properly, let's all ride in his cart."
The carter was ordered to drive on, with the four men sitting in the cart.
"Friend Zhang, will you tell me the name of that rich man, please?" the Spearman asked.
The Flea could not be prevailed upon. The first three or four times he made excuses. Then he said in a vague way: "He's the famous Mr. Guo."
The Spearman asked Li Rong: "Do you have a famous official called Guo in Tai'an?"
Li Rong replied: "Our Mr. Guo is both aristocratic and rich. He's on very good terms with all the officials. He shelters all kinds of idlers in his house."
Hearing this the Spearman thought: "If there's someone powerful behind it, we're not likely to be taken seriously."
Li Rong talked as they went about spear and staff play. Sometimes he sang songs. Thus the day slipped past. We needn't bore you with this.
Now they were in fact not more than a couple of stages from Mount Liang when Li Rong told the carter to take a gourd and get a fill of wine and some meat so they could drink a few cups on the wagon. Li Rong got out a dipper and the first measure of wine was ladled out and offered to the Spearman, who drank it off. When Li Rong called for more wine, the carter feigning clumsiness spilt the whole gourd-full of wine on the ground. As Li Rong was cursing the carter and telling him to go and get more, the Spearman collapsed on the floor of the cart with a thud, saliva dribbling from his mouth.
And who exactly was this Li Rong? He was Lungs, of course. The other three jumped down from the cart and drove it on to the Crocodile's inn. They carried the Spearman down to the boat and rowed him across to Golden Sands Landing. Song Jiang had already been alerted and came down the mountain with the other leaders to receive him. The effects of the drug were already beginning to wear off on the Spearman but they also gave him the antidote. He had quite a shock when he opened his eyes and saw everybody. "How did you get me here?" he asked Spots.
"I'd better explain," Spots said. "I had always heard that Song Jiang welcomed good men from every corner of the empire and so I and Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind became brothers in Wugang. I returned with him to the mountain stronghold and joined the band. Recently Twin Rods has been using his linked cavalry against them, and they don't know how to counter it. I suggested the hooked spear method. You are the only one who knows how to use it so we devised this plan. We sent the Flea on ahead to steal your armour. My part was to tempt you to take to the road. Later Lungs played the part of Li Rong. As we were coming through the mountains we drugged you. We want you to join us here and become one of our leaders."
The Spearman said: "So you've really done for me then!"
Song Jiang now stepped forward, cup in hand, and apologized, saying: "I myself for the time being have taken refuge in the marshes, awaiting a future imperial amnesty."
Leopard's Head also came forward cup in hand and apologized. "I sang your praises to everyone here. Please do not refuse."
The Spearman said: "Spots my friend, you have inveigled me here, but at home my wife will be arrested and what then?"
Song Jiang said: "That's no problem. Set your heart at ease, commander, because you can take my word for it that before long we will fetch your family and you will all be together again."
Chao Gai, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun all came forward with conciliatory speeches and a great reception banquet was organized.
Time was now devoted to selecting the strongest of the troops to learn the method of fighting with hooked spears, while the Magic Messenger and Spots were instructed to travel with all speed to the capital and fetch the Spearman's family. In a few days' time Panther was back with the Supremo's family and the Pill Monger returned from the capital with Thunderer's family. Green-Eyes returned to the stronghold with five cartloads of explosives and ammunition. A few more days passed, and then the Magic Messenger and Spots brought the Spearman's family in.
The Spearman was surprised to see his wife and asked her how she had got there. "When you disappeared and didn't turn up at the office for the roll call," she said, "I told them that you hadn't reported for duty because you were ill in bed. Then cousin Tang suddenly appeared with your armour. He said: 'We got it back, but your husband caught an infection on the journey and he is lying desperately ill at the inn. He wants to see you and the children.' He persuaded me to get into a carriage, but I had no idea where it was taking me till we arrived here."
The Spearman said: "Fair enough, friends. But it's a pity you left that armour of mine at home."

Spots grinned. "Cheer up," he said. "As soon as I'd got your wife off in the carriage I went back and got the armour again. I also persuaded these two girls to pack all the valuables in your house into bundles so they could be carried here."
"Then I suppose it's no good my thinking about returning," said the Spearman.
"I have another confession to make, cousin," said Spots. "On the way back here we bumped into a company of merchants. I dressed up in your armour and painted my face. Using your name I stripped those merchants of all their goods. Before long this will be posted up all over the capital and they'll be looking to arrest you."
"Well, you've really done your best to ruin me, haven't you?" said the Spearman.
Chao Gai and Song Jiang now excused themselves, saying: "If we hadn't done these things, how would we ever have got you to stay?"
Following this, accommodation was allotted to the Spearman and his family, and the leaders settled down to discuss how to break the power of the linked cavalry. Sergeant Lei by now had completed the manufacture of hooked spears, so Song Jiang, the Professor and others invited the Spearman to give a demonstration of their use. "I am ready to divulge all I know and train every troop leader," he said. "We must pick the strongest men for it." Everyone sat in the Assembly Hall and looked on while the Spearman selected his recruits and explained the method of the hooked spear. And much was to depend on this for:

*3000 armoured cavalry are about to be beaten,*
*The time has come for a hero's capture.*

"MY forefathers earned a living by making weapons," said Tang Long addressing the assembled leaders. "Because my father was skilled in that work he was employed at Yanan Prefecture by the General Old Zhong, Guardian of the Frontier. At that time the battle horses were protected by armor, which was a great success. The only way of defeating such cavalry was by the use of hooked spear. I know how to make those hooked spears, but am not experienced in their use. I have a cousin, however, who understands how to use the hooked spears, and he is a Drill Instructor in the army. He however has kept this knowledge to himself, and his marvelous methods are equally effective either with cavalry or infantry."
Lin Chong asked, "Is that man not Drill Instructor Xu Ning?"
"Yes, that is the man," replied Tang Long.
"If you had not mentioned it I should have forgotten all about him," said Lin Chong. "His skill is undoubtedly the most marvelous. I knew him well in the capital where we often compared our various methods. Only how can we get him to come here?"
"He has a most valuable heirloom at home of which there is no equal anywhere," said Tang Long. "I once went to the capital with my late father, and saw it with my own eyes. It was armor made of gold rings coated with swan feather. This armor is both light and strong, neither sword nor arrow can penetrate it. It was called "Sai Tang Lion." Many senior officials wanted to have a look of it, but he would not let them see it. It is as dear to him as his life, and he kept it locked up in a leather box on the beam of his house. If we could get that armor he would follow us here."
"In that case we can easily arrange matters," said Wu Yong. "We have a capable man here, and for this work we have use of Shi Qian, the 'Flea on the Drum.'"
Shi Qian said, "If the armor is still there I could of course soon get it."
"If you steal the armor," said Tang Long, "I will undertake to bring the man here."
"How could you induce him to come here?" asked Song Jiang.
Tang Long walked across to Song Jiang, and whispered something in his ear. Song Jiang laughed and said, "An excellent plan!"
"For this we must send three men to the Capital," said Wu Yong. "One of them is to purchase gunpowder, and the other two can bring the family of Ling Zhen here."
Upon hearing this Peng Qi stood up and said, "Why should not one man go to Yingzhou and bring my family here?"
"Do not worry about that," said Song Jiang. "We will send a man for your family." He then instructed Yang Lin to go to Yingzhou to do that work. He also deputed Xue Yong and Li Yun to accompany Yue He and Tang Long to the capital; the former to bring Ling Zhen's family and the latter to buy gunpowder. Shi Qian after making preparations departed by himself for the capital. The other four followed some time afterwards.
Shi Qian duly reached the capital, and stayed at an inn. The next day he inquired for Xu Ning's residence and one man told him, "Go through the barracks gate, and you will find his house; it is the fifth house on the east side; it has a black door." Shi Qian did so, and duly found the house. He first examined it both the front and the back door. There was a high wall all round the house with a two-storied tower inside, besides which was a large beam. He then went to the neighborhood, and asked whether Xu Ning was at home and was informed that he attended his duties about 5 A.M. and would not return until evening.
Shi Qian returned to the inn, and changed his dress. He told the innkeeper that he might not return that night, and asked him to look after his room. He went and had his evening meal at another inn. He then went to Xu Ning's house, and prowled around outside. It was soon dark, and became quite cold. It was a bright moonlight night. He saw a big tree in the grounds of a temple for the local earth god, and climbed up and hid himself in the branches. From this vantage point he saw Xu Ning arrive and enter his house. The servant soon came out with a lamp, and fastened the gate. He waited until he heard the drum in the tower sounded for the first watch of the night (9 P.M.). It was very cold, and hoar frost was forming on the tree. Everything was now quiet so he got down the tree, and went to the back door of Xu Ning's house where he climbed over the wall. He found himself in a very small courtyard. He went to the kitchen, where there was a light. Looking through the window he saw two maid servants cleaning and washing the dishes. He went to the tower, and climbed up the beam to a window on the second floor. Looking inside he saw Xu Ning, his wife, and a boy of about seven years of age sitting round a fire. On the rafter of the bedroom where he saw a leather box. He also saw a sword, a bow with arrows, and some clothes hanging on a clotheshorse. At last he heard Xu Ning call to the servant, "Meixiang, fold up the clothes for me." One of the maid servants came upstairs, folded the clothes, and put them away in a wardrobe. About 11 P.M. Xu Ning went to bed and his wife asked him, "Do you attend to duty tomorrow?"
"Tomorrow the Emperor goes to the Dragon Palace and I must go at 5 A.M."
His wife then told the servant, "My husband must be on duty by 5 A.M. tomorrow. You must have breakfast ready by 4 A.M."
Shi Qian had seen and heard all this, and was quite confident that he would get the leather box without any difficulty that night. If he get it too soon he might disturb his people and could not get out of the city so he would wait till nearly 5 A.M. Very soon, everybody in the house was asleep, but there was a lamp still left burning on the table. Breaking a hole in the paper window he took a reed, and blew out the light. About 4 A.M. Xu Ning got up, and called to the maid servant to get breakfast ready. When the servant came they were surprised to find that the lamp had gone out. Xu Ning told them to go to the back chamber and get a light. The woman servant went downstairs, and Shi Qian slid down the beam on which he had been perched so long. He went to the back door, and hid there in the shade. The maid opened the door, and went to the other chamber. Shi Qian slipped into the kitchen, and hid under a table. The maid soon returned with the lamp, shut the door, and lit the fire. The other servant soon took the coal stove upstairs. Very soon the water was boiling, and some was taken upstairs for Xu Ning to wash his face. Breakfast was soon served and finished. Xu Ning came downstairs, and left for his duty. Shi Qian now left his hiding place, went straight upstairs, and took his position on the rafter. The maidservants returned after fastening the gate, and went to bed again. Shi Qian waited until they were asleep, and then taking his reed he blew out the lighted lamp. Shi Qian very quietly got down from the rafter taking the leather box with him when Xu Ning's wife awoke, and hearing the noise called out, "What is that noise?" Shi Qian made a noise like a rat chattering, and one of the servants replied, "It is the rats. They are only fighting." Shi Qian now made a noise like rats fighting to cover his movements with the box. Slowly he got down the stairs, and at last reached the door, and then the outer gate which he opened, and was soon outside. He hurried off with the leather box, through the city gate as it was then nearly 5 o'clock and was open, and soon reached his inn. He immediately packed up his things, paid the innkeeper, and started off on the east road. After he had gone about ten //he stopped at an inn for breakfast. While eating a man entered, and Shi Qian recognized him as Dai Zong. They held a whispered conversation, and Dai Zong then said he would take the "Sai Tang Lion" armor to Liangshan Marsh while Shi Qian could follow and take his time. Shi Qian opened the box, wrapped the armor in a parcel, and handed it to Dai Zong who donned his magic puttees started off for Liangshan Marsh.
Shi Qian continued on his way, and after going about seven //met Tang Long, and explained the position to him. Tang Long told Shi Qian to continue on his way, and that he must only stop at inns where there was a white circle chalked on the door. At those inns he must display the leather box so that everybody could see it. Shi Qian agreed to do this, and started off while Tang Long went on his way to the capital.
Early in the morning when the maidservants in Xu Ning's house got up they found the house door open, and also the outside gate unfastened. They did not notice anything missing, and going back upstairs said to Madame Xu Ning, "It is strange that the gate is unfastened, but there does not seem to be anything missing."
"About 5 A.M. I heard a noise on the rafter, but you said it was some rats fighting. Go to see if the leather box is still there?"
The servants looked up, and were astonished. "We do not know where it has gone to!"
The wife upon hearing this got up quickly and said, "We must send a messenger to the palace to ask my husband to come back as soon as possible."
The maidservant found a messenger and sent him off. When he returned he said that Xu Ning was on duty inside the palace. Outside were guards who would not allow anyone to enter. The servants were very much upset, and hunted all round the house for the leather box like a lot of ants in a hot pan.
When the Emperor had retired from the palace, Xu Ning took off his uniform and returned home. When he was near the house a neighbor said, "There has been a thief in your house. They sent a messenger to tell you, but you did not come back immediately." Xu Ning was surprised at this, and hurried to his home. At the gate he met the servants who said, "You left home at 5 A.M. and presently a thief secretly entered the house, and stole the leather box on the rafter. He did not take anything else."
Xu Ning was dumbfounded at the loss. His wife said, "We do not know at what time the thief got into the house."
"Other things do not matter," said Xu Ning. "Only our precious family heirloom has been stolen. Marshal Hua Erwang offered me 30,000 strings of cash for that, but I refused to sell. I was so afraid of losing it that I hid it away on the rafter. Many men came to get a look at it, but I always said I had not got it. Now if people hear that it has been stolen, they will laugh at us. What shall we do?" Xu Ning could not sleep, but was continuously thinking the matter over. "Who could have stolen it?"
"I think it was stolen by someone who coveted the armor," said his wife. "Perhaps he stole it because you would not sell it. You had better make inquiries in all directions, and see if we can get a clue as to who has stolen it. At present, 'we must not beat the grass to startle the snake.'"
The next day Xu Ning was very downcast and stayed at home. After breakfast he heard someone knocking at the outer gate. A servant answered the door, and then announced that a man named Tang Long of Yanan Prefecture wished to see Xu Ning. Xu Ning told the servant to show him into the guest chamber. Upon meeting there they saluted each other. Xu Ning said, "I heard of the death of your father, but owing to my official duties I could not come to see you. Your place was also such a long way off, and I could not go. Where have you been working, and what brings you here today?"
"I cannot tell you all that has happened since in one sentence," replied Tang Long. "After my father's death I was very hard up, and in fact was at a loose end. I have just come from Shandong on a visit to you."
Xu Ning ordered the servant to bring in food and wine. Tang Long opened his bundle, and gave Xu Ning two ingots of silver weighing about twenty taels, saying, "Just before his death my father told me to hand you this silver. I had no intimate friend whom I could have asked to bring this present to you, so I had to keep it until I could give it you myself."
"I am extremely grateful to your late father for remembering me, and making such a valuable present," replied Xu Ning. "I have been very undutiful to your father, and shall never be able to recompense him."
"Never mind that," said Tang Long. "Before his death my father often spoke to me of your great skill. He could not come to see you as you lived so far away, so he decided to send you this thing as a memento."
Xu Ning thanked Tang Long, and asked him to dine with him. During the meal Xu Ning several times looked troubled, and even frowned. At last Tang Long said, "I see that you are worrying about something. What has upset you?"
Xu Ning sighed, "Younger brother, you do not know, but last night a thief got into this house."
"Did you miss anything?" asked Tang Long.
"He took the armor which is our great heirloom. Because of that I am rather annoyed."
"I remember seeing it some time before," said Tang Long. "It was a very rare thing. My father often spoke of it as a splendid work of art. Have you any clue as to who took it?"
"The armor was in a box which I hid on the rafter of my own bedroom. I have no idea who can have stolen it."
"What kind of box was it?" asked Tang Long.
"It was red deerskin box, and the armor was wrapped in fine silk inside."
Tang Long was startled. "A red deerskin box! Outside covered with white silk embroidered with a design of clouds in green, and lions playing with a ball!"
"Younger brother! Where did you see it?" asked Xu Ning.
"Elder brother, last night I stopped at an inn about thirteen //from here, and there I saw an old man with a sallow complexion who was carrying such a box on a pole. At the time I particularly noticed the box, and wondered what was inside. I even asked the man what was in the box. He replied that originally there was armor stored in it, but now there was only some clothes. That must be the thief with your box. I noticed that the man limped, and walked along very slowly. We must pursue him at once."
"If we succeed in arresting him it will be by Heaven's assistance," said Xu Ning.
"We had better waste no time, but get away at once," said Tang Long.
Xu Ning quickly put on his boots and weapons, and left immediately with Tang Long. When they had gone some distance on the road they came to an inn with a white circle on the door, and Tang Long suggested that they might make inquiries there. They entered and sat down. Tang Long asked the innkeeper whether he had noticed a man with a red deerskin box. The innkeeper remembered the man well, and said he had been there the previous night.
The two men started off again, and that evening they stopped at an inn which also had a white circle on the door. Xu Ning wished to push on, but Tang Long said he was too tired. There again they made inquiries, and the waiter remembered the man, and even told them that the man had said he was going to Shandong.
"Then we shall overtake him," said Tang Long.
After sleeping there the two men started off again early the next morning.
Again they made inquiries at the inns on the way, and always got news of the deerskin box. As it grew dark they came to an old temple, and there they saw a man resting with a load under a tree. Xu Ning ran forward and seized hold of Shi Qian (for he was the man). "How brave you are! Why did you steal that box from my home?"
"Wait a bit!" said Shi Qian. "Do not get excited! I stole the box, but what do you want me to do now?"
"You have no decency," said Xu Ning. "How can you ask such a question?"
"Well, look in the box, and see whether the armor is there," replied Shi Qian.
Xu Ning opened the box, but found it empty. "Where is the armor?" he asked.
"I will tell you," said Shi Qian. "My name is Zhang Da, and I am a Taian Prefecture man. In our town is a wealthy man who is a friend of General Old Zhong, Guardian of the Frontier. He knew of the armor you had, and wished to present it to the General. But he knew that you would not sell it, and therefore engaged me and another man named Li San to go to your home and steal it. In getting the box I had a fall and hurt my leg so that I could not walk very quickly. So Li San took the armor away, and left me behind to bring the empty box. If you now beat me, or send me to the *yamen* I will not say a word as to where the armor has gone to. If you will forgive me I will go with you to get back the armor."
Xu Ning was undecided how to act, and did not speak for some time. Tang Long interposed and said, "Elder brother, you need not be afraid of him running away. We can go with him, and get the armor. If we cannot get the armor we can send him to the *yamen*."
Xu Ning agreed to this. All three then went on the road, and stayed that night at an inn. Xu Ning and Tang Long were careful that Shi Qian did not escape. Shi Qian's leg was not injured, he only wrapped much silk round his leg. Because Shi Qian limped Xu Ning at last decided that it was not necessary to watch him closely. The following day they traveled far. They came at last to a place where the road divided, and there they met two men pushing a barrow, accompanied by a man who simply walked. They stopped and saluted Tang Long who asked them what they were doing at that spot.
The man replied, "I have been trading at Zhengzhou, and am now on my way back to Taian."
"That is fine," said Tang Long. "We are also going to Taian and wish to hire a barrow."
"Our barrow could carry all three of you," replied the man.
Tang Long then introduced Xu Ning, and told him that last year he had been to Taian on a pilgrimage, and while there had met this merchant, Li Rong. He knew him as a chivalrous man.
"In that case," said Xu Ning, "our man Zhang Da can ride on the barrow, and we can make haste." This was done. On the way Xu Ning asked Li Rong whether he knew a wealthy man, named Guo at Taian. Li Rong said he knew him, and this settled Xu Ning's mind as he felt that now he was sure to get the armor.
That day they were not far from Liangshan Marsh, and they stopped on the road while Li Rong sent his men to buy wine and food and bring it to them. When it arrived Li Rong took a gourd off the barrow, and filling it with wine offered it to Xu Ning who drunk it off. Li Rong was filling the gourd a second time for the others when apparently the jug slipped, and fell to the ground, and all the wine was lost. Li Rong shouted to his man to go and buy some more wine. Before the man returned Xu Ning was foaming at the mouth, and was lying down on the barrow. Who was this man Li Rong? He was Yue He from Liangshan Marsh. The men now wheeled the barrow off with Xu Ning, and soon reached Zhu Gui's inn. There they put Xu Ning on a boat, rowed him across the lake, and carried him up the mountain. There they were met by Song Jiang and the other leaders. A drug was now administered to Xu Ning who recovered his consciousness. Seeing such a crowd of men all around, Xu Ning asked Tang Long, "Brother, why did you deceive me and bring me to this place?"
"Elder brother, I will explain," replied Tang Long. "I heard that Song Jiang, the chief of these heroes, is always looking out for heroes to join his band. For this reason I came here and joined him. We have been attacked by troops under General Huyan Zhuo, and defeated. It was then I thought of the armor you had." He explained fully how the armor had been stolen, and brought to Liangshan Marsh. He also invited him to join the bandits as a leader.
"Brother, you have seriously injured me."
Song Jiang now stepped forward and spoke to Xu Ning. "I, Song Jiang, wait here with my men for the Emperor to admit us to citizenship. We are quite loyal, and will devote our life to our country. We do not covet riches, and have no desire to kill anybody. Our motives are of the best, and will stand your closest scrutiny. We request you to join us to act as agents for Heaven."
Xu Ning however again addressed Tang Long. "You deceived me in bringing me here, and have exposed my wife and family to arrest."
"That is already arranged," said Song Jiang. "You need not worry. I will be responsible, and see that no trouble happens to your family. I will see that they are all safely brought here."
Within a few days Xu Ning's wife and family arrived. Xu Ning was surprised, and asked his wife how she came there. She replied, "When you had left, there were many inquiries as to why you had not turned up for duty. I said that you were sick, and gave them money to silence the matter. Then some days afterwards Tang Long came, and said that you had fallen sick in an inn on the road. He told us all to go with him quickly in order to see you before you died. He induced us to start at once, and brought us here."
Xu Ning was pleased to see them, but said that now he could not go back to the capital. Chao Gai and Song Jiang both pressed him to stay with them, and gave him a separate house for his family. The leaders held a conference regarding further military operations, and they asked Xu Ning to instruct their men how to use the hooked spears, or halberds. He agreed to do this, and selected the strongest men for his purpose.

*3000 troops defeated at one battle,*
*A great hero surrendered on the spot.*

## The Spearman Xu Ning Teaches How to Use the Barbed Lance, the hooked spear, & Drills the Brigands; Song Jiang Breaks & destroys the Linked-Up Cavalry & Gains a Victory

In Fraternity Hall, the chieftains requested Xu Ning to demonstrate the barbed lance. He was a fine figure of a man. Tall, broad-shouldered and thick at the middle, he had a round fair face adorned by a mustache and goatee. After selecting his trainees, he went outside the Hall, picked up a barbed lance and showed how it was done. The spectators cheered.

"If you're using this weapon on horseback," he said, "you must swing from the waist. Advance in seven moves—three hooks and four parries. Then, one stab and one cleave. A total of nine changes. If you're on foot, the best way is to advance eight steps and parry four times. This will open the door. At the twelfth step, change. At the sixteenth, turn completely around, alternately hooking and stabbing. At the twenty-fourth, push your opponent's weapon up, then down. Hook to the east and parry to the west. At the thirty-sixth, making sure that you're well covered, seize the tough and fight the strong. This is the correct method of using the barbed lance. We have a jingle that goes:

*Four parries, three hooks, seven in all,*
*Nine changes in total weave a magic spell,*
*At step twenty-four parry forward and back,*
*At step sixteen do a big turn as well."*

As Xu Ning demonstrated, stage by stage, the chieftains watched. The fighters were delighted by the way he plied the lance. From then on, he taught the deftest of them day and night. He also showed infantry how to hide in brush and grass and snag the legs of horses, instructing them in three secret methods.

In less than half a month, he had taught five to seven hundred men. Song Jiang and the other leaders were extremely pleased. They made preparations to break the foe.

Huyan Zhuo, since the capture of Peng Qi and Ling Zhen, had been riding forth with his cavalry every day to the edge of the river and hurling challenges. But the brigand leaders near the shore only continued holding the various beach heads and installing sharp stakes under the water. Huyan was able to send scouts along the roads west and north of the mountain, but he had no way of getting to the stronghold.

Inside the brigand fortress Ling Zhen was directed to manufacture several types of cannon, and a day was set for the attack against the enemy. The men who had been learning the use of the barbed lance were by now quite adept.

"I'm neither clever nor far-sighted," Song Jiang said to the other chieftains. "I wonder whether my idea will meet with your approval."

"We'd like to hear it," said Wu Yong.

"Tomorrow we won't use our cavalry, but will fight entirely on foot. The military tactics of Sun and Wu are very suited to wooded and watery areas. We'll take the infantry down, divide them into ten units and lure on the enemy. When they charge with their cavalry, we'll withdraw into the reeds and brush. Our men with the barbed lances will already be there lying in ambush. For every ten of these will be an equal number with big hooked poles. The lances will bring down the horses, the poles will snag the riders. We'll prepare similar ambushes on the open plain and in the narrow defiles. How does that plan strike you?"

"I think that's how we ought to do it," said Wu Yong. "Conceal our soldiers and seize their officers."

"Barbed lances and hooked poles together. Exactly the way," said Xu Ning.

Song Jiang then formed ten infantry units, with two leaders in command of each to go down the mountain and lure the foe. Naval craft to serve as reinforcements were put under the command of nine chieftains. Six cavalry units were also dispatched under six chieftains. Their function was to shout challenges at the enemy from the side of the mountain. Ling Zhen and Du Xing were to have charge of the cannons.

Xu Ning and Tang Long were given leadership of the men with the barbed lances. The main army was under Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Dai Zong, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. They issued all general orders and commands. The remaining chieftains were to defend the various forts.

That night at the third watch the barbed lancers crossed the river, spread out and went into ambush. At the fourth watch the ten infantry units moved across. Ling Zhen and Du Xing took with them Fiery Wind cannon and mountings, and set them up on a height. Xu Ning and Tang Long, as they crossed to the opposite shore, each carried a trumpet in a bag.

Dawn found Song Jiang and the main army lined up along the river. They beat drums, shouted and waved their banners.

When news of this reached Huyan Zhuo in the headquarters tent of his central army, he directed Han Tao of his vanguard to go out and scout. Then he ordered that the horses of his armored cavalry be linked together. He put on his armor, mounted his snowy-hoofed black steed, took up his double rods, and rode forth towards Liangshan Marsh with his men and horses.

He saw Song Jiang with a large force on the other side of the river and spread his troops out in battle formation. He conferred with Han Tao, who said: "They have a detachment of infantry, I don't know how large, due south of here."

"Who cares how large! Charge them with our linked cavalry!"

Han Tao galloped forth with five hundred horsemen. But to the southeast another force of infantry appeared. Han Tao was about to send part of his cavalry against them, when to the southwest he saw still another detachment, waving pennants and shouting. He pulled his entire unit back.

"There are three bandit detachments to the south," he told Huyan. "They've all got Liangshan Marsh banners."

"For a long time those rascals have refused to come out and fight," Huyan mused. "They must be up to something."

Before the words were out of his mouth, to the north was heard the boom of cannon. Huyan swore. "Ling Zhen has gone over to the bandits! They've got him to bombard us!"

While they were all watching south, three more units welled up in the north. "Those bandits surely are hatching some scheme," Huyan said to Han Tao. "We'll divide our army in two. I'll fight north with one column, you fight south with the other."

They were about to do this when four more enemy units appeared to the west. Huyan began to grow panicky. Northwards, a volley of cannon fire erupted, and projectiles landed upon the bluffs. They were shot from one large and forty-nine smaller cannons, which is why the battery was called Mother and Sons. The shells burst with an overpowering roar. Huyan's soldiers, confused before the combat even started, dashed wildly amid the cavalry and troops led by Han Tao.

The ten brigand infantry units ran east when chased east, and west when chased west. Huyan was furious. He advanced north with his army. Song Jiang's men plunged into the reeds. Huyan came tearing after them with a large contingent of linked cavalry. The armored steeds, galloping in tandem, could not be checked. They crashed in among the dry reeds, tall grass and tangled thickets. A shrill whistle rent the air, and barbed lances on both ends of the linked lines snagged the horses' legs and brought them tumbling to the ground. The animals in the middle whinnied in fright. Long poles snaked out of the reeds and hooked the riders.

Huyan, realizing he had been tricked, gave his horse free rein and raced back south after Han Tao. To the north behind him Fiery Wind cannon thundered. Here, there, all over the hills and plain, brigand infantry gave chase. Linked armored cavalry rolled and fell everywhere amid the reeds and grasses, and everywhere were caught.

Han Tao and Huyan knew they had been duped. They rode madly about after their mounted men, seeking an escape route. But every path was thick as flax with the banners of Liangshan Marsh. No path was safe, and they headed northwest.

Before they had gone five or six *li* they were confronted by a strong unit with two bold fellows in the lead—Mu Hong the Unrestrained and Mu Chun the Slightly Restrained. Both carried halberds, and they shouted: "Defeated generals, stand where you are!"

Huyan, enraged, charged the two, brandishing his rods. They fought four or five rounds, then Mu Chun withdrew. Fearing a trap, Huyan did not pursue, but rode due north along the road.

Another powerful band came down the slope and blocked his way. It was led by Two-Headed Snake Xie Zhen and Twin-Tailed Scorpion Xie Bao. They raced towards him, each gripping a steel fork. Flourishing his rods, Huyan clashed with them in combat. They fought six or seven rounds, and the two brothers retreated.

Huyan chased them less than half a *li* when from both sides suddenly twenty-four men with barbed lances surged forth. Huyan had no more heart for battle. He turned his mount and hurried off, northeast.

Again he was stopped, this time by Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel, husband and wife. The road clearly was perilous, but the thorns and brambles on all sides were even worse. He kicked up his steed, brandished his rods, and charged through his interceptors. Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel were unable to catch him. He rode pell-mell northeast, his army in ruins, his men scattered like raindrops and stars.

Song Jiang's trumpets sounded a return to the mountain, where each warrior came forward to claim his reward. Of the three thousand linked armored steeds, a troop and a half—brought down by the barbed lances—had their hoofs damaged. These were stripped of their armor and kept for eating purposes. But the mounts of more than two troops were in fine condition. These were led up the mountain to be fed and cared for and used as brigand mounts. All the armor-bedecked cavalrymen were captured alive and taken to the stronghold.

Five thousand imperial infantry, pressed fiercely on three sides, tried to flee back into the midst of their main army, but were all brought down by the barbed lances and caught. Those who ran to the river were rounded up by the naval chieftains, put on boats, ferried across, and escorted up the mountain under guard.

The men and horses previously captured by the imperial forces were recovered and returned to the fortress. Huyan's palisades were dismantled and new forts were built along the banks. Two inns were again erected to serve as eyes for the brigands, and as before Sun Xin, Gu Dasao, Shi Yong and Shi Qian were put in charge.

Liu Tang and Du Qian brought Han Tao to the stronghold, a bound captive. Song Jiang personally untied him and invited him into the Hall. He apologized and had a feast laid in his honor. Peng Qi and Ling Zhen, at Song's behest, urged him to join them. Han Tao, who originally was one of the stars of Earthly Fiends, was naturally of the same persuasion, and he promptly became a chieftain of Liangshan Marsh. Song Jiang had him write a letter to his family, then dispatched men to Chenzhou to bring them to the fortress, where they and Han Tao were reunited.

Song Jiang rejoiced. He had broken the linked cavalry, captured many men and horses, and collected large quantities of armor and weapons. Every day he and his cohorts feasted in celebration. But as usual they guarded all approaches against possible attack by imperial soldiers. Of that we'll say no more.

Huyan, having lost so much of his imperial army, dared not return to the capital. He rode alone on his black steed with the snowy hoofs, his armor hanging over the pommel as he hastened from the scene of his disaster. Without money, he had to take the gold belt from around his waist and sell it for silver.

"It happened so suddenly," he said to himself. "Who can I look to for refuge?" Then he remembered. "Murong, the prefect of Qingzhou is an old friend. Why not go to him? His sister is an imperial concubine. If, through her influence, I can be given another army. I may still get my revenge."

Towards evening of his second day on the road, he was hungry and thirsty. He dismounted at a village inn by the roadside and tied his horse to a tree near the front door. He went in, placed his rods on a table, sat down and told the host to bring wine and meat.

"We've only wine here," said the host. "But they just slaughtered a sheep in the village. If you want meat, I'll buy you some."

Huyan opened the ration bag at his waist and took out some of the silver he had exchanged for his gold belt. He gave this to the host.

"Get a leg of mutton and boil it for me. And mix some fodder and feed my horse. I'll spend the night here. Tomorrow, I'm going on to Qingzhou."

"There's nothing against staying here, sir. But we don't have a good bed."

"I'm a military man. Any place I can rest will do."

The host took the silver and went off to purchase the mutton. Huyan removed his armor from his horse's back and loosened its girth straps, then sat down outside the door. He waited a long time. At last the host returned with the sheep leg. Huyan told him to boil it, knead three measures of flour for griddlecakes, and draw two drams of wine.

While the meat was cooking and the griddlecakes were on the pan, the host heated water for Huyan to wash his feet and led the horse to a shed in the rear. The host chopped grass and boiled fodder. Huyan warmed some wine and imbibed a while. Soon the meat was ready, and Huyan invited the host to eat and drink with him.

"I'm an officer of the imperial army," Huyan said. "Because I've had a setback in arresting the bandits of Liangshan Marsh, I'm going to join Prefect Murong of Qingzhou. Take good care of my horse. It was given to me by the emperor, and is called the Ebony Steed Which Treads in Snow. I'll reward you handsomely later on."

"Thank you, Excellency. But there is something I must tell you. Not far from here is Peach Blossom Mountain. On it is a band of robbers. Their leader is Li Zhong the Tiger-Fighting General. Second in command is Zhou Tong the Little King. There are about six or seven hundred of them, and they rob and pillage. Sometimes they raid this village. The authorities have sent soldiers to capture them time and again, but always without success. You must sleep lightly during the night, sir."

"I'm a man of matchless courage. Even if those knaves came in full force it wouldn't matter to me. Just make sure to feed my horse well."

He dined on meat and wine and griddlecakes. Then the host spread a pallet and Huyan lay down to sleep.

Because he had been depressed for several days, and because he had drunk a few cups of wine too many, Huyan reclined without taking his clothes off. Around the third watch he awakened. He heard the host, to the rear of the house, lamenting. Huyan jumped up, seized his twin rods and went into the back yard.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"I went out to add some hay and I found that the fence had been knocked down. Someone has stolen Your Excellency's horse! Look, there—torch light three or four *li* off in the distance. They must be heading for that place."

"What place are you talking about?"

"The robbers you see on that road are bandits from Peach Blossom Mountain!"

Huyan was startled. He ordered the host to lead the way, and they gave chase for two or three *li* along the edges of the fields. But the torches had vanished. There was no telling where they had gone.

"This is terrible," said Huyan. "I've lost the emperor's gift horse!"

"Go into the prefecture tomorrow and report the theft," advised the host. "They'll send soldiers to catch the robbers. That's the only way you'll get the animal back."

Sunk in gloom, Huyan sat until daybreak. Then he set out for Qingzhou, instructing the host to carry his armor. It was dark by the time they reached the city, and they put up at an inn for the night. Early the following morning Huyan presented himself at the prefectural court and kowtowed before Murong.

The prefect was astonished. "I heard that you had gone to catch the bandits in Liangshan Marsh, General," he said. "What are you doing here?"

Huyan related what had transpired.

"Although you lost many men and horses, it was not through lack of diligence," said Murong. "The bandits tricked you. It wasn't your fault. The area under my administration has often been raided by them. Now that you're here you can first clean out Peach Blossom Mountain and retake the steed presented you by the emperor. Then you can capture the robbers on Two-Dragon Mountain and White Tiger in one fell swoop. I'll report your exploits to the emperor, and you'll again be given command of an army and can get your revenge. How will that be?"

Huyan again kowtowed. "I'm deeply grateful for your concern. If you'll be kind enough to do this, I'll repay you with my life."

Murong invited him to accept temporary quarters in a guestroom, where he could change his clothes, eat and rest. The prefect told the host who had been carrying Huyan's armor to return home.

Three days passed. Huyan, anxious to retrieve the imperial gift horse, entreated Murong to give him soldiers. The prefect mustered two thousand infantry and cavalry, which he put under Huyan's leadership, and presented him with a black-maned charger. Huyan thanked him, donned his armor, mounted, and marched off with his men to recapture his horse, heading straight for Peach Blossom Mountain.

On the mountain Li Zhong the Tiger-Fighting General and Zhou Tong the Little King, having obtained the Ebony Steed Which Treads in Snow, feasted and celebrated every day. A scout who watched the road reported: "Soldiers and horses from Qingzhou heading this way."

Zhou Tong rose and said to Li Zhong: "Brother, hold the fort. I'll go and drive back the government forces."

He mustered a hundred brigands, took his lance, mounted, and rode down to meet the foe.

Huyan Zhuo approached the mountain with two thousand infantry and cavalry and spread out in battle position. Riding forth, he shouted: "Robbers, come and be bound!"

Zhou Tong the Little King deployed his men in a single line and cantered out with levelled lance. Huyan gave his mount rein and advanced to do battle. Zhou Tong spurred his animal. Soon the two horses drew together.

The riders fought six or seven rounds. Zhou Tong wasn't strong enough. He pulled his steed around and headed up the slope. Huyan chased him a while. But he was afraid of being tricked. He rode hastily down the mountain and set up a camp. There he waited for the next opportunity to fight.

Zhou Tong returned to his stronghold. "Huyan Zhuo is a highly skilled warrior," he told Li Zhong. "I couldn't stop him. I had no choice but to come back. If he pursues right to our fort, what can we do?"

"I hear that Zhishen the Tattooed Monk is in the Precious Pearl Monastery on Two-Dragon Mountain with a large band of men. With him, what's more, is some fellow called Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute, and a newly arrived pilgrim Wu Song. They're all formidable fighters. I'll send a letter requesting their aid. If we get out of this danger thanks to their efforts, I'll be glad to pay them tribute every month."

"I've known about those brave fellows for some time. I'm just afraid that monk still remembers the first time we met, and won't want to help."

Li Zhong laughed. "Never mind. He's a good man, very forthright. When he learns of the fix we're in, he'll sure come with warriors to the rescue."

"Yes, that's true."

The letter was written and two competent brigands were picked to deliver it. They rolled down the rear slope and struck out for Two-Dragon Mountain. They reached the foot of it in only two days. The brigands on guard there questioned them closely on the nature of their business.

Three chieftains sat in the main hall of the Precious Pearl Monastery. Zhishen the Tattooed Monk was first in command. Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute was second. Third was Wu Song the Pilgrim.

In the building at the entry gate were four lesser chiefs. One was Shi En the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub. The son of the warden of Mengzhou Prison at the time Wu Song killed General Zhang and his entire family, he and his father had been made responsible for apprehending the culprit. Rather than do this, Shi En had abandoned his home and fled. For some time he was a wanderer. Later, his parents died, and he heard that Wu Song was on Two-Dragon Mountain. He had hurried to join him.

Another lesser chief was Cao Zheng the Demon Carver. He had been with Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi when they took Precious Pearl Monastery and killed Deng Long. He too subsequently joined the band.

The third was Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener. The fourth was Sun the Witch. These two, husband and wife, had sold dumplings stuffed with human flesh at Crossroads Rise on the Mengzhou Road. They had joined in response to repeated letters from Lu Zhishen and Wu Song.

Cao Zheng, hearing that there was a letter from Peach Blossom Mountain, carefully questioned the messengers, then went up to the hall and reported to the three chieftains.

"When I left Mount Wutai I put up in Peach Blossom Village, and there I gave that prick Zhou Tong a good drubbing," Lu recalled. "Then Li Zhong came and recognized me. He invited me up to their mountain for a day of drinking. He pledged me his blood brother and wanted me to stay and be their chieftain. But the stinginess of those two annoyed me. I collected some of their gold and silver drinking vessels and left. Now they send messengers pleading for aid. Let them come up. We'll hear what they have to say."

Cao Zheng soon returned with the two emissaries. They hailed the chieftains respectfully and said: "Murong, prefect of Qingzhou, has recently been entertaining Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, who failed in an attack on Liangshan Marsh. The prefect has sent him to clean out our mountain strongholds on Peach Blossom, Two-Dragon and White Tiger, so that he may be given another army and take Liangshan and get his revenge. Our leaders beseech you great chieftains to come with armed forces and save us. When all this is over, we will be glad to pay tribute."

"We defend our own mountain and fortress. As a rule we don't go to anyone's rescue," Yang Zhi said to Wu Song and the Tattooed Monk. "But if we don't help, we'll damage the prestige of the gallant fraternity, for one thing. For another, if we let that lout capture Peach Blossom Mountain, he'll look on us with contempt. Let's leave Zhang Qing, Sun the Witch, Shi En and Cao Zheng to hold the fort. Then we three can take a little trip."
He mustered five hundred foot soldiers and sixty cavalrymen. Each donned his armor and equipment, and all headed for Peach Blossom Mountain.
When Li Zhong heard the news from Two-Dragon Mountain, he led three hundred brigands down as reinforcements. Huyan Zhuo rushed his entire complement to block their path. He deployed his men and, brandishing his rods, rode out against Li Zhong.
Li was from Dingyuan in Haozhou Prefecture, where his family, for generations, had earned their livelihood by their skill at arms. Because of his stalwart physique, he was known as the Tiger-Fighting General. But in his clash with Huyan he discovered he had met his match. After ten rounds or so, he could see it was going badly. He parried his adversary's weapons and fled.
Huyan, with a low opinion of Li's fighting ability, chased him up the mountain. Zhou Tong the Little King was at mid-point on the slope. He promptly threw down stones like goose eggs. Huyan hurriedly turned his mount and returned to the foot of the mountain. He found his government soldiers shouting in alarm.
"What are you yelling about?" he demanded.
"There, in the distance. A body of men and horses racing this way!" exclaimed the rear guard.
Huyan looked beyond them. A big fat monk on a white horse was leading a contingent, trailed by a rising cloud of dust. It was Zhishen the Tattooed Monk.
"Where is that prick who was beaten at Liangshan Marsh?" he was roaring. "How dare you come here and bluster?"
"I'm going to kill you first, bald donkey," Huyan responded, "to work off the rage inside me!"
Lu twirled his iron Buddhist staff, Huyan waved his rods, the horses met, the opposing forces shouted. The two men fought forty or fifty rounds with neither emerging the victor.
"This monk is fantastic," Huyan marvelled to himself.
On both sides trumpets blared and the contestants withdrew to rest. But after a short interval, Huyan grew impatient. Again he rode his steed into the arena. "Come out, thief of a monk," he cried. "Let's fight to a finish!"
Lu was about to meet the challenge when Yang Zhi said: "Rest a bit longer, brother. Watch me nab this oaf!"
Waving his sabre, he rode forth and clashed with Huyan. Forty or fifty rounds they fought with neither vanquishing the other.
Huyan was filled with admiration. "Where did they get two like these?" he wondered. "Truly remarkable. They never learned such jousting in the greenwood!"
Impressed by Huyan's superb skill with arms, Yang Zhi broke off the engagement, turned his horse and galloped back to his position. Huyan didn't give chase, but also turned his mount around. Both sides withdrew their forces.
"This is our first venture here," Lu Zhishen said to Yang Zhi. "We'd better not camp too close to them. Let's pull back another twenty *li*. We'll come out and fight again tomorrow."
With their men, they crossed to a nearby hollow and there set up a camp.
Huyan brooded in his tent. "I expected taking this gang of cheap robbers would be as easy as snapping bamboo," he thought. "Who knew I'd ran into such adversaries. What rotten luck!"
He could see no way out of his dilemma. Just then a messenger arrived from Prefect Murong.
"The General is ordered to return at once with his soldiers and defend the city," the man said. "Bandits from White Tiger Mountain under Kong Ming and Kong Liang are on their way to raid the prison. To prevent anything from happening to the prefectural government, the General is requested to hurry back with his forces."
This was just the excuse Huyan was looking for. He set out for Qingzhou with his infantry and cavalry that very night.
The next day Lu Zhishen, Yang Zhi and Wu Song led their brigands, waving banners and yelling, down the mountain. To their astonishment, there was not a sign of their foe. Li Zhong and Zhou Tong came down with men from their own mountain and invited the three chieftains to their stronghold. There, they slaughtered sheep and horses and spread a feast in their honor. At the same time they dispatched scouts to find out what was happening on the road beyond.

As Huyan was leading his contingent back to the city he saw a body of men and horses already on the outskirts of Qingzhou. At their head were Kong Ming the Comet and Kong Liang the Flaming Star—sons of Squire Kong who lived at the foot of White Tiger Mountain. In a quarrel with a local rich man, they had slaughtered him and his entire household. Next, they gathered six or seven hundred men, occupied White Tiger Mountain, and took to pillage and plunder. Prefect Murong arrested their uncle Kong Bin, who lived in the city and threw him into jail. They had been heading for Qingzhou to get him out. Now, they found themselves confronted by Huyan Zhuo and his contingent.
The two sides spread out and engaged in battle. Huyan rode to the front of his position. Prefect Murong, watching from a tower on the city wall, saw Kong Ming, with levelled lance astride a charger, attack Huyan. They met and fought over twenty rounds. Huyan wanted to display his prowess before the prefect. He noted that Kong Ming, whose skill with arms was not exceptional, was now entirely on the defensive. Huyan drove in close and snatched him off his horse.
Kong Liang and his men turned and fled. Murong, from the tower, shouted for Huyan to go after them. The government soldiers pressed hard and captured more than a hundred of the foe. Badly defeated, Kong Liang and the rest of his forces ran in all directions. Towards evening, they put up in an ancient temple.
After capturing Kong Ming, Huyan led him into the city and presented himself before the prefect. Murong was delighted. He directed that a cangue be placed around the prisoner's neck, and that he be confined in the same jail as his uncle Kong Bin. The prefect rewarded the troops and entertained Huyan. He asked about the brigands on Peach Blossom Mountain.
"I thought I had only to stretch out my hand and take them, as easily as catching turtles in a jug," said Huyan. "But unexpectedly a band of robbers came to their rescue. Among them was a monk and a big blue-faced fellow. I fought them both, but couldn't defeat either. Their skill is out of the ordinary. It's not the usual style of robbers in the greenwood. So I was prevented from capturing the bandits."
"That monk," said Murong, "is Lu Da, who was a major under Governor-General Zhong of the Yanan border region. Later, he shaved off his hair and became a monk, and he's now known as Zhishen the Tattooed Monk. The big fellow with blue tinged complexion was once an aide in the palace in the Eastern Capital. He's called Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute. Their third leader is Wu Song, known as the Pilgrim. He's the Constable Wu who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge.
"These three occupy Two-Dragon Mountain, from where they rob and plunder. We've sent troops to catch them several times, but they killed four or five of our officers. We haven't caught one of them to this day!"
"Their skill is superb. So that's who they are—Palace Aide Yang and Major Lu. They certainly deserve their reputation! But don't worry, Excellency. You have me here. I'll nab every one of them and turn them over!"
The prefect was very pleased. He gave a feast in Huyan's honor, then invited him to rest in a guest-house. Of that we'll say no more.

Kong Liang was leading the remnants of his beaten unit along the road. Suddenly, a band of men and horses emerged from among the trees. The bold fellow at their head was Wu Song the Pilgrim. Kong Liang rolled from his saddle and kowtowed.
"I trust all has gone well with you, sir warrior!"
Wu Song hastily returned the salutation. He raised Kong Liang to his feet.
"I heard you two brothers had occupied White Tiger Mountain and formed a righteous gathering," he said. "Several times I intended to pay my respects. But I wasn't able leave our stronghold, and the road to your place is difficult, so I couldn't get to see you. What brings you here today?"
Kong Liang told how his brother was captured while trying to rescue their uncle Kong Bin.
"Don't be upset, friend," said Wu Song. "I have six or seven brothers with me in our band on Two-Dragon Mountain. The other day Li Zhong and Zhou Tong on Peach Blossom Mountain were strongly attacked by government troops from Qingzhou, and they asked for our assistance. Lu and Yang went with some of our forces and fought Huyan Zhuo all day. For some reason, he and his men suddenly left in the night. The Peach Blossom Mountain people feasted Lu and Yang and me and presented us with a snowy hoofed steed. I'm taking our first contingent back to our stronghold. Lu and Yang are following and will soon be here. I'll tell them to raid Qingzhou and save your uncle and brother. How will that be?"
Kong Liang thanked Wu Song. After a considerable wait, Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi arrived with their cavalry. Wu Song introduced Kong Liang.
"I once met Song Jiang in his manor and put him to a lot of trouble," Wu said. "Today, for the sake of chivalry, we can combine the forces of the three mountain strongholds, attack Qingzhou, kill the prefect, capture Huyan Zhuo, and divide the money and grain in the storehouses for the use of our various bands. What do you say?"
"Just what I was thinking," asserted Lu Zhishen. "Let's notify Peach Blossom Mountain, and ask Li Zhong and Zhou Tong to bring their men. The three bands can strike Qingzhou together."
"It's a sturdily built city, its armed forces are strong, and Huyan Zhuo is a courageous fellow," mused Yang Zhi. "I don't mean to disparage us, but if you want to succeed you'd better take my advice."
"Let's hear your strategy, brother," said Wu Song. Yang Zhi spoke briefly, he wasted no words. And as a result, smoke rose from the ruins of every house of the citizens of Qingzhou, and the heroes of the Marsh ground their fists into their palms as they advanced belligerently.

Now in the Assembly Hall Chao Gai, Song Jiang, the Professor, Taoist Gongsun and the rest had requested the Spearsman to teach them the moves with the hooked spear. The Spearsman was as might be expected a fine figure of a man, extremely tall, with a pale face and a fine black moustache and whiskers, a solid trunk and broad shoulders.
When the Spearsman had chosen his trainees, he left the Assembly Hall and taking up a hooked spear started to do exercises with it. The onlookers applauded. Then he began to instruct them: "Generally when we use this weapon on horseback we strike from the waist and it goes step by step: seven forward moves — three hooks and four parries, followed by a thrust and a slash, making nine moves in all. If you are using the hooked spear on foot, then it's even better. First eight steps and four thrusts. That opens the gate. On the twelfth step, the first change. On the sixteenth turn about, hooking with the spear. On the twenty-fourth push up, then down. Hook to the east, parry to the west. On the thirty-sixth step keep your guard up and you've got 'em. That's how you fight with the hooked spear."
The Spearsman explained the method move by move, demonstrating each one to the assembled leaders, who were highly appreciative of the performance. From that day on those who had been selected, the nimblest and strongest, practised from dawn to dusk, while the infantry were also taught how to conceal themselves in the woods and trip the enemy horses. In less than a fortnight six or seven hundred had been trained, to the great satisfaction of Song Jiang and the other leaders. They were now ready to take on the enemy.
Now since the loss of the Supremo and Thunderer, Twin Rods had been coming daily to the water's edge to challenge his opponents to combat. But the mountain stronghold only gave orders for the boat captains to strengthen all shore defences and to fix concealed stakes in the water. Although Twin Rods had reconnoitred the roads on the north and west of the mountain, he could find no way of reaching the main stronghold.
Mount Liang now gave Thunderer a fixed time-limit for preparing various kinds of missile to be taken down and used against the enemy. Those who were to use the hooked spear technique had already completed their training.
Song Jiang said: "I may well be wrong, but I have a plan and I'd like everyone's opinion."
The Professor said: "We would like to hear your plan."
"For the coming engagement, let us not use cavalry. Let everyone fight on foot. We will use a tactic of Sunzi's, taking advantage of the rough and marshy terrain. The infantry will march down the mountain in ten divisions, with the objective of luring the enemy on. When their attack starts, everyone will take off into the reeds and undergrowth. Troops with hooked spears will already be lying in ambush there, and with every group of ten trained in the use of the hooked spear there will be ten more with snaring hooks. When the cavalry charge they will throw them down with their thrusting and hooking, and the others will use their snaring hooks to snag them. We will also have ambushes like this along the narrow paths in the flat areas. What do you think of it?"
"A great way to preserve our numbers and capture their leaders," said the Professor.
"This is exactly the right way to employ hooked spears and snaring hooks," said the Spearsman.
Song Jiang divided his troops into ten sections. The Red-Haired Devil and Skyscraper led one section; the two Mu brothers led another; one was led by Morbid and the Nine-Tailed Turtle; another by Whiskers and Redeye; one by Snake and Scorpion; one by the Forester and Rhinoceros, uncle and nephew; one by Steelbright and Short-Arse, the husband and wife team; one by the Pill Monger and the Flautist; one by the Dandy and Whitey; one by Panther and Green-Eyes. These ten sections of foot soldiers went down the mountain first, to draw the enemy on. After them went the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot and White Eel, the three Ruan brothers, the two Tong brothers and Flagpole. These nine boat captains were to support the campaign in boats. Then six leaders on horseback, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, Skyhawk, Mr. Chai, Colonel Sun and Golden Wings were to challenge the enemy on the slopes of the mountain. Thunderer and Uglymug were to command the artillery. The Spearsman and Spots were in charge of the troops with hooked spears; the troops of the main contingent were led by Song Jiang, the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, the Magic Messenger, the Little Duke and the Halberdier. These dispositions were announced and the remaining leaders were charged with guarding the various camps.
When Song Jiang had completed these arrangements, in the middle of the night, the troops with the hooked spears went down first and were ferried across the water and placed in ambush all about. In the early hours of the morning the ten contingents of infantry set off. Thunderer and Uglymug took wind shells and set up their guns on a high point, erecting racks and placing the shells on them. The Spearsman and Spots crossed the water with their signals. At first light Song Jiang surrounded by his troops beside the water, began drumming, shouting and waving banners.
Twin Rods inside his tent heard the noise. After receiving the reports from his lookouts, he sent Victorious with the advance guard to reconnoitre. The cavalry units were now linked together and Twin Rods himself donned full armour and mounted his famous black charger with the white socks. Brandishing his two rods and urging on the horses and carts he thundered towards the Marshes of Mount Liang.
Song Jiang could be seen beside the water, leading a detachment of his troops. Twin Rods ordered his forces to deploy. Victorious, leader of the vanguard, rode up to consult him: "Over there to the south there's a company of infantry. Do we know how many there are?"
"Don't worry about that," said Twin Rods. "Just get the linked cavalry to charge!"
Victorious took five hundred troops to make a quick reconnaissance and found that another group of enemy infantry had appeared to the south-east. He was about to send some of his men to investigate when he noticed another cluster of banners over to the south-west, where a great deal of flag-waving and shouting was going on. He led his troops back and reported to Twin Rods: "There's three companies to the south all with Mount Liang banners."
Twin Rods said: "The blighters have been lying low for such a long time. They must have some plan."
He had hardly finished speaking when a loud explosion was heard to the north. Twin Rods began cursing. "That must mean Thunderer's gone over to the bandits and taught them gunnery."
Now they all turned from the south and saw the banners of three divisions waving to the north. Twin Rods said to Victorious: "So that's their dastardly plan. We'd better divide our army in half. I'll attack the ones on the north and you attack the lot to the south."
But before they could put this plan into action, four more divisions appeared to the west. Twin Rods began to feel uneasy. A whole string of explosions was now heard from the north and shots began landing on the hillside nearby. The firing came from a big gun that was surrounded by forty-nine smaller ones, known as the "Mother and Sons." The noise when it fired was truly awesome. Twin Rod's troops were thrown into confusion before the fighting had even begun. Running this way and that, they become mixed up with the troops led by Victorious.
The ten divisions of enemy infantry, when attacked, simply melted away on every side. Enraged, Twin Rods concentrated his attack on the north. Song Jiang's men ran in all directions taking cover in the reedbeds. Twin Rods now attempted to sweep them away with his linked cavalry. The armoured horses galloped all together and had no means of stopping. They galloped straight into this tangle of withered reeds, and dead undergrowth. There amid a cacophony of whistled signals the experts with the hooked spears went into action. They attacked the legs of the horses on either end of the row and those in the middle panicked. The troops with the snagging hooks then subdued them and all over the wasteland people busied themselves tying up the prisoners.
Twin Rods realized that he had been caught in a trap with the hooked spearsmen. He pulled up his horse and galloped away south to look for Victorious. From behind him the wind shells began to whistle over his head. On this side and that, on every hill or stretch of wasteland, it was nothing but pursuing infantry. The linked cavalry of Victorious and Twin Rods had galloped pell-mell into the undergrowth where they were tripped and taken. Both leaders now realized that they had been outwitted. They galloped about in all directions trying to locate their cavalry and find a way out. But all these paths were thick with the banners of Mount Liang and there was no route they could take with any confidence. In the end they turned north-west. When they had gone not much over a mile a group of bandits appeared. The two fellows who commanded them blocked the road. One was Mu the Unstoppable and the other was Mu the Irrepressible. Each held a stout halberd. "You're defeated!" they shouted. "It's useless trying to escape."
Twin Rods was furious. Weaving his rods he galloped straight at them. After four or five bouts Mu the Irrepressible galloped off. Fearing a trap Twin Rods did not give chase but took the main route to the north.
At this point another group of bandits appeared on the mountainside and blocked his path. One was Snake and the other was Scorpion. They bore down on him, each armed with a trident. Twin Rods whirled his rods again and attacked. After five or six bouts Snake and Scorpion broke off and fled. But Twin Rods had not gone more than a few hundred metres when twenty-four hooked spear specialists appeared from either side and swept towards him. Twin Rods had no more stomach for the fight. He turned his horse's head north-eastward and fled along the road. Here he came upon the husband and wife pair, Short-Arse and Steelbright, standing in the way. His road was blocked and in addition escape on either side was hindered by thorny grass. Twin Rods slapped his horse, whirled his rods, and tried to force a way through. Short-Arse and Steelbright followed, but they couldn't catch him. He got away to the north-east.
Twin Rods had suffered a huge defeat and his forces had been scattered like raindrops.

The foe like a threatening storm appear;
*The black horse turns and gallops free.*
*Linked cavalry fall to the skill of the spear.*
The general into the wilds must flee.

Now our story divides. Song Jiang ordered the gong to be sounded, signalling withdrawal to the mountain stronghold, where all claimed their reward. Of the three thousand linked cavalry, a good half had been demolished by the hooked spears. The dead and dying horses were flayed and then used for food. The remaining good horses were taken up the mountain and fed well, to be used for riding. Their armoured riders were captured alive and also taken to the mountain. The five thousand foot soldiers found themselves surrounded on three sides and fled towards the army in the centre, where they were thrown down and captured by men with hooked spears. Those who fled towards the water were cut off by the sailors and picked up in their boats, after which they were rowed across to the landing and taken up the mountain.
All the horses and men previously captured by the government troops were rescued and returned to the stronghold. The camp that Twin Rods had set up was razed to the ground. The small camp at the water's edge was rebuilt, as were the two inns and other buildings that served as the stronghold's eyes, with Blackface and Auntie Gu, the Guv and the Flea reinstated as the landlords. The Red-Haired Devil and Skyscraper having captured Victorious bound him and took him a prisoner to the mountain stronghold. When Song Jiang saw him he personally loosed his bonds and invited him into the hall, where he courteously apologized and entertained him with a banquet. They got the Supremo and Thunderer to encourage him to join the company. Victorious was in fact one of the seventy-two baleful stars, so it is no surprise that he willingly consented to join them and became one of the leaders on Mount Liang. Song Jiang then prepared a letter and sent someone to get the family of Victorious and bring them to join him on the mountain. Song Jiang was delighted to have broken up the linked cavalry and to have gained new troops, armour, helmets and weapons, and there was feasting every day. The stronghold's defences and lookouts were put back on their old footing. Of this no more.

As for Twin Rods, having lost many troops, he dared not return to the capital. He rode away by himself on the black horse with white socks, his armour tied on the horse's back. He was looking for a refuge, but he had no money for his expenses. He unfastened his silver belt and sold it to provide himself with funds. As he rode along he thought to himself: "Who would have thought that today I would be so down on my luck? Where can I take refuge?"

Suddenly the thought came to him: "Governor Murong of Qingzhou and I have known each other many a year, why don't I go to him? If I can get his sister the imperial concubine on my side I may be able to get hold of another army to avenge all this."

After travelling for two days he found himself hungry and thirsty when evening came. Seeing a country inn beside the road, he dismounted, tethered his horse to a tree outside and entered. He laid his two rods on the table and sat down. He asked the waiter to bring him wine and food.

"We only sell wine here," the waiter said. "But if you want meat, they've just killed a sheep in the village. I can go and buy some mutton if you like."

Twin Rods unslung his provisions bag and took out some money in loose silver which he gave to the waiter, saying: "See if you can get a mutton leg to cook for me, and make sure you feed my horse. Tonight I shall stay here in your place. Tomorrow I go on to Qingzhou."

The waiter said: "Your Honour, you can stay here if you like, but I can't offer you a good bed."

"I'm a soldier," said Twin Rods. "So long as there's somewhere to lie down it'll be good enough."

While the waiter went off with the silver to buy mutton, Twin Rods unloaded his armour from the horse, loosened his belt and sat down in front of the door. It seemed a long time before the waiter reappeared, bearing a leg of mutton. Twin Rods told him to boil the mutton, make some pancakes with three catties of flour and bring three measures of wine. While he was cooking the meat and making the pancakes the waiter also heated water for Twin Rods to wash his feet. Then he put the horse in a little stable at the back of the house. He cut grass and cooked some oats for the horse. Twin Rods told him to warm some wine so he could have a drink first. Soon the meat was done and Twin Rods asked the waiter for more wine to drink with the meat. Then he said: "I am an officer of the imperial guard. Because I have suffered a setback in my plan to destroy Mount Liang I am heading for Governor Murong's in Qingzhou. Make sure you take good care of my horse. He's a very special horse, known as a snowy-footed black steed, a gift from the Emperor himself. You can be sure that I will reward you well."

"I am very grateful to Your Honour," said the waiter. "But there is something Your Honour should know. Not far from here there's this mountain, called Mount Peachblossom. There's a band of robbers up there. The chief is called Li Zhong, the Tiger-Killer, and his henchman is Zhou Tong, the Big Chief. They've got together an army of six or seven hundred and they go around robbing and plundering. They're always stirring up trouble in the region. The authorities keep sending out special troops to catch them but they've never been able to. You'd best be on your guard, Your Honour, and sleep lightly tonight."

Twin Rods said: "Ten thousand men could not stand up against me, let them all come, if they like, the whole bloody lot of them, who cares? You just make sure you look after my horse properly."

When he had eaten and drunk enough, the waiter made up a bed for him.

Now partly because Twin Rods had been having such a wearisome time, and partly because he had drunk a few cups too many, he lay down without even bothering to undress. He slept undisturbed till around midnight, when he awoke suddenly to hear the waiter cursing away to himself at the back of the house. He jumped up at once, grabbed his two rods and ran to the back of the house. "What are you making such a noise for?" he asked.

The waiter replied: "I got up to fetch grass and I saw that the fence was broken and Your Honour's horse had been stolen. I could still see some torches away in the distance. That must be where they're heading."

"Where do you mean?" Twin Rods asked.

"It's the road those robbers from Mount Peachblossom take, no doubt about it," said the waiter.

Twin Rods was devastated. He made the waiter lead him across the rice fields for several miles, but the torches had vanished and they had no means of knowing which way to go.

Twin Rods said: "I've lost the Emperor's horse! Now what am I going to do?"

"Tomorrow Your Honour must go to the authorities and report it," the waiter said. "They'll send troops to catch them and then you'll get your horse back."

But Twin Rods' sorrow knew no bounds. He sat there till day came and then, telling the waiter to carry his armour, set out for Qingzhou. It was getting dark when they reached the city and they spent the night at an inn. Next day at dawn he was outside the courtroom asking to see Governor Murong. The Governor had quite a surprise. "I was told you had been sent to apprehend the bandits of Mount Liang, Commander," he said. "What are you doing here?"

Twin Rods told him all that we have just recounted. Governor Murong said: "Although you've lost a lot of troops, it wasn't deliberate, you were caught out by the bandits' wiles, there was nothing you could do about it. In this district which I govern we have suffered many depredations from bandits. Since you are now here, you can clean up Mount Peachblossom and get the Emperor's horse back. Then you can go on to Twin Dragon Peak and White Tiger Mountain and hunt down the robbers in those two hideouts. When you've dealt with that mess, I will do my utmost to have you reinstated to lead a force against Mount Liang and have your revenge. How about that?"

Twin Rods prostrated himself again and said: "I am deeply grateful to you for your concern in this matter. If you will do this I shall be indebted to you till my dying day."

Governor Murong invited Twin Rods to go to a guest-room and rest. He provided him with clothing, lodging and food. The waiter who had carried the armour was sent home.

After three days, Twin Rods was impatient to recover the Emperor's horse, and kept asking Governor Murong for the troops. The Governor accordingly let him have two thousand infantry and gave him a black horse. Twin Rods thanked him, armed himself and mounted and led his troops forth in search of the missing horse, heading for Mount Peachblossom.

Now on Mount Peachblossom the Tiger-Killer and the Big Chief had spent every day since the capture of the Emperor's horse in carousing. That day one of their hidden scouts returned and reported: "Troops from Qingzhou are heading this way!"

The Big Chief rose to his feet and said: "You look after the camp, brother, while I go and send them packing!" He chose a hundred troops, grasped his spear, mounted and rode off down the mountain to encounter the government forces.

When Twin Rods and his two thousand government troops reached the mountain, they deployed in battle formation. Twin Rods rode out in front and bellowed: "Come out and surrender, you thieves and robbers!"

The Big Chief ordered his troops to spread out in a straight line. Then he rode out in front with his spear at the ready. Twin Rods charged him. The Big Chief urged his horse on to the encounter. The two horses clashed, but after only half a dozen bouts the Big Chief feeling that his strength was failing turned his horse's head and galloped off up the mountain. Twin Rods pursued him some way, but fearing a trap hurriedly turned back and set up camp at the bottom to wait and fight another day.

When the Big Chief returned to the stronghold, he told the Tiger-Killer: "Twin Rods is a great fighter. We can't handle him. All we can do is withdraw up the mountain, and if he follows us up here I don't know what we are going to do!"

The Tiger-Killer said: "I have heard that Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk, is at the Temple of the Precious Pearl on Twin Dragon Peak. He's got a lot of followers. And there is also someone called Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast. And there's a new arrival there, 'Pilgrim' Wu Song, who's got the courage of ten thousand. We'd better write them a letter, asking them to send troops to relieve us. To get ourselves out of this mess we'd better accept their authority over us. At the end of the month we can pay them some tribute."

"I know only too well how courageous they are. I'm just afraid that that monk may remember about what happened before and not want to help us," said the Big Chief.

The Tiger-Killer laughed and said: "Remember how he beat you up and stole a whole lot of our gold and silver cups? But why should he bear us any grudge? He has a generous nature. If he sends troops here to help us, I'm sure he will lead them himself."

"No doubt you're right," said the Big Chief.

They wrote the letter and sent two quick-witted men with it. The messengers stole down the far side of the mountain and headed for Twin Dragon Peak. They reached it in two days. First they made detailed inquiries. They were told that there were three leaders in the great hall of the Temple of the Precious Pearl. Chief of them was Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk, second in command was Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast, third was "Pilgrim" Wu Song.

There were four lesser chiefs on the gate lower down the mountain: one was Shi En, the Young Master (this was the son of the Warden of the Mengzhou prison camp. After Wu Song killed General Zhang and all his family, he fled with all his family and took refuge in the rivers and lakes. Later his parents died and hearing that Wu Song was on Twin Dragon Peak he rushed off to join them). Another was Cao Zheng, the Knife (he was the butcher who had been with Zhishen and the Blue-Faced Beast at the outset, when they seized the Temple of the Precious Pearl, after killing Deng Long). Also there were Zhang Qing, the Gardener and Sister Sun, the Ogress (these two were husband and wife. They had resided at Crossways Rise on the Mengzhou road, selling meat pies made with human flesh. They had joined the band because the Monk and the Pilgrim had written many letters inviting them).

When the Knife heard there was a letter from Mount Peachblossom, he asked for details, and then sent some one up to the great hall to inform the three chiefs. Zhishen, the Flowery Monk, said: "When I first left Mount Wutai, I spent the night in the neighbourhood of Mount Peachblossom, and I gave that Big Chief a bloody good hiding. As for that Tiger-Killer, when he knew it was me he invited me up the mountain for a day's drinking and called me his brother, wanted me to join them as one of their leaders. But they were stingy bastards, so I decamped with some of their silver. Now they're asking for help. Well, let's see what they have to say. Let their men come on up."

The Knife had only been gone a few moments when the messengers appeared in the hall. They saluted and said: "Governor Murong has recently received Commander Huyan known as Twin Rods, after his defeat at the hands of Mount Liang. Governor Murong has now ordered the destruction of the three strongholds, that is to say, our Mount Peachblossom, Twin Dragon Peak and White Tiger Mountain, and is going to let Twin Rods have troops to subdue Mount Liang and have his revenge on them. Our leaders are now asking you to come and help them. Later, when things are quieter we will pay you some tribute."

The Blue-Faced Beast said: "Supposing we just guard our own stronghold and protect the mountain, without offering them any help. I see two problems: firstly it will not improve relations between the heroes of the rivers and lakes, and secondly, if those bastards capture Mount Peachblossom, they will not have much respect for us here. Let us leave the Gardener, Sister Sun, the Young Master and the Knife to look after our stronghold while we three go and lend them a hand."

Accordingly five hundred foot soldiers and more than six hundred cavalry, fully equipped and armed, were detailed to go to Mount Peachblossom.

When the Tiger-Killer heard the news from Twin Dragon Peak he took three hundred troops down the mountain to meet them. But Twin Rods heard about this and quickly drawing his troops up to block the way, rode out to receive the Tiger-Killer, whirling his rods.

This Tiger-Killer was a native of Dingyuan in Haozhou and his family had always made their living by giving demonstrations with spear and staff. People called him the Tiger-Killer because of his great bodily strength. But when he came down the mountain to join battle with Twin Rods, how would he fare? After ten bouts he saw that things were not looking good for him, so he put up his weapon and fled. This behaviour was contemptible to Twin Rods, who galloped in pursuit. The Big Chief, who was stationed halfway up the mountain, began raining down ballista missiles the size of goose eggs and Twin Rods was obliged hurriedly to turn his horse and gallop down again.

The government troops were now raising a continuous outcry. "What's all the shouting about?" Twin Rods asked. "A column of troops is approaching," they told him.

He rode to the rear to see for himself. He saw a cloud of dust and at the head of the troops a big monk, riding a white horse. Now who was this? Well, listen:

*Since the day he was shaved, when he came to the monkhood, far and wide has he wandered, in search of good men. There's huge strength in those shoulders, violence is his birthright. He'll swindle the Buddha and shout at Guanyin! His monk's knife and staff give off a cold glint. Scripture is unknown to him, he's a stranger to fasting. It's the Flowery Monk, of course, it's Lu Zhishen.*

Monk Lu Zhishen shouted out: "These fuckers are the rabble defeated by the company from the Marshes of Mount Liang, and they think they can come here and frighten us!"

"You're the first I'll kill, you bald scoundrel!" Twin Rods shouted back. "You've really wound me up!"

The two horses converged, with Zhishen twirling his monk's staff and Twin Rods flourishing his rods. They fought forty or fifty bouts but neither had the advantage. Twin Rods was secretly admiring his opponent: "What skill he has, this monk!"

Gongs were now sounded on either side and the two rejoined their armies to rest awhile. After a brief respite, Twin Rods urged his horse forward again and cried: "Come out and meet me again, you bald scoundrel! Your hour has come, you're going to taste defeat!" The Monk was about to ride forth, but another hero had taken offence and shouted: "Take a rest brother, I'll capture the bugger for you!"

Who was this then, charging at Twin Rods with whirling sword? Listen:

*Once a commander of the imperial guard in the capital, disaster struck when he was involved in the transport of precious plants and stones: the stars were unpropitious. His sword can subdue the universe, his bow can settle the world. His strength combines the tiger's ferocity, the wolf's flexibility, the monkey's agility; he rides a fiery stallion, seated firmly on an embossed saddle. This hero's fame will enhance Mount Liang. This is the leader whom men call Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast.*

And so the Blue-Faced Beast rode out to do battle with Twin Rods. They fought more than forty bouts but neither could prevail. When Twin Rods saw how skilful his opponent was, he said to himself: "Where have these two come from? They're real professionals! This is not the kind of thing you'd expect from the greenwood."

When the Blue-Faced Beast saw that Twin Rods fought with such spirit, he feinted and then turned his horse and galloped back to his own ranks. Twin Rods likewise reined in his horse. He did not give chase. Both sides now withdrew their troops.

The Monk discussed matters with the Blue-Faced Beast. "We have got this far, but we must not try to reach the lower camp. Let us withdraw a few miles and tomorrow we will come to fight again." They withdrew their troops to a camp at the foot of a nearby ridge.

Twin Rods sat in his tent, gloomily turning things over in his mind: "I had thought it would all be as simple as splitting bamboo to capture this bunch of rebels. Who would have thought I was going to meet adversaries like these! It's just my luck!" He had got no further when a messenger from Governor Murong suddenly appeared and shouted: "You are to bring your troops back to protect the city, General! Two bandits from White Tiger Mountain, 'Blazing Comet' Kong Ming and 'Red Star' Kong Liang are marching with their troops on Qingzhou in search of provisions. The provincial stores are at risk. I am sent to ask you to return and organize the city's defences."

Twin Rods needed no further prompting. He led his troops back to the city by forced marches.

Next day the Monk, together with the Blue-Faced Beast and the Pilgrim, led the army forth with much cheering and waving of banners. When they reached the foot of the mountain, not a single enemy soldier was to be seen. They were quite amazed. The Tiger-Killer and the Big Chief led their troops down from the mountain and invited the three leaders up to their stronghold. Oxen and horses were slaughtered and a big feast was held in the guests' honour, while scouts were sent down to find out what was going on in the area.

When Twin Rods arrived back in the city with his army, he saw a column of troops approaching. Heading it were the two sons of Squire Kong of White Tiger Mountain, Blazing Comet and Red Star. These two because they had a quarrel with a rich man of the district, had killed his whole household, worthy and base, had gathered six or seven hundred men and set up shop on White Tiger Mountain, robbing and pillaging. Because their uncle, Kong Bin, lived in Qingzhou City he was arrested and imprisoned by Governor Murong. So Blazing Comet and Red Star marshalled their troops in the stronghold and moved to attack Qingzhou, with the aim of rescuing their uncle. Now they came up against the army of Twin Rods. The two sides engaged in a furious skirmish. Twin Rods rode out in front of his troops. Governor Murong, watching from the city gate tower, saw Blazing Comet lead the attack, charging with levelled lance straight at Twin Rods. The two horses clashed and they fought some twenty bouts. Twin Rods was eager to show off his skill in front of Governor Murong. Not rating Blazing Comet's fighting ability particularly highly, he contented himself with blocking and parrying. At the height of the contest, Twin Rods suddenly took Blazing Comet prisoner. Red Star could only lead his men off the field. Governor Murong from his tower signalled to Twin Rods to give chase. The government troops ambushed and captured a hundred or more, while Red Star's troops were routed and fled in disarray. At nightfall they found refuge in an old temple.

Having captured Blazing Comet, Twin Rods brought him into the city and went to see the Governor. The Governor was well pleased. He ordered Blazing Comet to be fitted with a heavy cangue and confined to prison, in the same cell as his uncle. The troops were rewarded and Twin Rods was entertained and questioned about Mount Peachblossom.

Twin Rods said: "I had thought it was just a case of 'To catch a turtle in a jar, put your hand in and there you are.' But a whole gang of bandits came to their rescue, one of whom was a monk, and another a big blue-faced fellow. I fought them both and had no success. Both have skills that are quite out of the ordinary, not at all what you would expect from outlaws. Otherwise I would have beaten them."

"That monk," said Governor Murong, "is the Old Field Marshal's former camp commandant in Yan'an, Major Lu Da. Nowadays he has shaved his head and become a monk under the name of Lu Zhishen, also known as the Flowery Monk. The one with the blue face is a former colonel of the palace guard, Yang Zhi, known as the Blue-Faced Beast. And there's another one, a wandering monk called Pilgrim Wu Song, who used to be Captain Wu Song, the one who killed the tiger on Jingyang Pass. These three have occupied Twin Dragon Peak, and devote themselves to plundering and pillaging. They have repeatedly clashed with the government forces and killed four or five hundred personnel of the anti-brigand brigade. Until now we haven't been able to capture them."

"Well, I can vouch for their military prowess," said Twin Rods. "So it's Colonel Yang and Major Lu, is it? Their reputation is no lie! But put your heart at rest. I know all about their skills now. Sooner or later I will capture all of them, one by one."

This was just what the Governor wanted to hear. He held a banquet in Twin Rods' honour and then invited him to rest in a guest-room.

Meanwhile Red Star was leading the shattered remnants of his army through a wood when he suddenly came upon a body of troops, led by a fine-looking warrior.

When this turned out to be Pilgrim Wu Song, Red Star quickly slid from the saddle and prostrated himself. "I trust you are in good health, sir?" he said.

Pilgrim Wu Song hastened to raise him up, saying: "I have heard about you and your brothers occupying White Tiger Mountain and raising a company. I often wanted to come and see you, but either I couldn't get down the mountain or the way was not clear, and so we were not able to meet. What brings you here today?"

Red Star told all about how they had wanted to rescue his uncle and how he had lost his brother.

Wu Song said: "Don't worry. There are six or seven of us who have a company on Twin Dragon Peak. We have been asked for help by the Tiger-Killer and Big Chief of Mount Peachblossom who were being attacked by the government forces. Our two leaders, Lu Zhishen and Yang Zhi took the men out to fight General Huyan, known as Twin Rods. They fought for a whole day, but then in the evening Twin Rods took himself off. The Mount Peachblossom lot gave us a banquet and made us a gift of the Emperor's horse. Now we are all heading for home. The other two are not far behind. Suppose I get them to go and attack Qingzhou and rescue your uncle and brother?"

Red Star thanked the Pilgrim most humbly. After a long wait, Monk Lu Zhishen and the Blue-Faced Beast came riding up. The Pilgrim introduced Red Star to them and said: "That time when I was with Song Jiang at the Kong's we were in all sorts of trouble. Now I think we should put honour first and combine the troops of all three mountain strongholds in order to attack Qingzhou, kill Governor Murong, capture Twin Rods, and seize enough government stores and money to supply all of us. How about it?"

"I am of the same opinion," said the Monk. "Let us send someone to inform them on Mount Peachblossom and tell the Tiger-Killer and Big Chief to bring their men here and we'll all of us go and attack Qingzhou."

But the Blue-Faced Beast said: "Qingzhou is strongly defended, it has good troops. And besides, there's Twin Rods who is a brave fighter. I'm not trying to belittle our strength, but if you want to attack Qingzhou, the only way is to do as I say. If you do, we'll succeed in due course."

"What do you suggest, then, brother?" said the Pilgrim. The Blue-Faced Beast replied briefly, but his words cannot be given in one sentence, and they were to have an important result:

In Qingzhou, a mass of broken isles and the smoke rising;
In the Marshes, each hero will rub his hands with glee.

ONE day after choosing his men for the use of the hooked spears Xu Ning entered the hall and took a hooked spear himself, and showed the assembled leaders some of his tricks. They applauded his skill. He then said to his men, "On horseback there are nine ways of handling the hooked spear, but on foot there are changes in every twelve paces." He then went through all these movements, and explained them. The leaders were much pleased at the exhibition and arrangements were made for a special company to be drilled in these methods from early morning till night. Within a fortnight there were fully five hundred men who could use the hooked spear.

During this time General Huyan Zhuo marched his men daily to the banks of the lake without meeting any opposition.

The bandits were in hiding watching these movements without showing themselves. Song Jiang said, "Friends, I have a plan, but do not know whether you will approve of it. I propose that tomorrow we should attack on foot, not a single man should be mounted on horseback. The men will be divided into ten companies and when the enemy advances our men must retreat into the reeds and brambles. Then as the enemy is close our men must use their halberds and hooked spears, and drag them off their horses, and make them prisoners. We must select an open plain with many narrow paths leading off on all sides into grass. What do you think of my plan?"

"It is a good idea," said Wu Yong.

Xu Ning also agreed with this. That day Song Jiang divided his men into ten companies, and they all left the mountain and crossed the lake. By 3 A.M. the following morning they had all found their hiding places. The cannons had also been transported and stationed on high ground.
The next day about 10 A.M. Song Jiang gave the signal, and all the men showed themselves with flags, and much beating of drums and gongs. General Huyan Zhuo was duly informed of this display, and sent Colonel Han Tao forward to attack. The horses were covered with armor. General Huyan Zhuo mounted his horse, and held an iron bludgeon in each hand. He ordered a general advance as he wished to annihilate the bandits. Colonel Han Tao came to have a final talk before the attack. He said, "On the south side there are many bandits on foot."
"Never mind how many there are," replied General Huyan; "attack them at once with the cavalry."
Colonel Han Tao led five hundred cavalry to the attack, but before he had gone far he saw two large bodies of men on foot towards the southeast and west. He therefore halted, and dividing his cavalry into three, gave each body its objective. He himself, however, returned to General Huyan Zhuo, and reported the position. The General said, "These bandits have not faced us for a long time, and they may employ some strategem." While he was saying this the bandits' artillery began to boom. "Those guns must be the work of Ling Zhen who has surrendered to the bandits." Looking round they now saw many bandits towards the north. He continued, "This must be a trick of the bandits, I will divide our troops with you. I will take half to the north while you take the rest towards the south." Again looking round he saw many brigands on the west side, and was surprised. There were booms on the north side, which sent shots quite near where they were then standing.
The shells exploded with great noise and about nine shots were thrown in all directions. Orders were given for a divided attack in all four directions, but as the troops advanced the bandits retreated on all sides. General Huyan Zhuo was annoyed at this, and galloped off towards the north side. He urged his cavalry to pursue the retreating bandits. When they reached a place full of reeds and bushes the cavalry became split up to follow the small paths. When they had gone some distance like this the troops heard a whistle blown in their rear, and immediately men sprang from hiding places, armed with hooked spears. The troops on the two wings were surrounded, and dragged off their horses in less than no time.
General Huyan Zhuo seeing the position extracted himself, and galloped off towards the south side of the plain. Upon reaching there he found that Colonel Han Tao had met with the same fate. The two saw brigands on all the roads, but seeing a weak spot towards the northwest they galloped off in that direction followed by a few of their cavalry. However they had only gone about two *li* when they found further progress blocked by a body of bandits in charge of two leaders who shouted out, "Defeated generals cannot pass!" General Huyan Zhuo was angry, and dashed forward to attack the two leaders. After about five bouts one leader retreated, but General Huyan Zhuo suspecting a trick did not pursue him. Instead he galloped off towards the north. Soon however he met another body of bandits with two leaders, and again he galloped to engage in combat. After about five bouts both leaders retreated. Huyan Zhuo pursued them, and he had only gone about a quarter of a *li* when he was attacked on both sides by about twenty-four men with hooked spears. General Huyan had no mind to fight with them so he turned his horse and galloped off. He, however, found that Wang Ying and Hu San Niang now blocked the road he had come. He saw that on either hand were many brambles so that there was no way of escape. He therefore urged the horse forward, and whirled aloft his two iron bludgeons.
He dashed past the two leaders who followed him. General Huyan Zhuo was now looking out for some of his men, but could not see a single one.
Just then Song Jiang gave the signal for a general return to Liangshan Marsh. About fifteen hundred horses had been wounded, and these were killed, and flesh used as food. An equal number of horses were captured, and were added to the bandits stock. About five thousand soldiers were taken prisoners. The camps of General Huyan Zhuo were all destroyed, and the new buildings were erected as inns at the foot of the mountain. When Song Jiang saw the prisoners he at once released Colonel Han Tao and many officers and he got Peng Qi and Ling Zhen to persuade them to join the bandits. Colonel Han Tao agreed to this, as he was destined to be one of the seventy-two leaders at Liangshan Marsh.
General Huyan Zhuo had escaped but having lost all his men he was very despondent as he rode by himself. He realized that he could not return to the capital. He thought, "I never expected to be in such an awful predicament. Where can I go now? The only place is Qingzhou where my old friend Prefect Murong may assist me. He may arrange the matter with the government, and then I may be able to find means of getting my revenge for this defeat."
He traveled in that direction for two days, and then in the evening he came to an inn by the roadside. He was both hungry and thirsty so he tied up his horse, and entered the inn. He sat down, placed his whip on the table, and ordered food. The waiter said that they had only wine, but if Huyan Zhuo would give him the money he would go into the village and buy some meat and food.
Huyan Zhuo did so, and asked him to buy some mutton. He also asked him to give his horse some fodder. He would stay there for the night, and go to Qingzhou in the morning.
"Sir, we have no beds here either," replied the waiter.
"That does not matter as I am an old soldier, and can sleep anywhere," said Huyan Zhuo.
The waiter went to buy the food, and Huyan Zhuo went to look after his horse. He then sat down outside the inn waiting for the waiter to return. Soon the waiter came, and Huyan Zhuo sat down for his evening meal. He told the waiter who he was, and said that he would depart for Qingzhou Prefecture the following day.
"Sir, I will tell you something. Not far from here is Taohua Mountain where there are some bandits named Li Zhong, nicknamed 'Tiger Fighting General,' and his company. There are about five hundred men in that band, and they are always raiding the surrounding villages. In fact they come here often so that tonight you must be wary."
"That will not upset me," said Huyan Zhuo, "I should not be afraid even if all of them came. You just take care of my horse."
As Huyan Zhuo had now finished his supper, the waiter prepared a temporary bed for him. That day he had been very melancholy, and in addition he had drunk rather a lot of wine so that he lay down to sleep without taking off his clothing. About 4 A.M. he was awakened, and heard the waiter complaining at the back of the inn. He jumped up, and taking his two whips he went to the door, and called out, "Why are you complaining like that?"
"I came out to feed your horse," replied the waiter, "and saw that a part of the fence had been broken down. I found that your horse had been taken away. I saw a torchlight about a *li* away, and it must have been the man stealing your horse."
"What place is in that direction?"
The waiter said it was Taohua Mountain, and Huyan Zhuo insisted upon his going with him to find the road. After they had gone a *li* the light in front vanished.
"This is a great disaster to me," said Huyan Zhuo, "as that horse was presented to me by the Emperor himself."
"Sir, we cannot do anything further tonight, so we must go back. Tomorrow you can go on to Qingzhou Prefecture, and there get soldiers to recapture the horse for you."
So they returned to the inn, but Huyan Zhuo could not sleep. Early the next morning he asked the waiter to accompany him, and carry his armor. They both set out for Qingzhou Prefecture where they reached after dusk.
Early the next morning General Huyan Zhuo went to the *yamen* of the Prefect Murong who was surprised to see him, and said, "I have heard that you went to attack the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. How is it that you come here?"
General Huyan Zhuo told the Prefect what had happened, and the latter said, "It was evidently not your fault that your army was defeated and destroyed, but was due to the vile strategy of the bandits. In this district there are many bandits. I want to use you against the brigands at Taohua Mountain, and there you can recover your horse as well. After that I shall ask you to clear the bandits from the Lianglong Mountain, and also the Baihu Mountain. Then if successful I will report the whole matter to the Emperor, and reestablish your command in the army, Then you can take your revenge on the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. What do you say to my proposal?"
"I am deeply grateful for Your Excellency's kind consideration, and shall be much pleased to undertake the task," replied General Huyan Zhuo. "I will pledge my life to repay you."
The Prefect gave him a room in his quarters, and supplied food and clothing. The waiter returned to the inn. After about three days General Huyan Zhuo got three thousand troops from Prefect Murong, and advanced upon Taohua Mountain.
The bandits at Taohua Mountain were delighted at having captured a general's horse, and they celebrated the event with several days' feasting. One day a bandit scout reported that a great many soldiers were approaching. The second leader in command Zhou Tong offered to meet the army, and he took about a hundred men and went down the mountain to meet the opposing army.
General Huyan Zhuo upon seeing the bandits, halted his soldiers and rode forward. He called out to the brigands, "Robbers, be quick to surrender." Upon hearing this challenge Zhou Tong arranged his men, and then riding forward engaged General Huyan Zhuo in conflict. After about seven bouts, however, Zhou Tong realized his own weakness, and retreated giving his men orders to retire to the stronghold on the mountain. General Huyan Zhuo seeing the bandits retiring, remembered his previous experience, and he ordered his army to stop pursuit.
Upon seeing Li Zhong, Zhou Tong explained what had happened, and asked what must be done if the soldiers advanced upon the stronghold. Li Zhong said, "We must get assistance from Lu Da, Yang Zhi, and Wu Song who are famous heroes at the Lianglong Mountain. I will write a letter at once, and send it by messenger. I will tell them that we will compensate them for any losses, and amply reward them for a success."
"I know there are many heroes there," said Zhou Tong, "but I am afraid that the leader Lu Da has an old grudge against us."
Li Zhong laughed at this, "Lu Da is a very straightforward man, and he may not treat us like that. I think that he will come and assist us when the position is fully explained by our messenger." He wrote the letter forthwith, and sent two men with it.
The letter reached the Lianglong Mountain within two days, and the leaders had a conference at the headquarters. The messenger explained that General Huyan Zhuo had been defeated at Liangshan Marsh, and was now endeavoring to retrieve his fortunes by attacking Taohua Mountain and other brigand's strongholds. After listening to the full statement Yang Zhi spoke, "We are independent and each protects his own stronghold. But it is true that if Huyan Zhuo destroys the Taohua Mountain stronghold it will be our turn next. We should therefore go with all our men, and fight together in this common cause."
This was agreed to, and that day five hundred bandits set out for Taohua Mountain.
When Li Zhong at Taohua Mountain heard of the arrival of the reenforcements he marched to meet them with three hundred men. General Huyan Zhuo being informed of this movement assembled his men on the main road. When the two forces met he rode forward to challenge Li Zhong to single combat. Li Zhong was a descendant from military ancestors, and he rode forward to keep up his reputation. After about ten bouts, however, he knew that General Huyan Zhuo was more than his equal, and therefore retired. Huyan Zhuo, however, pursued him up the mountain as he was confident of victory. Zhou Tong, however, seeing this gave orders to his men to throw stones at General Huyan Zhuo, and this hail of stones forced General Huyan to retire also. As he rode back, however, he was surprised to hear loud shouts from the rear of his own army. He then saw there was a large cloud of dust under which a troop of bandits were advancing. He rode forward, and saw that in front of the bandits rode a big fat monk. It was Lu Da, who shouted out, "Where is that prick that was defeated by the heroes at Liangshan Marsh? How dare you come here to disturb us?"
"I will first kill you bald-headed donkey," replied General Huyan Zhuo. "That will appease my anger."
Lu Da advanced flourishing his iron monk's staff, and was met by the General. They fought for about fifty bouts without either gaining an advantage, and at last General Huyan recognized that he had a skillful opponent. Gongs were sounded on both sides as a signal for an interval of rest for both combatants. After a brief rest General Huyan Zhuo dashed forward again, shouting, "Come on, you priestly thief."
Lu Da was on the point of returning to fight when Yang Zhi called out, "Brother, take a rest and I will engage this man." He then urged his horse forward, and met General Huyan Zhuo. They fought for about fifty bouts without either gaining any advantage, and then General Huyan thought, "This is the second man I cannot beat. But where do they come from? They do not look like brigands."
Yang Zhi seeing the skill of his opponent turned his horse to retire. General Huyan did not pursue him, and also retired.
Lu Da spoke to Yang Zhi, "We have just come and cannot encamp so close to this opposing army. Let us withdraw about seven *li*; and come again tomorrow." This was agreed to, and the bandits retired.
General Huyan Zhuo in his tent felt disappointed, as he had expected to deal with these bandits just as one breaks a piece of bamboo, but he had actually met his equals. He must be ill-fated to get such results. But what could he do just then? However a messenger came from Prefect Murong ordering him to bring the troops back to guard the town. The brigands from Baihu Mountain had arrived and were threatening the town. General Huyan gave orders immediately for a general retreat, and that night all the troops arrived near Qingzhou Prefecture.
The next day when Lu Da, Yang Zhi, and Wu Song led their bandits to the foot of Taohua Mountain, they were very surprised to find that the troops had all gone. It was not long however before Li Zhong and Zhou Tong arrived, and invited the three leaders to go to their stronghold on Taohua Mountain. There a feast was prepared, and matters discussed.
When General Huyan Zhuo reached Qingzhou Prefecture he saw a large body of men was approaching outside the town. They were the brigands from the Baihu Mountain under the leadership Kong Ming and Kong Liang. These two leaders had had a dispute with a wealthy man whom they had killed, and had then escaped to Baihu Mountain where they assembled about five hundred bandits. Because of this murder the Prefect Murong had arrested Kong Bin, the uncle of Kong Ming, and had put him in prison. Kong Ming therefore took the brigands against Qingzhou Prefecture to try to release his uncle from prison.
When General Huyan Zhuo arrived with his army he at once led them against the bandits. Prefect Murong having been informed of the arrival of the troops had taken up his position in a tower gate to watch the battle. General Huyan Zhuo rode out in front of the army, and his challenge was accepted by Kong Ming. The general soon found that his opponent was not very skillful, and soon succeeded in unhorsing him, and taking him prisoner. Upon seeing this Kong Liang gave orders for all the bandits to retreat.
Prefect Murong sent orders for the troops to pursue the brigands, and this was done, capturing about a hundred of them. The other brigands were scattered in all directions, and at last Kong Liang found himself alone, and slept that night in an old temple he came across.
Prefect Murong was much pleased that Kong Ming had been captured, and sent him to prison to join his uncle. The prefect rewarded the troops, and then sat down with General Huyan Zhuo to hear the news of the Taohua Mountain expedition. General Huyan Zhuo said, "The bandits at Taohua Mountain were cornered like a tortoise in a jar, but a strange thing happened. Another body of brigands arrived to attack us. They were led by a big fat monk, and a sallow complexioned man with both of whom I fought, but without success. Their military skill was quite unusual, and the were quite capable of defending themselves."
"I know that monk," said Prefect Murong; "He is Lu Da, who was previously a Major in the army, but afterwards became a monk and then a bandit. The other leader is Yang Zhi who was also previously an officer in the army. There is also another leader Wu Song, an ex-army man also, who is famous for having killed a tiger on Jingyang Ridge. They are now at the Lianglong Mountain, and although we have tried to dislodge them, our troops have failed, and have always been defeated."
"I also have heard of those men," said General Huyan Zhuo, "and certainly they are equal to their reputation. But I am here now, and will see to it that those men are captured."
The next morning when Kong Liang was riding in a forest, he met a body of bandits in charge of Wu Song. He dismounted, saluted, and inquired after his health. The two exchanged compliments and related what had happened on both sides.
At last Wu Song suggested that Kong Liang and his men should join with the bandits of Taohua Mountain in an attack on the government troops. Kong Liang agreed to this, and was taken and introduced to Lu Da and Yang Zhi.
When discussing the proposed attack on Qingzhou Prefecture by the combined bandits from the three mountains Yang Zhi said, "The town is strongly fortified, and has a General like Huyan Zhuo in charge of the defense so it will not be easy for us to take. But I have a plan that I think will succeed." He then explained how to take the town, and they were highly pleased with his proposal.

Tiles are broken; town in flames;
Pity the people of Qingzhou.
Smashing fists and crushing blows,
Admire the bandits and heroes.

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### The Bandits from the 3 Mountain Bands join forces against & Attack Qingzhou; All the tigers agree to repair to the Marshes, all the Heroes Cast Their Lot with Mount Liang Marsh, & the Warriors Return to the Marsh, United

"A large force is needed to take Qingzhou," said Yang Zhi. "We know that the famous Song Jiang, called the Timely Rain in the gallant fraternity, is in Liangshan Marsh. Huyan Zhuo is his enemy. Our Two-Dragon Mountain band will co-operate with the Kong brothers' band. We will wait here till the men from Peach Blossom Mountain arrive, and go with them to assault the town. Brother Kong Liang, you must travel at top speed to Mount Liangshan and beseech Song Jiang to join our attack. That is the best plan, because you and he are great friends. What do you brothers think?"
"Sounds all right to me," said Lu Zhishen. "I've heard a lot of good things about Song Jiang, though I'm sorry to say we've never met. People chatter about him so much they've nearly made me deaf. He must be quite a man, to be so famous. I went to see him when he was with Hua Rong in Fort Clear Winds. But by the time I got there, he was gone. Never mind. Kong Liang, you want to rescue your brother. You'd better hurry and ask Song Jiang's help. We'll stay here and start the battle against those pricks."
Kong Liang directed his men to remain with Lu Zhishen. He took only one companion. Disguised as a merchant, he set out swiftly for Liangshan Marsh.
Lu Zhishen, Yang Zhi and Wu Song went to their mountain strongholds and fetched Shi En and Cao Zheng and about two hundred fighters. On Peach Blossom Mountain when Li Zhong and Zhou Tong received the news they brought their entire force, except for forty or fifty left to hold the fort. All contingents converged outside the town and prepared for the assault. Of that, we'll say no more.

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On leaving Qingzhou, Kong Liang followed a winding road till he came to the tavern on the edge of Liangshan Marsh run by LiLi, who was called Hell's Summoner. There he stopped to buy some wine and ask the way. Kong Liang and his companion were strangers to Li. He invited them to be seated.
"Where are you from?" he queried.
"Qingzhou," said Kong Liang.
"Who is it you wish to see in the Marsh?"
"A friend of mine, on the mountain."
"Important chieftains live in that fortress on the mountain. How can you go there?"
"It's a chieftain I'm seeking—Song Jiang."
"In that case I have an obligation to you." LiLi ordered his attendants to serve wine.
"We've never met," said Kong Liang. "Why so courteous?"
"Anyone seeking a chieftain in the fortress is sure to be one of our kind, an old friend. He must be properly received and his arrival reported."
"I am Kong Liang, from a manor at the foot of White Tiger Mountain."
"I've heard brother Song Jiang mention you. We'll escort you to the stronghold today."
The two drank ceremonial cups of wine. LiLi opened a window overlooking the water and shot a whistling arrow. From the reeds on the opposite side of the cove a brigand propelled a boat. It stopped beside the tavern. LiLi invited Kong Liang on board. The craft was sculled to the Shore of Golden Sands, and the men began to climb.
Kong Liang was impressed by the bristling array of weapons at each of the three gates through which they had to pass. "I heard that the stronghold was well equipped," he said to himself, "but I never thought it was on such a scale!"
Brigands had gone ahead to report, and Song Jiang came down to greet him. Kong Liang hastily knelt and kowtowed.
"What brings you here, brother?" Song Jiang asked. Kong Liang burst into tears. Song Jiang said: "If you're in any danger or difficulty, don't hesitate to speak. We'll help you, no matter what it is. Brother, please rise."

"After we parted, my old father died. My brother Kong Ming quarreled with a well-to-do neighbor and killed him and his entire family. The authorities were hot on his trail, so we went up White Tiger Mountain and formed a band of six or seven hundred. We lived by robbery and pillage. Murong, the prefect of Qingzhou, arrested Kong Bin, our uncle whose home was in town, and threw him into prison with a heavy cangue around his neck. My brother and I staged a raid to rescue him, but outside the walls we were met by Huyan Zhuo who wields two rods. Brother fought, and Huyan captured him. They took him into Qingzhou and put him in prison also. There's no guarantee they won't kill him.

"I was chased and had to run. The next day, I met Wu Song. He introduced me to his companions. One was Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk. The other was Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute. We were like old friends the moment we met. We discussed the rescue of my brother. Wu Song said: 'We'll ask Lu and Yang to get Li Zhong and Zhou Tong from Peach Blossom Mountain, and join the forces from three strongholds in an attack on Qingzhou. You hurry to Mount Liangshan and request Song Jiang to help save your uncle and your brother.' That's why I'm here. I pray, for the sake of my departed father, that you rescue them. I'll be eternally grateful."

"It will be easy. Don't worry. Come pay your respects to our leader Chao Gai. We'll talk it over together."

Song Jiang presented Kong Liang to Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and the other chieftains. He related that Huyan Zhuo had gone to Qingzhou and cast his lot in with Prefect Murong and had recently captured Kong Ming, and that Kong Liang was seeking his rescue.

Chao Gai said: "Since the two brave brothers out of chivalry and righteousness, desire to rescue their uncle, and since you, brother Song, are their friend, we should indeed assist them. But you've ridden forth on expeditions many times, brother. This time you hold the fort and let me go."

"You're our highest leader. We mustn't lightly put you to any trouble," said Song Jiang. "This is a personal matter. Kong Liang has come all this distance to see me. He'd be embarrassed if I didn't go personally. I'd prefer to handle this alone with a few of our brothers."

Immediately, chieftains high and low pushed forward and volunteered. "We'll give our all," they cried. "Only take us along!"

Song Jiang was very pleased. That day a feast was given for Kong Liang, and Song Jiang direct Pei Xuan to muster men for the expedition and divide them into five contingents. The vanguard was to be led by Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Yan Shun and Stumpy Tiger Wang. The second unit was under Mu Hong, Yang Xiong, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. The chief generals Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng commanded the central force. The fourth contingent was headed by Zhu Tong, Chai Jin, Li Jun and Zhang Heng, while the unit bringing up the rear was under Sun Li, Yang Lin, Ou Peng and Ling Zhen.

When the five battalions were mustered they had fighters on horse and on foot totalling three thousand, under twenty commanders. The other chieftains remained with Chao Gai to hold the fortress. Song Jiang took his leave of Chao Gai and went down the mountain with Kong Liang and the brigand force.

Their march was uneventful, and they harmed none of the prefectures and counties along the way. They soon reached Qingzhou. Kong Liang went on ahead and informed Zhishen. The Tattooed Monk and his companions prepared a welcome. When Song Jiang and his central battalion arrived, Wu Song led Lu Zhishen, Yang Zhi, Li Zhong, Zhou Tong, Shi En and Cao Zheng forward to greet him. Song asked Zhishen to be seated.

"I've long known of your fame, brother," said the monk, "but I never had the chance to pay my respects. I'm very happy to meet you today."

"I don't deserve such courtesy," Song Jiang protested. "In the gallant fraternity your virtue is well known, Reverend. To be able to look upon your benevolent face is the greatest joy of my life!"

Yang Zhi rose and bowed. "I passed through Liangshan Marsh earlier," he said, "and the chieftains were kind enough to ask me to stay. But I stupidly declined. Today, you call here within sight of our mountain lair. Nothing under Heaven could please me more!"

"Everyone in the gallant fraternity has heard of Yang Zhi. My only regret is that we hadn't met sooner!"

Lu Zhishen ordered that wine be served, and introductions were made all around.

The next day Song Jiang asked about the situation in the prefectural town.

"After Kong Liang left, we had four or five clashes, with no clear result," said Yang Zhi. "Qingzhou's mainstay is Huyan Zhuo. If we capture him, we can push into that town like hot water through snow."

Wu Yong laughed. "He can be taken, but by guile, not by force."

"How do you propose to do it?" Song Jiang asked.

Wu Yong softly outlined his plan. Song Jiang was delighted.

"Very shrewd!"

That day he issued his instructions, and the next morning they proceeded to the walls of Qingzhou. They surrounded the town, beat their drums, waved their pennants, shouted, and shook their weapons. Murong was informed, and he hurriedly summoned Huyan Zhuo.

"Those bandits have brought help from Liangshan Marsh. What are we going to do?" demanded the prefect.

"Don't worry, Your Excellency," said Huyan. "By coming here they've lost their favorable terrain. It's only in the marsh that they can act up. Now that they've left their lair, we can nab them as fast as they come. They've nowhere to deploy. Please go up on the ramparts, Prefect, and watch me slaughter those rogues!"

Huyan quickly donned his armor and mounted his charger. He shouted for the gates to be opened and the drawbridge to be lowered. He rode forth at the head of a thousand infantry and cavalry, and spread them out in battle formation. From Song Jiang's contingent a horseman emerged. He was carrying a wolf-toothed cudgel. In a stentorian voice he cursed the prefect.

"Grafter! People-injuring thief! You've destroyed my home, and today I'm going to get my revenge!"

Murong recognized Qin Ming. "You were an officer of the imperial court," he shouted. "The state treated you well. How dare you rebel! When I capture you I'll have you smashed into ten thousand pieces! Nab that outlaw for me, first!" he yelled to Huyan.

Flourishing his rods, Huyan rode towards his objective. Qin Ming gave his steed full rein and galloped to meet Huyan, waving his wolf-toothed cudgel. They were a well-matched pair, and they fought nearly fifty rounds with neither vanquishing the other.

Murong felt the contest was lasting too long. He was afraid Huyan would lose. Hurriedly, he had the gongs summon his troops back to the town. Qin Ming did not pursue the departing foe, but returned to his own position. Song Jiang instructed his commanders to withdraw fifteen //and make camp.

Inside the town, Huyan got off his horse and reported to the prefect. "I was about to take that Qin Ming," he said. "Why did you sound retreat, Your Excellency?"

"You'd fought many rounds. I feared you were tired, so I called our forces back to rest, temporarily. Before he and Hua Rong rebelled, Qin Ming was commanding general here. The knave is not to be underestimated."

"I'll take that treacherous bandit, Your Excellency, rest assured. When I fought him just now he was getting clumsy with his rods. Next time, watch me smash him!"

"I know what a hero you are. But tomorrow, I want you to break open a gap in the enemy lines so that I can send out three men. I shall dispatch one to the Eastern Capital to ask for assistance, and two to neighboring districts and prefectures to raise troops to help capture the bandits."

"Your Excellency is indeed far-sighted."

The prefect wrote out a request for assistance, selected three officers, and made the necessary arrangements.

Huyan returned to his quarters, removed his armor and rested. Before dawn the next day an officer entered and reported: "On a hill outside the north gate three horsemen are observing the town. The one in the middle is wearing a red gown and is riding a white steed. The man on the right is Hua Rong. We don't recognize the man on the left, but he's dressed as a Taoist."

"That man in red is Song Jiang. The Taoist must be his general, Wu Yong. Don't alert them. Muster a hundred cavalry and bag all three."

Huyan hastily put on his armor and mounted. Rods in hand, leading his hundred horsemen, he had the north gate quietly opened and the drawbridge lowered, and rode swiftly towards the hill. Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Hua Rong continued staring at the town. Huyan raced up the slope. Only then did the three turn their mounts and walk them slowly away.

Before a grove of withered trees they again reined in. In hot pursuit, Huyan had just raced to the edge of the grove when shouts rang out and horse and rider dropped into a concealed pit. From both sides fifty or sixty men snared Huyan with hooked poles, hauled him out, and tied him up. Others extracted his horse.

By then the rest of Huyan's troop came charging up. Calmly fitting arrows to his bow, Hua Rong brought down the first five or six. Those behind halted abruptly, yanked their steeds around and, yelling, galloped off.

Song Jiang returned to camp and took his seat. Knife-wearing attendants pushed Huyan Zhuo before him. Song immediately rose and ordered that his bonds be removed. He personally conducted Huyan to a chair and greeted him respectfully.

"Why are you doing this?" Huyan asked.

"Would I be ungrateful to the imperial court?" Song Jiang retorted. "I was hard pressed by corrupt officials and forced to commit a crime. I've had to seek refuge in this marsh while awaiting an imperial pardon. I never expected to stir into action so mighty a general, for whom I have such great admiration. It was very wrong of me, and I beg your forgiveness."

"I am your prisoner. Ten thousand deaths would be too light a punishment. Yet you treat me with such courtesy!"

"Never would I presume to harm you. Heaven is my witness."

"Is it your wish, respected brother, that I should go to the Eastern Capital and ask for a royal pardon to bring to your mountain?"

"You couldn't possibly do that, General! Marshal Gao is a narrow-hearted villain. He forgets a man's large accomplishments and remembers only his small failings. You've lost a lot of troops, money and grain. He'd surely hold you culpable. Han Tao, Peng Qi and Ling Zhen have all joined our band. If you don't scorn our mountain stronghold as too humble, I'd be happy to relinquish to you my place as chieftain. When the court has use for us and issues its imperial pardon, we can once again serve our country with our utmost efforts."

Huyan hesitated for several minutes. But, firstly, since he was one of the stars of Heavenly Spirits, he naturally was of the same chivalrous mentality. And, secondly, he was overwhelmed by Song Jiang's courtesy and reasonableness. With a sigh, he knelt.

"It's not that I lack loyalty to the government. But your exceeding gallantry leaves me no choice but to agree. I'll follow you faithfully. The situation being what it is, there's no alternative."

Song Jiang was very pleased. He introduced Huyan to the other chieftains and directed Li Zhong and Zhou Tong to return his mount the Ebony Steed Which Treads in Snow. Then the chieftains conferred on how to rescue Kong Ming.

Wu Yong said: "If Huyan can trick them into opening the gates, we'll take the town easily. It will also put an end to any thought he may have of rejoining them."

Song Jiang went to Huyan and said: "It's not loot I'm after, but Kong Ming and his uncle are imprisoned in Qingzhou. We can't save them unless you get the town to open the gates."

"Since you've been kind enough to accept me, of course I'll do my best."

That night ten chieftains disguised themselves as government troops and rode forth with Huyan at their head. At the town moat they halted.

"Open the gates," shouted the general. "I've escaped and returned!"

Soldiers on the wall recognized Huyan's voice and hastily reported to Murong. The prefect had been brooding over the loss of the general. Now, hearing that he had come back, Murong was delighted. He jumped on his horse and rode to the town wall. He saw Huyan with about a dozen mounted men. He couldn't make out their faces in the dark, but he knew the general's voice.

"How were you able to return?" Murong called.

"Those knaves trapped my horse and took me to their camp. Some of my commanders sneaked this mount to me, and we got away together."

Murong ordered his soldiers to open the gates and lower the drawbridge. As the chieftains entered the town, he came forward to greet them. With one blow of his cudgel, Qin Ming knocked the prefect from his saddle. The Xie brothers set the town to the torch. Ou Peng and Stumpy Tiger Wang dashed up the wall and killed or scattered the defenders.

Song Jiang and the main force, seeing that Qingzhou was on fire, surged in. He transmitted an urgent order that the townspeople were not to be harmed, but to empty the town's treasury and grain stores. Kong Ming and his uncle and Kong Bin's family were rescued from the prison. Song Jiang directed that the fires be extinguished. The prefect's entire family, young and old, were killed, and all their possessions distributed among the marauders.

At daybreak a count was made of those families whose homes had been damaged by the fires, and they were given grain as relief payments. The money and grain taken from government stores came to nearly six hundred cartloads. Over two hundred good horses were also captured. A great feast of celebration was held in the main hall of the prefectural government, and the leaders of the three mountain strongholds were invited to go together to the fortress on Mount Liangshan.

Li Zhong and Zhou Tong sent people to Peach Blossom Mountain with orders to collect men and horses, and as much money and grain as possible, and then set fire to the stronghold and abandon it. Lu Zhishen dispatched Shi En and Cao Zheng to Two-Dragon Mountain. There, with Zhang Qing and his wife Sun the Witch, they assembled the brigands, loaded their money and grain, and burned down their stronghold in Precious Pearl Monastery.

In a few days time, the forces from the three mountains completed their preparations, and the entire body, led by Song Jiang, set out for the Mount Liangshan fortress. Song put Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Huyan Zhuo and Zhu Tong in the van to clear the way. Not a single prefecture or county was harmed during the march. Villagers, carrying their babes and supporting their old folk, burned incense and kowtowed in greeting.

The cavalcade reached Liangshan Marsh several days later. Chieftains of the water forces met them with boats, and Chao Gai and the leaders of the infantry and cavalry were awaiting them when they landed on the Shore of Golden Sands. They climbed together to the big stronghold, entered Fraternity Hall and took their seats.

A big feast was laid to celebrate the addition of twelve new chieftains: Huyan Zhuo, Lu Zhishen, Yang Zhi, Wu Song, Shi En, Cao Zheng, Zhang Qing, Sun the Witch, Li Zhong, Zhou Tong, Kong Ming and Kong Liang.

During the banquet Lin Chong told how the Tattooed Monk had once rescued him.

"I've thought about you a lot after we parted in Cangzhou," said Zhishen. "Has there been any news of your wife?"

"After I took over from Wang Lun, I sent someone home to fetch her. He found that Marshal Gao's wicked son had kept after her so hard that she finally killed herself. Her father was very depressed, and took ill and died."

Yang Zhi related how he met with Lin Chong when Wang Lun was still in control of the lair. All agreed that this had been fated. It was no accident. Chao Gai told the story of the capture of the birthday gifts on Yellow Earth Ridge. Everyone laughed heartily.

More feasts were given for several successive days. Of that we'll say no more.

The fortress had been strengthened by many men and horses, and Song Jiang was exceedingly pleased. He ordered Tang Long to oversee all metalwork and manufacture many kinds of weapons and armor. Hou Jian, who he put in charge of banners and clothing, added flags and pennants of every size and shape, embroidered with dragons, tigers, bears and leopards, and decorated with golden standards, white tassels, crimson fringes and black covers. On all sides of the mountain broad glacis were constructed. On the western and southern roads two taverns were rebuilt, both to receive visiting gallants and to listen for and quickly report the approach of government troops. Zhang Qing and his wife Sun the Witch, who originally had been innkeepers, were given charge of the tavern on the west. The south side tavern remained under Sun Xin and his wife Gu Dasao. Zhu Gui and Yue Ho continued to run the tavern on the east side, and LiLi and Shi Qian the one on the north. More barricades were set up in each of the three passes, and chieftains assigned to their defense. All were abjured to perform strictly their defined duties.

One day the Tattooed Monk spoke to Song Jiang. "I have a friend, a pupil of Wang Jin, called Nine Dragons Shi Jin," he said. "He's now on Mount Shaohua in Huayin County in the prefecture of Huazhou. With him, joined in brotherhood are Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist, Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger, and Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake. I think of Shi Jin often. He saved my life in the Waguan Monastery, and I won't forget it. I'd like to go and see him, and bring him and the other three back to join us. How does that idea strike you?"

"I've heard of Shi Jin's fame. It would be fine if you could bring him here. But don't go alone. Take Wu Song. He's a pilgrim monk. He'll be an appropriate companion."

Wu Song expressed his willingness to go. Zhishen collected his luggage and put on his slanting hat and waist bag, as suited a meditation monk. Wu dressed as a pilgrim. The two bid farewell to the chieftains, left the mountain and crossed the Shore of Golden Sands. Starting early and resting late, they travelled many a day until they came to the border of Huayin County in the prefecture of Huazhou. They headed directly for Mount Shaohua.

Song Jiang was worried about them after they left. He directed Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller to follow and keep an eye on them.

Lu Zhishen and Wu Song reached the foot of Mount Shaohua. Brigands in ambush stepped out and barred the road. "Where are you monks from?" they demanded.

"Is there an Excellency Shi Jin on this mountain?" countered Wu Song.

"You're asking for Chieftain Shi? Wait here a while. I'll report your arrival to our leaders and they'll come down and greet you."

"Just say Lu Zhishen is here."

The brigand wasn't gone long. He returned with Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist, Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger and Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake, who welcomed the two callers. But Shi Jin was not among them.

"Where is His Excellency?" queried Zhishen. "Why isn't he here?"

Zhu Wu stepped forward. "Aren't you Major Lu Da from the district of Yanan?"

"I am. And this pilgrim is the Constable Wu Song who slew the tiger on Jingyang Ridge."

The three chieftains hastily bowed. "We've long known the fame of you both! We heard that you'd set up a stronghold on Two-Dragon Mountain. What brings you here today?"

"We're not there any longer," said Zhishen. "We've joined Song Jiang in the big fortress on Mount Liangshan. Today we've travelled specially to see Excellency Shi."

"Please come to our stronghold on the mountain, then," said Zhu Wu, "and I'll tell you all about him."

"If you've got anything to say, say it! Waiting is too much of a friggin nuisance!"

"The reverend is an impatient man," Wu Song explained. "Why not tell him now?"

"After Excellency Shi joined us three on this mountain, we prospered," said Zhu Wu. "Recently, he went down and met an artist, a man named Wang Yi, from the Northern Capital in Taming Prefect. Wang had been painting some murals he had promised the Emperor of Golden Heaven Temple on Mount Huashan in the Western Range. He'd gone there with his daughter Jade Branch. Ho, the prefect of Huazhou—a crooked grafter who harms the people, one of Premier Cai's clique—went to the temple one day to burn incense and was struck by the girl's beauty. He sent emissaries several times to ask for Jade Branch as his concubine. Wang Yi wouldn't agree, so he took her by force and ordered the father exiled to a distant military region. Wang Yi, while passing through here on the way to exile, met Shi Jin and told him the story.

"His Excellency rescued him and brought him up the mountain, killing his two escorts. Then he went to the prefectural office to destroy Ho. But he was discovered, seized, and thrown into prison. The prefect is also mustering a force to wipe us out. We've nowhere to go and no way to cope. Our situation is bitter!"

"That prick has no manners! How dare he act so tough!" cried Zhishen. "I'll finish him off for you!"

"Please come to our stronghold for a conference," said Zhu Wu.

Zhishen was unwilling, but Wu Song pointed and said: "Can't you see the sun is already settling on the treetops?"

The Tattooed Monk roared impatiently and blew out a gusty breath. Reluctantly he went with the others to the Mount Shaohua fort. The five sat down together. Wang Yi was introduced to Zhishen and Wu Song. He told how Prefect Ho extorted decent people's money and seized their daughters. The three chieftains had cows and horses slaughtered and entertained the two visitors at a feast.

Zhishen refused to drink. He said: "Brother Shi isn't here, so I won't touch a drop. All I want is a good night's sleep. Tomorrow I'll go into town and kill that oaf!"
"Don't stir up any trouble, brother," Wu Song urged. "You and I can hurry back to Mount Liangshan and report. We'll request Song Jiang to lead a large force against Huazhou. In that way we'll rescue Excellency Shi Jin."
"By the time we get men from the fortress brother Shi Jin's life will have vanished!"
"Will you save him by killing Ho?" Wu Song was strongly opposed to the monk's going.
"Calm yourself, Reverend," said Zhu Wu placatingly. "Constable Wu Song is right."
"It's calm people like you who are going to be the death of brother Shi," cried Zhishen. "His life is in that fellow's hands and you sit here drinking and piddling over details!"
They finally persuaded him to drink a cup or two of wine. Lu went to bed with his clothes on. He rose at the fourth watch the next day, took his Buddhist staff and knife and set out swiftly for Huazhou.
"He wouldn't listen to me," said Wu Song. "He's sure to get into a jam!"
Zhu Wu instructed two discreet brigands to follow and keep track of the impetuous monk.
Zhishen rushed directly into town and asked where he could find the prefectural office. "Across that bridge and to the east," he was told.
He had just reached the pontoon bridge when someone advised him: "Get out of the way, monk. His Excellency the prefect is coming!"
"I was looking for him, and here he drops right into my hands," Zhishen said to himself. "That lout is a dead man!"
The prefect's escort of honor passed in pairs. His enclosed sedan-chair was guarded on either side by ten captains carrying whips and spears and iron chains.
"It won't be easy to get at the wretch," thought Zhishen. "And if I try and fail, I'll be a laughing stock!"
The prefect looked through the window of his sedan-chair and saw Zhishen, who was obviously hesitating whether to approach him. Ho crossed the bridge and at the prefectural office got out of his chair and summoned two of his captains. "Invite that big fat monk on the bridge to come to my residence for a vegetarian meal."
The captains went to the bridge and said to Zhishen: "The prefect invites you to a meatless repast."
"The knave is sure to die by my hand," thought Zhishen. "I wanted to strike him, but because I was afraid I couldn't get at him I let him pass. I'm still after him, and now he invites me!" He followed the captains to the prefectural compound.
Ho had already left instructions. When Zhishen arrived at the front of the hall he was told to leave his staff and knife and go to a rear building for his vegetarian meal. Zhishen demurred. Everyone berated him.
"For a monk you don't know very much! How can you carry weapons deep into the prefectural compound?"
Zhishen thought, "With my two fists alone I can crush that oaf's skull!"
He left his staff and knife on the porch and followed the captains inside. Prefect Ho was seated in a rear building. He shouted: "Seize that bald robber!" 30 or 40 police officers poured out of closets on both sides and pounced on Zhishen. Even if he were Prince Nezha, how could he avoid Earth's net and Heaven's snare? Indra himself couldn't escape from such a dragon's lair and tiger's den! Truly, the moth destroys itself in the flame; the angry turtle must die when it swallows the baited hook.

When Wu Song took Red Star to meet Monk Lu Zhishen and the Blue-Faced Beast and he asked them to rescue his brother and uncle, the Monk wanted to attack at once with the combined troops of the three mountain strongholds. But the Blue-Faced Beast said: "You can't take Qingzhou without a very big army. We know the reputation of Song Jiang on Mount Liang. Among the rivers and lakes he's known as the Opportune Rain. Twin Rods, moreover is his special enemy. We can combine our forces with those of the Kong brothers. I shall wait here till the troops from Mount Peachblossom are ready and then go to attack Qingzhou. Red Star, you go as fast as you can to the Marshes of Mount Liang and ask Song Jiang if he will come and help us mount a determined assault on the city. That's my idea. After all, Song Jiang is a good friend of yours, isn't he? What does everyone say?"
The Monk said: "Well, this is how it is. All the time I hear this one say Song Jiang is a good man and that one say Song Jiang is a good man, but unfortunately I've never met the gentleman. His name is on everyone's lips, it's perpetually buzzing in my ears. I'm sure the person in question really is a good man, or he wouldn't have such a reputation. Previously when he was with Colonel Hua on Windy Mountain I had the idea of going to see him. But just as I was about to start I heard that he had moved on, and it turned out once again that I didn't meet him. So there you are! Red Star, if you want to save your brother, go there quickly and ask them for help. The rest of us will stay here and have a go at the buggers first."
So Red Star handed over his forces to the Monk and disguised as a merchant, with just one companion, travelled night and day to Mount Liang.
The Monk, the Blue-Faced Beast and the Pilgrim went back to Twin Dragon Peak and told the Young Master and the Knife to bring several hundred more troops down in support. The Tiger-Killer and Big Chief on Mount Peachblossom heard the news and came with nearly all their troops, leaving only fifty or so to guard the camp. They all assembled before Qingzhou city and mounted a joint attack. But of this we shall say no more for the moment.
We turn now to Red Star and his companion, as they leave Qingzhou and travelling towards Mount Liang arrive at the inn of Li Li the Executioner where they stop for wine and to ask the way. Since their faces were unfamiliar, the Executioner invited them to sit and then asked: "Where have you gentlemen come from?"
"From Qingzhou," Red Star replied.
"Who do you want to see on Mount Liang?" the Executioner asked.
"There is someone I know there. It's him I want to see," said Red Star.
"The main stronghold on Mount Liang is where all the chief leaders live, why should you go there?" the Executioner asked.
"It is Song Jiang I want to speak to," said Red Star.
"If you are looking for Song Jiang, then I've got something special for you," the Executioner said, and he called the waiter to bring some special wine.
Red Star said: "We've never met before, what makes you so hospitable?"
"Well, you see, if you are looking for one of the leaders on the mountain, you must be one of us and an old friend of the company, so how could I be neglectful towards you?" said the Executioner. "I must go and report this."
Red Star said: "I am Kong Liang, and I come from a manor at the foot of White Tiger Mountain."
"I have heard Song Jiang speak highly of you, welcome to Mount Liang!"
When they had drunk the special wine, a window was opened in the water pavilion and a whistling arrow fired off. From the reeds on the other side of the creek a boat was rowed across. The Executioner motioned Red Star into the boat and they rowed across to Golden Sands Landing and then headed up the mountain.
Looking at the defensive strength of the three gates, with their forests of spears, swords, halberds and pikes, Red Star said: "I had heard that things were prospering in the Marshes of Mount Liang, but I didn't realize the setup was as big as this!"
A soldier had already reported their arrival, and Song Jiang hastened down to meet them. Red Star immediately prostrated himself.
"Why have you come here, my dear friend?" Song Jiang asked.
As soon as Red Star finished paying his respects, a great sob escaped him. Song Jiang said: "Obviously some painful thought assails you, my friend. Please feel free to tell me about it. No one can escape trouble, one must always do one's best to help others, so please rise, my friend, we want to help you."
Red Star said: "After you left us, Master, and my father passed away, my brother Blazing Comet became embroiled in a petty dispute with a local landowner and killed him and all his family. The authorities came to arrest him so we ran off to White Tiger Mountain and collected a band of six or seven hundred men, and set up as robbers. We have an uncle in Qingzhou called Kong Bin. He was placed under arrest by Governor Murong and thrown into prison with a heavy cangue round his neck. So we went to attack the city, aiming to set our uncle free. Unfortunately outside the city we ran into a chap known as Twin Rods, because he fights with a pair of rods. My brother fought him and got captured and taken into the city. He's in prison there now, I don't know whether alive or dead. They chased me also and destroyed my army. A day or so later I ran into Pilgrim Wu Song who spoke about you and introduced me to his companions. One of them is the Flowery Monk Lu Zhishen, another is the Blue-Faced Beast Yang Zhi. We hit it off immediately and I discussed with them how to rescue my brother. The Pilgrim said: 'I will ask my two friends, along with the Tiger-killer and Big Chief from Mount Peachblossom and the combined forces from the three mountain strongholds, to attack Qingzhou. You ride as fast as you can to the Marshes of Mount Liang to tell Song Jiang about it and ask him to come and help rescue your uncle and brother.' And that's why I'm here."
Song Jiang said: "It's quite a simple matter. Don't worry about it. First come and meet Chao Gai so we can all discuss it together."
Song Jiang took Red Star to meet Chao Gai, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun and the other leaders. He told them all how Twin Rods was in Qingzhou, staying with Governor Murong, how the Governor had captured Blazing Comet and how Red Star had come to ask for help.
Chao Gai said: "Well, seeing that there are good men, honourable and humane, in both those places and they are your friends, how could we not go and help? But my good friend, you have been down the mountain many times in succession, this time you should stay here to guard the camp and let me go instead."
Song Jiang said: "You are our chief. You mustn't go anywhere. Besides, this is entirely my business. Since he has taken the trouble to come all this way, they naturally would not be happy if I didn't respond myself. I'd just like to ask a few of our comrades to go with me."
Before he had finished speaking, everyone in the hall was clamouring to go, saying they'd give an arm or a leg to be part of it.
Song Jiang was well pleased. That day a banquet was held in Red Star's honour. While they were eating, Song Jiang asked Sterling to draw up a list of those who were to accompany him down the mountain. The group was divided into five contingents. The first, commanded by Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Dandy and Short-Arse, was to lead the attack. The second was led by the Unstoppable, Morbid, Snake and Scorpion. The main force was under the command of Song Jiang, the Professor, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, the fourth contingent was led by Whiskers, Mr. Chai, the White-Water Dragon and the Pilot, while Colonel Sun, Panther, Golden Wings and Thunderer were entrusted with forming the rearguard. These were the five forces under twenty leaders appointed by Mount Liang, together with two thousand men, horse and foot. The remaining commanders were to remain with Chao Gai and guard the stronghold.
Song Jiang now bade Chao Gai farewell and accompanied Red Star down the mountain. When the forces of Mount Liang set out in their five columns it was like this:
*As they march out from the Marshes it is like a great dragon uncoiling out of the ocean. As they leave Mount Liang it is like tigers and leopards rampaging through the sky. Led by their twenty heroes, the five columns advance. Each unit comprises thirty officers and men. Brilliantly coloured banners wave in dense clouds. Deadly steel blades glitter like frost and snow. Warhorses gallop forward with jingling bridles, warriors march proudly to the beat of ceremonial drums. Dust is raised in copious clouds, filling the sky with murk and gloom. Multi-coloured banners throng about the clever and resourceful Professor Wu Yong: upright under the green oiled umbrella sits Song Jiang the Just, he who does heaven's will. Passing spirits bestow respectful greetings; bystanders sing songs of celebration.*
Thus Song Jiang marched out from Mount Liang, at the head of twenty leaders and two thousand men, drawn up in five columns. Nothing of importance happened on the way. They passed through the province causing not the slightest harm to any of the people.
When they reached Qingzhou, Red Star first made contact with Monk Lu Zhishen and the leaders of the other force and a reception banquet was organized. When Song Jiang and his army arrived, Pilgrim Wu Song took his six comrades along to introduce them. After Song Jiang had persuaded him to be seated, the Monk said: "I have heard so much about you, yet for some reason we have never met. I am delighted finally to make your acquaintance."
Song Jiang replied: "You are too kind! Men of honour among the rivers and lakes are loud in their praise of your clear virtue. I count myself forever blessed to have seen you for myself."
The Blue-Faced Beast also stood, prostrated himself again, and said: "I once passed by Mount Liang and was honoured with an invitation to stay, but in my folly I declined. Now it is my great good fortune to see you here in our stronghold. This is the greatest favour heaven could show me."
Song Jiang said, smiling: "Your reputation is universal among the rivers and lakes. My only regret is that it has taken so long for us to meet."
The Monk now ordered wine and all the leaders introduced themselves to each other.
Next day Song Jiang asked: "Tell me about Qingzhou, how has the campaign fared?"
The Blue-Faced Beast replied: "Since Red Star left we have fought four or five times but have not defeated them. Their fortunes depend entirely on Twin Rods. If we could only capture him I believe we'd have them in the palms of our hands."
The Professor smiled craftily. "You won't take that one by force," he said. "We must use guile."
"What can we do to capture him?" Song Jiang asked.
"The only way is this," said the Professor and whispered something.
"Brilliant!" said Song Jiang delightedly.
Troops were given their orders that day, and next morning they marched. Arriving before the city all the troops deployed around it. Drums were beating, banners waving, the sound of cheering and challenges filled the air. When report of this reached Governor Murong's ears, he hurriedly demanded the presence of Twin Rods.
"These bandits have now gone and brought Song Jiang of the Marshes of Mount Liang here to help them," he said. "What are we going to do about it?"
"Rest easy, Your Excellency," said Twin Rods. "If the bandits come here they lose their advantage. These scum can only afford to be insolent within their marshes. Now that they have ventured out of their den we shall catch them one by one, they'll have no chance to show off round here. You can stand on the city walls and watch me slaughter them."
Twin Rods armed himself at once and mounted. He ordered the city gates to be opened and the drawbridge lowered and led out a thousand cavalry. He deployed his troops under the city walls.
A certain warrior now rode out from Song Jiang's ranks. He was carrying a wolf's-tooth mace, and he berated the Governor in stentorian tones: "You thieving bureaucrat, you scourge of the people! You murdered all my family! Now I'm going to have my revenge and wipe out your offence!"
Governor Murong recognized Thunderclap and replied in kind: "You, an officer of the imperial guard, the state never broke faith with you yet you had the nerve to turn rebel! When we catch you, you shall die the death of a thousand cuts! Bring me that villain!"
In obedience to the command Twin Rods galloped forward with whirling rods, intending to capture Thunderclap. The latter, brandishing his mace, rode to the encounter. Their horses met.
What a contest it was! Forty or fifty bouts they fought, and neither had the advantage. Finally Governor Murong, fearing that Twin Rods might lose, ordered the gong sounded for his troops to withdraw into the city. Thunderclap made no attempt to pursue them and also retired to his own lines. Song Jiang ordered all the leaders and field commanders to pull their troops back five miles or so and pitch camp.
Back in the city, Twin Rods dismounted and went to see the Governor. "I was on the point of capturing Thunderclap," he said. "Why did Your Excellency order the troops to withdraw?"
"You had fought so many bouts," said the Governor. "I was afraid you were tired. That's why I ordered the army back to take a break. That villain Thunderclap used to be my commander-in-chief. He turned traitor along with Colonel Hua. But you shouldn't underestimate him."
"Don't worry, Your Excellency. I will certainly get the better of that shameless turncoat. When I was fighting him just now, I noticed a flaw in his technique. In a few days' time you'll be able to see me dispatch him!"
"Since you're so brave," said the Governor, "open up a passage next time you're fighting and we'll send out three messengers. One can go to the capital to request reinforcements. The other two can go to neighbouring provinces to ask them to recruit troops to assist us in suppressing the bandits."
"You are a master strategist, Your Excellency," said Twin Rods.
The Governor wrote the letter that same day to request reinforcements and three officers were picked to set off when the opportunity arose.
Twin Rods after returning to his residence, took off his armour and went to bed. Before it was fully light an officer came to report: "There's three horsemen up on that little hill outside the north gate, spying on the city. One of them has a red robe and is riding a white horse. There's two others, one on each side of him. I know the one on his right is Colonel Hua, the Archer. The one on his left is dressed like a scholar."
"The one in red must obviously be Song Jiang," said Twin Rods. "The one dressed like a scholar must be the Professor. Don't do anything to frighten them. Find me a hundred cavalry and we'll ride out and get them."
Twin Rods armed himself and mounted immediately and put himself at the head of a hundred or more cavalry. The north gate was unobtrusively opened and the drawbridge lowered and they trotted up the hill. Song Jiang, the Professor and Colonel Hua seemed quite lost in their contemplation of the city. But when Twin Rods slapped his mount and urged it forward up the slope, the three turned their horses' heads and slowly rode off. As Twin Rods raced towards them they simultaneously reined in their horses beside a clump of ancient trees. Just as Twin Rods drew level with the trees a loud shout was heard and he plunged into a pit. Horse and rider both went in. Fifty hooks reached out on either side and pinned Twin Rods down while they bound him and took him away. The horse was led off after him. Of the cavalry who had also been in the pursuit, the leaders were shot down by Colonel Hua with his bow, while the rest managed to rein in their mounts and flee.
Song Jiang returned to the camp and seated himself, while his guards pushed Twin Rods into the room. Immediately Song Jiang stood up and shouted: "Untie him at once!" And with his own hands he raised Twin Rods up and seated him. Then he prostrated himself.
Twin Rods said: "Why are you doing this?"
"How should I dare to go against the Emperor? It is only because of a corrupt official, who oppresses the people and perpetrates injustices that I have been forced for the time being to take refuge in the marshes, and only until such time as the Emperor declares an amnesty. I have had the misfortune to offend you and provoke your fearsome anger. I am a true admirer of your valour. For this unintentional offence, I humbly beg you to pardon me."
Twin Rods said: "A prisoner must count death a trifle, why do you offer me courtesy and consoling words?"
"How could I dare to do anything prejudicial to your life?" Song Jiang said. "I pray to heaven that my simple thoughts may find favour and my humble request be heard."
Twin Rods said: "Can it be that you want me to go to the capital and plead for your amnesty?"
"But how could you do that?" said Song Jiang. "The infamous Marshal Gao is a mean-spirited man. He forgets any favours he owes, and remembers everyone's faults. You have lost many troops, money and materials, how could he not hold you responsible? But now Victorious, the Supremo and Thunderer have all consented to join our company on the mountain. If you do not regard our stronghold as too unworthy I would like to offer you a place among our leadership — but only until the Emperor sees fit to grant an amnesty. After that we will all be able to dedicate our services to the country."
Twin Rods gave it long and careful consideration. Well, he was, you see one of the baleful stars, so he was naturally favourable to their spirit of righteousness! And then, Song Jiang was so courteous and so persuasive!
Twin Rods sighed and then knelt on the ground and said: "It is not that I wish to be disloyal to my country. But I feel you are exceptionally honourable, it is impossible for me not to trust you. I agree to serve you. In the circumstances, I can have absolutely no argument against it." There is a poem about this:

Sent by the Emperor to clean out the stable,
*Soon he's a henchman, not a new broom.*
*To explain such disloyalty how is one able?*
Evil doings in the palace this puzzle illume.

Song Jiang was delighted. He presented Twin Rods to all the other leaders, and ordered the Tiger-Killer and Big Chief to bring the black horse with white socks, the Emperor's gift, for Twin Rods to ride on.
A meeting was now held to discuss plans for rescuing Blazing Comet. The Professor said: "If Twin Rods can persuade them to open the gates it will be easy as falling off a log. It will have the added advantage of cementing him to our cause."

Song Jiang listened and then reassured Twin Rods with these words: "It is not because I want to gain control of the city. It is simply that the Kongs, uncle and nephew, have been locked up there, and it is impossible to do anything for them if you don't get those gates opened."
Twin Rods said cheerfully: "Since you have enlisted me, I shall certainly do my best."
It was agreed that evening that ten leaders should go with Twin Rods, namely Thunderclap, Colonel Hua, Colonel Sun, the Dandy, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Snake, Scorpion, Golden Wings and Short-Arse — all dressed in army uniform. When these eleven horsemen reached the city, Twin Rods rode right to the edge of the moat and shouted across: "Ahoy there, guards! Open up! I've escaped!"
When they heard in the city that it was the voice of Twin Rods, they rushed to report it to the Governor. The loss of Twin Rods had plunged the Governor into gloom. When they told him that Twin Rods had escaped and come back, he cheered up at once. He immediately mounted and rode to the battlements. As he could see there were another dozen or so riders and could only hear Twin Rods' voice, not see his face, he asked: "How did you manage to escape, commander?"
Twin Rods replied: "The bastards tripped my horse. They captured me and took me into their camp. There was an officer there who had served with me before, and he managed to steal the horse for me and we escaped together."
Reassured, the Governor ordered the gates opened and the drawbridge lowered. The other ten followed Twin Rods in, and when they drew level with the Governor, Thunderclap knocked him from his horse with one blow of his mace. Snake and Scorpion started a fire. Golden Wings and Short-Arse rushed into the city, killing and scattering the enemy officers. Song Jiang's main force saw the fires in the city and all came pouring in. Song Jiang hurriedly issued orders for the people not to be molested in any way; stores and money were to be taken from the government coffers only. They went to the gaol and released Blazing Comet and his uncle, with all his family. Next they put the fire out. Governor Murong and his family were executed and their property seized and divided among the troops. When it was light a list was made of people whose houses had been burnt in the fire and provisions were distributed in compensation. The contents of the government coffers and grain stores were loaded onto five hundred or so carts. More than two hundred horses were rounded up. A big feast was organized in the government office to celebrate and the chiefs of the three mountains were invited to join the main stronghold. The Tiger-Killer and Big Chief sent someone back to Mount Peachblossom to fetch out all the horses, money and provisions, after burning down the camp. Monk Lu Zhishen sent the Young Master and the Knife back to Twin Dragon Peak to help the Gardener and Sister Sun collect up people, horses, money and stores and burn down the compound of the Temple of the Precious Pearl.
It took a few days to assemble all the troops from the three mountains. Then Song Jiang led this large contingent of troops and comrades back to Mount Liang. Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, Twin Rods and Whiskers were sent on ahead to clear the road. They passed through the province without any disturbance. The villagers, old and young, flocked to see them, offering incense and falling on their knees before them.
In a few days, they had reached the Marshes of Mount Liang. All the boat captains came across to meet them. Chao Gai and the other leaders from the main camp were at Golden Sands Landing to receive them. On reaching the stronghold, they all went to sit in the Assembly Hall of the Heroes and a great feast was organized to celebrate the arrival of new leaders: Twin Rods, Monk Lu Zhishen, the Blue-Faced Beast, Pilgrim Wu Song, the Young Master, the Knife, the Gardener, Sister Sun, the Tiger-Killer, Big Chief, Blazing Comet and Red Star — altogether there were twelve of these new arrivals. During the banquet Leopard's Head told how the Monk had once rescued him. The Monk asked: "After I left you in Cangzhou, Instructor, did you ever have news of your wife?"
"After we had that dust-up with Wang Lun, I naturally sent someone back to fetch my family, but I heard that my wife had been forced by Marshal Gao's son and had hanged herself. Her parents fell ill with grief and also died."
The Blue-Faced Beast then recalled the time when they had gone to the mountain while Wang Lun was in charge, and everyone said: "Something like this must be preordained; it was no accident!"
Chao Gai recounted the story of robbing the birthday convoy on Yellow Mud Ridge, which caused great mirth.
They took turns to organize the banquet on the days that followed. Of this no more.
Song Jiang was naturally well pleased to see so many additions to the company on the mountain. He made Spots overseer of the blacksmiths, with responsibility for supervising the manufacture of arms of every sort, including linked chain-mail armour. The Ape was manager of banners and clothing with orders to produce flags depicting the three powers, the nine planets, the four polar stars, the five directions, the twenty-eight constellations of the zodiac, together with flying dragons and pards, yellow halberds and white long-tailed banners, scarlet tassels and black umbrellas. Beacons were constructed on all four sides of the mountain and two more inns to the west and south were built to receive good men heading for the mountain, as well as to gather military intelligence. The inn on the west was put in the hands of the Gardener and Sister Sun — since this husband and wife team had originally kept an inn. The inn on the south was committed as before to the other husband and wife team — Blackface and Auntie Gu. The inn on the east was still to be run by the Crocodile and Lungs while the Executioner and the Flea were still at the inn on the north. The three gates leading up the mountain were reinforced and leaders appointed to man them. Everyone complied with these new regulations. Of this no more.
One day Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk, suddenly announced to Song Jiang: "I have a friend called Shi Jin, the Tattooed Dragon; the Tiger-Killer is also acquainted with him. He is on Little Mount Hua near Huayin in Huazhou. He is with Zhu Wu, known as the Strategist, and also one Chen Da, the River-Jumping Tiger, and Yang Chun, the White-Spotted Snake. They have formed themselves into a company there. I often think of my friend. He came to my rescue once, in the Temple of the Ceramic Tiles, I shall never forget it. I would like to go and pay him a visit, and persuade all four of them to join us here. What do you say?"
Song Jiang said: "I have heard good things of the Tattooed Dragon. I think it's a great idea for you to go and invite him to join us. However, I don't think you should go alone. I would like to ask Pilgrim Wu Song to accompany you. He is got up as a pilgrim, a kind of monk, you'll make a good pair."
"Certainly I will go with the master," said the Pilgrim.
So that same day they packed their bags. The Monk just went as a contemplative and the Pilgrim took on the role of his attendant priest. They bade farewell to the assembly of leaders on the mountain, and crossed over at Golden Sands Landing. Starting early, resting late, and travelling every day, they soon reached Huayin and headed for Little Mount Hua.
After the two of them had left, Song Jiang found himself uneasy, so he told the Magic Messenger to follow after them and listen out for news.
As they approached Little Mount Hua a guard sprang out and stopped them. "Where have you two monks come from?" he asked.
"Is a Mr. Shi to be found here on the mountain?" Wu Song asked in reply.
"If it's chief Shi you want, you'd better wait here a bit," the man said. "I'll go up and report to the leaders and they'll come down to see you."
"Tell them Monk Lu Zhishen has come to visit," said the Pilgrim.
The soldier had only been gone a little while when Zhu Wu, the Strategist appeared, with the River-Jumper and the White-Spotted Snake. But there was no sign of the Tattooed Dragon.
The Monk asked: "Where is Mr. Shi? Why can't I see him?"
"Excuse me, but are you Major Lu from Yan'an?" the Strategist asked.
"I am indeed," said the Monk. "And my attendant here is Captain Wu Song, killer of the tiger on Jingyang Pass."
The other three hurriedly saluted and said: "Your reputation is well known to us. We heard that you had set up camp on Twin Dragon Peak. What brings you here today?"
The Monk said: "We are not on Twin Dragon Peak any longer. We have joined Song Jiang's company on Mount Liang. We have come here to see Mr. Shi."
The Strategist said: "Since you are here, please come on up to our stronghold and let me explain everything to you properly."
The Monk said: "If you've something to say, then say it! All this messing about, who the fucking hell is going to put up with it?"
The Pilgrim said: "My friend is a little impatient. But if you've something to say, there's nothing to stop you saying it."
The Strategist said: "We had been doing very well in our stronghold here, ever since Mr. Shi came to us. Then he happened to meet a painter called Wang Yi, a native of the northern capital, who had come to fulfil a promise he had made to paint a mural at the Temple of the Golden Lord of Heaven on the western peak of Mount Hua. He had also brought his daughter, whose name was Jade, to keep him company. The district governor, Ho by name and originally a member of Grand Preceptor Cai's staff, a greedy official who unjustly persecuted the people, happened to visit the temple one day to burn incense. He saw the girl and fell for her, just like that. He kept sending people to say that he wanted her as a wife. When her father would not hear of it this governor abducted and raped her and sentenced the father to exile in a distant frontier post. The father passed through here on his way and met Mr. Shi, to whom he recounted the whole affair. Mr. Shi rescued him and gave him refuge on the mountain. He killed the two guards who had been sent with him, and then went to the government office with the intention of killing Governor Ho, but he was detected first and arrested and imprisoned. Now they intend to raise an army to wipe out our camp here, and we simply don't know what to do about it!"
The Monk was outraged: "Those fucking officials are shameless! The harm they do! You and I will go and kill the bastard!"
The Strategist said: "Please come up to the stronghold and discuss it all first."
When this party of five leaders had arrived in the stronghold and seated themselves, the offended father was invited in to explain to them what a greedy drunken despot Governor Ho was and how he made a habit of raping the daughters of respectable families. The Strategist and his comrades had oxen and horses slaughtered to provide a banquet for the other two visitors. As they were feasting, the Monk gave his views: "This bloody Ho is an utter disgrace, I shall go with you to the city and execute him!"
The Pilgrim said: "Don't be so hasty, brother. Let us ride back with all haste to Mount Liang and report the matter. We can ask Song Jiang to bring a big army to attack Huayin and rescue the Tattooed Dragon."
"If he has to wait while we go all the way back to the stronghold and fetch an army, who knows what will happen to the Tattooed Dragon," the Monk objected.
"But even if you kill the governor," said the Pilgrim, "how will you rescue the Tattooed Dragon?" He was totally opposed to letting the Monk go.
The Strategist also advised against it: "Please calm down, Master. Captain Wu is absolutely right."
The Monk grew even more angry: "You're such a cold unfeeling bunch, you'd let our friend Mr. Shi perish. Well, you needn't go back to Mount Liang, you can just stay and watch me!"
No one could dissuade him from it, their pleas that evening fell on deaf ears. In the morning he was up before dawn. He took his monk's staff and sword and hurried off to Huayin.
Pilgrim Wu Song said: "He refuses to listen to anyone. No good will come of this!" He sent off two sharp-witted soldiers to listen out for news.
As for the Monk, he went rushing into Huazhou and started asking for the government office. "Over the city bridge, and then turn east," they directed him. He was just crossing this pontoon bridge, when people started shouting: "Out of the way monk, His Excellency the Governor is about to pass."
"Well," he thought, "I was just looking for him, and here he is coming to find me! It really seems he's fated to die!"
The guard of honour began to pass in pairs, one after another, and then the Governor, in a luxury sedan. On either side the windows were protected by a dozen or so guards tightly packed around it, each carrying a steel-shafted spear.
"It's not a good idea to attack those bastards," the Monk thought, "because if I failed I should be laughed at."
Now the Governor happened to be looking out of the window and he saw the Monk, apparently hesitating about whether to approach. They went on over the bridge, and when he got out at the government office he told two of the guards: "Go and invite that big fat monk on the bridge to come and have a vegetarian meal here at the office." Accordingly the guards went up to Monk Lu Zhishen on the bridge and said: "His Excellency the Governor invites you to a vegetarian meal."
"The bugger has fallen right into my hands," the Monk thought. "I wanted to kill him but I couldn't think of a way to reach him so I let him go. I was wondering how to get to him, and he goes and invites me!" He followed the guards to the government office. The Governor had already made his arrangements. As soon as the Monk was outside the courtroom he was ordered to put down his staff and surrender his sword and then invited to go to have his meal in an inner chamber. The Monk was unwilling to comply at first, but they all told him: "We know you're a monk, but how can you be so ignorant of etiquette? How could you be allowed inside carrying a sword or a staff?"
The Monk thought: "Anyway, my two fists are enough to beat the bugger's brains out!" So he put down his staff, took off his sword in the corridor, and followed the guards inside. The Governor was sitting there waiting. He made a gesture with his hand and shouted: "Seize the bald scoundrel!" Forty police officers leapt from the wings and pulling him this way and that secured the Monk.
Well now, you can be Ogre in Chief, but you won't escape Heaven's net! You can be the fiery-headed door-god, but you won't come whole from the dragon's pool and the tiger's den! It was truly a case of

The moth flies into the flame that burns it up;
The turtle enraged swallows the hook that kills it.

YANG ZHI said that it would be better if they had the support of the brigands at Liangshan Marsh, and he suggested that Kong Liang should go to Song Jiang to ask for his assistance.
"That is a good idea," said Lu Da. "I very often hear of the fame of Song Jiang, but so far I have not met him. I have heard of him so much that I am almost made deaf with hearing his name. I hope our brother Kong Liang will go, and bring that famous man to join us. We will proceed with our attack on those pricks at Qingzhou in the meantime."
Kong Liang agreed, and handed over all his men to Lu Da. He then departed for Liangshan Marsh.
Lu Da then sent to his stronghold to summon all the 200 bandits upon hearing of the news from Qingzhou Prefecture. Li Zhong also got all his 500 men from Taohua Mountain. When these bandits arrived they joined to attack Qingzhou.
Kong Liang was allowed to pass the outposts upon reaching Liangshan Marsh and was conducted up the mountain. There he explained his mission to Song Jiang, and the other leaders, who unanimously agreed to join in the attack upon Qingzhou. The bandits were soon ready, and Song Jiang divided them up into five companies in charge of twenty leaders. They left the mountain the same day, and duly joined the other bandits in the neighborhood of Qingzhou Prefecture. There all the leaders were introduced, and were pleased to meet each other.
Song Jiang introduced the question as to how they were to attack the town, and Yang Zhi spoke, "Before you arrived we had attacked the town about five times without gaining any advantage. The defense of Qingzhou Prefecture evidently depends upon one man, General Huyan Zhuo and if we can capture him, his army would disappear like snow when hot water is thrown on it."
Wu Yong laughed and said, "To use force against such a man is useless. We must use strategy."
"How could that be done?" asked Song Jiang.
Wu Yong explained a trick he had thought of, and Song Jiang was delighted as he considered the plan excellent.
Early the next day all the bandits surrounded the town with much noise of gongs and drums. Inside the town the Prefect Murong upon hearing of this sent for General Huyan Zhuo. "Evidently," he said, "these men have now got the bandits from Liangshan Marsh to assist them, and we are surrounded. What shall we do?"
"These brigands are skilled in fighting on water," replied Huyan Zhuo, "but now they are out of their element and far away from their stronghold. I will capture them one by one. I request you to go to the gate tower, and watch me defeat them."
General Huyan put on his armor, mounted his horse, and led about one thousand men out the gates to meet the banaits.
Out of Song Jiang's forces Qin Ming rode forth armed with a spiked mace and he cursed the enemy. "You covetous and malicious thieves of the people. You have ruined my family, and today I come for revenge."
Prefect Murong on the wall recognized the man as ex-general Qin Ming, and shouted, "You were an official appointed by the Emperor, and were well treated. So why are you now a rebel? If I capture you I will have you hacked into a thousand pieces. General Huyan, please arrest that man."
General Huyan at once galloped forward towards Qin Ming who also advanced. They met, and were well matched. After about fifty bouts neither had gained any advantage.
Murong being afraid that General Huyan would not succeed in single combat had a gong sounded as a signal for the General to return inside the gate. As General Huyan retired, Qin Ming also withdrew without pursuing his opponent. Song Jiang issued an order for all the bandits to withdraw about five //from the town.
When General Huyan had dismounted inside the city he spoke to Prefect Murong, "I wanted to defeat Qin Ming. Why did you give the order for a retreat?"
"I saw that you had not succeeded after many attempts, and fearing that you would be tired, I thought it better that you should have a rest. That man Qin Ming was previously in charge of the troops here, but he and an officer Hua Rong deserted. You must not treat them lightly."
"You need not worry," said General Huyan, "as I can easily defeat that fellow. While we were fighting I noticed his weak spots. If he comes tomorrow I will certainly overcome him and kill him."
"In that case we must open a way through these bandits and get three messengers through. One can go to the capital, and beg for assistance there, and the other two can go to the towns in the neighborhood, and ask them to help us."
"Your proposal is excellent," replied General Huyan Zhuo.
The Prefect wrote his dispatches accordingly, and selected three reliable men to act as messengers. General Huyan retired to his quarters, undressed, and was soon asleep. Early the next morning before dawn he was awakened by a messenger knocking at his door. The man reported, "Just outside the North Gate there is a mound, and three horsemen are there overlooking the town. One on the right we recognize as Hua Rong, the one in the middle is dressed in red, and another one is dressed like a Taoist priest."
"That priest will be Wu Yong, and the one in red will be Song Jiang," remarked General Huyan. "They must not be disturbed at present. Let one hundred cavalry be mustered at once, and I will capture these three men." He quickly dressed, mounted, and led his cavalry to the North Gate. The gate was opened, and the drawbridge was lowered quietly. General Huyan and his men rode forth towards the mound. The three brigand leaders were still there looking towards the town, but as soon as the troops were near they turned their horses and rode away. General Huyan galloped after them, but as the men reached a clump of dead tree they halted. As General Huyan approached, his horse tripped and fell into a hidden pit. At the same moment there were many loud shouts from bandits who had lain in ambush at that spot. He was seized, and bound with ropes; and taken off as a prisoner in next to no time. As the troops came forward Hua Rong shot arrows, and killed several men at the head. The cavalry, seeing this, swung round and retreated in great confusion. When Song Jiang returned to his camp the executioners led the prisoner to meet Song Jiang who ordered that the prisoner should be set free. He then conducted him into his tent, requested him to be seated, and then saluted him with both hands.
"What is this done for?" asked General Huyan Zhuo.
"How dare I, Song Jiang, to disobey the Imperial Court? It is only the corrupt officials who force us to seek refuge at Liangshan Marsh. We will wait until the Emperor pardons us. I do not expect that we would give much trouble to you and have offended you, and I therefore beg you to forgive us this time."
"I am a prisoner," replied General Huyan, "and quite ready for death. Why do you treat me in this polite manner?"
"We have no desire to injure you," said Song Jiang. "Heaven knows that our intentions are good." He again saluted, and begged General Huyan to forgive him.
"Is it your idea to ask me to go to the capital and put your case before the Emperor and beg for a pardon?" asked General Huyan Zhuo.
"How could you go?" said Song Jiang. "There is still the Marshal of the Imperial Guard, Gao Qiu, in office. He is a mean fellow; always forgets meritorious deeds, and never overlooks a minor fault. As you have been defeated after great expenditure of money he will undoubtedly seek to punish you. Moreover, your three assistants, Colonels Han Tao, Peng Qi, and Ling Zhen, have already joined us. If you have no objection to join us, I will retire, and offer you my position as second-in-command here. If in the future the Emperor pardons us you can still be of service to the court."
General Huyan Zhuo for some time did not reply to this, and was evidently undecided. He saw that Song Jiang was treating him with great respect, and that there was some force in his arguments.
At last he sighed, and kneeling replied, "If I agree to your proposal you must not think me disloyal to the Emperor, because your generosity obliges me to comply with you. I will gladly 'hold your whip and stirrup,' and will never return."
Song Jiang was much pleased at this, and introduced General Huyan to the other leaders as one of their band. He then asked Li Zhong to return the horse stolen from General Huyan, and this was done. They then discussed how they were to rescue Kong Ming who was still in prison. "There is only one way," said Wu Yong "General Huyan must get the town gate open by some deception, and the rest will be easy. That will complete the estrangement between General Huyan and the Prefect."

Song Jiang addressed General Huyan Zhuo, "We do not wish to loot the town, but only get inside, and release Kong Ming and his uncle who are still in prison there. If it was not for that I would not ask you to get the town gate open by deception."
"As you have treated me with great hospitality," replied General Huyan. "I must do as you suggest."
About ten of the leaders disguised as soldiers and accompanied General Huyan Zhuo on horseback. They reached the town moat in the evening, and General Huyan called out, "Open the gate! I have just escaped with my life." The gatekeepers recognized the voice of General Huyan, and at once reported the matter to the prefect.
The Prefect Murong had been distressed at the capture of General Huyan, but when he heard this report he was delighted, and mounting his horse rode to the gate. In the dark he saw eleven horsemen, and could not make out who they were. He however called out, "General Huyan, how did you escape?"
"The bandits seized me, and took me as a prisoner to their stronghold," replied General Huyan. "There, however, was an old attaché of mine, and he secretly helped me to escape, and also gave me my old horse, and has accompanied me here."
The Prefect hearing this gave orders for the drawbridge to be lowered and the gate opened. Then the ten brigands were inside the gate, and Qin Ming struck at Prefect Murong and killed him on the spot. The other leaders soon scattered the guard. A fire was at once set in the city and Song Jiang and the other brigands outside, immediately advanced, and were soon all inside the town. Song Jiang immediately gave orders that the people were not to be troubled, and deputed a part of his men to seize the government granary and treasury. Another party attacked the prison, and soon rescued Kong Ming and Kong Bin and their relatives. The fire was extinguished. The members of the Prefect's family were all killed, and his residence were looted. When it was daylight, Song Jiang ordered that all civilians whose houses had been burnt should be compensated. The loot was placed on about five hundred carts, and sent to Liangshan Marsh. The bandits then held a great feast in the town, and afterwards Song Jiang invited all the brigands from the other three mountains to join together at Liangshan Marsh, and this they agreed to. It took several days before they all assembled at Liangshan Marsh. Altogether this adventure brought twelve new leaders to Liangshan Marsh.
After a time Lu Da spoke to Song Jiang about the bandits at Mount Shaohua, at Huayin County under the leadership of Shi Jin, and he asked to be allowed to visit his old friends there. He said perhaps he could induce them to come to Liangshan Marsh.
Song Jiang agreed to this, and appointed Wu Song to accompany Lu Da. The two leaders set off on their journey, but shortly after they had gone, Song Jiang thought that there might be risks on the way, and therefore dispatched Dai Zong, the Divine Traveler, to follow them.
Upon reaching Mount Shaohua, Lu Da and Wu Song were stopped by a sentinel bandit who asked what their business was. Wu Song said they wished to see Shi Jin, and a messenger was at once sent up the mountain to report the matter. Within a short time they saw the leaders Zhu Wu, Chen Da, and Yang Chun coming down the mountain to meet them, but Shi Jin was not with them. When they had been introduced, Lu Da asked where Shi Jin was, and Zhu Wu without replying invited them to come to their headquarters where matters could be discussed. But Lu Da objected to this, "If you have anything to say, goddamn say it at once. I came to see Shi Jin, but he is not here. I am not going further until you explain the position."
"We three were in charge of the stronghold, and then were joined by Shi Jin who became our chief," said Zhu Wu. "Everything went smoothly until one day he went down the mountain, and happened to meet an artist named Wang Yi who was traveling with his daughter. Sometime before Wang Yi had been sick, and had then taken a vow that if he recovered he would paint a special screen for a temple in that neighborhood.
"One day while doing this work the Prefect He came to the temple to burn incense before the god. He had been struck by the beauty of Wang Yi's daughter, and had sent a go-between to ask her to become his concubine. Wang Yi objected to this, and then the Prefect sent his soldiers to take the girl by force. A false charge was made against Wang Yi, and he had been banished to a distant prison. On the way as a prisoner he passed this spot, and so met Shi Jin to whom he told this story. Shi Jin was so annoyed that he attacked the escort of two soldiers, and killed them. He then went himself into the town to kill the Prefect, but was arrested and placed in prison, but I," continued Zhu Wu, "have no plan to solve this problem."
"This prick, the Prefect, is without decency," said Lu Da. "Why is he so brutal? I will go and kill him myself."
"Let us first go to our stronghold to discuss this question," said Zhu Wu.
Lu Da wanted to go at once, but Wu Song seizing hold of the monk's iron staff pointed to the sky, "Elder brother, you can see that the sun is almost touching the top of the trees, and it will soon be dark."
Lu Da saw this, but although still angry, he agreed to go up the mountain with them.
A feast was arranged, but Lu Da refused to join the others. "As long as our younger brother Shi Jin is absent, I will not eat or drink anything," he said. "I will sleep here for one night, but tomorrow I will go into the town, and kill that fellow."
"Do not be reckless," said Wu Song. "Tomorrow we must go to Liangshan Marsh, and ask Song Jiang to help us to attack Huazhou," he said to Lu Da.
"I am afraid that Shi Jin will be killed before the men come from Liangshan Marsh," said Lu Da.
"Even if you killed the Prefect," said Wu Song, "you would not then be sure of releasing Shi Jin from prison. I object very strongly to your going."
"Elder brother," interposed Zhu Wu, "what Wu Song says is quite right. Please keep cool in this matter."
"It is you indolent people that involves our younger brother Shi Jin!" replied Lu Da. "Now he is in prison, and yet you drink wine and eat food here as though nothing unusual had happened." He then left them, and went to bed. He was up early the next morning, and went away without speaking to any one.
As soon as this was found out, Wu Song considered that there would be immediate danger, and Zhu Wu at once sent two bandits to spy.
When Lu Da reached the town, he asked an average person where the *yamen* was. He was told to cross a bridge and then go east. Upon reaching the bridge, however, there were many men there who said, "You can't pass this way as the Prefect is coming." Lu Da thought, 'I come here to look for this man but there he is coming straight into my arms. He deserves death!" Soon the Prefect came along in his winter sedan chair and was attended by his guard on both sides. Lu Da seeing this realized that he could not carry out his plan. He thought if he made an attempt he might fail, and would only be laughed at.
Just at the moment the Prefect looked through the window of the chair and noticed Lu Da take a step forward and then withdraw as if undecided about something, so when he reached the *yamen* he told a messenger to go, and bring the big monk to see him. The messenger soon found Lu Da, who was surprised but pleased when he heard the message. Upon reaching the *yamen* he was asked to lay aside his broad sword and iron monk's staff, and was then asked to go into the Prefect's quarters to dine there. Upon reaching the room, the Prefect told his attendants, "Arrest that thief!" And Lu Da was arrested as a prisoner.

By flame, the moth is lured,
Its wings are quickly burnt;
By bait, the fish is caught,
Its struggles end in death.

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**The Professor Wu Yong purloins & by a Ruse Obtains the Golden Hanging Bell of the Emperor & his Deception in the Affair; Song Jiang Makes a Row & Fights at Mount Hua on the Western Peak**

The policemen rushed Lu Zhishen to the foot of the prefect's platform. "Where are you from, bald donkey?" shouted Ho.
"What crime have I committed?"
"Who sent you here to kill me? The truth, now!"
"I'm a monk, a man who's renounced the world. How can you ask me that?"
"I saw you waiting to attack my sedan-chair with your staff, but you didn't dare. Bald donkey, you'd better confess!"
"This bucko didn't try to kill you. Why have you arrested me? You're wronging a peaceful man."
"Since when does a monk call himself 'this bucko'? He's a plundering bandit from the fifth region West of the Pass, for sure, who's come to avenge Shi Jin! If we don't beat him, he won't admit it. Guards, give this bald donkey a good drubbing!"
"Don't you put a finger on me! Let me tell you something!" yelled Zhishen. "I'm Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk from Liangshan Marsh! It doesn't matter if you kill me! When my brother Song Jiang finds out and comes down from the mountain, you might just as well cut off your own donkey head and send it to him!"
Prefect Ho was furious. He had Lu Zhishen severely beaten, then ordered his underlings to fasten a big cangue around the monk's neck and throw him into the jail for the condemned. At the same time he sent off a dispatch to the central authorities, requesting instructions. Lu's Buddhist staff and knife were locked away for safe-keeping.
This matter was soon the talk of the entire prefecture. Lesser brigands got wind of it and hastened up Mount Shaohua to report. Wu Song was shocked. "Two of us were sent to attend to something and one has already been captured," he thought. "How can I go back and face the chieftains?"
While he was pondering another bandit arrived from the foot of the mountain and announced: "A chieftain dispatched from Mount Liangshan. He's called Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller, and he's waiting below."
Wu Song hastily went down, brought him up, and introduced him to Zhu Wu. They told Dai how Lu had refused to take advice and had fallen into a trap. Dai was startled.
"I can't stay here long," he exclaimed. "I must return to Mount Liangshan and let our brothers know, so that they can send forces to save him."
"I'll be waiting anxiously," said Wu Song. "I hope our brothers will hurry to the rescue."
Dai Zong ate a vegetable meal, then worked his magic travel formula and sped towards Liangshan Marsh. He reached the stronghold in three days. He related to Chao Gai and Song Jiang how Lu Zhishen had wanted to kill Prefect Ho in order to save Shi Jin, but had been snared himself, instead. Song Jiang was alarmed.
"Two of our brothers in difficulty," he said. "Of course we'll rescue them. We mustn't delay. We'll muster men and horses immediately and set out in three contingents."
In the van of the first unit were Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Lin Chong, Yang Zhi and Huyan Zhuo. They commanded a thousand armored cavalry and two thousand infantry and took the lead, pushing through mountains and spanning rivers.
The middle unit was headed by Song Jiang, with Wu Yong, Zhu Tong, Xu Ning, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao as his lieutenants. They led a mixed force of infantry and cavalry numbering two thousand.
Bringing up the rear with fodder and grain were Li Ying, Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, Li Jun and Zhang Shun, leading also two thousand infantry and cavalry men. This brought the expedition to a total of seven thousand. They left the mountain fortress, a turbulent stream of spears and halberds, men and horses, moving like the wind, and headed for Huazhou.
After several days on the road, they passed the halfway point, and Dai Zong was sent to announce their coining to the stronghold on Mount Shaohua. Zhu Wu and the other two leaders prepared animals for slaughter and fine wines in anticipation of their guests.
Song Jiang and his three contingents then arrived at the foot of the mountain. Wu Song went down with Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun to greet Song Jiang, Wu Yong and the other leaders and invite them to the stronghold. When all were seated Song Jiang asked about the situation in the town.
"Prefect Ho has imprisoned your two chieftains. He's only waiting for word from the imperial court before disposing of them," said Zhu Wu.
"What should our rescue plan be?" queried Song and Wu.
"It's a big town with a deep broad moat. A very difficult place to attack," said Zhu Wu. "Only by striking from within and without at the same time can you capture it."
"Tomorrow we'll go to the outskirts and take a look," said Wu Yong. "then we'll discuss our plan."
Song Jiang drank for some time. He longed for dawn so that he could start reconnoitering.
"They've got two of our big chieftains in their prison. They're sure to be prepared," said Wu Yong. "We can't go during daylight. But there will be a bright moon tonight. Let's start down late in the afternoon. At the first watch, we can reconnoiter."
When the sun was well past its meridian, Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Hua Rong, Qin Ming and Zhu Tong rode down the slope and advanced along a winding road. At the first watch they neared the town of Huazhou. They dismounted and observed it from a bluff.
It was the middle of the second lunar month. The moonlight was bright as day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. They could see several gates in the strong high wall enclosing the town. The moat was deep and wide. For a long time they stared, noting also Mount Huashan, west in the distance. Truly a formidable well-guarded town! What was to be done? None of them could think of a plan.
"Let's return to the stronghold," said Wu Yong, "and talk there." The five rode back through the night to Mount Shaohua. Song Jiang was frowning. His face wore a troubled expression.
"We'll send a dozen or so clever young men down to keep an ear cocked for what's going on," Wu Yong decided.
Before three days had passed, one of the scouts returned and reported: "The emperor has dispatched a Marshal of the Council of Imperial Defense, bearing a set of imperial golden hanging bells, to burn incense on Mount Huashan. He's come from the Yellow River to the Weihe."
"Brother, our worries are over," Wu Yong told Song Jiang. "Our plan is here." To Li Jun and Zhang Shun he said: "I want you to do this and this..."
"The problem is we don't know the terrain," said Li Jun. "It would be best if we had someone to lead the way."
"How about me?" Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake proposed.
Song Jiang was very pleased, and the three went down the mountain.
The following day, at Wu Yong's suggestion, Song Jiang, Li Ying, Zhu Tong, Huyan Zhuo, Hua Rong, Qin Ming, and Xu Ning followed quietly with five hundred men to a fording point on the Weihe River. There, Li Jun and Zhang Shun were waiting with more than ten large boats. Wu Yong told Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Xu Ning and Huyan Zhuo to lie in ambush upon the bank; Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Zhu Tong and Li Ying boarded the vessels; Li Jun, Zhang Shun and Yang Chun then concealed the boats along the shore. The party waited there through the night.
At daybreak, they heard the distant sound of gongs and drums, and three government craft hove into view. On a yellow banner was inscribed the words: *Marshal Su Who Burns Incense on Mount Huashan by Imperial Decree.*
On Song Jiang's boat, Zhu Tong and Li Ying, each holding a long spear, stood behind him. Wu Yong was on the prow. They blocked the government vessel with their own when it reached the cove.
A captain wearing a purple robe and silver girdle emerged from the cabin with twenty men. "What boat are you?" he shouted. "How dare you interfere with the passage of a high minister?"
Song Jiang, hands clasped before him, bowed and hailed the officer respectfully. Wu Yong, from the prow, replied: "Song Jiang, a champion of the righteous, from Liangshan Marsh, awaits your gracious orders."
A chamberlain who was on board came forward and said: "A marshal of the imperial court is on his way to Mount Huashan to burn incense on orders of the emperor. Why do you robbers interfere?"
Song Jiang continued bowing.
"We are champions of the righteous," replied Wu Yong. "We want only to see the marshal's honored visage so that we may offer him our plea."
"Who do you think you are, requesting to see the marshal!" cried the chamberlain. And two captains who stood on either side barked: "Keep your voices down!"
Song Jiang still did not stir from his position.
"We are inviting the marshal to come ashore. We have something to discuss with him," said Wu Yong.
"You're mad!" exclaimed the chamberlain. "The marshal is an imperial official. How can he talk with the likes of you!"
"If the marshal is unwilling to meet us I'm afraid our boys may give him a shock," Song Jiang said, standing erect.
Zhu Tong waved the pennant that was attached to his spear, and Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Xu Ning and Huyan Zhuo suddenly emerged with their men from their places of concealment. Setting arrows to their bow-strings, they took up positions on the bank by the ford. The terrified boatmen plunged into the interiors of the government vessels.
Alarmed, the chamberlain hurried in to report. Marshal Su had no choice but to emerge and take a seat on the prow. Again Song Jiang bowed and hailed him respectfully.
"Why do you halt my boat?" the marshal demanded.
"We would not presume to behave improperly."
"Then why, sir champion, do you block our passage?"
"We wouldn't dare. We want only to beseech the marshal to come ashore. There is a matter we wish to discuss."
"I am under imperial orders to burn incense on Mount Huashan, champion. How can I confer with you? A minister of the imperial court is not so lightly to be called ashore!"
"If Marshal Su refuses," said Wu Yong from the prow, "I'm afraid our followers will be equally unyielding."
Li Ying waved his pennanted spear and Li Jun, Zhang Shun and Yang Chun came rowing up in a boat. While the startled Marshal Su watched, Li and Zhang, sharp gleaming knives in their hands, leaped onto the government vessel, and knocked two of the captains into the water.
"Stop that nonsense," Song Jiang shouted. "You're startling His Excellency!"
Li and Zhang promptly dived into the river and heaved the two captains back. Both Li and Zhang were as at home in the water as they were on dry land. Now they bounded smoothly onto the deck.
The marshal's soul seemed to have left his body. Again Song Jiang yelled at his men. "You boys get out of here! Stop frightening the marshal! I'll persuade him to come ashore myself."
"If you have anything on your mind, champion, why not tell me about it here?" said Su.
"This is not the place to talk. Please come to our mountain stronghold. We have no wish to harm you. May the Spirit of Mount Huashan destroy me if I'm lying!"
Marshal Su no longer had any choice. He disembarked. He was given a horse, helped to mount, and led off by the outlaws.
Song Jiang and Wu Yong instructed Hua Rong and Qin Ming to accompany Su up the mountain. He himself swung into the saddle and followed, after ordering that the marshal's retinue plus the incense, sacrificial items and golden hanging bells all be brought along. He left only Li Jun, Zhang Shun and a hundred men to guard the boats. All the other chieftains returned to the stronghold.
There, Song Jiang dismounted and escorted Su into a large hall. He seated the marshal in the middle. The chieftains stood in lines on either side. Song Jiang kowtowed four times. He remained kneeling before Su.
"Originally I was a small functionary in Yuncheng County," he said. "A judicial proceeding compelled me to become an outlaw and take refuge in Liangshan Marsh. I am waiting for an imperial amnesty so that I may devote my services to our country.
"Two of my brothers, though blameless, have been framed by Prefect Ho and thrown into jail. We wish to borrow the imperial incense and accoutrements, plus the golden hanging bells, as a means of getting into Huazhou. When we've finished we'll return them. It will have nothing to do with you, Marshal. We pray that you consent."
"If you take the imperial incense and things and the matter becomes known, I will be implicated."
"Just blame everything on me when you get back to the capital, Marshal."

Su realized that men like these couldn't be refused. He therefore agreed. Song Jiang respectfully toasted him and laid a feast in thanks. He put the clothes of the entourage on his own men. From among the outlaws he selected a handsome, clean-shaven fellow and dressed him in the garments of the marshal, as an impersonation of Su Yuanjing. Song Jiang and Wu Yong were made up as chamberlains; Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu as captains. Outlaws in purple robes and silver girdles carried pennants, banners, ceremonial equipment and symbols of office, and bore reverently the imperial incense, the sacrificial objects and the hanging golden bells. Hua Rong, Xu Ning, Zhu Tong and Li Ying dressed as guards. Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun provided quarters for the marshal and his entourage, and wined and dined them.

Qin Ming and Huyan Zhuo were given command of one contingent of men and horses, and Lin Chong and Yang Zhi another, and were directed to advance in two columns towards the town. Wu Song was dispatched to the gate of the Mount Huashan Temple to wait for the trumpet's call, and then go into action. Dai Zong was sent on ahead to announce the coming of the "imperial mission."

To make a long story short, the procession left the mountain stronghold, descended to the fording point, got into the boats and embarked. Instead of calling on the prefect in Huazhou it went directly towards Mount Huashan Temple. Dai Zong announced its imminent arrival to the abbot of the Yuntai Monastery and the deacon of the temple. The clerics hurried to the shore to give welcome with flowers, candles and lanterns, banners and precious panoplies. The imperial incense was placed in a miniature pavilion, which the monks respectfully carried into the temple, along with the hanging golden bells.

The abbot approached the "marshal," and Wu Yong said: "He's been ill all through the journey. Get him a sedan-chair."

Attendants helped the "marshal" into the conveyance and he was carried to the temple's Hall for Officials and invited to rest. "Chamberlain" Wu Yong addressed himself to the abbot.

"The marshal is here under the emperor's decree with imperial incense and golden hanging bells to offer homage to the god. Why hasn't the local prefect appeared to welcome him?"

"We've already dispatched a messenger. I'm sure he'll be here shortly," replied the abbot.

Before the words were out of his mouth, the public prosecutor of the prefecture and sixty or so constables came as an advance party with wine and fruits to call on the "marshal." The outlaw who was disguised as this official, although resembling him somewhat, was unable to imitate his speech. Therefore he pretended to be ill and sat on a divan wrapped in a quilt. The public prosecutor, seeing the pennants, banners and serrated flags, all obviously imperial equipage from the Eastern Capital, was completely convinced of his authenticity.

The "chamberlain" went in twice, ostensibly to confer, then led the public prosecutor inside, where he knelt at the edge of the dais, a good distance from the "marshal," and kowtowed. The "marshal" pointed and mumbled something. Wu Yong led the public prosecutor forward, meanwhile berating him.

"The marshal is an important minister, very close to the emperor. He's come a long distance to this place under imperial decree to burn incense, and was ill on the road. Why didn't your prefectural officials go well forward to meet him?"

"We received notification that he was coming, but we had no idea he was so near. That's why we failed to greet him and he reached the temple ahead of us. The prefect was intending to come, but bandits on Mount Shaohua have joined forces with the outlaws in Liangshan Marsh to attack the town. We're on constant alert, and he doesn't dare leave. He sent me on ahead with wine of greeting. He'll be following soon to pay his respects."

"The marshal refuses to drink a drop until your prefect arrives and welcomes him with proper ceremony," announced Wu Yong.

The public prosecutor called for wine and drank with the "chamberlain" and the "retinue." Wu Yong again went inside and returned with a key. He led the prosecutor to see the pair of golden hanging bells. He opened the lock and, from their scented bag, removed the bells, showed them to the prosecutor, and suspended them from a bamboo frame. They were of matchless workmanship, having been made by the most skilful craftsmen in the imperial palace. Encrusted with pearls and precious jewels and with a red silk lantern suspended between them, they had hung in the center of the palace's Hall of the God. Only the special craftsmen of the imperial court could have created them.

After permitting the prosecutor to view the bells, Wu Yong returned them to their container and locked it. He then produced many documents from the Council of Administration and handed these to the prosecutor. He also requested the "marshal" to choose an auspicious day for conducting the sacrifice.

The prosecutor and his constables examined the documents, bid farewell to the "chamberlain," and returned to Huazhou to report to the prefect. Song Jiang thought with satisfaction: "Although that rogue of a prosecutor is crafty, we've got him completely buffaloed!"

By then Wu Song had taken up his position outside the temple gate. Wu Yong directed Shi Xiu to conceal a knife on his person and join him there. He also told Dai Zong to disguise himself as a captain.

The abbot of the Yuntai Monastery served a vegetarian meal, and ordered the overseer to have the temple tidied up. As Song Jiang strolled around the grounds he thought it a splendid place. The buildings were unusually fine. Huashan Temple was truly like heaven on earth.

Song Jiang then returned to the Hall for Officials. A gate-keeper reported: "Prefect Ho has arrived." Song summoned Hua Rong, Xu Ning, Zhu Tong and Li Ying—the four "guards," each bearing arms—and stationed them on either side. He positioned Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Yang Xiong and Dai Zong—all with concealed weapons—to the left and right.

The prefect, who had come with more than three hundred men, dismounted before the temple and swarmed in with his party. "Chamberlains" Wu Yong and Song Jiang observed that all were armed with swords.

Wu Yong immediately shouted: "A marshal of the imperial court is within. Trivial persons keep back!"

The crowd halted, and only Prefect Ho advanced. "Chamberlain" Wu Yong said: "The marshal invites the prefect to enter." Prefect Ho walked into the Hall for Officials and kowtowed before the "marshal."

"Prefect," said Wu Yong, "do you acknowledge your misfeasance?"

"I didn't know the marshal had arrived. I beg forgiveness."

"The marshal has come to Mount Huashan in obedience to the emperor's decree to burn incense. Why didn't you go well forward to welcome him?"

"We didn't know his arrival was imminent, and so were remiss in our duty."

"Seize him!" Wu Yong shouted.

Xie Zhen and Xie Bao had already pulled out their daggers. With one kick they knocked Ho to the ground, then cut off his head.

"Into action, brothers!" shouted Song Jiang.

The prefect's three hundred followers were paralyzed with fright. Hua Rong and the others closed in and swept them down like abacus beads. Half of them scrambled to the temple gate. But there Wu Song and Shi Xiu, brandishing their knives, waded in while outlaws bent on slaughter attacked from all sides. Not a single man of the three hundred got away. Some came later to the temple, and these too were killed by Zhang Shun and Li Jun.

Song Jiang ordered that the imperial incense and the golden hanging bells be packed up, and all quickly boarded the vessels. Even before they reached Huazhou they saw two columns of smoke rising. They surged into the town and first freed Shi Jin and Lu Zhishen from the prison. Next, they broke open the storehouses, took everything of value, and loaded it on carts. Zhishen rushed to the rear hall and got back his knife and staff. Jade Branch had long since jumped into a well and committed suicide.

Leaving Huazhou, they got into the boats and returned to Mount Shaohua, where they restored to Marshal Su the imperial incense, the golden hanging bells, the pennants, banners and symbols of office, and respectfully expressed their thanks. Song Jiang presented him with gold and silver on a platter. All of his retinue were similarly rewarded, regardless of rank.

A farewell banquet was given for them in the stronghold and gratitude to the marshal was again expressed. The chieftains escorted them down the mountain to their boats at the river ford. Every vessel and every single possession were returned to their owners. Once more Song Jiang thanked Marshal Su.

Song returned to Mount Shaohua and conferred with the four gallant leaders. They removed all money and grain from the fortress and set it to the torch. Then the outlaws, with horses, grain and fodder, set out together for Liangshan Marsh.

As to Marshal Su, after embarking he sailed to Huazhou. There he learned that the Mount Liangshan brigands had slaughtered soldiers, plundered the storehouses of money and grain, killed over a hundred army officers, stole all of the horses, and annihilated hundreds in the Huashan Temple.

Su instructed the public prosecutor to send a written report to the Council of Administration for transmission to the emperor stating that "Song Jiang robbed the imperial incense and hanging bells en route, and was thereby able to lure the prefect to the temple and murder him."

The marshal burned the imperial incense at the Huashan Temple and entrusted the golden bells to the abbot of the Yuntai Monastery. He then hastened back to the capital, travelling day and night, and reported to the emperor what had transpired.

Song Jiang, after rescuing Shi Jin and Lu Zhishen, again divided his forces into three contingents and, accompanied by the four gallant fellows from Mount Shaohua, returned to Liangshan Marsh. They harmed no one in any of the prefectures and counties through which they travelled.

Dai Zong was sent on ahead to the fortress to report their coming. Chao Gai and the other chieftains descended the mountain to welcome them. Together they went up and entered Fraternity Hall. When greetings had been exchanged, all joined in a feast of celebration. The following day Shi Jin, Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun, at their own expense, gave a banquet in thanks to Chao, Song, and the other leaders. Several more days passed.

To skip the minor details, one day Dry-Land Crocodile Zhu Gui suddenly arrived and reported: "On Mount Mangdang in Peixian County, Xuzhou Prefecture, there is a newly formed band of robbers, about three thousand in number. Their leader is a Taoist named Fan Rui. His nickname is Demon King Who Roils the World. He can summon the wind and rain, and he's a fantastic military tactician. He has two lieutenants: One is called Xiang Chong. His nickname is Eight-Armed Nezha. He carries a round shield pierced by twenty-four throwing knives. He can hit a man at a hundred paces and never miss. In his hand is an iron javelin. The other is called Li Gun. His nickname is the Flying Divinity and he also carries a round shield. Only his is pierced by twenty-four darts. These too are infallibly deadly at a hundred paces. He holds also a precious sword.

"These three sworn brothers occupy Mount Mangdang, and they rob and pillage. Now they have decided to come and swallow our fortress. I heard about this and had to report."

Song Jiang was furious. "How dare those crooks behave so rudely," he fumed. "I'll go down and deal with them!"

Nine Dragons Shi Jin stepped forward. "My three brothers and I have just come to the stronghold and haven't yet made the slightest contribution. We'd like to lead our own men and seize those robbers."

Song Jiang was delighted. Shi Jin mustered his contingents. Then he, Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun donned their armor, bid farewell to Song Jiang and went down the mountain. They crossed the water in boats from the Shore of Golden Sands and hurried along the road directly towards Mount Mangdang. In three days they came within sight of it. Here it was in ancient times that the first Han emperor Gao Zu killed the snake.

The three units proceeded to the foot of the mountain. Hidden robber scouts had already gone up to report.

Shi Jin deployed his forces from Mount Shaohua in battle formation. Guarded completely in armor, astride a steed as red as a glowing coal, he rode at the head of his men, a three pointed two-edged blade in his hand.

The three leaders behind him were Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun. Zhu Wu wielded two double-edged swords as he rode forward.

Reining in their steeds in front of their position, the four watched for some time. They saw a swarm of men come racing down the slope, preceded by two bold stalwarts. The first was Xiang Chong, of Peixian County, Xuzhou Prefecture. He carried a round shield in which twenty-four throwing knives were inserted. In his right hand he held a javelin. Attached to his back was an identifying pennant reading: *Eight-Armed Nezha.*

The second brave fellow, also from Peixian County, was Li Gun. He bore a round shield pierced by twenty-four darts. The shield was in his left hand. In his right he grasped a sword. Attached to his back was a pennant inscribed: *Flying Divinity.*

When Xiang Chong and Li Gun saw Shi Jin, Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun, astride their horses before the opposite position, they said not a word. Instead, while lesser robbers beat gongs and cymbals, the two charged, brandishing their shields. Shi Jin's force couldn't withstand them. While the rear guard withdrew, Shi Jin's forward unit resisted, but Zhu Wu's middle unit yelled and ran for their lives for twenty or thirty *li*. Shi Jin was nearly hit by a flying knife. Yang Chun dodged too slowly, and was wounded by one of them. His horse was injured, and he abandoned it and fled on foot.

Shi Jin counted his forces and found he had lost half. He conferred with Zhu Wu and the others. They were intending to send someone to Mount Liangshan for aid when a fighter came and reported: "There are some two thousand men and horses on that highway to the north where the dust is rising." Shi Jin and the others mounted and looked. They saw the banners of Liangshan Marsh. Riding at the head of the contingent were Hua Rong and Xu Ning. Shi Jin hastened to greet them. He related how Xiang Chong and Li Gun had attacked with their whirling shields and how his forces had been unable to withstand them.

"Brother Song Jiang has been worried about you. He was sorry he let you go. He's sent us two to help," said Hua Rong.

Shi Jin was very pleased. The two units combined and made camp.

At dawn the following day, as they were preparing to muster their men and go forth against the foe, a fighter arrived and reported: "More cavalry are approaching on the highway to the north."

Hua Rong, Xu Ning and Shi Jin rode out to meet them and saw an army of three thousand men led by Song Jiang personally. Shi Jin told him how formidable Xiang Chong and Li Gun were with their flying knives, darts and whirling shields, and that he had lost half his men. Song Jiang was greatly alarmed. "Let's make camp first," Wu Yong suggested, "then we can talk this over."

The impatient Song Jiang wanted to muster their forces and drive directly for the foot of the mountain. But it was already growing dark, and on Mount Mangdang blue lanterns were visible. Gongsun Sheng said, "Those people must know magic. The blue lanterns in their camp show that someone there's able to cast spells. We'd better fall back. Tomorrow I'll use a counter-spell and we'll catch a couple of them." Pleased, Song Jiang ordered his army to withdraw 20 *Li* and make camp. Early the next morning Gongsun worked his spell. And as a result, a demon king with clasped hands presented himself at Mount Liang, a miraculous general with full willingness surrendered in the Marsh.

After Governor Ho had enticed Monk Lu Zhishen into an inner room and shouted "Seize him!" the policemen shoved him in front of the bench and the Governor bellowed: "Where have you come from, you bald reprobate?"

The Monk replied: "What crime have I committed?"

"Tell the truth," said the Governor. "Who sent you here to assassinate me?"

"I am a monk," Lu Zhishen protested. "How can you ask me something like that?"

"I saw you, you bald ass," shouted the Governor. "You wanted to attack my sedan chair with your staff, you were thinking about it but you didn't dare. You'd bloody well better confess, you scoundrel!"

"Yes, well I bloody well didn't attack you, did I, so why have you arrested me? It's a fucking false accusation!" said the Monk.

"Who ever heard of a monk who uses language like that?" said the Governor. "This bald villain must be one of those bandits from west of the pass, come here on behalf of that robber Shi Jin. He'll never confess unless he's beaten. Guards, take him away and give him a bloody good thrashing."

The Monk cried out: "Keep your hands off me. I'll tell you myself. I am Lu Zhishen, sometimes called the Flowery Monk, from the Marshes of Mount Liang. I don't care if you kill me. My brother Song Jiang will hear about it and when he comes down from the mountain he'll execute you double-quick, you whole bloody gang of donkey's heads!"

The Governor flew into a towering passion. After the Monk had been beaten for a while, a heavy cangue was ordered for him and he was thrown into the dungeons. A letter to the Emperor was composed, requesting instructions. The staff and sword were placed under seal in the courtroom.

By now the whole district was in an uproar. The two scouts raced back to Little Mount Hua with the news. Pilgrim Wu Song, horrified, said: "We came here to do a job, one of us has now been lost, how can I go back and tell the leaders?"

As he was wondering hopelessly what to do, a soldier from the mountain appeared and said: "There's a leader here sent from Mount Liang. He's called Dai Zong, the Magic Messenger. He's waiting down below."

Pilgrim Wu Song hurried down to invite him up to the strong~hold, where they held a meeting with the Strategist and the others, and they explained how the Monk had fallen into the trap after refusing to listen to their admonitions. The Magic Messenger was greatly distressed: "I mustn't stop long," he said. "I must go back to Mount Liang and tell the others, so they can send troops to rescue him."

The Pilgrim said: "I shall wait here. I beg you, go quickly and return soon."

After eating some vegetarian food, the Magic Messenger started his magic walking and raced back to Mount Liang. Within three days he was at the stronghold and recounted to the two leaders how the Monk in trying to kill Governor Ho in order to rescue the Tattooed Dragon had fallen into a trap.

Song Jiang said in great agitation: "If two of our friends are in trouble, of course we must help. I won't hesitate for a moment." He named the troops and divided them into three contingents. The first party consisting of five commanders, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, Leopard's Head Lin Chong, the Blue-Faced Beast and Twin Rods, with a thousand armoured cavalry and two thousand foot, was to lead off and pioneer the route. The main party had six leaders, Song Jiang, the Professor, Whiskers, the Spearsman, Snake and Scorpion, and two thousand troops. The rearguard, responsible for stores and fodder, consisted of Skyhawk, Madcap, Morbid, the White-Water Dragon and White Eel with two thousand troops. Seven thousand troops in all left Mount Liang and set off for Huazhou. They marched flat out, making no stops. When they were halfway there, the Magic Messenger was sent on ahead to inform Little Mount Hua. The Strategist and his comrades laid on pigs, sheep, oxen and horses and brewed up some strong wine in readiness.

When Song Jiang's three divisions reached Little Mount Hua, Pilgrim Wu Song took the Strategist, the River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake down to pay their respects to Song Jiang, the Professor and others, and then they all went up to the camp and held a meeting. Song Jiang asked for information about the city, and the Strategist said: "Governor Ho has got the two leaders in the prison, and is only waiting for the Emperor's instructions to execute them."

Song Jiang and the Professor said: "What's our best plan, then, for rescuing the Tattooed Dragon and the Monk?"

"The city's suburbs are extensive and the moat is broad and deep," said the Strategist. "It's very difficult to attack. We can't get them unless we have someone on the inside."

The Professor said: "Tomorrow we'll go and see what the moat is like. Then we'll talk about it again."

Song Jiang sat drinking till late, and then wanted to go and view the city at once, without waiting till dawn. The Professor advised against it. "They've got two tigers shut up in the gaol there," he said. "Of course they'll be taking precautions. We certainly can't go in full daylight. But tonight there will be a moon. If we leave the mountain in the afternoon we'll get there at dusk and we can have a good look."

So next day they waited till the afternoon and then five of them, Song Jiang, the Professor, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, and Whiskers rode down the mountain and set off. Some time after seven o'clock they were outside the city walls of Huazhou. They halted at the top of a steep slope to observe the city. It was typical clear March weather and the moon was as beautiful as a picture, without a trace of cloud in the sky. Huazhou had several city gates. The walls were high and the earthen ramparts solid. The moat was broad and deep. They gazed long at it. Far off the peaks of Mount Hua, the great mountain of the west, could be made out. It was a fine sight:

*This famed peak is often called the Immortal's Hands; here is Guanyin's platform in the clouds. At the top there's the Jade Lady's wash basin; below the waters where the Milky Way can gaze upon itself. This is a whole universe of beauty: the pointed peaks rise heavenward as if the clouds grow from them; reverenced by all is this sacred mountain, whose strange rocks and awesome peaks invade the regions of the Dipper. Here every shade of blue and green is to be found. The most brilliant poet would find it hard to put into words; the brush of the most gifted painter could scarcely encompass it. In profound caves pale light awakes a myriad delicate hues; towering peaks and cliffs reflect the sun in a thousand purple flames. The disciple points into the distance; in the ornamental pond the lily breasts the ripples like a boat. In olden times, 'tis said, flowers fed by the waters of the well grew to an incredible size. Monstrous spirits grew angry, and split the mountain top to release the gods. The famous anchorite, lofty and pure, came to the simple hut to sleep. This is renowned Mount Hua, known for a thousand years, where incense has risen to heaven since time immemorial.*

Having appreciated the sight of Mount Hua, and noted that the city moat was broad, the defences solid, Song Jiang still had no idea how to proceed.

The Professor said: "Let us return to the mountain stronghold and discuss what to do."

Riding all night, they returned to Little Mount Hua. Song Jiang's brows remained knit; his concern showed clearly on his face.

The Professor said: "Let us send out a dozen sharp-witted scouts to listen all around for news."

Two days later one of these men suddenly appeared on the mountain and reported: "Recently the Emperor has sent an officer of his personal staff to take his personal gift of a pair of golden bells to the Western Peak and burn incense there. He is coming by way of the Yellow River and the Wei River."

The Professor said: "No need to worry now, brother, this has given me an idea." He called the White-Water Dragon and White Eel and said: "I want you two to do this ... and this...."

The White-Water Dragon said: "The only problem is neither of us knows the way. Wouldn't it be a good idea if we could take a guide along?"
White-Spotted Snake then spoke up: "Can I come with you?"
Song Jiang liked the idea, and the three of them set off down the mountain.
Next day the Professor asked seven of the leaders, Song Jiang, Skyhawk, Whiskers, Twin Rods, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and the Spearsman to go down the mountain quietly with five hundred troops. When they reached the crossing of the River Wei, the White-Water Dragon, White Eel and White-Spotted Snake had already provided a dozen large boats. The Professor ordered four of his party, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Spearsman and Twin Rods, to set up an ambush on the bank. The others, Song Jiang, the Professor, Whiskers and Skyhawk, got into the boats, which the three water leaders steered to a hiding-place along the bank.
They waited all night. When it grew light in the morning they heard the distant sound of gongs, drums and fifes and then three government boats drew near, all flying yellow banners proclaiming "Marshal Su Yuanjing, officer in charge of the imperial mission to burn incense on Mount Hua."
Song Jiang quietly rejoiced at what he saw: "The Mystic Lady said 'Chance lodgings will bring many joys.' Now I chance to meet this person whose name, Su, is the same as the word for lodging. There must be a meaning to it."
As the Marshal's boats approached the river mouth, Whiskers and Skyhawk grasped their long spears and stood behind Song Jiang and the Professor. When the boats reached the landing place, they were obstructed. Twenty or more guards in purple coats and silver belts appeared on the boats and shouted: "You there, on the boats, how dare you obstruct the channel and get in the way of the Marshal's convoy?"
Song Jiang, lance in hand, saluted. The Professor, standing at the prow, said: "Song Jiang, leader of the company in the Marshes of Mount Liang, respectfully requests an interview." The purser of the other boat appeared and said: "This is an officer of the imperial court, on his way to burn incense on the Western Peak, you are rebels from the Marshes of Mount Liang, how dare you stand in his way?"
The Professor said: "We are loyal subjects, we only ask to see the Marshal's face, we have a request to make of him."
The purser said: "Who do you think you are, to insist on seeing the Marshal?" The guards on either side shouted: "Lower your voice!"
Song Jiang said: "I would like to ask the Marshal to come ashore. There is something I want to discuss with him."
The purser said: "What rubbish! The Marshal is a high official of the court. How could he have anything to discuss with you?"
Song Jiang said: "I am afraid if the Marshal refuses to speak to me, my men may be a little rough with the Marshal."
Whiskers jabbed at the little banner on the boat with his spear, while on the bank Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Spearsman and Twin Rods advanced with their cavalry. They fitted arrows to their bows, and when they reached the river spread out along the bank. The steersmen on the boats all went and hid in their cabins in terror. The purser anxiously disappeared inside to report and the Marshal was obliged to come out and take a seat on deck.
Song Jiang saluted and said: "I do not wish to be discourteous."
The Marshal said: "Why do you interfere with our progress like this, my man?"
Song Jiang said: "I would not dream of trying to interfere with your journey, Marshal. I merely wish to invite you to disembark because I have a request to make."
The Marshal said: "I am travelling on imperial business. My mission is to burn incense on the Western Peak. What can you possibly have to discuss with me? How can you expect an important official of the court to disembark just to please you?"
Song Jiang said: "If you do not, I am afraid my companions over there may have something to say about it."
At this Skyhawk waved his signal flag and the White-Water Dragon, White Eel and White-Spotted Snake rowed their boats up. The Marshal appeared quite taken aback. White-Water Dragon and White Eel, swords flashing in their hands, leaped into the boat and with a shove sent the two guards flying into the water. Song Jiang immediately shouted: "Behave yourselves! You are frightening an important man!"
Splash! The two of them had dived into the water and were hauling the two guards out again. They moved as easily over the water as if it were level ground and effortlessly shot back onto the boat, causing the Marshal's heart almost to jump out of his mouth. Song Jiang again shouted: "Withdraw, men, stop frightening the great man. I will help him slowly to disembark."
The Marshal said: "What is your business, then, sir? Please tell me."
Song Jiang said: "This is not the place for it. I invite you to come to our mountain stronghold to hear our request. I intend no harm to you. If I harm a hair of your head, then let the Western Peak fall and crush me!"
By now it was clear that the Marshal could not avoid going ashore. He was obliged to leave the boat and step off onto the bank. A horse was brought and he was helped onto it, and then perforce must go where they led him. Song Jiang ordered Colonel Hua and Thunderclap to take him on up the mountain. Then he mounted himself and ordered the boat crews to unload the incense, religious objects, and the golden bells, and carry them up the mountain. Only the White-Water Dragon and White Eel remained behind with a hundred men to guard the boats.
All the other leaders now went up the mountain. Song Jiang rode into the camp and escorted Marshal Su to the Assembly Hall where he was given the place of honour, with the leaders ranged in their places on either side. Song Jiang prostrated himself four times, and then knelt before the Marshal and said: "I, Song Jiang, was previously an official in the Yuncheng administration, but official persecution forced me to take to the mountains and forests, and for the time being I have found refuge in the marshlands of Mount Liang, until such time as an amnesty allows me to serve my country again. At this moment two of my comrades are subject to groundless persecution by Governor Ho who has thrown them into gaol. I wish to borrow your Excellency's imperial incense, ritual objects and the golden bells to practise a deception on Huazhou. When our business is concluded you shall have them back and your person will suffer no harm whatsoever. That is my proposal."
Marshal Su said: "If you take the incense and the other ritual objects away, it will all come out in the end and I shall be in trouble."
"When you return, Marshal, you can put all the blame on my shoulders," said Song Jiang.
The Marshal saw from their looks that there was no way he could refuse, so he had to give permission. Song Jiang expressed his gratitude with toasts and a banquet. Then the uniforms of the Marshal's retinue were all borrowed from them. A likely-looking soldier was chosen. His head was shaved and he was dressed up in the Marshal's clothes to impersonate the Marshal. Song Jiang and the Professor dressed as pursers. Snake, Scorpion, Morbid and Madcap dressed as guards. The troops wore the red coats and silver belts and carried all the imperial standards, banners and insignia, and the religious objects, the boxes of imperial incense, the sacrificial offerings and the golden bells. Colonel Hua, the Spearsman, Whiskers and Skyhawk dressed as guards. The Strategist, the River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake kept the Marshal and all his followers entertained, plying them with wine. Finally two bodies of men marched out towards the city, one commanded by Thunderclap and Twin Rods, the other by Leopard's Head Lin Chong and the Blue-Faced Beast. Pilgrim Wu Song was sent on ahead to wait at the gates to the Temple of the Western Peak for the signal to act.
To spare you more details, the main party now left the mountain stronghold and made their way to the river bank where they boarded the boats. They did not announce themselves to the governor of Huazhou but instead went straight to the Temple of the Western Peak. The Magic Messenger went first to give the news to the abbot at the Hall of Clouds and the lay brothers from the monastery came down to the boats to welcome them ashore. With incense, flowers, lamps and candles, with banners and streamers, precious relics and umbrellas, they lined up on the bank. The incense was unloaded and taken to a tabernacle spec~ially prepared for it, which the people from the temple hoisted on poles. Behind it came the golden bells. When the abbot came to pay his respects to the Marshal, the Professor said: "The Marshal caught some infection on the journey and is not in good health. Please bring a sedan chair for him."
Attendants helped the Marshal into the sedan chair and he was carried to the abbot's quarters to rest. The Professor, pretending to be a purser, said to the abbot: "This is an important imperial delegation, bringing you the Emperor's gift of imperial incense and golden bells. Why is the provincial governor so neglectful that he is not here to welcome us?"
The abbot replied: "I have sent word to him. I am sure he will be here soon."
He had hardly finished speaking when the public prosecutor from the provincial administration with fifty or more police officers arrived to greet the Marshal with wine and dried fruit. Now although the soldier who was impersonating the Marshal looked very convincing, he obviously couldn't open his mouth. That is why he had been told he must pretend to be ill and sit on the bed muffled in quilts. When the public prosecutor saw him, together with all the banners, insignia, badges and the like, which were the prerogative of palace staff, why should he suspect anything? The purser bustled in and out, and petitioned twice. Then he took the public prosecutor in and made him prostrate himself far away at the bottom of the steps. The false marshal simply motioned with his hand, and his words were inaudible. As the Professor led the official forward he delivered a reprimand: "The Marshal is an important official of the court, he has taken the trouble to come all this way, bringing the imperial incense to you, he has even had the misfortune to contract an illness on the way which is not yet cured, why are the officials of the provincial government not here to welcome him after his journey?"
The public prosecutor replied with a conciliatory smile: "Although we received advance notification of the journey, we have had no more recent news, that is why we missed meeting you. It is unfortunate that the Marshal came first to the temple, because at present the Governor is much occupied with the robbers from Little Mount Hua, who have allied themselves with the Mount Liang outlaws and are planning an attack on the city. We have to watch out for them every day and for this reason he does not dare absent himself. He sent me here first to do the honours. He will come himself to meet you later."
The Professor said: "I warn you, the Marshal will accept no wine, not a drop. All he wants is for the Governor to come as quickly as possible so they can discuss the presentation."
The public prosecutor therefore had wine served to the purser and his own people. Then the Professor went inside to report and came back with a key and took the public prosecutor to see the golden bells. He opened the case and drew the golden bells, the emperor's gift, from their sheaths of perfumed cotton and hung them on a bamboo pole, so the official could have a good look. They were indeed of incomparable workmanship:
*The golden bells are cast in solid metal, and supplied with gorgeous multi-coloured trappings, including silk fringes, strings of pearls, and jewelled covers. They are swathed in yellow silk and eight-clawed green dragons twine about them. They are festooned with purple ribbons and pairs of gold phoenixes chase each other round the sides. Each bears a rich inlay of coral and cornelian, with amber and rare pearls. The fine porcelain of a lamp reflects the red gauze shade; a pink lotus is exquisitely framed in jade green leaves. Truly these bells deserve to hang in a palace, their quality would grace the most luxurious of settings.*
These golden bells, in fact, were made by one of the most skilled of the palace craftsmen. They were inlaid with the seven precious stones and with pearls and between them a red lantern was set. Originally they had hung in the centre of the Hall of the Heavenly Lord. Where else could they possibly have been made but in the palace?
After allowing the official one look, the Professor locked the bells away again in their case. Then he handed over to the official various documents from the Chancellery and demanded that the Governor come to discuss matters and fix the day for the presentation ceremony. The prosecutor and his men, having seen the various objects and documents, took their leave and returned to Huazhou to report to the Governor.
Song Jiang was secretly rejoicing, saying to himself: "This bugger is a slippery customer, but I think we've pulled the wool over his eyes." By this time the Pilgrim was already in position at the gates of the temple. The Professor told Madcap to conceal a sharp sword about him and go to the temple gate to assist the Pilgrim's work there. He also told the Magic Messenger to dress as a guard.
The abbot now served a vegetarian meal in the Hall of Clouds and ordered the temple's administrator and his staff to get the place tidied up in readiness.
Song Jiang meanwhile went for a stroll around the Temple of the Western Peak. It was certainly a fine building: a series of halls quite out of the ordinary, a true heaven on earth! When he came to the main hall he lit some incense and prostrated himself. Having said a silent prayer, he returned to the official hall. At that moment the door-keeper announced: "The Governor is here!"
Song Jiang called Colonel Hua, the Spearsman, Whiskers and Skyhawk and told them to stand with their weapons on either side. Snake, Scorpion, Morbid and the Magic Messenger all with hidden weapons also stood on his left and right.
Governor Ho and over three hundred men now arrived at the temple, dismounted, and began to crowd inside. The two false pursers, the Professor and Song Jiang, saw that these three hundred men were all trying to enter without relinquishing their arms. The Professor shouted: "A marshal of the imperial court is present, no outsiders without business here are permitted to enter!" The crowd halted and the Governor entered alone to pay his respects to the Marshal. The purser announced: "The Marshal invites the Governor for an audience." The Governor entered the ceremonial hall and prostrated himself before the false marshal.
The Professor said: "Governor, do you admit your fault?"
"I should have known that the Marshal had arrived. I beg to be forgiven," said the Governor.
The Professor said: "The Marshal has come here to the Western Peak on an imperial mission to burn incense. Why were you not here to receive him?"
The Governor replied: "We have had no recent news at the government office, that is why I failed to receive him."
"Seize him!" the Professor commanded in a loud voice. Snake and Scorpion had already got their swords out. They tripped him and then cut off his head.
"Go to it, lads!" Song Jiang now shouted.
The three hundred troops who had come with the Governor had remained standing there open-mouthed, too horrified even to run for it. Colonel Hua and his men rushed on them and began knocking them off like beads on an abacus. Some made a dash for the gate, but there the Pilgrim and Madcap began laying into them, their swords whirling; the troops from Mount Liang followed suit. Of the three hundred government contingent not one got away. Those who arrived later at the temple were killed by White Eel and the White-Water Dragon.
Song Jiang hurriedly called for the imperial incense and the hanging bells to be brought and taken back to the boats. In the city two fires were to be seen so they charged in and went straight to the gaol where they freed the Tattooed Dragon and the Monk. They broke into the treasury, removed all the valuables and loaded them onto carts. The caravan then left Huazhou and returned by boat to Little Mount Hua. Here they respectfully greeted the real Marshal and restored to him the imperial incense, the golden bells, the pennants, banners and religious items and so on, politely thanking him. Song Jiang ordered a tray of silver to be brought and presented and all the Marshal's followers, regardless of their position, were rewarded. A farewell banquet was held in the stronghold to thank the Marshal. Finally all the leaders accompanied him down the mountain to see him off. At the river bank all the boats and other possessions, without exception, were returned to their rightful owners.
Having thanked the Marshal and bade him farewell, Song Jiang returned to Little Mount Hua and when he had talked to the four leaders there, they collected all their money and provisions, set fire to the defences, and in a big column of troops and provisions set off for Mount Liang.
Now when the Marshal disembarked and entered Huazhou, he learnt that the Mount Liang bandits had slaughtered the garrison and sacked the treasury and stores. More than a hundred officers had died in the city and all the horses had been taken. At the Temple of the Western Peak many more had lost their lives. He made the public prosecutor prepare a report for the Council to present to the Emperor. In it, it was said that "Song Jiang waylaid the imperial incense and bells and used them to entice the Governor to the temple where he killed him." Marshal Su went to the temple and burnt the incense and presented the bells to the abbot. He then hastened back to the capital to report all these matters. Of this no more.
Song Jiang having rescued the Tattooed Dragon and Lu Zhishen, collected the four leaders from Little Mount Hua. As before, the troops were formed into three columns and they set off for Mount Liang. They crossed the province without in any way inconveniencing the populace. The Magic Messenger was sent ahead to report to Chao Gai and the others came down the mountain to meet them. Soon they were all back in the Assembly Hall of the Heroes, where greetings were performed and a big banquet held in celebration.
Following this the Tattooed Dragon and the other three each in turn paid for a banquet to show their gratitude to Chao Gai and the others. Several days passed in this manner, but I will spare you the details.
Then one day, out of the blue, the Crocodile came up the mountain and reported: "There's a new band of robbers on Mount Mangdang over in Xuzhou. They've got together three thousand troops. The chief is a Taoist called Fan Rui. His nickname is the Demon King and his tactical skill is brilliant. He has two lieutenants. One is called Xiang Chong, alias the Eight-Armed Ogre. He carries a collection of twenty-four throwing knives, stuck in a round shield, and wields a steel-hafted spear. The other is called Li Gun, alias Winged Ghost. He has twenty-four javelins, also stuck in a round shield, and he wields a trusty sword. These three are sworn brothers and they have occupied Mount Mangdang and devote themselves to plunder and pillage. They have been talking about coming here to take over the Marshes of Mount Liang. As soon as I heard about this I thought I ought to tell you."
Song Jiang was highly indignant. "The cheek of these bastards!" he exclaimed. "I shall have to go down and see about this!"
At this point the Tattooed Dragon jumped up and said: "The four of us have just joined the stronghold and we have as yet made no contribution whatsoever. Please let us take some of our troops and go to capture this bunch of brigands."
Song Jiang was pleased with the idea. So the Tattooed Dragon detailed some of his troops and when he and the Strategist, the River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake had armed themselves, they said farewell to Song Jiang and set off down the mountain. They crossed by boat at Golden Sands Landing and took the road to Mount Mangdang.
In three days they were in sight of this mountain, the very place where in days gone by the first emperor of Han scotched the snake and set the ball rolling. The horsemen were spotted and one of the lookouts went up the mountain to report.
The Tattooed Dragon deployed the troops he had brought from Little Mount Hua. Dressed in full armour and mounted on a flame-coloured steed he rode out in front of his forces, wielding his three-pointed double-bladed halberd. Behind him came the other three, the Strategist in the middle with his two swords. On his left was the River-Jumper, with a gleaming steel spear, and on his right, with a blade on a long pole, White-Spotted Snake.
The four horsemen reined in their horses in front of their ranks and after a few moments' wait they saw troops beginning to file down the slopes of Mount Mangdang. In front were two warriors, chief of them being the Eight-Armed Ogre with his twenty-four throwing knives. He could hit a man at a hundred paces, never once missing. In his right hand he brandished a short spear, and on his back was his personal banner with the words "Eight-Armed Ogre" painted on it.
The one behind him was Winged Ghost with his twenty-four javelins. He too could hit a man at a hundred paces. In his left hand he held the shield and in his right a sword, while on his back was his personal banner with "Winged Ghost" written on it.
Marching down the mountain these two came face to face with the Tattooed Dragon and his friends on horseback in front of their army. No word was spoken, but the soldiers started beating gongs and the two warriors from Mount Mangdang whirled their shields and charged into the attack.
The Tattooed Dragon and his forces were powerless to stop them. The troops at the rear went first. Shi Jin in the front rank put up some resistance. In the middle rank the Strategist and the others yelled in panic. It was an occasion when, as they say, there was no holding the horses. They bolted and fetched up over ten miles away. The Tattooed Dragon was almost hit by a throwing knife. The White-Spotted Snake, slow in dodging, had his charger wounded. He abandoned it and fled for his life on foot.
Of the troops which the Tattooed Dragon had brought, half were lost. He discussed what to do with the Strategist and the others who were all for going back to Mount Liang to ask for reinforcements. Whilst they were still anxiously trying to make up their minds, one of their officers rushed up and announced: "There's a big cloud of dust on the highroad to the north. Looks like two thousand troops marching this way." When the Tattooed Dragon and his companions went to meet them, they saw the Mount Liang flag and two commanders riding in front of the column. One was Colonel Hua the Archer, and the other was the Spearsman. The Tattooed Dragon proceeded to tell them about the terrifying weapons and rolling action of the Ogre and Winged Ghost and how the troops could not withstand it.
Colonel Hua said: "After you started Song Jiang was uneasy about you and regretted the decision he had taken so he sent us along as reinforcements."
The Tattooed Dragon and his companions were greatly relieved. They all made camp. Next day at dawn they wanted to muster their troops and attack, but an officer reported: "There are more troops coming along the road to the north."
Colonel Hua, the Spearsman and the Tattooed Dragon all mounted and went to meet them. It turned out to be Song Jiang himself, together with the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Mr. Chai, Whiskers, Twin Rods, Mu the Unstoppable, Colonel Sun, the Tamer, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, with three thousand troops.
The Tattooed Dragon told them all about the Ogre and Winged Ghost, with their whizzing knives and javelins and whirling shields, and how you couldn't get near them and how he had lost men. Song Jiang was alarmed. But the Professor said: "We should take up a defensive position first and then have further discussions."
Song Jiang was impatient and wanted to go in pursuit, as far as the mountain. By now it was getting dark. Looking up at Mount Mangdang they could see a mass of bright lanterns. Taoist Gongsun said: "Those bright lanterns in their camp must mean that they have magicians amongst them. Let us withdraw for the moment. Later I will propose a strategy for capturing those two."
Song Jiang was well pleased with this. He ordered the troops to retreat eight miles or so and set up camp. Early next morning Taoist Gongsun announced his plan, which was to have important results.

The Demon King consents to join Mount Liang;
The Winged Ghost is ready to go to the Marshes.

LU DA was very angry at being arrested in the *yamen*, and said, "I am a monk that has renounced the world! I am a peaceful man! How dare you arrest me! I wish to die along with Shi Jin. I shall not mind that. Only Song Jiang will punish you for my death. I will tell you something. No enmity cannot be abolished. If you hand over to me Shi Jin, and the daughter of Wang Yi, and then you resign from your position then our enmity will vanish. I see from your face that you are lustful, and have no right to be a Prefect. If you do these three things, however, Buddha will look upon you with mercy, but if you miss this opportunity you will live to regret it. Now let me go to see Shi Jin, and then give me an answer."
The Prefect was very angry at this, and said, "As I suspected, you came to assassinate me like Shi Jin. That fellow! You want to see him! Take this fellow to prison, have him beaten and I will deal with him later on. He is evidently a bird of the same feather with Shi Jin. Put a strong cangue on him, and see that he is well locked up." This was done, and the Prefect wrote a dispatch to the provincial governor asking for instructions.
This affair was soon known all over the town, and one of the brigand spies hearing of it, rushed off at once to Mount Shaohua to report it. Wu Song was surprised at the news and said, "How can I now face the other leaders when Lu Da has been taken prisoner?" While he was thinking the matter over another spy arrived, and reported that a leader named Dai Zong had just come from Liangshan Marsh, and was waiting at the foot of the mountain to see Wu Song. The latter immediately went down the mountain, and conducted Dai Zong up to their stronghold where he introduced him to Zhu Wu.
Dai Zong was surprised to hear the news about Lu Da and Shi Jin, and said. "I must not stop here! I will go back at once to Liangshan Marsh, and ask Song Jiang to send his men to rescue the two brothers."
"I will wait here until you return," said Wu Song. "Please come back quickly with assistance."
Dai Zong put on his charmed puttees, and flew off. It took him three days to travel from Shaanxi province to Liangshan Marsh in Shandong. When Chao Gai and Song Jiang got the news, arrangements were made for 7,000 cavalry and infantry to depart at once with sixteen leaders under the command of Song Jiang. Dai Zong was sent off to report to Mount Shaohua in Shaanxi province that help was coming. The bandits duly reached their destination, and the leaders were taken up the mountain to discuss matters. Zhu Wu reported that Lu Da and Shi Jin were still in prison, and the Prefect was now waiting a decree authorizing him to execute the prisoners.
Song Jiang asked whether there was any proposal as to how the prisoners could be rescued.
Zhu Wu said, "Huazhou is a very big town, and the moat is very deep. It is a difficult town to take. If there is a *coup d'état* inside the town we might succeed."
"Tomorrow we must go and inspect the town and its defenses," said Wu Yong. "Then we can discuss matters. We must not however go in the daytime because the prefect will take care, and will be on the lookout for us. We must start tomorrow afternoon so as to reach the town after sunset. There will be a full moon tomorrow."
This was agreed, and the next afternoon the five leaders started off on horseback, and reached the town about 8 P.M. They dismounted near a hillock where they could overlook the town. It was a bright moonlight night, with a cloudless sky. In the distance they could clearly see the Western Sacred Mountain, Mount Hua.
Song Jiang saw that the town was well situated for defense, and was also well protected.
Wu Yong suggested that they should return to their headquarters, and discuss matters again. They all remounted, and rode off. Song Jiang felt very depressed at the prospect. Wu Yong suggested that they should have scouts around the town to spy, and notice what was going on, and this was done.
Two days later one of these scouts arrived at Mount Shaohua, and reported that there was an official who was coming from the capital conveying a bell for the temple on Mount Hua as offered by the Emperor. He had crossed the Yellow River, and was now traveling along the Wei River towards Huazhou.
"Elder brother, do not be disappointed," said Wu Yong. "I think we can make something out of this." He then summoned Li Jun and Zhang Shun, and told them his plans.
Li Jun, however, pointed out that they did not know the district well, and therefore must have a guide to go with them. Yang Chun offered to accompany them. This was agreed to, and the three men left the mountain.
The following day Song Jiang with seven leaders and about five hundred men also left the mountain. Upon reaching the ferry across the Wei River they had got ten boats there, Wu Yong divided the leaders placing Hua Rong and three others on the bank with the men, while Song Jiang. Zhu Tong, Li Ying, and himself were on the boats. Li Jun, Zhang Shun, and Yang Chun were in hiding near the landing place. They waited there all that night, but early the next morning they heard the sound of gongs and drums, and soon an official boat hove in sight. It was flying a yellow flag on which was written that the official named Marshal Su was proceeding by Imperial Order to Mount Hua to burn incense and offer sacrifices.
Li Ying and Zhu Tong took their spears, and stood behind Song Jiang, while Wu Yong sat on the bow of his boat. Their boats blocked the river so that the official's boat had to stop. The men on the boat shouted, "Who are you? How dare you obstruct the river, and delay a Minister?"
Song Jiang held out an official ivory tablet such as is used by men on imperial business, and bowed. Wu Yong on his boat called out, "The hero Song Jiang from Liangshan Marsh wishes to interview Marshal Su."
An officer came forward on the boat, and replied, "This is a boat conveying Imperial Envoy Marshal Su to Mount Hua to offer sacrifices and burn incense. How can you bandits stop our passage?"
Song Jiang still retained his stooping posture, while Wu Yong spoke, "Our hero wishes to state a case to His Excellency."
The officer replied, "What kind of man are you? How dare you be so reckless as to wish to speak to His Excellency Su!" The men on both sides of him, however, asked the officer not to speak so loudly.
Song Jiang still retained his attitude while Wu Yong spoke, "We request your official to disembark here, and we will discuss an important matter on the bank."
"Stupid talk! His Excellency is on imperial business. How can he talk with the likes of you?"
Song Jiang now stood up and said, "If His Excellency will not meet me I am afraid that my men will have to give a surprise!"
Zhu Tong now took his spear at the top of which was a flag. and he waved this. Hua Rong and the other leaders seeing this signal brought all their men to the river bank. The sailors on the boat seeing this took cover, and the officer went into the cabin, and reported the matter to Marshal Su who came on deck and took his seat there.
Song Jiang again saluted, "I am afraid that I have been very disrespectful."
"Why have you stopped my boat in this way?" asked Marshal Su.
"We dare not hinder you," replied Song Jiang, "but I request you to disembark here, when I will disclose an important matter."
"I am on a special mission from the Emperor," said Marshal Su, "and have nothing to say to you. How can a high dignitary do as you wish?"
"If Your Excellency will not disembark," said Wu Yong, "I am afraid that our men will come here to fetch you."
Li Ying now waved a flag at the top of his spear, and immediately Yang Chun, Li Jun, and Zhang Shun rowed their boats towards the official boat. The Marshal was surprised at this. Li Jun and Zhang Shun unsheathed their swords and as the boats got near they leapt across, seized two of the minor officers and threw them into the river.
"Don't do such silly things," called out Song Jiang. "His Excellency will be upset."
Li Jun and Zhang Shun upon hearing this dived into the water, rescued the two men, and brought them safely on to the boat again.
"You two go away as you have frightened His Excellency," said Song Jiang. "We will talk matters over, and request His Excellency to disembark."
"Hero!" said Marshal Su. "What have you to say? You can tell me here."
"This is not a place to discuss matters," said Wu Yong. "We should prefer that you come to our stronghold on the mountain. We have no bad intentions, and if we deceive you, may the spirits of the Western Sacred Mountain Mount Hua punish us."
As Marshal Su saw no way of escape, he left his boat and went up the river bank. A man came from the forest with a horse, and Marshal Su mounted it. The leaders also mounted, and they all set off for Mount Shaohua. The incense, bell, etc. were taken off the official boat, and conveyed up the mountain. Li Jun and Zhang Shun with about a hundred men were left in charge of the boats.
Upon reaching the stronghold the leaders assembled in the main hall on both sides with Marshal Su in the seat of honor in the center. Song Jiang gave four salutations to the Marshal, knelt down, and said, "Previously I was a clerk in the magistrate's *yamen* at Yuncheng County, but I was persecuted, and compelled to escape to Liangshan Marsh where I joined the heroes there. We are quite ready and willing to help the Emperor when needed. Just now two of our leaders have been unjustly sent to prison by the Prefect of Huazhou. We wish to borrow the incense, bell, etc. and so get entrance into the town. We will relieve you of all responsibility in this trick. We hope that you will agree to our proposal."
"If you use my things in this way," replied Marshal Su, "I shall be blamed."
"When you return to the capital you may throw all the blame on me," said Song Jiang.
Marshal Su glanced round at the armed bandit leaders, and saw that there was no means of escape so he agreed.
Song Jiang again saluted, and offered wine to the Marshal. The leaders then exchanged clothing with Marshal Su and his official party. When all had been satisfactorily arranged the bandits in their new disguise left the mountain, and embarked on the official boat. But instead of going towards Huazhou they proceeded towards Mount Hua. Dai Zong went in advance to the temple on the mountain, and informed the head priest of the arrival of an "Imperial Commissioner." The priests came down the mountain, and met the boat upon arrival. The presents were carried in front, many being carried by the priests' servants to the temple. Wu Yong said that "the Marshal" had not been well on the journey so a closed sedan chair was provided in which the false commissioner was carried up the mountain. He was assisted out of the chair upon reaching the temple.
Wu Yong again spoke to the head priest, "We have brought many presents from the Emperor which are for the spirits of this mountain. But how is it that the Prefect of Huazhou is not here to receive us respectfully?"
"I will send a man to report your arrival," said the head priest, "and he will soon be here."
Soon after this, however, a deputy from the Prefect arrived with about seventy soldiers, and much fruit and wine for the "Imperial Commissioner."
The bandit who was acting the part of the "Imperial Commissioner" had certain likeness, but he had not the intelligence and learning, and therefore could not speak like an educated mandarin. Therefore he pretended to be sick so as to avoid conversation, and sat silently on the bed. But the Prefect's deputy saw all the genuine imperial presents and the official dresses, and had no suspicion. When introduced to the Marshall, he could not hear what the false commissioner was saying. But Wu Yong asked why the Prefect had not come personally, and the deputy explained how the brigands had been attacking the town, and how the Prefect were afraid of leaving the town, and had sent him as deputy. He said however, the Prefect would come later on. The deputy then ordered wine to be served to all the men who had brought the presents.
Wu Yong went, and got the key, and opened the box containing the bell. He took the bell out, and hung it on a framework. It was made by the best workmen at the capital, and looked very fine with its precious stones inlaid. Underneath the bell was a lamp with a red silk shade. It was intended that this bell should be hung in the center of the Imperial temple. It was a fine piece of craftsmanship such as only the Emperor could obtain.
After inspection by the deputy and the priests Wu Yong locked it up again in the box. He then took out the official letters, and handing these to the deputy asked him to convey them to the Prefect who could fix an auspicious time for his visit to the temple to offer the sacrifices.
The deputy and his followers then took their leave and returned to Huazhou to report the matter to the Prefect.
"What a cute plan," thought Song Jiang. "The Prefect is sure to be deceived." As there was nothing else to do he took a stroll round the temple admiring the building which really was of exceptional rarity and beauty. As he returned to the main hall he was informed that the Prefect was coming. He told Hua Rong, Xu Ning, Zhu Tong, and Li Ying (now dressed as Imperial soldiers) to take up their positions on both sides of the hall, and four other leaders with Dai Zong to take up their positions on both sides of the supposed Imperial Commissioner.
The Prefect brought with him about three hundred soldiers as an escort. They dismounted at the temple gate and entered. Song Jiang and Wu Yong saw that all the men were armed so Wu Yong called out, "As an Imperial Commissioner is here these soldiers must not come inside." The soldiers therefore halted, and the Prefect went forward by himself. Wu Yong then said, "His Excellency requests the Prefect to go into his room for an interview." The Prefect entered the room, and saluted the brigand on the bed in the disguise of an Imperial Commissioner.
"Prefect, are you not conscious of your fault?" asked Wu Yong.
"I did not know that His Excellency had arrived, and beg him to excuse me," replied the Prefect. "After the first dispatch from the government about these presents I got no further dispatch as to when you would arrive."
"Seize him," ordered Wu Yong, and immediately the four leaders standing at the side unsheathed their swords, and seizing the Prefect cut off his head.
"Proceed with your work," called out Song Jiang, and immediately all his men attacked the Prefect's escort. They were taken by surprise, and most of them were killed on the spot. Some tried to escape but were met at the gate by other bandits and were soon finished. Not a single man of the three hundred soldiers escaped death. Even civilians who had followed the soldiers to see the ceremony were also killed.
Song Jiang had all the Imperial presents transferred to the boat, and set off for the town. He saw that fire had broken out in several parts of the town, as his men had got inside. He himself went straight to the jail, and released Lu Da and Shi Jin. Lu Da got his monk's staff, and joined in the uprising. The daughter of Wang Yi had previously committed suicide by jumping into a well. The brigands secured much loot, and conveyed this on carts to their boats. When all was ready they returned to Mount Shaohua.
The offerings were duly handed over again to Marshal Su. Song Jiang also presented him with much gold and silver, and gave much also to his guard. After a feast Marshal Su and his men went down the mountain, and again embarked on their boat.
Marshal Su proceeded to Huazhou, and there he saw the enormous amount of damage that the bandits had done. He also went to Mount Hua, and saw the large number of dead bodies lying about. He then got the recorder in the town to write a full account of the disaster, throwing the full blame on Song Jiang and his brigands. He then returned to the capital to report the affair.
The bandits and leaders at Mount Shaohua agreed to join those under Song Jiang at Liangshan Marsh. They all left for that place where they celebrated their victory and alliance by the usual feast.
After this, however, there was a dinner provided by Shi Jin and three other leaders. At that dinner Chao Gai spoke, "I have something to tell you about what happened while Song Jiang and his men were at Huazhou. One day Zhu Gui came, and reported that at Mount Mangdan in Xuzhou Prefecture there are about three thousand brigands under the leadership of a man named Fan Rui, nicknamed the 'Demon King of Disorder.' He can control the wind and rain, and uses his men with great skill and strategy. He has two assistants—Xiang Chong and Li Gun, who are famous for throwing knives which would kill men at a hundred paces. These three are sworn brothers, and they have the intention of attacking Liangshan Marsh and getting control here. When I heard of this I was very angry."
Song Jiang was also annoyed at this report and said, "How dare they be so impudent? I must go and settle the matter."
At this point Shi Jin stood up and said, "We four brothers from Mount Shaohua have so far done no meritorious deed here, although we have been admitted to your band. We are willing to take our men to attack these robbers."
Song Jiang was much pleased at this offer, and it was agreed to. The men and horses were got ready, and they left the mountain with Shi Jin, Zhu Wu, Chen Ta, and Yang Chun.
It took them three days to reach Mount Mangdan. When Shi Jin saw the place he remembered that it was near there that Liu Bang who became first Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty had killed a snake. They soon reached the foot of the mountain, and an outpost went to report their arrival. Shi Jin arranged his men in ranks. He donned his armor, and rode to the front on a brown horse. He was armed with a sword with a double-edged blade. He was accompanied by the other 3 leaders.
They had not waited long when they saw a large number of men descending the mountain with two leaders in front—Xiang Chong and Li Gun. When they had arranged their men in ranks these two leaders without any parley rode forward to attack Shi Jin. They threw their flying knives, and Shi Jin found that he could not get near his two opponents so he gradually fell back. The other leaders also retreated about ten *li*. Yang Chun's horse was wounded and abandoned. Half of their men had deserted. Shi Jin held a conference with his comrades, and they all agreed that help must be requested from Liangshan Marsh. While they were talking, one of their scouts arrived, and reported that on the northern road there was a large body of cavalry coming towards them. Shi Jin galloped forward to see who they were, and recognized the flags of Liangshan Marsh. In front rode Hua Rong and Xu Ning, and Shi Jin rode forward to meet them. He told them how Xiang Chong, and Li Gun threw flying knives, and had driven him back without being able to even strike a blow. That day the Liangshan Marsh forces encamped in the same spot with Shi Jin's forces.
The next morning they were all ready for marching forward when another scout arrived and reported that there was a large body of cavalry coming along the north road. Shi Jin and the other leaders rode forward to reconnoiter, and were pleased to find that they were about three thousand brigands under the leadership of Song Jiang, Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng.
They then had a discussion, and Wu Yong was in favor of them remaining in camp that day. Song Jiang was impatient, and wished an immediate attack. Gongsun Sheng pointed out that on the mountain there were blue lanterns and he thought that this indicated that the bandits there used magical spells. He advocated that they should withdraw all their men to some distance, and he would find a plan to capture the three leaders Xiang Chong, Li Gun, and Fan Rui. This was agreed to and all the men withdrew about 6 *li*.

The king of devils joins the bandits;
The wounded chief surrenders to Liangshan Marsh.

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### Taoist Gongsun Sheng Defeats the ghosts & the Demon King on Mount Mangdang & Captures a Wizard; Chao Gai the Heavenly King is Hit & Wounded by an Arrow at Zengside in Zengtou Village

Gongsun told Song Jiang and Wu Yong his strategy.
"It's the same one used by Zhuge Liang when he positioned the boulders on the battlefield at the end of the Han Dynasty when the country split into three," said the Taoist. "We'll arrange our army into four groups and eight sections of eight companies each, totalling sixty-four, with the commander-in-chief in the middle. It will thus have four heads and eight tails, and be able to turn in any direction like the wind and clouds above the earth, as quickly as any wild beast, bird or reptile. When the enemy come down from the mountain and attack, we'll open into two and let them come in deep. As soon as our forces see our seven-starred banner wave, let them surround the enemy like a long serpent. I have a magic formula that will drive those three robber leaders to the center. Back or forward, left or right, they won't be able to get out. We'll dig a concealed pit and drive them into it. On either side we'll have men hidden with hooked poles, ready to take them."
Song Jiang was very pleased. He issued the appropriate orders, directing his officers to act accordingly. He deployed his positional forces under eight fierce commanders. These were: Huyan Zhuo, Zhu Tong, Hua Rong, Xu Ning, Mu Hong, Sun Li, Shi Jin and Huang Xin. He put Chai Jin, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng in charge of a central force. Song Jiang himself, plus Wu Yong and Gongsun, were in overall command, with Chen Da to transmit their orders by flag signals. Zhu Wu was directed to take five men to a nearby height, and from there observe the battlefield and report developments.
By mid-morning the army had neared the mountain and was spreading out in battle formation, banners waving and drums pounding provocatively. On Mount Mangdang twenty or thirty gongs thunderously crashed, shaking the earth. The three robber leaders proceeded down the slope, spreading out their force of over three thousand men. Fan Rui, their bold chieftain, rode in the van, with Xiang Chong and Li Gun to his left and right.
At the edge of the battlefield he reined in his horse. Fan Rui could work magic, but he knew little of military tactics. He watched while Song Jiang divided his army into four groups and eight sections. "Go on, deploy them," he said to himself with secret satisfaction. "That's exactly what I want you to do."
He turned to Xiang Chong and Li Gun. "When you see the wind rising, take five hundred knife twirlers and pitch in."
The two lieutenants, each grasping his shield, javelins and flying blades at the ready, waited for Fan Rui to start. His bronze comet hammer in his left hand, a two-edged sword in his right, the Demon King Who Roils the World muttered a few magic phrases, then shouted: "Speed!"
A wild gale rose on all sides, whipping up clouds of sand and stones that darkened the sky and obscured the sun. Shouting, Xiang Chong and Li Gun charged with their five hundred knife twirlers. Song Jiang's army separated into two, and the foe moved in. They were immediately beset by powerful bowmen from both sides. Only forty or fifty of the robber band were able to advance. The remainder withdrew to their original position.
Song Jiang, observing from high on a slope, saw that Xiang Chong and Li Gun were the midst of his forces. He directed Chen Da to wave the seven-starred banner. The outlaw army rolled and shifted into the form of a long snake.

Xiang Chong and Li Gun ran east and hurried west, turned left and wheeled right, but nowhere could they find an escape route. No matter in which direction they hastened, Zhu Wu pointed them out from his height with a small flag.
Gongsun also watched from a bluff. He unsheathed his ancient sword with its pine tree decorations, muttered an incantation, then shouted: "Speed!"
At once, a wind closely pursued Xiang Chong and Li Gun, whirling at their heels. The sky darkened, the sun lost its glow. They couldn't see a single man or horse. Everything was enveloped in a black fog. They completely lost sight of the men behind them. Panic-stricken, the two desperately sought a way back to their own forces, but in vain.
Suddenly there was a sound like a clap of thunder. The two cried out in consternation. Together they tripped and tumbled head over heels into a deep pit. From both sides men with long hooked poles hauled them out. They bound the captives with ropes and brought them to the mountain slope and requested rewards.
Song Jiang pointed with his whip. His three contingents plunged into a murderous assault. Fan Rui's men fled towards Mount Mangdang. Many couldn't escape. More than half were killed.
Song Jiang recalled his troops. When he and his chieftains were seated outside his tent, fighters led in Xiang Chong and Li Gun, under guard, and delivered them beneath his standard. He quickly ordered that their bonds be removed, and he went forward personally, wine goblet in hand.
"Forgive me," he said. "In the course of hostilities, we couldn't do anything else. I, the humble Song Jiang, have long known of the great fame of you three warriors. I was hoping to invite you to our mountain to join our righteous cause, but I never could find a suitable opportunity. If you won't consider it beneath you, return with us to our stronghold now. Nothing could give me greater happiness."
The two fell to their knees and kowtowed. "We know the great name of the Timely Rain, as who doesn't?" they responded. "Unfortunately, we were never able to pay our respects before. We failed to recognize your vast integrity, and went against Heaven's will. Today you have captured us. No death would be too heavy, yet you treat us so courteously. If you decide to spare our lives, we swear to serve you faithfully to the end of our days. As to Fan Rui, he can't get along without us two. If you, righteous leader, will let one of us go back, we'll try to talk him into joining you. Does that seem all right?"
"No need to keep one of you here as hostage. Both of you can return to your stronghold. I'll wait for your good news."
"Truly a man of noble generosity! If Fan Rui doesn't agree, we'll seize him and present him beneath your standard."
Song Jiang was very pleased. He invited them into his headquarters, wined and dined them, gave them fresh suits of clothing, and presented them with two fine horses. He directed a few of the outlaws to return their shields and weapons, escort them down the mountain, and see them off. The two were extremely grateful.
When they reached the foot of Mount Mangdang, members of their band were astonished to see them, and escorted them up to Fan Rui. He asked them what had happened.
"We've gone against Heaven's will and deserve to die," they said.
"Why do you say that, brothers?" he demanded.
They told him how chivalrous Song Jiang had been.
"Since Song Jiang is so generous and gallant, we shouldn't go against the will of Heaven," said Fan Rui. "Let's all join him."
"We've come to propose that very thing."
That night they set the affairs of the stronghold in order. The following morning, they presented themselves to Song Jiang and kowtowed before him. He raised them to their feet and invited them into his tent and seated them. Impressed by his manifestation of complete trust, they spoke frankly and at length about their various backgrounds.
The three invited the chieftains to their fortress on Mount Mangdang, where they slaughtered steers and horses and feasted Song Jiang and his lieutenants. They also rewarded the men of his three contingents. After the banquet Fan Rui pledged himself as a pupil to Gongsun Sheng. Song Jiang directed the Taoist to teach Fan Rui his Divine Method for Summoning the Five Thunderbolts, much to the latter's delight.
In the next few days, the livestock was led away, the stronghold's money and grain was packed, and belongings were laden on pack animals. Men and horses were assembled and the fortress was put to the torch. All then went with Song Jiang and his chieftains back to Liangshan Marsh. The journey was uneventful.

Dai Zong flew up the mountain to report their arrival. As they were about to ford the river at the edge of the marsh, a big fellow on the road near the reeds saw Song Jiang and kowtowed. Song hastily dismounted and raised the man to his feet.
"What is your name, sir, and where are you from?"
"My family name is Duan, my given name Jingzhu. Because of my red hair and yellow beard, I'm called the Golden Dog. My family are from Zhuozhou Prefecture, and I earn my living rustling horses in the north. This spring I stole a splendid animal north of the Spear Range. It's white as snow, without a single hair of a different color. From head to tail it's ten feet long, and stands eight feet high from hoofs to back. It can cover a thousand //in a day. It's famed throughout the north as the White Jade Lion That Glows in the Night. It belonged to a prince of the Tartars. When it was put out to graze at the foot of Spear Range, I nabbed it. In the gallant fraternity the Timely Rain is famous, but I never had a chance to meet you. I wanted to present you with the horse as a mark on my respect. But while passing through the village of Zengtou, southwest of the prefectural town of Lingzhou, it was seized from me by the fifth son of the Zeng family. I told him it belonged to Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh, but the churl was very insulting, and I dared say no more. I got away as quickly as I could. I've come here specially to inform you."
Song Jiang took a liking to the thin rough-looking fellow. In spite of his odd appearance, he was clearly not an ordinary person.
"Come with us to the stronghold," he said. "We'll talk about it there." He took Duan in his boat and they crossed to the Shore of Golden Sands.
Chao Gai, the Heavenly King, and the other chieftains, escorted the returning leaders to Fraternity Hall. Song Jiang introduced Fan Rui, Xiang Chong and Li Gun to the chieftains. Duan and the three greeted them with respect. Drums beat clamorously, and a feast was held in celebration.
More and more men were joining the mountain citadel. Bold fellows from all over came like the wind. And so Song Jiang instructed Li Yun and Tao Zongwang to supervise the building of new dwellings, and to construct additional forts on every side.
Duan spoke again of the merits of the horse. Song Jiang sent Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller to the village of Zengtou to inquire about it. In four or five days Dai returned.
"Zengtou has something over three thousand families," he told the chieftains. "One is known as the Zeng Family Establishment. It is headed by Zeng the Elder, who comes originally from the land of the Tartars. He has five sons, called the Five Tigers of the Zeng Family. Their names, in order of age, are: Tu, Mi, Suo, Kui and Sheng. Their instructor is Shi Wengong, and his assistant is Su Ding. The village is defended by six or seven thousand men and stockaded camps. They've built more than fifty cage carts, boasting there is no room on this earth for both us and them. They say they will capture all of our chieftains, that we are enemies.
"The thousand-//horse known as the Jade Lion is ridden by the instructor Shi Wengong. Even more infuriating, the wretch has composed a rhyme which he's taught all the kids in the village. It goes like this:

*When our horses' bridles jingle*
*God and demons with fear tingle.*
*Iron carts plus iron locks,*
*Prisoners nailed in iron stocks.*
*Liangshan Marsh we'll cleanly flush,*
*Chao Gai to the capital we'll rush,*
*And capture Timely Rain—that's Song,*
*And his war mentor Wu Yong.*
*Five Zeng tigers boldly stand,*
*Famed far and wide throughout the land."*

Chao Gai was enraged. "How dare those animals be so unmannerly!" he fumed. "I'm going down there personally. If I don't capture those rogues I won't return!"
"You're the leader of our fortress, brother," said Song Jiang. "You mustn't lightly take action. Let me go."
"It's not that I want to steal your thunder," said Chao Gai, "but you've gone many times. You must be weary from combat. This time I'm going. Next time, brother, it will be your turn."
Song Jiang pleaded in vain. The furious Chao Gai selected five thousand men and twenty chieftains and set forth. The remainder stayed with Song Jiang to guard the stronghold. Chao divided his forces into three brigades and went down the mountain, ready to march on Zengtou Village.
Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Gongsun saw them to the Shore of Golden Sands. While they were drinking a sudden wind snapped the pole supporting Chao Gai's standard. Everyone blanched.
"An evil omen," said Wu Yong. "Choose another day for your expedition, brother."
"The wind snaps your standard, brother, just as you're about to set forth. It's not auspicious for military action," said Song Jiang. "Wait a bit longer and then deal with those knaves. There'll still be time."
"The movement of wind and clouds is nothing to be alarmed about," retorted Chao Gai. "Now is the time, in the warmth of spring. If we wait until they build up their strength and then attack, it will be too late. Don't try to stop me. I'm going, come what may!"
Song Jiang couldn't dissuade him. With his troops, Chao Gai ferried across the river. Sunk in gloom, Song returned to the fortress. He sent Dai Zong down to watch developments and report.
Chao Gai with his five thousand men and twenty chieftains neared the village of Zengtou. Confronting them was stockaded camp. The following morning Chao went with the chieftains for a closer look. Clearly, the village was strongly fortified.
Suddenly, from a grove of willows seven or eight hundred men emerged. At their head was a bold fellow—Kui, fourth son of the Zeng family.
"You bandits from Liangshan Marsh are all rebels," he shouted. "I've been meaning to turn you over to the authorities and claim the reward, and now Heaven sends you right into my arms! Get off your horses and be bound. What are you waiting for!"
Chao Gai was very angry. As he turned his head he saw one of the chieftains riding forth to do battle with Kui. It was Lin Chong, the first to form the chivalrous band on Mount Liangshan.
The two horses met, and the warriors fought more than twenty rounds, with neither vanquishing the other. Kui realized he was no match for Lin Chong. He wheeled his mount and lance in hand, rode for the willow grove. Lin Chong reined in his steed and did not pursue. Chao Gai led his forces back to camp. There, they discussed strategy for attacking the village.
"Let's go tomorrow and provoke a battle," Lin Chong proposed. "We'll see what their strength actually is, then we can talk some more."
The next morning they marched with five thousand men to the broad plain outside the entrance to Zengtou, took up positions, beat their drums and shouted. Cannon thundered from the village and a large body of men rode forth, led by seven bold fellows in a single line. In the middle was the instructor Shi Wengong. To his left was his assistant Su Ding; to his right the eldest son, Tu. Continuing to the left were Mi and Kui; further right were Sheng and Suo. All were clad in armor from head to foot. An arrow fitted to his bow, Shi sat the thousand-//Jade Lion horse. He held also a crescent-bladed halberd.
After three rolls of the drums, several cage carts were pushed out from the Zeng family position and placed to the fore. Tu pointed at his adversaries.
"Rebellious bandits," he shouted, "do you see these carts? If we simply kill you, we won't be real men. We're going to nab every one of you, lock you in the carts and deliver you to the Eastern Capital, just to show you how tough we Five Tigers really are! Surrender now, while you still have the chance, then we'll see!"
Chao Gai, enraged, levelled his lance and galloped towards Tu. To protect him, the other chieftains also charged, and the two sides were soon locked in combat. The Zeng family forces retreated step by step into the village. Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo slew mightily to east and west, providing close cover for Chao Gai. But Lin could see that the prospects were poor. He hastily pulled back and reassembled his men. Both sides were strewn with casualties. Chao Gai returned to camp very depressed.
"Don't take it to heart, brother," the chieftains urged. "Worry will only injure your health. Brother Song Jiang also has setbacks at times in battle, but he wins in the end. The fighting was confused today. Both sides suffered casualties. But we haven't lost. No need to feel bad!"
Chao Gai said: "I'm not in a good mood, that's all." He remained in camp for three days. Though each day his troops went to challenge the foe, not a man came forth from Zengtou.
On the fourth day, two monks called on Chao Gai. They were escorted by several of the brigand soldiers. Chao received them outside his tent. The two dropped to their knees and kowtowed.
"We are custodians of the Fahua Monastery east of Zengtou," they said. "Those Five Tiger sons constantly harass our monastery, demanding gold and silver and money. There's nothing they won't do. We know their layout in detail, and we've come to show you how to get inside and take their fortifications. If you can eliminate them it will be a blessing."
Chao Gai was very pleased. He invited the monks to be seated, and had them served wine.
"Don't believe them, brother," Lin Chong advised. "How do you know it isn't a trick?"
"We are men who have renounced the material world. We wouldn't dare to deceive," protested the monks. "We've long known of the righteous behavior of the men of Liangshan Marsh. You never harm the common people wherever you go. We've come to join you. Why should we want to fool you chieftains? Besides, the Zeng family forces could hardly defeat your great army. Why be suspicious?"
"You needn't doubt them, brother," said Chao Gai. "We'll miss a big opportunity. I'll go myself, tonight, to see."
"Please don't, brother," Lin Chong urged. "Let me raid the village with half our men. You wait outside with reinforcements."
"If I don't go personally, would our forces be willing to attack? You remain with half our troops as reinforcements."
"Who will you take with you?"
"Ten chieftains and twenty-five hundred men."
That evening a meal was prepared and eaten. The bells were removed from the horses' bridles, the men wore stick gags, for a swift night march. Silently, they followed the two monks to the Fahua Monastery. It was very ancient. Chao Gai dismounted and went inside. There was no one around.
"Why are there no monks in a monastery of this size?" he queried.
"Those animals of the Zeng family caused so much trouble that most of them were compelled to return to secular life. Only the abbot and a few retainers remain. They're living in the courtyard where the tower is. Stay here temporarily. A little later, we'll lead you into the stockade of those rogues."
"Where is it?"
"There are four stockades. The Zeng brothers are in the northern one. If you take that, the others won't matter. The remaining three will quit."
"When shall we go?"
"It's now the second watch. We'll go at the third, and take them by surprise."
From Zengtou, they heard the measured beat of the watchman's drum. Later, they heard the drum sounding the half-watch. After that, they listened no more.
"The soldiers are all asleep," said the two monks. "We can go now."
They led the way. Chao Gai and the chieftains mounted and, with their men, left the monastery and followed. Before they had gone five //; the two monks had disappeared into the shadows.
The van was afraid to continue. The paths on all sides were tortuous and difficult. No homes or people could be seen. The forward troops became alarmed and informed Chao Gai.
Huyan Zhuo ordered a retreat. They had marched less than a hundred paces when on every side gongs crashed and drums pounded. Resounding yells shook the ground. Torches everywhere sprang to light.
Chao Gai and the chieftains hurriedly led their men in a withdrawal. They had just traversed two turns in the road when they ran into a troop of enemy cavalry, who showered them with arrows. One struck Chao Gai in the face, and he fell from his horse.
Huyan Zhuo and Yan Shun galloped off at top speed. Liu Tang and Bai Sheng behind them, put Chao back on his steed and fought their way out of the village. At the village entrance Lin Chong rushed up with reinforcements. Only then were they able to stem the foe. A wild melee continued until dawn, when both sides retired to their bases.
Lin Chong made a count of the troops. The three Ruan brothers, Song Wan and Du Qian had escaped by crossing the stream. Of the twenty-five hundred men who had gone in with Chao Gai only twelve or thirteen hundred were left. They had followed Du Peng back to camp.
The chieftains came to see Chao Gai. An arrow was stuck in his cheek. They pulled it out. Blood flowed, and he fainted. On the arrow was the name of the instructor Shi Wengong. Lin Chong directed that a salve made for metal weapon wounds be applied. Chao Gai had been hit by a poisoned arrow. The venom was working, and he was unable to speak.
Lin Chong ordered that he be placed on a cart, and that the three Ruan brothers, plus Du Qian and Song Wan, escort him back to the mountain fortress. The fifteen chieftains remaining in the camp conferred.
"Who would have thought when brother Chao Gai the Heavenly King came down the mountain that such a thing would happen," they said. "The wind snapped the pole of his standard, and this was the fulfillment of that bad omen. We'll simply have to return to the stronghold. Zengtou Village can't be taken in a hurry."
"We'd better wait for orders from brother Song Jiang before pulling our troops out," Huyan Zhuo said.
The chieftains were morose, the men had no heart for battle. All wanted to go back to the fortress. That night at the fifth watch, as the earliest faint light began to appear, the fifteen chieftains were still sunk in gloom. For indeed, a snake cannot travel without a head, a bird without wings cannot fly. The chieftains sighed. They had no assurance that either an advance or a retreat would succeed.
Suddenly, a picket guarding the road rushed in and reported: "Five enemy columns heading this way. Their torches are without number!"
Lin Chong immediately mounted. Torchlight had turned the hills on three sides as bright as day. Shouting foe were rapidly advancing. The chieftains did not resist. At Lin's orders, they broke camp and withdrew. The Zeng family forces pursued them fiercely. The two sides fought a running battle for sixty //before the brigands could break free. They counted their men. They had lost nearly seven hundred. It was a heavy defeat.
They hurriedly resumed the march in the direction of Liangshan Marsh. Halfway there, they were met by Dai Zong, who transmitted a command: They were to bring their troops back to the stronghold. There, new plans would be formulated.
The chieftains complied. On their arrival, they went to see Chao Gai. He was no longer able to eat or drink, and his whole body was swollen. Song Jiang wept by his bedside. He personally applied poultices and fed Chao medicines. The chieftains all kept vigil outside the tent. By the third watch of the third day a great weight seemed to be depressing Chao's body. He turned his head to Song Jiang. "Preserve your health, brother," he said. "Let whoever captures the bowman who slew me become the ruler of Liangshan Marsh." Chao Gai closed his eyes and died.
To Song Jiang it was as if he had lost one of his parents. He cried until he was faint. The chieftains helped him out of the tent. They urged him to look after the stronghold's affairs.
"Don't grieve so, brother," Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng advised. "Life and death are man's destiny. Why take it so hard? There are important matters awaiting your attention."
Song Jiang ceased his weeping. He directed that the body be leaved in fragrant water, dressed in burial garments and hat, and displayed in Fraternity Hall. The chieftains performed sacrificial ceremonies. A coffin and inner casket were built and, after an auspicious day was selected, placed in the main hall. A spirit curtain was hung and a memorial tablet put before it, in the center. The inscription read: *Memorial Tablet of the Venerable Chao the Heavenly King and Leader of Liangshan Marsh.*

All the chieftains, from Song Jiang on down, dressed in deep mourning. The junior officers and the rank and file wore mourning head kerchiefs of white. The fatal arrow, broken in a vow of vengeance, lay before the altar. A long white banner was raised. Monks were invited to the citadel from a nearby monastery to offer prayers for the departed. Every day Song Jiang led the outlaws in mourning. He had no heart to attend to the affairs of the fortress.

Lin Chong, with Gongsun Sheng and Wu Yong, discussed the matter with the other chieftains. They decided to make Song Jiang their leader and take their orders from him. The following morning, bearing flowers, lanterns and candles, Lin Chong and the others invited Song Jiang, the Defender of Chivalry, to be seated in the Hall of Fraternity.

"Hear us, brother," said Wu Yong and Lin Chong. "A country cannot be governed without a sovereign, a household cannot be ruled without a master. Chao Gai, leader of our mountain stronghold, has gone to Heaven. There is no one to make decisions. Your name, brother, is world renowned. We wish to choose an auspicious day and invite you to become our leader. We will obey your commands."

"Remember the dying wish of Chao the Heavenly King: 'Let whoever captures the bowman who slew me become the ruler of Liangshan Marsh,' " said Song Jiang. "You all know about it, you mustn't forget. I haven't avenged him, or wiped out this debt. How can I accept?"

"That is what Chao said." Wu Yong admitted. "But we still haven't caught the culprit, and the stronghold cannot be without a leader. If you don't take over, brother, who else would dare? Who will command our forces? His wish was as you say. Why don't you accept temporarily? We'll work something out later."

"Putting it that way is reasonable. I'll accept the post for the time being. When Chao Gai is avenged, when someone captures Shi Wengong, no matter who, he must become our ruler."

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind shouted: "Not only are you right for leadership of Liangshan Marsh, brother—you'd make a fine emperor of the Song Dynasty!"

"You're talking wildly again, you wretched oaf. Stop your raving or I'll cut your tongue out!"

"Why should you do that? I'm inviting you to become emperor, not the head of some little group worshipping a local god!"

Wu Yong intervened. "The scamp has no sense of proportion. Don't trouble yourself with the likes of him. Please deal with important affairs."

Song Jiang burned incense and sat in the chair of the supreme leader. On his left was Wu Yong, on his right was Gongsun Sheng. The row to the left was headed by Lin Chong, Huyan Zhuo headed the row to the right. All paid their respects and took their seats.

Song Jiang addressed them: "I have accepted this post temporarily. I am completely reliant on your support, brothers. We must be of one heart and mind, united in our efforts, as close as bone and marrow, acting together to carry out Heaven's will. Today our fortress has many men. It's no longer like it was before. I'm asking you brothers to command six sets of fortifications. Fraternity Hall shall be known from now on as Loyalty Hall. We shall have four sets of land fortifications, front and back, left and right. On the rear of the mountain will be two small forts. On the front of the mountain will be three fortified passes. We'll also have a fort on the water at the foot of the mountain, plus small fort on each of the banks. We shall ask you brothers to take charge.

"In Loyalty Hall I shall temporarily occupy the first position. Second shall be Military Advisor Wu Yong; third, Taoist Reverend Gongsun Sheng; fourth, Hua Rong; fifth, Qin Ming; sixth, Lu Fang; and seventh, Guo Sheng. The left set of fortifications shall be commanded by Lin Chong, Liu Tang, Shi Jin, Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, Du Qian and Song Wan, in that order. The right by Huyan Zhuo, Zhu Tong, Dai Zong, Mu Hong, Li Kui, Ou Peng and Mu Chun. The front set of fortifications shall be under Li Ying, Xu Ning, Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, Yang Zhi, Ma Lin and Shi En. Guarding the rear will be Chai Jin, Sun Li, Huang Xin, Han Tao, Peng Qi, Deng Fei and Xue Yong. The water defenses will be under Li Jun, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Ruan the Seventh, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun, Tong Wei and Tong Meng. These forty-three chieftains shall be the leaders of the six inner defenses of the stronghold.

"The first pass at the front of the mountain shall be held by Lei Heng and Fan Rui, the second by Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, the third by Xiang Chong and Li Gun.

"The small fort on the Shore of Golden Sands shall be commanded by Yan Shun, Zheng Tianshou, Kong Ming and Kong Liang. Duck's Bill Shore's small fort shall be under Li Zhong, Zhou Tong, Zou Yuan and Zou Run.

"As to the two small forts on the rear of the mountain, the one on the left shall be led by Stumpy Wang, Ten Feet of Steel and Cao Zheng; the one on the right by Zhu Wu, Chen Da and Yang Chun.

"In Loyalty Hall in the row of rooms on the left Xiao Rang shall be in charge of documents; Pei Xuan, rewards and punishments; Jin Dajian, seals and letters; and Jiang Jing, money and grain accounts. In the row of rooms on the right, Ling Zhen shall be in charge of cannon; Meng Kang, shipbuilding; Hou Jian, clothing and armor manufacturing; and Tao Zongwang, walls and ramparts.

"In the rooms of the two wings behind the Hall, we'll have the following supervisors: Li Yun, housing; Tang Long, iron smithery; Zhu Fu, wines and vinegars; Song Qing, feasts and banquets; Du Xing and Bai Sheng, miscellaneous.

"The four taverns which serve as lookout places for us shall continue to be run by Zhu Gui, Yue Ho, Shi Qian, LiLi, Sun Xin, Gu Dasao, Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch. Yang Lin, Shi Yong and Duan Jingzhu shall buy horses from the north.

"These are our dispositions. Let everyone respect them and none disobey."

From the day Song Jiang assumed the leadership of the stronghold in Liangshan Marsh, every chieftain, large and small, was happy and content. All gladly acceded to his directions.

One day Song Jiang conferred with them. He wanted to avenge Chao Gai and lead troops against the village of Zengtou. But Wu Yong was opposed.

"The mourning customs of the people must be respected, brother," he advised. "You must wait a hundred days before going into battle. It won't be too late."

Song Jiang heeded his words and remained in the stronghold. Every day he had prayers offered for Chao Gai's safe passage into Heaven.

One day he invited a monk whose Buddhist name was Dayuan—"Beatified"—and who was a member of the Longhua Monastery in Daming the Northern Capital. On his way to Jining, he had been passing through Liangshan Marsh, and had been asked to the fortress to conduct services for the departed. During a vegetarian meal, Song Jiang, in the course of conversation, inquired whether the Northern Capital had any places or people of note.

"Surely you've heard of the Jade Unicorn of Hebei?" the monk retorted.

Song Jiang and Wu Yong suddenly remembered. "We're not yet old. We shouldn't be so forgetful at our age," Song exclaimed. "There's a rich man in the Northern Capital called Lu Junyi. His nickname is the Jade Unicorn. He's one of the Three Remarkable Men of Hebei Province. He lives in the capital city and is highly skilled in the martial arts. With cudgel and staff he has no equal. If we could get him to join our stronghold, we'd need have no fear of any government troops or police sent to catch us."

Wu Yong laughed. "Why so despondent, brother? You want him up here? There's nothing hard about that!"

"He's the head of one of the leading families of Daming. How can we induce him to become an outlaw?"

"I've been thinking of this for some time, though for the moment I'd forgotten. I have a plan that will bring him up the mountain."

"You're not known as the Wizard without cause. Will you tell us, please, Military Advisor, what your plan is?" Calmly with 2 fingers pressed together, Wu Yong related his plan. And as a result, Lu Junyi cast aside embroidered banners, beaded drapes, and entered instead the dragon's pool and tiger's den. Truly, to bring 1 man into the Marsh, warfare was inflicted on the entire population.

Now what Taoist Gongsun proposed to Song Jiang and the Professor was this: "My plan is that of the famous general Zhuge Liang during the early years of the Han when he used stones instead of troops. Draw up the army so that it faces in all directions, with eight sections of eight, making sixty-four in all, the commander-in-chief in the middle. This is like a beast with four heads and eight tails. It can wheel to the left or turn to the right, it's a device like the wind and clouds that float over our heads, it has the adaptability of dragon, tiger, bird or snake. Now, wait until the enemy charge down the mountain and attack, then open out on two sides, and calmly invite them in. Then when you see the signal of seven stars, reform into a long snake. I now perform my little magic, and the result is that these three and their army will find themselves unable to go forward or back, left or right. Somewhere we will have prepared a trap, a concealed pit. We drive them towards it. Troops with snagging hooks are lying in ambush on either side, ready to pin them down."

Song Jiang was impressed with the scheme and issued orders at once, with strict instructions to all officers to keep to them precisely. Eight of their strongest, boldest leaders were to command the forces on the periphery. These eight were Twin Rods, Whiskers, Colonel Hua, the Spearsman, Mu the Unstoppable, Colonel Sun, the Tattooed Dragon and the Tamer. The main force in the centre was put under the command of Mr. Chai with the Little Duke and the Halberdier. Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun would control the signals given by the River-Jumper. The Strategist with five officers was to take up a position on a high point to report on the enemy movements.

The morning was well advanced when the army ranks spread out at the foot of the mountain and began to wave their banners, sound the drums and shout challenges. Then from Mount Mangdang the gongs began to reverberate like thunder and the three leaders marched down the mountain. They deployed a force of more than three thousand troops. The Ogre and Winged Ghost commanded the two flanks. In the centre on horseback was the chieftain called Fan Rui, a native of Puzhou, who had once been known as Father Purity and had acquired great skill with arms among the rivers and lakes. On horseback he wielded a flying hammer with devastating effect, and he seemed to have the ability to be everywhere at once, slaughtering generals and capturing ensigns. No one could touch him. He was nicknamed the Demon King. There is a poem which tells what he was like:

*About his head floats hair like black silk, his embroidered robe is all black and he is totally encased in armour which gleams like the winter sky. He uses the hammer with miraculous skill. He is truly an image of the Great Warrior of the North, and weird sprites are at his beck and call. His personal banner features wandering clouds, rivers and seas; his nickname is Demon King.*

Mounted on a black charger, the Demon King rode out in front of his ranks. On his left was the Eight-Armed Ogre, on his right Winged Ghost. Now although the Demon King had quite a few magic tricks up his sleeve, he was no military strategist. When he saw the formation in which Song Jiang's army was drawn up, facing all directions, he secretly rejoiced. "If you spread your troops out like that, you're playing into my hands," he thought.

"When the wind begins to blow," he commanded the other two, "break through their ranks with five hundred men whirling swords."

They responded by grasping their outlandish shields and readying their javelins and throwing knives and waited for the Demon King to act. The latter now stood up in his stirrups and raising his left hand with the flying hammer and brandishing his trusty blade in the right hand, muttered some magic spells, culminating in a shout of: "Chrrr!" Immediately a violent wind arose on all sides, which set sand and stones flying. The sky grew dark as night, with no gleam of light from sun or moon. The other two cheered and leading five hundred dervish swordsmen charged forward. Before this onslaught Song Jiang's forces parted into two halves. As the two enemy leaders charged into the middle they were subjected to a rain of ballista missiles from either side. Only fifty or so of their troops followed them forward; the rest returned to their own ranks. Watching from his hilltop, Song Jiang saw the two enemy leaders had entered the trap and told the River-Jumper to wave the seven-stars flag. At this signal the troops, dividing and wheeling about, transformed themselves into the snake formation.

Now the two enemy leaders, however they might drive east or west, twist or turn to right or left, could find no way out. On the hilltop the Strategist was using the little flag to point with: when they turned east, he pointed east, and when they turned west he pointed west. Taoist Gongsun was there on the hilltop too, of course, observing. He now drew his famous sword inscribed with pine trees, muttered a spell and cried out: "Chrr!" The wind began to wildly swirl at the feet of the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. They saw the world go dark, no ray of light was visible. Not a single enemy soldier was to be seen either, nothing but darkness wherever they looked. They could not even see their own troops behind them. They became extremely anxious; all they wanted was to turn back, but it was absolutely impossible to find a way out. And now suddenly there was a shattering peal of thunder. Unending curses burst from them as simultaneously they were both tripped and fell head over heels into a huge pit. Hooks reached out on either side and in no time at all they were subdued and bound with rope.

Their captors took them up to the top of the hill to claim their reward.

Song Jiang pointed with the stock of his whip and the three leaders of his main force went into action. The Demon King tried to withdraw to the mountain, but half his force was destroyed before he got away.

Song Jiang now called in his troops and the leaders held a meeting outside the commander's tent. The two enemy leaders were paraded under the banner. When Song Jiang saw them he immediately ordered them to be untied, and presenting the cup in his own hands said: "Do not be angry. These are the fortunes of war. I myself have heard so much about you. I wanted to invite you to join our company on the mountain. It is only because there was no opportunity to do so that we have had this misunderstanding. If you do not refuse, and consent to come back with us, we shall count it a great blessing."

The two prostrated themselves humbly and said: "We too know your great reputation. It is just that for some reason we have not had the opportunity to meet you. Obviously you have great loyalty and virtue, but we failed to recognize the fact. We went against the will of heaven and earth. Now we are your prisoners. We thoroughly deserve death, yet you treat us with such courtesy. If you spare us, we pledge to serve you till death, to repay your magnanimity. As for the Demon King, how can he carry on without us? If you would permit one of us to go back and speak to the Demon King, we would tell him to come here and pay his respects, what do you say to that?"

Song Jiang said: "There is no need to keep one of you here as a hostage. Why don't you both go back to your stronghold. I will wait for you to return with good tidings."

They thanked him and said: "What a gentleman you are! If Demon King refuses to submit we will capture him ourselves and make a gift of him to you."

Song Jiang was well satisfied with this, and told one of his men to bring in wine and food. He also ordered two new suits of clothes and two good horses for them, and told some men to fetch their shields and escort them back to their stronghold. As they rode back both of them were full of praise for Song Jiang's generosity. When they reached Mount Mangdang the guards were amazed to see them and admitted them into the camp.

The Demon King asked what they had come for. "We are a pair of unfortunates," they said. "We deserve a thousand deaths."

"Why do you speak like that, brothers?" asked the Demon King.

So they told him all about Song Jiang's noble spirit.

"If Song Jiang is really so noble, so generous, then we had better stop opposing heaven's will and quickly go down to pay our respects to him," said the Demon King.

"That's exactly what we wanted to suggest," they said. They packed up the camp that same evening, and next morning at daybreak they all went down together. When they reached Song Jiang's camp they threw themselves on the ground. Song Jiang raised them up and invited them to sit in his tent. From the outset they felt not a moment's awkwardness with Song Jiang; rather there was an immediate sympathy and trust between them and they exchanged views on everything. They invited all the Mount Liang leaders back to Mount Mangdang, and had oxen and horses slaughtered to feast Song Jiang and his commanders, whilst they also rewarded the men. After the dinner the Demon King begged to become Taoist Gongsun's disciple. At Song Jiang's insistence, Taoist Gongsun explained the technique of the Five Thunders to the Demon King, to the latter's delight. In a few days' time the cattle and horses were rounded up, all the valuables and stores were packed and loaded, the troops were mustered, the compound was fired and everyone left with Song Jiang and the others to return to Mount Liang. Nothing need be said of the journey.

When they were close to Mount Liang and only needed to make the crossing, a tall fellow approached Song Jiang along the road beside the reedbeds and prostrated himself.

Song Jiang hurriedly dismounted and raised him up and asked: "What is your name and where are you from?"

The other replied: "My name is Duan Jingzhu, but people call me Yellow Dog, on account of the colour of my hair and beard. I am from Zhuozhou. I've always been a horse thief, up in the north, in Tartar territory. Last spring north of the Spearbutt range I stole a magnificent animal, with a coat whiter than snow, not a single hair of a different colour. It was three metres from nose to tail and stood fully sixteen hands. A big strong horse, that would easily do three hundred miles a day. It was quite famous up there in the north. They called it the 'moonlight charger.' It had belonged to a Tartar prince, before I stole it up there in the mountains. Now I've heard a lot about the Opportune Rain, from brethren of the rivers and lakes, only I never had the chance to meet him. So what I wanted to do was to bring this horse and make a present of it to him as my pledge for entering the company. Unfortunately as I was passing through the village of Zengside in southwest Lingzhou it was stolen from me by the five sons of the Zeng family. I tried to convince them that it really belonged to Song Jiang of Mount Liang, but they just swore at me most horribly and I didn't dare pursue the matter. When I managed to get away I came straight here to tell you."

The speaker was a gangling, coarse-looking individual of a most strange aspect. What exactly was he like? Well, there's a poem for him:

A head surrounded with wild yellow hair,
*Legs that will carry him anywhere.*
*He's invisible as a man in a fog*
When he steals a horse. He's called Yellow Dog.

When Song Jiang saw how unusual this man looked, he secretly rejoiced. "In that case," he said, "why don't you come to the mountain with us and discuss matters?"

He took Yellow Dog into the boats with them and they crossed to Golden Sands Landing. When Chao Gai and the others received them in the Assembly Hall, Song Jiang introduced the Demon King, the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost, and Yellow Dog also paid his respects. A drum began to sound clamorously and a great feast was organized. Seeing that a lot more troops had been added to the stronghold and heroes seemed to be flocking in from all directions as if blown by the wind, Green-Eyes and the Nine-Tailed Turtle were ordered to build more houses and extend the stronghold's defences. And since Yellow Dog went on extolling the virtues of that horse, Song Jiang told the Magic Messenger to go to Zengside and find out what had happened to it.

After 4 or 5 days the Magic Messenger returned and told them: "There're three thousand or more families in Zengside. One of them is the Zeng family. Old Zeng is a Tartar. He has five sons, known as the Zeng Five. Starting with the eldest they are called Zeng Tu, Zeng Mi, Zeng Suo, Zeng Kui and Zeng Sheng. There is also an instructor there called Shi Wengong and he has an assistant called Su Ding. They've mustered an army of six or seven thousand troops in the village and built solid defences. They boast more than fifty prison carts. They are on record as saying that there's not room round here for both them and us. They are determined to capture all of us here in the stronghold; they're spoiling for a fight. The horse, Moonlight, is now being ridden by Instructor Shi Wengong. The bastards have done one particularly hateful thing. They've invented some verses that they teach the children of the village to sing:

When our jingling irons are heard,
*Gods and ghosts are sore afeared.*
*We lock our foes in prison carts*
*With iron spikes to quell their hearts.*
*We'll sweep Mount Liang and the Marshes clean,*
*Seize Chao Gai and turn him in,*
*Take the Opportune Rain alive,*
*And the Professor's fall contrive.*
*The Zengside Brothers Five are we,*
We shall forever famous be."

Chao Gai was hugely incensed. "How dare these animals speak so disrespectfully!" he said. "I'd better go myself. If I don't capture that lot, I vow never to return!"

Song Jiang said: "You are our chief. You cannot risk your own safety. I will go instead."

Chao Gai said: "It's not that I grudge you the glory. But you've been down so many times. You must be tired of fighting. This time let me go instead. Next time there's trouble it will be your turn."

When Song Jiang tried to insist, Chao Gai became quite annoyed. He selected five thousand troops and asked twenty of the leaders to go with him. The remainder were to stay with Song Jiang and guard the camp.

The twenty leaders appointed by Chao Gai were Leopard's Head, Twin Rods, the Spearsman, Mu the Unstoppable, the Red-Haired Devil, the Pilot, the three Ruan brothers, Morbid, Madcap, Colonel Sun, the Tamer, Skyscraper, the Door-God in the Clouds, the Dandy, Redeye, Golden Wings, Panther and the Daytime Rat. They led three columns down the mountain to attack Zengside. Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun accompanied them as far as Golden Sands Landing. As they were drinking wine there, a violent wind suddenly got up, splitting in two the new banner which Chao Gai had had made. Everyone turned pale at the sight of this. The Professor warned them: "This is not an auspicious omen. You had better postpone the attack."

Song Jiang also tried to talk him round: "You can go another time. This business of the wind tearing the banner doesn't look good for the army. It would surely be best to wait for a while before going off to deal with those villains."
Chao Gai said: "Sky and earth, clouds and wind, how can they be held to account? If we don't take advantage of this spring dawn to go and get them, we're just allowing them longer to build up their power, and when we do attack it may be too late. Don't stand in my way. Whatever happens I intend to go!"
Song Jiang could say nothing to dissuade him and Chao Gai led his army off across the water.
But Song Jiang felt most uneasy. When he got back to the stronghold he sent the Magic Messenger off after them, to listen out for news of their progress.
Chao Gai with his five thousand troops and twenty leaders reached the vicinity of Zengside and stopped before the stockade. Next day he and the other leaders rode out to take a good look at the place. What they saw was a site most dangerous to attack:
*All around it a desolate expanse of water; it's surrounded on three sides by a high ridge. Next to the moat is a river harbour like a coiled snake; close to the water a thicket of willows dense as rain. As you look down on it from afar, it is all green shadows with no sign of habitation. If you watch from close to, the perimeter fence is lost in blue shade. But there are youths there in the village fierce as door gods, there are children in the fields who spring from the soil like spirits. Evidently the defences are strong; obviously this is a village of tough men and strong horses.*
As they were watching, a detachment of some eight hundred troops suddenly appeared from a grove of willows. The leader wore a helmet of beaten copper and was dressed in linked armour. He wielded a spear of tempered steel and rode a fiery stallion. This was Zeng the Fourth. "You rebel scum from Mount Liang," he began to shout. "I was just coming to get you and hand you over to the authorities for the reward, apparently heaven is kind to me! You should have dismounted already so we can tie you up, what are you waiting for?"
As Chao Gai turned towards him with a look of fury, a warrior from his ranks rode forward and charged Zeng the Fourth. It was one of the founder members of Mount Liang, none other than Leopard's Head Lin Chong. The two horses clashed and they fought twenty bouts and neither had the advantage. After the twentieth bout, Zeng the Fourth, reckoning he could not get the better of Leopard's Head, rested his lance and turned his horse and raced back to the woods. Leopard's Head reined in his horse and did not follow. Chao Gai ordered his troops back to camp to discuss plans for defeating Zengside.
"Next time let's go and challenge them right outside the village," Leopard's Head suggested. "It'll give us a chance to see how things really are there, before we make our plans."
When daylight came the five thousand troops were marched to a deserted part of the level land at the entrance to the village and drawn up in battle formation. Drums rolled and the troops cheered. Loud reports came from Zengside and a large body of troops advanced, with seven leaders spread out in front in a straight line. In the centre was Instructor Shi Wengong. On his left was his assistant, Su Ding, and on his right the eldest Zeng. Also on the left Zeng the Second and Zeng the Fourth, while Zeng the Third and Zeng the Fifth were on the right. They were all in full armour. Instructor Shi Wengong had a bow with arrows and was riding Moonlight. He held a square-bladed halberd, finely carved. Three drumrolls were now heard and from the Zengside ranks a number of prison carts were wheeled out and placed in full view. Zeng the First pointed at the enemy and shouted: "Do you see my prison carts, you rebel scum? We are going to finish you off, or we're not men! We'll take you alive, one by one, and put you in the prison carts to take to the capital. There you'll die the death of a thousand cuts. But if you surrender now, there may be room for discussion."
Chao Gai responded by levelling his lance and furiously charging Zeng the First. Fearing for his safety, the other leaders went with him and the two armies met in confused combat. Gradually the Zengside forces were driven back into the village. Leopard's Head and Twin Rods gave Chao Gai close protection, hacking down the enemy on either side. Eventually Leopard's Head saw that the way forward was too difficult and hurriedly called the troops back to regroup. It was clear that they had suffered quite heavy losses and Chao Gai's heart was heavy when they returned to the camp. The other leaders rallied him, saying: "Be of good cheer, brother. It's no use grieving and it's bad for your health. When Song Jiang fights he generally has losses too. But in the end he always returns victorious. The fighting was fierce today, and both sides lost men and horses, but we weren't beaten. Why must you be so sad?" But Chao Gai's gloom was not dispelled.
Three days now passed in the camp. Each day they challenged the enemy but no one from Zengside put in an appearance.
Then on the fourth day two monks suddenly turned up in Chao Gai's camp, seeking help. Some guards brought them to the command tent, where they knelt and declared: "We are monks from the Fahua temple to the east of Zengside. Those Zeng brothers are always coming to our temple to pester us with demands for money or gifts. We are fed up with it! We haven't been able to find any way of escaping them, so we have come to beg you to go and raid their camp and get rid of them for us. It will be a blessing to the whole district."
Chao Gai was very excited by this. He asked the two monks to sit and regaled them with wine. But Leopard's Head warned him: "Don't be too trusting, brother. This may be a trap."
The monks said: "We are holy men, how could we tell a lie? We have heard so much about the reputation of Mount Liang for loyalty and honour. Wherever you go you never harm the people. That's why we decided to throw ourselves on your mercy. Why should we try to cheat you? Especially as the Zengs are not going to win against you. You've absolutely no reason to suspect us."
Chao Gai said: "Don't be so suspicious, brother. We could miss a great opportunity. I'll go myself to have a look this evening."
"Don't you go," Leopard's Head said. "I will take half the troops to raid the camp, while you stay outside to back us up."
Chao Gai said: "If I'm not going to go, why should anyone else? No, you can stay outside with half the troops and back me up."
Leopard's Head said: "Who do you want to take with you?"
Chao Gai said: "I'll take ten leaders and two thousand five hundred men." These ten leaders were: the Red-Haired Devil, Ruan the Second, Twin Rods, Ruan the Fifth, Golden Wings, Ruan the Seventh, the Dandy, Skyscraper, the Door-God in the Clouds and the Daytime Rat. That evening when they had eaten, with bells removed from the horse's bridles and the troops gagged to prevent sound, they swiftly and silently followed the two monks to the Fahua temple. They found it to be an ancient structure. Chao Gai dismounted and went in. He saw no monks inside. He asked the two monks: "Why is there not a single priest in this temple?"
"The monks were all vexatious creatures, they had to be expelled. There is only the abbot left and a few novices. They live in the court at the back. Halt your men here and wait for a while. When night thickens we will lead you to their camp."
"Where exactly is their camp?" Chao Gai asked.
"They've got four camps," the monk replied. "But I have a friend who is stationed in the northern camp. If you can capture that one, it's all that matters. You can forget about the other three."
"What time can we start?" Chao Gai asked.
The monk said: "Let's see, it's now only the second watch. If we wait till the third watch, they'll be totally unprepared."
For some time they went on hearing clearly the beat of the Zengside drum giving out the time. This continued for upwards of an hour and then there was silence.
"They must be all asleep now," the monk said. "We can start."
The monks led the way. Chao Gai ordered everyone to mount and they left the temple.
When they had gone less than two miles, it was so dark that they lost sight of the two monks and the troops in front feared to advance. There were paths leading in all directions, and not a soul to be seen. An officer came in great trepidation and reported this to Chao Gai. Twin Rods ordered a hurried retreat by the way they had come. But they had not gone much more than a hundred paces when all around them gongs and drums broke the silence together with earth-shattering cries, and there were torches wherever they looked. Desperately Chao Gai and his commanders sought to escape. But after two more turns in the path they ran into the enemy troops. The foremost of them shot a volley of arrows, and unfortunately one of these struck Chao Gai in the face, knocking him from his horse. The horses of Twin Rods and the Dandy bolted. The Red-Haired Devil and the Daytime Rat who were coming up behind them helped Chao Gai back onto his horse and galloped through the village. Leopard's Head and the others were waiting to assist them outside the village and put up a fierce resistance. A confused battle raged till dawn, when both sides returned to their respective camps.
When Leopard's Head got back and called the roll of his troops, it was found that the three Ruan brothers, the Door-God in the Clouds and Skyscraper had swum to safety, but of the two thousand five hundred troops who had gone less than one thousand three hundred remained. Together with Golden Wings they all repaired to the command tent. When they examined Chao Gai, they found that the arrow had hit him in the jaw. When it was pulled out he fainted from loss of blood. The arrow itself bore the name of Shi Wengong. Leopard's Head ordered the wound to be dressed with salve. It was however a poisoned arrow and the poison deprived Chai Gai of the power to speak. Leopard's Head had him placed on a litter and ordered the three Ruans, Skyscraper and the Door-God in the Clouds to go on back to Mount Liang with him. The remaining fifteen held a discussion.
The general view was this: "Remember the accident this time when our dear leader Chao Gai came down the mountain? The wind tore our banner. All we can do now is collect our troops and return. We'll never be able to capture this place."
Twin Rods said: "We must wait till we get orders from Song Jiang before we withdraw."
That day their gloom knew no bounds. The army had no more stomach for fighting. All they wanted was to return to the mountain.
In the evening around nine o'clock when it had just got dark they were sitting miserably in the camp. Truly it was a case of "A headless snake goes nowhere, a wingless bird cannot fly; they can but sigh and weep, since they can neither advance nor retreat." At this point a sentry suddenly rushed in and reported: "There's four or five columns of troops attacking. We can't even count the torches!"
Leopard's Head immediately ordered everyone to mount their horses. On the mountains which surrounded them on three sides the torches made it bright as day and there was shouting from every direction. Leopard's Head's forces did not stand and fight but struck camp and retreated. With the Zengside forces harrying them in the rear, they were forced to fight a rearguard action. It was not till they had gone twenty miles or so that they shook off the pursuit. When the roll was called they were found to have lost six or seven hundred men. After suffering this serious reverse, they took to the road by which they had come and headed for Mount Liang. Halfway there the Magic Messenger met them with orders to return to the stronghold and not to engage in further action. When they had marched their men back to the marshlands and up into the mountain, everyone attended the wounded leader, Chao Gai.
Neither food nor drink had passed Chao Gai's lips, he could eat nothing. His whole body was swollen. Song Jiang kept watch at his bedside, dressed his wound with his own hands and bathed it in hot water. The others stood watching outside. That evening in the third watch, towards midnight, Chao Gai's condition worsened. Turning his eyes on Song Jiang he ordered: "Dear brother, take care. Whoever catches the one who shot me, let him be lord of Mount Liang!"
Then his eyes clouded over and he was dead. For Song Jiang it was like losing a father and mother and he wept till his head swam. The others raised him up and urged him to take control of affairs. The Professor and Taoist Gongsun exhorted him: "You must spare yourself such grieving, life and death are man's portion, what use is grief? You must look to what has to be done now."
Song Jiang pulled himself together and gave orders for the body to be bathed in scented water and dressed for burial and then placed in the Assembly Hall. All the leaders came to pay their last respects. An inner casket and coffin were made, an auspicious time was chosen, the body was encoffined and placed in the hall, a screen was set up and a memorial tablet was fashioned bearing the words: "Duke Chao, lord of the Marshes of Mount Liang, inspired commander." All the leaders, from Song Jiang on down, wore full mourning. The lesser chiefs and all the men wore mourning headbands. The arrow was preserved as a pledge before the altar. Long banners were strung up around the stronghold and local monks were invited up the mountain to perform a memorial service for the benefit of Chao Gai's soul. Every day Song Jiang led the company in mourning. He had no heart for attending to the business of the mountain stronghold.
After discussion, Leopard's Head, Taoist Gongsun, the Professor and all the leaders now decided that Song Jiang should rule on Mount Liang. Everyone was in favour.
One day at dawn, when incense, lamps and candles had been lit, Leopard's Head led the company in requesting Song Jiang to come and take his seat in the Assembly Hall. The Professor and Leopard's Head opened the proceedings, saying: "Brother please hear us. 'A nation cannot survive a single day without a leader, a household cannot survive without a master.' Our leader Chao Gai has passed on. How can the stronghold remain leaderless? Your name is known everywhere within the four seas. Let us choose an auspicious day and time to inaugurate your rule as our chief, to be obeyed by everyone in all your commands."
Song Jiang replied: "Before he died, Lord Chao proclaimed: 'If anyone manages to take Shi Wengong, you'd better make him master in the Marshes of Mount Liang.' You all know this. Have you forgotten it, even though his mortal remains are not yet cold? His death has not even been avenged yet, or the bitterness wiped out. How then can I occupy this seat?"
The Professor urged him: "Though indeed Lord Chao said this, we have not in fact captured this person. How can we remain leaderless? If you refuse it, who else will dare take up the post? How will the troops of the stronghold be led? We respect all that you say, but please accept the position at least temporarily, until such time as another policy presents itself."
"What you say is reasonable. I will accept the position for the time being, but when the day of our vengeance arrives and the bitterness is wiped out, he who takes Shi Wengong, whoever it may be, must occupy this seat."
Iron Ox who was standing on one side suddenly exclaimed: "You shouldn't just be lord of the Marshes of Mount Liang, brother, you should be emperor, that's what!"
Song Jiang shouted angrily: "That big black fellow is talking rubbish again! Keep your big mouth shut or I'll have your tongue cut out!"
Iron Ox grumbled: "I wasn't asking for you to be just a local chieftain, I wanted you to be emperor. And you want to cut my tongue out!"
The Professor said: "This idiot has no sense of what's proper. Don't waste your time with him. Please give your attention to important matters."
Song Jiang lit incense and was installed as temporary incumbent of the first seat. His first deputy on the left was the Professor, his second, on the right was Taoist Gongsun. Next on the left was Leopard's Head and on the right Twin Rods. All the leaders paid their respects and took their seats on either side.
Song Jiang spoke as follows: "Today I shall temporarily occupy this position, relying entirely on the support and cooperation of all of you to advise me, in order that together we may follow heaven's path. Our numbers now in the stronghold are very great, not as in the past, and I would like you to separate into six main camps where you will reside. The Assembly Hall will in future be known as the Ceremonial Hall. Before it and behind it, on the right and on the left, there will be four land camps. On the other side of the mountain there will be two smaller posts. In front there will be garrisons for the three main gates. At the bottom there will be the waterside camp and a small post at each of the two landings. I would like you now all to accept these dispositions.
"The Ceremonial Hall will for the time being be my seat of residence. My second-in-command there will be the Professor, and after him in order Taoist Gongsun, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Little Duke and the Halberdier. The left-hand camp will be commanded by Leopard's Head, with the Red-Haired Devil, the Tattooed Dragon, Morbid, Madcap, Skyscraper and the Door-God in the Clouds. The right-hand camp will be commanded by Twin Rods, with Whiskers, the Magic Messenger, Mu the Unstoppable, Iron Ox, Golden Wings, and Mu the Irrepressible. The forward camp will be commanded by Skyhawk, with the Spearsman, the Monk, the Pilgrim, the Blue-Faced Beast, the Flautist and the Young Master. The rearward camp will be commanded by Mr. Chai, with Colonel Sun, the Tamer, Victorious, the Supremo, Redeye and the Pill Monger. The waterside camp will be commanded by the White-Water Dragon, with the three Ruan brothers, the Pilot, White Eel, the Cave Dragon and the River Rider. Altogether in these six camps there will be forty-three leaders.
"The first of the gates will be guarded by Sergeant Lei and the Demon King, the second by Snake and Scorpion, the third by the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. The post at Golden Sands Landing will be run by the Dandy, Whitey, Red Star and Blazing Comet, the post at Duck's-Bill Landing by the Tiger-Killer and Big Chief, the Forester and Rhinoceros. Of the two land posts the other side of the mountain, the left hand one will be occupied by Short-Arse, Steelbright and the Knife, the right hand one by the Strategist, River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake. Within the Ceremonial Hall the left hand chamber will be occupied by the Hand, as Master of the Rolls, by Chief Justice Sterling, by the Craftsman, our publisher of inscriptions, and by the Calculator, our treasurer. The right hand chamber will belong to Thunderer, chief of artillery, Flagpole, our shipwright, the Ape, our wardrobe chief, and the Nine-Tailed Turtle, superintendent of fortifications. In the chamber to the rear of the hall will reside other administrative staff: Green-Eyes, our housing officer, Spots, the supervisor of arms manufacture, Smiler, superintendent of wine-making, my brother, Iron Fan, supervisor of banquets, and Uglymug and the Daytime Rat as general overseers. The four inns or listening posts down below will be run by the Crocodile, Lungs, the Flea, the Executioner, Blackface, Auntie Gu, the Gardener and Sister Sun the Ogress, the same arrangement as before. Panther, the Guv and Yellow Dog will be responsible for buying horses in the territory to the north. Let everyone now respect these arrangements. Let there be no violations."
Every single one of the chiefs in the waterlands of Mount Liang was pleased that Song Jiang had become chief of the stronghold and all accepted his provisions without demur.
One day at a general assembly Song Jiang said: "I am anxious to avenge Chao Gai. Let us raise an army and attack Zengside."
The Professor said: "Brother, according to custom the period of mourning should be respected. Let us wait till the hundred days are past before raising an army."
Song Jiang followed the Professor's advice. He remained in the mountain stronghold, every day performing religious works to gain blessings for Chao Gai.
One day he invited a certain monk, called Dayuan, who was a member of the congregation at the Glorious Dragon Temple in the northern capital. Because he passed by the Marshes of Mount Liang on his way to Jining, they invited him to perform a service at the stronghold. As they were eating a vegetarian meal, and idly conversing, Song Jiang happened to ask about local customs and personalities in the northern capital and the monk said: "How come you haven't heard the name of the Jade Unicorn of Hebei? For Song Jiang and the Professor it was like a moment of illumination. They said: "We are not old, as you can see, so how can we be so forgetful? In the northern capital there is indeed a gentleman called Mr. Lu Junyi who is known as the Jade Unicorn, one of those famous three from Hebei, but now living in the northern capital and the possessor of wonderful fighting skills. His technique with the staff is quite unparallelled. If we had that man here with us, there'd be no reason to fear capture by the government troops, how could any troops get near us?"
The Professor said pleasantly: "Brother, what are you worried about? If you want him to come here, it's no problem at all."
Song Jiang said: "He is one of the great men in the northern capital. How could he be persuaded to become an outlaw?"
The Professor said, "I thought about it before, but for some reason it went right out of my mind. I've a plan that'll get him here."
Song Jiang said, "It's certainly not for nothing that people call you the Beacon of Learning! May I ask what method you intend to use to attract the person in question here?" The Professor's reply was unhesitating. Laying 2 fingers craftily across each other, he expounded his plan. It was to have an important result for the Jade Unicorn was to exchange the company of courtiers and the luxury of palaces for the dragon's pool and the tiger's den. Truly:

All so that one man should come to the marshlands,
The people suffered the soldiers' axes.

GONGSUN SHENG explained his strategy. He said, "At the time when the Han Dynasty was declining, General Zhuge Liang worked out his plans by means of stones. He formed a square, and divided each side into two. Each of these eight sections had eight companies so that there were altogether sixty-four companies. His headquarters was in the middle of the square. There were four "heads" or advance companies, and they could turn either to right or left, and lead the whole square. The result was that the whole square moved as one body (like a tiger) just according to the conditions faced. When an enemy was approaching the two leading companies separated, and opened the square. When the enemy was inside the wings he was in the coils of an encircling snake. I will adopt the same method, and when our three opponents are in our midst they will find no means of escape. I will have a concealed pitfall ready, and we will slowly drive them towards it until they fall into it. There they can be easily arrested by men with hooked sticks."
Song Jiang was pleased, and approved of the suggested plan. He issued orders placing Gongsun Sheng in charge of the forthcoming encounter, and dividing the bandits into eight parts.
The following day the brigands started on their march with much beating of drums and gongs, and when nearing Mount Mangdan they heard the sound of gongs. There were about three thousand bandits under the command of the three leaders. The two wings were in charge of Xiang Chong and Li Gun, with Fan Rui in the center. Fan Rui was without any skill as a general, and depended on his black arts for success. Upon seeing the opposing large army from Liangshan Marsh arrayed in the form of a square, he was quite pleased, and said to himself, "Song Jiang, you have arranged your men exactly as I have wanted you to do, but you will soon be caught by my ruse. So he sent orders to the other two leaders on the wings that when a strong wind arose they must advance with five hundred men rushing forward with their swords. Those leaders upon receiving this order put on their shields, and armed themselves with spears and throwing knives which could be hurled a long distance, and awaited the wind to be started by Fan Rui. The latter was seated on his black horse with a copper mace in his left hand, and with a sword in his right hand. He was muttering a spell, and then called out, "Quickly." Immediately a strong wind raged, hurling loose stones and sand about. The sky darkened, and the sunlight was obscured. Upon seeing this Xiang Chong and Li Gun gave orders and their five hundred men rushed forward.
Upon seeing the enemy advancing, Song Jiang gave the signal, and the front part of the square opened out on both sides. The five hundred men rushed into the square, and were fired upon from the remaining three sides with arrows. Most of them could not face this, and beat a hasty retreat. Only fifty men were left with the two leaders Xiang Chong and Li Gun. They dashed first one way and then another without a way out, Gongsun Sheng standing on a high mound had controlled the wind, and wherever the two leaders went they found the fierce wind with them hindering their movements. The two leaders could not see their followers, and were nonplused by the wind and darkness. At last their horses fell into the hidden trap, and there they were seized by men with hooked sticks, who took them to the camp at the base.
Song Jiang now dashed forward on his horse, and was followed by all his men. Fan Rui, seeing the advancing body of men, realized that his plan had failed, and at once retreated up the mountain with the remainder of his men—about half of the original force. Seeing this Song Jiang gave orders for the pursuit to stop, and returned to the camp at the base with all his men.
Upon seeing the two prisoners he unloosened their bonds, and offered them wine saying, "I hope you two heroes will excuse me. This has happened only owing to our fighting in opposite forces. I hope that you will now join us at Liangshan Marsh, and help us to seek justice. I am sorry that I have not had the opportunity before of meeting you and making this offer."

The two leaders kowtowed and replied, "We have heard of your celebrated name for a long time, but we have not had the fortune of meeting you. We now know for certain that you are a very just person. Had we known before of your goodness we would not have been your opponents. Today we are your prisoners, and expected to die, and never expected to be treated in this way. If you do not kill us we shall certainly be under a great obligation to you. As we have left Fan Rui, he will now be helpless without us, and if you would allow us to return we would explain to him who you really are, and probably get him to also join your force."
"I agree to your proposal," said Song Jiang, "and both of you may go. I will trust you, and will expect you both to come here tomorrow, and report the result of your journey."
They both kowtowed again, "We realize that you are really great. If Fan Rui will not listen to our pleadings, then we will seize him and bring him here by force."
Song Jiang was very glad, and invited them to dine with him. He then gave them new clothes, good horses, and sent two men to accompany them on their trip. On their horses the two leaders meditated on Song Jiang's generosity. Upon reaching Mount Mangdan the outposts were astonished upon seeing the return of their leaders, and sent the information up the mountain. Upon reaching the camp Fan Rui received them, and after explaining how they had been kindly treated by Song Jiang and then released, Fan Rui agreed that they could no longer oppose "The Will of Heaven," but must go and join forces with such a just man.
The following day they set out for Song Jiang's headquarters, where they were gladly welcomed. Their men and everything were duly brought to Liangshan Marsh, and the two bands of bandits were now united.
On the day that Song Jiang and the new adherents were arriving at Liangshan Marsh, and were on the point of crossing the lake a man saluted him. Upon being inquired for his name the man replied, "I am Duan Jingzhu, but because of my light-colored hair the people call me 'Golden Haired Dog.' I am a Zhuozhou Prefecture man, and get a living by stealing horses. This spring I stole a horse at Qianggan Ridge, and it was pure white without a single hair of any other color. It was very swift, and was well known as 'Jade Lion that Glows in the Night.' It previously belonged to a prince of the Jurchen Tartars. I have heard of your great reputation so I decided to present it to you. On the way, however, I was attacked at the village Zengtou where the horse was taken from me. I told them that it was your horse, but they only cursed you so badly that I dare not to go into details. I came to inform you of the matter."
Song Jiang saw from the man's appearance that he was not a ruffian, and replied, "As matters are like this I request you to come to our stronghold where we can discuss the case."
They then crossed the lake by a boat, and upon reaching the mountain all the leaders were summoned to attend the Assembly Hall where dinner was served. There Duan Jingzhu again recited how the horse had been stolen, and Song Jiang dispatched Dai Zong, the Divine Traveler, to the village Zengtou to find out where the horse was. Within five days Dai Zong returned, and reported that in the village there were about seven thousand men with many horses and about fifty carts. The headman named Zeng was a Tartar from the land of the Jurchens, and he had five sons. They had great influence there, and would not allow any opponent to exist. They declared they would crush Liangshan Marsh. The stolen horse was now in the possession of a drill instructor there named Shi Wengong. There was a very detestable poem recited on the streets of that village. It was as follows:

Startle all the spirits,
Capture all the brigands;
Arrest Chao Gai and Song Jiang,
Put them all in prison.
Strong and mighty are we,
Zeng has many tigers;
They are known throughout the empire,
There are none their equal.

"There is not a single person who does not sing that, and I found it unbearable."
Chao Gai was very angry and said, "Those animals have no sense of decency. I must go myself. If I do not capture them I shall not return. I only want five thousand men, and about twenty leaders to accompany me. The others will stop here under Song Jiang to guard our stronghold."
That day Chao Gai selected his twenty leaders, and they left the mountain with their men divided into three contingents. Song Jiang and the other leaders descended the mountain, and while they were drinking a parting cup there arose a strong wind which snapped Chao Gai's flagpole into two parts. When they saw this they were all astounded.
Wu Yong remonstrated with Chao Gai. "It is evident that the wind disapproves of our military preparations, and I therefore think that it would be better to delay our expedition for some time."
"It is nothing unusual for the wind to do such a thing," said Chao Gai. "The weather is favorable, and if we do not go now it will only enable them to prepare their defenses, and that might lead to our defeat. I ask you not to obstruct me in this matter as I intend to proceed at all costs."
Wu Yong saw that it would be useless to urge delay, and Chao Gai ordered his troops to cross the lake. Song Jiang and his men returned to the mountain, but Dai Zong was dispatched to watch the proceedings and report results.
Chao Gai and his men duly reached the vicinity of the village of Zengtou without any trouble, and encamped there. The following day he and the leaders mounted their horses and went to survey the land. They had stopped at a certain place, and while looking round they saw a large body of men emerge from a forest. In front of them rode a man who was Zeng Kui, the fourth son of the head Tartar of the village. When he got near he shouted, "You brigands are from Liangshan Marsh, and are outlaws. For a long time I have the idea to capture you, and now Heaven has given me that opportunity. You had better dismount at once, and become my prisoners."
Chao Gai was highly provoked at this insolent speech, but before he could reply one of his leaders dashed past him on horseback. It was Lin Chong, the "Leopard's Head." He engaged with Zeng Kui for about twenty bouts, and then the latter realized that he had an opponent whom he could not overcome so he withdrew to the forest. Lin Chong did not pursue him.
Chao Gai ordered that his fellow leaders should return to camp where they held a meeting to discuss matters. Lin Chong suggested that they should attack the village the following day, and then they would see how the enemy fought. This was agreed to, and the next morning their five thousand men took up their position on an open ground in front of the entrance to the village. Soon they heard the guns in the village fired, and a large number of men emerged from the village, led by seven men on horseback. These leaders wore armor. In the center was Shi Wengong, the teacher, riding the stolen white horse, and armed with a halberd, and bow and arrows. A drum was beaten three times, and at this signal the villagers opened their ranks to allow several prisoner's carts to pass through. (These were fashioned with dragon's heads in front.) Pointing to the carts one of the seven leaders, Zeng Tu, shouted, "You rebels! Do you see these carts? We do not wish to kill you, but only take you alive as prisoners so that we can send you to the Eastern Capital. That is how we, the Five Tigers, wish to display our skill. You had better submit at once."
Upon hearing this Chao Gai was very angry, and dashed forward. He was immediately followed by all his twenty leaders and the whole of their men. The two armies met, and a fierce struggle ensued. The villagers could not repulse the attack, and slowly fell back towards their village. Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo saw that the ground near the village was uneven, and suspecting a trap they ordered a general retreat. On both sides there had been many casualties.
Upon reaching their camp Chao Gai felt very sad, but his leaders said, "Brother, set your mind at ease, and do not grieve too much about our many losses today. You must not forget that our brother Song Jiang has had many defeats. We shall be victorious before we go back."
But Chao Gai still remained depressed.
For the next three days the brigands challenged the village to fight, but the villagers did not show themselves. But on the fourth day two monks came to Chao Gai's camp, where they said, "We are from the Fahua Monastery to the east of the village of Zengtou here. We have been frequently disturbed by the Five Tigers, sons of the Zeng family, who have demanded money from us. We know all their defenses, and are willing to show them to you so that you will relieve us of their trouble."
Chao Gai was pleased to hear this, and invited them to be seated and take refreshments. But Lin Chong exhorted Chao Gai, "Do not listen to these men, as this may be only a plot."
"I think we can depend upon them as they are both monks," replied Chao Gai. "We men of Liangshan Marsh are always willing to assist people in distress, and now that we are here, we must not miss this opportunity. These monks have no grudge against us, so why should they try to deceive us? You should not be so suspicious, and hinder our affairs. There is no reason why we should not win the next time. This evening we must try again."
"As you have decided to do so," said Lin Chong, "let us divide our men in half, and I will take one half into the village, while you remain in charge of the other half outside."
"If I do not go into the village I am afraid our men will hold back," replied Chao Gai. "You had better take charge of our men outside the village."
"Whom do you want to accompany you?" asked Lin Chong.
"I want ten leaders and two thousand five hundred men." He then named the ten leaders.
This was agreed to, and after the evening meal they set out. No bells were allowed on the horses, and each man carried a gag in his mouth so that nobody should utter a word. It was growing dark, and they followed the two monks to the Fahua Monastery outside the village. Chao Gai saw that it was a very old monastery. He dismounted, and entering the building saw that there was nobody inside. So he asked the monks how it was that the place was so empty. The monks replied that most of the monks had long since left the monastery on account of the trouble caused by the Zeng family. There was only the Abbot left, with a few acolytes, and they lived in the room near the pagoda. They said that Chao Gai and his men had better stay there till the third watch (11 A.M.) when the monks would take them to the village.
"Where is the stronghold of the village?" asked Chao Gai.
"There are four camps in the village, and the Zeng brothers are in the northern one. If you can get the northern camp the others will give no trouble," replied the monk.
"At what time can we go?" asked Chao Gai.
"Just now is about the second watch (9 P.M.), and it would be better to go about 11 P.M."
Just then the drums in the village signaled the time as the second watch. But after some time the drums were not beaten again, and the monks thought that that watchmen had gone to sleep. So they decided to start off at once, and the monks led the way. Chao Gai gave the order for an advance, and his leaders and their men silently followed him. They had gone about two //when Chao Gai missed the two monks who had been acting as guides. So a halt was called. They searched all around in the dark, but could not find the road. There were no houses there. The men were getting nervous so Huyan Zhuo shouted an order for a general retreat. They had only gone about a hundred steps when they heard drums beaten on all sides around them in the dark. Soon there were sounds of men shouting, and torches were lit all around them. Chao Gai and his men had not gone much farther when they met a body of men who discharged arrows at them. One of these hit Chao Gai in the face, and he fell off his horse. Five of the leaders lifted Chao Gai on to his horse again, and retreated. Lin Chong who had half the men in reserve saw the light, and heard the drums, and at once ordered an advance of his men. The fight continued during the night. Orders were not given for a general retreat to their camp until daybreak.
In camp Chao Gai was bleeding badly from the wound in his face, and Lin Chong applied a medicine to the wound. They examined the arrow, and found on it the name of Shi Wengong. They did not notice however that it was a poisonous arrow. A cart was obtained, and in this Chao Gai was sent back to Liangshan Marsh with an escort.
The leaders left behind held a conference. The general opinion was that the mishap to Chao Gai's flag when they started on the expedition was an omen, and now that Chao Gai was wounded they had better stop operations against the village and wait until Song Jiang's order for withdrawal. They were still in a nervous condition when a scout arrived, and reported that a large body of men with numerous torches was advancing towards the camp by five different roads. Upon going outside they saw torchlights on the hills all around their camp. Lin Chong suggested that they must not fight again in the dark, and this being agreed to, orders were issued for camp to be struck, and an orderly retreat to be undertaken. As the opposing army came up a general rear-guard fight took place as the bandits retreated step by step. They retreated about twenty //before the army of the Zengs stopped pursuit. Now the leaders saw that they had only about six hundred men left, all the rest having been captured, wounded, or killed. They went on towards Liangshan Marsh where they duly arrived.
There they found that Chao Gai was much worse, his body having swollen considerably, and he was no longer capable of either eating or drinking. Song Jiang stayed by the bedside attending to his chief, and about midnight the latter spoke, "Do not be surprised at what I am going to say. I wish that the person who captures the man who shot me with that arrow, should become chief of our men in my place." As soon as he had said this he died. All the leaders heard Chao Gai's will. After Chao Gai's death the leaders decided to ask Song Jiang to become their chief. A general meeting took place in the General Assembly Hall with Lin Chong in the chair. He opened the proceeding, "In the state and family a single day cannot pass without an Emperor or master respectively. Chao Gai has gone to Heaven, so that our affairs are now without a chief. We think that you, our elder brother, Song Jiang, should now fill the vacant position, and as tomorrow is a lucky day we propose to install you as our chief."
Song Jiang replied, "Upon his death-bed our chief Chao Gai told me that he wished the post be given to the man who would capture Shi Wengong. The death-dealing arrow is still there so how can we forget his dying command? We have not yet avenged the injury so how can we make any other arrangement?"
"Nobody has yet captured the enemy and carried out Chao Gai's command," said Wu Yong, "but still we cannot remain any longer without a chief. There is nobody here equal to you so we cannot appoint anyone else. We are all intimately known to you, and nobody would object to your order. We request you to occupy the post at least temporarily, and we can talk the matter over again at some future date."
"Your arguments are well reasoned," replied Song Jiang, "and I will agree to your proposal. But should any one if you capture Shi Wengong that man must be our chief."
"Elder brother," interposed Li Kui, "you need not talk of being chief here, because you would be ideal as the Emperor of the Song Dynasty!"
Song Jiang was angry and said, "If you talk of that nonsense again I shall have your tongue cut off."
"I did not ask you to be our chief," replied Li Kui. "I said you should be the Emperor and yet you want to cut off my tongue!"
"This man does not understand how affairs should be conducted," said Wu Yong. "We need not regard his sayings, but proceed with our business."
Wu Yong and Lin Chong stepped forward, and assisted Song Jiang to the chair placed in the central position, and there he took his seat.
The leaders on both sides saluted their new chief, and then also took their seats.
Song Jiang spoke, "Today I temporarily occupy this position, and beg for your support. We must be united, and work together as one body. We have all been appointed our work by Heaven. Now our forces are very great, and I propose to divide same into six parts so that we can live in six strongholds. I propose to rename this hall as the Loyalty and Justice Hall. On the four sides of it will be four big fortresses. Behind it will be two small fortresses. In front will be three strategic barriers with a fortress on the lake and two fortresses on the shores." He then divided the leaders into six parts, and gave them their respective new positions. Everything worked smoothly under the new arrangements, and during the hundred days of mourning for Chao Gai all new buildings were completed.
One day a traveling monk was passing near Liangshan Marsh, and the leaders asked him to stay at their stronghold and assist in the memorial prayers for Chao Gai. His name was Dayuan, and he came from the Longhua Monastery in the Northern Capital, Daming. One day Song Jiang asked him for the news of the Northern Capital, and in reply the monk said, "Sir, have you not heard about the 'Jade Qilin' at the Northern Capital?"
"I am so forgetful of affairs," replied Song Jiang. "It is true that in Daming Prefecture there is an official named Lu Junyi who has a nickname, 'Jade Qilin.' He has a very good reputation. His military skill is good, and in use of spear is unexcelled in the land. If we could get him to join us I should feel satisfied."
Wu Yong laughed at this and said, "Elder brother, how is it that you have not more confidence in your present staff? If however you want him here it is easy to get him to come."
"He is the leading literary scholar of the Northern Capital," replied Song Jiang. "How can we induce him to come here?"
"I often thought of bringing him here," said Wu Yong, "but owing to other affairs I forgot about him. I will find a means of getting him to join us."
"Your reputation as a *Clever Star* rests upon a firm foundation," said Song Jiang. "But how can you induce him to join us here?" Wu Yong then explained his plans in detail.

*A hero leaves his comforts,*
*Meets dangers face to face.*

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### The Professor Wu Yong Schemes to trap the Jewelled Qilin & Cleverly Tricks the Jade Unicorn; White Eel Zhang Shun at Night Roils, Upsets a Boat, & fights at Golden Sands Crossing Landing Bank

"With the aid of this facile three-inch tongue of mine, I shall go fearlessly to the Northern Capital and persuade Lu Junyi to come to our mountain," Wu Yong avowed. "It will be as easy as taking something out of a bag. You just put your hand in and you've got it. All I need is a rough courageous companion to go with me."
Before he had finished speaking, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind shouted: "Take me, brother Military Advisor."
"Desist, brother," Song Jiang cried. "If someone was needed for arson or murder, pillaging homes or raiding towns, you would be just right. This is a careful delicate operation. You're much too violent."
"You all scorn me because I'm ugly. That's why you won't let me go."
"It's not that. Daming is full of police. If anyone should recognize you, you'd be finished."
"That doesn't matter. No one is better suited for what the Military Advisor wants."
Wu Yong intervened. "I'll take you if you'll promise me three things. If you don't, you'll just have to stay here in the stronghold."
"I'll promise you not three, but thirty!"
"First, you're like wildfire when you're drunk. From today on, you've got to quit drinking. You can begin again when we get back. Second, you'll go as a Taoist acolyte serving me. When I tell you to do something, you do it. Third—and this is the most difficult—starting tomorrow you're not to say another word, you're to become a mute. If you promise these three things, I'll take you along."
"I can promise not to drink, and to act like an acolyte. But if I can't talk, I'll stifle!"
"If you open your mouth you'll get us into a muddle."
"Of course, it's easy. I'll keep a copper coin in my mouth. That'll do it."
The chieftains laughed. Who could persuade Li Kui to remain behind?
That day a farewell feast was given in Loyalty Hall. In the evening, all retired. Early the next morning Wu Yong gathered a bundle of luggage and directed Li Kui, disguised as an acolyte, to tote it down the mountain on a carrying-pole. Song Jiang and the other chieftains saw them as far as the Shore of Golden Sands. They urged Wu Yong to be careful, and to keep Li Kui out of scrapes. Wu Yong and Li Kui took their leave. The others returned to the stronghold.
The two travelled four or five days, stopping at inns in the evening and rising at daybreak, when they cooked breakfast and continued their journey. Li Kui was a constant irritation to Wu Yong. After several days, they arrived at an inn on the outskirts of the city. They spent the night there, and when Li Kui went down to the kitchen to cook their evening meal he hit the waiter so hard the fellow coughed blood.
The waiter went to their room and complained to Wu Yong. "That mute acolyte of yours is too rough, I was just a little slow in lighting the stove and he gave such a punch I spit blood!"
Wu Yong apologized and handed the man a dozen strings of cash for his pains. He berated Li Kui. Of that we'll say no more.
They rose the next morning at dawn, cooked breakfast and ate. Wu Yong summoned Li Kui to the room.

"You pleaded to be taken along, and all you do is aggravate me. We're going into the city today. It's no place for fooling around. I don't want you to cost me my life!"
"I wouldn't dare!"
"Now remember this signal. If I shake my head, you're not to move."
Li Kui promised. The two left the inn and set out for the city in disguise. Wu Yong wore a black crinkled silk head kerchief that came down to his eyebrows, a black Taoist cassock trimmed in white, and a multicolored girdle. His feet were shod in square-toed cloth shoes, and he carried a pole with a bronze bell which shone like gold. Li Kui's bristly brown hair was wound up into two coils on either side of his head. His black tiger body was clad in a short brown gown. A multicolored short-fringed sash bound his bear-like waist. He wore a pair of open-work boots for climbing mountains. On a pole with a curved end a strip of paper dangled, reading: "Fortunes told. One ounce of silver." At that time robbers marauded throughout the land, and every prefecture and county had to be defended by troops. Since the Northern Capital was the leading city in Hebei, it was garrisoned by an army under the personal command of Governor Liang. It was a neatly laid out metropolis.
Wu Yong and Li Kui swaggered up to the gate. The forty or fifty soldiers on guard were gathered around an officer seated in a chair. Wu Yong approached and bowed.
"Where are you from, scholar?" one of the soldiers asked.
"My name is Zhang Yong. This is Li, my acolyte. I'm a wandering caster of horoscopes. I've come to this great city to tell fortunes." Wu Yong produced his false license and showed it to the soldier. "That acolyte has wicked eyes," some of the other soldiers said. "Shifty, like a thief."
Li Kui, who overheard, was ready to burst into action. Wu Yong hastily shook his head, and Li Kui lowered his gaze.
"It's a long story," Wu Yong said apologetically. "He's a deaf mute, but he's terribly strong. He's the son of one our family's bondmaids. I had to take him along. He has no manners at all. Please forgive him."
Wu Yong strolled on through the gate, with Li Kui plodding at his heels. They walked towards the center of the city. Wu Yong rang his bell and chanted:

*Gan Luo won fame early, Zi Ya late,*
*Peng Zu and Yan Hui, each a different life span,*
*Fan Dan was poor, Shi Chong rich,*
*Fortune varies for every man.*

"Fortune, destiny, fate. I predict life, I foretell death, I know who shall rise high and who shall fall low," cried Wu Yong. "I'll tell your future for one ounce of silver." Once more he vigorously rang his bell.
Fifty or sixty laughing children trailed behind. Singing and giggling, they passed the gate of Magnate Lu's storehouse. Soon Wu Yong returned and marched by again, followed by the hooting youngsters.
Lu was seated in the office, watching his stewards check merchandise in and out. Hearing the noise, he asked the man in charge for the day: "What's all that racket outside?"
"It's really very funny," the man replied. "Some Taoist fortune teller from out of town is walking the streets offering his services. But he wants an ounce of silver. Who would give that much! With him is an acolyte, a sloppy looking fellow who walks like nothing human. Kids are following them and laughing."
"He wouldn't venture to make such large claims if he wasn't a man of learning. Invite him in."
The steward went out. "Sir priest," he called. "The magnate asks you in."
"Who is he?"
"The magnate Lu Junyi."
Wu Yong told Li Kui to come along, raised the door curtain, and entered the office. He instructed Li Kui to sit down on a goose-necked chair and wait. Then he approached Lu and bowed.
Lu bowed in return. "Where are you from, sir priest? What is your name?"
"My name is Zhang Yong. I call myself the Mouth That Talks of Heaven. I'm from Shandong, originally. I can cast horoscopes for emperors. I can predict births and deaths, high position or poverty. For an ounce of silver I can tell your fortune."
Lu invited Wu Yong to a small alcove in the rear of the hall. They seated themselves as host and guest. After tea was served, Lu ordered the steward to bring an ounce of silver.
"Please, sir priest, tell me my humble fate."
"When were you born?"
"A gentleman asks only about misfortune, not fortune. So you needn't talk of prosperity. Just tell me what else is in store," said Lu. "I'm thirty-two." He stated the year, month, day and hour of his birth.
Wu Yong took out an iron abacus, calculated a moment, then slammed it down. "Fantastic!" he exclaimed.
Startled, Lu demanded: "What lies ahead for me?"
"I'll tell you frankly, if you won't take it amiss."
"Point out the road to the lost traveller, sir priest. Speak freely."
"Within the next hundred days, bloody tragedy will strike. Your family wealth will be lost, and you will die at the sword."
Lu Junyi laughed. "You're wrong, sir priest. I was born in the Northern Capital and grew up in a wealthy family. No male ancestor ever broke the law, no female widow ever remarried. I conduct my affairs with decorum, I do nothing unreasonable, I take no tainted money. How can I have incurred a bloody fate?"
Wu Yong's face hardened. He returned the silver piece, rose, and walked towards the door. "People always prefer to hear what pleases them," he sighed. "Forget it. I'm willing to point out a smooth road, but you take my good words as evil. I'll leave you now."
"Don't be angry, sir priest. I was only joking. I'd like to hear your instructions."
"If I speak directly, don't hold it against me."
"I'm listening carefully. Hold nothing back."
"Your fortune has always been good, magnate. But your horoscope conflicts with this year's fate god, and the result is evil. Within a hundred days, your head shall be separated from your body. This has been destined. There is no escape."
"Isn't there any way to avoid it?"
Wu Yong again calculated on the abacus. He said: "Only if you go to a place one thousand *li* southeast of here. Although you may suffer some shocks and alarms, you will not be injured."
"If you can arrange that, I'll gladly reward you!"
"I'll tell you a four line prediction verse. You must write it on the wall. When it comes true, you'll appreciate my mystic powers."
Lu called for a brush pen and ink slab. Wu Yong sang these four lines and Lu wrote them on the white calcimined wall:

*A boat sails through the reeds,*
*At dusk a hero wanders by,*
*Righteous to the very end,*
*Out of trouble you must fly.*

Wu Yong collected his abacus, bowed and turned to go. Lu Junyi urged him to stay, at least until the afternoon.
"Thank you for kindness," said Wu Yong, "but I must get on with my fortune telling. I'll come and pay my respects another day."
Lu saw him to the gate. Li Kui took up the pole with the curved end and went out. Wu Yong bid Lu farewell. Followed by Li Kui, he departed from the city and returned to the inn. There he paid their bill and collected his luggage. Li Kui carried the fortune telling sign.
"The main job has been done," Wu Yong exulted, after they had left the inn. "Now we must hurry back to the stronghold and prepare our welcome for Lu Junyi. Sooner or later, he'll come."

*

To return to Lu Junyi, every evening at dusk he stood in front of his hall and gazed unhappily at the sky, sometimes muttering unintelligibly to himself. One day he impatiently summoned his stewards. Before long, they all arrived.
The chief steward was named Li Gu. Originally from the Eastern Capital, he had come to join a friend living in Daming. But the man was nowhere to be found and, after a time, Li Gu fell, frozen, outside the magnate's gate. Lu Junyi saved his life and took him into the household. Because Li Gu was diligent, could write and calculate, Lu put him in charge of household affairs. Within five years he rose to the post of chief steward. He managed all matters of both household and outside business, and had forty or fifty clerks working under him.
These now followed Li Gu into the hall and respectfully greeted the magnate. Lu looked them over and asked: "Where is that man of mine?"
The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when a person came before him. Over six feet tall, he was twenty-four or -five years of age, was adorned with a thin mustache and goatee, and had a slim waist and broad shoulders. The kerchief on his head was twisted into the shape of a papaya, with his hair coming up through a hole in the middle. His white gown had a round silk collar of filagreed silver thread. Around his waist was a girdle woven of fine spotted red thread. His feet were shod in brown oiled leather boots. A pair of gold rings shaped like animals dangled from the back of his head. His neckerchief was of fragrant silk. A fan inscribed by a famous calligrapher was tucked slantwise at his waist. Over one ear hung an all-season flower.
The young man was a native of the Northern Capital. After losing his parents as a child, he had been adopted by the Lu family. Because he had pure white skin, Lu engaged a skilled tattooist to decorate his body. The result was kingfisher blue added to white jade. No one could match the young man in beauty of physique. Not only was he gorgeously tattooed, but he could blow and strum musical instruments, sing and dance, and play word games. There was nothing he didn't know, nothing he couldn't do.
He could speak various dialects, knew the special jargon of many different trades. As for the fighting arts, no one could touch him. Hunting in the outskirts of the city, he could bring down any game with his bow. He used only three short arrows, and never missed. Wherever his arrow struck, there his quarry fell. Returning to the city in the evening, he seldom brought back less than a hundred birds. In archery contests, he cleaned up all the prizes.
His mind, too, was quick and agile. You had only to mention a problem and he gave you the answer. His name was Yan Qing. People of the Northern Capital were fond of quips, and they called him the Prodigy. He was Lu Junyi's most trusted adviser.
The men Lu summoned greeted him respectfully and stood in two lines. Li Gu headed the line on the left, Yan Qing headed the line on the right. Lu the Magnate addressed them.
"Last night a fortune teller predicted that unless I took refuge a thousand *li* southeast of here, I would suffer a bloody disaster within a hundred days. I remember now that southeast of here in Tai'an Prefecture, there's a temple on Mount Taishan called the Golden Temple of the Match-Heaven God. This god governs births and deaths and man's disasters. I shall go there and burn incense to expiate my sins and avoid the calamity. At the same time I can do a bit of business and admire the scenery. Li Gu, I want you to get me ten large carts and load them with our Shandong local products. Pack your luggage, because you're going with me. Yan Qing, you stay and look after the household and our storehouses. Li Gu will turn over his duties to you. I'm leaving in three days."
"Master, you're making a mistake," said Li Gu. "Everybody knows fortune tellers are slick talkers. You shouldn't listen to that fellow's claptrap. Remain at home. What's there to be afraid of?"
"My fate has been determined. Don't try to stop me. Once disaster strikes, it's too late to be sorry."
"Please listen to my humble opinion, master," said Yan Qing. "The road to Tai'an runs pass Liangshan Marsh, which is infested with bandits under Song Jiang. Though they rob and pillage, government soldiers and police can't get near them. Wait until times are more settled, if you want to burn incense. Don't believe that fortune teller's wild story. He's probably a plant from Mount Liangshan, sent to stir you up so that they can trick you into joining them. It's too bad I wasn't home last night. With two or three phrases I could have exposed the fellow and made him a laughing stock."
"You're both talking rot. Who would dare to deceive me! Those oafs in Liangshan Marsh—what do they matter? I can scatter them like grass, in fact I'll go and nab them. My prowess with weapons will show them what a real man is like!"
Before he had finished speaking, a woman emerged from behind a screen. It was his wife Jia.
"Husband," she said, "I've been listening to what you've been saying. 'Better to stay at home than even one *li* roam,' as the old saw goes. Ignore that fortune teller. Why put your vast family affairs aside and expose yourself to shocks and alarms in a den of tigers and lair of dragons just to do some business? Stay at home, be calm and content, relax quietly, and naturally nothing will go wrong."
"You don't know anything about it, woman! My mind is made up. I don't want to hear any more from any of you!"
Yan Qing said: "Basking in the reflection of your good fortune, master, I have been able to learn a little skill with weapons. I don't mean to boast, but if you take me with you and any bandits happen along, I should be able to knock off forty or fifty. Leave Chief Steward Li to look after things at home and let me accompany you."
"Li Gu knows trade practices I don't understand. He'll save me a lot of trouble. That's why I'm taking him and leaving you here. I have others to keep the accounts. All you have to do is take charge of the manor."
"My feet have been bothering me quite a lot lately," said Li Gu. "It's hard for me to walk any distance."
Lu was very angry. "Soldiers are trained for months for the sake of a few days of battle. I want you to go with me on this trip, and you've got all kinds of excuses. The next man who defies me is going to get a taste of my fists!"
Li Gu, frightened, looked towards the mistress. But she only walked sadly into an inner room. Yan Qing was even less inclined to speak.
Silently swallowing his humiliation, Li Gu went to pack the luggage. He got ten drivers, ten large carts, and forty or fifty animals to haul them. He loaded on the luggage, and had the merchandise securely tied in place.
Lu Junyi put his own affairs in order. The third day, he burned paper prayers, dispersed money to the male and female members of his family, and gave instructions to each. That evening he directed Li Gu to finish up quickly and prepare to leave the city first with two servants. Li Gu went off. The magnate's wife, seeing the carts, wept.
At the fifth watch the following morning, Lu rose, washed, and put on a complete set of new clothes. He gathered his weapons and went to the rear hall, where he burned incense in farewell to his ancestors. He instructed his wife: "Take good care of things at home. At the latest I'll be back in three months; at the earliest, only forty or fifty days."
"Be careful on the road, husband. Write to us when you can, so that we'll know how you're getting on."
Yan Qing came forward and bowed, in tears. Lu had orders for him as well.
"Be diligent in all things. Don't go running off to roister in houses of pleasure."
"Since you'll be away, master, I certainly won't slacken."
Staff in hand, Lu left the city. He was met by Li Gu.
"You and the two servants go on ahead," Lu directed. "When you find a clean inn have them prepare food, so that it's ready for the drivers and porters when they get there, and we won't be delayed."
Li Gu also carried a staff. He set off with the two servants. Lu and other servants followed with the carts. They passed splendid mountains and elegant waterways, travelling broad roads and level plains.
"I couldn't have enjoyed such scenery if I remained at home," Lu thought pleasurably.
After travelling forty *li* or more he was met by Li Gu, and they had a pastry lunch. Li Gu went on again. Another forty or fifty *li* and they reached an inn, where Li Gu had arranged quarters for the night for all.
Lu went to his room, leaned his staff, hung up his felt hat, removed his knife, and changed his shoes and stockings. It goes without saying that he rested and dined. The company rose early the next morning and cooked breakfast. When everyone had eaten, the animals were hitched to the carts and the march resumed.
They proceeded in this manner for several days, stopping at dark and continuing at dawn. Again, they put up at an inn for the night. The following morning they were preparing to go on when one of the waiters addressed Lu Junyi.
"I must tell you, sir, that less than twenty *li* from here the road passes an entry to Liangshan Marsh. The lord of the mountain is Song Jiang. Although he doesn't harm travellers, rather than suffer frights and alarms it's best to go by quietly."
"So that's how it is," Lu exclaimed. He told a servant to fetch his trunk. Lu unlocked it and took out a bundle from which he extracted four white silk banners. He ordered the waiter to bring four bamboo poles and attach the banners, one to each. On them, Lu wrote this series of lines:

*From the Northern Capital Lu the Bold*
*Transports merchandise a long, long way,*
*Determined is he to catch the robbers,*
*Fully his manliness to display.*

Li Gu and the others groaned. "Are you a relative of Song the mountain lord, sir?" asked the waiter.
"I'm a magnate from the Northern Capital. What relation would I be to those crooks! I've come specially to nab that lout Song Jiang."
"Speak softly, sir," begged the waiter. "Don't get me involved. This is no joke. Even with ten thousand men, you'll never get near Song Jiang!"
"Bullshit. You oafs are probably all in cahoots with him!"
The waiter was beside himself with despair. The drivers and porters were dumbfounded. Li Gu and the other servants knelt at the magnate's feet.
"Master, have pity on us. Save our lives, go back. Rather that than prayers for our departed souls!"
"What do you know!" Lu barked. "Would those little finches dare contend with an eagle? I've always wanted to show my prowess with arms, but I've never met a foe worthy. Today, I have my chance, here and now. Why wait! In those bags on my cart I've got some good hemp rope. The bandits I don't kill I'll knock down with my halberd. You tie them up and put them on the carts. If necessary abandon the merchandise. We'll use the carts for transporting prisoners. I'll deliver their chief to the capital and claim the reward. That will satisfy my wish of a lifetime. If a single one of you refuses to go along with me now, I'll slaughter you right here!"

The four banners were affixed to the four leading carts. The remaining six carts followed. Li Gu and the rest, weeping and sniveling, had no choice but to obey the magnate. Lu took out a halberd head and tied it to his staff tightly with three strong knots. He hastened the carts forward in the direction of Liangshan Marsh. Li Gu trembled with every step he took on the winding mountain road, but Lu pushed on relentlessly.

They marched from early morning till almost noon. In the distance they saw a big forest, with trees larger than a two-man embrace. When they reached the edge of the forest a shrill whistle pierced the air, terrifying Li Gu and the two servants. They didn't know where to hide.

Lu Junyi ordered that the carts be pulled to one side, under guard. The drivers and porters, bemoaning their fate, crawled beneath the carts. "When I knock the robbers down, you tie them up," Lu shouted. Before the words were out of his mouth, four or five hundred outlaws emerged from the edge of the forest. Behind them the crashing of gongs could be heard. Another four or five hundred brigands cut off Lu's retreat. Cannon boomed in the woods, and out leaped a bold warrior.

"Do you recognize the mute acolyte, Magnate Lu?" he called, brandishing a pair of axes.

Lu suddenly understood. "I've often thought of capturing you robbers," he cried, "and I'm here today to do it. Bring that knave Song Jiang down the mountain to surrender. Any tricks and I'll kill you all. I won't spare a one!"

Li Kui laughed. "Magnate, you've fallen for a clever ruse by our Military Advisor. Come and take your place in a chieftain's chair."

Enraged, Lu twisted his halberd and charged. Li Kui met him with axes swinging. Before they had fought three rounds Li Kui jumped from the combat circle, turned, and headed for the forest. Lu pursued, halberd level. Li Kui ran into the wood, zigzagging left and right. In a towering fury, Lu plunged in after him. Li Kui flew into a grove of pines. By the time Lu got there, his adversary was gone.

He was turning away when a group of men appeared from the side of the grove and a voice called: "Don't go, Magnate. Do you know me?"

Lu looked and saw a big fat monk, dressed in a black cassock and carrying an iron Buddhist staff by its lower end.

"Who are you, monk?" the magnate shouted.

The man laughed. "I'm Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk. I'm here on orders from brother Song Jiang to welcome you and lead you up the mountain."

"Bald donkey," Lu exploded, "how dare you be so rude!" Twisting his halberd, he rushed the monk.

Zhishen met him with whirling staff. Before they had fought three rounds, the monk parried Lu's halberd, turned and ran. Lu gave chase. At that moment Wu Song the Pilgrim stepped forth from among the brigands. He charged, brandishing two swords. Lu abandoned his pursuit of Zhishen and battled with Wu Song. They had fought less than three rounds when the Pilgrim hastened away.

Lu Junyi laughed. "I won't chase you. You louts aren't worth it!"

But then someone on the mountain slope called out: "You don't understand, Magnate. Haven't you heard that man fears falling into the water, just as iron fears falling into the fire? Our Military Advisor has made his plan. How can you escape?"

"Who are you, rogue?" Lu yelled.

The man laughed. "Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon."

"Petty crook, don't try to get away," the magnate fumed. He dashed at Liu, halberd in hand.

They had just battled three rounds when a voice off at an angle shouted: "Gallant Mu Hong the Unrestrained is here!" And Liu Tang and Mu Hong, each with a halberd, attacked Lu Junyi.

Before they had gone three rounds, Lu heard footsteps behind him. "At you!" he exclaimed. Liu Tang and Mu Hong fell back a few paces, and Lu whirled to face the adversary in his rear. It was Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle. From three sides Lu's foes assailed him. But he was completely unruffled, in fact the more he fought the stronger he became.

As they were belaboring each other, gongs crashed on the mountain top. The three chieftains feinted with their weapons and swiftly withdrew. Reeking of sweat from his exertions, Lu did not pursue. He returned to the edge of the forest to seek his carts and drivers. But the ten carts, their drivers and all the animals had vanished. Lu groaned.

He clambered to a high point and looked around. Far in the distance at the foot of a slope he saw a group of brigands driving the carts and animals before them. Li Gu and the others, tied in a line, followed. To the beat of drums and gongs, they were being led to a grove of pines.

Lu's heart burst into flames, rage engulfed him like smoke. Halberd in hand, he chased after the procession. When he was not far from the slope two bold fellows shouted at him: "Where do you think you're going?" One was Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard, the other Lei Heng the Winged Tiger.

"Small-time robbers," Lu yelled back. "Return my carts and drivers and animals!"

Zhu Tong twiddled his beard and laughed. "How can you be so dense, Magnate? Our Military Advisor often says: 'A star can only fly down, it can never fly back.' The way things stand, you might just as well come with us to the fortress and take your place in a chieftain's chair."

Infuriated, Lu charged the two with levelled halberd. Zhu Tong and Lei Heng met him with their own weapons. Before they had fought three rounds the former constables turned and fled.

"I'll never get my carts back unless I knock one of those bandits over," thought Lu. He pursued them recklessly around the bend of the slope. But the two had vanished. Instead, he heard the sound of clappers and flutes wafting down from the mountain top. He looked up. Fluttering in the breeze was an apricot yellow pennant on which was embroidered the words: *Righteous Deeds on Heaven's Behalf.* And there beyond, beneath a gold-spangled red silk umbrella, was Song Jiang, with Wu Yong to his left and Gongsun Sheng to his right. They were accompanied by a column of sixty or seventy men. All politely hailed Lu Junyi.

"Magnate, we trust you've been well!"

Lu grew very angry, and he cursed them by name. Wu Yong tried to soothe him.

"Calm yourself, brother. Song Jiang has long known of your virtue, and holds you in the greatest respect. He sent me to call at your gates and lure you up the mountain so that we might perform righteous deeds for Heaven together. Please don't take it amiss."

"Presumptuous bandits," yelled Lu. "How dare you trick me!"

From behind Song Jiang emerged Hua Rong with bow and arrow. "Magnate," he called, "don't force a showdown between us. Let me demonstrate my archery."

Before he had finished speaking, the arrow whizzed straight into the big red tassel atop Lu's broad-brimmed felt hat. Astonished, the magnate turned and fled. On the heights, drums shook the ground. From the east side of the mountain, led by Qin Ming the Thunderbolt and Panther Head Lin Chong, came a body of yelling mounted men, banners waving. A similar troop, also shouting and waving banners, charged out from the west side of the mountain, led by Two Rods Huyan Zhuo and Metal Lancer Xu Ning. Lu was so frightened he didn't know which way to go.

It was growing dark. Lu's feet hurt, and he was hungry. Frantically seeking an escape route, he hurried along a small mountain path. At dusk, mist veiled the distant waters, fog locked the deep mountains. The moon and stars were dim, the vegetation a pale blur. Lu was reaching the ends of the earth, if not the limits of the sky.

He looked around. There was nothing but reeds here, and misty water. Lu raised his face to the sky and sighed. "I wouldn't listen to good advice, and now I'm in a terrible mess!"

A small boat slid out from among the reeds, sculled by a fisherman. "You're very brave, sir traveller," the fisherman called. "This is the entry to Liangshan Marsh. What are you doing here in the middle of the night?"

"I've lost my way and can't find a place to spend the night. Save me!"

"This region is very broad, but there is a market town. It's over thirty *li* if you go by land, and the road is tortuous and difficult to follow. By water, though, it's only four or five *li*. Give me ten strings of cash and I'll take you there in my boat."

"Get me to an inn in the market town and I'll give you plenty of silver."

The fisherman rowed up to the shore and helped Lu on board, then shoved off with his iron-tipped bamboo pole. When they had gone four or five *li*, they heard the sound of an oar in the reeds ahead. A small craft flew out. On it were two men. The one in the prow, buff naked, gripped a long punting pole. The one in the stern was wielding a sweep oar. Pole held athwart, the man forward sang this song:

*Though poems and books I cannot read,*
*And in Liangshan Marsh I dwell,*
*I shoot fierce tigers with snarebows and arrows,*
*Fresh baited hooks bring me fish as well.*

Lu Junyi, startled, didn't dare utter a sound. From reeds on the right, two more men rowed out on another small boat. The man in the stern plied a creaking sweep oar. The man in the bow held horizontally a long punting pole. He sang this song:

*My favorite pastime is killing men,*
*A rogue I've been since the day I was born,*
*Thousands in gold means nothing to me,*
*I'm determined to nab the Jade Unicorn.*

Lu the Magnate groaned. Now, from the middle reeds a third boat came skimming towards him. The man in the prow was holding an iron-tipped wooden pole upside down, and he was singing this song:

*A boat sails through the reeds,*
*At dusk a hero wanders by,*
*Righteous to the end.*
*Out of trouble you must fly.*

The men on all three craft hailed Lu respectfully. The one in the center was Ruan the Second. Ruan the Fifth was on the boat to the left, Ruan the Seventh was on the boat to the right. The three craft approached. Lu was very alarmed. He knew he couldn't swim.

"Land me on the nearest shore," he urged the fisherman.

The man laughed. "By the blue sky above and the green waters below, I was born on the Xunyang River, came to Liangshan Marsh, and have never concealed my name. Meet Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon! If you don't surrender, Magnate, you'll be throwing your life away!"

Lu was astonished. "It's either you or me!" he shouted.

He lunged at Li's heart with his halberd. Li saw the blade coming. Hands on the sweep oar, he flipped over in a back somersault and landed ka-plonk in the water. The boat spun around in a circle and the halberd fell overboard. Suddenly, at the stern, a man shot up from under the water with a shout. It was White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun. Treading water, he grasped the rudder and gave a quick twist. The boat turned turtle, and the hero landed in the drink. Could he live through this? Truly, a plan had been laid to catch a phoenix and cage a dragon, a pit had been dug for a heaven-startling, earth-shaking man.

Now when that monk from the Glorious Dragon Temple happened to mention the Jade Unicorn, the Professor boasted: "I can easily go to the Northern Capital and get him to come here, just by using the persuasive powers of this little tongue of mine. It would be easy as falling off a log. All I'd need is a bold companion to go with me."

Before he had finished speaking, Iron Ox shouted out: "Professor, my dear friend, take me along with you!"

Song Jiang said sternly: "Absolutely not, brother, you'll stay here! For killing and arson, for plunder and pillage, for looting and destruction, you're the one we'll employ. But this is delicate business, you've not got the temperament for it. You're not to go."

"You all despise me, because you think I'm ugly," Iron Ox complained. "That's why you won't let me."

"We don't despise you," Song Jiang said. "But just now the capital will be packed with police. If you were to get caught you'd simply have thrown your life away for nothing."

"I don't care!" said Iron Ox. "I still want to go along with him."

The Professor said: "I'll take you with me if you'll obey three conditions. If you're not prepared to do as I say, you'd better stay here in the stronghold."

"Not only three, I'd obey thirty conditions!" cried Iron Ox.

"First condition: when you drink you blaze up like fire, so from today you've got to cut out drinking, no wine till we get back again. Second condition: you'll dress for this trip as a Taoist acolyte, my disciple, and if I call you, you must come immediately. Third condition — this is the hardest: from tomorrow you're not to speak a word, you're to pretend to be dumb. If you accept these three conditions, I'll take you."

"The bit about not drinking and dressing as a Taoist acolyte is all right. But to make me keep my mouth shut and not say anything, that'll kill me!"

"If you open your mouth, you're bound to stir things up," said the Professor.

"All right then," said Iron Ox. "I'll put a copper coin in my mouth, that'll do it!"

"Dear friend," said Song Jiang. "If you're really determined to go, you mustn't blame me if anything goes wrong."

"Of course, of course," said Iron Ox. "I'll be taking these two axes along. If the motherfuckers give me any trouble I'll cut a thousand fucking heads off!"

Everyone laughed. It was quite impossible to dissuade him. A farewell banquet was held that same day in the Ceremonial Hall and everyone went to bed late. Early next morning the Professor packed his bag and told Iron Ox to get dressed up as a Taoist acolyte and carry the luggage down the mountain on a carrying-pole. Song Jiang and the others accompanied them as far as Golden Sands Landing. They warned the Professor many times to be careful, and to keep a tight rein on Iron Ox. Then the two travellers said goodbye and the rest returned to the stronghold.

So the Professor and Iron Ox headed towards the Northern Capital. They travelled four or five days, each day stopping late at an inn to sleep and early in the morning making their breakfast and taking to the road again. Iron Ox gave the Professor many a headache along the way.

Before long they reached the Northern Capital and found an inn just outside. In the evening when Iron Ox went to prepare food in the kitchen he gave the waiter such a beating he was spitting blood. The waiter went to complain to the Professor: "That attendant of yours, the fellow who can't speak, is really horrible. Just because I was a bit slow with lighting the fire, he beat me up. Coughing up blood, I was."

The Professor hastened to apologize and gave him ten strings of silver to get himself fixed up. And, it goes without saying, he told Iron Ox off. When Iron Ox got up and cooked food for them again in the morning, the Professor called him in and said sternly: "You insisted on coming, damn you, and you're a continual nuisance on this journey. But we're going into the city now, and that's no laughing matter. Please don't put my life in jeopardy!"

"Of course not, I wouldn't dream of it," Iron Ox replied.

The Professor said: "We must have a secret signal. If I nod it means I want you to stop whatever you're doing at once."

Iron Ox took note.

They put on their disguises at the inn and made their way into the city. The Professor wore a sweat-band of black crepe over his forehead, a black Taoist robe with white borders, and a multi-coloured girdle of the kind you see on the Immortal Lu Dongbin. He had blunt-toed shoes of black cloth and was also holding a staff with a gilded copper bell on the end. Iron Ox's brown hair, usually unkempt, was coiled on either side of his head and fixed with a bone pin, his swarthy frame was enveloped in a short brown cassock of rough cloth, his thick waist was girt with a coloured sash with a short fringe, and he wore a pair of light climbing boots on his feet. He carried a pole taller than his own height bearing a placard with the words: "One tael of silver to hear your fate and fortune."

When they were dressed, they locked the door of their room and headed for the south gate of the city. It was only a quarter of a mile or so before they saw the gates of the Northern Capital. What a sight!

*The walls are high, the ramparts rugged, the moat broad and deep. Deers' antlers are planted all around, sharp tines are set on every side. The drumtowers are imposing, all bedecked with many-hued banners of silk. The battlements are flat and level, piled high with swords, lances, pikes and halberds. The coffers are overflowing, the citizenry flourishing. From courts to east and west music fills the heavens, shops to north and south are bursting with the goods that enrich earthly life. A thousand officials hold sway over the many-tiered city. A million of our people are dwelling in this land.*

Now in those days many thieves and robbers roamed the world and every region, every province and district was strongly guarded. Especially here in the Northern Capital, the most important city of Hebei, defended by the garrison troops of Governor-General Liang: here one would naturally expect things to be well organized.

As the Professor and Iron Ox strolled up to the city gate, therefore, they found forty or fifty men guarding it, presided over by a seated officer. The Professor approached and bowed. One of the guards said: "Where have you come from, master?"

"My name is Zhang Yong," the Professor said. "This disciple of mine is called Li. I make my living among the rivers and lakes casting horoscopes. I am coming to the capital to tell fortunes." He took out his false certificate which he showed to the corporal.

Someone said: "That disciple's got a way of looking at you just like a bloody criminal!" Iron Ox was about to take offence at this, but the Professor gave a quick nod and Iron Ox hung his head. The Professor went up to the gatekeeper and said apologetically: "It's a long story. This disciple of mine is deaf and dumb, but he's got prodigious strength. He was brought up by my family and I have no choice but to take him with me. I am afraid he doesn't know the ways of the world. I beg you to forgive him!"

They bade farewell to the guards and went on their way, heading for the centre of town, Iron Ox striding behind with his head held high. The Professor was shaking his bell and intoning: "To some it comes early, to others late; to each is given a different date. You may end poor, you may get rich, come to me if you want to know which." From time to time he would say: "Come along then, hear your fate and fortune, all you want to know about births and deaths, noble and base. Just a tael of silver to know what lies ahead," and then he would give his bell a shake. Fifty or sixty urchins followed behind, making fun of him. They came thus to the gate of Mr. Lu's pawnshop, amid much song and laughter and toing and froing, the children in a great uproar.

Mr. Lu, the Jade Unicorn, happened to be sitting in front of his warehouse, watching his assistants checking in goods, when he heard this commotion in the street and asked the man in charge: "What's all the excitement for out there?"

The man replied: "It's a laugh, sir! There's this travelling fortune-teller in the street. He's asking a whole tael of silver to tell your fortune, but who's going to pay that much? And there's this really uncouth novice with him who walks like nothing on earth. The children are all running after them laughing."

The Unicorn said: "He must be a man of great learning or he wouldn't ask so much. Go and ask him to come in."

The employee dashed out and shouted: "Master, the boss wants to see you."

"Who wants to see me?" said the Professor.

"Mr. Lu asks you to come in," said the man.

The Professor turned back, with the acolyte at his heels. Drawing aside the curtain he went in and stopped before the hall. He ordered Iron Ox to sit on a little goose-necked chair and wait for him. Here is what met his eyes as he went on in:

*Large, round eyes surmounted by clear eyebrows like a circumflex accent, a tall and upright stature, majestic bearing, god-like demeanour. The staff is his preferred weapon and in defensive technique he is indisputably a master. Of distinguished lineage, he inherits one of the most famous names in the capital. On the battlefield he will take on ten thousand horsemen, drive back a thousand infantry. Noble and generous he is, ever a defender of right. His talents are truly universal. This is Mr. Lu, known as the Unicorn.*

The Professor made his obeisance, and the Unicorn bowed in return and asked: "May I ask where you are from, Master, and what is your name?"

The Professor said: "My name is Zhang Yong and my religious name is Heaven's Spokesman. My people are from Shandong and I know how to cast a horoscope according to the official rules. I can predict births and deaths, riches or poverty. If you will give me a tael of gold or silver, I will tell your fortune."

The Unicorn asked him to come inside and took him to a little pavilion at the back of the house where he gave him the seat of honour. When they had drunk tea he told the servant to bring a tael of silver, and after handing over the fee, asked if he might trouble the holy father to cast an eye on his life.

The Professor said: "Please let me have the day and month of your birth for the calculation."

The Unicorn said: "I would like to know the bad, not the good, Master. There's no need to go into anything about wealth and honours. I'd just like to know about present actions, that's all. My age is thirty-two ..." He went on to give the year, month, day and hour of his birth.

The Professor took out an iron abacus and placed it on the table. He did a few calculations, and then pushed the abacus away, crying in a loud voice: "Oh, my God!"

Somewhat taken aback, the Unicorn asked: "Is it something very good or bad?"

The Professor said: "Please excuse me if I speak bluntly."

The Unicorn said: "I ask for nothing else but to receive your directions. Please speak freely."

The Professor said: "According to your fortune, there is going to be some bloody event within the next hundred days; your wealth and property cannot protect you from violent death."

The Unicorn laughed at this. "You must have got it wrong, Master. I happened to be born in the Northern Capital. I grew up in a rich man's house. My ancestors were faultless citizens. Among my female relatives none was ever unprincipled enough to remarry. Besides all this, I always act circumspectly and never do anything unreasonable or risky. How can some event involving bloodshed be hanging over me?"

The Professor's face had changed; he had turned pale. He quickly picked up the money he had been given and handed it back. Then he stood up to leave. He said with a deep sigh: "Verily heaven flatters men with false hopes. Well, well! My warning is clear and straightforward. But if honest advice is to be construed as an evil intent, I beg to be excused!"

The Unicorn said: "Do not be angry Master. I was only joking. I do wish to hear what you have to tell me."

The Professor said: "Then please do not be offended if I speak plainly."

"I shall listen carefully. Please conceal nothing."

"With all respect then, you have until now been blessed with good fortune, but this year your stars are contrary and you must expect ill effects. Within the next hundred days there will be dead bodies and strange signs. This is predestined. It cannot be prevented."

The Unicorn said: "Is there not some way I can escape?"

The Professor made some more calculations on the abacus, before replying: "Only if you go to reside in the south-east. If you are beyond a radius of three hundred miles this catastrophe can be avoided. Although there are still some reasons for fear, there will be no serious physical danger."

The Unicorn said: "If I manage to avoid the trouble I shall be truly grateful."

The Professor said: "Four verses are relevant to your fate. I will tell them to you and you must write them on the wall. Later they will be confirmed and you can verify my clairvoyance."

The Unicorn called for a brush and ink in order to write on the whitewashed wall. The Professor recited these four verses: "Through the reeds a small boat steers. All of a sudden a hero appears. The loyal man must seek a way out. There's nothing to do but to turn about."

When the Unicorn had written all this down, the Professor picked up his abacus, bowed and prepared to leave. The Unicorn tried to persuade him to stay. "Won't you sit down for a little, Master," he said. "Leave in the afternoon."

"I am most obliged to you," the Professor said. "But I have other fortunes to tell. I will come and pay my respects another day." He rose to leave. The Unicorn saw him to the door. Iron Ox took up his staff and went out. The Professor bade farewell to the Unicorn and with Iron Ox in tow left the city. They returned to the inn, paid for their room and food, and packed their bags. Iron Ox carried the sign and as they left the inn the Professor said to him: "Good work! Now we must hurry back to the stronghold and complete our strategy, prepare a trap for the Unicorn. Because he will be coming, that's for sure!"

We shall say nothing of the Professor's and Iron Ox's return to the stronghold. Rather we shall turn to the Unicorn, who after having his fortune told felt extremely ill at ease. He simply could not sit still. He was of course another one of the stars, destined to join the company. Anyway, having heard those predictions, he couldn't stand it another day and told his servant to summon all his employees for a meeting to discuss the business. Soon they were all present, including the chief administrator, a fellow called Li Gu. This Li Gu was originally from the Eastern Capital. He had come to the north to stay with a friend whom he had not been able to find. The Unicorn had found him freezing to death outside his gate and had rescued him and looked after him. Seeing that he was conscientious and could write and do sums, he gave him a post in his business. Within five years he had promoted him to chief administrator. He was now responsible for the whole business both in the house and outside. Under him he had forty or fifty storekeepers. Everyone in the household called him Manager Li. On this occasion all the employees, great or small, followed Manager Li into the hall and saluted.

The Unicorn looked them over and said: "How is it a certain person is missing?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a man entered. He was a tall young man of about twenty-four or twenty-five, with a neat beard and moustache, very narrow-waisted and broad-shouldered. He wore a handkerchief on his head, formed into the shape of a papaya, and a white silk robe embroidered with silver thread. A red sash spotted like a spider circled his waist. He had brown boots of oiled leather. His hair was gathered at the back of his head by two gold rings shaped like animals and a scented scarf protected the back of his neck. A fan painted by a famous artist was stuck in his belt. At his temple he wore some seasonal flower.

This man was a native of the Northern Capital, whose parents had died when he was small. He had been brought up in the Unicorn's house. Because his skin was exceedingly white, the Unicorn had a tattoo artist tattoo him all over, from head to foot. The effect was like kingfisher blue inlay on a white marble pillar. For beauty of physique no one, no matter who, could compete with him. But he didn't only have physical beauty. He could play all kinds of musical instruments, sing and dance, he was brilliant at word games, there was nothing he couldn't do, nothing he didn't have knowledge of. He knew every dialect and understood the jargon of every profession. For physical dexterity no one surpassed him; he used a Sichuan bow and just three short arrows. When he went hunting in the surrounding countryside he never missed: the arrow always hit its mark and he would return to the city in the evening with hundreds of different kinds of birds. When an archery club held a competition you can be sure the prize would go to him. Moreover he was extremely smart, the kind of person who really knows his way around. His name was actually Yan Qing — just the one character for his given name — but people in the Northern Capital called him the Prodigy. A poem describes his qualities:

*The lips are as if painted with vermilion, the eyes shining like lacquer, the features might be carved in jade. His courage is exceptional, his spirit vaulting, his intellectual endowment tremendous. His manners are natural and easy, he would be an ornament even to Mount Liang. When he sings the old airs his voice control is superb, he is naturally a great connoisseur of art, and in the groves of carnal pleasure he is always a leading player. On the drums he can produce a thunderous sound, the tone is clear and ringing when he plays the pipes, his conversation is philosophical and profound. His moves with the staff are impossible to read and with his fists and his flying kicks he can put four hundred troops to flight. All are envious of his powers: they call him the Prodigy.*

Naturally this Prodigy was a trusted member of the Unicorn's household. He now entered the hall, gave a loud greeting and took the second place, so that Manager Li was standing on the left, the Prodigy on the right.

The Unicorn opened proceedings as follows: "I have just had my fortune told. I was informed that within the next hundred days some bloody event would occur, unless I leave home and take refuge more than three hundred miles away in the southeast. It has occurred to me that there is somewhere I can go in the southeast. That is where Mount Tai is, the Eastern Peak, the Temple of Divine Benevolence, where they help people who are caught up in catastrophes. In the first place I can go there and burn candles and incense to limit the danger and alleviate the effects. Secondly I can shelter there from this particular disaster. Thirdly I can do some trade and enjoy a change of scene. Manager Li, please find me ten wagons and load them up with Shandong goods. Then get your luggage packed because you're going travelling with me. Prodigy, you will look after the household. From today on you will hold the keys to the stores jointly with Manager Li. I want to start in three days' time."

Manager Li said: "You're making a mistake, Master. Have you forgotten the proverb, 'Fortunes are told to suit the hearer'? Don't listen to all that fortune-teller's nonsense. What danger can there be if you stay home?"

The Unicorn said: "My fate is preordained. Don't argue with me. If disaster should strike, it would be too late to do anything about it afterwards."

The Prodigy said: "My dear master, please hear me. If you take the road to Tai'an in Shandong, you have to pass by the Marshes of Mount Liang. Nowadays Song Jiang is there in the marshes, with a bunch of cutthroats who pillage and plunder; the government forces can't even get near them. If you want to go and burn incense, wait for a time of peace. Don't trust all that rot the fortune-teller told you yesterday. Who knows if he isn't a criminal from Mount Liang dressed up as a Taoist, come here to deceive you? I'm only sorry I wasn't at home yesterday. If I had been, I'd have put a question or two to that priest, and I bet we'd have had a few laughs."

The Unicorn said: "Stop talking nonsense. Who'd dare come here and play a trick like that on me? And as for that bunch of fools in the Marshes of Mount Liang, who gives a fig for them? I consider them a mere bagatelle. I've thought of going to arrest them myself. After all, everyone praises the skill I have acquired in martial arts. I'm known to be a magnificent fighter!"

Before he'd finished speaking, a woman made her appearance from behind a screen. This was the Unicorn's wife. She was twenty-five years of age and her name was Jia. They had been married five years. She now said: "Husband, I've been listening. There's an old saying: 'Even a mile away from home, is not as good as at home.' Don't listen to all that fortune-telling rubbish. Why abandon your vast business interests and go in fear and trepidation to trade in the tiger's den and the dragon's pool? You'd much better stay home and practise meditation to purify the mind and suppress desire, and live in peace and tranquillity, at one with nature."

The Unicorn said: "What would a woman know about it? It's better to believe something is true than ignore it. Disaster has always been man's best teacher. One must bear both good fortune and ill. Anyway, I've made up my mind, so all of you had better shut up!"

The Prodigy again said: "I live always in the shadow of your good fortune, Master. I too have learnt a few things about staff play. I don't want to boast, but I could help you if I went with you. If you happen to meet some bandits on the road, I could deal with forty or fifty of them. Why not leave Manager Li at home and let me serve you on the journey?"

The Unicorn said: "There are things about trading I don't understand, that's why I am taking Manager Li along. I need his knowledge; he is a great help to me. So I'm leaving you to look after the business. Someone else will keep the books, and you will only be in temporary command here."

Manager Li now said: "I'm afraid I've been having a bit of a problem with my feet lately. I definitely won't be able to walk very far."

The Unicorn blew up. "'Feed troops for a thousand days, you'll only get a morning's work out of them!'," he said. "I ask you to go travelling with me and all you can do is offer excuses. If anyone else tries to make difficulties he shall have a taste of my fists!"

Manager Li's face was ashen with fear and no one dared to say anything else. They parted thus.

Concealing his anger and holding his tongue, Manager Li went to prepare the luggage. He procured ten wagons and ten porters, around fifty draft animals, had the luggage loaded on and a number of bales of goods securely tied.

The Unicorn went to get dressed. On the third day he burnt offerings and distributed money in his household, giving to everyone, young and old, male and female. That evening he told Manager Li to get two servants, have everything packed up and leave the city. When Li was leaving, the Unicorn's wife saw the wagons and went away weeping. Next day at dawn the Unicorn rose, bathed himself, put on new clothes and breakfasted. He got offerings and went to the hall at the back to take leave of his ancestors and burn incense. Just before departing he exhorted his wife to take good care of the house and said he would be back in somewhere between forty days and three months.

"Go carefully," she said. "And write home often."

The Prodigy then prostrated himself.

"I leave you in charge here," the Unicorn said. "See that everything goes smoothly. Don't go out whoring and creating trouble."

"If you are going to be away, how could I possibly neglect my duty?" the latter said.

The Unicorn picked up his staff and left the city. When he met up with Manager Li, he said to him: "Take two companions and go on ahead. When you find a nice clean inn, prepare some food there and wait. When the wagons and porters catch up, we'll eat. That way we'll avoid wasting any time."

Manager Li went off staff in hand, with his two companions. The Unicorn and a number of servants followed behind, escorting the wagons. There was beautiful scenery, fine mountains, wide waters, a broad and level highway, and the Unicorn rejoiced at what he saw. "If I had stayed at home, I would have missed such sights!" he thought. After something over ten miles, Manager Li approached with some dim sum for lunch. After they had eaten, he again went on ahead. They did another fifteen miles or more, and then they came to an inn where Manager Li arranged accommodation for the whole caravan. The Unicorn entered the room, leant his staff against the wall, hung up his hat, took off his sword, and changed his shoes. Nothing need be said of that night's food and lodging. They were up very early next morning to make breakfast. When they had finished eating, the teams were harnessed to the wagons and they took to the road again.

So they went on, for several days, travelling till late in the evening, starting early. Then at one inn where they stayed, the waiter came to the Unicorn as they were about to set off in the morning and said: "I think as how I ought to let you know, sir, not ten miles from our inn here you'll pass by a road that leads to the Marshes of Mount Liang. Although Song Jiang, who's the chief of them up there on the mountain, doesn't usually harm travellers, you want to watch your step round there, don't make too much of a stir like."

"So that's the way it is," was all the Unicorn said. He told his servants to get out the trunk with his clothes. He opened it and took out a package, from which he took four silk banners. He asked the waiter to let him have four bamboo poles. To each of them he then attached one of the banners. On each banner was written in characters the size of a bucket:

Here comes the Unicorn,
*To martial arts and exploits born.*
*Though bent on trade in distant lands,*
He'll first destroy the robber bands.

When Manager Li and the others saw this, they cursed their fate. The waiter asked: "Is that lot on the mountain friends of yours, then, sir?"

"I am a rich merchant from the capital," the Unicorn replied. "How could a lot of robbers be my friends? I'm going to catch that villain, Song Jiang."

"Please sir, not so loud. Don't involve me in it. It's no joke! Even with a hundred thousand troops, you wouldn't get nowhere near him."

The Unicorn said: "Bollocks! You villains are all in league with them!"

The waiter could only lament, while the drivers were struck dumb. Manager Li knelt down and said: "Master, please take pity on us all and let us go home alive instead of provoking heaven's wrath."

The Unicorn shouted: "What do you know about it? How could that bunch of paltry sparrows expect to compete with a swan? I've been in training all my life, but so far I haven't met anyone prepared to take me on. Now I've got a wonderful opportunity. If I don't seize it, when will I ever have another like it? In a bag on that wagon over there I've got a quantity of good hemp rope. If those bandits really want to die, just let them attack me. I shall knock them over one by one, a halberd blow for each. You lot just tie them up for me and chuck them on the wagons. If necessary we'll throw out all the merchandise to make room for the prisoners and deliver the whole gang to the capital and demand the reward. It will fulfil a lifelong ambition of mine. If any of you don't want to go on, I can kill you here first."

The banners were now strung up on the four leading wagons. The other six followed on behind. Manager Li and the others, despite their bitter complaints, had to do as they were told. The Unicorn took out a blade and mounted it on his staff, securing it with three tight knots. He set off after the wagons on the Mount Liang road. When he saw the mountains ahead, Manager Li dragged his feet, whereas the Unicorn simply couldn't get along fast enough. They had been travelling from first thing in the morning till nearly midday, when they saw far ahead a large wood, consisting of more than a thousand trees of immense girth. When they reached this wood, they heard a loud whistle. There was nowhere for the terrified Li and the two servants to hide. The Unicorn ordered the wagons to draw to one side. The drivers all cowered underneath, cursing their luck.

"If I knock them down, you tie them up for me!" the Unicorn shouted.

He had hardly finished speaking when four or five hundred men marched out of the wood. Then gongs sounded behind and another four or five hundred troops now stood blocking the way back. A gun went off in the wood and a hero leapt out.

Iron Ox, for that's who it was, gripped his two axes and bellowed: "Hello Mr. Lu! Do you recognize the mute Taoist novice?"

This made the Unicorn wild. "I've often thought about coming to get you, you band of desperadoes," he shouted. "And now I'm here, so you can go and tell Song Jiang to come down from the mountain and surrender. If he refuses, I shall see that you all die, every man jack of you!"

Iron Ox roared with laughter. "Mr. Lu," he said, "you've fallen into the Professor's trap. Don't waste any more of our time, there's a seat waiting for you on the mountain."

The Unicorn enraged grasped his halberd firmly and charged Iron Ox, who came to meet him whirling his two axes. Before they had fought thirty bouts Iron Ox slipped from the circle of combat, turned and ran off towards the trees. The Unicorn levelled his halberd and raced after him. On reaching the wood Iron Ox dodged this way and that among the trees. The Unicorn stumbled after him, mad with rage, till Iron Ox plunged into a dense thicket and disappeared. The Unicorn followed, but he could see no one. When he tried to turn back, a group of men came out from the pines, one of whom shouted: "Don't go away, Mr. Lu. Do you recognize me?" It was a strapping great monk, wearing a black cassock and carrying a staff of steel.

"Where the hell are you from?" the Unicorn exclaimed.

The Monk laughed and answered: "I am Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk. I am under orders from our military commander to meet you and escort you up the mountain."

The Unicorn really blew up at this. "How dare you speak to me like that, you bald ass!" Gripping his sword he charged the monk, who came to meet him whirling his steel staff. But before they had fought three bouts, the monk struck his opponent's halberd aside and then turned and left. The Unicorn rushed after him. At this point Pilgrim Wu Song appeared from the ranks, brandishing two swords, and attacked. Despairing of catching the monk, the Unicorn now turned his attentions to the Pilgrim. But again, before three bouts were completed, this new opponent took to his heels.

The Unicorn laughed sarcastically. "I shan't chase you. You're not worth bothering with, you pitiful wretches!"

Before he'd finished speaking, someone shouted down the mountain: "Mr. Lu, what's the matter with you? Have you never heard that 'Men fear water, steel fears fire?' My brother made the plan, how can you think you'll escape?"

"And who the hell are you?" the Unicorn shouted.

The other answered with a laugh: "I'm Liu Tang, the Red-Haired Devil."

"Stay where you are, you scum!" the Unicorn shouted. And levelling his halberd he ran at Liu Tang. But when they had fought three bouts another man shouted from the sidelines: "Mu the Unstoppable is here!" Then the two of them, the Unstoppable and the Red-Haired Devil, fought the Unicorn. Another three bouts and the Unicorn heard footsteps behind him. He gave a fearsome shout which stopped the other two in their tracks, and turned to engage the new assailant, who was Skyhawk. The three leaders now fought him in a T-shaped formation. Quite undaunted, the Unicorn fought all the harder. In the midst of this, a gong sounded on top of the mountain and all three of his assailants slipped away.

The Unicorn was drenched in sweat from his efforts and did not pursue them. When he returned to the edge of the wood and started looking for the carts and their drivers, he could see none of them, not even the draft animals. He climbed a small hill to get a better view. All he saw was far off on the mountainside a group of soldiers driving his carts and oxen before them and Manager Li and his followers strung out behind. They were rapidly disappearing into the pine forest, while the gongs and drums continued to sound.

When he saw this the Unicorn began to breathe out smoke and fire. He took a firm grip on his halberd and set off in pursuit. When he had nearly reached the mountain, two warriors shouted: "Where are you going?" One of these was Whiskers and the other was Sergeant Lei. When the Unicorn saw them, he shouted: "You insurgent scum, give me back my wagons and my porters."

Whiskers, fingering his handsome beard and grinning broadly, said: "Mr. Lu, how come you are so slow on the uptake? You've fallen into our military commander's trap, so even if you were to grow wings you wouldn't be able to get away. Why don't you come straight away to the Ceremonial Hall, where a seat awaits you."
This enraged the Unicorn still further. Grasping his halberd firmly he charged them. Whiskers and Sergeant Lei met him with their weapons at the ready. But before they had fought three bouts they turned and left the field. The Unicorn thought to himself: "I've got to knock one of them over, or I'll never get back the wagons." Throwing caution to the winds, he raced up the hill after them. But neither was anywhere to be seen. From the summit however came the sound of drums and fifes and raising his eyes he saw a banner of apricot yellow embroidered with four characters: "To follow heaven's path," and looking again he saw an umbrella of red silk embroidered with gold thread, and sitting under it Song Jiang, with the Professor on his left and Taoist Gongsun on his right. A company of two hundred or more now sang out in unison: "Mr. Lu, we trust you're in good health!"
This only added fuel to the flames of his anger and caused him to hurl insults up the mountain. The Professor spoke soothingly: "Calm yourself, please. Song Jiang has long admired you. That is why he sent a certain friend to your home, to arrange for you to visit the mountain, in order that together we may do heaven's will. Please do not be angry with us!"
"You unprincipled brigands, how dare you set a trap for me!" the Unicorn bawled.
Colonel Hua, the Archer, now stepped out from behind Song Jiang, holding a bow. He took an arrow and looking the Unicorn straight in the eye shouted: "Mr. Lu, I am not trying to show off. I just want you to see my skill with an arrow." He had hardly finished speaking before an arrow whistled through the air and struck the red tassel on top of the Unicorn's hat.
This had its effect on the Unicorn, who turned and fled. Drums now began to thunder on top of the hill and Thunderclap and Leopard's Head charged down the eastern slope at the head of a cavalry troop, with streaming banners and shouting loudly. At the same time Twin Rods and the Spearsman led another troop of cavalry down the slope to the west, also waving banners and shouting. To his horror the Unicorn saw that he was cut off. It was getting late, and he was footsore and hungry. He was beginning to fear there was no way out, when he spotted a narrow path leading towards the loneliest part of the mountain, and took it eagerly. It was around dusk, and mist was rising over distant waters, fog enveloping the mountains. Stars and moon shed only the faintest of light and it was impossible to see anything clearly. All he could do was keep on walking, even if it led to the edge of heaven or the utmost limits of the earth.
He came in fact to Duck's-Bill Landing. Here all that met the eye was lonely reedbeds and a vast expanse of misty water.
When the Unicorn saw this he raised his eyes to heaven and heaved a great sigh: "It's all because I didn't pay due attention to the holy man's words that I am now assailed by such troubles."
In this unhappy state, he saw the reeds part and a fisherman appear, rowing a small boat. Leaning on his oars, the fisherman shouted out: "Well, you're a bold one, and no mistake! This is forbidden territory in the Marshes of Mount Liang. What brings you here, halfway through the night?"
"I lost my way, that's what," said the Unicorn. "I can't find anywhere to stay. Can you help me?"
"In these parts there is one little place, but you'd have to go ten miles round to get there, and besides the way is complicated, it's very hard to find. By water it's only a couple of miles. If you don't mind parting with ten strings of silver, I'll take you there in my boat."
"If you'll ferry me across to an inn in the village I'll even give you something extra," said the Unicorn.
So the fisherman rowed to the bank to pick the Unicorn up, and then punted off with his iron boatpole. They had just gone a mile or so when they heard the creak of oars in the reeds ahead of them: a skiff shot out. There were two people in it. The one in front was stripped naked and equipped with a fishing rod. The one behind was sculling. The front man rested his pole and began to sing:

For reading the classics, I've no inclination,
*To live on Mount Liang's my only vocation.*
*I'll trap you a beast or make you a bait will*
Fetch to your line a bloody great turtle.

The Unicorn got a shock. He didn't dare make a sound. From the reeds on the right hand side came another sound and another boat appeared with two men in it. The one in the back was sculling and laughing as he did so, the other was resting his pole and singing:

Since the day I was born, I've been counted a tough 'un;
*Thieving, fighting, and murdering ruffian.*
*I don't want your gold, and your riches I scorn;*
My ambition's to capture the Jade Unicorn.

The Unicorn could only curse his luck. Then another small boat came flying towards them with a man standing in the prow, carrying an iron-tipped wooden pole and singing:

Through the reeds, a small boat steers.
*All of a sudden a hero appears.*
*The loyal man seeks a way out.*
Nothing to do but to turn about.

When the songs finished, a greeting was shouted out from all 3 boats together. In the middle boat was Ruan the Second, in the left hand boat Ruan the Fifth, and in the right hand boat Ruan the Seventh. The three boats now joined forces and headed straight for them.
What he heard struck fear into the Unicorn's heart. It occurred to him that he had no idea how to swim. He began to urge the fisherman to take him to the bank quickly. The fisherman only laughed and said: "The blue sky is above, green water below. Me, I was born on the River Yangtze, but now I reside in the Marshes of Mount Liang. I'm not the kind who changes his name every other minute; Li Jun, the White-Water Dragon, that's who I am! Now if you don't surrender right off, you'll just be throwing your life away for nothing!"
The Unicorn was really scared now. Shouting "it's either you or me!" he took his halberd and aimed a blow at the boatman's heart. The latter saw the blow coming and taking a firm hold on his scull, turned a backward somersault into the water. Splash! The boat was left drifting in circles on the water and the halberd disappeared under the waves. At this point, a man surfaced at the stern of the boat and shouted "White Eel is here!" Treading water, he pressed down on the rudder and then with a sudden twist turned the boat bottom to the sky, toppling its occupant into the water. This really was a case of:

Employ a scheme to beat the phoenix and trap the dragon,
Forge a snare for the man of whom heaven and earth go in fear.

"I rely on my small tongue," said Wu Yong, "to go to the Northern Capital and get the 'Jade Qilin' to join us here just as easily as I take an article out of my pocket. But it would be necessary that a man of strange appearance should accompany me there."
Li Kui heard this, and said, "Elder brother, I am willing to go with you."
"You keep quiet," said Song Jiang. "I shall need you if there is any arson, murder, or looting to be done. But this requires artfulness, and your nature is not suitable for such work."
"But am I not an ugly strange person?" said Li Kui. "Why not make use of my strange appearance?"
"I do not dislike you," said Song Jiang, "but if you go to the Northern Capital and they found out your name, your life would be in danger."
"Never mind that," said Li Kui, "I think that Wu Yong will see that I am suitable."
"You must listen to my three conditions," said Wu Yong. "If you do not agree to them then you must stay here."
"Three conditions will not stop me," replied Li Kui. "If there were thirty conditions I would agree to them."
"The first condition," said Wu Yong, "is that you should abstain from wine because when you take it you have a violent temper. Second condition, you must dress as a Taoist acolyte, and obey my orders implicitly. The third is difficult. From tomorrow you must not speak a single word, but act like a mute. If you will observe these three conditions you may go with me."
"The first two I can observe, but the third is very hard," said Li Kui.
"If you open your mouth mischief is bound to happen," said Wu Yong.
"I shall have to do it," said Li Kui. "I can keep my mouth closed by having a copper cash on my tongue."
There was general laughter at this. It was agreed to let Li Kui go, and that evening a farewell banquet was held in the Loyalty and Justice Hall.
Early the next morning Li Kui donned the priest's garb, and left the mountain with Wu Yong. For five days these two traveled along the road to the Northern Capital, Daming, and rested each night at inns on the way. Li Kui kept his word, but found it very difficult at times to keep quiet when he had lost his temper. Upon reaching the capital they stayed at an inn, and one evening when Li Kui was in the kitchen cooking food he lost his temper and struck one of the servants. The servant went and complained to Wu Yong of this. Wu Yong offered apologies, and gave the servant ten strings of cash in compensation.
The next morning after breakfast Wu Yong called Li Kui and said, "You have begun to annoy me with your temper. Let us have no more of this. Today you must accompany me and keep out of mischief. If there is any trouble today you may endanger my life. I will now give you a secret signal. When I wag my head you must not move."
They both then left the inn and went into the city. Wu Yong was dressed as a priest, and carried a small bell; Li Kui was dressed as an acolyte, and carried a stick over his shoulder to which was attached a piece of paper with a text written on it, "Tell fortunes, and give advice on any matter for one tael of silver."
At that time there were many soldiers in Daming Prefecture because in the country around were many bandits and thieves. It was also the headquarters of Grand Secretary Liang, the commander in chief of the armies north of the Yellow River. Wu Yang and Li Kui came to the city gate where there was an officer of the guard. Wu Yang saluted him, and the officer asked, "Sir, where are you from?"
"My name is Zhang Yong," replied Wu Yong, "and this is my assistant named Li. I am a fortune teller."
An inspector of passports was looking at Wu Yong's paper, when a soldier remarked, "This acolyte has the appearance of a thief." Li Kui was angry and would have hit the fellow, but Wu Yong wagged his head, and so Li Kui curbed his temper and hung down his head.
Wu Yong offered apologies for his assistant's quick temper, and then all being in order they went their way. As he went along the street Wu Yong rattled his bell and sang a ballad:

Gan Luo a mandarin, when young
Zi Ya when old;
Unlucky Yan Hui died in youth,
Peng Zu when old;
Fan Dan was always poor from birth,
Shi Chong was rich.
Some men just prosper, smiling,
Seem destined for the best of fate;
For others, graves are yawning,
Unlucky and unfortunate.
From me nothing is hidden,
Of life and death or poverty;
Beware of fatal omen,
Consult me now, avoid delay.

Having finished this he rang his bell again. He was soon followed by a crowd of boys who laughed at him. When he reached Lu Junyi's house he walked backwards and forwards there, singing the funny song, and ringing his bell, and being ridiculed by the crowd of boys.
Lu Junyi heard the noise, and asked a servant what it was about.
"It is very funny!" said the servant. "There is a fortune teller who asks for a tael of silver to tell one's horoscope. He is accompanied by a strange-looking acolyte who is very uncouth, and his antics amuse the people."
"As he asks for so much he must be a well-educated man," said Lu Junyi. "You go and ask him to come here."
The servant went and asked Wu Yong to come to his master. "What is your master's name?" asked Wu Yong. The servant told him, and then Wu Yong agreed to go. Upon reaching the room the servant gave Li Kui a chair on the veranda and asked him to wait there. He then lifted the door curtain, and showed in Wu Yong who saluted Lu Junyi.
"What is your honorable village and name?" asked Lu Junyi.
"I am Zhang Yong, and my nickname is 'Heaven's Mouth,' and I am a Shandong man. I am familiar with the book on 'Nativity and Fate,' and can foretell the future. My fee is one tael of silver."
Lu Junyi asked him to enter a smaller room at the back, and there sat down.
The host ordered tea, and also a tael of silver to be given to Wu Yong. He then asked Wu Yong to tell his fortune.
Wu Yong asked for the date, hour, etc. of his birth, but Lu Junyi said he did not want to know much of his good fortune but whether any mishap would happen to him. "This year I am thirty-two years old, and was born in the last month of the year."
Wu Yong shook his box, and throwing out the cash exclaimed, "How strange!"
Lu Junyi was startled and asked, "Is it auspicious or inauspicious?"
"I cannot be straight with you," replied Wu Yong, "because you would not like it."
"If I have gone astray I hope that you will tell me," said Lu Junyi, "and never mind what I say."
"In the near future," said Wu Yong, "you will meet some bloody disaster, and you will be killed. Your family possessions will all be lost."
Lu Junyi laughed at this and said, "I am afraid that you have made a mistake. I was born in this town, and have always had plenty of money. In our family we have never had a lawbreaker, nor have we had a criminal. Our widows have never re-married. Moreover my affairs have always been well done; nothing irregular, and no ill-gotten gain. How could I now get into some bloody disaster?"
Wu Yong changed his countenance, handed back the money he had received, and said, "Everywhere people like to be flattered. Enough! I speak the truth and yet my words are taken in an ill purpose. I must go now."
"Do not be annoyed at what I said," replied Lu Junyi, "I was only jesting. Please tell me exactly what yon think will happen."
"It is always hard to believe unpleasant truths," said Wu Yong.
"I ask you to conceal nothing from me, and I will hear the worst," said Lu Junyi.
"Your fate has been propitious up to now," said Wu Yong, "but this year there will be a change for the worst. Within a hundred days your body will lose its head. Your fate has been fixed by Heaven, and there is no way of escape."
"Is it not possible to avoid this trouble?" asked Lu Junyi.
Wu Yong again shook the cash in his box, and throwing them out examined them with apparently great care. He said, "It appears that if you went from here about three hundred //to the southeast you might get out of the reach of this coming disaster. You might still have some trouble there, but it would not be so serious."
"If you help me to escape this coming disaster I will recompense you liberally," said Lu Junyi.
"I'll express your fate in four lines of poetry that you may write down on the wall," said Wu Yong, "and when things happen to you, you will realize the accuracy of my prognostication." Lu Junyi summoned a servant to get a writing brush, and wrote on the white wall of the room the following stanzas as Wu Yong dictated:

On bank a gallant hero strolls,
His boat is hidden in the reeds;
The end is destined by fate
No sorrow if he takes rest.

After Lu Junyi had written this Wu Yong picked up his box and was about to depart but Lu Junyi requested him to wait a little. Wu Yong, however, said he had some business to attend to, but he would come again some other day. Lu Junyi accompanied him to the door, and both Wu Yong and Li Kui departed. Upon reaching the inn they packed up their baggage, paid their bills, and left at once. When they were on the road again, Wu Yong said, "That business is finished. We can now quickly go back to Liangshan Marsh, and await there for the arrival of Lu Junyi."
When Wu Yong had left, Lu Junyi kept going over what he had said. He kept looking at the sky and was restless. One day he sent for all his employees to discuss matters. His chief steward was named Li Gu, and was an Eastern Capital man. Previously he had come to the Northern Capital to see a friend, but as that man had left he found himself stranded. One winter day he was starving, and Lu Junyi saw him, and took pity on him, and gave him employment. He had proved his abilities in his work, and very soon he was promoted. Step by step he had become chief steward, and managed all the affairs of the estate. Under him were about fifty servants.
When all the employees had assembled Lu Junyi did not notice another confident steward so he asked where he was. Just as he spoke a big man presented himself. He was about twenty-five years of age, but had a moustache. He had broad shoulders, but a slim waist. He wore a white silk gown, and had a hat shaped like a melon. He had a red decorated belt, and wore yellow leather boots. A metal ring was hanging at the back of his head, and a flower was stuck in the side of his hat. He was a native of the town, and had been succored by Lu Junyi as he had neither father nor mother. His skin was quite white, and had been tattooed all

over with numerous designs. He played well on the flute and the lute, and was also good at singing and acting. In fact there was hardly anything he could not do, and do well. He knew all dialects, and spoke them fluently. He also knew the expressions used in every trade and profession. A skilled archer and good at all games, he was always a successful champion in whatever he took up. His name was Yan Qing, and he was known by his nickname 'The Prodigy.' He was the confident of his master Lu Junyi. It was he who now entered the room along with Li Gu, the steward.

When he saw them enter Lu Junyi spoke, "The other day I had my fortune told, and within a hundred days I shall meet a bloody disaster. In order to avoid that fate I must go about three hundred //to the southeast. The likely place I know is Mount Tai in Taian Prefecture, Shandong, where there is a temple dedicated to the Supreme Heavenly Emperor, who controls the births, deaths, and calamities of the people. I will go there and offer incense to redeem my sins. I can take refuge there until this threatening danger has passed by. While there I can buy and sell things, and also see the views. Li Gu, I want you to get ten carts for me, and load them with suitable goods for sale there. You can accompany me on this trip. You can hand over today all my household affairs to Yan Qing who will take your place. I want to start in three days from now."

"Sir, I am afraid that you are making a mistake," replied Li Gu. "There is a saying, 'Divinations can be forged in any form.' You better not believe what fortune tellers say. If you remain here there will be no fear of any danger."

"My life is decided by fate," said Lu Junyi. "Do not hinder my movements, because if the calamity happened it would be too late for regret."

"Sir, will you please listen to me," interposed Yan Qing. "If you go to Mount Tai you must pass close to Liangshan Marsh, and there the brigands are very powerful under a leader named Song Jiang. Soldiers have failed to suppress the brigands. If you must go to offer incense at Mount Tai, it would be better if you waited here until the affairs in that quarter are more settled. You need not believe what that fortune teller told you. It may be that he was sent by the brigands to delude you, and so get you into their net. I am sorry that the other day I was not here and did not see the man. I could have found out his game after asking him a few questions."

"Do not talk nonsense," said Lu Junyi. "Who can cheat me? I do not care a rap for those fellows at Liangshan Marsh because they are hardly worth a straw, and I myself could easily arrest them. Since my youth I have practiced all kinds of military drill, and am well known everywhere as a skilled fighter."

When he had finished speaking his wife came from behind the screen and said to him: "Husband, I have been listening to all you have said. There is an ancient saying, 'One //away from home, and things are not like home.' Do not listen to what the fortune teller said. Stay at home and look after our own affairs instead of going to places where you will meet with danger. It would be better to prepare another room where you can purify your heart and diminish the passion. Live there in solitude and nothing will of course happen to you."

"You woman do not understand affairs," replied Lu Junyi. "I have decided what I must do, and it is useless for you to interfere."

"I will go with you. I will not boast of my skill," said Yan Qing, "but if on the way we are attacked by brigands I will stand by you. I can defeat fifty such men myself."

"I do not understand trading matters," said Lu Junyi, "and that is why I want Li Gu to accompany me. You can stay behind and take care of the house."

"In the last few days I have been suffering from some foot trouble," said Li Gu, "and I cannot very well go with you."

Lu Junyi was angry at this, and said, "'Maintain troops for a thousand days, and use them only one day.' I want you to accompany me, and yet you offer excuses. If anyone places obstacles in my way I shall have to land out with my fist."

Li Gu was afraid, and looked helplessly at the wife who seeing the position withdrew behind the screen. Yan Qing even did not care to say another word. All the servants took their leave. Li Gu smothered his annoyance, and left the room to make arrangements for the journey. He got ten carts and fifty men to pull them.

Three days later all was ready, and after sacrificing to the family ancestors they took leave of all the household who assembled to see them off. After the first day Lu Junyi arranged for Li Gu and two men to go in advance, and make arrangements for the party to stay in the inns.

On the journey Lu Junyi enjoyed the scenery and the pleasure of traveling. He said that if he had stayed at home he would have missed all this.

They had traveled for several days without any untoward incident happening. One morning, however, as they were about to leave, a waiter of the inn spoke to Lu Junyi, "Sir, I have something to tell you. You are only seven //from Liangshan Marsh, and your road will take you close to that place. The chief of the brigands there is Song Jiang, and though he does not wish to injure travelers yet you must go quietly on your way without any anxiety."

Upon hearing this Lu Junyi had a box unlocked, and taking out four white flags wrote seven characters on each, "The Generous Lu Junyi of the Northern Capital." He then displayed these on sticks, and stuck them on the carts. His men upon seeing these flags were downcast as they were afraid. The inn waiter also was surprised and asked, "Are you a relative of Song Jiang at Liangshan Marsh?"

"No!" replied Lu Junyi, "I am a wealthy man from the Northern Capital; I come here to capture that fellow."

"Don't speak so loudly here," said the waiter, "because I do not want to be implicated in your affairs. I am not joking. If you had a thousand men with you, you could not capture any brigands here."

"Shut up!" said Lu Junyi, "I expect that you are in league with them."

The waiter covered his ears and ran away. Lu Junyi's men were now almost frightened out of their wits. Li Gu knelt down, and said, "Master, have pity on us. If you would let us go home alive, it will be very kind of you."

"What are you talking about!" said Lu Junyi. "Should an eagle be afraid of a sparrow? I have been well trained in physical drill since my youth, and I have never yet met a man who could defeat me. Today I shall perhaps have an opportunity of showing off my skill. I have placed on the top of that cart a sack of ropes. While I kill the men with swords you can pick them up and bind them on the barrows. Then we can cart them off to the capital, and the Emperor will reward us for our enterprise. If any of you are unwilling to go with me I will kill you on the spot."

Without any further objection all the carts moved forward, but the men were very mortified at being forced to go. Lu Junyi tied his halberd to one of the flag sticks on a cart. As they approached Liangshan Marsh the road became steeper, and the men took each step with fear. Lu Junyi urged them forward.

About 10 A.M. they saw in the distance a forest in which were monstrous trees. As they got near the forest they heard a whistle. Li Gu and two men were in front as usual, and upon hearing this they looked round for a hiding place. Lu Junyi gave orders for the carts to be placed at one side of the road. This was done, and the men took cover under the carts. Lu Junyi shouted out, "As I capture these brigands I want you to bind them with the ropes." As he was saying this he saw about five hundred men coming round the corner of the forest. Many gongs were also sounding behind him, and turning round he saw another body of five hundred men also approaching. A shell in the forest was fired off, and at the same time a man leapt out of the forest close to him. The man carried an axe in each hand, and shouted, "Do you recognize the fortune teller's acolyte?"

Lu Junyi was startled. He replied, "I have always had a desire to capture you brigands, so I intentionally come here to meet you. Tell Song Jiang to come here at once, and pay respects to me. If he delays his arrival I shall kill the whole lot of you."

Li Kui laughed at this and said, "Sir, our fortune teller predicted that you would be in danger, so I request that you come and join us as a leader."

Lu Junyi was angry at this, and seizing his halberd advanced. Li Kui did the same, holding his two axes aloft. After three bouts of fighting, however, Li Kui jumped apart, and retreated to the forest. Lu Junyi followed him, but Li Kui hid himself from place to place as Lu Junyi came near. At last Li Kui saw a chance, and escaped entirely into the forest. Lu Junyi looked round, but could not see a single man near that spot. As he was returning, however, he heard men behind him, and someone called out, "You need not go away. You surely will recognize me."

Lu Junyi looked round, and saw a big monk with a large iron staff in his hand. "Where are you from?" he asked.

The monk, Lu Da laughed and replied, "I am the monk Lu Da. I have been instructed to come and request you to take refuge at our stronghold."

Lu Junyi was more angry still and cursed, "You bald-headed donkey! How dare you talk in this impudent way!" He then advanced with his halberd in hand, and Lu Da stood on defense ready to receive the attack. After three bouts, however, Lu Da ran away with Lu Junyi in pursuit. They had not gone far when Wu Song armed with two swords stepped out of the trees, and faced Lu Junyi. He said, "Sir, if you will follow me there will be no bloody disaster."

But Lu Junyi would not listen to this, and attacked Wu Song. After three bouts, however, Wu Song also ran away.

Lu Junyi laughed at this, and called out, "I am not going to run after you, because evidently you fellows are of no importance."

He had hardly finished saying this when he saw a man at the foot of the hill who called out to him, "Lu Junyi, you need not boast! Have you not heard of the saying, 'Man fears falling into a trap; iron fears being cast into the fire.' Our commander-in-chief has a plot, and however you try to get away where there is no means of escape."

"Who are you, fellow?" shouted out Lu Junyi.

The man laughed and replied, "I am Liu Tang, the 'Red Haired Demon.'"

Lu Junyi reviled him, "You petty thief! Don't you also run away." He advanced and fought three bouts with Liu Tang who was then joined by another brigand, Mu Hong, the "Unrestrained," and they both attacked Lu Junyi. But after three bouts another voice was heard, and these two withdrew a few steps. Turning round Lu Junyi found his third opponent, Li Ying, the "Striking Hawk." He was now almost surrounded, but as he advanced each man retreated in turn. He did not pursue them as he was feeling quite warm, but returned to the spot where he had left his men, and the ten handcarts, but there was not a single one left. He therefore climbed a small eminence, and looked all round. In the distance he saw both his carts and men in charge of a party of brigands. His steward Li Gu was bound with ropes. Lu Junyi was extremely annoyed at this, and seizing his halberd he started off to try to catch up with them. On his way, however, he met two leaders of the brigands who shouted, "Where are you going?" One was Zhu Tong, the "Beautiful Whiskers," and the other was Lei Heng, the "Winged Tiger."

"You brigands!" replied Lu Junyi, "go at once, and return to me those carts and men."

Zhu Tong stroked his beard, and with a smile replied, "Do you not understand yet? Our wise leader has often said, 'In our galaxy of stars, some come, but none go!' As you cannot get away from here you better join us as a leader."

Lu Junyi was again angry, and advanced to attack them. They fought for about three bouts, and then the two leaders retired. When he saw this Lu Junyi thought that he must pursue them before he could get back his carts and men. But as he ran round the hill, his two opponents had disappeared. Up the hill, a number of drums were beating, and looking there he saw a yellow flag bearing four characters, "Executor of Heaven's Wish." Under a large red silk umbrella stood Song Jiang with Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng on either side. Behind them stood about seventy leaders who all saluted him, and called, "Sir, how are you?"

Lu Junyi paid no attention to this and simply cursed them.

"Sir, do not be angry," interposed Wu Yong. "Our commander Song Jiang has wished to meet you for a long time, and he sent me to your house to get you to come to our mountain. He wants you to join us here and not remain an outsider."

Lu Junyi replied, "You are only brigands, and how dare you try to deceive me!"

Hua Rong fixed an arrow in his bow, and called out, "Lu Junyi, don't be too confident in your skill, just watch my arrow." He then shot the arrow which took the red tassel off Lu Junyi's cap. Lu Junyi was startled, and beat a retreat down the mountain. He saw thousands of men to the east and west, so he went towards the north. It was now evening, and he felt both tired and hungry. Mists were covering the ground, and there was no moonlight. He could not find even a small path in the increasing darkness. He tried several times, but was always forced to stop by some obstacle. He soon found himself in tall reeds, with water on all sides. He stopped, and gazing towards Heaven he said, "Because I would not listen to advice, so now I am in trouble." While in this flight he saw a fisherman rowing a boat among the reeds. The man called out to him, "How brave you are! This is close to Liangshan Marsh, and it is now nearly midnight. Why have come to such a place?"

"I have lost my way," said Lu Junyi, "and cannot find a resting place. Please help me."

"There is a market village about ten //from here," replied the fisherman, "but the road is hard to follow unless you have been that way before. You could, however, get there easily by boat, and that way would only be about two //. If you will pay me ten strings of cash I will take you there on my boat."

"If you will convey me there," said Lu Junyi, "and find me an inn, I will pay you liberally."

The fisherman brought his boat to the side, Lu Junyi stepped on board, and the man pushed off. They had gone about two //when they heard another boat approaching. On that boat, they soon saw two men, one of whom was stripped naked, and was punting the boat along with a pole. The other man at the stern was sculling. The first named man was singing:

For books a hero has no need,
As brigand bold his life's secured;
With crossbow tiger fierce is shot,
By baited hook the fish is lured.

Lu Junyi was afraid, and dared not utter a sound. He just then saw another boat emerging from among the reeds on his left, on which were also two men just as in the first boat. One also began to sing:

I'm not of violent nature,
But Qilin in my boat,
I'm sure of being victor,
Take brigands by the throat.

Lu Junyi now realized his danger especially as he saw a third boat sculled by one man who also began to sing:

On bank a gallant hero strolls,
His boat is hidden in the reeds;
The end is destined by fate,
No sorrow if he takes rest.

When the song was ended, the men on the three boats all saluted Lu Junyi, and called out "*ruo*." They were the three brothers Ruan, Lu Junyi being unaccustomed to swimming asked the fisherman to take him to the bank at once. But the fisherman only laughed, and replied, "Above is the blue sky; below is the green water. I was born at Xunyang River, but afterwards went to Liangshan Marsh, I am Li Jun, the 'Muddy Water Dragon.' If you, Lu Junyi, do not submit now, your end is very near."

Lu Junyi was surprised at this, but said, "Then one of us two must die." He took his halberd, and thrust it at Li Jun who seeing this evaded the blow by turning a back somersault into the water. Soon the boat began to move round in a circle, and Lu Junyi's halberd had been thrown into the water. Just then he saw a head emerge from the water, and it said, "I am Zhang Shun, the 'White Fish.'" He seized hold of the rudder, and kicking the water, he overturned the boat, and threw Lu Junyi overboard.

A plot to capture the phoenix and dragon,
A trap to hold an extraordinary man.

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### Sniping with Arrows & by Shooting I from Ambush, the Pordigy Yan Qing Saves the Life of his Master with well-directed arrows; By Leaping from a Building's Upper Room balcony, Madcap Shi Xiu Snatches a Victim from the Execution Grounds & Saves a Life

Zhang Shun wrapped and arm around Lu's waist and swam with him towards shore. They soon reached the bank. Fifty or sixty men were waiting with lighted torches. These gathered round, removed Lu's dagger and stripped him of his wet clothes. They were about to bind his arms when Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller transmitted an order.

"Lu the Magnate is not to be harmed," he shouted.

An attendant gave Lu a silken embroidered tunic and gown to wear. Eight brigands brought a sedan-chair, assisted Lu into it, and set forth. Seen in the distance were twenty or thirty red silk lanterns, illuminating a mounted troop which was approaching to the accompaniment of drams and music. At the head was Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng. They were followed by many chieftains.

All dismounted. Lu Junyi hastily got down from his sedan-chair. Song Jiang knelt. The other chieftains, in rows, did the same. Lu also dropped to his knees.

"Since I have been captured, I request an early death."

Song Jiang laughed. "Please sit in your sedan-chair, Magnate."

The chieftains resumed their saddles. To the sound of music, the procession climbed through the three fortified passes and went directly to Loyalty Hall. There, the hosts dismounted and led Lu into the hall. It was brightly lit by lanterns and candles.

"Your fame, Magnate, has long thundered in my ears," said Song Jiang. "Being able to meet you today is one of the greatest good fortunes of my life. My brothers behaved rudely a little while ago. We beg your forgiveness."

Wu Yong stepped forward and said: "The other day, on orders from brother Song Jiang, I called at your gates disguised as a fortune teller. My aim was to lure you up the mountain so that you might join us in our mutual endeavors to act on Heaven's behalf."

Song Jiang invited Lu Junyi to be seated in the highest chieftain's chair. Lu's reply was courteous.

"I've no talent, knowledge or ability, and I've offended your prestige. Ten thousand deaths would be a light retribution. Why do you make sport of me?"

Song Jiang smiled. "Who would dare? Because of our genuine respect for your great virtue, Magnate, we have hungered and thirsted for your arrival. We pray you do not scorn our humble mountain fortress. Be our leader. We will unquestioningly obey your every command."

"Then let me die immediately, for I cannot accede to your wish."

"Let's talk about it again another day," Wu Yong suggested.

Wine was brought for the magnate. Lu had no way out, and he drank several cups. Lesser brigands conducted him to the rear hall to rest.

The next day sheep and horses were slaughtered and Song Jiang invited the magnate to a large feast. After much polite refusal, Lu consented to sit in the middle. When several rounds had been drunk, Song Jiang rose, goblet in hand.

"Last night we offended you, and for this we beg your pardon. Although our stronghold is small, and not a worthy place to water your horse, we hope you will consider our sincere fidelity. I gladly relinquish my position to you, Magnate. Please do not refuse."

"You're making a mistake, sir chieftain. There are no crimes against my name, and my family has a bit of property. A man of the great Song Dynasty I was born, a ghost of the great Song Dynasty I will die. I prefer death to accepting your proposal!"

Wu Yong and the other chieftains also joined in Song Jiang's pleas. But Lu was determined not to become an outlaw.

"If you're not willing, Magnate," Wu Yong finally said, "we can't force you. You would be with us in body but not in spirit. Since we have the rare privilege of having you here, even if you won't join us, at least stay a while. Then we'll escort you home."

"Why not let me go right now? My family has had no news of me. I'm afraid they'll worry."

"No problem about that. We'll have Li Gu return first with the carts. You can go a few days later."

Lu turned to his chief steward. "Are your carts and merchandise all there?"

"Not a thing is missing."

Song Jiang ordered that two large silver ingots be presented to Li Gu, and two small bits of silver be given to the servants, and ten ounces of silver be distributed among the carters. The recipients expressed their thanks.

"You know my difficulties," Lu said to the chief steward. "When you get home, tell my wife not to worry. Say I'll be returning in four or five days."
Li Gu, who wanted only to get away, readily assented. "I certainly will," he promised. He bid farewell and left Loyalty Hall. Wu Yong rose.
"Set your mind at ease, Magnate," he said. "Keep your seat while I see Li Gu off. I'll be back soon."
Wu Yong mounted and went on ahead to the Shore of Golden Sands and there waited for the chief steward. Soon Li Gu, the two servants, the draught animals and their drivers, came down the mountain. Wu Yong, who had five hundred brigands with him, hemmed the procession in on two sides. Seated in the shade of a willow tree, he summoned Li Gu before him.
"Your master has already talked it over with us and agreed. Today he's taken the second chieftain's chair. Even before he came up the mountain, he wrote a four line rebellious verse on the wall of a room in his house. Note the first word of each line. In the first it's 'Lu,' in the second it's 'Jun,' in the third it's 'Yi,' in the fourth it's 'rebels'—'Lu Junyi rebels.' Now you know what he's doing in our fortress! At first we were going to kill you all, but then we thought it would give our stronghold a bad name. So we're letting you go. Travel day and night and hurry home. But don't nourish any hopes that your master will return."
Li Gu fervently kowtowed. Wu Yong ordered that boats take the men and animals across the river. They shortly were speeding along the road to the Northern Capital.
We'll leave Li Gu for the moment and talk of Wu Yong after he went back to the banquet in Loyalty Hall. He besieged Lu Junyi with clever and persuasive arguments. The feast didn't end till the second watch. Another feast was laid the following day.
"I appreciate the good intentions of you chieftains in keeping me here," said Lu, "but for me every day is like a year. I must leave today."
Song Jiang replied: "I'm a man of no talent, and have been very fortunate to meet you, Magnate. I'd like to use my own money to give you a small dinner where we can have a heart to heart chat. Please don't refuse."
Another day passed. The following day Song Jiang laid a feast, the next day it was Wu Yong, and the day after it was Gongsun Sheng. To tell it briefly, there were over thirty chieftains, and each day each of them in turn gave Lu a banquet. Time slipped away, the sun and moon shuttling across the sky. More than a month went by. Again Lu proposed to leave.
"We'd like to keep you," said Song Jiang, "but if you really must go, we'll have a few modest drinks in farewell in Loyalty Hall."
The next day, Song Jiang again paid for the feast out of his own pocket. The other chieftains protested to Lu Junyi.
"Though our brother respects you one hundred per cent, we respect you one hundred and twenty," they said. "But you go only to his banquet! Just because you have regard for the substantial brick, that doesn't mean you should scorn the thin tiles!"
And Li Kui shouted: "I risked my life in the Northern Capital to invite you here, and you won't allow me to feast you. I'm going to hang on to your tail until you agree!"
Wu Yong laughed. "Who ever heard of that kind of an invitation? How crude! Magnate, forgive him. But, in view of their sincerity, you really ought to stay a little longer."
Almost unnoticed, another four or five days expired. Lu was determined to go. Then Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist approached him with a group of chieftains in Loyalty Hall. "Although we are of lesser rank," said Zhu, "we have expended some efforts for our brother Song Jiang. There isn't any poison in our wine! If you take offense and refuse to dine with us, I won't make any trouble. But I'm afraid my brothers will react badly. Then, being sorry will be too late!"
Wu Yong rose to his feet. "You men behave! I'll speak to the magnate for you. I'm sure he can stay on a bit longer. Why not? 'Advice offered, wine goblet in hand, is never ill-intentioned,' as the old saying goes."
Lu could not withstand the importunities of so many. He agreed to remain another short while. This stretched into an additional nearly forty days. It had been the fifth lunar month when Lu left the Northern Capital, and by now he had spent more than two months in the mountain fortress. Golden wheat rustled in the breeze and the dew was cool. Autumn Festival time was rapidly approaching.
Lu longed to go home, and he spoke to Song Jiang about it. Obviously, his wish was intense.
"That's easy enough," said Song. "Tomorrow, I'll see you to the Shore of Golden Sands."
Lu Junyi was delighted. The next day, his clothing and weapons were restored, and a column of chieftains escorted him down the mountain. Song Jiang presented him with gold and silver on a platter.
"I don't mean to boast," said Lu, "but my family has money and goods in plenty. I'll take only enough to get me to the Northern Capital. I don't want the rest."
Song Jiang and the other chieftains escorted Lu to the Shore of Golden Sands. There, they bade him farewell and returned to the stronghold. Of that we'll say no more.

We'll speak rather of Lu Junyi, who strode along at a rapid clip. In ten days he reached the suburbs of the Northern Capital. Since it was already dusk he didn't enter the city but put up for the night at an inn. Early the next morning he left the village hostel and hastened towards the city.
Before he had gone a *li* he met a fellow in tattered head kerchief and ragged clothes. The man, on seeing Lu, dropped to his knees and kowtowed. It was Yan Qing the Prodigy.
"What are you doing in this condition?" cried the magnate.
"This isn't the place to talk."
The two rounded the corner of an earthen wall and Lu started to question Yan Qing.
"Not long after you left, master," the young man related, "Li Gu returned and said to the mistress, 'The master has thrown in with Song Jiang in Liangshan Marsh. He's accepted the chair of the second chieftain.' Li Gu went to the authorities and accused you. They began living together and, claiming that I was disobedient, threw me out. They confiscated all my clothes and drove me from the city. And they warned all my friends and relations that they would go to court and prosecute anyone who gave me shelter, even if they had to spend half the family fortune doing it! As a result, no one dared have anything to do with me. Having no place to stay in the city, I've been wandering around in the outskirts, begging. I've had to live in a rear lane. Take my advice, master, and return to Mount Liangshan. Don't even consider anything else. If you go into the city, you'll surely be trapped."
"My wife isn't that kind of a woman," Lu shouted. "You're just farting, you oaf!"
"You don't have eyes in the back of your head, master, how could you have seen? You spent most of your time developing your physique, you never had much interest in sex. The mistress has been having an affair with Li Gu for a long time. Now they can shut the door and be together as husband and wife. If you go home, master, they're bound to do you dirty."
Lu was furious. "My family has lived in the Northern Capital for five generations. Everyone knows us! How many heads has Li Gu got to spare that he would dare pull such a thing? You've probably been up to some wickedness yourself, and you're telling me this to put me off! I'm going home and get to the bottom of this, and then I'll settle with you!"
Yan Qing wept bitterly and kowtowed, clinging to his master's garments. Lu kicked him aside and strode on towards Daming.
He entered the city and went directly home. His stewards gaped in amazement. Li Gu hurried forward to welcome him. He escorted Lu into the hall, dropped before him and kowtowed.
"Is Yan Qing here?" Lu inquired.
"Don't ask, master. It's a long story and you've had a tiring journey. Why don't you rest first, then I'll tell you."
Lu's wife emerged, weeping, from behind a screen. "Don't cry," urged Lu. "Just tell me what's happened to young Yan."
"Don't ask now, husband. It's a long story and you've had a tiring journey. Why don't you rest first. then I'll tell you."
The magnate was growing suspicious, and he demanded an answer.
"Why not change your clothes, worship in the family chapel, and have some breakfast," Li Gu suggested. "Then it will be time enough for us to speak." He had food laid out for the magnate.
As Lu was raising his chopsticks, he heard shouts at the front and rear gates.
Two or three hundred policemen came charging in. They promptly bound the astonished Lu and drove him with blows of their batons to the residency of the governor of the Northern Capital.
Governor Liang was at that moment holding court. In lines to his left and right were seventy or eighty policemen like wolves and tigers, and these brought Lu before him. Lu's wife and Li Gu both knelt to one side.
"You were one of the Northern Capital's good citizens, you knave," shouted the governor. "Why did you join the bandits in Liangshan Marsh and accept the second chieftain's chair? You came to link forces within and without so that they can attack the city! Now that you've been captured, what do you have to say?"
"In a moment of stupidity I let Wu Yong from Mount Liangshan, posing as a fortune teller, into my house. With lying words, he beguiled me to Mount Liangshan, where I was detained for more than two months. Fortunately, I was able to get away and come home. I have no evil intent. I pray Your Excellency will see into my heart."
"Do you expect anyone to believe that! If you're not in league with them, why did you stay there so long? The wife you abandoned and Li Gu have both exposed you. Would they make false accusations?"
"Since it's come to this, master, you'd better confess," Li Gu advised. "That poem you wrote on the wall at home has a hidden rebellious meaning. It's overwhelming proof. There's no need to say any more."
"We don't want to injure you," said Lu's wife, "but we're afraid you'll involve me. You know the old saying: 'When a man rebels, his family and all his relations must pay with their lives.' "
Kneeling before the governor, Lu cried that he was being wronged. "Don't say that, master," Li Gu urged. "If the charge is true, you can't escape it. If it's false, you'll easily clear yourself in the end. But first confess, and you won't have to suffer a beating."
Lu's wife agreed. "It's hard to get a false charge into court, husband, and it's equally hard to deny the facts. If you've committed a crime, you'll be the death of me! Will your sensitive skin be able to withstand the feelingless rods? Confess, and your sentence will be lighter!"
Li Gu had spread bribes high and low, and now Zhang the court clerk spoke up. "That stubborn villain! If he's not beaten he'll never confess!"
"Right," said Governor Liang. "Beat him," he shouted.
Policemen flung Lu Junyi face downward and pounded him till his skin split, his flesh protruded and blood flowed in rivulets. Three or four times he fainted. Finally, he could bear it no longer.
"I was destined for a violent death," he sighed. "I'll make a false confession."
As soon as the clerk obtained the confession, he had a hundred-catty cangue for the condemned placed around Lu's neck and directed that he be taken to prison, to the distress of all spectators inside and outside the court. That same day Lu was pushed through the prison gates, led to a pavilion and forced to kneel.
Seated on a bed was the superintendent of the city's two prisons, who was also the official executioner. He was Cai Fu, a native of the Northern Capital, known as Iron Arm for his strength with the executioner's blade.
Standing beside him was his brother Cai Qing, one of the guards. The people of Hebei Province like to make quips, and they gave Cai Qing the nickname Single Blossom because of his fondness for hanging a flower over one ear. Holding a courier's staff, he stood at his brother's side.
"Lock this condemned prisoner up," Cai Fu said. "I'm going home for a while. I'll be back later."
Cai Qing led Lu away.
Cai Fu rose and left the prison. He was passing through the gates when a man rounded a wall ahead. He was carrying a container of cooked rice and looked worried. It was Yan Qing the Prodigy.
"What are you up to, young brother?" Cai Fu asked.
Yan Qing dropped to his knees and wiped the tears rolling down his cheeks. "Brother Superintendent, have pity on my master Lu the Magnate," he pleaded. "He's been wrongfully convicted and has no money to pay for food. I begged this half container of rice outside the city so that he'll have something to stem his hunger, permit me to give it to him, brother Superintendent, and you'll be doing a good deed!" Yan Qing, his voice choking, prostrated himself.
"I know about this case," said Cai Fu. "You can bring him the rice."
Yan Qing thanked him and entered the prison. As Cai Fu was crossing the prefectural bridge, a waiter hailed him respectfully.
"There's a customer upstairs in our tea-house, Superintendent. He's waiting to speak to you."
Cai Fu went upstairs with the waiter and found Li Gu the chief steward. The two exchanged courtesies.
"What can I do for you, Chief Steward?"
"I've never concealed from you my good side or my evil. You know all about me, Superintendent. Tonight, I want you to finish him off. I've no other way to show my respect, but here are fifty ounces of gold in scallion shape. I'll take care of the other court officials and functionaries myself."
Cai Fu laughed. "Haven't you read what's carved on the tablet in front of the court? *It's easy to oppress the people but hard to deceive Heaven.* You're so crooked you cheat yourself. Do you think I don't know? You've taken over his property and stolen his wife, and you offer me a paltry fifty ounces of gold to kill him! If the Inspector General came down here and checked on me, I hate to think of the charge I'd have to face!"
"If it's not enough, Superintendent, I can add another fifty."
"Li Gu, you're the kind who would feed his cat its own tail! Are you trying to tell me that Lu Junyi, well-known magnate of the Northern Capital, is worth only one hundred gold ounces? Get this straight—I'll need five hundred ounces of gold, if you expect me to do him in!"
"I have them here. You can have the whole amount, as long as you do the job tonight."
Cai Fu took the gold and concealed it on his person. He stood up. "You can call for the body tomorrow morning." Li Gu thanked him, and happily departed.
Cai Fu returned home. No sooner had he arrived than a man raised the door curtain and entered.
"How do you do, Superintendent," the visitor said. A handsome man, he wore a round-collared gown the deep green of a raven's wing, a girdle with a buckle of mutton-fat jade. His turban was like the crown of a crested goose, his shoes were encrusted with pearls. He kowtowed before Cai Fu.
The superintendent hastily returned the salutation. "What is your name sir," he asked, "and what do you want to see me about?"
"It would be better if we talked inside."
Cai Fu invited his visitor into a conference alcove, where they seated themselves as host and guest. The caller opened the conversation.
"Don't be alarmed, Superintendent. I'm from the Henghai Shire of Cangzhou Prefecture. My name is Chai Jin. I'm a direct descendent of the Zhou emperors, and I'm known as the Small Whirlwind. Because I'm chivalrous and generous, I've become acquainted with members of the gallant fraternity everywhere. Unfortunately, I committed a crime and had to take refuge in Liangshan Marsh. I'm here today on orders of brother Song Jiang to inquire about Lu the Magnate. Who would have thought that due to the connivance of corrupt officials, an adulterous wife and her wicked lover, he would be cast into a cell for the condemned! His life is hanging by a thread, and his fate is in your hands. I'm calling at your home to tell you this, with no fear of the consequences to myself. If, with Buddha-like compassion, you keep Lu in this world, we shall not forget your great virtue. But if you permit an error even half the size of a grain of rice to occur, our soldiers will surround your city, our generals will arrive at your moats, and we'll smash our way in and slaughter the entire population, good and bad, old and young! We have long known that you are a bold fellow who is chivalrous and faithful. For want of a proper gift, we can present you only with a thousand ounces of gold. Now, if you want to arrest me, go ahead. Bind me with ropes. I swear I won't so much as frown."
In a cold sweat, Cai Fu was afraid to speak. Chai Jin rose. "When a gallant man does something, he doesn't dilly-dally. Let's have your answer."
"Please go back, sir. I can handle this."
"We have your promise. Your kindness will be rewarded." Chai Jin stepped out the door and summoned his companion. He took from him the gold and placed it in Cai Fu's hands. Then he bid the superintendent a courteous farewell and departed. The companion was none other than Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller—another man not easily put off.
But Cai Fu wasn't sure how to go about it. He thought for some time, then returned to the prison and conferred with his brother.
"Ordinarily, you're good at making decisions," said Cai Qing. "A small matter like this—what's so hard about it! As the old saying goes: 'Prove a killing with a show of blood, a rescue must be thorough or it's not any good.' Since we've got a thousand ounces of gold, we'll spread some of it around, high and low. Governor Liang and Clerk Zhang both have itchy palms. Once they've taken the bribes, they'll naturally spare Lu's life, and simply exile him to some distant place or other. Whether he's rescued or not is up to the bold fellows of Liangshan Marsh. We can only do our part."
"That suits me fine. Transfer Magnate Lu to a better place of confinement, and see to it that he gets good food and drink every day. Let him know what we're doing."
The two brothers came to an agreement. They secretly dispensed gold high and low, judiciously placing their bribes.
The next day, learning that nothing had happened, Li Gu went to Cai Fu's home and urged him to take action. Cai Qing said: "We were about to do it, but Governor Liang wouldn't permit us. He has ordered that Lu's life be spared. You work on the higher-ups. If they give us the word, there won't be any problem."
Li Gu sent an intermediary with money to see Governor Liang. But the governor only said: "This is a matter for the superintendent in charge of the prisons. Am I supposed to kill him myself? In a day or two I'll tell him to see to it."
Thus the governor and the superintendent each pushed the decision off onto the other. Clerk Zhang, who had received money from Li Gu, kept postponing a final disposition of the case. But Cai Fu came to him with another bribe and urged him to get it settled. Zhang drafted a judgment and brought it to Governor Liang.
"How shall we dispose of this?" asked the governor.
"It seems to me that although there's a complaint against Lu, there isn't any real evidence. He did stay in Liangshan Marsh for a long time, true, but he was inveigled into it, and we can't get at the real culprit. Give him forty blows and exile him three thousand *li*. How does that sound to Your Excellency?"
"Very intelligent. It suits me perfectly."
The governor directed Cai Fu to bring Lu Junyi before him. In open court he had the cangue removed, read aloud the confession, and imposed a beating of forty blows. A leafed iron cangue of twenty catties was then locked around Lu's neck and the governor sentenced the prisoner to Shamen Island. He instructed Dong Chao and Xue Ba to escort him there under guard.
These two originally had been policemen in Kaifeng Prefecture, and been ordered privately to kill Lin Chong while taking him to Cangzhou. Because they failed to do so, Marshal Gao Qiu had found an excuse for banishing them to the Northern Capital. Governor Liang, discovering that they were a competent pair, had added them to his staff. Now he directed them to escort Lu into exile.
Dong and Xue received the official sentence document and took Lu the Magnate from court to the dispatch office, and there had him detained. The guards then went home to pack their luggage and prepare for the journey.
When Li Gu heard about this, he groaned. He sent a man to invite the two guards for a chat. Li Gu received Dong Chao and Xue Ba at a tavern, conducted them to seats in a private room, and there served them with food and wine. After each had drunk three cups, Li Gu spoke.
"I won't try to deceive you—Lu the Magnate is my enemy. He is being banished to Shamen Island, which is a long way from here, but he hasn't a penny, and you two will have to foot all your own travel expenses. Even if you move very quickly, the round trip will take you at least three or four months. I haven't any proper gift, only these two silver ingots to burden your hands. When you reach a convenient place, a number of *li* away, or at most two stages from here, kill him. Bring back the tattoo on his face as proof and I'll give you each fifty ounces of gold in addition. All you have to do is write up some false report. I'll attend to the people in the governor's office."

Dong and Xue looked at each other. There was a long silence. The large silver ingots were a strong temptation.
"I'm only afraid we couldn't bring it off," Dong said.
"Brother," Xue remonstrated, "Master Li is a fine gentleman. We ought to do this for him. If ever we have any problems, he'll surely look after us."
"I never forget a favor," said Li Gu. "I'll gradually repay you."
The two guards accepted the silver, said goodbye, returned to their quarters, and gathered their luggage. The same night, they set out.
"I'm still in pain from the beating I had today," said Lu. "Couldn't we start tomorrow?"
"Shut your friggin mouth," said Xue. "It's rotten luck for gents like us to be stuck with a pauper like you! To Shamen Island and back is over six thousand *li*. Travel expenses are going to be enormous, but you haven't a penny. How are we going to manage!"
"Have pity. I've been wrongfully convicted."
"You rich usually won't even give a fellow a hair off their hide," said Dong. "Well, Heaven isn't blind, and now you're getting what you deserve! Don't complain. We'll help you walk."
Lu could only swallow his anger and move along. They left through the East Gate, and the guards hung their luggage and umbrellas on Lu Junyi's cangue. As a prisoner, there was nothing he could do about it.
By dusk, they had covered fourteen or fifteen *li*. There was a town ahead, and they looked for a place to spend the night. The waiter led them to a room in the rear and they set down their bundles.
"We are, after all, gentlemen of the police," Xue Ba said to Lu. "Are we to dance attendance on a prisoner? If you want to eat, cook up some rice!"
Lu had no choice but to go to the kitchen, with the cangue around his neck, and ask the waiter for fuel stalks. He twisted these into a bundle and made a fire in the stove. The waiter put rice on to boil and washed bowls and chopsticks for him. Lu had been born rich, and he didn't know how to do these things. The fuel was wet. It didn't burn well, and kept going out. Lu blew hard to keep it alight, and got his eyes full of ashes.
Dong grumbled and scolded. When the rice was cooked, the two guards helped themselves. Lu dared not take anything. The two finished eating, and allowed Lu to have the remainder of their soup and their cold rice. Xue cursed him continuously.
The meal over, Xue ordered Lu to heat water so that they could wash their feet. Only when the water was boiling hot did Lu venture to sit down in the room. The guards finished bathing their feet, then brought a basin of sizzling water for Lu. The moment he removed his straw sandals, Xue plunged his feet into the water. The pain was agonizing.
"A gentleman waits on you, and you have the nerve to grimace," snarled Xue.
The guards chained Lu behind the door, where he groaned all night. They themselves slept on the brick *kang* bed. At the fourth watch they got up and ordered the waiter to make breakfast. They ate, gathered their bundles and prepared to set forth. Lu's feet were blistered from the scalding. He could scarcely stand. What's more, it was a rainy autumn day, and the road was slippery. Lu skidded and stumbled with every step. Xue drove him on with blows of his staff, while Dong pretended to urge leniency. Xue complained and grumbled all along the way. They travelled more than ten *li* and came to a large forest.
"I really can't move," said Lu. "Have pity and let me rest."
The guards led him into the forest as the east was turning light. No one else was abroad.
"My partner and I got up very early this morning." Xue Ba said to Lu. "We're quite tired and would like to take a nap. But we're afraid you'll run away."
"Even if I sprouted wings I couldn't escape."
"We're not going to let you trick us. I'll tie you up." With the rope he had hanging at his waist Xue bound Lu around the middle to a pine tree, then pulled his feet back and fastened them as well.
"Go to the edge of the forest and keep watch, brother," Xue said to Dong. "Cough as a signal if anyone comes."
"Brother, do the job quickly!"
"Don't worry. Just keep watch."
Xue raised his official staff. "You mustn't blame us two," he said to Lu. "Your steward Li Gu told us to kill you during the journey. You'd die anyway after you got to Shamen Island. It's better to dispatch you here. Don't complain about us in the Nether Regions. A year from now will be the first anniversary of your death!"
His tears falling like rain, Lu lowered his head and waited to die. Xue raised his staff with both hands and started a blow at Lu's temple. Dong, on the edge of the forest, heard a thud, and he hurried back to look. The magnate was still tied to the tree, but Xue was lying face up at Lu's feet, the staff dropped to one side.
"Strange," Dong muttered. "Did he swing so hard that he tripped and fell?"
Dong tried to help him up, but couldn't budge him. Then he saw that blood was flowing from Xue's mouth, and three or four inches of a slender arrow protruded from his chest. Before Dong could yell, a man sitting in a tree to the northeast cried: "Here it is!" A bowstring twanged and an arrow lodged itself in Dong's throat. His feet flew up and he landed heavily.
The man leaped down from his perch, whipped out a dagger, cut the ropes binding Lu, and smashed open the cangue around his neck. Then he threw his arms around the magnate and wept aloud. Lu opened his eyes and recognize Yan Qing.
"Is this my ghost meeting you now?" Lu cried.
"I waited outside the chancellery and followed you and the guards," said Yan Qing. "The rogues wanted to kill you in this forest! But with two arrows from my crossbow I finished them both. Did you see it?"
"You've saved my life," said Lu. "But killing those two guards makes my crime more severe. Where can I go?"
"It was Song Jiang who started all this trouble. Where else except Mount Liangshan?"
"My wounds still hurt from the beating and my feet are torn. I can't walk."
"You mustn't delay. I'll carry you on my back."
Yan Qing kicked the two bodies aside, picked up his crossbow, tucked his dagger in its sheath, collected the official staves, lifted Lu onto his back, and headed east. By the time he had walked ten *li* or so, he was exhausted. They saw a small village inn, entered, and asked for a room. They bought some meat and wine to appease their hunger. For the time being, they remained at the inn.

Passers-by found the bodies of the two guards in the forest. The chief of the nearby hamlet informed the local village head, who in turn notified Daming Prefecture. An officer sent to investigate identified the victims as Dong Chao and Xue Ba, police guards in the governor's chancellery.
Governor Liang, on receiving the report, instructed the Inspector of Police of Daming to apprehend the criminals within a fixed time. Police, examining the scene of the crime, said: "These crossbow arrows are clearly Yan Qing's. We'd better move fast." Nearly two hundred policemen went separately to every home and inn in every town and village far and near and put up "Wanted" posters describing the two culprits in detail.
Lu Junyi, unable to walk, stayed at the inn recovering from his wounds. When the waiter heard about the murder, he could talk of nothing else. He noted the resemblance of his guests to the sketches in the "Wanted" posters, and hurried to the hamlet chief.
"There are two strange men staying at our inn," he said. "I wonder whether they could be the ones?"
The hamlet chief relayed this information to the authorities.

In search of something tasty, Yan Qing went with his crossbow to the nearby fields and shot some game. On his return, he found the whole village in an uproar. He hid in a grove of trees and watched. Two hundred policemen, armed with spears and swords, surrounded Lu Junyi, who was bound on a cart which was being pushed away. Yan Qing wanted to rush out and save him, but he had no military equipment, and could only groan.
"If I don't go to Mount Liangshan and get Song Jiang to come to the rescue," thought Yan Qing. "I'll be throwing my master's life away!"
He left immediately. He was still travelling by the middle of the night. He was hungry, but he hadn't any money. Yan Qing came to a small hill. It was covered with underbrush and had a few trees. He went into a grove and slept till daylight. He awoke very depressed. A magpie was chattering in a tree.
"If I can shoot that down," he thought, "I can beg some boiling water from a villager and cook it. That will ease my hunger pangs."
Emerging from the grove, he looked up. The bird cawed at him raucously. Yan Qing softly removed his crossbow from its sheath and offered a silent prayer: "I've only this one arrow. If my master is going to be saved, let it bring the magpie down. If my master is fated to die, let the magpie fly away unscathed."
He fitted the arrow to the string and shouted: "Bow, don't fail me!" The trigger mechanism twanged and the arrow hit the bird in the tail. It flew down the hill, the arrow trailing from its rump. Yan Qing gave chase, but he lost sight of his quarry.
While he was searching, he saw two men coming his way. The one in the lead wore a turban shaped like a pig's snout. Gold-traced silver rings dangled at the back of his head. A gown of fragrant black silk was bound at the waist by a gold-figured sash. He was shod in hempen sandals over soft stockings that reached his knees, and he carried a staff as high his eyebrows. The man behind had a broad-brimmed white felt hat on his head, a tea-colored gown with embroidered sleeves, a pink purse at his middle, and heavy leather shoes. On his back was a bundle of clothing. He carried a short cudgel. A knife hung at his waist.
They passed so close by, they almost brushed shoulders with Yan Qing. He turned and looked after them and thought: "I have no travelling money. If I knock those two down and take the purse it will be easier for me to get to Liangshan Marsh."
He hung his bow behind him and followed. The two, heads down, were concentrating on walking. Yan Qing caught up with the rear man in the felt hat. He punched him square in the back and knocked him down. But before he could hit the man in front, the fellow raised his staff and cracked Yan Qing on the left shin, tumbling him to the ground. The rear man meanwhile got up, planted a foot on Yan Qing, pulled out a dagger and poised to stab.
"Bold fellow," Yan Qing cried, "it doesn't matter if I die, but who will deliver my message?"
The man hesitated and lowered his arm, then pulled Yan Qing up. "What message have you, knave?"
"Why do you ask?"
The other man grasped Yan Qing's hand and pulled it forward, exposing the tattooing on his wrist. "Aren't you Yan Qing, the one they call the Prodigy, in the household of Lu the Magnate?" he asked.
Yan Qing thought: "One way or another, I'm going to die. I might as well tell the truth and let him arrest me, so that I can go to the next world with my master!" Aloud, he said: "Yes, I am!"
The two men laughed. "It's a good thing we didn't kill you. So you're young brother Yan! Do you know who we are? I am Yang Xiong the Pallid. And this is Shi Xui the Rash."
"We've been ordered by brother Song Jiang to proceed to the Northern Capital and inquire about Lu the Magnate," said Yang Xiong. "Our Military Advisor and Dai Zong have also come down from the mountain and are waiting for news."
Yan Qing told them everything that had transpired, and Yang said: "In that case I'll take you to brother Song Jiang in the fortress and we can decide what to do. Shi Xiu, go on to the Northern Capital, see what you can find out, and report back."
"Right," said Shi Xiu. He gave Yan Qing a muffin and dried meat to eat, and left him his bundle to carry.
The Prodigy went with Yang Xiong. They travelled through the night to the mountain fortress, where Yan Qing met Song Jiang and told the story in full. Shocked, Song Jiang summoned his chieftains for a conference.

We'll talk now of Shi Xiu. With only the clothes he wore on his back, he arrived at the outskirts of the Northern Capital. It was already turning dark and he was unable to enter the city, so he rested that night outside. He went in the next morning after breakfast.
He observed that people were sighing, and seemed quite downcast. Puzzled, he proceeded to the center of town. The door of every home was closed. He asked an old man what was wrong.
"Traveller, you wouldn't know," the old man replied. "Here in the Northern Capital we have a Lu the Magnate. He's one of our richest men. He was snatched away by the robbers of Liangshan Marsh and managed to escape. But when he came home he was convicted on a wrongful charge and sentenced to Shamen Island. Somehow, on the way, the two guards escorting him were killed. Last night, Lu was captured again, and today, at the third quarter afternoon, he's going to be executed here in the middle of the city! You'll be able to see it."
To Shi Xiu the news was like a douse of icy water. He walked on. At the main intersection was a two-storied tavern. He entered, went up the stairs, and sat down in a small room overlooking the street.
"Are you having other guests, or are you drinking alone, sir?" the waiter asked.
Shi Xiu glared. "A big bowl of wine and a large platter of meat. Just bring them and let's not have any friggin questions!"
Startled, the waiter poured two measures of wine and sliced a large platter of beef. Shi Xiu ate and drank steadily. Before long, he heard a growing hubbub in the street below. He looked out the window. The door of every home and shop was shut tight.
The waiter came up the stairs and said: "You must be drunk, sir! There's going to be a public execution down there. Pay your bill and go someplace else, quickly!"
"That stuff doesn't scare me. Get out of here before I give you a taste of my fists!"
Not daring to reply, the waiter went back downstairs.
On the street gongs crashed and drums thundered. Shi Xiu watched from his window. Crowds jammed all sides of the execution place. A dozen pairs of guards, bearing swords or staves, pulled and pushed Lu forward and compelled him to kneel outside the tavern building. Iron Arm Cai Fu carried the official sword of execution. Single Blossom Cai Qing held Lu's cangue.
"Magnate Lu," said Cai Fu, "you can see for yourself. It isn't that we two didn't want to save you. Circumstances are forcing us to do this! We've already arranged a seat for you in that Temple of the Five Saints ahead. Your soul can go there and claim it."
From the crowd a voice shouted: "It's three quarters afternoon!"
Cai Qing removed Lu's cangue and grasped his head. Cai Fu raised the executioner's sword. The clerk read in a loud voice the crimes listed on the condemned man's placard. The crowd of spectators gasped in anticipation. And with that sound, Shi Xiu, dagger in hand at the upstairs window of the tavern, let out a yell: "The bold fellows of Mount Liang Marsh are all here!" Cai Fu and Cai Qing pushed Lu aside, grabbed the ropes that had bound him, and ran. Shi Xiu leaped down from the window and wielded his steel knife, killing men like hacking melons and slicing vegetables. He downed a dozen or more before they could get away. He grabbed Lu with one hand and pushed south. Shi Xiu didn't know the Northern Capital streets, and Lu was too stunned to do more than stumble along. Governor Liang was astounded when he heard the news. He immediately summoned his highest commanders and directed them to have their soldiers seal off all 4 city gates. He sent his entire police force after the fugitives. Pursued by fast horses and powerful troops, could Shi Xiu and Lu the Magnate scale the high city walls and towering ramparts? Where could they go? They had no claws for burrowing into the ground, and no wings to fly them up to the blue sky.

Now the Unicorn, although a bold fighter, was quite helpless in the water, and White Eel had capsized the boat and knocked him in. What happened next was that White Eel grasped him by the waist under the water and swam to the other shore. Having relieved him of his weapon, he hauled the man out onto the bank. Torches had been lit and the forty or fifty men waiting there to receive the Unicorn surrounded him, took off his sword, stripped him of all his wet clothing, and were about to tie him up.
At this point the Magic Messenger shouted out an order: "Do not harm Mr. Lu in any way!" Someone was immediately sent with a padded cotton coat and silk robe for the Unicorn to put on. Eight soldiers came with a sedan chair, helped him into it and set off. Before long a score or more of red silk lanterns became visible in the distance, illuminating a small group of horsemen who were advancing to meet them to the beating of drums. At the head of them were Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun. Behind were all the other leaders. They all dismounted and the Unicorn hurriedly descended from the sedan chair. Song Jiang knelt first, and then all the other leaders in turn knelt down.
The Unicorn also knelt to return the courtesy. He said: "Since you have captured me, I would ask you to grant me a quick death."
Song Jiang smiled and said: "Please get into the sedan chair again." They all mounted, the music started up again and they rode up through the three gates till they reached the Ceremonial Hall. There they dismounted and the Unicorn was led into the hall, which was brilliantly illumined with lamps and candles.
Song Jiang came forward and spoke, in a very friendly tone. "Your great reputation has long sounded like thunder in my ears," he said. "Today I have the great good fortune to meet you. It is a pleasure I shall never forget. But I fear we have given you cause for annoyance and I beg you humbly to forgive us."
Next the Professor came forward and said: "The other day I told your fortune. I had been entrusted with visiting you to tell your fortune in order to get you here, to join the great enterprise, so together we can follow heaven's path."
Song Jiang now asked the Unicorn to take the first place among the leaders. The Unicorn replied modestly: "I have no talent, no knowledge or ability, I would count a thousand deaths light punishment, why do you jest with me?"
"How could we jest with you?" Song Jiang reassured him. "We value your nobility as those who hunger and thirst value food and water. Our greatest desire is that you will not leave our humble place but stay as our leader, ever to be obeyed by us."
The Unicorn replied: "Better for me to die, when living is so painful."
The Professor said: "Let's talk about it later."
Wine was poured and food prepared for his entertainment. The Unicorn had no alternative but to accept a few cups, and then a soldier took him to an inside room to sleep.
Next day Song Jiang had sheep and horses slaughtered and gave a big feast to which the Unicorn was invited. He had to be asked many times before he would sit down with them. After several rounds of wine Song Jiang stood up, cup in hand, and said ingratiatingly: "Last night I fear we offended you. I sincerely apologize. Although this stronghold of ours is so small and unworthy, hardly fit for your horse, for the sake of 'honour and loyalty,' two concepts we consider pre-eminent, I beg you to accept this position. Please do not refuse."
"You are mistaken in this," the Unicorn replied. "It was through no fault of my own that I became involved. Besides, I have some family dependents. I was born loyal to the dynasty, I must die loyal to the dynasty. I would rather die than agree to your proposal."
Although the Professor and each of the other leaders pleaded with him, the Unicorn refused to become an outlaw. Finally, the Professor said: "If you are not willing, how can we force you? We have implored you to stay, but it is not to your liking. All we can say is that since you are already here, although you do not want to join us, please allow us to entertain you here for a few days before we send you home."
"I have no objection," the Unicorn said. "Only I am afraid that the members of my family will be worried not having news of me."
"That's no problem," said the Professor. "We will send Manager Li back first with the wagons. You can go a few days later, what's wrong with that?"
The Professor asked Manager Li if he had all his wagons and merchandise.
Manager Li replied: "There's nothing at all missing."
Song Jiang ordered two large silver ingots to be brought and gave them to Manager Li. Two smaller ones were shared by the servants. He gave ten pieces of white silver to the wagon drivers. They all thanked him. The Unicorn said to Manager Li: "You know all about my situation. When you get back tell my wife not to worry. I shall be back in three or four days' time."
Manager Li was eager to get away and wasted no time in replying: "That's fine." Then he said goodbye and left the Ceremonial Hall. The Professor immediately after stood up and said: "Now Mr. Lu, just you relax and sit here for a little while. I will see Manager Li off down the mountain."

This was in fact just a pretext. What the Professor did was go first to Golden Sands Landing and wait. In a little while Manager Li with the two servants, the wagons, the oxen and their other companions came down the mountain. The Professor, surrounded by five hundred troops, was sitting under a willow tree. He called Manager Li over and said: "Your master has come to an agreement with us. He has taken the second place in our command. But this was already set out in a four-verse poem before he even came here. It's written on the wall in his house. Let me explain it to you. There are twenty-eight characters written on the wall, and each line contains an important word. '*Through the reeds a small boat steers*' contains the word *reeds*, which is the same as your master's name, Lu. '*All of a sudden a hero appears*' contains the word *hero*, the first part of your master's given name. '*The loyal man seeks a way out*' contains the word *loyal*, the second part of his given name. '*Nothing to do but to turn about*' contains the word *turn*. So in the four lines taken together you can find *reeds — hero — loyal — turn*, or in other words, *Lu Junyi turns*. What do you expect from us here on the mountain? Originally we were going to kill you all, but then we decided that it would reflect badly on our company. So now we are letting you go, to travel back as fast as possible. Do not expect your master to return home."

Manager Li and his companions thanked him profusely. The Professor ordered the boat to take them across the water and the whole caravan set off, hastening back to the Northern Capital. It was really a case of "Once off the hook the turtle stretches out his tail and shakes his head and doesn't look back."

Now our story divides in two. Let us leave Manager Li and the rest to journey home, while we return with the Professor to the Ceremonial Hall. He rejoined the banquet and flattered the Unicorn with a skilful tongue. The feasting continued until the second watch.

Next day when another feast was held in his honour, the Unicorn said: "I am most grateful to you all for inviting me, but I have to tell you that each day is like a year to me until I can leave."

Song Jiang said: "Unworthy as I am I have had the good fortune to make your acquaintance. I would like to offer you a little drinking party so that we can sit down and chat together. I hope you will not refuse me this." So another day passed.

Song Jiang was host on the next day, the Professor the day after, and Taoist Gongsun the day after that. To cut a long story short, more than thirty of the leaders in the hall took it in turn to host a feast and the days ticked by, the sun and moon going to and fro like a weaver's shuttle. Soon well over a month was gone. As he contemplated this, the Unicorn became ever more anxious to leave. Song Jiang said: "We won't try to keep you, when we know how eager you are to return home. But we must have one last little farewell celebration before you start."

Song Jiang's farewell for the Unicorn was held next day. And then all the other leaders came to the Unicorn and said: "We know our leader honours you greatly, but we honour you even more highly! If you'll only accept his hospitality and not ours, it's like valuing a brick more highly than a tile!" And Iron Ox who was among them cried out: "I risked my life to go to the Northern Capital and invite you here. If you won't accept hospitality from my brothers and myself, I shall take it as an insult that nothing will ever wipe out."

This made the Professor laugh. "What a way of inviting someone!" he said. "That's totally uncouth! Please forgive him, Mr. Lu, and accept their good intentions. Stay just a little longer!" And so another four or five days slipped by. When the Unicorn was absolutely determined to go, the Strategist marched into the Ceremonial Hall with a group of others and began to speak: "Although we are all brothers here, we've a bone to pick all the same. Is there poison in the wine or something? If Mr. Lu doesn't see fit to accept what we offer, that's fair enough. Only it's a bit late to say so now that we've gone to all the trouble."

The Professor rose and said: "Don't get upset. I will plead for you with Mr. Lu to stay a little longer, and I don't see why he shouldn't agree. As the proverb says: 'No need to fight when a cup of wine will set things right'." The Unicorn could not refuse them all, so he stayed a few days more. Altogether that made nearly a month and a half. So since the time he left the Northern Capital in August more than two months had slipped by here on Mount Liang. It was now well into autumn, with its soft breezes and refreshing dew, and the Mid-Autumn Festival was fast approaching. The Unicorn was really missing home and he said so. When Song Jiang saw that he was seriously homesick, he said: "That's no problem. Tomorrow we'll take you down to Golden Sands Landing and send you on your way." The Unicorn expressed his gratitude. As the poem says:

Away from your native mountains, the days pass slowly;
*Not a day but the heart longs for home.*
*At these times a man wishes for wings*
To waft him on the winds of heaven over the water.

Next day the Unicorn's original clothes, his sword and his staff were restored to him and all the leaders escorted him down the mountain. Song Jiang offered him a tray of gold and silver as a leaving present, but he refused it, saying: "I do not mean to boast, but I have plenty of this sort of thing at home. All I need is just some travelling expenses to get me to the Northern Capital. A gift like this I definitely cannot accept."

Song Jiang and the others then took him to Golden Sands Landing and said goodbye. Of this no more.

We shall not speak of Song Jiang's return to the camp, but of the Unicorn as he sets off and hastens homeward. In ten days he reached the capital. It was already getting dark so he didn't enter the city but stopped outside at an inn. He departed next morning at dawn and raced towards the city. He had not gone half a mile when he met someone with a ragged headcloth and clothes full of holes who after regarding him attentively pressed his knuckles to his forehead and prostrated himself. Looking carefully, the Unicorn recognized the Prodigy. "How do you come to be in such a state, lad?" he asked.

"This is not a good place to talk," the Prodigy said.

The Unicorn led him round the corner of an earthen rampart and then began to question him closely. The Prodigy said: "Not more than two weeks after you left, Manager Li came back and said to the mistress: 'The Master has given his allegiance to Song Jiang of the Marshes of Mount Liang and accepted the position of second-in-command.' He also went to the authorities and denounced you. He and the mistress had already come to an agreement, and they took umbrage when I disapproved, so they threw me out. They only let me take a single suit of clothes and then hounded me out of the city. They even told all the family and friends that anyone who gave me shelter would forfeit half his possessions and be reported to the authorities, so no one dared have anything to do with me. Since I could find nowhere to stay in the city I had to come out here and beg for a living. At the moment I am sleeping in the street. At first I thought of going to Mount Liang to find you, but I didn't want to do anything in a hurry. If you are thinking of returning from the Marshes, please listen to me and go back there at once. Don't even stop to think about it. If you go into the city you'll be caught in a trap."

The Unicorn shouted: "My wife is not like that! Shut your mouth!"

The Prodigy said: "Master, you can't see what's in front of your nose! What do you know about it? All you ever think about is martial arts, you don't know anything about women. Your wife had a relationship with Manager Li long ago. Now they're quite open about it, like husband and wife. If you go back there you'll meet your end!"

The Unicorn was outraged. He yelled at the Prodigy. "My family has been in the Northern Capital for five generations, everyone knows them. What kind of position does Li Gu have, how could he try something like that on? Most probably you've done something terrible yourself, and now you're trying to tell it the other way round. I'm going to go home and find out the truth of all this. You haven't heard the end of it!"

Weeping copiously, the Prodigy flung himself on the ground and tried to grasp the hem of his master's robe. The Unicorn spurned him with his foot and stalked off into the city.

When he entered his house all the employees looked very frightened. Manager Li hurried to meet him and then took him into the hall and prostrated himself. The Unicorn asked: "Where is the Prodigy?"

Manager Li replied: "You'd better not ask, Master. It's a long story and I'm afraid it will make you angry. I'll tell you later when you've rested."

The Unicorn's wife now appeared from behind the screen, weeping. "Don't cry," the Unicorn said to her. "Just tell me what has happened to the Prodigy."

"Don't ask now," she said. "I'll tell you all in good time."

The Unicorn was beginning to have doubts. He persisted in asking about the Prodigy, so Manager Li said: "Change your clothes and have some breakfast first, Master. Then we can talk about it."

He set about ordering food for his master. Just as the Unicorn raised the chopsticks, a tremendous knocking was heard at the front door and the back door and several hundred policemen burst in. The Unicorn was too shocked to do anything so they tied him up and drove him with a blow at every step to the detention cells. Governor Liang was presiding in the court at the time with his officers drawn up in two ranks on either side and some eighty or so ferocious guards. The Unicorn was flung down before the bench, while his wife and Manager Li knelt to one side. The Governor shouted out: "You're supposed to be a respectable citizen of the Northern Capital, you villain. What do you mean by going to hobnob with the brigands on Mount Liang and accepting the second position among their leaders? I hear you're even conspiring with them to attack this city! But we've got you now. What have you got to say for yourself?"

The Unicorn said: "Fool that I am, I was deceived by 'Professor' Wu Yong from Mount Liang, who came to my house disguised as a fortune-teller. He lured me to the mountain and they held me there under house arrest for over two months. Now I've managed to escape and return home. I swear I am innocent. I rely on your justice."

Governor Liang said: "Why keep pretending? If you weren't in league with that Mount Liang lot, why did you stay there so long? Your wife and Manager Li have already lodged an accusation, so someone's not telling the truth."

Manager Li said: "Master, since you're here you had better confess. I have seen the coded poem about rebellion on the wall in your house. It's the strongest possible evidence. You haven't got a leg to stand on!"

His wife said: "We didn't mean to harm you. We were just afraid you would get us involved. As the proverb says: 'For every traitor nine relatives pay the price'."

Kneeling before the bench, the Unicorn began to cry out that he was unjustly accused. Manager Li said: "It's not true that you've been unjustly accused. It's just that the truth can't be hidden, lies get found out. Hurry up and confess, so you won't have to be tortured."

The wife said: "Husband, falsehood won't easily pass into a court of law, the truth is hard to oppose. You go and get yourself into trouble and you ruin me as well. It's a fact of life that flesh is delicate but the cane has no feelings. Why not confess? You'll only get a limited sentence if you do."

Since Manager Li had given out money to everyone, Registrar Zhang declared to the court: "This feckless vagabond will never confess until he's beaten!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Governor. "Beat him!" he thundered. His officers bound the Unicorn and threw him down on the ground. No need to tell what happened. They beat him till the skin split and the blood streamed down. Three times he fainted. No chance here for the Unicorn to show off his martial skills! He could only look to heaven and sigh: "If it is my fate to suffer calamity, I'd better make a false confession and be done with it."

Registrar Zhang took down the confession and the one hundred catty cangue of a man condemned to die was imposed. The Unicorn was taken to the main prison and locked up. Onlookers inside and outside the court-house were deeply shocked. On entering the gaol the Unicorn received thirty more vicious blows of the cane. He was taken under escort to the inmost office and made to kneel before the warden's bench.

The warden pointed a finger at him and said: "Do you know who I am?"

The Unicorn dared not make a sound. It was in fact the warden of the two prisons, who also doubled as public executioner. His name was Cai Fu and he was a native of the Northern Capital. Because of his great strength, people called him Strongarm. Beside him stood his brother whose name was Cai Qing. He was the under-warden. He always liked to carry a flower and the people of Hebei had dubbed him Blossom. He now stood beside Strongarm, leaning on his staff of office.

"Chuck this felon into the dungeon," Strongarm said. "I'm going to take a walk. I won't be long." Blossom led the Unicorn away.

When Strongarm left the prison, he went to see a certain person down by the city wall. The man was carrying a rice pot and his expression was gloomy. Strongarm knew that this was the Prodigy. "Young Yan," he said, "what are you doing?"

The Prodigy knelt down and looking up with tears in his eyes, said: "Warden, my friend, please be merciful to my master, Mr. Lu, who has been unjustly accused and sentenced and cannot even afford to have food sent him. I have managed to beg this half pot of rice outside the city to provide some relief for my master's hunger. But I beg you to tell me what I can do to help." So saying he continued to weep and prostrated himself.

Strongarm said: "I know all about it. You take the rice to him so he can eat."

The Prodigy thanked him and went into the prison with the rice.

Strongarm now proceeded as far as the city bridge. Here he met a teahouse keeper who shouted out a greeting and said: "Warden, I have a customer upstairs who wants a word with you."

When Strongarm went upstairs, who should he see but Manager Li. When they had greeted each other, Strongarm said: "What is it you want to say to me, Manager?"

Manager Li said: "I'll tell you no evil, I'll tell you no lies. My future is entirely in your hands. This evening I've some business that I want to get completely wrapped up. There's nothing special about it, but here is fifty taels of gold in garlic-shaped ingots. This is for you alone. I will take care of the other officers of the court myself."

Strongarm grinned and said: "Haven't you seen the warning in the courtoom which says: 'It's not difficult to oppress the people but Providence is never cheated'? Do you think I don't know all about this dirty business of yours? You've already taken his goods and seduced his wife and now you give me fifty taels of gold to finish him off. If they review the case later on, I'm the one who will be in trouble."

Manager Li said: "I can understand your anxiety. I'll give you another fifty taels."

Strongarm said: "Manager Li, you are trying to make the cat eat the tail you've just cut off! A man so famous in the Northern Capital as Mr. Lu — is he only worth a hundred taels of gold? If you really want me to destroy him, let me be honest with you, you'll need to give me at least five hundred."

"I've got the gold here, you can have it. I only want to be sure you'll finish the business a little later tonight."

Strongarm took the gold and tucked it away. Then he stood up and said: "You can come for the body tomorrow morning."

Manager Li thanked him and went away with a light heart.

Strongarm went home. As soon as he got in, a stranger pulled aside the front door curtain and entered.

"Good evening, Warden!" said the stranger boldly. He was a remarkably distinguished looking man, and extremely well dressed. He wore a round-collared robe, the hue of a raven's wing and the belt around his waist was fitted out with jade decorations. His feet were shod in slippers embroidered with pearls and on his head was a coronet decorated with pheasant's feathers. He bowed to Strongarm as he entered the courtyard.

Strongarm hurriedly returned the courtesy and said: "May I ask your name, sir? And what can I do for you?"

"Shall we talk inside?" said the other.

Strongarm took him to a little conference room and invited him sit in the place of honour.

"Do not be afraid, Warden," the stranger began. "My name is Chai Jin. My family are descended from the Zhou Emperor and people call me the Little Whirlwind. For reasons of chivalry and philanthropy I have come to know many of the world's brave men. I had the misfortune to infringe the law and took refuge in the Marshes of Mount Liang. I am here with a commission from our leader Song Jiang, to report news of Mr. Lu. Who would have thought that a conspiracy of greedy officials, corrupt officers, a faithless wife and a scheming lover would land him in prison, on death row, where his life hangs by a thread. And he is in your hands. Death is the lot of mortal men, but I am sent to tell you this: if you can preserve Mr. Lu's life the Buddha's eyes will smile on you and your magnanimity will not be forgotten. But if even a hair of his head is harmed an army will be at the city walls and when the defences are breached every head will roll, without distinction of person, wise or foolish, young or old! I have long heard that you are a loyal and honourable man. I have nothing worthy to give you, but I have here a thousand taels of pure gold, as a very small gift. If you think you should arrest me, then go ahead and tie me up, I will not take it amiss."

What he heard made Strongarm so nervous that he broke out in a cold sweat. For a long while he was quite unable to answer. Finally Chai Jin stood up and said: "It is for you now to act. Please do not waste my time. I must have a decision."

Finally Strongarm said: "You can leave, sir. I will make arrangements."

Chai Jin bowed and said: "If I have your word, then I thank you." As he went out of the door he gave orders to a follower who brought in the gold, handed it to Strongarm, saluted and left. This follower waiting outside was the Magic Messenger — another hero who was not to be taken lightly.

Strongarm could not decide what to do. He thought about it for a long long time. Finally he returned to the prison and told everything to his younger brother. The latter said: "Usually you are so decisive. This is an easy matter, what's the problem? As the proverb says: 'If you kill someone there's bound to be blood, if you want to save someone, do it properly!' Since you've got a thousand taels of gold here, let's both go and buy everyone off for him. Governor Liang and Registrar Zhang both love money. If they've got a bribe in their hands they won't let Mr. Lu suffer the death penalty. They'll probably just banish him or something, then whether he's rescued or not depends on his friends from the Marshes of Mount Liang. Anyway, we'll be shot of it."

Strongarm said: "That's exactly what I was thinking. Now you get Mr. Lu to a safe place, make sure he's got plenty of good wine and food, and tell him the news."

Having made up their minds, the two brothers quietly distributed gold to all and sundry to ensure their support.

Next day Manager Li, seeing no sign of activity, went to Strongarm's home to urge him to get a move on.

Strongarm answered: "We were just about to do him in when His Excellency forbade it. Orders were received that he was to be kept alive. But if you go to the top and persuade them to give the authorization, then I've no objection."

Manager Li accordingly sent someone with money for bribes. But when this man tried to hand the money over, Governor Liang said: "This is the Warden's business. Surely you don't expect me to do it myself? Just leave it a few days and then I'll tell him to do it."

Everyone was passing the buck. Registrar Zhang had received the gold already and all he wanted to do was postpone the case. Strongarm was busy handing out bribes and trying to arrange for an early hearing. Registrar Zhang collected up the papers and presented them to Governor Liang who said: "How are we going to resolve this case?"

Zhang said: "In my humble opinion, although there is a serious accusation against Mr. Lu, there is no concrete evidence. Although he spent a certain time on Mount Liang, it was at most involvement with crime, not a serious crime in itself. Give him forty strokes and banishment to a distance of a thousand miles. Would that do, do you think?"

"A very clear appraisal," said Liang. "Exactly what I had in mind." So then he ordered Strongarm to fetch Lu from the gaol. The cangue was removed in the courtroom, the confession and case summary were read, and he was sentenced to forty strokes. A new twenty catty cangue was imposed and the beating was administered in front of the courtroom. Then two guards, Dong Chao and Xue Ba were appointed to escort him to the island of Shamen, his place of exile. These two had served in the Eastern Capital force and had escorted Leopard's Head on the road to Cangzhou. Because they had failed to kill Leopard's Head they got into trouble with Marshal Gao when they returned and were banished to the Northern Capital. Governor Liang had seen how capable they were and had retained them on garrison duties. He now put Mr. Lu in their charge.

So the two guards left the court and placed the Unicorn in the cells while they went home to pack their things, ready for departure.

Meanwhile, when Manager Li got to hear about all this, he was flabbergasted. He sent someone to ask the two guards to come and meet him. When they arrived at the inn, he asked them to take a seat and offered them wine and food. After three cups, he announced: "I will be frank with you. Mr. Lu is my enemy. Now he has been banished to the island of Shamen. It's a long way and he hasn't a penny, so you will have to waste your own money on the journey. It will be at least three or four months before you get back. I can't give you very much, but please accept these two big silver ingots as an initial payment. After a couple of stages at most, or as little as a few miles if you come to a really quiet spot, finish him off, remove the golden seals from his cheeks and bring them back as proof. When you let me know it is done, each of you will receive fifty taels of gold in garlic-shaped ingots. All you need do is lodge a report at the garrison command, and I will take care of everything."

The two looked at each other. They spent a long time considering it. The sight of the two big ingots naturally aroused their greed.

Dong Chao said: "I'm just afraid it may not work out for us."

Xue Ba said: "Listen, Mr. Li is obviously a reliable person. If we do this business he'll be well disposed towards us. If there's any problems we can ask him to sort them out."

Manager Li said: "I'm not one to forget a favour. I shall repay you very thoroughly."

Having taken the money, the guards went home to get their luggage, in order to leave that evening. The Unicorn said: "I received the beating today and it's still exceedingly painful. Can't we start tomorrow?"

"You shut your fucking mouth!" Xue Ba shouted. "Just my luck to be saddled with a useless bugger like you! It's over two thousand miles to Shamen, there and back, we've practically no funds for the journey, you haven't got a cent yourself, how do they expect us to manage?"

The Unicorn said: "You really ought to show me some consideration, as a victim of unjust persecution."

Dong scolded: "You rich men, you're never ever willing to part with a cent! Now heaven has opened your eyes for you, it'll teach you a lesson! Stop feeling sorry for yourself; we'll give you a hand."

The Unicorn just had to grin and bear it. He was obliged to go with them, passing out of the city through the eastern gate. The guards hung their bundles of clothes and their umbrellas on his cangue. So there was the Unicorn, once a rich man, now a convict. There was nothing he could do about it. Another thing he had to bear was the late autumn weather, everywhere yellow leaves falling and the wild swans overhead, and nothing to be heard in this scene of desolation but the sound of a flute:

Somewhere a flute, expressing autumn's sense,
*Stirring up feelings of sadness without reason,*
*So heartbreakingly sweet one cannot bear to listen:*
How can such heartbreak be lodged in a mere sound!

As they escorted him on the road the two guards treated the Unicorn well or badly by turns. When it was nearly evening and they had done about eight miles, they came to a small market town and found themselves an inn to stay. The waiter took them to a room at the back where they deposited their bags. Xue Ba said: "It's a tough enough job being a policeman, I don't see why we should also have to slave for a convict. If you want anything to eat, go and light the stove, double-quick!"

So the Unicorn, still with his cangue on, had to go to the kitchen and ask the waiter to let him have some straw, which he tied into bundles and took to the stove to get the fire going. The waiter washed the rice for him and cleaned some bowls.

Now the Unicorn was a rich man by birth and was quite incapable of this kind of work. The straw and tinder were damp and it wouldn't light. When by dint of much blowing he managed to get it to take, the smoke got in his eyes and he couldn't see. Dong meanwhile was grumbling and cursing away. When the rice was finally cooked the two guards took it and the Unicorn did not dare ask for any. By the time they had finished, all that was left for the Unicorn to eat was the dregs of some soup and some cold rice.

Dong never ceased cursing the Unicorn. After supper he sent him off to heat water for washing. Whilst he was waiting for the water to boil, the Unicorn ventured to go and sit down. When they had washed their feet, the other two got a bowl of boiling water and encouraged the Unicorn to wash his feet in it. The moment he took off his sandals, Xue thrust his feet straight into the boiling water. The pain was excruciating. Xue said: "Here I am, serving you, and you go and make faces!" The two guards went to sleep by the stove. Using some wire they confined the Unicorn behind the door of their room. They had themselves woken some time before dawn and told the waiter to make breakfast. After eating their fill they packed their bags and were ready to start. But the Unicorn found that his feet had come out in blisters and he could hardly bear to put them down.

It rained heavily that day, too, and the path was slippery. The Unicorn staggered at every step. Xue seized him by the waist and belaboured him with his staff of office, Dong gave him false encouragement. All the way he was complaining of injustice and cursing his luck. When they had gone three or four miles they came to a forest and the Unicorn said: "I really cannot go any further. For pity's sake, please let us rest a while."

So they took him into the forest. The sky was just brightening in the east. There was no one about. Xue said: "We got up very early and we're tired. We could take a little nap here in the forest if I wasn't afraid you might run away."

The Unicorn said: "Even if I grew wings I couldn't go anywhere at the moment."

Xue said: "Let's hear no more from you. Just wait while I tie you up."

He removed a piece of rope he had round his waist and attached it to the Unicorn's waist. Then he put a turn round a pine tree. He took another turn round the Unicorn's legs, securing them to the tree. Then he said to Dong: "You go to the edge of the wood and keep a lookout. If you see anyone coming warn me by coughing."

"All right, but try and do it quickly," Dong said.

"Don't worry. You just go and keep watch," Xue said.

Xue picked up his staff. Looking the Unicorn in the eye he said: "Don't blame us. That manager of yours, Li Gu, he's the one what told us to finish you off on the road. But anyway, if you got to Shamen you'd be as good as dead there, so what's wrong with disposing of you a bit sooner? Only don't make no accusations against us when you get down below. This time next year it'll be your anniversary."

The Unicorn began to weep. He lowered his head, awaiting death. Xue lifted the staff in both hands. He fixed his eyes on the spot on the Unicorn's skull where he was going to bring the staff down. Dong, keeping watch outside, heard the thump of the blow and hurried back to look. The Unicorn was still tied to the tree. Xue was lying flat on his back under the tree; his staff had fallen to one side. "This is extraordinary!" Dong thought. "Is it possible he used so much force that he fell over?" He examined the lying man's face: there was no sign of life. Blood was coming from the mouth. From the breast protruded several inches of the slender shaft of an arrow. Before Dong had time to cry out, he saw a man sitting up in one corner of the tree. At the same moment he heard the twang of a bowstring and an arrow struck him in the head. His legs went from under him and he fell with a crash. The man in the tree leapt down and taking a knife that was tied to his wrist cut the Unicorn's bonds, smashed the cangue, supported the Unicorn and abandoned himself to tears.

When the Unicorn dared to open his eyes he recognized the Prodigy. "Is it really you, lad," he cried, "or is it a spirit impersonating you?"

The Prodigy said: "Ever since you left the garrison I have been following hard on the heels of those two scoundrels. I saw them lock you up in the guardhouse and I saw Manager Li go to talk with them. I suspected that they meant you no good, so I left the city that same night. When you were staying at the inn I waited outside. I got up before dawn and came here first to wait. I guessed it had to be here in this wood that they would set to work. I've finished them both off with arrows, do you see?"

When this Prodigy had the bow in his hand, he could loose three arrows in quick succession and every one would hit its mark.

The Unicorn said: "Although you've saved my life, you've killed these two guards, which makes my fault even graver. Where can we possibly go now?"

The Prodigy said: "It was Song Jiang who got you into trouble in the first place. There is nowhere else we can go now but to the Marshes of Mount Liang."

The Unicorn said: "The trouble is all my wounds from the beating have opened and my feet are all blistered, I simply can't move."

The Prodigy said: "We mustn't waste any time. I will carry you on my back."

The Unicorn went to the dead guards and took some silver from them. He picked up his bow, stuck his sword in its scabbard, took a police staff, hoisted the Unicorn onto his back and set off northwards. After little more than three miles he was exhausted. When they came to a little inn, he went in to ask for a room and buy some wine and food to allay the pangs of hunger. The two of them rested here for a while.

Meanwhile a traveller had come upon the two dead policemen in the forest. He reported it to a local headman who passed it on to the district chief and a report was sent to the capital. In due course an inspector was sent to investigate and he established that the dead men were Dong Chao and Xue Ba from the garrison command. This was reported to the Governor, who issued a warrant and fixed a time-limit for the arrest of the murderer. Various police officers came to look. "The arrows evidently belong to the Prodigy," they announced. "There is no time to lose." Several hundred police were sent out in all directions, to put up notices with descriptions of the two wanted men and to spread the word in villages, districts and inns far and near, and inform the people in towns and markets so as to enlist them in the hunt.

The Unicorn was at this time still at the village inn, recuperating from his beating, and as he still could not walk, there he had to stay. The waiter heard about the murder case and learnt that there was a description of two wanted men at the district office. Having seen it, he hurried to report to the local headman: "There are two pretty suspicious-looking people at our inn. I wonder if it could be them." The headman went to report to the police.

Now the Prodigy, because there was nothing to eat, had taken his bow and gone to look for some game round about. He was on his way back when he heard a lot of shouting in the village. He hid in the trees to observe, and saw several hundred fully armed police standing around, while the Unicorn was dragged away bound in a prison cart. He wanted to rush out and save him, but he had no proper weapon so all he could do was lament. "Unless I go to Mount Liang and tell Song Jiang and persuade him to come and help, I am going to be responsible for my master's death!" he thought.

He set off at once. Halfway through the night he felt terribly hungry. But he hadn't a cent on him. He reached the top of a ridge where there was a thicket of tangled trees and lay down to sleep till daybreak. His heart was heavy and he kept hearing the chattering of the magpies in the branches above him. He thought: "If I shot one I could get some water from the local people and cook it. That would relieve this hunger."

When he walked out of the wood and raised his eyes, a magpie was looking at him. He quietly took out his bow and silently questioned fate and prayed to heaven, as follows: "This is the only arrow I have left. If I am to save my master, may the arrow hit and the magpie fall from the sky; if my master is fated to die, let the magpie fly away before the arrow reaches it."

He fitted the arrow to the bow and cried out: "May good fortune not desert me!" The bow twanged and the arrow hit the magpie in the tail. With the arrow stuck in it, the magpie flew off down the hill. The Prodigy bounded in pursuit. But he couldn't find it. As he was searching, two men appeared in front of him. Here is what they looked like:

*The foremost wears a scarf folded in the shape of a pig's snout, secured with two gold and silver rings at the back of the head, and a robe of very black silk. About his waist is a girdle of wrought gold, half length soft boots on his feet and he carries a staff of eyebrow height. The second wears a white felt hat to keep off the dust and a brown embroidered robe. His waist is girt with a purple belt and he wears leather walking shoes. He has a pack on his back, carries a short staff and a sword is stuck in his belt.*

The two newcomers were walking side by side with the Prodigy. The Prodigy eyed them and thought to himself: "I've got no money. Suppose I knock them down with my two fists and take their bags? Then I can travel on to Mount Liang."

He turned away to hide his bow. The two men were walking along with lowered heads, their eyes on the road. The Prodigy stole up and hit the second man, the one who was wearing a felt hat, on the back of the head. He crashed to the ground. As he was about to hit the one in front, he was instead caught himself by a blow from the latter's staff which took him in the left leg and knocked him to the ground. The other now struggled to his feet and planting one foot on the Prodigy drew his sword and was about to strike without more ado. But the Prodigy cried: "Wait, sir! I am not afraid to die, but who will notify my master?"

Instead of striking the other stayed his hand while he asked: "What the devil has a villain like you got to notify?"

The Prodigy said: "Why do you ask?"

The man in front now pulled the Prodigy's sleeve and the tattoo was exposed. He asked excitedly: "Aren't you someone from Mr. Lu's household, the Prodigy or something like that?"

The Prodigy thought to himself. "I'll die anyway, I might as well speak and let them turn me in, so my spirit and my master's can be together after death." Accordingly he said: "Yes, I am the Prodigy, from Mr. Lu's household. I was heading for Mount Liang to report and ask Song Jiang to rescue my master, that's what."

At this the two men both laughed and said: "Lucky we didn't kill you! So it's the Prodigy, is it? Don't you know who we are?"

The one in black was none other than Mount Liang's Morbid. The one behind was Madcap. Morbid said: "We have orders from the chief to go to the Northern Capital and find out how Mr. Lu is. The Professor and the Magic Messenger are following us down to wait for our report."

When the Prodigy knew who it was he gave them a full account of the previous events. Morbid said to Madcap: "In that case the Prodigy and I had better go back to the mountain stronghold to report all this to the chief. He will come up with a new plan. You go on to the capital and find out what is happening, then come back and report."

"Right", said Madcap, while the Prodigy picked up his pack and went with Morbid. They reached Mount Liang after travelling all night. When they saw Song Jiang the Prodigy recounted all that had happened in detail. Song Jiang was extremely worried and summoned all the leaders to discuss the situation and work out a suitable plan.

Meanwhile Madcap, with nothing but the clothes he was wearing, reached the capital as it was beginning to get dark. He couldn't enter the city so he had to spend the night outside. Next morning after breakfast when he went into the city he found everyone muttering anxiously about something. He began to fear the worst. When he reached the centre he found everyone had locked and barred their doors. He questioned some householders there, but the only answer he got was from an old man: "Haven't you heard then, sir, that a certain Mr. Lu of this city, a very rich man, was lured to Mount Liang by the bandits there and when he managed to escape and return he was persecuted by the authorities and banished to Shamen. Then somehow on the way there he killed his two guards. Yesterday they caught him, and today he's going to be brought here to be executed at half-past twelve. You'll be able to watch."

Madcap went to the market-place at once to see for himself. He found a tavern at the crossroads and went in. He found himself a cubicle overlooking the street and sat down. The waiter came bustling up and asked: "Are you waiting for someone sir, or are you on your own?"

Madcap glared at him and said: "Just bring a big bowl of wine and a big piece of meat, and cut out the bloody questions."

Much chastened, the waiter poured a double measure of wine and sliced a big piece of beef and brought it. Madcap ate and drank for a while. Before long there was a tremendous commotion in the street below. He stepped outside onto the veranda to look. Everyone had locked their doors and every shop was shut. The waiter rushed upstairs and said: "Are you drunk sir or what? They've got the criminal down there. You'd better hurry up and pay your bill and take yourself off!"

"What the hell should I be afraid of?" said Madcap. "Get out of here, unless you want me to hit you!"

That shut the waiter up and he went downstairs again. In a little while the clamour of gongs and drums became deafening. Madcap watched from the veranda of the inn, as the execution ground at the crossroads was marked off by a dozen executioner's men bearing swords and staves and the Unicorn with his hands tied was dragged and buffeted to a spot in front of the tavern where he was made to kneel. Strongarm took up the executioner's sword. His assistant, Blossom, supported the cangue and said: "Mr. Lu, you know everything. It isn't that we didn't want to help you, my brother and I, but it all went wrong. I have already arranged your place below in the Halls of the Blessed. When your spirit arrives there, it'll be received."

A voice rang out: "Twelve thirty! The hour has come!"

The cangue was removed, the assistant executioner steadied the head, the executioner raised the sword, and the registrar read out the crime sheet in a loud voice, the crowd was completely hushed. Then suddenly, from the upper floor of the tavern Madcap, sword in hand, shattered that silence with a great shout: "The forces of Mount Liang are here!" Strongarm and Blossom let go of the Unicorn, cut the rope and ran for it. Madcap leapt down from the veranda and raising his sword began slashing at people like someone splitting watermelons or picking vegetables. He killed a dozen without drawing breath. Then he grabbed hold of the Unicorn and made off, heading south. However, Madcap did not of course know the streets of the capital. He was further hindered by the fact that the Unicorn was terrified out of his wits and could hardly move a limb. When Governor Liang heard what was happening, he was horrified. He told his guards to form separate detachments, go to each of the four city gates, and close them. All the police were ordered to report for duty. Well, however much of a hero you may be, how can you scale the high walls and ramparts of a city? Our heroes were indeed in the situation of someone having to burrow through the ground without the benefit of teeth or claws, or trying to fly up to heaven without feathered wings.

WHEN Lu Junyi was thrown overboard he was rescued by Zhang Shun, who brought him to the bank, where there were many men with torches who seized Lu Junyi, disarmed him, removed his wet clothes, and were going to bind his hand with ropes. Just then Dai Zong appeared, and called out, "Do not injure Lu Junyi in any way!" He took some new embroidered clothes from a man, and handed them to Lu Junyi. A sedan chair was there, and Lu Junyi was asked to take his seat in same. In the distance were about forty men with red silk lanterns illuminated and beating drums who were to conduct Lu Junyi to the mountain. With them were Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and all the other leaders. When near, the chair was set down, and Lu Junyi got out. The leaders all dismounted, and knelt down. Lu Junyi also knelt down, and said, "I am your prisoner, and request a quick dispatch."

Song Jiang laughed and replied, "Sir, I request you to be seated in the chair."

Lu Junyi did this, and all the leaders again mounted their horses. They then all moved off up the mountain, and upon halting before the Loyalty and Justice Hall Song Jiang pressed Lu Junyi to enter the hall. There was a blaze of lanterns on all sides. In the hall Song Jiang addressed Lu Junyi, "I have heard of your fame for a long time, and today I am gratified to be fortunate enough to meet you. I am afraid that we have annoyed you just now, and I ask you to forgive us."

"I was instructed by our commander," said Wu Yong, "to go to your house as a fortune teller, and by some means get you to come and join us here."

Song Jiang requested Lu Junyi to occupy the second seat of honor, but the latter only laughed, and said, "At home I had no conduct deserving capital punishment, and now here I do not think of living. You want to kill me, then kill me at once. Do not joke with me."

Song Jiang laughed, "How dare I joke with you? Your virtue is abundant, and we have been longing for a long time to meet you. So we thought out a plan to get you to come here, and now we will obey your orders."

"Stay!" said Lu Junyi. "For me to die is easy, but to follow your wishes is very difficult."

"We had better discuss matters further tomorrow," said Wu Yong.

Food and wine were now brought in, and they all sat down. Lu Junyi saw no way of avoiding this so he ate and drank with the rest, and then was conducted to a bedroom.

The next day a feast was prepared, and Song Jiang pressed Lu Junyi to join them. When they entered the hall Lu Junyi was pressed to take the premier seat. During the feast Song Jiang stood up, filled Lu Junyi's cup with wine, and then said, "Last night we spoke rather abruptly, and now ask you to forgive us. Though our stronghold is small, and is not a suitable place for a great man, yet I ask you look at that inscription, 'Loyalty and Justice,' and become our commander-in-chief, and I will make room for you."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Lu Junyi. "You are wrong, I have committed no fault! Whether I live or die, I shall still be loyal to the Great Song Dynasty. I would prefere to die than to join you."

"If you are unwilling to join us," said Wu Yong, "we cannot force you to do so. We might detain your body, but we could not keep your spirit. Only it has been very difficult for us to get you come here. If you will not join us, we hope that you will stay with us for at least a few days."

"As you cannot keep me here, why should you not let me leave at once?" asked Lu Junyi. "I am afraid that my people at home will be very much upset at not hearing of me."

"That can be easily arranged," said Wu Yong. "We can send your steward Li Gu back with your carts and goods so that you can rest here for a few days." He then summoned Li Gu, and upon his arrival asked him, "Have you got all your goods and carts?"

"There are none missing," replied Li Gu.

Song Jiang sent for some silver, and distributed it among Li Gu and his subordinates.

Lu Junyi then spoke to Li Gu, "You know all my trouble. I want you to tell my wife everything, and urge her not to be downcast. If I am not killed here I will certainly come back."

"The men here like you," said Li Gu, "so that it won't matter if you stay here for one or two months." He and his men then withdrew.

"Sir, I hope that you will make yourself at home here," said Wu Yong. "I will go and see that Li Gu departs without any difficulty." He then left the hall, mounted his horse, and went down the mountain to wait for Li Gu. When he met him he said, "Li Gu, we have settled every thing with your master, and he has agreed to occupy the second seat in our assembly. While he was at home he wrote on the wall of a room a poem of twenty-eight characters, seven in each line, and along the top of the four lines are four characters, 'Lu' 'Jun' 'Yi' 'Rebels'. The poem is as follows:

'On bank a gallant hero strolls,
His boat is hidden in the reeds;
A long sword he holds,
To kill the traitorous ministers.'

"Today your master has arrived here, but you do not understand the reason. He asked us to kill all you men so that nobody would know where he was, but that would represent us heroes at Liangshan Marsh as being unjust. So you can now return and tell his people that he will never come back."

Li Gu and his men saluted. Wu Yong got a boat, and the party was rowed across the lake. Wu Yong took leave of them, and they departed on their way to the Northern Capital.

The next day another feast was held in the Loyalty and Justice Hall, and there Lu Junyi spoke, "As you have not killed me yet my stay here seems very long. Today I must take my leave of you."

"I have no ability," said Song Jiang, "but today I am aware of your greatness. Tomorrow I will arrange a private feast for us two then we can discuss matters fully. I must ask you not to decline the invitation."

The next day Song Jiang gave the feast, and the day afterwards Wu Yong also had a special private feast for Lu Junyi. Then Gongsun Sheng did the same, and he was followed by all the other thirty leaders so that Lu Junyi had a special feast every day for a whole month. At last Lu Junyi decided to depart at all costs, and Song Jiang agreed to this. He arranged for a parting feast, and drank wine with Lu Junyi. But the other leaders complained because Lu Junyi would not also drink wine with them. They used the proverb, "Why is the brick thick and the tile thin," i.e., why do you treat him intimately and treat us coldly?

Li Kui also called out, "I went through a lot of trouble in my journey to and from the Northern Capital to induce him to come here, but now he would not drink a parting cup with me. Let me fight with him to settle the affair."

Wu Yong laughed at this, but pointed out to Lu Junyi how much he was liked. At last Lu Junyi agreed to stay five days more. But after that he was again induced to stay until nearly another month had passed. It was then near the end of autumn, and the days were getting cold. At last Lu Junyi spoke personally to Song Jiang about his departure, but the latter only laughed, and said, "This can be easily arranged. I will accompany you across the lake tomorrow." The next day Lu Junyi put on his sword and clothes for journey, and all the bandit leaders came down the mountain to see him off. He accepted from them only enough money to cover his expenses on the way.

Lu Junyi had no adventure on his journey, and duly reached the Northern Capital. As it was evening when he arrived he decided to pass the night in an inn just outside the gate. The next morning he entered the city, and happened to meet a man who had a tattered turban and shabby clothes. Upon seeing Lu Junyi he began to cry. Upon looking at the man closely he recognized him as his employee Yan Qing, and therefore asked him what was the matter.

"This is no place to talk," replied Yan Qing. So they both went off the road to a quiet corner where Yan Qing said, "Sometime after you had gone Li Gu returned and told your wife that you had joined the brigands at Liangshan Marsh, and had become the second-in-command. So they both went to the *yamen*, and made an accusation against you. They then went away and lived together. As I objected to that arrangement they dismissed me, and then prevented me from getting other employment so that I have been reduced to begging for a bare living. I knew that you would not join the brigands, and therefore waited here for your return. Now if you will take my advice you will at once return to Liangshan Marsh, because if you stay here there will be danger for you."

"My wife is not the kind of woman who would do such a thing," replied Lu Junyi.

"As you have no eyes at the back of your head," said Yan Qing, "how could you know what has happened here? Previously you were so engaged in your military drills that you had no time for your wife's desires, and it was at that time that your wife had Li Gu as her lover. They now live together as man and wife, and if you interfere there it will lead you to trouble."

Lu Junyi was angry and said, "Our family has been in this town for five generations, and I am well known here. I know Li Gu dares not do this kind of thing. I think you may be deceiving me for some reason. I will go myself to make inquiries at my home, and then I will deal with you."

Yan Qing cried again, and seized hold of Lu Junyi's clothes, but the latter kicked him, and getting free he hurried off towards his home.

Upon arriving there all the servants were surprised to see him. Li Gu hurried forward, saluted, and requested him to enter the main hall. Lu Junyi asked for Yan Qing, and Li Gu replied, "That is a long story, and you had better not ask about him just now. You just take a rest and then I will tell you all about him."

Just then Lu Junyi's wife stepped from behind the screen, and he spoke to her: "How do you do, wife? Now can you tell me about Yan Qing?"

His wife replied, "You need not ask, as that is a long story. You may take a rest and then I will tell you all about him."

Lu Junyi was now very suspicious, and wanted to pursue his inquiries about Yan Qing. But Li Gu said, "Please change your clothes; then worship at your ancestral tablets; get your breakfast, and then we can discuss matters fully." He then went and ordered the food.

As Lu Junyi sat down to eat there arose a great noise at the gates, and about two hundred *yamen* aides entered. They seized Lu Junyi, bound him, and took him off to the *yamen* beating him on the way with their staves. The commander-in-chief of the garrison, Grand Secretary Liang took his seat on the bench. Lu Junyi was taken in front of the bench, and the *yamen* aides stood in ranks on both sides. Li Gu and Lu Junyi's wife had also arrived, and they knelt down at one side.

Grand Secretary Liang, addressed the prisoner in a loud voice: "How is it that you, a highly respected citizen of Daming Prefecture, the Northern Capital, went and joined the brigands at Liangshan Marsh, and became second-in-command there? Do you now return to the Northern Capital to devise schemes to attack us with the brigands? What explanation have you to offer?"

"I was rather stupid," replied Lu Junyi. "One of the brigand leaders, Wu Yong, came to my house in the disguise of a fortune teller. He instigated me to go to Liangshan Marsh, where I was kept as a prisoner for two months. By lucky chance I escaped and returned home here, really I have had no bad intentions. I request that you go into this matter fully."

"It is useless for you to say you have no bad intention," said the Grand Secretary Liang. "If you were not on very intimate terms with the brigands how could you stay there for two months? The accusation against you was made by your own wife and your steward Li Gu. It cannot be false."

"Master," said Li Gu, "if I were you I would make a full confession. On the wall of a room at your house we found a rebellious poem so that it is useless trying to hide anything."

"We do not wish to injure you," said Lu Junyi's wife, "but we are afraid of being implicated. There is a saying, 'If one man rebels, his family is exterminated.'"

Lu Junyi felt deeply wronged, knelt down, and denied the accusation.

"Master, do not deny the charge," said Li Gu. "If you now speak the truth you may get off more easily than if you speak falsely. If you do not confess very soon they will force a confession by torture."

The wife also said, "Husband! If there was nothing definite you would not be here, and if you speak the truth it will be easier to get your release. If you have done this, my own life will be endangered. Your flesh is sensitive, but the bamboo has no feelings. If you confess you will only be punished according to the law."

As Li Gu had bribed all the officials high and low, so the clerk of the court Zhang addressed the bench, "This is an obstinate man, and he will not confess without torture."

"That is so," said the Grand Secretary. He then gave an order for the accused to be beaten.

The court aides seized the prisoner, forced him on the ground, and beat him on the buttocks with the bamboo until blood flowed freely. Lu Junyi fainted several times. He could not endure this torture, and at last said, "My fate is evidently to meet with an untimely death so I will now confess."

The clerk of the court wrote down his confession, and afterwards the accused had a cangue fastened round his neck, and was sent to the prison.

Most of the public present considered that the prisoner had merely confessed in order to escape further torture.

In the prison Lu Junyi was in charge of a jailer Cai Fu, nicknamed, the "Iron Arm," who had his younger brother, Cai Qing, nicknamed the "Flower," as his assistant. Cai Fu was the chief executioner, and never took two strokes, his younger brother always wore a flower in his cap—hence the nicknames. Cai Fu told his younger brother to take the prisoner to a cell, as he wished to go home. This was done. As Cai Fu left the prison he was accosted by a man at the door who was crying and also carrying a can of food. Cai Fu recognized him as Yan Qing and asked what he was doing. Yan Qing knelt down with his tears falling to the ground like pearls and beans. He said, "Elder brother, I ask you to have pity on my master Lu Junyi as he was innocent, although now a prisoner. I have been begging for food, and have now brought a little for him. Do not refuse me." He could not control his sorrow or say another word, but burst into tears.

Cai Fu replied, "I know about the case. You can go inside and give the prisoner the food."

Yan Qing saluted, and entered the jail.

Cai Fu went on his way, but soon met a tea boy who called out, "There is a guest in our tea-house who wishes to speak to you." Cai Fu went upstairs with the man, and found Li Gu waiting for him. After saluting each other Li Gu spoke, "You know all about my affairs so I will not attempt to deceive you. Tonight I want you to extinguish his life. I wish to present you fifty taels of silver for this. If the officials make inquiries I will 'square' them."

Cai Fu laughed and said, "Have you not noticed the stone tablet on the wall of the court with the inscription, 'It is easy to deceive persons, but difficult to deceive heaven.' You may deceive yourself, but you may be sure that I shall know all about it. You have got hold of his wealth, and also his wife, and now you offer me a bribe to kill him. If I commit a crime I shall suffer for it when it is discovered."

"You think fifty taels are too small, so I will double that amount," replied Li Gu.

"Li Gu," said Cai Fu, ""you cut off the cat's tail, and then mix it with the cat's food.' Lu Junyi is a very wealthy man, and your offer is not enough. I might do it, however, for five hundred taels."

"I have the money here," said Li Gu, "and I will hand it to you, if you will kill him this very night."

Cai Fu took the money, hid it in his clothes, and then said, "You come early tomorrow morning for the corpse."

Li Gu thanked him, saluted, and took his departure. Cai Fu went on his way, and upon reaching his home was met at the entrance by a man, who was good looking, well dressed, with a jeweled belt, and embroidered silk shoes.

They saluted each other, and then Cai Fu asked for the man's name and business.

"Let us go inside and then we can talk," replied the man.

They did so, and took their seats in a small private room.

"Do not be alarmed at what I say," commenced the man. "I am a Henghai County man, and my name is Chai Jin. I am a descendant of the Emperor of Later Zhou Dynasty, and I am known as the 'Small Whirlwind.' I am just and upright and distribute wealth in good cause. By a misfortune I committed a crime, and therefore had to fly for safety to Liangshan Marsh. Our commander there is Song Jiang who instructed me to come here, and watch carefully the affairs of Lu Junyi. Who could know that the venal officials, avaricious subordinates, an adulterous wife, and a fornicating villain would join together to injure an innocent man. You hold the life of the innocent man in your hand. I have come to see about this matter, and have scorned the danger I run in doing so. If the prisoner survives we shall never forget your virtue. If the slightest error occurs in this matter then when the heroes of Liangshan Marsh enter this city they will kill everyone, whether good or bad, young or old. We have heard that you are a very upright man, so I will present you a thousand taels of silver. If you wish to arrest me please do so, and I will not resist you."

Cai Fu while listening to this was covered with goose flesh, and was so paralyzed that he could not utter a word.

So Squire Chai Jin continued, "Sir, do not hesitate, but give me an immediate answer."

"I request you, sir, to go back," replied Cai Fu. "I will arrange matters as you wish."

"As you agree to do this I will see that you are duly recompensed," said Squire Chai Jin.

He then took the money from his companion who was standing outside the gate, and handing it to Cai Fu took his leave.

Cai Fu was undecided what to do in view of what Squire Chai Jin had said. He however returned to the jail, and told his younger brother what had passed. His brother said, "You generally have no difficulty in deciding what to do, and as this is only a small matter where is the difficulty? There is a saying, 'In killing a man we must see his blood, in saving a man, we must save him out of trouble.' As we have a thousand taels of silver we can make presents to our superior and inferior men in his name. Both Grand Secretary Liang, and clerk Zhang are fond of bribes, and they can be bought to spare the life of Lu Junyi. We can easily arrange for him to be banished to another place, and so avoid trouble from Liangshan Marsh."

"What you say is just what I think," said Cai Fu. "Take Lu Junyi and put him in a decent cell, and see that he has good food and wine. You can also tell him what has happened."

The money was duly distributed among the various officials, and the matter was explained to them. The following day as Li Gu got no further news he went to Cai Fu's house to find out the reason. Cai Qing, the younger brother, was at home, and he told Li Gu, "We wanted to get rid of the prisoner as you proposed, but unfortunately we got orders from Grand Secretary Liang that the prisoner's life must be saved. So you had better go to the Grand Secretary and bribe him. As soon as he issues orders to us our work will soon be done."

Li Gu sent another man to bribe the officials, and an intermediary reported that the Grand Secretary declined to have anything to do with killing the prisoner. But perhaps after a few days the prisoner might commit suicide.

Clerk Zhang had been bribed by Cai Fu, so he put up the case purposely. Cai Fu also urged him that something should be done at once, and Clerk Zhang consulted Grand Secretary Liang as to how the case should be dealt with. "They had a clear accusation, but there was little proof of the crime. Though he stayed at Liangshan Marsh for some time, there was no evidence that he was really a bandit. We can beat him, and then banish him to some place about three hundred *li* away. What do you think of that?"

The Grand Secretary agreed to this proposal, so sentence was made that Lu Junyi was to receive forty blows with the bamboo, to have a smaller cangue, and be banished to Shamen Island.

This was done, and Lu Junyi was placed in charge of an escort of two men, Dong Chao and Xue Ba. Now these men were the same who had tried to kill Lin Chong when on his journey of banishment but were prevented by Lu Da. Upon receipt of the signed order they took charge of Lu Junyi, and placed him temporarily in a small room while they went home to get their traveling kit ready. Li Gu heard of the new arrangement, and sent a messenger to request Dong Chao and Xue Ba to come and see him before starting off. They duly met Li Gu in an inn where they all sat down in a private room to eat some food and drink wine. After drinking three cups of wine Li Gu spoke to them, "I will be straight with you. Lu Junyi is my enemy. He has no money now, and on this long journey to Shamen Island you will have to pay all the expenses yourself. It will be at least three months before you can get back. Just now I have only these two ingots of silver to give you. If however, when on the way you kill the prisoner, and upon your return you show me the skin bearing his brand mark, then I will give each of you fifty taels of silver. Then you can bring a report back that the prisoner died on the way and I will fix matters up all right for you at the *yamen*."

Dong Chao and Xue Ba looked at each other, and then Dong Chao replied, "I am afraid this is hard for us to do."

But Xue Ba said, "Our friend Li Gu is a well-known man, has a good name, and perhaps we can do this thing for him. If there is any difficulty he can arrange matters for us."

"I am not ungrateful, and I can certainly compensate you well," said Li Gu.

So Dong Chao and Xue Ba took the money, went home for their baggage, and departed that night with the prisoner.

They placed their baggage on Lu Junyi's cangue. They treated the prisoner very harshly on the way. Towards evening of the second day they had gone about five *li*, and they stopped at an inn, just on the outskirts of a forest. They were shown by the waiter into a room at the back, and Xue Ba spoke to Lu, "We are minor officials so how can we wait upon you. If you want a meal you must go and cook it yourself."

So Lu Junyi went into the kitchen, and getting some fuel from the waiter he lit the fire. The waiter also gave him clean rice to boil. But as Lu Junyi had been brought up in a wealthy family he did not know how to cook food. The fire he had lit soon went out, and upon his blowing the embers to revive the flame he got the ashes in his eyes. Dong Chao was annoyed at the delay, and cursed him. When the rice was cooked Dong Chao took it all away, and Lu Junyi dared not even ask for some. When they had finished there was a little left which they gave to Lu Junyi, but it was cold. Xue Ba now told Lu Junyi to boil some water to wash their feet. When he had done this Lu Junyi went into a room and sat down. When they had finished they filled a tub full of very hot water, and summoned Lu Junyi to come and wash his feet. When he had taken off his shoes they seized his legs, and thrust both feet into the boiling water. He shrieked with the pain.

Xue Ba said, "We wait upon you but you are so fastidious." They took a chain and fastened Lu Junyi to the door. They then went to sleep.

About 3 A.M. they got up, and called for the waiter to get their breakfast ready. When they had dined they picked up their bundles to leave the inn. Lu Junyi saw that his feet were all scalded, and he could not walk. Outside it was raining heavily, and the path slippery. Lu Junyi attempted to walk, but fell down. Xue Ba took a stick and thrashed him. Lu Junyi struggled on, while they cursed him. They had gone about three *li* like this when they came to a forest, and Lu Junyi said, "I cannot really go any further, and I hope you will take pity on me and allow me to rest here." They agreed to this, and they all entered the forest. It was now daybreak, and there were no people about. Xue Ba said, "We got up very early this morning, and as we are a bit tired we will rest here. We would like to sleep, but are afraid that you will try to escape."

"Even if I had wings I could not get away just now," said Lu Junyi.

"We will not trust you," said Xue Ba, "and will tie you up."

He took a hempen cord from around his waist, and tied Lu Junyi to a pine tree. He then asked Dong Chao to act as sentry some distance away, and to cough if he saw anyone coming.

"Brother, please get it done as quickly as possible," said Dong Chao.

Xue Ba took his stick, and said to Lu Junyi, "you must not think ill of us but your steward, Li Gu, asked us to kill you on the way. In any case you would soon have died at Shamen Island, so it would be better if you died here. When you get to the afterlife do not blame us."

Lu Junyi wept, but did not speak a word. Xue Ba lifted the stick to strike Lu Junyi on the head when Dong Chao at his post heard a noise, and assumed that the deed had been done. He hurried back to see the result, and there Lu Junyi was still tied to the tree, but evidently none the worse. Xue Ba, however, was lying at the foot of the tree, and his stick was some distance away. "How strange!" said Dong Chao. "You must have over-exerted yourself, and so have fainted." He stooped down to raise his companion, but could not move him. He now saw blood issuing from Xue Ba's mouth, and looking more closely he saw an arrow sticking in Xue Ba's breast. He was startled at this, and quickly looking round espied a man sitting in a tree. At the same moment the man shot an arrow which struck Dong Chao in the neck, and he fell down dead.

The man jumped down from the tree, and taking his sword cut the cord binding Lu Junyi to the tree. When Lu Junyi opened his eyes he saw that the man was Yan Qing, his servant, and exclaimed, "You! Surely we are both dead, and are now both spirits."

"I have followed you all the way from the town," said Yan Qing, "because I thought that they would try to murder you. But I have succeeded in killing them. See, here they are."

"You saved my life," said Lu Junyi, "but you have killed those *yamen* guards so that I am now implicated in a serious crime. Where can we go?"

"Song Jiang certainly did you an injury when he tricked you into leaving your home, but now there is no other place than Liangshan Marsh for us to go to."

"But I am still suffering from the beatings I got in the prison, and my feet were scalded so how can I walk, or go anywhere?" said Lu Junyi.

"We cannot delay matters, so I will carry you on my back." Yan Qing was feeling very perturbed, he kicked the corpses aside and then took Lu Junyi on his back, and started off in an easterly direction. But after going about three *li* like this Yan Qing felt tired, and therefore he stopped at an inn for the night.

Now it happened that some travelers passing near the forest saw the two corpses, and told the chief at the next village, who reported the matter to the officials at Daming, the Northern Capital. When the coroner arrived he recognized Xue Ba and Dong Chao. The officials duly issued an order for the arrest of the murderer within a fixed time. Upon examining the arrows it was found out that they belonged to Yan Qing, so another proclamation was issued giving description of that man, and also Lu Junyi, and ordering their immediate arrest.

Lu Junyi and Yan Qing were now staying at an inn. The waiter at the inn heard of the murder, and as everybody was talking about it, he had suspicions about them. So he went to the village, and told the chief there who sent a report at once to the local *yamen*.

As Yan Qing had no dish for the meal, he took his bow and arrows and went out to shoot some birds. As he was returning to the inn he heard a hubbub in the village so he hid in some trees to see what was happening. Soon he saw a large number of police with a cart on which Lu Junyi was bound a prisoner again. Yan Qing's first desire was to rush out, and rescue Lu Junyi, but he realized that this would be useless as he was not well armed. So he thought, "The only way now is for me to go to Liangshan Marsh, and beg Song Jiang to come and rescue Lu Junyi."

So he started off at once, and traveled all that night. He was very hungry, as he had not a cash to buy food. He crossed a ridge, but as the trees were very dense he could not find his way very well, so he lay down among the bushes and slept there. At daybreak he was aroused by a magpie chattering in a tree just over his head. He thought, "If I shoot that bird I can take it into a village, and get it cooked." When he got up, the magpie, seeing him, began to chatter again. He took his bow and an arrow, and prayed to Heaven, "I have only one arrow, but this shot must hit the bird if my master is to live. If my master's fate is death then this shot will fail." He fixed the arrow and addressed it. "Dart, do not fail!" He pulled the string, and the arrow flew and hit the magpie's tail. The bird flew away towards the foot of the ridge with the arrow sticking in its tail. Yan Qing ran in the direction the bird had gone, but instead of seeing the magpie he ran into two men. The first man wore a cap, in the shape of a pig's snout and had two rings hanging from the cap at the back of his head. He wore a brown silk gown and an engraved metal girdle. His cloth boots came up to his knees. He carried a long staff. The second man wore a big broad brimmed cloth cap and a tea-colored gown. His belt was red, and contained pockets for money, etc. He had leather boots. He carried a bundle on his back, a small stick in his hand, and a sword in his belt. Yan Qing passed the two men close by before he could stop. He looked round and thought, "Why should I not attack these man, and take their money, and so have enough to take me to Liangshan Marsh?" He stuck his bow in his clothes, and turned on the men. The two men, however, seeing his action went on as before. Yan Qing pursued them, and upon catching up, struck one in his back with his fist and knocked him down. The other man, however, took his stave, and swinging it struck Yan Qing on the leg so that he fell down. Before he could get up the other man put his foot on Yan Qing's back, drew his sword to kill him. At this, Yan Qing called out, "Good sir! I do not mind death, but I ask you to have pity on me, as there would be no man to carry the news." The man stayed his hand, and asked what the news was.

"Why do you ask for the news?" asked Yan Qing.

The man seized hold of Yan Qing's arm, and seeing the tattoo marks asked, "Are you not Yan Qing, the employee of Lu Junyi?"

Yan Qing was face to face with death so he thought, "As these men know me I had better tell them the whole truth." He replied, "Yes, I am Yan Qing."

The man said, "It was very lucky that we did not kill you. Do you not recognize us? We are from Liangshan Marsh. I am Yang Xiong and this man is Shi Xiu. We were deputed to come here, and find out what has happened to Lu Junyi. Wu Yong and Dai Zong will come very soon."

Yan Qing then told them all that had happened.

Yang Xiong said, "As that is the position I must go at once to Liangshan Marsh with Yan Qing, and ask for instructions. Meanwhile Shi Xiu had better go to Daming and watch what happens there."

Shi Xiu agreed to this, and gave Yan Qing some of their spare food, and also his bundle. They went their separate ways.
When Shi Xiu reached Daming it was just dark, and as the gates were closed he could not enter that night so he slept at an inn outside the gate. Early the next morning after breakfast he entered the city, and found the people very depressed about something. When he reached the market place he asked an old man whether there had been any trouble. The man replied, "Stranger! Do you not know about the case of Lu Junyi? Today he is to be beheaded about noon so that you can see the affair."
When Shi Xiu heard this his blood ran cold. He went to the place of execution, and entered an inn overlooking the ground. There he sat down and ordered wine and food.
The waiter asked, "Are you alone, or have you invited others to join you here?"
Shi Xiu was now very angry and shouted, "Bring me large bowls of wine and plenty of food. Don't ask stupid questions!"
The waiter was startled at this gust of temper, but hurried off, and soon brought the refreshments. Shi Xiu quickly ate a hearty meal, but just as he had finished he heard a row down below. Looking out of the window he saw that all the shops were closing doors. Just then the waiter entered, and asked if he had had enough and said, "An execution is taking place so would you please pay now and leave."
"What should I be afraid of?" asked Shi Xiu. "You get off at once before I hit you."
The waiter beat a hasty retreat. Soon afterwards drums and gongs were sounded in the street below, and looking out again Shi Xiu saw Lu Junyi being taken to the execution ground which was just in front of the inn where he was. The head jailer Cai Fu was there with his executioner's sword, and his brother Cai Qing who spoke to Lu Junyi, "You must understand that it is not us who do not try to help you, but you have done wrong. Over there is a temple, and we have prepared there a proper seat for your soul to rest there in peace."
The crowd standing round now called out, "It is well afternoon now."
So Cai Qing took off the cangue, and held the prisoner's head in position. Cai Fu raised the sword to strike the deadly blow. The clerk held aloft the sentence and read it aloud. The waiting crowd gasped in anticipation. Shi Xiu now drawing out his sword shouted out, "All the brigands from Liangshan Marsh are here," and jumped down to the ground. Upon hearing and seeing this Cai Fu and Cai Qing deserted. Shi Xiu killed every man within reach, and in no time ten men lay on the ground. He seized Lu Junyi, and took him off down the south street. Shi Xiu did not know the roads, and Lu Junyi was too dazed to notice anything. As soon as the news reached Grand Secretary Liang, he ordered all the city gates to be closed, and dispatched large numbers of soldiers to search the whole city for the escaped prisoners. How could any hero escape from a city under such conditions?

*A man cannot burrow through earth without claws;*
*Nor fly into the sky without wings.*

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**Song Jiang Attacks the Daming Prefecture in the Northern Capital with Troops; Scimitar Guan Sheng Discusses & plans How to Capture Mount Liang**

There was no way for Shi Xiu and Lu the Magnate to get out of the city. Police surrounded them and snared them with long hooked poles and looped ropes. In spite of their courage, the two couldn't resist overwhelming numbers. They were caught and brought before the governor, their captors crying that here was the rogue who had raided the execution grounds.
Shi Xiu was hustled into court. He stood, glaring. "You're a crook who ruins the country and injures the people, a slave of a slave," he shouted at Liang. "Soon my brother Song Jiang and his army will attack your city and trample it flat and hack you into three pieces! I've been sent on ahead to notify you louts!"
The onlookers were stupefied at Shi Xiu's revilement of the governor in open court. But Liang listened. For several minutes he was sunk in thought. Finally he ordered that a big cangue be fastened on each of the prisoners and that they be cast into the jail for the condemned. He put Cai Fu in charge, warning him against any slip-ups.
Cai Fu wanted to be on good terms with the gallants of Mount Liangshan. And so he detained his charges in a cell together, and every day served them good food and wine. As a result, they did not suffer, in fact they lived quite well.
Liang then summoned Wang, the newly appointed prefect, and asked him for a list of the casualties in the fracas. Seventy or eighty had been killed, and innumerable others had sustained head injuries, lacerations and fractured limbs. Liang dispensed government funds for medical treatment for the wounded and cremation for the dead.
The next day news began coming in of dozens of proclamations which had been posted inside and outside the city by the Mount Liangshan forces. Citizens, not daring to conceal them, reported the proclamations to the authorities. Governor Liang read one, and his soul flew up to Ninth Heaven in fright. It ran as follows:

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Song Jiang, a Liangshan Marsh fighter for righteousness, hereby notifies the authorities of Daming and all its inhabitants: Lu Junyi of the Northern Capital is a man of honor. We recently invited him to our mountain stronghold to carry out together with us the Will of Heaven and dispatched Shi Xiu to inform you of this. To our surprise you seized them both. If they are not harmed, and you turn over to us the adulterous wife and her lover, we will not intervene. If however you injure these men who are our wings, our limbs, we shall descend from our fortress in full force and take vengeance, incinerating and destroying everything, good or bad. Heaven and Earth will support us, and the spirits will assist. We shall wipe out the treacherous and exterminate the stubborn. Easily we shall enter the city, but not lightly will our wrath be appeased. Virtuous husbands and wives, filial sons and grandsons, righteous citizens and clean officials need have no fear. They may go peacefully about their affairs. Let all be thus advised.

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Liang again summoned Prefect Wang. "How shall we deal with this?" he queried.
Wang was a weak and timid person. "The imperial court sent soldiers to arrest that gang on Mount Liangshan several times, but they failed," he said. "What can a small city like ours do? If those wild villains attack before imperial forces come to the rescue, we'll be finished. I have a suggestion. Spare the lives of the two prisoners, but write a plea to the imperial court and notify his excellency Premier Cai. At the same time send our local troops out to prepare to repel any raiders. This will preserve the city and protect its inhabitants. If we execute those two, the brigands may attack immediately before reinforcements can arrive. The imperial court will blame us and the citizens will be thrown into a panic. It will be a nasty situation."
"Your proposal is quite sound," said Governor Liang. He summoned superintendent Cai Fu and gave him his instructions.
"Those two are no ordinary culprits," he said. "If you're too hard on them, they may die. If you're too soft, they may escape. I want you and your brother to watch them day and night. Be flexible, but keep them under constant guard. Don't relax for a moment."
Cai Fu was delighted with this order, since it fitted in precisely with what he had in mind. On leaving the governor he went to reassure the two prisoners. Of that we'll say no more.
Governor Liang then called his generals, Wen Da the Mighty Sword and Li Cheng the King of the Skies, to his residency for a conference. He told them of the proclamations from Liangshan Marsh and what Prefect Wang had proposed. Li Cheng was contemptuous.
"So those petty bandits may dare to emerge from their lair," he said. "It's nothing for you to be concerned about, Excellency. I'm not talented, and I've eaten much of the public larder without performing any meritorious deeds. Now I would like to do my utmost. Let me lead my soldiers forth and encamp outside the city. If the bandits don't come, we can discuss what to do next. Though strong, their days are numbered. I'm not boasting, but if they do venture out and attack, I guarantee not one of them will return alive!"
Liang was very pleased. He rewarded the commanders with gold and silks. The two thanked him, took their leave, and returned to their respective posts.
The following morning Li Cheng summoned his officers to his tent to confer. From among them Suo Chao, a handsome, impressive man came forward. He was known as the Urgent Vanguard, and his weapons were a pair of golden battle-axes.
"The bandit Song Jiang is coming soon to attack our Northern Capital," Li Cheng said. "Muster your soldiers, march them thirty-five //from the city and make camp. I will follow with more troops."
The next morning Suo Chao did as ordered. He halted at a place called Flying-Tiger Valley, and built a fortified encampment at the foot of the hills. Li Cheng, the day after, left the city with leaders of his middle and flanking units, marched twenty-five //to Locust Tree Slope, and there set up a stockaded camp. Both camps bristled with spears and knives. Branched stakes, like sharp deer antlers, were firmly embedded on the perimeters. On three sides deep pits were dug. The soldiers rubbed their hands in anticipation, eager to distinguish themselves and win glory for the emperor.

We'll divide our story into two parts. Those proclamation notices were written by Wu Yong after hearing the news from Yan Qing and Yang Xiong. On learning from Dai Zong that Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu had been captured, he had them put up when no one was around on bridges and roadways. Dai returned to the mountain fortress and told the chieftains in detail what had transpired.
Song Jiang was shocked. He at once had the drums sounded to summon the chieftains to Loyalty Hall. They took their seats in order of rank. Song addressed himself to Wu Yong.
"You meant well at the time, inviting Lu the Magnate up the mountain to join our band. But because of this, today he's in trouble, and brother Shi Xiu as well. What can we do to rescue them?"
"Don't worry, brother. I'm not talented, but I have a plan. We can use this opportunity to relieve the Northern Capital of its money and grain for our own use! Tomorrow is an auspicious day. Divide our chieftains into two. Leave half here to guard the fort. Give me the other half to attack the city."
Song Jiang directed Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan to muster the necessary forces to march the following day.
"These two big axes of mine haven't had any action for a long time," said Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. "I'm glad to hear we're going to fight and pillage again. Let me have five hundred men and I'll take the Northern Capital, hack Governor Liang into mincemeat, dismember the corpses of Li Gu and that adulterous female, and rescue Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu! The 'mute acolyte' will get his revenge. I'll do a thorough job of it."
"Although you're brave, brother," Song Jiang replied, "the Northern Capital isn't like other prefectures. What's more, Governor Liang is the son-in-law of Premier Cai, and his generals Li Cheng and Wen Da are of matchless courage. They're not to be underestimated."
"You knew I'm quick to speak, yet you let me go disguised as a mute," Li Kui yelled. "But now, though you know I like to kill, you won't let me be the vanguard. Do you want to aggravate me into my grave!"
"Since you insist," said Wu Yong, "you can go as a vanguard. Take five hundred bold fellows and set up an advance position. You can start tomorrow."
That evening Song Jiang and Wu Yong decided on the number of men to be used in the campaign. Pei Xuan wrote a notice which he dispatched to various installations on the mountain, outlining the order of march according to contingents and directing prompt execution.
It was then the end of autumn and the beginning of winter, a comfortable time for wearing armor, and the horses were sleek and fat. For a long time the men had not seen battle, and they longed for action. The hatred they felt was intense, and they were determined to wreak vengeance. Happy with their mission, they gathered their weapons, and saddled and bridled their steeds. They rubbed their hands, ready to start down the mountain at the appointed hour.
The first contingent, the vanguard, consisted of five hundred men under Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. The second, under Two-Headed Snake Xie Zhen, Twin-Tailed Scorpion Xie Bao, Kong Ming the Comet and Kong Liang the Flaming Star, consisted of a thousand men. The third also contained a thousand men and was led by the girl Ten Feet of Steel, and her lieutenants Sun the Witch and Gu Dasao the Tigress. The fourth was headed by Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle, assisted by Nine Dragons Shi Jin and Sun Xin the Junior General, and also contained a thousand men.
Song Jiang was the commander-in-chief of the central army, with Wu Yong as his military advisor. His four aides were Lu Fang the Little Duke, Guo Sheng the Second Ren Gui, Sun Li the Sickly General and Huang Xin the Suppressor of the Three Mountains. Qin Ming the Thunderbolt led the forward army, seconded by Han Tao the Ever-Victorious General and Peng Qi the Eyes of Heaven General. Panther Head Lin Chong commanded the rear army, and his lieutenants were Ma Lin the Elfin Flutist and Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion. The left army was commanded by Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, assisted by Golden-Winged Hawk Ou Peng and Yan Shun the Elegant Tiger. Hua Rong led the right army, aided by Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger and Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake.
Also on the expedition were the cannon expert Heaven-Shaking Thunder Ling Zhen, who was in charge of grain for the men and fodder for the horses, and Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller who was responsible for collecting military intelligence.
Each contingent, under its respective leader set out at daybreak in the prescribed order. Only the Deputy Military Advisor Gongsun Sheng was left behind with a body of men to guard the fortress and its three passes, assisted by Liu Tang, Zhu Tong and Mu Hong. The waterside fort was held by Li Jun and others. Of that we'll say no more.

We'll speak now of Suo Chao, seated in his camp in Flying-Tiger Valley. A horseman sped up like a meteor and announced that Song Jiang was approaching with an army of countless thousands. They were only twenty or thirty //away. Suo Chao immediately sent word to Li Cheng on Locust Tree Slope. The general hurriedly relayed the information to the city. At the same time he mounted his charger and rode directly to the forward camp. Suo Chao greeted him and told him the news in detail.
At dawn the next day the defenders breakfasted. When it was light they broke camp, moved forward to the Yu Family Hamlet, and deployed fifteen thousand infantry and cavalry in battle positions. Li Cheng and Suo Chao, in full armor, reined their horses beneath a pennant-decorated arch. Far to the east more than five hundred men could be seen flying towards them in a cloud of dust. Riding in the fore was Black Whirlwind Li Kui, a battle-ax in each hand. Glaring, he ground his teeth and shouted: "Your lord Black Whirlwind from Mount Liangshan is here!"
Li Cheng turned to Suo Chao with a laugh. "Every day we hear about the bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh. Why, they're just a pack of dirty bandits, not worth mentioning! Vanguard Commander, why don't you nab the louts?"
Suo Chao smiled. "There's no need for me to act. We have plenty of field officers eager for glory."
Before the words were out of his mouth, a senior officer named Wang Ding, twirling a lance, galloped forward with a hundred horsemen. Li Kui and his men couldn't withstand the united cavalry charge, and they fled in all directions. Suo Chao and his forces chased them past Yu Family Hamlet.
Behind the hill, gongs and drums suddenly resounded, and two cavalry troops rode forth. On the left was Xie Zhen and Kong Liang, on the right was Kong Ming and Xie Bao, and each troop contained five hundred fierce riders.
Startled by the appearance of these reinforcements, Suo Chao stopped his pursuit and hastily returned.
"Why didn't you capture the bandits?" Li Cheng demanded.
"We chased them beyond the hill and were about to take them when the rogues were reinforced. Their support had been waiting in ambush. We couldn't follow through."
"They're only bushwhackers. What's there be afraid of!"
Li Cheng led his entire forward army in a charge past Yu Family Hamlet. Ahead he saw banners wave, and heard yells and the thunder of drums and the crash of gongs. Another cavalry troop appeared. At the head of this one was a girl warrior, very smartly accoutred. On the red banner in front of the unit she was leading, the words *Female General Ten Feet of Steel* were inscribed in letters of gold. Gu Dasao was on her left, Sun the Witch on her right, and together they led a force of over a thousand. Their men were of every size and description and hailed from many different parts of the country.
When Li Cheng saw them he said to Suo Chao: "Soldiers like that are absolutely useless. Go at them directly, while I surround them with my troops."
Grasping his golden axes, Suo Chao struck his horse and galloped forward. Ten Feet of Steel turned her mount and raced for a hollow in the hills. Li Cheng, who had spread out his force, tore after her.
Suddenly, he heard earth-shaking yells. Charging towards him was Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle, flanked by Shi Jin and Sun Xin. Hastily, he and his soldiers retreated into Yu Family Hamlet. But then they were assaulted from the left by a contingent led by Xie Zhen and Kong Liang, and from the right by the unit under Xie Bao and Kong Ming. Meanwhile, the three women commanders had wheeled their troop around and were catching up from the rear.
So hot was the pursuit that Li Cheng and his men were scattered.
They pressed desperately on to return to camp. Ahead, they found Li Kui the Black Whirlwind blocking their path. Li Cheng and Suo Chao managed to dash through. By the time they reached the camp, they had suffered huge losses.
Song Jiang and his army did not chase them any further. They reassembled for a short rest, then made camp.
Li Cheng and Suo Chao hurried to the city and reported to Governor Liang. That same night Wen Da was rushed to the battle area with local reinforcements. Li Cheng received him in the camp on Locust Tree Slope and raised the question of a withdrawal strategy. Wen Da laughed.
"Those bandits are only a slight itch. They're nothing to worry about!"
That night they agreed on a plan and instructed the troops. At the fourth watch everyone had breakfast, at the fifth they donned their armor, at daylight they marched. Thrice the battle drums rolled as they broke camp and advanced towards Yu Family Hamlet.
Soon they saw Song Jiang's army, sweeping towards them like the wind. Wen Da the Mighty Sword spread his troops out in battle formation, and ordered his archers to shoot and stop the front ranks of the advancing foe. Song Jiang selected one of his senior officers to go forth. He bore a red banner with the words writ large in silver: *Qin Ming the Thunderbolt.*
Qin Ming reined his horse and shouted: "You corrupt officials of the Northern Capital, listen! We've been intending to attack your city for a long time. Only a fear of hurting its good people has prevented us. Turn over Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, surrender the adulterous pair, and we'll withdraw and swear we won't encroach. If you are stubborn, you'll bring fire down on your own heads that will melt jade and stones! Those are your only prospects. If you've anything to say, speak now, without delay!"
"Who will seize that varlet for me?" Wen Da furiously cried.
Before he had finished speaking, Suo Chao advanced to the front and shouted: "You were an officer appointed by the imperial court. How has the government ever wronged you? Instead of behaving like a proper person you've become a wretched bandit! I'm going to pulverise you when I catch you today!"
To Qin Ming the words were like coal in a stove, oil on a fire. He clapped his horse and charged, whirling his wolf-toothed cudgel.
Suo Chao spurred his mount to meet him. Two spirited horses collided, two sets of weapons clashed, the armies on both sides yelled. The contestants fought more than twenty rounds, with neither the victor.
Han Tao moved up on horseback from the ranks of Song Jiang's vanguard unit. He fitted an arrow to his bow, aimed, and let fly. The arrow struck Suo Chao in the left arm. He dropped his axes, turned and cantered back to his position.
Song Jiang pointed with his whip and all three armies surged forward. Corpses soon covered the plain, blood flowed in rivers. It was a crushing defeat. The Song Jiang forces chased the running foe past Yu Family Hamlet, then captured Locust Tree Slope. Wen Da fled all the way to Flying-Tiger Valley. When he counted his soldiers, he found he had lost a third.
On Locust Tree Slope Song Jiang made camp. Wu Yong said: "Beaten troops are always frightened. We ought to go after them before they recover their nerve. It's too good a chance to miss."
"You're quite right, Military Advisor," replied Song Jiang. He circulated the order that his crack victorious forces should that evening divide into four columns and march through the night to attack the city.
As to Wen Da, he had just caught his breath after returning to Flying-Tiger Valley, when a junior officer entered and announced a row of fires on a nearby hilltop. Wen Da mounted his horse and went out with a troop of soldiers to look. There, on a hill to the east, countless torches were turning the hills and the surrounding fields red.
To the west, too, fires gleamed. Wen Da led his men hastily in that direction. Suddenly, from behind he heard thunderous shouts. Racing in pursuit from the east was Hua Rong, followed by Yang Chun and Chen Da. Panic-stricken, Wen Da led his soldiers quickly back to Flying-Tiger Valley.
But then, from the glowing torches in the west Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, with Ou Peng and Yan Shun as his second in command, came charging downward. Pincers from east and west were closing in. And from the rear, there were more yells, and Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, aided by Han Tao and Peng Qi, raced up to join the fray. Shouting men and neighing horses milled in the firelight without number.
Wen Da's army was thrown into confusion. They broke camp and left. Again they heard yells, this time before them. There were bursts of flame Heaven-Shaking Thunder Ling Zhen and his assistants had slipped around to the side of Flying-Tiger Valley via small paths and were bombarding with their cannon.
Wen Da and troops plunged through and raced for the city. Ahead of them drums pounded. A troop of cavalry was blocking their way. In the firelight Panther Head Lin Chong moved forward, aided by Ma Lin and Deng Fei. On all sides drums thundered in unison and fierce flames erupted. The government soldiers, in turmoil, fled for their lives.

Swinging his sword, Wen Da was hacking his way through when he ran into Li Cheng. The two joined forces and fought a withdrawal action. By dawn they had battled to the outskirts of the city.
When Governor Liang heard the news, his soul was shaken from his body. He hastily mustered troops and sent them out to bring in the defeated soldiers. Then he locked the city gates and tightened his defenses.
The following morning Song Jiang's forces arrived. They pushed straight up to the East Gate and there made camp. They prepared to attack.
In the city's military headquarters Governor Liang called a conference. It was difficult to see any solution.
"The brigands are at our gates," said Li Cheng. "The situation is desperate. If we delay any longer, we'll be lost. You must immediately write a personal family letter, Excellency, to the premier, and send it by trusted emissary tonight. The premier will then be able to petition the emperor in the morning court to dispatch crack troops to our rescue. That would be best. Second, you should also officially notify all neighboring prefectures and counties to send relief troops quickly. Third, instruct the Daming Prefecture to conscript civilians to go up on the walls of the Northern Capital and help defend the city. Let them keep in readiness throwing logs, ballista stones, blinding lime and molten metal. Have them cock the crossbows, and be vigilant day and night. In this manner we can guarantee against mishaps."
"I can write the letter easily enough, but who will carry it?" Said the governor. That same day he designated one of his leading commanders, Wang Ding. Wang donned full armor, selected a couple of cavalrymen, and took the letter. The city gate was opened, the drawbridge lowered, the messengers went off to the Eastern Capital at flying speed. Neighboring prefectures and counties were officially notified to rush relief troops. Prefect Wang was directed to muster civilians for the defense of the city walls. Of that we'll say no more.
Song Jiang divided his forces and established camps on the north, east and west of the city, leaving only the approaches to the south gate open. Every day he attacked, at the same time urging the mountain stronghold to send grain and fodder for a long siege. He was determined to break into Daming and rescue Magnate Lu and Shi Xiu. Every day Li Cheng and Wen Da came out with soldiers and gave battle, but they were unable to win. Suo Chao was recuperating from his arrow wound, which had not yet healed.
Wang Ding and the other two riders arrived at the residency of the premier with the private letter and dismounted. The keeper of the gate went in and reported. The premier directed that Wang Ding be allowed to enter. Wang went directly to the rear hall, kowtowed and presented the message. Premier Cai Jing opened the letter and read it. Shocked, he closely questioned Wang Ding. The emissary related the story of Lu Junyi in detail, adding, "Song Jiang has surrounded the city with a huge force of bandits. We can't cope with them." He told also of the murderous battles at Yu Family Hamlet, Locust Tree Slope and Flying-Tiger Valley.
"You've had a tiring ride," said Cai. "Go to the government hostel and rest. I must hold a conference of officials."
"The Northern Capital is in a terrible dilemma, Your Excellency. It faces disaster. If it should fall, what will happen to the rest of Hebei Province? We hope Your Excellency will send troops quickly and destroy the rebels!"
"No need to say any more. You may go."
Wang Ding withdrew. The premier at once directed his officer of the day to summon the Chancellor of Military Affairs to an urgent conference on a military matter of the utmost importance. Shortly thereafter, Tong Guan, the Chancellor, accompanied by three marshals, arrived at the hall of state and presented themselves to the premier. Cai Jing told them in detail of the emergency in the Northern Capital.
"We need a plan, and a first-rate general, to drive off the marauding bandits and preserve the city," he said.
The assembled officers looked at one another with frightened expressions. From behind the infantry marshal a man stepped forward. A commander of the palace guards, his name was Xuan Zan. His face was as black as the bottom of pot, his nostrils were aimed at the sky, he had curly hair and a reddish beard. A massive fellow, he wielded a steel blade. His skill with weapons was out of the ordinary. Formerly married to the daughter of a prince, he had been known as the Ugly Son-in-Law. The prince, impressed by his winning several archery matches in a row, had given him his daughter in marriage. But Xuan Zan's ugliness had so revolted the girl that she died.
As a result he was held in low esteem and never rose above his rank of guards' commander. Tong Guan, a wily sycophant and courtier, considered himself infinitely superior, and treated him with contempt.
But at this moment Xuan Zan felt he had to speak, and he addressed the premier.
"I became friends with a man when I was in the rural areas. He is a direct descendant of Guan Yu, famed general at the end of the Han Dynasty, when the country split into three. His name is Guan Sheng, and he bears a striking resemblance to his noble ancestor. His weapon is a crescent-shaped halberd, and so people call him Guan Sheng the Big Halberd. He's now a lowly patrol officer in Pudong, but he's studied books of military lore since childhood, is thoroughly versed in weaponry, and is a man of matchless valor. If he is presented with money and raised to senior officer rank, he can expunge the water-girt fortress and destroy the wild rebels. This man is essential to the preservation of our country and peace in our land. He awaits only your command."
Cai Jing was delighted. He appointed Xuan Zan his emissary to ride like a comet through the night to Pudong with an invitation to Guan Sheng to come to the capital and confer. The assembled officials withdrew.
Xuan Zan immediately set out, accompanied by four or five other horsemen. In less than a day they arrived at the headquarters of the Pudong patrol and dismounted. Guan Sheng was there, discussing the rise and fall of prominent figures in ancient and current times with his friend Hao Siwen. When he was informed that an emissary had come from the Eastern Capital, he went out with Hao to welcome him. Guan exchanged courtesies with his caller and invited him into the hall and asked him to be seated.
"We haven't seen each other in a long time," said Guan. "What brings you all this distance today?"
"The Mount Liangshan bandits are attacking the Northern Capital. I've told the premier that you had a strategy for keeping the country tranquil, and a skill capable of destroying all enemy officers and troops. By imperial decree, and on orders of the premier, I bring you these gifts of money and satins and a fine saddle, and request you to set forth. You mustn't refuse, brother. Get your things together and we'll start for the capital."
Guan Sheng was extremely pleased. "This is Hao Siwen," he said. "He and I are sworn brothers. His mother dreamed she was entered by the spirit of a wild dog shortly before she became pregnant with Hao. And so, today, he is known as Wild Dog Hao. He's skilled in all eighteen of the military arts. Since I've been summoned by the premier, why shouldn't I take him with me, so that we can serve the country together?" Xuan Zan gladly consented. He urged them to commence the journey quickly.
Guan Sheng gave parting instructions to his family, collected his weapons, horse, helmet, armor and luggage, and set out that same night with Hao and a dozen big fellows from West of the Pass, all accompanying Xuan Zan. On reaching the Eastern Capital, they rode directly to the premier's residency and dismounted. The keeper of the gate announced them and they were invited in. Xuan Zan led Guan Sheng and Hao Siwen to the hall of state. They kowtowed to the premier, then stood respectfully at the foot of the dais.
Premier Cai Jing looked Guan Sheng over. He saw a tall, powerfully built man with a fine beard divided into three strands, eyebrows that extended to his sideburns, eyes turned up at the corners, a face as ruddy as jujubes, and crimson lips. Cai was very pleased.
"How old are you, officer?" he asked.
"Thirty-two, sir."
"Bandits from Liangshan Marsh have surrounded the Northern Capital. Tell me, please, do you have any good plan for breaking the siege?"
"I heard a long time ago that those bandits have taken over the Marsh and prey on the people and raid the towns. Now they've dared to leave their lair and seek their own destruction. It would be a waste of energy merely to relieve the Northern Capital. If you will give me an army of crack troops, I'll first take Mount Liangshan, then capture the bandits. Thus, neither of their forces will be able to help the other."
Cai Jing was delighted. "Besieging the kingdom of Wei to relieve the kingdom of Zhao—the strategy used in ancient days! Exactly what I was thinking." He directed the Council of Military Affairs to muster 15000 crack soldiers from the provinces of Shandong and Hebei, and let Hao Siwen lead the vanguard and Xuan Zan the rear contingent, with Guan Sheng in over-all command. Duan Chang the infantry marshal was given charge of grain and fodder supplies. The premier highly rewarded the three new commanders and set a date at which they were to proceed directly and in force against Liangshan Marsh. But the dragon's home is the sea; it cannot ride the mist and clouds. The tiger on the unfamiliar plain cannot fully use its teeth and claws. Truly, while gazing longingly at the autumn moon one can easily lose the glowing jewel in its casket.

Madcap, remember, has just rescued the Unicorn from execution; but not knowing the roads in the Northern Capital he can find no way to escape. Well, the next thing that happens is this: Government troops converge on them from all sides and the police pin them down — quite literally, with hooks — and tie them up. The unfortunate pair of heroes are overwhelmed by numbers.
Thus immobilized, they were led before Governor Liang, who had already been informed that the villains who robbed the execution ground were taken. When Madcap appeared in the court, he glared about him and reviled the Governor: "You filthy desecrator of our land and oppressor of the people, I am here on the orders of my chief. He will be coming here with an army to seize this town of yours. He will raze it to the ground and cut you to pieces! He sent me to tell you this!"
He ranted on, calling the Governor every name in the book, while the whole courtroom stared at him speechless. Governor Liang gave the matter long and troubled thought, then ordered heavy cangues for the two of them. They were taken to the cells for condemned prisoners and Strongarm, the gaoler, was ordered to guard them closely, and be sure nothing went wrong.
Now Strongarm was eager to keep in with Mount Liang and after locking them up together he brought them good wine and food every day. So, far from suffering, they actually ate very well.
Governor Liang summoned the newly appointed district magistrate to receive his orders. The casualties in the town were counted and there were found to be over seventy dead, as well as countless head injuries, cuts, bruises and damaged limbs. When he had read the official report, the Governor allotted public money to pay for medical treatment or cremation.
Next day reports began to arrive from people within and without the city who said: "We cannot remain silent about the fact that dozens of unsigned notices from Mount Liang have appeared; it is clearly our duty to report it."
When Governor Liang saw one of these notices he was frightened out of his wits. Here is what it said:
*Song Jiang of the Marshes of Mount Liang respectfully greets the government and people of the Northern Capital and wishes to inform them that: owing to the excesses of those who exercise authority under the Song dynasty, the abuse of power by corrupt officials, the cruel oppression of the innocent and the terrible plight of ordinary people, Mr. Lu, a valiant and upstanding gentleman of the Northern Capital, has asked to be admitted to our company and join with us in doing heaven's will. How vilely in your folly and greed do you torment the innocent! Mr. Shi also, whom we sent on ahead to report on the situation, has been wrongfully detained! But provided the lives of these two people are preserved, and the harlot and her evil lover handed over, I shall not attack you. If on the other hand a hair of their heads is harmed, or any injury whatsoever sustained by them, we shall mobilize all our forces and unite to exact revenge. When our army falls upon you, even jade will burn. We shall root out the evil deceivers, we shall eliminate the troublemakers. Heaven and earth are on our side, gods and spirits bestow on us their blessing. We shall enter the city with the greatest of ease, but not lightly will we be appeased. Honourable men and women, filial and obedient offspring, upright citizens and honest officials have nothing to fear — they should continue to perform their duties as normal. Let all take heed!*
Governor Liang read this unsigned proclamation and then summoned District Magistrate Wang for a consultation. "How should we resolve this business?" he said.
Wang was of a timid disposition and when he heard the proclamation he said: "If the court has repeatedly failed in its attempts to eradicate that rabble in the Marshes of Mount Liang, how will we, with our meagre resources, succeed? If those criminals attack us and the central government does not come to the rescue, it will be too late then to wish we had acted differently. If you ask me, we should spare these two lives. We can write a report and submit it to the Emperor and also inform the Grand Preceptor. In addition let us order our own troops to set up camp outside the city, to be prepared for any eventuality. By these means we can guarantee the peace of the Northern Capital, preserve our troops and protect our people. If any harm did come to those two and the outlaws attacked, well, in the first place there are no reinforcements, secondly the Emperor would hold us responsible, and thirdly it would agitate the populace and cause unrest in the city, all of which is highly undesirable."
Governor Liang said: "You have hit the nail on the head." He sent for Strongarm and said: "These two criminals are something of a problem. If you restrain then too harshly there is a chance they may die, but if on the other hand you are too lax I am afraid they may escape. You and your brother must temper rigour with mildness, but be constantly on your guard. Do not allow your vigilance to lapse for one instant."
This exactly suited Strongarm's book. "It's just what I wanted," he said to himself. He got his keys and went to the gaol to tell his two friends the good news. Of this no more.
Governor, meanwhile, summoned two of his generals, Swords-man Wen Da and Li Cheng, known as Vulcan, for consultations. He explained about the proclamation from Mount Liang and Magistrate Wang's proposed course of action.
Vulcan said: "A bunch of common bandits like these won't dare venture far from their den. Why is Your Excellency so worried about them? I am well aware that my talent is small and my salary more than my achievements warrant, but I am prepared to devote all my energy to this campaign. We will establish our camp outside the city and if the rebels fail to turn up we will think of something else. The bandits' fortunes are in decline, their days are numbered! If they have the nerve to poke their noses out and attack us, I don't want to boast, but not even a scrap of their armour will make the return journey!"
His Excellency was delighted with this speech, and he presented gold and rich brocades to both generals, who thanked him and took their leave, each returning to his own headquarters to rest.
Next day Vulcan went to his tent and summoned all his officers to a briefing. One of those present was a most impressive individual, a man of truly noble mien. This was Suo Chao the Hasty. He was the first to receive his orders. "The bandit Song Jiang is going to advance on the city some day soon," Vulcan told him. "He plans to attack the Northern Capital. You are to march your troops out of the city and make camp about ten miles away. I shall follow with my forces."
Hasty passed this order on to his troops the following day, and they marched to a place called Flying Tiger Valley, ten miles from the capital, where they pitched camp at the foot of the mountains. Next day Vulcan marched eight miles out and encamped at a place called Acacia Hill. Weapons were plentiful in the camp and they planted a thick hedge of deer's antlers all around it. On three sides they dug concealed pits.
The troops were now champing at the bit and the commanders were united in their resolve. They couldn't wait for the forces from Mount Liang to come at them, so they could have their chance of glory.
Now our story divides in two. The unsigned proclamation had of course been written by the Professor after the Prodigy and Morbid reported back and after the Magic Messenger, whom he sent to find out about the fate of Madcap and the Unicorn, reported that they had been recaptured. Copies of the proclamation were scattered in quiet places and posted up on highways and bridges, with the aim of protecting the lives of the captured pair, the Unicorn and Madcap.
When the Magic Messenger returned to Mount Liang and recounted the preceding events in detail, Song Jiang was extremely upset. The drum was beaten and a general meeting was held in the Ceremonial Hall, at which all the leaders, great and small, sat down in due order of precedence. Song Jiang opened the proceedings, addressing the Professor as follows: "This all began when you had the good idea of inviting the Unicorn to join our company. Now it has unexpectedly brought him great hardship. In addition we have lost Madcap. What can we do to rescue them?"
The Professor replied: "Do not worry, brother. Although I know my limitations, I am going to propose a scheme which will allow us to profit from this situation by sacking the Northern Capital and reprovisioning our stronghold. Tomorrow is an auspicious date. I would like you to divide us into two parties, one to guard the camp and the other to go with me to capture the city."
Song Jiang said: "I like the sound of this." He told Sterling to draw up a list of the leaders who were to set out on the following day.
At this moment Iron Ox intervened: "These two axes of mine have been idle far too long. This talk of fighting and plunder is meat and drink to them. Just give me five hundred troops to attack the Northern Capital and I'll make mincemeat of the Governor, catch Manager Li and his whore and cut them into little pieces, and rescue the Unicorn and Madcap. I'd like nothing better."
"I know how brave you are," Song Jiang said. "But the Northern Capital is not like any little provincial town and the Governor is the Grand Preceptor's son-in-law. Not only that but he's got two generals, Vulcan and Swordsman, who are a match for anyone. We must not underestimate them."
Iron Ox roared: "Brother, if you exaggerate other people's valour like this, you simply undermine your own confidence. You just watch me go and do it. If they get the better of me I swear I'll never come back."
The Professor said: "If you really want to go, we'll put you in charge of the vanguard, with five hundred picked men to constitute the spearhead. You can start tomorrow."
Song Jiang and the Professor held further talks that evening, and decided on their forces. Sterling prepared a roster, which was sent to all the camps. Everyone was to follow the dispositions and take care there was no slip-up.
The season was autumn, nearly winter, the time when it becomes more comfortable to wear armour and the horses are fat. The troops had not seen battle for some time, and were full of warlike spirit. Their ardour was exceptional and their thoughts dwelt only on revenge. Eager for glory, they prepared their weapons, saddled their horses and set off down the mountain full of anticipation.
Iron Ox was told to lead off with five hundred men to pioneer the route. Second were Snake, Scorpion and the Kong Brothers, Comet and Red Star, with a thousand men. Third was Steelbright, the woman warrior, assisted by Sister Sun the Ogress and Auntie Gu, with a thousand troops. Fourth was Skyhawk, assisted by the Tattooed Dragon and Blackface, also with a thousand troops. The main force was commanded by Song Jiang and the Professor, with four commanders on their staff: the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Colonel Sun and the Tamer. The vanguard was commanded by Thunderclap, accompanied by Victorious and the Supremo. The rearguard was commanded by Leopard's Head, with the Flautist and Redeye. On the left flank was Twin Rods, seconded by Golden Wings and the Dandy, on the right flank Colonel Hua with the River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake. Thunderer was in charge of supplies, the Magic Messenger was head of military intelligence.
When these dispositions had been announced, they led off in turn, starting at dawn. Only four leaders remained in the stronghold: the deputy chief, Taoist Gongsun, the Red-Haired Devil, Whiskers and Mu the Unstoppable, together with a sufficient number of troops to guard it. The three gates and the waterside camp were guarded by the White-Water Dragon and others. Of this no more.
Now while Hasty was waiting in the camp at Flying Tiger Valley, a messenger galloped up and reported: "Song Jiang is approaching with a huge army. They're less than ten miles away!"
Hasty passed on this intelligence immediately to Vulcan at Acacia Hill. Vulcan sent a messenger into the city and at the same time had his horse saddled and rode over to the forward camp, where Hasty received him and gave a full report.
Next day they breakfasted before dawn, rode out of the camp at first light and drew up their forces in battle formation outside the hamlet of Yubank. Fifteen thousand troops were deployed there. Vulcan and Hasty rode out in full armour and halted their horses under the pennants. Away to the east a cloud of dust was rising, evidence of a force of at least five hundred racing towards them. Vulcan pointed with the stock of his whip and his troops readied their bows and crossbows.
The opposing forces from Mount Liang deployed in a straight line opposite the hamlet:
*Each man wears a headband of alizarin red; all are clad in scarlet padded tunics. Their stork-like legs are encased in tightly wound puttees; their lean and supple waists are firmly supported by taut stomachers. The three-pronged forks glitter coldly, the four-bladed halberds give off a deadly sheen. Spears cluster thick as hemp, their tips of varying shape; bronze swords and scimitars pack the sky like snowflakes. The earth is alive with pennants that dance like flames, the heavens are on fire with banners bright as the sunset rack.*
Now an officer rides out from the east flank. This is Iron Ox, brandishing his two axes, glaring about him and baring his teeth, as he calls out in ringing tones: "Do you recognize Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind of Mount Liang?"
When Vulcan saw the opposition he burst out laughing and said to Hasty: "We're always hearing about these heroes from Mount Liang, but now we see what they really are: just a scruffy bunch of robbers! Can't you see? You are leader of the vanguard, why don't you go and capture that villain?"
Hasty smiled disdainfully: "No need of the butcher's knife to kill a chicken! We've plenty of worthy officers. There's no call for the commander himself to waste his time on them."
Before Hasty had finished a commander called Wang Ding rode out from behind, twirling his spear. He charged, a hundred cavalry following his lead.
Now Iron Ox was as valiant as they come, and in addition was fully protected by armour, yet before this onslaught his forces broke and ran. Hasty ordered his men in pursuit, and they chased the enemy past the hamlet, where suddenly round the shoulder of the hill drums thundered out and two bodies of cavalry appeared. Leading this cavalry charge were Snake and Red Star on the left and Comet and Scorpion on the right, each with five hundred men. Seeing these reinforcements, Hasty decided to abandon the pursuit. He reined in his horse and returned.
"Why didn't you bring the villain back?" Vulcan asked.
"I chased him to the foot of the hill and I was about to take him but the bastards have got reinforcements lying in wait there, so it wasn't practicable."
"Nothing to fear from a pack of robbers like that!" Vulcan said, and ordered his vanguard to advance from their position outside the hamlet.
They were met with waving flags, with cheers, thunder of drums and screech of gongs, as another troop of cavalry rode at them: it was led by a woman warrior of most gallant appearance, as the poem tells:

*Skin like jade, in form like a hibiscus flower, a beauty made in heaven. The scales of her golden armour flash as they ripple; the headband of red silk gauze allows a glimpse of silver. She grasps a noble blade in each delicate hand; such valour is awesome. The eyes are calm like autumn pools, she can unmask a thousand wiles. She steadily urges her steed forward; her sword cuts like the wind, she thirsts for the blood of government troops. Powder flies from her face, her battle tunic is soaked in sweat, a deadly air rises from breast and armpits. Officers' spirits faint, the enemy's courage melts away: this one is outstanding among women warriors. When she returns victorious a dark smile lights up her countenance.*

Steelbright's troops rode under a red banner with gold characters proclaiming: "The Woman Warrior Steelbright." On her left rode Auntie Gu, and on her right Sister Sun the Ogress. Their troops, a thousand or more, were of all shapes and sizes and from many different regions.

When Vulcan saw them, he exclaimed: "What use are that lot? First division, charge them head on! My own troops will divide and encircle them."

In obedience to the order Hasty gripped his bronze axe, slapped his horse and charged. Steelbright turned her horse and galloped off towards a fold in the hill. Vulcan's army followed up from all sides. But in the midst of this pursuit earth-shattering shouts rang out and a black mist veiled the sky as another cavalry troop came racing towards them. Vulcan hurriedly withdrew five miles or so and then, since visibility was nil, retreated to the hamlet. Snake and Comet with their cavalry fell on them from the left, Red Star and Scorpion charged from the right. The women warriors had turned their horses and were attacking from behind. Vulcan's men panicked. As they fought desperately to get back to their camp, Iron Ox popped up in their path. Vulcan and Hasty managed to break through, but by the time they returned to base they had lost many of their men.

Instead of pursuing them, Song Jiang's troops regrouped and rested for a while, before pitching camp. Vulcan and Hasty sent an urgent message back to the city, informing the Governor and requesting Swordsman to order out his army to relieve them without delay.

When they met in the camp at Acacia Hill, Vulcan proposed a withdrawal. Swordsman greeted this proposal with contempt. "This is just a minor setback, it's not to be taken seriously!" he said. "I'm not going to boast, but I shall engage them soon myself and I am confident of victory." Plans were made and all the officers received their orders; breakfast in the fourth watch, call to arms in the fifth, and at first light forward march!

Three beats of the drum and they struck camp and marched to the hamlet of Yubank.

Soon Song Jiang's army was seen like an advancing storm. Swordsman ordered his forces to spread out and deliver a steady fire of arrows and crossbow bolts at the enemy ranks. The drums beat a brave tattoo and flags of many colours were flourished.

From Song Jiang's ranks a warrior now rode forth under a red banner with silver characters, which proclaimed: "Thunderclap Qin Ming". Reining in his horse, he shouted out in stentorian tones: "All you greedy bureaucrats and corrupt officials of the Northern Capital, hear this: we would have attacked your city long ago if we had not feared it would harm the common people and the innocent. If you will release our two comrades and hand over to us the faithless wife and her blackguard lover, we will withdraw our forces. You have our word for it that we will not attack you. But if you persist in the folly of your ways it will result here and now in a conflagration hot enough to set the Kunlun mountain ablaze and cause jade to melt. If you have anything to say, say it. Your time is running out!"

Almost before he had finished, Swordsman shouted out in a fury: "Who will seize that robber for me?"

Immediately with a jingling of harness bells an impressive warrior appeared behind him and rode out in front. It was Suo Chao the Hasty, who had been given his nickname, you will remember, because of his impetuous nature.

"You were an officer in the service of the Emperor, you bastard," he yelled at Thunderclap. "What has the country done against you that you should abandon honour and consort with outlaws and robbers? When I capture you today I will carve you into a thousand pieces, your punishment will be worse than death!"

Now Thunderclap was also an impatient man. This challenge had the same effect as adding fuel to a fire or pouring oil on flames. Slapping his horse and twirling his wolf-toothed mace he charged. Hasty gave his horse its head and galloped to meet him. Two spirited steeds converged, two kinds of weapon clashed, as both armies cheered them on. They fought more than twenty bouts and neither had the advantage. Then from Song Jiang's vanguard Victorious rode out. He fitted an arrow to his bow, took careful aim and let fly. The arrow hit Hasty in the left shoulder, obliging him to drop his axe and gallop back to his own side. Song Jiang pointed with the stock of his whip and all three divisions charged forward together. They fought till the field was heaped with corpses and the blood flowed in rivers. It was a crushing defeat for the government forces. They were beaten back past the hamlet and the camp at Acacia Hill was taken. Swordsman had to retreat to Flying Tiger Valley. When his troops were counted it was found that a third had been lost.

Song Jiang now established his own camp at Acacia Hill.

The Professor said: "When an army is defeated like that they are bound to be demoralized. But if we don't seize this opportunity I fear they will recover their resolve. We should strike while the iron is hot."

"What you say makes very good sense," said Song Jiang. The same evening he ordered his victorious troops to form four divisions and launch a surprise attack on the city.

Now Swordsman had returned to Flying Tiger Valley as restless and impatient as a dog kicked out of the house or a fish that escapes the net. As he was discussing what to do next, a scout came and reported: "There's a line of lights on the hillside out there!"

When Swordsman rode out with some of his troops to take a look, he saw countless torches on the mountain to the east spreading a red glow over the mountainside and the neighbouring countryside. As Swordsmen led his men towards the enemy, a troop of cavalry appeared over the shoulder of the hill. Led by Colonel Hua, seconded by White-Spotted Snake and the River-Jumper, they were charging towards him from the flank. This was more than Swordsman had bargained for, so he withdrew to Flying Tiger Valley.

A vast number of torches now appeared on the hill to the west, as Twin Rods, supported by Golden Wings and the Dandy launched an attack. There were also shouts from behind them. This was Thunderclap, together with Victorious and the Supremo, making a determined assault. Swordsman's troops were thrown into confusion. They started to abandon the camp but there were more shouts in front of them, accompanied by the flash of gunfire. Thunderer and his assistants had got close to Flying Tiger Valley by small mountain paths and were setting up a bombardment.

Swordsman and his troops headed back towards the city. But now amid a roll of drums a troop of horsemen appeared, blocking their path. From a forest of torches Leopard's Head and his lieutenants the Flautist and Redeye rolled forward to cut off their retreat. With drums and gongs on all sides and fires blazing everywhere, the government troops panicked: it was every man for himself. Swordsman, his great weapon dancing in his hand, hacked a way through. He met up with Vulcan and they combined forces, fighting a rearguard action as they retreated. By dawn they had struggled back to the walls of the city.

When the Governor heard the latest news, he was frightened out of his wits. He at once ordered troops out of the city to cover the return of the defeated army, and then had the gates barred and bolted, intending to make a firm stand.

Next day Song Jiang's forces were at the East Gate, where they encamped and prepared for their assault.

Governor Liang held a conference in the military headquarters. It was difficult to see any way out. Vulcan said: "The bandits are at our gates. The situation is critical. If we hesitate we are lost. You must compose a personal letter to your father-in-law the Grand Preceptor and send a trusted messenger with it immediately to inform him of the situation, so that he can petition the Emperor at the dawn audience and troops be sent to relieve us. That's the main point. Secondly you must inform the authorities in neighbouring districts and get them to send us reinforcements without delay. Thirdly all our citizens must be ordered onto the walls to join in the defence of the city; wooden blocks and ballista stones must be stockpiled, bows and crossbows prepared, together with supplies of lime and molten metal, and a strict watch kept from morning till night. If we do this we should be all right."

The Governor said: "Writing the letter is no problem, but who will deliver it?"

It was in fact the guard commander Wang Ding who was despatched that same day. Dressed in full armour he rode off with a mounted escort bearing the confidential letter. The gate was opened, the drawbridge lowered, and off they sped towards the Eastern Capital, to communicate the intelligence and to spread word to the neighbouring provinces to send reinforcements. Magistrate Wang was ordered to assemble the citizens and get them up on the walls to prepare the defence. Of this no more.

Song Jiang now distributed his commanders around the walls of the city and camps were set up at the north, east and west, leaving a gap only in the south. Each day an attack was launched on one side or another. As quickly as possible they brought in supplies from the mountain stronghold in readiness for a long siege, because they were determined to break down the city's defences and rescue the Unicorn and Madcap.

Day after day Vulcan and Swordsman sallied forth to do battle, but to no avail. Hasty was still recuperating from his arrow wound, which had not yet healed.

We will now leave Song Jiang to his siege and describe how guard chief Wang Ding and his two companions, entrusted with the confidential letter, rode up to the residence of the Grand Preceptor in the Eastern Capital and dismounted. The doorman went in to announce their arrival and the Grand Preceptor ordered Wang Ding to be admitted. On reaching the inner room, he kowtowed and presented the letter. The Grand Preceptor tore it open and read it with growing concern. He asked for a full account and Wang Ding told him all about the affair of the Unicorn. "Song Jiang's army is now investing the city," Wang Ding said. "Their power is overwhelming. We can't hold out." He described the fighting at the hamlet of Yubank and at Acacia Hill and Flying Tiger Valley.

The Grand Preceptor said: "You've ridden hard and you must be tired. You'd better go to the rest house and sleep. I shall need to discuss this matter in council."

Wang Ding said: "Your Excellency, the situation in the Northern Capital is extremely grave, it could fall at any moment. If the city is lost, how can Hebei hold out? I hope you will send an army as early as possible to destroy the rebels."

The Grand Preceptor said: "You have said enough. You may leave."

When Wang Ding had gone, the Grand Preceptor told the duty officer to summon the President of the Military Council for an urgent discussion of the military emergency. Shortly after, this gentleman, by name Tong Guan, entered with three marshals. They greeted the Grand Preceptor, who told them in detail about the crisis in the Northern Capital. "So now what's our plan, and who's the best man to carry it out? How do we eliminate these bandits and rescue the city?"

The officials looked at each other. They were all pale. Then from behind the marshal of infantry a man stepped out. This was someone from the Palace Guard called Xuan Zan, a cavalry commander. Nature had endowed him with a face black as the bottom of a pot, a hooked nose rising skywards, curly red hair and whiskers and the physique of a tiger. He fought with a sword and was exceptionally skilled. Formerly he had been married to the daughter of a royal prince, so everyone referred to him as "The Ugly Son-in-Law". The prince had become enamoured of his military skills when he won a series of archery contests and so married his daughter off to him. Unfortunately the princess couldn't bear his looks and died of grief. After that there was no particular use for him so he was made a humble captain of guards. Marshal Tong Guan, who was an obsequious old toady, had no time for him at all and utterly despised him. But this fellow now felt irresistibly impelled to come forward and say to the Grand Preceptor: "I have a friend from the days when I was serving in the provinces. He is a descendant of Guan Yu of the late Han. His name is Guan Sheng. In looks he resembles his famous ancestor and since he also fights with a sword which is curved like the new moon, people call him Scimitar. He is at present in command of the outpost at Pudong and his talents have not received recognition. From childhood he has been a student of military strategy and has a deep understanding of the art of warfare; he has courage enough for a thousand men. If he is offered suitable gifts and promotion, he is the man who can sweep the marshes and wipe out the lawless bandits, to the great benefit of country and people. It needs only an order from you."

The Grand Preceptor was well pleased with this suggestion and he appointed the Ugly Son-in-Law as his emissary, to ride like the wind with a letter for Scimitar and invite him to the capital for talks. This done, the members of the Council withdrew.

To cut a long story short, the Ugly Son-in-Law galloped off with the letter and a retinue of four or five. Without losing a day he arrived at the Pudong outpost and dismounted. Scimitar was with his friend Hao Siwen at the time, talking of history and the rise and fall of states. When he heard there was an emissary from the capital, he quickly came out with Hao Siwen to receive him.

When greetings had been exchanged, Scimitar invited the Ugly Son-in-Law inside to sit down and asked: "We have not seen each other for a long time. What business prompted you to make this arduous journey?"

The Ugly Son-in-Law replied: "The outlaws from the Marshes of Mount Liang are attacking the Northern Capital and I ventured to recommend you strongly at a meeting with the Grand Preceptor as someone who would know how to bring peace and stability to the country and have the ability to force a surrender and execute the leaders. I am authorized by imperial decree and the personal instructions of the Grand Preceptor to present you with silk, currency and this saddle, to persuade you to go back with me. Please do not refuse. Just pack your things and come with me to the capital."

Scimitar was delighted with the prospect and said: "This friend of mine, whose name is Hao Siwen, is my adopted brother. At the time of his birth, his mother dreamt she had been entered by the spirit of the wild dog of the Gemini constellation before she became pregnant, so people call him the Hound. He is skilled in the use of every single one of the eighteen weapons. If I answer the Grand Preceptor's summons, why shouldn't I take him along so we can work together to save the country?"

The Ugly Son-in-Law agreed gladly. He urged them to start the journey at once.

So Scimitar gave instructions to his family and collected his horse, weapons, helmet and armour and packed his bags. Then he and the Hound and a dozen or so stalwarts from the frontier region set off with the Ugly Son-in-Law in great haste. On reaching the capital they rode straight to the Grand Preceptor's palace and dismounted. The doorman announced them and His Excellency bade them be brought in. The Ugly Son-in-Law led the other two before the dais and after prostrating themselves they stood to one side. The Grand Preceptor looked Scimitar over and found him to be a fine figure of a man, very tall, with a flowing beard and whiskers, broad eyebrows and bright upward-slanting eyes. His lips were deep red, as if painted.

"May I ask how old you are, commander?" said the Grand Preceptor, well satisfied with what he saw.

"I am thirty-two," Scimitar replied.

"The bandits of Mount Liang are besieging the Northern Capital. I would like to know if you can produce any plan for breaking this siege."

"I heard long ago about these brigands who have occupied the marshlands and are terrorizing and robbing the people. Now by venturing away from their hideout they are inviting disaster. Just to relieve the Northern Capital is a waste of effort. If you can let me have ten thousand or more spirited troops, I will start by capturing Mount Liang. After that, we will take the rest of the bandits. This will prevent either group from rendering assistance to the other."

The Grand Preceptor expressed his satisfaction with this plan. "That's really a way to turn defence into offence," he told Scimitar. "It's a plan after my own heart." He told the other members of the Military Council to find 15000 crack troops from Shandong and Hebei. The Hound was to command the vanguard, the Ugly Son-in-law the supporting force, and Scimitar was to have overall command. An infantry general was put in charge of supplies. The three leaders of the expedition were remunerated and a date was fixed for their departure, when they were to advance on Mount Liang in full force. When the dragon leaves the ocean, so it seems, he is bereft of his power over mists and clouds; when the tiger comes out on the plain, he cannot make full use of his teeth and claws. Perhaps then, this was to be a case of

*Rapt in contemplation of the autumn moon in the heavens,*
*They miss the shining pearl on the plate.*

IT was not long before the police found Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, and took them bound to the *yamen*. Having been brought before Grand Secretary Liang, Shi Xiu glared at him and abused him, "You are a crook that does the work of the slave's slave. But very soon my elder brother will arrive here with troops, attack and destroy the whole town. You will then be cut into three parts. He asked me to come here and inform you of your fate."

Many of the *yamen* officials were afraid, as Shi Xiu said this several times. When Grand Secretary Liang heard of this he could not speak for some time. He then ordered that large cangues be placed on the prisoners, and that they be sent into the prison for those about to be executed. He also instructed Cai Fu to guard them well as they must not escape again. Now Cai Fu wished to be on good terms with Liangshan Marsh so he placed the prisoners in quite decent cells, and gave them excellent food, so that they had nothing to complain of.

Grand Secretary Liang also instructed his assistant to suitably compensate the relatives of the persons who had been killed by Shi Xiu. There were at least seventy men who had been killed. A great many had been injured. They were given medical attendance and medicine free.

The next day the people found that anonymous placards had been secretly posted all over the town so they at once took some to the Grand Secretary who found them read as follows: "I, Song Jiang, commander-in-chief, at Liangshan Marsh hereby proclaim to all the officials at Daming Prefecture that Lu Junyi is the most honorable man in the land. I invited him to come to see me, and act with me in accordance with the Will of Heaven. How dare you, corrupt officials, accept secret bribes and oppress the people. I sent Shi Xiu to report this to you, but you have also arrested him. You must not execute those two prisoners, but at once arrest the adulterer and the adulteress who have caused this trouble. Should you execute my brothers, I shall come with large armies and take full revenge on you. I shall make no discrimination, but kill everybody. I will root out the lawbreakers, and Heaven and Earth will approve of my administration of justice. I chat and smile at this small affair, but I will come dancing to the beating of drums. Just men and decent women, filial sons and obedient grandsons, orderly citizens, and honest officials need have no fear of us. I issue this for your information."

As the Grand Secretary read this, his color changed, and he was quite nonplused to know what to do. He, however, sent for his assistant Wang to discuss the matter with him. Wang was a weak person, and when he had heard the details he said, "The imperial troops have tried several times to exterminate those brigands at Liangshan Marsh, but have failed every time, so what can we do as we are so weak? If the brigands attack us there will be no time to get more troops, and we shall soon be defeated. So I think it would be wiser for us not to execute the prisoners. Then we must report the matter at once to Prime Minister Cai and secondly we must assemble our troops outside the town so as to be prepared against the attack. If we do this I do not think there will be much danger, and the people will not suffer from an attack outside the town."

Grand Secretary Liang agreed to this and sent for the head jailer, Cai Fu. When he arrived the Grand Secretary said to him, "Those two prisoners are evidently very important persons, and I am afraid that if roughly treated by you they might die. You must therefore treat them well."

When Cai Fu heard this he was much pleased as it agreed with what he had already done. He returned to the jail and told his brother about the new order.

Grand Secretary Liang next sent for his two Generals to discuss matters with them. When they heard the news General Li Cheng said, "I think this place is too far from Liangshan Marsh, and the brigands will never get here. So why should you worry about this impudent notice? I have not much ability, but still I hold this important post. I have received imperial favors, but so far have not been able to show my gratitude in a practical way. I am willing to do my utmost for my master, and will take the troops and encamp outside the town. If the brigands come I will never let them go back alive."

The Grand Secretary was much pleased at this, and presented the General with much silk and gold.

The following day General Li Cheng held a conference of all his officers, and there one of his officers, Suo Chao, the "Urgent Vanguard," stepped forward. Li Cheng addressed him, "Song Jiang and his brigands will soon be here to attack Daming Prefecture. I want you to take command of some troops, and establish a camp about twelve //from the town. I will come and join you there with more men."

Suo Chao having received his orders took his troops the following day to a place called Feihu Gully, and there established a camp. General Li Cheng established another camp about three //nearer the town at a village called Huaishu Mound. Around these camps hidden pits and traps were made, so that the positions seemed impregnable. The officers and men felt quite secure, and calmly awaited the arrival of the brigands.

The proclamation issued from Liangshan Marsh was composed by Wu Yong, and was posted on every bridge and on every road. Dai Zong kept the leaders at Liangshan Marsh well informed as to the developments at Daming Prefecture. At a conference of leaders Song Jiang spoke to Wu Yong, "You had a good plan to inveigle Lu Junyi to our hold, but now he is in trouble. Our strong brother Shi Xiu has also been arrested. Have you any suggestion as to how we can save their lives?"

"Brother, do not worry," said Wu Yong. "If we embrace the present opportunities, we can not only save those two lives, but also seize much loot at Daming. Tomorrow is a very auspicious day, and I want you to give me half of our forces to proceed to Daming."

This was agreed to, and men were appointed for the coming expedition. But Li Kui interposed, "It is a long time since my two axes joined in a fray, and as they have just heard of this expedition they are naturally very glad. So please let me lead five hundred men in this expedition. I'll take Daming, chop Grand Secretary Liang to minceмeat, hack apart Li Gu and his old bag, rescue Li Junyi and Shi Xiu! Previously I was told to remain dumb on an expedition, but now I want to vent my anger."

"Younger brother," said Song Jiang, "this is a very serious and important affair, and we must not forget that Grand Secretary Liang, is the son-in-law of Prime Minister Cai. The government troops will be in charge of two great Generals, Li Cheng and Wen Da, who are brave and the equal of ten thousand men. We cannot treat them lightly, although I do not doubt your bravery and fierceness."

"Elder brother, you know that I am outspoken so you expected me to be silent," said Li Kui. "Now I should be only too pleased to kill our enemies, so why not let me go?"

"In that case," said Wu Yong, "you had better go in advance. You can lead a vanguard of five hundred men and conduct your own fighting. You can start tomorrow."

That evening Song Jiang talked over the details of the expedition with Wu Yong, and Pei Xuan wrote out the various orders, and dispatched them to the various leaders.

It was just the end of autumn, and the country was very suitable for campaigning. The horses were well fed and were in good condition. The men had rested for some time, and were quite ready for some more fighting. They got their arms, saddled the horses, and left the mountain in four divisions the next day.

Suo Chao at his camp near the Feihu Gully received a report from his scout that the brigands were now only ten //away, and were quickly advancing. He sent the news to General Li Cheng who sent all his cavalry to support Suo Chao. They were duly placed in position by Suo Chao.

The following day breakfast was taken at daybreak, and then they all went to meet the brigands. The brigands were approaching, and as they got near it was seen that Li Kui was in front of them. When near, he shouted, "Do you recognize your lord, 'Black Whirlwind' the hero of Liangshan Marsh?"

General Li Cheng on his horse laughed at this, and spoke to Suo Chao, "I have heard of the men of Liangshan Marsh, but this is a very dirty lot, and we need not take any notice of them. Now General, let us take that fellow."

Suo Chao also laughed, and replied, "It is beneath me. There is somebody else!"

Near them was a Lieutenant named Wang Ding who heard this, and without waiting for an order he galloped forward to fight with Li Kui, and was followed by his hundred cavalrymen. When Li Kui's foot soldiers saw the cavalry they turned and fled in all directions. As the cavalry pursued the men Suo Chao saw a large body of brigands advancing on both flanks so he signaled an order for the cavalry to retire.

General Li Cheng however asked, "Why not let them capture those brigands?"

"I am afraid there may be an ambush, and our cavalry might fall into a trap," replied Suo Chao.
But General Li Cheng did not agree with this, and ordered the soldiers to advance. As General Li Cheng advanced he saw that the main body of the brigands was led by a girl on horseback. On the flag he read the name of the commander, "Woman General, the 'Ten Feet of Green.'" The men were of all sizes—some big and some small, so that they looked disorderly.
Li Cheng turned to Suo Chao, "What is the use of this ill-assorted rabble? You take some men to fight that lot, while I will capture some of the other brigands."
Suo Chao whipped his horse and dashed forward. When the girl Hu San Niang, the "Ten Feet of Green" saw him coming she turned her horse round, and galloped off, followed by her men and her lady lieutenants, Gu Dasao and Sun Er Niang. General Li Cheng ordered his men to spread out and attack the retreating brigands. He had not gone far when he saw large bodies of brigands approaching, shouting and waving their arms. He therefore ordered a retreat, but when this movement was being done, he found brigands on both his flanks. Hu San Niang and her followers returned, and were now attacking his army in the rear. His men could not stand the attack on three sides, and they soon broke into disorder, and galloped off in all directions. As he neared his camp he found his way blocked by Li Kui and his men. General Li Cheng signaled for a charge, and his men bore down on Li Kui's body of men, and dividing it cut their way through. Upon reaching their camp he realized that he had lost a good number of his men. The brigands however did not advance any further, and so the battle came to a halt.
When Grand Secretary Liang heard of the defeat he immediately ordered General Wen Da to take the reserve of soldiers to support General Li Cheng. Upon reaching the camp Li Cheng met Wen Da, and after discussing the position asked for the latter's opinion.
General Wen Da laughed and replied, "It is only like a painful sore, and is of no importance." They however discussed their plans for the following day, and came to an agreement.
Early the next morning rations were served to the troops, and after breakfast orders were issued for a general advance, and they had just got moving when the brigands appeared in the distance also marching towards them. General Wen Da gave orders for the troops to halt, and open out, and for bows and arrows and spears to be ready. The brigands also halted, but a horseman rode forth with a red flag bearing the characters "Qin Ming the Thunderer." He pulled up his horse just in front of the Imperial troops, and shouted out, "Let covetous and corrupt officers from Daming Prefecture listen to me! For a long time I have planned to attack your town, but deferred doing so because I did not wish to injure the common people there. But if you will now release Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, and hand over the adulterer and adulteress we will at once retire, without any further fighting. If, however, you are stubborn and will not listen to this proposal then tell me so at once."
General Wen Da was angry at this, and turning round to his men asked, "Who will volunteer to go out and attack that fellow?"
Before he had finished saying this Suo Chao galloped forward to fight. Halting he called out to Qin Ming, "You were previously in the Imperial army, and you were not ill-treated. So why are you now a brigand instead of being a loyal man? Today I will capture you, and cut you up into small pieces."
At this Qin Ming was wild with rage, and raising his spiked mace, dashed forward. Suo Chao did likewise. Their horses took their riders, temper, and were also keen for the fray. The assembled troops cheered at the sight. The two fought for about twenty bouts without either gaining any advantage. Among the brigands was the leader Han Tao who shot an arrow which struck Suo Chao in the shoulder, and as the latter could no longer wield his battle-axe he turned his horse and retreated.
Song Jiang seeing this signaled the order for a general advance, and then began a great battle. Blood was flowing over the ground like water. The Imperial troops gave way, and being again defeated retreated to their camp. They further retreated to the second camp at the Feihu Gully. There Wen Da found that he had lost about one third of his men.
Song Jiang halted his men at the first camp, and discussed matters with Wu Yong who said, "The troops have been defeated a second time so that their morale will be weak just now. We must seize this opportunity for a further attack, before they have had time to recover." Song Jiang agreed to this, and issued orders at once for a general attack that very night.
General Wen Da was resting, and meditating in his tent that night when a soldier reported to him that there was a big fire on the east. General Wen Da immediately mounted his horse, and riding forward he saw all the hills and plains to the east were lit up. Looking round he now saw that to the west of his camp it was also ablaze with lights. He returned to camp, and saw that the brigands were advancing on both sides. He was very much upset, and had no definite plan of defense. The brigands approached with great noise. The Imperial troops were restless, and were evidently on the point of decamping, but they were now quite surrounded. General Wen Da had decided to cut a way through with his men, but just then the brigands opened fire upon them. He could not control his men any longer as they were in great disorder. He therefore spoke to General Li Cheng to get a few men together, and then with a sudden rush they broke through the cordon of brigands, and so escaped. This remnant of the Imperial troops reached Daming just after daybreak.
When Grand Secretary Liang heard of the disaster he felt as though he had lost two of his three souls. He hurriedly ordered all the remainder of his troops to rescue. When the defeated troops had all entered the town he ordered that all the gates be closed, and the wall strongly defended.
The following day the brigands approached and encamped outside the East Gate.
The Grand Secretary summoned a conference of all officials to discuss means of defending the town. At the meeting General Li Cheng spoke, "The brigands are just outside the town, and we are in great danger. If we are not careful the town will soon be taken. Sir, you should write a personal note to Prime Minister Cai, explaining our position, and asking for immediate relief. Send this by a very trusty and confidential courier this very night. Secondly, you should dispatch urgent letters to all the surrounding towns asking for support. Thirdly, you should issue a proclamation in this town appealing to every man to join in the defense of the town. They must prepare logs of wood and stone to hurl at the enemy; arm themselves with crossbows and stiff bows; get bottles of powder and lime dust, vile smelling manure; and take guard both night and day. If we do this at once we may be able to hold out for some time."
"I can write all the dispatches you refer to," said the Grand Secretary, "but who can face the danger outside and get through?"
Lieutenant Wang Ding volunteered to do this, and that night he left with the confidential dispatches. He was successful, and reaching the nearest town he delivered the messages, and had them sent to all the surrounding towns. He himself went on to the Eastern Capital with the important dispatch.
On the other hand, Song Jiang divided his men and besieged the town on three sides, but he left the South Gate open intentionally. He also ordered for supplies to be sent from Liangshan Marsh as he was uncertain how long the attack would last. He was however determined to continue his attack until both Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu were rescued.
Every day General Li Cheng and Wen Da led some of his soldiers outside the town to skirmish with the brigands but could not succeed.
Wang Ding quickly reached the Eastern Capital and delivered the confidential dispatches to Prime Minister Cai. The latter was astonished at the news, and questioned Wang Ding closely. Wang Ding told the whole story of Lu Junyi, and explained in detail how the Imperial troops had been defeated by the brigands.
The Prime Minister then told him to go and take rest after his tiresome journey, while he would discuss the matter with the other ministers. Prime Minister Cai Jing then summoned all the ministers to assemble in the Grand Council to discuss urgent matters. It was not long before all were assembled, and then Prime Minister Cai Jing, explained what had happened at the Northern Capital. He asked "What can be done to relieve the town and defeat the brigands?"
The ministers looked at each other in a helpless air, but nobody spoke. A man however stepped forward from behind the seat occupied by the commander of the infantry. He was Xuan Zan, a Captain of the Imperial Guard. His face was dark, and had a snub nose. His hair was curly, and his moustache was red. He was very tall, and was armed with a steel sword. During a war against a Mongol tribe he had distinguished himself as a skillful bowman, and the prince was so pleased with his skill that he had been given the prince's daughter in marriage. But the girl had not loved him, and as she had died after a short term of married life he had fallen into disfavor with the prince who had given him a minor military position as Captain in a cavalry regiment. For this reason he gained the nickname of "Disgraceful Son-in-law." He now addressed Prime Minister Cai Jing, "When I lived at home I knew a man named Guan Sheng, who is a descendant of the famous General of the Three Kingdoms, Guan Gong. His manner and form carries a close resemblance to his ancestor and he always carries a great halberd like Guan Gong. Because of this he is called, Guan Sheng, the 'Great Halberd.' He is in charge of a police force at Pudong in Shaanxi province, and is well known for his military skill. Nobody can beat him, and he is quite fearless. If presents were made to him and he was promoted to some responsible position in the army, I think he could exterminate the brigands and make the country safe."
Cai Jing was much pleased at this suggestion, and at once commissioned Xuan Zan, the "Disgraceful Son-in-law," to send a dispatch to Guan Sheng and bring him to the Eastern Capital, Kaifeng without delay.
We need not go into many details, but will just say that Xuan Zan duly carried out his orders, and quickly reached Pudong. He was gladly welcomed by Guan Sheng who had not seen him for a long time. When Xuan Zan had delivered his message Guan Sheng was highly delighted at the news. He then introduced him to his best friend, Hao Siwen, and told him the story of Hao's birth. "Hao Siwen's mother dreamt that a star, Jing Mu An descended and entered her womb. Soon afterwards a son was born and he was called Hao Siwen, with the nickname 'Jing Mu An.' He is well skilled in military drill, but so far has no opportunity of proving his ability, and lives an insignificant life here." Guan Sheng proposed to take Hao Siwen with him to fight against the brigands. This was agreed to, and they set out that night for the Eastern Capital. Their arrival was reported to Prime Minister Cai Jing, who invited them to enter. They all three entered the hall and saluted. Cai Jing was pleased with Guan Sheng's appearance, and asked for his age. Guan Sheng replied that he was thirty-two years old. Cai Jing then explained the position at the Northern Capital, Daming Prefecture and asked if he had any suggestions to make.
"I have long heard," said Guan Sheng, "that those brigands occupy Liangshan Marsh and make disturbances in the surrounding country. For the first time, however, they now leave their base far behind so I think we can easily defeat them. However, it would be useless to rescue Daming Prefecture with a large force. I beg you to give me ten thousand soldiers to capture Liangshan Marsh first, and by cutting off their base we can early arrest the brigands.
Cai Jing was very much pleased at this, and said, "That is the same method that was used in rescuing the Kingdom of Zhao by besieging the capital of the Kingdom of Wei. I agree with your plans." He then summoned the Grand Councilors, and explaining the plan got three armies placed under the command of Guan Sheng. An immediate start took place, and the armies went straight to Liangshan Marsh

When dragons leave their home in the sea;
They cannot fly in the clouds;
When tigers come down to the plain,
Of what use are their claws;
While yearning for the autumn moon,
The pearls in the tray are stolen.

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**Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo Deceives & Lures Scimitar Guan Sheng on a Moonlit Night & leads him astray; Song Jiang Captures Hasty Suo Chao on a Snowy Day in a Snowstorm**

Guan Sheng took his leave of the premier and assumed command of the fifteen thousand men. He divided them into three contingents and, with them, left the Eastern Capital, heading for Liangshan Marsh.
Meanwhile, Song Jiang and his commanders attacked the Northern Capital every day. Li Cheng and Wen Da dared not come out and confront them. Suo Chao's arrow wound had not yet healed. There was no one to fight.
Song Jiang was unable to crack the city. He grew morose. They had been away from the mountain stronghold for some time, but victory remained elusive. Sitting gloomily in his tent one night, he lit a candle and started to read over the Heavenly Books given him by the Mystic Queen. It struck him as odd that no army had been sent to relieve the long besieged city. And why hadn't Dai Zong, whom he had dispatched to the mountain fortress, returned? Song Jiang's mind was troubled. He could neither eat nor rest.
A junior officer came in and said: "The Military Advisor is here." Wu Yong entered the central tent.
"We've been surrounding the Northern Capital for quite a while. Why hasn't any army been sent to its rescue?" he queried. "And no one comes out to do battle. We know that three horsemen had left the city. Governor Liang must have dispatched emissaries to the Eastern Capital to report the emergency. Surely Premier Cai, his father-in-law, would send an army under an able general to his rescue. Could they be using the 'besieging Wei to relieve Zhao strategy'? Instead of relieving this place, they could be attacking our Mount Liangshan stronghold. That must be it. You've good cause for worry. We should call in our forces, but not withdraw all."
Just then Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller arrived. He reported to Song Jiang. "The premier has engaged the services of Guan Sheng the Big Halberd, direct descendant of the immortalized Guan Yu. He's leading an army in a raid on Mount Liangshan. The chieftains in our fortress don't know what to do. They hope you, brother, and the military advisor will return with our forces quickly and come to their aid."
"Even so," cautioned Wu Yong, "we mustn't be too hasty. Tonight, we'll have the infantry withdraw first. But we'll leave two cavalry units in ambush on both sides of Flying-Tiger Valley. When they learn in the city that we're pulling out, they'll certainly chase us. This is the plan we must follow. Otherwise, our army will fall into disorder."
"You've spoken well, Military Advisor," said Song Jiang.
He ordered Hua Rong to place five hundred troops in hiding on the left side of the valley, and Lin Chong to conceal another five hundred on the right. Huyan Zhuo be directed to take twenty-five horsemen and Ling Zhen to set up some artillery about a dozen //from the city. When the pursuing soldiers came out they were to fire their cannon. This would be the signal for the troops lying in ambush to close in for the kill.
At the same time, Song Jiang's forward contingent would pull back, with dragging banners and muffled drums, like drifting clouds after rain, like retreating troops who refused to fight.
The infantry rose in the middle of the night and began marching away, in order of their units. Not until early the next morning did the bugles sound for a general withdrawal.
All this was observed from atop the city walls—the dragging banners, the shouldered halberds and axes, the obvious intent to return to the mountains, the noisy bustle, the dismantling of the camps. The news was reported to Governor Liang.
"The Liangshan Marsh army has called in its troops. They're all leaving."
Governor Liang summoned Li Cheng and Wen Da.
"Evidently the premier has sent an army to capture their Mount Liangshan," said Wen Da, "and the knaves are afraid of losing their lair, so they're rushing to get back. This is our chance to slaughter them and nab Song Jiang."
Before the words were out of his mouth, a mounted messenger arrived with a directive from the Eastern Capital to join in exterminating the bandits. Pursue them, it said, if they retreat. Governor Liang promptly ordered Li Cheng and Wen Da to lead two contingents and harry Song Jiang's forces from the east and the west.
At the head of the withdrawing units, Song Jiang observed the soldiers pouring out of the city to give chase. He and his men moved quickly, as if their lives depended on it. Li Cheng and Wen Da pursued, straight to the side of Flying-Tiger Valley. Then cannon boomed behind them.
Li Cheng and Wen Da, startled by the blast, reined in their horses and looked. To their rear they saw a bristling array of banners and heard the wild thunder of battle drums. It was completely unexpected. Then five hundred men under Hua Rong, and an equal number under Lin Chong, surged towards them from left and right in a murderous charge.
It was too late to take defensive action. The government commanders knew they had been tricked, and led a full speed retreat. They ran right into a troop of cavalry, under Huyan Zhuo, which slaughtered them savagely. Li Cheng and Wen Da, their helmets gone, their armor in shreds, fled back to the city and bolted the gates.
Song Jiang's troops resumed their orderly withdrawal. As they neared Liangshan Marsh, they found Xuan Zan the Ugly Son-in-Law blocking their road. Song Jiang directed his army to halt and make camp. At the same time he sent a messenger secretly across the river and up the mountain with an order for relief units both by land and by water.

Inside the stronghold, Zhang Heng the Boat Flame, chieftain of the water forces, said to his brother Zhang Shun, White Streak in the Waves: "We haven't performed any meritorious deeds since coming here. Now Guan Sheng the Big Halberd of Pudong is attacking our fortress in three columns. Why don't we two raid his camp, capture him, and cover ourselves with glory? Then we'll be able to hold our heads up before our brothers."
"Our only job is to command these water forces," said Zhang Shun. "If we don't relieve a brother unit in danger, people will laugh at us."
"Don't be so finicky, otherwise we'll never distinguish ourselves. If you don't want to, that's up to you. Tonight, I'm going."
All Zhang Shun's pleas were to no avail. That night Zhang Heng put four or five men each on more than fifty boats. They were garbed for a stealthy raid, and carried bamboo spears and short daggers. Moonlight shone faintly on the cold dew. It was very still, around the second watch, when the small craft reached the shore.
Guan Sheng was in the central tent, reading by the light of a lamp. A junior officer on sentry duty came in quietly and reported: "Forty or fifty small boats have entered the reeds. The men on them are armed with spears. They're hiding there on both sides. We don't know what they're up to."
Guan Sheng smiled coldly. He turned to the commanding officer and whispered a few words.
Zhang Heng, leading between two and three hundred men, advanced on tiptoe from the reeds to the edge of camp. They pushed aside the pronged barriers, and continued directly to the center of headquarters. They saw in a tent Guan Sheng stroking his beard as he read beside a lamp.
Happily, Zhang Heng charged into the tent, spear in hand. At once gongs crashed and soldiers yelled, raising a terrible din. It sounded as if heaven and earth were falling, mountains and rivers collapsing. From four sides the soldiers in ambush spewed forth. Not one of the three hundred or so raiders got away. They were bound and pushed before the general's tent.
Guan Sheng looked them over and laughed. "Lawless rebels, petty scoundrels! Dare you come here and insult me?" He had Zhang Heng confined in a prisoner's cart. As to the others, he put them in jail, intending to deliver the lot to the capital after he had captured Song Jiang.
At this time the three Ruan brothers, in the fort by the waterside, were considering sending to Song Jiang for instructions. Zhang Shun came in.
"Although I begged him not to," he said, "my brother raided Guan Sheng's camp. He was caught and put in a prisoner's cart."
Ruan the Seventh uttered an exclamation. "We're all in this to the death, together through thick and thin. He's your flesh and blood brother. How could you let him be captured? If you don't rescue him, we Ruan brothers will!"
"I don't dare make a move without orders," said Zhang Shun.
"While you're waiting they'll chop him into mincemeat," cried Seventh.
"That's right," Second and Fifth agreed.
Zhang Shun couldn't convince them otherwise. He was forced to agree.
That night, at the fourth watch, all the chieftains of the water forces, large and small, were put in command of a hundred or more craft. Rapidly, they set sail for Guan Sheng's camp. To the sentry on the shore they looked like a swarm of ants. As they neared the bank, he hurriedly reported to the Big Halberd.
"Stupid thieving slaves," laughed Guan Sheng. He again whispered instructions to his commanders.
With the three Ruan brothers in the lead and Zhang Shun bringing up the rear, the yelling raiders charged into the camp. But not an enemy was in sight. Startled, the Ruan brothers turned to leave. Gongs crashed before the tents. From left and right government infantry and cavalry, in eight columns, closed in like giant scoops and dustpans.
Quickly alert to the danger, Zhang Shun dived into the water. The three Ruan brothers rushed along the path for the shore. Their pursuers caught up, and hooked poles snaked out and nooses flew, catching the Devil Incarnate Ruan the Seventh and dragging him away. Second, Fifth and Zhang Shun were rescued by Turbulent River Dragon Li Jun, Tong Wei and Tong Meng at the risk of their own lives.
The naval forces informed Mount Liangshan what had happened. Liu Tang told Zhang Shun to go by water directly to Song Jiang's camp and report. Song Jiang conferred with Wu Yong. How were they to drive back Guan Sheng?

"The coming battle will be decisive. On it victory or defeat will depend," said Wu Yong.
Before the words were out of his mouth, they heard battle drums thundering. Xuan Zan the Ugly Son-in-Law was leading his three contingents in a frontal assault. Song Jiang and his forces advanced to meet them. Xuan Zan appeared beneath an arch of pennants and reined in his horse.
"Who will go forth and seize that rogue?" cried Song Jiang.
Hua Rong promptly clapped his steed and attacked, holding his lance. Xuan Zan met him with whirling blade. Back and forth they fought, up and down the field, for ten full rounds. Hua Rong executed a feint, turned his mount and rode away. Xuan Zan pursued and began to catch up. Hua Rong set his steel lance in the rings of his saddle and took out his bow and arrow. Twisting around, he extended his powerful arms and released the feathered shaft. Xuan Zan heard the twang of the bow and, as the arrow sped towards him, raised his weapon. It pinged off the blade.
Hua Rong notched a second arrow to his string. His foe was closer now. He aimed at his chest and let fly. Xuan Zan ducked low over his stirrups, and the missile whizzed past. But the Ugly Son-in-Law was thoroughly impressed with his marksmanship. Abandoning the chase, he pulled his steed around and galloped back towards his position. Hua Rong wheeled his horse and pursued. As he narrowed the gap between them, Hua Rong winged a third arrow at Xuan Zan's back. It clanged against protective armor and bounced off.
Xuan Zan raced to his position and sent a messenger to Guan Sheng to report what had happened. The Big Halberd immediately called for his battle charger. He grasped his sword, mounted, and rode to the front, emerging beneath the arch of pennants.
Song Jiang commented quietly to Wu Yong on Guan Sheng's noble appearance. Turning to his chieftains, he said: "A heroic general, worthy of his fame!"
Lin Chong was angered by this remark. He said: "We brothers have fought sixty or seventy engagements since coming to Liangshan Marsh, and always with honor. Such a comparison reflects on our prestige!" He rode out at Guan Sheng, lance extended.
The Big Halberd shouted: "Swamp bandits, how dare you rebel against the imperial court! I challenge Song Jiang alone to a battle to the death!"
Song Jiang, from beneath his side's arch of pennants called Lin Chong to stop, and himself rode forth. He bowed to Guan Sheng.
"I am Song Jiang, a petty functionary from the town of Yuncheng," he said. "I respectfully present myself so that the general may criticise my shortcomings."
"A small official like you—how dare you rebel against the throne?"
"His Majesty has been deluded. He's given power to corrupt ministers and officials who harm the people. My brothers and I seek only to perform righteous deeds for Heaven and emperor. We have no evil intent."
"The emperor's soldiers are here before you, and you still resist! Your smooth talk can fool no one. Dismount and surrender, or I'll pound you to mincemeat!"
Qin Ming the Thunderbolt was infuriated. Brandishing his wolf-toothed cudgel, he sprang into the saddle and rushed forward. The Big Halberd galloped out to meet him. Lin Chong, afraid he would lose a chance to distinguish himself in combat, also flew to attack Guan Sheng. The three battled savagely in a cloud of dust like revolving figures on a carrousel lantern.
Song Jiang was concerned lest they injure Guan Sheng. He ordered the buglers to blow recall. Lin Chong and Qin Ming returned to the position.
"We were about to grab the lout," they said. "Why did you call us back and halt the battle?"
"Brothers," said Song Jiang, "we fight in righteous self-defense. We never use our strength against the weak. If it took two of you to capture him, he wouldn't acknowledge it as a fair defeat, and people would laugh at us. I consider him a courageous general, an able, loyal statesman, a descendant of an immortalized ancestor. If he would consent to go up the mountain, I'd gladly relinquish my place to him."
The two chieftains were very dissatisfied. That day, both sides withdrew their forces.
Guan Sheng, returning to his camp, dismounted and removed his armor. "I couldn't hold out against those two commanders. It was plain I was about to lose," he mused. "But Song Jiang called them back. I wonder why?" He directed that Zhang Heng and Ruan the Seventh be brought to him in their prisoner carts, and he questioned them:
"Song Jiang was only a petty functionary in Yuncheng. Why do you fellows support him?"
"Our brother is famed throughout Shandong and Hebei," Ruan the Seventh retorted. "He's called the Timely Rain and the Defender of Chivalry. A crude oaf like you wouldn't know that!"
Guan Sheng, with lowered head, did not reply. He ordered that the carts be taken away.
He brooded in his tent that night, unable to sleep or rest. He walked out and gazed at the moonlit sky. Frost covered the ground. Guan Sheng sighed. A scout approached him and reported.
"A bearded commander, riding alone and carrying only a whip, wishes to see you."
"Did you ask him who he is?"
"He bears no armor or weapons. He won't give his name. He says only that he wants to speak to the commander-in-chief."
"Very well. Bring him to me."
The man was escorted to Guan Sheng's tent. He looked vaguely familiar in the lamplight. Guan Sheng asked him who he was.
"Please dismiss your attendants."
Guan Sheng laughed. "If a general of a great army isn't of one heart and mind with his troops, how can he command them? In headquarters or out, high rank or low, we all know how to keep secrets. You can speak freely."
"My name is Huyan Zhuo. I was formerly the commander of the imperial linked-up cavalry which attacked Liangshan Marsh. But I was deceived by a bandit trick and lost the initiative. I was unable to return and report to the emperor. When I heard that you had come, General, I was overjoyed. On the battlefield this morning Song Jiang saw that Lin Chong and Qin Ming were about to capture you, and he called them back before they could do you an injury. He's long had the desire to surrender, but his bandits don't agree. He and I have conferred secretly on a way to compel them. If you are willing, General, tomorrow night take a light bow and short arrows, ride a swift horse along a small path into the bandits' camp, and seize Lin Chong and other brigand chieftains. Then you can turn them over to the authorities in the capital. Not only will you be performing a great deed, but Song Jiang and I will have our crimes forgiven."
Very pleased, Guan Sheng invited Huyan Zhuo to drink. Huyan told him that Song Jiang's main concern was loyalty to the emperor, and that it was unfortunate he had become involved with brigands. Guan Sheng stroked his beard and poured wine. The two spoke freely and without suspicion.
The next day, Song Jiang again mustered his forces to do battle.
Guan Sheng said to Huyan Zhuo: "Tonight, we'll put our plan into operation. But first we must defeat some of their top commanders."
Huyan donned some borrowed armor, mounted, and rode with the Big Halberd to the field of battle. The moment he set eyes on him, Song Jiang cried: "I never gave you an iota less than your due. Why did you steal away in the night?"
"Knavish bandits," Huyan replied. "You'll never amount to anything!"
Song Jiang ordered Huang Xin the Suppressor of the Three Mountains to fight him. Grasping his death-dealing sword, Huang vaulted into the saddle and rode against Huyan. The chargers met and the contestants battled. They had fought less than ten rounds when Huyan raised one of his rods and knocked Huang to the ground. Song Jiang's men rushed onto the field and carried Huang back. Delighted, Guan Sheng commanded all three contingents to attack and annihilate the foe.
"Don't do that," Huyan urged. "That knave Wu Yong is sure to have some scheme. If we pursue, we'll fall into their trap."
Guan Sheng immediately recalled his troops, and they returned to camp. In the central tent, he treated Huyan to wine and asked about Huang Xin the Suppressor of the Three Mountains.
"He originally was an important official in the imperial court and a district commander in Qingzhou Prefecture. He and Qin Ming and Hua Rong became brigands at the same time. Killing that bandit today has taken the edge off their prestige. When we slip into their camp tonight we're sure to succeed."
Guan Sheng was very pleased. He ordered that Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen head two columns as reinforcements. He himself would command a unit of five hundred cavalry armed with light bows and short arrows. Huyan Zhuo would lead the way. They would set out at the second watch, and by the third reach the middle of Song Jiang's camp.
At the boom of a signal cannon they would attack simultaneously from within and without.
The moonlight was as bright as day. At dusk they had put on their armor and removed the bells from their horses' bridles. The soldiers were equipped for stealthy action. When they mounted, each man gripped a short stick in his teeth to ensure silence. Huyan led the way and the others followed.
For half a watch they travelled a mountain path. Forty or fifty soldiers who had been lying in concealment rose up by the side of the road. "Is that you, General Huyan?" a low voice asked.
"No talking," Huyan snapped. "Follow behind my horse."
He rode on ahead, with Guan Sheng in his rear. They proceeded through a mountain gap. Huyan pointed with his lance. A red lamp glowed in the distance.
Guan Sheng reined in his steed. "What place is that?"
"Song Jiang's central army." Huyan urged on his horse.
As they neared the red lamp a cannon boomed. Guan Sheng and his cavalry charged. But when they reached the lamp, there wasn't a soul in sight, and Huyan had disappeared. Guan Sheng, startled, realized he had been tricked. Hastily, he pulled his mount around. On the surrounding hills, drums pounded and gongs crashed. Scrambling for any escape path, the soldiers fled for their lives. Guan Sheng galloped away, followed only by a few other riders.
They hurried through the mountain gap. On the edge of the grove behind them again a cannon boomed. Hooked poles shot out from every side and dragged Guan Sheng from his saddle. His weapon and horse were taken, he was stripped of his armor, and pushed and jostled into the main camp. Lin Chong and Hua Rong and a troop of horsemen cut off Hao Siwen. Attacked by the two chieftains, Hao fought them twenty or thirty rounds. He felt his strength ebbing and turned to flee. From obliquely behind him the girl warrior Ten Feet of Steel hotly pursued. She snared him with a crimson noose and dragged him from his steed. Brigand infantry rushed forward, grabbed him, and hauled him to the main camp.
In the meanwhile, Qin Ming and Sun Li, out after Xuan Zan with a troop of cavalry, ran into him on the road.
Xuan Zan rode forward. "Wretched bandits," he fumed. "Who resists me dies, who avoids me lives!"
Qin Ming was furious. He spurred his mount forward, brandishing his wolf-toothed cudgel, riding full tilt towards Xuan Zan. The chargers met and the contestants battled several rounds. Then Sun Li began closing in from the side. Xuan Zan grew flurried, he lost his old skill. He was knocked from his saddle by Qin Ming's cudgel. The three brigand contingents cheered. They rushed over and seized him.
While all this was going on, Li Ying the Heaven Soaring Eagle was raiding Guan Sheng's camp with a large force and rescuing Zhang Heng, Ruan the Seventh and the other captured naval brigands. They also seized a quantity of grain, fodder and horses, and induced many of the defeated foe to surrender.
At dawn Song Jiang and his forces returned to the mountain. The east was gradually turning light when he and his chieftains seated themselves according to rank in Loyalty Hall. Guan Sheng, Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen were brought in. Song Jiang hastily came down, ordered the guards back and personally untied them. He seated Guan Sheng in the central chair of the highest leader and kowtowed.
"This lowly criminal has accidentally offended against Your Excellency's authority," he said humbly. "I beg forgiveness."
Huyan Zhuo also came forward. "I was acting under orders and could not refuse. I pray you, General, excuse my presumptuous behavior."
Guan Sheng was nonplussed by the chivalrous attitude of the chieftains. He turned to Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen. "We're here as captives. What shall we do?"
The two replied: "Whatever you decide, General."
"We've no face to return to the capital," said Guan Sheng. "We ask only an early death."
"Why talk like that?" said Song Jiang. "If you don't scorn us as too insignificant, why not join us in performing righteous deeds on Heaven's behalf? Of course, if you'd rather not, we won't keep you. We'll send you back to the capital today."
"People call you Song Jiang the Loyal and Righteous, and you're certainly worthy of your name,, A man must requite the friend who understands him. Since we can no longer return home or to our posts, we'll gladly serve as ordinary soldiers under your command."
Song Jiang was delighted. He had a big feast of celebration laid that day, and sent men out to assure the scattered government troops of good treatment if they surrendered. Six or seven thousand responded. The remainder were allowed to go. Of the soldiers who capitulated, those who had families were given some silver and permitted to return home. Xue Yong, dispatched with a letter to Pudong, was instructed to fetch Guan Sheng's family to the stronghold. Of that we'll say no more.
During the feast, Song Jiang suddenly remembered Lu Junyi the Magnate and Shi Xiu, still incarcerated in the Northern Capital, and tears came to his eyes.
"Don't feel badly," said Wu Yong. "I have a plan. Muster our troops and attack Daming tonight. We're sure to succeed."
Guan Sheng rose and said: "As thanks for your not having killed me, I would like to march in the forward echelon."
Song Jiang was very pleased. The next morning he instructed that Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen's original troops be restored to them and that they serve as the forward unit's vanguard. Not one of the captured commanders was unwilling to join in the attack on the Northern Capital. Li Jun and Zhang Shun were directed to follow up with armored naval forces. All set forth in the order prescribed.

In the city Governor Liang was drinking with Suo Chao to celebrate his recovery from his wound. The sky was dull, and the wind howled. A cavalry scout entered and reported.
"Guan Sheng, Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen and their men have been captured by Song Jiang, and have joined his band. The Liangshan Marsh army will reach here today."
Governor Liang goggled, his mouth agape. Goblets toppled, chopsticks fell.
"Those bandits gave me an arrow wound," said Suo Chao. "Now I can get my revenge!"
Liang rewarded him with warm wine and directed him to lead city soldiers against the foe. He ordered Li Cheng and Wen Da to follow with reinforcements.
It was mid-winter and the weather was cold. For days the sky had been overcast with red clouds. A strong wind howled and moaned. Suo Chao marched to Flying-Tiger Valley and made camp.
The next day, Song Jiang with Lu Fang and Guo Sheng mounted a bluff to watch Guan Sheng fight. 3 times the big drums sounded and Guan Sheng rode onto the field. At the opposite end, Suo Chao appeared on horseback. He didn't recognize Guan Sheng. An aide said, "That's Guan Sheng the Big Halberd who's just gone over to the rebels."
Suo Chao silently gripped his lance and rode at his opponent. Guan Sheng clapped his horse and galloped to meet him, brandishing his sword. The 2 had fought less than 10 rounds when Li Cheng intervened. He had been watching from the government's central contingent and saw that Suo Chao's play with axes could never defeat Guan Sheng. Flourishing his blade, he joined in the assault. Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen moved in with their weapons to help the Big Halberd. Now five horsemen were involved. Song Jiang on the bluff pointed with his whip. His entire army rolled into action. Li Cheng's soldiers suffered a crushing defeat. Severely mauled, they retreated into the city that night and barred the gates. Song Jiang's troops chased them to the foot of the walls, then made camp nearby. The next day Suo Chao again surged out with a contingent of government soldiers. Wu Yong instructed his field officers to go through the motions of putting up a fight, but to retreat if the enemy advanced. Suo Chao, fooled by this display, returned to the city triumphant. In the evening, the clouds massed and the wind was fierce. When Wu Yong came out of his tent, it was snowing heavily. He dispatched infantry to a narrow stretch between a stream and a hillside, had them dig a pit, cover it over, and conceal it with earth. That night the snow continued to fall. The next morning everything was covered with a white mantle two feet thick. To the watchers on the city wall Song Jiang's forces looked frightened. They seemed to keep shifting from one position to another. Suo Chao, seeing this, mustered three hundred cavalry and sallied forth. The outlaws scattered and withdrew. Song Jiang directed naval chieftains Li Jun and Zhang Shun to go lightly armed towards the foe. Restraining their mounts, lances athwart, when they neared Suo Chao they cast their weapons aside and fled in the direction of the pit with Suo Chao in hot pursuit. An impatient man, he threw caution to the winds. Here the path ran close to the stream. Li Jun abandoned his steed and leaped into the water. He swam forward. "Brother Song Jiang, run!" he yelled. Suo Chao galloped recklessly across the narrow stretch. On the hillside behind, cannon boomed and startled horse and rider tumbled into the trap. Brigands who had been hiding immediately swarmed around. Even if Suo Chao had 3 heads and 6 arms, he couldn't have warded off the 7 injuries and 8 wounds inflicted upon him. Truly, deep silvery snow concealed a snare, beneath ivory jade flakes a pit trap lay.

Now the commander from Pudong known as Scimitar because his weapon was a large halberd with a curved blade was a real hero, as brave and loyal as they come. Taking leave of the Grand Preceptor, he marched out of the capital with an army of fifteen thousand in three units. He headed directly for the Marshes of Mount Liang.
Our story divides here. Song Jiang and his leaders had been attacking the Northern Capital every day but had met with no success. Government commanders Vulcan and the Swordsman had no intention of coming out to fight, and Hasty had quite a serious arrow wound from which he was not yet recovered, so there was no one in the garrison willing or able to do battle with them. Song Jiang was downcast by his failure to break down the city's defences. It was long since they came down from Mount Liang and victory was still not in sight.
One evening, then, sitting gloomily in his tent, he lit a candle and took out the Mystic Lady's books. As he was consulting them a thought suddenly struck him: they had been besieging the city for quite a while, yet no relief column had appeared. Moreover, the Magic Messenger, who had gone back to Mount Liang, had not yet returned. These thoughts rendered him anxious and restless.
At this moment the sentry suddenly reported: "The Military Adviser is here!"
The Professor marched into the command tent and said: "We have been besieging the city for a long time, so why is it no relief force has come to them and no one from the city has tried to attack us? Those three riders who left the city must have been sent by Governor Liang to inform the capital of the emergency. You would expect his father-in-law the Grand Preceptor to send troops immediately and you would expect them to have top commanders. Now, what if they are trying to turn defence into offense and instead of sending troops to relieve the danger here have gone directly to attack our stronghold on Mount Liang? It is a possibility you must not overlook. We must regroup. But we should not all withdraw at once."
At that very moment the Magic Messenger arrived and reported: "The Grand Preceptor in the Eastern Capital has requested the Pudong commander Guan Sheng, known as Scimitar, a descendant of the great Guan Yu, to head an army against the Marshes of Mount Liang. Our leaders in the stronghold don't know what to do. They beg you both to return with the army as fast as possible and advise them."
The Professor said: "Nevertheless we must not act precipitately. Tonight let us first withdraw the infantry, leaving behind two cavalry units to set up an ambush on either side of Flying Tiger Valley. When the city hear that we are retreating they will certainly come out in pursuit. We must do things this way, otherwise our retreat could turn into a rout."
"You are absolutely correct," Song Jiang said. He ordered Colonel Hua with five hundred troops to take up a position on the left of Flying Tiger Valley, and Leopard's Head with another five hundred to take up a position on the right. Twin Rods with twenty-five horsemen was to protect Thunderer while he set up cannon three or four miles from the city, with orders to hold his fire until the pursuing forces were close. This would be the signal for the troops in ambush to attack simultaneously from either side. Orders were also given for the first of the retreating troops to lower their banners and move off without gongs or drums, dispersing like clouds after the rain; they were to offer no resistance, giving the appearance of an army in full retreat.

The infantry divisions rose in the night and one by one set off. By about the middle of the next morning all were gone. Those in the city saw frenzied activity in Song Jiang's lines, as his men lowered their standards, shouldered arms, struck camp and departed, apparently heading back to the mountain. After observing closely, they reported to the Governor: "The forces of Mount Liang are packing up. They are all leaving."
The Governor immediately summoned Vulcan and the Swordsman to a meeting.
Swordsman said: "It must be because the Grand Preceptor's relief column has gone to attack Mount Liang. The buggers are scared of losing their hideout, that's why they're getting out in such a hurry. It's a great chance for us to pursue them and kill them. We've got to get Song Jiang."
Scarcely had he finished speaking when a messenger galloped up with a letter from the capital, announcing that an army had been sent to capture the viper's nest, and ordering that if the bandits retreated they should be harried. The Governor therefore ordered Vulcan and the Swordsman to assemble their forces and ride out on two sides in pursuit of Song Jiang.
As he retreated Song Jiang saw the troops from the city coming after them, taking few precautions. His army had retreated no further than Flying Tiger Valley when all the guns opened up simultaneously in the rear.
Vulcan and Swordsman were taken completely by surprise. They reined in their horses to look. Behind them was a sea of waving banners, with drums and gongs sounding furiously. As they hurriedly attempted to turn their armies round, Colonel Hua came charging in from the left and Leopard's Head from the right, each with five thousand troops. The two government commanders had no time to act. Realizing they had fallen into a trap, they retreated in panic.
But now directly before them was Twin Rods with a detachment of cavalry, wreaking havoc among their troops. After fighting till their fine helmets were smashed to pieces and their clothing and armour in tatters, Vulcan and Swordsman struggled back to the city, where they bolted the gates. They did not emerge again.
Song Jiang's army was now able to withdraw in an orderly fashion. When they drew near to the Marshes of Mount Liang, they found the Ugly Son-in-Law blocking their path. Song Jiang halted his troops and set up a temporary camp, while he sent a messenger secretly by a hidden route to cross the water and tell the leaders on the mountain that he wanted support from both land and water-borne troops.
The Pilot was in command at the waterside camp. He said to his brother White Eel: "You and I, we haven't made much of a contribution since we joined the stronghold. We always hear the others boasting about what they can do and we got to put up with their bragging. Now this bloke they call Scimitar is attacking us with three divisions. Why don't the two of us go and raid his camp and capture him? A coup like that, all our brothers'd be impressed!"
"But we command the water-borne forces," White Eel objected. "If we're not there to lend support when it's needed, we'll only bring disgrace on ourselves."
"If you're going to be so picky, we'll never get nowhere! All right, if you don't want to go I shall go on my own, tonight." The Pilot refused to listen to his brother's repeated objections. That same evening he assembled fifty or more small boats, four or five men to each, all with light armour to prevent noise and equipped with sharp bamboo spears and broad-bladed knives. By the pale light of the moon on a cold clear winter's night they steered their boats to land.
The time was around nine o'clock. Scimitar was in his tent. The lamp was lit and he was reading, when a sentry came and quietly reported: "Fifty or so boats have been spotted among the waterlilies. The men are all armed with spears and have gone to hide in the reeds on either side. I don't know what they intend, but I came at once to report it."
Scimitar smiled grimly. He quietly gave the order for all his troops to make certain preparations. All three divisions were alerted and each man concealed himself.
The Pilot and his three hundred men emerged from the reeds, taking care to cover their tracks. When they reached the camp, they pushed aside the deer's antlers and poured in. They saw lamps and candles burning in the command tent and Scimitar seated there, fondling his beard and reading a book on military strategy.
Rejoicing in his heart, the Pilot grasped his spear and charged into the tent. Immediately gongs rang out and a shout loud enough to shake heaven and earth, an uproar to split the mountains and cause rivers to burst their banks, arose from the hidden soldiers. The terrified Pilot dropped his spear, turned and fled. On all sides troops emerged from ambush. Poor Pilot, he had no chance! An expert waterman he might be, but what could it avail him when he was caught out in the open like this? Of his three hundred troops not one got away. All were tied up and dragged to the command tent.
Scimitar mocked them: "You outlaw scum, so you think you can make a fool of me, do you?" The Pilot was thrown in a prison cart and the rest were locked up. Now all that was needed was to catch Song Jiang and take the whole lot of them to the capital.
Let us leave Scimitar to his success, and join the three Ruan brothers, who held a meeting in the waterside camp, where it was decided to send someone to Song Jiang for instructions. Suddenly White Eel rushed in and said: "My brother wouldn't listen to my warnings and went to raid Scimitar's camp. I'm afraid he's been taken and they've put him in a prison cart."
Ruan the Seventh jumped up and said: "We have all sworn to live or die together, to stick to each other through thick and thin. You're his natural brother — why did you let him go on his own and get captured? If you don't want to go and rescue him, we will."
White Eel said: "But we don't have any orders from our leader, how can I act without them?"
Ruan the Seventh said: "While you're waiting for orders, your brother is going to get chopped into little bits!"
Ruan the Second and Ruan the Fifth said: "He's right!"
White Eel insisted nevertheless that they should take their orders from him. That night in the fourth watch all the leaders of the waterside camp were enlisted, great and small. With all their boats, over a hundred of them, they headed for Scimitar's camp. The soldiers on shore saw these war vessels swarming like ants close in to the bank and hurriedly informed their leader. Quite unperturbed, Scimitar said: "They're a bunch of incompetent slaves, what is there to worry about?" He summoned his commanders and quietly gave them their instructions.
With the three Ruan brothers in the lead and White Eel behind, the outlaws charged into the camp. They found plenty of weapons there and banners still flying, but not a soul to be seen. Fearing a trap, they turned to leave. Gongs now sounded in front of the tents, and from left and right the enemy emerged, both cavalry and foot-soldiers, in eight separate units. They began to close the intruders in, tightening the noose about them like a housewife sweeping dust into a pile or someone scooping up rice.
Judging the situation to be hopeless, White Eel leapt into the water and vanished. The Ruan brothers raced back along the path to the waterside, closely pursued. Hooks and lassoos came hurtling towards them and Ruan the Seventh, that Living Lord of Hell, was caught and dragged away struggling. The White-Water Dragon and the two Tong brothers at great personal risk managed to rescue Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth and White Eel.
Ruan the Seventh was locked up in a prison cart, where we shall leave him, in order to tell how the news from the Waterside camp reached Mount Liang and the Red-Haired Devil sent White Eel off to Song Jiang's camp to inform him of these developments. Song Jiang and the Professor considered how to drive Scimitar off.
The Professor said: "We're going to have it out with them once and for all." Before he had finished speaking they heard the sound of war drums and gongs. It was the Ugly Son-in-Law arriving at the main camp with his three columns. Song Jiang drew up all his forces to oppose him. They watched as the Ugly Son-in-Law rode out in front of the pennants and reined in his horse.
"See that commander on horseback? Go for him first!" Song Jiang ordered.
Immediately Colonel Hua slapped his horse, gripped his spear and charged the Ugly Son-in-Law, who swung his sword and rode to meet him. To and fro and back and forth, they fought ten bouts. Then Colonel Hua feinted, turned his horse and galloped away, his opponent in hot pursuit. He placed his lance in the rest and took out his bow. With the agility of a monkey he turned in the saddle and fired. His opponent heard the snap of the bow-string, the swish of the arrow, and made a quick movement of his weapon to block it. The arrow clattered against the blade. When Colonel Hua saw that one arrow had missed, he fitted a second to his bow and took careful aim. This time he fired at his opponent's chest. The Ugly Son-in-Law crouched low in the stirrups and evaded the shot again. But he had seen enough of his adversary's skill with the bow and thought better of pursuing him further. He quickly turned his horse and galloped back towards his own lines.
Seeing he was no longer pursued Colonel Hua turned and galloped after him. He fitted a third arrow, took careful aim and fired at the retreating back. There was a resounding thwack as the arrow hit the body-armour. Urging his horse forward, the Ugly Son-in-Law disappeared into his own ranks. He sent someone to inform Scimitar.
"Bring my horse, quickly!" Scimitar commanded his orderly. This horse was of impressive dimensions and red as a glowing coal, not a single hair of different hue. Scimitar strapped on his armour and girded himself with three belts. When he was fully accoutred, halberd in hand, he rode out in front of the troops. It was a brave sight as the ranks opened and the horseman rode out under the pennants. Song Jiang was so impressed by the sight of Scimitar, that he could not help quietly expressing his admiration to the Professor. The latter turned and addressed the others as follows: "Commanders and heroes, do not betray your fame!"
Before he had even finished, Leopard's Head cried indignantly: "We brothers have fought in sixty or seventy battles since we joined the Marshes of Mount Liang and when did our ardour ever slacken? Why does the military adviser insult our spirit?" With this he levelled his lance and rode out against Scimitar.
Scimitar greeted him with a shout: "Outlaws from the marshes, you are all traitors to the Emperor. Let Song Jiang himself answer to me!"
Song Jiang beside the pennants commanded Leopard's Head to stop. He loosed the reins and rode out himself. Greeting Scimitar with a deep bow he said: "I am Song Jiang, registrar of Yuncheng, at your service! What can I do for you?"
Scimitar said: "A miserable little clerk like you, how dare you betray the Emperor?"
Song Jiang replied: "The Emperor has been misled, that is the cause of it all. The land is ruled by dissolute and evil courtiers. Slander and flattery hold sway. Unjust and corrupt officials oppress the people. I and my comrades are doing heaven's will, we are no traitors."
Scimitar shouted back: "We are the imperial army! Do you still refuse to yield, do you still think you can deceive us with sweet words and flattering tongue? Dismount and surrender or I shall break you to pieces!"
This was too much for Thunderclap, who slapped his horse, whirled his wolf's-tooth mace and charged.
Scimitar likewise urged on his horse and rode to meet him. Leopard's Head, not wanting to be outdone, also raced forward to encounter Scimitar. The three horsemen circled as they fought like revolving figures on a lantern.
Song Jiang began to fear for the safety of Scimitar, the enemy commander, and had a bugle blown for his own commanders to withdraw. Returning to their ranks Thunderclap and Leopard's Head said to Song Jiang: "We were about to capture the villain, why did you order us to break off?"
Song Jiang said: "My friends,we have to preserve our honour. It is not right to take advantage of superiority in numbers. Even if you captured him he would not admit defeat and we would only incur shame. I have seen his valour. He is one of the most honourable officers there has been since the days of his famous ancestor. If we could get this man to join us on the mountain I would willingly cede my place to him.'
Thunderclap and Leopard's Head remained dissatisfied, but neither army initiated any further action that day.
When Scimitar had returned to his camp and taken off his armour, his thoughts ran as follows: "Two of my commanders fought hard but with no success. When I seemed to be losing Song Jiang ordered a withdrawal. I cannot understand his intention."
He told some of his men to bring in the prison carts with the Pilot and Ruan the Seventh in so he could question them. "Song Jiang is just a minor official from Yuncheng. Why do you lot obey him?" he asked.
Ruan the Seventh replied: "Our leader is famous throughout Shandong and Hebei. They call him the Opportune Rain and the Guardian of Righteousness. But what would a bunch of ignorant, unmannerly bastards like you know about that?"
Scimitar merely lowered his gaze and said nothing. He ordered the prisoners in their carts to be removed.
Scimitar spent a gloomy evening. He felt very restless and went out to inspect his lines. The sky was full of moonlight, frost glittered on the ground. But Scimitar's heart was heavy.
A sentry came to report: "There's a commander here with a beard, rode in by himself, just carrying a whip — says he wants to speak with you."
"Why didn't you ask his name?" Scimitar said.
"He is not wearing armour or carrying any other weapons," the man replied. "He refused to give his name. He just says he wants to see you."
"In that case bring him here," said Scimitar.
A moment later the man entered the tent and greeted the general politely. Something about him seemed familiar. From what he could tell by lamplight, Scimitar thought he must know him. When asked his name, the man replied: "Please dismiss your aides."
Scimitar complied.
"I am known as Twin Rods," said the other. "I used to have command of the united imperial armies. Now I have gone to live on Mount Liang. Those devils caught me out with a trick and I lost my army, so now I cannot go home! I was overjoyed when I heard that you had come. A little while ago when you were fighting, Leopard's Head and Thunderclap were about to capture you but Song Jiang suddenly called off the engagement because he was afraid you might come to harm. I tell you, this man simply wants to be reconciled to the court. He does not agree with the other bandits. He has discussed it secretly with me and we've thought of a way to bring the others in. If you are agreeable, I shall take you to their hideout tomorrow evening. You'll need light arms and fast horses — we'll go by small paths. Together we shall take Leopard's Head and the others alive and deliver them captive to the capital. Then we can all claim to have done loyal service."
Scimitar was greatly pleased by what he heard. He invited Twin Rods inside and regaled him with wine. They talked a lot about the importance Song Jiang gave to honour and loyalty and his misfortune in being obliged to go with the bandits through no fault of his own. The two men expressed the strongest affection for each other, without reservation.
Next day Song Jiang drew up his forces and offered battle. Twin Rods had explained the plan to Scimitar: "Today we must begin by defeating one or two of their leaders. In the evening we will put the plan into action," he said. When Twin Rods had borrowed a suit of armour, everyone mounted and rode out in front of their lines. There in front of the armies Song Jiang berated Twin Rods: "The mountain stronghold never showed you the slightest neglect. What possessed you to steal away in the night?"
"You're just common outlaws, what will you ever achieve?" Twin Rods replied.
Song Jiang ordered the Tamer out. Grasping his double-edged sword Tamer drove his horse forward and charged Twin Rods. The two horses met and before they had fought ten bouts Twin Rods raised one of his rods and knocked Tamer from his mount. Troops rushed out from Song Jiang's lines and carted Tamer off to safety. The jubilant Scimitar was all for ordering his troops into the attack. But Twin Rods said: "Don't pursue them. That Professor of theirs is full of artful schemes. I'm afraid if you follow them it may be a trap."
Accordingly Scimitar called his troops back at once and they returned to camp. Back in his tent wine was served and he questioned Twin Rods about the Tamer. Twin Rods said: "He was originally a famous general in the service of the Emperor, and he deserted to the outlaws at the same time as Thunderclap and Colonel Hua. We've made a good start by defeating that blighter. That'll take them down a peg or two. Tonight when we sneak into their camp we'll finish the job."
Scimitar gladly made his dispositions: the armies of the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound were to stand by. He himself would muster five hundred lightly armed troops and Twin Rods would lead the way. They would set off in the second watch, not long before midnight, and reach Song Jiang's camp around the third watch. A gun would be fired as a signal for the conspirators within the camp to unite with them and they would attack simultaneously.
It was a moonlit night, clear as if painted. Just after sunset they had put on their armour and removed the bells from the horses' harness. With everyone wearing light armour to diminish noise and the ordinary solders gagged to prevent talking, they rode forward, Twin Rods leading to show the way. For about an hour they followed a mountain path. Suddenly they came upon forty or fifty men-at-arms in concealed positions. "Is this General Hu?" they whispered. "Song Jiang sent us to meet you."
"Don't talk," Twin Rods ordered. "Just follow on behind my horse!"
Twin Rods urged his horse forward, with Scimitar and his troops hard on his heels.
Rounding another shoulder of the hill Twin Rods pointed with his spear and away in the distance they saw a red light. Scimitar reined in his horse and asked: "What's that, where the red light is?"
"That is Song Jiang's main army," Twin Rods said.
They hastened on. When they were close to the red light a gun was fired and they all charged forward behind Scimitar. But when they got there, there was no one to be seen. And when they called out to Twin Rods, they couldn't see him either.
With a shock, Scimitar realized he had fallen into a trap. Hurriedly he turned his horse, but now on the mountainside drums and gongs were sounding from every direction. In the general panic they could not find the way back, and it was every man for himself. As Scimitar galloped off only a few riders were left to follow him. And as they rounded the shoulder of the hill they heard the report of a gun in the forest behind them and hooks shot out on all sides and jerked Scimitar out of the saddle. His sword and his horse were taken from him, he was stripped of his armour and then pushed and shoved towards the main camp.
Meanwhile Leopard's Head and Colonel Hua with a squadron of cavalry had cut off Hound, whose valiant figure was clearly visible under the bright moonlight.
"You there!" Leopard's Head shouted. "Your leader, Scimitar, has fallen into the trap and is our prisoner. You're just a nobody, so you'd better dismount and give yourself up!"
Hound responded by furiously charging Leopard's Head. The two horses met and they fought many bouts, until Colonel Hua joined in and Hound finally found it too much for him and turned to flee. Then Steelbright, the woman warrior, came up from behind and with her red cotton lassoo dragged him from his horse. Footsoldiers rushed forward, made him prisoner and took him to the camp.
Now our story divides in two. First Thunderclap and Colonel Sun led a force to capture the Ugly Son-in-Law. They blocked off the roads to stop him getting away. He slapped his horse and abused them roundly: "You bloody peasants, if you stand in my way you're dead men. Clear off, if you want to live!"
Thunderclap was furious. He galloped forward, whirling his wolf's-tooth mace. The horses met and they fought several bouts. But when Colonel Sun joined in, the Ugly Son-in-Law lost his nerve. His technique with the sword began to desert him, and a blow from Thunderclap toppled him from his horse. All the troops roared their approval and rushed forward to apprehend him. Now Skyhawk and his troops charged into Scimitar's camp and after releasing White Eel, Ruan the Seventh and the other troops from the Waterside camp collected a quantity of fodder and horses, and then spread out in all directions to subjugate the remaining troops. By the time Song Jiang ordered everyone back to camp light was beginning to show in the east.
Everyone took their places in the Ceremonial Hall, and Scimitar, the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound were brought in one by one. Song Jiang hurriedly came down from the dais, ordered the guards to stand back, and with his own hands released them from their bonds. He escorted Scimitar to the seat of honour and kowtowed. He humbly begged forgiveness, saying: "Mannerless desperadoes that we are, we have offended your dignity. Please pardon us."
Scimitar hurriedly returned the courtesy, but he did not utter a word, nor did he make any other gesture.
Twin Rods now came forward and confessed: "I cheated you, I cannot deny it. It is my earnest hope that you will find it in you to forgive the deception I practised upon you."
Scimitar, seeing the nobility and seriousness of all the leaders, turned to the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound and said: "We are their prisoners. How should we respond?"
They both replied: "We await our commander's orders."
Scimitar said: "We have lost face and cannot return to the capital. Let us beg for a quick death."
Song Jiang said: "Why do you speak so? If it is not too far beneath you, we would like you to join us in doing heaven's will. If you are not willing, we certainly would not presume to detain you here; we will send you back to the capital right away."
Scimitar said: "When they speak of the honour and loyalty of Song Jiang they tell no lie. All of us now are in the position of having no home we can call our own, no country we can return to. I am prepared to serve under your command even as an ordinary soldier."
Delighted with this outcome Song Jiang organized a celebratory banquet and at the same time sent out parties to round up the routed enemy troops. The strength of Mount Liang grew by a further six or seven thousand. There were some old men and youngsters among the enemy, who were given silver and sent back home. The Pill Monger was sent off with a letter to Pudong to fetch Scimitar's family. Of this no more.
While Song Jiang was drinking he suddenly remembered how the Unicorn and Madcap were still languishing in the Northern Capital, and fought to conceal his tears.
The Professor said: "Don't be sad, brother. I have a solution. Forget your cares for tonight. Tomorrow we will raise an army and attack the Northern Capital. I promise you we will succeed."
Scimitar rose and said: "I have no better way to show my gratitude for your clemency. I would like to lead the vanguard."
This proposal pleased Song Jiang. Next day at dawn the orders were given out and the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound were given back their former troops so they could also spearhead the attack. All the other leaders who had been involved in the previous assault on the Northern Capital were to join in. The White-Water Dragon and White Eel were to follow with a naval force. In due order they all set off to attack the Northern Capital.
In that city the Governor was just celebrating with Hasty the latter's recovery from his arrow wound, when the leader of a mounted patrol reported: "All the generals from the capital, along with their troops, have been captured by Song Jiang and gone over to the enemy! The forces of Mount Liang are heading this way!"

The Governor was thunderstruck: his eyes nearly popped out of his head and his jaw dropped; he seemed paralysed. But Hasty said: "I got caught by a stray arrow before. Now's my chance to pay them back!."
The Governor rewarded Hasty and ordered him to lead his troops out to oppose the enemy. Vulcan and the Swordsman were to follow in support.
It was midwinter and bitterly cold. For days there had been red clouds veiling the sky and a howling blast from the north. When Song Jiang's army arrived, they found Hasty encamped at Flying Tiger Valley. The following day, when the armies took the field, Song Jiang led his vanguard with the Little Duke and the Halberdier to the top of a knoll from which they could watch Scimitar's attack.
Three beats of the drum and Scimitar rode out. Hasty immediately appeared from the opposing ranks. When he saw Scimitar, he didn't recognize him. One of his troops said: "That's him that's just gone over to the rebels, the one what they call Scimitar." Hasty wasted no time on words: he charged at once to engage Scimitar, who likewise slapped his horse and came on whirling his blade. Before they had completed ten bouts Vulcan, who was with main army, could see that Hasty's axes were failing him and he couldn't get the better of Scimitar, so he came out both swords whirling and joined the attack. Thereupon the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound also joined in on the other side, each with his own weapon.
The five riders revolved as a single unit. Watching from the knoll, Song Jiang pointed with his whip and his troops charged. Vulcan's forces were routed and fled in total disarray. They retreated into the city that night and bolted and barred the gates. They had no intention of coming out.
Song Jiang led his troops to the walls of the city and made camp there. Next day Hasty sallied forth by himself with a troop of cavalry. When the Professor saw this he instructed the troops to put up only a fake resistance. "If he attacks, find an opportunity to retreat."
Finding himself victorious this time, Hasty was well satisfied when he withdrew to the city. That night the red clouds massed and the snow began to fall thickly. The Professor had everything planned. The foot-soldiers were ordered to move quietly into position outside the city on a narrow road where the river ran close to the mountain. They were to dig a pit and cover it over with soil. The snow fell heavily and the wind blew fiercely all night, so that by dawn there were several feet of snow everywhere you looked. When those in the city observed Song Jiang's camp they seemed to detect a lack of resolve: the defences were continually being moved. Hasty accordingly selected three hundred cavalrymen and charged out of the city. Song Jiang's troops scattered in all directions. The waterside commanders, White-Water Dragon and White Eel, wearing light armour, were ordered to rein in their horses, level their spears and offer a show of resistance. But as soon as Hasty tried to engage them they threw away their spears and fled, deliberately leading him on towards the hidden pit. Hasty, true to his name, took no precautions. At this point the path ran along the river gorge. The White-Water Dragon abandoned his horse and raced ahead on foot, shouting as if to someone in front of him, "Song Jiang, my friend, run for it!"
Oblivious to danger, Hasty galloped after. A gun was fired somewhere on the mountain and both horse and man plunged into the pit. The troops waiting in ambush closed in. Even if Hasty had had 3 heads and 6 arms, he would not have been able to get out of that one! You can say indeed that

*Flakes of silver blanket the hidden trap,*
*Shards of white jade conceal the deadly pit.*

AT DAMING, the bandits attacked the town every day, but the government troops inside dared not sally forth for combat. Suo Chao had not yet recovered from the arrow wound, and could not take part in the fighting.
Song Jiang was disappointed at the delay in taking the town, and one night he was sitting in his tent reading by candlelight the Heavenly Books he had received from the Taoist Mystic Goddess, when his orderly entered and said that Wu Yong wished to see him.
When Wu Yong entered he said, "We have been besieging this town for a long time, and it is strange that no troops have come to relieve the town. We know that three horsemen left the town, and I expect they carried dispatches asking for help. As Grand Secretary Liang is son-in-law to Prime Minister Cai Jing the latter must send relief at once. But as no troops have arrived here it is possible that they have gone to Liangshan Marsh, and are adopting the military strategy as used in saving the Zhao by besieging the capital of the Wei. In that case, what shall we do? That is a possibility which we must not overlook. Would it not be better if we quietly sent some of our men back?"
Just then Dai Zong, the "Divine Traveler," came in and spoke, "A large army of Imperial troops have arrived at Liangshan Marsh, in charge of General Guan Sheng. Our leaders there cannot decide as to what should be done, but they ask you at least to send some men back to relieve the assault."
"Though this is the position," said Wu Yong, "we must not send all our men back at once. Tonight we can order our foot soldiers to start off on the return journey. The cavalry must be left here, and be so divided up that the enemy will not notice our reduced numbers. If the imperial troops in the town find out our position they would renew their attacks with greater vigor."
"What you say is quite true," said Song Jiang. He gave orders that Hua Rong should take charge of five hundred men and encamp on the left of the Feihu Gully, while Lin Chong should encamp on the right-hand side of the same village with another five hundred men. Huyan Zhuo should post his artillery about three //from the town, and in case of any attack from the government troops he must at once open fire. All the other men must disperse, and return individually to Liangshan Marsh, and were not to fight with any Imperial troops they might meet on the way. This movement took place secretly in the night, and by about 10 A.M. the following morning most of the brigands were quietly making their way towards Liangshan Marsh.
But the troops inside the town discovered the movement of the brigands, and Grand Secretary Liang was duly informed of this, and he summoned his two Generals for a conference.
"I think that this movement indicates that the Imperial troops are attacking Liangshan Marsh," said General Li Cheng, "and this has forced the brigands to withdraw their men from here. We must embrace this opportunity to attack them and capture Song Jiang."
Just at this point a messenger arrived with a dispatch from the Prime Minister at the Eastern Capital stating that an attack was being made upon Liangshan Marsh, and that if the brigands withdrew from Daming Prefecture the troops in the town should immediately attack them. Grand Secretary Liang therefore ordered his generals to pursue the brigands.
The Imperial troops shortly afterwards left the town for an assault, but when they had only gone a short distance they were fired upon by artillery at their rear. At this Generals Wen Da and Li Cheng were surprised and called a halt. Looking back they saw numerous flags flying, and heard many drums and gongs sounded as though there were many brigands there. While they were still wondering what to do they were attacked from two sides by the brigands in charge of Hua Rong and Lin Chong. General Li Cheng was afraid of a trap, and gave orders for a retreat to the town. The attack was so fierce, however, that the troops were just able to reach the town gates in the nick of time.
The brigands who were on their way to Liangshan Marsh found their roads blocked by Imperial troops, and could not reach their destination. So Song Jiang collected them together in a secluded place, and sent a messenger secretly to Liangshan Marsh informing them where he was, and giving orders for a joint attack to be made from both sides.
At Liangshan Marsh Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun were in charge of a fort on the bank of the lake. When Song Jiang's order was made known Zhang Heng spoke to his brother, "We have been here a long time, but so far have had no chance of doing anything. Now General Guan Sheng's army is approaching by three roads to attack us. How would it be if we attack his camp and capture the General himself? Then our reputation would be much enhanced."
"We are only in charge of this fort," replied Zhang Shun, "and if we do not get help from the other leaders we should be in great disgrace if we lost."
"If we are so circumspect, what day can we achieve a meritorious deed?" said Zhang Heng. "You need not take part in this. I will do it by myself this very night."
Zhang Shun remonstrated with his brother without effect. That night Zhang Heng took fifty boats, with five men on each armed with bamboo poles, spears, and swords, and clad in light short clothing. It was a cold frosty night with very little moonlight. The boats were taken across the lake and the men disembarked.
It was about 11 P.M. and General Guan Sheng was reading a book in his tent. One of his scouts entered, and reported that many boats had just come across the lake, and that the men were now making their way through the reeds and grasses towards the camp. General Guan Sheng smiled at this, and turning to his adjutant spoke quietly some secret word.
Zhang Heng and his two hundred and fifty men made stealthy progress through the reeds towards Guan Sheng's camp and removed sundry obstacles placed there as part of the defenses of the camp. In the camp they saw the General's tent, well lighted by lamps, and the General himself reading a book and stroking his beard. Zhang Heng saw no soldiers about, so he ran forward with his long spear in his hand. He had not gone into the tent when a gong was sounded, and there was such an outburst of shouting that it seemed as though both Heaven and Earth were falling to pieces. Zhang Heng was alarmed, and turned to retreat. But it was too late. He was seized, and also all his men were surrounded and captured. They were all taken before General Guan Sheng who laughed when he saw them. "You rabble of brigands! How dare you visit me like this?" He ordered Zhang Heng to be placed in a prisoner's cart and the rest to be put under guard.
At Liangshan Marsh, Zhang Shun went to the headquarters where the leaders were assembled, and told them what had occurred to his brother.
Upon hearing this Ruan the Seventh was excited, and said, "We are all in the same boat, and we must at once rescue our elder brother. Why did you not rescue him yourself? I and my brothers must go at once to rescue him."
"It was done without any orders," said Zhang Shun, "and therefore I dared not go with him."
"If you wait for orders from our commander-in-chief before you act then you will be too late to save your brother," said Ruan the Seventh.
Zhang Shun and the three brothers Ruan thereupon embarked their men, and about 3 A.M. a hundred boats were filled with men and went across the lake.
The scouts of the Imperial troops seeing this fleet with armed men immediately informed Guan Sheng. He laughed, and said, "These slaves are stupid." He turned and whispered orders to his adjutant again.
The brigands disembarked, and as they approached the camp they saw many lights burning, but not a single man. The brothers Ruan were startled, and decided to retreat. But a gong was sounded, but immediately soldiers sprang forth from hiding places on all sides. The brigands were quite surrounded, and Zhang Shun being near the boats dived in to the water at once. He and about four others escaped in this way, but all the others were taken prisoners.
Upon the news of the disaster reaching Liangshan Marsh, Liu Tang ordered Zhang Shun at once to make his way by swimming to Song Jiang's secluded camp. Upon arriving there Zhang Shun told the news, and Song Jiang discussed with Wu Yong how they could repel General Guan Sheng's army.
"Tomorrow we must have a trial of strength with these Imperial troops," said Wu Yong.
While they were talking of their plans the sound of drums was heard, and Wu Yong was surprised as it indicated that General Xuan Zan was approaching to attack the secluded camp. Song Jiang marched all his men out to meet the attack, and met then the Imperial troops. He turned to his men, and asked, "Who will go for single combat?" In response Hua Rong spurred his horse forward to engage in combat with General Xuan Zan. That General was ready, and they engaged in a fight. After about ten bouts, Hua Rong decided on a change of tactics. After delivering a blow with his sword he wheeled round and retreated. He now took his bow and arrow, and turning in his saddle shot at General Xuan Zan who was pursuing him. The General saw the movement, and lifting his sword caught the flying arrow with it. Hua Rong saw that he had failed, so immediately took another arrow, and shot it at the General who was now quite close. This time the general saw the arrow, and bent down on his horse, and the arrow just missed him. But the General realized the great skill of Hua Rong, and decided to run no further risks. He turned his horse, and went back to his men. Hua Rong seeing this also turned and pursued the General. Again he shot an arrow, but this struck the brass plate on the General's back and did no damage. Now the General rushed back to his camp and reported the feat to Guan Sheng.
General Guan Sheng ordered his attendant to bring his fiery horse. He rode forth with his great halberd in his hand. Song Jiang saw the fine martial bearing of the man, and turning round called out, "He is indeed a great hero!" Lin Chong hearing this expression was annoyed, and called out, "We brothers, since we joined at Liangshan Marsh we have taken part in many fights, and so far have never been daunted in any contact. Today we are not to be despised." So saying he whipped his horse and rushed forward to fight.
General Guan Sheng seeing this called out, "You brigands, it is not worthwhile for me to fall on you. I want Song Jiang to come forward, and explain why he has rebelled."
Song Jiang hearing this called Lin Chong to return, and then rode forward himself. He halted in front of General Guan Sheng, and saluting said, "I am now waiting for your questions."
"You were a clerk in a *yamen*," shouted General Guan Sheng, "how dare you rebel in this way?"
"The Imperial affairs are in disorder," replied Song Jiang, "and corrupt officials are in power; loyal men are ignored; and covetous men are employed. This results in the suffering of the people. We are the agents of Heaven, and have no personal aims."
Guan Sheng shouted, "It is clear that you are a brigand. Which Heaven has appointed you? My troops carry out the Son of Heaven's wish, but you have only fine words on your side. If you don't dismount at once, I will have you cut into many pieces."
Upon hearing this Qin Ming was angry, and dashed from the rear on horseback. At the same moment Lin Chong did the same. Guan Sheng, however, stood his ground, and fought with the two. The three horses circled round like a small whirlwind. Song Jiang called to the gongs to summon the two leaders to come back, and when they returned Qin Ming protested, "We could have captured that man. Why did you stop us?"
Song Jiang replied in a loud voice, "We are honest and upright, and we do not like to see two men attacking one. It is not fair. If you had captured him you could not capture his mind. He is a loyal and devoted official, and the spirits of his ancestors must be very proud of him. If we could win him over I would immediately resign in his favor."
Both Qin Ming and Lin Chong could say nothing against this. That day nothing further was done, and both armies retired to their bases.
Upon reaching his camp General Guan Sheng doffed his armor and sat down in silent meditation, "I would have been defeated by those two men, but when they were on the point of seizing me Song Jiang summoned them to return. I wonder why he did that?" So he sent for both the prisoners Zhang Heng and Ruan the Seventh and then asked them, "Song Jiang previously was only a clerk in a magistrate's *yamen* so why do you men serve him so faithfully?"
Ruan the Seventh replied, "Our leader Song Jiang is famous in Shandong and Hebei as 'the Protector.' You do not know honest and upright men, and therefore cannot recognize such men when you meet them."
General Guan Sheng bowed his head, but did not speak except ordering the prisoners to be taken back. That night he was restless, and as he could not sleep he got up, and strolled round his camp in the moonlight. It was a cold night, and hoarfrost covered the ground. Shortly an orderly came and said that a General had arrived and wished to speak to him.
"What is his name?" asked General Guan Sheng.
"He would not tell me that," said the orderly. "He is however unarmed and without armor."
"In that case you can admit him," said the general.
In a short time the man was brought to his tent. General Guan Sheng trimmed his lamp so as to get a clear view of the man, and thought the face was familiar. He, however, asked for his name.
"Can we talk together privately?" asked the man.
General Guan Sheng laughed at this and said, "I am commander-in-chief of these hundred thousand soldiers, and we are all united together with one mind. If we were not of one mind how could I command them? They are all familiar with my affairs, and I keep no secrets from them. You can talk to me without any hesitation."
"I am Huyan Zhuo," said the man, "and was previously a General in the Imperial army, and was once appointed to attack the brigand at Liangshan Marsh. They captured me by a ruse, and all my army was annihilated so that I dared not go back. Yesterday I heard that you had arrived here, and I was much pleased. This morning you were attacked by Qin Ming and Lin Chong, but Song Jiang summoned them to return as he was afraid that they might wound you. He had the idea that at some time he might surrender to you but the others would not agree with him. Just now I have had a secret conversation with Song Jiang, and discussed how we might make all the others surrender to you. So if you are willing we can suggest a plan. Tomorrow night you may come to our camp by a small by-path, lightly armed, to capture Lin Chong and the other bandits. By this not only you will gain great credit, but Song Jiang and I may also redeem our guilt."
General Guan Sheng was much pleased at this, and invited Huyan Zhuo to drink wine with him. Huyan Zhuo talked very much of the honesty and justice of Song Jiang, and dwelt upon his hard luck which had forced him to become a brigand.
The next day General Guan Sheng spoke to Huyan Zhuo, "As you have a certain plot for this evening, it would be better if I attacked and defeated the brigands today."
Huyan Zhuo donned his armor, and rode to the front of the Imperial army. When Song Jiang saw him he cursed him, "We never treated you unfairly why did you desert us last night?"
"Previously you were only a petty officer so how could you undertake a big affair now," replied Huyan Zhuo.
Song Jiang did not reply to this insult, but ordered Huang Xin to engage in single combat with Huyan Zhuo. The two fought for about ten bouts, and then Huyan Zhuo hit Huang Xin a severe blow with his bludgeon and knocked him off his horse.
General Guan Sheng was much pleased at this, and ordered a general attack. But Huyan Zhuo said this was not advisable because Wu Yong was full of tricks which he would use if his men were hard pressed. General Guan Sheng agreed and ordered a retreat to their camp.
Upon reaching the camp Generals Guan Sheng and Huyan Zhuo drank wine in the former's tent, and there the General asked about the opponent who apparently had been killed.
"That man Huang Xin was previously a Lieutenant-General in the Imperial army," replied Huyan Zhuo. "He joined the brigands at the same time as Qin Ming and Hua Rong. He is at variance with Song Jiang about many questions and perhaps that is why Song Jiang today ordered him to attack me so that he would get killed and be removed out of his way."
General Guan Sheng was pleased to hear this. He issued orders that Generals Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen at eleven o'clock that night should lead five hundred cavalry as a reserve on an attack on Song Jiang's camp. At the appointed time everything was ready. The iron accoutrements on horses and men had been taken off so that less noise would be made. Each man had a small gag in his mouth to prevent any talking. Huyan Zhuo mounted his horse and led the way.
It was a bright moonlight night. They had traveled for about an hour, and upon turning round a mountain they encountered a party of about fifty mounted brigands who called, "Are you not Huyan Zhuo's men?"
Huyan Zhuo told the men not to speak, but just follow him. He then whipped his horse, and galloped forward followed by General Guan Sheng and his men. They had soon passed round another ridge of the mountain, and then Huyan Zhuo halted, and pointed to a red lamp burning in the distance on the mountain.
"Where is that red lamp burning?" asked the general.
"That is in Song Jiang's camp," replied Huyan Zhuo.
They proceeded on their way, but when fairly near the red camp a bomb was fired, and General Guan Sheng galloped forward and called his men to follow him. But when they reached the red lamp they found nobody there, and even Huyan Zhuo had vanished. General Guan Sheng was startled and realized that he had been deceived. He turned round and ordered a retreat.
But now gongs and drums were heard on all sides. The path was soon lost, and the General saw his men scattering in all directions so that soon he had only about ten men with him. As they turned the spur of the mountain another bomb was fired, and he now saw a large body of armed brigands blocking his way. He was soon surrounded by men armed with hooked poles, and with these they caught hold of his clothes and pulled him off his horse. They seized his great halberd and horse, bound his arm, and pushed him forward towards their camp. Lin Chong and Hua Rong led another attacking party, to cut off Guan Sheng's reserve forces in charge of Lieutenant-General Xuan Zan who fought for about twenty bouts in the bright moonlight. At the end Xuan Zan was almost exhausted, and turning his horse tried to escape. But the "Ten Feet of Green," Hu San Niang had been watching this at one side, and she now threw her red silk lasso, caught Xuan Zan, and brought him off his horse. He was seized by the men around, and was also taken to the brigand's camp as a prisoner.
We will now see what had happened to the brigands led by Qin Ming and Sun Li against the reserve force of the Imperial troops under Lieutenant-General Hao Siwen. When they met on the road Hao Siwen reviled the brigands, "If you brigands obstruct my progress you will certainly die. If you wish to live then withdraw at once."
Qin Ming was angry at this speech, lashed his horse, and dashed forward for single combat. They fought for a long time, and then Sun Li went forward to assist Qin Ming. When Hao Siwen saw he had two opponents he was undecided what to do and was off his usual guard. Qin Ming seized the opportunity, and knocked Hao Siwen off his horse, who was immediately seized by the brigands.
Li Ying led other brigands to the camp of the Imperial troops, where they overcome the guard, released Ruan the Seventh and Zhang Heng, and took away all the stores, fodder, and accoutrements.
It was near daybreak when all was finished, and Song Jiang ordered all to start for Liangshan Marsh. Upon arriving there all the leaders assembled in the Loyalty and Justice Hall where the three captured Generals were brought. Song Jiang came forward to meet the Generals, and released them himself. He conducted General Guan Sheng, and made him sit in his own chair. He then bowed, and saluted the General and said, "We ruffians have offended your dignity, and beg for your pardon."
Huyan Zhuo now stepped forward, bowed, saluted, and then addressed the General, "I acted under orders from my commanding officer whom I dared not disobey. I hope that you will forgive me for deceiving you."
General Guan Sheng looked round on all the assembled leaders, and realized that they were all actuated by upright principles. He turned round and spoke to his two Lieutenant Generals, "We are prisoners here. What can we do?"

"We will follow your orders," they replied.
"We are too disgraced to return to the capital." said General Guan Sheng to Song Jiang. "Let us have an early death."
"Why do you talk like that?" asked Song Jiang. "If you do not despise our lowly calling perhaps you might join us to carry out the Will of Heaven. But if you are unwilling to do so, then we will not detain you here, but allow you to return to the capital."
"Many people have said that you are loyal and just, but now I know that that remark is true," said General Guan Sheng. "In this life if the Emperor treats me well, I will support him; if a friend treats me well, I will support him too. Now as I am undetermined I will stay here in the capacity of an ordinary soldier."
Song Jiang was much pleased, and ordered a feast to be prepared in honor of the General. He also ordered all the prisoners to be brought to Liangshan Marsh, and to be well treated. Those soldiers who wished to return home were allowed to do so, and presented with money for traveling expenses. A man was also sent to take the family of General Guan Sheng to join him at Liangshan Marsh.
During the aforementioned feast Song Jiang remembered that Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu were still in the prison at the Northern Capital, Daming so he shed tears. Wu Yong then spoke to Song Jiang, "Brother, do not be downhearted. I have a plan of rescuing our brothers. Tomorrow morning we may dispatch men to assist in the final attack on Daming."
Upon hearing this General Guan Sheng stood up and said, "I have not yet had the opportunity of recompensing you for your generosity, please allow me to take charge of this movement."
Song Jiang was much pleased, and agreed to this. Guan Sheng's troops were now enrolled as brigands, and were placed in charge of Hao Siwen and Xuan Zan who were under General Guan Sheng. They were to be the vanguard in the new attack on Daming.
In the Northern Capital, Grand Secretary Liang was now dining with Suo Chao. It was a dull day with a strong wind blowing. A scout entered, and reported that General Guan Sheng and all his troops had been captured, and moreover had all joined the brigands. They were now all advancing towards the Daming Prefecture. When Liang heard this he was astounded, and dropped the wine cup he was holding at the moment.
"I was wounded by an arrow from the brigands, and now must have my revenge," said Suo Chao.
Grand Secretary Liang the filled up a cup with wine, and presented it to Suo Chao saying, "Take the troops to encounter immediately."
It was now the middle of winter, and the weather was very cold with strong winds. The hooves of the horses were frozen and the armor was as cold as ice when they left the town.
Song Jiang had taken up his position on a mound where he could watch the pending battle.
The brigands under Guan Sheng soon faced the troops under Suo Chao. The latter did not recognize Guan Sheng, but his officers told him that fact. Suo Chao did not make any remark, but dashed forward on his horse, Guan Sheng also did the same, and the two fought.
After about ten bouts Lieutenant-General Li Cheng saw that Suo Chao was getting the worst of the combat so he galloped forward to assist him. But Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen on the other side, seeing this move, also came forward to assist Guan Sheng. Now the five horses were so close together that it was hard to follow individual movements. Song Jiang seeing this from his mound ordered a general advance, and the brigands attacked the Imperial troops, and drove them back towards the city. When they were close to the gates Song Jiang signaled for a cessation of hostilities.
The following day was very cloudy and it seemed like it was going to rain. Suo Chao led his troops outside the city, and Wu Yong ordered the brigands to put up a trifling defense. If pressed they were to retire. Thus Suo Chao won a slight victory, but ordered a retreat. That evening the clouds were heavier and quite low, and a big wind also sprang up. This was soon followed by a heavy fall of snow. Seeing this Wu Yong ordered a party of men to proceed to a defile in the hills near the town where a narrow road passed through, and there make pitfalls which, when finished, were to be covered over with earth. This was done. It snowed all night, and next morning the snow was deep enough to reach to the horse's knees.
In the morning Suo Chao went to the city wall to view the enemy. He noticed that owing to the snow the horses moved with difficulty, and were in some disorder. He therefore ordered three hundred of his cavalry to start a sudden raid. The mounted brigands upon seeing the cavalry scattered in all directions.
Song Jiang had ordered Li Jun and Zhang Shun to leave off their armor, and go out for single combat. They opposed Suo Chao, but soon threw away their spears and bolted after their men. Suo Chao was hasty, and pursued these men who induced Suo Chao towards the concealed pitfalls. The narrow path was on the bank of the river, and upon reaching that part the two men dismounted and jumped into the river as though to escape from Suo Chao. In the water Li Jun called out, "Brother Song Jiang, get away quickly!" Suo Chao hearing this dashed forward along the road towards the point where he thought Song Jiang was, fell into one of the pitfalls, and at once brigands were on the scene from all sides. Even if Suo Chao had had 6 arms and 3 heads he could not have got away.

White sheets of snow like silver,
As pure as broken jade.
Concealed a cunning pitfall,
As good as man ever made.

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### The Tower-Shifting Pagoda Lifter Heavenly King Chao Gai Appears to Song Jiang in a Dream as a Spirit; On the Water, White Streak Eel Fish in the Waves Gets His Revenge & rights an injustice in mid-stream

Suo Chao was seized. The remainder of his cavalry fled back to the city and reported that he had been captured. Governor Liang was panic stricken. He ordered his commanders to defend the city, but not go forth to give battle. He considered executing Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, but was afraid of angering Song Jiang. The capital could not rush support troops to him in an emergency and he might only get into deeper trouble. He therefore kept the two in prison and sent a dispatch to the capital that he was awaiting instructions from the premier.
Song Jiang returned to camp and seated himself in his central army tent. The outlaws who had caught Suo Chao brought him before Song Jiang's standard. Very pleased, Song Jiang ordered his men back, and personally untied the prisoner. He invited him into the tent and served him wine.
"Take a look at my brother chieftains here. More than half were once imperial military officers," he said comfortingly. "Because the emperor has been deluded and permits corrupt officials to hold power and harm the people, they have all volunteered to help me act on Heaven's behalf. If you don't scorn us, General, join our cause of righteous loyalty."
Yang Zhi came forward and paid his respects. He told Suo Chao what had happened since they parted. Clasping hands, they wept. The situation being what it was, Suo Chao had no choice but to submit. Song Jiang was pleased. That night, they drank in the tent in celebration.
The next morning they discussed how to take the city. But assaults several days in a row produced no results. Song Jiang was depressed. As he sat alone in his tent that night, a strange wind suddenly rose, reducing the lamp flame to the size of a pea. A figure appeared in the shadows. Song Jiang raised his head and looked. Chao Gai the Heavenly King was standing hesitantly in the entrance way.
"Brother," he said to Song Jiang, "you still haven't gone back. What are you waiting for?"
Song Jiang was astounded. He quickly got up and asked: "Where have you come from, brother? I still haven't avenged your wrongful death, and I'm uneasy about it day and night. Nor have I performed the sacrificial rites. And so your spirit appears, to berate me."
"It isn't that," Chao Gai replied. "Step back a bit, brother. Your life aroma stifles me. I don't dare draw any closer. I have come especially to tell you this: You're due for a hundred days of blood aura calamity. Only an earthly fiend star south of the Yangzi can cure you. The best thing you can do is call in your troops, quickly."
Song Jiang sought clarification. He pressed forward and said: "You come as a spirit from the Nether World, brother. Tell me the whole truth."
But Chao Gai gave him a push, and he suddenly wakened, as if from a dream. He shouted for a junior officer to invite the Military Advisor. Wu Yong soon arrived. Song Jiang told him the strange thing that had transpired, and asked him to interpret the dream.
"So Chao the Heavenly King appeared as a spirit. That's something you can't ignore," said Wu Yong. "The weather is cold and the ground is frozen. Our forces can't stay here much longer. It would be better to return to the stronghold for the winter. When spring comes and the snow melts we can attack the city again. It will be time enough, then."
"What you say is correct. But Lu the Magnate and brother Shi Xiu are still languishing in jail. Every day must seem like a year, while they wait for us to rescue them. If we go back now, I'm afraid those scoundrels will kill them. It's a bad situation whether we stay or leave."
No decision was reached.
The next day Song Jiang was dispirited and weary, he ached all over, his head felt as if it was split by an ax, his body burned with fever. He lay down and couldn't get up. The chieftains all came in to see him.
"My back is hot and painful," he said.
They looked and found a red swelling as big as a griddle.
"It's either an ulcer or a carbuncle," Wu Yong proclaimed. "I read a medical book once that said green bean powder protects the heart and prevents poisons from entering. We'd better buy some and feed it to brother. If only we could get a doctor! But we'll never find one here, with a war going on."
White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun thought of something. "When I lived on the Xunyang River my mother developed a backache, but no medicine seemed to help," he said. "Finally, we called in An Daoquan, a doctor of Jiankang District, and he cured her immediately. I later sent him some silver. Now, brother is so ill. That doctor is the only one who can treat him. Though the road is far and one can't travel very quickly, I'll hurry day and night and bring him here as fast as I can."
"In brother's dream Chao Gai told him he would have a hundred days of disaster, and that only an earthly fiend star south of the Yangzi could cure him. Could that man be the one?" Wu Yong wondered.
"If you know such a person, bring him to me, swiftly," Song Jiang begged. "Never mind the difficulties. This is the time to show your fraternal devotion. Travel day and night and fetch him. Save my life!"
Wu Yong gave Zhang Shun a hundred ounces of gold in leekstrip form to present to the doctor, plus thirty ounces of silver for travel expenses, and said: "Leave today. Come what may, bring him. Let nothing delay you. We're pulling up camp and returning to the fortress. Bring the doctor there. Be as quick as you can."
Zhang Shun said goodbye, shouldered his pack and set forth.
Wu Yong notified the chieftains to call in the troops and return to the stronghold. Song Jiang was transported on a cart. They left that same night. Having been caught in one ambush, the defenders in the Northern Capital guessed this was another trick, and didn't venture out.
Governor Liang, on hearing news of the departure, was at a loss.
Li Cheng and Wen Da said: "That knave Wu Yong is full of crafty schemes. We'd better remain here on the defensive, and not go after them."

As to Zhang Shun, he travelled day and night in his hurry to save Song Jiang. It was then the end of winter, and when it didn't rain it snowed. The road was hard going. But Zhang Shun pushed on, regardless.
When he reached the shore of the Yangzi, not a ferry boat was in sight. Zhang Shun groaned, but continued skirting the banks. Finally, he saw cookfire smoke rising from a cove of withered reeds.
"Boatman," he called, "bring your ferry and take me across."
The reeds rustled and a figure emerged. He was wearing a conical straw hat and a coir raincape. "Where do you wish to go?" he asked.
"I've urgent business in Jiankang. I'll pay you extra if you ferry me over."
"That's no problem. But it's late. When you get to the other side you won't find any place to sleep. You'd better rest on my boat. At the fourth watch, when the wind has died and the moon is bright, I'll take you across. You'll have to pay me a little more."
"What you say makes sense."
With the boatman, Zhang Shun entered the reeds. A small boat was moored to the bank. Beneath its canopy a thin youth huddled beside a fire. The boatman helped Zhang Shun aboard. Zhang went into the cabin, removed his wet clothes, and asked the youth to dry them over the fire. He opened his bundle, took out a quilt, wrapped himself in it, and lay down.
"Can you get any wine around here?" he called to the boatman. "It would be fine if you could buy some."
"There's no place that sells wine, but if you want rice I can give you a bowl."
Zhang Shun finished the rice, lay down and slept. For one thing he was weary from days of continuous travel, for another he was very careless. By the first watch he was sound asleep.
The thin youth who was warming his hands over the charcoal embers pointed pursed lips towards Zhang Shun. "Big brother," he said to the boatman, "have you had a look?"
The boatman circled around to the bundle on which Zhang's head was resting. He squeezed and felt hard metallic objects. He gestured with his hand. "Untie the boat. We'll do him in when we get to the middle of the river."
Parting the reeds, the youth leaped to the bank, loosed the mooring rope, jumped back aboard, and shoved off with a bamboo pole. Then he plied a creaking sweep oar and propelled the small craft to the river's center.
Softly the boatman bound Zhang Shun with ropes in the cabin, and brought out a cleaver from beneath the deck. Just then Zhang awoke and found his hands tied. He couldn't move. The boatman pressed him down and raised the big knife.
"Spare me, bold fellow, and I'll give you all my money!"
"I want your gold and silver, and I want your life as well!"
"Let me die in one piece and my ghost won't come back to haunt you!"
The boatman put down the cleaver and tossed Zhang Shun into the river. He opened the bundle and found a large amount of gold and silver. Frowning thoughtfully, he called the thin youth.
"Come here," he said. "I want to speak to you."
The youth entered the cabin. The boatman seized him with one hand and hacked him cruelly with the cleaver, bringing him to a sorry end. Then he pushed the body into the water, wiped up the blood-stains and rowed on.
Zhang Shun could stay under water for days. When he was thrown in, he sank down and gnawed open the ropes, then swam to the south bank. He saw a lamp gleaming in grove of trees. He climbed the bank and, dripping wet, entered the grove. Ahead was a rustic tavern. The proprietor had got up in the middle of the night and was pressing wine. The light of his lamp shone through a crack in the wall.
Pushing open the door, Zhang Shun saw an old man. He promptly kowtowed.
"Were you robbed on the river?" the old fellow asked. "And did you save your life by jumping into the water?"
"I wouldn't fool you, grandpa. I was on my way from Shandong to Jiankang on business and it was late. I found a ferry, but the two bad men on it robbed me of my clothes and money and threw me in. I'm a good swimmer, so I managed to escape. Grandpa, please help me."
The old man conducted him to the rear of the house, gave him a quilted coat, dried his wet clothes over the fire, and heated some wine for him to drink.
"What's your name?" he asked. "What's a Shandong man doing in these parts?"
"My family name is Zhang. Dr. An of Jiankang District is a close friend of mine. I've come to see him."
"In Shandong you must have passed Liangshan Marsh?"
"I went right by there."
"Song Jiang, the leader on that mountain, doesn't rob travellers or harm the people. He does only meritorious deeds on Heaven's behalf."
"He's loyal and righteous. He never attacks good persons, only corrupt officials."
"I've heard his band is truly righteous. They succor the poor and old, not like the knavish bandits we have here! Our people would be happy if he came. Then we wouldn't have to take any more abuse from crooked overlords."
"Don't be alarmed, grandpa, but I'm Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves. Brother Song Jiang has developed a carbuncle on his back, and I was sent with a hundred ounces of gold to invite Dr. An. But I was careless and fell asleep on the boat and those two scoundrels tied my hands and threw me in the river. I gnawed the ropes open and here I am."
"So you're a bold fellow from Mount Liangshan! I'll call my son. He'll want to meet you."
A young man shortly emerged from the rear. On seeing Zhang Shun, he bowed and said: "I've long known of your fame, brother, but never had the chance to meet you. My family name is Wang, and I'm the sixth in our line. Because my movements are swift, I'm called Lightning Wang Dingliu. I've always liked swimming and jousting with staves, but could never find a teacher who would accept me. I've been spending my days selling wine here on the banks of the river. I know those two who robbed you. One is Zhang Wang the River Blockade Demon. The thin young fellow, who is from Huating County, is called Oily Mudfish Sun the Fifth. Those villains are always robbing people on the river. Don't worry, brother. Stay here a few days. When the rascals come to drink, I'll avenge you."
"I appreciate your good intentions. But I'm very anxious about brother Song Jiang. I only wish I could fly back to the fortress in a single day! I must enter the city as soon as it's daylight and request Dr. An to go with me."
Wang Dingliu gave his own clothes to Zhang Shun, and feted him with chicken and wine. Of that, no more need be said.
The next morning the sky cleared and the snow vanished. Zhang Shun was given a dozen ounces of silver and escorted into Jiankang District. He went directly to the foot of Elm Tree Bridge and found Dr. An selling medicines in the doorway of his shop. Zhang Shun entered and kowtowed.
"It's been years, brother," the doctor said. "What wind blows you here?"
Zhang Shun followed him inside and related his adventures, from the trouble in Jiangzhou until he went with Song Jiang up the mountain. He said that the outlaw leader had developed a carbuncle on his back, and that he, Zhang, had been dispatched to fetch Dr. An. He apologized for not bringing a fee, but explained that he had been robbed and nearly lost his life on the river.
"I should go immediately, since it's Song Jiang the renowned fighter for righteousness," said the physician. "But my wife died and I've no one at home. I can't just walk off and leave everything."
Zhang Shun pleaded with him. "If you won't go, I can't return to the mountain."
"We'll discuss it again, later."
Only after much urging did Dr. An finally consent.
An spent a great deal of time with a local prostitute called Clever Pet Li. The doctor doted on her. That evening he took Zhang Shun to eat and drink at her place. Clever Pet hailed the young man respectfully as "brother."
After four or five cups, An was half drunk. He said to the girl: "I'll spend the night here. Tomorrow morning I'm off with this brother for Shandong. I'll be away from twenty days to a month. I'll come and see you when I get back."
"I don't want you to go! If you won't listen to me, stay away from my door!"

"My medicine kit is packed and I'm ready to go. I leave tomorrow. Cheer up. I won't be gone long."
In a childish tantrum the girl threw herself on An's chest. "If you don't listen to me and go, I'll curse you till the flesh flies from your bones!"
White Streak in the Waves was infuriated by these goings-on. He wanted to swallow Clever Pet down in one gulp.
It was growing dark. An was very drunk by now. He staggered into the girl's room and collapsed on her bed.
"Go home," Clever Pet said to Zhang Shun. "There's no place for you to sleep here!"
"I'll wait till brother sobers up. We'll leave together."
Since she couldn't get rid of him, the girl put him in a small room near the front door.
Zhang Shun was burning with impatience. How could he sleep? Around the first watch he heard a knock on the door and peered out through a crack in the wall. He saw a man slip in and speak to the old bawd who tended Clever Pet.
"You haven't been around in a long time," she said. "Where have you been? Tonight, the doctor's sleeping drunk in her room. What can we do?"
"I've brought her ten ounces of gold. She can have them made into hairpins. You must do something, old mother, to get us together."
"Wait in my room. I'll call her."
Zhang Shun recognized the man in the light of the lamp. It was Zhang Wang the River Blockade Demon. He had come to spend on Clever Pet some of the wealth he had recently acquired on the river.
Zhang Shun could scarcely contain his rage. He continued to watch. He saw the old bawd carry food and wine into her room, then fetch Clever Pet. He wanted to dash in after her, but he was afraid he'd mess things up and the robber would get away.
By the third watch the two servants in the kitchen were also drunk. The old bawd, who had been reeling around, sat in an intoxicated stupor beneath the lamp. Zhang Shun softly opened the door of his room and tiptoed to the entry to the kitchen. He saw a gleaming cleaver lying on the oven and the old bawd sprawled in a drunken slumber on a bench with her head to one side.
He crept into the kitchen and picked up the cleaver. First he killed the old bawd. He wanted to destroy the two servants next. But the cleaver had not been sharp to begin with, and hacking the old woman had turned its edge. Then he caught sight of an ax for chopping kindling. He grabbed it. Before the servants could cry out, he finished them both with one blow each.
Clever Pet, hearing the noise, hurriedly opened the door of her room. She found herself confronted by Zhang Shun. He swung the ax and split her chest asunder.
Zhang Wang saw, by the light of the lamp, the girl fall dead. He pushed open the rear window, leaped over the wall, and escaped.
White Streak in the Waves was frantic, but there was nothing he could do about it. Recalling what Wu Song had done under similar circumstances, he tore a strip from the edge of his tunic, dipped it in the blood, and wrote on the wall: "The killer is An Daoquan." He wrote it in dozens of places.
Around the fifth watch, as dawn was breaking, he heard An wake from his drunken slumber and call Clever Pet.
"Don't shout, brother," said Zhang Shun. "There's something I want to show you."
An got up. When he saw the four bodies he was paralyzed with fright. He trembled uncontrollably.
"Brother," said Zhang Shun, "do you see what's written on the wall?"
"You're ruining me!"
"Only two roads are open to you. Either you raise a rumpus, and I leave, and you pay for the crimes with your life. Or, if you want nothing to come of this, you go home, get your medicine kit, and rush with me to Mount Liangshan and save my brother. Take your choice."
"You're too reckless!"
When it was daylight. Zhang Shun wrapped some money for travel expenses and escorted An home. The doctor knocked till someone opened the door. He collected his medicine kit and left the city with Zhang Shun. They went directly to Lightning Wang's tavern.
"Yesterday, Zhang Wang passed this way," the proprietor said. "Unfortunately, I didn't see you anywhere."
"I met him too, but I didn't take any action. I'm on an important mission. Who has time for petty vengeance!"
Before the words were out of Zhang Shun's mouth, Lightning Wang exclaimed: "Here he comes again!"
"Don't alarm him. See where he goes."
They watched while Zhang Wang went down to his craft by the shore. Wang Dingliu hailed him.
"Hey, brother Zhang, bring your boat over. Two relatives of mine want to cross."
"If they want to board my boat, they'll have to hurry."
Lightning told Zhang Shun.
"Brother An," Zhang Shun said to the doctor, "you and I must exchange clothes. That way, we can get on board."
"How?"
"I have an idea. Don't ask."
The two put on each other's garments. Zhang Shun tied a kerchief around his head, and over this a large conical straw hair which shadowed his face. Lightning carried the medicine kit on his back. They walked down towards the boat.
Zhang Wang brought the craft to the bank and the three men went aboard. Zhang Shun crept to the poop deck and lifted up the boards. The cleaver was still there. He took it and returned to the cabin.
Zhang Wang plied the creaking sweep oar and the vessel glided to the middle of the river. Zhang Shun removed his hat and upper garments.
"Boatman, come quick," he called. "This cabin has blood stains."
"Don't joke," said Zhang Wang.
Not realizing it was a trick, he stuck his head in. Zhang Shun wrapped his arms around the boatman's neck.
"Robber," he shouted. "Do you recognize the passenger you ferried that snowy night?"
Zhang Wang stared, speechless.
"You duped me out of a hundred ounces of yellow gold and tried to kill me! Where's that thin young man?"
"I didn't feel like sharing the money with him and I was afraid he'd argue. So I killed him and threw his body in the river."
"You robber! I was born on the banks of the Xunyang and raised at the foot of Little Melon Hill. I sold fish for a living. Everybody knew me! Because I raised a row in Jiangzhou I had to go to Liangshan Marsh and join Song Jiang. We marauded all over. Everybody feared me! You tricked me onto your boat, tied my hands, and threw me in the river. If I wasn't a good swimmer, I'd be dead! We meet today as enemies. I can't forgive you!"
He pulled the boatman into the cabin, trussed his hands behind his back and tied them to his ankles. Then he heaved him into the Yangzi, exclaiming: "I didn't cut you up, either!"
Lightning Wang sighed as the river robber sank beneath the waves. Zhang Shun found his gold pieces and wrapped them up.
The three men rowed for shore. Zhang Shun said to Wang Dingliu: "I'll never forget your chivalry, brother. If you don't scorn me, perhaps you and your father will dispose of the tavern and come to Mount Liangshan where we can seek righteousness together. What do you say?"
"Nothing would please me better!"
At that, they parted. Zhang Shun and Dr. An changed back into their own clothes and disembarked on the north shore. Lightning Wang bid them farewell and rowed the boat home. He packed his belongings and prepared to catch up.
The other two, carrying the medicine kit, started on their journey. An was a man of letters who had always been a doctor. He wasn't used to walking. After about thirty *li* he was worn out. Zhang Shun invited him to an inn and bought wine. While they were drinking, a man entered and approached them.
"Why have you been so long, brother?" he exclaimed.
Zhang Shun looked up. It was Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller, disguised as a merchant. Hurriedly, Zhang introduced him to An, then inquired about Song Jiang.
"He's only semi-conscious and can't eat or drink. He seems to be dying. The crisis will be soon."
Zhang Shun wept, but An queried: "How is his complexion?"
"Haggard. He groans constantly. The pain never stops. I don't think he can last much longer."
"If he still feels pain, I can cure him. I'm only afraid I won't reach him in time."
"That's easy," said Dai Zong. He affixed two charms to An's legs and shouldered the medicine kit. "You come at your own pace," he said to Zhang Shun. "I'll go on ahead with the doctor."
Dai and An left the inn. Using the marvellous travel method, they sped off.
Zhang Shun remained at the inn for another two or three days. Sure enough, Lightning Wang, carrying their luggage, arrived with his father.
Delighted, Zhang Shun said: "I've been waiting for you."
"Dr. An?" asked Wang.
"Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller came here to meet me. He's gone off with the doctor."
Lightning Wang, his father, and Zhang Shun left together for Liangshan Marsh.
Dai and An, using the marvellous travel method, reached Mount Liangshan the same night. Chieftains, big and small, welcomed them and led them to Song Jiang's bedside. He was scarcely breathing.
But Dr. An, after taking his pulse, said: "You needn't worry, chieftains. His pulse is all right. Although his body is depressed, there's nothing very serious. I don't like to boast, but in ten days he'll recover."
The chieftains all kowtowed. An burned some artemisia over the carbuncle to draw out the poison, then applied a draw poultice externally and gave growth-stimulating medicines internally.
In five days the patient regained his rosy complexion, his flesh became tender, his appetite improved. Before ten days were up, although the wound wasn't completely closed, he was eating and drinking as usual.
Zhang Shun arrived with Lightning Wang and his father. After greeting Song Jiang and the chieftains, he told how he had been robbed and got his revenge, both times on the river.
"You nearly delayed brother Song Jiang's recovery," said the outlaw leaders with a sigh.
As soon as he was better, Song Jiang conferred with Wu Yong on how to attack the Northern Capital and rescue Lu Junyi the Magnate and Shi Xiu, as was their duty in chivalry. Dr. An had reservations.
"Your wound still isn't fully closed," he said. "You mustn't be too active. It interferes with the healing process."
Wu Yong added his own urgings. "Don't concern yourself about this, brother. It will only upset you. Just rest and regain your strength. I have no talents, but now that spring is here I definitely will crack open the Northern Capital, rescue Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu, and capture the adulterers. We guarantee to avenge you."
"With you aiding me so solicitously, Military Advisor, though I die, I'll be able to close my eyes." Wu Yong issued his orders in Loyalty Hall. And as a result the Northern Capital was turned into a fiery inferno, a forest of spears, and before the governor's residency lay a mountain of corpses, a sea of blood. Truly, his casual remarks caused demons to tremble in fear and gallant commanders to be overwhelmed with admiration.
It was the heavy snowfall that gave the Professor the idea for the plan which resulted in the capture of Hasty. But the rest of the government troops had managed to get away and take refuge in the city again, where they reported Hasty's capture.
The Governor was unavoidably downcast at this news. He gave orders to all his commanders to adopt a purely defensive strategy and under no circumstances go out to fight. He thought about executing the Unicorn and Madcap, but he did not want to provoke Song Jiang, which, if the court had no troops to send as reinforcements, would just be inviting disaster. His only recourse was to keep them under close guard and send to the Grand Preceptor for instructions.
Song Jiang meanwhile had returned to the camp and was sitting in the command tent. Hasty was soon brought into his presence by the men who had captured him. Song Jiang was very glad to see him, and having ordered his guards to withdraw, loosened the bonds with his own hands and invited him in to sit down. He offered Hasty wine and said everything possible to console him: "We band of brothers, you see, are for the most part former servants of the Emperor, and it is only because the Emperor has received bad counsel, because corrupt and venal ministers hold sway and power is given to evil officials who persecute the innocent, that so many have been glad to offer me their services and unite in doing heaven's will. If you do not think it beneath you, I would like you to join us in the service of honour and justice."
Yang Zhi, the Blue-Faced Beast (Hasty's old companion and rival), now came forward, greeted Hasty courteously and spent a while endeavouring to bring him round.
Now Hasty was in fact one of the baleful stars, so it is no surprise that he came into line and agreed to serve under Song Jiang. Wine was served in the tent that day to celebrate.
Next day they discussed how to capture the city. The siege had lasted many days, but the city still stood. Song Jiang was in a gloomy mood. When he laid his head on the pillow that night he heard a sudden sighing of wind and felt a deadly chill. Raising his head to see what was happening, he saw the figure of their dead leader, Chao Gai, hovering on the threshold. The apparition stood before him and exclaimed: "Why have you not turned back, brother? What are you waiting for?"
It was a considerable shock for Song Jiang. He sprang to his feet and asked: "Where have you come from? I still have not avenged the horror of your untimely death. My heart is uneasy about it night and day. You appear to me because I have not yet made the proper offerings and you wish to reprimand me."
Chao Gai said: "That is not it at all. Stand back a little, I beseech you. I cannot enter the room because the energy of your spirit is too strong for me. I come to say that a hundred days of extraordinary peril await you. None can save you but the Earth Spirit from south of the river. You must recall your army as soon as possible. That is your best policy."
Song Jiang wanted to find out more. He started forward and said: "Brother, you come from the regions of the dead, please tell me all." But Chao Gai shoved him away and he suddenly awoke to find it had all been a dream. He told one of his guards to fetch the Professor to interpret the dream for him. When the Professor came, Song Jiang told him of this strange business.
The Professor said: "If Chao Gai has appeared to you, we must take it seriously. The weather at present is cold, the earth frozen. Our troops cannot hold out much longer. Let us withdraw temporarily to the mountain. We can wait till winter is over and then when spring comes, when the snow thaws and the ice melts, it will be the right time to attack the city again."
"What you say is quite right," said Song Jiang. "But for our friends the Unicorn and Madcap who are imprisoned there the time will pass slowly while they wait for us to deliver them. I fear that if we withdraw their lives will be in danger. In this instance both retreat and going forward have perils."
They could not decide what to do.
Next day Song Jiang felt mentally and physically exhausted. His head felt as if someone was splitting it with an axe, his body felt like a bamboo basket in a steamer. He lay there in bed all the time and did not want to get up. When the other leaders came to see him, he said: "I have a sensation of burning pain in my back."
When his comrades examined him they found a red swelling like a hotplate. The Professor said: "This disease is either an ulcer or an abscess. I have looked in the books of medicine. It says he should be given green lentil paste to protect the heart and prevent the poison from reaching it. Someone must buy the lentils and prepare them for him."
Someone was sent off for the medicine, but it did not do any good.
Then White Eel said: "Back in the days when I was working on the Yangtze, my mother had an ulcer like this on her back and none of the medicines we tried would cure it, so in the end we went and got Doctor An Daoquan from Jiankang, south of the river. He knew how to deal with it. I got together some money afterwards and sent someone to him with it. Our brother's illness is very grave and I'm afraid it is a long and difficult journey to Jiankang; it'll take quite a while to get there. For our brother's sake it will be necessary to travel day and night. We must beg the doctor to come here."
The Professor said: "In that dream he had, Chao Gai said 'A hundred days of extraordinary peril, nothing but the Earth Spirit from south of the river can save you.' Surely this must be the person he meant?"
Song Jiang said: "Brother, if there is such a person, please go there for me at once, please spare no effort, for loyalty's sake, travel with all possible haste and implore him to save my life."
The Professor took out a hundred taels of gold in the shape of garlic bulbs for the doctor and another twenty or thirty taels of loose silver for travelling expenses. "Leave at once," he told White Eel. "By hook or by crook you must get him to come back with you, you must not fail. I shall strike camp today and return to the mountain. We will meet you there. Make haste."
White Eel bade them all farewell and set off with his pack on his back.
The Professor now made a general announcement: "We are temporarily withdrawing. We shall break off hostilities and return to the mountain."
Song Jiang was loaded onto a cart and they travelled back the same night. Those in the city, having experienced the previous ambush, assumed this was another ruse and didn't dare pursue them. When it was reported to the Governor next day, he said: "What can be behind this latest withdrawal?"
Vulcan and the Swordsman said: "The Professor is full of wiles, damn him. We must remain on the defensive. It wouldn't be a good idea to follow them."
Here our story divides. White Eel, in order to save Song Jiang's life, travelled on night and day. It was winter and always either raining or snowing, which made the road extremely difficult. Conditions were rendered even more trying by the fact that he had brought no raincoat. After travelling ten days or so he was close to the river Yangtze. It was blowing a gale from the north and low overhead icy clouds were scudding past. It had snowed heavily all day. White Eel battled on through wind and snow. Regardless of his own safety he had to cross the river. Although it was such a desolate scene, the river also had a beauty of its own. There's a poem which describes it:

*The cries of waterbirds, freezing mist, a lone goose, an ancient twisted tree, a solitary crow. Snow drifting down from the sky like plum blossom, scattered jade. The inn flag flutters beside a snow-laden bridge, the fisherman's boats at the crossing are clad in silver. Dark, dark the two or three houses of the village ahead; this might be a painted scene of the river at night.*

When White Eel came all alone to the banks of the Yangtze, he looked around for a ferry boat but there was none to be seen and all he could do was curse his luck. Wandering along the river bank he saw some smoke rising among the withered reeds. He called out: "Boatman, bring the ferry here quickly and pick me up!"

Something stirred among the reeds, and a man appeared wearing a broad bamboo hat and a raincoat. "Where do you want to go, sir?" he asked.

"I want to cross the river, I have business in Jiankang," White Eel replied. "It's urgent! I'll pay you extra, but just get on with it."

"I can take you of course," said the boatman. "But it's already quite late. If you're crossing the river you'll have nowhere to sleep. You'd better lie down and rest in the boat now. Then in the fourth watch, when the wind dies down and the moon is up, I'll ferry you across, if you pay me a bit more."

"That sounds reasonable," said White Eel.

The boatman disappeared into the reeds and reappeared with a small boat. Under the awning was a skinny youth squatting over a fire. The boatman helped White Eel aboard. White Eel went into the cabin and took off his wet clothing and asked the youth to dry it for him over the fire. He opened his pack and took out a cotton robe. He put it on in the cabin and then called out to the boatman: "Do they sell wine anywhere round here? I'd like to buy some."

The boatman replied: "There's nowhere to buy wine. You can have a bowl of rice if you like."

After eating the rice, White Eel lay down and slept. Well, he had had a rough time for the last few days, that was one thing, but also he was too trusting. He slept like a log until after seven. The skinny youth who was drying White Eel's outer robe over the coals saw he was asleep and called out to the boatman: "Do you see that, boss?"

The boatman took a good look. Then he went over and felt the bundle. Having assured himself that it contained something valuable, he made a sign to the youth and said: "Take the boat out into the middle of the river. We must get to work at once."

The skinny youth drew aside the awning, jumped out onto the bank and cast off the painter. He came aboard again and pushed off with the bamboo pole. He pulled on the sculls and the boat swung creaking out into the river. In the cabin the boatman took a length of rope and very carefully tied White Eel up into a bundle, then reached under a plank in the stern and took out a knife. White Eel suddenly awoke to find himself bound hand and foot and quite unable to free himself, while the boatman had a knife in his hand and was pressing him down. "Friend," said White Eel, "if you'll spare my life you can have all of the gold."

The boatman said: "I'm going to have the gold and your life."

"Then make sure I die in one piece, so my spirit doesn't come back to haunt you," said White Eel hurriedly.

So the boatman put down his knife and gave White Eel a shove which sent him — splash! — into the water.

The boatman next proceeded to open the bundle and seeing that it contained plenty of gold and silver, and having no desire to share this with the skinny youth, called out: "Come 'ere, you, I want to talk to you!"

When the boy slipped into the cabin, a single cut from the boatman's knife robbed him of his life and the body was pitched into the water. After clearing up the blood, the boatman rowed off.

Now White Eel was capable of staying under water several days. After he was pushed out of the boat he sat on the bottom of the river and gnawed through the ropes. Then he swam to the south bank. He saw lights in the darkness of a wood. He crawled out of the river and dripping with water made his way into the wood. There he found a country inn where they were up all night making wine. Light was shining through a crack in the wall. When he called for someone to open the door an old man appeared and bowed to him. "Were you attacked by robbers on the river?" the old man asked. "Did you escape by jumping in?"

"I'll tell you the truth," said White Eel. "I was on my way to Jiankang on business. It was getting late and I was looking for a boat to cross the river. I was unlucky enough to run into two bad characters who stole all my money and clothes and chucked me in. I know how to swim so I managed to escape. Please help me."

The old man took him inside and gave him a padded gown. He took his wet clothes away to dry them and warmed him some wine. "What do they call you, friend?" he asked. "What sort of business would someone from the north have round here?"

"My name is Zhang," White Eel said. "Doctor An of Jiankang is a friend of mine and I've come here to see him."

"If you've come from Shandong, didn't you pass the Marshes of Mount Liang?" the old man asked.

"I certainly did," said White Eel.

"That leader of theirs, Song Jiang, doesn't rob ordinary travellers," said the old man. "Nor does he kill people. He does heaven's will."

"Song Jiang always puts honour and loyalty first," said White Eel. "He never harms innocent people. It is only the corrupt ministers and greedy officials he hates."

"I have heard it said," said the old man, "that Song Jiang's lot are truly humane. They help the poor and assist old people. They're not a bit like the bandits we have round here! If they were to come here the people would have a good life; they wouldn't have to put up with being messed about by a gang of corrupt officials and greedy functionaries all the time!"

"Then you won't be frightened, sir," White Eel said, "if I tell you that I am White Eel, one of the company of Mount Liang, and they have sent me here with a hundred taels of gold to fetch Doctor An because our leader Song Jiang is suffering from an ulcer on his back. Unfortunately I was over-confident and went to sleep on the boat so those two villains were able to tie me up and chuck me in the river. I managed to bite through the rope, and here I am."

"If you are one of them, let me get my son to come and meet you," the old man said. A moment later a young man came in and prostrated himself. "I have heard so much about you," he said to White Eel, "but somehow I never had the chance before to pay my respects. My name is Wang Ding and I am the sixth in my family. Because I'm pretty athletic people call me Fleetfoot. The things I like best in the world are swimming and staff play. I have learnt from many teachers, but I am not yet perfect, so for the time being I make my life selling wine here on the bank of the river. I know those two who robbed you: one is Zhang Wang, whom they call the Pirate. The other, the thin chap, is from Huating. He is Sun the Fifth, known as Mudfish. Those two bastards often rob people on the river. But don't you worry. Just stay here a few days, and when they come in for a cup of wine we'll pay them back!"

White Eel said: "I am truly grateful for your kind offer. But for the sake of my leader Song Jiang I must not delay my return by a single day. As soon as it is light I must go into the city and ask Doctor An to go back with me."

Fleetfoot gave White Eel his own clothes to change into and quickly warmed some wine for him. Of this no more.

In the morning the sky was clear and the snow thawed. Fleetfoot gave White Eel a dozen taels of silver and told him how to reach the city centre. White Eel made his way to the Acacia Bridge, where he found Doctor An selling medicines in the front of his shop. He entered and bowed deeply. There is a poem that speaks of Doctor An's qualities:

*Of medical tomes, he has a great store,*
*With needles and scalpels his skill is renowned;*
*The equal of all the great masters of yore,*
*Doctor An's reputation is known all around.*

This Doctor An was equally expert in internal and external medicine, hence his fame. When he saw White Eel he asked: "It's such a long time since I saw you last, what wind blows you here?"

White Eel followed him inside and recounted in full the events in Jiangzhou and how he went with Song Jiang to the mountain. Then he told how Song Jiang was infected with an abscess on his back and how he, White Eel, had been sent to find the doctor. He confessed how he had almost lost his life on the river and for that reason had come here empty-handed.

Doctor An said: "If it concerns Song Jiang, such a renowned leader, I certainly ought to go along. Only, since my poor wife died, there's no one else at home and I can't go too far away, that's what makes it difficult."

White Eel earnestly entreated him: "If you refuse, I don't see how I can go back myself."

Doctor An said: "Let me think about it."

After White Eel had urged him many times, Doctor An agreed to go.

Now the fact is Doctor An had long had a relationship with a local courtesan known as Cutie. She was extremely pretty and the Doctor was infatuated with her. Doctor An took White Eel to her house with him that evening and ordered some wine. Cutie greeted White Eel respectfully. Cup followed cup and they drank freely. Finally the Doctor said to the girl: "I shall stay here with you tonight. Tomorrow morning early I have to go to Shandong with this friend of mine. It'll not be more than a month, perhaps only twenty days, before I come back to see you again."

Cutie said: "But I don't want you to go. You'd better take note, or else don't come back here again!"

The Doctor said: "I've already packed all my medicines. I'm ready to go and tomorrow morning I must start. You just take it easy. I'm going, but I won't waste any time."

Cutie brought all her feminine wiles into play. She clung to the Doctor and said: "All right, go then, if you won't listen to me. I shall put a curse on you and all your flesh will peel away!"

White Eel was so disgusted by her behaviour he could have murdered her. It was getting late by now. The Doctor who was dead drunk retired to the bedroom with Cutie and fell asleep on the bed.

The girl came back and tried to throw White Eel out. "You'd better go now, there isn't anywhere for you to sleep," she said.

But White Eel said: "I shall wait till the Doctor wakes, and then we will get going."

Since she could not get rid of him, she had to arrange for him to sleep in a little room by the main door.

White Eel was burning with impatience and he couldn't sleep. In the first watch someone came and knocked on the door. White Eel looked through a crack in the wall of his room and saw a man slip inside and start talking to the bawd.

"It's been such a long time, where have you been?" she asked the man. "Tonight the Doctor is with her, dead drunk. So what's the use?"

The man said: "I've got ten taels of gold here. I want to give it to her to make some trinkets. Please do me this favour. I just want to see her, that's all."

The woman said: "Stay in my room, I'll go and get her."

By the light of the lamp White Eel was now able to see that it was his friend from the river, the Pirate. The fact was, this villain always came here when he had got his hands on something valuable on the river. White Eel could scarcely contain his rage. As he continued to watch he saw the woman lay out food and drink on the table. Then she got Cutie to come out and keep the Pirate company. White Eel thought about bursting in on them, but he was afraid things might go wrong and the Pirate would get away. A little before midnight two servants in the kitchens got drunk and the bawd was also falling about all over the place; eventually she collapsed in front of the lamp and closed her eyes. White Eel quietly opened his door and crept out. A kitchen knife gleamed on top of the stove. The bawd was slumped on a bench to one side. White Eel went in and picked up the knife. He killed the bawd first. He wanted to kill the two servants but the knife wasn't sharp enough: the first killing had taken the edge off it. They tried to cry out. An axe for splitting firewood came conveniently to hand and he killed them both with one blow each. Inside the room the girl heard something. She hurriedly opened the door but she ran straight into White Eel. The axe rose and fell and she crashed to the floor, her rib cage split. Seeing she was dead, the Pirate opened a window at the back and escaped over the wall. Without compunction, White Eel tore a strip of his clothing, dipped it in blood and wrote on the wall "The murderer is Doctor An". He wrote this in a dozen other places as well.

Towards dawn the doctor awoke from his drunken stupor and called for Cutie. White Eel said: "Hush! I want to show you some people!"

Doctor An rose, and when he saw the four corpses he was so frightened he lost all feeling in his body and began to tremble violently.

"Have you seen what is written on the walls?" White Eel asked him.

"You have ruined me!" the Doctor exclaimed.

White Eel said: "There are only two courses open to you: either you raise the alarm, in which case I shall disappear and you will have to pay with your life; or, if you want to get off, you go home and get your medicines and we will travel night and day to Mount Liang to save the Leader's life. Which course you take is up to you."

The Doctor said: "My friend, this experience has really shortened my life!"

There is a verse about all this

*The woman had no feelings, money was her aim.*
*Why defer departure for such a paltry game?*
*Poor Cutie now is dead, she'll not come to the lover's call.*
*The joke's on Doctor An, infatuated fool.*

When it was light, White Eel bundled up some travel expenses and went back with the Doctor to his home. When the door was opened to their knock, they went in and got the Doctor's medicines. On leaving the city they headed for Fleetfoot's inn.

Fleetfoot received them, saying: "The Pirate came by yesterday. Too bad you missed him!"

"I've more important matters to attend to," said White Eel. "There's no time for petty vengeance." He had scarcely finished speaking when Fleetfoot announced: "Here he is, the bloody Pirate's coming!"

"Don't scare him away, then," said White Eel. "Let's wait and see where he's going."

The Pirate went down to the river bank and looked at his boat.

Fleet-foot called out: "Mr. Zhang, get your boat and come and take two relatives of mine across."

"They'd better get aboard double quick or they'll miss the boat!"

Fleetfoot relayed this to White Eel who said: "Doctor An, would you mind lending me your clothes? I'll give you mine in exchange.Then we can catch the boat."

"What's the idea?" Doctor An asked.

"I have a plan. Don't ask any questions," White Eel said.

So Doctor An took off his clothes and exchanged them for White Eel's. White Eel put on the head-dress and the broad-brimmed protective hat, which shaded his face. Fleetfoot picked up the bag of medicines and they went down to the river bank. The Pirate brought the boat alongside and the three of them got in. White Eel crawled into the cabin and went straight to the stern and lifted up the loose plank. The knife was still there. He picked it up and returned to the cabin. The Pirate began to row and with creaking oars the boat began to move out into the middle of the river. White Eel took off his outer clothing and called out: "Boatmen, come here, quick! Did you know you've sprung a leak here in the cabin?"

Not suspecting anything, the Pirate stuck his head into the cabin. White Eel grabbed him by the arm and shouted: "You bloody thief! Do you remember the traveller you took on board the other night when it was snowing?"

The Pirate took a good look and was struck speechless.

"You cheated me of a hundred taels of gold and silver," White Eel yelled. "And you tried to kill me! Where's that skinny friend of yours gone to?"

"It was when I got all that loot sir, I didn't want to share with him and I was afraid he might make trouble so I killed him and tipped him in the river."

"Do you know who I am?" White Eel yelled.

"Sir, I don't know who you are, I just beg you to spare my life," said the Pirate.

White Eel declaimed: "I was born on the banks of the Yangtze, grew up at the foot of Little Mount Solo, was superintendent of the fish auction, there's no one who doesn't know me! On account of the troubles in Jiangzhou I joined the company on Mount Liang to serve under Song Jiang and there's virtually nowhere I don't get respect. But you, you scum, you chucked me out of your boat with my hands tied. I went straight to the bottom, and if I hadn't known how to swim underwater, that would have been the end of me! Now it's time for revenge! You'll get no mercy from me!" With a sudden jerk he pulled the Pirate into the cabin and trussed him up, tying his hands and feet together as one would a horse. Then he launched him whole and entire, not a knife wound upon him, into the wide waters of the Yangtze. Without a doubt the Pirate became a twilight ghost on the spot, as Fleetfoot reflected with a sigh!

White Eel searched out the stolen gold and loose silver and packed them in his bundle. Then the three men rowed to the bank.

White Eel said to Fleetfoot: "My dear and respected brother, you have shown me such kindness as I shall not forget. If you don't think it beneath you, why don't you and your father pack up things at the inn and come to the Marshes of Mount Liang, to serve the cause of righteousness? How about it?"

"That is exactly what I was thinking," said Fleetfoot.

When they had said their farewells White Eel and the Doctor set off on the north bank, while Fleetfoot got back into the boat and rowed off home to pack his bags before following on.

So White Eel and the Doctor went on their way, carrying the bag of medicines. The Doctor was a scholar and not much of a walker. After ten miles or so he was too exhausted to go on. White Eel invited him into a country inn and treated him to some wine. While they were drinking a merchant came to the door and cried out: "Why are you wasting time like this, brother?"

It turned out to be Magic Messenger, in disguise. White Eel quickly introduced the Doctor and then asked for news of Song Jiang.

Magic Messenger said: "He has sunk into a kind of lethargy now. He won't eat or drink anything. It looks as if he's dying."

White Eel began to weep. But the Doctor asked: "What is his skin condition and colour like?"

"The flesh is all shrivelled up, he cries out all night, he is in constant pain, I don't think he can last much longer."

The Doctor said: "So long as he can still feel pain, he can be cured. I'm just worried we may be too late."

"That's easily remedied," said the Magic Messenger. He took out two of his magic amulets and bound them on the Doctor's legs. Picking up the bag of medicines, he said to White Eel: "You follow on slowly. The Doctor and I will go first." The two sped off, doing the magic walking.

White Eel rested several days at the country inn, till Fleetfoot arrived, with his pack and his father. White Eel greeted them delightedly. "I have been waiting here for you," he said.

"Where is the Doctor?" Fleetfoot asked.

"The Magic Messenger came to meet us and has taken him on ahead."

White Eel with Fleetfoot and his father now set off for Mount Liang.

Doing the magic walking, the Magic Messenger and the Doctor travelled without pause till they reached Mount Liang. All the leaders turned out to meet them. They hurried Doctor An towards the sick bed where the patient lay, hanging on to life, it seemed, by the barest thread.

The Doctor took his pulse and said: "Don't be alarmed. The pulse is quite strong. Although the infection is serious, it's not life-threatening. I'm not boasting when I say that I hope to have him back to normal in ten days."
This caused all the leaders to prostrate themselves before him.
The Doctor first used moxa to draw out the poison. Then he used medicine. Externally he applied a poultice, and internally a strengthening potion. In five days the skin began gradually to turn pink, the flesh became healthy, and the patient was able to take a little food and drink. After ten days though the wound was not completely healed his normal appetite had returned.
White Eel now brought Fleetfoot and his father to introduce them to Song Jiang and the other leaders and recounted how he had been robbed on the river and how he had gained his revenge. They all exclaimed admiringly: "It could have meant the end for our Leader!"
Now that Song Jiang was better, he held a discussion with the Professor. He wanted to attack the capital and rescue the Unicorn and Madcap. The Doctor rebuked him, saying: "The abscess is not fully healed yet, you can't go rushing about, if you do it will be difficult to make a complete recovery."
The Professor said: "I don't want you to worry about all this. Just think about yourself and get your constitution strong again. My skill doesn't amount to much, I know, but I would like during this period to attack the city, rescue the Unicorn and Madcap and capture the adulteress and her wicked lover. Do you approve of this?"
Song Jiang said: "If I can rely on you to do all this, I can die at peace!" So the Professor called a meeting in the Ceremonial Hall. And on this, much was to depend:

*The Northern Capital a field of fire, a forest of spears:*
*This city a mountain of corpses, a sea of blood!*
*Evil spirits and demons will be laughed to shame,*
*Brave commanders win universal acclaim.*

SUO CHAO'S soldiers did not follow his mad dash, but returned to the city and reported the matter to the Grand Secretary who was much upset by the news. He gave orders for all soldiers to stand on defense, but not go outside the city. He realized now that he could not execute Lu Junyi or Shi Xiu without aggravating Song Jiang for another attack. As the Imperial troops had been defeated he saw disaster facing him. He sent an urgent messenger to the Eastern Capital reporting the position and appealing for help.
Suo Chao was taken to the brigand's camp as a prisoner, and was brought before the assembled leaders in Song Jiang's tent. Song Jiang was much pleased at seeing him, dismissed the guard, untied the prisoner's bonds, and then addressed him, "You will have noticed that among our leaders here more than half have previously served in the Imperial army. If you do not disdain us we request you to join us to execute the Will of Heaven."
Yang Zhi now stepped forward, and greeted Suo Chao as an old friend. They talked and wept together at this meeting.
Since this was the position Suo Chao accepted Song Jiang's proposal. Song Jiang was very glad at this, and ordered a feast to be prepared to celebrate the occasion.
On the following day the attack on Daming continued, and was repeated for several days without any success. One night when Song Jiang was sitting in his tent in a melancholy mood, suddenly a very cold wind sprang up, and his lamp was almost extinguished by the icy blast. Looking up he saw in the dim light the form of a man who looked very like his late commander Chao Gai. The figure did not enter his tent, but spoke, "Younger brother, what are you doing here?"
Song Jiang was startled, but standing up, he replied, "Elder brother, where have you come from? I am very sorry that since you left I have not been able to avenge your death. Just now we have urgent business here so that I have not been able to sacrifice to you for some time. Today your spirit has appeared, and I am quite prepared to be reproved for my faults."
"Brother, you do not understand," said Chao Gai. "We were bosom friends, so I have now come to help you. There is a propitious star 'Di Ling Xing' in Jiangnan which will relieve you of your load of trouble. Of many plans sometimes the best and only one is to leave. Why do you not clear out at once? What keeps you here? If a calamity is approaching how can you avoid it? By that time you must not blame me for giving you no help."
Song Jiang wished for further information and took a step forward. He asked, "Spirit of my Elder Brother! I beg you to speak clearly and truthfully."
"You need not speak any further," said Chao Gai. "Arrange your affairs and depart without any delay. I must go now."
The figure vanished, and Song Jiang thought he had only had a dream. But he sent for Wu Yong to come and see him at once. Upon the latter's arriving Song Jiang told him of his dream.
"We cannot doubt that Chao Gai's spirit has actually conveyed that message to you," said Wu Yong. "It is very cold here, and our men cannot stand these hard conditions very long. We must send them all back to Liangshan Marsh. We can come again in spring and attack this town with greater chances of success."
"What you say is quite true," said Song Jiang. "But Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu are still in prison, and they are expecting us to save them. I am afraid that they will be executed if we leave now. What shall we do?"
They talked the matter over for a long time, but came to no decision.
The following day Song Jiang was feverish, and also had a splitting headache. He felt very tired, and did not get up. The leaders came to see what was the matter, and Song Jiang told them that he had a pain in his back. Upon examining the spot they found a big red swelling. Wu Yong said, "I have read in a medicine book that the poison in these swellings can be kept away from the heart by a diet of green beans. We have no doctor on our strength, so that is the best thing for the remedy."
"Previously my mother had the same complaint," said Zhang Shun, "and although we tried a hundred medicines she got no better. At last we got a doctor named An Daoquan from Jiankang Prefecture (Nanking) who knew the disease and cured her. I was very grateful to him, and whenever I got some money I sent it to him as gifts. I will ask him to come here and cure Song Jiang. But it is a long journey, and will take some time to get the doctor here."
Wu Yong then mentioned Song Jiang's dream of Chao Gai the previous night, and said how Chao Gai had suggested that a propitious star in Jiangnan, south of the Yangtze River could relieve him of a coming calamity. "Can it be that this doctor, An Daoquan, is that very star?"
"Younger brother," said Song Jiang, "send for this man at once, and save my life. There must not be the least delay in this matter."
Wu Yong got about one hundred taels of silver for the doctor and handed them to Zhang Shun. He also told him, "Today we are all going back to Liangshan Marsh, so you must bring the doctor there without any delay."
Zhang Shun started off immediately.
Wu Yong then issued orders for a return to Liangshan Marsh, and they started that very day, Song Jiang being carried on his bed in a cart.
When Grand Secretary Liang heard of the departure of the brigands he discussed matters with his Generals, and decided not to pursue them as they considered this move might be some new plot of the brigands to get them out of Daming Prefecture.
Zhang Shun traveled day and night with all possible speed, but he found it somewhat difficult owing to the snow on the ground. He braved both wind and snow without regard for his own safety. At last he reached the Yangtze River, but there was no boat available. He was very disappointed at this, but continued his way along the northern bank. He soon came to many reeds amid which he saw some smoke. He called out, "Hey brother! Quickly get your boat ready to take me across." A man emerged from the reeds wearing a broad straw hat and a grass raincoat. He asked, "Where do you want to go?"
"I want to go to Jiankang Prefecture, on urgent business," replied Zhang Shun, "and I will pay you much money to row me across the river quickly."
"I can take you across," said the man, "but it is getting rather dark now, and there is no place on the opposite bank for you to sleep. You had better sleep in my boat here, and I will take you across tomorrow morning at daybreak."
Zhang Shun agreed to this, and followed the man through the reeds to the bank where there was a boat with a young fellow on board warming himself at a fire. They went under cover on the boat, and Zhang Shun took off his wet clothing, and the boatman handed it to his assistant to dry at the fire. Zhang Shun undid his baggage, took his quilt, and wrapping it round himself lay down. He then asked the boatman whether it was possible to get some wine, and was informed there was none. Zhang Shun ate some rice, and then lay down again. He had had such a hard day traveling that he was very tired and soon fell asleep.
The assistant, seeing this, pulled his lips awry towards Zhang Shun, and whispered to the boatman, "Brother, do you see?" The boatman crept forward silently and felt at Zhang Shun's bundle. He then went back, and told his assistant to quietly row the boat into the middle of the river where they would kill the passenger.
The assistant jumped ashore, and untied the boat. Then pushing with a bamboo pole and then sculling, he took the boat into the middle of the river. While this was being done the boatman had quietly bound the sleeper with cords, and now carried him from underneath the cover on to the open deck. Zhang Shun was now awake, but found himself bound hand and foot. The boatman took a knife in one hand, and put the other hand on Zhang Shun.
"Please spare my life," appealed Zhang Shun. "I will give you all the money I have."
"I want both your money and your life," replied the boatman.
"Then do not kill me, but only drown me," appealed Zhang Shun, "and then my spirit will not trouble you afterwards."
"That I can do," said the boatman. He then took Zhang Shun and threw him into the water. Taking the bundle he opened it and was surprised to find such a lot of money. He frowned at this, and called his assistant. When the latter came inside, the boatman seized him, and taking the knife killed him on the spot. He then threw the body overboard. He washed the blood from the deck, and then sculled back to the bank.
When Zhang Shun was in the water he soon bit the cords tying his hands, then freed his feet, and swam to the southern bank of the Yangtze River. There he saw a light among some trees, and going near he found that it was an inn where they were distilling wine in the night. He called out, and pushing open the door entered, and saluted an old man who was inside.
The old man said, "I can see that you have been robbed on the river, and have escaped by jumping into the water, and swimming ashore."
"I will be quite straight with you," said Zhang Shun. "I am from Shandong, and am on my way to Jiankang Prefecture on urgent business. Last evening I got on a boat to cross the river, and did not suspect that the boatmen were bad fellows. They took all my silver and clothes, and threw me into the water. But I swam across to this side, and so saved my life. I appeal for your assistance."
The men led Zhang Shun into a room at the back, and gave him dry clothes for a change. He then produced food and wine. He asked for Zhang Shun's name and his business.
Zhang Shun gave his name, and explained that he wished to see an old friend Dr. An at Jiankang.
"On your way here did you pass Liangshan Marsh?" asked the man.
Zhang Shun admitted this, and the man remarked, "At that place there is a man named Song Jiang who does not molest travelers, but acts as the 'agent of Heaven.'"
"Yes," said Zhang Shun, "he is a very honest and upright man. He does not injure the people, but is opposed to all corrupt officials."
"I have heard the same. His followers help the poor, and the old, and are quite different to the brigands about here. If he came to this place he would be welcomed by all the people."
Zhang Shun then disclosed that he was one of the leaders at Liangshan Marsh. That Song Jiang was seriously ill with a boil on the back, and that he had been given a hundred taels of silver to go quickly for Dr. An. It was a misfortune that he had fallen asleep on the boat and been robbed.
The old man said, "As you are one of those leaders I will introduce my son to you." In a short time a young man came from the back room, and saluted Zhang Shun. He said, "I am Wang Dingliu, but the people call me, 'Lightning Goddess,' because I walk very quickly. I like swimming, but so far have not been able to get a good instructor to teach me the use of sticks, and have had to earn a living at this inn. I know those two thieves who assaulted you. One is Zhang Wang, the 'River Devil,' and the other is Sun the Fifth, the 'Oily Eel.' They are always robbing travelers. If you would stay here for a few days you would see them come here, and then you could have your revenge."
"I am grateful for your offer," said Zhang Shun, "but I cannot delay my important affair. So tomorrow I will go to the town, and after finding Dr. An I will see you again on my way back."
This was agreed to, and the following day Wang Dingliu gave Zhang Shun new clothes and ten taels of silver. It was a fine day, and the snow had stopped. Zhang Shun soon reached the town, and found Dr. An's place close to the Huaishu Bridge. He entered the dispensary, and saluted Dr. An Daoquan.
Immediately Dr. An remembered him, and said, "I have not seen you for many years. What wind has blown you here?"
Zhang Shun went into the inner room, and there told the doctor his business. He explained how he had been robbed in crossing the Yangtze River, and therefore arrived without money.
"As Song Jiang, the upright hero, is sick, it is important that he should be cured quickly," said Dr. An. "But unfortunately my wife died recently, and as I have no relative to look after my business here I cannot go to any distant place."
Zhang Shun pleaded earnestly for a long time for the doctor to go, and at last said he would not return without the doctor. Thus after much discussion Dr. An agreed to go.
In the town was a prostitute named Li Qiaonu who was on very familiar terms with Dr. An, and the latter took Zhang Shun to see her. Food and wine were provided, and during the meal Dr. An spoke, "I will sleep here tonight, but early tomorrow morning I will start on my journey to Shandong. I will return however in about a month."
"I do not like you to leave me," said the woman. "If you do not listen to me now you need not trouble to come here again to see me."
"I have made all preparations to start tomorrow," said Dr. An, "and I will come back as quickly as possible, so you must not worry."
The woman threw all discretion on one side, and leaning on his breast said, "If you go and forget me, I will curse the flesh from your body!"
Zhang Shun was very much annoyed with the woman. As it was now late in the evening, Dr. An was drunk, and he went into the woman's room, and lay down. The woman spoke to Zhang Shun, "You can go now, as I have no place here for you to sleep."
"I will wait here until the doctor is sober," said Zhang Shun, "and then we will depart together."
As she could not get him to go, the woman at last gave him a small room to sleep in.
Zhang Shun was annoyed at what had happened, and could not sleep. Shortly afterwards he heard a knock at the house door, and looking through a crack in his own room, he saw the door open and a man enter. The man spoke something to the old woman that ran the house, who opened the door for him and she asked him, "Where have you been lately? I have not seen you for a long time. The doctor is drunk inside, so you cannot stay here tonight."
"I have ten taels of gold here to be made into hairpins for your mistress. Please ask her to come here and talk with me now," said the man.
"Come into my room," said the old woman, "and I will bring her there."
Zhang Shun now recognized the man as Zhang Wang, the "River Devil," who had robbed him, and became excited. But he still watched what was happening as he did not want to delay his own affair by attacking this thief. The prostitute came, and sat drinking wine with Zhang Wang. About midnight the woman and two servants in the kitchen were quite drunk. Then Zhang Shun left his room, and went into the kitchen where he found a meat cleaver there. He killed the woman, but although he wanted to kill the two servants he found that the edge of the cleaver was not sharp enough after hacking up the old woman. He took a wood axe and killed them with that as they were going to call out. The prostitute in the inner room hearing the noise, opened the door, and met Zhang Shun with the wood axe in his hand. He dealt her a blow with it, and killed her on the spot. Zhang Wang, the robber, seeing this happen, jumped up, opened a window, and escaped that way. Zhang Shun was annoyed at this as the man might raise an alarm. He, however, tore a strip of cloth from the woman's clothing and dipping it in the pool of blood he wrote on the wall, "I, Dr. An, have killed these people." He wrote this in several places with the blood. About daybreak Dr. An awoke, and Zhang Shun said to him, "Please keep quiet but look at your lover here." Dr. An got up, and seeing the four corpses he was dumbfounded and trembled with fear.
"Brother, do you see what you have written on the walls?" asked Zhang Shun.
"You have seriously implicated me and endangered my life," said Dr. An.
"There are two ways lying before you," said Zhang Shun. "You can cry out for help in which case I shall run away, and leave you to your fate. Or you can ignore this affair, go to your shop for your medicines, and escape with me to Liangshan Marsh to cure Song Jiang. Which do you prefer?"
"You have been too malicious in your actions," said Dr. An, but he agreed to go.
It was still dark, and they both left the house. Upon reaching the doctor's shop they opened the door, got the medicines and bundle, and started off at once. They left the town, and duly reached the inn owned by Wang Dingliu on the bank of the Yangtze River. When he saw Zhang Shun he said, "It was a pity that you were not here yesterday when Zhang Wang happened to come here."
"I saw him yesterday," said Zhang Shun, "but I was too busy to attend to him. My business is so pressing that I have no time even for revenge."
Just as he finished saying this Wang Dingliu exclaimed, "Why, here is Zhang Wang coming now!"
"Do not alarm him! We will just see where he goes," said Zhang Shun.
Zhang Wang walked to the bank of the river, and was evidently looking around for his boat. So Wang Dingliu called out, "Brother, wait a little, and you can take two of my guests across who are waiting here now."
"I want to cross at once," said Zhang Wang. "Tell your guests to come quickly."
Wang Dingliu informed Zhang Shun of this, and Zhang Shun asked Dr. An to change clothes with him. "What is your idea?" asked Dr. An. "That is my affair," said Zhang Shun, "and you had better not ask any questions."
They exchanged clothing, and then went with Wang Dingliu to the bank where Zhang Wang's boat was waiting. They all three got in the boat. Zhang Shun went to the stern, and lifting up a plank took out a knife that was there. He hid himself under the cover of the boat. Zhang Wang shoved the boat off, and sculled towards the middle of the river. Zhang Shun now took off his clothes and called out, "Hey brother, come here! There are stains of blood on the planks."
"Sir, please do not joke with me," replied Zhang Wang. So saying he left the oar, and went towards the center of the boat. Then Zhang Shun seized hold of him, and said, "Thief! Don't you recognize me? Don't you remember the passenger who came on your boat the other night when it was snowing?"
Zhang Wang looked up, but could not speak.
"You took all my money," said Zhang Shun, "and tried to kill me. Where is your assistant now?"
"Sir," said Zhang Wang, "when I saw such a lot of money I was afraid that he would want an equal share, so I killed him and threw his body in the river."
"Previously I lived at Jiangzhou," said Zhang Shun, "and earned a living as a wholesale fish dealer. But now I live at Liangshan Marsh under our leader Song Jiang, and we are feared everywhere. You falsely decoyed me on your boat, and while asleep you bound me, and threw me into the river. If I had not been an expert swimmer I should have been drowned. We are now enemies, and I must kill you." He then pulled Zhang Wang onto the deck, bound him hand and foot, and threw him into the river.
Wang Dingliu heaved a sigh at this. Zhang Shun found where his money was stored, and took it back. They brought the boat to the northern bank, and there Zhang Shun spoke to Wang Dingliu, "You have been very good to me, and I shall never forget it. But if you do not think yourself above us, we should be very glad if you and your father would come and join us at Liangshan Marsh."
"What you say is just my own idea," said Wang Dingliu.
They then took leave of each other, and Zhang Shun and Dr. An continued on their way. But Dr. An was a literary man, and was not accustomed to traveling, so after walking about ten //he could not go any further. Zhang Shun found an inn, and they went inside to rest a while. While they were eating a meal they noticed a man coming in who spoke to Zhang Shun, "Brother, how is it that you are so late?" Zhang Shun recognized the man as Dai Zong, the "Divine Traveler." Zhang Shun introduced Dr. An, and then asked about Song Jiang.
"He is still very sick," said Dai Zong, "and cannot take any food. It looks as though he might die."

Zhang Shun weeped at this. Dr. An asked what was the state of the patient's complexion.
Dai Zong replied, "His skin is quite dry and wrinkled. He cries out with pain, and we are afraid that he is about to die."
"As he feels the pain I think we can cure him," said Dr. An. "But we must not delay our journey, but get there quickly."
"That is easy," said Dai Zong. He took two of his magic puttees, and fastened them on Dr. An's legs. He then shouldered the Doctor's satchel and spoke to Zhang Shun, "I will go with Dr. An first, and you may follow us slowly." They then went outside the inn, and the two flew away.
Zhang Shun stayed at the inn for three days, and then he was joined by Wang Dingliu and his father. They traveled together to Liangshan Marsh.
Dai Zong and Dr. An reached the mountain stronghold that night, and were at once taken in to see Song Jiang. The doctor found the patient breathing very feebly, and felt his pulse. Dr. An spoke to the leaders, "You need not be afraid, as it is not a serious illness, and I think I can cure him, so that he will be all right again in about ten days." The doctor then took some artemisia, and spread it on the boil to draw out the poisonous matter. He also gave him some medicine to take. After about ten days of this treatment Song Jiang's skin looked quite rosy, and was not so dry and warm as before. He also began to take nourishment.
As he got better, however, he began to worry and weep about Shi Xiu and Lu Junyi being still prisoners in Daming. Dr. An, however, objected to his being moved, or doing anything as he was only convalescent.
"Brother," said Wu Yong, "you can leave matters in my hands while you yourself obey the doctor's orders. It's now springtime, I'll undertake an attack on Daming Prefecture, and release our brothers from prison."
"If you avenge the wrong done to our brothers," said Song Jiang, "I'll die in peace." All the leaders were summoned to the Loyalty and Justice Hall where Wu Yong announced his plans for an attack on Daming Prefecture.

City changed to fiery furnace,
Mass of spears like forest trees;
Corpses piled up high as mountain.
Blood in pools as wide as seas;
Loyal heroes with their laughter
Make the devils turn and flee.

## 164
## The Flea Shi Qian Sets Fire to & Burns the Blue Jade Cloud Tower Mansion; the Professor Wu Yong plans the city's downfall, by a Ruse Takes Daming City with a Subtle Plan

"Fortunately, you're all right now, brother," Wu Yong said to Song Jiang. "Having Dr. An here treating your illness is a great blessing for our stronghold. While you were confined to bed, I frequently sent scouts into the Northern Capital to nose around. They say Governor Liang has got the jitters. He's afraid we're going to attack. I also had men put up proclamations in all the market places in and around the city assuring the ordinary people that they would not be harmed. We say that each wrong has its avenger and every debt has its creditor, and promise that when our army enters Daming we'll seek out only certain specific enemies. The result is that Governor Liang is more worried than ever. Premier Cai in the Eastern Capital has heard that Guan Sheng has come over to us, but he doesn't dare mention this in the presence of the emperor. Cai favors giving us amnesty and official posts. He feels that will solve everything. He keeps writing to Governor Liang, urging him to spare the lives of Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu as a sign of conciliation."
On hearing this, Song Jiang wanted to go down the mountain immediately and attack the Northern Capital. Wu Yong had another idea.
"It's now the lunar New Year and the Lantern Festival Day is rapidly approaching," he said. "It's the custom in the Northern Capital to put on a big display of lanterns. I'd like to take this opportunity to slip some men into the city, first, then attack. Coordinating inside and out, we can break through the defenses."
Song Jiang agreed. "Please work out the details," he said to the brigand commanders.
"The most important thing is to set a blaze inside the city as a signal. Which of you brothers will venture to go in and do it?" Wu Yong queried.
A man walked up to the foot of the platform. "I will!" Everyone looked. It was Shi Qian, known as Flea on a Drum.
"I lived in the Northern Capital as a child," he said. "There's one big tavern called Jade Cloud Mansion. Upstairs and down it has well over a hundred rooms. It's bound to be very lively the night of the Lantern Festival Day. I'll sneak into the city before that, and on the fifteenth of the first lunar month I'll climb to the top of the building and light a signal fire. Then the Military Advisor can dispatch forces to raid the prison. That's the best way."
"Just what I was thinking," said Wu Yong. "Start down the mountain tomorrow at daybreak. At the first watch on Festival night, if you can set a fire on top of the Mansion you'll win a lot of credit."
Shi Qian promised to carry out his mission, and departed.
The next day Wu Yong ordered Xie Zhen and Xie Bao to disguise themselves as hunters and go into the city with presents of game for the officials. When they saw the signal fire on the night of the fifteenth they were to stand in front of the government office and stop any officer or soldier who tried to report it. The two consented and left.
Wu Yong then told Du Qian and Song Wan to assume the garb of rice merchants and push two barrows into the city and find quarters. The moment they saw the signal blaze on the fifteenth they were to seize the city's East Gate. They promised and departed.
He instructed Kong Ming and Kong Liang to disguise themselves as beggars. They were to sleep under the eaves of some building in the busiest section of the city. When they saw the fire on the Mansion, they were to hurry and lend a hand. The two consented and left.
Wu Yong directed Li Ying and Shi Jin to dress as travellers, and to put up at an inn outside the East Gate. On seeing the signal blaze they were to kill the soldiers guarding the gate, take it over, and keep it for a convenient exit. The two promised and departed.
He told Lu Zhishen and Wu Song to move into a temple outside the city in the guise of itinerant monks. At the signal they were to go to the South Gate and block the government troops attempting to charge out. They agreed and left.
Wu Yong ordered Zou Yuan and Zou Run to pretend to be lantern sellers and put up at an inn in the center of the city. When they saw the fire on the roof top they were to go to the front of the prison and support the raiders. The two promised and departed.
He told Liu Tang and Yang Xiong to disguise themselves as policemen and take rooms in front of prefectural headquarters. When they saw the signal fire they were to prevent anyone from going in to report it, and thus cut the connection between the municipal administration's head and its tail. The two consented and departed.
He directed the Taoist Gongsun Sheng to assume the garb of a wandering priest, with Ling Zhen disguised as his acolyte, move into a secluded part of the city with hundreds of fireworks, and set them off when they saw the signal blaze. They agreed and left.
Zhang Shun was to enter the city with Yan Qing through the water gate via the moat and seize the adulterers in the home of Lu the Magnate.
Stumpy Tiger Wang, Sun Xin, Zhang Qing, Ten Feet of Steel Hu, Gu Dasao and Sun the Witch were to be three country couples coming to see the lantern display. They were to set fire to Lu's house.
Chai Jin and Yue Ho, dressed as army officers, would go to the home of Cai the prison superintendent and demand that he guarantee the safety of the two prisoners.
When all these dispositions had been made, the chieftains set out upon their various missions. It was then the beginning of the first lunar month.
We'll speak not of the bold fellows who departed, one by one, down the mountain, but tell instead of Governor Liang, as he summoned Li Cheng, Wen Da, Prefect Wang, and other high officials for a conference.
"Every year we put on a big display of lanterns to celebrate the first full moon, and make merry with the populace just as they do in the Eastern Capital," said the Governor. "But the Liangshan Marsh bandits have raided us twice, recently. I'm afraid a lantern festival might attract trouble. I'm considering calling it off. How do you gentlemen feel about that?"
"I think the robbers have stealthily withdrawn," said Wen Da. "Those proclamations of theirs prove that they're at their wits' end. There's nothing else they can do. You needn't let them concern you, Excellency. If we don't have our lantern display this year and those varlets find out about it they're sure to sneer at us. I propose that you issue an edict calling for even more fancy lanterns and celebrations than last year, and construct two hills of lanterns in the center of the city, Follow the example of the Eastern Capital and celebrate the Lantern Festival for five full days, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth, inclusive, with revels all through the night. Have the prefect check to make sure that everyone takes part. You too must join, Excellency, and celebrate with the people. I'll lead a cavalry unit to Flying-Tiger Valley, and there guard against the bandits pulling any tricks. District Commander Li can patrol with his Iron Cavalry around the outskirts of the city, to ensure that the populace is not disturbed."
Governor Liang was pleased with this suggestion. After he and his officials had discussed and agreed upon it, he had public proclamations issued accordingly.
Daming, known as the Northern Capital, was the largest city in Hebei and a thriving metropolis. Merchants and traders flocked there in droves. When they heard there was to be a lantern festival, all came to take part.
On the streets and in the lanes, local officials daily inspected the preparations. Wealthy families vied with one another in their displays, travelling anywhere from one hundred to three hundred //to buy handsome and flowery lanterns. Many vendors brought lanterns to the city annually. Families built special sheds in front of their doors, where they hung up their best lanterns and set off fireworks. Inside the courtyards other sheds were erected. Here, amid beautiful screens and revolving lights, pictures by famous artists graced the walls, and rare antiques and intricate toys were placed on view.
Every household in every street and lane had lanterns ready. Beside the prefectural bridge near the governor's residency an artificial hill had been built. Two paper dragons, one red and the other yellow, coiled around it. Each scale of their bodies was a small lantern, and water spewed from their mouths. Countless lanterns also illuminated both approaches to the bridge.
An artificial hill was erected in front of the Bronze Buddha Monastery. Around this coiled a blue dragon, lit by hundreds of lanterns.
Before the Jade Cloud Mansion was another artificial hill. On it was a white dragon, with innumerable lanterns on all sides. The Mansion was actually a tavern, the finest in the province. Three eaved stories high, with carved beams and decorated pillars, it was an extremely handsome structure of more than a hundred rooms. From morning till night the Mansion resounded with music and song.
All the temples and monasteries were festooned with lanterns to celebrate a prosperous new year. Needless to say, the displays in the houses of joy and amusement were more lavish still.
Scouts reported the news to Mount Liangshan. Wu Yong was delighted. He informed Song Jiang. Song wanted to lead personally an attack on the Northern Capital. But Dr. An disapproved.
"Your wound isn't entirely closed," he said. "You mustn't move about too much. If anger seeps in, the cure will be difficult."
"Let me go in your place," Wu Yong proposed. He and Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan then mustered eight contingents.
The first was led by Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, assisted by Han Tao and Peng Qi, with Huang Xin, Suppressor of the Three Mountains, commanding the reserve. This was entirely a cavalry outfit. Actually, Huyan's forward unit was not going to fight. It was a ruse to draw Guan Sheng into battle.
The second contingent had Panther Head Lin Chong leading the forward unit, aided by Ma Lin and Deng Fei, with Hua Rong commanding the reserve. This too was entirely cavalry.
The third contingent, also fully mounted, had Guan Sheng the Big Halberd leading the forward unit, seconded by Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen. Sun Li the Sickly General brought up the rear.
The fourth contingent, again fully cavalry, had Qin Ming the Thunderbolt in command of the forward unit, assisted by Ou Peng and Yan Shun. Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute led the reserve.
Mu Hong the Unrestrained, an infantry commander, was at the head of the fifth contingent. His lieutenants were Du Xing and Zheng Tianshou.
Another infantry commander, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, headed the sixth contingent, assisted by LiLi and Cao Zheng.
Infantry commander Lei Heng the Winged Tiger, aided by Shi En and Mu Chun, led the seventh contingent.
The eight contingent was led by infantry commander Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, seconded by Xiang Chong and Li Gun.
The eight companies were ordered to march that same day and to brook no delays. They were to reach the city walls by the second watch of the fifteenth of the first lunar month, infantry and cavalry advancing together.
When the command was given, the eight contingents set forth down the mountain. The other chieftains remained with Song Jiang to guard the fortress.
Now Flea on a Drum Shi Qian was a man who flew along eaves and walked atop walls. He didn't enter the Northern Capital on the regular road but clambered over the city wall at night. Unable to find accommodations at an inn for a single traveller, he wandered the streets all day and at night rested beneath the pedestal of a god in a temple. On the thirteenth he went to the center of town and watched the citizens erecting their sheds and hanging their lanterns.
He saw Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, carrying game, also strolling and looking. He observed too Du Qian and Song Wan coming out of a house of pleasure. Shi Qian went to an upper floor of the Jade Cloud Mansion and walked around. Down in the street again, he met Kong Ming, dirty, his hair dishevelled and wearing a tattered sheepskin coat, begging with a staff in his left hand, a bowl in his right. Kong Ming nudged him to go to the back and talk.
"You don't look a bit like a beggar, brother," said Shi Qian, "a big robust fellow like you, with a fair skin and rosy complexion! This city is full of policemen. If any of them sees through your disguise, our whole project may be delayed! You'd better stay out of sight."
While he was speaking, another beggar approached from the edge of a wall. Shi Qian looked at him closely. It was Kong Liang.
"You're another one with a snowy white skin," said Shi Qian. "Nobody would believe you were starving. They'll surely spot you as a fraud." Suddenly, two men grabbed them from behind and barked: "A fine thing you three are up to!"
They turned and saw Yang Xiong and Liu Tang. Shi Qian breathed a sigh of relief. "You nearly scared the life out of me!"
"Come with me," said Yang Xiong. He led them to a secluded spot and said reproachfully: "Don't you have any sense? How could you talk there? It's lucky it's only we two who saw you. If it was one of those sharp-eyed fast-moving policemen, brother Song Jiang's big plan might have to be postponed. We've seen the other brothers. There's no need for you to roam the streets any more."
"Zou Yuan and Zou Run are out selling lanterns," said Kong Ming. "Lu Zhishen and Wu Song have put up in a temple outside the city. That's enough talk. Let each man do his job when the time comes."
In front of a temple they met a Taoist priest coming out. "What are you five doing here?" he cried. It was Dragon in the Clouds Gongsun Sheng. Behind him was Ling Zhen, disguised as an acolyte. The seven exchanged significant glances, nodded in agreement, and went their separate ways.
With the festival day almost upon them, Governor Liang directed Wen Da the Mighty Sword to lead his mounted, troops out of the city and set up a position in Flying-Dragon Valley to guard against the bandits. On the fourteenth he ordered Li Cheng the Heavenly King to take five hundred Iron Cavalry, in full armor, and patrol the outskirts.
The next day, the fifteenth, the Lantern Festival Day, was clear and bright. At dusk, the moon rose, gilding the avenues and streets with silver. Crowds watched the rockets and admired the beautiful shining lanterns.
That night Superintendent Cai Fu instructed his brother to keep an eye on the prison. "I'm going home for a while. I'll be back soon."
As he was entering the door of his house, two men moved in after him. The first was dressed as an army officer. The other appeared to be a servant. But when Cai Fu looked at them in the light of a lamp, he saw that the first was Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind and the second Iron Throat Yue Ho. Cai Fu knew Chai Jin, and he invited them in and started to lay out wine cups.
"No wine, thanks," said the Small Whirlwind. "We've come with an urgent request. We know you've been taking excellent care of Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu, and for that we can't thank you enough. While all the festivities are going on we'd like to slip into the prison and see them. May we trouble you to lead the way? Please don't refuse."
Cai Fu was an experienced officer. He could guess pretty well what Chai Jin intended. If he refused and the outlaws succeeded in breaking into the city, not only he but his whole family would be exterminated. He had no choice but to risk the dangerous consequences. He gave them some old clothes to wear and disguised them as policemen. Then he changed his head kerchief and led them directly to the prison.
Around the first watch Stumpy Tiger, Ten Feet of Steel, Sun Xin, Gu Dasao, Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch, masquerading as three couples from the country, mingled with the crowds entering the city through the East Gate. Gongsun Sheng and Ling Zhen, carrying large hampers on shoulder-poles, went into the Temple of the City God and sat down on the veranda. The temple was next door to the prefectural government office.
Zou Yuan and Zou Run strolled towards the center of town bearing lanterns for sale. Du Qian and Song Wan, each trundling a wheel barrow, proceeded directly to the front of the governor's residency and merged with the revellers there. The residency was on the avenue leading to the East Gate.
Liu Tang and Yang Xiong, each holding a policeman's staff and with a weapon concealed on his person, sat down on either side of the prefectural bridge. Yan Qing and Zhang Shun swam into the Northern Capital beneath the water gate and concealed themselves in a secluded spot. Of all this we'll say no more.
Soon, the second watch was sounded in the drum tower. Shi Qian appeared with a basket on his arm. In it were sulphur and nitrate and things to ignite them, covered over by velvet ornaments for ladies' hair. He entered Jade Cloud Mansion and walked up the stairs. In every room pipes were tootling, drums and clackers beating, and games being played, as merry-makers noisily celebrated the Festival of the Lanterns. Pretending to be selling his hair ornaments, Shi Qian went from room to room. He met Xie Bao and Xie Zhen in the hallway carrying steel pitchforks from which rabbit game were suspended.
"It's time," said Shi Qian. "Why isn't there any activity outside?"
"We've just been out front and saw a mounted scout go by," said Xie Zhen. "Our troops have probably arrived. You just do your job."
Before the words had left his mouth a clamor arose in front of the building. Someone exclaimed: "The men of Liangshan Marsh are at the West Gate!"
"Hurry," Xie Zhen said to Shi Qian. "We're going to take our posts outside the government office."
He and Xie Bao hurried to their destination and found it crowded with defeated soldiers who had fled back to the city. They said: "Wen Da the Mighty Sword lost his position in a surprise raid. The bandits are headed this way!"
Li Cheng, who was patrolling atop the city wall when he heard the news, galloped to garrison headquarters. He mustered more troops, and ordered that the gates be closed and the city defended.
Prefect Wang had led over a hundred policemen, with chains and fetters, to suppress any disturbances. He returned to garrison headquarters hastily on learning of the impending attack. Governor Liang, who had been seated at his ease outside his residency, had not been alarmed when the first news reached him. But when, less than half a watch later, mounted scouts came flying back like comets, he was shaken to the depths of his soul. He hurriedly called for his horse.
At that moment Shi Qian ignited the sulphur and nitrate on the roof of Jade Cloud Mansion. An enormous flame shot into the sky, paling the moon. Governor Liang hastily mounted and started to ride to the scene. But two big fellows pushed over their wheel barrows, blocking the road, then proceeded to pour oil on them from lamps which had been hanging on the barrows and set them on fire.
Liang headed for the East Gate. Two other big fellows shouted: "Li Ying and Shi Jin are here!" and strode murderously forward, twirling halberds. The guards at the gate fled, but not before a dozen of them had been wounded. Du Qian and Song Wan then joined in, and the four, together, captured the East Gate.
Governor Liang saw he was no match for them. With his retinue he flew to the South Gate. There, he heard voices crying: "A big fat monk with a Buddhist staff and a beast-face pilgrim with a pair of sharp knives are yelling and slaughtering their way in!"
Liang turned his steed and went back to his residency. He saw Xie Zhen and Xie Bao felling men left and right with their steel pitchforks. He thought to go to prefectural headquarters, but dared not draw any closer. Prefect Wang tried to come out to him. Liu Tang and Yang Xiong brought their policemen's staves down on Wang's head with such force that his brains spattered and his eyes bulged, and he fell dead in front of the prefecture. His officers and clerks fled for their lives.

The governor hurriedly rode to the West Gate. The concerted boom of explosives in the City God Temple shook the earth. At the same time Zou Yuan and Zou Run with torches on long bamboo poles began setting fires to the eaves of houses, while Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel, in front of the southern brothel section, came fighting forward, aided by Sun Xin and Gu Dasao who had pulled out concealed weapons. Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch barged into the Bronze Buddha Monastery, clambered up the artificial hill and set it ablaze.

All over the city, the people were scurrying in terror. Screams and wails shivered in every household. In a dozen places flames brightened the sky. Confusion reigned.

As Governor Liang was rushing to the West Gate he met Li Cheng and his cavalry, and they all raced to the top of the city wall above the South Gate. Li reined in his steed, mounted the Drum Tower and peered out. Approaching was a huge array of men and horses and a banner inscribed with the words: *General Huyan Zhuo*. The general was a spirited and courageous figure in the firelight. To his left was Han Tao, to his right Peng Qi, while Huang Xin brought up the rear. Spread out like wings of a goose, the ruthlessly advancing contingent was nearly at the gate.

Unable to leave the city, the governor and Li Cheng concealed themselves beneath the archway of the North Gate and watched the brightly leaping flames. They could see a mounted force of unknown number flying towards them. It was led by Panther Head Lin Chong, who held a lance athwart as he urged on his horse. To his left was Ma Lin, to his right Deng Fei. Hua Rong brought up the rear.

Liang went again to the East Gate. Amid an advancing army of torches he could see Mu Hong the Unrestrained, with Du Xing on his left and Zheng Tianshou on his right. These three gallant infantry commanders, halberds in hand, were rapidly closing in on the city with over a thousand men.

Throwing all caution to the winds, the governor dashed through the South Gate. In the light of torches on the side of the drawbridge he could see Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, with LiLi on his left and Cao Zheng on his right. Buff naked, Li Kui swarmed up from the moat, brandishing his axes. LiLi and Cao came with him.

Li Cheng carved a bloody path out of the city to cover the governor's escape. Murderous cries arose on their left. From amid an army of countless torches, Guan Sheng the Big Halberd rode forth. Clapping his spirited roan and waving his blue steel blade, he galloped directly towards Liang.

Li Cheng, grasping his two knives, advanced to meet the foe. But he had no heart for the fight, and soon pulled his horse around and withdrew. From the left a combined force under Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen, with Sun Li bringing up the rear, charged fiercely. In the ensuing battle, Hua Rong advanced swiftly from behind, fitted an arrow to his bow and brought a lieutenant beside Li Cheng tumbling from his saddle. The startled Li turned and fled.

Before he had gone more that half a bowshot, drums pounded and gongs crashed on his right. In the firelight he saw Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, waving his cudgel on a spirited mount, murderously advancing with Yan Shun and Ou Peng, followed by Yang Zhi. Li Cheng fought as he retreated, still protecting the governor. They managed to break through.

Meanwhile, in the city Du Qian and Song Wan slaughtered the governor's family, old and young, good and bad. Liu Tang and Yang Xiong wiped out the family of Prefect Wang. Kong Ming and Kong Liang had climbed the rear wall of the city prison and were about to go in. Zou Yuan and Zou Run planted themselves at the front of the prison to prevent anyone from entering.

Inside, Chai Jin and Yue Ho recognized the signal fire. "Did you brothers see that?" they called to Cai Fu and Cai Qing. "What are you waiting for?"

Cai Qing was on guard at the door, but Zou Yuan and Zou Run smashed it open and shouted: "The whole band of bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh is here! Bring out Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu!"

Cai Qing hastily reported to his brother, but by then Kong Ming and Kong Liang had already jumped down from the top of the building. Chai Jin, regardless of whether the Cai brothers were willing or not, pulled out an implement, opened the fetters and released the two prisoners.

"Come with me, quick, to Lu's house and protect his family," Chai Jin said to Cai the Superintendent.

All rapidly emerged through the prison gate, where they were joined by Zou Yuan and Zou Run, and hurried to the home of Lu Junyi. The Magnate led the five Mount Liangshan men in a search for his wife and his steward Li Gu.

When Li Gu heard that an army of bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh had entered the city and saw the fires rising on all sides, his eyes twitched and he consulted with Lu's wife. They packed some valuables and hurried through the door. But then they heard front gates being knocked down and an unknown number of men rushing in. They turned in fright and stole out through the rear gate. They tiptoed along the wall and headed for the river, hoping to find a place of concealment.

On the bank Zhang Shun shouted: "Where does that woman think she's going!"

Panic-stricken, Li Gu jumped into a boat to hide. As he was about to plunge into the cabin, a hand suddenly reached out and grabbed him, and a voice shouted: "Li Gu, do you remember me?"

The steward recognized the voice of Yan Qing. "Young Prodigy," he cried, "we've never been enemies! Don't pull me ashore!"

Zhang Shun, on the bank, already had the woman clapped under one arm. He dragged her down to the boat. Yan Qing held on to Li Gu, and all went towards the East Gate.

Lu the Magnate, when he found his wife and steward gone, ordered his servants to pack his gold and silver and precious things, load them on carts and take them to the mountain fortress for distribution.

Chai Jin went with Cai Fu to his house where the superintendent collected his family and belongings. They prepared to leave for the mountain stronghold.

"You must save the ordinary people of the city, Excellency," said Cai Fu. "Don't let them come to any harm."

Chai Jin relayed his request to Wu Yong. But though the Military Advisor immediately issued appropriate orders, by then half the population had been killed or wounded.

The sky was already light. Wu Yong and Chai Jin, in the city, had the trumpets blow the call to assemble. The chieftains and Lu the Magnate and Shi Xiu all gathered at the governor's residency. The released prisoners praised Cai Fu and Cai Qing for their kindness and said they owned them their lives. Yan Qing and Zhang Shun brought forward Li Gu and Lu's wife. The Magnate told Yan Qing to keep them under guard until their disposition could be decided upon. Of that, we'll say no more.

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We'll talk rather of Governor Liang, fleeing the city under the protection of Li Cheng. They ran into Wen Da, returning with the remnants of his defeated army, and joined forces and travelled south together. Suddenly, the forward units set up a clamor. Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, with Xiang Chong on his left and Li Gun on his right—3 infantry commanders—were advancing on them with flourishing knives and spears. And behind the fugitives appeared Lei Heng the Winged Tiger, plus Shi En and Mu Chun, each leading a thousand foot soldiers and cutting off their retreat. Truly, the keeper sends the prisoner back to jail, the doctor orders the patient to return to bed.

The Professor said to Song Jiang: "Today we have the happiness of knowing that you are going to be all right, and also we have Doctor An here in the camp to treat your illness. This is wonderful news for us. Before you became ill I had already started sending out scouts regularly to report on events in the Northern Capital. Governor Liang has been scared of his own shadow lately. He imagines all the time that we are coming to get him. I have sent people to every district and market, both inside and outside the city, to post an unsigned notice telling the inhabitants they may hold it as certain that, just as every fault has its origin, so every debt has to be paid, and when our army comes to town it will know who its enemies are. This has made Governor Liang even more fearful of sinister plots. In the Eastern Capital the Grand Preceptor has heard that Scimitar has surrendered to us, but he doesn't dare tell the Emperor. He has an amnesty in mind, which would let us all off, for which reason he has been continually sending messages to Governor Liang telling him to keep the Unicorn and Madcap alive as a matter of policy."

When he heard this, Song Jiang was all for sending troops immediately to attack the city. But the Professor said: "We're at the end of winter, on the verge of spring. It's very near the lantern festival. It's the custom in the Northern Capital to have a big display of lights. I'd like to take the opportunity to infiltrate some of our troops into the city and coordinate the attack. With a concerted effort from within and without we can take the city."

Song Jiang said: "Good idea! Just go ahead!"

The Professor explained: "My main idea is this, we will start a fire in the city as a signal for the attack. Which of you is courageous enough to enter the city first and start the fire?"

Immediately one of the company stepped up and said: "Just the job for me!"

It was the Flea who spoke. He continued: "I was in the Northern Capital in my younger days. There's a many-storied restaurant there called Jade Cloud Mansion. Altogether it has hundreds of chambers. On the day of the lantern festival it's sure to be packed. I'll take advantage of a quiet time to sneak into the city and on the evening of the fifteenth I'll climb to the top of Jade Cloud Mansion and start the fire. You can designate some others to raid the gaol. That's our best plan."

The Professor said: "Exactly what I had in mind. Start tomorrow at dawn. Wait till the day of the festival and set fire to the tower in the first watch. That will be your role."

The Flea assented and departed.

Next day the Professor told Snake and Scorpion to dress as hunters, make their way to the government offices in the city and offer to sell them some game. On the night of the fifteenth, when the fire was seen, they were to proceed to the barracks and prevent the guards from spreading the news. They too departed.

Skyscraper and Door-God were ordered to disguise themselves as rice merchants pushing a barrow and seek lodgings inside the city. As soon as they saw the signal on the night of the fifteenth they were to go and seize the east gate. That was their role. They departed.

The two Kong brothers, Comet and Red Star, were told to disguise themselves as beggars, and choose a spot to sleep under the eaves of a building in the market place. On the evening of the fifteenth when they saw the signal they were to go along and lend a hand. They departed.

Skyhawk and the Tattooed Dragon were told to dress as merchants and establish themselves outside the east gate. When they saw the signal they were to kill the guards on the gate and maintain free passage in and out. They departed.

Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk and Pilgrim Wu Song were told to dress as pilgrims and wait around at a temple outside the city. When they saw the signal they were to take up a position outside the south gate and prevent any counter attack from that quarter. They departed.

The Forester and Rhinoceros were told to enter the city disguised as sellers of lanterns and find themselves an inn. When they saw the signal they were to proceed to the gaol and wait in front of it. They departed.

The Red-Haired Devil and Morbid, disguised as court officers, were to wait in front of the government offices. When they saw the signal they were to deny access to all messengers and prevent any reinforcements getting through. They departed.

Taoist Gongsun was to disguise himself as a wandering priest, with Thunderer as his disciple. They were told to station themselves at some quiet spot within the city with a hundred or so powerful rockets and explosives which they were to set off when they saw the signal. They departed.

White Eel and the Prodigy were told to enter the city from the river and proceed to the Unicorn's house where they were to seize only the faithless wife and her lover.

Short-Arse, Blackface, and the Gardener, with Steelbright, Auntie Gu and Sister Sun the Ogress, were to dress as three married couples from the country coming up to the city to see the lights and go and set fire to the Unicorn's house.

Mr. Chai and Lungs dressed as army officers were to go to the house of Strongarm, the gaoler, and ensure the safety of the two prisoners.

All these roles were allotted and everyone set about preparing for them. They were all determined that there should be no mistake.

The first day of the festival arrived. There is no need to tell how the heroes from Mount Liang set off down the mountain one by one. Rather let us describe how in the city Governor Liang summoned Vulcan, Swordsman and Magistrate Wang with a thousand of their officers to discuss arrangements for the lantern festival. The Governor said: "It is customary in the city to have a big display of lanterns, in celebration of the festival and for the delectation of the populace, just as it is done in the Eastern Capital. But we have twice been attacked by the bandits of Mount Liang recently, and I am afraid that to set out lanterns may be to invite trouble. I am in favour of cancelling the celebrations. What do the rest of you think?"

Swordsman said: "Those villains sneaked away quietly. Since then all they have done is put up these unsigned notices. I believe they have run out of ideas and can't think of anything else. Why are you so worried about them? If we omit to put out lanterns this year they will get to know about it and we will look foolish. You should issue an edict informing the citizens that there are to be even more lanterns than last year, even more illuminations in honour of the local gods. Two more turtle mountains can be built in the market place and it will all be exactly as in the Eastern Capital. You should order the displays to continue for five whole nights, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth. Have your officials carry out an inspection, to make sure all the citizens are taking part. You yourself can make a tour of the sights. It is important for you to be seen enjoying the festival with the people. As for me, I shall march a body of troops out of the city and station them at Flying Tiger Valley, in order to foil any plot by the bandits. And let General Li take his armoured cavalry and patrol the city walls to allay the fears of the citizens."

Governor Liang gave his consent. Following the commanders' decision notices were posted up to inform the citizens. Now, the Northern Capital was the most important centre in Hebei, home to every kind of trade and a place to which people flocked in droves. As soon as they heard about the lanterns, people rushed to take part. Throughout every street, alley, and pathway of the city the relevant district officials carried out a daily inspection and everyone busied themselves putting up illuminations. The rich households vied with each other in obtaining the best lanterns, which they went anything between thirty and a hundred miles to find. There were merchants also who came as they did every year to sell lanterns in the city. In front of every house stands were built for them and everyone wanted to have the best display of lights and the most original fireworks. Inside their courtyards they built imitation mountains of papier-mâché on which they hung colourful balloon lanterns, whilst inscriptions by famous calligraphers were displayed all around, together with all manner of antiques and curios. Every household in every street of the city, great or small, had to have its lanterns. A turtle mountain was built outside the garrison barracks by the bridge. It had two red and yellow paper dragons on top; every scale on their bodies was a lantern and water spouted from their mouths. There were countless lanterns in the region of the main city bridge and along the river. Another turtle mountain was constructed in front of the Temple of the Brass Buddha, on top of it a green dragon accompanied by thousands of coloured lanterns.

In front of Jade Cloud Mansion there was also a turtle mountain. Coiled around its top was a white dragon with myriad lights on every side. This restaurant was famous throughout Hebei and reckoned to be the finest in the province. It was a particularly impressive building, with three roofs, carved eaves and decorated pillars and it contained a hundred rooms all told, which constantly echoed to the sound of music, of flutes and songs delightful to the ear.

Every palace, monastery, temple, garden, or place of worship was decked with lights to welcome the new year. Needless to say, the houses of entertainment were likewise bedecked.

When the scouts from Mount Liang heard about all this and reported it, it was indeed music to the Professor's ears. He told it all to Song Jiang. Song Jiang would have liked to lead the army against the Northern Capital himself, but the Doctor said: "Your abscess is not completely healed and you are not ready for any violent movement. If inflammation sets in you will most likely not recover properly."

"But I am here to take your place," the Professor said.

Accordingly he had Sterling draw up a roster of eight companies. The first was commanded by Twin Rods, with Victorious and the Supremo, to spearhead the attack, supported by Tamer in the rear. These were all cavalry. When Twin Rods last fought, remember, it was a fake contest with Tamer, a tactical deception designed to draw Scimitar on.

The second column was commanded by Leopard's Head with the Flautist and Redeye leading and Colonel Hua following in support. These too were all cavalry. The third column was led by Scimitar with the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound leading and Colonel Sun in support, also cavalry. The fourth column was led by Thunderclap, with Golden Wings and the Dandy leading and the Blue-Faced Beast in support — more cavalry. The fifth column consisted of infantry, led by Mu the Unstoppable with Uglymug and Whitey. The sixth column was also of foot soldiers, led by Iron Ox, with the Executioner and Knife. The seventh column was another infantry division led by Sergeant Lei with the Young Master and Mu the Irrepressible. The eighth column was infantry commanded by Demon King with the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost.

These eight columns of horse and foot were to follow their orders and keep to a precise timetable. The second watch of the evening of the festival was the time set for them all to be there and to carry out an orchestrated attack on the Northern Capital.

Accordingly the eight columns set off down the mountain in due order, while the remainder stayed behind with Song Jiang to guard the mountain fortress.

As for the Flea, that consummate cat burglar, he did not try to march straight into the city, he climbed the walls by night. He could not find a single room at any of the city's inns, so he wandered the streets by day and in the evening went to the Temple of the Eastern Peak where he slept under the plinth of the Buddha's statue. On the thirteenth, he went to watch the residents and visitors building their stands and hanging up their lanterns. As he was looking on, Snake and Scorpion, with a selection of game strung on carrying-poles, also joined the spectators. A little after he caught sight of Skyscraper and the Door-God emerging from a house of entertainment. He went the same day to have a look round Jade Cloud Mansion, and saw Comet with unkempt hair and wearing a ragged old sheepskin, all very dirty; he was begging with a staff in his right hand and a bowl in his left. The Flea stole up behind him and said: "Look at you, mate, with that hale and hearty complexion you don't look one bit like a beggar. There's loads of police about in the city, if they find you out it could ruin the whole business. You'd better go somewhere quiet and keep out of the way."

As he spoke, another beggar appeared from beside the wall. It was Red Star. The Flea said: "You're just the same, mate. A face clean as the driven snow and a healthy look as doesn't belong to someone what's supposed to know nothing but hunger and privation. Anyone can see through that."

But before he had finished speaking, two men grabbed him roughly from behind and shouted: "What the hell are you playing at?"

He turned and saw that it was Morbid and the Red-Haired Devil. "You nearly scared the life out of me!" he said.

"Follow me, all of you," said Morbid.

He took them to a quiet spot and then abused them roundly: "Have you all taken leave of your senses? How could you carry on like that out there? Just as well it was us who saw you; if some sharp-eyed, quick-witted policeman had found you out our leader's whole plan would have been compromised! Now that we've seen what you get up to, we're taking care of everything. We don't need you out on the street any more."

Comet said: "The Forester and Rhinoceros are already in place selling lanterns on the street, Monk and Pilgrim are at their temple outside the walls. Cut the talk and let everyone get on with his own job."

Meanwhile they had come to the entrance of a temple. Out of this now strode a priest, who turned out to be Taoist Gongsun, with Thunderer at his heels, dressed as his disciple. All seven gave each other surreptitious nods and then went their separate ways.

As the day of the festival approached, Governor Liang gave Swordsman the order to lead his troops out of the city and encamp at Flying Tiger Valley to guard them from the bandits. On the eve, Vulcan was ordered to take his five hundred armoured cavalry and patrol the environs. The following day, day of the festival, dawned bright and clear. When the moon rose at dusk every street and market place, every nook and cranny was hung with coloured lanterns; from the broadest avenue to the smallest alley, illuminations everywhere.

*The weather for the festival is clear;*
*After fresh showers, proclaim that spring is here.*
*Transformed by a fiery filigree of lights*
*The city's like a view of Paradise.*
*The glow of lanterns warms the evening air,*
*With song and dance, the people pass the hour.*
*Feathers of peacocks deck the double gates;*
*Three holy mountains ride on turtles' backs.*
*By crimson curtains stand young girls in red;*
*Pale cavaliers ride by on handsome steeds.*
*The sound of flutes the public's ear entrances,*
*On decorated tiles, the moonlight dances.*
*Where Jade Cloud Mansion rises to the sky*
*Come bevies of maidens their charms to try;*
*The place is filled with lamps like silver globes,*
*With princes and nobles in their finest clothes;*
*One moment 'tis with pleasure-seekers teeming,*

*Next from the roof a plume of smoke is streaming.*

In the evening the gaoler Strongarm told his younger brother Blossom to look after the gaol. "I am going home to see about something," he said. "I won't be long." He had just entered the house, when two figures slipped inside. The first of them was dressed as an army officer, the one behind was muffled up. By the light of the lamp Strongarm recognized Mr. Chai. The other was Lungs. When he saw who it was, Strongarm invited them in and got something to eat and drink for them. But Mr. Chai said: "No need to offer us wine. I am here because I have something important to tell you: you have looked after our friends, for this we are deeply indebted to you. But tonight I want to take advantage of the excitement of the festival to visit the gaol and I hope you will be so good as to let me in. Please do not say no."

Now Strongarm was an official and he more or less guessed where this was tending. But if he did not go along with it, the city, he feared, would be destroyed, and where was the advantage of that? The lives of his family were also at stake. The result could be a veritable sea of blood. So he went and got some old uniforms which he gave them to put on to disguise them as policemen. He then changed his own headgear and took them off to the gaol.

Around the first watch, Short-Arse, Steelbright, Blackface, Auntie Gu, the Gardener and Sister Sun the Ogress, three couples disguised as country folk, mixed with a crowd of people and entered through the city gates. Taoist Gongsun and Thunderer, carrying a wicker basket, went to the Temple of the Town God and sat in the porch (the Temple of the Town God was next to the provincial office). The Forester and Rhinoceros were wandering about the city toting their lanterns. Skyscraper and the Door-God pushing their barrows arrived in front of Governor Liang's office where they concealed themselves among a crowd of merry-makers (the office was in the main street leading from East Gate). The Red-Haired Devil and Morbid, each carrying a staff of office but also with concealed weapons, were sitting on the town bridge, one on either side. The Prodigy and White Eel had entered the city from the water and hidden in a quiet place. Of this no more.

Before long the second watch was sounded from the drum tower. The Flea, clasping his basket with supplies of sulphur and saltpetre (materials for starting the fire) covered over with harmless trinkets, strolled into Jade Cloud Mansion. He went upstairs. There was enough blowing of flutes and thumping of drums and cymbals to pierce the clouds and shake the earth. The upstairs rooms were filled with young rowdies celebrating the festival. Under the pretext of selling trinkets the Flea went into every room and had a good look. He came across Snake and Scorpion, wandering about carrying forks with rabbits dangling from them.

The Flea said: "It's time. Why is nothing happening outside?"

Snake said: "When we got here a scout galloped past. Most likely our troops have arrived. You just get on with what you have to do."

Just as he finished speaking a shout went up outside the building: "The forces from Mount Liang are here! They're at the West Gate!"

Snake told the Flea: "Quick, get on with it! We're off to help them at the barracks!"

They reached the barracks in time to see the defeated remnants of the government cavalry gallop into the city, shouting: "Swordsman's camp has been overrun! The brigands from Mount Liang are at the city walls!"

Vulcan at this time was patrolling the city walls. When he heard the news he galloped to the barracks and ordered troops to secure the gates and save the city from capture.

Now Magistrate Wang was on patrol with the hundred or more troops of his bodyguard, ready to clamp down on any disturbances in the streets. When they heard the news they hurried back to the barracks.

Governor Liang had been having a drink or two, sitting in front of his office. When he first heard the reports he was not particularly worried. But less than an hour later the report brought by a flying despatch rider frightened him half out of his wits. "Saddle my horse!" he shouted in a panic.

At the same moment fierce flames were seen shooting skyward from Jade Cloud Mansion, a huge conflagration which eclipsed the moon.

The Governor leapt onto his horse. He was setting off to see what was happening when two big men appeared with barrows and blocked the road. They poured oil from their lanterns over the barrows and set fire to them. The barrows burst into flames. The Governor rode to the east gate but there he was confronted by two big men who shouted: "Skyhawk and the Tattooed Dragon are here!" Twirling their halberds they bounded forward, while the guards on the gate fled in terror. Door-God and Skyscraper, who had already wounded a dozen or so, now appeared and standing shoulder to shoulder with the other two held the gate.

Seeing how unpromising the situation looked, the Governor galloped off with his retinue towards the south gate. There they told him how a burly monk wielding a steel staff and a disciple of ferocious aspect with a pair of swords had charged into the city with bloodcurdling yells. The Governor turned his horse and raced back to military headquarters. Here he found Snake and Scorpion twirling their forks and striking out right and left. He hurriedly headed back to the government office but did not dare enter. When Magistrate Wang tried to come out the Red-Haired Devil and Morbid bludgeoned him with their staves, spilling his brains and bursting his eyeballs. He died on the spot. His guards and court officers fled for their lives.

As the Governor frantically turned his horse and made for the west gate, a series of earth-shattering explosions was heard from the Temple of the Town God. The Forester and Rhinoceros with bamboo poles in their hands were busy setting fire to the eaves of the buildings. Short-Arse and Steelbright charged forward. Blackface and Auntie Gu had taken out their hidden weapons and were also doing their bit. At the Temple of the Bronze Buddha, the Gardener and Sister Sun the Ogress had clambered on to the Turtle Mountain and were setting fire to it. By now every soul in the city was a terrified refugee, every house a scene of disaster and lamentation; on every side dozens of fires lit up the sky, whichever way you looked the same thing met your eyes.

Governor Liang galloping towards the west gate met Vulcan and his patrol and together they dashed to the south gate. They reined in their horses and climbed the drum tower to look out: a host of men, some on foot and some on horseback, were advancing outside the walls in battle array, with banners on which was written "General Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo". Seen by the light of the flames, the General made an intimidating and martial figure. On his left was Victorious and on his right the Supremo, while the Tamer brought up the rear, urging on the troops as they advanced toward the gate in arrowhead formation.

Their escape blocked, the Governor and Vulcan watched from the shelter of the north gate tower as untold numbers of the enemy attacked on that side too, clearly visible in the flames: this was the contingent of Leopard's Head, who led the charge on a fiery steed, lance at the ready, with the Flautist on his left, Redeye on his right, and Colonel Hua urging the troops on from behind.

Back to the east gate again, and here amid a forest of torches was Mu the Unstoppable, with Uglymug on his left and Whitey on his right, three stalwart leaders on foot heaving their halberds, charging into the city at the head of over a thousand troops. The Governor and his followers rushed back to the south gate and fought their way through. But Iron Ox was there by the drawbridge, clearly lit by the torches, with the Executioner on his left, Knife on his right. Iron Ox had stripped naked. Baring his teeth and gripping his two axes he came storming up from the moat with the other two at his side.

Vulcan led the retreat, hacking out a bloody path. Under his protection the Governor escaped from the city. But now from the left, with blood-curdling yells, amid a forest of torches, another mass of enemy troops poured forward. It was Scimitar, who urging on his mettlesome chestnut, his trusty blade dancing in his hand, was making a beeline for the Governor. Vulcan gripped his two swords and rushed to meet him. But by this time Vulcan had no appetite for the fight. He soon broke off, whipped his horse and fled. The Son-in-Law was coming up on Scimitar's left and the Hound on his right, with Colonel Sun behind urging on the troops in a furious charge.

At this critical juncture Colonel Hua arrived from the rear, fitted an arrow to his bow and shot Vulcan's lieutenant from his horse. Vulcan galloped off as fast as his horse would carry him, but had gone no more than half a bowshot when drums and gongs sounded on the right and Thunderclap galloped forward in a blaze of light, whirling his mace, with the Dandy and Golden Wings and the Blue-Faced Beast bringing up the rear. Vulcan fought a stubborn rearguard action. He lost half his troops, but he managed to preserve the Governor. They both got away.

Here our story divides. Let us first describe events in the city. Skyscraper and Door-God and went to kill all of the Governor's evil brood. The Red-Haired Devil and Morbid went to kill Magistrate Wang's family. The Kong Brothers, Red Star and Comet, climbed into the gaol over the back wall, while the Forester and Rhinoceros sealed off the front gate. Inside the gaol Mr. Chai and Lungs, when they saw the signal fires, said to Strongarm and Blossom, the two gaolers: "Do you see what's going on? What are you waiting for?"

When Blossom went to check the gate, Forester and Rhinoceros had already broken it down and were shouting "The company of Mount Liang are here! Bring out our friends the Unicorn and Madcap!"

Blossom hastily told his brother. At this moment the Kong brothers leapt down from the roof. The two gaolers had no option. Mr. Chai took out some instruments and broke open the fetters to release the Unicorn and Madcap. Mr. Chai said to Strongarm: "You two come with me and we'll rescue his family." They went off together. The Forester and Rhinoceros joined the two brothers and everyone went with Mr. Chai to the Unicorn's house to fetch out his family.

The Unicorn aided by Madcap, the two Kong brothers, Forester and Rhinoceros now began a search for the faithless wife and her lover, Manager Li.

Now when Manager Li heard that Mount Liang troops were invading the town and saw all the fires everywhere, he felt disaster impending. He discussed things with the woman and they made their valuables into a bundle, which he hoisted onto his back. They were just about to leave the house when there was a great hammering on the gate, which gave way, allowing the mob to pour in. Li and the woman rushed back inside. They hurriedly opened the back door, slipped over the back wall and headed for the waterside where they hoped to find somewhere to hide. But White Eel was on the bank. He gave a great shout: "Where does that woman think she's going?"

Manager Li, terrified, leapt into a boat and went to hide in the cabin. Just as he was disappearing inside, another man stretched out his arm, grabbed him by the hair and said: "Do you recognize me, Manager Li?"

Recognizing the Prodigy's voice, Manager Li hastily said: "Young friend, there's no ill-feelings between us, please don't put me ashore!"

On the bank White Eel had already grasped the woman by the waist and dragged her to the side of the boat. The Prodigy now took hold of Manager Li and they carried them both off to East Gate.

When the Unicorn failed to find Manager Li or his wife in the house he told his companions to bring out all his possessions, particularly anything of value, and load them onto carts and deliver them to Mount Liang to be shared out.

Mr. Chai went with Strongarm to his home. After they had collected his belongings and family to take to the mountain, Strongarm said: "Sir, please help the ordinary citizens, don't let harm come to them." So Mr. Chai went to find the Professor. As soon as he told him, the order was given to stop killing innocent people. But already half the citizens had suffered:

*The city now is lost in smoke, its towers all ablaze. Broken glass reflects the lurid glare, blackened alabaster bakes in the embers. The puppets there that gave such delight, now you can't tell front from back; the papier-mâché mountains which lit up the night, none can tell now which is the light side, which the dark. The old man's white locks are savagely seared; the dandy casts off his coloured parasol and flees. The hobbyhorse rider faces knife thrusts in the dark; even the festive tanner will scarce escape unscathed. The pretty maid strolling in the crowd has all her finery spoiled; the proud beauty come to view the sights sees in an instant her world destroyed. Alas this city for a thousand years the capital of song and dance is now become a bloody battlefield.*

By now it was completely light. The Professor and Mr. Chai ordered a gong to be sounded to halt the fighting. All the leaders and the Unicorn and Madcap met at the military headquarters, where the freed captives told how they had escaped harm in prison thanks to the care of the two brothers, Strongarm and Blossom. The Prodigy and White Eel handed over Manager Li and the woman. The Unicorn told the Prodigy to lock them up and guard them himself, until further orders. Of this no more.

Vulcan meanwhile had managed to rescue the Governor from the city. As they fled they ran into Swordsman, returning with the shattered remnants of his army. They joined forces and retreated southwards. Suddenly a cry arose in their front ranks. They were being attacked by Demon King, the Eight-Armed Ogre on his left and Winged Ghost on his right, with three bodies of infantry. From behind came Sergeant Lei with the Young Master and Mu the Irrepressible, each with a thousand foot, bent on cutting off their retreat. It was really a case of out of the frying pan into the fire, or as they say, see the doctor and have a relapse!

"I am very glad that you are getting better," said Wu Yong to Song Jiang. "While you have been sick I have sent many spies to Daming, and they have reported that Grand Secretary Liang is still very anxious and afraid that we will soon renew our attack. I have also had anonymous posters secretly put up in the city and the surrounding villages assuring the people that 'they need not be afraid when the Liangshan Marsh heroes appear again. Our hatred is directed against our enemy only, and the creditor will only collect the debt from the debtor. Our army is only for our enemies.' Liang has got our posters, which have upset him very much. At the Eastern Capital the Prime Minister feels much disgrace because of the disaster to the Imperial troops under General Guan Sheng. Many letters have been sent to the Grand Secretary ordering him not to execute the two prisoners Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu and that he must endeavor to placate us at Liangshan Marsh that we may come over on friendly terms to their side."

Song Jiang upon hearing this urged Wu Yong to depart at once to attack Daming Prefecture.

"Now the winter is over and spring is drawing near," said Wu Yong. "It will soon be the Lunar New Year and during the Lantern Festival that month will be a great display of lanterns in Daming. I am going to embrace the opportunity of the festival to get many of our men in disguise into the city, and then they can cooperate when our men attack the city from outside."

"A splendid plan!" said Song Jiang, "I wish you success."

"It is of first importance," said Wu Yong, "that many buildings should be set on fire inside the town as a signal to our men outside. Who is willing to go inside the town and set the place ablaze?"

A man stepped forward and said he was willing to go. This man was Shi Qian, the "Flea on the Drum." He said, "When I was young I lived in Daming. In the city is a tower called the Blue Cloud Tower, and there are over a hundred rooms there. At the Lantern Festival the city will be crowded, and on that night I will set fire to the Tower, and then our men outside can march in, and take the city."

This was agreed to, and it was arranged for Shi Qian to leave the following day. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao were ordered to be dressed up as hunters, carrying games to Daming, to be presented to the officials at the *yamen*. They had orders that at the Lantern Festival when they saw the Cuiyun Tower burst into flames they must station themselves near the entrance to the *yamen* to prevent any messenger from conveying the news to the officials inside.

Wu Yong also ordered Du Qian and Song Wan to be disguised as merchants with a cart of rice to go into the city, and to stay at an inn. When they saw the fire they were to go to the East Gate, kill the guard there, and take their place.

He also instructed Kong Ming and Kong Liang to go to the city as servants. They were to act as messengers.

Li Ying and Shi Jin were to go as travelers, and stay at an inn outside the East Gate. They were to assist in capturing the East Gate.

Lu Da and Wu Song were to be dressed as monks, and were to stay at a monastery outside the city. When the fire broke out they were to go to the Southern Gate, and prevent the soldiers from leaving the town by that way.

Zou Yuan and Zou Run were to stay at an inn inside the town as merchants selling lamps, and when the fire broke out they were to go to the prison.

Liu Tang and Yang Xiong were to go as minor officials, and stay at an inn close to the *yamen*. On the night of the fire they were to prevent messengers from conveying orders from the *yamen*.

Gongsun Sheng was to enter the town as a mendicant Taoist with Ling Zhen as his assistant, and to stay at some quiet spot. They were to carry fireworks with them, and when the fire broke out they were to burn the fireworks and make as much noise as possible.

Zhang Shun and Yan Qing were to enter the town by the water gate, and when they saw the signal they were to kill Li Gu and the adulterous wife of Lu Junyi.

Wang Ying and his wife, Hu San Niang, Sun Xin and his wife Gu Dasao, Zhang Qing and his wife Sun Er Niang, were to go into the town as country folks who went to view the sights. They were to set fire to Lu Junyi's house.

Squire Chai Jin and Yue He were to enter the town as military officers, and when the fire took place they were to go to the house of the head jailer Cai and arrange for the safety of the two prisoners.

All these arrangements having been made by Wu Yong the leaders mentioned above took their leave.

In Daming Prefecture, Grand Secretary Liang had called a conference of Generals Li Cheng, Wen Da, and Daming's Prefect Wang to discuss the celebration of the Lantern Festival. He said, "It is a custom that lanterns are in display to celebrate the occasion in the same as they do in the Eastern Capital. By this we let the people enjoy themselves with us. But this year there are exceptional circumstances. The bandits of Liangshan Marsh have attacked us twice, and I am afraid that they are only waiting for an opportunity to attack us again. I therefore think it would be better if we postpone this festival this year."

"I think," said General Wen Da, "that the brigands have all gone back to Liangshan Marsh, and although they have secretly posted up notices, yet I think they have no plan of attack, and that we need not worry about them. If we prohibit the lantern show on the 15th of the first month, the brigands, upon hearing of this, will laugh at us and conclude that we are afraid of them. I think we may issue an order that this year the people are encouraged to display lanterns and discharge fireworks. That we allow them five whole nights for this, from the 13th to the 17th, without interruption and that at the crossroads two additional large mountains of lanterns may be built up. The Prefect must see to it that this order is observed. You yourself will also celebrate the occasion in order to share the happiness with the people. As a precautionary measure against the bandits I will lead a squadron of cavalry out of the city to the Feihu Gully in order to guard the town on that side. General Li Cheng may have his men marching about the town to quell any disturbance."

The Grand Secretary was very much pleased at this proposal, and after further discussion General Wen Da's plans were adopted and put into execution.

On the north of the Yellow River, Daming was the most important prefecture. Daming itself was also a great metropolis and was the center for all government and trade activities. Therefore it was expected that many people from the surrounding country would come to enjoy the festivities of the Lantern Festival. The neighborhood chief in every part of the town supervised the preparations that were being made. The people entered into the spirit of the festival and there was keen rivalry as to who should have the best display. Mat sheds were erected at all the big houses with festoons of curiously shaped lanterns. Door screens were covered with lanterns of all varieties of colors. There were hung large numbers of scrolls of calligraphy and drawings by famous hands. At the Prefect's *yamen* there was a mountain of lanterns, with two red and yellow dragons with lanterns representing the scales, and arrangements for ejecting water into the river. Lanterns were innumerable, and covered the entire paper mountain. In front of the Tong Fu Monastery there was an erection covered with a thousand lanterns. In front of the Cuiyun Tower was another erection of lanterns with a white dragon similar to the others.

The tower was the most famous inn to the north of the Yellow River. It had threefold eaves, and all the beams were engraved with fancy designs in bright colors. There were over a hundred rooms for guests, and every day there was the sound of music and laughter in the building.

The spies from Liangshan Marsh duly reported this to the stronghold. Wu Yong was much pleased at the prospects, and discussed matters minutely with Song Jiang. The latter was very keen on going to Daming Prefecture to direct the attack but Dr. An would not allow this, so Wu Yong offered to go in his stead. Arrangements were made for most of the men to leave Liangshan Marsh and travel to the town by eight different routes, and they were all to reach the town on the time of the Lantern Festival.

Shi Qian duly arrived at Daming on his mission, but as the inns would not admit single individuals he contented himself with walking about during the daytime, and slept at a temple for the night. During the next few days he came across seven of the leaders from Liangshan Marsh who were in the town on secret service.

When the Lantern Festival was near at hand, Grand Secretary Liang issued an order for General Wen Da to take soldiers to the Feihu Gully and establish an outpost there. On the day before the Festival, General Li Cheng assembled five hundred soldiers, and marched them about the town. The festival day broke with splendid weather, and the Grand Secretary was quite happy and contented. In the evening there was the full moon in a clear sky, and the bright moonlight made the city look as though it was made of silver and gold. On the streets were crowds of men and women of all ages strolling about; fireworks were burnt on all sides; and everybody was enjoying the sights which were the best they had ever seen.

In the city jail the head jailer Cai Fu told his brother Cai Qing to take charge as he wanted to go home. When he had been at his home a few minutes two men came—one dressed as a military officer and the other as his orderly. Upon looking closely he recognized the first as Squire Chai Jin, and the orderly was Yue He whom Cai Fu did not know. Cai Fu requested them to come into a room where refreshments were already spread out, and there he offered them wine and cakes.

"We need not partake of wine," said Squire Chai Jin. "I have come here today to discuss an important matter with you. You have treated very well both Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, and I wish to thank you for this. As this is the Lantern Festival I should particularly like to go inside the jail and see my friends there. I hope that you will agree with us."

Cai Fu was a government official, and he at once understood that there would be some trouble, and the lives of all his family would be endangered if he refused to do as they wished. So he got some old clothes, and gave them to the two men so that they could disguise themselves as members of the prison staff. He then conducted them to the prison.

When the drum in the tower sounded the second watch, Shi Qian took a basket filled with brimstone and saltpeter covered with paper flowers, and entered the Blue Cloud Tower. He saw that in the rooms were parties of people singing and chatting, while flutes and stringed instruments filled the night with a melody of music. He went upstairs stopping at various rooms as a hawker trying to sell paper flowers and butterflies. He soon met Xie Zhen and Xie Bao who were dressed as hunters, and carried hares stuck on the end of forks over their shoulders. He spoke to them, "The time is now due. Have you seen anything outside?"

"Just now while we were looking outside we saw some scouts going to the *yamen*. We expect they are reporting the arrival of our troops. You had better get your work done at once."

Just then they heard great noise in front of the Tower, and they heard people shouting, "The brigands from Liangshan Marsh are outside the West Gate."

"Hurry up!" said Xie Zhen to Shi Qian. "Let us go to the *yamen* now and do our bit there." Upon reaching the *yamen* they found the defeated troops of General Wen Da had entered the city in disorder. They said, "The brigands attacked our camp, and drove us out. They followed us to the gate of the city."

General Li Cheng had heard the news, and had already dispatched his soldiers to guard the gates. Prefect Wang had taken one hundred soldiers to quell any disorder on the streets, and to arrest anybody attempting to make trouble. When he heard the news he returned to the *yamen*.

In the *yamen* Grand Secretary Liang had been drinking, and was slightly intoxicated. When he heard the news he treated it lightly. When the defeated cavalry began to arrive he became dumbfounded, but at last ordered his horse to be got ready. Just then the Blue Cloud Tower burst into flames, and lit up the whole town in a blaze of light. He quickly mounted his horse and started off. When he reached the street, however, two big men tried to stop him, but he avoided them and galloped towards the East Gate which, however, was guarded by Li Ying and Shi Jin.

Upon reaching the East Gate, Liang was attacked by four big men Li Ying, Shi Jin, Du Qian, and Sun Wan, and realizing that his soldiers there had been overcome he turned his horse and galloped off towards the South Gate. On the way however he heard people shouting that a big fat monk armed with an iron monk's staff had got in through the South Gate and was killing people on the way. The Grand Secretary therefore again turned his horse towards the *yamen*, but when near that place he saw two big men were running amuck on the street so that he could not pass. Just then he saw the Prefect Wang attacked by two brigand leaders Yang Xiong and Liu Tang who struck Wang on the head with a pole with such force that his brains splattered and killed him on the spot.
The Grand Secretary turned his horse again, and raced off towards the West Gate. On the way however he heard a loud explosion in the Temple of the City God. There the two brigand leaders Zou Yuan and Zou Run had long bamboo poles with torches on the ends, and were quickly setting fire to the houses about there. There was general confusion in the town, and the people were shrieking and crying with fear. There were fires in all parts of the town.
Near the West Gate the Grand Secretary happened to meet General Li Cheng, who rushed with him to the South Gate. Upon reaching there they ascended the city wall and went to the gate tower. From there they saw that there were many brigands on the streets with banners bearing the characters "General Guan Sheng, the 'Great Halberd.'" In the blaze of light they could see Guan Sheng mounted on a horse in a defiant attitude. He was supported by other leaders on horseback and they were fighting and killing as they came towards the gate. Grand Secretary Liang and General Li Cheng seeing the weakness of their position descended from the Gate Tower, mounted their horses, and went towards the North Gate. Upon getting near that place they saw so many brigands in charge of Lin Chong that they again turned, and went towards the East Gate. But that was no better as there were about a thousand brigands entering the city in charge of Mu Hong. So they turned to the South Gate. But on the way they met Li Kui and a number of other leaders, and when Li Kui saw them he ran forward wielding his two axes. General Li Cheng went in front with the Grand Secretary behind, and together they cut their way through the brigands. They, however, were attacked from the left by a large number of brigands led by Huyan Zhuo. General Li Cheng fought with Huyan Zhuo, but after about two bouts Li Cheng retreated as he realized that fighting was useless because other leaders were arriving. Among them was Hua Rong who shot an arrow which wounded the adjutant of General Li Cheng. General Li Cheng seeing his adjutant fall galloped off, but soon ran into another party of brigands under Qin Ming.
Li Cheng and the Grand Secretary, however, succeeded in getting through the South Gate, having killed so many men that they and their horses were covered with blood. Thus they rode off.
We will now return and see what was happening inside the city. In the jail Squire Chai Jin and Yue He, seeing the fires breaking out, spoke to the head jailer Cai Fu, "Do you see those fires? What time are you waiting for?" The main entrance of the jail just then was smashed in, and a crowd of brigands entered shouting. Chai Jin drew out his weapon, and breaking the cangues released Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu without waiting for the head jailer. Then he told Cai Fu, "You had better take me to your home, where I will protect your family." This was done.
Li Gu was at Lu Junyi's home, and seeing the fires and hearing the uproar on the streets he discussed escape with the late wife of Lu Junyi. They quickly made up bundles containing jewelry and valuables, with the idea of escaping, but they could not leave by the front gate as there was much noise and uproar there. So they went to the back door, and getting out, turned round corners, and at last reached the bank of the river. But Zhang Shun was there, and upon seeing them he shouted out, "Where is that woman going?" Li Gu did not reply, but jumped on a boat. A man on the boat, however, caught hold of him, and called out, "Li Gu! Do you recognize me?" Li Gu recognized Yan Qing by his voice, and replied, "Younger brother, we are not enemies. Let me go!"
But Yan Qing did not reply. He took Li Gu, and Zhang Shun took the woman, to the East Gate as prisoners. This had just happened when Lu Junyi arrived at his home. As he could not find Li Gu and his wife at once, he gave orders that all his movable wealth was to be packed and placed on carts to be conveyed to Liangshan Marsh. Head jailer Cai Fu also packed up his things and got his family ready to start for Liangshan Marsh. He then addressed Squire Chai Jin, "I request you to use your influence to spare the lives of the people in the city." Squire Chai Jin agreed to this, and went to see Wu Yong about it. Wu Yong concurred and issued orders to that effect but a great many people had already been killed or wounded. It was now daybreak, and Wu Yong gave the signal for his men to assemble. Grand Secretary Liang and General Li Cheng happened to meet with General Wen Da as they fled from the town. They had not gone far, however, before their progress was stopped by a party of brigands blocking their way.

Pardoned man again arrested.
Vile disease returns again.

## 165
## Song Jiang Rewards His 3 infantry divisions of his Army; Guan Scimitar Sheng Makes 2 Generals Surrender & Defeats the Water & Fire Generals

Fighting desperately, Governor Liang's forces broke through the strong encirclement and fled west. Fan Rui, plus Xiang Chong and Li Gun, tried to catch them in vain. Finally, with Lei Heng, Shi En and Mu Chun, they returned to the Northern Capital to await further orders.
Military Advisor Wu Yong, in the city, directed that proclamations be posted reassuring the citizenry and that the fires be extinguished. All the members of the families of Governor Liang, Li Cheng, Wen Da and Prefect Wang were either killed or ran away. No one bothered to inquire. The prefectural treasury was broken open, and its gold, silver, precious objects, silks and satins were loaded on carts. The conquerors also opened the granary. They distributed relief grain to the entire populace and loaded the remainder on carts also, for removal to the Mount Liangshan fortress.
Wu Yong ordered his commanders and men to prepare to march. Li Gu and the wife of Lu the Magnate were placed on prisoner carts and the cages nailed fast. The outlaw forces were divided into three contingents, then all set out for Liangshan Marsh. Dai Zong went on ahead to inform Song Jiang.
Song Jiang summoned the generals in the stronghold and they descended the mountain to greet the returning chieftains and escort them to Loyalty Hall. On meeting Lu the Magnate, Song Jiang kowtowed. Lu Junyi returned the courtesy.
"It was our desire to invite you here, Magnate, to join us in striving for righteousness," said Song. "We never thought we would encounter such difficulties and that you would nearly lose your life. Our hearts were torn with anxiety! But Heaven protected you, and we meet again. We are infinitely relieved."
Lu bowed. "Thanks to brother's prestigious power and the virtue of his chieftains, with united hearts and strength you have saved my humble self. I could never adequately express my gratitude, though I scattered my innards on the ground." He presented Cai Qing and Cai Fu to Song Jiang and said: "If it weren't for these two I would not be here."
Song wanted Lu to take over as leader. The Magnate was astonished. "How could a man like me command the mountain fortress?" he said. "Let me be your groom, brother, an ordinary soldier, to return your kindness in saving my life. That would be my greatest pleasure." Song Jiang continued to press him, but Lu wouldn't hear of it.
Li Kui protested: "If you hand over the leadership to someone else, brother, I'm going to start killing!"
And Wu Song added his complaint. "You're always trying to give your command away. It chills us brothers to the heart!"
"What do you varlets understand," Song Jiang shouted. "Stop your chatter!"
"You mustn't insist, brother," Lu said hurriedly. "You're making me very uneasy."
Li Kui had a suggestion. "Everything is quiet, now," he said. "You be emperor, brother. Let Lu the Magnate be your prime minister. Make us all big officials. We'll fight our way into the Eastern Capital and seize the friggin throne! That would be a lot better than friggin around here!"
Song Jiang was furious. He swore at Li Kui.
"Let Lu the Magnate rest in the east wing as our guest," Wu Yong offered soothingly. "Later on, when he has performed some meritorious deeds, we can talk again about relinquishing the leadership."
Only then did Song Jiang cool down. He told Yan Qing to share quarters with Lu, and provided accommodations for Cai Fu and Cai Qing and their households. Guan Sheng's family had already been brought to the fortress by Xue Yong.
Song Jiang ordered that a big feast be laid. He generously rewarded his cavalry, infantry and naval forces. He directed his commanders, high and low, to provide wine for their various units. Inside Loyalty Hall the chieftains, politely deferring to one another, drank and made merry.
Lu the Magnate rose to his feet. "The adulterous pair have been caught and are awaiting disposition."
Song Jiang smiled. "I'd forgotten. Bring them here!"
Men opened the cages of the prison carts and dragged the captives into the Hall. Li Gu was bound to the main pillar on the left, Lu's wife to the main pillar on the right.
"There's no need to interrogate these rascals," said Song. "Lu the Magnate, do with them what you will."
A dagger in his hand, Lu walked over to the culprits and cursed them furiously. He carved out their hearts, cut off their limbs and cast their bodies to the ground. Then he returned to the banquet and thanked the assemblage. The chieftains congratulated him and complimented him profusedly.

Meanwhile, Governor Liang, hearing that the outlaw forces had withdrawn, returned to the city with Li Cheng and Wen Da and their defeated army. The three found that nine-tenths of their families had been killed, and they loudly lamented. Armies arrived from neighboring towns to chase the men of Mount Liangshan, but by then they were far away. Governor Liang told the armies to return.
His wife had concealed herself in a flower garden in the rear and had escaped with her life. She advised Liang to petition the emperor to dispatch an army and wipe out the bandits and obtain vengeance, and at the same time to write a letter to her father the premier letting him know. Liang did so, reporting that over five thousand civilians had been killed and innumerable people wounded, with losses to the military exceeding thirty thousand.
The governor's emissary reached the premier's chancellery in a few days. He dismounted and was announced. The premier ordered that he be allowed to enter. The emissary went directly to the ceremonial hall, kowtowed, and presented the secret missive addressed to the throne. He related how the brigands had broken into the Northern Capital, and said they were a large and powerful foe.
Originally, Premier Cai Jing favored an amnesty. The credit Governor Liang would receive for effectuating it would also reflect favorably on himself. But the mission had failed miserably—a fact which could not be concealed. Now Cai wanted an all-out war.
"You may withdraw," he snapped.
At the fifth watch the following morning the Imperial Bell sounded, and civil and military officials gathered in the Waiting Court. Premier Cai stood at their head. Approaching the Jade Dais, he offered Governor Liang's petition to the Virtuous Sovereign. The emperor read it and was shocked.
Zhao Ding, a counsellor, stepped forward and said: "We've sent soldiers after those bandits a number of times, but always suffered heavy losses. That's because the terrain is in their favor. In my humble opinion, it would be better to grant them amnesty, recall them to the throne, give their leaders high rank and put them to the defense of our borders. That would solve it."
Cai Jing was very angry. "You're an imperial counsellor," he shouted, "yet you want to destroy our imperial discipline! Lowly madman, you deserve to die!"
"I order you to leave this court at once," said the emperor. He divested Zhao Ding of his office and returned him to the status of ordinary citizen.
No one dared to offer any other proposals.
"Those bandits are outrageous," the emperor said to Cai Jing. "Who can we send to capture them?"
"They're only a gang of robbers in the wilds. We've no need for a large army. I'd like to recommend two officers—Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, both commandants of Lingzhou Prefecture. If Your Majesty will issue an order and dispatch an emissary to fetch them and their men at all speed, they will be able to sweep away the filth."
Very pleased, the emperor issued commissions and directed the Council of Military Affairs to have them executed. Rising, the monarch left the chamber, followed by the multitude of officials. Many of them smiled sceptically to themselves.
The next day Cai Jing chose a chancellery official to deliver the imperial commissions to Lingzhou.

In the mountain stronghold, Song Jiang distributed among his infantry, cavalry and naval forces the valuables obtained from the treasury of the Northern Capital. Cows and horses were slaughtered, and feasts were held several days in succession to welcome Lu the Magnate. Although they had no fine delicacies, there were mountains of meat and seas of wine. The chieftains imbibed until they were half drunk.
"For the sake of Lu the Magnate," said Wu Yong, "we damaged the Northern Capital, slew many of its people, robbed the treasury, and chased Governor Liang and his generals out of the city. Surely, he'll report to the emperor. He won't let the matter drop, particularly since his father-in-law is the premier. They're bound to dispatch an army against us."
"There's reason for your concern, Military Advisor," said Song Jiang. "Let's send a man to the Northern Capital tonight to ferret out the news. Then we'll know how to prepare."
Wu Yong laughed. "I've already done that. He should be back soon."
While they were still discussing the problem at the banquet, the spy returned. "Governor Liang has petitioned the throne for a punitive army," he reported. "Counsellor Zhao Ding proposed an amnesty, but Cai Jing cursed him and had him kicked out of office. The emperor has commissioned Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, commandants of Lingzhou Prefecture, to proceed against us with their soldiers."
"How shall we confront the foe?" asked Song Jiang.
"Let them come," said Wu Yong. "We'll take them all in one swoop."
Guan Sheng rose and addressed the two. "I'm deeply grateful for the hospitality you brothers have extended to me ever since I arrived at this mountain," he said. "But I haven't done anything in return. I met Shan and Wei many times when I was still in Pudong, and I know all about them. Shan is very clever at using water to inundate enemy troops, and so everyone calls him the Water General. Wei is skilled with fire in his attacks. He employs flame-throwers on the battlefield, and so he's known as the Fire General.
"I have no talent, but if you'll let me have five thousand men, I'll stop those two on the road before they can get started. If they're willing to surrender, I'll bring them here. If they're not, I'll capture them and deliver them as my gift. There's no need for you brothers to use a large heavily armed force and tax your energies and spirits. I wonder whether you would consider my idea?"
Song Jiang was delighted. He instructed Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen to go along, and consented to give Guan Sheng the five thousand men he requested. The following morning Song Jiang and his chieftains feasted and saw the three commanders off at the Shore of Golden Sands, where they departed with their troops.
The chieftains returned to Loyalty Hall and Wu Yong said to Song Jiang: "Guan Sheng has gone, but we don't guarantee his devotion. We'd better have some good commanders follow and keep an eye on him. They can act as support forces."
"He seems a highly chivalrous person to me. He's shown no sign of wavering. You shouldn't doubt him."
"I'm afraid his heart might not be the same as yours, brother. I say let Lin Chong and Yang Zhi, with Sun Li and Huang Xin as their lieutenants, go down with another five thousand men."
"I want to go, too," said Li Kui.
"There's no need for you this time," said Song Jiang. "We already have enough good commanders."
"I'll get sick if this idleness keeps on! If you don't let me go along, I'll go on my own!"
"You listen to orders or I'll have your head!"
Sulkily, Li Kui left the Hall.
Lin Chong and Yang Zhi led troops down the mountain to support Guan Sheng. The next day an officer came and reported: "Black Whirlwind Li Kui left last night at the second watch with his two axes. No one knows where he's bound."
Song Jiang groaned. "All because I said a few harsh words! He's probably gone to join another band!"
"You're wrong, brother," said Wu Yong. "Li Kui may be rough and crude, but his sense of chivalry is very strong. He'd never join anyone else. He'll be back in a day or two. Don't worry."
But Song Jiang was very upset. He first sent Dai Zong after Li Kui, and later Shi Qian, Li Yun, Yue Ho and Wang Dingliu with four more separate search parties.
When Li Kui went down the mountain with his two axes during the night, he followed a small path in the direction of Lingzhou. "So many men and horses to fight two friggin generals!" he muttered. "I'll charge into the town and kill them with one chop of the ax each! That'll shake up brother Song Jiang, and raise my prestige again with the others!"
After walking half a day, he grew hungry. He groped in his waist purse and found that he had left the mountain in such a hurry he'd forgotten to take any money.
"It's a long time since I've robbed anyone," he thought, "but now I'll have to find some oaf to vent my anger on."
By the side of the road he saw a rustic tavern. He went in, sat down, consumed three measures of wine and two catties of meat, then rose and started to leave. The waiter stopped him and asked for money.
"I'll give it to you soon," said Li Kui. "Wait till I do a little business up ahead." He turned to go.
A huge ferocious-looking fellow came in. "You've got your nerve, you swarthy villain," he shouted. "Who runs a tavern so that you can eat for free!"
Li Kui glared. "This lord eats for free wherever he goes."
"When I tell you who I am, you'll be pissing and farting in terror. This lord is Han Bolong of Liangshan Marsh. The money to open this tavern was given to me by brother Song Jiang personally."
Li Kui grinned inwardly. "Our stronghold never even heard of this friggin lout," he thought.
As a matter of fact Han, who originally was a robber, had wanted to join the band on Mount Liangshan. He had sought out Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile and requested that he lead him to Song Jiang. But because Song first developed a growth on his back and then became very involved in warfare, he had been too busy to see anyone. Zhu Gui had told Han to carry on with his tavern business.
Now, Li Kui took one of the axes from his belt and offered it to Han Bolong. "Keep this as a pledge," he said.
Han didn't know it was a trick. As he reached for the ax, Li Kui whipped out its mate and cracked open Han's forehead with a splitting crunch. What a pity that Han Bolong, who'd been a bold ruffian half his life, should die at the hands of Li Kui!
The two or three waiters fled into the village, sorry that they had been born with only two legs. Li Kui took whatever money he could find, set fire to the thatched building, and continued on towards Lingzhou.
He had travelled less than a day when a big fellow approached from the side of the highway and examined him from head to toe.
"What are you looking at this lord for, varlet?" Li Kui demanded.
"Whose lord are you?" the man retorted.
Li Kui rushed him. With one blow of his fist the fellow knocked Li Kui flat on his backside.
"He throws a nice punch," thought Black Whirlwind, sitting on the ground. He raised his face and asked: "What's your name?"
"This lord hasn't any name. But if you want to fight, come on! Do you dare get up?"

Enraged, Li Kui prepared to jump to his feet. But a kick in the ribs from the big man sent him sprawling. "I can't lick this fellow," cried Li Kui. He hauled himself erect and started to leave.
The man shouted for him to halt, and asked: "What's your name, swarthy fellow?"
"Since I've lost, I'd rather not say. But you're a gallant fellow, so I won't deceive you. I'm Li Kui the Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh."
"Are you, really? Don't lie, now."
"If you don't believe me, look at these two axes."
"What are you doing out alone, if you're a Mount Liangshan man?"
"Big Brother squelched me, so I'm going to Lingzhou to kill two fellows named Shan and Wei."
"I hear that a force from the stronghold is already heading that way. Can you tell me who's in it?"
"Guan Sheng the Big Halberd is in command. He's followed by reinforcements under Panther Head Lin Chong and Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute."
Convinced, the man dropped to his knees and kowtowed.
"Truly," said Li Kui, "what is your name?"
"I was born in the district of Zhongshan. My family have been wrestlers for three generations. Our ways of striking with hands and feet have been passed down from father to son. We don't teach outsiders. But I've never had any good connections, and no one I've tried to throw in with would have me. I'm known all through Shandong and Hebei as Jiao Ting the Merciless.
"Recently, I heard that in Kouzhou Prefecture there's a place called Withered Trees Mountain, and on it is a robber who loves to kill. Though his name is Bao Xu, everyone calls him the God of Death. He goes forth from his mountain to rob and pillage. I'm on my way to join his band."
"A man with your skill ought to be joining Song Jiang, our Big Brother."
"I'd been hoping to go to your fortress for a long time, but I never had anybody to introduce me. Now that I've met you, brother, I'll be glad to join Big Brother Song Jiang."
"I've got to show him a thing or two, first. I've come all the way down the mountain and I haven't killed a single person. I can't return empty-handed. We'll go to Lingzhou, kill the two commandants Shan and Wei, then head back to our fortress together."
"Lingzhou is a fortified town. It's full of soldiers. With all our skill, just the two of us attacking wouldn't be any use. We'd only be throwing our lives away. We'd be better off going to Withered Trees Mountain and persuading Bao Xu to join the band with us on Mount Liangshan. That would be best."
While they were talking, Shi Qian approached behind them. He called to Li Kui: "Big Brother has been very worried about you. Please come back to the mountain. Four parties are out searching for you."
Li Kui introduced Jiao Ting.
"Big Brother is waiting for you," Shi Qian persisted.
"Enough," cried Li Kui. "Jiao Ting and I have it all settled. We're going to Withered Trees Mountain, first, and get Bao Xu to join us."
"You can't. Big Brother is waiting. We have to return to the stronghold now."
"If you won't come with me, tell Big Brother what I'm doing. I'll be back soon."
Shi Qian was afraid of Li Kui. He returned to the mountain fortress alone. Jiao Ting and Li Kui proceeded to Kouzhou Prefecture and headed towards Withered Trees Mountain.
As to Guan Sheng, with Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen and five thousand brigands, he neared Lingzhou. The prefect had already received the imperial mandate to transfer troops to the Eastern Capital, plus a directive from the premier. He summoned commandants Shan and Wei to a conference and transmitted the directive to them. The two officers mustered their soldiers, issued arms, had the horses saddled and bridled, drew grain and fodder, and fixed a date for departure.
Suddenly, a messenger arrived and announced: "Guan Sheng the Big Halberd of Pudong has arrived with troops and is invading our prefecture."
Shan and Wei were furious. At the head of their soldiers, they rode forth to confront the foe. As the two armies drew near they could see each others' drams and flags. From beneath an arch of pennants, Guan Sheng rode forward. On the far side, as drums thundered, the Water General, astride a black steed, appeared, gripping a black lance. His helmet, his armor, his robe, his boots—all were black. He was preceded by a man carrying a northern-style black banner which bore the inscription: *Water General Shan Tinggui*.
On the near side, bridle bells jingled as the Fire General Wei Tingguo rode out. His accoutrements were mainly red, and he was preceded by a soldier carrying an embroidered red banner in the southern style which bore the inscription: *Fire General Wei Tingguo*.
The two commandants entered the combat area together. Astride his horse, Guan Sheng greeted them courteously: "It's been a long time since we met, commandants."
Shan and Wei laughed. They pointed at Guan Sheng and reviled him: "Talentless, mad rebel! You're unworthy of the emperor's kindness. You've besmirched your ancestor's name! Now you recklessly lead troops here. It's completely inexcusable!"
"Commandants, you're mistaken," Guan Sheng replied. "Our sovereign has been deceived. Treacherous ministers have taken power. They employ only their intimates, they reprove only their enemies. But brother Song Liang is a man of virtue and benevolence who performs righteous deeds on Heaven's behalf. He has sent me here to invite you to join us. If you don't consider me too lowly, permit me to escort you to our mountain stronghold."
His words infuriated the commandants. Together, they charged, one like a dark cloud from the north, the other like a ball of flame from the south. As Guan Sheng waited to meet them, Xuan Zan flew out from his left and Hao Siwen burst forth from his right, and clashed with the two attackers, head on. Sword against sword flashed icily in ten thousand streaks, lance against lance filled the air with the chill of death.
Guan Sheng, watching from a distance, was full of admiration for the commandants. Suddenly, they broke off the engagement, turned their horses, and rode back into their own position. Hao Siwen and Xuan Zan closely pursued. Wei turned to the left, Shan to the right, followed respectively by Xuan and Hao.
As Xuan Zan gave chase, four or five hundred foot soldiers, with pennants and armor of red, stretched out in a single line and surrounded him. Hooked poles extended, nooses flew, and both horse and rider were snared.
Hao, pursuing Shan to the right, was also surrounded by five hundred infantry, only these had black pennants and armor. They surged up from behind and captured him.
While the two were being led off towards Lingzhou, Shan and Wei, with five hundred troops each, again came racing forth. Guan Sheng was unable to cope. He fell back with his men. Wei and Shan clapped their horses and pursued. Then, ahead of him, Guan Sheng suddenly saw two chieftains galloping in his direction. They were Lin Chong and Yang Zhi, and they swept around his flanks and plunged in among the Lingzhou soldiers, slaughtering and scattering them. Guan Sheng halted his remnant contingent, and united it with the Lin and Yang forces. He met the two, and was joined subsequently by Sun Li and Huang Xin. All made camp together.

The Water and Fire Generals, with Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen as captives, returned triumphantly to the town. Prefect Zhang received them, and had wine served in congratulation. He ordered that cage carts be built for the two prisoners, and directed an aide to set out that very night and deliver them to the Eastern Capital, with a guard of three hundred foot soldiers, and report the arrest to the imperial court.
The party followed a winding road towards the Eastern Capital. They came to a mountain covered with withered trees and dried reeds. To the crash of gongs, a gang of robbers suddenly appeared. The man in the lead brandished a pair of battle-axes, and he had a voice like thunder. It was Li Kui the Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh. And behind him was Jiao Ting the Merciless. They and their outlaws blocked the road and, without a word, seized the prisoner carts.
As the aide turned to flee, Bao Xu the God of Death, with an iron face and bulging eyes, closed in from behind. He swung his sword and hacked the aide from his steed. The rest of the escort party abandoned the carts and ran for their lives.
Li Kui saw that the prisoners were Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen, and he asked how they came to be in such a predicament.
"But what are you doing here?" Xuan countered.
"Big Brother wouldn't let me join in the slaughter, so I came down the mountain on my own. First I killed Han Bolong, then I ran into Jiao Ting, and he brought me here. Bao Xu was like an old friend as soon as we met. He's been treating me like a brother. We'd just agreed to attack Lingzhou when a lookout on the mountain spotted soldiers convoying prisoner carts in this direction. I figured that government troops had captured some bandits, but I never dreamed it was you."
Bao Xu invited everyone into his stronghold and feasted them with mutton and wine. Hao Siwen said to him: "Since you're willing to join us in Liangshan Marsh, brother, why not combine forces in an attack on Lingzhou? That would be an excellent arrangement."
"Brother Li Kui and I were talking about going in together. Combining with you is even better. I also have two or three hundred good horses I can give."
Bao Xu led his six or seven hundred men, and the five bold fellows set out together for Lingzhou.
Soldiers in the escort who had fled back to the town hurried and reported to Prefect Zhang: "Robbers intercepted us on the road. They seized the prisoner carts and killed our officer."
Shan and Wei were enraged. "We'll capture those rogues," they vowed, "and bring them here for execution!"
Then they heard that Guan Sheng was outside the town with troops and challenging them to battle, Shan rushed to be the first to respond. The city gate was opened and the drawbridge lowered and he rode forth at the head of a thousand cavalry. From an arch of pennants five hundred horsemen in black armor sped to the battlefield, with the Water General in the lead. He was an imposing figure as he loudly reviled Guan Sheng.
"Traitorous failure, you're going to die!"
Waving his halberd, Guan Sheng clapped his horse. They fought only twenty rounds when Guan Sheng pulled his steed's head around and quickly departed. Shan chased him for more than ten *li*. Guan Sheng flung some words over his shoulder.
"You'd better dismount and surrender! What are you waiting for?"
Shan thrust his levelled lance at Guan's back. But Guan Sheng, with his fabulous agility, parried the weapon with a sharp rap, shouting at the same time: "Down you go!" The diverted momentum brought Shan out of his saddle to the ground. Guan dismounted and helped him to his feet.
"I beg your pardon, General," he cried.
The frightened Shan kowtowed. He begged for his life and surrendered.
"I have spoken of you often to Big Brother Song Jiang." said Guan. "He's dispatched me specially to invite you two generals to join us in striving for righteousness."
"Talentless though I am, I will gladly do my humble utmost to work together on Heaven's behalf."
The two rode side by side and continued to talk. Lin Chong saw them and asked what had happened. Guan Sheng said nothing of victor or vanquished.
"We met in the mountains and got to chatting about old times, and I persuaded him to come with us," he merely remarked.
Lin Chong and the others were delighted. Shan returned to the front and shouted a command. Five hundred yelling soldiers in black armor swarmed over to the outlaws' side. The remainder fled back to town and hurriedly reported to the prefect.
Wei was greatly angered by the news. The next day he rode out with his troops to give battle. Shan, Guan Sheng and Lin Chong proceeded directly to the front. From the arch of banners opposite, the Fire General advanced on his battle charger. He cursed when he saw Shan following Guan Sheng.
"Ungrateful traitors, conscienceless wretches!"
With a laugh, Guan Sheng clapped his steed and rode forward to meet him. The two clashed, brandishing weapons. They had fought less than ten rounds when Wei galloped back to his position. Guan Sheng started to follow. He was stopped by a shout from Shan.
"Don't go after him, Commander!"
The Big Halberd quickly reined in. Five hundred fire soldiers, dressed in red, came flying from Lingzhou, and all carried incendiary implements. To the front and rear of their ranks were fifty carts piled high with very inflammable dry reeds. Each man had on his back an iron flask containing sulphur, nitrate and other incendiaries. The fire soldiers set all these ablaze and dashed among their foe. Men and horses, seared by the flames, fell dead or wounded. Guan Sheng's forces scattered in every direction. They retreated forty *li* before they halted and made camp.
Wei called in his troops and turned towards the town. He found it billowing with flames and smoke. What had happened was that Black Whirlwind Li Kui, together with Jiao Ting and Bao Xu and the robbers of Withered Trees Mountain, had approached Lingzhou from the rear and broken through the North Gate. They tore into the town, setting fires and pillaging Lingzhou's granary and treasury.
When Wei learned of this, he dared not enter. He hastily withdrew his troops, harried from behind by Guan Sheng who had again caught up. Communications between front and rear were disrupted. In any event, Lingzhou was already lost. Wei retreated to Zhongling, a county seat, and settled in. Guan Sheng surrounded the town and ordered his commanders to attack. Wei kept the gates closed and refused to come out.
"He's a brave man," Shan said to Guan Sheng and Lin Chong. "He'd rather die than submit to pressure. Go easy and you'll succeed. You won't get anywhere being impatient. I'm willing to go into the town, whatever the risks, and try to persuade him to surrender."
Guan Sheng was very pleased. He agreed to let Shan go in alone. An officer reported Shan's arrival. Wei came out to greet him and invited him into the hall.
"The imperial court has no lustre and the land is in turmoil," said Shan. "The emperor is confused, wicked ministers hold power. We're now serving Song Jiang, in Liangshan Marsh. Later, when the treacherous ministers have been deposed, there will be time enough to return to court and stamp out evil and restore correctness."
Wei considered this in silence for several minutes. Finally, he said: "I'll surrender only if Guan Sheng asks me to, in person. Otherwise, I'd rather die than submit."
Shan mounted his horse and returned with the reply. Guan Sheng said: "I'm a person of no consequence. The general rates me too highly." He prepared to set out, accompanied only by Shan.
"You'd better think it over, brother," said Lin Chong. "A man's mind is hard to fathom."
"The brave fear nothing," said Guan Sheng.
He rode directly to the county government office. Wei, receiving him with joy, kowtowed and surrendered. They talked of old times together, and Wei entertained Guan Sheng at a feast. That same day, he went with him to the brigands' camp, accompanied by five hundred of his fire soldiers. There he was introduced to Lin Chong, Yang Zhi and the other chieftains. The outlaw forces were re-assembled and all set out for the mountain fortress.
Song Jiang had sent Dai Zong to meet them on the road. When the Marvellous Traveller saw Li Kui he said: "Because you sneaked off down the mountain, we brothers have had to do a lot of wasted running around. Shi Qian, Yue Ho, Li Yun and Wang Dingliu have already gone back. I'd better return too and tell Big Brother, so he won't worry about you any more."
Dai Zong went on ahead. Guan Sheng and the others proceeded to the Shore of Golden Sands, where the naval unit in several trips ferried them across.
A man came running towards them, panting and exhausted. They all recognized him. It was Duan Jingzhu the Golden Dog.
"Didn't you go up north with Yang Lin and Shi Yong to buy horses?" asked Lin Chong. "Why have you come back in such a flurry?"
Duan's reply was brief, but as a result Song Jiang dispatched an army to attack a certain place. An old debt was expunged, vengeance was attained. Truly, he knew very well his words were a hook and line that once more would fish out trouble.

Now when the three fugitives, Governor Liang, Vulcan and Swordsman, rounded up their defeated troops and headed south, they were set upon front and rear by two divisions of infantry. The two commanders fought desperately to defend the Governor, Vulcan in front and Swordsman in the rear. Though completely encircled, they eventually managed to escape, their helmets battered and their armour and clothing in tatters. They had lost their armies, but at least the three of them got out of it alive. They now headed west.
The Demon King, with the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost did not follow up their victory but returned to the city with Sergeant Lei, the Young Master and Mu the Irrepressible to await orders.
Back in the city the Professor had taken measures to reassure the people and put out the fires. In the homes of the Governor, Vulcan, Swordsman, and Magistrate Wang the families had all either been killed or escaped. No one inquired about them further. The municipal treasury was sacked and all the precious metals, silks and brocades, everything of value, loaded onto carts. The food and grain stores were opened up and their contents distributed among the people. What was left over was also loaded onto carts and sent back to provision Mount Liang. All the leaders and troops were told to get ready for departure, and Manager Li and the Unicorn's unfaithful wife were locked into prison carts. The army was divided into three columns for the return to Mount Liang. It was a triumphant return, stirrups and bridles jingling gaily and the troops singing songs of victory. The Magic Messenger had been sent on ahead to inform Song Jiang, who assembled the other leaders and came down the mountain to receive them.
Everyone now proceeded to the Ceremonial Hall. When Song Jiang saw the Unicorn, he prostrated himself, while the Unicorn hurriedly returned the courtesy.
Song Jiang said: "When we invited you to come here and join our company, it was no part of our intention that you should suffer such misfortune and nearly lose your life. I am truly remorseful. But heaven has enabled us to meet here again today. That is the greatest blessing of my life."
The Unicorn thanked him, saying: "I owe everything to your noble spirit and to the valour of all the leaders. I wish with heart and soul I could repay you all for rescuing me, but no sacrifice would be adequate."
The Unicorn then introduced Strongarm and Blossom to Song Jiang, saying: "If not for these two how could I be here today? I can never sufficiently thank them."
Song Jiang now proposed renouncing the leadership in favour of the Unicorn, but the latter said: "Who am I, to be head of a mountain stronghold? To serve you, even in the most lowly capacity, as one of your ordinary foot soldiers perhaps, to be able thus to repay you for saving my life, that is what I would consider the greatest happiness!"
Song Jiang repeated the offer three times, and three times the Unicorn refused. So then Iron Ox said to Song Jiang: "If you make someone else take over as chief of the stronghold I shall start killing people!" And Pilgrim Wu Song said: "You are making us all very uncomfortable with this talk of stepping down!"
Song Jiang was furious with them: "What do you know about it, all of you? You should keep your mouths shut!"
The Unicorn hurriedly bowed and said: "If you continue to talk of standing down, I really can't stay on here."
Iron Ox shouted: "The present emperor is useless. We'll have Song Jiang for emperor, Mr. Lu can be prime minister and we'll all be counsellors. We'll invade the capital and capture the fucking throne, then we won't be stuck in this fucking hole any longer."
Song Jiang blew up and started yelling at Iron Ox. The Professor intervened: "Let the Unicorn reside in the apartment on the east and be treated as a guest. Later, when he has made a contribution, you can think of ceding your place to him."
Song Jiang was at last satisfied, and ordered the Prodigy to be housed in the same place. Other quarters were allotted and Strongarm, Blossom and their family were housed. Scimitar's family had already been brought to the mountain by the Pill Monger. Song Jiang called for a big banquet to be prepared and rewarded all the troops of all three military arms — cavalry, infantry and marine. The officers and men were told to gather in their own units to drink wine, while the celebration banquet was set up in the Ceremonial Hall. The leaders all treated each other with great courtesy and deference, much wine was drunk and a great time was had by all.
Then the Unicorn rose to his feet and said: "We are still holding the adulteress and her lover. I await your instructions."

Song Jiang said with a laugh: "I had completely forgotten about them. Have them brought in."
The soldiers unlocked the prison carts and pushed the pair of them into the hall. They were tied to pillars, Manager Li on the left, the woman on the right.
Song Jiang said: "No need to question their guilt. Please resolve the case yourself."
Dagger in hand the Unicorn descended the steps. After cursing the woman for a strumpet and a whore, he slit open their breasts and gouged out their hearts. They died on the spot. Shoving aside the bodies he mounted the dais again and prostrated himself in sign of gratitude to all present. The leaders were unstinting in their praise of his resolve.
Now we shall leave the company on Mount Liang feasting and distributing rewards to all while we proceed to the Northern Capital, whither Governor Liang had returned with Vulcan, Swordsman and the remnants of their armies as soon as he heard that the troops from Mount Liang had withdrawn. When they went to their homes to learn the fate of their families they found that the greater part of them were dead. Their grief was immeasurable. The armies raised by neighbouring districts to pursue the forces of Mount Liang had arrived too late, when the latter were already far away, so they were sent home. The Governor's wife had managed to escape by hiding in the garden. She told her husband to make out a report and send it to court so that her father, the Grand Preceptor, might muster an army and appoint a general as quickly as possible to exterminate the bandits and avenge the humiliation at their hands. More than five thousand citizens were reported dead, with countless wounded, and the army's losses amounted to over three thousand.
An envoy set off bearing the confidential report and not losing a day rode straight to the residence of the Grand Preceptor and dismounted. The doorman went to report his arrival. When the Grand Preceptor ordered him to be shown in, he went up to the dais, prostrated himself before it and handed over the confidential report intended for the Emperor. He gave an oral account of how the Northern Capital had fallen to huge rebel forces which had proved irresistible.
Now the Grand Preceptor had originally hoped to find some accommodation with the rebels which might have brought honours to his son-in-law and redounded to his own credit. But this policy had clearly proved disastrous and there was no way the fact could be concealed. He now wanted war. "Leave the chamber.You may withdraw!" he shouted to the envoy in a rage.
At dawn next morning, when the bell sounded, the officials, civil and military, were gathered in the Court of the Water Clock, the Grand Preceptor at their head. Standing at the foot of the jade stair, he made his report to the Emperor. His Majesty was greatly alarmed. Then one of the imperial counsellors came forward and said: "Troops have been sent many times before, and always they have met with disaster. This is because the terrain favours the rebels. In my humble opinion, the best policy would be to declare an imperial amnesty and summon them to court. We could give them responsible posts and send them to guard the frontiers."
The Grand Preceptor expressed outrage at this proposal. "You're supposed to be an imperial counsellor!" he fulminated. "Yet you would have the court abandon all principle! You're a crazy, incompetent fool! You deserve to die!"
The Emperor said: "Indeed, let him leave the court at once."
The unhappy man was stripped of all his honours and reduced to the rank of a commoner. After that no other courtier dared to speak his mind.
The Emperor asked the Grand Preceptor: "If these bandits are so pernicious, who can we get to exterminate them?"
"I assure you, Your Majesty, they are only a bunch of savages. I see no need for a great army. I would recommend two officers who are in Lingzhou. One is Shan Tinggui, the other is Wei Dingguo. They are serving at present in the regional command. I beg you to issue an order and send someone with all speed to summon them and their troops. Give them a fixed time limit for cleaning out the marshes."
The Emperor was happy to accept this advice and promulgated an edict instructing the Privy Council to issue the necessary transfer orders. The Emperor then retired and the ministers left the court, hiding smiles of disbelief. Next day the Grand Preceptor returned to his own office and appointed a messenger to carry the imperial edict to Lingzhou.
Let us return now to Song Jiang, who was in the waterside camp where the booty from the Northern Capital was handed out to the three arms of the Mount Liang forces, after which there were days of feasting in honour of the Unicorn. They may not have dined on phoenixes and dragon flesh, but there were victuals aplenty and the wine flowed like water. All the leaders were more or less drunk. The Professor said to Song Jiang and the rest: "For the sake of Mr. Lu we have just captured the Northern Capital, killed many of its people and plundered the stores and driven out Governor Liang. He must have reported all this to the court, especially as his father-in-law is the Grand Preceptor. What are we going to do about it? Because they will undoubtedly send an army to try and suppress us."
Song Jiang said: "I am sure you are right. Why don't we send someone immediately to the city to find out how things stand? And in the meantime we should be making our preparations."
"I have already sent someone," said the Professor with a smile. "He should be returning soon."
Whilst they were still at table and had not yet finished their discussion, the Professor's scout returned and reported: "It's true, the Governor has delivered his report, and they plan to send an army to annihilate us. One of the counsellors proposed an amnesty, but he was reviled by the Grand Preceptor and has been sacked. The Emperor has been persuaded to send an envoy to Lingzhou to order Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, two army commanders, to muster their own forces and march against us."
Song Jiang said: "How should we oppose them?"
The Professor said: "Wait till they get here and then capture them."
Scimitar rose to his feet and addressed Song Jiang and the Professor. "Your great generosity towards me since I came here has made me your debtor. I have as yet done nothing whatsoever on your behalf. I know these two commanders quite well. Shan, for instance, has made himself a specialist in harnessing water to drown an enemy force, which has gained him the name of Water General. Wei is experienced in the use of fire in battle and has devices to destroy the enemy by combustion, so people call him the Fire General. The forces of Lingzhou and of my district are under a joint command and these two officers are my subordinates. Now I don't mean to overestimate my abilities, but if I could have five thousand troops I would go and encounter them on the Lingzhou road, rather than wait till their attack gets under way. If they are prepared to surrender I will bring them back here. If they won't, I shall have to present them to you as captives. There is no need to mount a large-scale operation with all the leaders present in force. What do you say?"
Song Jiang was happy to accept Scimitar's plan, and ordered the Ugly Son-in-Law and the Hound to go with him. So in a few days' time Scimitar with a thousand troops went down the mountain. Song Jiang and the others arranged a farewell banquet at Golden Sands Landing, after which Scimitar and his two colleagues led their forces off.
When the others returned to the Ceremonial Hall, the Professor said to Song Jiang: "Scimitar has gone, but I am not convinced of his loyalty. We should send someone reliable who can keep an eye on him and also back him up."
Song Jiang said: "I believe Scimitar to be a man of absolute integrity, a man of his word. You shouldn't be so suspicious."
"I am afraid he may not be as perfect as you, that's all. Let us send five thousand troops down under Leopard's Head and the Blue-Faced Beast with Colonel Sun and the Tamer to back them up."
Iron Ox said: "I'll go too."
Song Jiang said: "We don't need you for this. We've already appointed reliable commanders."
Iron Ox said: "If I've got nothing to do I start to feel ill. If you won't send me with them, I shall go by myself, just for the hell of it."
Song Jiang said: "If you disobey my orders I shall have your head cut off!"
Iron Ox walked out in a huff.
We shall say no more of how Leopard's Head and the Blue-Faced Beast set off in support of Scimitar. The next day a soldier came in and reported: "Last night in the second watch Iron Ox went off somewhere with his two axes. We don't know where he was going."
Song Jiang was greatly upset. "It must be because I spoke harshly to him last night, he has probably gone to offer his services elsewhere."
The Professor said: "Don't be worried, brother. I know he's a coarse fellow, but he is truly a man of honour, he wouldn't let us down. I wager he'll be back in a couple of days. Just don't think about it."
But Song Jiang was still anxious. First he sent the Magic Messenger to search for Iron Ox. Then the Flea, Green-Eyes, Lungs and Fleetfoot were all sent off in different directions to join the search.
When Iron Ox set off down the mountain, carrying his two axes, he first found a small path which led towards Lingzhou. As he went he was thinking to himself: "What's the use of wasting so many men just to fight two fucking generals? I shall simply march into the city and finish them off with an axe blow each. That'll make the Leader sit up; it'll give me a bit of fun too!"
After walking half the day he was hungry. In his haste to leave the stronghold he hadn't thought to take any money for travelling expenses. He hadn't seen any action for a long time, so he thought to himself: "Anyway here's a chance to find some stupid bugger I can work off my feelings on!"
Just then he saw a country inn beside the path. He went in and sat down. He polished off three measures of wine and two catties of meat and then got up to leave. The waiter stopped him and asked for the money. "Just let me go and do a bit of business and then I'll pay you," said Iron Ox. With that he started to leave. But at that moment a fellow of ferocious aspect waylaid him: "You black bastard!" the man shouted, "You've got a nerve! Do you know whose inn you've picked to try and get a meal without paying?"
Iron Ox glared back at him and said: "I don't give a fuck whose it is, mate, so long as I eat for free!"
"You're going to shit yourself when you hear this," said the other. "I'm Han Bolong from the Marshes of Mount Liang, that's who I am! And it's Song Jiang what put up the money for this place!"
Iron Ox laughed to himself: "No one ever mentioned this bugger in the stronghold," he thought.
The fact is that this Han Bolong had been practising pillage and plunder among the rivers and lakes and wanted to join the company on Mount Liang. He had gone to the Crocodile and asked to be introduced to Song Jiang. But at the time Song Jiang was suffering from the ulcer on his back, and the stronghold was much too busy with troop movements so there just wasn't time to deal with him. Whilst he was waiting to be considered Crocodile had set him up in this village selling wine.
Iron Ox now took out one of his axes and said: "You can have my axe as a bond."
Not realizing he was being cheated, Han Bolong held out his hand to take it. Iron Ox raised his arm and aimed one crunching blow at his forehead that split him to the ribs. Thus did the wretched Han Bolong who had spent his life intimidating others meet his end at the hands of Iron Ox! The rest of the staff seemed only to wish their parents had endowed them with extra legs — they vanished into the inner recesses of the village! Iron Ox bent down and possessed himself of some money that was lying on the floor, set fire to the thatch and went on his way to Lingzhou.
He had been going less than a day when he came upon a big fellow sitting beside the highroad who was the spitting image of Iron Ox himself. The man was looking at him, so Iron Ox said: "Why are you staring at me, mate?"
The other replied: "I ain't yer mate!"
Iron Ox rushed at him but the other raised his fist and delivered a regular haymaker. "This fellow knows how to fight!" Iron Ox thought, as he came to, sitting on the ground. He looked up and asked: "What's your name, then?"
"I ain't got a name," said the other. "If you want a fight, you got one. Let's see if you can get on your feet."
Incensed, Iron Ox tried to jump up but received a kick in the ribs which felled him again.
"I can't win this one," Iron Ox exclaimed, and he tried to crawl away to safety.
He was stopped by a shout from the other: "What's your name then and where's you from?"
Iron Ox said: "Don't be scared if I tell you. I'm Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind from Mount Liang, that's who I am!"
"Is that the truth? Don't you lie to me!"
"If you don't believe me, take a look at these two axes!"
"If you're one of the company of Mount Liang, whatcher doing' wandering' about on yer own?"
"I had a bit of a set-to with the Leader, and I decided to go to Lingzhou and kill two fellows, one called Shan and one called Wei."
"What I heard was, Mount Liang's already sent troops. Can you tell me their leaders' names?"
"The first is Scimitar, and in support there's Leopard's Head Lin Chong and the Blue-Faced Beast."
The other prostrated himself. Iron Ox said: "Won't you tell me your name now?"
"I'm from Zhongshan. My family was professional boxers for three generations. You just seen what I can do. I learned it off me father, he wouldn't teach no one else. All my life I been unrecognized, never been accepted nowhere. In Shandong and Hebei they calls me Nameless. The other day I heard of a mountain in these parts called Dead Tree Mountain where there's this robber what spends his time murderin' people. His name is Bao Xu, but they calls him Pluto. He uses that mountain as a base for raidin' people's homes. I was just goin' to go off there and join up with his lot."
"With your skills, why don't you think of going to join our leader Song Jiang?"
"That's what I always wanted to do, only I didn't have no introduction. Now I've met you, I'd like to go back there with you."
"Well right now I've left the stronghold because I've got something to prove to the Leader. I can't go back empty-handed, got to kill someone first. Let's go together to Dead Tree Mountain and talk to this Pluto, and then we'll all go to Lingzhou and kill those two generals, Shan and Wei. After that we can go back to Mount Liang."
Nameless said: "Lingzhou is a big place, there's lots of troops there. Just the two of us, it don't matter how good we is at fightin', it wouldn't do no good. We'd be givin' our lives away for nothink. Wouldn't it be better just to go to Dead Tree Mountain, get that Pluto and all go back to the main stronghold to join up? I reckon that's the best plan."
While they were talking, the Flea had come up with them, and he now spoke: "Song Jiang is very unhappy. He wants you back on the mountain. People have gone off in all directions looking for you."
Iron Ox introduced the Flea to Nameless. The Flea began to urge Iron Ox to return to the stronghold, explaining how the Leader missed him.
Iron Ox stopped him. "All right, all right!" he said. "Nameless and I have already decided that we'll go to Dead Tree Mountain first and speak to Pluto. We'll return after that."
"That's not good enough," said the Flea. "Song Jiang wants you, you ought to go back right away."
"Unless you're coming with me, you'd better go back to the stronghold first and tell the Leader I'm coming."
The Flea, who was scared of Iron Ox, did as he was bidden, whilst Iron Ox and Nameless set off towards Dead Tree Mountain.
The story now divides. We will return to Scimitar, who with the Son-in-Law, Hound, and five thousand troops was approaching Lingzhou, where the Governor had received the imperial edict, together with the Grand Preceptor's letter, and had summoned generals Shan and Wei for consultation. The two generals having received their instructions, picked their troops, issued arms, harnessed horses, stocked up with provisions and fodder and set the day for departure. Just then someone reported: "General Guan Sheng from Pudong, known as Scimitar, is advancing with an army to attack us."
This news roused the Water and Fire Generals to action. They mustered their forces at once and marched out of the city to meet the enemy. The two armies approached each other, flags waving, drums beating. Scimitar rode out under the pennants. From the opposite ranks the Water General rode forth. His helmet was black with an exceptionally long black tassel. He wore black armour backed with bearskin, a short-sleeved tunic of black silk embroidered with clusters of kingfisher-blue flowers, a pair of fine leather boots and a belt holding a jade scabbard and fastened with a lion's-head clasp. He was armed with bow and arrows and a spear with a black shaft and rode a coal-black steed. Before him went a big black standard, emblem of the north, bearing seven silver characters: "General Shan Tingui, the Water General".
Then from the same side with a jingling of harness bells out rode General Wei Dingguo, the Fire General. He had a scarlet helmet with a red tassel as long as a broom handle. He wore chain mail with links of beasts joined nose to tail, a red robe embroidered with winged monsters and a pair of leather boots stitched with a jade-green cloud motif. He had a bow with a gilt design of birds and flowers and a sheaf full of wolf's-tooth arrows flighted with peacock feathers. He rode a red roan charger and brandished a bronze sword. Before him went a big red banner, emblem of the south, bearing seven silver characters: "General Wei Dingguo, the Fire General".
When Scimitar saw these two proud commanders riding out together, he cried out: "Generals, it is a long time since we last met!"
Generals Shan and Wei responded with abuse: "You contemptible coward, you insane traitor! You have spurned the court's favour, and stained the honour of your forebears! You'd be better off dead! What are you doing here with this army?"
Scimitar answered: "You are mistaken. The Emperor's judgement is clouded because wicked counsellors hold sway, giving employment only to their relatives and slandering all who oppose them. Our Leader, Song Jiang, is humane and generous. and does heaven's will. He has sent me to make a request to you. He asks you, if you will, to come with us and join the mountain stronghold."
Outraged by this suggestion, the two generals galloped back. They now led their armies out, one like a black cloud from the north, the other like a fierce fire from the south. Scimitar prepared to receive them, with the Ugly Son-in-Law on his left hand and Hound on his right. The cold sparks flew as sword met sword. A deadly chill was born, as spear parried spear. Watching from a distance Scimitar was able to observe that the Fire General grew stronger with every blow, and the Water General was not one whit afraid. But suddenly they both broke off, turned their horses and galloped back to their ranks. Hound and the Ugly Son-in-Law followed at their heels till they were well inside the enemy position. Then Fire General turned left and Water General turned right, the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound behind each respectively. Just as the Ugly Son-in-Law was about to catch his opponent, four or five hundred foot soldiers, with red flags and red armour, spread out and surrounded him. Hooks flew out, ropes were stretched taut, and both horse and man were taken alive.
The Hound likewise pursuing the Water General on the right was encircled by five hundred infantry with black flags and black armour. When they closed behind him he too was captured. Unhappy commanders, their pretensions were just pie in the sky!
The captives were transferred to the city while the troops continued the slaughter. Before Scimitar could prevent it he had suffered a huge defeat and was obliged to retreat. The Water and Fire Generals pursued him vigorously. As he fled two leaders came galloping towards him. They turned out to be Leopard's Head on the left and the Blue-Faced Beast on the right, who had been waiting with their troops concealed in a hollow. They charged and scattered the enemy. Scimitar rounded up his defeated army and joined forces with the other two. Soon after they met up with Colonel Sun and the Tamer. For the time being they all returned to camp.
When the two enemy generals returned victorious to the city, Governor Zhang welcomed them and honoured them with wine. He had prison carts made for the two captives and ordered an officer to muster three hundred infantry and deliver them to the Eastern Capital with a report. This officer and his troops, closely guarding the Ugly Son-in-Law and the Hound, followed a cir-cuitous route towards the Eastern Capital. But when they came to a mountain covered with dead trees and thick undergrowth, gongs rang out and a bunch of robbers appeared. The foremost toted two axes and spoke with a voice like thunder. It was none other than Iron Ox, the Black Whirlwind of Mount Liang. And who is that behind him?

*Like one in a thicket who crouches in wait,*
*His fists and his kicks are as deadly as fate.*
*When his anger's aroused like a mountain he falls:*
*Nameless his name is, whose fierceness appals.*

The road was blocked by Iron Ox and Nameless with their troops. Without saying a word, they attacked the prison carts. When the officer tried to escape, another bandit leader appeared behind him:

*Face of a murderer, black as a pot,*
*Eyes like two slits and wolf lips he's got.*
*Burning and killing he counts but a game,*
*Lord of the Underworld, Pluto his name.*

With one blow of his sword Pluto knocked the officer off his horse and killed him. The rest of the guards abandoned the prison carts and took to their heels. When Iron Ox saw that the prisoners were the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound, he asked what had happened.

"But how did you come to be here?" the Ugly Son-in-Law asked Iron Ox.

"The Leader wouldn't let me come and fight," Iron Ox said. "So I went off on my own. First I killed someone called Han Bolong, then I ran into this Nameless, who brought me here. We hit it off immediately with this fellow, Pluto, who received us like brothers. We had just agreed to go and attack Lingzhou together when a sentry spotted this bunch on the mountain with the prison carts. We thought it was just a government escort and some thieves they had caught. We had no idea it was you two."

Pluto invited them to his camp, killed an ox and entertained them with wine. Hound said: "Since you're thinking of joining the company on Mount Liang anyway, don't you think it would be best to use your troops now and all of us together mount a serious attack on Lingzhou?"

"That's just what I was saying to my friend Mr. Li here," said Pluto, indicating Iron Ox. "What you say is absolutely right. There's also another three or four hundred horses in my stronghold."

So at the head of five or six hundred troops the five warriors marched on Lingzhou.

By now the government troops who escaped had returned and reported to Governor Zhang: "We were attacked on the way by robbers, who took the carts and killed the officer."

The Water and Fire Generals were furious at this news. "This time when we catch them we'd better execute them on the spot," they exclaimed.

At this very moment Scimitar and his army arrived outside the walls and issued a challenge. The Water General was first to respond. The gates were opened and the drawbridge lowered and with five hundred troops he charged out of the city. He rode out under the pennants and reviled Scimitar: "You worthless traitor, how can you hope to live?" In response, Scimitar waved his sword and slapped his horse. When they had fought fifty bouts, Scimitar reined in his horse and galloped away, with the Water General in hot pursuit. The chase continued for over three miles, until Scimitar turned and shouted: "You'd better dismount and surrender, what are you waiting for?" The Water General levelled his spear and charged, aiming at the middle of Scimitar's back. With incredible skill, Scimitar used the back of his sword to parry the blow and with a cry of "Down you go!" swept the Water General from his horse. He immediately dismounted and rushed to help his opponent up, saying "Forgive me, General!"

The Water General prostrated himself apprehensively, asking to be spared.

Scimitar said: "I have often praised you to our Leader Song Jiang. I came here to invite you and your colleague to join our enterprise."

The Water General said: "I am unworthy, but I am prepared to work like a donkey to help you do heaven's will."

After this conversation the two of them rode back side by side. When Leopard's Head saw them approaching like this, he wanted to know what had happened. Scimitar said nothing of his winning the fight, but instead answered: "We found a quiet spot and had a heart to heart talk, and I persuaded him to join our cause."

Leopard's Head and the others were delighted to hear this. The Water General returned to his troops and shouted something. The five hundred in black armour came over. The remainder went back to the city, where they told the Governor.

The Fire General was outraged. He led his troops out next day to seek an engagement. The Water General rode out in front of the enemy with Scimitar and Leopard's Head. The Fire General was awaiting them under the pennants and when he saw the Water General with Scimitar he reviled them both: "You shameless turncoats, you base villains!"

Scimitar wasn't going to stand for such insults. He slapped his horse and charged. The two horses met, two weapons were raised simultaneously. Before they had fought ten bouts, the Fire General galloped off towards his own side. Scimitar was about to give chase, but the Water General shouted out: "Don't follow him, commander!"

Scimitar immediately reined in his charger. At the same moment from the Lingzhou ranks five hundred fire troops appeared. They wore red and they all carried incendiary devices. Jostling in front and behind came fifty fire carts, all loaded with reeds and other combustible materials. Every soldier had an iron gourd strapped to his back, containing sulphur and saltpetre and five-colour smoke powder, which they all lit simultaneously before dashing forward. Caught by the flames men fell and horses lay writhing on the ground. Scimitar's forces fled in all directions, and the flight continued over ten miles before they halted and took up a defensive position.

However, when the Fire General recalled his troops to the city, he saw that the city itself was burning: fierce flames and thick smoke were rising from it. It was Iron Ox, who with Nameless and Pluto and the men from Dead Tree Mountain had attacked the city from behind, breaking down the north gate, killing and burning and looting the stores and the treasury. When he learnt of this the Fire General was afraid to enter the city, so he hurriedly wheeled his troops round. Now they were attacked and harried by Scimitar who cut them in half. Having lost Lingzhou the Fire General was obliged to retreat to Zhongling and establish his base there. Scimitar surrounded him, ordering up all his troops to join the attack. The Fire General locked the gates and refused to come out.

The Water General now said to Scimitar, Leopard's Head and the others: "He is a gallant soldier. You can attack as hard as you like, but he will choose death rather than dishonour. You'll only get somewhere with him if you relax the pressure and don't push him too hard. I'm prepared to go in there, whatever the danger, and try to talk him round. If he will submit voluntarily, we can avoid bloodshed."

Scimitar liked the idea, so they sent the Water General off alone on horseback. When a sentry reported his approach, the Fire General came out himself to meet him. In his most persuasive manner, the Water General said: "Nowadays policy is uncertain, the land is in turmoil, the Emperor confused and power in the hands of evil men. I am going over to Song Jiang and intend to make my home in the marshes. Later, when wicked ministers have relinquished power, when evil retreats and righteousness returns, that will be the time to go back."

The Fire General considered this for a long time, then said: "If he wants me to go over, Scimitar must come himself to ask me. I will surrender to him. If he doesn't come I shall choose death rather than shame!"

The Water General mounted and rode back to tell Scimitar this. The latter said: "When a true man does business he does not suspect others." He proposed to go alone with the Water General, quite unsupported. Leopard's Head warned him: "It is hard to read a man's mind, sir. Think carefully before you do anything."

Scimitar replied: "It behoves a gentleman to show confidence."

When Scimitar reached the town, the Fire General welcomed him and wanted to prostrate himself in sign of surrender. He talked of old times and entertained Scimitar with a feast. That same day with his five hundred fire troops he went to the main camp where he met Leopard's Head and the Blue-Faced Beast and the other leaders. Then the troops were mustered and they marched back to Mount Liang. Song Jiang sent the Magic Messenger out to meet them. Magic Messenger said to Iron Ox: "Because you stole away down the mountain, many of our brothers had to go out looking for you all over the place. The Flea, Lungs, Green-Eyes, and Fleetfoot are all back now. I will go on ahead to let the leader know so he doesn't go on worrying about you."

We shall not talk about the Magic Messenger's return, but tell how Scimitar and the rest came to Golden Sands Landing and how the waterborne leaders supplied boats. Now as they were rowing the troops across in a series of trips a man came racing up breathless and distressed. It was Yellow Dog. Leopard's Head asked: "You went with Panther and the Guv to the north to buy horses, didn't you? Why do you return in such a state?" Yellow Dog's reply was not lengthy or elaborate but it caused Song Jiang to send troops out on a new campaign, in order to settle an old score and wipe the slate clean. Truly, words can be like hook and line, fishing up old troubles.

WHEN the Grand Secretary and his Generals and their followers found themselves surrounded by brigands they desperately fought their way out and escaped towards the West. The brigand leaders could not catch them so they returned to Daming Prefecture to await further orders.

In the town Wu Yong had ordered his men to help put out the fires. He also had the treasury opened, and had all the loot loaded up. The public grain stores were all opened, and much rice was given to the people, and the remainder was loaded up and sent to Liangshan Marsh. Li Gu and Lu Junyi's former wife were confined in prisoner's carts to be conveyed to the mountain stronghold. The brigands then were formed into three bodies, and so returned to Liangshan Marsh. Dai Zong having already been dispatched to inform Song Jiang of their complete victory.

Upon reaching their stronghold the brigand leaders were welcomed by Song Jiang and all assembled in the Loyalty and Justice Hall. When he saw Lu Junyi, Song Jiang kowtowed, and Lu Junyi did likewise.

"I was very careless," said Song Jiang, "when I requested you to stay at Liangshan Marsh. I did not think that it would cause so much misery to you. The hardships you underwent made me feel as though a sword had pierced my heart. But Heaven helped us, and so today we can see you here again."

Lu Junyi saluted and replied, "I am indebted to you for your powerful assistance, and am grateful to all the leaders for their heroism. Your united strength has rescued me from death. Even if my brains and kidney were rubbed on the ground I could not recompense you for your kindness." He then introduced Cai Fu and Cai Qing, and continued.

"I owe a great deal to these jailers who kept me alive and treated me so well."

Song Jiang then offered to abdicate his position to Lu Junyi who was surprised, and said, "What am I to accept your offer? I am only fit to hold your whip and stirrup, and act as an ordinary retainer."

Song Jiang however insisted upon his offer being accepted.

"Brother, you are not straightforward," interposed Li Kui. "You previously consented to occupy this position, but now you want to yield to another man. This chair must be made of real gold that you always regard it as a present. If you keep on yielding it, you will make me resort to my knife."

"You, fellow!" shouted Song Jiang.

Lu Junyi hurriedly saluted, and said, "If you still press me to take the position I must leave here."

"If Song Jiang became Emperor," said Li Kui, "and Lu Junyi the Prime Minister and all of us were now sitting in the gold palace it would be worthwhile for us to act in these polite ways. But as a matter of fact we are only brigands, so it is better for us to conduct ourselves as such."

Wu Yong interposed, "Would it not be better if we treated Lu Junyi as a guest, and ask him to live temporarily in the rooms on the east side. When he has done some meritorious deed we could then press him to accept the position of commander-in-chief."

Song Jiang agreed to this. He then ordered a feast to be prepared for all the men. The leaders had their feast in the Loyalty and Justice Hall where they all enjoyed themselves. During the feast Lu Junyi stood up, and addressed Song Jiang, "The adulterer and the adulteress are our prisoners here and await your disposal."

Song Jiang laughed and replied, "I had forgotten about them. Let the prisoners be brought in."

The prisoners were taken out of the cart, and tied up to posts in front of the hall.

Song Jiang then said, "There is no need to question them as to their crime. We can leave Lu Junyi to deal with them."

Lu Junyi took a sword, and going outside he cut both of them open and took out their hearts. He then hacked their bodies into small pieces.

When Grand Secretary Liang heard the news that the brigands had gone back to Liangshan Marsh he went back to Daming with his General and their few remaining soldiers. There they found what enormous damage had been done, and how their own families and property had been wiped out. He wrote a dispatch to the Prime Minister at the Eastern Capital giving particulars of the disaster, and requesting that troops be at once dispatched to safeguard the district. Of the civilians about five thousand, and of the soldiers about thirty thousand, had been killed.

Upon reaching the Eastern Capital the messenger delivered the dispatch. When first considering the matter the Prime Minister thought that it would be a good plan to induce the brigands to join the Imperial army as Grand Secretary Liang's success would have reflected favorably on himself. But on second thoughts after the debacle at Daming, he realized that that was now impossible as the brigands had gained such a victory, and as everybody would soon know about it. Therefore he was determined to attack the brigands and reestablish the name of the Imperial army as well as his own.

The following morning when the Emperor had his usual audience with his ministers at daybreak, Prime Minister Cai presented a memorial about this disaster. When the Emperor read the same he was shocked. The Councillor Zhao Ding stepped forward, and addressed the throne, "Many troops have been dispatched, but they have all been defeated. The brigands have the advantageous positions and so are invincible. My humble opinion is that Your Majesty issue an edict pardoning them for their crimes, and conferring upon their leaders official ranks, if they will reform, and help you to restore order in the country."

Prime Minister Cai was very angry at this, and spoke, "The Councillor's suggestion would endanger the moral dignity of the Emperor. Your crazy proposal makes you worthy of death!"

"In that case," said the Emperor, "he will retire from the court."

The Councillor withdrew, and was duly deprived of his office. After that who would dare to offer any suggestion or reproof about the case?

The Emperor then asked Prime Minister Cai Jing, "As these brigands are so truculent, who can be deputed to subdue them?"

"I think these brigands have not much power," replied Cai Jing, "and therefore we need not dispatch a very big army against them. At Lingzhou there are two men—one is Colonel Shan Tinggui and the other is Colonel Wei Dingguo. I recommend that Your Majesty issue an edict ordering them to take command of an expedition against Liangshan Marsh."

The Emperor was pleased at this, and had the edict written at once. He then left the court, and all the officials dispersed. Many of them regarded this event as a laughingstock among themselves. The following day the edict was duly dispatched to Lingzhou to summon the two Colonels.

At the stronghold on Liangshan Marsh the brigands continued their feasting in celebration of their victory. One day during the feast Wu Yong spoke to Song Jiang, "As we have done great damage at Daming Prefecture you may be sure that the Grand Secretary must write a dispatch to the Eastern Capital so that we cannot treat the matter as entirely settled. I expect that it will not be long before we are again attacked by the Imperial troops."

"I quite agree with your view," said Song Jiang. "Why don't we send spies to Daming Prefecture to find out what is being done, and prepare our men here for the coming attack?"

Wu Yong laughed and said, "I have already sent a spy, and he will soon be back." Duly as they were speaking before the feast was over the spy arrived, and reported that Grand Secretary Liang had sent a dispatch to the Eastern Capital asking for reinforcements. He also told them what had occurred at court, and how troops at Lingzhou had been ordered to attack Liangshan Marsh.

"What shall we do?" asked Song Jiang.

"Let them come," said Wu Yong. "We shall arrest them all."

Here Guan Sheng stood up and addressed them, "Since I arrived at Liangshan Marsh I have done nothing yet. I know both of these Colonels who are in command of the expedition against us. Colonel Shan Tinggui is fond of flooding the enemies camp by breaking the dams of rivers. For this reason people call him the 'Water God General.' Colonel Wei Dingguo is skillful at the use of fire attack, and therefore is nicknamed the 'Fire God General.' If you will let me have five thousand men I will go and meet them on their way from Lingzhou before they can reach here. If they will surrender, that would be all right. If they do not surrender, I will bring them to you as captives. I do not need any other leaders to assist me in this matter as I can manage it myself."

Song Jiang was pleased at this offer, and instructed Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen to accompany Guan Sheng under whom they had previously served. The following day they left with five thousand men.

When they had left, the leaders again assembled in the Loyalty and Justice Hall, and there Wu Yong said to Song Jiang, "Guan Sheng has gone, but you cannot guarantee his loyalty so we had better send a reliable man to watch his movements, but ostensibly to assist him."

"As I know," said Song Jiang, "Guan Sheng is quite loyal to us. From first to last he is always the same. You need not harbor any suspicion of him."

"I am afraid that he is not of the same mind as you," said Wu Yong. "I suggest that we dispatch another five thousand men in charge of Lin Chong and three other leaders to follow Guan Sheng."

"I also want to go," interposed Li Kui.

"We do not need you this time," said Song Jiang, "as we have capable leaders for this work."

"If I am idle I shall soon be sick," said Li Kui. "If you do not let me go, then I will go myself."

"If you disobey my order," said Song Jiang, "I will have your head cut off."

Li Kui did not reply to this, but left the hall with a very downhearted spirit.

The men under Lin Chong duly left the next day, and when they had gone a menial reported that the previous night Li Kui had left the mountain by himself with his two axes. Song Jiang was annoyed at this. He said, "Yesterday I injured his feeling and he must have gone somewhere else."

"Though he is a rough fellow," said Wu Yong, "yet he is very faithful, and I do not think he will desert us. You need not worry, he will return in a few days." But Song Jiang was anxious, and sent Dai Zong to find out where he had gone to. In addition he sent Shi Qian and three other leaders to look for him.

Li Kui had as a matter of fact taken the direct road to Lingzhou, and on the way he thought, "Those two Colonels are only minor officers, and I cannot understand why we should send so many men to attack them. I will go myself into the town of Lingzhou, and kill those officers with my axes, one axe for each man, and that will surprise my brother Song Jiang. Then I shall be able to argue the point with him to my advantage." He walked for half day, and then felt very hungry. He had left the mountain without any money. He soliloquized, "I must look out for a traveler and kill him." Soon he came to an inn, and entering he ordered a jug of wine and three *jin* of meat. He sat down and having eaten the food walked out. But the waiter demanded payment, and Li Kui said, "I have some business to transact, and when I come back I will pay you for the food." Just then he saw a big man approaching who shouted to him, "You black thief, you have some cheek! You eat our food, and won't pay for it. To whom do you think this inn belongs?"

Li Kui glared at the man, and replied, "Wherever I go I never pay for my food."

"If I tell you who I am you would be pissing and farting in terror," said the man. "I am Han Bolong of Liangshan Marsh, and this inn is provided by Song Jiang."

Li Kui was amused at the man's impudence and thought, "I do not know this damned fellow at our stronghold." The fact was that this man had tried to join them at Liangshan Marsh, but as Song Jiang was sick at the time he could not see him. Therefore, Zhu Gui told him to open an inn at this point, and await further instructions. Li Kui took an axe out of his belt, and said, "I will leave this in pawn with you for payment." Han Bolong thought this was a genuine offer, and held out his hand for the axe, but Li Kui lifted it up and cleaved open his head. When the waiters saw this they ran away.

Li Kui went into the inn, and took all the cash about there. He then set fire to the inn which was only made of straw matting. He went on his way, and the following day he met a big man who looked him over very minutely.

Li Kui asked him, "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Who are you?" asked the man.

Li Kui did not reply, but went forward to attack the man. The man avoided the blow, and hit Li Kui with his fist so that the latter was knocked to his backside. Li Kui had felt the great strength of the man, so he sat down, and looking upwards asked, "What is your name?"

The man standing over him replied, "I have no name, but if you want to fight I'll fight with you. Dare you get up?"

Li Kui was angry at this, and jumped up, but at the same moment received a kick in the stomach which sent him sprawling on the ground.

"I cannot overcome you," said Li Kui, and getting up was walking off. But the man stopped him, calling out,. "What is your name and where do you come from?"

"You have beaten me," said Li Kui, "and I do not care to tell you my name. Seeing that you are a fine fellow, however, I will not deceive you. I am Li Kui, from Liangshan Marsh."

"Are you speaking the truth now?" asked the man. "You need not lie to me."

"You may not believe me," said Li Kui, "but you can see these two axes."

"As you are from Liangshan Marsh where are you going alone like this?" asked the man.
"I had a dispute with our commander-in-chief, because I wanted to go to Lingzhou to kill those two officers, Shan and Wei."
"I have heard that some men have already left Liangshan Marsh. Can you say the name of the leader in charge of them?" asked the man.
"Guan Sheng is in charge of the first body of men, and Lin Chong is supporting him with another body of men."
Upon hearing this the man saluted Li Kui, who then asked, "Will you not tell me your name now?"
The man said, "I am a Zhongshan Prefecture man, and my great grandfather was a great wrestler. My father trained me to fight with the fists, and we have never adopted a pupil. My name is Jiao Ting but I am called the 'Disliked One.' A few days ago I heard that at Kushu Mountain in Kouzhou there is a strong brigand named Bao Xu, nicknamed 'God of Death,' who is very fond of killing people. I was thinking of going there and joining him."
"But instead of that," said Li Kui, "why not go to Liangshan Marsh, and assist Song Jiang."
"I have thought of that too," said Jiao Ting, "but I do not know anybody there who would introduce me. But today as I have met you I am willing to accompany you."
"I left the mountain in an angry dispute with Song Jiang," said Li Kui, "and as I have not yet killed those army officers I cannot very well go back with you. I suggest that we now go to the Kushu Mountain and get Bao Xu to join us in killing those two Colonels, Shan and Wei, and then, we can go to Liangshan Marsh."
"At Lingzhou there is a large army," said Jiao Ting, "and we two by ourselves can do nothing. It would be suicidal for us to go there alone. The best plan is for us to go to the Kushu Mountain and get Bao Xu to join us at Liangshan Marsh."
Just then they were interrupted by Shi Qian who came up and spoke to Li Kui, "Our commander, Song Jiang, was very anxious about your disappearing, and sent us in all directions to look for you, and bring you back to Liangshan Marsh."
Li Kui introduced Jiao Ting to Shi Qian. He then told Shi Qian of his plan, and said he would first go with Jiao Ting to Kushu Mountain. Shi Qian could not get Li Kui to change his mind, and so at last he went back to Liangshan Marsh to report the matter while the other two continued on their way.
Guan Sheng and his five thousand men duly reached Lingzhou. Inside the town Colonels Shan and Wei had received their orders from the Prefect, and had made all arrangements for a march on Liangshan Marsh. When they heard of the arrival of the brigands they were angry, and marched out their soldiers to oppose them. When the two armies met Guan Sheng rode forth. Immediately a man also rode out from the Imperial army. He wore a square iron helmet surmounted by a large plume, his armor was of bearskin covered with iron plates; under which was a black silk gown embroidered with kingfisher-blue flowers; he wore a pair of leather shoes decorated with a design in white; and a leather belt studded with metal plates engraved with lions. He rode a coal-black horse, and was armed with a bow and quiver full of arrows, and a spear. Behind him was a soldier carrying a black flag on which were seven characters in silver, "Shan Tinggui, the 'Water God General.'"
Another officer also rode forth from the imperial troops, and he wore a vermilion-colored helmet with a design in gold surmounted by a red plume; armor decorated with rings in which were animals done in metals, and under that a red silk gown embroidered with animals and clouds in colors; his leather boots were decorated with a Qilin in kingfisher blue. He was armed with a bow, arrows, and a sword, and rode a roan-colored horse. In front of him marched a soldier bearing a red flag on which were seven characters in silver, "Wei Dingguo, the 'Fire God General.'"
Guan Sheng sitting on his horse addressed these two Colonels, "It is a long time since we parted."
The two Colonels laughed, and abused him saying, "You inefficient upstart and rebellious profligate! You have been ungrateful to the Emperor's benevolence, and your ancestors would be ashamed of you. You have no modesty. You bring these armed men here now. What have you to say?"
"You two commanders are mistaken," replied Guan Sheng. "At present the Emperor is a weakling, traitorous ministers are in power, only relatives are employed, and officials are impeached for petty personal enmity. Our commander Song Jiang is benevolent, just, loyal, and sincere, and is acting according to the Will of Heaven. He has instructed me to come here and invite both of you to join him at Liangshan Marsh."
Both Colonels were very angry at this speech, and dashed forward to attack him. They looked like a black cloud and a red cloud threatening a storm. Before they came near Hao Siwen and Xuan Zan rode forth from both sides of Guan Sheng and engaged the opposing men. Sword clashed with sword and spear clanked with spear so that there seemed to be chilly flashes of bloody struggle. Guan Sheng looked on, and admired the great skill displayed by all the combatants. During the fight, however, both Colonels turned their horses at the same time, and withdrew. Hao Siwen pursued Shan Tinggui right into the army where the latter turned to the left. Xuan Zan pursued Wei Dingguo who turned to the right. When they had nearly caught up to the Colonels they suddenly found themselves surrounded by soldiers armed with hooked poles who closed in, pulled them off their horses, and made them prisoners. The prisoners were at once dispatched to Lingzhou, while the main body of soldiers moved forward to attack the brigands. Guan Sheng was surprised at the quick defeat and ordered his men to retreat. But they had only gone a short distance when Guan Sheng saw another body of brigands in charge of Lin Chong, and they joined in the fight against the Imperial troops, who soon retreated to their camp.
The two prisoners were placed in a cart, and dispatched at once to the Eastern Capital while the two Colonels were rewarded for the success attained. The prisoners were escorted by three hundred soldiers, and on the way they passed close to the Kushu Mountain. There they were attacked by brigands in front of whom was their new leader Li Kui with his two axes, and close behind him was Jiao Ting. Turning round to escape the captain of the escort found that in their rear was a big man with a complexion like a copper kettle—no other than Bao Xu—armed with a double-edged sword. Bao Xu hacked the Captain on the spot and the escort all began to run away, and in a minute there was nobody left with the prisoner's cart.
Li Kui released the prisoners, and asked for an explanation of their having been captured. Xuan Zan also asked Li Kui how he had come that way and Li Kui told them how he had made friends with Bao Xu at the Kushu Mountain, and now came down the mountain to attack the the escort of Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen.
Bao Xu invited them all to come to his stronghold on the mountain where he provided a feast. During the festivities Hao Siwen said that as Bao Xu and his men were willing to join with the brigands at Liangshan Marsh they should first join in the attack on Lingzhou. Bao Xu agreed to this, and arrangements were made accordingly.
When the news of the disaster to the escort reached Lingzhou Colonel Shan Tinggui was angry, and said, "If we arrest those two men this time, we must execute them here, and not send them to the Eastern Capital." Just then another report came that Guan Sheng was advancing to attack the town. Immediately Colonel Shan Tinggui mounted his horse, and led his five hundred soldiers outside the town. When near the brigands, the flags separated; and Colonel Shan rode forward by himself, and shouted at Guan Sheng, "You disgrace to your country! You defeated general. You are deserving death!"
Guan Sheng hearing this urged his horse forward, whirling his sword aloft. After about fifty bouts Guan Sheng turned his horse, and galloped off followed closely by Colonel Shan Tinggui.
Guan Sheng led Colonel Shan a long distance away from his troops, and then turning his head he called out, "Why not dismount and submit now? What time are you waiting for?" But instead of doing this Colonel Shan attempted to stab Guan Sheng in the back with his spear, but Guan Sheng seeing the movement shouted "Down you go!" and cut the spear with his sword, and this upset the balance of Colonel Shan who fell off his horse. Guan Sheng sprang from his horse, and ran to raise his enemy and said, "Please forgive me!" Colonel Shan replied, "I humbly submit to you."
"When I was at Liangshan Marsh," said Guan Sheng, "I very often spoke highly of you to Song Jiang. So I have specially come here to request both of you to join us in the cause of justice."
"I am willing to do my best and cooperate with you in carrying out the Will of Heaven," said Colonel Shan.
They then mounted their horses, and rode off abreast. When Lin Chong saw them riding together like this he asked for an explanation.
Now Guan Sheng did not want to say anything about the defeating of Colonel Shan so he replied, "In this secluded spot, we talk about our old friendship and I will try to induce him to join us."
They were all pleased at this, Colonel Shan then went back to his troops, and waving his hand called out, "Let all my men come over here," and his five hundred black jackets all joined the brigands. Those who did not wish to do so returned to the town, and reported this matter to the Prefect.
In the town Colonel Wei Dingguo was exceedingly angry when he heard of this desertion, and the following day he led his men outside the town and challenged the brigands to battle. In front of the brigands he saw Colonel Shan Tinggui and Guan Sheng and Lin Chong so he rode forward, and shouted at them, "You have forgotten the graciousness of our ruler, and have become mean rebels."
At this Guan Sheng only laughed, and whipping his horse dashed forward, and fought with Colonel Wei Dingguo. After about ten bouts Colonel Wei turned his horse, and ran away followed by Guan Sheng. But Colonel Shan called out, "Do not pursue him!" and immediately Guan Sheng stopped his horse. Just then the ranks of the soldiers opened and about fifty carts rushed out. These were piled up with burning reeds and grass. They were pushed by soldiers who carried on their backs iron cauldrons containing sulphur emitting large volumes of smoke. As they came near the brigands, all fell down on all sides, men and horses. Guan Sheng seeing this gave orders for a general retreat, and after withdrawing his men for about three *li* he called a halt.
Colonel Wei seeing the brigands retreating marched his soldiers back to the town. But as he drew near he was surprised to see the town on fire in various parts.
This was because when Colonel Wei left the town with his soldiers another body of brigands from the Kushu Mountain in charge of Bao Xu and Li Kui entered the town by the north gate, and started to loot and set fire to the houses.
Colonel Wei dared not enter the town, and just as he was going to withdraw Guan Sheng and his brigands had come upon him. So he decided to retreat to the neighboring town of Zhongling County which he duly reached. Guan Sheng had however closely followed him, and surrounded the town with his brigands. But Colonel Wei did not offer to fight, and kept the gates carefully defended and guarded.
Seeing this Colonel Shan spoke to Guan Sheng and Lin Chong, "This man is very brave, and would rather die than submit to a defeat. We must therefore take a broad view of the position and not press him too closely. Instead of fighting I will go by myself into the town, and persuade him to join us. I can talk him over and induce him to submit to you without fighting."
Guan Sheng was much pleased, and agreed to the proposal.
Shan Tinggui went into the town alone, and was duly announced, and taken in to see Colonel Wei Dingguo. He said, "Just now the court is misguided, and stupid ministers are in power. So it would be better for us both join Song Jiang at Liangshan Marsh, and there wait until corrupt officials retire when we may change our course and surrender to the court."
Wei Dingguo was turning this over in his mind for some time before he spoke. "If they really wish me to surrender Guan Sheng himself should come here and make the proposal. If he does not come I would rather die than go."
Shan Tinggui then took his leave, and duly reported the conversation to Guan Sheng, who said, "I am not an important person, but he holds me in such a wrong esteem." He at once mounted his horse and was ready to go to the town.
But Lin Chong remonstrated with them, "It is hard to know men's intentions, and you had better think the matter over carefully before acting."
"He's my old friend so you need suspect nothing," said Guan Sheng. So he set off, and when Colonel Wei saw him he was much pleased, and at once agreed to submit and go with them. He invited him to dine and during the meal, they talked about old times when they were colleagues. That evening Colonel Wei left the town with his five hundred soldiers, and surrendered to the brigands. The next day they all set out for Liangshan Marsh. We will now relate what important news had reached Liangshan Marsh.

Our feelings know that language fine,
Is subtle; like a hook on lint;
The hook is cast, and soon the man,
Is captured by the courtesan.

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**Song Jiang Attacks Zengtou Village at Night; The Unicorn Lu Junyi the Magnate Captures Shi Wengong alive as Prisoner**

"I went north with Yang Lin and Shi Yong to buy horses," Duan said, "and I picked over two hundred strong, well-sinewed, fine-coated steeds. But on the way back, while passing through Qingzhou Prefecture, we were set upon by a gang of robbers, headed by Yu Baosi, known as the Spirit of the Dangerous Road. There were more than two hundred of them. They stole all our animals and took them to Zengtou Village. I don't know where Shi Yong and Yang Lin have gone. I fled through the night and am hastening to the stronghold to report."
Lin Chong agreed that it was necessary to discuss the matter with Big Brother. They all forded the river and repaired to Loyalty Hall, where they met Song Jiang. Guan Sheng introduced Shan and Wei to the various chieftains. Li Kui told how, after going down the mountain, he killed Han Bolong, met Jiao Ting and Bao Xu and, with them, broke into Lingzhou. Song Jiang was very pleased with the addition of these four brave men.
But he grew very angry when Duan related the robbery of the horses. "They did this sort of thing to me before," he cried, "and now they've behaved discourteously again! I've been unhappy day and night because I haven't avenged the death at their hands of Chao Gai the Heavenly King. If I still don't avenge him now, I'll be the butt of ridicule and shame!"
"Spring is here," said Wu Yong, "the ideal season for battle. When we attacked them before, we failed to utilize the terrain. This time we must be clever."
"I hate them to the marrow of my bones. I'll get my revenge or, I swear, I'll never return!"
"Shi Qian can fly over eaves and skim atop walls. Send him in to scout around. When he comes back, we'll confer."
Flea on a Drum was dispatched to Zengtou. Two or three days later, Yang Lin and Shi Yong, who had escaped, arrived at the fortress. They said that Shi Wengong had been boasting in Zengtou that there was no room on this earth for both him and the outlaws of Liangshan Marsh. Song Jiang was in favor of mustering their troops immediately.
But Wu Yong said. "Wait till Shi Qian comes back and reports. It will be time enough, then."
Song Jiang, filled with rage, was thirsting for revenge. He couldn't contain himself. He sent Dai Zong to fly to the village and report back quickly with all the news he could find. In only a few days Dai Zong returned.
"Zengtou wants to avenge itself for Lingzhou," he said. "They're raising an army and setting up a big emplacement at the village entrance, with headquarters in the Fahua Monastery. Banners mark their outposts for hundreds of *li* around. I don't know how we can get in there."
The following day Shi Qian returned and reported: "I made very detailed inquiries. They've built five forts. More than two thousand men are guarding the entrance, under Shi Wengong. This is the main fort. The north fort is commanded by Zeng Tu, with Su Ding as his lieutenant. Zeng Mi, the second Zeng son, is in charge of the south fort. Zeng Suo, the third son, commands the west fort. The east fort is under Zeng Kui, the fourth son. The central position, in the village itself, is held by the fifth son Zeng Sheng and the father Zeng Nong. Yu Baosi the Spirit of the Dangerous Road is a huge fellow with an enormous girth. He's feeding those horses he stole inside the monastery grounds."
Wu Yong summoned the chieftains to a conference. "Since they've got five forts," he said, "we'll divide into five columns and attack each separately."
Lu the Magnate rose. "I have not yet shown my gratitude for being rescued and brought here. I would now like to go forward and give my all. Would that, I wonder, meet with your respected approval?"
Song Jiang was delighted. "If you're willing to go down the mountain, Magnate, you may lead the vanguard."
"The Magnate has arrived only recently," Wu Yong intervened. "He has no battle experience, the mountain paths are tortuous and ill-suited for riding. Rather than lead the vanguard, he would be better at the head of a contingent in ambush on the plain. When he hears the sound of our central unit's cannon, he can reinforce us."
Wu Yong was afraid that Lu would capture Shi Wengong and Song Jiang would feel constrained to fulfil the dying wish of Chao Gai that leadership be given to whoever caught his killer. Song Jiang, on the contrary, hoped that Lu would make the capture precisely so that he could turn over command of the stronghold to him out of respect to Chao Gai. But Wu Yong was adamant. He directed Lu to go with Yan Qing and five hundred infantry to paths upon the plain and await the signal.
Wu Yong divided the outlaw forces into five columns. Against the fort due south of Zengtou would go three thousand cavalry under Qin Ming the Thunderbolt and Hua Rong, seconded by Ma Lin and Deng Fei. The fort east of the village would be attacked by three thousand infantry under Zhishen the Tattooed Monk and Wu Song the Pilgrim, with Kong Ming and Kong Liang as their lieutenants. Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute and Nine Dragons Shi Jin, seconded by Yang Chun and Chen Da, would lead three thousand cavalry against the fort north of Zengtou. Sent against the fort to the west were three thousand infantry under Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard and Lei Heng the Winged Tiger. Zou Yuan and Zou Run were their seconds in command. The central fort would be attacked by five thousand troops under commander-in-chief Song Jiang, Military Advisor Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng, accompanied by Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Dai Zong and Shi Qian. Bringing up the rear would be a five thousand man unit of mixed infantry and cavalry under Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, with Xiang Chong and Li Gun as their lieutenants. The remaining chieftains would stay to guard the mountain stronghold.
The five columns led by Song Jiang advanced rapidly. Scouts reported their approach to Zeng Senior, who summoned Shi Wengong and Su Ding for a military conference.
"All we have to do is dig a lot of concealed pits and we'll catch their toughest commanders and fiercest men," said Shi. "That's the best way to deal with those scruffy bandits!"
Zeng Senior ordered his vassals out with mattocks and shovels to dig pits all round the entrance to the village, and cover them over with mats and earth. Then he had soldiers lie in ambush near the pits and wait for the arrival of the enemy. He had a dozen of so pits also dug around the northern approach to the village.
While Song Jiang's army was on the march Wu Yong sent Shi Qian ahead to scout. A few days later, Flea on a Drum returned and reported: "Pits have been dug north and south of Zengtou, I don't know how many, to trap us."
Wu Yong laughed. "Nothing remarkable about that!" He led the troops on until they were quite near the village.
Around noon that day the advance unit saw a rider passing by. Bronze bells tinkled on his horse's neck, and pheasant plumes were tied to its tail. The rider wore a black hat and white robe, and he carried a short spear.
Men of the vanguard wanted to give chase, but Wu Yong stopped them. He ordered them to make camp where they were, dig a deep moat on all four sides, and lay out a perimeter of iron spikes. Each of the five columns was directed to do the same.
For the next three days no one came forward from the Zengtou forts to give battle. Wu Yong once again sent Shi Qian, this time disguised as a junior officer manning one of the ambushes, to find out why. Flea on a Drum made a mental note of the concealed pits, how far they were from the various forts, and how many of them there were in total. In a single day, he had all the information required, in detail, and he returned and reported.
The next day Wu Yong instructed the vanguard infantry to divide into two units, equipped with mattocks. He also directed that one hundred carts be loaded with reeds and dry brushwood and be concealed among the central column.
That night he ordered that the infantry columns first attack the forts to the east and west of Zengtou at mid-morning the following day. The cavalry under Yang Zhi and Shi Jin should spread out in a straight line before the northern fort. If the foe there beat drums and waved banners, they should put on a display of fight, but under no circumstances advance. Wu Yong's orders were transmitted.
Shi Wengong was hoping that Song Jiang's forces would attack the south fort and fall into the concealed pits. The road before it was narrow.
Where else could they go?
At mid-morning the next day the sound of cannon was heard up ahead. Pursuit troops gathered at the south gate. Then a messenger arrived from the east fort.
"A monk with an iron staff and a pilgrim brandishing a pair of long knives are attacking us front and rear," he reported.
"They must be Lu Zhishen and Wu Song of Liangshan Marsh," said Shi Wengong. He sent part of his soldiers to support Zeng Kui.
From the west fort another messenger arrived. "A big fellow with a long beard and a robber with a face like a tiger, with banners reading *Beautiful Beard Zhu Tong* and *Winged-Tiger Lei Heng*, are pressing us hard," he said.
Shi Wengong sent a portion of his men to aid Zeng Suo. Once more cannon boomed ahead. Shi had no more troops to spare. He could only wait for his adversaries to advance and tumble into the pits, at which time his soldiers hiding behind the hills would come out and help Shi nab them.
But Wu Yong swept forward around the hills in two flanking movements. The infantry guarding the fort was afraid to leave it. The soldiers flushed out of ambush were driven towards the fort by Wu Yong's pursuing troops, and large numbers of them fell into the pits.

Shi Wengong was about to sally forth when Wu Yong pointed with his whip. Gongs crashed and from the midst of the outlaw forces a hundred carts were pushed out and set ablaze. The conflagration of reeds, brushwood, sulphur and nitrate concealed the sky with smoke and flames. By the time Shi and his soldiers emerged their road was blocked by burning carts. They could only avoid them and hastily retreat. Gongsun waved his sword and conjured up a mighty wind which blew the flames into the south gate of the fort. Several buildings and part of the stockade burst into blaze and were destroyed.
A victory had been won. Trumpets summoned the outlaws to reassemble. They returned to their camps and rested. That night Shi repaired his gate and both sides secured their positions.
The next day Zeng Tu said to Shi Wengong: "If we don't kill their leaders it will be hard to wipe those bandits out." Telling his tutor to defend the fort, he donned his armor, mounted, and rode out at the head of his troops to challenge his adversaries to battle.
When Song Jiang heard who it was, he proceeded to the front, escorted by Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. He saw Zeng Tu under an arch of banners, and he burned with hatred. He pointed at him with his whip.
"Who will take that scamp for me and get me my long-awaited revenge?"
Lu Fang the Little Duke clapped his steed and rode against Zeng Tu, holding upright his crescent-bladed halberd. The antagonists met amid a clash of weapons. They fought over thirty rounds. From beneath the arch of pennants Guo Sheng could see that Lu Fang was weakening. He had fought well for the first thirty rounds, but his movements had become clumsy, and he was forced on the defensive.
Fearful that Lu Fang would be defeated, Guo Sheng suddenly mounted and, twirling his own crescent-bladed halberd, flew onto the battlefield and joined in the attack on Zeng Tu. The three horsemen locked in combat.
A panther's tail, with spots like gold coins, dangled from the head of each of the halberds. Both were lifted as the two outlaws closed in to seize their opponent. Zeng Tu had a quick eye. He raised his lance and entangled the tails, but the crimson tassel on his own weapon was also caught. He couldn't pull them apart. All three men were wrenching to free them.
Hua Rong, watching from the outlaws' position, was afraid his two companions would suffer. He rode forward, his left hand grasping his bow, his right hastily fitting a long slim arrow. He bent the bow and let fly at Zeng Tu. At that very moment Zeng Tu had extricated his lance, while the halberds were still entangled and, quicker than it takes to say, was thrusting at Lu Fang's neck. The arrow struck him in the left arm, knocking him from his saddle. Lu Fang and Guo Sheng's halberds swiftly took his life.
A dozen horsemen galloped back and reported to Shi Wengong, who reported in turn to the central fort. Zeng Senior wept aloud. The warrior beside him, his son Zeng Sheng, was enraged. A man of superb skill with arms, he wielded a pair of swords with such deadliness that no foe dared come near him. He ground his teeth in fury.
"Prepare my horse," he yelled. "I'm going to avenge brother!"
His father couldn't stop him. In full armor, he took his swords, mounted, and rode to the front fort.
"You mustn't underestimate the enemy." Shi Wengong warned him. "Song Jiang has many intelligent bold officers. In my humble opinion we should continue holding our five forts while secretly dispatching an emissary to Lingzhou to request that the throne be petitioned immediately for a relief army. One half of it should be sent to attack Mount Liangshan, the other to defend Zengtou. That will take the heart out of the bandits. Their only thought will be to rush back to their stronghold. Then, though I am a person of no talent, I shall be glad to join with you and your brothers in pursuing and exterminating the brigands. We're sure to attain great distinction."
Before he had finished speaking, assistant instructor Su Ding arrived from the north fort. He agreed with Shi's proposal. "That scoundrel Wu Yong is full of tricks," he said. "He mustn't be considered lightly. Defense is the best course. When the relief army arrives, we can discuss long-range plans again."
"They killed my brother," Zeng Sheng shouted. "He must be avenged! Why should we wait! Delay will only give the enemy time to gather strength and make them harder to defeat!"
Neither Shi nor Su could dissuade him. Zeng Sheng mounted and, with a few dozen horsemen, flew from the fort to challenge the foe.
Song Jiang was notified. He instructed the advance force to give battle. Qin Ming, on receiving the order, started to go out, brandishing his wolf-toothed cudgel, against Zeng Sheng. But suddenly Li Kui, axes in hand, rushed forward without a word to anyone and occupied the center of the arena.
One of the enemy recognized him. "That's Li Kui the Black Whirlwind," he said.
Zeng Sheng directed his archers to shoot. Ordinarily, Li Kui went naked into combat, and he relied on the shields of Xiang Chong and Li Gun for cover. But this time he rushed out alone, and an arrow struck him in the leg. He fell like a collapsing Mount Taishan. The horsemen behind Zeng Sheng galloped forward to seize him, while Qin Ming and Hua Rong raced from the opposite side, followed by Ma Lin, Deng Fei, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. Since Song Jiang's men outnumbered him, Zeng Sheng was afraid to continue the engagement. He and his soldiers returned to the fort. Song Jiang called his forces back to camp.
The next day, Shi Wengong and Su Ding opposed any further combat.
But they had no affect on Zeng Sheng. "Brother must be avenged," he insisted. Shi had no choice but to don his armor and mount. His horse was the famous White Jade Lion That Glows in the Night which he had taken forcibly from Duan Jingzhu. Song Jiang rode out with his chieftains to meet him.
Shi raced fiercely towards them. Qin Ming, eager for first honors, flew forward. The animals met and weapons clashed. After twenty rounds Qin Ming faltered, and he rode back towards his original position. Shi, pursuing, thrust with his lance. He hit Qin Ming in the leg, and the Thunderbolt fell from his saddle. Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Ma Lin and Deng Fei raced to his defense. Although they managed to rescue Qin Ming, the enemy inflicted casualties. They withdrew and made camp ten //from the fort.
Song Jiang ordered a cart for the Thunderbolt and had him escorted back to the mountain fortress to rest. Then he conferred with Wu Yong. They sent word to the stronghold for Guan Sheng the Big Halberd, Xu Ning the Metal Lancer, Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo to come and lend a hand.
Song Jiang burned incense and prayed, and cast divining sticks. Wu Yong looked at the omens and said: "Since this place is penetrable, enemy soldiers will surely slip into camp tonight."
"We'd better prepare, then."
"Don't let it trouble you, brother. Simply order the chieftains of three camps to combine them into two, one east, one west, and place Xie Zhen on the left and Xie Bao on the right of this one. Let the remainder conceal themselves in ambush on all sides."
This was done. That night, the sky was clear and the moon was bright. There was no wind or clouds.
Shi Wengong, in his fort, said to Zeng Sheng: "The bandits today lost two commanders. They must be frightened and depressed. This would be a good time to raid their camp."
Zeng Sheng immediately ordered Su Ding in the north fort, Zeng Mi in the south, and Zeng Suo in the west, to come at once with their soldiers and join in the attack. Around the second watch, they stealthily posted pickets, removed the bells from their horses and the clanking armor from the men, and crept into Song Jiang's central camp. No one was in sight. The camp was empty.
Realizing they'd been tricked, they turned to beat a hasty retreat. But from the left came Two-Headed Snake Xie Zhen and from the right came Twin-Tailed Scorpion Xie Bao, with Hua Rong appearing in the rear, and all closed in together. In the darkness, Zeng Suo was skewered by Xie Zhen's steel trident, and tumbled dead to the ground.
Torches were applied to Shi's fort to the rear and wild shouts rose as outlaw troops smashed into the stockade from the east and the west. A savage melee raged through half the night. Shi Wengong clawed out an escape route and fled.
Zeng Senior's agitation doubled on learning of the death of his son Suo. The next day he asked Shi to write a letter of surrender. The instructor, who was also very frightened, did so, and dispatched it by emissary to Song Jiang's camp. Song Jiang opened it and read:
Zeng Nong, lord of Zengtou Village, bows his head and respectfully greets Song Jiang, commander-in-chief. My sons in a moment of rashness wrongly offended your prestige. When Chao Gai the Heavenly King came with troops and reasonably demanded our submission, one of my underlings dared to snipe at him with bow and arrow. We also criminally stole your horses. There aren't words enough to express my apologies. All of this was against my wishes.
Now that dog of a son is dead, and I sent this emissary to request peace. If you will end the fighting and retire your troops, I will return all of your horses and highly reward your forces with gold and cloth. It is my sincere desire to avoid casualties on both sides. I pray you give this matter your consideration.
By the time he finished reading, Song Jiang was in a rage. "He killed my brother Chao Gai," he fumed. "Why should I quit! I'll raze that village to the ground!"
The emissary, lying prostrate, trembled uncontrollably. Wu Yong hastily intervened.
"You're wrong, brother," he said. "We contended with them because they abused us. But now they are asking for peace. Can we abandon principle because of a moment of anger?"
A reply was written and ten ounces of silver given to the emissary who returned to the village. Zeng Senior and Shi Wengong opened the missive and read:
Song Jiang, commander-in-chief of Mount Liangshan, sets his hand in reply to Zeng Nong, lord of Zengtou: Since ancient times a country without credibility must perish, a man without virtue must die, wealth gained without rectitude must be confiscated, generals without courage must suffer defeat. Originally there was no enmity between Liangshan Marsh and Zengtou Village. Each stayed within its own boundaries. But your evil deeds aroused our hostility. If you seek peace you must return the horses you stole on two occasions, turn over the thief Yu Baosi; and reward our soldiers with money and cloth. Let your generosity demonstrate your sincerity. If you change your mind, we shall have to take other measures.
Zeng Nong and Shi were both shocked and depressed. The next day Zeng Nong dispatched an emissary with another message: "If you want Yu Baosi, please send a man as hostage."
Song Jiang and Wu Yong dispatched Shi Qian, Li Kui, Fan Rui, Xiang Chong and Li Gun as an earnest of a desire for negotiations. Just before they left, they were told what to do in the event of an emergency, and urged to act promptly. The five departed.
Guan Sheng, Xu Ning, Shan Tinggui and Wei Tingguo arrived from the mountain stronghold. After a reunion with the other chieftains they were stationed in the central column.
Meanwhile, Shi Qian and the four bold fellows met with Zeng Senior. "Big Brother has ordered us here to discuss peace," said Flea on a Drum.
"If Wu Yong sends five men he must be up to some trick," said Shi Wengong.
Li Kui angrily grabbed Shi and commenced to beat him. Zeng Senior hurriedly intervened.
Shi Qian said: "Li Kui may be crude, but he has Big Brother's fullest trust. He was specially chosen. You have no need for suspicion."
Zeng Senior was very anxious for peace. Ignoring Shi, he served the five wine and invited them to rest in the camp in the Fahua Monastery, and posted a guard of five hundred soldiers front and rear. He then appointed his son Zeng Sheng his negotiator and sent him to Song Jiang's camp with Yu Baosi.
After presenting themselves at the central column, they delivered the horses they had stolen, plus a quantity of gold and bolts of cloth.
"These are the latest horses you rustled," said Song Jiang. "Where is White Jade Lion That Glows in the Night that you snatched from Duan Jiangzhu the previous time?"
"My instructor Shi Wengong has been riding it," said Zeng Sheng. "That's why we didn't bring it."
"You hurry up and write a letter, and say I want that horse back, quickly!"
Zeng Sheng penned a missive and sent a man with it to the fort. When Shi was informed, he said: "Any other horse he can have, but not this one!"
Several times the messenger shuttled back and forth. Song Jiang absolutely insisted. Finally, Shi dispatched a reply.
"If he really must have my horse, let him withdraw his army first, and I'll give it to him."
Song Jiang went into a huddle with Wu Yong. While they were conferring a man suddenly arrived and reported: "Armies from Qingzhou and Lingzhou are on their way!"
"When those rascals in Zengtou hear about this, they're sure to pull a switch!" Song Jiang averred.
He secretly ordered Guan Sheng, Shan and Wei to engage the Qingzhou army, and Hua Rong, Ma Lin and Deng Fei to engage the forces from Lingzhou. He also summoned Yu Baosi privately, reassured him and treated him with great kindness.
"If you're willing to perform meritoriously, I'll make you a chieftain in our mountain stronghold," said Song Jiang. "Vengeance against you for stealing our horses will be forgotten. I'll break an arrow in pledge. If you won't co-operate, Zengtou will soon be destroyed. It's up to you." Yu decided to give in and accept orders. Wu Yong told him of his plan.
"Pretend to have escaped and run back to your fort. Say to Shi Wengong: 'I was in Song Jiang's camp with Zeng Sheng, negotiating peace. From what I heard, I now have the true picture. Song Jiang's only purpose is to get back his fine horse. He's not interested in peace. Once you return the animal, he's going to turn on us. He's heard that relief armies are on the way from Qingzhou and Lingzhou, and he's in a terrible flap. You must take advantage of this situation and act. It's too good to miss.' If Shi heeds your advice, we'll be ready for him."
Yu went to Shi's fort and spoke as directed. Shi led him to Zeng Senior and said that Song Jiang had no intention of making peace, and that this was a good time to attack his camp.
"But Sheng is there," the father protested. "If we change, they're sure to kill him."
"We'll smash into the camp and rescue him, come what may. Tonight we'll order all of our forts to muster their full complement of men and go with us against Song Jiang's camp. Once we cut off the snake's head its body—the rest of the bandits—will be immobilized. When we return there will be time enough to kill Li Kui and the other four."
"An excellent plan, instructor."
Su Ding in the north fort, Zeng Kui in the east fort and Zeng Mi in the south fort were notified to join in the raid. Yu managed to slip into the fort in the Fahua Monastery and see Li Kui and the others. He surreptitiously told Shi Qian what was going on.
Meanwhile, Song Jiang said to Wu Yong: "I wonder how our plan is working out?"
"If Yu doesn't come back, that means they've fallen for it," said the military advisor. "Tonight, they'll probably raid our camp. We'll pull out, first, and lie in ambush on both sides. At the same time we'll send Lu Zhishen and Wu Song with foot soldiers against their east fort, and infantry under Zhu Tong and Lei Heng against their west fort, while Yang Zhi and Shi Jin attack the north fort with cavalry. This method is called 'The Foreign Hunting Dog Waits for the Quarry in Its Den.' It never fails."
That night Shi Wengong set out with Su Ding, Zeng Mi, Zeng Kui and their soldiers. The moon was hazy, the stars were dim. Shi and Su were in the lead, Mi and Kui covered the rear. Bells had been removed from the horses and clanking armor from the men. All advanced quietly towards Song Jiang's camp.
They found the gates open and not a soul inside. It was completely still. The raiders knew they had been duped, and quickly departed. As they hurried back towards their fort they heard gongs clashing and cannon booming in Zengtou. Shi Qian, who had climbed into the bell tower of Fahua Monastery, had clangorously tolled the big bell. This was the signal for outlaw artillery to open fire on the East and West Gates of the village. With a roar, countless brigands poured through the blasted portals, slaughtering as they came. In the monastery, Li Kui, Fan Rui, Xiang Chong and Li Gun vigorously fought their way out.
Shi was anxious to return to the fort, but he couldn't find the road. The fort itself was a scene of mad confusion. Zeng Senior, on being informed that the men of Liangshan Marsh were charging murderously in from two directions, hung himself in despair.
Zeng Mi, hastening to the west fort, died from a thrust of Zhu Tong's halberd. Zeng Kui, fleeing to the east fort, was trampled to jelly in the chaos by horses' hoofs.
Pursued by Lu Zhishen and Wu Song. Su Ding rushed pell-mell through the North Gate, outside of which were innumerable concealed pits. He ran into Yang Zhi and Shi Jin, who killed him with arrows. The men and horses fleeing in his wake tumbled one on top the other into the pits, countless numbers dying in their fall.
Shi Wengong's White Jade Lion steed was fleet. He galloped through the West Gate into the wilderness. A black mist curtained the sky. Shi couldn't tell north from south. He rode on for twenty //, not knowing where he was.
A gong crashed in a wood and four or five hundred troops surged out. The commander at their head held a long staff, which he swung at the legs of Shi's mount. The magnificent stallion, before the blow could land, leaped over its attacker's head and galloped on.
Shi continued to race through the night. Dark clouds massed, chill vapors floated, a black mist spread, a fierce wind blew. In the emptiness, wherever he turned he was dogged by Chao Gai's spirit. Shi resumed his original road, and he ran into Yan Qing the Prodigy and Lu Junyi the Magnate.
"Where do you think you're going, wretched thief!" shouted Lu. With one thrust of the halberd into Shi's leg, he brought him from his saddle. Lu tied him up and marched him to Zengtou. Yan Qing led the famous steed to the main camp.
Song Jiang was both delighted and angry. While glad that Lu Junyi had distinguished himself, he was enraged to see Shi Wengong, who had slain Chao Gai the Heavenly King.
First he had Zeng Sheng decapitated and every member of the Zeng family slaughtered, old and young, without exception. Then he stripped the village of all gold, silver, valuables and grain and loaded them onto carts for delivery to the mountain stronghold, where they would be distributed as rewards among the chieftains and troops.
Meanwhile, Guan Sheng drove off the army from Qingzhou, and Hua Rong scattered the soldiers from Lingzhou, and they and their forces returned to the village. Not a chieftain, big or small, had been lost, and Song Jiang had regained the White Jade Lion That Glows in the Night, to say nothing of large quantities of booty.
Shi Wengong was locked in a cage cart, the outlaw troops were assembled, and all headed back for Mount Liangshan. None of the towns, villages or hamlets en route were molested.
On arriving at Loyalty Hall, they gathered before Chao Gai's spirit tablet. Xiao Rang the Master Hand, at Song Jiang's direction, wrote the memorial address. The chieftains wore mourning and wept. Shi Wengong's heart was cut out and offered as a sacrifice to the departed. The ceremony was completed.
Song Jiang then discussed with the chieftains the question of Chao Gai's successor.
"You, brother, should be the supreme leader, with Lu Junyi the Magnate as second in command," said Wu Yong. "The remaining brothers should retain their original ranks."
"Don't you remember Chao Gai's dying wish? 'Let whoever captures Shi Wengong become the ruler of Liangshan Marsh.' Today, Lu Junyi caught the knave and brought him up the mountain as a sacrifice to brother Chao Gai. Vengeance has been attained. It is only proper that he command. There's no need for a lot of talk."
"I'm lacking in both virtue and talent," Lu protested. "I wouldn't dare to assume such a position. Even if I were given the lowest rank, it would be too much."
"I don't mean to be overly modest." said Song Jiang, "but in three respects I am your inferior. First, I'm short and swarthy, ugly and incompetent, while you are handsome, stalwart, and of noble men. Second, I was only a petty functionary who committed a crime and had to flee. Because these brothers didn't scorn me, I was allowed to rule temporarily. But you are the son of a powerful family, and renowned for gallantry. Although you were in a bit of danger for a while, Heaven has defended you, and you're now out of trouble. Third, I can neither maintain stability in civil affairs nor win the support of troops in military matters. I haven't the strength to strangle a chicken, or draw a bow as much as an inch, whereas you can deal with a thousand enemies at once. You understand the present and are learned in the past. There's no one who doesn't concede your superiority. Because of your talent and virtue it is entirely fitting that you be the ruler of our mountain stronghold. Later, when you return to the service of the emperor and through merit build your career, you surely will become a high official, and we brothers will bask in your reflected glory. My mind is made up. You mustn't refuse any longer."
Lu Junyi respectfully and humbly kowtowed. "Brother, say no more," he begged. "Even if I die for it, I cannot accede to your order!"
"Remain as leader, let Lu be second in command," Wu Yong urged, "and everyone will be satisfied. You'll chill our men's hearts if you keep on relinquishing like this!" He had already noted the expressions on the faces of the others before making this statement.
Li Kui the Black Whirlwind raised his voice loudly: "I risked my life at Jiangzhou to come here with you. We've given you your way in everything. I'm not afraid of Heaven itself, so I ask you: Why do you keep trying to give up the friggin command? I'll start killing again! We can dissolve the gang!"
Wu Song also took Wu Yong's hint. "There are many high military officers under you, brother," he said, "who once took their orders from the emperor. They'll listen to you, but not to anyone else."
Liu Tang said: "There were seven of us when we first came up the mountain. It was our intention then to make you our leader. We couldn't serve another now."
"If you give up command, brother," Lu Zhishen shouted, "I say we should pack it in and each go his separate way!"
"Enough," Song Jiang cried. "I have a method. Whatever is Heaven's will, we'll act accordingly."
"What is your proposal," said Wu Yong. "Please tell us."
"It involves two matters," said Song Jiang. And because of these, 2 heroes were added to Mount Liangshan, and the district town of Dongping was stricken by calamity. The stars of Heavenly Spirits joined in loyal righteousness, and in Liangshan Marsh the stars of Earthly Fiends gathered.

When Yellow Dog caught up with Leopard's Head and the others he said: "I went up north with Panther and the Guv to buy horses. When we got there we chose only the best thoroughbreds, sturdy, swift horses with strong legs and healthy coats. We bought over two hundred. When we got back into Qingzhou territory, a band of robbers attacked — at least two hundred there were and the leader of them was Yu Baosi, otherwise called Perilous — they stole the whole lot and carted them off to Zengside. What became of Panther and the Guv I don't even know. I didn't wait around but came back as fast as I could to tell everyone what had happened."

Scimitar said they should return to the stronghold at once and confer with the Leader about this. So they crossed the water and went straight to the Ceremonial Hall to see Song Jiang. First Scimitar introduced the Water General and the Fire General to all the others and Iron Ox told of his encounter with ill-fated Bolong and how he had happened upon Nameless and Pluto and how they went together to attack Lingzhou. Song Jiang rejoiced that four new heroes had been added to the company. Then Yellow Dog gave a detailed account of the theft of the horses. Song Jiang was incensed. "They stole my horse once before. Now it's the same old story. It is a constant worry to me that Chao Gai's untimely death, for which they were responsible, has still not been avenged. If we do not go and teach them a lesson, we shall be a laughing-stock."

The Professor said: "It's spring and the weather is warm, it's a good time for a campaign. Previously when we fought them they were favoured by the terrain. This time we must go about it more astutely."

Song Jiang said: "This hatred has entered into the very marrow of my bones. I swear never to return till I have vengeance."

The Professor said: "The Flea has the right qualities for this job, we must send him first to reconnoitre. When he comes back we'll make our plans."

The Flea accordingly took himself off. Two or three days later Panther and the Guv were back, having managed to escape unharmed. They told how at Zengside Instructor Shi Wengong was boasting away and saying how he wasn't prepared to share power with the forces of Mount Liang.

Song Jiang was all for setting out at once, but the Professor said: "Wait till the Flea reports back, then we can go."

But Song Jiang was choking with rage. Until he had his revenge, he couldn't bear to sit still, so he sent the Magic Messenger off with orders to spy out the land and report back as fast as he possibly could.

Just a few days later, the Magic Messenger returned and said: "It seems Zengside wants to get back at us for the sacking of Lingzhou. They're raising an army. They've set up a camp just outside their town, with the main army headquarters in the Fahua Temple and flags planted for dozens of miles all around. It's hard to see how we can find a way through."

A day later the Flea returned and reported: "I went right into Zengside and I found out everything. They have built five well-fortified camps. Right outside Zengside there are two thousand plus troops guarding the town. In the main camp Instructor Shi Wengong is in command, with Zeng Tu, that's the eldest, on the north and Instructor Su Ding as his deputy. The second son, Zeng Mi, is on the south, number three, Zeng Suo, on the west, number four, Zeng Kui, on the east and number five, Zeng Sheng, in the centre with his father Zeng Nong. The fellow they call Perilous, who is extremely tall and broad to match, is looking after the stolen horses at the Fahua temple."

After hearing this the Professor called all the leaders together and it was agreed that since the enemy had five camps they should appoint five leaders, each to lead a division against one of the camps.

At this point the Unicorn sprang up and said: "You did me the service of rescuing me and bringing me here and I have not been able to repay it yet, so I would like now to offer myself to lead the attack. Have I your consent?"

Song Jiang was pleased with this and said: "If you are willing to go, you can command the first unit."

The Professor said: "You only arrived recently and you have not had any experience in battle yet. The mountains are steep and precipitous, treacherous terrain for riding. It's not a good idea for you to go first. Instead of leading a troop of cavalry, you should set up an ambush on level ground. Then at a given signal you can come up in support."

What was behind the Professor's proposal was the fear that the Unicorn might capture Instructor Shi Wengong and then in accordance with Chao Gai's last wishes Song Jiang would step down in favour of their enemy's vanquisher. That is why he didn't want the Unicorn to lead the first contingent. Song Jiang's idea, on the other hand, was precisely for the Unicorn to make some important contribution so that he could take the opportunity to make him chief of the mountain fortress.

Well, the Professor wasn't having any of it and insisted that the Unicorn should take the Prodigy and five hundred foot soldiers to take up a position on one of the small roads on the plain and await the signal.

The five army divisions were also announced: they were Thunderclap and Colonel Hua, with the Flautist and Redeye as his lieutenants and three thousand cavalry to attack the camp due south of Zengside; Monk and Pilgrim, with the two Kong brothers and three thousand infantry against the camp on the east; the Blue-Faced Beast and the Tattooed Dragon with White-Spotted Snake and the River-Jumper and three thousand cavalry against the camp to the north, Whiskers and Sergeant Lei with the Forester and Rhinoceros, against the camp on the west with three thousand infantry; the commanders-in-chief, Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun, aided by the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Snake, Scorpion, the Magic Messenger and the Flea and five thousand troops against the camp in the centre. Bringing up the rear would be five thousand infantry led by Iron Ox and the Demon King, with the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. The remainder were to stay behind and guard the mountain stronghold.

We shall leave Song Jiang and his five armies preparing their attack, and go to Zengside, whose scouts had observed these preparations and reported back. The head of the Zeng clan summoned instructors Shi Wengong and Su Ding to discuss the military situation.

Shi Wengong said: "We must oppose the Mount Liang attack by digging a lot of pits so we can capture this whole gang, troops and leaders together. That's the way to deal with this rabble. It's a pretty good plan, I think!"

Accordingly the head of the clan ordered all peasants and retainers to take their mattocks and shovels and dig dozens of concealed pits at the approaches to the village, covering them over with loose earth. Soldiers were to be concealed all around, lying in wait for the enemy. A few dozen pits were also dug on the road to the north.

But before Song Jiang's army set out, the Professor took the precaution of sending the Flea out on another spying mission. After a day or two the Flea returned and reported: "To the south and north of the Zengside camps a whole lot of pits have been dug to catch our cavalry."

"That's nothing to bother us!" said the Professor with a contemptuous laugh.

Under his orders, the army advanced and halted a little way off from Zengside. By now it was noon. The advance guard saw a Zeng horseman approach. His horse was decked with bells and a pheasant feather was attached to its tail. The rider wore a black headband and a white robe and carried a short spear. The troops wanted to give chase, but the Professor stopped them and told them to make camp. He gave orders for a ditch to be dug around the camp and filled with iron spikes. Each of the five divisions was to set up its own camp and dig a similar ditch filled with iron spikes.

They remained here three days and no one came out from Zengside to offer battle. The Professor sent the Flea off again to Zengside, disguised as a soldier from one of the Zeng ambushes, to find out why. He was also to inquire discreetly about the concealed pits, what distance they were from the camps and how many there were in total. Within a day the Flea had all the details. He made secret notes and reported back to the Professor.

Next day the Professor gave orders for the first division of infantry to be equipped with mattocks and split into two units. And over a hundred of the provisioning carts, loaded with reeds and firewood, were to join the main army. That night the commanders in each camp were told that in the morning the infantry were to start the attack on the east and west, and then the cavalry on the north led by the Blue-Faced Beast and Tattooed Dragon were to spread out in a line and if they heard drums and saw waving flags on that side make a deceptive show of power but not advance. These were the Professor's instructions.

Back in Zengside, Shi Wengong's plan was to draw Song Jiang on to attack his position and catch him in the pits. There was only a narrow road leading towards his camp and it was assumed that was the way the enemy would attack. Next morning cannon fire was heard in front of the camp. A large force of pursuit troops was mustered at the south gate. Next a report came from the camp on the east: "A monk with a steel staff and a pilgrim with two whirling swords are attacking us from two sides!"

"That must be Mount Liang's Lu Zhishen and Wu Song," said Shi Wengong. Fearing for the outcome, he sent reinforcements for Zeng the Fourth. But then it was reported from the camp on the west: "A fellow with a long beard and another most ferocious looking villain are attacking fiercely under banners which say "Whiskers Zhu Tong" and "Lei Heng the Winged Tiger". Shi Wengong sent off further reinforcements for Zeng the Third. More gunfire was now heard in front. Shi Wengong told his troops to keep calm and wait until the enemy fell into the pits, when the troops in ambush would come out and help to capture them.

At this point the Professor brought his cavalry round the side of the mountain taking a short cut along two small paths to arrive right in front of the enemy camp. The infantry guarding the camp at this point dared not move from their positions, and the troops in ambush were spread out on either side ahead of them. The Professor now attacked from behind and drove them all towards the pits. When Shi Wengong was about to make a sortie, the Professor pointed with his whip, a gun went off in their position and over a hundred carts were driven out and set fire to, so that the reeds and faggots on them, the sulphur and saltpetre all went up and the sky was filled with smoke and flames. When Shi Wengong and his troops rode out their way was blocked by the blazing carts. All he could do was tell his men to avoid them and try to withdraw. Taoist Gongsun now waved his sword and conjured up a great wind which swept the flames towards the south gate, burning down the enemy stockade and towers.

Reckoning the day was theirs, the Mount Liang commanders sounded the gongs to call all their forces back to base. That evening there were celebrations.

Shi Wengong spent all night repairing damage to the gates and both forces secured their positions.

Next day Zeng the First declared to Shi Wengong: "These bandits won't be finished till we've killed all their leaders." Leaving the defence of the camp in the hands of Shi Wengong, he led his troops out, mounted and in full armour, to challenge the enemy. When Song Jiang heard about this he told the Little Duke and the Halberdier to follow him and rode out in front. He halted under the pennants. The sight of Zeng the First rekindled all his rage. Pointing with his whip he shouted: "Who will take that bastard for me and avenge the former insult?"

The Little Duke slapped his horse, readied his square halberd and charged Zeng the First. Two horses met, two weapons were raised, and they went at it for thirty bouts. Waiting under the pennants, the Halberdier could see that one of the two was weakening. The fact was that the Little Duke's skill was no match for Zeng's. When he couldn't overcome his opponent in thirty bouts, his work with the halberd became ragged and all he could do was defend himself and try to dodge. Fearing his comrade was about to suffer defeat, the Halberdier urged his horse forward and charged, twirling his halberd, identical to the Little Duke's, and pressing Zeng the First hard. Out there in front of the armies the three riders blended into a single mass,

Now, to the end of the halberds was tied a golden panther's tail. Eager to capture Zeng, the Little Duke and the Halberdier both raised their weapons together, while Zeng with a quick eye used his spear to strike them aside. The tassel on the tip of his spear became entangled with the panther's tails and he could not pull it free. So there they were all three, tugging at their weapons but unable to use them.

Colonel Hua, a spectator among the ranks, saw this and fearing that both his comrades would be defeated urged his horse forward. He grasped his bow in his left hand and with the right hand took an arrow and fitted it to the string, bent the bow to the full and fired at Zeng. Zeng had just managed to wrench his spear away, while the two halberds remained entangled. It's slow in the telling but happens in a flash. Just as Zeng freed his spear and thrust at the Little Duke's neck, Colonel Hua's arrow hit him in the left shoulder, knocking him head over heels from his horse, the Little Duke and the Halberdier struck with the joined halberds and Zeng the First expired on the spot. A dozen of his cavalrymen galloped back and told Shi Wengong and the news spread throughout the main camp.

The head of the clan wept bitterly on hearing the news. At his side his youngest son, Zeng the Fifth, was inflamed with anger. Now this youngest son was remarkably skilled with his favourite weapon, a pair of javelins. No one liked to take him on. Maddened by the news of his elder brother's death, he ground his teeth and shouted: "Saddle my horse! I shall avenge my brother!" His father could not dissuade him. He donned full armour, seized his javelins, mounted and galloped out of the camp. "Don't underestimate the enemy," Shi Wengong warned him. "Song Jiang has a great many bold and resolute commanders. If you want my opinion, I think we should concentrate on defending the five camps and send a secret envoy to Lingzhou asking them to pass on an urgent request to the Emperor for reinforcements. With a good general and enough officers it would be possible to attack the bandits on two fronts. An attack on Mount Liang combined with a determined defence of Zengside would make them lose heart and send them scurrying back to their mountain. Then with my assistance, for what it's worth, and with the aid of your brothers we would rout them and undoubtedly win great glory."

Before he finished speaking the second in command from the northern camp, Su Ding, arrived. He heard the word "defence" and agreed: "That bloody Professor of theirs is a cunning bastard, don't underestimate him," he said. "Our only hope is to pull back. Until reinforcements arrive we must be very cautious."

Zeng the Fifth shouted: "They've killed my brother! How long must we wait to avenge him? We'll never get the better of them by just sitting on our arses while they grow in strength and confidence!"

Neither of the two instructors could stop him. He mounted and raced out of the gates, accompanied by only a few dozen riders, to issue his challenge. When Song Jiang heard, he ordered the advance guard to engage. In response to the order Thunderclap was just about to ride out to take on Zeng the Fifth, whirling his mace, when Iron Ox appeared. He made no inquiries, but axe in hand charged into the thick of things. There was someone in the enemy ranks who knew him and he muttered: "This is Mount Liang's Black Whirlwind, alias Iron Ox". When Zeng the Fifth saw him he ordered his archers to shoot. Now when Iron Ox fought he liked to strip naked and normally he had the barbarian shields of Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost to give him protection. But this time he charged forward on his own and was hit in the leg by Zeng the Fifth's arrow. He fell like a mountain. The horsemen following Zeng the Fifth charged forward eagerly. But from Song Jiang's ranks Thunderclap and Colonel Hua sped to the rescue, and behind them came the Flautist, Redeye, the Little Duke and the Halberdier to cover their retreat. When Zeng the Fifth saw how many people Song Jiang had, he dared not continue the fight and ordered his men back to camp. Song Jiang also recalled his forces.

Next day Shi Wengong and Su Ding had not intended to fight but Zeng the Fifth was so determined to avenge his brother that Shi Wengong was obliged to arm himself and mount his horse. This horse was in fact Moonlight, the thoroughbred originally stolen from Yellow Dog.

Song Jiang arrayed his forces against the enemy. When Shi Wengong came at them, Thunderclap thought to wrest the chief honour for himself and galloped forward to meet him. Two horses met, two weapons were raised. They fought around twenty bouts, till Thunderclap's strength began to fail him, and he retreated towards his own ranks. Shi Wengong gave chase and owing to his superlative skill with the spear caught Thunderclap in the back of the leg, toppling him from his horse. The Little Duke, the Halberdier, the Flautist and Redeye rushed forward to the rescue. But although the leader was saved the battle line was broken.

When the defeated troops were rallied they took up a defensive position some three miles from the main camp. Song Jiang called for a cart onto which Thunderclap was loaded. Whilst Thunderclap was taken back to the mountain stronghold to recuperate, Song Jiang conferred with the Professor. His idea was to fetch Scimitar and the Spearsman from the mountain, and for the Water General and the Fire General to lend a hand.

Song Jiang personally burnt incense and prayed for guidance and a horoscope was cast. When the Professor had examined the signs, he said: "Our position is not impregnable, without a doubt the enemy will attack tonight."

Song Jiang said: "We'd better make preparations then."

The Professor said: "There's no need to worry. First we must tell the leaders to abandon the camps on the east and west and set up an ambush with Snake on the left, Scorpion on the right. The rest of the troops should conceal themselves all around."

Evening came. It was a bright moonlit night, still and cloudless. Shi Wengong said to Zeng the Fifth: "The enemy lost two of their generals today. Their morale is bound to be low. We must take this opportunity to seize their camp."

Zeng the Fifth accordingly requested Su Ding in the north camp, Zeng the Second in the south and Zeng the Third in the west to bring up their forces for a joint assault on the enemy position. Some time before midnight they rode out silently with muffled harness bells and clad in light armour towards Song Jiang's main camp. When they found no one and knew they had seized an empty camp, they recognized a trap and hurriedly tried to pull out. Snake now attacked from the right and Scorpion from the left. Immediately behind them was Colonel Hua. In the darkness Zeng the Third was tumbled from his horse by a thrust from Snake's trident. Then torches were lit and a great cry went up, as troops came pouring in from all sides, attacking the camp. The battle raged half the night before Shi Wengong managed to fight his way out and return to base.

When the head of the Zeng clan heard he had lost another son he was overwhelmed with grief. He wanted Shi Wengong to write next day offering surrender. Shi Wengong was also scared, so he wrote the letter and sent a messenger with it to Song Jiang's camp. When the sentry reported there was an envoy from Zengside, Song Jiang had him brought in.

Song Jiang opened the letter and read:

*Zeng Nong, laird of Zengside, respectfully greets General Song Jiang and begs to inform him: yesterday my youngest son, responding to a mad impulse, committed a grave offence against your dignity. On a previous occasion also when the great Chao Gai led an expedition here and quite understandably sought our compliance with his will, an unlucky arrow was regrettably fired by a foolish soldier. There is also the matter of some stolen horses. Words cannot sufficiently express the regret that I feel on account of all this, none of which was of my own seeking. Now my foolhardy son is dead and I send my ambassador to you to sue for peace. If you will graciously agree to abandon hostilities and withdraw your troops all the previously stolen horses shall be restored to you and a quantity of valuables handed over in recompense to your armies, that further bloodshed may be avoided on either side. I beg you to give this proposal your most considered attention.*

This letter greatly annoyed Song Jiang when he read it. He tore it to pieces and abused the sender: "How can I call an end to the quarrel when they killed our brother? I must wipe out their village, nothing else will do."

The envoy was cowering on the ground, trembling in terror. The Professor hurriedly intervened, saying to Song Jiang: "You are mistaken, my friend. We fought them to avenge an insult. But now they have sent someone with a peace proposal and we cannot sacrifice what is right to the indulging of our resent-ment." He wrote out a reply and gave two taels of silver as a reward to the envoy, who returned to his camp and presented the letter. Old Zeng and Shi opened the letter and here is what they read:

*Song Jiang, commander in chief of the forces of Mount Liang, in reply to Zeng Nong, laird of Zengside: it is said that a nation is licensed to rule by its good faith, a general enabled to dominate barbarians through his bravery; that a man without courtesy is nothing and that ill-gotten gains have no worth. Originally Mount Liang and Zengside had no quarrel. But through an unprovoked act of aggression on your part hostility arose. If you would speak of peace you must make restitution of the horses stolen on two occasions, hand over the thief known as Perilous, and recompense our armies financially. Let generosity be the mark of your sincerity. If not, we shall draw our own conclusions.*

This communication dismayed Zeng Senior and Shi Wengong. The following day Zeng Senior sent someone else to say: "If you agree to make peace, we should exchange hostages."

Song Jiang was reluctant, but the Professor said: "We lose nothing by it." Accordingly five hostages went off, the Flea, Iron Ox, Demon King, the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. Just before they left the Professor took the Flea aside and whispered in his ear: "You must do this, and this.... Make sure you get it right."

So now the hostages were gone and Scimitar, Spearsman, the Water General and the Fire General arrived. After being greeted they were lodged in the main camp.

The Flea and his four companions presented themselves in Zengside. The Flea said: "I am here at our Leader's behest, with Iron Ox and these others, to negotiate peace."

Shi Wengong said: "The Professor has sent five of them. It must be a plot."

Iron Ox lost his temper. He grabbed Shi and started hitting him. Zeng Senior hurriedly tried to calm him down, while the Flea said: "Iron Ox may seem a little uncouth, but he is very dear to the Leader's heart. He sent him especially to allay your suspicions."

Zeng Senior desperately wanted to make peace, and he did not listen to his second-in-command. He entertained them with wine and then let them go to the camp at the Fahua Temple to rest. Five hundred soldiers were positioned all around them. Then he sent his son Zeng the Fifth with Perilous to Song Jiang's camp to negotiate terms.

The two men presented themselves and then the horses which had been stolen on the second occasion, together with a cartload of gold and silk, were handed over.

Song Jiang said: "These are all horses that were stolen last time. But what about that special white horse called Moonlight that Yellow Dog was bringing me; why isn't it here?"

Zeng the Fifth said: "It's the horse which instructor Shi rides, that's why we didn't bring it."

Song Jiang said: "Well, you'd better write a letter and tell them to return it to me, and be quick about it."

Zeng the Fifth wrote the letter and sent one of his followers back with it. Shi Wengong responded by saying: "I'd be prepared to part with any other horse. But I won't give him that one."

The messenger came and went several times. Song Jiang was adamant: he must have the horse. Shi Wengong finally sent a man to say: "If he insists on having this horse of mine, tell him I'll give it to him when he withdraws all his troops."

Song Jiang discussed this reply with the Professor. Before they had reached any conclusion, a man rushed in and said: "There are troops heading this way along the Qingzhou and Lingzhou roads."

"If those buggers hear about this, they'll pull out of the deal," Song Jiang said. Orders were given quietly and Scimitar, the Water General and the Fire General set out to confront the forces on the Qingzhou road, while Colonel Hua, the Flautist and Redeye went to meet the army on the Lingzhou road. Then Song Jiang secretly called in Perilous, and after a good deal of flattery and friendly treatment said: "If you are willing to join us in our enterprise, I will make you one of the leaders. We'll forget about the theft of the horses. I break this arrow as my pledge. If you don't agree, Zengside will sooner or later be destroyed and it will be your fault."

Perilous was nothing loath to bow and submit. The Professor now expounded a plan to him: "Pretend you've managed to escape and return to their camp. Tell Shi Wengong, 'When Zeng the Fifth and I were discussing peace terms with Song Jiang, I learnt the truth. Song Jiang only wants to get back the famous horse, Moonlight. He has no real intention of making peace. As soon as he's got the horse it will all change. I also heard that our reinforcements are coming up on the Qingzhou and Lingzhou roads. They are very worried about this. All we need do is devise some way to take advantage of it. We can't fail.' If he believes you I shall know what to do."

Perilous went straight to Shi's camp and said everything he had been told to say. Shi took him to see old Zeng and he repeated in detail how Song Jiang had no real intention of making peace and how they could use the opportunity to seize his camp. Zeng Senior said: "But they've got my son there, if we don't keep our word they'll kill him."

Shi said: "If we break into their camp we'll rescue him somehow. Send out the order to all the camps tonight for everyone to join in an attack on Song Jiang's main camp. Cut off the snake's head and the rest of the bunch will be helpless. We can kill Iron Ox and the others when we get back."
Zeng Senior said: "I leave you to plan the operation then."
Orders were immediately sent to Su Ding in the north camp, Zeng the Fourth in the east camp and Zeng the Second in the south camp to join in the attack. Perilous managed to slip into the camp at the Fahua Temple and secretly divulge the news to Iron Ox and the others.
Meanwhile Song Jiang was saying to the Professor: "What exactly is your plan then?"
The Professor said: "If that Perilous does not return, it will mean they have fallen for it. If they are coming to attack the camp tonight, we will stay hidden on either side, while Monk and Pilgrim take their infantry and enter their camp from the east and Whiskers and Sergeant Lei with their infantry enter on the west. The Blue-Faced Beast and the Tattooed Dragon can attack with cavalry on the north and cut off their retreat. It's what is called the Strategy of the Hidden Watchdog. It never fails."
Shi Wengong set off that night with Su Ding, Zeng the Second and Zeng the Fourth. It was a misty night with only the faintest starlight. Shi and Su were leading with the two Zeng brothers in the rear. Harness bells were muffled and the men wore light armour to prevent noise. When they reached Song Jiang's camp they found the gates open and absolutely no one there. There was not even the least sign of movement. Realizing they had fallen into a trap, they turned round and hastened back towards their own camp.
They found Zengside filled with the sound of gongs, drums and explosions. The Flea had climbed the bell tower of the Fahua Temple and rung the bell and at this signal the attack on the east, west and south gates had commenced, the sound of cannon fire mingling with the shouting of countless troops. Iron Ox, Demon King, the Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost had also set to work, bursting out of the Fahua Temple compound. In his haste to get back to his camp Shi Wengong lost the way. The Zeng Senior of Zengside seeing such turmoil in his camp and hearing that two columns of Mount Liang forces were attacking hanged himself. Zeng the Second rushed back to the camp on the west and was dispatched with a blow of Whiskers' halberd. Zeng the Fourth tried to re-enter the camp on the east but was trampled into the mud in the mêlée of men and horses. Su Ding fought his way desperately to the north gate but here there were innumerable pits and with Monk and Pilgrim at his heels and the Blue-Faced Beast and the Tattooed Dragon facing him he died in a flurry of arrows. The troops pressing behind him were driven into the pits where countless numbers perished.
Shi Wengong had his magnificent horse which could go so fast and he galloped out of the west gate and escaped into the wilderness. A black mist veiled the sky at this time and you couldn't tell north from south. When he had gone half a dozen miles he was completely lost. Then suddenly he heard harness bells from the direction of a small wood and four or five hundred troops appeared. Their leader carried a staff with which he struck at the horse's legs. But the horse was a real thoroughbred. It saw the blow coming, leapt over it and galloped on. As he raced forward Shi felt the clouds fly past and the cold air strike his face, while the black mist folded around him.
Suddenly in the void a man stood blocking his way, a ghost warrior as it seemed to him. He pulled his horse up short and turned back. But on every side, north, south, east and west, shades of Chao Gai entangled him. He returned to his former way, but now it was the Prodigy who stood before him, and the Unicorn also, who shouted: "Villain, where do you think you're going?" A blow from a halberd struck him in the leg and dragged him from the horse. He was bound with rope and taken back to Zengside. The Prodigy led Moonlight back to the main camp.
Song Jiang regarded the results of this action with mixed feelings. He was glad for the Unicorn's achievement. But it hurt him to remember how Shi Wengong had shot Chao Gai. The sight of his enemy was too much for him.
First Zeng the Fifth was executed. Not one of the Zeng clan now remained. The treasure and stores were seized and all they contained loaded onto carts and transported to Mount Liang, to be divided among the leaders, the biggest share going to the three armies.
By now Scimitar had repelled the Qingzhou forces and Colonel Hua had scattered the Lingzhou forces and all had returned safely. They had also obtained a magnificent horse, and a great deal of booty besides. No need to say more of that. Shi Wengong was locked in a prison cart, the troops formed up and all returned to Mount Liang. In the countryside they passed through on the way not a soul was harmed. Back in the stronghold all the leaders gathered in the Ceremonial Hall for a service for the benefit of Chao Gai's spirit. Song Jiang ordered Magic Hand to make out a proclamation requiring all the leaders to wear mourning and to express their grief. As for Shi Wengong, his chest was cut open and the heart ripped out and offered to Chao Gai's spirit.
Song Jiang now broached the subject of the leadership to the company assembled in the Ceremonial Hall.
The Professor said: "My worthy friend, I say the Unicorn should be number two, and the rest of us should keep our original places."
Song Jiang said: "Do not forget Chao Gai's last words: 'If someone captures Shi Wengong, whoever it may be, let him be leader on Mount Liang.' Today the Unicorn has taken that villain alive and brought him here as an offering to Chao Gai, avenging his death and obliterating the dishonour. He deserves it. There is no more to be said."
The Unicorn said: "My merit is slight and my talents scant, how can I be worthy to fill this post? Let me be least among you — it is still more than I deserve."
Song Jiang said: "I am not being modest when I say that there are three things in which I cannot compare with him. The first is my appearance: I am short and dark-skinned — I have neither his looks nor his talents. He is dignified in bearing and of imposing mien; he has the looks of an aristocrat. The second is my background: I am a mere government clerk and a criminal on the run. Our comrades were kind enough not to reject me and to allow me temporarily to be their leader. But he was born to a rich and noble family and has the name of a gentleman. It is true he faced certain troubles recently, but heaven has delivered him. The third thing is that I have neither knowledge of statecraft, nor confidence in my military leadership. There is no strength in my arm, no power in my body. Mr. Lu has the strength of ten thousand and knowledge of many things both ancient and modern, he is second to none. With such gifts as these it is only fitting he should be lord of the mountain stronghold. If the court accepts our allegiance again, he will accomplish great things. He will rise high in public service and his glory will be reflected on us all. My mind is made up. Do not oppose me."
The Unicorn prostrated himself and said: "All these words are of no use. I would prefer to die, I would solve the problem by relinquishing my life."
The Professor now urged: "My honoured friend, let Mr. Lu be second, we will all support that. If you persist in wanting to step down, it will be very bad for morale." The Professor had been watching the others' expressions when he came out with this. Iron Ox immediately gave a great shout: "I risked my life for you in Jiangzhou when I came with you. Everyone always gives way to you. But I'm not scared of anyone, not even heaven. You keep on stepping down to this one and that one, what's the fucking point? I warn you, I shall start killing and burning again!"
Pilgrim Wu Song guessed the Professor's intention and also put in his oar: "You've all kinds of military men under your command, many with commissions from the court. They accept your leadership, why should they be loyal to someone else?"
The Red-Haired Devil said: "In the beginning it was seven of us who came to the mountain. We chose to honour you with the leadership, and now you want to give it away to someone else!"
Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk shouted: "If you insist on handing over to someone else we will each go our own way."
Song Jiang said: "Shut up, all of you! What I say makes sense. Let us consider what is heaven's will and then decide."
The Professor said: "If you have something more to tell us, please let us hear it."
Song Jiang said: "I've two points to make." And in consequence of what he now said, 2 new heroes were to be added to Mount Liang and disaster was to strike in Dongping:

*The Mountain will have its complement of heavenly stars,*
*In the Marshes the earth stars will throng.*

COLONEL WEI and his men had reached Liangshan Marsh, and were making arrangements for the men to cross the lake when Lin Chong saw one of their leaders, Duan Jingzhu, also arrive, and asked him where he had been.
Duan Jingzhu replied, "I went with Yang Lin and Shi Yong to the north to buy some horses. We bought two hundred very fine animals, and were bringing them here when we were stopped near Qingzhou by some brigands under the leadership of Yu Baosi, whose nickname is the 'Dangerous Road Spirit.' They seized all our horses and took them off to Zengtou, the Zeng Family Village. Yang Lin and Shi Yong went away somewhere I did not know, so I hurriedly came here by myself to report the matter."
Lin Chong saw the importance of the matter, and at once took Duan Jingzhu across the lake to the stronghold to report matter to Song Jiang. The two Colonels from Lingzhou were also introduced to Song Jiang and the other leaders. Li Kui also introduced Bao Xu and his men from the Kushu Mountain.
Song Jiang was very angry at the horses having been stolen, and said, "It is these thieves who shot Chao Gai to death, and so far no punishment has been inflicted upon them. As they have now robbed our horses again we shall be disgraced if we do not take our revenge."
"As it is now springtime," said Wu Yong, "and we have not much to do, we can arrange to attack them. When Chao Gai was fighting, he lost the advantageous position, but this time we must use some strategy. Shi Qian is excellent in scaling walls so we can send him as a spy, to detect the position inside Zengtou." This was agreed to, and Shi Qian took his departure. In a few days Yang Lin and Shi Yong returned to Liangshan Marsh, and reported that at Zengtou, Shi Wengong was very boastful, and declared that they would not live under the same Heaven with the brigands at Liangshan Marsh. Song Jiang upon hearing this wanted to dispatch his men to attack Zengtou, but Wu Yong objected, and urged that they must wait until Shi Qian came back. Song Jiang, however, was in a towering rage at this insult, and wanted immediate revenge. He sent Dai Zong to go there and quickly return with the latest news.
In a few days Dai Zong returned, and reported, "The leading family at Zengtou are preparing for an attack on Liangshan Marsh, and have established a big encampment at the Fahua Monastery."
The following day Shi Qian arrived and reported, "I got inside the village and made careful inquiries. The villagers are divided into five companies under the command of Shi Wengong. Yu Baosi keeps our horses in the Fahua Monastery."
Upon hearing this Wu Yong held general conference of all the leaders and addressed them, "As these men are divided into five companies so we can divide our forces in the same way, and proceed to the village by five different roads."
Lu Junyi stood up, and said, "You saved my life, but since then I have had no opportunity of recompensing you. I am willing to risk my life on this expedition, but I don't know what is your opinion."
Song Jiang asked Wu Yong whether he could agree to Lu Junyi doing this, and Wu Yong replied, "The roads between here and Zengtou are very rugged and wild, and we could not allow Lu Junyi to lead the vanguard. He had better lead a body of men in ambush on the open field, and when he hears the sound of our bombs, he can come and join in the fight."
Song Jiang instructed Lu Junyi to act in this way. The other leaders were then divided into five detachments, and altogether 22,000 men were placed under their charge. They were given full instructions.
In the village of Zengtou the scouts duly reported the approach of the brigands, the headman of Zengtou sent for Shi Wengong and Su Ding, the two military instructors, for a discussion. Shi Wengong said, "We must dig pits and traps for these brigands." The head of the village ordered all the people to make pits in the different places and cover them over with soil. The village guard was to be stationed near these traps.
Before the Liangshan Marsh brigands drew near the village, Shi Qian was sent in advance as a spy. He found out the whereabouts of these hidden pitfalls, and duly reported the matter to Song Jiang.
Upon hearing this Wu Yong laughed and said, "That is not important." He gave orders for the men to move forward, and they soon reached the outskirts of the village. It was about noon, and a horse galloped towards them with copper bells tinkling, and with a long plume on its tail. Its rider had white clothes and a black hat, and carried a short spear. The brigands wanted to rush forward and fight with him, but Wu Yong forbade this, and ordered encampment there. He also ordered that trenches were to be dug all around their position, and these were to be protected by iron palisades. He instructed the five detachments raise defensive works accordingly around their separate camps.
They encamped there for three days but the soldiers in the village did not show themselves. So Wu Yong instructed Shi Qian to enter the village again as a spy, and to find out what was happening. He was also to locate exactly where the hidden pits were. Shi Qian did this, and within a day had found out all about the hidden pits, and duly reported the details to Wu Yong.
This information was made known to all the leaders, and Wu Yong then ordered that a body of men was to be armed with hoes, and that a hundred carts were to be loaded with grass and reeds, and all these were to be concealed in the center of the camp. This was done, and then Wu Yong issued orders that at 10 A.M. the next day an attack would be made on the village on the west and east sides by foot soldiers only. On the north side, however, other mounted men were to be on parade with flags flying and drums beating, but they were not to move forward.
The following day Shi Wengong heard the noise of bombs and was informed of the approaching of the brigands on all four sides, but he held his men back waiting for the brigands to advance and fall into the hidden pits. But Wu Yong gave orders for his men to attack the soldiers at the South Gate from two sides instead of a frontal attack. This was done, and they not only avoided the hidden pits, but actually drove the soldiers into their own traps.
Shi Wengong upon seeing this brought soldiers to the South Gate to repel the attack, but Wu Yong had given orders for all the carts to advance avoiding the pits, and when near the gates the dry grass and reeds were all set on fire. The flames spread to the gate tower, and so set that on fire, and Gongsun Sheng having control of the wind caused a south wind to blow, which carried the flames into the village.
When Wu Yong saw this desired result he withdrew his men to their camp while Shi Wengong inside the village had the fires put out, and during the following night endeavored to repair the damage done at the South Gate.
The following day a son of the village head Zeng Tu expressed his opinion to Shi Wengong that if they did not capture the chief leader of the brigands they would have no chance in defeating them. He therefore proposed to take some men to fight outside, while Shi Wengong guarded the South Gate. This was agreed to.
When Song Jiang was informed that Zeng Tu had come out to fight he accepted the challenge, and rode forth accompanied by Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. When he saw Zeng Tu he was angry, and pointing at him with his whip called out, "Who will fight with that fellow and revenge the death of our late commander?"
Upon hearing this Lu Fang whipped his horse and galloped forward. The two men fought for about thirty bouts. Guo Sheng then noticed that Lu Fang would be defeated as his opponent proved more skillful. Lu Fang was showing weakness, and was making mistakes. He was acting entirely on the defensive. So Guo Sheng whipped his horse, and galloped forward with his halberd in hand to engage Zeng Tu. Both of the two brigands had leopard tails fastened to the end of their halberds, and as they both lunged at Zeng Tu he, in a flash, took his spear to ward off the halberds.
But the spear happened to catch the two leopard tails and so the three weapons were entangled. All three men pulled in order to free their weapons without success. Hua Rong seeing this realized that Zeng Tu had the advantage so taking his bow he shot an arrow which hit Zeng Tu in the shoulder and sent him off his horse. Lu Fang and Guo Sheng now drove their halberds into Zeng Tu, and killed him immediately.
This fatality was reported to the village and when the village head heard of his son's death he cried. But a younger son, Zeng Sheng, was very angry, and called for his horse, and shouted out that he would avenge the death of his elder brother. Zeng Sheng would not heed his father's objections, and rode out to the South Gate. There he met Shi Wengong who said, "You must not treat these men too lightly, as they are very talented and skillful warriors."
But Zeng Sheng was determined. "They have killed my brother, and I must have revenge." He rode forward accompanied by about ten men on horseback.
Qin Ming was in charge of the brigands' advance post, and he was ready to accept the challenge when he saw that Li Kui with his axes had already gone forth. The Zeng troops recognized Li Kui, and Zeng Sheng ordered his archers to shoot at him. An arrow hit Li Kui on the leg, and he fell down. Zeng Sheng ordered his cavalry to capture Li Kui, but the brigand leaders Qin Ming, Hua Rong, and four others, also moved forward at the same time to rescue him. Zeng Sheng seeing so many opponents ordered his cavalry to retire, and so Li Kui was rescued.
The following day Shi Wengong again was opposed to any offensive, but Zeng Sheng was still keen on having revenge, so at last Shi Wengong put on his uniform and mounted his horse. The brigands were ready for action, and Qin Ming rode forward to fight with Shi Wengong. But after about twenty bouts Qin Ming felt being overcome, and turned his horse to retire, but Shi Wengong was too quick for him, and wounded Qin Ming in his leg, so the latter fell off his horse. Four brigand leaders, however, rushed to his rescue, and took him back to the camp. The defeated brigands retreated about three //where they encamped. Qin Ming was placed in a cart and sent back to Liangshan Marsh. Reinforcements under Guan Sheng and three other leaders were at the same time called for from the mountain stronghold.
Song Jiang burnt incense and prayed to the spirits, and secretly caste lots to divine the further proceeding of the battle. Wu Yong read the indication of the lots and said to him, "Congratulations, as there is no need for fear. This night I am sure the villagers will again press their attack. We must warn our leaders of this, and divide our men into two camps to the east and west of this place. The mounted men must be stationed all around, and wait for orders." This was done accordingly.
That night the moon shone brightly. There was neither wind nor cloud. Shi Wengong spoke to Zeng Sheng, "We have wounded two of the brigand leaders today, and as they have retired after being defeated they will be afraid of us now, so we must press forward our attack." Orders were given for a march that night. Horses were not to carry bells, and all was to be done in silence. About 11 P.M. they started off, but upon reaching the place where the brigands had stopped, they found nobody there. Suspecting some trick, Shi Wengong gave orders for all to return to the village. But they had not gone far when they were attacked from both sides. Fires were set up by the brigands on all sides, and the fighting went on till midnight when Shi Wengong got back to the village and wrote a note to Song Jiang admitting defeat, and offering to surrender. It read as follows:
"Zeng Nong, head of the Zengtou village, sends greetings to Song Jiang, commander of the army. Previously my son seized your horses, and offended you by his ignorance. When Chao Gai came here we ought to have surrendered to him. Unfortunately one of our soldiers sent a stray shot which wounded Chao Gai, and we recognize the seriousness of that offense, and can offer no excuse for same. Allowance may however be made of the fact that it was done without orders. My two sons have been killed, and I plead with you for peace. If you will withdraw your men I will return to you all the horses. I will also send you money, for distribution among your men. By peace we shall avoid further bloodshed. I write this with all due respects, and hope for your kind consideration."
When Song Jiang read this letter he seemed to he angry and tore it into pieces. He said to Wu Yong, "How can we settle things in this way when they have killed our leader? We must wipe them out."
The messenger heard this, and trembled on the ground in fear.
Wu Yong exhorted Song Jiang, "I think you may be wrong. In this fight both sides were merely in a display of temper. Now that they desire peace we should be in the wrong if we refuse to consider their proposal." After further discussion he wrote at once a reply, and handed it to the messenger with ten taels of silver.
The messenger duly returned, and handed the reply to Shi Wengong and Zeng Nong who read it as follows:
"Song Jiang, commander at Liangshan Marsh, replies to Zeng Nong, head of the Zengtou. It has always been a fact that a country without confidence among the people must become extinct in the end; without propriety soon become of no account. Unjust gains must be robbed, Generals without bravery must soon be defeated. These are definite laws. Liangshan Marsh and your village had no enmity before, and we both guarded our own domains respectively. But recently you did a wicked thing, and so we are now enemies. If, however, you wish to have peace then you must return to us the horses you stole, and also hand over to us Yu Baosi who stole the horses. You must also give money to our men. If you are sincere you must not treat lightly the proper procedure."
When they read this both men were surprised. But the following day they sent a messenger to talk with Song Jiang that if Yu Baosi was handed over to the brigands they must also hand over a man in exchange.
When Song Jiang received this message he agreed, and sent not one man, but five of his leaders to be exchanged for Yu Baosi. Shi Qian and Li Kui were two of the five, and before they left Wu Yong gave Shi Qian secret instructions what to do in case of treachery.
When they reached the village they were taken before Zeng Nong and Shi Qian said to him that they had come to arrange peace. But Shi Wengong replied, "As Wu Yong has sent you five men to arrange peace I think he must have some trick."
Li Kui was very angry at this, and seized hold of Shi Wengong to fight, but Zeng Nong interposed.
Shi Qian also spoke, "This man, Li Kui, is very rough but he is a personal friend of Song Jiang. You need not suspect him as Song Jiang specially sent him here."
Zeng Nong wanted peace, and would not listen to Shi Wengong's remarks. He ordered a meal for the five men from the brigands and provided them a room in the Hahua Monastery, and placed a guard of 500 soldiers to look after them.
Zeng Sheng and Yu Baosi were duly dispatched to discuss peace with Song Jiang. They took with them all the stolen horses, and also a cartload of silver and embroidered cloth. When Song Jiang saw the horses he noticed that the splendid white race horse presented to Liangshan Marsh by Duan Jingzhu was not among them and therefore asked why it had not been returned also.
"That horse is now ridden by Shi Wengong," replied Zeng Sheng.
"Then you quickly write a letter at once demanding the immediate return of that horse," said Song Jiang.
Zeng Sheng did this, and sent the letter off by a messenger. When Shi Wengong read the letter he spoke to the messenger, "I will not return the horse, but am quite willing to send another horse instead of it."
The messenger went back with this message, but was soon back again with the word that the identical horse must be returned. Shi Wengong then spoke, "As Song Jiang insists upon the horse being returned, I will return it, but only on the condition that he first withdraws his men from the environs of our village."
When this message was delivered to Song Jiang he consulted Wu Yong, and while they were talking a scout arrived, and reported that Imperial troops were approaching by two roads from Qingzhou and Lingzhou. Song Jiang said, "If Shi Wengong gets to know this he will probably change his mind, so we must keep the matter secret." He then divided his men into two bodies, and gave orders that they were to march along the two roads to oppose the coming troops on the way. He then summoned Yu Baosi and said, "We have a very important commission for you to carry through, and if you succeed I will promote you to a position as leader at Liangshan Marsh. I will take a solemn oath by this arrow that I will bear no more grudge to your taking my horse. But if you do not agree I shall recommence the attack on Zengtou."
Yu Baosi agreed to do what he was requested. Wu Yong then said to him: "You must enter the village quietly as though you have secretly left us, and tell Shi Wengong that you think we do not really desire peace, but that Song Jiang will try to get back the white race horse by some deception. That as soon as he gets the horse, his attitude towards the village will change. That as troops are approaching here from Qingzhou and Lingzhou, the brigands are in great terror and the villagers may now embrace the opportunity to attack Song Jiang."

Yu Baosi left with these orders, and duly came back to Zengtou. When Shi Wengong heard the news he decided to recommence his attack on the brigands. Zeng Nong however objected to a renewed attack as it would endanger the life of his son Zeng Sheng who was then staying with the brigands. But Shi Wengong said that when they had seized the brigands' camp Zeng Sheng would be saved. Shi Wengong then gave orders for all the men to be ready for an attack that very night.
Yu Baosi knowing all this went secretly to the Fahua Monastery, and told Shi Qian and the other leaders there what had been arranged.
In the brigands camp Song Jiang asked Wu Yong whether their plan would be carried out.
"If he does not return," said Wu Yong, "then we can assume that Shi Wengong suspects us. We may expect them to attack us this night, but we will not oppose them, but retreat and lay in ambush on both sides of their road. At the same time we may dispatch our men to their village while it is depleted of soldiers, and so we can establish ourselves there. That plan is called, 'Drawing the wild dog from its hole.' It generally succeeds."
That night Shi Wengong got his men together, and marched out of the village. There was little moonlight. When they reached the brigands' camp they were surprised to find the gate open and the place quite deserted. Shi Wengong now suspected a plot and ordered a retreat. But they had not gone far when they heard bombs being fired in their village, and also heard the large bell in the Fahua Monastery booming. From the noise it seemed that the brigands had got into the village.
In the Fahua Monastery, Li Kui and the other three leaders were armed, and rushing out with swords in their hands. When the headman, Zeng Nong, heard that the brigands had got into the village he committed suicide by hanging himself. His son, Zeng Mi, was killed in resisting the brigands on the west side of the village. Another son, Zeng Kii, was also killed in the confused fighting on the east side. Su Ding was killed near the North Gate where he found himself opposed by Lu Da and three other leaders. Many of the villagers met their death by falling into the traps while trying to escape from the village.
Shi Wengong being mounted on the white race horse reached the village before any of his soldiers, but seeing the confused mass of fighting in the streets he immediately left by the West Gate. There was a great deal of mist that night, and in the dark and confusion he was soon uncertain where he actually was. He had gone about two //when he heard a gong sounded in a forest, and soon he saw a body of about five hundred men. In front of them was their leader armed with a cudgel. He ran up to Shi Wengong and struck his horse with the cudgel. But the horse leapt over his head and carried Shi Wengong off. The mist here however was extremely thick, and it was blown about by a very strong cold wind. He thought he saw the spirit of Chao Gai everywhere in the mist, so he turned his horse and went back by the same road. He soon met Yan Qing, the servant of Lu Junyi. He then met Lu Junyi himself who called out. "Thief! Where are you going?" So saying he wounded Shi Wengong in the leg with his sword. The latter fell off his horse, was immediately seized, bound with ropes, and taken back to Zengtou as a prisoner. The coveted horse had also been captured and brought to the village.
Song Jiang was excited to get the horse again. He gave orders that every member of the Zeng family must be executed, including Zeng Sheng who was a prisoner. The whole village was then looted, all valuables and rice being loaded on carts, and transported to Liangshan Marsh.
The troops from Qingzhou and Lingzhou were attacked and defeated, and then all the brigands returned to Liangshan Marsh. In the Loyalty and Justice Hall all the leaders assembled, dressed in mourning, and held a memorial service to the spirit of Chao Gai. A prayer was written addressed to Chao Gai, and then burnt as a sacrifice. Shi Wengong was executed, and his heart was also offered as a sacrifice.
After this Song Jiang raised the question for discussion as to who should now be the commander-in-chief at Liangshan Marsh.
"You should remain in that position," said Wu Yong, "and Lu Junyi should be your assistant. All the other leaders can remain as before."
"But we must not forget the will of Chao Gai," said Song Jiang. "He said that whoever should capture Shi Wengong should be our commander-in-chief, no matter who he was. As Lu Junyi captured that thief and avenged the injury to Chao Gai, he must be our head without any question."
"My virtue is insignificant, and my ability is meager, so how dare I accept the position? Even if I occupy the lowest position my abilities would hardly be enough for that work," said Lu Junyi.
"It is not for the sake of modesty that I decline the honor," said Song Jiang, "but because Lu Junyi is superior to me in three things. First, I am of smaller stature and have a sallow complexion, while he has a majestic bearing, and nobody can be compared to him. Secondly, I was once only a petty official and became your head only through the generosity and kindness of the brothers here; while he was a very wealthy and important person and was famous for his heroism. Thirdly, I had no influence in pacifying the country and am without military knowledge. I could not even capture a chicken. In my body there is not even an inch of merit, while he has the power to oppose ten thousand men, and is very well versed in both ancient and modern affairs. Having these abilities he is very suitable for the job. If the Emperor wants us to return, and help him to achieve meritorious deeds then we shall he honored, and shall be able to gain promotion in official rank. These are my firm convictions, and I hope that you will raise no objections."
Lu Junyi kowtowed, and said, "Your talk is useless, because even if you threaten to kill me I cannot accept the position."
"We all recognized you, brother, as our leader," said Wu Yong, "with Lu Junyi as your assistant. If you do not accept this, I am afraid that our men will regard you as being cold-hearted." So saying he glanced round inviting the approval of all the others.
Li Kui instantly called out, "I risked my life at Jiangzhou in your service and we all admitted you as our commander. You issued all the orders, so it is now useless for you to be hypocritical as to abdicate your post in another's favor. Why do you keep trying to give up the damned command? If there is any change I shall create a disturbance, so that everybody has to leave."
Wu Song had noticed Wu Yong appealing for support, so he now stood up and said, "We have many ex-military officers, and I am sure they all wish you to remain as our commander-in-chief. We are unwilling to have any other man in that position."
Liu Tang then spoke, "When we first came here, there were only seven brothers, and we unanimously elected you as our chief. Why do you now think of another man for that position?"
Lu Da spoke in a loud voice, "If you, brother, still stand on politeness we must disband."
"You need not say anything else," said Song Jiang; "I have an alternative. We must discover the Will of Heaven in this matter, and follow that."
"What is your own exalted view?" asked Wu Yong. "Please tell us."
"There're two things to be done," said Song Jiang.

Liangshan Marsh gains 2 more heroes.
Dongping Prefecture becomes scene of remorse.

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## The Tattooed 9 Dragons Shi Jin Is Trapped & apprehended in Dongping Prefecture; Song Jiang Chivalrously Releases & treats General Twin Spears Dong Ping with generosity

"We're short of money and grain," Song Jiang said to the assembled chieftains, "but to the east of here are two prefectural towns where they have both. One is Dongping, the other is Dongchang. While we've never disturbed their people, when we asked them to lend us some grain, they flatly refused. I'm going to have the names of these towns written on separate slips of paper. Lu Junyi and I will each draw one. Whoever first conquers his town will become the ruler of Liangshan Marsh. Agreed?"
"Good," said Wu Yong. "We'll abide by Heaven's will."
"Don't talk like that," said Lu. "Big Brother must remain as leader. Otherwise I won't accept the mission."
But Lu was over-ruled. Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan wrote out the slips. Prayers were offered and incense burned. Then the drawing was made. Song Jiang picked Dongping, Lu got Dongchang. All of the chieftains were satisfied.
That day a feast was laid. While they were drinking wine, Song Jiang announced the disposition of the forces to be used in the attacks. His own command would consist of twenty-five chieftains including himself. They would lead an army of ten thousand infantry and cavalry. The three Ruan brothers—Second, Fifth and Seventh—would support them with a naval flotilla.
Under Lu Junyi would be another twenty-four chieftains. They too would command an army of combined infantry and cavalry numbering ten thousand, and would be supported by a naval flotilla under Li Jun, Tong Wei and Tong Meng.
The other chieftains, and those convalescing from wounds, would remain to guard the fortress. The dispositions having been made, the two armies set forth against the prefectural towns.
It was the first day of the third lunar month. The days were warm, the wind mild, the grass green, the turf soft—perfect conditions for battle.
We'll speak first of Song Jiang, as he marched on Dongping, Forty //from the town, he and his forces came to a village called Anshan, and there made camp.
"Cheng Wanli the governor of Dongping and his district military commander are both natives of Shangdang County, east of the river. The commander's name is Dong Ping. Because he's skilled with a pair of spears, he's known to everyone as General Two Spears. He has the courage of ten thousand," said Song Jiang.
"Although we're going to attack his town, we should treat him courteously. I want to dispatch two men with a written declaration of war. I shall urge him to surrender and avoid a battle. If he refuses, no one will be able to blame us for the carnage. Who dares to deliver my message?"
A man stepped forward. He was Yu Baosi. "I know Dong Ping by sight," he said. "I'll be glad to deliver the declaration."
Another man emerged from the ranks of the chieftains. His name was Wang Dingliu. "I haven't proven my mettle to the stronghold yet," he said, "and so I'd like to go with him on this mission."
Song Jiang was very pleased. He wrote his letter and gave it to the two volunteers. It stated only a request for grain.
When Governor Cheng of Dongping heard that an army under Song Jiang was camped in Anshan, he summoned his district commander, General Two Spears to discuss the military situation. Just as they had sat down, the gate-keeper entered and said: "Messengers from Song Jiang are here with a declaration of war."
Cheng directed that they be allowed in. Yu and Wang entered and presented the letter. Cheng read it. He turned to the general.
"They're demanding money and grain. What shall we do?"
The general was furious. He shouted for the emissaries to be taken out and decapitated. Cheng intervened.
"No! Since ancient times messengers between hostile states have never been killed. It would be highly improper. Let them each be beaten twenty strokes and sent back. We'll see what Song Jiang does next."
But the general was still fuming. He had the two bound and beaten till their skin split and their flesh burst asunder, and then had them driven from the town.
They returned to the camp, weeping. "That lout of a general has no sense of fitness," they complained. "He holds our fortress in contempt."
Anger filled Song Jiang's breast. He longed to level the town immediately. He instructed Yu and Wang to return to the stronghold and rest.
Nine Dragons Shi Jin rose and said: "I used to live in Dongping and was sweet on a girl in a pleasure house there. Her name is Li Shuilan. We were having a really warm affair. If I take some gold and silver and slip into town, I can stay in her house. I'll set a time, Big Brother, and you can attack. As soon as General Two Spears goes out to fight, I'll climb up into the Drum Tower and start a fire. Operating from within and without, we'll win a big victory."
"Excellent," cried Song Jiang.
Shi Jin put some gold and silver in a bundle, concealed a weapon on his person, and bid a respectful farewell.
"I won't move my troops, brother, until you pick an appropriate moment," Song Jiang informed him.
Nine Dragons entered the town and went directly to the home of Li Shuilan in the western pleasure house district. The pander of the establishment was startled to see him. He led Shi Jin inside and called the girl. Shuilan escorted Shi Jin upstairs and they sat down.
"I haven't seen so much as your shadow in ages. How come?" she queried. "I hear you're a big chieftain in Liangshan Marsh now. There's a notice out for your arrest. The last couple of days the streets have been buzzing with talk that Song Jiang is going to raid the town for grain. What are you doing here, anyway?"
"The truth is I am a chieftain on Mount Liangshan, but I haven't distinguished myself yet. Big Brother plans to attack the town for grain, all right. I told him about your place and he sent me here to spy. I've brought you some gold and silver. You're not to breathe a word. After this is over, I'll take you and your family up the mountain, and we'll be happy."
Shuilan glibly promised to do everything he asked. She accepted the money and served him food and drink. But later she discussed it with the bawd who was the pander's wife.
"When he was a regular caller, he was a good person," the girl said. "His coming here didn't matter. But now he's gone bad. If there's trouble, it won't be any joke for us."
"It's dangerous to provoke those bold fellows of Song Jiang in Liangshan Marsh," the pander cautioned. "They can take any town they like. When they break in here, they'll wreck everything. They'll go hard on us if we don't keep our word."
"Old idiot," his wife the bawd swore. "You're just ignorant! If there's a wasp in your bosom, pluck it out, as the old saying goes. Informants are never prosecuted—that's the universal rule. Go to the district court, quick, and inform on Shi Jin. Let them take him. Then, whatever happens, we won't be involved."
"He's brought us a lot of money," the pander said hesitantly. "What's the point of it if we don't do anything for him?"
"Animal," his wife exclaimed. "Your words are just farts! We bawds have harmed thousands! What's one more? If you don't inform on him I'll go down there myself and cry for justice—against you, as well!"
"Control yourself," urged the pander. "Tell Shuilan to hang on to him. We don't want to stir the grass and alarm the snake. He mustn't get away. I'll report to the police first, and let them nab him. Then I'll inform the court."
Shuilan went back upstairs. Shi Jin was struck by her alternating flushes and pallor.
"Is anything wrong? Why do you look so frightened?"
"I missed my step on the stairs and nearly fell. My heart's all aflutter."
Suddenly they heard footsteps running up the stairs and shouts outside the window. Dozens of policemen burst into the room. They hustled Shi Jin like a bound lion down the stairs, and rushed him to the district court of Dongping.
"You impudent scoundrel," shouted the governor. "How dare you come here to spy? If Li Shuilan's protector hadn't informed, you might have caused severe damage to our citizenry? Tell us the whole story, quickly! What did Song Jiang send you to find out?"
Shi Jin didn't speak.
"Rogues like that never talk unless you clout them," growled the general.
"Police and jailors, beat the villain," shouted Governor Cheng.
Shi Jin's captors spewed cold water on him, then struck him a hundred blows with big rods on each leg. He endured it, and didn't say a word.
"Put a heavy cangue on the lout and put him in the cell for the condemned," said General Two Spears. "When we catch Song Jiang we'll deliver them both to the Eastern Capital for punishment!"
To return to Song Jiang. After Shi Jin left, he wrote a letter to Wu Yong saying that Shi Jin had gone to the home of Li Shuilan the doxy to spy. The military advisor was shocked. He hastily conferred with Lu Junyi and hurried to Song Jiang that same night.
"Who told Shi Jin to go?" he demanded.
"It was his own idea. He said that the girl had been his mistress, that they were very close."
"You've made a mistake, brother. If I were here, I never would have agreed. Courtesans become intimate quickly, but they like new things and tire of the old. They've harmed countless talented men. They're as unstable as water. Even if she felt some genuine affection for him, she'd have a hard time going against her procuress. Shi Jin is sure to have come to grief."
Song Jiang asked what they could do about it. Wu Yong summoned Gu Dasao and gave her instructions.
"We must trouble you to go into Dongping. Disguise yourself as a poor beggar woman and slip into town. If anything's stirring, report back at once. If Shi Jin is in prison, approach one of the jailors and say you want to bring him some food, for the sake of past kindness. After you get inside, tell Shi Jin secretly. 'We're breaking into town the last day of the month around dusk. During the excitement, find a way to get yourself free.' The night of the last day of the month, you, Gu Dasao, start a fire as a signal. That's when we'll launch our raid."
Wu Yong turned to Song Jiang. "First, you must attack the county town of Wenshang, brother. The people are bound to flee to Dongping. Gu Dasao can mingle with the refugees and go in with them. No one will recognize her."
The military advisor mounted his horse and returned to Dongchang.
Song Jiang mustered five hundred men and sent them against Wenshang, under Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. Sure enough, the residents, supporting the old and carrying the young, scurried to Dongping to escape the battle. The town was thrown into confusion.
Gu Dasao, her hair dishevelled, her clothes in tatters, mingled with the crowds and entered the town. She begged along the streets until she came to the prefectural government compound. Her queries revealed that Shi Jin was indeed in prison.
The next day, carrying a jug of rice, she walked back and forth in front of the prison, waiting. Finally, an elderly policeman came out. She dropped to her knees and kowtowed, her tears falling like rain.
"What are you crying about, woman?"
"My former master Shi Jin is in there. It's been ten years since he left us. I heard only that he was travelling around as a merchant. I can't imagine what he's doing in jail. Nobody's sending him anything to eat, so I want to bring him this mouthful of food I've begged. Have pity, brother. Take me in. You'll be performing a greater blessing than building a seven-story pagoda."
"He's a bandit from Liangshan Marsh, and he's committed a capital offense. No one would dare to take you in there."
"He must accept what he deserves, even if it's death by slow slicing. But have pity on an old woman who only wants to deliver a mouthful of food for the sake of kindness in the past." Again Gu Dasao wept.
The old policeman thought to himself: "If it were a man, I couldn't do it. But what harm is there in a woman?" He led Gu Dasao into the prison where she found Shi Jin wearing a heavy cangue on his neck, and iron chains around his waist.
Nine Dragons was amazed to see her, but he remained silent. Gu Dasao pretended to weep and sob as she fed him from the jug. Jailors hastened towards them.
"That's a condemned evil-doer," they shouted. "Not even the wind gets in here. Who let you bring him food? Get out, quick, and save yourself a beating!"
There were too many people around. She couldn't say much, but only had time to whisper: "We're breaking into the town the last night of the month. Fight to free yourself."
Before Shi Jin could ask her what time of the night, the jailors drove her with blows out of the prison door. He remembered only "last night of the month."
It happened that the third lunar month had thirty days that year, instead the usual twenty-nine. But when Shi Jin asked one of the jailors, "What's the date?" the man remembered wrongly and said: "The last day of the month. I must buy some spirit paper to burn for the wandering souls."
Shi Jin could scarcely wait. Near evening, he got one of the keepers, who was half drunk, to take him to the latrine.
"Who's that behind you?" Shi Jin suddenly exclaimed.
As the man turned, Shi Jin wrenched open the cangue and struck him on the forehead with a corner of it, knocking him to the ground. With a brick Shi Jin smashed the wooden fetters on his feet. Falcon eyes glaring, he charged into the central pavilion, where several policemen were sodden with drink. He killed a few, the others fled.
Nine Dragons opened the prison gate, in anticipation of rescue from the outside. He released all the inmates, about fifty or sixty men. They came cheering out of their cells.

When the situation was reported to Governor Cheng, his face turned an earthen hue. Hastily, he sent for his district commander.
"There must be an enemy spy in town," General Two Spears averred. "Dispatch guards at once to surround the scoundrel! I'll seize this opportunity to lead troops out and capture Song Jiang. Defend the town well. Excellency. Send a dozen men to hold the prison gate. Let no one escape!"
The general mounted, mustered his troops and set forth. Cheng formed a force of keepers and guards, armed with spears and staves, and dispatched them to prison gate, where they stood, shouting. While Shi Jin didn't dare to come out, neither did they have the courage to go in. Gu Dasao could only bemoan the miscarriage of the plan.
General Two Spears, sallying out with his infantry and cavalry at the fourth watch, raced murderously towards Song Jiang's camp. A scout reported their approach.
"Gu Dasao must have run into trouble," Song Jiang said. "Now the foe is attacking. We'll give them a hot welcome!" He ordered his army to get ready.
By dawn the contending hosts were deployed in battle positions. General Two Spears Dong Ping rode forward.
Clever and ingenious, he was a man of considerable accomplishments. There were few skills he hadn't mastered, including the playing of string instrument and bamboo flutes. Throughout Shandong and Hebei he was famed as the dashing General Two Spears.
He cut a fine figure, and Song Jiang was filled with admiration. Attached to the General's arrow quiver was a pennant reading: *Heroic General Two Spears, noble lord of ten thousand families*. Song Jiang ordered Han Tao to joust with him.
Han Tao's weapon was a long lance. Grasping it firmly, he cantered towards Dong Ping. The General wielded his two spears with dazzling artistry. Han Tao was unable to cope.
Song Jiang next ordered Xu Ning the Metal Lancer into battle with his hooked weapon to replace Han Tao. Xu Ning at once galloped forward and locked Dong Ping in fierce combat. They fought desperately in a cloud of dust for over fifty rounds, with neither emerging the victor.
It was lasting too long. Song Jiang was afraid Xu Ning would lose. He had the trumpeter sound retreat, and Xu Ning turned his steed and rode back. General Two Spears closely pursued him right into the midst of the outlaws' position. Song Jiang waved his whip, and from all sides his troops closed in.
He rode to the top of a bluff and watched Dong Ping, surrounded by the outlaws. When the General headed east, Song pointed east with his pennant and the troops moved east and cut him off. When he tried to go west, Song pointed west with his pennant, and the troops shifted west and blocked him again.
Dashing first one way, then another, General Two Spears fought until late afternoon, when he finally broke through. Song Jiang did not give chase.
It was clear by then to Dong Ping that he could not wrest victory. He withdrew his forces into the town that same evening. Song Jiang moved his army up during the night and surrounded the walls. Inside the town Gu Dasao dared not light a signal fire and Shi Jin was unable to come out. Both were stalemated.

Now, Governor Cheng had a daughter of exceptional beauty, and Dong Ping, who was unmarried, had frequently sent intermediaries to plead his suit. But Cheng would not consent. As a result, there was some hostility between the two men, though they spoke to each other pleasantly enough. The morning after Dong returned to the town with his soldiers, he again sent a spokesman to press for the girl's hand.
"I'm a civil and he's a military official. Such a marriage would be ideal," said Cheng. "But I'd be a laughing stock if I consented now, with bandits at our gates and the situation so dangerous. Let's wait until we've driven them off and the safety of town preserved. It won't be too late then to talk about marriage."
The spokesman reported Cheng's reply. "Well put," said Dong, but in his heart he was very annoyed. He wasn't at all sure Cheng would agree later on.
Song Jiang, after arriving during the night, was intensifying his attack. The governor requested Dong Ping to go out and fight. Angrily, General Two Spears donned his armor and mounted. With three armies he marched from the town.
Beneath an arch of pennants on the field of battle, Song Jiang shouted: "How dare you, a lone general, oppose me? I've a hundred thousand men under me and thousands of able commanders, all united in carrying out Heaven's will to succor the needy and rescue the endangered! Better surrender now and avoid being killed!"
"Little clerk with the criminal tattoo on his cheek, death-deserving rogue," Dong fumed, "you're raving mad!"
Spears in hand, he galloped towards Song Jiang. From the left of his target Lin Chong and, from the right Hua Rong, rode out to meet him, each of them armed. They fought several rounds, then the two chieftains withdrew, while the outlaw army beat a confused retreat, as if already vanquished. Dong clapped his horse and courageously pursued.
Song Jiang pulled back to the border of Shouchun County, with General Two Spears closely following. When they were about a dozen //from the county seat, they came to a village. The post road running through its center was lined by thatched huts. Dong, racing after them on his horse, didn't know it was a trap. Out of healthy respect for Dong's power as a warrior, the night before Song had placed Stumpy Tiger Wang, Ten Feet of Steel, Zhang Qing, Sun the Witch and over a hundred men in ambush in the huts. They had laid ropes across the road and covered them with earth. At the sound of a gong, they were to raise and pull them taut, trip the steed, and catch the general.
When Dong reached the stretch of road, he heard Kong Ming and Kong Liang shout behind him: "Don't harm our ruler!" A gong crashed in front of the huts, the doors flew open, and ropes sprang up athward the road. As Dong's horse turned, more ropes rose behind it. Down went the animal and its rider. From the left Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel leaped out, from the right Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch. Together they seized Dong and stripped him of his helmet, armor and spears, and removed his horse. The two women generals bound his hands behind him and, each bearing swords, led him under guard to meet Song Jiang.
Song Jiang, who had gone past the thatched huts, reined in beneath a leafy poplar and watched the two women chieftains approaching with their prisoner.
"I instructed you to invite General Dong Ping here," he shouted. "Who told you to tie him!"
The 2 murmured apologies and withdrew as Song Jiang hastily dismounted and removed Dong's bonds. He took off his own armor and robe and gave them to the general to wear, prostrated himself and kowtowed. Dong hurriedly returned the courtesy.
"If you don't scorn us as too lowly, General," said Song Jiang, "please be the ruler of our mountain stronghold."
"I am your prisoner. Even death would be too light a punishment. If you are willing to spare me, I will consider myself infinitely fortunate!"
"Recently, we've run short of grain, and so we requested Dongping Prefecture to lend us some. We had nothing else in mind."
"That lout Cheng was once just a tutor in the house of Lord Tong Guan. Now he uses his high position to oppress the populace. If you'll allow me, brother, I'll fool them into opening the gates. You can charge in and take their money and grain as my thanks for your kindness."
Song Jiang was delighted. He ordered that Dong's possessions be returned. General Two Spears put on his armor and mounted. He rode back to Dongping Town, followed by the outlaw army, its banners and pennants rolled.
"You, on the walls," shouted Dong. "Open the gates!"
The soldiers above the gates brought torches and, in their light, recognized the district commander. They opened the big gates and lowered the drawbridge. Dong rode over and smashed the iron lock. Song Jiang and his army surged into the town.
They went directly to the prefectural government compound. An order was quickly transmitted that none of the ordinary people were to be killed, or their homes burned. Dong burst into Cheng's residency, slaughtered the governor and his entire household and took the daughter. At Song Jiang's direction, the prison was opened and Shi Jin rescued.
Song Jiang then looted the treasury of its gold and silver and valuables, and had grain from the government granary loaded onto carts, with instructions that it be delivered to the Shore of Golden Sands for the three Ruan brothers to take up the mountain.
Shi Jin led a party to the home of Li Shuilan in the western pleasure section. He hacked her, her pander, and bawd to pieces.
Song Jiang distributed Cheng's private possessions among the populace and put up proclamations that read: "We've executed the tyrannical governor. Good citizens go about your business in peace."
He then withdrew his army. Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat hurried towards the chieftains when they reached the town of Anshan. He told of a battle in the district of Dongchang. Song Jiang frowned, and his eyes grew large with anger. "Brothers," he cried, "we won't return to the mountain. Come with me!" Truly, the heroes of the Marsh in powerful assault marched again on Dongchang, a town of lavish and elegant riches.

Song Jiang, remember, had not yet carried out Chao Gai's dying wish. He was keen to resign the leadership to the Unicorn, but the others would not let him. What Song Jiang now said was this: "We are getting short of cash and provisions. There are two districts to the east of Mount Liang that are well stocked: Dongping and Dongchang. We have never bothered the people there before, but if we ask them for provisions, they will certainly refuse. Let us now draw lots. The Unicorn and I will each draw one of the cities, and whoever captures his city first shall be the leader on Mount Liang. How about that?"
The Professor said: "So be it. Let fate decide."
The Unicorn said: "No, I don't like it. I will only accept the mission if our friend remains leader."
But this time the Unicorn's wishes were ignored. Sterling was asked to write down the two city names and after burning incense and praying they each chose one. Song Jiang drew Dong-ping and the Unicorn drew Dongchang. No one said anything more.
There was a banquet that day, and while they were drinking Song Jiang picked his troops: Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, the Red-Haired Devil, the Tattooed Dragon, Spearsman, the Dandy, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, Victorious, the Supremo, the Kong brothers, Snake, Scorpion, Short-Arse, Steelbright, the Gardener, Sister Sun the Ogress, Blackface, Auntie Gu, the Guv, Perilous, Fleetfoot and Yellow Dog, twenty-five leaders in all, together with ten thousand cavalry and infantry; they would be supported by three leaders of the water-borne troops, the three Ruan brothers, with boats and crews.
In the Unicorn's force were the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Scimitar, Twin Rods, Whiskers, Sergeant Lei, Hasty, the Blue-Faced Beast, the Water and Fire Generals, the Ugly Son-in-Law, Hound, the Prodigy, Panther, Golden Wings, Thunderer, the Flautist, Redeye, the Young Master, Demon King, the Eight-Armed Ogre, Winged Ghost, the Flea and the Daytime Rat, a total of twenty-five leaders, together with ten thousand infantry and cavalry; also supported by three water-borne leaders, the White-Water Dragon and the two Tong brothers, Cave Dragon and River Rider, with their boats and crews. The rest of the leaders, including the wounded, were to guard the fort.
The arrangements made, they all set off down the mountain as ordained, Song Jiang and his group to attack Dongping, the Unicorn and his group to attack Dongchang. It was early spring and the weather warm with a light breeze, the grass green and the ground soft: ideal conditions for a campaign.
Song Jiang led his troops on towards Dongping and when they were just a dozen miles away, at a place called Anshan they made camp. Song Jiang said: "The Dongping Magistrate, Cheng Wanli and his military commander come from the same town. This commander is called Dong Ping and because he is an expert at fighting with two spears they call him Twin Spears. He is an extremely brave man. Although we plan to attack his city, he deserves to be treated with respect. We should send them both a written declaration. If they are willing to surrender, there will be no need to send in troops. If they won't listen to us and there is a massacre, no one can blame us. Who will deliver the letter for me?"
Someone now stepped forward, someone immensely tall and broad. The poem tells who it was:

*He's keener on honour than treasure,*
*He's built like a door god you'd say;*
*His shoulders are broad beyond measure,*
*This Lord of the Perilous Way.*

Perilous, for it was he, said: "I know Dongping. I'd like to deliver the letter."
Then another stepped forward, a gangling individual: "I'll go with him," he said. Who was this? Again, a poem tells us:

*A grasshopper's pointy-head and shiny eyes,*
*Stalking on knobbly legs like a fishing egret's;*
*When there's travelling to do he simply flies;*
*Fleet-foot he is, born on the banks of the Yangtze.*

The two of them now said: "We haven't done any important work yet for the mountain stronghold. Now we really want to go and give it a try."
Song Jiang was delighted and composed the letter immediately for Perilous and Fleetfoot to take. In the letter he explained all about their need for provisions.
Now when the Dongping Magistrate heard that Song Jiang had raised an army and was camped at Anshan he summoned the garrison commander, Twin Spears Dong Ping, to discuss the military crisis. Whilst this meeting was in progress the doorman came and announced: "Song Jiang has sent messengers with a letter."
The Magistrate ordered them to be brought in. Perilous and Fleetfoot presented the letter. The Magistrate read it and said to Twin Spears: "They want cash and provisions from us. What do you think we should do about it?"
Twin Spears was indignant. He advised that the request be rejected and the messengers executed. The Magistrate said: "We can't do that. It has always been the custom in war that you do not execute emissaries. It's against all the rules. We'll just give them twenty strokes of the cane and send them back. Then we'll wait and see what they do." But Twin Spears was still angry. He ordered the two messengers to be trussed up and beaten till they bled and then threw them out. When they returned to the camp they complained bitterly to Song Jiang: "That swine Twin Spears was determined to show us all how he despised us!"
When Song Jiang saw they had been beaten, anger choked him. He wanted to raze the city to the ground. But first he had Perilous and Fleetfoot placed on a cart and carried back to the mountain to recuperate.
Then the Tattooed Dragon stepped forward and said: "I lived in Dongping once. In those days I had a liaison with a certain lady from the entertainment world. She was called Li Ruilan — Jade Li. We were very intimate. Suppose now I take a quantity of gold and silver, slip into the city secretly and take up residence with her. We can fix a day for you to launch an attack. As soon as the Dongping forces march out to fight, I will climb up into the drum tower and start a fire. By coordinating the attack from within and without, we can achieve our objective."
"That's an excellent plan," said Song Jiang.
So the Tattooed Dragon got together the cash and put it in his bundle, concealed a weapon about his person, bade farewell and set off. "I won't make a move until you're ready," Song Jiang told him.
The Tattooed Dragon entered the city and made his way to Jade Li's residence in the entertainment district of the western quarter. When he saw who it was, the man who came to the door had quite a shock. He asked Tattooed Dragon inside and called the girl. Jade Li's beauty was exceptional and is described in a poem:

*She has a thousand charms, this peerless lass,*
*Fragrance of pear blossom when clouds pass,*
*Like birdsong-awakened dreams of heaven*
*Or plum blossom with its dawn-fresh vision.*

She led him upstairs and made him sit down while she questioned him: "How is it we haven't see you for ages? I heard you had become a robber chief in the marshes of Mount Liang, there's a police notice out for your capture. The streets have been buzzing lately with the news that Song Jiang wants to attack the city to get provisions. What are you doing here?"
"Well, I'll be frank with you," said the Tattooed Dragon. "I am one of the leaders on Mount Liang now, though I haven't done much to help them yet. Our Leader wants to get provisions here. I told him all about your house. I've come to do some spying. I've got a bagful of gold and silver, all for you. Please don't give me away. When the business is finished I'll take you and your family to the mountain. You'll have a great time there."
Jade babbled her consent and took the money. She arranged wine and food for him, and then went to discuss the matter with the madam. "When he used to come here before, he was a respectable person, I didn't mind having him here. But now he's become a criminal. If this gets out it will be no joke."
Her man said: "That Song Jiang and his company aren't the kind to mess with. If they do attack the city, it's bound to fall. If we grass on them, do you think they won't settle the score when they enter the city?
The bawd scolded him: "You old idiot! What do you know about the way things work? Don't you know the saying. 'When a bee gets under your shirt, you'd best take it off'? If you inform the authorities you'll avoid prosecution, it's a universal rule. Quickly, go to the government office and report him, get them to take him away. We don't want to be involved."
"But he's brought us a lot of money," the man objected. "Why should he have done that, if we aren't prepared to take a bit of a risk for him?"
"You old fool," she said. "I don't give a fart for what you say. Women in the business like us have trapped thousands of people, he certainly won't be the first. If you won't go and report him, I shall go to the government office myself and lodge a complaint. And I'll say you're in it too!"
"All right, keep your hair on," the man said. "Just make sure the girl keeps hold of him. No point in beating the grass and scaring the snake — so don't let him get away! Once I've told the police and got them to come and arrest him, we can make out the accusation."
When the girl came upstairs the Tattooed Dragon noticed she had coloured. "Is there some problem?" he asked. "You look so frightened."
"I made a false step when I was coming up the stairs just now and nearly fell," she said. "It gave me quite a turn."
The Tattooed Dragon may have been a hero, but she was easily able to deceive him. He suspected nothing. There is a poem which says:

*Houses of pleasure? No, cradles of guile;*
*The girl's just a thing at the bawd's beck and call.*
*Plotting behind your back like a demon.*
*You think you can buy their love? — dream on!*

Not more than a couple of hours later, whilst Jade was engaging in some rather risqué talk, sounds were heard on the stair as of someone dashing up and a lot of shouting outside the window. Several dozen constables burst into the room. The Tattooed Dragon had no chance to raise a finger. It was like an eagle taking a sparrow or a pellet bringing down a rock dove: trussed up like a disconsolate lion he was dragged downstairs and borne away to the court room.
The Magistrate greeted him with a roar: "How can you have the effrontery to come here all on your own to spy? If the gentleman from Mrs. Li's had not denounced you, innocent people would have suffered throughout our district! Quickly now, confess what you've been up to. What did Song Jiang send you here for?"
The Tattooed Dragon refused to speak. Twin Spears said: "You never get these bloody villains to confess unless you beat them."
"Take this bastard and give him a really good thrashing for me," said the Magistrate.
A number of gaolers and their assistants pounced on Tattooed Dragon. First they splashed cold water on his legs. Then they administered a hundred heavy blows to each leg. He bore up well under the beating and revealed nothing to them. Twin Spears said: "Fit him with a wooden cangue and throw him in the death cells. When we've captured Song Jiang we'll send them to the capital together."
Now after the Tattooed Dragon left, Song Jiang had written to the Professor giving a detailed account of what was happening. When the Professor read Song Jiang's letter, telling how the Tattooed Dragon had gone as a spy to stay in the house of the courtesan Jade Li, he was deeply disturbed. After telling the Unicorn, he went off in great haste to see Song Jiang. "Who told the Tattooed Dragon to go?" he asked.
"It was his own wish," Song Jiang said. "He said this courtesan was an old flame of his. It seems they had been very intimate, that's what gave him the idea to go."
"You weren't thinking, brother," said the Professor. "If I had been here I would never have allowed it. There's a saying: 'In the harlot's house don't let five words pass your lips.' They can give you a good time, but they're always hankering after novelty and won't stick with anything old. Many's the good man they've ruined. Not only is it their nature to be inconstant as water, but even supposing she had any real feeling for him, she takes her orders from the bawd. If that's where he's gone, you can bet your life he's in trouble!"

Song Jiang asked the Professor what he should do. The Professor summoned Auntie Gu and said to her: "Would you mind going and having a look? You can disguise yourself as an old woman and slip into the city on the pretext of begging. If you see anything untoward come back at once. If the Tattooed Dragon has landed in prison, go and tell the assistant gaoler: 'He once did me a good turn, I'd like to take him a spot of food.' When you get inside, quietly tell the Tattooed Dragon this: 'We will attack the city on the last night of the month just before dusk. Say you've got to go to the latrines and then work out some way to escape.' You, Auntie Gu, must start a fire on the last night of the month. This will be our signal to attack and complete the business. But first the Leader must attack Wenshang. The people will flee and seek refuge in Dongping which will give Auntie Gu a chance to mix with them and slip into the city without being noticed." Having expounded his plan, the Professor mounted and rode back to Dongchang.

Song Jiang ordered Snake and Scorpion to take 500 troops and attack Wenshang. As expected the people, old and young, fled in panic and sought refuge in Dongping.

Then Auntie Gu with dishevelled hair and tattered clothing, mingled with the crowd and was carried with them into the city, where she wandered the streets begging. When she came to the government offices, she heard of course that the Tattooed Dragon was in the gaol and was thus able to confirm the Professor's intuition. Next day she went to wait outside the gaol with a rice box. When she saw an elderly guard come out, she prostrated herself weeping copiously.

"Why are you weeping, old woman?" the guard asked.

"Mr. Shi is locked up in there, my old benefactor," said Auntie Gu. "He went away almost ten years ago now, they say he was trading among the rivers and lakes. I don't know why he has landed in prison. There's obviously no one to take him food. I've managed to beg a bit of food that I want to give him to relieve his hunger. Please, friend, if you could see your way to letting me in, it would be a worthy deed, with more merit in it than building a seven-storey pagoda!"

The guard said: "He's a robber from Mount Liang, his crime has earned him the death penalty, I dare not let you in."

"So he's really for it then. But why not let him have the food and die a little bit content? Just be merciful and let me in to give him this bite to eat, so I can repay his kindness in days gone by." She started crying again.

The guard thought to himself: "If it was a man I couldn't let him in, but what is there to fear from an old woman?" So he allowed her into the gaol, where she saw the Tattooed Dragon with a heavy cangue round his neck and a rope tied to his waist.

The Tattooed Dragon was astonished to see her but he made no sound. She went on pretending to weep and at the same time offered him the food. Another gaoler came along and shouted: "This is a malefactor awaiting execution. No one's supposed to get in here. Who said you could come in and give him food? Get out of here double quick, before I order you a beating."

With so many gaolers about, Auntie Gu couldn't say much. All she told Tattooed Dragon was: "There will be an attack on the last day of the month in the evening. They want you to start something inside the gaol."

Before the Tattooed Dragon could ask her more she was driven out by the gaoler. All he could remember was "last day of the month."

Now the third month of course was a long month. When the twenty-ninth arrived the Tattooed Dragon saw two gaolers talking and he asked them what the date was. The junior replied, and he got it wrong. He said "It's the last day of the month. This evening I'd better buy some paper to burn for wandering souls." The Tattooed Dragon waited impatiently for evening to come. One of the gaoler's assistants who was half drunk escorted him to the latrines. The Tattoed Dragon suddenly shouted out: "Who is that behind you?" When the man turned to look, Tattooed Dragon wrenched off his cangue and hit the gaoler with the end of it, knocking him out. Then he got a piece of brick and smashed his fetters with it. Carefully looking in all directions first, he rushed into the guardroom where there were several policemen, all drunk. He charged into the midst of them. Some were killed and some got away. He opened up the gates of the gaol, expecting to receive help from outside. He also released the other criminals in the gaol, fifty or sixty of them, who burst out of their cells tumultuously and fled.

Someone informed the Magistrate, whose face became ashen with fear. He hurriedly summoned his cavalry general to discuss what to do.

Twin Spears said: "There must be spies in the city. You must send a lot of troops to surround this villain. Meanwhile I shall take the opportunity to ride out and capture Song Jiang. You, Sir, must defend the city and send a few dozen constables to guard the prison gate. Don't let them get away."

With this he mounted and mustered his troops for the sortie. The Magistrate got together a force of gaolers, prison guards and officers of the law, who picked up their spears and truncheons and went to the prison where they made a lot of noise. The Tattooed Dragon was still inside and did not dare come out, nor did anyone from outside dare force an entry. Auntie Gu could only lament.

Twin Spears meanwhile had assembled his forces and ridden out of the city before dawn to attack Song Jiang's camp. When Song Jiang's scouts reported this to him, he said: "This must mean Auntie Gu has met with some misfortune. They're coming to attack us. We must prepare for battle."

Orders were given out and the troops all roused. It was getting light when Twin Spears' force drew near. The armies formed up on each side and Twin Spears rode out in front. He was indeed a hero without compare, exceptional in daring, and he made a noble picture. He had, moreover, a subtle mind, a thorough knowledge of all the classics and skill in all the musical instruments. In Shandong and Hebei they called him Twin Spears the Virtuoso.

When Song Jiang saw such a display of personal character he was partly pleased. Twin Spears also had a little flag planted in his sheaf on which was written: "Twin Spears the bold, renowned worldwide".

Song Jiang ordered Victorious to ride out to encounter the enemy. Armed with his steel lance Victorious attacked, but Twin Spears with his two spears was masterly and no man could best him. Song Jiang ordered out the Spearsman, master of the hooked spear technique, to take over from Victorious. Spearsman galloped at Twin Spears in a furious charge. The two fought more than fifty bouts on that field of battle and neither could prevail. The fight continued so long that Song Jiang feared Spearsman might lose and ordered a gong to sound the retreat. Spearsman reined in his horse and returned, with Twin Spears in hot pursuit, a weapon in either hand. Song Jiang waved his whip and troops encircled Twin Spears. Song Jiang was holding in his horse watching from the top of a knoll and could see Twin Spears in the encirclement. Every time Twin Spears turned east Song Jiang gave a signal and troops flocked east to surround him; when he turned west the signal flag pointed west and troops massed to the west. Twin Spears charged this way and that, wielding his two spears manfully until late afternoon when he managed to open up a path and escape. Song Jiang did not pursue him.

Seeing he could not win, Twin Spears withdrew his troops to the city that night. Song Jiang the same night moved his troops up under the walls of the city and completely surrounded it. Auntie Gu was inside but did not dare start the fire. Nor had the Tattooed Dragon managed to get out of the gaol. His way was blocked on either side.

Now, the Magistrate had a daughter who was extremely pretty. Twin Spears was not married and had repeatedly sent people to ask for her hand, but the Magistrate had not given his consent. Because of this, relations between the two were somewhat strained. The night that Twin Spears brought his troops back into the city he sent someone who was in his confidence to discuss this personal matter with the Magistrate. The latter said: "I am a civilian, he is a soldier. That is a good reason for such an alliance. But right now the bandits are at our gates, there is a crisis on. People will think it very odd if we announce a betrothal at such a moment. Wait till the bandits are gone and we have successfully defended the city. Then will be the time to arrange this marriage."

This is the reply Twin Spears' friend took back to him. Although Twin Spears replied quite respectfully: "So be it!", he had certain misgivings and was not entirely satisfied, fearing that later on the Magistrate would refuse him.

Song Jiang pressed them hard for a number of days. When the Magistrate kept urging combat, Twin Spears became irritated. He armed himself and mounted and led his forces out into the field.

Song Jiang himself stood before his troops under the pennants and shouted: "A single officer on his own like you, how can you take us on? Don't you know the old saying 'When a great building starts to lean, it takes more than one beam to prop it up.' You can see I've got ten thousand valiant troops here, and thousands of brave commanders, all ready to do heaven's will, to help the poor and rescue the beleaguered. Surrender at once and save your life!"

Twin Spears replied angrily: "A branded petty criminal, a rebel fit only to die, how can you talk such shit!" Then he levelled his two spears and charged. On the left Leopard's Head and on the right Colonel Hua rode forward together to oppose him with their weapons. After a few bouts they both turned and ran. Song Jiang's troops also feigned defeat and fled in all directions. Twin Spears, avid for glory, slapped his horse and galloped in pursuit.

Song Jiang and his forces retreated with Twin Spears in pursuit. About four miles out from the city they reached a small village where there were thatched huts on either side and the road running between. Not realizing it was a trap, Twin Spears eagerly urged his horse on. Now Song Jiang understood full well how brave Twin Spears was and the night before had ordered Short-Arse, Steelbright, the Gardener and Sister Sun the Ogress with a hundred soldiers to hide in the thatched huts. They had stretched tripwires across the road and covered them lightly with soil. They were to wait till the very moment he passed, then at the sound of a gong raise the tripwires to catch him. When Twin Spears in headlong pursuit reached that place he heard the two Kong brothers shout behind him: "You shall not touch our Leader!" At the same time a gong sounded from the thatched huts, the doors of each one flew open and the ropes were stretched taut. Twin Spears turned his horse's head but the tripwires were behind him as well and the animal stumbled, throwing its rider. Steelbright and Short-Arse rushed out from the left, the Gardener and Sister Sun from the right; they fell on him and made him prisoner. They relieved him of his helmet, his armour, his two spears and his horse. The two women warriors tied his hands behind his back and took him off to see Song Jiang.

Song Jiang rode through the huts and reined in his horse under a green willow. There he met the two women warriors with their captive, General Twin Spears Dong Ping. He sent the two women packing: "I told you to go and invite General Dong here, no one said you were to tie him up!"

The women obediently withdrew and Song Jiang hurriedly dismounted and undid the bonds with his own hands. He divested himself of his padded robe and gave it to Twin Spears to wear. Then he prostrated himself. Twin Spears immediately returned the courtesy. Song Jiang said: "If you do not consider it beneath you, please join us as one of our leaders."

"I am your prisoner," Twin Spears said with humility. "A thousand deaths would be nothing. If you consent to spare my life I shall count it a blessing."

Song Jiang said: "Our humble place is situated among the marshlands, it's very tranquil there. It is only because we are short of provisions that we came to Dongping. We have no other aim."

Twin Spears said: "That stuck-up Magistrate once held the post of tutor in the household of Marshal Tong Guan. Naturally he thinks himself so great he can oppress the people at will. If you will give me leave I will go back and open the gates, so you can enter the city and pick up money and supplies. That will be my way of repaying you."

Song Jiang accepted with alacrity and ordered a servant to return Twin Spears' helmet, armour, spears and horse to him. Twin Spears put on his armour and mounted. With Twin Spears leading and Song Jiang and his troops behind they headed for Dongping, keeping their banners furled. Arriving first on his own, Twin Spears shouted, "Guards, open up quickly!"

Recognizing Twin Spears by the light of the torches, the guards opened the gates and lowered the drawbridge. Twin Spears slapped his horse and rode forward. When he reached the gate, he smashed the iron lock, and Song Jiang and the rest poured in behind him. When they reached the government offices the order was given out that the people were not to be harmed, nor were any houses to be burnt. Twin Spears went to the Magistrate's residence, killed him and his family, and seized his daughter. Song Jiang ordered them to open up the prison and let the Tattooed Dragon out. Next, the treasury was unlocked and all the gold, silver, valuables and silk taken out. The granaries were opened and the grain supplies loaded onto carts and sent under escort to Golden Sands Landing for the Ruan brothers to take up the mountain. The Tattooed Dragon himself led them to Jade's house, where he hacked her to pieces, together with the bawd and all her household. The Magistrate's goods Song Jiang distributed among the people. A notice was posted along the streets, informing the citizens that the Magistrate had been executed as an oppressor of the people, but the innocent were free to go peacefully about their business. After this announcement, the troops were mustered for withdrawal and all the leaders went back to Anshan. Suddenly the Daytime Rat rushed up with news of the action at Dongchang. Song Jiang listened in horror and then gave a great shout: "My friends, do not return to the mountain. Come with me!" Indeed, it was a time for the forces of Mount Liang to advance again and capture the rich city of Dongchang.

THE leaders would not agree to Song Jiang's handing over the command to Lu Junyi, and Song Jiang did not like to disobey Chao Gai's dying wish so he addressed them, "Just now we are short of money and rice, but there is a good supply of those things at the cities to the east of Liangshan Marsh. The cities I refer to are Dongping and Dongchang Prefectures. We have never troubled those towns, so I think we may go there now, and borrow some rice from them. We will write the two names on slips of paper, and Lu Junyi and myself will draw lots. Whoever takes his city first will take command here."

"A good plan," said Wu Yong.

"That will not do," said Lu Junyi. "Song Jiang is our commander, and I prefer to obey his order only."

But the assembled heroes would not agree to Lu Junyi's suggestion. The slips of paper were written out, and after offering incense to the spirits, the lots were drawn. Lu Junyi drew Dongchang while Song Jiang drew Dongping. That evening Song Jiang divided the leaders and men. He took Lin Chong and twenty-four other leaders and altogether ten thousand men. Lu Junyi took Wu Yong and an equal number of leaders and men.

Everything was soon ready, and both forces left the mountain on the first day of the third month. The weather was warm with a refreshing wind blowing, and the fresh grass was of brilliant green color. The prospects for a campaign could not have been better.

Song Jiang led his force to within thirteen *li* of Dongping, and encamped there at a town called Anshan. Song Jiang addressed his leaders, "I know that the Prefect here is Cheng Wanli, and that with him is a great warrior who can face ten thousand men without defeat. He is called Dong Ping, and his nickname is the 'Two Spears General,' because he can use two spears at the same time. If we attack his town we must be polite, and inform him of our intention, so I will now write such a letter and send it to him. If he is willing to surrender, then all the fighting will be avoided. But if he is unwilling, then he cannot complain about the results. Who will take the letter?"

Yu Baosi stepped forward and said, "I know the Lieutenant General Dong Ping, and am willing to take the letter to him."

But Wang Dingliu also stepped forward and said, "I am a newcomer, and so far have not done anything to show my merits. So I should like to go on this mission."

This was agreed to, and after the letter had been written asking for the loan of some rice, the two men departed.

In Dongping the Prefect discussed with the Lieutenant General upon hearing of the arrival of the brigands at Anshan. While they were conferring, the letter from Song Jiang arrived, and the messengers were called in. Yu Baosi and Wang Dingliu duly presented the letter. The Prefect read the letter, and then spoke to the Lieutenant General, "The brigands want to borrow some rice. What do you think about it?"

The General was very angry, and ordered that the two messengers be taken outside and executed.

But the Prefect objected to this. He said, "There is an ancient rule, 'When two countries are at war, the delegates must not be killed.' That is only proper. The most we could do would be to give them ten blows each with the bamboo and send them back."

The Lieutenant General was still angry, but he agreed to this, and gave orders accordingly.

When the two messengers returned and reported the matter with tears Song Jiang was very angry. Shi Jin came forward and said, "When I lived in Dongping Prefecture I was on very intimate terms with a woman there named Li Shuilan. Now I can take some money to the town and stay at that woman's house. When you are ready you can attack the town, and I will set fire to the Drum Tower inside the town. By working together, both inside and outside, we can accomplish our object."

Song Jiang approved of this plan. Money was given to Shi Jin, and he left that day for the town. He duly reached the house of Li Shuilan, and she asked Shi Jin, "I have not seen you for a long time. I heard that the magistrate wanted to arrest you, and that you had escaped to Liangshan Marsh where you became a leader among the brigands. These two days there has been a great stirring on the streets because the brigands are coming to attack us. Why have you come here?"

"I will tell you the truth," replied Shi Jin. "I am a leader of the brigands, but so far I have done no meritorious deed. Just now they have come to borrow some rice from the town, and I have told them all about you. I come here really as a spy and here is a parcel of money for you. You must not let anybody know of my arrival. When the thing is finished, I will bring you to the mountain stronghold to enjoy pleasures.

The woman assented, and received the money. She then entertained Shi Jin with wine. During the meal she went down below, and spoke to the pimp, "This man was previously a good visitor here, and so we admitted him. But he has now become a bad man, and is wanted by the authorities, I think we may be implicated by his coming here."

The man said, "These brigands are very fierce, and never failed to take the town they attacked. If we betray this Shi Jin, they will kill us when they enter the town."

The madam of the brothel said, "How stupid you are! You do not know very much! An old proverb says, 'If a bee is on the breast, loosen the clothes immediately.' This is a rule. If we inform the authorities about this man, then we are free from blame. You had better go to the *yamen* at once, and tell them about this man. They will arrest him, and so we shall avoid any trouble."

The man said, "But he has given us plenty of money so we cannot treat him that way."

The woman abused him, "You brute! You're just talking farts! Our business here injures a countless number of men, not to say a single man. If you do not do as I tell you, then I will go to the *yamen* myself, and inform against you as well."

The pimp said, "Do not be so hasty. Shuilan must entertain and keep him here. We must not beat the grass to drive away the snake. I will go to the *yamen*, and inform them to have him arrested."

When Li Shuilan came upstairs again after this conversation Shi Jin noticed her face was changing colors so he asked her, "What has upset you like this?"

The girl replied, "I am somewhat upset because in coming up the staircase I missed my footing, and nearly fell down."

They had hardly had time to drink a cup of tea, when they heard the noise of men down below. About ten policemen entered the room, and seized Shi Jin, bound him with cords, and took him to the *yamen*.

When the Prefect saw Shi Jin he abused him, "Your courage appears to be bigger than your body. You come here as a spy all by yourself. If the father of the girl Li Shuilan had not informed against you, you might have done much injury to the people. Tell us quickly what you have to say in defense. What instructions did Song Jiang give you?"

Shi Jin did not speak, so the Lieutenant General said, "This kind of thief will not confess without a sound beating." The Prefect ordered that the prisoner be beaten. The attendants brought a pail of cold water, and after pouring it over the legs of the prisoner they gave him about a hundred blows on the same parts.

But still Shi Jin would not speak. Lieutenant General Dong Ping therefore, ordered that the prisoner be taken to the jail.

When Shi Jin had left for the town Song Jiang wrote a letter to Wu Yong informing him what had been done. When Wu Yong read the letter he was very surprised, and told Lu Junyi that he would go at once to see Song Jiang. This was agreed to, and Wu Yong traveled all that night. When he reached Song Jiang's camp Wu Yong asked him who had given the order for Shi Jin to go as a spy.

"He was willing to go, and made the proposal himself," replied Song Jiang. "He was previously very friendly with a girl Li Shuilan there."

"Brother, you have not thought the matter over," said Wu Yong. "If I had been here he would not have gone. Those girls injure many good men, and prefer new to old acquaintances. They have dispositions as changeable as water, and are quite controlled by their pimps. I am sure that Shi Jin will have met trouble there."

Song Jiang asked Wu Yong whether he had any plans to rescue Shi Jin. Wu Yong sent for Gu Dasao and spoke to her, "There is a troublesome affair which I want you to take in hand. I want you to dress as an old woman, and stealthily get into the town as a beggar. You must get the latest news there, and quickly return with it. If Shi Jin is already in prison, then go and speak to the jailer that the prisoner helped you sometime before, and therefore you want to bring him some food. When you are allowed to see Shi Jin you must tell him secretly that at the end of the month we shall come during the night and attack the town. He must find a place where he can afterwards escape that night. He must set fire to the buildings as a beacon for us to attack the town. Turning to Song Jiang he said, "You, brother, must take your men, and attack Wenshang, a town near-by, and the people there will escape to Dongping Prefecture. Gu Dasao will easily enter the town as one of the refugees without any suspicion being aroused. Then you can do what I have already told you."

When this plan had been arranged Wu Yong mounted his horse and returned to Dongchang Prefecture. Song Jiang then gathered his men together and marched on Wenshang. The people in that town fled to Dongping for protection as anticipated.

Gu Dasao joined the refugees as an old woman with hair and dress in great disorder. Upon entering Dongping with the others she began to beg for food on the streets. She soon found out that Shi Jin was in prison. The next day she got a basket of food, and went to the entrance of the prison. Soon a jailer came out, and Gu Dasao weeping bitterly saluted him, and the jailer asked her what she was crying about.

Gu Dasao replied, "My old master, Shi Jin, has been imprisoned; I have not seen him now for ten years. I heard that he was living as merchant, and do not know how he came to get imprisoned. I see that nobody gives him anything to eat, so I have brought him some food. I beg you to allow me to present this gift. By doing this your merit will be enormous."

"That man is a brigand from Liangshan Marsh," said the jailer, "and his crime deserves his execution. Who would dare allow you to see him?"

"If he has committed such a crime then he must answer for it," said Gu Dasao. "I pray you have pity on me and allow me offer him this food to show my gratitude to him." So saying she began to weep again.

The jailer thought, "If this were a man I would not dare to take him into the prison, but as it is only an old woman perhaps I might do it." So he told her to follow him, and took Gu Dasao to the cell where Shi Jin was chained up. Shi Jin recognized her, but although surprised dared not say a word. Gu Dasao burst into tears again, and gave Shi Jin some food. Other attendants seeing this called out, "That is a bad man waiting for execution. Why give him food? Get out of this place at once, or we will beat you with the bamboo." As Gu Dasao saw no means of staying, so she whispered to Shi Jin, to struggle by the night of the end of the month. Gu Dasao was then jostled out of the prison so that Shi Jin could not ask for further information as he had only caught the three words, "The night of the end of the month." It was the third month, and had 30 days, but on the 29th day he heard two jailers talking, and one asked, "What is the date?" The other man evidently made a mistake for he replied, "Today is the last day of the month, and I must buy some paper money and sacrifice to the spirits."

Shi Jin was not aware of the mistake in the date, and for the rest of the day was anxiously waiting for the coming of the night. That evening the jailer was half drunk, and when he took Shi Jin to the place where the paper money was to be burnt Shi Jin called out, "Who are those men at your back?" The jailer looked round to see, and Shi Jin seized his cangue, tore it off his neck, and knocked the jailer down with it. He then seized a stone, and broke the wooden fetters fastened to his feet. He then rushed into the guardroom where many of the jailers happened to be drunk, and using his wooden cangue he killed a number of them while some ran out of the room. He opened the prison gate expecting the brigands to be somewhere near at hand, but as nobody was there he entered the prison and released about sixty prisoners. There was now a great uproar from the released brutes.

When the Prefect heard of the disturbance in the jail he summoned General Dong Ping who expressed his opinion that the trouble must have been caused by a spy who had got into the town. He immediately issued an order for the soldiers to turn out and capture the spy. He also ordered other soldiers to march out of the town and attack the brigands. He asked the Prefect to defend the town and dispatch guards to the prison to prevent the prisoners from escaping.

The prison was soon surrounded, and Shi Jin was still inside, daring not to venture out. Gu Dasao was outside, and was sad because she could not get in.

The Lieutenant General and his soldiers marched out to attack the brigands' camp about 3 A.M. When Song Jiang heard the news he assumed that Gu Dasao must have been arrested and their plans discovered. He however ordered all his men to get ready for the coming attack.

It was the hour just before dawn. The two forces soon met and halted, when General Dong Ping rode forth. He was very intellectual and was well acquainted with the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and also the nine schools of philosophy. He was also a skilled musician. Song Jiang noticed his stylish manner, and was very glad to meet such a man. He noticed that his quiver was full of arrows, and from it was also sticking out a small flag with the characters, "Heroic Two Spears General, Marquis over 10,000 families." Song Jiang ordered Han Tao to give battle to the challenger.

Han Tao was armed with a long handled mace, while Dong Ping used his iron spears with great skill. After they had been fighting for some time Song Jiang thought that Han Tao stood no chance of victory so he ordered Xu Ning to relieve Han Tao. This was done, but after Xu Ning had fought about fifty bouts he had not gained any advantage. So Song Jiang being afraid that Xu Ning might be defeated ordered a gong to be sounded as a signal for him to return.

Upon seeing this Dong Ping raised both spears, and dashed after Xu Ning right into the brigands. Song Jiang signaled for his men to surround the foe, while he himself took his position on a mound so as to overlook the conflict. If Dong Ping tried to escape to the east Song Jiang signaled for his men to block that route and the same if Dong Ping tried another way. But Dong Ping used his spears with deadly effect every time, so that he could not be captured. After fighting like a rat in a trap he at last found a means of escape, and cut his way through the brigands. He had had enough fighting for that day so he ordered his soldiers to retire to the town.

But that evening Song Jiang ordered an advance on the town according to his original plan. They surrounded the town, but Gu Dasao, although she saw this, dared not set fire to any building. Shi Jin also had no courage to venture out.

Now the Prefect Cheng had a daughter who was very beautiful, and General Dong Ping being single had several times sent a matchmaker to try and arrange a marriage. But his offers had always been rejected by the Prefect. For this reason the General secretly did not like the Prefect, although openly they were friends. When Dong Ping got back to the town that evening he remembered this old grudge and sent a matchmaker to reopen negotiations for the marriage.

Prefect Cheng replied that the proposal was an excellent one, but on account of the present dangerous crisis he could not agree to the marriage as people would only be amazed and jump to wrong conclusions. But he would be pleased to discuss the matter when the brigands were driven away from the town.

The matchmaker reported this to Dong Ping, who ostensibly accepted the Prefect's idea but in his heart he was really dissatisfied as he was afraid that the Prefect would eventually decline his offer.

That night, however, the brigands attacked the town and the Prefect again ordered Dong Ping to defend the town. General Dong Ping was very angry at this renewed attack, and taking three regiments of soldiers he left the town.

Song Jiang was on horseback in front of his men, and when he saw Dong Ping he called out, "How dare you a lone General fight me with my overwhelming strength? If you submit I may spare your life."

Dong Ping was angry, and shouted, "You were only a petty clerk, so how dare you talk to me like this!" So saying he whipped his horse and dashed towards Song Jiang. But Hua Rong and Lin Chong were on both sides of Song Jiang, and they both galloped forward to fight with Dong Ping. After several bouts the two brigand leaders suddenly galloped away as if defeated, and in accordance with Song Jiang's previous orders the bandits upon seeing this scattered in all directions. Seeing this Dong Ping was elated, and wished to show off his abilities further, and whipping his horse galloped after the now retreating bandits under Song Jiang. After racing for about three *li* like this they came to a village with a single road between two rows of straw huts. Across the road the brigands had laid several ropes covered with a thin layer of earth to catch the enemy's horse. As Dong Ping dashed up the street a gong was sounded, the doors opened, and the ropes were stretched across the road as soon as he was going to pass. Dong Ping had hardly rushed forward, but his horse was tripped by the rope, and fell. The brigands leapt out of the huts, and seizing Dong Ping bound him with ropes. He was disarmed, and taken before Song Jiang who had pulled up his horse under a poplar tree. When Dong Ping came up Song Jiang pretended to be angry, and shouted, "I told you to invite General Dong Ping to come, why have you tied him with ropes like this?" He hurriedly dismounted, released the prisoner, and then saluted him. Dong Ping also saluted in response. Song Jiang then spoke to him, "If you do not disdain us we shall be pleased to receive you as a commander of our stronghold."

Dong Ping replied, "I am your prisoner, and deserve nothing more than death, but if you will forgive me, then I shall be very fortunate. But as you ask me to become your leader it makes me astonished."

"In our stronghold we are short of grain, and came to Dongping Prefecture to borrow some, and had no other intention," replied Song Jiang.

"That fellow, Prefect Cheng Wanli," said Dong Ping, "was previously a tutor in the family of His Excellency Tong Guan, and that was how he got the office of Prefect at Dongping. If you like I could return to Dongping, and by false pretenses get the gate of the town opened so that your men could enter, and so get all you require."

Song Jiang was very pleased at this offer and accepted same. He ordered the prisoner's arms, armor, and helmet to be returned to him. They mounted their horses with Dong Ping riding in front, and soon reached the town. Dong Ping called out for the gate to be opened. It was still dark, and the gatekeeper lit a torch to see who it was, and when he saw Dong Ping he at once opened the gate, and lowered the drawbridge. Dong Ping entered and killed the gatekeeper, and Song Jiang and his brigands nocked through the open gate, and were soon in control of the town. Song Jiang ordered his men not to kill the civilians, or set fire to the houses. Dong Ping went to the *yamen*, and killed the Prefect and all his family with the exception of the daughter whom he kept for himself. Song Jiang ordered the jail to be opened, and rescued Shi Jin. He also seized the treasury, and looted the gold and silver there. The town granary was also looted, and the grain was sent to Liangshan Marsh. Shi Jin took the men to the house of the woman Li Shuilan and killed everybody there. Song Jiang distributed all the goods in the Prefect's house among the people. He also issued a proclamation, "We have killed the officials who injured you people, so that now you may continue your avocations without fear." He then ordered his men to leave the town and return to Liangshan Marsh. When they were on the way however, Bai Sheng arrived with news as to how the expedition to Dongchang Prefecture had progressed.

Generals throwing stones which hit
Quite another target.

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### The Hotshot Featherless Arrow Assaults & knocks down Heroes with Stones; Song Jiang Abandons & gives away Grains to Catch, Capture, & gain a Brave Warrior

Bai Sheng said: "Lu Junyi has had two failures in a row in besieging Dongchang. The town is defended by a fierce general named Zhang Qin. He hails from Zhangte Prefecture and began his career in the cavalry. He flings stones with remarkable accuracy, hitting the mark every time. People call him the Featherless Arrow. Under him are two commanders. One is Gong Wang the Flowery-Necked Tiger, so named because he had a tiger tattooed all over his body, with its head decorating his neck. He throws a spear while riding. The other is Ding Desun the Arrow-Struck Tiger. His face is scarred from his cheeks to his throat. He throws a trident while riding.

"Lu waited outside the town for ten days, but no one came forth to fight. A few days ago, Zhang Qin emerged and Hao Siwen fought him for many rounds. Zhang then withdrew and Hao gave chase. A stone hit Hao on the temple and knocked him from his saddle. Yan Qing managed to strike Zhang's horse with an arrow, and so we were able to save Hao's life. That was our first failure.

"The next day, Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World rode forth with Xiang Chong and Li Gun, who brandished their shields. Unexpectedly, in an underhand pitch, Ding flung his trident and struck Xiang Chong. That was our second failure.

"Both men are nursing their wounds on one of our boats. Our general Lu Junyi has sent me here to request you to come to his aid."

Song Jiang sighed. "How unlucky he is. I even dispatched Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng to help him. I was sure he'd succeed in battle and thus gain face in our stronghold. Who'd have thought he'd meet his match. But that being the case, I and my brothers will have to go to his rescue."

He ordered the three armies to march. The chieftains mounted and went with Song Jiang to the outskirts of Dongchang. Lu met them and related what had transpired. Then all made camp.

While they were conferring, a junior officer entered and reported: "Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow is challenging us to personal combat."

Song Jiang and his chieftains rose and proceeded to a wide plain and deployed their troops. Three times the drums thundered, and Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow rode forward. Back and forth, from one end of the line to the other, he cantered, his animal's hoofs churning dust. Gong Wang the Flowery-Necked Tiger emerged abruptly from the left side of the enemy's arch of pennants. From the shadows on the right came the Arrow-Struck Tiger Ding Desun. The three rode onto the field of battle. Zhang Qin pointed at Song Jiang.

"Robber varlet of the swamp, I challenge a fight to the death!" Song Jiang asked his chieftains: "Who will contend with Zhang Qin?" Angrily aroused, one of the heroes beside him leaped into the saddle and galloped forward, brandishing a sickle-bladed lance. It was Xu Ning the Metal Lancer.

"Just the man!" thought Song Jiang approvingly. The two horses met, the two weapons vied. After less than five rounds Zhang Qin retreated. Xu Ning pursued. Featherless Arrow raised the lance in his left hand as if to thrust, while with his right he quietly extracted a stone from an embroidered pouch. Xu Ning was quite close. Zhang Qin suddenly twisted around and let fly with the stone. He hit poor Xu Ning squarely between the eyes, knocking him from his horse.

Gong Wang and Ding moved up to grab him. But Song Jiang's forces were many, and Lu Fang and Guo Sheng both rushed out with their crescent-bladed halberds and snatched the victim back to safety.

The shocked Song Jiang turned pale. "Who will take on that scoundrel?" he asked.

Before the words were out of his mouth, from behind him a horse flew forward. It was Yan Shun who next contended. He fought many rounds, but there was no holding Zhang Qin, and Yan turned and withdrew. Zhang Qin, racing in pursuit, pulled out a stone and threw. It clanged against the back plate of Yan's armor. Bending low over his saddle, Zhang Qin cantered away.

"That wretch is nothing to be afraid of!" a voice among the outlaws shouted. And a chieftain clapped his steed and flew on to the field, holding a long lance. Han Tao the Ever-Victorious General engaged Zhang Qin without another word!

A mighty cheer went up as the horses met. Han Tao wanted to display his skill before Song Jiang. Concentrating all his energies, he battled with Zhang Qin. But after less than ten rounds, Featherless Arrow withdrew. Han, wary of his stones, did not give chase. When Zhang looked back and saw he was not being followed, he wheeled his mount. Han Tao advanced with levelled lance. Zhang Qin stealthily extracted another stone. His hand rose and the missile struck Han Tao on the bridge of the nose. Blood streaming from the offended organ, Han fled back to his position.

Peng Qi was furious. Without waiting for Song Jiang's orders, waving a three-pointed, two-edged blade, he galloped towards Zhang Qin.

But before the two horses could meet, Featherless Arrow once more threw a stone concealed in his hand. Peng Qi was clunked on the forehead. He dropped his three-pointed, two-edged sword, and returned to the position in great haste.

One defeat after another. Panic gripped Song Jiang's heart. He was about to call a retreat. Then a mighty voice shouted from behind Lu Junyi the Magnate: "If our prestige is broken, how will we be able to fight in days to come? Let's see if those stones can hit me!"

It was Xuan Zan the Ugly Son-in-Law. He kicked up his horse and flew towards Zhang Qin, waving his blade.

"Singly come, singly go. Doubly come, flee in pairs," cried Featherless Arrow. "Haven't you seen my trick with stones?"

"You've hit others," retorted Xuan Zan, "but you'll never hit me!"

Even before he had finished speaking, Zhang Qin flung the stone in his hand. He struck Xuan Zan on the side of the mouth and tumbled him from his saddle. Gong Wang and Ding Desun advanced to seize him, but the outlaw forces, who outnumbered them, got there first and brought him back.

Song Jiang was consumed with rage. Sword in hand, he rent his gown and swore: "I'll either take Zhang Qin personally or I won't return to my army!"

Huyan Zhuo heard him make the vow. "What use are we brothers if you have to go forth yourself," he exclaimed. Astride his Ebony Steed Which Treads in Snow, he rode onto the field and reviled Zhang Qin.

"Over-rated scamp! What have you got except a bit of strength and courage? Do you recognize the great warrior Huyan Zhuo?"

"Traitor and vanquished general! See what you can do with this!" Featherless Arrow sent a stone sizzling through the air.

Huyan hastily raised his rods to ward it off and it struck him a paralyzing blow on the wrist. Since he could no longer swing the steel rods he returned to his base.

"All of the cavalry chieftains have been wounded," said Song Jiang. "Who of the infantry dares to capture Zhang Qin?"

Liu Tang, twirling his halberd, strode onto the field of battle. Zhang Qin laughed.

"Puny commander! I've beaten your cavalry. What good are footsloggers!"

Enraged, Liu Tang charged. Featherless Arrow turned his steed and cantered towards his position. Liu Tang raced after and caught up. With a swift hack, he struck the animal. It lashed out with its rear hoofs and switched its tail across Liu Tang's eyes, blinding him temporarily. A stone from Zhang Qin felled him to the ground. As he struggled to rise, government soldiers pounced on him and dragged him away.

"Who will rescue Liu Tang?" Song Jiang yelled.

Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute, brandishing his halberd, rode out against Zhang Qin. Featherless Arrow feinted with his lance. Yang Zhi swung, Zhang Qin ducked down to his stirrups, and the blade struck empty air.

"Take that!" cried Zhang Qin, with a quick underhand toss.

The stone clanged against Yang Zhi's helmet, chilling him to the marrow. Bending low over his saddle, he hurriedly withdrew.

"If we lose our manhood today, how can we return to Liangshan Marsh?" thought Song Jiang. Aloud, he said: "Who will work off this rage for me?"

Zhu Tong looked at Lei Heng. "They've taken Liu Tang. So what!" he said. "If one man can't deal with Zhang Qin, we'll attack him together!"

Both men carrying halberds, they advanced murderously, Zhu Tong on the left, Lei Heng on the right. Zhang Qin laughed.

"One's not enough, so you've added another. Even if there were ten of you, it wouldn't matter!" Not a flicker of fear crossed his face. In each hand he concealed a stone.

Lei Heng reached him first. Zhang Qin's arm rose in god-like stance, and the stone flew so quickly it was impossible to dodge. Before Lei Heng knew what was happening the missile struck his cheek and knocked him flat on his back. As Zhu Tong rushed to the rescue, a stone hit him in the neck.

Guan Sheng, from the position, saw that both were wounded. Gathering all his might, he galloped out on his swift roan, brandishing his dragon sword. Zhang Qin, who had just driven off the other two, returned to the field. Again he threw. Guan Sheng hastily raised his weapon to ward off the stone, and it nicked the edge, striking sparks. His taste for battle vanished. Guan Sheng pulled his roan around and went back to base.

When General Two Spears Dong Ping saw this, he said to himself: "I surrendered to Song Jiang only recently. If I don't display some of my military skill, people won't think much of me when we go up the mountain." He galloped onto the field, his set of spears in hand.

Zhang Qin rebuked him harshly. "Yours and mine are neighboring prefectures, as close as lips and teeth. Together we exterminated robbers, which was only fitting and proper. Why have you turned against the imperial court? You ought to be ashamed!"

Furious, Dong Ping charged. The horses met, the weapons rose. It was lance against spears, with four arms wildly darting. Sixty or seventy rounds they fought, then Zhang Qin rode away.

"Others may fear your stones," said Dong Ping, "but they can't touch me!"

Featherless Arrow set his lance in its socket, pulled a stone from his embroidered pouch, and threw. But Dong Ping's eyes were sharp and his hands fast. He flicked the missile aside. Zhang Qin extracted a second stone and threw again. Again, Dong Ping evaded it. Two stones had missed their mark. Zhang Qin was growing panicky. Dong Ping's steed pounded in hot pursuit of his own, almost nose to tail.

As Zhang Qin neared the left side of his army's arch of pennants, General Two Spears thrust at his back. Twisting, Featherless Arrow ducked low over his stirrups, and the blade went harmlessly by.

The two steeds were now racing parallel. Zhang Qin set aside his lance. With both hands he grasped Dong Ping, his arms and spears, and tugged. But he couldn't budge him. The two men grappled on horseback.

Suo Chao, watching from Song Jiang's position, hurried to the rescue, brandishing his big ax. Gong Wang and Ding Desun galloped out from the opposite position and intercepted him. They fought savagely. Zhang Qin and Dong Ping were locked in inseparable combat, while the mounts of the other three milled furiously about.

Lin Chong, Hua Rong, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng advanced together, two with lances, two with crescent-bladed halberds, to assist Dong Ping and Suo Chao. Zhang Qin saw that the situation was worsening. He abandoned Dong Ping and rode quickly back to his own position. But Dong Ping would not give up. He rode after Featherless Arrow right into the midst of the enemy, forgetting all about the stones. Zhang Qin stealthily pulled one from his pouch and waited for Dong Ping's horse to draw nearer. Then, "Take that!" he cried.

General Two Spears hastily dodged, and the stone whizzed past his ear. He returned to his base. Suo Chao left Gong Wang and Ding Desun and hurried after him Zhang Qin didn't use his lance but softly extracted a stone and flung it at Suo Chao. It struck him in the face before he could avoid it. Streaming blood, he returned to base with his ax.

Meanwhile, Lin Chong and Hua Rong had Gong Wang pinned down on one side, and Lu Fang and Guo Sheng had engaged Ding Desun on the other. Flurried, Gong Wang cast his javelin, but it hit neither of his opponents. He was weaponless now, and Lin Chong and Hua Rong captured him easily and took him back to their position.

Ding Desun twirled his trident and contended desperately with Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. He was unaware that Yan Qing was watching him from the arch of pennants.

"They've defeated fifteen of our chieftains in a row," thought the Prodigy. "We'll lose face if we don't nab at least one lieutenant."

He cast aside his staff, took up his bow, fitted an arrow, and let fly. It whistled into the hoof of Ding's mount, which stumbled to the ground. Lu and Guo immediately seized the fallen rider.

Zhang Qin wanted to go to his rescue, but the foe were too many. He returned to Dongchang with Liu Tang under guard. The prefect, from the town wall, had seen Featherless Arrow vanquish fifteen Mount Liangshan chieftains in succession. Although Featherless Arrow had lost Gong and Ding, he had captured Liu Tang.

The prefect proceeded to his office and celebrated his victory with wine. Then he had Liu Tang put in jail with a cangue around his neck, and sat down to confer with Zhang Qin.

As to Song Jiang, he returned with his army to camp. Gong and Ding he sent to the stronghold in Liangshan Marsh under escort. Afterwards, he consulted with Lu Junyi and Wu Yong.

"In the Five Dynasties period, Wang Yanzhang of the Great Liang beat thirty-six Tang commanders before the sun so much as moved their shadows," he said. "Today, Zhang Qin vanquished fifteen of our chieftains. Truly, a splendid general, no less a man than Wang Yanzhang!"

The others had no reply, and Song Jiang continued.

"It seems to me he relies completely on Gong and Ding to cover his flanks. Now that we've captured them, we ought to be able to think of some good way to catch him as well."
"You can rest assured, brother," said Wu Yong. "I've been observing his movements, and I have it all worked out. Send the wounded chieftains back to the fortress, and direct Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, Sun Li, Huang Xin and LiLi to bring as many of our naval forces as they can muster. We want carts and boats so that we can advance both by land and water, coordinate navy and cavalry, and trick Zhang Qin. In this way we will succeed." And Wu Yong explained how the forces were to be deployed.
In the town, Zhang Qin was saying to the prefect: "Although we won, the robbers' strength is still intact. Send scouts to investigate, then we'll decide what to do."
When the scouts returned, they reported: "Northwest of their camp there's vast amount of grain. We don't know where it came from, but it's loaded on over a hundred carts and five hundred boats, large and small, on the river. Both convoys are moving forward, under several supervisors along the way."
"Can those scoundrels be up to something?" the prefect pondered. "We must be careful that they don't trick us. I'll send out more scouts to make sure it's really grain they're carrying."
The next day a junior officer returned and said: "Those carts are laden with rice. Some of it spilled out. And although the cargoes on the boats are covered, we could see the ends of grain sacks."
"I'm leaving tonight," said Zhang Qin. "First, I'll stop the carts along the bank, then I'll seize the boats upon the river. If you'll lend a hand, Prefect, we'll capture them before the first beat of the watch drum!"
"An excellent plan. Just make sure you time it right." The prefect directed that the soldiers, after eating and drinking their fill, put on armor and take plenty of empty sacks.
Holding his long lance, Zhang Qin quietly left the town at the head of a thousand men. Though the moon was faint, the sky was studded with stars. Before the expedition had gone ten //they saw a convoy of carts and a banner reading: *Righteous Loyalty Grain of the Marsh Fortress.* Walking in the lead was Lu Zhishen. He carried his Buddhist staff. His cloak was girt up around the waist.
"I'll bounce a stone off the skull of that bald-pate!" muttered Zhang Qin.
By then Lu had seen him, but he pretended to be unaware, and continued striding forward. But he forgot to take precautions against Zhang Qin's stones.
"Speed!" shouted Featherless Arrow, astride his steed.
The flying stone struck Lu's head, drawing blood and knocking him flat. Zhang Qin's cheering soldiers charged. Wu Song whipped out his two knives, rushed forward and rescued Zhishen, then fled, abandoning the carts.
Featherless Arrow seized them. They were indeed laden with grain. Too pleased to bother pursuing Lu Zhishen, he brought the carts into the town. The delighted prefect took them over. "Now for the grain boats," said Zhang Qin.
"Be sure you time it right," the prefect admonished.
Featherless Arrow mounted and rode to the South Gate. Grain boats without number could be seen on the river. He shouted for the gate to be opened. Yelling, his army charged down to the river's edge. Suddenly, heavy clouds gathered and a dark mist spread and covered the sky. Zhang Qin's soldiers, infantry and cavalry, couldn't see a thing. Gongsun Sheng had worked a magic spell.
Zhang Qin grew flurried, and his eyes dimmed. He wanted to go back, but there was no way open to either advance or retreat. Wild shouts rose on every side. He had no idea where the attackers came from. Lin Chong, leading his Iron Cavalry, drove Zhang Qin, horse and rider, into the water. Waiting for him in a line in the river were eight naval chieftains: Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun, the three Ruan brothers and the two Tongs. Zhang Qin could not struggle loose. The three Ruan brothers grabbed and bound him, and took him into camp. The naval chieftains hurried to report his capture to Song Jiang.
At Wu Yong's urging, the outlaws attacked the town the same night. It was impossible for the prefect to withstand them by himself. On four sides outside the town cannon boomed. The gates swung wide. The terrified prefect had nowhere to run.
Song Jiang's forces surged into the town. First, they freed Liu Tang. Then they broke open the granaries, sent part of the grain and money to the mountain stronghold, and distributed the rest among the people. They spared the life of the prefect, since he ordinarily had been a decent official.
Song Jiang and chieftains gathered in the prefectural office. The naval commanders brought forward Zhang Qin. He had wounded many of their brothers, and the chieftains, grinding their teeth in rage, wanted to kill him. But Song Jiang ordered that he be untied, and came down the steps to greet him.
"We offended your mighty prestige by mistake," he apologized. "Please don't hold it against us." He invited Featherless Arrow into the hall.
Before the words were out of his mouth, Lu Zhishen, his head bound with a kerchief, rushed up with raised staff to smite Zhang Qin. Song Jiang blocked him and shouted at him to stand aside.
Moved by Song Jiang's chivalry, Featherless Arrow kowtowed and declared his surrender. Song Jiang poured wine upon the ground and broke an arrow.
"If you brothers insist on vengeance, Heaven will not protect you, and you'll die beneath the sword!" he prophesied.
The chieftains had no reply. They smilingly relaxed and acceded. Everyone was pleased. The troops were mustered in preparation for the return to the mountain. Zhang Qin had a suggestion.
"In Dongchang district there is a veterinary named Huangfu Duan," he said. "He's a good judge of horses, and knows the causes of their chills and fevers. With potions and needles, he cures them all. His skill is truly remarkable. He's from Youzhou Prefecture, originally. He has blue eyes and blond hair and foreign features, and is known as the Purple Beard. We could use him on Mount Liangshan. We could tell him to bring his family and come with us, if that meets with your approval."
Song Jiang agreed with pleasure. "If Huangfu Duan is willing to join us, we'll be glad to have him."
Happy that Song Jiang manifested such a clear fondness for him, Zhang Qin summoned the veterinary. Song Jiang and the chieftains were favorably impressed. Huangfu Duan was certainly out of the ordinary. His blue eyes had two pupils each, and his curly beard extended down below his waist. Huangfu was received with such chivalry that he willingly agreed to join the band. Song Jiang was more than content.
Having restored internal harmony, he ordered the chieftains to muster the carts, laden with grain and gold and silver, and set out for the mountain fortress. The two armies, front and rear, also marched.
The return journey was uneventful, and they soon reached Loyalty Hall. Song Jiang summoned Gong Wang and Ding Desun and spoke to them kindly. The two kowtowed and declared their allegiance. Huangfu Duan became the stronghold's official veterinary. General Two Spears Dong Ping and Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin were enrolled as chieftains.
Extremely pleased, Song Jiang called for a feast of celebration. Each took his place in Loyalty Hall according to rank. There were exactly one hundred and eight of them.
"Brothers," said Song Jiang, "from the time we began to gather on this mountain, we've never had any real losses anywhere. This is due to Heaven's beneficence, to the ability of no man. I'm leader today only thanks to the courage of you brothers. Joined here in righteous assembly, I've a few words I would like to say. I hope you brothers will listen."
"Please speak, Big Brother," said Wu Yong. "We'd like to hear you." Song Jiang expounded his ideas before the chieftains. And as a result, the 36 stars of Heavenly Spirits confirmed their destined number and the 72 stars of Earthly Fiends tallied with the divine design.

Now after taking Dongping Song Jiang withdrew his forces to Anshan, and was about to return to the mountain stronghold when the Daytime Rat came and announced: "The Unicorn has lost two divisions in the attack on Dongchang. They've a very brave general called Zhang Qing, a fellow who's immensely strong. He's a crack shot with a stone, never misses. People call him Hotshot. He has two lieutenants: one is Gong Wang, otherwise known as Stripes, because he's these tiger stripes tattooed all over his body and a whacking great tiger's head on the back of his neck. He can hurl a javelin from horseback. The other is Ding Desun, known as Scarface, who's got this great scar running from his cheek to his neck. He throws a trident from horseback. The Unicorn marched right up to the walls of the city, see, but for ten days no one came out to fight. Then a few days Fago Hotshot came out and challenged us. The Hound answered him. They fought a good many bouts and when Hotshot broke off the Hound chased him and got caught with a stone on the temple that knocked him off his horse. The Prodigal hit Hotshot's horse with an arrow, which allowed us to rescue the Hound, but we lost the battle. The next day Demon King, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost went out to fight with their whirling shields, but unfortunately the Eight-Armed Ogre caught one of Scarface's tridents in the ribs, so we lost that fight too. Because we have two leaders wounded and laid up in the boats, the Professor sent me to ask you to come and lend a hand as soon as possible."
Song Jiang sighed and said: "The Unicorn has had no luck. I especially got the Professor and Taoist Gongsun to help him, because I wanted him to have a military success. I thought it would stand him in good stead among our comrades. I never thought he would meet with such adversity! But since this is how it's turned out, we must all go and lend a hand."
Orders were given and three contingents were mobilized. The leaders mounted and rode with Song Jiang, till they reached the boundaries of Dongchang. There the Unicorn was waiting for them. He explained all that had happened, and they made a bivouac.
Whilst they were considering the situation, a soldier came in and reported: "Hotshot is challenging us." Song Jiang ordered his forces out. They formed up on a flat piece of wasteland. The leaders on horseback rode to the pennants gate, from whence Song Jiang observed the opposing army. They were drawn up in a straight line, under five different banners. Three beats of the drum and Hotshot Zhang Qing rode out.
From where he stood under the pennants Song Jiang admired Hotshot as he turned his horse this way and that, churning up the dust. On his left now appeared Stripes and on his right Scarface. The three rode forward together and Hotshot pointed towards Song Jiang and abused him: "You bog-dwelling rebel, your time has come!"
"Who will fight him for me?" Song Jiang asked his men.
A furious hero on a prancing steed appeared beside him, a spear dancing in his hand as he rode forward. It was the Spearsman. "A good match," Song Jiang thought.
The Spearsman flew at Hotshot. Two horses met, two weapons were raised on high. But before they had completed five bouts Hotshot turned away. When the Spearsman gave chase, Hotshot, distracting attention with the spear in his left hand, plunged his right hand into a cotton bag he had and picked out a stone. Twisting in the saddle he took careful aim at Spearsman's head, waited his moment and hurled the stone. It caught the unfortunate hero right between the eyes and knocked him from his horse. Stripes and Scarface rushed forward to take him prisoner. But Song Jiang had many commanders at his disposal, and the Little Duke and the Halberdier, both mounted and wielding halberds, rescued him and brought him back.
Nevertheless it had given Song Jiang and his companions a fright. They had all turned pale. "Who wants to take the fellow on now?" Song Jiang asked. Before he finished speaking, another warrior rode out from behind him. It was the Dandy. Song Jiang would have stopped him, but the Dandy was off already. He closed with Hotshot and they fought many bouts. Eventually the Dandy could no longer parry and he broke off and galloped away. Hotshot galloped after him. He took out a stone and hurled it at the middle of the Dandy's back. It struck the armour with a resounding clang. The Dandy crouched low in the stirrups and fled.
Someone else among Song Jiang's ranks now shouted: "I'm not scared of that oaf!" Slapping his horse and levelling his weapon he charged. It was Victorious, who engaged Hotshot without more ado. Two horses met and a great shout rose to the heavens. Victorious was eager to demonstrate his prowess in front of Song Jiang. Summoning up all his resolve he launched a furious onslaught. Before they completed ten bouts Hotshot turned away. Victorious, wary of his stones, did not pursue him. When Hotshot looked back and saw he was not being followed, he turned his horse round again. Victorious was ready to receive his charge with his spear, but Hotshot had concealed a stone in his hand which now he threw, catching Victorious right between the eyes. The blood spurted out and Victorious galloped back to his own ranks.
The Supremo was enraged by this and without waiting for Song Jiang's order flew at Hotshot, his three-bladed weapon dancing in his hand. But before the horses even met Hotshot raised his arm and the stone concealed in his hand caught the Supremo in the forehead. He dropped his weapon and galloped back.
After seeing so many of his leaders defeated, Song Jiang felt fear in his heart and was about to withdraw his forces. But then from behind the Unicorn someone shouted: "If we allow ourselves to be made fools of today, how will we fight tomorrow? Let's see if he can hit me with his stones!" It was the Ugly Son-in-Law. He slapped his horse and charged Hotshot, with whirling sword. Hotshot said: "Come one, come all. What do I care? Don't you know about my skill with a stone?"
The Ugly Son-in-Law said: "You hit the others, but you can't hit me."
Before he even finished speaking, Hotshot had raised his hand and the stone smashed into the side of his opponent's mouth, knocking him from his horse. Stripes and Scarface tried to take him prisoner, but Song Jiang still had plenty of commanders and they rescued him and brought him back. Song Jiang's anger knew no bounds and drawing his sword he slit the edge of his robe and made this solemn oath: "If I don't get this man I swear I shall never return to the army!"
When he heard the oath, Twin Rods said: "If you speak like that, what are we all here for?" So saying, he urged on his famous horse, the Emperor's gift, and rode to the front, shouting: "You upstart, you think you're great because brute strength and recklessness have brought you a bit of luck. Do you recognize Marshal Huyan Zhuo?"
Hotshot answered him: "You national disgrace, you miserable failure, now you are going to feel the weight of my dread arm!"
Before he even finished a stone was on its way. Twin Rods saw it coming and tried to fend it off with one of his rods. It struck him on the wrist. No longer able to wield his rods, he was obliged to return to his own ranks.
Song Jiang said: "The cavalry leaders have been put out of action. Which of the infantry commanders will take this villain on?"
The Red-Haired Devil stepped forward to do battle, spinning his halberd, his head held high. Hotshot reacted scornfully: "That's pitiful! Your cavalry are all defeated, what chance do you think the infantry will have?"
Needled by this, the Red-Haired Devil charged. Instead of facing him, Hotshot rode away. The Red-Haired Devil gave chase. As he closed the gap between them the Red-Haired Devil struck a crafty blow at Hotshot's horse. The horse lashed out with its hind legs. Its tail swept across his face, obscuring his vision and one of Hotshot's stones knocked him to the ground. As he struggled to rise enemy troops rushed out and dragged him off to their own lines.
Song Jiang gave a shout: "Who will go to rescue the Red-Haired Devil?"
Then the Blue-Faced Beast slapped his horse and whirling his sword charged at Hotshot. Hotshot feinted with his spear and, when his opponent slashed with the sword, bent low in the saddle so the blade cut nothing but air. He took a stone in his hand and shouted "Pow!" The stone whizzed past his opponent's ribs. The next stone hit the helmet and frightened the life out of the Blue-Faced Beast, who crouched low in the saddle and galloped back.
Song Jiang mulled it all over and thought to himself: "If we allow them to get the better of us like this, how can we return to Mount Liang? Who is going to bring me relief?"
Whiskers gave Sergeant Lei a look and said: "It can't be done by one man alone, but the two of us together will press him hard!"
Whiskers rushed forward on the left and Sergeant Lei on the right, both armed with halberds.
"One can't do it so you add another," said Hotshot with a sneer. "Make it ten if you like, it will please me even better." With the utmost calm he sat his horse and hid two stones in his hand. Sergeant Lei came on first. Hotshot raised his hand with a fluent motion and a stone whistled through the air. There was no chance of dodging; before Sergeant Lei realized what was happening it had hit him full in the face and he crashed to the ground. Whiskers rushed to the rescue and another stone hit him in the neck.
When Scimitar saw them wounded, he rode forward impressively twirling his black dragon blade, gave his chestnut steed its head and raced to the rescue of Whiskers and Sergeant Lei. Under cover of Scimitar's weapon the two of them made it back to the army, but Hotshot now fired another of his stones at Scimitar, who quickly parried with his sword. The stone struck the guard and sparks flew out. Scimitar having no stomach to continue the fight reined in his horse and returned. Twin Spears had only watched so far and he thought to himself: "I only changed sides recently. If I don't give some proof of my military skill, I shall be without honour when I go to the mountain with them." He took up his two spears and galloped forward.
Hotshot jeered at him: "You and I are from neighbouring provinces, as close as lips and teeth; what we should be doing is collaborating to exterminate the bandits. Why have you turned traitor? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"
Twin Spears flew at him in a fury. Two horses closed, weapons were raised, the spears clashed and arms tangled. After half a dozen bouts Hotshot turned his horse and put distance between them. Twin Spears said: "Oh no, other people got hit by your stones, but you won't get me!" Hotshot rested his spear and picked a stone out of the bag. The action of his arm was like lightning, the flight of the stone awesome. But Twin Spears' eyes were sharp and his hand quick and he struck the stone away. Seeing he had missed, Hotshot took out another stone and threw it. Again Twin Spears dodged. Having missed with two stones, Hotshot began to feel worried. With his horse's tail flaunted almost in the face of his pursuer's mount, he galloped back to his own ranks on the left. Twin Spears thrust at the retreating back. But he struck only air because Hotshot flattened himself in the saddle. After this blow had missed the two horses were level with each other. Abandoning his own weapon, Hotshot grabbed his opponent's spear arm and tugged. But he was unable to pull the spear from his grasp and the two adversaries became locked together.
In Song Jiang's ranks Hasty was watching. He whirled his great axe and charged to the rescue. On the enemy side Stripes and Scarface galloped out to intercept him. Hotshot and Twin Spears still had not managed to extricate themselves and Hasty, Stripes and Scarface were also locked in combat. Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, the Little Duke and the Halberdier now added the assistance of their two spears and two halberds. Alert to the danger, Hotshot finally broke away from Twin Spears and galloped back to his own side. Equally anxious that he should not escape, Twin Spears charged after him, forgetting to guard against his stones. Hotshot surreptitiously took up a stone, waited till his pursuer was close and yelled "Pow!" as he let fly. Twin Spears quickly dodged and the stone skimmed past his ear. Now Twin Spears turned back, while Hasty broke off the fight with Stripes and Scarface and charged Hotshot. The latter rested his spear, took up a stone and fired it at Hasty, who ducked too late. It hit him in the face and the blood flowed freely. He put up his axe and returned to his ranks.
Leopard's Head and Colonel Hua were still occupying Stripes on one side, while the Little Duke and the Halberdier had intercepted Scarface on the other side. In a panic Stripes flung his spear but failed to hit either of his opponents. Weaponless, he was captured alive by Leopard's Head and Colonel Hua and taken back to their lines. Scarface was still battling furiously against the Little Duke and the Halberdier with his throwing tridents. He didn't notice the Prodigy, who had been watching from the other side and said to himself: "In a short space of time I have seen them defeat fifteen of our leaders. If we can't capture even one of theirs, it's a huge loss of face!" Laying down his staff he took up a bow, set an arrow to the string and fired: swish! it hit Scarface's horse in the leg. The horse fell and the rider was captured by Little Duke and Halberdier and taken back to their ranks. Hotshot would have tried to rescue him but it was one against many and all he could do was retire into Dongchang, with his captive, the Red-Haired Devil.
The Magistrate, watching from the walls, had seen Hotshot defeat fifteen commanders from Mount Liang. Although they had lost Stripes and Scarface, they had taken the Red-Haired Devil. Once inside the city, the Red-Haired Devil was fitted with a heavy cangue and thrown into prison. Further discussions followed.
Song Jiang regrouped his forces. Stripes and Scarface were sent off to Mount Liang. Song Jiang said to the Unicorn and the Professor: "I have heard it said that in the era of the Five Dynasties the Liang emperor Wan Yanzhang defeated thirty-six Tang leaders, all in a short space of time. Today this Hotshot has bested a full fifteen of our leaders in no time at all. Although he is not one of ours, he is definitely a redoubtable warrior." Since no one had anything to say to this, Song Jiang went on: "I have noticed that he relies greatly on Stripes and Scarface to help him out. Now he is deprived of his lieutenants, perhaps we can devise some stratagem to capture him."
The Professor said: "Don't worry brother. I have observed his movements and I have a plan. But first the wounded commanders should be sent back to the mountain stronghold. You can ask Monk, Pilgrim, Colonel Sun, the Tamer and the Executioner to prepare a force of waterborne troops equipped with carts and boats to advance on land and water. The boats will pose a great temptation to Hotshot when he sees them. Thus will our objective be achieved." The Professor went ahead and made his dispositions.
Back in the city, Hotshot had been advising the Governor as follows: "Although we won, the threat has not been eradicated. You must send a spy to find out what is actually going on. Then we will decide what to do."
When the spy returned he reported: "Behind their camp to the northwest they've got several hundred carts carrying an unknown quantity of supplies. On the river they've also got boats with fodder for the horses, some five hundred of them. They're advancing by land and water, with horses and boats. Along the road there are several leaders supervising the operation."
The Magistrate said: "The villains are up to something. I fear we shall suffer the consequences. We'd better send someone out again to find out if it really is supplies."
Next day the soldier came back and reported: "The carts are definitely carrying food supplies. There's even some grain leaking from them. The boats on the river are covered over, but you can still see grain sacks."
Hotshot said: "I'll lead a party out tonight to cut off the carts on the bank first. Afterwards we'll seize the boats. If you back me up, we'll have it all wrapped up."
The Magistrate said: "It's a good plan. We must not let this opportunity escape." He ordered the army to be liberally supplied with food and wine, following which everyone was told to put on armour and issued with cotton sacks. Spear in hand Hotshot with a thousand troops quietly left the city.
It was a clear night with pale moonlight and a star-filled sky. They had only gone a few miles when they saw a string of carts, with a banner on which was clearly written "Official supply convoy of the waterside camp."
Hotshot also saw the Flowery Monk striding along at the head, with his monk's staff at the slope and his black habit rolled up. "I'm going to hit that bald ass on the pate with a stone," he said.
As he strode along Monk was not paying attention. He had eyes only for the road and didn't think to defend himself against stones. So when Hotshot on horseback released his stone with a cry of "Pow!", it hit Monk smack on the head. Blood gushed from the wound and he toppled over backwards. Hotshot's men cheered and charged forward. Pilgrim hurriedly drew his two swords and after a desperate struggle succeeded in rescuing his comrade. The carts were abandoned.
Having seized the carts, Hotshot ascertained that they did indeed contain food supplies and was well pleased. He did not pursue Monk but escorted the carts back to the city. The Magistrate gleefully disposed of them, and Hotshot said: "Now we're going to get the boats."

"Make the most of this opportunity," said the Magistrate.
Hotshot mounted and rode over to the south gate. From here he could see the cargo boats at the jetty, hundreds of them. He ordered the city gates to be opened and cheering loudly they charged down to the river. At this point dark clouds filled the sky, a black mist obscured the heavens. When the troops looked about them they could not even see each other. It was one of Taoist Gongsun's magic spells. Fearful and sightless, Hotshot wanted to turn back. But there was no way either forward or back. All around him were the shouts of the enemy but there was no knowing where they were coming from. Leopard's Head with his armoured cavalry pushed Hotshot's forces back to the river where eight leaders — the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel, the three Ruan brothers and the two Tong brothers — were waiting for them, spread out in a line. Even if Hotshot had had three heads and six arms, he wouldn't have had a chance of fighting his way out of this. He was captured by the three Ruan brothers, trussed up and taken back to the camp. The leaders of the water-borne troops rushed to tell Song Jiang. The Professor urged them all to mount a concerted attack on the city that same night.
The Magistrate had no hope of surviving by his own efforts alone. Guns were going off all around the city. He opened the gates but was horrified to find there was no way to escape. Song Jiang's forces poured in. They rescued the Red-Haired Devil first, and then opened up the stores. Part of the cash and grain was set aside to be sent back to Mount Liang, and part was distributed among the people of the city. The Magistrate, because he had generally been honest and fair, was spared.
Song Jiang called all his people together in the government offices. The boat captains brought Hotshot and handed him over. All the leaders who had been wounded by him were licking their lips at the prospect of seeing him die. But Song Jiang immediately came down from the dais to receive him personally. He apologized saying: "Forgive us for the offence, please do not hold it against us." Then he invited Hotshot up onto the dais. Even as he spoke, Monk, his head swathed in bandages, rushed up steel staff in hand to beat Hotshot. Song Jiang stood between them and hurriedly ordered him back. "Hands off!" he commanded.
Hotshot, seeing Song Jiang so generous of spirit, bowed deeply in sign of submission. Song Jiang, after offering him wine, broke an arrow and swore a solemn oath: "Any member of our company who seeks vengeance, let heaven abandon him and let him die by the sword."
After this no one dared open his mouth. For this was indeed a destined meeting of heavenly stars, bound in honour and loyalty to become allies. After his oath, Song Jiang said: "Let no member of this company harbour resentment," and they all relaxed and were merry. The troops were assembled for the return to the mountain.
Hotshot now happened to recommend to Song Jiang's attention a certain veterinary surgeon of Dongchang . The man was called Huangfu Duan, a double-barrelled surname. "This fellow is brilliant with horses," said Hotshot. "He knows all the animals' ailments, their chills and fevers, he treats them with medicines or acupuncture and never fails of a cure. He's really like the famous vet of antiquity. He has blue eyes and a red beard and looks like a foreigner, so people call him Uncle Redbeard. He could be extremely useful to Mount Liang. Why not invite him with his wife and family to go to the mountain?"
Song Jiang was pleased with the idea. "If Uncle Redbeard is willing to join us it will be most gratifying," he said.
Happy to find Song Jiang was so warm-hearted and generous, Hotshot went and invited Redbeard to meet him and the other leaders. Song Jiang saw immediately that this was someone quite out of the ordinary. He had prominent blue eyes and a curly beard reaching to his waist. Not only was Song Jiang immensely impressed with him, but Redbeard likewise was won over by Song Jiang's noble spirit and willingly agreed to follow the cause.
After some encouraging words to the newcomer, Song Jiang now gave orders for all the leaders to prepare the carts with the valuables and supplies and set off together. The cash and supplies from two provinces were all to be taken back to the mountain resort. One after another the leaders set out. Nothing of importance happened on the journey. Soon they were all gathered in the Ceremonial Hall on Mount Liang. Song Jiang had Stripes and Scarface released and after he had soothed them with flattering speeches they both declared their allegiance. Redbeard was added to the complement as expert in animal care. Twin Spears and Hotshot became new leaders. Song Jiang expressed his satisfaction by at once organizing a banquet to celebrate and all sat down in the Ceremonial Hall according to their rank. Song Jiang took note of the fact that they were now one hundred and eight in all. He made a speech in which he said: "My very dear friends, since first we gathered here on the mountain there have been no losses to our company. This is undoubtedly due to heaven's benevolence, not to human power. Recently you have honoured me as your leader, but I owe everything to your valour. Now for the sake of our brotherhood, and because I have a few more words to say, I ask you to hear me."
The Professor said, "We're yours to command." Song Jiang now spoke to them all and expressed what was on his mind. And it was to have important consequences:

*36 heavenly stars have come to earth,*
*And 72 earth stars, born amid strife.*

WHILE the brigands were on their way to Liangshan Marsh, Bai Sheng arrived and reported to Song Jiang, "Lu Junyi attacked Dongchang Prefecture twice, but was twice defeated. In that town there is a very fierce general named Zhang Qing who is a Zhangte Prefecture man, and is a very skillful horseman. He is unexcelled at throwing stones, and hits his mark every time. He is nicknamed, 'Featherless Arrow.' He has two capable adjutants: Gong Wang, nicknamed 'Flowery Necked Tiger' because his skin is all tattooed like the tigers. He wears a tiger's head, and on horseback throws his spear with great speed and precision. The other adjutant is called Ding Desun nicknamed 'Arrow Struck Tiger.' Both his face and neck are scarred. On horseback he throws his three-pronged trident.
"Lu Junyi arrived in Dongchang with his men, but for the first ten days the troops in the town did not come outside. Two days ago, however, General Zhang Qing came out with his army, and was challenged by Hao Siwen but after a few bouts Zhang Qing was going to retire into the town. Hao Siwen pursued him on horseback, but Zhang Qing threw a stone which knocked Hao Siwen off his horse. But Yan Qing had also followed them, and he now shot an arrow which wounded Zhang Qing's horse, and so saved Hao Siwen's life.
"The next day Xiang Chong and two others of our leaders went out to challenge combat, and adjutant Ding Desun came out to fight them, but he threw his three-pronged trident, and wounded Xiang Chong in the back. Xiang Chong then retired, and that was our second defeat.
"Those two wounded leaders are being attended to on our boats. Wu Yong however told me to come and request you to bring all your men to Dongchang to help him."
When Song Jiang heard this he was sad, and exclaimed, "Lu Junyi has had bad luck! I never anticipated this! We must all go and help him." He at once gave orders for all his men to march to Dongchang Prefecture.
The two forces were soon united, but while the leaders were discussing the situation a scout arrived and reported that General Zhang Qing and his soldiers had again left the town for a fight. The leaders at once mounted their horses and proceeded to an open field. The two forces faced each other with drums beating.
General Zhang Qing was attended by his adjutants Ding Desun and Gong Wang. All three rode forward, and when they halted General Zhang Qing pointed at Song Jiang and said, "You thief from the swamp! Shall we have a fight?"
"Who will fight this man?" asked Song Jiang to his leaders.
Immediately one of his heroes dashed forward armed with a hooked spear, and Song Jiang saw that it was Xu Ning, the "Spear Expert." Song Jiang was pleased as he knew that this man would be a suitable match for General Zhang Qing.
The two men fought, but after about five bouts General Zhang Qing retired. Xu Ning chased him on horseback, but General Zhang Qing put his spear to his left hand and held a stone in his right hand, and when Xu Ning drew near he turned in his saddle and threw the stone which struck Xu Ning in the face and knocked him off his horse. Both the adjutants galloped forward to capture Xu Ning, but at the same time Lu Fang and Guo Sheng also rode forward, and they succeeded in reaching Xu Ning first, and rescuing him, carried him back on their horses.
Song Jiang now asked for another volunteer, and at once another horseman dashed forward. He was Yan Shun, the "Elegant Tiger." He fought with General Zhang Qing for several bouts, but then realizing that he had no chance of winning he withdrew. General Zhang Qing pursued him, and threw a stone which struck Yan Shun in the back so hard that the latter rode with pain. A man shouted, "Who is afraid of this man?" and rode forward holding his long mace. This was Han Tao, the "Ever Victorious General." Han Tao wished to display his skill before Song Jiang so he did his best. After about ten bouts General Zhang Qing withdrew. Han Tao did not pursue him as he suspected that Zhang Qing would throw a stone as before. General Zhang Qing did turn round, but seeing that his opponent was not following him he wheeled his horse round and returned. But just as he neared he threw a stone which hit Han Tao on the nose, and caused blood to flow, so that Han Tao hurriedly retreated.
Upon seeing this Peng Qi, without waiting for orders, dashed forward, but before the two could fight General Zhang Qing suddenly threw another stone which struck Peng Qi right in the face, and made him drop his sword and ride back to the brigands' ranks.
Song Jiang was rather annoyed at these repeated repulses, and was inclined to withdraw all his men. But just then a man called out from behind, If we were repelled today, how can we fight tomorrow? Will he hit me with a stone as well?"
General Song Jiang saw that it was Xuan Zan, the "Disgraced Son-in-law." General Zhang Qing called out, "They come, and go, one by one, but it would be just the same if they come in pairs. Do you know how I throw stones?"
"You have hit others, but you cannot hit me," said Xuan Zan.
He had not finished saying this when he was struck in the mouth by a stone, and fell off his horse. The adjutants Gong Wang and Ding Desun were going to take him prisoner but they were outnumbered by the brigands who rushed forward and took Xuan Zan back.
Song Jiang was very angry at this, and drawing his sword he swore an oath, "If I do not capture this man I will not return."
Huyan Zhuo interposed, "If you take this oath of what use are we?" He at once whipped his horse, and galloped forward. He called out, "You proud one! You have strength without wisdom. Do you recognize the great General Huyan Zhuo?"
"You are a disgrace to our country and a deserter! You want also to suffer at my hand!" replied General Zhang Qing. So saying he again suddenly threw a stone, but Huyan Zhuo put up his whip and received the stone on his wrist. His whip fell to the ground, so he wheeled his horse and retired.
Song Jiang called out, "All our mounted men have been repulsed, so now a foot-soldier had better have a try."
Liu Tang now stepped forward armed with a halberd, but General Zhang Qing laughed at him, and said, "You, defeated bandits, your horsemen have suffered at my hand, not to say you a footman."
Liu Tang was very angry and advanced, but General Zhang Qing declined to fight with him and turned back to his army. But Liu Tang ran forward, and struck the general's horse with his halberd. The horse kicked Liu Tang, and knocked him down while General Zhang Qing threw another stone. Liu Tang was arrested and taken prisoner.
"Who will rescue Liu Tang?" shouted Song Jiang. Yang Zhi now dashed forward on horseback, and General Zhang Qing pretended to defend himself with his spear, but as Yang Zhi thrust with his halberd General Zhang Qing merely evaded the blow. Before Yang Zhi could recover his position he was struck on the head by a stone, and he quickly retreated.
Zhu Tong now turned to Lei Heng, and said, "Men are beaten singly, but we two might succeed."
Lei Hong agreed, and they both advanced on foot, armed with halberds. General Zhang Qing laughed when he saw them, and said, "One alone was useless so an extra one is added. But why don't they play for safety and send ten?" He secretly got two stones in his hand, and suddenly threw one at Lei Heng whom it hit on the forehead and knocked him down. Zhu Tong ran to assist Lei Heng, but another stone hit the former. In the ranks of the brigands Guan Sheng was angry when he saw this further repulse, and whipping his horse he galloped forward to rescue the two leaders. As he got near, however, General Zhang Qing threw a stone, but Guan Sheng received it on his sword so that it fell to the ground. Guan Sheng rescued the two leaders, and took them back into safety.
Dong Ping, the "Two Spears General," thought, "I have only recently joined these brigands, and it is now a suitable opportunity to show my skill. If I don't do something here, I shall have no distinction at the mountain stronghold." So he rode forth and charged General Zhang Qing who called out to him, "We were in command in neighboring towns, and assisted each other in a common cause. Why do you now oppose me? You are a disgrace!"
Dong Ping was annoyed at this, and they fought. The four arms and three spears whirled around and flashed, as numerous lunges were made. After about seven bouts however General Zhang Qing retired.
"You threw stones at the others," said Dong Ping, "so why not at me?"
General Zhang Qing put his spear in its buckle, and taking a stone threw it at his opponent. But Dong Ping knocked the stone to one side with the shaft of his spear. The general threw another stone, but this time Dong Ping crouched and avoided it. This rather disappointed the general, and made him afraid as Dong Ping was now quite close. Dong Ping lunged with his spear as the two horses galloped one behind the other, but General Zhang Qing evaded the blow. The two horses were now level, so General Zhang Qing seized Dong Ping with both arms, but failed to pull Dong Ping off his horse. The two men and two horses were now close together in one mass.
Suo Chao seeing this dashed forward with his axe to help Dong Ping, but on the other side the adjutants Gong Wang and Ding Desun also galloped forward to intercept the fresh opponents. Now there were two separate groups of fighters. Among the brigands Lin Chong and three other leaders rode forth. Upon seeing that he was outnumbered General Zhang Qing released his hold on Dong Ping and retreated. But Dong Ping pursued him right among the soldiers, having forgotten at the moment about the stones. General Zhang Qing reigned in his horse, and when Dong Ping was near he suddenly threw a stone. But Dong Ping saw the move, ducked, evaded the stone, wheeled his horse, and galloped away in safety. The general now threw a stone at Suo Chao which struck that man in the face, so that he at once wheeled his horse and retreated.
The other six horsemen were still fighting in two groups. At last Gong Wang was captured by Lin Chong while Yan Qing on the brigands' side took his crossbow and shot an arrow which wounded adjutant Ding Desun's horse, and he was immediately made prisoner. General Zhang Qing would have liked to rescue his adjutants, but decided not to do so as the opposing force was greater than his. So he ordered his army to return to Dongchang. Upon reaching the town the prisoner Liu Tang was sent to prison, and the Prefect entertained General Zhang Qing at a feast.
On the other side adjutants Ding Desun and Gong Wang were sent to Liangshan Marsh as prisoners.
Song Jiang was conferring with Wu Yong and Lu Junyi when he said, ' I have read that during the Five Dynasties (A.D. 907) there was a man named Wang Yanzhang who defeated thirty-six generals in about an hour. Today this General Zhang Qing has done almost the same thing, having defeated fifteen of our leaders in about the same time. He is undoubtedly a doughty warrior. But it is evident that he depends a great deal on the assistance of his two adjutants, but as we have captured them we can capture him with some strategy."
"You need not worry about him," said Wu Yong. "I have carefully noticed his method of fighting: I have long had a plan to capture him. We must now send all our wounded leaders back to Liangshan Marsh and then order Lu Da and four other leaders to arrange carts and boats to proceed by land and water to induce Zhang Qing into our trap.
In the town General Zhang Qing said to the Prefect, "Although we have twice defeated the brigands yet we have not entirely crippled their activities. We must send spies to find out what they are doing."
This was done, and it was not long before a scout returned and reported, "On the northwest side there are about a hundred carts and about fifty boats on the river. They are evidently all loaded with rice, but I do not know where they came from—but they are approaching the town."
"I am afraid that this is some plot of those brigands," said the Prefect. "We had better send a spy to find out whether it is really rice or not."
This was done, and the following day the scout returned and reported, "The carts are covered with straw, but I saw some grain fell from the cart, and found that it was rice. The boats have covers over the hatches, but I could see the sacks inside evidently filled with rice."
"I will take soldiers tonight, and capture both those carts and boats," said General Zhang Qing.
The Prefect agreed to this, and arrangements were made accordingly. That night a thousand soldiers left the town very quietly. There was not much moonlight, but the sky was clear of clouds and the stars were numerous. After going about three //the advance guard saw a train of carts bearing a flag. "Grain for the Loyalty and Justice Hall at Liangshan Marsh," General Zhang Qing saw Lu Da walking in front with his monk's staff over his shoulder. Lu Da pretended not to be aware of the arrival of General Zhang Qing, and for the moment had forgotten about the stone that was to be expected. General Zhang Qing suddenly threw a stone, which struck Lu Da on the head, made a serious wound, and knocked him down. The soldiers now all shouted and rushed forward. Wu Song was there with a halberd, and abandoned the carts, and rushed to rescue Lu Da. General Zhang Qing seized the carts and was much pleased to find that they really contained rice, so he did not pursue Lu Da, but took the carts into the town with his men. He then left with his army for the South Gate, where from the wall he saw many boats on the river loaded with rice.
He ordered the gate to be opened, and when they marched out they found there was a thick dark mist obscuring their view so that the men could hardly see each other. This was conjured up by Gongsun Sheng. General Zhang Qing decided to return, but was now uncertain as to which way to go. Just then there came loud shouts from the brigands, but he could not know where the brigands were. In trying to evade the brigands he found himself in the water, and was surrounded by brigand leaders who soon arrested him, and took him as prisoner to their camp. When this news was reported to Song Jiang he ordered a vigorous attack on the town.
The Prefect found himself helpless. The city gate was open, and there was sound of bombs outside the town. The brigands were soon in the town, and at once took the prison and released Liu Tang. They also looted the public granary and treasury, and sent half of the rice and money to Liangshan Marsh on carts—the other half being distributed among the people. As the brigands had no fault to find with the Prefect they did not touch him. The leaders assembled in the *yamen* and General Zhang Qing was brought there as prisoner. Many of the leaders showed their anger at the General who had wounded many of their friends, and wished to have him executed. But Song Jiang advanced, and saluted him saying, "We offended you unintentionally, we ask you to forgive us." He then conducted him to the hall. He had no sooner entered the hall than Lu Da with his head bandaged up, stepped forward with his monk's staff to get his revenge. But Song Jiang intervened, and protected General Zhang Qing, who, seeing this exhibition of kindness to a defeated defenseless man, at once saluted Song Jiang and agreed to join the brigands.
Song Jiang now took an oath, broke an arrow, and scattered a cup of wine on the ground, and said. "If we seek revenge Heaven will not support us."
Nobody could say a word against this, and they all agreed to abandon all ideas of revenge. There was soon general rejoicing at this auspicious climax. The next day they all departed for Liangshan Marsh.
Before departing, however, General Zhang Qing introduced to Song Jiang a famous veterinary surgeon who had a double surname Huangfu and a personal name Duan. He knew all diseases of horses, and could cure any sickness by either medicine or needle. He was a Yuzhou man, and had green eyes and light colored beard. He looked like a barbarian, and had the nickname, "Purple Bearded Uncle." There was need for such a man at Liangshan Marsh, and he was duly enrolled. He took his family with him to the bandits' stronghold.
Upon reaching Liangshan Marsh an assembly was held in the Loyalty and Justice Hall, and there Song Jiang talked very friendly with the two adjutants who were prisoners, and they also agreed to join the band. The new recruits were made leaders, and this brought the total number of the leaders to 108. We will now recount the speech made to the assembled leaders by Song Jiang.

36 heavenly heroes replete,
With earthly 72 complete.

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### In Loyalty & Justice Ceremonial Hall, a Stone Table is Found & a Stone Tablet Bears a Mystic writing in Heavenly Script with Heaven's Commands; The Heroes of Liangshan Marsh Take Seats in Order of Rank established once & for all

"After my trouble in Jiangzhou I came up the mountain," said Song Jiang, "and later, thanks entirely to the support of you heroic brothers, I was made leader. Gathered here today we have a total of one hundred and eight chieftains. I am very happy. Since brother Chao Gai's death, on each of the occasions we led troops down the mountain we always returned intact. This is because Heaven defended us. It was not due to the talent of any man. Whenever one of us was captured by the enemy, whether imprisoned or wounded, he always came back safely. All of this was the work of Heaven. None of us can claim any credit. And here we are today, one hundred and eight of us gathered in righteous meeting. Truly an event rarely witnessed from ancient times to the present!
"These are days when armed soldiers roam, slaughtering at will and committing unpardonable crimes. I'm thinking of holding a great mass to thank the spirits of Heaven and Earth for their protective benevolence. We should pray first that they continue to preserve our health and security. Second, that the emperor will pardon our terrible crimes and allow us to serve our country loyally to the death. Third, that Chao Gai's ghost may soon become a spirit in Heaven so that in later reincarnations we may meet again.
"We should pray also that those who died by violence—the burned, the drowned, the murdered innocents—be allowed to cross over into Heaven.
"This is what I'd like to do. I wonder what you brothers think of the idea?"
"Excellent," said the chieftains. "A fine thing that can bring only good."
"Let Taoist mentor Gongsun Sheng conduct the mass," suggested Wu Yong. "Send men down to invite Taoist priests of high attainment to attend and bring the necessary paraphernalia. Have someone buy scented candles and paper horses, plus fruit and flowers, vegetables and other meatless dishes, and all things required for the sacrifices."
It was decided to hold the mass for seven days, starting the fifteenth of the fourth lunar month. The stronghold spent money freely and made full preparations. As the time drew near, four banners were hung in front of Loyalty Hall. Inside, three high altars were built, and idols of the Seven Precious and Three Clean Saints were set. On either side stood the Spirits of the Twenty-Eight Constellations and the Twelve Watches—for these were the true officiators over all important masses. Outside the hall were placed idols of the guardian generals Cui, Lu, Deng and Dou. Then the paraphernalia was laid out and the Taoist priests invited to begin. Including Gongsun Sheng, they numbered forty-nine.

It was a clear, bright day, pleasant and mild, with the moon white in the summer sky and the breeze gentle. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi lit the incense first, followed by Wu Yong and the other chieftains. Gongsun Sheng, officiating over the sacrifices, handed out the required texts and orders. He and the forty-eight Taoist priests would conduct mass thrice daily for seven days. Then they would disperse.

Song Jiang begged Heaven for a sign. He asked Gongsun Sheng to burn special prayers written on paper three times daily, so that their smoke would waft them to the Emperor of Heaven. And so, the third watch of the seventh day found Gongsun Sheng on the first tier of the altar, the other priests on the second, and Song Jiang and the chieftains on the third. The lesser commanders and officers stood below. All were earnestly entreating Heaven for a sign.

Suddenly, there was a sound like the ripping of fabric in the northwest corner of the sky. Everyone looked. They saw an object resembling an upended golden platter, narrow at both ends and broad in the middle. Known as Heaven's Gate, or Heaven's Eye, it was dazzlingly bright and resplendent as sunset clouds. A column of fire, shaped like a willow basket, twirled down from the center of the Eye towards the altar. It circled the altar once, then plunged into the earth near the southern end of the hall.

Heaven's Eye was closed by then, and the Taoist priests descended from their altar. Song Jiang ordered men to dig with shovels and mattocks where the fire had vanished. At a depth of three feet, they found a stone tablet. It was inscribed on both sides with mystic writing. Song Jiang ordered that the ashes of the paper prayers be scattered.

At dawn the next day, after the priests had their breakfast, he gave them gifts of gold and cloth. Only then did they examine the stone tablet. It was covered with weird squiggles, like tadpoles, which no one could decipher. But one of the priests, named Ho, was skilled in the occult.

"I have a set of books at home, handed down from my ancestors," he said, "which teaches how to read Heavenly writing. Since ancient times, it's always been this tadpole script, and I've learned how to decipher it. Let me have a look and I'll tell you what it says."

Pleased, Song Jiang handed over the tablet. The priest perused it for some time. Finally, he spoke.

"These are names of all of you gallant warriors. On one side it says: 'Act in Heaven's Behalf.' On the other: 'Complete Loyalty and Righteousness.' At the top are diagrams of the Great and Small Dippers. Below that are your names. If there's nothing unfavorable, I'll read them aloud, one by one."

"How fortunate that you can solve the mystery. We're extremely thankful. If you can enlighten us, we'll owe you our deepest gratitude. Please don't hesitate even if it contains criticism. Hold nothing back. We want to hear every word."

Song Jiang told Xiao Rang the Master Hand to take notes on yellow paper.

Ho the Taoist priest said: "The thirty-six lines on the front are names of stars of Heavenly Spirits. The seventy-two lines on the back are names of stars of Earthly Fiends." He gazed at them for several minutes, then told Xiao Rang to copy as he dictated.

On the front of the stone tablet were the names of the 36 stars of Heavenly Spirits. They are:

Song Jiang, Tiankui Star, *the Timely Rain*
Lu Junyi, Tiangang Star, *the Jade Unicorn*
Wu Yong, Tianji Star, *the Wizard*
Gongsun Sheng, Tianxian Star, *the Dragon in the Clouds*
Guan Sheng, Tianyong Star, *the Big Halberd*
Lin Chong, Tianxiong Star, *the Panther Head*
Qin Ming, Tianmeng Star, *the Thunderbolt*
Huyan Zhuo, Tianwei Star, *the Two Rods*
Hua Rong, Tianying Star, *the Lesser Li Guang*
Chai Jin, Tiangui Star, *the Small Whirlwind*
Li Ying, Tianfu Star, *the Heaven-Soaring Eagle*
Zhu Tong, Tianman Star, *the Beautiful Beard*
Lu Zhishen, Tiangu Star, *the Tattooed Monk*
Wu Song, Tianshang Star, *the Pilgrim*
Dong Ping, Tianli Star, *General Two Spears*
Zhang Qin, Tianjie Star, *the Featherless Arrow*
Yang Zhi, Tian'an Star, *the Blue-Faced Brute*
Xu Ning, Tianyou Star, *the Metal Lancer*
Suo Chao, Tiankong Star, *the Urgent Vanguard*
Dai Zong, Tiansu Star, *the Marvelous Traveler*
Liu Tang, Tianyi Star, *the Red-Haired Demon*
Li Kui, Tiansha Star, *the Black Whirlwind*
Shi Jin, Tianwei Star, *the Nine Dragons*
Mu Hong, Tianjiu Star, *the Unrestrained*
Lei Heng, Tiantui Star, *the Winged Tiger*
Li Jun, Tianshou Star, *the Turbulent River Dragon*
Ruan the Second, Tianjian Star, *the Ferocious Giant*
Zhang Heng, Tianjing Star, *the Boat Flame*
Ruan the Fifth, Tianzui Star, *the Recklessly Rash*
Zhang Shun, Tiansun Star, *the White Streak in the Waves*
Ruan the Seventh, Tianbai Star, *the Devil Incarnate*
Yang Xiong, Tianlao Star, *the Pallid*
Shi Xiu, Tianhui Star, *the Rash*
Xie Zhen, Tianbao Star, *the Two-Headed Snake*
Xie Bao, Tianku Star, *the Twin-Tailed Scorpion*
Yan Qing, Tianqiao Star, *the Prodigy*

On the back of the stone tablet were written the names of 72 stars of Earthly Fiends:

Zhu Wu, Dikui Star, *the Miraculous Strategist*
Huang Xin, Disha Star, *the Suppressor of Three Mountains*
Sun Li, Diyong Star, *the Sickly General*
Xuan Zan, Dijie Star, *the Ugly Son-in-Law*
Hao Siwen, Dixiong Star, *the Wild Dog*
Han Tao, Diwei Star, *the Ever-Victorious General*
Peng Qi, Diying Star, *the Eyes of Heaven General*
Shan Tinggui, Diqi Star, *the Water General*
Wei Dingguo, Dimeng Star, *the Fire General*
Xiao Rang, Diwen Star, *the Master Hand*
Pei Xuan, Dizheng Star, *the Ironclad Virtue*
Ou Peng, Dikuo Star, *the Golden-Winged Hawk*
Deng Fei, Dihe Star, *the Fiery-Eyed Lion*
Yan Shun, Diqiang Star, *the Elegant Tiger*
Yang Lin, Di'an Star, *the Elegant Panther*
Ling Zhen, Dizhou Star, *the Heaven-Shaking Thunder*
Jiang Jing, Dihui Star, *the Magic Calculator*
Lu Fang, Dizuo Star, *the Little Duke*
Guo Sheng, Diyou Star, *the Second Rengui*
An Daoquan, Diling Star, *the Skilled Doctor*
Huangfu Duan, Dishou Star, *the Purple Beard*
Wang Ying, Diwei Star, *the Stumpy Tiger*
Hu Sanniang, Dihui Star, *Ten Feet of Steel*
Bao Xu, Dibao Star, *the God of Death*
Fan Rui, Diran Star, *the Demon King Who Roils the World*
Kong Ming, Dichang Star, *the Comet*
Kong Liang, Dikuang Star, *the Flaming Star*
Xiang Chong, Difei Star, *the Eight-Armed Nezha*
Li Gun, Dizou Star, *the Flying Divinity*
Jin Dajian, Diqiao Star, *the Jade-Armed Craftsman*
Ma Lin, Diming Star, *the Elfin Flutist*
Tong Wei, Dijin Star, *the Dragon from the Cave*
Tong Meng, Ditui Star, *the River Churning Clam*
Meng Kang, Diman Star, *the Jade Flagpole*
Hou Jian, Disui Star, *the Long-Armed Ape*
Chen Da, Dizhou Star, *the Gorge-Leaping Tiger*
Yang Chun, Diyin Star, *the White-Spotted Snake*
Zheng Tianshou, Diyi Star, *the Fair-Faced Gentleman*
Tao Zongwang, Dili Star, *the Nine-Tailed Tortoise*
Song Qing, Dijun Star, *the Iron Fan*
Yue He, Dile Star, *the Iron Throat*
Gong Wang, Dijie Star, *the Flowery-Necked Tiger*
Ding Desun, Disu Star, *the Arrow-Struck Tiger*
Mu Chun, Dizhen Star, *the Slightly Restrained*
Cao Zheng, Diji Star, *the Demon Carver*
Song Wan, Dimo Star, *the Guardian of the Clouds*
Du Qian, Diyao Star, *the Skyscraper*
Xue Yong, Diyou Star, *the Sick Tiger*
Shi En, Difu Star, *the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub*
Li Zhong, Dipi Star, *the Tiger-Fighting General*
Zhou Tong, Dikong Star, *the Little King*
Tang Long, Digu Star, *the Gold-Coin Spotted Leopard*
Du Xing, Diquan Star, *the Demon Face*
Zou Yuan, Diduan Star, *the Dragon from the Forest*
Zou Run, Dijiao Star, *the One-Horned Dragon*
Zhu Gui, Diqiu Star, *the Dry-Land Crocodile*
Zhu Fu, Dizang Star, *the Smiling Tiger*
Cai Fu, Diping Star, *the Iron Arm*
Cai Qing, Disun Star, *the Single Blossom*
LiLi, Dinu Star, *the Hell's Summoner*
Li Yun, Dicha Star, *the Black-Eyed Tiger*
Jiao Ting, Di'e Star, *the Merciless*
Shi Yong, Dichou Star, *the Stone General*
Sun Xin, Dishu Star, *the Junior General*
Gu Dasao, Diyin Star, *the Tigress*
Zhang Qing, Dixing Star, *the Vegetable Gardener*

Sun Erniang, Dizhuang Star, *the Witch*
Wang Dingliu, Dilie Star, *the Lightning*
Yu Baosi, Dijian Star, *the Spirit of the Dangerous Road*
Bai Sheng, Dihao Star, *the Daylight Rat*
Shi Qian, Dizei Star, *the Flea on the Drum*
Duan Jingzhu, Digou Star, *the Golden Dog*

When he had finished, the chieftains stared at the list in amazement. "Who would have thought," Song Jiang mused, "that a petty functionary like me would be the highest of all the stars. And you, brothers, originally were with me up in the sky together. Today, Heaven has indicated that it is right for us to be united in chivalry. We've reached our full number, and our ranks have been decided by Heaven, with a general division into higher and lower. We've been listed in order, under the star categories of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends. Each of you chieftains must keep to his particular rank. Let there be no squabbling. Heaven's edict must be obeyed."

"Who would dare go against Heaven's will!" said the chieftains.

Song Jiang rewarded priest Ho with fifty ounces of gold. He also gave some payment to the other priests. They collected their paraphernalia for the mass and departed down the mountain.

Song Jiang then conferred with Wu Yong and Zhu Wu. They decided to hang a tablet reading "Loyalty Hall" on the building of that name, put another sign on Unity Pavilion, and build stockades around all three passes in front of the stronghold. Behind the hall they would level a "V" shaped terrace up the slope, and construct a large pavilion at the apex, with building wings extending down on the east and the west. In the pavilion they would place the spirit tablet of Chao Gai. Song Jiang, Wu Yong, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng would occupy the east wing. Lu Junyi, Gongsun Sheng, Kong Ming and Kong Liang would occupy the west.

New pennants and banners were made. On the very top of the mountain an apricot-yellow banner was stretched reading: "Act in Heaven's Behalf." In front of Loyalty Hall were two banners. One said: "Defender of Justice from Shandong," the other: "Jade Unicorn from Hebei," meaning Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, respectively. In addition there were banners of dragons, tigers, bears and panthers rampant; pennants of blue dragons with white tigers, vermilion birds on black backgrounds; golden axes with white tassels, blue banners and black umbrellas, and large fringed banners of black. These were for the use of the armies. There were also banners of the Four Stars in the Big Dipper, Central Heaven and the Four Directions, the Three Essentials and the Nine Elements, the Twenty-Eight Constellations, the Sixty-Four Diagrams, the Nine Heavens and the Eight Diagrams—in all a hundred and twenty-four Heaven-governing banners, all made by Hou Jian. Metal tallies and seals were forged by Jin Dajian.

When everything was ready, an auspicious day was chosen, and oxen and horses were slaughtered in sacrifice to the Spirits of Heaven and Earth. The signs "Loyalty Hall" and "Unity Pavilion" were hung, and the apricot-yellow banner "Act in Heaven's Behalf was also put in place. To the pillars on either side of the entrance to the hall two vermilion vertical tablets were attached. Reading downward, and continuing from the right tablet to the left, they said: "Be ardently righteous and loyal always, never covet wealth or harm the people."

That day Song Jiang ordered a huge feast. He took up his tallies and seals of office and addressed the gathering. "Brothers," he said, "let each of you carry out your duties of leadership, and hearken without fail to orders. To do otherwise would harm our chivalry. Whoever willfully disobeys shall be punished according to military law. None will be let off lightly."

He then read the chain of command, which was as follows:

**General Commanders:** Song Jiang the Defender of Chivalry and Lu Junyi the Jade Unicorn
**Chiefs of Staff:** Wu Yong the Wizard and Gongsun Sheng the Dragon in the Clouds
**Officers for Money and Grain Control:** Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind and Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle
**Officers in Charge of Main Cavalry:** Guan Sheng the Bid Halberd; Lin Chong the Panther Head; Qin Ming the Thunderbolt; Huyan Zhuo the Two Rods and Dong Ping the General Two Spears
**Officers in Charge of Light Cavalry and Vanguard:** Hua Rong the Lesser Li Guang; Xu Ning the Metal Lancer; Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute; Suo Chao the Urgent Vanguard; Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow; Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard; Shi Jin the Nine Dragons and Mu Hong the Unrestrained
**Officers in Charge of Distant Scouting and Picket Cavalry:** Huang Xin the Suppressor of Three Mountains; Sun Li the Sickly General; Xuan Zan the Ugly Son in Law; Hao Siwen the Wild Dog; Han Tao the Ever-Victorious General; Peng Qi the Eyes of Heaven General; Shan Tinggui the Water General; Wei Dingguo the Fire General; Ou Peng the Golden-Winged Hawk; Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion; Yan Shun the Elegant Tiger; Ma Lin the Elfin Flutist; Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger; Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake; Yang Lin the Elegant Panther and Zhou Tong the Little King
**Senior Infantry Officers:** Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk; Wu Song the Pilgrim, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon; Lei Heng the Winged Tiger; Li Kui the Black Whirlwind; Yan Qing the Prodigy; Yang Xiong the Pallid; Shi Xiu the Rash; Xie Zhen the Two-Headed Snake and Xie Bao the Two-Tailed Scorpion
**Junior Infantry Officers:** Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World; Bao Xu the God of Death; Xiang Chong the Eight-Armed Nezha; Li Gun the Flying Divinity; Xue Yong the Sick Tiger; Shi En the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub; Mu Chun the Slightly Restrained; Li Zhong the Tiger-Fighting General; Zheng Tianshou the Fair-Eyed Gentleman; Song Wan the Guardian of the Clouds; Du Qian the Skyscraper; Zou Yuan the Dragon from the Forest; Zou Run the One-Horned Dragon; Gong Wang the Flowery-Necked Tiger; Ding Desun the Arrow-Struck Tiger; Jiao Ting the Merciless and Shi Yong the Stone General
**Officers in Charge of Four Water Defense Forts:** Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon; Zhang Heng the Boat Flame; Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves; Ruan the Second the Ferocious Giant; Ruan the Fifth the Reckless Rash; Ruan the Seventh the Devil Incarnate; Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave and Tong Meng the River Churning Clam
**Officers in Charge of Four Information-Gathering and New Arrival-Welcoming Inns:** Sun Xin the Junior General and Gu Dasao the Tigress (Dongshan Inn); Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener and Sun Erniang the Witch (Xishan Inn); Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile and Du Xing the Demon Face (Nanshan Inn); LiLi the Hell's Summoner and Wang Dingliu the Lightning (Beishan Inn)
**Chief Scout:** Dai Zong the Marvelous Traveler
**Officers in Charge of Delivery of Secret Messages for Infantry:** Yue He the Iron Throat; Shi Qian the Flea on the Drum; Duan Jingzhu the Golden Dog and Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat
**Officers Guarding Central Army Headquarters:** Lu Fang the Little Duke and Guo Zheng the Second Rengui
**Infantry Officers Guarding Central Army Headquarters:** Kong Ming the Comet and Kong Liang the Flaming Star
**Officers in Charge of Punishments and Executions:** Cai Fu the Iron Arm and Cai Qing the Single Blossom
**Cavalry Liaisons Among the Three Armies:** Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger and Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Iron
**Deputy Chief of Staff:** Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist

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The following are officers who were assigned administrative jobs:

**Dispatches and Orders:** Xiao Rang the Master Hand
**Military and Civil Awards and Punishments:** Pei Xuan the Ironclad Virtue
**Money and Grain Accounting:** Jiang Jing the Magic Calculator
**Boat Building:** Meng Kang the Jade Flagpole
**Tally and Seal Making:** Jin Dajian the Jade-Armed Craftsman
**Manufacture of Banners and Robes:** Hou Jian the Long-Armed Ape
**Veterinary and Horse Attending:** Huangfu Duan the Purple Beard
**Doctor of Medicine and Surgery:** An Daoshun the Skilled Doctor
**Weapons and Armor Making:** Tang Long the Gold-Coin Spotted Leopard
**Manufacture of Cannon:** Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaken Thunder
**House Construction and Maintenance:** Li Yun the Black-Eyed Tiger
**Butchery:** Cao Zheng the Demon Carver
**Banquet Supervision:** Song Qing the Iron Fan
**Wine and Vinegar Brewing:** Zhu Fu the Smiling Tiger
**Erection of Walls and Fortifications:** Tao Zongwang the Nine-Tailed Tortoise
**Chief Standard Bearer:** Yu Baosi the Spirit of the Dangerous Road

The decree was dated "a lucky day of the fourth lunar month, in the second year of the Xuan He Period (1121CE), at the great meeting on Mount Liangshan, when assignment of duties was proclaimed."

Each chieftain then received his appropriate tallies and seals and the feasting ended. Everyone was very drunk. The chieftains left to take up their posts. Those who had not yet been appointed retired to quarters before and behind the "V" terrace to await orders.

Song Jiang selected another auspicious day, burned incense, and ordered drums beaten to summon the chieftains. When all had assembled in the hall, he addressed them.

"This is no ordinary occasion. I have something to say. Since we have come together as the stars of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends, we must vow before Heaven to unite to the death without reservation, rescue one another from danger and aid one another in misfortune, while striving jointly to defend the country and preserve peace for the people."

The chieftains heartily concurred. They too lit incense and knelt together in the hall, Song Jiang continued.

"I was only a petty functionary, and have neither learning nor ability. But thanks to the protection of Heaven and Earth and the illumination of the sun and the moon, we brothers have gathered here on Mount Liangshan in the Marsh and formed a heroic host. There are now one hundred and eight of us, which conforms to the number ordained by Heaven and is pleasing to the hearts of men. From this day on, if any of us acts in a deliberately unvirtuous manner, or offends our code of chivalry, we pray that Heaven and Earth scourge him, that the spirits and men destroy him, that he never again be reincarnated in human form and remain forever sunk in the depths. We vow to serve our country in righteous loyalty, act in Heaven's behalf, defend our borders and secure our people. Heaven examine us, and by Your Luminance reply."

In chorus the chieftains swore their eternal unity. That day, they reaffirmed their fraternity in a blood oath. They imbibed heavily of wine before the convention finally disbanded.

This, reader, was the grand confluence of chivalry in Liangshan Marsh. The origin of these men and their assignments was preordained. We shall not repeat ourselves.

The gallant fellows often went down the mountain, alone or at the head of a body of men, or simply a few of the chieftains together, and patrolled the roads. Ordinary travellers and merchants were not molested. But if they encountered a high official, they lightened his coffers of their gold and silver. Not a member of his family was left alive. Loot was delivered to the mountain stronghold and put in the treasury for collective use. Trifling items of booty were divided among the men.

Ranging within a radius of three hundred *li*, the outlaws openly plundered the wealth of prominent families which oppressed the people. Who dared to oppose! They raided the accumulations of such persons and newly rich upstarts, near and far, and carried them up the mountain. They staged well over a thousand such raids. No one could resist them, and they cared nothing about possible public lamentations by their victims. In any event, no one spoke out and they were never exposed.

Song Jiang remained on the mountain after the oath of unity. The scorching heat of summer was replaced by the cool of early autumn. The Ninth Day of the Ninth Lunar Month Festival was fast approaching. Song Jiang directed Song Qing to lay a feast at which the brothers could enjoy the flowering chrysanthemums. All those who were away from the fortress were summoned back.

There was a mountain of meat and a sea of wine that day. Quantities were first dispensed among the outlying forces of the cavalry, infantry and navy, and among the junior commanders, so that they might form their own gatherings and dine together.

Chrysanthemums were banked in Loyalty Hall, where the chieftains sat according to rank, wine cups in hand. In the front of the hall, on either side, gongs crashed and drums pounded. The chieftains revelled, to the clink of cups and chopsticks, with much noise and laughter. Ma Lin played the flute and sang, Yan Qing strummed the *zheng* lute.

Before they knew it, it was dusk. Song Jiang, very drunk, called for paper and a brush-pen, determined to write a poem. When he had finished, he sang it to musical accompaniment. It went like this:

*Welcoming the Double Ninth*
*With newly distilled good wine,*
*We gaze at the blue waters, red bills,*
*Yellow reeds and dark bamboo.*
*The grey in my hair is ever increasing,*
*But a yellow chrysanthemum is tucked over one ear.*
*Let us savor our friendship,*
*More precious than gold or jade.*
*We've controlled the savage foe and can defend our borders,*
*Our orders are wise, our discipline tight.*
*We want only to repel the barbarian invaders,*
*Defend the people and our country.*
*Constantly we burn with loyal ardor, though wicked officials*
*Are blind to our exploits.*
*May the emperor soon hand down an amnesty,*
*Then will our hearts be fully at ease.*

"Day in and day out you talk about amnesty," Wu Song shouted. "You're cooling our enthusiasm!"

And the Black Whirlwind glared and exclaimed: "Amnesty, amnesty, who needs a friggin amnesty!" He kicked over the table, smashing everything on it.

"How dare that swarthy oaf behave so rudely," Song Jiang cried. "Guards, take him out and cut his head off!"

The chieftains dropped to their knees. "He's drunk. Forgive him, brother," they pleaded.

"Rise, brothers. Put him in jail, then."

The chieftains were relieved. A few jailors approached Li Kui.

"Are you afraid I'll resist?" the Black Whirlwind demanded. "I wouldn't complain if Big Brother had me sliced to ribbons! He could have me killed and I wouldn't care! Though Heaven itself can't scare me I'll listen to him."

He walked off with the guards to the jail. The incident shook Song Jiang into sobriety. He was very depressed. Wu Yong spoke to him soothingly.

"Everyone is enjoying this feast you ordered. Li Kui's a crude fellow and goes a little wild when he's drunk. Why take it to heart? Join our brothers in their revelry."

Song Jiang said: "When I got drunk in Jiangzhou and wrote that rebellious poem, he fought for me. Today I wrote another and nearly had him killed. Luckily, you brothers spoke up. My emotional ties with Li Kui are the strongest. We're as close as flesh and bone. I can't help having tears in my eyes."

He turned to Wu Song. "Brother, you're an intelligent man. I advocate amnesty so that we can return to a respectable life and become government officials serving our country. Why should that cool your enthusiasm?"

"All the ministers today, whether civil or military, are crooks," said Lu Zhishen, "and they've got the emperor fooled. Those rogues are as black as my cassock. Who can wash the imperial court clean? An amnesty won't solve anything. Let's have a ceremonial parting, and tomorrow each can go his separate way and be done with it."

"Listen to me, brothers," said Song Jiang. "The emperor is sacred and pure. Because he's surrounded by corrupt ministers he's temporarily confused. But the day will come when the clouds will part and the sun will emerge again. He'll know that we act on Heaven's behalf and never harm the people, and he'll pardon our crimes. We'll serve the country with one heart and strive to distinguish ourselves. What could be finer? That's why I hope we'll be amnestied soon. I want nothing else."

The chieftains thanked Song Jiang profusely. They drank heartily and with good cheer. The banquet broke up and they returned to their respective posts.

Early the next morning chieftains went to see Li Kui. He was still asleep. They awakened him.

"You were drunk yesterday," they said, "and you swore at Big Brother. Today, you're going to be executed."

"I wouldn't dare swear at him even in my dreams," said the Black Whirlwind. "But if he wants to kill me, let him."

They led him into the hall and asked Song Jiang what punishment he should be given. Song Jiang berated Li Kui sternly.

"I have many men under my command. We'd have no law and order whatever if they all behaved as rudely as you! For the sake of these brothers, I'll suspend sentence on your execution. But it will go hard with you if you misbehave again!"

Li Kui, murmuring submissively, withdrew. The chieftains also departed.

*

The days were uneventful as the winter solstice drew near. Snow fell, mantling the world with silver. The sky cleared and a man came up from below and reported: "Seven or eight //from here we captured a group from Laizhou transporting lanterns for the Eastern Capital. What shall we do with them?"
"Don't bind them," said Song Jiang. "Bring them up here." Not long after, the travellers were led into the hall. Two were government bailiffs, eight or nine were lantern artisans. Their wares were on five carts. The leader of them spoke.
"I'm a bailiff in Laizhou. These fellows are lantern artisans. Every year the capital orders three sets of lanterns from our prefecture. This year they've asked for two more in addition. The lanterns are the Jade Shed Intricate Nine-Hued type."
Song Jiang treated the travellers to wine and food, then asked them to display the lanterns. The artisans hung the Jade Shed lanterns, a total of eighty-one, on four sides. Suspended in Loyalty Hall, they extended from the rafters to the floor.
"I'd keep all your lanterns," said Song Jiang, "if I weren't afraid it might get you into difficulty. Just leave me one Nine-Hued lantern set, and you can deliver the rest to the officials. And here are twenty ounces of silver for your trouble."
The travellers thanked him and departed. Song Jiang had the lanterns lit and placed in Chao Gai's memorial hall. The next day he spoke to the chieftains.
"I was born in Shandong and I've never been to the capital. I hear that the emperor is having a big lantern show, with public merry-making and a celebration of the first full moon of the new year. Manufacture of the lanterns began in the winter solstice and has finished only now. I'd like to go into the city secretly with a few brothers and take a look at the lanterns."
"That's not feasible," said Wu Yong. "The Eastern Capital has more police than anywhere. If anything went wrong, what could we do?"
"I'll stay out of sight in an inn during the day. I'll only go into the city at night. What'd happen?" The chieftains tried to dissuade him in vain. Song Jiang insisted. And because Song Jiang went to see the lanterns, a theater was reduced to rubble and a street of brothels became a battlefield. Truly, bold tigers approached the Imperial Palace, fierce stars encroached on Reclining Ox Fort in the night.

Now, after capturing first Dongping and then Dongchang, they are back again on the mountain, and when a count is made there are found to be altogether one hundred and eight leaders. This causes great rejoicing.
Song Jiang spoke to them all: "Since the fight at Jiangzhou, when I first came to the mountain, upheld by your valiant spirit I have served as your leader. Now there are one hundred and eight of us gathered here together, and we have reason to rejoice. True, our friend Chao Gai has passed on, but many new recruits have come to the mountain and our position is secure. All this is due not to human efforts but to the protection of heaven! Those of us who have been captured or suffered imprisonment or been wounded are now safe and sound. That one hundred and eight of us are met here together is truly a rare and unprecedented event. So far the shocks and stresses of a turbulent time have left us no opportunity for thanksgiving. It is my heartfelt desire to hold a thanksgiving service in which we may express our gratitude to the powers of heaven and earth for their great benevolence towards us. Firstly this will afford us an opportunity to pray for the spiritual and physical well-being of all our company; and secondly we can pray for my dearest wish — that the Emperor may soon see fit to grant us amnesty and full pardon for all our transgressions, in order that each and every one of us may dedicate his life to the preservation of this land, even unto death; thirdly we must honour our leader Chao Gai and pray that he may quickly be reborn into this world and that we meet again. Let us pray also for all who have died violent deaths, by fire or flood, and all innocent victims of murder, in order that their spirits may soon cross over. That is what I propose. How say all of you?"
All the leaders praised this resolution, saying, "This is a path of virtuous merit, your idea is a good one."
The Professor said: "First let us ask Taoist Gongsun to conduct the service and then send someone down the mountain to invite eminent priests from all around with their ritual objects. We will have someone buy incense and candles, paper offerings, flowers and fruit and vegetarian food and everything else that is needful for this service."
It was decided that the ceremony should commence on the fifteenth day of the fourth month and last for seven days. They spent freely on the preparations. When the time drew near four long banners were hung in the front of the Ceremonial Hall and three high altars set up within. The interior of the hall was decorated with representations of the Seven Treasures and images of the three Pure Ones. Arranged in two rows were the twenty-eight constellations and the twelve mansions which properly preside over sacrifices of this kind. Outside the hall were the Four Generals, customary guardians of the altar. All the ritual objects pertaining to the ceremony having been laid out, the Taoists were invited up. Counting Taoist Gongsun there were altogether forty-nine priests.
The day of the sacrifice dawned clear, the weather most propitious, with a clear moon and a gentle breeze. Headed by Song Jiang and the Unicorn, with the Professor and the rest of the company following, they took it in turn to light incense. Taoist Gongsun officiated, presiding over the sacrifice and handing out pledges and spells in aid of the dead. Of this no more. Here's how it was at the service:
*Clouds of incense fill the air, the ornamental screen is richly patterned. Thousands of coloured candles shed their light, hundreds of silver lanterns illuminate the scene. Feather umbrellas rise in pairs, funeral banners cluster in profusion. The sound of chanting is wafted on the breeze, the world of appearances is suffused with moonlight. As the bell sounds, the priest goes in to make the offering to the Lord of the Void: while jade ornaments tinkle, the celebrant mounts the altar to worship the Lord of Heaven. Red silk robes are resplendent in the light of dawn, the priests' caps as exotic as royal regalia. The gods, guardians of the altar, are of truly hideous aspect; the ministers, governors of the firmament, of truly ferocious mien. In unison the priests proclaim repentance, on the sacred altar the libation is poured; the holy man quietly intones the mystic verse, with his priestly sword held on high he treads out the pattern of the Dipper. The green dragon comes secretly to the yellow road, the white crane flutters down to the purple mansion.*
Thus did Taoist Gongsun and the forty-eight invited priests perform the service in the Ceremonial Hall that day. Each day three offerings were made at dawn. After seven days had gone by, Song Jiang wanted to request a sign from heaven and instructed Taoist Gongsun to devise and burn special prayers to this effect.
In the third watch of the seventh day they were all assembled before the altar of the Void: Taoist Gongsun on the first level, the other Taoists on the second level, Song Jiang and the leaders on the third level, minor leaders and junior officers down below. All together they entreated heaven to grant them a sign. At that very moment, that is to say, in the third watch of the seventh day, there was a sound in the sky as of a cloth being rent, issuing from the northwest portals of heaven. They all saw something like a golden disc, elongated at either end and broader in the middle, stand upright in the sky. It was the phenomenon known as "The portals of Heaven open" or "Heaven's eye opens". From it shot a ray of light dazzling to the eye, a kaleidoscope of colour; this gave birth to a fireball, round as a basket, that came spinning down onto the altar. Round and round the altar it rolled and then plunged into the ground somewhere to the south.
Heaven's eye had now closed and the Taoists came down from the altar. Song Jiang ordered people to take picks and shovels and excavate the place where the fireball had fallen. Not more than three feet down they came upon a stone tablet, carved on both sides with mystic characters. The poem says:

*Around the altar stand the loyal and good,*
*Heaven's intentions are not easily understood.*
*Good and evil each its harvest reaps;*
*That time does not exist when heaven sleeps.*

Song Jiang ordered them to scatter the ashes from the burnt paper offerings. Early next morning the monks were fed and presented with generous alms of gold and silk. Then the stone tablet was brought out. It was found to be covered with dragon letters and phoenix characters, in a script consisting of strange tadpole-like squiggles, that nobody could read. But among the Taoists there was a monk called Ho, whose religious name was Xuan Tong — he was a student of the occult. He said to Song Jiang: "I have an heirloom, a set of books, handed down by my ancestors. They enable one to decipher mystic writing. These ancient writings are always in tadpole script, and I am able to read and interpret it. I can tell you what this tablet means."
Song Jiang was delighted to hear this and quickly had the tablet shown to Taoist Ho, who studied it for some time and then said: "This stone has all the names of the heroes inscribed on it. And down one side are the four characters 'To Do Heaven's Will' and on the other 'Loyalty, Righteousness, Twin Virtues'. On top are the stars of the heavens and under them names and titles. Provided the meaning is good I will expound it all to you from beginning to end."
"It is lucky that you are able to enlighten us, Master," said Song Jiang. "Fortune indeed is kind to us. We shall be most grateful if you can tell us what it says. Only, if there is anything un-favourable, please do not leave it out. I truly wish you to explain everything and not omit a single word."
Song Jiang ordered the Magic Hand to make a copy on yellow paper. Taoist Ho said that the thirty-six lines of writing on the front were the names of heavenly stars and on the back were the seventy-two earth stars. Below each was inscribed the name of one of the heroes. After studying it for quite a while he told Magic Hand to copy down everything from beginning to end. On the front were written the names of the thirty-six stars of the Marshes of Mount Liang, as follows:

*Chief Star of the Heavens: the Guardian of Righteousness, Song Jiang*
*Righteous Star of the Heavens: the Unicorn, Lu Junyi.*
*Opportune Star of the Heavens: the Beacon of Learning, Professor Wu Yong*
*Wandering Star of the Heavens: Dragon in the Clouds, Taoist Gongsun Sheng*
*Bold Star of the Heavens: Scimitar Guan Sheng*
*Valiant Star of the Heavens: Leopard's Head Lin Chong*
*Fierce Star of the Heavens: Thunderclap Qin Ming*
*Mighty Star of the Heavens: Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo*
*Brave Star of the Heavens: Colonel Hua Rong the Archer*
*Noble Star of the Heavens: Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind*
*Rich Star of the Heavens: Skyhawk Li Ying*
*Boundless Star of the Heavens: Whiskers Zhu Tong*
*Solitary Star of the Heavens: Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk*
*Perilous Star of the Heavens: Pilgrim Wu Song*
*Fixed Star of the Heavens: Twin Spears Dong Ping*
*Unshakeable Star of the Heavens: Hotshot Zhang Qing*
*Dark Star of the Heavens: Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Beast*
*Protective Star of the Heavens: Spearsman Xu Ning*
*Void Star of the Heavens: Hasty Suo Chao*
*Distant Star of the Heavens: Dai Zong the Magic Messenger*
*Bizarre Star of the Heavens: Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil*
*Deadly Star of the Heavens: Iron Ox Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind*
*Majestic Star of the Heavens: Tattooed Dragon Shi Jin*
*Complete Star of the Heavens: Mu Hong the Unstoppable*
*Retiring Star of the Heavens: Winged Tiger Sergeant Lei Heng*
*Reckoning Star of the Heavens: Li Jun the White-Water Dragon*
*Sword Star of the Heavens: Ruan the Second*
*Peace Star of the Heavens: Zhang Heng the Pilot*
*Scourge Star of the Heavens: Ruan the Fifth*
*Injury Star of the Heavens: White Eel Zhang Shun*
*Defeat Star of the Heavens: Ruan the Seventh*
*Prison Star of the Heavens: Morbid Yang Xiong*
*Skilful Star of the Heavens: Madcap Shi Xiu*
*Explosive Star of the Heavens: Two-Headed Snake Xie Zhen*
*Weeping Star of the Heavens: Two-Tailed Scorpion Xie Bao*
*Gifted Star of the Heavens: Yan Qing the Prodigy*

On the reverse of the tablet were listed the seventy-two earth stars:

*Great Earth Star: Strategist Zhu Wu*
*Baleful Earth Star: Tamer of Three Mountains Huang Xin*
*Bold Earth Star: Colonel Sun Li*
*Heroic Earth Star: the Ugly Son-in-Law Xuan Zan*
*Valiant Earth Star: Hound Hao Siwen*
*Mighty Earth Star: Victorious Han Tao*
*Brave Earth Star: the Supremo Peng Qi*
*Strange Earth Star: Shan Tinggui the Water General*
*Fierce Earth Star: Wei Dingguo the Fire General*
*Literate Earth Star: Xiao Rang the Magic Hand*
*Righteous Earth Star: Sterling Pei Xuan*
*Expansive Earth Star: Golden Wings Ou Peng*
*Contentious Earth Star: Redeye Deng Fei*
*Powerful Earth Star: Yan Shun the Dandy*
*Secretive Earth Star: Panther Yang Lin*
*Central Earth Star: Thunderer Ling Zhen*
*Able Earth Star: Jiang Jing the Magic Calculator*
*Auxiliary Earth Star: L Fang the Little Duke*
*Protective Earth Star: Halberdier Guo Sheng*
*Magical Earth Star: Doctor An Daoquan*
*Untamed Earth Star: Redbeard Huangfu Duan*
*Majestic Earth Star: Short-Arse Wang Ying*
*Swift Earth Star: Steelbright Hu, third of her family*
*Explosive Earth Star: Pluto Bao Xu*
*Blazing Earth Star: Demon King Fan Rui*
*Mad Earth Star: Blazing Comet Kong Ming*
*Crazy Earth Star: Red Star Kong Liang*
*Flying Earth Star: Xiang Chong the Eight-Armed Ogre*
*Speeding Earth Star: Winged Ghost Li Gun*
*Gifted Earth Star: Craftsman Jin Dajian*
*Renowned Earth Star: Ma Lin the Magic Flautist*
*Advanced Earth Star: Tong Wei the Cave Dragon*

*Retiring Earth Star: Tong Meng the River Rider*
*Boundless Earth Star: Flagpole Meng Kang*
*Pursuing Earth Star: Hou Jian the Ape*
*Encircling Earth Star: Chen Da the River-Jumping Tiger*
*Secret Earth Star: Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake*
*Bizarre Earth Star: Whitey Zheng Tianshou*
*Rational Earth Star: Tao Zongwang the Nine-Tailed Turtle*
*Superior Earth Star: Iron Fan Song Qing*
*Musical Earth Star: Lungs Yue Ho*
*Robust Earth Star: Stripes Gong Wang*
*Speedy Earth Star: Scarface Ding Desun*
*Solid Earth Star: Mu Chun the Irrepressible*
*Steady Earth Star: Cao Zheng the Devil with the Darting Knife*
*Demon Earth Star: Song Wan the Door-God in the Clouds*
*Fiendish Earth Star: Skyscraper Du Qian*
*Gloomy Earth Star: Xue Yong the Pill Monger*
*Hidden Earth Star: the Young Master Shi En*
*Empty Earth Star: Big Chief Zhou Tong*
*Lowly Earth Star: Tiger-Killer Li Zhong*
*Complete Earth Star: Uglymug Du Xing*
*Solitary Earth Star: Spots Tang Long*
*Horned Earth Star: Rhinoceros Zou Run*
*Short Earth Star: Forester Zou Yuan*
*Seasonal Earth Star: Smiler Zhu Fu*
*Imprisoned Earth Star: Crocodile Zhu Gui*
*Peace Earth Star: Strongarm Cai Fu*
*Injury Earth Star: Blossom Cai Qing*
*Slave Earth Star: Li Li the Executioner*
*Judicial Earth Star: Green-Eyes Li Yun*
*Evil Earth Star: Nameless Jiao Ting*
*Uncouth Earth Star: Shi Yong the Guv*
*Numbers Earth Star: Blackface Sun Xin*
*Secret Earth Star: Auntie Gu*
*Punishment Earth Star: Zhang Qing the Gardener*
*Strong Earth Star: Sister Sun the Ogress*
*Brisk Earth Star: Fleetfoot Wang Dingliu*
*Vigorous Earth Star: Perilous Yu Baosi*
*Wasteful Earth Star: Bai Sheng the Daytime Rat*
*Thieving Earth Star: Shi Qian the Flea on the Drum*
*Dog Earth Star: Yellow Dog Duan Jingzhu*

Thus Taoist Ho deciphered the stone tablet and Magic Hand recorded what he read out. Everyone marvelled greatly at it. Song Jiang said to the others: "I am just a humble official, yet apparently I am also the chief star of the heavens and we all share a common destiny. It has been revealed to us that our coming together here is predestined. Now our number is complete. The powers above have fixed the order of the heavenly bodies in their rank and precedence, and we must all observe the order, without rivalry or dissent from heaven's will."

They all replied: "The order of heaven and earth is fixed in nature. Who would dare to question it?"

Song Jiang took out fifty taels to reward Taoist Ho. The other monks received their fees, collected up their ritual objects and went their various ways down the mountain.

*Bright moon, cool breeze for the sacrifice;*
*The birds of the air provide sweet music;*
*The stars of heaven and earth have been listed in right order.*
*Their hearts are set for life on loyalty and righteousness.*

We shall not follow the priests back to their temples, but describe the discussion between Song Jiang, the Professor and the Strategist. They determined to have a plaque set up over the Ceremonial Hall bearing the words "Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness". Another plaque was to be placed in the Pavilion of Unity and new stockades built around the three gates. Behind the Ceremonial Hall a platform was to be constructed, at the centre of which a big hall would be raised with smaller buildings to east and west. The great hall would commemorate the spirit of Chao Gai, while the building on the east would house Song Jiang, the Professor, Little Duke and Halberdier, that on the west the Unicorn, Taoist Gongsun, Star and Comet. On the second level Strategist, Tamer, Colonel Sun, Magic Hand and Sterling would be housed on the left, Magic Messenger, Prodigy, Hotshot, Doctor An and Redbeard on the right. On the left of the Ceremonial Hall, controlling the Treasury and Stores, would be Mr. Chai, Skyhawk, Calculator and Thunderer; on the right Colonel Hua, Demon King, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. The first gate on the front approach would be guarded by Snake and Scorpion. The second gate by Monk and Pilgrim. the third gate by Whiskers and Sergeant Lei. Tattooed Dragon and the Red-Haired Devil would guard the eastern approach, Morbid and Madcap the western approach. On the north would be the Unstoppable and Iron Ox. Beyond the gates there were to be eight camps, four manned by land troops, and four waterside camps: to the south Thunderclap, Hasty, Golden Wings and Redeye; to the east Scimitar, Spearsman, the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound; to the west Leopard's Head, Twin Spears, the Fire and Water Generals; to the north Twin Rods, the Blue-Faced Beast, Victorious and the Supremo. White-Water Dragon and Ruan the Second would be in the southeastern waterside camp, with the Pilot and White Eel on the southwest, Ruan the Fifth and Cave Dragon on the northeast, and Ruan the Seventh and River Rider on the northwest. The rest all had special duties.

Flags and other items were renewed. An apricot yellow ensign was made for the summit bearing the words "To Do Heaven's Will"; in front of the Ceremonial Hall two red embroidered banners saying "Shandong's Guardian of Righteousness" and "The Hebei Unicorn". Other flags depicted flying dragons, tigers, bears and leopards, green dragon and white tiger, scarlet birds on black, golden orioles on a white background; there were blue banners and black umbrellas, with purple tassels and black borders.

Besides the army's war banners, there were banners with the stars of the Dipper and the five directions (north, south, east, west and centre), banners depicting the three powers (heaven, earth and mankind) and the nine classes, banners for the twenty-eight signs of the zodiac, the sixty-four figures of the *Book of Changes* and the colour combinations: in all, one hundred and twenty-four banners representing the governors of destiny. All these were made by the Ape. The Craftsman manufactured all the tallies and stamps for the army.

When all the preparations were complete, an auspicious day and time was chosen, oxen and horses were slaughtered and an offering made to the gods. The tablets were put up in the Ceremonial Hall and the Hall of Unity, and the yellow flag with "To Do Heaven's Will" was flown.

Song Jiang ordained a great feast that day and himself handed out the warrants and chops to the commanders and the orders, saying: "Let every one of our comrades, every leader great or small, note and respect the orders, with no argument or backsliding. If anyone does not obey he will be judged according to military law and will not easily escape punishment."

The duties allotted were as follows:

Supreme commanders of the Marshes of Mount Liang:
*Guardian of Righteousness Song Jiang, Lu Junyi the Unicorn.*
Military advisers:
*Beacon of Learning, Professor Wu Yong*
*Dragon in the Clouds, Taoist Gongsun*
Assistant military adviser:
*Strategist Zhu Wu*
Quarter-masters general:
*Little Whirlwind Chai Jin, Skyhawk Li Ying*
Cavalry division commanders:
*Scimitar Guan Sheng, Leopard's Head Lin Chong, Thunderclap Qin Ming, Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo, Twin Spears Dong Ping*
Cavalry brigade commanders:
*Colonel Hua the Archer, Spearsman Xu Ning, Blue-Faced Beast Yang Zhi, Hasty Suo Chao, Hotshot Zhang Qing, Whiskers Zhu Tong, Tattooed Dragon Shi Jin, Unstoppable Mu Hong*
Cavalry squadron and scout patrol commanders:
*Tamer Huang Xin, Colonel Sun Li, Ugly Son-in-Law Xuan Zan, Hound Hao Siwen, Victorious Han Tao, the Supremo Peng Qi, Water General Shan Tinggui, Fire General Wei Dingguo, Golden Wings Ou Peng, Redeye Deng Fei, Dandy Yan Shun, Magic Flautist Ma Lin, River-Jumping Tiger Chen Da, White-Spotted Snake Yang Chun, Panther Yang Lin, Big Chief Zhou Tong*
Infantry commanders:
*Monk Lu Zhishen, Pilgrim Wu Song, Red-Haired Devil Liu Tang, Sergeant Lei Heng, Iron Ox Li Kui, Prodigy Yan Qing, Morbid Yang Xiong, Madcap Shi Xiu, Two-Headed Snake Xie Chen, Two-Tailed Scorpion Xie Bao*
Infantry patrol commanders:
*Demon King Fan Rui, Pluto Bao Xu, Eight-Armed Ogre Xiang Chong, Winged Ghost Li Gun, Pill Monger Xue Yong, the Young Master Shi En, Irrepressible Mu Chun, Tiger-Killer Li Zhong, Whitey Zheng Tianshou, Door-God in the Cloud Song Wan, Skyscraper Du Qian, Forester Zou Yuan, Rhinoceros Zou Run, Stripes Gong Wang, Scarface Ding Desun, Nameless Jiao Ting, the Guv Shi Yong*
Commanders of the water-borne forces:
*White-Water Dragon Li Jun, Pilot Zhang Heng, White Eel Zhang Shun, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Ruan the Seventh, Cave Dragon Tong Wei, River Rider Tong Meng*
Commanders of the listening-posts and reception points:
Eastern inn — *Blackface Sun Xin, Auntie Gu*
Western inn — *Gardener Zhang Qing, Sister Sun*
Southern inn — *Crocodile Zhu Gui, Uglymug Du Xing*
Northern inn — *Executioner Li Li, Fleetfoot Wang Dingliu*
Chief of intelligence:
*Magic Messenger Dai Zong*
Intelligence officers:
*Lungs Yue Ho, Flea Shi Qian, Yellow Dog Duan Jingzhu, Daytime Rat Bai Sheng*
Special mounted bodyguards for the cavalry commanders:
*Little Duke Lü Fang, Halberdier Guo Sheng*
Special mounted bodyguards for the infantry commanders:
*Comet Kong Ming, Red Star Kong Liang*
Superintendents of punishment and execution:
*Strongarm Cai Fu, Blossom Cai Qing*
Heads of recruitment:
*Short-Arse Wang Ying, Steelbright Hu*
Construction and miscellaneous tasks:
Notices and orders:
*Magic Hand Xiao Rang*
Rewards and punishments:
*Sterling Pei Xuan*
Audit of cash and supplies:
*Magic Calculator Jiang Jing*
Construction of war vessels:
*Flagpole Meng Kang*
Production of warrants and chops:
*Craftsman Jin Dajian*
Manufacture of flags and banners:
*Long-Armed Ape Hou Jian*
Animal health:
*Redbeard Huangfu Duan*
Human health:
*Doctor An Daoquan*

Production of armour:
*Spots Tang Long*
Shells and ammunition:
*Thunderer Ling Zhen*
Building and maintenance:
*Green-Eyes Li Yun*
Butcher:
*Knife Cao Zheng*
Feasts:
*Iron Fan Song Qing*
Wine:
*Smiler Zhu Fu*
Fortifications and defences:
*Nine-Tailed Turtle Tao Zongwang*
Standard bearer:
*Perilous Yu Baosi*

When Song Jiang had issued the orders setting out all these duties and every officer had received his warrant and the feast was over, everyone was very drunk and they all went back to their allotted quarters. Those among them who had not received duties gathered around the platform awaiting orders. There are some lines which describe the excellencies of Mount Liang:

*Throughout the domain there may be various names but there is just one family. In the universe their nature as celestial stars is revealed; among human society their heroic quality is displayed. Drawn from far and wide, they have always been close for they are of one mind, to live and die together is their only wish. Though faces and language differ, as do north and south and east and west, they are all alike in feeling and spirit, constant in loyalty, truth, faith and righteousness. They include the descendants of emperors, representatives of the rich and famous, adherents of all three religions and all the philosophies, but also hunters and fishermen, butchers and public execu-tioners, and all call each other brother, making no distinction between noble and base-born. Some are closely related, as husbands and wives, uncles and nephews, while others are servants following their masters, yet all are united in the fight against injustice, all sit down together to eat and drink, not asking whether they are close or distant relatives. Spiritual or coarse, rustic or refined, there is no mutual suspicion between them, but all live together in friendship. Each has his special skill, whether with tongue and pen or sword and spear, whether in direct attack or the use of stealth: it is truly a case of each according to his ability. When the problem is forging a document, they can avail themselves of a Magic Hand to fashion an appropriate style; when it is a question of tyranny , they can boast of having killed the Failed Scholar. Wang Lun, to wipe out petty spite. Within these hundred leagues live one hundred and eight heroes. Once upon a time their fame spread far and wide among the rivers and lakes, just as in olden days sound used to carry from the bell towers. Now they know their order of precedence among the stars, each joined to another like the beads of a rosary. After Chao Gai, entrusted with the leadership, incontinently returned to heaven, it fell to Song Jiang to assume command in the stronghold. But speak not of a mere assembly of outlaws, for this leader's wish has ever been to give his allegiance to the highest authority in the land.*

The orders that had been given out in the Ceremonial Hall of Mount Liang were strictly observed by all. Song Jiang chose an auspicious day and time, burnt incense, and had the drum sounded to summon everyone to the hall. He said to them: "Things are not now as they used to be and I have a few words to say to you. Now that all the heavenly and earthly stars are assembled, we must all swear an oath, that we will unhesitatingly live and die together, support each other through thick and thin, and fight to preserve the nation and protect the people."

All were content to do so. Each man lit incense and knelt together in the hall while Song Jiang took the oath first: "I, Song Jiang, humble provincial official though I am, with little knowledge and less skill, give thanks that with the protection of heaven and earth, and assisted by the light of sun and moon, I am able to join with this company of brothers here on the mountain, to be united with this company of heroes here in the marshes, numbering one hundred and eight in total, in accordance with heaven's plan and our own wishes. From now on if any one of us swerves from his duty or abandons the path of righteousness, may heaven punish him, may the gods secure his downfall, may he not for ten thousand years be reborn in human form, but rather for a hundred thousand years be plunged in darkness without hope. I trust however that all will set their hearts on loyalty and righteousness, working together for the benefit of the nation, following heaven's will, defending the borders of our land and preserving its people. May heaven bear witness and vouchsafe a sign."

Everyone concurred with these sentiments, desiring to remain united in every life, to meet in every future world and never more be parted. The oath was sealed in blood, wine was drunk and finally the meeting broke up.

You must all of you, my friends, have heard of this occasion, known as the Great Meeting in the Marshes of Mount Liang!

The positions had now been established and no more need be said of this. The heroes went their own way down the mountain, some with troops, some setting out in small groups of their own. If they met merchants and their carts on the road they let them pass on unmolested. If they met high-ranking officials and found gold or money in their baggage, they killed them and their families and sent their possessions up the mountain to be placed in the general coffers. Small items were divided up ad hoc. Whether it was fifty miles or a hundred, whenever there were great riches which had been extorted from the people by local bigwigs, troops were dispatched there to expropriate the goods and take them up the mountain. They met with no resistance. If they heard of any who cheated the innocent and rode roughshod over the poor, amassing great personal riches, whether it was near or far troops were sent to confiscate the wealth and take it up the mountain. This happened in hundreds of cases and no one called them to account for it. Nor did they give any cause for accusations of injustice, so no one denounced them and they had no difficulties.

Since the time of the oath of loyalty Song Jiang had not been down the mountain again. Gradually the weather was becoming cooler with the approach of autumn and soon it would be the Festival of the Double Ninth. Song Jiang ordered his brother, Iron Fan, to organize a banquet, so that all the company could come together and enjoy the chrysanthemums in what is known as the Chrysanthemum Meeting. All those leaders who resided elsewhere than on the mountain, whether far or near, were summoned to participate. On the festive day there was meat stacked in mountains and wine flowing in torrents. Provisions were first distributed to all the leaders of the three arms, horse, foot and waterborne, with orders to assemble their men and entertain them. The Ceremonial Hall had been decked out with chrysanthemums. The leaders all took their allotted places, cups in hand. Gongs, flutes and drums set up a clamour in front of the dais and they all opened their hearts and gave themselves up to enjoyment. The Flautist played his instrument, Lungs sang an air, the Prodigal entertained them on the harp, everyone was having a good time. As evening fell Song Jiang, who was very drunk, called for paper and brush because he wanted to compose an ode while the effect of the wine was still on him. When he finished he gave it to Lungs to sing:

*Joyfully we meet today*
*To celebrate and fill our cups*
*With a new and heady brew.*
*We gaze upon green waters,*
*Red hills, pale reeds*
*And sad bamboo.*
*Much white the years have heaped upon*
*My head, but still I wear*
*A chrysanthemum in my hair.*
*Telling tales of days gone by*
*We sit before the wine-jar here,*
*More precious to us than gold or jade*
*The friendship of this company.*
*The wild beasts all are conquered now,*
*Our territory is secure,*
*Our orders wise, our army strong,*
*Our one desire*
*To fight our country's foe,*
*Our land and kin defend.*
*Constant in loyalty are we,*
*Our valour plain to see;*
*Though venal hearts deny it*
*And lying courtiers' tongues.*
*To ease our hearts there's but one way,*
*To the Highest we direct our plea,*
*And beg for amnesty.*

When Lungs reached the line about begging for amnesty, Pilgrim suddenly shouted out: "We go on and on begging for an amnesty. It'll drive me to distraction!"

Iron Ox now glaring about him with a most ferocious expression shouted out: "Beg for amnesty, beg for amnesty, beg for what fucking amnesty!" and kicked over the table, smashing everything that was on it.

"What does that ugly brute think he's playing at?" Song Jiang roared. "Guards, take him out and cut off his head!"

The others all knelt and said: "He's had too much to drink, it makes him wild, please forgive him, brother."

"Get up, all of you. Just put him under lock and key." Song Jiang said, to everyone's great relief. Some duty guards came forward and nervously asked Iron Ox to go with them. Iron Ox said to them: "You're scared I'm going to resist. If the Leader kills me I won't hold it against him, if he cuts me to pieces I won't mind. But apart from him I'm afraid of no one." Having said this, he went meekly with the guards to his room and slept. When Song Jiang heard what he said, he immediately became sober and bitterly regretted his own anger. The Professor consoled him: "You organized this feast for us, and everyone drank and had a wonderful time. He's a rough type and when he gets drunk he goes berserk. It's not something to get upset over. Be merry now like all the rest of us."

Song Jiang said: "When I got drunk in Jiangzhou I made a fool of myself by writing that seditious poem. Under the influence today I composed that ode and nearly destroyed a life! Thank goodness the rest of you prevented it! He is very close to me. It makes me weep inside." Then he said to Pilgrim: "Brother, you're an intelligent man. All right, suppose I have set my heart on an amnesty, so we can become legitimate again and serve our country, why should that make us lose heart?"

Monk spoke up: "The problem is that nowadays among the court officials, the civilians as much as the military, there is so much envy and corruption; how can we wash it clean? An amnesty won't solve the problem. Maybe we should all agree to part and each go his own way tomorrow to fight his own fights."

Song Jiang said: "Listen to me, all of you. Our Emperor is both illustrious and wise. The problem is only that he is thwarted by evil counsellors and temporarily deluded. I believe the day will come when he can see how we are doing heaven's will, how we do no harm to the innocent; then he will accord us a full pardon so that we can unite to serve the nation and leave behind a glorious name, what is wrong with believing that? This is why we must concentrate our hopes on obtaining the amnesty, we can have no other aim."

The company were utterly won over by his eloquence. More wine was drunk that day and a great time was had by all. Finally the party broke up and everyone returned to their quarters.

Next day at dawn when they went to find Iron Ox he had still not sobered up. The leaders woke him up, shouting: "Yesterday you were filthy drunk and abused the Leader. Today they're going to execute you."

Iron Ox said: "Even in my dreams I wouldn't dare abuse him. If he wants me killed, then so be it."

They took him to the Hall to ask forgiveness of Song Jiang. Song Jiang said sternly: "If all the troops under my command were as unruly as you, what sort of discipline would we have? In deference to all our comrades I will suspend the sentence of execution, but if you offend again you won't get off so lightly!" With many muttered apologies Iron Ox withdrew, and the others all left.

Nothing further happened until the new year drew near. On a day when the snow had begun to melt, a messenger announced that some of their troops had captured a convoy carrying lanterns from Laizhou to the capital some three miles from the stronghold and were awaiting instructions outside the first gate.

Song Jiang said: "Do not bind them. Ask them politely to come in." Soon they were standing in front of the Ceremonial Hall: two policemen, nine lantern makers, travelling with five carts. The chief of them said: "I am a constable of the Laizhou constabulary and these others are lantern makers. As a rule the capital orders three stands of lamps from us, but this year they've added two more. They're lamps painted in nine colours, richly decorated."

Song Jiang offered them all wine and asked them to show him the lamps. When they had taken out a painted lantern and fixed it all up, it was seen to consist of something like nine rows of nine lamps and it hung from the ceiling of the Ceremonial Hall right down to the floor. Song Jiang said: "I had thought to keep your whole production, but I'm afraid that might get you into trouble, which would not be fair, so I have decided to keep just the one set. You can deliver all the rest to the authorities in the capital. I shall pay you twenty taels of silver for this one." They prostrated themselves, thanking him profusely, and then left.

Song Jiang ordered the lantern to be lit and hung in the Chao Gai Memorial Hall. Next day he said to the company: "I was born in Shandong and I've never been to the capital. I have heard that the night of the full moon is to be celebrated for the benefit of the citizens by a grand display of lanterns, which they have been busy making since the beginning of winter. I would like to go secretly with a few comrades to see the illuminations for myself."

The Professor was dismayed: "You mustn't do that," he warned. "The capital will be swarming with police. Suppose something goes wrong, what would we do?"

Song Jiang said: "I'll hide away in an inn by day and only go out to see the illuminations at night. Where's the harm in that?" None of them could dissuade him. He was determined to go. And this is how it came about that

*Fierce tigers approach the city's glorious gates*
*A baleful star assaults the stall of the sleeping ox.*

WHEN the leaders who now numbered 108 were all assembled in the Loyalty and Justice Hall Song Jiang addressed them: "Since I escaped here as a consequence of some outrageous conduct at Jiangzhou I have ever been elected and supported as a leader by you heroic brothers. For that I shall always be grateful. Now I am very glad that we have assembled altogether 108 leaders. Since our late commander Chao Gai passed away we by the help of the spirits have always been victorious in every conflict. This has been due to no person's ability but to the protection of Heaven. Some of our leaders have been imprisoned, and some wounded, but so far not a single one has been killed. There has never been such an assembly of heroes since the world began. We however have killed many men so I propose that we conduct a great sacrificial ceremony for the pacification of their souls, and also to thank Heaven and Earth for their great assistance to us. By this I wish you first get peace at heart. Second, I wish that the Emperor will forgive us our crimes, that we may volunteer ourselves to the service of our country. Thirdly, I wish the early reincarnation of our late leader Chao Gai into a Heavenly spirit so that we may always be with him. Lastly I wish that all those who lost their lives in our fighting will be profited by our prayers. What do you think of this proposal?"

All the leaders approved of this, and Wu Yong said, "I think that the arrangements may be left to Gongsun Sheng, and we can get Taoist priests from everywhere to take part in the ceremony." The 15th day of the fourth month was selected as the first of the seven days of prayers. Sufficient money was appropriated from the treasury to cover the expenses. When the day was drawing near they erected two large flag-staffs in front of the hall, and also a three-storied terrace for the use of the service. Inside the hall they had statutes of ten Taoist Heavenly Immortals, and on each side of them were the spirits of the Twenty Eight Constellations. The Ten Celestial Branches and the Twelve Heavenly Stems were drawn in the hall and outside was erected a sacrificial altar. Four idols were prepared, and dressed up as the Guardian Generals of Cui, Lu, Deng, and Dou. The Taoist priests invited for this service were altogether 49 including Gongsun Sheng and they duly arrived on the appointed date.

Song Jiang and Lu Junyi took the leading part in the ceremony, and Wu Yong and all the other leaders were next to burn incense. Gongsun Sheng wrote the prayers which were distributed among the 48 priests for incantation. There were three services each day, and it took a whole week to finish the whole ceremony. On the last day about midnight Gongsun Sheng was on the first floor of the terrace, the 48 priests were on the second floor, while all the 108 leaders were on the third floor. All the brigands were kneeling around the terrace. They were all united in prayer to Heaven. About 1 A.M. a sharp noise was heard in the sky as though a huge piece of silk was being torn apart. Gazing upward the assembled mass saw in the sky a golden tray with two sides elongated. This was known as "Heaven's Gates Opened," or "Heaven's Eyes Opened." In the bright gap there shone a dazzling blaze of light. Circling around it were clouds of variegated colors. From the middle of the lights came a ball of fire which descended on the first floor of the terrace. It circled round the other two floors and then went to the south side where it disappeared. The Heaven's Gates were now closed. The priests and leaders descended from the terrace. Song Jiang called for shovels and spades to dig the ground where the fire had disappeared. They had dug down only about three feet when they found a stone tablet on which characters were engraved. Orders were given for incense and paper to be offered to Heaven for this gift.

The following day the stone tablet was examined, but nobody could decipher the characters which were evidently of very ancient style. But among the priests was one named He Xuantong who came forward and addressed Song Jiang, "At my home there is a very ancient book which might decipher these characters, and I have studied it a little." He examined the characters carefully for some time, and then said that he thought they were the names of the heroes of Liangshan Marsh. Then turning to the right lateral side he made out the four characters, "Carrying out Heaven's wish," and on the other side were also four characters, "Loyalty and Justice Achieved." On the top side there was a drawing of the Big Dipper. On the front of the stone were the names of the heroes which he said he could make out if Song Jiang permitted him. Song Jiang asked him to do this and hide nothing from him no matter what the message was. He then ordered Xiao Rang to prepare ink and paper, and write down what He Xuantong should decipher. The latter then deciphered one by one all the names of the 108 heroes of Liangshan Marsh, each of whom represented a star in the heaven.

When this was all disclosed the leaders were astonished.

Song Jiang addressed the assembly: "Who should know I, a humble clerk, am under a star, but you, my brothers, are also each under a star. Heaven evidently has intentionally brought us all together to uphold the rule of justice. Heaven has also given each of us our respective positions and responsibilities, so we can raise no disputes among us as to our duties."

All the leaders replied, "This is the Will of Heaven, and we will not disobey it." Song Jiang paid the priests and they all left the mountain.

He then assigned each leader his duties and also quarters. These were clearly written out on paper, sealed, and handed to each man. Song Jiang addressed the assembled leaders and impressed upon them the extreme importance of loyalty. He then told them, "We're now all bound together, must live and die as one body, and you must all support me to act up to the Will of Heaven."
All the assembled leaders took a solemn oath to observe these conditions and then all swore, "We're all united today and so we'll remain throughout this life. Any one among us who'll turn out to be traitor or coward will be noticed by Heaven and Earth and be killed by sword or lightning and his soul will be banished to the afterlife forever, never to be reincarnated in human form. " They then pledged each other in wine in which blood had been mixed. So was achieved this great assembly of heroes sworn to unite to uphold justice.

That night Lu Junyi had a very dreadful dream in which he met a giant warrior who arrested him and brought him to a grand mansion where he and the other 107 leaders of Liangshan Marsh were examined and sentenced to death. On the point of being executed he happened to look upward as he dreamt, and saw a tablet on the top of the door with four big characters meaning, "Universal peace throughout this kingdom."

Mandarins lead an honest life,
Great peace reigns in empire's bounds;
Far and wide no sound of strife,
Elders pass their time at feasts.
People rejoice and regard
Music and proprieties as their heritage;
They wish to voice their merriness,
With lavish songs and joyous ballads.
Graves of fathers, in trees' shade,
Hundred years pass, we'll be dead;
Emperor's taxes being all paid,
Sun's as warm as fur coat.
Zi Jian's fame sounds in vain,
Zhuangzi held official as ox;
Verses written when I'm drunk,
Attract no admiration when sung.

Suddenly, Lu Junyi let out a sharp cry and opened his eyes, his body drenched in a cold sweat that soaked through his ceremonial robes. The terrifying image of the executioner's blade and the headless corpses of his brothers vanished instantly, replaced by the warm, flickering candlelight of the Liangshan Hall. Around him, the grand banquet was only just drawing to a close, and the merry shouts of the hundred and seven heroes still echoed vibrantly through the rafters. Seeing his brother's sudden distress, Song Jiang raised his wine cup and laughed heartily, dismissing the horrific vision as a mere trick of the mind brought on by the heavy drinking and the overwhelming solemnity of their grand assembly. Lu Junyi forced a smile and drank, allowing the boisterous cheers of the hall to drown out his terror. Yet, as the stars faded and a new day dawned over the misty marsh, an icy shadow remained permanently cast over his heart—a silent, divine warning of the tragic path of amnesty and betrayal that lay just ahead.

## 072

### Chai Jin Wears a Cockade & Enters the Forbidden Courtyard in the palace with a flower in his hat; Iron Ox Li Kui on Festival Night Disturbs the Eastern Capital & raises hell

In Loyalty Hall that day Song Jiang announced the disposition of those who would go to see the lanterns: "I will travel with Chai Jin, Shi Jin with Mu Hong, Lu Zhishen with Wu Song, and Zhu Tong with Liu Tang. The rest of you will remain and guard the fortress."
"They say the lanterns of the Eastern Capital are a pretty sight," said Li Kui. "I want to go too."
"Impossible," said Song Jiang.
Li Kui insisted stubbornly. There was no refusing him. Finally, Song Jiang relented.
"All right. But only on condition that you don't make any trouble. Dress as a servant."
He told Yan Qing to accompany them also, with the specific task of keeping a watchful eye on Li Kui.
You will remember, reader, that Song Jiang's face bore the tattoo of the criminal. How could he appear in the capital city? After the skilled doctor An Daoquan had arrived at the stronghold he had removed the mark with a powerful caustic. Later, he treated the wound with good medicines. When a red scar formed he removed this gradually with daily applications of poultices containing powdered gold and ground jade. That is what medical books refer to when they talk of "obliterating blemishes with fine jade."
Song Jiang instructed Shi Jin and Mu Hong to go first, disguised as travellers. Lu Zhishen and Wu Song would go next, as wandering monks. Lastly would be Zhu Tong and Liu Tang, in the garb of merchants. All wore swords and carried halberds and, needless to say, had concealed weapons on their persons. Song Jiang himself and Chai Jin pretended to be vacationing officials. Dai Zong went as a lieutenant. In the event of any emergency, he could rush back to the stronghold with a report.
Li Kui and Yan Qing, the "servants," transported the luggage of the "officials" down the mountain on carrying-poles. The chieftains saw the travellers off to the Shore of Golden Sands. Wu Yong cautioned Li Kui. "Whenever you set out on your own you get into a jam. This time you're going to the Eastern Capital with Big Brother to see the lanterns. It's not your usual jaunt. You're not to drink on the road. Behave with caution and curb your temper. If you provoke any clashes, we brothers may have to terminate our relationship."
"Don't worry, Military Advisor," said the Black Whirlwind, "I won't stir up anything."
They parted, and the travellers set out. They touched Jizhou, passed Tengzhou, went through Danzhou, reached Caozhou, and at last arrived at an inn outside the Wanshou Gate of the Eastern Capital, where they took quarters. It was the eleventh day of the first lunar month. Song Jiang conferred with Chai Jin.
"I don't dare enter the capital tomorrow in daylight," he said. "I'll wait until the evening of the fourteenth, when the celebration is noisiest, and go in then."
"I'll scout out a route for you with Yan Qing tomorrow."
"Excellent."
The following day Chai Jin dressed handsomely, bound his head in a fresh kerchief, and put on clean shoes and stockings. Yan Qing also garbed himself fashionably. The two left the inn. The suburban households were festive and gay as they prepared to enjoy the lantern festival and celebrate the peaceful atmosphere. Chai and Yan reached the gate without incident and entered the city.
They strolled along Imperial Road, taking in the sights, and came to the area adjoining the palace's East Glory Gate. Here were many taverns and tea-houses, patronized by people richly garbed in silks and satins, each in a distinctive color. Chai Jin led Yan Qing to a small tavern. They went upstairs and sat down in a room overlooking the street.
They could see attendants going in and out of the palace grounds. Each wore a cockade in the shape of a flower with jade-green leaves tacked to the side of his head kerchief. Chai whispered some instructions in Yan's ear. Yan nodded, went swiftly down the stairs and left the tavern. Fortunately, the attendant he approached was rather simple-minded. Yan hailed him respectfully.
"I don't know your face," the man said. "We've never met."
"My master is an old friend of yours. He's sent me to invite you to join him. Aren't you Inspector Zhang?"
"My name is Wang."
"Oh, Inspector Wang, of course. That's the name. I was in such a hurry, I forgot."
Wang went with Yan into the tavern and up the stairs. Yan raised the door curtain and announced: "Inspector Wang is here." He gave Chai a hidden signal with his hand.
The two men exchanged courtesies. Wang looked at Chai Jin. He didn't know him. "My eyesight is poor," he said. "I'm afraid I don't remember Your Excellence. Would you be good enough to tell me your name?"
Chai Jin smiled. "We were friends as children. You'll think of it without me saying." He summoned the waiter and ordered wine.
Tasty dishes were served, and Yan Qing saw to it that the attendant's cup remained filled. When the man was half drunk, Chai questioned him.
"What is the meaning of that cockade?"
"Today, the emperor is celebrating the first full moon. There are twenty-four companies of us palace attendants, nearly fifty-eight hundred men in all. We've each been issued a new robe, a cockade in the shape of green leaves and a golden flower, and a small metal badge pinned above it reading: 'Celebrate with the People.' We're on call at all times. Only those with this palace cockade and robe are allowed in."
"I didn't know that," said Chai Jin. They downed several more cups, and Chai said to Yan Qing: "Get us a pot of warm wine."
Before long, Yan brought the wine. Chai Jin rose and addressed Attendant Wang, cup in hand.
"Drink this round I respectfully offer and you'll know my name."
"I just can't think of it. Please tell me."
Wang raised his cup and drained it. Almost instantly he began to drool from the corners of his mouth. His feet flailed, and he fell back off his bench. Chai quickly stripped Wang of his head kerchief, clothing and footwear, and put them on, including the cockade and the colored silk robe.
"If the waiter should ask," he said to Yan Qing, "tell him the attendant is drunk, and that the other gentleman will be back soon."
"No need to instruct me. I'll handle it."
Chai Jin left the tavern and went to the East Glory Gate of the palace. Because of the cockade and the color of his robe, no one stopped him from entering. It was a splendid, lavish place of glorious hues, a paradise on earth. Chai passed a number of compounds whose gates were closed and fastened with golden locks. Then, off to a side, he saw a sign in letters of gold, "Hall of Deep Thought." This was the imperial library.
Its vermilion doors of ornately carved wood were open. Chai Jin entered. Directly opposite was an imperial chair, flanked by tables on which lay brush-pens with ivory handles, decorated paper, imperial ink-slabs, and the famous grinding stones from Duanxi. Innumerable sets of books lined the walls, each with ivory fastenings. Behind the chair was a screen decorated with a scenic panorama in lovely colors. Chai Jin walked around to the back of the screen. It was blank, except for a listing of the four major outlaws, as follows: "Song Jiang of Shandong, Wang Qing west of the River Huai, Tian Hu of Hebei, Fang La south of the Yangzi."
"We are the ones who are ravaging the country," Chai Jin reflected. "It has been written here so that no one will forget." He drew a concealed knife and cut out the words "Song Jiang of Shandong" and hastily quit the building. Others were already entering.
Chai Jin left the inner grounds, departed through the East Glory Gate, and returned to the tavern. Attendant Wang was still in a drugged slumber. Chai took off Wang's clothes and put on his own. He directed Yan Qing to pay the bill and give the waiter a large tip.
As he and Yan were leaving he said to the waiter: "Attendant Wang and I are close friends. He's drunk, so I signed in for him at the palace. He still hasn't come to, but I have to go outside the city and must leave before the gates close. You can keep the change. Wang's clothing and identification are all here."
"I'll take care of everything, sir," the waiter assured him.
Chai and Yan left the tavern and exited from the city through the Wanshou Gate.
Towards evening the attendant awakened, Since his identifying robe and cockade were still with him, he didn't suspect what had happened. The waiter told him what Chai Jin had said. Still befuddled with drink, Wang returned home.
The next day a colleague informed him: "The words 'Song Jiang of Shandong' have been removed from the Hall of Deep Thought. Today security at every gate is as tight as the bands on a bucket. Anyone going in or out is closely checked."
Wang at last understood. But he didn't dare breathe a word.
On reaching the inn, Chai told in detail what he had seen in the palace, and handed over the "Song Jiang of Shandong" which he had cut from the imperial writing. Song Jiang examined it with many sighs. On the evening of the fourteenth he and several of his men went into the city to view the lanterns.
During the Song Dynasty the Eastern Capital was the leading metropolis. It grew prosperous and rich under the Taoist Sovereign.
At dusk that day a bright moon rose in the east in a cloudless sky. Song Jiang and Chai Jin were disguised as vacationing officials. Dai Zong wore the garb of a lieutenant. Yan Qing tagged along as servant. Only Li Kui remained at the inn.
The four men mingled with the noisy crowds swarming in through the Fengqiu Gate and wandered about the streets and marts. It was a warm evening with gentle breezes, ideal for strolling. On the main thoroughfare sheds had been erected in front of every door and hung with lanterns, which vied for beauty and turned the night into day. The buildings too were decked with lanterns, and the streets thronged with carriages and people.
The four men turned away from Imperial Road to a street lined on both sides with signboards denoting establishments of "misty moonlight." The four were struck by one house midway down. Its doorway was covered by a blue cloth drape, behind which was a curtain of spotted bamboo. Green silk gauze screened the windows on either side. Between them and the doorway hung two vertical plaques reading: "A Fairy Maid of Song and Dance, A Flower of Surpassing Grace."
Song Jiang and his companions went into a tea-house opposite and sat down. "Which courtesan's place is that?" they asked the waiter.
"The leading lady of her profession in the Eastern Capital, Li Shishi. And in the house next door to us is Zhao Yuannu."
"Isn't Li the one who's having a hot affair with the emperor?" Song Jiang asked.
"Not so loud," said the waiter. "There are eyes and ears all around."
Song Jiang leaned close to Yan Qing and whispered: "I want to meet Li Shishi and arrange something with her privately. Invent some story to get us in. We'll wait for you here." He remained with Chai Jin and Dai Zong, drinking tea.
Yan Qing walked up to the door of the courtesan's residence, pushed aside the drape, raised the bamboo curtain, and entered. He saw fine smoke rising from a bronze incense burner on a rhinoceros-hide table beneath a hanging duck and drake lamp. On two of the walls were scenic paintings by four famous artists. Below stood four armchairs, also covered by rhinoceros hide.
There didn't seem to be anyone around. Yan Qing crossed a small courtyard into another parlor. Here were three small beds of ornately carved camphor wood, cushioned with purple mattresses bearing a fallen-petals-in-a-flowing-stream design. A fine lamp hung on a jade stand, here and there were rare antiques.
Yan Qing coughed softly. A serving maid rounded a folding screen, saw Yan Qing and curtsied.
"What is your name, big brother? Where are you from?"
"Can I trouble you, sister, to ask mama to come out? I have something to say."
The girl left and, a few moments later, returned with the bawd. Yan urged her to be seated. He kowtowed four times. "What is your name, young brother?"
"You've forgotten me, mother. I'm Zhang Xian, son of Zhang the Second. I've been away from the city since childhood. I only returned today."
Zhang was a very common name. The bawd thought for several moments. She couldn't see the young man clearly in the lamplight. Suddenly, she imagined she remembered.
"Not little Zhang Xian near the Taiping Bridge? Where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages."
"Of course not. I've been away. Today, I'm looking after a guest from Shandong. He's got more property than words can say. He's probably the richest man in his province. He's here on business. One, he wants to enjoy the lantern festival; two, he's visiting relatives here in the capital; three, he's buying and selling merchandise; and four, he's longing to meet your lady. He asks only to sip tea at the same table, and he'll be satisfied. I wouldn't dare ask otherwise. I'm not kidding—that man has thousands in gold and silver, and he'd like to present some of it to this house."
The greedy bawd was very fond of money. Yan Qing's story went to her heart. She hastily called out Li Shishi and introduced her to Yan. He could see in the lamplight that the girl truly had a form that could sink fish and down geese, a face that eclipsed the moon and put the flowers to shame. Yan dropped to his knees and kowtowed. The bawd relayed his story to Shishi.
"Where is the gentleman now?" asked the girl.
"In that tea-house across the way," said Yan.
"Invite him to have some tea here."
"He wouldn't dare enter without your permission."
"Hurry over and ask him," said the bawd.
Yan Qing went to the tea-house and related the news in Song Jiang's ear. Dai Zong paid the bill and the three men followed Yan to the courtesan's house, On entering, they were escorted to the main parlor, where Li Shishi stood with hands folded demurely.
She greeted Song Jiang politely and said: "Zhang Xian has just been talking about your munificence. Your visit brings luster to our humble dwelling."
"I'm an ignorant man from an obscure mountain hamlet," replied Song. "To be able to gaze upon your beauty is my greatest good fortune." The courtesan asked him to be seated. "Who is this other gentleman?" she queried, indicating Chai Jin.
"My nephew Sheriff Ye," said Song. He also instructed Dai Zong to greet the girl.
Song Jiang and Chai Jin were ushered to guest seats on the left Side of the table, and Li Shishi took her place on the right, as hostess, while the bawd brought in the tea things. The girl poured for each of the four men personally. The tea leaves were finer than birds' tongues, the brew was as fragrant as dragon's saliva.
When they had finished and the tea service was removed, they chatted pleasantly.
The bawd entered and said: "His Majesty is waiting in the rear."

"I'm afraid I can't keep you any longer, today," the courtesan said to her guests. "But he's due to visit the Upper Purity Temple soon and won't be able to come here for some time. Once he goes, you gentlemen will be welcome to call again and join me in a few cups of wine."
Song Jiang bid her a respectful farewell and departed with his three companions.
When they had left her door Chai Jin said: "The emperor has two mistresses, Li Shishi and Zhao Yuannu. We've met one, what about the other?"
They went to the building next to the tea-house and raised the door curtain. Yan Qing spoke to Zhao Yuannu's bawd.
"These two gentlemen are wealthy merchants from Shandong. If they could meet your lady, they would present her with a hundred ounces of silver."
"My girl hasn't any luck. She's sick in bed and can't receive company."
"We'll try again another time," said Song Jiang.
The bawd saw them to the door and bid them farewell. Leaving the street, they headed towards Tianhan Bridge to view the massed lanterns display. As they neared the Fanlou Restaurant building they heard the shrilling of pipes and the beat of drums. Lanterns dazzled the eye, people swarmed in and out like ants.
Song Jiang and Chai Jin went upstairs, found a room and sat down. They ordered drinks and side dishes. Sipping their wine, they admired the lanterns gleaming outside in the night. They had downed only a few cups when they heard someone making up lyrics and singing them in the adjoining room:

*Though our courage surges to the stare,*
*Our heroic task is unfulfilled.*
*With dragon sword grasped firm in hand,*
*We won't quit till every scoundrel's killed!*

Song Jiang knew that voice. He hastily entered. There was Nine Dragons Shi Jin and Mu Hong the Unrestrained, quite drunk and talking wildly.
"You brothers frightened the wits out of me," Song Jiang said sharply. "Pay your bill and get out. If it was some policeman instead of me who heard you, you'd have been in a fine mess. I never expected you two to be so careless. Leave the city without delay. After the formal lantern display tomorrow night, I'm leaving too. That's the best way. We don't want to stir up any trouble."
Shi Jin and Mu Hong had nothing to say. They paid their bill, went down the stairs, and departed from the Eastern Capital.
Song Jiang and his three companions had a few more cups. They were a bit tipsy. Dai Zong paid the bill. Flipping their long sleeves, they left the restaurant. They returned to the inn outside Wanshou Gate and pounded on the door. Li Kui peered at them with sleepy eyes.
"What's the good of letting me come to the Eastern Capital?" he grumbled to Song Jiang. "You only make me stay here and watch the room. While I'm penned up in this friggin place, you fellows are out having a good time."
"It's because you have a bad disposition and are so ugly. I'm afraid if I take you into the city you'll only create a disturbance."
"Don't take me, then! Why make a lot of excuses? When did my looks ever scare anybody's family to death?"
"All right, tomorrow night, the fifteenth, and no more. We'll see the lanterns and leave immediately."
Li Kui laughed happily.
The next day, Lantern Festival Day itself, was bright and clear. Towards evening, huge crowds of celebrants gathered. It was a time of national peace and prosperity, when peasants toiled contentedly in their fields. Song Jiang and Chai Jin, in the guise of vacationing officials, followed by Dai Zong, Li Kui and Yan Qing, went into the city through the Wanshou Gate.
Although there was no curfew that night, each of the gates was guarded by soldiers in full armor, equipped with weapons at the ready. Their bows were strung, their swords were unsheathed, and every post was manned. Five thousand cavalry under the personal command of Marshal Gao Qiu patrolled atop the city walls.
Song Jiang and his four companions jostled through the crowds into the Eastern Capital. He whispered some instructions in Yan Qing's ear, and added: "I'll be waiting in the tea-house."
Yan Qing went to the home of Li Shishi and knocked on the door. The prime-ranking courtesan and her bawd received him.
"Ask your master, the magnate, to please forgive us," they said. "We never know when His Majesty is liable to drop in privately. We must be diligent."
"My master apologizes for disturbing you. Shandong is only a remote province by the sea. It doesn't have anything of value. What it does produce wouldn't be worth presenting to you. All he can do is send you one hundred ounces of gold as a token of his esteem. Perhaps the lady can have ornaments made out of them for her hair. If he comes across something attractive later on, he'll send it with his respects."
"Where is the magnate now?" asked the bawd.
"He's waiting for me at the end of the lane. We're going to see the lanterns."
There was nothing the bawd loved more in the world than wealth. When Yan Qing took out two gold nuggets, gleaming like live coals and put them on the table, she was overjoyed.
"This is Lantern Festival Day," she said, "and my girl and I are celebrating it at home with a few cups of wine. If the magnate wouldn't think our fare too meager, perhaps he'd visit our humble abode for a chat. Do you think he might come?"
"I'm sure he will. I'll pass on your invitation."
Yan Qing went to the tea-house and informed Song Jiang. They all repaired to the home of Li Shishi. Song Jiang told Dai Zong and Li Kui to wait at the front door.
The three entered the large parlor where Li Shishi received them. "We've only just met," she said to Song Jiang. "You shouldn't give such an expensive gift. It really isn't right."
"We have nothing of value in my rustic mountains. I can only offer this trifle as an expression of thanks."
The courtesan invited them into a small adjoining room, and asked them to be seated. Maids served rare fruits, fine food, vintage wine, and tasty delicacies. The crockery was of the best, the table was laid beautifully. Shishi approached them and bowed, wine cup in hand.
"I must have been lucky in my previous incarnation or I wouldn't be able to meet you two gentlemen today. With this simple wine, I pledge to you, my elders." Song Jiang said: "Although I have a bit of property in my mountain area, I have never seen anything so lavish as you have here. Your fame is known throughout the land, lovely and charming lady. An interview with you is more difficult to obtain than reaching Heaven. Yet here I am, actually chatting and drinking with you personally!"
"How extremely kind of you, magnate. You praise me too highly. I am unworthy!"
Both drank, and Shishi directed her personal maid to pour wine in tiny gold cups. Then the courtesan relaxed and gossiped about members of her profession. To all her remarks it was Chai Jin who replied. Yan Qing, who was standing off to one side, offered quips that made everyone laugh.
After several rounds Song Jiang became more loquacious. He rolled up his sleeves and gesticulated as he talked in the free manner of the brigands of Mount Liangshan.
"My brother is always like this after he's had some wine," Chai Jin smiled. "Pray don't laugh at him, lady."
"Drinking is for pleasure," said Shishi. "Why stand on ceremony?"
"One of those two servants at the front door," a young maid said, "the one with the yellow beard who's so weird-looking he scares you, is muttering curses."
"Tell them both to come in," said Song Jiang.
Dai Zong soon entered the side room with Li Kui. When the Black Whirlwind saw Song Jiang and Chai Jin sitting and drinking with Shishi, he glared.
"Who is this fellow?" Shishi asked. "He looks like one of those imps standing before the judge in the temple statuary."
Everyone laughed except Li Kui. He didn't know what she was talking about.
"He's the son of one of our family servants," said Song Jiang.
"It doesn't matter," said the courtesan with a laugh. "I have no refinement."
"The lout is a skilled warrior," Song explained. "He can tote two or three hundred catties and fight forty or fifty men."
Shishi called for large silver flagons and gave Li Kui and Dai Zong three rounds each. Yan Qing was afraid Li Kui would say something coarse, and he directed the two to return to their posts at the front of the house.
"When a real man drinks," said Song Jiang, "he doesn't use small cups." He picked up a large silver flagon and downed several rounds.
In a low voice, Shishi murmured a song by the poet Su Dongpo to the melody of *Xijiangyue*. His senses heightened by wine, Song Jiang called for brush-pen and paper. He ground the ink thick and black, dipped his pen, and spread the paper. "Though I have no learning," he said to the courtesan, "I'd like to scrawl a few words to express the sadness in my heart. I beg of you to hear me, foremost flower." Taking up his pen, Song Jiang, then and there composed a *yuefu* poem. It ran as follows:

*North and south,*
*Where under Heaven is there a place for this wild traveller?*
*My misty mountain stronghold*
*Is but a base for future status in the imperial capital.*
*Jade sleeves and swirling incense,*
*Red brocades and snow-white cuffs...*
*One smile from you is worth*
*A thousand ounces of gold.*
*Fairy maid, your beauty*
*Is more than I can bear!*
*Six times six in wild goose formation,*
*Plus eight times nine,*
*Waiting only for news*
*From the Golden Cock.*
*Our chivalry Heaven-embracing.*
*Earth-shaking our loyalty,*
*Yet recognized by none*
*Within the Four Seas.*
*Morose and sad at separation,*
*I drink,*
*And in a single night*
*My hair turns white.*

When he had finished, he handed the poem to Li Shishi. She read it a few times, but didn't understand. He was about to explain when the courtesan's personal maid entered.
"His Majesty has arrived at the rear door through the tunnel," she announced.
"I won't be able to see you off," Shishi said hastily to her guests. "Please forgive me." She hurried to receive the emperor.
The young maid quickly gathered the cups and utensils, carried away the small table, and swept the floor. Song Jiang and the others concealed themselves in a dark corner of the side room. From it they could see Shishi in the parlor kneeling before the sovereign.
"Your Majesty must be weary from affairs of state."
The emperor's head was covered by a silk gauze kerchief in the Tang style. He wore an imperial dragon robe.
"I've just returned from the Upper Purity Temple," he said. "I directed my son the prince to dispense wine to the populace at Xuande House and my younger brother to attend the fair at the Thousand Paces Esplanade. I had arranged to meet Marshal Yang, but he never showed up, though I waited a long time. So I came here. Approach, beloved, let us talk together."
"If we miss this chance, we may never get another," Song Jiang whispered to his cohorts in the darkness. "Why don't we three go forward and beseech an amnesty? What would be wrong with that?"
"Impossible!" said Chai Jin. "Even if he agreed, he could always reverse himself later."
Meanwhile, Li Kui's wrath was growing. Song Jiang and Chai Jin had sat drinking with the beauty, but he and Dai Zong had been sent to watch the door! Li Kui's hackles rose. His fury reached a boiling point.
Just then, Marshal Yang raised the hanging screen and pushed open the double doors. He was about to Step in when his eyes MI on Li Kui, Standing inside the entry.
"Who are you, knave? How dare you come here?" he barked.
Without a word, Li Kui picked up an armchair and flung it at Yang's head. The startled marshal tumbled backwards, knocking over another two chairs. Dai Zong rushed to intervene, but he was too late. Li Kui ripped pictures off the wall and set fire to them with a candle. Smashing left and right, he spread the blaze. Incense table, chairs, benches—he pulverized them all.
Song Jiang and his companions hurried out when they heard the tumult. They found the Black Whirlwind, stripped to the waist, going on a rampage. By the time they got outside the door, Li Kui was tearing down the street with a cudgel he had grabbed somewhere. Song Jiang decided to leave the city immediately with Chai Jin and Dai Zong, lest the gates be closed before they could escape. He directed Yan Qing to remain behind and look after Li Kui.
The moment the fire broke out in Li Shishi's home, the emperor was off like a streak of smoke. Neighbors who hurried to fight the blaze also rescued Marshal Yang. Of that no more need be said.
The sounds of the yelling and shouting reached Marshal Gao, who was patrolling above the North Gate. He hastened down with his soldiers to give chase. Li Kui, battling madly, ran into Mu Hong and Shi Jin. They were joined by Yan Qing, and the four fought their way to the inner side of the city wall.
Soldiers rushed to close the gate. But from the outside up charged Lu Zhishen with his iron staff, Wu Song with his double swords, and Zhu Tong and Liu Tang, swinging halberds. They hacked a path into the city and saved their four mates.
They got through the gate just about the time Gao and his mounted force were reaching it. Song Jiang, Chai Jin and Dai Zong had vanished. The eight chieftains grew alarmed.
Now it so happened that Wu Yong, the outlaws' military advisor, suspecting Song Jiang would have difficulty, had decided to raid the Eastern Capital. He fixed a time and dispatched a thousand armored cavalry under the five Tiger Chieftains. In the outskirts they met Song Jiang, Chai Jin and Dai Zong, and provided them with horses they had brought for that purpose. Then the other eight arrived and were also given mounts. But there was no sign of Li Kui.
Marshal Gao and men were preparing to charge forth. Five of Song Jiang's commanders—Guan Sheng, Lin Chong, Qin Ming, Huyan Zhuo and Dong Ping, galloped up to the edge of the moat.
"All the gallants of Mount Liangshan are here," they shouted. "Surrender the city and save yourselves from death!"
Gao dared not come out. He hurriedly pulled up the drawbridge and retreated with his soldiers to defensive positions atop the city wall. "You're Li Kui's best friend," Song Jiang said to Yan Qing. "Wait for the swarthy oaf and bring him back. I want to return to the stronghold with our men tonight before the foe can intercept us." Song Jiang and the outlaws departed. Yan Qing, watching beneath the eaves of a house, saw Li Kui emerging from the inn with his luggage on his back. An ax in either hand, he leaped forth from the inn gate with a yell and headed alone to attack the Eastern Capital. Truly, he left the inn roaring like thunder, flourishing axes to split the city gate.

Now in the Ceremonial Hall that day Song Jiang named those who were to go with him to see the illuminations in the Eastern Capital: "Chai Jin and I will go together. The Tattooed Dragon and Mu the Irrepressible will be another party, Monk and Pilgrim a third and Whiskers and the Red-Haired Devil a fourth. Only these four parties. All the rest will stay put and guard the fortress."
Then Iron Ox said: "They say the lights in the capital are something wonderful. I'd enjoy an outing too."
Song Jiang said: "How can you go?" But Iron Ox was hell bent on going and there was no way they could hold him back. Song Jiang said: "Go, then, if you must, but I'm not having you stirring up trouble; you'll have to dress as my servant, and we'll take the Prodigy along as well to keep an eye on you."
Now you will remember, friends, that Song Jiang was a branded criminal. How would he be able to enter the capital? Well, it was like this: when Doctor An came to the company on the mountain he had treated the marks with acid and then used a balm to heal the sores. Red scars appeared, to remove which he used a fine paste of gold and powdered jade which he rubbed on daily and all of them disappeared. This is like what it says in the medical books: "Fine jade to remove scars."
The Tattooed Dragon and Irrepressible were the first that day to set off, dressed as merchants. After them went Monk and Pilgrim in the guise of wandering monks, and then Whiskers and the Red-Haired Devil, also as merchants. It goes without saying that they all had swords in their belts and carried halberds and other weapons concealed about their person.

Song Jiang and Mr. Chai were supposed to be officials on leave. They took the Magic Messenger along too, disguised as a junior army officer, so that in case of need he could get an urgent message back to the stronghold. Iron Ox and the Prodigy, dressed as servants, picked up the luggage and set off down the mountain. The other leaders gave them a send-off at Golden Sands Landing. The Professor repeatedly exhorted Iron Ox: "Usually when you go off somewhere you can't keep out of trouble. This time you're going with the Leader to see the lights in the capital: this is no ordinary occasion, so don't drink on the road and be absolutely on your best behaviour. Whatever happens you mustn't carry on like you usually do. If there is an incident, it could mean the end of our brotherhood and we might never be able to meet again."
Iron Ox said: "All right, keep your hair on, this time I definitely won't cause any trouble."
They said their farewells and set off. After Jizhou the road led them through Tengzhou, Danzhou and Caozhou. When they arrived at the Longevity Gate of the Eastern Capital they sought a lodging for the night and Song Jiang and Mr. Chai held a discussion. It was the eleventh day of the month. Song Jiang said: "I daren't enter the city tomorrow in broad daylight. I must wait till the evening of the fourteenth when everyone will be very excited. That's the time for me to go in."
Mr. Chai said: "I'll go tomorrow with the Prodigy and spy out the land."
"Good idea," said Song Jiang.
So next day Mr. Chai dressed up very smartly, putting on a brand new cap, and clean shoes and socks, and the Prodigy also got himself up specially. Together they left the inn. Every house on the outskirts of the city was in a state of great excitement, full of noise and bustle as they prepared for celebrating the New Year. There was a truly festive atmosphere. They passed through the city gate without being stopped, and strolled along Imperial Avenue enjoying the sights. At the palace's Gate of Eastern Splendour they found the tea houses and taverns packed with people of fashion, all dressed up to the nines, each in a particular colour. They sought out a very small wine shop and occupied an alcove overlooking the street. Leaning on the balustrade and gazing out, they noticed that all the members of the palace staff passing in and out through the gate had bunches of green leaves stuck in the side of their caps. Mr. Chai whispered in the Prodigy's ear, I want you to do this and this. The Prodigy, quick on the uptake as ever, needed no further bidding. He hurried downstairs, and at the door of the tavern ran into an elderly palace attendant, whom he greeted familiarly. "But I've no idea who you are!" the man said.
"My boss says you are old acquaintances," said the Prodigy. "He sent me to invite you to join him."
This attendant's name was in fact Wang, but the Prodigy said: "You're officer Zhang, aren't you?"
"No, my name's Wang," the man replied.
"Wang, that's right," said the Prodigy glibly. "My master said to invite officer Wang. It was a slip of the tongue."
Officer Wang followed the Prodigy upstairs. The Prodigy drew aside the curtain and announced to Mr. Chai: "Officer Wang is here." He made a sign with his hand. Mr. Chai invited the officer in and the two men exchanged courtesies. Officer Wang studied Mr. Chai for a long, long time. He definitely did not recognize him. "I am afraid I have a problem with my eyes," he said. "I cannot tell who you are. Won't you aid my memory? Allow me to ask your name."
"We were acquainted in childhood. But I don't need to tell you that. You must remember it yourself." Mr. Chai called for wine and meat to treat the superintendent. The waiter set out fruit and nuts, while the Prodigy poured wine and pressed it upon the guest. When the latter was quite merry, Mr. Chai asked: "What is the meaning of that green ornament in your cap?"
Officer Wang said: "The Emperor will be celebrating the new year tonight. There are twenty-four companies of us attendants, altogether some five thousand eight hundred men, and each of us has been given a special robe and the green cockade and this little metal badge inscribed with the words 'Celebrating with the People'. We have to be on call here every day. So long as we've got the official badge and the palace robe we can get inside."
"Now I understand," said Mr. Chai.
When they had drunk quite a few more cups, Mr. Chai called the Prodigy over and told him to go and order a bowl of warm wine. In no time the wine arrived. Mr. Chai stood up and offered the cup to Officer Wang, saying: "When you have honoured me by drinking this bowl of wine, I'm quite sure my name will come back to you."
"I really can't remember it. Do please tell me." Wang took the cup and drank it off. Immediately he began to dribble and his legs went weak. He collapsed on the bench. Mr. Chai hurriedly took off his own cap, clothing and shoes, and then removed Wang's robe, and other garments, his shoes and so on, and put them all on, not forgetting the coloured cap and the identifying badge. Then he signalled to the Prodigy and said: "If the waiter starts asking questions, just tell him the palace official is drunk and the other gentleman will be back in a minute."
The Prodigy said: "No need to tell me. I'll take care of it."
Leaving the wine house, Mr. Chai went through the Gate of Eastern Splendour to view the inner courts. What he saw was a veritable paradise:
*A lucky cloud envelops the phoenix gate; an auspicious glow pervades the dragon tower. The glazed tiles are laid in happy pairs, coupled jade ornaments hang from the roof ridge. Here is the Eastern Gate, leading to the Imperial Way; here the main palace, encircled by a red wall. On the ceremonial platform horoscopes are being cast, in the Court of the Water Clock the officials take their places. Around the perimeter walls, painted red with ground pepper, green willows sighingly brush the roof supports; along the balustrade that surrounds each hall, crimson flowers gaily salute the passing of the imperial chair. The mind is tricked into thinking itself in fairyland, wandering with the gods in paradise.*
No one stopped Mr. Chai as he passed through the forbidden gate, because he was wearing the right clothes. He went first to the Hall of Purple Dawn and then to the Hall of Culture and Ethics, where all the doors were securely locked so he couldn't get in. He turned towards the Hall of Crystal Light and passing through a side door came to a doorway which bore the inscription "Palace of Profound Wisdom". This was the scholars' library. On one side was a vermilion screen with an open door in it. He slipped through and there in front of him was the imperial throne, with the four jewels of the study arranged on tables on either side — brushes with ivory holders, fine paper for memorials, special ink and a superior inkstone — and there were books too massed on the shelves each with an ivory marker. Facing this was a screen decorated with a wonderfully picturesque and detailed landscape. On the other side the screen was pure white and written here in the imperial hand were the names of the four most dangerous bandits;

*Song Jiang of Shandong to the east*
*Wang Qing west of the river Huai*
*Tian Hu of Hebei in the north*
*Fang La south of the Yangtze*

Mr. Chai thought to himself: "The country really is suffering from our activities, and these names are written here as a perpetual reminder of it." He took out his concealed dagger and cut out the words "Song Jiang of Shandong". He left the room quickly, as he heard someone coming. Passing out through the Gate of Eastern Splendour he returned to the inn. Officer Wang had still not woken up. Mr. Chai replaced the robe, cap, badge and other items, changing back into his own clothes. He told the Prodigy to settle the bill with the waiter and leave the change as a tip. Just before going downstairs he said to the man: "Superintendent Wang and I are old friends. Since he happened to be drunk, I went in and signed the roll for him. He is still drunk, but I live out of town and I must get to the gate before the curfew. The rest of the money is for you in recompense for your trouble. His special clothing and badge are all there."
The innkeeper said: "Don't worry sir. I'll take care of it for you."
Mr. Chai and the Prodigy left the inn and went out through the Gate of Longevity. It was late when Officer Wang awoke. He saw all his clothes were there and the cap with the badge, so he had no idea what had happened. The innkeeper told him what Mr. Chai had said and he went home still half tipsy. Next day someone came and told him: "The words 'Song Jiang of Shandong' have disappeared from the Imperial Library. Today security on the gates is tight as the hoops on a barrel. Everyone going in or out is being interrogated." Now at last he understood what had happened. But naturally he wasn't going to say anything.
Mr. Chai returned to the inn and gave Song Jiang a full account of what he had seen inside the palace. He produced the four characters in the Emperor's handwriting, "Song Jiang of Shandong", for Song Jiang to see. This occasioned many a sigh.
On the evening of the fourteenth the moon rose clear in the east, no trace of cloud. Song Jiang and Mr. Chai dressed as off-duty officials, with the Magic Messenger as an aide de camp and the Prodigy as their servant. They left Iron Ox behind on his own to hold the fort. Mixing with a crowd of revellers, they passed through the Gate of the Mounds and wandered about enjoying all the sights. The night was warm and mild, perfect for the festival. Along the main avenue every house was bedecked with lanterns, competing for splendour. The light they gave made it like day. From windows and terraces lights answered lights, in carriages or on horseback people paraded past. The four heroes strolled on down a street on either side of which were the signs of houses of entertainment. In the midst of these was one with a blue awning and a blind of speckled bamboo. The windows on either side were covered with green gauze, and a pair of inscriptions hung beside them: "The Queen of Song and Dance, the Nonpareil of Romance". After reading this, Song Jiang went into a teashop and asked for some tea. "What entertainer is it who resides opposite?" he asked the waiter.
"That's one of the capital's most superior courtesans. She's called Lily — Li Shishi is her full name."
"Is she the one that's a particularly close friend of the Emperor?" Song Jiang asked.
"Sh! Not so loud. Walls have ears!"
Song Jiang called the Prodigy over and whispered to him: "I'd like to have a tête-à-tête with this woman, but it must be in secret. See if you can think up some pretext to get us in there. I'll sit here and drink tea meanwhile."
The Prodigy went up to Lily Li's door. He drew aside the curtain, pulled up the bamboo blind and went inside. There were a pair of identical lanterns hanging there, and an incense table covered in rhinoceros hide on top of which was placed an antique brass incense burner from Boshan emitting a thin stream of incense. On two of the walls hung four landscapes by famous masters. Under them four chairs covered in rhinoceros hide were ranged in line. No one came out, so he penetrated into the inner courtyard. Here there was a large reception area furnished with three cedar wood couches, delicately carved and spread with red brocade cushions embroidered with blowing blossoms and rushing streams. A fine lantern was suspended from a rich frame and a number of rare antiques were displayed. He gave a slight cough and a young maid emerged from behind a screen. She curtsied to him and asked: "Who are you, sir, and where have you come from?"
"May I trouble you to call your mistress, I have something to tell her." The girl went back inside, and a moment later Ma Li appeared. The Prodigy asked her to be seated and kowtowed to her four times.
"Who are you?" she asked.
"Have you forgotten me?" he said. "Old Zhang's son, Zhang Xian. I left town when I was young and I've just returned."
Now in this world the names Zhang, Li and Wang are the commonest. Ma Li thought about it for a while. She couldn't see him very clearly in the lamplight. Then suddenly she seemed to remember. "Are you young Zhang Xian that used to live under the Peace Bridge?" she cried. "Where have you been? You haven't been here for ages."
"I was out of town, that's why I couldn't visit you," he said. "Now I'm working for a merchant from Shandong. He's got pots of money, I couldn't begin to tell you how much. He's the richest man in two provinces. He's here partly to enjoy the festival and visit relatives, and partly to do some business. But he also is most anxious to be granted an interview with your lady. He isn't asking any special favours, simply to sit at table with her would make him the happiest man in the world. I'm not just saying it for effect, this fellow is really loaded and he's more than willing to part with some of it."
Now the old bawd was of a covetous disposition: she doted on gold, and this speech of the Prodigy's had her drooling. She called Lily to come and meet the Prodigy at once.
Seen under the light of the lamps she was a fabulous creature. The Prodigy kowtowed to her:

*In the houses of pleasure she reigns supreme,*
*Perfection of beauty, the crème de la crème,*
*Cynosure of all eyes, the Emperor's included.*
*No wonder a hero can be so deluded.*

When the bawd had explained everything to her, Lily said: "Where is this gentleman, then?"
"He's in the teahouse across the road," said the Prodigy.
"You ought to have got him to honour me by having tea with me," she said.
"He wouldn't dare enter without your express permission," said the Prodigy.
"Off with you, I say, and invite him here," said the Ma.
The Prodigy returned to the teahouse and whispered the news. The Magic Messenger took out some money and paid the owner and they followed the Prodigy to Lily's place. They were immediately taken to the main reception room where Lily, with joined hands came forward and said: "Zhang Xian has said such a lot about you, sir. I'm honoured, I'm sure."
Song Jiang replied: "I am but a poor rustic, a fellow of no distinction. To be allowed the sight of such beauty as yours makes me happy for life."
Lily invited him to sit down. Seeing Mr. Chai she asked: "Is this gentleman some sort of relation of yours?"
"This is my cousin, sheriff Ye," said Song Jiang. He signalled the Magic Messenger to pay his respects also.
Song Jiang and Mr. Chai sat on the left, in the place of honour as guests, Lily on the right as hostess. A maid brought tea, which Lily offered with her own hands. Needless to say, the tea was of the most fragrant! When they had finished it the cups were taken away and the conversation was about to take a more intimate turn, when Ma Li came in and announced: "His Majesty is at the back door!"
"I really can't ask you to stay, now," Lily said. "But tomorrow he goes to the Palace of Higher Purity and he won't be coming here. Please call again for a chat and a few cups of wine."
Song Jiang murmured his assent and they left. From her door they strolled along a small street to Via Lactea Bridge to see the turtle mountain. Just as they were passing Birdcage Inn the sound of flutes playing within assailed their ears and a thunder of gongs and drums, while a blaze of lanterns dazzled the eye; people were milling about like ants. They entered the restaurant and having found themselves a pleasant corner to sit down and having ordered wine and some delicacies to eat, began to enjoy themselves, gazing at the lights and drinking. After a few cups they were interrupted by some singing in the next compartment :

*Our vaulting spirit spurs us on,*
*The heroic task is not yet done.*
*With sword in hand we'll not repose*
*Till every scoundrel's paid his dues.*

Song Jiang quickly went to investigate. It was the Tattooed Dragon and Mu the Unstoppable, who had got themselves dead drunk in the next room and were bawling out this foolishness at the tops of their voices. Song Jiang marched straight in and growled: "You two gave me one hell of a fright! Pay the bill, quick, and get out of here! Lucky it was me who heard you! If it had been the police you'd be in a fine pickle! I'd never have thought you two could be so stupid. You're to leave the city at once, don't waste a moment. And tomorrow, after seeing the lights, you must go back the same night, that's the only way we can be sure you won't get us into trouble."
Sheepishly they called the waiter and paid their bill. Then they slank downstairs and headed out of town. The others went on drinking and after a few more cups began to be quite flushed. The Magic Messenger paid and then they trooped downstairs and headed for the Gate of Longevity. Arriving at the inn they knocked on the door of their room. Iron Ox appeared rubbing his eyes and said: "I wouldn't have minded so much if you hadn't let me come at all, but to bring me along and then keep me cooped up in this room is fucking awful. And you lot have all been off painting the town red!"
"It's your character that's the problem and that ugly mug of yours," Song Jiang said. "I was afraid if we took you into the city you'd provoke some kind of trouble."
"All right, you don't have to take me," said Iron Ox, "But why all these excuses? When did you ever see me walk into someone's house and start killing people?"
"We'll take you tomorrow, for the main night of the Festival," Song Jiang said. "But as soon as we've seen the lights, we'll leave."
Iron Ox was full of glee.
The day of the full moon dawned fine and clear. Towards evening crowds beyond numbering began to gather, to celebrate the festival. There is an old poem which describes the festival:
*The day dawns mild, welcome gaps appear in the clouds, early spring is in the capital. Fine carriages compete, riders show off their skills on richly caparisoned horses; the turtle mountain, all agree, is enchanting as Fairyland; and when it grows dark coupled lanterns silently light up the night. The restaurant is strewn with scented iris; look up and you see the sky between the eaves. A faint breeze brings the sound of heavenly music; celebrations are in full swing at the house of pleasure; a host of beautiful women grace it with their presence. Incense is wafted along the street, there is mirth and merriment, stars prick heaven's vault. Gradually the sound of music fades, the revellers return under the bright moon. Dawn seems never to come.*
Song Jiang and Mr. Chai adopted their previous disguise as off-duty officials and with the Magic Messenger, Iron Ox and the Prodigy entered the city by the Gate of Longevity. Now although there was no curfew that night, the guard commanders at all the gates were in full armour and wearing uniform caps, with their bows strung and swords unsheathed. Discipline was to be strictly maintained. Marshal Gao himself was patrolling the city with five thousand cavalry. Song Jiang and his companions mingled with the crowds and were swept into the city. The Prodigy was given whispered instructions to do certain things and then meet them at a teahouse.
The Prodigy went and knocked on Lily's door. Ma Li and her protégé the famous courtesan came out to receive him and said: "I trust His Honour will excuse us for yesterday. His Majesty often comes here privately, without warning. We dare not fail in respect towards him."
The Prodigy said: "On the contrary, my master apologizes most humbly for inconveniencing you. Shandong is but a poor place, with nothing special to offer. What little it does produce is really not worthy of you, so my master has sent me to offer a hundred taels of gold, as a small token of his esteem. Later, if he manages to lay hands on something less ordinary, he will send it with his respects."
"Where is your master at this moment?" the old woman asked.
"He's waiting for me at the corner of the street. When I go back we're going to see the lights."
Cash and valuables, that's what this kind of old woman generally likes best in the world. When the Prodigy took out two ingots in the shape of charcoal and placed them in front of her, you can bet your life she was moved! "Seeing as it's the lantern festival," she said, "we were planning a little celebration at home with a few cups of wine. If His Honour would consent to it, he could join us here for a little chat."
"I'm sure he'll say yes if I ask him," said the Prodigy.
Back he went to the teahouse. After he'd passed on the invitation they all went round to Lily's house. Song Jiang told the Magic Messenger and Iron Ox to wait outside. The other three went into the main reception hall, where Lily received them. She thanked Song Jiang courteously, saying: "You and I have only just met, Your Excellency, but you're so generous! It's too much honour, really it is. I didn't ought to accept."
Song Jiang said: "My home is such a wild, uncivilized place, there really isn't anything special I could give you. I just wanted you to have some little thing that would express my feelings. There is really no reason for you to thank me."
She invited them into a little parlour and they all sat down according to the etiquette. The maid brought some rare fruit and served tea, with a particularly choice wine and some delicacies served on gold and silver dishes laid out on a low table. Lily raised the cup and came forward to prostrate herself, saying: "It must be in my stars that I should entertain you two gentlemen here today. Let me offer you this simple wine."

Song Jiang said: "Although in my rustic home I have a few possessions and a modicum of wealth, I have never seen such style as this. Your enchanting reputation has spread far and wide, just to secure an interview with you is an achievement like reaching heaven, to say nothing of receiving such entertainment at your hands."
Lily said: "You flatter me, sir. I am unworthy of it." After they had drunk she told the maid to pour wine into some tiny gold cups. Then she began to converse about affairs of fashion. It was Mr. Chai who answered, while the Prodigy stood to one side and proffered witticisms. After a few rounds, Song Jiang's tongue became loosened, he pulled up his sleeves and he gradually slipped into the ways of Mount Liang. Mr. Chai said with a laugh: "Our friend is like this when he's drunk. Please don't laugh at him."
Lily replied: "Everyone has his own character and it must be respected!"
The maid said: "Those two friends of yours outside — the one with the brown whiskers looks really terrifying, he keeps muttering and growling all the time."
"Send them in," Song Jiang said. Immediately the Magic Messenger came in with Iron Ox behind him. When Iron Ox saw Song Jiang, Mr. Chai and the Prodigy sitting there drinking wine with Lily, he felt pretty sick about it. He glared at them with a most ferocious expression.
"Who is this gentleman?" Lily asked. "He looks just like the spirit who stands before the Judge of Hell in the Temple of the Earth." Everyone laughed except Iron Ox, who did not know what they were talking about.
"He's Young Li, son of one of my servants," Song Jiang replied.
It was her turn to laugh. "It's nothing to me if he shares my family name," she said. "But the immortal Li Bai might be a bit put out!"
Song Jiang said: "This fellow is a great fighter. He can carry a load of several hundred pounds and defeat forty or fifty opponents at once."
Lily had a silver sconce brought and Iron Ox was invited to drink from it three times. Magic Messenger got the same treatment. The Prodigy was terrified Iron Ox would come out with something gross and signalled to them to return to their original place outside the door.
"When a man drinks, why use small cups?" Song Jiang now said. "Let's drink a few rounds from the sconce." Lily recited a poem and Song Jiang was inspired by the wine to call for paper and brush. He ground up a goodly supply of ink, filled his brush, opened out the paper and said to Lily: "My talent is slight and I cannot write a good poem, but I wish to express the sadness in my heart and beg you to give me a hearing." Thereupon he set to with the brush and produced this poem:
*North or south, heaven or earth, where will this restless spirit find a home? From the stronghold in the misty marshes of Shandong come I, to seek the pleasures of the capital. Here where silks and satins reign, and it's all sweet perfumes, fine fashions and soft lighting, one smile has more worth for me than a ton of gold. The form is divine but O, when will the heart be softened? Yet my mind returns to that reed-lined shore, those overgrown banks, the bright moon and the sky's cold blue, where the six times six joined to the nine times eight await the golden rooster's call. There you'll find courage enough to take heaven by storm, honour enough to fill the earth brimful, yet none within the four seas knows of it. Now, though, let us leave a thousand griefs behind and idle the night away with wine.*
When he had finished this he gave it to Lily, who studied it carefully but couldn't make out the sense. He was waiting for her to demand an explanation so he could tell her all that was hidden within it, when her maid came and announced: "His Majesty has returned by the tunnel and is at the back entrance!"
Lily immediately said: "Please forgive me for not seeing you out," and hurried off to receive the Emperor, while the maid quickly cleared away the cups and plates and so on, removed the table and swept the floor. Song Jiang and the others did not leave, however. They slipped into a dark corner where they were able to watch Lily kneel before the sovereign, welcoming him to her house and inquiring if he was tired.
The Emperor was wearing a Tang headdress of soft gauze and an imperial robe. He said: "I have been at the Palace of Higher Purity today. I left my son to distribute wine at the Hall of Virtue and my younger brother to see to the alms for the people at the Temple of a Thousand Steps. I had arranged to meet Marshal Yang, but grew tired of waiting when he did not appear. I have come here by myself. So approach, my dear, and let us have some conversation."
Song Jiang in his dark corner said: "If we let this opportunity slip, it'll be hard to find such another. Why shouldn't we all three of us speak to him about an amnesty?"
Mr. Chai said: "What's the use? Even if he agrees now, he can always repudiate it later."
They continued to discuss this in their corner. Now Iron Ox, having seen Song Jiang and Mr. Chai drinking with a beautiful woman and then been told to go and wait at the door with the Magic Messenger, was seething with discontent. He had a whole bellyful of anger which had found no outlet. It was at this point that Marshal Yang drew aside the curtain and pushed open the door. He was about to enter when he saw Iron Ox. "Who the devil are you and what the hell are you doing here?" he shouted.
Instead of answering, Iron Ox picked up a chair and thrust it in Marshal Yang's face. Too surprised to defend himself, the Marshal collapsed on the floor, knocking over two more chairs. Magic Messenger rushed to intervene but to no avail. Iron Ox was tearing down pictures and setting fire to them with a candle. He rushed about spreading fire everywhere and at the same time smashing up tables, chairs and lamps. The noise brought Song Jiang and the others rushing out. They saw Iron Ox stripped to the waist going berserk. The four of them made a dash for the door, followed by Iron Ox who snatched up a staff and laid about him with it. Since Iron Ox was obviously out of control Song Jiang could only think to get out of the city as fast as possible, together with Mr. Chai and the Magic Messenger, before the main gate was shut, cutting off their escape. He left only the Prodigy to look after Iron Ox. As soon as the fire broke out in Lily's house, the Emperor had fled like the wind. Friends and neighbours raised the alarm and also rescued Marshal Yang. No more to be said of all that.
The hubbub spread throughout the city. Marshal Gao, on patrol at the northern gate, heard the rumours and led his troops in search of the miscreants. While the Prodigy was doing his best to support Iron Ox, he came across Mu the Unstoppable and the Tattooed Dragon. The four of them joined forces and fought their way with staves and spears to the edge of the city where the guards were hurriedly shutting the gate. Monk with his steel staff and Pilgrim with his two swords were outside. Together with Whiskers and Sergeant Lei with their halberds they charged to rescue the other four. Just as they were all rushing through the gate, Marshal Gao's forces happened to arrive outside the walls. The eight from Mount Liang not seeing Song Jiang, Mr. Chai or the Magic Messenger, feared for their safety.
Now the Professor had guessed something like this might happen and fixed the time for a major attack on the Eastern Capital. He sent five bold commanders and a thousand armoured cavalry. They had reached the outskirts of the city that same evening and were waiting there, and they now met Song Jiang and the other two. They had brought some riderless horses on which the three fugitives were now mounted. Then the others came up and were also given mounts, all but Iron Ox who had gone missing.
Marshal Gao was mustering his troops for a sally. Song Jiang's commanders, who were Scimitar, Leopard's Head, Thunderclap, Twin Rods and Twin Spears, charged towards the city and halted beside the moat to shout: "The company of Mount Liang is here in force! Surrender the city at once, unless you want a massacre!"
Marshal Gao was too scared to attack now. He hurriedly ordered the drawbridge to be raised and deployed all his troops along the walls for defence. Song Jiang gave orders to the Prodigy: "You're the one who gets on best with that black beast. You can wait for him here and bring him along. The rest of the force and I'll return with all speed to the mountain fortress. I hope we'll meet with no further trouble *en route*." We shall leave Song Jiang and the others as they return, and remain with the Prodigy, who watches from beneath the eaves of someone's house and sees Iron Ox emerge with a great whoop from the inn carrying his luggage and his 2 axes, ready to take on the whole city by himself. Indeed, like a thunderstorm he roared out of the inn, waving the two axes with which he planned to batter down the city gates.



**Black Whirlwind Iron Ox has a scheme for catching demons & Pretends to Catch a Spirit; 2 heads are offered to the stronghold on Mount Liang by the Hero**

Yan Qing flung his arms around Li Kui's waist. With one twist, he threw him to the ground, head down and feet to the sky. Yan Qing then dragged him up, let go, and strode off along a path. Li Kui followed.
Why did Li Kui go with him? Because Yan Qing was the first among wrestlers. For that reason Song Jiang had dispatched him to control Li Kui. If the Black Whirlwind didn't listen, Yan Qing needed only one swift motion to floor him. Li Kui had had more than one taste of his hands and feet. He was afraid of Yan Qing and had to obey.
They dared not travel the highway. If pursuing government troops caught up, they'd have a hard time resisting. They made a wide detour in the direction of Chenliu County. Li Kui put on his clothes again and concealed his axes beneath them. Since he had no head kerchief, he parted his scorched-brown hair and did it up in two buns in the manner of a Taoist priest. They walked until daylight. Yan Qing had some money, and bought meat and wine in a village tavern. After eating, they continued on.
In the Eastern Capital that morning, confusion reigned. Marshal Gao led troops forth, but they were unable to apprehend the fugitives and had to return. Li Shishi claimed she knew nothing about anything. Marshal Yang also came back and rested. A check revealed that four or five hundred people in the city had been injured. Innumerable others, who had fallen or been knocked down, suffered bruises and contusions. Gao met with Tong Guan, head of the Council of Military Affairs, and they both conferred with the premier about petitioning the emperor. Troops were sent to pursue and catch the outlaws.
*
As to Li Kui and Yan Qing they reached a village called Four Willows. It was already late in the day, and they approached a large manor and knocked on the gates. They were ushered to a thatch-roofed hall, where Squire Di, who owned the manor, received them. He saw the buns of hair on Li Kui's head, but observed that he was not wearing a Taoist gown and was very ugly. Not knowing what to make of him, the squire addressed himself to Yan Qing.
"Where does this reverend come from?"
Yan Qing laughed. "He's a strange person. None of you have ever heard of him. We'd like something to eat, and to spend the night. We'll leave in the morning."
Li Kui didn't speak. The squire kowtowed before him.
"Help me, Reverend," he pleaded.
"What do you want me to do? Tell me frankly."
"There are over a hundred people in this household, including my wife and my twenty-year-old daughter. For the last six months the girl has been possessed by a spirit. She never leaves her room, and doesn't even come out to eat. If anyone tries to go near her, he's showered with bricks and stones. Many of us have been hurt. We've had the magistrate down several times, but he's never been able to catch the spirit."
"Squire, I'm a disciple of Abbot Lou of Qizhou. I know how to ride the clouds and capture demons. If you don't mind spending a bit, I'll nab him for you tonight. I'll need a pig and a sheep, first, for sacrifice purposes."
"We've got all the pigs and sheep you want, to say nothing of wine."
"Pick a couple of fat ones, and slaughter and roast them, and bring them here. I need also a few bottles of good wine, to make my arrangements. Tonight, at the third watch, I'll capture your spirit."
"If you want any written prayers or paper paraphernalia, Reverend, I have some."
"I've got my own magic. I don't need any of that friggin stuff. I'll just go to her room and snatch him."
Yan Qing could barely restrain his laughter. The squire had nothing but praise for Li Kui.
By midnight the roasted animals were laid out in the hall. Black Whirlwind called for a large bowl, and lined up a dozen bottles of heated wine. He lit two candles and ignited good incense in a burner. Then he dragged over a bench and sat down in the middle. But instead of reciting prayers, he pulled out one of his axes, hacked open the pig and sheep, and proceeded to tear off large chunks and eat them.
"Join me, young Prodigy," he said magnanimously.
Yan Qing only smiled coldly, and Li Kui continued gorging until he was full of meat and had consumed five or six bowls of fin wine, to the astonishment of the squire.
"Share this bounty with me," Li Kui said to the squire's vassals. In the twinkling of an eye he handed out the remaining meat. "Bring a bucket of warm water. I want to wash my hands and feet," he directed.
His orders were soon obeyed. After completing his ablutions, he demanded tea from the squire and said to Yan Qing: "Have you eaten yet?"
"I've had plenty," Yan Qing replied.
"We've finished the wine and meat, and tomorrow we must be on our way," Li Kui said to the squire. "We lords are going to sleep now."
"But this is terrible," cried the squire. "When are you going to catch the spirit?"
"You really want me to do that? Then lead me to your daughter's room."
"But that's where the demon is. Bricks and stones come flying out. Who dares to go!"
Li Kui grasped his two axes and directed men to stand with torches at a distance and light his path. He strode up to the house. It was faintly illuminated inside by a lamp. He peered in. A young fellow was holding a girl in his arms and they were talking.
With one kick the Black Whirlwind burst open the door and charged in swinging his axes. The lamp seemed to leap into a thousand slivers of light, shattered by Li Kui's blow. They young man tried to flee. Li Kui yelled, and hacked him down. The girl plunged under the bed and hid. Li Kui cut the man's head off, carried it over to the bed, and rapped on the frame with his ax.
"Come out, quick, woman. Otherwise I'll chop you and this bed to pieces."
"Spare me, I'll come out!"
No sooner had the girl poked her head out than Li Kui grabbed her by the hair and pulled her over beside the corpse. "Who is this fellow I've killed?" he demanded.
"Young Wang, my lover."
"Where did the bricks come from, and the food you ate?"
"I used to give him my gold and silver hairpins, and he would slip over the manor wall late at night and buy things."
"You filthy slut, what use are you!" Li Kui dragged her to the bed and cut her head off. He tied the two heads together by their hair, then placed the bodies side by side.
"I had a full meal. I need some exercise to help digest it." He stripped to the waist and flailed the two bodies with his axes as if he was drumming. Li Kui grinned. "That pair won't come back to life."
He stuck his axes into his girdle, picked up the heads, and returned to the hall. "I've caught two demons," he shouted, flinging down the heads.
The whole manor, astonished, gathered round to stare. They recognized the squire's daughter, but they didn't know who the other head belonged to. Finally, one of the vassals spoke.
"He looks something like Young Wang the bird-catcher from East Village."
"You've got sharp eyes," said Li Kui.
"How did you find out, Reverend?" asked the squire.
"Your daughter was hiding under the bed. I hauled her out and questioned her. She confessed he was her lover, Young Wang. Their food, he used to bring in. After I got all the information, I took action."
The squire wept. "Reverend, you should have spared my daughter."
"Stupid old ox! Your daughter takes a lover and you want me to spare her! Instead of thanking me, you weep and blame me. I'll settle with you tomorrow."
Yan Qing found a room, and he and Li Kui retired.
The squire led a group of people with lanterns and candles into his daughter's room. They saw the dismembered parts of the headless bodies scattered all over the floor. The squire and his wife wept distractedly. They ordered that the bodies be taken to the rear and burned.
Li Kui slept until daybreak. He jumped out of bed and sought the squire.
"Yesterday, I caught the spirit for you. Why don't you show your thanks?"
Squire Di had no choice but to wine and dine him. After Li Kui and Yan Qing finished eating, they left. The squire went back to managing his manor.

On departing from Four Willows Village Li Kui and Yan Qing set out again along the road. This time of the year the grass was withered and the fields denuded, branches had fallen and the hills were empty.
The journey was uneventful. They continued in a wide detour towards the northern end of Liangshan Marsh. They were still seventy or eighty //from the stronghold, not far from the town of Jingmen. The mountain was not yet in sight, and it was growing late. They went up to a large manor, knocked on the gate, and asked for shelter.
"Why don't we find an inn and put up there?" said Yan Qing.
"We're much better off with a leading family like this," Li Kui retorted.
Before the words were out of his mouth, the vassal returned and said: "My master the squire is very distraught. You two had better rest someplace else."
Li Kui barged right in and headed for the thatch-roofed hall. Yan Qing was unable to restrain him.
"Passing travellers ask to spend the night," Black Whirlwind bellowed. "What's so friggin important that it's got your squire all upset! I want to speak to him."
The squire, peering out, saw how fierce Li Kui looked. He sent a man to invite him to a wing of the hall. There, a side room was provided for the two visitors. Later, a meal was served, after which they went to bed.
Not having had any wine, Li Kui couldn't sleep. As he tossed and turned on the earthen *kang*, he heard the squire and his wife, in the adjoining room, weeping and sobbing. Thoroughly irritated, Li Kui didn't close his eyes a minute.
When at last it was light, he jumped out of bed and strode to the front of the hall. "Who was crying all night and preventing this lord from sleeping?" he demanded.
The squire heard him, He came out and explained: "We have an eighteen-year-old daughter and someone has taken her. That's why we're upset."
"Stupid old ox. All boys and girls must marry when they reach a certain age. What's there to be upset about?"
"We don't agree to the match. He snatched her away by force."
"More funny business! Who is the man?"
"When I tell you you'll fart and pee in your pants with terror. He's the supreme commander of Liangshan Marsh, Song Jiang. One hundred and eight bold fellows are the chieftains there, and they have a considerable army."
"What I want to know is how many of them came here?"

"Two days ago, their leader arrived with a young fellow, both riding horses."
Li Kui called Yan Qing over. "Listen to this old man. It seems our Big Brother says one thing and does another. He's not a good person."
"Big Brother wouldn't commit wrong. I'm sure there's nothing in this."
"Didn't he go to the house of that Li Shishi in the Eastern Capital? Why wouldn't he pull something dirty here?" Li Kui turned to the squire. "You've got food in your manor. We want to eat. I'm Li Kui the Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh. This is Yan Qing the Prodigy. If Song Jiang has taken your daughter, we'll bring her back."
The squire kowtowed his thanks.
The two returned to the mountain fortress. The trip was without incident. They went directly to Loyalty Hall, where Song Jiang received them.
"Where have you been, brothers," he queried. "You must have lost your way many times to be coming back only now."
Li Kui glared. Without a word he took his axes and cut down the apricot-yellow banner inscribed with "Act in Heaven's Behalf and ripped it to shreds. Everyone stared in amazement.
"What are you doing, you swarthy rogue?" Song Jiang shouted. Axes in hand, Li Kui charged across the hall towards Song Jiang. Guan Sheng, Lin Chong, Qin Ming, Huyan Zhuo and Dong Ping hurriedly blocked him, wrenched away his axes, and hustled him to the lower end of the chamber.
"That oaf is acting up again," Song Jiang cried angrily. He turned to Black Whirlwind. "Tell me, what have I done wrong?"
Li Kui was speechless with rage. Yan Qing stepped forward and related what had transpired from the time they left the Eastern Capital to their arrival at the manor near Jingmen.
"Squire Liu told us that two days ago Song Jiang and a young companion rode up to the manor," Yan Qing continued. "When he heard that they were men who acted in Heaven's behalf, he ordered his eighteen-year-old daughter to serve them wine. They ate and drank far into the night, then ran off with the daughter. Brother Li Kui, hearing this story, believed it to be true. I kept telling him: 'Big Brother isn't that kind of a person. Somebody must be impersonating him, and misbehaving in his name.' But Brother Li said: 'I saw him in the Eastern Capital hanging around that hussy Li Shishi like he couldn't bear to part. Of course he's the man.' That's why he's so furious."
"You've got it all wrong about Li Shishi. I didn't realize," Song exclaimed to Li Kui. "Why didn't you say something?"
"I considered you a chivalrous man. Who'd have thought you were such an animal! Imagine doing a thing like that!"
"Listen to me: I came back in the company of three thousand cavalry. If two horsemen dropped out, everyone would have noticed. And if I captured a woman, she'd be here in the stronghold. You can search my house, goon!"
"That's friggin nonsense, brother, and you know it. Every man in the fortress is under your command, and most of them would cover for you. She could be hidden anywhere. I used to respect you for not being a skirt-chaser. Actually, you're crazy about wine and women. Your killing of Yan Poxi was just a little show. The real thing was when you lusted after Li Shishi in the Eastern Capital. Don't try to deny it. Return his daughter to old Squire Liu, and we can still come to terms. If you don't, sooner or later I'll kill you."
"Take it easy. Squire Liu isn't dead yet, and all his vassals are still there. I'll go and confront him. If he identifies me as the man, I'll stick out my neck for your ax. If he says I'm not the culprit, what should your penalty be, disrespectful varlet?"
"If I can't pin this on you, you can have my head."
"Good. All you brothers are witnesses." Song Jiang directed Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan to write out two orders of execution as pledges for the bet, and each man signed one. Song Jiang handed his pledge to Li Kui. Black Whirlwind gave his to Song Jiang.
"That young fellow the squire spoke of must be Chai Jin," said Li Kui. "It can't be anyone else."
"I'll go too, then," said Chai Jin.
"That you will, never fear. If the squire identifies you, you'll get a taste of my axes, too, lord or no lord!"
"That's all right with me," said Chai Jin. "You go first and we'll follow, so there won't be any funny business."
"Right," said Li Kui. He called to Yan Qing. "We'll go on ahead. If they don't come, it's because they know they're guilty. We'll come back and have this out!"
Yan Qing and Li Kui proceeded to the manor. "Any news, bold fellows?" the squire asked.
"Our Song Jiang is coming here today for you to identify him," said the Black Whirlwind. "I want you and your wife and your vassals to take a good look. If it's him, speak up, don't be afraid. I'll be responsible."
A vassal announced: "A dozen horsemen are at the gates."
"That's them," said Li Kui.
While the others waited outside, Song Jiang and Chai Jin entered. They went directly to the thatch-roofed hall and sat down. Li Kui stood to one side with his axes, ready to strike as soon as the old man recognized the culprit. But Squire Liu walked over to Song Jiang and kowtowed.
"Is this the man who kidnapped your daughter?" the Black Whirlwind queried.
Squire Liu opened wide his weak old eyes and examined Song Jiang carefully. "No."
"What do you say to that?" Song Jiang asked Li Kui. "You two gave him a look and scared him. He doesn't dare speak."
"Call his vassals, then, and ask them.'
Li Kui summoned the vassals. In one voice they all said: "He's not the man."
"Squire Liu," said Song Jiang, "I am Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh. This brother is Chai Jin. Your daughter was probably kidnapped by an impostor. If you find out where she's gone, let our stronghold know. We'll take care of it for you."
To Li Kui he said: "This is no place for us to talk. When you get back to the fortress I'll have something to say." He and Chaj Jin and their escort left first for the stronghold on the mountain.
"A fine mess, brother," said Yan Qing.
"It's my fault for being too impatient. Since I've forfeited my head, I might as well cut it off and have you present it to Big Brother."
"You've no reason to kill yourself. I have a way out. It's called 'Bearing the Thomstick and Requesting Punishment.' "
"What do you mean by 'Bearing the Thomstick'?"
"You remove your clothes, have your hands tied, carry a thomstick on your bare back, and prostrate yourself before Loyalty Hall. You call out: 'Let Big Brother beat me as he will.' Of course, he won't have the heart. That's 'Bearing the Thomstick and Requesting Punishment.' "
"Not bad, but it's kind of embarrassing. I'd rather cut my head off and get it over with."
"All of us in the stronghold are your brothers. Who would laugh at you?"
Reluctantly, Li Kui returned with Yan Qing to the fortress.
Song Jiang and Chai Jin reached Loyalty Hall first. They were just talking about Li Kui with the other chieftains when they saw him approaching. He was buff naked, and on his back he bore a thomstick. He knelt mutely outside the hall, with lowered head.
"Why are you bearing a thomstick, you swarthy scoundrel?" Song Jiang smiled. "Do you think that way I'll have to let you off?"
"I was wrong. Take this big stick and beat me, brother."
"I bet against your head. Why bring me a thomstick?"
"If you won't forgive, brother, cut my head off. It will be what I deserve."
The chieftains all apologized on Li Kui's behalf. "I'll forgive him on one condition: that he capture the two impersonators and find Squire Liu's daughter and bring her home."
Li Kui jumped to his feet. "I'm off. It'll be as easy as catching turtles in a jug. I only have to put out my hand."
"There are two of them, and they're mounted. You're all alone. How are you going to get near them? Take Yan Qing along."
"I'll be pleased to go, brother, if those are your orders," said Yan Qing.
He went to his quarters and got his bow and a staff as tall as his eyebrows. With Li Kui he went once again to the manor of Squire Liu.
Yan Qing questioned him carefully. "They came when the sun was in the west," said the squire, "and left at the third watch. I don't know where they went. I didn't dare follow. The leader was short, thin, and dark-complected. The other was a big strong fellow, with a short beard and large eyes."
The two chieftains queried further, then said: "Don't worry, squire. We're going to return your daughter to you, come what may. Our Big Brother Song Jiang has ordered us to find her, and we must obey."
They asked for boiled meat and steamed muffins and put these in ration bags which they slung across their shoulders. Leaving the manor, they first searched due north. It was a desolate area, devoid of human habitation. In two days they found not a trace of their quarry.
Next they tried the east. A two-day search proved fruitless, though they ranged as far as Gaotang in Lingzhou Prefecture. Li Kui grew more irritable, and his face was flushed as they turned around and headed west. But in the next two days they again discovered nothing.
That night the two took shelter in an ancient temple at the foot of a hill, and bedded down on the big altar table. Li Kui, too annoyed to sleep, sat up. He heard someone walking by, outside. He jumped down from the table, opened the temple door, and looked. A man with a halberd was staring up the hill behind the temple. Li Kui followed.
Yan Qing, who heard him moving about, took his bow and staff and caught up with Black Whirlwind. "Don't chase him, brother," he said. "I have another way."
It was night, and the moon was hazy. Yan Qing handed his staff to Li Kui. The man was now some distance away, head down, walking rapidly. Yan Qing soon narrowed the gap between them until he was fairly close behind. Fitting an arrow to his bow, he pulled the string tight and let fly, crying. "Bow, don't fail me!" The arrow struck the man in the right leg and brought him down.
Li Kui raced forward, seized the fellow by the collar and hauled him back to the temple. "Where have you hidden Squire Liu's daughter?" he yelled.
"I don't know anything about it, sir," the man replied. "I haven't taken anyone's daughter. I'm only a petty highwayman, doing a very modest business. I wouldn't dare go in for anything big, like snatching a man's daughter."
Black Whirlwind tied the fellow securely and raised his axes menacingly. "If you don't tell the truth I'll cut you into twenty pieces!"
"Let me up and we'll talk this over," the man exclaimed.
"I'll remove the arrow from-you," said Yan Qing. He allowed the man to rise. "Frankly, now, who was it who stole Squire Liu's daughter? Though you're only a highwayman, you must have heard something."
"I'm only guessing, I don't actually know. But about fifteen //northwest of here is a place called Ox Head Mountain, and on it is an old Taoist temple. Recently, two tough characters, one named Wang Jiang and the other Dong Hai, both minor bandits in the greenwood, killed all the priests and acolytes in the temple, and moved in with their gang. There are only six or seven of them. They specialize in robbery and plunder. Wherever they go, the leader calls himself Song Jiang. My guess is that the two chiefs have taken the girl."
"There's reason in what you say," Yan Qing averred. "Don't be afraid of us. I'm Yan Qing the Prodigy of Liangshan Marsh, and this is Black Whirlwind Li Kui. I'll treat your arrow wound, and you lead us to where those two are staying."
"All right," said the man.
Yan Qing returned his halberd and bound his wound. Then, in the light of the hazy moon, supported by Yan Qing and Li Kui, the man conducted them along the road for fifteen //. They came in sight of the mountain. It wasn't very high, and did indeed resemble a reclining ox with its head on the ground.
As the three began climbing, the sky was not yet light. At the top they found an area enclosed by an earthen wall. Within was a moderately sized building of about twenty rooms.
"I'll go in and have a look," said Black Whirlwind.
"Better wait till daylight," Yan Qing advised.
But Li Kui had no patience. He jumped over the wall. Someone shouted. The door of the house opened, and a man with a halberd rushed out and charged Li Kui. Afraid that their rescue operation would be ruined, Yan Qing, holding his staff, also leaped the wall. The wounded highwayman streaked away like a wisp of smoke.
Yan Qing crept up to the bruiser who was fighting with Li Kui and cracked him on the cheekbone with his staff, knocking him into Li Kui's arms. With one whack of his ax on the fellow's back, the Black Whirlwind felled him to the ground. Not another person emerged from the building.
"There must be a rear exit," said Yan Qing. "I'll guard the back door and you watch the front. Don't go blundering in."
Yan Qing hid in the darkness beside the rear gate of the wall. He saw a man open the back door of the house and approach the rear gate with a key in his hand. Yan Qing advanced to meet him. The man spotted Yan Qing and skirted around the house towards the front.
"Stop him," Yan Qing yelled.
Li Kui dashed up and planted his ax in the man's chest. He cut the heads off the two bodies and tied them together. His blood lust aroused, he charged into the building, bowling men over like clay idols. Several of them cowered beside the stove. With one blow of his ax each, the Black Whirlwind dispatched them all.
In a room in the center of the building, sure enough, they found the girl, sobbing on a bed. She had misty hair and a flowery complexion. An alluring beauty.
"Aren't you Squire Liu's daughter?" said Yan Qing. "I am," the girl replied. "About ten days ago two robbers brought me here, and took turns ravishing me every night. I wept constantly and wanted to kill myself, but they watched me very closely. Now you two generals have saved me. You're like my father and mother reborn."
"Where are their two horses?"
"In the east wing."
Yan Qing saddled the animals and led them out. He collected the gold and silver hidden in the house—about five thousand ounces—and told the girl to mount. He wrapped up the money and tied it, along with the two heads, on the other beast.
Li Kui twisted grass into a torch, lit it on a lamp below a window of the building, and set the thatched roof afire from four sides. Then they pushed open the wall gate, escorted the girl down the mountain, and delivered her to the manor.
Her parents were overjoyed. All their cares vanished. They couldn't kowtow and thank the two chieftains enough.
"Don't thank us," said Yan Qing. "Go up to the fortress and thank our Big Brother Song Jiang."
The two refused the wine and food offered. They mounted the horses and hastened back to the stronghold. By the time they traversed the three fortified passes the rising sun was just crimsoning the rim of the mountains. They led the animals, laden with gold and silver and the two heads, directly to Loyalty Hall. Yan Qing reported to Song Jiang what had transpired.
Very pleased, Song Jiang ordered that the heads be buried, the gold and silver placed in the treasury, and the horses cared for with the rest of the cavalry steeds.
A feast was given the next day to congratulate Yan Qing and Li Kui. Squire Liu brought gold and silver to Loyalty Hall and tried to present it to Song Jiang in thanks. But Song Jiang would have none of it. After the wining and dining, he told the squire to take the money back with him to the manor.
Of that we'll say no more. A period of peace settled upon the mountain fortress.

*

Time passed quickly. Soon the willows were gosling yellow, gradually the river waves were a turquoise green. The cheeks of the peaches glowed pink, the faces of the apricots showed a faint smile. On the mountain front and rear, flowers began to sprout, branches started to bud. Life returned to the duckweed on the ponds and the reeds along the shores. It was a time of grain rains and clearing skies, of the mellow, comfortable weather of the third lunar month.
As Song Jiang was quietly seated one day, he saw a group of men being led up from below the pass under armed escort. An outlaw arrived first and reported: "We've captured some fellows who are built like oxen. They have seven or eight handcarts and a number of staves."
The captives—big, hulking men—knelt at the lower end of the hall. "We're from Fengxiang District," they said, "and we're on a pilgrimage to Tai'an Prefecture to burn incense. The twenty-eighth of this month is the anniversary of the birth of the Emperor of Heaven. We're also going to take part in the staves contest. It lasts for three days, and there'll be hundreds of competitors. This year the famous wrestler Ren Yuan of Taiyuan will be there. He's ten feet tall and calls himself the Sky-Supporting Pillar. 'No one can match me,' he boasts. 'I'm the best wrestler in the world.' We hear he's been undefeated in the temple fair contests for the past two years, and has won some valuable prizes. He's put up an announcement, offering to take on all comers. We thought we might see him in action, and also pick up a few pointers on fighting with staves. Pray, great chieftain, favor us with your benevolence."
Song Jiang summoned a junior officer. "Take these men down the mountain at once. They're not to be harmed. From now on, you're not to frighten persons on their way to burn incense in temples or returning. Let them pass freely." The travellers kowtowed and thanked Song Jiang for sparing their lives, and departed.
Yan Qing then approached and said a few brief words. And as a result, all of Tai'an Prefecture was alarmed, and the county of Xiangfu was thrown into turmoil. Truly, two tigers battled in the Temple of the East Sacred Mountain, a pair of dragons fought in Jianing Hall.

When Iron Ox charged out of the inn brandishing his two axes, intending to rush the city wall and batter down the gate, the Prodigy grabbed him by waist and thigh and with a single deft movement threw him on his back. He then dragged him to his feet and set off down a narrow lane. Iron Ox had no alternative but to follow.
But why should this Iron Ox be scared of the Prodigy? Because the Prodigy was the world's greatest exponent of unarmed combat, that's why. It was for this reason that Song Jiang had left him in charge of Iron Ox. If Iron Ox hadn't followed him, the Prodigy would have used unarmed combat on him again. Iron Ox was well aware of the Prodigy's skills and feared them, so he had to do as he was told.
They dared not follow the main road for fear of pursuit. If the government troops caught up they would not be able to hold them off. So they had to make a wide detour. Iron Ox had dressed again and concealed the two axes inside his robe. Because he had no headgear he had parted his light brown hair and tied it in two pigtails.
They walked until daylight. The Prodigy had some money with him, so they bought wine and food at a village inn. Then they were off again.
When day dawned in the Eastern Capital the city was in turmoil. Marshal Gao had led his troops out of the city but failing to find anyone they returned. Lily pretended to know nothing, and Marshal Yang had gone home to recuperate. When the casualties were counted there were found to be four or five hundred wounded and countless numbers injured by trips or falls. Marshal Gao together with President of the Military Council Tong Guan met at the Grand Preceptor's to discuss matters and it was proposed that troops should be mobilized at once for a campaign against the bandits.

Meanwhile Iron Ox and the Prodigy had reached a place called Four Willows. It was getting late, so they approached a large manor and knocked at the gate. They were admitted to the thatched hall. Squire Di, the owner, came out to receive them. When he saw Iron Ox had pigtails, but was not wearing a Taoist robe and moreover had a very uncouth look about him, he could not make out what kind of person he had to do with. "Where does this Taoist come from?" he asked the Prodigy.
"The Master is a most unusual person," the Prodigy answered with a smile. "You don't know him. But don't worry, so long as we get something to eat and lodging for the night, we'll be off first thing in the morning." Iron Ox said nothing. Nevertheless, the Squire prostrated himself before Iron Ox, saying: "Master, I beg you to help me!"
"How do you want me to help? Speak up!" said Iron Ox.
"There are more than a hundred persons in my household, besides my wife and daughter," said the Squire. "I only have the one daughter. She has just turned twenty. Six months ago she suffered an enchantment. Ever since that time she stays in her room and won't come out even for meals. If anyone goes to fetch her she throws bricks and stones at them. Everyone in the household has been injured by her. We've had the priests here time after time, but they haven't been able to subdue her."
"Well, Squire, I am a disciple of the Blessed Sage of Jizhou," said Iron Ox. "I can ride the clouds and mount the mists and I'm an authority on catching demons. Provided you're not stingy, I'll trap this devil for you tonight. All I want right now is a pig and a goat for sacrifice."
"We've got pigs and goats all right," said the Squire. "And plenty of wine too, of course."
"Then choose some good plump beasts for slaughter and cook them up," said Iron Ox. "We'll also need quite a few bottles of good wine. Get it all organized and I'll catch the devil for you in the third watch."
"If you need some volumes of incantations, Father, we have those too," the Squire said.
"My method is quite simple, it doesn't involve any fucking spells," said Iron Ox. "I just walk straight into the room and chuck the devil out."
The Prodigy could scarcely contain his laughter. The Squire took Iron Ox at his word and made lengthy preparations. When the pig and goat were cooked the food was laid out in the hall. Iron Ox called for ten big bowls and ten bottles of well-warmed wine. After the first round he lit two big fat candles and burnt some good incense in a container. Then he grabbed a stool and seated himself in the midst of it all. Wasting no time on prayers or spells, he took out an axe and began carving up the meat, tearing off great chunks and eating them. He invited the Prodigy to partake: "Come on, young feller-me-lad, why don't you join me?"
The Prodigy with a disdainful smile refused. Iron Ox ate his fill and polished off five or six bowls of wine, to the Squire's amazement. Then he called to the retainers: "You lot can come and finish it off." It was only a matter of minutes for him to hand out the remaining meat. Then he said: "Now bring me a bowl of hot water to wash my hands and feet, double quick." As soon as that was done he asked the Squire for tea. To the Prodigy he said: "Well, have you eaten or haven't you?"
"I'm quite full, thank you," the latter replied.
Iron Ox said to the Squire: "I've drunk and eaten my fill, tomorrow we'll be off, now it's time for bed."
"Oh dear!" said the Squire. "When are you going to catch the devil?"
"If you really want me to catch the devil, get someone to take me to your daughter's room."
"But if Your Reverence goes in there and the bricks start flying, no one will dare go in to help!"
Iron Ox picked up his two axes and told the servants they could stand at a safe distance with their torches and light him on his way. He strode up to the door. A lamp was burning faintly inside. Peering in he could make out a youth and a young girl in intimate converse, embracing each other. He kicked down the door and flourished his axes. Flames scattered in all directions and there was a loud crash. He had knocked over the lamp. The youth tried to run for it but Iron Ox let out a roar and felled him. The girl dived under the bed and hid. Iron Ox cut the man's head off with one blow and threw the body on the bed. Then he tapped with his axe on the side of the bed and shouted: "Come out quick! If you don't I'll chop this bed to pieces!"
The girl cried out hurriedly: "If you promise to spare my life I'll come out."
The moment she poked her head out Iron Ox grabbed her by the hair and dragged her over to the dead body. "Who is this bugger I've just killed?" he asked her.
"It's my lover, young Wang," she sobbed.
"Where did you get the bricks and the food from?" he asked.
"I used to give him money, and he climbed in over the wall at night," she said.
"What filthy bitches women are, I don't see the use of them!" he said and pinning her down on the bed he chopped off her head. He tied the two heads together and then piled her corpse on top of her lover's and said: "That's it, that'll do me! No more hunger to appease now." He loosened his top clothing, picked up his axes and surveyed the scene with the two corpses. It looked as if lightning had struck. Iron Ox laughed and said: "Obviously these two were not meant to live." He stuck his axes in his belt, picked up the heads and shouted across to the hall: "I've caught two demons!"
When he threw down the two heads in front of them everyone in the manor had a shock. They recognized one head as belonging to the Squire's daughter, but no one knew the other. Then one of the retainers began to have an inkling: "It looks a bit like young Wang the birdcatcher from Eastside," he said.
Iron Ox said: "You've got good eyes!"
"How do you know he's right, Master?" the Squire asked.
"When I dragged your daughter out from under the bed and questioned her, she said it was her lover young Wang and he was the one who brought the food she had been eating. I investigated thoroughly before I took action."
"But Master, you might have spared my daughter!" said the Squire tearfully.
Iron Ox scolded him saying: "You stupid old fool! Your daughter has a secret lover and you think she should be allowed to live? If you go on crying like that, I shall think you're ungrateful. I'll have something to say to you about this in the morning!"
The Prodigy had found a room and he and Iron Ox retired to bed. The Squire had lamps lit and went to the daughter's room. When he saw the two headless corpses cut into a dozen pieces, he fainted. Later he and his wife, bitterly lamenting, had the bodies taken to the back and went to burn paper offerings.
Iron Ox slept till daylight. Then he leapt up and said to the Squire: "Last night I cast out the devils for you, aren't you going to show your gratitude?" The Squire had to arrange wine and food for them. After eating, Iron Ox and the Prodigy departed. Squire Di set about arranging his affairs. Of him no more.
Iron Ox and the Prodigy left Four Willows and resumed their journey. Because of the season the grass was withered and the land desolate, the leaves had fallen and the hills were bare. Nothing occurred on the journey. Because they had made such a big detour they were approaching Mount Liang from the north. They were still about twenty-five miles away, somewhere near Thorngate. In the evening they came to a big manor and knocked on the gate. The Prodigy said: "We must find an inn to stay."
Iron Ox said: "This is some big landowner's place. It doesn't look much like an inn to me!"
Before he'd finished speaking, a retainer came out and said: "The master has trouble on his hands. Go and spend the night somewhere else."
But Iron Ox walked right in before the Prodigy could stop him. He went straight to the thatched hall and shouted out: "What's so fucking difficult about giving lodging to some passing travellers? You say your master's got trouble on his hands. Well I've got something to say to this man who's in trouble!"
The Squire was observing them from within and when he saw that Iron Ox was getting worked up he quietly sent someone out to receive them and take them to a little side chamber next to the hall. There they were invited to rest while some food was prepared for them. After a longish wait the food was brought and after eating they retired to sleep. Iron Ox had not had much to drink that evening, and he lay tossing and turning on the stove, unable to sleep. He kept hearing the Squire and his wife moaning and groaning in their room. It irritated him so much he simply could not close his eyes. First thing in the morning he jumped out of bed and went to the hall. "What sort of place is this?" he asked. "Someone was crying all night, I didn't sleep a wink."
The Squire was obliged to provide an explanation. "We have a daughter, just eighteen, and she's been abducted. That's why we're so upset."
"That's a strange tale," said Iron Ox. "Who has taken her?"
"If I tell you his name you'll be so scared you'll shit yourself!" said the Squire. "It's Song Jiang, the leader from the Marshes of Mount Liang! And there's a hundred and eight commanders there, not to mention troops!"
"Tell me," said Iron Ox. "How many of them was it came here?"
"He and a young fellow came here a couple of days ago, both of them on horseback ."
Iron Ox called out to the Prodigy: "Hey, young feller-me-lad, do you hear what this old man has to say? Our great leader is a hypocrite, he's not a good person at all!"
"The Leader never acts inconsiderately," said the Prodigy. "This can't be true."
Iron Ox said: "When he was in the Eastern Capital he took himself off to see that courtesan, why shouldn't he get up to something here?" To the Squire he said: "Have you got any food you can give us? I'll tell you the truth. I am the Black Whirlwind from Mount Liang and this fellow is known as the Prodigy. If Song Jiang has taken your daughter, we will go and get her back for you."
The Squire prostrated himself in thanks. When Iron Ox and the Prodigy got back to Mount Liang they went straight to the Ceremonial Hall. Song Jiang asked them: "Where have you two been? You must have lost your way a great many times, to hold you up so long."
Iron Ox refused to answer. He just glared back. Then he went to work with his two axes on one of the apricot yellow banners, cutting the words "To Do Heaven's Will" into little pieces. The company were shocked. Song Jiang asked: "What's the matter with the black beast?" Iron Ox strode up the hall, axes in hand, to confront Song Jiang. The poem says:

*In the Marshes of Mount Liang none harbours an ill intent,*
*But now in the Hall of Heroes there is a malcontent.*
*Here comes Iron Ox, in either hand an axe.*
*Say not the universe a righteous spirit lacks.*

Then Scimitar, Leopard's Head, Thunderclap, Twin Rods and Twin Spears hastily intervened, disarming him and shoving him down from the tribune. Song Jiang was furious: "The bastard's acting up again! he shouted. "Tell me what I've done to deserve this!"
Iron Ox took a deep breath but refused to speak. The Prodigy stepped forward and said: "Please let me tell you about what happened to us on the journey. When he came out of the inn with his axes in the Eastern Capital, he wanted to go and break down the city gates, but I wrestled him to the ground and took him away. I said, 'The Leader has left. You can't be crazy enough to do anything on your own.' Luckily he listened to me. We didn't dare take the main road. He didn't have any headgear so he tied his hair in two plaits. When we came to a Squire Di's place at Four Willows they took him for a Taoist priest and asked him to cast out devils. He caught the Squire's daughter having it off with her lover and chopped them to pieces. Next we took the main road west into the mountains. He insisted on making a big detour which took us close to Thorngate. It was getting late so we went to ask a Squire Liu to put us up. Our brother's sleep was disturbed because the old couple were crying all night, so next morning he went and asked them what it was all about. The Squire said that a couple of days before Song Jiang from Mount Liang, together with another young chap, had ridden up to the house. The Squire had heard that Song Jiang was an honourable man and he told his daughter, a young girl of eighteen, to come and serve them wine. After drinking half the night, they grabbed the girl and left.When Iron Ox heard this story he believed it all. I told him over and over again that our leader was not that kind of man. I suggested there might be plenty of impostors who would like to take advantage of his fame to get up to wild tricks. But he kept saying that he had seen how you were infatuated with the singer Lily in the Eastern Capital and couldn't leave her alone, and if it wasn't you who could it be? That's what's got him excited."
Song Jiang said: "How was I to know you'd draw such a false conclusion? Why didn't you say something?"
"I always thought you a man of virtue," said Iron Ox. "But you're just an animal. This is a fine thing you've done!"
Song Jiang shouted: "You listen to me! Two or three thousand troops were with me when I came back here. If even two horses had gone astray, someone would have noticed it. If I had abducted a girl, she'd have to be here in the stronghold. Go to my residence and see for yourself."
Iron Ox said: "Brother, that's a load of fucking crap! Everyone here is under your orders. They'll all protect you. You could have hidden her anywhere! I used to think you were pure and virtuous, but now I know you're just crazy for wine and sex! Killing Yan Poxi was just the beginning. This trip to the Eastern Capital to search out that Lily was true to form. Stop pretending and give the girl back to Squire Liu, then we can talk. If you don't give the girl back I shall have to do something. It may be sooner, it may be later, but I shall kill you."
Song Jiang said: "Stop shouting for a moment. This Squire Liu is still alive, the retainers are there, let's go together and confront him. If I lose this argument, I will bare my neck to your axe. If I don't lose it, what punishment do you think you deserve, you disorderly lout?"
"If I can't make it stick, you can take my head!" said Iron Ox.
"Good, let all the company be witnesses to this," said Song Jiang. He ordered Sterling to write out two copies of a document, one for each to sign. They then exchanged copies.
Iron Ox said: "And that young man who was with you, it's got to be Mr. Chai."
"Then I'd better go along too," said Mr. Chai.
"Of course you'll come," said Iron Ox. "And if you lose you'll have a taste of my axe, I don't care if you're the great Mr. Chai or the great Panjandrum!"
Mr. Chai said: "Fine. You go first and wait for us there. If we were to go first, you'd suspect something."
Iron Ox said: "That's settled then," and called to the Prodigy: "We'll go together, like before. If they don't come, because of their guilty conscience, I won't fail to return and settle the account."
Indeed, as the poem says:

*The Sage's deeds invite no breath of blame;*
*The second in virtue finds reproof no shame.*
*Only the lowest, blinded by his own nature*
*Provokes men's wrath but won't accept their censure!*

So Iron Ox and the Prodigy returned to Squire Liu's. When the Squire came out to meet them he asked: "How is the business getting on?"
Iron Ox said: "I've got Song Jiang to come here for you to identify him. You and your wife and the retainers must look very carefully. If he's the one, just speak the truth. Don't be afraid of him. I shall give you justice."
At this moment a retainer said: "There's a dozen horsemen approaching the manor."
Iron Ox said: "It's them. Lodge the men and horses to one side, only let Song Jiang and Mr. Chai come in."
The two leaders entered the thatched hall and sat down. Iron Ox stood on one side, fingering his axes, ready to act as soon as the Squire said it was them. The Squire came forward and bowed to Song Jiang. "Is this the one who stole your daughter or not?" Iron Ox asked. The old man screwed up his eyes and stared with all his might. Finally, he said: "No."
"Well?" Song Jiang said to Iron Ox.
Iron Ox said: "It's the way you're looking at him, he's scared of you. He daren't say it was you."
"Then call the retainers to come and identify me."
Iron Ox called in the retainers and they all said in unison: "He's not the one."
"Squire Liu," said Song Jiang, "I am Song Jiang of Mount Liang, and this is Mr. Chai. Your daughter was abducted by someone using a false name. If you can find out who it was, report to us on the mountain and I will ensure you have justice." To Iron Ox he said: "I shan't deal with you here. When you return to the mountain you will receive judgement."
Song Jiang, Mr. Chai and their retinue left first. The Prodigy said to Iron Ox: "What can you do now, brother?"
"It's all because of my hasty temper that I messed it up. Since I've been proved wrong, I'd better just kill myself and you can take my dead body to the Leader."
"What do you want to go and kill yourself for? I'll show you a way out. It's called 'Bearing thorns and pleading for punish-ment'."
"What do you mean by 'bearing thorns'?"
"You take off all your clothes and tie yourself with rope. Then with a branch from a thornbush on your back you prostrate yourself before the high table in the Ceremonial Hall and say: 'Leader, please beat me.' Naturally he won't want to do it. That is what's called 'bearing thorns and pleading for punishment'."
"I suppose that's all right, but it's pretty embarrassing. Wouldn't it be better just to cut my head off and have done?"
"Everyone's your friend in the stronghold. They won't laugh at you."
So Iron Ox had no alternative but to return with the Prodigy to the mountain stronghold, "bearing thorns and pleading for punishment".
Song Jiang and Mr. Chai were already sitting in the Ceremonial Hall, telling the others about the affair with Iron Ox, when the latter marched in, stripped naked and bearing a great thorn branch on his back. He knelt with bowed head before the high table and spoke no word. Song Jiang laughed and said: "You black lout, what have you got that thorn bush for? You won't get off just like that!"
Iron Ox said: "I was wrong. Please take a stick and beat me as many times as you like."
Song Jiang said: "We both wagered our necks. What's the point of coming here with the thorns?"
"If you won't pardon me, get a sword and cut off my head, I've no objection."
Everyone else pleaded for Iron Ox. Song Jiang said: "If he wants to be forgiven, he's first got to go and catch those two impostors and find Squire Liu's daughter and return her to him."
Iron Ox leapt to his feet and said: "Easy as falling off a log!"
Song Jiang said: "There's two of them and they've got horses, how can you ever catch up with them on your own? Get the Prodigy to go with you again."
The Prodigy said: "I'd like nothing better." He went back to his room and got his crossbow and a staff of eyebrow height, and the two of them returned to Squire Liu's.
The Prodigy questioned the Squire closely. The latter said: "The sun was just setting when they arrived and they left in the third watch. I've no idea where they were from and I didn't dare follow them. The chief was quite short, with a swarthy complexion. His sidekick was thickset, with short hair and big eyes."
When they'd taken this in, they said: "Don't worry, Squire. One way or another we'll get your daughter back for you. It's our Leader Song Jiang's orders. We've got to find them, we dare not give up." They asked him for some boiled meat and unleavened bread. Each man put his supplies in a bag which he slung over his shoulder and off they went.

First they headed due north, but the land was desolate and devoid of human habitation. After a couple of days they had seen and heard nothing. Then they travelled east and in a couple of days reached the neighbourhood of Gaotang in Lingzhou province. But there was still no news. Iron Ox was burning with impatience as they turned back west and searched for a couple more days with no result. In the evening they came to an old temple in the mountains and rested in the dormitory. Unable to sleep, Iron Ox got up and sat on the floor. He heard someone walking outside the temple. He jumped up and opened the door and saw a man with a halberd walking along a path that skirted the foot of the mountain behind the temple. He followed him. The Prodigy heard. He picked up his crossbow and his staff and chased after Iron Ox. "Friend Li, stop!" he called. "I've got a better idea."
It was a misty moonlit night. The Prodigy handed his staff to Iron Ox. They could see the man plodding along in the distance, his head lowered. The Prodigy crept up on him and fitted a bolt to his crossbow. With a cry of "Fly true, don't let me down!" he released the bolt, which hit the man in the right leg and brought him crashing down. Iron Ox raced to him and grabbed him by the collar. He dragged him back to the temple and demanded: "Where have you taken Squire Liu's daughter, you rapist?"
"Sir, I know nothing about this," the man declared. "I ain't stolen no squire's daughter. I'm just a local highwayman. It's just small stuff what I do, I don't get involved in nothing big and I'd never think to steal someone's daughter!"
Iron Ox tied him up. Then he took out his axe and shouted: "If you don't confess I shall cut you into a dozen pieces!"
"Let me go and I'll talk," the man said.
The Prodigy said: "Look here, let me treat the arrow wound." He released him and then asked: "Who actually did take Squire Liu's daughter? If you're a highwayman round here, you must have heard some rumours."
The man said: "I can make a rough guess, but I can't say if it's right or not. About five miles northwest of here there's this mountain they call Buffalo Head. In the old days there was a Taoist monastery up there. Recently it's been occupied by two robbers. One is called Wang Jiang, the other is Dong Hai. The two of them's outlaws, what people calls denizens of the greenwood. They killed all them Taoist monks and novices. Then they got half a dozen mates and occupied the monastery, as their base for pillage and plunder. Everyone thinks it's Song Jiang, so most likely it's them two as nabbed the girl."
The Prodigy said: "This story has the ring of truth about it. Now don't be afraid when I tell you that I am Yan Qing, known as the Prodigy, from Mount Liang, and this is Iron Ox, alias the Black Whirlwind. I will take care of that arrow wound of yours, and you are going to lead us to the place."
"That's okay by me," the man said.
The Prodigy went and fetched the man's halberd for him and then bandaged his wound. By the pale light of the moon they walked five miles, supporting the wounded man, till they reached the mountain. It was not especially high, but it did indeed look like a buffalo's head. They reached the top before daylight. Here they found a mud wall surrounding a score of huts.
"I'm going over that wall," Iron Ox said.
"Better wait for daylight before you do anything," said the Prodigy.
But Iron Ox was far too impatient to wait. He scaled the wall, and they heard a lot of shouting inside. Doors opened and a man rushed out and attacked Iron Ox with a halberd. The Prodigy began to fear things might go badly and used his staff to pole-vault over the wall. The man with the wounded leg vanished like smoke.
The Prodigy surreptitiously approached Iron Ox's assailant from the side and struck him a blow to the temple which toppled him into Iron Ox's arms. Iron Ox slashed him in the back with his axe and he fell to the ground. No one else came out. "The buggers must be escaping at the back," the Prodigy said. "I'll block the back door and you watch the front. But don't go rushing in there."
The Prodigy went round to the back entrance of the compound and waited there in the dark. Soon a man appeared with a key and opened a gate in the wall. The Prodigy darted towards him. The man, alerted, shot away under the eaves round to the front. "Watch out in front!" the Prodigy shouted. Iron Ox rushed forward and felled the man with a blow which split him in two. He tied the two heads together. His blood was up now. He burst inside the building and began to smash everything up, like a demented spirit. The rest of the gang were cowering beside the stove. He routed them out and killed each one with a blow of his axe. As expected, in an inner room a girl lay on the bed sobbing. She was a real beauty, with clouds of hair and a brilliant complexion:

*Beneath the silken skirts a tiny shoe protrudes;*
*The white breast more than roses a sweet perfume exudes;*
*But beauty has no power to check a storm of sighs,*
*Grief beyond measure clouds the clear pools of her eyes.*

The Prodigy said: "You must be Squire Liu's daughter, am I right?"
"I was abducted ten days ago by those two devils," she said. "They brought me here and forced me to sleep with them each night in turn. I wished I could die but they watched me all the time. Now you have come to save me, sirs, it is like a rebirth, you are a second mother and father to me."
The Prodigy said: "They have two horses. Do you know where they keep them?"
"They are in the east wing," she said.
The Prodigy saddled the horses and led them out. Then they collected up all the booty that was stored in the house, four or five thousand taels it turned out to be. The Prodigy bade the girl mount and the gold and silver were packed up and together with the robbers' heads loaded onto the other horse. Iron Ox got a straw torch and lit it from the embers of the stove. Then he set all the thatched huts ablaze. They opened the gate and escorted the girl back down the mountain to Squire Liu's. The parents were overjoyed to see their daughter and came to thank the two leaders for ending their troubles. The Prodigy said: "Don't thank us. You'd better come to the mountain fortress and pay your respects to our leader, Song Jiang." Refusing all food and wine, he and Iron Ox mounted the two horses and galloped back to the stronghold.
When they got there the sun was sinking behind the hills. They passed through the third gate and led the horses loaded with gold and silver and the heads of the brigands straight to the Ceremonial Hall where they paid their respects to Song Jiang. The Prodigy recounted all that had happened. Song Jiang was delighted. He ordered the heads to be buried, the gold and silver to be placed in the treasury and the horses to be stabled with the other war horses and fed well. A banquet was organized to honour the Prodigy and Iron Ox next day. Squire Liu also got together some gold and silver and came up the mountain with it. He entered the Ceremonial Hall and prostrated himself before Song Jiang. Song Jiang would not accept the gift. After regaling the Squire with food and wine he sent him back to his estate. Of him no more.
The days slipped by uneventfully on Mount Liang.
*The willows are yellowing, gradually the water takes on the colour of a mallard's head. Peaches produce a mass of pink flowers, red buds start to show on the apricot. This side of the mountain is jewelled with flowers, the other side clad in vegetation: new growth is bursting out everywhere. Duckweed spreads over the water, reeds cover the marshes, all signifying rebirth. April, month of the grain rains, starts fine, glorious weather. The mists have just ended, it's going to be a splendid spring.*
One day when Song Jiang was seated in the hall a group of captives was brought up from down below. "We've captured this herd of cattle," his troops told him. "And there's seven or eight carts and some herdsmen too."
The men were proud fierce-looking fellows. They knelt before the tribune and said: "We are all from Fengxiang and we're on our way to worship in Tai'an. It's the festival of the Buddha's birthday and we are going to enter the staff-fighting competition. The festival will last three days and there will be hundreds of contests. There's going to be a chap there called Ren Yuan who's a famous wrestler. He's a very big man and they call him Colossus. He boasts that there is no one in the world who can match him in unarmed combat, and says everyone admits he is the greatest. It's said that he has won the contest at the temple two years run-ning and no one wants to take him on so the prize is not likely to be contested, though he's put up a notice challenging all comers. We are going along because of him. We want to worship at the temple, but we'll also be able to get a look at him and perhaps also pick up a few tricks from him. We hope you'll be kind and set us free."
Song Jiang immediately called a soldier and told him: "Escort these gentlemen down the mountain and see that no harm comes to them. In future if you come upon any worshippers on their way to the temple, don't disturb them, let them go peacefully on their way."
They went away most thankfully. The Prodigy now stood up and made a request. He needed few words. On this much hinges: a disturbance was caused in Tai'an and there was big trouble in Xianfu. Indeed,

*At the Temple of the Eastern Peak 2 tigers fight it out,*
*2 dragons strive for supremacy at the sacred spot.*

## 172
## The Prodigy Yan Qing Cleverly Defeats Sky-Supporting Pillar Colossus in fair fight; Iron Ox Li Kui Plays the Magistrate it in a country court in Shouzhang County & lords it

Although the last of the thirty-six Stars of Heavenly Spirits, Yan Qing was more quick-witted, well-informed, and adaptable than the other thirty-five. He addressed Song Jiang.
"Since childhood I have followed Lu Junyi the Magnate and learned from him the art of wrestling. In all the gallant fraternity, I have never met my match. Now there is a good opportunity. It will soon be the twenty-eighth of the third lunar month. I would like to go, alone, to the competition platform and try my skill against the Sky-Supporting Pillar. If I lose, I don't care if I die in the process. If I win, I'll earn a bit of glory for Big Brother. It's sure to stir up plenty of excitement. Maybe you could send some men to support me."
"I hear the fellow is ten feet tall," said Song Jiang, "as solid as steel, and enormously strong. You're short and thin. I know your technique is good, but how will you ever get near him?"
"His height and huskiness don't bother me. I'm only afraid he won't fall for my tricks. 'In wrestling use strength if you've got, use wiles if you've not,' as the old saying goes. I'm not boasting, but I'm very quick to seize an advantage. I won't necessarily lose to that big lout."
Lu Junyi the Magnate said: "This young Prodigy has indeed been good at wrestling since an early age. Let him go if he wants to. After the contest I'll see to it that he gets back."
"When do you want to leave?" Song Jiang asked Yan Qing.
"Today's the twenty-fourth. I'll bid you farewell tomorrow, brother. The journey will take a day or so. I'll reach the temple fair grounds on the twenty-sixth and spend the twenty-seventh inquiring around. Then, on the twenty-eighth, I'll fight him."
The following day, Song Jiang gave Yan Qing a farewell banquet. He was dressed like a rustic, but he wore embroidered clothes under his simple padded robe. Disguised as a Shandong pedlar, he had a drum-rattle tucked in his sash and carried his merchandise on a long shoulder-pole. The chieftains laughed at his appearance.
"Since you're made up as a pedlar," said Song Jiang, "give us a Shandong pedlar's song."
Yan Qing complied, twirling his drum-rattle in one hand, and beating out rhythm with wooden clappers in the other, giving a very creditable imitation. Everyone laughed. They drank till all were pleasantly mellow. Then Yan Qing took leave of the chieftains and went down the mountain. Crossing at the Shore of Golden Sands, he struck out along the road to Tai'an Prefecture.
Towards evening, as he was looking for an inn to spend the night, he heard a voice shouting behind him: "Brother Prodigy, wait for me!"
Yan Qing rested his carrying-pole and looked. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind was hastening after him.
"What do you want?" Yan Qing demanded.
"You stayed with me twice when I went to Jingmen Town. I saw you leave alone and I was worried about you. So I didn't ask Big Brother's permission, but just sneaked off to keep you company."
"I don't need you. Go on back."
"You're a fine one! I come to help you, and you act like that. I'm friggin well going with you!"
Yan Qing couldn't be ungracious in the face of Li Kui's chivalrous concern. "I don't mind your coming along," he said, "but they'll be celebrating the Emperor of Heaven's birthday and the town will be jammed with people from all over. Many of them might recognize you. I'll let you come on three conditions."
"All right."
"On the road we walk one before and one behind, and when we put up at an inn you're not to leave the door. That's one. Two, when we stop at an inn near the fair grounds you're to play sick. Cover your head with your quilt and pretend to snore. Don't make any other sound. Three, the day of the contest when you stand among the watching crowd, you're not to raise any rumpus. Brother, can you agree to that?"
"Easy! I'll do anything you say."
That night, they slept at an inn. They rose the next day before dawn, paid the bill, travelled a distance, and cooked breakfast.
"You go on ahead half a *li*, brother," said Yan Qing, "and I'll follow."
There were many people on the road going to the temple to burn incense, or returning. Several talked about the redoubtable Ren Yuan. "For two years he hasn't been beaten at the East Sacred Mountain Temple fair," they said. "This is going to be the third year."
Yan Qing listened. He would remember that. In late afternoon, as he neared the temple, he saw other travellers stopping by the roadside and reading something. He rested his load, pushed through the gathering to the front and looked. Stretched across two upright red poles like an ornate street arch was a pink signboard. On it was written: "Sky-Supporting Pillar Ren Yuan of Taiyuan, Wrestler." In smaller script on either side were the words: "Puncher of the fierce tiger on the South Mountain, kicker of the writhing dragon in the North Sea."
Yan Qing raised his carrying-pole and smashed the board to splinters. Without a word he again shouldered his pole and proceeded towards the temple. Several of the watchers, eager to stir up excitement, flew to Ren Yuan and reported that a man had shattered his signboard in challenge.
Yan Qing caught up with Li Kui and they looked for an inn. The temple fair was very lively. A hundred and twenty trades were all displaying their wares, fourteen to fifteen hundred inns were welcoming guests from many different parts, and a goodly number were full at this festival time. Yan Qing and Li Kui finally found a place at the far edge of the fair grounds. The prodigy rested his load, while Black Whirlwind rolled himself up in a quilt on the bed.
"A pedlar from Shandong come to do some business at the fair, are you, brother?" said the inn attendant. "I wonder if you have enough money for the room?"
"You shouldn't underestimate people," said Yan Qing, in the manner of a country bumpkin. "How much can a little room cost? Even if it were a large room, whatever others give, I can pay the same."
"Don't be offended, brother. This is our busiest season. It's better to have a clear understanding, first."
"This is a business trip. It doesn't matter about me. I can sleep anywhere. But I met this relative from my home village on the road, and he's come down with asthma. I've brought him to your inn so that he can rest. Here are five strings of cash, on account. Go to the kitchen and make us something to eat. I'll give you a tip when we leave."
The attendant took the money and went out to prepare the food. Of that no more need be said.
Not long after there was a hubbub at the inn door, and twenty or thirty big fellows entered. "What room is the man in who smashed the signboard as a challenge?" they asked the attendant.
"We don't have any such person."
"Everyone says he's here."
"We've only two rooms for rent. One is empty. The other is occupied by a Shandong pedlar and his sick relation."
"It's the pedlar who smashed the sign."
"Don't make me laugh! He's a slim young fellow. What use would a challenge from him be!"
"Take us to his room and let's have a look at him."
"It's that room down in the corner."
The men walked over, but the door was locked. They peered in through the window. All they could see was the feet of two men, sleeping. They didn't know what to think.
One of them said: "Since he had the courage to smash the sign and challenge the champion, he's surely no ordinary person. He's afraid someone will try to harm him before the match, so he pretends to be sick."
"That's probably it," the others agreed. "But there's no use guessing. We'll see when the time comes."
By dusk at least twenty or thirty such groups had called at the inn to inquire. The attendant's lips were dry and cracked with denials. That evening, when he brought the two guests their food, Li Kui poked his head out of the bedding.
"*Aiya!*" the attendant yelped. "The challenger!"
"He isn't the challenger. He's sick," said Yan Qing. "I'm the one who's challenging."
"Don't kid me. Ren Yuan could swallow you in a single gulp."
"You needn't smile. I have a trick that will hand you all a good laugh. When I come back from the match, I'll give you a present."
When the two had finished eating, the attendant collected the bowls and dishes and took them to wash in the kitchen. He didn't believe a word of what the Prodigy had told him.
The next morning, while they were having breakfast, Yan Qing said to Li Kui: "Brother, lock the door and sleep."
He mingled with crowds going into the Temple of the East Sacred Mountain. Located on the slopes of Mount Taishan, it was one of the most lavish and magnificent temples in the world. He wandered around a while, and offered four kowtows when he emerged from a thatched pavilion.
"Where can I find Teacher Ren, the wrestler?" he asked one of the worshippers.
"He instructs two or three hundred pupils in that big inn at the foot of the Welcome Benevolence Bridge."
Yan Qing, arriving at the bridge, found twenty or thirty wrestlers sitting on the railing. Ahead were gold-trimmed pennants and banners, embroidered canopies, and man-high backrests. He entered the inn yard. Ren Yuan was sitting in a pavilion in the center. He was indeed as huge and imposing as a temple guardian idol. Seated sideways on a bed with exposed had chest, he was every inch a tiger killer and mover of mountains as he watched his pupils perform.
One of them softly told him that this was the man who had shattered the signboard. Ren Yuan jumped up and fanned out his elbows.
"Anyone who wants to die this year can come and risk his life at my hands," he announced.
Yan Qing lowered his head and hurriedly departed. He could hear the gales of laughter behind him. He returned to Li Kui, and they drank and dined together.
"All this sleep is suffocating me," Black Whirlwind grumbled.
"Only one more night," Yan Qing consoled him. "Tomorrow's the showdown."
They chatted about various things of no interest to us.

Around the third watch the thud of drums sounded. Worshippers in the temple had commenced burning incense in celebration of the Emperor of Heaven's birthday. At the fourth watch, Yan Qing and Li Kui rose and ordered the attendant to fetch hot water so that they could wash their faces. They combed their hair smooth, removed their padded gowns, wrapped their legs in knee-length bindings, and put on silk trousers, hemp sandals, and a clean shirt each, binding this round the waist with a sash.
"We're leaving our luggage here," they said to the attendant. "Look after it for us."
"Nothing will be missing. Come back soon a winner!"
Staying at the inn were twenty or thirty pilgrims who had come to burn incense. "Think it over, young fellow," they urged Yan Qing. "Why throw your life away?"
"When everyone is cheering my victory, you can collect some gifts for me," the Prodigy replied.
The pilgrims departed for the temple.
"I might as well bring my two axes," said Li Kui.
"You can't do that," said Yan Qing. "If anyone recognizes you it will defeat our main purpose."
They mingled with the crowds and found an inconspicuous place for themselves on one of the temple porches. The grounds were jammed with worshippers. Huge as it was, the Temple of the East Sacred Mountain was soon filled to overflowing. Even the ridges of the roofs were lined with spectators.
Facing Jianing Hall a shed had been erected, and in it were gold and silver trophies and prizes of silks and satins. At the door of the hall five beautiful horses were hitched, all with fine saddles and bridles.
The prefect directed that no more worshippers be allowed to enter the temple, and settled down to watch the wrestling match in honor of Buddha. An old referee, holding a bundle of bamboo rods, mounted the platform outside the hall and worshipped the god. Then he called this year's wrestlers to come forth and contend.
Before the words were out of his mouth a tide of humanity surged forward. Preceded by a dozen staff-bearing guards and four embroidered pennants, Ren Yuan approached seated on a litter. In the van and to the rear were twenty or thirty stalwarts with tattooed arms. Surrounded by a jostling crowd, the procession reached the platform. The referee invited Ren Yuan to step down, and greeted him with a few warm words of welcome.
"I have won the championship at the temple for the last two years and earned a few unmerited prizes," said Ren Yuan. "This year I must fight stripped to the waist."
While he was speaking a man came with a bucket of water. Ren Yuan's disciples were standing around the platform in a dense circle. Their master opened his sash, removed his head kerchief, draped his padded Sichuan silk tunic over his shoulders, and loudly and respectfully hailed the Emperor of Heaven. He drank two mouthfuls of the holy water and discarded the tunic. Admiring cheers went up from thousands of throats.
How was Ren Yuan attired? A topknot done up in red thread crowned his head. He wore a jade green silk tunic fastened at the waist over a shirt with triple rows of jade buttons and trimmed with gold ruffles. His knee-length pants were plated with bronze and had a bronze crotch protector. Iron plates and rings encircled the calves of his legs. His wrists were firmly taped. Kicking shoes shod his feet. This, then, was the Sky-Supporting Pillar, who could lift the seas on earth and conquer the demons below.
"You've been the unrivalled champion here at the temple for the last two years, Teacher," said the referee. "This is the third year. Is there anything you would be willing to say to the assembled worshippers?"
"From four hundred prefectures and regions, from over seven thousand counties, good people come to burn incense in honor of the Buddha. All bring gifts which I have so unworthily won as prizes during the last two years. This year, after making my devotions, I am returning to my country home, and shall not be coming to this mountain again. From where the sun rises in the east to where it sets in the west, beneath the sky where sails the sun and moon, from the land of the barbarians in the south to the remote regions of Yan in the north, is there a man who dares to contend with me for prizes?"
Before Ren Yuan's voice had died away, Yan Qing raised himself up on the shoulders of the men on either side of him and shouted: "Yes, there is!" He flew to the platform across the backs of the throng. The crowd shouted.
"What is your name, young fellow?" the referee asked. "Where is your home? Where have you come from, now?"
"I'm Zhang the pedlar, from Shandong, and I've come especially to challenge him."
"Your end is near, young fellow, don't you realize that? Have you a sponsor?"
"I'm my own sponsor. No one has to be compensated for my life if I die!"
"Strip down and let's have a look at you."
Yan Qing whipped off his head kerchief. His gleaming hair was tied up in a topknot. He took off his straw sandals and squatted by the side of the platform and, unwound his leggings. Jumping up, he removed his shirt and struck a pose.
The turbulent spectators shouted their approval. They were astounded. Ren Yuan, at the sight of Yan Qing's finely muscled body, felt a thrill of fear.
On the Moon Terrace outside the hall sat the prefect, keeping order. Surrounding him, at his beck and call, were seventy or eighty pairs of black-clad police. Yan Qing came down from the platform and approached the terrace. The prefect was favorably impressed by his jade-smooth physique.
"Where are you from, young man?" he asked. "What brings you here?"
"My name is Zhang. I'm a first son, and I hail from Laizhou Prefecture in Shandong. I heard that Ren Yuan has challenged all wrestlers, and I made the trip specially to contend."
"The horse with full equipage over there is my prize. Suppose I give them to Ren Yuan. The trophies in the shed I propose to let you and him share, half and half. I'll also raise you up and let you serve at my side."
"Prefect, I don't care about the prizes. All I want is to dump him and give everyone a laugh, and hear the plaudits of the crowd."
"He's as huge as a temple guardian idol. I doubt if you'll be able to get near him."
"I'll willingly die in the attempt." Yan Qing again mounted the combat platform and faced Ren Yuan.
The referee asked Yan Qing to sign a waiver, then pulled out a list of rules, which he read. "You understand?" he said to the Prodigy. "No dirty tricks."
Yan Qing laughed coldly. "He's loaded with protective gear. I'm wearing only these thin silk pants. How could I do anything?"
The prefect summoned the referee. "That's a splendid young man. It's a pity," he said softly. "Tell him you'll call it a draw, with no need to contend."
Returning to the platform, the referee said to Yan Qing: "I'll let you go back to your village alive, young fellow. I'll declare this contest a draw."
"You're taking too much for granted! How do you know whether I'd win or lose?"
The area was jammed with spectators. Thousands of worshippers lined either side in dense rows like the scales on a fish. People were sitting on every inch of space atop the esplanades and on the roofs, all avidly awaiting the match.
Ren Yuan seethed with hatred. He longed to throw Yan Qing into the clouds so that he would be smashed in the fall.
"Since you're both determined to go ahead," said the referee, "we shall proceed with this wrestling match in honor of the Emperor of Heaven. Be careful and pay attention to the rules."
By this time the early morning mist had dissipated and the sun was beginning to rise. Holding his bundle of bamboo rods, the referee gave final instructions.
"Commence!" he shouted.
It's important to be clear in describing this wrestling-match, with its various moves. Telling it is slow, but things happened as quickly as a meteorite flashing across the sky.
At first Yan Qing only crouched on the right, while Ren Yuan stood on the left like a door god. Yan Qing didn't stir, and the space between them remained empty. Ren Yuan edged around to the right, but Yan Qing only watched the ground on three sides of his rival.
"If that's all he's going to do," mused the champion, "I won't have to move a hand. With one kick, I'll boot him off the platform."
Ren Yuan drew nearer. He feinted with his left foot. "None of that!" cried Yan Qing. Before Ren could close in, he slipped low past the big man's left side. Angrily, Ren whirled, but Yan weaved and dodged back past the right ribs of his opponent.
Turning his huge body again and again, Ren grew confused, and his feet stumbled. The Prodigy darted forward, grasped Ren's shoulder with his right hand, his crotch with his left, shoved his shoulder under Ren's chest, and lifted. Five times he spun with his hapless foe, who was dangling, feet in the air, to the edge of the platform.
"Down you go," he yelled, and tossed Ren, head first, to the ground.
This gambit is called the Pirouetting Pigeon. The crowd cheered wildly. Ren Yuan's disciples, seeing their master thrown, knocked over the shed and seized the trophies. Loud quarrels and fist fights broke out among the crowd. Twenty or thirty of Ren's wrestling pupils clambered onto the platform. The prefect hadn't a chance in the world of keeping order.
No one expected that this scene would incense a mighty figure. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, his strange eyes widening in a glare, watched angrily from the side, bristling like a tiger. He had no weapon, so he pulled up a pine sapling as easily as plucking a scallion and snapped it in two. With one segment in each hand, Li Kui commenced flailing. Some of the spectators recognized him, and called out his name. This brought policemen, who were outside, pouring into the temple.
"Don't let the Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh get away!" they shouted.
When the prefect heard this, he scooted out of the rear of the hall so fast the three souls in his head and the seven spirits beneath his feet vanished With him. Some people crowded around the platform, but most of the worshippers hurried from the temple.
Ren Yuan was lying in a daze at the foot of the platform, barely breathing, when Li Kui reached him. Black Whirlwind pried up a stone slab and pounded Ren Yuan to a pulp. He and Yan Qing battled to the temple gate, where they were met by a hail of arrows. Climbing to the roof of a temple building, they hurled tiles at their assailants.
A clamor arose at the gate, and a body of men fought their way forward. Their leader wore a wide-brimmed hat of white felt and a white silk gown, and carried a dagger at his waist. In his hands was a halberd. It was Lu Junyi, the Jade Unicorn of the Northern Capital. Behind him were Shi Jin, Mu Hong, Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, with a thousand men. Forcing open the gate, they surged in to the rescue.
Yan Qing and Li Kui leaped down from the roof and joined them, and all left together. Li Kui returned to the inn for his axes, and went on a killing rampage. By the time prefectural government troops arrived at the scene, the outlaws were far gone. The soldiers knew that the men of Liangshan Marsh were difficult adversaries, and were afraid to give chase.
Lu Junyi ordered that Li Kui be collected and the return journey commenced. But during a half day's march, they saw no sign of him on the road. Lu laughed.
"That trouble-maker. Someone will have to find him and bring him back to the mountain."
"I'll do it," Mu Hong volunteered.
"Fine," said Lu.

Meanwhile, Li Kui, axes in hand, proceeded to the county town of Shouzhang. The court had just adjourned for the noon recess when he walked up to the gate of government headquarters.
"The lord Black Whirlwind of Liangshan Marsh is here!" he shouted.
The staff of the county office was paralyzed with fright. Theirs was the closest town to the outlaw stronghold, and mothers had only to say "Black Whirlwind Li Kui" to scare crying children into silence. And now, here he was, in person. A terrifying situation!
Li Kui went in and sat down on the magistrate's official chair. "A few of you had better come out and talk," he called. "Otherwise, I'll set fire to the place."
People in the corridor held a hasty conference. They decided they'd have to comply. "He might really do it," they said. Two of their number were selected and sent into the hall.
They kowtowed four times and, still on their knees, spoke. "Since you've come, chieftain, you must have some instructions."
"I don't want to disturb your county. I was passing by and thought I'd stop a while and fool around. Call your magistrate. I want to see him."
"When he heard you'd come, he left through the back door. We don't know where he's gone."
Li Kui didn't believe them. He wandered through the rear chambers, looking for the magistrate, and came upon the clothing wardrobe. He twisted open the lock, took out the official hat, affixed the corner attachments, and put it on. Next, he slipped into the green robe of office, tied the belt, exchanged his hemp sandals for elegant boots, took up the elmwood tablet, and walked back into the hall.
"All you officers," he called, "come in here and see this!" They had no choice but to obey. "How does this outfit look on me?"
"Very appropriate."
"Now, I want you to summon court for me. If you don't, I'll level this town to the ground."
The officers were afraid of him. They called a number of functionaries, who beat three rolls on the big drums with bone and ivory sticks, then all advanced and hailed Li Kui respectfully.
Black Whirlwind laughed heartily. "Now, let two litigants argue their case."
"No litigant would dare to appear before the chieftain."
"Then a couple of you can act the parts. I won't hurt you. It's just for fun."
The functionaries conferred, and picked two jail keepers to play the roles. Local people crowded the gate of the county office to watch. The two litigants knelt at the front of the hall.
"Pity me, magistrate," said the plaintiff. "That man struck me."
"He cursed me, first," retorted the defendant. "That's why I hit him."
"Who is the one who was hit?" Li Kui queried.
"I, sir," said the plaintiff.
"And who is the one who hit him?"
"He swore at me," said the defendant, "so I clouted him."
"The man who did the hitting is a good fellow," said Li Kui. "Let him go. The other is a spiritless lout. Why did he allow himself to be struck? Put a cangue around his neck and parade him before the populace in the street outside the office."
Li Kui rose, fastened the green official gown, tucked the elmwood tablet in his belt, grasped his big axes, and went out to supervise the affixing of the cangue around the neck of the plaintiff. Only after the man was put on exhibition at the county office gate, did Black Whirlwind stride on. He was still wearing the magistrate's splendid clothes and boots. The people who had been watching at the gate couldn't restrain their mirth.
He wandered around the town for a while, and then he heard pupils chanting their lessons. He raised the door curtain of the schoolroom and went in. The terrified teacher leaped out of the window and fled. Pupils wept, screamed, ran, or hid. Chuckling, Li Kui departed. Just outside the door he ran into Mu Hong.
"Everyone has been worried stiff about you, and here you are playing the fool! Come back to the mountain at once!"
Mu Hong dragged Li Kui off without any ceremony. Black Whirlwind was compelled to leave Shouzhang County and return to Liangshan Marsh. Crossing the Shore of Golden Sands, the two arrived at the fortress. Everyone laughed at the sight of Li Kui's attire. Song Jiang was holding a celebration for Yan Qing in Loyalty Hall when Black Whirlwind, enveloped in a green magistrate's robe, discarded his axes, swaggered in, and kowtowed before him, elmwood tablet in hand. As he began his prostrations, he trod on the gown, ripping it, and fell sprawling. The assembled chieftains roared with laughter.
"You've got a nerve, sneaking down the mountain without my permission," cried Song Jiang. "For that, you deserve to die! Every place you go, you make trouble. I'm saying this in front of all our brothers—I won't forgive you the next time!"
Li Kui sang out a respectful acknowledgment, and withdrew.
The succeeding period on Mount Liangshan was uneventful. The men practiced daily with their weapons, the infantry and cavalry maneuvered, the naval forces polished their skills. In each of the forts they busily manufactured more war machines, clothing, armor, blades, bows and arrows, banners and pennants. Of that we'll say no more.

Meanwhile, Tai'an Prefecture had sent a report to the imperial court in the Eastern Capital. The Council for Reports to the Throne had been receiving reports from the various prefectures and counties, and they all were complaints about the depredations of Song Jiang and his forces. The minister decided to present them together.
The day the imperial audiences were to be held, at the sound of the Jingyang Bell all the high officials gathered in the Hall of the Water Clock to await the arrival of the emperor at the morning court. It was a month since the Taoist Sovereign had last conducted such a session.
At three raps of the rod in the imperial ante-chamber, the civil and military officials formed in two bodies at the foot of the golden stairs. The holy ruler appeared. All kowtowed, and the chief of ceremonies called: "If anyone has a petition, let him come forward. If there are none, this court will adjourn."
The Minister of the Council for Reports to the Throne advanced and said: "Our council has received a great many reports from the various prefectures and counties complaining about Song Jiang and his robber chieftains. These brigands openly attack towns and cities, pillage treasuries and granaries, kill soldiers and civilians. They are insatiable, but wherever they go no one seems able to defeat them. If they are not destroyed soon, they will cause tremendous damage. We pray that Your Majesty take appropriate measures."
"Last year at the first Lunar Festival, they raided this capital," said the emperor. "This year they're causing disturbances everywhere, not just in prefectures and shires near their lair. I ordered the Council of Military Affairs to send troops against them, but have not yet received any reports."
Cui Qing, the Inspector General, stepped forward and said: "We hear that in Liangshan Marsh they have a banner which reads 'Act in Heaven's Behalf.' It tends to delude the common people. Because the people sympathize with them, it is not feasible to send troops among them. Moreover, Tartar Liao armies are attacking our borders, and our outposts are not able to cope with them all. It would be very inconvenient for us to divert soldiers at this time to a punitive expedition against the bandits. In my humble opinion, those deperadoes in the mountains, lawbreakers all, have gone into hiding and are committing wicked acts because they have no other way out. If a royal amnesty could be issued, and a high minister, bearing a dispensation of imperial wine and food, could go to Liangshan Marsh and speak kind words and offer the amnesty on condition that they fight against the Liao, both the public and private interests would be served. We pray that Your Majesty take appropriate measures."

"There's reason in what you say," replied the emperor. "It's my approval." He designated Marshal Chen Zongshan as emissary, and directed him to proceed to Mount Liang with the symbolic imperial wine and an amnesty for all. Court was adjourned, and Marshal Chen took the royal decree and returned home to prepare for the journey. And because Marshal Chen went with the amnesty, thousands of weapon blades and armored cavalry covered the mountain, and vast armadas of fighting ships crowded the waterways. Their thunderous clashes flushed out the demons and angered the King of Hell. Truly, fragrant imperial wine turned to stomach-burning gall, a royal pardon led to a declaration of war.

Now although the Prodigy was the last one of the thirty-six, he was in no way inferior in ability and spirit, in the breadth of his experience and knowledge or in his physical strength and brilliance to the other thirty-five. This is how he addressed Song Jiang that day: "Since my earliest days I studied unarmed combat with Mr. Lu, the Unicorn. Among the rivers and lakes I have yet to find anyone who can match me. Here is a wonderful opportunity. It is not long till the festival of the Buddha's birthday. I want to go and join that contest. I can go alone, I don't need anyone to come with me. I shall enter the ring with him and see if I can give him a fall. If I lose and get killed I shall have no regrets. If on the other hand I win, it can perhaps contribute a little glory to your cause. In the event that I win there will certainly be rioting, so then maybe you can send someone to help me out."
Song Jiang said: "My dear friend, I have heard that the man is gigantic, they say he's built like a doorgod and has enormous strength. As for you, you're so small and lightly built, how can you hope to touch him, whatever your skill?"
The Prodigy said: "His size and strength are no problem. My only worry is that he may cheat. As the proverb says: 'In wrestling the strong man uses his strength, the weaker man uses his brains.' I am not trying to boast, but my approach is flexible, I can adapt to circumstances. I'm not likely to lose to some clumsy great oaf."
The Unicorn said: "This protégé of mine was always a brilliant wrestler from his earliest days. Let him do what he wants. Tell him he can go. When the time comes I will go myself to rescue him and bring him back."
"When do you want to go?" Song Jiang asked.
"Today is the twenty-fourth," the Prodigy replied. "Tomorrow I shall bid you farewell and go down the mountain. If I stop for one night on the way I shall arrive at the temple on the twenty-sixth. That will give me the twenty-seventh to look around, and on the twenty-eighth I shall fight him."
Nothing particular happened that day. The following day Song Jiang gave a farewell party for the Prodigy. When he appeared in simple country garb, with just one patched old robe for best wear packed away in his bundle, and got up as a Shandong trader with a rattle in his belt and his wares slung on a long carrying-pole, it raised quite a laugh among the company. Song Jiang said: "Since you're dressed as a trader, you'd better sing us a Shandong trader's song." So, whirling the rattle in one hand and knocking out the rhythm with the bamboo clappers in the other, the Prodigy gave them a rendering of the Happy Trader's Air and produced such an exact impression of someone from Shandong that everyone had to laugh again. When they'd drunk themselves merry the Prodigy bade farewell to the other leaders and went down the mountain. He crossed at Golden Sands Landing and took the road to Tai'an.
It was getting late and he was about to look for somewhere to stay when he heard a shout from behind: "Ho there, young feller-me-lad, wait for me." He paused and put down his carrying-pole. It was Iron Ox. "What have you come for?" he asked.
"You kept me company on two trips to Thorngate," Iron Ox replied. "When I saw you going off all on your own I felt uneasy, so I slipped away without telling the Leader. I've come to give you a hand."
"I don't need you for this," said the Prodigy. "Go back right away."
Iron Ox flared up immediately: "You really are incredible! With the best of intentions I come to help you and you take it amiss. But I'm going with you anyway!"
The Prodigy thought for a moment. He did not want to give offence, so he said to Iron Ox: "You can come, I suppose. But remember it's the Buddha's birthday, there will be visitors there from far and wide and there are sure to be many who recognize you. You can only go with me if you promise to obey me in three things."
"I promise," said Iron Ox.
"We must go separately on the road and when we get to an inn you are to stay put, you're not to go out again, that's the first thing. The second is that when we're staying at the inn you're to pretend to be ill and cover your face completely, pretend to snore. You're not to speak. The third thing, when you join the crowd at the temple to watch the fight, you must make no disturbance. Can you manage all this?"
"No problem. I'll do everything you say."
They found an inn for the night, were up at dawn and after paying for their lodging breakfasted together before setting out. The Prodigy said: "You go first and I'll follow on about a mile behind you."
On the road there was an endless stream of worshippers. They were all talking about the famous wrestler and his skill, how for the last two years he had been unrivalled at Mount Tai and how this was like to be his third year as champion. The Prodigy kept his own counsel. In the afternoon he came upon a group of bystanders standing stock still, their faces all turned in one direction. The Prodigy put down his carrying pole and elbowed his way through the crowd to see what was going on. He saw something just like a local billboard, two red uprights supporting a white notice which read: "Ren Yuan the Colossus, Champion of Taiyuan." Beside this were two rows of smaller characters: "The strength in his fists affrights the tiger of the Southern Peak, the power of his kick shatters the dragon of the Northern Seas." Having read this, the Prodigy reached for his carrying-pole and demolished the sign with it. Without uttering a word, he picked up his load again and headed for the temple. Among the onlookers there was no shortage of busybodies who flew to report to Colossus that this year there was a challenger.
The Prodigy met up with Iron Ox, who was there ahead of him, and together they went to find an inn. Naturally it was immensely busy at the temple and its environs. In addition to the stalls of hundreds of different trades there were fourteen or fifteen hundred inns filled with worshippers from all over. With the approach of the festival there was scarcely room anywhere, most of the inns being completely full. They had to go right to the edge of town to find a room. After putting down his load the Prodigy took out a quilt and told Iron Ox to lie down and sleep. The waiter came and said: "A Shandong trader, are you? I suppose you've come here for the festival. Can you really afford to pay the price of this room?"
The Prodigy replied, putting on a country accent: "Don't 'ee underestimate people, friend. A tiny place like this, 'tis not reasonable to be charging the price of a big room. But I reckon there's nowhere else to go and I'll have to pay thee what thou asks."
The innkeeper said: "No offence intended, but this is the high season, see. It's best to make things clear at the outset."
The Prodigy said: "I only came here to trade, there's nowt special about it for me. I couldn't find anywhere to stay and I happened upon this countryman of mine on the road and he's fallen ill, that's why I have to ask for a room. I'll give thee an advance of five strings of cash and I'll trouble thee to cook us up something to eat, if thou wilt. Before we leave I'll reward thee well." The innkeeper took the money and went off to prepare the food. Of this no more.
Soon after a hubbub arose at the door of the inn. Twenty or thirty big fellows marched in and asked the landlord: "Which room is he in, the fellow who destroyed the notice and announced his challenge?"
"He's not in my place," said the innkeeper.
"Everyone says he's here," they said.
"I've only got the two rooms. One of them is empty and a trader from Shandong with a sick friend has taken the other."
"That's the one who made the challenge," they said.
The innkeeper said: "Don't make me laugh! That chap is just a weedy little fellow, what could he do?"
"Take us to the room so we can have a look," they said.
"He's in that room," the innkeeper said.
They went to see, but found the door tight shut. They tried peering through the window and were able to make out two men fast asleep on the bed. They couldn't work it out. Then one of them said: "Since he tore up the challenge he must be a worthy opponent. It can't be the little fellow, it must be the other one and he doesn't want people to size him up so he's pretending to be ill."
"That'll be it," said the others. "Anyway, there's no need to guess, we'll know in due course."
By dusk as many as twenty or thirty groups had arrived at the inn to make inquiries and the innkeeper, I can tell you, was hoarse with trying to explain. That evening when he took food in to them he got quite a shock because Iron Ox stuck his head out from under the bedcovers: "Blimey!" he exclaimed. "So this is the bloke wot's going to fight!"
"He's not the one who's going to fight," said the Prodigy. "He's sick. I'm the one who's come here to fight."
"No kidding!" said the innkeeper. "Colossus would have the likes of you for breakfast!"
"'Twere best not to mock me. I know a trick or two, and I shall certainly give everyone something to laugh about. There'll be summat in it for thee too when I come back."
The innkeeper watched them eat and then cleared away the dishes. He went back to the kitchen to wash up, still unbelieving.
Next day when they had breakfasted, the Prodigy said to Iron Ox, "Bolt the door and have a good lie in," while he himself mingled with the crowd and went to take a look at the Temple of the Eastern Peak, which was of course the finest in the world:
*This temple is on Mount Tai, the Eastern Peak, which towers over the world: of the five sacred peaks this is the most venerable, the chief power among ten thousand gods. So remote is the summit you imagine the air you breathe there must be ambrosial; the pine-clad peak is ever swathed in cloud and mist. The temple's tiered terraces reach heavenward like the golden bird spreading its wings to fly away; its halls and pavilions rise like the jade hare sitting up ready to bolt. You'll see carved beams and painted pillars, jade tiles and vermilion eaves. From afar the sacred images shine with jewels like ancient imperial regalia; from close to their robes resemble the dress of the first emperors. Here is the Supreme Arbiter of the Nine Heavens, in red silk robes set off by his Immortal's cap; the Lord of the Bright Spirit, too, in his yellow ochre cassock with the jade sash slanting across his shoulder. To the left of the main altar is a chapel dedicated to the ladies; on the right one associated with officials. Three thousand generals in bronze armour to guard the imperial carriage are impressively represented in the hall with closed doors; a hundred thousand ironclad troops protecting their lord line the two corridors. See the pagoda of the Five Peaks, adjoining the quarters of the heir apparent; see the Hall of Peace and Humanity beside the imperial residence. Over there the Hill of the Tombs, where the Judge hands out the seventy-two sentences; and there Temple of the White Mule, where the Earth God regulates the twenty-four powers. You won't miss the Iron-faced Marshal in charge of the fiery pit, with his supernatural powers that never wane; or the general who holds in his hand the five ways of life and death, who manifests himself eternally. Imperial incense is always burning, heavenly messengers hurry about their business delivering divine edicts; at the time for sacrifice, young and old are filled with the desire to gain merit. In the Hall of Peace and Prosperity the incense swirls; at Southern Gate auspicious airs eddy about. Ten thousand pay homage to the Jade Lord: people come from far and wide express their faith in the Benevolent Divinity.*
The Prodigy strolled around for a time. At a thatched shrine he prostrated himself four times in homage to the Buddha, and then asked the other worshippers: "Where can I find Instructor Ren Yuan, the famous wrestler?"
One loquacious fellow said: "He's at that big inn beside Benevolence Bridge. He'll be there with two or three hundred students of his." Thither the Prodigy now directed his steps. He found a few dozen students of the pugilistic art sitting on a rail of the bridge. Before them were planted a multitude of banners and streamers and tall embroidered backrests and cushions. He slipped into the inn and saw Colossus sitting in the central court. He was indeed built like a giant and had the ferocious look of a doorgod. He was seated nonchalantly on a bed and his shirt was open to the waist. The whole impression was of someone with the ferocity of the legendary Tigerkiller or the strength of the Mountainmover. He was watching some students working out. There were some there who recognized the Prodigy as the one who had thrown down the challenge and they whispered as much in Colossus's ear. He sprang to his feet and began gesticulating: "This year there is someone who wants to die," he growled. "He's handing me his life on a plate."
The Prodigy lowered his gaze and got out fast. He heard laughter behind him. He returned to his own inn and arranged some food and wine to share with Iron Ox. Iron Ox said: "I'm sick of all this sleeping!"
"Only one more evening. Tomorrow's the day that will sort out the men from the boys!"
They chatted on. Nothing worthy of record was said. Around midnight, drums and gongs began to beat as the worshippers in the temple saluted the Buddha's birthday. About one o'clock the Prodigy and Iron Ox rose and asked the innkeeper for hot water. They washed their faces and combed their hair with care, took off their padded robes, bound their legs and fastened on knee guards and put on silk trousers and hemp shoes. Each attached a clean shirt to his belt. Having breakfasted they called the innkeeper and said: "Keep an eye on our things for us."
The innkeeper replied: "They'll be quite safe. I wish you luck and a speedy return."
There were twenty or thirty worshippers staying at the same inn. They said to the Prodigy: "Young man, why not pour yourself a cup of wine instead of going there to throw away your life?"
The Prodigy said: "If you go along to cheer for me, you can all share something of the victory."
The crowd went on ahead and after they had left Iron Ox said: "I'd better take my two axes along."
"Absolutely not!" said the Prodigy. "It would give people the wrong idea and ruin everything."
Tagging onto a group of people they went to the temple and found themselves a place to wait quietly. The worshippers were really packed in there that day, standing shoulder to shoulder, so that the vast Temple of the Eastern Peak was filled to overflowing. There were even spectators sitting astride the rooftops. Next to the Hall of Secret Scriptures a stand had been put up to hold the prizes, gold and silver vessels and rolls of embroidered silk. Five thoroughbreds were tethered outside, complete with saddles and bridles.
Eventually the worshippers were ordered to stop moving about. The old man who was to referee this year's festival contest mounted the stage, holding two bamboo sticks. After worshipping the Buddha, he invited the contestants to prepare themselves. Before he finished speaking, there was a surge in the crowd and a score of guards with staves marched forward two by two behind four embroidered banners. After them came Colossus, borne on a litter, surrounded by twenty or thirty toughs with tattooed arms. They mounted the stage and the referee invited Colossus to step out while he spoke a few warm words of welcome.
Colossus replied: "Two years running I have come here to Mount Tai and taken first place. These few prizes I got virtually for nothing. This year it seems I shall at least have to strip for action."
As he finished speaking someone came with a bowl of water. Colossus's disciples were sitting beside the stage surrounding it in a dense circle. He first removed his sash and then his headband. He unbuttoned his padded Sichuan robe and shouted out an invocation to the Buddha. He received two mouthfuls of holy water.
Finally he took the padded robe right off and a gasp of admiration went up from a thousand throats.
The master of ceremonies said: "Instructor, you have been uncontested champion here for two years now. This will be the third. Have you a few words for the edification of the public?"
Colossus said: "All you good people have come here from a hundred different provinces, a thousand districts, to celebrate the festival of the Buddha's birthday. You all contribute to the prize, which I have been fortunate enough to win the last two years. When I leave this year I shall not return to the mountain again. Now is there anyone in the universe, from the east where the sun rises to where it goes down in the west, from the lands of the southern barbarians to the northern limits of the civilized world, who dares challenge me for this title?"
Scarcely had he finished speaking when the Prodigy, pressing down on the shoulders of those around him, cried out: "Yes, there is!" He flew to the stage over the backs of the crowd. A murmur spread through the spectators. The master of ceremonies asked: "What is your name, sir, and what your place of origin? Where have you sprung from?"
"I am a trader from Shandong," the Prodigy replied. "And I am here expressly to fight him for the title."
The master of ceremonies said: "My good sir, death is staring you in the face, are you aware of that? Do you have a sponsor?"
"I am my own sponsor," the Prodigy replied. "If I die, no one will demand compensation."
"Then you'd better strip and let us see you," said the master of ceremonies.
The Prodigy removed his cap. His hair was tied in two smooth pigtails. He took off his hemp sandals and bared his legs. Squatting at the side of the stage he unfastened his gaiters and knee guards. He stood up, removed his cotton shirt and struck a pose. Throughout the temple there was a movement like a storm at sea or a river in flood as the crowd burst into prolonged applause. They were dumbstruck. Even Colossus, seeing his opponent's tattooes and his lithe, muscular body felt a tremor of apprehension. Outside the door of the hall the magistrate sat to keep order, surrounded by some eighty guards in black uniforms. He sent someone to call the Prodigy down from the stage to be presented to him. Seeing the beauty of his physique, like a marble pillar inlaid with jade, he rejoiced. "Where are you from, young man?" he asked. "What brought you here?"
The Prodigy said: "My name is Zhang, and I'm the first in my family. I come from Laizhou in Shandong. I heard that Colossus was challenging all comers so I came to fight him."
The magistrate said: "You see that horse over there, complete with saddle and bridle? That is the prize I am giving. Let me give it to Colossus. The other valuable items on the stand I will order to be shared out between the two of you. I am willing to appoint you to my personal staff."
The Prodigy said: "Your Excellency, the prize is not important. All I want is to give him a fall and provide some entertainment for the public and hear their applause."
The magistrate said: "He's such a big man, built like a doorgod, you wouldn't even be able to touch him!"
The Prodigy said: "I'm not afraid to die." He went back onto the stage, impatient to begin the contest. The master of ceremonies asked him first to sign a contract. Then he took out the rules of the contest and read them out. "Do you understand?" he said to the Prodigy. "There must be no cheating."
The Prodigy said with a smile of contempt: "He is fully prepared and equipped. I have nothing but these silk shorts. How can I cheat against him?"
The magistrate now called the master of ceremonies over and said: "This fellow is very young. I feel sorry for him. Go and declare it a draw."
The master of ceremonies returned to the stage and said to the Prodigy: "Young man, save your life and leave this place. I will declare the match a draw."
The Prodigy said: "What makes you so sure I'm going to lose?"
The crowd were all assembled by now: thousands of worshippers had taken up positions on two sides, like fish scale tiles lining the roofs of halls and corridors. They were horrified to think they might be cheated of the spectacle. And Colossus was full of confidence. He couldn't wait to boot the Prodigy off the face of the earth, to grind him to dust.
"Very well," said the master of ceremonies. "Since you both want to fight, let this year's contest in honour of the Lord Buddha proceed. Make sure you abide by the rules."
Now the stage was empty but for the three men. The morning mists had cleared and the early sun was growing warm. The master of ceremonies took up his bamboo sticks and after a final word to both men cried out: "Commence!"
The two contestants moved this way and that. I shall do my best to describe it clearly to you, but what's long in the telling happens in a flash; like shooting stars or a lightning bolt, blink and you've missed it. The Prodigy crouched a little on the right. while Colossus took up an attacking stance on the left. The Prodigy did not give an inch. For the start each man occupied one half of the stage.
When he saw that the Prodigy ceded no ground, Colossus thought to take him on the right, but the Prodigy merely circled round. Colossus said to himself, "The bugger's trying to sneak in behind me. I won't even have to raise a sweat. One kick will be enough to boot him right off the stage." He tried to close in, feinting with his left foot. The Prodigy cried out "No you don't!", and when Colossus lunged he slipped past his left shoulder. Annoyed, Colossus turned round and made another grab for his opponent, who sprang aside and slipped under his right shoulder. It was difficult for the big man to change direction and after three turns his movements were growing clumsy. The Prodigy now rushed in and caught him with his right hand, placing his left hand in his opponent's crotch and shoving one shoulder under his chest to upend him. He whirled around four or five times till he'd swung him to the edge of the stage and then with a cry of "Down you go!" hurled him head first from the ring. This catch by the way is well known — it's called "The Pigeon's Swing".
Simultaneously ten thousand spectators burst into applause. When Colossus's disciples saw their master overthrown they threw down the stand and smashed up all the prizes. Amid the melee some of the disciples rushed onto the stage. In vain did the magistrate try to prevent them. However, someone on the sidelines was beginning to boil over. Iron Ox it was, who when he saw what was happening advanced glaring ferociously and bristling like a tiger. Having no other weapon to hand, he snapped off some pinewood palings, easy as someone pulling chives, and with one in each hand entered the fray.
Now among the worshippers there was someone who recognised Iron Ox and when he spoke out the name the police guards outside the temple all rushed in shouting: "Don't let him get away! It's the Black Whirlwind from Mount Liang!"

When the magistrate heard this name, his three souls seemed to rise through the top of his head while his seven spirits sank through the soles of his feet! He decamped as fast as his legs would carry him. People all around were pushing and shoving as the worshippers tried to save themselves. Iron Ox came upon Colossus lying beside the stage still groggy from the fall and scarcely breathing. He picked up a stone and smashed his skull in. When the two from Mount Liang had fought their way out of the temple, they met a hail of crossbow bolts outside. The best they could do was climb onto the roof where they started ripping off tiles and hurling them.

Before long an even greater tumult arose in front of the temple. A group of men were attacking. Their leader wore a white Fanyang hat and a white robe; he had a sword at his belt and wielded a halberd. It was none other than that hero from the Northern Capital, the Unicorn. Behind him were seven more, the Tattooed Dragon, Mu the Unstoppable, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, Pilgrim Wu Song, Snake and Scorpion, with a thousand men. They charged into the temple. The Prodigy and Iron Ox jumped down off their roof and joined them. Iron Ox rushed back to the inn and got his two axes and came out fighting. By the time the garrison troops arrived the heroes were far away. The troops knew what a tough proposition the Mount Liang forces were and dared not pursue them.

The Unicorn now ordered the others to collect Iron Ox and head for home. But when they had marched half a day, Iron Ox was missing again. "No doubt he's gone to look for more trouble somewhere," said the Unicorn with a laugh. "We shall have to send someone to fetch him back."

"I'll go and fetch him," said Mu the Unstoppable.

"Right," said the Unicorn.

Now we shall leave the Unicorn leading his forces back to Mount Liang and follow Iron Ox who with his two axes in hand had got as far as the township of Shouzhang. Here the local court had been in session and had just adjourned. Iron Ox went straight in, shouting: "Your old friend the Black Whirlwind is here!"

The inhabitants were petrified — too scared even to run away. You see, this place Shouzhang was very close to Mount Liang and the words Black Whirlwind of Mount Liang were commonly used to frighten children with. Now that the gentleman was here in person, naturally they were terrified! Iron Ox went in and seated himself in the magistrate's chair. "Send two people in to talk to me," Iron Ox shouted, "otherwise I will burn the place down!"

Outside in the corridor everyone discussed what to do: "We can send people in to talk to him. But how can we make him go away?"

Two of the officials went in and prostrated themselves four times. Still kneeling, they said: "Esteemed chief, what is your command?"

Iron Ox said: "I have not come to harm the people of this place. I was just passing by, on a pleasure trip. Please ask your magistrate to come here, I want to talk to him."

They went out. When they returned they said: "When he saw you coming His Excellency opened the back door and left. We don't know where he has gone."

Iron Ox did not believe them. He went round to the back to look. "You can see for yourself," they said. "There are his headdress and his robes in that cupboard."

Iron Ox twisted off the lock. He took out the magistrate's cap with its attachments and put it on. He also donned the magistrate's robe and the official belt. He found the black shoes and exchanged them for his own hemp sandals. Then, after picking up the wooden tablet he walked into the courtroom and shouted: "Come here, you lot, I want you!"

There was nothing for it — everyone had to obey.

Iron Ox said: "What do you think of my dress?"

"It suits you very well," they all said.

"You clerks and attendants are going to organize a court session for me, so get on with it," he said. "If you don't do as I say, I shall raze this place to the ground."

They were scared to death, so they had no alternative but to get together the necessary officials, bring out the maces, sound the drum three times and announce the court session. All this provoked loud guffaws from Iron Ox. "You must get two people to plead a case," he said. One of the clerks said: "Great chief, Your Honour, no one would dare to!"

"If there's no one who wants to bring in a case, two of you must invent a case yourselves," he said. "I won't do them any harm, it's just for a laugh."

The officials held a discussion, and two prison officers were chosen to make up a case of assault. The public were let in to watch. The plaintiff and the accused knelt before the bench. The former said: "Have pity on me Your Honour, he hit me." The other said: "He insulted me, that's why I hit him."

"Which one was it that was hit?" Iron Ox asked.

"Me, Your Honour," said the plaintiff.

"And which one did the hitting?"

"He insulted me first, so I hit him," said the accused.

Iron Ox said: "This one who did the hitting is a good fellow. Release him at once! The other's too feeble! Why did he let himself be hit? Put a cangue on him and parade him in front of the courthouse." He stood up and fastened his robe, stuck the tablet in his belt and took up his axes. He watched them put the cangue on the plaintiff and ordered him to be taken out. Then he strutted out of the courtroom without changing the ceremonial shoes. The people watching at the door could scarcely contain their laughter.

As he was pacing about before the government office, the sound of children reciting their lesson in the schoolroom caught his attention. He drew aside the curtain and went in. The terrified teacher leapt out of the window and ran off. Children cried, children shouted, or ran about, or hid. Iron Ox nearly laughed his head off. As he came out again he ran into Mu the Unstoppable, who said: "Everyone's worried to death about you, and you're just acting the fool here! Get back up the mountain, quickly!"

Much against his will, Iron Ox was dragged away. His pranks in Shouzhang at an end, he returned to the Marshes of Mount Liang as the poem tells.

*Among the bumpkins he plays the fool,*
*He never learnt to behave, alas.*
*His tour of inspection takes in the school,*
*He makes fun of the law, he breaks up the class.*

The two of them crossed at Golden Sands Landing and went up to the stronghold. Everyone laughed when they saw how Iron Ox was dressed. When he entered the Ceremonial Hall Song Jiang was engaged in celebrating the Prodigy's victory. Iron Ox swaggered into the room in his magistrate's garb and holding his two axes. He halted before the dais, clutching the wooden tablet and prostrated himself before Song Jiang. The second time he stood up he tripped on the robe and fell over and everyone laughed.

"You animal, you've got a nerve!" Song Jiang shouted. "You went off down the mountain all by yourself without even telling me. That's a capital offence in itself. Everywhere you go you cause trouble. I was just telling our comrades that I won't pardon you again.!"

Iron Ox mumbled something and withdrew.

For a time life went on peacefully on Mount Liang and nothing happened worthy of relating. On the mountain the army had exercises each day, to maintain the troops in readiness, and the waterborne troops practised with their boats. More arms were manufactured in all the camps: in addition to clothing and armour, more spears, swords, bows and crossbows with their ammunition, more flags and banners etcetera.

Meanwhile a full report of the events in Tai'an had been sent to the capital. When this reached the council they had already received similar reports from all over the place, all telling of Song Jiang's insurgency and the trouble it was causing in numerous districts. At this time the Emperor had not dealt with any business for a month.

The morning court had been summoned and all the officials civil and military were arrayed in their ranks before the imperial steps. The master of ceremonies shouted out: "If there are matters to report, stand forth and declare them; if not, take leave and depart." The minister responsible for receiving reports stepped forward and said: "Your Majesty's Council of Ministers is continually receiving reports from many districts saying that Song Jiang and his band of robbers have been openly entering cities and plundering the stores, robbing the treasury and killing government troops. They are insatiable and wherever they go no one can resist them. If they are not apprehended soon it will become a major problem."

The Emperor said: "Last year these bandits disturbed the capital during the lunar festival. Now they are continuing their depredations over a wide area, not just in the districts that are close to their lair. More than once we have ordered members of the War Council to send the army against them, but no one has yet reported back."

Cui Qing, the inspector general, now came forward and said: "I have heard that they have a big banner on Mount Liang which says, 'To Do Heaven's Will'. This is a trick to impress the people, but so long as they have the people's support we cannot send troops against them. Moreover the Liao Tartars are attacking our borders and we do not have enough troops to cover all fronts. It would be highly inconvenient at this moment to start a campaign against the Mount Liang bandits. In my humble opinion, it is because they have no alternative that these desperadoes in the mountains have put themselves outside the law, have taken to the greenwood and are committing these wicked acts. If Your Majesty were to proclaim an amnesty and provide a gift of imperial wine and other valuables, and send some high-ranking official as ambassador to them, to speak diplomatically and offer them the amnesty in exchange for their fighting against the Tartars, it would answer all our needs. I beg your Majesty to consider my proposal."

The Emperor said, "What you say is very true, it accords with my own wishes." He named Grand Marshal Chen as the ambassador who was to carry the edict and the imperial wine, and this was to have important consequences. The incense and the wine would become an irritant, the edict an incitement to war.

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### The Devil Incarnate Ruan the 7th Upsets & sinks the Boat & Steals the Imperial Wine; The Black Whirlwind Iron Ox Rips Up the Pardon edict, Curses Emperor Hui Zong, & abuses the Emperor's envoy

As Marshal Chen was preparing for his journey, several people came and said: "Your mission will serve the government and remove a burden from the populace. Both the army and the people will benefit. The men of Liangshan Marsh place loyalty to the throne above all. They await only the emperor's amnesty. Speak sweet words, Marshal, and reassure them. Your clean name will be renowned for ten thousand generations."

Just then the majordomo of the premier's chancellery arrived. "The premier would like to speak to you, Marshal," he said.

Chen mounted his sedan-chair and went directly to the chancellery on New Song Gate Avenue. The majordomo led him to the study in the inner sanctum, where the premier received him. Chen sat down politely to one side. They had some tea, then Premier Cai spoke.

"I hear the emperor is sending you to Mount Liangshan with an amnesty. That's why I've asked you for a talk. You mustn't relax our imperial discipline when you get there, or violate our national laws. Remember what the *Analects of Confucius* say: 'When on a mission, wherever you go, abuse not the sovereign's command, and be a worthy emissary.' "

"This I know. Please give me your instructions, Premier."

"I've directed my majordomo to accompany you. He's well acquainted with the law. If you run into any snags, he'll be able to remind you."

"I'm deeply grateful for your consideration," said Chen. He took his leave of the premier, left the chancellery with the majordomo, got into his sedan-chair, and returned home.

He had just settled down to rest, when his gate-keeper entered and announced: "Marshal Gao is dismounting at the gate." Chen hastened out to welcome him, and invited him to be seated in the hall. After an exchange of pleasantries, Gao came to the point.

"If I had been present when the imperial court was considering an amnesty for Song Jiang, I would have opposed it. Those brigands have insulted the court time and again, and their crimes reach the sky! Pardoning them and letting them come into the capital is sure to provoke disaster. I wanted to submit my own petition, but the royal decree had already been announced. Well, we'll see what happens. If those bandits still have no conscience and stall on the amnesty, return to the capital quickly, Marshal. I'll petition the emperor to muster a large army, which I'll lead personally, and wipe them out, root and branch! That's my fondest wish. I have a captain under my command who's a clever and competent speaker. Give him one question, and he'll answer you ten. He can go with you and lend you a hand."

"I'm grateful for Your Excellency's concern."

Marshal Gao rose, and Chen escorted him to the gate of the residency. There, Gao climbed on his horse and departed.

The next day Premier Cai's Majordomo Zhang and Marshal Gao's Captain Li arrived at Chen's headquarters. Marshal Chen's horses were already saddled and bridled and his soldiers mustered. Ten generals placed ten bottles of imperial wine into hampers decorated with dragons and phoenixes, and these were carried by bearers on shoulder-poles and preceded by imperial yellow banners.

Marshal Chen mounted. Accompanied by a trusted entourage of five or six, plus Zhang and Li, also on horseback, and with the emperor's decree carried in the lead, he led the procession through the New Song Gate. The officials who were seeing them off returned to the city.

The party wound its way to Jizhou. Prefect Zhang Shuye met them and invited them into the prefecture, where a feast had been laid. He inquired about the amnesty, and Marshal Chen told him the story.

"In my humble opinion, it's the best solution," said the prefect. "There's just one thing: you must speak to them pleasantly and reassure them with kind words. Nothing else matters so long as you accomplish the main objective. Your good name will be famed to all posterity. Several of those outlaws are very hotheaded. If you say one word that triggers them off, the whole deal may be spoiled."

"Nothing can go wrong with us two along," said Majordomo Zhang and Captain Li. "You talk only of caution and affability, Prefect. What about our imperial discipline? Those worthless fellows must be constantly chastened. If you let them get too cocky they'll set a bad example to others."

"Who are these two?" the prefect queried.

"This is Premier Cai's majordomo, and this is a captain under Marshal Gao."

"It would be better if they didn't go."

"They're trusted confidants. If I don't take them, the premier and the marshal will get suspicious."

"I'm only trying to help. I'm afraid your journey will be futile."

"With us two along," the majordomo interjected, "though there be ten thousand fathoms of water, not a drop will escape!"

The prefect was afraid to say any more. After feasting his guests, he escorted them to the hostel for officials, to rest.

The next day the prefecture sent a man to inform Mount Liangshan of the mission. Song Jiang had been conferring daily with his chieftains in Loyalty Hall on the military situation. Spies had already reported to him that an amnesty was being offered and, although he had not yet seen any proof of this, he was overjoyed. Now, the messenger arrived from Jizhou and said: "Marshal Chen, an emissary from the royal court, has reached our prefecture. He brings ten bottles of imperial wine and a vermilion decree of amnesty. Prepare to welcome him."

Song Jiang was delighted. He rewarded the messenger with wine and clothing material and ten ounces of silver, and sent him back.

"We're going to be pardoned and become government officials," he said to the chieftain. "Our hardships have not been in vain. At last we will attain our just rewards."

"To my mind the amnesty won't go through," said Wu Yong. "Even if it does, they consider us with contempt. Better wait till the scoundrels come at us with a big army and we give them a good drubbing. We'll slaughter their men and down their horses till we terrify them even in their dreams. That's the time to accept an amnesty. Then we can do it with dignity.'

"You shouldn't talk like that," said Song Jiang. "It goes against our principle of 'loyalty.' "

"High court officials coming here," mused Lin Chong. "They're up to something, and it's not necessarily good."

"There's sure to be some threat in the decree, to frighten us," said Guan Sheng.

"These fellows must be Marshal Gao's men." said Xu Ning.

"Stop being so sceptical, all of you," Song Jiang ordered. "Get ready to welcome them."

He instructed Song Qing and Cao Zheng to prepare a feast, and Chai Jin to supervise all arrangements, "in proper style." He directed that a dwelling be provided for Marshal Chen, with silk and satin furnishings, and colored decorations hung throughout. He sent Pei Xuan, Xiao Rang, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng down the mountain and twenty //along the road to welcome the arrivals. The chieftains of the naval forces were to moor large boats by the shore to ferry them across.

"Don't make a move without my orders," Wu Yong warned the chieftains.

Xiao Rang and his three companions, with another five or six carrying wine and tidbits, all completely unarmed, advanced twenty //as a welcoming party.

During that stage of Marshal Chen's journey, Majordomo Zhang and Captain Li did not ride, but walked ahead of the horses. Two or three hundred government troops followed. These included a dozen military officers from Jizhou, riding in ranks to the fore. Next came the imperial wine bearers, and then the mounted purveyor of the Vermilion decree, which was in a casket strapped to his back. Fifty or sixty jail-keepers from the prefecture tagged along, hoping to pick up a little graft from the outlaws.

The procession was greeted by the welcoming party, who prostrated themselves, then knelt by the roadside.

"Your Song Jiang thinks pretty highly of himself," said Majordomo Zhang. "The emperor has sent an amnesty. Why isn't he here to receive it? This is an insult! You're all criminals who deserve to die. An imperial amnesty would be wasted on you. Marshal, let's go back."

The four brigands again prostrated themselves. "Our stronghold has not seen the amnesty yet," they explained. "We don't know if it is true or not. Song Jiang and all the chieftains are waiting to welcome you on the Shore of Golden Sands. Pray don't be angry, Marshal. The main thing is to carry this matter through for the sake of our country. Please forgive us."

"Even if we don't carry it through, I see no danger of you robbers flying up to Heaven," sneered Captain Li.

"What kind of talks is that," Lu Fang and Guo Sheng muttered. "They're only trifling with us!"

Xiao Rang and Pei Xuan continued to plead with the emissaries. The wine and tidbits they offered were refused. But the government expedition went with them to the river, where three warships were waiting. On one the horses were loaded; on the second, Pei Xuan and his party; on the third, the marshal and his entourage. The amnesty and the imperial wine were placed in the bow of this last craft. It was commanded by the Devil Incarnate Ruan the Seventh.

Seated on the prow of his vessel, Ruan gave directions to his twenty-some-odd naval oarsmen, each armed with a dagger at his waist. When Marshal Chen first came on board he was very lofty and aloof as he took a seat in the center. Ruan called to his sailors to row, and the men on both sides sang as they bent to their oars.

"Donkeys!" swore Captain Li. "His Excellency is present. Absolutely no sense of discretion!"

The sailors ignored him, and went on singing. Li threatened them with a rattan cane, but they stared at him fearlessly.

"If we feel like singing, what's it to you!" several of them said. "Wretched rebellious bandits, how dare you talk back to me!" Li fumed. He flailed wildly with his cane. Sailors on both sides promptly leaped into the water.
"You beat my oarsmen and force them overboard," Ruan the Seventh called from the bow. "How is this boat going to move?"
Two swift craft were seen to approach from upstream. Ruan had previously partially flooded the hold of his boat. Now, as the two vessels closed in behind him, he pulled out the plug and yelled: "We're leaking!"
Water poured into the hold. As Ruan cried for help, it was already over a foot deep. The two craft pulled alongside, and Marshal Chen was hastily assisted over to one of them. All efforts were concentrated on getting away. No one had time to think about the imperial wine or the emperor's amnesty. The two light boats rowed on swiftly ahead.
Ruan ordered his men to bail out the hold and mop it dry. "Bring me a bottle of that imperial wine," he called. "I want to see what it tastes like."
A sailor fetched a bottle, opened the sealed cap, and handed it to Ruan. Its fragrance tickled his nose.
"It may be poisoned," he said, "but I'll take the risk and try it!" He put the bottle to his lips and kept swallowing till he drained it dry.
"A pleasant bouquet," he said. "But one bottle is hardly enough. Bring me another!" He drank that one, too. Now that his throat was moistened, he finished off two more. Suddenly, he realized that he had created a problem.
"What am I going to do?" he said.
"There's a cask of liquor in the bow," one of the men suggested.
"Fetch me a bailing scoop and I'll give you fellows a share," said Ruan.
What he did was to distribute the remaining six bottles of imperial wine among the sailors, and when they had consumed them, filled the ten empty bottles with cheap rustic liquor from the cask. Resealing the caps, he put the bottles back in the royal hampers decorated with dragons and phoenixes. Then the men plied their oars mightily and sent their craft skimming along.
They reached the Shore of Golden Sands just as the others were disembarking. Song Jiang was waiting to welcome the royal emissary with incense and flowers and colored lanterns. Gongs crashed, drums pounded, and the fortress band made joyful music. The imperial wine was placed on a table which was carried by four men. The emperor's amnesty was similarly transported on another table. As Marshal Chen stepped ashore, Song Jiang kowtowed before him.
"I'm a former petty functionary whose face is marked with the criminal's tattoo, and my wicked deeds obscure the sky. Though Your Excellency has demeaned himself to come here, I cannot entertain you properly. I humbly crave your pardon."
"The marshal is a high official of the imperial court," said Captain Li. "He brings you men an amnesty. This is no small affair. How could you dispatch a leaky boat commanded by an ignorant rustic? You nearly endangered His Excellency's life!"
"We have plenty of good boats. We'd never dare send a leaky craft for His Excellency."
"Are you trying to deny it?" demanded Majordomo Zhang. "The hem of the marshal's robe is soaking wet!"
Song Jiang's five Tiger Cavalry chieftains pressed close behind to left and right, his eight Cavalry Picket commanders ranged themselves fore and aft. The insolence of Zhang and Li enraged them, and they would gladly have slain them were it not for the restraining presence of Song Jiang.
Only after Song Jiang's repeated entreaties did Marshal Chen get into the sedan-chair provided. Horses were brought for Majordomo Zhang and Captain Li. The two continued to behave with disgusting arrogance. Song Jiang persuaded them to mount and the procession, with much shrilling of pipes and beating of drums, proceeded upward through the three passes. Song Jiang and over a hundred chieftains followed.
All dismounted on reaching Loyalty Hall, and the marshal was invited in. The imperial wine and the amnesty were placed in the center at the upper end of the building. The marshal, the majordomo and the captain stood on the left side. Xiao Rang and Pei Xuan stood on the right. Song Jiang called the roll of chieftains. One hundred and seven men—only Li Kui was missing.
It was the fourth lunar month, and they were wearing light battle robes of lined silk as they knelt in the hall to hear the reading of the amnesty. Marshal Chen took the document from its casket and handed it to Xiao Rang. Pei Xuan officiated. At his call, the chieftains kowtowed. Xiao Rang unrolled the decree and read it out in a loud voice:

Edict: The country is governed by both civil and military means. The earliest emperors used both ceremony and punitive wars to preserve our territory. Matters may go smoothly or with difficulty. People may be clever or stupid. As I carry on the rule of my ancestors over this great empire, on which the sun and the moon always shine brilliantly, stretching so vast under the heavens, there is none who does not give me homage.
Recently, Song Jiang and his gang have been roistering over the wooded hills and pillaging the shires. Originally, I was going to suppress them with soldiers, but I feared this would cause harm to the people. I have therefore sent Marshal Chen forward with my amnesty. On receipt of it the bandits must turn over all their money, grain, weapons, horses and boats to my officials, destroy their lair, and be led into the capital. I will then pardon their crimes. If they lack conscience and oppose this decree I shall dispatch troops and wipe them out, young and old. Let this amnesty be proclaimed so that all may know.
In the early summer, fourth month of the third year of the reign of Xuan Ho.
Amnesty hereby proclaimed.

Xiao Rang finished reading. Anger darkened the countenance of Song Jiang and his men. Suddenly, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind leaped down from an overhead beam. He snatched the amnesty from Xiao Rang's hands and tore it to shreds. Then he grabbed Marshal Chen and commenced pummeling him with his fist.
Song Jiang and Lu Junyi threw their arms around Li Kui, and finally managed to separate him from the marshal.
"Who is this varlet," shouted Captain Li. "How dare he behave like this!"
Black Whirlwind was just looking for someone to hit, and he turned his attentions to Li. Punching him, he demanded: "Whose words are those, written in that amnesty?"
"It's an imperial decree from the emperor," said Majordomo Zhang.
"Your emperor doesn't understand anything about us bold fellows here! Pardoning us—what crust! Your emperor's name is Song. So's my Big Brother's. Your Song is an emperor. Why shouldn't my Song be an emperor too! Don't you come stirring up this Black Whirlwind, or I'll kill every one of you amnesty-writing officials!"
The others pulled him away from the emissaries and hustled him out of the hall.
"Don't take it to heart, Marshal," Song Jiang urged. "Not the slightest rudeness will be allowed. Bring the imperial wine and let everyone savor the emperor's kindness."
A golden goblet inlaid with jade was produced. Pei Xuan first poured wine from an imperial bottle into a silver testing bowl. It was cheap rustic liquor. The contents of the other nine bottles were similarly examined. All were of the same crude brew.
Shocked, most of the chieftains stalked out of the hall. Lu Zhishen brandished his iron staff and swore.
"Mother-rapers! This is going too far! Trying to give us watered liquor for imperial wine!"
Red-Haired Demon Liu Tang rushed forward with his halberd. Advancing together came Pilgrim Wu Song with his swords, plus Mu Hong the Unrestrained and Nine Dragons Shi Jin. The six commanders of the naval forces walked out, cursing.
Plainly, the situation was tense. Song Jiang blocked off his men with his body and ordered a sedan-chair and horses for the marshal and his escorts. They were to be escorted down the mountain immediately, and no one was to harm them. Most of the chieftains were in a towering rage. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were compelled to mount their own steeds and see the marshal through the three passes personally. Kowtowing, Song Jiang begged forgiveness.
"It's not that we don't wish to surrender," he said. "The fact is that the framers of the amnesty don't realize how complicated our situation is here. If only the decree contained a few comforting words, we would gladly die ten thousand deaths to serve our country! Please explain that, Marshal, when you report to the throne."
The emissaries were hastily ferried across. Farting and pissing in terror, they fled back to Jizhou.
Song Jiang returned to Loyalty Hall and summoned the chieftains to a feast. "Although the court decree wasn't very intelligent, you shouldn't have behaved so impetuously," he said.
"Don't delude yourself, brother," said Wu Yong. "There will be an amnesty some day. But why reproach the brothers for getting angry? The court's attitude was too contemptuous. Forget about all that for now. Order full equipment for the cavalry, weapons for the infantry, and a refurbishment of our naval vessels. Sooner or later the government is going to send a big punitive army against us. We've got to slaughter their soldiers and down their horses in one or two battles, so that they're bereft of their armor and fear us in their dreams. That will be the time to talk about amnesty again."
"Absolutely right," said the chieftains. The feasting ended, and they retired to their respective quarters.

Meanwhile, Marshal Chen reached Jizhou. He told Zhang Shuye what had transpired in the mountain stronghold.
"Perhaps you said something you shouldn't?" suggested the prefect.
"I didn't dare open my mouth!"
"In that case, it was just a waste of effort. In fact, it made matters worse. Hurry back and report to the throne, Marshal. You mustn't delay."
Marshal Chen, Majordomo Zhang, Captain Li and the entourage returned to the Eastern Capital that night. Chen related to the prime minister in detail how the bandits of Liangshan Marsh had ripped up the decree. Cai was furious.
"How dare those petty robbers be so rude! We'll teach them to insult the great Song Dynasty!"
Chen wept. "If I hadn't been protected by your emanations, Premier, my shattered bones would be lying in the bandit fortress right now! Fortunately, I escaped with my life and was able to see your beneficent countenance again!"
The premier summoned the Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong Guan, and Marshal Gao and Marshal Yang to a military conference. They soon reported to the White Tiger Inner Sanctum. When they were seated, Cai sent for the majordomo and the captain, who told how the imperial decree was torn to shreds in the Mount Liangshan stronghold.
"Why should such scoundrels be amnestied!" cried Marshal Yang. "Which official recommended such a thing?"
"If I had been present, I surely would have opposed it," said Gao. "I never would have agreed!"
"Thieving rats and marauding dogs, contemptible rabble," fumed Tong. "I have no talent, but just let me lead an expedition personally, set a time limit, and I'll wipe them off the earth!"
"We'll petition the throne tomorrow," said the others. The meeting disbanded.

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At the morning court the next day, high officials waited on the imperial stairs. Three times the rods rapped in the imperial hall, and officials divided into civil and military sections. Three times they called: "Long live the emperor," and made their obeisances. Premier Cai stepped forward and reported the outcome of the amnesty mission. The emperor was very angry.
"Who was it who proposed that I issue an amnesty?" he demanded.
"The Inspector General Cui Qing," someone replied.
The emperor ordered Cui to report to the Ministry of Justice and ask for punishment. He turned to the premier. "Those bandits have wreaking havoc for a long time. Who can we send to annihilate them?"
"We cannot succeed without a large force. In my humble estimation, the Chancellor of Military Affairs should lead the expedition personally. He can attain victory within an allotted time."
The emperor summoned Tong Guan and asked: "Are you willing to lead troops and seize the brigands of Liangshan Marsh?"
Kneeling, Tong replied, "As the ancients put it: 'The filial son must do his utmost, the loyal minister must stake his life.' I'm ready to give my all to eradicate this canker in our hearts." Marshal Gao Qiu and Marshal Yang Jian pledged their support. The emperor then issued a decree directing that gold seals and military tallies be issued to Tong Guan, that he be raised to the rank of Grand General, and that troops be drawn from various sources and placed under his command for use against the bandits of Mount Liangshan. A date was fixed for him to set forth. And because Tong Guan marched with his army, thousands of cavalry filled the mountains and valleys, and innumerable fighting ships rode the green waters. Truly, only 3000 equestrians, bold as tigers, rolled up countless soldiers, courageous as leopards.

Now when Marshal Chen, furnished with the imperial edict, returned to his office and started to make his preparations, there were many who came to express their approval: "This business you are undertaking, Marshal, will greatly benefit the country and will calm the fears of the people. That lot in the Marshes of Mount Liang are loyal and honourable and this imperial amnesty is what they are hoping for. You must speak diplomatically and do all you can to allay any fears they may have."
At the same time an official of the Grand Preceptor's office arrived to say: "The Grand Preceptor would like a word with you, Marshal."
The Marshal mounted a sedan chair and was taken to the Grand Preceptor's palace in Newgate Street. The official showed him to the library, where he found the Grand Preceptor sitting in a side chamber. When they had taken tea, the Grand Preceptor said: "I hear the Emperor is sending you to the Marshes of Mount Liang with an amnesty. I sent for you because I have something I want to say to you: when you go there you must not betray the court's principles or make an agreement which contravenes the law. You know what it says in the *Analects* of Confucius: 'He who acts with restraint, wherever he is sent, and upholds the sovereign's honour, he is the one who can be called a faithful ambassador.'"
Marshal Chen replied: "I am certainly mindful of this. I am most grateful to Your Excellency for the advice."
The Grand Preceptor said: "I am going to send my chamberlain with you. He is an expert on the law and if you meet with some problem he will be able to advise you."
"This is most generous, Your Excellency. I am truly grateful," the Marshal said. He took leave of the Grand Preceptor and returned in the sedan to his residence, accompanied by the chamberlain. He had just gone to bed when the doorkeeper came and announced that Marshal Gao had arrived. He hurriedly went out to receive him and invite him in. There was some talk of the weather. Eventually Marshal Gao said: "This pardon that has just been announced for Song Jiang, if I had been involved I would certainly have put a stop to it. That villain has dishonoured the Emperor and committed infamous crimes and if now they want to give him a free pardon and bring him here to the capital, we are certainly going to regret it. I would have made a counter-proposal, but the Emperor has spoken, so we will just have to wait and see the outcome. If the villains remain obdurate and continue to show contempt for the law you must return at once. We won't report it to the Emperor but raise an army which I shall lead myself, to weed out the evil. Yes, that is what I shall do. Now, I have an officer on my staff who has a quick wit and a ready tongue. He will be invaluable to you in assessing the situation."
Marshal Chen said: "I am most grateful for your concern."
Grand Marshal Gao rose. Chen escorted him out. He mounted and left. Next day the Grand Preceptor's man, Chamberlain Zhang and the Grand Marshal's man, Colonel Li both turned up. Marshal Chen had his horse saddled, paraded his men, picked up the ten bottles of imperial wine which he had them pack in a box bearing the imperial insignia and load up, with a yellow banner to go before. He mounted and together with five or six personal attendants, plus the chamberlain and the colonel, all on horseback, with the imperial edict borne at the head, led his party out through the New Gate. Some minor officials who had come to see them off returned to the city.
They had an agreeable journey to Jizhou. Here Governor Zhang received them and invited them to a banquet in his residence. He asked about the amnesty. Marshal Chen explained everything. The Governor said: "In my humble opinion this amnesty is an excellent idea. There is just one thing. When you get there, you will have to be very diplomatic: you will need to choose your words with the greatest care in order to allay their fears. Whatever happens we want the mission to succeed. There are one or two real hotheads among their number. If a single word offends their sensibility, the whole enterprise will come to nothing."
Chamberlain Zhang and Colonel Li said: "We are both going with the Marshal, so there won't be any mistakes. You should not keep urging caution and flattery, Your Excellency. It is an insult to the Emperor's authority. Inferiors should be kept in their place. If you allow them too much latitude, it can create a precedent."
The Governor said: "Who are these two?"
Marshal Chen said: "This one is a confidential assistant of the Grand Preceptor, and the other is one of Marshal Gao's aides."
The Governor said: "Then you'd better tell them to stay out of it!"
"They are confidential members of the staff of the Grand Preceptor and the Grand Marshal. It will look bad if I don't take them with me."
"I am saying it for your own good. I fear your mission will not succeed."
Chamberlain Zhang said: "If we are present, nothing can go wrong."
The Governor dared not say more. He organized a banquet for them and invited them to sleep in his residence. Next day a messenger was sent to inform the company on Mount Liang.
Song Jiang was holding the daily meeting in the Ceremonial Hall to discuss military matters, when one of his spies reported what was going on. Though this news was unconfirmed, Song Jiang was gratified. Later that day one of his men brought in the messenger from Jizhou who said: "They have sent a Marshal Chen from the court with ten bottles of imperial wine and an imperial edict proclaiming a general amnesty for you. He is in Jizhou right now, so be prepared to receive him."
In great excitement Song Jiang had wine and food brought out, together with two bolts of best silk and ten taels of fine silver, and sent the messenger back. He then addressed the company: "We have been granted an amnesty. We are to serve our country. Not in vain have we suffered so many privations. Now we are about to reap the reward!"
The Professor was less sanguine. "In my humble opinion," he said, "this amnesty will come to nothing. Even if there is an amnesty, they still look on us as bandits. When they bring their big army here our best plan is to give them a real shock — kill the whole lot, man and beast. Let them see us in their nightmares! Then we can talk of an amnesty, because there will be some basis for respect."
Song Jiang said: "If we followed your advice we would have to forget about honour."
Leopard's Head said: "When I was at court I came across so many lying bastards. You can't expect anything good from them."
Scimitar said: "I guarantee the proclamation will include some threats, intended to frighten us."
Spearsman said: "This envoy is bound to be one of Marshal Gao's people."
Song Jiang said: "Don't be so suspicious. Just get on with preparing for their reception."

Song Jiang told his brother Iron Fan and Knife to prepare a banquet and put Mr. Chai in charge of the arrangements. He wanted everything to be perfect. A tent was prepared for the Marshal, festooned with five-colour silk and other hanging decora-tions. Sterling, Magic Hand, the Little Duke and the Halberdier were ordered down the mountain to wait for them about six or seven miles away. The Waterside leaders prepared some big boats at the crossing. The Professor said to them: "You must follow my orders exactly, otherwise things could go wrong."

So Magic Hand and the three others, plus five or six men, all totally unarmed, took wine and nuts to a spot some miles from the stronghold to receive the delegation. For that day's journey Marshal Chen and his party were on foot, leading their horses, with two or three hundred of their men behind them and a dozen horsemen from the Jizhou garrison leading the way. The imperial wine was transported on poles and the box with the imperial edict was carried by a rider. There were also fifty or sixty guards from the Jizhou prison service, who were hoping to gain a portion of fame and fortune from this visit to the Marshes of Mount Liang. When he saw the reception committee of Magic Hand, Sterling, the Little Duke and the Halberdier, who were waiting in an attitude of humility by the roadside, the Chamberlain said: "Who does this Song Jiang think he is? We are bearing the imperial edict with the pardon, why doesn't he come out to meet us him-self? It's an insult! How can we present the Emperor's pardon to a bunch of common thieves like this? We should turn back, Marshal!"

The four from Mount Liang maintaining their humble posture excused themselves: "Because the stronghold had received no official notification from the Emperor we did not know if it was really true. Song Jiang and the other leaders are awaiting you at Golden Sands Landing. We beg you not to be angry with us, Your Excellency. Our only wish is to serve our country with honour and make amends for our crimes."

Colonel Li said disdainfully, "Whether or not this business goes forward, I don't see you lot flying up to heaven!" As the poem says:

*The courtiers, 'twas ever so, abound in sneers:*
*No time, they say, for small men's mean affairs.*
*Now like sweet rain imperial grace descends;*
*Too bad this amnesty won't meet its ends.*

The Little Duke and the Halberdier felt insulted: "What kind of language is that! They're treating us with contempt!" Nevertheless Magic Hand and Sterling invited the delegation to partake of the wine and nuts, which they refused to do. All proceeded therefore to the waterside, where the three Mount Liang war vessels were waiting. The horses were embarked in one, Sterling and his helpers went in another, while the Marshal was invited to board the third with all his retinue. The imperial edict and the imperial wine were placed in the prow.

This boat was commanded by Ruan the Seventh who was seated in the bows. Twenty sailors had been selected to row, each equipped with a sword. When the Marshal came on board he sat with his nose in the air, as if disdaining all around him, Ruan the Seventh gave a signal to his men. As they started rowing, the two ranks of sailors burst into song.

"You oafs," Colonel Li scolded. "There's an important person on board. Have you no respect?"

The sailors paid no attention but just went on singing. The Colonel took a cane and lashed out at them. They were unimpressed. One or two more outspoken ones said: "What's it to you, if we want to sing?"

"Do you answer me back, you dogs?" the Colonel said. He attacked them furiously with his cane and they all dived into the water. Ruan the Seventh sitting in the bows said: "If you beat my sailors like that and drive them overboard, how do you expect this boat to move?" At this moment two fast skiffs appeared. Ruan the Seventh had previously allowed two of the holds to fill with water. As the skiffs approached from behind, he pulled up the rudder and shouted: "We're sinking!" With water bubbling out of the hold, everyone began shouting for help. There was now a foot of water in the bottom. The two light skiffs drew near and everyone urged the Marshal to go aboard one of them. So busy were they rowing to safety that they forgot all about the imperial wine and the imperial edict. As the skiffs sped off, Ruan the Seventh ordered his sailors to bail out the hold and mop up the water. Then he said: "Bring me a bottle of that imperial wine. I'm going to see what it tastes like!"

One of the hands went and fetched a bottle. He broke the seal and handed it to Ruan the Seventh who sniffed it: it was wonderfully fragrant. "It might be poisoned, of course," he said. "That wouldn't do me much good. I'd better try just a little." Not bothering with bowls, ladles or jugs he took a sip. Then he scoffed the lot. When one bottle was gone, he said: "That's not bad at all!" One bottle obviously wasn't going to do the job so he had them bring another, which he finished likewise. He was getting a taste for it and he drank four bottles. "Now what are we going to do?" he said.

The sailors said: "There's a bucket of ordinary wine stowed in the bows."

"Bring me the bailer," he said. "I'll let you all have a taste of this." The remaining six bottles of imperial wine were shared among the hands. Then the bottles were refilled with ordinary country wine, the original seals put back on and the wine replaced in the containers with the imperial insignia. The boat positively flew to Golden Sands Landing, where they all went ashore.

Song Jiang and the other leaders were all there to receive the delegation with incense, candles and lanterns and a fanfare of gongs and drums. Every musical instrument in the stronghold was playing when the imperial wine was laid out on tables, each table to be carried by four men. The imperial edict was also carried on a table. When Marshal Chen stepped ashore Song Jiang greeted him by prostrating himself, hand to forehead. "I have committed many errors and have given Your Excellency the trouble of coming here. I must beg you to pardon my inadequate welcome."

Colonel Li said: "The Marshal is an important official of the court. He is bringing you the Emperor's amnesty. This is not an everyday affair. How could you send these leaking boats manned by such ignorant country bumpkins? It came near to costing the Marshal his life!"

"Our boats are all sound. Of course I wouldn't send a leaking boat to fetch His Excellency!" Song Jiang said.

The Chamberlain said: "His Excellency's clothes are still wet. How can you tell such lies?"

Five imposing leaders stood at Song Jiang's shoulder, never leaving his side, and there were eight horsemen surrounding him. When they saw the Colonel and the Chamberlain gesticulating wildly in front of the Leader and stamping their feet, obviously engaged in fierce argument, they were tempted to kill them. Only their respect for Song Jiang made them hold back.

Song Jiang invited the Marshal to get into a sedan chair and proceed to the fortress for the reading of the edict. He was obliged to repeat the invitation four or five times. Two horses were brought for Colonel Li and the Chamberlain. This wretched pair had got quite above themselves and behaved with total lack of courtesy. But Song Jiang gave the word and the party set off up the mountain accompanied by vigorous music, and rode through the three gates. Song Jiang and the others, over a hundred, followed behind. On reaching the Ceremonial Hall they all dismounted. The imperial wine and the box with the edict were placed opposite, while the Marshal with Colonel Li and the Chamberlain stood on the left, Magic Hand and Sterling on the right. Song Jiang called the roll of the leaders, one hundred and seven — Iron Ox was the only one missing. It was the fourth month and everyone was wearing uniforms padded with silk, as they knelt in the hall to hear the edict read. The Marshal took the edict out of its box and gave it to Magic Hand. Sterling saluted. The others all bowed their heads. Magic Hand opened the edict and read out in a loud voice:

*Hear this: the civil arts establish peace, the military arts create stability. The Five Rulers based their rule firmly on the rites and music; the Three Sage Kings used military means to bring about stability. Events can be favourable or unfavourable, men can be wise or foolish. I inherited this great task of government from my ancestors, and there is none under the light of sun and moon, none in the universe, who does not owe me homage. Recently Song Jiang and others have gathered together in the mountain fastnesses to plunder and rampage. Originally I thought to use military force to punish them, but I fear this might cause hardship among my people. I am therefore sending Marshal Chen to proclaim an amnesty. On receipt of this, they are to render up immediately all money and supplies, military equipment, horses and boats and demolish their hideout, in order to expiate their crimes. If they remain obdurate and oppose this decree, I shall send an army against them that will spare no one, young or old. You have been warned.*

When Magic Hand finished his reading everyone, from Song Jiang on down, looked furious. Suddenly Iron Ox leapt down from the rafters, snatched the proclamation from Magic Hand, tore it into a thousand pieces and made a grab for the Marshal. Then he began to use his fists. Song Jiang and the Unicorn seized him by the waist and held him back. Just as he managed to break free, Colonel Li said: "Who the devil is this? How dare he behave so insolently?" Iron Ox, thwarted in his attempts to hit someone, turned on him violently and began to beat him up, shouting: "All that stuff in the proclamation, who said it?"

The Chamberlain stammered: "Th-th-that is the Emperor's edict."

Iron Ox said: "That emperor of yours obviously doesn't know us. If he wants to give us a pardon, he'd better make us feel good! Your emperor's family name is Song. Our Leader is also called Song. You made yours emperor, but ours refused to be an emperor. And here's someone you oughtn't to come and provoke because come what may I'm going to kill all those officials of yours who wrote that edict."

Everyone now tried to smooth things over and Iron Ox was pushed off the stage. Song Jiang said: "Please don't be worried, Marshal. There's nothing wrong in the slightest, I assure you. Just bring out the imperial wine and we'll all feel honoured."

Accordingly a gold hammer encrusted with jewels was produced, and Sterling was told to fetch a bottle of imperial wine and decant it into a great silver sconce. When this was done it became evident that it was simple country wine. The other nine bottles were broached and poured into the sconce and it was all the same insipid country brew. When the company saw this, they were amazed and then one by one they left the hall. Monk wielding his steel staff began to abuse the delegation at the top of his voice: "You filthy mother-fucking scum. You think you can get away with anything! You switched the imperial wine for this piss and you think you can fool us with it!"

The Red-Haired Devil was also charging about waving his halberd, Pilgrim had drawn his two swords, Mu the Unstoppable and the Tattooed Dragon rushed forward together. The six waterside leaders departed down the mountain cursing.

Song Jiang saw things were bad but he stood firm and ordered the porters to carry the Marshal back down the mountain and allow no harm to come to him. By now most of the leaders, greater and lesser, were baying for blood, and Song Jiang and the Unicorn themselves were obliged to mount and ride with the Marshal and his edict-bearing party to protect them as they rode down through the gates. Again he apologized: "Don't think that we have no intention of submitting. The problem is that whoever it was drafted the document did not know us and was not familiar with our ways on Mount Liang. If only the language were more conciliatory, we would do anything to make amends, we would willingly face ten thousand deaths. When you return to the court, please say that some polite words are all it needs."

He hurriedly saw them across the ferry. The members of the retinue were shitting themselves in terror. They positively flew back to Jizhou.

When Song Jiang returned to the Ceremonial Hall he organized a feast for the leaders. He said: "The wording was pretty stupid, I admit, but you were all too hasty."

The Professor said: "Don't go on deluding yourself, brother. There will be an amnesty some day, for sure, but why blame your comrades now for being angry? The court is really treating us with too much contempt. But enough of talking. It's time for you to give some orders: have the cavalry saddle their horses, the footsoldiers prepare their weapons, the water-borne troops check their boats. Before long we're going to have a big army at our gates. We must give them a complete thrashing in a couple of battles and wipe their force out; let them see us in their nightmares! Then it will be time for talks."

Everyone said: "The military adviser is absolutely correct."

It was daylight when the meeting broke up and they all returned to their quarters.

Meanwhile the Marshal had returned to Jizhou and told the Governor what had transpired when the edict was read on Mount Liang. The Governor said: "I'll wager it's because you used the wrong language."

"I didn't even dare open my mouth," said the Marshal.

"In any case you've wasted your time," said the Governor. "The mission has failed and you'd better return to the capital as fast as you can and report to the court. There's no time to lose."

So the Marshal and his two companions, with their men, has-tened back to the capital. When he saw the Grand Preceptor he told how the bandits of Mount Liang had torn up the amnesty and responded with insults. The Grand Preceptor was incensed. "That bunch of brigands, how dare they behave so outrageously! How can the great Song Empire permit the insolence of this rabble!"

"But for the protection of your great name I should have had to leave my bones on Mount Liang," the Marshal lamented. "I am lucky to have escaped with my life and to be able to report back to Your Excellency!"

The Grand Preceptor sent word for President of the Military Council Tong Guan and Marshals Gao and Yang, to come at once to his office to discuss the grave military situation. In a little while they were ushered into the chamber of the war council in the White Tiger Pavilion. When all were seated, the Grand Preceptor had Chamberlain Zhang and Colonel Li describe the tearing up of the amnesty on Mount Liang and the insults.

Marshal Yang said: "Whoever suggested offering an amnesty to this rabble? What official thought this one up?"

Marshal Gao said: "If I had been present that day I would have stopped it. How could this business have been undertaken?"

Marshal Tong said: "We are we worrying our heads over a pack of thieving rats and mad dogs. I know I've no special talent, but I'm ready to lead an army out and I guarantee that within a fixed time limit I will have swept the marshes clear!"

The others said: "Tomorrow propose it to the Emperor." With that the meeting broke up.

At the next day's morning court, after the courtiers had made their obeisance and ministers completed the ceremonies, the Grand Preceptor came forward and reported this matter to the Emperor. The Emperor was very angry. "Which of you advised us that day to proclaim an amnesty?" he asked.

A minister replied: "It was the suggestion of Your Majesty's chief of staff Cui Jing, Sire."

The Emperor ordered the offending minister to report to the Ministry of Justice for sentencing. Turning to the Grand Preceptor, he asked: "These scoundrels have been causing trouble for too long, whom shall we send to arrest them?"

"We must use a considerable army or we will not be able to catch them out," said the Grand Preceptor. "In my humble opinion the chief of the Military Council should go himself, with a strong enough force to make a clean sweep. He can get it all done within the given time."

The Emperor summoned Tong Guan and asked: "Are you prepared to head the campaign against the outlaws in the Marshes of Mount Liang?"

Tong Guan knelt and declared: "Sire, there is an old saying, 'For the sake of filial piety you must give all your strength, for the sake of honour you must sacrifice your life.' I am prepared to work like a horse in order to remove this internal threat." Marshals Gao and Yang both gave their backing. The Emperor had the order promulgated, funds allotted and the commission written out appointing Marshal Tong as commander-in-chief with power to raise troops throughout the empire and select an auspicious day to embark on the campaign to eradicate the bandits in the Marshes of Mount Liang. And indeed, we can say:

*Proudly, like a great general, he enters the fray;*
*He returns hanging his head like a beaten child!*

## 174
## The Professor Wu Yong Lay Out 4-Dipper Positions & 5-Pennant Arches & unfurls the standard of the Dipper; Song Jiang Sets Troops in 9 Segments Within an Octagon & attacks in the 8 Trigrams formation

Tong Guan proceeded to the Council of Military Affairs to muster troops and issue tallies. He ordered each of the eight military districts under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Capital to dispatch ten thousand men, headed by the district commander. The capital guards were to provide twenty thousand soldiers to protect the main body. Tong turned the running of the Council of Military Affairs over to his deputy. From the imperial garrison he selected two good generals to lead the forces on his left and right flanks.

Within ten days preparations were completed. Marshal Gao designated an official who would be responsible for quartermaster supply. Tong Guan, who maintained overall command, directed the officers of his three armies to get ready. He had weapons issued from the armory, and selected an auspicious day for departure. Marshals Gao and Yang gave him a farewell banquet. The imperial court directed the Council of Administration to dispense money among the soldiers.

Tong Guan ordered his commanders to set forth with the troops the following day. He bid farewell to the emperor, vaulted into the saddle, and left the city. Five *li* beyond the gate he found Marshals Gao and Yang waiting for him with a large body of officials. Tong dismounted, and Gao handed him a ceremonial cup of wine.

"Military Affairs Chancellor," said Marshal Gao, "you will undoubtedly distinguish yourself for the throne and return victorious. But you mustn't underestimate the bandits who conceal themselves in the marsh. First, store up a good supply of grain and fodder and build strong stockades, then you can lure them down from the mountain. Send suitable persons to scout out what they are up to before advancing. Capture every one of them alive. Don't let the imperial court down. I hope you will consider what I say."

"The words from your vast learning will remain engraved on my heart. I will not forget."

The two men drank. Marshal Yang came forward with ceremonial flagon and addressed Tong.

"The chancellor has read books on military lore and is deeply versed in strategy. Ordinarily, he would catch the bandits as easily as turning over his hand. Unfortunately, they operate in a marsh, and have the terrain in their favor. I trust, Chancellor, that you have a good plan."

"I will strike when the opportunity presents. I have my own methods," said Tong.

The two officials drank to him, and said: "Here, outside the capital's gate, we pledge you this: We shall look forward eagerly to news of your victory." They bid one another farewell and got on their horses.

Gao, Yang, and the other dignitaries returned to the city. The numerous minor officials who were also seeing Tong Guan off gradually dwindled away.

The three armies marched, every man bristling with martial spirit. They kept well-formed ranks. Discipline was strict. Leading the expedition was a vanguard of four divisions, commanded by a general. The rear unit was also comprised of four divisions, under another general. Covering the left and right of the eight divisions were flanking units headed by more generals. In addition to the main body commanded by Tong Guan directly, the twenty thousand infantry and cavalry guarding the flanks were all crack members of the imperial garrison. Holding his baton, Chancellor Tong supervised the march. The weapons advanced like a turbulent river, men and horses seemed to sail with the wind.

After fifty *li* they made camp. The next day they resumed the march along the winding road. In less than two days they reached the boundaries of Jizhou Prefecture. Zhang Shuye, the prefect, emerged from the city to greet them. The armies camped outside the walls.

Tong Guan, with a troop of light cavalry, rode in and dismounted before prefectural headquarters. Zhang invited him into the main hall. The prefect kowtowed and was raised to his feet. He stood courteously before the Chancellor of Military Affairs.

"Those swamp bandits kill good citizens and rob travelling merchants. They're committed many a wicked crime," said Tong Guan. "Time and again we've tried to catch them, but we've never done so, and they've been allowed to spread. I come at the head of a hundred commanders and a hundred thousand troops. I shall eradicate the mountain stronghold, capture the brigands, and restore peace to the populace."

"The bandits operate in the marsh, Chancellor," said Zhang. "Although they're only mountain outlaws, there are some intelligent and courageous men among them. Don't let yourself be governed by anger. Devise careful plans, and you will succeed."

"It's timid, weak officials like you, leery of weapons and scared of death, who harm the nation and allow such brigandage to exist!" Tong shouted in a rage. "I'm here, now! You've nothing to fear!"

Zhang dared say no more. He lavishly wined and dined his guest, and Tong Guan left the city. The following day, at the head of his huge force, Chancellor Tong neared Liangshan Marsh.

Song Jiang had been informed by his spies of the coming attack some days before. With Wu Yong he worked out an airtight strategy, and they awaited the arrival of the big army. They instructed the outlaw chieftains to obey orders and allow no slip-ups.

Tong Guan had designated Duan Pengju, district commander of Suizhou Prefecture, as leader of the vanguard, with Chen Zhu, district commander of Zhengzhou, as his deputy. District Commander Wu Bingyi of Chenzhou was named leader of the combined rear; his deputy was Li Ming, district commander of Xuzhou. Han Tianlin, district commander of Tangzhou, and Wang Yi, district commander of Dengzhou, were put in charge of the left patrol; district commander Ma Wanli of Ruzhou and Zhou Xin, district commander of Songzhou, led the right patrol. Generals Feng Mei and Bi Sheng commanded the flanks of the central army. Tong Guan, the commander-in-chief, in full armor, exercised personal control over all operations.

Three times the battle drums thundered, and the army resumed its march. Before it had gone ten *li*, an enemy patrol was seen approaching in a rising cloud of dust. Thirty or so outlaw riders, the bells on their horses jingling, drew near. Black kerchiefs bound their heads, and they wore green battle robes. Their steeds were decked in red tassels and dozens of copper bells. Plumes protruding from the animals' hindquarters. The men carried long thin lances banded with silver, and light bows and arrows.

The standard of the leader bore the inscription: *Patrol Commander Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow.* To his left was Gong Wang, to his right Ding Desun. About a hundred paces from Tong Guan's advance unit, the patrol reined in and turned back. The two commanders of the vanguard were unable to act, since they had no orders. They reported to the central command. Tong Guan rode forward personally. Before he had finished his inspection, Zhang Qin again advanced. Tong Guan was about to send men after him when one of his aides issued a warning.

"He has stones in an embroidered bag behind his saddle. When he throws, he never misses. Better let him alone."

Featherless Arrow rode out three times. Tong Guan made no move. Zhang Qin and his patrol went away.

Again the government army marched. Before it had gone five *li* gongs sounded behind the hills and around the bend came five hundred outlaw infantry. They were led by Black Whirlwind Li Kui, Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, Xiang Chong the Eight-Armed Nezha, and Li Gun the Flying Divinity. At the foot of the slope the brigands spread out in a straight line, round shields neatly in place.
Tong Guan at the head of his army waved his fly-whisk baton, and his soldiers surged rapidly forward. Li Kui and Fan Rui divided their infantry unit into two, both of which withdrew around the bend, all carrying their shields reversed. The government troops pursued them through a gap in the hills.
Reaching the other side they found a broad level plain, and there they began setting up their battle positions. In the distance Li Kui and Fan Rui scaled a height and disappeared into a forest.
Tong Guan's men erected a tall wooden command platform. Two military experts climbed to the top. In response to Tong's orders they directed soldiers to left and right, high and low, moving them into four positions shaped like hollow scoops.
No sooner was this done than cannon boomed on the rear of the mountain, and out flew a body of brigand cavalry. The government vanguard, already in position, waited to meet the foe. Ordering an aide to hold his horse, Tong Guan climbed to the top of the command platform. He saw a column of horsemen surging from the east side of the mountain. The foremost troop carried red flags, the second had striped ones, the third bore blue flags, the fourth also carried flags that were striped.
Another cavalry unit was sweeping around the west side of the mountain. The first troop carried striped flags: the second, white: the third, also striped; and the fourth, black. Behind each of the flag bearers streamed massed pennants of yellow.
Hurriedly the government generals repaired to the center of the army and established defensive formations. They could see the raiders clearly now, advancing from the south. Bearing flags of flaming red the lead riders were dressed in red gowns and armor; their roan-colored horses were festooned with red tassels.
The red standard in the lead was embroidered above in gold thread with the six-starred Southern Dipper, and below in cinnabar with the emblem of a bird. On it was written: *Vanguard General Qin Ming the Thunderbolt,* and Qin suddenly emerged from the sea of red banners. On his left was deputy commander Shan Tinggui the Water General, on his right deputy commander Wei Dingguo the Fire General. Twirling their weapons astride their roan steeds they halted at the edge of the battlefield.
To their east were riders bearing blue flags. They wore blue gowns and armor, and blue tassels decorated their blue-grey horses. The blue standard in the lead was embroidered above in gold thread with the four-starred Eastern Dipper, and below in blue thread with a dragon. On it was written *The Big Halberd Guan Sheng, General of the Left Army,* and from the sea of blue banners Guan suddenly emerged. Beside him were his deputy commanders. On his left was Ugly Son-in-Law Xuan Zan, on his right Hao Siwen the Wild Dog. The three, weapons in hand, astride their blue-grey mounts, halted at the edge of the battlefield.
To the west appeared a troop of horsemen bearing white banners and wearing white gowns and armor, and riding white horses with white tassels, The white standard in the lead was embroidered above in gold thread with the five-starred Western Dipper, and below with a white tiger. On it was written *Panther Head Lin Chong, General of the Right Army,* and from the massed white banners Lin surged forth, flanked by his deputy commanders. On his left was Huang Xin Suppressor of the Three Mountains, on his right Sun Li the Sickly General. Twirling their weapons astride their white steeds they reined in at the battlefield.
Behind came cavalry with black banners. The gowns and armor of the men were black, as were the horses and their tassels. On the black standard in the lead the seven-starred North Dipper was embroidered above in gold thread, with the symbol for the Seven Northern Constellations below. It bore the words: *Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, General of the Combined Rear,* and Huyan suddenly emerged from amid the sea of black banners. With him were his deputy commanders. Ever-Victorious General Han Tao was on his left, the Eyes of Heaven General Peng Qi was on his right. Weapons in hand they halted their black steeds at the edge of the field of battle.
From the shadows of an arch of pennants to the southeast a troop rode forth carrying blue banners and wearing red armor. Embroidered on the standard in the lead in gold thread was the wind symbol above and a flying dragon below. Written on it were the words: *General Two Spears Dong Ping,* and Dong emerged with his deputy commanders from amid the banners. On his left was Ou Peng Golden-Winged Hawk, on his right Fiery-Eyed Lion Deng Fei. They reined in at the battlefield, weapons in hand.
A troop with red banners and white armor emerged from the shadows of an arch of pennants to the southwest. Embroidered on the lead standard in gold thread was the earth-symbol, and below that a winged bear. It bore the words: *Urgent Vanguard Suo Chao, General of the Cavalry,* and Suo rode forth from the banners, accompanied by his deputy commanders. On his left was Elegant Tiger Yan Shun, on his right Ma Lin the Elfin Flutist. Weapons in hand, the three halted their chargers at the battlefield.
Through an arch of pennants to the northeast came a body of horsemen with black banners and blue armor. On the lead standard embroidered in gold thread was the symbol for mountain, and below that a flying panther. On it was inscribed: *Cavalry General Nine Dragons Shi Jin,* and Shi emerged from the sea of banners with his deputy commanders. On his left was Gorge-Leaping Tiger Chen Da, on his right White-Spotted Snake Yang Chun. Weapons in hand, they halted at the battlefield astride their chargers.
From the northwest, through an arch of pennants came a cavalry unit with white banners and black armor. The symbol for Heaven was embroidered in gold thread on the upper half of the lead standard; below it was a flying tiger. *Cavalry General Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute* read the standard, and Yang emerged from amid the banners, accompanied by his deputies. Yang Lin the Elegant Panther was on his left. On his right was Zhou Tong the Little King. The three reined in their chargers at the edge of the field of battle, holding their weapons.
The outlaw forces were thus laid out in a huge iron octagon, cavalry grouped with cavalry, infantry with infantry, all bristling with weapons, banners in neat rows—a formidable array! In the center were flags of apricot yellow, interspersed with sixty-four long banners, each bearing the octagon diagram.
At the four points of the compass the octagon was broken by four arches. Cavalry massed at the southern end, and in the shadows of the arch of pennants were two commanders, in ordinary dress astride yellow-brown horses. The first was Beautiful Beard Zhu Tong, the second was Lei Heng the Winged Tiger. All the riders in the troop carried yellow banners, wore yellow robes and yellow bronze armor, and sat yellow-brown steeds decked with yellow tassels.
The interior position was also open at four corners. Shi En the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub commanded the eastern opening, the western entry was under Zheng Tianshou the Fair-Faced Gentleman, Song Wan the Guardian of the Clouds held the southern, and Xue Yong the Sick Tiger the northern.
In the center of the yellow pennants was an apricot-yellow banner reading: *Act in Heaven's Behalf.* From the pole to which this was attached ran four woolen cords, and these were grasped by four tall stalwarts to hold the pole firm. Also guarding the banner was a man on horseback, Yu Baosi the Spirit of the Dangerous Road.
Behind these was an artillery platform under the command of cannoneer Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder. He was assisted by well over twenty men who surrounded the platform. To their rear was a section of outlaws armed with hooked poles and nooses for snaring the enemy.
Next was another massing of banners and pennants, seven each on four sides, a total of twenty-eight, embroidered with twenty-eight different constellations. In the center of these was a wool-napped, gosling-yellow flag bordered with pearls, with golden bells hanging from its lower edge and topped with plumes, indicating the headquarters of the highest commander.
Guarding this flag was Jiao Ting the Merciless, assisted by Kong Ming the Comet and Kong Liang the Flaming Star, both mounted and both in ordinary dress. In ranks to their front and rear were twenty-four brigands in iron armor and armed with wolf-toothed cudgels.
Next were embroidered generals' flags, with twelve men on each side carrying square-bladed decorated halberds. The embroidered flag on the left read: *Lu Fang the Little Duke.* The embroidered flag on the right was inscribed: *Guo Sheng the Second Rengui.* Both commanders were mounted.
Between the rows of halberdiers were infantry armed with steel pitchforks. They were led by the brothers Xie Zhen the Two-Headed Snake and Xie Bao the Twin-Tailed Scorpion, both of whom were in ordinary dress, and guarded the central army. Next, on finely saddled steeds, were two civil officers in charge of rewards and punishments. One was Xiao Rang the Master Hand, who looked after documents on Mount Liangshan. The other was Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan, who was the chief secretary of the stronghold.
These were followed by twenty-four security guards dressed in purple and armed with wide-bladed sabres. They were led by two executioners wearing silks and satins, who stood between the rows. The first was Iron Arm Cai Fu. The second was his brother Cai Qing, known as the Single Blossom. They stood to the fore, with sword carriers to their left and right.
Behind, in two rows, were twenty-four brigands with gold and silver lances. Each row was under a mounted commander. The twelve in the left row bore gold lances, and their commander, also bearing a lance of gold, was Xu Ning the Metal Lancer. The twelve in the right row all bore silver lances, including their mounted commander Hua Rong the Lesser Li Guang. Both leaders had a gallant yet dangerous air. Their Lancers all wore black gauze turbans with ornaments of jade leaves and gold flowers tucked under in front of the ear. The twelve gold lancers in the left row wore green, the twelve silver lancers in the right row wore purple.
Still further back were pairs in silk clothes and colorful hats, groups in pink gowns and embroidered tunics. On either side were tents of jade green, vermilion panoplies and black umbrellas, yellow axes and white whisks, floating greens and flashing purples, then two lines of twenty-four ax-halberdiers, and twenty-four in pairs bearing rods. Between these, in a single line, were three umbrellas embroidered in gold thread and three fine horses in brocaded trappings.
Two heroic figures stood before the middle steed. The man on the left, of noble visage, was that incomparable chieftain Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller. He held a gosling-yellow flag inscribed with the word *Order,* and was responsible for the swift transmission of all military information and troop movement directives.
The man on the right was strikingly unusual in appearance. He was that dashing chieftain so skilled at secret activities, Yan Qing the Prodigy. Slung across his back was a powerful bow and sharp-tipped arrows. He held an eyebrow-high staff and was responsible for the security of the central army.
On the far right side of the army, seated on a handsomely equipped mount beneath a blue silk canopy embroidered in gold thread was that famed Taoist of high virtue Gongsun Sheng the Dragon in the Clouds. A true reverend, he could summon the wind and call the rain, order about demons and work magic. Attached to his back were two excellent swords, and the reins in his hands were of silk.
On the far left, astride a richly caparisoned steed beneath a blue silk canopy embroidered in gold thread, was that agile-minded, ever-victorious righteous general Wu Yong the Wizard, a remarkable strategist and tactician. He held a feathered fan. A set of bronze chains hung from his waist.
In the exact center, seated on the White Jade Lion That Glows in the Night, under a bright red canopy embroidered with gold thread, was the loyal and virtuous commander-in-chief Song Jiang, originally a citizen of Yuncheng, a county seat in Jizhou Prefecture in the province of Shandong. Known as the Timely Rain and Defender of Justice, he was in full armor and carried a sword of the finest Kunwu steel. Astride his gold-saddled white horse, he observed the battlefield and directed the central army.
Behind him, on battle chargers, were thirty-five lieutenant-generals in symmetrical ranks, armed with halberds, swords, bows and arrows. Next were twenty-four trumpeters and a complete military band. Beyond the battlefield, commandoes crouched in ambush on either side.
Leading the flanking forces on the left of the central army Mu Hong the Unrestrained, seconded by his younger brother Mu Chun the Slightly Restrained, had fifteen hundred men under his command. An equal number were led by Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon on the right, aided by Tao Zongwang the Nine-Tailed Tortoise.
In the rear position was a female contingent, all on horseback, consisting of Ten Feet of Steel in the middle, Gu Dasao the Tigress on the left, and Sun the Witch on the right. Also covering the rear were their husbands Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger, with Sun Xin the Junior General to his left, and Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener to his right.
Infantry and cavalry together, the outlaw forces totalled two thousand. But their manner of deployment was not to be underestimated. From his command platform Chancellor Tong Guan looked over their nine segments within an octagon, the brigands' bold cavalry, their heroic infantry, and his soul flew from him in fright, and his heart dropped.
"I couldn't understand why government troops were defeated each time they sought to capture these bandits," he cried. "Who knew they were so formidable!"
He watched for a long time, and heard the steady beat of the gongs and war drums of Song Jiang's army. Tong Guan came down from the platform, mounted his horse and rode to the front.
"Who dares to go fiercely forth and challenge combat?" he asked his generals.
A bold vanguard commander vaulted into the saddle and bowed to Tong Guan. "I will be glad to," he said. "Please give the order."
The speaker was Chen Zhu, district commander of Zhengzhou Prefecture. He wore a white robe and silver armor. His horse was bluish-white and decked with brown tassels. Chen, who wielded a long-handled sword, was deputy leader of the vanguard.
Tong Guan directed that three rolls be beaten on the golden drums, and that the red flag of the vanguard be broken out on the command platform. Chen Zhu galloped forward from the arch of pennants. Both armies set up a cry. Chen reined in, holding his blade horizontal.
"Wicked bandits, rebellious traitors," he shouted, "the emperor's soldiers are here! Surrender, or your bones and flesh will be ground to mud! Regrets will be too late!"
From the southern end of the outlaws' position, vanguard commander Qin Ming the Thunderbolt raced his steed to the field of combat. Without a word, he rode directly at Chen Zhu, brandishing his cudgel. The horses met, weapons waved, the cudgel struck, the blade slashed. Four arms contended, eight hoofs churned the turf.
Back and forth, they fought for more than 20 rounds. Qin Ming feinted and let Chen Zhu move in. Chen's sword sliced the empty air. Thunderbolt raised his cudgel and brought it down with full force, smashing his opponent's helmet and cranium with a single blow. Chen Zhu fell dead beneath his steed. Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, Qin Ming's deputy commanders, rode out quickly, seized the mount of the fallen foe, and escorted Qin Ming back to the outlaw lines.
Beneath the southeastern arch of pennants, General 2 Spears Dong Ping watched Qin Ming win the first contest. "This has taken the wind out of the sails of the government army," he thought. "What'd be a better time than now to dash over and capture Tong Guan!"
With a thunderous roar, a spear in either hand, he smote his steed and charged across the field. Tong Guan turned his horse and rode in amid his central army. At that same moment, Suo Chao the Urgent Vanguard beneath the southwest arch of pennants uttered a shout. "Let's nab Tong Guan! What're we waiting for!"
He galloped across the field, waving his big axe. Since both ends were already in motion, Qin Ming ordered his entire troop of red-bannered cavalry to charge and take Tong Guan. Truly, all of the chancellor's misdeeds came home to roost. They pursued him like black eagles chasing a purple swallow, like savage tigers after an innocent lamb.

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## The Men of Mount Liang Lay Ambush on All Sides; Song Jiang Twice Vanquishes Chancellor Marshal Tong Guan

Three units of Song Jiang's vanguard raced across the field. They ploughed into Tong Guan's army with swords and axes and inflicted a crushing defeat. Badly mauled, the government forces scattered, abandoning arms and equipment, yelling in fright. More than ten thousand soldiers were cut down. The rest fled thirty *li* before they halted and made camp.
Wu Yong had the trumpeters blow assembly. His order was transmitted: "Stop the pursuit and slaughter. We only want to give them a sample!" The outlaws returned to their stronghold, where they reported their exploits and claimed rewards.
Tong Guan was very disturbed over the losses his army had sustained, and he summoned his generals for a conference. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng reassured him.
"Don't worry, Chancellor," they said. "The bandits, when they learned we were coming, were able to lay out their battle positions ahead of time. Our forces were unfamiliar with the situation here, and the brigands were able to trick us. With the mountain as their base, they can move troops around and create diversions. We've had a temporary set-back because of the terrain. We'll reorganize and rest for three days to let our men regain their morale and give our horses a breather. Then we'll stretch our entire army into a long line, all on foot, and advance. We'll be like a mountain snake: If the head is attacked, the tail will come to the rescue; if the tail is attacked, the head will come to the rescue; if the middle is attacked, both head and tail will support it. Each section will be part of a continuous whole. This next battle we're sure to win."
"An excellent plan," said Tong Guan. "Just what I was thinking, myself."
He issued appropriate orders. The soldiers were re-grouped and given further training.
At the fifth watch on the third day the government troops rose and ate a hearty breakfast. The horses were equipped with leather armor, the men wore iron plate. Swords and axes, bows and arrows, all were readied. Truly, weapons flowed in a rapid stream, infantry and cavalry sped like the wind.
Generals Feng Mei and Bi Sheng led the government army, militant and imposing, in a rapid march on Liangshan Marsh. The eight columns divided into a left and right. Three hundred armored cavalry rode as advance scouts. After a while they returned and reported to Tong Guan: "We haven't seen a single enemy soldier on the field where we fought the other day."
Suspicious, the chancellor summoned his generals and demanded: "Shall we withdraw?"
"Don't even consider it," Feng Mei urged. "Just keep pushing on. In our long snake deployment what have we to fear?"
Forward wound the government expedition until it came to the edge of the marsh. Not an adversary was in sight. They saw only a body of water and misty reeds. On the summit of the mountain stronghold in the distance an apricot-yellow flag unfurled, but there was no other movement.
A small boat glided out of the reeds along the opposite shore. Its lone occupant, in a conical hat and coir cape, sat sideways with his back to the government troops, fishing.
"Where are the robbers?" the soldiers hailed him.
He did not respond. Tong Guan ordered his archers to shoot. Two mounted men rode down to the edge of the river, fitted arrows to their bows, and let fly. The first arrow pinged off the conical hat and dropped into the water. The second clanged against the coir cape and also landed in the river.
The marksmen were two of Tong Guan's best archers. Startled, they wheeled their steeds around and trotted back. They bowed from the saddle and reported: "Both arrows scored a hit, but they didn't penetrate! We don't know what he's wearing!"
Tong Guan dispatched three hundred crack archers of the mounted vanguard. They spread out along the river bank and shot their feathered shafts, together. The fisherman remained unperturbed. Though most of the arrows fell short, several reached the boat. But those which struck the conical hat or coir cape bounced off harmlessly.
Since the target couldn't be killed by arrows, Tong Guan sent soldiers who could swim to capture him. Forty or fifty divested themselves of their armor and clothing and plunged into the river.
From the noise to the stern of his boat, the fisherman knew they were coming. Calmly he set down his tackle and picked up the oar which was lying beside him. As each swimmer drew near, he cracked him with the oar—on the temple, the crown, or the forehead—driving him beneath the waves. The others hastily returned to the bank and sought their clothes and armor.
Tong Guan was furious. He ordered five hundred more soldiers to the river and demanded that they capture the fisherman; whoever retreated would be cut in two! The soldiers stripped on the shore and jumped in, shouting. The fisherman turned the craft around and pointed at Tong Guan on the bank.
"Thieving minister, disrupter of the nation, animal who ravages the people! So you've come here to die! Don't you know you're as good as dead!"
Enraged, Tong Guan bellowed for his cavalry archers to shoot. The fisherman laughed.
"They'll never get here in time!" He flicked off his coir cape and conical hat and dove deep.
The five hundred soldiers by then had reached the boat. Suddenly, there were wild yells among them, as they began to sink. For the fisherman was White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun. Under his hat and cape had been a bronze helmet and bronze armor. Encased like a turtle in its shell, he had been impervious to arrows. Now with his dagger he was killing soldiers, one after another, and the river was red with blood. Those who could, fled for their lives, while Tong Guan goggled from the shore in stupefaction.
"That yellow flag on top of the mountain seems to be moving," an officer beside him said, pointing.
The chancellor peered. Neither he nor his generals could fathom the significance. Feng Mei had a suggestion.
"How about dividing three hundred armored cavalry into two troops and sending them around both sides of the mountain to have a look at the rear?"
But as the horsemen neared the mountain, a cannon thundered from the reeds, spreading a pall of smoke. The cavalry quickly returned. "They're lying in ambush there!" they reported.
Tong Guan was stunned. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng ordered their men to stay out. Several hundred thousand soldiers waited, weapons in hand. Mounted messengers galloped to every section of the army, shouting: "Whoever runs will be executed!"
While the chancellor and his generals watched from their saddles, drums pounded on the rear of the mountain. Fierce shouts shook the heavens, and a large detachment came racing forward, all carrying yellow banners, with two valorous leaders at their head.
Riding golden brown horses were the heroic Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard and his deputy commander Lei Heng the Winged Tiger. With them were five thousand men, mounted and on foot, eager to destroy the government soldiers. At Tong Guan's order Feng Mei and Bi Sheng rode forward to meet the foe. They drew rein at the field of combat, weapons at the ready, and swore.
"Surrender, you lawless bandits! What are you waiting for!"
Lei Heng laughed and shouted back: "Death is staring you in the face, dolts, and you don't even know it! How dare you venture to do battle with us!"
Bi Sheng was very angry. He clapped his steed and charged Lei Heng with levelled lance. The Winged Tiger spurred his mount. The horses met, the weapons clashed. Over twenty rounds the contenders fought with neither besting the other.
Feng Mei, seeing that Bi Sheng couldn't win, smote his mount and rode to join the fray, waving his sword. Zhu Tong uttered a cry and galloped, brandishing his blade, to intercept Feng Mei. Four horses, two sets of battlers, fought splendidly on the field of combat. Tong Guan kept exclaiming in admiration.
Just as the contest was reaching its climax Zhu Tong and Lei Heng executed a feint, turned their mounts, and rode towards their original position. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng, reluctant to let them go, gave chase. The outlaw force, shouting, withdrew in the direction of the rear of the mountain. Tong Guan led his army in hot pursuit past the foot of the mountain.

On the summit, trumpets blared. The government troops looked up. From before and behind, cannon balls whistled overhead. Tong Guan realized that enemy forces were hiding in ambush. He ordered a halt.
An apricot-yellow banner unfurled on the mountain top, embroidered with the words: *Act in Heaven's Behalf.* Skirting the side of the slope Tong Guan saw amid a phalanx of colored pennants and banners on the heights the figure of Song Jiang, world-renowned hero from Yuncheng County in Shandong and Defender of Justice. Behind him were his generals Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Hua Rong and Xu Ning, plus his Gold and Silver Lancers.
Angrily Tong Guan ordered a contingent to go up and seize Song Jiang. Two columns prepared to ascend the slope. The sound of beating drums and hearty laughter floated down. Tong Guan's rage grew, and he ground his teeth.
"That robber dares to toy with me," he grated. "I'll capture him myself!"
"Chancellor, you must have a plan," Feng Mei said. "Don't go into danger personally. Call back our army and we'll investigate further. After that we can advance."
"Nonsense! We've already come this far. Why should we withdraw! We've been ordered to engage the bandits as quickly as possible. Now, we've seen them. We can't retreat!"
Before the words were out of his mouth, shouts were heard from the rear army, and a scout reported: "Due west, from behind the mountain, a strong force has emerged and split our rear army in two!"
Tong Guan, startled, hurried to the rescue with Feng Mei and Bi Sheng. At that moment behind the mountain on the east side drums sounded and out rushed another contingent. Half carried red banners, half carried blue. Five thousand infantry and cavalry, they were headed by two generals.
Qin Ming the Thunderbolt commanded the red banners, Guan Sheng the Big Halberd led the blues.
The two galloped up on their horses and shouted: "Tong Guan surrender your head!"
Enraged, the chancellor sent Feng Mei against Guan Sheng and Bi Sheng against Qin Ming. Angry shouts in his rear army intensified, but Tong Guan had the trumpets call assembly. He ordered his rear to fall back, and not be impatient for combat.
Zhu Tong and Lei Heng, leading a force of yellow banners, again attacked, this time in a pincers movement. The government troops were thrown into confusion. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng protected Tong Guan, and he fled for his life. An outlaw force, five thousand strong, cut in at an angle and intercepted them. Half of this unit bore white banners, the other half black. Commanding the blacks was Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, commanding the whites was Panther Head Lin Chong.
The two shouted from their horses: "Treacherous Tong Guan, where do you think you're going? Stand and be killed!" They charged in directly among the government soldiers.
Duan Pengju, district commander of Suizhou, took on Huyan Zhuo. Ma Wanli, district commander of Ruzhou, contended with Lin Chong. Ma commenced to weaken after only several rounds. As he turned to flee, Lin Chong uttered a roar. Hopelessly flurried, Ma was pierced by Lin's thrust. He fell dead beneath his horse.
Duan Pengju lost his appetite for battle at the sight of his companion's body. He parried Huyan's rods, wheeled his mount around, and galloped away.
Huyan gave chase, and the two armies clashed in a general melee. Tong Guan scrambled to get back to his own forces. Wild shouts rose in the forward ranks. From behind the mountain a contingent of brigand infantry came running, and ploughed into the very center of the government army. It was led by a monk and a pilgrim, who yelled: "Don't let Tong Guan escape!"
The monk never read the scriptures but specialized in slaughter. He was Lu Zhishen, otherwise known as the Tattooed Monk. The pilgrim had killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge. He was Wu Song, the boldest hero in the marsh-girt stronghold. Lu with his Buddhist staff, and Wu with his pair of swords, slashed into the government position.
The outlaw infantry charge shattered the imperial army into segments. Both advance and retreat were impossible. Tong Guan could only, with Feng Mei and Bi Sheng, break through the encirclement and hack a bloody path to the rear of the mountain. Just as they were catching their breath, they again heard the thunder of cannon and the pounding of drums. Another contingent of outlaw infantry, headed by two commanders, stopped them once more.
Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, each with a five-tined pitchfork, led their infantry in a headlong attack. Tong Guan and his men could not be checked. They broke through the barrier. But assailed from five sides by outlay forces on horse and on foot the government army was fragmented. Tong Guan fled, protected by Feng Mei and Bi Sheng.
The Xie brothers, with their pitchforks, rushed towards the mounted generals. Tong Guan clapped his horse and galloped off at an angle. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng, hurrying to cover his rear, met the district commanders of Tangzhou and Dengzhou—Han Tianlin and Wang Yi, and the four, together, fought their way out.
They hadn't gone very far, and were just catching their breaths, when they saw before them a cloud of dust and heard fierce yells. Out of a leafy green glade flew a mounted troop, headed by two commanders, and obstructed their road. General Two Spears Dong Ping and Urgent Vanguard Suo Chao charged directly at Tong Guan without a word.
Wang Yi, with levelled lance, tried to intercept them, but Suo Chao raised his ax and cut him from his steed. Han Tianlin, attempting a rescue, was pierced through by Dong Ping's spears. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng again galloped off with Tong Guan, striving desperately to save him. Drums beat on all sides. They had no idea from which direction the enemy was coming.
Tong Guan hauled his mount to the top of a bluff and looked. Four contingents of Liangshan Marsh cavalry, two auxiliaries and two units of infantry had surrounded the government troops and were sweeping through them like giant baskets and scoops, scattering them like clouds before the wind. The soldiers were running, panic-stricken, east and west.
A troop appeared at the foot of the slope. Tong Guan recognized the banners of district commanders Wu Bingyi of Chenzhou and Li Ming of Xuzhou. Their soldiers, beaten and bedraggled, carrying broken weapons, had come around Mount Linlang, seeking a place to hide. When Tong Guan hailed them, they turned their horses and started up the slope eagerly. But from the side of the mountain there were shouts, and a troop of cavalry charged forth. They bore two identifying banners and were led by Yang Zhi and Shi Jin. These two commanders, waving their blades, barred the way of the government officers.
Li Ming with levelled lance advanced on Yang Zhi. Wu rode against Shi Jin with crescent-bladed halberd. The two pairs fought up and down the slope and round and round, each man exerting his utmost skill. Tong Guan, reined in on the bluff, didn't know which to watch.
The four battled for over thirty rounds. Wu thrust at his opponent's heart. Shi Jin twisted, and the halberd slipped by his ribs, horse and rider following the impetus of the lunge. Shi Jin swung his blade, and a bloody head, still encased in its golden helmet, dropped to the ground. Wu's body collapsed beside it.
Li Ming decided he'd better go. But a terrible roar from Yang Zhi scared the soul out of him and set him to trembling so violently that his lance slipped from his nerveless fingers. Yang Zhi chopped with his sword. Li Ming dodged and the blade struck his horse's loins. As its rear quarters sank Li leaped from the saddle. He cast aside his lance and ran. But Yang Zhi with a swift slash cut him down. Poor Li Ming, half his life an army officer, and now it was all gone like a dream.
The two district commanders lay dead on the slope. Yang Zhi and Shi Jin pursued the demoralized government troops, cutting heads like melons.
Tong Guan, with Feng Mei and Bi Sheng on the bluff, dared not go down. At a loss he asked his two generals: "How can we break out of here?"
"Calm yourself, Chancellor," said Feng Mei. "I see an encampment of ours due south. As long as their flag still flies, we can be saved. Commander Bi will remain to protect you, and I will carve open a path and bring them to your rescue."
"The day is growing late," said the chancellor. "Watch for a suitable moment and dash over and return soon."
Grasping his long-handled sword, Feng Mei rode quickly down the slope, and galloped full tilt along the road south. He found the unit under district commander Zhou Xin of Songzhou. They were in a tight formation and were resisting staunchly. Feng Mei was led into the position.
"Where is the chancellor?" Zhou Xin asked.
"On that slope, ahead. He's waiting for your unit to rescue him. There's no time to waste! Get started immediately!"
Zhou Xin ordered his infantry and cavalry to coordinate closely. No one was to fall behind. Body and mind, all were to combine their efforts. With the two commanders leading the shouting troops, the detachment hastened towards the slope.
Before they had gone the length of an arrow-shot a unit cut in from the side. Feng Mei rode forward to engage them, waving his sword. But then he recognized Duan Pengju, district commander of Suizhou. The three joined forces and continued to the foot of the slope. Bi Sheng came down to meet them, and escorted them to the bluff.
They conferred with Tong Guan, who queried: "Shall we fight out of here tonight, or wait until morning?"
"We four will defend you to the death, Chancellor," Feng Mei assured him. "If we break through the encirclement tonight we'll be able to escape the bandits."
As darkness began to fall they heard yells without end on every side and the disorderly beating of drums. Around the second watch the moon was bright. With Feng Mei in the lead and all grouped around Tong Guan in a protective phalanx they made a concerted rush down the slope.
At once, voices shouted: "Don't let Tong Guan get away!"
The officers fought in a due southerly direction. By the fourth watch, after a confused battle, they finally broke through. Tong Guan, on horseback, pressed his fingers to his forehead and reverently thanked the gods of Heaven and Earth.
"How fortunate that we could escape this calamity!" He and his party pushed out of the area and hastened towards Jizhou. Just as they were congratulating themselves they saw on the slope of a mountain ahead a procession of countless torches. Behind them shouts rose once more.
In the light of the flaming brands they could see two bold fellows armed with halberds, walking in advance of a heroic general on a white horse. The rider, who carried a steel-tipped lance, was none other than Lu Junyi the Jade Unicorn, also known as Lu the Magnate. The halberdiers preceding him were Yang Xiong the Pallid and Shi Xiu the Rash. Their force of over three thousand, brimming with militant spirit, now intercepted the government unit.
Lu shouted: "Tong Guan dismount and be bound! What are you waiting for?"
"Enemy soldiers are before and behind us," the chancellor said to his cohorts. "What are we going to do?"
"I'll defend you with my life, Chancellor," said Feng Mei. "We officers will protect you and wrest a way to Jizhou! I'll fight that robber personally!"
Striking his mount, he cantered towards Lu, brandishing his sword. The horses met and the men battled. After only a few rounds Lu parried the big sword with his lance, closed in quickly, and grasped Feng around the waist, simultaneously lifting him from the saddle and kicking his steed away. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu rushed to Lu's support, while outlaw troops dragged off the prisoner.
Bi Sheng, Zhou Xin and Duan Pengju, desperately defending Tong Guan, hurled their soldiers against the brigades preventing their passage, fighting as they advanced. Lu the Magnate gave chase. Tong Guan's beaten army scurried like a bereaved family's dog, darted like fish which escaped the net.
By dawn they had shaken off their pursuers. Jizhou was in sight when, from around the bend of a mountain ahead, a body of infantry shot out. They wore iron breastplates and pink silk turbans, and were led by four commanders.
Who were they? Li Kui with his two axes, Bao Xu holding a sword, and Xiang Chong and Li Gun each wielding spiked shields. They rolled down the slope like a ball of fire, slaughtering government soldiers left and right.
Tong Guan and his officers fled, fighting as they ran. Li Kui carved into the imperial cavalry and cut the legs of Duan Pengju's steed from under it. Raising his axes, with one blow he cracked Duan's skull, with another he sliced his throat. Duan was finished.
When the remnant government troops finally neared Jizhou they were in a sorry state, their helmets over one ear, their neck guards halfway up their cheeks. Men and horses were exhausted. They stopped at a stream to drink and water the animals. A cannon suddenly boomed, and arrows flew at them like a swarm of hornets. Hastily, the soldiers scrambled back up the bank. A troop of cavalry trotted out of a grove, headed by three heroes.
They were Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin, plus Gong Wang and Ding Desun, commanding well over three hundred horsemen. Little bronze bells tinkled on the bridles of the steeds, and they were bedecked with plumes and red tassels. The riders carried light bows and arrows, embroidered pennants and decorated spears. Led by their three commanders, they charged.
They were not a large force, and Zhou Xin rode forward to meet them, while Bi Sheng covered Tong Guan's hasty departure. Zhang Qin grasped Zhou's extended lance with his left hand. His right hand pulled back in a throwing position.
"Take that!" he cried, and a stone struck Zhou on the bridge of his nose, knocking him from his saddle.
Gong Wang and Ding Desun galloped up, and pierced Zhou's throat with their pitchforks. Like grass blighted by frost, like blossoms pelted in the rain, he expired beneath his horse's legs.
The fleeing Tong Guan and Bi Sheng dared not enter Jizhou, but led their remnant force instead through the night in the direction of the Eastern Capital. En route they picked up other escaping soldiers, and together made camp.
Song Jiang, a benevolent and virtuous man, who sought only to shun wickedness and become law-abiding again, had no desire to pursue and slaughter. Afraid his officers would be reluctant to abandon the chase, he immediately dispatched Dai Zong with an order to all his chieftains to gather their commands and return to the mountain stronghold and claim Everywhere trumpets sounded assembly. Commanders in the saddle rhythmically beat their weapons against their metal stirrups, and the infantry sang songs of victory as the outlaw troops, unit by unit, entered Liangshan Marsh and marched into the Water-Girt Fortress.
Seated with Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng in Loyalty Hall, Song directed Pei Xuan to distribute the individual awards. Feng Mei, who had been captured by Lu the Magnate and delivered, bound, to the stronghold, knelt outside the hall. Song Jiang personally untied him, led him into the hall and invited him to be seated. He apologized for having inconvenienced him, and poured him wine to calm his fears. All of the chieftains had gathered, and that day there was general feasting and the dispensing of rewards to the troops.
After two days, Feng Mei was furnished with a saddled horse and preparations were made to escort him down the mountain. He was overjoyed. Song Jiang again apologized.
"Please forgive us for venturing to display our prowess on the battlefield, General," he said. "Our only desire is to obey the emperor and serve our country. Because we've been outlawed we've been compelled to behave in this manner. When you arrive at the imperial court, please explain for us. If we can some day bask again in the light of royal favor, we will never forget your great kindness, living or dead."
Feng Mei kowtowed and thanked Song Jiang for having spared him. Song Jiang supplied an escort which saw him out of the brigands' territory. Feng Mei went back to the capital. Of that we'll say no more.
Again in Loyalty Hall, Song Jiang conferred with Wu Yong and the other chieftains. All of the ambushes deployed during the battle had been planned by Wu Yong. So devastating had been the slaughter that Tong Guan was chilled with fear. Even his dreams were terror-ridden. He had lost two-thirds of his army.
"Once Tong Guan reaches the capital and reports to the emperor he's sure to raise another expedition," Wu Yong predicted. "We must send a man to learn what's going on. Then we can make suitable preparations."
"I agree completely," said Song Jiang. "But which of our brothers should it be?
"Let me go," said someone among those seated in the hall.
The others all looked and they said, "He'd be ideal. He's capable of big things." And because this person went, hundreds of war-craft were constructed outside the walls of Jizhou and on Mount Liang, a huge store of grain was added. Truly, battle chargers perished at the foot of the blue cliffs, boats cutting the waves sank in the weedy green waters.

Three divisions of Song Jiang's vanguard pursued the enemy that day with swords and axes, committing great slaughter. Marshal Tong Guan's forces suffered a grave defeat, a total rout; one of those occasions when drums and gongs are abandoned, pikes and halberds thrown away, a disaster of such dimensions that sons lose fathers, fathers can't find their sons, and brothers call each other's names in vain. Ten thousand government troops fell that day, and the survivors fled over ten miles before they dared pause and make camp.
The Professor had the gong sounded to recall Mount Liang's troops, saying: "No need to finish them off right now. That's enough for a token of what we can do."
The Mount Liang troops returned safely to the mountain stronghold and everyone was rewarded for his efforts.
Meanwhile the Marshal, having lost the battle and many men and horses besides, pitched camp and set up defences as quickly as possible to allow his army to recuperate. His mood was grim as he summoned all his commanders to discuss the situation. Two of his commanders, Feng Mei and Bi Sheng, said: "Do not be downhearted, sir. The rebels knew in advance that we were coming and they were able to set up their positions first. When we got here we did not have good intelligence and we fell into their trap. Bandits like these draw their strength from the mountains and the ability to deploy superior numbers. If they lose the topographical advantage their strength will prove illusory. We must regroup and prepare. Let us do nothing for three days, in order to revive our spirits and rest the horses. After three days we can draw up our troops in the snake formation, using our infantry to lead the attack. This formation is like a big mountain snake: if you strike at the head the tail responds, if you strike at the tail the head responds. And if you strike in the centre both head and tail respond — all are tightly linked. A method like this is certain to bring results."
The Marshal said: "It's a good plan. It has my approval."
Orders were given out and all units of the army drilled in what they had to do. On the third day they breakfasted at dawn. When officers and men had all eaten their fill, the horses were padded out in leather, the troops donned armour and equipped themselves with swords and axes, and bows were strung — as the poet says, there were "weapons thirsting for blood, men and horses swift as the wind." With Generals Feng Mei and Bi Sheng in the lead, this huge host descended on the Marshes of Mount Liang. The army was divided into eight columns, right and left. A squadron of armoured cavalry went ahead to reconnoitre. When they reported back to the Marshal and the main army, they said: "In the spot where the battle was fought the other day we saw no one."
The Marshal was disturbed by what he heard. He visited the two generals of the vanguard and said: "Do you think we should turn back?"
Feng Mei replied: "You must think only of advancing sir, not of turning back. With our snake formation, what is there to fear?"
So the army proceeded and when they were well into the marshes there was still not a single enemy in sight, nothing but water as far as the eye could see and reedbeds and mist rising over the water. Far off on the other bank they could see the mountain with a yellow flag fluttering on its summit. But there was absolutely no sign of movement. The Marshal and his two commanders reined in their horses in front of the troops. In the distance near the opposite shore they could see a small boat among a forest of reeds. In the boat was a man wearing a blue coolie hat and a green coat of woven bamboo. He was all alone, leaning on the gunwale of the boat and fishing. The Marshal's men reached the shore and shouted to the man: "Where are the bandits?" But there was no answer.
The Marshal called for expert archers. Two horsemen stole towards the shore and halted at the water's edge. They fitted arrows to their bows, aimed at the fisherman's back and let fly. The first arrow pinged off the fisherman's hat and fell into the water. The other archer's arrow clattered off the fisherman's coat and also fell into the water. These two were the Marshal's top archers and it gave them quite a surprise. They turned their horses and rode back. Bending respectfully in the saddle they reported to the Marshal: "We hit him with two arrows but they bounced off. He is wearing some kind of protection."
The Marshal ordered up three hundred crack archers from the mounted scouts and lined them up along the shore to fire a salvo. A cloud of arrows sped towards the fisherman but he was quite unperturbed: many fell in the water and others stuck in the boat, but all those which hit the coat or hat dropped harmlessly into the water. Seeing that arrows could not kill the man, the Marshal directed some of his men who could swim to undress and swim to the boat to capture him. Soon forty or fifty of them were in the water. The fisherman heard the splashing behind his boat. Quite unhurriedly he put down his fishing rod and picked up the sweep. He struck them with this as they approached the boat, catching them on the temple or the back of the head or the top of the skull and driving them under. Some of them eventually managed by swimming underwater to return to the bank and went back to find their clothes.
Marshal Tong Guan was furious. He ordered five hundred men into the water. He was determined to catch that fisherman. He warned them that anyone who returned would be put to the sword. So five hundred disrobed and leapt into the water with a loud shout. The fisherman turned his boat round to face the shore and pointing at the Marshal shouted: "You blight on the land, you savage beast, oppressor of the people, this is where you are due to meet your end! You aren't afraid to die?"
Incensed, the Marshal ordered his archers to shoot again.
The fisherman only laughed. "Watch out, because our troops are at hand!" he said. He shook his finger at them and then stripped off his hat and coat and dived into the water. When the five hundred swimmers reached the boat confused cries were heard and they began to disappear beneath the water. For this fisherman was White Eel. The hat he wore had a covering of woven bamboo leaves, but underneath it was made of bronze. The coat too had a sheet of tempered bronze underneath, and it fitted him like a tortoise its shell. Small wonder then that the arrows failed to penetrate. White Eel now dived to the bottom, took out his knife, and set about stabbing the enemy one by one. As they went down the blood came bubbling up. Some managed to swim away and escape. The Marshal watched open-mouthed on the bank. Someone standing beside him said: "Look, the yellow banner on the mountain is moving!"
Marshal Tong Guan took a good look, but he couldn't make out what it meant. Nor could anyone else make any sense of it. Feng Mei said: "Let us divide the three hundred armoured scouts into two sections and send them each a different way round the mountain on reconnaissance, to find out what is going on."
Just as they were approaching the mountain, a thunderous, earth-shattering explosion was heard in the reed-beds and a cloud of smoke came billowing out. The scouts came back from either side to report that it was an ambush, to the Marshal's consternation. Generals Feng and Bi both sent men to tell the troops not to panic. Tens of thousands of government troops with drawn swords now advanced to shouts of "Anyone who retreats will be executed!"

The Marshal watched while, to a thunderous roll of drums on the mountain and bloodcurdling cries from the enemy, a body of horsemen galloped out, all waving yellow pennants, two valiant commanders in the lead. These two, both riding dun horses, were Whiskers and Sergeant Lei. They were leading five thousand cavalry in an attack on the government forces.
The Marshal ordered his two commanders to fight them. The two levelled their lances and charged into battle shouting: "You shameless renegadoes, you'd better surrender, what are you waiting for?"
Sergeant Lei greeted this with derision. "You've come here to die, you oafs, don't you know that? What makes you think you're a match for me?" he shouted.
Bi Sheng angrily slapped his horse, levelled his lance and charged. Sergeant Lei did likewise. The horses met, the weapons rose and fell, the battle raged for over twenty bouts and still there was no victor. Feng Mei seeing his colleague go so long without victory, slapped his horse, whirled his sword and galloped to join in. Whiskers saw and with a shout slapped his horse, twirled his weapon, and galloped to oppose him. Four horses, two pairs of riders, fought it out in front of the armies, while Marshal Tong Guan looked on and applauded.
Eventually the fight strayed some way down a gully. Whiskers and Sergeant Lei broke off, turned their horses and galloped back to their ranks. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng were having none of that and galloped after them. Their opponents set up a cry and fled towards the mountain. The Marshal threw his troops forward, in an all-out attempt to catch them.
A bugle spoke now on the summit and when they looked up they saw missiles flying towards them. Realizing it was an ambush, the Marshal called off the pursuit.
At this point the yellow flag with the four words on it "To Do Heaven's Will" was broken out on the summit. This heralded the appearance up there, amid a forest of duel colour pennants, of that famous Shandong hero, Guardian of Righteousness Song Jiang. Behind him were the military adviser, Professor Wu Yong, Taoist Gongsun, Colonel Hua and the Spearsman, accompanied by a good many troopers with silver spears and gold spears. Livid with rage, the Marshal ordered men up the mountain to capture Song Jiang. Dividing into two columns his troops attempted to scale the heights. There was a thunder of gongs and drums followed by the sound of the heroes laughing. This added fuel to the fire, and Marshal Tong Guan grinding his teeth shouted out: "How dare these bandits laugh at me! I shall capture them by myself!"
General Feng Mei warned him: "Marshal, it's a trap. You mustn't put yourself at risk. Withdraw the troops and give us time to find out what is going on before we launch an attack."
"Balls!" shouted the Marshal. "Now we are here there can be no turning back. We must join battle and fight them night and day. Now I have seen them I won't countenance a withdrawal."
Before he finished speaking a cry went up from the rear: "An enemy force is attacking west of the mountain and they've cut our lines in two," came the report. The horrified Marshal with Feng Mei and Bi Sheng galloped back to rescue the rearguard. But now drums sounded on the east and another cavalry troop galloped out. Half had red pennants, the other half blue pennants. Led by two tall commanders five thousand horsemen charged behind red and blue banners maintaining perfect order. The red leader was Thunderclap and the blue leader Scimitar. As they came on they shouted: "Marshal Tong Guan, we're going to have your head!"
Outraged, the Marshal sent Feng Mei to take on Scimitar while Bi Sheng engaged Thunderclap.
Hearing the panic-stricken cries of the rearguard, the Marshal now had the gongs sound the retreat, ordering his forces to end all attempts at pursuit of the enemy, break off and withdraw.
When Whiskers and Sergeant Lei led the yellow pennant troops in a charge, pressing home their attack on two sides, the Marshal's troops were thrown into utter confusion. Feng Mei and Bi Sheng flanking their commander fled for their lives. As they were fleeing another body of fierce troops came charging in from one side and began to trade blows. Of these troops one half had white pennants and the other half black pennants. Amongst the black and the white pennants were two tall leaders with five thousand troops who blocked the way. Twin Rods was the leader of the black company, Leopard's Head the leader of the white company. They both suddenly shouted out: "Marshal Tong Guan, you evil counsellor, where do you think you can go to? Come and be killed!" And they charged straight into the enemy.
One of the Marshal's commanders engaged Twin Rods and another took on Leopard's Head. Before the second of these had had more than a few bouts with Leopard's Head he realized he was not up to it and tried to escape. With a roar Leopard's Head redoubled his efforts and caught him with a spear thrust which flung him dead from his horse. The other government commander, when he saw what had happened to his colleague, had no heart to continue the fight. He blocked his opponent's two rods and abruptly turned his horse and fled. Twin Rods pursued him furiously.
With the two armies locked in confused combat Marshal Tong Guan ordered his men to fight their way out again. Then a great shout went up from the leading division as a crowd of infantry shot out from behind the mountain and attacked the centre of his force. They were led from the front by a monk and a pilgrim, who came on shouting: "Don't let Marshal Tong Guan get away!" The monk was one whose thoughts dwelt not at all on repentance but rather on killing, one whose nickname was the Flowery Monk, in other words Lu Zhishen. The pilgrim was that killer of the tiger on Jingyang Pass, one of the boldest brethren of Mount Liang, Pilgrim Wu Song.
Under the onslaught from these two, the Marshal's main army scattered in all directions. For those in front there was no way forward, for those in the rear there was no retreat, Marshal Tong Guan was obliged with Feng Mei and Bi Sheng to carve a path through the encircling troops and flee past the mountain. As they were trying to get their breath back there was a thunder of gunfire and a tremendous burst of drums and gongs and two fierce leaders appeared with a body of infantry to block their way. It was Snake and Scorpion, each wielding a five-tined fork and with a company of footsoldiers. Rather than face them, the Marshal's troops attempted to circle round them, but the enemy attacked from every side, scattering them like chaff. Feng and Bi had just managed to get the Marshal away from this when Snake and Scorpion popped up in the path of the horses, threatening them with their forks. The Marshal hastily slapped his horse and galloped off to one side, with Feng and Bi after him.
Two other government generals, Han and Wang with a superhuman effort managed to break out of the centre. They made some headway, but had still not got their breath back when they heard bloodcurdling yells ahead of them and out from the greenwood burst another body of troops, with two leaders, who stood blocking their path: Twin Spears and Hasty. Without a word these two charged the Marshal and his party. General Wang levelled his lance and rode to meet them. Hasty's axe rose and fell and Wang fell dead from his horse. Han who had ridden to Wang's assistance was killed by a thrust from Twin Spears.
Feng and Bi risking their own lives to defend the Marshal fled with him. The clamour of drums and gongs was all around them and it was impossible to know whence the next attack was coming. When the Marshal stopped his horse on a knoll to look about him, the enemy were everywhere, four troops of cavalry, supported by two divisions of infantry on either flank, in a formation like a wicker basket or winnowing sieve. And the main army of Mount Liang was advancing fast.
Marshal Tong Guan's forces were like clouds driven by the wind. But as he watched, a body of horsemen appeared on the hillside and he recognised the standards of two of his own commanders, Generals Wu and Li. Their lances were splintered and their halberds shattered. These were the remnants of defeated troops who had sought refuge here on Gemstone Mountain. After cheers and greetings, they started to send troops up the mountain but there were more shouts and a troop of cavalry galloped out and two well-known flags were unfurled. Led by two intrepid commanders these charged the government troops. Who were the commanders? Who else but the Blue-Faced Beast and the Tattooed Dragon! They sped to cut off the two government generals. Li levelled his lance and rode to meet the Blue-Faced Beast, while Wu with his halberd took on the Tattooed Dragon. The two fighting couples drifted this way and that over the mountainside, circling and turning, each man applying every ounce of his strength and skill.
The Marshal reined in his horse to watch. After some thirty bouts Wu struck with his halberd at Tattooed Dragon's chest. The latter dodged and the weapon whistled past his ribs. As Wu and his horse shot forward Tattooed Dragon's sword caught him and the next thing his helmet was rolling at his horse's feet, the bloody head still inside it. That put paid to Wu. When Li strove to turn his horse and flee, the Blue-Faced Beast gave a bloodcurdling yell which struck such fear into Li's heart that he lost all control over his weapon. When the Blue-Faced Beast struck downward at his head, he swayed aside and the sword lodged in his horse's haunches. The horse staggered, throwing its rider, who lost his spear altogether. He tried to run off but Blue-Faced Beast was too quick for him and aimed a second blow which found its target. Thus did the wretched Li, a general of universal renown, discover how wealth and fame are but an illusion.
So now two of the government generals lay dead there on the mountainside. Blue-Faced Beast and the Tattooed Dragon pursued the defeated army and it was like splitting melons or cutting gourds.
Marshal Tong Guan, Feng Mei and Bi Sheng were watching from further up the mountain. They dared not come down; no course now seemed open to them. "We're never going to get out of this," they thought. But then Feng Mei said to the Marshal: "We may be saved, sir! I have just spotted a large body of government troops taking up defensive positions due south of here. Their flags are still flying. They can rescue us. If General Bi stays here to guard you, I will fight my way through and fetch them. We'll get you out, I promise!"
The Marshal said: "It's getting dark. Wait for the best moment and then go and return with all possible speed."
Feng Mei heaving his weapon charged off down the mountain and carved out a passage southward. When he reached them, he found that the government troops were those of General Zhou; they had closed ranks and were putting up a stiff resistance. When General Zhou saw Feng Mei approaching, he asked: "Where is the Marshal?"
"Up there on the mountain," Feng Mei replied. "He's waiting for you to come to the rescue. There's no time to waste. You must move at once."
General Zhou gave the order for cavalry and infantry to cover each other and to advance with single-minded determination, maintaining their proper formation. The two generals led from the front and the troops raised a cheer as they charged up the slope. Before they had travelled a bowshot they perceived an apparent threat from some troops on their flank. Feng Mei rode to meet them whirling his sword, but found them to be troops belonging to the government commander who had fled from Twin Rods, General Duan. The three generals now combined their armies and continued to advance to the foot of the mountain where Bi came to meet them. When they reached Marshal Tong Guan they held a conference. "Should we try to break out tonight? Or would it be better to wait for dawn?"
Feng Mei said: "We four will give our lives to protect the Marshal. Our only chance is to break out tonight."
As night began to fall, there was a hubbub of ceaseless shouts all around, punctuated by the sound of gongs and drums. About the second watch when the moon rose, they made a desperate charge down the mountain, Feng Mei leading and the whole government force clustered around the Marshal in the middle. Assailed from all sides by shouts of "Don't let Marshal Tong Guan get away!" they attempted desperately to force their way southward. The battle raged till the early hours, when finally they broke through in the centre. The Marshal pressed a hand to his forehead and gave thanks to the spirits of heaven and earth, saying: "Heaven be praised, we have come through!" Then he urged his horse forward, heading for Jizhou.
But while they were still rejoicing at their escape, they saw a mass of torches, countless numbers, on a hillside ahead of them, and there was shouting behind them as well. Lit by the torches were two tall heroes twirling halberds, followed by another on a white horse and bearing a steel-tipped lance. Who was this? It was none other than the Unicorn, and the two with halberds who preceded him were Morbid and Madcap. The torchlight revealed that they were leading a force of over three thousand. There they stood, full of spirit and energy, blocking the way ahead. The Unicorn shouted out: "Marshal Tong Guan, get off your horse and let us tie you up, what are you waiting for?"
The Marshal said to his companions: "An ambush in front, pursuit behind, whatever can we do?"
Feng Mei said: "I am prepared to sacrifice my life in your service sir. The rest of you stay here and guard the Marshal, while I make for Jizhou. I will fight these bastards by myself!"
Slapping his horse and whirling his sword he charged the Unicorn. The two horses converged and before they had fought twenty bouts the Unicorn knocked his opponent's sword aside with a blow from his lance, came in close and seized him by the midriff. Kicking his horse away he made him prisoner. Morbid and Madcap hurried forward to help and with their troops dragged Feng Mei off unceremoniously. The other government generals, valiantly defending the Marshal, charged the forces that were blocking their path and fought their way out. They made off with the Unicorn in pursuit. The defeated army scattered like abandoned dogs or fish that have escaped the net.
By daybreak Marshal Tong Guan and his remaining commanders had managed to shake off the pursuit and were approaching Jizhou. Suddenly from behind a hill in front a company of footsoldiers appeared. They all had armour and red turbans and there were four leaders. First was Iron Ox with his two axes, then Pluto with a big sword and Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with their shields and javelins, and they came rolling forward like a hot coal over the face of the earth, scattering the terrified government troops before them. The Marshal and his commanders, fighting a desperate rearguard action, managed to escape.
Iron Ox continued to scythe his way through the government ranks with his axes. He took a swing at the legs of General Duan's horse, knocked him off and split his skull. For good measure he chopped the head off, and that was the end of it, so far as General Duan was concerned! By the time the government troops were nearing Jizhou they were in a parlous state. Their helmets were battered down over their ears, and neckpieces twisted round to the front. None of the three divisions had any fight left in them. The men were exhausted, the horses spent. When they reached the banks of a stream they all went down to drink. Then gunfire sounded on the opposite bank and arrows began to fly like locusts. As they scrambled back up the bank a troop of horsemen swept out of a wood. It was Hotshot with Stripes and Scarface and three hundred cavalry. These troops had horses decked with bronze bells, pheasant's feathers and red tassels, light bows with short arrows, embroidered pennants and decorated lances. Their commanders led the charge.
General Zhou saw that the attacking force was small and rode to encounter them, while Bi Sheng tried to get the Marshal away. General Zhou loosed his horse's reins and levelled his spear. But Hotshot grasped the spear with his left hand and with his right groped in his saddlebag like someone hunting for treasure. Then he let out a cry. "Pow!" — his stone caught General Zhou square on the nose and knocked him from his horse. Stripes and Scarface rushed to lend a hand and stabbed their pitchforks into his throat. Like a plant burnt by the frost, like flowers shaken from the trees by rain, General Zhou's life came to an abrupt end.
The Marshal and Bi Sheng had managed to get away. They dared not try to enter Jizhou, but with the shattered remnants of their army marched all that night towards the capital. On the way they collected some of their own fleeing troops.
Now Song Jiang was both humane and intelligent, and wanted only to avoid evil and be reconciled to the court. He would not countenance indiscriminate persecution and slaughter. He feared however that the other leaders would not agree and would be determined to pursue the Marshal, so he hurriedly sent Magic Messenger with orders for all the leaders to recall their men and return to the mountain stronghold so they could claim their rewards.
Everywhere gongs rang out recalling the troops. The mounted leaders rode with jingling stirrups, the marching men sang their songs of victory; in their various companies they made their way back to the Marshes of Mount Liang, returning one by one to the Place of Many Meanderings. Song Jiang, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun reached the stronghold and went to take their places in the Ceremonial Hall. Sterling was ordered to calculate everyone's reward. The Unicorn brought in his captive, General Feng Mei, who knelt before the dais. Song Jiang himself untied his bonds and invited him to be seated. With his own hands he offered him the cup, doing his best to put him at his ease. The other leaders all took their places and many animals were slaughtered that day to feast the armies.
Feng Mei was entertained for two days, before a horse was saddled and he was escorted down the mountain. He greatly enjoyed himself. Song Jiang made him a speech in which he said: "If we have given you offence, General, please forgive us. We have no evil intention. Our dearest wish is to be reconciled to the court and use our strength in the service of our country. Unjust and unprincipled men have stood in our way. I hope that when you return to the capital you will put in a good word for us. If I have the good fortune to meet you again some day, I shall certainly not have forgotten your noble character." When Feng Mei in turn had expressed his gratitude for the sparing of his life, he mounted and rode down the mountain. Song Jiang had him escorted as far as the outskirts of the capital. Of this no more.
Song Jiang returned to the Ceremonial Hall to discuss things with the Professor and the other leaders. Now this method they had employed of the multiple ambushes had all been planned and organized by the Professor. They had succeeded in striking fear to the heart of Marshal Tong Guan and shattering his confidence. The horror of it in fact would revisit the Marshal in his sleep. He had lost two thirds of his army. The Professor now said: "When Marshal Tong Guan gets back to the capital he will report to the officials. It is inconceivable that they will not send another army. Someone must go to the capital to gather intelligence and report back, so we can be prepared."
Song Jiang said: "I am in complete agreement with what the Professor says. Which of you is willing to go?"
"I'd like to go!" It was someone from quite far down in the ranking who volunteered. But everyone agreed: "If he goes, the mission is sure to be a success!" And indeed, if this person had not gone things would have been different. As a result of his mission, a new plan is to be drawn up, another government army defeated. Or to put it another way,

*Armies will clash and horses perish among blue hills,*
*The boat tossed on the billows will sink beneath green waters.*

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## 10 border general Commandants converge on Mount Liang & Confer on Taking Mount Liang Marsh; Song Jiang Defeats Marshal Gao the Ball the 1st Time

The volunteer was Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller. Song Jiang said: "We depend entirely on you to find out all about their military preparations. But you'd better have someone to help."
"I'll be glad to go along," said Li Kui.
Song Jiang laughed. "You, Black Whirlwind who never stirs up trouble!"
"I won't make any trouble this time."
Song Jiang shouted at him to get out, then asked: "Which of you brothers will go?"
"How about me?" queried Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon.
"Good," said Song Jiang. He was very pleased.
That day the two men packed some belongings and went down the mountain.
Meanwhile, Tong Guan and Bi Sheng neared the Eastern Capital with forty thousand men, all that was left of their beaten army. They ordered their commanders to lead the various units back to their camps. Tong Guan and Bi Sheng entered the capital with only the imperial guards. The chancellor removed his armor and went to call on Marshal Gao.
The two exchanged courtesies, and Tong was invited to be seated in a quiet alcove of the rear hall. He related in detail the defeats he suffered in two major encounters, the killing of his eight top commanders, his heavy losses in troops and horses, the capture of Feng Mei, and his own general dismay.
"Don't let it upset you, Chancellor," said Gao. "All you have to do is give the emperor a false report. Who would dare petition against you! I'll go with you to the prime minister. We'll work something out."
Tong and Gao mounted their horses and rode to the premier's mansion. An aide announced: "Chancellor Tong has returned." Prime Minister Cai Jing guessed that he had been defeated, and when told that Gao Qiu was calling with him, directed that they be ushered into his study. Tong kowtowed before the premier, his tears falling like rain.
"Don't take it so hard," said Cai. "I've heard you've had heavy losses."
"In that bandit marsh it's impossible to advance without boats," said Gao. "The chancellor had only cavalry and foot soldiers. That's why he lost the initiative and fell for the bandits' ruse."
Tong told about his defeat, and the premier said: "You lost an enormous number of troops, expended vast amounts of money and grain, and had eight column commanders annihilated. How dare I report this to the emperor?"
Tong Guan again kowtowed. "Cover up for me, Premier, I beg you! Save my life!"
"Tomorrow, at the royal audience, I will say only: 'The weather was extremely hot, our soldiers were not accustomed to it. So they discontinued the action and withdrew.' If he grows angry and says: 'This canker in our hearts must be eliminated, otherwise, the results will be calamitous.' how should I reply?" queried the premier.
"I don't mean to boast," said Gao. "But if you allow me to lead an expedition, I'll pacify those bandits in one engagement!"
"Since you're willing to go yourself, Marshal, naturally that's fine. I'll propose you tomorrow for commander-in-chief."
"There's just one thing. Besides an imperial decree mustering an army, I need boats. They should either be allocated from military and civilian craft, or I should be authorized to buy lumber at the official price and build my own ships of battle. Only by advancing simultaneously on land and on water, on boats and on horseback, will we be able to win the day."
"That won't be any problem," said Cai.
The keeper of the gate came in and said: "Feng Mei has returned."
Tong Guan was delighted. The premier directed that he enter. He asked the general what had happened.

Feng Mei kowtowed. “Song Jiang released as many as possible of those he captured and took the rest up the mountain. Not only didn’t he kill us, but he gave us travel expenses and allowed us to return home. It is for that reason that I am able to see you noble countenance again.”
“It’s a bandit trick and an insult to our government.” said Gao. “We shouldn’t muster local troops, but go as far afield as Shandong and Hebei to select able men who’ll go with me.”
“Since we’re all agreed,” said Cai, “we’ll meet again tomorrow and petition the emperor.”
Tong and Gao returned to their respective headquarters.
They met again in the Waiting Chamber the following day at three strokes after the fifth watch. When the drums sounded, officials assembled in the imperial courtyard according to rank. All kowtowed, then arose and stood below the Jade Staircase in two groups—one civil, the other military.
The chief of ceremonies, holding his staff of office, called: “If anyone has a petition, let him come forward. If there are none, this court will adjourn.”
Prime Minister Cai stepped forth and addressed the emperor. “We dispatched Tong Guan, Chancellor of Military Affairs, with a large army in a punitive expedition against the bandits of Liangshan Marsh. But the weather turned very hot and our forces had not yet adapted to it. Moreover, the bandit territory is all water and bogs. It’s impossible to move without boats. Our infantry and cavalry were unable to advance. And so the expedition was called off and our forces returned to their camps, where they are waiting now for your imperial orders.”
“How can they go again, since the weather is so hot?” cried the emperor.
“Tong Guan Will report to the Military Procurate for punishment. We propose appointing a new commander and sending out another expedition. We request your royal decree.”
“Those brigands are indeed a canker in our heart. They must be exterminated. But who will undertake this task for me?”
Gao Qiu stepped forward. “Though I have no talents, I would gladly strain like a beast of burden to wipe out the bandits. I beg for your imperial command.”
“Since you are willing to share my difficulties, I order you to muster an army.”
“Liangshan Marsh is over eight hundred //in circumference. Without fighting ships it is impossible to advance. I request permission, therefore, to cut timber in the neighborhood of the marsh and have carpenters build boats. Either that, or grant me funds with which to buy civilian boats and convert them to military use.”
“I authorize you to do whatever is necessary and possible. Only avoid causing harm to the people.”
“I would never dare! Please don’t set too strict a time limit, and I will endeavor to succeed.”
The emperor called for silken robes and golden armor, and presented them to Marshal Gao Qiu. He also selected an auspicious day for the expedition to commence.
When the imperial audiences ended, Tong Guan and Gao Qiu saw the prime minister back to his mansion. Cai directed the Council of Administration to transmit the royal decree for the mustering of a new expeditionary army.
“There are ten commandants who distinguished themselves in expeditions against neighboring states like the Guifang, the Tangut, the Golden Tartars, or the Great Liao,” said Gao. “They’re excellent military men. I’d like you to appoint them my generals.”
Premier Cai agreed. He issued a directive ordering the ten commandants to report at Jizhou with ten thousand crack troops each. All of the leaders had formerly been robbers in the greenwood. Later, they were amnestied, and rose rapidly to become high officials. Skilful and courageous, they won something of a reputation for themselves. Now, they received directives ordering them to Jizhou within a prescribed time, each heading a column of ten thousand, on pain of military discipline if they were late.
In the Jiankang district of Jinling was a naval unit. Its commanding officer was a man named Dragon Dream Liu, because his mother, when she conceived him, had dreamed that a black dragon had entered her womb. He grew up to be an excellent swimmer. Liu won distinction in a campaign against bandits on the Xiajiang River in Sichuan and was raised to the rank of admiral. He had fifteen thousand sailors under his command, and five hundred rowed vessels. His responsibility was the area south of the river.
Gao wanted this naval unit and its boats, and he ordered their immediate transfer. He also sent a trusted confidant, an infantry colonel named Niu Pangxi, to search up and down the river and along all its tributaries for more boats. Niu was to bring any craft he found to Jizhou where they were to be turned over for Gao’s use.
There were many generals in Gao’s headquarters. Two of the most able of these were brothers—Dang Shiying and Dang Shixiong, both field commanders and both extremely brave. From the imperial guards, Gao drew another fifteen thousand crack troops, bringing his total force up to a hundred and thirty thousand. He had grain delivered to the various columns, so that it could be issued to the troops during their march. Daily, he had armor and clothing put in order, and pennants and banners manufactured. But he still was not ready.
Meanwhile, Dai Zong and Liu Tang spent a few days in the Eastern Capital collecting information. Then they hastened back through the night to the mountain fortress and rendered a detailed report. When Song Jiang heard that Marshal Gao was personally going to lead an expedition against him, and that he had gathered a hundred and thirty thousand troops from all over, and that ten commandants would be serving as generals, he was shocked and frightened. He went into conference with Wu Yong.
“Have no fear, brother,” said the military advisor. “Didn’t Zhuge Liang defeat Cao Cao’s army of a hundred thousand in ancient times with only three thousand men? I’ve heard of those ten commandants. They’ve served the imperial court well. Of course they appeared very heroic when there was no one around who could match them. But today, against our band of fine brothers—veritable wolves and tigers every one—they’re out of date. You’ve nothing to worry about. Before the ten columns arrive, I’ll give them a scare!”
“How will you do that?”
“They’re to meet in Jizhou. I’ll send two quick killers to wait in the outskirts. When the troops draw near, they’ll slaughter a few.”
“Who do you have in mind?”
“Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin and General Two Spears Dong Ping.”
Song Jiang gave the two named chieftains a thousand men each. He ordered them to patrol the outskirts of Jizhou, and intercept and kill approaching government troops. He also directed his naval commanders to prepare to seize enemy boats. Assignments were given, as well, to other chieftains. No need to say what these were; you’ll learn later on.
Although more than twenty days had passed Gao was still in the capital. The emperor sent a message urging him to march. Gao ordered his Imperial Guards force to leave the city first, and he directed some thirty-odd singers and dancers, girls and boys from the entertainment quarter, to go along for their amusement.
On the date of the Guards’ departure, Gao pledged before the flag, took his leave of the emperor, and got ready to set forth. A month had gone by, and it was now typical early autumn weather. Government officials, large and small, were waiting at the pavilion ten //beyond the city gate to see them off. Marshal Gao, in full armor, rode a battle charger with a golden saddle. Preceding him were five auxiliary mounts with equipage encrusted with jade. To his left and right were the brothers Dang Shiying and Dang Shixiong. Behind came generals of the Imperial Guards, masters of arms, generals of defense, generals of militia, and other high-ranking officers. The army which followed marched in neat ranks.
At the pavilion Gao dismounted and bid the assembled officials farewell. The ceremonial wine-drinking send-off completed, he again climbed into the saddle and proceeded towards Jizhou. He allowed his soldiers to pillage freely en route, much to the detriment of the local population.
One after another the ten columns neared Jizhou. Commandant Wang Wente, at the head of his column, was more than forty //from his destination after a forced march. He was still driving hard when they reached a place called Phoenix Tail Slope. At the foot of the slope was a large grove. Wang’s advance unit was just skirting this when they heard the crash of a gong.
From between the rear of the grove and the base of the hill a troop of cavalry trotted out and blocked the road. Its leader wore a helmet and armor and carried a bow and arrows. Attached to the sheath and quiver of these weapons were two small yellow pennants. One was inscribed: *Heroic General Two Spears.* The other read: *Gallant Duke of Ten Thousand Households.* In each hand he grasped a steel-tipped spear. It was none other than Dong Ping, the boldest assault leader in Liangshan Marsh, known as Dong the Brash.
He reined in his steed athwart the road and shouted: “Where are you from? Come down from your mounts and be tied. What are you waiting for?”
Wang checked his horse and laughed. “Even jars and jugs have two ears. You must have heard of us ten commandants. We’ve won scores of commendations, we’re famous. I’m Wang Wente, the foremost among us.”
Dong Ping laughed. “You’re a rustic lout who couldn’t kill anyone but his mother’s lover!”
Commandant Wang was furious. “Rebellious bandit! How dare you insult me!”
He clapped his horse, levelled his lance and charged. Dong Ping, both spears horizontal, met him head on. They fought for thirty rounds, with neither emerging the victor.
Wang realized he couldn’t defeat Dong Ping. “Rest a while,” he shouted. He rode back to his position. Wang instructed his column not to remain and give battle but to break through.
With the commandant in the lead, the column smashed open the road block and, yelling, fought their way free. Dong Ping and his men followed in close pursuit. As the column passed the grove, another cavalry troop appeared suddenly before them. In the lead was Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin.
“Halt!” he shouted.
He flung a stone at Wang Wente’s head. Wang tried to dodge, but it struck him on the helmet. Bending low over his saddle, Wang fled. The two chieftains gave chase. They had nearly caught up, when another unit cut in ahead at an angle. Wang recognized the column led by Commandant Yang Wen, hurrying to his rescue. Dong Ping and Zhang Qin dared not come any closer. They withdrew.
The two columns entered Jizhou, where they were received by the prefect Zhang Shuye. A few days later word came that Marshal Gao and his army were approaching. The ten commandants went out to meet him, and escorted him into the city. The prefectural office was converted temporarily into an army headquarters, and all rested.
Marshal Gao ordered the ten columns to camp in the outskirts of Jizhou. When Dragon Dream Liu arrived with his naval forces they would all set forth together. The columns did as directed, felling timber on the nearby hills and confiscating doors and windows of the villagers to build shelters and make beds for themselves. They caused severe losses to the local people.
Gao remained in his headquarters in the city, grabbing more recruits for his expedition. Anyone who had no silver for bribes was put in the foremost assault ranks. But if a man was able to spread a bit of money around he stayed in the central army and received frequent commendations for “valor.” There was a great deal of this kind of corruption.
Dragon Dream Liu and his flotilla arrived after only a day or two, and Liu reported to Gao. The marshal summoned the ten commandants to join them in a strategy conference. Wang Huan had a proposal.
“Let the infantry and cavalry go ahead and lure out the bandits, then send in the naval forces to destroy their lair. They won’t be able to fight on two fronts, and we’ll capture them all.”
Gao agreed. He ordered Wang Huan and Xu Jing to lead the vanguard, Wang Wente and Mei Zhan to bring up the rear, Zhang Kai and Yang Wen to command the left flank, Han Cunbao and Li Congji to command the right, Xiang Yuanzhen and Jing Zhong to be ready as reinforcements for front and rear. Dang Shixiong with three thousand crack troops joined the flotilla to aid Dragon Dream Liu and observe the battle.
Each unit now had its orders. After three days of preparation, they invited Gao to review them. The marshal came out of the city and personally inspected the columns, one by one. He then directed them, plus the naval forces, to set out for Liangshan Marsh.
Dong Ping and Zhang Qin returned to the fortress and gave a detailed report. Song Jiang and his chieftains led the outlaw army down the mountain. Before they had gone very far, they came within sight of the foe. The adversary forces halted within arrow shot of each another and set up their battle positions.
Commandant Wang Huan rode forward from the government vanguard, carrying a long lance.
“Unrighteous bandits, desperate rustics,” he shouted, “do you recognize General Wang Huan?”
The embroidered banners on the opposite side parted and Song Jiang rode forth. “Commandant Wang,” he called respectfully, “you’re of a venerable age. You shouldn’t be going into combat for the state. Your opponent might make a slip and put an end to your blameless life. Go back. Send a younger man to fight.”
Wang was furious. “The mark of the criminal is on your face, petty functionary! Dare you oppose Heaven’s soldiers!”
“Don’t insist, Commandant. These bold fellows of mine who ‘act on Heaven’s behalf’ wouldn’t necessarily lose to you.”
Wang Huan’s reply was to level his lance and charge. From behind Song Jiang a warrior rode out, his own lance horizontal, the bells on his steed’s bridle jingling. It was Panther Head Lin Chong, and he galloped to engage his adversary.
The horses met, the soldiers yelled. Marshal Gao reined in his steed and watched from the front lines. The men on both sides shouted and cheered. Cavalrymen rose in their stirrups and infantrymen pushed back their helmets to get a better view. The contestants displayed their utmost skill. Nearly eighty rounds they fought, with neither emerging the victor. Trumpets sounded and the combatants separated and returned to their positions. Commandant Jing Zhong went to the forward army and bowed from the saddle to Marshal Gao. “I’d like to have a go at the bandits. I request your permission.”
Gao ordered Jing to proceed. Bridle bells behind Song Jiang again jingled and Huyan Zhuo rode out to meet the challenger. Jing, wielding a long-handled blade, was astride a melon-yellow steed. The contenders met and fought twenty rounds. Huyan executed a feint, parried the big blade, and brought his steel rods with full force down on Jing’s head, spattering his brain matter. Eyes bulging, Jing fell to the ground, dead. Gao had lost 1 of his commandants. He urgently dispatched another—Xiang Yuanzhen. Xiang flew to the front with levelled lance. “Bandits,” he cried, “who dares do battle with me?” General 2 Spears Dong Ping surged to the front and engaged the enemy. Before they had fought ten rounds Xiang whirled his mount around and rode off, trailing his lance. Dong Ping clapped his horse and chased after him. Instead of entering his position, Xiang, apparently flurried, skirted its edge and continued to flee, with Dong Ping in hot pursuit. Xiang socketed his lance, grasped his bow with his left hand, fitted an arrow with his right, and stretched the string to its full. Suddenly, he twisted around and shot. At the twang of the bow, Dong Ping threw up a warding hand, but the arrow struck him in the right arm. He dropped his lance and galloped back. Xiang, now the pursuer, readied another arrow. Huyan Zhuo and Lin Chong hastened out and escorted Dong to the safety of the position. Marshal Gao ordered a mass attack just as Song Jiang was directing that Dong Ping be returned to fortress. The rear guard was unable to hold, and the outlaws scattered. Gao chased them as far as the water’s edge. There he dispatched scouts to make contact with the government naval forces. These, meanwhile, under Dragon Dream Liu and Dang Shixiong, were winding deep into the marsh. Mist and reeds obscured the creeks and rivulets. The masts of the government flotilla were strung out over a distance of ten //. Cannon sounded from the mountain slope and from every side small boats converged. The soldiers on the government craft, who were rather frightened to begin with, completely panicked when they saw the small craft swarming out from the depths of the reeds and cutting the government vessels off from each other. Most of them abandoned ship and fled. The bold fellows of Mount Liang were quick to take advantage of the confusion. Beating drums and gongs, they propelled their small boats forward. Dragon Dream Liu and Dang Shixiong hastily turned their vessel around. But the shallow channel they had navigated earlier had been jammed with logs and brushwood by the outlaws, snagging oars and blocking passage. More soldiers leaped into the water. Dragon Dream Liu divested himself of his armor, crawled up the bank, and struck out along a path. Dang Shixiong, unwilling to leave the vessel, ordered the sailors to row into a tributary. Before they had gone two //, they saw ahead three small boats, commanded by the three Ruan brothers, each of whom grasped a spear. As the boats neared the government craft, the remaining government soldiers jumped into the water. Dang stood alone on the prow with a long lance, facing Ruan the Second. As the boats of Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh pressed closer, Ruan the Second dived into the water. Dang realized his danger. He, too, jumped, abandoning his lance. Suddenly, Zhang Heng the boat hand shot up from beneath. He grabbed Dang by the hair and around the waist, and tossed him dripping into the reeds. A dozen or so brigands who had been hiding there tied Dang securely and took him off to the fortress. Gao saw that his entire flotilla was in disarray and that his men were fleeing towards the mountains. His boats, all bearing the flag of Dragon Dream Liu, had been rounded up and captured. Gao’s water approach had failed. He ordered his troops back to Jizhou. New measures would have to be considered. It was late in the day when they started their march. All around cannon suddenly thundered and Song Jiang’s forces attacked from several sides. Marshal Gao could only groan in dismay. Truly, happiness has not yet arrived when trouble returns; illness has just receded when misery descends again. A marshal became a man who had lost his way, 10 columns of militant soldiers turned into a defeated rabble. And as a result, army-men could not return to their camps, naval forces fled to a dream world.

After the forces of Mount Liang have inflicted two defeats on Marshal Tong Guan, Song Jiang and the Professor discuss matters and decide that they should send someone to the capital to find out exactly how things stand. When they receive the report, they will prepare for battle.
Hardly had they reached this decision when Dai Zong, the Magic Messenger spoke up: “I would like to go,” he said.
Song Jiang said: “No one is better than you at getting intelligence. But it would still be best if you had someone to go with you and assist you.”
Iron Ox said: “I’ll go along and lend him a hand.”
Song Jiang found this humorous. “You’re the one who never causes any trouble of course,” he said.
“Well this time I promise not to, if you let me go,” said Iron Ox.
But Song Jiang just told him he must withdraw his offer and asked again: “Which of you is prepared to go?”
The Red-Haired Devil said: “Why don’t I go?”
Song Jiang was satisfied with this arrangement. The two of them packed their things the same day and set off down the mountain.
We shall not follow the Magic Messenger and the Red-Haired Devil on their mission to gather intelligence in the Eastern Capital, but describe how Marshal Tong Guan and his lieutenant, Bi Sheng, had rounded up some forty thousand of their defeated troops along the road and as they approached the capital had ordered the regional commanders to take their troops back to barracks, so that only the imperial guard entered the city. Marshal Tong Guan took off his armour and uniform and went straight to Marshal Gao’s palace to discuss matters. After a formal greeting he was invited into a secluded chamber at the back. He recounted how two armies had been lost and eight divisions captured with most of their troops, and how Feng Mei had been taken alive and all the rest of the sorry tale.
“Don’t you worry,” Marshal Gao said, “we will have to conceal all this from the Emperor, of course. Nobody would be fool enough to tell him! You and I must go and talk to the Grand Preceptor and come up with a new strategy.”
So they mounted and rode over to the Grand Preceptor’s palace. The latter had heard that Marshal Tong Guan was back and guessed he had not been victorious. When Marshals Tong Guan and Gao were announced he had them shown into the library for the interview. Marshal Tong Guan prostrated himself, shedding many a tear. “Don’t worry about it,” the Grand Preceptor said. “I already know about your defeat.”
Marshal Gao said: “The bandits live among the marshes. They cannot be attacked without boats. The General faced them with only cavalry and infantry. That is the reason he could not prevail and fell into their trap.”
Marshal Tong Guan described how he had been bamboozled, and the Grand Preceptor said: “You have lost a lot of troops and wasted money and supplies. Eight armies were destroyed. I don’t see how we can tell the Emperor all this.”
Marshal Tong Guan humbly said: “I beg you to help me by concealing it. My life depends on it!”
“Then tomorrow you must say to His Majesty that the weather was too hot and the troops could not endure the conditions, so you temporarily called a halt to the campaign. But the question is, what are we all going to say if His Majesty is angered and says ‘An internal threat like this, if not thoroughly eradicated is likely to return to plague us’?”
Marshal Gao said: “I don’t want to boast, but if you can procure me the troops I will go myself and settle the affair once and for all.”
“If you are willing to go that is certainly the best solution. I can guarantee to get you appointed tomorrow.”
Gao also said: “There’s just one thing. There will have to be an imperial decree authorizing the levy of troops and the building of boats. We must either commandeer existing public and private boats or use public funds to buy timber and other materials to construct boats for the purpose. Unless we attack by land and water simultaneously, with both cavalry and waterborne troops, I can’t get the job done within the required time.”
“That is no problem.”
While this discussion was going on, the doorman came in and said: “Feng Mei has returned.”
Marshal Tong Guan was very pleased. Marshal Gao, Gao the Ball, had him shown in and asked him to give an account of himself. Feng Mei prostrated himself and then told how all those who had been captured and taken up the mountain had been released by Song Jiang completely unharmed, and even given travelling expenses to return to their homes. That, he explained, was why he was now able to present himself.
“It’s a cunning trick,” Gao the Ball said. “They are trying to fool the people. For the next expedition we will not use local troops. I will get well trained and experienced troops from Shandong and Hebei.”

"That's settled then," said the Grand Preceptor. "We will meet again tomorrow and lay the plan before His Majesty."
They all went home. Next day before dawn they gathered in the ante-chamber. At the beat of the dawn drum they took their places in the courtyard according to precedence. After doing obeisance, military and civil officials lined up separately below the steps. The Grand Preceptor stepped forward and addressed the Emperor. "Last time Marshal Tong Guan, President of the military council, was appointed to lead a big army against the rebels in the Marshes of Mount Liang. But there has been a heat wave and his troops could not endure the conditions. Furthermore the bandits have made their home in the marshes and the campaign cannot be conducted without boats since cavalry and infantry alone cannot get at them. He has therefore called a temporary halt to the campaign, and his men have all returned to barracks to rest, pending further instructions from Your Majesty."
The Emperor declared: "How unfortunate if this hot weather means the campaign cannot be renewed!"
"Let Tong Guan be stripped of his command," the Grand Preceptor said. "And we will appoint another commander in his place. If Your Majesty will give the authorization."
"These robbers are a grave threat to our security. They must be extirpated. Who will bring us this relief?"
Gao the Ball stepped forward and said: "I have little talent, but I am prepared to work like a slave to eradicate the rebels, if I have Your Majesty's authority for it."
"If you are willing to undertake this, I give you a free hand to pick your troops."
Gao had a further request: "The Marshes of Mount Liang are a hundred leagues in circumference. Without boats we cannot get in there. I beg you to authorize me to obtain timber in the region of Mount Liang and undertake the building of boats or to use government money to buy boats from the people for use in the campaign."
The Emperor said: "You have my authority to take whatever is needed. But have great care not to harm the people!"
Gao the Ball said: "I would not dream of it! I only request you to extend the time limit, so that I may finish this business successfully."
The Emperor sent an embroidered robe and a suit of gold armour which he presented to Gao, instructing him to select an auspicious day for starting.
After that morning's audience, when Marshals Tong Guan and Gao had seen the Grand Preceptor back to his palace, the secretariat was ordered to release the imperial requisition for levying troops.
Gao the Ball said: "We have ten border commanders who have done the country good service in fighting barbarians or Tartars of one tribe or the other. They are very experienced in battle, and I'd like to enlist their services as commanders." The Grand Preceptor agreed to the request and had ten official letters of appointment written out, ordering each of the ten commanders to raise an army of ten thousand crack troops and assemble at Jizhou. It was to be made clear to them that the matter was of the utmost importance and all were expected without fail to raise the ten thousand troops and set off within the given time.
Now these ten border generals were all well trained and experienced soldiers, in addition to the fact that they were former outlaws who had been pardoned and had risen to fairly high rank. They were quick-witted and genuinely brave, their reputation was solidly based. The secretariat set the date of their departure and made ten copies of the order, requiring all ten armies to have reached Jizhou by a certain date. Delays would be punishable by military law.
There was also in the south a commander of waterborne forces, an outstanding leader, known as Dragondream Liu. His mother had dreamt that a black dragon entered her womb just before the onset of birth pangs. When he grew up he became an expert sailor. He had already had considerable success in suppressing pirates in the river gorges of Sichuan and had been promoted to brigadier general. He had a force of fifteen thousand marines and five hundred boats at a base in the south. Marshal Gao wanted this naval force to join his command immediately. He also sent one of his trusted advisers called Niu Bangxi, an infantry commander, to search along the river and waterways for boats and commandeer and assemble them at Jizhou for the use of his forces.
On his staff Gao had many officers, but two of them were particularly able, two brothers, Dang the elder and Dang the younger. They had reached the rank of colonel and each was a match for ten thousand ordinary men. From the barracks of the imperial guard Gao selected fifteen thousand men, and of ordinary troops a hundred and thirty thousand. He sent out an advance guard to provide supplies along all the roads. He spent many more days preparing armour and having banners made, before he was ready to set off.
Meanwhile the Magic Messenger and the Red-Haired Devil had spent a number of days in the capital gathering intelligence. Having amassed a deal of information, they hurried back to the mountain stronghold to report. Song Jiang was disturbed by the news that Marshal Gao himself was in command and had mustered tens of thousands of troops under the ten border commanders and he called in the Professor to discuss matters. The Professor said: "Nothing to worry about, brother. I know all about those ten commanders. They have done the court good service, but they have never faced any real opposition, that is how they gained their reputation. Whereas what we have here is a brave company of men, bold as wolves and tigers. So those ten are history — there's nothing to fear from them! Before they and their ten divisions even get here we're going to give them a bloody nose."
How are you going to do that?" Song Jiang asked.
"They will all converge on Jizhou," said the Professor. "We will send out a skirmishing party under two of our commanders to position themselves near Jizhou. When the enemy approach they will mount a lightning attack. This will serve up a warning to Marshal Gao."
"Who shall we send?" asked Song Jiang.
"Hotshot and Twin Spears."
Song Jiang gave the order for each of these two leaders to take a thousand men to patrol Jizhou and intercept the enemy divisions before they got there. He also ordered the waterborne commanders to be prepared to seize any boats at their moorings. Thus the leaders of the mountain stronghold made their dispositions in advance, and we need say no more of them, for all shall be known in its time.
Back in the capital Gao the Ball was taking his time. When he had tarried twenty days or more the Emperor issued an edict urging him to set off. Gao gave the imperial guard their marching orders first. He also had thirty or more singers and dancing girls selected to go along for the army's entertainment. In due course he made his sacrifice before the flag, paid his respects to the Emperor and was ready to set off. A month had elapsed since the start of preparations and it was autumn. The officials were waiting at the three-mile pavilion to give them a send-off. Marshal Gao was wearing uniform and riding a charger with a gilt saddle. Five horses with embossed saddles and jade ornaments went before, on either side of him were the two Dang brothers and following behind were all the high-ranking officers of the palace guard. It was an impressive turnout. But the poem says:

*Their evil plotting's just not decent;*
*Their thirst for war breaks every precept.*
*Brute force is never swayed by meekness;*
*Those with power think virtue weakness.*

So Marshal Gao and his army rode out of the city. When they came to the three-mile pavilion he dismounted to bid farewell to the officials. They drank a stirrup cup, then mounted and set off towards Jizhou. He gave his men great license along the way and they plundered the villages and harassed the people unashamedly.
The ten border divisions also headed to Jizhou one after another. One of the Generals called Wang Wende with an army from the north travelled non-stop. One day when he was still a dozen miles or so away, urging his men along at breakneck pace, he came to a spot called Peacock's Tail Heights, where there was a great forest under the hill. His leading troops were skirting this forest when they heard the sound of gongs and a troop of cavalry rode out of a wood at the foot of the hill, blocking their advance. The leader was dressed in helmet and armour and was equipped with bow and arrows. In the quiver were stuck two small flags. On one of them was written in gold characters: "Twin Spears, the bold warrior" and on the other "Dong Ping, unsurpassed in gallantry" and in either hand he held a steel spear. Among the Mount Liang leaders Twin Spears was the always first to join the fray and for this reason was known as Breakneck Dong. As he reined in his horse and stood blocking the road he shouted: "What troops are you? Dismount at once and allow us to tie you up. What are you waiting for?"
Wang Wende made his horse curvet and said with a derisive laugh: "Even jars and pitchers have ears. Have you never heard of the mighty deeds of us ten border generals? Does the world famous name of the mighty Wang Wende mean nothing to you?"
Twin Spears riposted with a sneer: "You pompous oaf, all you're fit for is killing your mother's lover!"
Enraged by this, Wang shouted back: "Renegade scum, how dare you insult me!" He slapped his horse, levelled his lance and charged Twin Spears. The latter came to meet him with his two spears at the ready. They fought thirty bouts and neither had the advantage. Concluding that he could not get the better of Twin Spears, Wang shouted: "Let us take a break and continue the fight later." Each rode back to his own ranks. Wang told those on his side not to think of standing and fighting but to get out quick. With Wang leading, the troops beat a tumultuous retreat, Twin Spears in pursuit. Just past the wood they came upon another body of men. The leader of these was Hotshot. "Halt!" he shouted. A stone from his hand flew towards the head of Wang, who hurriedly ducked. The stone hit his helmet. Crouching low in the saddle he galloped off. His pursuers were evidently gaining on him, when another troop charged out from one side. This turned out to be another of the border commanders, Yang Wen, coming to his aid. Twin Spears and Hotshot gave up the pursuit and turned back.
The two border forces entered Jizhou together to rest. The magistrate received them both. After a few days scouts reported that Marshal Gao's forces were approaching, and all ten border generals rode out to meet him. After greeting him they escorted him back into the city. He made his headquarters temporarily in the government offices and retired to rest. He ordered the border generals to take up positions outside the city and await the arrival of Dragondream Liu with his marines so they could all attack together. Each of the ten divisions set up camp and cut down timber at the foot of the mountain; they ransacked people's houses to build their shelters and did much harm to the local inhabitants. Marshal Gao's headquarters in the city ordered a general conscription; those who had no money were destined for the front line, those who could pay earned a sinecure at headquarters. This abuse of power knew no bounds. A couple of days after the Marshal's arrival, Dragondream also arrived with his boats. When the latter had paid his respects, Gao sent for the ten border generals so that together they could work out a plan. Wang Wende said: "You should first send out a patrol to entice the bandits out to fight. Then we can send the boats in to attack their lair. If we split their forces like this we can capture the whole lot!"
Gao the Ball approved this proposal. He assigned the various border generals to the vanguard, the left and right flanks, the reserves. Dang the younger was to take three thousand troops to lend Dragondream's marines a hand on the boats and oversee operations there. When everyone had their orders, three days passed in preparations, after which Marshal Gao was invited to review the troops. He rode out of the city and personally inspected them. Then he gave the order for the army to march and the waterborne force to set sail, all converging on the Marshes of Mount Liang.
By now Hotshot and Twin Spears had returned to the stronghold and given a detailed report. Song Jiang and the others led their troops down from the mountain. They had not gone far before they saw the government troops approaching. The leading ranks fired at the enemy and both sides took up defensive positions. Then Wang Huan of the government vanguard rode forward wielding a long spear. "You shameless bandits," he shouted, "you disgrace to your country, don't you know me? I am Wang Huan!"
In the opposing ranks the pennants parted and Song Jiang himself rode forth and greeted Wang Huan: "General Wang, you are not a young man any longer! You are too old to be fighting for your country and bearing arms against the enemy. I fear you will meet with some mishap and lose your life in vain! Go home and get someone younger to come out and fight!"
Wang indignantly berated him: "You, a paltry civilian, how can you oppose a general of the imperial army?"
Song Jiang replied: "Don't brag, General Wang! We band of brothers are here to do heaven's will, there is no way we can lose to you!"
Wang's response to this was to level his lance and charge, whereupon with a jingling of harness bells a leader behind Song Jiang pressed forward. This turned out to be Leopard's Head. The two horses met, and both sides cheered them on. Marshal Gao himself rode to the front and reined in his horse to watch. Then all that was heard was the shouts and cheers of the two armies, while cavalrymen stood up in their stirrups to watch and infantrymen took off their helmets to see better. The two opponents showed off all kinds of moves with the spear.
Wang's great fight with Leopard's Head went on for some seventy or eighty bouts, and still neither could gain an advantage. Gongs were sounded on both sides and they separated and returned to their own ranks. Then another government general rode out. Bending respectfully in the saddle he petitioned Marshal Gao. "I would like to have it out with these bandits in single combat, do I have your consent?" Gao told him to go ahead. With a jingling of harness bells Twin Rods rode out from Song Jiang's ranks to take him on. The government general wielded a great blade on a long pole and rode a bay charger. The weapons clashed and they fought some twenty bouts. Twin Rods feinted. He blocked the other's blade and raising his rod in one fluent movement brought it down square on his opponent's head so that the brains spurted out and the eyeballs burst. He died on the spot.
Having lost one of his border generals, Marshal Gao hastily sent out another, who galloped forward and cried: "Do you dare take me on, you rebel scum?" Twin Spears rode out from behind Song Jiang and accepted his challenge. Before they had fought ten bouts, the border general suddenly put up his spear and fled. Twin Spears slapped his horse and gave chase. His opponent did not return to his own ranks but headed off past their position into no man's land. Twin Spears galloped after him. The other rested his spear and took his bow in his left hand. Fitting an arrow to the string with his right hand, he bent the bow, twisted in the saddle and let fly. Twin Spears heard the snap of the bowstring and raised his arm to shield himself. The arrow hit him in the right shoulder. He dropped his spear, turned his horse and fled. His opponent put up his bow and arrows and gave chase. When Twin Rods and Leopard's Head saw this they both galloped to the rescue and brought Twin Spears back. Marshal Gao now threw his whole army into the attack. Song Jiang first gave orders for Twin Spears to be taken back to safety in the mountain stronghold. Then his army, unable to withstand the onslaught, broke up and scattered in all directions. Marshal Gao pursued them as far as the waterside. There he allotted some of his force to go and support the waterborne attack.
By this time Dragondream and Dang the younger, after embarking their forces, had piloted their boats deep into the Marshes of Mount Liang. Here they found nothing but endless beds of reeds and bulrushes, choking up the many-branching waterways. With constant poling they managed to advance a few miles by water. Then suddenly a signal gun went off on the mountainside and a swarm of little boats appeared from every direction. For the soldiers on the government boats, already cowed by the vast extent of those desolate reed beds, the sight of all these small boats coming at them from hiding-places in the reeds, not in the least awed by their great flotilla, was just too much. Instead of those in front and behind coming to each other's aid, most of the crews jumped overboard.
When the Mount Liang leaders saw panic in the enemy ranks, they urged their boats forward to the beat of the drums and fell on them. Dragondream and Dang hurriedly tried to retreat, but by now the way they came was blocked: the Mount Liang forces had used small craft to bring timber and debris from trees cut on the slopes of the mountain to clog the channels, making it impossible to ply the oars. The soldiers all leapt into the water. Dragondream removed his uniform and armour and clambered out onto the bank. He chose a small path and fled. Dang was reluctant to leave the boat and went on urging the sailors to row for their lives down a quieter channel. But after half a mile they found three boats blocking the way. The three Ruan brothers were in these boats, each armed with a spear. As the boats closed on each other, the government crews dived into the water. Dang was left alone standing in the prow, spear in hand. He joined battle with Ruan the Second. Ruan the Second dived overboard and disappeared, but immediately Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh replaced him. Realizing he stood no chance, Dang threw away his spear and also jumped overboard. Then from the depths Pilot emerged, grabbed him by the hair with one hand, the other arm encircling his waist, and dragged him dripping out onto the reed bed. A dozen lads in hiding there used hooks to subdue him and tie him up and he was carried off live to the waterside camp. When Gao the Ball saw all this confusion on the water, the crews either fleeing towards the mountain or bound and captive on the boats, and the whole flotilla under Dragondream's flag captured, it was clear to him that the battle on water was lost, and he hurriedly ordered his leaders to recall their troops and return to Jizhou to work out another plan. By now it was already getting dark. All around guns were going off incessantly. They didn't even know where the attacks were coming from next. Gao could only curse his luck. Indeed, he was as one who *losing his way in the dark encounters a ghostly archer on the fight at the Red Cliff is assailed by a fateful wind.*

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## The Red-Haired Devil Liu Tang Burns the Ships of War; Song Jiang Defeats Marshal Gao the 2nd Time

Although the artillery were only signal cannon firing blanks, and no outlaws were lying in ambush, Marshal Gao was frightened. He had no belly for further battle. He scurried back to Jizhou with his troops that same night. His infantry casualties were not high, but he had lost more than half his naval effectives, and not a single war ship returned.
Dragon Dream Liu managed to get back, after considerable difficulty. Sailors who were able to swim, had escaped. Those who could not, had all drowned.
His military prestige damaged, his energies depleted, Gao could only encamp in the city and wait for Niu Pangxi to arrive with fresh boats. He sent a dispatch to Niu urging speed: Niu was to seize any craft he could lay his hands on, bring it to Jizhou, and fit it out for the next expedition.
At the fortress Song Jiang returned first with Dong Ping. Doctor An Daoquan removed the arrow and dressed the wound with Golden Spear Ointment, and directed Dong to rest. Wu Yong and the other chieftains arrived next. Zhang Heng, head of the naval forces, brought Dang Shixiong to Loyalty Hall and claimed his reward. Song Jiang ordered that the prisoner be taken to the rear of the fortress and held under house arrest. The captured boats were to be distributed among the various chieftains commanding the water defenses.
In Jizhou Marshal Gao summoned his generals into council to discuss strategy against Mount Liangshan. Commandant Xu Jing spoke.
"I started wandering as a child," he said. "When I grew up and was giving exhibitions of arms and peddling medicines I made friends with a man. He's a skilled strategist and tactician, and has the talent of Sun Wu and Wu Qi—those ancient theoreticians of war—and the wisdom of Zhuge Liang. His name is Wen Huanzhang. He teaches school in the village of Anren on the outskirts of the Eastern Capital. If we could get him to be our chief of staff he could defeat Wu Yong's crafty schemes."
Gao at once sent a top-ranking general, with gifts of silks and a saddle horse, to invite the village teacher to come to Jizhou as quickly as possible and advise on military affairs. Only three or four days after the general departed, a report came from outside the city: "Song Jiang has arrived with his army. He challenges us to fight."
Marshal Gao was furious. He mustered the troops in the city and sallied forth. He also directed the commandants of the various forts to go out and give battle.
When Song Jiang saw Gao and his army approaching, he hastily drew back fifteen *li* to a broad, level plain. Gao closed in pursuit. Song Jiang's forces set up positions at the edge of a mountain slope. From a troop bearing red banners a fierce-looking commander burst forward. On his banner were the words: *Two Rods Huyan Zhuo.* He reined in his steed and halted at the edge of the battlefield, his lance held athwart.
"That's the fellow who commanded the emperor's chain-linked cavalry and sold out to the enemy," snarled Gao. He sent Commandant Han Cunbao, who wielded a crescent-bladed halberd, forth to meet him.
Without a word, the two clashed, one hacking with his halberd, the other thrusting with his lance, neither slackening for a moment. For more than fifty rounds they fought. Then Huyan executed a feint, broke away, struck his horse, and rode down the slope. Han, on racing steed, quickly followed.
Eight hoofs churned the turf like iron bowls. The chase continued for six or seven *li*, until the contestants were far from all the others. Han began closing the distance between them. Suddenly, Huyan turned his mount around, put up his lance and, brandishing his two rods, galloped to meet his pursuer. They battled for a dozen rounds. Again Huyan parried the crescent-bladed halberd and rode away.
"He can't get near me with his lance," thought Han Cunbao, "and can't beat me with his rods. I can take that thief alive! What am I waiting for!"
Han rapidly gave chase. But as he rounded a bend between two mountains, the path forked. Which direction had Huyan taken? He urged his steed up the slope and looked. He saw Huyan Zhuo riding off along a stream.
"Where do you think you're going, wretched robber!" bawled Han. "Dismount and be bound, and I'll spare your life!"
Huyan halted and cursed Han fulsomely. Han rode in a wide circuit so that he came up behind Two Rods and cut off his retreat. On one side was the mountain, on the other side the stream. Their field of combat was the narrow space between, and it was there they met. The horses had little room to maneuver.
"Surrender now," called Huyan. "Why wait?"
"You're beaten already, and you want me to surrender!"
"I've lured you here because I want to capture you alive! That's your only hope for survival!"
"It's I who am going to capture you alive!"
The rage of the two men again flared. Han rained stabs against Huyan's chest and abdomen with his long halberd. Parrying left and right, Huyan countered with a whirlwind of thrusts from his lance.
For thirty more rounds they fought. As Han thrust at Huyan's ribs, Huyan lunged for Han's heart. Both dodged, and the weapons each went harmlessly by. But Huyan clapped the shaft of Han's halberd under his arm, and Han seized Huyan's lance with his hand. Both pulled and tugged with all their might from their saddles. The rear legs of Han's steed were in the stream. Huyan and his horse were dragged into the water.
The men struggled and wrenched, the horses kicked up spray till both combatants were drenched. Huyan abandoned his lance and, with Han's halberd still clamped under one arm, reached for his rods. At that moment, Han dropped Huyan's lance and grabbed his arms. Locked in combat, the two tumbled into the water. Their horses spurted up the bank and galloped towards the mountains.

Weaponless, the men wrestled in the stream. Their helmets fell off, their armor hung in pieces. In the deep water they traded kicks and punches, moving gradually back to the shallow edge of the stream.
While the battle was raging, a troop of cavalry arrived at the bank, headed by Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin. They seized Han Cunbao and sent men to recover the horses. Hearing the neighs of the cavalry steeds, the animals returned themselves. The armor and weapons were retrieved from the stream and given to Huyan Zhuo. He mounted, dripping wet. Han was also put on a horse, his hands tied behind his back, and all rode quickly for the gap.
Ahead, they saw coming towards them another body of cavalry, searching for Han Cunbao. Both troops halted. In the fore of the government forces were two commandants—Mei Zhan and Zhang Kai. When these observed the bound and dripping Han mounted on a steed, Mei Zhan grew very angry. Brandishing a three-pronged two-edged blade, he charged at Zhang Qin.
Before they had fought three rounds, Zhang Qin broke and galloped away. Mei Zhan followed. Zhang Qin unlimbered his ape-like arms, twisted his wolf-like waist, and let fly with a stone. It struck Mei Zhan on the temple, drawing fresh blood. The commandant dropped his sword and covered his face with his hands. Zhang Qin wheeled his mount around. Zhang Kai fitted an arrow to his bow, pulled it to the full, and sped the feathered shaft. Zhang Qin yanked up his horse's head, so that it took the arrow in the eye. As the beast fell to the ground its rider leaped clear and prepared to fight on foot.
But Zhang Qin's only real military skill lay in throwing stones. With the lance he was slow. Zhang Kai, after rescuing Mei Zhan, came after Zhang Qin. The lance of the man on horseback darted like a thing bewitched. Zhang Qin defended himself as best he could, and when he could withstand no more, dashed for cover amid his own troop. Zhang Kai pursued, slaughtering horsemen left and right until he reached the site of Han Cunbao.
He was about to ride back with Han when he heard a clamor of wild yells. Two more cavalry troops were tearing through the mountain gap. One was led by Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, the other was headed by Big Halberd Guan Sheng, both chieftains riding fast and fierce. Zhang Kai, protecting Mei Zhan, departed hastily, abandoning their men. The cavalry cut in and again captured Han. Zhang Qin grabbed a riderless horse and mounted, but Huyan was exhausted and could only follow in the wake of the attackers. The impetus of the assault carried the men of Mount Liangshan to the fore of the government soldiers, and they harried them all the way back to Jizhou. There they ended the chase. They returned to the fortress with Han Cunbao that same night.
When Song Jiang, seated in Loyalty Hall with the other chieftains, saw the prisoner, he ordered his men to stand back and untied him personally. He invited Han to be seated at the head of the hall and treated him solicitously. Han was grateful beyond words. Song Jiang then asked Dang Shixiong to join them, and afforded Dang the same courteous treatment.
"You two generals may feel completely at ease," he said. "We have no evil intentions. We've come here only because corrupt officials have forced us to do so. If the emperor grants us amnesty we'll be happy to serve the government."
"But didn't Marshal Chen bring you an amnesty?" said Han. "Why didn't you take that opportunity to return to the path of righteousness?"
"Although it was an imperial amnesty, its terms were not clear. What's more, the emissaries had substituted a cheap rural brew for the imperial wine. My brothers were unconvinced. And that Majordomo Zhang and Captain Li dared to threaten and insult us!"
"Because no good person was in charge, a matter of importance to the state was delayed," Han said regretfully.
Song Jiang feasted his guests. The next day he presented them with saddled horses and saw them off to the mouth of the valley. The two spoke highly of him all the way to Jinzhou. By the time they neared the city it was late. They did not enter until the following morning.
They went to Marshal Gao and told him how Song Jiang had released them. Gao grew very angry.
"It's a bandit trick to soften our army's resolve! How can you two have the effrontery to see me? Guards, take them out and kill them!"
Wang Huan and the other officials dropped to their knees and pleaded: "It's not their fault. The scheme is Song Jiang's and Wu Yong's. If you execute Han and Dang, the bandits will laugh at us."
Gao finally let himself be persuaded. He rescinded his order, but he stripped both men of their ranks and directed them to report to the Military Procurate in the Eastern Capital for punishment. The two left under escort for the capital city.
Han Cunbao was the nephew of Han Zhongyan, a former premier. Many officials in the court had obtained their positions through him. One of these was Zheng Juzhong, originally a royal tutor, and now a censor in the court. Han Cunbao had great respect for him and told him about his problem. Zheng got into his sedan-chair and took Han to consult with Minister Yu Shen.
"We'll have to appeal to the prime minister," said Yu, "then we can petition the emperor."
He and Han went together to Premier Cai Jing and reported: "Song Jiang has no evil intentions. He's waiting only for an amnesty from the emperor."
"He destroyed the previous decree. Men so lacking in courtesy cannot be amnestied, they can only be wiped out or arrested."
"That was because the emissaries did not state the emperor's noble purpose and express his concern. They spoke harshly instead of kindly. For that reason the mission failed."
Only then did the premier consent to help.
The following morning when the Taoist Emperor opened court, Cai Jing again proposed offering an amnesty to Song Jiang and his men if they surrendered.
"Marshal Gao has asked Wen Huanzhang of Anren Village to be chief of staff, and Wen has already reported to the court for duty," said the emperor. "We shall send him as our emissary. If the brigands consent to submit, we will forgive their previous crimes. If not, we shall set a time limit within which we shall expect Marshal Gao to either exterminate them or bring them back to the capital as prisoners."
Cai Jing drafted the appropriate decree and, at the same time, invited Wen to dine with him in his mansion. Wen was a famous scholar, well known to most of the high ministers in the imperial court. Each of them drank to him in greeting. After the banquet Wen returned to his quarters and packed for his journey. He bid farewell to the emperor and set out the same day.
Meanwhile, in Jizhou Gao fretted impatiently. The gatekeeper entered and announced: "Niu Bangxi is here." Gao directed that he come in. Niu bowed respectfully and Gao asked: "What about the boats?"
"We confiscated along the way over fifteen hundred, large and small. They're all waiting below the lock."
Very pleased, the marshal rewarded Niu. He ordered that the craft be congregated in a wide bay and grouped in threes. Each group was to be decked with planks and chained together at the stern, so as to carry the maximum number of infantry. The cavalry would escort them along the banks.
By the time the dispersement of troops was settled and the soldiers had become adapt at boarding the craft half a month had gone by. Mount Liangshan already knew all about it.
Wu Yong instructed Liu Tang to strengthen defenses along the water courses. He told the naval chieftains to prepare small boats, nail iron plate to their prows, and fill their holds with brushwood sprinkled with sulphur and saltpetre. These would wait in the inlets.
He also ordered artillery expert Ling Zhen to place signal cannon on all the surrounding heights. Pennants were to be tied to tree-tops in the thickets along the river and gongs and drums and fireworks were to be readied there to create the impression that well-manned military encampments were at hand. Gongsun Sheng was asked to perform magic and raise the wind. The main forces would fight as three armies on the land.
Wu Yong's plan for the men of Mount Liangshan was completed.
In Jizhou, Marshal Gao hastened the departure of his contingents. His naval craft he placed under the leadership of Niu Bangxi, who again collaborated with Dragon Dream Liu and Dang Shiying as the three top commanders. Gao donned his armor, the drums thundered thrice and the boats in the bay set sail, while on land the cavalry swung into a trot. The craft sped forward like arrows, the horses seemed to fly, as the government troops pushed into Liangshan Marsh.
Gongs and drums beating, the naval vessels glided on, winding ever deeper into the marsh in an endless succession of masts. But not a single outlaw boat did they meet. As they neared the Shore of Golden Sands, they saw two fishing craft in a cove of lotus flowers. There were only two men on each, and they were clapping their hands and laughing uproariously.
Dragon Dream Liu, on the leading government vessel, ordered his archers to shoot. The fishermen dived into the river and swam underwater. Liu urged his flotilla on, and they gradually drew closer to the Shore of Golden Sands. A line of shady willows fringed the bank. Two brown oxen were tied to one of the trees, and three or four herd boys lay dozing on the grassy sward. In the distance a lad seated on the back of another ox was softly playing a flute.
Liu directed his assault squad to land first. The sleeping boys jumped up and, laughing merrily, disappeared into the willow grove. Six or seven hundred soldiers of the advance unit started clambering up the bank. A cannon boomed within the willows. On either side, war drums beat. A contingent in red armor, led by Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, burst into view on the left. On the right suddenly appeared a contingent in black armor, headed by Two Rods Huyan Zhuo. The two units, each comprised of five hundred men, swarmed towards the bank. By the time Dragon Dream Liu yelled for his troops to return to the boats he had already lost more than half.
Niu, hearing the agonized yells of the advance force, ordered his rear boats to pull back. But a string of cannon shots sounded on a hilltop and the reeds commenced to rustle. Gongsun Sheng, his long hair streaming down, his sword in hand, stood upon an astrological diagram on the summit, raising the wind. It moaned through the trees, gathering momentum, and pelted the soldiers with sand and stones and whipped up giant waves. Dark clouds enshrouded the earth, completely blocking out the sun. It was a wild, raging gale.
Dragon Dream Liu also hastily directed his vessels to retreat. From the criss-crossing inlets in the reeds and water lilies a number of small craft sped out and dispersed themselves amid the government flotilla. A drum sounded; and on each little boat torches were lit. This was in accordance with the plan Wu Yong had given to Liu Tang, whereby the naval chieftains would load the craft with dry reeds and brushwood sprinkled with oil, sulphur and saltpetre. In an instant, great flames were leaping skyward, and the small boats closed in on the larger vessels. Soon, from one end to the other, the entire government flotilla was ablaze.
Liu removed his helmet and armor and jumped into the water. Not daring to go near the shore, he headed for where the river was wide and deep, hoping thus to escape. A small craft, piloted by only one man, shot out of the reeds to intercept him. Liu flipped over and swam underwater. Someone seized him around the waist and hauled him to the boat, where he was dragged aboard. The man on the boat was Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave. The one who had grabbed him was Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon.
Meanwhile, Niu Bangxi, seeing all the government vessels in flames, also stripped off his armor and prepared to leap into the river. Suddenly, a man appeared on the prow holding a grappling hook. With this he snagged Niu and pulled him into the water backwards. The man was Zhang Heng the Boat Flame.
Corpses littered the waterways of Liangshan Marsh, their blood encrimsoning the waves. There were bashed and battered skulls without number. Dang Shiying, who was fleeing in a small craft, was killed by swarms of arrows from the reeds on both sides. Many of the soldiers could swim, and these escaped with their lives. Those who could not, died of drowning. Prisoners were escorted under guard to the fortress. Li Jun and Zhang Heng wee about to do the same with their captives Dragon Dream Liu and Niu Bangxi, but they were afraid Song Jiang would only let them go again. After talking it over, they killed the two by the roadside, cut off their heads and brought these to the mountain instead.
Meanwhile, Marshal Gao, leading his army as reinforcements to the water's edge, heard the continuous boom of cannon and the steady beat of drums. He guessed that the fighting was on the river, and he hastened forward, surveying both the banks and the nearby hills. He saw soldiers emerging from the water and crawling up the banks and running. Gao recognized one of the officers and asked him what had happened. The mail told how all the boats had been burned. He said he didn't know where the others were.
Gao's heart chilled with alarm. The yelling continued, and black smoke filled the sky. The marshal hastily led his troops back along the road they had come. Drums suddenly thundered on the hills ahead. A troop of horsemen burst forth and blocked their path. In the lead was Suo Chao the Urgent Vanguard, wielding a mountain-splitting battle-ax as he cantered towards them. At Gao's direction, Wang Huan, the commandant who was riding beside him, trotted out with levelled lance.
Before the two had fought five rounds, Suo Chao wheeled his mount and withdrew. Marshal Gao and his contingent pursued. But when they rounded the foot of a hill, Suo Chao had vanished. At that moment, they were attacked from behind by a troop led by Panther Head Lin Chong.
They suffered some casualties. They travelled another six or seven //; and a troop under Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Brute caught up and inflicted further losses. After another eight or nine //Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard harassed their rear, imposing still more casualties.
These were tactics devised by Wu Yong—not preventing retreat, but persistently raiding from behind. The battered government troops had no heart for battle. They wanted only to flee, and were incapable of protecting their rear.
Panic-stricken, Gao flew back to Jizhou. By the time he reached the city it was nearly midnight. Just then he saw flames rising from the fort in the outskirts and heard shouts of alarm. Shi Xiu and Yang Xiong plus five hundred foot soldiers lying in ambush had, with only a few torches, set the city ablaze, then slipped away.
Gao's soul leaped from his body in fright, and he hurriedly sent men to inquire. Only when they returned and reported: "They're gone," did he relax. A count of his troops showed he had lost more than half.
As Gao sat deep in gloom, a scout from a far outpost entered and reported: "An imperial emissary is arriving." Gao rode forth with his army and commandants to greet him. Wen Huanzhang, the emissary, told him of the proposed amnesty. When all the officers had been presented, they returned to headquarters in the city to confer. Gao ordered that a copy of the document be made.
The marshal had already suffered two heavy defeats and lost all his boats. If he delivered the amnesty now, he'd be ashamed to face people on his return to the capital. For several days he vacillated, unable to come to any decision.
It so happened that in Jizhou there was an old functionary named Wang Jin, a cruel, crafty fellow who was popularly known as "Cut Your Heart Out" Wang. He had been given to headquarters by Zhang Shuye, the prefect of Jizhou. Having read a copy of the amnesty, and learning that Gao was in a dilemma, Wang presented himself before the marshal.
"Your Excellency needn't worry about the amnesty," he said. "I have a way to cope with that. The Hanlin scholar who has drafted the document is surely on good terms with Your Excellency, since he has left the rear door open."
Gao was mystified. "What do you mean?"
"The most important part of the document is the line in the middle that reads: 'Obliterate Song Jiang, Lu Junyi and the other chieftains' crimes; we grant them amnesty.' This sentence is not clear. Have the copyist break it up into two sentences: 'Obliterate Song Jiang,' and 'Lu Junyi and the other chieftains' crimes, we grant them amnesty.' Then lure Song Jiang into the city, seize him as their leader, and execute him. Disband and scatter his followers. Since ancient times it has been said: 'A snake without a head cannot crawl, a bird without wings cannot fly.' Without Song Jiang, what good are the others! How does this strike Your Excellency?"
Gao was delighted. He immediately appointed Wang his chief advisor and told Chief of Staff Wen Huanzhang of the plan.
"An imperial emissary can act only in a righteous manner," Wen protested. "We cannot indulge in such deception! If any of Song Jiang's followers should learn of this and expose us, it would be extremely awkward!"
"Nonsense," cried Gao. " 'The essence of military tactics is deception.' From the earliest days this has been the rule. There's no need to be so proper."
"This is a decree from the emperor, and so will be believed by everyone throughout the land. The words of the emperor are precious as jade. They cannot be tampered with. If we were to do what you say, and later it should be found out, we'd have no credibility in the future."
"We'll deal with the present, and worry about the future some other time," said the marshal.
He dispatched a messenger to Mount Liangshan directing Song Jiang and his entire complement to come to the walls of Jizhou to hear an imperial decree granting them amnesty.
After having again defeated Marshal Gao in battle Song Jiang instructed his junior officers to collect the remains of the burned boats and use them for firewood. Those that had been unscathed were to be turned over to the water defense positions. Captured enemy generals should be allowed to go back, at intervals, to Jizhou.
Song Jiang and his chieftains were conferring in Loyalty Hall when an officer entered and reported: "A messenger has come from Jizhou Prefecture. He says: 'The imperial court his sent an emissary with a decree granting amnesty and conferring official posts. I have been dispatched to announce this good news.' "
On hearing these joyous tidings from on high, Song Jiang smiled all over his face. He summoned the messenger into the hall.
"The royal court has granted an amnesty," the man said. "I have been sent by Marshal Gao to invite all of you chieftains to the walls of Jizhou for a ceremonial reading of the decree. We have no other intention. Please discard any doubts."
Song Jiang said he would discuss the matter with his generals. He rewarded the messenger with silver and satins and directed him to return to Jizhou. Then he ordered his chieftains to prepare to go and hear the reading of the imperial document.
"Don't be so hasty, brother," urged Lu Junyi. "Marshal Gao is probably up to something. You can't just rush into this!"
"If you men are always so suspicious, how will we ever return to the path of righteousness?" Song Jiang countered. "For better or worse, let's go."
Wu Yong smiled. "We've beaten that rogue Gao so badly his gall's chilled and heart's shattered. No matter how elaborate a scheme he may have, it won't work. Besides, we're all gallant warriors. There's no need to worry. Just go along with brother Song Jiang down the mountain. I'll send Black Whirlwind Li Kui on ahead first with Fan Rui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun and a thousand infantry to be in ambush on the east road to Jizhou. I'll also send sister Ten Feet of Steel with Gu Dasao, Sun the Witch, Stumpy Tiger Wang, Sun Xin and Zhang Qing and a thousand cavalry to he in ambush on the west road to Jizhou. If they hear a series of cannon shots, they'll charge to our rescue at the North Gate." After Wu Yong's arrangements were carried out, the chieftains descended the slope. Only the naval commanders remained to guard the fortress. And so, Marshal Gao, refusing to heed the advice of Chief of Staff Wen, lured the heroes from their stronghold.
Who would have thought that this would convert the outskirts of Jizhou and the fringes of Mount Liang Marsh to battlefields. The resulting melee was like wolves among a pack of dogs, tigers amid a flock of sheep. Truly, that single imperial decree stirred up the passions of the entire band of warriors.

It is clear to Marshal Gao that his waterborne forces are in trouble and he is already preparing to retreat, when shots are heard on all sides. He hurriedly calls in his troops and sets out on the road back.
In fact the Mount Liang leaders had only fired the signal guns. There were no troops in ambush. Nevertheless, it frightened Gao out of his wits and he and his men withdrew into the city as fast as their legs would carry them. When the infantry were counted it was found that they had not lost many, but the greater part of the waterborne force had been destroyed and not one of the boats returned. Dragondream himself had managed to get back. Of his sailors, those who could swim escaped with their lives; those who couldn't drowned.
Marshal Gao was demoralized, his confidence shattered. He quartered his troops inside the city and waited for Niu, the infantry commander, to arrive with the commandeered boats. He even sent some one with a letter telling him to get a move on and instructing him to seize boats of any kind, any-thing that could float, and bring them to Jizhou to join the campaign.
Song Jiang had taken the wounded Twin Spears up the mountain from the waterside camp. The arrow was drawn and Doctor An was asked to treat him. Doctor An applied an ointment to the wound and kept the patient in the stronghold to convalesce. The Professor brought the other leaders up the mountain. The Pilot brought in Dang the younger and claimed his reward. Song Jiang had Dang placed under house arrest in the camp at the rear, and all the captured boats were incorporated into their own forces, divided equally among the leaders.
Returning to Marshal Gao in Jizhou, he called a meeting of all his generals to devise a new plan for the capture of Mount Liang. One of the border generals, Xu Jing, said: "In my youth I was a frequenter of the rivers and lakes. One time when I was peddling medicines I made the acquaintance of a certain person who is a master of strategy and an expert in military methods. He has the tactical genius of Sunzi and the cunning of Zhuge Liang. His name is Wen Huanzhang and at the moment he is serving as a simple instructor in a village outside the capital. If we can prevail upon this man to join our counsels, we will have the means to counter the Professor's tricks."
Accordingly the Marshal sent an officer to ride post haste to the capital with a gift of embroidered silk and a horse to locate this genius in his village retreat and invite him to join them in the capacity of adviser. The Marshal wanted him to report without delay to Jizhou and take part in their military planning. Three or four days after the officer left, it was reported that Song Jiang's forces were challenging them outside the city walls. A wrathful Gao ordered his own troops out of the city to oppose them and commanded all the border generals to join him.
When Song Jiang's army saw Marshal Gao's forces approaching, they quickly retreated two or three miles to an open plain. Gao followed. Song Jiang took up a position on the side of a hill. From among the red pennants a warrior rode forth. His standard proclaimed him to be "Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo". He pulled his horse up and with lance at the ready waited in front of the army. "That's the bugger who turned traitor when he was commanding the linked cavalry," Gao said. He ordered General Han Cunbao to fight him.
Han's weapon was the square halberd. The two wasted no words but there before the armies joined battle, one thrusting with the halberd, the other countering with his lance. After more than fifty bouts, Twin Rods feinted and broke off. He slapped his horse and galloped away towards the mountain. Eager for glory, Han galloped after him. Eight horse's hooves battered the ground with a sound like upturned cups. In a couple of miles they reached a deserted area and with Han gaining on him Twin Rods turned his horse, abandoned his lance and rode at his opponent whirling his rods. After another dozen bouts, Twin Rods parried and galloped off again. Han was thinking to himself that the other had failed to touch him with his spear, and now was unable to defeat him with the rods, so he would be a fool if he didn't follow up his advantage and capture his enemy alive! He galloped after him. After passing through a narrow opening in the hills, Han was confronted by two roads and could not tell which his adversary had taken. He reined in his horse and scanned the hillside. He saw Twin Rods in the process of skirting a stream. He shouted: "Where do you think you're going, you vile rebel! Dismount and surrender, if you hope to save your life!"

Twin Rods held his ground and returned the insults. Han advanced in a flanking movement to cut off Twin Rods' retreat. The two met on the banks of the stream. On one side was the mountain, on the other water, with only a narrow path between, not wide enough even for the two horses to turn round. Twin Rods shouted: "Come on, surrender, what are you waiting for?"
Han shouted back: "You are my prisoner! What makes you think I'm going to surrender to you?"
Twin Rods said: "I lured you here because I wanted to take you alive. Your life hangs by a thread!"
Han said: "I'm the one who's going to take you alive!"
The exchange grew increasingly heated, till Han started to strike out with the halberd at the other's ribs, the blows coming fast as rain. Twin Rods likewise thrust this way and that with his lance as swiftly as one straining to catch the wind. They fought another thirty bouts. With the battle at its height, Han aimed a blow at the pit of Twin Rods' stomach just as the latter thrust at Han's chest. Both moved aside so that the weapons whistled past their ribs. Twin Rods grasped the stock of the halberd and Han clutched at the haft of the spear.
So there they sat on their horses pulling and tugging, pushing and shoving. The hind quarters of Han's horse slipped into the stream, pulling Twin Rods, horse and rider, after. They continued to wrestle for a while in the water. The horses were totally immersed, the men soaking wet. Twin Rods relinquished his spear to the other and wrenched away his halberd. As he reached for his rods Han threw away the spear and tried to seize Twin Rods by the shoulders. Another tug-of-war ensued and they both fell off into the water. The two horses struggled out onto the bank and bolted over the hillside. The two riders had lost all their weapons in the water, their helmets sank, their armour and clothing were in tatters. All they could do was to fight on with their bare hands. There they stood in the water trading blows. They dragged each other into the shallows. They were still at it when a troop of cavalry appeared on the bank. It was Hotshot and his men, who set to work at once and made Han prisoner and sent someone to find the runaway horses. In fact the horses didn't have to be found because when they heard the whinnying of the others and the shouts of the men they cantered back to join the company. The arms were fished out of the stream and handed to Twin Rods, who remounted, still dripping wet, while Han's hands were tied behind his back and he was loaded on a horse.
They were riding back with their prisoner to the valley mouth when they encountered another troop of horsemen, government troops sent out to look for Han. The two groups faced each other off. There were two government commanders, border generals Mei Zhan and Zhang Kai. When Mei saw his comrade Han sitting bound and dripping on the horse he flew into a rage. Whirling his three-pointed two-bladed weapon, he set on Hotshot. The horses met, but before they had completed three bouts Hotshot galloped away, with Mei in pursuit. Turning easily in the saddle, with his supple arms and flexible waist, Hotshot launched a stone which caught Mei on the temple. The blood spurted out. Mei dropped his weapon and put both hands to his head. Hotshot quickly turned his horse but as he did so Zhang Kai fitted an arrow to his bow, bent it and aimed at the head of Hotshot's horse. It pierced the horse's eye and the horse fell. Hotshot sprang to one side, grasped his spear and proceeded to attack on foot. Unfortunately Hotshot was really skilled only at throwing stones, he was not at all quick with the spear. Zhang Kai first made sure of Mei's safety and then came after Hotshot. What he could do with the spear on horseback was magical and the best Hotshot could manage was to parry. Finding the attack too fierce for him, the latter trailed his spear and took refuge among the ranks of his men, while Zhang Kai charged about all over the place putting fifty or sixty to the sword, causing mayhem and rescuing Han Cunbao in the process.
Zhang Kai was about to turn back with his two comrades, the wounded Mei Zhan and Han, whom he had just rescued, when there was more shouting and two more columns of troops appeared in the defile. One lot were Thunderclap's men, the others Scimitar's. While Zhang was covering Mei's escape the two Mount Liang contingents charged in and grabbed Han for the second time. Hotshot seized another horse, and together with Twin Rods vigorously harried the retreating enemy all the way till they were directly in front of the government position. The government army then took the opportunity of retreating into Jizhou. The Mount Liang contingent did not pursue them, but took their prisoner Han that same evening up to the mountain stronghold.
Han was taken with hands bound before Song Jiang as he sat with the others in the Ceremonial Hall. Ordering the escort to stand back, Song Jiang untied the bonds himself and invited Han to take a seat. Han expressed deep gratitude and the other prisoner, Dang the younger, was brought out to see him. Song Jiang said: "Please have no fears. We mean you both no harm. It is only because of cheating ministers and corrupt officials that we must live like this. If the Emperor will only grant us an amnesty we will strive with all our hearts in the service of our country."
Han said: "Previously when Marshal Tong Guan brought you the Emperor's pardon why did you not take the opportunity then to renounce your criminal activity and return to the straight path?"
Song Jiang replied: "The official document contained ambigui-ties. It was also couched in opprobrious terms and the imperial wine was switched. That is why my comrades were not happy with it. There were two hangers-on, Colonel Li and Chamberlain Zhang, who did their best to intimidate us and shame us."
"Then it was all because no honest men were involved that affairs of state miscarried!" Han commented.
Song Jiang feasted them that evening and on the following day had horses saddled and escorted them through the pass. As they rode back the two government commanders discussed Song Jiang's many virtues. It was already late when they reached Jizhou. They entered the city next morning and reported to Marshal Gao. They told him how Song Jiang had released them. Gao was furious. "It's trickery," he shouted. "They want to undermine the morale of my troops. I don't know how you have the nerve to present yourselves before me! Guards, take them out and execute them!"
All the other generals fell to their knees and said: "They are not responsible for it. It's Song Jiang and the Professor who have made this plan. If you execute them the bandits will only laugh at you."
Bending to the general entreaty, Gao spared their lives but stripped them of their commands and sent them back to the capital for the Grand Preceptor's sentencing. They left at once.
Now in fact this Han Cunbao was the nephew of Han Zhong-yan, who had once been chief minister. Many court officials had come under his tutelage. One in particular was a professor called Zheng Juzhong, who had been promoted by him to court censor. Han Cunbao related all that had happened to the professor, who immediately called for a sedan and took him to consult state secretary Yu Shen. The latter said: "We must ask the Grand Preceptor first and then report it to His Majesty."
When they were received by the Grand Preceptor, they said: "Song Jiang really means no harm, all he wants is a royal pardon."
"Previously they received the offer of an amnesty with insults. Such disgraceful behaviour cannot be pardoned, they must be made an example of."
"Unfortunately those who were sent with the pardon previously did not follow the Emperor's instructions and made no effort to speak diplomatically. Instead of flattery they used insulting language, that is why the offer was not accepted."
The Grand Preceptor allowed himself to be convinced. At next day's morning court when the Emperor ascended the throne, he proposed the drawing up of a new amnesty proposal to bring peace. The Emperor said: "Marshal Gao has just sent someone to request the services of Wen Huanzhang as military adviser. He is to report there almost immediately. Let us make him our envoy. If they are willing to submit, their crimes will be remitted in full. If they remain obdurate have Marshal Gao apprehend them within the stipulated time and bring them here."
The Grand Preceptor drafted the necessary document and arranged a banquet for Wen. Wen was in fact quite renowned and had many friends among the high-up officials at court. Plenty of wine and food were laid on for his reception. When the party broke up he got ready for the journey:

*For years in the village a hidden recluse,*
*He's suddenly summoned to serve the nation.*
*To put his traditional knowledge to use*
*He needs no great man's recommendation.*

We shall say no more of Wen's departure from the capital bearing the Emperor's commission but return to Gao the Ball and his troubles in Jizhou.
A doorman announced: "Niu Bangxi is here!"
Gao had him admitted and when he had prostrated himself asked: "How about the boats?"
Niu said: "On the way here we commandeered more than fifteen hundred boats. They are moored at the barrier."
The Marshal was pleased with Niu's work and rewarded him. He gave orders for the boats to be let into the main channel, linked in rows of three and covered with a wooden deck. Iron rings were to be fixed to the stern. Each was to carry a full complement of infantry, while the cavalry were stationed along the bank to guard them.
By the time the Marshal's troops were all settled on board and fully conversant with their duties a month had gone by and all was known to Mount Liang. The Professor had a plan which he expounded to the Red-Haired Devil, putting him in overall command of the operation on the water. All the waterside leaders were to prepare small boats. To the prow of each boat would be affixed an iron spike, while dry reeds and firewood were piled on the decks, primed with saltpetre and other incendiary materials. The boats were to be moored in the small inlets. Thunderer, the artillery chief, was to be stationed on a mountain lookout for the firing of signals and signal flags would be placed among the trees and reed beds of the waterside. Trumpets, drums and stocks of explosives were positioned, men and horses deployed and a false camp set up. Taoist Gongsun was to work his spells and summon a wind. Three divisions of cavalry would be deployed on land to lend support. All this was in the Professor's plan.
Back in Jizhou Marshal Gao urged on his troops. The water-borne forces were under the command of Niu Bangxi, with Dragondream Liu and Dang the elder. Gao the Ball put on his armour, ordered the usual three beats of the drum and the boats sailed from the harbour as the land forces mounted and rode off. The boats sped swift as arrows, the horses galloped like the wind, all towards Mount Liang. We will tell first of the attack by water. Propelled unceasingly forward by their crews, to the sound of drums and gongs, the flotilla swept deep into the territory of Mount Liang. There they found not an enemy boat in sight. However, as they approached Golden Sands Landing, they saw two fishing boats among the water lilies, with just two men to each boat. They were clapping their hands and laughing. Dragondream in the lead boat ordered his men to fire a salvo of arrows. The fishermen dived overboard and disappeared. Dragondream urged his boats on. Cautiously they approached the landing. The spot was shaded by some graceful willows, to which two buffalo were tethered. Three or four shepherd boys lay sleeping on the sward. Some way off there was another shepherd boy, riding backwards on a buffalo and playing the flute.
Dragondream ordered his vanguard ashore. As they charged up the bank the shepherd boys leapt to their feet laughing and vanished among the trees. As the first four or five hundred men advanced a report sounded among the trees and on every side drums and gongs began to beat. A troop of horsemen in red armour charged out on the left, led by Thunderclap; a troop of horsemen in black armour charged out on the right, led by Twin Rods, five hundred men to each force. They blocked the route back to the water. Dragondream hurriedly ordered his men back to the boats but he had lost most of them. Niu heard the cries up ahead and ordered the following boats back. Then a string of explosions was heard up on the mountain and there was a rush of wind among the reeds. This was due to Taoist Gongsun, creating his magic wind up on the peak, his hair floating in the wind and sword held high as he trod out the pattern of the Dipper. First the wind roared through the trees, then stones and sand began to fly, a wave of white veiled the sky and a black cloud cloaked the earth. The sun appeared as a red disk that gave no light and the wind howled. Dragondream yelled to his men to row for dear life, but now from a little channel among the reeds and water lilies small boats appeared and cut right through the government flotilla. Drums and gongs were beating, torches flared up. In a second there was a huge conflagration. Flames leapt in all directions, engulfing the government boats. All of them were ablaze:
*Black smoke hangs over green water, red flames dance on the waves. Wind rips up the water lily leaves and sends them flying through the sky; the force of the flames consumes a forest of stalks in the reed beds. Spirits howl, and ghosts weep; the sun is veiled and sheds no light. Cliffs tremble, mountains tumble; a wave of angry sound roars through the air. Boats capsize, oars are still. No longer do the bright ensigns flutter at the stem; no longer do swords and halberds flash brightly from decks and turrets. Corpses float beside dead fish, hot blood bubbles through the billows. A thousand flames leap skyward; a million fires skim the surface of the water.*
Dragondream seeing flames everywhere and all his boats ablaze, stripped off his helmet and armour and dived into the water. He dared not approach the bank but swam towards the deepest, broadest channel, hoping to escape that way. Then from among the reeds a boat appeared, poled by one man, and came towards him. Dragondream dived under the water. But there another was waiting, who seized him by the waist and dragged him out onto the boat. It was Cave Dragon in the boat, and the one who seized him was the White-Water Dragon.
Meanwhile Niu, seeing government boats on fire everywhere, also shed his arms and armour and was about to jump overboard when someone boarded his boat at the bow with a grappling iron. The grappling iron latched onto him violently and dragged him down into the water. This was the Pilot at work.
The number of those who lost their lives in the Marshes of Mount Liang, of whom nothing remained but corpses, headless or with smashed skulls, floating everywhere, their blood swirling through the water, was beyond telling. Only Dang the elder, rowing a small boat, managed to get away. Arrows and crossbow bolts streamed from either bank killing those who struggled in the water. Some who could swim escaped, all those who couldn't were drowned. Many were captured alive and taken up to the main camp. The White-Water Dragon held Dragondream and the Pilot held Niu. They would have taken them up to the stronghold, only they were afraid Song Jiang would release them, so they finished them both off by the roadside, cut off the heads and sent those up instead.
By now Marshal Gao had brought his army to the waterside in support. From a string of loud reports, and the incessant beating of the drums, they deduced that a battle was raging on the water. The urged their horses forward to a point between the mountainside and the water where they could observe. They saw soldiers everywhere scrambling out onto the bank and running for their lives. When Gao realized they were his own troops and asked what had happened, he was told that the flotilla had been set on fire and it was not known what had become of it. This did nothing to allay his fears. The shouts were incessant, black smoke filled the air, so they tried to turn back the way they had come. With a roll of drums a troop of cavalry galloped out and stood in their way. This charge was led by Hasty, whirling his mountain-splitter of an axe. At Gao's side General Wang Huan levelled his lance and joined battle with Hasty. Before they completed five bouts Hasty turned his horse and galloped off.
Marshal Gao led his forces in pursuit. Entering a defile they lost sight of Hasty. As they rode forward Leopard's Head came up behind them and attacked. After two or three miles the Blue-Faced Beast launched another attack from the rear. A few miles more and Whiskers attacked. This harassment was what the Professor had planned. His forces would make no attempt to stand and face the enemy but harry his rearguard instead. The demoralized government troops had no heart for the fight and only wanted to get away, so they did nothing to protect their rear. Hard pressed all the way, Gao the Ball retreated into Jizhou. By the time he got there it was the middle of the night. Then he heard of fires burning in the camps outside the city walls and much commotion. It was Morbid and Madcap with their five hundred infantry lying in wait who had started several fires and slipped away undetected. Gao was frightened out of his wits. He could not rest until he had sent out someone to reconnoitre. When a roll was called it was found he had lost the greater part of his troops.
As Gao the Ball was gloomily pondering the situation, one of his men reported the arrival of an imperial envoy. Gao rode out to receive him, accompanied by a body of troops and his remaining generals. The business of the imperial amnesty was explained. When all had met the imperial emissary and military adviser, Wen Huanzhang, they rode into the city to confer in the government office. Marshal Gao asked for a copy of the edict, which he studied carefully. To withhold the amnesty would be dangerous: he had lost two battles to the bandits and all the boats he commandeered were burnt. But if he presented it, he would be returning to the capital in disgrace. He was in a quandary. Several days passed without his reaching any decision.
Now it happened that in Jizhou there was an old official called Wang, a mean bastard whom everyone called "Vicious" Wang. He served as an official in the commissariat. Having seen the edict and heard that Gao could not make up his mind what to do, he came forward to offer a clever solution. "There's no cause for concern, Your Excellency," he said. "The wording of the document suggests a way out. The official who drafted it has been kind to you because he has left an open door."
Marshal Gao was surprised. "Why do you say that?" he asked.
Vicious Wang said: "The crux of the edict is in this sentence: 'With regard to the bandits in the Marshes of Mount Liang and the punishment they deserve for their crimes an exception being made, for Song Jiang, for Lu Junyi, known as the Unicorn, and for all the rest full pardon is granted, absolving them from the consequences of their wrongdoings.' It's all in the punctuation. Suppose when we read it out we take away the comma after 'an exception being made' and place it after 'crimes', it sounds as if the pardon is for 'Lu Junyi, known as the Unicorn and all the rest', but not for Song Jiang. You can then lure them into the city and nab just the leader, Song Jiang. After that, their whole organization will disintegrate. As the saying goes, 'A headless snake can't move, a wingless bird can't fly'. Once Song Jiang is eliminated, what can the rest of them do? I would like to know what Your Excellency thinks of this?"
Gao the Ball was pleased. He promoted Wang to head of department and summoned Wen, the new military adviser, to tell him of this scheme. But Wen rebuked him: "An imperial envoy can only enter into open and honest negotiations, he cannot be involved in an act of treachery. If Song Jiang has some experienced men under him who recognize the trick, it could misfire, with the most unfortunate results."
Gao said: "Nonsense. In the old manuals of strategy it says 'In military affairs guile is essential'. We can't afford to be too honest."
"However it may be in military affairs, in this case we are dealing with the words of the Emperor. Everyone must be able to trust them. It has always been said that the Emperor's word is sacred. That is what we mean by "the Emperor's jade speech", something which cannot be altered or amended. If we do as you suggest and it gets out, we will lose all credibility."
Gao said: "One's got to be realistic." He refused to listen to his military adviser and sent someone off to Mount Liang to tell Song Jiang and all the band to come down to Jizhou to hear the amnesty proclaimed.
Meanwhile Song Jiang, having defeated Marshal Gao yet again, ordered the damaged boats to be broken up for firewood and the ones which had escaped unscathed to be pressed into service at the waterside camp. As for the prisoners they had taken, they were all set free and allowed to return to the city.
Now while Song Jiang was holding a meeting with all the leaders in the Ceremonial Hall, it was announced that someone had come from Jizhou to tell them there was an envoy from the court bearing the good news that they were to be pardoned, and rewarded with high office and titles of nobility. Song Jiang's delight knew no bounds. He invited the messenger into the hall. The man said: "The court has proclaimed an amnesty. Marshal Gao sent me to invite you all to a ceremony in Jizhou for the reading of the imperial edict. Be assured of his good intentions and know that you have nothing to fear."
After discussing it with the Professor, Song Jiang had silver brought and rolls of silk to reward the messenger and sent him back down to Jizhou. Then he gave orders for all the leaders great and small to prepare to attend the reading of the imperial edict. But the Unicorn said: "Do not be too hasty brother. I fear this is some trick of Marshal Gao's. Maybe you should not go."
Song Jiang said: "If you're always so suspicious how are we ever going to get back into favour? For better or worse we simply have to go along and see."
The Professor brushed aside these fears: "We've just made mincemeat of Gao the Ball. Whatever schemes he may have, he's in no position to carry them out right now. Consequently, it's quite safe for us all to accompany the Leader down the mountain. But I'll send Iron Ox on ahead with Demon King, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre, Winged Ghost, a thousand infantry, have them take up a position on the eastern approach to the town, Steel-Bright with Auntie Gu, the Ogress, Short-Arse, Blackface, the Gardener, and a thousand men will take up a position on the west. If they hear a series of explosions they're to proceed at once to the north gate." When the Professor had finished making these dispositions, they all went down the mountain, leaving only the waterborne leaders to guard the camp. Now all because of Gao's deception, inviting these heroes down from their mountain under false pretences against the advice of his military adviser, Jizhou was to become a battlefield. A solemn edict from the sovereign's hand was about to arouse the fury of every single member of that band of heroes.

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## White Eel Zhang Shun Drills Holes through the Paddle-Wheel Boats & sinks the government fleet; Song Jiang Defeats Marshal Gao the 3rd Time

Marshal Gao, seated in his headquarters in Jizhou, summoned Wang Huan and his other commandants into conference. He ordered them to strike camp and move with their contingents into the city. All were to remain on the alert and fully armed. No flags were to be displayed on the city walls, except above the North Gate, where an imperial yellow banner would be unfurled bearing the words: *The Emperor's Edict.* Gao, the emissary and the high officials then mounted the wall and awaited the arrival of Song Jiang.
From the mountain fortress Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow set forth with an advance cavalry unit of five hundred, made a circuit of the city, and headed north. Then the Marvellous Traveller Dai Zong arrived and scouted on foot. This was reported to Marshal Gao, and he went personally to the ramparts of the outer wall, accompanied by a retinue of over a hundred. Flags were set up. An incense table was placed in the foreground.
Song Jiang's army could be seen approaching far to the north. First came trumpeters and drummers and many flagbearers, then the chieftains—in scoop and circle and "V" formations. On horseback, the foremost of these—Song Jiang, Lu Junyi the Magnate, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng, bowed from their saddles and hailed Marshal Gao.
On Gao's instructions an officer shouted from the wall-top: "The imperial court has deigned to pardon your crimes and has sent a special decree. Why do you come in armor?"
Song Jiang sent Dai Zong to the foot of the wall with the reply: "We have not yet heard the gracious statement and don't know what it contains. We therefore dare not come unprotected. If Marshal Gao will summon all the residents of the city and let them hear the decree with us together, we will then remove our armor."
Gao issued the appropriate order and, before long, all the citizens of Jizhou were assembled. Only then did Song Jiang and his chieftains advance. To a flourish of drums and trumpets, they dismounted. At a second flourish, they approached the city wall on foot. Behind, junior officers, leading the chieftains' horses, halted an arrow-shot away and assembled in neat ranks. At a third flourish, the chieftains stood with hands respectfully clasped and prepared to hear the decree. From atop the wall, the emissary read:

Edict: Each man's character is unique, a state has only one essential morality. People who behave well are proper citizens, those who do evil are rebels. For the latter, no good fate lies in store. We can only pity them. We bear that for a long time a band has congregated on Mount Liangshan, unresponsive to kindly exhortations to restore goodness to their hearts. We dispatch our emissary with this decree: Obliterate Song Jiang... Lu Junyi and the other chieftains' crimes, we grant them amnesty. Let the leaders report to the capital to give thanks, let their followers return home. Reject not the imperial decision. Let the emperor's benevolence expunge wickedness and restore righteousness to your hearts. Oppose not Heaven's will to replace the old with the new. Let this decree be proclaimed for all to know.

When the words "Obliterate Song Jiang" were read out, Wu Yong said to Hua Rong: "Did you hear that?"
The moment the reading was completed, Hua Rong shouted: "Since you won't amnesty our Big Brother, why should we surrender!" He notched an arrow to his bow, pulled it to the full, and yelled at the emissary: "Take a look at Hua Rong's magic arrow!"
The feathered shaft struck the emissary between the eyes. Government officers tried urgently to save him, while the gallant outlaws below cried: "Down with them!" and loosed a volley of arrows at the men atop the city wall. Marshal Gao hurriedly took cover.
All four gates of the city opened, spewing out Jizhou troops. Drums pounded in the midst of Song Jiang's coterie. The outlaws mounted then-horses and withdrew. The municipal forces pursued them five or six *li*; then started back. Behind them cannon thundered and Li Kui came charging from the east with brigand infantry, while from the west Ten Feet of Steel led her cavalry in an attack. Both arms of the pincers closed in together.
Fearing an ambush, the government troops quickly withdrew into the city. Song Jiang and his unit then turned around and charged, so that the local Jizhou contingents were being attacked from three sides. Thrown into great confusion, they were slaughtered by the score as they fled towards the city. Song Jiang and his men did not pursue for long, but returned to Liangshan Marsh.
Gao wrote a report to the emperor stating that Song Jiang's bandits had killed the emissary and refused to submit to the royal decree. He sent in addition a personal letter to Prime Minister Cai, Chancellor Tong and Marshal Yang urging them to confer, and requesting the prime minister to petition the throne for immediate reinforcements for use against the brigands, and the right to requisition fodder along the way.
On receipt of Gao's letter, the premier obtained an audience with the emperor and told him what had transpired. The sovereign's face clouded.
"Those bandits have insulted the throne! They've rebelled against us repeatedly!" He ordered each of his armies to provide reinforcements, and to take their orders from Marshal Gao.
Marshal Yang, who already knew of the consecutive defeats, selected two generals from the Imperial Divisions. He also directed that five hundred crack infantry from each of the four camps at Dragon Fierce, Winged Tiger, Sun Lift, and Loyal Righteousness be mustered, totalling two thousand men, to go with the generals in aid of Gao against the brigands.
Who were these two generals? The first was Qiu Yue, Chief Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guards and Commander of the Left Echelon Protecting the Royal Person. The second was the Deputy Chief Drill Instructor of the Imperial Guards and Commander of the Right Echelon Protecting the Royal Person, Cavalry General Zhou Ang. Both men had been decorated many times for valor, were famed for their skill with arms, and enjoyed high prestige in the capital. Moreover, they were completely trusted by Marshal Gao.
Marshal Yang ordered them to depart immediately, and they went to take their leave of the prime minister. "Be prudent and win distinction soon, and we surely will raise you to more important posts," Cai said. The two generals thanked him.
From the four camps they chose, one by one, tall, stalwart men who were narrow of waist and broad of shoulder, superb specimens from the provinces of Shandong and Hebei who could climb mountains and swim rivers. Then they took their leave of Marshal Yang and various high officials, and announced they were departing the next day. The marshal presented them each with five excellent horses for their personal use in battle. He promised them a big send-off. The generals thanked him and went to their respective commands to prepare.
The following morning the troops, geared up for the march, assembled in front of Imperial Divisions headquarters. Qiu Yue and Zhou Ang divided them into four contingents. The thousand soldiers from Dragon Fierce and Winged Tiger, plus more than two thousand cavalry, were under Qiu Yue. Zhou Ang commanded the thousand from Sun Lift and Loyal Righteousness, in addition to another two thousand some-odd cavalry. Still another thousand foot soldiers were split into two follow-up support units.
By the time the sun was brightening the troops were formed in ranks. Marshal Yang examined them personally from the tower above the city gate. The junior officers looked imposing, the soldiers bold, as they stood behind their embroidered banners. And when, from amid the troops of cavalry, General Qiu Yue suddenly rode proudly forth to lead the column on the left, the capital's citizenry broke into cheers.
The men of Sun Lift and Loyal Righteousness stood also in smart formation, each contingent behind its embroidered banner. General Zhou Ang cantered forward from the midst of his assembled horsemen, stern and fierce, to lead his right column to the edge of the city.
There, he and Qiu Yue dismounted, bowed to Marshal Yang and bid farewell to the officials. Leaving the Eastern Capital, they set out with their troops for Jizhou.
In the city of Jizhou, Marshal Gao and Chief of Staff Wen conferred. They decided that, while waiting for the reinforcements to arrive, they would dispatch men to the surrounding hills to fell timber. They would obtain boat builders from nearby counties, set up a shipyard outside Jizhou, and construct vessels of war. They would also enlist bold fellows to serve as sailors.
It happened that a man named Ye Chun, a boat builder from Sizhou Prefecture, was living in one of the inns. On his way to Shandong he had passed Liangshan Marsh and had been waylaid and robbed by some of the petty bandits. Unable to afford the journey home, he now hung around the city. When he heard that Gao was felling timber for war craft to invade the marsh, he sketched a couple of vessels and went to call on him.
After courtesies had been exchanged, Ye said: "Why did the last naval expedition fail? Because your boats were simply confiscated from here and there, and used wind and oar power, neither of which are reliable. What's more, they were small, low-lying and narrow, so that it was difficult for their crews to use weapons.
"According to my plan, if you want to defeat the bandits you must build a few hundred big warships. The largest of these should be the type known as the Big Paddle-Wheeler. It has twelve paddle-wheels on each side and holds several hundred men. Twelve men turn each of the wheels. A bamboo screen along the gunwales wards off arrows. On deck will be towers for archers, and to these winches and pulleys will be attached.
"One rap on a bamboo segment in the ramparts of the bridge will be the signal to advance. All twenty-four paddle-wheels will immediately begin to rotate, and the boat will fly forward. The outlaws have no craft that can stop it. And when all our archers fire together, they'll never be able to block our arrows.
"The second type of vessel you need is known as the Small Paddle-Wheeler. It has a total of twelve wheels and holds a hundred or more men. A long spike protrudes from both its prow and its stern. It also has archer towers on each side and is also protected by a bamboo screen. This craft can be used in the narrower waterways of the marsh to prevent those rogues from laying ambushes. If you accept my plan, the bandits of Mount Liangshan will soon be subdued."
As Gao listened and examined the sketches, he was very pleased. He called for wine and food and clothing and rewarded Ye Chun. Gao put him in charge of the boat building project.
Gao pushed the men day and night, setting time limits within which to deliver the timber to Jizhou. Each county had to supply materials needed for the vessels' construction. Any man who was two days late in fulfilling his duties received forty strokes. If he was three days late, he got double. If he exceeded five days, he was executed according to military law. The pressure never let up. Many ordinary citizens were killed, and the people bemoaned their lot. A jingle going around ran like this:

*A frog in a well can't see the whole sky,*
*Gao has taken advice from a jerk.*
*Paddle-wheelers won't win him victory,*
*A waste of money and exhausting work.*

Sailors to be added to the fleet kept arriving in Jizhou, and Gao assigned them to the commandants of his various camps for training. Then one day the city gate-keeper announced: "Qiu Yue and Zhou Ang, the generals sent by the imperial court, are here." Gao directed his commandants to go outside the wall to greet them. When the two were ushered into his presence, Gao received them with food and wine. He entertained them and instructed an officer to reward their troops. The generals requested Gao's order to sally forth and do battle.
"Wait a few days, gentlemen, till the paddle-wheelers are ready," said Gao. "Then we can proceed on land and water together. With our combined naval and cavalry operation, we'll suppress the bandits in a single battle!"
"It will be child's play," boasted the generals. "Rest assured, Marshal? we surely will return to the capital victorious!"
"If you match your words with deeds, I shall petition the emperor to have you both promoted to important posts."
The feasting ended, the generals mounted their horses in front of Gao's headquarters and returned to their commands. They settled their troops in encampments and awaited orders.
When Song Jiang and his chieftains hurried back to Mount Liangshan after their rebellious outcry and murderous battle at the walls of Jizhou, Song Jiang was anxious. "Twice they've come with amnesties, and both times we injured the emissary," he said to Wu Yong. "That makes our crimes more serious than ever. What are we going to do? The court will surely dispatch an army to punish us."
He sent a scout down to find out what was happening and report back as soon as possible. In a few days the man returned with the details. Song Jiang and Wu Yong conferred in Loyalty Hall. They knew now that Gao had raised a navy, and that he had put Ye Chun in charge of building a fleet of hundreds of paddle-wheelers, large and small. Also that the Eastern Capital had dispatched reinforcements under Qiu Yue and Zhou Ang, both courageous generals.
"How can we stop ships that size when they come flying across the water?" said Song Jiang.
Wu Yong laughed. "What is there to be afraid of? All we need is a few naval chieftains. We have powerful warrior leaders to fight them on land. Anyhow, it will take them several weeks to build those big vessels. We've forty or fifty days yet. Send a couple of brothers down to get into their shipyard and stir them up a bit. Meanwhile, we'll gradually be thinking of a way to cope."
"Excellent. I'll tell Flea on a Drum Shi Qian and Golden Dog Duan Jingzhu to go."
"Better ask Zhang Qing and Sun Xin to disguise themselves as timber haulers and mix with the others and get into the yard also. And tell their wives Gu Dasao and Sun the Witch to dress up like the women food servers and go in with them. Flea on a Drum and Golden Dog can be their support."
Each of the pairs was summoned to the hall and instructed what to do. All were inordinately pleased and went separately down the mountains to carry out their missions.
Marshal Gao continued driving the boat builders day and night and conscripting people into his labor force. The entire area east of Jizhou was one vast shipyard. The several thousand artisans building the hundreds of large craft complained bitterly about conditions. But the rough soldiers threatened them with their swords, and forced them to work without rest.
Flea on a Drum and Golden Dog reached the shipyard first. "Since the other four will be setting fire to this place, you and I won't be making much of a show here," Flea said to Dog. "Let's just lay low till that happens. Then I'll wait outside the city gate. Troops are sure to be sent out. I can slip in when they open the gate, climb up to the wall tower, and set it to the torch. You, meanwhile, can be kindling a nice blaze in the fodder depot west of the city. They won't know where to rush first. We'll give them a good scare."
The two concealed incendiary powders on their persons, and separated to find safe resting places.
Zhang Qing and Sun Xin, on nearing Jizhou, saw four or five hundred men hauling lumber to the shipyard. They joined them and also laid their shoulders to the ropes. At the entrance to the yard over two hundred soldiers, each with a dagger at his waist, belabored the straining porters with sticks to greater speed.
Inside there was much confused activity. They whole area was enclosed by a large palisade and contained two or three hundred thatch-roofed work-sheds. Thousands of artisans were busily engaged. In one section men were sawing planks, in another carpenters were nailing them to the hulls, in a third others were caulking the cracks. Laborers without number were bustling about. Zhang and Sun drifted into dark corners of the kitchen-shed and kept out of sight.
Their wives, Sun the Witch and Gu Dasao, wearing soiled clothes and each carrying a jug of cooked rice, entered with other women noisily delivering food. Gradually, day waned and a bright moon rose. But most of the artisans went on working at their never-ending tasks.
Around the second watch Sun and Zhang set fire to the left side of the yard, while their wives started a blaze on the right. The thatched roofs burst quickly into flames. Yelling in alarm, the artisans and laborers knocked down the palisade and fled into the night.
Marshal Gao, who was sleeping, was aroused by a man hastening in and reporting: "The shipyard is on fire!" Gao got up quickly and ordered his army to the rescue. Qiu Yue and Zhou Ang, leading a contingent of municipal troops, hurried from the city to quench the blaze. Shortly thereafter flames began to dance on the wall tower. Gao mounted his horse and led troops personally up the wall. As they were fighting the fire another report came in: "The fodder depot to the west is in flames! The blaze has turned the sky as bright as day!"
Qiu and Zhou, by then rushing with their forces to the fodder depot, heard suddenly the thunder of drums and a chorus of murderous yells. Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin and five hundred cavalry, who had been hiding there in ambush, now dashed out, with Zhang heading directly for the two generals.
"Mount Liangshan's whole complement of heroes are here!" Featherless Arrow shouted.
Qiu Yue, angered, clapped his horse and waved his sword, and galloped towards Zhang Qin, who met his charge with levelled lance. Less than three rounds they fought, and Featherless Arrow turned and left. Eager to win glory, Qiu pursued. "Halt, bandit!" he cried.
Zhang socketed his lance and quietly drew a stone from his embroidered pouch. Twisting around, he waited till Qiu drew near, then let fly with a shout: "Here!"
The stone struck Qiu in the face, knocking him from his horse. Zhou Ang and several standard bearers tore pell-mell to the rescue. While Zhou engaged Featherless Arrow, the others got Qiu back into his saddle. Zhou and Zhang fought only a few rounds, when Zhang departed. Zhou did not pursue, and Zhang again returned. He saw approaching the four contingents under Wang Huan, Xu Jing, Yang Wen and Li Congji. Zhang waved his hand as a signal and led off his five hundred cavalry.
Fearing an ambush, the government troops did not give chase. They reassembled and went back to fighting the fires. The sky was already light by the time they extinguished the three blazes. Gao dispatched an officer to learn the state of Qiu's wound. The stone had hit him in the mouth, dislodging four of his teeth and lacerating his nose and lips. The marshal directed a doctor to treat him.
Qiu's injury intensified Gao's antipathy for the men of Liangshan Marsh. He hated them to the marrow of his bones. He sent an order to Ye Chun to hasten the construction of the boats, and instructed his commandants to set up camps around the perimeter of the yard and stay constantly on the alert.
Zhang Qing, Sun Xin and their wives were delighted. Flea on a Drum and Golden Dog returned. All six were met by cohorts who had come down to escort them back to the mountain fortress. On arriving in Loyalty Hall they told how they had set the fires. Song Jiang was very pleased. He gave a feast in their honor and handsomely rewarded them. Thereafter, he sent spies down frequently.
By the time the boats were built it was winter. But that year was warm. Marshal Gao was glad. He felt Heaven was helping him. He urged his naval officers to familiarize themselves with the use of the vessels, which were being launched one after another. Sailors, conscripted from all the surrounding areas, now numbered over ten thousand. One half was put to learning to propel the craft, the other half practised archery. In less than twenty days the necessary preparations were completed. Ye Chun invited Gao to inspect the fleet.
On the appointed day Gao arrived with his generals and commandants. More than three hundred paddle-wheelers lay in their moorings. A dozen or so were selected and decked with pennants, to the crash of gongs and the beat of drums. At a knock on the bamboo segment, the wheels on both sides of the vessels began to churn, and they skimmed forward at truly flying speed. Gao's heart warmed with joy.
"The bandits will never be able to stop boats as fast as these," he exulted. "We're sure to win!"
He rewarded Ye Chun with money and silks. He also paid the artisans travelling expenses and let them go home.
The next day Marshal Gao directed that fruits and animals and paper replicas of gold and silver ingots be prepared for a sacrifice to the Water Spirit. The generals formed ranks and invited Gao to light the incense. Qiu Yue, whose wounds had healed, was consumed by hatred. He longed only for a chance to capture Zhang Qin alive and wreak his vengeance. With Zhou Ang and the commandants he mounted and rode behind Gao to where the boats were moored. There, all dismounted and Gao conducted the sacrifice. After the incense was lit and the ceremonies completed, the paper money was burned and the generals offered their congratulations.
Gao directed that the singers and dancers who had been brought from the capital come on board and entertain, while the sailors practised propelling the large craft flying across the waters. The sound of music and revelry continued until well after dark. That night all slept on board.
The next day, and the day after there was more feasting and drinking. Still, the vessels did not sail. Suddenly a scout arrived and reported: "The Mount Liangshan bandits have written a poem and posted it in front of the City God Temple in Jizhou. Here is a copy." The poem ran as follows:

*We'll capture Yang Jian and old Gao Qiu,*
*And mop up the prefectures on the Central Plain.*
*Even if your paddle-wheelers number ten thousand,*
*You won't leave Liangshan Marsh alive again!*

Gao was furious. He wanted to set forth at once. "If I don't kill all those bandit rebels, I won't come back!" he raged.
"Cool your wrath, Marshal," Chief to Staff Wen urged. "I think they're actually afraid. That's why they bluster. It doesn't matter. Wait a few days. Decide exactly how you're going to use your troops on land and on water, then start. There's still time. Though it's already winter, the weather is warm. It's a blessing from Heaven, a sign of your prestige."
This kind of talk pleased Gao, and he went into the city to discuss troop movements. Zhou Ang and Wang Huan would lead a large army to follow along on land and give support to the navy. Xiang Yuanzhen and Zhang Kai would go with a force of ten thousand and block the large road in front of Mount Liangshan. The marsh had always been a place of mist and reeds and wild inlets. The road had been built, on Song Jiang's orders, only recently. Gao wanted to get his men in there first, and cut the connection with the mountain fortress. His Chief of Staff Wen, his other generals, his Chief Advisor Wang Jin, the boat builder Ye Chun, his standard bearers, his senior and junior officers, would all travel with Gao in the armada.
Wen objected. "You should supervise the cavalry advance on land, Marshal. Don't go with the fleet. It's too dangerous."
"There's nothing to worry about, retorted Gao. "The last two times not only didn't we capture any of the bandit leaders, but we took heavy casualties and lost many of our boats. This time we've got excellent craft. If I don't assume personal command how are we going to nab those rebels! We're going to fight them to the death! You need say no more."
The chief of staff dared not pursue the subject. He followed the marshal on board. Gao designated thirty large paddle-wheelers, with Qiu Yue, Xu Jing and Mei Zhan in command, as the van. Fifty small paddle-wheelers under Yang Wen, Chief Advisor Wang Jin and Ye Chun the boat builder, would go first to clear the way. A big red pennant on the lead craft bore the inscription in words of gold: *We roil the seas, stir the rivers and churn up white waves to pacify the country and suppress the torrent-causing demons.*
On a vessel in the central section of the fleet were Gao, Wen, and the boy singers and girl dancers. Green standards, generals' flags, pennants of yellow and white, and canopies of red and black broke out on all the boats, and arms were displayed in the central section. Vessels under Wang Wente and Li Congji brought up the rear.
It was the middle of the eleventh lunar month. The cavalry was given the order to march. Qiu Yue, Xu Jing and Mei Zhan, on the lead craft in the van of the armada, set sail. Like flying clouds and rolling mist, the government forces advanced on Liangshan Marsh.
The three generals in the van urged on their vessels, dispatching the small paddle-wheelers to both sides of the river to block the inlets, while the large paddle-wheelers proceeded full speed ahead. Eyes bulging, necks straining, the officers stared before them, as the craft wound swiftly deeper into the marsh.
Song Jiang and Wu Yong, who had been informed in detail about the enemy movements, had made careful preparations, and awaited the arrival of the government boats.
Gao's fleet could see in the distance a few small vessels approaching, each carrying fourteen or fifteen men dressed in armor. A captain sat in the middle of each craft, and on each was a white banner reading: *The Three Ruan Heroes of Liangshan Marsh.* Ruan the Second was on the boat in the center, Ruan the Fifth to his left, and Ruan the Seventh to his right. What appeared in the distance to be shining armor was actually only gold and silver paper.

The three vanguard generals shouted for the lead craft to open fire, and cannon balls, musket shots and rockets spewed forth. The three brothers and their crews waited fearlessly till the paddle-wheeler drew close enough to bring them within range, then, with a shout, dived into the river and swam away under water. Qiu Yue and his cohorts captured only three empty boats.
Before the fleet had proceeded another three *li*; three more skiffs were seen swiftly approaching. On the first were a dozen or so men, their bodies daubed with pigments of black, yellow and red. Their long hair hung unbound, and they whistled as they came. On the other two craft were six or seven men, and these were streaked red and yellow. Meng Kang the Jade Flagpole commanded the central vessel. Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave commanded the boat to the left. Tong Meng the River Churning Clam captained the craft to the right.
Qiu Yue ordered his lead vessel to fire. With a shout, the painted figures dived into the river. Again the government forces took possession of only three abandoned vessels.
After proceeding another three or more *li* the van of the armada saw three medium-sized boats, propelled by eight men on each plying four oars. A dozen brigands, grouped around a captain who was seated in the prow of one of the vessels unfurled a red banner reading: *Naval Chieftain Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon.*
On the craft to the left sat a captain holding an iron spear. Here, a green banner read: *Naval Chieftain Zhang Heng the Boat Flame.*
A bold figure stood on the craft to the right. Stripped to the waist and barefoot, he had several iron chisels tucked into his belt. In his hand was a bronze hammer. A black banner inscribed in silver read: *Chieftain Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves.*
"Thanks for delivering your boats to the marsh!" Zhang called.
The three vanguard generals shouted for their archers to shoot. Simultaneously with the twanging of the bowstrings, the men on the three craft somersaulted into the river.
It was early winter. None of the soldier and sailor conscripts on the government vessels cared to enter the icy water. While they hesitated, a volley of shots sounded from the signal cannon on the heights. Hundreds of little craft sped out from reeds on all sides like swarms of locusts. On each of these were four or five men and an unspecified cargo. The big paddle-wheelers tried unsuccessfully to ram them.
Obstructions, shoved in beneath the water, suddenly stopped the paddle-wheels from turning. Arrows shot from the archery towers were warded off by the men on the little craft with board shields.
They closed in on the big ships, caught their tillers with grappling hooks, hacked at the sailors at the wheels. Fifty or sixty brigands were already clambering up the lead ship. The frantic officers wanted to withdraw, but their retreat was cut off.
As the van vessels fought a confused battle, wild yells rose in the rear of the armada. Marshal Gao and Chief of Staff Wen, hearing the panic from their position in the center of the fleet, hurriedly sought to go ashore. A clamor of trumpets and drums shook the reeds. The soldiers on Gao's ship yelled: "We're leaking!" and jumped into the river.
Before and behind, all the paddle-wheelers were shipping water. Gao could see them sinking. while the little craft engulfed them like ants.
The government vessels were brand-new. How could they leak? Zhang Shun and a team of expert sailors had swum underwater with hammers and chisels and knocked holes in the bottoms, so that they were leaking like sieves.
Gao mounted the tiller deck in the stern and yelled for help to the boat behind. A figure spurted out of the river and leaped on the tiller deck. "I'll save you, Marshal," the man exclaimed. Gao stared. He had never seen him before.
The man strode forward. With one hand he grabbed Gao's head kerchief, with the other he grasped his belt. "Down you go," cried the swimmer. He tossed the marshal into the river with a splash. How the mighty had fallen!
Two little craft came flying over, and Gao was hauled on board one. His captor was White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun. In the water Zhang could take a man as easily as catching a turtle in a jar. He had only to extend his hand.
When the fleet was thrown into confusion, Qiu Yue, on the lead vessel, was anxious to escape. Suddenly, a naval officer emerged from among the outlaw sailors who had boarded the ship. Before Qiu could defend himself, the man bounded up to him and hacked him down with one sweep of his blade. The swordsman was Yang Lin the Elegant Panther. Xu Jing and Mei Zhan saw Qiu Yue die, and rushed to fight Yang Lin.
Four more lesser chieftains advanced on the generals: Zheng Tianshou the Fair- Faced Gentleman, Xue Yong the Sick Tiger, Li Zhong the Tiger-Fighting General, and Cao Zheng the Demon Carver. All came charging up from the rear.
It was too much. Xu Jing jumped overboard. To his surprise, someone was waiting for him beneath the waves, and he was taken.
Mei Zhan was stabbed in the thigh by Xue Yong, and fell into the hold. Eight chieftains were leading the outlaw naval forces. Three of these were still on their first boat. Li Yun the Black-Eyed Tiger, Tang Long the Golden-Coin Spotted Leopard, and Du Xing the Demon Face. Even if those government commandants had three heads and six arms apiece, they could never have got away. Song Jiang was in control of the Liangshan Marsh naval contingents. Lu Junyi the Magnate commanded the outlaw warriors on land.
At the time of the complete victory on the waterways, Lu was leading his army in an advance along the main road in front of Mount Liangshan. They ran into the government forces under Zhou Ang and Wang Huan.
Zhou Ang rode to the fore and shouted: "Rebellious bandit, do you recognize me?"
"You worthless officer," Lu yelled back. "Your death is before your eyes and you still don't know it!" He levelled his lance and galloped towards his foe.
Zhou Ang gave his mount full rein and raced to meet him, brandishing his battle-ax. They clashed on the road before the mountain.
Less than twenty rounds they fought, with neither the victor, when cries arose from the rear of the government troops. Outlaw forces, which had been lying in ambush in the forests on both sides of the road, had come charging out and were assailing the soldiers from all directions. Led by Guan Sheng and Qin Ming in the southeast, and by Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo in the northeast, the brigand heroes closed in rapidly.
Commandants Xiang Yuanzhen and Zhang Kai couldn't stop them. They fought their way free and ran for their lives. Zhou Ang and Wang Huan dared not remain and give battle. Trailing their weapons, they turned their steeds and followed after the fleeing generals to the safety of Jizhou City. There, they quartered their troops and awaited further news.
After winning the naval engagement and capturing Gao Qiu, Song Jiang directed Dai Zong to transmit his urgent order: none of the prisoners were to be harmed. Chief of Staff Wen and the other officials still on the big paddle-wheelers, plus the singing boys and dancing girls and the rest of their company, were removed from the vessels. Then, trumpet calls signalled the outlaw forces to retire to the fortress with their captives.
Song Jiang, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng were in Loyalty Hall when Zhang Shun brought in the dripping Gao Qiu. Song Jiang hurried forward to meet him. He had fresh clothes of silks and satins brought for Gao to change into. Then he escorted the marshal to the interior of the hall and begged him to be seated in the central place of honor.
Dropping to his knees and murmuring that he deserved to die for his crimes, Song Jiang kowtowed. Gao hastily returned the courtesy. Song Jiang directed Wu Yong and Gongsun to help the marshal to his feet, and once again beseeched him to be seated. He instructed Yan Qing to transmit the order: "Whosoever, after today, kills any person shall be severely punished according to our military law."
One by one, the outlaw chieftains brought in their prisoners. Tong Wei and Tong Meng with Xu Jing; Li Jun and Zhang Heng with Wang Wente; Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu with Yang Wen; the three Ruan brothers with Li Congji; Zheng Tianshou, Xue Yong, Li Zhong and Cao Zheng with Mei Zhan; Yang Lin with the head of Qiu Yue; Li Yun, Tang Long and Du Xing with the heads of Ye Chun and Wang Jin; Xie Zhen and Xie Bao with Chief of Staff Wen, plus the singing boys and dancing girls and the entire theatrical company. Only four had escaped: Zhou Ang, Wang Huan, Xiang Yuanzhen and Zhang Kai.
Song Jiang directed that fresh clothes be provided to all, and that they be permitted to clean up a bit. He then invited everyone into the hall, and asked them be seated according to rank. He directed that the captured soldiers be allowed to return to Jizhou. For the singing boys and dancing girls and their company he provided a good boat, and told them to go back on their own.
Song Jiang ordered that cows and horses be slaughtered and that a feast be laid. To the strains of joyous music he rewarded his troops and, summoning his chieftains, presented them to Marshal Gao. He repeatedly toasted his guest, while Wu Yong and Gongsun kept their cups filled and Lu Junyi the Magnate and the others stood in attendance.
"I'm only a petty functionary with the tattoo of a criminal upon my face. I would never dare oppose our holy emperor," Song Jiang exclaimed. "I was forced to come here because of my many heavy offenses. Although I was twice approached with the emperor's benevolent forgiveness, the missions were perverted and corrupt. It's a long complicated story. Rescue me, Marshal, from the depths of the pit and let me see the sun again! Your kindness will be engraved upon my bones! I will pay for it with my very life!"
Gao looked around at the assembled gallants. Bold and heroic, intelligent and imposing, each and every one was handsomely dressed. Although they were no longer on the battle field, he was still half afraid of them, and he said: "Rest assured, Song Jiang. When I return to the court I will petition the emperor for a full amnesty. You will be pardoned and rewarded with an important post. Your warriors, high and low, will also enjoy the emperor's favor and become respectable officials."
Overjoyed, Song Jiang bowed and thanked the marshal. In the banquet that followed, although elegant dishes were lacking, there were mountains of meat and seas of wine. All of the chieftains, by turns, respectfully toasted their eminent guest of honor.
Gao's tongue was loosened by drunkenness, and he boasted: "I've been a wrestler since childhood. I'm the world's best."
Lu Junyi, also drunk, was irritated by Gao's bragging. He pointed at Yan Qing and said: "This young brother also knows how to wrestle. He won the East Sacred Mountain competitions three times."
Gao lumbered to his feet, took off his robe, and demanded that Yan wrestle with him. Because Song Jiang had been treating Gao respectfully as a marshal of the imperial court, the chieftains had tolerated his vainglorious talk. Now they saw his challenge to Yan Qing as a good chance to shut his mouth. They stood up.
"Good, good," they said. "Let's have the match." They swarmed noisily out of the hall.
Song Jiang was also in his cups. His mind was fuzzy. When the two contenders removed their outer garments and walked to the broad open porch, he ordered that a soft rug be put down.
The two struck poses, then Gao lunged. But Yan Qing's hands were swifter. He grabbed Gao and, with one twist, threw him so hard on his back that Gao lay stunned for several minutes, unable to rise. This grip is known as the life-saver. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi hurriedly raised Gao to his feet and helped him put on his clothes.
"You're a little drunk, Marshal," they said, smiling. "How can you wrestle in this condition? Please don't be offended."
Badly shaken, Gao returned to the banquet. He drank until far into the night, when he was assisted to quarters in the rear of the hall.
The next day, Song Jiang gave another banquet to soothe Gao after his shock of the previous night. The marshal announced he wished to leave.
"I have no intention of detaining Your Excellency," Song Jiang assured him. "May Heaven strike me dead if I'm deceiving you!"
"If, mighty warrior, you permit me to return to the capital, I and my whole family will be your guarantors before the throne. An amnesty will surely be granted and you will be given an important position. If I go back on my word, may I have no cover under Heaven and no hiding place on Earth and may I die pierced by spears and arrows!"
Song Jiang kowtowed in thanks.
"You may keep my generals here as hostage if you don't believe me.
"There's no need. How could I doubt a high noble like you? I'll have mounts prepared for them and send them back to their camps."
"We're grateful for your considerate treatment. And now I must go."
Song Jiang and his chieftains begged Gao to remain a bit longer. The next day they again feasted and talked until late, but on the third day the marshal insisted that he must leave. Song Jiang gave him a final farewell banquet.
"Send one of your more intelligent men along," Gao suggested. "He can accompany me when I petition the emperor and relate your circumstances here on Mount Liangshan. Then an imperial decree can be issued quickly."
Song Jiang wanted nothing more than an amnesty. After conferring with Wu Yong, he selected Xiao Rang the Master Hand for the mission. "Better send Yue Ho the Iron Throat, too," Wu Yong recommended. "Let them both go."
"Although you trust me, warrior," said Marshal Gao, "I'd like to leave Chief of Staff Wen here as a token of my word." Song Jiang was very pleased. On the fourth day, he, Wu Yong, and about twenty equestrians accompanied Gao and his commandants down the mountain and saw them off all the way to the Shore of Golden Sands, a distance of over 20 *li*. They bid the marshal farewell and returned to the fortress. From then on they watched for an emissary and listened for good tidings. News of Gao's return preceded him, and Zhou Ang, Wang Huan, Xiang Yuanzhen, Zhang Kai, and Prefect Zhang Shuye came out of the city to greet him. After entering Jizhou, the marshal remained for several days. He instructed the local commandants to lead their troops back to camp to rest and await orders. Then, with General Zhou Ang, plus senior and junior officers, he set out for the Eastern Capital with his army accompanied by Xiao Rang and Yue Ho. Prefect Zhang Shuye returned to Jizhou, where he maintained strict security precautions. And because Gao took with him two representatives from Mount Liang Marsh, gallant men met their sovereign in the ornate palace, bravos were entertained by high officials and lofty nobles. Their courage was sung at lavish banquets, they were conspicuous heroes amid the fiercest of generals.

Marshal Gao, who has made Jizhou his headquarters, has called the border generals in for talks. With their armies they have been ordered to strike camp and repair to the city. They are ordered to remain within the city fully armed and ready for action. All officers from the camps are to man the walls in a state of full alert. No ordinary banners are flown from the city walls. A yellow flag only is flown over the north gate, displaying the two words: "Imperial edict". In the company of the imperial envoy and all the officials, Gao the Ball awaits the arrival of Song Jiang.
What they did that day on Mount Liang was to send out Hotshot with five hundred cavalry. When this party reached Jizhou they made a complete circuit of the city walls and then withdrew to the north. A little later the Magic Messenger came to reconnoitre on foot. Marshal Gao was told of it and went himself to the lookout platform next to the parapet, accompanied by his staff of a hundred or more, a ceremonial umbrella and an altar for burning incense. Away to the north Song Jiang's army was seen approach-ing. First came trumpets and drums, with flags and banners on all sides, and then the leaders in various formations — the rice scoop, the big circle and the V of a flight of geese. At their head rode Song Jiang, with the Unicorn, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun, who all bowed very low to Marshal Gao and saluted him. Marshal Gao immediately sent someone up onto the walls to declare: "The Emperor has pardoned your offence and issued an amnesty, so why do you come here armed?"
Song Jiang ordered the Magic Messenger to approach the foot of the wall and answer: "We have none of us yet received this great favour; nor do we know the contents of the edict. We cannot take the risk of disarming. We trust you will understand our position. Please summon the people of the city and let us all hear the edict together. Then we will gladly lay down our arms."
Gao ordered the populace to assemble on the city walls to hear the edict read. Soon they were all there, a great crowd milling about. Outside the city Song Jiang and his companions saw this multitude lining the walls and rode forward. At the first beat of the drum they dismounted. At the second beat they strode towards the city, while orderlies behind them took charge of the horses. They waited respectfully a bowshot from the walls. At the third beat of the drum they joined their hands together in sign of obedience and the reading commenced. Here is what the herald read out:
*Hear ye! By his deeds shall every man be known. For the governance of the nation there is but one right way: the doer of good is accounted a loyal citizen; the wrongdoer is a traitor. We have long known of the gang in the Marshes of Mount Liang: how they transgress all rule and decline to reform. Today we send our envoy to publish our decree: With regard to the bandits in the Marshes of Mount Liang and the punishment they deserve for their crimes, an exception being made for Song Jiang, for Lu Junyi, known as the Unicorn, and for all the rest full pardon is granted, absolving them from the consequences of their wrongdoings. Let the leaders come to the court to show their gratitude. Let the followers return home to their own communities. The stain of corruption is quick to spread, alas! Therefore eschew evil and return to the path of righteousness. Cease your disturbances and turn over a new leaf. This is our will, let all who hear take heed.*
When they heard the herald pause after the bit about an exception being made for Song Jiang, the Professor caught Colonel Hua's eye and said: "Did you hear that?" As soon as the reading was finished, Colonel Hua gave a great shout: "If you do not pardon our Leader, how can the rest of us surrender?" He set an arrow to his bow, drew the string and shouting to the official who had read the edict, "See the might of Hua Rong's arrow!" shot him through the centre of the forehead. People rushed to assist him. All the Mount Liang leaders shouted "Get them!" and a hail of arrows fell on the city. Gao the Ball was forced to keep ducking.
Troops emerged on every side. Drums sounded among Song Jiang's band and they all mounted and galloped off. The troops from the city pursued them for a mile or two. Then a signal shot was heard from the rear and Iron Ox's infantry charged from the east, Steelbright's cavalry from the west. With these two forces converging on them, the government troops turned tail, fearful of being trapped in the middle. Song Jiang's troops now turned about and charged as well. As the forces of the ambush pressed home their advantage the government troops were thrown into confusion and fled. Many were killed. But Song Jiang called a halt and instead of pressing home his advantage withdrew to Mount Liang.
Marshal Gao reported to the Emperor from Jizhou : "Song Jiang and his bandits have shot Your Majesty's herald and rejected your amnesty." At the same time he wrote secretly to the Grand Preceptor, and Marshals Tong and Yang for advice, urging the Grand Preceptor to petition the Emperor to provide logistical support along the route and send troops by forced marches to back up the operation against the bandits.
The Grand Preceptor, on receiving Gao's confidential letter, went straight to the Emperor and told him. The Emperor's displeasure was evident. "These lawless rebels have insulted us and committed heinous offences! " He issued instructions for all forces to place themselves at Marshal Gao's disposal. When Marshal Yang heard that there had been yet another defeat, he appointed two more intrepid commanders from the imperial guard and told them each to select from the four regiments — Dragon, Flying Tiger, His Majesty's and Loyal Hearts — five hundred seasoned troops, making two thousand in all, to reinforce Marshal Gao in his efforts to subdue the bandits.
Who were these two commanders then? One was a chief instructor of the imperial guard by name Qiu Yue; the other was assistant instructor of the imperial guard and equerry Zhou Ang. These two commanders had done the Emperor good service and were widely known. They had a profound knowledge of tactics and were strict disciplinarians. They were also close friends of Marshal Gao.
When Marshal Yang had told these two of their appointment and set a deadline for their departure, they went to take leave of the Grand Preceptor, who said: "If you perform your task with prudence and meet with success, you can be sure of promotion!"
They thanked him and left. In choosing the troops from the four regiments, they took only the strongest and fittest, narrow-waisted and broad-shouldered natives of Shandong and Hebei, well adapted to climbing mountains and travelling by water. Then they bade farewell to the members of the Military Council and went for a last word with Marshal Yang. "We are leaving tomorrow," they told him. Marshal Yang gave them each five good horses to use in their campaign. They thanked him and returned to their barracks to make final preparations.
Next morning the troops had saddled the horses and the army paraded in front of the imperial barracks. The colonels formed their troops into four divisions. A thousand men from Dragon regiment and from Flying Tiger, together with another two thousand cavalry, were commanded by Chief Instructor Qiu. A thousand from His Majesty's and Loyal Hearts with another two thousand cavalry were under Assistant Instructor Zhou. There were a thousand infantry, divided equally between the two commands. Punctually at dawn everyone formed up their troops to march out of town. Marshal Yang personally reviewed the troops from the city gate tower. It goes without saying that the general's subordinate officers and orderlies made a brave show. Marching under two banners and surrounded by a posse of chargers, Instructor Qiu's guard pressed about him. As he proudly led the army of the left hand forth the people of the capital broke into spontaneous applause. Then it was the turn of the army of the right hand, equally well disciplined. Preceded by two embroidered banners and surrounded by his cavalry commanders Assistant Instructor Zhou rode out. When they reached the edge of the city, he and Instructor Qiu dismounted, saluted Marshal Yang and bade farewell to the Military Council.
Back in Jizhou Marshal Gao had been discussing things with the magistrate: "When these reinforcements arrive we must first send people to the nearby forests to cut down trees for timber. All the boat builders in the region must be drafted and boat yards set up outside the city to build warships. We must enlist courageous sailors and officers."
Now in one of the Jizhou inns there was a guest called Ye Chun. He was from the south and he was a master boat builder. On his way through Shandong he had passed through the Marshes of Mount Liang and been robbed of all his money by a small band under a minor chieftain. Unable to return home, he had been drifting among the rivers and lakes.
When this Ye Chun heard that Marshal Gao was planning to cut timber and build boats, to gain the upper hand in the campaign against the bandits, he drew up some designs for boats and asked to see the Marshal. After greeting the latter respectfully, he said: "Do you know why you failed before, Your Honour, when you sent in your boats? It was because you had taken the boats from anywhere and everywhere. Some were propelled by sail, some by poles, some by oars, none of them were exactly right for the job. What is more, they had narrow keels, they weren't adapted for fighting. I'd like to show you a plan. If you want to get the better of those bandits you must first build a hundred or so big boats. The biggest is the kind we call a Leviathan. You have twenty-four rotating paddles along the two sides. They will take several hundred men. You use a dozen sailors to turn each paddle. There are bamboo screens along each side for protection against arrows. An archery tower is built on the deck. To start the attack you strike the side of the battlemented turret and the twenty-four paddles all turn together and the boat simply flies! Nothing is going to stop a boat like this! If it encounters enemy boats the hidden crossbowmen open fire. Nothing is safe from them! The

second kind of boat, which we call a mini-Leviathan, only has half the number of paddles. It can take around a hundred men. Attached to the bow is a spike and along the sides are turrets for crossbows, as before, protected by matting. These boats can enter the small channels in the Marshes and prevent the enemy from hiding there. If you follow this plan you'll subdue the bandits in no time. It's a cinch!"

Marshal Gao took a look at the plans. He was well pleased with them. He had wine, food and clothing brought as a present for Ye Chun and put him in charge of boat building. The work pushed ahead every day: trees were cut down for the timber, a date was set by which it was all to be delivered to Jizhou. Every district and village was involved in the effort to provide boat building materials. Forty strokes of the cane was the punishment for missing a deadline by two days. One more stroke was given for every additional day after the third. Execution under martial law followed after five days. Everywhere the people were goaded on, under threat of death. Many perished. The people groaned.

*For a frog in a well the view's not wide;*
*They're taking the idiot Gao for a ride.*
*These paddle boats are bound to fail:*
*The expense and labour is to no avail!*

While Ye Chun gets on with the building of his paddle boats and such, we can consider the conscripted sailors, who were now pouring into Jizhou. Marshal Gao divided them equally among his commanders and sent them off for training. And that was that.

But now a doorman entered and said: "They've sent two new commanders from the court, Instructor Qiu and Assistant Instructor Zhou." Gao sent all his commanders out to meet them outside the city. When they arrived at the government offices to pay their respects to the Marshal, he ordered wine and food. After some flattering words, supplies were sent out to their troops while the Marshal entertained them. They asked him to give the order for them to go out and do battle, but he said: "Rest for a few days until our new boats are ready. Then we will mount a combined attack by land and water, with boats and cavalry, so we can settle all the bandits in one fell swoop."

"Don't worry, Marshal," the two said. "We view this business with the bandits as child's play. We shall certainly return victor-ious."

Gao said: "If your results match your words, I shall report it to the Emperor and you will certainly be promoted to high office."

When the party broke up they rode back to their respective camps and set about drilling their troops.

While Gao was urging on the boat building, eager to start the campaign, Song Jiang and the others, who had rushed back to the mountain after calling off the siege of Jizhou, were discussing things with the Professor. He said: "Twice an amnesty has been offered and twice we have attacked the Emperor's envoy. Our offence is doubly grievous and they are bound to send more troops." He sent scouts down to find out what was going on and report back as quickly as possible. In just a few days they returned with a full report: "Marshal Gao has just established a naval force, and appointed one Ye Chun to build boats, over a hundred paddle boats, large and small. And the Eastern Capital is sending two new commanders from His Majesty's personal guard to assist in the campaign. They are called Qiu and Zhou, and they're both brave soldiers. They've each been given a lot of troops and they're heading this way."

Song Jiang said to the Professor: "Big boats like those are very fast, how can we destroy them?"

"What's the problem?" said the Professor, grinning confidently. "All we need is a few of our waterborne leaders, that's all. When we take them on ashore we'll have to put up a good fight. All the same, I reckon these big boats will be some time in the building, and won't be ready for a while. We've still got about six weeks' grace. Let's send one or two of our comrades to those boat yards to tease them a bit, then in our own good time we'll deliver the knock-out blow."

Song Jiang said: "I like the idea! We'll send out the Flea and Yellow Dog."

The Professor said: "Better send the Gardener and Blackface along too. They can dress as woodcutters and mix with the crowd and get into the boatyard. And Auntie Gu and Sister Sun can pretend to be women taking food for the workers and mix with a crowd of women to get in. They can all lend the Flea and Yellow Dog a hand. The Gardener can take some back-up troops, just in case."

Everyone was called into the hall to receive their orders. All were excited. They went down the mountain separately and set about their business.

Now Marshal Gao was urging on the boat building from morning to night and from dawn to dusk people were being drafted for forced labour. All along Jizhou's east side were boat yards, busy with the construction of the hundred paddle boats. There was even a gaggle of foreign troops who went about with drawn swords, terrorizing the workers night and day, so great was the urgency of the work.

When the Flea and Yellow Dog reached the boatyard, they decided: "Evidently the Gardener and Blackface and their wives are going to start fires in the boatyard, so when we get there we won't show our hand at first. We'll lie low until the fires start. Then if I station myself near the city gate, I can take advantage of the moment when troops rush out to fight the fires in order to slip inside and start a fire in the tower. You can go to the west of the city and start a fire in the grain store. They'll have to keep rushing from one side to another. That'll put the wind up them!"

This was their plan. They secreted on their persons the materials for starting fires, and then went separate ways to find suitable hiding places.

When the Gardener and Blackface reached the town they saw a group of several hundred people dragging logs into the boat yard. By mingling with them and helping to drag the logs, they got inside. At the gate there were two hundred or so soldiers, armed with swords and truncheons, who beat the workers to make them work harder at pulling the logs and delivering them inside. The whole place was surrounded by a fence. Scattered about inside were several hundred thatched huts. They saw thousands of artisans. The carpenters were all at work in one place, the boat builders in another and the caulkers in a third. With so many artisans and workers milling about, it was impossible to know how many there were. After sneaking inside, the two heroes went and hid near the perimeter fence. Sister Sun and Auntie Gu, dressed in threadbare clothing and carrying rice pots, tagged onto a crowd of women victuallers who entered in a noisy throng. It was getting late and the moon had come out. All the workers were struggling to complete their tasks. It would soon be nine o'clock. The Gardener and Blackface started a fire on the left of the boat yard; Sister Sun and Auntie Gu started their fire on the right. The thatched huts began to burn fiercely. The boat yard workers cried out in panic. They tore up the fence and dashed out in all directions.

Marshal Gao was asleep when someone began shouting: "There's a fire at the boat yard!" He hurriedly dressed and despatched officers to fight the fire. Instructors Qiu and Zhou went with their troops to lend a hand. Before long another fire started in the gate tower. When Marshal Gao heard he called for his horse and took some of his men over to fight this fire. Then it was reported: "There's another fire over in the western grain store!" The flames illuminated the scene as brightly as daylight. When the two instructors took their men to fight the fire in the western store they heard the beat of a drum and a hair-raising battle cry. It was Hotshot and his five hundred cavalry who had been lying in wait there. When he sighted the two instructors, Hotshot charged. As the forces met, Hotshot shouted out: "The whole army of Mount Liang is here!"

Chief Instructor Qiu, enraged, slapped his horse and brandished his sword and charged to meet him. Hotshot did likewise, wielding his long lance, but after no more then three encounters he slapped his horse and galloped away. The Instructor wanted to follow up his advantage. He shouted, "Stay, you rebellious villain!"

Hotshot rested his lance and deftly took a large stone from his belt. Twisting in the saddle, he waited till the Instructor was quite near and then, with a cry of "Pow!" hurled his stone, catching the Instructor full in the face and toppling him from his horse. Assistant Instructor Zhou saw this and charged to the rescue with several of his junior commanders. While the Assistant Instructor fought off Hotshot, his men loaded the Chief Instructor onto a horse and left. After several bouts with the Assistant Instructor, Hotshot turned his horse and fled. His opponent did not give chase. Hotshot turned again, but seeing himself threatened by three of the border generals and their troops, he gave a signal to his five hundred cavalry and pulled back the same way he had come. Fearing an ambush the government troops did not pursue them, but reassembled and returned to the city, where they concentrated on putting out the fires. By the time all three fires were out day had dawned.

Marshal Gao asked for a report on the Chief Instructor's condition. The stone had hit him right on the mouth, knocking out four teeth. His nose and lips were split. Marshal Gao ordered a doctor for him. With this serious wounding of the Chief Instructor, Gao's anger with Mount Liang entered into the very marrow of his bones. He sent for the boat builder Ye Chun to impress upon him the need to move on fast with the work, and had the fence around the boat yard closely guarded by his officers day and night. Of this no more.

Now the Gardener and Blackface and their wives were well pleased with the results. The Flea and Yellow Dog also started homeward. A party came out to meet all six with horses to take them back to Mount Liang. Everyone went to the Ceremonial Hall to hear about the arson attack. Song Jiang was delighted and ordered a banquet in honour of the six. From now on he continued to send scouts out from time to time to keep an eye on the situation.

It was winter by the time the boats were nearly finished. But the weather was especially warm that year, and Marshal Gao was pleased because he felt heaven to be on his side. When Ye Chun's boats were ready, Marshal Gao ordered the sailors aboard for training. One by one the big and small paddle boats and the other boats were launched. Of sailors and others brought into the city from the four corners of the earth there were more than ten thousand. Half of these were sent aboard to learn how to propel the paddles, while the other half practised with the crossbow. After some twenty days, when he was satisfied with the level of training, Ye Chun asked the Marshal to inspect the boats. There is a poem which says:

*In warfare the secret has always been speed;*
*A dilatory general will seldom succeed.*
*Marshal Gao is a slacker, in tactics unskilled:*
*These boats are his downfall, they're too slow to build.*

The Marshal took all his officers and staff along to see the boats. There they were, more than three hundred of them, spread out on the water. From a dozen or so picked vessels, festooned with banners, came the beat of gongs and drums. Then after a loud bang, as someone struck the side of the tower, the paddles suddenly began to turn and the boats shot forward swift as the wind or a lightning flash.

Marshal Gao felt a surge of excitement. How could the bandits stop boats that could fly like this? The war was as good as won! He brought out money and ingots to reward Ye Chun. As for the rest, the artisans, he gave them their travel expenses and packed them off home. Next day he ordered an offering to be prepared of black oxen and white horses, together with pigs and sheep and fruit and nuts. Paper gold and silver were also needed to bribe the water spirits. When all this was ready, the commanders entreated Marshal Gao to burn incense.

The Chief Instructor's mouth had healed but the iron had entered his soul and he was longing for the day when he would take Hotshot alive and exact his revenge. So now with the Assistant Instructor and all the other officers he mounted and followed Marshal Gao down to the boats. Here they all dismounted and assisted the Marshal in his sacrifice to the river gods. After the ceremony with the incense, they burnt the paper offerings. Everyone applauded and the Marshal called for the troupe of performers they had brought with them from the capital. They were brought on board to play and sing during the ensuing banquet. While the troops practised working the paddles at speed, the sound of music, song and dance spread far and wide over the water. The festivities went on till the small hours.

Everyone slept on board that night. Next day there was more feasting, and so it continued for three days. There was no chance for the boats to sail. Then suddenly someone rushed in and said: "Those Mount Liang bandits have written a verse and stuck it up in Jizhou in front of the temple of the Earth God. Someone tore it down and brought it here."

Here is what this poem said:

*Gao the Ball, that upstart fraud,*
*Can't seem to get his troops on board.*
*Who cares if he has a million boats?*
*We're going to sink whatever floats.*

Goaded to fury by these verses, Gao wanted to attack at once. "I swear we'll never go back, till we've exterminated those lawless bastards!" he fumed.

Military adviser Wen cautioned him: "Calm your thunderous anger, Marshal. The insolent beggars must be scared stiff; ten to one they're just bluffing. No one could take them seriously. Enjoy a few days rest, until the armies are properly embarked. There's no hurry. We're in the middle of winter, but the weather's warm and conditions are just fine. Everyone knows your Excellency's formidable reputation."

Calmed by this flattery, Gao returned to the city and made his dispositions in consultation with his generals. Assistant Instructor Zhou and border general Wang Huan were to lead a large land force in support, while border generals Xiang and Zhang with ten thousand cavalry seized the approach road to Mount Liang. Mount Liang had always been isolated by a vast wilderness of reed beds and water, but recently there was this new road that Song Jiang had built; it didn't exist before. Marshal Gao ordered the cavalry to cut this route. The rest, that is to say, military adviser Wen, Chief Instructor Qiu and five border generals, together with the Marshal's secretary Vicious Wang and boat builder Ye Chun, the rest of his staff and junior officers and so on, were all to accompany the Marshal in the attack by water.

But military adviser Wen warned him: "You should go with the cavalry, sir. You shouldn't go on the boats, it's too big a risk for the commander-in-chief."

"Nonsense!" Gao the Ball replied. "The last two times we didn't have enough reinforcements, that's why we lost so many men and boats. This time we've got all these new boats just built. If I don't take command myself, how can I expect the bandits to be captured? This time it's a war to the finish. So you can just shut up."

Not daring to open his mouth again, Wen could do nothing but follow the Marshal aboard. Gao ordered thirty of the big boats to form the vanguard, commanded by Instructor Qiu and border generals Xu and Mei. Fifty small boats under border general Yang Wen, Vicious Wang and boat builder Ye Chun were to clear the way. Two red silk banners were flown from the leading boat, with the words in gold: "We shall sweep the seas, dredge the depths and roll the waves flat, to pacify the land and exterminate malefactors."

On the command boat of the main force were the Marshal and military adviser Wen, together with the singers and dancers and a detachment of personal guards. The forty odd large boats of the main force were provided with green awnings, the commander's flag, an array of yellow banners and white streamers, red pennons and black umbrellas, together with all the army's weapons. On the last of the boats two more border generals directed operations.

It was the middle of December. The cavalry set off first. Then the leading boats of the naval force went forward, with their three commanders aboard. Along they flew like storm clouds in the wind, setting their course for the Marshes of Mount Liang.

Song Jiang and the Professor had received a full report of all this and had made their preparations. They were now waiting for the government fleet to arrive.

The three commanders of the vanguard were coming on at speed. The small paddle boats were on either side, sealing the small channels, while the large paddle boats sailed up the middle. The government commanders, like stalk-eyed crabs or tall-necked cranes, stared fixedly ahead as they raced forwards deep into enemy territory.

Then far off in the distance, a crowd of boats was seen. On each boat there were fourteen or so men, all in armour, a leader in their midst. The first three boats were flying white flags, with the words "Ruan Brothers of Mount Liang". Ruan the Second was in the middle, Ruan the Fifth on the left and Ruan the Seventh on the right. Their gleaming armour could be seen from afar, but in reality the gold and silver plates were cut out of paper and stuck on. When the first three units of the government force saw them, the order was given to open fire. A salvo of shells, musket shots and fire arrows winged away. Totally undismayed the Ruan brothers waited till the boats were well within range and then, when the shooting began, gave a great shout and plunged into the water. The Chief Instructor and his crew captured nothing but three empty boats.

The government flotilla continued another mile or so and then they saw three light skiffs shooting towards them like the wind. The first of these raced forward with a crew of a dozen, their bodies painted with woad and ochre, smeared with earth and clay, their hair unbound; they were blowing on whistles. The boats on either side held only half a dozen men each, variously stained with red and green. The one in the middle was Flagpole, with Cave Dragon on his left and River Rider on his right. The Chief Instructor again gave the order to open fire. Immediately the enemy abandoned their boats with a shout, diving into the waves. Three more empty boats were captured. Another mile, and three more medium-sized boats appeared, four-oared, two men to an oar. They also carried a dozen troops, waving red flags and crowded around a leader who sat in the prow. On the flag was written: "White-Water Dragon Li Jun". The warrior on his left was brandishing a spear and holding a green flag with the words "Pilot Zhang Heng". On the right stood a hero who was bare chested and bare footed, with several chisels stuck in his belt, and a bronze hammer in his hand. He had a black flag with silver letters which said: "White Eel Zhang Shun". As they steered their boats they shouted out: "Thank you for sending us your boats!"

"Fire!" came the command from the leading government boats. As the crossbow bolts whistled towards them the occupants of the three enemy boats somersaulted into the water and were gone. Now remember it was a winter's evening. Which of the conscripts in the government boats would have been prepared to jump into the water?

They were still trying to decide how to respond to this, when a series of reports rang out on the summit of Mount Liang and thousands of little boats shot out from the surrounding reed beds and came skimming towards them like a swarm of locusts. There were four or five to each boat, and the decks were loaded with something which could not be identified. When the large paddle boats tried to close on them, it was found that they wouldn't move. The crews strained to turn the paddles but the water ahead was filled with hidden obstructions and the paddle blades simply wouldn't budge. And when crossbows were fired from the towers, every crew member on the little boats shielded himself with a plank. As the enemy boats closed on them, someone grappled their rudder with a hook, whilst another slashed at the crew with a sword. Before long fifty or more of the enemy had swarmed aboard the leading boat. The other boats tried to retreat but the way behind was also blocked and there was no escape. While the leading boat was thus embroiled, a cry arose from the hindmost. Hearing this commotion, Gao and Wen on the middle boat thought of disembarking, but at this moment gongs and drums sounded among the reeds and all the sailors in their boat cried out: "She's sprung a leak!" Water was pouring in. The first and last boats were also leaking and apparently about to sink. Everywhere little boats swarmed like ants, converging on the big boats. Now, how was it these brand-new vessels of the Marshal's were taking in water? Well, it was all on account of White Eel and his band of skilled sailors, who with hammer and chisel had knocked holes in the hulls below the waterline, so the water came flooding in everywhere.

As Marshal Gao clambered onto the bridge and shouted to the boat behind to come to the rescue, someone emerged from the water and sprang up onto the bridge, saying: "I will rescue you, Marshal!" It was not someone Gao knew. The stranger grasped him with one hand by the topknot and with the other by the belt and shouting "Down we go!" hurled him, splash! — into the water. The horrified commander of the great armada was now a soused and drowning man! Then two small boats shot out from the bank to rescue him. On one of them was White Eel, who thrust his hand into the waves and plucked the Marshal out, like someone who grasps a turtle in a jar!

As the battle raged all around, the Chief Instructor on the leading boat frantically tried to think of a way out. Suddenly from the melee a sailor emerged and before the Chief Instructor had time to defend himself one blow of the sword had toppled him into the water. The attacker was Mount Liang's Panther. Generals Xu and Mei rushed over to attack their comrade's killer. Immediately four leaders leapt out from a knot of sailors — Whitey, the Pill Monger, the Tiger Killer and Knife, and rushed the government generals from behind. Seeing the situation so unfavourable, Xu leapt into the water. But he was counting without the enemy lurking under the surface and he was soon captured. Mei was wounded in the thigh by a thrust from the Pill Monger's spear and toppled into the hold.

Now, eight of the Mount Liang leaders had volunteered to serve with the waterborne forces and three of these were aboard the first boat: Greeneyes, Spots and Uglymug. If the government commanders had had three heads and six arms, they still would not have got anywhere against them!

Song Jiang and the Unicorn had led separate forces on land and on the water. The former led the attack by water, the latter the attack on land. Let us say no more of the victory by water and turn our attention to the Unicorn, who commanded a famous force along the approach road to Mount Liang, where they came up against the Assistant Instructor and border general Wang Huan. When they met, the Assistant Instructor rode out in front and shouted: "Rebellious scum, do you know who I am?"

The Unicorn shouted back: "You're nobody, and you're about to meet your death right here, though you don't yet know it!" With this he levelled his lance and kicked his horse and charged the Assistant Instructor. The latter swung his great axe and rode to meet him. There on the road to the mountain they did battle. They fought nearly twenty bouts, but neither had the advantage. Then a shout went up from the troops in the rear. The main army from Mount Liang had left the mountain earlier to lie in ambush in two wooded areas and were now attacking from every side with bloodcurdling yells. On the southeast Scimitar, Thunderclap, from the northwest Leopard's Head and Twin Rods, all these heroes converged. The other two border generals could not withstand their ferocious charge. As soon as they managed to fight their way out they took to their heels. The Assistant Instructor and Wang also had no heart for a fight and put up their lance and axe and fled back along the road all the way to Jizhou, not stopping till they were inside the city. They tethered their horses and went to hear the news.

Meanwhile Song Jiang's waterborne force had captured Marshal Gao. Song Jiang immediately told the Magic Messenger to pass on the order that the captives were not to be harmed. Wen, the military adviser, and the others on the boats of the main fleet, together with the singers and dancers and all the staff, were taken off. The bugle was blown to recall the troops to the stronghold. White Eel brought in the dripping Marshal and presented him to Song Jiang, the Professor, Taoist Gongsun and the other leaders in the Ceremonial Hall. Song Jiang hurried down to receive him and ordered clean silk clothing for him so he could change. Afterwards he led him to the dais and begged him to be seated opposite, then he respectfully prostrated himself before him, saying "We have given you great offence!" Gao hurriedly returned the courtesy.

When the Professor and Taoist Gongsun had paid their respects Song Jiang asked them to be seated too. He told the Prodigy to proclaim that from then on any further killing would be punished by death. Shortly after this a whole crowd of people arrived with prisoners: five border generals were brought in and the head of the Chief Instructor, as well as the heads of boat builder Ye Chun and Vicious Wang. Also captured were military adviser Wang, and the artistes and other hangers-on. Only the four on land had escaped: the Assistant Instructor and three of the border generals.

Song Jiang ordered all the leaders to change their clothes and tidy themselves. When they had done so, they were asked to enter the Ceremonial Hall and be seated there according to their rank. As for the troops captured alive, they were all sent back to Jizhou. In addition a comfortable boat was equipped for the artistes and others, who were then left to their own devices.

Song Jiang had oxen and horses killed and arranged a great banquet. While the troops were rewarded and there was a lot of music played, all the chiefs great and small assembled and came up to be presented to Marshal Gao. When these ceremonies were completed, Song Jiang proposed a number of toasts and the Professor and Taoist Gongsun took charge of the wine and offered it round, while the Unicorn and the rest stood in attendance. Song Jiang addressed the company as follows: "How could a lowly official such as I, branded as a criminal, oppose the will of our sacred Emperor? It is simply because of faults I committed that I have been forced to live like this. Although we have twice received offers of pardon from the Emperor, they were presented in a perverse and malicious form. I don't want to go into that now, but I hope Your Excellency will be merciful and help a deeply sinning man. If you rescue me from the pit where I languish and bring me back into the sunlight, your kindness will be engraved on my heart forever, I will repay it with my life!"

When Gao saw those heroes, all so strong and manly, with Leopard's Head and the Blue-Faced Beast staring angrily at him, as if they might explode at any moment, he was more than a little intimidated. He said: "Song Jiang, put your mind at rest! When I return to the court, I will urge the Emperor to grant a full amnesty." Song Jiang was delighted and prostrated himself in gratitude. The banquet that day was extremely elaborate. All the leaders passed round the cup. Gao got very drunk and lost all his inhibitions. He said: "When I was young I learnt wrestling, I'm the best in the world."

The Unicorn was drunk too. Riled by Gao's boastfulness he pointed to the Prodigy and said: "This young friend of mine knows a thing or two about wrestling. He has won the competition on Mount Tai three times!"

Gao rose to his feet and started taking off his clothes, because he was determined to wrestle with the Prodigy. Everyone had seen what respect Song Jiang gave him, as a Grand Marshal of the court, so there was nothing they could do but go along with it. The Prodigy needed no urging: he couldn't wait to take Gao down a peg. So they all stood up and said: "Good, let's have some wrestling!" Excitedly they crowded down from the dais. Song Jiang was drunk too, and his judgement was not entirely clear. The two men stripped and Song Jiang ordered soft mats to be spread out on the platform. Standing on a velvet rug, the contestants took guard. Gao rushed in first. The Prodigy reached out and caught him and with one quick twist threw him down on the mat. He didn't move for some time. This catch is known as 'The Lifesaver".

Song Jiang and the Unicorn hurriedly picked the Marshal up and helped him on with his clothes. Everyone said laughingly: "You were drunk, Marshal, you were in no state for wrestling. Please don't be upset!"

Gao the Ball's chagrin was unbounded, but he returned to the banquet and went on drinking till late into the night, when he was helped to his bed.

Next day another feast was laid on, to put the Marshal at ease. All the Marshal wanted now was to leave, and see the last of Song Jiang and company. Song Jiang said: "If we have kept you here, Marshal, it is not because we harboured any ill intent. If I am not being honest with you, may heaven strike me dead!"

Gao said: "If you are generous enough to allow me to return to the court I will petition the Emperor on behalf of all of you, secure an amnesty, and bring you back into the nation's service. I will not betray you, it would be an unpardonable crime, let me die at another's hand if I do!"

Song Jiang bowed his head in gratitude. Marshal Gao went on: "If you do not trust me, I can leave behind some of my generals as hostages."

Song Jiang said: "How could a man of your noble character not keep his word? There is no need for any hostages. Later I will have horses provided for all of you and escort you back to your camp."

Marshal Gao thanked him, saying: "You are most gracious. I am truly grateful. But now I must be going."

Song Jiang and the others pressed him to accept further hospitality. Two more banquets were arranged for that day. The dishes were continually renewed and they did not break up till the small hours.

On the third day Marshal Gao was determined to leave. Song Jiang and his company still urged him to stay on. A farewell banquet had been arranged and presents of gold, silver and brocades were paraded. Something like a thousand pieces of gold were given to the Marshal in lieu of the banquet. The other commanders likewise received gifts. Gao made a show of refusing but in the end accepted it all. Whilst they were drinking, Song Jiang raised the question of the amnesty again. Gao the Ball said: "You can send someone with me, if you like, someone diplomatic. I will take him to see the Emperor, so that he can explain your precise concerns and obtain an appropriate decree."

Now Song Jiang really wanted this pardon. He discussed the matter with the Professor and then told Magic Hand to go along with the Marshal. The Professor said, "Send Lungs along too. They can keep each other company."

Marshal Gao said: "Since we trust each other, I'll leave my military adviser here with you as a guarantee." Song Jiang accepted this arrangement. On the fourth day, Song Jiang and the Professor with a score of cavalry escorted Marshal Gao and his officers down the mountain. They travelled 6 or 7 miles further with them after the crossing from Golden Sands Landing. After they had said farewell to the Marshal, they returned to the stronghold where they awaited news of the amnesty. Marshal Gao and his party headed for Jizhou. When their imminent arrival was announced, the Governor and the four generals who had escaped came out to meet them. Marshal Gao decided to remain in the city just long enough to regroup his army and instruct his generals to take charge of their own troops and lead them home to rest for a while pending further orders. After this, he himself, with the Assistant Instructor from the imperial guards and the officers of his own army set off for the Eastern Capital, taking Lungs and Magic Hand along too. Now because Marshal Gao had with him these two leaders from Mount Liang, certain things were going to happen. Heroes would be found mixing in the halls of the great, brave men would be seen treading the floors of palaces.

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## The Prodigy Yan Qing Meets the Emperor By a Trick on a moonlit night; Magic Messenger Dai Zong Rescues Xiao Rang & his comrades from their plight

On Mount Liangshan the chieftains conferred. "I wonder what Gao Qiu will do," mused Song Jiang.

Wu Yong laughed. "He's a beady-eyed, slippery character, the kind who'll turn on you in a flash. He lost so many troops and wasted so much of the government's money and grain, when he gets back to the capital he's sure to claim that he's ill. He'll make some vague report to the emperor and order his army to rest. Xiao Rang and Yue Ho he'll keep under house arrest. So far as an amnesty is concerned, you're just hoping in vain."

"That's terrible! We won't get the amnesty, and we're harming two of our men besides."

"Pick two more clever fellows and send them to the capital with money and jewellery. Have them inquire what's going on and find a connection who can convey our wishes to the emperor. Then Gao Qiu won't be able to squirm out of it. That would be the best plan."

Yan Qing came forward. "Before we raised such a rumpus in the Eastern Capital last time, we managed to get acquainted with Li Shishi. I imagine she guessed pretty well what we're after. Since she's the emperor's mistress, of course he didn't suspect her of having anything to do with us. She probably simply said that we had found out where he went for his private pleasures and deliberately tried to frighten him. The incident was closed. Let me go to her again with money and jewellery. Pillow talk is the quickest way to get word to the emperor. It will be easy. One way or another, I'll persuade her."

"All right," said Song Jiang. "But you may run into danger."

"Let me go along and help," Dai Zong proposed.

"When we attacked Huazhou, you did a favor to Marshal Su," Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist reminded Song Jiang. "He's a good-hearted person. If he intervenes with the emperor for us, it will help a lot."

Song Jiang summoned Chief of Staff Wen and invited him to be seated. "Do you know Marshal Su Yuanjing?" Song Jiang queried.

"We were students together," Wen replied. "The emperor never goes a step without him. Su is extremely virtuous and generous, a kindly, amiable person."

"Frankly, we doubt whether Gao Qiu will really request the emperor for an amnesty when he returns to the capital. I met Marshal Su once when he was burning incense in Huazhou. I'd like to beg him to petition for us."

"If that's what you want, General, I'll write a letter which you can have delivered."

Pleased, Song Jiang called for paper and pen. At the same time, he lit fine incense, brought out the Heavenly Books of the Mystic Maid, prayed to Heaven, and cast bamboo prediction slips which revealed an extremely favorable omen. Then he drank with Dai Zong and Yan Qing to their successful journey.

Two large hampers were packed with gold and jewellery and silks, and the letter was concealed on the person of the emissaries, who bore also forged identity documents from the Kaifeng prefectural government. Both were disguised as bailiffs.

They took their leave, crossed at the Shore of the Golden Sands and headed for the Eastern Capital. Dai Zong carried an umbrella and wore a pack upon his back. Yan Qing, his bailiff's staff on his shoulder, toted the hampers, one at either end. His black gown was tucked up in front, a pouch hung at his waist. Puttees bound his legs to the knees, his feet were shod in hempen sandals. Except for pauses to eat or drink, the two halted only to sleep at night, pushing on again at dawn.

After many a day, they arrived at the Eastern Capital. Instead of going in directly, they circled round to the Wanshou Gate. A guard halted them. Yan Qing set down the hampers.

"What are you stopping us for?" he demanded in a countrified accent.

"Orders from headquarters. Men from Mount Liangshan may try to slip in with the crowds. At every gate all travellers must be questioned."

"You certainly know your duty," Yan Qing snickered, "questioning your own people! We have some business to do in Kaifeng Prefecture. I don't know how many thousands of times we've gone through this gate! You question us and turn a blind eye to the Mount Liangshan men strolling by right under your nose!"

He pulled out the forged documents and shoved them in the guard's face. "Can you recognize Kaifeng identity papers?"

The officer in charge of the gate shouted at the guard: "They've got Kaifeng papers. What are you questioning them for? Let them in!"

Yan Qing snatched back the documents, shoved them inside his gown, picked up the hampers and walked on. Dai Zong, with a cold laugh, followed.

They proceeded to the neighborhood in front of the Kaifeng government compound, sought out an inn, and retired.

The next day Yan Qing changed into a cloth gown, tied at the waist by a sash, and wore a hat at a rakish angle in the manner of a young idler. He took from the hamper a packet of gold and jewellery.

"I'm going to see Li Shishi, brother," he told Dai Zong. "If anything goes wrong hurry back to the stronghold."

Yan Qing proceeded to the courtesan's home. The carved railings were still there, and the green windows and vermilion doors had been repainted, prettier than before. He pushed aside the door curtain of spotted bamboo and entered.

The fragrance of incense greeted him. Pictures and calligraphy by famous artists had again been hung in the parlor; beneath the eaves were twenty or thirty trays of curiously shaped stones and miniature pines. Brocaded cushions were piled on couches of carved sandlewood.

Yan Qing coughed softly. A maid emerged, then informed the courtesan's "mama" that they had a caller. The bawd was startled to see him.

"What are you doing here again?"

"Please ask the lady to come out. I have something to say."

"The last time you called you got us into trouble and wrecked the house. If you've anything to say, say it."

"My words are for the lady's ears only."

Li Shishi, who had been listening outside the window, now entered. She was a lovely sight, her cheeks as rosy as dew-drenched apples, her waist as supple as a willow swaying in the breeze, a veritable Heavenly Maid, more beautiful than a Moon Fairy. Her skirt swirled as she glided lightly into the room.

Yan Qing stood up, placed the packet on the table, kowtowed four times before "Mama" Li, then twice before Leading Courtesan Li.

"You're too courteous," Shishi protested. "You shouldn't honor one so young."

Yan Qing rose and said: "Last time we gave you a fright. We've been uneasy ever since."

"Don't deceive me," exclaimed the girl. "You said you were Zhang Xian and that the other two were merchants from Shandong, and you created a terrible riot! Luckily, I was able to cajole the emperor. If it were anyone else but me, she and her whole establishment would have been ruined!"

"There were a couple of lines in that poem your magnate wrote which I wondered about:

*Six time six in wild goose formation,*
*Plus eight times nine,*
*Waiting only for news*
*From the Golden Cock*

I was about to question him, when the emperor arrived unexpectedly. Then the rumpus started, and I had no chance. Now that you're here, you can explain. Don't try to fool me. Tell me the truth. I won't be satisfied till you clear things up!"

"I'll tell it to you straight, but please don't be alarmed, Queen of Courtesans. That short swarthy fellow who sat at the head of the table was none other than Song Jiang the Defender of Justice. In the second seat, the fair-complexioned man with the mustache and goatee was the Small Whirlwind Chai Jin, descendant of Emperor Chai Shizong. The man dressed as a bailiff who stood opposite was Dai Zong the Miraculous Traveller. The one at the door who fought with Marshal Yang was Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. I myself am from Daming Prefecture, the Northern Capital. Everyone call me Yan Qing the Prodigy."

"Big Brother Song Jiang came to the capital to see you, and sent me first, disguised as Zhang Xian, to arrange it. He wasn't seeking to buy your smiles and charms, but wanted rather to reveal to you our story because he knows you're close to the emperor. We hope you'll tell His Majesty of our desire to act on Heaven's behalf, defend our country and preserve peace for the people. An early amnesty will prevent a further loss of lives. If our monarch will grant such a decree, you, my lady, will be the chief benefactor of the thousands of men on Mount Liangshan. Due to the interference of corrupt ministers, the true situation has been kept from the emperor. And so, we seek this path. We have no intention to frighten you, my lady. Big Brother has no proper gift to offer, only these small trinkets. He begs that you don't laugh at them, and accept."

Yan Qing opened the packet and spread upon the table gold and jewellery and precious plates. The bawd, who loved riches, was enchanted. She urged Shishi to accept, and led Yan Qing to a small private room and begged him to be seated. She served him fine delicacies and waited on him solicitously. Since no one knew when the emperor was likely to drop in, none of the young lords and rich young gentlemen ever dared to venture to the courtesans' house for tea. Li Shishi waited on Yan Qing personally.

"I'm a condemned criminal," he protested. "How dare I sit at the same table with the leading courtesan in the land?"

"Don't talk like that," exclaimed the girl. "You're a famous warrior. It's only because no good person has been able to speak up on behalf of you men that you've had to bury yourselves in the marsh."

"The first amnesty, which Marshal Chen brought, had no reassuring words, and he substituted cheap drink for the imperial wine. The second amnesty was phrased in such a way that it could be interpreted as excluding Song Jiang and Lu Junyi. For that reason, we didn't surrender. Next, Minister Tong came with an army, and we demolished them in two engagements. Finally, Marshal Gao mobilized thousands of people and built a great fleet and attacked. In three battles we wiped out more than half his forces. The marshal himself was captured and taken to our stronghold. Brother Song Jiang not only didn't kill him, but treated him royally and sent him back to the capital. All the prisoners were also let go. When he was on Mount Liangshan the marshal swore a great oath that he would petition the emperor for our amnesty. We dispatched two of our men with him—Xiao Rang the Master Hand and Yue Ho the Iron Throat. But it looks like the marshal has them confined in his residency and won't let them out. He'll never admit to the emperor that his losses were so heavy."

The girl agreed. "He wasted money and grain and the lives of his officers and men. He wouldn't dare tell the emperor the truth. I heard all about it. Let's have a few cups together and discuss this thing."

"I'm a very poor drinker."

"You've had a long, hard journey. Here you can relax. We'll drink some wine and then decide what to do."

Yan Qing couldn't get out of it. He had to match the courtesan cup for cup.

Li Shishi had made her start in life as a prostitute. She was a temperamental girl, and when she saw that Yan Qing was a fine figure of a man and an eloquent speaker she took an immediate liking to him. As they drank, she began dropping hints, which grew increasingly provocative. Yan Qing was a clever fellow, and he understood perfectly. But he was a dedicated warrior, determined to put through Song Jiang's grand plan. How could he respond?

"I've heard you're an excellent musician, brother," said the courtesan. "I'd love to hear you play."

"I have studied music a bit," Yan Qing admitted. "But I wouldn't have the nerve to perform in your presence, my lady."

"I'll play first, then, and you listen."

Shishi directed a maid to bring her flute. She took the instrument from its brocaded bag and blew softly. Truly a lovely sound, soaring into the clouds and seeping into the rocks.

Yan Qing was lavish in his praise. When Shishi had finished she handed him the flute.

"Now play something for me."

Yan Qing wanted to win her esteem. He accepted the instrument and performed with all his skill. The girl was enchanted.

"I didn't realize you were such a talented flutist!"

She took up a lute and played a little tune. The notes lingered in the air like a chorus of jade chimes, like a duet of orioles.

Yan Qing bowed his thanks and said: "I'll sing a song for your amusement, my lady." He had a beautiful voice, and he enunciated the lyrics clearly. At the conclusion of his song, he bowed again.

The girl raised her cup and drank to him. She thanked him in her most seductive tones. With lowered head, he murmured an acknowledgment. After a few more drinks, the courtesan addressed him with a smile.

"I hear that your body is artistically tattooed. Would you let me have a look?"

Yan Qing laughed. "It's true I have a few decorations. But how dare I disrobe in my lady's presence?"

"With a gallant gentleman like you, who worries about such things?"

At her insistent pleas, Yan Qing finally removed his robe. Shishi was delighted. She ran her jade fingers over the designs. The young man hastily put his robe on again.

Again she drank with him. Her suggestiveness was quite open now. Yan Qing was afraid she'd make a move he'd find hard to repel. Suddenly, he had an idea.

"How old is my lady this year?" he asked.

"I'll be twenty-seven."

"I'm two years younger, twenty-five. Since you're kind enough to give me your affection, I'd like to acknowledge you as my foster big sister."

Yan Qing dropped to his knees. Like pushing a golden mountain, like a toppling jade pillar, he kowtowed eight times.

This stymied the girl's wicked inclinations and enabled the grand plan to go forward. Anyone else so beguiled with drink and sexual allure would have brushed the grand plan aside. But Yan Qing had a will of iron. He was a real man!

Then Yan Qing asked "Mama" Li to come in, and he kowtowed to her too, and acknowledged her as his foster mother.

"Stay here with us," said Shishi. "There's no need to live at an inn."

"That's very kind of you. I'll go get my things."
"Don't keep me waiting, now!"
"The inn's not far. I'll be right back."
Yan Qing took his leave, went to the inn, and related to Dai Zong what had happened.
"Excellent," said the Miraculous Traveller. "I'm only afraid she'll arouse you and you won't be able to control yourself."
"A man who can be diverted by drink or sex when he's out on a mission is no better than a beast! May I die beneath ten thousand sword cuts if I let that happen to me!"
Dai Zong laughed. "We're both men of honor. No need to swear."
"But there is. You surely doubt me."
"Just go quickly. At a propitious time push the thing through and hurry back. Don't make me wait too long. We have to deliver that letter to Marshal Su."
Yan Qing packed some odd bits of gold and jewellery and silks and returned to Shishi's house. He gave half to "Mama" Li and distributed the rest among the servants and attendants. They all were very pleased. Quarters were prepared for him in a room adjacent to the parlor, and he moved in. Everyone fondly addressed him as "Young Uncle."
By fortunate coincidence that evening a man came and said: "The emperor is coming tonight." On hearing this, Yan Qing went to Li Shishi.
"Do me a favor, sister," he pleaded. "Arrange for me to meet the emperor so that I may request his imperial pardon in writing for my crimes. You'll be conferring a blessing."
"I can do that. Move him with your eloquence. I've no doubt he'll grant it."
Gradually, darkness fell. The moon was hazy, the air was filled with the fragrance of flowers and the musky scent of orchids. Accompanied by a young eunuch, the sovereign arrived through the secret tunnel at the rear door of the courtesan's house. He was dressed in the white garb of a scholar. Seating himself in the anteroom, he directed that the front and rear gates be locked and the lamps and candles brightly lit. Li Shishi, formally dressed and coifed, presented herself before his majesty. She curtsied, and they exchanged courtesies.
"Put on something more comfortable and entertain me," said the emperor.
Shishi did so, and led the monarch into her chamber. A table had already been laid with delicacies. The courtesan lifted her cup and urged him to drink.
"Come, beloved," he said happily, "sit beside me." He was obviously in a good mood.
"A cousin of mine, who has been wandering around, just arrived today," said Shishi. "He longs to see Your Majesty, but dares not present himself. He's asked me to make the request."
"Since he's your cousin, why not?"
The courtesan summoned Yan Qing. He dropped to his knees and kowtowed. The emperor was pleased by his handsome appearance. Shishi directed Yan Qing to entertain the sovereign with some flute music while he was drinking his wine. After a while she played the lute, then she told Yan Qing to sing. The young man again kowtowed before the monarch.
"I only know some naughty tunes, which I wouldn't dare sing!"
"Exactly what I need to cheer me," said the emperor. "I'm here privately in this house of pleasure. Go right ahead."
Yan Qing took up a pair of ivory clapper sticks, bowed again to the sovereign, and said to Shishi: "If I go off key, sister, please correct me." He cleared his throat and, keeping time with the clappers, sang:

*No news from him*
*Since he left our village,*
*Constant longing*
*Tears at my heart.*
*The swallows are gone,*
*The flowers fade,*
*In just one spring*
*My waist grows thin.*
*Faithless lover,*
*When will he return?*
*It would have been better*
*If we never had met!*
*In dreams we're together,*
*But then I awake,*
*Outside my window*
*Orioles sing in the dawn.*

Yan Qing was in excellent voice, and the emperor, delighted, bade him sing again. The young man kowtowed.
"I have another tune that's rather special."
"Good. Let's hear it." With feeling, Yan Qing sang:

*Hear my plea, hear my plea,*
*Who knows how I've wandered,*
*Who knows!*
*In Heaven and on Earth*
*The innocent oft are wronged,*
*In the Fiery Pit, 'tis said,*
*Are hearts that are loyal and true,*
*Loyal and true!*
*Surely the day will come*
*When great benevolence*
*Will be by men repaid!*

"What's the meaning of this song?" asked the startled monarch.
Weeping bitterly, Yan Qing prostrated himself on the ground. The emperor was puzzled.
"If you'll tell me what's troubling you, perhaps I can find a solution."
"I've committed towering crimes! I dare not address my sovereign!"
"I forgive you. You may speak freely."
"All my life I've been a wanderer. While travelling with merchants in Shandong and passing by Liangshan Marsh, we were captured and taken to the bandit Stronghold. There I stayed for three full years. Only recently did I escape and return to the capital. Although I've seen Cousin Shishi, I dare not walk the streets for fear that someone will recognize me and report me to the police. How would I be able to explain?"
"He's been miserable," Li Shishi added. "You must help him, Your Majesty!"
"That's easy," the emperor laughed. "No one would dare molest the young cousin of Leading Courtesan Li."
Yan Qing gave the girl a significant glance. Shishi pouted and said to the monarch: "All I want is your written pardon. Then my cousin won't have to worry."
"How can I write it? I don't have my royal seal here."
"A pardon in your own hand is better than any document with a seal. Save my cousin! You'll be doing me a great favor!"
Unable to resist her blandishments, the sovereign called for pen and paper. "Mama" Li brought the writing materials from the study and Yan Qing ground the ink stick on the writing slab. The girl handed the emperor the ivory brush-pen with purple bristles. In a flourishing script he commenced to write on the imperial yellow paper, then paused.
"I'm afraid I've forgotten your name."
"I'm called Yan Qing."
"Ah." The emperor wrote: *Xuan Ho the Taoist Sovereign does hereby pardon Yan Qing of all crimes.* Let no official arrest or question him. At the bottom, he signed his name.
Yan Qing respectfully received the document and kowtowed. Shishi raised her cup and drank her thanks.
"Since you've been in Liangshan Marsh, you must know the situation there," said the monarch.
"Song Jiang and his band have *Act in Heaven's Behalf* written on their banner and their hall is called *Loyalty Hall.* They never attack a government seat or harm the people. They kill only corrupt and slanderous officials. They long for an early amnesty so that they can devote themselves to serving our country."
"But I sent them amnesties twice. Why did they reject them and refuse to surrender?"
"The first one contained no words of comfort, and the emissary substituted cheap local brew for the imperial wine. The second was read in a manner that excluded Song Jiang. The brigands suspected a trick, and that changed everything. Minister Tong led an army against them, but after two engagements only a few escaped with their lives. Marshal Gao organized a huge civilian force to build ships of war, and attacked, but he didn't gain so much as a broken arrow. In three engagements the bandits slaughtered his men and cut his army in two and captured the marshal. He vowed he would get them an amnesty, and they let him go, sending two of their men with him and keeping Chief of Staff Wen as hostage."
The emperor sighed. "I knew nothing of any of this. Tong Guan said his troops couldn't stand the summer heat; that's why they returned. Gao said he had come back to the capital temporarily because he was ill."
"Although you are a wise sovereign," said Shishi, "you live deep inside the palace. How can you know when dishonest ministers conceal the truth?"
Again the monarch sighed. It was growing late. Yan Qing took his pardon, kowtowed and withdrew. The emperor and Shishi went to bed, where they revelled in intimate union.
The monarch left with the waiting young eunuch before dawn. Yan Qing got up and, on the excuse that he had some matters to attend to early in the morning, went back to the inn. He told Dai Zong everything that had been said, word for word.
"It's developing very well," said the Miraculous Traveller. "Now, let's deliver the letter to Marshal Su."
"After we've eaten."
The two had breakfast, filled a hamper with gold and jewellery and silks, took the letter, and headed for Marshal Su's residency. They asked one of the neighbors whether he was home.
"The marshal hasn't returned from the palace yet," they were told.
"Why not?" said Yan Qing. "There are no audiences in session at this hour."
"He's our sovereign's closest companion. The emperor never goes a step without him. He may come home early, he may come home late. It's hard to say."
"There's the marshal now," someone exclaimed.
Very pleased, Yan Qing said to Dai Zong: "Brother, wait for me outside the residency. I'm going to speak to him."
Approaching was a sedan-chair carried by porters in brocaded garments and ornate hats. Yan Qing knelt in its path.
"I have a letter to present to the marshal," he called.
Su looked at him. "Come with me," he directed. Yan Qing followed the sedan-chair into the residency compound. It halted before a large hall. The marshal got down, entered an adjoining study and seated himself. He ordered Yan Qing to come in.
"On whose business are you?"
"I've come from Shandong with a letter from Chief of Staff Wen."
"Which Chief of Staff Wen?"
Yan Qing presented the letter. The marshal looked at the envelope.
"I couldn't imagine who it was! Why, it's Wen Huanzhang, my childhood schoolmate!" he opened the letter and read:

With hands washed clean, kowtowing a hundred times, I write this missive to the Respected Marshal. It's thirty years since I played in your home as a child. Recently, Marshal Gao appointed me Chief of Staff of his army. Unfortunately, he wouldn't heed my advice, and was defeated three times in succession. I'm ashamed to mention it. We both were captured and bound. But Song Jiang, in his benevolence, would not permit us to be harmed.
With Xiao Rang and Yue Ho—two men from Mount Liangshan, the marshals has now returned to the capital, promising to seek an amnesty. I have been left as hostage. I pray that you urge the emperor to pardon the crimes of Song Jiang and his cohorts, and let them make recompense through meritorious deeds. This will benefit not only our country, but the entire world! Your credit will resound through the ages!
Rescue me and allow me to live! I anxiously await your reply and trust you will understand.
In deepest gratitude, respectfully,
Wen Huanzhang

*The__ day of the first month, spring,*
*of the fourth year of the Xuan He Period*

Marshal Su was astounded. "Who are you?" he demanded.
"Yan Qing the Prodigy from Liangshan Marsh." The young brigand went out for the hamper and brought it into the study. "I waited on you several times when you were burning incense in Huazhou, Marshal. How could you have forgotten? Brother Song Jiang sends you these paltry gifts as a small token of his esteem. He prays every day that you will save us. His sole desire is that the marshal will obtain our amnesty. If you can persuade the emperor to grant one, you will be the great benefactor of the thousands of men on Mount Liangshan. The time for my mission is limited. I must go back now."
Yan Qing kowtowed and left the residency. Marshal Su directed that the gifts be put away. He already had an idea.

Dai Zong and the Prodigy returned to the inn and Yan Qing said: "The first two parts of our mission succeeded pretty well. But Xiao Rang and Yue Ho are still detained in Gao's residency. How are we going to get them out?"
"We'll dress as bailiffs again and wait in front of Gao's place. When some officer comes out, we'll bribe him to let us see them. Once we've made contact, we'll decide what to do."
The two disguised themselves, took some money, and proceeded towards Taiping Bridge. At the gate of the residency they kept watch. Soon, a young captain came swaggering forth. Yan Qing approached him and bowed.
"Who are you?" the captain demanded brusquely.

"Shall we go to the tea-house where we can talk?"
Dai Zong was waiting in a private room, and the three sat down together and had tea. Yan Qing spoke.
"I'll come to the point. Marshal Gao brought two men back with him from Mount Liangshan. One is called Yue Ho. He's relative of this brother here, and I'd like to see him. So we're asking your assistance."
"I don't want to hear it! I don't know anything about what goes on in there!"
Dai Zong took from his sleeve a large silver ingot and placed it on the table. "There's no need for him to leave the residency," he said. "Just let us speak to him and you can have this ingot."
Stirred by the sight of the silver, the captain admitted: "Those two are there, all right. But the marshal has ordered that they must remain in the rear garden. If I let him out to talk to you, you must keep your word and give me the ingot."
"Naturally," said Dai Zong.
The officer hurriedly went back to the residency, while Yan Qing and Dai Zong waited in the tea-house. In less than half a watch, he returned, all in a flurry.
"First give me the silver. I've got Yue Ho in one of the side buildings."
Dai Zong whispered something in Yao Qing's ear and handed the captain the ingot. Yan Qing went with the officer to the side building and saw Yue Ho.
"Talk quickly, you two, then go," said the captain.
"I'm here with Dai Zong," Yan Qing said to Yue Ho softly. "We're planning to rescue you and Xiao Rang."
"They've got us in the rear garden. The wall is high and they've hidden the ladders. How are you going to do it?"
"Is there a tree anywhere near the wall?"
"There are large willows all along one side."
"Tonight, listen for a cough. We'll be outside and throw over the ends of two ropes. Tie them to the willows, and we'll pull our ends tight. Then you and Xiao Rang climb over. At the fourth watch. Don't be late."
"What're you so gabby about?" the captain called. "Go back inside and be quick about it!" Yue Ho returned to the garden and quietly informed Xiao Rang. Yan Qing swiftly reported to Dai Zong. All waited for night to fall. On the street, Yan Qing and Dai Zong bought two thick lengths of rope and concealed them under their robes. They wandered to the rear of the residency to get the lay of the land. They found a stream and two empty boats moored not far from the bank. They hid in these craft until they heard the watchman's drum sound 4 times. The 2 went ashore, circled round to the rear wall, and coughed. From within they heard an answering cough. Both sides were ready. Yao Qing threw over the rope ends. Giving them time to be secured, he and Dai Zong pulled their ends tight. Yue Ho was the first to climb out, and he was followed by Xiao Rang. When both had slid down, they tossed the ropes into the garden. The four hid themselves in the boats until daybreak. Then they proceeded to the inn and knocked on the door. They packed their luggage, cooked and ate breakfast, paid the bill and left. As soon as the city gate was opened, they swarmed through and headed for Mount Liang to report their news. And if those four hadn't returned to the stronghold, would Marshal Su have petitioned the throne and obtained a full amnesty for Song Jiang and his men? Truly, when a high official reads a royal edict, heroes kneel before the imperial presence.

Three times the heroes of Mount Liang had inflicted defeat on Marshal Gao by water, and they had even held him captive on the mountain. But Song Jiang would not allow him or his men to be harmed and had released them all. When Marshal Gao returned to court with a number of his troops, Magic Hand and Lungs went with him to the capital until the amnesty was arranged and for his part Gao left behind his military adviser Wen Huanzhang. Whilst he was on Mount Liang the Marshal had promised: "When I get to the court I will personally take care of Magic Hand and his companion, and when the Emperor grants me an audience I will recommend that as a matter of urgency a messenger be sent here with the pardon." Lungs had been ordered to go too as a companion for Magic Hand. However, it is not of them that we must tell now, but of the discussions that were proceeding on Mount Liang.
Song Jiang said: "Now Marshal Gao is gone, I begin to doubt whether he was sincere."
The Professor found this amusing: "From what I know of him he has the temper of a wasp and the nature of a snake. He is two-faced and thankless. He has just lost a vast number of troops and squandered a huge amount of government money and provisions. When he gets back he is bound to plead illness and stay away from court. He will deliver an ambiguous report to the Emperor in order to buy time and rest his troops. Magic Hand and Lungs will be kept under house arrest. If you're thinking of waiting for that pardon, you're wasting your time!"
"What are we going to do, then?" said Song Jiang. "The pardon is still wanting, and we've lost two good men."
The Professor said: "You'd better pick two quick-witted characters and send them to the capital with plenty of funds so they can find out what's going on, hand out bribes and let everyone know the true facts so Marshal Gao can't cover up. That's the best plan."
The Prodigy rose to his feet and said: "That time we caused an uproar in the capital, I managed to get into the house of Li Shishi, the singer, remember? When the trouble broke out I think they more or less guessed what was going on. The point is, since she is the Emperor's lover, he wouldn't suspect her of anything. No doubt she said: 'The bandits from Mount Liang found out about Your Majesty's secret visits and decided to come here and give us a fright', and the business was all hushed up. This time I'll go there with some gold and jewels. There's nothing more effective than a pillow present. I can size things up and decide what to do."
Song Jiang said: "It would be putting a lot of weight on your shoulders!"
The Magic Messenger said: "I'll go too and give him a hand."
The Strategist said: "Previously, when we attacked Huazhou Marshal Su was pretty cooperative. He's a man of integrity. If we can persuade him to petition the Emperor, things will go all right for us."
Song Jiang remembered the words of the Mystic Lady: "Chance lodgings will bring many joys". Might not this be what they referred to, since the Marshal's name, Su, was written with the same character as *lodging*? He summoned Wen, Marshal Gao's military adviser and said: "Your Excellency, do you know Marshal Su Yuanjing?"
Wen replied: "We were classmates. Now he is very close to the Emperor. He's an extremely compassionate and generous person. He's the kind of man who's always ready to put in a good word for someone."
Song Jiang said: "Let me be frank with you. We suspect that when Marshal Gao gets back he will not ask for the amnesty on our behalf. I once met Su when he was in Huazhou. I would like to send someone to him with a present to beg him to speak to the Emperor on our behalf so we can bring this affair to a successful conclusion."
Wen said: "In that case, I'd better write you a letter for him."
This was exactly what Song Jiang wanted. He called for paper and brush. Meanwhile he burnt some good incense and took out the Mystic Lady's books and after looking to heaven and saying a prayer pulled out an excellent omen. He then regaled Magic Messenger and the Prodigy with wine before their journey. They collected the money and valuables in two big baskets, while the letter was concealed by one of them on his person. As before, they carried a forged warrant from the authorities of the capital. Dressed as policemen, they bade their companions farewell, went down the mountain, crossed at Golden Sands Landing and set off for the Eastern Capital. Magic Messenger had an umbrella and a pack on his back. The Prodigy had a staff of office and the baskets on a carrying-pole. He wore a black shirt, a silk sash around his waist, knee guards and hemp shoes with eight eyelets. On the journey they stopped only when necessary for food and drink, travelled till late and set off early. They reached the capital without delay and casually tried to enter the city by the Gate of Longevity. But as they approached the guards stopped them. The Prodigy put down his load and affecting the local accent said: "Why are you stopping us? What's all this about then?"
"Strict orders from above," the guard said. "They're afraid some of those types from Mount Liang may try to sneak into the city. That's why we're required at every gate to question all travellers from the country outside, coming and going."
The Prodigy jeered at him. "You're a pretty smart fellow, aren't you?" he said, "Questioning your own people, like this! We both worked here since we was nippers, must've been through this gate more times than I can count, but you, you go and question us. Whereas that lot from Mount Liang, I bet you'd let them walk through right in front of your eyes." Then he took out the fake warrant and thrust it under the man's nose: "Here, see this? Is it a government pass, or isn't it?"
The guard commander shouted: "If he's got a government pass, what's the point of questioning him? Let them go!"
The Prodigy retrieved his warrant and tucked it away, then picked up his carrying pole. Magic Messenger gave a sarcastic laugh. The two went off into the city to look for an inn.
Next day the Prodigy put on a clean robe and a gauze sash, changed his headdress and tilted it over one eye, in the manner favoured by profligates. From the bundle he took out some gold and valuables, tied up them in a handkerchief, and said to Magic Messenger: "I'm going to Lily's now to do that business. If I should get caught go back to Mount Liang at once." He set off in the direction of Li Shishi's. Arriving at her door, he found that it hadn't changed at all: there were the same curving balustrade, with the carved rail, green windows and red door, but it had all been repainted. He lifted the bamboo curtain of a side door and went in. He immediately smelt some wonderfully fragrant incense. Arriving at the guest chamber, he found it hung with famous old paintings; beneath the eaves were more than a score of weirdly shaped stones and miniature pine trees. The back of the couch was of carved cedar wood. The cushions on the little bed were covered in brocade. He gave a discrete cough. The maid came out to see what it was, and went back in again to fetch Mama Li. When she saw the Prodigy she had a shock: "Why have you come back?" she asked.
"Ask Lily to come here," he said. "I've got something to say to her."
"You gave us a lot of trouble," she said. "You smashed the place up. If you've got anything to say, say it."
"I'm not going to say anything unless Lily is here," said the Prodigy.
Lily was listening in the next room but she was reluctant to appear. Eventually she did. What a sight! The Prodigy thought of morning dew on plum blossom, of willows gently swayed by the breeze, of houris in paradise, of goddesses, nymphs and fairies, as Lily glided into the room with mincing steps. He rose to his feet at once and placed his package on the table. He prostrated himself four times before the old woman and twice before Lily, who modestly protested: "Please, no ceremonies. I am too young. I don't deserve this honour."
Rising to his feet, the Prodigy said: "I fear we inconvenienced you last time. I and my friends had nowhere else to take refuge."
"Don't try to kid me," she said. "You told me you were Zhang Xian, and your two friends were merchants from Shandong. Then there was all that hullabaloo. Luckily I was able to find a way to explain it to His Majesty, but if it had been anyone else but me there'd have been a proper mess! And what's those two lines of verse your man wrote down: 'Six times six like a skein of geese plus nine times eight, just waiting for the news of the golden chicken'? It sounded pretty suspicious to me. I was going to ask what it meant, but then there was His Majesty's surprise visit, and then that brawl, so I never had the chance. Now you are here and you can explain it to me. But don't hide anything, tell me the truth. If you're not going to be open with me, I don't want nothing to do with it!"
"I'll tell you everything, sweet lady," said the Prodigy. "But prepare yourself for a shock. That short black chap who was with me that time, the one who took the place of honour, was none other than Song Jiang, the fount of chivalry. The fair-skinned one, who took the second place, the one with the three-cornered hairdo, that was the Little Whirlwind Chai Jin, descendant of a famous emperor; the one disguised as a policeman who stood by the door was the one we call the Magic Messenger. The one who fought with Marshal Yang in the courtyard was Iron Ox, otherwise known as the Black Whirlwind Li Kui. I myself am from the northern capital and people call me the Prodigy. Our Leader Song Jiang came here on purpose to seek an interview with you. He told me to gain access to your house, pretending to be Zhang Xian. He just wanted a glimpse of your beauty, he wasn't asking anything in return. Your position has made you so famous, he would like to come himself and tell you about our wrongs, how all we want is to be able to do heaven's will, serve the country and protect the people. If His Majesty will only hear us and grant us pardon, it will prevent so much suffering. If you help us, you will be the saviour of countless thousands of heroes on Mount Liang. We are being persecuted all the time by evil officials, those who spread slander, abuse their power, prevent the rise of virtue, keep good men down. This is why we have to grasp this opportunity, it's not because we want to frighten you. The Leader cannot come here himself to pay his respects, but he has a very small gift for you, which he hopes you will not despise." The Prodigy opened the package and spilled its contents on the table. Out poured gold and pearls, jewels, precious plates and bowls. Now, the old woman had a passion for such baubles and she was delighted. She quickly called a maid to gather them up and invited the Prodigy into one of the private rooms inside and had him served with the choicest wines, the rarest foods. Lily's house, of course, was somewhere the Emperor might drop in at any time, so nobody, whether noble or prince or rich man, would visit expecting to be offered tea! Yet of all that was displayed there, wine and dishes of fruit and nuts, Lily offered him with her own fair hands. The Prodigy said: "I am an outlaw under pain of death, how can I remain seated in the presence of a princess?"
"Don't be silly, now," she said. "Your lot are famous; of course I've heard about you. It's just because there aren't enough good men around to give you a leg up, that's why you've had to go and bury yourselves in those marshes."
The Prodigy said: "The time before when Marshal Chen came with the pardon there was no friendliness or sympathy in the language. And in addition the wine was switched. On the second occasion when an envoy brought the pardon an important sentence was deliberately left ambiguous: *an exception being made for Song Jiang, for Lu Junyi, known as the Unicorn, and for all the rest full pardon is granted, absolving them from the consequences of their wrongdoings*. That's why we still couldn't accept it. Marshal Tong attacked us. After two battles there was nothing left of his forces, not so much as a scrap of armour. After this Marshal Gao forced the people to build boats for his campaign. After three more battles most of his army was destroyed and Marshal Gao himself was made prisoner and taken up the mountain. No harm was done to him. He was entertained royally not once but many times and then sent back to the capital. All the other prisoners were released. When he was on Mount Liang, the Marshal swore that after he returned to court he would petition the Emperor to send an unconditional pardon. He therefore took two of our people with him: Magic Hand, our master calligrapher, and Lungs, renowned for his singing voice. Obviously he is keeping these two under house arrest and won't let them out. He has not told the Emperor about his losses."
Lily said: "How could he? He'd never dare tell the Emperor about all that money and supplies he's wasted and all the men and officers he's lost! I've heard rumours of this. Have a few cups of wine with me first and then we'll think what we can do about it."
The Prodigy said: "I can't take wine."
Lily said: "You've had a long hard journey. A few cups will do you good."
The Prodigy had to give in. He was obliged to join her in drinking.
Now Lily naturally had the habits of a courtesan. She was a flirt, and talking to the Prodigy with his quick wit and ready tongue she took quite a fancy to him. As they drank together, she did her best to get him excited using suggestive language. After a certain number of cups her hints became more and more transparent. The Prodigy was no fool. Of course he knew what was going on. But he was a man of honour and his purpose was firm. He would have hated to endanger the Leader's aims. He had no intention of letting himself go.
Lily said: "I've heard you have a tremendous talent for music. It's good to listen while one's drinking. I'd love to hear you sing."
The Prodigy said: "I'm no good really, how could I possibly perform in front of you?"
"I'll play for you first," she said. "You can just listen." She called the maid and told her to bring the flute. She took it out of its cotton case and began to blow softly. It was indeed a sound to melt the hardest heart and make the spirits soar. The Prodigy was hugely impressed. After playing one piece, she handed him the flute and said: "Now you play something for me!" He dared not disappoint her if he wanted his business with her to succeed, so he took the flute and played a haunting melody. Lily could not stop applauding. "You play absolutely marvellously," she said. She took back the instrument and played another short tune. What a magical sound! Like the warbling of two orioles, ravishingly sweet.
To show his gratitude the Prodigy said: "I will sing for you." He burst into song, a truly moving and beautiful rendition; the phrasing and control of rhythm were perfect. He concluded and bowed. She took up the cup and drank to him, murmuring some seductive little sounds to stir his senses. But he just sat there with his head respectfully bowed.
After several more cups, she said with a laugh: "I have heard that you are completely covered with tattooes. Dare I ask to see what they're like?"
He said with a smile: "It is true that I have some tattooes, nothing very much. But how could I possible bare myself in front of you?"
"A young man with such a fine body needn't be bashful about showing it," she said.
After much discussion they came to an agreement and the Prodigy bared his upper body. Lily expressed her delight as she touched him with her delicate little fingers. He quickly covered himself again. They had another cup of wine and she continued trying to excite him. He was afraid she might make some move he would find it difficult to reject. Suddenly he thought of something. "How old are you exactly?" he asked.
"I shall be twenty-seven this year," she answered.
"And I am twenty-five, so I am two years younger than you," he said. "Since you have been so kind to me, may I have the honour of calling you elder sister?" He stood up and flung himself down before her. Eight times he prostrated himself. These eight salutes were what brought her licentious ideas to a standstill and enabled the important business to go ahead. Had he been anyone else, the wine might have gone to his head and the whole affair been ruined. This episode proves that the Prodigy had a will of iron. He was a true gentleman. He called Mama Li in too, and prostrated himself before her, treating her as an adoptive mother.
When he was about to leave, Lily said: "You must stay here with us. There's no need for you to go to an inn."
"If you are so kind as to invite me, let me go back to the inn and fetch a few things."
"Don't you keep me waiting, now," she said.
"The inn is not far," he said. "I'll be back in a moment."
Having bidden her a temporary farewell, he went back to the inn and told Magic Messenger what had happened. "That's great," the latter said. "The only trouble is I'm afraid you may have lecherous thoughts that you can't repress."
"A man who drowns his conscience in debauchery is no better than a beast. If I have any such thoughts, may I die the death of a thousand cuts!"
Magic Messenger laughed and said: "We are both men of honour. You don't have to swear any oaths!"
"I must, otherwise you won't trust me."
"You just go quickly, choose your moment, get the business done as quickly as possible and come straight back. Don't leave me waiting here too long. There's still that letter for Marshal Su waiting to be delivered."
The Prodigy packed a bag with some loose gold, jewels and other valuables, and returned to Lily's house. He gave half to the old woman and divided the rest among all the other members of the household, so that each one got their share. A room was prepared for him to one side of the guest quarters. Everyone in the house addressed him as uncle.
It so happened that as evening approached someone arrived and announced that the Emperor intended to come that night. The Prodigy immediately went to Lily and prostrated himself. "I want to ask you a favour, Elder Sister," he said. "Will you allow me to see His Majesty tonight? And provide some of the imperial paper and brushes so he can write out a pardon? I am dependent on your bounty!"
Lily said: "Certainly I will present you to the Emperor tonight, and if you let him know your problems there's no need to worry about getting his pardon."
Evening came on. The moon shone mistily, a multitude of scents perfumed the air. At this moment His Majesty walked down the little path to Lily's back door, leading a young eunuch from the palace and dressed as a common scholar. He was taken to sit in a private room. All the doors, back and front, were bolted, and every lamp and candle in the place was lit. Lily came to receive him, with a comb in her hair and most elaborately got up. After the ceremonial exchange of greetings, the Emperor asked her to change her elaborate attire and to entertain him. Lily obeyed and then took him to the inner room. All kinds of delicacies had been prepared for the occasion, fruit and nuts and such, all laid out waiting. Lily raised her cup for a toast, and the Emperor responded happily by calling out: "Approach, my dear and sit with me!" Seeing the Emperor in such a good mood, Lily respectfully petitioned him: "I've got this cousin who went away when I was small. He returned today. He asked if he could see Your Majesty. Of course it is not for me to say, but may I entreat Your Majesty to admit him to the royal presence?"
"Since he is your relative," the Emperor said, "of course he may be admitted into my presence, I can have nothing against it."
The girl sent for the Prodigy to appear before the Emperor. The Prodigy pressed his knuckles to his forehead and prostrated himself. The Emperor liked his looks. Lily told him to play something on the flute to entertain His Majesty while he was drinking. Then she played the lute and asked the Prodigy to sing. The Prodigy bowed and said: "The only songs I know are licentious love songs, how can I perform something like that for His Majesty?"
The Emperor said: "Just the sort of thing that's needed for a private visit to a house of pleasure, something to banish care. No need to be shy."

So the Prodigy took up the ivory clappers, bowed and then said to Lily: "Please correct me sister if I hit some wrong notes." He filled his lungs, grasped the ivory clappers and sang:

*Since the day he left his home,*
*No news, no sign from him.*
*Longing and pain afflict me now*
*When will my poor heart break?*
*No longer do the swallows come,*
*The flowers are faded all.*
*I waste, I pine; when will I see*
*The faithless wretch again?*
*Better it were we'd never met.*
*In my dreams I sense him, yet*
*When I wake it's only the oriole*
*Greeting the dawn outside my window.*

This performance was indeed like the fluting of an oriole, beguiling to the senses. The Emperor wanted him to sing again. The Prodigy bowed very low and said respectfully: "I have a little air of my own that I'd like Your Majesty to hear." He sang thus:

*Hear my plea! Hear my plea!*
*I've wandered who knows where*
*Far from the haunts of men.*
*Many there are in the world*
*Who suffer cruel wrong:*
*Many languish in the fiery pit*
*Yet house a loyal heart.*
*A loyal heart, a loyal heart,*
*The day for giving thanks will come,*
*And a merciful lord shall be repaid!*

Somewhat taken aback, the Emperor asked: "What exactly is the point of choosing this song?"
The Prodigy began to weep and prostrated himself.
Still more alarmed the Emperor said: "You'd better get it all off your chest. I will sort it out for you."
The Prodigy replied: "My crimes are unforgivable. I don't know how I can tell you."
The Emperor said: "If I pardon you there is no crime. You may speak freely."
The Prodigy said: "Since my youth I have been wandering in the rivers and lakes. I found myself in Shandong, I went with some merchants and when we were passing the Marshes of Mount Liang I was taken up the mountain and remained there three years. This year I managed to escape and return to the capital. I found my cousin, but I don't dare show myself in the street. If someone should recognize me and report it to the police what would become of me?"
Lily then put in a word: "This is my cousin's only worry. I beg you, Your Majesty, you must decide his fate!"
"It's no problem," the Emperor said pleasantly to the Prodigy. "You're a close relative of Miss Li, no one will dare to arrest you."
At a sign from the Prodigy, Lily coquettishly pressed the Emperor further: "But please Your Majesty, won't you put the pardon in writing? Once he has your forgiveness he can rest easy."
"But I don't have the imperial seal here, how can I do that?" the Emperor objected.
"Your personal calligraphy is good enough for anyone. If you vouchsafe my cousin your protection, you will be bestowing the greatest of blessings on poor little me."
The Emperor could put up no further resistance. He ordered writing materials to be brought. The old woman went and fetched the four treasures of the study — paper, brush, ink and ink stone — while the Prodigy ground the ink on the stone and Lily handed the Emperor a fine-haired brush with an ivory shaft. The Emperor smoothed out the sumptuous paper and began to write across it in bold characters. He paused and said: "I'm afraid I don't recall your name."
"They call me Yan Qing, Sire," the Prodigy said.
Here is what the Emperor wrote:
*His Sacred and Imperial Majesty Xuan Ho, Guardian of the Way and Keeper of the Mysteries, hereby absolves Yan Qing of all his crimes. Let no officer seek to detain him!*
When he finished writing, he appended the royal monogram. The Prodigy kowtowed again to the Emperor and Lily filled the cups to show her thanks. The Emperor remarked: "If you stayed on Mount Liang you must know all about the place."
The Prodigy said: "Song Jiang's band have a banner which says "To Do Heaven's Will" in big characters. Their ceremonial hall is known as the Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness. They have never tried to usurp the local government nor do they harm good people. They only attack greedy officials, corrupt ministers, slanderers and sycophants. They live all the time in hope of a royal pardon and their chief desire is to serve the country."
The Emperor said: "But I have twice promulgated decrees granting them an amnesty. Why do they continue to resist and refuse to surrender?"
"Sire," said the Prodigy, "the first of those decrees was couched in insulting terms. What is more, the imperial wine that was sent with it was purloined and some very ordinary stuff substituted for it. That is why everything went wrong. The second time there was a deliberate omission in the text: Song Jiang appeared to be excluded from the amnesty, the wording was ambiguous. So it went wrong again. Marshal Tong's army attacked and after two battles it was totally destroyed. Marshal Gao raised an army and press-ganged the people to build boats for his campaign, vowing to wipe out Mount Liang entirely, but in three battles his troops were cut to pieces and he himself captured alive and taken up the mountain. He promised to secure an amnesty when he got back to the capital. He brought two members of the company back here with him, and left Colonel Wen, his military adviser, behind as hostage."
The Emperor said with a sigh: "I knew nothing of all this. When Marshal Tong returned he said the heat was too much for them, he said he ordered a ceasefire to allow his troops to rest. Marshal Gao said he had called a temporary halt to the campaign and returned to the capital because sickness prevented the attack."
Lily said: "Despite Your Majesty's clairvoyance and heavenly status, the proper path can be obstructed by evil counsellors, you can't help it."
But the Emperor remained exceedingly downcast. It was quite late when the Prodigy took up his pardon, kowtowed and went to bed. The Emperor slept with Lily and was fetched just before dawn by one of the palace eunuchs.
When the Prodigy rose next day he announced that he had business to attend to early and returned to the inn where he gave Magic Messenger a full account of what had been said and done. Magic Messenger said: "We're in luck then. Let's go and deliver the letter to Marshal Su."
"We can do that after breakfast," said the Prodigy.
After breakfast they packed a hamper with gold and valuables, took the pardon and directed their steps toward Marshal Su's palace. Inquiring in the neighbourhood they heard that the Marshal was not at home. The Prodigy said: "The morning audience at the palace should be over by now. Why isn't he back?"
The man said: "Marshal Su is the Emperor's favourite, he scarcely leaves his side. Sometimes he comes home early, sometimes late. You can never be sure."
Just as he was speaking, someone else said: "Isn't that the Marshal coming now?"
The Prodigy was very pleased and said to Magic Messenger: "You wait here at the gate, Brother. I'll go and see him by my-self." When he approached he found a knot of richly dressed attendants escorting the sedan. The Prodigy knelt down right there in the street and cried: "I have a letter for His Excellency!"
The Marshal looked him over and said: "You'd better come inside then."
He went inside with the sedan which stopped in the front of the hall, where the Marshal got down and went to sit in the library on one side, inviting the Prodigy to follow. "Where are you from and what's your business?" the Marshal asked.
"I am from Shandong, and I am bearing a letter from Colonel Wen."
"What Colonel Wen is this?"
The Prodigy took out the letter and presented it. Marshal Su inspected the seal and said: "Why, that's who it is! It's Wen Huan-zhang who was my schoolmate when I was young." He broke the seal and read:
*Dear and respected friend: I greet you most humbly. When we were small we used to play together. But that is thirty years ago now! Recently I was invited by Marshal Gao to join his staff as military adviser. Because he neglected my advice and refused to take precautions, he suffered three defeats, shameful to relate. The bandits captured him and tied him up, but their respected leader Song Jiang, moved by a humane and generous spirit, would not allow any harm to come to him. Now Gao has taken two of their company to the capital with him, the Magic Hand and Lungs, to seek the royal pardon, and left myself here. I beg Your Excellency to raise this matter with His Majesty and request him to quickly proclaim the amnesty for Song Jiang and his company and allow them to redeem their crimes through good works, to the great benefit of the country and of the world! Rescue me I beg you, I await your reply and trust you will understand.*
The Marshal found this quite surprising. "And who are you then?" he asked the Prodigy.
"I am Yan Qing. On Mount Liang they call me the Prodigy," the latter replied. He went out and fetched the hamper. "I often attended Your Excellency that time when you were going to burn incense at the temple in Huazhou, have your forgotten? Our Leader Song Jiang has sent a few little gifts for you, in token of his sincerity. Every day in the divination ceremony we have been told to pray that Your Excellency will intercede for us. Song Jiang and the others are ardently hoping that you will procure us the amnesty. If you could find the time to raise this matter with the Emperor the whole host on Mount Liang will owe you eternal gratitude! The Leader gave me a strict time limit, so now I must go back." With this he took his leave.
The Marshal had servants collect up the gold and valuables. He had much to think about. The Prodigy and Magic Messenger went back to their inn to talk things over: "These two affairs are all under way. Now there's only the question of the Magic Hand and Lungs in Marshal Gao's palace. How are we going to get them out?"
Magic Messenger said: "We'll disguise ourselves as country people again and wait around in front of Gao's residence until someone comes out. We'll take some money along to bribe him and secure a meeting with them. When we've seen how the land lies we can decide what to do."
So as soon as they had changed they got some money and went round to Marshal Gao's. They watched the front gate for a while, till a young palace superintendent came out. The young man walked with a swagger, and the Prodigy greeted him with the utmost respect. "What's your business?" he asked the Prodigy. The latter replied: "Would Your Honour be so good as to accompany me to a teashop? I would like to have a word."
They found a convenient nook inside, where Magic Messenger joined them. They sat down and ordered tea. "I won't beat about the bush," said the Prodigy. "One of those two that the Marshal brought back from Mount Liang, the one who is known as Lungs, is a relative of my friend here and he would like to see him, that is why we have approached Your Honour."
"You can forget it," said the young official. "That's all in the hands of the Military Council and top secret. No one can do it."
Magic Messenger now took the money from his sleeve and placed it on the table. "All you have to do," he said, "is bring Lungs out to see us for a moment, we don't need to get inside. If you do, these bars of silver are for you."
The sight of this booty awakened the man's greed. "It's true we have these two men in there," he said. "The Marshal has ordered them to be lodged in the garden at the back. If I bring him out for you so you can speak, will you keep your word and give me the money?"
"Of course," said Magic Messenger.
The man stood up. "You two wait for me here in the tea-shop," he said, and rushed off into the palace. They had waited less than an hour when he came hurrying back. "Give me the money first," he said. "I've got him here in another room."
With a certain amount of whispering they handed over the money and after putting it away he took them to a neighbouring room to see Lungs. "When you've had your talk, clear off!" he said.
"We want to draw up a plan for getting you out," the Prodigy said to Lungs.
"They've got us in the garden at the back," said the latter. "The wall is high and I can't see any way to climb it. There's a ladder for picking flowers, but they've hidden it. How can we get out?"
"Are there any trees near the wall?" the Prodigy asked.
"There are some big willows next to it, as it happens," said Lungs.
"Then tonight listen for a cough. That will mean I'm outside and I'm going to throw over the ends of a couple of ropes. You can put them over the branch of a willow tree and from the other side we'll haul you up to the top of the wall. It'll be in the fourth watch. Make sure you're there."
"Haven't you talked long enough?" the superintendent said: "Get out now." When Lungs went back inside he quietly told Hand about the plan while the Prodigy hurriedly explained everything to Magic Messenger. Then they all waited for night to come. On the street the Prodigy and Magic Messenger bought two lengths of hemp rope, which they secreted on their persons. Then they went to the back of Marshal Gao's palace to find a place to hide. Just behind the palace there was a stream. 2 empty boats were moored there, a little distance from the bank. They hid inside the boats till they heard the drum beat for the fourth watch, at 1 a.m. Then they went up to the garden wall and coughed. From inside came a quiet answering cough. When those on each side of the wall had established each other's whereabouts, the Prodigy threw over the rope's ends. The 2 on the inside made the ropes as secure as they could and those outside took a turn on each rope and began slowly to pull. First Lungs appeared over the top and then Magic Hand. They dropped to the ground. The ropes were thrown back inside the wall, and then everyone went to the inn and knocked on the door. They collected the luggage from the room and cooked breakfast and settled the bill. Then they went to the city gates and waited till they opened, when they left and headed back to Mount Liang to report. Had these four not completed their mission, things would have turned out differently. As it was, Marshal Su made his report to the Emperor and the outlaws received their pardon.

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### The Mount Liang Fortress Distributes its Wealth & holds a clearance sale; Song Jiang & All of his Men are Amnestied & return to favour

When Yan Qing didn't return that night, Li Shishi became suspicious. Marshal Gao's trusted subordinate, delivering breakfast to Xiao Rang and Yue Ho the next day, found the room empty. He hurriedly informed the chief steward. The steward searched the garden, and discovered the two ropes tied to the willow. The captives had escaped. He had no choice but to report to the marshal. Gao Qiu's gloom deepened at this startling news. He secluded himself in his residency, claiming he was ill.
The following day the Taoist Sovereign held court at the fifth watch and received the homage of his officials. He seated himself on the throne in the Hall of Culture and Virtue.
"Are the civil and military officials all assembled?' he asked.
"They await outside the hall, each in his respective group, civil on the left, military on the right," replied the chief of ceremonies.
The emperor ordered that the curtain be rolled up and that Tong Guan, Chancellor of Military Affairs, come forward.
"That punitive expedition of a hundred thousand troops you led personally against Liangshan Marsh, was it victorious or defeated?" queried the sovereign.
Tong Guan knelt and replied: "It wasn't that I didn't do my utmost! But it was the height of summer, and the soldiers weren't used to the surroundings and the climate. Many fell ill. Two or three out of ten died. With our forces dwindling, all I could do was bring them home for further training. Unfortunately on the way back more than half died of heat prostration. Your Majesty directed the bandits to surrender but, filled with false pride, they haughtily refused. Then Gao Qiu went after them with a naval armada, but he sickened and had to return."
"Inept, treacherous minister! Your failure to tell the truth has caused our nation great damage. How is it that in only two engagements the bandits utterly demolished the imperial forces! And that rascal Gao Qiu, after wasting who knows how much of the province's money and grain, not only lost many ships and a considerable number of troops, but was personally captured and taken to the bandits' mountain stronghold! Instead of killing him, Song Jiang and his lieutenants treated him courteously and let him go. Our royal orders were disgraced and made a laughing stock!
"I have heard that Song Jiang and his men neither attack local governments nor harm the people. They seek only an amnesty so that they can serve the country. Officials like you, who are jealous of the talents of others and deliberately conceal the facts, are the lowest of vermin! A fine Chancellor of Military Affairs! You should be ashamed! I ought to have you executed to appease the indignation of the people, but I'll spare you for the time being!"
The emperor shouted at Tong Guan to fall back. Silently, the chancellor withdrew to a side. The sovereign addressed his Hanlin Academy scholars.
"Prepare my personal imperial decree, and send it with a high official, ordering Song Jiang and his men to return from Mount Liangshan."
Marshal Su Yuanjing came forward and knelt before the throne. "Although I have no talent, I would be glad to go."
The sovereign was very pleased. "I'll write the document myself," he exclaimed. He ordered that a table be brought and the paper be spread.
After penning the decree, he called for the imperial seal and impressed it on the document. He directed the Keeper of the Royal Stores to draw thirty-six gold slabs and seventy-two slabs of silver, thirty-six bolts of red satin and seventy-two bolts of green satin, plus one hundred and eight bottles of yellow-sealed imperial wine, and entrust them to the marshal. He also gave Su twenty-four bolts of cloth for coats and linings and a banner proclaiming the imperial amnesty in letters of gold, and ordered him to set forth on the morrow.
The marshal took his leave of the emperor and left the Hall of Culture and Virtue. Court concluded, the officials withdrew, and Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong Guan slunk back to his residence in disgrace. He dared not attend any more royal audiences, and feigned illness. When Marshal Gao heard what had happened, he was terrified. He too was afraid to appear before the sovereign.
Marshal Su had the imperial wine and other gifts packed and shouldered by porters. Mounting his horse, he left the city. Officials saw him and his entourage out of the Nanxun Gate. The party proceeded towards Jizhou, flying the imperial banner with its inscription of gold.
Meanwhile, Yan Qing, Dai Zong, Xiao Rang and Yue Ho returned through the night to the stronghold and reported to Song Jiang and the other chieftains. Yan Qing showed them the pardon the emperor had personally written by hand.
"Good news is sure to come," said Wu Yong.

Song Jiang burned fine incense, brought out the Heavenly Books given him by the Mystic Maid of Ninth Heaven, and raised his head and prayed. When he cast the divining sticks they revealed an extremely lucky omen.
"We're sure to succeed," cried Song Jiang. He requested Dai Zong and Yan Qing to go once more to the city, check on developments and report back immediately, so that adequate preparations could be made. A few days later, the two returned. "The emperor has entrusted Marshal Su with his royal decree," they said. "The marshal is also bringing imperial wine, gold and silver slabs, satin of red and green, and cloth for coats and linings. He's on his way to proclaim the amnesty and will be here soon."
Song Jiang was overjoyed. From Loyalty Hall he busily issued a series of orders: Men were to set up twenty-four shelters along the road from Liangshan Marsh to Jizhou, all decorated with bunting and filled with musical instruments. There, musicians—hired from neighboring shires—would play to welcome the procession. A lesser chieftain was to be in charge of each of the shelters. Others were sent out to buy fruit and sea delicacies and wine and tidbits to serve as snacks.
Marshal Su and his entourage, winding their way towards Mount Liangshan with the amnesty, reached Jizhou. Prefect Zhang Shuye came out to welcome them, and settled them in the hostel for officials. Politely, he raised his cup of greeting.
"Twice before the royal court sent amnesties. It was a serious loss to the country that they were not effectuated because their delivery was entrusted to the wrong persons. This mission of yours, Marshal, will surely be of great benefit."
"His Majesty has recently learned that the band on Mount Liangshan are interested primarily in righteousness. They neither raid the prefectures nor harm good people. They stress acting in Heaven's behalf. And so His Majesty has dispatched me with his hand-written decree, plus gifts of thirty-six slabs of gold, seventy-two slabs of silver, thirty-six bolts of red satin, seventy-two bolts of green satin, a hundred and eight bottles of yellow-sealed imperial wine, and twenty-four bolts of cloth for coats and linings, to deliver an amnesty. Do you think the gifts too trifling?"
"It's not a question of gifts with these people. They want to serve the nation faithfully so as to earn fame for their posterity. If only you'd been able to come earlier, Marshal, our country wouldn't have had to suffer such heavy losses in officers and soldiers, money and grain. Once these warriors return to the fold they certainly will perform meritorious deeds for the emperor."
"Can I trouble you to go to the fortress, Prefect, and tell them to prepare to receive my mission? I will wait here."
"Of course."
The governor mounted his horse and left the city with a dozen men. At the foot of the mountain he was met by lesser chieftains, who at once reported the news to the stronghold Song Jiang hastened down and escorted Prefect Zhang to Loyalty Hall.
"Congratulations," Zhang exclaimed. "The emperor has dispatched Marshal Su with his personally hand-written amnesty, together with valuable gifts. The marshal is already at Jizhou. Prepare, warrior, to welcome the imperial decree."
Pressing his fingers to his brow in a gesture of delight, Song Jiang said: "He is bringing us new life!" He begged Zhang to dine with him.
"I'd love to," said the prefect, "but the marshal would be annoyed if I were slow in getting back."
"At least have a drink, and accept these paltry things—I can hardly call them gifts." Song Jiang presented gold and silver on a platter.
"I wouldn't dare."
"A mere trifle, why refuse? Not nearly enough to express our thanks, but do take them as a small token of appreciation. Once the mission is completed, we shall offer something more substantial."
"I'm deeply grateful for your good intentions. But please keep them here, for now. I can always call for them later."
Prefect Zhang was absolutely incorruptible. He made strict demands upon himself.
Song Jiang directed his generals Wu Yong and Zhu Wu, plus Xiao Rang and Yue Ho, to escort Prefect Zhang to Jizhou, and there see Marshal Su. On the day after the morrow all chieftains, big and small, would wait to greet the emissary thirty //from the fortress.
Wu Yong and the others travelled through the night to return the prefect to Jizhou, and called on the marshal the next morning at the hostel for officials. They kowtowed and remained kneeling before him. Su directed them to rise and be seated. Deferentially, the four replied they wouldn't dare. The marshal asked their names.
"I am called Wu Yong," said the brigand military advisor, "and these are Zhu Wu, Xiao Rang and Yue Ho. We have been sent by brother Song Jiang to welcome Your Excellency."
"Why, Master Wu, how nice to see you again! It's been years since last we parted in Huazhou. Who would have thought that we'd meet again today.' I am fully aware of the fidelity and righteousness in your hearts. Corrupt ministers have used their authority to conceal the true facts from the emperor. But now he knows, and has dispatched me with his personal amnesty, imperial wine and various gifts. You need have no hesitation about accepting them."
The four kowtowed their thanks and said: "It is entirely due to the marshal's kindness that we crude rustics living in a mountain wilderness have the good fortune to meet Your Excellency and receive His Majesty's benevolence! It shall be engraved always on our hearts and bones! We don't know how we can ever repay!"
Prefect Zhang entertained them that night at a banquet.
Early the next morning in Jizhou three carts were laden with burning incense. A group of porters bore the imperial wine in a phoenix and dragon decorated case. Another group carried gold and silver slabs, and silks and satins of red and green. A miniature pavilion housed the emperor's decree. Marshal Su rode beside it as the procession headed east. Prefect Zhang, also on horseback, followed, with Wu Yong and the other three riding in his wake. Horsemen leading the way in the tightly packed assembly carried the gold-lettered imperial yellow banner, preceded by troops with fluttering pennants beating golden drums.
For nearly ten //they advanced along the winding road, and soon reached the first shelter. Marshal Su noted the gay bunting and the tootling musicians playing a welcoming tune. A few score li beyond they arrived at another decorated shelter. Ahead they saw, amid swirling incense, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi kneeling in the road, and behind them, also on their knees in neat ranks, all the other chieftains, big and small, waiting to welcome the imperial decree.
"Let everyone mount," the marshal directed.
They rode together to the water's edge, where many boats ferried them to the Shore of Golden Sands. Above and below the three passes music soared to the heavens. Soldiers, celebrants, in clouds of incense, flowed in long lines to Loyalty Hall.
There the riders dismounted, and the incense and the imperial decree in the miniature pavilion were carried into the hall. In the center stood three ceremonial tables skirted with imperial yellow gauze of dragon and phoenix design. The decree was placed on the central table before the tablet representing the emperor, which was in the exact middle of the room. The gold and silver slabs were set on the left table, the red and green satin on the right, while the imperial wine and the cloth for the coats and linings were placed before the tables on the floor. From a golden burner rose the fragrance of fine incense.
Song Jiang and Lu Junyi escorted Marshal Su and Prefect Zhang to the seats of honor. Xiao Rang and Yue Ho stood on the left, Pei Xuan and Yan Qing stood on the right. Lu and the others knelt before the dignitaries. At Pei Xuan's command, all kowtowed. Xiao Rang then read the decree:

Imperial Edict: From the day I assumed the throne I have ruled with virtue and righteousness, changing the world by ceremonial rectitude, bringing peace through punishments and rewards. Never have I ceased seeking good ministers or loving the populace. Broadly have I dispensed charity, endeavoring to bestow happiness equally upon all. The people enjoy my benevolence, even infants know my concern.
Song Jiang, Lu Junyi and their men are loyal and righteous, and do not engage in violent persecution. For a long time they have wished to return and display their gratitude. Although they have committed crimes, it was not without reason. In view of their sincerity, I sympathize with them deeply. I have directed Marshal Su to deliver my amnesty to Song Jiang and the other offenders presently residing in Liangshan Marsh. I bestow also on Song Jiang and his higher chieftains thirty-six slabs of gold and thirty-six bolts of red satin; to his lesser chieftains I give seventy-two slabs of silver and seventy-two bolts of green satin. From the date of this decree let them cast doubt aside, return quickly and submit. Important tasks will be given them.
Let this document be proclaimed so that all may know.

*The second month, __ day, spring,*
*in the fourth year of Xuan He*

"Long live the emperor!," shouted Song Jiang and his cohorts. They fell to their knees and kowtowed. As Pei Xuan called the roll, Marshal Su dispensed the gifts. The imperial wine was opened and poured into a huge silver tureen. From this it was ladled out, warmed and placed in a silver wine pot. Marshal Su filled a golden goblet and addressed the chieftains.
"On orders from our sovereign I have brought this imperial wine as a gift. Fear it not, warriors. See, I drink before you."
He drained the cup, and the chieftains voiced their thanks. Su filled it again and presented it to Song Jiang. Song dropped to his knees and drank. Lu Junyi, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng were each in turn handed the goblet. Finally, Su toasted all one hundred and eight chieftains together.
Song Jiang directed that the wine be poured, and invited Marshal Su to be seated in the center of the hall. The chieftains paid their respects. Song Jiang then approached.
"I had the honor of meeting you at the temple on the West Sacred Mountain. I'm profoundly grateful for your kindness. Thanks to your efforts with those close to the emperor, my men and I are able to see the sun again. We shall never forget."
"I knew how loyal you all are, and that you act in Heaven's behalf, but I didn't realize you were being wronged. And so I dared not put in a word for you before. I'm sorry for the delay. It wasn't until I received the letter from Chief of Staff Wen and your generous gift that I began to learn what was going on. While chatting with emperor in Mantled in Incense Hall one day I managed to tell him. He checked and found what I told him was correct. The following day, while holding court in the Hall of Culture and Virtue in the presence of all his officials, he severely castigated Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong Guan, and blamed Marshal Gao for having repeatedly failed. He called for his writing equipment, personally penned an amnesty, and entrusted me to bring it and present you and your chieftains with gifts. I hope you will wind up your business here quickly and report to the capital. You must show yourselves worthy of the emperor's benevolence."
All were very pleased and respectfully expressed their thanks. Song Jiang invited Chief of Staff Wen to join them. The happy reunion between Su and Wen spread joy throughout the hall. Wen and Prefect Zhang were seated opposite Marshal Su, and everyone took his place at banquet tables according to rank. Many toasts were drunk, while outside the band vigorously played. Although the fare was not elaborate, there were mountains of meat and seas of wine. All drank heavily, and had to be supported to their quarters to rest.
The following day, they feasted again, talking of things old and new, and chatting about their aspirations. On the third day they dined once more, and took the marshal on a tour of the mountain. They returned to their quarters at dusk, many sodden with wine. After several such days, though Song Jiang and his chieftains were reluctant to let him go, the marshal said he must leave for the capital.
"You don't understand," he explained. "It's been some time since I delivered the amnesty. If you heroes return promptly, all will be well. If you don't, false and jealous ministers will very likely gossip."
"We were hoping you'd stay a few days more," said Song Jiang, "but since you feel you must go, of course we won't detain you. Let's have one more day of drinking, and we'll see you off early tomorrow morning."
The chieftains joined in a merry feast, and again voiced their thanks in the course of toasts. Marshal Su spoke flattering and reassuring words. They caroused until night.
The next morning horses and carts were readied. Song Jiang brought gold and jewels on a platter to the marshal's quarters, and respectfully presented them. Only after Song Jiang's repeated urging did Su accept and place them in his chest of clothing. His luggage packed, his horse saddled, the marshal prepared to set forth.
Those returning with him were given food and wine by Zhu Wu and Yue Ho, and lavishly rewarded with money and clothing material, to their great delight. Gold and valuables were also presented to Chief of Staff Wen and Prefect Zhang. They accepted only after Song Jiang insisted. He ordered that Wen depart with Marshal Su.
To the beat of golden drums and the trilling of fifes the chieftains accompanied the marshal down the mountain, proceeding a distance of thirty //after crossing the river at the Shore of Golden Sands. There all dismounted and raised their wine cups in a farewell toast.
"When you see the emperor, Marshal, please give him an excellent report," said Song Jiang.
"Rest assured, warrior. Wind up your affairs and come to the capital as soon as possible. When your army nears the city be sure to send someone on ahead to notify me. I'll inform the emperor and dispatch a welcoming party. We want to do this in proper style."
"Excellency, I beg your indulgence. Wang Lun built the mountain stronghold in this small marsh of ours, and he was succeeded by Chao Gai. I, in turn, have ruled here for many years. Damage to the neighboring populace has been considerable. For the next ten days I'd like to distribute our wealth among them. Once that's done we'll hasten to the capital without further delay. Would you please convey this to the emperor so that he'll allow us a bit more time."
Marshal Su assented. He bid them farewell and, with his entourage, headed for Jizhou.

Song Jiang and his men returned to the stronghold. In Loyalty Hall the assembly drum was beaten. As the chieftains seated themselves all the officers gathered. Song Jiang addressed them.
"Brothers, ever since Wang Lun established the fortress and Chao Gai strengthened it this place has flourished. Many years have passed since you brothers rescued me at Jiangzhou and chose me as leader. Today we've been amnestied and have seen the face of the sun again. Soon we shall go to the capital, serve our country, win prestige and privileges for our wives and children, and enjoy the blessings of peace. Those of you who have things which should go in the storerooms deliver them there for our common use. The remaining property shall be divided equally among us in a righteous manner with no contention.
"We hundred and eight are all stars. We live and die together. The emperor's amnesty frees us of any crimes. Soon we shall go to the capital and see His Majesty. We must be worthy of his benevolence. As to you other officers, some of you came with the intention of joining us, some simply followed others, some are army officers who lost their commands, others were captured. If you wish to go with us to the capital, you may enroll. If you don't, you may resign. I will pay you off and you can return to civilian life."
On Song Jiang's instructions Pei Xuan and Xiao Rang prepared two registers. After discussion among the members of the three armies four or five thousand men resigned. Song Jiang gave them money and gifts and sent them on their way. Those who wished to remain registered for duty.
The next day Song Jiang had Xiao Rang write proclamations and sent men out to post them in all the neighboring towns and hamlets. Everyone was invited to come to the mountain for a ten-day close-out. The proclamation read as follows:

Notice from Song Jiang and his warriors in Liangshan Marsh: Because in the past we occupied these hills and groves we caused considerable disturbance among the neighboring populace. Now His Imperial Majesty has amnestied our crimes and we are returning to his service. As a recompense to you neighbors we are holding a close-out for ten days. We shall dispense our property among you, free of charge. This is absolutely true. Have no doubts. Please honor us with your presence. It will be our pleasure.

Song Jiang and his warriors of Liangshan Marsh

*__ day of the third month of the fourth year of Xuan He*

From the storerooms gold and jewels, silks and satins were distributed among the chieftains and officers and men. Another portion was selected as a gift for the government. The remainder was piled in the fortress for dispensation during the ten-day close-out.
This ran from the third to the thirteenth of the third month. Meat and wine were liberally served to the people, who came in droves, carrying empty bags and trays. Song Jiang ordered that they be compensated at the rate of ten times the damage suffered. Happily the recipients thanked him and departed.
When the close-out ended, the chieftains began packing for the trip to the capital. Song Jiang thought the men's families should return to their old homes. But Wu Yong had another idea.
"Better keep them here, brother," he said. "It will be time enough for them to go home after we've seen the emperor and been assured of his kindness."
Song Jiang saw the point. "You're right." He ordered the chieftains to get on with their packing and, at the same time, reorganize their troops.
They very soon set out, and quickly reached Jizhou where they warmly thanked Prefect Zhang Shuye. He gave a banquet for all the warriors and rewarded the ranks of the three armies.
Song Jiang thanked the prefect and they left the city. Preceded by an advance contingent of six or seven hundred they marched towards the Eastern Capital. Dai Zong and Yan Qing were sent on ahead to notify Marshal Su. The marshal promptly informed the emperor: "Song Jiang and his army are on their way."
The sovereign was very pleased. He directed the marshal and the imperial controller to greet the arrivals with pennants and standards. The two at once left the city.
The brigand forces were marching in smart formation. In the fore were two red banners, one reading *Obey Heaven,* the other *Defend the Country.* The chieftains were in full armor. The only exceptions were Wu Yong—who wore a black silk head kerchief, Gongsun Sheng—who wore a heron feathered Taoist coat, Lu Zhishen—in a fiery red Buddhist robe, and Wu Song—in a pilgrim's black cassock. All the others were in battle dress with metal fittings.
They had been marching for many a day, and now, as they neared the capital, the vanguard saw coming towards them the imperial controller with pennants and standards. Song Jiang was informed. He and his chieftains went first to greet Marshal Su then halted the army outside the New Official Gate, set up shelters, and waited for the emperor's summons.
Marshal Su and the imperial controller entered the city and informed the emperor.
"I've heard a lot about Song Jiang and his chieftains," said the sovereign. "A hundred and eight of them, bold and courageous, all corresponding to star spirits. Remarkable men. Today they have submitted and returned to the capital to become respectable citizens. I shall proceed with my officials to Xuante Tower. Let Song Jiang and his chieftains march in full armor at the head of their army and enter the city, but with not more than four or fire hundred troops. I will review them as they march from east to west. I also want the people and the officials, civil and military, to know these gallant heroes who are now our loyal subjects. Then let them divest themselves of their armor and weapons, put on the satin robes which I have presented to them, and enter the palace through East Glory Gate. I shall receive them in the Hall of Culture and Virtue."
The imperial controller went to the brigands' camp and transmitted the message to Song Jiang.
The next day Song Jiang had Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan select six or seven hundred stalwart men, and before these place golden drums and colorful flags, then a corps of spear and sword and ax bearers, with the two red banners *Obey Heaven and Defend the Country* in between. Every man carried a sword and bow and arrows, and wore full armor. In ranks they entered the city's East Gate.
Civil and military, the whole populace had turned out, supporting the old and holding the young. They lined the roads and stared at the brigands as if they were gods. The emperor and his officials watched from the tower. They saw the golden drums and fluttering pennants, the swords and axes in gleaming array, the white fetlocked cavalry, and the red banners *Obey Heaven* and *Defend the Country.* In addition there was a band of thirty or so mounted musicians, drumming and blowing. Finally came the massed ranks of the stalwarts. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao cleared the road for the procession, Zhu Wu brought up the rear.
The emperor was delighted at this magnificent display. He said admiringly to his officials: "They are indeed heroes!"
He instructed the chief of ceremonies to tell Song Jiang and the chieftains to change into ceremonial clothes and be prepared to be received at court. The order was transmitted. Outside the place gate the men removed their armor, donned the satin robes of red and green, attached the slabs of gold and silver, put on the special hats and pale green boots worn at imperial audiences. Gongsun Sheng had tailored his red satin into a Taoist coat, Lu Zhishen had made a Buddhist robe, and Wu Song a pilgrim's cassock. All had used the material presented by the emperor. With Song Jiang and Lu Junyi in the lead, seconded by Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng, and followed by the other chieftains, they entered the East Glory Gate. The ceremonial fittings and paraphernalia had already been placed in order.
By then it was early morning, and the sovereign arrived at the Hall of Culture and Virtue. The master of rites led Song Jiang and the chieftains into the royal presence. They formed lines and, in keeping with the commands of the chief of ceremonies, kowtowed and shouted, "Long live the emperor!" Pleased, His Majesty invited them to draw near and be seated according to rank. On his order, a banquet was laid by the imperial caterers. The emperor's vintners brought the wine, the Delicacies Department brought the entrees, the royal chefs did the cooking, and the official Banquet Bureau served the food, while in the background music played. The emperor, in his royal chair, joined them personally at the table.
The feasting went on until dusk. Song Jiang and the chieftains thanked the sovereign, and left the palace with flowers in their hair. Outside the West Glory Gate they mounted their horses and rode back to camp. The next day they again entered the city and went with the imperial master of rites to the hall of Culture and Virtue to express their gratitude. His Majesty, very pleased, was thinking of giving them official rank so that they would qualify for appointment to government posts. Again Song Jiang and the chieftains thanked him and returned to camp.

But the Chancellor of Military Affairs said to the emperor: "They've only just submitted and have not yet won any merit. They shouldn't be given rank so easily. They ought to distinguish themselves in battle, first. What's more, there are thousands of them camped outside our gates. That's a bad situation. Among Song Jiang's forces are officers of the capital garrison who fell into his hands. They should return to it. Officers and men from other armies should also go back to their original units. The remainder should be divided into five columns, and assigned to duty in different parts of Shandong and Hebei. That would be best."
The next day, the sovereign sent the imperial controller to the camp with a directive: *Song Jiang's forces shall be disbanded and returned to their original units.*
The chieftains were angry. They said: "Though we've submitted to the throne, not only aren't we given rank, but you want to split us brothers up! We chieftains have vowed to live and die together! If you insist on dividing us, we have no choice but to go back to Liangshan Marsh!"
Song Jiang hastily stopped them. He begged the controller to explain the situation to the emperor. The controller reported word for word, not daring to leave anything out. Startled, His Majesty summoned his Chancellor of Military Affairs.
"Although those fellows have surrendered, they haven't actually changed. Sooner or later, they're going to make serious trouble," said the chancellor. "It seems to me you should issue an order which will lure them into the capital, exterminate the whole hundred and eight, and then disband their army. This will save the country from disaster."
The sovereign hesitated. From behind a screen, a high official emerged, dressed in a purple gown and holding an ivory tablet. "On every border the beacon fires burn continuously," he shouted, "and within the country there's danger of internal calamity! It's all because treacherous ministers like you're wrecking His Majesty's domain!" Truly, only this voice calling for strengthening the nation and pacifying its borders could save our Heaven-startling, Earth-shaking heroes.

After the Prodigy's happy encounter with the Emperor at Lily's house when he got a personal pardon from him, and after he had seen Marshal Su, and with Magic Messenger devised a plan to free Lungs and Magic Hand from house arrest in Marshal Gao's palace by means of a bribe, the four of them left the city the moment the gates opened and hurried back to Mount Liang to report all these events. Lily was concerned when the Prodigy did not return that night. And in Marshal Gao's palace the confidential servants who took food to Lungs and Magic Hand next day found their quarters empty and anxiously reported this fact to the major-domo. The latter went to the back garden to see for himself. When he saw the two ropes over the branch of a willow tree he realized the two prisoners had escaped and had no choice but to inform the Marshal. Gao the Ball was shocked and highly apprehensive. Pleading illness he shut himself up in his palace. At the next morning's court audience, after the initial ceremonies had been completed, the Emperor told his close advisers to order Marshal Tong Guan to come forward. "Last year you had a hundred thousand troops and my personal commission to mount an attack on the Marshes of Mount Liang," he said. "Were you successful?"
Tong Guan knelt and said: "With the army I led there last year we mounted an offensive but it failed. The reason was that my officers suffered from the summer heat and they all got sick. Three out of ten died. In view of the great hardship to the troops I temporarily withdrew and called a halt to the campaign. I sent them all back to barracks to recuperate. Many of the imperial guard became sick on the return journey and there were heavy losses. Since then there has been an offer of amnesty, but those villains in the Marshes refuse to be pacified. Marshal Gao has used naval forces to attack them, but was also obliged to turn back on account of sickness."
The Emperor was furious. "You're rogues, all of you, envious of the worthy and able," he shouted. "You think you can lie to me about everything! Last year you took troops to Mount Liang. How is it that after only two battles the enemy routed them and our army was totally destroyed? It was a disaster! Then that scoundrel Gao the Ball went and squandered vast amounts of government money and provisions, lost thousands of boats and crew, had I don't know how many infantry and cavalry slaughtered, and allowed himself to be captured by the robbers and taken up their mountain. Song Jiang and his gang did him no harm, they released him and sent him home. I have been informed that this Song Jiang and his band do not attack government property, do not harm innocent people, and would like nothing better than an amnesty so they can serve their country. Everything is the fault of you greedy, deceitful ministers, on whom I have bestowed honour in vain, who have brought the country's affairs to rack and ruin! You have mishandled important affairs of state, you are utterly shameless. I have decided to be merciful this time. But future transgressions will not be pardoned."
Tong Guan remained silent and withdrew to one side. The Emperor went on: "Amongst you officials, which of you thinks he is able to go and make peace with Song Jiang and his band on Mount Liang?"
Immediately Marshal Su Yuanjing came forward and knelt before His Majesty. "Despite my inadequacy I would like to have a try," he said.
The Emperor was relieved. "I will write out the edict in my own hand," he said. He had his special desk brought, smoothed out the paper and proceeded to write out the edict there and then. His courtiers simply brought the writing materials and he did the rest himself. Then he ordered the official in charge of the treasury to take out thirty-six gold tokens and seventy-two silver tokens, thirty-six rolls of crimson brocade and seventy-two of green, one hundred and eight bottles of yellow seal imperial wine, all this to be delivered to Marshal Su. There were also twenty-four rolls of material for clothing and a banner proclaiming the amnesty in gold characters. A time limit was set for the departure of the mission. Marshal Su bade the Emperor farewell in the Palace.
After the court was dismissed Marshal Tong returned shamefacedly to his residence where he claimed sickness and did not return to court. When Marshal Gao heard about these proceedings he was shaken rigid and dared not show his face at court. There is a poem:

*The amnesty offered is clear beyond doubt;*
*The embassy's ready, about to set out.*
*Kind treatment prevails over pacification:*
*Too bad that they've suffered such aggravation.*

So Marshal Su, with the imperial wine, the gold, silver, silk and other materials, rode out of the city. The imperial banner with gold characters was unfurled and all the officials came to the Gate of Southern Fragrance to see them off as they headed for Jizhou. Of this no more.
Meanwhile the Prodigy, Magic Messenger, Lungs and Magic Hand had travelled non-stop back to Mount Liang, where they recounted everything to Song Jiang and the rest. The Prodigy took out his own pardon in the Emperor's own hand and showed it to them. The Professor said: "This is really good news for us." Song Jiang burnt some top-class incense and took out the Mystic Lady's books in order to consult the heavens. The omens were excellent, and Song Jiang felt on top of the world, confident that all would now go well for them. The Magic Messenger and the Prodigy were asked to go off again and check up on their story, returning as fast as possible so that suitable preparations could be made. They were gone a few days. When they returned they said: "The court is sending Marshal Su himself here with the edict, and also imperial wine, gold and silver, crimson and green brocades and clothing material, to announce the amnesty. They'll soon be here!"
In great excitement Song Jiang gave out his orders in the Ceremonial Hall, specifying who was to go down to Jizhou, and ordering the erection of twenty-four marquees decked with silk embroidery, to house flutes, drums and gongs. Hired musicians were brought in from all over the neighbourhood and divided among the marquees to greet the imperial party. One of the minor chiefs was allotted to each marquee to supervise all this. People were sent out separately to buy fruit and nuts and seafood, superior wine, dried food and suchlike, everything that was necessary for a great banquet.
Meanwhile Marshal Su bearing the imperial edict and with a retinue of one thousand had reached Jizhou. Governor Zhang rode to the outskirts of the city to welcome him and installed him in the government rest-house. After a few words of formal greeting, the Governor offered Marshal Su wine. Then he said: "The Emperor has twice declared an amnesty but because the wrong envoys were employed affairs of state have miscarried. Now you have been sent, Marshal, and there can be no doubt that your mission is going to do the state great service."
The Marshal said: "The Emperor has heard that the band on Mount Liang hold loyalty dear and do not attack government property or harm innocent people, and that their motto is 'To Do Heaven's Will'. Now the Emperor has done me the honour of sending me to proclaim the amnesty, with an edict written in his own hand and a gift of thirty-six gold tokens, seventy-two silver tokens, thirty-six bolts of red silk and seventy-two of green, a hundred and eight bottles of yellow seal imperial wine, twenty-four bolts of cloth for clothes. Does that sound like enough?"
"With those people it's nothing to do with the size of the gift." said the Governor, "They want to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and win fame for posterity."
Marshal Su said: "If I wait here, do you think you could go to the mountain to inform them and tell them to prepare to receive the edict?"
"Most willingly," said the Governor. With a dozen followers he rode out of the city towards the Marshes of Mount Liang. At the foot of the mountain they were met by a minor chief who announced their coming. Song Jiang hurried down the mountain to receive the Governor and escort him up to the stronghold. After greetings had been exchanged in the Ceremonial Hall, the Governor said: "My heartfelt congratulations to you all, gentlemen! The Emperor has sent Marshal Su, bearing an imperial edict in his own hand, to announce the pardon. There is also a gift of tokens, certifying his approval, cloth, imperial wine and silk awaiting you in Jizhou. You should prepare to receive the edict."
Song Jiang struck his forehead with his knuckles in respect and said: "Our luck has turned!" They immediately pressed the Governor to stay and celebrate with them. But the latter said: "Do not think me ungrateful, but I am afraid the Marshal will think something is amiss if I do not return as quickly as possible."
Song Jiang said: "Have just one cup. I won't dare press you to more." But the Governor was adamant. Song Jiang then had trays of gold and silver brought and tried to present them to him, but the Governor said: "This I certainly cannot accept!"
"It's nothing but a meagre token of my goodwill," said Song Jiang. "When the business is completed I shall repay you more adequately."
The Governor said: "I truly appreciate your generosity. But let us leave all this here in the stronghold. I can always fetch it later." This governor can indeed be called an honest and upright man! There is a poem:

*This governor's certainly one of a kind:*
*Not gold but Song Jiang is his friend.*
*Being honest he thinks is the way to gain hearts;*
*He'll win them with kindness not threats.*

Song Jiang sent some of his officers with the Professor, the Strategist, Magic Hand and Lungs to accompany the Governor down the mountain and return to Jizhou with him to meet Marshal Su. A couple of days later the other leaders would ride ten miles out from the camp to await Marshal Su's coming.
The Professor and company had gone straight to Jizhou with the Governor. The day after arriving there they went to the government rest-house to see Marshal Su. After greeting him they knelt. The Marshal bade them all rise and be seated. They modestly refused. The Marshal asked their names.
"I am Wu Yong," said the Professor. "These are my friends the Strategist, Magic Hand and Lungs; we come by order of our leader Song Jiang to welcome Your Excellency. The day after tomorrow the Leader and our other colleagues will travel ten miles from the mountain stronghold to await you."
The Marshal said with pleasure: "My learned friend, many years have gone by since we saw one another in Huazhou. Who would have thought we would meet again here today? I know that all of you are honest and loyal, and that it is through evil counsellors that your path is blocked, that you are prevented from rising through the influence of calumny and envy. Today the Emperor fully understands this and has sent me to you with an edict written in his own hand, with gold and silver tokens, with red and green silk, imperial wine and rolls of cloth to proclaim an amnesty. You may rest assured: you can accept it without reservation."
The Professor and his companions prostrated themselves again in gratitude. "Savages that we are," they said, "we thank Your Excellency for honouring us with this visit. We are truly grateful for the Emperor's favour and for Your Excellency's good offices. All this is engraved on our hearts and we can never repay it."
The Governor organized a feast for them. By dawn on the third day three ceremonial cars had been constructed in Jizhou. The imperial wine in a special casket was carried on one. The gold and silver tokens, the red and green silk were carried on another. The imperial edict was placed inside a special shrine on the third. Marshal Su mounted and set off eastward riding at the side of the shrine containing the edict, with the Governor behind him. The Professor and the other three also on horseback followed on, with a crowd of lesser figures pressing behind them. One of the front riders had unfurled the yellow imperial banner proclaiming the gifts and their progress was heralded by trumpets and drums and waving pennants. They had only gone a few miles when they saw the first of the marquees. The roof was festooned with decorations and beneath it were musicians with pipes, drums and gongs giving them a resounding welcome. A few more miles and they came upon another decorated marquee with incense burning in front of it. Song Jiang and the Unicorn were kneeling there and behind them the whole mass of the outlaw band on their knees to honour the imperial edict.
Marshal Su said: "Everyone please rise and mount!" Together they all now rode to the water's edge, where hundreds of battle craft ferried them across to Golden Sands Landing. They passed upward through the three gates to a thunderous musical accompaniment, and between the unbroken ranks of an honour guard, amid swirling incense, till they reached the Ceremonial Hall, where all dismounted. The special car with the imperial shrine was carried in. Three altars had been set up inside swathed in yellow silk. Three rousing cheers of 'Long Live the Emperor' rang out as the imperial edict was set down with the gold and silver on its left and the red and green silk on the right. The imperial wine and the clothing material were placed in front. Incense was lit in gold burners. Song Jiang and the Unicorn ushered Marshal Su and Governor Zhang to seats on the high dais. Magic Hand and Lungs stood on their left, Sterling the Registrar, the Prodigy, Song Jiang, the Unicorn and others on their right. Sterling made the announcement and Magic Hand began to read the edict:
*Be it known: from the time of my accession to the imperial throne I have ruled the world with justice and humanity, maintaining order with appropriate rewards and punishments, tireless in pursuit of virtuous counsel and boundless in my love for the people. My subjects are all, down to the very least and youngest, aware of my concern for them. I know that Song Jiang, the Unicorn and all their band are loyal and true at heart, that they do not commit senseless violence, and have long desired to return to allegiance, earnestly hoping to redeem themselves; and although they have committed crimes, these crimes are not without reason and if their true feelings are known they can be regarded with sympathy; consequently I am sending my adviser Marshal Su to the Marshlands of Mount Liang bearing this edict to absolve Song Jiang and all his leaders, greater or lesser, from all their crimes and grant them unconditional pardon. There is also a gift of thirty-six gold tokens and thirty-six rolls of red silk for Song Jiang and his senior commanders, and seventy-two silver tokens and seventy-two rolls of green silk for his junior commanders. On receipt of this amnesty, let them not disappoint me but return at once to the court that they may receive important posts. Let this edict be proclaimed for all to know.*
*Published on the nth day of the second month, spring of the fourth year of Xuan Ho.*
When the reading was over, Song Jiang and the others again gave three cheers for the Emperor and prostrated themselves in gratitude. Marshal Su had the gold and silver and silk brought and told Sterling to call the roll so it could be distributed. The imperial wine was broached and poured into a large silver bowl, from which it was ladled out, warmed and poured into silver jugs. Taking a gold cup and filling it with wine, Marshal Su said to them: "Although I have the honour to bear the Emperor's express command to bring this wine and reward you all, I would not wish you to feel any suspicion, so I am going to drink this cup first, in order that you may see there is nothing to fear."
The company applauded as Marshal Su drained the cup and then ladled out more wine and handed it to Song Jiang. Song Jiang raised the cup in his hands and knelt to drink it. After him the Unicorn, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun drank in turn. All one hundred and eight leaders had to drink one cup. Finally Song Jiang ordered the imperial wine to be taken away and asked the Marshal to remain seated while all the leaders in turn kowtowed before him. Song Jiang then came forward to express his personal thanks: "I had the honour to make Your Excellency's acquaintance previously at the Western Peak. I am eternally grateful for Your Excellency's great kindness in interceding with the Emperor. Truly this is a new dawn for all of us. It is a day that will remain engraved on our hearts, a day never to be forgotten."
Marshal Su said: "I am fully aware that your hearts are loyal and true, and that your aim is to do heaven's will, but since I was not previously aware of the wrongs done to you, I could not bring the matter to His Majesty's attention. Consequently there was a considerable delay in redressing them. But then a missive from the military adviser, followed by your most generous gift, apprised me of your sense of injury. The Emperor was pleased to hold some conversation with me that day in the Incense Hall and he asked about you so I was able to acquaint him with the details. His Majesty made full inquiries and everything confirmed what I had told him. Next day in the Hall of Culture and Ethics he reprimanded Marshal Tong in front of the whole court and severely criticized Marshal Gao for his repeated failures. He called for his writing materials and indited in his own hand this edict which he sent me to deliver to the stronghold, together with gifts for all the company. It is hoped that you will pack up and return as soon as possible to the capital and not disappoint His Majesty's earnest desire for reconciliation."
This gladdened all hearts and they gratefully prostrated themselves. The ceremonies completed, the Governor excused himself, on the grounds of having government business to conduct, and bidding the Marshal farewell returned to the city. Song Jiang now had Colonel Wen the military adviser brought in to join them. He and Marshal Su thoroughly enjoyed talking about old times, and everyone had a good time. Marshal Su was entreated to take the chief place among them with Colonel Wen in the second place of honour. Everyone else took their place in order of precedence for a grand banquet. The hall was filled with the sound of music. Although it may not have been a case of "roasting a dragon, boiling a phoenix" there is no doubt that the phrase "mountains of meat, oceans of wine" applied. Everyone got very drunk that day and staggered back to their quarters in the small hours. Another feast was organized for the day after, and all spoke freely and shed their cares, they told the story of their life and shared their innermost feelings. On the third day there was yet another feast, this time in honour of Marshal Su, which only broke up in the evening when they were all drunk.
Suddenly several days had gone by and Marshal Su expressed his intention of returning. Song Jiang and his friends pressed him to stay, but he said: "You don't understand. It is already several days since I set out to bring you the pardon. Righteousness will reign supreme if you all return promptly. But if I do not hasten back, I fear there is a real danger that evil tongues will wag and objections be raised."
Song Jiang and his friends said: "In that case we must not detain you, Marshal. Let us conclude today's celebrations, and early tomorrow we will accompany you down the mountain."
All the chiefs were present that day to honour the Marshal. While they drank, they expressed their thanks and the Marshal likewise used flattering words. The party broke up late. Next morning bright and early horses and carts were made ready, and Song Jiang with his own hands carried a tray of gold and jewels to the Marshal's quarters and respectfully presented it. The Marshal refused to take it. Not till the third time of asking would he accept. Clothes were packed, packs fastened, horses saddled and all prepared for the start. The Strategist and Lungs had been looking after the Marshal's followers for the last few days. They provided them according to custom with choice food and drink — wine to the limit of their capacity. All were richly rewarded as well with gold and silver and silk and none went away dissatisfied. Gold and jewels were also presented to Colonel Wen, who at first refused them, but relented at Song Jiang's insistence. Song Jiang now proposed Wen should return with the Marshal to the capital. All the chieftains assembled to see Marshal Su off to a rousing accompaniment of martial music. They went with him down the mountain, across the water at Golden Sands Landing and for a further ten miles of the road. Then they dismounted to share a stirrup cup. Song Jiang took the cup first and raising it said: "Please speak well of us, Your Excellency, when you see the Emperor again."
The Marshal replied: "You may rest easy on that count. Just make sure you pack up and return to court as soon as possible. When you bring your troops to the capital, send someone along to my residence first to let me know. I will petition the Emperor for an official reception; it will be a grand state occasion."
Song Jiang said: "Allow me to make one request, Your Excellency. A good many years have gone by in this place in the marshes, first under Wang Lun who built the stronghold on the mountain and then under Chao Gai and now myself. During this time the neighbouring folk have suffered no little inconvenience. Forgive my presumption, but I would like to redistribute our wealth by holding a ten day clearance sale. When we're done with this we will all of us return to the capital. I certainly do not want to delay. I hope you will convey this proposal to the Emperor and humbly request him to grant us an extension."
When the Marshal had given his consent they parted and the Marshal's group rode on to Jizhou, while Song Jiang and the rest returned to the stronghold where everyone was summoned by the drum to a meeting in the Ceremonial Hall. The leaders all took their seats and a great crowd of troops assembled below the platform. Song Jiang announced: "My friends, since the times when Wang Lun first built this fortress and Chao Gai drew up the ordinances, we have prospered exceedingly. Since the day you rescued me and brought me here from Jiangzhou and honoured me as leader, several years have passed. Today, thanks to the Emperor's pardon, we are permitted to appear before His Majesty again. Soon we must go to the capital and offer our services to the country. All of you who have items which belong in the stores should hand them in. The remaining valuables will be distributed equally. The one hundred and eight of us who are heavenly stars must live and die together. The Emperor has treated us with great benevolence, sending us his edict with an unconditional pardon and releasing us all from the consequences of crime. I and the rest of the one hundred and eight will soon head for the capital, in order not to disappoint the Emperor's great benevolence. Of the rest of you, there are some who became outlaws of their own choosing, some who followed their leaders to the mountain, some who are deserters from the army and some who are common robbers. Now that I and my companions have received the royal pardon, we must go to the court. If any of you wish to go with us your names will be added to the roll. If you do not wish to go then speak your name and we will here part company. I will personally pay you a gratuity and let you go down the mountain to live as you please."
When these orders had been given out Sterling and Magic Hand were appointed to draw up the lists. On receiving their instructions the three forces conferred separately. Of those who opted for leaving there were four or five thousand. Song Jiang paid them all off in money and goods and added a bonus. Those who opted to stay on reenlisted and their names were noted down. Next day Song Jiang told Magic Hand to write a notice and have it posted throughout the neighbourhood, in every district, village and hamlet, to inform all and sundry that they were invited to the mountain for a grand ten day disposal of goods. The notice was as follows:
*Song Jiang and the company on Mount Liang wish it to be known by all and sundry: that that they are aware their presence in the region as outlaws has given rise to some inconvenience to the people. Recently in his graciousness the Emperor has granted them an amnesty. This is to inform the public that for the next ten days a clearance sale will be held. This is a genuine offer and all who come will be rewarded. The purpose of this announcement is to let all know, near and far. All are welcome.*
*Issued the nth day of the third month of the fourth year of Xuan Ho by Song Jiang and company of the Marshes of Mount Liang*
When Magic Hand had finished the notice someone was sent to post it up everywhere immediately. Part of the cash and valuables and silk and other articles in the treasury was divided among the leaders, officers and men, a portion was set aside as a contribution to the nation, and the remainder was piled up in the stronghold for the ten day clearance which lasted from the third of the third month to the thirteenth. Oxen and sheep were slaughtered and wine was warmed in order to feast all who came to the mountain and to reward their servants. When the time came the locals flocked to the mountain stronghold with baskets and cases. Song Jiang ordered them to be compensated tenfold and all left the mountain well contented, after prostrating themselves to express their gratitude.
The general clearance went on for ten consecutive days. At the end of this period it ended and everyone was ordered to settle their affairs and repair to the capital for their audience with the Emperor. At this point Song Jiang wanted to send all the families home. But the Professor objected: "You shouldn't do that. Keep our families here in the stronghold till after our audience with the Emperor. When His Majesty has shown proof of his favour it will be time enough to send our families home." Song Jiang had to agree. "Your advice is good," he said. The order was issued for all the leaders to get packed up right away and muster their men. Song Jiang and the others hastily stirred themselves and went to Jizhou to thank Governor Zhang. The latter arranged a banquet for them and distributed rewards among the army. Song Jiang and his companions then said goodbye to the Governor and set out from the city with a vast host, heading for the Eastern

Capital. Magic Messenger and the Prodigy were ordered on ahead to let Marshal Su know of their coming. On hearing the news Marshal Su went in to tell the Emperor that Song Jiang and his companions were on their way. This intelligence gladdened the Emperor's heart and he told the Marshal, together with one of the Emperor's defence council to ride out of the city to meet them in full armour and carrying banners. Marshal Su rode forth with the Emperor's mandate.

Song Jiang's forces were travelling in excellent order. In front came two red banners. On one were the words "To Do Heaven's Will", on the other the words "For the Defence of the Realm". All the leaders were dressed in full armour except for the Professor who wore the silk kerchief made famous by Zhuge Liang and a robe of feathers, Taoist Gongsun, who wore a robe trimmed with crane's down, Monk Lu Zhishen with a cassock of fiery red and Pilgrim Wu Song in a fresh black one. The remainder were in battle array, each wearing the colour of his choice. They tarried not one day on the road, and when they were approaching the capital they learnt of the Emperor's representative coming out to greet them. When Song Jiang heard, he rode forward with his commanders to meet Marshal Su and then halted his army outside New Gate where they bivouacked, awaiting the Emperor's com-mand. Marshal Su and the official returned to the city and reported to His Majesty: "Song Jiang and his army are encamped outside New Gate, Sire. They await your orders."

The Emperor said: "We have heard that Song Jiang and his friends number one hundred and eight, that they represent heavenly powers and are moreover of a brave and martial spirit. Now they wish to surrender and are returning to the capital. Tomorrow we will repair with the whole court to the Tower of Illustrious Virtue. Let Song Jiang and his friends be informed that they should dress in full battle array and enter the city, with a limited number of troops, say a maximum of five thousand infantry and cavalry. Let them travel from west to east and we will review them. Let the people honour them as servants of the realm. Afterwards they are to remove their armour and change into the silk robes which have recently been presented to them, and pass through the Gate of Eastern Splendour to the Hall of Culture and Ethics where I will give them audience."

The imperial aide went to the camp outside the city and relayed the Emperor's wishes to Song Jiang and his friends. Next day Song Jiang ordered Sterling to select five hundred of the strongest and fittest infantrymen and, with gongs, drums and banners marching at the front followed by troops armed with spears, swords, battle-axes or halberds and rising from their midst the two red banners which said "To Do Heaven's Will" and "For the Defence of the Realm" and the remaining troops all carrying swords or bows and arrows and each man wearing his personal body armour, drawn up in their companies, they entered by the Eastern Gate. Then the people of the city, civilians and military, with their families, young and old, turned out to watch, as if gazing upon the gods.

The Emperor now led his courtiers to the Tower of Illustrious Virtue and entered the pavilion to watch. There were the gongs, drums and standards drawn up in front, followed by the various companies carrying spears, swords, battle-axes and halberds. There were two on white horses bearing the two red banners "To Do Heaven's Will" and "For the Defence of the Realm" and also twenty or thirty mounted musicians. Behind them came the gallant company of heroes. Here is how it was as they entered the palace compound for their audience with the Emperor:

*A light breeze blows at the foot of the jade steps; the incense burners are misted with dew. The sun is just starting to rise in the east; to the north the sky's veil is half rolled back. Beyond the Gate of Southern Fragrance are waiting the one hundred and eight who are returning to the fold: before the Tower of Illustrious Virtue a million throats salute the Sovereign. All is done in accordance with solemn court ceremonial and strict military discipline. Wind, rain, sun and stars bear witness to the clearing of the heavens; lightning and thunder no longer disturb the sky's serenity. Before the imperial watchtower a thousand spirits have assembled: viz, saints, immortals, nachas, doorgods, kings of Hell, infernal judges, gateway spirits — all the way down to rakshasas and goblins, each one of them looking up to the Emperor; under the phoenix tower a deadly array of beasts have gathered: as, tiger-cats, leopards, unicorns, chimaeras, dingoes, golden eagles, hawks, turtles, apes, right down to dogs, rats, snakes and scorpions, all of them acknowledging the Lord of Song. Present are the five dragon powers of the universe: namely, the cloud dragon, the river dragon, the forest dragon, the nine-striped or tattooed dragon and the one-horned or unicorn dragon, and with them the cave dragon and the river beast or river rider, all obedient to the court. The various tigers have come down from the mountain: the winged tiger, the river-jumping tiger, the elegant tiger, the ornate tiger, the green-eyed tiger, the smiling tiger, the short-legged tiger, the wounded or scarface tiger, the pill toting tiger, the mother tiger, all in due order paying homage. Naturally the nobility are represented, as court etiquette dictates. More surprising is the inclusion of militiamen, doctors, craftsmen, boatmen and the like. Many grave gentlemen are present, bearded and whiskered: but would you have expected to see these judges, these womenfolk, these sons and heirs, these monks and pilgrims? There are military officers and civilian officials of every rank, there are replicas of many famous characters of antiquity. There are the good-looking ones, like Whitey with his elegant flower, with his flute, his fan, his drum and his flag, as if poised to burst into song and dance. There are those whom fortune has not favoured with looks, like the Blue-Faced Beast, with a countenance ugly as sin, but adept with lance and sword, happiest in the strife of battle. Some are immensely tall, like Perilous; some quarrelsome, like the Guv, or the Tamer of Three Mountains. Some have brown hair, some green eyes, all are honourable. They touch the sky, they leap the waves, not one follows the paths of duplicity and cunning. Admitted now to the presence of the Monarch, they no longer have to live unrecognized or "Name-less"! The barriers set against them now dismantled, this day they can truly be called "Unstoppable"! Here they come now, this great company, masters of sword and staff play, ready to take on all these corrupt courtiers who cheat honest men and oppress the people. See them march, the righteous, basking in their sovereign's favour, about to reap their reward!*

So there was the Emperor with all his courtiers in the Tower of Illustrious Virtue watching the parade led by Song Jiang of the Marshes of Mount Liang. The imperial countenance broke into a smile, indicating how His Majesty's heart was gladdened, and turning to his courtiers he said: "What a brave show these fellows make!" His enthusiasm knew no bounds.

A senior palace official now brought Song Jiang and his company the order to change into the newly gifted silk clothing, for their audience with the Emperor. He told them to remove their battle gear outside the Eastern Gate and don the red and green silk robes with gold and silver insignia that the Emperor had presented to them, and the court headdress and the green court shoes. The only exceptions were Taoist Gongsun who had used the red silk for the official robe of a Taoist priest, Monk Lu Zhishen in his monk's garb, and Pilgrim Wu Song who changed into a new cassock. All of them were showing off the imperial gifts. With Song Jiang and the Unicorn at the head, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun close behind, the whole company processed through the Gate of Eastern Splendour.

The strictest court procedure was followed that day. The imperial carriage had been prepared and in the early morning the Emperor arrived at the Hall of Culture and Ethics. The Master of Protocol led Song Jiang and his companions one by one into the court where they all lined up to do obeisance. After the usual court ceremonies and three cheers for the Emperor, His Majesty graciously invited them all to enter the Hall of Culture and Ethics and bade them be seated in due order. An imperial banquet was ordered, to be laid in the Temple of Official Salaries. The finest imperial wine and rarest delicacies were supplied for this and a musical accompaniment. The Emperor graciously joined them at table.

Thus did the Emperor honour Song Jiang and his companions in a banquet which did not break up till the small hours. After expressing their thanks they went in with flowers in their hair and all mounted outside the Gate of Western Splendour and returned to their camp.

Next day they returned to the city and processed to the Hall of Culture and Ethics to express thanks again. The imperial countenance showed pleasure: His Majesty desired to advance them and told them to return next day to learn of their appointments. They thanked him and returned to camp. Of this no more.

Now officials of the Military Council unanimously advised: "Those who are only recently pardoned and have as yet contributed nothing should not be promoted so rapidly. It were best to wait till they have given proof of their loyalty and performed some meritorious service before offering them official posts. At present they are numbered in thousands and have pitched camp close to the capital, which is most undesirable. Your Majesty should deal thus with Song Jiang and his armies: those generals who were originally lured from the imperial armies can return to their posts; troops from outside should return to where they came from; the remainder can be formed into five divisions and transferred to Shandong and Hebei. That is our advice."

Next day the Emperor's envoy went to Song Jiang's camp and relayed the Emperor's decision that Song Jiang's forces were to be broken up and returned to their home provinces. The leaders were highly incensed: "We have voluntarily offered our allegiance but we have received no office in return and now they want to separate us. But we vowed to live and die together, we will not consent! If that is really what they want, we had better return to Mount Liang!" Song Jiang hurriedly called a halt to all this and using honourable words of entreaty, begged the envoy to convey his request to the Emperor.

The envoy returned to the court. He did not dare conceal anything from the Emperor but reported exactly what had been said. The Emperor was concerned and hurriedly summoned the members of the Military Council. The President of the Council, Marshal Tong said, "Even though they've surrendered, they have not changed their spots, blast them! This presages great ills for the country. In my humble opinion, it would be best for your Majesty to have them lured into the capital and then exterminated, all one hundred and eight of them. Then their armies can be split up. This way, greater ills will be prevented."

On hearing this, the Emperor hummed and hawed for a long time. Suddenly an important official burst out from behind a palace screen wearing a red robe and carrying ivory tablets. He shouted: "On all sides the warning beacons blaze, evil threatens in our midst, all because of evil counsellors your reign's like to be ruined." Indeed I who was a pillar of the nations was coming to the rescue of I before whom heaven shakes and the earth moves.

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## Song Jiang is Ordered to Smash the Liao Tartars; At Chen Bridge Station, Weeping, he Executes a Subordinate & the Quay is littered with corpses

That year the king of the Liao Tartars dispatched his armies over the mountains. First they occupied nine border prefectures. Then, in four columns, they swept down and pillaged Shandong, Shanxi, Henan and Hebei. Every prefecture and county sent petitions to the throne pleading for rescue. All such documents had to pass through the hands of Tong Guan, Chancellor of Military Affairs. He talked it over with Prime Minister Cai Jing, Marshal Gao Qiu and Marshal Yang Jian, and they decided not to forward the petitions. They only notified a few neighboring prefectures and urged them to send reinforcements and relief. This was as futile as trying to fill a well with snow. People knew about it, but they kept the facts from the emperor.

Then, the four crooked ministers hatched a scheme. They arranged for Tong Guan to propose to the sovereign a means that would destroy Song Jiang and his men. They hadn't expected that another important minister would intervene. The man who hurried out from behind the screen was Marshal Su Yanjing, and he appealed directly to the emperor.

"Your Majesty! Song Jiang and his bold fellows have just surrendered. The hundred and eight of them are extremely close and devoted. They'd never agree to being separated. They'd rather die, first. And now, some people want to have them killed! These gallant men are extremely brave and intelligent. If, when you bring them into the city, they rise up in revolt, then what? How will you deal with them?

"The Liao Tartars have occupied nine border prefectures with a hundred thousand troops, and every county is petitioning for relief. We have sent some units, but it's been like splashing water on ants. The enemy is too powerful. Our forces can't cope with them. We've lost every engagement. All this news has been kept from you.

"In my humble opinion if we dispatched Song Jiang and his fine generals and all the troops under their command to the border, they could defeat the Liao bandits. Sending them into battle will truly be of great advantage to our country. As a mere minister I cannot order this, myself, but I beg Your Majesty to consider."

Pleasure suffused the emperor's countenance. He queried his officials. All agreed that Su's proposal was reasonable. The sovereign angrily berated Tong Guan and his fellow conspirators.

"By your slanders and lies you've harmed our country. Your jealousy of talent has blocked the path of the meritorious. Your distortions have seriously damaged affairs of state! But I will forgive you this time and not pursue the matter."

The emperor personally drew an edict naming Song Jiang as the Vanguard General against the Liao Tartars, and stating that his chieftains would be awarded official rank in keeping with how they distinguished themselves. He directed Marshal Su to deliver the edict to Song Jiang at his camp. The sovereign dismissed court and his officials withdrew.

Marshal Su brought the imperial document to Song Jiang's camp and told him the emperor's intention. Song Jiang hastily lit incense, kowtowed in thanks for His Majesty's benevolence, and opened the edict. It read as follows:

Edict: When Emperor Shun assumed the throne, he raised Gao Tao to enforce his rule. When Tang became sovereign, he appointed Yi Yin to maintain peace. From the time I established my reign I have been tireless in selecting men of excellence. Recently, Song Jiang and his cohorts have joined us. They wish to obey Heaven and defend the country. They are all honorable and entirely faithful. Such great talent should not be used lightly.

Now, the Liao armies have invaded our borders. I have appointed Song Jiang as the Vanguard General to smash them, and Lu Junyi as "Vice-Vanguard General. His other officers will be awarded appropriate rank when their meritorious deeds are reported to the throne. Let them all set out at once, go directly to the enemy's lair, castigate the evildoers, save the people, and purge our border regions. Each prefecture through which they pass shall supply them with money and grain. They are authorized to punish any official who fails to comply.

This imperial edict is hereby proclaimed.

*__ day of the fifth month*
*of the fourth year of Xuan He*

Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, and the other chieftains, who had listened, kneeling, while the document was being read, were very pleased. They kowtowed, and Song Jiang expressed their thanks to Marshal Su.

"We've been hoping for a chance like this to serve out country," he said, "to win credit and position and become loyal officials. You've been kinder to us than our own parents, intervening with the emperor on our behalf. Our only problem is that we still haven't disposed of Chao Gai's spirit tablet on Mount Liangshan, and our families haven't yet returned to our homes. And our walls and battlements must be destroyed and our ships of war brought here. Would you please request His Majesty to allow us to return to the mountain and attend to these matters? Then we can get our arms and equipment in order and devote ourselves entirely to serving the nation."

Marshal Su gladly assented and reported to the emperor, who instructed the treasure to draw one thousand ounces of gold and five thousand ounces of silver, plus five thousand bolts of satin, and issue them to the chieftains. He ordered the marshal to handle the distribution at the camp. The gifts were to be given to the dependents of those with families, to guarantee their support for the rest of their lives. Chieftains without families would receive the gifts directly, to use as they saw fit.

Imperial order in hand, Song Jiang expressed his thanks and directed the distribution. As he was leaving for the palace, the marshal offered Song Jiang a few words of advice.

"Go to the mountain, General, but come back quickly. Let me know of your return in advance. There must be no delay."

Song Jiang and his chieftains then conferred on who should go. They decided that these should be Song Jiang, his chief generals Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, Lin Chong, Liu Tang, Du Qian, Song Wan, Zhu Gui, Song Qing and the three Ruan brothers—together with cavalry, infantry and naval forces of over ten thousand. The rest of the army would remain encamped near the capital under Vice-Vanguard General Lu Junyi. The journey to the mountain stronghold was uneventful. Seated in Loyalty Hall, Song Jiang instructed the families to pack and get ready to start for home. He also ordered that pigs and sheep be slaughtered, incense and candles lit, and ingots and horses of paper burned as sacrifices to the spirit of Chao Gai. Then the former leader's spirit tablet was also reduced to ashes and a feast laid for all the chieftains.

In carts and on horseback the families departed for their original homes. Song Jiang directed his retainers to escort their families and old Squire Song and his household back to their native village in Yuncheng County and become respectable citizens again.

He told the three Ruan brothers to select the most useful of the ships of war, and to distribute the remaining smaller craft among the neighboring populace. These could also dismantle the buildings and take the materials. The fortifications in the three passes and structures like Loyalty Hall were to be destroyed.

When all this was done and everything put in order, the armed forces were assembled. They returned swiftly to the capital.

The march was without incident, and they soon reached the camp where Lu Junyi and the others were waiting. Yan Qing was sent on to the city to inform Marshal Su that they were ready to take leave of the sovereign and commence the expedition. The marshal duly notified the emperor.

The next day His Majesty received Song Jiang and his chieftains with smiling countenance in the Hall of Martial Heroes. Libation cups were drunk, and the sovereign, extremely pleased, spoke.

"Go forth and crush the Liao Tartars. Let us hear news of victory soon. We shall make much important use of you. As to your generals, they shall be awarded rank according to their merit. Let there be no delay!"

Song Jiang kowtowed and offered thanks. "I was only a petty functionary who committed a heinous crime and was exiled to Jiangzhou," he said. "There, for rebellious words written while drunk, I was condemned to execution in the public square. These brothers rescued me, and since I had no place else to hide, I took refuge with them in Liangshan Marsh. For all these crimes I deserve ten thousand deaths! Yet Your Majesty, in your vast benevolence, has seen fit to pardon me. Though I split my liver and gall with exertion, I shall never be able to repay Your Majesty's kindness! I shall certainly expend my utmost strength and devotion to carry out your royal order, or die gladly in the attempt."

Very pleased, the sovereign again awarded cups of imperial wine. At his direction, Song Jiang was presented with a gold-embossed set of bow and arrows, a fully accoutered fine steed, and a precious sword. Song Jiang kowtowed and voiced his gratitude.

Then he took leave of the emperor and returned to camp with the imperial gifts. He ordered his commanders to prepare to march.

Emperor Hui Zong the following morning directed Marshal Su to transmit his order to the Council of Administration to dispatch two officials to Chen Bridge Station and there give send-off rations to Song Jiang's departing troops. Each man was to receive a bottle of wine and a catty of meat, and not an ounce less. The chancellor worked through the night, preparing the rations, then sent two officials to distribute them.

Song Jiang, after conferring with Wu Yong, divided his army into two groups, with the five Tiger and eight Wildcat chieftains leading the infantry in the van and the ten Charger chieftains leading the cavalry bringing up the rear. He himself, together with Lu Junyi, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng, would command the central forces. The three Ruan brothers, Li Chun, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun, under whom would be Tong Wei, Tong Meng, Meng Kang, Wang Dingliu and the various sailor chiefs, would command the naval vessels, and sail from the Caiho River into the Yellow, and there proceed north. Song Jiang announced that the army would follow the highway from Chen Bridge Station, and instructed his chieftains to forbid any harassment of the local populace.

The two officials designated by the Council of Administration arrived at Chen Bridge Station to distribute the emperor's largesse to Song Jiang's forces. Shamelessly dishonest, they stinted for their own private gain. These bribe-taking back-biting liars gave out wine bottles that were only half full, and the catty of meat each man received weighed only ten ounces instead of sixteen.

After distributing to the forward group, the officials came to a rear unit whose troops wore black helmets and black armor. They were shield-bearers under Xiang Chong and Li Gun. Among these was a junior commander who discovered the chicanery and angrily berated the two officials.

"It's grafters like you who sabotage the emperor's benevolence!"

"What do you mean?" they cried.

"His Majesty ordered a bottle of wine and a catty of meat for each man, and you've cut them both! We don't like to quarrel, but your characters are a disgrace! You'd steal the gilt off the face of an idol of Buddha!"

"You've got a nerve! Slicing to death would be too good for you! You're still a Liangshan Marsh rebel!"

Furious, the young officer threw the meat and wine in their faces.

"Arrest that rascally robber!" they howled.

The young man drew his sword from the edge of his shield. The official pointed at him indignantly.

"Dirty bandit! Would you dare use that blade!"

"When I was on Mount Liangshan I was better than the best of your fighters! I killed thousands of them! Why would I scruple about a couple of crooks!"

"We dare you to kill us," they bawled.

The young commander stepped forward and slashed the face of one of them. He collapsed to the ground. The watchers cried out in alarm and fell back. The junior officer hacked again several more time. Clearly, the man was dying. It was too late for the troops to intervene.

Xiang Chong and Li Gun flew to inform Song Jiang. Startled, he exclaimed to Wu Yong: "What are we going to do?"

"The Chancellor of Administration doesn't like us. This thing gives him precisely the chance he's been looking for," mused Wu Yong. "All we can do is direct the execution of our officer, report the matter to the Council of Ministration, halt our march and await a disposition. Have Dai Zong and Yan Qing rush to the city and quietly notify Marshal Su. Request him to inform the emperor of the provocation. That will forestall the chancellor from twisting the facts. I guarantee nothing will come of it."

The strategy agreed upon, Song Jiang galloped to Chen Bridge Station. The junior officer was standing beside the body of the slain official. Song Jiang directed that wine and meat be taken from the hostel for officials and dispensed among the troops. Then he summoned the young officer into the hostel and questioned him.

"He kept cursing us and saying we were rebellious bandits from Liangshan Marsh, and that we all ought to be exterminated! I lost my temper and killed him. I'm waiting for your sentence, General."

"He was an official of the imperial court. I was afraid of him myself. How could you slay him? We're all sure to be implicated. Our march against the Liao Tartars had only started, we haven't yet won a bit of distinction, and you pull a stunt like this. What are we going to do?"

The young commander prostrated himself and waited for death. Song Jiang wept.

"From the time I came to Mount Liangshan I never harmed any of our brothers, big or small. But now that I'm an official I have no choice. I must obey the law. I know your aggressive spirit is still strong, but you shouldn't have given free rein to it as you did in the old days."

"I'm ready to die."
Song Jiang ordered the young officer to drink heavily of wine and hang himself from a tree. When this was done he had him decapitated.
The body of the official was formally encoffined, and a letter sent to the Council of Administration. Actually, the chancellor already knew all about it, but of that we'll say no more.
Dai Zong and Yan Qing hurried directly to Marshal Su's residency on entering the city and told him in detail what had happened. That evening the marshal went to the palace and informed the emperor. The following day His Majesty held court in the Hall of Culture and Virtue. When the drum boomed in the dragon tower and the bell sounded in the phoenix belfry, the seneschal rapped three times with his rod and the civil and military officials formed ranks in two groups at the foot of the stairs.
From among them the Chancellor of Administration came forward and said: "A soldier in the army of Song Jiang, who only recently surrendered to the throne, has killed an official our chancellery dispatched to distribute wine and meat. We hope Your Majesty will look into the matter."
"I entrusted your chancellery with a mission. The responsibility is yours," replied the sovereign. "Your men were untrustworthy. That was the cause. They deliberately cut the meat and wine ration. The Mount Liangshan soldier refused to be cheated, and a clash was the result."
"Who would dare cut the imperial wine?" the chancellor protested.
The emperor grew angry. "I've already sent an investigator, and I know the whole story. You can't deceive me with your subtle words and evasions! You dispensed only half bottles of my gift of imperial wine, the meat you gave only ten ounces to the catty. That is what enraged the soldier and caused the bloodshed!" Then His Majesty asked: "Where is the culprit?"
"Song Jiang has decapitated him and says that his head will be displayed. He has reported the matter to the chancellery, halted his march and is waiting for a disposition."
"Let his breach of discipline be noted. We shall settle the matter according to his merits when he returns from defeating the Liaos."
Silently, the chancellor withdrew. His Majesty dispatched an emissary to urge Song Jiang to continue his expedition after displaying the head of the decapitated young officer at Chen Bridge Station.
Song Jiang expressed thanks for the emperor's benevolence, hung up the head as directed and buried the body. Heart-brokenly, he wept. Then he wiped his tears, mounted, and headed north with his army.
Every day they covered sixty //before making camp. They caused no trouble in any of the counties and prefectures through which they passed. The march was uneventful, and after a time they neared the borders of the Liao Tartars.
"The Liaos have been invading us in four columns," Song Jiang said to Wu Yong. "Should we divide up and go after them, or attack their cities and towns?"
"It's a vast territory and thinly populated. If we split up we won't be able to coordinate. Better take a few cities first, then we'll see. If we hit them hard they'll naturally call back their soldiers."
"An excellent plan," approved Song Jiang. He summoned Duan Jingzhu and said: "You know the northern roads well. I'm going to let you lead the advance. Which is the nearest prefecture?"
"Tanzhou is right ahead. It's a vital entry to Liao territory. A deep river called the Lushui winds around the prefectural city and connects with the River Weiho. You'll need warships to attack Tanzhou. Once our flotilla arrives we can assault from land and water together, and take the city."
Song Jiang dispatched Dai Zong to urge Li Jun and the other naval chieftains to hasten their armada and assemble in the Lushui.

Dongxian Bojin, the man who commanded the Tanzhou garrison, was a vice-minister of the Kingdom of Liao. Under him were four fierce generals—Aliqi, Yaor Weikang, Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji. All were absolutely fearless. When Vice-Minister Dongxian learned that Song Jiang and his entire army had been dispatched by the Emperor of Song and was nearing his territory, he reported at once in writing to the king. He requested aid from the neighboring prefectures of Qizhou, Bazhou, Zhuozhou and Xiongzhou, and at the same time sent his soldiers to meet the enemy. Aliqi and Chu Mingyu took leave of the duke and led forth thirty thousand men.
Meanwhile, Guan Sheng the Big Halberd was advancing with the forward section of the vanguard towards Miyun County, which was part of the prefecture of Tanzhou. The county magistrate hurriedly reported this to the two Tartar generals.
"The Song emperor's army is marching this way with banners flying. They're all amnestied brigands from Liangshan Marsh under Song Jiang."
Aliqi laughed. "They're only bandits. Why worry?" He ordered his soldiers to make camp and prepare to give battle outside Miyun.
The next day, Song Jiang heard that Liao forces were approaching, and he instructed his troops to engage them. "We'll test their mettle," he said. "But we don't want any unnecessary losses."
The chieftains donned their armor and mounted. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi rode personally to the front lines to observe. Far off they could see the Tartar forces, who carried black flags and banners, advancing in dark swarms that covered the earth and obscured the sky. Arrows from the bows of both sides stopped the contending hosts a distance apart.
The black flags separated. On a magnificent prancing horse a Tartar general rode forth. He was fair complected, with red lips, golden hair and green eyes, and was tall and powerful. The banner behind him read:

ALIQI, GENERAL OF THE GREAT LIAO KINGDOM.

Song Jiang looked. "That general is not to be underestimated," he said to his chieftains.
Before the words were out of his mouth, Xu Ning the Metal Lancer rode forth, his sickle-bladed lance held athwart. Aliqi hooted at the sight of him.
"The Song Dynasty is doomed! Sending scruffy bandits as officers! What brass to invade our great nation! Only death awaits you!"
"You worthless officer, disgrace to your country, how dare you insult us!"
The armies of both sides shouted as Aliqi and Xu Ning clashed in combat. For more than thirty rounds they fought, and Xu Ning realized he could not win. He withdrew towards his own lines, pursued by the Tartar general. Hua Rong hastily notched an arrow to his bowstring. But Zhang Qin, leaning on the pommel of his saddle, had already drawn a stone from his brocaded pouch, and now he flung it at the approaching general. Like a streaking meteor, like an arrow from a bow, it struck Aliqi near the left eye and knocked him head over heels to the ground. Hua Rong, Lin Chong, Qin Ming and Suo Chao galloped forward and caught first the fine steed, then Aliqi himself.
Chu Mingyu, Aliqi's second in command, wanted to rush to his rescue, but Song Jiang's entire army charged in a murderous assault that swept the Tartars from Miyun County. It inflicted such heavy losses that the defenders fled back to Tanzhou. Song Jiang did not follow. Instead, he made camp in Miyun.
He went to see Aliqi. The stone had hit him at the end of the eyebrow, near the temple, destroying the eye. The Tartar general died in great pain.
Song Jiang ordered that he be cremated, and had Zhang Qin credited with the First Merit in the record book. Aliqi's chain armor, his decorated lance of white pear wood, his jade-embossed belt with its lion's head buckle, his dappled silver-grey steed, plus his boots, robe, bow and arrows, were all given to Zhang Qin. That day the expeditionary force celebrated the victory with a feast in Miyun. Of that no more need be said.
The next day Song Jiang broke camp and ordered his army to march directly on Tanzhou. When Vice-Minister Dongxian was informed that they were advancing, and learned that they had killed one of his generals, he closed the gates and directed his troops to remain inside the city. Then he heard that a naval armada had also reached the walls, and went with his generals to look from the ramparts. He saw Song Jiang's chieftains, waving banners and brandishing weapons, shouting challenges as they stood in bold array.
"No wonder our young Aliqi was defeated," said the vice-minister.
"Who says he was defeated?" Chu Mingyu protested. "He was vanquishing the barbarian chieftain, chasing after him when a savage dressed in green knocked him from his horse with a stone. It took four barbarians with lances to capture him. Our side was caught unawares. That's why we lost."
"What does the stone-throwing savage look like?"
Someone pointed Zhang Qin out. "See that fellow with the black pouch, wearing our young general's clothes and armor and riding his steed? That's the one."
Dongxian leaned over the ramparts for a closer look. But Zhang Qin had seen him first. Galloping forward, he winged a stone. It grazed Dongxian's ear, scraping off a bit of skin. His retinue shouted in alarm.
"The savage has a formidable skill," muttered the vice-minister, nursing his painful ear. He came down from the wall and wrote a report to the Liao Tartar king. He also notified all the prefectures along the border to be on their guard.
For four or five days Song Jiang's army attacked, to no avail. They retired to Miyun and made camp. While Song Jiang was conferring in headquarters, Dai Zong came and reported that the naval chieftains had arrived at the Lushui River on ships of war. Song Jiang sent Dai Zong to summon them to headquarters. Before long, Li Jun and the others appeared.
"This is not like battling in the marsh," Song Jiang reminded him. "Find out first where the water is deep and where it is shallow, then advance. The Lushui current is swift. If anything goes wrong, we won't be able to save you. Proceed carefully. Keep your men concealed. Pretend you're delivering grain to Tanzhou. I want you chieftains to carry hidden weapons and stay under cover. Have only four or five men plying the oars and two on shore pulling the two ropes on each vessel. Move slowly towards the city and moor the boats on either shore outside and wait for our land forces. When the Tanzhou authorities see you they're sure to open the river gate to get the grain quickly. At that moment all of you burst out and capture the gate. You'll earn great distinction."
Li Jun and the naval chieftains acknowledged the order and departed. A junior officer entered and reported.
"A huge army is tearing in this direction from the northwest. They're carrying black flags. There are over ten thousand of them, and they're moving towards Tanzhou."
"They must be reinforcements from the king of the Liaos," said Wu Yong. "Let's send out a few chieftains to block and scatter them. We don't want them to stiffen the courage of the troops in the city."
Song Jiang mobilized Zhang Qin, Dong Ping, Guan Sheng and Lin Chong, with a dozen or so small chieftains and five thousand troops, and dispatched them at flying speed to meet the foe.
When the king of the Liao Tartars heard that the gallant Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh had cut through with his army directly to Tanzhou and had surrounded the city, he ordered two of his nephews to lead a relief expedition. One was called Yelu Guozhen, the other Yelu Guobao. Both were Liao generals, both were royal nephews, and both were immeasurably brave. At the head of ten thousand men, they were rushing to support Tanzhou. As they drew near, they were met by the Song forces. The two sides spread out in battle positions, and the two Tartar generals rode forward.
They were brothers. They were dressed the same, and they carried the same lances. From Song Jiang's ranks, General Two Spears Dong Ping cantered to the fore. He shouted to them in a powerful voice. "Where do you hail from, barbarian officers?" This infuriated Guozhen. "You marsh bandits invade out great kingdom, and you have the nerve to ask where we hail from!"
Dong Ping said no more, but galloped directly towards Yelu Guozhen with spears at the ready. The young Tartar was hot-tempered and unyielding. He lowered his metal lance and charged. The two horses met, the three points whirled. In the cloud of dust, in that murderous frenzy, the wielder of the two spears displayed exceptional skill, the manipulator of the metal lance showed miraculous ability. Fifty rounds they fought, with neither emerging the victor.
Guobao feared his older brother was tiring. He beat the headquarters' gong, signalling a call to withdraw. Guozhen was more than willing. The struggle was getting too hot for him. But Dong Ping locked him between the two spears and wouldn't let him go. Because Guozhen's mind was racing, his hands faltered. Dong Ping with his right arm swept aside the heavy green lance, with his left spear he stabbed into the base of his opponent's throat. Poor Guozhen's golden crown fell from his head, his feet turned skyward, and he tumbled from his saddle to the ground.
With levelled lance, Guobao galloped to the rescue. To Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow this was too good an opportunity to miss. Socketing his pearwood lance, he drew a stone from his embroidered pouch. He clapped his steed and raced into the field of combat.
Quicker than it takes to say, when the two flying horses were about a hundred feet apart, and while the young Tartar was heedless of all but the coming clash, Zhang Qin drew back his arm and threw. "Take that!" he cried. The stone struck Guobao full in the face, and sent him somersaulting from his saddle.
Guan Sheng, Lin Chong and their troops swarmed forward. The Liao soldiers, leaderless, scattered in panic. Those of the ten thousand who escaped being slaughtered fled wildly. The fully caparisoned mounts of the royal nephews were captured, as were their golden standards. Guozhen and Guobao were Stripped of their jewelled crowns and robes and armor, and their heads were cut off.
Over a thousand battle chargers had been taken. These were driven to Miyun and presented to Song Jiang. Delighted, he rewarded his troops, and credited Dong Ping and Zhang Qin with the Second Merits. He would send a written report of the victory to the emperor after the capture of Tanzhou.
That night Song Jiang and Wu Yong worked out their strategy. Lin Chong and Guan Sheng were to lead a detachment of cavalry and assault Tanzhou from the northwest, Huyan Zhuo and Dong Ping would move with their horsemen from the northeast, Lu Junyi would attack from the southwest.
"I and our central forces will advance from the southeast. At the sound of our cannon, all strike together," said Song Jiang.
He directed Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder, Black Whirlwind Li Kui, Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, and Bao Xu the God of Death, together with shield officers Xiang Chong and Li Gun and over a thousand shield-twirling soldiers, to proceed to the foot of the city walls, and from there fire the signal cannons when the time came.
At the second watch, land and naval forces would go into action together. The orders given, all units prepared for the assault.
Meanwhile, Dongxian the vice-minister waited in Tanzhou for his relief. Remnants of the defeated army of the royal nephews straggled into the city and told him what had occurred.
"Prince Yelu Guozhen was killed by a man wielding two spears. Yelu Guobao was knocked from his horse with a stone thrown by a fellow in a green turban and then seized and slain."
The vice-minister stamped his foot in exasperation. "That savage again! He's caused the death of two royal nephews! How am I ever going to face the king! When I catch that green turbaned lout I'll pound him to bits."
That evening a scout reported: "Six or seven hundred grain boats have moored along both banks of the Lushui, and an army is approaching in the distance."
"Those barbarians don't know our waterways and have sailed their grain boats here by mistake," said the vice-minister. "Their army's surely after the grain." He summoned Chu Mingyu, Cao Mingji, and Yaor Weikang and gave the 3 generals his instructions: "Song Jiang and his barbarians have sent another large force against us. There're also a number of their grain boats in our river. Yaor Weikang, go out against the raiders with a thousand troops. Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji, open the water gate and bring those vessels in here, fast. Even if we get two out of three, that will be fine. You'll earn great distinction." At dusk that evening, Song Jiang's left flank infantry force, under Black Whirlwind and Fan Rui, advanced towards Tanzhou and began reviling the Tartars. Yaor Weikang, who had been ordered to go out against them by the duke, opened the city gate and lowered the drawbridge. But Black Whirlwind, Fan Rui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun, with their thousand infantry, all fierce sword and shield men, dashed up and occupied the other end of the bridge, bottling the Tartars inside. Ling Zhen had set up his cannon, and was waiting only for the time to fire them. Arrows were whizzing down from atop the city walls, but the shield bearers gave him protection.
Bao Xu and the thousand men were yelling in the background. They sounded more like ten thousand from the noise they made. When his soldiers couldn't get out of Tanzhou, the vice-minister grew frantic. He hastily ordered Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji to open the water gate and seize the boats. Song Jiang's navel chieftains were lying motionless in the holds. As soon as the water gate opened, they pried up the deck boards and converted the craft into vessels of war. On learning this, Ling Zhen fired a Blazing Wind cannon. The boats moored along either shore sailed forward to engage the enemy craft. From the left came Li Jun, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun, rapidly plying their oars. From the right, the three Ruan brothers in their warships bore murderously down on the enemy boats. Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji realized they had fallen into an ambush. Hurriedly, they tried to beat a retreat. But it was too late. The Song fighters were already boarding their craft. They could only run for shore. Song Jiang's 6 chieftains charged the water gate. They killed or drove off the defenders. The two Tartar generals fled for their lives. A torch waved atop the water gate, and Ling Zhen fired a Wagon cannon. Its projectile screamed across the sky. Continuously the bombardment mounted, scaring the duke out of his wits. Black Whirlwind, Fan Rui and Bao Xu, leading Xiang Chong, Li Gun and their shield bearers, went tearing into the city. The vice-minister and his general Yaor Weikang saw that all the gates had been taken and the Song troops were pouring in from every side. They mounted and fled Tanzhou through the North Gate. Before they had gone 2 //they were intercepted by Guan Sheng the Big Halberd and Panther Head Lin Chong. The Tartar vice-minister and general had no choice but to give battle.

Now it so happened that a Tartar prince had that year invaded and seized the frontier regions of nine provinces beyond the mountains. The enemy attacked on four fronts occupying parts of Shandong and Shanxi and plundering Henan and Hebei. Urgent requests for help had been coming in from all these districts. Such requests were channelled through the Military Council before being presented to the Emperor. The President of the Military Council, Marshal Tong Guan, conferred with Grand Preceptor Cai and Marshals Gao and Yang, and they elected to withhold these facts from His Majesty. All they did was write to the neighbouring provinces and urge them to send reinforcements. This was like trying to fill a leaking bucket.
The only person who did not know what was going on was the Emperor himself.
Recently these four faithless officials had agreed that Tong Guan should propose to the Emperor a course of action which would eliminate Song Jiang and his company. Unexpectedly someone rushed out from behind a screen in the palace. This person was none other than Grand Marshal Su, and here is what he said to the Emperor: "Your Majesty, we have just welcomed back Song Jiang and his fine body of men. The hundred and eight of them are united by the closest bonds of fellowship and there is no way they will consent to be split up; even under pain of death they have sworn never to be parted. How could we now conspire to take their lives? This is a company of men of exceptional intelligence and courage. If we bring them into the city and they become disaffected, what chance would we have then? At present the Tartars have raised an army of a hundred thousand and occupied districts of nine provinces beyond the mountains. All the local governors are begging for help; troops have been sent time and again, but they are just a drop in the ocean. The barbarian armies are huge and the forces we send never have a proper strategy. Each time it results only in loss of men and officers. All this has been concealed from Your Majesty. In my humble opinion the answer is to dispatch Song Jiang and his excellent commanders with all their forces to defend our borders and fight off the marauders. Let these heroes make their contribution and serve their country. It would be to everyone's advantage. Of course I have no power to authorize this policy. I beg Your Majesty to give the order."
The Emperor expressed himself well pleased with Marshal Su's proposal. He questioned his officials, and found all to be as he had been told. He delivered a stern rebuke to Marshal Tong and his cronies. "It is all thanks to you, you bunch of rogues, you enemies of the public good, that important affairs of state have gone awry; jealous of virtue and envious of ability, you have conspired to prevent the rise of good men, your calumny and dissembling have done great damage to our interests and you have tried to cover it all up." The Emperor personally wrote out the order appointing Song Jiang to lead the expedition against the Tartars with the Unicorn as second-in-command and promising promotion and honours to the other commanders when they had earned it. Marshal Su was told to deliver these orders himself to Song Jiang's camp and have them read out before everyone. The Emperor then withdrew and the court was dismissed.
So Marshal Su took the imperial order to Song Jiang's camp to be read out in front of the army. They hurriedly constructed an altar for the occasion and knelt to hear the Emperor's command. It was greatly to their satisfaction. Song Jiang and the rest repeated their thanks: "This is exactly what we want, to serve the country, gain glory, earn promotion and be accepted as loyal servants of the Emperor. We owe it all to Your Excellency, for working so hard on our behalf. You have been like a parent to us. But we still need to honour the spirit of our first leader Chao Gai by giving his mortal remains a final resting-place. There is also the matter of our families whom we have not yet sent home. And we have still to demolish our defences and bring away the boats. May we trouble you to ask the Emperor to grant us an extension so that we may return to the mountain to make these arrangements and prepare our equipment, our spears, swords, armour and horses, before setting off to do our utmost in the service of our country?"
Marshal Su was perfectly content with this and returned to tell the Emperor. The latter ordered a thousand catties of gold, fifty of silver and five thousand bolts of fine silk from the treasury to be awarded to the Mount Liang leaders and appointed Marshal Su to take charge and see to their delivery and distribution in the camp. Those who had families were rewarded with a grant of money to provide for their families for the rest of their days, those without families were granted a capital sum for their personal use and enjoyment. After Song Jiang had given thanks, the reward was fully distributed among them. Before returning to the court, the Marshal said to Song Jiang: "Go back to the mountain, but go quickly and return soon. When you do, send someone to inform me first. Waste no time!"
So Song Jiang called a meeting to decide who was to go back to the mountain. It was agreed that Song Jiang himself, the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Leopard's Head, the Red-Haired Devil, Skyscraper, Door-God, the Crocodile, Iron Fan and the Ruan brothers should go with a force of around ten thousand infantry, cavalry and water-borne troops. The main army would remain encamped near the capital under the Unicorn's command.
Song Jiang and his party journeyed back uneventfully and the leaders took their seats in the Ceremonial Hall. The families were told to get their things together and be ready to leave. Pigs, sheep and cattle were slaughtered, incense lit and money and horses brought as an offering to the spirit of Chao Gai. Paper money and votive tablets were burnt. After that all the families seated in carts or on horseback set off for their various places of origin. The retainers were also sent back. Old Squire Song and his family returned to civilian life in the village in Yuncheng. The Ruan brothers were ordered to select the most usable boats; the

smaller boats which were of no use to them were all handed over to local people. The locals were also told they could remove any of the buildings they wanted. The fortifications and the Ceremonial Hall were totally demolished. When all this business was com-pleted, men and horses assembled and they returned immediately to the capital.

They arrived after an uneventful journey and were received in the camp by the Unicorn and others. The Prodigy was sent to inform Marshal Su that they wanted to take their leave of the Emperor before starting on their campaign. Marshal Su duly informed His Majesty and next day took Song Jiang to the Hall of Martial Valour for an audience. The Emperor expressed his pleasure and graciously offered wine to Song Jiang. Then he was pleased to say: "Go forward fearlessly, urge your army ever onward, destroy the barbarian invaders for us and return victorious. We will prefer you to high office and all your commanders will be honoured according to their desserts. Lose no time!"

Song Jiang kowtowed and said with great frankness: "I am just a small official, Your Majesty. I committed a crime and was banished to Jiangzhou. In a drunken moment I spoke out of turn. Just as I was about to be executed I was rescued by the band from Mount Liang. I had nowhere to go so I took refuge in the Marshes where I wasted away my time. For all my crimes I merit a million deaths. You have pardoned me, Your Majesty and given me a position, your mercy is boundless! Considering all the kindness you have shown me, I can never adequately repay it. Now that I have received your commission, I shall spare no effort to serve you unto death!"

This speech won yet more rewards from the Emperor, who had the following gifts brought out: a sheaf decorated with magpies drawn in gold, a fine horse, a saddle and harness, a magnificent sword. All this he bestowed on Song Jiang. Song Jiang kowtowed and took his leave. He had the Emperor's gifts taken back to the camp and gave orders for the army to be ready to march.

Now the Emperor issued instructions to Marshal Su to tell the Secretariat to send two officials to Chenbridge Quay to distribute a bounty among Song Jiang's leading divisions: a bottle of wine and a catty of meat for every man to be drawn from government stores, each man to receive the full ration. The Secretariat worked flat out to secure the supplies and sent the two officials to supervise the handing out.

Song Jiang took command of his army and following the Professor's advice it was divided in two for the campaign. Five experienced commanders were in the lead and ten bold horsemen rode at the back. Song Jiang, the Unicorn, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun were in the centre. The water-borne contingent was led by the three Ruan brothers, the White-Water Dragon, the Pilot and White Eel, with the Tong Brothers, Flagpole and Fleetfoot under their command and a good many hands to work the boats as they sailed north on their voyage from Jizhou via the Yellow River.

Song Jiang spurred the three contingents on. As they took the road to Chenbridge Quay orders were given to the troops that they were not to molest the local people.

By this time the two petty bureaucrats sent to Chenbridge Quay by the Secretariat had started to give out the imperial gift of wine and meat. Unfortunately this shameless pair were bent on self-enrichment and held back some of the supplies for their own advantage. The ensuing trouble was entirely due to these two deceitful villains and their insatiable appetite for riches. Of every bottle of imperial wine they kept back half and from every catty of meat they subtracted six ounces. The distribution to the first division of troops passed off without incident. Then came the turn of the Black Division — this was a body of men who wore black helmets and black breastplates. They were shield-bearers, troops under the command of Winged Ghost and the Eight-Armed Ogre. Among them was a certain sergeant who on receiving his handout examined it and saw that there was only half a bottle of wine and ten ounces of meat. Pointing at the two officials, he began to abuse them: "You're a pair of greedy rogues, you've sabotaged the Emperor's gift!"

"How dare you make such accusations!" they replied.

"The Emperor granted us a bottle of wine and a catty of meat. You've pinched half of it! If we let you get away with it, you'll go from bad to worse. You're the kind who'd nick the gold leaf off the Buddha's face!"

"You rebel scum!" they shouted. "Death's too good for you! You still haven't changed your lawless Mount Liang ways!"

The sergeant was furious. He hurled the wine and meat in their faces.

"Arrest that man!" they screamed.

The sergeant promptly drew one of the knives that was stuck in his shield. "You lousy rebel, what makes you think you can threaten us!" they protested.

"When I was on Mount Liang I killed a million buggers like you!" he replied. "What makes you think your thieving lives are worth anything?"

"You wouldn't dare!" they yelled.

He took a pace forward and the knife flashed through the air. It caught one of the officials full in the face and he crashed to the ground. There was an uproar and the bystanders fled. The sergeant strode forward and stabbed his victim several times, till it was obvious the man's life was at an end. The sergeant's comrades could do nothing to stop him.

Winged Ghost and the Eight-Armed Ogre reported the matter to Song Jiang. The latter was very worried. He consulted the Professor as to what they should do about it. The Professor said: "The Secretariat has no love for us. Today's business will give them just the opportunity they want. We must impose the death penalty, report it to the Secretariat and see that the sentence is carried out. Then we must send Magic Messenger and the Prodigy straightaway to the capital, in secret, to tell Marshal Su everything. We must ask him to acquaint the Emperor with our grievance so the Secretariat cannot get in a complaint against us first. I trust it will go no further."

Having decided what to do, Song Jiang rushed to Chenbridge Quay. The sergeant was waiting meekly beside the body of his victim. Song Jiang ordered the people in the rest house to take out the wine and meat and get on with distributing them amongst the armies. He summoned the sergeant before him in the rest house and asked him to give an account of what happened. The soldier said: "He kept calling us rebels, he insulted us and said death was too good for us. I lost my temper and killed him. I await your sentence, sir."

Song Jiang said: "He was an official of the court. I myself have to pay him respect. How could you go and kill him? You have implicated all of us. It was only recently that I was entrusted with this mission against the Tartars. We have not yet the least achievement to our names, and now something like this happens! How is it going to look?"

The man kowtowed and said he was willing to die. Song Jiang said with infinite sadness: "Since I arrived on Mount Liang, not one of our comrades has suffered at my hands. Now it's a matter for public justice and there's absolutely nothing I can do about it. Even if you were irresistibly provoked, we cannot tolerate the old ways now."

The soldier said: "I had better die."

Song Jiang ordered the man to be given wine till he was drunk and then to hang himself from a tree. Afterwards his head was cut off. The official's body was encoffined and a report was written out and sent to the Secretariat. And that was that.

Magic Messenger and the Prodigy slipped into the capital and went to Marshal Su's. They told him the full details of the affair. The Marshal went that evening to the palace and acquainted the Emperor with the facts. When His Majesty gave an audience in the Hall of Culture and Ethics, someone from the Secretariat submitted this complaint: "A soldier under the command of the newly reconciled leader Song Jiang has killed one of the officials sent by the Secretariat to supervise the distribution of the imperial bounty. We beg Your Majesty to order the leader's arrest."

The Emperor said: "Did I not put it in your hands? It is the responsibility of your department. You entrusted the business to unsuitable persons, that is why this disturbance has arisen. Not all of the wine and meat allotted was used. The soldiers could see that they were not getting all they were entitled to; that is the cause of the problem."

Some of the officials protested: "Who would dare to mis-appropriate imperial stores?"

The Emperor's anger at this was awesome. "We have conducted a secret investigation," he thundered. "We are acquainted with every detail. You want to pull the wool over our eyes, with your euphemisms and your insinuations. One half of each bottle of wine was embezzled and a third of every catty of meat, that is what aroused the soldier's anger and caused blood to be shed!"

After a moment the Emperor asked: "Where is the murderer now?"

"Song Jiang himself ordered him to be beheaded to set an example," the officials told him. "It was reported to us that the sentence has been carried out."

The Emperor said: "Since he has executed the guilty soldier, Song Jiang's offence is light. For the time being let it be simply recorded and when he comes back from the campaign against the Tartars we will judge him according to his desserts."

The officials of the Secretariat had nothing to say to this and quietly withdrew. The Emperor sent to Song Jiang urging him to set off and to have the soldier's head displayed at Chenbridge Quay as a warning.

On receiving the official who bore these orders, Song Jiang expressed his gratitude and then had the soldier's head exhibited and the body buried. He was greatly upset by the affair and was still weeping when he mounted and gave the order to march northwards. They travelled twenty miles each day before making camp. They did no damage in the villages they passed through and nothing worthy of relating occurred along the way. When they were nearing Tartar territory Song Jiang conferred with the Professor. "Since the Tartars have invaded on four fronts," he asked, "should we divide our forces and engage them all, or should we attack their towns first?"

The Professor said: "It's a big area and if we divide our forces we will be spread out too thinly and it will be difficult for the various divisions to support each other. It would be better to attack several towns first and then see what happens. If we attack in force they will be bound to concentrate their troops."

Song Jiang said: "You give good advice." He summoned Yellow Dog and said: "You are familiar with the northern topography. You can lead the advance guard. What districts are we near to?"

Yellow Dog said: "In front of us is Tanzhou. It's an important strategic city of the Tartars. It can be approached by water. There's a very deep channel known as Lu Water which completely encircles the city. Lu Water connects with the Wei River, so we can attack with boats. Tell the boats to get up there fast. If we attack by land and water simultaneously, linking up with our boats, we can take Tanzhou." Song Jiang accordingly sent Magic Messenger to urge the White-Water Dragon and his commanders to make all speed and assemble the fleet in Lu Water.

So Song Jiang prepared his troops, including the waterborne force, and set a time for a joint attack by land and water to take Tanzhou by storm. Within the city of Tanzhou the general in command of the defence was Chancellor Dongxian, a vice-premier of the Tartar Kingdom of Liao. Under him were four brave commanders, named Aliqi, Yao'er Weikang, Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji, fearless warriors each one of them. When the Chancellor heard that Song Jiang and his band were approaching, under orders from the Song emperor, he wrote to inform the King, at the same time requesting help from four neighbouring districts, and sent troops out of the city to engage the enemy. Two of the generals, Aliqi and Chu Mingyu, were ordered to take to the field.

Now Scimitar, who was leading an advance party of the vanguard, had advanced with his troops to a village called Miyun, already in the district of Tanzhou. When the Tartar governor heard the news, he hurriedly reported to the two Tartar generals: "This imperial army is marching under the banner of Song Jiang, the recently pardoned renegade from Mount Liang."

Aliqi laughed. "If it's only that miserable renegade there's nothing special about it," he said and ordered his troops to finish setting up camp. On the following day they would ride out from Miyun, to encounter Song Jiang.

Song Jiang heard next day that the Tartar army was close at hand and ordered his commanders to engage them. He wanted to test them out but he didn't want to suffer any serious losses. His generals armed and mounted. Song Jiang and the Unicorn also armed and rode out at the front of the advancing army. Far off they could see the Tartar army approaching in a great horde. Black as black, veiling the heavens and blotting out the sun, was a whole mass of waving black banners. From either side crossbow bolts flew towards the opposing ranks. Now an opening formed among the black banners of the enemy and a Tartar chieftain charged out on a huge horse. Plain to see on this chieftain's standard were the words: "Aliqi, grand warrior of Liao".

When Song Jiang saw this he said to his generals: "This commander must not be underestimated." He had hardly finished speaking when the Spearsman rode out, carrying his hooked spear athwart the saddle. He halted in front of the ranks. Aliqi saw him and shouted: "The Song dynasty is destined to be defeated! They've chosen a bunch of outlaws for their generals, and now they dare to come here and oppose a mighty nation, they must want to die!"

Spearsman shouted back: "You're just a petty chieftain from a rotten little princedom! How can you dare to use such language!" The shouting match continued for a while, and then they both charged: the two horses clashed, weapons were raised. When they had fought some thirty bouts Spearsman could hold out no longer and he fled towards his own ranks. Colonel Hua hurriedly took his bow and arrows and charged after the Tartar. Hotshot also, seating himself firmly in the saddle, reached into his saddlebags and took out a stone. Carefully taking aim he threw it, hitting the Tartar general plumb in the left eye and causing him to fall headlong from his horse. Colonel Hua, Leopard's Head, Thunderclap and Hasty rushed forward in a group, grabbed the general's horse, made its rider prisoner and returned with him to their own ranks.

When the enemy second-in-command, Chu Mingyu, saw his commander fall he wanted to rush forward and rescue him, but was prevented by Song Jiang's main force, who attacked him front and rear.

Forced to abandon Miyun, the enemy suffered a rout, retiring in all haste to Tanzhou. Song Jiang did not pursue them but made camp at Miyun. Aliqi's brow was shattered and he had lost one eye; he died later of his wounds. Song Jiang ordered the body to be cremated. In the official record it was noted that Hotshot had achieved the first success of the campaign. Aliqi's chain mail, spear of seasoned wood, his Tartar belt with the jewel-encrusted lion's head, his dappled grey mount, his boots, robe, bow and arrows were all given to Hotshot. Everyone celebrated that day in Miyun, with wine and feasting. Of this no more.

Next day Song Jiang issued the orders in his tent: setting out from Miyun they were to attack Tanzhou. When Chancellor Dongxian, governor of Tanzhou, heard that one of his generals had been killed, he barred the city gates and refused to come out. He also heard that there were some boats in the vicinity, so he took all his commanders up onto the battlements to see what was going on. Below him he saw Song Jiang's whole army, all those intrepid commanders lined up amid waving banners and deafening shouts, ready and eager to do battle, and he said: "Is it any wonder, then, that Aliqi was defeated?"

The second-in-command Chu Mingyu said: "Who says that lot defeated him? They were beaten first. Our commander was chasing them when one of them, a savage in green, threw a stone that knocked him off his horse. Then four of them with spears came and seized him. I was hemmed in and I couldn't reach him, that's why they got him."

The Chancellor said: "What does he look like, this savage who threw the stone?"

One of his retinue who knew pointed him out, saying: "That fellow in the blue turban right under the walls, look. He's wearing our general's armour and riding our general's horse. He's the one."

When the Chancellor went up onto the parapet to get a better look, Hotshot spotted him. He urged his horse forward and let fly with a stone. The Chancellor's aides shouted for him to take cover. The stone flew past, grazing the Chancellor's ear. Ruefully rubbing his ear, the Chancellor said: "The savage is a serious threat!" He descended and wrote a letter to the Tartar king requesting him to tell all the neighbouring districts to be prepared.

After four days of fighting outside the city walls Song Jiang's forces had still not prevailed, so he withdrew to Miyun. He was in his tent, trying to work out a strategy for taking the city, when Magic Messenger came to report that the water-borne contingent had reached Lu Water. Song Jiang summoned the White-Water Dragon and his comrades to the camp for a meeting. When they got there, he said: "This time it's not like in the Marshes of Mount Liang. We need to investigate the strength of the current and the depth before we can attack. That Lu Water current looks pretty strong to me. If any one gets into trouble it will be difficult to rescue them. You'd better check it out thoroughly. It doesn't do to be overconfident. The best thing will be to disguise the boats and make them look like supply vessels. The leaders should conceal their weapons and remain below. Just keep three or four up on deck to steer and pull the oars and another two on the towpath. Approach the city slowly, moor the boats on both banks and wait till we launch our attack. When they learn about it in the city they will open the water gate and make a sortie to seize the supplies. That'll be your chance to get control of the water gate. It will be a major contribution."

When the boat captains had left with their orders, a look-out came in and reported: "There's a body of troops heading this way. They've all got black embroidered banners, there's more than ten thousand of them, and they're heading for Tanzhou."

The Professor said: "They must be Tartar reinforcements. We'll send some leaders to cut them off and scatter them. We don't want them to raise morale in the city." Song Jiang sent out Hotshot, Twin Spears, Scimitar and Leopard's Head with a few dozen subalterns and five thousand troops.

Now when the Tartar king heard that it was Song Jiang and his band who were attacking Tanzhou and had the city under siege, he had sent two princes to relieve it. They were called Yelü Guozhen and Yelü Guobao and were two of the best generals in Liao as well as being of royal blood. They were ferocious warriors. Here they were then at the head of ten thousand Tartar troops riding to save Tanzhou. Song Jiang came to meet them.

The opposing forces lined up facing each other. The two Tartar generals rode out in front together. They were brothers and were dressed identically. Both wielded spears. As Song Jiang drew up his forces, Twin Spears rode out in front and shouted at the top of his voice: "You there, the barbarians, what are you doing here?"

Guozhen shouted back indignantly: "You bog-dwelling outlaws, you insult our great country and you even have the nerve to ask what we're doing here!"

Twin Spears wasted no more words, but made his horse curvet, then took a firm grip on his lances and charged. The Tartar princeling had a spirit of steel; he was not going to give an inch. He levelled his steel lance and attacked also. The two horses came together, the three spears became entangled. The two fought in a cloud of dust. The one with two spears had a technique which was all his own. The one with a single spear used many tricks. After fifty bouts there was still no victor. Guobao, seeing his brother had been fighting a long time, was afraid his strength might fail him and sounded the gong in the command centre. In the midst of the struggle Guozhen heard the gong and was more than willing to disengage but he was caught up in his opponent's double-spear play and simply could not break free. He began to be worried, his reflexes were slowing down. With the weapon in his right hand Twin Spears struck aside his opponent's spear of green wood and with the left hand struck a blow that bit into the base of his skull. Wretched Guozhen! His gold coronet fell off and his two legs waved a moment in the air as he plummeted from his horse.

When Guobao saw his brother fall he charged to the rescue. Hotshot saw him coming and needed no urging; resting his wooden lance, he reached inside his embroidered bag, grasped a stone, slapped his horse and flew to the front. Guobao was racing towards him and he rode to meet him head on. When the two horses were no more than a dozen yards apart and the Tartar so eager to get to grips with his adversary that he took no heed of danger, Hotshot's hand drew back and with a cry of "Pow!" he launched the stone straight at Guobao, hitting him full in the face and hurling him head over heels from his horse. Scimitar and Leopard's Head immediately pressed home the attack. Now leaderless, the Tartar troops fled in all directions.

So in a single engagement ten thousand Tartars were routed, the two commanders' horses and all their trappings seized, together with two gold shields, jewelled coronets and armour. The heads were cut off, in accordance with custom. A thousand more battle chargers were rounded up, and all this was taken to Miyun and presented to Song Jiang. Well pleased, Song Jiang rewarded the three commanders, and it was noted in the record that this second achievement was by Hotshot and Twin Spears, a fact which would be reported to the Emperor once Tanzhou had been taken.

Song Jiang and the Professor conferred till evening and then wrote out the orders. Leopard's Head and Scimitar were to lead a determined attack on the city from the northwest; Twin Rods and Twin Spears to head another from the northeast; the Unicorn to approach from the southwest; they themselves would bring up the main army from the southeast. A gun would be fired as a signal for everyone to attack at once. Thunderer, chief of artillery, protected by Iron Ox, Demon King, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with a thousand shield-bearers, was to take up a position close to the city walls where he could fire the gun. Nine o'clock was set as the time for the joint attack by land and water to begin. Every man was eager for the fight and after receiving their orders all prepared for the storming of the city.

The Chancellor had just strengthened the city's defences and was awaiting reinforcements when the remnants of the two princes' defeated armies straggled into town and told of what had happened. Of the two princes they told how the elder had been wounded by a warrior with two spears, and the younger knocked off his horse by a stone thrown by one with a blue turban and taken captive.

Trembling with apprehension, the Chancellor cursed: "That savage again! If we've lost both princes, how am I ever going to face the King? If I catch that devil with the blue turban I shall cut him into a thousand pieces!" Later a soldier reported: "There's five or six hundred cargo boats have sailed into Lu Water. They're tied up on both banks. And there's some troops approaching far away."

The Chancellor said: "The savages are not familiar with our waterways. Their supply vessels have come here by mistake. The troops on the bank must be coming to collect the supplies." He gave instructions to his three remaining commanders: "Song Jiang and his savages are moving some of their troops here, and some supply boats have just appeared in our river. Let Yao'er Weikang take a thousand men and attack them while the other two open the water gate and let the current carry the boats in. If you can get just two out of three you'll have done us good service." Little did he know! As the poem says:

*The result is never exactly as planned.*
*Outside the city the boats now stand.*
*But the Chancellor hasn't understood,*
*He opens the gate and lets in the flood.*

That evening at dusk the infantry led by Iron Ox and Demon King on the left approached the city walls and started hurling insults. The Chancellor urged Yao'er Weikang to make a sortie against them. The gates were opened and the drawbridge lowered. But then Iron Ox and Demon King, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with a thousand infantry, all shield-bearers with knives, sprang onto the drawbridge and there was no way the enemy troops could get out of the city. Thunderer now had his guns ready to fire and was just waiting for the right moment. He was surrounded by shield-bearers to protect him from arrows fired from the battlements and Pluto's men were behind him yelling. Although they were only a thousand, they gave the impression of ten thousand. The Chancellor seeing his own men were unable to get out of the city hurriedly called the other two to open the water gate and seize the boats. Song Jiang's water leaders were all ready and waiting in the holds of the boats but they had not made their move yet. When the water gate was opened, they gradually removed all the planking from the decks and the true nature of the war vessels was revealed. Thunderer got the message and let off his first shell — a wind fire shell. As the report

echoed around, the war boats from both banks converged on the enemy boats. From the left bank the White-Water Dragon, Pilot and White Eel, from the right bank the three Ruan brothers. They steered their vessels in amongst the enemy. The Tartar commanders saw the enemy boats bearing down on them and did not want to face them, assuming it was a trap. They hastily tried to turn their boats around but the sailors all jumped overboard and swam to the bank. By now Song Jiang's captains had taken control of the water gate. The enemy guards on the gates either were all killed or ran away. The two commanders saved themselves as best they could. On the water gates a previously prepared fire was lit and Thunderer let off a cart box shell which shot high into the sky and exploded. The Chancellor heard the long-drawn-out echoes and the spirit nearly fled from his body. Iron Ox, Demon King and Pluto with the shield-bearer chiefs Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost rushed into the city. The Chancellor and Yao'er Weikang, seeing the gates had all been captured and Song Jiang's four armies were advancing from every side, could do no better than mount their horses and abandon the city, leaving by the north gate. In less than a mile they ran into Scimitar and Leopard's Head blocking their escape. It was indeed a case of *Heaven's web spread so thickly it's hard to move a step, Earth's net stretched so high, how can one escape?*

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### Song Jiang Attacks Qizhou City & hi s forces capture another city; The Unicorn Lu Junyi's great Battles at Green Fields in Yutian County

Vice-Minister Dongxian and Yaor Weikang had no stomach for a fight after a brief fierce encounter with Lin Chong and Guan Sheng. Desperately, they broke through at an angle and fled. Since it was Tanzhou they were after, the chieftains did not pursue but moved quickly instead into the city.

After the Song forces took Tanzhou and scattered the remaining Tartar troops, Song Jiang posted notices guaranteeing that the local population would not be harmed in the slightest. He directed that as many as possible of his war vessels should sail into the city, then rewarded his soldiers. As to the Tartar officials, those who had some prestige he kept on in their original positions. The remainder he pressured to leave the city and return to the desert. He sent a written report to the emperor on the conquest of Tanzhou, together with the valuables he had removed from the city's treasury. He wrote also to Marshal Su, requesting him to convey the news to the sovereign.

The emperor, on being informed, was delighted. He ordered that Zhao Anfu, a commissioner from the Council of Military Affairs, proceed at once to the front with twenty thousand imperial cavalry troops.

Song Jiang and his chieftains, learning of Zhao's impending arrival, travelled a long distance from the city to meet him. They then escorted him to quarters in the prefectural residence, being used temporarily as the army's high command. All the generals came to pay their respects. Zhao Anfu, a direct descendant of the imperial Zhao family, was a man of benevolence and virtue who conducted his affairs in a correct and upright manner. It was this person, recommended by Marshal Su, that the emperor had chosen to oversee the military operations.

Zhao was very pleased to find Song Jiang such an honorable man. He said: "His Majesty is well aware how dedicated you and your officers and troops are. He has deputed me to supervise. He also sends you gifts of gold and silver and bolts of satin laden on twenty-five carts. I am to report to the throne the names of those who especially distinguish themselves and petition that they be awarded official rank. I shall also report again those prefectures and shires you have already taken. All of you commanders must do your utmost and cover yourselves with glory. When you return victorious to the capital, His Majesty will surely make important use of you."

Song Jiang expressed thanks and said: "Can I trouble Your Excellency to take over control of Tanzhou? I propose to divide my forces and attack the other major prefectures of the Kingdom of Liao, so that the enemy won't be able to coordinate."

He distributed the gifts among his officers, then called back all his troops and directed that they wait for orders regarding the forthcoming attack on the Tartar cites.

"Qizhou isn't far ahead," said Yang Xiong. "Beyond that is a vast area rich in money and grain, rice and wheat. It's truly the Liao treasury. Conquer Qizhou and you can get the rest."

Song Jiang thereupon requested his military advisor Wu Yong to confer with him.

Meanwhile, Vice-Minister Dongxian and Yaor Weikang, heading east, ran into Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji and the remnants of their defeated army. Like a dog whose master has just died, like a fish which has escaped the net, they were scurrying along. All joined forces and hastened to the prefectural city of Qizhou. There they were received by Prince Yelu Dezhong, younger brother of the king. They told him of the large and mighty army commanded by Song Jiang, and of the remarkable barbarian stone thrower who flung his missiles with devastating accuracy and never missed. It was he who had killed the two royal nephews and General Aliqi.

"In that case you must help me destroy him," said the prince.

Before the words were out of his mouth a roving scout entered and reported: "Song Jiang has divided his army into two columns and is attacking our prefecture. One column is advancing on Pinggu County, the other is moving against Yutian County."

"Lead your troops to Pinggu," the prince said to the vice-minister, "but don't engage the foe. I'll wipe out the barbarians at Yutian with my army, then slip around and come at the ones near Yutian from the rear. They won't be able to get away."

He also notified the prefectures of Bazhou and Youzhou to send reinforcements immediately. He set out with a large army, accompanied by his four sons. They flew towards the beleaguered Yutian.

Commanding a column of thirty thousand men each, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were advancing on the target county seats. When he neared Pinggu Song Jiang found the approaches firmly held. He did not venture to push on, but encamped west of the town.

Lu Junyi, with his force of thirty thousand strong, was soon within sight of the Tartar foe at Yutian. He conferred with his general Zhu Wu.

"I don't know this border area," he said. "I'm not familiar with the terrain. How should we go about it?"

"In my humble opinion being strangers to these parts we should proceed cautiously. Spread our troops in a long curved-snake formation. If the enemy attacks our head, our tail can come to its aid. If our head is attacked, our tail can aid. If our middle is attacked, both head and tail can provide support. They won't be able to break any link in our circle. In that way we won't have to worry about being unfamiliar with the terrain."

"My own feeling, exactly," said Lu, very pleased. He ordered his troops to advance.

In the distance, they could see the Liao soldiers swarming towards them, like a dense dark fog, like rolling yellow sand dunes. Their black flags were rows of raven clouds, their fine steeds were charged with a lethal spirit. Their broad-brimmed hats of green felt were like lotus leaves stirred by the breeze in a thousand ponds, their iron helmets were ten thousand leagues of ocean seas gleaming dully neath the winter sun. Each buttoned his tunic on the left side, wore his hair down to his shoulders, and dressed in double chain mail over a thick tightly woven robe. Stalwart, dark complected men, they had green eyes and brown hair.

The Tartar cavalry were broad-shouldered, with waists of steel and legs of iron, and they rode excellent mounts. Their bows were tipped with rams' horns, their poplar arrows had been scoured with sand. Their broad tiger skin capes contrasted with their narrow saddles of incised leather. Raised in the border regions, they grew up skilled in weaponry. For generations they had been riding the most spirited horses. Their infantry marched to the blare of bronze trumpets and the throb of sheepskin drums, their cavalry played flutes and fifes as they cantered along.

Prince Dezhong arrived at Yutian and deployed his troops for battle. Zhu Wu climbed a "cloud ladder" to observe them. He came down and reported to Lu Junyi.

"The barbarians have spread out in a 'Five Tigers Backed by a Mountain' position. Nothing special," said Zhu. He went up the ladder for another look.

Left and right he waved his signal flag, deploying the Song expeditionary forces. Lu watched, mystified.

"What battle position is this?"

"It's called 'Leviathan into Roc.' "

"How can a 'leviathan become a roc'?"

"In our North Sea we have a fish known as the white leviathan. It can turn itself into a roc and fly ninety thousand *li*. This battle position at first glance appears quite small. But as soon as the fighting starts it can expand enormously. That's why it's called 'Leviathan into Roc.' "

Lu Junyi heartily approved. Then the enemy's battle drums pounded, their pennant gate opened and the prince, the king's younger brother, rode forth together with his four sons, two on each side, all dressed alike. Small mirrors fringed by black tassels dangled from the young men's shoulders, and each carried a good sword and sat a swift horse. They reined in at the edge of the battlefield in a straight line. Behind the prince in deep ranks were many officers.

"How dare you marsh bandits invade our borders!" the sons shouted.

"The two armies are face to face," said Lu to his chieftains. "Which of our heroes will be the first to do combat?"

Almost before the words were out of his mourn Guan Sheng the Big Halberd rode forward waving his big blade. The prince's son Zongyun, brandishing his sword, clapped his horse and galloped to meet him. Before they had fought five rounds, another son, Zonglin, joined in the fray.

At this, Huyan Zhuo, swinging his rods, quickly engaged him. The other two sons, Zongdian and Zonglei, raced forward, to be met by Xu Ning and Suo Chao. The four pairs clashed in a wild melee.

Featherless Arrow Zhang Qin, meanwhile, rode quietly to the edge of the field of combat. Soldiers of the Tartar force which had been defeated at Tanzhou recognized him, and hurriedly reported to the prince.

"That savage in the green robe is the stone-thrower. He's coming close on his horse, and must be up to his old tricks!"

Tianshanyong, the famous Tartar bowman, overheard this and said: "Don't worry, Your Excellency. I'll give him a taste of my skill!" Tianshanyong used a painted crossbow and feathered iron bolts one foot long and shot from the saddle. His nickname was Drop of Oil.

Now he cocked the trigger and advanced stealthily, partly concealed by two Tartar officers who rode before him. But Zhang Qin caught sight of him, drew a stone from his pouch and flung it with a yell. It whizzed past the bowman's helmet. Tianshanyong slipped behind his horse's back and fitted a bolt to his crossbow. As soon as Zhang Qin was near enough, Tianshanyong fired.

*"Aiya!"* cried Zhang Qin. Hastily, he attempted to dodge. But the bolt struck him in the neck and knocked him from his saddle. General Two Spears and Nine Dragons Shi Jin, followed by Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, in a desperate rush, rescued him. The arrow was extracted, but a bandage around Zhang Qin's neck couldn't stop the flow of blood. Lu directed Zou Yuan and Zou Run to take him in a cart to Tanzhou and have him treated by the physician An Daoquan. They departed on the cart. Of that we'll say no more.

Shouts again rose at the front, and a scout reported: "A cavalry detachment is racing this way from the northwest. They don't respond to hails. They're just knocking everyone aside and plunging directly into the battlefield."

With Zhang Qin hit in the neck by an arrow, Lu had not much eagerness for combat. The four chieftains pretended to be losing, and retreated to their own lines, pursued by the four Tartar princelings. Meanwhile, Liao attackers were smashing through from the northwest like an avalanche. Nothing could stop them. The Song forces, split into fragments, were unable to come to each other's aid.

Lu Junyi, alone with his one mount and single lance, fought past the enemy lines. It was dusk, and he ran into the four Tartar princelings who were just returning. Fearlessly he fought them all. Suddenly he executed a feint and Zonglin closed in, hacking with his sword. Lu froze him with a yell. Before Zonglin could recover his wits, Lu's lance stabbed him from his horse. The other three, startled and a bit frightened, rode quickly away. Lu dismounted, cut off his adversary's head and hung it on his steed's neck. Vaulting into the saddle, he proceeded south.

Encountering a unit of Liao troops, well over a thousand, he charged them so savagely they broke and ran. A few *li* further on, he saw another detachment. In the dark moonless night he couldn't at first tell who they were. But then he heard voices speaking in his own Song accents.

"Whose army is that?" he called.

Huyan Zhuo answered. Lu was delighted. He joined them.

"We were broken up by the Tartars, and couldn't help each other." said Huyan. "The four princelings fought here with Han Tao and Peng Qi for a time. I don't know what became of them after that."

"I killed one, and three ran away. Then I barged into over a thousand more, and scattered them. I never thought I'd meet you here."

They all headed south. After travelling only about a dozen *li* they saw their path blocked by another detachment.

"We'd better wait till daylight," said Huyan. "There's no use attacking in the dark."

From the opposite side a voice sang out: "Is that you, General Huyan Zhuo?"

Huyan recognized the voice of Guan Sheng the Big Halberd. "Commander-in-Chief Lu is here too," he shouted.

All the chieftains dismounted and sat down on the grass to confer. Lu and Huyan told what had happened to them, after which Guan Sheng spoke.

"We lost the initiative and couldn't come to each other's aid. I and Xuan Zan, Hao Siwen, Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo were riding around looking for a road, and ran into a thousand of our troops. When we got here it was dark. We don't know the terrain and were afraid of falling into an ambush. We decided to wait for daybreak before travelling on. I never expected to meet you, brother."

The two units joined forces.

At dawn they wound their way south and once again reached Yutian town. They saw a body of men ahead, patrolling outside, and recognized General Two Spears Dong Ping and Metal Lancer Xu Ning. They had camped there after having been scattered by the Tartars.

"Hou Jian and Bai Sheng have gone to report to Song Jiang," they said, "but we don't know where Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Yang Lin and Shi Yong are."

Lu ordered a count of those who had already arrived in Yutian, and found they were more than five thousand men short. He was quite disturbed. At mid-morning he was informed that the four missing chieftains had returned with over two thousand troops. Lu summoned the chieftains.

"We four managed to fight through and go deep into vital enemy territory," said Xie Zhen. "But we lost the road and didn't know which way to turn. This morning we ran into the Tartars again and killed a whole slew of them. Only then were we able to get here."

Lu ordered that the head of the princeling Zonglin be hung up on display in Yutian town, and rewarded the troops. Around dusk just as the men were preparing to rest, a young officer patrolling the roads entered and reported: "Liao soldiers are surrounding the town. We don't know how many."

Startled, Lu took Yan Qing to the top of the town wall for a look. They saw gleaming torches for a depth of ten *li*. A junior officer pointed out the princeling Zongyun, riding a fiery steed and supervising troop movement.

Yan Qing said: "Yesterday they hit Zhang Qin with a sneak arrow. Today we'll return the compliment."

He fitted an arrow to his bow and shot. The missile struck Zongyun on the bridge of his nose and knocked him from his saddle. His soldiers hastily rescued him. The Tartar troops retreated five *li*. Lu conferred with his generals in the town.

"They've pulled back a bit," he said, "but they'll surely encircle us again in the morning. We'll be closed in tighter than an iron bucket. How are we going to get out?"

"Song Jiang would rescue us if he knew," said Zhu Wu. "Striking from within and without, we could break the siege."

Truly, they had gone from the den of tigers and dragons into a snare net covering earth and sky. Was it victory or defeat which lay in store for them?

They waited until daylight and saw that the Liao contingents had surrounded them on all sides without a crack. A cloud of dust arose in the southeast as tens of thousands of soldiers marched towards them. The chieftains stared.

"It must be Song Jiang with our army," said Zhu Wu. "When he attacks south, we here will strike with our entire force!"

The opposing Tartars maintained the siege from mid-morning till mid-afternoon, but then they could withstand the flank attack no longer. They began pulling back from the perimeter of the town.

"After them," cried Zhu Wu. "What are we waiting for!"

Lu directed that the four gates of the county town be opened and led his troops out in hot pursuit. They slaughtered the Tartars and scattered them like falling stars and scudding clouds. Song Jiang also chased the fleeing enemy a long distance. Only at daybreak did he sound the trumpets to regroup and enter the county town.

When all the Song troops had gathered, Lu announced an offensive against Qizhou. Twenty-three chieftains were left with Commissioner Zhao to defend Tanzhou. The remainder were divided between left and right columns. Forty-eight went with Song Jiang who commanded the left, thirty-seven with Lu Junyi who commanded the right.

Both armies would march on Qizhou simultaneously, Song Jiang's column from Pinggu, and Lu's column from Yutian. Zhao Anfu and the twenty-three chieftains held Tanzhou. Of that no more need be said.

Originally Prince Yelu Dezhong the Tartar king's younger brother was defending Qizhou with the aid of his four princeling sons, a dozen generals, and over a hundred thousand troops. His chief general was called Baomisheng. The second in command was Tianshanyong.

Song Jiang's troops had campaigned several arduous days in a row. Song saw that they were weary and ordered a temporary rest. For the assault on Qizhou he already had a plan. But first he dispatched a man to Tanzhou to inquire about Zhang Qin's arrow wound.

"The injury is superficial. Tell our highest leader not to worry," was Dr. An's reply. "Once the pus is drained he'll recover quickly. But our soldiers are suffering from many ailments because of the heat. I've asked Commissioner Zhao to send Xiao Rang and Song Qing to the Eastern Capital to buy heat-stroke medicine in the Imperial Hospital. Huangfu Duan, our veterinary, wants medicine for our horses. They will attend to that, too."

Very pleased, Song Jiang consulted with Lu regarding the attack on Qizhou. "I had this plan before I knew you were surrounded at Yutian," he said. "Gongsun Sheng is a native of Qizhou, Yang Xiong used to be a bailiff in the local government, and Shi Xiu and Shi Qian both lived there for a long time. The other day when we defeated the Tartars, I instructed Shi Xiu and Shi Qian to mix with the remnants of their army and retreat with them into the town. Once they get there they'll have a place to stay.

"Shi Qian said to me: 'In Qizhou there's a big temple called the Baoyan Monastery. Its vestibule houses scriptures and precious objects. In the center of the compound is a magnificent hall, and in front of this is a fine tower that pierces the clouds.' And Shi Xiu said: 'I've told him to hide on the roof of the vestibule. I'll bring him food every day. For calls or nature he'll just have to wait till dark. As soon as you and our troops assault the town he'll set fire to the top of the tower.' Shi Qian is a veteran roof-climber and wall-sealer. He won't have any trouble concealing himself. When the time comes he'll put the prefectural government offices to the torch. They've talked it over and have already gone. I'm mobilizing our attack forces."

The next day, Song Jiang and his soldiers quit Pinggu County and joined Lu and his men. Together, they marched on Qizhou.

Meanwhile, the prince was raging over the loss of two of his sons. He conferred with his chief generals Baomisheng, Tianshanyong and the Vice-Minister Dongxian.

"Last time the relief columns from Zhuozhou and Bazhou both advanced widely spread out," he said. "But now Song Jiang has concentrated his forces at Yulian. Sooner or later he'll attack Qizhou. What are we going to do?"

"I'd have nothing against those barbarians if they hadn't invaded," said Baomisheng. "But since they have, I must fight them as enemies. I'm going out and capture a few. Otherwise, they'll never leave!"

"One of them wears a green robe and is fantastically good at throwing stones," said the vice-minister. "Be careful of him."

"I hit him in the neck with an arrow," said Tianshanyong. "He's probably dead."

"Except for that fellow," said the vice-minister, "the others don't matter."

A junior officer entered and said: "Song Jiang's army is rushing towards Qizhou."

The prince hastily mustered his troops and flew out to engage the foe. Thirty *li* from the town the opposing contingents met, and both deployed in battle positions. Baomisheng, his long lance held athwart, rode forth.

"Who will break him, seize his banner, and win the first distinction?" queried Song Jiang.

Before the words had left his mouth, Panther Head Lin Chong was in the field, contending with the Tartar general. They fought over thirty rounds, with neither the victor. Lin Chong wanted to be the first to distinguish himself. He closed in with his eighteen-foot lance and its snake-shaped point. Uttering a thunderous roar, he brushed aside his opponent's weapon and thrust into Baomisheng's neck. The Tartar general fell from his horse.

Song Jiang was very pleased. Both armies yelled. Tianshanyong rode forward next. From Song Jiang's ranks Xu Ning emerged to meet him, bearing a sickle-bladed lance. The two had fought less than twenty rounds when a thrust from Xu Ning brought his opponent tumbling to the ground.

Two generals vanquished in a row! Song Jiang was delighted. He waved his army into action. The Liao Tartars, frightened by the death of two top commanders, fled towards Qizhou. Song Jiang's forces pursued them a dozen //or so, then pulled back.
That night they set up camp and Song Jiang rewarded the troops. The following day they struck camp and headed for Qizhou. On the third day the prince, having lost two senior generals, grew very nervous when informed that Song Jiang's army was approaching. He hastily gave instructions to Vice-Minister Dongxian.
"Go out there and meet the foe! Take some of the pressure off us!"
The vice-minister couldn't very well refuse. He set forth with Yaor Weikang, Chu Mingyu, Cao Mingji and a thousand soldiers and deployed outside the town walls.
Song Jiang's contingents drew near and assumed a goose-wing formation. Their pennant gate opened and Suo Chao cantered forward, holding a large battle-ax. Yaor Weikang sped out from the Tartar ranks, lance in hand.
They met and fought for more than twenty rounds. The Tartar began to lose courage, and with it his taste for combat. He longed to get away. From the top of the town wall the prince saw him turn his steed and start for the Tartar position. But Suo Chao caught up, raised his big ax, and brought it down on Yaor Weikang's skull, cleaving it in two.
The vice-minister ordered Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji to rush into the fray. They were both eight-tenths scared, but since they couldn't get out of it they advanced with their lances.
Nine Dragons Shi Jin, brandishing his sword, emerged to take on the two of them. Shi Jin was a great warrior. One sweep of his blade hacked Chu Mingyu from his saddle. Cao Mingji tried to flee, but Shi Jin caught up and, with another swing of his sword, cut him to the ground. Then he galloped directly into the Tartar position.
Song Jiang pointed with his whip, and his men rushed the drawbridge. In an ever-deepening gloom the prince ordered that all the gates be shut and every general take a stand on top of the walls. He sent a hurried report to the king, and dispatched emissaries to Bazhou and Youzhou requesting immediate assistance.
"They've locked the town up tight," Song Jiang said to Wu Yong. "What should we do?"
"We've got Shi Xiu and Shi Qian in there. They'll stay as long as necessary. Prepare scaling ladders and cannon on four sides for the attack. Have Ling Zhen launch an artillery bombardment first. If we hit them hard they're sure to crack."
"Precisely what I was thinking." Song Jiang ordered an offensive that very night.
The assault was intense. The prince directed that the entire populace man the walls. Shi Xiu, who for several days had been hiding in the Baoyan Monastery, bad been growing impatient at the lack of action. Now Shi Qian came to him excitedly.
"Brother Song Jiang is hitting the town hot and heavy. There'll never be a better time for setting those fires!"
They made their plans. Shi Qian would first put the top of the tower to the torch, then the monastery hall. "You burn the government offices," said Shi Qian. "When our forces at the South Gate see all these important places ablaze they'll strike even harder. They'll crack this town wide open!"
Both set out with powder, flint and steel, pipe length and coal, concealed on their persons. By nightfall Song Jiang's troops were assailing the town relentlessly.
The nimble Shi Qian could skim along eaves and skip over walls as easily as on level ground. He soon had the top of the tower in flames. Since it was the highest point around, the blaze could be seen plainly inside the town and out for a distance of over thirty //; like a fiery gimlet. Then Shi Qian ignited the monastery hall.
These two fires threw the town into an uproar. Among the citizenry, old and young panicked, boys cried, girls wept, and all ran for their lives. At this moment Shi Xiu climbed to the top of the government office and set it ablaze. The authorities realized the enemy had concealed agents at work. What did the populace care about defending the town walls? Nobody could stop them. They dashed off to look after their homes. Soon the monastery was also in flames. On the way out, Shi Qian had put it to the torch.
Four or five fires in less than half a watch told the prince that Song Jiang had operatives in the town. Hurriedly, he mustered some troops, took his wife and two children, loaded a cart, opened the North Gate and left.
Qizhou was in great confusion. Song Jiang urged his men to drive harder. Murderous yells rose inside the town and out. The attackers captured the South Gate. Vice-Minister Dongxian knew he couldn't hang on alone. He departed in the wake of the prince through the North Gate.
Song Jiang and his army surged into Qizhou. First, he had the fires extinguished. At daybreak, he posted notices reassuring the populace. He billeted as many of his troops as possible inside the town and issued them rewards. The achievements of Shi Qian and Shi Xiu were recorded in the distinguished conduct book for officers. Song Jiang sent a written dispatch to Zhao Anfu.
"We have taken the large prefecture of Qizhou. We would be pleased to have Your Excellency move your quarters here."
To which the commissioner wrote a reply: "I shall remain in Tanzhou temporarily, while Vanguard General Song Jiang holds Qizhou. Due to the severe summer heat, this is not a good time to shift troops. We can discuss this again when the weather is somewhat cooler."
Song Jiang then instructed Lu Junyi to encamp with his forces in Yutian County. The remainder of the army would occupy Qizhou. When the weather cooled, new orders would be given.
Meanwhile, Prince Yelu Dezhong and Vice-Minister Dongxian, together with their wives and children, fled to Youzhou. From there they went to Yanjing to report to the king. The monarch of the Liao Tartars was seated in his Golden Hall. Before him his civil and military officials stood in ranks. Court was just concluding.
The privy councellor announced: "The prince has arrived from Qizhou and awaits an audience."
The king immediately had them summoned. On entering the hall the prince and the minister prostrated themselves before the throne and wept aloud.
"Don't distress yourself, dear brother," said the king. "Whatever it is, tell me all about it."
"The Song emperor has sent an expeditionary army under Song Jiang against us. They're very strong. We can't seem to stop them. They've killed two of my sons and four Tanzhou generals. Then they rolled on and took Qizhou. We've come to Your Majesty to request death!"
"Rise, sirs," said the king. "We must talk this over. Who, after all, is this barbarian, Song Jiang? Just a bandit!"
Marshal Chu Jian the vice-premier came forward and explained. "I've heard about this fellow. Originally he was a bandit in a stronghold in Liangshan Marsh. But he never hurt good, ordinary folk, and sought always to act on Heaven's behalf. He killed only corrupt officials who harmed the people. Tong Guan and Gao Qiu led armies against him, but he completely smashed them in only five battles. No one has been able to arrest the gallant men in his band. Three times the emperor sent him offers of amnesty. Finally, he surrendered. He's been appointed vanguard general of the expeditionary force, but has not been given any official rank. The rest of his chieftains have no status either. These are the men who have been dispatched to slaughter us. I hear there are a hundred and eight of them, and each corresponds to a star in Heaven. They are formidable foes. Don't underestimate them, Your Majesty!"
"In view of what you say, what should we do?" exclaimed the king.
His elegant gown sweeping the floor, Minister Ouyang stepped forward confidently. "Long live Your Majesty," he said. "A son should be filial, a minister should be loyal. Although I am without talent, I have a small plan for driving back the Song invaders."
The king was pleased. "If you've any good suggestions, let's hear them." Ouyang was brief and as a result, Song Jiang won great distinction, his name was inscribed in history, deeds in the royal records. His forces returned from the border singing paeans of victory, beating time on their stirrups with their whips. Truly, their skill in defending their country vied with Lu Wang's, their righteous merit exceeded that of Zhang Liang.

The Tartar Chancellor saw Tanzhou was lost and he could do nothing but flee from the city, guarded by Yao'er Weikang and his men. But they ran into Leopard's Head and Scimitar, who set upon them. Having no mind to do battle, they turned aside and ran for their lives. Leopard's Head and Scimitar did not pursue them, being mainly concerned with taking the city, towards which they now sped.
Song Jiang also entered the city at the head of a huge force, which scattered the Tartar troops. He immediately published an order to allay the fears of inhabitants and enemy soldiers alike, promising that not a hair of their heads would be harmed. He ordered all the boats to be brought inside. He also rewarded the army and reinstated all the Tartar officials with Chinese names, while those without Chinese names were expelled from the city and sent back to the wilderness they had emerged from. He also wrote out a report for the court announcing the capture of Tanzhou and had all the silk, gold and other valuables from the treasury sent off to the Eastern Capital. He wrote to Marshal Su asking him to mention this to the Emperor.
When the Emperor heard, he expressed great delight. He issued an edict appointing an official from the capital, Commissioner Zhao, to lead out a force of twenty thousand palace guards and take charge of the campaign. When this news reached Song Jiang and his comrades, they rode a long way out from the city to meet the new commander-in-chief and brought him into Tanzhou to rest. He was taken to the temporary military headquarters in the governor's residence. All the leaders came to pay their respects. Commissioner Zhao was a descendant of the Zhao emperors and was known as a just and generous man, who conducted himself honourably. He had moreover been specially recommended for the job by Marshal Su. When Commissioner Zhao saw Song Jiang's humanity and virtue he was very pleased and said: "The Emperor has heard about the diligence of all your leaders and the efforts of your troops and has sent me here to direct operations. There are twenty carts of gold and silver and silk to reward you. Those who have done particularly meritorious service will be mentioned in despatches and recommended for a government salary. Your armies have already captured this provincial capital. I will bring this to the attention of the court. If you all continue to do your utmost and win success, when you withdraw and return to the capital the Emperor will see fit to advance you."
Song Jiang and his comrades expressed their thanks and said: "May it please Your Excellency to undertake the defence of Tanzhou. We will now divide our forces and set out to capture other strategic cities of the Tartars and disrupt their communica-tions." The bounty was handed out to the commanders and they were ordered back to their armies to await orders for the next action against the enemy.
At this point Morbid said: "I was previously in the Qizhou region. It's a big city, full or wealth and bursting with provisions. It's what you might call the granary of the Liao Tartars. If we take Qizhou, we've got all the rest within our grasp."
Song Jiang heard him out and then summoned the Professor for consultation.
As for the two fleeing Tartars, Chancellor Dongxian and his general Yao'er Weikang, they had continued to head east and had met up with their fellows Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji who with some of their defeated troops were fleeing towards Qizhou. When they all reached that city they saw the King's younger brother, Prince Yelü Dechong and told him: "Song Jiang's army is vast. They've got a savage devil who throws stones and is very skilled at it, a hundred percent accurate, never misses. He's devastating. Already two princes and the commander Aliqi have been killed by his stones."
The Prince said: "In that case you'd better remain here and help me exterminate the vermin."
He had hardly finished speaking when a scout galloped in and reported: "Song Jiang's army in two divisions is marching to attack Qizhou. One division has attacked the village of Flat Combe and the other is threatening Green Fields."
"Chancellor," the Prince ordered, "position your forces outside Flat Combe but don't engage the enemy. I will first capture the savages at Green Fields and then take the other lot from behind. They'll have nowhere to run. We must also tell the two neighbouring districts to send an army each to support us."
The King, you see, had sent this prince, his younger brother, to organize the defence of Qizhou. He was assisted by his four sons: Zongyun, Zongdian, Zonglei and Zonglin and two subordinate commanders of the Qizhou garrison, Baomisheng and Tianshanyong. The Prince now ordered Baomisheng to guard Qizhou, while he led out the army and together with his four sons and Tianshanyong raced towards Green Fields.
Now when Song Jiang was marching to Flat Combe he came to a narrow defile and deeming it too dangerous to enter this, he made camp there to the west of the village. As for the Unicorn, when with his various commanders and thirty thousand troops he reached Green Fields he met the Tartar army. He consulted with the Strategist. "The problem is," he said, "I just don't know this region. I'm not familiar with the geography. What should we do?"
The Strategist replied: "In my humble opinion, if a commander does not know the lie of the land, he should not attack recklessly. You should draw up your forces in a formation like a long snake whose head touches its tail, an endless circle. If you do that you reduce the importance of not knowing the topography."
The Unicorn said: "That is just what I was thinking." When they resumed their advance, they saw the Tartar horde in the distance, swarming over the face of the earth:
*The desert is covered with them, like a pervasive black fog. Flapping like vultures their black banners fill the sky; their linked cavalry strike terror to the heart. Thousands upon thousands of green woollen hats, resembling a lake full of water lily leaves stirred by the breeze; millions upon millions of iron helmets like an ocean of frozen waves under the winter sun. All wear tunics buttoned on the wrong side and hair down to their shoulders, heavy chainmail with a close mesh and tightly woven battle tunics. They are strong and tough, these barbarians, with dark faces, green eyes and brown hair. These riders thundering forward are broad of shoulder, with ribs of steel and legs of iron. Their bows are tipped with ram's horns and their arrows made of scoured poplar. They sport tiger skins and narrow embossed saddles. Born and bred beyond the frontier, they grew up knowing how to shoot; hailing from the north they are accustomed from childhood to mastering mettlesome mounts. They go into battle with bronze trumpets and deerskin drums, playing on reed whistles while they ride.*
The Prince's army was already deployed at Green Fields. The Strategist climbed a platform to observe them and when he came down he reported: "The enemy forces are in the 'tiger hugs the mountain' formation. There's nothing clever about that!" Returning to the command platform he waved the signal flags, causing the Song army to wheel this way and that till they were in the desired formation. The Unicorn did not know this manoeuvre and asked what it was. "It's known as 'Leviathan changes into Roc'," the Strategist replied.
"What does that mean?" the other asked.
The Strategist explained: "In the Northern Sea there is a huge beast called Leviathan. It can change into a bird and fly three thousand miles. This formation, from far or near, makes the force appear a small one, but when it comes to fighting it expands into a big one, that's why it has this name."
The Unicorn was hugely impressed.
Among the enemy ranks the drums now began to beat. The ranks opened where the banners were and out rode the King's brother, with his four sons on either side of him. They were all dressed alike. Each had a little mirror hanging down the middle of his back, with a black tassel.
Four bright swords, four swift horses pressed to the front of the Tartar army; and behind the prince stood the serried ranks of his troops with their various commanders. The four sons now shouted out: "You there, the outlaws, how dare you violate the borders of our kingdom?"
The Unicorn turned to his men and asked: "The two armies are face to face, which hero will be first to challenge them?"
Before he finished, Scimitar, brandishing his bright blade shaped like the crescent moon, rode out. On the opposing side Zongyun swung his sword and slapped his horse and rode to meet him. Before they had fought five bouts Zonglin slapped his horse, flourished his sword and rode to join the fight. At that Twin Rods raised his two weapons and charged in. Now the other two brothers levelled their swords and urged on their horses to join battle. So Spearsman and Hasty rode to meet them, each with his own weapon. The four contending pairs coalesced into a single group and the battle raged on for some time.
As they fought, Hotshot quietly slipped out from the government ranks. One of the enemy commanders, a survivor from the defeat at Tanzhou, recognized him and hurriedly informed the Prince: "That devil in the green uniform over there is the one who fights with the stones. He has ridden out in front. He is up to his old tricks."
The Prince's lieutenant, Tianshanyong, said: "Never fear, Your Highness, I will give him a taste of my crossbow." This Tianshanyong was an expert at shooting on horseback, using a black crossbow that fired winged iron bolts a foot long. He was nicknamed Spot of Oil. He cocked the crossbow and rode forward stealthily, shielded by two lieutenants who rode before him. Hotshot saw them and grasped one of his stones. He took aim at the foremost and cried "Pow!" The stone grazed the man's helmet. Tianshanyong ducking behind the other's horse quietly steadied his crossbow, fitted a bolt, waited till the enemy was close enough and fired. Hotshot cried "Aiya!" and ducked, but the arrow hit him in the throat and he fell from his horse. Twin Spears and Tattooed Dragon together with Snake and Scorpion dashed to his aid.
When the Unicorn saw Hotshot he ordered the arrow to be pulled at once. The blood could not be staunched. A cloth was tied about his neck and Snake and Scorpion carried him onto a cart. He was sent back to Tanzhou to be treated by Doctor An.
Just after the cart had left, a cry arose in the front ranks. "Enemy troops attacking from the northwest, coming on at pace, not stopping to parley. They're charging straight in and cutting our lines to pieces!"
The Unicorn, having just lost Hotshot to an arrow, was in no mood to continue the fight. His four leaders feigned defeat and withdrew. The four Tartar princes wanted to follow up their success and gave chase, while the enemy force approaching from the northwest also came in from the flank.
The Tartar horde fell on them like an avalanche. The attack was so fierce there was no opportunity for clever tactics. The commanders of the three Song divisions became separated and no one could go to the aid of anyone else. The Unicorn was forced to defend himself with his spear all on his own.
As daylight began to fade the four princes came upon the Unicorn while they were heading for home. The lone horseman, with only his spear, defended himself against four enemy captains, showing absolutely no fear. After fighting for two hours or so, the Unicorn had some advantage. He feinted and when Zonglin slashed with his sword cried out and lunged. Before his opponent could parry he had transfixed him with a single spear thrust and knocked him from his horse. This took the wind out of the other three's sails. White with fear, they lost all inclination to continue the fight and galloped off. The Unicorn dismounted, cut off the victim's head and tied it to his horse's neck. He vaulted into the saddle again and headed south. He now ran into another body of Tartar troops, around a thousand of them. He attacked and scattered them and then set off again. He had not gone more than a mile or two when he sighted more troops.
On this moonless night it was impossible to make out visually what manner of troops these were. But their voices could be heard and they spoke in the tongue of Song. "Whose men are you?" the Unicorn asked. To his great relief, it was Twin Rods who replied. They joined forces. "We were scattered by the Tartar attack and could not help each other," Twin Rods said. "I managed to break out with Victorious and the Supremo and we fought our way here. I wonder how everyone else fared?"
The Unicorn said: "I killed one of four who were attacking me: the other three got away. After that I ran into a thousand of the enemy and put them to flight. The next thing was meeting you here, to my great surprise."
The two leaders now rode on south with their retinue. They had only gone a few miles when they came upon some troops blocking their path. Twin Rods said: "It's far too dark for us to attack them. Let's wait till daylight. After that we'll sell ourselves dear!"
They were overheard by those who faced them, one of whom shouted out: "Is that General Twin Rods, by any chance?"
Twin Rods recognized Scimitar's voice and shouted: "We've got the Unicorn here!" Everyone dismounted. They all sat on the ground while the Unicorn and Twin Rods told their stories. Scimitar said: "They overwhelmed us. We could not help each other. Myself, the Son-in-Law, Hound, the Water General and the Fire General managed to get away. We rounded up a thousand or so of our troops and came on here. Since we had no idea where we were we decided to lie up until dawn. We certainly weren't expecting to see you."
They combined their forces and all waited until day dawned, before heading on south. When they reached Green Fields they saw a body of troops watching the road. It was two comrades, Twin Spears and Spearsman, who were camping there after breaking up a Tartar force. They said: "Ape and the Daytime Rat have gone off to tell Song Jiang. The only leaders missing are Snake and Scorpion, Panther and the Guv." The Unicorn ordered the troops to be formed up. A count was made of all officers and men and more than five thousand troops were found to be missing. This was distressing news indeed. At nine o'clock someone came and reported: "Snake, Scorpion and the other two are here with two thousand men."
Questioned by the Unicorn, Snake said: "We got ourselves in a bit too deep. Then we lost our way and didn't dare turn back. This morning we ran into some more of the enemy and killed a good many. Finally we made it back here."
The Unicorn ordered the head of Yelü Zonglin to be brought and had it displayed in Green Fields as an example and to encourage the troops. Around dusk when the troops wanted to sleep a scout came and reported: "We are surrounded on all sides by a Tartar army, heaven knows how many!"
Greatly alarmed, the Unicorn went up onto the battlements with the Prodigy to look. There were torches everywhere for miles around. A junior officer pointed out Yelü Zongyun on a prancing steed haranguing his troops. The Prodigy said: "Yesterday Hotshot was caught by a lucky shot of theirs, today we'll repay the compliment!" He took up a crossbow and fired a single shot which caught the enemy general full in the face and knocked him from his horse. The Tartars cried out in alarm. When Zongyun did not regain consciousness they retreated several miles.
The Unicorn now discussed their situation with his com-manders. "Although we had a lucky shot and the enemy have retreated a little, when daylight comes the siege will be renewed. We are caught in the jaws of a steel trap. How can we escape?"
The Strategist said: "When Song Jiang hears about it he's bound to come to our aid. Our combined efforts should get us out of trouble."
They waited. When dawn came they could see the Tartar army drawn up all around them without a break. Then to the southeast amid a cloud of dust thousands of horsemen appeared. Everyone's eyes turned towards the south. The Strategist said: "That must be Song Jiang's army! Wait till they've formed up and start to attack down there. Then we'll all join in."
The Tartar forces maintained their encirclement the whole morning but by the afternoon they were tired and when Song Jiang's onslaught began they were not willing to stand up against it so they regrouped and withdrew. The Strategist said: "This is the time to go and get them! What are we waiting for?"
The Unicorn gave the order to open all the town gates and his troops issued forth to pursue and harry the Tartars, who suffered a great defeat. In fact they were cut to ribbons, smashed to smithereens. Their soldiers fled in all directions and Song Jiang pursued them for miles. When it was fully light he had the bugle blown to recall his men. They entered Green Fields and joined up with the Unicorn's forces. Plans to attack Qizhou were announced.
One group of leaders was now ordered to remain and defend Tanzhou under the orders of Commissioner Zhao. The rest were divided into two armies, left and right: the left army was commanded by Song Jiang, with the Professor and forty-eight others; the Unicorn would lead the other army with thirty-seven commanders, including the Strategist. Song Jiang was to attack via Flat Combe and the Unicorn was to advance from Green Fields, while Commissioner Zhao with the twenty-three other leaders remained to defend Tanzhou. Of this no more.
Seeing that the troops had fought hard all day, Song Jiang ordered a period of rest. He had already made his plans for the attack on Qizhou. First he sent someone to Tanzhou to inquire after Hotshot's wound. The following reply came back from Doctor An: "Although there are some external lesions of skin and flesh, there is no internal damage. There is no need to worry, com-mander. When the pus is fully drained there should be no further problem. But the weather is particularly hot at the moment and many of the troops are sick. Could you ask Commissioner Zhao to send Magic Hand and Iron Fan to the capital to buy medical supplies? They should go to the health department to stock up with medicine for sunstroke. Redbeard also wants a supply of horse medicine from the government stores. Magic Hand and Iron Fan could be asked to do all these things. I hope this is possible."

Song Jiang willingly accepted this request, and held further discussions with the Unicorn about how to proceed against Qizhou. "I made this plan before I heard that you were encircled at Green Fields," he said. "Taoist Gongsun is a Qizhou man and Morbid used to be public executioner there; Madcap and the Flea both lived there a long time. When the Tartar army retreated the other day, I told the Flea and Madcap to disguise themselves as troops of the defeated army and mix with the others who would obviously take refuge in the city. Provided they managed to get inside they'll know where to hide. The Flea even had a plan. 'There's a big temple in Qizhou,' he told me. 'It's called Temple of the Jewel. It has a famous treasury. In the middle is the great hall, and in front of that there's a pagoda, that reaches up into the clouds.' Madcap said that if the Flea went and hid in the top of the pagoda, he would take him food every day. Then when our army was ready to storm the city the Flea would start a fire up there to give the signal. The Flea is an experienced cat burglar. He should know how to conceal himself. Madcap can go and start a fire in the government offices at the same time. They decided all this between them before they left. So I've been busy preparing the army here."

Next day Song Jiang led his army out of Flat Combe and joining forces with the Unicorn marched on Qizhou.

Now the Prince had lost two of his sons and could not get over his grief. He held a meeting with his leaders and Chancellor Dongxian to decide what to do. "Last time the advance of our relief columns was uncoordinated," he said. "Now Song Jiang and his armies are at Green Fields. Sooner or later they will advance and attack this city. We have to make a plan!"

General Baomisheng said: "If they would keep to themselves there wouldn't be any trouble. But now that the savages have decided to invade I shall be obliged to go out and fight them. As soon as I've captured a few of them they'll take themselves off."

The Chancellor said: "There's one of them who wears a green robe who throws stones. He's extremely dangerous, you want to watch out for him."

General Tianshanyong said: "I got him in the throat with a crossbow bolt. I reckon he's dead by now!"

The Chancellor said: "He's the only one that matters."

During their discussion it was reported that Song Jiang was attacking. The Prince hurriedly gave orders to his armies and told Baomisheng and Tianshanyong to march out of the city and encounter the enemy. They were to halt Song Jiang's advance about ten miles outside.

The two armies were drawn up for battle. Baomisheng was on horseback with a gigantic lance. Song Jiang, at the head of the opposing army, saw him and said: "Who's the first to win glory by knocking out that general and taking his flag?"

Before he'd finished, Leopard's Head was out in front engaging the Tartar general in fierce combat. They fought thirty bouts and neither had the advantage. Determined to have first honours, Leopard's Head flourished his long serpent lance. He came in close and uttering a cry like thunder he thrust with the lance, piercing the Tartar's neck and hurling him from his horse. As Song Jiang looked on delightedly a great cry went up from the armies. The other Tartar general, Tianshanyong levelled his lance and charged. On Song Jiang's side Spearsman readied his hooked spear and galloped to oppose him. The horses met and before they had fought twenty bouts a thrust of Spearman's lance unseated and killed the Tartar. Now both enemy leaders had bitten the dust and Song Jiang was doubly pleased. He threw his whole army into the attack. The Tartars were routed and fled back into Qizhou. Song Jiang pursued them a little way and then recalled his forces.

Song Jiang pitched camp and rewarded the troops. Next day they struck camp and marched on Qizhou. Having lost two of his leaders, the Prince was thoroughly disconcerted, and when it was reported that Song Jiang was attacking he hurriedly told Chancellor Dongxian: "You'd better take some troops out to oppose him and buy us some time!"

The Chancellor dared not disobey. Reluctantly he led out Yao'er Weikang, Chu Mingyu and Cao Mingji, with a thousand troops, and took up a position outside the city. Song Jiang's army slowly advanced in V formation. Hasty rode forward from the gate of pennants hefting his big axe. Yao'er Weikang rode out from the Tartar ranks. Without more ado the two warriors clashed and fought twenty bouts. Then the Tartar's nerve failed him: he had no more stomach for the fight and he fled. Hasty galloped in pursuit, whirling his axe in both hands. Aiming directly at his opponent's head he brought the axe crashing down and split his skull. The Chancellor hurriedly ordered the other two to take the field. They were already terrified but they could hardly refuse, so there was nothing for it but to take up their spears and ride forward. From Song Jiang's side the Tattooed Dragon waved his sword and slapped his horse and rode out to take them on. Eager to show his prowess, the Tattooed Dragon raised his sword arm and slashed downwards, knocking the first of them from his horse. His companion immediately tried to flee but a thrust of Tattooed Dragon's sword caught him from behind and he too fell. Tattooed Dragon gave his horse its head and galloped about among the Tartar ranks, while Song Jiang gave the signal for the rest of his troops to attack in a charge which took them right up to the drawbridge. By now utterly terrified, the Prince commanded that the gates be bolted and barred and ordered all his commanders up onto the battlements to defend the city. He informed the King and sent to the two neighbouring districts for reinforcements.

Song Jiang conferred with the Professor. "With the city barricaded against us like this, how are we going to deal with them?" he said.

"Don't forget we've got Madcap and the Flea inside," said the Professor. "It can't possibly take long. Have siege ladders put up all around and ballistas positioned for the attack. And have Thunderer launch incendiary shells from every side before we go in. If we hit them hard they're bound to break." Song Jiang gave the order for the assault on the city to begin that afternoon from all sides at once.

When the Prince heard that they were under attack on all sides from Song Jiang's army, he ordered the entire population of the city up onto the battlements to defend it. Madcap by now had spent several days hiding in the city at the Temple of the Jewel and had seen no signs of activity. Then the Flea came and told him: "The Leader is outside the city with our army; they're mounting a ferocious attack. We must start the fires, what are we waiting for?"

After conferring they agreed that the Flea would start a fire in the pagoda first and then set fire to the Buddha hall. "And you go and set fire to the government offices," said the Flea. "When our comrades outside see all these important buildings near the south gate in flames they will be encouraged in their efforts to fight their way in." Having made their plans they secreted the necessary incendiary materials — steel and flint, fuses and gunpowder — about their persons. That evening Song Jiang launched an all-out attack.

Well, the Flea was someone accustomed to flying over walls and floating on rooftops; leaping barriers and crossing city defences was no harder to him than walking on level ground. First he went to the pagoda and started a fire there. It was a tall building and when the fire broke out no one within the city or without could miss it. The conflagration was like a beacon, visible for miles. Afterwards he went to the Buddha hall to start a fire. These two fires turned the city into a flaming cauldron. Everywhere people poured out of their houses with cries of terror and fled for their lives. Madcap rushed to the government offices and started a fire in the main hall. With fires burning in three areas of the city, it now became obvious that spies had infiltrated. The people had no more thoughts of defending the city. Rather than standing firm they all rushed off to look after their families.

A little later another fire started in the temple gate. The Flea had torched it as he was leaving. The Prince, having seen all these fires break out in the space of less than an hour realised that Song Jiang must have some of his people on the inside. He hurriedly mustered some troops, collected his family, including his two remaining sons, loaded up a cart, had the north gate opened and fled. Song Jiang could see there was panic in the city and urged his troops forward to storm it. The battle raged inside and outside the city and in no time the south gate had fallen. The Chancellor, completely outnumbered, could only follow the example of his royal master and exit through the north gate.

Song Jiang led his army into Qizhou. He ordered the guns on every side to stop firing. At dawn he published an edict to reassure the people. He brought all his troops inside the city and rewarded all the commanders. Madcap and the Flea came in for a special mention in despatches and a special report was sent to Commissioner Zhao to let him know Qizhou had been taken and to invite him to make it his headquarters. The Commissioner replied: "I shall continue to reside for the time being in Tanzhou. Let General Song Jiang undertake the defence of Qizhou. Right now it is the hot season and the weather is too warm for moving troops. I will review these arrangements when the weather is cooler." Song Jiang ordered the Unicorn to go with the same commanders as before to Green Fields and camp there, while the others remained to guard Qizhou. These arrangements were to last until the weather became cooler.

The Tartar Prince and the Chancellor, after fleeing with their families to the nearby district of Youzhou, went straight to see the King in Yanjing. The King was sitting on his throne in his palace, with his officials, civil and military, drawn up in two ranks before him. He had just ended his audience, when a chamberlain entered and announced: "The royal brother has come from Qizhou and is waiting outside!"

The King immediately ordered him to be shown into the hall. The Prince and the Chancellor flung themselves down in front of the throne and set up a tremendous wailing.

"My own dear brother," the King said, "Please do not distress yourself so! Whatever it is that is troubling you, tell me all about it!"

The Prince said: "The Song emperor has sent Song Jiang with an army to attack us. Their forces are very strong, it is hard to withstand them. Two of my sons have lost their lives, in Tanzhou four generals have been killed. Their army have swept all before them. We have lost Qizhou. We come asking for death!"

The King graciously replied: "Please rise, we must discuss the situation seriously." He went on: "This leader of theirs can't be anything much, surely? Isn't he just a common bandit?"

Amongst the ranks of officials was Chief Minister Chu Jian, who now stepped forward and said: "I have heard that this Song Jiang and his gang used to be outlaws operating among the swamps and waterways around Mount Liang. But it is said that they never harmed ordinary folk and did heaven's will, killing only greedy officials and corrupt ministers, the oppressors of the people. Marshals Tong and Gao — Gao the Ball they sometimes call him — were sent to capture them with armies that got totally destroyed. No one has been able to get the better of this bunch. Three times the Emperor sent them an edict proclaiming an amnesty and finally they gave themselves up. Song Jiang was made a general, but no other official honours were conferred and the rest of them have no official status. Now they have been sent to fight us. There's supposed to be one hundred and eight of them, representing heavenly stars. They are exceedingly brave and it is essential not to underestimate them!"

The King said:" If that is what you think, what do you say we should do about it?"

Another official now stepped forward. This was Chancellor Ouyang. His scholar's robe brushing the floor and clutching the ivory tablets to his chest, he said: "Long live Your Majesty! Humbly and respectfully I would like to venture a proposal for getting rid of the Song army."

The King said: "I know you've great experience. Let us hear what you have to say." Chancellor Ouyang spoke and his words were few but to the point. What he said was to have the result that Song Jiang's name would be inscribed in the annals of history and immortalized in the imperial record.

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## Song Jiang at Night Crosses Yijin Pass; The Professor Wu Yong devises a way & Captures Wenan Town by a Ruse

Ouyang explained, "Song Jiang and his band are bold gallants from Liangshan Marsh. But the emperor of Song today is manipulated by Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian. These four crooked ministers are jealous of real talent and block righteous conduct. If you're not their intimate you can't advance, if you don't give them money they don't want you. They'll never permit the Song Jiang faction to exist for long. In my humble opinion, Your Majesty should grant him high rank, bestow on him gold and silks, fine furs and horses. I'll be glad to go as your emissary and urge him to serve our great Liao kingdom. If he and his chieftains join us, Your Majesty can take the Central Plain as easily as turning over your hand! I beg you to consider!"

"What you say is quite true," mused the king. "You shall be my emissary. Take with you a hundred and eight fine saddle horses and a hundred and eight bolts of the best silk. Tell Song Jiang that he shall be a Grand General, the Supreme Commander of our Liao soldiery. As a sign of our faith in him, he shall also have a bountiful gift of gold and silver. Write down the names of the chieftains. They too shall be given official rank."

From the attending ranks Wuyan, the commander-in-chief, stepped forward and addressed the throne. "Why amnesty Song Jiang and his gang of petty bandits?" he cried. "I have under my command twenty-eight star-blest generals and eleven Heaven-guided officers. With our powerful army and bold commanders, what have we to fear? If the barbarians refuse to withdraw, I'll lead our troops personally and slaughter the lot!"

"You're a splendid warrior, a winged tiger, true," said the king. "But if we add them to our forces, your wings will be doubled. Don't try to prevent it."

After this rebuff, no one else dared speak. Wuyan was the country's leading general, versed in all eighteen branches of military art, an excellent strategist and tactician. Around thirty-five, tall and stalwart, he had a fair complexion and rosy lips, brown hair and green eyes, and was possessed of matchless courage and strength. In battle he used a long iron lance flecked with steel, and when in the thick of combat the iron slabs at his waist clanked fearsomely. Truly a formidable fighter!

On receipt of the governmental decree, Ouyang assembled the many gifts, mounted his horse and proceeded towards Qizhou where Song Jiang was resting his troops. Informed that a Liao emissary was approaching, Song didn't know whether this boded good or evil. He brought out the Books of the Mystic Maid and cast divining sticks. They fell in a pattern auguring great good fortune.

He told Wu Yong about the omen and said: "It probably means the Liao emissary will offer us an amnesty. What should we do?"

"If that is so, we can match their plan with one of our own. Accept it. Let Lu Junyi hang on to Qizhou, then take Bazhou prefecture. Once we've got Bazhou, the Liao kingdom is sure to crack. Tanzhou we already have. First become a high general of the Liao kingdom. The rest will be simple. Do the difficult things first and the easy things later. Don't let them suspect."

When Minister Ouyang arrived at the town, Song Jiang ordered that the gate be opened and the Tartar official be allowed to enter. Ouyang dismounted in front of the prefectural office and went directly to the main hall. Ceremonial greetings were exchanged. Host and guest took their seats.

"What brings you here, sir?"

"There is small matter. Could I speak to Your Excellency alone?"

Song Jiang directed his chieftains to withdraw. He led his visitor to a secluded room in the rear. Ouyang bowed.

"Our Liao kingdom has long known of your fame, General. Because of the vast distance between us, unfortunately we never had the opportunity to view your noble countenance. We have heard, too, that when you were in your mountain stronghold you acted always in Heaven's behalf, and that you and your brother chieftains were of one heart. Today, in the Song court evil ministers block the path of righteousness. If you dispense bribes among them you can obtain high office and important duties. If you don't, even though you do great deeds for your country, you are kept in obscurity and never rise in rank. This wicked clique holds power. They slander the upright, are jealous of ability, make no distinction between what is worthy of reward and what deserves punishment, and have sown confusion throughout the land. Bandits run wild south of the Yangzi, on both sides of the Zhejiang River and in the provinces of Shandong and Hebei. The people are so despoiled by them they can barely sustain themselves.

"Out of a desire to serve your emperor loyally, you surrendered with a hundred thousand crack troops. But you were given only the position of a mere vanguard general, and have not been elevated to official rank. Nor has any rank been granted to your brother chieftains, despite their devoted efforts to serve their country. Although you have led your army into the desert, suffered privations and performed meritorious deeds, the imperial court has bestowed no rewards. This is all due to the schemes of the wicked monsters. Only by sending whatever plunder you may acquire to Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian can you be sure of attaining official rank and winning royal favor. Should you fail to do this, no matter how faithfully you perform and how conspicuously you distinguish yourself, when you return to the capital you will be branded a traitor.

"I have been dispatched as the emissary of the king of Great Liao to inform you of His Majesty's desire to designate you his Grand General and Supreme Commander of the Liao soldiery, and to present you with gold and silver plus a hundred and eight bolts of silk and a hundred and eight fine mounts. I am also to write down the names of all one hundred and eight of you so that official titles may be bestowed. I have no wish to cajole you, General. I am here because our king, who has long known of your virtue, has deputed me to invite you and your chieftains to accept an amnesty and submit to his rule."

Song Jiang heard him out, then replied. "What you have said, sir, is very true. Because I was born of mean estate and was just a petty functionary in Yuncheng City I had to flee after committing a crime and take temporary refuge in Liangshan Marsh. Yet the Song emperor offered me an amnesty three times, and finally pardoned my crimes. Although my position is lowly and I have not yet performed any meritorious deeds, I would like to repay the emperor for his kindness in forgiving me. The Liao king wishes to grant me high rank and present me with valuable gifts. I dare not accept. Please take them back. Since it is now the heat of summer, I have ordered my army to rest and have borrowed two of your monarch's towns to quarter them in. Let's wait until the cool of autumn. Then we can discuss this again."

"If you don't scorn them as too trivial, General, at least accept the gifts. I will come for another talk later on."

"You must realize there are a lot of eyes and ears among the hundred and eight of us. If word of this leaks out, there will be trouble."

"But power is firmly in your hands. Who would dare disobey?"

"You don't understand. The majority of my chieftains are fearless straight-forward warriors. Better let me prepare them. When we're all agreed, there'll be time enough to give you an answer."

After wining and dining Ouyang, Song Jiang saw him out of the town. The emissary mounted and left. Song Jiang told Wu Yong what had transpired.

"What shall I do?"

Wu Yong sighed, head down, but did not reply.

"Why do you sigh, Military Advisor?"

"I've been wondering. Since you place loyalty first, I'm afraid to say too much. It seems to me there's a great deal of truth in Minister Ouyang's statements. Our Song emperor, though noble and intelligent, has lost much of his power to Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian. What's more, he trusts them. Even if we distinguish ourselves, there's no assurance we'll be elevated. After three amnesty offers you, our leader, have been given only the empty title of Vanguard General. In my humble opinion going over to the Tartars at least would be better than maintaining a fortress in Mount Liangshan. Of course it might violate your sense of loyalty."

"You're badly mistaken! Going over to the Tartars is out of the question! Even if the Song Dynasty wrongs me, I can't wrong the Song Dynasty. I may not receive any rewards, but I'll leave behind a clean name. Heaven will not forgive me if I turn traitor! We ought to be loyal and serve our country unto death."

"Since that's how you feel, brother, we can use this opportunity to take Bazhou. But we'll have to rest our soldier and horses temporarily because of the summer heat."

The two reached agreement, but they didn't tell the other chieftains. They remained in Qizhou waiting for the heat to pass.

While chatting with Gongsun Sheng the following day Song Jiang said: "I've often heard you speak of your teacher Luo the Sage as a lofty scholar of a prosperous era. That time we attacked Gaotang Prefecture, and I sent Dai Zong and Li Kui to request your aid in countering Gao Lian's magic, you mentioned that Luo the Sage's occult skill was extremely effective. Could I trouble you, brother, to take me to his temple so that I may burn incense and pray, and wash the earthly dust from my soul? Would that suit you?"

"I've been thinking about going home to see my old mother and paying my respects to my old teacher at the same time. But I saw you were busy settling down our troops, and didn't dare ask. I was going to request leave today. It never occurred to me that you would want to go, too. We can start tomorrow morning. I'll present you to my teacher and go visit my mother."

The next day Song Jiang turned over command of the army to his military advisor, and prepared famous incense, fresh fruit, gold and jewels and fine silks. Together with Hua Rong, Dai Zong, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Yan Shun and Ma Lin, he and Gongsun set out for Two Fairies Mountain in Jiugong County at the head of five thousand infantry.

Astride their horses, the chieftains rode deep into the mountains. Green pines mantled the slopes, and the air was cool and clear. The summer heat was left far behind. Truly, mountains of great beauty. Gongsun pointed.

"That is called 'Fish Snout Mountain.' "

Gongsun led Song Jiang to the Temple of Purple Shades where all dismounted and straightened their clothes. A junior officer carrying the incense and gifts, they proceeded to the Crane Pavilion. Taoist priests greeted Gongsun and Song Jiang respectfully.

" 'Where is my teacher?" Gongsun asked.

"For the past few days the master has been meditating in the rear," replied the priest. "He hasn't been seeing anyone and seldom comes to the temple."

With Song Jiang, Gongsun followed a hilly winding path behind the temple towards the sage's retreat. Before they had gone a //; they saw a fence of brambles. Outside it were green pines and cypress, within were pretty shrubs and flowers. In the center were three connected snow caverns. It was here that Luo the Sage read scriptures.

An acolyte, seeing them arrive, opened the gate and came out. Gongsun entered a thatched shack in front of the Crane Pavilion and kowtowed before his teacher, Luo the Sage.

"Song Jiang, my old friend from Shandong, has received an amnesty. By imperial order, he leads an army against the Liao, and has already reached Qizhou. Today, he has come specially to pay you his respects."

Luo directed that he be invited in. As Song Jiang entered, Luo came down from the dais to greet him. Song Jiang begged Luo to be seated so that he might kowtow before him.

"You are a mighty minister of our state, General," protested the Taoist, "with gold at your waist and purple in your clothes. You're on a mission for His Majesty. I'm only a poor rustic priest. How do I dare?"
But Song Jiang insisted, and Luo finally sat down. Song Jiang first placed the fine incense in the burner and lit it, then he kowtowed eight times. He summoned Hua Rong and the other chieftains, and they did the same.
Luo asked them all to be seated and instructed his acolyte to serve tea and fruit. After making a few polite inquiries about their journey, the Sage addressed himself to Song Jiang.
"You correspond to a star of Heavenly Spirit, General, you're famed throughout the Central Plain, you're surrounded by other Star Spirits, and together you act in Heaven's behalf. Recently you have submitted to the rule of the Song court, for which virtuous deed you shall be remembered for countless generations.
"My pupil Gongsun Sheng I introduced into our order personally, and he shunted off earthly interests and devoted himself to truth. Subsequently, he had no choice but to join you, since he too was a spirit descended from a star. Today you have deigned to visit me, General. I am not worthy. Please overlook my faults."
"I was just a petty functionary in Yuncheng, and had to run away to the mountains because I committed a crime. Fortunately, heroic companions came like the wind from every direction. We're of one voice, one breath, as close as bone and flesh, limbs of the same body. Only after Heaven sent a sign did we know that we were united as stars of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends.
"Three times the Song emperor granted us amnesty and forgave our crimes, and my chieftains joined me in submitting to imperial rule. I have been put in command of an expeditionary force against the Liao. Since we were passing your holy place, I thought I might take advantage of this lucky chance to offer my respects. If you could tell me what lies ahead, sir Sage, I would consider myself infinitely fortunate."
"Stay a while, General. Have a vegetarian meal with me. It's getting late. Spend the night in our crude thatched shelter and go back in the morning. What do you say?"
"I'm longing to have you unravel the mystery, Teacher. Only then will I be able to go on with peace of mind." At Song Jiang's signal, his retainers proffered the gold and jewels and silks to Luo the Sage.
"I'm an old man living quietly in a rustic retreat," said the Taoist. "I have no use for riches. A cloth gown to cover my body is good enough. I have never worn silks. As a commander of whole armies you have to spend thousands every day, General. Take back your gifts. Use them for your soldiers. I have no need for such things. I'll just keep the platters of fruit."
Song Jiang again kowtowed and begged Luo to accept, but the old man was adamant. A vegetarian meal was served. When they had finished eating, they drank tea. Luo told Gongsun to go home and see his mother.
"Come back early in the morning and accompany the general back to the city," he admonished.
That evening Luo chatted with his visitor. Song Jiang told in detail what was troubling him, and pleaded for a prophecy.
"You have a loyal heart, General, and you act in conformity with Heaven's will. God will surely protect you. Some day you will be entitled a noble. Have no doubt, after your death sacrifices will be made to your spirit in a temple. But in life your future is rather dim. It's far from perfect."
"Do you mean, Teacher, that I won't come to a good end?"
"Oh, no. You'll die in your bed, and be buried in a proper grave. It's just that in your life there are many abrasions among the smooth, more sorrows than joys. When you're at the height of your success, you should pull back a bit. Don't strive too long for wealth and rank."
"Such things have never been my desire. I want only to be together always with my brothers. If I can have that, I'll be content though I live in poverty. My sole wish is peace and happiness for all."
Luo the Sage smiled. "When the final parting comes, who of us can hope to stay!" Song Jiang bowed and begged him for a prophecy. The old Taoist directed his acolyte to bring paper and pen. Then he wrote this eight-phrase prophecy and handed it to Song Jiang:

*Few are the loyal,*
*Rare are true friends.*
*Success in the Northland*
*Is but the moon's sickly glow.*
*At winter's start*
*The geese fly away.*
*When dynasties change*
*Old titles must go.*

Song Jiang didn't understand. He bowed to the Sage and said: "Please explain, Teacher. What's the meaning of this riddle?"
"It's decree from Heaven and cannot be revealed. When the time comes, you will know. The night is dark and the hour is late. Please return to the temple, General. We'll meet again in the morning. Some years ago I received something while asleep. I want to enter that dream again so that I can return it. Forgive me, General."
Concealing the eight-phrase prophecy on his person, Song Jiang took his leave of the sage and went back to the temple. The Taoist priests conducted him to their meditation hall, and there he spent the night.
Early the next morning, he again went to call on Luo the Sage. Gongsun was already waiting in the thatched shack. Luo had a vegetarian breakfast served. When it was over, he addressed Song Jiang.
"I have a request. My pupil Gongsun's mundane pursuits are only temporary. His destiny is to follow the Way. But if he remains here now to look after me, he'll be neglecting his brothers. I'll let him go with you, General, and achieve great merit. But when you return to the capital and report your victory to the throne, I hope you will allow him to come back here. Thus he will be able first to carry on the Way and then end his mother's constant longing. I have no doubt that as a gallant warrior, General, you behave in a righteous manner. I wonder whether you would be willing to accept my suggestion?"
"Teacher's word is my command! Whether brother Gongsun remains with me is up to him. I wouldn't dare interfere."
Luo the Sage and Gongsun Sheng in a pious gesture placed their palms together before their faces. "We thank you, General," they said, "for your golden promise."
The chieftains bid farewell to Luo. He saw them to the outside of the retreat. "Look after yourself, General. May we hear soon of your being entitled!"
Song Jiang bowed and departed. The horses had been fed and groomed, and were waiting for him and his chieftains in front of the monastery. The Taoist priests saw them off to the outskirts of the temple grounds, and there bid them farewell. The Visitors led their steeds to a level halfway down the slope. Then all mounted and rode back to Qizhou.
The journey was uneventful. They dismounted in front of the municipal government office in the center of town. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind was there to greet them.
"You went to see Luo the Sage," he said. "Why didn't you take me along?"
"Luo claims you tried to kill him. He's got it in for you."
"He gave me a hard enough time!"
Everybody laughed.
Song Jiang entered the government compound, and they all went to a hall in the rear. He showed the eight-phrase prophecy to Wu Yong, but no one could decipher it.
"Brother," said Gongsun, "this is a mystic decree from Heaven. Its meaning is not intended to be clear. Put it away, it will serve you all your life. Don't try to guess. Remember what my teacher said—when the time comes, you will know."
Song Jiang acceded to Gongsun's advice. He placed the decree inside the Three Heavenly Books for safekeeping. The army remained in Qizhou for the next month or more. There were no military developments.
In the latter half of the seventh lunar month a dispatch arrived from Commissioner Zhao in Tanzhou. He said the imperial court had sent a directive urging an offensive. Song Jiang talked it over with Wu Yong. They went first to Yutian and met with Lu Junyi and the others. They held practice maneuvers, got the weapons in order, and settled deployment details. Then they returned to Qizhou, offered sacrifices to their flags, and chose an suspicious day for setting forth.
At this moment an attendant announced: "An emissary from the Kingdom of Liao."
Song Jiang went out to receive him. It was Minister Ouyang. He was invited to the rear, and courtesies were exchanged.
"What brings you here, Minister?"
"I prefer to speak to you alone."
Song Jiang dismissed his orderlies.
"The King of Great Liao has exceeding admiration for your virtue, General. If you come over, he will surely be moved to give you rank and titles. But that is of relatively small import. What matters is that you join us early so that His Majesty may not be kept in suspense."
"No one else is here, I can speak freely. The last time you called, my chieftains all guessed your purpose. Half of them are not willing to submit. If I go to Youzhou Prefecture with you to visit the king. Lu Junyi, my Vice Vanguard General, is certain to pursue me with troops. And if we battle there outside the town, the old fraternal feeling among my brothers will come to nought! I must first take refuge in some city—it doesn't matter which—with some of my trusted cohorts. Then, if Lu learns what I've done, and comes after me, I can stay out of his way. If he refuses to take my advice, I can still fight him. If he doesn't know, and returns to the Eastern Capital, I'm going to have trouble anyway. But by then I will have seen the king. I'll have time enough to go forth at the head of a Great Liao army and engage the foe."
Very pleased, Ouyang said: "We're not far from Bazhou. There are only two approaches to it. One is called Yijin Pass. It's flanked by high steep cliffs, and through it runs a post road. The other is called Wenan Pass, and it also has ugly heights on either side. Beyond this is the county town. There two passes are the gateways to Bazhou from the flanks. You can, if you wish, take shelter in Bazhou. The city is ruled by Kangli Dingan, the king's brother-in-law. You can stay with him, General, and see what develops here."
"In that case, I'll send people to my home immediately to fetch my father, so that he won't be caught. You may dispatch men to me secretly, Minister, to lead the way. I'll start preparing tonight."
Ouyang was very happy. He bid Song Jiang farewell, left the government compound, mounted his horse and departed.
Song Jiang summoned Lu Junyi, Wu Yong and Zhu Wu to Qizhou, and they evolved a ruse for taking Bazhou. Lu then returned, and Wu Yong and Zhu Wu gave secret instructions to the other chieftains. With fourteen of these Song Jiang readied a force of ten thousand. Now, they had only to wait for Minister Ouyang to reappear.
Two days later Ouyang came again at a gallop. "The king of Great Liao is convinced of your good intentions," he announced to Song Jiang. "With you on our side what have we to fear of the Song army! His Majesty will also be supported by cavalry from Yuyang and infantry from Shanggu. Since you're worried about your father we're sending people to invite him to Bazhou. He and the king's brother-in-law can keep each other company."
"The chieftains who are willing to go with me are all prepared. When shall we start?"
"Tonight. Please issue your orders."
Song Jiang directed that to ensure silence every metal part of the horses' equipment be muffled and that the men march with wooden gags in their mouths. They would be leaving that very night. He entertained the emissary until dusk, then he ordered that the town's West Gate be opened.
Ouyang led the way with a few dozen horsemen. Song Jiang and a body of troops followed. When they had gone something over twenty *li* Song Jiang suddenly uttered a cry of dismay.
"*Aiya!* I arranged with Wu Yong, my military advisor, to go over to the Great Liao together. We left in such a hurry, I didn't wait for him. Let's slow down a bit, and send someone to get him."
Around midnight, the gate of Yijin Pass loomed before them. Minister Ouyang shouted a command.
"Open the gate!"
The officer in charge complied. The army marched through and continued on to Bazhou. Shortly before dawn Ouyang invited Song Jiang to enter the city. Kangli Dingan, the king's brother-in-law, was notified of their arrival. Brother of the queen, he was extremely influential. What's more, he was possessed of remarkable courage. Serving under him in the defense of Bazhou were two ministers. One was called Jinfu, the other Yeqing.
When he heard that Song Jiang had come to surrender, Dingan ordered that the army camp outside the city, and that only Vanguard General Song Jiang be allowed to enter. Ouyang led Song Jiang into the presence of the Royal Brother-in-Law. Impressed by his handsome appearance, Dingan came down from the dais to greet him. After courtesies were exchanged in the Rear Hall, Dingan invited him to be seated.
"The Royal Brother-in-Law is a tree of gold branches and jade leaves, while I am only a small officer who surrenders. How dare I accept such ceremony? How can I ever repay?"
"Your fame as conqueror of the Central Plain is known throughout the land. You have won the admiration of our Liao king. He will surely make important use of you."
"Basking in your reflected glory, Royal Brother-in-Law, I shall do my utmost to display my gratitude for His Majesty's vast beneficence." Very pleased, Dingan ordered that a feast of congratulations be laid for Song Jiang, and that cows and horses be slaughtered to feted his soldiers. A house was provided in which Song Jiang and Hua Rong and the others could stay. Only then were the troops allowed into the city. The chieftains paid their respects to the Royal Bother-in-Law and the Tartar generals, then joined Song Jiang in their special quarters.
Song Jiang sent for Ouyang and said: "Would you please notify the officials at the pass gates to let Wu Yong through when he arrives. He will live here with me. I forgot about him last night, we travelled so quickly. Wu Yong is indispensable to me in major military affairs. He's equally adept in civil matters, and he knows every aspect of strategy and tactics."
Ouyang sent word to both Yijin and Wenan: Should a scholarly looking gentleman named Wu Yong appear, let him in.
From atop the gate at Yijin Pass the official in charge saw a huge cloud of dust stretching from earth to sky. It heralded the approach of a large army. The official primed his cannons and prepared to engage the foe.
In front of the mountain a lone horseman appeared. He looked like a scholar. With him, on foot, were a monk and a pilgrim. They were followed by about a dozen villagers. All hurried towards the gate. The horseman drew rein before it and raised his voice in a shout.
"I am Song Jiang's military advisor Wu Yong. I'm trying to find him. The Song troops are hot on my heels! You must open the gate and save me!"
"That's the man, all right," thought the official. He ordered that the gate be opened to admit Wu Yong. The monk and the pilgrim promptly barged in with him. Soldiers at the entrance tried to stop them. The pilgrim was well inside by now.
"We are two men who have spurned the material world," cried the monk. "The Song troops are on our trail. Please save us!"
Soldiers attempted to push them out. The monk and pilgrim lost their tempers. "We're not monks at all," they yelled. "We're Lu Zhishen and Wu Song the Lords of Slaughter!"
The Tattooed Monk began swinging his iron staff, cracking every skull he encountered. The Pilgrim wielded his pair of swords, killing soldiers like slicing melons and cutting vegetables. The dozen "villagers" were actually all chieftains. They rushed the gate and took it over. Lu Junyi and his army then poured through the pass into Wenan County. The officials at the gate couldn't stem the tide. The entire county soon fell to the attackers.
Wu Yong galloped to the walls of Bazhou. The officials at the gate reported his arrival. Song Jiang and Minister Ouyang went to meet him and led him to the presence of the Royal Brother-in-Law.
"I was a bit late getting started," Wu Yong explained. "I hadn't expected Lu Junyi to hear about my leaving the town. He came tearing after me, and chased me as far as the pass. Now I've reached this city. I don't know what Lu did after I escaped him."
Just then a mounted comet scout entered and reported: "The Song army has captured Wenan County and is heading this way!"
The Royal Brother-in-Law mustered troops and prepared to go out and meet the foe. "You needn't do that," said Song Jiang. "Wait till Lu reaches our walls. I'll try to persuade him to come over. If he doesn't agree, there'll still be time to fight him."
Another mounted scout reported: "They're not far from the city now."
Dingan the Royal Brother-in-Law and Song Jiang mounted the walls for a look. They saw the Song troops deployed in neat ranks outside the city. Lu Junyi, in helmet and armor, grasping his lance astride a spirited steed, was positioning his forces. An imposing martial figure, he reined in beneath his gate of pennants.
"Let Song Jiang, the opposer of the imperial court, come out," he shouted.
Standing in the ramparts beneath the watch tower, Song Jiang called back: "Brother, the Song court makes no distinction between what should be punished and what should be rewarded. Slanderers and intriguers hold power. I have already gone over to the king of Great Liao. Come and help me. Let's both support the king. Don't forget the many days we were together in Liangshan Marsh."
"I had a happy family and a prosperous business in the Northern Capital when you inveigled me up the mountain! Three times the Song emperor offered us amnesties. He's been more than kind to you. How could you betray him? You swarthy sawed-off incompetent! Come out and fight! We'll see who's the better man!"
Angrily, Song Jiang commanded the guards to open the gate. He directed Lin Chong, Hua Rong, Zhu Tong and Mu Hong to go forth and capture Lu Junyi. Lu restrained his officers from assisting him, and fearlessly charged directly at all four. They battled for more than twenty rounds. Then the four turned their mounts and withdrew towards the city. Lu waved his lance and swept forward with a large contingent in pursuit. Lin Chong and Hua Rong took a stand at the drawbridge over the moat. Then, feigning defeat, they retreated into Bazhou, still battling. The large Song army massed outside set up a mighty cheer.
Inside the city, Song Jiang and his forces immediately turned on the Tartars and joined in the assault. The slaughter was widespread. Many surrendered. Dingan the Royal Brother-in-Law stared, open-mouthed. He was utterly helpless. Together with his ministers, he was caught and bound.
Song Jiang led in the troops which were still outside the city and had a reunion with his chieftains in the prefectural government center. He sent for Dingan the Royal Brother-in-Law and Ministers Ouyang, Jinfu and Yeqing, invited them to be seated, and received them courteously.
"You Liaos didn't understand," he said. "You figured us all wrong. My band of gallants were never bandits racketing around in the wooded hills. Every one is a star spirit. They wouldn't betray their emperor. All we wanted was to capture Bazhou, and we took this opportunity to do so. Now that we have succeeded, you, Royal Brother-in-Law, may return to your native land. Have no fear. We have no intention of killing you. Those under you may also go back, with their families. Bazhou now belongs to our empire. Don't contend for it again. Our soldiers will be everywhere. We won't permit any interference."
Song Jiang directed all Tartar officials in the city to leave, and return with Dingan to Youzhou. He also posted proclamations reassuring the local populace, and instructed Lu Junyi to go back with half the troops and hold Qizhou. He himself remained in control of Bazhou with the other half. He sent a messenger with the news to Commissioner Zhao. Overjoyed, Zhao relayed the information in a report to the emperor.
Dingan and his three ministers, plus many officials, travelled to the Tartar capital in Yanjing. They told the king of Song Jiang's false surrender. "And as a result, the barbarians have conquered Bazhou!"
The monarch was furious. He cursed Minister Ouyang. "It's all because of your slavish intrigues, shifting everything around! You've lost us the vital city of Bazhou! How are we going to hold Yanjing!" He shouted an order: "Take him out and execute him!"
Wuyan the commander-in-chief came forward. "Don't worry, Your Majesty. There's no need for our country's king to exert himself over that rogue Song Jiang. We have a plan. Forgive Minister Ouyang. If Song Jiang finds out you had him killed, he'll laugh at us."
The monarch pardoned Ouyang, then questioned Wuyan. How could he defeat the barbarians and recapture the cities?
"I shall go with twenty-eight star-blest generals and eleven Heaven-guided officers and deploy in battle formation. We'll flatten those barbarians in a single action!"
Before the words were out of Wuyan's mouth, Commanding General Ho stepped forward and added his guarantee. "Rest assured, Your Majesty. It seems to me the old saying is correct: You don't kill a chicken with an ox-slaughtering knife. Why use our regular army for a thing like this? I have a little plan that will send all the barbarians to a grave-less death!"

"We'll be delighted to hear it, my dear Minister," said the king, very pleased. Opening his mouth and wagging his tongue, Ho detailed his shrewd plan. And as a result, Lu Junyi was lured to a place where the horses had no fodder and the soldiers no grain. The entire Song army almost perished, a band of heroes nearly ended.

Here then is what Chancellor Ouyang said: "These troops of Song Jiang's are all tough characters from the Marshes of Mount Liang. The Song Emperor is young and is controlled by Grand Preceptor Cai and Marshals Tong, Gao and Yang, four corrupt ministers, jealous of virtue and resentful of ability, who prevent the rise of good men, advance none but their own kin, and give employment only to the rich. How much longer will this be tolerated? In my humble opinion, Your Majesty should offer high honours and rich rewards, cash, silk, costly furs and well-fed horses, and I will go to them as your envoy to persuade them to come over to the service of Liao. If you can get this group on your side, the central plain is yours for the taking. Of course it is not for me to decide, but I beg your Majesty to look favourably on my suggestion."

The King said: "You are absolutely right. You shall go yourself as ambassador, and take one hundred and eight good horses, a hundred and eight rolls of brocade together with my personal order appointing Song Jiang head of national security, field marshal and commander in chief of our national forces. Present him with quantities of gold and silver as a token of good faith. Get a list of names of all the leaders so that honours can be conferred on each and every one of them."

At this point Marshal Wuyan stepped forward from the ranks of officials and petitioned the King as follows: "This bunch of outlaws of Song Jiang's — what's the point of making peace with them? I've got twenty-eight war-hardened brigadiers in my command plus eleven generals, with fearless troops and commanders like these what have we got to fear from such savages? If they do not withdraw, I shall personally lead the army against them and destroy them."

The King said: "An audacious plan indeed! You are like a tiger with wings. But let us rather add this company from Mount Liang to your numbers. It simply means you will grow two more wings. So cease your objections!"

Naturally, after the King had rebuffed Marshal Wuyan's proposal no one else had anything to say. This Wuyan was the Tartars' foremost general, he had a complete knowledge of all the eighteen branches of military art and was thoroughly experienced in strategy and tactics. He was around thirty-five years old, a tall man of impressive stature and dignified bearing. With his pale complexion and reddish beard, brown hair and green eyes, he was altogether a fine figure of a man. In battle he wielded a massive lance of solid steel. In hand to hand fighting he would reach for the sword at his belt and wield it with a mighty clanging sound. Truly one in a thousand!

We will say no more of Wuyan's objections, but tell of how Chancellor Ouyang with the Liao king's commission and a good stock of gifts, horses among them, mounted and departed for Qizhou. Song Jiang was resting his troops there when he heard that the Liao king was sending an ambassador. Not knowing if this boded well or ill for him, he got out the Mystic Lady's books and made a random selection. He came up with an extremely lucky omen. He told the Professor: "I have picked a first-rate sign. It sounds as if the Tartars want to offer us a treaty. How should we respond?"

The Professor said: "If they do, we will counter any schemes they may have with one of our own. First you must accept. Hand over the defence of Qizhou to the Unicorn and we will take Bazhou from them. Once we get Bazhou their defeat is assured. We've already got Tanzhou, and if you can win their confidence, it'll all be perfectly simple. Just make a few difficulties at the start before you accept, to prevent suspicion."

When Chancellor Ouyang reached the city Song Jiang ordered the gates to be opened to let him in. The ambassador dismounted in front of the government offices and entered the court room. The ceremonies completed, they seated him in the place of honour and Song Jiang asked: "What is the reason for this visit?"

"There is a little matter I wish to discuss with you," the ambassador replied. "But it is for your ears only. Please ask your aides to leave the room."

Song Jiang told everyone else to withdraw and led the ambassador to an inner room to talk. Chancellor Ouyang bent close to Song Jiang's ear and said: "We of Liao know all about you, General, even if so many rivers and mountains separate us that we did not hitherto have the opportunity of meeting you face to face. We have heard of your exploits at the stronghold on Mount Liang, how you do heaven's will, how you are all a united band of brothers. At present wicked ministers of the Song court are preventing the rise of virtue and only those with sufficient wealth to bribe their way in can obtain high office. Those who are too poor to hand out bribes, even if they do the state great service, remain plunged in obscurity and go unrewarded. This gang of evil counsellors abuses power through flattery and luck; they are jealous of virtue, envious of ability; rewards and punishments are not fairly allotted, disorder rules. In the provinces south of the river bandits abound and gangs of wild outlaws, while honest men suffer their depredations and cannot make a living. Now with a hundred thousand men you have pledged allegiance to the throne again and been appointed commander-in-chief of this expedition, but you have not received any real honours. And though your comrades toil on behalf of the country they are still all commoners. Following your orders you lead your troops into distant regions, suffer much hardship and gain glory for the nation, yet the court offers nothing in return. This is all a conspiracy. Any booty you may seize along the way must be presented to that gang of four corrupt ministers, otherwise you will have no hope of obtaining honours and the Emperor's favour. And if you object to this state of affairs, you will be treated as a criminal when, after doing honest service and achieving glory, you return to the court. Now I have a message for you from the King of Liao. He has sent me to present you with an order appointing you Field Marshal and Commander-in-Chief of the Liao national forces. He offers you quantities of gold and silver, one hundred and eight rolls of silk, one hundred and eight horses. He wishes to have a list of the names of the one hundred and eight leaders in order that titles may be conferred. I do not come to deceive you, General. It is because our king has long known of your virtue that he has sent me here, to ask you and all your comrades to join us."

Song Jiang replied: "All that you say is correct. It is true that I am of humble origins and only served as a minor official in Yuncheng, that I had to flee after committing a crime and made my residence temporarily in the Marshes of Mount Liang to escape from trouble. The Emperor three times issued an edict offering pardon for all crimes, although my government post was minor and I had not really done anything to deserve such benevolence. Now your king does me great honour and offers rich rewards. All the same, I cannot accept and I must ask you to leave now. I want my troops to rest, because the weather is very hot at the moment. I shall hold these two towns temporarily for the King. In the autumn, when the weather is cooler, we can consider the matter again."

Chancellor Ouyang said: "Do not reject the proposal, general. Keep the King's gifts for the time being. I will leave now, but in due course I will come and talk to you again. There is no need to rush things."

"You must know, Ambassador, that among the one hundred and eight of us there is a great deal of gossip. If word of this should get out, there would be big trouble."

"But they are all under your command, General. How would anyone dare disobey?"

"You don't understand the situation. There are many strong and unruly characters among us. Wait until I have put them in the right mood and got general agreement and when the time is right we can talk again. As you say, it's best not to hurry."

Well, Song Jiang held a banquet for the ambassador and then saw him off as he rode out of the city. Then he consulted the Professor. "This great long speech from the Tartar ambassador, what was all that about?" he asked.

In reply the Professor just sighed profoundly and with his head lowered muttered something to himself.

"Why the sigh, Professor?" Song Jiang asked.

"I've been thinking," he said. "But in view of your insistence on honour, I'd better keep my mouth shut. Really everything the ambassador said was perfectly reasonable. Our emperor is illustrious, but the four corrupt ministers control him, he is in their hands. Even if we do achieve something later on, we won't get rewarded for it. After the three amnesties your only recompense has been the empty title of commander-in-chief of this expedition. If you want my opinion, our best policy would be to abandon Song and follow Liao. We wouldn't lose anything by it. The only problem is your obsession with honour."

"You're wrong," said Song Jiang. "If we go over to Liao, it still won't profit us. Even if the Song dynasty fails me, it is still not honourable for me to let the dynasty down. Years later even if I have not been rewarded, I still leave an honourable name. But if I abandon my principles, heaven will not forgive me. If I am allowed to serve my country with honour, death is a small price to pay!"

"Then if you're determined to stick with your honour, there is only one course for us to follow. We must take Bazhou from them. At present it's the hot season, however, and we must rest our troops for a while."

The Professor and Song Jiang made their plans, but they did not divulge them to the others. They all rested in Qizhou, waiting out the hot weather.

One day as he was chatting with Taoist Gongsun at their headquarters. Song Jiang said: "I have heard a great deal about your teacher, the Blessed Sage. They say he has attained ripe age and wisdom. Previously, because we were attacking Gaotang and wanted to overcome Gao Lian's sorcery, I secretly sent Magic Messenger and Iron Ox to find you and you said: "My teacher, the Blessed Sage, has mystic powers." May I now trouble you to take me, when you have the time, to the monastery, so that I may burn incense and worship and shake the world's dust off my feet. What do you say?"

Taoist Gongsun said: "I have indeed been wanting to return home to see my mother and to visit my teacher. But I saw that you were worried about settling the army and didn't like to speak of it before. In fact I was going to ask you now, when you surprised me by saying you want to go there. We'll set off together first thing tomorrow so we can pay our respects to my teacher and I can visit my mother."

Next day Song Jiang left the Professor temporarily in command of the army. He provided himself with incense and fresh fruit, gold, pearls and patterned silk, and took Colonel Hua, Magic Messenger, the Little Duke, the Halberdier, the Dandy and Magic Flautist with him. The eight leaders rode at the head of five thousand foot soldiers and took the road for Jiugong on Second Immortal Mountain.

After leaving Qizhou, they soon found themselves deep in the mountains. It was a country full of cool pine forests and the sound of wind in the branches. The summer's heat was absent here and the mountain scenery was magnificent. "This place is called Fish Nose Mountain," said Taoist Gongsun:

*Mountain springs are everywhere, all around is the sound of rushing brooks. Dawn spreads a rosy glow over everything; the music of cascading waters fills the air. In the river gorges one can lose oneself in the contemplation of nature's beauty; blue peaks and crags parade into the distance. Before the cave scarlet flowers and green creepers trail among the clouds; in front of jade cliffs stand cinnamon trees and vines writhing upward like smoke. The green apes bring offerings of fruit and nuts; the tailed deer come with flowers in their mouths. A thousand peaks soar upward in rivalry, at evening the white cranes harken to the teaching of the immortals; ten thousand torrents vie with each other in flowing, hidden birds hold a dialogue with the soft breeze. So remote is this spot that the world's dust never settles here, in these fastnesses you'll see no fine carriages.*

When they arrived at the Hall of the Purple Void everyone dismounted and arranged their dress. A soldier carried the incense and other gifts inside, leaving them at the portals of the Crane Pavilion. The Taoists from the monastery, when they saw Gongsun Sheng, rushed forward to greet him, and were introduced to Song Jiang to whom they also paid their respects. "Where is my teacher?" Taoist Gongsun asked them.

They replied: "These days he is meditating at the hermitage on the mountain. He rarely comes in here at all."

Taoist Gongsun and Song Jiang went to look for the hermitage. When they passed beyond the monastery they found a precipitous path which led them by a winding route over the mountainside. They had not gone half a mile before they came to a hedge of thorns, set in a grove of dark green pines and paler green cypresses and enclosing a jade-green lawn bejewelled with flowers. In the centre were three snow grottoes and here they found the Sage sitting very upright studying the Scriptures. When his acolyte saw there were visitors he opened the gate to receive them. Taoist Gongsun went straight to the thatched canopy over the Crane throne and made obeisance to his teacher. Then he said: "My old friend, Song Jiang of Shandong, has been pardoned by the Emperor and has been made Commander-in-Chief of the expeditionary army in a campaign aimed at breaking the might of Liao. He has come to Qizhou and wants very much to pay his respects to you. Here he is."

The Sage invited them inside.

When Song Jiang entered the Sage came down from his throne to welcome him. Three times Song Jiang begged the Sage to be seated to receive his homage, but the Sage said: "Great General, I am but a simple Taoist, a mere country bumpkin, who am I to receive homage from you?"

Song Jiang with equal determination sought to belittle himself and to pay homage. Finally the Sage was persuaded to sit while Song Jiang first took out the fresh incense and lit it in the burner. Then he prostrated himself eight times and ordered Colonel Hua and the others to do likewise. The Sage asked them all to be seated and told the acolyte to boil water for tea and serve them with fruit and nuts. He said: "General, you are a manifestation of the chief star of the Dipper, surrounded by other bright planets, come together to do heaven's will. Now you have renewed your allegiance to the Emperor your fame will shine ten thousand years undimmed!"

Song Jiang said: "I started off as just a minor clerk in Yuncheng. I fled to the mountain to escape punishment for a crime. Thanks to the help of many brave men we have found fame. We all speak with one voice and share the same aims. We are as close as bone and flesh, as indispensable to each other as arms and legs. Heaven sent us a sign to tell us that we are heavenly stars and earth stars and our coming together is destined. I received the Emperor's commission to lead a great army against Liao. When my journey brought me close to your retreat, I felt it must be ordained by fate that I was to come here and pay my respects to you. I sincerely hope, Teacher, that you will enlighten me as to the road ahead. This is what I want above all else."

The Sage said: "I am afraid, General, I have lived apart from the world for many years now, my heart is like a dead ember. I can be of little use to you. Please forgive me."

When Song Jiang persisted in his request, the Sage said: "Please sit with me a little, General. We will prepare some vegetarian food. It is getting late. Perhaps you should stay here, rough mountain refuge though it is, just for tonight. Tomorrow morning you can ride back. What do you think?"

Song Jiang said: "I still have not had the benefit of your advice, to spread light on my confusion, how could I leave yet?" He ordered his followers to bring in the gold and valuables and the patterned silk and present them to the Sage. The latter said: "I live here in the wilds, leading a frugal existence, even if I did accept these gifts I could have no use for them. I need only a simple cloth to cover my nakedness, I don't wear rich brocades and silks. Whereas you, General, are in charge of many thousands, you have to pay your troops, you must have many expenses. I beg you therefore to take these gifts back."

Song Jiang kowtowed again and pleaded with him to accept, but the Sage was adamant. The vegetarian food was now brought. They ate and drank tea afterwards. The Sage sent Taoist Gongsun off home to see his mother. He was to return next morning and go back to the city with them. Song Jiang stayed on and sat talking with the Sage. He opened his heart to the old man and requested his advice. The Sage said: "General, a loyal heart, in harmony with heaven and earth, will always find favour with the gods. He who serves his feudal lord in life, and after death provides food for the monks, will feel no anxiety. The only problem you have is that the line of your fate is flawed, not everything will go smoothly."

Song Jiang said: "Is it true then, Master, that I am not going to die peacefully?"

"Not at all," said the Sage. "At your death you will lie in state. After death you will return to the grave. A fate that is flawed means that in life there will always be troubles: worries will be many, pleasures few. When your reputation is at its greatest, you should draw back. Do not become too attached to fame and riches."

Song Jiang again said: "Teacher, I have no desire for riches. But I would like my comrades not to be separated, even if they have led humble lives. That is what would give me most pleasure. I want them to be happy."

The Sage smiled and said: "When you reach the great frontier how'd anything be held against you lot?" Song Jiang prostrated himself again and asked the Sage for a mantra. The Sage told his acolyte to bring paper and brush and wrote out an eight verse mantra for Song Jiang's benefit. Here it is:

True hearts are few,
*Honesty rare;*
*Glory is transient*
*As the moon's wan light.*
*Winter sets in,*
*The wild geese take wing;*
*One state succeeds another,*
Old honours surcease.

When Song Jiang had read it through he did not understand it and begged for an explanation: "Teacher, please give me your analysis for my guidance."

The Sage said: "This is heaven's secret decree. It cannot be disclosed. Later, when the time comes, you will understand it by yourself. But now it is late, the night is advanced. Go back to sleep in the monastery, and tomorrow we will talk again. Some time ago I had a dream. I wish to return to it. Please excuse me."

Song Jiang put away the mantra, bade the Sage goodnight, and went back to the monastery to sleep. The Taoists showed him to his room in the abbot's quarters.

When he went next morning at dawn to see the Sage, he found Taoist Gongsun was already there. The Sage had vegetarian food brought for them. When they had eaten he said to Song Jiang: "General, there is just one thing I would like to ask you if I may. This disciple of mine, Gongsun Sheng, originally left the world to follow me here on the mountain. He withdrew from the cares of the world, as is only right and proper. But because he happens to be one of the heavenly stars he has been obliged to absent himself. Our worldly state is brief and the way is long. If he were to stay here now to serve me, he would forfeit your love. But if he goes with you now to perform deeds of glory, if you are victorious and return to the capital and then decide to part, I trust you will send him back to me. Firstly it will mean I have a disciple again, and secondly his old mother will not be left waiting in vain. You are an honourable man so I know you will behave honourably. Is all this acceptable to you?"

Song Jiang said: "How could I possibly neglect your wishes? Besides, Taoist Gongsun and I are brothers. Go or stay, of course it is up to him, how could I stand in the way?"

The Sage and Gongsun bowed their heads and said: "Thank you for this promise."

They all now took their leave of the Sage, who accompanied them some way down the path before they parted. His last words were: "May good fortune go with you, General, and may you receive great honours." Song Jiang prostrated himself. The monks escorted them till they were outside the temple bounds. There they all mounted and rode back to Qizhou.

The journey was uneventful. When they reached the city they dismounted in front of the government offices. Iron Ox met them and said: "You've been back to see the Sage. Why didn't you take me along?"

Magic Messenger said: "The Sage said you tried to kill him! You are definitely not in his good books!"

"And look what he did to me!" said Iron Ox. Everyone laughed, remembering Iron Ox's embarrassment.

They all followed Song Jiang inside. He took out the Sage's mantra and handed it to the Professor to study. The Professor could not explain it, nor could the others who all examined it in turn. Taoist Gongsun said: "Brother, this is to do with heaven's secret plan. It cannot be elucidated. It has been given to you to keep with you all your life, but there's no point in asking yourself what it means. The meaning of the Teacher's mantra will be made manifest in due course."

Song Jiang harkened to these words and hid the mantra inside the Mystic Books.

The army now remained encamped at Qizhou for over a month and there was no further military action. Half way through the seventh month a letter arrived from Commissioner Zhao in Tanzhou informing them of an order from the court demanding action. Song Jiang conferred with the Professor. They decided to join forces with the Unicorn at Green Fields, train the army, prepare their arms, and after dividing the responsibilities return to Qizhou to sacrifice to the flag and select a day to start their campaign. But just then an aide announced: "There is an ambassador from Liao."

Going out to receive him, Song Jiang found that it was Chancellor Ouyang again and invited him inside. After the exchange of courtesies he asked: "What is the purpose of this visit?"

The other said: "Would you ask your aides to leave the room?"

When Song Jiang had complied, the other said: "The great king of Liao is fully conversant with the General's virtues. If you would consent to surrender and give us the benefit of your assistance, you would certainly receive great honours. My only hope is that you can decide soon, so that my sovereign may not be kept in suspense."

Song Jiang answered: "There are no outsiders present. I can therefore speak openly to you. You need to know that last time you came the whole company learnt of your intention. Among them all exactly half rejected the idea of surrendering. If at that time I had gone with you to Youzhou to see your king, the Unicorn, my second-in-command, would have pursued me. If we had fought there, in front of the city, it would have meant the end of our former loyalty to each other. What I must do now is go with some of the people I can trust totally and find a city somewhere, no matter where, to hide out in. If he comes after me, and if he discovers my whereabouts, we can turn him away. If he won't listen, then we'll have to fight him. If he can't discover our whereabouts and goes back to the Eastern Capital to report, it'll be a different scenario. Then we must see your king and raise a Liao army to march against him: it will be time to fight."

All that Song Jiang said was highly satisfactory to Chancellor Ouyang and he said: "Our city of Bazhou is reached by only two passes. Once is called Easy Passage: it has high rugged mountains on either side and only the one road running between. The other is in Wenan, which lies in the midst of a barren plateau, where the mountains are very wild and a narrow pass leads down into the city. These two places are like the two doors of Bazhou. If things are as you say, you will be quite safe hiding out in Bazhou. The King's brother-in-law, Kangli Dingan, is commander of the garrison. You can stay there with him and wait to see how things go here."

Song Jiang said: "In that case I will send someone home at once to fetch my father and get everything settled. You can get someone to lead me there secretly. If we are agreed on this, I will make preparations tonight."

Delighted with the way things were going, Chancellor Ouyang said farewell, mounted and rode away. The same day Song Jiang sent someone to ask the Unicorn, the Professor and the Strategist to come to Qizhou to work out a plan for the capture of Bazhou. They came, saw Song Jiang and reached a decision. The Unicorn left with his instructions, while the Professor and the Strategist gave out secret orders to their own commanders: do this, do that! Song Jiang chose fifteen leaders and ten thousand men to accompany him. Having picked the troops, he had only to wait for Chancellor Ouyang. After a couple of days the

Chancellor galloped in and announced: "My king knows you are truly a man of noble spirit, if he has you on his side, what has he to fear from the Song forces? This nation of ours has fine troops and fine commanders, stalwart men and sturdy mounts, that can all play their part. If you want to bring your father out and are worried about his safety, let him stay with the King's brother-in-law in Bazhou, I will send someone to fetch him."
Song Jiang replied: "The leaders who have agreed to go with me are all ready. When can we start?"
"You can start tonight. Please give the order," said the Chancellor.
So Song Jiang made his dispositions, ordering the bells to be removed from the horses bridles and the soldiers to march gagged, and to be ready to leave the same evening. The ambassador was entertained and when dusk fell the western gate of the city was opened to let them out. Chancellor Ouyang surrounded by a dozen horsemen led the way, Song Jiang following with his own detachment of troops. When they had travelled six or seven miles, Song Jiang suddenly let out an oath: "Oh my God!" he said. "I agreed with the Professor that we would surrender to Liao together and in all this rush I forgot him. Tell the troops to advance slowly and send someone at once to fetch him."
But it was already the third watch and the entrance to the pass at Easy Passage was before them. Chancellor Ouyang shouted for the guards to let them through. The guards on the barrier raised it and the whole party passed through and headed down into Bazhou. The Chancellor welcomed Song Jiang to the city as dawn was beginning to show, and went to inform the royal brother-in-law. This commander was actually the queen's elder brother. He was a very powerful person and also very brave. Under him he had two ministers residing at Bazhou. One was called Jinfu and the other Yeqing. On hearing that Song Jiang was coming to surrender to them, he ordered the army to bivouac outside the walls and invited the commander, Song Jiang, into the city. Chancellor Ouyang and Song Jiang entered together and went to see him. When he saw that Song Jiang was someone quite exceptional, he stepped down to greet him and invited him into the inner hall. After the usual courtesies he told Song Jiang to take a seat. Song Jiang said: "Your Highness is of royal blood, and I am a surrendering enemy, how can I accept such an honour from you? How would I ever repay it?"
The other replied: "I know all about you. Your name is a household word in the Central Plain, and your fame has reached our kingdom too. Our king is hugely impressed with you."
Song Jiang said: "I have received so much honour from you, I am wholeheartedly grateful for your kindness."
The Prince was in the best of moods and ordered a banquet to be served. Oxen and horses were slaughtered to feast the army. A residence was chosen to house Song Jiang, Colonel Hua and the rest and quarters provided for the whole army within the city. Colonel Hua and the other leaders were presented to the royal brother-in-law. When all had rested, Song Jiang said to the Chancellor: "Would you be so good as to send word to the guards on the pass to make sure that when the Professor arrives he is allowed through? He and I will stay together. We were in such a hurry yesterday that we didn't wait for him. Our military planning cannot succeed without him. He is thoroughly versed in tactics and strategy; he has top qualifications and immense practical knowledge."
Chancellor Ouyang gave the necessary orders, and a messenger was sent to instruct the guards of both passes to watch out for "a refined-looking fellow, name of Wu Yong" and allow him through.
The authorities at Wenan got the order first and sent someone on to Easy Passage to put them in the picture. Later the guards, looking out from the pass, observed the dust rising like a cloud to blot out the sun, drawing a veil across the heavens. A crowd of horsemen drew near, and the man in the lead answered the description, "a refined-looking fellow". Behind him were a monk and a pilgrim, and following close behind them a dozen or so peasants — all racing towards the pass. When the foremost of the group reached the pass, he shouted: "I am Song Jiang's second-in-command and military adviser, Professor Wu Yong. I am looking for my commander and the Song army is hard on my heels. Open up and save me."
"This is the one we're expecting!" the guards said to themselves. They opened the gates and let the Professor in. But then the monk and the pilgrim came on too. The guards barred the way but the pilgrim had already got his foot in the gateway. "We are holy men," the monk said, "and the troops are after us. You've got to save us!" When the guards still tried to deny them entry, the monk became angry and the pilgrim was incensed. "We are not what we seem!" they shouted. "We are the deadly Monk Lu Zhishen and Pilgrim Wu Song, that's who we are!" The Flowery Monk swung his steel staff and began to strike out, Pilgrim drew his two swords and began to despatch people, easy as splitting melons or chopping vegetables. By now the peasants had rushed through the gates and seized the pass — these "peasants" were actually Snake, Scorpion, Executioner, Green-Eyes, Panther, the Guv, the Flea, Yellow Dog, the Daytime Rat and Perilous. The Unicorn and his troops now reached the pass and were able to charge straight into Wenan. The guards could not stop them and Wenan was quickly taken.
The Professor had galloped straight on down to Bazhou. When the guard on the door announced his arrival, Song Jiang and Chancellor Ouyang received him and took him to see the royal brother-in-law. The Professor said: "I am afraid I am a little late. As I was setting out the Unicorn somehow got wind of it and pursued me all the way to the pass. I came straight on to the city and didn't wait to hear what happened there."
At this very moment a despatch rider galloped in to report: "The Song troops have taken Wenan and are attacking Bazhou!"
The royal brother-in-law immediately gave orders for troops to move out and face them. But Song Jiang said: "Don't send the troops out. Wait till they reach the city walls. I will parley with him and try to calm him. We only need to fight him if he rejects diplomacy." As he spoke scouts arrived and reported: "The Song army is very close!"
The royal brother-in-law and Song Jiang went up onto the battlements to look. The Song army was drawn up in orderly ranks below the walls. The Unicorn in full armour riding a mettlesome charger and equipped with a spear rode out from the gate of pennants and shouted: "Send out the traitor Song Jiang!" Song Jiang was standing on the parapet beside the gate tower. He pointed at the Unicorn and said: "Brother, our recompense from the Emperor is not assured, corrupt officials stand in the way of our advancement, slander and envy hold sway. That is why I have given my allegiance to the King of Liao. If you agree, join me in the service of Liao and preserve the unity which we maintained for so long on Mount Liang."
The Unicorn reacted furiously: "You lured me from my peaceful life in the Northern Capital to join you on the mountain. The Emperor offered you an amnesty three times. What ill-treatment can you possibly complain of ? How can you betray your country? You are a man of short views and no ability. Come out and let us two decide this matter, win or lose, in a fight to the death."
Song Jiang indignantly ordered the gates to be opened and sent out Leopard's Head, Colonel Hua, the Strategist and Mu the Unstoppable ordering them to "capture the insolent devil". The Unicorn was unimpressed by these four. Ordering his troops to stand firm as he managed his fiery charger and levelled his lance, he charged them all. After twenty bouts, Leopard's Head and his companions turned their horses' heads and fled towards the city, with the Unicorn and his men in hot pursuit. When they reached the drawbridge Leopard's Head and Colonel Hua turned to face their attackers and pretended they were feigning defeat to lure them into the city. The Unicorn's army streamed tumultuously in behind them. Song Jiang and the other leaders now revealed their true colours and welcomed the Unicorn in. There was great slaughter on all sides. The defenders were helpless and terrified. The Prince could only stand and stare in amazement, totally nonplussed. Along with all his counsellors he was taken prisoner.
Song Jiang led his troops into the city and all the leaders went to see him in the government offices. He first ordered the royal brother-in-law and the three counsellors to be seated so he could pay his respects to them. He said to them: "You Tartars don't understand us, you got it all wrong. We are not just a bunch of common outlaws! Each of us has his destined place and rank. How could we betray our country to serve you? We wanted to capture Bazhou, that's all. We took this chance of doing so. Now that we have succeeded, we ask the Prince and the rest of you to return to your own country. You need have no fear, we mean you no harm. But everyone under your command, including all their families, must leave. Bazhou belongs and has always belonged to the Emperor and you must never attack it again. From now on it will be heavily guarded. No disturbance will be tolerated."
Song Jiang's orders were that every single Tartar official in the city administration was to vacate his post and return with Governor Dingan the royal brother-in-law to Youzhou. Song Jiang also reassured the people. He sent his second-in-command the Unicorn with half the army back to fortify Qizhou while he himself remained with the other half of the army in Bazhou. He sent messengers to inform Commissioner Zhao that Bazhou was taken, to the great satisfaction of the latter who immediately sent word to the Emperor.
So Prince Dingan returned to Yanjing, with the three counsellors and all their people. He went to see the King and told him all about Song Jiang's fake surrender which had enabled the savages to take control of Bazhou. The King was furious. He turned on Chancellor Ouyang: "It's all your fault, you incompetent fool!" he yelled. "You kept egging us on to fight, and now you've lost us Bazhou, our most important city, and put Yanjing in grave peril. Take him away and cut off his head!" Thereupon Marshal Wuyan stepped forward and said: "Your Majesty, have no fear, I reckon there's no need for you to waste your time on these curs. To my way of thinking, there is no point in executing Chancellor Ouyang. If Song Jiang heard we had done so he would only laugh at us." The King took note and pardoned the Chancellor. Marshal Wuyan went on: "I with my twenty-eight top commanders and eleven brilliant generals will muster an army and annihilate that rabble."
Hardly had he finished when Marshal Ho also came forward and said, "Don't worry, Your Majesty! I've an idea. There's a proverb that says 'You don't need an axe to kill a chicken'! There's no need for the commander-in-chief to go himself. I've a plan that'll drive these scums to an unknown grave."
"My dear fellow," said the King delightedly. "Tell me quickly what you've in mind." So Marshal Ho began to speak and divulged his plan. And it was to have important effects: the Unicorn was to find himself in a place where there was no fodder for horses and no food for man, a situation to make the valiant faint and heroes knit their brows.

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### Song Jiang Battles on Lone Deer Mountain & is victorious; The Unicorn Lu the Magnate gets into trouble & is Trapped in Black Rock Gorge Stony Valley

Ho Zhongbao, the commanding general, ranked second after Wuyan, the commander-in-chief of the Great Liao armed forces. Very tall, powerfully built, a shrewd strategist, he wielded a three-pointed two-edged sword. He was responsible for the defense of Youzhou Prefecture, and was in charge of every branch of military service.
"We have a place in Youzhou called Stony Valley," he told the king. "Hemmed in on all sides by high mountains, a single road goes in and ends there. I intend to use a dozen or so cavalrymen to lure the barbarians into that valley and then surround it with troops. The enemy won't be able to go forward, and won't be able to retreat. We'll starve them to death."
"How will you get them to come?" asked Wuyan.
"They've taken three of our big prefectures, and are feeling very proud of themselves," said Ho. "They're sure to want Youzhou, next. If I dispatch troops to provoke them, they'll certainly give chase. We'll lead them into the valley, and they'll be stuck!"
"Your plan is incomplete. Once you get them there, you must send a large force in to slaughter them. Now let's see how you go about it."
General Ho took his leave of the king, donned his armor, buckled on his sword and mounted his horse. He returned to Youzhou at the head of a column of infantry. There he mobilized his soldiers and divided them into three units. One was to defend Youzhou, the other two were ordered to attack Bazhou and Qizhou. These were placed under the commands of Ho Chai and Ho Yun, respectively, younger brothers of the commanding general. They were not to win. In fact they were to pretend defeat and draw the Song army across the line into Youzhou, where the next move of the plan would go into effect.
Meanwhile, in Bazhou, Song Jiang received the report: "The Liaos are assaulting Qizhou. We're in danger of losing it. We hope you'll send relief forces at once."
"Since they're attacking, we've no reason to be resting," said Song Jiang. "We'll use this opportunity to conquer Youzhou."
Leaving behind a small unit to defend the city, he and the rest of the army broke camp and headed for Qizhou. There, they would join forces with Lu Junyi the Magnate's contingent, and set a date for their offensive.
The Tartars under Ho Chai continued their advance on Bazhou. They ran into Song Jiang's troops after they had left the city and were halfway to Qizhou. They clashed only two or three times, and Ho Chai led his soldiers away in a retreat. But Song Jiang did not pursue. He was informed that Ho Yun had assailed Qizhou, and had also withdrawn when Huyan Zhuo came out to give battle.
Song Jiang conferred in his tent with Lu Junyi on how to take Youzhou. Wu Yong and Zhu Wu had some words of caution.
"The enemy wouldn't have split their soldier into two columns if they weren't trying to lure us in. We mustn't fall for their tricks."
"You're wrong," Lu protested. "We've beaten them time after time. Why should they want to pull us towards them? If we don't conquer Youzhou now, when we can, it may not be so easy later. Move immediately, I say. What are we wailing for!"
Song Jiang agreed. "The rogues are exhausted. What kind of plan could they have? This is our chance."
He ignored Wu Yong and Zhu Wu's advice and marched on Youzhou, dividing his forces into three columns, large and small. Soon, the advance unit sent back word: "Liao soldiers ahead, blocking the road." He rode forward to look.
He saw coming around the side of the mountain a swarm of black flags. Song Jiang ordered his advance unit to spread out. The Tartar army rolled towards them, covering the earth. Bearing their embroidered black flags, they separated into four columns and deployed in front of the mountain slope. As Song Jiang, Lu and the chieftains watched, from the hundreds of thousands of Tartars massed like black clouds, a high general emerged. Holding athwart his three-pointed, two-edged sword, he halted his steed at the opposite end of the field of combat. On his banner were inscribed the legend: *Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Great Liao Army Ho Zhongbao.*
"He must be an excellent warrior," said Song Jiang. "Who dares to vie against him?"
Before the words were out of his mount, Guan Sheng the Big Halberd, waving his crescent-shaped blade, galloped forward on his roan pinto. No talk was exchanged between the two. They met in instant battle.
Truly, they were two dragons contending for a treasure, a pair of tigers fighting over prey. To and fro they twisted like the turning body of a phoenix, up and down they flailed like the beating wings of a fabulous *luan*. Sword clanged against sword, flashing yards of icy fire. Steed pounded against steed, shaking half the sky with their murderous power.
More than thirty rounds the warriors battled. But Commanding General Ho, instead of intensifying his efforts, turned and rode towards his own lines. Guan Sheng galloped in pursuit. Ho led his troops back around the mountain. Song Jiang and his army chased them for forty or fifty *li*.
Suddenly, on all sides war drums began to thunder. Song Jiang hastily shouted for his army to withdraw. But a contingent of Tartars, pouring down the slope on the left, blocked his retreat. As he agitatedly divided his forces to meet the threat, another Tartar contingent charged from the right. Ahead, General Ho wheeled his soldiers around to attack from the front. Song Jiang's men were completely enclosed in a giant pincers. The Tartars had cut the Song dynasty army in two.

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The rear half, fighting hard under Lu Junyi, could no longer see the forward elements. They desperately sought an opening through which to pull back. Another Liao unit assailed them from the side. The Tartar soldiers, yelling savagely, were now attacking all around, tightly hemming them in. Lu sent his chieftains in charges to left and right, front and rear, urgently trying to break through. They fought with magnificent valor.
Dark clouds suddenly massed, blotting out the sky and turning day into night. The men lost all sense of direction. Lu was panic-stricken. Leading his-troops, he struggled to smash free. The Tartars, hearing ahead the tinkling of bridle bells, galloped to meet the foe.
Lu and his men reached a gap in the mountains. He could hear the voices of the Tartars and the neighing of their horses inside the gap, and he urged his army forward. A wild gale arose, whipping up sand and gravel, blinding both sides. Lu battled in this maelstrom until nearly midnight. Only then did the wind fade and the clouds part, revealing a sky full of stars.
The Song soldiers took their bearings. All around were high trackless mountains and steep pathless cliffs. Only twelve chieftains and five thousand troops could be accounted for. Hemmed in by cliffs all around, they sought in vain for a way out.
"The men are weary after fighting all day," Lu thought. "We'll rest here tonight and continue searching tomorrow."
When the dark clouds gathered and the wind blew, Song Jiang's forces were also blinded by sand and gravel and unable to see one another. Gongsun Sheng, on horseback, recognized it at once as a magic spell. He waved his precious sword and muttered an incantation, then shouted: "Speed!" He pointed with his precious sword, and the clouds dispersed and the gale subsided. The Liao army pulled back without giving battle, and the broad evil miasma gradually vanished.
Having broken clear of the encirclement, Song Jiang and his troops withdrew to a high mountain. There they linked up with more of their forces and placed their grain carts in a wide circle to form a rough stockade. A count of the chieftains revealed that thirteen of them, including Lu Junyi the Magnate, were missing, as well as five thousand troops.
At daybreak, Song Jiang sent Huyan Zhuo, Lin Chong, Qin Ming and Guan Sheng with soldiers to look for them. But after searching all day, they could find no trace. He then took out the Three Heavenly Books of the Mystic Maid of Ninth Heaven and lit incense and cast divining sticks. "The general omen isn't bad," he said, "but they seem to have fallen into an evil area and can't get free."
Worried, he sent Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, disguised as hunters, to scour the mountains. He also ordered Shi Qian, Shi Yong, Duan Jingzhu and Cao Zheng to travel around and see if they could pick up any news. The Xie brothers, wearing tiger skin robes and carrying steel fork-spears, pushed deep into the mountains. By dusk they saw no sign of human habitation, only an endless jumble of heights. They crossed another few mountains. By then it was night. In the misty moonlight, they saw a pin-point of lamplight on a far slope.
"Someone must live there," they thought. "We'll go and ask for something to eat."
They strode swiftly in the direction of the lamplight. After walking a *li* or more, they reached their destination. Beside a grove was a dilapidated shack of two or three rooms. They could see the lamp burning through a crack in the wall. Pushing open the door, they found an old woman of about sixty. They set down their fork-spears and bowed in greeting.
"I thought it was my sons coming home," said the woman. "I never expected guests. No need for courtesy. Where are you from, hunters? What brings you here?"
"We're from a family of hunters in Shandong," said Xie Zhen, "but we came to these parts to do bit of trading. Who knew we'd run into armies fighting and killing all over the place? We lost our capital and haven't been able to earn a living. So we've been hunting in these mountains for a little wild game to feed ourselves with. But we don't know the paths and we've lost our way. Could you put us up for the night, old mama?"
"Nobody can carry his home with him, as the old saying goes. My two boys are also hunters. I'm expecting them back today. Just sit yourselves down and I'll make you some supper."
The Xie brothers thanked her. "We're grateful to you, old mama."
She went inside, and they sat down outside the front door. Before long, two men appeared, carrying a roebuck. "Ma, where are you?" they called.
The woman came out and said: "So you're back, boys. Put that deer down and meet our guests."
Xie Zhen and Xie Bao hastily bowed. The other two returned the courtesy and asked: "Where are you from, sirs? What brings you here?" The Xies repeated what they had told the mother.
"We live here," said the young men. "We're called Liu the Second and Liu the Third. Our father was Liu the First, but unfortunately he died. Only our mother is left. Our family has been hunting for a living for twenty or thirty years. The paths here are tricky. We don't know them all ourselves. You say you're from Shandong? Why come here to seek a living? Don't try to fool us. You're not really hunters, are you?"
"Since it's come to this, there's no use pretending," said the Xies. "We'll tell you brothers the truth." Falling on their knees, they explained. "We are indeed hunters from Shandong. We're brothers named Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. But for a long time we've been following our brother Song Jiang in Liangshan Marsh. Recently, we were amnestied, and we've come with him to smash the Tartars of Great Liao. The other day General Ho scattered one of our units in a big battle, and we don't know what's become of them. We two have been sent out to inquire."
The Liu brothers laughed. "So you both are bold gallants. Rise, please. We'll show you the way. Rest a while. We'll cook you a haunch of venison and warm some local wine. You're our guests."
The meat was soon cooked and the Lius served the Xie brothers. Over the wine they said: "We've long heard how Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh acts on Heaven's behalf and never harms good people. His fame has spread all the way to the kingdom of Liao."
"Our brother takes loyalty and righteousness as his main guide. He's vowed never to trouble honest folk. He kills only corrupt officials, and uses his strength to aid the weak."
"That's what we heard. So it's really true!"
All four were very pleased. They formed a deep mutual affection.
"That missing contingent of ours," said the Xie brothers. "It has more than a dozen chieftains and four or five thousand men. We can't imagine what's become of them. They must be trapped somewhere."
"You're not familiar with our terrain. This section is under the rule of Youzhou Prefecture. We have a place called Stony Valley. A dead-end road runs into it, and there are steep cliffs on both sides. If that entry is blocked, whoever has gone in can't come out. That's where your unit must be. No other place is broad enough to hold so many troops. Where Vanguard General Song Jiang is camped is called Lone Deer Mountain. Before it is a broad plain where you can fight freely, and from the summit you can see foes approaching from any direction.

"If you want to rescue your unit, you have to crack open Stony Valley at all costs. The enemy must have a large force bottling up the entry. That section is full of cypress trees, and the two tallest ones, looking like big umbrellas, mark the entrance to the valley. You can see them from a long way off. Rut be careful. Commanding General Ho can work magic spells. General Song Jiang must cope with them."
The Xie brothers thanked the Liu's and travelled through the night to return to their camp.
"What have you heard?" Song Jiang asked, the moment he saw them.
They told him what the Liu brothers had said. Startled, he summoned Wu Yong to a conference. While they were talking, a junior officer entered.
"Duan Jingzhu and Shi Yong are here with Bai Sheng."
"Bai Sheng was trapped together with General Lu. It's a wonder he was able to get away," exclaimed Song Jiang. He summoned the three to his tent.
Duan Jingzhu spoke first. "I was scouting with Shi Yong among some high mountains," he said, "when I saw a bundle of felt rolling down from a summit. We watched it roll to the foot of the slope. It looked like a big ball of felt clothing, all tied with cord. We walked over to the edge of the grove, where it stopped, and found Bai Sheng inside."
Bai Sheng explained. "General Lu and twelve of us chieftains were engaged in a fierce battle. Suddenly the sky darkened and the sun lost its lustre. We couldn't tell one direction from another. We heard voices and the neighing of horses. Lu ordered us to charge. Before we knew it we were deep in a cul-de-sac surrounded by high cliffs and no way out, cut off from any grain or fodder. Our whole column is truly in a bad situation. General Lu directed me to roll down the mountain and try to get through to report. Luckily, I ran into Shi Yong and Duan Jingzhu. We hope you'll send reinforcements quickly, brother, and get us out of there. We're sure to die if you don't."
That very night Song Jiang mustered his troops and, with Xie Zhen and Xie Bao leading the way, headed for the two big cypresses, that is, the entrance to Stony Valley. His order was that the infantry and cavalry fight with all their might. Come what may, they had to smash open the valley.
All night they marched, and by daybreak they could see the two big umbrella-like trees in the distance. A troop under the Xie brothers hastened directly towards the entry. Commanding General Ho spread out his soldiers. The two brothers were eager to be the first to give battle, and Song Jiang wanted to launch a general offensive, but Panther Head Lin Chong galloped swiftly to the fore and engaged Ho Chai, After only two rounds, a thrust in the belly from Lin Chong brought him tumbling from his saddle.
Song Jiang's infantry, seeing that the cavalry had drawn first blood, now raced forward. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, swinging his pair of battle-axes, carved a path through the Liao soldiers. Behind him came Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World, Bao Xu the God of Death, plus Xiang Chong and Li Gun and their ferocious shield fighters, all wielding their weapons with lethal effect.
Black Whirlwind Li Kui made for Ho Yun. He rushed under his mount and broke its leg with one blow of the ax. Animal and rider fell to the ground. Li flew at them with his axes, hacking them both into mincemeat. The Liao soldiers swarmed forward, but they were stopped cold by Fan Rui, Bao Xu and their shield fighters.
Commanding General Ho had seen his two brothers die. He muttered a magic incantation. A wild gale rose and black clouds covered the mountain-tops, plunging the entire valley into darkness. Song Jiang summoned Gongsun Sheng. The Taoist, seated on his horse, murmured a few words, grasping his precious sword. Then, in a loud voice, he shouted: "Speed!"
Strong winds from all sides blew the clouds away to reveal a brightly shining red sun. In full force, Song Jiang's troops tore into the Liao army. His magic having failed and the enemy attacking with such vigor, General Ho could only wave his sword, clap his horse and gallop from the field. The two armies clashed in savage battle. Finally, the Tartars broke and fled helter-skelter.
The cavalry chased them, while the infantry opened up the entry to the valley. The Tartars had piled it high with big stones, blocking the road. After removing the stones, the foot soldiers pushed in quickly. Lu Junyi, when he saw them, cried out that he was ashamed.
Song Jiang ordered a halt to the pursuit of the Liao troops. "Call everyone back to Lone Deer Mountain," he said. "Our men and horses need rest."
Lu wept aloud. "If you hadn't come to my rescue, I surely would have died!"
Song, Lu, Wu Yong and Gongsurt rode back to camp side by side. There, the men removed their armor and rested. The next day, Wu Yong had a proposal.
"We ought to use this opportunity to take Youzhou. If we can do that, we'll have the Liao kingdom in the palm of our hand."
Song Jiang directed Lu Junyi and the twelve chieftains and their forces to proceed to Qizhou and rest there temporarily. Leading the other chieftains and troops personally, he left Lone Deer Mountain and set out for Youzhou.
By then Commanding General Ho had retreated into the city, very distressed by the loss of his two brothers. A cavalry scout reported: "Song Jiang's army is advancing for an attack." Ho grew even more upset.
Tartar soldiers mounted the city walls and looked. From the northeast a contingent bearing red banners, and from the northwest a contingent bearing green banners, were moving rapidly towards Youzhou. General Ho was shocked when the news was transmitted to him. He went up on the walls to see for himself. To his relief, he recognized the banners as Liao standards.
Inscribed with letters of silver, the red banners were those of Taizhen Xuqing, the Royal Son-in-Law, with an army of over five thousand. The green banners, written in gold and decorated with pheasant feathers, belonged to Security General Li. Keeper of the Palace and Vice Minister of Royal Security, Li Ji was a hereditary noble descended from the famous Han Dynasty official LiLing. His headquarters were in Xiongzhou, and he had more than ten thousand troops under his command. It was he who conducted the major raids on the Song borders. When he heard that the king of Liao was losing his cities, he hurried to the rescue.
General Ho sent this message to both columns: "Do not enter the city, but conceal yourselves north of the mountains. When I sally forth against Song Jiang's forces, close in on them from left and right." He then marched from Youzhou with his army.
As Song Jiang neared the city Wu Yong said: "If they bar the gates and don't come out that means they're not prepared. If they march to meet us that means they've laid an ambush, for sure. In that case, we should divide into three columns, one to continue the advance on the city, the other two to guard against flank attacks by the ambushers."
Truly, soldiers must meet all assaults, whether by land or water. Song Jiang instructed Guan Sheng, aided by Xuan Tan and Hao Siwen, to lead the left column, and Huyan Zhuo, with the assistance of Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, to lead the right. Each would consist of more than ten thousand men, and would advance slowly along the paths behind the mountains. Song Jiang would command the main force and march directly on Youzhou.
Meanwhile, General Ho moved out with his troops to meet the attackers. The two armies confronted each other, and Lin Chong rode forth and engaged the general. After less than five rounds, Ho turned and rode away. Song Jiang's soldiers pursued. General Ho split his army into two columns. But instead of entering Youzhou, they skirted round it and continued on.
With a cry of "Halt!" Wu Yong ended the chase. Almost before the command had left his lips, Taizhen the Royal Son-in-Law charged down from the left, to be met by Guan Sheng's column. Huyan Zhuo engaged Security General Li's assault from the right. Three battles were raging at once. Corpses covered the plain, and blood flowed in rivers.
It was obvious to General Ho that the Tartars could not win. He wanted to return to Youzhou, but he encountered Hua Rong and Qin Ming, who engaged him in fierce combat. He tried to get to the West Gate, but he was blocked by General Two Spears Dong Ping, and another savage clash ensued. He turned towards the South Gate, but there Zhu Tong compelled him once again to fight a pitched battle. Not daring to continue in his attempts to reach the city, he struck out north along the main road. He was quite unprepared when Huang Xin the Suppressor of the Three Mountains charged, waving his big sword.
Panic-stricken, Ho became flurried. A blow from Huang struck his horse's head. The general abandoned the animal and ran. Two infantry chieftains, Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu, unexpectedly rushed him from the side and threw him flat on his face. At the same time Song Wan galloped up with levelled lance. Rather than disrupt their fraternal unity in contending to be the general's captor, they killed him on the spot.
The Tartar troops scattered and ran for their lives. The Royal Son-in-Law saw Ho's army banner fall and the soldiers flee. He knew the situation was bad. With his red-bannered column, he skirted round the rear of the mountains and hastily departed. Security General Li, engaged in the frontal battle, guessed that something had gone wrong when he could no longer see the red banners. He led his green bannered soldiers to the rear of the mountains and also withdrew.
All three enemy columns were in full retreat. Song Jiang drove directly on Youzhou. He took it without a struggle. Once inside the city, he billeted his troops and issued proclamations reassuring the local populace. He then dispatched an urgent message to Tanzhou, reporting the victory to Commissioner Zhao and requesting him to send troops to hold Qizhou. The naval chieftains and their craft were to come to Youzhou and await further orders. Lu Junyi the Magnate was to use part of his contingent to defend Bazhou.
Four major cities under Song control—Commissioner Zhao was delighted. He immediately sent a report to the emperor and made the necessary troop deployments to Qizhou and Bazhou. The situation was becoming critical for the Kingdom of Great Liao. Commissioner Zhao instructed the naval chieftains to get ready to sail. The big cities of the north were restored to Song rule—a remarkable feat.
The king of Great Liao in his palace summoned his top officials, civil and military. He conferred with Youxi Bojin the premier, vice-premier Chu Jian, and all the highest generals.
"Song Jiang has invaded our borders and taken four major cities. If he could conquer Youzhou, what's to prevent him from attacking our capital? Yanjing will be hard to defend! Commanding General Ho and his two brothers were all killed and Youzhou has been lost. Our country is beset by troubles. What do you ministers think we ought to do?"
Wuyan, the commander-in-chief, stepped forward. "Have no fears, Your Majesty. Several times I have requested to be sent with troops, but always I was prevented. As a result, the brigands are running amok and causing calamity. I beg a royal decree commissioning me to march with an expeditionary force against the foreign invaders and setting a time limit for their defeat. I shall seize Song Jiang and his chieftains and recapture our fallen cities."
The king acceded to his request. He issued to Wuyan the pearl-encrusted tiger standard, a gold seal and a royal decree, yellow and white panoplies, and banners of red and black. The monarch's orders were strict.
"Everyone—regardless of noble birth, royal kinship, or military affiliation—shall obey the commands of my beloved minister Wuyan. Muster an army quickly and set forth."
Wuyan, carrying the royal seal and official tallies, went to the training field, summoned his generals, and ordered them to gather all the Tartar forces and bring them to the capital. His eldest son, Yanshou, approached him in the reviewing pavilion with a suggestion.
"While you're raising this huge army, father, why not let me go first with a number of fierce generals, join forces with Taizhen the Royal Son-in-Law and Security General Li, and attack Youzhou. We'll slaughter eight tenths of the barbarians, and when you come you'll mop up the rest as easily as catching turtles in a jug! How does that strike you, father?"
"A good idea, my son. Take five thousand cavalry, twenty thousand crack infantry, and go. Since you're joining with the Royal Son-in-Law and the Security General, it'd work out well. If you succeed, let me know by urgent dispatch." Happily, Yanshou mustered his troops and left for Youzhou. And because Wuyan's son dared the Song army to combat, the outskirts of Youzhou became the approaches to the 9 Li Mountains, and the banks of the Wanshui River became busy fording points. Truly, Heaven and Earth tremble when cavalry legions race, demons quake when hordes of infantry charge.

Now this Marshal Ho of the Tartars was second-in-command to Marshal Wuyan. He was tall and immensely strong. He was skilled in magic and wielded a double-edged blade with three points. At the time he was commander of the garrison at Youzhou and responsible for all military affairs there.
Marshal Ho now said to the King: "There's a place in the area of Youzhou called Black Rock Gorge. There is only one way in and it is surrounded by very rugged mountains, with no easy access. What I do is, I send a dozen horsemen to entice the enemy into it, we put a few troops outside and we've bottled 'em up in there. There's no way out for them. They'll starve!"
Marshal Wuyan said: "How do we know they'll take the bait?"
Marshal Ho said: "They've captured three of our most important provinces, they'll be brimming with confidence, they're bound to think of attacking Youzhou. If I send my troops there with instructions to draw them on, they're certain to give chase. Once we've led them into the trap, they're never going to get out!"
Marshal Wuyan said: "I'm worried your plan might not work. We still need the main army to finish them off. But we'll see how you get on."
Marshal Ho bade them farewell and fully accoutred rode off to Youzhou at the head of a small body of infantry. Once there he divided the cavalry into three squadrons, one to guard the city, the other two to advance and threaten Bazhou and Qizhou. After receiving their orders the two attacking parties were ordered out, under the command of the Marshal's two brothers. The elder, Ho Chai, was to attack Bazhou and the younger, Ho Yun was headed for Qizhou. Their instructions were not to seek victory but to feign defeat and draw the enemy on into Youzhou, in accordance with the plan.
Song Jiang meanwhile had fortified Bazhou. Someone reported: "There's a Liao army attacking Qizhou. There could be problems. Please send reinforcements."
Song Jiang said: "Since they've come to attack us, we shall attack them, and make it an opportunity to capture Youzhou."
Leaving a small number of troops to defend Bazhou, Song Jiang ordered the rest of the army to strike camp. He marched them towards Qizhou where he planned to link up with the Unicorn and agree a time for the attack.
When the Tartar force under Ho Chai was approaching Bazhou they ran into Song Jiang and his army coming out from the city. Before they had finished three bouts Ho Chai and his forces fled, but Song Jiang did not pursue them. Meanwhile Ho Yun on his way to Qizhou met Twin Rods and likewise retreated.
Song Jiang conferred with the Unicorn in his tent. They discussed their plan for taking Youzhou. The Professor and the Strategist said: "These two forces that have come from Youzhou must have been sent with the aim of luring us there. We must not go."
The Unicorn said: "You are mistaken, Professor. They've just suffered a string of reverses, how can they be planning anything? We must attack now, come what may, because later it will be more difficult. If we don't take Youzhou now, when can we do it? We'll never have another opportunity like this."
Song Jiang agreed: "They're at their last gasp. They aren't capable of carrying out any plan. We must strike while the iron's hot!"
Ignoring the advice of the Professor and the Strategist, Song Jiang ordered the attack on Youzhou forthwith. The two armies were divided into three columns each and set off. Soon the first column reported: "The Liao army is standing in our path."
When Song Jiang rode out in front to see for himself, a forest of black banners appeared on the hillside ahead. He ordered his vanguard to spread out, whereupon the Tartar horde also split into four divisions and deployed along the slope. As Song Jiang, the Unicorn and their commanders watched, millions of troops poured forth like a black cloud, evidently protecting a Tartar general who wielded a double-edged blade with three prongs and was riding at the head of the army. The banner which preceded him bore the legend: "Marshal Ho, second-in-command of the great Liao army".
The Tartar now cantered out in front, lance at the ready.
Song Jiang said: "This must be one of their top commanders. Who dares to take him on?"
Immediately Scimitar rode out, flourishing the bright crescent of his blade. He flew forward on his lively mount and without a word joined battle with Marshal Ho. After some thirty bouts Marshal Ho's spirits seemed to flag. Turning aside his weapon he galloped towards his own ranks. Scimitar gave chase. Marshal Ho led his defeated army off up the slope. Song Jiang ordered his army forward in pursuit. After they'd covered some fifteen miles, war drums began to be heard on all sides. Song Jiang hurriedly ordered a retreat, but they were threatened by an enemy column on the slopes to their left. When Song Jiang sent some troops to engage them another enemy column appeared on the right. Marshal Ho had now ordered his troops also to turn and charge. Song Jiang's forces, under attack from all sides, were unable to maintain contact and were cut in two by the enemy.
The Unicorn had been bringing up the rear. Having lost contact with the army in front, he searched desperately for a way through. When he tried to retreat he came upon another enemy force lying concealed off to one side. These troops now attacked. The shouts of the Tartars filled the sky as they charged out from every direction. The Unicorn and his men were driven deep into the mountains. The Unicorn ordered sallies this way and that in an attempt to break out. His leaders fought valiantly and made superhuman efforts, essaying charges in every direction. But suddenly a dark cloud engulfed them, a black miasma that veiled the sky, blotting out the world as if night had suddenly fallen, so that there was no telling north from south or east from west. When the Unicorn in consternation led a detachment of men in a desperate charge through the murk, they heard bells ahead of them. They gave the horses their heads and raced forward. At the mouth of a narrow defile they heard men's voices and horses neighing, but as they galloped onward a violent wind got up, flinging stones about and scattering sand. They could see nothing ahead but they pushed on. Around the second watch the wind swept the clouds from the sky and all the stars were visible again.
Looking around them, all they could see were mountains, with forbidding cliffs and crags on every side, and no way to climb them. Of the original force twelve leaders remained: Spearsman, Hasty, Victorious, the Supremo, River-Jumper, White-Spotted Snake, Big Chief, Tiger-Killer, Forester, Rhinoceros, Panther and the Daytime Rat. There were five thousand men. By the light of the stars they searched for a way back, but the mountains enveloped them completely. It was impossible.
"We fought all day, we are all tired to death," the Unicorn said to his leaders. "We'll rest here for the night. Let there be no more fighting for the time being. Tomorrow we'll find a way out."
Song Jiang too had experienced the black cloud all around, while he was fighting, the stones and sand flying, and had likewise been unable to see his opponents. Alone of his force Taoist Gongsun had recognized the workings of a magic spell. Quickly taking up his trusty blade he waved it about while reciting a spell of his own. Then with a cry of "Chrr!" he pointed the sword heavenwards and the dark cloud cleared, the wind ceased. The Tartar forces broke off the fight and withdrew. Urged on by their leader, Song Jiang's troops broke out of the encirclement and withdrew to a hilltop to regroup. They joined the supply carts in a circle nose to tail and made camp. When the roll was called the Unicorn and thirteen others were missing, together with five thousand troops.
When day broke, Song Jiang ordered Twin Rods, Leopard's Head, Thunderclap and Scimitar to lead out search parties in every direction. They searched all day but returned without any news. Song Jiang then took out the magic books and lit some incense, in order to read the signs. When he had done this and read the signs, he said: "It seems likely they have fallen into a dark place and find it very difficult to get out." Finding no relief for his anxiety, he told Snake and Scorpion to disguise themselves as hunters and roam over the mountains in search of news. He also sent the Flea, the Guv, Yellow Dog and Knife off in different directions to see if they could find anything out.
Snake and Scorpion dressed in tiger skins and toting steel tridents headed deep into the mountains. When the day began to darken they were already far in and whichever way they looked there was no sign of human habitation, nothing but jumbled peaks receding into the distance. They passed several more ridges. The moon shone mistily and far off on the mountainside a lantern gleamed. "If there's a lantern someone must live there," they told themselves. "We'd better go and see if they'll give us something to eat." So they directed their steps toward the light. In less than half a mile they reached three thatched huts nestling at the foot of a wooded slope. The light was shining through a crack in the wall of one of them. Pushing open the door, they beheld an old woman of some sixty years. They put down their tridents and prostrated themselves. "I thought it were my sons returning," she said. "I weren't expecting visitors. Get up, please. Where be you from? You're hunters, that I can see, but what brings you to these parts?"
"We are originally from Shandong," said Snake. "And we used to be hunters. But we came here to trade and then we got caught up in some fighting. It went on for days so we lost all our money and didn't have any means of livelihood. We're brothers, you see. All we could do was come here to the mountains to look for some game to keep us from starving. Unfortunately we don't know the paths and we lost our way. We've come here to ask if you could give us lodging for a night. We do hope you'll let us stay!"
"Well, no one can carry his house on his back, as they say. My two sons are hunters too. I be expecting them back any minute. Sit you down now and I'll get you some supper."
Snake and Scorpion thanked her. "We're truly grateful to you," they said. She went inside and they seated themselves in front of the door. In a little while two men appeared with the carcase of a deer on a carrying pole. "Where are you, Ma?" they shouted.
The old woman reappeared and said: "So you're back are you? Put that thing down and come and meet two visitors." Snake and Scorpion hurriedly kowtowed. The others returned the courtesy and said: "Where you from? And what brings you to these parts?"
Snake and Scorpion told their story again. The other two said: "This here is our ancestral home. We're the Liu brothers — I'm Liu the second and this is Liu the third. Our father was Liu the first, but he passed away, we've only got our mother now. Hunting is what we do for a living, nigh on thirty year we been at it. The paths round about here's tricky, there's places we don't even know ourselves. You're from Shandong, so how could you expect to make a living here? Come off it, you're not really hunters, are you!"
Snake and Scorpion said: "Okay, what's the point in trying to hide anything? We'll tell you the truth." There is a verse about what happens now:

Cliffs and peaks are all about,
*The army's trapped, it can't get out*
*To learn what paths the forest hides,*
The brothers pick some local guides.

Snake and Scorpion knelt down and said: "We were originally hunters in Shandong, that much is true. We're brothers and we're known as Snake and Scorpion. We became followers of Song Jiang of Mount Liang a while back. There has been an amnesty and we came here with him to destroy the might of Liao. There was a big battle with their Marshal Ho a few days ago. Our troops were scattered and part of our force has disappeared completely. We've been sent out to see if we can find out what happened to them."
The response was very friendly: "That's all right then, if you be brethren of the rivers and lakes, we'll be glad to act as your guides. But sit down now while we cook up some of this venison and share a few cups of our best wine with you."

It was not long before the meat was ready and the Liu brothers served it to them. Whilst they were all drinking the Lius asked: "Is it true what they say about your Song Jiang, that he does heaven's will and never harms the innocent? Everyone knows about him here in Liao."
Snake and Scorpion said: "Loyalty is the most important thing for him; he has vowed never to lay hands on the innocent and only has it in for corrupt officials and bullying officers who persecute the weak."
"Exactly what we heard. So it be true then!" the others said.
Everyone was happy and feelings of mutual friendship were expressed without reservation. Snake and Scorpion said: "There were ten leaders and four or five thousand men in the part of our army that's disappeared. It must be some huge area of land to swallow them all up."
"You don't know the country up here in the north. Right here in our district there be a place called Black Rock Gorge that's got only one road in and perpendicular cliffs and rugged peaks all about. Block the access road and you won't never get out again. Wouldn't mind betting that's where they've wound up. There be no proper road leading to it. The place where your leader General Song Jiang's camped is called Lone Deer Mountain. This plain in front of it be a fine place for fighting. On top of the mountain there you can see troops coming from any direction. But that there Black Rock Gorge, to rescue your companions you'll need to open it up and let them out. Only there's bound to be a lot of troops blocking the mouth. There's lots of cypress trees round there, but there's two particular big'uns, tallest of the lot and shaped like umbrellas, right by the entrance to the gorge. You can see 'em from everywhere, so you'll recognize the entrance. Watch out for one thing, though: that Marshal Ho can do magic. You want to tell General Song Jiang how important it be to break them spells of his."
Snake and Scorpion thanked their two informants and hurried back to the camp. "Did you get any reliable information?" Song Jiang asked them. They related all that the Liu brothers had told them. Song Jiang was disturbed by what he heard. He summoned the Professor for consultations. While they were talking a messenger came in and reported: "Yellow Dog and the Guv have come in with the Daytime Rat."
"The Daytime Rat is one of the leaders who were lost with the Unicorn," Song Jiang said. "If he's got back that's really interesting news." He summoned them to his tent for questioning. Yellow Dog spoke first: "The Guv and I were exploring a deep rift in the mountains when a kind of bundle came bounding down from above. We saw it come to rest at the bottom and found it to be a thick bundle of cloth tightly secured with cords. It fetched up at the foot of a tree. Inside it was the Daytime Rat."
The Daytime Rat said: "Whilst I was fighting along with the Unicorn and the other lot, a great darkness came over the earth and the sun disappeared. You couldn't see a thing in any direction. We could just hear voices and horses neighing. The Unicorn was determined to go forward. What we didn't know was that we were walking into a trap. We found ourselves lost with high mountains all around and no way out. There are no food supplies there and it's really tough for the horses and men. The Unicorn ordered me to roll down from the mountain top, to try and get a message out. I was lucky enough to meet Yellow Dog and the Guv, so now I'm here to beg you to send troops to rescue them, otherwise they're all dead men."
That same night Song Jiang detailed a body of troops, with Snake and Scorpion as guides, to head for the tall cypress trees that marked the mouth of the valley. He impressed on everyone that they must attack with the utmost vigour, because it was essential to open up the route.
They marched till daybreak, when they were able to make out the two big cypress trees in the distance, shaped like umbrellas. Snake and Scorpion led them all forward.
Marshal Ho, guarding the pass, ordered his men to spread out and sent his two brothers out first to engage the enemy.
Song Jiang's troops charged forward, determined to capture the pass. Leopard's Head led the way. He encountered Ho Chai, the Tartar Marshal's elder brother, and after just two bouts knocked him from his horse with a spear thrust to the belly. After the success of the first wave of cavalry, the footsoldiers advanced. Iron Ox swinging his two axes wreaked havoc in the Tartar ranks. Behind him came Demon King and Pluto, followed by Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost, with their shield bearers. Iron Ox came face to face with Ho Yun, the Marshal's second brother. He rushed at Ho's horse and chopped at its legs, causing it to fall and the rider with it. The axes whistled through the air, meting out the same fate to horse and man. The Tartar troops surged forward but were met by Demon King and the Eight-Armed Ogre's shield bearers.
Having lost both his brothers, Marshal Ho now uttered a spell and by some kind of magic caused a violent storm, so that clouds arose from the earth, cloaking the mountains in darkness and plunging the valley mouth into gloomy murk. Just at this moment Taoist Gongsun came forward and, grasping his trusty sword, muttered a few words and cried "Chrrr!". Immediately a fierce wind swept away the clouds on all sides, revealing the sun's golden disc, clear as clear. As the Song infantry and cavalry launched a furious attack on the Tartars, Marshal Ho saw that his magic was impotent. He responded to the enemy attack by flourishing his sword, slapping his horse and charging. When the two armies clashed, the Song forces scattered the Tartars who fled in all directions.
While the cavalry pursued the Tartar army, the infantry set about clearing the pass. The Tartars had heaped huge black rocks on top of each other to seal it off. Once they had cleared these, the infantry rushed through into Black Rock Gorge. When the Unicorn saw Song Jiang's men he was truly mortified. Song Jiang called a halt to the pursuit of the Tartars, ordering his commanders to regroup on Lone Deer Mountain so that the weary troops could get some rest. On meeting Song Jiang the Unicorn burst into loud weeping. "If you had not providentially come to the rescue I would have been dead," he said.
The four leaders now rode back to the camp to allow their troops to rest. They took off their armour and for a while all was quiet.
Next day the Professor said: "We should take advantage of this opportunity to capture Youzhou. Once Youzhou is in our hands, the Tartars are finished. And it's ours for the taking!"
So Song Jiang told the Unicorn and the others who had been with him to return to Qizhou and take a break. He himself with the other commanders and troops set out from Lone Deer Mountain to attack Youzhou.
Marshal Ho had retired to the city. His heart was heavy for the loss of his two brothers. His mood was worsened when lookouts announced that Song Jiang was advancing on them. The whole army was nervous. Troops on the battlements looked out and saw a host of red banners in the northeast and a host of blue banners in the northwest. Two armies were advancing on Youzhou. Marshal Ho was informed and was very disturbed. But when he went to see for himself, he recognized the banners, to his immense relief, as belonging to Liao. The silver characters on the red banners proclaimed them to be troops of Taizhen Xuqing, the king's son-in-law; he had five thousand men. The blue banners had gold characters and a pheasant feather, indicating that the troops belonged to General Li. This officer was a police chief and deputy head of security at the palace, an office which he had inherited from a famous ancestor. Everyone referred to him as Chief Li. He had ten thousand men under his command, and had been responsible for the original attacks on Song territory. Hearing that the King of Liao had been losing cities, he had brought his troops up in support.
Marshal Ho immediately sent messengers to both armies warning them not to enter the city but to set up an ambush beyond the mountains and rest until he had led his own army out. When Song Jiang appeared they were to attack him from either flank. After giving out these orders, Marshal Ho marched his men out of Youzhou.
As Song Jiang and his forces were approaching Youzhou, the Professor said: "If he shuts the gates and declines to come out and fight, it will mean he is not ready. If he marches his men out to face us, it will mean there is some ambush. We should divide the army into three sections for the attack. One section can head straight for Youzhou and engage the enemy. The other two can defend the right and left flanks. When the concealed troops come out they will oppose them." Song Jiang accordingly detailed Scimitar, the Son-in-Law and Hound to lead the troops on the left flank and Twin Rods with the Fire General and the Water General to command the right flank. Each with over ten thousand troops was to advance slowly by mountain paths. Song Jiang went ahead with the rest to initiate the attack on Youzhou.
When Marshal Ho led his troops out he was confronted by Song Jiang. As the two armies faced each other, Leopard's Head rode forward and challenged Marshal Ho. After less than five bouts, the Marshal turned his horse and galloped off. When Song Jiang and his men gave chase, Marshal Ho's army divided in two. Instead of entering the city they rode round it on either side. "Don't follow them!" the Professor shouted. Immediately the royal son-in-law's force appeared on the left flank and was engaged by Scimitar. From the right came Chief Li, and Twin Rods met him. Furious fighting ensued between the various armies until corpses littered the ground and blood flowed in rivers.
When it became evident that the Liao forces were not going to win, Marshal Ho wanted to return to the city. But he met two government commanders who drew near and then attacked. They were Colonel Hua and Thunderclap, hell bent on fighting him. He tried to turn away towards the west gate of the city, but here he met Twin Spears who also attacked. Heading for the south gate he met Whiskers, who engaged him at once. Abandoning any attempt to reach the city, Marshal Ho took to the highway and galloped off northwards. Too hasty to take precautions he ran into the Tamer, who appeared in front of him with his great sword raised on high.
Marshal Ho was taken completely by surprise. Before he had time to act the Tamer's sword fell plumb on his horse's head. Abandoning the horse the Marshal tried to flee on foot, but unexpectedly Madcap and Morbid, the two infantry commanders, came at him from either side striking at his abdomen. Door-God also attacked with his spear. The Marshal's troops were too demoralized to put up a fight and their commander died in a flurry of spear thrusts.
The Tartar troops scattered and ran for their lives, every man for himself. The royal son-in-law seeing the commander-in-chief's standard fall and his troops take to their heels, realized that the situation was hopeless. So he led the troops of the scarlet banner away round the mountain. Chief Li as he fought on saw that the scarlet banners had disappeared and understanding that the day was lost also retreated round the mountain with the troops of the blue banner.
When Song Jiang saw that all three armies had fled he marched his whole force into Youzhou to take control of it. Calm and composed, they marched in to the beat of a single drum. They made camp and Song Jiang issued a proclamation to reassure the people. He then sent a messenger to Tanzhou to ask Commissioner Zhao to send troops to reinforce Qizhou and ordered the boat commanders with their vessels to report to Youzhou. His second-in-command the Unicorn was ordered to defend Bazhou.
They had now seized a total of four important cities. When Commissioner Zhao received the news he was delighted. He reported to the court and also sent orders to Bazhou and Qizhou to tell the boat captains to make ready for an attack by land and water.
The Liao king held an audience which all his officials, civil and military, attended. The chief minister Youxi Bojin, together with his deputy and all the high-ranking officers were present at the discussions. The King said: "Since Song Jiang has invaded our territory and occupied four of our most important cities, sooner or later he is bound to attack our capital. Will we ever be able to defend Yanjing? Marshal Ho and his two brothers are all dead, our government officials and army commanders are faced with many serious problems. How can we manage matters?"
The commander-in-chief, Marshal Wuyan, stepped forward and said: "Have no fear, Your Majesty! I have repeatedly offered to take charge, but I was always prevented. Now in this adversity I beg you to issue a decree appointing me to command an army. I shall select troops from all regions and mobilise without delay. Song Jiang and all his gang must be captured without fail and the stolen cities restored to your rule."
The King not only granted this request but heaped him with honours; as well as the royal commission, special insignia were conferred on him. "You may ask for any commanders you wish," the King told him. "Were they princes of the blood I should command them to serve under you. Muster your army as quickly as you can, then go forth and conquer!"
Armed with the King's commission and requisition orders Marshal Wuyan went down to the drill field and recruited a large force. He ordered troops from every corner of the land to be brought in to swell the numbers. When this was being done his eldest son, Yanshou, entered the review stand and said: "Father, while you are preparing the army let me go ahead with a number of commanders to join up with the King's son-in-law and Chief Li. We will go to Youzhou and destroy most of the rebel force. Then when you arrive you can clear out the rest, easy as catching a turtle in a jar! Does this meet with your approval?"
"What you say is good, my son. You can take five thousand swift cavalry, twenty thousand hardened troops, and form the vanguard. Then as soon as you've linked up with the King's son-in-law and the Chief of Security you can attack. If you've a victory to report, send word at once." With these orders, the young commander set off most contentedly to organise a complete army and head for Youzhou. It was truly a case of 10000 galloping horses affright heaven and earth, 1000 dashing commanders trouble gods and ghosts.

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## Song Jiang Wages a Big Battle at Youzhou; Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo Forcibly Captures a Tartar General

Yanshou, leading twenty thousand men, after joining forces with Taizhen the Royal Son-in-Law and Security General Li, had thirty-five thousand soldiers under his command. He made sure their arms and equipment were all in order, and then set forth. A scout soon reported this to Song Jiang in Youzhou. Song conferred with Wu Yong, his military advisor.
"We've defeated the Liao forces several times in a row. They must be sending their crack troops and best generals against us. What should our tactics be?"
"Station our army outside the city and wait. Challenge them when they arrive. If we show them up as incompetent, they'll of course withdraw."
"Clever and clear, Military Advisor." Song Jiang ordered his contingents to leave the city.
Ten //from Youzhou is a flat plain called Fangshan. It is fringed by mountains and streams. Here, the army deployed into a Nine-Unit Octagon battle position.
Before long, the Tartars came into sight, in three columns. The one under young commander Yanshou, Wuyan's son, carried black banners. The Royal Son-in-Law's column bore red banners. Green were the banners of the Security General's column. All three spread out in battle positions when they saw Song Jiang's army.
Yanshou had learned military tactics under his father's personal tutelage. His knowledge was profound, his skill tricky. He viewed Song Jiang's battle formation, then directed his red and green banner contingents to deploy to left and right and build fortifications. He himself mounted a "sky ladder" amid his central column and observed Song Jiang's position. He came down with a superior smile on his face.
"Why are you smiling, General?" his lieutenants asked.
"That Nine-Unit Octagon of Song Jiang—who doesn't know that! It can't fool anybody. I'll just give him a scare."
He ordered three flourishes on the decorated battle drums, and had a command platform erected. Mounting the platform, with two flags he signalled deployment instructions to his left and right columns. Then he came down, got on his horse, directed his top officers to spread out the army, and rode to the front to confront Song Jiang.
He shouted: "You Nine-Unit Octagon can't deceive anyone! Do you recognize my formation?"
So the Tartar commander wanted to vie in deployment positions, did he? Song Jiang directed that "sky ladders" be erected, and he, Wu Yong and Zhu Wu climbed up to have a look at the Liao contingents. The three columns were linked, with left and right near enough to provide mutual support.
Zhu Wu recognized it immediately. "That's called the Great Monad and Three Powers—Heaven, Earth and Man," he told Song Jiang.
Leaving the other two on the command platform, Song Jiang came down and rode to the front. He pointed with his whip at Yanshou.
"You've set out a Great Monad and Three Powers position," he called. "There's nothing special about that."
"So you recognize it," said the young Tartar. "Watch us change, and see if you still know it." He turned and rode back to his command platform, mounted it and signalled a change with his flags.
Wu Yong and Zhu Wu, from their platform, saw that the foe had assumed a Four Elephants formation. They sent word to Song Jiang. Meanwhile, Yanshou had again emerged and sat his steed, weapon athwart.
"Do you recognize our position?" he demanded.
"You've converted into a Four Elephants formation."
The young Tartar shook his head in surprise and laughed coldly. Again he climbed his platform and signalled with his flags, while Wu Yong and Zhu Wu watched from their own platform. "That's the Revolving Octagon," said Zhu Wu. Again he notified Song Jiang.
Once more the young Tartar appeared at the front. "Can you recognize that?"
Song Jiang laughed. "It's only the Revolving Octagon! Nothing unusual!"
Thoughtfully, Yanshou said to himself: "I learned these deployments from teachers in secret, yet he identified them all. He must have some talented people on his staff."
Again he returned to his central column, got down from his horse, climbed the platform, and signalled with his flags. His army broke into eight eights, or sixty-four units, with no opening on any side. Zhu Wu, on the "sky ladder," recognized it.
"That's the Eight-Sector Diagram of Zhuge Liang," he told Wu Yong. "Head and tail are both concealed. No one knows where they are." They dispatched a man to request Song Jiang to come up and see for himself!
"Don't underestimate that Liao general," they advised him when he had joined them on the platform. "Those four are all traditional battle positions. They've been passed down without change. The first was the Great Monad and Three Powers. From that came the Four Elephants, which then produced the Revolving Octagon, which converted to the Eight-Sector Diagram. An incomparable progression, a matchless deployment!"
Song Jiang came down from the platform, mounted, and rode to the front. The Tartar general stabbed his halberd into the ground and reined in.
"Can you recognize our position?" he shouted.
"You are only a young commander with narrow vision, like a frog at the bottom of a well! All you know is these few deployments. Moves like your Eight-Sector Diagram, with its concealed head, couldn't deceive even a child of the Song empire!"
"Since you know all of my battle positions, why not lay out a marvellous one of your own? See if you can fool me!"
"I only know the Nine-Unit Octagon. It may not be very profound, but dare you attack?"
The young Tartar laughed. "A small operation, nothing to it! Don't pull anything sneaky. Just watch us knock you over!"
He ordered the Royal Son-in-Law and the Security General to be ready with a thousand men each. "After I drive into their position," he told them, "you reinforce me." His battle drums began to pound.
Song Jiang also ordered three flourishes on his battle drums, and directed that the gate of pennants be opened and the young general be allowed to enter.
Yanshou assembled a task force of around twenty junior officers and a thousand armored cavalrymen. He calculated on his fingers that this was a "fire" day, and therefore decided not to attack from due south. He led his contingent around to the left to a point southwest of his objective, unfurled his white banners, and charged. Only half his unit was able to penetrate the Song lines. A shower of arrows halted the rear half and sent it back to its own position.
The young Tartar drove directly into Song Jiang's central column. Suddenly, a silvery metal barricade seemed to rise all around him. He blanched and thought: "Where did that wall come from?" He ordered his men to push out the way they came in.
But when they turned they saw behind them a misty silvery sea. Everywhere was gurgling water, but no path. Increasingly agitated, Yanshou led his troops due south, but a ball of fire, spewing long rays like sunset beams, rolled before them. Not a single enemy soldier was in sight. The young Tartar dared not advance in that direction.
They swerved to the east, only to be confronted by leafy trees and tangled undergrowth and, at either end, stakes of branches sharpened like deer antlers. They'd never get through there! But when they turned north a black mist covered the sky and somber clouds hid the sun. They couldn't see their hands in front of their faces. It was as dark as the chambers of Hell.
Yanshou was completely stymied. "Song Jiang must be working some magic," he said to himself. "It's hopeless. All we can do is smash our way out, or die trying!" He gave the command and his men charged, yelling.
"Where do you think you're going, infant general!" boomed the voice of a big commander who suddenly broke through from the side. A rod flew down towards Yanshou's forehead. Sharp-eyed and nimble, he parried the blow with his crescent-bladed halberd. But immediately a pair of rods struck, snapping his weapon in two. Before he could resist, the foe closed in swiftly, locked him effortlessly in ape-like arms and, with a single twist of his wolf-like waist, lifted him from his saddle and captured him.
Blocked, his cavalry troop obeyed when they were shouted at to dismount. They could see nothing in the stygian darkness. They had no choice but to get down from their horses and surrender. The man who had taken Yanshou prisoner was none other than Tiger Chieftain Two Rods Huyan Zhuo. Gongsun Sheng, who had worked the magic, on learning that the young Tartar general had been caught, put an end to the spell. The sun once more shone on the battlefield from a clear blue sky.
Meanwhile, Taizhen the Royal Son-in-Law and Security General Li, each with a thousand soldiers, waited for news so that they could bring up their reinforcements. But since, to their surprise, they heard nothing, they didn't venture to move. Song Jiang now appeared at the front and called to them.
"Surrender, you two units. What are you waiting for? We've already captured Yanshou." At his order, his swordsmen pushed the young Tartar general forward.
Security General Li spurred his horse and galloped to rescue Yanshou with levelled lance. Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, brandishing his wolf-toothed cudgel, rode out to meet him. They clashed, weapons flailing, as the two armies set up a mighty yell.
Li lost his nerve, and his hands faltered. One blow from the wolf-toothed cudgel shattered his helmet and his skull together. He fell in a heap to the ground.

The sight was too much for the Royal Son-in-Law. He retreated rapidly with his unit. Song Jiang ordered his men to pursue. The great Liao forces fled in utter defeat. More than three thousand cavalry mounts were captured that day. Fallen banners and weapons filled the valley. Song Jiang led his troops on to Yanjing, determined to roll up the rest of the foe and win back all imperial territory under Liao domination.

Remnants of the defeated Tartar contingent reached Commander-in-Chief Wuyan and told him that his son Yanshou had been captured in battle and all his officers had surrendered. Security General Li had been killed by a blow of Qin Ming's club and his troops had fled, no one knew where. Taizhen the Royal Son-in-Law had also run for his life. There was no news of him, either.

Wuyan was shocked. "My son studied military art since childhood. He was very adept," he said. "How could that rogue Song Jiang have captured him?"

"And all he had was a Nine-Unit Octagon defense. Nothing remarkable," Wuyan's lieutenants added. "Yet when our young general formed four different deployments, that barbarian knew every one of them. He said to him: 'You recognized my Nine-Unit Octagon, but dare you attack?' And when we charged from the west with over a thousand cavalry, he deluged us with arrows so that only half our men got through, and somehow he captured our young general."

"That Nine-Unit Octagon is easy enough to hit," mused Wuyan. "He probably converted it into something else."

"We could see from our command platform—he didn't move his troops and his flags didn't change," the commanders assured him. "But a black cloud covered the battlefield."

"He must have used magic. If we don't muster our army, the scoundrel is sure to come here. I'll win victory or kill myself! Who dares to lead soldiers as my vanguard general?"

Two high-ranking officers promptly stepped forward and volunteered. One was Qiong Yaonayan, a national army general. The other was Kou Zhenyuan, a general of the Yanjing city contingent.

Wuyan was pleased. He said: "Proceed cautiously. Take a vanguard of ten thousand and open a road through the mountains. Where necessary, build bridges. Our main force will follow."

The two departed. Wuyan then appointed eleven senior generals and twenty-eight lieutenant-generals as commanders of the expeditionary force. It would consist of over two hundred thousand crack troops—all the country's available soldiers. He would petition the king himself to lead it.

Meanwhile, Qiong and Kou advanced through the mountains with their ten thousand men. A scout reported to Song Jiang in Youzhou the approach of this formidable foe. Startled, Song Jiang notified Lu the Magnate to bring as many men as possible. He also ordered the transfer of troops from Tanzhou and Qizhou, and invited Commissioner Zhao to come and observe the operations. He directed his naval chieftains to call their sailors ashore, and assemble in Bazhou before continuing their march.

Commissioner Zhao, under the protection of the naval chieftains, arrived last. All required forces were now congregated in Youzhou. After greetings had been exchanged, Commissioner Zhao complimented Song Jiang.

"You're so tireless, General, a pillar of our country! Your fame, your irradicable virtue, shall be known for countless generations. When I return to the capital, I shall recommend you highly to the emperor."

"A useless small official like me is not worth mentioning. Basking in the reflected glory of our great emperor and benefiting from Your Excellency's splendid prestige, I have made some small accomplishments. Anyone could have done the same. I have recently been informed that Tartar Commander-in-Chief Wuyan, by draining his nation's military manpower, has raised an army of over two hundred thousand, and is heading this way. Victory or defeat depends on the coming battle. I propose that you build a fort fifteen //from here, Commissioner, and observe how my brothers and I exercise our utmost fidelity and strength in this decisive engagement! Sustained by the emperor's overflowing virtue, we sure shall win victory to show our gratitude for His Majesty's benevolence!"

"Use your opportunities well, General. Sun Zi said: 'More calculation or less calculation determines victory or defeat.' Plan your strategy carefully. Consider every detail."

Song Jiang bid farewell to the commissioner and set off with Lu the Magnate at the head of a large army. They skirted Yongqing County, which is part of Youzhou Prefecture, set up camp and built fortifications. All the chieftains assembled in the headquarters tent for a conference.

"Wuyan is leading the entire Liao army against us," said Song Jiang. "This is no small matter. The battle will decide our life or death. You brothers must push forward and never retreat. The smallest merit will be reported to the court, and the emperor's rewards will be mutually shared. No one person will reap the benefits."

The chieftains rose and said: "We would never dare disobey your orders. We shall do our best in gratitude for your great kindness."

A junior officer entered. "A Liao emissary is here with a battle challenge."

Song Jiang directed that he be brought to the tent to present the document. Opening it, Song Jiang read that Generals Qiong and Kou, who were under Commander-in-Chief Wuyan of the Kingdom of Liao, as leaders of a vanguard force challenged the Song army to a decisive battle on the morrow. Song Jiang noted his acceptance on the bottom of the document. He ordered that the emissary be given food and wine and allowed to return to his own encampment. At daybreak the following day victory or defeat would be determined.

It was late autumn and early winter then. The men wore heavy armor, hide coverings protected the horses. The Song troops finished breakfast before dawn. When the sun topped the horizon, they broke camp and marched. Before they had gone five //they saw the Liao army in the distance. Amid the foe's embroidered black flags, two vanguard banners glistened. Battle drums thundered, the gate of pennants opened, and General Qiong rode forth. Lance athwart his prancing horse, he halted at the edge of the field of combat.

Song Jiang, beneath his own gate of pennants, was impressed by Qiong's heroic appearance. "Who will vie with this general?" he asked.

Nine Dragons Shi Jin, sword in hand, galloped forward on bounding steed. The two chargers met and their riders battled, sword against lance in a dazzling pattern of motion. Four arms thrust and flailed, eight hoofs churned the turf. Twenty or thirty rounds the men fought. Shi Jin felt his strength ebbing. He turned his horse and headed back towards his own position, with Qiong in hot pursuit.

Hua Rong, who had been directly behind Song Jiang, notched an arrow to his bowstring and rode to the front. When the Tartar was close enough, Hua Rong let fly. The arrow struck Qiong in the face and knocked him from his saddle. Shi Jin, hearing him fall, wheeled his mount around and raced back. With one sweep of the sword, he dispatched Qiong Yaonayan. Though an able warrior, the poor Tartar official nevertheless lost his life.

When Kou saw Qiong cut down, fury rose in his heart, rage flooded his gall. With levelled lance he urged his steed to the front.

"What bandit dared kill my brother with a sniper's arrow?" he cried.

Sun Li the Sickly General galloped out to engage Kou. Pounding battle drums shook the heavens, the air rang with ear-splitting yells. Sun Li's lance darted like a thing possessed. Kou was eight-tenths afraid. After only twenty or so rounds, he turned his horse and fled. Rather than disturb his army's front, he circled to the northeast.

Sun Li, eager to distinguish himself, didn't slacken his chase. Kou was well in the lead. The Sickly General set his lance in its socket, took his bow in his left hand, notched an arrow with his right, and drew the bow to its full. Aiming at Kou's back, he let fly.

The Tartar heard the twang and threw himself prone. As the arrow whizzed by, he snatched it. Sun Li silently applauded his foe. Kou laughed scornfully.

"The rogue thinks he's an archer!"

He clamped the arrow between his teeth and set his lance in the saddle rings. Quickly, he grasped a stiff bow in his left hand, fitted the arrow with his right, twisted around in the saddle and shot at Sun Li's chest.

The Sickly General had seen what the Tartar was up to, and had been riding a zig-zag course. He flung himself back as the arrow neared him, and it flew harmlessly past. His steed couldn't be checked. It careened onward at an all-out run.

Kou slung the bow over his shoulder. He looked back and saw Sun Li lying prone on his horse.

"That arrow must have got him," he thought.

But Sun Li was only pretending. His powerful legs gripped his animal's middle in a tight clasp which prevented him from falling off. Kou slowed his mount and turned to capture his pursuer. When the two horses were only a few meters apart, Sun Li suddenly sat up.

"If I don't take you now," he yelled, "you'll surely run away!"

Kou was stunned. But he shouted back: "You dodged my arrow; let's see you avoid my lance!" He thrust at Sun Li with all his force. Sun Li swelled his chest, let the point clang against his armour, slides off to the side, and then he moved in swiftly and grappled with his opponent. He raised the steel rod hanging from his wrist and brought it down in a crushing blow which tore away half of Kou's pate. The Tartar commander who for most of his life had been an official in Zhenyuan, died at Sun Li's hand, and his corpse lay at his horse's feet. With upraised lance, Sun Li returned to the front. Song Jiang and his army charged the foe. Leaderless, the Tartars fled in all directions. Song Jiang was still pursuing them when he heard ahead a volley of cannon fire. He ordered his naval chieftains to take a contingent and block the water approaches. Just as he was directing Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng to ride to the top of the mountain and keep watch, he saw the Tartars rumbling towards them in swarms which covered the earth. Song Jiang was terrified. His three souls shook and his 7 spirits trembled. Truly, no matter how clever a man may be, it is difficult to escape danger.

The young Tartar commander, Marshal Wuyan's son, with his twenty thousand or more Tartar troops, met up with the royal son-in-law and Chief Li, to constitute an army of over thirty-five thousand. Fully equipped as to weapons and all other necessary items, they formed up and marched off. Before long a scout was reporting this to Song Jiang in Youzhou.

"The enemy have suffered several defeats in a row," Song Jiang said to the Professor. "This time they must have picked experienced troops and top commanders for their attack on us. What's our best plan?"

The Professor said: "Form our men up outside the city. When the Tartars get here we must engage them cautiously, to test them out. If they are no good they will retreat."

Accordingly Song Jiang ordered his troops to take up a position some three or four miles from the city — at a place called Square Mountain, where the ground was level. They were to occupy an area bordering the river at the foot of the mountain in the formation known as the "Eight Trigrams". After a while they saw the Tartar army approaching in three divisions.

The young commander's troops marched under a black banner, the royal son-in-law's under a red banner and Chief Li's under a green banner. The attack was well coordinated. When he saw Song Jiang's formation — under his father's tuition he had become expert in strategy and also in the magic arts — he ordered the red and green divisions to take up positions on either flank and secure themselves. In his own position among the central force he had an observation tower set up and climbed it. Having observed that Song Jiang's formation was indeed the Eight Trigrams one he came down again with a superior smile on his face. "Why do you smile, sir?" his second-in-command asked.

"Because everyone knows that Eight Trigrams formation of theirs," he said. "Who do they think they can fool with that? I'm going to give them a nasty surprise, you'll see!"

He ordered three beats of the drum to be sounded. Then he had a command platform set up. In obedience to signals from two flags on the platform his army wheeled right and left to take up a certain formation, after which he descended again and mounted his horse, ordered the soldiers in his front ranks to make way and rode out in front to parley with Song Jiang.

"Who do you think to impress with your Eight Trigrams formation?" the young commander shouted. "Do you understand what formation I've got?"

Realizing that the Tartar general wanted to compete in battle strategy, Song Jiang ordered an observation platform to be raised and with the Professor and the Strategist mounted it to observe the enemy formation. He saw their three armies drawn up so that the right and left flanks were facing each other. The Strategist recognized this at once. "It's what they call the Trinity," he told Song Jiang. Leaving the other two on the platform, Song Jiang came down and mounted and rode out in front. Pointing with his whip he said: "Do you really suppose there's something special about your Trinity?"

The young commander said: "All right, so you recognize our formation. But just watch our manoeuvres. You'll see something you don't know." He rode back and climbed the platform again. At a signal from the flags the formation changed. The Professor and the Strategist, who were still on their platform, saw the new formation take shape as the Magic Square and sent someone down to inform Song Jiang.

The young commander rode out in front again, resting his halberd and said: "Now can you tell what our formation is?"

"The Magic Square," said Song Jiang.

The young commander gave a curt nod. He returned to his ranks and mounted the platform and again came the signals introduce another change.

The Strategist said: "This is the Revolving Octagon." The messenger informed Song Jiang again. The young commander rode out and shouted in a very loud voice: "Now can you name our formation?"

Song Jiang laughed pityingly and said: "I should say it's just the Revolving Octagon!"

This gave the young commander food for thought. "All these formations were handed down to me confidentially. I didn't expect this fellow would be able to recognize them. The Song army must have some outstanding people." He rode back and mounted the platform again. More signals and the troops wheeled round to form an impenetrable square made up of eight times eight units, sixty-four that is. The Strategist took a good look and said to the Professor: "This is Zhuge Liang's Eight Times Eight. It conceals the front and the rear, so you can't tell where they are." They sent someone to ask Song Jiang to come up and see the formation. "Don't underestimate him," they said. "These formations of theirs are straight from the textbook. First the Trinity, then the Magic Square, then the Revolving Octagon and then the Eight Times Eight: it's a sequence which permits a seamless transforma-tion and is considered the acme of military tactics."

Song Jiang descended from the platform, mounted his charger and rode out in front. The young commander grasped his halberd, pulled his horse up in front of the other army and shouted: "Do you recognize my formation now?"

Song Jiang shouted back: "You're just too green! You're as limited in your views as the frog in the bottom of a well. All you know is these manoeuvres which you think so great. You don't really think you can fool anyone, do you, with your Eight times Eight and hiding the front rank? Our great Song army certainly isn't going to be put off by a mere boy!"

"All right, so you know my formations, let's see if you can produce something to surprise me then!"

"We'll stick with this old formation of ours. You don't think much of it, but do you dare attack it?"

The young commander sneered: "With such feeble strategy, how can it be a problem? You don't realize what a chance you're taking! We shall smash you to pieces!"

He gave out his orders. The royal son-in-law and Chief Li were to command a thousand men each and wait till he had made a breach in the opposing ranks, then come in to back him up. The drum was sounded in the main army.

On the Song side the drum was also sounded three times and the troops were instructed to fall back on two sides before the young commander's attack and let him through.

The young commander mustered a score of his officers and a thousand armoured cavalry. After doing some calculations on his fingers he worked out that it was a fire day and decided not to attack directly from the south, the direction of fire. He led his troops round to the left flank, on the west. A white flag was unfurled and they charged. The troops of his rear were halted by a hail of crossbow bolts, so only half his force got through. The rest returned to their ranks.

Once inside the enemy position, the young commander charged Song Jiang's main army. But suddenly they seemed to be surrounded by an expanse of shining white, like the sides of a steel box. It was a sight that made the young commander turn pale as a sheet. "How can they have defences like this in the middle of their army?" he asked himself in amazement. He ordered everyone to try to break through and fight their way back the way they had come. But when they looked back they saw nothing but a vast white surface like a sea of silver, and heard nothing but the sound of water. They could see no way through. Still more alarmed, the young commander led his men towards the south opening. But here they were confronted by a hundred balls of fire and thousands of fiery threads snaking out over the ground. Of enemy troops there was no sign. He dared not approach this south opening so he headed diagonally towards the east gate, only to find the way again blocked by the leafy branches of trees and mountains of timber strewn on the ground, defended on all sides by deer's' antlers. Again, no way through. Turning back to the north opening, they found a thick black mist veiling the sky, a dark cloud obscuring the sun: if you held out your hand you couldn't see the fingers, it was dark as hell. So there he was, stuck in the middle of the enemy force, stymied at every turn. "Song Jiang must be employing magic," he thought to himself. "No point in asking how, we've just got to get out or die in the attempt." He gave his troops the order and with a mighty yell they charged.

At this moment a tall warrior sprang up on one side and shouted: "Where do you think you're going to, youngster?"

The young commander was prepared to put up a fight, but before he could strike a blow, a rod flashed towards his head. His reflexes were quick and he parried with his square halberd. There was a loud crack as two rods broke the halberd in half. As he tried to resist, his opponent thrust at his chest and with a supple movement seized him and dragged him from the saddle. So dark was it that the rest of his troops could not make out what was going on. They had no alternative but to dismount and surrender. The young commander's captor was none other than that fearsome warrior Twin Rods Huyan Zhuo.

All this time Taoist Gongsun with the main army had been weaving his spells. Now the young commander had been captured, Taoist Gongsun put away his magic and normal daylight returned.

Meanwhile the royal son-in-law and Chief Li, each with a thousand men, were waiting in the wings for the signal to attack in support of their commander. To their surprise they saw no sign of battle, so they dared not attack. Song Jiang now rode out in front of his men and shouted across the divide: "You'd better surrender; what're you waiting for? We've your young commander!"

He told a group of swordsmen to push the captive out in front. When Chief Li saw his commander a captive, he galloped forward with his spear to rescue him. But Thunderclap, who was in the front ranks, charged out with his wolf's-tooth mace and flew at him. The horses clashed, the weapons were raised, and a continuous roar rose from the 2 armies. Chief Li was the first to waver. His reactions began to slow and Thunderclap caught him with a blow on the head that pierced and shattered his helmet. He crashed to the ground. The royal son-in-law seeing Chief Li defeated withdrew his forces. Song Jiang ordered his whole army into action and the Tartar troops were routed. Over three thousand horses were taken, and the whole valley was littered with abandoned banners, spears and halberds. Song Jiang now led his army to attack Yanjing, determined to push back the enemy and recapture all the stolen territory for his Emperor.

When the defeated Tartars fled to their capital and saw Marshal Wuyan, they told him how his son had attacked the Song army and been captured alive and how all his officers had surrendered. They told too how Chief Li had died there and the royal son-in-law had run for his life and no one knew where he was. The Marshal was thoroughly perplexed: "My son has studied military tactics since he was small," he said. "He knows all there is to know about it. What kind of formation did that devil Song Jiang use to capture him?"

"Just the ordinary Eight Trigrams formation, nothing special at all," they told him. "Our young commander tried out four different formations and that madman knew them all. In the end he said to our general: 'You know all about this formation of ours, but do you dare to attack it?' Our general ordered an attack by over a thousand cavalry from the west. We were fired on by their archers and crossbowmen and only half the riders got through. How they managed to take him alive we can't tell you."

The Marshal said: "He wouldn't have had any trouble attacking a familiar formation like that. They must have switched to another one."

"We were on the command platform," the generals said. "We could observe their formation. The ranks did not move, the signal flags did not change. All we saw was a black cloud hovering overhead which hid their army."

"Then it must be magic," the Marshal said. "Now, if I don't attack first, they'll be coming here. If I can't defeat them I shall cut my own throat! Who will volunteer to be in my vanguard? Who will lead the attack? I must stay with the main force."

Two commanders stepped up together: "We two want to be first," they said. One was General Qiong from the main army, the other General Kou from the Yanjing garrison.

The Marshal was pleased. "Take great care, then, both of you," he said. "I shall give you ten thousand troops to form the vanguard. Remember it's up to you to open the way and do your very best. I shall be right behind you with the main army."

While Qiong and Kou prepared and then set off, leading the vanguard, Marshal Wuyan mustered a huge army under eleven illustrious generals and twenty-eight commanders.

Song Jiang's spies informed him that Qiong and Kou were attacking and that the enemy force was not negligible. Not a little concerned, he called for the Unicorn's troops, as well as the garrisons previously established at Tanzhou and Qizhou. He invited Commissioner Zhao to come and direct the campaign. He also told the boat captains to disembark all hands and to muster in Bazhou to join the battle on land.

The boat captains brought Commissioner Zhao up to Youzhou. Song Jiang and the others received him and after greetings had been exchanged the Commissioner said to Song Jiang: "You are most diligent, General, a true pillar of the state, your name will live ten thousand years. When I return to the court I will most certainly commend you to the Emperor."

Song Jiang replied: "My merit is slight, I have done nothing of significance. Any achievement I have is due to the Emperor's graciousness and your reputation, sir, not to my own ability. Today I received a report on the military situation. I heard that Marshal Wuyan of Liao has enlisted two hundred thousand troops to dispute the government of this country with us. This time it is prosper or perish, sink or swim, this battle is going to be decisive. I would ask Your Excellency to set up camp about five miles away where you can observe the contest. I shall do everything in my power, you will see, and I trust that my comrades and I can go forward to victory."

The Commissioner said: "I trust your judgement."

Song Jiang bade Commissioner Zhao farewell and with the Unicorn marched the main army to the village of Everbright where they halted and made camp. He summoned all the leaders to his tent to discuss the military situation. "This time Marshal Wuyan is going to lead the Tartar forces himself," he told them. "Their arrival is imminent and it has to be taken very seriously! Our very lives and the success of our mission will depend on this battle. Each and every one of you must go forward valiantly, there can be no thought of retreating. Any success you achieve will reach the ears of the Emperor who is sure to reward you, to the benefit of us all."

As one man, they rose to their feet and said: "No one would dream of disregarding our Leader's orders!"

Whilst these discussions were going on a sentry came to report the arrival of a Tartar emissary with a declaration of war. Song Jiang had him brought in to his tent and the missive was presented. Song Jiang broke the seal. He read that the two aides to the Tartar commander-in-chief Marshal Wuyan, leaders of his vanguard, were proposing a decisive battle in the coming days. Song Jiang signified his acceptance at the bottom of the letter. He ordered the envoy to be given wine and food and then sent back to his camp.

Autumn was over and winter just beginning. Everyone was wearing heavy armour and the horses had their protective leather trappings, so the season was propitious. The following day they breakfasted at dawn and set out. They had not gone much more than a mile when they came face to face with the Tartars.

General Qiong rode out in front on a prancing steed. Song Jiang was impressed by the sight. "Who wants to do battle with that commander?" he asked.

Then Shi Jin the Tattooed Dragon galloped out on a mettlesome charger, sword in hand and rode to join battle with Qiong. The horses clashed, weapons were swung. After 32 bouts, the Tattooed Dragon aimed a blow that missed its target. Disconcerted by this, he turned his horse and galloped back towards his own ranks. Colonel Hua who was behind Song Jiang saw the Tattooed Dragon bested and grasped his bow. He fitted an arrow to it and guided his horse forward. The arrow whizzed to its target, striking Qiong square in the forehead, knocking him from his horse. The Tattooed Dragon hearing him fall turned immediately and with another sword blow finished him off. When Kou saw the fate of his comrade, the iron entered his soul. Lance at the ready, he charged forward and shouted: "You rebel dogs, how dare you conspire against my brother!" Immediately Colonel Sun galloped towards him. Drums sounded to the heavens the shouting was endless. Colonel Sun's work with the steel spear was awe-inspiring. Kou barely lasted twenty bouts, before reining in his horse and fleeing. He dared not return to his own side for fear of becoming entangled with the front ranks, so he rode round them on the northeast. Colonel Sun was after glory and didn't want to let him get away. He gave his horse its head and galloped in pursuit. Kou had already put a fair distance between them. Colonel Sun rested his lance, took his bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right, bent the bow to the full and, aiming carefully at his opponent's back, let fly. Kou, hearing the snap of the bowstring, bent over and just before the arrow hit stretched out his hand and grasped it. Even Colonel Sun, when he saw this, could not help applauding in his heart. Kou smiled grimly to himself. "The blighter thinks he's a dab hand with the bow." He put the arrow between his teeth, placed his lance in the rest, took his own bow in his left hand and the arrow in his right, fitted the arrow to the string, twisted round in the saddle, and fired at Colonel Sun's chest. Colonel Sun saw what was going on out of the corner of his eye. He swayed this way and that, and as the arrow was about to strike leant over backwards so that it passed harmlessly overhead. His horse bolted. Kou hung the bow on his shoulder and straightened up. Seeing Sun go over backwards, he thought he must have hit him. But Colonel Sun had a firm seat and his legs pressed the stirrups while he lay along the horse's back, keeping him in the saddle. Kou turned and headed back to take him. As the 2 horses' heads seemed about to meet, with no more than a yard or two between them, Colonel Sun jerked himself upright and let out a piercing yell. For a moment, Kou was taken aback. Then he recovered and said, "You managed to avoid my arrow but you'll be unable to dodge my spear," and aimed a mighty thrust at Colonel Sun's chest. The other raised his arm to ward off the blow and the spear point merely glanced off his armour and grazed his ribs. Kou tried to get in close. Sun raised the jointed steel whip that hung from his wrist and flicked it at the other's head. It sliced off half his skull. Thus did General Kou, who had served the Tartars for half a lifetime, meet his death at the hands of Colonel Sun. His lifeless body crashed to the ground at his horse's feet, while Colonel Sun placed his lance in the ring and returned to his own side. Song Jiang gave his troops free rein to Harry the enemy. The Tartars, now leaderless, scurried away in all directions, every man for himself. As Song Jiang gave chase, he heard ahead of him a series of loud reports. He ordered the waterborne leaders to take a body of men to block the river inlet. He told Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, the Little Duke, and the Halberdier to ride to the hilltop to see what was going on. They observed a scene of great confusion, as a horde of Tartar troops poured forward. It was a chilling sight.

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### Commander-in-Chief Marshal Wu Yan Sets Up & employs the Zodiac Deployment; The Mystic Queen Counsels & Instructs Song Jiang in a Dream

From a bluff Song Jiang viewed the powerful Liao army, then rode quickly back to his own position. He ordered a withdrawal to a mountain pass in Yongqing County. There, in his tent, he conferred with Lu the Magnate, Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng.

"Although we defeated them in battle and killed two of their vanguard generals," he said, "the army I saw from the bluff is huge and strong. They're coming in endless lines. Only a tremendous force can deal with them. But we're comparatively few. What can we do?"

"Skilled generals among the ancients were able to defeat larger foes and do it beautifully," said Wu Yong. "In the old days, Xie Xuan of the state of Jin, with fifty thousand troops, beat back Fu Jian with twice that number. There have been many such cases. What are you worried about! Order out soldiers to go into battle with pennants tightly ranked, arrows notched to the bows, swords out of their scabbards. Set deer antler stakes in depth, alertly defend our camps. Construct good trenches and fortifications, have our weapons all laid out, our ladders and cannons in working order, and everything in proper readiness. We'll deploy simply in the Nine-Unit Octagon. This will be our defense. Though they come with a million soldiers, they won't dare to attack!"

"Well put, Military Advisor," said Song Jiang. He transmitted his instructions and directed his chieftains to await his orders.

Breakfast was before dawn the next day, and they broke camp when the sun cleared the horizon. They marched to the border of Changping County, spread out in battle formation, and set up new encampments. Foremost were the cavalry. Then came the infantry under Tiger General Qin Ming, with Huyan Zhuo to the rear, Guan Sheng on the left, Lin Chong on the right. Suo Chao was southeast, Xu Ning northeast, Dong Ping southwest, and Yang Zhi northwest. Song Jiang commanded the central contingent. The other chieftains maintained their original posts. The rear infantry established another position, under the command of Lu Junyi the Magnate, Lu Zhishen and Wu Song.

Amid their thousands of troops, the chieftains, talented militarists every one, rubbed their hands and prepared for the slaughter. The positions were laid out. They were ready for the Tartars.

Before long, they saw the Liao contingents moving forward in the distance. First came six units, serving both as an opening wedge and a defensive shield, three to the left and three to the right, five hundred men in each, the relative positions of the units shifting constantly.

Behind these the main force followed, their numbers covering the earth. The lead contingent was a sea of black flags and it stretched out in a row of seven cavalry troops, with a thousand riders in each, and each led by a senior commander. How were the commanders attired? Black helmets, armor and robes, astride ebony steeds and bearing ordinary arms. Each troop was designated by one of the Seven Northern Constellations.

The commanding general of all seven had on his standard the Mystic Militant Water Planet of the North. How was he dressed? A brown bandanna which covered his forehead bound his long silky black hair. Over a sleeveless black robe was silver armor chilling to behold. A lion's head belt clasped the darkly gleaming metal. He sat his spirited stallion firmly in a saddle of tooled leather. Hanging from his shoulder, the quiver bearing his arrows and hard bow of scoured poplar was decorated with animals rampant and flying fish. He held a three-pointed, two-edged, four-sided, eight-ringed sword. His name was Quli Chuqing and his personal troop consisted of three thousand horsemen with black shoulder-length hair, and their standard was the Five Vapors Constellation of the North. Supporting the black bannered contingent were infantry without number.

Green dragons writhed on the banners of the left contingent, which advanced in a row of seven cavalry troops, with a thousand riders in each, and each led by a senior commander. How were these commanders dressed? In four-seamed helmets, scaled armor in the shape of poplar leaves covering robes of kingfisher green. They rode horses with manes dyed green, and carried regular weapons. The Seven Eastern Constellations were the standards for the seven troops, and over them all was a commanding general whose standard was the Green Dragon Wood Planet of the East.

How was he attired? A lion's head helmet, armor from the hide of a fleet horse over a fine green robe, bound by a girdle of gold and green jade. He sat a saddle of tooled leather, a quiver of bow and arrows hung from his waist, and his hawk's beak boots were planted in stirrups of precious metal. In his hand was a crescent-bladed battle-ax with a filigreed gold handle, and his dragon horse was of the Clear Jade breed. His name was Zhi'er Folang and his personal troop contained three thousand cavalrymen bearing green banners. Their standard was the Nine Vapors Constellation of the East. Supporting the green bannered contingent were countless foot soldiers.

The right contingent, bearing white tiger banners, contained seven cavalry troops in a row, with a thousand riders in each, and each led by a senior commander. How were these commanders attired? In water-burnished helmets, and shining silver armor over plain silk robes. They rode snowy white horses and carried hand-gripped weapons, and their seven troops were designated by the Seven Western Constellations.

Over all seven was a commanding general whose standard was the Gold Planet of the Deep Pool of the West. How was he dressed? In a conical helmet with phoenix feathers, and double hooked armor of patterned silver plus a coldly gleaming jade belt over a fitted plain silk robe of flying snowflakes design. He rode a fleet steed of the Jade That Shines in the Night breed, and wielded a silver halberd of pure steel. His name was Wuli Kean, and his personal troop contained three thousand horsemen bearing white-tasseled silk pennants. Their standard was the Seven Vapors Constellation of the West. Before and behind the white bannered contingent were supporting infantry without number.

Pink banners marked the rear contingent—seven cavalry troops in a row, each with a thousand horsemen, each led by a senior commander. How were these commanders attired? In conical hats of ochre red and robes dyed the color of orangoutan blood, over which was chain and fish-scale armor of peach pink. They rode roan chargers called Red Rabbits and carried grip-handled weapons. The troops were named after the Seven Southern Constellations. Over all was a commanding general whose standard was the Ochre Peacock Fire Planet.

How was he dressed? In a stitched cap with shiny red tassels, and a purple-sheened pink robe covered by armor with a sunset design, and boots basted with red thread. A red leather belt encrusted with precious stones bound his waist, a quiver containing a hard bow and arrows hung from his shoulder. He carried an eight-foot-long dragon sword in his hand and rode a rough-red steed. He was General Dongxian Wenrong, and he led a personal troop of three thousand horsemen bearing red silk pennants. Their standard was the Three Vapors Constellation of the South. Supporting the pink-bannered contingent were foot soldiers without number in red-tasseled, red-stitched clothes.

In front of the Liao fixed position to the left were five thousand fierce horsemen, wearing caps stitched with gold thread and gold-plated armor over pink robes with crimson tassels. They bore fiery-red banners and rode roan steeds. The commander wore a stitched gold cap of hibiscus and sceptre pattern, and golden chain mail of linked animal faces over a fiery red embroidered robe, bound by a girdle encrusted with gold and precious stones. He carried a matched set of Sun and Moon swords and rode a Five Luminances red horse. He was Prince Yelu Dezhong, Royal Brother of the King of Liao. His standard was the Sun.

To the right in front of the Liao fixed position were five thousand women cavalry. They were dressed in patterned silver caps, silver hooked armor over plain robes of tasseled silk, and bore white pennants, rode white horses, and wielded silver-handled blade-lances. Their commander had in her hair, on opposite sides of her head, two pins of phoenix design trailing green silk. Around her forehead was a red silk band with precious stone sequins. The cloud pattern on her shoulders was tastefully set off by the brocade of her skirt. Over her silver armor she wore a tunic embroidered with dragons. Her small flowered boots rested firmly in her stirrups. In her diaphanous sleeve she carried a light jade-handled whip. She bore a Seven Star precious sword and rode a spirited silver-white horse. She was Dalibo, Royal Princess of the Kingdom of Liao. Her standard was the Moon.

Between the left and right cavalry units, amid a mass of yellow banners, were generals in golden armor, riding gold-hued horses. Their robes and armor formed a swath of yellow clouds, their embroidered yellow turbans were a mist covering half the sky. Four of these generals held the highest rank. Each commanded three thousand soldiers, and each defended one of the four corners of a square.

In the southeast corner was Royal Nephew Yelu Derong. He wore golden armor and an animal-face belt over a robe of black. Three pins held his golden cap in place. He carried a bow and arrows and a black-tasseled lance, and rode a pale dark steed. His standard was the Mouth of the Net Constellation.

Royal Nephew Yelu Dehua was in the southwest corner. He wore silver armor and a simple belt over a purple robe, and precious ornaments decorated his cap. He carried a stiff bow and arrows, wielded a precious sword and rode a black-maned, black-tailed roan. His standard was the Commemorative Constellation.

In the northeast corner was Royal Nephew Yelu Dechong. He was dressed in a green robe, silver armor, and wore a purple cap and precious belt. Hanging from his waist were a dragon bow and phoenix arrows. He grasped a crescent-bladed halberd and rode a Five Luminances yellow steed. His standard was the Purple Vapor Constellation.

The northwest corner was defended by Royal Nephew Yelu Dexin. He wore bronze armor over a white robe. A red band shot with black thread bound his forehead, and he was adorned with a gold-inlaid, gem-encrusted belt. A carved bow and arrows hung from his waist. In his hand he held a Seven Star precious sword, and he rode a jet-black steed with snowy white fetlocks. His standard was the Lunar Comet.

From among the yellow banners a general emerged whose standard was the Central Control Star. To his left were green flags, to his right were white banners. Before him were red panoplies, behind were black umbrellas. Encircling him were flags representing the twenty-four solar terms, and the sixty-four sections of the Octagon, plus the Southern Aurora, the Northern Dipper, the Flying Dragon, the Flying Tiger, the Flying Bear, and the Flying Panther—all blending in a confusing array which obscured the Jade Firmament.

How was this general attired? In a purple and gold cap encrusted with precious gems, in tortoise-back armor of gleaming gold over an embroidered silk gown from Sichuan, in a girdle of charming jade from Lantian. His bow, hanging on his left side, had a steel center and was etched in gold. His arrows, in a quiver on his left, had phoenix feathers and barbed heads. He was shod in hawk-beak-patterned, cloud-soled boots, and he rode an iron-backed, silver-footed horse. He sat a decorated saddle, the purple silk reins wrapped around the pommel, his feet firmly in the stirrups. At his waist hung his sword of command, in his hand he held his general's baton.

As he rode to the fore, he grasped the ochre-decorated shaft of his crescent-bladed halberd. Amid that gold and glittering array he was clearly the leader, for he was Wuyan, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Forces of the Kingdom of Great Liao.

Behind the yellow banners was a royal phoenix and dragon carriage, surrounded by seven concentric rings of fully armed soldiers. In the center were thirty-six pairs of yellow-turbaned warriors who pushed the carriage. Preceding it, on the trace horses, were nine postillion riders in saddles of gold. Eight pairs of warriors in embroidered garments brought up the rear.

Seated on a throne in the middle of the carriage was the King of Great Liao, on his head a tall conical turban, his body encased in a nine-dragon robe of royal yellow, a Lantian jade girdle around his waist, red court boots upon his feet. Flanking him were his ministers. Youxi Bojin, the premier was on his left. Marshal Chu Jian, the vice-premier was on his right. Both wore ornate caps, fiery-skirted ochre gowns with purple fringes and gold slabs, and girdles of ivory and jade. On either side of the throne stood richly dressed boys and girls, holding jade and ivory implements. Royal Guards closely surrounded the carriage. For his standard the king had personally selected the North Star Which Reigns Imperially over All. The ministers to his left and right flew banners showing accompanying constellations.

The Liao army was now in position, spread out in an egg-shaped celestial deployment, anchored firmly like an overturned basin. Flags in four corners, weapons on eight sides, locked in shifting rings, the Tartars were able to advance or withdraw at will.

Song Jiang first pinned down the enemy's forward pickets with arrows from his archers. Then he and Wu Yong and Zhu Wu climbed a sky-ladder for a look. What he saw astonished him. Wu Yong didn't recognize the Tartar layout, but Zhu Wu said it was a Zodiac Deployment.

"It's called the Great Monad," he explained.

"How should it be assaulted?" Song Jiang asked.

"It keeps changing all the time. It's very difficult to come to grips with it," said Zhu Wu. "I don't know how to assault it."

"If we can't crack it open, how are we going to drive them back?"

"The trouble is we don't really understand their set-up," said Wu Yong. "How can we attack?"

While they were conferring, Wuyan the Tartar commander-in-chief was issuing his orders. "Today is a 'gold' day," he said. "We'll therefore have four officers—Gold Dragon Zhang Qi, Gold Ox Xue Xiong, Gold Dog Aliyi and Gold Ram Wang Jing—go with the Great White Gold Star General Wuli Kean and attack Song Jiang."

At the battle front, Song Jiang and his chieftains observed the seven Tartar troops to the left. Their pennant gates now opened, now closed, while drums thundered. Within their position, they seemed to be moving about a lot. The commander's banner travelled from east to north, to west, to south.

"The Celestial Platter is turning to the left," said Zhu Wu, "and today is a 'gold' day. That means they're going to attack."

Before the words were out of his mouth, five cannons boomed in unison, and soldiers surged out of the enemy position. In their center was the Gold Star General and his four satellites. With the force of an avalanche they led five troops in a murderous charge. Nothing could stop them. Taken by surprise, Song Jiang's forces hastily retreated, while trying to stem the foe's advance. But the Tartars caught them in a pincers, and they suffered heavy losses. They scrambled back to their fortified camp. The Liao army did not pursue.

A check revealed that Kong Liang had received a sword wound, Li Yun had been hit by an arrow, Zhu Fu had been injured by shrapnel, and Shi Yong had been stabbed by a lance. Among the troops there were wounds without number. The casualties were loaded onto carts and sent to a rear camp for medical treatment by Dr. An Daoquan. Song Jiang instructed his forward echelons to lay iron brambles and plant deer antler stakes and defend the camp's approaches.

"We took a beating today," Song Jiang said to Lu Junyi moodily. "What are we going to do? If we don't go out and challenge them, they're sure to launch an offensive."

"Use two columns to hit the units defending their flanks, while another two assault the seven troops due north," Lu proposed. "Then have our infantry pour in through the middle. We'll see what the knaves have got in there."

"All right."

The next day, in accordance with Lu's suggestion, they put their fortified camp in order, opened the gates wide, and moved forward with their assault contingent. As they neared the Liao position, the six units in charge of defense spotted them. Song Jiang ordered Guan Sheng to move up from the left, Huyan Zhuo from the right. He himself advanced in a frontal drive. Soon, they were in contact with the foe. Song Jiang then dispatched two more contingents to strike at the black-bannered seven troops in the center from the left and right. Sure enough, they broke them, and inflicted heavy casualties.

The black-bannered troops were in disarray. Song Jiang now ordered the five hundred shield warriors under Li Kui the Black Whirlwind to strike, to be followed by an infantry charge led by Lu Zhishen and Wu Song. It was a chaotic battle. Cannon thundered on all sides. Two columns from east and west, and the king's own yellow-bannered troops directly ahead, smashed into Song Jiang's forces. The pressure was too great. They turned and fled. The rear guard couldn't hold. It was badly mauled by the time it reached the fortified camp.

A check showed that more than half of Song Jiang's effectives had been destroyed. Du Qian and Song Wan were severely wounded. Li Kui was missing—as he hacked his way into the enemy position Black Whirlwind had been pinned down by hooked poles and captured. The news distressed Song Jiang. He ordered Du Qian and Song Wan to the rear camp for medical treatment. Injured horses were led off to be tended by Huangfu Duan.

"Today we lost both Li Kui and the battle," Song Jiang said to Wu Yong. "What can we do?"

"We captured Wuyan's son, the young general, a few days ago. We can make an exchange."

"If we do that now, how will we be able to save other chieftains we may lose in the future?"

"Why worry ahead of time, brother? Let's solve first things first."

A junior officer entered and announced: "A Liao emissary is here with something to say."

Song Jiang directed that he be brought in. As soon as he was presented, the emissary delivered his message.

"Our commander-in-chief has ordered me to inform you that today we captured one of your chieftains. Instead of killing him, our commander wined and dined him. He offers to exchange him for his son, the young general. If you are willing, we will return your chieftain."

"We'll bring the young general to the front tomorrow and make the exchange," Song Jiang promised.

The Tartar emissary mounted his horse and departed.

"We have no plan for breaking the enemy position," said Song Jiang. "It would be good if we could use the exchange to get a respite in the hostilities."

Wu Yong agreed. "Our army needs a rest. If we can work out some new strategy in the meanwhile, we can always hit them later."

That evening, men were sent to fetch the young general to headquarters, and an emissary was dispatched to Commander-in-Chief Wuyan.

The Tartar general was seated in his tent when a junior officer announced: "A messenger is here from Song Jiang." Wuyan ordered that he be allowed in. The emissary, on entering, spoke his piece.

"Our Vanguard General Song Jiang conveys his respects to Your Excellency. He is ready to exchange the young general for our chieftain. Since the weather is bitterly cold and the soldiers are weary, to prevent frostbite and suffering he proposes an armistice and a renewal of discussions in the spring. We request the Commander-in-Chief's approval."

"So you've captured that stupid, worthless son of mine," Wuyan shouted. "Even if he lives, he'd never have the effrontery to face me! We don't need any exchange. Take him out and kill him for me. If Song Jiang wants an end to hostilities, let him surrender, bound hand and foot, and save you all from death! Otherwise, I'll come with my mighty army and not a single blade of grass will be left standing! Now get out!"

The emissary flew back on his horse to the fortified camp and reported the conversation to Song Jiang.

Alarmed, and afraid that he would lose the chance to rescue Li Kui, Song Jiang left camp with the young Tartar general and hurried to the front.
"You can release our chieftain," he called. "I'm returning your young general. If you don't want an armistice, that's all right with us. We'll fight it out with you to the death!"
From the Liao position Li Kui was quietly placed on a horse and led to the fore. On this side, the same was done with the young general. Without another word from either adversary, the exchange was made. Li Kui returned to camp. The young general rode away. Neither side took hostile action that day. Song Jiang withdrew to camp with his soldiers and celebrated with Li Kui.
Later, he conferred with his chieftains in his tent. "The Liao force is powerful and we have no plan for cracking it," he said. "I'm anxious and worried. Each day seems like a year. What shall we do?"
Huyan Zhuo had a proposal. "Divide into ten columns. Leave two to hold our position, and hit them with the other eight, together, in a decisive battle."
"I rely entirely on your united hearts and strength, brothers," said Song Jiang. "That is the method we'll employ."
"We couldn't budge them in the last two engagements," said Wu Yong. "It would be better to wait till they attack us."
"That doesn't sound like a good idea to me. As long as the brothers are determined to combine against the foe, there's no reason why we should be defeated."
Orders were issued the same day. The following morning they broke camp, separated into ten columns, and marched out at a rapid pace. Two columns first established a back-up position. The remaining eight, disdaining any preliminary palaver with the foe, plunged into the Zodiac Deployment, shouting and yelling, banners waving.
At once cannon rumbled, forty-eight pennant gates opened, and Tartar soldiers charged in a wide snaking line. Song Jiang's men were taken by surprise. They retreated in disorder, trailing banners and lances, their trumpets and drums askew. They lost many troops before reaching their fortified camp.
Song Jiang ordered his chieftains to defend the mountain pass with pallisaded fortifications, dig a deep moat around the camp, and plant deer-antler stakes. The gates were to be kept closed. No one was to go out. The army would spend the winter in camp.
In response to repeated petitions to the throne by Commissioner Zhao Anfu, the emperor granted winter clothing to the expeditionary force. These were to be delivered by Wang Wenbin, formerly a drill instructor in the Imperial Guards and now the garrison commandant at Zhengzhou. Wang, an intelligent and courageous man, was highly qualified in both civil and military affairs. He left the capital with over ten thousand armored troops and a convoy of civilian drivers and nearly two hundred carts laden with five hundred thousand items of clothing, heading first for Chen Bridge Station. He was instructed to urge Song Jiang to resume hostilities and push for an early victory; delay would be a punishable offense. A yellow banner at the head of the convoy was emblazoned with the words *Imperial Gift Clothing*. Officials along the route supplied food and fodder.
The journey took many a day. At the Border Hall, Wang met Commissioner Zhao, to whom he handed a document from the Council of Administration. Zhao read it. He was very pleased.
"You've come just at the right time, General! Song Jiang has failed repeatedly in his assaults on the Zodiac Deployment laid out by Wuyan, the Liao commander-in-chief. Many of his chieftains were wounded. They are here right now, being treated by Dr. An. Song Jiang has built a fortified camp in Yongqing County and doesn't dare sally forth. He's very depressed."
"That's why the emperor has sent me. He wants him to resume the offensive in a combined operation with my men. Although Song Jiang has suffered several defeats, I can't go back to the Council of Military Affairs and simply report this to the emperor. I'm not very clever, but I've read a few books on military lore and know a bit about strategy. I'd like to go to the front and try a few tactics. Perhaps I could take some of the burden off Song Jiang in a decisive battle. Would that meet with Your Excellency's approval?"
Commissioner Zhao was delighted. He gave a feast for the commandant and rewarded the carters. He told Wang to deliver the clothing to the troops, but first dispatched an emissary to inform Song Jiang.
When the man arrived, Song Jiang was brooding in his tent. He was advised that Wang Wenbin, the garrison commandant at Zhengzhou, had arrived from the capital with fifty thousand items of winter clothing, and that Wang was authorized to join in a combined offensive. Song Jiang immediately sent a man to lead Wang to his tent, where he welcomed him with wine. After they had downed several cups, Wang asked what seemed to be the difficulty.
"When I was ordered to this border area by the court, thanks to the emperor's beneficent emanations I conquered four big cities," said Song Jiang. But then, in Youzhou Prefecture, Wuyan, commander-in-chief of the Great Liao Kingdom, laid out a Zodiac Deployment. Two hundred thousand troops, in neat array, like stars in the sky, with the king himself taking personal command! I've lost several engagements in a row. I can hold defensively, but I've no plan for attack. I dare not move. Fortunately, you've come, General. I hope you will teach me."
"There's nothing wonderful about that Zodiac Deployment! I have no talent, but I'd like to go to the front with you and take a look at it. Then we can decide."
Song Jiang gladly agreed. He directed Pei Xuan to turn the clothing over to the chieftains for distribution. When all were warmly dressed, they faced south and gratefully shouted long live the emperor. That day a feast was laid for General Wang and his soldiers were rewarded.
The next morning the reinforced army set out. Wang Wenbin mounted and proceeded to the front in full armor. Tartar soldiers opposite, watching their approach, reported it to headquarters. Trumpets and drams promptly sounded in unison, and loud shouts arose. Six cavalry units moved out from the Liao position. Song Jiang dispatched units which drove them back. Wang climbed the command tower for a look.
"It's just an ordinary deployment," he said, after coming down the ladder. "I don't see anything startling."
Actually, he didn't recognize the enemy deployment, and was only putting on a show of knowledge. He directed that the drums of the forward echelon pound out a challenge. The drums and trumpets of the adversaries responded in kind. Song Jiang reined in his steed.
"We don't want dogs and wretches," he shouted. "Have you got any real men who will fight?"
Even before he had finished speaking, the fourth gate of the black-bannered troop opened and an officer flew out. His hair, which hung loose, was bound at the forehead by a strip of yellow silk. He wore darkly gleaming armor of metal hoops over a sleeveless black robe. On a raven-black horse, a three-pointed sword in hand, he rode briskly to the front. Behind him came innumerable junior officers. At the head of their procession, a black banner bore the inscription in letters of silver: *General Quli Chuqing*.
"What better place than here for me to display my skill," Wang said to himself. With levelled lance he cantered into the field and, without any preliminaries, charged the Tartar general.
Wang lunged with his weapon, the Tartar parried with his blade. They had contended for about twenty rounds when the Tartar turned and fled. Wang raced after him. The Tartar had not really been vanquished. It was only a trick to lure Wang into pursuit. Brandishing his big sword, the Tartar waited till Wang was close, then turned swiftly and hacked. He cleaved Wang clean through from shoulder to chest, tumbling him dead at his horse's feet.
Hurriedly, Song Jiang called back his troops, while the Liao soldiers advanced. They fought a sharp engagement until the Song forces retreated to their camp in disorder. The death of Wang Wenbin had shocked both officers and men, and they stole glances at one another.
Song Jiang wrote a report to Commissioner Zhao: "Wang Wenbin went voluntarily into combat and was killed. Half the soldiers he brought with him have returned to the capital." Zhao was depressed by the news, go and extremely worried. He could only relay the information to the emperor and to the Council of Military Affairs.
Brooding in his camp, Song Jiang wracked his brain for a means to break the Liao army. He ate and slept badly, he was restless and disturbed. It was a bitterly cold winter night, and he sighed as he sat huddled over a single candle. Around the second watch, he wearily stretched out with his clothes on. Outside, the wind howled. The chill ate into his bones. He sat up.
Suddenly, he saw before him a green-clad girl acolyte, her palms pressed together in salutation.
"Where did you come from?" he queried.
"I'm here on orders from our queen. She extends her invitation. Can I trouble you to come a short distance with me, General?"
"Where is your queen?"
"Not far."
Song Jiang went with the acolyte out of the tent. A glow—an interplay of gold and jade—suffused the upper and lower sky. There was a fragrant breeze and a soft mist. The weather was like spring.
They walked only two or three //and Song Jiang saw ahead, in a large grove of pine and cypress and purple osmanthus, a stone-balustraded winding path overhung by lush bamboos and swaying willows. Crossing a stone bridge, they passed through a gate with a cinnabar-red lintel. Inside the courtyard were buildings with beautifully painted walls, decorated rafters and beams, red gold-studded doors, jade-tiled roofs and heavy eaves, curtains like delicate prawn tendrils and tortoise-backed window sills.
The acolyte led Song Jiang east along a corridor to a room on the left. She pushed open the vermilion door and asked him to be seated for a few minutes. On all sides of the room were quiet cloud windows and sunset-hued daises. It was filled with the scent of heavenly flowers and rare incense.
The girl went away, but returned very quickly. "Our queen invites the star lord to join her," she said.
The seat of Song Jiang's chair was scarcely warm. He rose immediately. Two fairy maids came in, wearing garlands of hibiscus and jade. Their garments were of red silk and gold thread, their faces were like the full moon, their hands like tender bamboo shoots. They glided towards Song Jiang and greeted him. He dared not look at them directly.
"You needn't be so modest, General," they said. "Our queen is just changing her clothes. She wants to discuss some affairs of state. Please come with us."
Assenting, Song Jiang followed them.
A bell sounded and chimes rang as a green-clad girl welcomed Song Jiang outside a large hall. The two fairy maids preceded him up the stairs on the east side. They approached a pearl curtain. Song Jiang could hear the tinkling of little jade chimes stirring in the breeze. The green-clad girl invited him in. He knelt before an incense table.
Then he raised his eyes and looked around. Amid fresh clouds and purple mist, directly opposite on a couch carved with nine dragons, there sat the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven. On her head was a crown of nine dragons and flying phoenixes. She wore a gossamer blouse of pale brown decorated with precious gems in dragon and phoenix design and a sun and moon skirt. Her feet were shod in pearl-studded cloud pattern slippers. She held a rod of flawless white jade. In attendance were twenty or thirty fairy maids.
"It's been several years since I gave you the Three Heavenly Books," said the Mystic Queen. "You have kept them well and observed them faithfully. Now the Song emperor has sent you against the Tartars. Are you succeeding?"
Song Jiang prostrated himself before her and replied: "I have respected the Books and kept their secret ever since Your Majesty presented them to me. On orders of the emperor I have been campaigning against the Tartars, but I have failed several times in attacks on the Zodiac Deployment laid out by Wuyan, the enemy's commander-in-chief. I've no idea how to crack it. We're in a precarious situation."
"Don't you know the magic formula?"
Song Jiang again kowtowed. "I do not. I'm just a crude ignorant fellow. Pray, instruct me, Your Majesty."
"The Zodiac Deployment is arranged like the solar system. Simply bludgeoning will never break it. You have to follow the Laws of Harmony and Antagonism. The black-bannered contingent, for example, centers around the Water Planet, and has the Five Vapors Constellation of the North as its standard. You should select seven of your chieftains and equip them with flags, armor, clothing and steeds the color of yellow earth, and have them drive against the contingent's seven cavalry troops. Then order one of your fiercest generals, also dressed in earth-yellow, to go in and capture the foe's Water Planet General. Don't we say that earth conquers water?
"Send white-robed soldiers under eight chieftains against the green-bannered troops on the left, since metal conquers wood. Send red-robed soldiers under eight chieftains against the white bannered troops on the right, since fire conquers metal. Send eight chieftains with black-bannered soldiers against the red-bannered rear contingent of the Liaos, since water conquers fire.
"Then send nine chieftains at the head of a green-bannered unit to cut into the foe's very center and take their yellow-bannered commander-in-chief. Wood conquers earth. Dispatch a unit carrying embroidered banners and dressed in flowery robes to crack the foe's sun contingent, and another unit bearing purple banners and dressed in silver armor to smash their moon contingent. On twenty-four carts, corresponding to the twenty-four solar terms, set cannon and shot, and bombard the center of the Tartar forces. Have Gongsun Sheng raise an astral storm and under its cover push directly up to the king of Great Liao.
"In this manner you will win total victory. But you must not operate during daylight. Wait until the darkness of night. Lead your troops yourself. Take personal command of your central army. Exhort your men. One concerted effort will do it.
"My words must be kept secret. Defend the country and bring peace to the populace and never slacken.
"There is a limit to dealings between celestials and mortals. At this point we part on earth forever. When you come to abide in the Heavenly Palaces we shall meet again. Return quickly now to your camp. Do not linger."
The Mystic Queen ordered the green-clad girl to serve tea. Song Jiang drank. She directed the girl to escort Star Lord Song Jiang back to camp. He kowtowed and expressed his deep gratitude, and left the hall. The girl led him down the stairs on the west side, then through the gate with the cinnabar-red lintel to the path. They crossed the stone bridge to the grove of pines. The green-clad girl pointed.
"The Liao soldiers are there. That is where you can break through."
Song Jiang looked. The girl gave him a sudden push, and he awakened. He had been dreaming in his tent. In the stillness he heard the watchman's drum strike the hour. It was already the fourth watch.
He summoned his military advisor to interpret his dream. When Wu Yong entered the tent, Song Jiang asked: "Have you a plan for breaking the Zodiac Deployment?"
"I'm afraid not."
"I saw the Mystic Queen in a dream and she gave me a secret method. I've decided upon it and would like your advice. We can call our chieftains and give them their assignments. For this battle we must use our best."
"I'd like to hear it." Song Jiang described the method briefly. And as a result, the king of Great Liao surrendered, hands extended together, and Commander-in-Chief Wuyan lost his life. Truly, celestial strategy was employed and clever tactics adopted; in an astral battle, the Song armies broke through the magic pass.

After looking down from the hilltop on this huge force of Tartar troops, Song Jiang hurriedly turned his horse and rode back to his army. He ordered them to retreat to Everbright Pass and fortify their position. He called the Unicorn, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun to his tent to discuss what to do: "Although we've beaten them twice, and killed two of their top generals, the force I saw from the top of the hill is immense; it stretches as far as the eye can see. It's got to be the entire Tartar army against us. If we fight them we'll have to give it everything we've got. But I'm still afraid we shall be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. What are we going to do?"
The Professor said: "It's always been the case that good tactics enable a smaller force to defeat a larger one. Once, in the days of Jin, fifty thousand troops put one hundred thousand to flight. You've nothing to fear. Just impress on all the commanders that they must be sure to have everything ready: banners all neat and tidy, bows strung, swords checked, deer's antlers set out to protect the camp, moats dug, a full supply of arms laid on, siege ladders and ballista stones and suchlike prepared — then they must wait. Deploy the army again in the old Eight Trigrams formation. They can't all attack it at once, so even if there's a million of them, they'll think twice about it."
Song Jiang said: "Your words are golden." He gave out the orders and the commanders put them into effect. Breakfast was prepared in the fifth watch and they struck camp at dawn and proceeded to Changping, where the troops were deployed and organized their defences. The cavalry were in front, valiant commanders and brave men all, led by Thunderclap and Twin Rods behind him. Scimitar was on the left, Leopard's Head on the right, Hasty on the northeast, Twin Spears on the southwest, the Blue-Faced Beast on the northwest. Song Jiang commanded the main army. The other leaders kept their old duties. The infantry brought up the rear, headed by the Unicorn, Monk and Pilgrim. The leaders of the ten thousand or so troops were all battle-hardened veterans. They were all itching to get started. All the preparations made, there was nothing to do but await the Tartars.
These soon became visible, far off in the distance. First came six companies of cavalry, five hundred in each, three on the left and three on the right, which kept rotating and were not fixed in one place. These roving companies are called "scouts" or "shock troops".
After them came the main army, darkening the face of the earth. The leading troops all had black banners. In the centre there were seven troops of cavalry, a thousand horsemen to each and its own commander. How were these commanders got up? Well, they had black spiked helmets, black armour and black robes, and they rode black horses. They carried ordinary arms. They represented each of the seven northern constellations. The commander-in-chief represented the black war star of the north, sign of the element water. And what did he look like? He had black hair, long and silky, and his forehead was tightly bound with a dark bandanna; he wore a sleeveless black tunic and oiled black armour with a fine silver mesh. He rode a lively black thoroughbred and carried a sharp three-sided blade with a black hilt. This was the Tartar chief Quli Chuqing, who had his personal guard of three thousand cavalry in black armour with unbound hair, their standard the five powers constellation of the north. The footsoldiers marching under the black banner were innumerable. It was truly a case of "freezing clouds block out the eastern sun, a black hole swallows the wind over the northern sea"!
The left hand army had the green dragon banner. There were seven troops of cavalry, each with a thousand horse and its own commander. How were they dressed? They had four-cornered helmets, willow-leaf armour, and jade green tunics. They rode blue-roan chargers and were fully armed. They represented the seven eastern constellations. The standard of the commander-in-chief represented the eastern green dragon, the sign of wood. How was he dressed? He wore a lion helmet, armour decorated with mythical beasts and a jade green tunic with a gold belt. He carried a crescent-shaped axe with a gold hilt and his mount was a blue roan. This was the Tartar chief Zhijian Fulang, with a personal guard of three thousand green banner cavalry, representing the nine powers constellation of the east. The number of footsoldiers marching under the green banner was beyond reckoning. It was like seeing blue spots erupting on the yellow highway, green sundering the purple cloud-begetting rock!
The right hand army had the white tiger banner, with seven companies of cavalry, each with a thousand horse and its own commander. How were the commanders dressed? They had silver embroidered caps, white armour and white silk robes. They rode horses white as snow. They all carried hand arms and had standards representing the seven western constellations. Their commander-in-chief had the metal planet of the west on his standard. How was he dressed? He had a peacock feather in his helmet and linked armour of wrought silver with a jade belt that gave off a cold sheen. He wore a plain white robe with cloud pattern embroidery and was mounted on a thoroughbred of the same type as Song Jiang's Moonlight. He carried a shining steel halberd. This was the Tartar chief Wuli Ke'an, leader of three thousand white banner warriors representing the seven powers constellation of the west. The white banner troops had an escort of countless footsoldiers. It was like the traveller's camel drinking the mountain snow, the barbarian chief breaking the ice of the well!
The rearguard had a crimson banner and seven troops of cavalry each with a thousand horsemen and its own commander. How were they dressed? They had red lacquered caps and tunics the colour of orangutan's blood, with peach-coloured fish-scale armour. They rode swift horses of the type known as red hares and were all fully armed. Their standards represented the seven southern constellations. The standard of their commander-in-chief was the red fire planet of the south. How was he dressed? He had a red helmet with a bright tassel and a deep red robe the hue of madder. He had red armour and boots with red stitching, a gem-studded red leather belt and a strong bow and quiver of arrows slung over his shoulder. He had a sword with a fine blade and rode a fiery chestnut. This was the Tartar chief Dongxian Wenrong, leader of three thousand red banner troops whose standard represented the three powers constellation of the south. Under the red flag also marched innumerable footsoldiers dressed in red. You could have imagined Lord Six setting forth from his mansion, thunder and lightning giving birth to the three fireballs!
In front on the left there was a contingent of a thousand brave troops with gold embroidered caps, bronze armour and deep red robes and a flame-red standard. Their horses had purple trappings and they were clustered around a leader in a cap with a gold lotus and sceptre pattern and gold armour fashioned from linked animal heads. He had a fiery red embroidered tunic and a jewelled gold belt. He had two swords like sun and moon and rode a five-star horse. This was Prince Yelü Dechong, the King's brother and his standard was the sun. It was as the golden crow declining to the west, the arch of fire rising over the eastern sea!
In front on the right were five thousand women warriors. They wore embroidered silver caps, silver armour and plain white robes with white tassels and had white banners and white horses and weapons with silver shafts. They were gathered around their chief who wore two gold phoenix pins on a green ribbon, a red headband with precious stone sewn to it, a cloud pattern on her shoulders tastefully complemented by her embroidered skirt, and a dragon patterned robe over her silver armour. Tiny embroidered boots were firmly set in the gold stirrups and in her fluttering sleeves she flourished a jade handled whip. A fine seven-star sword was her weapon and she rode a silvery-grey horse. This was the royal princess Dalibo and her standard was the moon. One seemed to see the jade hare rising over the headland, the ice disk painting the terraces a glittering white!
Between the two divisions was a crowd of troops with yellow banners surrounding their leaders, all on dun horses and wearing yellow armour. The yellow robes and armour were like a great yellow cloud, the yellow turbans seemed to fill the sky with yellow mist. There were four chiefs each with three thousand cavalry formed in a square. At each corner was one of the chiefs, closely surrounded by his own guard. On the southeast was a chieftain in green robe and golden armour with a magnificent spear and mounted on a blue roan horse, his standard the lohou constellation. This was Yelü Derong, one of the King's nephews. On the southwest was a chieftain in purple robe and white armour wielding a fine blade and mounted on a bay horse with black mane, his standard the jidou constellation. This was Yelü Dehua, another of the King's nephews. In the northeast corner was a warrior in a green robe and white armour bearing a square halberd and

mounted on a dun thoroughbred, his standard the purple power constellation. This was the King's nephew Yelü Dechong. At the northwest corner was a warrior with a white robe and bronze armour carrying a seven star fine sword and riding a piebald with a black mane, his standard the lunar comet. This was the King's nephew Yelü Dexin.

Among the yellow troops was a commander hemmed in on the left by troops with green flags, on the right by men with white axes, in front by men with red banners and behind by black sunshades. The banners represented the twenty-four powers, the sixty-four diagrams, the Southern Aurora and the Northern Dipper, the winged dragon, winged tiger, winged bear and winged panther, all jumbled together to create a scrambled version of the celestial chart, a confused image of the universe. The commander carried a square halberd with a decorated red shaft. How was he dressed? He wore a seven-jewel purple and gold cap, a gold breast-plate like a turtle's shell, a red robe of embroidered silk, a belt decorated with Lantian jade. On his left shoulder hung a gold, painted bow reinforced with steel, on his right a sheaf of peacock feather arrows. He rode an iron-grey horse with silver fetlocks, with an elaborately embossed saddle and gold stirrups and the purple silk reins were wrapped round the pommel. The sword at his belt was a symbol of his command and he was holding a whip with which he directed operations. This chieftain, who was surrounded by a glittering throng of guards and whose standard was the earth planet of the central mansion, was the Tartar general Wuyan, commander-in-chief of the Liao armies.

In the centre, behind the yellow banners, was the royal carriage, surrounded by seven companies of warriors bearing all the main weapons. There were also thirty-six pairs of yellow-turbaned strong men, in nine groups, to push the carriage. In front there were nine trace-horses with gold saddles and bridles, and walking behind eight pairs of footmen with embroidered tunics. In the carriage rode the King of Liao. He wore a tall Tang-style turban and a yellow nine-dragon robe. His belt was of Lantian jade and he had red ceremonial boots. His ministers were on either side of him. On the left was his chief minister Youxi Bojin, on his right deputy chief minister Chu Jian. They both wore sable hats and scarlet robes and carried purple-ribboned seals and gilt tablets. Their belts were adorned with ivory and jade. On either side of the royal sedan were youths and maidens holding jade and ivory symbols and implements. The sedan was closely surrounded by the royal guards. The King's personal standard was a representation of the Purple Emperor of the North, chief of all the heavenly stars. It was like all the stars of heaven leaving their celestial thrones, a hundred thousand heavenly bodies come down to visit earth.

On completion this secret zodiac formation of the Tartars had the form of an egg, or an upturned bowl. There were flags marking the four corners, and spears at all the eight points of the compass. It revolved continually, advancing and retreating by turns.

Song Jiang first responded by telling his bowmen to shoot at the front rank. He had an observation platform erected in his main army and ascended it with the Professor and the Strategist. What he saw gave cause for considerable alarm. The Strategist at once recognized the zodiac formation and said to the other two: "This is based on the principle of the primal cause and interlocking constellations!"

"How do we fight it?" Song Jiang asked.

"It changes continuously and its internal structure cannot be assessed. You need to think twice before attacking it."

Song Jiang said: "If we can't openly confront it, how do we ever drive them back?"

The Professor said: "If we don't know anything about what's going on inside the formation, how do we attack?"

Whilst this discussion was going on, Marshal Wuyan gave out his orders from the centre of the enemy army. Since the day belonged to metal, four of his commanders whose signs were the ones associated with metal — the dragon, the ox, the dog and the ram — were to advance under general Wuli Ke'an, the great white metal star, and attack Song Jiang.

What Song Jiang's army saw was that the seven pennant gates on the opposing army's right flank either opened or closed, while there was a thunderous roll of drums from the centre and the formation began to revolve. The lead banners began to change places: from east to north, from north to west, from west to south. The Strategist said: "They're following the anti-clockwise rotation of the heavens. Today is a metal day, they're rotating anti-clockwise, there's an attack coming."

He had hardly finished speaking when five loud reports sounded and a body of troops sprang out from the opposing ranks, five companies with the general representing the metal star in the centre. They rolled forward with the force of an avalanche, a relentless tide. Song Jiang's troops gave way without striking a blow. With the Tartar shock troops pressing hard on his front and attacking from both flanks. Song Jiang was overwhelmed and ordered a hasty retreat to the original camp. The Tartars did not pursue them. When a roll was called it was found that Red Star had been slashed by a sword, Green-Eyes had been hit by an arrow, Smiler by a ballista missile, and the Guv had a spear wound. Countless soldiers were wounded. The wounded were loaded onto carts and taken back to the base camp for Doctor An to treat. Song Jiang ordered the forward troops to lay out thorn bushes and a deep barrier of antlers and put a strong guard on all the gates.

It was a gloomy Song Jiang who sat with the Unicorn and the other leaders and discussed the situation: "We lost the battle today. What should we do? If we don't go out to fight them tomorrow they will come for us here."

The Unicorn said: "Next time let us set up two forces to take on those shock troops of theirs and another two units to attack the seven gates on their northern flank. And should we not also get the infantry to effect a breakthrough in the centre so that we can find out what is happening on the inside of their formation?"

"All right, let us do that," Song Jiang said.

Next day, they organized themselves inside the camp and made their preparations, following the Unicorn's proposal. The gates were opened wide and the troops marched out. The Tartars could be seen not far off, six companies of their shock troops coming on in force. Song Jiang sent out Scimitar on the left and Twin Rods on the right to drive them back. The main army marched straight ahead to engage the Tartar army. Song Jiang sent Colonel Hua, Thunderclap, Twin Spears and the Blue-faced Beast on the left and Leopard's Head, Spearsman, Hasty and Whiskers on the right to attack the seven black pennant gates. They did indeed break through the forces there and scatter them, leaving the formation with seven shattered units on the north.

Iron Ox, Demon King, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost were now ordered to advance with five hundred shield bearers. Behind them came Monk, Pilgrim, Morbid, Madcap, Snake and Scorpion with their infantry in support. Once inside the zodiac formation all they could hear was gunfire on all sides. When the yellow banner troops attacked them from east and west, Song Jiang's men could not hold out and were forced to retreat. A stand by the rearguard also broke down and they fled in confusion back to the camp. When the roll was called, around half the troops were missing. Skyscraper and Door-God were seriously wounded, too. Iron Ox was not to be seen.

What had happened was that Iron Ox had charged forward furiously, determined to hack his way through the enemy ranks. He had been surrounded, subdued with hooks and taken prisoner. This was most distressing news for Song Jiang. He first ordered Skyscraper and Door-God to be taken to the base camp for Doctor An to treat, and all the wounded horses to be handed over to Redbeard for treatment.

Song Jiang discussed the situation again with the Professor and the others. "Today we lost Iron Ox and suffered another defeat. What are we going to do about it?"

The Professor said: "That youngster we took prisoner the other day is Marshal Wuyan's son. Perhaps we can make an exchange."

Song Jiang said: 'If we make the exchange now, what are we going to do if we lose another leader?"

The Professor said: "What's the point in always making difficulties? Let's stick to what's in front of us."

He had hardly finished speaking when a soldier came and reported that an emissary from the Tartars had come to parley. Song Jiang had him brought in.

"Our commander wishes me to say," the man began, "that we have captured one of your leaders who attacked our main army. We have not harmed him but instead entertained him with wine and food. The Marshal would like to return him to you, in exchange for his son. If you accept this, he will send your leader back."

Song Jiang said: "In that case I will bring your young commander out in front of the armies tomorrow and we will make the exchange."

The Tartar emissary mounted and left, bearing Song Jiang's reply.

Song Jiang discussed the matter further with the Professor. "We have no plan for defeating them. Would it not be better when we take out the young commander to arrange a truce?"

The Professor said: "If we give our troops a rest, while we work out a new plan, we can always resume the war later."

That evening they had the young commander brought under cover of darkness and sent someone to Marshal Wuyan to tell him what they intended. Marshal Wuyan was sitting in his tent when a soldier reported that an emissary from General Song Jiang wished to speak with him. The Marshal had him brought in and he said: "Our commander, General Song Jiang respectfully greets you and says that he will return your son to you today, in exchange for our leader, and proposes that because the weather at present is cold and conditions very hard for the troops both sides should temporarily cease hostilities and make no further attacks until the spring, to protect men and horses from frostbite. He hopes for your agreement."

Marshal Wuyan exclaimed: "My son is without shame. He allowed himself to be taken alive by you. Even if he has escaped with his life, how can he face me? We do not need this exchange. Take him away and execute him for me. If you want an armistice, send your Song Jiang here with his hands bound. Otherwise you will all die because I will launch a full attack. There will be nothing left of you!" Then he roared: "Get out!"

The emissary flew back to the camp and told Song Jiang this.

Song Jiang was chiefly worried that he might not be able to rescue Iron Ox. He ordered them to strike camp and took the young commander out in front of the ranks and shouted out: "If you release our leader, I will set your young commander free. It does not matter about the armistice. I'm quite prepared to go on fighting."

There was no discernible change among the Tartar ranks, but Iron Ox appeared on horseback. Likewise a horse was brought to carry the young commander back to his side. Thus it was done, with mutual understanding, in a simultaneous exchange, both men returning to their own. There was no further fighting that day. Song Jiang withdrew into his camp and celebrated the return of Iron Ox.

In consultation with all his leaders in his tent, Song Jiang said: "The Tartars are very strong. I am very worried about not having a plan for defeating them. This waiting is unbearable. What can we do?"

Twin Rods said: "Let us divide our forces into ten units tomorrow. Two columns to attack their shock troops, the other eight to strike together at the main army. Let us resolve this contest once and for all."

Song Jiang said: "We must have a unanimous decision about how to deploy our forces."

The Professor said: "We have twice failed to break through, would it not be better to adopt a defensive position and wait till they attack us?"

Song Jiang said: "That is not a very good policy either. Our only chance of victory is if we all unite to mount a concerted attack!"

The order was given that they should strike camp early in the morning and move forward at top speed, in ten divisions. The first two divisions intercepted the shock troops. The other eight, without a word spoken, charged straight into the zodiac formation. A sound like thunder arose in the centre and the four times seven or twenty-eight gates all opened together as the formation converted into a "single file snake", and struck! Song Jiang's men had no hope of defending themselves. They turned and fled, panic-stricken, scattering banners and spears behind them, littering the ground with gongs and drums. They dashed back to the refuge of their original base, losing men all along the way. Song Jiang ordered the pass to be blocked and deep moats dug, with strong barricades of antlers to deny the enemy access. He was preparing to winter there.

Meanwhile Commissioner Zhao had repeatedly written to the court requesting winter clothing and other items for them. In response to this the court sent a former instructor of the imperial guard, currently commander of the garrison at Zhengzhou, Wang Wenbin by name — a man who was both scholar and soldier and highly regarded at court. He was ordered to collect a force of ten thousand guards and enlist peasants as carters to transport fifty thousand suits of warm clothing for General Song's army, also transmitting the command that General Song pursue the campaign vigorously and achieve an early victory. Armed with the Emperor's commission, Wang collected the necessary weapons, packs of clothing, horses and so on, enlisted the carters and troops and the requisite number of carts, left the Eastern Capital and headed for Chenbridge. The carts all bore a flag saying "Imperial consignment of winter clothing".

Thus they pursued their journey. Along the route their food was supplied from official provisions. It took them many days. Arriving at a wayside pavilion, they met Commissioner Zhao and handed him the imperial missive. The Commissioner was well pleased. "You've come at the right time," he told Wen. "General Song has lost several battles recently to a Tartar force which is drawn up in the zodiac formation. Many of his commanders and men are wounded and are at present recuperating here under the care of Doctor An. General Song has fortified himself at a place called Everbright and dares not engage the enemy. It's a very depressing situation."

Wang said: "But it is precisely to urge him to attack that the court has sent me here. They want an early victory. It would be difficult for me to return to the capital and tell the Military Council that he has suffered such reverses. For what it is worth, I have studied the military manuals since I was a boy, and I think I know a thing or two about strategy. If I were to join the army, I reckon I could devise some sort of plan. I'd like to take them on, and relieve some of the pressure on General Song. Would Your Excellency authorize this?"

The Commissioner was only too pleased to do so, and entertained him with wine and food and rewarded the carters also. He instructed Wang to deliver the clothing to Song Jiang's army for distribution. But first he sent some one on ahead to inform Song Jiang.

Song Jiang was sitting in his tent in a gloomy mood when the Commissioner's messenger arrived and told him that the court had sent Wang with five hundred thousand suits of winter clothing and with instructions that he, Song Jiang, was to push ahead with his offensive. When the envoy reached Song Jiang's camp he dismounted and entered the tent, where wine was served to welcome him. After several cups he asked for an account of the situation. Song Jiang said: "Since I was honoured with this frontier post, through the Emperor's bounty, we have captured four major cities. But here in Youzhou we have been thrown off balance by the Tartar general's army in a zodiac formation. They've got two hundred thousand troops, drawn up in perfect order according to the rotation of the constellations. Please explain this to His Majesty. I have lost several battles running and I can think of no strategy to use against them. Now you are here I should be most grateful for your advice."

Wang said: "But I don't see that there's anything so special about this zodiac formation. I don't know much about it, but why don't you let me go the front and take a look? I could give you a fresh opinion."

Song Jiang assented eagerly. First he told Sterling to hand out the clothing to the army. Everyone put on the new clothes and kowtowed towards the south, shouting "Long live the Emperor!" in thanks. Wine was provided at headquarters that day in honour of the visitor and a bounty was distributed to his troops.

A few days later all the troops were mobilized. Wang put on the new helmet and armour he had brought with him, mounted and rode out fully accoutred in front of his troops. This was observed by the Tartars in the opposing lines who reported it to their commanders. Drums and gongs rang out, a tumult of shouting arose and six columns of Tartar troops advanced. Song Jiang detailed a similar number to drive them back. Wang went up onto the command platform to have a look. When he came down he said: "It's the usual thing, that formation of theirs. I don't see there's anything to fear." Now no one knew this, but in fact Wang didn't know the first thing about it and was just boasting. He ordered his vanguard to sound the drums and issue a challenge. Drums and bugles sounded also among the opposing Tartar ranks. Song Jiang shouted out to the Tartars: "Don't send out a bunch of rogues, we want to see if you've anyone capable of real fighting!"

He had scarcely finished when from the fourth gate among the black pennants a commander raced out. This Tartar leader wore his hair loose and flowing, and his forehead was bound with a yellow silk bandanna. He was clad in oiled bronze armour, and a sleeveless black tunic. He rode an ebony charger and wielded a three-sided blade. He halted in front of the countless Tartar horde. On the black standard were the words "Great Tartar Chief Quli Chuqing" in silver characters. Reining in his horse abruptly, he issued a challenge.

Wang thought to himself: "If I don't show off my talents now, when will I have a better opportunity?" He levelled his lance, kicked his horse and rode forward, preferring to waste no words and get to grips with the Tartar at once. As he thrust with his lance the Tartar countered with dancing sword. They hadn't fought twenty bouts when the Tartar turned and made off. Wang galloped after him, determined to catch him. But the Tartar was not defeated, it was just a trick to lure Wang on, and now he readied his blade, waited till Wang was close enough, turned and delivered a blow which cleft Wang's trunk in two. Wang died on the spot.

Immediately Song Jiang ordered his troops to withdraw. The Tartars harried them all the way and it was another total defeat. Song Jiang's panic-stricken forces retreated into the camp. All the leaders looked at each other in horror, having seen Wang killed on his horse. Song Jiang had to compose a report, informing Commissioner Zhao that Wang Wenbin volunteered for combat and had been killed. He ordered the party which had brought the supplies to return to the capital.

When the Commissioner heard what had happened he became very depressed. Vexatious though it was, he was obliged to write a report for the representatives of the Military Council to take back with them to the capital.

On learning from books you shouldn't rely;

*Wang's was a foolish way to die.*

*Many in peace can win by boasting;*

In real war they'll get a roasting.

A thousand thoughts assailed Song Jiang as he sat gloomily in his tent, but he could think of no plan to follow nor imagine any way the Tartars could be defeated. He could not rest or eat properly and his sleep was disturbed.

One winter's night when the weather was bitterly cold he closed his tent tightly and sat gloomily before a single candle. In the second watch exhaustion overcame him and he lay down without undressing. Suddenly a fierce wind began to howl through the camp and a chilly blast assailed him. He sat up and saw a servant girl who stepped forward and made him a deep bow.

"Why are you here?" he asked her.

"I have to deliver a message from Holy Mother," she answered. "She asks if you would kindly pay her a visit."

"Where exactly is she?" he asked.

"Not far away at all," the maid explained.

Song Jiang followed her out of the tent and found the sky full of brilliant light, a sweet breeze sighing, soft clouds sailing by, the weather like spring. In less than a mile they came to a wood, where luxuriant dark green pines mingled with thick pale green cypress, and there were purple cinnamon trees and a stone balustrade. All around was a flourishing forest of tall bamboo, weeping willows and fine peach trees. Crossing an arched bridge with a curved rail they came to a round door painted red. They went through and found themselves among frescoed walls and decorated windows, painted columns and carved beams, vermilion doors with brass studs and green-tiled roofs. The maid led Song Jiang along a corridor to the left and stopped in front of a pavilion on the east. She pushed open the red door and told him to sit down inside and wait for a moment. The room was full of decorative windows and raised platforms, sweet-scented flowers and fragrant incense.

The maid went inside and then returned to announce: "Holy Mother requests the pleasure of your company." He had not been sitting there long enough to warm the mat, but he stood up. Two fairies entered: they wore immortal's caps with jade adornments and red silk dresses trimmed with gold. They curtsied to him. He dared not raise his eyes. "Why so bashful, General?" they said. "Holy Mother is just changing her dress and will be out in a moment. She would like to discuss affairs of state with you and wants you to do something for her. Please come this way."

Song Jiang followed obediently. He heard the sound of bells and tinkling jade. The maid motioned him to enter the palace. The two fairies preceded them, leading the way up the eastern steps. They stopped in front of a pearl curtain. He could hear melodious sounds within. At the maid's bidding he passed through the curtain and knelt at the foot of the altar. When he raised his eyes he beheld auspicious clouds, a swirling pink mist. Right before him on her special dragon throne sat the Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven. She wore her dragon cap and her dragon robes, embroidered with the seven treasures, a skirt bearing symbols of river and mountain, sun and moon. On her feet were pearl slippers and she held the ceremonial tablet of pure white jade in her hand. On each side of her were the fairies, more than a score of them.

The Mystic Lady said to Song Jiang: "Much time has fled away since I gave the mystic books into your keeping. You have kept to the path of honour and righteousness since then and have not been neglectful of your duty. Now the Song emperor has sent you to destroy the Tartars. How is the campaign going?"

Song Jiang humbly prostrated himself and said: "I am always mindful of the honour you did me by bestowing the mystic books upon me and I have not revealed their secret to anyone. I have received the Emperor's command to defeat the Tartars, but unfortunately I have suffered a series of defeats at the hands of Marshal Wuyan's army, drawn up in this zodiac formation of theirs. I cannot think of a way to fight them and the situation at present is disastrous."

"Do you know how this zodiac formation works?" she asked.

"I am afraid I am very ignorant. I do not understand it. I beseech you to enlighten me," he said.

"It follows the principle of yang," she said." A direct attack on it will never succeed. To defeat it you must use the system of contraries. For example, their leading troops with the black banners follow the water sign and correspond to the northern star in heaven. What you must do is select seven commanders, with yellow banners, representing earth, with yellow armour and clothing and dun horses, and have them attack the Tartars' seven black pennant gates. And you must choose a bold commander, also in yellow, to seize the water standard. This works because earth conquers water. Similarly you need eight leaders in white, representing metal, to attack the green banner troops on their left wing. This is because metal conquers wood. You must have eight leaders in red to attack the white banner troops on their right wing because fire conquers metal, leaders in black to attack the red banners of their rearguard, because water conquers fire, and nine leaders in green to attack their main army and their leader, because wood conquers earth. You will also need two columns of troops with embroidered banners and patterned robes to break the power of their "sun" brigade, and troops with a plain flag and white armour to combat the effect of their moon

brigade. You must build twenty-four thunder carts with guns to fire heavy missiles and explosives into their central army. Get Taoist Gongsun to raise wind and thunder with a spell so you can penetrate right to where their king is. If you carry out this plan it will assure you of total victory. You must not attack by day, though. It must be in the middle of the night. You must lead the attack yourself, directing the main army. Exhort your troops to go forward and finish it off in one go. Do not reveal my words to anyone. Your duty is to protect the country and ensure peace, you must have no thought of retreating. Well, nothing is forever and I must bid you farewell. We will meet again another day in the Purple Palace and the Golden Towers. You have to return now, I must not detain you longer." She had the maid serve him tea and then told her to take him back to the camp.

Song Jiang prostrated himself again to thank her and left. The maid led him away down the western steps. They passed through the red door and followed their former route over the stone bridge and through the pinewood. The girl pointed and said: "There are the Tartars you have to defeat!" He followed the direction of her pointing finger and awoke with a start to find he had been dreaming and was in his tent.

At that moment he heard the drumbeat announcing the fourth watch. He sent for the Professor to ask him about the dream. When the Professor presented himself in the tent, Song Jiang said: "Have you thought of any plan for defeating the zodiac formation?" The Professor said: "I can't think of anything good."

Song Jiang said: "Last night I dreamt that the Mystic Lady imparted a secret to me. I've been thinking about it and I'd like to discuss it with you. Let's summon a meeting of all the leaders so that we can explain the situation." It was indeed a case of //eaven prompts a plan to suit the hour; celestial strategy will break the magic power.

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## Song Jiang Cracks the Foe's Deployment & achieves final victory; Marshal Su proclaims the treaty & Bestows the Emperor's Pardon

Word for word, Song Jiang related to Wu Yong the method given to him by the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven in his dream. When they had agreed upon a course of action they informed Commissioner Zhao. They had twenty-four gun carriages built of planks and iron sheeting, with oil-soaked faggots stored below in each and a cannon mounted above. Artillery men worked through the night to finish the job. Song Jiang then assembled his commanders and issued his battle orders:

The central division cavalry in earth-yellow robes would, headed by General Two Spears Dong Ping, strike at the heart of the Water Planet contingent, while units under seven other chieftains would hit the seven black-bannered cavalry troops to the left and right.

The center of the Wood Planet position would be assaulted from the west by cavalry in robes of white and gold under Panther Head Lin Chong, while the seven green-bannered Liao units to the left and right were being attacked by seven other chieftains.

Cavalry in robes of fiery red, led by Qin Ming the Thunderbolt, would go against the Metal Planet position from the south, simultaneously with raids by seven other chieftains on the seven white-bannered Tartar sections to the left and right.

From the north, cavalry in robes of water-black, commanded by Two Rods Huyan Zhuo, would raid the Fire Planet position. At the same time seven other chieftains would charge the red-bannered enemy units to the left and right.

Cavalry in robes of woody green under Guan Sheng the Halberd would strike from the south at the Earth Planet position held by the Tartar commander-in-chief. The yellow-bannered troops of the foe's central army to the left and right would be assailed by eight other chieftains.

A contingent carrying embroidered banners and dressed in flowery robes would, commanded by seven chieftains, go against the Sun division on the left, while another seven chieftains leading a unit in purple robes and silver armor would move against the Tartar's Moon division on the right.

A fierce, bold force headed by six chieftains would cut through directly to the foe's center and capture the king. Another five would provide cover for the cannon carriages moving up to the middle.

The naval chieftains and their forces would sail as close to the battlefield as possible and lend support.

Eight five-sided flags would be issued, and the Song forces would deploy in their usual Nine-Unit Octagon.

When Song Jiang had finished issuing his orders, the commanders returned to their respective contingents and made ready. The twenty-four gun carriages were laden with their equipment and pushed to the front. Truly, it was a strategy that would startle Heaven and Earth, and shake the very fiends and demons.

Meanwhile, Wuyan, commander-in-chief of the Liao army, mystified by Song Jiang's failure, day after day, to give battle, dispatched pickets who advanced as far as the perimeters of the expeditionaries' camp. Song Jiang continued with his preparations and set a date for the offensive.

Then, late in the day, determined, he marched with his men. As they drew near the Liao emplacements, they spread out in a straight line. Powerful bowmen to the fore kept the enemy at a distance while the Song forces waited for evening.

At dusk, wind massed thick clouds, bringing darkness before it was night. Song Jiang ordered his troops to gag themselves with reed sticks and wait for whistle signal. That night he sent forth four columns, retaining at the front only his earth-yellow horsemen. The columns dispersed the Liao pickets, then circled round towards the northern end of the enemy position.

A volley of cannon fire broke from the Song army about the first watch. Huyan Zhuo's contingent smashed in and took the Fire Planet. Guan Sheng then carved through the foe's central army and captured the Earth Planet. Lin Chong drove into the left army and seized the Wood Planet. Qin Ming grabbed the Metal Planet after cutting into the right army. Dong Ping, hitting the lead unit, took the Water Planet.

Gongsun Sheng waved his sword, casting an astral spell, and released five thunderbolts. The night wind blew with such force from the south that the tops of trees touched the ground. Stones rolled and sand flew, the God of Thunder streaked the sky with lightning. The twenty-four gun carriages, protected by five hundred shield warriors commanded by five chieftains, trundled into the Liao position. Ten Feet of Steel struck with her soldiers into the center of the Sun emplacement, while Zhishen the Tattooed Monk drove with his men into the position of the Moon. Following the gun carriages, Lu Junyi the Magnate and his troops hit the Tartars' central army in a direct drive. Each unit pursued and slaughtered its own quarry.

Cannon roared in the night, thunder exploded overhead. In that murderous atmosphere rocks rolled and gravel flew. So great was the killing that the stars moved in the sky, the sun and moon grew dim. Fiends wept, demons cried, as soldiers clashed in wild confusion.

Wuyan the Tartar commander-in-chief was busily shifting his generals when he heard yells and tumult on all sides and the sounds of combat. By the time he mounted, the gun carriages had already reached his central army. Flames spurted into the sky as the boom of cannon shook the ground. Guan Sheng and his cavalry smashed through to the commander-in-chief's tent. Grasping his crescent-bladed halberd, Wuyan rode at Guan Sheng and gave battle. Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow, flinging his stones, knocked down aides left and right. Many were injured, and fled for their lives, pursued by four chieftains who inflicted further devastation with their swords. His aides gone, Wuyan turned his steed and raced north. Guan Sheng galloped after.

Hua Rong, who saw the Tartar commander-in-chief run, also gave chase. Fitting an arrow to his bow, he let fly at Wuyan and hit him squarely in the back. The arrow clanged against the metal back plate, showering sparks. Before Hua Rong could shoot again, Guan Sheng caught up and swung his Green Dragon Halberd. The commander-in-chief was wearing three layers of armor—steel mail nearest his body, then a suit of sea animal hide, and all covered by a suit of golden chain mail. Guan Sheng's blow cut through the two outer layers. As he raised his blade to strike again, Wuyan closed in beneath its shadow and attacked with his crescent-bladed halberd.

They had fought four or five rounds when Hua Rong reached them. He sped an arrow at Wuyan's face. The commander-in-chief hurriedly dodged, but the missile nicked off the tip of his ear and scraped through his phoenix-plumed metal helmet. Wuyan fled.

Zhang Qin, in hot pursuit, flung a stone at Wuyan's head. It knocked him prone on his horse's back, but he continued riding away, trailing his halberd. Guan Sheng again caught up and again swing his Green Dragon Halberd. He sliced upwards through the commander-in-chief's waist, bones and all, right to his head. Wuyan tumbled to the ground. Hua Rong caught his fine horse and exchanged it for his own. Zhang Qin pierced the fallen Tartar with his lance. Thus expired a commander-in-chief, a gallant warrior, after only one hack of a halberd and one thrust of a lance! Poor Tartar hero. All passed as in a dream.

Lu Zhishen, leading Wu Song and five other chieftains, charged yelling into the Sun position. Yelu Dezhong, turning to flee, was tumbled from his steed when Wu Song broke the animal's neck with one blow of his blade. Wu Song seized the Liao general by the hair and cut off his head. Dezhong's two sons fled for their lives. The Sun position was smashed, its men scattered.

"We'll push on to the center, take the Liao king, and that will be the end of it," said Lu Zhishen.

In the Moon position, the Royal Princess, hearing the murderous shouts on all sides, hurriedly mustered her female warriors to ride to the rescue. But they were beset at their tents by Ten Feet of Steel, brandishing her pair of swords and leading Gu Dasao and five other chieftains. After many rounds, Ten Feet of Steel put aside her swords and closed with the princess, wrapping her arms around her waist. The two wrestled on horseback, tightly locked. Wang the Stumpy Tiger rode up and captured the princess. Gu Dasao and Sun the Witch killed and scattered the female soldiers, while the three men chieftains aided from the side. Poor highborn pampered princess, to thus fall captive, bound and tied!

Lu Junyi and his troops also cut into the Liao central army, killing Tartar officials and generals while Xie Zhen and Xie Bao cut down the "headquarters" flag. The king, closely guarded by his ministers and captains, withdrew towards the north. But his nephews Yelu Derong and Yelu Dexin were hacked from their mounts and killed. Nephew Yelu Dehua was captured. Nephew Yelu Dechong disappeared, no one knew where. The Liao army was completely surrounded, and the slaughter continued till the fourth watch. Not a single man of the more than two hundred thousand Tartar forces was left alive.

At daybreak the chieftains returned. Song Jiang sounded the trumpets recalling his men to camp. He directed that those who had taken captives turn them over and receive their rewards. Ten Feet of Steel came forward with the royal princess; Lu Junyi with nephew Yelu Dehua; Zhu Tong with Quli Chuqing the Water Planet; and other chieftains with five more generals. Heads of innumerable slain foes were also presented.

Song Jiang placed the eight prisoner generals in the charge of Commissioner Zhao of the Song central army. Captured horses were distributed among the chieftains.

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The king of Great Liao, retreating in a panic to Yanjing, hurriedly ordered that the four gates of the city be closed, the moat defended, and that no one go out to confront the enemy. On learning that the king had withdrawn to Yanjing, Song Jiang directed his army to break camp. They marched to the Liao capital and surrounded it. Song Jiang invited Commissioner Zhao to observe the coming battle from the rear camp. He instructed his troops to ring Yanjing with scaling ladders, cannon and shot, to build fortifications and prepare for the attack.

Very nervous, the king summoned his ministers to a conference. They all said: "The situation is dangerous. The best thing would be to submit to the Song empire." The king agreed. He had a flag of surrender flown from the ramparts and dispatched an emissary to the Song camp with the message: "We will pay cattle and horses, pearls and gems, every year. We will never invade the Middle Kingdom again."

Song Jiang led the emissary to Commissioner Zhao in the rear camp, where he repeated the Tartar proposal.

"This is a matter of prime national importance," said Zhao. "Only the emperor can decide. I haven't the authority. You'll have to send a high minister to the Eastern Capital and request an audience. Only if the emperor formally approves the surrender in writing and pardons your crimes will we be able to end the war and withdraw our troops."

The emissary returned to Yanjing and reported to the Liao king. The sovereign summoned his civil and military officials to confer. Chu Jian, the vice-premier, spoke.

"Our army is weak, our generals few, our soldiers are virtually gone. How can we resist the foe?" he said. "But in my humble opinion at this critical juncture we can still win men's hearts with bribes of gold and silks. I would be willing to go to Song Jiang's camp personally with lavish gifts. We'll have him halt the fighting and call off the attack on the city. At the same time we must give expensive presents to top ministers in the Eastern Capital and buy them over. Then they will speak for us before the emperor and obtain a milder disposition. Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian have great power, and they're all rogues. The boy emperor listens to their advice. Bribe them with gold and silks and buy their support. We'll surrender and be pardoned. The Song forces will be pulled back and the war ended."

The Liao king approved his vice-premier's proposal.

Chu Jian left the city the following day and proceeded to Song Jiang's camp. Song Jiang received him in his tent and asked what brought him. Chu Jian spoke of the surrender, and proffered a number of valuable gifts.

Song Jiang heard him out, then said: "If we hit your capital day after day, you can be sure we'll take it. And when we do, we won't spare even the roots of the grass lest resistance grow again! I've seen your surrender flag, and I've called a halt to the fighting. Since ancient times in wars between two countries there has always been the right to capitulate. You are allowed to surrender. I, therefore, have checked my troops. I permit you to go to the imperial court to request sentencing and offer tribute. Do you think Song Jiang is the sort who can be bribed? Don't ever try that again!"

The Liao vice-premier was frightened. Song Jiang continued.

"Go to the imperial court and obtain a decree. I will keep my troops out of action temporarily. Go at once and come back quickly. Don't delay."

Chu Jian thanked Song Jiang, left the camp, mounted his horse, returned to Yanjing and reported to the king. All the important ministers conferred and reached an agreement. The following day the king and his ministers contributed fine curios, gold and silver, precious gems and glittering pearls, and these were loaded on carts for delivering by the vice-premier and fifteen other officials to the Eastern Capital. Over thirty saddle horses were readied for the journey and a petition to the emperor written.

On leaving Yanjing the delegation first called on Song Jiang. He led Chu Jian to the presence of Commissioner Zhao and told him of the mission. Zhao entertained the emissary courteously. After consulting with Song Jiang, he also wrote out a report to the emperor regarding their military progress. He deputed Chai Jin and Xiao Rang to turn it in to the Council of Military Affairs for transmission to the throne, and directed them to accompany Chu Jian to the capital.

For many days they were on the road. At last, they arrived. Ten cartloads of valuable gifts, the carts and their drivers were put up in the official hostel. Chai Jin and Xiao Rang handed in to the Council of Military Affairs the report on the military situation.

"Our army has Yanjing surrounded," they said. "We can take it at any time. The Liao king has hung a surrender flag on his ramparts and dispatched his vice-premier Chu Jian to petition for permission to capitulate, and to implore a pardon and an end to the war. We dare not decide on our own. We request an imperial decree."

"Stay with Chu Jian in the official hostel for the time being," said the council officer. "We here have to consider the long-range implications."

Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian, as well as the heads of the other departments, large and small, were all avid for gain. Chu Jian the emissary from Great Liao and his entourage, needing their assistance, called first on Cai Jing the premier and the three top ministers, then on the heads of various other departments. To all of these officials they paid bribes and presented gifts.

The following day the emperor conducted his morning audience in the palace. All the assembled high officials, civil and military, kowtowed. Tong Guan, head of the Council of Military Affairs, addressed the throne.

"Our vanguard leader Song Jiang has destroyed and driven back the Liao soldiers, and has advanced as far as Yanjing, their capital, which he now has surrounded. It is likely to fall to us at any time. The king of Liao has hung out a flag of surrender and seeks to capitulate. He has sent here his emissary Chu Jian with an offer to become our tributary. They will submit to our terms, but beg for a pardon and peace, and plead that we withdraw our troops and end the war. They promise to pay tribute every year without fail. None of the ministries dares to decide on its own. We request an imperial disposition."

"If we talk peace and halt the hostilities, they will still exist as a nation," said the sovereign. "What do you ministers think we should do?"

Cai Jing the premier stepped forward.

"We have reached a consensus," he said. "Since ancient times the barbarians beyond our borders have never ceased harassing us. In our humble opinion, Liao should retain its identity as a nation and serve as a buffer state in the north, the lips to our teeth, so to speak. Their annual tribute will be to our advantage. We should permit them to surrender on our terms, end the hostilities, and summon our troops back to defend the capital. But we ministers cannot presume to intervene. We beg Your Majesty to decide."

The emperor approved the premier's proposal. "Bring the Liao emissary before me," he directed.

The order was transmitted summoning Chu Jian and his entourage. They knelt in a line at the far end of the hall and fervently kowtowed. A minister brought forward their petition and unrolled it on the imperial table. The Royal Petition Speaker read it in a loud voice:

Yelu Hui, Ruling Lord of the Kingdom of Great Liao, kowtows one hundred times and states to Your Majesty: Born in the desert and raised in a barbarian land, I was unfamiliar with the great laws of Your Majesty and never studied the major social duties of civilized man. Deficient in culture and military talents, I was surrounded by vicious sycophants, men greedy and corrupt, short-sighted as rats but crafty as roebucks. I was ignorant, they rapacious. We invaded your borders, provoking your army's reprisal. Mere ants cannot stir Mount Taishan, rivers cannot be halted in their flow to the sea. Although we still possess a few desolate cities, we have not enough provisions for even half a year.

Today, I dispatch my emissary Chu Jian to venture into your awesome presence and surrender out lands and request punishment. If Your Majesty will pity us and spare our poor lives and not destroy our ancestral inheritance, your name shall be engraved on our bones. With the utmost exertion, we shall serve forever as a guard of your borders and a buffer for your imperial reign. You will give new life to our young and old, and all our descendants will be eternally grateful. Yearly, we will pay tribute. We vow never to fail.

Trembling, we wait expectantly! In sincerity and fear, we bow our heads and kowtow! Respectfully submitted.

Yelu Hui, Ruler of the Kingdom of Great Liao

*The __ day of the Winter Month*
*in the fourth year of Xuan He*

The ministers heard the petition with pleasure, and the emperor directed that imperial wine be served to the emissary. Chu Jian and his entourage presented tributes of gold and silks to the royal court. The emperor ordered that the Treasury receive them, and that it accept thereafter annual tribute of money and cattle. He, in turn, gave gifts of silk and feasted the emissaries in the Hall of Imperial Caterers. He instructed them to go back to Liao.

"I will dispatch an official who will accept your surrender," he said.

Chu Jian and his party thanked the emperor, took their leave and returned to the official hostel. When the imperial audience ended they called at the various ministries to complete the necessary formalities and dispense more bribes.

Cai Jing reassured Chu Jian. "You go back," he said. "The four of us will see to everything."

Chu Jian thanked the premier and returned to the kingdom of Liao.

At the imperial audience the following day, Cai Jing entered at the head of the corps of officials. He petitioned the throne to pardon the Tartars. The emperor consented, and directed the scholars of the Hanlin Academy to draw up a document of pardon. He ordered Marshal Su to deliver and read it, and Commissioner Zhao to instruct Song Jiang to cease hostilities and return to the Eastern Capital. He was to release all prisoners, give back the captured cities, and restore to the Liao authorities whatever had been taken from their treasuries.

Royal court ended and the attending officials withdrew. The next day they called on Marshal Su and set a date for seeing him off. Su did not wish to delay the imperial decree. He had sedan-chairs and horses and attendants readied for the journey, took his leave of the emperor, bid the ministry officials farewell, and departed for Liao with Chai Jin and Xiao Rang.

It was the depths of winter. Masses of clouds hung heavy in the sky. The envoys passed Chen Bridge Station and headed for the frontier. Snow blanketed the plains, powdering the trees and garbing the vast open spaces in silver. Through snow and wind, Marshal Su and his party wound their way forward.

The snow still had not melted when they reached the border area. Chai Jin and Xiao Rang sent a mounted courier on ahead to inform first Commissioner Zhao, and then Song Jiang, of their arrival. Carrying ceremonial wine, Song Jiang and an escort party travelled fifty //and knelt by the roadside in greeting. Marshal Su and the officials in his party were very pleased by this welcome. They were invited into the camp, where Song Jiang had a feast laid. He and the marshal discussed affairs in the imperial court.

"Cai Jian, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu, Yang Jian and other high ministry officials have all been bribed by the Tartars," said Su. "Because of their urgings, the emperor has agreed to a surrender and an end to the fighting. Your troops are being called back to guard the capital."

Song Jiang sighed. "I have no criticism of the court. It's just that our accomplishments here seem to have been in vain."

"Don't distress yourself, General," said the marshal. "When I return to the capital, I shall speak highly of you to the emperor."

"And when he hears my testimony," added Commissioner Zhao, "he surely will show his appreciation for your deeds."

"There are a hundred and eight of us, doing our utmost for our country," said Song Jiang. "We have no personal ambitions, or any desire to impose on His Majesty's benevolence. As long as we can remain together in our labors, that will be our greatest happiness. If you can propose that for us, Commissioner, we shall be deeply grateful."

That day all dined and made merry. Only at evening did the feasting end. A messenger was dispatched to the king of the Liaos, notifying him to prepare to receive the decree.

The next day Song Jiang selected ten generals to escort Marshal Su and the decree into the kingdom of Liao. They were dressed in silk robes and golden armor and were fully armed. Guarding the marshal with a complement of three thousand infantry and cavalry, front and rear, they marched into the city.
The residents of Yanjing burned fragrant incense and hung festive lanterns before the doorway of every home. The king himself led his civil and military officials, all mounted and formally dressed, outside the South Gate to welcome the decree. Then they proceeded to the Royal Hall, where the ten Song generals arraigned themselves on either side, and Marshal Su took a stand to the left of the Dragon Pavilion. The king and his officials knelt before the hall. At a call from the Chief of Ceremonies, they kowtowed. The Liao chamberlain requested the decree. He then read it aloud:
The Emperor of Great Song proclaims: Since the days of our earliest kings and emperors there never was a sovereign who did not govern his subjects, nor subjects who did not sustain their sovereign. The Middle Kingdom has its ruler. Surely you barbarians have one too!
In violation of celestial laws, you Liaos have repeatedly invaded our borders. For this, you deserve to be instantly extinguished. But your petition has moved me to pity. I have not the heart to destroy you, and shall permit you to remain as a nation.
Effective from the day you receive this edict, all captured commanders shall be returned to Liao, your cities shall be restored once again to Liao rule.
But annual tribute must be delivered without fail. Respect our great country, venerate Heaven and Earth. This is the duty of you barbarians. Never forget!
We issue this decree so that all may know.

*The __ day of the Winter Month*
*of the fourth year of Xuan He*

The king of the Tartars and his officials kowtowed and voiced their thanks. The imperial decree, on its dragon platform, was carried past, and the king and Marshal Su formally met. They exchanged courtesies, and the king invited the marshal to the rear of the hall, where a lavish feast of many delicacies was laid. While the Tartar officials poured wine and toasted their guests, beautiful girls played military airs on fifes and drums, or languorously turned in slow native dances.
When the banquet ended, Marshal Su and his party were provided quarters in the hostel for officials. Each member of the entourage received a gift.
The next day the king directed Chu Jian, his vice-premier, to go to the camp and invite Commissioner Zhao and Song Jiang into Yanjing to dine. On conferring with Military Advisor Wu Yong, Song Jiang decided it would be inappropriate for him to go. Commissioner Zhao, therefore, went without him to accompany Marshal Su. The king of the Tartars entertained the imperial emissaries at a grand banquet. Mulled grape wine was poured into silver goblets, delicious antelope meat was piled high on golden platters. Everywhere was tasty fruit and floral decorations of many hues.
And when it was nearly over, the king presented Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao with curios on a golden platter. They feasted until far into the night.
To the accompaniment of martial music, the king and his officials the following day escorted Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao out of the city and saw them off to camp. Again Vice-Premier Chu Jian was sent to call on Song Jiang. This time he brought gifts of cattle, sheep, horses, gold, silver and colorful silks. At a large meeting, he rewarded the troops and gave valuable presents to the commanders.
Song Jiang ordered that the Royal Princess and her company be released and permitted to go home. He also restored to Liao sovereignty the cities of Tanzhou, Qizhou, Bazhou and Youzhou. He saw off Marshal Su, who was returning to the capital. After reassembling his entire force, he dispatched his central army to serve as an escort for Commissioner Zhao. He then gave a banquet in the camp at which he rewarded his naval chieftains. He instructed them to sail back to the Eastern Capital and wait there for further orders.
He invited the premier of the Tartars and his deputy for a chat. The king directed premier Youxi Bojin and Vice-Premier Chu Jian to call on Song Jiang in his headquarters. Song Jiang received them in his tent, and host and guests took their respective places.
"Our soldiers have neared your capital's walls, our commanders are at your moat. Victory is at hand," he said. "Originally, we had no intention of letting you surrender. We were going to smash in and obliterate everything. It would have been quite reasonable for us to do so. But, granting your request, I permitted you to appeal to the imperial court. The emperor took pity on you and decided not to wipe you out. He is allowing you to surrender, unconditionally, and is giving you very generous terms.
"I am about to return to the Eastern Capital. Don't make the mistake of thinking we couldn't have defeated you. Don't provoke us again. Pay your annual tribute without fail. Behave yourselves. Commit no more crimes. If our army has to come again, we won't let you off so easily!" The premier kowtowed and apologized for their crimes. In a softer tone, Song Jiang further advised them. They thanked him for his kindness and departed.
He put another contingent on the march for home, this one under woman commander Ten Feet of Steel. He directed Xiao Rang to write, and Jin Dajian to inscribe, a stone tablet commemorating the Song victory. The tablet was erected at the foot of Maoshan Mountain, fifteen //east of Yongqing County. It is still there today.
His remaining troops he divided into five columns and set a date for the march. But then Lu Zhishen burst into his tent and, clasping both hands together in greeting, addressed him.
"After I killed the Lord of the West, I fled to Yanmen County in Daizhou Prefecture, and Squire Zhao brought me to Mount Wutai, where I took refuge with the abbot and became a monk. Because I twice got drunk, knocked open the gates and rioted in the monastery, the abbot sent me to the Great Xiangguo Monastery in the Eastern Capital, and the abbot there gave me a job looking after their vegetable garden. But Marshal Gao wanted to have me killed because I rescued Lin Chong, and I became an outlaw. I got to know you, brother, and I've been with you for many years.
"I've been thinking of my first teacher, the abbot at Wutai. I haven't been to see him in all this time. I often remember what he told me—Even though it's my nature to kill and burn, I'll eventually be purified and become a saint. Since everything is quiet and peaceful at present, I'd like to ask for a few days off and pay my respects to him. I want to contribute the rewards I've accumulated to the monastery and request him to predict the future. You and the army go on ahead, brother. I'll catch up."
Song Jiang was surprised. He thought a moment, then said: "I'd no idea you knew this holy man. Why didn't you say so? We'll go with you, also pay our respects, and ask him to foretell the future."
He discussed it with the other chieftains. They all wanted to go, except for Gongsun Sheng who was a Taoist. Song Jiang decided, after talking it over with Military Advisor Wu Yong, to leave Jin Dajian, Huangfu Duan, Xiao Rang, and Yue Ho to aid Deputy Vanguard General Lu Junyi in commanding the army, which was to continue returning by contingents to the capital. "We'll take only a thousand men, and our chieftains," said Song Jiang, "and go with Lu Zhishen to call on his abbot." Lu Zhishen expressed his willingness. The party prepared gifts of famous incense, fine silks, clothing, money, and set out for Mount Wutai. Truly, they left aside their armor and weapons to wander through lonely forests. By the Terrace of Rain and Flowers they called on a high-ranking monk of great virtue, at the Hall of Virtue they saw gleaming lamps and ancient Buddhas. And as a result, a single phrase scorned the search for name and fame, a few brief words kicked aside obsession with life and death.

Song Jiang had forgotten nothing of what the Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven told him in his dream. He called the Professor in to draw up the plan and informed Commissioner Zhao, in order to have his approval. The twenty-four gun carriages were constructed in the camp, using varnished planks and sheet iron. Underneath was storage for combustible materials, on top a platform for guns. The work went on day and night, in the effort to have them completed as soon as possible.
All the leaders were called together to hear the battle plan and Song Jiang assigned responsibilities. There was to be a leader dressed in yellow, representing the element "earth", to combat the Tartar company under the sign of the water star: Twin Spears was chosen for this, with seven others to counter the seven black pennant Tartar squadrons under this command. There was to be a leader in white representing metal, to combat the Tartar troops under the sign of wood: Leopard's Head was chosen for this, aided by seven others. There was a contingent in red representing fire to counter the Tartars under the sign of metal: Thunderclap was chosen to lead this, also with seven others. There was a contingent in black, representing the northern water star, to combat the Tartars under the fire sign, Twin Rods to lead it, with seven others. There was a contingent in green, representing the eastern wood sign, to combat the yellow banner troops of the main Tartar army: Scimitar would lead this with eight others. For the contingent with the embroidered banner to combat the Tartar's sun company on the left Monk, Pilgrim, Morbid, Madcap, Nameless, Spots and Strongarm were chosen. The contingent with coloured robes and white armour to combat the Tartars' moon company on the right consisted of Steelbright, Auntie Gu, Sister Sun, Short-Arse, Blackface, the Gardener and Blossom. A particularly bold group of leaders were needed to attack the Tartar's central com-mand and capture the King: there were six of these commanded by the Unicorn. There were five to protect the artillery, led by Iron Ox. The rest, including the boat captains, were to back up the troops in the front line of the attack. The troops were formed up as before in the Eight Trigrams formation, and provided with banners to mark out the octagon.
Everyone followed Song Jiang's instructions to the letter. They hurried to finish the gun carriages, load them up and deliver them to the front. It was a plan calculated to shock heaven and earth, to astound ghosts and gods.
When some time had passed without any sign of Song Jiang offering battle, Marshal Wuyan ordered his shock troops to reconnoitre outside Song Jiang's camp.
By now continuous work had ensured completion of the gun carriages, so Song Jiang had only to choose an auspicious time to begin. He launched his attack in the evening. At the outset the troops were deployed in a straight line and maintained a heavy fire of crossbow bolts towards the enemy position, to pin them down until it began to get dark.
At dusk an icy north wind began to blow in from the left bringing with it thick red clouds, which veiled heaven and earth so that darkness came much earlier than normal. Song Jiang gave orders for them to hold split reeds in their mouths as whistles and communicate by whistling. First of all four of the divisions peeled off leaving the troops in yellow drawn up in the front line. These four divisions attacked the enemy scouts, turning the enemy flank and charging off northwards.
In the first watch Song Jiang's troops set off a string of explosions on the left. Twin Rods broke through the pennants and headed directly for the rearguard to attack the fire commander. Next Scimitar charged the central army, taking on the earth star. Leopard's Head attacked the left flank, the wood star. Thunderclap took on the metal star and his troops on the right flank. Twin Spears led his troops forward to attack the water star in the front ranks. Taoist Gongsun with the main army held his sword aloft and worked his magic, treading out the pattern of the Dipper and summoning the five thunders. A gale blew up from the south, tearing the limbs off trees and scattering sand and gravel all around. The twenty-four gun carriages were called in, accompanied by their allotted leaders and five hundred shield bearers, hardened soldiers all, who were to get them through into the heart of the enemy position. Steelbright and Auntie Gu had led their troops into the centre of the Tartar moon brigade. Monk led his troops through to penetrate the Tartar sun brigade. The Unicorn led a detachment behind the gun carriages into the Tartar central army. Each leader sought out his allotted opponent. When the guns started firing that evening it was louder than thunder, it was a sound to make the stars tremble and put the planets in a spin, a noise to cause sun and moon to lose their shining, a racket to provoke despair in ghosts and gods. The Tartars were terror-stricken.
Marshal Wuyan, who was directing operations at the centre, heard a great tumult of shouting and sounds of battle on every side. Just as he leapt into the saddle, the gun carriages came within range. Flames started to light up the sky, accompanied by earth-shattering explosions. All of a sudden Scimitar and his men were in front of the Marshal's tent. Grasping his halberd the Marshal engaged Scimitar in a furious fight. Hotshot began firing off stones at random, knocking down enemy officers left and right. Many were hit. Those who could, ran for their lives. Skyhawk, Mr. Chai, the Son-in-Law and Hound gave free rein to their horses and charged about cutting down the enemy with their swords. Finding himself deprived of his aids, Marshal Wuyan turned his horse and galloped northward, with Scimitar in hot pursuit. Truly one might say, "All around the missiles fly, smoke and burning fill the sky"!
Colonel Hua, who was in the rear, saw that Marshal Wuyan was beaten and he joined in the chase. Grabbing his bow, he fitted an arrow to it, took aim and fired. The arrow hit the Marshal in the middle of his back. There was a clang and sparks flew: the arrow had struck the back plate of the Marshal's armour. Colonel Hua was about to fire again when Scimitar galloped up, waving his green dragon sword and slashing at the Marshal's head. The Marshal was wearing three kinds of armour. The first layer, which he wore inside, was chain mail of hardened bronze. In the middle he had armour made out of the skin of some kind of sea animal. On the outside he had a suit of shining mail. When Scimitar slashed he only pierced two of these layers. When he struck again, the Marshal dodged beneath the arc of the sword, then jerked his horse round and thrust with his square halberd. They had only fought a few bouts when Colonel Hua caught them up and aimed another arrow at the Marshal's forehead. The Marshal quickly ducked and the arrow passed right through his winged golden helmet grazing his ear. The Marshal fled again, and Hotshot raced after him. He took a stone and hurled it at the Marshal's head. The stone landed with a thump but the Marshal galloped on, trailing his spear. Scimitar galloped up beside him and delivered another fierce cut with the sword. Hotshot raced up too and gave a spear thrust. Thus did the unfortunate Marshal, once a hero of such renown, meet his end, from one sword cut and one spear thrust.
While this was going on, Monk, Pilgrim and the others of their group, all yelling at the tops of their voices, charged into the enemy's sun brigade. The commander, Prince Yelü Dechong, tried to make a run for it but a blow to his horse's head from Pilgrim's halberd brought him crashing to the ground. Pilgrim grasped him by the hair and cut his head off. Thus was the power of the "sun" vanquished! "If we can now get their king, that'll really finish it off!" Monk said.
Meanwhile the Tartar princess surrounded by her moon brigade heard the sounds of battle all around and, after hastily arming herself, was about to ride out with her women warriors and attendants. At that moment Steelbright with her two swords closely followed by Auntie Gu and the others, charged into the tent and engaged the princess in combat. They fought innumerable bouts until Steelbright abandoned her swords and closed with the princess. She grabbed her by the shoulders and the two of them wrestled together on horseback; they appeared as if sculpted from a single block. Then Short-Arse arrived on the scene and took the princess prisoner. Auntie Gu and the Ogress continued to harass the women warriors inside the tent. Outside Blackface, the Gardener and Blossom continued the good work. The hapless lady of the palace found herself bound and captive.
The Unicorn's contingent had broken through in the centre. Snake and Scorpion first tore down the command flag and fell to slaughtering the enemy troops and commanders. A group of officials and guards surrounding the royal carriage fled northwards. Two of the royal nephews died in action. One royal nephew was taken alive and the other disappeared. The main army was surrounded and the fighting went on till the fourth watch. When they broke off it was found that the Tartar force of twenty thousand or more had been decimated. At dawn all Song Jiang's leaders returned. He ordered the gong to be sounded for their withdrawal to camp and told everyone to report their captives and receive their reward. Steelbright reported the capture of the princess. The Unicorn had one of the royal nephews; Whiskers the Black Water Star, and so on. Countless heads were brought in by various leaders. Song Jiang ordered the eight captured commanders to be handed over to Commissioner Zhao for internment. As for the horses, they were shared out among Song Jiang's leaders for their own use.
The Tartar king had fled to Yanjing, where he ordered the four gates to be bolted and barred and the defences reinforced everywhere. There was no question of his coming out to fight. Song Jiang accordingly ordered his troops to strike camp and invest the city. He invited Commissioner Zhao to come up to the rear camp and direct the siege. He had siege ladders and ballistas set up outside the city and strengthened his own position in preparation for the final attack.
The Tartar king was overwhelmed with grief. He called all his ministers together to discuss the situation. Everyone said: "Our situation is desperate. Should we not surrender to the Song Emperor? Surely that is the best plan?"
The king accepted this view. So a flag of surrender was raised and someone was sent to the Song camp with this message: "We promise yearly to send oxen and horses, to contribute pearls and jewels every year and never again to violate the borders of the Middle Kingdom." Song Jiang took the messenger to see Commissioner Zhao in the rearward camp and speak to him about the offer of surrender.
Commissioner Zhao said: "This is an affair of national importance. It has to be decided at the top and I cannot give you an answer. If you Tartars wish to surrender you must appoint a responsible minister to go himself to the capital and seek an audience with the Emperor. If the Emperor accepts your submission and pardons your transgressions, all well and good. We will withdraw our troops and cease hostilities."
The messenger took this answer back to the King. When the latter summoned all his officials, civil and military, to discuss the matter, Chu Jian, the deputy chief minister stepped forward and said: "At present we have few troops and fewer commanders. With such a depleted army how can we possibly go on fighting? In my humble opinion, I should go myself to General Song's camp bearing handsome gifts. We must ask him to halt the attack and meanwhile collect tribute to take to the Eastern Capital to bribe all the officials of their Military Council, persuading them to put in a good word for us with the Emperor and not intrigue against us. At present four corrupt officials hold power — the Grand Preceptor and Marshals Tong, Gao and Yang. The Emperor is young and follows their advice. If we can bribe these four with gold and silk, to buy their good will, our surrender will be accepted and they will withdraw their army and cease hostilities." The King accepted this advice.
Next day Minister Chu Jian went to Song Jiang's camp. Song Jiang received him in his tent and asked the purpose of his visit. He first talked about the surrender and then promised Song Jiang gold and silk and suchlike toys.
Song Jiang said: "We have been besieging your city for many days now. Sooner or later the city will fall, never fear, and we will pluck out the problem by the roots to make sure the weeds never grow again. However, we saw that you had raised the flag of surrender so we called a halt, to allow you to present yourselves before the Emperor, to apologize and offer tribute. But why do you make these promises of wealth to me? What do you take me for? Let me hear no more of this!"
The Minister, Chu Jian was terrified by the response he got, but Song Jiang said: "We will allow you to go to the court, to the highest authority. We will not attack while you are gone, but you must go and return as soon as possible. Do not delay!"
The Minister thanked General Song and departed. He rode back to Yanjing and reported to the King. A meeting of all the King's ministers accepted the idea, and the King and his nobles contributed gold, silver, precious stones and pearls and all manner of costly baubles, which were loaded onto carts. Minister Chu Jian was to take them to the Eastern Capital, accompanied by a dozen or so officials. Thirty or more horses were found for them to take also and a formal written apology was composed, after which they set off.
The delegation went first to see Song Jiang in his camp. Song Jiang took the Tartar minister to see Commissioner Zhao to let him know what was happening, namely that the Tartars were sending their deputy chief minister personally to deliver a formal notice of apology and surrender. Commissioner Zhao entertained the Minister most courteously. After deliberating with Song Jiang, he consented that the request be passed on to the Emperor, in a communication that would be carried by Mr. Chai and Magic Hand, together with a report on the military situation for the Military Council. Mr. Chai and Magic Hand were to accompany the Tartar minister to the capital.
They travelled without stopping and on arrival in the capital they took the carts loaded with valuables and their drivers to stay in the government rest house. Mr. Chai and Magic Hand first delivered their military report to the Military Council and said: "The army at present has invested Yanjing, which is on the point of falling. The King of Liao has raised the flag of surrender and sent his minister offering to apologize and capitulate. They want an armistice. We have no authority in the matter so we request the Council's decision."
The Council replied: "Keep him in the government rest house for the moment while we give the matter more thought."
Now the Grand Preceptor and Marshals Tong, Gao and Yang were all greedy men. The Tartar minister and his party to gain their ear had made sure that these four key players, and also all the members of the Military Council, had received sweeteners. They went around presenting gifts to every official in order to curry favour. At the next morning court, after all the courtiers had made obeisance, President of the Military Council Marshal Tong stepped forward and said: "Our army commander General Song Jiang has pushed the Tartars back into Yanjing and now has them under siege there. The city is on the verge of falling. The Tartar king has raised a flag of surrender and wants us to accept his capitulation. He has sent his minister to tender allegiance and offer both tribute and an apology. He wants to discuss peace and the withdrawal of our troops, the total cessation of hostilities. They say they will never again violate our frontiers. They beg you to look favourably on their request."
The Emperor said: "What are the views of all of you on this proposal to make peace and withdraw our troops?"
The Grand Preceptor now came forward: "We are all agreed on the matter. Historically it has never been our policy to annihilate the barbarian peoples on our frontiers. In my humble opinion, to maintain the Tartars as a buffer state on our northern border, paying annual tribute, is in the nation's best interest. We should accept their surrender and apology, order a complete cessation of hostilities, and bring our army back to defend the capital. It is not of course for us to decide the matter, but we beg your Majesty to do so."
The Emperor accepted the advice and issued a proclamation granting the Tartar delegation an audience. Accordingly a palace official directed the Tartar minister and all his delegation to present themselves at the palace to pay homage. An official handed in the Tartar King's petition, which was unrolled on the Emperor's desk. The herald read out in a loud voice:
*Born in the wilds and bred among barbarians, I was totally ignorant of the laws of ethics, the obligations of morality. I was deceived by treacherous officials and lying generals, a pack of scoundrels who have the hearts of wolves allied to the habits of a dog and are greedy and corrupt, with the vision of a rat and the brains of a deer. In my benighted state, I allowed in an act of madness the violation of your borders, thus provoking stern reprisals by Your Majesty's army. When our rash commanders troubled your peace it was like ants trying to move Mount Tai or one who would stop a river flowing to the sea!*
*I am now sending my ambassador, Minister Chu Jian, to offer Your Majesty our lands and to request your judgement upon us. If you will pity our insignificance and spare this land inherited from our forefathers, and forgive us for what has happened, it will usher in a new era: we will employ our troops only in the defence of your frontier; all our people, young and old, will receive new life, our children and our children's children will bless you; we will pay tribute regularly and without fail.*
*Trembling and with bated breath we await your verdict.*
*Yel Hui, King of Liao*
When the Emperor had studied the petition, everyone made obeisance and imperial wine was served in honour of the Tartar delegates. The latter brought in their tribute of gold and silk and the like and presented it to the Emperor. His Majesty ordered it all to be taken to the Treasury, and ordained that this procedure, with the tribute of cows, horses and other items — should be repeated each year. The Emperor also reciprocated with gifts of gold, silk and clothing and an official banquet was held. Afterwards Minister Chu Jian and his companions were told they should return home and await the arrival of the Emperor's envoy to supervise the surrender. They thanked the Emperor, took their leave of him and returned to the rest house.
After the court adjourned that day the delegates again sent someone to all the officials to hand out bribes. The Grand Preceptor gave every assurance that he and the other three would look after the Tartars' interests. Minister Chu Jian thanked him and returned to his country.
Next day the Grand Preceptor led all the courtiers into the court to request the preparation of a treaty to take to Liao. The Emperor consented and a member of the Hanlin Academy was immediately ordered to draft it. Marshal Su was to deliver the treaty and see it proclaimed in Liao. Orders were also given for Commissioner Zhao to instruct General Song to withdraw his troops and cease hostilities, bringing his army back to the capital. All prisoners were to be released, the captured cities restored to Tartar rule and all sequestered goods and property restored. The Emperor dismissed the court and the courtiers dispersed.
Next day all the members of the Military Council went to Marshal Su's palace to fix the date of his departure.

With the royal edict in his hands Marshal Su dared not delay. He organized his sedan, horses and retinue, took his leave of the Emperor and bade farewell to the members of the Military Council. Then with Mr. Chai and Magic Hand and the Tartar delegation, he set off for Chenbridge and the border. They were travelling in the depths of winter. There were thick red clouds and the ground was mantelled in snow, forests and plains all clad in white. Battling against the elements, Marshal Su and his party pressed on. The snow relented as they approached the frontier, but there was no thaw. Mr. Chai and Magic Hand sent messengers on ahead to inform Commissioner Zhao and forewarn General Song.

When Song Jiang got the message he arranged wine for their reception and with the other leaders rode forward fifteen miles to meet them. After the greetings the wine was served and there was general rejoicing. Song Jiang invited them all to his camp and arranged a welcoming banquet at which court affairs were discussed. Marshal Su described how the members of the Military Council, in particular the notorious four, had all taken the Tartars' bribes and vigorously promoted their cause with the Emperor, and how the peace proposal had been accepted, including recall of all troops and cessation of hostilities, the army returning to garrison the capital.

Song Jiang said somewhat sadly: "I don't wish to complain, but up till now our efforts seem to have brought us little reward."

Marshal Su said: "Do not worry, commander. When I get back I shall certainly commend your assiduity to the Emperor."

Commissioner Zhao added: "And I shall bear witness to your diligence and your achievements."

Song Jiang said: "There are one hundred and eight of us, and we have all striven loyally to defend the country, with no thought of personal gain. Our greatest wish is that we be allowed to continue together. But if you can find a way to advance our interests, we shall be most grateful."

There was great feasting and revelry that day and they did not break up till late. Later, messengers were sent to warn the Tartars to prepare for receiving the treaty.

Next day Song Jiang detailed ten leaders to escort Marshal Su into the Liao capital to proclaim the treaty. They were all in their best uniforms and gleaming armour and fully accoutred. This escort consisted of Scimitar, Leopard's Head, Thunderclap, Twin Rods, Colonel Hua, Twin Spears, Skyhawk, Mr. Chai, the Little Duke and the Halberdier. There were also three thousand troops, providing a close guard for the Marshal as he rode in. The people of Yanjing had not seen a Chinese military force for hundreds of years and when they heard about the Marshal's arrival there was great excitement. They placed incense and lanterns in their doorways. The King graciously rode out at the head of his officials, civil and military, to receive the imperial edict at the south gate and escorted them back to his palace. The ten leaders of the escort placed themselves around him and Marshal Su found a place to the left of the dragon pavilion. The King and his officials knelt outside the palace. The officials inside prostrated themselves, the king and his ministers prostrated themselves. The Tartar chief minister asked for the treaty and read it out, there in front of the palace:

*The great emperor of Song proclaims:*

*Since the founding of the kingdom by the Three Emperors and Five Sovereigns, China has always had a ruler. It is to be supposed then that you barbarians will have your ruler too. The recent violation of our borders by the kingdom of Liao in contravention of heaven's law would justify your total annihilation. We have however considered your petition and been moved to compassion. We shall show mercy to you and not impose the ultimate penalty, but permit your state to go on existing. From the date of this edict all captured commanders shall go free and return home and all occupied lands will be handed back. But you must not neglect to pay the annual tribute. Respect our great nation and obey the laws of heaven and earth, for that is the duty of barbarians. You are warned!*

*Issued the nth day of the winter month of the fourth year of Xuanho*

When the chief minister finished his reading, the King and his ministers gave thanks. These ceremonies completed, an altar was set up for the edict to repose on and the King talked with Marshal Su. After some polite conversation he invited the emissary to an inner room where a royal banquet with choicest dishes was laid on. Wine was served and many a bumper drunk. There was song and dance throughout, the air full all the time of the sound of native flutes. Beautiful Tartar girls gave a spirited performance of their dance, spinning and gliding to the beat of their traditional instruments. At the end of it all, Marshal Su and his entourage were escorted to the guest quarters, where they slept. All the Marshal's suite received financial rewards that day.

Next day the King sent Minister Chu Jian to the camp to invite Commissioner Zhao and Song Jiang to join the revels in Yanjing. After discussing it with the Professor, Song Jiang decided it would not be appropriate for him to go, so the Commissioner went by himself and kept Marshal Su company that day at a grand banquet organized for the Song emissary by the Tartar king. Copious drafts of grape wine were poured from silver sconces and the meat of kids was served up on gold platters. There were exotic fruits and rare flowers everywhere. When it all drew to a close the king had costly objects brought on gold trays to offer the guests. They went on drinking till the small hours. On the third day the king summoned all his officials, civil and military, and to the sound of martial music they escorted Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao back to the camp. Later the king instructed Minister Chu Jian to take gifts to the camp of oxen, sheep, horses, gold and silver and silk, to reward Song Jiang's army with a banquet and provide more gifts for all the leaders.

Song Jiang ordered the Tartar princess and her thousand followers to be set free and sent home. The captured cities of Tanzhou, Qizhou, Bazhou and Youzhou were restored to Tartar rule. He saw Marshal Su off on his return to the capital. He ordered all leaders to muster their troops, carts and drivers and named those who were to set off first, the main army being assigned to escort Commissioner Zhao. Song Jiang organized a banquet of his own in the camp to reward the waterborne leaders and despatched the boats and their crews to the capital with orders to await further orders when they got there.

Song Jiang again sent someone into the city to tell the chief minister and deputy chief minister that he wanted to talk to them. When the King sent them to him, Song Jiang invited them into his tent and made them sit in the place of honour. He began as follows: "Our army was at the gates of your city, it had reached your last line of defence and you were hard pressed. Originally we did not intend to let you off. We were going to take the city by storm and wipe you out. This would have been perfectly justified. But we agreed to let you petition the Emperor and he took pity on you, out of the kindness of his heart and decided not to persecute you but to accept your surrender and your offer to pay tribute and apologize. Now it is all settled and we are returning to the court. But you must not think we would not have defeated you, and make it an excuse for causing further trouble. Make sure you pay your taxes in full every year. We shall return home now, but you must have great care not to transgress again! If we have to come back we will not let you off lightly!"

The two ministers humbly knocked their heads on the ground to acknowledge their fault and in gratitude for the mercy shown them. After Song Jiang had repeated his warning in a gentler tone they gratefully withdrew.

Song Jiang appointed a body of troops with Steelbright in command to go on ahead. Then he ordered the regimental stonemasons to select a stone and had Magic Hand write out an inscription as a memorial of these events. After the Craftsman had inscribed the stone it was set up on Grassy Hill, about five miles east of Everbright, where it stands to this day.

Song Jiang now divided his army into five columns and set the day for their departure. At this point Monk Lu Zhishen unexpectedly came to his tent, bowed and said: "It is many years since the time when I killed the butcher and fled to Daizhou in Yanmen, where Mr. Zhao took me and introduced me to Abbot True Knowledge at the monastery on Mount Wutai and I shaved my head and became a monk. After I had twice got drunk and caused trouble in the meditation hall he sent me to Abbot Pure Knowledge at the Xiangguo Temple in the Eastern Capital to ask for a job. I was told I could look after the vegetable garden but when I rescued Leopard's Head from the wicked schemes of Marshal Gao I had to become an outlaw. I have been serving under you for a long time, many years now, and I keep thinking of my old teacher. I have never been back to see him. I can't help remembering how he said that although killing and burning was part of my nature, eventually I would find enlightenment. Now we are at peace, our problems all past, I would really like you to grant me a few days leave so that I may go to Mount Wutai and pay my respects. I intend also to make a donation to the temple of all the wealth I have received as booty and ask my teacher to tell me what my future holds. You go on ahead, please, with the army, and I will catch you up later!"

A great heaviness came over Song Jiang as he listened to this request. He said: "Why did you not tell us before that this living Buddha is so close at hand? We might all go to pay our respects and ask him about the future."

When he discussed it with the others, they all wanted to go. Only Taoist Gongsun declined. Song Jiang made plans with the Professor: "Let us leave the Craftsman, Redbeard, Magic Hand and Lungs with my deputy the Unicorn to command the army and continue the march. The rest of us, with just a thousand troops, will go with Monk Lu Zhishen to pay our respects to Abbot True Knowledge.

So Song Jiang and the others parted from the army. They collected incense, silk, garments, gold and silver and set off for Mount Wutai. Indeed they were set to

Exchange the trappings of war and battle
*For the unworldly halls of meditation;*
*On the terraces of rain and flowers*
*Visit the man of supreme virtue to pay him homage;*
*In the Hall of of Virtuous Conduct*
*Encounter the Buddha of the Burning Lamp, and*
*Hear the sentence that governs the road to fame and wealth,*
The word that transcends the problem of life and death.

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## On Mount Wutai, Song Jiang visits the Master & Consults the Seer; At Double Woods Crossing, the Prodigy Yan Qing meets an old friend

Song Jiang and the chieftains, taking only a thousand men, arrived with Lu Zhishen at the foot of Mount Wutai, and there made camp. A messenger was sent up the mountain to announce their presence. Divesting themselves of their armor, Song Jiang and his brothers started climbing the slope, on foot, wearing their military robes of embroidered silk. As they neared the monastery archway, they heard the pealing of bells and the beating of drums. Monks in large number came out to welcome them. They courteously greeted Song Jiang, Lu Zhishen and the others. Many of them remembered Zhishen. The sight of the hundred or more chieftains, arrayed neatly in ranks behind Song Jiang, filled them with awe and admiration.

"The abbot is meditating and cannot be disturbed," the elder told Song Jiang. "Please don't be offended, General." He invited the visitors to sit a while in the reception room.

Tea was served. An attendant entered and said: "The abbot has just completed his meditations. He invites the general to join him in the Meditation Hall."

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Song Jiang and his entourage of over a hundred walked to the hall. The abbot came quickly down the steps and led them inside, where they exchanged courtesies. Song Jiang looked at the prelate. He was a man in his sixties. His hair and eyebrows were completely white. He had fine bones and the air of one who has lived long in remote mountains.

When all the chieftains had entered, Song Jiang requested the abbot to be seated. Then he and the chieftains lit incense and bowed. Lu Zhishen did the same.

"In the years you've been gone you've killed and burned just like before," the abbot berated Zhishen.

The Tattooed Monk remained silent. Song Jiang stepped forward and said: "I have long known of your virtue, Abbot, but I never was fortunate enough to have the chance to see your noble visage. A campaign against the Liao has brought me to this region, and so I am able to offer homage to a great prelate. It gives me the utmost happiness. Lu Zhishen has been my brother. Although he has killed and set fires, he has never harmed good people, and his heart has been pure. It was he who led us here to pay our respects."

"High-ranking prelates who have called here have spoken at times of mundane affairs," said the abbot. "I have long known of your acting in Heaven's behalf, General, and your loyal heart. I know too how much emphasis your commanders place on chivalrous conduct. Following you, my disciple Lu Zhishen of course could do no wrong."

Song Jiang fulsomely expressed his thanks.

Lu Zhishen presented a packet of gold and silver and silks to his teacher, the abbot.

"Where did you get these things, my pupil? Immoral riches I can never accept."

"These are rewards I've accumulated. They're of no use to me. I've brought them especially for you, Teacher, to use for the benefit of all."

"They would mean little to our monks. I'll use the money to buy a set of sutras. Expiate your sins and you'll reach a state of purity."

Lu Zhishen thanked the abbot. Song Jiang, too, presented money and silks. The prelate adamantly refused to take them.

"If you won't accept our gifts, Teacher," said Song Jiang, "at least you can use them to provide vegetarian meals for the monks."

The callers rested at the monastery on Mount Wutai all that day, and the abbot entertained them at a meatless meal. Of that no more need be said.

After another vegetarian repast the next day, bells pealed and drums pounded in the temple on Mount Wutai. The abbot summoned his monks to hear him discourse and make predictions. Cassocks draped over their shoulders and carrying their cushions, they filed into the temple and sat down. Song Jiang, Lu Zhishen, and the other chieftains stood on either side.

A stone chime sounded, and two red gauze lanterns lighted the abbot to his chair on the dais. Holding a stick of smoldering incense, he offered a prayer.

"With this incense, I humbly wish ten thousand years to the emperor, with the empress at his side, and a thousand autumns to the prince. May the imperial children flourish, and the officials rise constantly in rank. Let there be peace throughout the land, and may the people be happy at their labors."

The prelate took another stick of incense. "May our patrons be at ease in body and mind, live for a thousand circuits of the sun, and their fame last forever."

Taking a third stick, the abbot intoned: "May the country be peaceful and the people serene for years to come, the five grains abundant, the three religions glorious, with calm on all four sides, and everything exactly as wished."

The prelate then seated himself, while the monks rose and stood, palms of their hands together. Song Jiang advanced with a stick, bowed and, palms together, addressed the abbot.

"I have a question. I wonder if I dare ask?"

"What is your proper query?"

"One's life on earth is limited, though suffering is without end. Man's body is weak. His greatest concern is life and death. I've come here to ask my fate."

The abbot's reply was cryptic: "By the six senses bound, by the four elements restricted, several times you've tumbled in the flames of battle. Alas, all living things afloat in this world futilely howl in mire and sand."

Song Jiang bowed and stood in attendance. The chieftains also advanced with incense and bowed.

"We pray only that we may live and die together," they said, "and meet always in future incarnations."

The monks then withdrew and the abbot invited his guests to dine on vegetarian fare in the Hall of Clouds. After the meal, Song Jiang and Lu Zhishen accompanied the abbot to Meditation Hall. They chatted until nightfall.

"Zhishen and I had hoped to spend many days with you, Teacher, dispelling our ignorance," said Song Jiang. "But as leader of a large army, I cannot stay too long. I do not understand your pronouncement. Since we're about to return to the capital, I pray you, Abbot, tell me what the future holds in store."

On a sheet of paper, the prelate wrote four phrases: *When the shadows of the wild geese pass, in the east there is no unity. Cocking an eye he scores his mark, at Double Woods full prosperity.*

The abbot handed the paper to Song Jiang. "Your whole life is here, General. Preserve this prediction well. In time it will come true."

Song Jiang looked at the paper. He couldn't make head or tail of it.

"I'm a stupid person. I don't understand. Please explain. Shall I expect good or ill?"

"These are mystic Buddhist words. Think them over. I cannot tell you clearly, lest I reveal Heaven's secrets."

The prelate then called Lu Zhishen before him and said: "I shall soon be leaving you forever, my pupil, to go to my just reward. You, too, I give a four phrase prediction. Keep it and use it all your life."

And the abbot wrote: *Take Xia when you encounter him. Seize La when you meet. When you hear the tide, round out the circle. When you see the tide, in silence rest.*

Bowing, Zhishen accepted the paper. He read it several times and concealed it on his person. Again he bowed and thanked his teacher.

"Remember these words, my pupil," said the abbot. "Don't forget your original form."

All retired to rest for the night. The following day, Song Jiang and Lu Zhishen, plus Wu Yong and the chieftains, bid the abbot farewell. The abbot and all the monks saw them off as far as the mountain arch of the monastery.

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Song Jiang and his entourage hurried through the night and returned to the main army, where they were met by Lu Junyi and Gongsun Sheng. Song Jiang told them what had transpired on Mount Wutai and showed them abbot's prediction. They couldn't decipher it either.

"How could the likes of us hope to understand such secret religious Words," exclaimed Xiao Rang. Everyone sighed regretfully.

Song Jiang ordered the army to march. All three divisions headed for the Eastern Capital. After several days on the road, they reached a place called Double Woods Crossing.

Now Abbot True Knowledge of Mount Wutai, the community where Lu Zhishen had first been made a monk, was a living Buddha of the Song era and knew things that were past and things that were to come. Many years before he had recognized that Lu Zhishen was an exceptional person, both physically and mentally. But he knew also that Zhishen's human destiny was not yet fulfilled and he had to pay his debt for taking a life. He therefore sent him back to take his turn in the world of illusion. Nevertheless, the spiritual urge was alive in Lu Zhishen and he was now possessed by this idea of returning to pay his respects to his old master. Song Jiang also was endowed with a virtuous nature and had therefore decided to accompany him on the visit to Abbot True Knowledge.

When Song Jiang, together with the other leaders and their troops, reached the foot of Mount Wutai, he ordered them to make camp, and sent someone up first to the temple to announce their coming. They removed their armour and uniforms and dressed in civilian clothing set off up the mountain on foot. When they arrived at the temple gate they heard bells and drums inside and the monks came out to meet them and pay their respects. There were many among them who remembered Lu Zhishen, and were amazed to see him in the midst of this gallant company led by Song Jiang. "The Abbot has just started meditating," the Prior respectfully told Song Jiang. "I am afraid he cannot receive Your Excellency at the moment. Please do not be offended." He invited them to go and wait meanwhile in the reception hall. When they had been served tea a monk came in and said: "The Abbot has finished meditating and is ready to receive you in his quarters. Please come with me."

So Song Jiang with his company, who numbered over a hundred, followed their guide to the abbot's quarters. The Abbot courteously came out to greet them and invite them in. After the exchange of courtesies Song Jiang took stock of the old man. He had seen more than sixty summers and his eyebrows and beard were white, but his physique was still robust and his bearing dignified: he had the look of a truly spiritual man.

The leaders trooped inside. Song Jiang begged the Abbot to be seated while he lit incense and did homage, and the others also prostrated themselves. Next Lu Zhishen the Monk came forward with incense and did reverence. The Abbot said: "It is a good many years since you left here, my disciple. Haven't you had enough of killing and burning?" Lu Zhishen was at a loss for words. Song Jiang intervened. "I have heard so much of your virtue, Father," he said, "although my destiny has not permitted me hitherto to meet you and pay my respects. A command from the Emperor to fight the Tartars brings me here and allows me this opportunity to make your acquaintance. It is something I shall treasure all my life. Although my brother Zhishen is somewhat inclined to killing and burning, his heart is true and he does not harm the innocent. Besides, it is he who has brought us to you."

The Abbot said: "I receive many religious dignitaries here and I am not uninformed about worldly affairs. I have heard about you, General, how you do heaven's will and love honour and righteousness. If my disciple Zhishen is with you how can I possibly object?"
Song Jiang thanked him profusely.
Monk Lu Zhishen now took out a bundle containing gold, silver and brocades and offered it to his teacher. The Abbot said: "My son, where does all this stuff come from? I cannot receive goods that have been obtained unjustly."
"These are all things which I have received as reward for my own efforts," he replied. "They are no use to me and I came here expressly to give them to you, for the use of all."
The Abbot said: "The brothers would have no use for them. I will spend the money on our library of sacred texts. Curb your sinfulness my son and you will soon achieve virtue."
When Monk Lu Zhishen had thanked him, Song Jiang also tried to present some money and silk to the Abbot. The latter refused it. Song Jiang said: "If you will not accept this offer-ing, Father Abbot, let the father provisioner spend it on vege-tarian banquets for the whole community." They stayed the night, and the Abbot ordered vegetarian food for them. Of this no more.
Next day, the provisioner having made his preparations for a vegetarian banquet, bells and drums were sounded and the Abbot summoned all the monks to the Hall of the Law for prayer and instruction. A little later the whole community, wearing their robes and carrying their cushions to sit on processed into the hall. Song Jiang, Lu Zhishen and the others lined up on either side. A stone chime was struck and two red silk lanterns lit, as the Abbot was escorted to his throne. He began to offer up holy incense praying: "With this first stick of incense I pray in all humility for long life for the Emperor and prosperity for all his people. With this second stick of incense I pray for our benefactors, that they may have peace of body and mind and live for many years. With this third stick of incense I pray for the people of our land, that there may be peace and prosperity, that all may live in security and harmony, that the three faiths may flourish and good order prevail." After these prayers he seated himself on his throne and the monks lined upon either side each with joined palms in an attitude of reverent attendance.
Song Jiang now came forward and having offered incense did homage with joined palms. Then he said: "There is something I would like to ask you about, Master, if I may make so bold. In scripture it is said that our stay here on earth is limited, the sea of bitterness has no bourn, man's strength is puny and death conquers all."
"The six senses are tied many years, the four elements long remain embroiled," the Abbot replied. "Suffering must be endured in stone and flames, numerous vicissitudes experienced. Alas! All living things in this floating world incessantly cry out, plunged in mud and mire."
When the Abbot finished speaking, Song Jiang bowed and waited reverently to one side. The others now came forward to offer incense and swear an oath: "Our only wish is to live and die together, and always meet again in other lives." After this the monks processed out and everyone was invited to the refectory for the vegetarian banquet.
After this repast Song Jiang and Lu Zhishen went with the Abbot to his quarters, where conversation continued well into the night. Song Jiang had a request to make: "Lu Zhishen and I would have liked to submit ourselves to your guidance for several days, so you could point out our failings. But because I have to lead an army I cannot afford so much time. I am afraid the meaning of your pronouncement just now was not clear to me. Since I must now take my leave and return to the capital, I beg you to enlighten us as to what the future holds."
The Abbot took paper and brush and wrote out this four-line verse:

Wild geese breast the wind, their shadows falter;
*Reunion in the east is out of reach.*
*Take careful aim and all will be achieved;*
What the heart desires is finally attained.

He handed this to Song Jiang, saying: "This is your life, General. Keep it safely and it will serve you well."
Song Jiang was none the wiser and again asked: "Master, I am very stupid and I do not understand religious language. Would you please set my mind at rest by explaining it to me?"
The Abbot said: "It is mystic language. The meaning is hidden. You must work it out for yourself. It cannot be explained." He called on Monk Lu Zhishen to come forward and said to him: "When you leave this time, my disciple, I have to say goodbye to you forever. The reward is nigh. I have a four-line verse for you, which if you keep it in mind will serve you well for the rest of your days." He spoke thus:

Meet Xia and take a prisoner;
*Find La and make an arrest.*
*Hear the tide and awake from darkness*
Recognize old faithful and learn stillness.

Monk Lu Zhishen bowed his head as he received the mantra. Having read it several times he put it away and prostrated himself to show his thanks. They stayed one more night at the monastery and in the morning bade the Abbot farewell and departed. The abbot and monks saw them off as far as the main gate.
We shall now leave the Abbot and his community to return to their monastery while we follow Song Jiang and company as they hasten back to camp. When they rejoined the army, Song Jiang told the Unicorn about the oath they had all sworn on Mount Wutai, and took out the mantra to show it to him and Taoist Gongsun. None of them could make out its meaning. Magic Hand said: "It's not for people like us to interpret these mystic sayings." They all remained baffled.
Song Jiang gave orders for the army to march as soon as possible. The leaders passed the order on to their troops and they set off towards the eastern capital. Wherever they passed the troops committed no crimes at all and the people including old and young flocked to see these great generals. They all revelled in the brave sight presented by Song Jiang and his companions.
After a few days' march they came to a place called Double Woods. The citizens and a number of farmers from neighbouring villages lined the roadside to watch them. Song Jiang's men were riding in vee formation in pairs bridle to bridle. Suddenly in the foremost ranks a rider leapt from his saddle, plunged into the crowd of spectators on the left and dragged one of them out, shouting: "What are you doing here, brother?"
The two of them exchanged courtesies and began talking. When Song Jiang came up with them he saw that it was the Prodigy who had dismounted and was now deep in conversation with another man. Clasping his hands together, the Prodigy said: "Xu, old man, this is our leader General Song Jiang." Song Jiang reined in his horse to have a look at the stranger:
*A piercing gaze from under well-shaped eyebrows; tall stature, a three-pointed beard. He wears a black gauze cap fitting closely over the forehead and a scholar's robe of rough brown cloth with a black border. A coloured sash binds his waist and he has square-toed black cloth slippers. This is not your ordinary rough and ready countryman, but a veritable hermit of the woods.*
Seeing this fellow had a most unusual look about him and an elegant bearing, Song Jiang quickly dismounted, bowed respectfully and asked: "May I inquire your name, sir?"
The other prostrated himself and said: "Your fame is universal. I came here to pay my respects."
Such courtesy was almost embarrassing and Song Jiang quickly raised him up saying: "I have done nothing to deserve this!"
The other said: "My name is Xu Guanzhong. I am from the Eastern Capital, but now I am living in the country. The Prodigy and I are friends from the old days but we were parted over ten years ago and I had no idea I would meet him here today. I was delighted when I heard that he had enlisted in your company. When I heard about your defeat of the Tartars I came here to watch you go past. It's a sight I shall remember all my life. I would like to invite my friend back to my place so we can have a talk. Would you give him leave?"
The Prodigy also said: "It's a long time since I last saw friend Xu. This is a quite unexpected meeting. I like Mr. Xu's idea and I'd only be gone a short while. If you and the others carry on, I can catch you up later."
Song Jiang suddenly recollected: "The Prodigy has spoken much of you and described you in glowing terms. I just haven't had the good fortune of meeting you before. What would you say if I asked you to join us and give us the benefit of your experience?"
The other thanked him but said: "Your offer is most generous, General, and I have long wanted to be able to serve, but my mother is old, over seventy, and I cannot leave home."
Song Jiang said: "In that case I shall not try to persuade you." Turning to the Prodigy, he said: "Make sure you return, otherwise I shall be worried. Once we get to the capital, sooner or later there will be an audience with the Emperor."
The Prodigy said: "Of course I shall obey your command." Then he went to inform the Unicorn and they bade each other goodbye.
Song Jiang mounted and the company set off. When they had gone a bowshot, they saw that Song Jiang was still talking to the Prodigy's friend so they waited till Song Jiang clapped heels to his horse and then all rode on together.
Our story now divides in two. We must first tell how the Prodigy summoned his orderly, prepared his bundle for the journey and had another horse saddled. His own horse he gave to his friend to ride. He went into an inn by the roadside to take off his armour and change into civilian clothes. Then they both mounted and followed by the orderly with the luggage left Double Woods and headed northwest. After passing several villages and hamlets and many forests and hills, they came to a winding mountain road. They talked about old times and shared their feelings. Beyond the mountain was a broad river. After travelling ten miles or so, his friend pointed and said: "My house is up there, among those mountains." A few miles more and they were in the midst of the mountains. The view of the peaks and the river gorge was spectacular, and the Prodigy was so absorbed in the scenery he did not notice it was getting late:

Dusk gives birth to purple mists;
Water mirrors the red-flecked sky.

Now the great peak here was called Mount Majestic and in the old days the great Emperor Yu, Tamer of the Waters, came here, as evidenced by the words in the *Classic*: "To Mount Majestic he came." It is now in Xun district in the same province as the capital. But enough of that.
The Prodigy's friend took him through several mountain passes and then they came to a valley which had a flat floor about a mile across. Among a thick clump of trees two or three thatched cottages could be glimpsed. There were also some reed cabins facing the south bank of the river. This half hidden retreat stood within a compound hedged with bamboo: "With bamboos waving all about, set in a grove of scarlet maples and jade-green cypress." His friend pointed and said: "There is my humble abode."
Inside the fence the Prodigy could see a brown-haired village youth in a shirt of rough cloth, picking up some dry pine sticks and piling them under the thatched eaves. When he heard the horses' hooves the youth straightened up to look and gave shout of disbelief: "Horses! What are horses doing here?" Looking again he recognized his master on the second horse. He rushed out of the gate and stood with respectfully crossed arms, staring open-mouthed. Of course, when they were leaving the Prodigy's friend had said he didn't want bells on the harness, that is why they got so close without being heard. The two riders dismounted and went through the gate. The orderly tethered the horses. They entered the hall and both sat down in the places of guest and host. After tea had been served, his friend told the orderly to remove the horses' saddles and bridles and take them to the back for the farmhand to feed and water them. He gave the orderly a side room at the front to sleep in. The Prodigy went to pay his respects to his friend's mother. They then went to a westward-facing cottage on the east. A window seat at the back gave onto a stream of clear water. The two of them seated themselves beside the window, leaning on the sill.
"I'm afraid you must find my house a mean little place. I hope you won't think it beneath you!"
The Prodigy said: "Beautiful mountains, a rushing stream, what more could one ask for?"
His friend asked some questions about the campaign against the Tartars. After a while the village lad came with a lighted lantern. He closed the window and set up a table on which he laid several plates of vegetables, as well as dishes of chicken and fish, home-grown fruit and a jug of warm wine. The Prodigy's friend poured a cup and presented it to him, saying: "I invited you here but I've only rough wine and country fare to offer you. I know it's not adequate."
The Prodigy was profuse in his thanks: "You're really far too kind," he said.
After they'd had a few cups, the scene outside was bathed in moonlight. The Prodigy opened the window to look out. It was perfect: a gentle breeze, fleeting clouds, pale moon, clear stream, the water in shadow, the mountain bright, the whole house bathed in light. The Prodigy marvelled at it all. "Those days in the capital we used to be inseparable. Then when you had to go away to fight we lost touch. Now you have found this wonderful spot, nothing could be finer! Whereas I ... well, just look at me, driven this way and that, never a moment to sit down and relax!"
His friend smiled and said: "Song Jiang is such a great man, he towers over all the rest. He is one of the stars. And now he has quelled those marauders. As for me, hiding in the wilds in my little snail's shell of a home, how can I be compared with you lot? There is that in my character which does not accord with the times. Everywhere I see power falling into the hands of unscrupulous men and corrupt courtiers. This is why I have no desire for public office. But I have travelled a good deal and seen a lot of beautiful scenery. I have given it all some thought," he ended with a laugh. He rinsed the cups and poured again. The Prodigy took out some twenty taels of silver and offered it to him, saying: "Just a small gift, I hope you won't despise it." His friend resolutely refused to take it. The Prodigy urged him to, saying: "You have such ability. Why don't we go to the capital together and look out for an opportunity, get ourselves positions?"
His friend sighed deeply and said: "Nowadays the wicked hold sway. They resent good men and those who are truly able. They're devils and monsters, all puffed up with pride. Men who are honest and true are thrown into prison and ruined. My ambition died long since. If you ever achieve fame and success, you should seek retirement immediately. Remember the old saying: 'When the birds are finished, the trusty bow is put away.'"
The Prodigy nodded and sighed. They sat up talking half the night before finally taking themselves to bed.
Next day, after washing and breakfasting early, his friend showed the Prodigy all round the district. The Prodigy climbed the hill to see the view. You could see peak after peak. To the west it was nothing but mountains, no sound but the cries of wild animals, and not the least trace of human activity. It was difficult to estimate the number of people living in these mountains, but there can't have been more than a score of households. The Prodigy said: "This is truly paradise."
All day the Prodigy feasted his eyes on the scenery and when evening came he slept there another night.
Next day the Prodigy announced his departure: "I don't want to keep General Song waiting. I really must go."
When his friend was seeing him off, he said: "Wait just a moment!" A minute later the village lad appeared with a hand scroll, which the friend presented to the Prodigy, saying: "Here are some rough sketches I made the other day — they're not very good I'm afraid. You can look at them properly when you get to the capital. Perhaps you will find some use for them."
The Prodigy thanked him and told the orderly to pack the scroll. The two friends were loath to part and they walked a little of the way together. Eventually the Prodigy said: "You can go a hundred miles when you see someone off, but in the end you've still got to say goodbye. Don't come any further. It'll be such a long way back for you!" It was with infinite sadness that they parted. The Prodigy stood for a long time watching his friend go, and then at last mounted. He told the orderly to do likewise and they rode off.
They wasted no time on the journey. As luck would have it, Song Jiang was camped outside at Chenbridge when they arrived, awaiting the Emperor's command. Of their reunion, when the Prodigy entered the camp, we need say nothing.
Now Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao had entered the capital first with their troops and had told the Emperor about the valiant performance of Song Jiang and his men. They announced that Song Jiang had brought his troops back and was waiting outside the city. Zhao described what a hard time Song Jiang and his army had had of it on the frontier. The Emperor asked many questions and everyone was full of praise. It was decreed that the chamberlain should announce that Song Jiang and the others were to ride in full armour into the city for an audience with the Emperor. Accordingly they dressed themselves in full armour and battle uniform, with leather belts, helmets, and chain mail and embroidered silk robes with gold and silver insignia and rode in through the Gate of Eastern Splendour for their audience. Arriving at the Hall of Culture and Ethics they saluted and gave three rousing cheers for the Emperor. They made a brave spectacle, all in military uniform except the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Monk and Pilgrim who followed their own style of dress. The Emperor expressed his pleasure: "I have heard of your trials and tribulations, of how hard the battle was on the frontier and how many of you were wounded, I was deeply affected by it."
Song Jiang prostrated himself again and said: "It is a consequence of the blessings that attend upon Your Majesty's reign that, despite some wounds, we have all come through safely. Today the rebels have surrendered and peace has returned to the border regions. Under Your Majesty's august rule how can we count anything a hardship?" He prostrated himself again. When the Emperor gave orders that the Military Council decide what rank to confer on them, the Grand Preceptor and Council President Marshal Tong said: "We beg Your Majesty to allow us more time to consider the matter of official rank." The Emperor conceded this. Meanwhile a banquet was arranged in their honour. Song Jiang was rewarded with a silk robe, a suit of gold armour and a fine horse, and the Unicorn and the others were likewise presented with gold and cloth, all from the palace coffers. The whole company expressed their thanks. Then they left the palace. Outside the Gate of Eastern Splendour they mounted and returned to camp, to await further orders. Time passed and the Grand Preceptor and the President of the Council did nothing about conferring military rank. They were determined to put it off.
One day Song Jiang was sitting idly in the camp chatting with the Professor about things past and present, things lost and gone, when the Magic Messenger and Madcap marched in wearing civilian dress. "I'm bored with sitting here in the camp with nothing to do," Magic Messenger said. "I want to go off on an excursion with my friend Madcap. Can we have your permission?"
"All right, but come back in good time and we'll have a few cups together," Song Jiang said.
The two of them left Chenbridge and wandered slowly northward. After passing through several small towns or villages, they suddenly came upon a large stone monument beside the road. There were words on the stone which read: "The inventor of writing". There was also some lines of smaller characters half obliterated by the wind and rain and hard to decipher. Magic Messenger looked and said: "This must be where the Father of Writing made his discovery."
Madcap laughed and said: "Fat lot of good that is to the likes of us! Illiterate bastards we are!"
Still laughing at this they proceeded on their way. They came next to a place where there was a wide open space covered in broken tiles. On the north side of this was a stone memorial arch with a horizontal stone inscription bearing the words "Bolang Town". Magic Messenger examined it for a moment and then said emotionally: "And this must be where Zhang Liang the Abnegator proposed the tactics that would defeat the old dynasty and secure the rise of the Han!"
Magic Messenger cried excitedly: "What a fellow he was!"
Madcap said: "What a pity that mallet did not strike home!"
They contemplated all this for a while and then headed on north again till they were six or seven miles from the camp. Madcap said: "We've been fooling around long enough. We'd better find somewhere to have a bowl of wine and then go back."
"That looks like an inn ahead of us," Magic Messenger said. They went in and found themselves a cheerful place to sit beside the window. Magic Messenger struck the table and cried: "Bring us wine!"
The waiter laid five or six dishes of vegetables on the table and said, "How much wine, sirs?"
"Bring us two measures to start with."
The waiter was back in no time with the wine and also plates of beef, mutton, and tender chicken. As they sat there drinking and talking, a man came in. He was carrying an umbrella, a staff, a pack on his back, wore a black shirt, 8-eyelet sandals, and had a bag tied to his belt. Breathing hard, he put down the umbrella, pack, and sat himself down. "Bring me some wine, fast!" he shouted. The waiter brought a measure of wine and some plates of vegetables. "No need for ceremony," the man said. "If you've any meat just cut me a plate. I'll eat it as it comes. I'm on an urgent mission!"
He began to gulp the wine down. Magic Messenger stared at him. He was thinking to himself, "I bet this bugger's a policeman. I wonder what the hell he's up to!" Joining his hands in respectful greeting, he asked: "What business do you've, friend, that's so urgent?" The other never stopped eating and drinking and the words came out in dribs and drabs. What he said was to have consequences: Song Jiang was to gain yet more merit and a vast tract of land was to be restored to the rule of Song.

## 189
## Song Jiang leads his army across the Yellow River; The Unicorn takes a city by trickery on a dark night

The campaign against the Liao Tartars is over and Magic Messenger and Madcap have been off on a private jaunt. On their way back to the camp they stop for a drink and their attention is drawn to a stranger who has just told the waiter he is on an urgent mission.
Since the man looked like a policeman and was obviously in a tearing hurry, Magic Messenger asked: "What business are you on exactly?"
The man put down his chopsticks and wiped his mouth before saying: "Have you heard about the insurrection of Tian Hu of Hebei?"

"We know a bit about it," Magic Messenger said.
"This bastard Tian Hu has seized a number of districts and provinces up there in the North and the government troops just can't stop him. Only recently he took Gaizhou and sooner or later he will attack Weizhou. The inhabitants go in fear night and day and in the country the peasants have all fled. The authorities have sent me with an urgent message for the Military Council."
He jumped up immediately, shouldered his pack, collected his umbrella and cudgel, paid the bill and made his exit. As he was going out of the door, he said disconsolately: "A policeman's lot is truly a hard one. I've had to leave all my family back there in the city. I only hope the court will send troops as fast as possible!" With that he hastened off in the direction of the capital.
After hearing this news, Magic Messenger and Madcap also paid up and left. When they got back to the camp, they told Song Jiang what they had heard. Song Jiang discussed it with the Professor. "We're all of us just wasting our time here. It's not good for morale. Wouldn't it be better to ask the Emperor to let us get involved in the action?" he said.
The Professor said: "The best way would be to speak to Marshal Su about it first."
A general meeting of all the leaders was held to discuss the plan and everyone approved. Next day Song Jiang dressed in his official uniform and rode into the city with a dozen horsemen. He went straight to Marshal Su's palace. The Marshal was in his office and he had Song Jiang shown in immediately. Song Jiang prostrated himself and then stood to attention. "What can I do for you, General?" the Marshal said.
Song Jiang said: "Your Excellency, I have heard that Tian Hu of Hebei is in revolt, that he has seized several provinces and declared himself emperor and has even got as far as taking Gaizhou and is expected to attack Weizhou any minute. I and my men have been idle a long while. We would like to take an army to fight the rebels and defend our country. We hope you will be kind enough to obtain authorization for this."
The Marshal was enthusiastic: "It is greatly to your credit that you want to serve your country, General," he said. "I will do all I can to obtain the Emperor's consent."
"We are most grateful. We can never repay you," Song Jiang said.
The Marshal ordered wine for Song Jiang. In the evening Song Jiang returned to the camp and told the others.
Marshal Su went to the palace next day for the dawn audience and saw the Emperor in the Hall of Incense. The Military Council had just reported on Tian Hu's rebellion, how he had occupied five provinces and fifty-six districts and proclaimed a new dynastic name with himself as emperor, how he had just captured another city and how aid was urgently requested. The Emperor was greatly disturbed. He said to his officials: "Which of you is willing to lead an army to suppress these rebels for me?" Marshal Su stepped forward. Clutching a tablet to his chest he bowed and respectfully submitted: "I have been told that Tian Hu has the strength to snap wood and bend poles. This is a forest fire that can only be put out by the efforts of a determined commander with bold troops. General Song Jiang has just returned victorious from his defeat of the Tartars and is camped outside the city. I beg Your Majesty to send him and his men to put down the rebellion. I am sure they will do well."
The Emperor was pleased with this proposal and ordered an official of the Military Council to fetch Song Jiang and the Unicorn to the Hall of Incense for an audience. When they had kowtowed, His Majesty spoke: "I know of your valiant exploits. I now have another commission for you . I wish you to go north to Hebei. You must shirk no hardship and quickly return victorious. I will reward you with promotion."
They kowtowed and said: "We thank you, Your Majesty, for having such faith in us. We shall do our utmost and serve you even unto death."
The Emperor openly showed his pleasure and he appointed Song Jiang Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Pacification Expedition, with the Unicorn as his second-in-command. They were rewarded with imperial wine, with gold and silver, gilt armour and rolls of silk and the other leaders all received silk and silver. Their orders were to put down the rebellion and they were promised rank and honours according to their results. The divisional commanders were all to be paid in silver from the Palace Treasury. A deadline was set for the start. Song Jiang and the Unicorn went once more to express their appreciation of the honour, receive their commission and take leave of the Emperor. After this they rode back to camp and held a meeting in their tent to which all the leaders were summoned. They were told to get their horses and armour ready for the campaign against Tian Hu.
Next day the Treasury paid out the silver and silk for the leaders to distribute among their subordinates. Song Jiang and the Unicorn ordered the water-borne leaders to sail first, proceeding to Yuanwu on the Yellow River, where they were to await the arrival of the main force and ferry them across. The cavalry leaders were ordered to prepare their horses for a joint attack by land and water.
Now this villain Tian Hu was originally a simple hunter. He was very strong, experienced in combat, and addicted to the company of evil youths. His base of operations was surrounded by mountains and well adapted to defence. The people of this area, it being susceptible to flood and drought, were poor and their resources scarce, so rebellion was never far from their thoughts. Tian Hu had profited from the situation to assemble a bunch of ruffians, trump up false rumours and inflame the minds of simple people. At first he simply engaged in plunder; later he seized control of whole districts and the authorities dared not stand in his way.
But why, you will ask, if Tian Hu was just a hunter was he so formidable? Let me explain: in those days government officials were greedy and military commanders cowardly. Although every district had its own garrison of government troops, they were made up of troops who were old and infirm, or just plain fictitious, and all they did was eat up the funds, one man accounting for the entitlement of two or three, or else those who had nothing better to do would simply fork out some silver and buy a stand-in, purchase a proxy, in order to get their hands on government supplies. There were those too who would hire someone to answer for them when the roll was called for training exercises. Since everyone covered up for everyone else it was impossible to unmask them. The government spent a fortune and had nothing at all to show for it. When it came to war, the troops had no idea how to fight. There was no discipline and when they saw the dust of battle or heard the shots they behaved as if they wished their parents had given them two sets of legs. There were one or two commanders who led out armies against Tian Hu, but they hadn't the guts to take him on; all you saw of them was their rears as they fled in all directions. They faked the reports and even killed good men in order to take credit for themselves. Because of harassment by the government troops the people became still more disaffected and flocked to the rebel cause. That is how the rebels had come to occupy five provinces and fifty six districts. Tian Hu had built himself a palace at Fenyang and set up a bogus government, styling himself Prince of Jin. He had keen troops and bold generals and his position was well defended. At present he was advancing with his army in two columns.
Song Jiang picked the day to start and bade farewell to the members of the Military Council. Marshal Su came to see him off in person, and Commissioner Zhao at the Emperor's behest came to the camp to reward the army. The leaders thanked him and then gave the army its marching orders. Three guns were fired and with a brave accompaniment of drums and gongs they set forth, heading northeast.
It goes without saying that Song Jiang gave the strictest orders to his troops to maintain good discipline and not cause the least harm in any of the places they passed through. When they reached Yuanwu district, local officials came out to meet them. Their scouts reported that the boat commanders were already at the river bank waiting to ferry them across. Song Jiang ordered the White-Water Dragon and the other boat chiefs to divide their six hundred sailors into two groups, left and right. They were to commandeer some local boats and load all the horses and carts. One by one Song Jiang and the other leaders were ferried across to the northern bank. The boat chiefs were then ordered to take the battle fleet on and assemble in the Wei River at Weizhou.
On reaching Weizhou Song Jiang's vanguard pitched camp. The local officials had organized a banquet to entertain Song Jiang. When he arrived, they told him: "Tian Hu's bandits are a huge force. It won't be easy to disperse them. Zezhou is defended by Tian Hu's second-in-command Niu Wenzhong. He has sent two of his lieutenants with ten thousand men to attack some of our villages and he is leading ten thousand troops himself against the neighbouring province. We urgently need your help!"
Song Jiang heard them out and then returned to the camp to consult with the Professor about sending a relief force. The Professor said: "Lingchuan is of great strategic importance to Gaizhou. Wouldn't it be better to take a force there to attack it, then we can break the siege in two places at once."
The Unicorn then said: "Inexperienced though I am, I would like to lead the attack on Lingchuan."
Song Jiang thought this a good idea and allotted the Unicorn ten thousand cavalry and five hundred infantry. With him were to go ten cavalry commanders and nine infantry commanders. He set off next day.
Song Jiang was in his tent, still planning the campaign with the Professor. "The bandits are over-confident," the latter said. "The Unicorn should be able to defeat them. The only problem is that this whole region has very rugged terrain, full of mountains and gorges; we should send two leaders to reconnoitre and spy out the land before we attack."
Hardly had he finished when the Prodigy came to the tent and said: "You needn't worry, Professor. I've got a map of the area right here." He took out a hand scroll and unrolled it on the table. Song Jiang and the Professor submitted it to a thorough scrutiny. It depicted every mountain, gorge, walled city and pass in the region. Every detail could be read on it — where you could camp, where an ambush could be laid, where a pitched battle could be fought.
"Where did you get this?" the Professor asked in amazement.
The Prodigy replied: "Remember how we were coming back from the campaign against the Tartars and I ran into my old friend Xu Guanzhong at Double Woods? He invited me to go and stay with him and when I was leaving he presented me with this scroll. He called it just a rough sketch, but when I got back to the camp and had some spare time, I happened to take it out to look at it and realized it was a perfect representation of this whole area."
Song Jiang said: "The day you came back I was just getting ready for my audience with the Emperor and I didn't really have time to ask you much. He looked like a good man, that friend of yours. You've told me a lot about his good qualities; what exactly is he doing nowadays?"
The Prodigy answered: "Guanzhong is a very talented person. He is skilled in martial arts, extremely brave, and has all the lesser accomplishments like music and painting. But he doesn't want to join the government service, so he has retired to the country." He went on in this vein at length, till the Professor said: "It's truly a miracle that such an honest man exists!" He and Song Jiang were hugely impressed.
Now the Unicorn first ordered the Tamer and Colonel Sun, with three thousand men to set up an ambush about two miles east of Lingchuan, and the Tattooed Dragon and the Blue-Faced Beast with three thousand men to take up a position the same distance to the west. "Tonight at the fifth drumbeat," he told them, "we will advance stealthily with the men gagged and no harness bells. Tomorrow we will attack. If the enemy are unprepared and we take the city, we will hoist a signal on the south gate and you will move cautiously into the city to join us. If their preparations are good, we will fire a gun and both supporting forces must join in the attack at once." The four leaders set off.
Before dawn next day the Unicorn rose and breakfasted and led his forces bravely to the walls of the city. There they divided into three units, deployed in a straight line and with waving banners and thundering drums issued their challenge to the enemy.
The guards on the walls raced to report to the commander Dong Cheng and his two lieutenants. This Dong Cheng was Niu Wenzhong's vanguard commander. He was tall and strong and wielded a long wind-splitter of a sword. When he heard that the Song court had sent troops from Mount Liang and that they were already positioned outside the city ready to attack, he hurriedly called a meeting at his headquarters to appoint those who were to counter-attack. One of his lieutenants, Geng Gong, warned: "I have heard that this company of Song Jiang's are not to be taken lightly. We ought to concentrate on defence and send someone to Gaizhou to request reinforcements. If we attack them from two sides we can defeat them."
His commander reacted indignantly: "It is intolerable that those blighters should have the nerve to come here and threaten our city. But they've had to march a long way and they must be tired. Just wait while I go and deal with them — there'll be no survivors!"
He was not moved by anything Geng Gong could say and only responded with: "You stay here then with a thousand men to guard the city. Go up into the gate tower and watch while I slaughter the bastards!" He hurriedly armed and took up his weapon and together with another of his lieutenants, sallied forth to do battle.
The gates were opened, the drawbridge lowered and several thousand troops poured across. They were met with solid fire from the Song army. Heralded by a roll of drums, Dong Cheng rode forward and shouted: "You bog-dwelling scum, prepare to meet your death!"
Whiskers galloped forward from the other side and shouted back: "We are the government forces. I'd advise you to dismount and let us tie you up, double-quick. It'll save us dirtying our weapons!"
To cheers from both sides, the two warriors met in the middle ground. The horses clashed, weapons were raised. They had not fought more than ten bouts when Whiskers whirled his horse about and galloped off eastward. Dong Cheng gave chase. Colonel Hua on the eastern flank levelled his spear and received his charge. They fought over thirty bouts and neither had the advantage. The other rebel commander who had remained close to the drawbridge saw that his chief was not having much success. He whirled his steel lance, slapped his horse and charged to the rescue. Hard pressed now by two opponents, Colonel Hua turned and galloped off to the east, his two opponents following close behind. Then he turned again and resumed the fight.
Within the city Geng Gong saw his two comrades pursuing the enemy and fearing something might go amiss was about to sound the gongs and drums to recall their forces when a bold company charged forward from the Song ranks — it was made up of ten commanders, Iron Ox, Monk, Pluto, the Eight-Armed Ogre and others. Together they raced towards the drawbridge. Before their ferocious onslaught the northerners' resistance crumbled. Geng Gong ordered the gates closed.
Well, it's slow in the telling but happens in a flash: Monk and Iron Ox were already inside the city. When the guards on the gate rushed forward in a body to repel them, Monk gave a triumphant shout and felled two of them with his staff, while Iron Ox whirling his axes knocked down five or six more. Pluto and the others rushed forward and seized the gate, scattering the remaining guards. Geng Gong saw things were going badly and rushed down from the tower. He tried to escape to the north but was caught by the foot soldiers and made prisoner.
Dong Cheng and his lieutenant, who were still engaged with Colonel Hua, heard the outcry from the drawbridge and turned their horses and galloped back. Instead of pursuing them Colonel Hua placed his lance in the rest and taking his bow and an arrow, aimed carefully at the middle of Dong Cheng's back and fired. Dong Cheng plunged from the saddle, legs waving in the air. The Unicorn and his commanders gave the signal and the whole army charged. The lieutenant was transfixed by a thrust from Twin Spears, the majority of the troops were killed and the remainder fled in all directions. All the Song commanders now entered the town. Iron Ox charged around killing everyone he met, devastating as a forest fire. Only when the Unicorn gave the order: "Don't harm the people, brother," did he consent to stop.
The Unicorn quickly ordered his officers to hoist the army's flag on the south gate to inform the troops waiting in ambush, and also ordered a guard to be set on all the gates. In no time the troops from the ambush arrived. The heads of the two dead northern commanders were handed in and Pluto brought in the captive Geng Gong and some others. The Unicorn had them released from their bonds. He raised Geng Gong up and made him sit as guest in the place of honour.
Geng Gong prostrated himself in gratitude and said: "I am a defeated general, yet you treat me so generously!"
The Unicorn raised him up again and said: "You did not come out of the city to fight. You are cleverer than the rest of Dong Cheng's lot. General Song welcomes good men. If you are willing to renew your allegiance to the Emperor, General Song will surely help to secure you a post."
Geng Gong bowed and thanked him again, saying: "Since you have graciously spared my life, you can count me your slave."
The Unicorn, in the best of moods, did all he could to reassure these enemy leaders and at the same time had notices posted to calm the populace. He rewarded his own troops, and laid on wine to entertain Geng Gong and his companions.
When the Unicorn questioned Geng Gong about the strength of the Gaizhou garrison, the latter replied: "Gaizhou is garrisoned by Marshal Niu's men. There's two towns to the west of it, but on the way from here there's only Gaoping, about twenty miles away at the foot of Mount Hanwang. It is defended by Zhang Li and Zhao Neng with twenty thousand troops under them."
On hearing this the Unicorn toasted Geng Gong, saying: "Drink this cup with me, General. This evening I would like you to do something for me. I hope you won't refuse."
Geng Gong said: "In view of your generosity, sir, I am ready to do anything for you."
The Unicorn said: "If you accept, I will give instructions to some of my comrades and their subordinates. If you don't mind I would like to start at once."
He summoned the five or six recently captured commanders, rewarded them with food, wine and silver, promising them more if they succeeded. When they finished the wine, he ordered Iron Ox and Pluto and seven other infantry commanders, with a hundred picked infantrymen, to dress in the Lingchuan soldiers' uniforms and insignia. He also ordered Tattooed Dragon and the Blue-Faced Beast to take five hundred cavalry with muffled harness bells and follow Geng Gong's party at a certain distance. He told Colonel Hua and the rest to defend the town. He himself took three thousand men and followed on in support.
When all the orders had been given, Geng Gong and his party set off according to plan. It was late in the day and by the time they arrived at the south gate of Gaoping dusk had fallen. By the light of the stars they could make out the banners thickly clustered on the walls and hear the sharp beat of the drum sounding the hours. Geng Gong shouted out: "I am Geng Gong, from the Lingchuan garrison. The city has fallen because two of our commanders wouldn't listen to me and opened the gates to attack the enemy. I quickly mustered these hundred men and escaped through the north gate. I got here by taking small paths. Just let me in, will you?"
The guards recognized him by the light of their torches and quickly went to tell generals Zhang and Zhao. These two went up onto the walls themselves whilst their men lit many torches and illuminated the scene all around. Zhang shouted back to Geng Gong: "You seem like one of ours all right, but I'd like to have a closer look." He went down and made a thorough examination to satisfy himself that it was indeed Geng Gong of Lingchuan and all the uniforms and insignia were a hundred percent correct. Among the troops of the garrison there were many who knew the commanders and they pointed them out: "That's so-and-so, that's so-and-so." Zhang confessed himself satisfied and said: "Let them in!"
So the gates opened, the drawbridge was lowered, and thirty or forty troops lined the drawbridge while Geng Gong entered the town. The troops in the rear jostled and pushed, shouting: "Get inside, get inside, they're after us!" They paid no heed to their commander. The guards on the gate shouted: "What's going on? Let's have some order here!"
As this dispute was raging, fires were seen at the foot of Mount Hanwang and a squadron of horsemen advancing, the two leaders in front shouting: "Rebel commanders stand and fight!" Already seven ferocious beasts had mingled with Geng Gong's soldiers — these were Iron Ox, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre, Winged Ghost, the Red-Haired Devil, Morbid and Madcap. All now drew their weapons and stormed into the city, a hundred or so strong. Those in the city had no time to act; they couldn't even manage to get the gates shut. Inside and outside the walls the guards were slaughtered by the dozen. The invaders gained control of the gates and Zhang could only curse. When he rushed down from the walls looking for Geng Gong, he ran into Madcap. After three or four bouts Zhang lost heart and fled, trailing his spear. Iron Ox caught him from behind. An axe smashed down and Zhang was cut in two. By now the party of horsemen from the bottom of Mount Hanwang had reached the city and thrust their way in. It was led by the Tattooed Dragon and the Blue-Faced Beast. Each set about killing the northerners on his own account. The second commander was killed in the mêlée and most of the garrison of Gaoping died with him. Zhang's family were all put to the sword. For the people it was as if they had woken in the midst of a nightmare. Their screams rose to heaven. After a while the Unicorn led his army into the city. He ordered a guard to be put on every gate, and deputed a dozen of his men to go about shouting that the people were not to be harmed. At dawn notices were put up to reassure the people, rewards were distributed among the army and a messenger sent to inform Song Jiang.
How had the Unicorn been able to subdue two cities so easily and so fast? The reason was that Tian Hu's forces lacked discipline and recent battle experience. They underestimated the military threat and the valour of Song Jiang's forces. The Unicorn's success was beyond his expectations, but the Professor had calculated that this time he would succeed.
But enough of this. Song Jiang's forces, remember, were camped outside Weizhou. He was holding a meeting in his tent when he heard that the Unicorn had sent a messenger with news and was asking for further orders to attack.
"The Unicorn has captured two towns in succession. We've got them on the run!" he said to the Professor delightedly.
At this moment scouts from the two armies came in and reported: "Two more towns have surrendered, after hearing that Lingchuan has fallen."
Song Jiang said to the Professor: "For astute planning, the world has seldom seen your like!"
He wanted to strike camp at once and march westwards to link up with the Unicorn for a further push. But the Professor said: "There are enemy held cities both right and left of us here in Weizhou, the river is to the south and there is another city on the west. The topography makes it easy to defend, but if the enemy know we are going west, they can move south and cut our forces in two. Then what will we do?"
"You're absolutely right," Song Jiang said. He ordered Scimitar, Twin Rods and Taoist Gongsun to take five thousand cavalry and strengthen the defences of Weizhou. He also ordered the boat captains, White-Water Dragon, the Pilot, White Eel, the Ruan Brothers and the Tong Brothers, to anchor their boats on the Wei River outside the town to protect the flank. These orders were carried out.
In due course Song Jiang and the main army struck camp and set out. Nothing happened on the way. When they reached Gaoping the Unicorn came out to receive them.
"My dear friend," Song Jiang said. "You have subdued two cities, in short order. It's no mean achievement. Everything shall be recorded on the roll of honour."
The Unicorn brought the recently surrendered Geng Gong and introduced him. Song Jiang said: "You have repented the error of your ways and returned to the straight path, General. Join me now in fighting for the country's good. The Emperor will certainly reward you with high office."
Geng Gong prostrated himself in thanks and then stood to attention.
Song Jiang's army was too big so he did not march them into the city but camped outside. The same day he had a meeting with the Professor and the Unicorn to decide where to attack next. The Professor said: "The mountains round Gaizhou are high, the valleys deep, and access is difficult. We have just taken two places in the region and their forces are isolated. If we now take Gaizhou we split them in two. We can then divide our forces and attack on two fronts and Weisheng will fall." Song Jiang said: "That is exactly what I was thinking."

He ordered Mr. Chai and Skyhawk to guard Lingchuan and told Colonel Hua and six others to get ready. The Tattooed Dragon and the Unstoppable were to guard Gaoping. Mr. Chai and 3 others went off according to instructions. At this point Hotshot made a request: "I've been unwell the last two days. I'd like to stay in Gaoping for a while until I'm better. I'd be available for general duties in the camp." Song Jiang sent him into Gaoping with Doctor An for treatment. Next day when Colonel Hua and his party arrived, Song Jiang split the army into 5 divisions. These 5 divisions bore down on Gaizhou like a dragon rising from the ocean or a tiger emerging from the forest. It was a time when all were determined to gain glory, eager for their part in the spoils!

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### Colonel Hua shows his mastery of the bow; The Professor's clever plan defeats Gaizhou

Song Jiang's army in five divisions was marching on Gaizhou. When scouts from that city heard about it, they rushed back to report. The garrison commander, Niu Wenzhong, had cut his teeth in the greenwood and prospered there, finding rich pickings among the rivers and lakes. He had put his wealth at the disposal of Tian Hu and aided and abetted him in his rebellion. For grabbing large tracts of Song territory he was rewarded with the rank of marshal. His weapon was a double-edged three-pointed affair and he was exceptionally skilled in its use. He had four valiant commanders to help him run Gaizhou, Lionface Fang, Tigercat An, Wildcat Chu and Bearcat Yu, and each of these four had four lieutenants, so there were sixteen of them in all. The garrison of Gaizhou under Niu and his commanders consisted of thirty thousand northern troops. When they heard that Lingchuan and Gaoping had fallen, they had made their own preparations, while also sending to Weisheng and Jinning for help. On receipt of the latest report Lionface Fang was ordered out with his four lieutenants to engage the enemy. Just before they started, Niu told them: "I want you to know, comrades, that I shall be right behind you, ready to give support."

Lionface said: "No need for you to bother yourself, Marshal. It was only bad luck that those other two towns fell. They got them by trickery. I vow not to return if I don't kill half a dozen of them today."

They put on their armour and rode out of the east gate. The Song vanguard met them. Everyone took up battle positions and the sound of war drums shook the heavens. From the pennants gate in the northern ranks Lionface Fang rode forth, followed by his four lieutenants, banners fluttering on either side. He wore a tall cap, dragon-scale armour and a green brocade robe, a belt with a lion clasp and green boots. Over his left shoulder was a bow, over his right a quiverful of arrows. He rode a dun thoroughbred and held a steel spear. "You bog-dwelling bandits," he bellowed, "how dare you come and steal our cities by trickery?"

From the ranks of the Song army Colonel Sun answered: "Hear this, you rebel scum: the imperial army is here. Are you sure you want to die?" With this he slapped his horse and charged at Lionface. Enveloped in a cloud of dust, the two of them fought more than thirty bouts, until gradually Lionface began to weaken. One of his lieutenants, Zhang, saw that his commander could not get the better of his adversary and reached for his bow. He rode forward and loosed an arrow at Colonel Sun. The latter saw it in time and pulled on the reins. The arrow hit his horse in the leg. He jumped clear and grasping his spear continued the fight on foot. The horse galloped on for a few more strides and then fell. Zhang, realizing he had missed, drew his sword and galloped forward to join the fight. His charge was halted by Thunderclap. Colonel Sun wanted to return to his ranks and get a new horse, but he was hemmed in by Lionface's relentless spear thrusts.

All this was too much for Colonel Hua, the Archer: "So these buggers think they can sneak up and shoot arrows, do they?" he ranted. "Then let them taste one of mine!" He bent his bow to the full, took careful aim at Lionface, and released his shaft. It took Lionface full in the face and he tumbled headlong from his horse. Colonel Sun ran up and finished him off. Then he went back for a new horse.

The fight between Zhang and Thunderclap continued, Thunderclap's cudgel rising and falling only inches from Zhang's skull as the latter defended himself by blocking and parrying. But Lionface's fall had put fear into his heart and gradually he began to lose the battle. Another of his northern comrades slapped his horse and galloped forward to assist him. To fight two at once was nothing to Thunderclap. The three horses formed a T-shape as the fight raged on.

But now Colonel Hua took a second arrow, fitted it to the string and aimed at Zhang's back. He bent the bow to the full and shouted "Take that!" as the arrow sped to its target, hitting with such force that it went right through and pierced the breastplate in front! Head down and heels in the air Zhang plummeted from his mount. His comrade seeing him fall dodged aside, turned his horse and galloped back to his own ranks. Thunderclap was hard on his heels. By now Colonel Sun had found a new mount and joined the others in urging the troops forward. The northerners were thrown into utter confusion. Their three remaining commanders could not withstand the onslaught and hastily retreated.

Now a great roar was heard from behind. This was because Marshal Niu, fearing Lionface might be defeated, had ordered Tigercat and Bearcat into the attack with five thousand cavalry each in two columns. Colonel Hua and his comrades hastily had their troops take up defensive positions just as the three enemy commanders they had been pursuing also turned their troops about and renewed their attack. The Song commanders found themselves under attack from three sides. They pressed on valiantly, but it was obvious they were encircled.

At this point another cheer rose heavenward on the east, causing panic among the northerners again. Two squadrons of Song cavalry, Twin Spears and company on the left flank, the Tamer and company on the right, were charging simultaneously. The northerners were completely routed; it was a massacre. Their leaders struggled back into the city and the gates were bolted. The Song army pursued them up to the walls but were obliged to withdraw, when wooden blocks and ballista missiles started raining down on them.

Soon after this, General Song and the main army arrived at a spot about three miles from the city and made camp. Presiding in his tent, Song Jiang ordered Magic Hand to record Colonel Hua's achievements. Suddenly a gust of wind passed through the camp from west to east, setting all the flags flapping. The Professor said: "This wind is an omen. They'll make a surprise attack on the camp tonight. We must prepare."

Song Jiang said: "Certainly it's something quite out of the ordinary!" He ordered four of the leaders with three thousand troops to set up an ambush on the left of the camp and four more with a similar force to conceal themselves on the right. Monk, Pilgrim, Iron Ox, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with the shield-bearers were concealed in the centre, with five hundred men. A shot was to be fired as signal for them all to attack. When they were all in place Song Jiang and the Professor settled down candle in hand, as if for a chat about military matters.

Now Marshal Niu, who had lost three of his officers and found, when they were counted, that he had lost more than two thousand men, was sitting gloomily in his tent when Tigercat came to him with a suggestion: "You should stop worrying, Your Excellency. That rabble of Song Jiang's have just had a string of successes. They will be feeling very pleased with themselves and they won't be expecting anything. Tonight let me raid their camp. We can carve them up and pay them back for what they did to us today."

"And I will lead the back-up force myself," Marshal Niu said excitedly. "Wildcat and Bearcat will stay and guard the town."

"If Your Excellency is going to be involved," said Tigercat contentedly, "we're bound to capture Song Jiang."

They marched that night in the second watch, Tigercat accompanied by his four lieutenants, with five thousand cavalry in light armour, no bells on their horse's bridles and the troops gagged to prevent talking. When they reached the Song camp they let off a bloodcurdling yell and charged in. They found the gates open and the camp brightly illuminated. Tigercat recognized a trap at once. As he struggled to turn his horse and retreat, the signal gun went off and the Song leaders charged in from left and right. Within the camp Iron Ox and the other five with their shield-bearing troops swept forward. The northerners were routed and fled in all directions. One of the leaders fell to Wu Song's sword, another was killed by Short-Arse. Tigercat and two others found themselves surrounded in the centre. Realizing they were in serious difficulties, Marshal Niu and two of the lieutenants led a rescue attempt. Amid the general confusion, both sides withdrew their forces.

Next day Niu counted his men and found over a thousand missing. He had also lost two more officers and another was gravely wounded, his life in the balance. As Niu was gloomily mulling this over, it was announced that an envoy had arrived from Weisheng with a proclamation. He quickly mounted and rode out of the north gate to receive him. After their return to the city, the proclamation was read: it told how the royal astronomer had recently observed in the night sky a planet which had invaded the field of Jin, heavenly counterpart of Tian Hu's kingdom. It was essential in consequence that Niu strengthen the city's defences and watch out for trouble. Niu in turn told the envoy how the Song emperor had sent Song Jiang to attack them, how the Song army had taken two cities in succession and were now quite close and how there had been fighting the day before and he had lost five officers. Only if reinforcements were sent quickly could the town be saved.

"At the time when I left Weisheng," the other replied, "we had no news of this. It was only when I was half way here that I heard rumours of Song Jiang's army being sent to attack."

Niu entertained the envoy with a feast and presented him with gifts, while at the same time laying up blocks of wood and ballista missiles and preparing bows and crossbows, fire arrows and incendiary materials, for a determined defence until the reinforcements arrived. Of this no more.

Meanwhile the Dandy, Short-Arse and company had completed their rout of the troops who attacked the camp, and had returned victorious. Next day Song Jiang ordered siege carts to be prepared for the assault on the city. He ordered Leopard's Head and three others to take ten thousand troops and attack the east gate, another four leaders with ten thousand troops to attack the south gate, a similar force to attack the west gate. The north gate he left free, for fear that if a relief force arrived and those inside launched a counter attack his own men would be caught between two fires. Another group, four leaders and five thousand troops, were to conceal themselves at the foot of a steep hill northeast of the city and a similar force were to lie in ambush in a dense wood northwest of the city — these would engage any relief force that appeared. Colonel Hua and three others with a thousand cavalry would patrol the perimeter and liaise with the forces attacking the gates. This party would be supported by three hundred infantry under Iron Ox and five others.

Having received their orders everyone went off to carry them out. Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the Professor with some of the minor leaders moved the camp to a position close to the city walls. Green-Eyes and Spots were ordered to prepare siege towers and scaling ladders and supply them to each of the attacking forces.

Leopard's Head and his companions erected their scaling ladders and siege towers outside the east gate and began pushing them up to the walls. Troops in light armour were ordered up into the siege towers, whilst those below shouted encouragement. The city's defenders responded with a shower of fire arrows, thick as a swarm of locusts. The attackers had no answer to this and in no time the siege towers were all ablaze and came crashing down. They suffered five or six dead and a dozen wounded. In the battle on the south and west soldiers were also killed or wounded by fire arrows and missiles. The upshot was that they fought for a week without any result.

In view of this, Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the Professor went themselves to the south gate to superintend the operation. While they were there Colonel Hua and his roving patrol arrived from the west gate heading east. Bearcat and two of his lieutenants were supervising the defence on the gate tower. When they saw Colonel Hua approaching the walls, one of them said: "Two of our commanders were wounded by that one the other day. Now's our chance to avenge them!" He took up his bow, fitted an arrow to it, took aim at Colonel Hua's heart and let fly. Colonel Hua heard the snap of the bowstring and leant backwards in the saddle. The arrow landed conveniently to hand and he wrenched it out and put it between his teeth while he straightened up. He laid his lance in the rest, took the bow in his left hand and fitted the arrow to it, took aim and fired. The arrow hit his opponent in the throat, passing right through and out the other side. Colonel Hua gave a triumphant shout: "Who do you think you are, you rat, shooting off arrows like that? You shall all die, one after the other!" With his right hand he took another arrow and shot again. There were screams from the tower and several hurtled to the ground. Bearcat and his remaining lieutenant, white with fear, took cover in the nick of time. Colonel Hua laughed con-temptuously: "Now you know something about the skill of the Archer!" he shouted, while Song Jiang and the Unicorn applauded loud and long.

"Why don't we all go with Colonel Hua to review the situation along the city walls?" the Professor said. So, closely guarded by Colonel Hua and his company, Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the Professor made a circuit of the city walls.

Later on back in the camp, the Professor summoned the former Lingchuan commander Geng Gong and questioned him about Gaizhou's layout. Geng Gong said: "Niu Wenzhong fancies himself as a military leader. He'll be up on the walls, organizing the city's defence. In the northern sector there are some temples and a large open space with nothing but grass." This gave the Professor an idea, which he explained to Song Jiang. The Flea and Madcap were summoned and given secret instructions. "This is the plan. Colonel Hua will also be given instructions and you will work in concert." Thunderer, Snake and Scorpion were told to take two hundred men and a sufficient quantity of signal rockets of various sizes and proceed in a certain way. Monk and Pilgrim were to have three hundred musicians. The Red-Haired Devil, Morbid, Perilous, and Yellow Dog with two hundred men each, all carrying incendiary materials were to head southeast and northwest, all according to the plan. The Magic Messenger was sent to the contingents on the east, west and south to give them the secret orders. When fires started inside the town they were to attack with all their might. Everyone left to put these orders into effect.

Now Niu Wenzhong had been watching for the relief force night and day, but there was no sign of it and he was extremely anxious. He reinforced the guards and had more wooden blocks and ballista missiles moved up onto the walls. Suddenly at dusk a tremendous shout was heard outside the north gate, while drums thundered and bugles blared. Niu rushed to the north gate but when he looked out from the walls the noise ceased. He could not tell where the enemy were. As he stood there hesitating, shouting broke out on the south, and again a din of gongs and drums that shook the heavens. He told the commander on the north gate to guard it strongly and rushed to the south gate. Again the shouting ceased as soon as he looked out and the drums and gongs were silent. He stared out for a long time, but there was nothing but the very faint sound of a drum beating in the Song position to the south. Otherwise all was quiet, not even a glimmer of light. He slowly descended from the wall. He was about to go back to check the government offices when a string of explosions rang out from beyond the east gate at the same time as shouting and thundering drums at the west gate. Driven thus from east to west and back again, he had no rest till dawn. Then the enemy renewed their attack on the town and did not withdraw till evening. That night at the first drumbeat bugles and drums clamoured again. Niu said: "The buggers are trying to scare us. We'd better ignore them. We'll just make sure our defences are strong and see what they do."

Suddenly at the east gate the sky was lit up, countless torches, siege towers and scaling ladders were being trundled up to the walls. Niu rushed to the eastern wall, where Wildcat and two of his lieutenants were fighting off the attack with fire arrows and ballistas. Then came an explosion that made the mountains and valleys reverberate and even shook the city's watchtowers. The defenders were terrified. For two nights there had been so much disturbance they hadn't been able to close their eyes for an instant and the attacks had been renewed at dawn. Niu himself had been constantly on patrol on the walls.

But now suddenly a host of banners were seen approaching from the northwest and a dozen Song scouts galloped into the main camp. Assuming it was the relief force, Niu ordered Bearcat to prepare to make a sortie to meet them.

Now this force approaching from the northwest belonged to the Jinning governor, who was Tian Hu's younger brother the third prince Tian Biao. He had received Gaizhou's request for help and had sent two of his best commanders, Feng Xiang and Wang Yuan, with twenty thousand troops. As they approached, about three miles out from the city they heard a sudden report and from the densely wooded slopes of the steep hill on either side of them two bodies of troops raced out. This was the ambush set up under Tattooed Dragon and the Tamer. Although there were twenty thousand in the Jinning relief force, they were tired after a long march and no match for these troops who after waiting there over ten days were in fine shape and raring to go, and who now came at them on both flanks. It was a rout. The northern relief force discarded gongs and drums, banners and spears, helmets and armour and a vast number of horses. The majority of the troops were killed. The two commanders escaped with their lives and led the battered remnants of their force back to Jinning. And that was that.

When Niu saw the two columns of the relief force cut off and fighting for their lives, he immediately ordered Bearcat to open the north gate and hasten to their assistance, the north gate, remember, being the one point from which the city was not under siege. But the moment Bearcat crossed the drawbridge he ran into Colonel Hua's roving patrol approaching from the west. The cry went up: "It's the Archer!" So frightened were they that instead of an orderly retreat they piled back into the city in a disorderly mob. Now, Bearcat's morale had already been shattered at the south gate. He had no desire to make a fight of it, but fled back into the city like his men. Colonel Hua's party rode forward and killed a score of enemy soldiers, but let the rest take refuge in the city without pursuing them. The gates were quickly barred.

The Flea and Madcap, dressed in northern uniforms, had now been swept into the city. After passing through the gates they took advantage of the commotion to slip into a small alley. Down this alley they found an ancestral hall with an inscription which read: "Temple of the Local Earth God". They crept inside and found a Taoist warming himself in front of a brazier at the east end. When he saw two soldiers enter, the Taoist said: "What's the news from outside, lads?"

They replied: "Bearcat said as 'ow we 'ad to go an' fight, but we ran into that bloke they calls the Archer an' even Bearcat hisself daresn't take 'im on. Proper pandemonium it was, so we got back inside the city sharpish. Then we took advantage of the confusion to come in 'ere." The Flea took out some loose silver and gave it to the Taoist, saying: "Give us a couple of bowls of that wine what you got stashed away, to keep out the bleedin' cold."

The Taoist responded with a pitying smile: "Don't you know there's a military crisis, has been for days? I haven't even got any incense left. Where would I get wine from?" He tried to give the silver back to the Flea.

Madcap pushed his hand away, saying: "Take it any'ow. We'll see again later. Day after day we been on guard, it's been 'orrible. We 'aven't slept a wink. You let us stay 'ere tonight and get a bit of shuteye, an' we'll push off first thing in the morning."

The Taoist shook his head: "Don't be angry with me. Marshal Niu has given strict orders. They come and inspect all the time. If I let you stay we wouldn't have a chance."

The Flea said: "In that case we'll 'ave to go somewhere else."

Madcap sidled up to the Taoist and squatted by the fire. The Flea took a quick look around to make sure no one could see them and then winked at Madcap. Madcap quietly took out a dagger. Oblivious to the danger, the Taoist went on warming himself. Reaching from behind Madcap ripped the knife across his throat. They bolted the doors of the temple. It was early evening, just before the first watch. The Flea went round the back to the kitchen, where he found a door. Beyond it was a little courtyard where dry grass was piled up under the eaves in two heaps. They carried this in and heaped it over the corpse. Then they unbolted the door. From the courtyard they climbed up onto the roof and concealed themselves on the far side of the ridge.

6 bright stars appeared in the sky. They waited a while, then slid down from the roof and went to reconnoitre outside the temple. There was no one in the street. They took a few more steps and paused to look around again. Although there were several neighbouring households, all were quiet and had their doors locked. There was only a faint sound of weeping. The Flea went a little further to the south. Beyond the corner of a long mud wall was a large expanse of waste land. There were dozens of piles of combustible materials on it. "This is their ammunition dump," the Flea thought to himself. "How come there's no one to guard it?"

The fact is that everyone was up on the walls engaged in repelling the enemy and no one had time to inspect this site. When the watchmen heard that the Song army had scattered the relief column, they reckoned it was all up with the city. They didn't bother about the munitions but were only concerned to save their skins and went off to find somewhere to hide away before the city fell. The two heroes went back to the temple and got their tinderboxes. They set light to the pile of grass on top of the Taoist's corpse. Then they went to the waste ground, where each piled up half a dozen bonfires. In a moment, the whole area was ablaze, flames mounting to the sky. The temple also had caught. One of the people with houses west of the ammunition dump heard the fire and came out with a torch to investigate. The Flea rushed up and snatched the torch away from him. "Let me go and alert Marshal Ox," he shouted.

The local saw their uniforms and naturally didn't think of objecting. Waving the torch, the Flea joined by Madcap, sped off southwards, shouting something about warning the Marshal. They started fires under the houses wherever they found a suitable place. Then they threw away the torch and melted into the background. They took off their northern uniforms and went to hide in a quiet place. Now that fires had appeared in half a dozen streets, the city was seething with alarm. When he heard that the ammunition dump was on fire the Marshal gathered a party and rushed to put the fire out. Outside the city, the attackers seeing the fires knew the Flea and Madcap were at work on the inside and redoubled their efforts. Song Jiang and the Professor, with Snake and Scorpion, rushed over to the south. The Professor said: "I noticed before that the city wall was quite low on this side." He directed Thunderclap and his men to move the siege towers up to the wall. Then he told Snake and Scorpion: "The enemies are demoralised, their troops are exhausted. See if you can get up onto the wall!" Halberd in hand, Snake climbed the siege tower beside the battlements and leapt from it onto the wall; Scorpion followed suit. With a great shout they charged along the parapet, sweeping and stabbing with their weapons. The soldiers were tired and frightened and when they saw Snake and Scorpion bearing down on them so ferociously, they flung themselves off the wall. Tigercat levelled his spear and fought several bouts with the two on the wall till a blow from Snake's halberd struck him through and Scorpion followed up and split his skull. By now more Song troops had poured into the city from the siege towers, over a hundred of them. Following Snake and Scorpion they charged down from the wall shouting: "Step forward and we'll make mincemeat of you!" They killed two of the commanders, felled the guards on the city gates, took control of the gates and lowered the drawbridge. Immediately Spearsman and his comrades rushed in. Together with Victorious, Spearsman led a charge to the east gate, where Tiger-cat An failed to stop them and was killed. They took over the gate and let Leopard's Head in. Thunderclap and the Supremo seized the western gate and let in Twin Spears. Three more of the enemy commanders were killed by their own troops. Corpses were draped over the wells, blood filled the gutters. Niu Wenzhong saw the city was lost and took to his horse and galloped out of the north gate, together with Bearcat and some two hundred troops. They had gone no distance at all when out of the gloom two figures loomed, Iron Ox and Monk Lu Zhishen, a wild warrior and a ferocious monk, and stood in their way. Truly, it is hard to escape heaven's net, difficult to evade earth's pitfalls.

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### Iron Ox dreams he is fighting the courtiers; Song Jiang divides his army into 2 wings

Seeing the city was lost, Niu Wenzhong had no recourse but to flee. He left Gaizhou escorted by Bearcat and three of the lieutenants and they ran straight into Iron Ox and the Monk, who with their infantry stood blocking the escape route. "We've been waiting for you on General Song's orders, you hopeless fuckers," Iron Ox shouted. "And we've waited a long time!" He came at them, whirling his two axes. The axes rose and fell and two of the lieutenants bit the dust. Niu was so terrified his soul flew right out of his body. Before he could make any move, a blow from Monk's staff smashed down, shattering helmet and skull, and he fell lifeless from his horse. Of two hundred soldiers there were no survivors. Only Bearcat and the remaining lieutenant escaped, dashing off into the undergrowth. "Let 'em go," the Monk said. "The two asses can report what's happened."

The heads of the three commanders were chopped off, according to custom, the horses were rounded up, the armour and helmets collected, and loaded with these spoils they returned to the city.

Song Jiang's main army now entered the city and orders were given out for the fires to be extinguished and the citizens protected. After this the leaders assembled to report their successes. Song Jiang ordered the heads to be displayed on the gates. Next morning notices were posted to restore public order. All three army columns were allowed to camp inside the city and rewards were given out to the commanders. The names of Madcap, Flea, Snake and Scorpion were inscribed on the honours list. A report was produced informing the court of the capture of Gaizhou, the contents of the stores and treasury were transferred to the capital and a full report was sent to Marshal Su.

It was now the end of the last month of the year. Several days elapsed while Song Jiang was reorganizing his army and then Hotshot, now recovered from his illness, returned with Doctor An to present himself for duty. "Excellent," said Song Jiang. "Tomorrow is the fifth anniversary of the reign. We must have a general gathering."

Next day at crack of dawn the company paraded in the garb of servants of the throne and Song Jiang led them in paying homage to the Emperor. When the formal ceremony of obeisance was done they exchanged their court dress for war robes of scarlet brocade and came in perfect order, all ninety-two of them including the recently surrendered Geng Gong, to greet their general with seasonal wishes. General Song Jiang had organized a big feast, a great celebratory banquet, and many a toast did they propose to him. After a good many rounds of wine, Song Jiang addressed them: "Thanks to you all, the nation has regained three cities. And now we are met here to celebrate New Year's Day. It is truly a special occasion. My only regret is that we are without Taoist Gongsun, Twin Rods, Scimitar, the boat captains, and those others who were left to guard the three cities."

The junior commanders were summoned and received their rewards and the same day goats and wine were ordered to be sent to the garrisons of the three cities in further recognition of their achievements. Before this order could be carried out, it was announced that envoys had arrived from these cities to convey congratulations to General Song Jiang on behalf of the leaders whose responsibilities did not allow them to attend in person. Song Jiang said happily: "This gives me almost as much pleasure as seeing them face-to-face." The envoys were rewarded and then everyone settled down to some serious drinking, which did not end before they were all drunk.

Later Song Jiang was planning an excursion to the eastern suburbs to greet the spring, for it was the time of the spring festival. In the evening the wind blew from the northeast bringing in heavily laden clouds, and snow began to fall, filling the whole sky. In the morning they all awoke to find something like this:

*Soft as willow fluff, smooth as goose feathers; a flock of white egrets floating on high, white gulls swirling over the river: borne on the wind, spinning and eddying into palace courts, brighter than midsummer sun glinting on weapons. A thousand mountains banked high with jade cause the bedazzled woodcutter to lose his way, ten thousand dwellings dressed in white, what poems they have inspired from the recluse! If we have already had the bumper harvest snow portends, what happy omen is this? Many bear arms on the borders; what counts is not numbers but fortune's favour!*

At that time Magic Hand said to the others: "There's quite a number of different names for snow: the smallest kind is known as 'bee swarm'; when the flakes are a little bigger it's 'goose feathers'; then you have the three-lobed flakes or 'triplets'; then the four-lobed 'quatrefoils'; the five-lobed ones are 'plum blossom' and the six-lobed are 'sestets'. This snow is formed from congealed air so you see it's six-lobed, reflecting the magic number six. After the spring festival what you get is always predominantly plum blossom, not the six-lobed kind any more. Although today is the day of the spring festival, we're still at the crossroads between winter and spring and this snow may be either five-lobed or six-lobed."

When Lungs heard this little lecture, he stepped out from under the eaves and began catching the falling snowflakes on the sleeve of his black robe to have a look at them. It was true, they were like six-petalled flowers, but there were some that were not perfectly formed or had sharp corners, and among them were some that were five-lobed. Lungs began crying out "It's true! It's true!" so everyone crowded around to look, with the result that a snort of warm air from Iron Ox melted all the snowflakes, causing general laughter.

Song Jiang wanted to know what was going on: "What are you laughing at?" he asked. "We were trying to look at the snowflakes but Iron Ox's hot breath melted them all," they said.

Song Jiang laughed too. "I've ordered wine so we can all have a party in the Spring Garden," he said.

Just to the east of the town there was a garden called Celebration of Spring. In the middle of it was the Pavilion of Fragrant Rain, screened by a grove of cypress, pine and plum trees. That afternoon they all gathered there and amid much noise and laughter and lively conversation the time passed quickly; soon it was dark and lamps were lit. Song Jiang was merry and kept reminiscing about the old times and the hardships they had passed through and how much he owed to them all. "I was just a local clerk," he said. "Then I committed a serious crime and you lot, fighting against the odds, heedless of personal danger, repeatedly risking your lives, came and rescued me. That time when Magic Messenger and I were taken out to the market place in Jiangzhou, I thought it was all up with us. Now I have become an officer of the crown, fighting for my country. When I look back on those past events, truly it's like a dream!"

At this point he began to break down and the tears streamed down his face. Magic Messenger and Colonel Hua, and others who had shared the hard times with him, were also moved to tears.

Iron Ox by now had drunk rather too much wine and was feeling the effects. In the middle of telling them something his eyes gradually closed and he went to sleep, resting his face on his arms. Suddenly the idea came to him that it was still snowing outside. His body seemed to float mysteriously and he found himself out in the open. When he looked around he was amazed: "There isn't any snow after all! What's the point of sitting indoors? Why don't I go and take a stroll round that temple?" A little way from the garden, just as he was leaving the city behind, he suddenly remembered something: "Heavens! I've forgotten my axes!" But when he put his hand to his belt, there they were. So he marched on, not thinking where he was going nor knowing how far he had gone when he saw a high mountain in front of him. Almost immediately he reached the foot of it and a man appeared before him wearing a scholar's cap and a light yellow Taoist's robe. This person approached and said: "If you're in the mood for a stroll, Commander, take a turn on the mountain, it's a blessed place."

"What is it called?" Iron Ox inquired.

"It's called the Mountain of the Heavenly Pool," the other replied. "Come back and see me again when you've had your walk."

Iron Ox followed the suggestion and walked all round the mountain. By the side of the path he came upon a little compound. Sounds of a quarrel issued from within. He rushed inside and found a dozen people with staves and cudgels smashing up the tables, chairs and other household items. In their midst was a tall fellow who was shouting: "Hurry up and hand over your daughter for me to marry, you old fool. Don't you dare refuse! You make just the slightest objection and I'll kill the whole lot of you!"

When Iron Ox heard this, he began to boil with indignation: "You fucking bastards," he hissed. "How dare you try to take away someone's daughter by force?"

"What's it to do with you if we want his daughter?" they shouted back.

Iron Ox took out his axes and started laying about him in a frenzy. To his surprise, he knocked down two or three effortlessly with the first blow. Some of them tried to escape, but he pursued them and with half a dozen blows sent seven or eight heads rolling. The ground was littered with corpses. Only one escaped and ran off. Iron Ox tried to go in again, but both leaves of the door were securely bolted so he demolished the door with a kick. Inside a white-haired old man and an old woman were sobbing. When Iron Ox charged in they cried out: "Oh no, they've come for us!"

Iron Ox shouted back: "I saw there was an injustice. I've killed all the bastards, come and see." The old man tottered after him to look. He grabbed Iron Ox's arm and said: "You've killed some villains all right, but I'm the one that'll have to pay for it."

Iron Ox said with a laugh: "Don't you know me, old fellow? I'm Iron Ox from Mount Liang. Along with my leader Song Jiang I've been amnestied and sent to get Tian Hu. My pals are all drinking in the city and I got bored with it so I came out for a stroll. Never mind about those bastards, if I'd killed a thousand or two, what the fuck would it matter?"

The old man wiped his eyes and said: "I suppose it's all right then. Please come in and sit down." When Iron Ox went inside he found a table already spread with wine and food. The old man bade him sit down opposite, filled a bowl of wine to the brim and offered it with both hands, saying: "You have saved my daughter. Please drink this cup."

Iron Ox took it and drank it and the old man offered him more. When he had drunk off four or five, a tearful old woman appeared leading a young girl, who saluted him respectfully with crossed arms. The old woman said: "Commander, since you serve with General Song and appear to be so thrifty, if you don't despise our unworthiness, please take our daughter with you."

When he heard this, Iron Ox leapt to his feet and said: "What a disgusting idea! Do you really suppose I killed those buggers because I wanted your daughter? Shut your fucking noise and don't talk such fucking shit!" With this he kicked over the table and rushed out of the house. Immediately a tall bearded character with a halberd strode after him, roaring out: "You black bastard, stop! What do you mean by killing all my people? What business is it of yours if I want their girl?" Raising his halberd he came charging at Iron Ox. Iron Ox swung his two axes furiously and they fought twenty bouts, till the other, seeing he could not win, knocked the axes aside and fled, trailing his halberd. Iron Ox followed hot on his heels. They came to a little wood where he suddenly saw a number of fine buildings. The other man flung away his halberd and disappeared among a crowd of people. As Iron Ox pondered this, he heard a voice from inside one of the buildings: "Iron Ox must cease this unruly behaviour. Bring him to me!" Suddenly it dawned on Iron Ox: this was the Hall of Culture and Ethics where the day before with his brother Song Jiang he had attended an audience with the Emperor. This was where the Emperor lived! The voice continued: "Down on your knees, quickly, Iron Ox!" He put away his axes. He could make out the Emperor seated on his throne a long way in front of him, with a number of officials lined up in front of the throne. He kowtowed assiduously three times, and then thought to himself. "Oh dear, I've missed one out!"

"Why were you killing people just now?" the Emperor asked.

Still kneeling he replied: "Those villains were trying to force someone's daughter. It made me angry, so I killed them."

"When Iron Ox sees an injustice he seeks to eradicate the evil," the Emperor said. "Your valour is commendable. I shall exonerate you from blame and appoint you to my personal guard."

"How far-sighted the Emperor is!" Iron Ox thought joyfully. He knocked his head on the ground a dozen times and then stood to attention.

In a short while the Grand Preceptor and the three wicked marshals, Tong, Yang and Gao appeared and kneeling before the throne said: "Look at this Song Jiang! He's been given a great army to get Tian Hu and he's just idling away the time instead of attacking, drinking every day. We request that Your Majesty punish him."

Iron Ox heard this and an indescribable rage swelled in his breast till he could no longer contain it and he charged forward with his two axes. With one blow to each he chopped off their heads and said: "Your Majesty don't listen to these villainous counsellors. Our dear leader has captured three cities. He is camped now at Gaizhou and about to launch the attack. How can they tell such lies?"

When the other officials saw Iron Ox kill the four bigwigs, they tried to arrest him, but he waved his axes and said: "If you touch me, you'll meet the same fate!", so no one dared lift a finger. Chuckling to himself, Iron Ox said: "That's great! Those four villains have got their just desserts. I shall go and tell the Leader." With that he strode out of the palace. Immediately he came to a mountain, which he saw at once was the place where he had just met the scholar. And there he was, the scholar, standing at the foot of the mountain. He greeted Iron Ox with a smile: "Did you have a pleasant walk, Commander?"

Iron Ox replied: "I'd better tell you, sir, that I have just killed four wicked ministers."

"Is that so?" said the scholar, quite unperturbed. "I was doing something in Fenjing. Just recently I happened to come here, and knowing of your loyalty and righteousness, I wanted to have a word with you. I have something important to say. At present Song Jiang is pursuing Tian Hu. I have a formula to impart to you that will enable Tian Hu to be captured. You must memorize it carefully and repeat it to Song Jiang." He then intoned to Iron Ox: "To exterminate Tian Hu and his ilk, jade arrowtip must serve your purpose." He repeated this five or six times. What he said seemed meaningful to Iron Ox so he carefully memorized the words. The scholar now pointed towards the woods and said: "There's an old lady over there, sitting among the trees." When Iron Ox turned to look, he found the scholar had disappeared. "That was quick!" he said to himself. "I'd better go and have a look to see if there's someone in the woods." There was indeed an old woman sitting there, and when he approached to take a closer look, it was his own mother! She was sitting on a black rock, her eyes tight shut. He rushed forward and embraced her: "Mother, are you still suffering? I thought you had been eaten by a tiger. But now here you are!"

His mother said: "My son, I was not eaten by the tiger."

Weeping he said: "I've been given an amnesty and now I really am a government official. My brother Song Jiang's army is camped at the northern capital. I will carry you there on my back." At this moment there was a sudden commotion and out rushed a ferocious striped tiger. It roared and waved its tail and sprang. Iron Ox grabbed his axes intending to chop it down but he used too much force and both axes bit the air and then smashed down into the table in the Pavilion of Fragrant Rain in the Celebration of Spring Garden.

Song Jiang and the others had been chatting about everyday events and the talk was at its most absorbing when they saw Iron Ox had dozed off at the table. They thought nothing of it. Suddenly there was this fearful racket. Iron Ox in his sleep was beating the table with both hands, upsetting bowls and dishes, splattering his sleeves with the sauces. He kept repeating: "Mother, the tiger's gone, the tiger's gone!" When he opened his eyes and saw the bright light of the lamps and all his comrades sitting around him still drinking, he exclaimed: "By all that's wonderful, it was all a dream!"

The others laughed and said: "What was a dream? What are you so pleased about?"

Iron Ox told them how he had dreamt of his mother, that she wasn't dead after all, but his conversation with her had been interrupted by a tiger! They expressed their sympathy. Then he recounted how he had killed the thugs and kicked over the table. At this point Monk, Pilgrim and Madcap clapped and shouted: "Bravo!"

"That's not the half of it!" Iron Ox said with a grin. And he told them how he had killed the four evil ministers. They all applauded and shouted out: "That's great, that's terrific! That's the sort of dream that's worth having!"

Song Jiang said: "I don't know what you're making such a noise about. It's only a dream, it's not important!"

But Iron Ox was just getting to the main point. Pulling up his sleeves, he said: "Who says it's not fucking important? I've never done anything more enjoyable in my life. Besides, I had another strange dream. A scholar told me some kind of verse: 'To exterminate Tian Hu and his ilk, jade arrowtip must serve your pur-pose.' He said this was the secret of destroying Tian Hu and told me to memorize it carefully and tell it to you."

Neither Song Jiang nor the Professor could explain this. When Doctor An heard the words "jade arrowtip" he was dying to say something, but Hotshot gave him a look and he smiled a little and after that did not open his mouth. The Professor said: "This is a pretty strange dream. If the snow clears we can attack." They finished their drinking and went to bed and the night passed uneventfully.

Next day the snow had begun to thaw and in the command tent Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the Professor divided the army into two columns to attack from either side. The eastern force would attack through Kettle Pass and move on to Goodborough to get behind the rebel headquarters; then they would turn back via Dagu to Lin where they would join up with the others. The western force would take Jinning and penetrate to the northwest of Weisheng where they would meet the others at Lin.

Having divided his forces, Song Jiang said to the Unicorn: "From here our two forces will attack from the east and the west. Which side will you take?"

The Unicorn replied: "I shall accept whichever you give me. It is not for me to choose."

Song Jiang said: "Nevertheless, let us test heaven's will. Let's write the two divisions down on ballot papers and each draw one." So Sterling wrote:

East

And:

West

On 2 pieces of paper and after Song Jiang and the Unicorn had both prayed and burnt incense, Song Jiang drew 1 of them; now because of the result, a number of valiant commanders were to join the army. And a famous wizard was to appear at the foot of 9 Dragon Mountain.

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### Scimitar wins over 3 leaders; Iron Ox lands them in a mess

After dividing up the forces in Gaizhou, Song Jiang and the Unicorn draw lots, having first prayed and burnt incense. Song Jiang draws the eastern route, to Fort Kettle and Goodborough, so the western, through Jinning, falls to the Unicorn. They are only waiting for the snow to completely thaw before setting out. The defence of Gaizhou is left in the hands of Colonel Hua and four others with twenty thousand troops. On the sixth of the month, an auspicious day, the two generals muster their troops.

News now came in that two cities, previously beaten into submission by the rebels, had, on hearing of the approach of the government army, overpowered their governors and were handing them over as prisoners. A delegation headed by the elders of these two places had arrived with a tribute of goats and wine. This development was most welcome to Song Jiang: he rewarded them and made a friendly announcement recognizing their return to allegiance. The two governors were executed as a demonstration that the forces of the government were now in control and as an example to other rebels.

That same day the two armies marched out of the north gate. Colonel Hua had organized wine for the send-off. Taking cup in hand, Song Jiang said to Colonel Hua: "After your exploits against the enemy I have every confidence in your ability to defend this city, my friend. The threat is from the north. If the enemy attack, it is necessary to strike back and destroy their morale so they will not intrude south again." Colonel Hua attended carefully to his orders.

Song Jiang again took his cup and addressed the Unicorn: "Today at the start of our campaign we have received this good news of the handing over of the prisoners and surrender of these two cities. You will now be able to attack Jinning straight away, secure a quick victory, capture the rebel leader Tian Hu, inform the court and enjoy wealth and honour thereafter."

The Unicorn said: "It is owing to your reputation, dear brother, that those two cities have surrendered without a fight. You have entrusted me with this task and I shall of course address it with the utmost seriousness."

Song Jiang took the copy of the picture by the Prodigy's friend that he had previously had Magic Hand make and gave it to the Unicorn for his own use. He then established the three divisions of his troops: vanguard under Leopard's Head and three others, rearguard under Colonel Sun and seven others and the main force led by himself and the Professor. The combined force of fifty thousand troops set off heading northeast. His second-in-command the Unicorn bade everyone farewell and with his own forty leaders and fifty thousand troops marched in a northwesterly direction.

After seeing them off Colonel Hua returned to the city. He gave orders for two camps to be set up a mile or two north of the city under the Young Master and Spots each with five thousand troops, provided with crack archers and every kind of incendiary device to foil the enemy. He also, it goes without saying, established ambushes east and west of the city. Please bear in mind that seven other leaders had been left to defend the three previously captured towns.

When Song Jiang and his contingent had marched ten miles he saw a mountain range ahead. It was some while before they reached it. The sight was striking:

*Mists, layer upon layer, make dim the light of day.*
*Peak piled on peak stands in the goose's way;*
*Glimpses of cliffs like city walls are seen*
*Mid towering clouds and winding waters green.*

As Song Jiang was examining the scene, Iron Ox pointed and said: "Those mountains are exactly like what I dreamed of the other night."

Song Jiang summoned Geng Gong, the enemy general who had surrendered to them earlier, and asked: "You are familiar with the region, you must know all about those mountains. If it is as Guanzhong's picture shows, Mount Fang is east of the provincial capital and this is called Mountain of the Heavenly Pool."

Iron Ox spoke up: "That's the name that scholar used in my dream. I had forgotten it."

Geng Gong said: "It is indeed the Mountain of the Heavenly Pool. Its fallen rocks and cliffs are like a city rampart and in the old days people used to take refuge there. Nowadays the locals say it's haunted. A mysterious red glow is often seen at night. And woodcutters have observed a strange odour there."

"This all seems to confirm Iron Ox's dream," said Song Jiang.

They marched twenty miles that day before making camp. Nothing of note occurred on the way. Soon they were taking up a position just south of Kettle Pass.

Kettle Pass was situated under the mountain's eastern crest, where the terrain was shaped like a kettle. In Han times a customs post had been established here, and it became known as Kettle Pass. To the east was Baodu or Calf Mountain and Kettle Pass lay between the two mountains, some twenty-five miles south of Goodborough and Goodborough Pass. It was held by eight of Tian Hu's commanders with thirty thousand crack troops. One of these commanders, Shan Shiqi, the younger brother of a rich man of the region, was exceptionally talented and skilled in fighting. Because he had killed a man and wanted to escape punishment he joined Tian Hu and after achieving success in battle had been made a general. He wielded a heavy steel staff with great expertise. When Tian Hu heard that the court was sending Song Jiang's forces against him, he sent this Shan Shiqi to Goodborough to pick ten thousand first class troops and join the other seven at Kettle Pass. Once there his orders were to get on with the job and not worry about reporting back for orders.

When Shan Shiqi reached Kettle Pass and heard that Gaizhou had fallen he reckoned it would not be long before the Song army attacked the pass. So he spent each day training his men and feeding up his horses, in readiness for the battle. Suddenly it was reported that Song Jiang's army had made camp only a mile or two south of their position. He mobilized ten thousand cavalry and with three other commanders put on armour, mounted and rode out to do battle.

The two armies were drawn up facing each other. The archers on either side began shooting at the opposing ranks. Martial music struck up on both sides and colourful banners were unfurled. Where pennants marked the opening in the northern ranks Shan Shiqi rode forth: "You marsh-dwelling outlaws!" he roared. "How dare you invade our territory!"

On the opposite side Leopard's Head rode forward and shouted in reply: "You're a bunch of common robbers! The imperial army is here now so what's the point of resisting?" He twirled his lance and gave his horse its head. The two adversaries met in the middle: while two armies cheered, two riders clashed, four arms struck this way and that, four horse's legs became entangled. They fought more than fifty bouts and neither had the advantage. Leopard's Head secretly admired his opponent's skill. One of the northern lieutenants believing his commander could not gain victory by himself galloped to his assistance, whirling his sword; on the other side Hotshot also galloped into action. The fight raged on: four assailants in two pairs. Hotshot and his opposite number fought more than twenty bouts. His strength ebbing, Hotshot turned his horse and galloped away. The other gave chase. Hotshot rested his lance, reached into his saddlebag and took a stone. He twisted in the saddle and with a shout of "Pow!" flung the stone, hitting his opponent square on the nose so that he fell from the saddle streaming with blood. Hotshot took up his lance again intending to finish him off but two other northerners were galloping to the rescue.

When those above on the pass saw one of their champions bested and fearing defeat for the commander sounded the gong for retreat, Song Jiang did likewise. "We got one of their commanders today," he said to the Professor. "It's bound to affect their morale. But the mountain terrain is difficult and their fort appears to be very strong. What's our best plan for defeating them?"

Leopard's Head said: "Let me challenge them again tomorrow. I'm sure I can defeat that leader of theirs. Then you can launch a determined attack."
"Don't be in such a hurry!" the Professor said. "As Sunzi says, 'When you can't win, stick to defence. When you can win, attack!'"
Song Jiang said: "The Professor is quite right."
Next day when Leopard's Head and Hotshot asked permission to engage the enemy, Song Jiang said: "We may have won one battle, but it's still not going to be easy to take the pass. You must have Spearsman and Hasty to back you up."
Leopard's Head and Hotshot with five thousand men advanced to the foot of the pass, banners waving, drums thundering. They hurled challenges and insults at the enemy all morning, but there was no response. Just as they were about to give up, a gun went off in the fort, the gates opened and Shan Shiqi with four of his commanders and twenty thousand men charged out. Leopard's Head said to his companion: "They think they've an advantage because we're tired. We must attack." Hasty and Spearsman now came up from the rear. The armies faced each other and without a word engaged. Leopard's Head found an opponent. When Shan came out, Hotshot took him on with his spear. Hasty with his axe did battle with two others. With both armies roaring encourage-ment, the seven riders revolved in a cloud of dust, whirling round like shadows on a lantern. Leopard's Head fought till he was drunk with the excitement of battle. Suddenly he let off a cry and struck his opponent from his horse with a thrust of his spear. Hasty's two opponents were running out of strength when they saw their comrade fall. One of them feinted and galloped off. The other, planning to follow suit, tried to parry Hasty's axe but was cut in two.
When he saw he had lost two of his commanders Shan also galloped away towards his own ranks, but Hotshot gave chase. He took a stone and flung it at the retreating general. It landed with a resounding crack on Shan's helmet, frightening him out of his wits. He crouched low in the saddle and fled. The one remaining enemy commander hurriedly ordered his men back to the pass, but they were caught by Leopard's Head and his cavalry and totally routed. Shan and the remnants of his troops scuttled back into the fort and barricaded themselves inside. Leopard's Head continued the pursuit to the foot of the pass, but there they were assailed with arrows and stones by the defenders and could not gain entrance. Leopard's Head was hit in the left shoulder and gave the order to retreat. Back in the camp Song Jiang told Doctor An to treat Leopard's Head. Fortunately he had thick armour and the damage was slight. Of this no more.
When the roll was called, Shan found that he had lost more than two thousand men, as well as two commanders. It was decided to send a messenger to the Prince at Weisheng to tell him that Song Jiang's army was powerful and would be difficult to hold off and to entreat him to send reinforcements to secure the situation, and at the same time arrange secretly for the commanders on Calf Mountain, Tang Bin, Wen Zhongrong and Cui Ye to march east and cause trouble in the rear of the Song army. A time would be set, with a gun as signal for the defenders to charge down the pass: the enemy would be caught between two fires and surely defeated. Having made the plan, Shan strengthened the guard on the fort, and then there was nothing more to do but wait for Tang Bin's reply.
Meanwhile Song Jiang, depressed that Kettle Pass seemed impregnable and had held them up already more than two weeks, was sitting gloomily in his tent when it was suddenly announced that an envoy had arrived with a confidential letter from Scimitar, who had been left to defend Weizhou. Song Jiang and the Professor hastily opened it. Here is what they read:
*Tang Bin, commander of the garrison at Calf Mountain was formerly with me in Pudong. Because he is valiant and steadfast, I had a great affection for him. Ill-treated by some influential people he lost patience and killed one of his enemies. The authorities arrested him immediately. He wanted to take refuge on Mount Liang, but south of Pudong the road took him past Calf Mountain and he fell in with robbers. He fought with the two leaders, Wen Zhongrong and Cui Ye, and neither of them could defeat him so they asked him to stay and be chief of the stronghold. When Tian Hu seized Kettle Pass he wanted him to surrender. Tang Bin had no wish to do so but he realised he was isolated and had no alternative. He remained on the mountain to cover Kettle Pass .1 flank. Recently he heard that I was governor of Weizhou and on New Year .1 s Day he rode over to Weizhou, coming secretly and unescorted to explain his true feelings to me. He said he had always respected you for your honour and integrity and that his chief desire was to surrender to you and fight under your banner to redeem his fault. I myself rode back with him to Calf Mountain to encourage the other two, Wen Zhongrong and Cui Ye, to pull their socks up. They have agreed to reform and we now have a secret deal and their word as pledge.*
After reading this through carefully Song Jiang and the Professor decided not to make any move but to wait and decide on their strategy after observing developments in the fort.
After Shan had sent the secret message to Tang Bin asking for his support, the soldier returned with this reply: "The moon is full at present. I will not move my forces till it has waned. We do not want the enemy to see what we are doing."
Shan said: "That's reasonable."
There was no attack from the Song army either for the next ten days. Then it was suddenly reported that Tang Bin was approaching from the east with a group of horsemen. Soon Tang Bin reached the fort and went to see its commander: "Tonight in the third watch my two lieutenants with ten thousand men will slip away from Calf Mountain and head east. They will wear light armour and ride without bells on their harness. By break of day they should be behind Song Jiang's lines. You must be ready to play your part with a sortie from the fort."
"We shall have them in a vice," Shan said gleefully. "It's the end of the Song army!" He ordered wine for Tang Bin in celebration.
After nightfall Tang Bin looked out and remarked: "That's funny. There seems to be someone prowling around out there." As he spoke he took two arrows from the sheaf of one of his bodyguards and shot them into the dark. And indeed it was the case that in order to capture the fort Song Jiang had stationed men outside to spy on their activities under cover of darkness. With the arrow he fired Tang Bin had hit one of these men in the right leg, but from its effect it appeared the arrow had no barb. Puzzled by this the soldier examined the arrow and found that some lengths of cloth had been tightly wound around the tip. He realized something was up and sped back to the camp to report to Song Jiang. By the light of the lamp Song Jiang tore off the covering and found several lines of minute spidery script. It was a secret message from Tang Bin: the fort would be handed over to them early next day. Wen and Cui would take up positions behind the General's lines and a gun would be fired as signal for those inside the fort to launch an attack. This would be the opportunity for Tang Bin to seize the fort. He requested General Song to be ready to enter it.
Having read this missive, Song Jiang made secret preparations with the Professor. The latter said: "Scimitar has confidence in all this. But if enemy troops are going to be in our rear, we cannot neglect to take precautions. Send Colonel Sun and four others and ten thousand troops with drums and banners to take up position in the rear. If Wen and Cui do turn up, they must keep them out of the camp until the fort is definitely in our hands. They should not allow them to advance until they hear the report of the big gun. And let Spearsman and Hasty set up an ambush with five thousand men on the east, and Leopard's Head and Hotshot do likewise on the west. When they hear the gun they can come out to back us up and we'll enter the fort together. But just in case there's any treachery they'll be there to help out."
"You think of everything, Professor!" Song Jiang said.
So the orders were given and everyone prepared accordingly.
Up on Kettle Pass, Shan in accordance with what Tang Bin had told him listened for the gun from behind the Song position. Some time after dawn a whole string of reports sounded to the south and a cloud of dust was seen rising to the rear of the Song army amid much waving of banners and general confusion. Tang Bin said: "Wen and Cui have got there. It's time for us to attack." They set off in order, Shan in the lead, Tang in the second wave. Two commanders stayed behind to guard the fort.
When the Song army sighted the attack they quickly retreated. Shan led the charge, urging his cavalry on. Suddenly a gun fired and two troops of cavalry appeared from the Song left and right flanks and charged. At the same moment Tang Bin ordered about turn and led his troops back up to the pass, where they took up a position with spears at the ready, leaving Shan and his lieutenant to carry on the fight alone. Another gun, and from the Song ranks Iron Ox and the shield bearers poured forward. Shan realized some plan was afoot and ordered a retreat. But the way back to the fort was now blocked: "You must answer to Tang Bin! Kettle Pass is already in Song hands! Dismount and surrender!" he shouted, as he killed the first of the retreating rebel leaders with his lance. Shan was totally nonplussed and could only lead a few dozen of his men off to one side in a desperate attempt to escape. Leopard's Head and Hotshot let them go and continued on forward, wanting first of all to secure the pass.
At this point Iron Ox and company reached the top. Another gun and they joined Tang Bin in killing the guards. The fort was taken. In this action another two rebel commanders had been killed, one in the fort and the other outside. The northerners fled, abandoning helmets, armour and horses. Two thousand were dead and five hundred taken prisoner. The rest surrendered.
Soon Song Jiang and the main army arrived and entered in due order. Tang Bin dismounted, prostrated himself before Song Jiang and said: "My fault is great, but I have heard of your righteousness and humanity. I wanted to join you, but could not find the way, so I was unable to make your acquaintance. Now heaven has granted me this opportunity. This will make me happy for the rest of my life!" Again he prostrated himself.
Song Jiang returned the courtesy and raised him up, saying: "If you are willing to declare your allegiance to the throne and join me in subduing the rebels, I will report it when I return to the court and the Emperor is bound to pardon you."
Colonel Sun now reported back with Wen and Cui, the two outlaws who had marched to the rear of the Song army. Song Jiang had them brought in while Colonel Sun stationed his forces outside the fort. The two outlaws said to Song Jiang: "We would count ourselves lucky to serve under you as your slaves and work like dogs or horses."
Song Jiang said: "You have helped us to capture the pass. This is no small contribution. It will all be clearly noted on the record." A feast was held after this to celebrate with Tang and his two companions. A count was taken of the troops inside and outside the fort: twenty thousand had come over from the rebels and a thousand horses. All the leaders were rewarded for their work. Then Song Jiang asked Tang how many troops there were at Goodborough. "Originally there were thirty thousand," he said. "Shan brought ten thousand here to reinforce the pass. So now there must be twenty thousand, plus the ten commanders."
Tang Bin also said: "Tian Hu relies on Kettle Pass as a shield for Goodborough. Now it has fallen, he has lost a limb. Humble as are my talents, I would like to lead the attack on Goodborough."
Geng Gong, the commander who had surrendered at Lingchuan, was keen to go with him and Song Jiang consented. A little later he said to Wen and Cui: "You used to be on Calf Mountain and know the conditions there. I hear much of your valour. I would like to give you some troops and ask you to fortify it. When we are ready to attack Goodborough we will ask you to join us. What do you say?"
"Your wish is our command," they answered in unison. After wine had been drunk they left for Calf Mountain.
Next day, when Song Jiang gave out orders he sent Magic Messenger to the Unicorn at Jinning to inform him of the military situation and return straight away. While Magic Messenger was performing this duty, Song Jiang discussed things with the Professor and made dispositions for the attack on Goodborough. Tang Bin and Geng Gong with ten thousand men were to attack the east gate, Hasty, Hotshot and another ten thousand the south gate, leaving free access by the west gate for reinforcements from Weisheng, to prevent the besiegers being caught between forces inside the city and others outside. Iron Ox and companions with five hundred infantry would form a roving patrol. Colonel Sun and two others would take their troops up to Kettle Pass to help Demon King and Flautist defend it. This done, he and the Professor with the rest of them struck camp and marched toward Goodborough, camping again just a few miles from it to the south.
Now our story divides. The officials of Tian Hu's defence committee in Weisheng received reports from Shan Shiqi, the commander of Kettle Pass, and from Tian Biao in Jinning and duly informed Tian Hu that the Song forces were strong and posed an imminent threat both to Kettle Pass and to Jinning. When Tian Hu held a meeting with his staff to discuss the sending of reinforcements, someone stepped forward wearing a yellow turban and a cloak of crane's down, like the great general, Zhuge Liang, and said: "Great Lord, I would like to go to Kettle Pass and repel the enemy."
This man's name was Qiao Lie. He was from Jingyuan in Shaanxi. When his mother was pregnant she dreamed that a wolf entered the room, which later turned into a deer. When she awoke she gave birth to Qiao Lie. At the age of eight Qiao Lie was already expert with spear and staff. Wandering in the mountains one day, he met a magician who imparted his secret arts to him and he learnt how to conjure up winds, summon rain, ride the mists and mount the clouds. He went to the Two Immortals Mountain in Jiugong seeking the Way but the Master refused to receive him and sent an acolyte with these instructions: "Your command is external, you have yet to grasp the hidden truth. Turn to good and beat the demons, then you will come to me again."
Visibly angered, Qiao Liu withdrew. Henceforth he relied on his own efforts to achieve knowledge, through his ceaseless wanderings. Because of his reputation for magic, people called him the Wizard. Later he came to the district of Anding. A serious drought occurred there, with not a drop of rain for five months and the authorities published an appeal for a rainmaker, promising a reward of three thousand cash. Wizard Qiao Lie accepted the challenge and went to work. Abundant rain ensued. When the magistrate saw there was a sufficiency of rain, he forgot about the promised reward. That wasn't all. There was a crooked scholar in the town called Ho Cai who was very thick with the local treasurer. When he heard about the affair, he encouraged the treasurer to hand over the lion's share of the reward money to the magistrate and appropriate the rest for himself. Ho Cai then borrowed from him and made a small profit. The treasurer even gave three strings of cash to the Wizard, but said: "With a talent like yours, you really don't need the money. I am responsible for collecting taxes and I can never get it all in. I have to scrape it together here and there. If you take my advice, you'll leave this reward money in the treasury for the time being. Then when you need it you can always come and take it out."
The Wizard flew into a passion. "That reward money was contributed by the wealthy householders of the district. How can you embezzle it? What's in the treasury comes from the blood and sweat of the people and you want to cream it off to buy yourself smiles and pleasures and let affairs of state go hang. I'll kill you, you corrupt and profligate vermin, and get rid of a worm at the heart of the treasury!" He raised his fist and smashed it into the man's face. A debauched degenerate like that, fat and short of breath to boot, could hardly put up a fight. The Wizard punched and kicked him into such a condition that when he had crawled home battered and bruised he took to his bed and lay there in a sorry state for four or five days till he died of his injuries. His wife lodged an accusation with the authorities. The magistrate guessed that the reward money was at the root of the trouble. He signed a warrant and sent bailiffs to bring in the accused, Wizard Qiao Lie, for questioning. When the Wizard heard this, he immediately went back home and packed his things and then went with his mother to seek refuge in Weisheng. Here he gave himself out to be a Taoist sage and exchanged the name Lie for Qing, taking the religious name of Tao Qing.
Not long after all this, Tian Hu started his rebellion and, having heard of this Tao Qing's special gifts, recruited him. The Wizard helped Tian Hu to gain control of many districts by fabricating scandals, making full use of his magic arts and duping simple people. Tian Hu relied on his judgement in everything and named him Holy Sage, Protector of the Land, Marshal of the Army and Deputy Chief Minister. By this time he had changed his name and was called Grand Master Qiao Taoqing.
The Wizard now asked Tian Hu to give him command of an army to reinforce Kettle Pass. Tian Hu said: "You are diligent in my service, Grand Master!"
They had hardly finished speaking when Sun An, one of Tian Hu's ministers, appeared and said: "I would like to take an army to reinforce Jinning." Tian Hu gave them both joint command of the expedition against the southerners and gave each of them twenty thousand men.
The Wizard also said: "The situation at Kettle Pass is serious, so I shall take light cavalry and ride with the utmost speed to rescue them." Tian Hu was delighted and ordered his military council to allot them the troops. This done, the two generals mustered their troops before departing.
This Sun An was the Wizard's fellow-countryman — from the same district, that is. He was tall and strong and a fairly skilled tactician. His energy was exceptional. He had studied martial arts to considerable effect and wielded a finely engraved double-edged sword. He had killed two men in a family vendetta and was relentlessly pursued by the authorities so he fled from his home. He had been a close friend of the Wizard's and when he heard that the Wizard was serving with Tian Hu he went to Weisheng to take refuge with him. After the Wizard introduced him to Tian Hu and spoke of his prowess, he received a palace appointment. Now with ten officers and twenty thousand men he set out to reinforce Jinning.
Meanwhile the Wizard himself set off with his four commanders. They marched by night towards Goodborough and quickly reached a point just a few miles north of the city, when their scouts reported: "Kettle Pass fell to the Song army yesterday. Now they are advancing on Goodborough in three columns."
The Wizard was infuriated. "These fools are impudent. I shall have to show them the power of my art!" He ordered his forces to go forward with all speed. They ran straight into the forces of Tang Bin and Geng Gong who were attacking the north gate.
When they heard that two thousand horsemen had appeared in the northwest, Tang and Geng formed their troops up for battle. The Wizard's forces halted and they faced each other, banners waving and drums beating. Between the northerners and the southerners there was but the length of a bowshot. Surrounded by four officers at the head of the northern troops Tang and Geng could see a Taoist on horseback under a red umbrella. A black banner in front of the horse bore two lines of large gold characters, seventeen in all, which said: "Protector of the Land, Holy Sage and Chief Minister for War, Grand Master Qiao the Wizard, leader of the Expedition against the Southerners." Geng Gong exclaimed in alarm: "This fellow is to be feared!" Before they could engage, Iron Ox with his roving patrol of five hundred men happened on the scene and wanted to attack. Geng Gong said: "This is Tian Hu's right hand man and most accomplished fighter. He knows magic, he is truly formidable!"
Iron Ox said: "What good will his fucking magic do him when I've chopped the fucker's head off?"
Tang Bin also said: "Don't underestimate him!" But Iron Ox wasn't listening. Waving his axes he charged forward. Fearing trouble, his companions Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost followed on with five hundred of their shield-bearers. "The fools must learn some manners!" said their antagonist with a devilish laugh. With the utmost composure he took his precious sword and pointed at the sky, muttered a spell and cried out "Chrrr!" Instantly the clear blue sky filled with black clouds and mist, a violent wind got up and sand and dust began to fly. Black murk swallowed up Iron Ox and his five hundred men. It was like being inside a black lacquer box: no glimmer of light, no chance of moving an inch, nothing but the sound of wind and rain. They knew not where they were.

Well, you may be the bravest of the brave but you can't grow wings and fly away:
*Not even the fiery-headed door god escapes earth's pitfalls, heaven's net,*
*Nor does the 8-armed* nazha *step lightly forth from the dragon's pool, the tiger's den!*

## 193
## Song Jiang remains loyal to his lord; Qiao the Wizard wins by magic

Now Iron Ox had ignored the words of Tang Bin and Geng Gong and led his forces out in an attack and got into difficulties through Wizard Qiao's use of magic and all his force, five hundred or more, had been taken alive, not a single one escaped. Geng Gong, when he saw things were turning out so badly, turned his horse's head eastward and with two cracks of the whip fled the scene. Tang Bin saw Iron Ox and the others caught and their forces scattered and saw Geng Gong flee, so he thought to himself: "This magic of Qiao the Wizard's is powerful stuff. If I'm caught alive I shall be made a mockery. They say that a soldier should value honour more than life. Anyhow, the way things are now it's better to die!" So furiously brandishing his lance he galloped forward in a desperate charge. Qiao the Wizard quickly muttered a spell and cried: "Chrrr!" and among his ranks a cloud of sand rose up and swept down upon Tang Bin. Completely blinded by the sand, Tang Bin was unable to strike a blow. Caught by the enemy and wounded in the left leg he fell from his horse and was taken alive. There was in fact a rule among the northerners that for every officer captured alive the reward was double, so the leaders were never killed. But among Tang Bin's troops — ten thousand of them all lost in the sand — it was a massacre. They were scattered like chaff and the greater part perished.
Leopard's Head and Spearsman at the east gate heard the noise of a great battle south of the city and rushed over there to give support. The city garrison had recognized the Wizard's banner and quickly opened the gates to receive him. Iron Ox and his comrades were also herded into the city.
Geng Gong was now seen fleeing with the remnants of his force. They were galloping flat out, saddles awry, reins flying, helmets skewwhiff. They only pulled up when they saw Leopard's Head and Spearsman. These two asked where the rest of their troops were. Struggling to speak, Geng Gong finally managed to blurt out a couple of words. Leopard's Head took him back to the main camp and on the way they ran into Short-Arse and Steelbright with a patrol of three hundred cavalry. They went together to inform Song Jiang.
Song Jiang was horrified to hear that Iron Ox and the others had been captured. "Iron Ox and his comrades are done for!" he wailed.
The Professor tried to comfort him. "Don't get so upset," he said. "We'll soon put things right. If they've got magic on their side we must send at once to Kettle Pass and fetch the Demon King to fight them."
"We can do that," Song Jiang said, "but at the same time we must go forward and bargain with those bandits for Iron Ox and the others."
The Professor tried in vain to dissuade him. Leaving the Professor in charge of the camp, he set off at once himself at the head of eight of his most trusted commanders and twenty thousand troops heading north to Goodborough. Hasty and Hotshot joined up with them and with banners waving and thundering drums, shouting and banging gongs, they charged up to the city walls.
Meanwhile the Wizard had entered the city and gone to preside in the court room. The ten military commanders reported to him and were about to hold a welcoming party for him when scouts reported the arrival of the Song troops. The Wizard responded angrily to the news: "The effrontery of the bastards!" He said to the garrison commander: "I'm going to go and get that Song Jiang!" He mounted and with four of his lieutenants and three thousand cavalry rode out of the city to encounter the enemy.
The Song troops were drawn up ready for battle when the gates opened and the drawbridge was lowered and a host of cavalry poured out. At their head was the Wizard, his precious sword unsheathed. The two armies, their banners waving, faced each other. Each set up a heavy fire of arrows and crossbow bolts at the opposing ranks. Trumpets blared and drums rolled on either side. From the Song ranks Song Jiang rode forth, with Perilous bearing his standard and his commanders spread out to his right and left. Half choking with indignation he pointed at the Wizard and shouted: "You rebellious brigands. Quickly return my brothers and their troops to me. If you're not quick about it, I shall take you alive and chop you into a thousand pieces!"
The Wizard replied: "Mend your manners, Song Jiang! If I don't choose to give them back, how do you suppose you're going to make me?"
By way of answer Song Jiang pointed with the stock of his whip and his commanders charged *en masse*. The Wizard through clenched teeth growled out his magic spell, pointed west with his sword and shouted "Chrrr!" In an instant countless warriors appeared in the west and bore down on the Song forces. Then the Wizard pointed north with his sword, muttered a magic formula and cried out "Chrrr!" Immediately heaven and earth went dark, the day was obscured, sand flew and stones rolled, earth shook and the heavens rocked. As Leopard's Head and company charged they could see nothing before them but sand and darkness, no sign of an enemy. They were stopped in their tracks. They sat there on their horses, baffled and bewildered. Then Leopard's Head galloped back to protect Song Jiang and flee with him northwards. The Wizard ordered his troops in pursuit. They caught the Song force and cut it to pieces. It was a rout.

Song Jiang and his commanders fled in confusion but they had not covered more than a few hundred yards when something extraordinary happened: the open plain in front of them became an expanse of tossing billows with no visible shore or limit, vast as the great Eastern Ocean. Even had they possessed wings they could not have flown across it. The enemy behind were catching up, evidently death awaited them. Monk, Pilgrim and the Red-Haired Devil cried out: "Surely we're not going to let ourselves be captured!" They tried to turn and charge. Suddenly there was a clap of thunder and up in the sky appeared twenty or more spirit knights in golden armour who came on with whirling weapons, overwhelming Monk and his friends. The northern troops followed up and took them all prisoner. Then there was a great shout:

"Song Jiang dismount and be tied up if you want to live!"

Song Jiang gazed heavenwards and sighed: "I do not fear death, it is only that I have not yet repaid my Emperor's favour and I leave my old parents without support. Nor can I rescue Iron Ox and my other comrades. But with things as they are all I can do is fight to the death, to avoid being shamed." Leopard's Head and the other six crowded closely about him and said: "We will follow the Leader in suppressing demons and killing bandits!" In these straits Perilous, hit in two places by arrows, still held aloft the Leader's standard and followed in Song Jiang's footsteps never more than a foot behind. The northerners, seeing the Leader's standard still flying, were wary of advancing.

Sword in hand, Song Jiang and his companions thought about killing themselves. But at that moment a figure was seen approaching. It spoke: "Stop. You have nothing to fear. I am the Lord of the Fifth Stem. I have seen your honour and loyalty and I have come to turn back the evil tide and enable you to return to your camp."

It was an astonishing sight. He bore two horns on his head, his body was black, he was naked but for a pair of yellow trousers and in his left hand he held a bell. He bent and picked up a clod of earth and flung it at the towering waves. Instantly the original plain reappeared. "You must suffer a few days of disaster," he said. "But now the water has gone and you must return quickly to your camp and send someone to Weizhou for reinforcements. Make every effort to defend your country!" With this he changed into a whirlwind and disappeared.

Their amazement knew no bounds. Surrounding Song Jiang to protect him, they headed south. After a mile or two they saw a cloud of dust and another squadron of cavalry appeared. It was a force led by the Professor, coming to their assistance. Song Jiang said to him: "I ought to have listened to your advice. I might not have seen you again, ever!"

The Professor said: "You can tell me about it when we get back to the camp."

They entered the camp in good order and then recounted how a god had come to save them in their predicament.

The Professor put a hand to his head and said: "The Lord of the Fifth Stem is the Earth spirit. Your valour must have impressed the Lord of the Earth. Remember, earth conquers water!" Understanding now the manner of their delivery, Song Jiang and his companions gave thanks to heaven.

Now as evening came on some defeated soldiers returned and told how in the confusion they had been attacked by four enemy commanders from Goodborough, who made a sally that killed many and scattered the rest. A count was made and more than ten thousand were found to be missing. The Professor said: "The enemy are using magic. They've already defeated us twice. We must plan quickly and decide how to defend this camp. Our troops are demoralized for the moment. It is only to be expected that these devilish devices, phantom warriors and the like, will sap their resolve. We must vacate the camp and fix up goats to make the drum sound, whilst we make our real camp a few miles off."

Song Jiang gave out the order and the army withdrew to a certain distance. The Professor also told him to create two camps: a smaller one contained within a larger, connected at the corners in a complex six-lobed pattern. These orders were carried out and when it was all set up the arrival of Demon King from Kettle Pass was announced. He went immediately to see Song Jiang and asked for detailed information about the Wizard. Then he said: "Don't worry brother. It is undoubtedly magic. Tomorrow I will make up a spell and capture him."

The Professor said: "If he does not attack tomorrow, I shall sit tight and wait till Taoist Gongsun arrives."

Song Jiang accordingly sent Hotshot, Short-Arse, Snake and Scorpion and five hundred cavalry, with instructions to ride posthaste by night to Weizhou and bring back Taoist Gongsun to rescue them from this enemy. They saddled their horses, bade farewell to Song Jiang and left. The army then set about laying out barricades of deer's antlers and strengthening the stockades; they strung their bows and unsheathed their swords, laid armour and weapons ready to hand and made sure that bells were rung and there was plenty of noise as, candle in hand, they waited for day.

As for the Wizard, having got Song Jiang into serious difficulties with his magic, he was planning to press home the advantage and capture him. When he saw that the water had suddenly disappeared and Song Jiang had slipped away, he was greatly put out. "My magic spell was something quite out of the ordinary, how did he manage to break it? He must have someone really special in his army." He withdrew his troops to the city and held a meeting with his commanders. They prepared a celebratory banquet in his honour, while the Song captives were brought before him. One of the northern commanders standing on the Wizard's left, started berating Tang Bin when he was brought in. "You turncoat, the Prince of Jin has never let you down!"

Tang Bin shouted back: "Your time is up, all of you."

The Wizard ordered them all to speak their names. Iron Ox just glared at him, held his chin up, stuck out his chest and shouted: "Listen here, you sneaky Taoist. I am Iron Ox Li Kui, otherwise known as the Black Whirlwind."

The others, including Monk and Pilgrim, in response to his questions resolutely refused to open their mouths. The Wizard therefore ordered some of their troops to be fetched. They were soon brought in by the sword and axe bearers and after questioning them one by one the Wizard learnt that Iron Ox and his companions were Song commanders. Then he addressed them, saying: "If you agree to surrender and serve our Prince of Jin, you will all be rewarded with high honours."

Iron Ox replied in a voice like thunder: "What do you think I am? Cut out the fucking shit. If you want to chop me up, that's your business. Cut me a hundred times and if I blink you can call me a coward!"

The others also abused the Wizard: "You perverted Taoist! Stop dreaming! You can cut our heads off, but we won't bend a knee, our legs are iron."

Enraged, the Wizard ordered them to be taken away and executed. Monk laughed out loud: "For me to die is like going home. If I die today, I am following the Way." The sword and axe bearers surrounded them as they were taken down. The Wizard thought to himself: "I've never seen such hard men. I'd best leave them be and think about it." He hurriedly ordered his men to untie their hands and guard them closely. Pilgrim began to shout: "Come on, then, you filthy rebels, cut my head off quickly and be done with it!" The Wizard lowered his head and said nothing as his guards escorted them out.

The Wizard had seen his magic water trick fail and he was already anxious in his heart. He remained in the city and waited to see what the Song army would do. Neither side ventured forth. After five or six days two more northern commanders arrived. They reported to the Wizard and their troops were quartered inside the city. When the Wizard saw that the Song troops had fortified themselves in their camp and were not going to attack, he assumed they must have run out of ideas. He mustered a force and with four of his commanders and twenty thousand men left the city at the fifth drumbeat and camped at Five Dragon Mountain, intending to attack at dawn. He said to his second-in-command: "Today we must capture Song Jiang and take back Kettle Pass." The latter replied: "We have confidence in Your Honour's magic art."

The Wizard launched his attack on Song Jiang's camp with ten thousand troops. When the Song scouts got the news they reported it at once to Song Jiang, who ordered Demon King and the Fire and Water Generals to muster their men, saddle their horses and counter-attack.

The Wizard was observing the Song camp from the top of a knoll. He could not help admiring what he saw. The report of a gun was heard from the camp, the gates opened and troops poured out. On either side now many-coloured banners waved, and the heavens shook to the thunder of the drums. The Wizard came down from the knoll and rode out in front of his lines, his commanders on either side of him. On the Song side Demon King rode out through the gate of pennants. Brandishing his trusty sword, he hurled abuse at the Wizard: "You lying Taoist, how dare you give yourself such airs!"

The Wizard thought to himself: "Most likely this fellow knows some magic. Let's try him out." He shouted back: "Curb your tongue, you hopeless loser! Do you dare pit your martial skills against mine?"

Demon King retorted: "If you want a contest, come out and fight!"

The two armies cheered and the drums rolled. Demon King slapped his horse, pointed his sword and charged. The Wizard likewise urged on his horse, waved his sword and galloped to the encounter. Two swords were raised on high, two demons fought. At first it was just two riders locked together in combat; later each brought his supernatural powers into play and it was two spiralling black clouds swaying this way and that between the armies, to and fro and back and forth. The men of both armies watched open-mouthed. Drunk with the fever of battle, Demon King thought he spied an opening and slashed at his opponent. But his sword bit the air and he almost fell off his horse. The Wizard had drawn him on intentionally, inviting the blow while he himself performed the empty dragon skin trick. Back now in front of his troops he guffawed loudly. Demon King retired chastened to his own side.

Next, two passages formed in the Song ranks, to left and right. From the left the Water General stormed out, with five hundred infantry all in black armour with black banners, carrying shields and javelins, pitchforks and sharp swords; from the right the Fire General rode forth with his fire-masters dressed in scarlet, carrying torches, pushing and dragging fifty fire carts loaded with reeds and other incendiary materials. Tied to the back of each man was an iron gourd, filled with gunpowder and five-coloured smoke powder, which they lit simultaneously. These two columns of troops, those on the right enveloped in black smoke, those on the left with fire spiralling up to heaven, came on at pace, striking fear into the hearts of the northerners, who were on the verge of fleeing. The Wizard shouted: "Deserters will be executed!" With his trusty sword in his right hand he muttered a spell and instantly a black cloud covered the earth, a storm broke out and huge hailstones began to pelt the Fire and Water contingents. The storm intensified and their lights were extinguished. The hailstones battered their formation to pieces and frightened the Water General and the Fire General out of their wits. They scuttled back to their own ranks without having had a chance to strike a blow, their pride squashed flat as a pancake.

In a little while the hail ceased and the clouds withdrew and the sky was as blue, the day as bright as before, but the ground was still covered with countless hailstones smooth as a hen's egg and the size of a man's fist. The Wizard could see the enemy — pates cracked, foreheads bloodied, eyes half closed, noses skew-whiff, slipping and sliding all over the place on the ice. He shouted out in stentorian tones: "Do you have anyone else with special abilities?" Whereupon Demon King, shamefacedly advanced, hair dishevelled, waving his sword and desperately mumbling a spell. A violent wind arose in all four quarters blowing sand and rocks about, while there was darkness over the earth and the sun went out. Urging on his men Demon King charged. The Wizard laughed and said: "What can you hope to achieve with this piddling magic of yours?"

He too waved his sword and made magic. He muttered a spell and the wind turned on the Song forces driving them back. There was a loud clap of thunder and countless ghost troops and spirit warriors filled the sky and came charging down on the Song forces. Horses whinnied, men screamed, and there was total panic. The Wizard and his four commanders followed up with a murderous charge. Now his magic had failed him, Demon King gave up all attempt at resistance and fled. As the northerners harried them and the situation became desperate, a beam of golden light appeared in the Song camp. It scattered the sand storm and caused the spirit warriors to fall flat on the ground. Everyone could now see that they were just cutouts of coloured paper. When the Wizard saw his spirit warriors had failed, he concentrated all his magic powers. With hair flying, he waved his sword and recited another spell: a shout of "Chrrr!" and the Magic of the Three Waters was launched. Within seconds a vast sea of blackness began sweeping in from the north. Then a gentleman rode forth from the Song ranks. He brandished an ancient sword patterned like a pine tree, recited a spell and cried "Chrrr!".

Immediately a host of yellow-robed spirit warriors appeared in the sky and flew northwards. They dispersed the black cloud. The Wizard was stunned. When they saw the Wizard's magic defeated, the Song forces gave a shout of triumph: "Qiao you evil Wizard, a greater power than yours is at hand!" The Wizard flushed to the tips of his ears in mortification and retreated to his own ranks. That mastery of the spirit world the Wizard had striven so hard for now hangs its head and has lost its impetus. Truly it would be as hard to wash out this occasion's shame as to hold the water of 3 rivers in the hands.

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## The Wizard takes refuge on 5 Dragon Mountain; Taoist Gongsun besieges the 100 Valleys

Now the person in the Song army called on to defeat the Wizard's black arts was of course Taoist Gongsun. When he received word from Song Jiang in Weizhou, he came rushing back, accompanied by Short-Arse, Hotshot, Snake and Scorpion. He went to see Song Jiang immediately. This was just when the Wizard was using his magic arts to defeat Demon King. It was the eighth day of the second month, designated by the fifth stem and seventh root. Now the fifth stem corresponds to the element "earth", and Taoist Gongsun asked the Lord of the Heavenly Roots and Stems to subdue those northern waters, sweep back the noxious miasma and restore bright day. When he and Song Jiang rode out in front of the troops, they were able to see the Wizard and his army ignominiously fleeing south. Taoist Gongsun said to Song Jiang: "We've beaten him, but if we let him get back into Goodborough he'll dig in his heels. Quickly, order Spearsman and Hasty to move east to the south gate with five thousand troops to deny them entry. Short-Arse and Blackface can take five thousand to cut him off on the west. Tell them if they encounter the defeated army simply to prevent them from entering the city and not to engage them." Song Jiang gave the necessary orders and his commanders carried them out. It was just after nine o'clock when Song Jiang and Taoist Gongsun with six other commanders and twenty thousand men began to advance. The northern commander guarding the Wizard, fought a rearguard action. More troops joined them under two other commanders. They had just reached the camp on Five Dragon Mountain when they heard the Song drums and gongs behind them, and the heaven-shattering cheers of the men as they surged forward. One of the Wizard's lieutenants said: "Stay in the camp, Your Honour, while I and my forces engage them in a fight to the death."

Now the Wizard had boasted in front of the whole army. Moreover, in the practice of his magic he had not hitherto met a rival. To find himself now hard pressed by the Song army was a total loss of face. He answered: "No, all of you stand back and let me deal with them." He deployed his troops in a long battle line behind him, with his lieutenants bunched up on the right and left. "You bog-dwelling bandits," he yelled at the Song army. "What gives you the right to throw your weight about like this? I shall have to hand you out another thrashing!" This Wizard, you see, was from Jingyuan in the far northwest, a very long way from Shandong, and he didn't know Song Jiang and his company at all!

Then the Song army, with much waving of banners, lined up for battle. The two armies faced each other: trumpets brayed, drums thundered. The yellow banner of the southerners was flourished, a passage opened among the pennants and two riders appeared. There sat the Shandong Guardian of Righteousness, Song Jiang the Opportune Rain. On his left hand was Dragon in the Clouds Taoist Gongsun, pointing his trusty sword at the Wizard and saying: "What you have learnt is only the external Tao, you have not grasped the true way, quickly dismount and surrender!"

The Wizard looked closely and saw that it was the one who had broken his spells. "Do you really think I would surrender to you, just because my magic went wrong today?" he answered.

"You still dare to talk about that piddling magic of yours?" Taoist Gongsun said.

"If you think yourself so superior you'd better take another look at what I can do!" the Wizard shouted back. He summoned up all his powers and pronounced a magic formula. He pointed at his lieutenant, whereupon the latter's spear was snatched as if by an invisible hand, wafted through the air like a flying serpent and directed down at Taoist Gongsun's head. Taoist Gongsun pointed his sword at Thunderclap and the latter's wolf-tooth mace rose out of his hand and parried the spear, darting this way, that way, through the air, as if controlled by the wind. Both armies watched in silent amazement. With a loud crash, and an answering shout from the onlooking troops, the shaft of the mace met the spear and knocked it out of the air. It landed with a resonant thud on the northerners' war drum, splitting its skin. The soldier carrying the drum turned white as a sheet. Next thing, the mace was back in its owner's hand, as if it had never left it. The Song soldiers laughed till the eyes disappeared in their faces. Taoist Gongsun shouted: "So you think you can fool around with weapons in front of the master, do you?"

The Wizard responded by conjuring up another spell: he pointed to the north and shouted "Chrrr!". Immediately a black cloud gushed from Five Dragon Mountain behind their camp, and in the midst of it a black dragon with huge scales and billowing mane. As it flew towards them Taoist Gongsun emitted a loud guffaw and also pointed to Five Dragon Mountain. Out shot a yellow dragon, at the speed of lightning, something between cloud and mist in form. It flew at the black dragon and there in the sky they began to fight. "Come forth, green dragon!" the Wizard now shouted and a green dragon raced out from the mountain, but after it came a white dragon opposing it. The armies watched the contest open-mouthed. The Wizard whirled his sword and shouted: "Quickly, red dragon, to the rescue!" Instantly a red dragon appeared and came swirling down. There in the sky the five dragons wove to and fro and it was just as the five elements, metal, wood, water, fire and earth, interact with and counter each other, within a single mass. A violent wind arose and several dozen of the standard bearers in either army were bowled over by its force. Taoist Gongsun transferred the sword to his left hand and with his right tossed his deer whisk into the air, where it performed a somersault and became a great bird like a wild goose and flew off. In seconds it waxed and grew till it reached to the ninth heaven when it turned into a giant roc hovering in the sky like a black cloud before stooping on the dragons. With a splitting sound like thunder the dragons burst asunder, scattering scales and talons in all directions. You see, this Five Dragon Mountain was a sacred place, where five-coloured clouds were often seen. The dragon god appeared to men in their dreams there, so a temple had been built, within which was displayed an ancestral tablet of the Dragon Lord and the green, yellow, red, black and white dragons of the five directions, formed from clay, gilded and painted in bright colours, were to be seen winding up the corresponding sides of a pillar. The two men had used magic to make these dragons fight as their representatives, and then the big roc Taoist Gongsun had fashioned out of his whisk smashed the five dragons to pieces and the shards rained down on the heads of the northern troops. The soldiers screamed in panic and could find no shelter from those ancient hardened chunks of pottery which left them black and blue and bleeding heavily. In a short space of time more than two hundred were injured and fled. The Wizard found he was bereft of his powers and could do nothing about it. A yellow ceramic dragon's tail falling on him from the heavens nearly cracked his skull and squashed his Taoist cap. Taoist Gongsun pointed once more and the roc softly vanished and the whisk was back in his hand again. When the Wizard made to produce more magic, Taoist Gongsun worked his Five Thunders magic. From his head sprang a yellow-turbaned spirit warrior who shouted: "Get off your horse and surrender, Wizard!"

The Wizard tried a spell, but it had no effect whatsoever. Flabbergasted by his powerlessness, the Wizard slapped his horse and fled back to his own ranks. Leopard's Head now let his horse go, whirled his spear and gave chase, shouting: "Stop, you evil sorcerer!" Two of the northern commanders rode out with readied weapons to stop him and Spots rode to support him. They fought it out in two pairs out in the middle to the cheers of the two armies. Leopard's Head fought more than twenty bouts with his opponent and neither could gain an advantage till Leopard's Head spotted an opening and lunged at the legs of his adversary's horse. The horse fell and Leopard's Head thrust his lance into the other's chest, killing him. The second northerner, at the height of his contest with Spots, saw his comrade fall, dodged aside and galloped off. Spots gave chase and brought his iron club down on the man's head, smashing both helmet and skull, so he fell dead from his horse. Song Jiang pointed with the stock of his whip and the Gardener, Green-Eyes, Steelbright and Auntie Gu charged together. The northerners fled in disarray and there was great slaughter. The Wizard, surrounded by four of his commanders, now abandoned the camp at Five Dragon Mountain and headed for Goodborough. They had passed the mountain and were only about two or three miles from the city when the sound of a war drum erupted ahead of them and with loud cheers a lively body of men poured out of a small path on the east, led by Spearsman and Hasty. Before the two sides had engaged the two commanders guarding Goodborough saw fighting outside the town and led a sortie from the south gate with five thousand troops. Spearsman and Hasty separated their forces to take them on. Hasty went one way with two thousand troops and his opponent resisted for a dozen bouts before Hasty, furiously wielding his axe, chopped him in two. The second northern commander hurriedly retreated into the town. Hasty galloped in pursuit and killed a hundred northerners, but had to stop when he reached the south gate because the enemy were safely inside and had raised the drawbridge and barred the gates. When wooden blocks and ballista missiles began to rain down from the walls, he was obliged to withdraw. Meanwhile Spearsman with three thousand men remained to block off the retreat of the main northern army. In spite of having lost one battle the northerners at this point still had twenty thousand men to oppose Spearsman. But two of the commanders had no stomach for the fight and fled westwards with five thousand cavalry escorting the Wizard. The remaining two encircled Spearsman who was greatly outnumbered, until Hasty and Song Jiang arrived from south and north. The northerners could not hold out against attacks from three sides. One of the leaders, wounded in the left shoulder by a thrust from Spearsman, fell from his horse and was trampled into the mud. The other tried to flee but was caught by Hotshot, whose spear transfixed him from the back and brought him crashing to the ground. In the ensuing rout most of the thirty thousand were killed. Corpses littered the fields and blood ran in rivers. Drums, trumpets, banners, helmets and armour were captured, horses were abandoned in countless numbers. The survivors scattered in all directions. Song Jiang's combined forces now numbered twenty-five thousand. They heard that the Wizard and his two commanders were fleeing north with five thousand and would have set off in pursuit, but it was late afternoon and the troops after battling furiously all day were hungry and exhausted. Song Jiang was about to recall them and return to camp for food and rest, and was pleased to hear that the Professor knowing how long and hard they had fought, had ordered Demon King and the Fire and Water Generals to come to their assistance with twenty thousand troops, equipped with torches and flares. Taoist Gongsun said to Song Jiang: "Now we've got reinforcements, you and the army go back to camp to rest and eat while I and the other three continue the pursuit. It is imperative that we get their Wizard to surrender."

Song Jiang said: "It is thanks to your powers that we have escaped disaster. After your unflagging efforts you should come back to the camp with us and rest. We can finish things off tomorrow. The Wizard is a broken reed; we've nothing more to fear from him."

Taoist Gongsun said: "There is something you should know, brother. My old teacher, the Great Sage, said these words to me many times: 'In Jingyuan there is someone they call the Wizard, who knows the rudiments of Taoism and came to me as a seeker after the Way. Initially I rejected him, because of a certain devilish spirit in him, because he had a base nature with a propensity to evil and because the time was not ripe. Latterly the evil of his nature has been in retreat: a happier destiny has superseded and he has turned to virtue. If haply his path crosses yours, you can reform him and once equipped with my mystic powers there will be profit from him in times to come.' On the way here from Weizhou, in obedience to your orders, I made some inquiries about this enemy with magic powers, and Marshal Zhang told me that the general who surrendered to you, Geng Gong, knows him well. Apparently he is that same Wizard my master spoke of. We have already seen that his magic is on a par with mine. It's only with the Five Thunders method, imparted to me by the Great Sage, that I was able to overcome him. This district is called *Good*borough, which fits in with my teacher's verse: 'Turn to *good* and beat the devils.' If we allow him to escape, most likely he will go to perdition and my master's mantra will not be fulfilled. This opportunity must not be lost. That is why I must continue the pursuit and find a way to make him surrender."

This long speech made all clear to Song Jiang and he was full of gratitude. With the rest of the leaders and troops he withdrew to the camp for food and rest, while Taoist Gongsun with Demon King and the Fire and Water Generals and ten thousand troops pursued the Wizard as proposed. Meanwhile the Wizard and his two commanders with the remnants of their army, some five thousand men all told, had approached Goodborough from the west. They were heading for the west gate when suddenly drums and trumpets sounded and a fierce squadron of cavalry emerged from behind a thick wood and charged. At its head were Short-Arse and Blackface. They rapidly deployed their five hundred men and blocked his way to the city. The Wizard's two lieutenants led a desperate charge. Their opponents, in accordance with Taoist Gongsun's orders, made sure they could not enter the city but did not actively engage them either and let them get away to the north. The defenders of the city had heard that the Wizard's magic had failed him, that he had suffered defeat and that the Song forces were strong. They were anxious about their defences and reinforced all the gates. They made no attempt to open them and come to their leader's assistance. Not long after this Blackface and Short-Arse were joined by Taoist Gongsun and his forces. "You two had better go back to the main camp for rest and food," he told them. "I am going to continue the pursuit."

They did as told. It was late afternoon. The Wizard and his companions were hurrying north, like dogs kicked out of the house or fish escaped from the net, with Gongsun and his commanders in hot pursuit. Taoist Gongsun shouted after them: "Dismount and surrender, it's futile to resist!"

The Wizard shouted back: "Everyone must serve his own master, why do you seek my destruction?"

Dusk had already fallen. The Song troops had lit torches and flares which illuminated the scene as brightly as day. When the Wizard looked about him, he could only see his two commanders and about thirty troopers. The remainder of his force had fled in all directions. He was about to draw his sword and kill himself but one of his lieutenants stayed his arm and said: "You must not do it, Your Honour." He pointed to the mountains which lay ahead of them and said: "We can take refuge up there." The Wizard, at the limit of his powers, followed his 2 commanders into the mountains. Now, north east of Goodborough was a mountain range

called the Hundred Valleys, a spot where the legendary emperor, Shennong, inventor of agriculture, used to test the crops. There was a place there known as Shennong's Temple. This is where the Wizard and his companions set up camp. There were now only some fifteen men with them. The reason why Taoist Gongsun had allowed him to escape into the mountains was that he wanted to force his surrender. If the Song force had caught him they would have killed him, even if there had been not one but five thousand of him. But enough of this. Suffice to say that after allowing him to escape into the mountains Taoist Gongsun divided his men into four sections and posted them on all sides of the Hundred Valleys. In the second watch a host of torches appeared, one lot on the east and another on the west. This was because Song Jiang on returning to base had ordered Leopard's Head and Hotshot out on patrol that night, each with five thousand men. When they joined up with Taoist Gongsun it made a force of twenty thousand in two camps. They had the Wizard thoroughly surrounded, as you can imagine.

When Song Jiang heard next day that Taoist Gongsun had got the Wizard and his forces bottled up in the 100 Valleys, he made plans with the Professor to attack Goodborough. Orders were given to strike camp and March on the city. But the surrounding water had still not drained away. The defenders of the city had strengthened the moat and after two days, it still had not fallen. In his camp south of the city Song Jiang was depressed at the failure. Since the day Iron Ox and his companions were taken prisoner nothing had been heard of their condition and Song Jiang's heart bled for them. The Professor sought to comfort him: "Stop worrying, brother. The city should fall into our hands for the mere cost of a few pieces of paper."

"What's your idea?" Song Jiang asked eagerly. Calmly the Professor placed 2 fingers together and expounded his plan. It was to have important results.

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**Commissioner Chen takes over the administration; Princess Jade Arrowtip becomes a leader of men**

Then the Professor said to Song Jiang: "The garrison of the city are weak and vulnerable. Previously they relied on the Wizard's magic. Now he has been defeated and they know they are not going to be relieved; they are bound to be scared. I had a look early this morning from an observation platform and the guards on the walls look demoralized. Now we can take advantage of their distress to open up a new route. Tomorrow the seriousness of their predicament will induce them to surrender and the city will fall into our hands with no bloodshed at all."

Song Jiang was delighted with this: "Your counsel is always invaluable, Professor," he said. After their deliberations, a dozen or so copies of a military dispatch were produced. It read as follows:

*Song Jiang, Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Pacification Expedition to the North to the garrison commanders and the citizens of Goodborough:*

*Tian Hu's crime of rebellion is subject to the full penalty of the law, but his allies and accomplices may be excused. If garrison commanders repent of their errors and return to the right path, and having resolved to turn over a new leaf order their troops and people to open the gates and surrender, I will vouchsafe to petition the Emperor for a pardon. If your commanders remain obdurate, then all and sundry, both the military and civilians,must, as the Emperor's loyal subjects, do what is right by overpowering the military commanders and reinstating allegiance to the Emperor. The leaders will be richly rewarded and may expect honours and rank. If you persist in error or shirk your duty the city will be taken and not a stone will be left standing nor a single person alive. This is our word.*

Song Jiang gave orders for this proclamation to be attached to the heads of arrows that were fired into the city from all sides. He ordered the commanders attacking the gates to relax the pressure and observe developments within. Next day at dawn a huge outcry was heard in the city, following which flags of surrender were raised on all the gates. Two junior officers of the garrison had killed the three commanders and their heads were displayed on poles as a sign to the Song army. Iron Ox and the others were released from the gaol and mounted in sedans; the gates were thrown open and they were escorted triumphantly out of the city. The people then lit incense and candles to welcome the army. Song Jiang ordered the commanders of all units to form up their troops and march in good order into the city. Not a blow had been struck, not a soul had been harmed and the populace expressed their joy vociferously.

Once Song Jiang was ensconced in the government offices, Iron Ox and his companions entered and said: "We had almost given up hope brother! It is only because of you we are able to meet again. It is like a dream!"

Song Jiang and the others wept tears of relief. Later the leaders of the uprising came forward and prostrated themselves. Song Jiang hurriedly returned the compliment and raised them up saying: "You have done the proper thing, your lives are secure. There is no need for this ceremony."

They replied: "Immediate surrender was our only chance to escape punishment. Your graciousness is engraved on our hearts, we owe you our lives." They also gave a full account of how Monk, Iron Ox and the others had never faltered but had steadfastly abused their captors. Song Jiang was moved to tears of admiration.

Iron Ox said: "They tell me that lousy bugger is holed up over in Hundred Valleys. Let me go and chop the fucker up, to relieve my fucking feelings."

Song Jiang said: "Taoist Gongsun and his men have got the Wizard penned in there, because he wants him to surrender. It's something to do with a mantra of the Great Sage's. So hold your horses!"

Monk said to Iron Ox: "Listen to the Leader's orders! You must!" So Iron Ox desisted.

Song Jiang now issued a proclamation to allay the people's fears, rewarded the army commanders and had the exploits of Taoist Gongsun and the leaders of the uprising recorded. He was busy with military matters when it was reported that the Magic Messenger had returned. As soon as he entered Song Jiang asked him the news from Jinning.

Magic Messenger reported as follows: "I went to Jinning as you ordered and found the Unicorn attacking the city. He said to me: 'Wait till I've got the better of this lot, and then you can go back and tell our Leader the good news.' He kept me there three or four days, but Jinning simply would not fall. Then one evening on the sixth of this month there was a thick fog, so thick you couldn't see in front of your nose, and the Unicorn ordered his men to place sandbags surreptitiously under the walls. Around midnight, when the sentries on the northeast had grown careless, our troops crept up by means of the sand bags onto the city walls and killed a number of guards. Tian Biao fled via the north gate. His remaining commanders surrendered. More than five thousand war horses were taken and over twenty thousand troops gave themselves up. A considerable number were killed.

"The Unicorn now had control of Jinning. When daylight came the mist lifted. As the pacification process was proceeding it was suddenly reported that Tian Hu's deputy chancellor Sun An and ten lieutenants had arrived on the scene with a relief force of twenty thousand and had taken up a position only a few miles from the city. The Unicorn ordered Thunderclap and three others out to oppose the Chancellor and himself led the reserves. Thunderclap and the Chancellor fought sixty bouts but it was a stalemate. When the Unicorn arrived with his troops, he was impressed by the Chancellor's valour and ordered the gongs sounded to break off the fight. The Chancellor did likewise and everyone returned to camp.

"The Unicorn told everyone that such a brave antagonist would have to be defeated by guile, not force. Next day he laid an ambush and then rode forth himself to challenge the Chancellor. When they had fought some fifty bouts the Chancellor's horse suddenly stumbled and threw him. 'That does not count,' the Unicorn shouted to him. 'Quickly, get yourself a new mount!' The Chancellor found himself a new horse and they fought another fifty bouts. Then Unicorn feigned defeat and galloped off luring his opponent towards the edge of a wood. A report rang out and from either side the troops who had been waiting in ambush rushed out. The Chancellor had no time to act: his horse stumbled on the trip wires and the troops rushed up and seized both man and horse. Three other northern commanders dashed to the rescue, but were halted by the Blue-Faced Beast, Golden Wings and Redeye. As they fought it out, three pairs of riders, the Blue-Faced Beast gave a sudden cry and lunged with his spear, knocking his opponent from his horse. Golden Wings tricked his adversary into thrusting with his sword and dodged aside so that the blow hit only the air, and before he could recover Golden Wings' spear had pierced his heart. The third northern commander, seeing his two comrades fall, slapped his horse and galloped back towards his own ranks. But Redeye gave chase and brought his axe down on his head, smashing both the helmet and the skull inside. The Unicorn now urged his troops forward and the northerners were routed. Four or five thousand were killed and the rest ran three miles or more before making camp.

"Our troops returned victorious to the city. Some of them brought in the Chancellor, bound hand and foot. The Unicorn personally released his bonds and received him with the utmost courtesy, urging him to renew his allegiance to the Emperor. When he found the Unicorn's treatment so honourable, the Chancellor was willing enough to cooperate. He said to the Unicorn: 'There are still seven commanders and fifteen thousand troops at large. Will you allow me to go and negotiate their surrender?' The Unicorn could see no objection to this. The Chancellor rode by himself to the northern camp and talked the seven into surrendering. The Unicorn was delighted to see them and entertained them with wine. The Chancellor said: 'I marched out of Weisheng at the same time as the Wizard, who headed off to relieve Kettle Pass. This fellow has magic powers. I am afraid General Song may have some trouble with him. The Wizard and I are fellow countrymen. On account of your generosity towards me I would like to go to Kettle Pass and find out what is going on. I will try to persuade the Wizard to surrender.' The Unicorn gave his consent and sent me along with the Chancellor to report the victory. He told off the Son-in-Law and three others with twenty thousand troops to reinforce the garrison at Jinning. He is taking the remainder to attack Fenyang. We left only yesterday but I let the Chancellor do the magic walking with me. Today on the road I learnt that you were besieging Goodborough and that you had the Wizard surrounded. Just before we got here I heard that you had taken the city so I came here at once. The Chancellor is waiting outside."

Song Jiang was very pleased and told Magic Messenger to show the Chancellor in.

When the latter entered, Song Jiang saw it was someone quite out of the ordinary, of noble mien and dignified bearing. He came down to welcome him.

"I deserve a thousand deaths for opposing you." The Chancellor said, kowtowing respectfully.

Song Jiang returned his greeting and insisted: "You have changed your ways and returned to the right path, help me to subdue Tian Hu and when we return we will petition the court. You are sure to be rewarded with office." The Chancellor thanked him and stood up. Song Jiang bade him be seated and poured wine for him.

"The Wizard's magic is dangerous," he said. "It is fortunate that Taoist Gongsun was able to defeat it."

"Taoist Gongsun wants him to surrender, so he can put him back on the right track," said Song Jiang. "He has been holed up there for three or four days, but he still shows no sign of surrendering."

"We are good friends," said the other. "I must go and tell him to surrender."

Song Jiang sent him off by the north gate with Magic Messenger to Taoist Gongsun's camp. When the Chancellor explained his intentions, Taoist Gongsun was pleased and gave him permission to climb the mountain and seek out the Wizard. He rode off up the mountain alone.

The Wizard, remember, was hiding out with the two commanders and fifteen soldiers in the Shennong temple where they survived by sharing the Taoists' vegetarian food. There were only three Taoists at the temple and the Wizard and his party had soon eaten up all the food it had taken them months to collect from the faithful, but since they were outnumbered they had to put up with it. The Wizard heard the hubbub that day in the city below and climbed a ridge to see what was going on. When he saw soldiers all round outside the walls and people coming and going through the gates, he knew it had already fallen to Song Jiang. As he was lamenting this, he noticed a woodcutter emerge from a wood on the hillside below, with an axe stuck through his belt and a staff over his shoulder. Slowly and deliberately the man wended his way up the mountainside, singing to himself:

*On the way up: hauling a boat.*
*On the way down: go with the flow.*
*Hauling a boat: nowt but a chore.*
*Go with the flow: please thyself.*
*On the way up is not so bad:*
*Get to the top, 'tis all the way down.*

As he listened to this little woodcutter's ditty, the Wizard felt uncertain. "Do you know what the news is of the city?" he asked the man.

"The deputy governor has been killed by his two subordinates and the city has gone over to the Song," the man replied. "Song Jiang's force captured it without striking a blow."

"So that's the way it is," said the Wizard. The woodcutter completed his ascent and having reached the top headed off round the shoulder of the hill. A man on horseback now appeared, also making his way up the hill towards the temple. The Wizard was surprised to recognize Chancellor Sun An. What was he doing here? The Chancellor dismounted and made obeisance. "You were leading the relief column to Jinning, Chancellor," the Wizard said. "Why are you here on your own? It's swarming with troops down there. Why did they let you through?"

"Let me explain, brother ..." the Chancellor said. Noticing that the Chancellor failed to address him as Lord Protector, the Wizard realized something was wrong. "Let us go into the temple," the Chancellor said, "and I will tell you everything."

After the Wizard's two commanders had been introduced, the Chancellor recounted the fall of Jinning. The Wizard was struck speechless. "Do not be mistrustful, brother," the Chancellor said. "General Song is completely just, and if we enter his service and renew our allegiance to the Emperor, we will not be losers by it. I have come here to find you. Did you not once seek knowledge from the Great Sage?"

"How did you know about that?" the Wizard asked.

"The Great Sage would not receive you and sent an acolyte to tell you that you should 'Turn to good and beat the demons', am I right?"

"Yes, yes," the Wizard replied eagerly.

"Do you know who it was who broke the power of your magic?" the Chancellor asked.

"My adversary! I only know that he is one of Song Jiang's people. I know nothing of his background."

"He is the Great Sage's disciple, his name is Gongsun Sheng and he is one of Song Jiang's deputies. It was he who explained that mantra to me. This place is called Zhaode or Goodborough. Don't you see how the collapse of your magic power accords with the saying: 'Turn to good and beat the demons'? Gongsun Sheng has the Great Sage's injunction to reform you and set you back on the right path. That is why he has you surrounded here but has not come up to capture you. He has the means to overcome you and if he wished you harm what would stop him? Please see the truth."

These words effected in the Wizard a great awakening and with his lieutenants he duly accompanied the Chancellor down the mountain to where Taoist Gongsun was camped.

When the Chancellor announced him, Taoist Gongsun came out to welcome him into the camp. The Wizard prostrated himself and asked for pardon: "You show me such mercy as I do not deserve. After the trouble I have given you, it makes my guilt even greater."

Taoist Gongsun returned his greeting with alacrity and entertained him warmly. Seeing the other treated him so honourably, the Wizard said: "I was blind not to recognize a good man. If I am permitted to serve you I shall be happy all my life."

Taoist Gongsun now called off the siege and his commanders on all sides packed up and followed him back into the city. Song Jiang also received them most courteously and spoke conciliatory words. The Wizard, seeing Song Jiang's friendliness, was even more pleased. The other Song commanders arrived and Song Jiang ordered them all to be quartered inside the city. Wine was served in celebration. During the banquet, Taoist Gongsun said to the Wizard: "This magic of yours, at the highest level it can't compare with the Nirvana that the Boddhisattvas for aeons past attest to, the sense of being at home in mystic knowledge. And at the ordinary level it's no more than what the thirty-six immortals of Fairyland can achieve when years of exercises have enabled them to practise the art of metamorphosis, transcending the world of appearances and knowing the joy of creation. All you've got is a few borrowed spells which allow you to usurp natural powers and call ghosts and spirits to your aid, what in Buddhism they call sorcery and in Taoism we call necromancy. If you think this knowledge will enable you to transcend the mundane and achieve pure spirituality, what a huge error that is!"

When he heard all this the Wizard felt as if he had woken from a dream. He prostrated himself before Taoist Gongsun and called him master. The others too after listening to the Taoist's explanation of these secret mysteries were awed by his spiritual prowess. Finally the party broke up and they all went to bed. The night was uneventful.

Next day Song Jiang told Magic Hand to write out a report informing the court of the capture of Jinning and Goodborough and requesting Marshal Su to appoint officials to fill the vacant posts in the six captured cities as quickly as possible so the rest of them could get on with the campaign. As soon as this document had been satisfactorily drafted it was entrusted to Magic Messenger to deliver, with orders to start at once.

Magic Messenger packed his bags, chose a fleet-footed orderly to accompany him, bade farewell to Song Jiang and with his magic walking reached the Eastern Capital next day. He went straight to Marshal Su's palace to hand in the report and was lucky enough to catch the Marshal in his office. He spoke to one major-domo Yang, to whom he gave some small monetary gifts, asking him to see that the report reached the Marshal. Yang took it in and a few minutes later returned to say: "The Marshal orders you to attend on him." Magic Messenger followed him inside. He found the Marshal ensconced on his throne reading the report. When Magic Messenger had paid his respects the Marshal said: "This is a critical juncture and your arrival is most timely. The other day the Grand Preceptor and his gang in the presence of the Emperor brought accusations against your leader of incurring heavy losses of commanders and men, betraying public trust and shaming the country. They launched this campaign of defamation to persuade the Emperor to impose heavy penalties. The Emperor prevaricated. Then Deputy Chief Minister Chen memorialized him, accusing the Grand Preceptor and company of making false accusations against good men and picking on the innocent. He said that you had broken through Kettle Pass and asked for your accusers to be punished for bearing false witness. This only made the Grand Preceptor more determined to secure Chen's downfall. Yesterday he told the Emperor that Chen was author of a slanderous book, *In Praise of Yao*. Yao was supposed to represent the Emperor Shenzong and in some way this implied a criticism of himself. He wanted Chen punished for slander. Fortunately the Emperor has not yet pronounced judgement. This report of victory you bring will not only save Chen's bacon but also take a lot of pressure off me. I shall report this at tomorrow's dawn court." Magic Messenger thanked him and went to find somewhere to rest and await the outcome. Of this no more.

Next morning Marshal Su attended the dawn court, which was held in the Hall of Culture and Ethics. Immediately after the acclamation, Marshal Su announced Song Jiang's victories and told how he was in hot pursuit of Tian Hu and had won control of six provinces, as reported by a messenger who had just arrived from him. His Majesty expressed his complete satisfaction. Marshal Su also said: "As for the accusation that Deputy Chief Minister Chen wrote *In Praise of Yao* to represent the former emperor as Yao and Your Majesty as Shun, since when was praising Yao a crime? Minister Chen is honest and straightforward. He deals with affairs in a forthright manner and is brave and resourceful. I request that he be promoted and sent to Hebei to oversee the army. He is sure to achieve good results." The Emperor gave his consent and issued a proclamation saying: "Minister Chen is hereby promoted to Marshal and entrusted with the Northern Pacification Campaign. Imperial Commissioner Chen is to proceed with twenty thousand imperial guards to Song Jiang's headquarters to take over the running of the campaign. He is to take silver to pay them and reward commanders and men."

The court broke up and Marshal Su returned to his residence and summoned Magic Messenger to receive the reply. Magic Messenger after learning the outcome bade the Marshal farewell, and left the capital. Doing his magic walking he reached Goodborough next day. The whole trip had only taken him four days.

Song Jiang was busy arranging his forces and discussing the next campaign. When Magic Messenger returned he asked at once for news of the mission. Magic Messenger delivered Marshal Su's reply. When he had read it Song Jiang gave a full account to the other leaders. They all said: "That Commissioner Chen's a brave man! We'd better not just sit here twiddling our thumbs!" Song Jiang announced that the next attack would start as soon as they received the imperial edict. They all took note and remained in their quarters in the city. Of this no more.

Now north of Goodborough in the same province was the town of Lu. When Chi Fang, commander of the garrison there, heard that the Wizard was cut off, he sent a messenger to Weisheng by night with an urgent report for Tian Hu. The head of Tian Hu's bogus administration received it and was just about to take it in when the news suddenly broke that Jinning had fallen and that Third Prince Tian Biao was fleeing for his life. Hard on the heels of this news came the arrival of Tian Biao himself.

The Third Prince went in with the minister and prostrated himself before Tian Hu. He broke out into a loud wailing: "The Song army are too strong. They have captured Jinning and killed my son. I only just managed to escape. I have betrayed the trust you placed in me. I deserve a million deaths!"

The Third Prince continued to weep as the minister also reported his news: "I have also received a report from the commander of Lu saying that the Wizard is cut off by the Song forces and the fall of Goodborough is imminent."

Tian Hu hastily summoned all his officials, including the president, the vice-president and the army commander to discuss the situation. "Song Jiang has violated our borders, seized two of our main cities, killed many of our troops and is presently besieging the Wizard, what are you all going to do about it?"

At this point the Royal Brother-in-Law Wu Li spoke out: "There's no need to worry Your Majesty! I know my duty to my country, I shall raise an army and set off for Goodborough and in short order capture that Song Jiang and his rabble, and restore the cities to your rule."

This Royal Brother-in-Law was originally just a rich man of Weisheng. He was profoundly skilled in the use of spear and staff and immensely strong. He was a good shot too with the bow and wielded a fifty catty wind-splitter of a sword. Tian Hu was captivated by the beauty of his young sister and married her. He subsequently made the brother Grand Marshal, with the title "Royal Brother-in-Law".

The Royal Brother-in-Law went on: "My daughter Qiongying recently dreamt that a spiritual being had instructed her in the martial arts. When she awoke she found she was endowed with outstanding strength. Not only is her martial skill exceptional but she also has another miraculous talent. She can throw a stone and kill a bird ten times out of ten. People have taken to calling her 'Jade Arrowtip' I shall make her commander of my vanguard and I am confident she will achieve great things."

After the Emperor had confirmed their appointment and the Royal Brother-in-Law had thanked him, army commander Ma Ling announced, "I'd like to lead a force against the enemy at Fenyang." Tian Hu was pleased and granted him a seal and a general's banner, as well as jewellery. The Royal Brother-in-Law and Ma Ling each received 30000 troops and rapidly prepared to march. We shall say nothing of Ma Ling and his force as they march towards Fenyang but turn our attention to the Royal Brother-in-Law as, armed with the King's commission, he goes down to the parade ground to select thirty thousand troops, and organise arms and equipment for them. Returning to his residence he gave his daughter her orders as leader of the vanguard, took leave of Tian Hu and mustered his troops for the march. So Jade Arrowtip under her father's command marched on Goodborough. The intervention of this woman warrior was to have consequences.

*A chaste maid feels hatred beyond endurance;*
*A hero discovers the joys of matrimony.*

## Hotshot meets his destined bride; The Professor plans to poison the Royal Brother-in-Law

The Royal Brother-in-Law has made his daughter Jade Arrowtip commander of the vanguard and is himself following on behind with the main army. The girl was just sixteen, a lass beautiful as a flower. She was not his real daughter. Her original name was Qiu and she was the daughter of a man called Qiu Shen. Her home was in a little Fenyang village called Flossdown. This incidentally was the same Flossdown that was famous in the days of Duke Jin of the Spring and Autumn period. Her father, who was quite a rich man, attained the age of fifty without having a male heir. Happening to lose his wife, he took a second wife — a girl from another village — and she gave birth to Jade Arrowtip. When the girl was ten, her grandfather passed away and her mother had to go back to her native village with her husband Qiu Shen for the funeral. This village was in the next district, more than twenty miles away. Since it was so far, they were obliged to leave the child behind in the care of their butler Ye Qing and his wife. When they were half way there, a band of robbers suddenly materialized and killed the husband, scattered the retainers and kidnapped the wife. The retainers made their way back and told the butler, Ye Qing, what had happened. Now although this Ye Qing was only in service, he was what could be called a man of honour and knew something of spear and staff play. His wife besides was a sensible woman. When Butler Ye Qing told his employer's relatives, the latter appealed to the police to catch the robbers and buried the body. But the Qius' only real concern was to secure the inheritance for one of their own, and the butler and his wife were left to take care of their young mistress. A year or more later when Tian Hu's rebellion broke out, he seized Weisheng and sent out the Royal Brother-in-Law to plunder. When the latter got to Flossdown and started grabbing all the riches and kidnapping men and women, the Qiu heir was killed by Tian Hu's rebels and Butler Ye Qing and his wife together with Jade Arrowtip were all seized.

Now the Royal Brother-in-Law had no children. Struck by Jade Arrowtip's beauty he took her to show to his wife, whose name was Ni. Never having had a child of her own, Mistress Ni loved Jade Arrowtip at first sight and treated her as a daughter. From the start Arrowtip was extremely clever and had a hundred pretty wiles. Realizing she could not run away, since she had no relatives to turn to, and knowing Mistress Ni loved her, she persuaded her adoptive father to take Butler Ye Qing's wife An into his employ. As a result the butler's wife and Arrowtip were inseparable.

When he was first arrested, Butler Ye Qing had thought about escaping. But Arrowtip was still young and he and his wife were virtually all she had left in the world, and he realized that if he ran away there was no knowing what would become of her. It was fortunate his wife was there for her and if the opportunity presented itself he would try to get them all to safety. His master had met his end, he was no more. Then there was nothing for it but to serve the Royal Brother-in-Law.

After a successful campaign the Royal Brother-in-Law gave Butler Ye Qing his wife back, but she continued to come and go in the governor's residence and report the news to Jade Arrowtip. The Royal Brother-in-Law petitioned Tian Hu and Butler Ye Qing was given an official position.

Later the Butler was sent by the Royal Brother-in-Law to the Stonehouse Hills to fetch timber and stones. A member of his military escort pointed at the cliffs and said: "There is some beautiful rock there that is white as snow, absolutely flawless. The local inhabitants tried to carry it off and there was a tremendous clap of thunder and some of those who were trying to take it fainted from terror and did not come to for quite a while. Now they all bite their fingers and pray and daren't go near it."

When the Butler went with them to look, everyone cried out in amazement: "How extraordinary! Before it was just a block of white stone, now it's turned into a woman's body!"

The Butler went up to it and had a good look. Truly it was extraordinary. It was the body of his late mistress. The face was quite unharmed, but the skull was shattered, as if she had fallen off the cliff. He shed tears of horror and amazement, but this was not the time or place for explanation.

At this point a soldier stepped forward: he had been one of Tian Hu's grooms and he gave a detailed account of Mistress Song's capture and death. "It was back in the first days of the Prince's rebellion, in a place called Jiexiu, that he kidnapped this woman, intending to make her his concubine. She persuaded him to free her from her bonds. When they got here she threw herself down from the top of the cliff and died. Seeing she was dead, the king told me to strip off her clothes and jewellery. I actually lifted her onto my horse and took off her clothes, I got a very good look at her face, there can be absolutely no doubt that it's her. That was over three years ago, and the body is still in perfect condition."

The Butler wept copiously at this tale. Turning to the soldier he said: "I recognize her too. It's Mistress Song, the daughter of my neighbour." He ordered the soldiers to bury the body, and lo and behold, it was a block of white stone again. Everyone was full of wonder as they went off to complete their business fetching stone. When the Butler returned to Weisheng he told his wife how Tian Hu had kidnapped Mistress Song and how she had killed herself to preserve her chastity. He asked her to inform Arrowtip discreetly.

When Arrowtip heard this it was as if a thousand arrows pierced her heart. All the time she had to repress her tears and grieve in secret but not for a moment did she abandon her thoughts of revenge. When she closed her eyes one night a spirit appeared to her and said: "If you want to avenge your parents, let me teach you martial arts." She was a clever girl and when she awoke she remembered everything. She secretly got a staff, bolted the door of her room and practised. After quite a while she was expert. Gradually the winter of the fourth year of the reign drew near. One evening Arrowtip happened to fall asleep with her head resting on the table. Suddenly there was a rush of wind and a strange scent assailed her nostrils. A scholar appeared, wearing a turban, accompanied by a young warrior in a green robe, whose role was to teach her the art of throwing stones. The scholar said to her: "I went all the way to Gaoping to invite the Unshakeable Star here to instruct you in magic skills that will save you from the tiger's den and enable you to avenge your family. This gentle-man is also your destined partner from a previous incarnation." These last words were a cause of such embarrassment that she quickly covered her face with her sleeve. In doing so she brushed the knife. The clatter it made woke her to the cold moonlight and a dying lamp. It was like a dream and not a dream. She sat there for a long time in a daze before she lay down to sleep again.

Next day she remembered about the art of throwing stones. She picked up a round stone the size of a chicken's egg outside her window and without thinking threw it at the upward-pointing finial on the ridge of the roof. It was a direct hit and with a crash the tile shattered into a thousand pieces which fell in a cloud to the ground. The noise brought Mistress Ni, her adoptive mother, running to see what had happened. Arrowtip artfully explained: "Last night I dreamt that a god came to me and said: 'Your father has a royal destiny. I have come to teach you the mystic arts of battle, to help your father in his ambition.' Just now I picked up a stone and threw it without thinking and it broke the tile on the roof."

Mistress Ni was astonished. She reported the tale to her husband who refused to believe it and summoned Arrowtip for questioning. When she was tested in the handling of spear, sword (long and short), halberd, cudgel, staff, trident and harrow, she was found to be proficient in them all. As for the art of stone-throwing, she never missed! The Royal Brother-in-Law thought to himself in amazement: "I am indeed destined to fortune. Some kind of heavenly spirit is aiding me." The upshot was that he ordered Arrowtip to practise her horsemanship and swordplay and news of her prowess spread throughout the household and the people of Weisheng also became excited. They dubbed her "Jade Arrowtip". The Royal Brother-in-Law wanted to find a husband for Arrowtip but she said to his wife: "I won't marry anyone but a stone-thrower. If you try to marry me to anyone else, I shall kill myself." Mistress Ni told this to her husband, who decided the whole business was too difficult and gave up the idea.

The two words "royal destiny" burgeoned in the Royal Brother-in-Law's mind and he made Arrowtip commander of his vanguard. His idea was that a split between two factions would allow him to take the middle ground and assume the rule himself. He picked his troops carefully, instructed his officers and marched out of Weisheng. He allotted five thousand picked troops to Arrowtip in the vanguard, whilst he himself followed on with the main army.

We shall leave the Royal Brother-in-Law and his adopted daughter Jade Arrowtip as they advance, and turn to Song Jiang and company who were waiting for the arrival of Commissioner Chen in Goodborough. After ten days it was announced that he had come. Song Jiang led the others a long way out of the city to meet him and escort him to his quarters in the governor's residence which for the time being was to serve as military headquarters. They all paid their respects. The Commissioner knew all about Song Jiang's virtues but happened not to have met Song Jiang face to face. Now that he saw his modesty and generous spirit he felt even more respect for him. "His Majesty, who has heard of your repeated successes, has sent me here to supervise operations. I come with carts loaded with gold, silver and silk to reward you all."

They prostrated themselves in thanks and said: "We are grateful, Your Excellency, for all you have done on our behalf. We know it is you who have won us this reward. The Emperor's favour comes to us as a result of your merit and even if we lay down our lives for you we can never adequately repay you."

The Commissioner said: "You have done sterling work. When you return to the capital the Emperor will find you important posts."

Song Jiang again prostrated himself and said: "May it please you, Your Excellency, to undertake the administration of Goodborough, so that we are free to deploy our forces and attack Tian Hu in his lair and disrupt his forces."

The Commissioner said: "Before I left the capital I mentioned to the Emperor that the cities you have captured lack administrative officers and a time limit was set for them to start their duties. They should arrive any day now."

Song Jiang distributed the reward among the army and at the same time composed a dispatch with which he sent Magic Messenger to every district and village ordering his commanders to await the arrival of the new officials and then hand over to them and report back for duty with their troops. He sent to Fenyang for news of the situation there. He informed the Commissioner of the contribution made by Tang Bin who had surrendered in Hebei, and recommended the two leaders of the uprising in the city for the command at Kettle Pass and Calf Mountain, in order to release Colonel Sun and Whiskers for further duties. The Commissioner agreed to everything.

Suddenly an urgent report came in from the scouts. "Tian Hu has sent Ma Ling with a relief force for Fenyang and the Royal Brother-in-Law and Princess Jade Arrowtip are marching on Xiangyuan from the east."

After consulting the Professor, Song Jiang organized a force to meet the enemy. At this point the Wizard said: "Ma Ling possesses magic powers and has a method of magic walking. He carries a metal block which he throws with deadly accuracy. I have received many favours from you but I have not yet done anything for you. I would like to go with my master, Taoist Gongsun, to Fenyang and persuade Ma Ling to surrender."

Song Jiang was well pleased and ordered two thousand troops to accompany them. The two of them bade him farewell and set off at once.

Song Jiang now ordered Hasty with six other leaders and twenty thousand troops to attack Lu, while Short-Arse with Steelbright, Blackface, Auntie Gu and a thousand cavalry were to carry out reconnaissance and ascertain the position of the northern troops. He himself bade farewell to the Commissioner and marched out of Goodborough heading north with the main army, together with Chancellor Sun An, who had come over to them just recently, and thirty five thousand troops.

On reaching a point north of Mount Wuyin in Xiangyuan district Short-Arse and his patrol came upon the advance guard of the northern army under two commanders, one of them being the Butler. The two forces clashed, with drums thundering and waving banners. At the forefront of the northerners was the other commander, Sheng Ben. On the Song side Short-Arse galloped forward to do battle. Without a word he slapped his horse, twirled his spear and charged. A shout went up from both sides as Sheng Ben galloped to meet him. When they had fought a dozen bouts Steelbright rode out with whirling sword to support her husband. Two opponents at once was too much for Sheng Ben and he turned his horse and galloped off. Steelbright galloped in pursuit and cut him down with a blow of her sword. Short-Arse and his men charged and the Butler, unable to face them, hurriedly retreated. The Song forces gave chase and killed five hundred or more. The remainder scattered in all directions. The Butler, with no more than a hundred horsemen, fled to somewhere about eight miles south of Xiangyuan. Jade Arrowtip and her forces were encamped here.

Just six months before, Tian Hu had sent the Butler with General Xu Wei to the garrison of Xiangyuan. When the Butler heard that Jade Arrowtip, whom he had served so faithfully, remember, after her true parents were killed, had been made commander of the Royal Brother-in-Law's vanguard, he requested permission to take his troops out on reconnaissance hoping for a chance to meet up with his mistress. The Prince sent another of his officers, Sheng Ben, along with him and he was the one killed by Steelbright. The Butler now was fortunate enough to make contact with Jade Arrowtip's forces.

When the Butler came into the camp, he saw how his mistress had grown up: although a woman, her appearance was dignified and imposing and she bore herself like a true leader. The moment she saw who it was, she dismissed her aides and said to him: "Although I've escaped from the tiger's den, I've only got five thousand men. How am I going to avenge my parents? If I run away it seems like a betrayal. I am in a quandary and I was waiting for you."

The Butler said: "I have been thinking about it but I can't see any way. If I think of something, I'll let you know." He had hardly finished speaking when it was announced that the southerners were attacking. Jade Arrowtip armed at once and marched out to meet the enemy.

The two armies faced one another, banners and drums responding to each other on either side, the troops drawn up in battle formation. In the opening of the northern ranks a beautiful young woman warrior appeared, seated on a silver charger. On this young woman's standard it was clearly written: "Princess Jade Arrowtip, Leader of the Vanguard for the Expedition against the Southerners." Even the Song troops exclaimed in admiration. Stirring martial strains were heard on either side while brilliantly coloured embroidered banners blotted out the sun.

When Short-Arse saw it was a beautiful woman, well, naturally, he drove his horse forward, levelled his lance and charged. To cheers from either side, Jade Arrowtip slapped her horse, twirled her halberd and rode to meet him. After a dozen bouts, Short-Arse simply couldn't control his thoughts and his work with the spear became confused. Arrowtip thought to herself: "This man's disgusting!" She feinted and then slashed him in the left leg. His legs waved in the air and he fell headlong from his mount.

When Steelbright saw her husband wounded, she gave a furious shout: "You dirty bitch! What are you playing at?" and charged to the rescue. Arrowtip levelled her halberd and received the charge. Short-Arse was still floundering on the ground and the northerners surrounded him and took him captive. But Blackface and Auntie Gu snatched him away from them. Auntie Gu saw Steelbright could not get the better of Arrowtip and rode to her assistance, wielding her two swords. Imagine that encounter! Three women, six arms, four swords and a halberd, all whirling about like a snowstorm, like a shower of shattered crystal, like a blizzard of flower petals! So fast was the movement that to the eyes of the onlookers in the two armies it became just a blur! After twenty bouts Arrowtip feinted, then put up her halberd and fled, while the other two gave chase. Arrowtip switched the halberd to her left hand and in her right took a stone. She bent her willow waist, screwed up her eyes, took aim at Steelbright and let fly. It caught Steelbright on the wrist of her left arm. The pain caused her to drop one of her swords and she turned her horse and galloped back to her own ranks. Auntie Gu abandoned the chase and rode to help her comrade. Arrowtip reined in her horse and turned to chase them. Blackface furiously charged, waving his two rods. But before he arrived, a stone from Arrowtip clattered on his helmet of hardened bronze. That was enough for him. He abandoned the attack and galloped back to his own ranks. They all retreated with the wounded Short-Arse and Steelbright.

As Arrowtip was preparing to follow up, a loud report rang out. It happened to be the end of the second month, the time of year when there are willow branches in bud waving in the breeze and horses neighing restlessly in the meadows. Down the hillside raced a squadron of men: Leopard's Head and the Chancellor, together with Iron Ox and his infantry in support. The two groups met with thundering drums, waving flags and a continuous uproar. Eight-pointed lance at the ready, Leopard's Head led his troops forward. Opposite, Jade Arrowtip twirled her square halberd and urged her horse on. When Leopard's Head saw it was a woman he shouted: "What makes you think you can oppose the imperial army, you wretched female?"

Jade Arrowtip answered not a word but twirled her halberd, slapped her horse and charged. Leopard's Head rode to meet her. The horses clashed, the weapons were raised. After countless bouts Jade Arrowtip was too exhausted to block the blows so she dodged aside with a wild sweep of her halberd and turned her horse and fled eastwards. Leopard's Head galloped after. The Chancellor who was also out in front saw her banner and shouted: "Don't follow her commander, it's probably a trick." But a redoubtable warrior like Leopard's Head was not going to listen to that. He strove all the harder to catch her. Over the springy turf eight hooves clattered with the sound of upturned cups, as they flew like the wind.

Jade Arrowtip waited till Leopard's Head closed on her, then took the halberd in her left hand and reached into her saddlebag with the right, took out a stone, twisted in the saddle and launched the stone directly at his forehead. Leopard's Head was sharp-sighted and agile and he parried the stone with the butt of his spear. Seeing she had missed, she took another and it flashed through the air like a shooting star. With awesome accuracy it sped towards Leopard's Head. Too late he tried to dodge. The stone hit him in the face and the blood spurted out. He put up his lance and returned to his own side, pursued by Jade Arrowtip.

The Chancellor was just about to go forward when the men in his ranks made way and outpoured five hundred battle-hardened infantrymen led by Iron Ox, Monk, Pilgrim, Snake and Scorpion. Brandishing his axes Iron Ox charged forward shouting: "What's that bloody woman playing at?" Jade Arrowtip grasped another stone and flung it at Iron Ox, catching him square on the temple. Iron Ox had a shock but luckily his skin was tough and his bones strong. and though the wound was painful there was no serious damage. Seeing she could not knock him down, Jade Arrowtip galloped back to her own ranks. Iron Ox, tiger's whiskers bristling with indignation, eyes bulging in fury, roared into the attack. His comrades, fearing for his safety rushed after him. The Chancellor tried unavailingly to stop them. Jade Arrowtip saw them all coming and knocked Snake to the ground with another stone, whereupon the other three rushed to pick him up. Iron Ox was still out to get her, so she waited till he was close; her next stone caught him on the temple. This second hit drew blood. But Iron Ox was made of steel. Painted red with blood, that swarthy face seemed on fire. Whirling his axes he burst upon the northern ranks and began wreaking havoc.

The Chancellor had seen Jade Arrowtip return to her own ranks and mustered his men for a charge. But at this moment the Royal Brother-in-Law along with General Xu Wei and eight junior officers arrived with the northerners' main army and there was confused fighting on all sides. Monk and Pilgrim rescued Snake and then returned to the fray. Scorpion took charge of his brother and was trying to get him away from the fighting when they were overtaken by the enemy, bound and dragged back to the other side. Iron Ox's infantry were repulsed. But the Chancellor, fighting with desperate courage, cut one of the northern commanders down from his horse with a single sword blow. The Royal Brother-in-Law was also hit in the neck by an arrow fired by one of the Chancellor's men and fell from his horse. The General made a desperate charge, rescued him and put him on a horse.

When Jade Arrowtip and her commanders saw the Royal Brother-in-Law hit by an arrow, they hurriedly sounded a withdrawal. By now more Song troops were coming up from the south. This time it was Hotshot, who had received an urgent dispatch in the camp from which he learnt of a stone throwing woman warrior among the northerners who had wounded Steelbright and others. He wondered greatly at the report and begged Song Jiang to let him go at once to reinforce them, because he wanted to see this woman warrior for himself. But Jade Arrowtip had already withdrawn from the field. Escorting her adoptive father, the Royal Brother-in-Law, she was riding off towards Xiangyuan, skirting the great forest. Hotshot stared after her. The poem says:

*Proudly she turns her horse and rides away,*
*Surrounded by the bustle and pageantry of war.*
*She enters the forest and is lost to view,*
*Among multitudes of flowers, a flower's easily concealed.*

When the Chancellor saw Snake and Scorpion taken and Monk, Pilgrim and Iron Ox charging into battle, he would have liked to muster his troops and join in, but it was getting dark and he and Hotshot were obliged to protect Leopard's Head and order their troops back to camp.

Song Jiang was in his tent where Short-Arse's wounds were being attended to by Doctor An. Short-Arse turned out to be not only wounded in the foot, but also cut about the face. When Doctor An had finished treating him he turned his attention to Leopard's Head. Song Jiang was extremely upset when he heard Snake and Scorpion had been taken and the whereabouts of Iron Ox and the others were not known. In a little while the Pilgrim and Iron Ox appeared, muddy and bloodstained. "When I saw how excited Iron Ox was," said the former, "I was determined not to hold back. Together we murdered them, smashed right through them till we reached the city walls. There we found they had Snake and Scorpion tied up and were just about to take them inside. We killed the escort and grabbed our two comrades. But their general came up with the main army and recaptured them. We fought our way out and came back empty-handed. We don't know where Monk has got to."

Song Jiang's eyes filled with tears. He ordered search parties out in all directions to listen for any sign of Monk and told Doctor An to attend to Iron Ox. Night had now fallen. Song Jiang ordered a roll call and it was found they had lost more than three hundred. The defences were strengthened and alarms set up. Nothing happened that night. When it was reported early next morning that there was no news of Monk, Song Jiang grew still more gloomy. He sent Lungs and three others out to search, each with a detachment of light cavalry. He would have liked to attack the city himself, but too many of his leaders were wounded and he was obliged to rest his forces. Those in the city had barred and bolted their gates and did not come out to fight. After two days Perilous caught a spy and brought him in. The Chancellor recognized him as the northern superintendant, Butler Ye Qing. He said to Song Jiang: "From what I hear this is a brave man. He ventured out of the city all on his own. There must be something behind it." Song Jiang had the man's bonds released and told him to come forward. The Butler kowtowed repeatedly and said: "I have a secret matter to discuss. Please dismiss your aides and I will explain myself."

Song Jiang said: "These are all my friends. We have no secrets from each other. You may speak freely."

The Butler then said: "In the battle the other day, the Royal Brother-in-Law was hit by a poisoned arrow. He has become delirious and the doctors in the city can do nothing for him. On the pretext of looking for a doctor I have come out to make certain inquiries."

Song Jiang asked: "What are you doing about the two leaders of ours you captured the other day?"

"I didn't want any harm to come to them. Since the Royal Brother-in-Law's mind is not clear I have been giving the orders for him. For the time being the two commanders have been locked up and they are quite safe there."

The Butler told them what Tian Hu had done to Jade Arrowtip's true parents and all the rest of her story. When he finished he was overcome with grief.

Song Jiang remained uneasy. Since the Butler was a northerner, he feared a plot. As he was hesitating, Doctor An stepped forward and said: "Truly it must be a stroke of fate. This is no accident!"

Then he explained. "Last winter commander Zhang, our Hotshot that is, dreamed that a scholar asked him to go and teach a young woman how to throw stones. He also told him that this girl was destined for him as his wife. When he awoke he appeared to have lost his wits. That was when you sent me away with him to Gaoping for the rest cure. I took his pulse and realized it was some kind emotional disturbance. I questioned him at length and finally he confessed the cause of his illness and I was able to proceed with the cure. Now that we have heard this story of the Butler's, does it not sound exactly as if it refers to Hotshot?"

Song Jiang again asked the surrendered Chancellor, who replied: "I had certainly heard that Jade Arrowtip was not the Royal Son-in-Law's real daughter. One of my officers and the Royal Son-in-Law's aide are close friends, so I have heard quite a lot about the girl. The Butler's story could well be true."

The Butler said: "My mistress Jade Arrowtip is resolved to have vengeance and wipe out the disgrace. I have witnessed her ferocious courage in battle. I fear that if the city falls it will be reduced to rubble. I have risked death to come here. I implore you to help us."

The Professor stood up and took a long, hard look at the Butler. "His distress seems genuine," he said to Song Jiang. "I am sure he is honest. Heaven will favour your purposes and allow a filial daughter to have vengeance!" Then he lowered his voice and said to Song Jiang in confidence: "Although our forces are divided into three columns to attack, if Tian Hu joins up with the Jin, we will be caught between two fires. If the Jin refuse to take the field and Tian Hu's plan fails, he will surrender to them. Then how will we pacify the region? What I have in mind requires inside help. This is an opportunity. Given this match of Hotshot's, we need only do thus ... and thus ... Then Tian Hu's fate is in Jade Arrowtips's hands. The spirit Iron Ox saw in his dream is a harbinger of this. Don't you remember the lines he was told to memorize: 'To exterminate Tian Hu and his ilk, jade arrowtip must serve your purpose'?"

Song Jiang suddenly got the message and nodded enthusiastically. He summoned Hotshot, Doctor An and the Butler and explained the secret plan. They set off in accordance with their instructions.

Well, the commander of the garrison at Xiangyuan saw the Butler returning and heard him shout: "Quick, open the gates! I am Superintendant Ye Qing. I was sent to fetch doctors Quan Ling and Quan Yu and we've just arrived!" One of the guards reported it to the guard commander and shortly afterwards the order came back to open the gates. The Butler entered the city with his two doctors in tow. They went straight to the palace. From within came the order for them to enter and get to work. The Butler went in first with Quan Ling and asked among the staff and attendants for his mistress Jade Arrowtip, to whom he introduced the doctor. When they arrived at the Royal Brother-in-Law's couch they found him scarcely breathing. The doctor took his pulse and applied some ointment and gave him a tonic to take. In three days the patient's skin gradually regained a healthy colour and his appetite began to return. In just five days, although the wound had not fully healed his appetite was normal. He was delighted and told the Butler to bring the doctor in to see him. "Thanks to your brilliant treatment," he said to him, "my wound has healed. One day when I come into my own, you shall share in my fortune."
The doctor prostrated himself and said: "My skill is slight and unworthy. But I have a brother who was with me a long time in the rivers and lakes and who picked up some skill in martial arts. He is expert in making up medicines. I beg Your Excellency to give him advancement."
The Royal Brother-in-Law gave orders for the doctor's brother to be admitted. Since his appearance was quite out of the ordinary, the Royal Brother-in-Law was well pleased with him and told him to stay outside the palace and be ready for orders.
The two brothers kowtowed and left. Four days passed and then it was suddenly reported that Song Jiang was advancing on the city. When the Butler went to report this to the Royal Brother-in-Law he impressed on him that Song Jiang's forces were powerful and bold and only the Princess would be able to repel them.
The Royal Brother-in-Law ordered Jade Arrowtip down to the parade ground to organize an army. At this point the Doctor's brother said: "I am here at your service, Your Excellency. I have heard that the enemy are approaching. My ability is slight, but if you give me an army I will endeavour to see the enemy so beaten that nothing survives, not so much as a scrap of armour." Then the Butler feigning a great anger said to him: "Since you've got such a big mouth, do you dare test yourself by fighting me?"
Quan Yu replied with a laugh: "I studied the eighteen weapons from childhood, I am certainly your match."
The Butler requested the Royal Brother-in-Law's permission, which was granted, together with arms and a horse. The two men armed and mounted and went to it on the parade ground in front of the saluting post: backwards and forwards they fought, sculpted into a single block, moulded into a single mass, man against man, horse against horse. They fought forty or fifty bouts and neither had the advantage. All this time Jade Arrowtip was standing on the sidelines studying Quan Yu's face. Suddenly she exclaimed: "He looks like someone I saw before; his technique with the spear is just like mine." After pondering this for a while, she suddenly remembered: "The person in my dream, who taught me to throw stones, had a face like that. I wonder if he can throw stones too." Grasping her halberd she galloped forward and interposed it between the two combatants. She was afraid, you see, that the Butler might injure Quan Yu. She didn't know they were really both on the same side. With her halberd she aimed a blow at Quan Yu and he met it with his. They fought fifty bouts. Suddenly she turned her horse and galloped back towards the pavilion. Quan Yu raced after her. She grasped a stone, turned and flighted it towards the pit of his stomach. He saw it coming and stuck out his hand and caught it deftly. Marvelling at his dexterity, she took another stone to throw. As he saw her raise her arm, he also took a stone and threw it. There was a loud crack as the two stones met in mid-air and broke into splinters which fell to the ground.
The commander of the garrison, General Xu Wei, and most of the others were all manning the gates that day and there were only some junior officers at the parade ground. Some of these suspected Quan Yu might be a spy. But when they saw that their mistress Jade Arrowtip, who was a princess, was prepared to compete with him and since it was the Royal Brother-in-Law's own confidential aide Butler Ye Qing who had brought him in, it was impossible for anyone to raise objections. Evidently there was nothing to be done about it and they thought best to trim their sails to the wind. Anyway, Tian Hu was destined for defeat and heaven hid the truth from the Royal Brother-in-Law. He called Quan Yu in and presented him with robes, armour and a horse and gave him command of two thousand troops to go out and meet the enemy. Quan Yu thanked him and led his troops out of the city promising he would repulse the enemy and report victory when he returned. The Royal Brother-in-Law was delighted. Having rewarded Quan Yu he retired for the night, which passed uneventfully.
Next morning the Song troops had arrived and the Royal Brother-in-Law sent Quan Yu out with three thousand troops to engage them. From early morning till noon the attacks continued and Quan Yu put the Song commanders to flight with his stone throwing. He led his troops in a charge to occupy Mount Wuyin and Song Jiang's army were pushed right back and retreated to Goodborough. Quan Yu returned in triumph to the city and announced his success.
The Royal Brother-in-Law was tremendously pleased. "Now that you have this person," the Butler said to him, "and also Jade Arrowtip, there's no need to worry about how fierce the Song commanders are. How can we not prevail?" He also said: "Previously my mistress expressed a wish. She said she would only marry someone who could throw stones. This man is so valiant, he would not disgrace her."
The Butler persisted and finally the matrimonial union became a reality, settled and sealed irrevocably. The Royal Brother-in-Law having given his consent, the sixteenth of the third month was chosen as being an auspicious day, the appropriate ceremonies and feasting were laid on and Hotshot was welcomed into the family as son-in-law. There was music, singing and merriment that day, mountains of brocades and embroideries, meats and wine galore; it goes without saying that the bridal chamber was resplendent with lights. The best man conducted the ceremony. Side by side Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip dressed in their wedding finery did homage to the earth god and then to the Royal Brother-in-Law, her bogus father. Swelling music rose to heaven, rare perfumes tickled the senses. The couple made a solemn vow as they entered the bridal chamber. The Jade Arrowtip whom Hotshot observed in the light of the lamps was quite different from the one on the parade ground. There is a poem about this:

*Her fingers are soft as lotus in the pool,*
*Her waist more flexible than branches of the willow on the belvedere.*
*Her gliding steps' allure*
*A thing more rich than men's ability to find a price for.*
*Now as she turns her head under the lamplight,*
*It's an immortal you see.*
*Floating among heaven's peaks.*

From then on Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip were like fish and water, clasping each other close as lacquer or rubber, it goes without saying.
That night in bed Hotshot divulged to his bride his real name. He was in fact Hotshot Zhang Qing, a commander of the Song forces and Quan Ling the doctor was Doctor An, also of the Song army. Jade Arrowtip likewise recounted all her troubles. The sound of their voices went on all night. The plot was hatched in two days' time. The Royal Brother-in-Law was poisoned, General Xu Wei was inveigled into the palace for a secret meeting and also killed. The rest surrendered. Hotshot and Arrowtip ordered total secrecy in the city: anyone who betrayed the secret together with all his friends and family would be put to death. Any who opposed the uprising, military or civilian, would be liquidated. Thus the news was prevented from leaking out. Snake and Scorpion were released from prison and with Hotshot and the Butler took command of the four gates. Doctor An escorted by the Butler's men returned to Goodborough to inform Song Jiang. The Professor ordered Iron Ox and Pilgrim to take Magic Hand by night to see Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip in Xiangyuan, where he was to study samples of the Royal Brother-in-Law's handwriting and forge a letter telling Tian Hu how he, the Royal Brother-in-Law, had acquired a live-in son-in-law. The Butler was instructed to deliver this to Weisheng and see what happened. The Butler duly bade farewell and set off for Weisheng.
Back in Goodborough, after Magic Hand and Doctor An had left, Song Jiang heard that Hasty and the Spearsman had captured Lu. The messenger who reported the victory said: "When Hasty and his troops invested Lu, their commander barred the gates and refused battle. Spearsman and his men devised a plan: they stripped naked and taunted the defenders, working them up to such a pitch that they were desperate to fight and the commander had no alternative but to open the gates and attack. The northerners streamed out in all directions in a frenzy. Our men fought them and retreated at the same time, luring them on till they were scattered and far from the city. Then Tang Bin charged from the east and Spots from the west. Under pressure from both sides they could not get back and close the gates and Spots and Tang Bin fought their way inside and seized control. Spearsman ran the commander through with his lance and as for the others, some died and some fled. More than five thousand northerners were killed, three thousand war horses were taken and ten thousand troops captured alive. When Hasty and his party entered the city they reassured the people and sent off this report."
Song Jiang was delighted with the news. He composed a report for Commissioner Chen and recorded the exploits of Hasty and company and gave out rewards. He also wrote out a military order, requiring all units to return to base so they could launch a combined attack. The messenger returned to Lu.
In Weisheng the members of Tian Hu's military council kept getting reports of the Wizard and the Chancellor surrendering and Goodborough and Lu having fallen. Tian Hu had a shock when they informed him. As he was discussing with them what to do, it was reported that the aide to the commander of Xiangyuan, Butler Ye Qing had arrived with a letter from the Royal Brother-in-Law. Tian Hu had him shown in at once. Now this visit was to have important consequences. Weisheng would be razed to the ground and the robbers would gather there, a certain usurping prince would be taken alive.

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## The Monk is delivered from the well of karma; White-Water Dragon floods the town of Taiyuan

Now Tian Hu had received a letter delivered by Butler Ye Qing. He broke the seal and handed it to one of his officials who could read and had it read out to him. Here is what it said: "I, the Royal Brother-in-Law, have taken in a son-in-law named Quan Yu. This individual is extremely brave and has routed the Song army, forcing Song Jiang to retreat to Goodborough. I have today sent my daughter Jade Arrowtip with him to attack Goodborough. I venture to send my servant Ye Qing with this good news and as to the business of the marriage I beg Your Majesty to forgive my fault in arranging it without authorization."
After reading this Tian Hu looked somewhat relieved. He issued an order confirming Quan Yu in his status of royal son-in-law and sent the Butler back accompanied by two of his own officials with the order and also a gift of red patterned silk, brocades and silver for the new royal relative. The Butler took his leave and with his two companions set off for Xiangyuan.
Previous to this Magic Messenger on Song Jiang's orders had conveyed his military order to all districts and areas, before proceeding to Fenyang to find out how the Unicorn was faring. The new administrative officials had been arriving in the districts in a continuous stream. Accordingly the army commanders had been handing over the reins of government to them and reporting back to Goodborough in turn. First came the commanders of the Weizhou garrison, Scimitar and Twin Rods, together with Colonel Sun and his companions from Kettle Pass and Wen and Cui from Calf Mountain. When they had reported to Commissioner Chen and Song Jiang, it was announced that the water-borne chief White-Water Dragon and the rest of his commanders, having received intelligence of the fall of Lu, had sailed the fleet from the Wei via the Yellow River to Lu Water and were assembled there ready for action. Song Jiang ordered a celebration, at which there was much wine and excited talk. Next day he ordered Scimitar and company to Lu, with the boat commanders to back them up, and sent Hasty and company to attack two other towns behind enemy lines and stir things up in their rear. He wanted to waste no time, fearing that the enemy in desperation might surrender to the Jin.
In due course all the other garrison commanders handed over to the new civilian administration and returned to base with their troops. After greetings had been exchanged they heard how Colonel Hua had fought another engagement with the northern commander Shan Shiqi in which two thousand enemy troops were killed, the commander surrendered and the other officers fled. When they brought Shan Shiqi in there was wine to celebrate.
Song Jiang and the army now stayed put in Goodborough in order to reinforce the deception involving Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip and convince Tian Hu that he was too scared to venture forth. Of this no more.
The Unicorn had by now overcome Fenyang. Tian Bao as he fled had happened to meet up with Ma Ling's company. This Ma Ling was practised in magic. He could ride both on wind and fire and, like a good horse, a hundred mile journey meant nothing to him, a fact which had earned him the name of Magic Steed. He made expert use of a metal block, with which he could inflict terrible damage. It was also believed that in battle a magic eye would appear in the middle of his forehead, for which reason he was also know as God of Fire. He was second only to the Wizard in his magic powers. He had two lieutenants Wu Neng and Xu Jin, who had also acquired some of his arts. Magic Steed now joined forces with Tian Bao to form an army with eight other commanders and thirty thousand troops. They marched to a point a few miles north of Fenyang and made camp. The Song commanders judged it unwise to engage them there and retreated into Fenyang. Not only did they not dare attack the northern army; they were also concerned that the northerners might attack them.
As the Unicorn and his companions were considering their predicament, a guard from the east gate rushed in and reported that Song Jiang had sent Taoist Gongsun and the Wizard with ten thousand troops to their assistance. The Unicorn immediately had the gates opened to admit them. The Unicorn invited Taoist Gongsun to sit in the place of honour, with the Wizard next to him, and offered them wine. "The powers of this Magic Steed are prodigious," he told them. "He has already wounded Sergeant Lei, and half a dozen others. I am stuck here, helpless, and you've arrived in the nick of time."
The Wizard said: "I and my master, Taoist Gongsun, asked General Song to send us here to capture him." As he was speaking a guard rushed in and said that Magic Steed was attacking the east gate, his two lieutenants were at the west gate and Tian Bao with four others was at the north gate. Taoist Gongsun said: "I will make a sally from the east gate and deal with Magic Steed, the Wizard will go from the west gate and capture Wu Neng, while you attack from the north gate and take on Tian Bao."
The Unicorn ordered four others to assist the Wizard. Magic Messenger asked to join Taoist Gongsun because he had heard that Magic Steed could do magic walking. The Unicorn gave his consent. He also ordered River-Jumper and others to back up the Wizard. He himself with Thunderclap and company sallied forth from the north gate and attacked Tian Bao. Outside Fenyang waving banners veiled the sky to north, east and west that day as the battle raged.
We shall ignore for the moment the progress of the Wizard and the Unicorn and tell how Magic Steed's men, waving their banners, beating their drums and shouting taunts and challenges outside the city, saw the gates open, the drawbridge descend and the southern army pour out. They formed up in a line like a long snake. Magic Steed levelled his halberd and shouted out: "You rotten band of fucking losers, give us back our city at once. One moment's delay and you're done for!"
Golden Wings and Redeye rode forward and shouted back: "Your time has come, the day of your death is here!" Then they brandished spear and mace, slapped their horses and charged Magic Steed, who came to meet them. After more than ten bouts, Magic Steed got out his metal brick and took aim at Golden Wings. But Taoist Gongsun had already ridden forward and began to do magic with his sword. As Magic Steed raised his arm, Taoist Gongsun waved his sword and there was a sound like a clap of thunder: a red light burst out, and Taoist Gongsun's sword blazed with fire. Magic Steed's block fell to the ground, rolled about and melted. Taoist Gongsun had the true Taoist magic and in an instant the ranks of the southerners and their weapons were all blazing with light and had formed into a flaming crocodile, like a fire dragon. Magic Steed's metal magic was defeated by Taoist Gongsun's fire magic.
Taoist Gongsun now flourished his whisk and the whole army advanced together. The northerners suffered a huge defeat: smashed to bits, they were, turned inside out! Two thirds of the men were lost. Magic Steed fled for his life. It was lucky for him that he had his brand of magic walking, enabling him to run away eastward, borne on wind and fire. Magic Messenger who had already strapped on his amulets for magic walking gave chase, halberd in hand. But soon Magic Steed had done a dozen miles to Magic Messenger's ten and was out of sight. However, as he sped onward he came upon a fat monk who ran straight at him and knocked him down with a blow of his staff. Easily as one might drive a sheep the monk made Magic Steed captive.
As this monk was questioning his prisoner, Magic Messenger caught up with them. He took in what had happened and as he drew near he recognized the monk as Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, who had marched with the other army, Song Jiang's that is, on the eastern route. "However did you get here, Father?" he asked in amazement.
"Where is here?" Monk replied.
"We're east of Fenyang," Magic Messenger said. "This is the northern commander Magic Steed. There's just been a battle in which Taoist Gongsun broke his magic spells and I was chasing him. The bugger can certainly move! It's like a miracle from heaven that you were here to stop him."
Monk said with a grin: "Well, I'm no miracle from heaven. Actually I came out of the ground!"
Together they trussed Magic Steed up and with plain earth-bound steps made their way back to Fenyang. Magic Messenger asked Monk again where he had been and as they walked the latter explained: "The other day Tian Hu sent this fucking woman to attack outside Xiangyuan, near Goodborough. She was good at stone throwing and she wounded many of our commanders. I was at the front of a charge, intending to capture the bitch. I wasn't watching out and there was a concealed pit in amongst the undergrowth. I went right in with both feet and ended up sitting on the bottom. Fortunately I wasn't hurt. I looked around and found an opening on one side. When I explored this, a strange thing happened: I seemed to see the sky and the moon. There were farms and cottages and there were crowds of people, all busy at their work. When they saw me they laughed. I didn't stop to ask why; I just kept on going. Beyond the human habitations I came to a completely deserted area. Eventually I found a thatched hut. Coming from inside it was the tock-tock of the wooden fish. There was a monk in there just like myself, sitting cross-legged and reading the scriptures. I asked him the way and he answered with a smile: 'Where you come from is where you must come from, where you go is where you must go.' This didn't make much sense to me and I began to get annoyed. He just went on smiling and said: 'You know where you are.'
"'How the fuck should I know where I am?' I said.
"Again he said: 'At best you should think of combating evil; at the lowest level there is fear of hell. It is very big, the universe, it is vast, what mind can encompass it?' Then he went on: 'All men have a mind; where there is mind there is desire. Hell and heaven, all are born from desire. The three worlds therefore are nothing but mind, the ten thousand laws are but mental phenomena. If there is no desire, reincarnation ceases, the cycle of rebirth is broken.' When I heard his words I was enlightened. I gave a great shout of acclamation. Still smiling he said: 'You have entered the well of karma and it is hard for you to escape from illusion. I will direct you.' He led me out of the hut. We took but a few paces and then he said: 'Here we must part, but we will meet again!' Pointing to the way ahead he said: 'Proceed straight on and capture the magic steed.' When I turned round he was gone. There was a flash of light, and suddenly the scene changed. This man appeared. I saw him hesitating and I knocked him down with my staff. But I have no idea what I am doing here. Obviously the seasons are quite different here from Goodborough; the peaches and plums are in full leaf, no sign at all of any flowers."
Magic Messenger was amused. "Spring is over," he told him, "the peach and plum blossom has all fallen."
The Monk did not believe him. He protested: "It's not the end of the second month yet. It was only just now I fell down the well. I was there just a short time. How can spring be over?"
Magic Messenger found all this very puzzling. But soon with their captive they were back in Fenyang.
By this time Taoist Gongsun had completed his rout of the northern army and recalled his troops to the city. The Unicorn and his group had killed three of the enemy commanders and after pursuing Tian Bao and Duan Ren for several miles had scattered the northerners. Tian Bao and his remaining commanders took their defeated army north. The Unicorn withdrew with his forces to the city and met the Wizard and his company returning from their pursuit of Wu Neng and Xu Jin. The northerners had suffered defeat and heavy losses at the hands of the combined Song forces. Wu Neng had been knocked off his horse and killed by a blow from the White-Spotted Snake's sword and Xu Jin had been run through by Hound. Many horses were captured, together with a vast quantity of uniforms, armour, gongs, drums, saddles and bridles.
The Unicorn and the Wizard now combined their armies and made a triumphal entry into the city. Just after the Unicorn reached the government offices Monk and Magic Messenger arrived with their captive, Magic Steed. Delightedly the Unicorn asked Monk: "How did you get here? And what is the news of the Leader's campaign against the Royal Brother-in-Law?" Monk retold the story of his falling in the well and Song Jiang's battle with the Royal Brother-in-Law and all of the Unicorn's commanders marvelled at his account.
Then the Unicorn himself untied Magic Steed's bonds. Magic Steed had already heard what Monk said on the road and now seeing the Unicorn was so honourable he prostrated himself and indicated his will to surrender. The Unicorn rewarded the whole army. Next day the commanders left in charge of Jinning reported for duty to Fenyang, having been replaced by the new officials. The Unicorn sent Magic Messenger off to tell Song Jiang of the victory and held a discussion with his second-in-command the Strategist, about how to continue the campaign and so on.
Magic Steed meanwhile had passed on his method of rapid walking to Magic Messenger and they both reached Song Jiang's camp within a day to give a full report of the victory. When Song Jiang heard about the Monk he was as pleased as he was astonished. He went himself to report it all to Commissioner Chen. Of this no more.
Back now to Tian Bao and his lieutenants: creeping like curs kicked out of the house, darting like fish escaped from the net, they scurried into Weisheng. As Tian Bao, weeping, confessed his shameful dereliction, an official of the usurper's War Council rushed in and said: "For two days, Sire, we have been inundated with reports of defeat — of Magic Steed captured, of the troops of Scimitar and Twin Rods besieging this town, of the Unicorn having taken that town. Only from the Royal Brother-in-Law in Xiangyuan does there come the good news that the Song troops are too scared of him to attack."
Tian Hu was too devastated by the situation to take any decision. Some of his military and civil officials discussed things and proposed surrendering to the Jin to the north of them. But a deputy chief minister named Lucky Bian intervened, saying: "The southerners only have three armies. Weisheng is surrounded by mountains, we have supplies enough for men and livestock for two years. Your Majesty's crack guard number over twenty thousand. There are two towns east and west of us with fifty thousand troops in each. To our rear are four more cities strongly defended, with ample supplies to enable them to hold out for a good while. There is an old saying: 'Better face a crowing cock than a buffalo's backside.'"
Tian Hu was hesitating about what to say to this, when it was announced that Butler Ye Qing had arrived. When Tian Hu had him shown in, he prostrated himself and said: "The Princess and her consort, whose repeated successes have given them supremacy in the field, are attacking Goodborough. They were about to lay siege to the city, when the Royal Brother-in-Law fell sick and was unable to direct the operation. They beg Your Majesty to send a replacement commander and some picked troops to help them win Goodborough back."
Another of the usurper's officials, Superintendent Fan Quan, now stood up and said: "I have heard that the Princess and her consort are very brave. The Song army dare not face them. If Your Majesty would lend his own weight to this attack, supported by brave soldiers and intrepid commanders, it is certain to succeed. If you leave the young Prince to govern in your stead, I could assist him."
Tian Hu agreed to this proposal. In fact Fan Quan's daughter had been a stunning beauty and he had given her to Tian Hu who favoured her greatly. He had therefore no reason to mistrust Fan Quan's words. The latter had taken large bribes from the Butler, however. He also understood the strength of the Song army and had made up his mind to sell his country.

Tian Hu sent Lucky Bian with ten commanders and thirty thousand troops to oppose the Unicorn and Colonel Hua. He also ordered Marshal Fang Xuedu with a force of the same size to confront Scimitar and his troops. He himself with two of his ministers, two field-marshals and two generals was to lead an army of a hundred thousand picked troops. Sacrifices to flag and leaders were performed, oxen and horses slaughtered and the army rewarded. Another edict was promulgated appointing Tian Hu's younger brothers Tian Bao and Tian Biao with Fan Quan and a number of other officials, civil and military to advise Prince Tian Ding in governing the country.

When the Butler heard this he secretly sent someone he could trust to ride post haste to Xiangyuan and inform Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip. Hotshot sent Snake and Scorpion out of the city by means of a rope to inform Song Jiang, with orders to return at once.

Lucky Bian waited while his commission was made out and the troops selected. He wasted three days on this. Then with his commanders and thirty thousand troops he marched out of Weisheng's east gate. His force was in two divisions: the vanguard had three commanders and five thousand troops. They had reached a place called Mount Floss, where a forest ran along the foot of the mountain; the leading troops were just skirting the forest, when there was a sudden clamour of gongs and a squadron of cavalry burst out from behind the shoulder of the hill. What had happened was that on receiving the report from Hotshot, Song Jiang had told Colonel Hua and others to ride here at speed with a force of five thousand cavalry in light armour and with horse's bells removed. One of these commanders now rode to the front with a spear in either hand. This was the Song commander Twin Spears, leading exponent of the cavalry charge. He shouted out: "What troops are you? Surrender at once, what are you waiting for?"

One of the enemy shouted back angrily: "You swamp-dwelling outlaws! Why are you attacking our towns?"

Twin Spears replied: "We are the imperial army. Resistance is pointless!" Slapping his horse and levelling his two spears he charged and the enemy commander rode to meet him. After twenty bouts the northerner began to tire and could no longer parry effectively. Twin Spears ran him through the throat and he fell lifeless from his horse. His comrade, enraged, galloped at Twin Spears, but Colonel Hua rode out to cut him off. After more than ten bouts Colonel Hua turned away and his opponent gave chase. Colonel Hua took an arrow and fitted it to his bow. Twisting in the saddle he took aim and fired, hitting his enemy in the face. The helmet fell, the legs kicked in the air and the rider crashed to the ground. Colonel Hua turned and finished him off. Twin Spears and the others swept the enemy back, killing two more of their leaders. The northerners were defeated and the better part of five thousand men were killed, the rest fled. They captured many gongs, drums and horses and pursued the enemy a couple of miles until Lucky Bian's army arrived on the scene.

Now Lucky Bian was originally a farmer and the strength of a water buffalo was in his shoulders and arms. He was an experienced fighter and had been head of a robber band. The two armies met and faced each other, banners waving, bugles blaring and drums thundering. Lucky Bian rode in front of the northern forces, wearing a bronze winged helmet and fish-scale armour. He was a tall man, with a thick growth of whiskers surrounding his mouth, square-jawed, broad-shouldered, with straight eyebrows and round eyes. He rode a powerful charger and shouldered a mountain-splitter of an axe. He had four lieutenants on either side and other officers behind to protect him. His troops were drawn up in perfect order.

From the Song side the Tattooed Dragon rode out: "Who do you think you are?" he shouted. "Dismount at once and let us tie you up to avoid dirtying our weapons!"

Lucky Bian laughed scornfully. "Pitchers and jugs have ears, don't you have any? Do you mean to say you haven't heard of Lucky Bian?"

Tattooed Dragon replied: "You peasant! This is the imperial army, what chance do you think you have against us?" With that he slapped his horse, levelled his 3-pointed double-bladed weapon and charged Lucky Bian, who came to meet him whirling his axe. 2 horses met, 2 weapons were raised. Sword and axe clashed, horses' feet tangled. They fought more than thirty bouts but there was no victor.

Colonel Hua was so impressed by Lucky Bian's martial skills that he thought it dishonourable to use an arrow, impersonal as that is, so he slapped his horse, levelled his spear and joined the fray. Lucky Bian fought bravely with the two of them and still there was no victor. The northern leader feared their man might lose and sounded the gong for withdrawal. Since it was getting late and they were outnumbered, Colonel Hua and Twin Spears made no effort at pursuit. They withdrew to the south and the two armies camped about three or four miles apart. That evening a big wind got up from the south, thick clouds descended and at midnight a great rainstorm broke. Tian Hu by this time was more than thirty miles from Weisheng, with all his officials, commanders and troops. At nightfall they made camp. The camp-followers and concubines were in the tents and Tian Hu was relaxing with Fan Meiren, his concubine, in his tent. That was the night the rain came. The downpour continued five days without stopping. It was difficult for the soldiers to cook or even to stand on their feet. Above them heaven seemed continually weeping, below them was always the sound of water gurgling. Of this no more.

Meanwhile Hasty and others met up with Scimitar's party and the water-borne leaders and their boats and conferred. Leaving the Water General and the Fire General to defend Lu, Scimitar advanced with his army by land and water. He captured Yushe and left it in charge of Hasty and Spots. Then he pressed home his advantage, taking Dagu and killing the senior garrison commanders, whose subordinates surrendered in droves. He calmed the populace, rewarded his troops and sent a messenger to Song Jiang to report the victory. Next day Scimitar and his group also encountered the rain storm, which pinned them down in their camp. Suddenly it was reported that the Unicorn had left the Son-in-Law and others to settle Fenyang and attacked and taken two other towns where he left Victorious and the Supremo and the Kong brothers in charge respectively, and was now investing Taiyuan with the main army. But because of the rain he was unable to attack it. The White-Water Dragon chanced to hear this report and rushed to Scimitar to say: "This incessant rain that the Unicorn has run into means we can't afford to delay. What if the enemy should make a desperate sally from the city? But I have an idea. I'd like to go and discuss it with the Unicorn." Scimitar gave his consent. So the White-Water Dragon left, appointing the Tong Brothers, Cave Dragon and River Rider, to take charge of the boats in his absence. He took the Pilot, White Eel and the Ruan Brothers with him, and two thousand sailors. Wearing straw hats and wooden clogs they braved the storm and made their way with all speed to the Unicorn's camp. Despite the weather they talked for a long time. The Unicorn was excited, and ordered his men out to brave the elements and cut down trees and build rafts, while the White-Water Dragon and his party made their own preparations, of which we shall say nothing here. Now Tian Hu's officials in Taiyuan, garrison commander Zhang Xiong and his two subordinates were real monsters. These three were the cruellest among all the rebels. The soldiers under their command were wild and licentious and the people of the town, persecuted beyond their endurance, had abandoned homes and possessions and fled in all directions. Seventy or eight percent of them had left. Though surrounded, Zhang and his gang were still confident they could hold out. He and his pals reasoned as follows: with all this rain the Song army had no chance of plunder, they had no advantage by land or water, firewood was scarce, they would have no heart to make a long stay of it, a quick counter-attack would certainly bring victory. It was the beginning of the fourth month and Zhang Xiong was just about to attack out of all four gates when he suddenly heard the thunder of gongs on all sides. He hurriedly climbed the watchtower, whence he was able to observe the Song army struggling through the rain in clogs, clambering onto the high ground. Whilst he was wondering what this meant, he heard a thunderous roar from the Zhibo Drain and from east and west of the town: it was as if thousands of men and millions of horses were charging. A moment later a huge wave swept down on them, a raging torrent, like the great neap tides of September or the floods when the waters of the Yellow River spill over. Truly they had no more chance than three planks put there to shore up a collapsing dyke or a couple of sandbags that are meant to stem a river in spate.

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### Hotshot & Arrowtip work in tandem; Song Jiang & the Commissioner jointly announce victory

So White-Water Dragon working in concert with the Pilot, White Eel and the Ruan brothers and all their company of sailors had taken advantage of the deluge and the surging waters to flood Taiyuan by breaching the Zhibo Drain and Jin Water. Instantly the water came boiling out:

*The water gushes forth, a great wave rears up. Soldiers ride in on planks and rafts, commanders advance on the flying flood. Gods howl, ghosts weep, the day is plunged in sightless murk. Peaks shake, mountains crumble, the vast wave roars like an angry beast. City walls come tumbling down, there's no more shelter anywhere. Banners vanish on the tide, their green and red tangled with the soldiers' spears. Frothing and foaming, the rushing waters have gone berserk. Corpses wallow like fish or turtles, hot blood bubbles through the waves. In a moment trees are uprooted, in an instant rafters are hobnobbing with the waters.*

A tremendous hubbub arose in the city. When they saw the water rushing towards them soldiers and civilians clambered onto walls and rooftops or clung to planks and beams. The weak, the elderly, the obese could only climb onto chairs and tables. But moments later even benches and tables were swept away as houses collapsed and they all went to join the fishes and the turtles. White-Water Dragon, the Pilot and White Eel and the Ruan brothers rode the floodwaters towards the city and fetched up on a level with the city wall. Their men leapt out onto it, cutlasses in hand, and began killing the guards. Other troops attacked on rafts.

Under this onslaught resistance could only crumble. Up on the watchtower the commander, Zhang Xiong, cursed his luck ceaselessly as he watched the two brothers, Pilot and White Eel, halberd in hand, leap with a shout from their craft, land on the walls and race up the tower. They slaughtered a dozen guards in quick succession. The rest fled in confusion. There was no escape for Zhang Xiong. The Pilot knocked him down with a blow of his halberd, while White Eel rushed forward and struck off his head with a loud crunch.

By the time the waters began to recede, countless numbers of soldiers and inhabitants were dead, either drowned or killed in the fighting. The south wall was left encumbered by beams, pillars, leaves of doors, window handles and the like, and floating corpses. The only building still standing in the city was the summer palace built by Emperor Shenwu of the Northern Qi dynasty, which had very solid foundations. Those who were near it rushed up the steps in a jostling, trampling crowd. More than two thousand people died, and even on that eminence and on the city walls the survivors numbered only about one thousand. Outside the city the Unicorn had secretly warned the people in advance that when a gong was struck they were all to go up onto the high ground. Moreover outside the city there was more open space, so the waters dispersed faster and the people did not drown.

The west gate was seized by White-Water Dragon and his sailors, the north by the Pilot and White Eel, the east by Ruan the Second and Ruan the Fifth, and the south by Ruan the Seventh. So the Song flag now flew over all four gates. In the evening when the water receded and the land was revealed again, White-Water Dragon threw open the gates and invited the Unicorn in. No cock crowed, no dog barked inside the city and the corpses were heaped in mounds. Although the wickedness of Zhang Xiong and his cronies was manifest, White-Water Dragon's treatment of them was exceedingly cruel. Thousands knelt everywhere in the mud and water, kowtowing like people offering candles at the temple, and begging for mercy. After examining them the Unicorn found that only a dozen or so were soldiers, the rest were just ordinary people. Two of the commanders had climbed into the branches of a tree next to a building behind the government offices. When they saw the waters receding they crept down but were captured and taken before the Unicorn. He ordered them to be executed and the corpses displayed. He had the money in the treasury distributed to relieve the common people who had suffered from the floods inside and outside the city. He sent a messenger to Song Jiang to report the victory, ordered his troops to bury the dead and repair the walls and buildings and commanded the people to stay in their homes.

We shall say no more about how the Unicorn settled Taiyuan, but return to the time before the city's fall when Tian Hu with an army of a hundred thousand was forced by the rain to halt and make camp south of Brass Key Mountain. His scouts reported that the Royal Brother-in-Law was dead and that the Princess and her consort had retreated to Xiangyuan to bury him. Shocked by this news, Tian Hu sent a messenger to Xiangyuan with orders for Jade Arrowtip to fortify the city strongly and for her consort Quan Yu to report to him for duty. He also wanted to know why the people he had sent to Xiangyuan had not reported back.

Next day the rain had ceased and at dawn despatch riders came in with news that Song Jiang was sending the Chancellor and Magic Steed with troops against them. This report threw Tian Hu into a passion: "Those two received the highest favours from me," he ranted. "Now they turn traitor! It is not to be endured! I shall have to go and have a word with them myself! The rest of you must spare no effort. Anyone who captures them will be richly rewarded with gold and honours."

The army advanced under Tian Hu's personal command and encountered the Song forces. From the enemy's banners the northerners could see that the commanders they faced were Colonel Sun and the Flautist. At the front of the northern army were massed soldiers with clubs, axes, swords and lances; amid the paired banners, under a yellow ochre umbrella with a nine-coiled flying dragon, seated on a silver-maned white horse with jade trappings and gold saddle, was the great rebel prince Tian Hu, personally directing the engagement. From the rear of the southern ranks now came Song Jiang who was also personally in command, with the Professor and others at his heels.

When Tian Hu heard Song Jiang was there he wanted to start the battle at once and capture Song Jiang. But just then a messenger arrived to say: "Scimitar and his forces have taken two more cities and in the west the Unicorn has also taken two more. They have flooded Taiyuan and no one is left alive there. Deputy chief minister Lucky Bian was halted at Mount Floss by Colonel Hua and others, while the Unicorn came up from Taiyuan to attack from the rear. Lucky Bian could not hold out against this attack from two sides and was defeated and captured by the Unicorn. The Unicorn has now joined forces with Scimitar and they are surrounding Qinyuan and have it in an iron grip."

This report left Tian Hu petrified and he immediately decided to retreat into Weisheng again.

One of Tian Hu's ministers, Li Tianxi, held the position while the other four retreated with him. But then a report sounded from Brass Key Mountain and Monk with four others and a picked force of infantry secretly deployed there by Song Jiang began to advance in two columns. Tian Hu hurriedly ordered his royal guard into action but they were immediately met by Magic Steed and the Chancellor, coming in on their flank from the east. Magic Steed bestriding wind and fire attacked the northerners with his metal block, while the Chancellor cut and thrust with his two swords. They went through the northerners' ranks as if there were no one there, slicing the army in two. The Professor had used his forces so cleverly that although there were a hundred thousand of the northerners they made mincemeat of them, scattering them to the four winds and inflicting a massive defeat. As minister Li Tianxi and the others fled east with Tian Hu in their midst they found themselves opposed by Monk and his company with their stout staves and the shield bearers with their javelins and knives, who cut a bloody swathe through the enemy troops, scattering their commanders and forcing them to flee west. Although Tian Hu had the pick of the royal guard under his command, now they had to face the imperial army they found they had never met such fierce opponents. How could they be expected to put up a fight?

Only a few of Tian Hu's staff now remained — two commanders, one official and the chief of police, with about five thousand demoralized troops. Clustering around him they retreated.

Then, when the danger was already extreme, another body of cavalry charged in from the east. When Tian Hu saw them he raised his eyes to heaven and said with a sigh: "Now it's the end!" The leader of this troop was a bold young commander wearing a blue turban and green uniform and grasping a wooden lance, seated on a tall charger with a white curling mane. On his standard it said clearly: "Quan Yu, Leader of the Campaign against the Southerners". The Butler who was following close behind Tian Hu saw this banner and explained it to the King. Tian Hu immediately sent word to the Princess's consort, for that is who it was, that his help was needed. The Royal Consort came forward, dismounted, knelt and said: "Sire, I am in full armour and I cannot make proper obeisance. I deserve to die for such disrespect."

Tian Hu said: "That is no fault, my dear friend."

"The situation here is desperate," the Consort said. "I beg Your Majesty to take refuge in Xiangyuan. When the Princess and I have repelled the enemy, we will invite you to return to the palace in Weisheng and devise a plan to return things to their former glory."

Tian Hu was well pleased with this. He gave the orders and they set off for Xiangyuan, the Consort taking up the rear to guard against attacks from pursuers. As they reached the city a hubbub arose behind them. When the guards saw who it was they quickly opened the gates and lowered the drawbridge. As one of Tian Hu's commanders led the troops forward, the soldiers heard pursuit behind and there was a rush to get into the city in which no respect at all was paid to the King. As soon as they were inside there was a loud report and on either side the concealed troops sprang forward forcing the northern commander and his men into some concealed pits, where they were indiscriminately massacred with long spears. Less than half of the unfortunate three thousand men survived. A cry went up: "We want Tian Hu alive!" Realizing the city had turned and it was all a trap, Tian Hu hurriedly reined in his horse and fled north. The Consort, alias Hotshot of course, and the Butler gave chase. But Tian Hu's horse was swift and they couldn't catch him. When he was already a bowshot ahead a gust of wind suddenly arose in front of his horse and a girl appeared and called out: "Tian Hu you swine, you killed my family, where do you think you can run to?" Then from where she stood another gust of fateful wind caught him head-on, and next thing she was gone. Tian Hu's startled horse shied and whinnied and he was thrown to the ground. Hotshot and the Butler now caught up. Leaping from their horses they pressed forward with their men and made him prisoner.

One of Tian Hu's last remaining guards commanders charged to the rescue, but Hotshot hurriedly remounted, grasped a stone and let fly, hitting the northerner square in the face and knocking him from his horse. "I'm no bloody Prince Consort," he roared. "I'm Hotshot, a warrior in the Song army under General Song Jiang."

Simultaneously Iron Ox and Pilgrim charged out of the city at the head of five hundred infantry, scattering the Palace guards and the police superintendent's two thousand men like chaff. After dispatching the guard commander, Hotshot tied Tian Hu up and drove him back into the city. The gates were then locked, and orders given that they were not to be opened again until Song Jiang had destroyed all the northern forces and Tian Hu could be handed over.

Monk now came on the scene. When he saw Tian Hu had already been taken, he and his followers turned west again and continued to harry the enemy till they reached the foot of Brass Key Mountain. The time was now around five o'clock.

Song Jiang had fought the northerners all day and killed more than twenty thousand of them. Leaderless now they fled in all directions. Fan Meiren, Tian Hu's concubine, and the other female attendants were all killed by the soldiery. Four of the commanders including minister Li Tianxi and thirty thousand troops were holed up on Brass Key Mountain, where Song Jiang had them surrounded. When Monk came to report that Hotshot had captured Tian Hu, Song Jiang clasped his hands together in joy and immediately sent an urgent dispatch to Xiangyuan instructing Pilgrim and company to make sure the gates were securely bolted and keep Tian Hu under the closest guard. He also ordered Hotshot off to Weisheng to assist Jade Arrowtip.

Now Jade Arrowtip had received secret instructions from the Professor and was lying in wait on the slopes of Mount Shipan outside Wuxiang, with Snake and Scorpion and six others and five thousand cavalry all in northern uniforms and insignia. When they received news that the battle with Tian Hu had begun, they marched with all speed to Weisheng. That evening, at sunset, with a crescent moon hanging in the sky, Jade Arrowtip approached the city walls and sang out sweetly: "It's the Princess. I'm escorting the Prince. Open up, quick!" The guards rushed to the palace to report. The brothers Tian Bao and Tian Biao mounted and galloped to the southern ramparts. They raced up to the top of the gate tower to look: there was the yellow ochre umbrella, and beneath it, seated on his lively grey with the embossed saddle, the Prince. In front of him stood a young woman warrior, with "The Princess Jade Arrowtip" in large characters on her standard. Behind was a long train of ministers and officials stretching into the distance. In ringing tones Jade Arrowtip called out: "We have been defeated by the Song army. I have rescued the Prince and brought him here. Come out to receive him at once!"

Having seen the Prince, they opened the gates and went out. As they halted before his horse, the Prince shouted out: "Seize those two villains for me!" His officers leapt forward and arrested them.

"But we are guiltless!" they cried, struggling to free themselves. But the officers bound them. In fact this "Prince" was the Professor's invention: he had the Chancellor select from the ranks of the southern army a soldier who resembled the Prince, and dress him up as Tian Hu. The ministers and officials behind were Snake and Scorpion and their men in disguise. Now they all drew their swords, while Fleetfoot and some others with five hundred men marched Tian Bao and Tian Biao off to Xiangyuan. When those in the city saw their leaders arrested and marched away southward, they realized it was a plot. But they were prevented from charging out of the city and attacking because Arrowtip, determined to get the young Prince Regent, Tian Ding, boldly forced her way in with Snake and Scorpion. The first of the guard commanders to oppose her was knocked over by one of her stones. Six or seven of them suffered the same fate, while Snake and Scorpion fought alongside her. Outside the city Lungs and Yellow Dog ordered their men to remove the northern insignia and show themselves in their true colours, and then joined in the attack and seized the south gate. After scattering the northern resistance they raised the Song flag.

The city was in tumult. A number of the usurper's officers and ministers together with some of the royal family led a counter-attack. Jade Arrowtip and her four thousand had penetrated deep into the dragon's lair by now and were seriously exposed. But Hotshot arrived with eight thousand men and seeing Jade Arrowtip, Snake and Scorpion engaged in a desperate struggle attacked with his stones, putting out four northern commanders in quick succession and beating back their forces. "Don't go any further: we're too isolated," he told Jade Arrowtip.

"I've got to avenge my father," she replied. "They can tear me limb from limb, but I won't leave off!"

"I've captured Tian Hu already," Hotshot replied. "He's being held in Xiangyuan."

Only then was she satisfied.

They were about to retreat from the city when something happened that was truly a judgement of heaven on wrongdoers. The Unicorn arrived, having taken Qinyuan. Seeing the flag on the gate, he marched his army straight into the city and joined Hotshot in the attack. Thunderclap and his companions took the east gate, Golden Wings and some others the west gate, the Tamer and his men the north gate. Morbid and Madcap and others with the infantry hacked their way with swords and axes into the royal palace. Another group of infantry commanders entered through the back gate. Of the wives and concubines and the royal entourage countless numbers were killed. The Prince Regent, when he heard what was happening, killed himself. All the Song commanders on the spot now joined in the slaughter of the usurper's ministers and officials, his family members, and all the rest of the gang. For indeed:

*On palace steps the bodies lie;*
*The blood streams out through royal gates.*
*War takes no account of low or high:*
*The soul its own outcome dictates.*

The Song troops went on killing in Weisheng till the corpses littered the streets and blood ran in the gutters. Finally the Unicorn gave out an order that no one was to harm the people and sent someone to tell Song Jiang the news. Only near dawn did the fighting cease. Many enemy commanders surrendered.

At daybreak the Unicorn had a roll call taken. Leaving aside the Strategist, who had remained in charge of the garrison at Qinyuan, all his commanders had come through the battle unscathed. The only casualty was Geng Gong, the enemy commander who had come over to them previously — he was trampled to death in the mêlée. When the leaders came to report their successes, Nameless brought in the corpse of the Prince Regent. Snarling with hatred, Jade Arrowtip drew her sword and hacked off the head and dismembered the body. The Royal Brother-in-Law's wife was already dead but Arrowtip wanted to find Mrs. Ye, the Butler's wife, who had brought her up, so she took leave of the Unicorn and went with Hotshot to Xiangyuan to take Tian Hu to Song Jiang's camp. The Unicorn was just settling some military matters when a scout reported that Fang Xuedu had Hasty and Spots bottled up in Yushe. The Unicorn sent Scimitar and some others to rescue them.

Next day Song Jiang overcame minister Li Tianxi on Brass Key Mountain and sent someone with a report to Commissioner Chen: "The rebel's stronghold has been taken and the leader captured alive. Please come to Weisheng and take command." When Song Jiang arrived outside Weisheng with the main army, the Unicorn and his men went out to welcome him. Song Jiang issued a proclamation to calm the people. The Unicorn brought the prisoner Lucky Bian to him. Song Jiang was so impressed by his manly bearing that he loosed his bonds with his own hands and treated him courteously. Seeing Song Jiang was so honourable Lucky Bian was filled with gratitude and surrendered. Next day Jade Arrowtip, Hotshot and the Butler brought the three Tian brothers in prison carts and handed them over. Arrowtip and Hotshot paid their respects to Song Jiang side by side. Arrowtip apologized to Short-Arse and the others for the offence she had done them. Song Jiang ordered Tian Hu and his brothers to be locked up together until such time as the army withdrew, when they would take them to the Eastern Capital and hand them over. He ordered wine to be served in honour of Jade Arrowtip and Hotshot.

That same day the enemy commander of Wuxiang surrendered to them with all the personnel, military and civilian, under his command, handing over all the records and supplies. After recompensing him, Song Jiang reappointed him. When Song Jiang had been two days in Weisheng, scouts reported that Scimitar and his party had reached Yushe and together with Hasty and Spots caught the northern commander Fang Xuedu between two fires and killed him, as well as five thousand of his men. The rest had surrendered. Song Jiang said to them all delightedly: "Thanks to the efforts of all of you, we have successfully put down the uprising." Everyone's exploits were faithfully recorded as was Jade Arrowtip's and Hotshot's part in capturing the leader and attacking the rebel stronghold. After three or four days Scimitar returned and the arrival of Commissioner Chen was announced.

Song Jiang marched out of town with all his commanders to welcome the Commissioner, who praised him saying: "In only five months you have performed wonders. I hear that you have captured the rebel leader. I am forwarding the report of your victory to the capital immediately. The court is sure to reward you with high honours." Song Jiang thanked him again.

Next day Jade Arrowtip came to make a request. She wanted to go to Stonehouse Mountain in Taiyuan to find her mother's body and give it burial. Song Jiang told Hotshot and the Butler to accompany her.

Song Jiang asked the Commissioner to burn down Tian Hu's palace with all its ostentatious halls and luxurious apartments. He also proposed that the contents of the government granaries should be given out to assist the many whose homes had been burnt down by the soldiery. He then drafted a report for Marshal Su to present to the court and sent Magic Messenger off with it immediately.

Bearing this report, Magic Messenger caught up with the man sent by the Commissioner and they entered the Eastern Capital together. They went first to Marshal Su's palace and handed the report to Yang, his chamberlain. Marshal Su was delighted and next morning at the dawn court read out the Commissioner's report to the Emperor. His Majesty openly showed his pleasure and gave orders for Song Jiang and the others to make all necessary provisions and then march the army back to the capital, where high honours awaited them. With this news Magic Messenger set off again the same day, after bidding Marshal Su farewell. Shortly after noon next day he reached Weisheng and reported to the Commissioner and Song Jiang. These two ordered all members off the puppet government who had been captured alive, with the exception of the Tian Hu and his brothers who were to be sent separately to the capital, to be taken to the execution ground and beheaded.

A few villages in Jinning had remained uncaptured. Half of the rebels' henchmen and lackeys in these places disappeared when they heard that Tian Hu was taken, the rest gave themselves up. The Commissioner spared them all, reinstating them as loyal subjects. He had notices posted everywhere to calm and reassure the people. Others who had worked for the rebels but done nobody any harm and surrendered voluntarily were told to go back to their villages and take up their normal agricultural occupations. The work of pacification complete, garrisons were posted to protect the boundaries and maintain the peace. Of this no more.

The Emperor issued an edict and sent a special envoy to Hebei to deliver it. After that a full meeting of the Military Academy was called, which the Emperor was to attend, and the Grand Preceptor spoke beforehand on military affairs and they listened respectfully. But there was one official there who sat staring at a corner of the room and paid him no attention. The Grand Preceptor was highly indignant and demanded to know the man's name. It was indeed a case of "One person left out means trouble for all". For after the Grand Preceptor asked this man's name:

*Heavenly stars and earth stars will spread their wings;*
*Brave leaders and fierce troops pacify Hubei.*

## 199
## The theft of a burial plot leads on to rebellion; A stroll on a fine spring day provokes dalliance

After some inquiries, the Grand Preceptor learnt that this official who had ignored his discourse on tactics, pointedly fixing his gaze on a corner of the room, was called Luo and was from a military family of Yunnan and a graduate of the Academy. But when the Grand Preceptor's indignation was on the point of exploding, the Emperor was announced. He was obliged to shelve the matter and lead the members out to welcome His Majesty. They escorted the Emperor inside and performed the ceremony of obeisance.

Well, after the Emperor had spoken of military affairs, this Luo, before the Grand Preceptor can even open his mouth, jumps up and launches into the following tirade: "As a humble member of Your Majesty's military academy I know I am risking my life by this, but I must speak to Your Majesty of the dangers of the bandit Wang Qing's insurrection west of the river Huai. The turmoil Wang Qing is provoking beyond the Huai has been going on for five years now and the government forces have proved incapable of ending it. Marshal Tong Guan and Cai the Younger, the Grand Preceptor's son, were entrusted with the campaign against these rebels but their whole army disappeared. They tried to cover up by lying to Your Majesty. They said they had ordered a ceasefire because the climate was unfavourable to the troops. They even said the army was affected by some epidemic. Meanwhile Wang Qing's viciousness grows ever more unbridled. Last month he defeated the forces of my home state of Yunnan. What do we see? Plunder and rapine, licentiousness, horrors that scarce bear repeating. Eight military commands have been seized and eighty-six districts. The Grand Preceptor is supposed to be the chief prop of your reign, yet his own son suffered ignominious defeat and betrayed the country's trust in him. Before Your Majesty entered just now he was trying to lecture us on military matters. This is presumption beyond endurance, this is madness, this is insanity. I beseech Your Majesty to reprimand the Grand Preceptor and his cronies, the whole pack of corrupt, cheating officials, and appoint commanders and an army to put down the rebels as soon as possible, in order to save the people from their devastation, in the interests of good government and for the people's welfare. The whole world will rejoice!"

The Emperor was moved to anger by what he heard and severely reprimanded the Grand Preceptor and the rest for the cover-up, but the latter, with their glib tongues, talked him round and he finally retired to the palace without having imposed any sanctions. Next day the governor of Bozhou, Hou Meng, arrived in the capital on official business and also gave a frank account of how Tong Guan and Cai the Younger had failed in their duty and disgraced their country. At the same time he extolled Song Jiang's strategic skill and multiple achievements, pointing out how he and his men had subdued the Tartars and settled Hebei and were now ready to withdraw and make a triumphant return to the capital. Now that Wang Qing was on the rampage, the Governor begged His Majesty to order Song Jiang's company first of all be given due honours and then sent beyond the river Huai where they would undoubtedly achieve great results. The Emperor gave his consent and the order was sent to the Military Council to bestow appropriate ranks on Song Jiang and his commanders.

The Grand Preceptor and his colleagues discussed the matter and made the following recommendation: "Wang Qing has taken Wanzhou. Recently three more districts, all close to the capital, have asked for help. We request Your Majesty to order Commissioner Chen and General Song Jiang not to return to the capital but to move their army rapidly to Yuzhou. We will appoint Marshal Hou Meng as Commander-in-Chief of this expeditionary force. Academician Luo too is a skilled tactician so we will send him along as well to serve in Commissioner Chen's force. Song Jiang and his followers will be fully occupied putting down the rebellion, there is no need to give them official rank until they have successfully dealt with the situation beyond the river Huai. It will be time enough then for celebrations and honours."

Of course the Grand Preceptor knew this Wang Qing was a force to be reckoned with, he had discussed it all with Marshals Tong and Yang and Gao the Ball. He knew what he was doing sending Hou Meng and Luo to Commissioner Chen. He was hoping Song Jiang and company would get themselves defeated — and if Hou and Luo should pass on as well, who cares? Would it not be killing two birds with one stone?

But enough of this. Suffice it to say that the Emperor consented to all the schemes of these four villains: the orders were written out, Marshal Hou and Academician Luo were instructed to leave immediately for Hebei and deliver them to Song Jiang and company, together with a reward of gold and silver, bales of silk, robes, armour, horses, imperial wine and suchlike. The new officials who were to fill all the vacant posts in the province were ordered to proceed there at once and take up their duties by a given date. This business concluded, the Emperor was carried off again by his friends Wang Fu and Cai the Younger to the Model Mountain Pleasure House.

Marshal Hou Meng led his party off on the road north with the Emperor's edict and the thirty-five carts fully loaded with the bounty for Song Jiang and his commanders. Nothing occurred on the journey and without losing any time they crossed Kettle Pass and Goodborough and were soon approaching Weisheng. Five or six miles from the city they ran into the Song detachment escorting the captive rebel leaders. The fact was that Song Jiang had received the order to withdraw just as Jade Arrowtip returned from burying her mother. He wrote a detailed report of events for the court, including an account of Jade Arrowtip's integrity and honour, her exploits in capturing the rebel leader, the surrender and return to the Emperor's service of the Wizard, the Chancellor and the rest and the good service they had done. He then sent Hotshot, Jade Arrowtip and the Butler off in advance with the captive rebels.

Hotshot, who was in the lead, first met Marshal Hou Meng and Academician Luo. When they had told him of their mission he sent a messenger back to inform Commissioner Chen and Song Jiang, who rode out to meet the imperial envoys. The embassy bearing the imperial edict entered the city and a special altar was set up to burn incense. Song Jiang and the Commissioner with all their commanders lined up in orderly ranks knelt with their faces to the north whilst Sterling called out the acclamation. Marshal Hou Meng facing south stood on the left of the imperial altar and read out the proclamation:

*Hear our will: In accordance with the respect due to heaven and to the ancestors, in administering this great kingdom I have inherited, I am compelled to request the services of great men in the furtherance of affairs of state. Recently there have been many alarms on the frontier and disturbances in the country at large. General Song Jiang and his men, traversing much rough terrain and many dangerous regions, have successfully performed the task of pacification, secured the payment of tribute by the rebels and shown themselves to be fully worthy of our trust. I now send Marshal Hou bearing my edict, to reward Commissioner Chen, Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the rest with gold and silver, robes, horses, armour, imperial wine and the like in recognition of their services. But now once more, by reason of the insurgency of the bandit Wang Qing west of the river Huai, order is disturbed, injury inflicted on my people, my lands invaded and my western capital in tumult, and I must call again on the services of Commissioner Chen as civil governor, Song Jiang as Commander of the Pacification Expedition, the Unicorn as his deputy, with Marshal Hou Meng as Commander-in-Chief of the Expedition. On receipt of this edict, they are to lead the army out and march with all despatch to the relief of Wanzhou. If they work diligently to subdue the rebels and restore peace we guarantee that the army will be amply rewarded. Commissioner Chen will be instructed to draw on the rich treasury of Hebei and make out an official register and everyone can count on our favour. This is our decree.*

Afterwards they gave three cheers for the Emperor and prostrated themselves again in thanks. Then the Marshal brought out the reward. Names were called out in due order and each received his portion. The Commissioner, Song Jiang and the Unicorn each got five hundred catties of pure gold, ten bales of silk brocade and a set of robes, a horse and two bottles of imperial wine. The Professor and the other thirty-four principal leaders got two hundred catties of silver, four bales of coloured silk and a bottle of imperial wine. The Strategist and the rest of the seventy-two secondary leaders got a hundred catties of silver and a bottle of imperial wine. The rest of the gold and silver the Commissioner had distributed among the men. When this was all done, Song Jiang repeated his orders to Hotshot, Jade Arrowtip and the Butler to proceed to the capital with the captives. Taoist Gongsun came and requested Song Jiang to set up five images in the Temple of the Dragon Lord on Five Dragon Mountain. Song Jiang agreed and sent craftsmen to carry out the work.

Song Jiang sent Magic Messenger and the Magic Steed to tell every garrison commander to muster his troops as soon as the new officials arrived to replace them and rejoin the main army for the campaign against Wang Qing. He spent several days making his own preparations, and by this time the new officials had all arrived at post and the garrison commanders and their troops were coming back one after the other. After handing out their rewards to them, Song Jiang told Hand and Craftsman to engrave a tablet commemorating all these things. At midday on the fifth day of the fifth month he told his brother Iron Fan to arrange a feast to celebrate the peace, with Commissioner Chen presiding and all the new civilian governors, together with Marshal Hou and Academician Luo and all the assistant magistrates and other officials according to their rank, and his own company of one hundred and seven commanders (Hotshot being absent in the capital), as well as the Hebei leaders who surrendered, viz, the Wizard, the Chancellor, Lucky Bian and others, a total of seventeen, all seated in two orderly rows. During the banquet, the Com-missioner, Hou and Luo praised the achievements of Song Jiang and his men. Song Jiang and the Professor thanked them. Conversation was about the court or about matters dear to their hearts, candles and torches burned brightly, and the party did not break up till after midnight.

Next day Song Jiang and the Professor conferred and organized their forces. They bade farewell to the other officials and with the Commissioner set off southward. They caused absolutely no trouble in the places they passed through, where the people lined their route with incense, candles and flowers and thanked them for having put down the bandits, and made it possible for them to enjoy heaven's mercy again.

We shall now leave Song Jiang to his southern campaign and turn to Hotshot who with Jade Arrowtip, the Butler and the prisoners confined in their carts had reached the capital. First he delivered Song Jiang's missive to Marshal Su with the money and presents. Marshal Su conveyed this to the Emperor, who was full of praise for Jade Arrowtip's virtue and filial piety and gave orders for a posthumous title to be conferred on her mother and a shrine dedicated to her in the local temple to celebrate her exemplary constancy, with offerings made in spring and autumn. Jade Arrowtip was also awarded a title, and Hotshot was promoted and a reward of fifty taels of pure silver was bestowed on them. Hotshot also got back his old post.

The three of them were commanded to go back and join Song Jiang in the march westward beyond the Huai and bid for further glory. The Emperor gave the order for the rebel King and his brothers to be taken to the execution ground and put to death by slow cuts. Jade Arrowtip handed small images of her parents to the executioner and asked him to hang them up at the execution and place an altar before them. At three minutes past midday when Tian Hu had been cut to pieces she laid the remains on the altar, offered the blood as a libation to the spirits of her mother and father and wept noisily. News of Jade Arrowtip's activities had spread and a crowd had turned out to watch. She wept so bitterly that there were none that were not moved to tears. After-wards with Hotshot and the Butler she gave thanks, kowtowing towards the capital. Then they set off for Wanzhou to join Song Jiang in the campaign against Wang Qing. Of this no more.

Now you must try to store this in your memory, friends, because here comes a digression about Wang Qing's life, from childhood to the time of his growing up, in order that all shall be clearly known. Wang Qing had been a humble police sergeant in the Kaifeng district of the capital. His father was a rich man of the capital addicted to litigation, who would stir up trouble and then sue, commit an outrage and bring trouble down on his own head, and set traps for honest citizens. For this reason people gave him a wide berth. On the word of a fengshui expert, he coveted a certain piece of land which was supposed to ensure him an illustrious son. This plot was the burial ground of a family to whom he was related. With the help of the fengshui merchant he plotted their downfall. He got his way forcibly by trumping up charges against the family and bribing the officials. The family lost their patrimony and, powerless to defend themselves against him, they left the capital and went to reside far away. Later after the rebellion, when all Wang Qing's clan were exterminated, this family alone were allowed to survive because it was found that Wang Qing's father had ruined them. After he had taken over the coveted plot and buried his own father and mother there, his wife was delivered of a son in the last month of the year. He dreamt that a tiger entered the house and squatted down west of the hall, but was driven out by a lion. When he woke up, Wang Qing was born.

From his earliest days Wang Qing was profligate. At sixteen he became very strong. He wouldn't study but spent his time at cockfights and the horses, or practising with spear and staff. He being an only son his parents loved him dearly and of course spoiled him. No wonder they had no control over him when he grew up! All he did was gamble, sleep with prostitutes and drink. When they admonished him he would blow up and swear at them, nothing they could do would stop him, he had to have his own way. After six or seven years the family fortune was exhausted and on the strength of his ability he got taken on as a sergeant in the constabulary. As soon as he had some money in his hand he was everyone's friend and would spend freely on food and drink. When hard times returned he would resort to his fists and look for a fight. People regarded him therefore with a mixture of fear and admiration.

One day, then, Wang Qing went to attend the roll call, and when it was over went to stroll south of the city in the Jade Ford Gardens. It was the sixth year of Huizong's reign, a beautiful late spring day. There were swarms of people strolling about and hordes of cavalry:

*Flowers in the gardens, girls on the embankment;*
*Strolling groups that paint the scene with grace.*
*Cavaliers a-canter, sweetness of fresh grass.*
*They're tipsy in the teahouse — blossom scents the air.*

Wang Qing wandered about by himself for a while and then went and leant against a weeping willow that stood beside a lake in the garden, waiting for an acquaintance to turn up so they could go and have a few drinks together. Before long he saw on the north shore of the lake a group of a dozen or so young stewards or the like, gathered about a sedan chair inside which sat a young woman beautiful as a flower bud. She wanted to look at the scenery and she had dispensed with the bamboo screen. Wang Qing was a great admirer of feminine beauty and the sight of such a splendid girl had him with his tongue hanging out. He recognized that group of stewards as belonging to the household of Marshal Tong. He followed at a distance until they reached the Model Mountain which was in the northeast district of the capital. Here the Emperor Daojun had contrived an artificial landscape of dramatic peaks and weird stones, ancient trees and rare birds, innumerable pavilions, plants, lakes and rustic taverns. It was bounded by a red wall and gate, like that in the palace, and like the palace too there were guards inside so that ordinary strollers would not presume to set foot there. Here the bearers put down the sedan-chair, the serving maids helped the lady out and they passed through the gate, chattering merrily to each other.

The guards all made way for them and let them enter, for the lady was in fact the daughter of Tong Guan's younger brother, who was Marshal Yang's daughter's son. Marshal Tong had brought her up as his own daughter and destined her for the Grand Preceptor's grandson in marriage. She was called Jiaoxiu and she was just sixteen. Today she had persuaded Marshal Tong, taking advantage of the fact that the Emperor was spending two days of pleasure with Lily, to let her visit the Model Mountain. The Marshal had first given orders to guards, so of course they let her in. After four hours she still had not emerged. Wang Qing hung about outside watching for her. He was getting very hungry so he wandered off to a wine shop in East Street to get some wine and food. He hurriedly downed six or seven cups but he was afraid he might miss her, so without even asking for the bill he threw down a heavy piece of silver on the counter for the waiter, saying: "I'll be back in a minute to settle up." He returned to his former post and waited there a while. Suddenly the girl came out with her attendants, walking slowly. She did not get into the sedan. She began admiring the scene outside. As he strolled towards her, Wang Qing saw that she was truly lovely. In fact her beauty made such an impression on him that his heart seemed to hammer uncontrollably, his bones and flesh turn to jelly. He was melting like an ice lion in the fire, instantly he was overcome!

As for the girl, she too had noticed Wang Qing in the crowd. She looked and liked what she saw. Then one of the stewards got the people to move back, her nurse pushed her into the sedan chair which, with the attendants gathered about it threaded its way through the crowd to the Temple of the Sacred Peak outside the Gate of Wild Jujubes, where she stopped to light incense. Wang Qing followed her in. The temple was packed, it was impossible to move, but when the crowd saw it was Marshal Tong's people, they made way for them. When she got down from the chair to do the incense, Wang Qing pushed forward. But he could not get very near and besides was afraid the stewards would shout at him. So it occurred to him to pretend he was a familiar servant of the temple god, and help her light the candles and incense. Now their eyes met, he staring fixedly at her and she returning the gaze with equal urgency. Now, the Grand Preceptor's grandson had been born a simpleton and, since the girl had several times heard the matchmaker saying it was so, she was constantly bemoaning her fate. Now when she saw Wang Qing's elegance and good looks the little idiot's mind filled with romantic ideas. Then one of the stewards, who had been observ-ing, recognized Sergeant Wang Qing. He went straight up and smacked him one in the face! "This is not something for the likes of you!" he shouted. "You, a common Kaifeng policeman, you've got a nerve! Who told you to worm your way in here? If His Excellency gets to hear about this, that ass's head of yours won't be secure on its neck any longer!" Wang Qing dared not reply. He hung his head and sneaked off, sighing and cursing himself: "What a fool I am! How can a warty toad like me expect to dine on wild swan's flesh?"

Wang Qing returned home crestfallen that evening, hiding his anger and disappointment. But the amazing thing was that the girl, when she got home, went on thinking about him night and day. She bribed her maid to go and find out all about him from the Head Steward. The maid was friendly with the Head Steward's wife; they did a spot of pimping together. They got Wang Qing in secretly by a back door and in utter secrecy an affair started between Wang Qing and the Marshal's adopted daughter. Wang Qing was in seventh heaven and gave himself up to drinking every day. Time doesn't stand still however, and 3 months soon passed: extreme joy always gives way to sadness. One day when Wang Qing had got himself drunk as a lord he blurted it all out in front of his commanding officer. Subsequently the affair was bruited abroad and inevitably Marshal Tong came to hear of it. He was furious. That he wanted to punish the offender and get him cashiered goes without saying. So after this Wang Qing felt he dared not go back to Marshal Tong's residence. One day while he was sitting idly at home — it was near the end of the fifth month and a blazing hot day — he got a bench and placed it in the courtyard of his house to catch the breeze, then went back inside to get a fan. He suddenly saw the legs of the bench move and it followed him inside from the courtyard, "Good heavens!" he exclaimed and launched a kick at it with his right foot. "Ouch!" he screamed. Well if he hadn't kicked the bench, many things would have been different. As soon as he did kick it, he was in trouble. Truly, as the heavens have unpredictable storms, so is man ever threatened by catastrophe.

## 200
## Wang Qing is punished for his adultery; Gong Duan takes a fighting instructor

When the bench began behaving so strangely, Wang Qing went up and gave it a kick. Only he used too much force, because he pulled a muscle and could do nothing but squat there shouting: "Help, help!" He was quite unable to move. His wife heard the cries and rushed out to see what was happening. She saw the bench lying on its side and her husband in a heap on the ground so she went up and slapped his face, saying: "You useless thing, you! You spend all the day outside and never think of coming home. Now when you are here you have to play silly games!"

Wang said: "Don't laugh at me, dear. It's no joke. I've done my back in. It's very painful."

The woman helped him up. Leaning on her shoulder and shaking his head, he cried out through clenched teeth: "Aiya! It hurts like hell!"

"You profligate," she scolded. "You fucking good-for-nothing. When you're off on one of your sprees you're always ready to lash out with your feet and fists, and now look at you, the joke's on you!" Realizing what she had just said was not exactly appro-priate, she put her silk sleeve in front of her mouth and giggled. Wang Qing also, when he heard "the joke's on you" applied to such a painful situation, could not help laughing and let out a guffaw. She boxed his ears again for him, saying: "You crazy fucker, what've you been up to?"

When she finally got him onto the bed, she pounded a dish of walnuts for him and warmed a jug of wine. Then she went and bolted the door, spread the mosquito net and lowered the curtain for him to sleep. It goes without saying that with that pain in the ribs he could not stir. The night passed uneventfully. Early next morning the pain was still just as bad and he could see no way of getting to the roll call in front of the government offices. As midday was approaching his wife packed him off to see if he could get hold of some ointment and he hobbled as best he could to a place near the government offices where Old Qian, who was an expert in sprains and pulled muscles, had a shop. There he bought two medicinal patches to stick on his back. Old Qian said: "If you want it to heal quickly you should take a couple of doses of a healing potion to increase the blood flow." So saying, he mixed the potion and handed it to Wang Qing, who took out a piece of silver about two or three tenths of a catty in weight. He asked for a piece of paper to wrap the money in. The old fellow saw what he was doing and pretended to look away. Wang Qing handed him the packet, saying: "Please do not think I am disrespectful. You can buy some watermelon to eat."

The old man said: "One doesn't make money out of one's friends, sergeant. I can't allow it." Even as he spoke he took the packet in his right hand, opened his medicine cabinet and popped it inside.

Wang Qing picked up his medicine and was about to leave when a fortune-teller appeared round the corner of the street west of the Government offices. He wore a cap pulled down over his eyebrows and a robe of brown cloth and was carrying a sunshade from which was suspended a sign with big characters that read "Secrets of the Other World" and on either side of this some smaller letters that read: "Li Zhu of Jingnan, ten dollars a time, every word guaranteed, compares with the finest."

When Wang Qing saw it was a fortune teller, his mind being full of this business with the girl and the strange happenings of the day before, he shouted out: "Mr. Li, come in and sit down!"
"What can I do for you sir?" said the fortune teller. As he spoke his eyes slid over Wang Qing exploring him from head to foot.
"I'd like to hear my fortune," Wang Qing replied.
Mr. Li lowered his sunshade and entered the apothecary's. He greeted Old Qian with joined hands, saying "Please excuse the disturbance." Then from within his robe of rough brown cloth he produced a red sandalwood box. He took off the lid and took out a large copper coin which he presented to Wang Qing, saying: "Go and say a silent prayer to heaven, if you will sir."
Wang Qing tried to make a deep obeisance to the sun's flaming red disk, but it hurt so much he couldn't bend. He was stiff as an eighty- or ninety-year-old and all he could manage was a little bob, something between a bow and a nod, after which he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed. Observing this, the fortune-teller said quietly to Old Qian: "If he's using your medicine no doubt he'll be better soon. I assume he's injured himself in some way?"
"There was some funny business with a bench," the old man said. "He kicked it and strained his back. When he came in just now he couldn't even speak properly. He's used two of my patches and already he's able to bend his waist again."
The fortune-teller said: "Just what I thought."
After completing his prayers, Wang Qing gave the coin back to the fortune-teller. The latter asked him his name, then waved the divining tube in the air and intoned:
*The day is auspicious the time is right, the Sage casts the sticks, let that which is hidden be revealed. The Tao is all-embracing and universal, it connects all things: it unites the virtues of heaven and earth, combines the brightness of sun and moon, gives motion to the cycle of the four seasons, relates the good and ill luck of gods and ghosts. This gentleman, Mr. Wang of the Kaifeng district of the Eastern Capital, would purchase from heaven his fortune. On this day in this place he entreats all the great Sages, every god and saint, by all that is most sacred, most holy, most blessed, most spiritual to point the way to the lost one, to make manifest his destiny.*
The fortune-teller cast the sticks twice for a double divination, what he called a water and thunder divination. Observing the disposition of the six lines, he asked: "What exactly is it you want to know about?"
"Domestic matters," Wang Qing replied.
Li nodded and said: "Don't be upset if I speak frankly. It's hard, very hard. You will have many troubles, but things will improve later. There are some verses that you should remember." He began to wave about a pleated fan of oiled paper on a bamboo frame and recited: "Home's in a mess, strange events portend disaster, there is no peace to be had there. I see trouble with an old temple, a dangerous bridge, a malicious attack, an official injustice or a serious illness. When there is no proper order, how can one prosper? See honour fierce fright, litigation connected. When people are not at ease, accidents occur. When the limbs are weak, a man is insecure. A change can bring improvement. Meet tiger-dragon-chicken-dog day means more trouble."
Wang Qing was sitting facing Li. He couldn't abide the strong smell of lacquer from the fan so he held his silk sleeve across his nose as he listened. After his recital Li said: "I said I would be frank. There are yet more strange events lying in wait for you at home! You had better move house, if you want to be safe. Tomorrow is a dangerous day. Watch out!"
Wang Qing heard the warning but didn't know how to act on it. He took out some money to pay Li. Taking up his sunshade Li walked out of the shop and went east. At that moment half a dozen constables from the district office spotted Wang Qing and said: "What are you doing loafing about here?"
When Wang Qing explained about the strange happening and spraining his back they all had a good laugh. "Friends," he said, "if His Excellency asks for me just cover up for me, will you?"
"We'll take care of it," they said, and went away.
Wang Qing went home and got his wife to brew the medicine. He was determined to get better so he kept on taking the tonic and chased it down with several cups of wine. What he didn't realize was that this concoction was a heating potion, and when he went to bed that night and his wife snuggled up to him, his ardour was aroused. The trouble was, he was in such pain he couldn't move. But the woman had suffered weeks of neglect all the time Wang Qing had been involved with the Marshal's daughter and constantly away from home and her desires were burning like fire. She wasn't going to let him off, no way! So she climbed on top of him and they reversed the roles of pleasure.
They got up late next morning. After washing, Wang Qing was starving and he warmed some wine for himself. He was just in the middle of breakfast when a voice outside called out: "Is the sergeant at home?" His wife looked over the fence and said: "It's two policemen." Wang Qing was nonplussed, but he had to put down his rice bowl, wipe his mouth go and out to greet them. "What can I do for you gentlemen?" he asked.
"Nice work if you can get it, sergeant," they said. "Look at the colour on you — drinking at this hour of the morning! The guv called the roll this morning and when you weren't there he was right pissed off. We told him that stuff about seeing something strange and hurting yourself but he didn't buy it. He made out a warrant and told us not to come back empty-handed." They handed the warrant to Wang Qing.
"How can I go and see him when I'm flushed from drinking like this?" he said. "Just wait a bit, then I'll go."
"Nowt to do with us," they said. "But the guv is waiting for you. If you don't go at once, we'll be in trouble too. Come on, get a move on!" They started to pull him. When his wife came out to see what was happening he was already out of the door. The dragged him all the way to the government office where the magistrate was sitting on a leopard skin chair. "We brought Wang Qing, like you ordered, sir," they said.
Wang Qing made the obligatory four kowtows and the magistrate shouted: "Wang Qing, you're one of my officers. Why are you shirking, why didn't you report for duty?"
Wang Qing told his story again, adding: "I really am in pain, I can't sit or lie comfortably, I can't walk properly. I wouldn't dream of deceiving you, Your Excellency. Please be lenient."
But the magistrate saw his face was red and he yelled: "You idle bastard, getting drunk is all you're good at. You got involved in all that hanky-panky and now you're inventing a pack of lies, think you can fool your superior!" He shouted to the guards to take him out and beat him. Wang Qing didn't even have time to open his mouth. They beat him till the blood ran to make him confess his story was a fabrication, and that he was hoping to deceive the credulous with seditious intent. Wang Qing after being manhandled by his wife the night before and now tortured by the police was truly like a block of wood between two axes, or a corpse revived. Able to hold out no longer, he was obliged to make a false confession. The magistrate recorded his statement and ordered his officers to put him in irons and throw him in the death cells, whilst the death penalty was demanded for the fabrication of evil tales and seditious plots. He was taken down.
Of course Marshal Tong had sent a secret message to this magistrate with orders to this effect because he was determined to pay Wang Qing out and get rid of him; this mysterious event had cropped up most opportunely! Everyone in that government office knew about the liaison with the Marshal's daughter and they were all spreading it around that: "Wang Qing has been punished because of that affair. He won't get out of this alive." However, the Grand Preceptor and his son did not much like the sound of this: they felt that if Wang Qing were put to death the affair would gain in notoriety and the scandal would be even greater. So they quietly got some officials they could trust, who were also friends with the magistrate, to tell him he should quickly banish Wang Qing to a distant frontier where he would be lost to view. They also appointed a day for the girl to be betrothed, firstly in order to save Marshal Tong's face and secondly to put an end to the gossip. The Grand Preceptor's grandson was something of a simpleton and would not know whether the girl was a virgin or not, so that was no problem.
In deference to the Grand Preceptor's wishes confidentially imparted to him, the magistrate convened his court. Wang Qing was brought up from the cells, the cangue was removed and he was sentenced to twenty strokes of the cane. A tattooer was summoned to brand his cheeks, the distance of his banishment was calculated and he was assigned to the prison camp at Shanzhou. The court ordered a full ten catty cangue for him, which was fitted and sealed, a warrant was made out and two guards or escorts, Sun Lin and Ho Ji, assigned to deliver him. As the three of them left the court, Wang Qing's father-in-law approached and took them to a wine shop on South Street opposite the court room. He told the waiter to bring them wine and food, and after a few cups and some dishes, he took out a bundle of silver and offered it to Wang Qing, saying: "Here's thirty taels of silver for your travelling expenses."
Wang Qing reached out his hand, saying: "Most kind of you, father-in-law."
The other pushed away his hand, saying: "Not so fast. I'm not giving you the money for nothing. You're being sent off to Shanzhou, that's hundreds of miles, over rough roads and mountain passes, who knows when you'll be back. You've been fooling around with someone's daughter and you've had no time at all for your wife. Who's going to look after her for you now? You've no family, land or property to your name. You've got to sign a divorce certificate and let her marry again. It will avoid problems later. If you do this, you can have the money."
Wang Qing was always a spendthrift. He was thinking that he hadn't an ounce of silver in his pocket, how was he going to manage the journey to his place of banishment? Whatever way he looked at it, he needed that money. He took a deep breath and said: "All right, I'll sign the paper."
His father-in-law took the certificate with one hand as he handed over the money with the other. Then he left.
Wang Qing went home with his guards to pack his bags. His wife had already been taken away by her father and the door was locked. He went and borrowed an axe from a neighbour and broke the door down. He found all his wife's clothes were gone and all her jewellery. It made him half angry and half sad. He got a Mrs. Zhou who lived next door to come and prepare some food and wine for the policemen. He gave them ten taels of silver and said: "It still hurts a lot from the beating. I can't walk properly. I would like a few days to rest before we set off." They'd had the money, so of course they agreed. It was in vain that the Grand Preceptor's son sent friends round to urge the policemen to get going. Wang Qing sold off all his household possessions and rented his house to a Mr. Hu, a man of substance.
Wang Qing's father, who had gone blind as a result of his son's behaviour, lived somewhere else. When his son visited they always quarrelled. Now, hearing that his son had got into trouble with the authorities and been banished he found it surprisingly painful. He got a lad to lead him to his son's house. "You never listened to my warnings, my son," he said. "That's why you've ended up like this." The sightless eyes filled with tears as he spoke. Wang Qing, who from childhood had never been accustomed to use the word "father", now at the moment of final split-up felt a sudden pang and cried out: "Father, I've been so cruelly used by corrupt officials and so insulted by my father-in-law who made me sign a divorce before he would give me money."
His father said: "They'd never have treated you like that if you'd loved your wife and shown respect to your father-in-law."
This censoriousness infuriated him. He paid no further attention to his father but packed his bags and left town with the two policemen. His father tore his hair and beat his breast and said: "I should never have come to see the ungrateful wretch!" The boy led him back home and that was that.
After leaving the capital Wang Qing and his guards took lodgings in a lonely spot so he could recuperate for another ten days or so. When his wounds were better the policemen insisted he set off. Moving slowly they headed for Shanzhou. It was the beginning of August and the weather was blazing hot, so they could only do about fifteen miles a day. They suffered the usual discomforts of travel, sleeping in beds people had died in, eating suspect food. After more than a fortnight on the road they passed Mount Song. One day one of the guards pointed to a mountain range far off in the west and said: "That's the Northern Mang Mountain."
Talking as they went and making the most of the morning cool, they covered another twenty-six miles and then they came to a town on the eastern end of the mountain set in a rich country. Thither they directed their steps. East of the town, where dwellings were few, there was a T-shaped grove of tall poplars. Under the trees they found a crowd of people, jostling and craning their necks and there in the shade a fellow stripped to the waist and calling people to come and see his exhibition of staff play. They decided to take a rest under the trees. Wang Qing was soaked with sweat from the walking, his whole body dripping. With his cangue round his neck he pushed his way into the crowd and stood on tiptoe to see the fellow with the staff. After a moment he smiled involuntarily and said: "It's not serious stuff, what he's doing." The man was working himself up to a climax and when he heard this he put down his staff to see who had spoken. It was just a convict! He was outraged. "You bloody felon!" he shouted. "My staff play is renowned far and wide. What right have you to open your fucking mouth? Who said you can criticize me and talk such shit?" Throwing down his stick he squared up to Wang Qing and punched him in the face. Immediately two young men in the crowd stepped forward and separated them, saying: "Stop it!" They asked Wang Qing: "Are you an expert then?"
Wang Qing replied: "I spoke without thinking. I didn't mean to make this gentleman angry. I do have a little knowledge of staff play."
The other continued to rail against him: "You bloody convict, I bet you don't dare to take me on!"
The other two said to Wang Qing: "If you're willing to and can beat him, then these two strings of stolen cash are yours."
Wang Qing said with a grin: "It's no problem." He made his way through the crowd and borrowed a staff from one of the guards. He took off his shirt and rolled up his robe. Then he took a firm grip on the staff. The bystanders said: "You've got that cangue round your neck, how can you manage the staff?"
"That's the whole point." Wang Qing answered. "If I can beat him with this cangue on, there'll be no doubt about my skill."
"You'll certainly deserve the silver if you can beat him with the cangue on," they all cried. Everyone made way for him. His opponent was ready for him, staff in hand, and giving it a flourish shouted: "Come on, let's have you!"
Wang Qing said to the crowd: "Please don't be too critical. I only hope I won't disappoint you, gentlemen."
His opponent, hoping to take full advantage of the fact that Wang was hampered by the cangue, performed a move known as "the python swallows the elephant". Wang Qing countered with a move called "the dragonfly skims the water". The other gave a shout and lunged. Wang Qing took a step back. The other followed, raising his staff and aiming a hefty blow at Wang Qing's forehead. Wang Qing swayed to the left and his opponent's staff hit nothing but air. His recovery was too slow and as he tried to dodge Wang Qing struck him on the wrist and his staff fell to the ground. Luckily Wang had moderated the full force of the blow, but even so the wrist was broken. The crowd all laughed. But Wang Qing rushed forward and taking the other's hand in his said: "Forgive me for the blow!" The man made an attempt to scoop up the money with his left hand, the right hand being too painful. The crowd scolded him: "He's beaten you. It was just agreed this money was for the winner." Now the two young men who had come forward before grabbed the money and gave it to Wang Qing, saying: "Please, we would like to invite you to our house for a chat."
The staff play merchant could hardly dispute the matter with all those people so he had to pack up his things and head back to the city. After that the crowd dispersed.
The two young men led Wang Qing and his guards south past some woods, all of them wearing straw hats to keep off the sun, till they reached a village. Here among the trees was a manor house surrounded by a mud wall in a grove of willows. Outside the house the sound of cicadas filled the trees, inside the beams were alive with the twittering of swallows. They were led into the thatched hall and after formal courtesies had been exchanged they all took off their sweat shirts and hemp sandals and seated themselves. Their hosts said: "From your accent, you're from the capital, gentlemen?" Wang Qing told them his name and explained how he had been unjustly sentenced by a venal magistrate. He politely asked the other two their names. "I am Gong Duan," said the elder, "and this is my younger brother Gong Zheng. This is our ancestral home and the place is called Gong Village." He told a retainer to take away the visitors' wet shirts and dry them and then after drawing some cool water to relieve their thirst, take them up to bathe. Tables were laid first in the hall with freshly made dimsum, following which chickens and ducks were killed and some beans were boiled and peaches picked to offer them with the wine.
Then the retainers re-laid the tables: first a dish of peeled garlic and a dish of chopped chives. Then tea and vegetables were brought in, fruit and nuts, and fish, chicken, duck and so on. They seated Wang Qing in the place of honour with the two policemen next to him. The brothers took the host's place, while servants poured the wine. "I am a convicted criminal," Wang Qing said. "I am most grateful for your kindness, but I really do not deserve so much honour."
Gong Duan said: "Nonsense. Who can say he never gets into trouble? And who carries wine and food with him when he travels?"
They played guessing games and forfeits that evening and wine flowed till they were half tipsy. Gong Duan opened his mouth and said: "This little village of ours has about two hundred souls, all told. For some reason they insisted that we should be their leaders. It's true we're quite handy with fists and staves and can beat most people. Well, this spring in the second month at our local temple festival they put up a stage and had some performances and my brother and I went along to see. There was a quarrel over some betting and we got pretty badly beaten up by this chap from our village called Huang Da. We can't defeat him and he's been boasting to everyone about how he's the strongest. It's driving us crazy, but we've had to swallow our pride. Now we've seen how complete your technique is and we'd like you to be our teacher. If you would agree to train us we'd be extraordinarily grateful to you."
Wang Qing was only too happy to oblige and accordingly they prostrated themselves in the show of respect due to a teacher. They all got thoroughly drunk that evening, and then went to bed to get the benefit of the cool night air. Next morning Wang Qing was up betimes and took Gong Duan, the elder brother, down to the threshing floor to practise his footwork. As they were thus engaged a tall man strode in with his hands behind his back and shouted: "What's this bloody convict doing here trying to cheat us over his skill?" Now the appearance of this man was to have important results: further calamities would befall Wang Qing and Gong Duan would conceive an even greater hatred. Truly

*A life of misrule begets only disaster:*
*What do gamblers win but disgrace!*

## 201
### A warden loses his life because of his brother-in-law; A prison official removes his cousin's scar

Now while Wang Qing in the Gong brothers' compound was enjoying the start of a sunny day, cooled by a gentle breeze, training the elder brother in the art of attack and defence with the staff on their threshing floor shaded by the willow trees, a tall man marched in. The top of his head was shaved but he had no headgear and the remaining hair was tied back in a pigtail; he wore a short loose-fitting gown of brown cloth with plain silk trousers and open straw sandals, and he carried a triangular fan. As he marched in with his head held high, arms crossed behind his back, he saw this convict conducting the training session. He had heard the day before about a convict who defeated the expert performing in East Mang, and was afraid that the Gong brothers were learning some new moves, so he shouted to Wang Qing: "If you're a convict, what are you doing hanging around here to cheat people, instead of getting on with your journey?"
Wang Qing thought this must be some relative of the Gongs' so he didn't like to answer back. In fact it was Huang Da, their enemy. He too had come out to enjoy the morning freshness and was on his way to the house of Old Liu on the western end of the Gong village to collect a gambling debt, when he heard some noise up at the Gongs'. He was familiar with them, which is why he marched in uninvited.
An indescribable rage filled Gong Duan's breast when he saw who it was. The feeling rose towering and irrepressible, and he burst out: "You scoundrel! You piece of ass and ox shit! The other day you cheated me of my wager, how dare you walk in here and try to bully people!"
Huang Da equally annoyed riposted: "Go stuff your mother's arse!" He threw down his fan, raised his fists and rushed at Gong and punched him in the face. Wang Qing when he heard them giving vent to their feelings like this, guessed this must be Huang Da and rushed forward to help. He aimed a blow at Huang Da's ribs and Huang Da came crashing down. Before he could recover the Gong brothers and two of their retainers had pinned him down and began pounding him with their fists and feet in the back, chest, shoulders, ribs, flanks, cheeks, head and four limbs. There was nowhere their fists or feet did not reach except perhaps the tip of his tongue! He received an infinity of blows. His gown and trousers were in shreds. "That's enough, that's enough!" he kept shouting. He was now completely naked, not a scrap of clothing left to cover him. Only when the two guards of the prisoner's escort intervened did the Gongs at last stop.
After such a pounding Huang Da could only lie there gasping, there was no thought of resistance in him. Gong Duan told some of his farm workers to carry him half way to East Mang. They left him there on the grass where he lay naked in the sun for half the day. Eventually some neighbouring farmers came out to get fodder and found him. They carried him back home and he took to his bed. He got someone to write an accusation and take it to the local authorities. Of this no more.
Having fought all the first part of the morning, the Gongs told their retainers to bring some refreshments and invited Wang Qing and his guards to breakfast.
"That fellow will be back looking for revenge one of these days," said Wang Qing.
"If the lousy bastard wants to try something on, there's only his wife on his side, the neighbours were just scared of him, that's all. Now they've seen him beaten up, they won't back him. If he dies, we can pay a retainer to say he's responsible, take the beating and keep his mouth shut. If he doesn't die, then it's only a case of fighting. Anyway, I've had my revenge, entirely thanks to you, master, so please drink some wine and stop worrying. Once you've taught us fencing, we will have to repay you properly."
Gong Duan took out two silver ingots, each weighing five taels, and gave them to the guards, to persuade them to stay a little longer. With the money in their hands they could only say yes. They stayed more than ten days, in fact, and each day Wang Qing practised moves with spear and staff with the two brothers. The guards went on insisting they should leave, and when they heard that Huang Da had sent someone to the local government office to lodge a complaint, Gong Duan took out fifty taels of silver and gave them to Wang Qing for the journey to Shanzhou. They rose in the night and packed their things and left the house before daylight. The elder told his younger brother to carry the silver he had just given Wang Qing and accompany him on the journey.
The journey was uneventful and without any delay they reached Shanzhou. The two guards took Wang Qing to the government office and handed in the warrant from the Eastern Capital. Having acquainted himself with the facts, the magistrate accepted Wang Qing and signed the receipt which he gave to the escorts to take back. Of this no more. He then dispatched Wang Qing to the prison camp, while the guards returned to the capital with their receipt.
Gong Zheng then went off to see someone he knew there and gave him the money to give to the warden of the gaol for Wang Qing to buy some things he might need. This warden's name was Zhang Shikai. After receiving the money he had Wang Qing's cangue removed and excused him the serious flogging. Wang Qing was not given any work. He was given his own room and allowed to come and go as he pleased.
Gradually two months passed and it was late autumn. One day as Wang Qing was sitting idly in his cell, a guard came in and said: "The Warden wants to see you."

Wang Qing went with him to the reception room and kowtowed. The Warden said: "You've been here some time now, and I haven't yet asked you to do anything. I want to buy a good Chenzhou bow. Since you're from the capital and Chenzhou is in the same province, you ought to be able to tell whether the price is right." He took a package from his sleeve and handed it to Wang Qing saying: "Here's two taels of the best silver. Go and get me a bow."

"I'll take care of it," Wang replied. He took the package to his cell where he opened it and found it to be indeed pure silver. He weighed it and it was a fraction over the weight. He left the camp and headed for a shop that sold bows, where he bought a real Chenzhou bow for only one seventy. When he got back to the camp with it, the Warden was not in his office, so he gave it to one of the officials of his household to take it to him. Happily there were thirty cents left over. Next day the Warden called him in again and said: "You are very efficient. The bow you bought yesterday is excellent."

Wang Qing said: "You should apply heat in its box to season it, Your Excellency."

"You don't need to tell me that," the Warden said.

From then on the Warden sent Wang out every day to buy things, only it was not like before. He did not advance him any money, but gave him an account book and told him to note down in it what he bought each day. But of course the shopkeepers would never let him off paying. He was obliged to draw on his own capital so he could buy the things and deliver them to the Warden's office, and the Warden always found fault, so it was always curses and beatings. After ten days when he presented the accounts and asked to be paid not a cent was forthcoming. When it came to the monthly balance, all he received from the Warden would be ten strokes, or twenty, or thirty. All in all he must have received a good three hundred and his legs were black and blue. The fifty taels of silver Gong Duan had given him had all been used up on these expenses.

One day Wang Qing went to the shop of one Doctor Zhang, maker of pills and mixer of beverages for internal and external applications, concoctor of medicines and seller of ointments, by the eastern corner of the triumphal arch west of the camp, because he wanted a cream to rub on his sores. The doctor talked while he applied the ointment for him: "An uncle of that prison warden of yours was here the other day, buying an ointment for his wrist. He said he'd had a fall in East Mang. But it looked more to me as if it had been broken by a sharp blow."

"How come I've never seen him in the camp?" Wang Qing asked eagerly.

"He's the brother of the Warden's minor wife," the doctor said. "His name is Pang Yuan. This Mistress Pang is the Warden's favourite. Her brother is a dreadful gambler and is also fond of spear and staff play. He owes everything to his sister who looks after him."

When he heard this Wang Qing was practically certain it was this Pang Yuan whom he had beaten the other day in the shade of the poplars. Small wonder the Warden was out to get him. When he went back to the camp he secretly got some wine and food and invited one of the junior turnkeys and gave him money and slowly questioned him about Pang Yuan. What the man told him confirmed what Doctor Zhang had said. Two things in particular he said: "You injured this Pang Yuan the other day at East Mang and he has complained about you to the Warden. I'm afraid you can't escape the thrashings!"

Truly we can say:

*Be not too keen to win the race;*
*Better to yield and know your place!*
*From a single blow the quarrel's made;*
*With interest it will be repaid!*

Back in his room, Wang Qing sighed and said: "As they say, don't fear justice, fear those who hand it out! The other day instead of keeping my big mouth shut I told that bugger I could beat him with the staff. How was I to know he was the younger brother of the prison Warden's sweetheart! If he's so determined to get me I'd better start by keeping out of his way and think of a plan later." He went out surreptitiously and bought a sharp knife which he secreted on his person just in case. Ten days passed and luckily there was no trouble. His wounds had healed somewhat.

Then one day the Warden ordered him to buy two rolls of silk. This had to be taken seriously, he could not put it off. He went at once to the shop and made the purchase. When he got back the Warden was sitting in the reception room and he went straight there and reported. The Warden objected that the colour was wrong, that it was not long enough and the pattern was old-fashioned. "You cheeky beggar," he shouted. "You're a convict, you ought to be carrying water and shifting stone. Or maybe you should be locked up in solitary! This work I've given you is far too good for you. You just don't know when you're well off, you idle bastard."

Wang Qing bore it all in silence, kowtowing like someone laying out candles and asking for mercy.

"For the time being we'll postpone the beating. Go and get it changed quickly. If you don't bring it back by this evening, if you're a second late, then watch out for your life!"

Wang Qing had to take off his own clothes and pawn them for a couple of strings of cash in order to pay extra for changing the silk. This all took time and when he returned it was already after lighting up time and the camp gates were shut. The duty officer said: "How can I take it on myself to let you in after dark like this?"

Wang Qing said: "I'm on a mission for the Warden." But the duty officer didn't want to hear. Wang Qing had to give him all the money he had left before he would let him in and he still held him up a long time. Carrying his bundles of silk Wang Qing went to the door of the residence. The doorkeeper said: "His Excellency has had a big quarrel with his first wife. He's gone to the second wife's room, and the mistress is fuming. I daren't pass on your message, it's more than my life's worth!"

Wang Qing was thinking to himself: "He said I had to bring it back by tonight. Why put all these obstacles in my way? It's all meant to get me into trouble. How can I get out of the beating tomorrow? My life is really in that villain's hands. I've been beaten three hundred times. Isn't that enough to satisfy his taste for revenge? Previously he had all the money from Gong Zheng. Now he's changing his face and persecuting me like this!"

Now from his childhood Wang Qing had been an awkward cuss and even his own father and mother had been scared of upsetting him. When his rebellious spirit was aroused, he seemed proof of the saying "Gentlemen hate passionately, it's manly to express your anger". The thing was now, he could neither do it nor refrain from doing it. He had reached the limit. While everyone in the camp, convicts included, was asleep, he quietly crept round to the back of the residence, climbed a low wall, silently drew back the bolt on the rear door and hid on one side. By starlight he could see that inside the wall on the eastern end there was a stable and on the west end a very small shed which on closer inspection turned out to be a privy. Wang Qing picked up a set of wooden palings that were inside the stable and leant them against the wall by the two-leaved gate, climbed onto them and thence onto the wall, pulled up the palings after him and leant them inside, and carefully slipped down to the ground. First he drew back the bolts on the two doors and hid the wooden palings. There was another wall within and from behind it came the sound of laughter. He crept over to this wall and pressed his ear to it. Straining to hear, he recognized the Warden's voice and a woman's voice. There was also another man's voice. They were drinking and gossiping inside. After stealthily listening for some while, he heard the Warden say: "Brother-in-law, that villain will report back to me tomorrow and then his life will be forfeit to the cane."

"I reckon all the bugger has is used up by now," said the other man. "I hope you'll get on with it and finish the fucker off!"

The Warden said: "The day after tomorrow you'll have what you want!"

The woman said: "That's enough, now! Don't you two ever stop?"

The man said: "Who asked your opinion, sister? It's none of your business!"

Wang Qing listening outside the wall could get about one word in three, but the meaning was clear. A vast anger arose in his soul, an indescribable fire, towering into the sky, impossible to restrain, and he was involuntarily filled with the strength of a door god, till he was ready to throw down that plastered wall and charge in and kill the scoundrels. Indeed so far as they were concerned it was a case of

*Illness strikes when all seems well.*
*Calamity looms when life's at the full.*
*Till autumn's winds the grasshopper plays.*
*The Reaper's waiting to end your days.*

Just when he could bear it no longer, he heard the Warden say: "Boy, bring a lamp to light me to the privy." Immediately Wang Qing pulled out his knife and crouched down in the corner behind a plum tree. Then with a creak the door swung open, and casting a glow like the setting sun the boy emerged with a travelling lantern, the Warden following. They proceeded, unaware because of the dark that there was someone hiding there, watching only where they set their feet, till they reached the double doors and a curse resounded: "The incompetent oafs, not one of them pays attention. Why can they never remember to bolt the doors?"

The boy held the doors open and watched while the Warden exited through them. Wang Qing quietly crept up behind. The Warden heard steps behind him and turned just in time to see Wang bearing down on him with the knife in one hand and the fingers of the other splayed out. The Warden's heart and other organs flew heavenward as he cried out: "A thief!" It's slow in the telling but happens in a flash. Wang Qing's knife descended, carving a gash from ear to collarbone, and his victim crashed to the floor. The boy, though in the normal way of things he got on well enough with Wang Qing, when he saw him with the knife glinting in his hand, in the process of performing the dreadful deed, was naturally terrified. He would have fled, but his legs were as if nailed to the ground. He tried to scream, but he had been struck dumb and no sound came out. He was literally scared out of his wits. As the Warden lay writhing on the ground Wang Qing threw himself on him and finished him off with a stab in the back.

Pang Yuan, drinking in his sister's room, heard muffled noises outside and without waiting to light a lamp ran out to look. When he saw someone coming, Wang Qing delivered a kick to the boy with the lantern and both boy and lantern disappeared. Pang Yuan thought it was the Warden beating the boy so he called out: "Why are you beating him, brother-in-law?" As he came forward, Wang Qing charged and stabbed at him in the dark, catching him in the ribs. Pang Yuan let out a screech like a stuck pig and fell to the floor. Holding the head up by the hair, Wang Qing cut it off.

The woman had heard the screams outside: she told one of the maids to light a lantern and they rushed out to see what was going on. Wang Qing thought to kill her too. What a scene that was! Words are not adequate to describe it! Anyway, Wang Qing saw in a flash that there were a dozen maids behind, all carrying makeshift weapons and screaming. Springing into action, he fled the scene. He opened the back door, scrambled over the wall of the prison compound, removed his bloodstained clothing, and wiped his knife and put it away. The watchman's drum sounded the third watch. Taking advantage of the fact that the streets were empty he approached the city wall. Shanzhou had an earthen wall and it was not very high nor was the moat very deep. He was able to cross both.

We shall leave him to make his escape, and describe how the Warden's wife Mistress Pang with two of her maids came out with a lantern to investigate. None of the others came with them. First she came upon her brother's bleeding head, lying on the ground in one place and the body in another. The women stared at each other in utter terror, feeling as if their skulls had been split open in eight places and a bucket of ice-cold water poured over the top. For a long time they stood and no words came out. Then stumbling and shaking with fear they ran back in again. They shouted to the other servants inside and to the guards on duty outside. Torches were lit, weapons grasped, and everyone went to the back to see. Outside the double doors they found the Warden's body and the boy lying on the ground gasping for breath and spitting blood. It was obvious he was not long for this world. Seeing the back door open they assumed it was a thief who had got in at the back. They rushed out to look and found the two bundles of silk thrown down on the ground and with one voice they all said: "Wang Qing!" They hurriedly called a roll of the convicts and found that Wang Qing alone was missing. The whole camp was in an uproar, and also the people who lived around it on every side. Outside the back wall the blood-stained clothing was found and careful examination showed it to be all Wang Qing's. They discussed what to do and agreed that the matter must be reported to the magistrate before the opening of the city gates. Someone was sent at once. By now it was the fifth watch. The magistrate was shocked and sent the district police chief immediately to obtain details of the victims and ascertain the whereabouts of the murderer. It was ordered that the gates remain closed for two days and a state of emergency be maintained while a thorough house-to-house search was conducted, but no trace was found of the murderer. The magistrate published a notice and had it distributed to all the villages in his jurisdiction, requiring village elders to carry out searches and apprehend the murderer. The notice gave details of Wang Qing's place of origin and age; it contained a description of his appearance and build, together with a picture, and announced a reward of a thousand strings of cash. Anyone who knew anything of his whereabouts was obliged to report it and would receive the reward. Anyone harbouring the criminal or giving him food and lodging would be prosecuted as an accomplice and suffer the same fate as the criminal. Neighbouring districts for miles around were put on the alert.

After climbing the city wall that night, Wang Qing had made a bundle of his clothes and waded across the moat. He was thinking: "I've got out of it with my life, but where can I go now?" Winter was approaching. The leaves had fallen the grass withered, and he had to find his way with only the stars to light him. He followed several small paths and finally came to a main road. He moved along at a smart pace and by the time dawn was showing red in the east he had done a good twenty miles, but he continued on, heading south, till he came to a populated area. He remembered he still had a little money on him and decided to approach and find something to eat and drink and give himself time to think where he was going to go. In a little while he came to a market. It was still early and the wine shops and eating house were not open yet. There was just one eastward facing house under whose eaves hung a battered lamp, announcing it to be a rest house for travelling merchants. The place had not been properly closed up the night before and the door was half open. Wang Qing advanced and pushed the door, which swung open with a creak. The man who appeared from inside was still unwashed. Wang Qing recognized him. It was his first cousin, Fan Quan. In his youth he had been a successful broker with his father in Fangzhou, and had been made superintendant of the district's two prisons. This spring in the third month he went to the capital on official business and stayed several days in Wang Qing's house. "Cousin, how've you been keeping?" Wang Qing called out.

"Can it be cousin Wang Qing?" the other replied. Startled by his appearance and by the two golden seals tattooed on his cheeks, he did not at first know what to say. Wang Qing looked around to make sure no one was near and then knelt before him and said: "Cousin, save me I beg you!" Fan Quan hurriedly raised him up and said: "You really are Wang Qing then?"

Wang Qing waved a hand and said: "Keep your voice down!"

Fan Quan caught on at once and taking him by the sleeve pulled him inside. Luckily the night before he had chosen a single room. Quietly but urgently he asked: "Why are you looking like this?" In a whisper Wang Qing told him all about the injustice he had suffered and the banishing to Shanzhou, after which he told of Warden Zhang's cruel treatment and what had happened just the day before. Fan Quan was so shocked he could not at first think what to do. Then he quickly washed and shaved, had breakfast, and paid the bill for food and lodging. Having decided that Wang Qing must pretend to be a gaoler's assistant, they left the inn and headed for Fangzhou. As they went Wang Qing asked his cousin how he came to be there. "My governor sent me to deliver some papers to the governor of Shanzhou," he said. "Yesterday I received the reply and set off. But it was getting late so I stopped here for the night. I had no idea you were in Shanzhou or that all this had happened."

They continued their journey all night till they arrived in Fangzhou. Two days had passed and in Shanzhou the notices were out for the arrest of the murderer Wang Qing. Fan Quan returned home anxiously and told Wang Qing: "You're not safe here in the city. I've got some cottages out in the country, east of Mount Ding, on a piece of land I bought for myself last year. I've settled a few farm hands there to cultivate it. You'd better go and hide there for a few days. Later you can decide what to do."

He waited till dark and then took Wang Qing to the cottage at Mount Ding. They decided to change his name to Li De. Fan Quan thought the tattoos on Wang Qing's cheeks didn't look too solid. Luckily he had previously been in Jiankang and having heard a lot of Doctor An, had gained his confidence by means of generous gifts. Doctor An had shown him a way of removing tattoos. He used an acid on Wang Qing's cheeks and afterwards an ointment to heal them. At first the treatment raised a red welt but the tattoos disappeared. In two months even the scar was gone. Since time is ever fleeting, a hundred days soon passed and it was the spring festival of the first year of the reign. The Government pursuit of Wang Qing had come to nothing. His face now bore no trace of the tattoos and gradually he began to go about more confidently, wearing the clothes that had been donated to him by his cousin. One day as he was sitting bored in the cottage, he heard a certain commotion in the distance. He asked some of the peasants what the excitement was all about. "There's some people called Duan, Mr. Li, lives just west of us here. Well these Duan brothers have a singer to come from the capital. They've put up a stage and all. There's going to be a performance, with all kinds of music. They say she's the latest thing, a top-notch artist. She's expected to pull in a huge audience. You ought to go along and take a look." After this build-up, Wang Qing was never likely to resist. But because he went there, certain things would happen. A young lady of the district was going to marry a convict, the people would suffer a load of misfortune at the hands of a fierce beast.

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### At the Duans' a bridegroom is welcomed; The chief on House Mountain fights 2 opponents

When Wang Qing rushed over to the next village, Mount Ding, he found a crowd of five or six hundred gathered there. The stage was set up on the threshing floor outside the village. The artist had not yet made her entrance, but around the stage there were some thirty or forty tables. People were crowding around, throwing dice and placing bets. Others, a group of twenty or so, were squatting on the ground tossing coins.

That's how it was: some shaking the dice and shouting out the combinations — pairs, straight, flush, full house, and so on, others tossing coins and calling heads or tails. There was laughter and curses and even serious fights. The losers took off their shirts and pawned their clothes, ready to lose all they had and ruin their business, forgetting to eat and sleep. This was losing indeed, going the whole hog! Those who were winning were in expansive mood, strutting and swaggering about, marching this way and that in search of drinkers willing to continue the game, their purses, bags, and sleeves overflowing with money. But when the final reckoning came, they would find they had really won very little. They gambled their winnings away or had them eaten up by the gaming master's rake-off.

Besides the gambling scene there were also all the countrywomen who had abandoned the hoeing and watering of their crops and come flocking in droves, and who stood there, brown faces upturned and gold teeth glinting, waiting expectantly for the actress to appear. There were also mothers and fathers and their offspring. She was really smart and fashionable and many people had come to see her. Not only the locals from the village were there; people from the city had come to gaze too. A huge area of that green countryside had been trampled bare.

Well, to cut a long story short, Wang Qing became restless after watching this scene for a while. As he glanced round the throng beside the stage his eye was taken by a large bewhiskered gent sitting on a bench and leaning his arms on the table. He had round eyes and a big head, broad shoulders and narrow waist. Five strings of cash were piled on the table, a dice cup and six dice, but he had no takers. "It's about ten months since I fell foul of the law," Wang Qing was thinking. "In all these months I haven't had a go at this. I've got that money Fan Quan gave me the other day for my living expenses. Why don't I test my luck, try a few throws with this fellow? I'll just make enough to buy myself something special to eat." He took out his money and threw it down on the table, saying: "Let's give it a go."

The other man took a good look at him and said: "Come on then." As he spoke another man emerged from the crowd around the table in front. He had a long thin face and bore a distinct resemblance to the one who was sitting. He said to Wang Qing: "Is that all you've got? You won't get far with that. Have some money from me. I'll only charge you two percent on your winnings."

"Fair enough!" Wang Qing said. He took two strings of cash from the man, who set aside twenty cents from each. "That'll do," said Wang Qing, and announced he was going to try for a full house. After the first few throws, another man approached and put down a stake. Now Wang Qing was accustomed to gambling in the style of the Eastern Capital: he believed in his luck, but he also knew a trick or two and was a master of bluff and deception. The man who had lent him the money took the opportunity to slip round to the other side of the table, while the newcomer encouraged him to give the dice a "good whirl".

Straight off Wang Qing won two strings of cash. Having won, he went on throwing and his luck held. He was about ready to leave off, but the other man impatiently renewed his stake, seemingly determined to go on to the bitter end. When Wang Qing threw a nine, the other man only threw eight. In not much more than an hour he had lost five strings of cash and was cleaned out. From his winnings Wang Qing made up two strings of cash with a piece of twine and put them on one side. He strung together the rest of the money to his satisfaction and was about to lift it onto his shoulder when the man who had lost cried out: "Where are you taking that money? I reckon that's still too hot from the stove — you're going to burn your hands!"

"You lost to me," Wang Qing replied angrily. "Cut it out!"

The other man glared at him and said: "You son of a bitch. Can't you see I'm your superior?"

Wang Qing replied in kind: "You motherfucking peasant! If you hit me in the stomach you'll never get your fist out! How can you stop me taking the money?"

The other put up his fists and aimed a blow at Wang Qing's face. The latter swayed to one side and caught the other's arm, thrust his right elbow into the pit of his stomach and tripped him with his right leg. The man's strength availed him nothing, he could not break the hold and he crashed over backwards and lay flat on his back, face to the sky. The onlookers all began to laugh. The man struggled to rise but Wang Qing pressed him down and subjected him to a regular going over. Now the one who had first put down the money came and without a word of either reproof or encouragement scooped up all the money on the table. Furious, Wang Qing left the man on the ground and raced after the other. Suddenly a woman appeared from the crowd and began shouting: "He won't get away with it, the blighter, he's got me to reckon with!"

This is what she was like:

*There's a ferocious glint in her eye, a malignant expression on her face. Her waist and limbs are thick and coarse; she lacks all feminine charms. Her skin is rough; she relies on thick make-up to cover the blemishes. She boasts a headful of weird hairpins, and offers glimpses of two arms covered in most ordinary looking bangles. When it comes to moving the stone mortar, she laughs at the way others pant and strain; picking up the rail of the well she is proud that it costs her no effort. If it's needlework you're after, she hasn't a clue; but for kicking and fisticuffs she's a real artist.*

She was around twenty four or five, this woman. She removed her outer garment rolled it up and threw it down on the table. Inside she wore a tight short-sleeved robe of parrot green silk and underneath wide breeches of padded silk. She strode forward, raised her fists and shaped up to Wang Qing. Well, since she was a woman and he could see a weakness in her guard, Wang Qing thought he was going to have some fun. He deliberately refrained from using fast kicks, and instead took up a wrestler's stance, adopting an open posture and waiting for her to attack.

By now the actors had come on stage to perform their comic sketch, but the people had all gone off to watch this fight between a man and a woman and were crowding around them in a tight circle. The woman saw that the man was going to confine himself to blocking and parrying, but she hadn't enough strength to force the issue. So she waited for an opening and then performed a "black tiger", aiming one fist at his heart. He swayed to one side and she struck only the air. Before she could recover her balance he grabbed her and upended her with a twist. As soon as she hit the ground he lightly picked her up in a move called "the tiger grabs a head". "Be careful," he said, "you'll get your clothes dirty. Forgive me for being a bit rough, but you did start it." She was not the least bit put out. "You're pretty nifty," she said. "That's a good hold."

Now the man who had lost money and been beaten, together with the one who had first put up money and then grabbed the winnings, pushed through the crowd and began shouting: "You lecherous bastard, you've got a nerve! How dare you interfere with our little sister!"

Wang Qing shouted back: "You're a fucking bad loser. You stole my money, and now you're making filthy insinuations." He rushed at them with his fists flying. Then another man came out of the crowd and got between all three of them. "Mr. Li, enough of this!" he shouted. " Duan brothers, stop it! We're all neighbours. If you've got something to say to each other, then say it nicely!" It was Wang Qing's cousin, Fan Quan. The three men stopped fighting. Cousin Fan Quan hurriedly said to the girl: "Please forgive him."

The girl bowed and said: "Is Mr. Li a relative of yours?"

"He is my cousin."

"He's a terrific fighter!"

Wang Qing said to Fan Quan: "I couldn't bear to see that villain lose and then call in his accomplices to steal the money!"

Fan Quan said pleasantly: "To them it's a business, why did you have to come and make trouble?"

The Duan brothers were watching their sister expectantly. She said: "Out of respect for Mr. Fan you mustn't fight with him any more. Give us the money."

In deference to his sister, who was evidently something special, Duan the Fifth was obliged to admit that he had lost the money fairly and hand it over to her. She gave it to Fan Quan, saying: "Here is the original sum. Please take it." With that she hustled her brothers away, while Fan Quan likewise took Wang Qing back home.

Fan Quan made no secret of his annoyance: "For my mother's sake I lay my life on the line, letting you stay here. If an amnesty comes up we can do some business together. Why the devil do you have to be so restless? Those Duan brothers are real troublemakers. And the girl is even worse. They've nicknamed her 'Big Beast'. I don't know how many young gentlemen she's ruined. When she was fifteen she was married to a squire who was an old idiot and before a year was out she'd burnt him to death. Relying on their strength she and her two brothers earn themselves a dishonest living by going around creating disputes like that. In all the villages round about they're afraid of them. Their speciality is getting people to gamble. That gaming table is the bait, don't you see? It was just asking for trouble to go there and stir things up, my friend! If you've been noticed, we're going to be in a real mess!"

Wang Qing kept his mouth shut during all this.

Fan Quan stood up and said: "I've got to go and report for duty at the government office. I'll come back and see you tomorrow."

We shall leave Fan Quan to go off to Fangzhou, and tell of Wang Qing, who went to bed quite late and passed an uneventful night. Next morning when he had just completed his toilet, one of the farm workers entered and said: "Squire Duan has come to see you."

Wang Qing went out to receive the guest who turned out to be a wrinkled silver haired old gentleman. After the exchange of courtesies Squire Duan took the place of honour. He looked Wang Qing up and down from head to foot and muttered to himself: "What a giant!" He asked Wang Qing about his family background and what brought him to the neighbourhood, what was the relationship between him and Fan Quan and whether he was married or not. Wang Qing responded to this interrogation by telling him a pack of lies to throw him off the scent: "I'm from the Western Capital, my parents are both dead, and my wife also, Fan Quan and I are first cousins. Last year he came to the Western Capital on business and saw I was all alone with no one to look after me so he invited me back here. I know a bit about fighting and I'm watching out for an opportunity here to advance my fortunes."

Squire Duan seemed satisfied with this. After asking Wang Qing what his sign was, he said goodbye and left. After a certain while as Wang Qing was wondering about all this he had another caller. "Is Mr. Fan at home?" he asked. "And is this Mr. Li I'm speaking to?" They stared at each other in amazement, both thinking: "We've met before." They exchanged courtesies and were just about to start a conversation when Fan Quan turned up. When the three of them were seated, Fan Quan said: "What brings you here, Mr. Li?"

When Wang Qing heard that name, he suddenly remembered: "It's Mr. Li the fortune-teller!"

For his part the fortune-teller was thinking: "It's that chap from the Eastern Capital, name of Wang, who wanted me to tell his fortune." He said to Fan Quan: "I have never been to your home before, sir. May I ask you, is it true that you have a relative called Li?"

Fan Quan pointed to Wang Qing and said: "But this is my relative, Mr. Li."

Wang Qing leant towards him and said cannily: "Li is my original name. Wang is the name of the family I married into."

The fortune-teller smiled and said with a wave of the hand: "I was right then. I thought it was Wang. We met before in the Eastern Capital, didn't we?"

Wang Qing could see that he remembered exactly. He lowered his head and said nothing. The fortune-teller said: "After I left you, when I went back to Jingnan I met a stranger who taught me the ancient secrets of swordplay. Recently in Fangzhou I heard there was something going on here and came here in the hope of earning some money. The Duans know how I can handle a sword and wanted me to teach them so they invited me to stay in their house. Just now Squire Duan came home and gave me your sign to do your horoscope. When did I ever see such a good fortune? Some day you'll be rich beyond words! Right now a great marriage is in the offing, a most fortunate affair. Miss Duan and her father have much pleasure in inviting you to bcome part of the family. Since it is an auspicious day I took the liberty of calling as their representa-tive. Miss Duan's fortune is splendid. It is really suitable that you should get together. Like steel bowl and iron broom, it's a union made in heaven. May I look forward to drinking the betrothal wine?"

After listening to this long speech, Fan Quan sighed to himself and thought: "Those Duans are a troublesome lot. If I stand in the way of this alliance or try to prevaricate, there's going to be no end of trouble. I'd best go along with it." To the fortune-teller he said: "So that's how it is! I'm most grateful to the Squire and Miss Duan for their kind thoughts. The only thing is, this cousin of mine is not much of a catch. Are you sure he's good enough?

"Aiya!" exclaimed the other. "Don't be so modest. Miss Duan never stops talking about him!"

Fan Quan said: "That's excellent then! I can be his guarantor." He took out a five tael silver ingot and gave it to the fortune-teller saying: "Here in the country we haven't got the means to entertain you properly. This is just a little something to prepare some refreshments, in token of my gratitude."

The fortune-teller said: "There's no need."

Fan Quan said: "It's nothing! There is just one condition. You must not mention that he has two names. I hope everything will go well."

Li Zhu was like any other fortune-teller: once he had the money in his hand he left with many professions of gratitude and went back to the Duans. What did it matter to him whether the man had one name or two, or what kind of person he was? His business was to secure the match, get the wine flowing, earn himself some money. Especially since the girl herself had set her sights on the other party and they were all afraid of her, even the Squire himself wouldn't want to cross her. The affair was as good as settled.

As the fortune-teller went to and fro he was hoping to talk up the betrothal money, to the greater benefit of the go-between. But Fan Quan was afraid the question of money would arouse difficulties and urged that both sides should minimize the costs. This was pleasing to Squire Duan, who was a thrifty man, and no time was lost fixing the day. They settled on the twenty-second of the same month. Sheep and pigs were slaughtered, fish and frogs caught, there would be big bowls for the wine and big dishes for the meat. A few relatives were invited to the wedding banquet, musicians were hired and the bridal chamber decked with flowers, all at minimum cost. Fan Quan had a new set of clothes made for Wang Qing. Because of his official duties he himself had to leave early. Wang Qing and the girl went through the official introductions and drinking from the betrothal cup and so on, all as quickly as possible. The Squire had the banquet laid in the main hall, and together with twenty or so relatives, his own children, the groom and the matchmaker, they feasted all day long and the party did not break up until nightfall. Then the relatives who lived nearby said thank you and left. The ones remaining because they lived too far away were the girl's uncle and aunt, the Fangs, the family of her cousin Qiu, and Duan the Second's brother- and sister-in-law, the Shis. The three men were to sleep over in the east wing. The three ladies, who were all bright young things, prepared some food and wine for the newly weds to warm up the bridal chamber. With much giggling they continued drinking for a while, then everyone prepared for bed. At this point an old servant came to make up the beds and turn down the covers in the bridal chamber and invite the new master and his wife to go to rest. She then bolted the door of the chamber on the outside and took herself off.

Miss Duan had been domineering and headstrong even as a child. She was in no way inexperienced and knew the ways of the world. Nor was she troubled by shyness. She had already taken her hair pins out and removed her outer garment. Wang Qing was a man of the world and since his sentencing, which was ten months now, he had known no woman. Miss Duan had beetling brows and big eyes, it is true, and had nothing like the sweet allure of his former lover the Marshal's daughter or his wife, but seen now by lamplight her swelling form, her red stomacher unlaced to reveal the soft white breasts naturally aroused his lust and he rushed forward to embrace her. She boxed his ears roundly and said: "No hanky-panky, let's get that clear!" But when they embraced on the bed and slipped between the covers, then they shared the bliss of the common pillow:

*One a country girl of easy virtue, the other a rough convict; both have skin a foot thick and great clodhopper feet! One is panting urgently like an ox resting under a willow; the other sweetly utters coarse words, like the oriole among flowers. There are no momentous oaths and treaties here, yet there is a great fluttering of flags; no trembling or reluctance greets the clouds and rain, for here compacted lie ten thousand bewitchments.*

Outside the bedchamber that night there was a deal of lewd talk and laughter. The ladies, Mistresses Fang, Qiu and Shi, were all youthful and they had all drunk enough to turn their cheeks bright red, so instead of going to sleep they enlisted the wives of the two Duan brothers and all together crept up to the bridal chamber and put their ears to the wall to listen. They could hear every sound plainly. Wang Qing was an experienced lover well versed in the arts of the bedchamber. When he saw his new wife was more than willing, he did all he knew how to satisfy her. The group of young women outside, hearing all the sounds, found that their silk knickers were soaked through.

There, then, was this bevy of females outside the room, engaged in sniggering and lewd commentary, nudging and pinching each other, when Duan the Second burst upon them, shouting: "This is a fine thing! Are you senseless, all of you, fooling around like this?" This stopped them in their tracks. They had nothing to say for themselves. "Sister, sister, get up!" Duan the Second shouted. "You've invited calamity into your bed!"

The woman, in the midst of her pleasure, reacted furiously: "What're you doing, kicking up such a row in the middle of the night?"

"You're in for a bloody shock!" he shouted back "You're in deep trouble!"

Now Wang Qing was no fool. He told his wife to get dressed and they both came out to find out what was going on. The other women had fled. The moment Wang Qing appeared Duan the Second grabbed him and dragged him off to the main hall where they found Fan Quan cursing fate, frantic as an ant on a hot plate with nowhere to go. Soon the Squire joined them, with his other son and his daughter. Apparently back in the Gong village their enemy Huang Da had recovered from his beating and after inquiries had traced Wang Qing to his present whereabouts. The previous day he had arrived in Fangzhou and informed the Governor. The latter had issued a warrant and sent a captain with troops of the local militia to arrest the murderer Wang Qing, together with Fan Quan, guilty of harbouring him, and the Duan family. Because he worked in the government office Fan Quan was friendly with the registrar of cases, who had leaked the news to him. He abandoned everything and raced back to say government troops would be there any minute, they were all for it! There was a general stamping of feet and beating of breasts, as if a henhouse had been overturned, a great deal of commotion, and everyone began to accuse Wang Qing of ruining Miss Duan. In the midst of all this the fortune-teller turned up. He stepped forward and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to get out of this, you'd better listen to me!"

They all crowded forward to hear what he had to say. "The damage is done," he said. "There are thirty-six things you can do in a crisis, but the best is always running away."

"But where can we go?" they clamoured.

"Mount Fang, House Mountain, is only a few mile west of here," he said.

"But that's the robbers' hideout," they said.

"Are you stupid, or what?" he said scathingly. "Do you really think you can go on as respectable citizens, as if nothing had happened?"

"Then what are we to do?" they said.

"I know Liao Li, the leader of the band there, quite well," he said. "He's got five or six hundred troops and the government forces can't catch him. You'll have to act fast. Pack up all your valuables and go there to join the band. It's the only way out."

Mr. Fang and the others were also afraid they'd eventually be implicated and were persuaded by Wang Qing and his wife to join them. All of them saw no other solution but to follow this path. Everything of any value on the estate was collected and packed up. Thirty or forty torches were lit. Then having completed their preparations nine of them — Wang Qing and his wife, her two brothers, Messers Fang. Qiu and Shi her relatives, the fortune-teller and Fan Quan the government official — buckled on swords and took up spears and halberds. The retainers were summoned and over forty of them said they wanted to go too, so they packed their things. The party would proceed with Wang Qing, Fortune-teller Li and Fan Quan in the lead, the ladies in the middle and Fang, Qiu and Shi bringing up the rear. Luckily the ladies had sturdy farmer's legs and could keep up with the men. The Duans were the last to leave and went round setting fire to their farm. With much cheering they shouldered their weapons and set off westwards. The people round about regarded these Duans with as much dread as a tiger so when they saw them passing with torches and cudgels and didn't know what was going on they simply bolted their doors. No one thought of interfering.

They had only gone a mile or so when they ran into the captain of militia and Huang Da who had joined forces to arrest them. The captain who was leading soon fell: Wang Qing's sword cut him in two and the rest of the party surged forward and scattered the militia men. Wang Qing also killed Huang Da.

They reached House Mountain a little before dawn. The fortune-teller proposed to go up the mountain first alone in order to explain what they wanted, before taking the rest of them up to join the band. Scouts in the stronghold saw the lights down below and reported it to their chief, who assumed it was government troops. Accustomed to think of them as useless, he rose quickly, armed himself and went down with some of his men to deal with them. Wang Qing saw lights coming down the mountain and then a body of men, and made preparations. When the robber chief got to the bottom and saw the people he realized they were not government troops. He levelled his spear and shouted: "What the fuck are you buggers doing disturbing my fortress? Don't you know you're tempting fate?"

The fortune-teller stepped forward and bowed. "Great prince, it is I, your friend Li Zhu," he said. He proceeded to explain about Wang Qing's crime and the killing of the governor and government troops. But when the chief heard him describe Wang Qing's qualities and saw he had all the Duans in support, it occurred to him that he was on his own and he began to fear that later on they might oppose him. So he turned to the fortune-teller and said: "There isn't room for all of you in this place of ours."

This in turn gave Wang Qing an idea, "They've only this one chief. If we get rid of him, what alternative will his troops have?" He raised his halberd and attacked. The bandit came angrily to meet him, twirling his lance. Fearing for her husband's safety Miss Duan joined in with her halberd. These 3 fought 10 bouts before one of them fell. What they say is true, it's near the well that the pot gets broken, the strong man dies by the sword!

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### Song Jiang gives his men a break; The Wizard sends the fire right back

The robber chief had only fought half a dozen bouts with Wang Qing and his wife when Wang Qing spotted an opening and ran him through with his halberd. Miss Duan rushed in and finished him off. This man had ruled his little world like a king, but now it was all a vain dream! Wang Qing put up his weapon and announced: "If there is anyone who objects, the same fate will be his!" None of the troops, seeing their leader dead, was prepared to argue. They switched their allegiance forthwith.

Wang Qing led the way up the mountain. By this time light was beginning to show in the east. All around the mountain were natural rock formations shaped like houses, whence its name of Mount Fang or House Mountain. Wang Qing made arrangements for everyone, organized the troops and inspected the camp's provisions and assets of cash and valuables. Oxen and horses were slaughtered, the troops rewarded, and wine was laid on for a general celebration. Wang Qing was elected leader. Thereafter arms were manufactured and the troops received training to prepare them for taking on the government forces. Of this no more.

Now some of the militia men and officers sent to arrest Wang Qing and defeated that same evening had managed to escape with their lives and went back to report to the governor of Fangzhou. "Wang Qing had been forewarned," they said. "They attacked us and killed the captain as well as the accuser Huang Da. They made off to the west."

The Governor was greatly disturbed. Next day a count was made of the militia and it was found that over thirty had been killed and another forty wounded. The Governor held a meeting with the officers of his garrison and ordered the bandit suppression force and troops of the garrison to pursue and capture the miscreants. The resistance was fierce and more government troops were killed. The bandits of House Mountain, with Wang Qing and his friends, began making regular forays down the mountain to pillage and burn. In the face of the bandits' unbridled savagery the Governor issued a proclamation ordering all districts to contribute troops from their own defence forces to aid in suppressing them. He also planned a campaign against them with his own defence chief, General Hu, who selected troops from the garrison, chose an auspicious day and set out on the campaign. But there was a sudden disturbance among the troops of both camps. The reason for this was that for two months they had not had any rations or pay and were half-starved. In this condition, how could they be expected to catch bandits? When news of the mutiny reached the Governor he was obliged for a start to supply a month's pay and rations. However this handout only made things worse! Why so? Well, the authorities were normally very stingy. Now that the troops found they only had to make a fuss and they were generously rewarded, they became quite overbearing. There was also a more trivial aspect. The forms of respect for authority had been neglected, becoming weaker and weaker until they dwindled to nothing. With the breakdown of discipline mutiny suddenly flared among the troops and they killed their general. The Governor decided things looked bad and, pausing only to rescue the official seal, fled the scene.

There was now no authority in the city. All the local vagabonds joined forces with the rebellious army and began looting and burning the houses of loyal citizens. The bandit Wang Qing, seeing the city in revolt, took the opportunity of marching his troops down to capture it. The rebellious troops and the malefactors in the city enlisted with the bandits. Thus Wang Qing gained advantage and was now able to make Fangzhou his base. In the end the Governor did not escape either — they killed him too.

Wang Qing seized all the contents of the Fangzhou stores and treasury and ordered Li the fortune-teller and the two Duans to muster troops on House Mountain and elsewhere, and lay in stores of fodder and grain. Villages were plundered far and wide. Vagabonds and disaffected folk poured into the city. The two Gong brothers, Wang Qing's former pupils in swordsmanship, who had been denounced by Huang Da and had all their property confiscated, heard that Wang Qing was raising an army and came to join up. Neighbouring cities were only concerned to defend themselves. No one there had a thought of coming after the rebels. Within two months the rebels had enlisted twenty thousand men and captured three more cities.

Nearby cities reported all this to the court and the court ordered the arrest of the rebels. But the Song army was short of supplies and the troops ill-trained; the men did not respect their commanders and the commanders did not know their men. Whenever the alarm was sounded, reports of the rebel strength grew to alarming proportions: the troops were paralysed with fear and the people's morale was shattered. The eve of a battle found the officers quaking in their boots and their forces weak and irresolute. Then of course Wang Qing and his lot threw everything into the attack and the government troops were bound to lose. So the disturbance caused by Wang Qing grew ever greater and he captured Nanfeng as well. When the court appointed a general, he had to present gifts to the Grand Preceptor and Marshal Tong and bribe Marshals Gao and Yang and even when they all had their bribes nothing got done. The general, having spent his own money and got power into his own hands, would act shamelessly, hanging on to the stores, discriminating against men of integrity, allowing the soldiers to rape and loot, antagonizing the local population and driving honest citizens into the arms of the rebels.

Thus the power of the rebels grew continuously and their territory began to expand. Fortune-teller Li, being originally from Jingnan, came up with a plan whereby he resumed his fortune-teller's garb, entered that city and secretly organized the riff raff into a resistance which, coordinated with the attack from outside, handed them the city. He was duly appointed military adviser and styled himself Prince Chu. Subsequently the rebels were joined by some important pirates and bandits.

Within three or four years the rebels had overrun six Song commands. Wang Qing built himself a great palace in Nanfeng, complete with courts and towers, and assumed a false imperial title. He copied the Song administrative system with its civil and military officials, its burocracy, palace ministers and generals. He gave important posts to all the founder members of his movement, including Fortune-teller Li, his in-laws the Duans, his relative Fan Quan and those former pupils in the art of the sword the Gong brothers. The former Miss Duan was now the imperial consort. In the spring of the fifth year of the Emperor's reign — during the time Song Jiang was in Hebei dealing with Tian Hu and on the day of the battle at Kettle Pass — Wang Qing's forces captured Yun'an and Wanzhou. They had now overrun eight military commands.

But once Wang Qing attacked Wanzhou, which was very close to the Eastern Capital, the Grand Preceptor and his cronies could no longer conceal everything from the Emperor. They requested him to order Cai the Younger, the Grand Preceptor's son, and Marshal Tong to attack Wang Qing and relieve Wanzhou. These two maintained no proper discipline: the ordinary soldiers were treated with the utmost harshness and their morale was at rock bottom. Therefore Wang Qing's forces were able to inflict a great defeat on them: Wanzhou was lost and the Eastern Capital came under serious threat. The two government generals were afraid they would be held accountable and withheld the truth from the Emperor. The rebels, followed up their success by besieging two more cities.

Song Jiang's army, having just pacified Hebei, now had to go and deal with the situation west of the river Huai. It was truly a case of "no time to enjoy the feast, the horse's hooves don't stop". With this great army of more than two hundred thousand they were moving south. They had crossed the Yellow River when a directive arrived from the War Council urging Commissioner Chen and Song Jiang to rush to relieve the two cities under siege. They urged their sweating mounts on through the summer heat, taking great care not to harm the local population in any way. The rebels heard of their approach and lifted their siege.

At this time Hotshot, Arrowtip and the Butler, after witnessing the execution of Tian Hu, had received the imperial favour and were hurrying to rejoin Song Jiang in the campaign against Wang Qing. A fortnight after they left the capital they met up with him. After the greetings they gave a full account of the Emperor's gracious treatment. Everyone was greatly impressed. Song Jiang told them to be ready for service.

Song Jiang requested Commissioner Chen, Marshal Hou and Academician Luo to set up their headquarters in the nearby town, which was unsuitable for quartering the army. He ordered the army to make camp at Mount Fangcheng, where the cool shade of the forest would provide protection from the heat. Because they had travelled hundreds of miles many of the men were suffering from sunstroke and he ordered Doctor An to prepare medicines for them. He also ordered them to erect awnings for the horses and instructed Redbeard to treat the horses and trim their manes.

The Professor said: "If the army camps in the forest there is a danger that the enemy might use fire."

Song Jiang said: "We'll have to take the risk." High up on the mountain he had them construct a small mountain refuge with shelters made of bamboo matting in a cool place under the trees. Then Qiao the Wizard, who had surrendered in Hebei, came to him and said: "I owe you a great debt for your magnanimity. I would like to suggest a way to protect the camp."

Song Jiang was pleased and when he had heard the plan in secret he sent the Wizard off to the mountain refuge. He selected thirty thousand strong men and told Hotshot and Arrowtip to take ten thousand cavalry to the foot of the east mountain to lay an ambush. The Chancellor and Lucky Bian were to lay an ambush with ten thousand cavalry under the west peak. When they heard the main force fire the big gun they were to attack. All the stores and fodder were to be piled up on the south, guarded by Skyhawk and Mr. Chai with five thousand men.

After these orders had been given Taoist Gongsun suddenly came and said: "It's a good plan, brother, but with the weather as hot as this the men always get sick and if the enemy made a sudden and determined attack our troops would have a hard time of it, even if they were ten times better than normal. Let me practise my art a little to get us all some respite and refresh the troops so they can regain their strength." He began to wave his sword and tread out the pattern of the Dipper, in his left hand the thunder seal, in his right hand the magic sword. Concentrating his mind and thinking deeply, he turned toward the southeast aspect and taking a deep breath, intoned a spell. In a moment a cool breeze began to blow, and clouds filled the sky and released their load on the mountain. The whole of Mount Fangcheng was streaming with water. Two hundred thousand men and horses breathed in the freshness with joyous relief. Everywhere else except just here on the mountain it was hot as a furnace, the cicadas whirring and birds and animals all hiding away. All of Song Jiang's men were delighted and exceedingly grateful for Taoist Gongsun's special powers. In less than a week Doctor An had put everyone back on their feet and Redbeard had got the horses back into shape; men and horses were all restored to full strength. Of this no more.

Now the rebel commander of Wanzhou was one of their best tacticians. They had dubbed him Uncle Know-all. When he learnt that Song Jiang's army were camped in the forests on the mountain to avoid the heat, he said: "That lot are all bandits from the marshes, they know nothing about military tactics. They don't amount to anything. Let me just put a little plan of mine into action. I'll make sure that of the two hundred thousand not half survive!" He gave his orders, selecting five thousand of his best troops equipped with fire arrows, rockets and torches. Two thousand carts were also marshalled and loaded with dry reeds and firewood, together with gunpowder and other incendiary materials, with four men to propel each cart. It was the seventh month, the beginning of autumn, when Uncle Know-all with his four commanders led out this force, taking ten thousand armoured cavalry in support, the riders in light armour and the horses without bells, and leaving two of his deputies to defend the city.

It was towards evening that they rode out and a strong breeze happened to get up. "It's a sign! Song Jiang is destined to lose this battle," Uncle Know-all exclaimed delightedly. By the third watch they were close to the southern slopes of Mount Fangcheng. Suddenly the valley was filled with mist. "Heaven is definitely on our side," said Uncle Know-all. He ordered the troops in the rear to assist by drumming and shouting. Then he ordered five thousand men to bombard the forests on the mountain with their fire arrows, rockets and torches and set fire to them. He ordered two of his commanders to roll the carts forward and set them on fire and then propel them towards the stores on the mountain. Everyone now charged forward. Then suddenly there came a cry: "Watch out!" It was extraordinary! The south wind that had been blowing strongly suddenly veered round to the north. Reports like thunder began to roll down from the mountain. Under the influence of the Wizard's power over wind and fire, the fire arrows and such all began to fly south into the ranks of the rebels. Like a million golden snakes and fire dragons twisting and turning, their own weapons flew towards them. There was no hope of dodging. The Song army celebrated this occasion with a verse making fun of Uncle Know-all:

*A military scheme is hard to assess;*
*The rebels have landed themselves in a mess.*
*The fire that they used becomes their own pall.*
*Uncle Know-all, you see, does not know it all!*

Song Jiang had told Thunderer to fire a signal shell: the shell climbed high into the sky and burst with a shattering roar. Then from the east Hotshot and Arrowtip, from the west the Chancellor and Lucky Bian, came charging out with their troops and the rebels were routed. One of their commanders was cut in half by the Chancellor, another was knocked from his horse by one of Jade Arrowtip's stones and finished off by Hotshot with his spear. A third was transfixed by Lucky Bian and a fourth was killed by his own troops. Most of the twenty-three thousand rebel troops were burnt to death. The remainder scattered and melted away. All the two thousand fire carts were destroyed by fire. Only Uncle Know-all and three or four hundred men got back alive to Wanzhou. The Song army lost nothing to the fire, not even its firewood. Not a soldier was injured. They took huge quantities of horses, uniforms, gongs and drums. After their victory Hotshot, the Chancellor and the rest returned to the camp to report their success. They presented the heads of the defeated rebel commanders, and Song Jiang rewarded them all for their efforts and mentioned the Wizard's contribution and the achievements of the others in his report.

The Professor said: "Your excellent plan, brother, has done for the rebels' morale, but the Wanzhou region is awkward terrain for us. It is an eminently fertile plateau, and if the rebels throw in more troops and defend it in force, we won't get control of it in a hurry. Now that the cool breezes and dews of autumn bring respite from the summer and the troops have recovered their strength, we should make the most of the fact that our strength is increasing while they are weak, and strike while the iron is hot. I am sure we can win."

Song Jiang approved and ordered Scimitar with nine others and thirty thousand cavalry to take up a position east of Wanzhou and prevent the rebel forces from the south reinforcing it. Leopard's Head also with nine others and thirty thousand cavalry were to take up a position west of Wanzhou and block the enemy forces from the north. The commanders went off to carry out these orders. Then the Chancellor with the seventeen others who had surrendered in Hebei came and said: "We are all very grateful to you for choosing us. As a small repayment of our debt of gratitude we would like to lead the attack on the city." Song Jiang accepted this proposal and ordered Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip to join them with fifty thousand cavalry. These commanders marched on Wanzhou.

Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the Professor, in command of the main contingent, struck camp and headed south from Mount Fangchen. They made camp a few miles from Wanzhou. Green-Eyes, Spots and the Nine-Tailed Turtle were put in charge of building defences and manufacturing arms. Hotshot and his friends were sent ahead on reconnaissance. They were stopped by the water around Wanzhou. Uncle Know-all, who had escaped, remember, from the Song trap, the moment he reached Wanzhou had sent a messenger to Wang Qing at Nanfeng and also requested reinforcements from all the neighbouring provinces. Now the city was surrounded by the Song army and he ordered his troops to defend the city strongly and make no attempt to counter-attack until the reinforcements came.

The Song army strove for nearly a week to take the city but its defences were solid and not to be broken down in a hurry. The rebel commander of Yuzhou to the north sent set out with a relieving force of twenty thousand but he was killed by Leopard's Head and all his troops scattered. The same day reinforcements approached from the south and were defeated by Scimitar. Their commanders were sent to Song Jiang to deal with. Many from both armies were executed.

At this time Green-Eyes was put to producing siege equipment, while the Chancellor, Magic Steed and their men laboured to fill sandbags and pile them up on all sides, pushing them up to the walls of the city. Daring and agile solders were chosen to cross the moat by means of flying bridges and windlasses. The troops fearlessly scaled the walls and took the city, capturing the commander Uncle Know-all alive. More than twenty of his officers were killed in the fighting and over five thousand troops. Ten thousand surrendered.

Song Jiang and the army entered Wanzhou. Uncle Know-all was executed and his head exposed as a lesson to the people. The deeds of Scimitar, Leopard's Head, Hotshot, the Chancellor and others were recorded. A report was sent to Commissioner Chen and a request that he come and take charge of the city.

The Commissioner was delighted with the news and soon arrived, together with Marshal Hou and Academician Luo. Song Jiang and the army welcomed them and the Commissioner of course was full of praise for their achievements.

Ten days passed while Song Jiang reviewed the military situation. It was already the beginning of the eighth month and the heat of summer had retreated. Song Jiang said to the Professor: "Which city should we attack first?"

The Professor said: "If we go south from here we come to Shannan, which gives access to their southernmost limit and also commands another city to the north. It is of great strategic importance to the region. If we take it, we have cut the enemy forces in two."

Song Jiang said: "Exactly what I was thinking." He left Colonel Hua and some others with fifty thousand troops to assist the Commissioner in defending Wanzhou. The Commissioner also retained the services of Magic Hand. The White-Water Dragon and the other boat commanders were told to take their boats and men and sail down the river, meeting up with them north of Shannan. The land army was divided into three. They bade the Commissioner farewell and with 150000 men marched on Shannan. Truly it was an example of

*A great host on the march affrighting heaven and earth;*
*Battalions of warriors to make gods and ghosts quake.*

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### A scholar fools a superior force; The sailors overwhelm the city's defences

Song Jiang has given orders for a combined land and water attack on Shannan, boats and cavalry working in conjunction. The land forces have been divided into the usual three columns. Scouts of the vanguard report that Wang Qing already has intelligence of their advance and has sent another twenty thousand troops under four commanders to oppose them. On hearing this Twin Spears orders the Chancellor and Lucky Bian to set up an ambush with five thousand men on his left flank and Magic Steed and Tang Bin to do likewise on his right flank and to attack when the signal is fired.

By the time these arrangements have been completed, the enemy are already advancing with flags and drums and a great deal of shouting. The two armies face each other, in full battle array, drawn up north and south. Each side keeps up a heavy fire of arrows and crossbow bolts. First of the rebel commanders is Mi Sheng, wearing a bronze helm, his bow painted with magpies and his arrows flighted with eagle's feathers, his face puce and his eyes fixed in a brazen stare. He carries a long-handled mountain-splitter of an axe and is seated on a tall chestnut with a curly mane.

"You bunch of robbers from the marshes, why have you joined forces with the unjust and despotic Song emperor, and why do you come here to die?" Mi Sheng shouted out.

On the Song side the drums thundered in response and out rode Hasty and yelled: "Watch your language, you rebel bandit! I'm going to give you a hundred blows of my axe!" Brandishing his gilt axe, he slapped his horse and charged.

A continuous roar arose from both armies as the two leaders met in the middle. Horses clashed, axes rose and fell, they fought fifty bouts and neither had the advantage. This enemy commander, Mi Sheng, was truly brave!

In the Song ranks Thunderclap saw that Hasty could not prevail and rode forward to join the fight, waving his wolf's-tooth mace. Another enemy leader met him with his halberd. These four fought it out in a cloud of dust and just as the fight was at its most furious a report sounded and the Chancellor and Lucky Bian attacked. They were met by another of the enemy com-manders, while Magic Steed and Tang Bin charged from the right flank and also encountered an enemy commander. Jade Arrowtip now came forward on the Song side and surreptitiously took out a stone and threw it. It caught Thunderclap's antagonist on the nose and knocked him from his horse. Thunderclap rode up and with a blow of his mace smashed both helmet and skull. On the left flank the Chancellor fought ten bouts with his opponent before his sword chopped the man from his horse. On the right Tang Bin also ran his opponent through. The rebel leader Mi Sheng, seeing his companions thus disadvantaged, thrust aside Hasty's gilt axe, slapped his horse and galloped off.

Hasty, the Chancellor and Magic Steed urged their followers to give chase and the rebels were routed. They pursued the enemy commander round the side of the hill, but there the enemy had laid an ambush of ten thousand cavalry, concealed in a dense wood, and two enemy leaders led this force out in support of the fleeing Mi Sheng, who now turned about and led the charge. Among the Song ranks Wen Zhongrong, one of the two robber chiefs of Mount Calf who had defected from Tian Hu's forces in Hebei, was eager for glory and charged to meet him. After ten bouts Mi's axe cut him in two. Maddened by the sight, his comrade Cui Ye galloped into the attack. When they had fought six or seven bouts Tang Bin slapped his horse and rode to his friend's assistance. Preferring not to face two at once, Mi Sheng gave a great cry and chopped Cui down before riding at Tang Bin.

At this point the husband and wife pair of Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip decided to intervene. Hotshot took a stone and launched it at Mi Sheng. The latter had a good eye and quick hands. He parried with his axe. Sparks flew and the stone clattered to the ground. Seeing her husband had missed, Arrowtip hurled a stone. Mi Sheng saw the second stone and ducked. It clanged on his bronze helmet. Now Spearsman and Twin Spears came out from the Song ranks in a furious charge. Faced by such a throng of enemy commanders, Mi Sheng blocked Tang Bin's lance, turned his horse and fled once more. Tang Bin gave chase, but the other two enemy commanders stood in his path and unfortunately Mi Sheng got away. They had to content themselves with killing the other two enemy commandeers and scattering their troops. Vast quantities of horses, drums and gongs, armour and uniforms were taken. Twin Spears ordered his men to retrieve the bodies of Wen Zhongrong and Cui Ye for burial. Tang Bin wept bitterly for his two companions and personally supervised the interment. Twin Spears and the others made camp with their men somewhere south of the mountain.

Next day Song Jiang and the other two columns arrived and joined up with Twin Spears and his men. Song Jiang was saddened by the loss of two allied commanders. Libations were poured and then he conferred with the Professor over their plans to take the city. The Professor and the Strategist mounted a siege tower to observe the city's defences. When they came down they told Song Jiang: "There is nothing to be gained by attacking such solid defences directly. We should let them think that we intend to attack, but just await developments." Song Jiang ordered the siege equipment to be withdrawn and sent out sharp-witted scouts to listen for news.

We shall leave Song Jiang there and tell how Mi Sheng with a mere two or three hundred horsemen had fled to Shannan. The garrison commander was Wang Qing's brother-in-law, Duan the Second. When Wang Qing heard that the court was sending Song Jiang there he had made Duan Commander-in-Chief of the eastern plain and sent him here to strengthen the city's defences. Mi Sheng now told him that Song Jiang's forces were redoubtable and that they had lost five of their own commanders and the army was no more. He begged him to provide troops so they could retaliate. Now Mi Sheng had been sent out by Wang Qing himself, that is why he dared to ask for troops. Duan was outraged: "Although you are not under my command, I will have you executed for suffering defeat and losing leaders!" He called his aides to come and carry out the sentence. At this point someone popped up and said: "Calm yourself, Marshal, and leave him alone!" The speaker was Wang Qing's special envoy, Zuo Mou. Duan said: "Why should I pardon him?"

"I have heard that he is very brave, and has killed two of the Song generals," said Zuo. "Song Jiang's forces are truly very strong. It will take reasoning to defeat them, not just brute force."

"What do you mean by reasoning?" Duan asked.

"All of Song Jiang's supplies are stored in Wanzhou, and have to be brought from there. I have heard that Wanzhou is weakly defended. You must send some of your people secretly to the commanders of the neighbouring towns and fix a date for them to attack Wanzhou from the south. I will select some crack troops here and put them under Mi Sheng's command. He will attack Wanzhou from the north and have a chance to redeem his fault. When Song Jiang hears about it he will withdraw his forces to protect Wanzhou. We will take advantage of this to attack from here and catch him between two fires. We will be able to capture him!"

Duan was a countryman, what did he know of military strategy? He accepted Zuo's plan without demur and sent people off immediately to the neighbouring towns of Jun and Gong to secure their cooperation. Then he put twenty thousand troops under the command of Mi Sheng and two others. They left by the west gate under cover of darkness with banners furled and drums silent and headed for Wanzhou.

Song Jiang at this moment was engaged in thinking about how to capture Shannan when his boat captain, White-Water Dragon, arrived and said: "The boats are all now tied up on the Han River or Xiang Water. I have come to know your wishes."

Song Jiang invited him to his tent and they were drinking a few cups of wine, when a scout came in with a report on something that was happening in the city and how the enemy had sent troops to attack Wanzhou. Somewhat alarmed, Song Jiang called in the Professor to discuss this.

The Professor said: "Commissioner Chen and Colonel Hua are brave and resourceful men, there is no need to be concerned about this development in Wanzhou; on the contrary it provides us here with the opportunity to take the city." He went on for a long time, expounding his secret plan to Song Jiang. Song Jiang was satisfied with it and passed on secret instructions to White-Water Dragon, also ordering the infantry commander Pluto with twenty other leaders and two thousand men to go with him that night under cover of darkness.

Meanwhile Mi Sheng and the other rebels were marching on Wanzhou. A scout reported the fact in Wanzhou and the Commissioner ordered Colonel Hua and Leopard's Head out with twenty thousand men to repulse them. As they were leaving the city a scout came in with an urgent report. "The rebel general Mi Sheng has arranged for reinforcements from Jun. There's thirty thousand of them just a few miles north of here." The Commissioner ordered Little Duke and the Halberdier to take twenty thousand troops out to counter this new threat. In less than two hours further urgent news arrived: "Two enemy commanders from Gong with thirty thousand men are approaching our west gate!"

They all looked at each other in horror. "We've only two military commanders left in the city, the Son-in-Law and Hound," they were thinking: "We've ten thousand troops, but half of them are old and infirm. How can they defend us?"

Then Magic Hand spoke: "No need to worry, Commissioner. I have a plan." Folding two fingers together, he proceeded: "We do thus and thus and thus … and we've got them!" Everyone from the Commissioner down nodded approval. The Commissioner gave the necessary orders and told the Son-in-Law and Hound to choose five thousand strong men and lay an ambush at the west gate to attack the enemy when they were retreating. They left to carry out his instructions. He also told the old and infirm soldiers that they were not needed to defend the city. Their job was to hide all the flags and banners until a shot was fired from the west gate tower, when they should raise them all at once. They were to remain under cover and not leave the city. He next had wine and pots of food carried to the west gate tower and a banquet laid out there. Then with Marshal Hou and Academician Luo he went up into the gate tower where they put on a show of drinking, with much laughter and animated talk, after telling their men to open the gates wide for the enemy. After quite a while, the two enemy commanders with ten of their lieutenants arrived in a tumultuous throng. They saw the gates wide open and the three officials and a scholar up in the gate tower drinking amid sounds of merriment and loud music. Not a flag did they see flying on any of the walls. General Ji from Jun hesitated. He was afraid to advance. The second commander said: "They must be ready for us. We'd better withdraw at once, or we'll be caught in their trap." Ji gave the order, and as he did so a gun went off in the tower with a thunderous report and drums shattered the silence, while countless banners rose on the walls. The rebel troops had heard what their commanders were saying and it had made them nervous. Now they saw what was happening in the city they panicked, without a blow having been struck. When the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound charged out of the city the rebels fled, abandoning countless drums and trumpets, uniforms, arms, horses and armour. More than ten thousand were killed. The two generals were killed by their own troops in the stampede and the remaining officers fled for their lives. The Son-in-Law and Hound recalled their troops and returned victorious to the city. To the north Colonel Hua and Leopard's Head had already killed the other two rebel generals and scattered their troops. Only Mi Sheng got away.

Just as this contingent were returning victorious to the city, it was reported that two more rebel columns were approaching. The western force had already been broken up by Magic Hand's cunning plan. To the south, where Little Duke and Halberdier were fighting, the issue remained in the balance. Colonel Hua's force were ordered south immediately to assist Little Duke and the Halberdier, who were involved in fierce fighting. They knocked the rebels for six, scattering them to the four winds, killing and capturing many. More than thirty thousand died that day from the three rebel columns and countless numbers were wounded: the fields were littered with corpses, the ditches running with blood.

Leopard's Head and his companions called in their troops and entered the city. Along with the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound they went to the government office to report their success. Commissioner Chen and the other officials were delighted and Magic Hand's clever plan came in for special praise as well as the bravery of Colonel Hua and his comrades. These heroes modestly kept quiet.

The Commissioner ordered a celebration feast for the commanders, while their troops were rewarded. The exploits were recorded in despatches and the city's defences put in order. Of this no more.

As for Duan the Second, the night after he had sent his troops out of the city, he climbed the watchtower to have a look at the besieging Song army. It was getting on for the middle of the eighth month and the moon nearly at the full, illuminating the scene as brightly as daylight. He saw a flurry of flags and banners hurriedly retreating north. He said to his aide: "Song Jiang must have heard about the threat to Wanzhou so he is withdrawing."

"You're right," said the aide. "We can send out a force of armoured cavalry to attack them."

Duan appointed two commanders with twenty thousand troops to harry the Song forces. They saluted and left.

Looking westward from the city, Duan noticed flood water reflecting the moonlight and shining light everywhere. Over this expanse Song supply ships were slowly being poled northward. Now Duan was a robber at heart and when he saw so many loaded boats sailing past, with no sign of a military guard, just a crew of six or seven to each boat, he quickly ordered his men to open the west watergate and told his boat commander to take five hundred warships and attack the transports. The Song troops on the boats responded by hurriedly lining them up alongside the shore and jumping out. As the rebel commander bore down on them, some kind of loud signal was emitted from the boats and hundreds of little fishing boats began pulling away, each with two men rowing and three or four bearing shields and javelins or short halberds. As these came flying towards them, the rebel commander ordered his men to fire rockets and fire arrows at them. Apparently deterred by this, the crews of the fishing boats leapt into the water with loud cries and disappeared.

Having apparently won the contest, the rebels seized the boats and their commander told the sailors to row them into the city. The first boat was just in when the order came that all boats were to be searched before they entered. The commander told them to begin by searching the boat that was already inside, and about half a dozen men went on board. But when they tried to remove the decking, it seemed to be made of solid timber and they couldn't shift it. The commander began to smell a rat: "It must be some trick!" he said. He ordered axemen to break the deck open and see what was inside. "Don't take any of these boats into the city," he was saying, when three or four of the rearmost transports outside the city began to move forward, without human agency, as if drifting with the current or propelled by the wind. Now he knew it was a trap and he tried to jump ashore, but a dozen men with cutlasses in their mouths emerged from the water.

It was White-Water Dragon and his seven companions White Eel, the Pilot, the Ruans, Cave Dragon and River Rider. The rebels tried to draw their weapons but White-Water Dragon blew a whistle and the infantry commanders and their men concealed on the hindmost boats broke open the decking and sprang out with a shout. They were armed with short spears and there were twenty leaders and a thousand infantrymen. They went to work at once, leaping out onto the bank and slaughtering rebels. The latter offered no serious resistance but fled in disorder. Their commander was killed by Cave Dragon. The greater part of the sailors were killed by White-Water Dragon's men outside or inside the city and the water ran red. They seized the watergate. Pluto and his savage company guarded Thunderer as he let off the signal shell with a shattering roar and then went off killing and burning on their own account. The city was in a frenzy all this time, brother calling to brother, sons searching for fathers, lamentations rising to heaven. Duan heard and rushed with his troops to the rescue but he ran into Pilgrim and company. He was wounded in the leg by a blow from Fleetfoot's halberd and taken alive. Monk, Iron Ox and ten others raced to the north gate, scattered the guards there, and opened it and lowered the drawbridge. Hearing the uproar and the shells Song Jiang's army attacked. They met the other two rebel commanders and a fierce battle ensued. Lucky Bian killed one of the rebels and the other was knocked down by the Wizard and trampled into the mud. The best part of the thirty thousand armoured cavalry were killed. The Chancellor, Lucky and Magic Steed led their forces into the city through the north gate. The rebels were routed, the city taken, and Song Jiang was invited to enter with the main army.

It was now the fifth watch. Song Jiang gave orders for the fires to be put out and no harm done to the people. As soon as it was light a proclamation was issued to restore peace and the commanders presented their trophies. Fleetfoot brought in Duan the Second, bound hand and foot. Song Jiang sent him under escort to the Commissioner to be dealt with. The commander of the city garrison had already been killed by his own men. Many others were killed and over ten thousand of the rebel garrison sur-rendered. Song Jiang had oxen and horses slaughtered to reward his army and recorded the exploits of White-Water Dragon and his comrades. Magic Steed was sent off to report the victory to the Commissioner and to obtain news of the rebel movements. Not many hours later he was back and reported: "The Commissioner is delighted and has sent off a report of his own to the court." He went on to tell them about Magic Hand's scheme and Song Jiang was alarmed. "What if the enemy had seen through it? That's typical of a scholar!"

He ordered the grain stores to be opened up to relieve the people whose property had been burnt by the soldiers. When all the military affairs had been settled, he conferred with the Professor about how to attack Jingnan. Suddenly word came from the Commissioner that rebel bands from the Western Capital were running amok, infringing on districts of the Eastern Capital, and that Song Jiang was to pacify the Western Capital first before attacking Wang Qing's base. He had also appended a note of his own critical of the Military Council. Song Jiang and the Professor now discussed how to divide their forces so they could simultaneously attack Jingnan and the Western Capital. Then the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, the Unicorn, with the generals who had come over to them in Hebei, volunteered for the attack on the Western Capital. Song Jiang approved this and appointed twenty-four leaders and 50000 troops under the Unicorn for the job. The Unicorn and his force set off the same day. Song Jiang left Tattooed Dragon and some others in charge at Shannan. He told him: "If the enemy comes, just concentrate on defence." He himself led 80000 troops to attack Jingnan. Then this great force swept forward like a river in flood, men and horses swift as the wind. Truly you could say

*A host of banners and pennants paint the sky red;*
*Swords and lances glitter like a vast field of snow.*

## 205
## Song Jiang wins a great victory at Mount Ji; The Strategist smashes the 6 flower formation

So Song Jiang and his army advanced on Jingnan. They covered twenty miles a day before stopping for the night. In the places they passed the people suffered not the slightest aggravation. The cavalry finally made camp in the region of Mount Ji.

Mount Ji, north of Jingnan, had great strategic importance. It was guarded by a bandit named Li Rang with thirty thousand troops under his command. He was a relative of Li the fortune-teller and Wang Qing had appointed him District Commander. When he heard that Song Jiang had taken Shannan and captured Duan the Second, he sent an urgent messenger to Nanfeng informing Wang Qing and his relative the fortune-teller as follows: "The Song army is very strong. They have already taken two main cities. Now they're advancing on Jingnan and a detachment under the Unicorn is headed for the Western Capital." Greatly disturbed by this news, Fortune-teller Li entered the palace to tell Wang Qing. A palace attendant went in and reappeared a moment later to say: "Please wait, General. His Majesty will be out in a moment." Fortune-teller Li waited and waited and nothing happened. He made inquiries of one of the palace officials who was a friend of his and was told: "The King and his consort have just had a big fight!"

"What about?" he asked.

The official whispered in his ear: "The King hasn't been to her apartments for ages, because she's ugly. She's mad at him!"

He waited a while longer. The attendant came out again and said: "His Majesty asked me to come and see if you're still here."

"I've been waiting hours!" he said. The attendant went back inside and in a little while, closely surrounded by a bevy of ladies-in-waiting, Wang Qing came out and ascended his throne in the outer chamber. Fortune-teller Li bowed low and said: "Sire, my cousin Li Rang reports that Song Jiang with a strong army has captured Wanzhou and Shannan and is now advancing in two columns, one to attack the Western Capital and the other to attack Jingnan. I entreat Your Majesty to send a relief force."

Wang Qing was outraged. "What, that bunch of robbers from the marshes!" he exclaimed. "What's so terrible about them?" He gave orders for General Du Bo with twelve officers and twenty thousand men to relieve the Western Capital and Marshal Xie Yu with a force of equal size to relieve Jingnan. These two took their warrants, picked their troops and prepared their arms. The bogus military council made out the appointments and put Quarter-Master General Gong Zheng, elder of the two Gong brothers, with two assistants in charge of supplies. They all took leave of Wang Qing and set off on their separate routes. Of this no more.

Meanwhile Song Jiang's army had halted and made camp a few miles north of Mount Ji and were preparing for the attack, when scouts returned with news of the enemy's movements. Song Jiang discussed things with the Professor and then told the others: "We have heard that Li Rang has brave men under his command and Mount Ji is of great strategic importance to Jingnan. Although we outnumber them, their position is strong, whereas ours is overlooked by the mountain and is dominated by them. This Li Rang, what's more, is a cunning bastard. If you get into a fight with him you will have to watch out. Don't take anything for granted."

Then he gave the order: "Go back into camp, secure the gates and clear the decks. Any unauthorized moving about or shouting will be punished. Failure to carry out an order immediately will be punished." From then on discipline was strictly maintained. Song Jiang sent Magic Messenger with orders for White-Water Dragon and his company to guard the transports closely and bring them up gradually to supply the army. He sent an envoy to challenge Li Rang to a showdown the following day. He appointed eight leaders with twenty thousand men to lead the assault. To another four leaders and two thousand men he gave the task of cutting down trees to clear a route for their advance and form a battlefield. The rest would remain with him to defend the camp.

Next day they breakfasted before dawn. By the time men and horses had all had their fill it was daylight and they were ready for action. Li Rang with his five lieutenants and twenty thousand troops came charging down from the mountain. These five were the boldest among the rebels and Wang Qing had made them his special strike force. They now came face to face with Thunderclap and his colleagues. They lined up at the foot of the northern slope, with reinforcements above them on the mountain. There was much waving of signal flags now among both armies as they formed up for battle. Both loosed volleys of arrows at the opposing ranks, while the drums thundered and many-coloured standards dazzled the eye. An opening appeared among the rebel ranks and Commander Yuan Lang rode out. He had a helmet of weathered bronze, and black chainmail. He rode a black charger with a curly mane. His face was red and his hair brown. He carried two hammers of polished, hardened steel, the one in his left hand weighing fifteen catties, the one in his right hand sixteen. He shouted out: "Which of you bog-dwelling outlaws dares step forward and face death?"

From the Song ranks two of the commanders who had come over to them in Hebei, Huang and Jin, wanting to have some achievement to their names, galloped forward and hurled abuse: "You traitorous villain, how do you dare show your face?" One of them whirled his windsplitter of a sword, the other twirled a spear of pure steel, as they charged. The rebel commandeer came to meet them. The three horses and riders fought in a T-shape. After thirty bouts Yuan Lang parried and then turned his horse and galloped off. As the Song commanders rode in pursuit, he suddenly turned his horse. Jin, who was in front, struck out with his sword, but the rebel raised his left arm to block the blow and Jin's sword missed its mark. Before he could recover, the hammer in Yuan Lang's right hand struck right through the helmet and shattered his skull. He fell from his horse. His companion Huang now arrived and thrust with his spear at Yuan Lang's heart. The latter was sharp-eyed and quick of hand and swayed aside so that Huang's spear met only air and slipped harmlessly past his ribs. Yuan Lang tucked the hammer under his left arm and with the right hand grasped the shaft of his opponent's spear. He gave it a tug and Huang started to fall towards him. Catching him with his right hand round the waist and holding onto his horse, he threw him to the ground. The troops applauded and rushed forward to take Huang prisoner, while the horse galloped back riderless to the Song ranks.

Now Thunderclap, seeing these two commanders lost, was moved to anger. Forcing his horse forward and whirling his wolf's tooth mace, he attacked the rebel. The latter advanced to meet him, spinning his hammers. When they had fought more than fifty bouts, Jade Arrowtip galloped out to join Thunderclap, on her silver grey charger, square halberd at the ready. On her head was set a purple and gold winged cap; she wore a war robe of finely embroidered red silk and was encased in armour of silver chainmail interlaced with gold.

Another of the rebel leaders, seeing it was a woman attacking them, laughed and said: "You can see Song Jiang and his friends have no breeding! How can they let a woman ride into battle?" So saying he went to meet Arrowtip's attack brandishing his three-pointed double-bladed sword. After ten bouts Arrowtip knocked aside his blade with her halberd and galloped back towards her own ranks. With a shout he urged his horse after her. Reaching into her embroidered saddle bag she surreptitiously took out a stone and bending her willow waist took aim at the rebel and let fly. It hit him square in the face causing terrible lacerations. Blood poured out and he fell headlong from his mount. She abruptly turned her horse and finished him off with a blow of her halberd.

When the brother of Arrowtip's victim saw him die at the hands of the woman warrior, a great anger rose in his breast. He slapped his horse and rode at her, whirling a jointed tiger's eye chain. Twin Rods galloped to intercept him. Everyone stopped to watch them go at it. There was really nothing to choose between them, it was six of one to half a dozen of the other! Twin Rods had a steel helmet with a towering crest, a yellow silk headband shot with gold, a black silk robe with seven stars and oiled black chainmail. He rode a black charger with white socks. The other also had a crested helmet, a red silk headband, a black silk robe patterned with blue flowers, oiled black chainmail threaded with gold and he rode a fiery chestnut. Twin Rods also had his octagonal rods of burnished steel. The pair of them traded blows in front of the armies, coming and going, this way, that way, and after fifty bouts there was still no victor.

Thunderclap and his opponent by now had fought a hundred and fifty bouts. Watching from the top of a knoll the rebel bandit leader Li Rang had seen the woman warrior with her deadly stone throwing knock out one of theirs and ordered a retreat. Thunderclap and Twin Rods did not give chase. Their two opponents carefully guarding their backs returned to their own ranks and the rebel force withdrew up the mountain.

Thunderclap called in his troops and returned to camp. He reported that the enemy commanders were very brave, that they had taken the lives of two of his commanders and that but for Hotshot's wife his troops would have been completely demoral-ized. Song Jiang was exceedingly disturbed. "How are we ever going to capture Jingnan then?" he said to the Professor. The latter, crossing two fingers, expounded a plan. "The only way is to do thus ... and thus ... and thus."

Song Jiang accepted the plan and ordered the Monk and thirteen others together with Thunderer and five thousand brave infantrymen to go by night with the moon dark, wearing light armour and carrying short weapons, bucklers, throwing knives and javelins, and make their way by the small trails to the other side of the mountain. They set off.

Next morning Li Rang sent down his war declaration. Song Jiang and the Professor discussed it. The Professor said: "They must have something up their sleeve. Monk and his party should have got themselves into position by now. We must prepare for battle at once."

Song Jiang accepted Li Rang's challenge immediately and a soldier was sent up the mountain with his reply. Thunderclap and company were instructed to lead the attack as previously. They would attack with twenty thousand troops, with bows and crossbows in the outer ranks and halberds and shields on the inside, war carts going in front and cavalry behind in support. Tamer and three others were to wait in the camp with ten thousand men; Skyhawk with a similar force was also stationed inside the camp. "When you hear our signal from the front line, bring your men up on the east and west flanks." Scimitar and six others with twenty thousand cavalry and infantry were stationed behind the camp to prevent reinforcements reaching the rebels. The whole operation was directed by Song Jiang himself, the Professor and Taoist Gongsun. The rest of them would guard the camp. Early in the morning the Professor mounted a siege tower to observe. The terrain was rough and difficult and he hurriedly ordered the army to pull back a little way to allow the relief columns room for manoeuvre.

They were just completing this operation when the rebel leader Li Rang with his four lieutenants and twenty-five thousand troops appeared on the slopes of Mount Ji. One of these lieutenants had told his men to display the remains of Huang on bamboo poles. There were five thousand armoured cavalry. The riders all wore full helmets and chainmail so that only their eyes showed. The horses also had full armour and only their hooves were exposed. This was because Li Rang had seen the day before how the woman warrior wounded one of his commanders with a stone. Like this even if stones were thrown the armour would give protection. The cavalry were in threes, two archers supporting a spearsman. They charged and the main force followed behind in two columns. The onslaught was too fierce for the Song forces who were pushed back. Song Jiang hurriedly ordered the signal to be fired. Already a hundred or so soldiers pushing the carts had been wounded, but it was as well the carts were there because they prevented the armoured cavalry from getting through. On the other hand, the cavalry behind the carts were unable to charge.

At this critical moment a string of reports sounded from the mountain. It was Monk and his party who had scaled the ridge and now launched their attack. The enemy camp was only defended by five thousand superannuated soldiers and a deputy commander. Monk and his men killed them all and the camp was in their hands. When Li Rang saw his camp had fallen to the enemy, he tried to retreat, but he ran into Tamer and Skyhawk, advancing in two columns. Song Jiang also ordered the artillery to fire on the armoured cavalry and the rebels were routed. Monk, Iron Ox and their companions now poured down the mountain-side and set on the enemy, scattering them to the four winds. The unfortunate Yuan Lang, a brave leader, was killed by a shell; Li Rang was killed by Monk; two others died in the mêlée and only one escaped. Vast quantities of helmets and armour, gongs and drums and horses were taken. Most of the thirty thousand troops were killed. Corpses littered the mountainside. When Song Jiang recalled his troops and they were counted, they were found to have suffered over a thousand dead. As night was now approaching they made camp there north of the mountain.

Next morning Song Jiang marched up the mountain. After appropriating all the gold and silver and stores, they set fire to the camp. The commanders were rewarded and the exploits of Monk and his companions and of Jade Arrowtip were recorded. Then the army was ordered to march. They next made camp five miles outside Jingnan. The Professor was consulted about how to attack the city. Of this no more.

Here our story divides. We must go back to the Unicorn's column, which we left advancing on the Western Capital. They forged ahead, surmounting all obstacles. One of the places they passed through was Baofeng, where the rebel commander Wu Shun and his men came out with incense and candles and surrendered the city to them, expressing their desire to renew their allegiance to the Emperor. The Unicorn proclaimed peace and reappointed Wu Shun as governor of the city. All the rebel leaders were grateful and gave evidence of their gratitude by abandoning their wicked ways and returning to the path of righteous-ness. After this, for the Unicorn and his men the troubles seemed to be over. They moved rapidly and without wasting a day reached a point ten miles south of the Western Capital, a hill known as the Watchtower, and made camp. They learnt that the city was under the command of Gong Duan, second of the Gong brothers, and his deputy Xi Sheng and a crowd of brave officers. This Xi Sheng was a good tactician and also versed in magic arts. When the Unicorn conferred with the Strategist to devise a plan for taking the city, the latter said: "I have heard that Xi Sheng is a passable soldier and he will certainly attack us. Let our army take up a position and then wait till the enemy attack. We will not rush into it."

"Excellent advice!" said the Unicorn and ordered his army to take up a position on the plain south of the mountains in the revolving ring formation.

As they waited the enemy were seen advancing in three columns, red banners in the centre, blue banners on the left and red banners on the right. When they came within range of the Song formation the rebel commander split off the blue and red banners on the left and right and had them take up positions on either flank. He mounted a siege platform to observe the enemy and when he saw they were drawn up in the revolving ring, he came down and said: "That formation is old hat. I'll show them a formation that'll put the wind up them!" He mounted the platform again, ordered the drums to beat and with two signal flags directed the deployment of his army. When the left and right flanks were properly lined up, he came down again, mounted his horse and with his commanders rode out in front to parley with the Unicorn. Reining in his horse in front of his troops, he shouted: "Who do you think you can fool with that revolving ring formation of yours? Do you know what my formation is?"

Realizing it was a competition in strategy, the Unicorn went up onto a siege platform with the Strategist to look. The enemy formation was based on threes — three men to a squad, three squads to a platoon and five platoons to a company, forming a square on the outside and a circle on the inside, with the bigger units enclosing the smaller, making it all continuous and interdependent.

The Strategist said: "This is Doctor Li's 'Six-lobed formation'. The good doctor cut Zhuge Liang's original eight lines to six. The rebel leader thinks he can scare us with a formation we don't know. He doesn't realize that this eight line formation of ours can turn into eight by eight, giving sixty-four, in other words Zhuge Liang's eight line formation, which can smash his six-lobed one."

The Unicorn rode out in front and called out with a laugh: "Do you really believe this paltry six-lobed formation of yours can cause us any surprises?" He returned to the army and the Strategist went up onto the dais and began waving the signal flags this way and that and the eight line formation began to change. Then he told the Unicorn to give the order for the Blue-Faced Beast, the Chancellor and Lucky Bian to lead two thousand armoured cavalry into battle. The sign for the day was metal so the troops that were thrown into the attack had to be brought up from positions on the south, the direction of fire. When Blue-Faced Beast received the command, he ordered three rolls of the drum and then advanced against the enemy's western position. At this point, the Unicorn led Magic Steed and others in a charge on the left flank. They raced forward and routed the enemy. In their advance, Blue-Faced Beast and company clashed with Xi Sheng. The latter fled north, protected by a group of brave commanders. The Chancellor and Lucky Bian were eager to acquire merit and rushed after them, not realizing they were riding into a trap. Suddenly there were thunderous reports from the mountain and a troop of horsemen raced out. The Blue-Faced Beast's company tried to turn back but it was too late. Truly, it was a case of

*Charging men and horses lost under the green cliff;*
*The boat that can ride the waves founders among green rushes.*

## 206
## The Wizard raises a fog & captures the city; Mr. Chai stores up ammunition to fight the enemy

Racing towards Watchtower Mountain in pursuit of Gong Duan's general Xi Sheng, the Blue-Faced Beast and company fail to observe an enemy ambush behind the shoulder of the hill. Ten thousand rebel cavalry rush out and engage them in a fierce fight, while the troops they are pursuing escape to the safety of the city. The Chancellor did his utmost and two of the rebel commanders were killed, but with only a thousand men the Song detachment were totally outnumbered and got driven deep into a ravine. Surrounded on all sides by sheer cliffs they had no way out. The enemy closed off the entrance with tree trunks and rocks and reported back to the city's governor, Gong Duan, who stationed two thousand troops at the mouth of the ravine. Unless they grew wings there was no way they could escape.

We shall leave Blue-Faced Beast bottled up in there and return to the Unicorn who defeated Xi Sheng's six-lobed formation — largely thanks to Magic Steed's skill with the metal block, which he employed to knock down a considerable number of the enemy, as well as to the bravery of the others — and secured a great victory, killing three of the rebel leaders. He pressed home the advantage by taking Dragon Gate Pass, with the loss of over ten thousand of the enemy, capturing besides vast quantities of horses, helmets and armour, gongs and drums as the enemy retreated into the Western Capital.

When the Unicorn's forces were counted, only the Blue-Faced Beast and his companions were missing, with their one thousand cavalry. The Unicorn ordered Snake, Scorpion, the Forester and Rhinoceros, with a thousand men each, to spread out and search in every direction. But by nightfall they had still found nothing.

Next day the Unicorn stayed put and ordered the search to be continued. Snake and his party scaled cliffs and conquered heights, scrambling up through the undergrowth till they reached the highest peak of Watchtower Mountain on the east. Looking west from the summit, they thought they could make out a group of men and horses deep within a hidden valley, but so thick were the trees and vegetation they could see nothing clearly and they were so high above that no sound would carry. Snake ordered them to descend, looking out on the way for locals whom they could question. They saw no one. The inhabitants had all been forced out of their homes by the fighting. Eventually they came to a level area in a very remote corner of the mountain where there were a few houses belonging to some impoverished peasants, who huddled together in terror when they saw troops. Snake said to them: "We are soldiers of the imperial army, sent here to arrest bandits." This only increased their consternation. Snake said soothingly: "We serve under General Song Jiang."

"Would that be the one as killed the savages, captured Tian Hu and never did no harm to the locals?"

"That's him!" said Snake.

They knelt and said: "You're not come here to take our chickens and steal our dogs, then? Last year when government troops come to catch bandits they behaved worse nor bandits theirselves. That's why we come here, to get away. Uncommon glad to see you we be sir!"

Snake told them about the disappearance of the Blue-Faced Beast and his thousand troops and that hidden valley west of the peak.

"Windy Valley, that's what it be called," they said. "There be only one way in." They took Snake and his men to the mouth of the valley. As luck would have it, Forester and Rhinoceros got there at the same moment. They joined forces and attacked the rebel guards, putting them to flight. They set about clearing the logs and rocks together and then Snake and Forester advanced into the valley. The season was autumn so you can just imagine what the valley was like!

*A gloom is cast over cliffs and vales,*
*The trees are chilled by autumn's breath;*
*Above, the vapour smokes and swirls,*

*Below, the woods are dark as death;*

Blue-Faced Beast and his forces, men and horses, were lying about exhausted under the trees, but when they saw the search party they leapt to their feet. After Snake had distributed the dry rations he had brought, to allay the pangs of hunger, they made their way out of the valley. Snake took the villagers with them to meet the Unicorn. The latter gratefully gave them silver and grain to relieve their wants. They kowtowed in thanks and departed calling down blessings on his head. Later Scorpion also returned to camp. By then it was late and they went to bed and passed an uneventful night.

Next morning the Unicorn was discussing with the Strategist the disposition of troops for attacking the city. Suddenly a messenger arrived to say that Wang Qing was sending a relief force under general Du Bo, with twelve officers and twenty thousand troops and they were only ten miles away. The Unicorn told the Strategist and six others to take twenty thousand men and position themselves in front of the camp to prevent any sortie from the city. Snake and three others were given five thousand troops to defend the mountain stronghold on Mount Ji. He himself would take the rest, thirty-five thousand troops, to meet the enemy.

Then the Prodigy spoke up. "You should not get involved in this battle yourself, sir."

"Why do you say that?" said the Unicorn.

"Last night I had an unlucky dream," he said.

"The things that come to you in sleep are not to be trusted. Danger is of no concern when one serves one's country."

"If you are determined to go, please give me five hundred infantrymen to do something."

The Unicorn laughed. "What do you plan to do, lad?"

"You needn't worry about that. Just give me the men."

"All right then, I will. I can't wait to see what you do with them!" said the Unicorn. He went on laughing at the Prodigy after the latter led his command away.

The Unicorn now set out with the main army. When they crossed the bridge over the river Ping, where there were many strange stones that had been there since the days of the Tang, they saw the Prodigy and his men cutting down trees. Although the Unicorn thought this was pretty odd he was impatient to start the battle so there was no time to stop and ask questions. He marched to a few miles west of Dragon Gate and drew his troops up in line to the west and waited for the enemy. Two hours later they appeared. Drums thundered and shouts rose to the sky as the two armies faced each other. On the west the rebel second-in-command, Wei Ho flourished his long-handled sword, slapped his horse and rode out in front. On the Song side Shan Shiqi, one of Lucky's comrades, received his attack without a word, seated on his prancing steed, his lance at the ready. They fought it out for thirty bouts and then Shan's lance caught Wei's horse in the hind leg. The animal lashed out with its hind legs and threw its rider. With another thrust of his spear Shan killed him.

Among the rebel ranks Feng Tai was enraged and whirling a pair of steel rods he slapped his horse and charged Shan. They had fought ten bouts or more when Lucky Bian, seeing his companion could not get the better of his adversary, readied his lance and joined in. Feng gave a great roar and thrust with his lance knocking Shan from his horse and putting an end to him with a second thrust. Then he turned on his new assailant. But Lucky was a tougher proposition. As Feng's horse drew level he gave a shout and thrust his spear into Feng's chest, killing him in the saddle. A cry went up from both sides. The rebel commander Du Bo, seeing he had now lost two of his commanders, felt a fire in his breast, he was smoking with anger. He levelled his long lance and rode into battle himself. From the other side the Unicorn also advanced and fought fifty bouts with him and neither had the advantage. That long serpent lance of Du Bo's was enough to scare a ghost. The Chancellor saw the Unicorn could not win this fight and galloped to assist him. The rebel leader Zhuo Mao rode at him whirling a wolf's-tooth mace. Before they had completed five bouts the Chancellor's greater experience took effect and he knocked his opponent from his horse. Then he turned and rode at Du Bo. Du saw him kill Zhuo and before he could strike a blow himself the Chancellor's sword fell on him too, cutting off his right arm and hurling him to the ground. The Unicorn finished him off. Now the Unicorn and his companions pushed the enemy back, inflicting a great defeat on them.

Suddenly a troop of horsemen appeared from a small path to the southwest. At the head of them was a rider of swarthy complexion and uncouth appearance, with flourishing whiskers and short hair, wearing a Taoist's cap of iron and a travelling robe and mounted on a fiery chestnut. Grasping his sword and waving his troops on, he made his horse caper and bounded forward. The Unicorn and his men could see his rebel insignia and they urged their men to charge. He made no attempt to engage them but began to mutter the words of a spell. Then he slashed with his sword to the south and instantly fire spurted from his mouth. Moments later the whole waste ground between the armies was on fire and the flames were racing towards the Song side. The battle was lost before the Unicorn could do anything about it. Abandoning drums, gongs and horses, his men fled in disarray. Those who were too slow had their heads and foreheads seared. More than five thousand died like this. Surrounded by his commanders the Unicorn raced back to the River Ping Bridge.

Just as the first of the men set foot on the bridge to cross, it collapsed in ruins. It was indeed fortunate that the Prodigy had cut down trees on either side and constructed a pontoon bridge so they were still able to make the crossing and twenty thousand survived. The Unicorn and Lucky Bian fell behind in the race for the crossing and just as they reached it the enemy commander caught up with them and spat fire at Lucky, whose whole body was engulfed in flames. He fell flaming from his horse and was killed by the enemy troops. The Unicorn was fortunate to make it to the floating bridge and escape.

As the pursuing enemy were coming up, the foremost troops informed the Wizard. The latter rode out alone sword in hand to meet the enemy leader. When the enemy leader saw him, he again shaped a blow with his sword toward the south and the fire he breathed this time was fiercer than before. The Wizard composed a secret formula and pointed with his sword to one side to summon the three water spirits. In an instant flocks of black clouds streamed across and disgorged foaming cascades of water which fell in a billion, billion drops like tiny pearls or specks of jade dust, drenching the rebel leader and dowsing his fire. When he saw his magic had failed, he turned his horse and galloped away, but the horse trod on a wet stone and stumbled, throwing its rider to the ground. The Wizard raced after him and cut him in two with his sword. Of the five thousand cavalry more than five hundred were trampled down. The Wizard waved his sword and shouted out: "Surrender at once or you'll all lose your asses' heads!"

It was too much for the rebels! They dismounted and sur-rendered their weapons, begging for mercy. The Wizard reassured them with kind words and had the head of the rebel leader exposed. He presented the prisoners to the Unicorn, who was profuse in his thanks and also praised the Prodigy's contribution. On questioning the prisoners they learnt the name of the rebel leader. He was known as a practitioner of fire magic and was exceedingly ugly: people called him Scorcher. He had helped during the original uprising but had disappeared for two years. Recently he had come to Wang Qing and said: "The Song army is powerful. Let me get rid of them for you." Wang Qing sent him off immediately to the Western Capital.

The two enemy commanders had seen the relief force destroyed and dared not come out. They simply reinforced the guard on the city walls.

The Wizard said now: "This place is strongly fortified. We will not be able to break down the defences. You must let me practise a little of my magic tonight to help you succeed. I want to repay your kindness."

"Tell me what you propose," said the Unicorn.

The Wizard whispered in his ear: "We will do this and this and this.... We will do it thus and thus and thus...." The Unicorn was delighted and made certain appointments and the commanders went off to prepare for the attack. Instructions were also given concerning the burial of Shan Shiqi and Lucky Bian, the former Hebei commanders. The Unicorn himself made the libation.

That night in the second watch the Wizard drew his sword and made magic. Soon a fog arose, cloaking the whole city in darkness. The guards could see not an inch in front of their noses, could not even see each other. Screened by this darkness the Song troops hauled themselves up by means of windlasses and climbed onto the battlements. A sudden report and the fog immediately lifted. On all the walls now stood Song soldiers, every man carrying a lighted brand, spreading a glow that lit everything below clearly, revealing all. The troops of the garrison were struck dumb with fear and stood rooted to the spot. Then the Song troops drew their swords and the massacre began. Multitudes of rebels were cut down. The two rebel commanders saw the sudden change and rushed with their troops to the rescue. But the Song army now held all four gates. The Unicorn's main army poured inside and the two rebel commanders were killed by their mutinous troops. The other officers of all ranks surrendered, along with thirty thousand men. The ordinary people were exonerated.

At dawn the Unicorn issued a proclamation restoring peace, recording the Wizard's achievement and rewarding the army. He sent Magic Steed to tell Song Jiang the news. At evening Magic Steed returned and said: "Song Jiang has fought with the enemy for several days at Jingnan and defeated Nanfeng's relief force and taken the leader Xie Zhu prisoner. Because of the strain he has become ill and is confined to the camp. For some time now the Professor has been in charge of military affairs."

Disturbed by this news the Unicorn immediately made all necessary military arrangements and handed over the defence of the Western Capital to the Wizard and Magic Steed. Next day he bade them farewell and with the Strategist and twenty others set off with all haste for Jingnan. They wasted no time on the way and soon reached the main camp north of the city. They were relieved to learn that, thanks to the treatment of Doctor An, Song Jiang was sixty or seventy percent recovered from his illness. They were just talking about the question of the rebels when a fugitive soldier burst in and said: "I were with Tang Bin escorting Magic Hand and his party. We'd only got ten miles when two of them generals from Jingnan, Generals Mi and Ma, come at us with ten thousand troops out of a small mountain trail. They'd heard the commander-in-chief were ill like and were 'oping to attack our camp from the rear, but they ran into us. We was out-numbered and couldn't do nothing against two of them at once, especially seeing as that General Mi is particular brave. Tang Bin got hisself killed and Magic Hand, Craftsman and Sterling got taken. Them two enemy leaders were going to continue on here and attack us when they heard as how the Unicorn and his army had arrived. So they cleared off with their prisoners."

Song Jiang involuntarily let out a cry. "I fear for their lives!" he lamented and immediately suffered a relapse. The others tried to animate him. The Unicorn asked him: "Where was Magic Hand going?"

"When he heard I was ill, Magic Hand left Commissioner Chen to come and see me. He also brought instructions from the Commissioner for the Craftsman and Sterling to go to Wanzhou where they were needed to inscribe a tablet and examine a scroll. I sent them all off today with Tang Bin and an escort of a thousand men. I did not mean them to be captured by the enemy. I fear they will be killed!"

Song Jiang now told the Unicorn to help the Professor to take the city, capture Mi and Ma and exact revenge on them. They joined the army north of the city. After exchanging courtesies with the Professor, the Unicorn immediately told him about Magic Hand. The Professor said: "Alas! They're done for!" He ordered the troops to surround the city and attack it fiercely. The commanders acted accordingly. The Professor also ordered men up onto the siege towers to shout out towards the city: "Send out Magic Hand, Sterling and the Craftsman to us at once! If you're not quick about it your city will be destroyed and all of you, civilian or military, are dead men!"

The garrison commander in the city, also appointed governor by the rebel administration, merely strengthened the defences. The two generals, Mi and Ma, who had shunned an engagement with the Unicorn, had taken refuge within. After capturing Magic Hand and his companions they had been able to call for the gates to be opened because at that point the Song army had not yet tightened its grip on the city. They presented their three captives to the Governor. The latter had heard of the fabulous Magic Hand and he ordered the men to release him from his bonds, thinking that he would declare his submission. All three captives simply glared back and abused them roundly: "You stupid rebels, what sort of men do you take us for? Quickly, give us a couple of chops and be done with it! Don't imagine these knees will ever get anywhere near the ground! Another day when Song Jiang comes and takes your city the whole pack of you will be sliced to pieces, you rats!"

"Beat the dogs into submission!" cried the Governor, beside himself with rage.

The guards took up cudgels and battered the prisoners to the ground, but not one of them would consent to kneel. Rather they continued to shout imprecations. The Governor said: "You want to be finished off with just one cut, but I shall settle your hash infinitely slowly!" He shouted to the guards: "Take these dogs and fix them up at the gate and beat their legs for them. When their legs are smashed they'll have to be kneeling." They guards took them away, fitted them with cangues and beat them black and blue.

Now among the members of the public, soldiers and civilians, who came to see the Song captives, was one who became exceedingly angry. This was a manly looking fellow with beetling brows. He was called Bountiful and he had lived for years next door to the stationer's in South Street opposite the government office. An ancestor of his had been governor of Jingnan during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and when the river broke its banks had personally led his officials in a rescue operation. It rained heavily and the current was strong and the officials asked him to take a rest. He said: "Wang Zun stopped the flow with his own body. How can I do less?" He persevered and the waters retreated. That year there was a bumper harvest, producing grain six-fold, and it was in memory of this that Bountiful had been given his nickname. When he happened to come to Jingnan, the people honoured him greatly because of his ancestor. He was noble, far-seeing, wise and exceedingly strong, skilled in martial arts and thoroughly brave. When he met a brave man, whatever his rank or station, he would make friends with him. When Wang Qing started his rebellion and attacked the city, Bountiful had presented a plan for defeating the rebels but the authorities rejected it, and that is why the city fell. Under the rebels, the people were ordered into the city and no one was permitted to leave. Bountiful lived there thinking and planning night and day, but you can't make cloth from a single thread. Now he saw the rebel soldiers beating up the three prisoners and heard that the Song army was attacking fiercely on their account and that both the people and the military were in a state of complete panic. After thinking about it for a while, he said to himself: "Now is the time. It's the only chance of rescue for the city." He rushed home. It was late afternoon. He quickly had a servant grind some ink and at the stationer's next door bought a quantity of strong paper. Then by the light of the lamp, carefully loading his brush, he wrote with a flourish in big characters:

*You citizens are all loyal subjects of the Song. It cannot be with willing hearts that you aid the rebels. General Song is the court's loyal commander, who killed the Tartars and caught Tian Hu; no one dares to take him on. Under his command are one hundred and seven bold leaders, all of one heart and mind. From those three men you saw being beaten outside the gates of Government House you can tell the calibre of Song Jiang's commanders. The rebels have tortured those three, but the troops in the city are weak and their commanders incompetent; sooner or later the city will fall, and then even the stones will burn. Any of you who want to save your skins, join with me in fighting the rebels!*

After he had written out these broadsheets, Bountiful made some discreet inquiries. When he learnt that people were staying in their homes lamenting, he said to himself: "If that is how the people feel, my plan will work." He waited till just before dawn and then went out and dropped his broadsheets in all the town's busy places.

Soon it was light and people began picking them up and reading them, one after another. A crowd quickly gathered. Before long the members of a patrol confiscated one of the broadsheets and rushed to inform the Governor. The latter had a shock and immediately sent an official with orders for the guards to watch the doors of Government House closely as well as the barracks. He also instigated strict measures to catch the enemy agents. As for Bountiful, he equipped himself with a sword, which he kept hidden, and mingled with the crowd. He also picked up the broadsheet and read it out in ringing tones for all to hear. The public looked on uncertainly as the Governor's official bearing the government order galloped up to the barracks with four or five soldiers in attendance. Bountiful stepped forward and with a great shout slashed at the horse's legs. The official was thrown from his horse and Bountiful cut off his head with one blow. With the head in his left hand and the sword in his right he shouted out: "All who want to save their lives follow me and we'll kill the rebels!"

Bountiful was well known to the guards in front of Government House and they knew him to be a man of iron. In a moment he was the centre of a mob of five or six hundred. Seeing the soldiers had joined him, he cried out with redoubled vigour to the people: "Come and join us if you've got the guts!" His voice carried many hundreds of yards. All around people responded by grabbing sticks and cudgels, tearing up palings, breaking off chairlegs. In a twinkling they were five or six thousand. They set up a continuous roar and led by Bountiful burst into the govern-ment office. The Governor was accustomed to bully his officers and persecute the men of his personal guard and they all nourished an intense hatred of him. When they heard of the uprising they joined the mob. Charging inside they slaughtered the Governor and all his family. By the time Bountiful led them out again, the mob had grown to twenty thousand. They released Magic Hand, Sterling and Craftsman from the stocks and removed the cangues. Bountiful told three men with strong backs to carry them. Led by Bountiful and bearing the Governor's head, they rushed to the north gate, killed the guard commander and scattered his troops, opened the gate and let down the drawbridge.

The Professor had just reached the north gate to personally direct the attack when he heard the uproar in the city. When he saw the gate being opened he thought the enemy were about to make a sortie. He hurriedly ordered his troops to pull back three or four bowshots and form a defensive line. Then he saw Bountiful, bearing the head, with three soldiers behind him carrying Magic Hand and his companions. As soon as the drawbridge was lowered they rushed out. Magic Hand shouted to the startled Professor: "Professor, we have to thank this brave man who has incited the people to kill the rebels and save our lives!"

The Professor was as delighted as he was amazed. Bountiful said to him: "The situation is urgent, there is no time for ceremony. Please move your army into the city immediately!"

Beside the drawbridge there was already a crowd of soldiers who all shouted in unison "Let General Song Jiang enter the city!"

Seeing such a variety of people all gathered there, the Professor ordered his commanders to march their men into the city, with instructions that if any man killed someone the whole platoon was to be executed. When they heard this the rebel guards on the north all laid down their arms and came down from the walls. The news also reached the guards on the south, east and west and they tied up their officers and opened the gates, welcoming Song Jiang's army with open arms. Only General Mi was courageous enough not to give in and escaped through the west gate, breaking through the encirclement and getting away.

The Professor sent an urgent despatch to Song Jiang, whose gloom and despondency were almost entirely dispelled by the news. Briskly he gave the marching orders. When the army reached Jingnan, Song Jiang took over the government office and issued a proclamation restoring peace and rewarding his commanders. He summoned Bountiful, asked him his name and assisted him to a seat. He greeted him most courteously and said: "You, sir, have eliminated the rebels and made life secure for the people, subdued the city without bloodshed and rescued my three brothers, I bow down before you."

Bountiful likewise bowed repeatedly, saying: "It is not through my efforts but through the power of the ordinary soldiers and people." His words impressed Song Jiang even more. The other leaders then paid their respects to Bountiful. The rebel commanders in the city were brought in and Song Jiang offered an amnesty to all who surrendered. There was great rejoicing in the city and ten thousand or more gave themselves up.

Now the water-borne forces under White-Water Dragon arrived in the river Han and came to report. Song Jiang ordered a banquet in honour of Bountiful. He offered him the cup with his own hands saying: "When I return to the court I shall tell the Emperor of your great talents and virtue and you will certainly be promoted."

Bountiful said: "That is not what I would wish. I did not act out of desire for fame or riches. I have always had an undisciplined nature and the people at home do not have a high opinion of me. I have little talent and no real experience. Nowadays we see that calumny reigns in high places and good men have no credit. Besides, though a man's nature be forbearing and his conduct amenable, yet will it not enable him to obtain enlightenment. I observe that there are many driven by ambition to bear the insults of office whose activity is not beneficial. And those who strive to maintain a family find their virtue is sapped and they have delivered themselves into the power of evil men. As for me, having no burden of office, am I not like the crane that rides the clouds, enviably free to fly where I will?"

Neither Song Jiang nor any who served under him could resist a sigh on hearing this long speech. Taoist Gongsun, Monk, Pilgrim and all the rest who were present sat there nodding appreciatively at Bountiful's words. That evening when the party broke up Bountiful bade farewell and left the government office. Next morning Song Jiang after sending Magic Messenger to tell the news to Commissioner Chen, went himself to Bountiful's house to pay his respects. He found it empty. Pinned to the wall was a note which said: "This morning before dawn I packed my belongings, bade my family farewell and set off, I know not whither."

When Song Jiang went back and told the others how Bountiful had slipped away in the night, every one of them breathed a sigh. That evening Magic Messenger returned and told them that the as yet unpacified districts of Shannan and Wanzhou facing the campaign organized by Commissioner Chen and Marshal Hou with Leopard's Head and his companions had all sued for peace. The court had sent a good many new officials and all had taken over. The Commissioner was on his way with all his commanders and would arrive soon.

Song Jiang decided with the Professor that as soon as the Commissioner arrived to take charge they would start their campaign against the leadership of the rebellion. Song Jiang rested at Jingnan five or six days more till he was fully recovered. Then one day it was announced that the Commissioner had arrived and they went out to welcome him.

The Commissioner rewarded the army commanders handsomely. After that the acting governor of Shannan, Tattooed Dragon, arrived with his men, having handed over to the new officials. Song Jiang requested the Commissioner to take over the city, bade farewell and set off with his land and water-borne forces to seize the rebel's stronghold at Nanfeng. Now all one hundred and eight leaders were together again, plus those who had surrendered in Hebei, viz the Chancellor and eleven others with two hundred thousand troops. They had fought and won countless battles, their strength kept on growing and everywhere they went the rebels surrendered at the mere sight of them. Song Jiang was able to report the recovery of many districts to Commissioner Chen, and the Commissioner sent Academician Luo with troops to take control of them.

Song Jiang and his water-borne forces advanced as far as the borders of Nanfeng. Scouts came in with the intelligence that Wang Qing had made Fortune-teller Li his Commander-in-Chief and had raised a water-borne force of fifty thousand, while there were another three columns of local troops, twenty thousand in each, under some local commanders. A dozen brave officers, then, with hundreds of thousands of troops were advancing on them, and Wang Qing himself was directing the operation.

Song Jiang consulted the Professor about all this: "The enemy have turned out in full strength; it seems they have decided on a showdown. How can we get the better of them?"

The Professor said: "In battle as they say numbers aren't everything. We're all of us here now. Let us divide our forces and attack before they have a chance to settle down." Song Jiang gave orders accordingly.

On the first day Skyhawk and Mr. Chai led six others and five thousand men to escort the supply carts and carts filled with silk and ammunition in the army's rear. At a place called Dragon Heights at the foot of the mountain they found a village surrounded by cliffs like earthen ramparts with three access roads. The people lived in a hundred or so rough huts but they had all fled because of the fighting. That evening a strong wind blew from the northeast and black clouds piled up. Because the sky was so menacing, Skyhawk and Mr. Chai were afraid rain might damage the supplies and ordered their men to open up the huts and drag the carts inside. They were about to start preparing a meal for themselves when a patrol led by Pill Monger arrested a spy and came to report to Mr. Chai: "Under interrogation this spy told us that General Mi with ten thousand picked troops plans to burn our supplies tonight in the second watch. At present they are concealed on the mountain."

This place Dragon Heights, you see, had two cliffs that faced each other forming a kind of gate barely wide enough for a boat to be rowed through; the sides were clad in impenetrable scrub. Skyhawk immediately said to Mr. Chai: "I'll go to the village and wait for the bastards and give them such a drubbing not a scrap of their armour will survive whole."

Mr. Chai said: "That General Mi is a true soldier. You won't beat him just by strength. Besides we haven't enough troops. Let me try a little plan of mine first. We'll need five or six gun carts with explosives and a hundred or so carts of firewood. We'll avenge Tang Bin and company and annihilate the treacherous swine." He had his men bring the supplies, ammunition and carts and ordered Skyhawk to guard the stores with three thousand troops equipped with fire arrows. At dusk they all left the narrows and headed south, leaving behind hundreds of carts loaded with firewood, lined up on the lower ground southwest of the village. Among

the hundred or so empty carts, drawn up in a number of different places, they deliberately placed some supplies so that they were visible. Explosives were hidden everywhere underneath together with firewood primed with gunpowder. He told the Young Master and three others to take two thousand men and set up an ambush along the East Peak road and Water General to do likewise along the road south from the village, in preparation for the enemy attack. All was done thus and thus and thus, according to plan. Mr. Chai himself with the Fire General and three hundred infantrymen equipped with incendiary materials, concealed themselves among the trees and scrub on the mountainside.

At nine o'clock General Mi with his two lieutenants and more than ten thousand troops in light armour, the horses with muffled hooves and harness bells, with banners furled and drums silent, approached the southern pass. The Water General ordered his men to light their torches and attack. After four or five bouts with Mi, he slapped his horse and led his troops in retreat. General Mi, who was a brave and unsuspecting soul, raced after them. The Young Master and the Pill Monger seeing fire on the south road left a thousand troops to their two companions and galloped toward the village to close off the road. By now the rebels were streaming into the village. They attacked the higher ground on the northeast and found nothing but empty houses, no supplies anywhere. They searched about and found that on the lower ground there were several hundred carts of supplies with only five or six hundred soldiers to guard them. The latter saw them coming and with shouts of alarm scattered and ran for it. General Mi said: "They can't have much in the way of supplies!" He ordered his men to light torches so they could see. At intervals among the supply carts there would be a couple loaded with silk brocade. When the rebels saw this they fell to plundering them. General Mi was trying to put a stop to this when from above them on the mountainside fire arrows and firebrands began raining down, setting the carts with firewood ablaze. A shout rose from the rebels as they tried to take cover but the fuses were already lit to fire the charges and with a roar like thunder they went off. Before the rebels could take evasive action they were mown down by the shells. Well, the fires blazed and the cannon roared as though the heavens were falling in or earth splitting. In a moment all the thatched huts were hidden in clouds of smoke or converted into balls of fire. General Mi was killed by a shell, as were most of his men. Many suffered terrible burns. Then the Water General and the Young Master attacked with their three columns killing the other two enemy generals. Of the 10000 rebel troops, only 1000 or so escaped with their lives. When daylight came Mr. Chai's unit joined up with Skyhawk's and brought the supply train up to the camp. Song Jiang was in the headquarters tent making the dispositions for his troops, cavalrymen were saddling their horses, the infantry putting their weapons in order. Indeed,

*Flags and banners painted the sky red;*
*Swords and spears glittered like snow.*

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### Wang Qing crosses the river & is captured; Song Jiang completes his defeat of the rebels

So Song Jiang sat in his tent that day and his commanders paraded to receive their orders. A gun was fired, music played and the flag was raised. At the signal the guard commanders fell in outside the tent, standing to attention, to hear the orders. A fanfare and the orders were read out, after which they kowtowed and went to stand on either side.

Next the platoon leaders knelt to hear the disciplinary arrangements: all insolence or disorder in the ranks, all insubordination or questioning of orders, all wavering in the face of the enemy were to be stamped out.

For every twenty or so men there was an ensign. To them Song Jiang spoke personally: "Discipline is your responsibility: if any man fails to advance or is neglectful of his orders you are to punish him." The ensigns stood down, the music sounded again and everyone returned to their companies to proceed as commanded. Finally Song Jiang gave out the orders for the boat commanders.

The drummer was to give the orders with a handclap: one, form up; two, raise banners; three, forward march! Next to the band the five directions flag was raised and a gun fired. The signal was given to strike camp and all was ready for battle:

*The thunder of the drum shakes the mountain peaks;*
*Banners fill the sky dismaying gods and ghosts.*

Wang Qing meanwhile was planning his battle formation. He appointed the leaders of the vanguard and the left and right flanks. He himself would command the main army with a number of his aides and police chiefs to protect him. Fortune-teller Li was head of the army. The troops were drawn up in perfect order with Wang Qing in overall command of the operation. The horses had protective armour, the men chainmail. The bows were strung. Three beats of the drum and all stood to. Forward march!

They had not gone more than a few miles when a cloud of dust announced the approach of a Song patrol. Thirty riders appeared, all wearing blue scarves and green battle robes, and there was a great jingling of harness bells as they rode forward. Their horses were decked with scarlet tassels, their harness hung with dozens of bells; they sported pheasants' feathers, the hafts of their spears were bound with silver rings and they carried light bows and short arrows. The leader of this band, bearer of the Emperor's commission after winning back his honour, was that paragon of warriors Hotshot. He wore a gold-embroidered blue turban and a special war robe of blue brocade. His waist bound with a crimson sash, slippers of soft leather on his feet, he bestrode a horse with a silver saddle. On his left was another imperial appointee, the chaste and filial Jade Arrowtip. She wore a crimson cap with a golden pattern and a war robe of crimson silk brocade. About her waist was a sash of many colours and on her feet small winged slippers. Her mount was a grey thoroughbred. On the right, a little lower down, bearing the flag, was that worthy servant the Butler, also a recipient of the Emperor's favour. This party rode on till they were quite close to Fortune-teller Li's company, not more than a few hundred paces separating the two forces, before they turned their horses and rode back.

The two leading rebel commanders urged their horses forward in a charge. Hotshot slapped his horse, levelled his spear of seasoned wood and rode at them, Jade Arrowtip following behind, square halberd at the ready. When these four had fought a dozen bouts, Hotshot and Arrowtip knocked aside their opponents' weapons, turned and galloped off. The rebels gave chase, but there were shouts from their companions on either side: "Don't follow them. Those two have got masses of stones in their saddlebags and when they throw they don't miss!"

The rebel leaders reined in their horses at once. Then on Dragon Heights a drum thundered and a company of five hundred infantry appeared, with four marching in front: Iron Ox, Demon King, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. As they came on their men spread out in a long line under the mountain, with the shield bearers thickly clustered on either side. The rebel commanders urged their men forward and Iron Ox and Demon King split their force into two columns, which turned and using the shields to cover their backs retreated towards the mountain again.

By now the main rebel army with Wang Qing and Fortune-teller Li had come up and they all advanced together. Iron Ox and Demon King had raced up the mountain and disappeared over a ridge into the forest. They were nowhere to be seen. Fortune-teller Li ordered the rebel troops to form up on the level wasteland. Suddenly a loud report from the mountain and a column of men was seen racing forward on the south with three leaders in their midst: Short-Arse, in the centre, Colonel Sun on the left and the Gardener on the right. They rolled forward with five thousand cavalry and infantry. Wang Qing was just about to deploy troops to oppose them when the gun on the mountain fired again and another column of troops raced out on the north with the three women warriors: Steelbright in the centre, Auntie Gu on the left and the Ogress on the right, also with five thousand cavalry and infantry. The rebel commanders on the right received this charge, while Short-Arse and company clashed with the rebels on the left. They fought a dozen bouts before the Song commanders turned their horses and galloped off to the east, Steelbright and company following suit.

When Wang Qing saw them retreat he said with a sneer: "If these fuckers are all Song Jiang's got, how can we go on losing to them?" He led the main army in pursuit. They had not gone more than a couple of miles when the crash of a gong rang out and the four infantry commanders who had previously retreated began to advance from the thickets on the left flank of the mountain. Four more had now joined them: Monk, Pilgrim, the Red-Haired Devil and Nameless, with five hundred infantry, all armed with round shields and short swords. The rebel second-in-command immediately detached two thousand troops to engage them. After a few bouts Iron Ox and company feigned defeat and retreated in two separate columns, covering their backs with their shields as they fled into the forest and disappeared. The rebels gave chase, but Iron Ox and company were too fast for them and in an instant they had vanished. Fortune-teller Li hurriedly told Wang Qing: "Do not follow them, Sire. It's a trick. We should form up and wait for them to attack."

Before Li had completed this manoeuvre there was a thunderous report on the mountain and the whole of the main Song army poured forth to take up a position in the centre. Wang Qing ordered those on his right and left to stand guard while he mounted the observation platform. Here is what he saw:

To the south: troops with red banners, red armour, red robes, vermilion tassels and chestnut horses massed behind a command banner that is red with gold embroidery, and beside it, among a crowd of red pennants, a tall leader. This is Thunderclap, with the Water General on his left and the Fire General on his right, all fully armed and mounted on chestnut horses.

To the east: troops with blue banners, blue armour, blue robes, blue tassels and blue-grey horses following a blue command flag with gold embroidery and another tall leader. This is Scimitar, with the Son-in-Law on his left and Hound on his right, all fully armed and mounted on blue-grey horses.

To the west: troops with white banners and so on. In front of them Leopard's Head, with Tamer on his left and Colonel Sun on his right.

To the rear of these: troops all in black behind Twin Rods, with the Supremo on his left and Victorious on his right.

To the southeast: troops with blue banners and red armour, led by Twin Spears, with Golden Wings on his left and Redeye on his right.

To the southwest: troops with red banners and white armour led by Hasty, with the Dandy on his left and Flautist on his right.

To the northeast: troops with black banners and blue armour, led by the Tattooed Dragon with River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake.

To the northwest: troops with white banners and black armour, led by Blue-Faced Beast with Panther and the Big Chief.

These forces offer protection on eight sides like an iron bucket. They are all in their proper units, cavalry with cavalry, infantry with infantry, all armed and provided with their banners, an awe-inspiring sight. In the centre of the octagon is a cluster of yellow banners, among them sixty-four depicting all the figures of the *Book of Changes* outlined in gold, in four groups. South of the central section are cavalry, with two senior leaders: Whiskers and his subordinate Sergeant Lei, their forces all in yellow. On the east of the central section is the Little Master, on the west Whitey, on the south Door-God and on the north Pill Monger. Grouped behind the yellow flags, the artillery, with its commander, Thunderer, and twenty of his gunners standing around their guns. Behind these a contingent with hooks and ropes, and behind them some banners of various colours with the twenty-eight heavenly mansions represented on all sides.

Among the gold embroidered banners is the goose yellow command banner, worked in felt and bordered with real pearls, with gold bells along the bottom edge and surmounted by a pheasant's feather. Guardian of this is an impressive giant of a man with a cap secured by a fishtail pin, and dragon scale armour. This is Perilous. Beside the banner are two ensigns, both mounted, dressed identically and holding steel lances: the two brothers, Comet and Red Star. In front of and behind their horses twenty-four armoured guards with wolf's-tooth maces. Behind, two signal flags and on either side twenty-four halberdiers. Two riders in the midst of them: Little Duke and Halberdier. In the midst of the halberds a thicket of tridents with two powerful commanders, identically dressed: Snake and Scorpion, both with three-pronged forks, protecting the central army. Behind them two horsemen with silver saddles: Magic Hand and Sterling. Behind them soldiers dressed in red with hemp-bound swords and in their midst the two executioners, Strongarm and Blossom.

At the very back are ranks of spearsmen with gold spears and silver spears, one lot under Spearsman, the other under Colonel Hua. Behind these row upon row of padded uniforms, coloured turbans, crimson robes, padded jackets, then two shimmering, glittering walls of green streamers and blue screens, crimson pennants and yellow-shafted halberds with white animal tails hanging from them, preceding three ranks of halberds, axes, whips and hammers.

In the midst of these, under three gilt umbrellas, seated on precious saddles, the three chiefs: on the right, with his star cap and crane's feather cloak, Dragon in the Clouds, Taoist Gongsun Sheng, on the left, with his silk kerchief and feather fan, the Beacon of Learning Professor Wu Yong, in the centre, on the famous horse Moonlight with a gold saddle, that humane and virtuous general, scourge of brigands and rebels, Shandong's Opportune Rain, Song Jiang the Guardian of Righteousness. In front of his horse on the left stands the Magic Messenger, master of flying despatches, military intelligence and troop dispositions. On the right is the Prodigy, protector of the main army and entrusted with special missions. Behind his horse are ranks of pikes and halberds, horses with embroidered saddles, thirty-five junior officers on horseback with lances, a company of archers. Also the musicians playing for all they are worth. To the rear of the whole army are two companies of roving troops waiting on either side to protect the flanks: the Guv and Nine-Tailed Turtle with three thousand infantry on the left and Irrepressible and Unstoppable with three thousand on the right. The whole formation is drawn up in perfect order. Truly, it can be said that:

*Many the troops are, the battle plan mighty;*
*Like tigers the men, their horses pure dragon.*
*Bent on their task of subduing the West,*
*The leaders shout threats that spell death to the rebels.*

And so this hedge king, this upstart Wang Qing stood on the observation platform with Li the fortune-teller and surveyed the opposing force, which before his eyes took on this formation based on the nine mansions of the *Book of Changes*. The troops were fierce enough, the leaders brave enough, the expressions grim and the weapons sharp-edged enough to frighten his soul out of its body, to cause his spirits to plunge. Despite himself he had to say: "No wonder we keep losing to them. Who'd have thought an army could be so imposing!"

The drums on the Song side kept up an incessant thunder. Wang Qing and the fortune-teller descended from the platform, mounted their horses and rode out with the security chiefs on either side and a crowd of palace attendants behind. Wang Qing gave the order for his vanguard to attack. The opposing armies were lined up facing east and west, and wood was the sign for the day. The Song ranks on the west opened and Leopard's Head sped forward. Both armies cheered. He reined his horse in, rested his eight-pointed serpent lance and shouted at the top of his voice: "You rebellious fool, you mad dog conspirator, the imperial army is here, why have you not surrendered? If you wait till I've ground you to dust, it'll be too late then for regrets!"

In the rebel ranks Fortune-teller Li, who knew the laws of cause and effect, hurriedly gave the order for the two commanders on the left flank to take the red-banner troops into action. This order was carried out, to much shouting from the armies and thundering music. Leopard's Head took on one of them and four arms rose and fell while four horse's hooves clattered on the ground. The antagonists, hidden in a cloud of dust, surrounded by the chill of death, went this way and that, swooping to the left and spinning to the right. They fought fifty bouts and neither had the advantage. This rebel leader was one of their bravest. When his comrade saw he was not winning, he raised his sword and charged to the rescue. Faced by two opponents, Leopard's Head gave a great shout and making a supreme effort thrust the first of them through with his lance, flinging him from his horse. His deputies, Tamer and Colonel Sun, galloped forward. Tamer dealt the second leader a great blow with his deadly sword: the blood gushed and there was the helmet rolling under the horse's legs.

When the second rebel leader died, his troops scattered and the enemy ranks were broken. Wang Qing heard he had lost two of his commanders and immediately ordered a retreat. But just then a gun going off in the Song army was the signal for frenzied activity as, white leading black, black leading blue, blue leading red, they changed their formation into a long snake and then a winnowing basket, effecting a complete encirclement. Wang Qing and Fortune-teller Li moved their troops this way and that, attacking in different places, but they were just running their heads against a brick wall; they simply couldn't break out. What a battle that was, between the government forces and the rebels!

*Weapons clash, horses and riders dash against each other. Spear foiling sword: the sword aims to split the skull, the spear darts like a swordfish to meet it; the sword strikes from below, the spear bears down like an earth-borer; the sword sweeps along the ground, the spear blocks it like the fringe of a corselet. Sword countering spear: the spear lunges at the heart, the sword makes a five-flower defence; the spear seeks to prick the eye, the sword parries. Halberd defeating shield: the shield advances like a spinning top, the halberd sweeps it aside like the wind; the shield bores in from the side, the halberd stands athwart; the shield comes crowding forward, the halberd draws back and jabs defensively. Shield countering halberd: the halberd closes, the shield ducks and weaves; the halberd presses hard, the shield responds with a block. The naked blade hidden in silk feigns defeat, pretends surrender; the steel trident thrusting upward, sweeping downward, feints and ripostes. The sniper on horseback watches his opportunity; in front of carts men with billhooks wait for the horses. Rods, darts, maces, hammers, broadswords, halberds, lances, bucklers: here the conflict raging unabated, there the fortunes ever in the balance. Blood soon runs in rivers, corpses are piled in mountains.*

Fierce fighting continued for a long time, but eventually the rebels were routed and the government forces prevailed. Wang Qing gave the order to withdraw into Nanfeng, hoping to make new plans. But then a gun went off in their rear and a messenger galloped up and reported: "Sire, there are more enemy troops behind us!" The hero leading this contingent was none other than the Unicorn, armed with his lance of hardened steel, with Morbid on his left and Madcap on his right and ten thousand battle-ready troops. They charged furiously at the rebels' rearguard. Morbid knocked one of the commanders off his horse, Madcap ran the other one through, as the impetus carried them on through the rebel ranks.

In the midst of this crisis, Wang Qing heard another loud report and the Monk marched out from the left with seven other leaders and a thousand infantry, equipped with cudgels, cutlasses, axes, pikes, swords, javelins and round shields; they cut through the enemy like someone slicing a melon or chopping vegetables. On the right the Gardener, Short-Arse, Blackface and Hotshot and their respective wives, with a thousand cavalry, armed with spears and lances of weathered wood and bronze, square halberds, double-edged swords and daggers attacked the rebels' left flank, bowling them over, going through them like a knife through rotten wood, scattering them to the four winds.

The Unicorn, supported by Morbid and Madcap, took on the main army, killing the commander, routing the flanking troops and pressing on with the intention of capturing Wang Qing. Instead he found the fortune-teller, who was an excellent swordsman and came at him with his sword darting at the speed of lightning. The Unicorn was unable to cope with this and retreated into the lee of Song Jiang's main army. The commander on the right was Taoist Gongsun, who advanced muttering a spell. He cried out "Chrrr!" and the sword flew out of Li's hand and dropped to the ground. The Unicorn galloped up to him and stretching out his long arms and twisting his supple waist wrenched him off his horse and handed him over to be tied up. Then he slapped his horse and readied his lance and charged off again in search of Wang Qing, like an eagle stooping on a swallow or a tiger devouring a lamb. The rebels abandoned drums and gongs and threw down their halberds and spears. There was complete havoc; it was one of those days when fathers mourn sons, sons search for fathers and brothers lose each other. The greater part of a hundred thousand troops were killed. The field was littered with corpses, blood ran in rivers. Thirty thousand gave themselves up. Apart from a few who managed to run away, the rest ended up more dead than alive, trampled underfoot by men and horses, battered to pieces, rendered into mincemeat. Two fearsome rebel commanders had their horses killed under them by Nameless, who dragged the riders off and killed them too. Arrowtip knocked the rebel Li Xiong down with one of her stones and finished him off with her halberd. Another rebel commander was accounted for by Fleetfoot, the latter's halberd knocking him from his mount and spitting him as he attempted to flee. Many of the upstart's officials, ministers, security chiefs and officers of all kinds never made it to safety. Apart from the fact that the chief rebel himself was missing it was a complete victory for the Song forces.

Song Jiang had the gong sounded to recall his troops and they made for Nanfeng. He sent Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip off on reconnaissance with five thousand cavalry. He also sent Magic Messenger ahead to gather news of the Chancellor's attack on Nanfeng. The Magic Messenger used his magic amulets, so he overtook Hotshot and Arrowtip. The journey took him all morning and when he returned he gave this account: "When he got your orders, the Chancellor dressed himself as one of the western army to try and deceive the city, but they saw through it. They dug a pit just inside the gates. Then they opened the east gate and let his troops in. Seven of the officers under the Chancellor's command, and five hundred men with their horses charged through the gate and all, men and horses, plunged into the pit. There were troops hidden on either side who with long spears and pikes stabbed all five hundred or more of them to death. Luckily the Chancellor was at the back. He waited his moment and then charged through and got his men to fill in the pit. They continued on into the city and the guards fled. He seized the east gate, but later the enemy counter-attacked on all sides and got them surrounded in there. As soon as I heard this I raced back here. On the way I met Hotshot and Jade Arrowtip and told them and they are rushing there with their troops."

Song Jiang immediately mobilized the main army and marched them with all speed to surround Nanfeng. Hotshot and Arrowtip by now had reached the East Gate and reinforced the Chancellor. They were engaged in fierce fighting. Song Jiang and his army also entered by the East Gate and captured the city, putting the rebels to flight. They raised the Song banner on all the gates. Many of the usurper's officials in the city, civil and military, were executed, including Fan Quan — Wang Qing's cousin and erstwhile government official. The usurper's consort, formerly Miss Duan, when she heard the government troops were in the city, having been always strong and an accomplished horsewoman, girded herself and rode forth at the head of a hundred or so of her bravest attendants. They left the palace through the rear court, heading for the west gate with the intention of joining the rebel forces at Yun'an. But they ran into Jade Arrowtip, who at that moment was attacking the palace from the back. Miss Duan brandished her sword and urged her horse forward in one last desperate charge. One of Jade Arrowtip's stones caught her in the face. Bleeding profusely she fell from her horse. Troops rushed up to tie her up and make her prisoner. Her maids were all killed. Jade Arrowtip pressed on into the palace garden. All the palace maids, when they heard the Song army had entered the city, either hanged themselves or threw themselves down wells or stabbed themselves to death or threw themselves down steps, almost all dying by their own hand. The remainder were tied up by Arrowtip's troops and taken before Song Jiang in his tent. He was well pleased and ordered Miss Duan and her attendants to be locked up until Wang Qing was captured and then sent off to the capital. He again sent out detachments in all directions to hunt for Wang Qing.

Wang Qing with only a few hundred armoured cavalry left to him had broken out of the encirclement and fled to the east of Nanfeng. When he saw fighting in the city he was frightened half out of his wits. The main Song army was at his back and there was no chance of fleeing northwards. Looking about he found he had barely a hundred men. The remainder, even those he trusted most, had fled in the face of defeat. With those remaining he headed for Yun'an. On the way he spoke with those nearest him: "I still have Yun'an, Dongchuan and Ande. This region east of the river is not large, but surely it will suffice for a kingdom? What hurts me is that those courtiers who were happy to take my salary, have deserted me now in my time of need. As soon as we have driven off the Song troops, I will arrest those ungrateful traitors and have them sliced into little pieces."

There was no rest for horses or men as they galloped on till dawn. They were relieved when they saw Yun'an before them. Wang Qing said happily: "They are well prepared. See how bravely the banners are flying and how well camouflaged the guns." He spoke as they were hastening towards the city.

But one of his followers who could read and write said: "Sire, something is wrong. Why is the city full of Song flags and ensignia?" Wang Qing looked again and it was true: on the east gate was a banner, visible from afar, which had large gold embroidered characters: "General Song's Commander of Water-borne Forces in the West, White-Water…". Below were three lines which could not be made out because of the way the wind was blowing the flag. When he saw this Wang Qing's heart went heavy as lead, his whole body numb, and for a long time he was quite unable to move. Indeed it was as if the Song forces had fallen from the sky. Finally one of his close aides, who was an astute fellow, said: "Sire, there is no time to lose. I beg you to remove your royal insignia and flee to Dongchuan. I fear this city has changed hands."

Wang Qing said: "You are right, my friend." He took off his towering crown and divested himself of his imperial dragon robe embroidered with figures of the sun and moon, removed his jewel-encrusted belt and his slippers and changed into a simple turban, ordinary clothes and soft leather shoes. His followers also removed their outer clothing and then, like dogs kicked out of the house or fish escaped from the net, they fled away by small paths, passing Yun'an by and heading for Dongchuan. They travelled till men and horses were exhausted and every stomach empty. The people had suffered so long at the hands of the rebels that when they heard of great battles, they had all taken to the road and there was no sign of human habitation at any of the important places along the route. All was silent: no cock crowed, no dog barked. You could not even get a drop of water, let alone find a place to buy wine and food.

By now some sixty or seventy of Wang Qing's personal attendants had absented themselves, saying they had to go to the toilet or needed a pee. The party, now consisting of thirty, rode on till evening when they came to Kaizhou, still in Yun'an province, where a river blocked their path. This was the river Clearwater, which rose in a lake in Dazhou. The water was indeed especially clear, hence the name. Wang Qing said: "If only we could find a boat to take us across!" One of his retinue pointed and said: "Over there, Sire, look, where the reeds are thinner and the geese are landing, there are some fishing boats."

They all went down to the river bank. It was the depths of winter but the day was bright and clear. There were about a dozen fishing boats: some of the men were fishing and others were drying their nets. Out in midstream there were some boats where the fishermen were playing the guessing fingers game and drinking from large bowls. Wang Qing sighed and said: "Look at those fellows, how happy they are! How different from my lot. They are my subjects, but they know nothing of the hardships their prince must suffer!"

One of the attendants shouted: "Ahoy there, fishermen! Bring some of your boats over here to ferry us across. You'll be handsomely paid for it."

Two of the men set down their bowls and the boat came creaking across the water. A fisherman in the bows poled the boat in to the bank. He looked Wang Qing up and down from head to toe and said: "Look lively about it then. We've still got more drinking to do. Get in, get in!"

Wang Qing's attendants helped him aboard. The fisherman was a big fellow with shaggy eyebrows, big eyes, iron-grey whiskers and a voice like a gong. He held the pole in one hand and with the other helped Wang Qing aboard. Then he gave one shove with his pole and the boat shot away from the bank a metre or more. This caused a great commotion among the attendants left on the bank. "Hey, bring the boat back here at once," they cried out in unison. "We all want to go across!"

The fisherman glared at them and said: "And where do you plan to go to then?" Then he put down his pole, planted a hand on Wang Qing's chest, pulled on his arms and threw him to the deck with a crash. Wang Qing tried to struggle but the man with the oars put them down and leapt up to help pin him down. The fishermen who were drying their nets jumped ashore and fell on the attendants, making them prisoner one after another.

The big fisherman with the pole was of course the White-Water Dragon, and the one rowing was Cave Dragon. The fishermen were all members of the Song water-borne force. White-Water Dragon had received orders from Song Jiang to sail his fleet to engage the rebel fleet. They had fought a big battle at Gautama Narrows where they'd killed the rebel commander and taken his deputy, Hu Jun, prisoner, inflicting a heavy defeat on the enemy. Recognizing him from his bearing as exceptional, White-Water Dragon had courteously released his prisoner. In gratitude the latter had contrived to open the water gates of Yun'an for him and he had captured it, killing the garrison commander. Anticipating that the rebels after being defeated and scattered by the main army would attempt to flee back to their base, he left White Eel and the Pilot in charge of the city and went with Cave Dragon, River Rider and their men disguised as fishermen, to set a watch for the returning enemy. He posted the three Ruan brothers also at three other river crossings to keep watch. When he saw Wang Qing approaching, riding at the head of a crowd, he assumed he was an enemy leader, though he did not know it was the chief villain of all. After interrogating his followers he learnt that it was Wang Qing and he clapped his hands with joy. He recalled the Ruan brothers and the Tong brothers to help guard the city and with the former enemy commander, Hu Jun, took Wang Qing and his followers to Song Jiang. They learnt on the way that Song Jiang had taken Nanfeng. On entering the city they took Wang Qing to the government office. Song Jiang was somewhat downhearted at the time, because of their failure to capture Wang Qing, and he could scarce contain his joy when he heard the news. When White-Water Dragon entered, he was loud in his praises: "Dear Brother, this is a major achievement," he said. White-Water Dragon presented Hu Jun to him and said: "This is the man who deserves the credit."

Song Jiang asked him his name and enquired about his part in the taking of Yun'an. After Song Jiang had distributed rewards and compensation, he conferred with them all about how to capture the two cities still in rebel hands, Dongchuan and Ande.

The newly surrendered Hu Jun said: "Don't worry about it, General. I can tell you something which'll take care of both places, it's a cinch!" Song Jiang was delighted to hear this. He took Hu aside and respectfully asked him what his plan was. Hu bowed and said a few words that were to have important consequences: without a shot fired the cities were recaptured, the army subdued and the rebels forced to surrender.

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### The Prodigy Yan Qing shoots geese at Autumn Double Woods Crossing; Song Jiang brings his captives to the Eastern Capital

Now when Song Jiang asked General Hu Jun what was his plan for capturing Dongchuan and Ande, the latter replied: "The garrison commander at Dongchuan is my younger brother Hu Xian. Out of gratitude to Commander Li for sparing my life, let me go to Dongchuan and order my brother to surrender. When the garrison at Ande find they are alone, they will have no alternative but to give themselves up."

Song Jiang was pleased and ordered the White-Water Dragon to go too. He now made his dispositions, deploying troops to pacify the districts that had not yet surrendered, and sent Magic Messenger to request the court to declare the campaign successfully concluded, and to deliver a report to the Commissioner for forwarding to Marshal Su. With the army he went to Wang Qing's imperial palace to impound all valuables in the treasury and burn down and destroy all the topless towers and splendid halls, all the weapons of war and uniforms. He likewise sent word to Pilot in Yun'an ordering him to burn and destroy all the armaments in the palace there.

Magic Messenger went first to the Commissioner in Jingnan. The latter added a report of his own. Magic Messenger went next to the capital and handed the reports in to Marshal Su together with some gifts. Marshal Su presented the report to the Emperor for his scrutiny. The Emperor expressed great satisfaction and immediately ordered the drafting of an edict for the Western region whereby the rebel Wang Qing was to be sent to the capital for sentencing, and the usurper's concubines, officials and hangers-on executed in the local market-places and their heads exhibited. The people had suffered cruelly at the hands of Wang Qing and there was to be an indemnity of cash and rations, distributed to each needy household to relieve poverty. The surrendered Hebei commanders who had died in battle were rewarded posthumously by gifts to their followers. The temporary administrations were to hand over to new officials as soon as possible. Where local officials had first sided with the rebels and later returned to their allegiance, their conduct was to be judged by Commissioner Chen and dealt with on merit. All who had contributed to the putting down of the rebellion would be rewarded with official posts on the army's return to the capital. Magic Messenger went on ahead in order to tell them about the edict. Commissioner Chen and company were all in Nanfeng. Hu Jun had by now got his brother to surrender and the people of Dongchuan had handed over all the local registers and treasury accounts and come to await their sentence. The rebels of Ande in trepidation followed suit. Thanks to the efforts of White-Water Dragon these three places, Yun'an, Dongchuan and Ande, had all been pacified without the farmers having to leave their work in the fields or the merchants their shops. All of the eight cities and eighty-six districts seized by Wang Qing had now been recovered.

Some ten days after Magic Messenger returned to Nanfeng from the capital, the Emperor's envoy arrived bearing the decree. Commissioner Chen and his officials received it and one by one all the instructions were carried out. The envoy returned to the capital early next morning. The Commissioner had the Duans, Li the fortune-teller, and all their accomplices brought out of the gaol and after sentencing they were beheaded and the heads exposed on the gates as a lesson. Miss Duan, who had been rebellious from childhood, had insisted on arranging her own marriage and had committed a capital crime, had not only lost her own life in the process but implicated many of her relatives. Her father had died earlier in the camp on House Mountain.

Anyway, to be brief, after recording the exploits of the White-Water Dragon and the rest, Commissioner Chen and Song Jiang had notices posted in every district to reassure the people. Eighty-six districts had been returned to the Emperor's control and their inhabitants' loyalty could be counted on again. All the other followers of the insurgency were left unharmed and told to return to their former trades or to farming. In due course the Wizard and Magic Steed came from the Western Capital, new officials having arrived to take over the administration there. Other leaders who had been seconded to local administrations began to arrive from all over. After White-Water Dragon and his comrades handed over their administrative duties and came to Nanfeng, the Commissioner with all the officials and Song Jiang's one hundred and seven commanders and the surrendered commanders from Hebei, celebrated the peace with a banquet, in honour of all the military commanders and civilian officials, and to reward the army. Song Jiang put Taoist Gongsun and the Wizard in charge of a religious ceremony which was to last seven days and nights, to ease the passage of the souls of the dead commanders and of all who had suffered an unjust death in the West.

Shortly after this it was announced that the Chancellor had caught some infection and died in the camp. Song Jiang was very upset. He arranged the funeral and the body was buried at Dragon Heights. The Chancellor's death affected the Wizard deeply and he said to Song Jiang: "He was my countryman and my close friend. He committed a crime in order to avenge his father and had to throw in his lot with the rebels. When you enlisted him I hoped that his fate would improve. Who'd have thought that he would suddenly die like this! The fact that I joined you is due to his having set me straight. You can imagine my feelings now he is dead. The kindness of yourself and the Unicorn is engraved on my heart and I can never repay it, but I would like to ask you to allow me to take myself off to the wilderness; I need to husband what remains to me of the life force."

When Magic Steed heard about this he too went to Song Jiang and said: "Please allow me to go with the Wizard."

Song Jiang was exceedingly reluctant but since they were adamant he had to let them go. A farewell party was held, at which Taoist Gongsun was notably silent. The two of them said goodbye and then went to take leave of the Commissioner, after which they departed contentedly. Later they would both proceed to where the Great Sage was and sit at his feet and follow the Way till they reached the end of their days.

The Commissioner calmed the fears of all the people in the West, civil and military, and provided them with aid. This was the region beyond the Huai River, which is why in the days of Song they called it West of the Huai, or the West. The Commissioner now ordered all his commanders to pack up and return to the capital.

Song Jiang ordered the main army to escort Commissioner Chen and the other two on the journey and told the water-borne leaders to sail on ahead to the capital first in their boats, tying up and awaiting orders when they got there. He instructed Magic Hand to compose an inscription and the Craftsman to carve a stone tablet to commemorate these events. The monument was placed to the east of Nanfeng at the foot of Dragon Heights, where it stands to this day. A send-off was organized for the Hu brothers; when Song Jiang returned to court he told the Emperor how they had turned over a new leaf and made an important contribution to the victory and got them appointed as water-borne commanders in Dongchuan, but that was later.

Song Jiang now divided the army into five columns and fixed the time of departure. As well as the troops left to guard each district, there were also a number who asked leave to return to farm their land. Nevertheless there were more than a hundred thousand who left Nanfeng and headed for the capital. They had strict orders not to cause any disturbance in the regions they passed through, and the people came out to greet them with incense, lamps and candles. After several days' march they came to the place called Autumn Woods Crossing, at the foot of the Autumn Woods range. The landscape around here was particularly beautiful, full of streams and rocks, and Song Jiang looked around him as he rode. Raising his eyes to the sky he saw a flock of wild geese, not flying in their usual formation but scattered any old how, as if something had frightened them. He was puzzled by the sight. Then he heard a clamour of applause from the troops ahead and sent someone to inquire the reason. What had happened was this: the Prodigy had been practising with a bow and arrows and had aimed at the geese flying overhead. Every arrow had hit. In no time at all he shot a dozen or so birds, to the amazement of his companions. Song Jiang summoned the Prodigy to him. He arrived at the gallop with his bow bent and an arrow ready, and his horse's crupper loaded with dead geese. He vaulted from the saddle in front of Song Jiang and stood to attention.

"So you've been shooting geese, have you?" Song Jiang said.

"I was practising and I saw these geese flying past, so I had a shot at them and to my surprise every arrow hit."

"It is natural for a soldier to practise archery, and you have a talent for it," Song Jiang said. "But just think about these migrating geese, how to escape the cold they leave the northern moun-tains and cross over lakes and frontiers to seek the warm lands south of the River in search of grain and rice, and then at the start of spring fly all the way back again. This bird is an emblem of virtue. No matter if they're ten or fifty, the group is bound together by mutual courtesy, the seniors go first, the youngest follow behind, their flight is orderly, they abide by the rules of the flock. When they rest at night they set a watch. If one of a pair is lost the other grieves and will take no other mate all its life. It is a bird which has all the five virtues: humanity, righteous-ness, courtesy, wisdom and faith. If they fly past a dead goose they show all the signs of alarm: this is humanity. If a goose loses its mate it never takes another: this is righteousness. They fly in their proper order with no striving to be first: that is courtesy. To avoid the eagle they go via lakes and passes, that is wisdom. South in autumn, north in spring, never failing: this is faith. A creature so abounding in virtue, how can you harm it? As the flock wings through the sky they call out to each other. They are just like our company. Now you have shot these birds, it's like losing one of our number is for us. How would we all feel? From now on please do not harm this admirable bird."

The Prodigy was silent. He deeply regretted his actions. Song Jiang still mastered by his emotion improvised this poem:

*Among rugged mountains a vast expanse of water;*
*Geese wing their way across the heavens;*
*Suddenly one of a flying pair is cancelled by an arrow:*
*Cold moon in the sky, clear breeze and heartbreak.*

Song Jiang recited the poem. The words seemed to affect him deeply. That night they camped in the approaches to Autumn Woods Crossing. Song Jiang in his tent again remembered his sadness at the Prodigy's shooting the geese; he took out paper and brush and wrote the following:

*Across the clear sky the flock is broken and the geese scatter in panic; their objective was simply to go down to the wintering grounds. For the grass is withered, the sand washed clean and the water spread out flat under a distant sky. It is hard to express all that one feels, at best one shares but a little of one's thoughts. At day's end the sky is veiled, evening mist rises from the ancient moat. Impossible to describe the sadness. Now that the reeds are gathered in, there is no more shelter. Alas, when will they return to visit the beauteous region? Birds call forlornly, the melancholy riverside is not a place where one would choose to linger. We await the return of spring days and the paired swallows atwitter in the eaves.*

He gave this to the Professor and Taoist Gongsun to read. The sentiments expressed in the poem were gloomy and depressed in the extreme. Song Jiang was obviously plunged in gloom. That night the Professor and the others organized a party which only ended when they were all drunk. At dawn next day they mounted and rode south. It was near winter's end, but it was a wintry landscape they rode through, according well with Song Jiang's mood. They did not pause till they reached the capital and set up camp at Chenbridge, to await their orders.

Meanwhile Commissioner Chen and Marshal Hou had entered the city with the main army and had already told the Emperor of Song Jiang's achievements. They told him that General Song Jiang and his troops were on their way back to the capital and had already reached the frontier. The Emperor was full of praise when he heard from Commissioner Chen how hard Song Jiang and his troops had fought. The Commissioner and the Marshal were both honoured, as well as being rewarded with silver and silk. The palace chamberlain received orders to admit Song Jiang and his companions for an audience and to have them ride into the city in full armour.

In obedience to the imperial order, Song Jiang and the rest of the one hundred and eight put on their armour, dressed in embroidered robes, and with gold and silver banners rode through the Gate of Eastern Splendour to the Hall of Culture and Ethics for their audience with the Emperor. They kowtowed respectfully and gave him three cheers. It was a sight to gladden the Emperor's heart: all of them in brocade robes with gold belts, except the Professor, Taoist Gongsun, Lu Zhishen the Monk and Wu Song the Pilgrim, who wore their own appropriate dress. "We have heard much," he said, "of your bitter campaign and how hard you strove to suppress the bandits, how many of you suffered injury. Our heart goes out to you."

Song Jiang again prostrated himself and said: "Because Your Majesty enjoys such favour from heaven, we have come through, albeit with a few wounds. Now the traitors have surrendered, the West has been pacified. In serving Your Majesty's greatness how can we feel any burden?"

He prostrated himself again to show his gratitude, and then went on: "We beg now to present the captive Wang Qing to Your Majesty, in order that his case may be resolved."

The Emperor said: "I shall order the officials of the judicial committee to arrange for him to be punished with a lingering death."

Song Jiang told the story of how Bountiful masterminded the handing over of the city of Jingnan without harm to the people and modestly rejected any offer of advancement.

The Emperor said: "I am truly moved by such faithful service." He ordered the Military Council to try to bring Bountiful back to serve in the capital. Song Jiang and the others kowtowed again to show their gratitude. But what member of the Military Council was going to exert himself to acquire for the Emperor the services of an honest man? However, that is another story.

That same day the Emperor ordered the members of the Military Council to consider the conferring of rank and honours on Song Jiang and his company. The Grand Preceptor and the President of the Council, Marshal Tong, discussed it and proposed the following: "Peace has still not been fully restored, so we cannot make these appointments yet. Let us give to Song Jiang the title of Guardian of Righteousness, licensed to bear arms for his sovereign as Emperor's Champion, and to his second-in-command the Unicorn the title of Warrior First Class, also licensed to bear arms for the Emperor, as a palace guard. The Professor and the other thirty-three will have the rank of full commanders in the armed forces: the Strategist and the other seventy-one will have the rank of vice-commander. Their army will be rewarded with gold and silver from government funds." The Emperor accepted this arrangement and ordered the Military Council to confer these titles forthwith and to pay the monies due to them in advance.

Song Jiang and company went to bow and express their thanks in the Hall of Culture and Ethics. The Emperor ordered the Secretariat to prepare a great banquet and presented Song Jiang with an embroidered robe, a suit of gilt armour and a fine horse. For the rest, from the Unicorn down, the reward was different: it was to be drawn from the treasury.

Song Jiang and his companions expressed their thanks and left the palace. Outside the Western Gate they mounted and returned to camp to rest and await their next assignment.

That day after the judicial committee had prepared a placard announcing his crime, the prison cart was opened and Wang Qing was taken out. The words "hack to death" were pronounced and he was hustled towards the market place. The onlookers were jostling and shoving to get a better view. Some were spitting and shouting abuse, others were moved to tears. Wang Qing's father, his former wife and in-laws, his whole family and household had been apprehended when he first declared his rebellion and suffered the extreme penalty.

Now only Wang Qing was left to face the executioner's sword. Two stuttering rolls of the drum and a cracked note on the gong, the sword drawn and glittering like fresh snow; black banners streaming above like a storm cloud! The executioner's awesome roar summoning the demons of hell! The time a little past noon. Wang was dragged to the crossroads and the sentence was read out, ordering slow death by slicing. The onlookers might say to themselves:

*The criminal always has something to teach us:*
*For dreams in the head the body must pay.*
*Surely the crime must have been heinous!*
*Why else should he suffer this way?*

The chief executioner carried out the sentence and the felon's head was exhibited. Of this no more.

Having received their reward Song Jiang and his companions returned to the camp the following day. Now Taoist Gongsun strode into the command tent. He greeted them all with a very low bow and said: "Previously my teacher, the Blessed Sage, told me that after accompanying you back to the capital I was to return to him on the mountain. Now your achievement is complete and you have made your name, I must bid you farewell and take leave of the company, for I must return to study the Way with my teacher and look after my old mother for the remainder of her days."

Song Jiang had given his word and could not go back on it. But he was weeping inside as he said to Taoist Gongsun: "I remember the old days, when we first met, and it was like a flower opening. Now you must go and it is like the flower that fades and falls. I must be true to my word of course, but how will I be able to bear this parting?"

Taoist Gongsun said: "Had I abandoned you in the middle of something, then there would have been cause to reproach me. But now that you have fulfilled your task, you have to let me go."

Song Jiang tried hard to make him change his mind, but he would not. So as usual a feast was organized for all the company to bid him farewell. Cups were raised, with many a sigh. Everyone was sad and they all had gifts for him which he did his best to refuse. His friends however kept stuffing them in his pack. Next day, after a final farewell, Taoist Gongsun put on his hemp sandals, shouldered his pack, bowed low to the ground, and then set off northward. Song Jiang missed him sorely for many days and his heart was heavy.

In time it drew near to the first full moon of the new year, and government officials were all preparing to offer congratulations to the Emperor. The Grand Preceptor did not want Song Jiang and his companions to join this ceremony, because he feared that the Emperor would be obliged to give them all new official posts. He asked the Emperor to issue an order forbidding them to come to court for the ceremony, all except Song Jiang and the Unicorn who had official positions. The others, who had no rank, were to be excluded from the ceremony lest they offend the Emperor. At dawn on the day all the courtiers, including Song Jiang and the Unicorn in their uniforms, lined up in the court of the Water Clock to await the Emperor and to pay homage according to court etiquette. His Majesty held court that day in the Palace of Purple Dawn, where Song Jiang and the Unicorn after doing obeisance, waited in line below, not presuming to approach the throne. Gathered around the throne there were many notable beauties to be observed and much finery on display. Many a toast was drunk. After a whole morning of this the time came to express thanks and depart, and the Emperor was carried off in his palanquin. Song Jiang and the Unicorn changed their official robes and rode back to camp, flushed with drinking. When they arrived the others noticed Song Jiang's gloomy expression and seeing something was wrong came one by one to greet him, afterwards lining up on the side. Song Jiang merely hung his head and did not speak. "Why have you returned from court so sad, brother?" the Professor asked.

Song Jiang heaved a sigh: "Fortune it seems does not smile on me, my path is obstructed," he said. "We have smashed the Tartars and eliminated bandits, marched this way and that and suffered many hardships, and I have involved all of you in these things, yet without proper recompense. That is why I am sad."

"Just because things don't work out is not fit cause for grief," the Professor said. "Sorrow is to be shared and one should not take things too much to heart."

Iron Ox spoke up: "Don't you see, brother? When we were on Mount Liang none bothered us. But you kept saying amnesty, amnesty, and now we've got the amnesty and it's nothing but trouble. If we could only get out of here and go back to Mount Liang it'd be great!"
Song Jiang blew up. "This black brute is at it again," he shouted. "We're servants of the crown now, loyal servants of the Emperor. Don't you understand anything? You still can't change!"
Iron Ox said: "You won't listen to me, but I tell you, you're going to regret it!"
Everyone laughed at him and then they all drank Song Jiang's health. They went on till late that night before parting. Next day they went with a few dozen cavalry into the city to give the compliments of the season to Marshal Su, Counsellor Zhao and the members of the Council and their coming and going was noted by many.
Someone reported it to the Grand Preceptor, who next day petitioned the Emperor to have a banning order posted at all the city gates to say: "All members of the expeditionary force are to remain in their camp outside the city and await orders. Without receiving an order from the highest authority they are on no account to venture into the city! Any violation of this order is to be punished by military law!" Someone saw this notice when it was put up outside the Chenbridge Gate and reported it to Song Jiang, whose gloom increased. When the others heard about it they were furious and would have rebelled, only Song Jiang prevented it.
The boat captains went to the Professor and told him they wanted to discuss something. The Professor went down to the boats, where the White-Water Dragon and the rest said to him: "The court has broken faith with us. Corrupt officials have usurped power and are standing in the way of honest men. The Leader has destroyed the Tartars, annihilated Tian Hu and now put down Wang Qing. All he's got for it is the title of Emperor's Champion, and we ordinary folk have not been promoted at all. Now there are notices everywhere prohibiting us from entering the city. Most likely those scoundrelly officials plan to break up our company and post us all to different places. We want to make a proposal to you, because we know that if we put it to the Leader he will reject it. Let us attack the capital and plunder it. Then we can go back to the Marshes of Mount Liang. The outlaw's life is the only one for us."
The Professor said: "The Leader will definitely not stand for that. You're wasting your breath. If the arrowhead's not good, do you break the shaft? Everyone knows a headless snake won't get anywhere. How do you expect me to propose this? Even if he agreed, there'd still have to be a way of putting it into action. If he doesn't accept it, you'll never get anywhere with this rebellion of yours!"
When they saw the Professor wasn't prepared to put forward the proposal, the boat leaders shut up. The Professor went back and while he was chatting with Song Jiang about the military situation, he said: "We always used to be completely independent, completely at ease. All of us had a good life. But since we received the amnesty, we have fought for our country and served our country, and not been under any constraint, but we have not been given responsibility, and our brothers are angry."
Song Jiang was shocked: "Has somebody been saying something to you?"
"It's a normal reaction, why should it need explaining? As they say, if you have riches and honour everyone wants you, if you're poor and a thief everyone shuns you. Look at the shape and the colour if you're judging the state of a beast or a situation."
Song Jiang said: "If the comrades are becoming disaffected, it would be better for me to die and go to the other world with my honour still intact!"
Early next morning he called a general meeting. When they were all assembled in front of the tent, Song Jiang began his speech: "I started off as just a local clerk in Yuncheng. Then I committed a serious crime. But thanks to the support of all of you, I became your leader. I have now risen to a government position. But you know the saying, 'Without pain no gain.' Success and trouble go together. We may not like this ban the authorities have imposed on us, but it is our duty to respect it. You must none of you enter the city unless you have a reason. We lived as outlaws in the mountains and forests and our manners are rough and ready. If we cause trouble, we will face the penalty of the law and also ruin our reputation. It is really all for the best that we are not allowed into the city. If you resent these restrictions and won't accept them, you had better cut off my head first, and then you can do what you like. For otherwise, if I am to live in the world without honour, I will have to kill myself and leave you free to do as you please."
This speech produced tears and protestations of loyalty from all of them. They dispersed and thereafter none of them went into the city without business there. But the fifteenth of the first month was approaching and it was the custom in the capital to have a display of lights to celebrate the first new moon of the year. All the streets would be festooned with lanterns and every government office would be lit up.
The Prodigy and Lungs were discussing the festival. "There's going to be this display of lights and fireworks in the capital to celebrate the new year, the Emperor and the people will all be having a good time. Why don't we two change our clothes and slip into the city to see it?"
As they spoke, someone else suddenly appeared and said: "If you're going to see the lights, please let me come with you." It was Iron Ox. He went on: "I know you didn't want me to know about it. But I heard everything."
The Prodigy said: "I'd have nothing against your coming with us if it wasn't for your temper. You're bound to cause a disturbance. You know this ban of the Military Council's forbids us to go into the city. If you go with us to see the lights and cause some sort of rumpus, we will have fallen right into their trap."
"I won't cause any trouble this time, I'll do exactly as you say!"
"All right, tomorrow we must all dress up as travellers," said the Prodigy. "You can come with us."
Iron Ox was delighted with this. Next day he dressed appropriately and waited for the Prodigy. Unfortunately Lungs was terrified of Iron Ox, and he went off earlier with the Flea. There was no escape for the Prodigy; he had to take Iron Ox with him to see the lights. He dared not enter the city directly through the Chenbridge Gate, so they made a big detour and went in through the Gate of the Mounds.
Strolling along arm in arm they came to a house of entertainment called the Mulberry Club. They heard the sound of gongs coming from inside and nothing would suffice Iron Ox but that they should go in, so the Prodigy pulled him into the middle of a crowd. They could hear the voice of a storyteller upstairs. He was reciting from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and had reached the point where Duke Guan has his bone scraped to remove the poison. The Duke has had this poisoned arrow in his shoulder, you see, and the poison has entered the bone. The doctor says: "In order to deal with the poison we must erect a brass post with an iron ring on top and put your arm through it and secure it with rope. Then I will have to cut the wound open and remove a proportion of the bone to get rid of the poison. I will stitch it up with oiled thread and apply an ointment externally and some special medicine internally. In two weeks it will be as good as new. The treatment for this kind of wound is very hard." The Duke gives a loud laugh and says: "A true man has no fear of death, so why should he be worried about an arm? I don't need your post and your ring. Why don't you just start cutting right away?" He calls for a chessboard and starts a game, offering his left arm to the doctor and telling him to scrape the bone and remove the poison. His colour does not change and he goes on talking and joking with the onlookers. When the storyteller reached this point there was a great roar of approval from Iron Ox: "That's what I call a real man!"
The rest of the audience turned and stared at Iron Ox and the Prodigy in amazement. The Prodigy hurriedly tried to shut him up: "What a country bumpkin you are, brother!"
Iron Ox protested: "You can't help applauding something like that!"
The Prodigy dragged him away from the Mulberry Club and they wandered down a narrow passage where they came upon a fellow intent on destroying a citizen's house: bricks and mortar were flying all over the place.
The citizen was saying: "These are times of peace, heaven and earth are supposed to be at rest! Just because I ask him to pay back some money he wants to tear my house down!"
When Iron Ox heard this he smelt an injustice and wanted to step right in and start a fight. The Prodigy was equally determined to prevent it. Iron Ox went on glaring at the man ferociously, itching for trouble. The man said: "I've got an account to settle with him. What business is it of yours? Any day now I've got to go with Marshal Zhang to fight south of the river, so you'd better not provoke me. If I go there I'm as good as dead anyway, I might as well fight you here, because if I get killed at least I'll get a decent coffin."
"What's all this about south of the river?" said Iron Ox. "I haven't heard anything about a mobilization order."
The fight having been averted, they went back down the passage and at the end of a side-street found a tiny teahouse. They went in and found a place to sit and have a cup of tea. Sitting opposite was an old fellow who invited them to join him. They chatted as they drank their tea, and the Prodigy asked: "Tell me, sir, at the end of this street we met a soldier involved in a brawl and he said he was going south of the river with Marshal Zhang and that there would be a mobilization. Is it true there's going to be a war?"
"You haven't heard then?" the old man said. "The bandit Fang La is in rebellion south of the river. He has occupied eight provinces and twenty-five districts, which he calls his country. Sometime soon he'll attack Yangzhou. The government have sent Marshal Zhang and General Liu to arrest him."
Iron Ox hurriedly paid for their tea and they raced back to the camp. They went straight to the Professor and told him about it. He thought it excellent news and went to tell Song Jiang about Fang La's rebellion and how the court had appointed Marshal Zhang to lead a campaign against him. Song Jiang said: "We are all of us wasting our time here, it's very bad for us. Don't you think we should send to Marshal Su and ask him to tell the Emperor we would like to offer our services in this war?" When they held a general meeting of the leaders everyone approved this plan. Next day Song Jiang changed his uniform and took the Prodigy with him to the city to help explain things. They went straight to Marshal Su's. The Marshal was at home and as soon as they were announced he invited them in. Song Jiang stepped up to the dais and prostrated himself respectfully. The Marshal said: "What can I do for you, General? I see you come all dressed up."
Song Jiang said: "Because of the recent notices published by the Military Council, forbidding military personnel to enter the city unless summoned, I would not come without cause. I have ventured to come here because I wish to make a request. I have heard that Fang La has started a rebellion south of the river, that he has proclaimed a new dynasty and has overrun Runzhou and is likely to cross the river and attack Yangzhou. My army and I have long been idle, wasting our time in camp. We request permission to join the campaign and fight for our country. I would ask Your Excellency to forward our request to the Emperor."
The Marshal's reaction was most favourable: "Your words accord exactly with my thoughts, General. I shall support your request in every way. Please return to your camp and tomorrow morning I will present your proposal to the Emperor. I am sure His Majesty will give you employment."
Song Jiang returned to camp and told the others.
Next day Marshal Su attended the dawn court. While the Emperor was presiding over his officials, civil and military, in the Hall of Incense, he was told how Fang La was wreaking havoc south of the river where he had seized territory and proclaimed his own dynasty (a new year name) and was thus in rebellion and usurping the prerogatives of the Emperor and how an attack on Yangzhou was feared. The Emperor said: "But we have already appointed Marshal Zhang and General Liu to lead a campaign and we do not yet know the outcome."
At this Marshal Su stepped forward and said: "This outlaw poses a serious threat. Your Majesty has already appointed Marshal Zhang and General Liu, it is true, but we should send Song Jiang's two armies which have just returned victorious from the West to spearhead the attack. I am sure they will be successful."
The Emperor thought this was a good idea and immediately sent someone to the Military Council with orders. The members of the Military Council came to the palace to receive the edict, and Song Jiang and the Unicorn were ordered to attend for an audience with the Emperor in the Hall of Incense. When they had paid homage His Majesty gave Song Jiang the letter appointing him Commander of the Southern Pacification Expedition against Fang La, and appointing the Unicorn his second-in-command. Each was awarded a gold belt, a brocade robe, a suit of gold armour, a fine horse and twenty-five coloured silk coats with linings. The others were all given silk and silver with a promise of further honours if the expedition was successful.
After receiving their commissions Song Jiang and the Unicorn bade the Emperor farewell. The Emperor said: "Among your company there is one who is an expert carver of inscriptions, known as the Craftsman, and also one who knows how to cure sick horses known as Redbeard. Would you leave these two behind to serve me?"
They assented, thanked the Emperor again and returned to the camp.
The two leaders rode along contentedly, letting their horses follow their own pace. Outside the town they came to a market-place where they saw a man who was playing with an object in his hand. It was contrived of two sticks with a string stretched between them which when manipulated by the hand caused an object to hum. It was unfamiliar to Song Jiang, so he had a soldier call the man over and asked: "What is that thing?"
The man replied: "It's a Tartar bell. You pull the string and it makes a noise." Song Jiang made a verse about this:

*A low note and a high note,*
*Loud enough and clear enough to reach heaven;*
*But on its own a heroic spirit isn't much use;*
*Without a helping hand it won't produce!*

Song Jiang said to the Unicorn with a laugh: "It's like you and me, you see. We might have huge talents, but without someone to help us along we won't produce a sound."
"Why do you say that?" said the Unicorn. "From what we know of the great leaders past or present, it's great personal ability they need and without it they won't do anything great however much they are promoted."
Song Jiang said: "I'm afraid I can't agree with you there. If it weren't for Marshal Su's generous support, we would never have been allowed to return to the Emperor's service. One should not forget what one owes to others."
The Unicorn knew that he was wrong and had nothing to say to that.
When they returned to the camp there was a meeting for all the leaders in the command tent. Except for the woman warrior Jade Arrowtip, who was pregnant and remained in the capital with the husband and wife team of the Butler to look after her and the doctor to attend her, they were all told to pack up and prepare their horses and armour and be ready to march, to join the campaign against Fang La. Later, when her time came, Jade Arrowtip was delivered of a fine boy with a square face and big ears. He was named Zhang Jie. Later, when she heard her husband had been killed by the rebel Li Tianrun on Lone Pine Heights she fainted from grief. Afterwards she went herself with the Butler and Mrs. Ye to Lone Pine Heights and they bore the coffin back to Hotshot's old home town of Zhangde for burial. Later still when the Butler became ill, she lived with old Mrs. Ye. She had a hard time of it bringing up the fatherless child. When Zhang Jie was grown he took part in the famous defeat of the Jin at Monk's Plain, where their general escaped detection by shaving off his beard. For this he was given high military honours, but later went home to look after his old mother until she died. Because she had remained constant to the memory of her husband, he obtained permission to erect a memorial arch in her honour. Thus ended the story of Jade Arrowtip and her filial and conjugal virtues.
But enough of this. We must return to Song Jiang who, the day after receiving his commission to march against Fang La obtained the gift of silk and silver from the government stores and divided it among the leaders for distribution to the army. He also sent Redbeard and the Craftsman to the court to attend the Emperor. He dealt first with the boats, ordering the captains to prepare poles, oars and sails and head for the main river, at the same time ordering the cavalry to prepare bows, arrows, spears and swords, uniforms and armour. It was to be a joint attack by land and water, and in order to keep up with the boats they must be ready to march immediately. At this point the Grand Preceptor sent one of his household to request the services of Magic Hand to do some writing for him. The next day some bigwig turned up in person to ask for Lungs because he had heard he had a wonderful voice and wanted to give him a position in his household. Song Jiang had to accede to all these requests. He had now lost five of his company and he was not at all happy about it. Finally, having made his plans with the Unicorn, he ordered all the leaders to prepare to leave the city.

Now, this Fang La had long been disaffected. His strength had grown gradually, and now turned into a serious threat. Originally he had been a woodcutter in the mountains of Shezhou. One day he had gone to the river to wash and in his reflection had seen himself wearing a crown and the dragon robes. Because of this he told people that he was destined to be emperor. At the time when granite was collected in the south, the people had become resentful and disaffected. Fang La took advantage of this to declare his rebellion, and built himself a grand citadel at Bangyuan Gap in the district of Clearwater, complete with gardens, halls and towers. He also had travelling palaces at Muzhou and Shezhou and equipped himself with a complete set of officials, civil and military, a military council, court servants and military commanders, the whole shooting-match. In all he seized eight towns — Shezhou, Muzhou, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Changzhou, Huxhou, Xuanzhou and Runzhou. Now he styled himself emperor and illicitly claimed authority over the whole region: it was a serious business.
The name Fang La originated from Taoist books. In one of them it says: "To thousands ten add a small stroke, in winter's depths give praise and honour. After crossing the river, he makes his appearance in the southern kingdom." For "thousands ten" it is more usual to say "ten thousand" which is written with the character *wan*. If you add a small stroke to *wan* you get *fang*. Winter's depths is the winter solstice in December and the festival which celebrates it is known as *la*. One to whom praise and honour are given is the ruler. So you have the two characters for Fang La, who declares himself ruler of eight towns south of the river, a region whose natural boundary is the Yangtze.
Meanwhile Song Jiang having selected his leaders and said goodbye to the worthy councillors, Marshal Su and Counsellor Zhao came to give him a send-off and reward the troops. The boat captains moved out into the Huai River and set sail for the naval base at Huai'an with instructions to assemble at Yangzhou. Song Jiang and the Unicorn thanked Su and Zhao, divided their army into five columns and headed for Yangzhou.
The journey was uneventful. The advance guard made camp at Huai'an, where a local official organized a banquet for them and invited Song Jiang into the city when he arrived. The official told Song Jiang: "Fang La's army is formidable, you must not underestimate them. Ahead of you is the Great River, that's the first hurdle you have to leap. On the other bank of the river is Runzhou, At present this stretch of the river bank is defended by Fang La's chief lieutenant and twelve others. Unless you can gain Runzhou as a base you'll find it difficult to defeat them."
Song Jiang therefore asked the Professor to devise a plan. Since the river lay in front of them blocking their path, it would be necessary to use the boats to lead the attack.
The Professor said: "There are two islands in the river opposite Runzhou. You can get some of our comrades to go there first to reconnoitre, to find out what is going on on the other bank and what sort of boats we need for the crossing."
Song Jiang summoned the boat captains to receive their orders. "Which of you're prepared to undertake a spying mission for me and find out what's going on across the river?" 4 of them volunteered. And if it had not been these 4, things might have been different. We would not have seen the corpses piled high to rival North Peak or the waters of the Yangtze died red with blood.

Happening to look up at the sky, Song Jiang saw several lines of wild geese. But they were not in their usual formations. Some flew high, some low, and all were squawking in alarm.
While puzzling over this, he heard cries of admiration further up the line of march, and sent a mounted scout to inquire. The man quickly returned and reported that Yan Qing the Prodigy had been practicing with his bow. Every arrow had hit a goose, bringing down well over a dozen, thus arousing the watchers' acclaim.
Song Jiang directed that Yan Qing come to him immediately. The Prodigy wore a broad-brimmed white felt hat and a parrot-yellow tunic quilted with flaxen floss. Astride a roan desert steed and carrying his bow and arrows, he cantered up to halt before Song Jiang, the dead geese hanging over his horse's rump. He dismounted and stood waiting.
"Was that you, shooting geese just now?"
"I needed practice and saw them flying overhead. I didn't expect every arrow to score a hit. I must have brought down more than a dozen."
"A military man ought to practice his archery, and you're an expert at it. I was just thinking—these geese leave the Tianshan Range in autumn and fly south across the Yangzi with reeds in their beaks to where it's warm and they can find food, and don't return till the following spring. They're the most virtuous of birds. They travel in flocks of up to half a hundred, flying in orderly ranks, with the leader at the head and the inferiors behind. They never leave the flock, and post sentinels when they rest at night. If a gander loses his goose, or a goose her gander, they never mate again. These fowl possess all five attributes—virtue, righteousness, propriety, knowledge and faith.
"If a goose dies in flight, all utter cries of mourning, and none will ever harass a bereaved bird. This is virtue. When a fowl loses its mate, it never pairs again. This is righteousness. They fly in a definite order, each automatically taking its place. This is propriety. They avoid hawks and eagles, silently crossing the passes with reed sticks in their beaks. This is knowledge. They fly south in autumn and north in spring, every year without fail. This is faith.
"How could you have the heart to harm such admirable creatures? Those geese passing in the sky, all helping one another, are very much like our band of brothers. Yet you shoot them down. How would we feel if it were some of our brothers we had lost? You must never hurt these virtuous birds again!"
Yan Qing listened in penitent silence. Emotionally, Song Jiang composed and recited a poem:

*Jagged peaks draped in mist,*
*Three lines of geese across the sky.*
*Suddenly in flight a mate is lost—*
*Cold moon, chill breeze, a mournful cry.*

He felt extremely depressed. That night, the army camped at Double Woods Crossing. Song Jiang brooded in his tent. He called for paper and writing brush and composed these lines:

*Far from the startled scattered flock*
*In the vast clear firmament*
*A wild goose flies.*
*A lone shadow seeking a sheltering pond*

*Finding naught but dry grass, sandy wastes,*
*Open water, endless skies.*
No poet,
*I can only set down these few thoughts.*
*Dusk in an empty ravine,*
*Campfire smoke in an ancient fort,*
*I'm more dejected than I can say!*
Though we've cleared the reeds
*We've no place to spend the night.*
*When, oh when, will we see once more*
*The Yumen Gate to our homeland!*
Drearily, I sob and sigh.
*Longing to depart this hateful river.*
*Would that spring come soon again,*
*With swallows nesting in the beams.*

Song Jiang showed what he had written to Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng. His sadness and loneliness were quite apparent. He was very unhappy. That night Wu Yong plied him with wine until he was drunk.

The next morning they mounted and continued the southward march. It was early winter, and the desolate landscape deepened Song Jiang's gloom.

After many a day, they finally neared the capital. They made camp at Chen Bridge Station and awaited the emperor's directive.

Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao, who had reached the city first with the central army, praised Song Jiang's deeds to the sovereign, and reported that he and his forces were already outside the pass in the environs of the capital. Commissioner Zhao related the arduous exploits of Song Jiang and his generals in the border region. The monarch warmly voiced his approbation. He instructed the royal chamberlain to summon them to his presence, and permit them to enter the capital in full armor.

On being notified by the royal chamberlain, Song Jiang and his chieftains—one hundred and eight in all—donned armor and helmets, carried their weapons, hung gold and silver slabs on their silken robes, and filed into the palace through the East Glory Gate. His Majesty received them in the Hall of Culture and Virtue, where they kowtowed and shouted long live the emperor. Their magnificent military apparel impressed the monarch. Only Wu Yong, Lu Zhishen and Wu Song wore the clothes of their religious calling. The sovereign was very pleased.

"I have heard much of your hardships on the expedition and your dedication in the border region. I was greatly concerned over the many casualties you suffered," he aid.

Again kowtowing, Song Jiang replied: "Thanks to the good fortune emanating from Your Majesty, the border region is now at peace. Some of my generals were wounded, but none seriously. The sandy kingdom of the Liao has already capitulated. This, too, is a result of Your Majesty's benevolent teaching." He bowed once more and expressed his gratitude.

The emperor wanted to confer on Song Jiang a rank of nobility, but Premier Cai Jing and Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong Guan advised against it.

"Our borders are still troubled," they said. "He should not be raised. Give him an honorary title of Defender of Righteousness, let him bear imperial arms, and put him in charge of guarding the palace. As to Lu Junyi, he can be called Military Teacher and be permitted to bear imperial weapons; make him head of military training. Wu Yong and the rest of the thirty-six can become full commanders, Zhu Wu and the remainder of the seventy-two can be vice-commanders. We can also spread some money among the soldiers."

The sovereign agreed. He instructed the Council of Military Affairs to grant the appropriate ranks and issue the monetary rewards. Song Jiang and his chieftains kowtowed and thanked the emperor for his benevolence. The monarch ordered the Imperial Caterers to give a banquet in their honor. When it was over, Song Jiang was presented with a silken robe, a set of gold armor, and a fine horse. Lu Junyi and the others were also given gifts drawn from the Treasury. All expressed their thanks. They withdrew from the palace through the West Glory Gate, mounted and returned to camp, there to await further orders from the imperial court.

Gongsun Sheng, the following day, came to Song Jiang's tent. He placed his palms together and bowed in the Taoist fashion to Song and the other chieftains.

"My teacher Luo the Sage instructed me to return to the mountain and continue my studies after escorting you safely to the capital. You agreed to this, brother," he said to Song Jiang. "Now that you have returned, famous and in triumph, I must not linger. I shall say farewell, go back to the mountain, and spend the rest of my days studying the Way and caring for my old mother."

Song Jiang couldn't renege on his promise. With tears in his eyes he said: "Our days together were like opening flowers. Our parting is like flowers that fall. I gave my word, but it breaks my heart to see you go!"

"I would be lacking love and respect if I left you halfway. But you're already famous and a success. This is no place for a poor Taoist. You must give your consent."

When all Song Jiang's urgings proved in vain, he ordered a large farewell banquet. All sighed as they raised their cups. Tears flowed with the wine. Gongsun refused gifts of gold and silks. The chieftains, over his protests, stuffed them in his luggage.

The next day he took his leave. He wore hemp sandals and carried his luggage on his back. Palms together, he bowed his head, then set off towards the north.

For several days Song Jiang grieved. His tears fell like rain.

New Year's Day was fast approaching, and the officials prepared to celebrate. Premier Cai was afraid that if Song Jiang and all his chieftains were present at the court festivities the emperor would see them and be reminded to make important use of them. He therefore persuaded the monarch to limit the invitations to Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, the only two who held imperial posts. The other chieftains who had been on the expedition against the Tartars had no official ranks. They were "excused" from attending lest they "alarm the sovereign."

On New Year's Day the emperor held court, and the officials came to offer their congratulations. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, both in formal dress, were in the Waiting Room for the morning imperial audience, and kowtowed with the officials. The emperor, in fringed hat and wearing a jade-encrusted girdle, was seated on his throne, attended by his high ministers. But neither Song Jiang and Lu Junyi nor the officials were allowed to enter the imperial hall. They could only observe the jewelled ornaments and fine trappings of the ministers, coming and going as they toasted the sovereign.

This went on from dawn until noon. Only then were those outside given a little imperial wine with which to express their thanks. Then the officials withdrew and the emperor concluded his court.

Song and Lu left the palace, removed their court dress, mounted their horses and returned to camp, their faces dark. Wu Yong and the other chieftains were waiting for them. As they offered congratulations on the holiday, they observed Song Jiang's gloomy expression. The hundred or more of them lined up on either side. Song Jiang sat in silence, his head lowered.

"You've just been congratulating the emperor, brother. Why so dejected?" Wu Yong queried.

Song Jiang sighed. "I must have been both unlucky. We went through so much hardship to smash the Liao, but I've obtained very little for you brothers. I myself have been made only a petty official."

"Though you haven't yet achieved good fortune, why be downcast? All things are pre-ordained. There's no need to worry."

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind spoke. "You still haven't thought this out, brother! When we were in Liangshan Marsh, nobody could push us around. But all you could talk about was amnesty, amnesty! Now that we've got it we have nothing but aggravation. We brothers are all here together. Let's go back to Liangshan Marsh, I say, and be happy!"

"You're talking wild again, black beast," Song Jiang shouted. "All of us have been made officers in the imperial army. You don't understand these things. You're still a rebel at heart!"

"If you don't listen to me, brother," Li Kui insisted, "all you'll get is more abuse!"

Everyone laughed. They raised their cups and congratulated Song Jiang on the New Year. They drank until the second watch before breaking up.

The next day, with a dozen horsemen, Song Jiang entered the city and offered congratulations on the New Year to Marshal Su, Commissioner Zhao, and various ministry officials. Many persons observed this, and one of them reported to Cai Jing. The following day, after obtaining the emperor's approval, Cai had notices posted on every city gate!

They read as follows: *All officers and commanders of expeditionary forces shall remain in camp and wait for orders. They are not to enter the city without specific instructions in writing from higher headquarters. Whoever disobeys shall be punished according to military law.*

One of the notices was posted at Chen Bridge Gate, and a person who saw it told Song Jiang. His depression deepened. The chieftains were furious. Except for Song Jiang, all seethed with rebellion.

Several naval chieftains requested a conference with Wu Yong. Escorted on board a warship, he met Li Jun, Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun and the three Ruan brothers.

"The imperial court doesn't keep its word. Treacherous ministers wield power and block the correct path," they said. "Although Brother Song Jiang has broken the Liao, he's been made only a petty palace functionary. He hasn't been able to obtain any raise in rank or rewards for the rest of us. Now a notice has been posted forbidding us entry into the city. We think those evil ministers are trying to split us up, to transfer us away. We'd like you to support us. If we ask brother, he'll flatly refuse. Our idea is to fight a bloody battle, pillage the city clean, go back to Liangshan Marsh and become brigands again! That would be best!"

"Brother Song Jiang will certainly refuse. You're wasting your time. If the arrow point doesn't leave the bow, the shaft is sure to snap. The headless snake cannot crawl. How can I propose such a thing? We can't do anything until brother is willing. If he doesn't agree and you rebel on your own, you'll never succeed."

It was plain that the military advisor would not be their advocate. The six naval chieftains fell silent.

Returning to camp, Wu Yong chatted with Song Jiang about military affairs. Then he said: "Our brothers usually were free to come and go as they pleased, and they were quite happy with the situation. Yet today, even though we've been amnestied and you've been made an official, they're suddenly been restricted. They can't accept it. They're very angry."

Song Jiang was startled. "Has someone been saying something to you?"

"No one had to say anything. It's common sense. As the old saying goes: 'People want wealth and position, they hate being poor and lowly.' You've only to look at their faces to see their mood."

"The brothers may want to revolt, Military Advisor, but though I die and go to the Nether World I'll never abandon my loyalty to the emperor!"

The next morning Song Jiang summoned all his chieftains for a conference. When they had assembled before his tent, he addressed them.

"After starting in life as a petty functionary in Yuncheng, I committed a major crime. Thanks to your support, brothers, I became your leader and, today, a government official. Since ancient times it has been said: 'A mature man is not without restraint; without restraint one cannot achieve maturity.' The court has its reasons for posting those notices. You're not to go into the city without permission. Many of us in the mountain forests were just rough soldiers. Whoever stirs up trouble will surely be dealt with according to law. Our reputation will be damaged. It's lucky for us we're not allowed into the city. If you feel so hampered that you must revolt, cut off my head first! Otherwise I won't be able to face the world. I'll have to kill myself! The choice is yours!"

At Song Jiang's words, the chieftains wept. They reaffirmed their fealty, and the meeting disbanded.

From then on, unless on official business, none of them went into the city. As the first lunar festival drew near, in the Eastern Capital, as was the annual custom, the streets were festooned with lanterns. In the camp, Yan Qing the Prodigy had a proposal for Yue Ho the Iron Throat.

"The emperor and the people are celebrating the New Year with fireworks and lantern displays. Let's disguise ourselves and go in and have a look."

"If you're going to see the lanterns," someone said, "You'll have to take me."

Yan Qing turned around. It was Li Kui the Black Whirlwind.

"There's no use trying to fool me," said Li Kui. "I heard everything."

"We can take you easily enough," said Yan Qing, "but I'm worried about that temper of yours. You're sure to stir up trouble. The Council of Military Affairs has posted notices forbidding us to enter the city. If you create a row, we'll fall right into their trap."

"I won't cause any fuss. I'll do whatever you say."

"All right, then. Dress up as a traveller tomorrow, and you can come."

Black Whirlwind was delighted.

The next day, in the garb of travellers, the three set out. Yue Ho and Shi Qian, whom they happened to meet, sneaked in first. Yan Qing couldn't get rid of Li Kui and had no choice but to let the Black Whirlwind accompany him. They dared not enter the Chen Bridge Gate. Making a detour around the capital, they went in through Fengqiu Gate.

Hand in hand they strolled towards the amusement center. Li Kui, hearing the sound of music, insisted on going in. He and Yan Qing pushed through the crowds to where a performer was reciting a ballad based on an episode in the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It was about the famous hero of antiquity, Guan Yu, who had been struck in the left arm by an arrow. The poison had seeped into his bone.

"If you want me to cure you," said the doctor, "you'll have to put your arm through iron hoops attached to a bronze rod and let me bind it tight. I'll slice open your flesh and cut out the three tenths of the bone that's been poisoned. After putting growth-promoting medicine inside, I'll sew you up with oiled thread and apply ointment to the outside. In less than half a month you'll be as good as new. But the operation is very painful."

Guan Yu laughed. "Even death doesn't daunt a real man. Would I worry about a mere arm? No need for your rod and hoops. Just slice away!"

He called for his chess-board, and played a game with a friend, while the doctor carved the bone and extracted the poison. Guan Yu never blanched. He chatted and laughed with his friend all the while.

When the ballad reciter reached this point, Li Kui shouted out: "Now that's what I call a brave man!"

The startled audience turned to stare. Yan Qing hastily restrained him.

"How can you be so dumb, brother? An amusement center is no place to make a big disturbance over a little thing!"

"I couldn't help it. I was carried away."

Yan Qing dragged him out. They left the amusement center and walked along a cross-town street. A man was slinging bricks and tiles at another man's house.

"Twice I've loaned you money," cried the person under attack. "Not only do you refuse to pay back but, out of a clear blue sky, you bombard my house!"

Aroused by the injustice, Li Kui wanted immediately to intervene. Yan Qing flung both arms around his waist. Li Kui glared.

"There's a debt question between him and me," said the brick thrower. "What's it to you? I'm going south of the Yangzi any day now in an expedition against the bandits, so you'd better not rile me! It's sure death down there! I'd just as leave fight you and be killed here! I end up in a coffin either way!"

"What's this about going south?" said Black Whirlwind. "We haven't had any mustering of troops or orders to commanders."

Yan Qing calmed the combatants and, with Li Kui, left the cross-town street. Traversing a lane, they saw a small tea-shop, went in and sat down. As they were sipping their beverage, they got into conversation with an old fellow, opposite.

"Can you tell us something, grandpa?" said Yan Qing. "We ran into a brawling soldier just now who said he was leaving soon on an expedition across the Yangzi. Where exactly are they going?"

"Oh, you don't know? A bandit there named Fang La has rebelled. He's occupied eight prefectures from Muzhou to Runzhou and twenty-five counties. He calls this territory a nation. Sooner or later the rebels will attack Yangzhou. The emperor has ordered Military Governor Zhang and District Commander Liu to clean them out."

Yan Qing and Li Kui paid their bill and hurried back to camp, where they reported their conversation to Wu Yong. The military advisor was very pleased. He told Song Jiang about it.

"Being idle here is not right," said Song Jiang. "We should ask Marshal Su to petition the emperor to let us join the expedition."

He discussed the matter with his chieftains. They all liked the idea.

The next day Song Jiang changed his clothes and went into town with Yan Qing. At the residency of Marshal Su they dismounted. They were announced and, on the marshal's instructions, ushered in. Song Jiang bowed in greeting.

"Why are you dressed in civilian garb, General?"

"The Military Affairs Council has forbidden all expeditionary officers to enter the city unless summoned, and I wanted to see Your Excellency privately. I hear that Fang La, south of the Yangzi, has rebelled, occupied several prefectures, and calls himself a king. He's advanced as far as Runzhou. It's expected that, sooner or later, he'll cross the river and attack Yangzhou. My forces are idle, just camped here. It's not right. I'd like to lead them on an expedition against Fang La and demonstrate our loyalty. I pray Your Excellency petition the emperor for us."

Marshal Su was very pleased. "Exactly what I'd been thinking, General. This is of great importance to our country and our people. Why shouldn't I petition the emperor? Go back. I'll do it first thing in the morning. He's sure to give it serious attention."

Song Jiang bid the marshal farewell, returned to camp, and informed his brothers.

When the marshal attended the early court the next day, he found the monarch conferring with his civil and military officials in the Mantled in Incense Hall. The emperor was speaking of how Fang La was ravaging the south, how he had occupied twenty-five counties in eight prefectures, given himself a dynastic title, had rebelled and proclaimed himself king. It was only a question of time until he attacked Yangzhou.

"I have directed Governor Zhang and District Commander Liu to lead an expedition, but so far I haven't seen any results," the emperor said.

"The bandits are a serious menace," Marshal Su agreed. "Why not send, in addition, Song Jiang who defeated the Liao Tartars? The two combined forces can surely wipe out the rebels and win a great victory."

"Your proposal suits my purposes excellently," said the monarch. He ordered that the Chancellor of Military Affairs be summoned to hear his decree.

Governor Zhang and his staff officers Cong and Geng requested that Song Jiang and his troops go as the vanguard of the expedition. When the Chancellor of Military Affairs had received his orders, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were sent for. They kowtowed before the emperor.

The sovereign proclaimed Song Jiang Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Pacification, and Vanguard of the Expedition Against Fang La. He named Lu Junyi as second in command. To each he awarded a gold belt, a silk robe, golden armor, a fine horse, and good cloth for twenty-five garments. The other generals were given cloth and silver, and a promise of a rise in rank and status upon displays of merit in battle. Silver was given to the various chieftains. All these awards were to be drawn from the official treasury. A time limit was set for the departure of the expeditionary force. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi begged to take leave of the emperor.
"You have a carver of jade seals, Jin Dajian, and an experienced judge of horses, Huangfu Duan," said the monarch. "Leave those two for our use."
Song Jiang and Lu Junyi again kowtowed. They thanked the emperor, left the palace, mounted their steeds and headed for camp. They rode side by side in high spirits.
In a marketplace outside the city they saw a man shaking out a rhythm on a pair of wooden castanets. They clattered with the movements of his hand. Song Jiang had never seen such a contraption.
He had a soldier ask the fellow: "What is that thing?"
"It's called a Foreign Clapper. When you shake your hand, it makes a noise."
Song Jiang composed a poem on the spot:

*Now a low sound, now a high,*
*Clackety-clack into the sky,*
*Though heroic strength pervades the air,*
*If not used, it's wasted there.*

From his seat in the saddle, he laughed. "That Foreign Clapper is like you and me. Between us, we have heaven-piercing capabilities. But if no one shakes us into action, how can we perform any resounding deeds?"
He told his aides to give the man some silver, and they rode on. Song Jiang continued to chat with Lu Junyi. Again poetic images rose in his mind, and he composed another verse:

*Though by the finest craftsmen made,*
*Feeble chime the hearts of jade.*
*Only taken well in hand,*
*Will they ring throughout the land.*

"Why do you say that, brother?" Lu protested. "Our talents are equal to those of any general, past or present. If that weren't so, what good would it do to take us in hand?"
"You're wrong, brother. If Marshal Su hadn't petitioned for us, would the emperor have given us such important assignments? A man who gains fame shouldn't forget his benefactors."
Lu felt the reprimand was justified. He had nothing more to say.
Returning to camp, they convened a meeting of the chieftains and directed that as many horses and as much armor as possible be assembled in preparation for an expedition against Fang La. The next day the emperor's awards were drawn from the treasury and distributed, and Jin Dajian and Huangfu Duan were sent off to serve the imperial court.
Song Jiang instructed the armada to leave first, directing the naval chieftains to put the craft in ship-shape condition. They were to sail towards the Yangzi. The cavalry chieftains were told to ready their weapons and armor. When the expedition started, land and water forces would proceed together.
Premier Cai Jing suddenly arrived at the camp. He demanded that Xiao Rang the Master Hand be given into his service. The following day District Commander Wang appeared and asked for Iron Throat Yue Ho. He said he'd heard that Yue Ho was a good singer and he needed such a person in his residency.
Song Jiang had no choice but to consent, and he saw the two of them off. He had now lost five brothers, and he felt very badly. He finished making plans with Lu Junyi and ordered the contingents to get ready to march.

The revolt of Fang La, south of the Yangzi, had commenced some time before. It developed gradually. No one had expected it to turn into such a large affair. Fang La had been a woodcutter in the hills of Shezhou Prefecture. One day, while washing his hands in a stream, he observed his reflection in the water. He seemed to be wearing a crown and a dragon robe. Fang La therefore announced he was destined to be a king, and started his rebellion.
He established a Precious Hall in the Pangyuan Cavern in Qingxi County, and built a Royal Garden and Palace. He set up smaller palaces in Muzhou and Shezhou, and designated civil and military ranks, created ministries, appointed premiers and generals, and a whole panoply of ministers. (When reconquered by the Song Dynasty Muzhou became Yanzhou, Shezhou became Huizhou. Today they are called Jiante and Wuyuan.)
Subsequently, Fang La took Runzhou, present-day Zhenjiang. By then he controlled a total of eight prefectures containing twenty-five counties. The eight prefectures were: Shezhou, Muzhou, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Changzhou, Huzhou, Xuanzhou and Runzhou. Jiaxing, Songjiang, Chongte and Haining at that time were counties, and were among the twenty-five under the eight prefectures. Fang La proclaimed himself king and appointed provincial, prefectural and departmental officials. This was no small organization. It was infinitely larger than some gang of bandits in the hills.
Fang La fulfilled a heavenly prophecy which read: *Ten thousand plus a dot and the last winter month shall a monarch be. Across the Zheshui River, in Wuxing, proclaim aloud your sovereignty.* A dot above the character for "ten thousand" converts it into "fang." The last winter month is known as "la." Thus "Fang La" the king. Of course his eight prefectures south of the Yangzi were much smaller in area than the kingdom of Liao.

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Song Jiang, meanwhile, fixed a date for his march and bid farewell to the various ministers. Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao saw the army off personally, and rewarded the troops. The naval chieftains had already sailed their boats from the Sishui River into the Huai, and were moving in the direction of the Huai'an Dyke. They would ultimately assemble at Yangzhou.
Taking a respectful leave of the marshal and the commissioner, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi set forth. The army was divided into five columns. Their destination was also Yangzhou. The march was without incident, and the vanguard unit reached Huai'an County and made camp. The Yangzhou prefectural officials provided a banquet for Song Jiang and quarters in the city when he arrived.
"Fang La has a powerful army. You mustn't underestimate him," they said. "Ahead is the Yangzi, which flows 9,300 *li* before emptying into the sea. That's the first dangerous barrier you have to cross. Then you come to Runzhou, which is held by Fang La's Minister of Military Affairs Lu Shinang and twenty-four commanders whose job it is to defend the banks. Unless you can take Runzhou, you'll have a hard time withstanding Fang La."
Song Jiang called Military Advisor Wu Yong into conference. How were they going to cross the Yangzi? Their campaign against the Liao Tartars had been on dry land. It required no contribution from the naval chieftains. But now a navy was indispensable.
"There are two islands in the river near Runzhou—Jinshan Hill and Jiaoshan Hill," said Wu Yong. "Send a few brothers there to spy out the approaches to the city and learn what kind of boats are needed to get across."
Summoning his naval chieftains, Song Jiang said: "Which of you brothers will find out about water approaches and think of a plan for getting our soldiers over?" 4 men stepped forward and proclaimed their willingness. And because these scouts went forth, corpses were piled as high as Beigu Mountain and the Yangzi River flowed red with blood. The sacked city of Runzhou was left an abode for naught but weeping ghosts and howling demons, and the Jinshan Monastery was turned upside down. A great army soared over Black Dragon Range, an armada swallowed White Goose Shore.

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### White Eel Zhang Shun swims to Temple Hill by night & Stages a Night Ambush at Jinshan Monastery; Song Jiang Cleverly succeeds in capturing Runzhou City

The mighty Yangzi has two large tributaries—the Hanyang River and the Xunyang River. It passes many places in its 9,300 *li* march from Sichuan to the sea. For this reason it is called the Long River of Ten Thousand *Li*. In the Wu and Chu areas there are two islands in the river. One was known as Jinshan Hill, the other Jiaoshan Hill. On Jinshan Hill a monastery wound up the slope into the heights, and so was called the Monastery Embracing a Hill. The monastery on Jiaoshan Hill was hidden in a declivity, and so was called the Hill-Embraced Monastery. The islands were precisely on the dividing line between the Chu and Wu areas. On the north bank was Yangzhou, on the south bank was Runzhou—today called Zhenjiang. At Runzhou, Fang La's Minister of Military Affairs, Lu Shinang, defended the river banks. Lu was a rich man from Shezhou who obtained his position as a reward for contributing money and grain to Fang La. When he was young he studied books on military strategy. He used a snake lance eighteen feet long with outstanding skill. Under him were twelve commandants, better known as "The Twelve Gods South of the Yangzi." They cooperated in defending the shore in each of the twelve prefectures. Lu was general of a total of fifty thousand southern soldiers. They held the banks. More than 3000 warcraft rode the waves near Dew Pavilion. It was clear water between there and Guazhou, the ferry point on the opposite north shore.

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Meanwhile, Song Jiang's army had reached Huai'an, the last stage before assembling in Yangzhou. Song was conferring with Wu Yong in his tent.
"We're not far from the Yangzi, now," he said. "The enemy hold the southern shore. Who can I send as scouts to find a way of getting across?'
Four chieftains promptly volunteered. Who were they? Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind, Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves, Shi Xiu the Rash, and the Devil Incarnate Ruan the Seventh.
"Form two teams—Zhang Shun with Chai Jin, Ruan the Seventh with Shi Xiu," Song Jiang directed. "Go to the islands of Jinshan Hill and Jiaoshan Hill. Find out the strength of the foe in Runzhou and report back to me in Yangzhou."
The four took their leave of Song Jiang, divided into two teams, and proceeded first to Yangzhou, disguised as travellers. They met no one along the road. The local populace, hearing that an expeditionary army against Fang La was on its way, moved and hid themselves in outlying villages. The four split up after reaching Yangzhou. Each took along some dry rations. Shi Xiu and Ruan the Seventh set out for Jiaoshan Hill with two servants.
Chai Jin and Zhang Shun, armed with sharp daggers and halberds, also with two servants, all carrying dry rations, hurried to Guazhou. It was early spring. The sun was warm and the air fragrant with flowers when they arrived at the banks of the Yangzi. From a height, they observed the tumbling misty waves. A magnificent river scene!
On the other side they could see a long stretch of green and white flags at the foot of Beigu Mountain, and a line of many craft flanking the shore. On the north bank where the four stood there wasn't even a wooden spar.
"All the houses on the road to Guazhou were empty," said Chai Jin, "and here at the river there are no boats. How can we learn what's happening over there?"
"Let's find a house to rest in," Zhang Shun suggested. "I'll swim to Jinshan Island and see what I can find out."
Chai Jin agreed, and the four walked along the shore until they came to a thatched shack. The door was locked from the inside. They couldn't push it open. Zhang Shun knocked a hole in the side wall and crawled in. A white-haired old woman rose from beside the stove. "Why didn't you open your door, old mother?"
"We've heard that the emperor is sending an army to fight Fang La, and we're right on the road to the river. A lot of people have moved away and gone into hiding. They've left me to take care of the house."
"Where's your son?"
"He went to the village to look after his wife and children."
"There are four of us, and we want to cross the river. Is there a boat around?"
"Where could anyone find a boat? Lu Shinang, when he heard the army is coming, took all the boats to Runzhou."
"We have our own rations. If you let us live here a day or two, We'll give you some silver as rent. We won't disturb you."
"You can stay. That's no problem. But I don't have any beds."
"We'll manage."
"I'm only afraid that big army will come here pretty soon."
"We'll be able to hide."
Zhang Shun opened the door and Chai Jin and the two servants entered. They rested their halberds, put down their luggage, brought out their dry rations and wheat-cakes, and ate.
Zhang Shun again went down to the river and looked. He saw Jinshan Monastery on an island precisely in the middle of the Yangzi. "Minister of Military Affairs Lu must go to that hill frequently," he said to himself. "I'll slip over tonight and pick up some news."
He returned and told Chai Jin what was on his mind. "There isn't even a small boat around here. How can we find out what's doing on the other side of the river?" he said. "Tonight I'm going to make a bundle of my clothes, wrap in two ingots of silver, put the whole thing on my head, and wade over to Jinshan Monastery. I'll bribe some monks, get the news, and come back and tell Big Brother. You wait here."
"Go and return quickly," said Chai Jin.
It was a starry evening, with a gentle breeze. The waves were calm, the water and the sky were the same color. Zhang Shun tied his clothes and two silver ingots in a bundle which he bound to his head, tied a sharp dagger at his waist, and entered the river at Guazhou. The water only came up to his chest. It was virtually like walking on dry land.
As he neared the foot of Jinshan Hill, he spotted a small craft moored beside the rocky slope. He crept over to it, removed the bundle from his head, stripped off his soaking garments, rubbed himself dry, changed into the clean clothes, and sat down in the boat. He could hear a watchman's drum in Runzhou striking the third watch.
Concealing himself, he looked around. A small vessel was sculling, downstream in his direction. "Those fellows are up to no good, zigzagging like that," he mused.
He decided to shove off. It was then he discovered that his boat had only a mooring rope, but no oars or poles. Once again he removed his clothes. Pulling out his dagger, he waded towards the approaching craft.
The two men plying the sweep oar were watching the north shore, and didn't see Zhang Shun closing in from the south. He suddenly popped up at the side, grasped the gunwale and slashed with his dagger. The men dropped the oar and toppled into the river. Zhang Shun sprang onto the craft. Two more men emerged from the cabin. Again Zhang Shun stabbed. One collapsed into water, the other, terrified, fell backwards into the cabin.
"Who are you? Whose boat is this?" Zhang Shun shouted. "Tell the truth and I'll spare you!"
"Hear me, good sir. I'm the steward of the Chen Guan family in Dingpu Village outside of Yangzhou City. I've just delivered a gift of grain to Minister Lu in Runzhou. He's accepted it and sent me back with one of his captains to demand fifty thousand bushels of white rice and three hundred boats. That will be my master's entrance fee into Lu's forces."
"What's the captain's name? Where is he?"
"His name is Ye Gui. He's the man you just cut down."
"What's your name? When did you bring the surrender offer to Lu? What's in this boat?"
"I'm called Wu Cheng, sir. We crossed over on the seventh of this month. On Minister Lu's instructions, I went to Suzhou to see the king's younger brother Fang Mao, the Third Great Prince, and drew three hundred unit banners and my master's official appointment document. He's been made prefect of Yangzhou and a Lord of Central Clarity. I have also a thousand uniforms and a letter from Minister Lu."
"How many soldiers does your master command?"
"Several thousand infantry and a hundred or so cavalry. His two sons, Chen Yi and Chen Tai, are both formidable warriors."
Having obtained the information he wanted, Zhang Shun with one stab of his dagger thrust Wu Cheng into the river. Then he took over the sweep oar and rowed back to Guazhou.
Chai Jin hurried out at the sound of the oar and saw Zhang Shun arriving in a boat. Zhang Shun related what had happened in detail. Chai Jin was very pleased. They took from the cabin the document and letter, three hundred unit designation banners of red silk, and a thousand army uniforms of various color. They formed two large loads.
"I'll get my clothes," said Zhang Shun. He rowed back to Jinshan Island, retrieved his clothing, his head kerchief, and the silver ingots. By the time he returned to the Guazhou banks it was almost dawn. A heavy mist blanketed the ground. At the shack they paid the old lady two or three ounces of silver, shouldered the loads, and went back to Yangzhou.
Song Jiang's forces were camped outside the city. The prefectural officials gave a banquet in his honor and invited him to move into the hostel for visiting dignitaries. They wined and dined him several days in a row, and fed his soldiers.
When the feasting was over, Chai Jin and Zhang Shun called on Song Jiang in the hostel. They said: "Chen Guan has tied in with Fang La. He's about to sneak rebel troops across to attack Yangzhou. Luckily, I intercepted Chen's steward in midriver. This is your chance, brother, for a brilliant stroke."
Song Jiang was delighted. He called Wu Yong into conference and asked: "How shall we go about it? What would be our best plan?"
"Under the circumstances, taking Runzhou will be as easy as turning over your hand," said the military advisor. "Once we nab Chen Guan, it will be a sure thing." He spelled out his strategy.
"Excellent," said Song Jiang. He directed Yan Qing the Prodigy to disguise himself as Captain Ye, and Xie Zhen and Xie Bao to dress as two southern soldiers. He gave them specific instructions. The three left the city for the village of Dingpu, the Xie brothers carrying the loads.
Forty *li* or more from Yangzhou, they neared Chen Guan's manor. Twenty or thirty vassals, in ordinary garb, were lined up neatly at the gate. Yan Qing hailed them, assuming a local accent.
"Is the master at home?"
"Where are you from, traveller?"
"Runzhou. Took a wrong turn after crossing the river. We wandered around for hours before reaching here."

The vassals ushered the visitors into the guest-house and told them to rest their loads. Then they led Yan Qing to Chen Guan in the rear of the manse. Yan Qing bowed.
"Ye Gui presents his respects."
"Where are you from, sir?"
"If you'll ask the others to withdraw, I'll venture to tell you."
"These are all trusted associates. You can speak freely."
"My name is Ye Gui. I am a captain under the command of Minister Lu. On the seventh day of the first month he received Wu Cheng with your secret message. He was very pleased. He directed me to escort Wu Cheng to Suzhou to convey Your Excellency's idea to the Third Great Prince, the king's younger brother. The prince petitioned His Majesty and obtained for you the position of prefect of Yangzhou. After you have met with the minister, he will determine ranks for your two sons. Wu Cheng has unfortunately been laid low by the flu. In order not to delay matters, the minister has dispatched me with your certificate of appointment, along with his letter, as well as your seal of office, tablet of authority, three hundred unit banners and a thousand uniforms. He would like Your Excellency's grain vessels to make delivery on the Runzhou river bank at the appointed time."
Yan Qing handed over the official appointment certificate. Chen Guan read it joyfully. He hastily lit incense and, facing south, voiced thanks for this benevolence. He summoned his two sons, Chen Yi and Chen Tai, and presented them to the "captain." Yan Qing instructed the Xie brothers to deliver the banners and uniforms to the rear manse. Chen Guan invited Yan Qing to be seated.
"I'm only a common soldier. How dare I sit in Your Excellency's presence?"
"You come as an emissary of His Majesty with documents of appointment for my humble self, sir. I would not be lacking in courtesy. Please be seated. It's quite proper."
After repeatedly protesting, Yan Qing finally sat down at a distance. Chen Guan called for wine and preferred him a cup. Yan Qing politely refused.
"I never drink," he said. He nevertheless downed two or three cups.
Then the two sons came forward to congratulate their father. With a significant glance, Yan Qing signalled to the Xie brothers. Xie Bao slipped a powerful drug into the wine pot when no one was looking. Yan Qing rose and spoke.
"I have brought no wine with me from across the river, but if I may use Your Excellency's brew, I would like to offer my congratulations."
He poured a goblet to the full and urged Chen to drain it. He also gave a cup each to the two sons and the various close cronies. When all had drunk, Yan Qing pursed his mouth and gestured with his head. Xie Zhen left the building, found a firebrand, took out a small cannon and signal flag concealed on his person, went outside the manor, and fired the cannon. At the sound, chieftains, who had been waiting in concealment to the left and right, came running.
Yan Qing, in the manse, watched man after man collapse. He whipped out his short sword, and he and Xie Bao cut off all the heads. Ten gallant fellows poured in, yelling, through the manor gate. The vassals were unable to stem their rush. Yan Qing and the Xie brothers strode out carrying the heads of Chen Guan and his sons.
By then another six chieftains had arrived, leading a thousand troops. They ringed the manor, rounded up Chen Guan's family, and killed them all. Then, with the vassals in tow, they marched down to the cove. Riding at anchor were three or four hundred craft, laden to the brim with rice. The vessels were counted and a report rushed to Song Jiang.
He conferred with Wu Yong. Then they packed, took their leave of Governor Zhang, and marched with the army to Chen Guan's manor. They selected troops to board the craft, meanwhile dispatching a man to urge the naval vessels to hurry over.
"We'll send three hundred fast boats, first," said Wu Yong, "each flying Fang La's banner. On deck, a thousand men will dress in the uniforms we got from him, and another three or four thousand will wear ordinary garb. An additional twenty thousand troops will be concealed in the cabins. Mu Hong will be disguised as Chen Yi, Li Jun as Chen Tai. They will each captain a large boat. Other chieftains will command the remaining craft."
Mu Hong and Li Jun headed the first fleet. Each was supported by ten chieftains. Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun led the second fleet. They were backed by four chieftains each. Ten chieftains captained the third fleet. That made a total of forty-two chieftains commanding the three hundred vessels.
These were to be followed by Song Jiang and the others in boats carrying the horses, a thousand warcraft like swimming dragons and speeding leviathans, all flying Song Jiang's banner and containing the whole force of infantry and cavalry and commanders. The admirals of this armada would be Ruan the Second and Ruan the Fifth.
Meanwhile, on Beigu Mountain in Runzhou, a lookout observed the three hundred craft setting sail from the cove. Fluttering from their masts was the red banner designating the grain convoy. This was immediately reported to the harbor master. Minister Lu, accompanied by twelve commandants, all in full armor, their bows strung, their swords unsheathed, rode down to the river bank. With them was a unit of crack troops.
A hundred boats were nearing the shore. On the first two vessels were two men who appeared to be leaders. They were surrounded by soldiers in uniforms with a lock designation, stalwart fellows every one.
Minister Lu dismounted and sat down in a silver armchair. The twelve commandants formed two lines along the bank. Mu Hong and Li Jun hailed Lu respectfully. Captains to the left and right shouted for the boats to halt. The hundred craft, in a straight line, dropped anchor.
Sailing with a favorable wind from the north, the next two hundred also arrived. They divided into a hundred to the right and a hundred to the left, so that each of the three groups was equi-distant from the others.
The shipping commissioner approached the near craft.
"Where are you from?"
"My name is Chen Yi," said Mu Hong, "and my brother is called Chen Tai. Our father, Chen Guan, has ordered us to deliver these fifty thousand bushels of white rice, three hundred vessels, and five thousand crack troops, in gratitude to Minister Lu for having petitioned the king on his behalf."
"Minister Lu dispatched a Captain Ye the other day. Where is he?"
"Captain Ye and Wu Cheng both have typhoid fever. They're bedridden and couldn't come. But we've brought our father's seal of office and his appointment document."
The shipping commissioner took them and walked up the bank to Minister Lu. "The sons of Chen Guan of Dingpu Village outside Yangzhou have brought grain and soldiers," he said. "And here is the seal of office and appointment certificate you sent him."
Lu examined them. It was indeed the original document. He ordered that the two sons be allowed ashore. The shipping commissioner shouted for Chen Yi and Chen Tai to be brought before the minister.
Mu Hong and Li Jun mounted the bank, followed by twenty chieftains. "The minister is here," yelled the guards. "Persons with no business, stay away!" The twenty chieftains halted. Mu Hong and Li Jun, each with hands clasped and bodies inclined deferentially, also waited at a distance. After a lengthy pause, the shipping commissioner again conducted the two forward. They knelt before the minister.
"Why hasn't your father Chen Guan come in person?" Lu demanded.
"Our father has heard that Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh is approaching with a large army," replied Mu Hong. "He's afraid the bandits will disturb the countryside. He's staying at home to deal with them."
"Which of you is the elder?"
"I, Chen Yi, am," said Mu Hong.
"Have you two brothers learned the martial arts?"
"Basking in Your Excellency's propitious emanations, we have had some training."
"This rice you're bringing, how is it stored?"
"Three hundred bushels per large vessel, one hundred bushels per small."
"No doubt there's more to your mission than delivering grain!"
"Father and sons, we're completely loyal. We'd never venture to do anything untoward!"
"Your personal intentions may be all right, but there's something fishy about those troops on your craft. I can't help being suspicious. You two stay here. I'm going to send four commandants with a hundred soldiers to search your boats. It'll go hard with you if we find anything wrong!"
"We came hoping that you would make important use of our services. How can you doubt us!"
Before Lu could issue his order, a mounted scout trotted up and reported. "An order from the king has arrived at the South Gate. Your Excellency is requested to go at once to receive it."
The minister hurriedly mounted. "Hold this bank. Don't let anyone ashore," he instructed his officers. "Chen Yi and Chen Tai are to come with me."
Mu Hong shot Li Jun a significant glance. Lu rode on ahead. Calling their escort of twenty, they followed him into the city. But the guards at the gate barked a command.
"Minister Lu said that only these two are allowed in, no one else!"
Mu Hong and Li Jun were permitted to pass. The twenty chieftains had to wait. Minister Lu proceeded across the city to the South Gate, where he met the royal emissary.
"What's so urgent?" Lu asked.
The messenger was Fang La's royal usher, Feng Xi. He replied in an undertone: "Eunuch Pu Wenying the court astrologer has recently reported that, according to the night sky, many star spirits have entered this Wu area. He says half of them emit no light, a sure sign of serious trouble. The king has handed down this order, instructing you, Minister, to guard the bank well. Any persons coming from the north must be closely questioned. Kill them immediately if they arouse even a shadow of suspicion! They must not be allowed to remain!"
Lu was shocked. "A party of men has just come that I'm very doubtful about, and now this order. Please come into the city and read it to me."
Feng Xi went with Lu to the provincial office, and there the emissary read the directive aloud. Just then, a messenger galloped up with a report.
"An order from the Third Great Prince in Suzhou. He says: 'Your news about the surrender of Chen Guan of Yangzhou is incredible. It's probably invented. At the same time there has been the announcement by the royal astrologer regarding the entry of star spirits into this Wu area. You must hold the river bank firmly. I am sending a man to supervise."
"So the Great Prince is also concerned," said the minister. "I've ready received a royal edict."
He ordered his forces to closely guard the river front. No one was to be allowed to disembark. Lu then feasted the two emissaries.
Meanwhile, time was dragging for the men on the three hundred boats, and nothing was stirring. First Zhang Heng, Zhang Shun and the eight chieftains came ashore from the hundred craft on the left, carrying their arms; then another hundred, weapons in hand, from the hundred vessels on the right. The southern soldiers guarding the bank were unable to stop them.
Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and the Xie brothers headed for the city. Officers at the gate hurriedly blocked their path. With a hack and a chop, Li Kui promptly cut two of them down. Yells were heard as Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, each wielding a steel pitchfork, charged into Runzhou. With all this happening at the same time, it was impossible for the guards to close the gate.
As Li Kui bored into the passage, killing everyone he met, the twenty chieftains who had been denied entrance earlier now rushed in and seized the guards' weapons.
The twelve commandants had just received Minister Lu's order to hold the river front when the noise of the fighting at the city gate erupted. Hurriedly, they mustered their forces. But by then Shi Jin and Chai Jin had directed their troops on the decks of the three hundred craft to divest themselves of their southern uniforms and had led them ashore. They were followed by the soldiers who came swarming out of their concealment in the cabins.
Commandants Shen Gang and Pan Wende hastened with two columns to defend the city gate. Shen Gang was cut down from his horse by a single thrust from Shi Jin. Zhang Heng's spear ran Pan through the side. A wild melee followed, during which the remaining ten commandants fled into Runzhou to protect their families.
When Mu Hong and Li Jun heard the news, they took firebrands from a tavern and began setting blazes. Minister Lu sprang into the saddle. Three of the commandants had come to his support. By then the city was burning as if the sky had fallen.
Guazhou, seeing the conflagration, rushed a relief force. Battles raged at all four of the city gates, but on Runzhou's walls the banners of Song Jiang were already flying. The slaughter and confusion on every side were beyond description.
Another hundred and fifty warcraft arrived from the north shore and unloaded two thousand cavalrymen and their mounts, led by ten chieftains in full armor. They charged into the city. Minister Lu was badly defeated. With his broken army he fled to Dantu County.
The expeditionary forces occupied Runzhou. They extinguished the fires and took command of the four gates. At the shore they welcomed Song Jiang's boat, and watched the other vessels, like swimming dragons and speeding leviathans, arriving on favorable winds at the south bank.
Chieftains of high rank and low led Song Jiang into the city. First, he posted notices reassuring the local populace. Then he mustered his military officers and assembled them at central headquarters, where they claimed their awards.
Shi Jin presented the head of Shen Gang, Zhang Heng the head of Pan Wente, Liu Tang the head of Shen Ze. Kong Ming and Kong Liang came forward with their captive Zhuo Wanli, Xiang Chong and Li Jun with their prisoner Ho Tong. Hao Siwen had killed Xu Tong with an arrow from his bow.
The attackers had taken Runzhou, killed four commandants, and captured two others. They had slaughtered southern aides, officers and soldiers without number.
Song Jiang's army had lost three chieftains, either killed by arrows or trampled to death by horses in the confusion of battle. They were Guardian of the Clouds Song Wan, Jiao Ting the Merciless, and Tao Zongwang the Nine-Tailed Tortoise. Song Jiang was very distressed.
"Life and death come to every man," said Wu Yong. "Although we've lost three of our brothers, we've taken our first prefecture south of the Yangzi and removed a dangerous obstacle. Why upset yourself and injure your health? If we're to serve our country well, we'd better discuss national affairs."
"The hundred and eight of us are inscribed on the stone tablet, we correspond to stars in the sky. First in Liangshan Marsh, and then on Mount Wutai, we vowed to live and die together. Who would have thought that after we returned to the capital Gongsun Sheng would leave us, the emperor would retain Jin Dajian and Huangfu Duan, Premier Cai would take Xiao Rang, and District Commander Wang would demand Yue Ho! And now, when we've just crossed the Yangzi, we've lost three more brothers! Song Wan wasn't very accomplished, but I remember what a great help he was when we first established ourselves on Mount Liangshan. And today he's gone to the Nether World!"
Song Jiang ordered the soldiers to set up a sacrificial altar on the spot where Song Wan died, and to lay out paper silver ingots, a black pig and a white sheep. He personally dedicated the sacrificial wine. Zhuo Wanli and Ho Tong, the commandants who had been taken prisoner, were decapitated, and the blood from their severed heads sprinkled to propitiate the spirits of the three departed heroes.
After revising the prefectural government and the local administrations, Song Jiang issued awards and wrote a report of his victory to Governor Zhang, inviting him to come and inspect. Corpses on the streets were collected, removed from the city, and burned. The bodies of the three slain chieftains were buried outside of Runzhou's East Gate.
Minister Lu had lost half his effectives. He retreated to the county town of Dantu with his six remaining commandants, and dared not venture out again. In a written dispatch to Suzhou, he begged the Third Great Prince to rescue him. Suzhou sent an army under General Xing Zheng. Lu welcomed him gratefully. In county headquarters, Lu told how, in the guise of Chen Guan's surrendering troops, Song Jiang's forces had been able to sneak across the Yangzi.
"But now that you are here, General," Lu concluded, "we shall regain control of Runzhou City."
Xing Zheng replied: "When the Third Great Prince's informed that certain stars were invading this region, he decided to dispatch me with an army to patrol the river front. We didn't expect that you'd have already been put at a disadvantage. But with your assistance, Minister, I'll avenge you." The next day, Xing Zheng marched forth with his army to recapture Runzhou. In Runzhou, meanwhile, after consulting with Wu Yong, Song Jiang sent Tong Wei and Tong Meng with a hundred or more men to Jiaoshan Hill to look for Shi Xiu and Ruan the Seventh. He also dispatched a contingent to take Dantu. Five thousand strong, it was commanded by ten chieftains. On the way, they encountered Xing Zheng's army. An exchange of arrows caused both forces to halt out of each other's bow range and set up positions. Battle drums thundered, multi-colored embroidered banners fluttered in the breeze. Xing Zheng rode forward with levelled lance, flanked on either side by the six commandants. From the Song army midst, Guan Sheng, brandishing his crescent halberd embossed with a dragon design, cantered out to meet the foe. The two contenders clashed in a murderous rage, their mounts stirring up clouds of dust. After fourteen or fifteen rounds, one of the men fell from his horse. Truly, the boldness of heroes is no match for a general's clever plan. Relying on the capture of officers and men, they sought to retake the first prefecture south of the Yangzi.

The 3100 mile long River Yangtze consists in fact of three rivers, the Hanyang River, the Xunyang River and the Yangtze River. From Sichuan to the sea it passes through many places. This is why it is known as the Great River. In the region of Wu and Chu two mountains divert the river's course. One is called Golden Island and the other Burnt Island. On Golden Island there is a temple. It covers the slopes of the mountain, and the place is known as Temple Hill. On Burnt Island there is a temple which is sheltered in a fold of the hill which hides its outline, so it is called the Hill Temple. The two mountains situated in the middle of the river lie exactly on the demarcation line between Wu and Chu. On one side is Yangzhou, east of the Huai, and on the other Runzhou in Zhejiang, today called Zhenjiang.
Now in Runzhou it is Fang La's right-hand man, Marshal Lü Shinang who defends the river bank. Originally a rich man of Shezhou, he contributed to Fang La's finances and was made chief of staff in consequence. His weapon is a long serpent lance and his military prowess is exceptional. He has twelve officers under his command who are known as the Southern Twelve. All are employed in the defence of the river bank in Runzhou. Under Marshal Lü's command is an army of fifty thousand soldiers from the south, spread out along the bank. Three thousand war vessels are moored under the Pavilion of Sweet Dew. On the north bank is Guazhou Crossing, and at this point the river bank is wide open, totally without cover.
Song Jiang's forces, complete with horses and boats, have proceeded by land and water as far as Huai'an, on their way to the assembly point at Yangzhou. Song Jiang is in his command tent, discussing the situation with the Professor: "We're not far from the Yangtze, here. The south bank is held by the rebels. Who is prepared to go on a spying mission for me, to find out what's going on across the river and see whether we can launch our attack?"
Four leaders volunteered. They were Mr. Chai the Little Whirlwind, White Eel, Madcap and Ruan the Seventh.
Song Jiang said: "Divide yourselves into two groups, White Eel go with Mr. Chai and Madcap with Ruan the Seventh. One lot get over to Golden Island and the other lot to Burnt Island. When you find anything out come back and tell us."
The four took their leave of Song Jiang, and each with a companion and dressed as merchants they took themselves off to Yangzhou. All along the way the people had heard that a big army was coming to suppress Fang La and had moved into the country to take refuge. The two groups separated in Yangzhou. Each man carried some provisions. Madcap and Ruan the Seventh and their companions set off for Burnt Island.
As for Mr. Chai, White Eel and companions, they arrived at Guazhou carrying their provisions and equipped with spears, sharp swords and halberds. It was early spring, the day warm and fragrant with blossom. On reaching the Yangtze they looked down from a vantage point and saw white horses on the stream and rolling misty waves. It was a fine sight! Looking across towards North Peak they saw a mass of green and white banners and an armada of war vessels lined up along the shore. On the northern bank, where they were, there was not a single tree.
Mr. Chai said: "We've seen houses along the way here but no people. There is no ferry to cross the river. How are we ever going to find out what is going on on the other side?"
White Eel said: "You find a house to rest in while I swim across to Golden Island and make inquiries."
"That sounds a good idea," said Mr. Chai.
When they reached the river bank, they found a row of huts, all with locked doors which they could not get to open. White Eel went round the side and climbed a low wall and slipped inside the area. A white-haired old woman popped out from behind a stove.

"Why did no one open the door?" he asked her.
"Well sir, since you ask," she said. "We heard tell as how the court be sending a big army to fight Fang La. We're right in the path of the storm here and they're all gone off to hide. They left me to look after the house, 'cos I'm just an old body."
"Where have all the men gone?" White Eel asked.
"Gone to hide in the country, all on 'em," she said.
"There's four of us and we want to cross the river," White Eel said. "Where can we find a boat?"
"You won't find no boats here. When Marshal Lü heard the army were coming to attack he requisitioned all the boats and took them over the river to Runzhou."
"We've got our own food," White Eel said. "We only ask you to give us shelter here for a couple of days. We'll pay you rent and we won't disturb you."
"You can stay here, no problem with that, but there aren't no beds."
"We'll make our own arrangements."
"But listen here, sir, I'm afeared the army be coming!"
"We can cope with that!" White Eel opened the door and let in the others. They leant their halberds against the wall and put down their packs, took out some dry food and pancakes and ate them. White Eel went back to the river bank. He could see Temple Hill in the middle of the stream:
*The river arches like a turtle's back, the mountains stand tall as a dragon's crest. Twists of blue are glimpsed through floating wreaths of silver; white funeral scrolls unroll across volumes of liquid jade. Far off the golden halls, exposed to all the winds that blow; in the distance the bell loft rising on its many-storeyed stone base. The pagoda soars upward into the blue empyrean; the sermon hall ripples with the reflected light of green waves. The galleries open to a view of roving sails; the recreational hall is brisk all day with the sound of water. Over Temple Hill at night the will-o'-the-wisps play.*
After observing it for a while he said to himself: "Marshal Lü most probably goes there often. If I swim over to it tonight I'm bound to find something out."
He went back and conferred with Mr. Chai. "We're here now, and there isn't a single boat. It's difficult to know what's going on on the other side. Tonight I'll swim across to Temple Hill with my clothes and two big pieces of silver in a bundle on my head. I'll bribe the monks and find out how things stand. Then we'll go back and tell the Leader. You wait here for me."
"Don't be too long about it," Mr. Chai said.
It was a fairly bright night. The wind was soft and the river calm, water and sky were indistinguishable. White Eel stripped and tied his clothes in a bundle. He knotted a white silk sash about his waist and packed two silver ingots in a head band which he wrapped round his head and stuck a cutlass in his sash. He entered the water at Guazhou Crossing and headed out into the middle. The water only came up to his chest, so it was like walking on land. When he reached the island he found a small boat moored at the foot of a cliff. He crept up to it. He lowered the bundle of clothes from his head, took off his wet things, dried himself and put on dry clothes, and sat down in the boat. He heard the Runzhou drum beat for the third watch. As he looked out from his hiding-place he saw a boat approaching over the water. "That boat is moving very suspiciously," he thought to himself. "They must be spies!"
He was going to cast his boat off, but found it was moored with a thick rope and there were no oars. There was nothing for it but to strip off again, take his dagger and commit himself to the water and swim towards the other boat. The two men in the other boat were rowing hard, looking toward the northern shore, and clearly not expecting any danger from the south. White Eel surfaced and swam to the side of the boat. He pulled down on the gunwale and simultaneously made a broad sweep with his cutlass. The two rowers dropped their oars and dived into the river. White Eel immediately hauled himself on board. Two men emerged from the cabin. With one blow of his cutlass White Eel knocked one of them into the water while the other rushed back inside in terror. White Eel shouted: "Who are you? Where is this boat from? If you tell me the truth I'll spare you!"
"If you please, sir," the man replied, "I'm steward to the Chen household in Dingpu village near Yangzhou. They sent me across to Runzhou to make terms with Marshal Lü and offer him provisions and he sent one of his officers back with me. He is asking for fifty thousand catties of rice and three hundred boats as a pledge."
"What is the captain's name and where is he?" White Eel asked.
"He's called Ye Gui and he's the one you just pushed in the river."
"What's your name, when did you take the offer of surrender across and what else have you got in this boat?"
"I'm Wu Cheng, I crossed on the seventh of January. Marshal Lü sent me to Suzhou to see the King's third brother, Fang Mao, and pick up three hundred banners and a letter of appointment for my master, Colonel Chen, making him governor of Yangzhou. His Royal Highness also conferred his own insignia and a thousand uniforms together with a warrant addressed to Marshal Lü."
"Who is this master of yours? How many troops and horses has he?" White Eel asked.
"Around a thousand men and several hundred horses," the other replied. "And he's got two very brave sons by his own wife. Chen Yi is the elder and Chen Tai the second. The Colonel is called Chen Guan."
Having obtained all the information he wanted, White Eel killed the man with one blow of his cutlass and threw the body in the water. Then he began to row and didn't stop till he reached Guazhou Crossing.
Mr. Chai heard the sound of oars and hurried out to see. It was White Eel rowing a boat towards him. He asked what was going on and White Eel gave him an account which pleased him greatly. White Eel disappeared into the cabin and brought out a bundle of papers, three hundred red silk banners and a thousand multi-coloured uniforms, which he made into two piles for carrying. "I'm going back now to get more uniforms," he said. He rowed back to Golden Island and collected uniforms, headgear and some silver. By the time he got back to the Guazhou shore it was getting late and a heavy mist cloaked the earth. He made a hole in the bottom of the boat and pushed it out into the river to sink. When he reached the house he gave two or three taels of silver to the old woman and the two companions carried the rest of the stuff back to Yangzhou. At this time the army was encamped outside the city, and Song Jiang had been invited into the city where the officials had been feasting him all day.
Mr. Chai and White Eel waited until the party broke up and then spoke with Song Jiang in the rest house. They told him how Chen Guan and his sons had gone over to Fang La and planned sooner or later to help the army to cross the river and attack Yangzhou. They told him how a chance encounter on the river had served their turn. Song Jiang was delighted and asked the Professor to work out a plan of action.
"This is a great opportunity," the latter said. "Runzhou is at our mercy! We'll get Chen Guan first and the rest will follow. It just needs this and this...."
A little while later the Prodigy had disguised himself as Captain Ye, while Snake and Scorpion as instructed had dressed as southern soldiers. After inquiring the way to Dingpu, Snake and Scorpion picked up the carrying poles and the Prodigy having received detailed instructions they left Yangzhou and headed for Dingpu. A dozen miles or so from the city they found themselves at the gate of Chen Guan's estate, which was manned by a score or more of smartly dressed retainers, all in the same uniform.
The Prodigy greeted these retainers, putting on a southern accent: "Be your master at home, friends?"
"Where are you from, sir?" they replied.
"I come from Runzhou," the Prodigy answered. "I got lost after crossing the river. I was wandering about all day till they told me to come here."
The retainers invited them inside and told them they could put down their loads. The Prodigy was taken to the back to see Colonel Chen. He prostrated himself and said: "Ye Gui, at your service sir!"
"Where have you come from?" the Marshal asked.
The Prodigy replied in a southern accent as before: "I'd make bold to tell you, Your Excellency, if we might speak alone."
"These men are all in my confidence, you may speak freely before them."
"Well, then, my name is Ye Gui, sir, like I said, and I am on the staff of Marshal Lü. On the seventh of January we received the confidential letter delivered by Wu Cheng. The Marshal was pleased with it and told me to escort Wu Cheng to Suzhou to tell the Third Prince of Your Excellency's proposal. The Third Prince sent word of it to His Majesty, who announced that he was appointing you governor of Yangzhou and that your esteemed sons would also receive honours when they met Marshal Lü. Wu Cheng was about to return when he suddenly caught a chill and became too unwell to travel. Fearing the plan could be compromised, the Marshal sent me to give you the royal letter of appointment, together with his own instructions, the official stamp and badge of office, three hundred banners and a thousand uniforms. He wants you to deliver your supply boats to Runzhou by a certain date." With this he took out the official order and handed it to Colonel Chen.
Colonel Chen was overjoyed. He immediately had an altar set up for burning incense and prostrated himself in thanks toward the south. Next he sent for his two sons. The Prodigy told Snake and Scorpion to fetch the uniforms and banners and bring them to the hall. Colonel Chen asked the Prodigy to be seated. The latter objected: "I am just an ordinary soldier. How can I be seated in the presence of Your Excellency?"
"You are the envoy of the authorities over there," the Colonel replied. "You have brought me the royal mandate. How can I not honour you? Of course you must sit down."
After repeated refusals the Prodigy was persuaded to sit down, which he did at a polite distance. The Colonel ordered wine but when he offered it to the Prodigy, the latter refused, saying: "I am a teetotaller." After two or three rounds, the Colonel's sons arrived to join the celebration. The Prodigy gave Snake and Scorpion a significant look to indicate that it was time to get going. Scorpion took out the drug provided by Doctor An and unseen by the enemy leaders dropped it in the wine jug. The Prodigy rose to his feet and said: "Although I have brought no wine of my own, allow me to participate in offering you congratulations." He filled a beaker with wine and offered it to the Colonel, inviting him to drink it off. Next he offered wine to the two sons, who also drained their cups. There were also some trusted retainers present, and each of them was served a cup of wine by the Prodigy.
At a sign from the Prodigy, Snake went outside, got his tinderbox and took out the signal rockets he was carrying. He let them off in front of the manor. The comrades lying in wait on either side heard the reports and came out to join them. The Prodigy waited till he saw they were coming and then drew his sword. He and Scorpion set to work on the drugged enemy. Soon they had cut them all down. The comrades were now kicking up a row outside the manor and burst in through the main gate. These ten were our friends Monk, Pilgrim, Tattooed Dragon, Morbid, Iron Ox, Eight-Armed Ogre, Winged Ghost, Pluto, Panther and Pill Monger.
What hope had the retainers on the gate of keeping them out? Inside the Prodigy, Snake and Scorpion had seized the heads of the Chens, the father and two sons. Outside more troops were arriving, led by Whiskers and five others. They surrounded the compound with a thousand troops and whole of Colonel Chen's family was slaughtered. Some captured retainers took them to the river bank where they found three or four hundred boats tied up in the harbour and near the estate, loaded up with food supplies. A list was made and a report sent at once to Song Jiang.
On hearing that Colonel Chen had been killed, Song Jiang and the Professor decided to launch their attack. Everything was packed up. They bade farewell to Commissioner Zhang and headed for the Chen estate. The leading commanders were assigned to boats while messengers were sent to urge their own water-borne force to get a move on. The Professor said: "We must select three hundred fast boats and equip each with Fang La's banners. The first thousand troops will dress in their uniforms, the remainder will have to wear whatever is to hand."
Over two thousand troops were hidden in the three hundred transports. The Unstoppable pretending to be the elder Chen and White-Water Dragon as the second brother, were each to go in a big boat. The first squadron was led by Unstoppable and White-Water Dragon and with Unstoppable there were these ten leaders:
*Eight-Armed Ogre, Winged Ghost, Pluto, Pill Monger, Panther, Skyscraper, Door-God, Forester, Rhinoceros, the Guv*
With White-Water Dragon went these ten leaders:
*Cave Dragon, River Rider, Comet, Red Star, Whitey, Executioner, Green-Eyes, the Young Master, the Daytime Rat, Nine-Tailed Turtle*
The second squadron was commanded by the Pilot and White Eel. With the Pilot went these four leaders:
*Knife, Uglymug, Stripes, Scarface*
With White Eel were these four:
*Flagpole, Ape, Spots, Nameless*
With the third squadron went ten leaders divided between two boats:
*Tattooed Dragon, Sergeant Lei, Morbid, Red-Haired Devil, Blossom, Hotshot, Iron Ox, Snake, Scorpion, Mr. Chai*
Three hundred vessels, carrying a total of forty-two commanders, made the first crossing. Meanwhile Song Jiang and the others were taking the horses aboard war boats. A thousand boats including fast attack boats and others, all flying Song Jiang's flag and carrying a quantity of infantry and cavalry were prepared for the crossing. Two of the boat commanders, Ruan the Second and Ruan the Fifth were in charge of this operation.
We shall not go with Song Jiang's army to cross the river, but join the southern lookouts on North Peak at Runzhou when they spot the first three hundred boats setting out from the opposite shore. Each boat is flying the red flag signifying transports for clothing and supplies for the advance guard.
The southern soldiers hurriedly reported this to the authorities. Marshal Lü summoned his twelve officers. They put on their armour, strung their bows, unsheathed their swords and went down to the river bank to see what was going on. They saw a line of a hundred boats in front approaching the bank. On the boats the two leaders were surrounded by a throng all wearing golden chain mail. All fine upstanding men. Marshal Lü dismounted and seated himself on a silver throne, while his twelve commanders lined up in two ranks along the river bank. When Mu the Unstoppable and the White-Water Dragon saw Marshal Lü sitting there on the bank they came to attention and saluted. One of the Marshal's aides shouted an order for the boats to heave to and the first hundred dropped anchor in a straight line. The two hundred behind them also came on, propelled by the wind, splitting into two groups, a hundred to one side, a hundred to the other, so they were stationed in three equal squadrons. A southern liaison officer went down to the boats and asked: "Where are you from?"
"My name is Chen Yi," the Unstoppable replied. "This is my brother Chen Tai. My father is Colonel Chen, Governor of Yang-zhou, and he commands us to bring you fifty thousand catties of rice, three hundred boats and five thousand picked troops in return for the Marshal's favour."
The southern officer said: "The other day His Excellency sent Ye Gui to you. Where is he?"
"The Colonel and Wu Chang have both got flu and are being treated at the manor. They couldn't come," said the Unstoppable. "Allow me to give you this letter with the official stamp."
The major-domo took it and went to the river bank and reported to the Marshal: "The two sons of Governor Chen have brought supplies of rice for the troops. They have a letter."
The Marshal looked and saw it was the genuine article, so he ordered the two men to be brought ashore. The major-domo summoned them. As the Unstoppable and the White-Water Dragon went ashore, the other twenty followed. A corporal shouted out: "A minister of the Crown is present. Other persons may not approach." The others halted, while Unstoppable and White-Water Dragon stood some way off, inclining respectfully with crossed arms. After a suitable pause, the southern officer led them forward to make their obeisance, kneeling before the Marshal, who said: "Why hasn't your father come himself?"
"He has had intelligence that Song Jiang and his troops from Mount Liang are on the way," said the Unstoppable. "He fears there may be trouble in the district, so he is waiting at home. He does not dare absent himself."
"Which of you is the elder?" the Marshal asked.
"I am," said the Unstoppable.
"Has either of you had any military training?"
"If it please Your Excellency, we have had quite a bit," said the Unstoppable.
"This rice you are bringing, how is it disposed?"
"The bigger boats are carrying three hundred catties, the smaller ones a hundred."
"I suspect you may have some hidden purpose," the Marshal said.
"Our family are honest and trustworthy. How could we harbour any ill intent?"
"That's as may be, but all those soldiers on your boats look remarkably tough specimens. How can I not be suspicious? You two wait here, while I send four of my officers with a hundred troops to search the boats. If there's the slightest irregularity, you'll be for it!"
"We came here to serve you. Why should we not be trusted?"
Just at that moment, as the Marshal was giving the order for the search party to be sent, a scout reported that a royal messenger had arrived at the southern gate and wanted the Marshal to go and receive him at once. The Marshal quickly mounted and gave the order: "Guard the river bank for me and keep those two here till I return." The Unstoppable exchanged looks with the White-Water Dragon as the Marshal rode off. Then they summoned the others and started to enter the city gate. The guards on the gate shouted: "The Marshal only said those two were to enter. The rest are not allowed in!"
So the Unstoppable and the White-Water Dragon proceeded on in while the others waited at the gate.
When Marshal Lü received the envoy at the south gate he asked: "What is it that's so urgent?"
In hushed tones the envoy, who was one of Fang La's palace aides, told the Marshal: "According to the astronomer royal recent observations of the night sky have revealed numerous stars crossing into the territory of Wu, among them several which lack lustre, meaning that serious disasters impend. His Majesty has published a decree, ordering Marshal Lü to defend the river bank. If any strangers appear from the north they must be thoroughly investigated. If there is anything at all suspicious about them, let them be executed forthwith."
Marshal Lü had a shock. "I was just thinking that this lot look suspicious. Now I have confirmation. But please come into the city to read out the decree."
The envoy accompanied him to the government office and was just about to read out the edict when another messenger rushed in: "There's a messenger from Suzhou with an order from the Third Prince. He says: 'This offer of surrender from the Chens of Yangzhou is not to be trusted. We fear a trap. His Majesty has just informed us that the astronomer royal has observed baleful stars in the territory of Wu. The river bank must be fortified. I will be sending someone to inspect the work'"
Marshal Lü said: "This is just what the Prince is worried about. I must report it to him." He ordered them to lock up the commanders from the boats on the river and not let any of them return to the river bank. He also ordered a banquet to entertain the two envoys.
Meanwhile the men on the three hundred boats found that a long time had passed without any sign of activity, so the Pilot and White Eel with eight subordinates, all armed, disembarked from the boats on the left, as did the ten commanders from the boats on the right, spears and swords at the ready. The southern troops guarding the bank were powerless to stop them. Iron Ox, Snake and Scorpion sped on towards the city. The guards on the gate hurriedly barred their way. Iron Ox whirled his axes and with a cut and a thrust dispatched two of them. There was tumult in the city as Snake and Scorpion forced their way in brandishing their pitchforks. Under these simultaneous attacks the guards had no hope of closing the gate. Iron Ox continued to wreak havoc. The twenty Song leaders already there grabbed their weapons and joined the fray. By the time Marshal Lü's urgent order to fortify the river bank arrived, they had already entered the city. By the time the twelve rebel commanders heard the commotion and found their arms and horses, the Tattooed Dragon and Mr. Chai had already instructed the three hundred troops on the boats to remove their southern uniforms and disembark first, while the troops who had been hidden on the boats soon joined them.
The first two southern commanders arrived with reinforcements at the gate and were knocked off their horses and killed by the Tattooed Dragon and the Pilot. As the rest of the Song forces attacked, the other ten southern commanders fled into the city to protect their families. The Unstoppable and Iron Ox, already in the city, heard what was happening. They got a light from an inn and started setting fire to the place.
Marshal Lü hurriedly mounted and enlisted three commanders to help but by now the town was ablaze, the fire having arisen as if from nowhere. The Song forces over in Guazhou observed the signal and prepared reinforcements. After bitter fighting the four gates at last fell and Song Jiang's flag was hoisted on the walls. The carnage and confusion are difficult to describe ... but you shall see.
Another hundred and fifty boats were assembled near the north bank and the horses loaded aboard. Ten commanders all in full armour, led by Scimitar, were to go with them.

When this force, including a thousand subalterns and two thousand troops, poured into the city, Marshal Lü was routed. He fled with his wounded to Dantu and the Song army occupied Runzhou. The fires were put out and a guard established on the four gates and then the commanders went to the river bank to welcome Song Jiang, who arrived in a paddle boat that came flying over the water towards them, with the wind behind it. They escorted Song Jiang into the city. Notices had already been posted to reassure the people. The commanders paraded to report their successes. The Tattooed Dragon, the Pilot and the Red-Haired Devil each presented the head of an enemy commander, Red Star and Comet handed over a captured enemy commander, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost another, and Hound exhibited the body of the rebel leader he had shot with an arrow. Runzhou had been taken, four of their commanders killed, two more captured, and a host of their junior officers had died.

When Song Jiang's troops were counted, it was found that they had lost three leaders, killed by arrows or trampled by horses during the battle: Door-God, Nameless and Nine-Tailed Turtle. Song Jiang's heart was heavy at this news and nothing could console him. "A man's life and death are fixed by fate," said the Professor. "True, we have lost three of our brothers, but there is the satisfaction of having removed the principle obstacle to our campaign south of the river. Why go on upsetting yourself? If we still aim to make a worthy contribution to our country, we should be discussing affairs of state."

Song Jiang said: "The names of the one hundred and eight are engraven upon the stone tablet, each representing a star. At the foundation of the company on Mount Liang, and again on Mount Wutai, we made a vow: that we would live and die together. The rot set in after we returned to the capital, when Taoist Gongsun left. Then His Majesty retained the Craftsman and Redbeard and the Grand Preceptor wanted Magic Hand. Someone else requisi-tioned Lungs. Now here in Zhejiang we have lost three more of our brothers. I know the Door-God did not have any outstanding achievement to his name, but I cannot forget the part he played in the establishment of Mount Liang. And to think that now he is a shade wandering in the underworld!"

Song Jiang ordered a sacrificial altar to be set up on the spot where the Door-God died and paper money to be offered up, together with a black pig and a white lamb. He poured the libation with his own hands. The two captive commanders were executed there and their blood sprinkled as an offering to the souls of the three dead heroes. Song Jiang then went back to the government office and distributed rewards. He wrote out a report and sent someone with it to Marshal Zhang, inviting him to come and see things for himself. Of this no more.

The dead bodies were removed from the streets and taken out of the city to be burnt. The bones of the three slain warriors were buried outside the east gate.

Marshal Lü had lost the greater part of his force. With six of his commanders he had taken refuge in Dantu and had no intention of coming out to fight. He sent an urgent messenger to Suzhou asking the Third Prince for help. On receiving the message, Suzhou sent General Xing Zheng with reinforcements. Marshal Lü received the general, and after the usual polite inquiries about health, took him to the office and offered a full account of events: "By pretending to be Colonel Chen's surrendering troops, Song Jiang's forces managed to cross the river. Now you are here you must recapture Runzhou for us."

The general said: "The Third Prince had already heard that evil stars had entered Wu territory and sent me here with an army to guard the river. We did not know that you had suffered this reverse. Now, if I can have your support, we will work together to avenge it."

Next day the general led his army out to recapture Runzhou.

Meanwhile Song Jiang had conferred with the Professor in the Runzhou district office and decided to send the Tong brothers, Cave Dragon and River Rider, with a hundred men to search for Madcap and Ruan the Seventh, the two who had gone to Burnt Island, you remember. They also ordered troops out to attack Dantu. There were five thousand of these, under ten commanders headed by Scimitar. As they headed for Dantu they encountered General Xing Zheng's army. The battle commenced with an exchange of arrows as both forces manoeuvred into position. On the side of the southern troops General Xing rode out with levelled spear and six of his commanders in two groups. Scimitar responded by drawing his crescent blade and riding at the opposing general. After a dozen bouts or more, one of the two was knocked from his horse. It was a case of

*Close to the well's where the pitcher gets broken;*
*The general dies in front of his troops.*

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## The Unicorn Lu Junyi takes half the army & Marches to attack Xuanzhou Prefecture; Song Jiang fights a great Battle at Piling Shire

After only fourteen or fifteen rounds, Guan Sheng swung his halberd and cut Xing Zheng from his saddle. Poor southern hero, his life vanished like a dream! At this, Huyan Zhuo urged his men into the fray. The six commandants fled southwards. Minister Lu abandoned Dantu and led his broken contingents in the direction of Changzhou County.

The ten chieftains occupied Dantu and notified Song Jiang of their victory. He moved a large force into the county and there made camp. After rewarding the troops, he rushed a dispatch to Military Governor Zhang reporting that he now was in control of Runzhou. The following day, staff officers Zong and Geng arrived in Dantu with rewards from the governor. Song Jiang distributed them among his commanders.

Conferring with Lu Junyi, Song Jiang said: "Xuanzhou and Huzhou prefectures are also being held by Fang La's brigands. Let's divide the army into two columns, and each of us lead one. We can draw lots to determine who goes where."

Song Jiang drew Changzhou and Suzhou, Lu drew Xuanzhou and Huzhou. Song directed Ironclad Virtue Pei Xuan to divide the officers and men. With the exception of Yang Zhi who was ill and remained in Dantu, the others were assigned to the different columns.

In Song Jiang's contingent there were thirteen senior commanders, who, apart from Song Jiang himself, were Wu Yong the Wizard, who served as the chief of staff; Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle; Guan Sheng the Big Halberd; Hua Rong the Lesser Li Guang; Qin Ming the Thunderbolt; Xu Ning the Metal Lancer; Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard; Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk; Wu Song the Pilgrim; Shi Jin the Nine Dragons; Li Kui the Black Whirlwind; and Dai Zong the Marvelous Traveler. And there were twenty-nine lieutenant commanders, who are: Huang Xin the Suppressor of Three Mountains; Sun Li the Sickly General; Hao Siwen the Wild Dog; Xuan Zan the Ugly Son in Law; Han Tao the Ever-Victorious General; Peng Qi the Eyes of Heaven General; Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World; Ma Lin the Elfin Flutist; Yan Shun the Elegant Tiger; Xiang Chong the Eight-Armed Nezha; Li Gun the Flying Divinity; Bao Xu the God of Death; Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger; Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel; Yang Lin the Elegant Panther; Shi En the Golden-Eyed Tiger Cub; Du Xing the Demon Face; Kong Ming the Comet; Kong Liang the Flaming Star; Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder; Cai Fu the Iron Arm; Cai Qing the Single Blossom; Duan Jingzhu the Golden Dog; Hou Jian the Long-Armed Ape; Jiang Jing the Magic Calculator; An Daoquan the Skilled Doctor; Yu Baosi the Spirit of the Dangerous Road; Song Qing the Iron Fan and Pei Xuan the Ironclad Virtue.

These senior and lieutenant commanders led a force of thirty thousand crack troops.

In Lu Junyi's contingent there were fourteen senior commanders, who, in addition to Lu Junyi himself, were: Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist; Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind; Lin Chong the Panther Head, Dong Ping the General Two Spears; Huyan Zhuo the Two Rods; Suo Chao the Urgent Vanguard; Mu Hong the Unrestrained; Yang Xiong the Pallid; Lei Heng the Winged Tiger; Xie Zhen the Two-Headed Snake; Xie Bao the Twin-Tailed Scorpion; Zhang Qin the Featherless Arrow; Liu Tang the Red-Haired Demon and Yan Qing the Prodigy.

The thirty-three lieutenant commanders were: Shan Tinggui the Water General; Wei Dingguo the Fire General; Lu Fang the Little Duke; Guo Sheng the Second Rengui; Ou Peng the Golden-Winged Hawk; Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion; Li Zhong the Tiger-Fighting General; Zhou Tong the Little King; Chen Da the Gorge-Leaping Tiger; Yang Chun the White-Spotted Snake; Xue Yong the Sick Tiger; Du Qian the Skyscraper; Mu Chun the Slightly Restrained; Zou Yuan the Dragon from the Forest; Zou Run the One-Horned Dragon; LiLi the Hell's Summoner; Li Yun the Black-Eyed Tiger; Shi Yong the Stone General; Zhu Gui the Dry-Land Crocodile; Zhu Fu the Smiling Tiger; Sun Xin the Junior General; Gu Dasao the Tigress; Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener; Sun Erniang the Witch; Zheng Tianshou the Fair-Faced Gentleman; Tang Long the Gold-Coin Spotted Leopard; Cao Zheng the Demon Carver; Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat; Gong Wang the Flowery-Necked Tiger; Ding Desun the Arrow-Struck Tiger; Wang Dingliu the Lightning and Shi Qian the Flea on the Drum.

This column also contained thirty thousand crack troops. Still another group of chieftains captained the naval units.

Tong Wei and Tong Meng, who had been sent to Jiaoshan Hill to look for Shi Xiu and Ruan the Seventh, returned and said: "They killed a whole family at the river bank, seized a light craft and went over to the monastery on the island. When the abbot heard that they were bold fellows from Liangshan Marsh, he invited them to a vegetarian meal. Later, after learning what Zhang Shun had accomplished, they got a boat at the foot of the hill and captured Maogang. That's a good place for an assault on Jiangyin and Taicang on the sea coast. They've sent a written request for naval chieftains and warcraft."

Song Jiang directed Li Jun and seven other chieftains to join Shi Xiu and Ruan the Seventh with a fleet of a hundred vessels and five thousand men. Reader, please note, when Song Jiang divided his army into two columns at Dantu he had less than a hundred chieftains—ninety-nine, to be exact, including himself. The large boats sailed with the naval chieftains to assault the seaports of Jiangyin and Taicang, the smaller entered the streams around Dantu and went with Song Jiang for the attack on Changzhou.

Meanwhile, Lu Shinang, Fang La's minister of military affairs, withdrew to Piling Shire—major defense sector of Changzhou. The governor of Changzhou was Qian Zhenpeng, and under him were two generals. One was Jin Jie, from Shanghao in Miug County. The other was Qian's trusted associate Xu Ding. Qian originally had been a constable in Qingxi County. But he had helped Fang La capture several cities and had been given charge of governing Changzhou.

When Qian heard that Lu had retreated to Changzhou after having been defeated and losing Runzhou, he went with Jin Jie and Xu Ding, opened the gates, and invited him into the city. He entertained Lu courteously and discussed future measures.

"Set your mind at ease, Minister," said Qian. "I am a man of no talents but, thanks to the emanations of His Majesty's good fortune and Your Excellency's prestige, I shall gladly give my all to drive Song Jiang and his gang back across the Yangzi and recover Runzhou. Those rogues will never dare to so much as look south of the river again!"

Reassured, Lit said: "With you exerting such efforts, Governor, our country has no reason to be alarmed. After you have expelled the foe and restored Runzhou to us, I shall earnestly urge the king to bestow on you the highest honors."

That day Lu gave a feast. Of that we need say no more. In his expedition against Changzhou and Suzhou, Song Jiang now neared Piling Shire with a large force. Under him were eleven commanders headed by Guan Sheng, and three thousand troops. At the outskirts of Changzhou they waved their banners and thundered a challenge on their drums.

"Who dares to drive back the enemy?" queried Lu.

"Permit me to offer my services," said Qian, from the saddle of his charger.

The minister assigned six commandants to assist him. They mustered five thousand men, opened the city gate, lowered the drawbridge, and marched forth. Qian, gale-stirring sword in hand, astride a curly-maned swift roan, rode in the van.

Guan Sheng pulled his men back a short distance and allowed Qian Zhenpeng to deploy in battle position. The six commandants flanked Qian on either side. Guan Sheng reined in his steed and brandished his sword.

"Hear me, bandits," he shouted. "You're aiding a rebel who destroys life and angers the Heavenly Spirits. Our imperial army has arrived, but instead of realizing your deadly danger, you dare to resist! We'll not leave until we've slaughtered every last one of you knaves!"

Qian was furious. "You're just a bunch of scruffy robbers from Liangshan Marsh who don't know the will of Heaven! Instead of supporting a rightful king, you surrender to an immoral moron of a sovereign and come to vie against our great kingdom! We're going to pulverise you till there's nothing left of you or your armor!"

Guan Sheng, raging, charged waving his dragon-engraved halberd. Qian met him, wielding his gale-raising sword. Evenly matched, they clashed in a battle worthy of record in book or painting. Blades flashed icily in an atmosphere heavily lethal. The horses pranced and neighed as the contestants struck and parried. Like a streaking meteor was the gale-stirring sword, like lightning across the plain was the dragon-engraved halberd. Hoofs churned the dust, bridle bells jingled into the clouds. Weapons darted, the murderous intensity terrified the celestial spirits.

More than thirty rounds the warriors fought and Qian gradually was forced on the defensive. Two commandants on the southern side, seeing him weaken, galloped out with levelled lances and attacked Guan Sheng in a pincers. They were Zhao Yi and Fan Chou. This angered two chieftains in the Song army. One brandished a lethal sword, the other clutched a tiger-eyed cudgel, as they raced out on their horses. They were Huang Xin the Suppressor of the Three Mountains and Sun Li the Sickly General. Six warriors, three pairs, fought desperately on the field of combat.

Minister Lu hastily sent generals Xu Ding and Jin Jie from the city to join the fray. Weapons in hand, they rode forth.

Zhao Yi versus Huang Xin, Fan Chou versus Sun Li—they were at first evenly matched. But as the battle intensified, southern commandants Zhao and Fan began gaining the advantage. And now Xu Ding and Jin Jie, each wielding a big halberd, were also in the field. The Song army sent Han Tao and Peng Qi to engage them. It was Jin Jie against Han Tao, Xu Ding against Peng Qi. The five pairs battled in deadly earnest.

Actually, General Jin Jie had secretly made up his mind to surrender to the Song forces. In order to create confusion in his own ranks, he retreated to them after desultorily fighting only a few rounds. Han Tao pursued him. At this, southern commandant Gao Keli quickly fitted an arrow to his bow, pulled it to the full, and let fly. The feathered missile struck Han Tao in the cheek, knocking him from his steed.

Qin Ming hastily clapped his horse and raced to the rescue, flourishing his wolf-toothed cudgel. But southern commandant Zhang Jinren, with one thrust of his lance, pierced Han Tao's throat and killed him. Peng Qi and Han Tao had been first and second in command of the same unit, and close as brothers. Burning to avenge Han, Peng broke off from Xu Ding and rode directly towards Gao. Xu Ding galloped after him, but was intercepted by Qin Ming. Gao levelled his lance and prepared to meet his assailant. But Peng Qi was taken unawares by a thrust of Zhang's lance from the side and tumbled from his saddle.

Infuriated by the loss of two chieftains, Guan Sheng couldn't wait to charge into Changzhou. Concentrating his remarkable strength, he sliced Governor Qian to the ground. He was about to capture the governor's curly-maned roan when his own mount stumbled and tossed him off. Gao and Zhang galloped forward to seize Guan Sheng, but Xu Ning, Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen raced ahead and snatched their fallen brother back to the Song position.

Minister Lu's entire army then came pouring out of the city. Guan Sheng and the chieftains had lost the initiative. They retreated north. The southern contingent pursued them for more than twenty //before giving up the chase.

Guan Sheng returned with his beaten forces to Song Jiang and told him of the death of Han Tao and Peng Qi. Song Jiang wept bitterly.

"Who would have thought that after crossing the Yangzi I would lose five brothers? Can I have angered Heaven? Am I not to be allowed to capture Fang La? Am I destined for defeat?"

"You're wrong, Commander-in-Chief," said Wu Yong. "Victory and defeat are common in warfare, and man's birth and death are predestined. They're nothing to wonder about. Today, our two chieftains were fated to die, and that's all there is to it. Please don't upset yourself. Concentrate on our important affairs."

Li Kui came to the tent and said: "Let a few fellows who recognize my brothers' murderers point them out and I'll kill the rogues and avenge them!"

Song Jiang ordered his units to fly white mourning banners on the morrow, and said: "I'll lead you all to the city personally! We'll have a showdown with those bandits!"

The next day Song Jiang and his entire army, on water and on land, in boats and on horse, left camp and set forth. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, leading chieftains Bao Xu, Xiang Chong, Li Gun and five hundred tough brave infantry, moved up as a vanguard to the walls of Changzhou.

Minister Lu, depressed by the loss of Governor Qian, had dispatched three urgent messages in a row to the Third Great Prince in Suzhou, begging for assistance. He also had sent a plea to the throne. Now, he received a report.

"Five hundred infantry are advancing on the city. Their banner says they are led by Li Kui the Black Whirlwind."

"That lout is the fiercest man in Liangshan Marsh. He's a born killer. Who will take him on?"

Gao Keli and Zhang Jinren, two distinguished commandants, stepped forward.

"If you capture the rascal," said Lu, "I will see to it that the king raises you in rank and rewards you handsomely."

The two took their lances, mounted, and marched from the city with a thousand infantry and cavalry. Li Kui stretched his troops before them in a line. He stood in front, grasping his two battle-axes. By his side was Bao Xu, a broad cutlass in hand. Xiang Chong and Li Gun, nearby, held barbed shields. In their right hands they gripped steel javelins. Chests and backs protected by armor plate, the four chieftains stood in a line at the front.

Southern commandants Gao and Zhang, wildcats who were stronger than tigers, ravens who could bully eagles, deployed their thousand soldiers near the city walls.

A few of Song Jiang's scouts recognized Gao and Zhang as the killers Of Han Tao and Peng Qi. They pointed them out to Black Whirlwind. Dispensing with any challenges, Li Kui charged across the field with his axes. Bao Xu hastily called Xiang Chong and Li Gun, who were waving their barbed shields, and all four swept into the enemy position.

The astonished Gao and Zhang were completely unprepared. They turned their horses to flee, but the barbed shields were already twirling under the animals' muzzles. Gao and Zhang lunged with their lances, but the shields warded off the thrusts. Black Whirlwind hacked the legs of Gao's mount and brought the rider tumbling to the ground.

"Take him alive," cried Xiang Chong. But Li Kui was a killer. He couldn't be stopped. He decapitated Gao with a single blow of his ax. Bao Xu pulled Zhang from the saddle and cut off his head as well.

The four then ripped into the southern troops. Li Kui tied Gao's head to his belt and, with both hands free, swung his axes left and right. A thousand enemy infantry and cavalry ran pell-mell back into the city, but not before Black Whirlwind had mowed down three or four hundred of them.

At the drawbridge Li Kui and Bao Xu wanted to fight their way into Changzhou. They were restrained only by the strenuous efforts of Xiang Chong and Li Gun. Cannon balls pelted down on them from the city walls, and the four withdrew. They found their five hundred men still standing in a line exactly where they had left them. The soldiers had wanted to join in the fighting, but no one dared to get near Li Kui when his blood lust was aroused and he was slaughtering indiscriminately.

By then Song Jiang had come riding up. Li Kui and Bao Xu presented the heads. The other chieftains were amazed.

"How did you do it?" they asked.

"We destroyed many of the foe and intended to take these two alive. But our hands itched. We couldn't control ourselves. So we killed them."

Song Jiang said: "Since we have the heads of the murderers of Han Tao and Peng Qi, we can look up at the sky from under the white mourning banners and offer them as sacrifices."

Again he wept bitterly. Then he had the white banners taken down, rewarded the four raiders and marched with his troops to the walls of Changzhou.

Inside the city, Minister Lu was highly alarmed. He conferred with Jin lie, Xu Ding and the four commandants on how to drive Song Jiang back. They all had seen Li Kui's one-man massacre, and their hearts were chilled. No one would venture out. Again Lu called for volunteers but, like geese whose beaks had been pinned shut by arrows, like fish hooked through the gills, they couldn't utter a sound. Not a man dared to respond.

Sunk in gloom, Lu sent observers up on the walls. Song Jiang's army had surrounded the city. They were pounding drums, waving banners, yelling challenges. Lu ordered all his generals to man the ramparts. They left his headquarters. Alone, he pondered fruitlessly. Finally, he summoned his closest confidants. Their only wish by then was to escape. Of that we'll say no more.

Meanwhile Jin Jie returned home and said to his wife Jade Orchid: "Song Jiang has ringed the city and is pressing from three sides. Changzhou is short of grain. It can't hold out for very long. Once they break in, their blades will turn us all into ghosts!"

"You're loyal to the emperor and want to surrender. When you were a Song official the imperial court treated you well. Since you're willing to abandon evil and return to righteousness, why not capture Minister Lu and turn him over to Song Jiang? That will ensure your welcome."

"Lu has four commandants under him, each with his own troops. That oaf Xu Ding and I have never got along, and he's one of Lu's most trusted associates. A single strand can't spin a thread, a single hand can't clap alone. I'm afraid I couldn't bring it off. It would only end in disaster."

"Write a secret message, bind it to an arrow, and shoot it out of the city tonight. Let Song Jiang know what you're planning. By coordinating from within and without, he'll be able to take Changzhou. Go forth tomorrow and pretend to be defeated. Let the Song forces follow as you retreat into the city. It will be a splendid deed."

"Very clever, my dear wife. I'll do as you say."

The next day Song Jiang stepped up his assaults on the city and Minister Lu called his generals into conference. Jin Jie spoke.

"Changzhou is on high terrain. It's easy to defend but not a good place from which to attack. We should hang on until relief comes from Suzhou. Then we can all go into battle together."

Lu agreed. "Well said." He instructed Ying Ming and Zhao Yi to hold the East Gate, Shen Bian and Fan Chou the North Gate, Jin Jie the West Gate, and Xu Ding the South Gate. The generals and their soldiers took up their respective posts.

That evening Jin Jie wrote a secret letter and attached it to an arrow. In the still of the night he sped it from atop the wall towards an enemy patrol outside the West Gate. The officer in charge hurriedly delivered it to Lu Zhishen the Tattooed Monk and Wu Song the Pilgrim, who commanded the western camp. They had Du Xing rush it to the main camp to the northeast, where Song Jiang and Wu Yong were conferring by candlelight in the headquarters tent. Song Jiang read the letter with joy. He had its contents immediately transmitted to all three camps.

The following day they launched an offensive from three sides. Minister Lu, in the command tower on the wall, heard an earth-shaking explosion in Song Jiang's position, and a fiery cannon ball flew over and struck a corner of the tower. Half of it collapsed with a crash. In mortal fear, Lu hurried down from the wall. He exhorted the generals guarding the four gates to go out and repel the foe.

Three rolls on the battle drums, and the city gates were opened wide and the drawbridges lowered. From the North Gate Shen Bian and Fan Chou marched forth with their men. Guan Sheng the Big Halberd rode out to meet them on Governor Qian's curly-maned roan.

He was just about to engage Fan Chou in combat when Jin Jie and his troops emerged and challenged the enemy to fight. Sun Li cantered forward and took on Jin Jie. Before they had fought three rounds, Jin Jie, feigning defeat, turned and galloped away. Sun Li pursued, closely followed by nine more chieftains. Jin Jie retreated into the city, and the chieftains pushed in after him, capturing the West Gate.

The news that Song Jiang's army was pouring in through the West Gate put Changzhou in a turmoil. Fang La had cruelly oppressed the people, and their hatred knew no bounds. They rushed out in full force to help the Song attackers. Song Jiang's banner was already flying on the city ramparts.

Fan Chou and Shen Bian, seeing that the tide had turned, hastily started back to Changzhou to protect their families. But Wang the Stumpy Tiger and woman warrior Ten Feet of Steel cut in from the left and grabbed Fan Chou. Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen dashed up on the right and knocked Shen Bian from his saddle with their lances. The Song soldiers captured him.

Now the entire army under Song Jiang and Wu Yong surged into the city, seeking out southern troops and killing them in great number. Minister Lu and Xu Ding fled desperately through the South Gate. Pursuing Song troops were unable to catch them, and returned to Changzhou. While awaiting further orders, they discussed the awards they would claim.

Zhao Yi, who had been hiding in the home of one of the local populace, was seized by his host and handed over. Ying Ming had been killed in battle. His head was presented as proof.

Song Jiang, on entering Changzhou, posted notices reassuring the masses. They crowded to the prefectural center, supporting the old and carrying the infants, to express their thanks. Song Jiang comforted them, and promised they would be considered as good, law-abiding citizens. The chieftains also came to claim their awards.

When Jin Jie arrived to pay his respects, Song Jiang descended the steps to greet him personally and invite him into the hall. Kowtowing at the foot of the steps, Jin Jie voiced his gratitude. He said his wife deserved the credit for his return to the Song regime as a loyal official.

Song Jiang directed that Fan Chou, Shen Bian and Zhao Yi be locked in cage carts and escorted by Jin Jie to Governor Zhang in Runzhou. He wrote a covering document which he gave to Jin Jie. At the same time he instructed Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller to fly on ahead with a letter vouching for Jin Jie and urging that he be accepted into the main Song army. Song Jiang praised his loyalty so highly that Zhang received him when he arrived at Runzhou. The Governor was very favorably impressed. He presented Jin Jie with gold and silver and silks, a fine horse and ceremonial wine.

Deputy District Commander Liu Guangshi appointed him an expeditionary commander. Later, when they broke the Golden Tartars under Fourth Prince Wushu, Jin Jie distinguished himself many times in battle. He eventually was given his own command, and died while fighting at Zhongshan.

But to get back to that day in Runzhou, Zhang and Liu, after rewarding Jin Jie, had the three rebel commanders killed, their bodies pulverised and their heads hung up on public display. They also sent lavish rewards to Song Jiang and his forces.

After settling his army at Changzhou, Song Jiang dispatched Dai Zong to learn the results of Lu Junyi's campaign against Xuanzhou and Huzhou. Meanwhile, a mounted scout arrived with a report.

"Minister Lu is in Wuxi. He's joined forces with a rescue army from Suzhou, and they're heading this way."

Song Jiang selected ten infantry and cavalry chieftains and ordered them south with ten thousand men to meet the foe. Guan Sheng and other chieftains commanding the advance contingent bid Song Jiang farewell and left the city.

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Dai Zong returned with Chai Jin and told Song Jiang: "General Lu Junyi's captured Xuanzhou. He's sent Chai Jin to tell you about it." Song Jiang was delighted. He greeted Chai Jin with wine and conducted him to the rear hall. Chai Jin handed him a detailed written report that read:

Fang La's garrison general of Xuanzhou, Jia Yuqing, had under him six commandants, all natives of Shezhou and Muzhou. Jia sent them forth with three columns. Our chieftains killed four in personal combat, and their columns retreated into Xuanzhou. Lu Junyi ordered an all-out assault. When we neared the city gates, enemy soldiers on the walls threw down a grind stone, killing one of our chieftains. Their arrows flew like rain. All were poison-tipped. Two more of our chieftains were hit. Both died when we got them back to camp. General Lu, angered, pushed the attack through the night. The East Gate was not very well defended, and so we took Xuanzhou. We killed their fifth commandant during the assault. Garrison General Jia fled with his remnant troops towards Huzhou. We don't know where Cheng Shengzu, the sixth commandant, has gone. The grindstone killed Zheng Tianshou the Fair-Faced Gentleman. Slain by poison arrows were Cao Zheng the Demon Carver and Lightning Wang Dingliu.

On hearing that he had lost 3 more brothers, Song Jiang wept wildly and collapsed in a faint. His skin was yellow, lips purple, fingernails blue, and eyes lustreless. There was no telling about the state of his 5 organs but his 4 limbs were paralysed. Truly, flowers open, only to be blown down by the wind. Can the moonlight withstand dark gathering clouds? Could Song Jiang recover after falling unconscious?

Now when General Xing and Scimitar fought, they had not completed fifteen bouts before the latter raised his weapon and with a great slash sent his opponent tumbling from his horse. Twin Rods immediately led a mighty charge and the six enemy commanders turned and fled southwards. When Marshal Lü saw his troops had been routed he retreated with his wounded to Changzhou. The ten Song commanders took over the town of Dantu and sent word to Song Jiang. The main army soon arrived and pitched camp outside the town. The army was rewarded and a message was sent to Marshal Zhang requesting him to assign troops to garrison Runzhou. Next day two staff officers arrived with a reward for the troops in Dantu, which Song Jiang accepted and distributed.

Song Jiang now called the Unicorn in to discuss plans for the campaign. "At present," he said, "Xuanzhou and Huzhou are both in the hands of the rebel Fang La. You and I will divide the army into two columns, and draw lots to decide who goes where." Song Jiang drew Changzhou and Suzhou, while the Unicorn drew Xuanzhou and Huzhou. Song Jiang called on Sterling to split the army into two equal divisions. Except for Blue-Faced Beast, who could not take part in the campaign because he was sick and was left behind at Dantu, all the leaders were allotted to one or the other column, forty-two of them with Song Jiang and forty-seven with the Unicorn.

Now keep this firmly in mind, everyone, that the Unicorn was to attack Xuanzhou and Huzhou with forty-seven commanders, while Song Jiang was to attack Changzhou and Suzhou with forty-two commanders. The boat commanders were a separate unit with their own plan of campaign, on account of Cave Dragon and River Rider having been sent to Burnt Mountain to find Madcap and Ruan the Seventh. They had come back and reported: "Madcap and Ruan the Seventh got to the river, killed a family there, stole a fast boat and went over to the Hill Temple on Burnt Island. When the abbot learnt they were from Mount Liang he invited them stay there and entertained them. After hear-ing about White Eel's exploits, they made further inquiries and found that Maogang would be a good base from which to attack down the coast. They send a report and are requesting boat commanders and boats prepared for battle." Song Jiang sent the White-Water Dragon and the other seven boat commanders with five thousand sailors to back up Madcap and Ruan the Seventh. There were thus ten leaders in this attack, with a hundred boats.

You understand, friends, that when Song Jiang divided up his army in Dantu he had only ninety-nine leaders, not even a full hundred.

The water-borne leaders had all the large boats for the assault on Jiangyin and Taicang along the coast, while the small boats gathered in the narrow waterways around Dantu ready to join the attack on Changzhou.

Now Marshal Lü and his six staff officers had fortified themselves at Piling in Changzhou. The governor of this place was Qian Zhenpeng and under him were two generals: one was Jin Jie, and the other Xu Ding, who was a close friend of the Governor. The Governor himself had originally been police chief of Clearwater, but after helping Fang La to gain control there he had received advancement. When he heard that Marshal Lü had been defeated and that Runzhou was lost and the army retreating on Changzhou, he told his generals to open the gates and let them in. He received them in the government office and entertained them, and then they discussed the question of defence. The Governor said: "Don't worry, Marshal. I know I am not especially talented, but I will work like a horse to bring about the downfall of Song Jiang and his villainous gang and send them scuttling back across the river. I will recapture Runzhou. They shall submit to my will!"

Marshal Lü's response was fulsome: "When you show such determination, how can order fail to be restored to the country? After your triumph, I will petition His Majesty for you myself and honours will be heaped upon you." A big banquet followed. Of this no more.

Meanwhile Song Jiang was leading out the troops allotted to him to attack Suzhou and Changzhou in a major offensive against Piling. His commander-in-chief was Scimitar, and under him were Thunderclap and nine others. This made eleven of them, who with three thousand troops halted before the walls of Changzhou amid a forest of banners and thundering drums to issue their challenge to battle. When he saw them, Marshal Lü said: "Who is going to drive them off for me?"

The Governor had his horse saddled and said: "I shall give it my all!"

The Marshal appointed six staff officers to go with him and five thousand troops. The gates were opened, the drawbridge lowered and the Governor sallied forth, brandishing a mighty blade and riding a chestnut stallion.

Scimitar responded by withdrawing his forces somewhat, until the enemy had taken up their battle positions, with the six commanders divided equally on either side of the Governor. Then Scimitar rode forward, resting his weapon, and bellowed: "Hear this, you rebels! You are fighting on the side of a traitor, whose actions offend against natural law and incur the wrath of gods and man! The forces of righteousness are at hand. Have you no fear of death that you dare oppose us? I swear to you that if we do not make you pay for it with your lives I shall never take up arms again!"

The Governor replied furiously: "You rabble are just robbers from Mount Liang! You have no understanding of heaven's will since you ignore the cause of a strong prince and choose to bow down before a foolish and unprincipled lord. You have the nerve to pick a fight with our great country. We shall give you such a beating that not even a scrap of your armour will be left whole!"

Enraged, Scimitar charged forward, his crescent blade flashing, while the Governor likewise drew his sword and charged to meet him. They fought over thirty bouts, till the Governor's strength began to fail him and he could scarcely hold out. Then from the ranks of the southerners two commanders, seeing his plight, levelled their spears and rode out side by side. These two came at Scimitar, one from either side. Two commanders from the Song ranks were provoked by this and charged, one wielding a deadly sword, the other a tiger's eye chain. They were the Tamer and Colonel Sun. The other southern commanders were waiting in two ranks in front of their lines. Marshal Lü hurriedly ordered two more of them to their general's assistance.

Now in fact one of these southern commanders, Jin Jie, had already formed the intention of surrendering to the Song and was really interested in creating disorder among his own side, so after only a few bouts he turned his horse and galloped back towards his own ranks. Victorious was not going to let this opportunity slip and gave chase. When the southern commander Gao Keli saw Victorious hard on his comrade's heels, he took up his decorated bow, fitted an arrow to the string, took careful aim and let fly. The arrow hit Victorious full in the face and he fell from his horse. Thunderclap hurriedly slapped his horse and whirling his wolf's-tooth mace charged to the rescue. But already another southerner, Zhang Jinren, had thrust his spear into Victor-ious and finished him off. Victorious and the Supremo were sworn brothers, and when the latter saw his friend die he was determined to avenge him. He shook off his opponent and charged back towards the main southern army to search out Gao Keli. The man he had been fighting gave chase but Thunderclap stood in his way. Gao Keli saw the Supremo coming and levelled his lance to receive him. Intent only on revenge, the Supremo failed to protect himself and received a thrust to the ribs from Zhang Jinren's spear, which spitted him and hurled him from his horse.

Seeing two of his commanders killed was intolerable to Scimitar and in a blazing fury he charged towards Changzhou. With a display of awesome might he dealt the enemy commander, Governor Qian, one blow which knocked him lifeless from his beautiful long-maned chestnut stallion. Scimitar was about to seize the horse when his own, hit in the leg by an arrow, stumbled and threw him. The southern commanders Gao Keli and Zhang Jinren galloped towards Scimitar, but he was rescued by Spearsman, the Ugly Son-in-Law and Hound who got him back to their own lines. Marshal Lü now led a ferocious sally from the city and Scimitar was forced to retreat northwards with heavy losses. The southerners pursued them for more than six miles.

After his losses that day, Scimitar decided to head back and report to Song Jiang. When he heard of the deaths of Victorious and the Supremo, Song Jiang wept. "I never thought when we crossed the river that we would lose five of our brothers!" he lamented. "It must be that heaven is angry with me and does not wish me to defeat Fang La, otherwise why should we suffer these reverses?"

The Professor said: "You're talking nonsense! Winning and losing, victory and defeat, these are normal events for a soldier, there's nothing unusual about them. Today was the day these two leaders were destined to die, that's all. Put aside your grief and let us discuss tactics."

At this moment Iron Ox rushed into the tent and said: "Let someone who knows the killers of those two lead me to the swine and let me kill them, to avenge my two brothers!"

Song Jiang ordered a white flag of mourning to be raised the following day and announced that he would personally lead the whole army against the city to do battle and achieve final victory. Next day he led a huge attack by land and water, setting out as soon as the boats had arrived. Iron Ox with Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost and five hundred brave infantrymen went ahead to reconnoitre and arrived before the walls of Changzhou.

Marshal Lü having lost Governor Qian of Changzhou was greatly disturbed and had sent three urgent messages to Third Prince Fang Mao in Suzhou asking for help. He also sent a report to the court. Now he heard that five hundred infantry were at the city gates and that according to the banner their leader was the Black Whirlwind Li Kui, alias Iron Ox. "That blackguard is Mount Liang's most vicious bandit, a notorious killer," said the Marshal. "Who will go and capture him for me?"

Two distinguished generals presented themselves: Gao Keli and Zhang Jinren. The Marshal said to them privately: "If you capture the bandit for me, I shall use all my influence to secure your promotion." The pair of them grasped their lances and mounted and led out a thousand cavalry to do battle. When he sighted them, Iron Ox deployed his infantry in a straight line and grasping his two axes placed himself in front of them. Pluto was to one side of him, armed with a broad long-handled sword. On the other side were Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with their spiked shields and steel javelins in their right hands.

So there they were, these four, wearing armour plating to protect chest and back and standing at the head of their men. The two southern leaders were like mountain cats that think they have got the better of a tiger, or magpies taunting an eagle. They had a thousand troops and had deployed them just outside the city.

There were several scouts among the Song army who recognized those two southern generals as the ones who had killed Victorious and the Supremo and pointed them out to Iron Ox. "See them two commanders? They're the ones as killed our two."

Iron Ox said not a word but took up his two axes and charged straight at the enemy ranks. Pluto, calling to Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost to follow with their whirling shields, rushed off to help him. All shouting in unison, the four of them fell on the enemy. Gao Keli and Zhang Jinren were shaken and turned their horses without even waiting to strike a blow. But the two shield-bearers were already under the horses' noses. When Gao and Zhang tried to strike downwards with their lances, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost parried with their shields, and at the same moment Iron Ox swept Gao from his horse with a blow of his axe. Gao fell under the horse's feet and Eight-Armed Ogre shouted out: "Keep him alive!" But killing was in Iron Ox's nature and he could not restrain himself. One more blow and Gao's head was off. Pluto likewise had knocked Zhang from his horse and cut off his head with a single blow. All four now continued to rampage through the enemy ranks. Iron Ox had tied Gao's head to his belt and whirling his two axes, plunged into the thick of it, giving no quarter.

1000 southern troops died on the field of battle, and then as they fled into the city three or four hundred more, till Iron Ox and Pluto had reached the drawbridge. They wanted to fight on into the city, but Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost insisted they hold back. By now missiles were raining down from the city walls. The four warriors withdrew a little. They found their five hundred troops drawn up as before in a straight line. They had not dared to go into action. They had thought about joining the battle, but since Iron Ox was laying about him indiscriminately they feared he would not distinguish between friend and foe and preferred to keep their distance.

Now a cloud of dust announced the arrival of Song Jiang's army. Iron Ox and Pluto presented the heads, which were recognized as being those of Gao and Zhang. The others were critical: "Why did you take their heads?" they said.

"We killed a good many more. We intended to take these two alive, but our hands itched to do it and we couldn't resist," they replied.

"Since we've got the heads now, we'll put them under the white banner, to propitiate the spirits of Victorious and the Supremo," Song Jiang said. He wept a while as the heads were placed under the banner, and then rewarded Iron Ox and the other three. Then they all headed for Changzhou.

Back in that city Marshal Lü was exceedingly concerned. He discussed with Jin Jie, Xu Ding and the remaining four staff officers how to repel Song Jiang's force. All his generals had seen how Iron Ox fought and were quaking in their boots. None of them wanted to lead a counter-attack. The question was put to them several times, but they were as if struck dumb. No one spoke, no one dared offer a suggestion. With a heavy heart Marshal Lü ordered someone up onto the battlements to observe, as Song Jiang's army took up positions on three sides of the city and with drums and banners issued their challenge right under the city walls. Marshal Lü ordered all his commanders up onto the walls to organize the defence. They departed, leaving him alone in the inner chamber to contemplate his situation. He had no plan. He summoned some of the most trusted members of his entourage for further discussions. Their only suggestion was to abandon the city and run for it. Of this no more.

Meanwhile guard commander Jin Jie went home and said to his wife, Jade Orchid: "Song Jiang's army is camped on three sides of the city and we are short of provisions, we won't be able to hold out long. If the city falls, we are all destined for slaughter."

Jade Orchid said: "You are a loyal soul. I know you really want to return to your allegiance to the Emperor. There's the added motive that you used to hold an important post under the Song. The court never found fault with you. Wouldn't it be best to turn over a new leaf, capture Marshal Lü and hand him over to Song Jiang? I'm sure it's the most advantageous policy."

"But he's got four bodyguards, each with his own troops," her husband objected. "And that bastard Xu Ding, who is no friend to me, is very close to the Marshal. I fear the scheme could misfire and only invite disaster."

"You must act with secrecy," his wife said. "Wait till dark, attach a sealed letter to an arrow and fire it out of the city to inform Song Jiang that he can have the city with inside help. Go out to fight tomorrow and feign defeat. Then you can be credited with leading them into the city."

"That's a brilliant idea, my love," he said. "That's exactly what I'll do." The poem says:

*Flee the dark and seek the light,*
*That's the way to put things right.*
*A woman with a loyal heart,*
*Helps a man to see his fault!*

Next day Song Jiang launched a fierce assault on the city. Marshal Lü called a meeting. Jin Jie said: "Our defences are strong. We should concentrate on defence and not think of attacking. If we are firm in our defence we can wait till Suzhou sends reinforcements. Then we can join together to fight them."

"That makes good sense," the Marshal said. It was agreed that two of them should defend the east gate, two of them the north, Jin Jie would take the west and Xu Ding the south. They all went off to organize their guard. That evening Jin Jie wrote his confidential letter and tied it to an arrow. He waited till it was fully dark and all was quiet and then one of his scouts went up onto the battlements and fired it off towards the west. One of Song Jiang's men picked it up and hurriedly reported with it to the camp. The western camp was under the command of Monk and Pilgrim. When they saw the letter they hurriedly sent their subordinate Uglymug to report with it to the headquarters in the north-east camp. Song Jiang and the Professor were discussing matters and the tent was brightly lit when Uglymug presented Jin Jie's letter. Song Jiang was delighted and ordered all three camps to be informed.

Next day the leaders in all three camps attacked the city simultaneously. Marshal Lü was watching from a tower as Song Jiang's Thunderer prepared his guns and fired off an explosive shell which landed beside the tower and brought the corner of the tower crashing down. Marshal Lü fled from the walls in panic and ordered the commanders of the four gates to make a desperate sally. Three beats of the drum sounded and the city gates opened, the drawbridge was lowered. The two generals from the north gate advanced. Scimitar, mounted on the horse of the dead governor rode out from the Song ranks and took on one of them. As the two were going at it, Jin Jie led some bold troops out from the west gate. Colonel Sun engaged him. Before completing three bouts Jin Jie feigned defeat and galloped back. Colonel Sun, charged forward, with the Dandy and the Flautist close behind him, followed by Monk, Pilgrim, Red Star, Comet, the Young Master and Uglymug.

As Jin Jie retreated into the city Colonel Sun reached the west gate behind him and proceeded to seize it. Fighting broke out within the city and it became evident that the Song forces had got in by the west gate. At this point the people, who had been persecuted by Fang La beyond their enduring and had reached a point where their pent-up anger was ready to explode, hearing that Song forces had entered the city poured out to join in the fight. Song Jiang's flag was soon flying over the walls. Two of the southern commanders realized the city had changed hands and were rushing back to defend their families when Short-Arse and Steelbright cut them off from the left and caught one of them, while the Son-in-Law and Hound charging in from the right knocked the other from his horse and took him and his men prisoner. Song Jiang and the Professor led the main army into the city. On all sides southern soldiers were captured and promptly executed. Taking his friend Xu Ding with him, the Marshal left by the southern gate and fled for his life. Song Jiang's army could not catch up with him so they returned to the city to await orders and reward for their exploits. A third southern commander tried to hide in a commoner's house and was caught by the people and handed over. A fourth was killed by his own troops and his head taken. Song Jiang went to the government office and published a proclamation to calm the people, who flocked there, young and old alike, to give thanks. Song Jiang reassured them, saying that he recognized them as loyal citizens. The leaders were all invited to apply for their rewards.

When Jin Jie went to the government office to pay his respects to Song Jiang, the latter stepped down to receive him personally and invited him to take a seat. Jin Jie's relief was boundless, and he became again a loyal subject of the Song Emperor. This was all thanks to the good advice of his wife, as we already know.

Song Jiang had the three captured commanders placed in prison carts and ordered Jin Jie to take them himself to Marshal Zhang's headquarters in Runzhou. Bearing the order and with the prisoners under close guard Jin went to Runzhou and handed them over. Before he left, Song Jiang sent Magic Messenger with an

urgent letter recommending Jin to the army. Learning from this letter how highly Song Jiang rated Jin, the Marshal received him most hospitably and heaped upon him gifts of gold and silver, silk, a horse and wine. The Marshal's deputy, Liu Guangshi, retained Jin on his staff and gave him military rank to serve with the army. Later he was with Liu Guangshi at the defeat of the Jin and fought with distinction. Later still he was given his own command and died in the action at Zhongshan. That is the story of Jin Jie.

Marshal Zhang and his deputy rewarded Jin Jie that day and had the three prisoners hacked to pieces and their corpses exhibited as a ghastly example to all, following which someone was sent to Changzhou with the reward for Song Jiang's troops.

Meanwhile Song Jiang, after settling his troops in at Changzhou, had sent Magic Messenger to find out about the Unicorn's campaign against Xuanzhou and Huzhou. He had also received reports that Marshal Lü had taken refuge in Wuxi and had linked up with the reinforcements sent from Suzhou and was ready to attack again. To meet this threat he moved a force of cavalry and infantry south, consisting of Scimitar and nine others and ten thousand men. They set off at once. The Magic Messenger now returned, together with Mr. Chai, to bring news of the Unicorn's campaign. He announced that Xuanzhou had been taken and that Mr. Chai was with him to report on the action. Song Jiang was delighted, and after Mr. Chai had paid his respects he got out the wine to celebrate and they went into an inner room, where Song Jiang asked for a detailed description. Mr. Chai produced the despatches and gave his own oral account. Fang La's governor of Xuanzhou was Jia Yuqing. He had six lieutenants, whom he ordered to advance from the city in three columns. The Unicorn divided his forces into three columns to meet them. In the centre Twin Rods took on one of the enemy commanders and Twin Spears another. After ten bouts Twin Spears killed his opponent and the other enemy commander fled. Their forces were routed. On the left Leopard's Head and Hasty took on their opposite numbers. Leopard's Head's halberd dispatched his opponent and Hasty finished his with the axe. On the right Hotshot and the Unstoppable were fighting. The former knocked down his adversary with a stone and the Tiger-Killer hastened to finish him off. The Unstoppable's opponent fled. Four enemy leaders were killed that day and the rest of them took refuge in the city. The Unicorn immediately ordered his commanders to take the city. They got to the gate but had no protection against the enemy soldiers on the walls. One of the leaders was struck and killed by a millstone that hurtled down. A hail of arrows also rained down on them, all with poisoned tips, hitting two more commanders, who both died when they got them back to the camp. After losing these three leaders, the Unicorn persisted all night in the attack. The guards on the east gate could not hold out and the city was taken. One enemy commander was killed in the fighting and the other escaped and led the shattered remnants of their troops towards Huzhou. Monk had got into trouble during this battle and his whereabouts were unknown. The leader killed by the millstone was Whitey, and the two hit by poisoned arrows were Knife and Fleetfoot. The news that he had lost three more leaders grieved Song Jiang sorely. Whatever may have been the state of his five internal organs, his 4 limbs suddenly would not respond. One might indeed say that:

*The flower scarce opens before the wind destroys it:*
*The moon so bright is quickly veiled by cloud.*

Song Jiang fell senseless to the floor.

## 211

### Turbulent River Dragon Pledges Brotherhood in a small gathering of heroes on Taihu Lake; Song Jiang Convenes a major Large Meeting in Suzhou City

It was some time before the chieftains were able to revive Song Jiang. When at last he could speak, he said to Wu Yong: "We'll never take Fang La. We've been very unlucky since crossing the river. We've lost eight brothers, one after another!"

"Talking like that will only discourage our forces," said the military advisor. "We returned to the capital intact after defeating the Liao because that was Heaven's will. Some of our brothers' time was up, and we lost them. But we've captured three big prefectures—Runzhou, Changzhou and Xuanzhou, thanks to the emperor's fortunate emanations and your own splendid prestige. What's unlucky about that? You've no reason to be discouraged."

"You're right, of course. I guess I was counting too heavily on the hundred and eight of us being star spirits and our names appearing on the stone tablet. We've all been as close as arms and legs to a single body. I couldn't help feeling grieved by the bad news today."

"Please don't upset yourself. You must preserve your health. Concentrate on the disposition of troops and the Wuxi offensive."

"I'll keep Lord Chai Jin with me. Have Dai Zong notify Lu Junyi to attack Huzhou and meet us in Hangzhou as soon as possible."

Wu Yong had Pei Xuan write the dispatch and sent Dai Zong off with it to Xuanzhou. Of that we'll say no more.

Meanwhile, Minister Lu and Xu Ding, fleeing to Wuxi, met the relief army sent by the Third Great Prince from Suzhou. It was headed by General Wei Zhong, and under him were a dozen or more commanders and ten thousand men. The two contingents joined forces and prepared to defend Wuxi. Lu told how Jin Jie had virtually made a gift of Changzhou to the enemy.

"Don't worry, Minister," said Wei Zhong. "We'll get it back for you."

A cavalry scout reported! "Song Jiang's army is nearly here. Better get ready." Wei Zhong mounted his steed and led his troops out of the North Gate to confront the foe. But when he saw how strong Song Jiang's army was, with Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, followed by Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Jun, charging directly towards him, he knew his army couldn't withstand them, and pulled back in disorder, completely routed. As he hastily retreated into the city, the four chieftains were right behind him. Lu fled through the South Gate. Guan Sheng and his troops by then had captured Wuxi, and the city was in flames. Wei Zhong and Xu Ding also escaped through the South Gate, returning to Suzhou.

Guan Sheng rushed a report of the victory to Song Jiang, who soon arrived with the other chieftains. Notices were posted reassuring the local populace that they would be treated as good citizens. The army made camp in the county, and a request was sent to Governor Zhang and Deputy District Commander Liu that they retain control over Changzhou.

Minister Lu, with Wei Zhong and Xu Ding, leading their defeated forces, hurried to Suzhou city and begged succor from the Third Great Prince. They said they had been unable to hold Wuxi because Song Jiang's army was of overwhelming strength. Infuriated, Fang Mao ordered his guards to execute Minister Lu at once.

"Song Jiang's commanders are experienced warriors, men of remarkable Courage," said Wei Zhong, "and their soldiers are all Liangshan Marsh bandits with plenty of battle experience. They're hard to beat."

"I'll withhold the sword from your neck for the time being," Fang Mao said to the minister. "You can have five thousand more troops. Go out first and patrol. I'll also assign some more generals. We'll make farther plans later."

Lu bowed and thanked him. Dressing in full armor, he took his snake lance, eighteen feet long, mounted and led his soldiers from the city.

Fang Mao summoned eight more generals, each tall and strong and highly skilled with weapons. A sickle-bladed lance in hand, he rode out with them personally to observe the combat. Preceded by the eight generals, and followed by thirty-two commanders in neat ranks, he led fifty thousand soldiers through the city's Changho Gate. Minister Lu, with Wei Zhong and Xu Ding, who had left earlier, by then had passed the Cool Hill Monastery and were advancing towards Wuxi.

Already informed by his scouts, Song Jiang had marched more than ten //from Wuxi County with a large contingent under several generals. The two armies sighted each other and deployed into battle positions. Minister Lu angrily cantered forward, lance in hand, and challenged Song Jiang to do combat.

Song Jiang was standing beneath an arch of pennants. He turned his head and called: "Who will capture this knave for me?" Before the words were out of his mouth, Xu Ning the Metal Lancer galloped out with his golden lance and engaged Minister Lu. To the encouraging shouts from their respective sides, they fought more than twenty rounds. Then Lu tried a feint, and Xu ran him through the ribs. The minister fell dead to the ground. Both armies yelled. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind brandishing his axes, and Bao Xu the God of Death flourishing his sword, plus Xiang Chong and Li Gun each twirling his barbed shield, tore across the field. The southern soldiers were thrown into confusion. Poised for a charge, Song Jiang's forces found themselves confronted by Fang Mao's main army. They halted each other's advance with swarms of arrows, and both contingents took up battle positions. The eight southern generals spread out in a straight line. Fang Mao was enraged to learn that Minister Lu had been killed. He rode forth, lance athwart his saddle, and reviled Song Jiang.

"You're only a gang of petty robbers from Liangshan Marsh! The doomed Song court has named you a Vanguard General and sends you to invade our land of Wu! I'll not withdraw my soldiers till we've slaughtered you, every one!"

Song Jiang, also on horseback, retorted: "You're just a bunch of rustics from Muzhou! What chance have you of ever winning sovereignty! Surrender and save your necks. We are the imperial army. How dare you resist us with tricky words? We're not leaving till we've killed you all!"

"Enough of this chatter. I have here eight fierce generals. Dare you select eight to do them battle?"

Song Jiang laughed. "We'd be no true gallants if we pitted two against one. We'll match you eight for eight. But no man knocked from his horse is to be killed. He must be carried back to his own side. There must be no sniping with arrows and no seizure of corpses. If there is no clear victor, no general melee shall be allowed, and the contest must be continued the following day."

Fang Mao agreed. At his order, his eight generals rode forward, weapons in hand. Song Jiang spoke to his own officers. "Let eight cavalry commanders enter the field." Through the arch of pennants, from the left and from the right, eight chieftains moved forward on their steeds in formation. Drums thundered, banners fluttered, each side fired a signal cannon, and shouts rose from the two armies as the sixteen mounted figures lined up against their opposites.

For more than thirty rounds they fought, until a man was downed. And who was the victor? Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard. His lance had stabbed his opponent from his saddle. Trumpets in both armies sounded the withdrawal. The remaining seven pairs disengaged and returned to their original positions.

Fang Mao the Third Great Prince, due to the loss of his general, felt at a disadvantage. He pulled his forces back into the city of Suzhou. Song Jiang praised his cavalry chieftains and made camp near the Icy Hill Monastery. He raised Zhu Tong in rank. Pei Xuan wrote a report of the matter to Military Governor Zhang. Of that we'll say no more.

The Third Great Prince held the city but wouldn't come out and fight. He posted his generals at the gates, laid a field of barbed branches in depth, lined the walls with bowmen and cannon, prepared to heat molten metal, and piled bottles of lime along the ramparts. He would defend Suzhou stubbornly.

Song went to view the situation with four chieftains and thirty some-odd cavalry. The city was surrounded by water and the walls were strong. "We won't take this place in a hurry," he thought. He returned to camp and conferred with Wu Yong.

Li Jun the naval chieftain was announced. He had just arrived from Jiangyin. Song Jiang directed that he be invited into the headquarters tent. He entered and Song Jiang asked him about the situation along the coast.

"We sailed against Jiangyin and Taicang and they battled us with naval craft," said Li Jun. "Ruan the Second finished one of their commanders with a thrust of his spear, another was killed by our arrows, and we captured both towns. Then Shi Xiu, Zhang Heng and Zhang Shun took Jiading, and the three Ruan brothers occupied Changshu. I've come specially to report."

Delighted, Song Jiang rewarded Li Jun. He sent him on with a dispatch concerning the victories to Governor Zhang and Deputy District Commander Liu in Changzhou. There, the two officials further rewarded Li Jun and instructed him to return to the camp at Icy Hill Monastery.

Realizing that only a naval offensive could crack the watergirt Suzhou, Song Jiang kept Li Jun with him, and directed that he prepare vessels for the assault.

"Better let me go and have a look, so that I'll know what I'm doing."

"Right."

Li Jun was gone two days. When he returned he said: "The southern side of the city is near Taihu Lake. I'll need a boat that will take me into the lake from the Yixing tributary. From there, I'll cross over to Wujiang and see what news I can pick up about the southern end. Then we'll be able to attack from four sides and break in."

"An excellent idea. Just what I've been thinking. But I must get some good assistants to go with you."

Song Jiang appointed four chieftains to aid in capturing more coastal towns and directed the recall of Tong Wei and Tong Meng. Li Jun took the order and the replacements to Jiangyin and returned with Tong Wei and Tong Meng two days later. Song Jiang greeted them, and instructed them to go with Li Jun and spy out the southern end of Suzhou.

The three set sail in a little craft. Two boatmen plied the sweep oars. They followed Tixing Creek around to Taihu Lake, a broad body of water of beautiful emerald green. Crossing the lake, they neared Wujiang and saw in the distance forty or fifty fishing boats.

"We'll pretend we're fish buyers," said Li Jun, "and ask some questions."

They rowed over to the first vessel and Li Jun queried: "Got any carp?"

"If it's carp you want, come home with me and I'll sell you some."

Li Jun's boat accompanied a few of the fishing craft. Before long they sighted a hamlet of twenty or so households in a grove of bent-backed weeping willows. There the fishermen moored their boats and led Li and his party to a compound on the bank.

The moment he set foot inside the compound gate, the first fisherman whistled. Seven or eight big fellows with hooked poles immediately closed in from both sides, snagged Li and his two companions and dragged them further into the compound. They tied each of the three to a big stake without a word.

Li Jun looked around. He saw four bold gallants sitting in a thatched hall. The first of these had a red beard and brown hair and wore a blue quilted silk tunic. The second, a tall thin fellow with a short mustache was dressed in a dark green cotton shirt with a round collar. The third was swarthy and had a long beard. The fourth had a broad bony face, a curly spade-shaped beard and, like the third fellow, was dressed in a blue quilted tunic. All wore broad-brimmed hats of black felt and carried weapons. The leader shouted at Li Jun.

"Where are you rogues from? What are you doing on our lake?"

"We're traders from Yangzhou. We've come to buy fish."

"Don't bother to question him, brother," advised the bony faced man. "He's obviously a spy. Just let me cut his heart out to go with my wine!"

Li Jun said to himself: "I was a smuggler on the Xunyang River for a long time, and for several years a gallant in Liangshan Marsh. Who would have thought I'd end my life here. Well, if I'm finished, I'm finished!" He sighed, looked at Tong Wei and Tong Meng and said: "I got you two into this. We'll all become ghosts together!"

"Don't talk like that," the brothers replied. "Death doesn't matter. It's only a pity that dying here like this will reflect on Big Brother's prestige."

The three gazed at each other. Chests high, they waited for death.

The four bold gallants observed them and heard what they said. They exchanged glances. "That leader of theirs is clearly no lowly person," they remarked.

"Who are you, really?" Red Beard demanded. "What are your names?"

"If you're going to kill us, then kill us," Li Jun retorted. "Though we die, we're not going to tell you, lest we be shamed before the whole gallant fraternity!"

Convinced that the three were bold fellows like himself, Red Beard jumped up, cut their bonds and released them. The four escorted them into the hall and invited them to be seated. The leader kowtowed before them.

"We have been robbers all our lives," he said, "but we never have met such chivalrous men as you. Where are you from, gallant sirs? We would be pleased to learn your names."

"We can see that you four elder brothers must be bold fellows, so we'll tell you. Then you can take us wherever you wish," said Li Jun. "We are chieftains under Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh. I am Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon. These two are brothers—Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave and Tong Meng the River Churning Clam. Our band has been amnestied by the imperial court. After breaking the Liao Tartars we returned to the capital and were ordered to destroy Fang La. If you are his men, you can turn us in and claim your rewards. We won't offer any resistance."

The four gallants promptly kowtowed. Kneeling, they said: "We have eyes but couldn't recognize Mount Taishan! Please forgive our rude blunder. We four have nothing to do with Fang La's bandits. Originally we were robbers in the forest, but now we live here in Willow Hamlet. On all sides are deep coves. No one can get in without a boat. Our fishing is only a pretext. Actually, we grab whatever we can on the lake. Last winter we learned how to swim, and now no one dares to interfere with us. We heard long ago that Song Jiang had gathered some of the boldest gallants under the sky in Liangshan Marsh. His name is well known. We've heard too about Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves. We never dreamed we'd meet you here today!"

"Zhang Shun is one of us," said Li Jun. "He also is a naval chieftain. Right now he's chasing bandits around Jiangyin. I'll introduce you to him. May we ask you four your names?"

"Because we were operating in the greenwood, they're kind of odd," said the leader. "Don't laugh! I'm Fei Bao the Red-Beard Dragon. This is Ni Yun the Curly-Haired Tiger, this is Pu Qing the Taihu Python, and that's Di Cheng the Thin-Faced Bear."

Li Jun was very pleased. "Now we need have no doubts about one another." And he explained: "Big Brother Song Jiang is vanguard general of an expedition against Fang La. He wants to take Suzhou but he has no plan. He's sent us three to spy out the terrain. If you four bold fellows will come with us to Song Jiang, I guarantee you'll be made officials. After we've finished Fang La, the emperor will raise you still higher."

"If we wanted positions, we could have become commanders under Fang La long ago," said Fei Bao. "But we seek only a free life, not rank. We'll go through fire and water if you need our help. But if you want to make us officials, we're not interested."

"In that case," said Li Jun, "how about pledging ourselves as blood brothers?"

The four bold fellows gladly agreed. They slaughtered a pig and a sheep, poured cups of wine, and vowed to consider Li Jun their elder brother. Li instructed Tong Wei and Tong Meng to make the same pledge to the others.

Li Jun told of Song Jiang's desire to take Suzhou. "But Fang Mao won't come out and fight," he said, "and the city is surrounded by water. There are no roads we can advance on, and the creeks are narrow and difficult to navigate. How can we break in?"

"Stay here and relax a couple of days, brother," Fei Bao advised. "Functionaries from Fang La in Hangzhou go to Suzhou often on government business. We can use this as a means of getting into the city. I'll send a few fishermen to inquire. If any Fang La people are en route, we can decide what to do next."

Li Jun agreed, Fei Bao sent off the fishermen, and the seven remained in the hamlet, chatting and drinking. Two or three days later, the fishermen returned and reported.

"In Pingwang Town there are about a dozen cargo vessels flying yellow banners from their stern which read *Royal Armor*. They're obviously from Hangzhou. Only six or seven people man each boat."

"This is our chance," said Li Jun. "We hope you brothers will help."

"Let's go," said Fei Bao.

"If just one of those boats get away," warned Li Jun, "our plan will fail."

"Don't worry," said Fei Bao. "We take full responsibility." Sixty or seventy small craft were gathered and set sail. The seven gallants sat in seven boats. Fishermen manned the others. All were laden with concealed weapons. The little vessels slipped from the creeks into the river, then spread out.

That night the moon and stars filled the sky. The ten government craft were moored neared the Dragon King Temple at the eastern end of the river. Fei Bao's boat got there first. He whistled shrilly, and the sixty-odd fishing craft closed in and affixed themselves to the government vessels.

Startled sailors rushed out of their cabins, only to be hooked by the grappling poles and tied up in batches of four or five. Those who jumped in the water were fished out and hauled on deck. The little craft pulled the big vessels into the lake, and across to Willow Hamlet.

By then it was the fourth watch. The batches of bound prisoners were weighted with big rocks and thrown into the lake and drowned. Questioning of the two leaders revealed that they were store-house keepers of Fang La's eldest son, Fang Tianding the Prince of Southern Peace. On his orders they had been delivering three thousand suits of armor to Fang Mao the Third Great Prince in Suzhou. Li Jun asked the leaders their names, confiscated their documents, then had them killed.

"Before we take any action, I must consult with Big Brother about this," he said.

"I'll have you ferried across," said Fei Bao. "We'd better sneak you through the creeks past the enemy positions." He directed two fishermen to take Li Jun in a fast boat.

"Conceal the captured vessels and armor in the creek behind the hamlet," he instructed Fei Bao and the Tong brothers. "Don't let anyone know about them."

"No problem," said Fei Bao. He went to attend to it personally.

Two fishermen, propelling a little craft through the creeks, conveyed Li Jun past the enemy positions. He disembarked at Icy Hill Monastery and returned to camp. He told Song Jiang what had happened. Wu Yong, also listening, was overjoyed.

"Capturing Suzhou will be as easy as spitting on your hands. Let Li Kui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun take two hundred shield bearers and go to the hamlet on Taihu Lake. There they can work out a plan with Fei Bao and his three gallants. Tomorrow, they can go into action."

Li Jun crossed the lake with the two fishermen, got more boats, fetched Li Kui and the others, then proceeded to the hamlet and introduced the four chieftains to Fei Bao, who was somewhat startled by the appearance of the Black Whirlwind. He wined, and dined them, as well as the two hundred shield bearers.

The next day, after conferring, Fei Bao and Ni Yun dressed as the store-keepers of the armor, put on southern official uniforms, and pocketed their documents. The fishermen disguised themselves as sailors on the government boats. Li Kui and the two hundred shield bearers hid in the holds. Pu Qing and Di Cheng captained the rear vessel, which carried incendiary equipment.
They were about to sail when a fisherman came and announced: "A boat out there is zig-zagging across the lake."
"Something's up," exclaimed Li Jun. He hurried to have a look.
Two men were standing on the prow of the vessel—Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller and Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder. Li Jun whistled sharply, and the boat flew towards the hamlet. The two men came ashore.
"What brings you here? Is there any news?" asked Li Jun.
"In his rash to get Li Kui to you, Big Brother forgot something important," said Dai Zong. "He's dispatched me and Ling Zhen specially with a hundred cannon. We couldn't catch you when you were on the lake, and we didn't dare land on these unknown banks. He wants you to enter the city at dawn. Once you get in, fire the cannon as a signal."
"Perfect!" said Li Jun. He had the cannon barrels and carriages shifted over to his craft and concealed beneath the armor.
When Fei Bao heard that it was Dai Zong, he entertained him with food and wine. Ling Zhen and the ten gunners who had accompanied him hid themselves inside the third boat.
They sailed for Suzhou that night at the fourth watch. They arrived after the fifth. Soldiers on the walls, seeing the southern flags they flew, quickly reported. The official in charge of the gate was General Guo Shiguang the Flying Panther. He mounted the wall, questioned the commanding officer, and demanded the convoy's documents. They were hauled up and examined, then sent to the headquarters of the Third Great Prince for certification. Only after Guo posted observers below did he open the gate. But he also sent men down to inspect the boats. They reported that they were piled high with armor. Guo let them sail in, one by one, but when ten had entered he had the gate closed again.
An observer dispatched by the Third Great Prince arrived—an official accompanied by five hundred soldiers who took positions along the bank and moored the craft. Li Kui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun emerged from the cabins. Their rough appearance startled the official, and he hastily inquired who they were.
By way of answer, Xiang Chong and Li Gun charged, with twirling shields. A sword flew, cutting the official down from his horse. Li Kui leaped ashore, swinging his axes. He ploughed into the five hundred soldiers, hacking chunks out of a dozen in a row. The others fled.
Two hundred shield bearers poured from the cabins and swarmed upon the shore. They began setting fires. Ling Zhen positioned his gun carriages, mounted the barrels, and loosed a dozen in a volley that rocked the tower on the wall. From 4 sides, attackers closed in on the city. Fang Mao the Third Great Prince, planning in his palace, nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of the signal cannon. Commanders guarding the various gates rushed with their men towards where the salvoes were thundering without cease. From all of the gates came the report: "Snipers' arrows are mowing down our men! Song soldiers are already on the walls!"
Suzhou was thrown into a turmoil. No one knew how many Song troops had got in. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and Bao Xu were tearing around the city with two shield bearers slaughtering southern soldiers. Ling Zhen, protected by Li Jun, Dai Zong and the four bold rustics, continued to fire his cannons. Song Jiang sent all three columns against Suzhou. As these fought their way in, the southern troops scattered and fled for their lives. The Third Great Prince hastily donned his armor and mounted his horse. With 600 or 700 armored troops he attempted to break out of the South Gate. But he bumped into Li Kui and his cohorts, who wreaked havoc among them. The Southerners broke and ran, at a moment when Lu Zhishen barged out of a lane, brandishing his iron staff. Fang Mao knew he couldn't resist. He turned his steed and galloped back towards his palace. But Wu Song suddenly emerged from beneath Raven Bridge, chopped the animal's leg with his sword, and brought the prince tumbling to the ground. Another swing cut off Fang Mao's head. Wu Song presented his trophy to Song Jiang in his new headquarters in the prince's palace. The order was to destroy the southern army and capture as many of the foe as possible. Only Liu Yun managed to get away. With some remnant troops, he fled towards Xiuzhou. Seated in the palace, Song Jiang ordered a halt to the killing of civilians and directed his men to put out the fires. He also issued a proclamation reassuring the populace. Then he summoned his chieftains to the palace to claim their rewards. He already knew that Wu Song had slain Fang Mao, Zhu Tong had caught Xu Fang, Shi Jin had captured Zhen Cheng, Sun Li had killed Zhang Wei with his staff, Li Jun had run Chang Sheng through with his lance, and Fan Rui had destroyed Wu Fu. Xuan Zan and Guo Shiguang had inflicted such grievous wounds on each other that both had died beneath Horse Watering Bridge. Many subordinate enemy officers had been made prisoner, and their captors also came forward, seeking recognition. Song Jiang directed that Xuan Zan's body be laid in a fine coffin with full mourning decorations and that he be buried at the foot of Tiger Mound Hill. The head of Fang Mao and the prisoners Xu Fang and Zhen Cheng were sent to Changzhou for disposition by Governor Zhang. The governor had the 2 captives sliced to pieces in the public square. Fang Mao's head was dispatched to the capital. Substantial rewards were sent to Suzhou for distribution among the commanders. Zhang then issued an order that Deputy District Commander Liu take over control of Suzhou and that Song Jiang continue with his expedition against the rebels. Before long, a mounted scout arrived in Suzhou with the news: "Deputy District Commander Liu and staff officer Geng are here to assume command." Song Jiang and his chieftains went out to greet them and escort them into the city. They were moved into the palace and formally congratulated. In the prefecture office, Song Jiang conferred with his chieftains. He dispatched scouts to learn what progress his navy was making along the coast. They returned and reported that when the rebel officials in the coastal counties heard that Suzhou had fallen, they had scattered and fled, and that in these counties all was now peaceful. Very pleased, Song Jiang reported the victory in writing to the Central Army and requested the governor to restore all former Song officials to their posts. He then ordered various commanders to take over control of the captured coastal counties and let the naval chieftains who had been holding them return to Suzhou. Within a few days, this was done. The naval chieftains told Song Jiang that when the three Ruan brothers attacked Changshu, Shi En had been lost. Kong Liang died in the assault on Kunshan. Neither of them knew how to swim, and each had fallen into the water and drowned. Shi Xiu, Li Ying the others had all come back. Another two chieftains gone. Very unhappy, Song Jiang sighed without end. Fei Bao and his three gallant companions came to bid him farewell. They were leaving for home. When his pleas that they stay proved in vain, he rewarded them and instructed Li Jun to escort them to Willow Hamlet. With Tong Wei and Tong Meng, Li Jun saw them home, and there the four bold rustics wined and dined the three chieftains. Fei Bao rose and, handing a cup of wine to Li Jun, said a few words. And as a result, Li Jun's fame spread across the seas, his name was known throughout the world. He became king of a foreign land, but never encroached upon the borders of China. Truly, realizing its fate the toad sloughs off its skin, performing great deeds a fish becomes a dragon.

The other leaders rushed to revive Song Jiang and after what seemed an age he came to and said to the Professor: "I fear that we are not going to prevail over Fang La. Ever since we crossed the river we have suffered misfortune. One after the other, we have lost eight of our brothers."
The Professor tried to rally him: "Do not speak like this or you will ruin our morale. Before, when we defeated the Tartars, we all returned safely and that was all according to heaven's plan. If this time some of our brothers have died, it simply means that they have completed their allotted span. You can't deny that since we crossed the river we have captured three important cities: Runzhou, Changzhou and Xuanzhou. Clearly this is due to the Emperor's standing with heaven and your reputation. Who says our cause does not prosper? You have no reason for this despondency."
Song Jiang said: "Of course it is heaven's will, yet still I think of the one hundred and eight, come together in correspondence with the heavenly stars and according to what was inscribed on the celestial tablet. We are close to one another as hand and foot. How can I not grieve when I hear such terrible news?"
The Professor insisted: "Stop worrying about it. You will only do yourself injury. Please think about how to send reinforcements to attack their Marshal Lü in Wuxi."
Song Jiang said: "Leave Mr. Chai to keep me company. Write out another order for Magic Messenger to take to the Unicorn asking him to attack Huzhou and then unite with us again as soon as possible in Hangzhou."
The Professor got Sterling to write out the order and sent Magic Messenger to Xuanzhou with it. Of this no more.
Meanwhile Fang La's Marshal Lü and Xu Ding had retreated to Wuxi where they met up with the reinforcements sent by Third Prince Fang Mao from Suzhou. These were under a senior general called Wei Zhong with ten lieutenants and a thousand men. They had been sent to relieve Changzhou but now joined in the defence of Wuxi. Marshal Lü explained how Jin Jie had delivered Changzhou to the enemy. Wei Zhong said: "You may rest easy, Marshal. I am going to get the city back for you."
At this very moment a scout reported: "The Song army is approaching. We need to prepare."
Wei Zhong rode out of the north gate at the head of his troops to encounter the enemy. They saw a huge Song force bearing down on them, led by Iron Ox, together with Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost. Wei Zhong's spirits quailed and before they had even had time to form up his troops began to run. As they scurried back into Wuxi, the four foremost pursuers rushed into the town behind them. Marshal Lü fled through the south gate. Scimitar occupied the town. Wei Zhong and Xu Ding also made it out through the south gate and returned to Suzhou. Scimitar and his men now had Wuxi and sent a messenger to Song Jiang to report the fact. Song Jiang and the other leaders came to Wuxi and issued a proclamation reassuring the people and accepting them as loyal citizens. The army was stationed there and a message was sent requesting Marshal Zhang and his deputy to take over the defence of Changzhou.
Meanwhile Marshal Lü with Wei Zhong and Xu Ding had taken the remnants of their beaten army back to Suzhou to request help from the Third Prince, explaining that the Song forces were too strong for them and telling how his troops had been rolled back like a mat and the city lost. The Prince flew into a passion and ordered his military council to strip Lü of his command and execute him. But Wei Zhong and the others protested, saying: "Song Jiang's commanders are all battle-hardened, bold and skilful warriors. What's more, his soldiers are bandits from Mount Liang, well versed in fighting. It makes them extremely hard to defeat."
"I will suspend the sentence, then," said the Prince. "You can have five thousand men to spearhead an attack. I will command the main force myself and follow on behind you."
Lü prostrated himself in thanks. Then he put on full armour and grasping his long serpent lance rode out of the city.
The Third Prince mustered eight generals, all strong well-built men with plenty of battle experience. He put on his armour, grasped his square halberd, mounted his horse and after inspecting his troops advanced to do battle. With the eight generals riding in front, and twenty or thirty subalterns with fifty thousand southern troops drawn up in orderly ranks behind, he rode out through the palace gates to encounter Song Jiang.
By the time the vanguard under Marshal Lü, followed by Wei Zhong and Xu Ding, had passed the Temple on Cold Mountain and were approaching Wuxi, Song Jiang had received reports from his scouts and with some of his junior commanders had moved troops a few miles in front of the town. The two armies confronted each other, banners waving and drums sounding, drawn up in battle formation. Marshal Lü, boiling with anger, settled himself on his horse, took a firm grip on his lance and rode forward to challenge Song Jiang. Song Jiang in response turned and asked his commanders: "Which of you will capture that bandit for me?"
He had hardly finished when the Spearsman, firmly grasping his gold lance and settling himself on his horse, rode forward and engaged Marshal Lü. A shout went up on either side as the spears clashed. They fought more than twenty bouts. Then Marshal Lü parried and Spearsman's lance came in under his guard and knocked him from his horse. A roar went up from both armies. Iron Ox with his axes, Pluto with his javelins, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with their barbed shields rushed forward, throwing the southern contingent into utter confusion.
Song Jiang's army now met the Third Prince's troops head on. There was an exchange of arrows as both armies formed up for battle. On the southern side the eight commanders were drawn up in line. The Prince in the centre heard that Marshal Lü had been killed and was enraged. He rode out in front and abused Song Jiang: "To me you are just a bunch of burners and looters, bandits from Mount Liang. The luckless court made you a general and told you to invade our land. Well, I'm going to teach you a lesson, when I've finished with you you'll know what fighting really is!"
Song Jiang pointed and said contemptuously: "And you're just a bunch of peasants! What makes you think you have a destiny? You a ruler? What a hope! Why not surrender right away and save your life? We are the imperial army! I'm going to finish you off, or I vow never to fight again."
The Prince roared: "I'm not going to waste my breath on you. I've got eight brave commanders here. Have you got eight you'd dare to pit against them?"
Song Jiang laughed scornfully: "I could certainly find two for each one of yours, but it wouldn't be honourable. Send out your eight and I'll send out eight of mine. We'll compare our fighting skills and see who comes off best. But let the rules be these: anyone who loses his mount shall be taken back to his own ranks, there are to be no snipers with arrows and no body snatching. If there is no clear victory, it must not degenerate into a brawl: the contest will be renewed tomorrow."
Fang Mao sent out his eight commanders, armed and mounted. Song Jiang said to his champions: "Hand over your commands before you go out to fight." Barely had he finished speaking when the eight rode forth. They were Scimitar, Colonel Hua, Spearsman, Thunderclap, Whiskers, Tamer, Colonel Sun and Hound. The pennants gates opened right and left to let them through. The drums set up a rapid rhythm on either side, while flags of many colours were waved and signal rockets sent up. With both armies shouting encouragement the sixteen met, each seeking out his own opponent and falling on him.
All the sixteen were brave men and they fought with great determination. After thirty bouts, one of them fell head over heels from his horse. Who was the unlucky one? It was the southerner Gou Zheng, whom Whiskers with a thrust of his spear had knocked from his horse. Gongs sounded on either side and the other seven pairs of contestants separated and returned to their own ranks.
When Fang Mao saw that he had lost one of his commanders, he felt things would go against him and withdrew with his army into Suzhou. Song Jiang urged his men forward and made camp close to the Temple on Cold Mountain. He rewarded Whiskers with promotion. Sterling wrote out a despatch which was sent to Marshal Zhang. Of this no more.
The Prince fortified himself in the city. He ordered his leaders to strengthen the defences on all the gates, setting out deer's antlers, positioning ballistas and crossbows on the walls, with a good supply of explosives and missiles, molten metal stored under an awning and bottles of acid on the battlements, in preparation for a dogged defence of the city.
When the southern army did not sally forth next day, Song Jiang took Colonel Hua, Spearsman, Tamer and Colonel Sun together with thirty horsemen to observe the city. He found that all round Suzhou on the outskirts was a mass of waterways and the walls of the city itself were solid. "This city won't fall to us in a hurry," he thought. He went back to the camp and discussed with the Professor a plan of attack. Some one came and reported: "The boat leader White-Water Dragon is here from Jiangyin to see you, sir."
Song Jiang had him brought in and asked what the news was from the coast. White-Water Dragon replied: "Since I was put in charge of the water-borne forces with Madcap, we have attacked the islands of Jiangyin and Taicang and other places down the coast. When their commander sailed out to oppose us, he was knocked into the sea by a spear thrust from Ruan the Seventh and his lieutenant died in a salvo of arrows. So we were able to take those two places. On the same day Madcap, the Pilot and White Eel took Jiading and the Ruan brothers took Changshu. This is what I came to tell you."
Song Jiang was excited by this news. He rewarded the White-Water Dragon and sent him off to report to Marshal Zhang and his second-in-command. White-Water Dragon went off to Chang-zhou and gave a detailed report on the taking of the two islands, and the killing of two enemy commanders. The Marshal rewarded him handsomely and sent him back to Song Jiang for further orders.
Since Suzhou was surrounded by wide expanses of water, Song Jiang realized he needed to launch a water-borne attack and retained White-Water Dragon for this purpose. He wanted boats to be prepared, ready for sailing. White-Water Dragon said: "Let me go and check the width of the channel and see how we can use our forces. When I come back we can make our plan." Song Jiang assented.
White-Water Dragon was gone two days. When he came back he said: "Just to the south of the city is Lake Tai. What we want is a small boat that can enter the Yixing channel and secretly pass into Lake Tai and thence to Wujiang to get intelligence of the southerners before we advance."
"Very well, only you need another leader to go with you," said Song Jiang. He ordered Skyhawk, together with Red Star, Comet, the Young Master and Uglymug to the coast to help the water-borne forces and replace the Tong brothers, Cave Dragon and River Rider, who were needed to assist White-Water Dragon. Skyhawk with these orders departed for the island of Jiangyin. Within two days the Tong brothers arrived and Song Jiang explained tactfully that they were needed to help White-Water Dragon carry out an important spying mission by boat.
So White-Water Dragon and the two Tongs set off in a light boat with two sailors to row. They rowed into the narrow channel at Yixing and after many twists and turns came out into Lake Tai. What met their eyes was a vast expanse of water, like a great sheet of jade:
*Sky and water merge in the distance, the water seeming to rise into the sky; all around is water, not a speck of land to be seen, everywhere sky and water are of uniform brightness. The water's clear mirror is broken only by the reflections of egrets flying by in pairs; the perfection of the empyrean is shattered only by the gulls that soar heavenwards two by two. When the lake is a-glitter with spring, its wavelets shimmer like fish scales; swollen by summer's downpours, its billows challenge heaven; immaculate with autumn moonshine, it unfurls a golden path; dusted with winter snow, it fills the world with reflected light. When primeval chaos was first resolved, the water god appropriated this crystal mansion to himself.*
As the poet says:

*Over the vastness the seagulls float;*
*Green spring's the time to dye your clothes;*
*Going to and fro men wear themselves out;*
*At sundown it's time to head for home.*

As they were rowing across the lake and drawing near to Wujiang they saw a flotilla of fishing boats, forty or fifty of them. "Let's pretend we want to buy fish," said the White-Water Dragon. "We can get some information out of them." They rowed closer, and he shouted out: "Have you got any big carp there?"
The fishermen answered: "If it's big carp you want, you'd better come home with us and we'll sell you some."
They followed the fishing boats and before long they came to a place all surrounded by twisted willow trees. Enclosed within a bamboo fence were some twenty or so houses. The fishermen first moored their boat, then helped the three leaders ashore and took them into a compound. The moment they stepped inside, seven or eight big fellows gave a loud shout and pinning them down with hooks dragged them into the house. Without a word of explanation they tied them to a wooden pillar.
They found themselves in a thatched hall where four bold buccaneers were seated. The chief of them had a reddish beard and whiskers and wore a robe with blue sleeves. The second was tall and thin, with a short beard and dressed in a dark green robe with a round collar; the third was dark with long whiskers and the fourth had a bony face with high cheekbones and a round beard. These last two were dressed alike in padded robes with blue sleeves. They all wore black felt hats and carried weapons. The leader shouted at White-Water Dragon: "Where are you lot from? What're you doing here on our lake?"
"We're from Yangzhou," he answered. "We came here to trade. We want to buy fish."
The one with the bony face said: "No point in asking 'em questions, brother. They're obviously spies. Just whip their hearts and livers out; we'll have'em with our wine."
"After all those years as smuggler on the Xunyang River," White-Water Dragon was thinking to himself, "and a good while too as outlaw on Mount Liang, who would have thought I'd end my days here! Well, well, well!" He sighed and exchanged a look with the other two. "I'm to blame for getting you into this mess. I've turned you into ghosts!" he said. "There's only one way to go now."
"Don't talk like that, brother," they said. "We don't mind dying. It's only that dying like this is an insult to the Leader's name." Looking about them, they held their heads high and waited for death.
After hearing their talk, the four fishermen looked at each other and said: "This leader of theirs must be someone out of the ordinary!"
"What sort of people are you then?" the chief asked. "Can't you reveal your names to us? We'd really like to know."
"Go ahead and kill us, if you're going to," White-Water Dragon said. "We'll die sooner than tell our names. We don't want to be a laughing-stock!"
At this the chief of the fishermen jumped up and cut their bonds with a knife, releasing them all. He and the other three raised them up and invited them to sit in an inner room. Then he prostrated himself and said: "We're robbers and we've been around, but I've never seen men with such spirit as you! Please tell us where you are from. We really want to know your names!"
"You are obviously brave fellows," said White-Water Dragon. "So I'll tell you, and afterwards you can do what you like with us. We all serve under Song Jiang of Mount Liang. I am the White-Water Dragon and these two friends of mine are Cave Dragon and River Rider. We have been pardoned by the Emperor; recently we defeated the Liao Tartars, and after we returned to the capital we were given the task of capturing Fang La. If you serve Fang La, you'd better hand us over and get the reward. We won't put up any resistance."
When the fishermen heard this, they kowtowed again, and still kneeling said in chorus: "We couldn't see what was in front of our noses. We treated you disgracefully! Forgive us, please forgive us! We certainly don't serve Fang La. We chose to seek our living in the greenwood long ago. Now we've ended up in this place, which is known as Willow Farm. There are hidden channels all around, but no boat can get in. We just use fishing as a cover, so we can make a living on the lake. This last winter we've learnt a bit about fighting on the water, that's why no one wants to meddle with us. We have long heard how Song Jiang of the Marshes of Mount Liang seeks out good men. We have also heard of you, and of a certain White Eel. We had no idea we were going to meet you here!"
"White Eel is my friend, and my comrade in the water-borne forces. At present he is in Jiangyin, arresting rebels. Another time I'll bring him here so you can make his acquaintance. May I ask your names?"
"Because we're of the greenwood, we all have nicknames. Please don't laugh! I am Red, this is Curly, that's Shark, and the last is Bony."
"There's nothing more to worry about then, gentlemen," said White-Water Dragon approvingly. "It's good to know we're all members of the same family! Our leader, Song Jiang has been made commander of the expeditionary force against Fang La. His present aim is to capture Suzhou and before deciding how to go about it he sent us three out on reconnaissance. Now we have met you, you can come with us to see the Leader. He's sure to take you on and after we capture Fang La the court will give you advancement."
"With all due respect," said Red, "if we were ambitious for office, we could have been generals under Fang La years ago. Fact is we don't want to serve. All we want is a merry life. If you need our help, we'll go through fire and water for you. But if you're offering us official posts, all I can say is we don't want 'em."
"In that case let us just declare ourselves blood brothers, how about that?"
The four fishermen were well pleased with this suggestion, and had a pig and a goat slaughtered and wine brought for a celebration, as they and White-Water Dragon swore an oath of loyalty as brothers. Cave Dragon and River Rider followed suit.

The seven at Willow Farm discussed the problem of capturing Suzhou. They agreed that the Third Prince would not come out to fight. The city was surrounded on all sides by water and there was no way to attack it. The channel was so narrow it could hardly be attacked by boats. How would they ever take the city? Red said: "Stay here for a couple of days and rest. From time to time one of Fang La's people from Hangzhou comes to Suzhou on official business. That could be our chance to capture the city. I'll get up a group of fishermen and send them out to do some spying. When we hear that someone is coming we can make a plan."
"That's a great idea," said White-Water Dragon.
Red sent some of the fishermen off on their mission, while he entertained his guests with wine at the farm. After several days of this, the fishermen returned and said: "A dozen or so cargo boats have appeared at Pingwang all with yellow flags at the stern bearing the words 'Royal uniforms'. They've obviously been sent from Hangzhou. There's only half a dozen men on each."
"This is our chance," said White-Water Dragon. "I hope you're all going to help."
"We'll start right away," said Red.
"If just one of the boats gets away, the whole plan will be ruined," said White-Water Dragon.
"Don't you worry. I'll take care of it," said Red. He assembled sixty or seventy fishing boats. Each of the leaders was to go in one. Fishermen would be in the others, all with hidden weapons. They crept out of the small channels into the main river, spread themselves out and advanced.
That night the moon and stars were bright as the ten official transports anchored in the east river in front of the Temple of the Dragon Lord. Red's boat reached them first. A sharp whistle was the signal and sixty or seventy fishing boats approached and grappled the bigger vessels. On the transports men rushed up on deck and were pinned down with hooks and then tied together in bunches of five or six. Some jumped into the water and were hooked and dragged aboard again. The small boats now had control of the transports and sailed away with them to distant parts of the lake. In the fourth watch they all reached Willow Farm.
Most of the enemy personnel, bound together with ropes, had big stones attached to them and were thrown into the lake to drown. The two commanders were retained for questioning. They turned out to be officers of Fang La's treasury in Hangzhou, bearing an official order and charged with delivering three thousand suits of new iron armour for the Third Prince in Suzhou. White-Water Dragon got their names and a set of official papers out of them and then they were killed. "I must go and discuss this with the Leader," he said. "And then we can finish the job."
Red said: "I will tell some of my people to take you. I think you had better go by the small channels." Two of the fishermen were ordered to row White-Water Dragon back in a light boat. White-Water Dragon told Cave Dragon, River Rider and the others the government transports must be hidden carefully in the small channels at the back of the farm and no one allowed to see them. "No problem," said Red. He went off himself to deal with the boats.
So White-Water Dragon with the two sailors travelling by small channels in their light boat arrived at the Temple on Cold Mountain and went ashore. He went to the camp and gave Song Jiang a detailed account of the preceding events. "Then Suzhou is ours!" said the Professor triumphantly. "You must give orders for Iron Ox, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with two hundred shield-bearers to return with White-Water Dragon to the farm on Lake Tai, where they are to make joint plans with this fellow Red and his comrades and launch an attack a day later."
Equipped with these orders White-Water Dragon and his companions went back to Lake Tai. On the way they picked up Iron Ox and his group and escorted them to Willow Farm, where White-Water Dragon introduced them all to the fishermen. Red had quite a shock when he saw what Iron Ox looked like. Two hundred or more were treated to wine at the farm. On the third day, as they had planned, Red disguised himself as the treasury official in charge of the armour, with Curly as his lieutenant. They put on southern uniforms and took the official documents with them. The fishermen were disguised as sailors manning the transports and Iron Ox and his companions were hidden in the holds of the vessels. Shark and Bony were in charge of the last boats, which carried combustible materials. Just when they were about to start a fisherman came and reported: "There's a boat out on the lake that keeps going to and fro."
"That sounds very odd," said White-Water Dragon. He hurriedly went to see for himself. At the prow of the boat stood two men. They were Magic Messenger and Thunderer. White-Water Dragon let out a loud whistle and the boat shot towards them. "What are you doing here?" asked White-Water Dragon when they had come ashore and been introduced.
"The Leader sent Iron Ox off in a hurry," said Magic Messenger. "He forgot something important. We've been sent here with a hundred signal rockets. We missed him out on the lake and we were scared to come in close to shore. The rockets are to be set off tomorrow morning when you get inside the city."
"Good!" said White-Water Dragon, and had the rockets transferred to the boats with the armour and stowed away.
When Red heard this was Magic Messenger he called for more wine to entertain them.
Thunderer was hidden away inside the third boat with ten rockets. That night in the fourth watch they set sail from Willow Farm and steered for Suzhou. By the end of the fifth watch they were close to the city walls. When they saw the southern flag the guards on the walls hurriedly reported to the guard commander, Guo Shiguang, who came up onto the walls himself. He asked for a full report and had the documents sent up so he could examine them. He sent someone to report it all to the Third Prince's office. The documents were scrutinized and then someone was sent down to the boats to inspect them. Finally they were allowed into the city. Guo himself was sitting on a chair beside the water-gate and he ordered a further inspection. The boats were found to be stuffed with armour so one by one they were allowed to enter. When all ten had been allowed through, the water-gate was closed again. The Third Prince's inspector with five hundred men had now arrived on the bank. He ordered the boats to tie up. Iron Ox and his companions now made their appearance. The inspector was struck by the ugly look of these four and hurriedly asked who they were. But by this time Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost were already waving their barbed shields and firing off javelins. The inspector was knocked from his horse and when the five hundred troops tried to board the vessels Iron Ox leapt ashore with his two axes and cut down a dozen of them. The rest fled.
The others on the boats, including the two hundred shield-bearers, now came ashore and began starting fires. Thunderer set up his gun and started sending off signal rockets. He sent off ten in a row. The explosions shook the city towers. Fighting broke out everywhere. The Third Prince was holding a meeting in the government office when he heard the explosions and was so frightened his spirit nearly left his body. The guard commanders on all the gates, when they heard these incessant explosions, rushed back into the city centre. The rumour began to fly about that the army commander had been killed by a stray arrow and Song troops were already inside the city. Suzhou by now was in a ferment. No one could say how many Song troops had entered. Iron Ox and Pluto were charging all over the place with the two shield-bearers killing the southern troops. White-Water Dragon and Magic Messenger together with Red and company were guarding Thunderer as he busied himself with his rockets. Song Jiang had already detailed three army columns to take the city. As these rushed in the southern troops scattered before them and fled for their lives.
The Third Prince hurriedly put on armour and with a few hundred armoured troops was trying to force a way out through the south gate when he ran into Iron Ox and his gang, who set about the armoured troops and had them running in all directions. Monk also emerged from an alley, heaving his steel staff. The Third Prince could put up no resistance. He galloped back alone to the government office. From under the Magpie Bridge Pilgrim emerged and hacked at the horse's legs. One blow of his sword brought Third Prince crashing to the ground, and a second removed his head.
Pilgrim took the head back to the army to show Song Jiang and ask for his reward. Song Jiang was already in the city, sitting in the Prince's office. He ordered all the leaders to go round the town, search out, and kill the southern troops. Almost all were taken. Only one of their commanders got away, together with a beaten remnant of the army, and went to Xiuzhou.

*Heaven's mandate cannot be gainsaid.*
*Peace for usurpers is never within reach.*
*The Third Prince quickly loses his head.*
*Learn the lesson such examples teach!*

Song Jiang went to sit in the Prince's office and issued orders that honest citizens and the ordinary people were not to be harmed and the fires everywhere were to be put out. He also issued a proclamation for military and civilians. He then summoned his commanders to the palace to receive their rewards. It became known that Pilgrim had killed the Prince, Whiskers had taken one commander alive and the Tattooed Dragon had captured another, Colonel Sun had killed a third with his rods, White-Water Dragon had killed a fourth with a spear thrust, Demon King had killed a fifth. The Ugly Son-in-Law had fought a ferocious duel with the garrison commander, Guo Shiguang, in which the two men mortally wounded each other and died under Horse-Watering Bridge. The rest had all captured junior officers and came to make their claims.
Song Jiang was sorely grieved by the loss of the Ugly Son-in-Law and sent someone to arrange the encoffining and burial at Tiger Mound Hill. The Third Prince's head and the two captives were sent to Marshal Zhang's headquarters in Changzhou to show justice having been done. Marshal Zhang had the prisoners hacked to pieces in the marketplace and sent the Third Prince's head to the capital. He sent a considerable supply of wealth to Suzhou to reward the army and issued an order requesting his deputy, Liu Guangshi, to fortify Suzhou and commanding Song Jiang to continue the campaign and capture all the rebels.
A mounted scout reported the arrival of General Liu and another officer to take over the government of Suzhou. All the leaders went with Song Jiang to welcome the General and his retinue to the city and take them to stay in the Prince's palace. After these ceremonies, Song Jiang and his leaders held a meeting. Scouts were sent to obtain news of the water-borne forces on the coast. It was reported that in all the places along the coast, when they heard Suzhou had fallen, the rebels had fled and that all the coastal districts were now peaceful. Song Jiang was delighted, and sent a report to headquarters, requesting Marshal Zhang to reappoint all the former officials and detail more troops to every district to protect the people so that all his water-borne forces could be withdrawn and brought back to Suzhou for further duties.
Within a few days all former officials had gone to their posts and the water-borne leaders were all back with the main force in Suzhou. They heard how the three Ruan brothers had lost the Young Master in the attack on Changshu and Red Star in the later attack on Kunshan. Madcap, Skyhawk and their group had all returned safely. The Young Master and Red Star did not know how to swim so when they fell in the water they drowned.
Song Jiang's heart was heavy when he learned that he had lost three more comrades. His sighs were endless. Pilgrim also wept when he thought of former times and the close ties between them all.
Red and his friends now wanted to return home and came to say goodbye. Song Jiang tried his hardest to make them stay, but to no avail. When they had been rewarded, White-Water Dragon was instructed to escort them back to Willow Farm. Cave Dragon and River Rider went with him, and on arrival the fishermen regaled them with wine. While they were drinking Red rose to his feet to toast White-Water Dragon and made a short speech, which was to have no small effect: White-Water Dragon was to leave the Central Plain and set up a base overseas. Truly it is the case that

*To save his life the toad will shed his skin;*
*For profit and fame the fish becomes a dragon.*

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### In Ninghai District, Song Jiang is plunged in Mourning in the battle for Hangzhou; At Yongjin Gate, White Eel Zhang Shun dies at Goldenflood Gate & Becomes a Spirit

Fei Bao said to Li Jun: "I'm a crude stupid fellow, but I've heard clever persons say: 'One must have failures as well as successes, one must have sorrow as well as joy.' You've built a career in Liangshan Marsh in a score or more years, winning every battle, and when you defeated the Liao Tartars you lost none of your brothers. But now you're going against Fang La, and clearly your vitality is crumbling. You won't be able to last much longer.
"Why am I not willing to become an official or general? Because once peace is restored, there would be one person after another trying to take my life. As the old saying goes: 'In order to keep the peace, the general himself can have no peace.' That's very well put. We four and you three have pledged ourselves blood brothers. Why not, while the tide is still with us, find a quiet refuge? Let's put some money together, buy a large boat, hire a few sailors, and search the rivers and seas for a good place to settle down and live out the rest of our lives. What could be sweeter?"
Li Jun bowed and replied: "Your words are most enlightening, brother. What you suggest would indeed be fine. It's just that we still haven't beaten Fang La. I can't cast aside my obligation to Song Jiang. It isn't time yet for me to leave. If I were to go with you today, I'd be violating my chivalrous duties. If you're willing to wait until we've conquered Fang La, I and my two brothers will gladly join you. You can start preparing now. Heaven crush me if I go back on my word! I'll be no real man!"
"We'll make arrangements about the boat," the rustic gallants said. "We'll be looking forward to your arrival, brother. Don't disappoint us!" Li Jun and Fei Bao sealed their pact with wine. All vowed to carry it out scrupulously.
The next day, Li Jun said good-bye to the four, and with the Tong brothers went back to Song Jiang. He told him they had no desire to become officials—they felt they would be happier remaining fisherman. Song Jiang sighed, then went on readying his land and naval forces for the offensive. Wujiang County was already free of rebels, and the Song forces had taken Pingwang Town. They set out now for a drive on Xiuzhou Prefecture.
Duan Kai, the general responsible for its defense, had learned that Fang Mao the Third Great Prince had been killed in Suzhou, and his only thought was to wind things up and leave. When he heard that the main Song army was already not far from the city, and saw in the distance the advancing banners blocking out the sun on land and water in a combined operation of boats and cavalry, he was scared stiff. The vanguard under Guan Sheng and Qin Ming had reached the city walls, and their naval vessels were closing in on the West Gate.
"You needn't attack," he called from the ramparts. "We will surrender." And he ordered that the gates be opened.
He directed that Song Jiang be welcomed with sheep and wine, and conducted him, amid burning incense and flowery lanterns, to the prefectural center. Duan Kai was the first to present himself. Song Jiang promised him that he would be considered a good official, and issued proclamations reassuring the local populace.
"I originally was a law-abiding citizen of Muzhou Prefecture," said Duan Kai. "But I was repeatedly oppressed by Fang La, and was compelled to serve under him. Today the Celestial Army has arrived. I wouldn't dream of not submitting." People like Duan Kai realized the Heavenly destiny of the Song Dynasty.
"Who is defending the city of Hangzhou in the Ninghai Military District?" Song Jiang asked him. "How many effectives has he?"
"Hangzhou covers a wide area, and is densely populated. North and east is dry land, the river is on the south, to the west is the lake. It's held by Fang La's son Fang Tianding the Prince of Southern Peace. He commands an army of more than seventy thousand, and has twenty-four generals and four marshals—a total of twenty-eight.
"Two of them are especially formidable. One is a monk from Shezhou, known as the Buddha of Precious Light. His original name was Deng Yuanjue. He wields an iron Buddhist staff weighing over fifty catties. Everyone calls him 'National Advisor.'
"The other, Shi Bao, comes from Fuzhou. His weapon is a comet hammer, and when he throws it, he never misses. He also has a fine sword called the Wind Splitter. It can cut bronze and iron. Even three layers of armor the Wind Splitter slices right through.
"The remaining twenty-six are all selected generals, all extremely tough and courageous. You mustn't underestimate this foe, Excellency."
Song Jiang rewarded Duan Kai, and ordered him to report these matters to Governor Zhang. Later on, Duan Kai marched with the governor's army and took part in the defense of Suzhou. Deputy District Commander Liu Guangshi was made military governor of Xiuzhou. Now, Song Jiang shifted his troops to the village of Zuili Pavilion and established a base.
After banqueting and rewarding the chieftains, he discussed with them the attack on Hangzhou. Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind rose to speak.
"Ever since you rescued me in Gaotang Prefecture, you have lavished your affection on me and given me undeserved honors," he said to Song Jiang. "So far, due to my own weak fate and personal inadequacies, I have not been able to requite this benevolence. I would like, today, to penetrate into Fang La's lair as a spy. If I can perform with merit I will be of service to the throne and will reflect honor on you, brother, at the same time. I wonder whether you will permit me to try?"
Song Jiang was very pleased. "If you can learn the enemy's internal situation we shall be able to attack and capture the chief bandit Fang La, deliver him to the capital and, for this small achievement, share in the honors. But I'm afraid the task may be too much of a hardship, brother."
"What of it? The possibility of death doesn't daunt me. My only request is that Yan Qing go with me. He knows the local dialects and is quick to seize opportunities."
"Of course, brother. Yan Qing is with Lu Junyi's forces at the moment. I'll dispatch an order for him to come at once."
Just then someone announced: "General Lu's special emissary Yan Qing has arrived to report a victory."
"You're sure to succeed, brother," Song Jiang said happily to Chai Jin. "He's come precisely when we need him. It's a good omen."
Chai Jin, too, was delighted.
Yati Qing entered the tent and respectfully greeted Song Jiang. They welcomed him with food and wine.
"Have you come by land or water, brother?" he was asked.
"By boat," he replied.
"Dai Zong told us you were attacking Huzhou. How is it going?" Song Jiang queried.
"After leaving Xuanzhou, General Lu divided his forces into two," said Yan Qing. "Half went with the vanguard against Huzhou. They killed the puppet garrison head Gong Wen and five of his sub-commanders and took the city. They destroyed and dispersed the enemy troops, reassured the populace, and dispatched a written report to Governor Zhang requesting that he send a prefect to take control for the crown. I was ordered to report the news to you. The other half, under Lin Chong, was ordered to capture Lone Pine Pass, then join us for the Hangzhou offensive. I've heard that they're fighting every day along the road to the pass, but they haven't been able to take it. General Lu and Zhu Wu have gone personally to assume command, leaving General Huyan to hold Huzhou until the governor sends a prefect. Then he is to attack and take Deqing County, before joining the offensive against Hangzhou."
"How many chieftains are involved in these campaigns? Can you tell me the names?"
"Twenty-three have gone for the assault on Long Pine Pass," Yan Qing replied. "They are Lu Junyi, Zhu Wu, Lin Chong, Dong Ping, Zhang Qin, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Ou Peng, Deng Fei, Li Zhong, Zhou Tong, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, Sun Xin, Gu Dasao, LiLi, Bai Sheng, Tang Long, Zhu Gui, Zhu Fu and Shi Qian.
"Nineteen, including Huyan Zhuo, are to hold Huzhou the moment and later attack Deqing County. They are Huyan Zhuo, Suo Chao, Mu Hong, Lei Heng, Yang Xiong, Liu Tang, Shan Tinggui, Wei Dingguo, Chen Da, Yang Chun, Xue Yong, Du Qian, Mu Chun, Li Yun, Shi Yong, Gong Wang, Ding Desun, Zhang Qing and Sun Erniang.
"When I left the actions were already being carried out."
"Dividing the force into two, under the circumstances, is obviously the best method. Lord Chai Jin has asked that you go with him into Fang La's territory and gather intelligence. Are you willing?"
"Certainly, if that is your wish, Commander-in-Chief." Pleased, Chai Jin said: "I will dress as a white-robed minor scholar. You disguise yourself as my servant. We'll stroll along carrying a lute, a sword, and a bag of books. Master and man—no one will suspect us. At the coast we'll find a boat and sail past Yuezhou, then follow a small road to Zhuji County. Then we'll cross the hills. It's not far from there to Muzhou."
"Yuezhou is part of our Central Plain," said Song Jiang. "Fang La has no control in that sector. I'll notify the local officials to give you safe conduct."
On the day designated Chai Jin and Yan Qing bid Song Jiang farewell and departed with lute, sword and books. They headed for the coast to find a boat and commence their intelligence operations. Of that we'll say no more.
Meanwhile, Military Advisor Wu Yong, addressing Song Jiang, said: "Along half the southern side of Hangzhou is the Qiantang River. It empties into the sea. A few men in a small boat could sail in around the coast, pass through the Zheshan Gate, and get up near the South Gate of the city. If they fired cannons and raised signal flags, they could cause great alarm in Hangzhou. Which of your naval chieftains could handle this mission?"
"Let us go," cried Zhang Heng and the three Ruan brothers, almost before the words were out of his mouth.
"Hangzhou's west side fronts on the lake. We'll need naval forces to get across there, too," said Song Jiang. "I can't let you all go."
"Zhang Heng and Ruan the Seventh, then," Wu Yong said to the two chieftains. "And you can take Hou Jian and Duan Jingzhu."
The chosen four set off with thirty or so sailors, and took with them a dozen cannons and signal flags. They skirted the coast until they found a craft, then sailed up along the Qiantang River.
Hear me, reader. This is a very diverse tale, handed down to us from the story-tellers of old. We couldn't possibly tell it all at one sitting. But we will sketch the broad outline, as you shall see. Remember it, for only thus will you be able to follow the complications and subtleties of the plot.
Song Jiang returned to Xiuzhou to plan the attack on Hangzhou. Suddenly, he was informed that an emissary was arriving from the Eastern Capital with imperial wine and rewards. Song Jiang and his commanders, high and low, welcomed him into the city, expressed their thanks, and feasted him at a banquet at which the imperial wine was served. During the course of the drinking the emissary said the emperor had a slight illness, and that the Royal Hospital wanted to summon Dr. An Daoquan to treat him. An imperial order had been issued, and the emissary had come to fetch the doctor. Song Jiang dared not refuse. The next day, he and his chieftains saw Dr. An off ten //out of the city on his journey back to the capital with the emissary.

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After dispensing rewards among the chieftains, he selected a day for dedicating his flags at a sacrificial ceremony and starting his march. Then he bid farewell to Deputy District Commander Liu Guangshi and staff officer Geng, mounted, and set forth, advancing on land and water, navy and cavalry coordinating. When they neared Chongte, the rebel general who was holding the county fled to Hangzhou.

Meanwhile, Fang La's eldest son Prince Fang Tianding was consulting with his generals in his external palace. It was located on the site of where the Soaring Dragon Palace stands today. The twenty-eight senior officers were discussing how to meet the threat of the Song army. Of these, four were marshals: Buddha of Precious Light Deng Yuanjue the National Advisor, Marshal Shi Bao the Great Southerner, General Li Tianrun the National Suppressor, and General Si Xingfang the Defender of the Country. Their military titles had been conferred on them by Fang La.

"Since Song Jiang has crossed the Yangzi as the vanguard of a combined land and naval operation, we've lost to him three large shires," said Prince Fang Tianding. "Only Hangzhou remains as the bulwark of our Southern Country. If we lose that, how will Muzhou stand? Not long ago our Astrologer the eunuch Pu Wenying reported to the throne that stars of earthly fiends would be invading our Wu area, and indeed we have suffered heavy losses there, precisely to those Song forces. You officers all hold high ranks, you owe our nation the utmost loyalty. Let no one be remiss in his duties to the crown."

"Rest assured, Your Highness," the generals replied. "With our crack troops and fierce commanders, we're more than a match for Song Jiang. Although we've lost several prefectures, the officers in charge were all incompetents. That's why they were defeated. We hear that Song Jiang and Lu Junyi are advancing on Hangzhou in three columns. If Your Highness and the National Advisor will hold the district of Ninghai as our eternal base, we generals will go forth and meet the foe."

Very pleased, the prince ordered his army to divide into three columns also to counter the enemy offensive. He retained only National Advisor Teng as defender of the city. The other three marshals each commanded a column. Si Xingfang, with four generals, was ordered to go to the relief of Deqing Prefecture. Li Tianrun, with four generals, was directed to reinforce Lone Pine Pass. Shi Bao as commanding marshal, plus eight generals, were to meet the foe's main contingent.

Each marshal was presented with gold and silks as an encouragement to an early departure. Marshal Si, on the way to Deqing with his column, headed first for Fengkou Town. Marshal Li and his column's first objective on their march to Lone Pine Pass was the prefecture of Yuhang.

Song Jiang and his army, winding forward, arrived at Linping Mountain. They saw on the summit a swath of red flags and considerable activity. Song Jiang sent Hua Rong and Qin Ming ahead as advance pickets, and urged his naval officers to get their boats—which were being transported on wheels—across the Changan Dyke.

Hua Rong and Qin Ming, with a thousand men, rounded the entrance to the mountains and ran directly into Shi Bao and his southern troops.

Two of his generals promptly charged the two chieftains. One was named Wang Ren, the other Feng Yi, and each wielded a long lance. The Song contingent spread out in battle formation. Qin Ming, brandishing his wolf-toothed cudgel, took on Feng Yi. Hua Rong, lance at the level, met Wang Ren. The four steeds dashed together, and their riders fought more than ten rounds, with neither side emerging as victor. The two chieftains observed that the southern army was being reinforced from the rear.

"A brief rest," they called, and all rode back to their respective positions.

"Don't be so impatient for battle," Hua Rong said. "Report the news to Big Brother, quickly. He'll have to discuss this."

A dispatch was rushed to the Central Army. Song Jiang, accompanied by Zhu Tong, Xu Ning, Huang Xin and Sun Li, hurried to the front. Southern generals Wang Ren and Feng Yi rode forward once more.

"We dare you defeated officers to come out and Fight again," they yelled.

Qin Ming, angered, waved his wolf-toothed cudgel and galloped towards Feng Yi. Wang Ren challenged Hua Rong. Before Hua could respond, Xu Ning kicked his mount and raced out with levelled lance. Xu Ning and Hua Rong were first and second in command in their unit—one gold lancer, one silver. Hua Rong now hastened after, fitting an arrow to his bow. When he was close enough, before the two could clash, he shot. The feathered missile hit Wang Ren and knocked him from his saddle.

The southern troops were much disheartened. Feng Yi, startled to see his colleague fall, grew clumsy. A blow on the head from Qin Ming's cudgel felled him to the ground.

The southern soldiers scattered and fled, with the slaughtering Song army hot on their heels. Shi Bao was unable to stem the tide. He retreated to the Gaoting Mountains and made camp near New East Bridge. But the Southerners didn't feel secure. They withdrew into the city that evening.

By the next day, the imperial forces had already crossed the Gaoting Mountains and themselves made camp at New East Bridge. Song Jiang directed that the army divide into three columns and proceed against Hangzhou in a pincers offensive. The first column—an infantry unit—would march from the town of Tangzhen against the city's East Gate. The second column—a naval unit—would go from New North Bridge to take Gutang, cut the western approaches, and assail the city gates facing the lake.

The center column was to consist of infantry, cavalry and naval forces and be divided into three detachments. Their objectives were Hangzhou's Beiguan Gate and Genshan Gate. Behind the advance detachment would come Song Jiang, Military Advisor Wu Yong and the overall command, followed by the third detachment—which would provide reinforcements and supplies on both land and water.

These dispositions having been agreed upon, the three columns set forth.

We'll speak first of the central column's advance detachment under Guan Sheng. Probing to New East Bridge, they encountered not a single southern soldier. Guan Sheng grew suspicious, pulled back and reported by messenger to Song Jiang, who then replied via Dai Zong.

"We cannot advance carelessly. Let two chieftains go out with pickets every day," was Song Jiang's order.

Hua Rong and Qin Ming went the first day, Xu Ning and Hao Siwen the second. But several days passed without any of the enemy coming forward to do battle.

Then Xu Ning and Hao Siwen, with a few dozen cavalry, roved as far as Hangzhou's Beiguan Gate. It was wide open. They rode up to the drawbridge. Battle drums thundered on the city wall, and out charged a troop of horsemen. The two chieftains hastily wheeled their mounts. Wild shouts rose on the road skirting the west of Hangzhou, and more than a hundred enemy cavalry galloped before them. Xu Ning, fighting desperately, managed to break through, but when he glanced back, there was no sign of Hao Siwen. Then he looked again, and saw scores of enemy officers leading the captured Hao into the city.

As Xu Ning hurriedly turned, and arrow struck him in the neck. He raced off with the missile still imbedded in his flesh, pursued by six southern generals. Luckily, he ran into Guan Sheng and was rescued, but he fainted from loss of blood. The six generals, chased off, returned to the city.

Guan Sheng hastily reported to Song Jiang, who rushed to see Xu Ning. The chieftain was bleeding from every orifice. Weeping, Song Jiang summoned an army doctor. The arrow as extracted and a salve for wounds from metal weapons applied. Song Jiang ordered that Xu Ning be placed on one of the naval vessels to rest, and he personally supervised the transfer. Four times Xu lapsed into unconsciousness. Only then did they realize he had been struck by a poisoned arrow. Song Jiang gazed up at the heavens and sighed.

"Our marvellous Dr. An Daoquan has been called to the capital. We have no talented physician here who can save him. We're going to lose another of our limbs!" Song Jiang was very distraught.

Wu Yong urged him to return to camp, and not let his feelings for a brother distract him from important military problems, to the detriment of the country. Song Jiang had Xu Ning sent to Xiuzhou to recuperate. Half a month of treatment was in vain. The poisoned arrow wound could not be cured, and Xu Ning died. But that was later.

Now, Song Jiang sent an agent into the midst of the foe to inquire about Hao Siwen. The next day he received a report: "On the city wall above the Beiguan Gate, Hao's head is hanging on display from a bamboo pole. We've just heard that Fang Tianding has cut his body to pieces!"

Song Jiang felt very badly. Half a month later, he received news of the death of Xu Ning. The loss of these two chieftains created difficulties for him in deploying his troops. He remained holding the highway.

Li Jun, whose column arrived at New North Bridge, sent a unit ahead to scout out the road to Gutang, deep in the hills. A report was quickly brought back: Hao Siwen had been decapitated and Xu Ning killed by a poisoned arrow.

"It seems to me," Li Jun said to Zhang Shun, "our main objective is the juncture of the roads to Lone Pine Pass and the Huzhou-Deqing sector. Enemy soldiers are in and out of there all the time. But while we're throttling their transport lines, they can be attacking us from two sides. We don't have enough men to meet a double assault. We'd be better off pushing into the western hills and setting up there. Our battlefield will be West Lake. Behind the hills is the road to Zhongxi. It's a good escape route."

He dispatched a junior officer to get Song Jiang's approval, then led his troops over Taoyuan Ridge into the western hills. They made camp at what is known as Lingyin Monastery. He also established a small encampment on the north side of the hills at Xixi Gap, today called Gutang Hollow. His forward pickets were at Tangjiawa.

"The southern soldiers have withdrawn into Hangzhou," Zhang Shun said to Li Jun. "They haven't come out to fight in half a month. If we just hang around in these hills we'll never earn any distinctions. What I'd like to do is swim across the lake, slip in under the water gate and set some fires. That will be your signal to assail the water gate. Once you've taken it, report the seizure to Big Brother, and all three columns can attack Hangzhou together."

"A good idea. But I'm afraid you can't do it alone."

"After all the kindness Big Brother has shown me over the years, it will be a small recompense."

"Wait at least till I've requested him to send us reinforcements."

"We can be doing both at the same time. He'll know by the time you've entered the city."

That evening, Zhang Shun concealed a sharp dagger on his person, ate a good meal replete with wine, and walked to the edge of West Lake. He gazed at the green hills on three sides, at the azure water, and peered across at the distant city, with its four closed gates fronting on the opposite shore. The gates were called Qiantang, Yongjin, Qingbo and Qianhu.

Reader, please note, West Lake was not then what it became subsequent to the southern migration. Only after the Golden Tartars and the Song Empire made peace and ended their warfare, and the emperor moved the capital to Hangzhou, did the area achieve its great prosperity. Dozens of scenic spots were set up along the lake. The green hills on three sides provided a remarkable background. The colorful boats and taverns, the cool pavilions overlooking the water, were indeed a pleasure to behold. As the famous Su Dongpo put it in one of his poems:

*Neath Clear skies how charmingly glistens the lake,*
*Strangely lovely the hills when shrouded in rain.*
*West Lake may with Xi Zi compare,*
*Adorned or natural, equally fair.*

Another of his verses remarks:

*Hill after green tower beyond tower,*
*Song and dance at West Lake endlessly flow.*
*Visitors drunk on the heady warm breeze,*
*Consider Hangzhou another Bianzhou.*[2]

Subsequently others also wrote poems and rhymes about the beauties of West Lake—far too many to record.

On Xiling Bridge, Zhang Shun halted and stared for a long time. It was a warm spring day, the lake was a deep blue, the surrounding hills were jade green.

"I grew up on the Xunyang River and encountered many a wind and wave," Zhang Shun mused, "but never have I seen such an enthralling body of water! Whoever died here would be a happy ghost!"

He removed his cloth shirt and put it beneath the bridge. He bound his hair in a topknot with red yarn. He tied a silk skirt round his waist with a sash, and from this hung a dagger. Barefoot, he plunged into the lake and swam across under water. It was around the first watch, and the moon was pale.

When he neared Yongjin Gate, Zhang Shun raised his head above the surface and listened. A drum on the city wall struck the fourth interval of the first watch. The area between the wall and the lakefront was still and deserted. Four or five soldiers were watching from the ramparts. Zhang Shun quickly submerged. After a time, he again poked his head out. There was no one to be seen upon the wall.

He groped in the channel beneath the water gate. It was blocked by an iron lattice, and above that, a heavy drape. The ropes by which the drape was attached were hung with copper bells. Zhang Shun, finding the lattice-work impenetrable, tugged at the drape, setting the bells to jangling. Men shouted on the wall. Zhang Shun, moving swiftly beneath the surface, swam back to the lake.

Soldiers came down and examined the drape, but they couldn't find anyone, and returned to the ramparts. "Some large fish must have bumped into it," they concluded, "and set those bells off." They maintained a lookout for a while, then went back to sleep.

Zhang Shun listened. Soon, the drum on the wall struck the third watch. He waited a long time, till he was sure the soldiers were sleeping soundly. Then he crept ashore. Since he couldn't get in through the water gate, and since he couldn't see anyone on the wall, he decided he would attempt to climb over.

"If there are soldiers up there, I'll be throwing my life away," he said to himself. "Let's see."

He felt around for a clod of earth and tossed it up. Soldiers who weren't asleep raised a clamor. Again they descended and inspected the water gate, and again they found nothing. From the tower on the wall, they peered out at the lake. There wasn't a single boat anywhere. Prince Fang Tianding had ordered all craft to moor outside Qingbo Gate or in Jingci Cove, and no other place.

"Queer," the soldiers exclaimed. "It's surely a ghost. We'll just go to sleep and ignore it."

Although that was what they said, actually they didn't retire, but crouched vigilantly behind the ramparts. Zhang Shun listened for an entire watch. Nothing was stirring. He crept to the foot of the wall. There was no sound from the watchman's drum. Zhang Shun cautiously threw up another clod. Still no response.

"It's the fourth watch already. The sky will soon be light," he thought. "It's now or never!"

He was halfway up the wall when a loud tattoo roused the soldiers. He leaped down into the channel and started to swim. A deluge of arrows, javelins and stones poured into him from the ramparts. Poor heroic Zhang Shun gave his life in the channel at Yongjin Gate!

That same day, Song Jiang received a report from Li Jun: "Zhang Shun is swimming into Hangzhou. He'll set fires as a signal for us to attack." The information was transmitted to the troops outside of East Gate.

Song Jiang conferred in his tent with Wu Yong that night until the fourth watch. Wearily, he dismissed his aides and reclined his head on the table.

A sudden gust of icy wind brought him bolt upright. The lamplight dimmed. It was frightfully cold. When his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he saw a figure that was neither ghost nor human, standing in the chill mist. It was spattered with blood.

"Big Brother has lavished his kindness upon me for many years," said the figure in a low voice. "I offer my dead body as recompense. I was killed today by javelins and arrows at Yongjin Gate. I come to bid you farewell."

"Aren't you brother Zhang Shun?" Song Jiang cried. He turned and saw on the other side of the tent another three or four bloodstained figures. He couldn't make out who they were. He burst into tears and awoke. It had all been a dream.

Aides, hearing the sound of his weeping, rushed into the tent. "How strange," said Song Jiang. He asked the military advisor to interpret the dream for him.

"You were just over-tired," said Wu Yong, "and you had a nightmare."

Song Jiang told exactly what had occurred in his dream. Wu Yong replied soothingly: "Didn't Li Jun say that Zhang Shun was going to cross the lake and set signal fires in the city? It was on your mind and you had a bad dream."

"Zhang Shun was a very clever fellow. If he perished, it surely was a blameless death," Song Jiang avowed.

"That's a very dangerous stretch, from the shore to the city wall. It's quite probable he lost life, and his ghost came in a dream to inform you."

"But who were the other three or four?"

Neither Song Jiang nor Wu Yong could guess. They sat talking until daybreak. Nothing seemed to be happening in the city, and this made them all the more suspicious.

In the afternoon, Li Jun rushed a dispatch to them: "Zhang Shun tried to scale the wall at Yongjin Gate, and was killed in the water by arrows! His head is hanging from a bamboo pole on the wall west of the lake!"

Song Jiang wept and collapsed in a faint. Wu Yong and the other chieftains all felt terrible. Zhang Shun was exceptionally good to people, and was very well liked.

"I feel worse than if I lost my father or mother," cried Song Jiang. "The agony goes to my very heart and marrow!"

"You should concentrate on important national affairs, brother," Wu Yong and the chieftains urged. "Don't let your grief injure your health."

"I must go to the lakeside and mourn him."

"It's too risky. If the enemy finds out, they'll surely attack."

"I know how to deal with that." Song Jiang sent Li Kui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong, and Li Gun on ahead with five hundred infantry to reconnoitre. He himself followed with Shi Xiu, Dai Zong, Fan Rui and Ma Lin and another five hundred. They proceeded quietly along the paths in the western hills towards Li Jun's camp. On learning that they were coming, Li Jun met them halfway. He led the chieftains into the meditation hall of the Lingyin Monastery for a rest. Song Jiang again wept. He asked the monks to pray that Zhang Shun's ghost be allowed to become a spirit and enter Heaven. The next evening, he directed a junior officer to erect a white banner on Xiling Bridge by the lake shore, reading: *Soul of Departed Brother and General Zhang Shun,* and lay out many objects for a sacrificial ceremony. He also gave secret instructions to Li Kui. At the start of the road leading to the northern hills, he put Fan Rui, Ma Lin and Shi Xiu into ambush on both sides of the bridge. Dai Zong he kept with him. Shortly before the first watch, Song Jiang donned a white robe and golden helmet bound in mourning silk, and walked with Dai Zong and six or seven monks from Small Stroll Hill to Xiling Bridge. The young officer had already tethered a black pig and a white sheep, laid out sacrificial objects of gold and silver, and lit candles and lanterns and incense. Song Jiang testified to his friendship with Zhang Shun and, facing the Yongjin Gate, wept. Dai Zong stood by his side. The monks rang their bells and chanted scriptures. They called to the soul of Zhang Shun, beseeching it to descend on the spirit flag. Then Dai Zong read the sacrificial address, and Song Jiang poured the libation wine upon the ground. Weeping, he raised his head to the eastern heavens. Suddenly, shouts arose on either side of the bridge. Drums thundered in the northern and southern hills, and from each direction a troop of equestrians came tearing down to seize Song Jiang. Truly, a place of sacrifice to a chivalrous departed comrade became a small battlefield in the service of the sovereign; the slaughter of a few southern officers stirred the waves of West Lake sky high.

Now what Red told the White-Water Dragon was this: "I am not very clever, I'm just a country bumpkin in fact, but wise men say, so I hear: 'In this world there are both successes and defeats, men must rise and men must fall.' You, brother, have done honourable service on Mount Liang for a good many years. You have seen many battles and many victories. When you lot defeated the Liao Tartars, you didn't lose a single one of your comrades. But now you're up against Fang La, and evidently your confi-dence has received a blow. Maybe your luck has run out. You may ask why I don't want an official post. Because of the state world's in, that's why. When peace comes, there will be many who have it in for you. There's an old saying, 'It's the soldier who secures peace, but he never enjoys it himself.' How true that is! Since we are now blood brothers, why don't all of us, meaning you three too, while we've still got time, find us a quiet place to make a living — raise a little capital, get ourselves a big boat and some sailors to man it, and sail the rivers and seas till we reach the place to lay down our bones. Wouldn't that be a blessed state?"

White-Water Dragon heard him out. Then he threw himself down and said respectfully: "My dear friend, your words are truly enlightening and inspiring. The trouble is Fang La has not yet been defeated and I cannot abandon Song Jiang. It would be unforgivable. If I were to go with you now, I would be throwing away a lifetime of hard-earned honour. But if you can wait for me, until such time as Fang La has submitted, I and my two brothers will return. I really hope you will assist us and prepare the way. You have my word and if I don't keep this promise, you can say I'm no true man!"

The four said: "We'll get the boat ready, then, and we'll be looking forward to your coming. Please don't let us down!"

Both sides drank wine to conclude the pact and swore to keep their word.

Next day they bade farewell and returned to see Song Jiang. They explained to him how Red and his pals did not want to be given posts and only wanted to catch fish and live an easy life. Song Jiang sighed for a while, and then gave orders for the land and water-borne troops to prepare for sailing.

The province of Wujiang was now free of rebels. When they took Pingwang with a determined attack, Xiuzhou lay before them. This province's governor Duan Kai had heard about Third Prince Fang Mao's death in Suzhou and was busy packing up to leave when his scouts reported that a big army was not far off. Looking out over water and land he saw banners blotting out the sun from a combined force of boats and cavalry, and had the kind of shock that makes the spirit quail, the organs fail. The first detachment under Scimitar and Thunderclap was at the city walls; the boats moved up to surround the west gate. Duan Kai shouted

down from the wall: "Don't attack! We surrender!" The city gates were opened and with incense and candles, with sheep and wine, Duan Kai welcomed Song Jiang into the city and had him taken to the governor's residence to rest. Since the Governor himself had been the first to welcome him, Song Jiang set him at ease, calling him a loyal official, issuing at the same time a proclamation to reassure the people. Duan Kai said: "We were indeed loyal to the Emperor, but we were under duress from Fang La and could not follow our own inclination. Now the imperial army is here, what else should we do but surrender?"

Song Jiang asked for some detailed information: "Who is in command of the defence of Hangzhou? How many troops and generals do they have?"

"Hangzhou covers a large area, thickly populated. It can be approached by land from the north. To the south is the river, to the west the lake. It is defended by Fang La's eldest son, Southern Prince Fang Tianding. He has more than seventy thousand troops, twenty-four generals and four marshals, twenty-eight commanders in all. The two senior ones are very brave. One is a monk from Shezhou often called Tathagata, Precious Light, whose religious name is Original Enlightenment. His weapon is a big staff made of solid steel that must weigh over fifty catties. He is held to be a religious master. The other is Shi Bao whose chief weapon is a flying hammer that doesn't miss, though he also manages a sword known as the Wind-Slicer, which can cut copper or iron and slice through three layers of armour plate like thin air. There's also another twenty-six officers, all excellent soldiers and very brave. You must not underestimate them."

Song Jiang rewarded Duan Kai for this information and then sent him off to Marshal Zhang at headquarters to put him in the picture. Later this Duan Kai served under Marshal Zhang in the garrison at Suzhou, while Zhang's deputy, Liu Shiguang, took over the garrison at Xiuzhou, and Song Jiang moved his troops forward to Zuiliting and set up camp there.

When Song Jiang feasted his army and held a meeting to discuss the strategy for taking Hangzhou, Mr. Chai stood up and said: "Ever since you saved my life at Gaotang I have remained conscious of the debt I owe you and which I have not yet repaid. I now propose that I should infiltrate Fang La's lair to spy on him. If I am successful, it will be something to recompense the Emperor and also add to your renown. Have I your permission to do this?"

Song Jiang replied delightedly: "If you are prepared to go and beard the villain in his den and find out the lay of the land for us, it will enable us to launch an attack, capture Fang La and hand him over to the authorities. That will be no small service indeed and will bring honour and riches to us all. But I fear this mission may simply be too dangerous."

"I am not afraid of dying. Only it would be good to have the Prodigy as companion. He is someone who knows all the roads and can speak the local patois. In addition he knows how to adapt to circumstances."

Song Jiang said: "How could I refuse? The only problem is that the Prodigy has been posted to the Unicorn's command. We will have to send for him."

In the middle of this discussion, a sentry reported: "The Prodigy is here with a report from the Unicorn."

Song Jiang said excitedly: "This expedition of yours, brother, is bound to be a success! The fact that the Prodigy has just turned up here like this is an excellent omen!"

When the Prodigy had reported and been given food and drink, Song Jiang asked him: "Did you come by land or by water?"

"I came by boat," he answered.

"When the Magic Messenger came back he told us that the attack on Huzhou had started," Song Jiang went on. "How is it going?"

"When he marched from Xuanzhou, the Unicorn divided his army into two columns," the Prodigy replied. "He himself led a thousand cavalry against Huzhou, and killed the usurper's governor and five of his lieutenants. Huzhou capitulated and all the enemy troops were destroyed. A proclamation was issued to reassure the people, a request was sent to Marshal Zhang to secure the city, and I was sent here to report to you. The general's other column of troops was led by Leopard's Head with orders to capture Lone Pine Pass and meet up at Hangzhou. At the time when I left I heard that there had been heavy fighting every day on the road to Lone Pine Pass and they had not managed to take it. The Unicorn was planning to go there himself with the Strategist, leaving Twin Rods in command of the army, to guard Huzhou until someone was sent to take over there and with orders to strengthen the defences and pacify the people, and then proceed to take Deqing and rendezvous at Hangzhou."

"Can you tell me which commanders were detailed to guard Huzhou and take Deqing, and which were sent to attack Lone Pine Pass?" Song Jiang asked. "How many were sent off and how many remained with Twin Rods?"

"There are twenty-three for Lone Pine Pass and nineteen for Huzhou and Deqing. Here is the list," the Prodigy said. "At the time I left they had settled the arrangements and were planning to start the attack soon after."

"It's good that the attack will be on two fronts," Song Jiang said. "But Mr. Chai wants you to go with him on a spying mission to Fang La's den. Are you willing to go?"

"If those are your orders, of course I will go. I shall be delighted to accompany Mr. Chai."

Mr. Chai was well pleased: "I shall go as an unemployed scholar and you can dress as a servant. We'll travel as master and servant, and we'll take a lute, a sword and some books. No one will suspect us. We'll go to the coast and take a boat, travelling via Yuezhou. Then we'll take the small roads to Zhuji, cross the mountains and from there it's no distance to Muzhou."

A day later Mr. Chai and the Prodigy said farewell to Song Jiang, picked up their lute, sword and books and headed for the coast to find a boat. Of this no more.

Now the Professor said to Song Jiang: "On the south of Hangzhou is the Qiantang River, which connects it to the sea. If a number of people sail up from the coast via Redcliff Gorge, tie up on the river bank outside the southern gate and let off rockets and raise signal flags, it will cause panic. Which of you boat commanders would like to give it a try?"

Almost before he finished speaking, the Pilot and the Ruan brothers said: "We'll go!"

Song Jiang said: "On the west side Hangzhou adjoins the West Lake. We'll also want boat commanders for crossing that. You can't all go."

The Professor said: "Why not let the Pilot and Ruan the Seventh go to manage the boats, and the Ape and Yellow Dog go with them." So it was agreed that it should be these four with thirty sailors, taking with them a dozen or so flares and signal flags. They were to head for the coast and find a boat to take them up the Qiantang River.

You know, friends, telling this story is like flinging a handful of sand. When my predecessors recorded the events, they wanted to tell it all, every detail, but you simply can't tell everything at once. But gradually the plot will unfold and you shall know all. For the moment just try to remember the general direction. Later all that is most hidden will be revealed.

After designating his troops Song Jiang returned to Xiuzhou and planned the attack on Hangzhou. Suddenly he heard that an envoy from the capital had arrived with imperial wine to reward the troops. He went with all his officers to receive this gentleman and welcome him to the city. Thanks were expressed and there was a banquet in the envoy's honour to accompany the wine. During these celebrations the envoy mentioned that the Emperor was indisposed and the Medical Council had requested the services of Doctor An Daoquan. He was carrying an order to this effect and had instructions to take Doctor An back with him. Song Jiang dared not refuse. Next day when the celebrations ended arrangements were made to send Doctor An to the capital. Song Jiang and the rest went as far as the three-mile pavilion to see them off and drink a parting cup with them.

Meanwhile the bounty brought by the Emperor's envoy was divided among the leaders and after that they said their farewells, mounted and set off. As it was to be a joint attack by land and water, the boats sailed at the same time and they headed for Hangzhou. When the governor heard he fled to Hangzhou.

Now Fang La's son, Southern Prince Fang Tianding, was holding a meeting in the travelling palace — the site of this is the place we now call Flying Dragon Inn. Under his command he had four generals, all appointed by Fang La. He also had twenty-four senior commanders. That made twenty-eight in all in his garrison. They were all present to discuss the situation.

The Southern Prince said: "Since Song Jiang invaded across the river we have lost three cities to him. Now only Hangzhou remains as a shield for the south. If it meets with disaster, how will we defend Muzhou? Previously the royal astronomer declared that evil stars had invaded the territory of Wu, portending great disasters. It must have meant this bunch. Since they have violated our frontiers, you have a responsibility, all of you, to defend your country to the last drop of your blood. There must be no shirking!"

There was a chorus of reassurance: "Never fear, Sire. We have many excellent soldiers and commanders who have not yet had a proper go at them. Although we have lost a certain amount of territory, that is only because we did not have the right personnel in place. We have heard that Song Jiang and the Unicorn are advancing in three columns to attack Hangzhou. Your Highness and the Marshal should fortify the city, you can make it impregn-able. We generals will each lead our troops into the field."

The Southern Prince was greatly encouraged by this and gave orders for the army to advance in three detachments and engage the enemy, leaving only the monk Precious Light to stay with him and guard the city.

Three generals divided the army, each taking one division. This done they were all rewarded and urged to start. Marshal Si Hengfang took one division of troops to relieve Deqing and set off towards Yuhang. We can forget the other two divisions, for we shall now join Song Jiang's army marching towards Linping Mountain, on whose summit they see a red banner flying. Song Jiang sent Colonel Hua and Thunderclap to investigate and at the same time urged the boats and carts to proceed with all haste to Chang'an Landing.

When Colonel Hua and Thunderclap with a thousand cavalry reached the mouth of the pass, they encountered the southern troops under Shi Bao. Two southern commanders riding in front, Wang Ren and Feng Yi, charged the enemy on sight. They thundered forward, lances at the ready. Colonel Hua and Thunderclap formed up their troops and then Thunderclap brandishing his great wolf-tooth's mace took on Feng Yi while Colonel Hua levelled his spear at Wang Ren. Four horses clashed and they fought ten bouts, but no one had the advantage. Colonel Hua and Thunderclap seeing the enemy commanders had reinforcements behind them, shouted out: "We'll take a rest!", turned their horses and returned to their own lines.

Colonel Hua said: "Do not renew this fight, brother. Let us go back to consult the Leader and consider what to do." The rearguard hurriedly turned back to report to the main army. Song Jiang now rode forward with four more leaders: Whiskers, Spearsman, Tamer and Colonel Sun. Feng Yi and Wang Ren again rode forward and shouted abuse: "Do the leaders we defeated not dare come back for more?"

Thunderclap, enraged by this, brandished his mace, gave free rein to his horse and charged Feng Yi. Wang Ren challenged Colonel Hua, but at this moment Spearsman rode forward with levelled spear. He and Colonel Hua made a perfect pair. one with a gold lance the other with a silver lance. Colonel Hua also urged his horse forward in the wake of Spearsman. He grasped his bow and fitted an arrow to it. Before Spearsman and Wang Ren could meet, he took careful aim and released an arrow. It toppled Wang Ren from his horse. At this the southerners lost heart. Feng Yi had a shock when he saw his comrade fall; before he had time to strike a blow he was hit on the head by Thunderclap and fell from his horse. The Song contingent charged and Marshal Shi Bao's forces were overwhelmed and retreated hastily to Look-out Hill, taking up a position near New East Bridge. By now it was getting late and no one had a clear plan, so the southern troops retreated into the city.

Next day Song Jiang passed Look-out Hill and took up a position where he could threaten New East Bridge. He ordered his army to be divided into three units for the attack on Hangzhou. The first of these consisted of infantry under Whiskers and five others, the boat crews under White-Water Dragon, and a contingent of cavalry and foot under Scimitar. The main force was led by Song Jiang and the Professor with seventeen others. The support group was under Skyhawk.

It's either too much or too little, that's the problem. I must now tell how Scimitar, leading the vanguard of the main army reconnoitred as far as New East Bridge, and saw no sign of the southern army. But he was suspicious and after withdrawing from the bridge sent a message back to Song Jiang. Song Jiang sent Magic Messenger with this warning: "We must not go in recklessly. Establish a roster for two of the commanders in turn to lead a patrol."

Colonel Hua and Thunderclap went the first day, Spearsman and Hound the second. This went on for several days — and still no sign of the enemy. One day, when it was again the turn of Spearsman and Hound, they took a dozen cavalrymen and rode as far as the North Gate of the city. They found it open. But when they went through to take a look at the drawbridge, there was a thunder of drums from within and a squadron of cavalry charged out. Spearsman and Hound turned their horses, but a cry went up on a road west of the city and over a hundred horsemen galloped forward. Spearsman fought for his life to break through the attacking cavalry. When he turned to look back he could not see Hound. Later he looked again just in time to see a group of southern officers taking Hound off a prisoner into the city. As he turned again to flee, an arrow struck him in the back of the neck. He galloped on with the arrow still stuck in him, six enemy commanders in pursuit. They came upon Scimitar who delivered him from his pursuers. When Spearsman got back he fainted from loss of blood.

After forcing back the southern commanders, Scimitar hurriedly reported to Song Jiang and told him what had happened. Song Jiang rushed off to look at Spearsman. He was bleeding at mouth, nose and ears and Song Jiang wept and then ordered the army doctor to try to save him. The arrow was pulled out and a special salve applied. Song Jiang ordered the wounded man to be carried down into one of the boats to rest and went to see him there himself. Spearsman lost consciousness four or five times that night, and they knew then that the arrow which had hit him was poisoned. Gazing heavenwards Song Jiang sighed and said: "Doctor An has been taken away from us by the authorities in the capital and now we have no doctor expert enough to save him. Therefore I must lose another of my limbs!" His grief knew no bounds.

The Professor came and implored Song Jiang to return to the camp and take charge of the military situation again and not to let personal grief ruin affairs of state. Song Jiang had Spearsman sent back to Xiuzhou for treatment but it seemed there was no antidote for the poison. He also sent someone off to get news of Hound. Next day a soldier came and reported: "Hound's head has been stuck on a pole on the battlements at the North Gate of Hangzhou." Later it was learnt that he had been cut to pieces by the Southern Prince. Song Jiang was exceedingly pained by this news. In less than two weeks the news came that Spearsman had died. Overcome by the loss of two more leaders, Song Jiang gave no orders for his army to advance and they remained where they were, blocking the road.

Meanwhile White-Water Dragon and his party had advanced to New North Bridge and taken up a position there. After sending some scouts on to Gutang, deep in the mountains, to reconnoitre the route, he received the report of the two leaders' deaths. He discussed the situation with White Eel: "This road we're on, I reckon the important thing is that it controls the route between Lone Pine Pass, Huzhou and Deqing. If the enemy want to come and go along it and we stand in their way, they can fall on us from both sides. There's only a few of us, we won't be able to make a stand against them. Would it not be better to push on into the Western Mountains and take up a strong position there? The waters of the West Lake are the ideal battlefield for us. And behind the Western Mountains you come down to the West River, so there's a good escape route." He sent a soldier to inform Song Jiang and ask for his instructions. Later on they marched to Peach Garden Ridge, deep within the mountain range and made camp in what is now called Temple of the Holy Mystery. North of the mountains in the gorge of the West River they also set up a smaller camp, in what is now Gutang. A reconnaissance party was sent on to Tangjiawa. That day White Eel said to White-Water Dragon: "The southern army have all withdrawn into Hangzhou. For two weeks we have seen no enemy. How are we ever going to win fame stuck here in these mountains? I'd like to swim the lake and enter the city secretly through the water gate and start a fire as a signal. Then you can bring the army and seize their water gate and send word to the Leader and all three columns of the main army can attack the city together."

"It's a good idea, but I don't see how you will be able to carry it out on your own."

"If I had to give my life in order to repay the Leader for so many years of good treatment, it would not be a lot," said White Eel.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry then. Wait till I have informed the Leader, so he can arrange the back-up troops."

"I shall get going whilst you send the messenger. By the time I reach the city the Leader will know about it."

So that night White Eel took a dagger with a spade-shaped blade and concealed it on his person, and ate and drank his fill. When he reached the shore of the West Lake he looked about and saw blue hills on three sides, the green water of the lake and in the distance the city with its four main gate towers rising above the lake. Those four gates were Embankment Gate, Goldenflood Gate, Brightwave Gate and Lakeside Gate. You see, friends, this Hangzhou was once, before even the days of Song, called Clearwater City and it was under King Qian that it became Hangzhou, capital of the Ninghai commandery. Ten gates were built then: on the east Market Gate and Fodder Bridge Gate; on the south Tidal Gate and the Gate of Encounters; on the west Lakeside Gate, Brightwave Gate, Goldenflood Gate and Embankment Gate; on the north North Gate and Mount Gen Gate. After the Song court moved to the south, the city was further embellished: it became known as City of Flowers, or Peace Capital, and three more gates were added. But in those days, when it was occupied by Fang La, it was still the old city of King Qian. It had a circumference of thirty miles and though not as splendid as it was to become after the Emperor's move south it was exceedingly rich and orderly, the scenery of river and mountains was as beautiful as always and the people flourishing, whence the saying: "Above is Heaven but below we have Suzhou and Hangzhou."

The incomparable beauty of the West Lake in the days of Song is simply impossible to describe. White Eel stood on the shore and gazed for hours. It was a warm spring evening. the waters of the lake were suffused with purple and all around the mountains clustered in folds of kingfisher blue. "I was born on the banks of the Yangtze," White Eel said to himself. "Great winds, huge waves, I have seen all that a million times, but never did I see anything like the beauty of this lake. If I were to die right here, I would become a happy ghost!" So saying he took off his shirt and laid it out on the bridge. He wound a piece of red cloth about his head and wrapped his silk bathing costume around his waist. He donned a garment that left his torso bare and attached a knife. Barefooted he slipped into the water and began to swim along the bottom of the lake.

It was early evening and the moonlight was only faint as White Eel groped his way toward Goldenflood Gate. When he poked his head out of the water to listen, he heard the drum beat announce the hour: it was the last quarter of the first watch, half-past eight. All was quiet outside the walls, not a person to be seen. On the battlements close to the parapet there were four or five sentries. White Eel dived again and waited a while before poking his head out to have another look.

All was quiet on the battlements this time, no one stirring. White Eel made his way along towards the doors of the lock. They were protected by an iron grating. He felt along this and found it covered by a net to which a rope was attached. On the other end of the rope was a bell. The grating was strong and it was impossible to enter the city that way. When he touched the net it pulled the rope and the bell rang on the other end. Immediately there was a hubbub on the city walls. White Eel dived to the bottom and waited. He heard the soldiers come down to examine the net. When they found no one, he heard them say: "Must be a big fish disturbed the net. Must have bumped into it." They poked around for a while but they found nothing so they all went back to sleep.

A little while passed and White Eel heard the drum beat for the third watch, eleven o'clock. He waited till after half-past and then decided the soldiers must all be fast asleep. He swam close to the wall again. It was evidently impossible to enter the city from the water, so he climbed out onto the bank. There was no one to be seen up on the battlements and he decided to climb the wall. But if there was someone watching up there, he thought, he would lose his life. He had better make a test first. He found a clod of earth and threw it at the top of the wall. One of the sentries who was not sleeping gave the alarm and came to look at the water gate again. But he could see nothing moving so he went back up onto the wall and from the look-out scrutinized the surface of the lake. No sign of any boat. Of course all the boats on the West Lake by order of the Southern Prince had been assembled in the Harbour of Compassion at Brightwave Gate, so there should not be any boats anywhere else.

"What are you making such a fuss about?" the other guards asked the man. "Must be a ghost," he muttered. "We'd better go back to sleep and not upset him!" This is what he said, but in fact he did not go to sleep but remained on watch concealing himself behind the battlements. White Eel waited till the next watch was sounded. All seemed quiet. He stole over to the wall to listen. The drum was silent now. He was still nervous about climbing, so he picked up another clod of earth and threw it. There was no response. He thought to himself: "It's already the fourth watch. If I don't climb this wall before dawn, I won't get another chance."

He was half-way up when he heard a challenge from above. All the guards were alerted. From half-way up the wall he plunged down into the water, hoping to conceal himself by diving. But bows and crossbows on the wall were pouring down a deadly hail of arrows and missiles. Thus did our unhappy hero die, right there in the water at the foot of Goldenflood Gate!

*One expects a great fighter will die by the sword;*
*A watery death is the swimmer's reward.*
*It's close to the well that the pot gets broken,*
*Cut out the heroics, or you'll wish you'd not spoken!*

Our story now divides. We will speak of Song Jiang who had received White-Water Dragon's report informing him that White Eel was going to enter the city from the water and send a fire signal and had informed the contingent at the east gate of this plan.

That evening Song Jiang was discussing things in his tent with the Professor. In the fourth watch a great tiredness came over him. He dismissed his aides and lay down on a bench to sleep. Suddenly he felt a cold wind. When he sat up to look, the lamp grew dim and he was assailed by an icy draught. As he strained his eyes to see, something appeared, not exactly a person and not exactly a ghost, in a miasma of cold air. This figure was covered in blood. It spoke softly: "I followed you for many years, brother. You treated me always with great generosity. Now my death repays you. I died at Goldenflood Gate, shot by an arrow. I have come to say farewell!"

Song Jiang said: "Can it be White Eel?" Turning to another side he saw three or four others, all covered in blood, though he could not make them out clearly. He cried out in pain, and suddenly awoke. It had all been a dream. Hearing him cry out the guards outside his tent rushed in. Song Jiang said: "Most strange!" He summoned the Professor to interpret his dream.

"You were just very tired, my friend," the Professor said. "What sort of strange dream did you have?"

"There was a current of cold air and I perceived the figure of White Eel covered in blood standing just here. He said 'I followed you for many years and you always treated me kindly. Now I have laid down my life for you. I died at Goldenflood Gate, shot by an arrow, and I have come to say farewell.' When I turned I saw three or four others also covered in blood, but I couldn't make out who they were. Then I woke up crying."

The Professor said: "Earlier the White-Water Dragon told you White Eel was going to cross the lake to enter the city and start a fire. That must have been on your mind, that's why you had this nightmare."

"I can't help thinking that White Eel is such a clever person, but yet there might be something quite beyond his control that has caused his death."

"To reach the city from the West Lake must be a most dangerous undertaking. I fear he could indeed have lost his life. It could be why his ghost came to visit your dream."
"Who are those others then?" said Song Jiang.
He and the Professor discussed it but came to no conclusions. They sat and waited for dawn. There was no sign of activity in the city and they began to get over their fears. At noon a messenger arrived from White-Water Dragon and told them: "White Eel tried to get into the city by Goldenflood Gate and was hit by an arrow. He died in the water and now his head is stuck on a pole over the West Lake as an example to the people."
Song Jiang was so overcome by grief at this news that he fainted. The Professor and the others were also extremely upset. White Eel was such a good person and everyone loved him dearly.
Song Jiang said: "Had it been my father and mother the loss could not have been more painful. This news has pierced my heart."
The others tried to comfort him. "You must keep in mind our mission. You must not let your feelings get the better of you."
"I must go myself to the lakeside to mourn him."
The Professor warned, "You mustn't put yourself in danger. If the enemy hears of it, they'll attack."
Song Jiang said: "I know what to do."
He sent Iron Ox, Pluto, 8-Armed Ogre, and Winged Ghost with 500 infantry to reconnoitre, while he himself followed with Madcap, Magic Messenger, Demon King, the Flautist, and 500 troops, travelling secretly to White-Water Dragon's camp by small paths through the Western Mountains. They welcomed him and took him to rest in the abbot's quarters of the Temple of the Holy Mystery. He cried a while longer, and then asked the monks to recite sutras and make offerings for the spirit of White Eel. The following evening he told the troops to set up a white funeral banner beside the lake bearing the words: "To commemorate the spirit of our brother, White Eel, bold and righteous commander." This was planted at the waterside while offerings were placed on the Bridge of the Western Mound and Iron Ox was given certain instructions. A watch was set up on the road north where it entered a defile into the mountains, with Demon King, the Flautist and Madcap concealed on either side; Magic Messenger remained with Song Jiang. As soon as night began to fall, nearly the first watch, Song Jiang donned a white robe and a bronze helmet swathed in white silk for mourning, and made his way down from the mountain with Magic Messenger and half a dozen monks to the Bridge of the Western Mound. The orderlies had lined up offerings of black pig and white lamb and paper money. Lamps and candles were lit and incense was burning. Song Jiang wrote the name of the deceased on the tablet and cast his gaze downward from the bridge as he mourned. Magic Messenger stood a little to one side. The monks began to ring bells and chant, calling out the dead man's name and singing his praises and lowering the funeral banners. Then Magic Messenger read the eulogy and Song Jiang poured the libation with his own hands. He wept as he directed his eyes towards the eastern sky. While Song Jiang was thus mourning, loud shouts were heard from either side and drums sounded simultaneously on the hills north and south. Two fierce forces were racing towards them intent on capturing Song Jiang.

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## The ghost of White Eel Zhang Shun captures Fang Tianding the Southern Prince; Song Jiang takes Ninghai District Commandery with a trick

When he went with Dai Zong to sacrifice to the spirit of Zhang Shun at Xiling Bridge, Song Jiang hadn't realized that Prince Fang Tianding knew about it and ordered two columns under ten generals to capture him. Now these burst out of the city and came charging forward, five via the southern hills, five via the northern, leading a total of three thousand soldiers. They had emerged through the Front and Rear Gates around midnight.
The imperial units lying in ambush to the left and right of the bridge, five thousand men in each, saw the torches on the road ahead. They promptly lit their own torches and advanced in two bodies to meet Prince Fang's contingents marching from the northern and southern hills. Finding their foe prepared and waiting, the Southerners beat a hasty retreat, pursued by imperial forces on either flank.
One column, hurrying to go back across the river, was surprised by the Ruan brothers' unit of five thousand. It swarmed out from behind Baoshu Pagoda Hill, cut off the escape route, captured one general and killed another. The other column was intercepted at Dingxiang Bridge by five hundred infantry under Li Kui. Shield twirlers Xiang Chong and Li Gun plunged in among the foe, and their throwing knives quickly dispatched a southern general. Bao Xu hacked another down with his sword, while Li Kui's axes cleaved a third in twain. Most of the southern soldiers were driven into the lake and drowned.
By the time reinforcements rushed from the city Song Jiang's troops had withdrawn into the hills. They reassembled at the Lingyin Monastery, and each hero came forward to claim his reward. Together, the two units had captured more than five hundred good horses.
Song Jiang left Shi Xiu, Fan Rui and Ma Lin to aid Li Jun in guarding the hillside emplacement overlooking West Lake, and ordered them to prepare to assault the city. He returned with Dai Zong and Li Kui to the camp on Mount Gaoting. He met with Wu Yong and other chieftains in his tent.
"By following our plan," he said to the military advisor, "We've already killed four of their generals and captured a fifth. We're sending him to Governor Zhang for execution."
Only the situation in Lone Pine Pass and Deqing was unknown to Song Jiang. He sent Dai Zong to find out. A few days later the Marvellous Traveller returned and reported.
"Lu Junyi has taken Lone Pine Pass and sooner or later will be arriving in this sector."
Pleased but worried, Song Jiang asked: "How are our officers and men?'
"I have the whole story. But you'd better read it in this dispatch. Please don't be upset."
"We must have lost more of our brothers. Don't try and conceal anything. Tell me everything frankly."
"Lone Pine Pass has high mountains on either side, with only a single road running through it. On the heights, controlling the pass is a fort, and beside it is a tree, dozens of meters high, from which a lookout can see far in every direction. Below are groves of pine. Three generals command the fort. The first is called Wu Sheng, the second Jiang Yin, the third Wei Heng. In the beginning they came down every day and battled with Panther Head Lin Chong until he wounded Jiang Yin with his lance. After that, Wu Sheng dared not come out, but remained holding the pass."
"Then Li Tianyou and four other southern generals arrived as reinforcements. They emerged the next day and gave battle. Lu Fang killed Li Tianyou with his lance after nearly sixty rounds. The enemy soldiers retreated into the pass and remained there. Our troops waited in vain for several days. General Lu sent Ou Peng, Deng Fei, Li Zhong and Zhou Tong to find an approach up the sharp and dangerous mountain heights. They were taken by surprise by Li Tianrun, who charged out of the fort to avenge his brother. With one sweep of his sword he killed Zhou Tong, and Li Zhong was wounded. If our rescue force hadn't arrived in time, all four scouts would have been lost. As it was, three were able to return to camp.
"The next day General Two Spears Dong Ping, burning for vengeance, reined his steed at the foot of the pass and loudly reviled the enemy commanders. A cannon ball skimmed him so closely that the concussion injured his left arm. He couldn't use his lance and had to return to camp and have the arm put in splints.
"He wanted to go out again the next day, but Lu Junyi wouldn't let him. Another night passed. The arm was slightly better. Without telling General Lu, Dong Ping conferred secretly with Zhang Qin, and the two set out on foot. Li Tianrun and Zhang Tao came down from the fort to give battle. Dong wanted to take Li alive, and they fought ten rounds. But Dong's skill didn't match his zeal. His left arm had been wounded and he had to fall back. Li drove him out of the pass.
"Zhang Qin then thrust at Li with his lance. Li dodged behind a pine. The point of the weapon sank deep into the tree. While Zhang was frantically trying to pull it out, Li stabbed him through the stomach, and he collapsed to the ground. Dong saw him go down, and he started to rush forward with his two spears. But Zhang Tao, behind him, swung his sword and cleaved him in twain at the waist.
"By the time General Lu learned about the fight, it was too late to go to the rescue, and the enemy soldiers had already withdrawn to their fort. There was nothing he could do about it.
"He sent Sun Xin and Gu Dasao, husband and wife disguised as refugees, deep into the mountains, where they found a path to the fort. They led LiLi, Tang Long, Shi Qian and Bai Sheng up this path in the middle of the night and set the fort on fire. The southern generals realized our forces were already in the pass, so they abandoned the fort and fled. When General Lu took over and made a count of our troops, he discovered that Sun Xin and Gu Dasao had captured southern general Wu Sheng, LiLi and Tang Long had nabbed Jiang Yin, and Shi Qian and Bai Sheng had caught Wei Heng—the original commanders of the fort. All three were delivered to Governor Zhang. The bodies of Dong Ping, Zhang Qin and Zhou Tong were recovered and buried above the pass.
"General Lu chased the enemy soldiers forty-five //beyond the pass, caught up and engaged Li Tianrun in battle. They fought more than thirty rounds, and Lu killed Li with his lance. The southern reinforcement troops were in no condition to fight, and they retreated with the three remaining generals. Lu Junyi will be here soon. If you don't believe me, Commander-in-Chief, you can read this dispatch."
Song Jiang read the document, deeply depressed. Tears gushed from his eyes.
"General Lu has won a victory," said Wu Yong. "We can move troops to form the other side of a pincers. We'll surely defeat the Southerners. What we should do now is link up with Huyan Zhuo's column in Huzhou."
"You're absolutely right," said Song Jiang.
He ordered Li Kui, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun to go with three thousand infantry over the hills and make the connection. Black Whirlwind, thanking Heaven and Earth, set forth with the contingent.

For his attack on Hangzhou's East Gate, Song Jiang dispatched Zhu Tong with five thousand infantry and cavalry. They advanced rapidly along the Tangzhen road from the village where they had been camped to a point outside Vegetable Market Gate, as the East Gate was also known. The eastern suburbs along the river were then heavily populated, with more homes and shops than in the city, and many vegetable gardens and orchards. Here, the Song forces spread out, and Lu Zhishen, iron staff in hand, strode to the foot of the walls.
"Come out, you friggin barbarians," he shouted. "I dare you to fight!" The soldiers on the ramparts hurriedly reported to the prince's palace. Monk of Precious Light Deng Yuanjue the National Advisor, learning that it was a monk who was issuing the challenge, addressed himself to the prince.
"I've heard that in Liangshan Marsh there is a monk called Lu Zhishen who wields an iron staff," he said. "If Your Highness will mount the wall at East Gate, you can watch me go a few rounds with him."
Prince Fang Tianding was very pleased. He issued his instructions. Accompanied by Marshal Shi Bao, he went with his eight top generals to Vegetable Market Gate. The gate was opened, the drawbridge lowered, and Deng and five hundred infantry swordsmen sped forth.
"So the southern army has a shaven-pate of its own," Lu Zhishen said to himself. "I'll give the churl a hundred licks of my staff!" Without a word, he charged.
In the shadows of the weeping willows, on the lush green turf, two silvery serpents flew, a pair of jade dragons leaped. The furious Lu had not a bit of cleanliness in his heart. The angry Deng was completely devoid of compassion. When did the first ever respect the Buddhist laws? He murdered people in the dark of the moon! When did the second ever read the scriptures? He set fires when the wind was high!
They fought more than fifty rounds, but neither could vanquish the other. Prince Fang, watching from the wall top, was filled with admiration.
"I've heard of Zhishen the Tattooed Monk of Liangshan Marsh, but I didn't realize he was so formidable! He certainly deserves his reputation," he said to Shi Bao. "Fighting all this time, he hasn't yielded an inch to our Precious Light Monk."
"I'm dazzled myself," said the marshal. "I've never seen such a match!"
Just then, a mounted messenger galloped up and reported: "More enemy troops at Beiguan Gate!" Shi Bao hastily left the prince.
Wu Song the Pilgrim saw that Zhishen could not defeat the Precious Light, and he feared there might be an accident. Brandishing his pair of swords, he charged. The National Advisor knew he couldn't cope with the two of them. He retreated into the city. Wu Song started to pursue, but out through the gate galloped a ferocious commander. He was Bei Yingkui, one of Prince Fang's generals, and he assailed Wu Song with levelled lance.
They clashed on the drawbridge. Wu Song closed in, cast aside one sword, grasped his opponent's lance and, with a yank, pulled man and weapon from the saddle. Slash went his blade, and Bei's head rolled on the ground, Lu Zhishen moved up with reinforcements.
Prince Fang hurriedly ordered his men to raise the drawbridge, and pulled his troops back into the city. Zhu Tong withdrew the Song forces ten //and made camp. He dispatched a messenger to Song Jiang reporting the victory.
That day Song Jiang had led his troops to Beiguan Gate and challenged the foe to battle. Southern general Shi Bao took his Comet Hammer and mounted. Carrying his Wind Splitter sword, he had the city gate opened and rode forth. From the Song army, Big Halberd Guan Sheng cantered out to meet him. More than twenty rounds they fought, then Shi Bao turned his steed and withdrew. Guan Sheng quickly checked his horse and returned to his position.
"Why didn't you pursue?" Song Jiang queried.
"His swordsmanship is in no way inferior to mine," said the Big Halberd. "When he retreats like that, he must be up to some trick."
"Duan Kaizeng says the man flings a comet hammer," Wu Yong interjected. "He rides off, feigning defeat, and lures his adversary deep into enemy territory."
"If we go after him, he'll play us dirty," said Song Jiang. "We'll recall our troops and go back to camp." He dispatched a man with a reward for Wu Song.
Meanwhile, Li Kui marched with his infantry to join Lu Junyi. On a mountain road they ran into Zhang Jian and his defeated soldiers, and fiercely attacked, killing southern general Yao Yi in the course of the wild skirmish. Zhang Jian and Zhang Tao fled towards the pass, but were intercepted by General Lu Junyi. After another big clash, the two southern generals fled along a path into the mountains. Their pursuers were hot on their heels. They had no choice but to abandon their mounts and plunge ahead on foot.
But then, from a bamboo thicket, two men suddenly emerged. Each held a steel pitchfork. Before the southerners could defend themselves, they were knocked flat by the two and hauled down the slope. Their captors were none other than Xie Zhen and Xie Bao.
When General Lu saw the two prisoners he was very pleased. Joining forces with Black Whirlwind Li Kui, he proceeded to the main camp on Mount Gaoting. He told Song Jiang of the deaths of Dong Ping, Zhang Qin and Zhou Tong. Both men were deeply grieved. The other chieftains in Lu's army paid their respects to Song Jiang, and the reunited units made camp.
The next day Song Jiang sent Zhang Jian to the Governor in Suzhou to be executed and his head hung up on display. Zhang Tao was disemboweled in front of the camp and his heart raised towards Heaven in a sacrifice to Dong Ping, Zhang Qin and Zhou Tong.
"I'm going to ask General Lu to go with has contingent to the Deqing County road," Song Jiang said to Wu Yong, "connect with Huyan Zhuo's column and come back here together, to join in our attack on Hangzhou City."
Lu accepted the mission, mustered his troops, and marched in the direction of Fengkou Town. Just as they arrived, they ran into the returning defeated forces of Si Xiangfang. A murderous battle ensued. Si fell into the water and drowned. What was left of his soldiers fled. Lu and Huyan combined units and returned to Song Jiang in the camp at Mount Gaoting.
The reassembled chieftains conferred. Now that the two main columns had reached Hangzhou, Song Jiang left control of Xuanzhou, Huzhou and Lone Pine Pass to Governor Zhang and staff officer Cong, who would keep the peace in all captured territory.
He noticed that Lei Heng and Gong Wang were missing from Huyan Zhuo's contingent. Huyan told him what had happened.
"Lei Heng fought Si Xingfang for twenty rounds outside the South Gate of Deqing County Town, and Si hacked him from his steed. Gong battled Huang Ai. Huang drove him into the stream. Horse and rider fell, and the southern soldiers stabbed him to death with their spears. Suo Chao split southern commander Mi Quan open with his ax. We captured Generals Huang Ai and Xu Bai. We drove Si Xingfang into the water and he drowned. Xue Dounan managed to escape in the confusion of battle. We don't know where he's gone."
Song Jiang's tears fell like rain at the news of the death of Lei Heng and Gong Wang. "Zhang Shun appeared to me in a dream the other day," he said to his chieftains, "and I saw to the right of him several bloodstained figures. I know now that they were the ghosts of Dong Ping, Zhang Qin, Zhou Tong, Lei Heng and Gong Wang. If I can take Hangzhou and Ninghai District, I shall ask the monks to conduct a fine service to ensure the passage of our brothers' souls into Heaven."
He had Huang Ai and Xu Bai delivered to Governor Zhang for execution. Of them we'll say no more.
That day he ordered that cattle and horses be slaughtered and gave a banquet for his army. The next day he and Wu Yong planned the division of their forces for the Hangzhou offensive.
Lu Junyi, with twelve senior and lieutenant commanders, would at tack the Houchao Gate. The twelve commanders were Lin Chong, Huyan Zhuo, Liu Tang, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Shang Tinggui, Wei Dingguo, Chen Da, Yang Chun, Du Qian, Li Yun and Shi Yong.
Hua Rong would strike Genshan Gate with fourteen senior and lieutenant commanders, who were, apart from Hua Rong himself, Qin Ming, Zhu Wu, Huang Xin, Sun Li, Li Zhong, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, LiLi, Bai Sheng, Tang Long, Mu Chun, Zhu Gui and Zhu Fu.
Supported by ten chieftains, Mu Hong would proceed to the camp in the western hills to help Li Jun assault the gates fronting on the West Lake. The eleven commanders were Li Jun, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Meng Kang, Shi Xiu, Fan Rui, Ma Lin, Mu Hong, Yang Xiong, Xue Yong and Ding Desun.
Sun Xin and other seven commanders would go to the camp outside East Gate and assist Zhu Tong in attacking Vegetable Market and Jianqiao gates. The seven chieftains were Zhu Tong, Shi Jin, Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, Gu Dasao, Sun Erniang and Zhang Qing.
From the East Gate camp eight chieftains were chosen who would handle intelligence and logistics. They were Li Ying, Kong Ming, Yang Lin, Du Xing, Tong Meng, Tong Wei, Wang Ying and Hu the Ten Feet of Steel.
Song Jiang himself was to lead twenty-one senior and lieutenant commanders to attack along the road to Beiguan Gate. These commanders were Wu Yong, Guan Sheng, Suo Qiao, Dai Zong, Li Kui, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Ou Peng, Deng Fei, Yan Shun, Ling Zhen, Bao Xu, Xiang Chong, Li Gun, Song Qing, Pei Xuan, Jiang Jing, Cai Fu, Cai Qing, Shi Qian and Yu Baosi.
Thus, the gates on all four sides of the city would be assailed.
Song Jiang and his contingent pushed right up to the Beiguan Gate and issued their challenge. Drums and gongs sounded on the walls, the gate was opened, the drawbridge lowered, and Shi Bao rode forth to give battle. Suo Chao the Urgent Vanguard, impetuous as always, galloped out, waving his big ax, and engaged him.
After less than ten rounds, Shi Bao executed a feint and withdrew. Suo Chao, ignoring Guan Sheng's shout of warning, pursued. A flying hammer suddenly struck Suo Chao full in the face, knocking him from his saddle. Deng Fei rushed to the rescue, but Shi Bao's horse got there first. Before Deng could defend himself, Shi Bao, with one sweep of the sword, cut him in two.
At this, the monk Precious Light the National Advisor came charging out of the city with a number of fierce commanders. Song Jiang's unit, badly defeated, retreated north. Hua Rong and Qin Ming slashed into the pursuing southerners from the side and drove them off, then escorted Song Jiang back to camp. The victorious Shi Bao returned to Hangzhou in jubilation.
Song Jiang, in his tent in the Mount Gaoting camp, brooded over the loss of Suo Chao and Deng Fei.
"There are some very tough generals in that city," Wu Yong said. "We can only take it by guile, not by direct confrontation."
"We keep losing men. How do you propose to do it?"
"You've already arranged for our army to assault all of the gates. Hit the Beiguan Gate again tomorrow. The foe is sure to come out and fight. We'll pretend to be defeated and lead them far from the city. At the sound of a signal cannon, our other forces will then hit all the gates at once. Whichever one manages to break in will immediately set fires as a signal calling for reinforcements. The enemy soldiers won't know which way to turn, and we'll win a big victory."
Song Jiang directed Dai Zong to transmit the appropriate orders. On his instructions, Guan Sheng went with a small cavalry troop the next day to Beiguan Gate and challenged the foe. Drums pounded on the walls and Shi Bao again rode forth with a contingent. The southern general engaged Guan Sheng. They had fought less than ten rounds when Guan Sheng hastily retreated. Shi Bao and his soldiers gave chase. Ling Zhen Fired a cannon. At this signal, the Song troops shouted and attacked the city gates in simultaneous drives.
We'll tell first of the assault on Houchao Gate by General Lu Junyi with Lin Chong and the others. As they neared the city they saw that the gate was open and the drawbridge down. Liu Tang, eager to win first honors, galloped straight in, sword in hand. The soldiers on the wall cut the rope and dropped the slab gate. Poor Liu Tang. Both he and his horse were quickly killed in the gateway.
When Hangzhou became the capital in the days of King Qian, he built the city gates in three layers. The outermost was a slab gate, next was a two-leafed set of iron doors, and innermost was a large grill gate. As soon as the slab gate dropped behind him, Liu Tang was attacked by soldiers who had been hiding on both sides. How could he not die?

Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo went back with their men to headquarters and reported to Lu Junyi. None of the Song troops had succeeded in forcing any of the gates, and all withdrew. A messenger raced with the news to Song Jiang in the main camp. He wept bitterly over the death of Liu Tang.
"Another brother gone! From the day we pledged brotherhood in Yuncheng County and went with Chao Gai into Liangshan Marsh, Liu suffered years of tribulation. He never knew any happiness. But he survived hundreds of battles and engagements and never lost his fighting spirit. Who would have thought he'd die in this place today!"
"That plan was no good," Wu Yong admitted. "Not only did it fail, but we lost a brother to the bargain. Call our troops back from the gates. We'll think of something else."
Song Jiang was very upset. He longed for quick vengeance and sighed without end. Black Whirlwind tried to reassure him.
"Don't worry, brother. I'll go out tomorrow with Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun. One way or another we'll take that oaf Shi Bao."
"He's a remarkable hero. You won't even get near him."
"I don't believe it. If I don't nab him tomorrow, you'll never see me again!"
"Be very careful. He's no pushover."
Li Kui went to his own tent, poured out a big bowl of wine, piled a platter with sliced beef, and asked Bao Xu, Xiang Chong and Li Gun to join him.
"We four have always fought as a team," he said. "I just bragged to Big Brother that we were going to capture Shi Bao tomorrow. I don't want any of you holding back."
"Big Brother is always letting the cavalry take the lead," said Bao Xu. "We four must vow here and now that we'll show what our infantry can do. When we grab that churl tomorrow we'll be able to hold our heads high."
The following morning the four ate and drank their fill, took up their weapons and prepared to march. "Watch us slaughter them," they said.
Song Jiang saw that they were half drunk. "Don't you go throwing your lives away," he admonished.
"You underestimate us, brother!" Li Kui replied.
"I just hope you keep your word."
Mounting, Song Jiang rode with cavalry commanders Guan Sheng, Ou Peng, Lu Fang and Guo Sheng to Beiguan Gate. They beat drums, waved banners and challenged combat. The fiery Li Kui planted himself before them, brandishing his axes. Bao Xu, holding a big broad cutlass, glared wildly, waiting only for the carnage to start. Xiang Chong and Li Gun grasped their shields, each fitted with twenty-four throwing knives, and stood on either side with levelled spears.
On the wall, drums thundered and gongs crashed, and Shi Bao rode forth on a melon-yellow steed, carrying his Wind Splitter Sword. He was accompanied by two generals named Wu Zhi and Lian Ming. They advanced to meet their adversaries.
Li Kui was a man who feared neither Heaven nor Earth. With a roar, he and his three companions rushed Shi Bao. They were upon him by the time the Wind Splitter was raised. Li Kui swung his ax and broke the leg of Shi's horse. Shi leaped from the saddle and took refuge among his cavalry.
Bao Xu had already hacked Lian Ming from his steed, and the throwing knives of the two shield-wielders were darting everywhere like jade fish and silver needles. Song Jiang sent his cavalry in a charge up to the walls. They were greeted by a deluge of logs and ballista stones from the ramparts. He hurriedly called them back. He saw Bao Xu plunging through the city gate. Song Jiang could only groan.
Shi Bao was hiding within the gate. When Bao Xu came running in, he dealt him a slanting blow from the side that cut him in two. Xiang Chong and Li Gun quickly covered Li Kui and the three retreated. Song Jiang and his contingent returned to camp. His gloom deepened over the death of Bao Xu. Li Kui also wept.
"This plan was no good either," said Wu Yong. "Although we killed one of their generals, we've lost Li Kui's right-hand man."
Everyone was very depressed. Just then the Xie brothers returned with a report. Song Jiang directed that they speak in detail.
"I scouted with Xie Bao twenty or so //from Hangzhou's South Gate to a place called Fan Village," said Xie Zhen. "We saw moored along the river bank a line of several dozen boats, and went down for a look. It turned out that they were a convoy of grain vessels commanded by an administrator named Yuan from Fuyang County. We were going to kill him, but he cried and said: 'We're all good citizens of the Great Song Empire, but Fang La is crushing us with levies. If any man refuses to pay, he and his whole family are slaughtered. We've heard that the imperial soldiers have come to remove the blight. We want nothing more than to see peace again. We're sick of all this suffering!' "
"He obviously was honest, so we didn't kill him. We asked: 'What are you doing here?' He said: 'The counties received an order from Prince Fang Tianding to clean out the reserves of all the villages and hand over fifty thousand bushels of white rice. I was put in charge, and was on my way to turn over what's been collected so far—five thousand bushels. Because your great army has surrounded the city and there's fighting, we haven't dared go any closer, and are laying over here temporarily.' That's the whole story, General. We've returned specially to let you know."
Wu Yong was delighted. He said: "This is a Heaven-sent chance. Those grain vessels will serve us well." And he requested Song Jiang to issue the following order: "Let the Xie brothers lead a group of fifteen chieftains, disguised as boatmen and their wives. They are not to say a word, but mix with the crews and sail with them into the city. Once there, let Ling Zhen fire a volley of cannon shots. That will be our signal to move up troops as reinforcements."
The Xie brothers called Administrator Yuan ashore and informed him of Song Jiang's instructions. "As good Song Dynasty citizens you must carry them out," they said. "After it's over, you'll be handsomely rewarded."
Yuan had no choice but to comply. Many army officers boarded the craft and took over as boatmen. The original boatmen were put to other tasks. Wang Ying, Sun Xin and Zhang Qing changed clothes with three of them, and their wives Ten Feet of Steel, Gu Dasao and Sun the Witch disguised themselves as boatwomen. Junior officers manned the sweep oars. Weapons were hidden in the holds. The boats then sailed to the banks outside the city.
The Song forces were not far from Hangzhou's gates. Administrator Yuan went ashore, followed by Xie Zhen, Xie Bao and many of the boatmen. They walked up to the gate and demanded entry. Soldiers on the wall queried them, then informed the palace. Prince Fang Tianding sent Wu Zhi, who went out, counted the vessels, returned and reported. Fang ordered six generals to go forth with ten thousand soldiers and guard the northeast approaches while Yuan sailed in with his convoy. The chieftains and their wives, mingled with the crews, went in together. The five thousand bushels of grain were soon unloaded, and the six southern generals marched back into the city with their troops.
Song Jiang's forces again ringed Hangzhou at a distance of only two or three //and spread out in battle deployment. At the second watch, Ling Zhen went with nine cases of Mother and Sons small cannons to the top of Wushan Hill and set them off. The chieftains lit torches and started blazes in many parts of the city. All Hangzhou was thrown into confusion. They had no idea how many Song troops had entered the city.
Prince Fang in his palace was shocked. He hastily donned his armor and mounted. But by then the soldiers on the walls above the gates had fled from their posts. The Song units launched a massive offensive, all eager to gain glory in capturing the city.
Meanwhile in the hills to the west Li Jun, on receiving his orders, led his unit rapidly to Pure Benevolence Cove, obtained boats, and crossed West Lake. They landed near Yongjin Gate and began seizing each of the water gates. Li Jun and Shi Xiu started by climbing over the wall. In the darkness of night they engaged in mixed fracases.
Only South Gate was unbesieged. Through this the defeated southern army fled. Prince Fang, on his horse, couldn't find a single officer. Scurrying like a cur whose master has died, frantic as a fish dodging the net, he left Hangzhou accompanied by only a few infantrymen.
At the foot of Five Clouds Hill, they saw a man, buff naked, emerge from the river, a knife in his teeth, and leap upon the bank. Frightened by this fierce apparition, Prince Fang struck his mount and tried to flee. But no matter how he flailed, the animal refused to budge. It was as if someone was grasping its bridle.
The man ran up, pulled Fang from the saddle and cut off his head with a single sweep of the knife. The head in one hand, the knife in the other, the man then mounted Fang's horse and galloped towards Hangzhou.
Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo encountered him just as they reached Six Harmonies Pagoda with their troops. They recognized him in astonishment as Zhang Heng the Boat Flame. "Where are you coming from, brother?" Huyan called. Zhang Heng didn't reply, but continued racing towards the city.
Song Jiang and his main force had already entered Hangzhou. He made Prince Fang's palace his headquarters. The chieftains in occupation were startled to see Zhang Heng galloping up. He rode directly to Song Jiang, rolled from the saddle, flung the head and the knife on the ground, kowtowed twice, and burst into tears. Song Jiang embraced him.
"Brother, where have you come from? And where is Ruan the Seventh?"
"I'm not Zhang Heng."
"If you're not Zhang Heng, who are you?"
"I'm Zhang Shun. Because I was killed by spears and arrows in the channel outside Yongjin Gate, a trace of my spirit refused to leave and floated on the water. This moved the Marsh-Shaking Dragon King residing in West Lake. He made me Lord of Jinhua and kept me on in his underwater Dragon Palace as a spirit noble. When you were breaking into Hangzhou today, brother, I dogged the footsteps of Prince Fang and, in the middle of the night, followed him out of the city. I saw brother Zhang Heng on the river, borrowed his body, flew up the bank, hastened to the foot of Five Clouds Hill, killed that scoundrel and hurried back to see you!"
He fainted dead away. Song Jiang raised him up. Zhang Heng opened his eyes. He saw Song Jiang and the chieftains, the bristling swords, the crowds of soldiers.
"Is it in the Nether Regions that I'm seeing you, brother?" he asked.
Song Jiang wept. "You loaned brother Zhang Shun your body and he killed the rogue Prince Fang. You're not dead. We're all very much alive. You're fine."
"That means, then, that my brother is dead!"
"Zhang Shun tried to swim under a water gate on West Lake and get into the city and set fires. But he was discovered and killed outside the gate by spears and arrows."
Zhang Heng wept bitterly. "Brother!" he cried and collapsed to the ground, unconscious. His limbs were rigid, his eyes closed. His seven souls and 3 spirits were uncertain. Truly, if he had not gone with the King of Hell's commanding general, he surely would have been called by Hell's Summoner.

Now when Song Jiang and Magic Messenger went to perform the ceremony for White Eel on the Bridge of the Western Mound, it was reported to the Southern Prince. He ordered out ten commanders to capture Song Jiang. Their forces were in two columns and each commander had three thousand troops. It was around midnight when the gates opened and the two columns swept out.
At just this moment Song Jiang and Magic Messenger were offering up the wine and burning the paper offerings. They heard a tremendous uproar below the bridge as Demon King and the Flautist on the left and Madcap on the right saw the lights and after lighting their own torches and dividing into two sections charged the enemy forces. When the southern troops saw that they had lost the element of surprise, they tried to turn back. Song Jiang's men harried both groups. One enemy column hurriedly crossed back over the river but were surprised beyond Baoshu Pagoda Mountain by Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth and Flagpole, who fell on them with a force of five thousand, cutting off their return route. One enemy commander was captured and another killed in the fighting. As for the other column, they were intercepted at Treaty Bridge by Iron Ox, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with five hundred infantry. The two shield-bearers charged into the thick of the fighting, with dancing shields and javelins bared, and quickly accounted for one enemy leader, while Pluto and Iron Ox cut down two more. Most of the southerners died when they fell in the lake and were drowned.
By the time southern reinforcements were sent out from the city, Song Jiang and his army had withdrawn into the mountains. They gathered at the Temple of the Holy Mystery and each man claimed his reward. Between them, they had captured more than five hundred good horses. Song Jiang ordered Madcap, Demon King and the Flautist to join White-Water Dragon and his party in defending the West Lake camp and prepare to attack the city. Taking only Magic Messenger and Iron Ox with him he returned to the camp at Look-out Hill. The Professor welcomed them into the command tent and Song Jiang told him: "With this plan of mine we've killed four of them and captured another, whom we shall send back to Marshal Zhang to be executed."
Song Jiang had not received any news from Lone Pine Pass and Deqing, so he sent Magic Messenger, with instructions to report back as quickly as possible. Within a few days he returned and told Song Jiang that the Unicorn had already captured Lone Pine Pass and would soon have caught up with them. As he listened Song Jiang felt half pleased and half apprehensive. He wanted to know how the commanders had fared. Magic Messenger replied: "My job is just to report on the battle. They gave me a full account and here is the official report. Only please don't get upset."
Song Jiang said: "Are you saying that more of our comrades have been lost? Don't hide anything from me. Tell me the whole truth!"
Magic Messenger said: "When the Unicorn tried to attack Lone Pine Pass he found high mountains on either side with only a single narrow path running between. Their fortress was built right on top and had a group of very tall trees beside it, visible from all around. Below were dense thickets of pines. There were three enemy commanders in the fortress. At first they came down every day and fought with Leopard's Head, until one of them was wounded by Leopard's Head's spear. After that they wouldn't venture forth, but shut themselves up in the fortress. Later on Li Tianrun and four others arrived with reinforcements. They all came down to fight next day and after fifty or sixty bouts the Little Duke killed the leader of the enemy attack with a halberd thrust. After this the enemy retired to the fortress again and would not come out.
"Our troops down below waited for several days. Finally the Unicorn, seeing that the pass was steep and rugged, sent Golden Wings, Redeye, Tiger-Killer and Big Chief to pioneer a route. Li Tianrun, who wanted to avenge his comrade, surprised them, charging down the mountain and killing Big Chief. Tiger-Killer was wounded but got away. But if help had been any slower in coming they would all have been done for. The remaining three were rescued however and brought back to the camp.
"Next day Twin Spears, impatient for revenge, rode to the foot of the pass and hurled insults at the enemy commanders. He was careless: a shot from the mountain hit him in the left arm. When he returned to camp he was unable to hold a spear. A splint was made for the arm and he was determined to go out again next day and have his revenge, but the Unicorn would not allow it. After another day the arm was better and without telling the Unicorn Twin Spears got together with Hotshot and the two of them went off without horses to climb the mountain on foot. On top of the pass Li Tianrun and another challenged them. Twin Spears was determined to capture Li and went forward wielding his two spears. Li met him with a long lance and they fought ten bouts. Twin Spears was full of courage but his left hand could not hold the spear steady and he was forced to give ground. As Li chased after him down the mountain he was attacked by Hotshot with a spear. He dodged behind a pine tree and Hotshot's spear stuck in the tree. He tried to pull it out but it was stuck fast and wouldn't budge and Li's spear caught him and knocked him to the ground. Twin Spears saw him fall and rushed in with his two spears but another enemy commander came up from behind and cut Twin Spears in two with a sweep of his sword. The Unicorn heard what was going on and rushed to the rescue but by this time the enemy had retreated up the pass and there was nothing those below could do.
"Finally Blackface and Auntie Gu disguised themselves as refugees and travelled deep into the mountains. They discovered a small path and led the Executioner, Spots, the Flea and the Daytime Rat up to the summit by this route. By midnight they had groped their way to the top and lit a beacon there. Realizing Song troops had infiltrated the pass the enemy abandoned their fortress and fled. When the Unicorn sent troops up the mountain, Blackface and Auntie Gu captured one of the original three commanders, the Executioner and Spots another and the Flea and the Daytime Rat the third. These three were all sent off later to Marshal Zhang at headquarters. The bodies of Twin Spears, Hotshot and Big Chief were recovered and buried there on the mountain. Some five miles beyond the pass the Unicorn caught up with the enemy and engaged them. He fought more than thirty bouts with Li and eventually killed him. The three remaining commanders fought on reluctantly and broke off as soon as they had a chance.
"The Unicorn will be here very soon," Magic Messenger ended by saying. "If you have doubts about any of this, General, you can read it all in the written report."
Song Jiang looked at the report but it did nothing to allay his grief. His tears fell abundantly.
The Professor said: "Since the Unicorn has won, we can now press home our attack. We will defeat the southern army here and then move to reinforce Twin Rods in Huzhou."
Song Jiang said: "You're right!" and ordered Iron Ox, Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost to take three thousand infantry and approach by the mountain route. Iron Ox went off pleased as punch. Meanwhile Song Jiang's force attacked on the east. He ordered Whiskers and his original five thousand cavalry to advance from the village along the Tangzhen road to outside Market Gate and secure the eastern approach. In those days the road east along the river was a mass of houses and cottages and wayside inns and the area beyond the city a vast expanse of fields and plots of land. When they came within range of the city the forces deployed, with Monk out in front. Staff at the slope, he swaggered up to the walls and shouted: "You fucking bastards, come out and fight!"
When those in the city saw that it was a monk who was thus challenging them they reported it at once to the palace. Learning that it was a monk who wanted to fight Precious Light stood up and petitioned the Prince as follows: "I have heard that on Mount Liang they have this monk called Lu Zhishen who fights with a steel staff. I beg Your Majesty to come to the eastern wall and watch me trade a few blows with him!"
The Southern Prince was delighted and ordered eight bold commanders together with Marshal Shi Bao to go to the wall near Market Gate to watch the master fight. So there were the Prince and the Marshal sitting on the watchtower with the eight commanders on either side of them to see Precious Light show off his fighting skill. This was an accomplished fellow:
*He is dressed in a cassock of fiery red, his waist bound with a black and gold sash, a chaplet all of precious stones hanging at his side; his shoes are deerskin slippers with nine eyelets, his breast is protected by a special corselet fashioned from animal skins and he wields a monk's staff of solid steel.*
The gates opened and the drawbridge was lowered and Precious Light rushed out with five hundred swordsmen on foot.
"So the southerners have got a bald fellow too!" said Monk. "I'll make the bastard taste a few hundred blows of my staff!" Wasting no time on words, he charged forward whirling his staff. Precious Light likewise advanced to meet him. As the two wielded their staves, what a contest!
*Profound Wisdom is on the rampage, no room in that heart for benevolence; Precious Light is in a passion, no thought of mercy enters in there! Does the one respect the Buddha's law? Not likely! His thoughts are all of killing people at the dark of the moon. Does the other study the Scriptures? Not he! His entertainment is burning things down in a raging storm. The one, were he present at the meeting on the Holy Mount, would scorn the Buddha for twiddling his thumbs on the waterlily terrace; the other, were he standing before the Hall of the Law would snatch his magic weapon from the Guardian of Truth! One throughout his life has paid no heed to the doctrine of forgiveness; the other in all his days has found no time to acquaint himself with Holy Writ!*
They fought fifty bouts and neither had the advantage. Up in the watchtower the Southern Prince said to Marshal Shi Bao, commander of his army: "I've heard what they say about Mount Liang's Flowery Monk Lu Zhishen, but it didn't occur to me he could be as fantastic as this. His reputation does not lie. They've been fighting a long time, and he has given away nothing to our master, Precious Light!"
The Marshal said: "I'm absolutely amazed too. I've never seen fighting like this before!"
At this moment a messenger announced: "There's another enemy force at North Gate."
The Marshal hurried off to see. Meanwhile in the Song ranks Pilgrim had seen Monk could not get the better of his adversary and feared a mishap. Unable to restrain himself he rushed forward whirling his two swords and attacked Precious Light, who, seeing it was two against one, put up his staff and retreated to the city.
As Pilgrim impetuously rushed after Precious Light, another enemy leader appeared on a prancing charger and bore down on him with levelled lance. They met at the drawbridge, where Pilgrim dodged and, throwing away one of his swords, grasped the shaft of his opponent's lance, dragged both weapon and man to the ground and with a single sword blow split his skull. Monk rushed in to lend a hand and the Prince hurriedly ordered the drawbridge raised, after calling his troops back into the city. Whiskers likewise withdrew his army to the camp three miles out and sent a report to Song Jiang.
That same day Song Jiang marched to North Gate to issue a challenge. Marshal Shi Bao took up his mace and mounted. With his sword in hand he had the gates opened and rode out to meet his foe. On the Song side Scimitar responded. When they had fought more than twenty bouts, Shi Bao turned his horse and galloped off. Scimitar reined in his horse and returned to his own ranks.
"Why did you not pursue him?" Song Jiang asked.
Scimitar replied: "Shi Bao's skill is every bit as great as mine. If he broke off the fight, it must be some trick."
The Professor said: "It's like Duan Kai said. 'This fellow is expert with the flying hammer. He deliberately turns his horse and pretends to be defeated to lure you on into a remote spot."
Song Jiang said: "If you'd followed him you'd surely have met disaster. Let us call in our forces and return to camp." He also sent someone to reward Pilgrim.
Meanwhile Iron Ox and his comrades with their infantry had gone to reinforce the Unicorn and on a narrow mountain path ran into Zhang Jian and his defeated army. They made a vigorous attack. Yao Yi was killed in the fighting. The two Zhangs got away and fled up the mountain by the same narrow path. Here they met the Unicorn and fierce fighting ensued till they fled by a narrow path into the depths of the mountain range. They were hotly pursued and had to abandon their horses and flee downhill. Suddenly from a thicket of low bamboo two warriors emerged carrying steel tridents. Before the Zhangs could offer any resistance they were stabbed with the tridents and carried off captive down the mountain. Their captors were of course Snake and Scorpion.

This capture delighted the Unicorn. He now joined forces with Iron Ox and his party. A meeting of all the leaders was held and they went to the main camp on Look-out Hill to see Song Jiang. When the loss of Twin Spears, Hotshot and Big Chief was recounted, all were deeply affected.
When all the leaders had paid their respects to Song Jiang, the armies were combined and marched back to camp. Next day Zhang Jian was sent off to Marshal Zhang at headquarters where he was executed and his head displayed as an example. Zhang Tao was executed right there in the camp, his heart and liver cut out and offered to the spirits of Twin Spears, Hotshot and Big Chief, as was proper.
Song Jiang and the Professor decided as follows: to start with, the Unicorn would be asked to march his army to Deqing in support of Twin Rods and his group. When they had joined up they would make plans to capture the town.
With these orders, the Unicorn gave his army orders to march, heading for Fengkou. There they ran into Si Hengfang, sent by the Southern Prince to relieve Deqing and now in retreat. The Unicorn launched a murderous attack and Si Hengfang fell in the water and was drowned. The rest of his force scattered and ran.
After the Unicorn had met up with Twin Rods, they joined forces and repaired to the main camp at Pavilion Mountain, where they saw Song Jiang and a general meeting was held at which everyone gave their opinion. Now that both armies had reached Hangzhou, Song Jiang left it to Marshal Zhang and his appointees to take over the administration of Xuanzhou, Huzhou, Lone Pine Pass and so on and to post notices everywhere reassuring the people. Of this no more.
Song Jiang had noticed that Sergeant Lei and Stripes were absent from Twin Rods' force. Twin Rods told how Sergeant Lei had fought thirty bouts with Si Hengfang at the south gate of Deqing and been chopped from his horse, and how when Stripes was pursuing Huang Ai across the river, horse and man had fallen in and been stabbed to death by the southern troops. One enemy commander had been killed by a blow of Hasty's axe, and two more had been taken alive. Si Hengfang as we know had been driven into the river and drowned. Only one southern commander had managed to flee with his troops and his whereabouts were not known.
Song Jiang's tears flowed freely when he heard they had lost two more comrades. He said to the others: "When White Eel appeared to me in a dream the other day, I saw three or four on his right covered with blood and in torn clothing. Those who appeared to me must have been Twin Spears, Hotshot, Big Chief, Sergeant Lei and Stripes, who are now of the company of ghosts. If I take Hangzhou and conquer the Ninghai Commandery, I shall ask many monks to perform a ceremony."
The two latest prisoners were sent to Marshal Zhang for execution. Of this no more.
That day Song Jiang had oxen and horses killed to feast the armies.
Next day Song Jiang made his plans with the Professor and the forces were divided up as follows for the offensive on Hangzhou.
The Unicorn and twelve others to attack Tidal Gate.
Colonel Hua and fourteen others to attack Mount Gen Gate.
The Unstoppable and eleven others to proceed to the West Lake camp, and join White-Water Dragon and his men in the attack on Lakeside Gate.
Blackface and eight others to proceed to the camp on the east and assist Whiskers in attacking Market Gate and Fodder Bridge. Eight leaders from the eastern camp, including Skyhawk, to liaise with the other forces.
The commander-in-chief to take twenty-one leaders and attack down the road to North Gate.
This was Song Jiang's plan of action for putting all the gates under pressure at the same time.
Song Jiang led his large force down the highway to North Gate, halted under the walls and delivered his challenge. Drums and gongs sounded on the battlements, the gate opened, the drawbridge was lowered, and Marshal Shi Bao rode out to take up the challenge. On Song Jiang's side, Hasty, impetuous as ever, brandished his axe and without more ado flew at Shi Bao. The horses clashed, the warriors battled furiously, but before ten bouts were up Shi Bao dodged aside and galloped off. Hasty gave chase. Scimitar hurriedly shouted to him not to follow, but too late! Hasty received a blow to the head that knocked him from his horse. Redeye raced to the rescue but Shi Bao was there too and before Redeye could strike a blow Shi Bao's sword had cut him in two. The monk, Precious Light, charged out of the city with several bold commanders, and the Song force was routed and fled northwards.
At this point, however, Colonel Hua and Thunderclap charged from the flank and drove the southern troops back, enabling Song Jiang to retreat to his camp. Elated by his victory, Shi Bao returned in triumph to the city.
Song Jiang's army withdrew to the camp on Look-out Hill to recover. The loss of two more leaders, Hasty and Redeye, weighed heavily on Song Jiang's heart as he sat in his tent. "If they have such redoubtable commanders," the Professor said, "we can win only by guile, not in a direct confrontation."
"When we keep losing men and commanders like this," Song Jiang said, "what chance do we have of defeating them?"
The Professor said: "When we have regrouped, attack North Gate again. They are sure to come out to fight. We must feign defeat and lure them as far away as possible. Then we'll fire a signal and all the units outside the gates will attack together. As soon as our troops break through one of the gates they will start fires. This will cause confusion and panic and victory will be ours."
Song Jiang sent out Magic Messenger to inform everyone of this plan.
Next day Song Jiang sent Scimitar with some troops to North Gate to issue a challenge. Drums sounded on the battlements and Shi Bao rode out and engaged him. Before they completed ten bouts Scimitar hurriedly withdrew. Shi Bao's troops gave chase. Thunderer fired the signal. As it went off, every unit of the Song army gave a great shout and all charged forward together.
When the Unicorn with Leopard's Head and the others attacked Tidal Gate they found it open, with the drawbridge lowered. Eager to gain the first honours, the Red-Haired Devil urged on his horse and sword in hand charged into the city. Those on the battlements immediately cut the rope with an axe and the portcullis fell. That was the end of the unfortunate Red-Haired Devil! Both horse and man died there in the gateway. You see, when King Qian built Hangzhou as his capital he installed three kinds of gate: a portcullis on the outside, a heavy gate with two leaves of steel in the middle, and a wooden grill inside. When the Red-Haired Devil rushed into the gateway the portcullis above him was quickly dropped. As the enemy had troops concealed on either side, he didn't stand a chance!
When they saw what had happened, Leopard's Head and Twin Rods withdrew to the camp and reported to the Unicorn. The attacks on all the gates had failed — all had been repulsed. A messenger was sent to inform Song Jiang in the main camp. On hearing that the Red-Haired Devil had died, Song Jiang wept bitterly: "He should not have died, this comrade of ours. He was present at the very first gathering at Yuncheng, he followed Chao Gai to Mount Liang; he lived through all those years of hardship and never had time to enjoy the fruits. He came safe through hundreds of battles, he never let his spirit be cowed. Whoever would have thought that he was going to die here today!"
The Professor said: "This plan was a failure, it was not the right way to go. It brought about the death of a comrade. Recall all units and let us make another plan."
Song Jiang was on fire, desperate to be revenged and appease his anger. His sighs were endless. Then Iron Ox, his lieutenant, said: "Rest easy, brother. Tomorrow I will go with Pluto, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost and by hook or by crook we will grab that bastard Shi Bao!"
Song Jiang said: "He's a highly skilled fighter. How do you think you'll even get near him?"
Iron Ox said: "Don't you believe it. I'll capture him tomorrow, or I will never see you again."
"Just be careful then. Don't treat it lightly!"
Iron Ox went back to his tent. He poured himself a big bowl of wine, got a big plate of meat, and invited the other three in to drink with him. "The four of us always fight together. Today I boasted in front of the Leader that we will capture that bastard Shi Bao tomorrow. I hope you're game for it."
Pluto said: "The Leader is forever sending the cavalry in first, this time let us make sure that we go first and let us go forward with determination to capture Shi Bao. We four will win a share of glory for ourselves!"
Early next morning, after drinking themselves tipsy, they took up their arms and were ready to set out after asking the commander-in-chief to come and see them fight. Song Jiang saw they were half drunk and said: "This isn't a game. Don't play with your lives!"
"Do not patronize us, brother," said Iron Ox.
Song Jiang said: "I only hope your deeds live up to your words!"
Song Jiang mounted and rode with Scimitar, Golden Wings, Little Duke and the Halberdier to the city's North Gate. Drums rolled, flags waved as he issued the challenge. Iron Ox, desperately impatient, stood in front of his horse gripping his axes. Pluto was there with his sword, staring ahead with bulging eyes, eager for the fray. Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost, their round shields harbouring twenty-four javelins, stood on either side, spears at the ready.
Now drums and gongs sounded on the battlements and Marshal Shi Bao on a horse yellow as a melon, grasping Wind-Slicer, rode forth with two of his leaders to face them. The moment they appeared, Iron Ox, who feared nothing on heaven or earth, gave a terrible roar and with his companions rushed at Shi Bao's horse. Shi Bao raised Wind-Slicer to meet them and immediately they came to grips. Iron Ox swung his axes and cut the horse's legs from under him. Shi Bao leapt down and took refuge among a group of his own cavalry. Pluto had swept one of the lieutenants from his horse with a sword cut. The two shield-bearers let fly their darts, which filled the air like a shoal of leaping fishes, or a swarm of driven leaves.
When Song Jiang led his cavalry up to the walls, they were met with a shower of wooden blocks and ballista missiles from the walls. Fearing casualties he hurriedly ordered them to withdraw. Unfortunately Pluto had already rushed the gate. Song Jiang could only lament. Shi Bao, already safe inside the walls of his city, saw Pluto rush in and with a sideways swipe cut him in two. Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost gave Iron Ox cover as they hastily retreated. The loss of Pluto left Song Jiang even more heavy-hearted when they returned to camp. Iron Ox was also weeping when he got back.
The Professor said: "This plan was no good. Although we've killed one of theirs, we've also lost Iron Ox's second-in-command."
Whilst they were thus reflecting on their woes, Snake and Scorpion came in to report: "Scorpion and I reconnoitred to within six or seven miles of the South Gate," Snake said. "At a place called Grassy Village, we found a string of several dozen boats tied up on the river bank. We went and asked what they were. They turned out to be transports provided by Judge Yuan of Fuyang. I was about to kill the crew, but they began to plead with me. 'We are all loyal citizens of Song,' they said to me. 'We were drafted by Fang La. Anyone who resisted had all their family killed. Now the imperial army has come to deal with him, we have been hoping that we could live in peace again. We did not expect to run into more trouble!' After that I felt sorry for them and didn't want to kill him. 'What are you doing here?' I asked Judge Yuan. He said he had been told by the Southern Prince to go round every district and commandeer fifty thousand catties of rice. So far he'd managed to get hold of five thousand and was on his way to hand it in but when he got that far he heard the city was invested by a Song army and dared not proceed. So he'd tied up there. When I'd found all this out, I came to tell you."
The Professor was excited: "It's a heaven-sent opportunity. Those transports will be the making of us. The commander-in chief must write out the orders for you two brothers to lead the party and take along with you the artillery chief Thunderer, and fifteen others. Disguise yourselves as sailors and don't speak. Mix in with the boat crews and when you get inside the city you can let off signal rockets. We will arrange for the troops to back you up."
Snake and Scorpion called Judge Yuan ashore and told him what the Professor wanted. "If you are loyal citizens you will support this plan," they told him. "If the business succeeds you're sure to be well rewarded." The boat commander had to agree, of course, and the party of leaders went aboard. The crews were retained for general duties but their uniforms were taken from them and given to Short-Arse, Blackface and the Gardener so they could be disguised as sailors. Steelbright, Sister Sun and Auntie Gu dressed as boatwomen and the ordinary soldiers took on the role of rowers. They hid their weapons in the holds.
All the boats were now brought in close to the bank, while units of the besieging Song army remained in the offing. The boat commander went ashore and Snake, Scorpion and the other so-called sailors went up to the city gate and called out. The guards questioned them closely and then reported to the palace. On the orders of the Southern Prince, one of the commanders opened the city gate and went down to the river to inspect the boats. When he reported back, the Prince sent six commanders and ten thousand troops to keep guard on the northeast while the boats were unloaded and the grain transported into the city.
During this operation the Song leaders mixed with the sailors carrying grain and the women warriors followed them. In no time at all the five thousand catties of foodstuff had been moved inside. The six southern commanders marched their men back into the city. The Song army had renewed its siege and was positioned about a mile from the walls. That evening in the second watch Thunderer took out nine "mother" shells, went to the top of Mount Wu and let them off. All the leaders lit torches and began starting fires everywhere.
In a little while the city was seething with rumours: no one knew for sure how many of the enemy were inside the walls. When the news reached the Southern Prince in his palace he was in a panic. He put on armour hastily and mounted his horse. The guards on all the gates had fled. The Song forces were full of energy, every man eager to do his best to capture the city.
Meanwhile in the mountains west of the city White-Water Dragon and his group had got their orders and were advancing. They seized boats and attacked from the lake, coming ashore at Goldenflood Gate. The leaders each separately attacked the water gates.
Green-Eyes and Madcap were the first to climb the walls. All evening there was confused fighting in the city, only the southern gates were not surrounded and it was from here that the desperate rebel army fled. The Southern Prince had ridden out to find his troops but could find none, so with only a few infantry he too exited through the South Gate, scurrying off like a dog kicked out of the house, darting away like a fish escaped from the net.
The Southern Prince continued till he reached Five-Cloud Mountain, where a man emerged stark naked from the river with a sword between his teeth and bounded onto the bank. The Prince beat his horse wildly, desperate to get away from this terrifying sight. The horse, strange to relate, refused to move, beat it as he might. It was as if there were someone holding its bridle.
The strange apparition bore down on them and dragged the Prince from the horse's back. With one blow he cut off the Prince's head. Then he sprang onto the horse and head in one hand and sword in the other galloped off to Hangzhou.
Leopard's Head and Twin Rods, as they were marching their troops toward Six Harmonies Pagoda, happened to run into this man and thought they recognized him as the Pilot. It was a big surprise. "How did you get here, brother?" Twin Rods asked. The man gave no answer but galloped straight on into the city. Song Jiang with his army had already entered the city and he had taken over the Southern Prince's palace as his seat of government, so it was guarded by his men. They all had a shock when the Pilot galloped in. The horseman rode right up to Song Jiang, then slid from the saddle and threw the head and the sword on the floor. He kowtowed twice and began to weep. Song Jiang hastily embraced him and said: "How did you get here, brother? And where is Ruan the Seventh?"
"I am not the Pilot," the other answered.
"If you're not the Pilot who are you?"
"I am White Eel. Because I was killed by arrows outside Goldenflood Gate, my spirit is obliged to linger there in the water. By the grace of the West Lake's Dragon Lord of Rain and Thunder I have received the title of 'Lord of Splendour' and are permitted to reside in the Dragon Palace. Now that you have captured the city, I, as a spirit, have dealt with the Southern Prince. When I was following him out of the city last night, I saw my elder brother, the Pilot, in the river and borrowed from him his corporeal shell. I came out onto the bank and killed this villain at the foot of Five-Cloud Mountain. Then I came straight back to see you." The moment he finished speaking he collapsed on the ground. Song Jiang himself raised him up. When he slowly opened his eyes and saw Song Jiang and the others, the forest of weapons all around him, the thickets of soldiers, he said: "Am I really in the underworld with my brother White Eel?"
Song Jiang said, weeping: "Just now you lent your body to your brother and he killed the villain Prince Fang Tianding. You are not dead. We are all living men, you can touch us and feel us."
"Are you telling me that my brother is dead?"
"Your brother wanted to swim through the West Lake and enter the city by the water gate to start a fire. Unfortunately he was spotted trying to climb the walls at Goldenflood Gate and he died there riddled with arrows."
With a wail of "My brother!" the Pilot fell to the ground unconscious. When they examined him, his limbs were lifeless, his eyes clouded, and his seven spirits and three souls had drifted far, far away. Indeed as they say:

*You won't escape the hand of Fate;*
*The Reaper's always on your trail!*

## 214
## The Unicorn Lu Junyi Assails the Shezhou Road & the route falls to him; Song Jiang Battles on Black Dragon Ridge

At last Zhang Heng was revived, "Help him into a tent," said Song Jiang, "and give him medical treatment. Ask him what happened along the coast."
He instructed Pei Xuan and Jiang Jing to record the valorous deeds of the chieftains in the recent fighting. By then it was morning, and all had gathered in the camp. Li Jun and Shi Xiu had captured southern general Wu Zhi; the three women chieftains had caught Zhang Daoyuan; Lin Chong, with his long serpent lance, had run Leng Gong through; and the Xie brothers had killed Cui Yu. Only five of the southern commanders had escaped.
Song Jiang issued a proclamation reassuring the populace and rewarded his troops. Zhang Daoyuan was sent to Governor Zhang for execution. In a written dispatch, Song Jiang recommended that Administrator Yuan, who had contributed his grain, be appointed magistrate of Fuyang County. The governor issued a certificate of office with the name left blank. Of that we'll say no more.
The chieftains rested in the city. An aide reported: "Ruan the Seventh is here. He's come by way of the river." Song Jiang summoned him to his tent and questioned him. Seventh told his story.
"I set out with Zhang Heng, Hou Jian and Duan Jingzhu and our men, and along the coast we found boats. We sailed off Haiyan, intending to go inland up the Qiantang River. But the winds and tides were against us and we were driven out to sea. When we tried to get back, the gale capsized us, throwing everyone in the water. Hou Jian and Duan Jingzhu couldn't swim and were drowned. Most of the sailors managed to survive, but scattered in all directions. I swam to Haikou and got as far as Ochre Hill Gate, when the tide swept me to Banfan Hill, and I swam ashore there. I saw brother Zhang Heng in the river off Five Clouds Hill. I waited for him to come up the bank, but then he disappeared again. Last night I saw the light of the fires here in Hangzhou, and I heard the cannon. I figured you must be fighting in the city, so I swam here up the river. Has brother Zhang Heng come ashore yet?"
Song Jiang told him about Zhang Heng, then had him rejoin his brothers. He instructed the three Ruans to resume their duties as naval commanders. He also ordered all naval chieftains to gather their boats on the river and get ready to sail against Muzhou.
Because the spirit of Zhang Shun had appeared in human form, he built a temple to him on the banks of West Lake outside Yongjin Gate, calling it Lord of Jinhua and sacrificing there. Later, after defeating Fang La and earning honors, Song Jiang returned to the capital and reported Zhang Shun's feat. The emperor bestowed the posthumous title of General of Jinhua. The temple to Zhang Shun's memory has remained in Hangzhou.
Song Jiang was deeply saddened by the loss of so many chieftains since crossing the Yangzi. In the Pure Benevolence Monastery he had prayer services conducted for seven days and seven nights, dispensed charity, sacrificed to the spirits of the departed, prayed for their smooth passage into Heaven, and set up memorial tablets. After these good deeds were done, he destroyed all of Prince Fang's paraphernalia of rank and office and distributed his valuables among the Song army officers.
Peace was restored to Hangzhou, and the people feasted in celebration. Song Jiang conferred with Military Advisor Wu Yong on a long-range plan for the offensive against Muzhou.
It was by then the end of the fourth lunar month. Suddenly, the report came in: "Deputy District Commander Liu Guangshi has arrived with an emissary from the capital." Song Jiang and his chieftains met them outside Beiguan Gate and welcomed them into the city. At headquarters the imperial decree was read.

Vanguard General Song Jiang: You have attained great merit in the war to wipe out Fang La. We bestow 35 bottles of imperial wine and 35 sets of silk clothing as rewards to your senior commanders. To the lieutenant commanders we bestow bolts of satin.

The monarch only knew that Gongsun Sheng had not crossed the river with them, but not that they had suffered heavy casualties.
At the sight of the thirty-five sets of clothes and thirty five bottles of imperial wine Song Jiang's heart was stricken, and tears flowed from his eyes. The emissary asked him what was wrong. Song told him of the loss of the chieftains.
"The emperor hasn't heard," cried the emissary. "I shall certainly tell him when I get back."
Song Jiang gave a banquet for the emissary and Liu, attended by all the remaining chieftains, big and small. They drank the imperial wine and expressed thanks to the monarch for his kindness. The wine and clothing intended for the chieftains who had died were kept.
The following day Song Jiang took one bottle and one set of clothes to Zhang Shun's temple. He called his name and sacrificed the wine to him. The clothing he draped on a clay idol. The rest of the clothes he burned in sacrifice to the other departed chieftains.
The emissary stayed a few days, then returned to the capital. Song Jiang saw him off.
Ten or so days quickly passed. Governor Zhang sent a dispatch urging Song Jiang to begin his offensive. Song and Wu Yong invited Lu Junyi to a conference.
"To get to Muzhou, we go directly along the river," said Song Jiang. "To reach Shezhou, we must follow the small road through Yuling Pass. That means we'll have to divide our forces and hit two objectives. Which one would you prefer, brother?"
"The soldier obeys his general. Whatever you order, brother. I wouldn't presume to choose."

"Let's leave it to Heaven's will, then."
Song Jiang decided on the number of men for each column, wrote out two lots, burned incense and prayed for guidance. The two leaders then drew. Song Jiang picked Muzhou, Lu's slip read "Shezhou."
"Fang La's lair is in Bangyuan Cavern in Clear Stream County," said Song. "After you've taken Shezhou, brother, camp there and notify me immediately. We'll fix a date to drive on Bangyuan Cavern together." At Lu's request, Song allocated the chieftains. Thirty-six would accompany Song Jiang in his offensive against Muzhou and Black Dragon Ridge. They were the military advisor Wu Yong, Guan Sheng, Hua Rong, Qin Ming, Li Ying, Dai Zong, Zhu Tong, Li Kui, Lu Zhishen, Wu Song, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Lu Fang, Guo Sheng, Fan Rui, Ma Lin, Yan Shun, Song Qing, Xiang Chong, Li Gun, Wang Ying, Hu Sanniang, Ling Zhen, Du Xing, Cai Fu, Cai Qing, Pei Xuan, Jiang Jing and Yu Baosi. Seven senior and lieutenant naval chieftains would command the naval vessels going with the army to Muzhou. They were Li Jun, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Ruan the Seventh, Tong Wei, Tong Meng and Meng Kang.
Twenty-eight commanders would support Lu Junyi in his assault on Shezhou and Yuling Pass. They were military advisor Zhu Wu, Lin Chong, Huyan Zhuo, Shi Jin, Yang Xiong, Shi Xiu, Shan Tinggui, Wei Dingguo, Sun Li, Huang Xin, Ou Peng, Du Qian, Chen Da, Yang Chun, Li Zhong, Xue Yong, Zou Yuan, Zou Run, LiLi, Li Yun, Tang Long, Shi Yong, Shi Qian, Ding Desun, Sun Xin, Gu Dasao, Zhang Qing and Sun the Witch. He would have an army of thirty thousand.
Lu departed on the appointed date after bidding farewell to Song Jiang and Deputy District Commander Liu. He and his troops wound through hill country, skirting Linan County.
Song Jiang prepared his boats, Organized his infantry and cavalry and assigned his commanders, on the day selected he dedicated his banners at a sacrificial ceremony, then set forth on land and water, war vessels and horsemen moving in coordination. A plague was rampaging in Hangzhou and six of the chieftains were ill and couldn't march. Two others were looking after them, making a total of eight who had to be left behind. The remaining thirty-seven headed for Muzhou with Song Jiang, following along the river first in the direction of Fuyang County.

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We'll talk now of Chai Jin and Yan Qing who had departed from Song Jiang at Xiuzhou. From there they had proceeded to Haiyan County, gone by boat from the seacoast to a point past Yuezhou, then followed a winding road overland to Zhuji County, forded the Yupu and travelled to the border of Muzhou Prefecture. The officer guarding the pass stopped them.
"I am a scholar from the Central Plain," Chai Jin told him. "I know astrology and geomancy, I understand *yin* and *yang*; the wind and clouds, the Three Astral Glows, the Nine Schools and the Three Religions. There's nothing in which I'm not versed. I've come because I've seen from afar emanations of a new emperor emerging south of the Yangzi. Why do you block my virtuous path?"
Impressed by Chai Jin's high-flown language, the officer asked him his name.
"I am called Ke Yin, and I come alone, except for a single servant, to offer my services to your exalted country. I have no other purpose."
The officer kept Chai Jin at the pass and dispatched a messenger with the news to Muzhou. He reported to Deputy Prime Minister Zu Shiyuan. Advisor Shen Shou, Royal Inspector Huan Yi and Grand Marshal Tan Gao. They had Chai Jin brought before them and greeted him kindly. They were very interested in what he had to say. Since he had such a fine appearance, they were not in the least suspicious.
The prime minister directed the royal inspector to take Chai Jin to the palace in Clear Stream to meet the king. At that time Fang La had palaces both in Muzhou and Shezhou prefectures. The main palace housed the highest civil and military offices. The palace in Bangyuan Cavern in Clear Stream County was also such a headquarters.
Chai Jin and Yan Qing went with Huan Yi to Clear Stream where they were first introduced to Lou Minzhong the prime minister. Chai Jin held forth in elegant language which pleased Lou very much. He insisted on entertaining Chai Jin in his chancellery. He admired Chai Jin's intellectual attainments and propriety. Lou originally had been a teacher in Clear Stream County. Although he had some learning, it wasn't very high. Chai Jin's manner of speaking delighted him.
The following morning they waited in the palace for Fang La to hold court. In the throne room royal concubines and beautiful serving maids were arrayed in attendance. Outside in ranks were high civil and military officials, and before the palace stood the royal guards with their golden melon emblems. The prime minister then addressed the throne.
"I would like to present a worthy gentleman named Ke Yin from the Central Plain, the land of Confucius. Thoroughly conversant with the civil and military arts, he is both learned and courageous. He knows astrology and geomancy, understands the winds and clouds, can read the signs of Heaven and Earth, is expert in the Three Religions and Nine Schools. All philosophies are to him an open book. He has been drawn here by emanations of an imperial emergence. He is now outside the gate awaiting Your Majesty's summons."
"Let the worthy gentleman enter," said Fang La. "He may wear ordinary dress."
Chai Jin was called into the palace. He kowtowed, fervently wished the king long life, then was led before the throne. Fang La was favorably impressed by Chai Jin's noble mien.
"Where are these imperial emanations you've seen, sir?" he asked.
"I am from the kingdom of the Central Plain, Sire. Both of my parents are dead. I am my own sole support, and I live by the occult learning handed down from the ancient sages. Recently the Imperial Star has been very bright, casting its light directly on the eastern part of your Wu region. I therefore had no hesitation to make the long arduous journey. Here, south of the Yangzi I have again seen the five-hued imperial glow, and find that it rises from Muzhou. Today I am privileged to view Your Majesty's holy visage, your imperial carriage, your face like the sun—all manifestations of that glow. I am indeed the most fortunate of men!"
Again Chai Jin kowtowed.
"Although I possess a kingdom here in the southeast, my cities have been invaded and captured by Song Jiang's forces." said Fang La. "Now they are heading this way. What should I do?"
"The ancients had a saying: 'Easily obtained, easily lost; arduously obtained, strongly held.' After Your Majesty established your kingdom here in the southeast you conquered many prefectures. Although Song Jiang has invaded some of them, good fortune will soon return to this sacred land. Not only will Your Majesty's territory south of the Yangzi be secure, but in days to come your reign will extend to the Central Plain, restoring the Golden Age of Antiquity, exceeding the past glories of Han and Tang."
Overjoyed, Fang La directed that Chai Jin be seated on a satin cushion. He feted him at a royal banquet and gave him the title of Royal Secretary.
From that day forward, Chai Jin was very close to Fang La, and he deliberately cajoled and flattered him. In less than half a month every official inside and outside the palace was strongly attached to Chai Jin.
Chai Jin's fairness in everything he did before long won him still greater favor in the eyes of the king. Instructing the deputy prime minister to act as intermediary, Fang La gave his daughter the Princess Jinzhi to Chai Jin in marriage, and bestowed on him the title of Duke Consort. Yan Qing, who called himself Yun Bi, was made a royal attendant, and became known as Attendant Yun.
After his marriage to the princess, Chai Jin could go anywhere he pleased in the palace, and he knew all the inside stories. Fang La also consulted him on important military matters.
"Your aura is correct, Sire," Chai Jin often said to him. "It's just that you are being assaulted by certain stars. You'll have no peace for the next half-year. But when Song Jiang is depleted of generals, those stars will retreat and your reign will be restored. You'll roll up the foe far and wide, and you'll control the Central Plain."
"Song Jiang has killed many of my best-loved generals," said Fang La. "What can I do about that?"
"I have examined the night sky. The signs for Your Majesty show that although you have dozens of generals, they are not righteous and soon will perish. But Twenty-eight stars will come to replace them and restore your reign. Moreover, a dozen or more of Song Jiang's generals will surrender and join you. They too are stars in your destiny, and will be your loyal officials aiding you to expand your borders." To Fang La these were happy tidings.

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Meanwhile, Song Jiang's army, having left Hangzhou, advanced on land and water towards Fuyang County. Deng Yuanjue, the Southerners' National Advisor, with four generals, was holding the pass with remnants of their defeated forces, and sent an urgent plea to Muzhou for support. Deputy Prime Minister Zu dispatched ten thousand troops under two of his most trusted commanders. One was called Bai Qin, the other Jiang De, and both were men of boundless valor. When they reached Fuyang County, they joined forces with National Advisor Deng and, together, occupied the mountain top.
Song Jiang's expedition had already reached Seven Li Bay, and pushed on, with the navy leading the cavalry. Learning of this, southern general Shi Bao rode down from the summit with his Comet Hammer and Wind Splitter Sword and headed for the foe. Guan Sheng was about to go forth when Lu Fang stopped him with a shout.
"Wait a bit, brother. Watch me fight a few rounds with the lout!"
While Song Jiang observed from the shadows of the arch of pennants, Lu Fang cantered towards Shi Bao, crescent-bladed halberd in hand. The southern general, grasping his Wind Splitter Sword, met him on the field of combat. They battled fifty rounds and Lu Fang began to weaken. Guo Sheng, also wielding a crescent-bladed halberd, galloped to his assistance. Fighting two against one, Shi Bao never faltered.
It was at this moment that the National Advisor sounded the retreat. He saw from the mountain top that Song Jiang's fleet, sailing the river on a favorable wind, had reached the shore and the men were already landing. Afraid of being caught in a pincers, he ordered a withdrawal.
But Lu Fang and Guo Sheng had no intention of letting Shi Bao escape. After they had fought another four or five rounds, Zhu Tong rode out from the Song Jiang position. Shi Bao couldn't handle three against one. He knocked their weapons aside and fled.
Song Jiang pointed with his whip, and his army charged the ridge. The southerners were unable to withstand them. They pulled back into Tonglu County. Pressing forward through the night, the Song army crossed White Hornet Ridge and made camp. At the same time the Xie brothers, Yan Shun, Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel were sent to secure the east road, while Li Kui, Xiang Chong, Li Gun, Fan Rui and Ma Lin were directed to seize the west road. Each contingent commanded a thousand infantry, and their orders were to march on Tonglu County and capture the enemy installation. The armada was to continue its advance upon the river, captained by Li Jun, the three Ruan brothers, the two Tong brothers and Meng Kang.
By the time Xie Zhen and his contingent reached Tonglu County it was nearly midnight. The National Advisor was conferring with Shi Bao when suddenly they heard cannon fire. The southerners hastily mounted.
They saw the torches of three columns approaching at a rapid clip. Shi Bao fled, and the others hurriedly followed. None of them dared stand and fight.
Now the columns were upon them. Southern general Wen, who had been a little slow in getting on his horse, raced along a small path, only to be confronted by Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel. The husband and wife team dragged him from his saddle and took him captive. Black Whirlwind Li Kui and his unit slaughtered and set fires. Song Jiang ordered the rest of his troops to break camp and move into the county town of Tonglu. There, Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel presented their prisoner Wen Kerang and claimed their reward. Song Jiang directed that the southern general be sent to Governor Zhang for execution. Of that we'll say no more.
The next day Song Jiang moved both his land and naval units up to the foot of Black Dragon Ridge. Beyond the ridge was Muzhou. The National Advisor and his southern generals occupied the pass and stationed their troops all around. Because it was near the Yangzi, the pass was flanked by swift waters on one side and steep cliffs on the other, with fortifications above and a naval fleet below.
After making camp and building palisades, Song Jiang directed Li Kui and his contingent to go out with five hundred shield-bearers and scout the paths. But at the base of the ridge they were greeted by a shower of logs and rocks from above and had to return. Song Jiang then called half the fleet ashore and instructed Ruan the Second to take two assistants and a thousand sailors in a hundred boats and row, beating drums and singing folk songs, to a point near Black Dragon Ridge.
Fang La had a naval base there with five hundred vessels of war and five thousand sailors. They were commanded by four admirals known as the Four Dragons of Zhejiang. The top-ranking admiral was Cheng Gui the Jade-Clawed Dragon. His lieutenants were Zhai Yuan the Satin-Scaled Dragon, Qiao Zheng the Wave-Breasting Dragon, and Xie Fu the Pearl-Playing Dragon. Fang La himself had given them these names. The four originally were boatmen on the Qiantang River. After they joined him, he made them officials of the third degree.
Ruan the Second and his craft, travelling with the swift current, rowed to the shore. The four admirals in the naval base were already informed. They had prepared fifty fire rafts. Built of large pine logs they were piled high with hay under which incendiary fuses were concealed, and lashed together by strips of bamboo. The rafts lay waiting on the beach. As Ruan the Second, Meng Kang and the Tong brothers neared the shore, the four admirals watched for a while, then each waved a pale red signal flag and shoved off in four fast boats. They were dressed in ordinary garb.
The boats drew close quickly. Ruan the Second shouted an order, and his sailors loosed a volley of arrows. The fast boats withdrew. Yuan chased them towards the shore. The four admirals leaped upon the bank and ran, followed by many of their sailors. Ruan saw the naval base further up the beach and did not venture to approach. He and his men returned to their vessels.
Suddenly, a banner waved on Black Dragon Ridge and gongs and drums thundered. The fire rafts were ignited and pushed down into the river, where they advanced rapidly with the wind. Behind the raiding party large boats loomed up. The southern sailors on them yelled. All were equipped with long spears and grappling hooks, and they closed in, thrusting and killing.
The Tong brothers saw that the enemy was too strong. They beached their craft, crawled to the mountainside, then began climbing, seeking a path that would bring them back to their camp.
Ruan the Second and Meng Kang were left to confront the foe, alone. The fire rafts floated nearer. Ruan was about to jump into the water when a southern craft glided up behind and a grappling hook snaked out and nabbed him. Afraid that he would be humiliated if captured, Ruan the Second cut his own throat and died. Meng Kang also started to dive into the river. Cannons on the fire rafts all fired together. A projectile from one of them crushed his helmet and pulverized his skull.
The four admirals advanced rapidly on fire-spewing vessels. Li Jun, Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh were in the rear of the raiding party fleet. When they saw that their forward craft were defeated, and that the foe was moving towards them fiercely along the bank, they hastily turned their boats and retreated with the current. Abandoning their attempt to land, they returned to Tonglu.
On Black Dragon Ridge, National Advisor Deng and Marshal Shi Bao followed up the victory of their fleet by sweeping down the mountain. But the water was too deep and the distances from their bases too far for the contending forces to maneuver freely. The Song raiders went back to their Tonglu camp, and the southerners withdrew again to Black Dragon Ridge.
Song Jiang brooded in his tent in Tonglu over the death of Ruan the Second and Meng Kang. He ate and slept badly. Wu Yong and the chieftains could not console him. Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh, who wore mourning, finally came and spoke to him.
"Our brother gave his life for his country," they said. "That was a lot better than dying in disgrace in Liangshan Marsh. You're our Commander-in-Chief. You mustn't distress yourself. Concentrate on important national affairs. We two will get our own revenge."
On hearing this, Song Jiang cheered up a bit. The following day he mustered his troops and prepared to set forth once more. Wu Yong advised against it.
"Don't be impatient, brother. We must work out a good plan, first. Then it will be time enough to cross the ridge."
Xie Zhen and Xie Bao said: "We brothers were hunters, originally. We're well accustomed to climbing mountains and crossing ridges. Why don't we dress as hunters again, go up the mountain and set a big fire? That will throw a scare into those southern rogues. They'll abandon the pass and run."
"A good idea," said Wu Yong. "But that mountain's a dangerous place. It will be very hard to get up there. One slip and you may lose your lives."
"Since escaping from prison in Dengzhou and joining the band in Liangshan Marsh, thanks to Big Brother's fortunate aura we've enjoyed many years as gallant men. And now the government has pardoned us and we can wear silken clothes. If for the sake of the imperial court and to repay Big Brother we're smashed to bits, it won't be too much for us to give."
"Don't speak such unlucky words," Song Jiang cried. "I only hope we can win a great victory and return to the capital. The emperor will see to it that we're properly rewarded. You two must do your utmost for our country."
The Xie brothers went to prepare. They put on their tiger skin tunics, hung sharp knives at their waists, and took up their steel pitchforks. Bidding Song Jiang farewell, they set out along a path in the direction of Black Dragon Ridge.
It was only about the first watch. They met two junior officers lying in ambush along the road and killed them both. By the time they reached the foot of the ridge it was the second watch. They could hear the watchman's drum striking the hour in the southerners' fort above.
Travel on an open path would have been too dangerous. The Xie brothers ascended the steep side of the mountain, grasping vines and shrubs and hauling themselves laboriously upwards. The moonlight was as bright as day. When they had completed two-thirds of their climb they could see lamps glimmering on the ridge top. They hid themselves in a hollow and listened. The watchman's drum sounded the fourth watch.
"The night is short. It won't be dark much longer," Xie Zhen whispered to his brother. "Let's go on."
They resumed their arduous ascent. Soon they reached a sheer cliff face which required all their attention and the full use of their hands and legs. For this reason, they tied their steel pitchforks to their backs. One of these, caught by a vine, clanged loudly against a rock. Sentries on the top spotted them.
Xie Zhen, who was just crawling into a declivity, heard a voice above shout: "Got you!" A hooked pole reached down and tangled itself in his hair. Zhen hastily reached for his knife. The man above tugged. In an instant, Zhen was dangling free in the air. Panic-stricken, he swung his blade, snapping the pole in two. Poor Xie Zhen, a gallant half his life, plunged from the high cliff a hundred and ten feet to his death, smashed on the jagged rocks below!
Seeing his brother fall, Xie Bao began to climb down hurriedly. He was deluged by shower of rocks, large and small. Crossbow darts bit into him from a bamboo thicket. Poor Xie Bao, a hunter all his life, joined his brother in death near a bamboo grove on the side of Black Dragon Ridge!
At daybreak men were sent down to fetch their bodies. They were left exposed to the elements on the ridge.
A scout reported the news to Song Jiang. He wept so bitterly he fainted several times. He ordered Guan Sheng and Hua Rong to muster soldiers at once, capture Black Dragon Ridge and the pass, and avenge the four chieftains.
"Don't be impatient, brother," Wu Yong cautioned. "They died because it was Heaven's will. Rash actions won't win the pass. We need to work out clever strategy and shrewd tactics. Only then can we deploy troops."
"Already a third of my brothers are gone," Song Jiang cried angrily. "I can't permit those wretches to leave those bodies out in the open. We've got to bring them back, tonight, and give them a proper burial, in coffins!"
"The rascals are leaving them there like that with a purpose. You mustn't be rash, brother."
But Song Jiang refused to listen. He mustered 3000 crack fighters, designated Guan Sheng, Hua Rong, Lu Fang, and Guo Sheng as his lieutenants, and arrived at Black Dragon Ridge that very night. Around the second watch, a young officer said, "Can those be the bodies of Xie Zhen and Xie Bao there ahead?" Song Jiang rode up for a look. Suspended from bamboo poles on 2 trees were 2 corpses. A piece of bark had been stripped from one of the trees and on the exposed white of the trunk some words had been written. But they couldn't be distinguished in the dark of the moon. Song Jiang called for a glowing punk used to ignite cannon fuses. Blowing on it, he lit a lantern. He read the inscription: Eventually Song Jiang shall end like this. Furious, he ordered the bodies removed from the trees. Suddenly, on four sides torches glowed, drums thundered, and southern troops closed in. Arrows zinged down from above. Warships in the river were landing men on the bank. Song Jiang could only groan, completely at a loss. Hastily he retreated, but Shi Bao was blocking his path. He turned, only to find Deng Yuanjue charging his flank. Poor Song Jiang, he'd always been chivalrous, his nobility was as lofty as the eternal sky. Now disaster and death without burial stared him in the face. Truly, slaughter on a huge scale impended, the situation was fraught with danger.

When the Pilot heard that his younger brother, White Eel, was dead, he fainted from grief and remained unconscious for a long time. When he finally revived, Song Jiang said: "Take him to the tent to rest. We'll ask him later for his account of things on the coast."
Song Jiang got Sterling and the Magic Calculator to write out a list of everyone's achievements and a general assembly was called for nine o'clock. The White-Water Dragon and Madcap had taken one enemy commander prisoner, the three women warriors another, Leopard's Head's serpent lance had killed one, Snake and Scorpion had accounted for another, Marshal Shi Bao and four others got away. Song Jiang issued a proclamation to reassure the people, rewarded the army, and sent the two prisoners to Marshal Zhang at headquarters to be publicly beheaded. Judge Yuan, the bearer of tribute who had collaborated with them, was recommended for the post of magistrate at Fuyang and referred to Marshal Zhang for the appropriate letter of appointment. Of this no more.
While the leaders were resting in the city, an aide announced: "Ruan the Seventh has just arrived by river."
When Song Jiang summoned him to his tent and questioned him, he said: "I went down the coast with the Pilot, Ape, Yellow Dog and the sailors and we found a boat which took us beyond Haiyan. We were planning to make our way into the River Qiantang. Unluckily for us the wind and current were unfavourable and drove us out to sea. As we were trying to get back a storm wrecked our boat and we all had to swim for it. Since Ape and Yellow Dog didn't know how to swim, they drowned. With the sailors it was every man for himself, and they were dispersed in all directions. As for me, I swam towards the river mouth, but when I got to

Redcliff Strait the current carried me towards Half-Tomb Hill. As I was trying to get back I saw the Pilot in the water near Five-Cloud Hill, but then I lost sight of him again. Yesterday evening I saw fires in the city and heard a string of explosions and I guessed you must be fighting in Hangzhou, so I came here along the river. Did the Pilot make it back?"

Song Jiang told him about the Pilot and then sent him to see his brothers. He put Ruan the Seventh in charge of the boats again and sent the water-borne forces back to the river to get their boats ready for an attack on Muzhou. Remembering how White Eel's spirit had appeared to him, he went to the bank of the West Lake outside Goldenflood Gate. There he had a temple built dedicated to the Lord of Splendour and made an offering there himself. Later, after Fang La was subdued and Song Jiang, who had earned much credit at court, reported these events on his return to the capital, the Emperor issued an edict conferring on White Eel the posthumous title of Commander of Splendour and sacrifices were made to him at the temple in Hangzhou.

But to return to Song Jiang in the palace: the thought of having lost so many leaders since crossing the river made him exceedingly gloomy. He went accordingly to the Temple of Mercy to arrange for the land and sea battle to be commemorated in a memorial service lasting seven days and nights, with a distribution of food for souls in the underworld and sacrifices offered up for their speedy release and the setting up of votive tablets. After the religious observances, the Southern Prince's palace was razed to the ground and all the valuables distributed among the leaders. Once calm had been restored in Hangzhou a celebratory banquet was held. After that Song Jiang had lengthy discussions with the Professor as to the best way to attack Muzhou.

Now, in the middle of the fourth month, they suddenly heard that General Liu Guangshi had arrived with an envoy from the capital. Song Jiang and his commanders went to meet them outside North Gate and welcome them into the city. They all went to the palace for the reading of an edict: "In view of the fact that Marshal Song Jiang, Commander-in-Chief of the expeditionary force, and his lieutenants have achieved outstanding successes against the rebel Fang La, we have awarded thirty-five bottles of imperial wine and thirty-five suits of cotton clothing to the senior commanders. The others will receive rolls of silk." The court of course only knew that Taoist Gongsun was absent from the force that crossed the river to fight Fang La, they did not know about the loss of the other leaders. When Song Jiang looked at those thirty-five robes and bottles he was deeply moved and could not hold back his tears. When the envoy questioned him about it, he explained about the losses and the envoy said: "The court of course knew nothing of all this. When I go back I shall have to submit a report."

A banquet was held for the envoy, hosted by General Liu, with the other commanders all seated according to their rank. The imperial wine was presented and all drank of it. The royal gifts intended for those leaders who had died were set aside and offered up to their spirits the next day. Song Jiang also set aside a bottle of wine and a suit of clothing for the spirit of White Eel. He went to the shrine to make the offering and dressed the clay effigy of the dead man in the gift robes. The envoy remained a few days longer and then returned to the capital.

Gradually the days slipped by and soon several weeks had passed. Marshal Zhang wrote urging the commander-in-chief to renew the campaign. Song Jiang and the Professor summoned the Unicorn for a meeting. "One lot has to go to Muzhou, advancing along the river to the viper's nest; another has to go to Shezhou by way of the trail over Sundance Pass. We now need to divide the forces between us for the attack. Which route would you like?"

The Unicorn said: "You are my superior and I am entirely at your orders. It is no business of mine to choose."

Song Jiang said: "All the same, we had better draw lots and see what is heaven's will." He had the two lists of leaders drawn up and then the place names were written on two papers. They burnt incense and prayed and then each drew one of the papers. Song Jiang drew Muzhou and the Unicorn drew Shezhou. Song Jiang said: "Fang La's headquarters is at Bangyuan Gap in Clearwater district. If you take Shezhou, you can make camp there and send word to let me know and then we will fix the day for a joint attack on the robber's den."

The Unicorn asked Song Jiang to apportion the troops. This done, the Unicorn, with a total of twenty-nine leaders and thirty thousand troops, took leave of General Liu, said goodbye to Song Jiang, and headed for the mountains beyond Hangzhou. The hard part of the journey began after Lin'an.

Meanwhile Song Jiang's army, after the boats had been made ready, the troops prepared and the leaders and men divided up, set out with waving banners on the allotted day for a joint attack by land and water, boats and cavalry giving each other mutual support.

At this time the plague struck in Hangzhou and several leaders were infected. These were the Pilot, Unstoppable, Comet, Crocodile, Panther and the Daytime Rat. Since they showed no sign of recovery, they could not join the attack, and the Irrepressible and Smiler were detailed to look after them. That meant eight leaders in all were left in Hangzhou. The rest accompanied Song Jiang on the campaign against Muzhou, thirty-seven of them, making their way along the river towards Fuyang.

We shall say no more of the advance of these two armies, but turn to Mr. Chai and the Prodigy, who after leaving them in Xiuzhou, had taken a boat in Haiyan, travelled via Yuezhou to Zhuji, crossed the river Yupu and arrived at the border of Muzhou.

When the border guards stopped them, Mr. Chai said: "I am a scholar from the central plains. I am conversant with heavenly geography and an expert in Yin and Yang. I know the six stations of wind and clouds and can analyse the heavenly bodies, I have a thorough knowledge of the nine schools and three religions, nothing is hidden from me. I saw from afar some form of heavenly emanation in the regions south of the river, that is why I come here. Why do you obstruct my path?"

Mr. Chai's speech seemed so extraordinary to them that the border guards asked him who he was. "My name is Ke Yin," he replied. "Master and servant we are and we come with none but friendly intentions."

The guard commander detained him and sent someone to inform the deputy chief minister, Zu Shiyuan. and three other important officials, namely Councillor Shen Shou, Secretary Huan Yi and Marshal Tan Gao. Someone was accordingly sent to take Mr. Chai to Muzhou. After the exchange of courtesies, Mr. Chai's eloquence, allied to his striking appearance, won them over completely. The minister was delighted with him and told Secretary Huan Yi to take him to Clearwater for an audience with the Prince. Fang La, you see, had established temporary offices in both Muzhou and Shezhou, but his central administration was at a place called Bangyuan Gap, in the district of Clearwater.

Mr. Chai and the Prodigy then accompanied Secretary Huan Yi to the Prince's citadel at Clearwater where they were first received by Chief Minister Lou, who was highly impressed by Mr. Chai's lofty language and powers of expression, and entertained him officially. The fact that the two men talked so well and were so educated and cultured, was already strongly in their favour. This Chief Minister Lou had once been a teacher, and though his knowledge was far from profound, Mr. Chai's eloquence impressed him enormously.

The following day at dawn the courtiers were drawn up waiting for Fang La to make his entrance, in the inner rank the wives, concubines and female attendants, in the outer rank four ministers and nine deputy ministers, as well as all the civil and military officials, followed by two ranks of officials, mace-bearers and courtiers. The Chief Minister now stepped forward and declared: "The Central Plain is the home of Confucius. Today we are honoured with the presence of a scholar named Ke Yin, who is conversant with both literature and warfare. He has abundant knowledge and is skilled in interpreting heaven and earth. He can identify six kinds of weather and explain heavenly portents, knows the three religions and nine schools, and of the one hundred schools of philosophy there is not one he is not familiar with. He has followed some heavenly sign here and is waiting outside. He offers himself to the service of our sovereign."

Fang La said: "Since this scholar has come to us, let him present himself at court in white robes."

The court usher relayed this order to Mr. Chai and escorted him into the court. Mr. Chai kowtowed and then stood up and saluted the Prince. He advanced to stand in front of the curtain.

Fang La recognized this man as someone outstanding, with his air of a true son and grandson of dragons, and was pretty well won over from the start. "You say you have followed a sign here," he said. "Explain yourself."

"My humble abode is in the Central Plain. I am an orphan. I studied by myself. I learnt the secret mysteries discovered by preceding scholars and the mysteries known to ancestral teachers. Recently I was making observations of the night sky and I saw a star of outstanding brilliance standing over the eastern regions of this land of Wu. I followed it here to its source, not shrinking from the trials of a long journey. When I arrived south of the river, I saw a trail of five-coloured imperial vapour emanating from Muzhou. Now it is given me to contemplate this august countenance, this truly lordly air, that shines more brightly than the sun and corresponds exactly to what the signs foretold. I can make no secret of my joy!" Having said this he kowtowed again.

Fang La said: "Although I rule over part of the southeast, at present Song Jiang has robbed me of some of my cities. He is advancing on us here. What should we do?"

Mr. Chai said: "In olden days they had a saying, 'Easily gained is easily lost, hard won means hard to lose.' This southeastern kingdom of Your Majesty's since its foundation has forged ahead like a mat unrolling, acquiring ever more districts. Although at present Song Jiang has seized some of these districts, fortune will soon turn again in your favour. One day not only the southeast but also the Central Plain will belong to Your Majesty."

This was all music to Fang La's ears. He offered Mr. Chai a brocade cushion to sit on, regaled him with a banquet and made him one of his ministers. From now on Mr. Chai was with the Prince every day and never failed to find flattering words for him. Within a couple of weeks he was everyone's friend, from the Prince down to his least officials. After this, having seen the justice of all his dealings, Fang La became truly fond of the man and asked the Chief Minister to open negotiations for Princess Golden Iris to be married to him. As royal son-in-law Ke Yin, alias Chai Jin, was given the rank of Master of the Rolls, while the Prodigy, who had changed his name to Yun Bi, became know to everyone as the Master's Man. After his marriage to the Princess, Mr. Chai came and went freely in the palace and knew all the goings-on, inside and out.

Whenever Fang La had some important military matter to decide, he invited Mr. Chai to the palace to advise him. Mr. Chai would repeat something like: "Your Majesty's emanations are correct, only there is a star with an adverse influence, it will take you six months to find peace. You must wait till Song Jiang has no more generals at his disposal. Then the malignant stars will withdraw and Your Majesty's enterprise will be back on track. You will make great advances and seize the whole Central Plain."

Fang La said: "But so many of my favourite generals have been killed by Song Jiang. What am I to do about that?"

Mr. Chai said: "I saw a sign last night. At present the indicators of Your Majesty's fortune are predominantly adverse but this will soon pass. Then the twenty-eight signs of the zodiac will favour you and your enterprise will be renewed. A dozen or so of Song Jiang's leaders will come over to you and they are the stars that will mark the start of a great expansion in your territory."

Fang La was well pleased with the answer.

We shall leave Mr. Chai to his role of royal son-in-law, and return to Song Jiang and the main army. They have left Hangzhou and proceeded to Fuyang. At the same time Precious Light and the other four southern commanders have marched the remnants of their defeated army to the pass guarding Fuyang and have sent to Muzhou for reinforcements.

Deputy Chief Minister Zu Shiyuan ordered two officers and ten thousand troops to reinforce the contingent guarding Fuyang. These two officers, Bai Qin and Jing De, who were both exceedingly brave men, joined forces with Precious Light and the others and occupied the mountains.

Song Jiang's army meanwhile arrived at Two Mile Bay. They were advancing with the water-borne forces in the lead and the cavalry behind. When Marshal Shi Bao saw this he mounted and took up his shooting-star hammer and star-splitter sword and rode down the mountain to challenge Song Jiang.

Scimitar was about to take up the challenge when Little Duke shouted out: "Wait brother and watch me have a few bouts with the villain." Song Jiang watched from the pennants' gate as Little Duke with his halberd took on the Marshal, while the latter brandished Wind-Slicer. After fifty bouts, Little Duke began to flag. Then the Halberdier urged on his horse and charged into the attack. Even with his one sword against two halberds the Marshal gave nothing away to the other two. Then, when the combat was still at its height, Precious Light sounded the gong for the southerners to break off. What had happened was that he had seen how with a favourable wind the Song war boats had arrived close to shore and were lined up along the bank. Afraid of being caught between two fires, he ordered a withdrawal. Little Duke and the Halberdier however went on fighting and would not let their opponent get away. The Marshal fought on for another three or four bouts, and then Whiskers rode out with his spear and joined the fray. Three opponents at once was too much even for Marshal Shi Bao and he knocked their weapons aside and made off. Song Jiang pointed with the stock of his whip and they charged over Fuyang Ridge. The Marshal's troops did not stop to take up positions till they reached Tonglu.

Song Jiang continued his advance till nightfall and they camped the other side of White Hornet Ridge. That night he sent a party from the east under Snake and Scorpion, and another from the west under Iron Ox to attack the camp in Tonglu, and ordered the boat captains to attack along the river. When Snake's party arrived at the Tonglu camp it was around midnight. Precious Light was planning strategy with Marshal Shi Bao when they heard a sudden report. There was no time for most of them to mount their horses. They saw fires on three sides. Together with the Marshal they all fled and no one tried to make a stand. One of their commanders did not even manage to mount his horse and fled on foot along small paths. He ran into Short-Arse and Steelbright, who fell on him and captured him alive. Iron Ox's party were busy killing and starting fires in the village.

When Song Jiang received the reports he ordered his army to strike camp and advance to Tonglu where they set up their position and stationed all the carts and horses. Short-Arse and Steelbright handed over their captive and claimed a reward. Song Jiang sent the captive southern commander off to Marshal Zhang at Hangzhou to be executed. That's the end of him.

Next day Song Jiang planned an attack by land and water. He assembled his troops below Black Dragon Ridge, which stood between him and Muzhou. Precious Light meanwhile led his troops up this mountain and occupied the pass. This pass over Black Dragon Ridge was close to the main river at a place where the cliffs were steep and the current swift. The enemy now held the top of the pass and the river below was guarded by their war fleet. Song Jiang's army camped not far off and built a stockade. Infantry commanders Iron Ox, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost were sent with five hundred shield-bearers to reconnoitre. When they got within range of Black Dragon Ridge wooden and stone missiles rained down on them and they were unable to continue. All they could do was go back and report to Song Jiang.

Song Jiang next ordered Ruan the Second, Flagpole, Cave Dragon and River Rider and to take some boats up the river. Ruan the Second took a thousand sailors and a hundred boats and with fluttering banners and beating drums and singing war songs they rowed towards Black Dragon Ridge. But here, with the mountain at its back, was Fang La's whole fleet. Five hundred vessels were stationed here, with around five thousand sailors.

The first four of Fang La's boats were commanded by the Four Dragons of Zhejiang. These four had been boatmen on the river Qiantang. On joining up with Fang La they had been given high rank. When Ruan the Second and his party steered out of the mainstream towards the shore, the four southern commanders in the waterside camp already had wind of it and had prepared fifty fire boats. These were rafts of pinewood piled high with bundles of grass within which were concealed gunpowder and incendiary materials, tied with bamboo ropes and lined up along the shore. Whilst Ruan the Second and the others were busy rowing shorewards, the four southern commanders were watching them from upstream. Each of them now waved a pink signalling flag and their four fast boats shot downstream. Ruan the Second ordered his men to fire their arrows, and the four boats turned back. He ordered an all-out effort to catch them. The boats reached shore. The four commanders and a number of sailors leapt out and ran for it.

Seeing so many boats moored there, Ruan the Second did not dare land. As he was wondering what to do, he saw flags waving on Black Dragon Ridge; gongs and drums began to sound and all the fire rafts were lit simultaneously and began to bear down on them, driven by the wind. On the bigger boats at the back a cry went up. Bristling with spears and grappling hooks, these boats followed on behind the fire rafts. Since the opposing force was large and the shore was near, Cave Dragon and River Rider steered their boats ashore and then abandoned them and began to climb the cliffs. Once on top they made their way back to camp.

Ruan the Second and Flagpole tried to face the enemy. The fire boats came on blazing furiously. Ruan the Second dived in and tried to swim round to the stern of the boat. He was caught by a grappling hook. Terrified that he might face the shame of capture, he drew his sword and killed himself. Flagpole saw it was hopeless and tried to dive in, but at that moment a fire boat blew up and the explosion smashed his helmet and made mincemeat of him. The four southern commanders came charging along after the fire boats. The White-Water Dragon, Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh, who were at the back, saw the leading boats were in trouble and managed to turn their boat about and let the stream carry them down to Tonglu.

Let us return to Precious Light and Marshal Shi Bao on Black Dragon Ridge. When they saw their boat commanders had won, they led their troops in a furious charge down the mountain. Reckoning the odds were stacked against them, the Song army retreated to Tonglu and made camp. The southern forces withdrew to Black Dragon Ridge.

Song Jiang fortified himself at Tonglu. Miserable at the loss of Ruan the Second and Flagpole, he sat gloomily in his tent. He could get no rest; his dreams were disturbed. The Professor and the others could do nothing to animate him. When their mourning was over, Ruan the Seventh and Ruan the Fifth admonished him: "Our brother has given his life for the country. Had he died in the Marshes of Mount Liang, it would have been a death without honour. It is your duty to lead us and you should not be upset. You must consider the cause. We will take responsibility for avenging our brother."

Song Jiang cheered up a little at this. Next day he gave out new orders for a renewed attack. "Do not be too hasty," the Professor warned. "We must have a plan before trying to pass Black Dragon Ridge." At this point Snake and Scorpion spoke up: "We grew up as hunters, we know all about mountain passes. We will disguise ourselves as local hunters, climb the mountain and start a fire. It will give the bastards a shock and they'll abandon their position."

The Professor said: "It's a good idea but I'm afraid this mountain is very steep and you may not be able to find a way up. If you should lose your footing you'd most likely be dead men!"

Snake and Scorpion said: "When we two escaped from prison in Dengzhou we went to Mount Liang and in the shadow of your good fortune we served a good many years with you as leaders. Later we received the imperial amnesty and were permitted to wear official robes. To sacrifice our own comfort for the state and for the sake of avenging our brother can hardly be considered too much."

Song Jiang said: "There is no need for such wild language, friends. We must aim to complete this business successfully as soon as possible and return to the capital. The court cannot be ungrateful. Just do your best, and serve the country well."

They went off to prepare their packs. They dressed in tiger skins, stuck sharp knives in their belts and carried their tridents. They bade Song Jiang farewell and set off along small tracks toward Black Dragon Ridge. It was already the first watch. Along the way they ran into two sentries whom they killed. By the second watch they were just below the pass. They could clearly hear the drum beat in the enemy camp. They dared not take the main route, so they forced their way slowly upward through creepers and undergrowth. It was a bright moonlit night, almost like day. They rested and then climbed. They could see a light glimmering on top of the ridge. At the last stage they stopped to listen: the drum beat for the fourth watch! Snake whispered to his brother: "There's not much night left, it'll soon be light. We'd best get on."

They proceeded on up. So intent were they on climbing, their hands and feet fully occupied, that they allowed the tridents fastened to their shoulders and trailing behind them to scrape against the undergrowth. This made a noise and they were spotted by the enemy on top of the ridge. Snake was negotiating an overhang when he heard a shout from above, "Got 'im!" and a hook caught him by the topknot. As he reached for the sword at his belt a jerk from above hoisted him off his feet. In desperation he swung the sword above his head, cut the hook and instantaneously plummeted into the void. Thus did the unfortunate Snake, a hero of universal renown, meet his untimely end, falling from this thousand metre cliff. His body was torn to shreds on the rocks below, jagged and sharp as wolves' teeth.

When Scorpion saw his brother fall he tried to retreat down the cliff, but rocks were raining down from above and crossbow bolts, fired from cover of the undergrowth. The wretched Scorpion also, the famous hunter, died riddled with arrows on Black Dragon Ridge. The two bodies lay there in the undergrowth.

In the morning someone was sent down from the ridge to bring the bodies up and expose them. Information about all this was retrieved by Song scouts and it was reported to Song Jiang that Snake and Scorpion lay dead on Black Dragon Ridge. The news caused him enormous grief and several times he passed out. Then he ordered Scimitar and Colonel Hua to prepare the troops for an assault on the mountain, to avenge their four comrades. The Professor warned: "You must not be too hasty, brother. Those who died, it was their fate to die. If you want to capture the pass it is no good rushing things. We really must have a good plan and use cunning to gain control of the pass. After that we can launch an all-out attack."

But Song Jiang was very angry. "Who would have thought that we would lose a third of our companions," he said. "We cannot allow those villains to expose the bodies of our brothers on the mountainside. I must make a sortie tonight to bring the bodies back and give them a proper funeral."

The Professor said: "I am afraid that exposing the bodies is a trick. Do not act rashly."

But Song Jiang would not listen to him. He assembled three thousand picked troops, to be led by Scimitar, Colonel Hua, the Little Duke and the Halberdier. They attacked that night. When they reached Black Dragon Ridge it was the second watch. One of the soldiers reported: "There's two exposed bodies up ahead. I reckon it's Snake and Scorpion." Song Jiang galloped forward to see for himself. He saw two heads stuck on poles on two trees and on the trees a notice with two lines of characters. In the moonlight he could not make out clearly what they said. He ordered a flare to be lit and blowing on the flame saw by its light what was written:

Here too ere long will Song Jiang's head be exhibited.

Outraged, Song Jiang ordered them to climb the tree at once and get the corpses down. At that very moment torches sprang up on every side of them, drums and gongs began to beat. A huge enemy force was all around. Volleys of arrows fell on them from the mountain above, and from the river below the sailors from the boats began to pour up the slope. Song Jiang could only curse his luck. He had no idea what to do. If he tried to retreat, Marshal Shi Bao had him; the way was blocked. If he tried to go round, Precious Light appeared and attacked him. It was truly after the fashion of one of those tragic tales of history.

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### At Muzhou, an Arrow Strikes Deng Yuanjue & Precious Light is snuffed by; On Black Dragon Ridge, a Spirit Assists Song Jiang by magic

In a stentorian voice Shi Bao shouted: "Song Jiang dismount and surrender! What are you waiting for?"

This greatly angered Guan Sheng. He clapped his horse and charged Shi Bao, brandishing his halberd. But before they could clash, shouts arose in the rear. The four admirals had mounted the bank and now came tearing forward, in conjunction with southern commanders Wang Ji and Chao Zhong who rushed down from the ridge.

To halt this assault, Hua Rong hurriedly engaged Wang Ji. They fought several rounds and Hua Rong retreated, pursued by Wang and Chao. Hua quickly shot two arrows in succession and brought both of them down. The Song forces cheered but dared not advance. Instead, they withdrew.

The quick disposal of Wang and Chao halted the admirals in their tracks. Hua Rong had stemmed the rear assault successfully. But suddenly two more southern units moved up on the Song flank. One was led by Bai Qin, the other by Jing De. Lu Fang and Guo Sheng rode out and engaged them. The four battled fiercely in a fight to the death.

Song Jiang was very worried. But just then yells rang out behind the southern forces, and they broke and ran. Li Kui and the shield bearer Chieftains Xiang Chong and Li Gun and a thousand infantry had smashed into Shi Bao's rear. When National Advisor Deng rushed reinforcements, his own rear was assaulted by Lu Zhishen and Wu Song. their blades hacking and cleaving, the pure iron staff pulverizing all in its path. With them were a thousand foot soldiers. And behind these were eight more chieftains leading a charge of mixed infantry and cavalry. From all sides the Song troops ripped into the contingents of Shi Bao and Deng Yuanjue. After rescuing Song Jiang they escorted him back to Tonglu. Shi Bao withdrew his forces up the ridge. In the camp Song Jiang thanked his chieftains.

"If you brothers hadn't come to my aid, I would have joined Xie Zhen and Xie Bao as ghosts in the Nether Regions!"

"You went despite my advice," Wu Yong reminded him. "I was afraid there would be some mishap, so I sent our chieftains to relieve you."

Song Jiang was profuse in expressions of gratitude.

On Black Dragon Ridge, Shi Bao and National Advisor Deng conferred in their camp. Shi said: "Song's forces are back in Tonglu at the moment. But if they sneak around the rear of the mountain, Muzhou will be in imminent danger. I wish you'd see the king in his palace in Clear Stream, National Advisor, and request him to send us reinforcements. Then we can hold out for a long time."

"You're absolutely right, Marshal," said Deng. "I'll go at once."

He mounted and rode to Muzhou, where he called on the prime minister Zu Shiyuan and said: "Song Jiang's army is strong. It can't be stopped. If they come rolling towards the pass, we'll be in trouble. I've come to request the king for reinforcements."

Zu rode with Deng from Muzhou to Bangyuan Cavern in the county of Clear Stream. There, they saw Lou Minzhong the prime minister and told him of their intention to petition for more troops.

Fang La the king held court the next morning. The prime minister, his deputy, and National Advisor Deng attended. They kowtowed, and Deng came forward and hailed the sovereign respectfully.

"This humble monk, on receiving your royal orders, went with the prince to hold Hangzhou. Song Jiang attacked with strong troops and brave generals. We had great difficulty in withstanding them. Then Administrator Yuan slipped them in on his grain boats and we lost the city. The prince was eager for battle, and he died in the fray. Marshal Shi Bao and I retreated to Black Dragon Ridge, where we are guarding the pass. Recently we've killed four of Song Jiang's generals, and he's rather shaken. He's camped now in Tonglu, but sooner or later he'll sneak along some path into the pass. It will be very hard for us to hold the ridge. We earnestly beg Your Majesty to give us more crack forces so that we may defend the pass, drive back the brigands and regain our cities. This humble monk has come specially to submit this petition."

"We've already allocated all the troops we can spare to our critical points," said Fang La. "We've just sent tens of thousands to the pass at Yuling, another place where the situation is tight. All we have left are the Royal Guards who protect my palace. I can't very well let them go."

"If you don't give us reinforcements, Sire, there's nothing I can do," Deng said. "There will be no way to defend Muzhou if Song Jiang crosses the ridge!"

Prime Minister Lou added his plea: "Black Dragon Ridge is vital. There are thirty thousand Royal Guards. Give the National Advisor ten thousand. I beg Your Majesty to consider."

But Fang La was adamant. He refused to send any of the Royal Guards to the aid of Black Dragon Ridge.

Royal court ended and the participants left the palace. Lou conferred with the officials. It was decided that Deputy Prime Minister Zu would dispatch a general and five thousand troops as reinforcements. Deng and. Zu returned to Muzhou together and selected a crack force of five thousand and a top-ranking general—Xiahou Cheng. Deng went back with these to the ridge, where he told Shi Bao what had transpired.

"Since the king won't give us any of his Royal Guards to repel the invaders, we can only hold the pass, but not go out and give battle," said the marshal. "The four admirals must firmly secure the river banks. If enemy vessels come, they can drive them back. They cannot take any offensive action."

Meanwhile, because his losses in chieftains were heavy, Song Jiang remained camped in Tonglu. For more than twenty days his soldiers did not venture forth. Then a mounted scout arrived with a report.

"Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong has arrived in Hangzhou with rewards from the emperor. He has sent General Wang Bing with rewards also to General Lu's army at Yuling Pass. Chancellor Tong will soon be here to make the presentation."

Song Jiang hastened with Wu Yong and the chieftains twenty *li* outside the town to greet him. When they were back in the county government center, the imperial decree was opened and read, and the gifts distributed among the chieftains. Song Jiang and the others paid their respects to Chancellor Tong and gave a banquet in his honor.

"During my journey here I heard your losses were severe," said Tong.

Song Jiang replied with tears in his eyes. "When I went with Commissioner Zhao on the northern expedition against the Liao Tartars, we were victorious and didn't lose a single commander. But in this campaign against Fang La, even before we departed from the capital Gongsun Sheng left us. The emperor has retained several of our chieftains. After crossing the Yangzi, at each place we attacked we lost a few more. Recently, eight or nine have fallen ill in Hangzhou, and there's no guarantee they'll survive. We fought twice at Black Dragon Ridge, and lost another few. That sector is a combination of dangerous mountains and swift waters, a difficult place in which to battle. We haven't been able to break into the pass no matter how we've tried. How fortunate that your benevolent presence should come among us just when we were most distressed!"

"The emperor knows of your great accomplishments," said Tong. "He's heard also of your losses, and therefore has dispatched me, with Generals Wang Bing and Zhao Tan, to assist you. I've sent Wang to General Lu's camp to distribute part of the rewards there."

He introduced Zhao Tan to Song Jiang. The new-comers made their quarters in Tonglu Town, and were feted by their hosts.

The next day, in preparation for an assault on the ridge and the pass, Chancellor Tong mustered the troops. Wu Yong urged restraint.

"You must be cautious, Excellency. Let us send Yan Shun and Ma Lin along secluded paths to find some villager who can tell us of a route to the other side of the pass. Then we'll be able to launch a pincers' attack. The foe won't be able to cope with two fronts at once. We'll take the pass as easily as spitting on our hands."

"An excellent idea!" Song Jiang agreed.

He dispatched the two chieftains with a few dozen stalwarts to scour the countryside for an informant. In the evening they returned with an old man.

"Who is he?" asked Song Jiang.

"A local person," said Ma Lin. "He knows the mountain paths well."

"Old fellow," said Song Jiang, "if you can lead us past Black Dragon Ridge I'll reward you handsomely.

"My family have been ordinary residents around here for generations," the old man said, "but Fang La is oppressing us cruelly and we have no place to hide. Fortunately, the emperor's soldiers have come and the people can have peace again, I'll take you beyond the ridge to Dongguan Town. Muzhou isn't far beyond. Near the city's North Gate, you swing around past the West Gate, and there's Black Dragon Ridge."

Song Jiang was delighted. He directed that the old guide be given silver and kept in the camp. He had him served food and wine.

"Hold Tonglu County." Song Jiang requested Chancellor Tong the following day. "I will go out with our troops near Muzhou and hit the ridge and the pass from both sides. We'll take them all right."

On Chancellor Tong's instructions, Song Jiang divided his forces into two columns. With twelve chieftains, he marched off along a path. Tong led the other column openly down the road.

Song Jiang had a contingent of ten thousand. Guided by the old man they moved silently, the bridles of the horses muffled, the men biting stick gags. Halfway up the slope, they were intercepted by enemy soldiers. At Song Jiang's order, Li Kui, Xiang Chong, Li Gun and their man charged. They annihilated all four or five hundred of the foe.

Around the fourth watch the column reached Dongguan Town. Wu Yingxing the garrison commander had only three thousand troops. They couldn't possibly hold out against Song Jiang's overwhelming numbers. They left in a rush and returned to Muzhou. Wu reported to Deputy Prime Minister Zu.

"Song Jiang's army has slipped past Black Dragon Ridge and is already at Dongguan."

Zu was shocked. He hurriedly called his generals into conference.

Meanwhile, on Song Jiang's instructions, cannoneer Ling Zhen fired off a volley, startling Shi Bao in the fort on the ridge. He sent Bai Qin and a detachment out to scout. They saw the banners of Song Jiang carpeting the plains and wooded slopes. They hastily returned to the fort and Bai Qin reported to Shi Bao.

"Since the king won't give us any reinforcements, we can only hold the pass," said Shi Bao. "We can't go to the rescue."

"You're making a mistake, Marshal!" Deng the National Advisor remonstrated. "Whether or not you aid Muzhou is up to you. But if the palace falls, there'll be no guarantee for any of us. Stay here if you like. I'm going to Muzhou!"

Shi Bao's urgings that he remain were useless. Deng mustered five thousand soldiers, took up his Buddhist staff, and departed with General Xiahou down the ridge.

Song Jiang's contingent at Dongguan, instead of driving on Muzhou, went first to assault the ridge and the pass, and ran directly into National Advisor Deng's force. As the two units neared each other, Deng rode forward and challenged individual combat. Hua Rong leaned close and whispered into Song Jiang's ear. Song Jiang nodded his agreement. He summoned Qin Ming and the three conferred. Then Qin Ming cantered out to meet Deng.

Fifty or sixty rounds they fought. Qin Ming turned and fled, and the Song army scattered. Thinking he had defeated Qin Ming, Deng abandoned him and galloped to capture Song Jiang.

Hua Rong was all prepared. Protecting Song Jiang, he waited until the National Advisor came near. Then he drew his bow to the full, aimed, and let fly. The arrow streaked like a comet into Deng's face and knocked him from his horse. The Song soldiers immediately closed in and killed him.

A wild and bloody battle ensued, and the southern troops were badly defeated. General Xiahou couldn't withstand the foe. He fled to Muzhou. Song Jiang's column raced to Black Dragon Ridge. But a rain of logs and ballista stones drove them back. Song Jiang turned his unit abruptly and headed for Muzhou.

Xiahou, in the southern capital, told Deputy Prime Minister Zu: "The Song army has passed Dongguan, killed National Advisor Deng, and will be here today!" Zu immediately deputed a man to go with Xiahou to Clear Stream and tell the prime minister. Lou relayed the information to the king.

"The Song army is already beyond Dongguan and is hurrying to attack Muzhou. We beg Your Majesty to dispatch troops quickly, or all will be lost."

Fang La was astonished. He hastily summoned Marshal Zheng Biao to the palace, gave him fifteen thousand of the Royal Guards, and ordered him to reinforce Muzhou that same night.

"I shall obey your decree, Sire," said Zheng. "But I request that the Royal Astrologer go with us. In that way we shall be able to defeat Song Jiang."

The king agreed and summoned Bao Daoyi the royal astrologer. With palms pressed together, Bao bowed before the throne.

"Song Jiang and his army have invaded our territory and destroyed our cities, our troops and our generals. Even now they are marching on Muzhou," said Fang La. "We hope you will work your magic, save our country and people, and preserve our land."

"Set your mind at ease, Sire." said Bao. "Though I am not talented, I do have a little learning. With the aid of Your Majesty's powerful good fortune, I shall sweep the ground with Song Jiang's army, and they shall lie everywhere dead and unburied."

Very pleased, Fang La feted the astrologer. After the banquet, Bao bid the king farewell. Then he conferred on tactics with Zheng and Xiahou.

This Bao Daoyi hailed from the Jinhua Mountains. He became a priest very young, and studied the unorthodox school of Taoism. Later, he threw his lot in with Fang La, turned schemer and rebel, posed evil for righteousness and, whenever engaged in battle, used his wicked magic to harm others. He had a precious sword called the Occult Universe which could fly a hundred paces and kill a man. As a reward for his help in unvirtuous activities, Fang La named him Able Royal Astrologer.

Zheng Biao had been a constable in Lanxi County, Wuzhou Prefecture, and was a skilled wielder of spear and staff. After joining Fang La he was appointed Marshal of the Royal Guards. Entranced by Taoist magic, he became a disciple of Bao the Royal Astrologer, and learned many spells from him. Because whenever he was fighting to the death he could produce a mystic cloud, everyone called him Zheng the Prince of Demons.

Xiahou also was from the Wuzhou hills. He started life as a hunter, and was good with a steel pitchfork. He was part of the entourage of Deputy Prime Minister Zu ruling Muzhou.

Now, the three were conferring in the headquarters of the Royal Guards. The gate-keeper announced that the eunuch Pu Wenying had come to call on the Royal Astrologer.

Pu entered and said: "I have heard that you are considering how to cope with the Song army. Last night I examined the sky. The stars of the southern generals all are lusterless, while the stars of half of Song Jiang's generals are bright. Although it's good that you march against the foe, Royal Astrologer, I'm afraid you're doomed to failure. It would be better if you petitioned the king to discuss terms of surrender, and save the country from calamity."

Furious, Bao whipped out his Occult Universe sword and, with one blow, cleaved Pu Wenying in two. He hurriedly reported the incident to the king in writing. Of that we'll say no more.

Then, the vanguard under Zheng Biao left Clear Stream. Bao followed with the central unit, Xiahou brought up the rear. They marched to save Muzhou.

Song Jiang's forces assailed Muzhou without any fixed plan. A mounted scout reported that reinforcements from Clear Stream had arrived for the beleaguered southerners. Song Jiang sent Stumpy Tiger Wang and his wife Ten Feet of Steel out with a patrol of three thousand cavalry to confront the foe. They met on the Clear Stream road, and Zheng Biao rode forth to engage Stumpy Tiger. Without exchanging a word they fought eight or nine rounds.

Zheng muttered an incantation under his breath, and shouted: "Speed!" A cloud of black vapor spewed from the top of his helmet. In the cloud stood a Heavenly spirit in golden armor, raising a Demon-Smiting precious cudgel. Panic-stricken, Stumpy Tiger floundered, and Zheng ran him through with his lance.

When Ten Feet of Steel saw her husband fall from the saddle, she charged Zheng brandishing her two steel-blue swords. They fought briefly and Zheng turned and galloped away. Burning for vengeance, the girl raced after him. Zheng put aside his lance and, from a silken pouch, drew out a gold-plated bronze brick. Suddenly he twisted around and flung it at his pursuer's forehead. It struck squarely, and Ten Feet of Steel fell dead to the ground. Poor beautiful female warrior, her life was gone like a dream of spring!

Zheng the Prince of Demons pressed his advantage to drive back the Song patrol. The northerners were badly defeated. They returned and reported to Song Jiang that Stumpy Tiger and Ten Feet of Steel had been killed by Zheng Biao, and that the patrol had lost more than half its effectives.

Enraged by the death of his two chieftains, Song Jiang mustered five thousand men and rode out to battle, accompanied by Li Kui, Xiang Chong and Li Gun. They soon were within sight of Zheng the Prince of Demons and his contingent. Song Jiang cantered forward and shouted at Zheng angrily.

"Rebellious bandit, how dare you kill two of my chieftains!"

Zheng rode towards him with levelled lance. This infuriated Li Kui. Swinging his axes, Black Whirlwind raced out, covered by Xiang Chong and Li Gun, who also ran at Zheng twirling their shields. The Prince of Demons turned and fled, with the three hotly pursuing him, directly into the southerners' position. Fearful for Li Kui's safety, Song Jiang threw in another five thousand troops. The southerners broke and scattered.

Song Jiang had the trumpeters blow the call to reassemble. The two shield chieftains, escorting Li Kui back, suddenly found themselves enveloped in a black cloud that obscured the sky. They couldn't tell north from south, day from night. Song Jiang's army lost its sense of direction completely. Zheng the Prince of Demons had imposed a spell. The Song forces, unable to see a thing, began floundering about.

Song Jiang raised his face to Heaven and cried: "Am I really doomed to die in this place!"

By then it was already afternoon, and the cloud broke up and the mist dissolved. All around Song Jiang saw huge fellows in golden armor surrounding them in ranks. The Song forces prostrated themselves and waited for death. Song Jiang dismounted and surrendered.

"Kill me quickly," he exclaimed. He crouched on the ground. He heard the sound of wind and rain, but he saw no one.

His officers and men covered their faces and waited for the thrusts that would finish them. But soon the wind and rain passed, and no blades descended.

A hand grasped Song Jiang and a voice said: "Arise, please!"

Song Jiang lifted his head and looked. Standing before him was a scholar. Astonished, Song Jiang scrambled to his feet and bowed.

"Who are you, sir?"

"My name is Shao Jun. I'm a native of these parts. I've come specially to inform you, righteous warrior—Fang La's number is nearly up. In only ten more days he'll be destroyed. I have expended myself several times on your behalf. Although you've suffered some difficulties today, relief will soon be here. Are you aware of that, righteous warrior?"

"When, exactly, can we capture Fang La, sir?"

The scholar gave him a push, and Song Jiang awakened. It had all been a dream. The huge fellows he had seen surrounding them were only pine trees, gilded by the sun.

He shouted for his chieftains to get up and find a road. The cloud and mist were gone, the sky was clear. Beyond the pines, yells were heard. Song Jiang led his men quickly in that direction. There was Lu Zhishen and Wu Song, about to engage Zheng Biao.

Royal Astrologer Bao, watching from his horse, saw Wu Song striding towards Zheng with a pair of swords. He pulled his Occult Universe sword from its scabbard and flung it. The blade bit into Wu Song's arm so deeply he fainted from loss of blood. Lu Zhishen, enraged, barged in with his iron staff. By the time be rescued his companion, Wu Song's arm was dangling inert, but they had captured Zheng's mystic sword. Wu Song regained consciousness. With one slice of his knife, he cut off the useless left limb. Song Jiang ordered that he be carried back to camp to recuperate.

Lu Zhishen, who had barged right through to the rear of the enemy unit, now engaged General Xiahou. The two fought several rounds, and Xiahou left in defeat. Zhishen ploughed into the southern soldiers with his Buddhist staff. They fled in every direction. Xiahou headed for the wooded mountains. Zhishen pursued him tenaciously into their depths. Zheng the Prince of Demons and his troops came hurrying towards the Song contingent, Li Kui, Xiang Chong and Li Gun, with twirling shields, flying knives, swift javelins and mighty axes, rushed to meet them. Unable to stem the assault, Zheng retreated over hills and waterways. The three pursuers, although they were unfamiliar with the terrain, wanted to distinguish themselves before Song Jiang, and gave headlong chase across a stream.

On the west bank, three thousand southern soldiers suddenly blocked their path. Xiang Chong hastily turned to go back, only to find his retreat cut off at the shore by two southern commanders. He called to Black Whirlwind and Li Gun, but they were already well beyond in their pursuit of Zheng Biao.

Li Gun, fording another stream ahead, stepped unexpectedly into a deep hole and fell. He was immediately riddled by arrows and killed. Xiang Chong, as he attempted to plunge down the bank, was tripped up by a rope. Before he could struggle to his feet, southern soldiers swarmed all over him and hacked him to mincemeat.

Poor Li Gun and Xiang Chong, what chance had they to display their heroism! That left only Li Kui, continuing the chase into the mountains.

Meanwhile, the Song unit at the shore pushed across. Before they had gone half a *li* they heard shouts behind them. Hua Rong. Qin Ming and Fan Rui had caught up with reinforcements. Together, they smashed the southerners, drove into mountains and rescued Li Kui. Only Lu Zhishen was nowhere to be seen.

They returned and told Song Jiang what had happened. He wept bitterly. A count of his troops revealed he had lost about half. Lu Zhishen was missing, and Wu Song was minus a left arm.

A mounted scout announced: "Military Advisor Wu Yong has come by water with ten thousand troops."

Wu Yong arrived and explained: "Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong and his column have joined forces with the units under Generals Wang Bing, Zhao Tan and Liu Guangshi, and all are at the foot of Black Dragon Ridge. Only thirteen chieftains have been left behind. The remainder are here with me."

Song Jiang told him of their losses, adding: "Wu Song is a cripple, and nobody knows what's become of Lu Zhishen. Is it any wonder I'm heartsore!"

"Take a broad view, brother," Wu Yong urged. "This is the time to capture Fang La. It's a matter of major national importance. You mustn't let your distress over our brothers ruin your health."

Song Jiang pointed at the surrounding pines and told Wu Yong about his dream.

"There must be a temple near here for you to have had such a remarkable dream," said the Military Advisor. "That spirit who appeared obviously was protecting you."

"You're absolutely right. Let's look around and see if we can find it."

They walked into the wooded mountains. Sure enough, less than half an arrow-flight away, they came upon a temple. On a plaque in gold letters were inscribed the words: *Temple of the Black Dragon Spirit.*

The two men entered and gazed at the idol of the Dragon Spirit at the upper end of the building. Song Jiang was amazed. It was none other than the apparition which appeared to him in his dream! Song Jiang kowtowed and voiced his gratitude.
"I cannot thank you enough, oh Dragon Spirit, for saving me! I beg for your continuing aid. If I conquer Fang La, I shall petition the emperor to build here a magnificent temple, and confer on you an exalted title!"
After kowtowing once more the two left the building and examined the stone tablet in the courtyard. It said that during the Tang Dynasty a scholar named Shao Jun failed in the imperial examinations and drowned himself. The Lord of the Heavens pitied him and made him a Dragon Spirit. Thereafter, when the local people prayed for wind they got wind, when they prayed for rain they got rain. And so they built this temple and sacrificed in each of the four seasons.
Song Jiang called for a black pig and a white sheep and held his own sacrificial ceremony. On leaving the temple, he looked carefully at the surrounding pines, and told Wu Yong how they had marvelously been converted into giant warriors.
To this day there is a Temple of the Black Dragon King outside Yanzhou's North Gate. And the Forest of Ten Thousand Pines still stands.
Returning to headquarters, Song Jiang and Wu Yong sat up half the night discussing how to repel the enemy and attack Muzhou. Song Jiang then wearily laid his head on the table and slept. A voice announced: "Scholar Shao has come." Song Jiang hastily got up and left the tent to greet him.
The Dragon Spirit bowed and said: "If I hadn't protected you yesterday, Bao the Royal Astrologer, who by a magic spell changed the pines into warriors, would have captured you. But I'm grateful for the sacrifices you made to me, and I've come specially to thank you. I want to tell you also that you soon will break into Muzhou, and within ten days capture Fang La."
Song Jiang wanted to invite his visitor into the tent and question him further, when he was awakened by a sudden gust of wind. It had been another dream.
He urgently summoned the Military Advisor and told him what he had dreamt.
"Since the Dragon Spirit has appeared to you again, we definitely can launch our attack on Muzhou," said Wu Yong.
"Perfectly correct," cried Song Jiang.
At daybreak he ordered that the troops be mustered for an offensive against the city. He directed Yan Shun and Ma Lin to hold the Black Dragon Ridge road, and Guan Sheng, Hua Rong, Qin Ming and Zhu Tong to drive towards the North Gate with the vanguard. Ling Zhen was instructed to fire directly into the city nine vollies of Mother and Sons shells.
Their bursts shook the earth and sky, and the hills and mountains trembled. The southern soldiers in Muzhou were scared out of their wits. They were in a panic before the fighting even started.
The rear army contingent of Royal Astrologer Bao and Zheng the Prince of Demons had already been scattered by Lu Zhishen, and Xiahou chased off to parts unknown. The remainder withdrew into the city. Bao and Zheng conferred with Deputy Prime Minister Zu and the other leaders.
"The Song army is upon us," they said. "What can save us?"
"Since ancient times whenever enemy soldiers are at the gates a battle to the death is the only solution," said Zu. "If they break in, we'll surely be captured. The situation is critical. We must go forward."
Zheng the Prince of Demons, seconded by Tan Gao and Wu Yingxing and a dozen or more subordinate officers, opened the gates and led forth ten thousand crack troops. Song-Jiang directed his forces to fall back half an arrow-flight and permit the foe to emerge completely from the city and deploy in battle positions.
Bao the Royal Astrologer seated himself in an armchair atop the city wall. Deputy Prime Minister Zu, Advisor Shen, and Royal Inspector Huan also took seats and watched from the ramparts. With levelled lance, Zheng cantered forward. Song Jiang sent Guan Sheng the Big Halberd against him. They fought only a few rounds. No match for Guan, Zheng could only parry and dodge. Seeing this, Bao on the wall worked his magic. He muttered an incantation and shouted: "Speed!" Bao puffed out a breath, and from the top of Zheng's head black vapor billowed. In the cloud a spirit in golden armor appeared, grasping a Demon-Smiting Cudgel which he raised to strike. Another black cloud spread from the southern army. Song Jiang immediately directed Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World to counter the magic. He himself chanted the secret incantation from the Heavenly Books for dispelling wind and darkness. From Guan Sheng's helmet rolled a white cloud. In it was a spirit astride a black dragon, an iron hammer in his hand. He charged the golden-armored spirit which had emerged from Zheng's head. The contending armies yelled as the supernatural warriors fought. After only a few rounds, the dragon-riding spirit drove off his opponent. With one swing of his halberd Guan Sheng cut Zheng from his horse. Bao the Royal Astrologer, shocked by the wind and thunder amid the Song army, hastily started to rise. A flaming ball from Ling Zhen's heaven-shaking cannon smashed his head and body to smithereens. The southern forces were defeated, and the Song army surged towards Muzhou. Zhu Tong ran Grand Marshal Tan Gao through with his lance, tumbling him from his mount. Li Ying's flying sword killed Garrison Commander Wu. When the flaming cannon ball disintegrated Bao the Royal Astrologer, the southern soldiers on the wall scrambled down and ran. Song Jiang's troops were by now inside the city. In their massive advance they captured Deputy Prime Minister Zu, Advisor Shen and Royal Inspector Huan. The subordinate officers were slain, every one, with no one bothering to ask their names. Song Jiang burned Fang La's palace and distributed his gold and silks among the commanders. He also issued a proclamation reassuring the populace. Even before a count of his soldiers was completed, a mounted messenger raced up with a report. "On Black Dragon Ridge Ma Lin's knocked from his saddle by Bai Qin's javelin. Shi Bao sped over and cut him in two with his sword. Yan Shun dashed into the fray but Shi Bao threw his Comet Hammer and killed him. Shi Bao's pressing his advantage to drive this way." Deeply grieved, Song Jiang wept over the death of yet another 2 chieftains. He ordered Guan Sheng, Hua Rong, Qin Ming, and Zhu Tong to battle Shi Bao, Bai Qin, capture Black Dragon Ridge, and the pass. And because the chieftains fought at Black Dragon Ridge, they annihilated the enemy bandits in Clear Stream County and nabbed the hay-haired king in Bangyuan Cavern. The names of Song Jiang and his chieftains were inscribed in historical annals for a millennium; the story of their splendid deeds has been passed down through the ages. They demonstrated their courage in Black Ridge Pass; in the cavern at Clear Stream they won their fame.

In attempting to rescue the bodies of Snake and Scorpion on Black Dragon Ridge, Song Jiang has fallen into Marshal Shi Bao's trap. Enemy troops spring up on all sides, with Shi Bao in front and Precious Light blocking the way back. "Dismount and surrender, Song Jiang, what are you waiting for?" Marshal Shi Bao bellowed.
Provoked by this, Scimitar slapped his horse, whirled about and charged. But before they crossed swords, a cry went up from the rear. The Four Dragons, commanders of the enemy fleet, had come ashore and joined the two commanders on top of the pass, Wang and Chao; they were now pouring down the mountainside together. Colonel Hua rode out to bolster the rear and engaged one of the leaders. They fought innumerable bouts and then Colonel Hua turned and retreated. Wang and Chao raced in pursuit. Colonel Hua fired two arrows in quick succession and they both fell. A cry of dismay went up from their troops who halted and began to retreat. The four boat commanders also came to a halt, after seeing the fate of their comrades. Colonel Hua had stemmed the tide.
But now another attack came in from the flank, led this time by Bai Qin and Jing De, the two officers sent with reinforcements by the Deputy Chief Minister in Muzhou. From Song Jiang's ranks two commanders rode out: the Little Duke, who took on Bai, and the Halberdier who opposed Jing. They were all locked in mortal combat and Song Jiang was urging his side on, when an uproar rose to the heavens in the enemy's rear and their army broke up. It was because Iron Ox and his two lieutenants, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with their infantry had taken Marshal Shi Bao's cavalry from the rear. When Precious Light attempted to bring his troops up in support, he encountered Monk and Pilgrim, the one hacking with his two swords, the other heaving his steel staff. Each was followed by a thousand infantrymen as they charged into action. Behind them came Thunderclap, Skyhawk, Whiskers, the Dandy, the Flautist, Demon King, Steelbright and Short-Arse, with both cavalry and infantry, in a desperate charge. The Song troops scattered the forces of Marshal Shi Bao and Precious Light, rescued Song Jiang and the others, and brought them safely back to Tonglu. Shi Bao retreated up the pass.
Song Jiang thanked all the commanders. "If you hadn't come to the rescue my friends, I would now be a ghost wandering in the underworld like Snake and Scorpion."
The Professor said: "When you insisted on going and wouldn't listen to my humble advice, I was afraid something would go wrong, so I sent the others to back you up."
Song Jiang's gratitude knew no bounds.
Let us now turn to the discussion that was going on between Marshal Shi Bao and Precious Light on Black Dragon Ridge. "For the time being Song Jiang has retreated to Tonglu and is camped there," said the former. "If he goes secretly by hidden paths and crosses the mountain, Muzhou will be seriously threatened. Would it not be best for you to go yourself to the palace at Clearwater and request His Majesty to send reinforcements to secure the pass? Then we will be able to hold out indefinitely."
"What you say is quite right," Precious Light replied. "I'll go at once." He mounted and went first to Muzhou where he spoke to the Deputy Chief Minister: "Song Jiang's troops are formidable. We can't stop them and I fear we will be swept away. We are facing defeat. I have come to ask for reinforcements to help us hold the pass."
The Minister heard him out, and then together they rode over to Bangyuan Gap in Clearwater. They saw the Chief Minister first, and put in their request for reinforcements. Next day at the early morning audience, Fang La having ascended his throne and the ministers including Precious Light having made obeisance, the latter stepped forward, wished His Majesty long life and said: "Armed with Your Majesty's commission I went to help the Southern Prince defend Hangzhou. Unfortunately Song Jiang's troops turned out to be too powerful and we were unable to withstand their onslaught. Then Judge Yuan, who was in command of some transports, turned traitor and let them into Hangzhou so we lost the city. The Prince, eager for glory, went out to fight and was killed. Now Marshal Shi Bao and I have retreated to the pass on Black Dragon Ridge. Recently we killed four of Song Jiang's commanders, and our position is relatively strong. But Song Jiang at present is camped at Tonglu and I fear that sooner or later they will find hidden paths to infiltrate the pass; it is difficult for us to defend the whole mountain. I request Your Majesty to send us more commanders and picked troops as soon as possible to secure the pass at Black Dragon Ridge, repel the enemy and bring the whole region under control again."
Fang La said: "All our troops are already deployed. Recently the situation has been critical in Shezhou at Sundance Pass and we have had to send thousands of troops. There's only the imperial guard left, and I need them to defend the palace. I can't go scattering them all over the place!"
"If you won't send reinforcements, you leave me helpless. If the Song army gets through the mountains, how can Muzhou be defended?"
Chief Minister Lou stepped forward: "This pass at Black Dragon Ridge is really vital to us. I know there are still thirty thousand imperial guards. We could let Precious Light have ten thousand to defend the pass. I beg Your Majesty to consider it."
But Fang La would not listen to Lou's advice either. He insisted that the imperial guard could not be sent. The court was dismissed and everyone left the palace. Lou discussed the situation with his officials and it was decided that the Deputy Chief Minister should send a general and five thousand troops from Muzhou.
Precious Light and the Minister went back to Muzhou and picked the troops, who were to be led by one Colonel Xiahou. When all this was explained to Marshal Shi Bao on Black Dragon Ridge, he said: "Since the court refuses to send the imperial guard, we will simply hold the pass, we will not go out and seek battle. Tell the four boat commanders to guard the river closely and fight off any boats that attack but not initiate any action."
We shall now leave them to their arrangements for the defence of Black Dragon Pass, and tell instead how Song Jiang, after the loss of his leaders, remained at Tonglu and made no move to attack. After twenty days or more of inactivity, a scout came and reported: "The Emperor is sending Marshal Tong with bounty. He has reached Hangzhou already. He heard that the army has been divided and has sent General Wang Bing to Sundance Pass with the portion for the Unicorn's army. He is bringing our gifts himself and will be here at any moment."
Song Jiang rode out some six miles with the Professor and his other commanders to meet Marshal Tong. Back in the government office, the imperial edict was read out and the bounty divided among Song Jiang's commanders. They prostrated themselves in thanks and then a banquet was arranged to welcome the Marshal.
Marshal Tong asked: "On the way here I heard that you have suffered losses."
Song Jiang said tearfully: "Previously, during the northern campaign against the Tartars, we were entirely successful and we did not lose a single commander. But this time before we even left the capital Taoist Gongsun had left us and we were deprived of several others before we set out. Since crossing the river we have lost a lot of leaders. And recently eight or nine fell sick in Hang-zhou: their lives hang in the balance. We have made two assaults on the pass up there at Black Dragon Ridge and lost several leaders. Because the mountain is steep and the river swift-flowing, it is difficult to attack. We have not been able to break through. At this critical time your visit is most welcome."
Marshal Tong said: "The Emperor is fully aware of all you have achieved, General. He heard that you had lost some com-manders, and told me to bring Wang Bing and Zhao Tan to help you out. I have sent Wang Bing to the other army to distribute their gifts." He then introduced Zhao Tan to Song Jiang and his companions and the feasting continued at the Tonglu camp.
When Marshal Tong mustered the army next day for an attack on Black Dragon Pass, the Professor warned: "Don't take it too lightly, Your Excellency. Why don't we send the Dandy and the Flautist to a quiet place along the river to ask the locals for directions and find a hidden route which will take us through the mountains? If we can get behind their lines and cut them off, we can take the pass with no effort at all."
Song Jiang said: "It's a good idea." He sent the Dandy and the Flautist off with a dozen men to search the countryside and ask the people about routes. A day later in the evening they returned with an old man. "Who is he?" Song Jiang asked.
"He's a local inhabitant who knows all the ways through the mountains and gorges hereabouts," said the Flautist.
Song Jiang said: "Old man, if you can show us a path that will take us beyond Black Dragon Ridge, I will reward you handsomely."
"I was born in these parts," said the old man. "Us ordinary folk've suffered something terrible at the hands of Fang La and we'd no way to escape. Heaven be praised that the imperial army is here now and us can have some peace again. I can show you a path as will get you beyond Black Dragon Pass. It comes out at Dongguan, that's pretty near Muzhou, to the north of it. Black Dragon Pass is round to the west."
Song Jiang, delighted, told them to give the old man silver and keep him in the camp. He had him provided with plenty to eat and drink. Next day he requested Marshal Tong to guard the camp while he took twelve commanders and advanced along the mountain track. They had around ten thousand men, cavalry and foot. With the old man as their guide they set off. The horses' hooves were muffled, the harness bells silenced and the men gagged to prevent talking as they marched. At Little Ox Mountain they found an enemy contingent blocking the way. Song Jiang sent Iron Ox, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost forward. The enemy, numbering about four or five hundred, were wiped out by Iron Ox and his companions. They reached Dongguan around the fourth watch.
The local commander of the southern forces heard that the Song army had got through to Dongguan. Since he had only two thousand troops at his disposal, he did not put up any serious resistance. At the first push he fled to Muzhou, where he told the authorities: "Song Jiang and his army have got past Black Dragon Ridge by taking hidden paths and are now at Dongguan." The Deputy Chief Minister in a panic summoned his commanders. Song Jiang had already ordered Thunderer to set off a string of explosions. Marshal Shi Bao and his force up on the pass heard them and were terrified. Marshal Shi Bao hurriedly sent out a reconnaissance party under Bai Qin. They found Song Jiang's banners everywhere, filling sky and earth, spread over the whole terrain. They hurriedly returned to the mountain and reported to the Marshal.
"Since the court has not sent us any reinforcements, we will just defend the pass, we will not try to relieve them," the Marshal said.
"That would be a mistake," said Precious Light. "If we don't send assistance to Muzhou, just think what will happen. If the palace is defeated, our own safety cannot be guaranteed. If you won't go, I will go to relieve Muzhou by myself."
The Marshal did his best to dissuade him, but Precious Light took five thousand troops and wielding his steel staff set off down the mountain with Colonel Xiahou.
Now Song Jiang on reaching Dongguan had not tried to attack Muzhou immediately. Instead he marched toward Black Dragon Pass, and so ran into Precious Light. The two armies gradually closed and battle commenced. Precious Light rode out in front and challenged. Colonel Hua whispered in Song Jiang's ear: "If we do this and this, we've got him!"
"Right!" said Song Jiang, nodding. He told Colonel Hua to work it out with Thunderclap.
Thunderclap rode out first and engaged Precious Light in combat. After half a dozen bouts he turned his horse and galloped off. The troops scattered in all directions. Thinking Thunderclap was beaten, Precious Light let him go and galloped towards Song Jiang to make him prisoner. But Colonel Hua of course was guarding Song Jiang and ready for this. He waited till the priest was quite close, then bent his bow to the full and taking careful aim fired an arrow point blank. The bow was bent like a full moon, the arrow sped like a shooting star; it caught Precious Light full in the face. He crashed to the ground and the soldiers finished him off. Now they all advanced together and the southerners were routed. Colonel Xiahou could not fight on alone and fled to Muzhou. But when the Song troops reached the foot of the pass, blocks of wood and ballista missiles rained down on them and the advance was halted. Consequently they turned about and marched on Muzhou instead.
Colonel Xiahou rushed in to report to the Deputy Chief Minister: "The Song army has broken through to Dongguan. They killed Precious Light. Any day now they'll attack Muzhou."
The Deputy Chief Minister sent someone with Colonel Xiahou to the palace in Clearwater to ask Chief Minister Lou to tell His Majesty that the Song army had broken through by mountain tracks to Dongguan and would soon be attacking Muzhou, and to ask His Majesty to send reinforcements. Any delay would be disastrous.
Fang La got a shock. He hurriedly ordered Marshal Zheng, commander of the palace guard, to take fifteen thousand men and rush to relieve Muzhou.
Zheng said: "I will carry out your command, but I beg you to let me have the assistance of the imperial astronomer, to help me against Song Jiang."
Fang La granted this request and summoned his astronomer Bao Daoyi, known as the Sorcerer. When the latter was informed of the royal wish, he presented himself at the palace for an audience. He bowed very deeply. Fang La explained: "My lands have been invaded by Song Jiang's army. We have repeatedly lost cities and troops. Now his army has reached Muzhou. I hope you will be able to deploy your magic powers to save our land and people and preserve our patrimony."
The Sorcerer said: "Your most enlightened Majesty, I am just a poor Taoist, but in my humble opinion, Song Jiang's army will be swept away, by virtue of Your Majesty's divine favour."
Highly gratified by this answer, Fang La invited him to sit down and a banquet was arranged in his honour. When he had eaten and drunk he left the palace and joined Marshal Zheng and Colonel Xiahou to discuss the campaign.
The Sorcerer was in fact from the Mountains of Splendour. He had joined the monkhood in youth and had studied the black arts. Later he joined Fang La when the latter was plotting his insurrection. In battle he would use his black magic as a weapon. He also had a magnificent sword which was known as the Heaven Raker. It could fly through the air and kill a man at a hundred paces. On Fang La's behalf he had committed some horrifying acts which earned him his name of Sorcerer. Marshal Zheng had started off as a captain of infantry. From a lad he had practised with spear and staff. He had met up with Fang La by chance, and had risen to be commander of the palace guard. He loved Taoism and considered himself a disciple of the Sorcerer, from whom he had acquired knowledge of a number of magic tricks. In battle he could summon up clouds or mist and people called him the Devil's Marshal. As for Colonel Xiahou, he had originally been a hunter from a mountain district and could wield a trident. He had come to serve the Deputy Chief Minister in the Muzhou administration.
These three then were making their plans in the Marshal's palace when a doorman came and announced: "There's one of them sky watchers asking to see you, name of Pu Wenying."
When the Sorcerer asked what he wanted, Pu Wenying said: "I have heard that you, Your Excellency, with the Marshal and the General are planning a campaign against Song Jiang's forces. When I was observing the night sky, I noticed that the southern stars were all obscured, whereas the stars of Song Jiang and his commanders were mostly still bright. I am sure your plan is a good one, but I fear it may not have a good result. Would it not be better to go back to His Majesty and ask him to consider surrendering, in order to spare our country from misfortune?"
The Sorcerer flew into such a rage at this that he picked up the Heaven Raker and cut Pu Wenying in two. Then he announced what he had done in a memorial to Fang La, asking him to consider the matter closed. And that was that. The historian has a poem:

*In the southeast, the king's power fades,*
*Though wizards and sorcerers are his aids.*
*When one comes who knows heaven's will*
*Him the Sorcerer's sword must kill.*

The Devil's Marshal was appointed commander of the vanguard, marching first out of the city to lead the attack. With the Sorcerer commanding the main army and Colonel Xiahou bringing up the rear they set off to relieve Muzhou.
Now as Song Jiang and his army were wondering how to go about storming Muzhou, a scout suddenly reported that southern reinforcements were on the way from Clearwater. Song Jiang sent Short-Arse and Steelbright out to reconnoitre. With three thousand cavalry they took the road to Clearwater. When the two forces met, the Devil's Marshal rode out to engage Short-Arse. Without a word the two leaders deployed their forces and set to. They fought eight or nine bouts and then the Devil's Marshal began to mutter a spell. A sudden shout of "Chrrr!" and from his helmet a cloud of black smoke poured out. In the middle of this black smoke stood a spirit warrior in golden armour with a mighty club, a proper demon-queller. He raised this weapon heavenward, and it came hurtling down. Short-Arse was paralysed with fear: his arm faltered and his legs grew clumsy, his skill with the spear deserted him and a single blow from the Devil's Marshal knocked him from his horse. Steelbright saw her husband fall and raced to the rescue, whirling her two swords. The Devil's Marshal turned on her, but after just one bout he galloped off. Steelbright, determined to avenge her husband, gave chase. Her adversary rested his spear and deftly reaching for a bag that hung by his side took out a square lump of brass, turned in the saddle, took aim and flung it in her face. She died before she hit the ground. Poor girl, beautiful and skilled at arms, it all ended here for her! The Devil's Marshal mustered his troops and the Song force was routed.
When the Song stragglers got back and told Song Jiang that the two leaders were dead and the greater part of the men, he was furious. He immediately stood his army to and ordered Iron Ox, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost with five thousand cavalry to lead the attack.

The Devil's Marshal and his men were soon in sight. Song Jiang almost choking with anger rode out in front and shouted at them: "You rebel scum, how dare you kill two of our commanders!"
The Devil's Marshal responded by riding out, spear at the ready, to attack Song Jiang. But Iron Ox was not having it. He picked up his two axes and rushed forward, while Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost, weaving their shields, gave him cover. They charged ahead, trying to get to close quarters with the Devil's Marshal. But the latter turned his horse and galloped off, while his three antagonists charged on into the southerners' ranks. Song Jiang feared he might lose Iron Ox and quickly mustered five thousand cavalry and charged. The southerners fled in all directions. Song Jiang had the gong sounded to recall the troops. The two shield-bearers returned with Iron Ox.
At this moment a black cloud appeared all around them, masking the sun, a black mist which filled the sky, so thick you could not tell north from south or east from west and day was turned into night. There was no way forward for Song Jiang's army. The poem describes it:
*Dark clouds every way you look, a black fog that fills the sky; wind and rain rage and spout. The heavens are angry, thunder roars. Mountain torrents shake the earth, all is confusion, as if the sky itself were falling. River gorges boil and churn as though the earth were opening up. Ghosts howl in sorrow, gods roar in sympathy. You can strain your eyes but you scarcely see a thing; your ears are filled with the sound of a thousand trees.*
When the Devil's Marshal had darkened the world with his magic spell, Song Jiang's army lost their way and stumbled into a place where the gloom was so deep that they could see nothing. All order was lost in the army. Song Jiang raised his eyes to heaven and sighed. "Can it be that I am destined to die here?" he thought. The darkness lasted from early morning to mid-afternoon. Finally it began to lift and a glimmer of light appeared: they saw the place was full of tall warriors in golden armour, who completely surrounded them. When Song Jiang saw this he fell to the ground in terror. He kept muttering: "Heaven grant me a quick death!" He dared not raise his eyes, and in his ears was the perpetual sound of wind and rain. All his men remained bowed to the ground, expecting death, waiting for the sword to fall. A little longer and the storm had passed. When Song Jiang looked up and saw the sword was not going to fall after all, someone came and raised him up, saying: "Stand up, please!" When Song Jiang raised his eyes and looked, he saw it was a scholar offering him this help.
Song Jiang's fear melted away. He stood up and exchanged courtesies. He asked the man's name.
"My name is Shao Jun," the other replied. "My home is here. I came today to let Your Honour know that Fang La's days are numbered. In ten days' time he will be finished. I have already helped you a lot. You have had a hard time of it, but relief is at hand, do you understand?"
Song Jiang asked again: "Master, when is it ordained that Fang La will fall?" But as he spoke the other gave him a push and he awoke. It was all a dream! He looked around and saw that the tall warriors surrounding him were in fact pine trees. He gave a shout and all his men jumped up and began looking for a way out. The clouds had receded, the mists withdrawn, the sky was bright, the air clean; beyond the ring of pine trees shouts could be heard.
Song Jiang led his men in a charge to break out, and they came upon Monk and Pilgrim fighting their way along the road and grappling with the Devil's Marshal. The Sorcerer on horseback saw Pilgrim on foot wielding his two swords and attacking his commander, so he drew his Heaven Raker. It flew through the air and embedded itself in Pilgrim's left shoulder. The blood spurted out. Monk rushed forward furiously with his steel staff and rescued Pilgrim. Pilgrim's left arm had been almost completely severed. Monk wrenched out the Heaven Raker. When Pilgrim came to, he saw that his arm had been cut through and was hanging by a thread, so he got his own sword and with a quick blow cut it right off. Song Jiang ordered some men to carry him back to the camp to rest.
Monk went charging off to do battle with Colonel Xiahou. After several bouts Colonel Xiahou gave up and fled. Monk went in with his staff and scattered the southerners while Colonel Xiahou escaped into the forest. Monk was not going to allow that and followed him deep into the woods.
Meanwhile the Devil's Marshal had brought up his troops, so Iron Ox, Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost charged him, brandishing shields, javelins, darts and axes. They were too much for the Devil's Marshal, who fled across the river gorge and made off. His three opponents did not know the way, but they were so avid for glory that they crossed too and raced after him. Three thousand troops appeared on the other bank of the river and cut them off. Eight-Armed Ogre hurriedly tried to turn back and was confronted on the river bank by two enemy commanders. He called out to Iron Ox and Winged Ghost, but already their pursuit of the Devil's Marshal had taken them far away. Further on the gorge unexpectedly became very deep and when Winged Ghost stumbled and lost his footing, he was finished off by the southerners' arrows. Eight-Armed Ogre slithered down the bank but was tripped by a rope and as he struggled to get up was cut to pieces in a flurry of blows. Poor Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost — what did it avail them now to be heroes?
Iron Ox was all alone as he plunged ever deeper into the mountains. The enemy troops on the river bank were gaining on him, and were only a few hundred yards away, when a thunderous roar arose behind. It was Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and Demon King coming to the rescue. They thrust the southern troops aside and continued on till they were able to reach Iron Ox and bring him back to safety. Monk however was still missing. When these leaders met Song Jiang they told him how the Devil's Marshal had been pursued across the river and how Eight-Armed Ogre and Winged Ghost had been lost and only Iron Ox saved. Song Jiang's grief was boundless. Of the troops engaged in the operation a third had been killed, Monk was missing and Pilgrim had lost his left arm.
Whilst Song Jiang was still mourning, a scout reported: "The Professor, Scimitar, Skyhawk, Whiskers, the Dandy and the Flautist have just arrived by water with ten thousand troops."
Song Jiang met them and asked the Professor about the situa-tion. The Professor replied: "Marshal Tong has his own troops and Generals Wang Bing and Zhao Tan and General Liu all have forces of their own. They have reached Black Dragon Ridge. We left thirteen behind, but the others are all here with me to help you.
Song Jiang told him: "We have lost some comrades, Pilgrim is crippled, Monk is missing. I can't help being sad."
The Professor urged him: "You must cast off your depression. Now is the time to capture Fang La. You must put the good of your country first and not allow grief to impair your own health."
Song Jiang pointed out the pine trees and told the Professor about his dream. The Professor said: "Since you have had this premonitory dream here, do you not think there must be a temple hereabouts, with a tutelary spirit whose aim is to protect you?"
Song Jiang said: "Your observation is a very good one. Let us search the mountain together." The two of them strolled off into the forest. They had not gone half a bowshot when they came upon a temple, with an inscription in gold characters which said: "Temple of the Black Dragon Lord". When they went in, Song Jiang had a surprise: on the altar was an image of the Black Dragon Lord, and it was exactly like the person he had seen in his dream. Song Jiang prostrated himself again and said: "Thank you for your great kindness in saving me, Dragon Lord. Although I have no way to repay you, I hope I may count on your help. If we can overcome Fang La, I will do everything in my power to persuade the court to build a temple to honour your name."
They prostrated themselves again, and went back down the steps. They read the inscription, and learnt that the god was a graduate of the second class in the Tang dynasty called Shao Jun, who on failing to pass the examination for the first class had thrown himself in the river and died. The Lord of Heaven in honour of his devotion to duty made him a Dragon Lord. This was a spot where whenever the people prayed for wind they got wind, whenever they prayed for rain they got rain, so the temple was built and they made offerings there in each of the four seasons. In view of all this Song Jiang ordered a black pig and a white sheep for sacrifice. After making their offering, they went out and had another good look around. All about them were the pine trees that had undergone the strange metamorphosis. To this day there is outside the northern gate of Yanzhou a temple dedicated to the Black Dragon Lord and the name of that place is Thousand Pine Woods. Ancient traces remain, as the poem tells:

*The loyal heart's known to the spirit,*
*Who to the loyal gives secret help.*
*If you want to know who the Dragon Lord is,*
*At 1000 Pinewoods, the tablet tells you.*

After thanking the Dragon Lord for granting him his protection, Song Jiang left the temple and rode back to the main camp. There with the Professor he made plans for the attack on Muzhou. They went on till midnight, when Song Jiang suddenly felt exceedingly weary. He had just lain down on a bench when he heard someone say: "Graduate Shao would like to talk to you." Song Jiang hurriedly rose and went out to meet him. The Dragon Lord made him a deep bow and said: "But for my help you would have been captured yesterday by the Sorcerer, through those magic spells of his that can turn pine trees into men. But I am grateful for the respect you have just paid me and I want to tell you that in a few days from now Muzhou can be stormed and that in ten days' time Fang La can be captured."
Song Jiang was about to invite him into the tent to question him further, when a sudden gust of wind woke him and he found he had been dreaming.
He immediately summoned the Professor to discuss the dream. The Professor said: "If the Dragon Lord appears to you like this, I am sure it means we can soon attack and take Muzhou."
Song Jiang said: "It's just what we wanted!"
Next day at dawn he gave the orders. The main force was reserved for the attack on Muzhou, while the Dandy and the Flautist were sent to guard the main road from Black Dragon Ridge. Scimitar, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and Whiskers were to lead the attack on Muzhou from the north. First Thunderer was ordered to fire nine explosive shells into the city. The shells fell with an earth-shattering din, a huge explosive force, and the troops in the city were frightened out of their wits and thrown into confusion without a blow struck.
After Monk scattered the enemy rearguard and pursued Colonel Xiahou none knew whither, the Devil's Marshal and the Sorcerer had taken refuge in the city and were discussing their plan of action with Deputy Chief Minister and other officials. Someone said: "The Song army is here, how can we save our-selves?"
The Minister said: "History tells us that when the enemy are at the walls, when they reach the moat, there is only one way to save yourself: face them and fight to the death! If the city falls we will all be captured. The situation is desperate. Our only hope is to attack!"
So the Devil's Marshal with a dozen or so commanders and ten thousand troops charged out through the city gates and faced Song Jiang. The latter ordered his troops to fall back half a bowshot to allow the enemy to take up a position outside the city. The Sorcerer had a chair brought out onto the battlements, while the Minister and his officials were all sitting in the watch tower as spectators. The Devil's Marshal levelled his lance and galloped forward. On the other side Scimitar came out, wielding his blade. The horses met and they fought several bouts. The Devil's Marshal was no match for Scimitar. All he could do was parry and block, or dodge to left or right. So from his vantage point on the wall the Sorcerer made his magic, muttered a spell and shouted: "Chrrr!"
As he pronounced the magic word and blew, from the Marshal's helmet there sprang a black cloud and in the midst of this cloud appeared a spirit warrior in golden armour, wielding a magnificent demon-quelling sword that he raised on high before letting it fall. Among the southern ranks a black cloud spiralled up. Song Jiang summoned Demon King to see what was happening and ordered him to do some magic. He himself also employed the secret formula he had learnt from the mystic books for turning the wind and dispelling darkness. Then from Scimitar's helmet a white cloud burst forth, in the midst of it a spirit warrior with flaming hair, a blue face, green eyes and flashing teeth, astride a black dragon and wielding an iron mace. He and the god in golden armour issuing from the Marshal's helmet did battle while the two armies cheered them on. They fought countless bouts until the warrior on the black dragon began to force the one in golden armour back. At this point Scimitar with one blow of his sword cut the Devil's Marshal from his horse. The Sorcerer had seen how the wind was rising and thunder crashing from the Song side and was just rising to his feet when one of Thunderer's explosive shells hit him. It smashed him to smithereens. The southern troops were routed and fled back into Muzhou as fast as their legs would carry them. Whiskers knocked one of their commanders from his horse with a spear thrust and Skyhawk killed another with a throwing knife. When the soldiers inside the city saw the Sorcerer killed by a shell, they began pouring out over the walls. Song Jiang's men burst through the gates and pressed forward eagerly to seize the Minister and the rest. No one stopped to ask any names: they were all killed. The first thing Song Jiang did was to burn down Fang La's palace. The valuables in it were shared out among the army commanders. A proclamation was issued to reassure the populace. But before they even had time to number their losses, a scout reported: "The Flautist has been knocked from his horse by a spear thrust on the road west to Black Dragon Ridge and cut in two by Marshal Shi Bao's sword. The Dandy tried to retaliate and Shi Bao, the bastard, killed him with his flying hammer. After his successes Shi Bao is sure to attack us." On hearing of these two further losses, Song Jiang was sick at heart. He immediately sent Scimitar, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and Whiskers to confront Marshal Shi Bao and try to capture Black Dragon Ridge. Now had these four not attacked Black Dragon Ridge, things might have been different. For in Clearwater a rebel host is to be annihilated, at Bangyuan Gap the outlaw Prince taken alive, and in consequence the fame of Song Jiang and his company will live a millennium, their deeds be proclaimed in a million chronicles.

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### The Unicorn Lu Junyi Wages a great Battle at Sundance Pass; Song Jiang plans to capture the citadel at Bangyuan Gap & Cleverly Takes Clear Stream Cavern

Guan Sheng and the other three chieftains led their men rapidly up Black Dragon Ridge. They soon encountered the army of Shi Bao.
"Bandit, how dare you kill my brothers!" Guan Sheng shouted from his horse.
Shi Bao saw it was Guan Sheng, and he lost his eagerness for combat. He withdrew to the top of ridge and ordered Bai Qin to take him on. The two had fought less than ten rounds when, from the summit, gongs hastily sounded the call to retreat. Guan Sheng did not pursue.
The southern soldiers had been thrown into confusion. Shi Bao, repelling the raiders from the east, had neglected the west. Now, a large unit under Chancellor Tong was swarming up this side of the ridge.
Song army general Wang Bing clashed with southern commander Jing De. After something over ten rounds, Wang cut Jing from his saddle. At the same time, chieftains Lu Fang and Guo Sheng raced to capture the top. But before they reached it, a huge boulder came bounding down. Guo Sheng and his steed were crushed to death.
Meanwhile on the east side Guan Sheng, noting the confusion in the southern position above, realized that Song forces must be attacking on the west, and led his men in a charge to the summit. The enemy contingent, assailed from two sides, was quite disorganized.
Lu Fang and Bai Qin met in battle. They hadn't fought three rounds when Bai lunged with his lance. Lu dodged and the thrust slid by his ribs. But Bai grabbed Lu's lance and twisted it completely around. Too close to ply their weapons, they both dropped them of one accord and, still mounted, grappled in hand-to-hand combat. The perilous ridge was a difficult place for horses to keep their footing. The strenuous wrestling of their riders threw the animals off balance. They stumbled over the edge and rolled down the cliff. Both warriors were killed in the fall.
Guan Sheng and his men drove upwards on foot. Shi Bao saw that he was blocked on both sides. He feared humiliation if captured. With his Wind Splitter Sword, he cut his own throat. The Song forces were in control of Black Dragon Ridge and the pass. Guan Sheng dispatched a swift messenger to Song Jiang with the news.
Upstream from Muzhou, another Song unit closed in, so that a squeeze was being exerted from both above and below. The four southern admirals in the naval base on the river saw that Black Dragon Ridge was gone, and that Muzhou had fallen. They abandoned their boats and fled to the opposite shore. There, the local people caught Cheng Gui and Xie Fu and turned them over to the conquerors in Muzhou. Zhai Yuan and Qiao Zheng managed to escape.
The large Song force under Chancellor Tong and Deputy District Commander Liu returned to Muzhou, and Song Jiang went out to welcome them into the city. The armies were installed in camps, and proclamations issued exhorting the people and local soldiers to resume their jobs. Countless southern troops had surrendered. Song Jiang opened the storehouses and distributed grain among the populace. They went back to their original occupations as good citizens.
The hearts of Admirals Cheng Gui and Xie Fu were cut out and offered in sacrifice to Ruan the Second and Meng Kang. Similar ceremonies were held for the chieftains slain on Black Dragon Ridge. Li Jun was ordered to take the captured high southern officials on many vessels and deliver them to Governor Zhang.
Song Jiang was greatly distressed by news of the death of Lu Fang and Guo Sheng. He made no further troop movements, but waited for Lu Junyi and his column. When Lu arrived they would jointly assault Clear Stream.
After the division of forces at Hangzhou, Lu had set forth with twenty-eight chieftains and thirty thousand men. They marched along mountain paths in the direction of Shezhou. Passing through Linan Town, an ancient capital, they neared Yuling Pass.
The pass was held by Pang Wanchun, one of Fang La's leading generals, and the best archer in the southern kingdom. His lieutenant commanders were called Lei Jiong and Ji Ji, each of whom operated an eight-hundred-catty crossbow which had to be cocked by foot pressure, and wielded a big spiny club. Pang had a force of three thousand. He had heard Lu was coming, and was all prepared, just waiting for him to get closer.
Lu sent an advance probe of thee thousand infantry under six mounted chieftains headed by Shi Jin. Winding towards the pass they didn't encounter a single enemy soldier. Shi Jin grew suspicious and conferred with the other chieftains.
At that moment a white banner appeared at the top of the pass, and beneath it stood the crack archer Pang Wanchun. Pang looked at Shi Jin and laughed.
"You should have stayed in Liangshan Marsh, scruffy bandit," he said contemptuously, "where you begged an amnesty from the Song emperor. You've got a nerve coming to my country and playing the bold hero! Of course, you've heard of me, and I know you have among you some scamp called Hua Rong. Let him come out and match archery with me. But first I'll show you one of my marvellous shots."
Before the words were out of his mouth, he whizzed an arrow at Shi Jin, hit him squarely and knocked him from his horse. The other five chieftains rushed forward, helped him back into the saddle, and they all withdrew.
A gong crashed on the mountain top, and from the pine groves on both sides swarms of arrows flew. The chieftains abandoned Shi Jin in their haste to get away. But when they rounded the gap, they saw Lei Jiong on one of the opposite slopes and Ji Ji on the other. The two deluged them with bolts from their crossbows. Not even the nimblest heroes could have avoided those lethal shafts. Poor Liangshan Marsh chieftains, life passed from them like a dream! Six of them lay below the pass in a heap of corpses.
Of the three thousand infantry only a hundred odd managed to escape. They told Lu what happened. It was a paralyzing blow. For a long time he sat in a dazed silence.
"Taking it so hard will only delay our important mission," Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist said. "We can work out another plan, capture the pass, kill their generals and obtain our revenge."
"Brother Song Jiang made a point of giving me many excellent chieftains," said Lu, "but I've already lost six of them without winning the battle. And only a hundred or so of the three thousand infantry remain. How am I going to face him when we get to Shezhou!"
"The ancients had a saying: 'The time isn't as important as the terrain. But the terrain isn't as important as unity with the people.' We're all from Shandong and Hebei on the Central Plain. We're not used to hilly warfare, and so we lost the advantages of terrain. What we now need is one of the local people to serve as our guide, someone who can show us through the twists and turns of the local mountain paths."
"You're quite right. Who can we send to scout the trails?"
"In my humble opinion, Flea on a Drum Shi Qian would be just right. He can fly over eaves and climb walls. He'll find a way if anyone can."
Lu summoned Shi Qian and spoke to him. Flea on a Drum took some dry rations, hung his dagger at his waist, and left the camp.
He travelled half the day. As night began to fall he saw a lamp gleaming in the distance. "Where there's lamplight there must be people," he thought, and groped towards it through the darkness.
The glow was coming from a small monastery. Flea on a Drum slipped in. An old monk was sitting in one of the buildings, chanting scriptures. Shi Qian knocked on the door. The old man told a young acolyte to open it. Flea entered and bowed.
"No need for ceremony, sir traveller," said the monk. "What brings you here in these times of war and slaughter?"
"To tell you the truth, Reverend, I'm a commander under Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh. My name is Shi Qian. We have been dispatched by imperial decree to destroy Fang La. But last night the bandit generals at Yuling Pass killed six of our chieftains with arrows, and we can't get through. My mission is to find out whether we can bypass it, and I've wandered here deep in the mountains. Can you help us solve the problem, Reverend? If you know of some path that will get us secretly by the pass, we'll reward you handsomely."
"All the local people have been harmed by Fang La. There isn't one who doesn't hate him. The villagers here used to support me, but they've all ran away and scattered. I have no place to go, so I can only stay on and wait to die. Fortunately, the emperor's soldiers have arrived to restore happiness to the people. Finishing off the bandits will rid us of a scourge. I haven't dared to say much before, for fear the bandits would find out. But since you're a commander from the Imperial Army, I'll speak freely. There isn't any path here, but if you go to the ridge of the west mountain you'll find one that will take you above the pass. I'm only afraid that the bandits have blocked it and you won't be able to get through."
"Do you happen to know whether it goes to the enemy's fort?"
"It goes behind it. Another path goes down from there through the pass. But you may not be able to get through. They've probably built a big stone barricade."
"As long as there's a path I'll get by no matter what they've built! You've given us our opening. I'll report back to my chief and you'll be richly rewarded."
"Please don't tell any outsiders you got the information from me."
"I'm a very careful person, Reverend. I won't give you away."
Shi Qian bid the old monk farewell, returned to camp, and told Lu Junyi about the path. Delighted Lu called his advisor into conference.
"Excellent," said Zhu Wu. "We'll take Yuling Pass as easily as spitting on our hands. We must send another man with Shi Qian so that they can put through our plan."
"What has to be done, Advisor?" asked Flea on a Drum.
"Setting blazes and firing a cannon are the most important. You'll have to carry the cannon, flint and steel, up behind the fort above the pass, and fire a shot as a signal. That's your main task."

"Is that all? Then I don't need anybody else. I can do it myself. No companion can fly over eaves and walls like I do. He'd only slow things down. While I'm doing my part of the job, how will you be capturing the fort?"
"That's easy. The foe are sure to have troops lying in ambush, and we'll have to deal with them. All we have to do is set to the torch every thicket and grove along the way, and they'll have no place to hide."
"Very shrewd, Advisor."
Shi Qian took his fire-making equipment, toted the cannon in a pack upon his back, and bid Lu farewell. Lu gave him twenty ounces of silver and a bushel of rice for the old monk, directing a junior officer to carry the gifts.
In the afternoon of that day they reached the monastery. "Our Vanguard General is deeply grateful," Shi Qian said to the monk. "He sends these small things as a token of his appreciation."
Flea on a Drum handed over the gifts. He instructed the junior officer to go back to camp, then turned again to his host.
"Could I trouble you to tell your young acolyte to lead the way?"
"It would be better to wait till late at night. You might be seen from the fort during daylight."
That evening the monk laid a meal for Shi Qian and, when it was night, said to his acolyte: "Lead this commander over there and come right back. Don't let anybody know."
Shi Qian and the boy left the simple monastery and headed deep into the mountains. Through forests and over ridges, grasping bushes and vines, they laboriously climbed the rugged slopes in the dim light of a pale moon.
At last they came to a steep cliff face. Higher up were traces of a small path which had been cut into the rock. But at the top boulders had been piled and surmounted by a stone wall. How could anyone get past?
"Commander," said the boy, "the fort is on the other side. There's a road leading to it from the wall."
"You can go back, young acolyte. I know the way now."
The boy departed.
Flea on a Drum was a man who could fly over roofs, walk on walls, leap fences and steal horses. Using that ability now, he scaled the barricade easier than twiddling your thumbs.
In the wooded area to the east, half the sky was red. Lu and Zhu had broken camp and marched, setting fires as they advanced towards the fort. A forward unit of four or five hundred cleared the road of corpses, for the fires had left the enemy ambushers no place to hide.
Pang the crack archer in the fort above was informed. "Their method makes our ambushers useless," he said. "But we'll hang on here. Let's see them get through!"
As the Song forces drew near, he rode out with Lei Jiong and Ji Ji to defend the entrance to the pass.
Step by step, Shi Qian crept towards the fort. He climbed a tall tree and concealed himself amid the leafy branches. He saw the three southern commanders, with bows and arrows and big crossbows, lying in wait outside the pass, and the Song column moving up like a trail of fire. Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo reined in their horses below and shouted at the foe.
"Bandit generals, how dare you resist the emperor's troops!"
The southern commanders, intent on readying their bows, had no idea that Flea on a Drum was already above the pass. He slid down the tree stealthily and crept to the rear of the fort. There he saw two haystacks. He hid between them, took out his fire-making apparatus and placed the cannon on one of the stacks. With sulfur and nitrate, he ignited first one stack, then the other. Lighting the fuse, he climbed swiftly with the cannon to the roof of the fort. It went off with a heaven-shaking boom just as the two haystacks burst into blaze.
Panicked before the fighting even started, the southern soldiers yelled and ran. Who had any stomach for battle? While Pang and his two lieutenants watched flames leaping behind the fort, Shi Qian, on the roof, fired another blast from his cannon. The explosion shook the entire fort, terrifying the southerners so that they dropped their weapons, shed their armor, and fled through the fort's rear.
From his perch on top of the roof, Shi Qian uttered a loud cry: "Ten thousand Song troops are already in the pass! Surrender quickly if you don't all want to die!"
Scared out of his wits, Pang could only stamp in frustration. Lei and Ji were wooden with shock. They couldn't move a muscle.
Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo were the first up the mountain. The other chieftains rushed beyond the fort and chased the fleeing foe more than thirty //: Sun Li caught Lei Jiong, Wei Dingguo captured Ji Ji. Only Pang Wanchun escaped. Over half the southern effectives were rounded up. The Song column camped at the fort.
Lu rewarded Flea on a Drum generously. He cut the hearts from Lei Jiong and Ji Ji and offered them as sacrifices to Shi Jin and Shi Xiu and the other four chieftains who had been slain. Their six bodies were recovered and buried high on the slope. All the other corpses were burned.
The next day Lu and his chieftains donned their armor and mounted. Lu rushed a dispatch to Governor Zhang reporting the capture of the pass. At the same time, the column hastened through and marched directly to the outskirts of Shezhou, where they made camp.
Prince Fang Hou, the Governor of Shezhou, was Fang La's uncle on his father's side. Under him were two generals, and together they ruled Shezhou Prefecture. One was Minister Wang Yin, the other Vice-Minister Gao Yu. They garrisoned Shezhou with twenty thousand troops led by a dozen or more commanders. Wang originally was a stonemason in the Shezhou hills. He wielded a steel lance and rode a fine horse called Around the Mountains Flyer. This steed could climb slopes and ford rivers as if on level land. Gao was also a local man. He came from an old family. His weapon was a segmented lance. Because both were only slightly literate, Fang La, while giving them high administrative posts, actually limited them to military affairs.
After his defeat, Pang Wanchun returned to Shezhou and reported to the prince in the palace. "A native resident gave us away," said Pang. "He guided the Song forces along a secluded path to the pass. Our soldiers were scattered and we were unable to resist."
The prince was furious. "Yuling Pass is the most important barrier before Shezhou! Now that the Song troops have taken it, they'll be here sooner or later! How are we going to repel them?"
"Restrain your anger, Your Highness," urged Minister Wang. "As the ancients have said; 'Failure in battle should not be censured. Heaven gives perfection to no one.' Postpone punishing General Pang. Instead, issue a decree that he must win. Let him lead forth an army to drive back the Song column. If he fails to wrest victory, his crimes can be treated as double."
Fang Hou agreed. He gave Pang five thousand soldiers and ordered them to march, demanding that they return triumphant.
That day Lu Junyi launched his assault on Shezhou. The city gates opened and General Pang emerged with his large contingent. The two armies deployed in battle positions. Pang rode forward and challenged personal combat. From the Song side Ou Peng, carrying an iron lance, cantered out to meet him.
Less than five rounds they fought when Pang withdrew in defeat. Ou Peng, wanting to display his valor, galloped after. Pang turned in the saddle and let fly with an arrow. The skilful warrior Ou Peng caught it in mid-air. He didn't know that the southern general shot his arrows in series. After snatching the first missile, he raced heedless in pursuit of his foe. Pang's bow-string twanged, and a second shaft hit Ou Peng squarely, knocking him to the ground. Ministers Wang and Gao, on the city wall, saw Ou Peng fall and Pang lead his unit in a fierce charge.
The Song forces, defeated, retreated thirty //before making camp. A count of their officers and men revealed that Zhang Qing the Vegetable Gardener had been killed in battle. Sun the Witch, with the help of her soldiers, retrieved her husband's body and burned it. She wept distractedly. Lu was distressed at the sight. He felt his tactics were wrong.
"We lost another two chieftains in our attack today," he said to Zhu Wu. "How can we go on like this?"
"Victory and defeat are both usual fare to military men, and times of life and death are all predestined," said Zhu Wu. "The southerners believe they've compelled us to retreat. They're sure to launch a sneak raid against our camp tonight. We can move out and lie in ambush on four sides. In the center of camp we can tether a few sheep and then ..." Zhu Wu whispered the rest of his plan.
Huyan Zhuo hid with one unit to the left of the camp. Lin Chong with another unit to the right, Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo with a third unit to the north, and the other chieftains with the remaining forces along the paths all around. When the southerners raided that night, fire in the middle of the camp would be the signal for the ambushers to strike. The Song contingents took up their positions.
Meanwhile, Ministers Wang and Gao, who knew a bit of strategy, conferred with Fang Hou the king's uncle. They said: "We beat the Song forces today and forced them back thirty //: Their camp is defenseless, their men and horses exhausted. If we raid them now we can win a complete victory."
"Work it out carefully. If you're sure you can do it, go ahead."
"Pang and I will stage the raid," said Gao. "You and Wang stay here and guard the city."
That night the two generals donned their armor and marched with their troops. The horses' equipage was muffled, the men clamped sticks in their teeth to ensure silence. Nearing the camp, they saw that the stockade gate was open, and were hesitant to advance any further. The sound of the watch drum was clear, but its beat was confused. Gao reined his mount.
"Don't go in."
"Why not, sir Minister?"
"Their watch beat is all wrong. They must be up to something."
"Surely you're mistaken, sir. They're defeated, dispirited and weary. Even the watchman must be half asleep. No wonder his beat is sloppy. It's nothing to worry about. Let's just push on in."
"You're probably right."
They urged their raiders forward. Armed to the teeth, the troops entered the camp. The two southern generals went directly to headquarters, but not a commander was in sight. Suspended a few feet above the ground from some willows were a couple of sheep, drum-sticks tied to their legs. When they kicked about, they struck the drums beneath them. Thus, the erratic beat. The raiders had captured an empty camp.
"We've been tricked!" the two generals cried in alarm. They turned and ran.
Flames had begun to rise in the center of the stockade. On a mountain top a cannon boomed, and a fiery ball hit the camp. On four sides the men who had been lying in ambush now charged fiercely. The two generals, rushing through the stockade gate were met by Huyan Zhuo.
"If you want to live, bandits," he roared, "dismount and surrender!"
Minister Gao fled in panic. He wanted only to escape, he had no heart for battle. Huyan caught up, and brought his twin rods down in a blow that shattered half of Gao's skull.
General Pang fought desperately to break out of the encirclement. Just as he was getting away, a hooked pole snaked out and tripped up his horse. Tang Long, who had been hiding by the side of the road, captured Pang alive.
Song chieftains were slaughtering southern soldiers on all the mountain paths. At daybreak, they returned to camp. Lu Junyi, seated once again in his headquarters, handed out rewards. Of that we'll say no more.
A count of Lu's forces revealed the loss of chieftain Ding Desun. While in the mountains he had been bitten in the foot by a snake. The poison had seeped into his abdomen and killed him. The Song victors cut the heart out of Pang Wanchun and offered it in sacrifice to Ou Peng, Shi Jin and the other slain brothers, and sent Pang's head to Governor Zhang.
The next day, Lu and his column marched to Shezhou. The gate was open, no banners flew on the walls, the ramparts were devoid of soldiers. Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo, eager to win first honors, dashed in with a detachment before Lu could stop them. By the time he arrived with his central unit, they were already inside.
Minister Wang had been informed of the losses the southerners had sustained in their abortive raid on the camp. He pretended to have abandoned the city and dug a large concealed hole within the gate. When the two Song chieftains barged in, horses and riders landed in the pit. Southern spearsmen and archers, who had been hiding on either side, riddled them with spears and arrows. Poor mortals, their spirits left them in an earthen hole!
Angered by their loss, Lu ordered his vanguard to attack. Each man carried a clod of earth which he threw into the pit, then went on to join the wild carnage. In the end it was the bodies of southern soldiers and horses which filled the cavity.
On a cavorting steed at the head of his troops, Lu galloped to the center of Shezhou and ran directly into Fang Hou the king's uncle. They fought only a single round when Lu in his terrible fury called on all his might and cut Fang Hou from the saddle with a single thrust of his halberd.
The southern troops opened the West Gate and fled, hotly pursued by the Song forces. Many of the foe were killed or captured.
Meanwhile, the fleeing Minister Wang was stopped by Li Yun. Wang levelled his lance and cantered forward. Li Yun was on foot. Wang's charging steed knocked Li to the ground. Shi Yong, also on foot, ran to the rescue. But he was helpless against the southerner's lance, which darted like demon. After several rounds, it took Shi Yong's life.
From the city Sun Li, Huang Xin, Zhou Yuan and Zhou Run raced out and assailed Wang. He battled all four courageously and without fear. But then the formidable Lin Chong joined the fray. Even if he had three heads and six arms Wang couldn't have withstood five chieftains. In a concerted move, they closed in and stabbed him to death. Poor southern minister, thus ended his aspirations!
They cut off his head and galloped with it to General Lu, who was resting in the Shezhou palace. Order had been restored and proclamations reassuring the populace posted. The troops were already stationed in the city. Lu dispatched a messenger to Governor Zhang with news of the victory, and sent a similar report to Song Jiang.
Song Jiang, waiting with his army in Muzhou, was pleased that the joint offensive against the enemy's lair could now begin. But he was devastated by the loss of thirteen more chieftains, and he wept as though his heart would break. Military Advisor Wu Yong consoled him.
"Life and death are pre-ordained. Don't ruin your health with grieving. You have to deal with matters of major national importance."
"Yes, I know, but I can't help feeling awful. One hundred and eight are listed on the stone tablet in Heavenly script. Who would have thought we'd be cut down so severely. It's like losing my arms and legs!"
Wu Yong begged Song Jiang to calm himself. "Reply to Lu and fix a date for an assault on Clear Stream County," he urged.

Meanwhile, Fang La in his palace in Bangyuan Cavern in Clear Stream County summoned all of his top officials, civil and military, to discuss how to deal with Song Jiang's army. Leaders of defeated troops who had just returned reported: "Shezhou is finished, the Royal Uncle and Ministers Gao and Wang have been killed. The Song army is advancing in two columns to attack Clear Stream."
Startled, Fang La said to his ministers: "You have been appointed to the highest positions and have reaped the benefits of ruling our prefectures, shires and towns. But Song Jiang's army is rolling across the land and all of our cities have fallen, except for Clear Stream and this palace. Now he is coming here as well, in two columns. How shall we repel the foe?"
Prime Minister Lou Minzhong came forward and said: "The Song forces have nearly reached our palace, and it will be difficult to defend. Our soldiers are weak, our generals few. Unless Your Majesty takes personal command I'm afraid they won't do their utmost."
"It is indeed as you say," Fang La agreed, and he issued the order: "Let all officials of every rank prepare to go with me and fight a decisive battle."
"Who will lead the vanguard?" queried Lou.
"The Security General, Governor and Commander-in-Chief, our Royal Nephew Fang Jie. General Du Wei, Marshal of the Infantry and Cavalry, shall be his second in command. Under them will be thirty commanders leading fifteen thousand troops of the Royal Guards. Let them open paths through the mountains, bridge rivers, and advance in an offensive expedition."
Fang Jie, nephew of the king, was also the grandson of Fang Hou who had been killed at Shezhou. He had been about to ask to be sent out to avenge his grandfather, and now he was appointed leader of the vanguard. A diligent person, Fang Jie wielded a crescent-bladed halberd and was utterly fearless.
Du Wei had been a blacksmith in the mountains of Shezhou. He could forge arms and was a trusted confidant of Fang La. In battle he used six throwing knives. He fought on foot.
Fang La appointed Ho Conglong, who was master-instructor of Royal Guards, commander of another ten thousand Royal Guards, and ordered him to march against Lu Junyi in Shezhou.
Song Jiang's army meanwhile was advancing on land and water from Shezhou to Clear Stream. Li Jun was in charge of the naval units proceeding along the river. Wu Yong, riding by Song Jiang's side, had a suggestion.
"Fang La must know we're closing in. If he decides to hide in the mountains he'll be hard to find. To catch him and bring him before the emperor in the capital, we'll have to operate from within and without. Someone who recognizes him has to point him out before we can nab him. We also have to know where he's heading, so he won't escape.
"A false surrender will get our people inside his camp and enable us to cope with his moves. Chai Jin and Yan Qing have already gone as spies, but we haven't heard anything from them. Who should we have to pretend to surrender?"
"Li Jun would be best, in my humble opinion. He can sail in with grain boats and offer them as his entry gift. That will allay their suspicions. Fang La is a petty-minded fellow from a mountain hamlet. When he sees so much grain, he won't be able to turn it down."
"Very clever, Military Advisor," said Song Jiang. He dispatched Dai Zong with secret instructions to Li Jun.
The naval chieftain thereupon directed Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh to disguise themselves as captains and the Tong brothers to pretend to be sailors. They then set sail from Daxi with sixty vessels laden with grain. All flew banners indicating that they were delivering the cargo as a gift. As they neared Clear Stream County, they were met by a southern warcraft which showered them with arrows.
From the deck, Li Jun shouted: "Cease fire! I have something to say. We have come to surrender! We present this grain to your great country as a gift to your soldiers. We hope you will accept."
Clearly Li Jun and his men were unarmed. The southerners stopped shooting. They sent a boarding party, which made a careful examination then reported back to Prime Minister Lou.
"Li Jun is surrendering with a gift of grain."
Lou ordered that he be permitted to land. Brought before Lou, Li Jun bowed.
"What are you to Song Jiang?" Lou demanded. "What's your rank? Why have you come with this grain to surrender?"
"My name is Li Jun. Originally I was a bold fellow on the Xunyang River. I snatched Song Jiang from the execution grounds in Jiangzhou and saved his life. But now that he has been amnestied by the emperor and made a Vanguard General, he's forgotten the favor I and my mates have done him. Several times, he's humiliated me. Although he's occupied a number of prefectures in your great country, many of our brothers have been killed. He himself doesn't know whether to advance or retreat, but he's forcing me and my naval forces to go forward. I can't take any more of his insults! So I'm turning his grain vessels over as my personal gift, and surrendering to your great country."
Convinced, Lou conducted Li Jun to Fang La in the palace and told him about it. Li Jun kowtowed and repeated his story. Fang La saw no reason to doubt him. He appointed Li Jun Chief Admiral, and made admirals of Ruan the Fifth, Ruan the Seventh, Tong Wei and Tong Meng. The boats were to be moored in the Clear Stream naval installation.
"After I have driven back Song Jiang and restored my royal rule, I will reward you further," Fang La promised.
Li Jun bowed his thanks and left the palace. He unloaded the grain and delivered it to the granary. Of that we'll say no more.
Meanwhile, Song Jiang sent Guan Sheng, Hua Rong, Qin Ming and Zhu Tong forward with a probing contingent to the border of Clear Stream County. There they met Royal Nephew Fang Jie and his army. The two forces spread out in battle formation.
In the southern position, Fang Jie sat his horse, holding his halberd athwart. To his rear was Du Wei, on foot. Clad in full armor five throwing knives concealed behind his back, Du Wei carried a seven-starred precious sword. The two men proceeded to the front.

Qin Ming rode out from Song Jiang's position. Brandishing his wolf-toothed mace, he cantered directly towards Fang Jie. Without a word from either, they dashed. Fang Jie was young and spirited, and highly skilled with the crescent-bladed halberd. They fought more than thirty rounds, with neither emerging the victor. Both men battled relentlessly, exerting their utmost talent.
Since Fang Jie obviously wasn't making any progress, Du Wei slipped out from behind his horse and threw a knife directly at Qin Ming's face. As the thunderbolt dodged the flying blade, Fang Jie finished him with one thrust of his halberd. Poor Qin Ming the thunderbolt, he died an untimely death!
Fang Jie dared not press his advantage to attack the Song position. Junior officers quickly pulled back their slain leader with hooked poles. When informed of the loss of Qin Ming, Song Jiang blanched. He directed that the body be encoffined and prepared for burial, and again sent forward another contingent.
Emboldened by his triumph, Fang Jie shouted: "If you have any more bold warriors, let them come out and fight!"
Song Jiang hurried to the front. To the rear of Fang Jie he saw Fang La's royal entourage advancing in a body, amid poles topped by golden gourds and row upon row of battle-axes. There were lines of crescent-bladed halberds, corps of flags embroidered with dragon and phoenix, pennants of green and red, jade stirrups, tooled leather saddles, banners encrusted with pearls and sewn with kingfisher-blue thread. On panoplies of dragons rampant were stitched azure clouds and purple mist. On flags of flying tigers were designs of auspicious clouds and smoke. Civil officials stood to the left, military to the right, all in full ranks. The usurper king made a great show of having "ministers." No better than a bandit in the hills, he aspired to sovereign's rule!
And there in the middle, beneath a nine-segment imperial yellow umbrella, seated easily on a steed with a jade-encrusted bridle, was the usurper king himself—Fang La. He wore a high hood of bright gold with turned-up corners and a robe embroidered with nine dragons amid sun, moon, and clouds. A jade belt embossed with gold and precious stones bound his waist. His feet were shod in a pair of royal boots stitched in gold thread with soles of cloud design.
On a silver-white thoroughbred he rode to the front to direct the battle personally. He spotted Song Jiang, opposite on horseback, and ordered Fang Jie to capture him. The Song forces also prepared to fight and catch Fang La. Fang Jie was about to go forth when a mounted messenger galloped up and reported.
"The Song forces under General Lu Junyi captured Ho Conglong when his army went to the rescue of Shezhou. They have scattered our troops and are already at the rear of the mountain!"
Fang La was shocked. He hastily ordered a withdrawal and a defense of the palace. Fang Jie instructed Du Wei to hold the position while the king retreated, then the two commanders followed.
On arriving in Clear Stream, Fang La heard cries and lamentations rising from the palace. Everywhere was the glow of flames. Soldiers and horses milled about in confusion. Li Jun and his four companions had set the city to the torch. Fang La rushed in with his Royal Guards in an attempt to save Clear Stream.
Song Jiang and his army gave chase, fighting and killing. They saw that the city was on fire and knew that Li Jim and the others had performed their mission. They drove on. Just then Lu Junyi and his column rounded the mountain, and they joined forces and attacked together.
The Clear Stream palace was crushed in a vice of Song troops. Everywhere they captured southern soldiers. They broke the defenses of the city completely. Guarded by Fang Jie and his men, the king fled to Bangyuan Cavern.
Song Jiang and his main army entered Clear Stream. They sacked Fang La's palace, destroying his illegal royal paraphernalia and confiscating his valuables. They burned the palace to the ground and cleaned out his treasury and granary.
Reunited, the forces of Song Jiang and Lu Junyi made camp in Clear Stream, and the chieftains came forward to claim their rewards. A count revealed more losses. The tall Yu Baosi and Sun the Witch had died of wounds inflicted by Du Wei's throwing knives. Zou Yuan and Du Qian were trampled to death by horses. LiLi, Tang Long and Cai Fu had all been severely wounded, and medical treatment had been of no avail. Ruan the Fifth had been killed by Prime Minister Lou in Clear Stream County.
The chieftains received awards for the ninety-two southern officials they had caught. Lou and Du Wei had disappeared. Notices were posted reassuring the population, and the captured officials were sent to governor Zhang's headquarters, where they would be decapitated and their heads hung up on display.
A local informant reported: "When your army broke into Clear Stream, Lou hung himself in a pine grove because he killed Ruan the Fifth."
Du Wei hid in the home of the mistress he was keeping, a young singer. Her pander exposed him, and Song Jiang rewarded the man. On Song Jiang's orders, Du was decapitated. Cai Qing cut out Du Wei's heart and offered it, dripping blood, in sacrifice to the chieftains who died in the Clear Stream battle. Song Jiang officiated personally at the ceremony. The next day, he and Lu Junyi marched with their units to Bangyuan Cavern and surrounded the entrance. Fang La sat tight in his cavern, defended only by Fang Jie and his troops. But the southerners would not come out and fight and the Song contingents had no way of getting in.
Although Fang La was anxious, there was nothing else he could do. The stalemate continued for several days. Fang La was sunk in gloom. Suddenly, a high official in an embroidered silken robe prostrated himself at the foot of the gold dais. "I've no talents, Sire," said the man, "but I've never repaid for the great benevolence Your Majesty has bestowed upon me. I'm familiar with all the books of military lore and I've devoted my life to weaponry. If you'll give me a detachment, Sire, I'll drive back the Song army and restore our nation. I hope my proposal meets with Your Majesty's wishes." Delighted, Fang La mustered the soldiers in the cavern palace and sent the man forth with them to fight Song Jiang. It was impossible to predict who would win, since both sides were strikingly impressive. And because Fang La dispatched this unit, heads rolled at the foot of the golden dais and hot blood spattered the jade-panelled palace door. Fang La's nest was swept clean and Song Jiang performed a great deed.

Now as Scimitar and his three companions raced up Black Dragon Ridge they came face to face with Marshal Shi Bao and his men. "You bandits, how dare you kill our comrades!" Scimitar yelled at them.
When Marshal Shi Bao saw it was Scimitar he had no stomach for the fight. He retreated to the top of the pass and ordered his lieutenant Bai Qin to fight Scimitar. Two horses met, weapons were raised to strike, but before they had completed ten bouts, the gong was beaten urgently at the top of the pass to recall the troops. Scimitar did not pursue them.
Up on top of the pass there was a state of panic. Marshal Shi Bao had only been attending to the attack from the east. He had not been prepared for trouble from the west, where Marshal Tong now came storming up with a large squadron of cavalry. The chief Song general was Wang Bing and he took on the southerners' Jing De. After a dozen bouts Wang Bing knocked his opponent from his horse.
Little Duke and the Halberdier charged forward to capture the pass but before they got there a huge boulder came crashing down on the Halberdier killing both horse and man.
When Scimitar on the western slopes saw the tumult at the top of the mountain and learnt that there were Song troops on the west, he gave all his commanders the order to launch a concerted attack. There was fierce fighting on top of the pass, with the defenders pressed on both sides.
Little Duke met Bai Qin and they engaged in furious combat. After a couple of bouts Bai Qin thrust with his spear and Little Duke dodged, allowing the weapon to pass harmlessly under his armpit, and then responded by slashing with his halberd. The two horsemen were so close they had no room to wield their weapons, so they cast them aside and wrestled with each other. They had come to a very precipitous part of the mountain where there was no firm foothold for the horses and the furious struggle of the riders suddenly caused both men and horses to plunge over the edge. Both men fell together to their deaths on the mountain!
By now Scimitar and his men were storming up the mountain on foot. With Song troops coming up on both sides, Shi Bao could see there was no escape either way and rather than face the ignominy of capture he killed himself with his own sword. The pass at Black Dragon Ridge was taken and Scimitar ordered Song Jiang to be informed immediately.
Down at the river base the four southern boat commanders, seeing Black Dragon Ridge was lost and Muzhou had fallen, abandoned their boats and fled across the river, where people living along the other bank captured two of them and brought them in to Muzhou. The other two got away and it is not known where they went.
The main Song army now headed back to Muzhou. When Song Jiang heard, he came out to meet them. Marshal Tong and General Liu entered the city and took up quarters there. After they had installed themselves, they issued a proclamation to calm the enemy troops and civilians, telling them to go about their ordinary business. Countless southern troops surrendered. Song Jiang distributed all the public stores of rice among the people, and the whole district was pacified and renewed its allegiance to the Emperor. The two captured boat commanders were cut to pieces and their hearts offered up to the spirits of Ruan the Second and Flagpole. Offerings were also made to the spirits of all the comrades who had died on Black Dragon Ridge. White-Water Dragon and the other boat commanders were enlisted again to prepare several boats and transport the captured officials of the bogus king to Marshal Zhang at headquarters. Song Jiang's grief at losing Little Duke and the Halberdier was boundless. He ordered no further advance. He was waiting till the Unicorn and his forces arrived so they could carry out a combined attack on Clearwater.
We shall leave Song Jiang in the camp at Muzhou and tell how, after the troops were divided at Hangzhou, the Unicorn, as second-in-command of Song Jiang's army with thirty thousand men and twenty commanders under him, took the mountain route to Shezhou. They passed King Qian's old capital of Lin'an and began to approach Sundance Pass. This was guarded by one of Fang La's generals called Pang Wanchun, known as the Master Bowman. He was the finest archer in all the regions south of the river held by Fang La. He had two lieutenants, Lei Jiong and Ji Ji, who could handle immensely strong crossbows and also fought with spiked maces. They each had five thousand men.
The pass, then, was defended by these three. When they heard that the Unicorn, second-in-command of the Song forces, was on his way, they readied their weapons and awaited the enemy's arrival. Now the Unicorn's army was very nearly at the foot of the pass and they sent out an advance guard of three thousand infantry under Tattooed Dragon, Madcap, River-Jumper, White-Spotted Snake, Tiger-Killer and the Pill Monger to reconnoitre. These six commanders were all mounted on war chargers, while the rest were on foot. They proceeded to the foot of the pass without encountering a single enemy soldier and Tattooed Dragon began to get suspicious and was about to call for a discussion. But before he could open his mouth they reached the foot of the pass and looking up saw a white embroidered banner with Bowman standing beneath it.
When Bowman saw Tattooed Dragon and his companions, he began to insult them: "You're a bunch of robbers, only fit for life on Mount Liang! You wangled yourselves an amnesty from the Song emperor. How dare you invade our territory, and pretend to be heroes. Have you heard that men call me the Master Bowman? I'm told that among your rabble there's someone they call Hua Rong the Archer. Send him out so I can give him a lesson in archery! You lot can have a little demonstration of my mastery right now!" Even before this tirade finished, an arrow was winging its way. It hit Tattooed Dragon fair and square, toppling him from his horse. The other five rushed forward to pick him up and get him back on his horse, intending to carry him to safety. But at that moment gongs rang out on top of the mountain and volleys of arrows were fired simultaneously from the pine trees on either side of them. They had to forget about Tattooed Dragon; it was every man for himself. When they reached the mouth of the gorge, Lei and Ji were positioned there on either side and the crossbow bolts rained down. Brave as lions they might be, but there was no escaping this barrage. There on the river bank the unfortunate six learnt all about the vanity of human aspirations! Tattooed Dragon, Madcap and the rest, not one of them escaped; they were just a pile of corpses on the mountainside!
Of three thousand infantry only about a hundred men survived and got back to tell the Unicorn what had happened. The Unicorn was thunderstruck. For a long time he stood there in a daze, like someone out of his wits or drunk.
The Strategist also grieved for his old comrades River-Jumper and White-Spotted Snake, but in the end he said: "Calm yourself, commander, or we will fail in the main task. We should devise a new tactic for taking the pass and killing their commanders, in order to avenge this horror."
The Unicorn said: "The Leader gave all these commanders and men into my charge and now before even winning one battle I have lost six of the leaders and three thousand men. Only a hundred have come back. If things go on like this, how will I ever be able to meet him in Shezhou?"
The Strategist said: "There's an old military saying: 'Topography counts for more than time, and good relations with the locals are the most important of all.' We are all men from the central plains, from Shandong and Hebei. We're not used to fighting along the rivers, so we don't have the territorial advantage here. We must get some of the local people to show us the way; we must learn from them all the twists and turns of the mountain trails."
The Unicorn said: "You are quite right. But who should we send to find out about this?"
The Strategist said: "I'd like to suggest the Flea. With his ability to walk on rooftops and scale walls he should be ideal for the mission."
The Unicorn accordingly summoned the Flea and the latter, after he'd had it explained to him, set off, equipped with some dry rations and a sharp dagger.
The Flea made his way deep into the mountains. He was so intent on finding his way the day passed quickly and it began to get dark. He came to a place where he could see a light glimmering in the distance. He said to himself: "If there's a light, there must be someone's house." Under cover of darkness he crept towards the light. What he found was a little thatched hut, with light filtering through the walls. He walked up to the front and peered in. An old monk was sitting on the floor reciting the scriptures. The Flea knocked on the door and the monk called to a young boy, who opened up. The Flea entered and prostrated himself before the monk. The latter said: "No need for ceremony, sir. How did you find your way here, in these times of strife?"
"I will not deceive you, Master," the Flea said. "I am one of Song Jiang's officers, from Mount Liang, they call me the Flea. We have been commissioned by the Emperor to capture Fang La. Unfortunately yesterday six of our commanders were shot dead by the enemy forces holding Sundance Pass. We don't know any way to get across and they have sent me to reconnoitre and find out what trails there are that cross the mountain. I have been wandering all day through some very wild places and now I've got here. I very much hope you will be able to instruct me, if there are some hidden ways to cross the mountain. I should be extremely grateful."
The old monk said: "The people here have all suffered persecution from Fang La, there is none who does not hate him. I live here through the charity of the people, whose offerings feed me. But lately the villagers have all been driven away and since I have nowhere else to go I just have to stay here and wait for death to come. It is a great cause for rejoicing that the Song army is here and everyone is pleased about it. If you capture the bandits you will be delivering the people from a great evil. I have been afraid to say too much lest they get to hear of it. But if you are a representative of the imperial army, then I can talk to you freely. Where I am here there is no way over the pass. But there is a path over to the west that will take you across. I fear though that the enemy may have blocked it and you won't be able to get through."
The Flea said: "If there is this path, Master, I would like to know if it connects with the enemy's camp."
The old monk said: "This hidden path comes out right behind the enemy camp. Downhill from there is the way across the mountain. Only I'm afraid they may have put big boulders across it and it will be hard to get through."
The Flea said: "Never mind about that. So long as there is a path, there's no problem about anything they may have done to block it; we can find a way to deal with that. After what you've told me, I'd better go back and report to the commander-in-chief. I'll be back to reward you later."
The old monk said: "If you see any strangers, please don't talk to them about me."
"I'm very discreet. I won't say a word about you."
The Flea bade the old monk farewell and went back to the camp. He told the Unicorn what he had heard. The latter was delighted and asked the Strategist to devise a plan for capturing the pass. The Strategist said: "If there's a path through the mountain, we've got them! You must send the Flea out again with someone else because there's an important job to do."
"What is the job?" the Flea asked.
The Strategist replied: "The important part is starting fires and letting off flares. The two of you must carry rockets and kindling materials with you. Go to the back of their camp and get the fires and the rockets going, that is going to be your job."
The Flea said: "If that's all it is, there's no need for anyone else to come with me. I can do it all myself. If you send anyone else along he won't be as good at climbing as me and it could mess things up. But if I go and carry out this assignment, how are the rest of you going to get up the mountain?"
The Strategist said: "That's easy. That ambush of theirs can only work once. I don't care about their ambushes. Whenever we find thick undergrowth along the way we shall set fire to it. Then it won't make any difference if they do have an ambush."
The Flea said: "Brilliant!" He collected the incendiary materials, tied the rockets in a pack and strapped it to his back, bade the Unicorn farewell and was ready to set off. The Unicorn gave him twenty taels of silver and a catty of rice to give to the old monk and ordered a soldier to carry it. In the afternoon he and the bearer took his former route to the thatched hut where he said to the old monk: "Our commander-in-chief sends his respects and offers you this small gift." He handed over the silver and the rice, which the monk took, and then sent the soldier back to the camp. Then he asked the monk if he would show him the way. The monk said: "Wait a little. You can go when it's really dark. If you go in daylight I'm afraid they may spot you." He prepared some supper for the Flea and when night came he told his acolyte to guide the Flea as far as a certain place and then return, taking care not to be seen. The boy led them deep into the mountains by hidden trails. Traversing the forest and skirting peaks, sometimes having to clamber on hands and knees, they covered several miles of trail through mountain fastnesses under a pale moon, till they reached a forbidding cliff, a jagged wall of rock. A single narrow opening was visible in the distance, but great boulders were piled up there creating a formidable barrier.
The boy said: "You can see the pass from here, commander. It's where that pile of rocks is. Beyond that there is a clear road."
"You go back now, lad," said the Flea. "I can find my way from here."
The boy left and the Flea brought his special skills to bear — walking on roof tops, remember, scaling walls, vaulting fences and doing dodgy deals — as he negotiated the piled-up rocks. Over in the east a red glow was filling the sky, arising among the trees. It was the Unicorn and the Strategist, who had struck camp and were advancing towards the pass, setting fire to the forest as they went. The four or five hundred men in the lead, were picking up their dead as they skirted the mountain and setting fire to the undergrowth, to rob the enemy troops in ambush of their cover.
Up on Sundance Pass Bowman heard that the Song troops were setting fire to the forest and said: "So that's their plan. They want to prevent our setting up ambushes. Well, we'll just concentrate on holding the pass. They'll never get through."
As the Song troops gradually drew closer, he and his lieutenants, Lei and Ji, took up their positions in the pass.
Meanwhile the Flea had made his way step by step up the mountain. He climbed into the crown of a tall tree and hid among the foliage. From this vantage point he was able to observe the three enemy commanders preparing their arrows and cocking their crossbows and settling down behind cover to wait. He could also see the Song troops starting up the fires as they advanced. Among them were Leopard's Head and Twin Rods, who reined in their horses below the pass and shouted: "You villains, how dare you offer resistance to the imperial army?" The southerners were just waiting for the chance to shoot; they had not seen the Flea, who was already behind their lines.
Cautiously the Flea climbed down from the tree and made his way to the back of the pass. There he found two piles of firewood. He took out his tinder box and kindled a flame. He set the rockets up on top of the firewood, laid a trail of gunpowder to ignite the further of the two piles, and then lit the fuse on the nearer one. As the fuses burnt he took more rockets and a light and climbed onto the roof of a building to set fire to it. The two piles of firewood ignited simultaneously and the rockets went off with a shattering bang. The effect on the troops guarding the pass was devastating. A great cry went up and they all tried to flee. No one thought any more about fighting. As Bowman and his two lieutenants rushed back to put out the fire, the Flea set off more rockets on the roof of the building. They went off with a roar that shook the whole building and the terrified enemy troops threw down their weapons, abandoned their armour and clothing and fled down the other side of the mountain. From his position on the roof the Flea was shouting: "There's ten thousand Song troops on the pass. You'd all better surrender if you want to save your lives!"
Bowman was frightened out of his wits, stumbling about in panic. Lei and Ji were scared rigid, too shocked even to move.
Leopard's Head and Twin Rods led the charge up the mountain and dashed to the head of the pass. All the leaders were competing to be first and they chased the fleeing southerners more than ten miles beyond the pass. Colonel Sun captured Lei, the Fire General took Ji, Bowman was the only one who got away. Most of his troops were captured. The Song army made camp at the top of the pass.
With Sundance Pass now in his hands, the Unicorn rewarded the Flea. The hearts of Lei and Ji were cut out there on the mountain and offered to the spirits of Tattooed Dragon, Madcap and the other six, whose recovered bodies were buried there too. The rest of the dead were burnt.
Next day all the leaders armed and mounted. A report was sent to Marshal Zhang, informing him of the capture of Sundance Pass, and the troops moved on, making camp when they were close to Shezhou.
Now the governor of Shezhou was Fang La's uncle, Fang Hou. He had two assistants, civilian appointments, to help guard the town. One was Chancellor Wang, the other Secretary Gao. Under their orders were another dozen military officers and a garrison of twenty thousand men. Chancellor Wang had originally been a local stone mason. He wielded a bronze spear and had a fine horse, known as the Mountain Flyer, because it could traverse mountains and rivers as if they were level ground. Secretary Gao was also a local man, scion of an ancient family. His weapon was the rods. Because these two had considerable literary talents, Fang La had conferred high rank on them and given them temporary command of troops.
When the defeated Bowman returned he went straight to the palace and told the Royal Uncle: "The Song troops have overrun the pass because local people showed them the hidden trails to follow on the mountain. Our army has been routed and we cannot stop the enemy."
The Royal Uncle was outraged. He stormed at Bowman, saying: "Sundance Pass is our most important weapon against attack. If the Song army has broken through, it won't be long before they are at the gates of Shezhou. How are we going to keep them out?"
Chancellor Wang said: "Calm yourself, Your Highness. Remember the saying, 'Victory and defeat are a soldier's lot; you can't blame anything on a single battle.' Your Highness should postpone sentencing Bowman and let him lead the troops again with orders to win, to be first in the field and repulse the enemy. If he fails again you can double the sentence."
The Royal Uncle concurred and gave Bowman five thousand troops, with orders to go out and face the enemy and not come back till he had defeated them.
After Sundance Pass, the Unicorn pressed on to Shezhou and launched an attack with all his commanders. The gates opened and Bowman rode out to offer battle. The two armies took up their positions and Bowman rode out in front and issued his challenge. Golden Wings rode out from the Song ranks with his steel spear and engaged him. Before they had fought five bouts, Bowman fled. Golden Wings, eager to show his prowess, gave chase. Bowman twisted in the saddle and fired an arrow behind him. Golden Wings adroitly plucked the arrow from the air. Unfortunately it did not occur to him that Bowman could fire off two arrows in quick succession. Having caught one arrow he relaxed his vigilance and gave himself up to the chase. The bowstring twanged as Bowman fired a second arrow and Golden Wings fell. On the city walls Chancellor Wang and Secretary Gao saw the enemy commander fall and reckoning that Bowman had won the fight charged out with all the troops remaining in the city. The Song forces were defeated and retreated to a position ten miles away where they made camp. The leaders were counted and it was found that they had also lost the Gardener in the fighting. When she heard her husband was dead, Sister Sun the Ogress sent some of her troops out to bring the body back for cremation and she wept for a long time. The Unicorn's heart was heavy. His plan, he felt, had not been good, and he summoned the Strategist to develop a new one: "In today's attack we lost two more leaders. What are we going to do?"

The Strategist said: "Winning or losing, victory or defeat, it's all in the day's work for a soldier. Today the enemy saw us retreat and they'll want to make the most of it. They'll be thinking tonight is the time to take advantage and I'm sure they'll raid our camp. Let us redeploy all our troops and set up ambushes on all sides. Tie some sheep up here and then make certain arrange-ments. Twin Rods can set up an ambush on the left, Leopard's Head on the right, the Water General and the Fire General to the rear and the rest of you conceal yourselves all around along all the small paths. Tonight when they attack wait for the signal flare from the centre and then fall on them from every direction."
When the Unicorn had issued all the instructions, everyone went off to make their preparations.
Now Chancellor Wang and Secretary Gao were not without ideas. After discussing things with Bowman, they went to the Royal Uncle and put a proposal to him: "Today the Song army is defeated, They have retreated to a position about ten miles away. They are camped in the middle of nowhere and their army must be exhausted. Surely we should take this opportunity to go there and finish the business off?"
The Royal Uncle said: "Consider it carefully with all the com-manders, and if it can be done, do it."
Secretary Gao said: "I propose with Bowman to carry out an attack on their camp. The Chancellor will stay here with Your Highness to guard the city."
That night the two commanders put on their armour and led out their forces, with harness bells muffled and the troops gagged to prevent talking. They reached the Song camp. The gates were closed and they were at first reluctant to go in. For a while they listened to the drum beat sounding the hours. At first it sounded clearly enough, but later it became confused. Secretary Gao reined in his horse and said: "We can't go on!"
Bowman said: "Why not, Your Excellency?"
"The sound of their drum is unclear. There's something up!"
"I don't think so, Your Excellency. They came back defeated today. They must be exhausted. They're half asleep. that's why the drumbeat is not clear. We're wasting time, Your Excellency. We ought to attack!"
"All right then!" with this Secretary Gao gave the word for an all-out attack on the camp. But when they got through the gate and headed for the enemy headquarters, there was not a single enemy soldier to be seen. All they found was a willow tree with a number of sheep tied to it. Attached to the sheep's legs were drumsticks, arranged to beat the drums. So that was why the drum beat had sounded so unclear! They had captured an empty camp. It was extremely ominous. The cry went up: "It's a trap!" As they turned to leave fire broke out in the enemy headquarters and explosions sounded on the surrounding hillside. On every side the troops in ambush sprang out and attacked. The southerners raced for the gate, but here they met Twin Rods, who roared: "Dismount and surrender, you bandits, if you want to save your lives!"
Secretary Gao's only thought was to run for it. He had no stomach for a fight. But Twin Rods was onto him, bringing his weapon down with a force that split his skull. Bowman fought desperately to escape from the encirclement and succeeded in getting away. But he was not watching out for Spots who was still concealed and with his hooked spear tripped Bowman's horse and captured him alive. The rest of the army pursued the southerners along the mountain trails until dawn and then returned to camp.
Back at headquarters the Unicorn ordered the leaders to be counted and it was reported that Scarface had been bitten in the foot by a poisonous snake on one of the mountain paths and the poison had risen to his stomach and killed him. They cut out Bowman's heart and offered it to the spirits of Golden Wings, Tattooed Dragon and the rest. The head was then sent back to Marshal Zhang.
Next day the Unicorn renewed the attack on Shezhou. They found the gates of the town open. No flag was flying on the walls and there were no sentries in the watchtower. The Fire General and the Water General eager for glory charged through the gate, the Unicorn following with the rest of the army. He had cause to lament. The other two had already gone through, but Chancellor Wang on learning that the force sent to attack the enemy camp had been destroyed had set up this pretence of an abandoned town and had dug a big pit just inside the gate. The two leaders bursting with heroism had taken no precautions as they entered and both men and horses had plunged into the pit. The spearsmen and archers concealed on either side stepped forward and slaughtered them. Unfortunate water and fire geniuses, their fame was buried with them in a hole in the ground!
The Unicorn grieved for the loss of two more leaders. He quickly gave the order that each man in the advance guard was to carry a sack of earth to throw in the pit and to go on in and massacre the southerners till the pit was filled with their bodies too. He led the charge into the city himself, on a prancing horse. He met the Royal Uncle, Fang Hou. They had fought just one bout before the Unicorn, driven by his burning rage, summoned up all his considerable powers and struck a blow with his halberd that swept his opponent clean off his horse. The troops in the city opened the west gate and fled. The leaders of the Song army fought their way forward to capture the southerners.
As Chancellor Wang was trying to escape he ran into Green-Eyes, who attacked with his spear. Wang counter-attacked, also with a spear. Since Green-Eyes was fighting on foot and Wang was mounted, Green-Eyes was soon trampled under the horse's hooves. The Guv saw him knocked down and rushed to the rescue. Wang was fiendishly skilful with the spear and the Guv had no chance against him. After several bouts Wang had a clear advantage and with a sudden spear thrust took the Guv's life. He died on the spot.
Colonel Sun, the Tamer, Forester and Rhinoceros now arrived on the scene and halted Wang's charge. He fought furiously against four adversaries at once and showed absolutely no fear. Then suddenly Leopard's Head joined the fray. This was another who could not be frightened and even if Wang had had three heads and six arms he wouldn't have been able to stand up against five. All of them now were stabbing and hacking away at Wang, and this time things were quite beyond the unfortunate Chancellor's control. The five Song commanders were soon galloping back with the head to show it to the Unicorn, who by now was resting in the Shezhou governor's residence. Order was restored, a proclamation was issued to reassure the citizens, the leaders were given quarters inside the town and a messenger was sent with a report to Marshal Zhang. At the same time the Unicorn informed Song Jiang that he was ready to attack.
Song Jiang and his comrades, remember, were at Muzhou, waiting for the armies to join up so they could attack the bandits' hideout together. He received the Unicorn's dispatch announcing that Shezhou had been reconquered and the commanders had occupied the city centre and were awaiting the command to move against the viper's nest. Song Jiang also learnt that they had lost Tattooed Dragon, Madcap, River-Jumper, White-Spotted Snake, Tiger-Killer, Pill Monger, Golden Wings, the Gardener, Scarface, the Fire General, the Water General, Green-Eyes and the Guv, thirteen leaders in all, as well as many junior officers. It was extremely painful and he grieved bitterly. The Professor did his best to animate him: "A man's living and dying are ordained by fate. This grieving is damaging to your health. Let us keep our eye on what is important, the national interest."
Song Jiang said: "You are right, but one cannot help grieving. I keep remembering how at the outset one hundred and eight names were recorded in mystic writing on the stone tablet. Who would have expected that now so many are fallen! One after another, so many of my limbs hacked off!"
The Professor tried to console Song Jiang and then wrote a reply to the Unicorn, fixing a date for the joint attack on Clearwater.
Now we shall leave Song Jiang and the Unicorn and turn to Fang La, sitting in council in his citadel at Bangyuan Gap in Clearwater, discussing with his officials, civil and military, how to deal with Song Jiang's offensive. When the remnants of the defeated army straggled back and told him Shezhou had fallen, and that his uncle, Fang Hou, the Chancellor and the Secretary were all dead, and the Song forces in two divisions were advancing to attack Clearwater, Fang La was horrified. To the ranks of his assembled courtiers he said: "All of you have received honours from me, you have your share of power in my government and enjoy great riches. How can you allow Song Jiang's forces to push you back like this and allow so many cities to fall, so that now Clearwater remains our only stronghold? I have just been told that the Song army is on its way here. How are we to confront them?"
Then Chief Minister Lou stepped forward and declared: "Now that the Song forces have reached Shezhou, it will be difficult to defend this palace. Since our numbers are small and our leaders few, I am afraid that unless Your Majesty leads the campaign himself our generals will not go forward with confidence."
Fang La said: "That is reasonable." He accordingly issued a proclamation in which he declared that every region and every district, every official and imperial servant, councillor or officer was to go forward under the sovereign's leadership to conclude the war.
Lou also asked: "What leader should we appoint to command the vanguard?"
Fang La replied: "I will appoint the commander of my own palace guard, the royal nephew Fang Jie, with Colonel Du Wei from my personal staff as his deputy. They can have thirteen thousand guards from the citadel and three thousand officers to lead the attack."
This Fang Jie was indeed Fang La's nephew, grandson of the Fang Hou who had commanded the garrison at Shezhou and had just been killed by the Unicorn, and he was eager to avenge his grandfather, so he really wanted this command. He was a scholar, but he had learned to manage the square halberd and was as brave as they come. As for Du Wei, he had been a Shezhou blacksmith skilled in the manufacture of weapons and was a close friend of Fang La's. He used six throwing knives and fought on foot.
Fang La also gave out another order sending Instructor Ho Conglong of the palace guard with ten thousand men against the Unicorn in Shezhou.
We will leave Fang La to his arrangements for countering the enemy on two fronts, and rejoin Song Jiang and his army as they set off by land and water, leaving Muzhou and heading for Clearwater. White-Water Dragon with his sailors and boats pushed off from the river bank while the Professor and Song Jiang rode with the land force. The Professor spoke as follows: "My one fear about this campaign is that Fang La may escape deep into the mountains where it will be difficult to catch him. If we are to take him alive so that he can be handed over and exhibited to the Emperor, we need cooperation from within. If we can make contact with one of his own people we will be able to get him. We need to know his whereabouts, so he can't get away."
Song Jiang said: "Right, in that case we must use the trick of pretending surrender, we must fight deception with deception, in order to set up a conspiracy within. We sent Mr. Chai and the Prodigy there as spies, but we have not heard anything from them. Who can we send now? It must be someone who can plausibly pretend to be surrendering."
The Professor said: "In my view the White-Water Dragon would be the best one to send. He can take some transports full of grain and pretend he is handing them over as a pledge of his good faith. Fang La is a peasant at heart and when he sees so much grain he won't be able to resist it."
Song Jiang said: "Good thinking!" He sent Magic Messenger by water to where White-Water Dragon was, to acquaint him with the plan and give him his instructions. As soon as White-Water Dragon had grasped what was wanted, Magic Messenger returned to the main army.
White-Water Dragon told Ruan the Fifth and Ruan the Seventh to disguise themselves as bo'suns with Cave Dragon and River Rider as ordinary seamen. With sixty transports, all flying newly altered flags signalling that the supplies they carried were intended as tribute, they sailed up the main river. When they approached Clearwater, southern war boats appeared up river and bore down on them, simultaneously firing arrows. White-Water Dragon shouted out: "Don't fire, I want to talk! We want to surrender and we are bringing these supplies as tribute to your prince, to feed his army. We hope you will accept us."
The commander of the other boats, seeing they were unarmed, held his fire and sent someone across to question them. He saw that the boats were indeed full of grain and a report was sent to Chief Minister Lou, saying that the White-Water Dragon had surrendered and was handing over grain supplies as tribute. The Chief Minister ordered the men ashore. When White-Water Dragon had paid his respects, the Chief Minister asked him: "What exactly are you in Song Jiang's army? What is your position? And why do you want to surrender?"
"My name is Li Jun and I was born on the Yangtze. I saved Song Jiang's life when we raided the execution ground in Jiangzhou. Recently he received an amnesty from the Emperor. Since he was made general and commander of the government expeditionary force, he has forgotten what he owes to us. He has slighted me many times. Now with this invasion of your territory we keep losing more and more of our comrades and he himself cannot make up his mind whether to go forward or retreat, but he always forces us sailors into the front line. We are tired of being humiliated, and we have secretly diverted his grain supplies to hand over to you so we can surrender."
After all this the Chief Minister not only decided to trust him but also took him into the palace to tell Fang La about his surrender and the supplies. White-Water Dragon prostrated himself before Fang La and repeated his request. Fang La suspected nothing. He told the four boat captains to bring their boats into the government harbour and promised that when he had driven out Song Jiang's army he would reward them further. White-Water Dragon prostrated himself in thanks and went out to supervise the unloading of the supplies, for removal to the government granary. Of this no more.
We now return to Song Jiang and the Professor and their arrangements. Four commanders, Scimitar, Colonel Hua, Thunderclap and Whiskers were appointed to the vanguard and they led the army as far as the border of Clearwater, where they came into contact with Fang La's nephew, Fang Jie. The two armies took up their positions and then Fang Jie rode out with his halberd at the slope, while Du Wei on foot stood behind him. This Du Wei was in full armour with five throwing knives slung behind him and a seven-star sword in his hand. One behind the other they rode out in front of their army. Thunderclap was the first out on Song Jiang's side. Whirling his wolf's-tooth mace he charged Fang Jie. Now Fang Jie was a young man, but very determined and he handled the square halberd with great expertise. He fought more than thirty bouts with Thunderclap and neither had the advantage. Fang Jie could see that Thunderclap was extremely skilled, and was fighting with a lifetime's experience behind him; he gave his opponent no opening. The contest was at its height and Thunderclap continued to use all his skills, not offering his opponent the slightest chance. But he failed to observe the scoundrel Du Wei who had followed on behind Fang Jie's horse and who now darted out with one of his knives in his hand and flung it in Thunderclap's face. As he tried to dodge, Thunderclap was caught by a blow from Fang Jie's halberd and knocked from his horse. He was dead before he hit the ground. Poor Thunderclap, he was extinguished quite soundlessly! Fang Jie did not dare follow up this victory and the Song troops were able to drag the body away, using hooks. They were demoralized by the loss of Thunderclap and Song Jiang had to reorganize them to continue the battle as well as make arrangements for the burial.
Fang Jie was full of his victory. He stood in front of the ranks and yelled: "If there are any more of you Song warriors who fancy yourselves, come out and fight!"
Thereupon Song Jiang rode out in front. He could see that behind Fang Jie on horseback under a yellow silk umbrella was the rebel prince himself, Fang La.
Fang La now rode out in front and took control of the battle. When he saw Song Jiang there he sent Fang Jie off to fight and capture him. For their part, the Song troops were preparing to engage with the aim of capturing Fang La. As Fang Jie was about to do battle, a messenger arrived: "Instructor Ho of the royal guard and his men on their way to relieve Shezhou have been captured by Song troops under the Unicorn. Their forces have been destroyed and Song troops have reached the mountain behind us."
Horrified by the news, Fang La hurriedly ordered the army to fall back on the citadel. Fang Jie told Du Wei they must hold the front line to give the royal carriage time to get away. Having done this, they too withdrew. As they reached the outskirts of Clearwater they heard a tremendous uproar rising heavenwards, and saw fires blazing everywhere, men and horses milling about. It was White-Water Dragon and the boat captains setting fire to Clearwater. When Fang La saw this he ordered the royal guard into the city to save it. They charged in and the situation became very confused. Seeing that the enemies were in retreat, Song Jiang's forces gave chase. When they reached the city and saw the flames they knew that White-Water Dragon and his companions were at work. The troops were mustered and every commander ordered to attack on his own initiative. By now the Unicorn's men had also got beyond the pass and were coming up in support on either side, their arrival most timely. Song troops were attacking the Clearwater base from every side. Song Jiang and all his comrades were charging in from all directions, every one of them bent on capturing southern troops and razing Clearwater to the ground. Fang La now had only Fang Jie to lead the army, protect him, and cover his withdrawal to the citadel at Bangyuan Gap. Song Jiang's main force now entered Clearwater. They burst into Fang La's palace, collected up all the illegal weapons, money and treasure, and after checking the palace stores set fire to it, burning down Fang La's whole establishment. The government warehouses were also ransacked. Song Jiang and the Unicorn's joined forces and made camp inside the city. The commanders all gathered to claim their rewards. When the leaders of both armies were counted it was found that Perilous and the Ogress had both been killed by Du Wei's throwing knives, Rhinoceros and Skyscraper had been trampled to death in the mêlée by cavalry; the Executioner, Spots and Strongarm, who had received wounds so serious that the doctor was unable to save them, were dead too. Ruan the Fifth who had been first into Clearwater was killed by Chief Minister Lou. The Song leaders claimed the capture of ninety-two of the usurper's officers, and were duly rewarded. Only Chief Minister Lou and Du Wei were unaccounted for. A proclamation was issued to reassure the populace and the captured officers were sent off to Marshal Zhang at headquarters for beheading. Later a member of the public came and reported that the Chief Minister, having killed Ruan the Fifth and knowing that the city was lost, had hanged himself from a tree. As for the villainous Du Wei, he tried to hide in the house of his kept woman, Baby Wang, but had been handed over by her protector. Song Jiang rewarded the protector, and then sent people to fetch the body of the Chief Minister. He ordered Blossom to cut out Du Wei's heart and liver and the warm blood was spilt in offering to the spirits of Thunderclap, Ruan the Fifth, Perilous and the Ogress and all the rest who had given their lives in the battle for Clearwater. Song Jiang publicly offered incense with his own hands and then next day with the Unicorn marched to the citadel at Bangyuan Gap and invested it. As for Fang La, with only his nephew Fang Jie to guard him he had withdrawn to his citadel. There his forces strengthened their defences and would not come out to fight. Song Jiang and the Unicorn laid siege to the place, but they had no means of getting inside. For Fang La, however, it was like sitting on needles. When the siege had been continuing for a number of days and Fang La's spirits were at very low ebb, a tall gentleman in court robes presented himself, bowing to the ground in front of the throne. "Your Majesty," he said, "I am nothing, but your munificence and grace are such that I must do my best to requite them by offering you my services, relying on the ancient knowledge of tactics I have acquired, the hidden secrets of warfare, all the lessons and experience derived from the manuals of military art. If Your Majesty will grant me the troops, I shall repel the Song invaders and restore national honour. Will Your Majesty accept my offer?" Fang La was overjoyed and gave orders immediately for the palace guard to be put at the speaker's disposal to counter-attack and challenge Song Jiang, for whatever might result from it, this person was clearly someone outstanding. Now if Fang La had not given command of his army to this person, things would certainly have been different. For now there were to be heads rolling on the steps to the throne, hot blood gushing over palace walls. The viper's nest would be swept clean and Fang La taken, and Song Jiang would reach the pinnacle of his fame.

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### Monk Lu Zhishen Expires in Zhejiang by the riverside in a Trance; Song Jiang returns to his birthplace Home in his Official silk robe Finery

The official who offered to lead the expedition from the Cavern was none other than Ke Yin the Duke Consort. Fang La was overjoyed. "We are very fortunate," he said, "that the consort is willing to exercise his might in battle against the brigands. We gladly utilize his genius to regain our national glory."
Ke Yin immediately prepared to set forth with his troops. Yun Bi was his second in command. Fang La presented the consort with his personal golden armor and silken robe and a fine horse. Accompanied by Fang Jie the Royal Nephew and more than twenty generals, Ke Yin marched from Bangyuan Cavern with ten thousand of the Royal guards and spread out in battle position.
The news was reported to Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, who also deployed their forces. They saw Duke Consort Ke Yin riding forward. No one recognized him as Chai Jin. Song Jiang ordered Hua Rong to fight him. Lance at the ready, Hua Rong cantered to the front and shouted derisively at his challenger.
"Who are you, knave, that you dare help rebels against the Imperial Army? Just wait till I get my hands on you! I'll pound you to mincemeat! Dismount and surrender, and I'll spare your life!"
"I'm Ke Yin from Shandong. Everyone knows my fame. A bunch of scruffy robbers like you from Liangshan Marsh are really beneath my notice! We're more than a match for you! I'm determined to wipe you out and recapture our cities!"
Song and Lu, on their horses, listened and thought: "That's Chai Jin's voice. He never in the past said anything which indicated he might betray us. He's changed his name from Chai Jin to Ke Yin, but the names mean virtually the same thing."
"Before Lord Chai became an outlaw he often gave shelter to wanted men and disguised them as merchants," said Wu Yong. "Can he have forgotten his old loyalties?"
"Let's see what happens in his joust with Huan Rong," said Lu Junyi. Hua Rong kicked his steed faster. The horses met, the weapons clashed, and the warriors fought. Gradually they moved into a ravine, battling ever closer to one another.
"Pretend to be defeated, brother," Chai Jin said in a low voice. "I'll explain later."
Hua Rong heard. After three rounds, he turned his mount and withdrew.
"Beaten officer, I won't chase you," Ke Yin shouted. "Is there anyone else who thinks so well of himself? Let him come out and fight!"
Hua Rong galloped back to the position and told Song and Lu what had happened. "Let Guan Sheng do combat," Wu Yong suggested. Waving his halberd, with its blue dragon etched into the steel, Guan Sheng raced to the front.
"Petty officer from Shandong," he yelled, "I dare you to joust with me!"
Fearlessly, they battled less than five rounds when Guan Sheng feigned defeat and returned to the Song lines. Ke Yin did not pursue. Instead, he rode forward and shouted another challenge.
"Is there any strong general among you who dares to fight?"
On Song Jiang's orders, Zhu Tong was the next contender. Back and forth the two battled, deceiving both armies. After only six or seven rounds, Zhu Tong fled. Chai Jin gave chase and lunged in a false thrust with his lance. Zhu Tong leaped from his saddle and ran back to the Song position.
The southern soldiers captured the abandoned horse and the consort waved them forward in a wild charge. Song Jiang and his troops hastily retreated ten *//*before making camp. Ke Yin pursued them for a distance, then returned with his contingent to the cavern.
The news was reported to Fang La: "The heroic duke consort has defeated three enemy generals and driven the Song forces back ten *//.*"
Fang La, delighted, ordered a royal banquet. After the consort had removed his armor he was invited into the rear palace and given a seat of honor at the festive board. The king raised his gold goblet and toasted him personally.
"I knew you were a scholar, but I never realized you had such military skill! Had I known earlier what a hero you are, we wouldn't have lost so many cities. Give full play to your brilliance, slaughter the bandits, and restore our sovereignty, and you shall share with us the glories of peace and enjoy together national restoration."
"Rest assured, Sire," said Ke Yin. "I will do my utmost. I pray Your Majesty will watch tomorrow from the top of the hill while I annihilate Song Jiang and the rest of his crew!"
Fang La consented. He was very pleased. That night they feasted until late, then each retired to his quarters in the palace.
The next morning Fang La held no royal court, but ordered the slaughter of steers and horses to feed his troops to the full. Then all donned armor and mounted. They rode cheering from the cavern, amid waving banners and pounding drums. Accompanied by his retinue and cabinet officials, the king climbed to the top of the hill above the cavern to watch the duke consort do battle.
Song Jiang transmitted this order to all his chieftains: "Today's engagement will be critical. Do your utmost to catch Fang La, but don't kill him. When your soldiers see Chai Jin in the southern position turn his horse, charge after him into the cavern and capture Fang La."
Rubbing their hands in anticipation, the northerners took up their weapons. Every man was eager to plunder the riches of the cavern, and win glory and rewards by seizing Fang La.
The Song forces deployed outside the cavern. On the southern side, Ke Yin sat his horse beneath an arch of pennants, about to ride forth into combat. But Fang Jie the Royal Nephew, his lance held athwart his saddle, intervened.

"Wait until I've killed one of their generals," he urged. "Then you can lead our men against the foe."
The Song units were pleased to see that Yan Qing was standing behind Chai Jin. "This scheme is sure to succeed," they said, and prepared for action.
Fang Jie rode forward and issued his challenge. From the Song position Guan Sheng cantered out, brandishing his halberd. The two warriors had fought only ten rounds or so when Hua Rong joined in the fray. Though assailed by two opponents, Fang Jie battled without fear. They could not subdue him, but gradually he was forced onto the defensive.
Then Li Ying and Zhu Tong rode forth and also attacked. Four against one were too much. Fang Jie turned his mount and started to leave. Ke Yin emerged from the arch of pennants and blocked his way. The consort waved his hand, and the four Song chieftains closed in, while Ke Yin himself charged with levelled lance. Fang Jie jumped from his steed and tried to flee, but Chai Jin pierced him with a single thrust. Yan Qing dashed up from behind and finished Fang Jie off with his sword.
The southern soldiers were stunned. Then they ran for their lives. The "duke consort" raised his voice in a shout.
"I am not Ke Yin but Chai Jin, a chieftain in the army of Song Jiang. The Royal Attendant, with me, is actually Yan Qing the Prodigy. We now know all about everything inside and outside the cavern. Whoever captures Fang La alive will be made a high official and ride a fine horse. Surrender and avoid bloodshed! Resist and be slaughtered with your entire family!"
Chai Jin, Yan Qing and the four chieftains, leading a large contingent, drove into the cavern. Fang La saw it all from the top of the hill. Angrily, he kicked over his golden throne and plunged deep into the hills. When five columns of Song Jiang's army rushed into the cavern, they discovered he was gone, and caught only some of his retinue.
Yan Qing and a few trusted confidants, after removing two loads of gold and jewels from the treasury, set fire to the inner palace. When Chai Jin entered his own consort's residency, he found that his wife the princess had hung herself. He burned the residency down, cremating her inside it. He allowed her attendants to run away.
In the main palace the Song chieftains slaughtered everyone—the king's concubines, his personal guards, his royal relations... and plundered his treasures. Song Jiang urged them to search the palace for Fang La.
Ruan the Seventh discovered in an inner room the trunk in which Fang La kept his crown, his royal robe, his green jade belt, his white jade scepter, his Care-Free boots. He couldn't resist the temptation to try the lavish finery on. In full regal attire, he mounted his steed and trotted to the front of the palace. The soldiers at first thought he was Fang La. But when they crowded around they saw it was Ruan the Seventh, and everyone laughed. Ruan thought it was all a great joke, and rode about the palace grounds watching the looting.
Wang Bing and Zhao Tan, the two generals who had come from the Eastern Capital with Minister Tong, had taken part in the assault on Bangyuan Cavern. They heard the tumult among Song Jiang's troops, and someone said that Fang La had been caught. They hurried to join in the seizure so that they could claim some of the credit. But they saw only Ruan the Seventh, all togged out the royal robe, the crown upon his head, laughing uproariously.
"You've got a nerve dressing up like Fang La and making a spectacle of yourself!" they fumed.
Ruan pointed his finger at them and raged. "Who do you pricks think you are! If it weren't for our brother Song Jiang your donkeys' heads would have been chopped off by Fang La long ago! All you can do is try to cut in on the glory my brother chieftains and I have earned! You'll go back and tell the emperor it couldn't have done without the help of you two big generals!"
Wang and Zhao, infuriated, were ready to fight. Ruan snatched a spear and raced towards them. Huyan Zhuo, who witnessed the quarrel, galloped up and separated the contestants. An officer had notified Song Jiang, and he too hurried to the scene. He and Wu Yong yelled at Ruan to dismount, remove the royal vestments and cast them aside. Song Jiang apologized to the two generals. Although Wang and Zhao had no choice but to accept the placatory words of Song and his chieftains, inwardly they would not forget their hatred.
That day corpses littered the ground in Bangyuan Cavern, and blood flowed in streams. According to *Song Annals* over twenty thousand of Fang La's soldiers were annihilated. On Song Jiang's orders, the palace buildings were put to the torch. The royal halls, the ornate towers, the inner chambers, the bejewelled alcoves—all were reduced to ashes. The Song army made camp at the entrance to Bangyuan Cavern and built a stockade, A check of the prisoners revealed that only Fang La had escaped. Song Jiang ordered a search of the mountains and had the local populace notified: Whoever captured Fang La would be recommended to the emperor for a high official post; whoever supplied information as to his whereabouts would be rewarded.
Meanwhile Fang La scurried through the mountains like a dog whose master just died, like a fish which evaded the net. Discarding his robe of imperial yellow, his golden-flowered hood, his royal court boots, he fled over the heights in grass and hempen sandles. In a single night he crossed five mountains.
He came at last to a hollow. There, nestled against a slope was a rude monastery. Fang La was hungry. He started towards it to ask for something to eat. From behind a pine tree a big fat monk suddenly emerged. He knocked Fang La down with his Buddhist staff and tied him up. The cleric was none other than Zhishen the Tattooed Monk. He took Fang La to the monastery, obtained some food, then started down with him. They met a party of soldiers who had been searching the mountains for the former king. Together, they escorted the captive under guard and brought him before Song Jiang.
When he saw who it was, Song Jiang was delighted. "Where did you find him, Reverend?" he asked Lu Zhishen.
"After the battle in the Grove of Ten Thousand Pines on Black Dragon Ridge, I chased Xiahou Cheng into the mountains and killed him. I pushed on in deeper, looking for more of the southern brigands. But I got lost and was wandering around when I met an old monk on a wild and verdant slope. He led me to his rustic monastery and said: 'We've plenty of fuel and grain and vegetables. Wait here. If you see a big fellow come out of the pine forest, grab him.' I saw fires burning at the foot of the mountains, and kept watch all night. I didn't know where the paths ran in those parts. But this morning I spotted this rogue climbing over the rise. So I knocked him down with my staff and tied him up. I had no idea it was Fang La."
"Where is the old monk now?"
"I don't know."
"He must be a saintly person to be so psychic. When I get back to the capital I'm going to report your great deed to the emperor. You'll be able to return to secular life and become an official. Your future wife and children will be honored, you'll be a credit to your ancestors, you'll recompense your parents for their kindness in raising you."
"I've lost interest in mundane affairs. I don't want to be an official. It will be enough if I can find a quiet place to live out the rest of my life in peace."
"We'll make you abbot of some big monastery. That also is very honorable. Your parents will be proud of you."
Lu Zhishen shook his head. "I don't want any part of it. Having a lot of things is no use. Just this flesh on my frame of bones—nothing could be better than that."
Song Jiang fell silent. Neither he nor Zhishen was happy. The troops were already mustered. Fang La was locked in a cage cart, to be delivered to the emperor in the Eastern Capital. Song Jiang issued the order and the army left Bangyuan Cavern in Clear Stream County and headed for Muzhou.
In Muzhou Governor Zhang, Deputy District Commander Liu, Chancellor Tong and staff officers Cong and Geng joined forces and made camp. They learned of Song Jiang's great victory, and that he had captured Fang La and brought him to Muzhou. All called to congratulate him. Song Jiang and his chieftains bowed respectfully.
"We've heard that it was an arduous campaign, General, and that brothers have been lost," said Zhang. "But you've been completely victorious. We're extremely happy."
Song Jiang again bowed. Weeping, he replied: "There were a hundred and eight of us when we went to break the Liao Tartars, and we returned to the capital intact. Gongsun Sheng left us, and several more remained in the capital. But since conquering Yangzhou and crossing the Yangzi, we've lost seven out of ten. Although I'm still alive, how can I go back to Shandong and face my old neighbors and relations!"
"Don't talk like that, General. You know the old saying: 'Poverty or wealth, high rank or low, short life or long—all are predestined.' Those fortunate enough to live must send off the unfortunates who have died. You have no reason to be ashamed of your losses. You're successful and famous. The emperor will surely reward you with high honors and rank. When you visit home in your official finery you'll be envy of all. Don't concern yourself with incidentals. Just concentrate Oil returning with your army and reporting to His Majesty."
Bowing his thanks, Song Jiang issued appropriate orders to his chieftains. Governor Zhang directed that, with the exception of Fang La who was to be delivered to the Eastern Capital, all captured southern officials were to be decapitated in Muzhou's public square.
Officials of counties not yet captured, on learning that Fang La had been taken, either fled or came to Muzhou to surrender and pay their respects to Governor Zhang, in about equal number. The capitulators were accepted and treated as good citizens. Notices, posted everywhere, reassured the populace.
As to the remaining adherents of the southern rebels, if they hadn't harmed anyone and were willing to surrender, they were allowed to return to the countryside and their land and property were restored. With all the counties and prefectures now under control, Song officials and garrisons were placed in charge to defend the territory and protect the people. Everyone resumed his original occupation.
Zhang gave a large banquet in Muzhou to celebrate peace, congratulate his officials and generals, and issue awards. He directed that Song Jiang and Lu Junyi return with their Vanguard Army to the capital. The various units assembled their equipment and got ready to march.
Tears fell from Song Jiang's eyes whenever he thought of the chieftains who had died. Then Zhu Fu and Mu Chun went to visit the six chieftains who were ill in Hangzhou, and they too were stricken. Only Yang Lin and Mu Chun survived and were able to join the march. Today, at last, there was peace, after the many hardships they had been through together, but six poor brothers had passed on.
In a quiet spot in a Muzhou temple Song Jiang had a long banner hung, three hundred and sixty scriptures read, and prayers offered so that the deceased might ascend from the Nine Depths into Heaven. The next day he had steers and horses sacrificed at the Black Dragon Temple in ceremonies which he attended with Wu Yong and the other chieftains. They burned paper replicas of gold and silver ingots as thanks to the Black Dragon Prince for his benevolent protection. Returning to camp. Song Jiang collected the bodies of all the chieftains who had died and gave them proper burial.
The expeditionary army prepared to follow Governor Zhang to Hangzhou, there to await the official imperial decree ordering their return. A list of chieftains who had distinguished themselves was sent to the sovereign with a report. Only thirty-six of the original one hundred and eight were left. They were as follows: Song Jiang the Defender of Chivalry; Lu Junyi the Jade Unicorn; Wu Yong the Wizard; Guan Sheng the Big Halberd; Lin Chong the Panther Head; Huyan Zhuo the Two Rods; Hua Rong the Lesser Li Guang; Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind; Li Ying the Heaven-Soaring Eagle; Zhu Tong the Beautiful Beard; Zhishen the Tattooed Monk; Wu Song the Pilgrim; Da Zong the Marvelous Traveler; Li Kui the Black Whirlwind; Yang Xiong the Pallid; Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon; Ruan the Seventh the Devil Incarnate; Yan Qing the Prodigy; Zhu Wu the Miraculous Strategist; Huang Xin the Suppressor of Three Mountains; Sun Li the Sickly General; Fan Rui the Demon King Who Roils the World; Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder; Pei Xuan the Ironclad Virtue; Jiang Jing the Magic Calculator; Du Xing the Demon Face; Song Qing the Iron Fan; Zou Run the One-Horned Dragon; Cai Qing the Single Blossom; Yang Lin the Elegant Panther; Mu Chun the Slightly Restrained; Tong Wei the Dragon from the Cave; Tong Meng the River Churning Clam; Shi Qian the Flea on the Drum; Xun Xin the Junior General and Gu Dasao the Tigress.
To the mountain-shaking pounding of drums and gongs, their red victory pennants stretching over a distance of ten *li*, the triumphant Vanguard Army left Muzhou. The cavalry rhythmically beat their metal stirrups, the entire force raised their voices in murderous song.
The march to Hangzhou was uneventful. Because Governor Zhang's troops were in the city, Song Jiang camped at Six Harmonies Pagoda. He and his chieftains took quarters in the Six Harmonies Monastery. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi went frequently into Hangzhou while waiting for orders.

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Lu Zhishen and Wu Song, quartered in the monastery, relished the beauty of the hills and streams in the outskirts of the city. That night the moon was bright and the breeze cool, the sky and waters an azure blue. The two were asleep in the monastery when, around midnight, they were awakened by the boom of the incoming river tide. Lu Zhishen was from west of the Pass and had never heard this sound before. He thought it was a battle drum, that brigands were again attacking. He leaped from his bed and grabbed his iron staff. With a yell he started to rush outside. The monks were astonished.
"What's wrong, Reverend?" they asked. "Where are you going?"
"I heard a battle drum. I'm going to fight!"
The monks laughed. "You're mistaken, Reverend. That's no battle drum. It's the Old Faithful Tide on our Qiantang River."
Lu was surprised. "Why do you call it that?"
Opening the window, the monks pointed at the great head of water rolling up the river. "The tide comes in once during the day and once at night, always on time. Today is the fifteenth of the eighth month, and it arrives at the third watch. We call it Old Faithful because it's never late."
Zhishen peered at the water, then suddenly he understood. He clapped his hands and laughed.
"The prophesy of my old abbot said: 'Take Xia when you encounter him,' and after the fight in the Forest of Ten Thousand Pines I captured Xiahou Cheng. 'Seize La when you meet,' said the abbot, and I've caught Fang La. Now I must fulfil the rest of the prophesy: 'When you hear the ride, round out the circle. When you see the tide, in silence rest.' Well, I've heard the tide and I've seen it, but how do I do the other part? Can you brothers tell me?"
"You've joined the Buddhist order, how is it you don't understand?" said the monks. "In our religious parlance 'to round out the circle and in silence rest' means to die."
Zhishen laughed. "So that's what it's called. In that case I'll have to round out my circle and rest in silence. Heat a few buckets of water. I must bathe first."
The monks thought he was joking. But they knew he had a violent temper, and dared not refuse. After Lu had cleansed himself and changed into the fresh monk's clothing presented to him by the emperor, he instructed one of his junior officers.
"Notify brother Song Jiang. Ask him to come here and see me."
He went into the interior of the temple and wrote an ode on a slip of paper. In the meditation hall, he pulled a hassock to the center, lit some fragrant incense in a burner, and placed the slip of paper on a meditation couch. Then he seated himself cross-legged on the hassock, with his left foot resting on his right and, quite naturally, transcended into space. By the time Song Jiang received the message and hurried with his chieftains to the temple, Lu Zhishen was already motionless. The ode read as follows:

*In life, I performed no virtuous deeds, preferring murder and arson.*
*Suddenly my metal shackles were opened, the jade lock shattered.*
*Hark! The Old Faithful Tide comes on the Qiantang River, and today I know myself at last.*

On reading the ode, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi sighed without cease. The chieftains burned incense to the departed Lu Zhishen and kowtowed. Governor Zhang and Chancellor Tong and the other officials hastened from the city and did the same.
Song Jiang distributed the deceased's Buddhist garments and the rewards given to him by the emperor among the monks, and asked them to conduct memorial services for three days and three nights. The body he had put in a cinnabar red casket and requested the abbot of Jiangshan Monastery to officiate at the cremation. Abbots came also from ten other monasteries to join in the prayers.
Lu Zhishen's remains were cremated behind the Six Harmonies Pagoda. The Jiangshan abbot approached the encoffined body, torch in hand, and pointed at it.
"Lu Zhishen, Lu Zhishen," he intoned, "you began your career in the greenwood. Arson burned in your eyes, murder festered in your heart. Now you have gone with tide to where none can find you. Amazing! Flying white jade flakes shall fill the sky, the earth shall be covered with yellow gold!"
The abbot lit the pyre, the monks prayed, and flames consumed the casket. Then the bones were collected and interred in the pagoda courtyard. All of Lu Zhishen's extra clothing, money and the contributions he had received from various officials were donated to the Six Harmonies Monastery for the common use of whoever resided there.
Wu Song, though he was still alive, now had only one arm.
"I'm a cripple," he said to Song Jiang, "and I don't want to go to the capital to be presented to the emperor. I'm giving all my money and awards to Six Harmonies Monastery so that I'll be clean and unencumbered. When you send in the list of those going to the capital, brother, leave my name off."
"As you wish," said Song Jiang.
Wu Song became a monk in the Six Harmonies Monastery. He lived to the ripe old age of eighty, but that was later.
Song Jiang went daily into Hangzhou to inquire for news. Governor Zhang and his forces departed first, and Song Jiang moved his troops into the city. Half a month went by and an imperial emissary arrived with an order directing Vanguard General Song to return to the capital with his army. By then Governor Zhang, Chancellor Tong, Deputy District Commander Liu, staff officers Cong and Geng, Generals Wang and Zhao, and the central forces had all departed for the capital.
When Song Jiang and his army were about to set forth, Lin Chong was unexpectedly stricken by paralysis, Yang Xiong developed a growth on his spine and died, and Shi Qian expired from appendicitis. Song Jiang felt very badly. Then a dispatch arrived from Dantu County saying that Yang Zhi had died and had been buried there. Since Lin Chong's paralysis could not be cured, they left him in Six Harmonies Monastery under Wu Song's care. He passed away half a year later.
Yan Qing the Prodigy approached his former patron Lu Junyi privately after they left Hangzhou.
"I have been with you since childhood," he said, "and you have been kinder than words can say. Now that we have accomplished our mission, why shouldn't we two give up our official ranks and live out our lives in some secluded place where our fame is unknown?"
"Ever since Liangshan Marsh returned to the fold of the Song Dynasty, we've been going north to subdue the Liao Tartars and south to capture Fang La. They've been bitter costly campaigns in which many of our brothers have been lost. Of my own family, only you and I are left. Now that we shall soon be able to return home in official finery and have honors bestowed on our future wives and children, why should you choose so pointless a course?"
The Prodigy smiled. "You're making a mistake, patron. There is a point to my course. It's your course which probably will turn out badly."
Yan Qing was a very far-sighted young man.
"I haven't the slightest personal ambition," Lu protested. "Are you suggesting the imperial court will consider me dangerous?"
"Many famous and loyal heroes of ancient times who contributed much to the founding of new dynasties were executed by their sovereigns."
"They all committed offenses of one sort or another. I've done nothing wrong. What cause have I for concern?"
"You'll be sorry that you haven't listened to me, but then it will be too late. I was going to bid farewell to General Song Jiang, but he's very strong on fraternity. I'm afraid he wouldn't let me go. So I'll take my leave only of you, patron."
"Where will you go?"
"Either ahead of or behind you!"
Lu Junyi laughed. "All right, have it your way. Let's see where you end up."
Yan Qing kowtowed eight times. That night he gathered some money and valuables and departed for a destination unknown. The next morning a note was delivered to Song Jiang. It read:

I, Yan Qing, greet the Vanguard General with the deepest respect. I am extremely grateful for your benevolent teachings. Even my utmost efforts could never repay you. Because of my feeble destiny and weak talents I am not worthy of official honors. I intend to retire to rustic life. I wanted to bid you farewell, but knowing your strong fraternal sentiments I feared you would not let me go, and slipped away in the night Please forgive me. I would like to leave these four lines by way of respectful farewell:

I gladly relinquish official rank,
For wealth and honors I have no need.
Only the amnesty I retain,
With simple fare my life sustain.

The verse struck a chord of melancholy in Song Jiang's heart. He collected the tablets of office of the chieftains who had died and sent them on to the capital, so that the appointments might be cancelled. Travelling along a winding road, the troops reached the outskirts of Suzhou. Li Jun the Turbulent River Dragon pretended to be stricken with an ailment and took to his bed. The news was reported to Song Jiang, who came personally with a doctor to see him.
"Don't delay the march on my account, brother," Li Jun pleaded. "The emperor will reproach you. Governor Zhang probably has already been back for some time. Have pity, brother, and leave Tong Wei and Tong Meng to look after me. We'll catch up and attend the imperial court as soon as I am well again. You hurry on to the capital with the army."
Though reluctant, Song Jiang could not procrastinate. Zhang was sending dispatches urging speed. Li Jun and the two Tong brothers were left behind, and Song Jiang and his chieftains rode on.
Li Jun and the Tong brothers then sought out Fei Bao and the three other rustic friends, and the seven conferred in Willow Hamlet. They disposed of their family possessions, built a ship and set sail from the port of Taicang for foreign parts. Li Jun eventually became king of Siam. Tong Wei and Fei Bao also became officials in a foreign land, each occupying coastal territory and doing as he pleased. But that was all in Li Jun's later history.
The march of the Song troops was uneventful. Song Jiang's heart was heavy when they traversed Changzhou and Runzhou, where the had fought costly battles. Only two or three out of ten of his chieftains remained since crossing the Yangzi. The army passed Yangzhou and entered Huai'an. The capital wasn't far away. Song Jiang ordered the chieftains to get ready to be received by the emperor.
They reached the Eastern Capital on the twentieth day of the ninth month. Governor Zhang and his forces entered the city first. Song Jiang's men camped at their old site in the outskirts, Chen Bridge Station, and waited for orders.
A count of the chieftains showed a total of twenty-seven, including Song Jiang. Of these, only twelve were senior officers. He wrote out a list of those who had died for their country to present to the emperor, and instructed his remaining chieftains to prepare suitable attire for attending the imperial court. Three days later, they received the emperor's summons.
That morning at daybreak the twenty-seven rode into the city. This was the third time the capital's populace had seen the chieftains arrive for a reception by the Taoist Sovereign. The first was when they were granted the imperial amnesty. They were garbed in the silks of red and green given to them by the emperor then, and wore tablets of silver and gold. The second time, on their return to the capital after defeating the Liao Tartars, they were dressed in armor. Today, on His Majesty's orders, they wore civilian robes and headgear. The watching crowds sighed in admiration.
At the palace gate, the twenty-seven dismounted and entered. They kowtowed eight times at the foot of the vermilion jade stairs, then retreated and kowtowed another eight times, then advanced to midway between the two positions and kowtowed eight times more. Their twenty-four obeisances raised a cloud of dust, and their cries of "Long live!" shook the air.
Emperor Hui Zong saw how drastically their numbers had been depleted, and his heart was moved. He summoned them into the hall. With Song Jiang and Lu Junyi in the lead they mounted the golden stairs and knelt before the jewel-encrusted curtain. The sovereign instructed them to rise. By then his ministers had rolled up the curtain.
"We have heard of your hardships in the punitive expedition across the Yangzi, and that you have lost more than half your brothers," said the emperor. "We feel very badly about that."
Song Jiang, weeping, remained on his knees. "Because I am only a crude talentless rustic, I can never repay Your Majesty's kindness, though I spill my liver and brains on the battlefield! There were a hundred and eight of us when we pledged brotherhood in the Wutai Mountains. Who would have thought we'd lose eight out of ten! I have a list here, Your Majesty, which I hesitate to present. I pray that in your benevolence, Sire, you will make a suitable disposition."
"We shall honor the graves of those who died for the throne. Their contribution shall not be forgotten."
Song Jiang again bowed and submitted his petition. It read:

Vanguard General and Commander-in-Chief of the Pacification of the South Song Jiang and others respectfully report: Though ignorant and crude and having committed heinous crimes, we have been the recipients of Your Majesty's kindness, for which we can never repay though our bones be ground to powder and our bodies pulverized. We and our brothers, on leaving the Marsh, have done our utmost to eradicate evil. Of one mind, we vowed fraternity on Mount Wutai, and have been defending our country and protecting the people with full loyalty ever since. In Youzhou we defeated the Liao Tartars, near the cavern in Clear Stream we captured Fang La.
In making these modest contributions, we have lost many excellent commanders. For this we grieve night and day. We pray Your Majesty will consider the matter and bestow your benevolence on those who have died and your protection on those who still live.
Our only wish is to return to the countryside and till the land. We beseech you, Sire, to allow us to retire. Earnest and trembling, we await Your Majesty's decision with bowed heads. The following is a list of our commanders …

The itemization showed that fifty-nine had been killed in battle, ten died of illness, one expired in a religious trance, one was crippled and became a monk at Six Harmonies Monastery, another was a Taoist who returned to Qizhou, four had gone off on their own, five had remained in or returned to the capital, and twenty-seven now presented themselves before the throne. The petition was signed by Vanguard General Song Jiang and Vice-Vanguard General Lu Junyi.
"One hundred and eight of you, all stars in the firmament," the emperor sighed, "and only twenty-seven left after another four departed! You literally have lost eight out of ten!"
He bestowed posthumous titles on those who had died. If they had surviving sons, he called them to the capital and gave them official posts. If they had none, he had temples built where sacrifices might be dedicated to their memories. Because Zhang Shun's spirit had performed deeds of conspicuous value, it was named a Golden Glory General. Lu Zhishen, for having captured Fang La and transcending from life in a trance, was named the Chivalrous Illustrious Reverend. Wu Song was made abbot of the Six Harmonies Monastery, where he lived out his days. Ten Feet of Steel and Mother Sun, who had died in battle, were also given honorific posthumous tides.
The ten senior chieftains present at the imperial ceremony were made prefects or prefectural or district military commanders. The fifteen lieutenant chieftains were given command of various army units. All were to await formal certification by the appropriate departments. Gu Dasao was appointed magistrate of Dongyuan County.
Song Jiang was entitled Marshal of Military Virtue and made governor of Chuzhou Prefecture and commander of its armed forces.
Lu Junyi was entitled Marshal of Military Contribution and made governor of Luzhou Prefecture and deputy commander of its armed forces.
His Majesty also presented the fifteen lieutenant chieftains with three hundred ounces of gold and silver and five sets of silken clothing each. For each of the ten senior chieftains the gift was five hundred ounces of gold and silver and eight sets of the silken clothing. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were each awarded one thousand ounces of gold and silver, ten sets of silken clothing, an imperial court robe, and a fine horse.
All thanked the sovereign.
The spirit of the Black Dragon Prince had twice manifested itself in Muzhou, defended the country and the people, and enabled the army to win complete victory. The emperor bestowed on the Black Prince a long and magniloquent title. He also changed the names of Muzhou to Yanzhou, and Shezhou to Huizhou, because these had been seats of Fang La's rebellion.
Clear Stream County became, for the same reason, Chunan County, and Bangyuan Cavern was split away from the rest of the peninsula to form an island in the river. The prefect of Muzhou was directed to use money from his treasury to erect a temple for the Black Dragon Prince, and the emperor personally sent a name plaque. The building still stands to this day.
South of the Yangzi Fang La's depredations had been severe. His Majesty exempted the people there from all taxes and labor levies for the next three years.
Each of the chieftains thanked the monarch. He invited them to an imperial feast to celebrate the peace and to congratulate them on their achievements. Civil and military officials of the highest rank entered the banquet hall. When it was over, Song Jiang addressed the sovereign.
"Since receiving the amnesty in Liangshan Marsh, we've lost more than half our troops. Some wish to return home. We pray, Sire, that you exercise your benevolence."
The emperor decreed as follows: Those who wished to remain in the army would be given a hundred strings of cash, ten bolts of silk and be assigned to either the Fierce Dragon or the Imposing Tiger Camp, where they would receive monthly stipends of money and grain. Those who wished to leave would be given two hundred strings of cash, ten bolts of silk, and be permitted to return home and be civilians again.
"I was born in Yuncheng County," said Song Jiang, "but since committing my crimes I have not dared to go back. Pray grant me permission, Sire, to sweep my family graves and visit my relatives and neighbors. I will then go to Chuzhou and assume office."
Very pleased, the monarch presented him with ten thousand strings of cash for maintaining his ancestral manor. Song Jiang and the chieftains, again expressing their gratitude, took leave of the sovereign and withdrew.
The next day the Council of Administration gave a banquet to celebrate peace, to which all the chieftains were invited. The day after, the Council of Military Affairs did the same. Governor Zhang, Deputy District Commander Liu, Chancellor Tong, staff officers Cong and Geng, and Generals Wang and Zhao were all raised in rank. But that is not part of our story.
On the recommendation of the Military Procurate, and in accordance with an imperial decree, Fang La was sliced to bits and beheaded in a public square of the Eastern Capital, and the remains placed on display for three days.

Song Jiang and his brother Song Qing left the capital with a company of one or two hundred soldiers who carried their chieftains' luggage and awards. The return to Shandong Province was without incident.
On reaching their native village in Yuncheng County, they were welcomed by neighbors and relations, but when they arrived at the manor they found that their lather, the old squire, had died, and that he was still lying in his coffin. The two brothers wept heartbrokenly. They were deeply grieved. Family and vassals offered condolences.
The old squire had kept the manor's farm and property in excellent condition. Song Jiang was able to concentrate on making funeral arrangements. He hired monks and priests to offer prayers for his departed parents and ancestors. Officials from county and prefecture called without cease.
A propitious day was chosen and, with the brothers serving as pallbearers, the squire's body was carried to a high plateau and laid to rest. Prefectural officials, neighbors and elders, friends and family, all attended. Of that we'll say no more.
Song Jiang thought of the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven, and recalled that he had not yet shown his gratitude. He paid artisans fifty thousand strings of cash to build her a temple. Soon it was completed—with two covered walks, a mountain gate, a statue of the Mystic Queen, and painted decorations.
Afraid that if he stayed too long in the countryside the emperor would reproach him, Song Jiang selected a date for the removal of his mourning vestments and again had several days of prayer services conducted. Then he gave a farewell feast for neighbors and village elders. The following day his relations gave him a banquet to congratulate him and demonstrate their affection. Of that, we'll say no more.
Song Jiang entrusted the affairs of the manor to his brother. Although Song Qing had also been made an official, Song Jiang instructed him to remain at home, attend to the farm, and maintain the family shrine. What money he still had with him he distributed among the people. But to put idle chatter aside, after several months at home Song Jiang left his native village and returned to the Eastern Capital. Many of his brother chieftains had fetched their families and settled down. Some had already assumed office. Families of those who had died for the throne went back to their villages with the bonuses the emperor had bestowed upon them. Song Jiang gradually dispersed his army. Soon the families of the slain had all departed. Those appointed to office bid farewell to the various ministers and left to take up their duties. Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller came to see Song Jiang. As they sat and chatted, Dai told him something. And as a result, Song Jiang the hero of Yuncheng County became the ghost of Liao Er Flats. His name was recorded in history for thousands of years; his deeds were inscribed for centuries. Truly, his splendid spirit pervaded his temple, and his picture was hung in the Imperial Hall of Fame.

Now the gentleman who had appeared on the steps to the throne and offered to lead Fang La's army out to fight was in fact the royal son-in-law and Master of the Rolls, Prince Ke Yin. After hearing what he had to say, Fang La could scarcely contain his joy. Prince Ke Yin was to be joint commander of the southern forces and with Yun Bi, known as the Master's Man, he put on his armour and rode out to take up his command. Fang La, after giving him his own gilt armour and royal robe and finding him a good mount, sent him forth. Together with Fang Jie, the royal nephew, Prince Ke Yin commanded ten thousand palace guards, with more than twenty subordinate officers. They rode out of the citadel and deployed in battle formation.
Song Jiang's army besieging the citadel had already allotted different sectors to the various commanders. Song Jiang was in the centre, and because he was troubled by the thought that two thirds of his comrades had been lost and they still had not captured Fang La and that the southerners would not come out to fight, his brows were knitted in a frown and his countenance expressed deep gloom, until, that is, a soldier came in and reported: "They are coming out of the citadel to fight!"
Song Jiang and the Unicorn immediately ordered everyone to mount and ride forward. As the armies took up their positions, Prince Ke Yin was the first to be seen riding out in front of the southern ranks to do battle. Was there anyone in Song Jiang's army who did not recognize him? For who else was it but Mr. Chai!
Song Jiang ordered Colonel Hua out to take on the challenger. Colonel Hua galloped forward, his lance in the rest. He stopped in front of the enemy and shouted: "What kind of villain are you, you traitor, daring to oppose our might? If I capture you, you will be hacked to pieces, your flesh and bones made into mincemeat! Your only chance is to dismount now and give yourself up."
Prince Ke Yin, Mr. Chai that is, replied very clearly: "I am Ke Yin of Shandong. Who does not know my name? You scum, you're just a bunch of outlaws from the Marshes of Mount Liang. Do you think I'm not a match for your tricks? I am resolved to exterminate you and deliver the city."
Song Jiang and the Unicorn had been listening to this. They thought carefully about Mr. Chai's words. There must be a hidden meaning. His name was Chai, and he had changed it to Ke. Well, *chai*, "firewood", and *ke*, "a wooden handle", were pretty similar. And his given name *jin*, "enter", had been changed to *yin*, "lead in", that was the same too. The Professor said: "Let's watch and see what happens when Colonel Hua fights him."
Colonel Hua, levelled his spear, made his horse prance and charged into battle. Two horses met, two kinds of weapons were raised and the two leaders became so closely embroiled that they blended into a single mass. Then Mr. Chai murmured to Colonel Hua: "Now please pretend to be defeated, brother." Colonel Hua heard. He went on fighting for another three bouts, then turned his horse and galloped off: "I disdain to chase you, you coward," Mr. Chai shouted. "If there's anyone else who thinks himself a fighter, let him come out and face me!'
Colonel Hua galloped back to his side and told Song Jiang and the Unicorn what had happened. The Professor said: "Send Scimitar out to fight him."
Scimitar raced out to fight, flourishing his bright crescent blade: "Do you dare take me on, you petty Shandong chieftain?" he shouted.
Mr. Chai levelled his spear and charged. Two weapons clashed and both men fought fearlessly. Before they completed five bouts, Scimitar also feigned defeat and galloped back to his ranks. Ke Yin did not pursue him, but shouted: "Is there anyone else among you who dares to face me?"
Song Jiang ordered Whiskers out. Whiskers charged, but he too was only pretending to fight and after five or six bouts he fled. When Mr. Chai pursued and threatened him with his spear, he abandoned his horse and scurried away on foot, while the southerners rushed out and seized his horse. Mr. Chai encouraged the southern troops to charge and Song Jiang ordered his troops to fall back about three miles and take up a position there. After pursuing them for a while, Mr. Chai withdrew to the citadel. Someone had already told Fang La: "Ke Yin is incredibly valiant! He's routed the Song army and beaten three of their commanders! Song Jiang has lost the battle and has retreated three miles."
Fang La was delighted and ordered a royal banquet. As soon as Mr. Chai had taken off his armour and changed his uniform, he was invited to sit in the inner palace. The King himself toasted him and praised him, saying: "I had no idea your fighting skills were so great! I only knew you, dear son-in-law, as a scholar. Had I known before you had such military prowess, we need never have lost so many cities. I hope you will use your talents to the full and teach these adventurers a lesson, restore our territory and allow us to enjoy peace and boundless prosperity."
"Have no fear, Your Majesty! You can rely on me to strive heart and soul for the nation's glory. I would suggest that tomorrow you go up onto the hill to see me do execution on Song Jiang and his ilk."
Fang La gave proof of his satisfaction by holding a banquet that went on long into the night before they all retired. In the morning he had oxen and horses slaughtered so the whole army could eat their fill, after which everyone armed and rode to the mouth of Bangyuan Gap to challenge the enemy, with banners waving, much cheering and a thunderous tattoo of drums. Fang La with his entourage went up onto the heights above the citadel to watch Ke Yin fight.
Song Jiang had given his men these orders: "Today's battle is not like before. It is needful for you to do your utmost. You leaders must make every effort to capture their chief, Fang La. But do not kill him. Every officer must observe them carefully and watch when Mr. Chai turns his horse and retreats. That is the moment to rush forward and capture Fang La. There must be no mistake!"
Everyone was gleefully preparing, unsheathing their weapons. All were eagerly anticipating the sacking of the citadel, all were ambitious to capture Fang La and achieve glory and rich rewards. Song Jiang now ordered his leaders to deploy their troops and take up their positions in front of Bangyuan Gap.
Just as Ke Yin was about to ride out from the ranks of the southerners, Fang La's nephew Fang Jie, mounted and carrying his halberd at the ready, said: "Stay your hand, Commander, and hold in your horse, until I have had a go at them. You can bring your troops in afterwards to mop up!"
Everyone on the Song side could see the Prodigy behind Mr. Chai, and they said excitedly: "Today all our planning is bound to pay off!" They were raring to go.
Now Fang Jie urged his horse on. From the opposing ranks Scimitar rode out to meet him, brandishing his famous blade. The horses clashed, and this way, that way, thrust and counter-thrust, they fought ten bouts. Then Song Jiang ordered Colonel Hua into the arena. Undismayed, Fang Jie fought bravely against two for a few more bouts. Though he could not win outright, he skilfully parried and dodged their blows. Song Jiang now sent out Skyhawk and Whiskers, who galloped into the attack. Pressed hard by four opponents, Fang Jie turned his horse and galloped back towards his own side. Mr. Chai, who was waiting for him in front of the southerners' position, waved his hand and the four Song leaders gave chase. Mr. Chai levelled his spear and charged Fang Jie. Taken aback by this turn of events, Fang Jie leapt from his horse and tried to flee. But before he could get anywhere Mr. Chai's spear had knocked him down. Following up behind, the Prodigy dispatched him with his sword.
The southern troops were totally bewildered. They ran for their lives. Mr. Chai shouted out: "I am not Ke Yin. I am Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind, in the service of Song Jiang! And my follower here is Yan Qing, the Prodigy! We know all the secrets of the citadel! Anyone who captures Fang La will be rewarded with high office and fine horses. Troops who surrender will be spared, those who resist will be executed." Signalling to the four leaders and the rest of the Song army to follow, he turned and charged into the citadel. Fang La, who had been watching on the heights with his entourage and had seen Fang Jie killed and the army routed, realized the situation was desperate. Kicking over his gilt throne, he fled and headed into the mountains.
Song Jiang, with his army in five divisions, charged into the citadel, hoping to take Fang La alive. But Fang La was gone and they only got his followers. The Prodigy called to some trusted companions and burst into the treasury. They grabbed two loads of gold and valuables and then started a fire in the inner court of the main building. When Mr. Chai broke into the eastern palace, Princess Golden Iris had already hanged herself. He set fire to every building. The servant girls he spared, allowing them to run off. But when the army invaded the main palace, they slaughtered all the concubines, royal guards and members of the royal family, and plundered all the valuables. Song Jiang and the rest continued to search the palace for Fang La.
Ruan the Seventh penetrated into the innermost regions of the palace and came across a trunk containing the usurper's regalia: the royal cap, the dragon robes, the jade belt, the white jade tablet and the shoes. Seeing all this finery, he thought to himself: "These are Fang La's clothes. Why shouldn't I try them on, just for a laugh?" He put on the dragon robe, fastened the jade belt, slipped into the shoes and set the cap on his head and stuck the white jade tablet in his belt. He leapt onto his horse and whip in hand galloped out of the palace. It caused a tremendous com-motion, as the soldiers thought it was Fang La. But when they rushed forward for a closer look they saw it was only Ruan the Seventh and everyone burst out laughing. To prolong the joke he rode up and down watching the looting that was under way.
In the midst of these goings-on, Generals Wang Bing and Zhao Tan, the two who had come from the court with Marshal Tong, arrived on the scene. They had heard the noise and heard rumours that Fang La had been taken and they were hoping to share in the glory. When they saw it was only Ruan the Seventh fooling around, dressed in the royal regalia, complete with royal cap, the generals berated him: "What, are you planning to follow in Fang La's footsteps, dressed up like that?"
Ruan the Seventh took it badly. Pointing at the generals he said: "Who the fuck are you? If it wasn't for our leader, Song Jiang, you two asses would have got your heads cut off by Fang La. Now that we've done all the hard work, you two think you'll come along and pretend to the Emperor, who doesn't know any better, that you had a hand in the victory."
The two generals were outraged by this and would have assaulted Ruan the Seventh. But Ruan grabbed a soldier's short spear and charged Wang Bing first. Twin Rods hurriedly rode between them. By now Song Jiang had been informed and he came racing up. When they saw Ruan dressed in the royal regalia, he and the Professor ordered him to dismount at once. The clothes were torn off him and thrown aside, while Song Jiang tried to make peace with the generals using conciliatory language. But although Song Jiang and the others did their best to calm them down, the two continued to harbour a grudge.

The ground was littered with corpses and the gutters ran with blood in the citadel that day. According to Song dynasty records, more than twenty thousand of Fang La's troops were killed. Song Jiang gave orders for fires to be started everywhere to make sure all the buildings were burnt to the ground. All the royal towers and terraces, palaces and courtyards, the delicate pavilions and gorgeous dwellings were consumed by the flames.

When Song Jiang and his companions were satisfied that the burning was complete, the troops were quartered at the entrance to Bangyuan Gap and a palisade was erected. The prisoners were listed and only the chief, Fang La, was missing. A thorough search of the mountainside was ordered and it was announced that anyone bringing Fang La in would be recommended to the Emperor for promotion; anyone providing information leading to his capture would be duly rewarded.

Now Fang La had in fact escaped from the heights above the citadel by means of hidden paths and headed for the wild country deep inside the mountains, traversing high ridges and impenetrable forests. Having shed his imperial robes, cast off his golden crown and exchanged his court boots for hemp sandals, he fled for his life, scrambling over the mountainsides. All night he was on the run. After crossing five peaks he came to a hollow in the hill where there was a thatched hut built in the lee of the slope. He was starving and he was just about to enter the hut to look for something to eat when from behind a group of pines a great fat monk sprang out, knocked him down with his staff and tied him up with a length of rope. This was none other than Lu Zhishen, the Flowery Monk. He took Fang La into the hut and gave him some food, then dragged him down the mountain till they met up with one of the army's search parties. Together they took the prisoner to Song Jiang.

Song Jiang was delighted to learn that they had captured Fang La. "How did you happen to be waiting there for him, Father?" he asked.

"After the battle at Thousand Pines on Black Dragon Ridge," Monk replied, "I chased Colonel Xia deep into the mountains, killing any enemy troops who put up a fight. I went so far that I lost my way. As I was trying to find the way back I came to a very wild patch of forest, where I met this old monk, who guided me to a little thatched hut and said: 'There's plenty of firewood and food. Just stay here and wait. When you see a big chap coming out of the forest, grab him.' That night I saw fires down the mountain. I watched them all night, but I didn't know where the paths were to get down. This morning I saw this bugger scrambling across the mountain so I knocked him down with my staff and tied him up. I had no idea it was Fang La!"

Song Jiang again asked: "Where is the old monk now?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. He disappeared after taking me to the hut and telling me about the firewood and food.

"That monk was obviously a *luohan* or bodhisattva," Song Jiang said. "This apparition led you to accomplish a famous deed. The Emperor must be told of it when we return to the capital. You can leave the monkhood and become a great official with a comfortable position in the capital and marry someone from a good family, conferring honour on your descendants and repaying your parents for all they have done."

Monk said: "My heart is ashes, I have no ambition for high office. My only desire is to find a quiet, pure place to go where I may rest my body and prepare my soul."

Song Jiang said: "If you really do not want to leave the monkhood, why not go to the capital and become abbot of some famous monastery? That too would be a way to pass on glory to your posterity and to honour your parents."

Monk shook his head and cried out: "I want none of that! To desire much is no use. If one can die with a complete body, that is more than enough."

Song Jiang was filled with sadness by what he heard, as were the others.

As soon as a role had been called of their commanders, Fang La was placed in a prison cart and sent to the capital to be shown to the Emperor. Song Jiang now ordered the army and all the leaders to depart from Bangyuan Gap and Clearwater and return to Muzhou.

Marshal Zhang now met with General Liu, Marshal Tong and two other members of the Military Council in Muzhou where all the armies were united in one camp. When they heard that Song Jiang had succeeded in capturing Fang La and was bringing him to Muzhou, they all joined in congratulations. When Song Jiang and his companions finished paying their respects, the Commissioner said: "I already know how hard you have striven on the frontier and how many of your comrades you have lost. Now your efforts have been crowned with success. Allow me to congratulate you!"

Song Jiang again prostrated himself and, weeping, said: "At the start we were one hundred and eight. When we dealt with the Tartars we had absolutely no losses. Then we unexpectedly lost the services of Taoist Gongsun, and later the Grand Preceptor retained some of our company. Since we put down the insurrection in Yangzhou and crossed the river, I regret to say we have lost seven out of ten. Although I myself have come out of it alive, what of my honour? What can I say when I return to family and home in Shandong?"

The Marshal said: "Don't speak like that. Remember the old saying: 'Rich or poor, noble or base, our lot is given us; a short life or a long one, it's fixed by fate.' What does the proverb say? 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.' What's the point in grieving over the leaders you have lost? You have distinguished yourself and achieved much and when the court hears of it you will be rewarded with high office. You will have position and honour and a fine house. You will return to your birthplace in sumptuous robes. Who can quarrel with that? Don't waste your time on other things. Just get on with organizing the army for the return."

Song Jiang prostrated himself in thanks and then went to summon his commanders. The Marshal had already given orders for all the captured insurgents and usurping officials, with the exception of Fang La, who was to be sent under guard to the capital, to be executed in the market place. In a few villages that had not yet been recaptured the rebels and corrupt officials, on learning of Fang La's capture, had either fled or given themselves up. They were spared and returned to being loyal citizens. A notice was circulated to calm fears and reassure the people. The rest, who had followed the insurrection but not done anyone any harm, were allowed to surrender and go back to their villages and were directed to return to their normal trades or plots of land. Once order had been restored to the whole district, guards were appointed to defend the borders and make the people secure. Of this no more.

The Marshal's officials now organized a banquet to celebrate the peace, honour the generals and officials and reward the army for its efforts. All commanders were told to conclude any unfinished business. Orders came from the court that they were all to pack up and set out in due course.

But Song Jiang continued to weep copiously whenever he thought of his dead comrades. The Pilot and five more of those who had suddenly fallen ill in Hangzhou together with Smiler and the Irrepressible, who had stayed to look after them, had died from the disease. Only Panther and the Irrepressible had returned to join the army attack. Remembering the hardships they had all undergone, he felt it only right and proper now peace had returned to organize prayers for the release of their souls. A tall banner was raised in Muzhou and a service for the release of souls, their deliverance from the nine infernal regions, and the remission of their sins was organized in one of the temples. Libations were made to the three hundred and sixty points of the compass.

Next day oxen and horses were slaughtered for the sacrifice and they all gathered in the Temple of the Black Dragon Lord to make the offering in thanksgiving for his protection. On their return to the camp, the bodies of all who had died in action were collected and prepared for burial. After the interment, Song Jiang and the Unicorn ordered their armies to rejoin Commissioner Zhang in Hangzhou, until the Emperor authorized their withdrawal to the capital. First everyone's achievements were recorded in a report which was forwarded to the Emperor.

There were now only thirty-six of the original company surviving, to wit: Song Jiang, the Unicorn, the Professor, Scimitar, Leopard's Head, Twin Rods, Colonel Hua, Mr. Chai, Skyhawk, Whiskers, Monk, Pilgrim, Magic Messenger, Iron Ox, Morbid, White-Water Dragon, Ruan the Seventh, the Prodigy, the Strategist, Tamer, Colonel Sun, Demon King, Thunderer, Sterling, Calculator, Uglymug, Iron Fan, Rhinoceros, Blossom, Panther, Irrepressible, Cave Dragon, River Rider, the Flea, Blackface and Auntie Gu.

So Song Jiang and his leaders and troops left Muzhou and set off for Hangzhou. Then indeed the mountains resounded with the sound of gongs summoning the troops, the countryside was filled with a red tide of victory banners!

The journey was uneventful. Marshal Zhang's troops were in the city, so Song Jiang was quartered outside at the Pagoda of the Six Harmonies, where they all rested for a while until Song Jiang and the Unicorn went into the city to receive their orders.

Meanwhile Monk and Pilgrim, who were also quartered at the temple, had been admiring the scenery around the city, which was quite beautiful, with magnificent views. One night when the moon was bright and a soft breeze blowing, water and sky uniformly translucent, the two went to sleep in the monastery. Around midnight the roar of the tide on the river was suddenly heard. Monk was from Guanxi, west of the mountains, and had never encountered something like the Zhejiang tide, known as "Old Faithful". He thought it was war drums beating and imagined bandits were attacking. He leapt out of bed, groped around for his staff and with a loud shout rushed outside. The monks were amazed and came to ask: "What's come over you? Where are you off to?"

Monk replied: "I thought I heard war drums. I was going out to fight."

They all roared with laughter. "You're mistaken," they said. "That's not war drums. That's just Old Faithful on the river Qiantang."

It was Monk's turn to be shocked. "Why is it called Old Faith-ful?" he asked.

The monks flung open the windows and pointed out the tide to him. "It comes twice a day, regular as clockwork. Today is the fifteenth of the eighth month, the tide is due precisely at midnight. Because it never fails it's known as Old Faithful."

When Monk looked at that tide, it was as if his eyes were opened. He clapped his hands and laughed. "My teacher, Abbot True Knowledge, presented me with a mantra which says 'Meet Xia and take a prisoner' and during the battle in Thousand Pine Woods I did indeed encounter one Colonel Xiahou; then it's 'Find La and make an arrest', and in fact I captured Fang La also. Now it must be 'Hear the tide and awake from darkness, recognize Old Faithful and learn stillness.' Well, I've just encountered Old Faithful, so what comes next ought to be 'learning stillness'. The question is, can any of you lot tell me what 'learning stillness' might mean?"

"You a monk," they chorused, "and you haven't yet learnt that in Buddhism learning stillness means death?"

Monk grinned and said: "If that's what they call learning stillness, it's going to happen to me today. Would you please warm some water for me, I'm going to take a bath."

They all thought he was joking, but they knew what he was like and dared not disobey. An acolyte was ordered to prepare hot water for him to bathe himself. When he had changed into new monk's clothing, from the imperial gift, he told the soldiers under his command to fetch Song Jiang and asked the monks to bring him paper and brush. With these he wrote out an elegy and then went to the meditation hall, where he appropriated a meditation couch and sat down in the middle. He lit some fine incense and placed the paper beside him. He sat cross-legged, left leg resting on right, and his soul flew easily up to heaven. When Song Jiang received the message and rushed there with the others to see him, he was no longer stirring. The elegy said:

*All my life long I never sought to gain merit;*
*My interest was only in killing and burning.*
*Now of a sudden the golden cord is cut,*
*The jade lock shattered;*
*Now Old Faithful rides on Qiantang's stream,*
*And I know at last who I really am.*

When Song Jiang and the Unicorn read this their sadness knew no bounds. The other leaders also came to burn incense and pay their last respects. Marshal Zhang and Marshal Tong came and offered incense and paid their respects. Song Jiang distributed alms among the monks and arranged for a three-day service. He had the body enclosed in a red sarcophagus and asked Abbot Benevolence of the famous Mount Jing temple to officiate at the cremation. Monks from the Ten Houses of the Five Sacred Peaks also came to participate. The sarcophagus was borne in procession to the cremation ground in the inner court of the Pagoda of the Six Harmonies. Father Benevolence holding a torch stood before the sarcophagus. He gestured towards Monk Lu Zhishen and delivered this short address:

*O Lu Zhishen, O Brother Profound Knowledge, you come out of the greenwood with your eyes of an arsonist, your mind full of killing, and all of a sudden you return with the tide: we shall find you no more among the living. O the sky's vault is filled with jade, the earth transmuted into pure gold!*

Father Benevolence lit the pyre and all the monks began to recite sutras. When the flames had consumed the sarcophagus the bones were collected and buried right there in the courtyard of the Pagoda of the Six Harmonies. All the deceased's possessions, his monk's robes, his begging bowl, the wealth which had been his part of the Emperor's reward, were handed over to the pagoda for the benefit of the community. His monk's staff and cassock of black cloth were also donated.

Song Jiang inquired about the health of Pilgrim Wu Song. Though he had survived his wound, he was permanently disabled. He said to Song Jiang: "I am a cripple now. I don't want to go back to the court. I shall donate all my wealth and possessions to the community of this temple and become a free monk, or pilgrim, that's what I shall do. When you draw up the list of those who are returning, please leave my name out."

Song Jiang said: "I shall respect your wishes."

Pilgrim remained at the temple and died peacefully, aged eighty. But that was later.

Song Jiang attended in the city each day to await orders, until Marshal Zhang arrived with the main army. Two weeks after the Marshal took over in the city, the Emperor's envoy arrived with orders for Song Jiang and the rest of the company to return to the capital. Marshal Zhang and the other top-ranking officers left first. Song Jiang and the others took a little longer to pack up. Before they left, Leopard's Head suddenly became paralysed. Morbid died of a tumour on his spine and the Flea succumbed to cholera. These deaths were a heavy blow to Song Jiang. News came from Dantu that the Blue-Faced Beast was also dead and had been buried in the cemetery there. Leopard's Head's paralysis was found to be incurable so he was left at the temple in the care of Pilgrim. Six months later he too was dead.

As Song Jiang and the others were leaving Hangzhou to return to the capital, the Prodigy came in private to the Unicorn and said: "I have served you since childhood. I owe everything to you, master. Now that our task is completed, I would like to suggest that we resign the positions we were granted and go away quietly to hide our footsteps and bury our names, find some place where we can live out our days in peace. What do you think about this?"

The Unicorn said: "Since the time we were pardoned, we have gone through a hundred battles, laboured ceaselessly, suffered many a hardship. Many of our comrades have died but we two have been fortunate enough to survive. Now is the time to return home in glory, start a home, with a wife of good family and privileged sons. Why do you want to embark on a project that has no future?"

"You are mistaken, master," said the Prodigy with a wry smile. "My plan is the one which has a future. I'm afraid it's what you propose that has no future!"

This Prodigy one can say truly was one who knew when to advance and when to retire, or to put it another way, knew how to read the signs:

*The battle's fought, the day is won,*
*A quiet retreat's his only thought.*
*Let worldly men for fame strive on;*
*Ambition's measure's always short.*

The Unicorn said: "I've never for a moment wavered, lad, so how could the Court hold anything against me?"

The Prodigy said: "Have you never heard of all those faithful ministers and generals of antiquity whose services to the crown were rewarded with disgrace and death?

The Unicorn said: "What I heard was that they brought trouble on themselves through excessive ambition. Whereas I don't aspire to such heights, so I can't provoke such accusations."

The Prodigy said: "Well, if you won't listen to me, I fear you will come to regret it. If I go to tell Song Jiang I'm leaving, he is an inflexible man and I'm afraid he won't release me, so I shall say farewell only to you, master."

"Where will you go if you leave me?" the Unicorn asked.

"I shall not be far away from you," he replied.

"So be it," said the Unicorn. "But I'd still like to know where you're thinking of going!"

The Prodigy prostrated himself eight times and on the same day tied some valuables in a bundle and set off for who knows where. Next morning a soldier found a paper addressed to Song Jiang. This is what Song Jiang read:

*Your servant Yan Qing, the Prodigy, humbly greets you and declares: Since you received me into the company I have received such favours from you as even with my death I could not fully repay. Now in view of my weakness and inadequacy I feel myself unfit for public service and beg permission to retire to the countryside and live as a private citizen. I wanted to bid you farewell, but I feared that your sense of responsibility would make it difficult for you to release me, so I shall depart quietly tonight. I leave you with these short verses and hope that you will find it in you to forgive me:*

*For the goose to go solo may be a surprise.*
*I resign my appointment, all honours despise.*
*With the pardon in hand I shall now prepare*
*To live far removed from the world's idle care.*

After reading the Prodigy's letter and poem, Song Jiang felt truly saddened.

Song Jiang had the tablets awarded by the Emperor to leaders who had since died collected up and returned to the appropriate authorities in the capital.

Song Jiang's army set off, and when they reached Suzhou the White-Water Dragon, pretending to have caught a cold took to his bed. His men informed Song Jiang. Song Jiang himself went with the doctor to see him. White-Water Dragon said: "Brother, do not delay your journey or the Emperor will blame you. I am afraid Marshal Zhang will have been there a long time already. If you want to do me a favour, you might leave Cave Dragon and River Rider to look after me. When I am better we can come after you to see the Emperor. Please go on ahead with the army."

Although he had misgivings, Song Jiang could not waste any more time. He had to start. There was even a dispatch from Marshal Zhang demanding haste so he left the three boat commanders behind and set off with all the others for the capital.

As for White-Water Dragon and his friends, the three of them in accordance with their previous agreement went off to find the four fishermen. They spent all their capital building themselves a boat at Elmhurst, after which they sailed from Taicang Harbour for foreign lands. Later White-Water Dragon became lord of Siam. Cave Dragon, River Rider and the rest filled positions overseas and prospered, holding sway in other coastal regions. But that is part of another story, the story about White-Water Dragon.

After an uneventful journey Song Jiang and his men reached Changzhou and Runzhou, two towns they had previously fought for. Song Jiang could not help feeling the pain of it: only twenty or thirty percent of the leaders who had crossed the river still survived. After Yangzhou, when they reached Huai'an and knew the capital was not far off, Song Jiang ordered all his commanders to prepare themselves for their audience with the Emperor. On the twentieth of the ninth month they reached the Eastern Capital. Marshal Zhang and the main army were already in the city, so Song Jiang had to be stationed outside and they set up camp as before at Chenbridge to await the Emperor's orders.

At this point some soldiers from the company that had remained behind with White-Water Dragon in Suzhou arrived and announced that he had not been ill at all but simply unwilling to join government service in the capital, and that he had now gone off somewhere with Cave Dragon and River Rider. This gave Song Jiang further cause for sadness. When he told Sterling to draw up the list of leaders present in the capital, there were only twenty-seven of them on it, besides those who had died in the Emperor's service. A letter of thanks was written to all those listed and they were ordered to remain at hand in readiness for their audience. Three days later at the dawn court, when all the courtiers assembled to greet the Emperor, the Emperor ordered Song Jiang and his company to be summoned.

As the light slowly spread in the east, Song Jiang, the Unicorn and the others rode into the city. The people turned out to see them. This was their third audience with the Emperor. The first time, after the amnesty, they had paraded in the red and green silk robes that were the Emperor's gift to them, displaying the gold and silver tablets they had been awarded. After defeating the Tartars, at the Emperor's command they had ridden in fully armed. This time, since peace had been restored, the Emperor ordered civilian dress, so they were in the ceremonial attire of the court as they rode into the city. When the people saw how few of them remained, a great sigh went up. They reached the Meridian Gate and smartly dismounted and went in. A chamberlain led them to the foot of the palace steps. With Song Jiang and the Unicorn in front, they advanced and prostrated them-selves eight times, then retreated and prostrated themselves another eight times. Finally they positioned themselves halfway between the two extremes and prostrated themselves eight times again — making twenty-four times in all, producing an effect of lively movement and ending in rousing shouts of "Long live the Emperor!"

The Emperor responded by expressing his sadness on seeing they were so few. He ordered them all to be admitted to the imperial presence and Song Jiang and the Unicorn led them up the steps. They knelt at the top before the pearl screen. His Majesty graciously invited them to rise and his attendants raised the screen. "I know that you have suffered many hardships in subduing the disturbances in the South and that you have lost most of your comrades. It causes me enormous grief," he said.

Song Jiang, his face streaming with tears, prostrated himself all over again and gave the following account. There were fifty-nine leaders, he said, who died in His Majesty's service, to wit:

Fourteen senior commanders: *Thunderclap Qin Ming, Spearsman Xu Ning, Twin Spears Dong Ping, Hotshot Zhang Qing, Red-Haired Devil Liu Tang, Tattooed Dragon Shi Jin, Hasty Suo Chao, White Eel Zhang Shun, Ruan the Second, Ruan the Fifth, Sergeant Lei, Madcap Shi Xiu, Snake Xie Zhen, Scorpion Xie Bao*

And forty-five junior commanders: *Door-God Song Wan, Nameless Jiao Ting, Turtle Tao Zongwang, Victorious Han Tao, Supremo Peng Qi, Whitey Zheng Tianshou, Knife Cao Zheng, Fleetfoot Wang Dingliu, Ugly Son-in-Law Xuan Zan, Star Kong Liang, Young Master Shi En, Hound Hao Siwen, Redeye Deng Fei, Big Chief Zhou Tong, Stripes Gong Wang, Pluto Bao Xu, Yellow Dog Duan Jingzhu, Ape Hou Jian, Flagpole Meng Kang, Short-Arse Wang Ying, Steelbright Hu Sanniang, Eight-Armed Ogre Xiang Chong, Winged Ghost Li Gun, Dandy Yan Shun, Magic Flautist Ma Lin, Water General Shan Tinggui, Fire General Wei Dingguo, Little Duke Lu Fang, Halberdier Guo Sheng, Golden Wings Ou Peng, River-Jumper Chen Da, White-Spotted Snake Yang Chun, Perilous Yu Baosi, Tiger-Killer Li Zhong, Pill Monger Xue Yong, Green-Eyes Li Yun, Guv Shi Yong, Skyscraper Du Qian, Scarface Ding Desun, Forester Zou Yuan, Executioner Li Li, Spots Tang Long, Strongarm Cai Fu, Gardener Zhang Qing, Ogress Sun Erniang*

Ten leaders died of illness, namely:

Five senior commanders: *Leopard's Head Lin Chong, Blue-Faced Beast Yang Zhi, Pilot Zhang Heng, Unstoppable Mu Hong, Morbid Yang Xiong*

And five junior commanders: *Comet Kong Ming, Crocodile Zhu Gui, Smiler Zhu Fu, Daytime Rat Bai Sheng, Flea Shi Qian*

One senior commander achieved enlightenment and passed away at the Temple of the Six Harmonies: *Monk Lu Zhishen*

One senior commander who lost an arm had refused all honours and chosen a life of contemplation: *Pilgrim Wu Song*

One senior commander previously in the capital had returned to a life of contemplation in the provinces: *Taoist Gongsun Sheng*

Four had refused all honours and departed along the way: *Prodigy Yan Qing, White-Water Dragon Li Jun, Cave Dragon Tong Wei, River Rider Tong Meng*

Five were previously retained in the capital, including the doctor who was sent for by the court: *Doctor An Daoquan, Redbeard Huangfu Duan, Craftsman Jin Dajian, Magic Hand Xiao Rang, Lungs Yue Ho*

Thus twenty-seven leaders only were present that day at court.

The Emperor continued to express his grief: "Originally there were one hundred and eight of you, all corresponding to stars," he said. "Now there are only twenty-seven — and the four who have departed already. It is quite true that you have lost four-fifths of your company." He ordered that all the leaders who had died in the service of the Emperor should receive titles of nobility. The leaders who were present at this audience were given official posts, of which the secretariat was informed, with the exception of Auntie Gu, who was however given a title of nobility.

Song Jiang was to be imperial commissioner in Chuzhou and commander-in-chief of the garrison. The Unicorn was to be imperial commissioner in Luzhou and deputy commander of the troops. The Professor was to be chief of communications in one of the guards regiments. Scimitar was to be military governor in the district of the Northern Capital. Twin Rods was to be chief instructor with the Imperial guard. Other posts went to Colonel Hua, Mr. Chai, Skyhawk, Whiskers, Magic Messenger, Iron Ox and Ruan the Seventh.

All went to give thanks for the titles and offices they had received and each received in addition a generous financial reward.

Song Jiang told His Majesty how the Black Dragon Lord had appeared to him twice and protected both the country and the army, helping them to victory. The Emperor accordingly conferred on the Dragon Lord the title of "Dragon Lord, patron of loyalty and of virtue, provider of protection and purveyor of comfort". He also changed the names of Muzhou and Shezhou to Yanzhou and Huizhou, to efface the memory of the part they played in Fang La's uprising. Clearwater was renamed Peacehaven and Bangyuan Gap was opened up and converted into an island. The local authorities were ordered to build a temple to the Black Dragon Lord on Black Dragon Mountain, for which the Emperor provided an inscription in his own hand. Traces of this temple remain to this day. In recognition of what the people in many towns south of the river had suffered under Fang La, they were excused from taxes for three years.

When Song Jiang and the others had expressed their gratitude, The Emperor ordered a peace banquet to honour their achieve-ments. All the officials civil and military were present, all the ministers and secretaries. When the leaders went to thank the Emperor, Song Jiang took the opportunity to make a request: "Since we received the amnesty many of our troops have died. If there are some who would like now to return home, I beg Your Majesty to look kindly on them."

The Emperor assented and gave the order: "Any soldier who wishes to serve in the imperial army shall be given a hundred strings of cash and ten rolls of material and enlisted in a regiment of the royal guards, either the Dragons or the Tigers. Those who do not wish to serve, let them be given two hundred strings of cash and ten rolls of material and sent home to their villages to work as ordinary citizens."

Song Jiang had another request: "I was born and grew up in the village of Yuncheng. Since the time I fell from grace I have never dared return. Would Your Majesty graciously grant me some leave, so that I may go back and attend to the tomb of my ancestors and visit my family, before taking up my post in Chuzhou? Of course I would not go without Your Majesty's consent."

The Emperor was pleased with the respectful tone and granted Song Jiang an additional hundred thousand strings of cash to facilitate his return home. Song Jiang took leave of the court. Next day the Privy Council gave a banquet to celebrate the peace and the day after the Military Council gave their banquet. Marshal Zhang and all the other senior officers had already received important honours but that does not concern our story. Fang La, on the other hand, was taken on the Emperor's order to the market-place and cut to pieces there. His death lasted three days.

*Honour and rank the one secures,*
*While the other a cruel death endures.*
*Men get their just reward at last,*
*Which for some comes slow, for others fast.*

Song Jiang was given the leave he had requested. Those of his troops who wanted to continue serving in the army were rewarded and appointed to two of the imperial guards regiments as grooms. Those who wanted to leave the army were also rewarded and sent back home to serve the people there. The junior commanders all received rewards and were given military or civil appointments or sent off to serve on the frontier. With their official letters of appointment they went off to their posts where they helped preserve the peace.

When all this was settled, Song Jiang said farewell to them for the time being, and with his brother Iron Fan and a few hundred troops, carrying the Emperor's gifts, his luggage, uniform and campaign booty, left the capital and headed for Shandong. They were returning home in fine silk robes. The journey was uneventful. Formerly when he reached the neighbourhood his father and family would come out to meet him. Now when he got to the manor he learnt that the old squire was already dead, though the burial of the coffin had yet to take place. The two brothers could not restrain their grief. Their relatives and the retainers all came to pay their respects. Before he died, squire Song had left the fields and the household in very good order, all just as it had always been. Song Jiang organized a service at the manor and invited Buddhist and Taoist priests in to pray for his deceased parents. A constant stream of local officials visited. When the day and time had been chosen, the two brothers themselves carried their father's coffin to a place on the hill for burial. Many people came for the funeral that day, local dignitaries, family and neighbours, old and young, connections of all kinds. But enough of this.

Mindful of his as yet unfulfilled promise to the Mystic Lady, Song Jiang used fifty thousand strings of cash to pay stone-masons and others to restore the temple of the Mystic Lady of the Ninth Heaven and had new images installed in the two side galleries and new decorations, all of which was carried out with great care. But time was passing and Song Jiang was afraid of incurring the Emperor's displeasure, so he appointed a day to end his mourning. After a few more days of Taoist ceremonies, he organized a big banquet to which he invited all the village worthies.

The next day his relatives gave him a banquet. No more need be said of this.

He transferred ownership of the estate to his brother, Iron Fan who, although he had received honours, preferred to remain in the country where he could attend to the farm and tend the ancestral shrine. All the wealth Song Jiang had earned he distributed among the poor.

Having spent several months in his native place, Song Jiang bade farewell to home and old friends and returned to the capital to be reunited with his comrades. Some of them by now had moved their families to the capital to live, and others had left for their posts elsewhere. The close relatives of those who had died in the Emperor's service had received a handsome reward and been told to return home and compensate the families. By the time Song Jiang returned to the capital, these had all returned home well satisfied.

In obedience to the court's order, Song Jiang had bade farewell to the members of the Military Council, packed his things and was ready to go to his post, when the Magic Messenger appeared with something to tell him. Magic Messenger sat down and said a great deal that was to have important consequences: Song Jiang while living was to become known as the Hero from Yuncheng and after death Lord of Duckweed Marsh. It will be true to say:

*How noble and pure the breeze that is born in the temple!*
*How imposing the portraits in the mausoleum!*

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### Song Jiang after death goes to Duckweed Marsh & his Ghost Haunts Liao Er Flats; The Emperor Hui Zong Dreams a visit to Mount Liang Marsh

Dai Zong rose and said to Song Jiang: "The emperor in his benevolence has appointed me prefect of Yanzhou. Today I intend to submit my resignation and leave for the Sacred Mountain Temple in Tai'an Prefecture where I shall become a Taoist priest and live out my life in tranquility."

"Why do you take this course of action, brother?"

"I had a dream that the Summoner to the Nether World was calling me. So I made up my mind."

"You have that marvellous ability to travel quickly, brother. You'll surely become a spirit of the district after you die."

They parted. Dai Zong resigned his post, went to the Sacred Mountain Temple, and became a Taoist priest. Every day he burned incense and diligently prayed for the Emperor of Heaven. Though he was not ill, several months later he bid farewell to his fellow priests and died, smiling cheerfully. His spirit appeared in the temple frequently after that. Worshippers set up a statue of him in the temple, using his original skeleton as the framework.

Ruan the Seventh, when he received his appointment, took leave of Song Jiang and assumed office as commandant of the Gaitian Military District. In the next few months, Generals Wang Bing and Zhao Tang, remembering how he had insulted them at Bangyuan Cavern, frequently complained about him to Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong.

"He put on Fang La's royal garments and jade girdle. Though it was only a joke at the time, it's still on his mind," they said. They wanted to have him killed. "That Gaitian Military District is a secluded place, and the people there are savage," they said. "He's sure raise a rebellion."

Tong told Premier Cai Jing, who reported to the emperor and requested an order canceling Ruan the Seventh's appointment and reducing him to ordinary civilian status.

No one was more pleased than Ruan when the decree was issued. He returned with his old mother to Stone Tablet Village in Liangshan Marsh and became a fisherman again. Ruan supported the old lady for the rest of her days. He himself later died at the age of sixty.

Chai Jin the Small Whirlwind, in the capital, noted that Dai Zong had resigned his post and become a priest. He learned, too, that the imperial court had removed Ruan the Seventh from office and reduced him to an ordinary citizen on the theory that because he had worn Fang La's royal vestments he probably wanted to rebel.

"I was a duke consort under Fang La," Chai Jin said to himself. "If those evil ministers find out and slander me before the emperor, won't I be dismissed and humiliated also? It would be better if I took the initiative and saved myself the trouble."

Claiming that he could not function efficiently because of recurring bouts of rheumatism, he asked to resign and return to his farms. Permission was granted. He bid farewell to the officials and went back to his estate in Henghai District, Cangzhou Prefecture, where he lived a life of ease. One day, though in perfect health, he suddenly passed away.

Li Ying served as commandant of Zhongshan District for half a year, when he heard of Chai Jin's retirement. He too claimed inability to serve due to rheumatism. He resigned and returned to his village of Lone Dragon Mountain. Later he joined up with Du Xiang, and they became rich. Both came to a good end.

Guan Sheng, commandant of the Daming garrison in the Northern Capital, won the respect of his troops and the local populace. One day, returning drunk from military maneuvers, he fell from his horse and took ill and died.

Huyan Zhuo, who had been appointed a commander of the Imperial Guards, drilled his men every day. In later years he led an army against the Fourth Prince of the Golden Tartars. He was killed in battle west of the Huai River.

Zhu Tong performed well as commandant of the garrison at Baoding. Later he fought under General Liu Guangshi against the Golden Tartars, and ended his days as governor of the Taiping Military District.

Hua Rong assumed office as prefect of Yingtian, where he went with his wife and younger sister. Wu Yong, who was unmarried, took charge in the Wusheng Military District, where he arrived accompanied only by a boy servant. Li Kui, also unmarried, had just two servants with him when he assumed office in Runzhou Prefecture.

Why do we tell of these latter three only up until the time they commenced their official duties, but reveal the final fate of the previously mentioned seven? That is because the seven do not appear again in our story. As to the other five senior chieftains—Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, Wu Yong, Hua Rong and Li Kui—we shall be hearing more of them.

Regarding the fifteen lieutenant chieftains, aside from Song Qing who was already at home, Du Xing also returned to the countryside to join Li Ying. Huang Xin assumed office in Qingzhou. Sun Li, with his brother Sun Xin and sister-in-law Gu Dasao, plus his own wife and children, resumed their former jobs in Dengzhou. Zou Run had no desire to become an official and went back to the Mountain in the Clouds.

Cai Qing returned with Guan Sheng to the Northern Capital as an ordinary citizen. Pei Xuan and Yang Lin, after talking it over, returned to Horse Watering Valley and retired. Jiang Jing, missing his old home, went back to Tanzhou as a plain civilian. Zhu Wu had been learning Taoist lore from Fan Rui for some time and, like him, became a Taoist priest. Together, they roamed the land, finally joining the temple of Gongsun Sheng, where they lived out their days.

Mu Chun returned to civilian life in Jieyang Town. Ling Zhen the remarkable cannoneer was appointed to the Imperial Explosives Bureau. Doctor An Daoquan became a senior physician in the capital's Imperial Hospital. Huangfu Duan was given charge of the Imperial Stables. Jin Dajian was already an official of the Imperial Treasury. Xiao Rang was named tutor in the Residence of Premier Cai. Yue Ho remained in the palace of Prince Consort Wang, where he lived out his days in ease and contentment. Of these we'll say no more.

Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, after parting, left to take up their respective posts. Lu Junyi, who had no family, proceeded to Luzhou accompanied by a few travelling companions. Song Jiang bid farewell to the emperor and his ministers and departed for Chuzhou with several family servants.

From then on, each of the chieftains went his separate way. We'll say no more of that either.

When Tai Zong succeeded Tai Zu the first Song emperor he proclaimed his aims, but in the end he couldn't see through the deception being practiced upon him. Hui Zong the present sovereign was clairvoyant and wise, but corrupt ministers managed to gain control under him as well, to the detriment of the virtuous and loyal. It was a great pity. Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian created wide confusion and harmed the country and the people sorely.

The high honors and substantial rewards given to Song Jiang and his chieftains profoundly disturbed Marshals Gao and Yang. They conferred about it.

"Song Jiang and Lu Junyi are our enemies," said Gao. "Now they've been made high officials and honored by the imperial court. Swinging into the saddle they command armies, dismounting they rule the population. We ministers have become a laughing stock! We must remember the old saying: 'Gentlemen scorn the timid, heroes must be ruthless.' "

"I have a plan," said Yang. "We'll get rid of Lu Junyi first. It will be like cutting off Song's right arm. The man's tremendously brave. If we dealt with Song first and Lu found out he'd surely turn on us and create a very bad situation."

"Let's hear your plan."

"Have a couple of Luzhou military men complain to the ministry that Lu is raising an army and storing up grain and fodder with the intent to revolt. We'll take them to the premier and they'll ask him to report this to the emperor. Premier Cai will carry through the deception and request the emperor to invite Lu to the palace. When His Majesty entertains him at an imperial feast, we'll slip some mercury into his food. It will lodge in his kidneys and he'll be incapacitated. He won't be able to do anything of any importance. Then we can send an emissary to Song Jiang with imperial wine in which we'll have put a slow-working poison. In half a month he'll be beyond saving."

"An excellent idea," said Gao. The two wicked ministers dispatched a confidant to fetch two local men from Luzhou. They wrote out a complaint for them and sent them to the Council of Military Affairs. The complaint alleged that Lu Junyi was raising an army in Luzhou and storing fodder and grain in preparation for a revolt, also that he was in constant touch with Song Jiang in Chuzhou and kept him informed of his scheme.

Tong Guan the Chancellor of Military Affairs also hated Song Jiang. He accepted the complaint and relayed it to the office of the premier. Cai read it and summoned the others to a conference. Gao and Yang proposed that the accusers be brought directly before the emperor. This was done.

"When Song Jiang and Lu Junyi smashed the Liao Tartars, and later when they captured Fang La, they had hundreds of thousands of soldiers under their command, yet they showed no indication of wicked ideas," said the sovereign. "Now that they have taken the path of virtue, would they leave it and return evil for good, revolt even? I have never wronged them. Why should they rebel against the throne? There's something fishy here. I don't believe it."

"Your Majesty talks of loyal love," said Gao and Yang. "But a man's heart is hard to fathom. Lu Junyi probably considers his rank too low. He's not satisfied and wants to rebel. Fortunately, people have discovered it."

"I shall call him before me and get at the facts personally."

Cai and Tong had a suggestion. "Lu Junyi is a wild beast. He's difficult to control," they said. "If he's startled he'll become suspicious. That will make things very awkward. It won't be easy to catch him. Why not invite him to dine, Sire? In the course of conversation Your Majesty can feel out his real intentions. If there's nothing to it, we can forget the whole thing. He'll think inviting him is just a sign that Your Majesty doesn't forget his meritorious officials."

The emperor agreed. He sent an emissary with a summons to Lu Junyi to appear at the imperial court for an assignment. When the emissary arrived at Luzhou, officials came out of the city to greet him. They escorted him to the prefectural office, where he read the document.

To skip the petty details, Lu immediately rode back to the capital with the emissary. He rested in quarters outside the palace. Early the next morning, he waited at the East Glory Gate for the imperial audience to commence. Premier Cai Jing, Chancellor of Military Affairs Tong Guan, Marshals Gao Qiu and Yang Jian escorted Lu Junyi before the monarch. When obeisances were completed, the sovereign spoke.

"I wished to see you again. Are you comfortable in Luzhou?"

"Thanks to Your Majesty's fortunate emanations, the army and populace are all peaceful."

The emperor chatted with Lu until nearly noon. The Master of the Imperial Chefs announced that lunch for the traveller was ready if the monarch wished him to dine. Gao and Yang had already placed mercury in the food which was set upon the table. The emperor directed the Chef Master to serve Lu Junyi. Lu bowed to the sovereign and ate.

"You must look after our troops in Luzhou well," the emperor admonished. "We don't want anything to happen."

Lu Junyi respectfully expressed his thanks and left for Luzhou. He had no inkling of what the four wicked ministers were plotting.

"We'll soon see important results," Gao and Yang exulted.

Starting the return trip, Lu felt a pain in his back and a general weakness. He couldn't ride a horse, so he took a boat. After several days on the Huai River, they reached Sizhou Prefecture. There, something happened. Lu had been drinking that night, and he insisted on standing on the prow. By then the mercury had seeped not only into his kidneys but into his bones as well. He was unable to stand firmly, and his drunkenness made him stumble. Lu fell into the Huai River and drowned.

Poor Jade Unicorn of Hebei, to become a wronged ghost in the watery kingdom! His body was fished out, encoffined in Sizhou, and buried on high ground. The local officials wrote a report to the imperial ministries.

When the four plotters received the news, they reported to the emperor: "Sizhou notifies us that Lu Junyi fell into the Huai and drowned. Song Jiang is sure to become suspicious. He may start something. We suggest Your Majesty send an emissary with imperial wine as a mark of sympathy and calm him down."

The monarch thought for some time. If he didn't agree, he wasn't sure what Song Jiang's reaction would be. Yet if he did agree, he had a feeling Song Jiang might be harmed. But he could see no other alternative. In the end he let himself be persuaded by the lies and deceptions of the four wicked ministers. He directed an emissary to take two bottles of imperial wine to Chuzhou.

It happened that the man was a trusted crony of Gao and Yang. Fate had determined the day when Song Jiang must die, but who would have thought that the four would be the instrument of his demise! They put a slow-working poison in the wine and directed the emissary to go directly to Chuzhou and deliver it.

After Song Jiang assumed the governorship of Chuzhou and command of the local troops, he was solicitous of the welfare of both the soldiers and the people. The populace loved him like a parent, the troops adored him. He was lenient in his judgments, wise in his administration. The people willingly obeyed him, he had the respect of all.

He enjoyed walking outside the city's South Gate, where there was an area called Liao Er Flats. It was laced with waterways and in the center was a tall beautiful mountain thickly covered with pine and cypress. Its scenic loveliness reminded him of Mount Liangshan and its surrounding marsh. Though smaller, it had the same peaks and winding paths, the same swelling heights like crouching dragons and tigers, the same abrupt cliffs, stairways and terraces, the same streams everywhere, and lakes front and rear.

The place gave him much pleasure, and he said to himself: "When I die, this is where I'd like to be buried." Whenever he was free, it was here he wandered, happy and relaxed.

During the first ten days of summer in the sixth year of Xuan Ho, half a year after he took office, Song Jiang heard that an emissary had arrived from the capital with imperial wine. Accompanied by other officials, he went out of the city to welcome him and escort him in. In the public hall the emissary read the emperor's greeting, presented the wine and urged Song Jiang to drink. When Song Jiang requested the emissary to join him, the man refused, saying he was a teetotaler. Song Jiang ceremoniously drank and the emissary returned to the capital. He would not accept the gift which Song Jiang offered.

Song Jiang's stomach began to pain him soon after, and he suspected something had been added to the wine. He quickly made inquires and learned the emissary had in fact done some drinking while stopping at a hostel for officials along the road. Song Jiang realized he had been tricked. He was positive the wine had been poisoned by the evil ministers. He sighed.

"Since childhood I studied Confucianism, and when I grew up I learned how to be a minor official. Unfortunately I became involved in crime, but I never had the slightest desire to rebel. Now the emperor listens to deceitful ministers and sends me poisoned wine! What have I done to deserve this! It doesn't matter if I die, but Li Kui, who is today the commandant of Runzhou, will certainly take to the hills again when he hears about this dirty trick the imperial court has played. That will ruin the reputation of loyalty to the emperor I have sought so diligently all my life! There's only one thing I can do."

He dispatched a man that same night to Runzhou with a message to Li Kui to come to Chuzhou immediately.

Black Whirlwind Li Kui was morose and depressed ever since becoming commandant of Runzhou. All day long he drank with his companions. That was the only thing he enjoyed. When he received the message from Song Jiang he said to himself: "Big Brother has sent for me. It must be important." He embarked by boat at once with an aide. On reaching Chuzhou he went directly to Song Jiang in the prefecture.

"From the time we broke up I've done nothing but think of you brothers," said Song. "Wu Yong is in the far-off Wusheng Military District. Hua Rong is in Yingtian, but I haven't had any news of him. Only you, brother, are relatively near. So I've asked you to come and discuss a very serious matter."

"What is it, Big Brother?"

"First have some wine."

Song Jiang escorted Black Whirlwind into a rear hall, where wine and a goblet was waiting. Li Kui drank for some time until he was half intoxicated.

"I must tell you, brother," said Song. "I hear the imperial court is sending me poisoned wine. If I die what will you do?"

"Rebel, brother," Li Kui shouted. "Let's rebel!"

"Our army is gone, our brothers are scattered. How can we rebel?"

"I've got three thousand men in Zhenjiang, you have soldiers here in Chuzhou. We'll muster them, and as many of the local people we can get to join us, raise more troops, buy horses, and fight! We'll be happy back in Liangshan Marsh. At least we won't have to take any more crap from those rascally ministers!"

"Slowly, brother. We must talk this over."

Black Whirlwind of course didn't know that the wine he imbibed contained a slow poison. That night he drank more. The next day Song Jiang saw him off to his boat.

"When will you start your revolt, brother?" Li Kui asked. "I'll come with my troops and reinforce you."

"Brother, don't blame me!" said Song Jiang. "The emperor sent me some poisoned wine the other day, and I drank it. I'm going to die soon. All my life I've tried to adhere to two principles—loyalty and righteousness. I would never practice deceit. Now, though I am innocent, the imperial court is causing my death. But I'd rather the emperor wronged me than wrong the emperor.

"I was afraid that after I died you would rebel and spoil our reputation for loyalty and righteousness, earned while acting in Heaven's behalf in Liangshan Marsh. And so I asked you here and gave you the poisoned wine also. When you return to Runzhou you'll surely die.

"After you've expired, come to Liao Er Flats, outside Chuzhou's South Gate. It's a beautiful place, and looks just like Liangshan Marsh. Our spirits can meet there. That's where I'm going to be buried after I die. I've already decided!" As he spoke, Song Jiang's tears fell like rain.

Li Kui also wept. "Enough, enough, enough!" he cried. "I took care of you in life, Big Brother, and I'll be a minor ghost and serve you after death as well!"

His body felt heavy. Weeping, he bid Song Jiang farewell and boarded his craft. When he reached Runzhou, sure enough, the poison activated.

As Black Whirlwind lay dying, he instructed his attendants: "After I'm gone you absolutely must take my coffin to Liao Er Flats outside Chuzhou's South Gate and bury me beside Big Brother." Later, his orders were carried out.

Song Jiang felt very badly when Li Kui sailed away that day. He thought of Wu Yong and Hua Rong, and sorrowed that he'd never see them again. The poison began to work during the night. On his deathbed he said to his trusted followers: "You must fulfil my request. Bury me on high ground above Liao Er Flats. Your virtuous conduct will certainly be rewarded. Promise that you will." So saying, he died.

His followers prepared to bury him in Chuzhou, according to ceremony. The prefectural officials, informed of his request, agreed to honor it. Together with his intimates, functionaries young and old carried his coffin to a place above Liao Er Flats and buried him there. A few days later, the coffin of Li Kui was brought from Runzhou. His associates kept their word and interred him next to Song Jiang.

Song Qing was ill at home. A member of the family returning from Chuzhou informed him that his brother Song Jiang had passed away there. Qing was too sick to attend the funeral, but he sent a family member to conduct a sacrificial ceremony at Liao Er Flats and arrange for the grave to be kept in order.

As for Wu Yong, he was not happy either after assuming office. He thought constantly of the affection between Song Jiang and himself. Suddenly, one day he felt very depressed and uneasy. That night Song Jiang and Li Kui came to him in a dream and tugged at his clothes.

"We always put loyalty and righteousness above all, acting on Heaven's behalf and never wronging the emperor," they said. "But the imperial court sent us poisoned wine and, though blameless, we died. We're buried in Liao Er Flats outside Chuzhou's South Gate. If you still remember the old days come and visit our graves."

Wu Yong was about to ask questions when he suddenly awakened. It had been only a dream. But his tears fell like rain, and he sat up in bed until daylight.

The next day he packed some belongings and hurried, alone, to Chuzhou. When he got there he learned that Song Jiang indeed was dead. There wasn't a person he spoke to who didn't sigh. He went to Liao Er Hats, swept the graves, and sacrificed to the spirits of Song Jiang and Li Kui. Beating his hand on Song Jiang's grave mound, he wept.

"Your spirit is not yet gone, brother, hear what I say! I was a village school teacher. First I followed Chao Gai, then I met you, brother, and you saved my life. We shared honors together for several decades, all thanks to your virtue. Now you have died for our country and appeared to me in a dream. I still haven't repaid your kindness, brother. I shall be glad to take the dream as an omen and join you in the Nether World."

Wu Yong wept bitterly. He decided to hang himself. Just then Hua Rong, who had arrived in Chuzhou by boat, came rushing to the grave. He was startled to see Wu Yong.

"I thought you were an official in Yingtian," said Wu Yong. "How did you hear about Big Brother's demise?"

"Ever since we broke up I've never felt easy in my mind. I kept thinking of all of our brothers. The other night Song Jiang and Li Kui came to me in a dream and said they had been killed by poisoned imperial wine and were buried above Liao Er Flats. They said if I hadn't forgotten the old days I must visit their graves. I dropped everything and travelled day and night to get here."

"I had the same dream and came for the same reason. Nothing could be better than our meeting here today. I've been thinking—I can never repay brother Song Jiang for all he's done for me, and I can't bear to part with him. I'm going to hang myself here so that our spirits can be together, and as a demonstration of my loyal and righteous heart."

"Since that's how you feel, General, I'll join you," said Hua Rong, "and show my devotion to Big Brother as well."

"I was hoping that after my death you'd bury me here," said Wu Yong. "How is it that you want to do the same thing?"

"I hate to part with Big Brother, and I can't forget his kindness. In Liangshan Marsh we were major criminals, but luckily we survived. We fought in battle after battle as bold gallants together. Then the emperor amnestied us, and we marched on expeditions north and south, distinguishing ourselves by our valor. Today, we're known throughout the land. But the imperial court suspects us. They're bound to be watching us for 'offenses.' If they trump up charges and have us executed, regrets will be too late. I'd rather go with you to the Nether World. I will at least leave a clean name and my body will be given proper burial."

"Listen to me, brother, I'm alone, without any dependants. It doesn't matter if I die. But you have a young son and a sweet wife. What will they do?"

"There won't be any problem. I've left them a bit, enough to feed themselves. Besides, my wife's family will look after them."

The two men wept together, then hung themselves from a tree.

On Hua Rong's boat his attendants became concerned when, after a long time, their master failed to return. They went to the graves and found him and Wu Yong dead. Hastily, they reported to the local officials, obtained coffins, and buried the two beside Song Jiang's grave. The burial mounds were like four hills.

Moved by Song Jiang's virtue and righteous loyalty, the people of Chuzhou erected a shrine to his memory. They offered sacrifices the year round, and none of their prayers were unanswered.

Meanwhile in the Eastern Capital, the Taoist Sovereign had been uneasy ever since sending Song Jiang the imperial wine. Though he had no news, he thought of him frequently. But Gao Qiu and Yang Jian constantly diverted him with talk of pleasurable pursuits. They wanted only to block off the righteous and injure the loyal.

Then, one day, while amusing himself in the palace, the monarch suddenly recalled his mistress Shishi. Accompanied by two young eunuchs, he went through the tunnel to her rear garden and pulled the bell cord.

The girl hurried out and received him. She led him to the bedroom and asked him to be seated. The emperor ordered that all the gates, front and rear, be bolted. The girl adorned herself formally and proffered respectful obeisances.

"I've been slightly unwell lately," said the sovereign, "but Dr. An Daoquan has cured me. It's been months since we've met, beloved, but you've been always on my mind.. Seeing you again makes me very happy."

"I'm unworthy of your affection, Sire." The girl laid out wine and delicacies for the ruler's delectation.

After only a few cups, he felt very sleepy. The lamps flickered and a chill breeze blew through the room. He saw standing before him a figure in a yellow robe.

"Who are you?" asked the startled monarch. "Why are you here?"

"I am Dai Zong the Marvellous Traveller, a lieutenant of Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh."

"What brings you to this place?"

"Brother Song Jiang is nearby. He requests that Your Majesty come with me."

"Where do you wish to take me?"

"To a place that's pure and fair. Please come, Sire."

The emperor rose and walked with Dai Zong to the rear garden. A horse stood waiting. The monarch mounted and they were off. Travelling through cloud and mist, he could hear the sound of wind and rain. At last they arrived.

All around were misty waters and cloud-obscured heights. Neither the sun nor moon could be seen, the sky and water were of one color. Liao Er Flats was a riot of red smartweed and green reed leaves. Waterfowl gambolled on stony beaches, mandarin ducks and drakes rested in pairs beside ponds of lotus. On the wooded slopes frost had turned the leaves to ten thousand scales of a fiery dragon, dew on the dykes glistened like the golden eyes of countless savage beasts. Gradually, a pale moon and a few scattered stars appeared in the night sky. It was autumn, and the breeze was chill and the dew icy.

The emperor couldn't gaze enough at the beautiful scene. "What is this place?" he queried. "Where are you taking me?"

Dai Zong pointed to a pass on the top of a mountain. "You'll soon know, Sire. There's where we go."

They climbed the slope, passing through three fortified passes. Before the third, more than a hundred men prostrated themselves by the roadside. All were armed, and wore helmets and armor of gold. The monarch was astonished.

"Who are these people?"

The first of them, plumes flying from his golden helmet, stepped forward and said: "I am Song Jiang of Liangshan Marsh."

"I appointed you governor of Chuzhou. What are you doing here?"

"Please come to Loyalty Hall, Your Majesty, and I will tell you all about my wrongful demise."

At the hall the emperor got down from his horse, entered the building and was seated. He saw many people kowtowing in the mist outside.

The monarch couldn't understand. Song Jiang mounted the steps and knelt, tears streaming down his face.

"Why do you weep?" asked the sovereign.

"Although I at one time fought against the imperial troops, I was always loyal to Your Majesty and never had a seditious thought. After the amnesty, I drove back the Liao Tartars in the north and captured Fang La in the south, at the cost of eight out of ten of my brothers, who were like my arms and legs. In keeping with your decree, Sire, I took office in Chuzhou. I never squeezed a penny from the army or the people. Heaven and Earth knew the purity of my heart. Your Majesty sent me poisoned wine and I drank it. I died with no regrets."

"But I was afraid Li Kui would be angry, and rebel. So I summoned him from Runzhou and killed him with the poisoned wine. Wu Yong and Hua Rong visited my grave and hung themselves out of chivalry. We four are buried above Liao Er Flats outside of Chuzhou's South Gate. Pitying us, the villagers have built a shrine there. But although we are dead, our souls will not depart. We have remained to inform Your Majesty of our unwavering fidelity and to beg you to determine the justice of the matter."

The monarch was amazed. "I sent an emissary with sealed imperial vintage. Who could have substituted poisoned wine?"

"Ask your emissary. Then you'll know which treacherous scoundrels were behind it!"

Gazing around at the magnificent citadel and its three fortified passes, the emperor was impressed. "What is this place?"

"Liangshan Marsh, Sire, where we dwelt in the old days."

"Although you have passed on, you will be reincarnated as men again. Why do you congregate here?"

"The Jade Emperor of Heaven, moved by my righteous loyalty, designated me Deity of Liangshan Marsh. Since this is my domain, my chieftains have joined me. We sent Dai Zong, the Marvellous Traveller to bring you, Emperor of Ten Thousand Carriages, to our marsh, so that we might state our grievances and assure you personally of our devotion."

"But why didn't you appear to me in my inner palace?"

"I am a spirit of the Nether World. How could I appear amid imperial splendor? Today you left your palace, so we were able to invite you."

"I've been sitting a long time. Is it possible for me to look around?"

Song Jiang bowed and conducted him from the building. The sovereign noted the plaque above the entrance. It read, in large letters, *Loyalty Hall*. He nodded and descended the steps. Suddenly, from behind Song Jiang, Li Kui appeared, battle-axes in hand.

"Emperor, emperor!" he cried in a terrible voice. "How could you believe your four deceitful ministers and wrongfully destroy us? Today we've met and I can take vengeance!" Brandishing his axes, he rushed at the monarch.

Startled, the sovereign awoke. It had all been a dream. He was drenched in perspiration. Shishi was sitting alone in the lamplight.

"Where was I just now?" he asked.

"Why, you've been lying on the bed, Sire."

He told her of his strange dream, and she said: "The righteous become saints when they expire. Can it be that Song Jiang really has died and appeared to you in a dream?"

"I'll certainly inquire about this. If it's true, I'll have a temple built in his memory and give him a posthumous title."

"A good idea. It will show that Your Majesty does not forget your meritorious officials."

The emperor sighed much that night.

The next morning he summoned his ministers to the palace. Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu and Yang Jian, afraid he would question them about Song Jiang, left the moment the imperial court was concluded. Only Marshal Su and a few other high officials remained waiting for an audience.

"Have you any news of Song Jiang, Governor of Chuzhou?" the sovereign asked Su.

"No news, Sire, but last night I had a peculiar dream."

"Tell me about it."

"I dreamt that Song Jiang came to my home dressed in his usual armor and helmet. He said he had died from poisoned wine Your Majesty had sent him. Sympathizing with his righteous loyalty, the people of Chuzhou buried him above Liao Er Flats outside the South Gate of the city and built a shrine where they sacrifice to him."

The emperor shook his head. "Very strange. I had the same dream." And he said to the marshal: "Send someone you trust to find out whether this is true, and report back to me immediately."

Su dispatched a man as directed.
The next day, the monarch sat in his Hall of Culture and Virtue. Gao Qiu and Yang Jian were present.
"Have your ministries any news of Song Jiang?" he asked them.
They dared not reply truthfully. Both said they did not know. Suspicious, the emperor had an uncomfortable feeling.
Marshal Su's man returned from Chuzhou. He said that Song Jiang had died of drinking poisoned imperial wine, that the people, respecting his loyalty to the emperor, had buried him on high ground above Liao Er Flats. Moreover, Wu Yong, Hua Rong and Li Kui were interred there with him. Local citizens, out of pity, had built a shrine to his memory. They sincerely worshipped there, and their prayers were always answered.
Su hastily led his emissary before the emperor in the palace. The man repeated his story. The sovereign was stricken with grief.
At his imperial court the next day, he was very angry. He berated Gao and Yang in the presence of all his officials.
"Traitorous liars, would you ruin my empire!"
Falling to their knees the two kowtowed and begged forgiveness. Cai and Tong spoke up on their behalf. "Life and death are pre-ordained. The ministries have received no official notification, so they dared not report. In fact, they didn't know. A document arrived from Chuzhou only last night. They're intending to report to you this morning, Sire. They're just waiting for you to ask." Again, the monarch was deceived by the four rogues, and their crimes were concealed. He shouted for Gao and Yang to withdraw and directed that the emissary who delivered the wine be produced. But the fellow had unexpectedly died on the return trip from Chuzhou. The next day Marshal Su called on the sovereign and related how Song Jiang had become a saint, and how efficaciously he responded to the prayers of the people. The emperor ordered that Song Qing carry on his brother's rank and office. But the younger man was suffering from rheumatism and could not assume the duties. He sent a reply of thanks and regrets, saying he wanted only to remain in Yuncheng and farm the family estate. Sympathizing with Qing's filial sentiments, the sovereign made him a gift of a hundred thousand strings of cash and three thousand *mu* of land. He decreed that if Qing had a son he would be given an official post. In subsequent years Qing's son Song Anping, after qualifying in the imperial examinations, was appointed a secretary scholar. But that was later. At Marshal Su's request, the emperor conferred on Song Jiang the posthumous title of Loyal, Chivalrous, and Efficacious Duke, and authorized funds for the construction of a temple dedicated to his memory in Liangshan Marsh. In the main building, statues were placed of Song Jiang and the other chieftains who died for the empire. The monarch personally wrote the words for the name plaque— *Loyalty Temple.* On receipt of the imperial funds, Jizhou Prefecture immediately started construction. Song Jiang's spirit appeared frequently in Liangshan Marsh, and the people sacrificed to him constantly. When they prayed for wind they got wind, when they prayed for rain they got rain. He appeared too in Liao Er Flats. There the people also built a large temple, with two wings. They petitioned for and received an imperial donation. In the main hall they installed statues of the thirty-six senior chieftains. In the wings, they put statues of their seventy-two lieutenants, plus figures of servants. People came from near and far to worship, and their prayers were always answered. Those who defend their country and protect the people have incense burned to their memories for ten thousand years. Sacrifices are made to them for generation after generation. They bring to their worshippers security and peace. In response to prayers, they bestow riches and prosperity. Remains of these ancient sites still exist to this day.

When Song Jiang returned to the capital after his triumphant visit to his native village, he summoned his comrades and ordered them all to pack their bags and proceed to their posts. At this time the Magic Messenger came to see Song Jiang. They chatted for a while and then Magic Messenger stood up and said: "Don't think I am not grateful for my post, but I propose to resign it. I want to go to the Temple of the Eastern Peak in Tai'an and become a lay-brother and serve the temple. My greatest wish is to be granted an easy end to my life."
Song Jiang said: "Whatever gave you such an idea, brother?"
"I dreamt last night that the Lord of the Underworld had sent for me," he answered. "That is why I have made this resolu-tion."
"Dear brother, you have always been the Magic Messenger in this world. No doubt you are destined to be the messenger of the gods in the next."
Magic Messenger said goodbye and after handing in his resignation went to the temple in Tai'an, where he joined the community as a lay-brother and diligently attended the gods each day, praying and burning incense with unfailing piety and devotion. One evening a few months later, without having been ill at all, he bade farewell to all the monks and passed away with a smile on his face. Later his spirit manifested itself many times at the temple of the Eastern Peak, and local people who prayed in the temple had an image placed there which was a perfect representation of his features.
Ruan the Seventh also received a title and said farewell to Song Jiang and went to Gaitian as military governor. Not long after he was in trouble because Generals Wang Bing and Zhao Tan, moved by their old grudge from the time when they lost face because he shouted at them in Fang La's citadel, went on repeating to Marshal Tong the story of his misdemeanour when he dressed up in Fang La's royal regalia. Although it might appear just an impromptu joke, they said, in reality it was evidence of a dangerous tendency and in a backward place like Gaitian he was bound to stir up rebellion. Marshal Tong informed the Grand Preceptor who spoke to the Emperor and got him to publish an order and send it down there stripping Ruan the Seventh of his title and making him a commoner again. When this happened, Ruan the Seventh at heart was not sorry. Taking his mother with him he returned to Stonetable in the Marshes of Mount Liang and resumed his old trade as fisherman, caring for his mother till the end of her days. He lived till sixty.
As for Mr. Chai, the Little Whirlwind, when he saw the Magic Messenger give up his post and go into retirement, and when he heard how the court had removed Ruan the Seventh from his post and stripped him of his title because his prank with Fang La's clothes was interpreted as a sign that he wanted to imitate that rebellion, he was reminded how he himself had acted as a son-in-law to Fang La. He thought that if at some future date evil ministers discovered this and wanted to make trouble for him with the Emperor, he too would be dismissed from his post and how would he bear the shame? Surely it was better to recognize the problem now and take action to avoid it. On the pretext of suffering from an intermittent fever of unpredictable occurrence, which made it difficult for him to carry out his duties, he asked permission to retire to his estate. He said goodbye to the others and returned home to live an independent life there, dying suddenly one day without an illness.
Skyhawk was made governor of Zhongshan, which office he filled for six months, until he heard that Mr. Chai had retired and decided himself to claim that mental illness prevented him from carrying out his duties. He asked the Military Council for permission to surrender his post and return to his estate on Lone Dragon Heights. Later with Uglymug he acquired wealth and had an easy death.
Scimitar commanded the garrison of the Northern Capital and was such a brave heart that everyone respected him. One day coming back very drunk after some military exercises he lost his seat and fell from his horse. He never regained consciousness.
Twin Rods received a command in the imperial barracks and every day drilled the Emperor's guard of honour. Later he took part in the campaign against the Fourth Prince of Jin and died in action west of the River Huai.
Whiskers achieved success in the Baoding garrison and later went with General Liu Guangshi to fight the Jin. He achieved high military rank.
Colonel Hua took his wife and family and his younger sister with him to his post in Yingtian. The Professor, who had never had a family, went by himself, with just a boy to serve him, to his post in Wusheng.
Iron Ox went off with two servants to his post in Runzhou.
Now you may ask why I have only told you where these last three went to, and not what happened to them later. That's because the previous seven you will not meet again so I had to tell you how they finished up. But the last three, together with Song Jiang and the Unicorn, you will be meeting again and you will see what befell them in due course.
Song Jiang and the Unicorn remained in the capital while they said goodbye to the others and saw them all off to their posts. Some had no official duties and went off to their families, well provided with gifts of silk, gold and silver from the Emperor. Back in their native places they pursued their own interests. The fifteen lesser leaders who had survived had been in the capital, except for Song Jiang's younger brother, Iron Fan, who had gone back to their estate. Uglymug accompanied Skyhawk back to the country. The Tamer was reassigned to his old post in Qingzhou. Colonel Sun went back with his younger brother Blackface and Auntie Gu to serve as before in Dengzhou. The Rhinoceros did not want to be a government official and went back to the moun-tains. Blossom returned to the Northern Capital with Scimitar and remained a commoner. Sterling had come to an agreement with Panther and after receiving their titles they were given leave to return to Waterworld and the Magic Calculator missed his old home and returned there as a commoner. The Strategist had become interested in Demon King's Taoist magic and the two of them became priests wandering among the rivers and lakes, winding up in Taoist Gongsun's establishment where they ended their days. Mu the Irrepressible went back to Jieyang and became a model citizen. Thunderer, with his exceptional skills with gunpowder, was reassigned to his old post as chief of ordinance in the Imperial guard. Five others remained in the capital, as before: Doctor An, who had been summoned there previously, became a bigwig in the Medical College; Redbeard, the vet, became chief overseer of the Emperor's stable; Craftsman had a post in the palace; Master Hand, the calligrapher, got a job in Marshal Su's household as private tutor and Lungs, the singer, remained a member of Prince Wang's household, living in clover till the end of his days. No more of them.
Now it was time for Song Jiang and the Unicorn to part, each going off to his own post. The Unicorn had no family, so with just some servants he took himself off to Luzhou. Song Jiang, after thanking the Emperor and taking his leave of the Military Council, headed for his post in Chuzhou, accompanied by some old family servants. We need say no more of all these partings.
Ever since the pledge made when Taizong succeeded Taizu, the Song dynasty's founder, that crimes under the preceding administration would not be prosecuted, the regime had been blighted by corruption. And the present emperor, who was both pious and intelligent, was impeded by evil counsellors who had wormed their way into his confidence and were enemies to all virtue, more's the pity. At this time it was those four notorious villains Grand Preceptor Cai, Marshal Tong, Gao the Ball and Marshal Yang who were turning the world upside down and constituted a blight on country, family and people. This time the two Grand Marshals, Gao and Yang, seeing how the Emperor honoured and rewarded Song Jiang and his lot, were exceedingly displeased. When they discussed matters they decided: "Song Jiang and the Unicorn are our enemies. Now we see them becoming honoured officials, receiving all these favours from the Emperor. In their military capacity they have command of troops, as civilians they have power among the people. We members of the Military Council, how can we not be the object of scorn and laughter? There's an old saying: 'Without hatred you cannot be a minister, without poison you cannot be considered a man!'"
Yang said: "I have been thinking about this. We must deal with the Unicorn first. We can finish off Song Jiang later. That Unicorn fellow is formidable and if we began with Song Jiang and he realized what was happening, the business could turn nasty and cause us a real problem."
"What's your idea, then?" said Gao the Ball.
"We get some Luzhou soldiers to come and complain to the Military Council about the Unicorn, saying he is recruiting troops, buying horses and getting in supplies because he plans a rebellion. Then we'll send over their accusation to the Grand Preceptor's office. We fool the Grand Preceptor and when he reports it to the Emperor he requests permission for us to deal with it. We have the Unicorn lured to the capital and when the Emperor gives him wine, we put some mercury in the drink which will destroy his kidneys. After that he'll not be much good for anything. Then we can send someone with imperial wine for Song Jiang. The wine will contain a slow poison, so that in a couple of weeks he'll be beyond saving."
Gao exclaimed: "An excellent plan!"
The two villains sent someone they trusted to find two Luzhou people to make out the accusation for them. They told them to go to the Council of Ministers and warn them that the Unicorn was recruiting troops and so on in Luzhou and planning a rebellion and that he had sent someone to Chuzhou to enlist Song Jiang in the enterprise. Now the head of the Council of Ministers was Marshal Tong, who had his own reasons for hating Song Jiang and company. As soon as he received the accusation, he went directly to the Grand Preceptor with it. The latter read it and called a ministerial meeting. Gao and Yang were present at this, and it was agreed that the accusers should be taken to see the Emperor. His Majesty said: "To my knowledge, Song Jiang and the Unicorn have been engaged in suppressing bandits on all sides. They had thousands of soldiers under their command, yet they showed no sign of evil intentions. They have abandoned their old ways and reformed, how can they now be rebellious? We have done nothing to upset them, how can they plan to go counter to our will? This smells of a plot. Until there is further evidence I shall find it hard to believe."
Then Gao and Yang, who were there of course, said: "Your Majesty, whatever reason may teach, the human heart is impossible to fathom. The Unicorn must harbour resentment because he thinks his post is beneath him. Festering dissatisfaction has turned to thoughts of rebellion. Unluckily for him he has been found out."
The Emperor said: "Bring him here for me to question him and ascertain the truth for myself."
The Grand Preceptor and Marshal Tong remonstrated: "This Unicorn is a wild beast. His behaviour is unpredictable. If he is alarmed, he may take flight, which would prove most awkward. It could be very difficult to catch him afterwards. No, the best policy is lure him to the capital and then Your Majesty should give a banquet for him and speak to him graciously whilst we observe his behaviour and see if the story is true or not. If there is nothing in it there will be no need for any interrogation. It will just have served to show how Your Majesty values loyal service."
The Emperor agreed to this and a royal edict was composed and sent by special envoy to Luzhou, asking the Unicorn to return to the court because the Emperor had something to say to him. When the envoy reached Luzhou all the government officials went to meet him outside the town. He was taken to the government offices where the edict was opened and read. To put it briefly, the Unicorn went back with the envoy to the capital, both riding post horses. The journey was uneventful. They stopped at the court reception hall, and in the morning went to the gate of Eastern Splendour to wait for the dawn court. As usual, the Grand Preceptor and Marshals Tong, Gao and Yang were present and they took him to a side chamber to see the Emperor. When he had made obeisance, the Emperor said to him: "I wanted to see you personally." He went on to ask: "Is everything satisfactory at Luzhou?"
The Unicorn prostrated himself again and said: "Thanks to Your Majesty's munificence, the army and the people there are peaceful and prosperous."
The Emperor asked a few more questions and the audience dragged on until noon, when the major-domo came and announced: "The repast Your Majesty ordered is ready, will it please Your Majesty to give the order to start?"
By this time Marshals Gao and Yang had already secretly had the mercury added to the food that was on the royal table. The Emperor most graciously offered the Unicorn food from his own kitchen. The Unicorn thanked him humbly. The Emperor flattered him, saying: "Return to Luzhou and be diligent, take care of your military and civil officials, let nothing untoward occur."
With many protestations of gratitude the Unicorn left and returned to Luzhou. He suspected nothing of the four villains' plot. Gao and Yang said to themselves: "We've done it!"
When the Unicorn reached Yingzhou that night he felt a terrible pain in his kidneys. He could not stand up and he certainly couldn't ride a horse, so he had to travel on by boat. When he reached Sizhou on the river Huai he had arrived at the end of his allotted span of years and something was bound to happen. That night he got drunk and went to stand on the prow of the boat to pass the time. Just at that moment the mercury slid down into his guts and entered the very marrow of his bones. Through the effect of this and also because he was drunk, his legs went weak, he lost his footing and fell. The Unicorn drowned in the depths of the river Huai. Poor Unicorn, Wonder of the North! He was obliged to become a wronged ghost in the water. His servants fished out the body and buried it at a suitable spot outside Sizhou. The authorities sent in a report to the Military Council. Of this no more.
Now the first part of their plot was complete, the four conspirators presented the Sizhou report to the Emperor, saying: "The Sizhou authorities report that when the Unicorn reached the Huai he got drunk and fell in the river and drowned. We members of the Military Council consider it our duty to report this. Owing to the Unicorn's death we are apprehensive that Song Jiang may become suspicious and want to make trouble. We beg Your Majesty to send an envoy to Chuzhou with some imperial wine for Song Jiang, to keep him happy."
The Emperor agonized over this proposal. If he turned it down, it was impossible to say what else might follow; if he let it go ahead, he feared ill would come of it. But the result was inevitable. In the end with their lying tongues and subtle deceitful words the villains talked the Emperor into it and he reluctantly gave his permission, he had no means of refusing them. Instructions were given for an envoy to carry two jars of imperial wine to Chuzhou, with immediate effect. Naturally this envoy was a crony of Gao and Yang. Well, fate had only allotted Song Jiang a certain number of days. It was fated that this wine with the poison added to it by those evil officials should be brought to Chuzhou by the imperial envoy.
Now, since the day Song Jiang arrived in Chuzhou as commissioner, he had also doubled as commander of the army. When he took up his duties he was popular with both military and civilians; the people saw him as a father to them, while the soldiers looked up to him, the laws were respected, public affairs were in good order and since he had won the hearts of the people he was honoured by all. When he had leisure, he liked to walk outside the town. There was a certain place beyond the south gate called Duckweed Marsh. Here there was a hill surrounded by ponds. This hill was most beautiful, with abundant stands of pine and cypress, an exceedingly scenic spot. Although not great in area, the mountains clustered round it making a protected place in the hill's embrace, full of crooked crags and gentle slopes, surrounded by creeks and ponds in front and behind. It was just like the waterside camp at Mount Liang. The moment Song Jiang saw it his heart rejoiced and he said to himself: "If I were to die here, this is where I would like to be buried. But when I have the chance I will come here often to walk. It is a place to arouse joy and banish care."
To cut a long story short, about six months after Song Jiang arrived at his post, he heard the news that some imperial wine had arrived, and went out with the crowd to meet it. Back in the courtroom he opened and read the imperial edict, and the envoy presented the wine and made him drink some. In return Song Jiang invited the envoy to drink, but the latter excused himself, saying that he could not take wine. Song Jiang had some gifts to present to the envoy, who refused them and departed.
After drinking the wine Song Jiang felt a terrible pain. He began to suspect the wine had been poisoned. He ordered his people to find out about the envoy. It turned out he had drunk wine at the rest house on the journey. Song Jiang knew now that it was a plot and the evil ministers must have poisoned the wine. He said with a sigh: "I studied the Confucian teaching when I was a child; when I grew up I became a government official, and later unfortunately fell into a criminal way of life, but never once did I harbour a disloyal thought. Now the Emperor has been too easily persuaded by slander and has sent me poisoned wine. Though innocent of any crime I stand convicted. My death is not important, but there's Iron Ox as military governor in Runzhou and if he hears that the authorities have played this dirty trick on me, he will revert to the greenwood and raise another band, and then the honourable reputation we have striven to achieve will be ruined. There's only one thing to do." That very night he sent someone to Runzhou to ask Iron Ox to come at once, because he had something to discuss with him.
To tell the truth, Iron Ox had been very bored since he was made governor of Runzhou. He spent his time drinking with his officers, wine was his only solace. When he heard that Song Jiang had sent for him, he said: "If the Leader wants me, it must be something important." He went back with the messenger by boat. He entered the government office and prostrated himself. Song Jiang said: "Since the company split up I have missed my comrades night and day. The Professor is too far away, and I have had no news at all of Colonel Hua. You're the only one who is relatively close, at Runzhou. I sent for you because I have something important to discuss with you."
"What is it?" Iron Ox asked.
"Have some wine first," Song Jiang replied. He invited him to an inner chamber where food and wine had been prepared and made him eat and drink. He waited till he was tipsy, then said: "Dear brother, I have heard that the Emperor is sending me poisoned wine. If I am meant to die, what do you think we should do?"
"Start a rebellion!" Iron Ox roared.
"But we've no troops left, our comrades are all scattered, how could you start a rebellion?"
"I've got three thousand troops in Runzhou. You've got some troops here, we can count them in. The people will rise up. We'll recruit energetically and buy horses, and then we'll go for it! It'll be back to Mount Liang, it'll be great! Far better than having to put up with sneering officials!"
"Softly, brother," Song Jiang said. "There's another way." For in fact into the wine he offered in welcome he had put a slow poison. Iron Ox had drunk, and next morning a boat was ready to take him back. "Whenever you're ready to march," he said to Song Jiang, "I will muster my forces and come to support you."
Song Jiang said: "Brother, forgive me. The Emperor's envoy has already been here and given me the wine. Sooner or later I will die. All my life I have cared for just one thing: honour and loyalty. I would never allow anything to sully my reputation. Now I am condemned to die, though innocent, by the Emperor. The Emperor may let me down but I shall not let the Emperor down. I was afraid that after my death you would start a rebellion and ruin the reputation we had in the Marshes of Mount Liang for loyalty and for doing heaven's will. That's why I asked you here, I wanted to see you. Yesterday I put a slow poison in your wine. When you get back to Runzhou you will die. After your death they can bring you here. There is a place here outside the south gate called Duckweed Marsh where the scenery is just like the Marshes of Mount Liang. Let our ghosts be together! When I die I will be buried in this place. I have arranged it already!" He had spoken, and the tears poured down his face.
Iron Ox was also weeping as he replied: "Well, well, well! I served you in life, let me be a little ghost under your orders after death!" Thus he concluded. Already he felt a sensation of heaviness. In this maudlin state he bade Song Jiang farewell and boarded the boat. Back in Runzhou the poison had its inevitable effect and he died. Just before his death he instructed his staff: "When I die, please do take my coffin to Duckweed Marsh outside the south gate of Chuzhou, to be buried with my brother, Song Jiang." Those were his last words. When his people had prepared the coffin, they set off in obedience to his wishes.
One thing especially troubled Song Jiang, after he had said goodbye to Iron Ox: he would not see the Professor and Colonel Hua again. That evening, as the poison was beginning to do its deadly work, he told his people: "Please follow my instructions: bury my coffin in the country outside the south gate, at Duckweed Marsh. I shall be most grateful for your kindness. Please don't forget!" Those were his last words.
His servants prepared the coffin and organized the funeral. In obedience to his words the local officials, together with his personal servants, clerks and members of the public bore his coffin to Duckweed Marsh for burial. A few days later Iron Ox's coffin was brought from Runzhou and laid to rest beside Song Jiang's tomb. Of this no more. As for Song Jiang's brother, Iron Fan, he had fallen ill at home and when some of the family servants returned and said his brother had died in Chuzhou, being ill he could not make the journey to pay his last respects. Later, on learning that his brother was buried at Duckweed Marsh he sent some family servants to make offerings and check that the grave was all right and properly supplied, before they returned. But enough of that.
As for the Professor, who had been appointed chief of communications in the Wusheng garrison, after travelling to his post he often found himself unhappy, and kept on missing the intimacy with his old friend Song Jiang. One day he suddenly felt particularly uneasy and was unable to sleep that night. Next night he dreamt of Song Jiang and Iron Ox, who were pulling him by the sleeve and said: "Professor, we always held loyalty to be the most important thing and to do heaven's will, and we never went against the Emperor. Now the court has requited us with poison and we are dead, though guilty of no crime. They have buried us in

the countryside at Duckweed Marsh. Professor, if you still remember the old days, please come and visit our graves." The Professor wanted to question them further, but he awoke and found it was a dream. He sat there weeping copiously and waiting for dawn. After this dream he was unable to eat or sleep, so next day he packed his bags and headed for Chuzhou. He went alone, taking no servants. When he got there Song Jiang was dead of course, and all the local people were grieving. He arranged a service and went to Duckweed Marsh, where he found the graves and made offerings to their spirits. Then he beat the mound with his fist and weeping said: "My honourable brother's bold spirit will not be eclipsed, I pray that it may shine forth. I am just a village scholar. First I followed Chao Gai, then I was with my brother Song Jiang. Brother, you saved my life and enabled me to enjoy good fortune. I have been through a dozen wars and come out on top, thanks to you. Now you have died for your country, and appeared to me in a dream. Rather than seek vengeance, I prefer to prolong this good dream and join you in the world of the Nine Fountains." And with this he burst into tears again. He was just about to hang himself when Colonel Hua leapt off a boat and appeared in front of the grave. When he saw the Professor they both had a shock.

The Professor asked: "You are serving as an official in Yingtian. How did you know Song Jiang was dead?"

Colonel Hua said: "After I went to my post I was not at peace for a single day. I kept worrying about my brother. Last night I had a strange dream. I dreamt that Song Jiang and Iron Ox came to me and pulled me by the sleeve and said that the court had rewarded them with poison and I saw the grave at Duckweed Marsh in the countryside outside Chuzhou. Song Jiang said that if I hadn't forgotten the old days I might like to come and see the grave. So I left my family and sparing no effort came here as fast as I could."

The Professor said: "I had the same strange dream, exactly the same as yours. That is why I came. It is very good that you came today. I miss Song Jiang so much, his kindness, his righteousness, I feel so lonely without him, that I have resolved to hang myself in this place, so that my spirit can be with him. I leave all the funeral arrangements in your hands."

Colonel Hua said: "If that is your intention, Professor, I shall follow you, so I too can be with our brother."

Thus did they keep to their old principle of living and dying together!

But the Professor said: "I want you to bury me here after my death. How will you do it if you die too?"

"I have been thinking how sorely I miss our brother's humanity, how I shall never forget his kindness. When we were on Mount Liang we had committed a serious crime, we were lucky to escape death. Thanks to the Emperor's amnesty, we went north to fight, south to fight, we achieved honour. Our fame has travelled far and wide, everyone has heard of us. Something led the court to suspect us, and now the slightest rumour will be enough to condemn us. If the plots prevail and we suffer an unjust punishment it will be too late then to do anything about it. Better to follow our brother and meet at the Yellow Springs, so we leave an untarnished name in the world, and our bodies will have proper burial!"

The Professor said: "Dear brother, listen to me. I have no family, there's only me. There is nothing to prevent my dying. You have children and wife, how can you look after them?"

"That's no problem. My coffers are full, and there are many members of my wife's family who can take care of things."

They both wept for a while and then hanged themselves from the tree.

The servants on the boats waited a long time. When their masters still did not return, they went to the tomb to see and found they had both killed themselves. They hurriedly reported it to the authorities. Coffins were prepared and the Professor and Colonel Hua were buried at Duckweed Marsh alongside Song Jiang's tomb, so there were four similar mounds in a line from east to west. The people in grateful memory of Song Jiang's virtue and loyalty set up an altar there, where offerings were made in the four seasons; all who made the pilgrimage to that place had their prayers answered.

We shall pass over the frequent manifestations of Song Jiang's spirit, and tell how the Emperor at his court in the Eastern Capital after awarding the royal wine to Song Jiang was often troubled in his mind, and hearing no news of Song Jiang became extremely concerned about him. Gao the Ball and Marshal Yang continued their life of ostentatious display and wasteful luxury, always standing in the way of reform and plotting against honest men.

One day when the Emperor was relaxing in the inner palace he suddenly bethought himself of Lily, and with two attendants followed the passage to her back door and pulled the bell rope. Lily hastened to receive His Majesty and went to sit with him in the bedroom. He ordered the front and back doors to be locked. When Lily, in all her finery, had presented herself, the Emperor said: "I have not been feeling very well lately, I had to call in Doctor An to treat me. I have not been to see you for many days. But I have thought of you a lot. Seeing you now gives me huge pleasure!

Lily said: "Your Majesty is too kind to me, I feel quite embarrassed!"

Wine was served and His Majesty enjoyed himself drinking. After several cups he appeared to become tired. Lamps and candles were lit and then suddenly a draught of cold air was felt in the room. His Majesty saw a man in a yellow shirt in front of him. Startled, he asked the man: "Who are you and where are you from?"

"I am the Magic Messenger and I serve Song Jiang of Mount Liang," the other replied.

"Why have you come?"

"My brother Song Jiang is waiting," replied the Magic Messenger. "He entreats you, Your Majesty to get in your carriage and come to him."

"Where am I to tell the carriage to take me?"

"Song Jiang knows a very beautiful place and he invites Your Majesty to walk with him there."

The Emperor stood and followed Magic Messenger into the garden. His carriage was waiting. Magic Messenger invited him to get in.

It is as if mist and cloud have descended and there is a sound of wind and rain. In the place they come to:

*Misty waters are everywhere, clouds and mountains fill the view. There is no brightness of sun or moon, water and sky are all one colour. The duckweed grows profusely, reeds clothe the islets in dense green: two by two the wild geese on the sand spit sadly calling, in pairs the exhausted wagtails perching on the edge of the withered lotus. Gaunt maples stand about like grief-stricken wives weeping for the absent loved-one, solitary willows face the wind, their branches like the sad eyebrows of lonely women. The moon is watery, the stars cold, the night long; the time is autumn, season of cold winds and heavy dews.*

The Emperor is enchanted by the scene that meets his eyes and he asks Magic Messenger: "What is this place? Is it where you wanted me to come?"

Magic Messenger points to a road winding up the hill and says: "Please go on, Your Majesty. When you get there you will understand."

The Emperor drives on up the mountain. He comes to three gates and at the third he sees a hundred men bowing down to the ground, all in war robes and breast plates, with leather belts and bronze helmets and armour. Amazed by what he sees he asks: "Who are you all, my friends?" Then their leader, wearing a bronze winged helmet, embroidered robe and gold armour, steps forward and says: "I am Song Jiang of Mount Liang."

"I sent you to be military governor of Chuzhou," says the Emperor. "What are you doing here?"

"We have invited Your Majesty to our Ceremonial Hall, to hear the story of our unjust death."

The Emperor gets down and takes his seat in the hall. Looking about him he sees as if in a mist many warriors standing in line. He feels uncertain. The leader, Song Jiang, mounts the dais and kneels before him. Weeping he asks leave to speak.

"Why do you weep?" the Emperor asks.

"Even though we once opposed the Emperor's forces, we always retained our loyalty and never for a moment entertained thoughts of rebellion. After we received the imperial amnesty we first expelled the Tartars and then pacified three bandits and later we lost the greater part of our brothers. Your Majesty graciously commanded me to govern Chuzhou. Let heaven and earth bear witness, after I took up my post I had no secret relations with the military or the people. Now you have paid me with poisoned wine, but I died guiltless. I was afraid Iron Ox would be angry and it might make him disloyal to his sovereign. So I sent to Runzhou for him and poisoned him myself. The Professor and Colonel Hua killed themselves out of loyalty at my tomb. All four of us are buried at Duckweed Marsh outside the south gate of Chuzhou. The people have built a memorial hall there to honour us. Our spirits are not yet dispersed. They are gathered here now to inform Your Majesty that throughout our lives we were loyal from beginning to end. We beseech Your Majesty to hear us!"

The Emperor is horrified by what he hears. "I sent my special envoy with yellow seal imperial wine. Who could have changed it for poisoned wine then?"

Song Jiang says: "You can ask your envoy. He will know how the trick was carried out."

The Emperor looks at the stalwarts on all the gates and says sadly: "Where is this place that you are all meeting?"

"This is Mount Liang, where we all came together in the old days."

"But if you're all dead now, you should have departed for a new life. Why are you still here?"

"The Lord of Heaven took pity on us for our loyalty. He issued an edict appointing us tutelary spirits of Mount Liang. We have come here because of the complaint that we have not yet had the chance to lodge. We sent Magic Messenger to beg Your Majesty to come to the Marshes so that we might declare how we have been constantly loyal."

"Why did you not come to me in my palace?"

"Spirits of the underworld, how could we enter your splendid courts and halls? So in your graciousness you have consented to come to us."

"Is it possible for me to look around?"

They all prostrate themselves again to show their appreciation of the favour and His Majesty comes down from the dais and turns his gaze upon the tablet which bears in large characters the words: Great Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness. He nods to himself and proceeds down the steps. Suddenly Iron Ox steps out from behind Song Jiang. Holding his two axes he bellows: "Emperor, Emperor, why did you listen to those four scoundrels' criticism and defamation? Now that you're here, it's time to settle accounts!" So saying he whirls his axes and runs at the Emperor.

From the shock of this, the Emperor awoke and knew it had all been a dream. His body was bathed in a cold sweat. He opened both eyes, blinking, and saw the candles and lamps lit. Lily appeared not to have slept. He asked: "Have I been somewhere?"

"Your Majesty just laid his head on the pillow and went to sleep," she said.

The Emperor told her all about his mysterious dream. She said: "When people are truly good they die and become saints. Could it be that Song Jiang really is dead and that he manifested himself in Your Majesty's dream for some purpose?"

"I shall have to make some inquiries," the Emperor said. "If it turns out that he is dead, I must build a temple for him and officially declare him a hero."

"If you do this, it will show that Your Majesty does not neglect his loyal servants."

The Emperor heaved many a sigh that night.

Next day around dawn the order was given for the court to assemble in the side palace. But the Grand Preceptor, and Marshals Tong, Gao and Yang were all afraid that the Emperor might ask about Song Jiang, and left the palace. Only Marshal Su and a few other senior officials were waiting there. "Have you had any news of the military governor of Chuzhou, Song Jiang?" the Emperor asked Marshal Su.

"Although I have had no news, last night I had a strange dream. It was very odd."

"Tell me about this strange dream of yours," the Emperor said.

"I dreamt that Song Jiang came to my house dressed in uniform, helmet and armour, and claimed that Your Majesty had sent him poisoned wine. The local people, honouring his memory, had buried him outside the south gate at Duckweed Marsh and set up a shrine where offerings are made in every season."

When the Emperor heard this he nodded and said: "This strange business is just like in my dream." He told Marshal Su: "Send someone you can rely on to Chuzhou to investigate this affair and come back and report quickly."

"It shall be done," said the Marshal. He left with the Emperor's order, returned to his palace and sent a trusted servant to Chuzhou to find out about Song Jiang. Of this no more.

Next day when the Emperor drove to the Hall of Culture and Ethics, he saw Marshals Gao and Yang standing on one side and asked them: "Does the Military Council have news of the military governor of Chuzhou?"

Both were afraid to answer and neither could think of anything to say. The Emperor was filled with suspicion and his displeasure showed plainly on his face.

Marshal Su's man after making his inquiries in Chuzhou told the Marshal how Song Jiang had drunk poisoned wine and was dead, and how the local people out of respect for his loyalty had buried him on a hill at Duckweed Marsh. He also told how the Professor, Colonel Hua and Iron Ox were buried in the same place and the people had built a memorial hall to honour them and make offerings to them in spring and autumn.

Marshal Su hurriedly called the man inside to prepare a report for the Emperor. The Emperor could not conceal his feelings when he heard it. At next day's dawn court he expressed his anger, reprimanding Gao and Yang before all the courtiers: "You corrupt officials, betrayers of your country, you have ruined my people!"

They both grovelled, knocking their heads on the ground in acknowledgement of their guilt. The Grand Preceptor and Marshal Tong also came forward and said: "People's life and death are destined. The Military Council had received no report, we did not dare to repeat news that might be false. Last night the report from Chuzhou reached us. We were just about to inform Your Majesty...."

Once again the Emperor had the wool pulled over his eyes by the faithless four and they were allowed to get away with it. He simply told Gao and Yang to withdraw and then ordered the original official who was sent with the wine to be apprehended. But it turned out that the envoy after leaving Chuzhou had died on the return journey. Next day Marshal Su saw the Emperor in the side palace and told him again about the apparitions of Song Jiang's spirit. The Emperor wanted to transfer Song Jiang's title to his brother, Iron Fan. Iron Fan however was sick and could not serve as an official, so he politely declined, saying he only wanted to be a farmer in Yuncheng. In recognition of his filial piety the Emperor granted him a hundred thousand strings of cash and three hundred acres of land to support his family and promised that if he had offspring the court would advance them. Later Iron Fan had a son, Song Anping, who passed the official exams and served in the imperial library — but that is another story. In response to Marshal Su's report, the Emperor indited in his own hand a document granting Song Jiang a posthumous title of nobility in recognition of his loyal and valiant service and ordering a temple to be built on Mount Liang with a grand hall and images of Song Jiang and the others. He also donated to this temple an inscription in his own hand naming it "Temple of Loyalty and Pacification". There is a poem:

*The heavenly stars are returned to the sky,*
*The earth stars gone back under the ground.*
*From earliest days they were revered as saints*
*By historians ever regarded as heroes.*

In later times Song Jiang's spirit made many appearances and the people continued to make offerings to it in the four seasons. In the marshes of Mount Liang, when they prayed for wind they got wind, when they prayed for rain they had rain. At Duckweed Marsh in Chuzhou, because Song Jiang's spirit kept appearing, the local people built another shrine, a hall with two galleries, and even requested an imperial tablet for it. Thirty-six statues were placed in the main hall and seventy-two in the galleries. Year after year offerings were made there and thousands went to worship. Traces of it exist to this day. The historians have two funeral scrolls in the Tang style:

*Blame not heaven for what man gets;*
*Recall how sovereigns pay their debts!*
*For the country's good they gave their all,*
*Till the Tartars' expulsion and Fang La's fall.*
*Heaven and earth stars, all are gone,*
*But slander and calumny still reign on.*
*Would that the deadly cup they'd refused,*
*And gone where men are better used!*

And the other:

*They lived life to the full, in death earned rank;*
*Of all a man may know no page left blank:*
*The horses of war, whose whinnying fills the night,*
*The moon over the mountain spilling its light,*
*The apes that sadden autumn with their cries,*
*The clouds that gather and thicken as daylight flies.*
*Why seek rare compositions unlike to please,*
*When you can read of heroes such as these?*
*In Duckweed Marsh now lie they all at rest,*
*For eternal peace, a hidden place is best.*
*Flowers their petals shed, birds' dirges sing,*
*Remembering these whom nothing back can bring.*